

The Day the Queen came to Bendigo

Friday March 5th 1954 a momentous day for the City of Bendigo.

On a train at 4:05PM the Queen arrived in Bendigo.

Many questions have been asked like “Do you remember the day the Queen visited us ?”

My calculation is that if you are a Bendigonian and under 70 years of age you will not have these memories.

This article written on a cold and wet day in June 2016 will record not what was written at the time but personal memories that are mine of that day so long ago.

In another time of 1954 services as we know them today were not available so ingenuity to make this a memorable day abounded everywhere.

The total distance of the Royal Procession was lined with soldiers but where did they all come from?

National Service training for all 18 year olds had been in force since August 1951 and with a 3 year span to complete left so many still in the services, these were utilized .

I recently wrote an article on the O’Keefe Rail trail and as at the time it was a viable railway line. On this many hundreds if not thousands of National Service men were transferred to Bendigo for the event. This plus so many of us attached to the 38th Battalion here in Bendigo made up the numbers.

At this time I was Sgt. in charge of the Wireless Section Signals Platoon at 38th Battalion Headquarters Mollison Street Bendigo under Capt. Russell Emond.

One of the organizers main worries was with the huge crowds and the possibility of a Bendigo hot day as often happens in early March there could be many medical emergencies.

Bendigo was not at that time endowed with the ambulance services we have today so units were drafted in from nearby towns. These were strategically placed around the route.

Two way radio was not available to public utilities or emergency vehicles at this time so we the Army Signals were drafted to this role.

I was placed in charge of this operation and my team were dispatched around the city one soldier with each ambulance delivered by Jeep.

Each soldier had a 56lb (25kg) radio strapped to their back and if lucky we had a range of 5miles (8 Kms).

As the Base Station in charge I was situated on the roof of the Bendigo Base Hospital. Also situated there was an announcer for the ABC.

As the time approached for the Queens arrival I was advised by the ABC that I could not transmit when they were on air reporting on the Queens cavalcade as it wound up and down the Hospital driveway.

I appointed my second in charge to take command, closed down my radio and joined the Nurses and Patients in the driveway to welcome the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Attached is a photograph of staff and patients at the door of the hospital on that day.

I stood to attention and saluted whilst all others cheered and waved.

March 5th 1954 was a beautiful sunny day with a mild southerly breeze, no one collapsed, our services were not required but we were there.

Tom Luke June 2016.



Photograph Bendigo Advertiser

