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**THE 2/2 AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION:
THE HISTORY OF A GROUP EXPERIENCE**

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NOVEMBER 1989

A thesis submitted for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University

CERTIFICATE

Except where acknowledged in the text this thesis represents my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other University.

McBride .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I am indebted to the men of 2/2 Battalion: those I got to know, and those long-dead whom I met in letters and diaries.

In 1981-1982 I received invaluable help from Michael Piggott, Bill Fogarty and Geoff McKeown at the Australian War Memorial's Research Library. At that time I also met and talked with many scholars about war, soldiers and history. For their special interest and encouragement I thank the late Professors Sir Keith Hancock and John Robertson. For their helpful advice I thank Dudley McCarthy and Drs David Horner, Robert O'Neill and Hank Nelson.

Many more people than I can name here helped me in various ways but two deserve mention: Virginia Stuart-Smith for her very timely support and Olwyn Green, a fellow traveller down 2/2 paths since 1981, for her sustaining interest.

Trish Wilkins typed the manuscript with care and an understanding that went beyond word processing technicalities.

I could not have brought the thesis to fruition without the guidance and encouragement of my supervisors, Allan Martin, Cameron Hazelhurst and John Eddy. Allan Martin, however, has seen the thesis through from beginning to end: I am grateful for his untiring ability to inspire a sense of completeness.

Finally I thank my husband, Paul Mason, and my daughter, Colette, for their patience and understanding. They have not known a wife or mother without the 2/2 Battalion.

PRECIS

The 2/2 Battalion A.I.F. was a volunteer fighting unit of the Second World War. This study explores the collective experience of battalion members from recruitment in October/November 1939 to disbandment in February 1946. During that time the unit engaged in five campaigns: three of the Middle East and Mediterranean under British command and two of the Pacific War under American command. Battalion ideals, which find their fullest expression in the unit history and post-war association tend to project public images of communal effort, sustained high morale and unswerving loyalty. Using War Diary records, letters, diaries and veteran interviews this study examines the men's varied and fluctuating responses to their fighting conditions as well as those of the long waiting periods in between. Traditionally military histories deal more with aspects of strategy and operations rather than individual or group responses to fear, death, wounds and illness in battle. Neither do they usually broach the subject of social tensions in an army unit both in and out of action. Questions guiding such an approach allow fruitful comparisons between the 2/2's public and private account of its experience in the years 1939-1946. Such enquiry also raises important questions about the formation of wartime identities, long-observed to be indissoluble in the post-war period.

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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The maps for this thesis have been drawn largely from contemporary maps and those filed in War Diaries. In the case of New Guinea they were original maps drawn by the American Army Engineer Corps. I am indebted to Syd Trigellis-Smith for his assistance in compiling the maps and Arthur Ayres for the artwork.

MAPS

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Your fancies and fortunes I've borrowed
Your songs of the land or air.
Men say not 'He joyed' or 'He sorrowed',
But say, 'My battalion was there'

Unidentified frontispiece
in Pryce, H.W., Your Old
Battalion: War and Peace
Verses, Cornstalk Publishing
Company, Sydney, 1926

INTRODUCTION

A picture of the War from the front line stand-point, made without afterthought, will neither tickle a taste for foulness nor slake a thirst for pomp if it is drawn from what was seen and felt, and noted, at the time.⁽¹⁾

Traditionally battalion histories have been written by participants for participants. This study is not another such history for the 2/2 Battalion but an examination of a very distinct experience: that of an army community at war, in this case one composed of volunteers from Australia's second imperial force (2nd A.I.F.) in the years 1939-1945.

2nd A.I.F. veterans, other than Japanese prisoners-of-war, have attracted little attention from historians. Indeed the Anzac legend and its impact on Australian society have been studied far more than the men themselves. One obvious reason for this lacuna in Australia's Second World War history is the lack of a substantial body of letters and diaries which was available to historians of the previous war. Other reasons are harder to determine and yet assumptions about Second World War veterans exist despite the lack of evidence. In 1962 Alan Seymour's play, The One Day of the Year - intended to both question and 'find some compassion' - instead created the enduring archetype for Anzac Day reunions, the beer-swilling veteran full of machismo.⁽²⁾ While every stereotype is said to hold its grain of truth much of what has been written about the 2nd A.I.F. reinforces rather than questions long-held assumptions. It seems too from extant publications that the soldiers' impressions of themselves are either

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1. J.C. Dunn, The War the Infantry Knew, Cardinal, London, 1987, p.v, first published in a private edition of 500 in 1938.
 2. A Seymour, The One Day of the Year, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1976 (first published 1962), p.4.

treated as sacrosanct, thus containing self-evident truths, or dismissed as self-conscious contrivances.⁽³⁾ What is intriguing about these approaches is their co-existence with an official tradition which is renowned for its humane military history. While the latter is true of most official volumes other studies concentrate on policy, command and strategic problems as well as those of a more sociological nature, the impact of war on Australian society.

Such oversight however is general among military historians. As General Archibald Wavell wrote to Basil Lidell Hart in the 1930s:

If I had time and anything like your ability to study war I think I should concentrate almost entirely on the "actualities" of war - the effects of tiredness, hunger, fear, lack of sleep, weather, inaccurate information, the time factor and so forth. The principles of strategy and tactics and the logistics of war are really absurdly simple: it is the "actualities" that make war so complicated ... so difficult, and ... so neglected by historians.⁽⁴⁾

Undoubtedly Wavell over-simplified the role of technical matters to emphasise his point but his advice was nonetheless instructive. The first to accomplish something like Wavell had in mind was John Baynes. In 1965 his work on the 2nd Scottish Rifles created a context for looking at the soldier's reactions and adjustments to fighting conditions. The study's well-trained, regular battalion at its first action on the Western front in 1915 provided a structure for the

3. P. Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1981 and J. Barrett, We Were There: Australian Soldiers of World War II Tell Their Stories, Viking, Melbourne, 1987. For analyses using mainly fictional sources see R. Gerster, Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1987 and J. Ross, The Myth of the Digger: The Australian Soldier in Two World Wars, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1985.

4. Quoted in J. Connell, 'Writing About Soldiers', Journal of Royal United Service Institute, No.639, Vol.CX, August 1965, p.221.

examination of morale and 'the myriads of threads and influences' (5) which shape a unit, both in and out of action. The study however lacks perspective as it ends with the battle: the 2nd Scottish Rifles victorious but having sustained heavy casualties. British historians have continued to write battalion histories using archival material and veteran interviews. A recent Australian study took this approach, but as its subject was the 2/21 Battalion, imprisoned by the Japanese in early 1942, its perspective is bound by the unique experience of captivity. (6)

This study is an attempt to understand the social processes which bound the 2/2 Battalion together during six years of war. For many it was a living community which still lives to the present in the form of the Battalion Association, which has a mailing list of 800 including not only veterans but widows and other interested persons. The 2/2, which left Australia for the Middle East in early 1940, ended its fighting life in New Guinea in August 1945. Its nine distinct phases in that time provided its members with several transitions from different social worlds. Its various campaigns in vastly different theatres also exposed them to changing conditions of war as well as differing outcomes in battle, the 2/2 experiencing both victory and defeat early in its history. The much longer periods of inactivity between the shorter and far more spectacular fighting periods made up the bulk of the men's existence but rarely do military histories cover

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5. J. Baynes, Morale: A Study of Men and Courage - The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle 1915, Frederick A. Praeger, New York 1967. See also Introduction by K. Simpson in J.C. Dunn, op.cit., pp.xvii-li.
 6. J. Beaumont, Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

what an army unit does out of action. To follow the unit through its various stages of development makes it possible to test the ideal of battalion unity against the disruptive processes of battle casualties and reinforcement. Other expected strains on cohesion were the social tensions between the distinct, hierarchical groupings in the unit. The 2/2's incorporation of some 39th militia Battalion men in mid-1943 was an opportunity to look at in microcosm the rivalry between A.I.F. and militia during the Second World War.

Morale, the concept which in military terms covers every aspect of a soldier's life, lay at the base of the many questions I set out to ask about the kaleidoscopic experiences of 2/2 men. These questions had to do with such diverse matters as the excitement of travel; training and discipline; the experience of being in action, with its far-ranging psychological responses, and the soldier's all-pervading problem of boredom. The concept of battalion morale itself however has its own problems requiring an exploration of the processes whereby hundreds of individual responses are translated into the professed feeling of a large group.

Such internal probing of the 2/2 required the uncovering of many hard-to-get-at sources. To get inside the unit it was necessary to meet its veterans and not only become familiar with the social structure of the war time unit but also with the men's understanding of what their experiences meant to them. Further paths of enquiry were through the battalion's own myths and legends, evident in two published histories, one of 1946, Nulli Secundus Loq, and the other of 1977, Purple Over Green. The existence of the latter, which the men call their 'official' history, raised questions from some about what

could be added to the account. Others, conditioned by the anti-war climate of the previous two decades, were very wary of ~~the~~ my 'approach'. At the beginning I invited members - through an article in the battalion's second-monthly newsletter - to help me in the research. This approach yielded several correspondents and offers of material but nowhere enough to sustain the study's working objectives. To get in touch with veterans I attended several reunions in Sydney, Newcastle and Ballina to meet 2/2 members. To reach those of the 39th Battalion I went to Melbourne in August 1982 for the 40th commemoration of 'Kokoda Day'.

The reunions were a vital step in the information-seeking process. As a result of the many contacts made at these gatherings, and the follow-up letters written to any man who expressed interest, I made two trips to northern New South Wales, and one to Melbourne, for interviews and the collection of material, including letters, diaries, photos and other memorabilia. While definite questions guided the interviews I invited veterans to choose the area of discussion considered significant to them. Early research revealed that it was impractical for every interviewee to cover his entire war experience. Some categories, such as being an original, a reinforcement or a prisoner-of-war needed highlighting and again requests to hear from those with special insights went through the newsletter.

As far as was possible I interviewed a cross-section of the unit but as the entire structure had changed many times over during its six wartime years there were obvious limitations to achieving uniformity. Three out of the four battalion commanders were deceased as was the case also among the medical officers. And while the latter left written reports in the War Diary none of the commanders left private documents of any kind. More 'originals' responded to the research

research than reinforcements but the latter provided valuable information and insights. The 39th Battalion's own history was in progress during much of the eighties. Significantly too some of the originals who were privates when the war began had been promoted by the end of their war service. Unavoidably the study's bias is towards those veterans who still belong to the Association. Attempts to contact those outside this network, both by myself and some of the men themselves, were fruitless.

The question of how much gender influenced the research must be considered although it is difficult to answer. The veterans themselves emphasise that what is missing from any retrospective, second-hand account of army living is the soldier's slang, obscene language, humour and sexuality. To take just one example some men told me of how the term 'doover' covered everything, e.g. 'doovers' for manoeuvres. When asked how it was possible to know what 'doover' meant if it was used to indicate everything the men replied: 'ah, you have to be a soldier to understand that'.⁽⁷⁾

The main questions of this study however sought answers to different topics but mainly those to do with the men's experience of their fighting conditions. Sometimes the subjects were difficult for men not usually considered articulate or accustomed to expressing painful emotions. I was very much aware that gender could be a variable influencing the relationship between myself and subjects, particularly on the second round of interviews when I was several months pregnant. Would my apparently vulnerable state inhibit reference to aspects of war which stimulate ideas about death, brutality and fear? But in the end gender did not count. Once the men perceived that the research was an attempt to understand them,

7. Veterans at Ballina Reunion, 11 September 1982

warts and all, they responded readily to the research, not the researcher. The men too were often well aware of the distortions of history-making. They were grateful to be given the opportunity to put forward their views as participants, confessing that their evidence was just as fallible as any other source. As Hugh Jackson wrote in 1983:

In earlier correspondence we touched on the strong and solid bond that exists between men who have seen action together in a good unit. A bond that is difficult to define ... I think I am also right in suggesting that returned men think of themselves as being a little different by virtue of this bond and in a way that unfortunately is not commonly understood. They suffer hurt when memorials are vandalised, when the media refers to Anzac Day as just an opportunity to booze up, when paint was thrown over the troops from Vietnam when they had nothing to do with the decision to send them there. Then out of the blue comes [someone] to "put the record straight" and to try and fill the gap in understanding between themselves and others. They want to help you because you are helping them.(8)

Participant involvement does of course raise questions about subjectivity and the value of remembered experience. The literature on oral history is replete with warnings about the pitfalls of using oral testimony. One person can only ever know a fraction of the total picture; memories fade quickly and what may be recalled in a coherent pattern years later was probably initially a jumble of fleeting impressions. Memory is perhaps sharpened in times of heightened perception but it is none the more reliable for that influence. Other evidence suggests that there is a strong tendency for participants to incorporate themselves into standard myths.(9)

8. H. Jackson, letter to author, 8 March 1983.

9. J. Murphy, 'The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory', Historical Studies, 1987 22, 87, 1986, pp.157-75. J. Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago, 1965 (1st published in French, 1961). L. Douglas & P. Spearritt, 'Talking History: The Use of Oral Sources', in G. Osborne & N.F. Mandle (eds.), New History: Studying Australia Today, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp.51-68.

Undoubtedly hindsight, judgement and interpretation influence the way people organise their memories of past events. The same rules of evidence however can be applied to what is said about past events as to what is written about them. In the case of 2/2 men it was often possible to corroborate what they had to say with documentary sources. Significantly too their unit histories, which were essentially documents projecting the idea of a collective memory, could be fruitfully compared with individual recollections. Exploring issues with the veterans sometimes meant penetrating the structure of established battalion mythologies.

Documentary sources also have their shades of meaning. Unit historians tend to treat official War Diaries as established evidence but both the accuracy and quality of the records depended on individual diarists, and possibly the interests of the battalion commander. Some diarists were laconic almost to the point of muteness whereas others like Roland Hoffman of the original 16th Brigade Headquarters 'saw the men of whom he was one playing a part in a great drama'. He often addressed his comments to 'the historian' of the future.⁽¹⁰⁾ On 6 December 1939 Hoffman wrote of C.E.W. Bean's visit to Ingleburn camp: 'He read the first month's entries ... and gave some hints and advice culled from his own experience'.⁽¹¹⁾

Generally the War Diaries, particularly those of medical units, provided a wealth of observations about the soldier's reactions to almost every aspect of life in his unit and at the front line. In the 2/2's case varying attitudes to diary records were evident over the six year period. Nonetheless the many items filed with the diary

10. G. Long, To Benghazi, Australian War Memorial Canberra, 1952, p.69. Hoffman founded and edited A.I.F. News in Palestine.

11. A.W.M. 52, 8/2/16, War Diary, 16th Brigade Headquarters, 6 December 1939.

summaries built up a clear picture of day to day life in the various theatres. When the men's own accounts, written and oral, intersected with the more static diary accounts they breathed life into the bare outline, they did not just 'colour' the narrative.⁽¹²⁾ As Barbara Tuchman wrote after examining the documents left by First World War protagonists:

Through this forest of special pleading the historian gropes his way trying to recapture the truth of past events and find out 'what really happened'. He discovers that truth is subjective and separate, made up of little bits seen, experienced and recorded by different people. It is like a design seen through a kaleidoscope; when the cylinder is shaken the countless coloured fragments form a new picture. Yet they are the same fragments as made a different picture a moment earlier. This is the problem inherent in the records left by actors in past events. That famous goal, "wie es wirklich war" is never wholly within our grasp.⁽¹³⁾

12. J. Beaumont, op.cit., p.8.

13. B. Tuchman, August 1914, Constable, London, 1962, p.428.

CHAPTER ONE

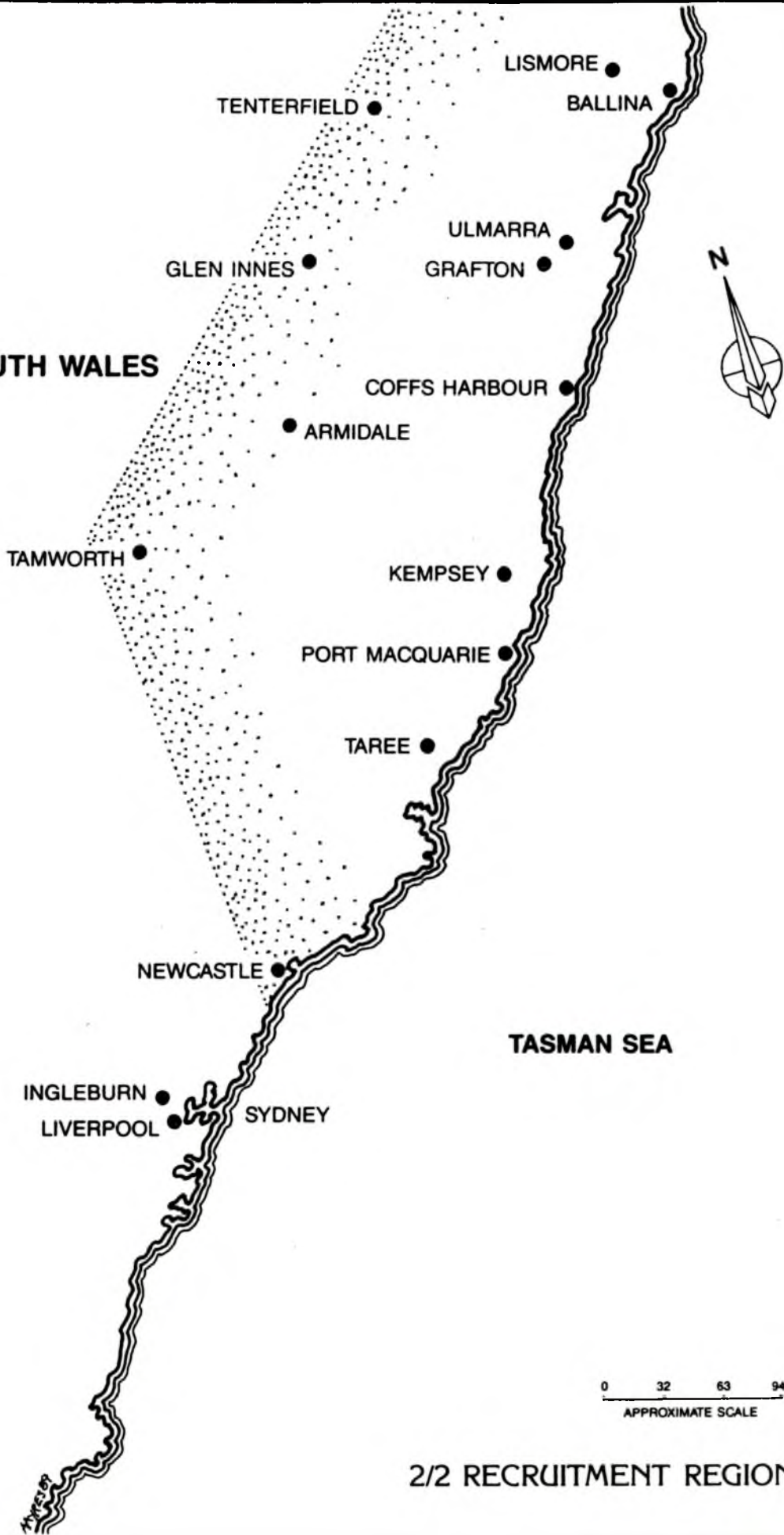
RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND DEPARTURE FROM AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 1939 TO JANUARY 1940

The 2/2, one of four battalions of 16th Brigade, 6th Division, 2nd A.I.F., sailed from Sydney Harbour on 10 January 1940 in a convoy of troop ships bound for the Middle East. The men of the 16,500 strong 6th Division had been the first to respond to the government's call on 15 September 1939 for a special force to assist Britain in its war against Germany. The Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, announced the decision to send troops within twelve days of the declaration of war in Europe, six days later than New Zealand's' announcement of a similar force.

The battalion was made up of volunteers who had been recruited in September and October 1939 from the Newcastle, New England and Northern Rivers districts of New South Wales. In the battalion history, Purple Over Green, Stan Wick records proudly that 2/2 troops were the first to embark at Pymont on 9 January 1940 then first to disembark in Egypt one month later on 12 February.⁽¹⁾ Some in the 2/2 were also amongst the first Australian infantrymen to take up a front line position in the Second World War when they relieved a British unit, the Kings Royal Rifle Corps, at the Libyan border wire on the night of 19 December 1940, two weeks before battle with the Italians at Bardia.⁽²⁾

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1. S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion Association, 1978 (2nd edition), p.25. First published 1977.
 2. A.W.M. 52, 8/2/16, War Diary, 16th Infantry Brigade, 19 December, 1940 (16th Brigade War Diary).

NEW SOUTH WALES



TASMAN SEA

0 32 63 94 MILES
APPROXIMATE SCALE

2/2 RECRUITMENT REGION

Five years later on 13 September 1945 after five campaigns which took it to the Middle East, the Mediterranean and New Guinea, the 2/2 stood on parade at Cape Wom near Wewak on the northern coast of New Guinea to watch Major General H.C.H. Robertson accept a formal surrender from Lieutenant-General Adachi, Commander of the 18th Japanese Army. Japan's unconditional surrender on 15 August had ended the war in the Pacific and brought the 2nd A.I.F.'s function to an end, the 2/2 ceasing its existence finally on 15 February 1946.

In soldiering, war and war remembrance the battalion has long been the all-embracing concept uniting infantrymen. Most studies though conclude that primary group allegiances in an army unit are strongest at the small group level.⁽³⁾ Soldiers, it has been found, develop their closest personal ties in the company, platoon and section but their identity, loyalty and reverence are ultimately with the battalion. This usually life-long veneration of the battalion by many veterans and a stress on unity, identity and camaraderie in memorial rituals tends to obscure for the participants, as well as observers, the impermanent and complex nature of a wartime battalion.

In the period 1939-1945 the 2/2, like all other 2nd A.I.F. units, continually altered its composition through the processes of discharge, transfer and reinforcement. Purple Over Green's nominal

3. See S.A. Stouffer et al., The American Soldier (4 vols.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1949; E.A. Shils and M. Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', The Public Opinion Quarterly, Summer, 1948, pp.328-315; J. Madge, The Origins of Scientific Scientology, Tavistock Publications, London, 1963 (Ch.9 'Social Science and the Soldier'); S.C. Sarkesian, Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress and the Volunteer Army, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1980.

roll indicates that 2,865 men joined the unit at some time in its existence suggesting a large turnover of personnel when establishment figures for an Australian battalion during the war were 600-700 men.⁽⁴⁾ Of interest too is the fact that the length of time in the battalion was not a criterion for any man who wished to have the 2/2 recorded on his discharge papers.

Of the 2,865 battalion members 171 were killed in action, 23 died of wounds and 409 were wounded in action. While my research has not established accurately the fate of each wounded 2/2 man because of restricted access to individual records it is important to note the various paths which wounded men would have followed. Some would have been discharged because of incapacitating wounds, others would have returned to the 2/2, but most likely wounded personnel would have been transferred to other units after hospitalisation and recuperation.

Discharges through medical unfitness caused further losses to the battalion occurring mostly as a result of either wounds or illness acquired during active service, but at other times because of existing or pre-existing medical conditions. Again in practice it is impossible to establish accurately the numbers falling into each of these categories without recourse to individual records. As well medical unfitness for front line service did not always lead to discharge from the army. Some men removed from front line service found employment in administrative and other occupations in the battalion or elsewhere in the 2nd A.I.F.

Battalion losses other than through deaths, wounds or medical unfitness occurred in Greece and Crete in April and May 1941 when 169

4. The statistics in the following paragraphs are from S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.343-379 and C. Mann, 'Facts, Figures and Answers, Nulli Secundus, Vol.35, No.4, August 1984, pp.16-19. The latter established that 74 members were absent from Purple Over Green's first nominal roll.

members became prisoners of war. These men spent the next four years separated from each other in various prison camps in Germany, Austria, Poland and Yugoslavia, two dying in captivity, one settling in Austria after the war.

Reinforcements replenished falling battalion establishment throughout the war, but most notably after Greece and Crete in mid-1941, and after the Papuan campaign in late 1942. On these occasions the battalion had to be built up substantially when fighting conditions in each campaign reduced it to a skeleton. Thus, by the time the war entered its sixth year, the 2/2 had only 79 'originals'. Then when the war ended only 44 could claim that they had experienced life in 2/2 Battalion from the heady days of its recruitment in November 1939 to the end of its last campaign in August 1945.

In late 1939 recruitment for the expeditionary force stirred up less public fervour than had been evident in the early days of the First World War when the government only had to 'watch the flood of volunteers'.⁽⁵⁾ In August 1914 1st A.I.F. recruitment also inspired an outpouring of patriotism from the Australian populace but two and a half decades later 'no brass bands and ... banners'⁽⁶⁾ led men to recruiting offices. Those who enlisted, and those who wished to make an informed choice about enlistment in the various branches of the armed services, did so in a most uncertain climate. Initially the Defence Minister, Geoffrey Street, denied that there were plans for an

5. L. Robson, The First A.I.F.: A Study of its Recruitment 1914-1918, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1970, p.27.

6. G. Long, To Benghazi: Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Vol.I, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, pp.54-55.

expeditionary force, but after the Prime Minister's public call for volunteers on 15 September the minister chose to call the new force the 'Proposed Special Force'.⁽⁷⁾ Then on 8 October, after much confused public debate on whether the proposed expeditionary force was a rightful heir to the 1st A.I.F., the former became known as the 2nd A.I.F.

On 19 October further confusion arose about the 2nd A.I.F.'s purpose when Cabinet reintroduced conscription for home defence.⁽⁸⁾ Compulsory training for home defence, which had been shelved since 1929, began again on 1 January 1940 with the aim of maintaining the militia at a strength of at least 75,000. Although this scheme sought to increase the effectiveness of Australia's home defence it laid the foundation for the peculiar two-army system which proved a source of bitter conflict between the 2nd A.I.F. and militia throughout the war. Although the tensions between the 'two armies' will be discussed at length later, it is important to note here that a 'coolness'⁽⁹⁾ developed early between 2nd A.I.F. and militia enlistees. Pejorative terms such as 'chocolate' and 'fairweather' soldiers, widely used at the time, indicated deep antagonisms between the two groups reflecting far more than the Australian soldiers' propensity for sardonic humour. In 1939 2nd A.I.F. volunteers received less pay than the militia who were rightly or wrongly seen by 6th Division 'originals' to be avoiding the greater responsibility.

Army recruitment policy-makers also expected that the militia would assume greater participation in the new force. In late September 1939 policy predictions were that the 2nd A.I.F. would

7. Age, 18 September 1939.

8. G. Long, op.cit., p.63.

9. ibid., p.67

comprise 50% militia, 25% ex-servicemen and 25% from other sources.⁽¹⁰⁾ Policy guidelines also stated that the preferred 2nd A.I.F. recruit was to be no less than five feet six inches tall, single, classified A1 at medical examination and not employed in an essential industry. The age limits for enlistees were 20 and 35 years with the upper age limit extended in exceptional cases to 40 years for warrant and non-commissioned officers.

Before medical examinations began in early October a list of reserved occupations appeared in newspapers. The list, which occupied three columns of small type, advised that certain occupations would not be accepted for the 2nd A.I.F. if the applicant exceeded a certain age limit. If successful in his application a 2nd A.I.F. recruit agreed to the terms of enlistment which were 'for voluntary service in Australia or abroad for the duration of the war and twelve months thereafter unless sooner lawfully discharged'.⁽¹¹⁾

Early recruitment fell short of predictions and produced unexpected trends.⁽¹²⁾ The average age of recruits was higher than expected and only 20 to 25 per cent - fewer than 5,000 - came from the militia. In New South Wales 3,000 men gained acceptance in the 2nd A.I.F. during the first three days of recruitment. Thereafter enlistments decreased daily creating fears for recruitment officers that the 6,300 quota would not be filled before November when the new units were due in camp. By 13 October only 3,400 had been enlisted in New South Wales, and of those nearly one half were without previous military training, only 1,200 being from the militia which numbered

10. A.W.M. 54, Written Records 1939-1945 War, 422/7/8, Memo to Military Board, Army Headquarters, Victoria Barracks Melbourne from H.Q. 2nd Division, 20 September 1939.

11. ibid.

12. G. Long, op.cit., p.58.

25,000 in that State. By 30 October New South Wales had 6,120 2nd A.I.F. recruits and of these 3,018 had no military experience, 1,468 had previous experience but had not come directly from the militia and 1,634 were militia men.

Observers advanced many reasons for the slow rate of enlistment, above all the uncertainty of the new force's destination and confusion over the reintroduction of compulsory training for home service. Sir Henry Gullett, the Minister for External Affairs and Information, raised the problem of waning enlistments at a War Cabinet meeting on 28 October suggesting that low enlistment rates from the militia were due in part to the lack of an effective link between it and the expeditionary force. According to the minister, militia officers were discouraging enlistment in the new force in the belief that a later division would be raised enabling them to hold their commands and take their men with them.

1st Australia Corps' diary offered three reasons for the low militia transfers. Firstly the lack of inspiring leadership by the Commonwealth failed to raise militia support. Secondly many militiamen were reluctant to relinquish well paid positions to join a force which might not go overseas. Lastly it was thought that both active and passive opposition by militia commanders deterred militia enlistments to the volunteer force. In addition the news of a large-scale Empire Air Training Scheme made many young men hold back from enlisting in the army. (13)

13. ibid., pp.59-62.

2/2 Battalion came into being at 0900 hours on 24 October 1939 when Lieutenant-Colonel George Wootten, a Gallipoli veteran, country solicitor and part-time regular soldier between the wars, established his headquarters at Victoria Barracks in Sydney.⁽¹⁴⁾ On the same day Wootten enlisted three other men, the adjutant Captain R. Dibbs, the quartermaster, Lieutenant B.S. Black and the Regimental Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer I.D. Sanderson. On the following days he accepted another two captains and six lieutenants. Then Major Ivan Dougherty became the unit's second in command having surrendered his rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the militia to join the A.I.F. By 2 November the battalion comprised 12 officers, two sergeant majors, one sergeant and 41 militia privates. On that same day, after a week of administrative preparation, this nucleus of the unit left Victoria Barracks for Ingleburn to await the arrival of the volunteers.

The recruits arrived at Ingleburn in two contingents, the first arriving over two days, 4 and 5 November, and comprising two train-loads, 90 on the first, 304 on the second. Ken Curtis recalled that the initiates on the first train

were mostly dressed in civilian clothes but many wore the uniforms of their militia units. They carried their belongings in all types of luggage including suitcases, gladstone bags, sugar bags and large brown paper bags, some of which were beginning to wilt (like their owners). The seedy appearance of the new recruits contrasted sharply with the somewhat dandified attire of Lt. Goslett, who had been silently watching the men disgorge from the train. As a mounted officer of the 13th Battalion, he wore highly-polished leggings and spurs and carried a riding crop. Together with riding breeches, a full-skirted jacket, a Sam Browne belt and dazzling brasswork and leathers, he presented a picture of sartorial elegance. Hence when Bombadier McDermott saluted smartly and handed the parade over to Lt.

14. The following details about formation are from S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.1-8 and A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion (2/2 War Diary), October and November 1939.

Goslett ... a pregnant silence .. was broken by a bibulous voice from the ranks saying "Gawd look at the bloody pansy".(15)

The second contingent of recruits, which prides itself on longer service in the 2nd A.I.F., marched to Ingleburn on the morning of 6 November, leaving the Recruit Reception Depot at Liverpool where they had had basic training for some two weeks, among them 60 Newcastle men.

On 6 November when the various groups came together as a battalion with a strength of 17 officers and 815 other ranks a month or more had passed since each man made his choice to enlist. In the period between applying to enlist and arriving at the training camp each recruit had passed through a series of steps which began his socialisation into the army. Following the lodgement of an application to enlist, which had been signed by both parents, if the recruit was under 21, he was called for attestation. At this procedure the potential recruit filled in an attestation form and then if passed A1 at medical examination swore an oath of allegiance. In most cases the newly-sworn recruit made out a will, was issued with an enlistment number and rank, and assigned to a unit. Henceforward the enlisted man identified himself by number, rank, unit and division. For the men of 2/2 Battalion this identification was symbolised further in their purple and green colour patch and the motto 'Nulli Secundus' - second to none, continuing the tradition set by the 2nd Battalion in the First World War, although 2nd A.I.F. colour patches had a grey border to distinguish them from corresponding militia units. By the 2/2's own admission its motto is by no means unique.

15. K. Curtis, 'Birth of a Battalion', A.J. Marshall (ed.), Nulli Secundus Log, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion A.I.F., Sydney 1946, p.11.

Many British and Australian units had, or still have it, including the Coldstream Guards. (16)

Few 2/2 men committed their early impressions of training camp to writing, but one close observer of personnel at Ingleburn related the ignorance of many recruits about what their new life entailed. According to the 16th Brigade diarist 'a few actually believed they would be in camp for only fourteen days and then ... return home'. One soldier who lived under such illusion addressed a letter to the Camp Commander in which he tendered seven days' notice, stating that 'he already felt convinced army life would not be agreeable to him'. (17)

Those from the country, like the majority in the 2/2, were likely to be in Sydney for the first time and over-awed by both the scale of city living and their army quarters. In his first letter home Jack Ulrick told his father:

The camp itself is immense imagine a place as big or I think bigger than Ulmarra [near Grafton] all the same huts although I think huts is a misnomer as they are very good 24 men to each and there is loads of room all the Ulmarra boys are in the hut with me and are at present writing home. (18)

After his first visit to Sydney Ulrick recounted that he and several friends with 'Georgie Finn for a guide' went

... for a run going in on the electric trains [sic]. Had a fast ride ... and thoroughly enjoyed it ... We got off at Central and George led us down bloody passages and stairs and tunnels till we

16. See G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.51 and I. Morrison, 'The Motto and the Patch', *Nulli Secundus*, Vol.39, No.5, October 1988, pp.8-9.

17. 16th Brigade War Diary, 20 October 1939.

18. J. Ulrick, collection of letters loaned to author, early November 1939 (Ulrick letter).

finally came out to George Street. From there we went down to the Quay and had a look at the Bridge etc. We had a great look around and were star gazers all the way.

In the same letter Ulrick asked his father for the address of a friend who was also at Ingleburn 'If I don't know what battalion he is in I have no chance of locating him ... so ... write and give us his battalion and company and if possible what platoon No. he is in'.(19)

According to Purple Over Green, 2/2 recruits found the transition from civilian to army life quite difficult. As civilians before November 1939 they had led relatively free lives within the structure of the law, but as soon as they reached Ingleburn 'a superior authority'(20) required that they rose early, showered, shaved, dressed, ate, went on parade and ran their lives to a preordained routine. Any failure to comply with set orders could result in some form of punishment under the disciplinary code of the Manual of Military Law.

The sardonic quip, 'you'll be sorry', which became so popular with 2nd A.I.F. divisions in the war, is said to have originated at Ingleburn in early November 1939.(21) The phrase summed up neatly the fate of many naive civilians who faced army codes and practice for the first time. In little over two months the recruits had to learn the rigours of discipline and drill and be prepared on a war footing. The Ingleburn training syllabus, which had been prepared for men with no previous military experience, included elementary foot drill, arms drill, elementary musketry, hygiene education and lectures on various military subjects including the soldier's responsibility under

19. Ulrick letter, undated November 1939.

20. S. Wick, op.cit., p.13.

21. K. Curtis, op.cit., p.11.

military law.(22) Ulrick told his father that it was 'all stuff we have had in the militia' and that they were all anxious to start their new training with the Vickers machine-guns and trench mortars.(23)

Training civilians for war was difficult in the Australian army of 1939 because of the lack of experienced instructors. If the new way of life was perplexing for recruits some officers also found that 'a whole new life of responsibility was opening up before them'. Some saw the responsibilities of wartime leadership as more onerous than the 'comparatively free and easy days of routine duties and limited responsibility'(24) in the militia. Others who had no officer training before the war felt that they had gained their commissions because of leadership qualities that they brought from civilian life. In a letter to the author in 1982 John Dunlop recalled that in October 1939 when he first saw Brigadier A.S. ('Tubby') Allen, Commander of 16th Brigade, he only had to say he had been in commercial life in charge of 'some 15 country commercial travellers, ... 20 packers and storemen and ... 20 typists, office boys and the like' to be 'snatched up' as an infantry officer. After only two weeks at an officer training school near Ingleburn Dunlop advanced from Lance Corporal to Lieutenant.(25)

Ken Curtis, an original 2/2 sergeant, also recalled that when training began seriously at Ingleburn 'anybody with any experience at all' instructed recruits:

22. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.12-13.

23. Ulrick letter, undated November, 1939.

24. S. Wick, op.cit., p.13.

25. J. Dunlop, letter, 26 July 1982.

... lance corporals had platoons of fifty-odd hard bitten citizens to train and command ... There was only one Lewis gun available to each platoon and a limited [number] of rifles. Nobody had seen a Tommy gun and the Owen ... existed more or less in its inventor's head. (26)

The lack of experienced instructors and inappropriate equipment were not the only factors which disrupted training. In contrast to the usually strict camp standards laid down for soldiers in training conditions at Ingleburn were extremely lax. The recruits obtained ample weekend and night leave and as well wives and girlfriends visited the camp on Sundays. While such leniency probably helped to cushion the recruits' adjustment to army life it worked against the development of a sense of unity amongst virtual strangers: 'we were learning to be infantrymen, but we still weren't soldiers and we still weren't a unit in the sense that we know it now'. (27)

Other adjustments to communal living also took their toll on recruits and delayed the creation of a disciplined unit. At first most recruits wore ill-fitting and mis-matched uniforms, not receiving full uniform until mid-December. Inoculations for typhoid and other diseases in heat-wave conditions in early December also caused considerable discomfort, while 'Ingleburn throat' afflicted many in the camp. Flu hospitalised Ulrick who told his father that the field hospital tents were "full" with such cases. (28) On top of settling in and these minor health problems other tensions surfaced. 16th Brigade troops were quick to express their anger over the high prices in the canteen run by private rather than army contractors. The 2/3's troops

26. K. Curtis, op.cit., p.12.

27. ibid., p.13.

28. 2/2 War Diary, December 1939, 16th Brigade War Diary, 3 December 1939 and Ulrick letter, early December 1939.

gained notoriety by burning down their canteen while picquets placed on the 2/2's saved it from a similar fate.⁽²⁹⁾

In mid-December, two weeks after Cabinet's decision on 28 November to send the 2nd A.I.F. overseas, 16th Brigade marched through Sydney. The decision in late November reassured the troops that something positive was under way. It however gave no joy to the A.L.P., whose leader, John Curtin, warned of the consequences of maintaining a volunteer army overseas, arguing that such a commitment during the First World War led to the effort to *introduce* conscription *for overseas service.*⁽³⁰⁾ Some public cynicism towards the volunteers, such as that expressed by the 'Domain reds',⁽³¹⁾ reinforced the hostile political attacks but in spite of its most strident critics the 2nd A.I.F. developed a 'defiant pride'.⁽³²⁾ Ernie Osbourne, of Kempsey and then in 2/2's D Company, described the prevailing atmosphere in a letter to his mother after the 2nd A.I.F.'s first public march:

Gee, what a crowd. I thought there was a crowd when the harbour bridge was opened but it had nothing on the crowd at the march, women were crying and playing up, one onlooker ... called out 5/- a day killers ... and one of our mates knocked him off his feet and the crowd did give [him] a cheer.⁽³³⁾

29. G. Long, op.cit., p.68.

30. ibid., p.65.

31. Term given to anti-war orators in the Domain, Sydney.

32. G. Long, op.cit., p.67 quoting a 6th Division unit diarist.

33. E. Osbourne, collection of letters and papers loaned to author, 7 January 1940 (Osbourne letter).

The origins of the volunteers who made up the 2/2 Battalion and other 6th Division units in 1939 have long been the subject of myth and hearsay. Popular perception has held that the 6th Division comprised mostly unemployed. The idea that large numbers of unemployed filled the ranks of the newly-formed 2nd A.I.F. largely developed from claims made in Parliament by the Labor politician, Eddie Ward. During a debate in mid-November on the decision to raise an expeditionary force Ward charged that recruitment for the force was a 'form of economic conscription': single unemployed men receiving 8s 6d a week would find the prospect of earning 5s a day with food and quarters an attractive inducement to enlist.⁽³⁴⁾

Purple Over Green and other 2/2 sources are generally silent on the question of unemployed in the original battalion. Nonetheless the unit's own account of the 'incredibly assorted collection of individuals' who were on the trains to Ingleburn provides a colourful impression of the types who would always be known as 'originals':

There were sleeper cutters and timber-getters from the Dorrigo and cow-cookies and banana-growers from the Tweed. There were businessmen and tradesmen from cities like Newcastle, Grafton and Armidale. There were station owners and station hands from the frosty New England. There were school teachers and bank clerks from practically anywhere. And there was a sprinkling of plain hobos.⁽³⁵⁾

The original A Company comprised mainly men from the Newcastle, Coalfields and Maitland area, one of its officers being a Newcastle lawyer.

Other 6th Division veterans paint a similar picture in memoirs and unit histories. Henry 'Jo' Gullett of the Victorian 2/6 claimed

34. G. Long, op.cit., p.64.

35. K. Curtis, op.cit., p.11.

that his unit in 1939 had 'school-teachers, farmers, labourers, clerks, salesmen, men of nearly forty [and] boys out of high school'.⁽³⁶⁾ A South Australian unit, the 2/10, boasted it had 'a cross-section of Australians' including a 'confident city group ... calm and sturdy country fellows and [an] exuberant party of good scouts from Broken Hill'.⁽³⁷⁾ Ken Clift of another N.S.W. battalion, the 2/3, described how 'chartered accountants, barristers and engineers'⁽³⁸⁾ enlisted as unemployed to avoid reserved occupations. Clift and other 2/3 historians also claimed that 2/3 "'originals" shrugged off the abusive epithets "economic conscript" and "five bob a day killer" as most ... had been previously employed'.⁽³⁹⁾

Brigadier F.W. Speed, who was in charge of 17th Brigade's recruit training in Victoria in late 1939, also contested the idea of 'economic conscription' in Peter Charlton's book, The Thirty-Niners. Speed of the 2/5 Battalion, and a part-time adjutant in a militia battalion before the war, believed that in late 1939 even though some men joined straight from school and others were unemployed a 'substantial number' left jobs 'of one kind or another'. In the brigadier's view, the 2/5, recruited largely from Melbourne's industrial suburbs, was more likely to have had a higher proportion of unemployed than other Victorian units, but the case was otherwise.⁽⁴⁰⁾

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36. H. Gullett, Not As a Duty Only, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976, p.10.
37. F. Allchin, Purple and Blue: The History of the 2/10th Battalion A.I.F. (The Adelaide Rifles), The Griffin Press, Adelaide, 1958, p.3.
38. K. Clift, The Saga of a Sig: The Wartime Memories of Six Years' Service in the Second A.I.F., K.C.D. Publications, Sydney, 1972, p.6.
39. K. Clift et al., War Dance: The Story of the 2/3 Aust. Inf. Bn. 16 Brigade 6 Division, P.M. Fowler and 2/3 Battalion Association, Sydney, 1980, p.9.
40. Cited in P. Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1981, p.21.

Official sources tend to confirm contemporary impressions of early 2nd A.I.F. enlistment. In October 1941 a Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics summary of the ages and occupations of men who enlisted in the A.I.F. and R.A.A.F. between October 1939 and March 1941 revealed that A.I.F. units from every state contained men from varied backgrounds and occupations with about two percent making up the category 'Other Ill-Defined and Unspecified Occupations and Not Gainfully Employed'. Of the total 51,137 some 8,000 were from administrative, professional and clerical positions, 5,805 from commerce and finance, 6,158 from agricultural, pastoral and dairying and 2,550 from building. The category 'Labourer Undefined' had 9,780. (41)

In the late forties Central Army Records Office (CARO) compiled a more precise breakdown of 1939 enlistment for the Department of Labour and National Service. (42) Using many of the occupational categories of the previous Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics summary, CARO grouped occupations under twelve classifications in which the last two described those in 'ill-defined, other and unspecified' occupations and 'persons not gainfully employed'. For the months of September, October and November 1939 only 46 came under 'not gainfully employed' while 3,245 made up the other category. Total A.I.F. enlistments to the end of November were 17,844. (43) On these figures only 0.2% of 2nd A.I.F. recruits actually described themselves as unemployed in 1939. If however the above two categories are added

41. 'A.I.F. and R.A.A.F. Personnel', Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics interim summary, Canberra ACT, 14 October 1941. Copy given to author by G. McKeown, Research Officer, Australian War Memorial, June 1981.

42. A.W.M. 127, CARO (Central Army Records Office), Compendium, p.214.

43. A.W.M. 54, Written Records 1939-1945 War, 834/4/4 'A.I.F. Gross Monthly Recruiting Figures, September 1939 to December 1942'

together then 18% of the 2nd A.I.F.'s original recruits were without precise occupational description.

As far back as 1952 Gavin Long warned of the unreliability of statistics compiled from attestation papers.⁽⁴⁴⁾ In the first volume of the official history Long noted the small number of recruits who actually stated 'unemployed' at the time of attestation. Of a sample of 14,953 randomly selected from all recruits who enlisted in 1939, he found that only 200 (1.3%) actually stated 'unemployed' on the attestation form. Long's statistics reveal a higher percentage of unemployed in the 1939 A.I.F. than does the CARO sample but both samples show a lower percentage of unemployed than the author's sample of 169 2/2 men who enlisted in 1939. Of those 22 (13%) described themselves as 'unemployed'.⁽⁴⁵⁾ And while the 2/2 figure is not reliable because of sample selection method, it does support the official historian's wariness towards attestation statistics. The figures cited in this discussion also refute a claim made recently by Michael McKernan that attestation papers showed a high percentage of unemployed in the 2nd A.I.F.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Mainly through anecdotal evidence the 'thirty-niners' themselves helped to generate the popular belief that the attestation papers of the first months of enlistment would show a high percentage of unemployed. Although Long drew attention to the now well-known ploys used by recruits to avoid reserved occupations and age barriers surprisingly he failed to note an ambiguity in the attestation form

44. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.58.

45. The author had access to 500 personal 2/2 files at Central Army Records Office, Melbourne, July 1983. Policy at the time dictated that the sample comprise the first 500 files in alphabetical order and that only attestation forms be examined.

46. M. McKernan, *All In: Australia During the Second World War*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1983, p.20.

itself.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Unlike the 'application to enlist', which had several employment questions, the attestation form required the recruit to answer only one, 'What is your trade or occupation?' On the first form, the applicant/recruit had been asked his present trade or occupation and his employer's name and address. As well at the time of applying to enlist the attending recruitment officer filled out a section on the form dealing with reserved occupation status.⁽⁴⁸⁾

From this research it would seem that applying to enlist and attestation have become synonymous events in 2nd A.I.F. recollections. The 'application to enlist' form with its more specific and probing questions on employment was more likely to have encouraged the eager volunteer to describe himself as unemployed or to invent an occupation. Conversely it has been believed that unemployed men entered false occupations on attestation forms to avoid the stigma associated with the tag 'economic conscript'. While such action seems plausible most 6th Division recruits had applied to enlist, had been attested and were in camp by early November, more than a week before Ward introduced the idea of economic conscription.

While many 2/2 men admitted in interviews with the author that they put their age up to enlist no man admitted to being unemployed. And only one admitted to falsifying his application to enlist on both occupational and age grounds. Geoff Coyle of Newcastle, who left the army in 1945 with the rank of major, claimed he was unemployed and older than his years on his application form to avoid being detected as a sixteen year old newspaper boy.⁽⁴⁹⁾

47. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.58.

48. Copies of both forms and will examined at Australian War Memorial. A.W.M. 54, Written Records 1939-1945 War, 117/4/1.

49. G. Coyle, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983.

When critics branded the 2nd A.I.F.'s early recruits 'economic conscripts' they questioned the volunteers' motives for enlistment in a way unknown to their fathers. Just how widespread opposition to the 2nd A.I.F. has been difficult to assess, but it is clear that the questioning of Australia's participation in the Second World War was insignificant when compared with the conscription referenda of the First World War and the intensity of the Vietnam War protest. Indeed Long could write in the early fifties that he believed it would be one hundred years before Australians questioned why their countrymen and New Zealanders 'volunteered so readily for service half a world away'. At that time he also asked whether the Anzacs of the Second World War had been 'adventurers or those brought up in an ardent loyalty to England ... or men bored with humdrum lives ... or the unemployed and unskilled in search of occupation - or some of each of these?' He concluded that in the face of the many barriers put before volunteers in 1939 only the most eager enlisted. According to Long 90 per cent of recruits were Australian born and many still felt strong loyalty to Britain. And while some men admitted that they enlisted to escape uninteresting occupations, dull towns or domestic difficulties the lure of adventure, self-enhancement and membership in the tradition of the 1st A.I.F. were equally powerful motives for others.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Indeed during the early days of recruitment a sense of communion between the 1st and 2nd A.I.F.s was carefully engendered. Perhaps the most persuasive arguments came from C.E.W. Bean, the father of Australian war history. His article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 15 December exemplifies the attempts to create a link between the two generations. Appearing at the time of the 2nd A.I.F.'s first march through Sydney, the article claimed that the most vital factor in

50. G. Long, op.cit., p.56.

moulding the 2nd A.I.F. was the considerable number of younger A.I.F. who were 'sons of diggers and in many cases diggers who had been killed'.⁽⁵¹⁾ Bean affirmed that for these men the A.I.F. was a spiritual home and in them the old A.I.F. lived again.

Ian McKenzie, an original 2/2 officer, also sensed the 2nd A.I.F.'s historical significance. In an article in the Newcastle Morning Herald he told readers on 16 November 1939 of the establishment of Ingleburn camp. Following a description of how hills covered with grazing cattle and strawberry beds had been turned into hills covered with huts for 6,000 men McKenzie continued:

History is repeating itself in the Ingleburn district. The camp is in the Liverpool area,,within a mile or so of the old A.I.F. camp. More than 20 years ago a generation of Australian men swept in their thousands over those and other hills in the district. Advancing, retreating, parrying the bayonet thrust, they learned it all in this area. Along the highway, where distance is marked in Roman numerals on ancient milestones, the old A.I.F. men took their route marches. Little they thought as they swung along the rough old road that their sons would be soldiers of the new A.I.F., training in the same district, because the same enemy which threatened civilisation then would be menacing the world again.⁽⁵²⁾

In interviews several 2/2 men revealed that their fathers were in the 1st A.I.F. A former adjutant, and now legendary character in the 2/2, Colonel Duncan ('Pansy') Goslett, was the son of a man who was at the Anzac Cove landing, served the entire war then discharged in 1918. The father died of tuberculosis at 48. From an early age Goslett wanted to be a soldier but his father was opposed to him being a 'licensed murderer'. Like his father Goslett had a very low enlistment number and was one of the first officers selected for the

51. The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 December 1939. Also C.E.W. Bean, The Old A.I.F. and the New, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1940

52. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.9.

2/2. Of his father and himself Goslett said 'you could say we were both in before the bugler's lips were moist'.⁽⁵³⁾

Carl Parrott, a mortar-platoon sergeant from Newcastle, also had a 1st A.I.F. father. The latter, who was in a tunnelling company on the Western front, opposed the son's enlistment in 1939, advising him against joining the infantry, if he had to join anything, but as Parrott reflected in 1982 he did not heed his father on either count. Under-aged when he volunteered he persuaded his father to sign his enlistment papers. The father signed against his better judgement fearing that his son would go to Sydney and change his name if he did not have parental permission. Explaining this strong desire to join up, Parrott said that 'to be truthful' he did not go to war out of patriotism but rather to 'break the monotony'. Before the war he worked on the waterfront and was in the militia. On the night Menzies announced that Australia was at war he was guarding installations at Newcastle. Patriotism, Parrott reflected forty years later, was something he and others developed after the war.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Jack Smithers, also from Newcastle, did not speak directly of his reasons for joining the 2nd A.I.F. but his background revealed itself in a discussion over his diary, letters and photographs, when it emerged that his father had been killed in France in 1917. His brother, who joined the R.A.A.F., died in an air crash in Scotland in 1943.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Ulrick, one of 14 men from the Ulmarra district to join the A.I.F. in 1939, summed up his motive for enlistment with the phrase 'What a time to be 21'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ This sense of having no alternative also

53. D. Goslett, interview, Normanhurst, 31 May 1983.

54. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983.

55. J. Smithers, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983.

56. J. Ulrick, interview, Grafton, 8 November 1982. Ulrick intended to use this phrase as a title for his memoirs if he ever got around to writing.

expressed the position of a Grafton man, Tom Mawhinney. A well-respected regimental sergeant major in 2/2 Battalion, Mawhinney believed that the outcry against 6th Division came from a vocal minority and in no way 'fitted the facts'. As he put it, in the 2/2:

we had more than our share of very wealthy men with really good jobs. There would not have been many who didn't have a fair idea of what we were letting ourselves into but our whole way of life was at stake and most of us felt we had no option. No doubt many of us had some relation who had served in the 1st A.I.F. and we of course hoped we would not let them down. (57)

Charlie Green, another from the Ulmarra district but one without 'a father model compelling him', enlisted against his dairyman father's wishes but for reasons known mostly to himself. As his widow wrote in 1985:

[Charlie] would have felt it was the honourable thing to do ... It is possible though, as his enthusiasm for the militia shows, he sensed he had a talent. The war [gave] him ... an opportunity to explore it. Or, he might have wanted to break out of his narrow existence, to be his own man. (58)

While 1st A.I.F. tradition was undoubtedly a powerful influence on early enlistment, some 2/2 men question the Anzac mythology approach which many writers use to explain why Australians volunteered in 1939. Don Fairbrother, an original and later senior officer in the 2/2, believed that Peter Charlton in his book The Thirty-Niners 'made

57. T. Mawhinney, interview, Grafton, 9 November 1982. Also notes written in response to paper 'The Poor Bloody Infantry' presented by author at A.W.M. History Conference, February 1982.
58. O. Green, 'The Name's Still Charlie', unpublished biography of Charles Green. Olwyn Green was also from Ulmarra leaving the district only after the death of her husband in Korea in 1950. At that time Green commanded 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, as part of a United Nations force.

too much' (59) of the 2nd A.I.F. being cast in the mould of the 1st. Charlton, who dedicated his book to 'the first and finest' (60) paints the 6th Division volunteers as men raised on the feats of the Anzacs and keen to uphold their tradition. Other 2nd A.I.F. chroniclers and admirers adopt this unquestioning approach tending to superimpose 1st A.I.F. stereotypes upon the 2nd. In a typical excerpt, Ken Clift of the 2/3 described the 1939 volunteers as the 'cream of Australian manhood', claiming that a certain 'sameness' in characteristics marked the volunteers of the two forces. Anzacs of both generations were seen to possess 'clean, craggy features, laconic humour, casual recklessness and disregard for authority'. (61)

Fairbrother believed that instead of being 1st A.I.F. 'clones', 2nd A.I.F. men had a sense of being soldiers in their own right with a completely different war on their hands from that fought by the 1st A.I.F. (62) For others 'a sense of approaching threat' during the thirties compelled them to enlist when war came. Sir Ivan Dougherty, who virtually commanded the 2/2 in its earliest months, said that he used to be chided for his militarism in the thirties but that it was a sense of duty and patriotism which influenced his decision to transfer from the militia to the A.I.F. in 1939. (63) Dr Leo Armati, the unit's first and longest-serving Regimental Medical Officer, saw his decision to enlist as a natural progression from playing competitive sport and holding King and country dear. (64)

59. D. Fairbrother, interview, Port Macquarie, 7 July 1982 (Fairbrother interview).

60. P. Charlton, *op.cit.* General Blamey first called the 6th Division 'the first and finest'.

61. K. Clift et al., *op.cit.*, p.8.

62. Fairbrother interview.

63. Sir I. Dougherty, interview, Cronulla, 29 March 1982.

64. Dr L. Armati, interview, McMahon's Point, 27 September 1982.

Many other 2/2 men, like Alan Goudge, said they would never have joined the 2nd A.I.F. if they had known the war would last six years. Goudge, who spent four years in a prisoner-of-war camp in Austria after his capture in Greece, remembered the influence of six years' separation on his marriage and other family ties. He married his wife on 1 January 1940, a few days before the 6th Division sailed for Palestine, not seeing her again until the end of the war. His sister, who was six years old when he left Australia, was a teenager on his return. (65)

Many 2/2 men spent their final and pre-embarkation leave celebrating Christmas with their families. Then on 9 January 1940, after reveille at 0330 hours, the 2/2 marched to Ingleburn station, presenting 'a more steadfast company' (66) than they had on their arrival a few weeks previously. At Pymont wharf in groups of 100, the battalion boarded the Otranto, one of four transports which carried the 16th Brigade group to the Middle East. Mid-morning the ships moved into the harbour anchoring near Taronga Park Zoo. That night a Neutral Bay man wrote to Osbourne's mother:

My father and I happened to be one of the fortunate ones to see the troop ships anchored in Sydney harbour before setting sail tonight for the other side. The rumour soon spread around the suburbs that the boats were [sic] there and that launches were taking people to view same. My brother was sailing so we went to say a final farewell and luckily we saw him.... He was on the 'Otranto'. I am not sure whether your son threw the letters to me from that ship or the 'Orcades' ... in the excitement. They were all bright and happy on both ships.... The only reason I am

65. A. Goudge, discussion with author at 2/2 Battalion Association Commemorative Dinner, Newcastle, 7 November 1981.

66. K. Curtis, op.cit, p.13.

not with them is that I'm a young married man with ... two beautiful baby girls. (67)

On the following morning at 1000 hours the two liners steamed into outer Sydney Harbour. Excited crowds covered every vantage point on the harbour front to give the troops a rowdy farewell. Ferries, steamers and little coasters on the harbour and railway-engines on shore added to the excitement by sounding their sirens. (68) Then at 1300 hours the Otranto, Orcades, Orford and Strathnaver moved out of the harbour past one of their escorts, the battleship Ramillies, one soldier on the Otranto recording his impressions of the departure. Corporal Roland Hoffman, a Sydney journalist who died in England in August 1945 after his release from a German prisoner-of-war camp, wrote:

Sydney with its Bridge, its coves and bays and ferries and its sky-flung buildings had never looked lovelier, more entrancingly beautiful than she looked just now to the troops who swarmed the riggings and lined the rails to linger sentimentally and introspectively over her imposing but disappearing sky-line ...

Thoughts were revealed on rugged sunburned faces as clearly as though they lay on X-ray negatives. This leaving home was not coming easy to anyone and these men tough, carefree citizens [sic] ... were realising what it meant to them. For the first time - perhaps some were realising the sacrifice they had undertaken - and many pairs of eyes became unfamiliarly dim. (69)

Later in the day, when the ships were out of sight of land, the Australian convoy joined six other transports of the 4th New Zealand Brigade. With Ramillies leading and the cruisers Canberra on one flank and Australia on the other the convoy sailed southwards. Letters home

67. J.W. Minnett, letter, 9 January 1940, in E. Osbourne's collection of letters and papers loaned to author.

68. K. Curtis, op.cit., p.13; S. Wick, op.cit., p.18 and G. Long, op.cit., p.69.

69. 16th Brigade War Diary, 10 January 1940.

from 'on board the Otranto' give contrasting impressions. Osbourne wrote: 'What do you know I never saw the ship sail from Sydney Harbour, we were down writing letters to post when I came up on deck she was about 2 mile out to sea ... I was so surprised I through [sic] the letters overboard'.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Ulrick told his father of the 'wonderful sight' which greeted him and his companions when they walked on deck every morning: 'I can't give details but imagine a body of great liners sailing along in formation rising and falling as they carry a load of Australia's men into a heavy sea'.⁽⁷¹⁾

The Otranto's stay at Fremantle on 13 January gave the troops a chance to see the Western Australian capital. Smithers wrote:

Crowds of people under every street light cheering us as busload after busload of soldiers rode past on their way to Perth. A wonderful reception very much appreciated by us all ... Perfect summer night strolled around Perth for a while. Full of soldiers and sailors Aust. and N.Z. ... and Eng. and French sailors. Everybody on the best of terms with each other and having the time of their lives. Saw many humorous scenes ... Returned to Fremantle about 2230 hrs. Met 2 french [sic] sailors in bus who entertained us with songs [including] Booms a Daisy in French.⁽⁷²⁾

On 10 February, in a letter which was written on Perth's Savoy Hotel paper, Ulrick told his father of his leave with Bill Sully, Max Finn and George Steen:

At last we can give you a little bit of news that it is a bit different from the rest ... [In Fremantle] ... we ... hailed a car the people looked like a young married couple and he gave us a good trip. He took us by what he called the mountain road, which ran through a beautiful big park or reserve [King's Park] and pulled up overlooking Perth. It was a wonderful sight.

70. Osbourne letter, 12 January 1940.

71. Ulrick letter, 14 January 1940.

72. J. Smithers, diary loaned to author, 13 January 1940.

When we hit Perth [the man] took us in and shouted and wished us good luck ... we were lucky to strike a cove like that ... The pubs don't close till 9.30 so by [then] we were very merry ... You can quite imagine thousands of laughing, singing troops in a place, their last glimpse of Aussy [sic] and all happy. [Perth] was one of the noisiest places on the map that night. Our last bit of Australia was certainly a snifter.⁽⁷³⁾

73. Ulrick letter, 10 February 1940.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAINING IN PALESTINE AND EGYPT

FEBRUARY TO DECEMBER 1940

The 2/2, as part of the Australian - New Zealand convoy, arrived in the Middle East in February 1940 after four weeks at sea and a brief call at Colombo, Ceylon. On the afternoon of 12 February the ships docked at Ismailia in the Suez Canal where Anthony Eden, Secretary for the Dominions, Sir Miles Lampson, British Ambassador and General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief Middle East, boarded the leading transport, the Otranto. In the presence of more than a dozen newsreel and press photographers 2/2 troops heard Eden read a message from the King to welcome the first Australians and New Zealanders to arrive in the Middle East. Cheers went up when the men heard that news of their safe arrival had reached Australia. During previous days rumour had it that Hitler broadcast the sinking of the Otranto with all on board.⁽¹⁾ Undoubtedly many felt like Jack Smithers, who hoped when he noted the 'false rumour'⁽²⁾ in his diary, that the news did not reach Australia where it would cause unnecessary anxiety for families.

After a slow journey up the Canal the Otranto docked at El Kantara at midnight. In the early hours of 13 February 2/2 troops with the rest of 16th Brigade boarded trains which took them across the Egyptian-Palestine border to Gaza and El Majdal. At Gaza, a place well known to the Australians through 1st A.I.F. associations, British

1. A.W.M. 52, War Diary, 8/2/16, H.Q. 16 Brigade, 12 February, 1940 (16th Brigade War Diary) and E. Osbourne, letter, 24 February 1940, in collection of letters on loan to author (Osbourne letter).

2. J. Smithers, diary on loan to author, 7 February 1940 (Smithers diary).

MEDITERRANEAN SEA



PALESTINE

TEL AVIV

JERUSALEM

EL MAJDAL

GAZA

JULIS

DEAD SEA

ALEXANDRIA

AMIRIYA

IKINGI MARYUT

EL KANTARA

ISMAILIA

LAKE TIMSAH

CAIRO

HELWAN

BORDER

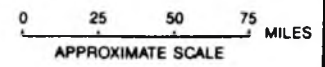
BORDER

LIBYA

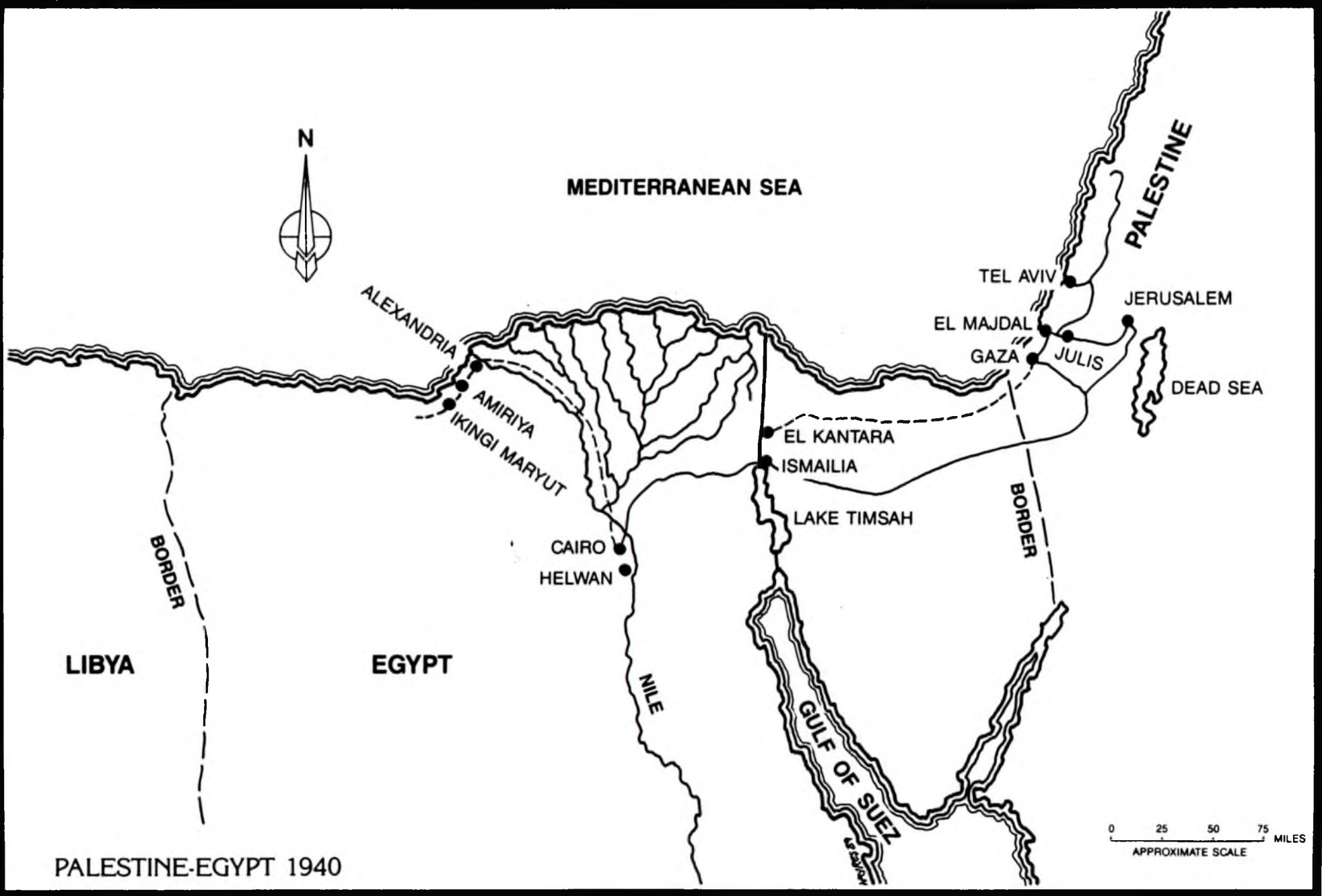
EGYPT

NILE

GULF OF SUEZ



PALESTINE-EGYPT 1940



troops gave them hot tea before they continued the journey by bus to Julis Camp. There the Australians found quarters that had been prepared for them by the 2nd Battalion Black Watch and the 1st Battalion Hampshire Regiment, two regular battalions of the Palestine Garrison.

Training with the British began within a week of the unit's arrival at Julis. During the next few months the troops settled into a well-regulated life of intensive drill and exercises, competitive sport and sight-seeing when on leave in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. In mid-1940, as events in Europe brought the Middle East onto a war footing, the men adapted to living under the threat of enemy attack. On 1 September the 2/2 left Julis for Helwan Camp, near Cairo in Egypt, where it spent five weeks before moving to Amiriya, not far from Alexandria. In November the unit took part in a divisional exercise at Ikingi Maryut in Egypt. Then in mid-December some 2/2 troops relieved a British unit at the Libyan border to await orders for their first battle.

The eleven months with the British laid a solid foundation for the 2/2's sense of tradition. The Australian volunteers saw the British regulars in Palestine as masters of a skill they were anxious to learn. The men took their lead from Brigadier A.S. 'Tubby' Allen, Commander 16th Australian Brigade, who, from the outset, encouraged close contacts between 16th Brigade and the Scottish regiment, the 2nd Battalion Black Watch. He arranged for an Australian platoon to be attached to the latter for training and later organised exercises in

which both British and Australian troops took part. In March 1940 Australian officers also attended British officer-training schools.(3)

While the 2nd A.I.F. eagerly adopted British regimental tradition in early 1940, in Australia at the same time, political and military leaders were seeking to increase their independence in the military management of Australian troops. In February 1940 the Australian War Cabinet approved a charter for 1st Australia Corps and according to it no part of the 2nd A.I.F. was to be detached or employed without the consent of the Commander-in-Chief, General Thomas Blamey. The charter, which had been greatly influenced by C.E.W. Bean's suggestions, also laid down that questions of policy regarding deployment of the 2nd A.I.F. were to be decided by consultation between the United Kingdom and Commonwealth governments.(4)

Such policy decisions had little immediate effect for ordinary soldiers in Palestine. For 2/2 troops and their peers the Australian Army's rules and norms were the major influences moulding disparate elements into a distinctive military force. In the Army breaches of military law, however trivial, led to punishments defined by scale in the 'Australian Military Regulations and Orders'. This document provided for arrest, charge, trial and the limitations of offences dealt with by a commanding officer. Once a soldier was on a charge he faced the process of Orderly Room Procedure in which the accused paraded before his company commander. If the offence was trivial the latter dealt with it immediately, but in the case of a serious offence

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3. G. Long, To Benghazi: Australia in the War of 1939-45, Vol. I, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, p.73.
 4. For a fuller account, see D. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy, 1939-1945, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp.44-45.

the soldier paraded before his battalion commander, where he had to elect to be tried summarily or by court-martial. (5)

While rules and regulations defined the 2/2 soldier's role within the context of the army as a whole other processes in his unit defined the boundaries of his experience. Like all 2nd A.I.F. units, the 2/2 was self-contained, commanded by a lieutenant-colonel and defined by its hierarchical organisation of personnel into rifle companies (100-120 men), platoons (25-35 men) and sections (6-10 men) with supporting arms. In the corresponding chain of command majors or captains commanded the companies, lieutenants the platoons and corporals the sections. (6)

The division of 2/2's components into two distinct elements further defined the role of each battalion member. All the way down the organisational structure in any army, fighting formations, of whatever size, comprise both a command or administrative element (Headquarters) and a functional one. For example Headquarters 6th Australian Division describes only those members who have administrative command of the division. 6th Australian Division includes all formations (brigades and battalions) organic to the whole. The 2/2 replicated this partition of functions at the battalion, company and platoon levels. And although the 1939 6th Division followed the old organisation of four battalions to a brigade, in May 1941 the 2/4 left 16th Brigade to become part of the 19th, following the new British organisation of three battalions to a brigade. (7)

5. Cited in 'Its Discipline Makes an Army', The Sydney Morning Herald, undated January 1940, clipping in collection of letters and papers loaned to author by R.S.M. Waters (Waters papers). For copy of charge sheet see A.W.M. 52, Written Records 1939-1945 War, 231/1/2.

6. In notes given to author by B. Fogarty, research librarian at Australian War Memorial, June 1981. Fogarty served with 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment in Vietnam.

7. G. Long, op.cit., p.123.

The battalion commander, whose responsibilities are training, discipline and execution of tactics in battle, is said to influence the style of the battalion more than any other person. 2/2 men of all ranks recall that Lieutenant-Colonel George Wootten set the tone for both the unit's identity and cohesion. Hailed as their 'paterfamilias' in Purple Over Green Wootten is also remembered as 'a gruff old so-and-so' who treated his men as his own.⁽⁸⁾ Geoff Coyle, 16 on enlistment, recalled that in Palestine Wootten called him in to have a talk reminding Coyle that it was some months since he had written to his mother.⁽⁹⁾

In 1983 Don Fairbrother and Allan Baird recalled that in late 1939-early 1940, at a time when the 47 year old Wootten was the only officer in the battalion with First World War experience, the more youthful officers drew on his expertise. Wootten passed on 'the rudiments of war' to the inexperienced and gave them much to think of in regard to their responsibilities. His methods were sometimes 'rough', but such treatment 'was what the boys and the unit wanted'. Fairbrother believed that Wootten 'expressed himself in the early days of the war as a commander forming a battalion'. He knew what was required to bring 'handfuls of blokes' together and how to 'knock them into shape'. In Fairbrother's words:

[Wootten] had a mental picture from his First World War experience as to the shape he had to get the battalion in, if it was going to go to operations. This is exactly how he went about it [and] his personality was such that, quite readily, he drew everybody together.⁽¹⁰⁾

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8. S. Wick, op.cit., p.408 and D. Fairbrother interview, Port Macquarie, 7 July 1982.
 9. G. Coyle, interview, Newcastle, 7 June 1983
 10. D. Fairbrother and A. Baird, joint interview, Port Macquarie, 7 June 1983.

Sir Ivan Dougherty, who stayed with the unit as its second-in-command until May 1940, also believed that Wootten's role was most influential. He was 'rigid' but he knew his men and was 'always sure of the officers he picked'.⁽¹¹⁾ Ian McKenzie, the Staff Officer who worked closely with Wootten at Ingleburn and in Palestine, remembered particularly the commander's insistence on a high standard of drill on the parade ground and his rigid enforcement of discipline.⁽¹²⁾ Cyril Read, the unit's padre from Ingleburn until after Greece, recalled that Wootten liked to uphold British tradition and that he was 'keen on big church parades'.⁽¹³⁾ Dr Leo Armati remembered that Wootten was quick to instruct him on the precision of army procedure, when Armati, as a novice, sent a personal letter to his commander recommending improved health and sanitation at Ingleburn. Armati later heard from the adjutant that Wootten appreciated having 'an interested medical officer'.⁽¹⁴⁾

Although battalion folklore tends to enshrine Wootten and the unity he inspired some testimonies throw light on what must have been closer to the reality of social relations in the unit. Censorship and the self-constraints imposed by a life-time of obedience to a code of military honour prevented many from being critical of others or the army system. Interviewed on tape in 1983 one high-ranking officer had no criticisms of 2/2's morale, discipline or leadership at any time during the war; but later, 'off the record' he spoke of two major factions among the officers in the Middle East. The officer, who

11. Sir I. Dougherty, interview, Cronulla, 29 March 1982.

12. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.408.

13. Padre C.A. Read, interview, Brisbane, 9 September 1982 (Read interview).

14. Dr L.V. Armati, interview, McMahon's Point, 27 September 1982 (Armati interview).

claimed that 'you either belonged to one or the other'(15) said that he belonged to neither, his loyalty was to Wootten.

Segregated social relations in the unit also determined that it was the officers more than other ranks who remembered Wootten's influence. To the ordinary soldier the battalion commander was a figurehead remembered more by anecdote than personal detail. Wootten's actions however made a lasting impression on one man. Carl Parrott, who held the rank of private in 1940, spoke for the first time in 1983 of the time when he was on a charge, as a result of having refused to shoot at absent without leave offenders who escaped from detention while he was on guard duty. Wootten severely admonished Parrott and another soldier for not taking action against fellow Australians, an idea that Parrott found both abhorrent and a betrayal of his class. He conjectured that if he had carried out his duty in May 1940 he would never have been able to return to Newcastle to live or work again on the waterfront, where he and others were before the war and where many returned afterwards.(16)

In interviews and discussions with the author several men recalled clearly the influence that platoon commanders had on their lives as soldiers, speaking of individual platoon commanders with the reverence that officers reserve for Wootten and his successors. Such praise is understandable as the very nature of small group commands means that platoon and section leaders know the men in their charge intimately. Importantly too for the relationship between the troops and these officers, the men see platoon commanders as those sharing the hazards of the firing line. Not surprisingly much combat research

15. D. Goslett, interview, Normanhurst, 31 May 1983 (Goslett interview).

16. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983. Author examined the charge sheet for this incident in Parrott's personal file at Central Army Records Office, Melbourne, in July 1983.

focuses on the way a mutual dependency develops between members of smaller groups within the larger unit. Indeed Stouffer and his associates wrote in 1949 of the 'extraordinary' importance of primary group relations in sustaining morale and cohesion in a fighting unit, a notion few studies have rejected since the path-finding research.(17) As George Caling said in 1982: 'a soldier's first love is the platoon'.(18)

Much has also been written of the way a battalion takes on a life of its own, no description finding more approval among 2/2 veterans than that of Henry 'Jo' Gullett's in Not As A Duty Only. From his own experiences with the 2/6 in the Middle East in 1940 Gullett came to see that it takes much more than hundreds of men to make up an infantry battalion. Men can only be called a battalion when they have learned thoroughly the soldier's trades and disciplines. Even then they are not a battalion in the spiritual sense unless they have shared and persevered in all manner of soldierly things.

An effective battalion in being, ready to fight, implies a state of mind - I am not sure it is not a state of grace. It implies a giving and a taking, a sharing of almost everything - possessions, comfort, affection, trust, confidence, interest. It implies a certain restriction and at the same time a certain enriching and widening of the human spirit. It implies doing a hundred things together - marching to the band, marching all night long, being hungry, thirsty, exhausted, filthy, being near but never quite mutinous. It involves not the weakening but the deferment of other bonds and interests; the acceptance that life and home are now with the battalion. In the end it is possible to say "the battalion thinks" or "the battalion feels" and this is not an exaggeration.

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17. S.A. Stouffer et al., The American Soldier, (IV Vols), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1949; E.A. Shils & M. Janowitz, Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II, The Public Opinion Quarterly, Summer, 1948, pp.280-315; J. Madge, The Origins of Scientific Sociology, Tavistock Publications, London, 1936 (Ch.9 'Social Science and the Soldier'); S.C. Sarkesian, Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military, Sage Publications, California, 1980.
18. G. Caling, interview, Campbell, ACT, 18 April 1982.

Hugh Jackson, a former 2/2 platoon commander, believes 'Gullett's concept ... is so concise and so true it defies further comment'.(19)

Purple Over Green conveys much of the same ideas in its account of the first year's training. In April 1940 the men could only feel they were 'becoming an efficient battalion'.(20) At that time training intensified with exercises in the Hebron Hills where each rifle company bivouaced for several days. During the following weeks and from time to time until the battalion left Palestine the men spent days on the Jaffa Range firing their weapons with live ammunition. In June battalion and brigade exercises continued in conditions described by an original officer, Arch McLellan:

The days were hot and dry, shade non-existent and water so scarce that it was rare ... to refill our water bottles during the day's march. Most of the country was soft and sandy except in the Hebron Hills where it was stony. Cross-country marches usually involved crossing endless ploughed fields or pushing through miles of fall crops. The exercises were made easier by the small army of camp followers who accompanied the troops selling oranges, grapes, watermelons and sometimes soft drinks ... Sometimes we absorbed so much fruit juice we didn't use our water bottles.(21)

In July, as the exercises continued, 2/2 rifle companies took the part of the enemy for other 16th Brigade units. Of the many exercises carried out that month one was 29 miles, one 16, one 15 and another

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19. H. Gullett, Not As A Duty Only, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976, pp.1-2. See also J. Baynes, Morale: A Study of Men and Courage - The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915, Frederick A. Prager, New York, 1967 for an excellent analysis of battalion esprit de corps and E. Lambert, The Twenty Thousand Thieves, Frederick Muller, London, 1980 (First published 1951) for fictional account of 2nd A.I.F. battalion in Middle East. Also H. Jackson, letter to the author, 10 July 1982.
20. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.28-50.
21. A.A. McLellan, 'Early Palestinian Days ... And Egypt', A.J. Marshall (ed.) Nulli Secundus Log, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, pp.22-23.

12. All consisted of patrols, long marches, defensive, offensive, and gas exercises, digging and various other manoeuvres. In one typical week the troops covered 72 miles, returning to camp either at midnight or dawn. As compensation for the hard training the unit organised a bathing place by the ruins of Ascolon, eight miles from Julis. Although parties travelled to Ascolon every Sunday officers planned that some exercises end there so that the men could rest at the beach. Then in September, when the unit moved to Egypt, the troops left behind many comforts. According to McLellan the camp at Amiriya 'had no amenities of any kind'(22) and the training in Palestine was nothing when compared to Egypt. The men grappled with a desert broken by hills and valleys in which soft sand, broken rocks or fossilised wood were found. In Egypt too there were no fruit vendors to relieve monotonous marches.

The divisional exercise at Ikingi Maryut marked the point at which 2/2 men felt they 'were now a battalion'.(23) Some men conveyed what the hard physical training did to their minds and bodies. On 24 October Jack Ulrick wrote to his father, a member of a Home Defence unit on the Clarence River:

I suppose you know the difference between slope and order arms by this time but don't get the idea you're good. You are not good at rifle drill till you can do it with that 'click one two, click one two, click' and at the same time be thinking of a big chicken dinner or a mug of beer you are going to have on leave.(24)

In 1986 Basil 'Jika' Travers, an original officer, Rhodes scholar and international rugby player before the war, recalled that he and others

22. *ibid.*, p.24.

23. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.47.

24. A.J. Ulrick, collection letters on loan to author, 24 October 1940 (Ulrick letter).

were never fitter than at the end of 1940, an impression also held by their medical officer, Armati.(25) Undoubtedly the unit achieved its peak physical condition and high morale as a result of discipline and training, but in the end uniforms, colour patches, drill, competitive sport and ceremonial parades equally played their part in making the men feel at one with their battalion. As John Dunlop put it in 1982 'one does somehow get a sense of unity by performing fairly intricate parade ground exercises as one man'.(26)

While the Australians trained in Palestine the course of the Second World War surprised observers on all sides.(27) After Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 and Britain's declaration of war two days later a stalemate ensued. In the first seven months of the war, the period known as the 'phoney war', no further move from Germany and uncertainties over what Italy and Japan might do created an impression of unreality for many people.

Allied fears were realised however on 9 April 1940 when the Germans invaded and quickly overran Denmark and Norway. Four weeks later on 10 May the German army invaded Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. By the end of the month the Germans fully occupied the Low Countries forcing the Allies to retreat. In Britain, where Winston Churchill became Prime Minister at the time of the May invasion, patriotism reached new heights during the Dunkirk evacuation

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25. B.H. Travers, interview, Sydney, 25 July 1986 and Armati interview.
 26. Sir J.W. Dunlop, letter to author, 4 June 1982 (Dunlop letter).
 27. G. Long, The Six Years War: A Concise History of Australia in the 1939-1945 War, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1973, (Chs 2 & 3 pp.12-50); and T.B. Millar, Australia in Peace and War, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, pp.135-138.

which ended on 4 June. Six days later Italy declared war on the Allies as Germany continued its unchecked advance southwards, France asking for an armistice on 17 June.

These events in Europe altered battle lines dramatically. After France's capitulation Germany occupied much of Western Europe while Britain stood alone, inadequately defended and vulnerable to invasion. The French and Dutch colonial possessions, Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies, were no longer under imperial sovereignty and vulnerable to Japanese invasion. In the Middle East, when Italy entered the war in June, Wavell confronted two large Italian armies in Libya and Abyssinia with a composite force of troops, including a British armoured division, an Indian division and incomplete divisions from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, dispersed from Palestine to Kenya.(28) It was however to be another six months before the Australians went into action against the Italians.

In the first half of 1940 2/2 men were perhaps more likely to think of themselves as tourists than as soldiers preparing for action. For many foreign travel was compensation for enduring the more mundane aspects of army life. Very early in the Otranto's voyage the 16th Brigade diarist observed that 1st A.I.F. veterans continually compared the 2nd A.I.F.'s 'tourist like accommodation'(29) with the more cramped conditions of their predecessors. Nonetheless life on board prepared the troops for intense training, Smithers noting there were three-and-a-half hours in the morning and one in the afternoon.(30)

28. G. Long, op.cit., (To Benghazi) pp.94-97.

29. 16th Brigade War Diary, 11 January 1940.

30. Smithers diary, 10 January 1940.

The Otranto's call at Colombo on 31 January gave the troops their first few hours of foreign sight-seeing. With their pay exchanged into local currency the Australians went ashore, their superiors mindful of them wearing uniforms proudly and upholding white prestige. Pedlars and rickshaw drivers besieged the soldiers from all sides, some even before they left the ship. Telling his father about his 'first sight of the East' Ulrick wrote:

At this joint there is no jetties, the boats just anchor in the harbour and everything and everybody is taken ashore in boats or ?lighters. Almost before we dropped anchor the natives were at us in small boats laden with fruit, nuts and all the knickknacks imaginable. There [sic] method of sale was to heave a small rope up to the decks with a canvas bag attached and then the fun began. These nigs were awful rogues and if you did not argue with them you paid treble the value of anything ... Most of there stuff looked alright in the boats but proved very shoddy on examination. The lads would buy fruit and coconuts then pelt the core and skins back at them, didn't they leap and prance and yabber when hit.(31)

The Australians left Colombo with fleeting impressions. Smithers and his friends hired two cars for an hour to visit various places including a Buddhist temple where they 'had to remove hats and boots before entering'. Smithers also enjoyed talking to the 'native police and soldiers' whom he found more helpful than 'ordinary natives'. And although he enjoyed the visit he had '[no] wish to go there again'.(32) Ulrick's five page letter of his day in Colombo expresses the same ambivalence. His group also hired a car considering themselves lucky:

... for we struck a nig who had been to Aussy and spoke English reasonably well. He was a regular bloomin' gramophone and described every little tin pot show and all the big buildings in

31. Ulrick letter, 10 February 1940.

32. Smithers diary, 31 January 1940.

sight ... our first stop was a nigger with a cobra but the thing looked that dopey that we chucked him a coppers and scrambled. Our next call was ... a temple. Outside a heap of nigs attacked our boots and took them off and put them on again when we returned and as usual the eternal palm was stuck under our noses. 'Tip please master!'

While Ulrick enjoyed seeing Colombo's showplaces other aspects left him unimpressed. In the town proper there was 'no end to foul smells ... and the food they were selling would make one of our Aus pigs sick'. He also observed that 'a lot of the natives chew betel nut making them spit a bright red stream all over the place which does not improve things'. Finally he said: 'you must remember to see anything nice here you had to forget the niggers who where [sic] everywhere in hundreds'.⁽³³⁾ Ken Curtis thought that the Ceylonese probably profited financially from the troops' visit but that the battalion 'got its money's worth in general entertainment'. He wondered however 'if [the troops] helped raise the much vaunted white man's prestige. Sights such as muscular Australians holding rickshaw races were common, with bewildered coolies sitting inside the rickshaw'.⁽³⁴⁾ Many others possibly remembered the call at Colombo for the gastro-enteritis epidemic which afflicted hundreds on board the Otranto within 24 hours of leaving port.⁽³⁵⁾

The convoy's arrival in Egypt brought the travellers face to face with the classical images of a world they had known previously through religion and literature. Sir Frederick Chilton, one of the unit's most respected commanders, described the experience of arriving in the Middle East as one of 'watching biblical images come to life'.⁽³⁶⁾

33. Ulrick letter, 10 February 1940.

34. K. Curtis, op.cit., p.15.

35. 16th Brigade War Diary, 1 February 1940 and Smithers diary, 1 February 1940.

36. Sir F.O. Chilton, interview, Clareville, 30 March 1982 (Chilton interview).

For others the Middle East was mysterious and strange, the feeling conveyed in Roland Hoffman's account of the Otranto's journey along the Suez Canal:

Our slow progress up the Canal was a source of wide-eyed interest to those of the troops who had not been through before, and opened up a new vista of education for them. The very monotony of this vast arid panorama had a fascination of a sort. The landscape of nothingness with just an occasional outcrop of cactus, or a miserable palm bent by the winds of ages to relieve its flatness was an almost frightening prospect, unlike any of our own desert country which usually has at least the quality of ruggedness. Occasionally, a lone Arab wrapped in his robes, squatted like a Sphinx in the shade of the canal bank and watched us pass. Once a caravan of 15 camels, with the hooded, dusky camaleer [sic] out in front was seen starting off from a little adobe settlement. It strung out along the track bound East for a destination that must have - or seemed to us - been called Nowhere.(37)

In first letters home from Julis the men, who themselves came mostly from rich agricultural areas in northern New South Wales, marvelled at the similarity between Palestine's landscape and their own. Even 'good old Aussie Gum [sic] trees were very much in evidence', (38) as well as wattles and kurrajongs. Smithers told his mother that it was hard for the men to realise they were so far from home when the view was 'so much like the Hunter River Valley and the camp ... very much like Ingleburn'.(39) Ulrick wrote:

As you have probably heard and read we are plonk in the middle of the Holy Land [and it is] certainly different from what I expected. I expected to see sand and desert all round but where we are is very fertile and every square inch is cultivated. The oranges are something to be eaten to appreciate they are simply perfect and we eat them by the dozen.(40)

37. 16th Brigade War Diary, 12 February 1940.

38. W.G. Ellis, letter loaned to author by son, undated.

39. J. Smithers, collection of letters, photos and newspaper cuttings on loan to author, 24 February 1940 (Smithers letter).

40. Ulrick letter, 18 February 1940.

Ernie Osbourne, who told his mother that money could not have bought the 'wonderful trip over', went on to describe what he had absorbed of 'strange Palestine'. From the train window through misty rain Osbourne and his companions saw:

the small villages [in] which ... the houses were made of clay and the same colour as the ground and the roofs were made of earth and grass grew on top and the people were dirty looking to us but it may have been their skin colour ... the donkeys were so small and there were hundreds of camels about the country is a bit different from ours no trees but plenty of green feed oats I think it must be and there [sic] fields are plowed [sic] with a donkey and a cow yoked up together gee it was funny to us and to see the camel pulling the plough it is a funny sight the plough is made like a fork stick, it is wood in most cases.(41)

There were of course those who, in their turn, observed the troops. After watching the arrival of the 'boys from Down Under' in the heat of a Palestinian afternoon, a local journalist wrote:

As the train steamed into the tiny wayside station, lean bronzed faces appeared at the windows surmounted by the distinctive Australian hats, broadbrimmed and clipped up at one side ... The troops detrained with a quiet but cheerful efficiency, swinging their kitbags out of the carriage-doors with an easy strength, they fell into line along the platform with the traditional informal discipline of the Australian soldier.(42)

As is the way with ex-patriate communities the 2nd A.I.F. made Julis a home away from home. The men decorated their own dwellings and gave names like 'Wagga Wagga', 'Kings Cross' and 'Ingleburn' to all the roads and living quarters, the camp's five sections earning

41. Osbourne letter, 24 February 1940.

42. 'Rousing and Ardent Welcome for Boys from Down Under', cutting from The Palestine Post, 13 February, 1940, Waters papers, Smithers diary notes on 13 February 1940 that he purchased a copy of the paper to send home.

the names of 1st A.I.F. generals.(43) As the 16th Brigade diarist wrote:

The intersection of Eden Road and the main Gaza Road has been [renamed] Kings Cross .. not a haphazard choice of names. Although there is no jungle of sky-flung buildings of flats and tenements at this corner as there is at Sydney's cosmopolitan annexe, there was the same bustling bazaar atmosphere and the same polyglot crowds. Here, until they were hunted away a couple of days ago scores of Jews and Arabs selling things (oranges, watches, silk etc) gathered and did business with the troops.(44)

Initially communication between the Australians and local communities was difficult. In fact the unit's arrival in Palestine coincided with serious riots in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.(45) For the next month security orders restricted troop movement outside Julis, the men travelling only in parties which had at least one soldier with a rifle and ball ammunition. Officers carried loaded revolvers at all times and leave buses always had one fully armed man. In mid-February the 2/2 hired an Arab interpreter in an attempt to ease relations between the unit and Arab contractors working at Julis. Eventually increased contact between the camp and local communities, and the soldiers' more frequent leave sojourns, led to increased understanding on both sides.

While the Australians referred to the local inhabitants as 'wogs', 'coolies' or 'niggers' in their letters home they nonetheless enjoyed the mix of nationalities when on leave. Smithers marvelled at seeing the 1939 film, 'Goodbye Mr Chips', in four languages. The dialogue was English with French sub-titles at the bottom of the

43. G. Long, op.cit., p.72.

44. 16th Brigade War Diary, 27 February 1940.

45. A.A. McLellan, op.cit., p.22 and S. Wick, op.cit., p.29.

screen, Hebrew on the left-hand side, German on the right.(46) Smithers also saved a Jewish man from drowning when on one leave while on another he met a Spanish/French couple who invited him home for dinner.(47) Osbourne and four others were 'the only soldiers' at an Arab wedding. The Australians wore garlands of flowers around their necks and 'copped a share of scent', which was thrown over the bridal couple. The soldiers left the festivities with 'nearly every nigger [stopping and saying] really nice, really nice'.(48) Ulrick told his father that he and friends went to the barber's for a 'bit of a do up ... and a good old yarn'. They drank coffee 'which almost had to be eaten'. But 'to drink coffee with an Arab is an act of friendship and when offered is never knocked back for it would be bad form. The barber spoke pretty good English and taught us a little Arabic'.(49)

In 1982 Chilton recalled that the Australians liked the Arabs generally as they seemed to share the same sense of humour, although as peace-keepers they often saw a darker side to the racial and political conflicts in the Middle East.(50) In a letter to a friend in May 1940 Hoffman listed several Arabic and Australian/Arabic expressions to show how popular they were with the troops. Jewish phrases were less evident, although 'Shalom' enjoyed a brief popularity.

46. Smithers diary, 22 February 1940.

47. Smithers letter, 22 August 1940.

48. E. Osbourne letter, 17 May 1940.

49. Ulrick letter, 26 February 1940.

50. Chilton interview, Ulrick letter, 9 April 1940 and O. Green, 'The Name's Still Charlie', unpublished biography of C.H. Green (Green manuscript).

Arab goodbye	Mas salaameh
Very good	Kwayess gateer (a nice attractive phrase)
It doesn't matter	Maleesh
Ended, finished	Mafeesh
No money	Mafeesh filoos (the reason I'm not going to have a spot tonight is mafeesh filoos)
Come here	Ismach
Go	Imshi
Bread, food	Mungaree
Tomorrow	Bukra

The Arabs also picked up Australian words, the most popular being 'the three Bs, bonza and okay'. Some Arab experiments with Australian terms however occasionally backfired as in the case of the legendary camp vendor who believed the troops were trying to cheat him. In exasperation he cried out 'You think I know NOTHING. I know bugger all'. (51)

The Australian Comforts Fund in co-operation with other organisations and army commanders catered well for the Australian soldier's accommodation, recreation and sight-seeing in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. For reasonable rates the troops enjoyed four days in Jerusalem visiting places of Biblical interest such as Bethlehem, the Garden of Gethsemane and Jericho. The Comforts Fund in co-operation with a well-equipped Y.M.C.A. kept the price of the tours within the means of all ranks. Such a concerted effort by authorities was not only in the interests of the soldiers but was also intended to keep the troops out of trouble. Senior leaders knew from First World War experience that the discipline of Anzac troops rated poorly against that of the British, Egyptians and Palestinians. Anxious to counteract unfavourable impressions the authorities provided sporting amenities and set up bathing beaches where life-saving teams on the Australian model operated. (52)

51. Letter filed in 16th Brigade War Diary, May 1940.

52. G. Long, op.cit., pp.74-75.

In a letter to his father Ulrick summed up what a day in Tel Aviv could provide: 'To go on leave [there] is ... most looked forward to ... she's a wow of a place ... The most amazing part ... is that it is only 25 years old and ... very modern compared with the other joints which mostly date back to the Crusaders'. Ulrick and his friends fraternised with 'Scotties and Tommies' and ate at cafes 'where one gets grog and fodder all together'. The bottled beer, which unfortunately 'wasn't Tooth's Old', was 'not bad at all', while another 'vicious kind of [bottled] drink' had 'a fight in every drop'.⁽⁵³⁾ In June after four days' leave in Jerusalem Ulrick recounted:

I had a good afternoon's tennis at the Y.M.C.A. building ... The courts are grand, the best hard-courts I have played on anywhere, the raquets [sic] and shoes were supplied by the 'Y' people. The Y.M.C.A. at Jerusalem ... was built by a wealthy American and is said to have cost \$1,000,000. There is a tower which gives a wonderful view of the city, 4 courts, cricket ground, bike track, billiards, ping pong, libraries and tons of other pastimes and pleasures not to mention a great swimming pool where everyone swims in the nude (one for ladies of course).⁽⁵⁴⁾

As part of planned activities senior 2/2 officers organised visits to Jewish villages by the troops and battalion band.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Padre Read recalled that where possible he tied his sermons to places of historical significance. As well he sometimes accompanied the troops on sight-seeing tours in the Holy Land. As Green observed after the war 'with the Arabs as guides you never knew what was genuine'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Another place of interest was Gaza. In March a 2/2 bus tour visited

53. Ulrick letter, 31 March 1940.

54. *ibid.*, 22 June 1940.

55. Chilton and Read interviews.

56. Green manuscript, p.72.

the Gaza War Cemetery and environs, Osbourne telling his mother that 'it was great to see how the cemetery was kept [but] the place did not appeal to us very much'.(57) Similarly a 2/2 officer's poem contrasted the squalor of Gaza with the well-tended cemetery. Gaza was where 'filth and rotting lungs pollute the air' whereas the cemetery was seen as a place 'where drooping gum trees spill their shade ... in the garden that the dead have made'.(58)

Another event reminded the troops that they followed the 1st A.I.F.'s footsteps. On 25 April commemorative services held at Gaza and in other towns recalled that 'for the first time in 22 years members of the Australian military force commemorated ANZAC [sic] Day overseas'. Five hundred men from all ranks attended a Dawn Service in the Gaza War cemetery while Arab and Jewish communities attended the town services. As the 16th Brigade diarist noted 'the sincere enthusiasm of townsfolk as our men marched through the streets was significant of their sympathy in the present struggle'.(59)

Despite the authorities' efforts to provide troop diversions discipline was a problem in Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East in 1940.(60) By far the most common offence was being absent without leave (A.W.L.), probably followed closely by drunkenness. From the outset the men received heavy fines for being A.W.L. but the problem was hard to curb. As early as 18 February the 16th Brigade diarist noted both the high incidence of offences and the failure of prohibitive measures. Some men evaded camp barriers by disguising themselves as Arabs. On 19 February 11 2/2 men found guilty of being

57. Osbourne letter, 28 March 1940.

58. A.G. McRae's, 'Gaza - Town and Cemetery' in A.J. Marshall (ed.) *Nulli Secundus Log*, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, p.110.

59. 16th Brigade War Diary, 25 April 1940.

60. G. Long, *op.cit.*, pp.74-75.

A.W.L. were fined seven Pounds each.(61) In a welcoming address Wavell had asked the Australians to show the local populations that they were not 'rough, wild, undisciplined people given to strong drink'. As we have seen Australian commanders tried to play down 1st A.I.F. reputations but by April Allen was drawing attention to the 'discreditable behaviour' of Australian troops. In an instruction on discipline he claimed that troops had been seen in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem riding in gharries in excessive numbers, eating and drinking in the street, scattering small coins, directing the traffic, riding donkeys and using obscene language. Dress irregularities included wearing collars undone and having hands in pockets and as noted previously, donning Arab attire.(62) Battalion folklore, oral and written, is replete with such stories, and along with the Australian soldier's language and humour, worthy of study in themselves.

And while company and battalion commanders had to deal sometimes with serious and occasionally criminal offences Chilton's opinion was that most charges were for 'discreditable behaviour' which more often than not had to be distinguished from boisterous youthfulness.(63) Other senior 2/2 officers also believed that the Australian attitude to discipline was clearly different from that of the British. Duncan Goslett, who nurtured the unit's first recruits, and who later was adjutant in Palestine, thought that 'the Australian soldier had a far more casual approach to military discipline than did the "hard-core" English soldier [who was] punctilious in his observance of discipline'. Goslett, who at one time knew the name, number and

61. 16th Brigade War Diary, 18 and 19 February 1940.

62. G. Long, op.cit., p.74.

63. Chilton interview.

personal details of every man in the unit, believed that saluting was not a reliable barometer for 2nd A.I.F. morale:

You don't salute on the battlefield ... saluting is a parade ground ... rear area sort of thing ... it's an outward mark of respect for the rank - not for the individual - for the fact that [the] officer carried what we used to call the King's Commission.

The Australians clearly disliked saluting the British but they saluted their own officers, even if they forgot the general.(64)

For many men such neglect in saluting was probably marked by the casualness evident in one of Ulrick's letters:

The mob had a laugh at me the other day. We were walking through a town ... and came across a Pommy Brigadier looking at some horses and a couple saluted but 4 or 5 didn't and catching my eye he beckoned me over and gave me a great lecture on Aussies and saluting in general.(65)

In 1989 Caling recalled for Nulli Secundus that some British officers instigated the behaviour which they found so unacceptable. On 13 February 1940 as a member of the first Battalion on Guard at Julis Caling witnessed the arrival of 'several pukkha sahib' who were there to advise Battalion Headquarters on military protocol in Palestine. On the group's departure:

... an officer travelling in the last car displayed his contempt for Empire troops in general and Colonials from Down Under in particular by extending two fingers, then with an upward movement [making] an obscene gesture in recognition of [Caling's] expertly executed Present Arms ... [The Australian's] free-flowing tirade of colourful expletives reverberated throughout the surrounding

64. Goslett interview.

65. Ulrick letter, 25 August 1940.

countryside long after the convoy of British Brass ... faded in the distance. (66)

The Australian soldier's egalitarianism was also the cause of a disturbance at Julis in May 1940. At the opening of a brick theatre, which housed 1,000, 16th Brigade troops objected to the 'class distinction grading' of the seats. According to the 16th Brigade diarist, in the only official account of the incident, an 'irresponsible element' objected to the seats being divided into three grades, 80 mils (2s) for officers, 60 for non-commissioned officers and 30 for other ranks. The troops felt that whoever could afford the best seats should have them. They also disliked the practice of marching other ranks to their seats. The protest began with catcalls and boos, then men hurled oranges and stones through the windows. Officers from each 16th Brigade unit eventually quelled the disturbance. (67) According to the 2/3's Bob Holt, although the officers reprimanded the soldiers 'from that time onwards anyone could go to any seat in the theatre providing he had the "filluse" [money] to purchase the ticket'. (68)

Although Purple Over Green cites Long's account of the breakdown of discipline at the theatre, neither it nor any other 16th Brigade unit history elaborates on the incident. Hindsight however led other men to reflect on the inequity of social relations in the early 2nd A.I.F. In 1982 Sir John Dunlop recalled that in Palestine and later in Cairo the 2nd A.I.F. operated very much within the British Army

66. Cited in B. McGrath, 'Julis 1940 - The First Battalion Guard', Nulli Secundus, Vol.40, No.3, June 1989, p.46

67. 16th Brigade War Diary, May 1940 and G. Long, op.cit., (To Benghazi) p.75. Peter Hooper recalled the incident in an interview in Newcastle in July 1983 but had nothing to add to the official account.

68. R. Holt, From Ingleburn to Aitape, R. Holt, Lakemba, 1981, pp.24-25.

system which segregated officers and other ranks. Bars, restaurants and hotels visited by officers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were out of bounds to other ranks, and even sergeants had their own mess which excluded corporals and privates. Dunlop recounted that Wootten often took a group of subalterns into Tel Aviv on Saturday nights and 'delighted in getting [them] drunk' to see how they coped with the situation. Forty years on Dunlop reflected that the officers might have been better employed getting drunk with their own non-commissioned officers or platoons if the purpose of the commander's outing was the engendering of morale or trust in one another.(69)

Prior to the Second World War, and for most of its duration, officers received very little formal instruction on how to deal with morale and social welfare problems. As Dunlop said of his training in Australia:

I think there probably were some periods ... devoted to man management, leadership or whatever it might have been called. I have a dim recollection that there were some pamphlets or instructional handbooks ... but I do not remember my company commander nor my C.O. nor anyone else instituting any formal teaching as to how to engender morale in one's platoon or whatever command one had ... my recollection is that one had to rely on whatever leadership qualities one had brought from civilian life.(70)

Other 2/2 officers agreed with this account suggesting even further that military morale was for them throughout the war an emotional rather than theoretical notion. Morale, they said, was something 'you just knew was there'.(71)

69. Dunlop letter.

70. *ibid.* The first booklet for officers on social welfare problems appeared in 1943/44, Goslett interview.

71. Fairbrother and Baird interview.

Napoleon's much quoted dictum states that 'in war the moral element is to all others as three is to one'.⁽⁷²⁾ While this may be so military morale remains a nebulous concept which can only be defined by studying the network of influences that make up a battalion at any given time. Theoretically it is the combination of sound training and the fostering of esprit de corps which produces high military morale. In war the state manifests itself ultimately in the soldier's absolute determination to do his duty to the best of his ability in any circumstances.⁽⁷³⁾

Wavell said more plainly that the standard causes of good morale were 'square meals and a square deal',⁽⁷⁴⁾ the latter including adequate rest, mail, proper medical care, efficient equipment and good welfare services, particularly for families at home. Allen, who was very much aware of his men's needs for amenities, supervised the setting up of Australian-run canteens which provided the troops with goods from home rather than relying on those of the British. Similarly Allen appointed three Australian war correspondents as founders of A.I.F. News, a direct concession to the men's need for outside news but with an Australian emphasis. In the early days in Palestine the scarcity of mail from Australia and expensive postage were hardships for many troops who felt isolated and often homesick. As Ulrick told his father on 7 February 1940:

The last letter I got from home was the one you penned on the 10th of Jan. so you can see how our mail service is a bit mucked up ... and we eagerly await mail days. Mrs. Sullivan writes to

72. Cited in J. Baynes, op.cit., p.94

73. For an expanded discussion of high military morale see ibid., p.108.

74. Cited in ibid., p.96.

Bill a page a day and posts it at the end of the week, giving all the small items of news which is very interesting when one is so far away

In 1985 Olwyn Green recalled the scene at the other end: 'News of the arrival of A.I.F. mail got around in Ulmarra. We would gather near the post office or at my father's shop with letters, photos and souvenirs ... eager to exchange news and check up on all the boys ...' The postage rate for letters was 60 mils (1s 6d) and for cards 30, costly for married men who received a much reduced allotment after their wives' share had been taken out. After Italy's entry into the war air mail from Australia ceased for several weeks and no surface mail arrived for three months. Osbourne wrote home mid-September: 'What do you know we received mail (boat) two day's back written in April ... it was old but welcome'. It took until the end of the year for postage rates on letters to be reduced to 9d and for the introduction of a twice weekly service.⁽⁷⁵⁾

Throughout 1940 the officers, including the medical officer and clergymen, provided welfare, leadership and emotional support for the troops. According to Goslett the sense of unit well-being by the end of its first year resulted from a mutual respect between officers, non-commissioned officers and troops. And while some officers 'fell by the way' when it came to providing good leadership, many others had 'the happy knack of being able to understand their men and their fellow officers as human beings'. The troops only followed those officers whom they understood were 'fair dinkum' and among the original officers were many such men including Charlie Green, the youthful dairy farmer from Swan Creek near Ulmarra. Goslett believed

75. Ulrick letter, 7 February 1940, Osbourne letter 12 September 1940, Green manuscript, p.76 and G. Long, op.cit., pp.74-75.

that Green, who at 19 was one of the 2/2's youngest officers, had those special qualities that made a capable infantry officer: 'Troops would follow Charlie anywhere because he understood them and they understood he was fair dinkum ... that's their expression ... if you're fair dinkum you're pretty right'.(76)

Leo Armati holds a similarly undisputed place in battalion recollections. On 10 May 1942, around the time Armati left the battalion, the diarist summed up the medical officer's life with the unit noting that 'the "doc" or Leo to those who knew him better' turned down promotion many times to remain with the 2/2. As a keen sportsman Armati often played in battalion football matches after which he treated the players' injuries. And because he knew the whole battalion by name he was a 'terror to malingerers'.(77)

In 1982 Armati agreed that his participation in sports helped him establish relations with the troops. During his time with the unit he captained the battalion football team, put the shot and managed A.I.F. soccer teams which played British regiments. Of his role in the unit, Armati said:

... To be a success you had to be part of the battalion ... interested in everything the battalion did. If they went out on exercise you had to be prepared to go on exercise with them. If they went on foot you had to be prepared, within reason, to go on foot. In other words, you sweated it out with them. You just had to. You had to know everyone as well as you could possibly know seven or eight hundred people.

The chief medical problems at Julis were the ordinary infections of communal living such as sore throats, gastro-enteritis and tinea, but more serious infections such as catarrhal jaundice (hepatitis) and

76. Goslett interview.

77. 2/2 War Diary, 10 May 1942.

malaria were always anticipated. The medical officer also had responsibility for the prevention and control of venereal disease to such an extent that if men were admitted to hospital with it the medical officer could find himself on a disciplinary charge because of neglect in his duty. Following from this Armati believed that the 'terrible rule' of hospitalising any person with an urethral discharge in a special venereal disease unit worked against venereal disease control.

In order to offset the unpleasant consequences of some other rules Armati set up his own 'little hospital' at Julis. By treating battalion members who were 'fairly sick' but not sick enough to be sent to a hospital unit Armati enabled soldiers to stay with the 2/2:

when you sent a person off to a hospital they lost their identity and a lot of fellows, the genuine fellows didn't like this and they wouldn't come along if they were really sick because they were frightened I'd send them away. Sometimes I got myself into difficulties treating them like that. I'll always remember one fellow with catarrhal jaundice. He was one of my prized orderlies. When he got the jaundice I put him in the tent and he said "Please don't send me away" ... I had him there for a month. Eventually I had to be careful not to let him infect others in the unit. He would have been ... better off in hospital but at least we kept him and this was good for morale. This [was] why I had the tent with the battalion, because all these things counted.⁽⁷⁸⁾

Armati cherished the privacy that his special tent gave both him and his patients. The fact too that he was the sole occupant of his own tent gave him scope to act as an intermediary. In camp living such privacy was rare, and although some may have seen it as a privilege, Armati believed privacy helped him greatly in his role as confidant. On many occasions and for various problems the troops sought his reassurance and advice. In times of stress, whether

78. Armati interview.

through army living or problems at home, many needed someone to confide in, and as Armati observed the men usually turned to their best friends, the padre or the medical officer: 'it happened a lot' that a man heard in a letter from his wife that she was leaving him for someone else. In Armati's view, these personal problems were only part of the privations suffered by the 'poor bloody infantry' who were 'on the receiving end of everything'.

[They] miss out on all of the comforts ... the fellow in the section misses out on the bit that the platoon fellow has. For instance I would have been better off than the fellow in the section ... I had a ... more privileged position. Well this privilege extends further and further back. And by the time you get into [the] glorified atmosphere of say 1 Corps Headquarters ... you're so far away from the war ... you might as well be a civilian.(79)

In Australia during the first half of 1940, as elsewhere in Allied countries, people found it hard to grasp that a war was in progress. Michael McKernan's study of Australians during this time depicts them as being generally cynical and apathetic about the European conflict as it did not fit the war model derived from that of 1914-1918.(80) Official war historians however offer a different view. According to Gavin Long, although 2nd A.I.F. enlistments decreased considerably in the three months following the 16th Brigade's departure for the Middle East, they increased dramatically in response to Europe's worsening situation. In the first three months of 1940, part of the 'phoney war', total enlistments were 2,344. In April there were 5,441 but by

79. *ibid.*

80. M.McKernan, All In: Australia During the Second World War, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1983, Chs. 1 and 2, pp.1-58.

May 8,000. Then in June, following France's capitulation and Italy's entry into the war, 48,000 enlisted. Even before the 'phoney war' ended, 100,000 Australians, one-sixth of the men of military age* in the country volunteered for service overseas in one of the three armed services. By the end of March 1940 22,000 were in the A.I.F., 68,000 had signed applications to join the Air Force and 7,000 were in the navy. In Long's view, the early enlistment rate was a 'remarkable response' by men distanced geographically from the war. The decision to volunteer for service seemed all the more remarkable when it was made in a climate of official indecision as to the final form Australia's contribution to the war overseas would take.(81)

Paul Hasluck described the government's organisation of a considerable national war effort in spite of the outward show of public indifference. Initially development of the armed services took priority and by March 1940 the government undertook to organise, recruit and train roughly a quarter of a million men in various categories and to provide a substantial part of their equipment. The decision early in March to raise the 7th Division and to form an Australian Army Corps involved a total commitment to raise and train an expeditionary force of 90,000 men by June 1941, including those already enlisted in the A.I.F. The newly-formed Empire Air Training Scheme required 57,473 men up to March 1943. By the end of February 1940 the Air Force, apart from the Empire Scheme, was raised from a pre-war establishment of 2,800 to 5,400 and the navy from 5,440 to 11,600. A railway survey company, three railway construction companies and two forestry companies totalling 40 officers and 1,203 other ranks were sent abroad. In addition for the purposes of home defence training and garrison duties within Australia 4,000 permanent

81. G. Long, op.cit., (The Six years War), p.27. *(20-29)

soldiers, 3,000 militia permanently called up and 5,000 garrison units were maintained. By the end of February half the militia, which was at a strength of 62,300, had completed a period of three months' continuous camp training with the second half about to begin. Thus the Australian war effort had discernible shape in early 1940 with 177,000 men devoted wholly to the armed services and another 75,000 kept partly-trained for home defence.(82)

And while the 6th Division prepared for action during the first half of 1940 the 2nd A.I.F. expanded. By July it comprised the 6th Division stationed in Palestine, the 7th training in Australia and the 8th still being formed. At the time of Germany's invasions of Scandinavia and the Low Countries a further two convoys of 2nd A.I.F. personnel left Australia to join units in the Middle East. That containing 17th Brigade left Melbourne on 4 and 15 April, while that containing the 18th left the same port three weeks later amid speculation as to its final destination. Previously Australia considered sending her troops to help defend the western front but by departure time it had disappeared. Instead Germany's occupation of European states, and thereby their colonial possessions, brought the Australian convoys into peril on the Red Sea route. At Britain's request that of the 17th Brigade continued its journey to Palestine while the 18th, which carried 8,000 Australians and 6,800 New Zealanders, changed course around the Cape of Good Hope and sailed to England.(83)

82. P. Hasluck, The Government and the People, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, p.173.
 83. G. Long, ibid., p.34 and T.B. Millar, op.cit., p.138.

Throughout 1940 the war was more immediate and threatening to 2/2 men than it was to their kin in Australia. Those who volunteered in the earliest days of the war soon found themselves identifying more closely with civilian populations in England and Europe than with the society they left behind. In June, when Italy entered the war, the troops adjusted quickly to conditions of war preparedness. At Julis blackouts occurred at night and guard duties increased, passwords also being introduced. Tents, previously forming neat communities, were scattered and the troops dug in. Censorship intensified and as we have seen surface mail was delayed. On 18 June 'everyone who could get near a radio listened' (84) to Churchill's speech which exhorted the British and their Allies to withstand German might. Australian soldiers in the Middle East also followed the air battle in Britain and events in Europe with great interest because each new development brought the possibility of fighting closer to their quarters.

And while the move to Egypt in September brought intensified training and raised the men's hopes of action the waiting continued. Even in new surroundings boredom was hard to overcome, nostalgia tingeing many sight-seeing impressions. Ulrick told his father that his new camp was in an oasis near an old castle 'of bow-and-arrow days'.

The palms and ... castle give it a sort of motion picture affect [sic] and it seems strange to see our soldiers walking around when feirce [sic] Bedeoins or Foreign Legionares would fit the place better. Suppose this all sounds very nice but the usual swarms of flies knock a bit of the glamour off.

The oak trees nearby reminded Ulrick of those along the creek banks and swamps near Ulmarra.

84. 16th Brigade War Diary, 18 June 1940.

... to hear the wind whistling in them sure sounds like home ... Twelve months ago today we were in Grafton about to push off for Ingleburn and haven't we crossed some dry gullies since then. We have added another city to our visiting list, Alexandria ... it is quite a nice town [but] it has its slums like all Eastern Cities.(85)

From Cairo Osbourne wrote to his mother of the 'grouse time' he was having away from regimentation:

... just think four whole days to ourself & no parades no revallie [sic] to wake us up and no guard dutys of a night instead we have white sheets, pillows & slips telephone at our disposal washing done infact [sic] the laundry man [called] this morning & had it back for tea and did we have a swag of it ...

Osbourne thought the part of the Nile flowing through the city was 'about the size of the Mcleay [sic] but ... muddy'. He also thought it strange to 'see the Gippos picking cotton but reminded himself 'its also the first time I've seen cotton pickers'. To Smithers the Cairo hotels were as good as any in Australia and although 'Egyptian women wear black veils up to their eyes [they] are much better looking than the Arabs'. The Pyramids were also 'much bigger than I expected'.(86)

In January 1940 2/2 men left Australia after spending very little time together in camp and having only rudimentary training. After eleven months of living and training side-by-side with regular British troops

85. Ulrick letter, 4 November 1940.

86. Osbourne letter, 12 September 1940 and Smithers diary, 5-7 September 1940.

the Australians learned much about being soldiers, preferring some aspects more than others. In the 2/2 disparate elements achieved a strong sense of being a battalion by living, training and enjoying leisure together. For many the opportunities for travel outweighed the less exciting aspects of army life. As travellers too their reactions often reflected the preconceived notions of their own culture but they nonetheless enjoyed 'seeing the world'. Waters thought that for others the enforced isolation under an unyielding military code 'cracks them up after the glamour wears off'. Another man wrote: 'we joined up to fight. The greatest fight we are having is with boredom'.(87)

Pride in the ideal of unity tends to overshadow the existence of tensions between the men at this time, both those between officers and other ranks and between individuals themselves in the distinct social groupings. For many the most irksome aspect of battalion life was the hierarchical ranking in social relations. As Osbourne observed: 'I find out the only way to get a stripe in this one time army is crawl for it & I never done that in my life & I don't intend to start now'. Waters and Osbourne, both boxers in battalion competitions, wrote to their mothers of settling personal disputes with their pugilist skills. As Osbourne said:

One of our sergeants got hostile with me. Soon took the sting out of him ... with the gloves. He only went three rounds and said "you win". While they have the stripes on you dare not touch them, but if they have the guts as this one did well you can have it out.(88)

87. Waters and unnamed soldier cited in Green manuscript, p.100.

88. Osbourne letter, 12 September 1940.

Waters thought after his fight that 'the boys respect me more now'. In 1982 he told Olwyn Green: 'I learned to accept the separation and authority [of army living] but I jacked up against rank. I hated being called Waters. I was in more trouble over that than anything. It makes you feel like shit'.(89)

Life was no easier sometimes for those charged with maintaining discipline. In 1982 Tom Mawhinney observed that it was 'natural for the ORs to have a go at the boss'. For him too the results of efficient training brought their own discipline which in turn influenced the control of fear in action. In his view disciplined troops tended to retain their dispersion when under fire whereas ill-trained troops bunched up seeking comfort from the proximity of others. 'Real discipline' was not something troops were driven to: its achievement came through mutual group respect.(90) And Mawhinney perhaps summed up the qualities of many successful 2/2 officers when he defined those of Green:

Everyone knew what a good soldier he was but it was not so well known what a warm-hearted and human man he was. He had the capacity to unbend ... He was a fairly strict officer but then all the good ones were but he was also intensely loyal to his men and did all in his power to get them any extras that may be going be it in a bit of leave or extra rations or a spare bottle of beer.

Many men spoke to the author of Mawhinney in the same way.(91)

In a lecture to platoon commanders at Latrun in 1942 the 2/1's medical officer, Tom Selby, passed on what he had learned from living with an infantry battalion for more than eighteen months. He told his audience that they had 'unique opportunities for getting close contact

89. Cited in Green manuscript, p.99.

90. T. Mawhinney, notes written for author, 1982.

91. Cited in Green manuscript, p.106 and A. Bell, interview, Yamba, 3 November 1982.

with and knowledge of their men'(92) in order to understand them better. And while guidelines could be offered to potential leaders it was often hard to define what made one man successful and another not. As Green's widow surmised in 1985 after interviewing many veterans from the various units her husband commanded:

Officer and gentleman ... Charlie in some ways didn't measure up; he did not come from the gentleman class and [had] no formal education. His fellow officers no doubt noticed his occasional lapse in grammar and other tell-tale signs. But the soldiers, it seems, didn't notice. If you drew attention to it, they seemed surprised because they hadn't noticed or considered that it would be an issue. To them he was a born leader.(93)

Class distinctions it seems were not a bar to becoming an enthusiastic soldier. Dunlop also observed that it was 'one of our most ocker N.C.O.'s'(94) who instilled the passion for British drill into the rest of the unit on his return from a British officer-training school.

There were others of course who fell short of the high standards but the veterans refrained from speaking about them. As George Blanch wrote in 1988:

As an original member ... I could give you some important information about the Battalion ... The only thing that I am worried about is the fact that if I were to tell you all I know it would embarrass some of the former Officers ... & as some of them are now deceased I feel that ... their dependents might not like what I have to tell.(95)

Whatever the tensions of that first formative year in the unit's life many men remember it as their happiest of the war. In 1985 Bruce

92. Copy of lecture 'The Duties of a Platoon Commander in Relation to the Health of His Men' given to author by Dr T. Selby in a collection of letters and papers.
93. Green manuscript, p.59.
94. Cited in ibid., p.93.
95. G.W. Blanch, letter to author, 24 June 1988.

Brock, the original officer known affectionately by the Arabs as 'Brock Effendi', wrote of Julis: 'one could hear "lights out" echoing ... in the distance from camp after camp even when lights were not used in the open after Italy came into the scrap - haunting memories'.(96)

96. Cited in Green manuscript, p.74.

CHAPTER THREE

FIRST BATTLES: BARDIA AND TOBRUK, JANUARY 1941

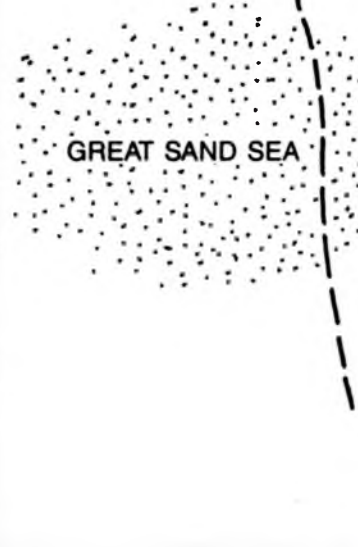
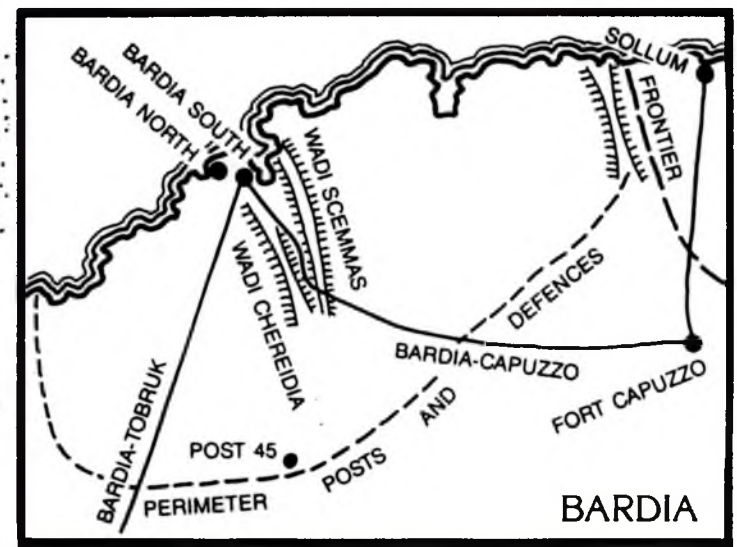
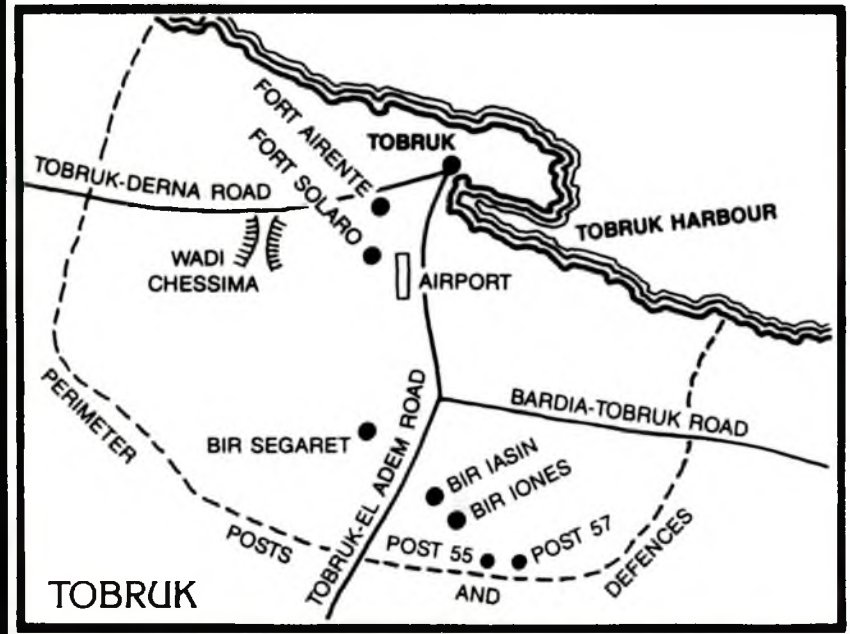
December 1940 brought the 2/2 closer to its first action: the fight with the Italians in Libya. Two months previously when the unit moved from Julis to Helwan Italy had invaded Egypt as far as Sidi Barrani. Then on 9 December the British with three brigades of the 4th Indian Division counterattacked and drove the Italians back to Bardia. While the fighting progressed the British deployed Indian troops against other Italians in Abyssinia and chose the Australian 6th Division for the drive against Bardia, deciding later that Tobruk should also be taken. The capture of the Libyan seaports was seen to be crucial for the restoration of British control in the Mediterranean and for the protection of what were then considered great national interests. The Allies also feared Germany's increased capacity to wage war if Hitler gained access to Middle Eastern oil supplies.⁽¹⁾

From early December onwards the Australians moved closer to battle lines. On the 5th Major-General Iven McKay, Commander 6th Australian Division, received instructions to move 16th Brigade forward to occupy the box defences at Maaten Bagush. The 2/2's move coincided with Colonel Wootten's promotion to the Reinforcement Depot in Palestine, his replacement being Major Frederick Chilton. Losing its original commander at such a time could have been a blow for the 2/2 but Chilton's esteemed position among the men more than offset

1. The following details are from G. Long, To Benghazi: Australia in the War of 1939-45, Vol. 1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, Chs 7 & 8, pp.143-206; S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978 (2nd ed.) First published 1977, Ch.3, pp.53-84; A.W.M. 52, 8/2/16, War Diary, 16th Brigade, December 1940 (16th Brigade War Diary) and A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, December 1940 (2/2 War Diary).

BARDIA-TOBRUK AND WESTERN DESERT 1941

0 63 125 MILES
APPROXIMATE SCALE



Wootten's departure on 11 December. On the same day the 2/2 left Amiriya travelling by train to Sidi Haneish where the troops awoke on the morning of the 13th to the sound of falling bombs. Four days later the Australians, then under the command of the British general, Richard O'Connor, moved closer to hostilities in a dust storm which had been blowing for seven days. On the 19th the 2/2 arrived at Sollum which had fallen six days previously to General O'Moore Creagh and the British 7th Armoured Division. During that day 16th Brigade troops marched 12 miles up the Sollum escarpment through the Halfaya Pass into Cyrenaica, a strip of country in north-eastern Libya. Just before midnight the 2/2 reached the frontier wire. Before dawn it relieved the positions on the Capuzzo-Bardia road held by the Kings Royal Rifle Corps, one of two motorised battalions of the British 7th Armoured Division. At dawn the men saw Bardia lying before them over a wide dusty plain.

While the troops had their first Christmas away from Australia the unit's preparations for the attack on Bardia intensified. On 28 December it withdrew to Hagfed Carruba where during the next few days all ranks became familiar with details of the coming action on a sand table model of the enemy area over which the unit was to attack. In line with the timetable prepared by Battalion Headquarters Chilton and his staff took the company commanders through every step of the operation, explaining the objectives of each company. Then Chilton and the company commanders took the platoon commanders and sergeants over the model. Then finally the platoon commanders instructed their sections so that every man in the unit had an idea of landmarks, targets, enemy positions and objectives.

The battle for Bardia began at 0530 hours on 3 January 1941, lasting for 55 hours. The capture of Tobruk, occurring two weeks

later on 21 January, took 23 hours. 2/2's casualties during the first operation, the highest for 16th Australian Brigade, included nine officers and 81 other ranks. Of 12 platoon commanders only four escaped either death or injury whereas 19 other ranks were killed and 62 wounded. At Tobruk the 2/2 had the lowest casualties for the brigade, 16 other ranks of whom five were killed. The roles the unit played in each operation explains the difference in casualty rates. At Bardia it was one of the leading battalions in a combined tank and infantry advance on well fortified positions whereas at the next operation we find the 2/2 described as having as difficult and dangerous a role as the 2/5 at Bardia.(2) Although total casualties were far less at Tobruk the medical officer noted that what injuries were sustained were more severe than at Bardia.(3) After the two operations the Australians had charge of nearly 70,000 prisoners.

The victories at Bardia and Tobruk assumed great symbolic significance for the 2nd A.I.F. as a whole and for its individual units in particular. The 2/2 historian wrote that Bardia and Tobruk were places where the unit 'proved itself beyond doubt as a formidable fighting force' thus taking 'its place in history with justifiable pride'.(4) Other units wrote of Bardia and Tobruk similarly, their accounts differing little in essence from that of Roland Hoffman's. On 5 January part of his report read:

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2. Statistics are from S. Wick, *Purple Over Green*, p.84 and A.J. Marshall (ed.) *Nulli Secundus Log*, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, p.104.
 3. 2/2 War Diary, January 1941.
 4. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.83.

After Bardia we have no compunction in blatantly feeling pride and satisfaction [and] we can't help reflecting on the first days of the formation of this Bde and this Div. In those early times of October-December 1939 the A.I.F. [was] subjected to humiliating jeers and sneers by Sydney citizens ... These people who are no doubt cheering loudest in the general acclamation of the Bardia battle, frequently made the allegation that the 6th Division was composed mainly of unemployed and unemployables. At this time when so many of our comrades lie dead or maimed around us we meditate on this early discouragement ... with some bitterness. It is of some satisfaction therefore to hear the Bde Commander who has been of us and with us give it as his opinion that members of this div. are equal as fighters and as common men of Australia with any corresponding Australian unit that fought in the Great War.(5)

The official version of the 2nd A.I.F.'s part at Bardia and Tobruk conveyed similar pride even if qualifications tempered the analysis. According to Gavin Long the Australians at Bardia showed that 'men of determination and cunning' with weapons in their hands were equal to any fortress. While he also judged the 6th Division in January 1941 to be the fittest and best prepared Australian force in the Second World War Long took pains to dispel notions that its success was due partly to the Italian Army's demoralisation.(6) As Shawn O'Leary of the 6th Division Cavalry Commandos observed in 1975 the belief persists that Bardia was a 'flimsy fortress ... defended by toy soldiers'.(7) This view derived from the criticisms of some senior 2nd A.I.F. officers who had seen service on the Western Front during the First World War. And while they did not witness the action at Bardia they sought to play down the strength of Italian resistance lest the 2nd A.I.F. be spoiled by easy victory. Balancing this view Long wrote at length of how the Italians fought hard at many places

5. 16th Brigade War Diary, 5 January 1941.

6. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.204.

7. S. O'Leary, To The Green Fields Beyond: The Story of the 6th Division Cavalry Commandos, Wilke Group, Brisbane, 1975, p.46.

during the battle revealing that infantry casualties were higher proportionately at Bardia than they had been at Sidi Barrani.(8)

16th Brigade War Diary entries illustrate how the need for self-justification influenced the participants' version of the fighting. The 3 January entry, which may have been written retrospectively, claimed that as soon as the leading battalion reached the wire 'Italians in hordes threw down their arms and beseeched our men to take them prisoner'. On the original document the Brigade Commander crossed out the words quoted above writing in ink beside them 'nobody gave out until routed out, e.g. every position had to be out-manoevred'. In the margin alongside the diarists's praise for the 'magnificent' job done by the British tanks the brigadier also put 'It should be remembered that magnificent though the tanks were, they could not take the posts - they prepared the stage for the infantry'.(9)

Some ten days later the diarist suggested that the difficulties faced by the Australians against the Italians may have been understated. He then wrote that the enemy:

ONLY [sic] threw down their arms after our troops had weathered the storm of their fd.(?) guns and SAA barrage and had them at bayonet point. The Italians shot it out with our men right up to their own doorsteps as it were. It was then, at the last minute, when our troops had, to the amazement of the Italians, come on and on through their fire curtain without so much as a momentary hesitation that the enemy's morale collapsed. Italian officers and men, according to their own stories after capture, gained the impression that our fellows were supermen. They thought [the Australians] had some divine immunity from ... their fire because ... THEY KEPT ON COMING ON [sic].(10)

8. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.203.

9. 16th Brigade War Diary, 3 January 1941.

10. *ibid.*, 14 January 1941.

Australian troops wore new leather jerkins for the attack which some believe led to the legendary claim that the Italians thought that their adversaries wore bullet proof vests.

At Bardia and Tobruk, as in all battles, soldiers' stories of the fighting grew into legends. While some 2/2 stories have been acknowledged as such others have lived on in battalion folklore tending over the years to blur the distinction between fact and fiction. The most-quoted story had to do with press reports that Australian troops sang and smoked as they went into action at Bardia, a 2/2 company singing the theme-song of the popular Hollywood film, The Wizard of Oz. Both Gavin Long and Stan Wick drew attention to the legendary quality of the story further explaining that the troops had not sung the Wizard of Oz but a rude parody of South of the Border, a song popular with the British and Australian armies in 1940-41. The 'jovial giant', Perc Miller, is said to have instigated the singing while the 'puckish' Captain P.J. Woodhill, who later died of illness in Syria in 1941, has always been credited with naming the song for correspondents.(11)

Another legend had an 'Armidale sergeant [riding] the General's white horse in Bardia'. After the fighting George Caling sent his family a photo of himself on a white horse flanked by companions on darker horses. In January 1943 an Armidale newspaper claimed that:

it was in the advance on Bardia that Sergeant Caling, then a lance-corporal ... noticed a number of horses belonging to the Italians loose outside the town. Having been a horseman at home Caling caught the only one wearing a saddle, mounted it and rode it into town where the colour of the horse made him one of the

11. G. Long, op.cit., p.166 and S. Wick, op.cit., p.62.

most conspicuous figures and so created history for Armidale. (12)

Caling went along with this account after the war but admitted in 1982 that news cameramen had set up the photo with him and his friends as willing collaborators. (13) Similarly in 1946 Nulli Secundus Log pointed out that a photograph of four soldiers advancing on a partly destroyed building was not what it seemed:

A Coy goes into action! Or at least that's how the caption described it. Actually an astute cameraman persuaded some of the boys to do over a sector a second time so that a few realistic pictures could be made. (14)

In December 1940 north eastern Libya presented the 2/2 with an inhospitable tract of country. As Gavin Long describes it the Australians fought their inaugural campaigns on the shelf between the Great Sand Sea to the south and the Mediterranean in the north. In an area bounded by the frontier and the Gulf of Sidra Cyrenaica resembled the western desert of Egypt except in the north west between Derna on the east and the fertile farmlands of Benghazi on the west. There rose the Jebel Achdar (Green Highlands), a tableland of 150 miles from east to west where rain fell to allow farming on its wooded northern slope.

The Cyrenaican desert was low and arid supporting only scattered clumps of drought resistant camel bush. The desert, eroded by fierce

12. G. Caling, collection papers, newspaper cuttings and photographs loaned to author.

13. G. Caling, interview, Campbell, A.C.T., 18 April 1982 (Caling interview)

14. A.J. Marshall, op.cit., p.18.

winds over time descended to the sea in a series of low, irregular escarpments. On the coast, wind and water had carved steep ravines into the cliffs. The desert floor was smooth and firm in parts but serrated by wadis or covered by stones elsewhere. While there were potholes of soft sand the continuous sand dunes characteristic of the Libyan desert began 100 miles from the coast.(15)

To defend Cyrenaica the Italians had fortified the two easternmost coastal towns, Bardia which lay 15 miles across the frontier, and Tobruk which was 60 miles farther west. Around Bardia, 'a tiny town in a barren stony waste'(16) the Italians constructed an 18 mile arc of almost continuous concrete anti-tank ditch, which was backed by a double row of underground posts, which in turn were protected by barbed wire and minefields. Plans captured at Sidi Barrani revealed that the posts in the forward line were about 800 yards apart and protected by their own anti-tank trench. Each post had one or two 47 millimetre guns, and from two to four machine guns, which the Italians fired from concrete sided pits connected by trenches with a deep underground shelter. Although the latter offered almost complete protection against heavy shelling it had no overhead cover for the men in the gun posts and no fire-step in the connecting trenches.

Plans also showed how a second arc of posts lay 400 yards behind the forward line. The posts were numbered consecutively from south to north with odd numbers for the outer posts and even numbers for the inner, and as the numbers were marked on both maps and posts the attacking Australians located themselves easily. Aerial photography detected a considerable arsenal including 110 guns and some long stone

15. G. Long, op.cit., pp.146-148.

16. S. O'Leary, op.cit., p.39.

breast works. Each flank of the line lay on the inner bank of one of the steep-sided wadis carved into the cliffs forming the coast from Sollum northwards but elsewhere the posts were in flat, almost featureless territory, which offered little cover to an attacker and few landmarks. The intelligence reports before Bardia under-estimated almost by half the number of Italians awaiting the Australian assault on their positions.

Cyrenaica's climatic conditions which included winds, drought, dust and extremes of temperature made pre-battle living conditions hard. The wind which blew fiercely whipped up harsh dust which reduced visibility to a few yards. The winter nights were bitterly cold but the days were very hot. The troops had no shelter from cold, heat or wind. The ground was so stony that they had difficulty finding sites for trenches but the men learned quickly to look for areas that desert rats chose as there the soil was likely to be softer and with fewer stones. As Jack Smithers noted in his diary: 'could not dig very deep because of the stony ... ground just under sand so had to build up'.(17)

Life in the trenches outside Bardia was far from pleasant. The scorching heat and reflection of the sand burned the men's eyes and faces during the day, while at night they froze: 'Sand was in everything - our clothes, our food, our water [even] our mouths were dry with grit'.(18) The yellow-grey powdery sand even choked the Bren gun mechanism so much so that on 29 December during a 2/2 inspection it was found that only six out of 50 guns fired. Water was scarce and a quart rationed daily had to satisfy drinking, shaving, washing and

17. J. Smithers, diary on loan to author, 2 January 1941 (Smithers diary).

18. Cited in P. Shaw, Brother Digger: The Sullivans 2nd A.I.F., Greenhouse Publications, Melbourne, 1984, p.26 and G. Long, op.cit., p.152 on guns.

teeth-cleaning needs. Other adaptations were necessary in the isolated terrain. Jack Ulrick told his father:

I suppose you are wondering just what we are doing all the time, well, mostly it is wingeing [sic] about the cold. Its a blasted cold country this Libya and the wind which blows continually does not improve things much. One good thing about the works is the fact that when Bill and I go to bed we are warm. [It] consists of a hole 3 ft. deep and just wide enough for both to be comfortable. Over the top we have an old peace [sic] of canvas stretched to keep out dew and dust mainly for dust though. Inside besides many bits of canvas and ground-sheets we have 9 good woolly blankets and sleep like bugs in a rug. We cooperate pretty well and our hips seem to want a spell at the same time and we roll over together. (19)

Christmas of course sharpened the men's perceptions of differences between home and the war front. On 24 December Herb Williams, a 2/2 original who had transferred to 6th Division Signals before Bardia wrote in his diary: 'Christmas Eve and what a time we are having ... a pint of water per day, captured enemy food and to top it off a scare from above every now and again ... bloody lovely'. On Christmas Day the troops had 'more macaroni and bully beef for breakfast'. And while Christmas dinner was yet 'more macaroni ... bully beef stew and sago custard Santa [brought each man] ten cigarettes, 1 oz. of tobacco and half a thrippenny [sic] chocolate', Ernie Osbourne telling his mother that 'with this growth of beard I have on I could have easy been mistaken for Santa Claus'. (20) Ulrick also thought that Christmas was 'quite a funny day', and of the hardships, he wrote:

19. J. Ulrick, collection letters on loan to author, 1 January, 1941 (Ulrick letter).

20. Cited in R. Lovett, unpublished articles and papers on loan to author (Lovett papers) and E. Osbourne, collection of letters and papers loaned to the author, 26 December 1940 (Osbourne letter).

... we came out at daylight and had a look at one another and everybody swore. Not a bloomin' comfort did we have. Jack Young and I shared a tin of salmon and had to laugh in the finish. Fancy salmon on Xmas Day. We had just finished when Bill Ryan the CSM arrived with comfort parcels from the Comforts Fund and A.J.C. [Australian Jockey Club] so we hoed in to the tune of cake, pudding and peaches and cream. We were beginning to feel how we should after Xmas dinner when the magic word "beer" flashed down the line. Some excitement. We got our beer, one case to the company, six [bottles] to our platoon, one to every five men! Still it was better than none. You should have seen five of us drinking a bottle of beer Jock Hetherington, Angus Macqueen, "Robbo" Robinson, Billy Sully and myself. We nearly had a raffle and then decided to share her out. To see us doing an act like that would have broken a publican's heart.(21)

A conference at Mackay's Headquarters on 28 December outlined the plan for the Bardia attack. The 2/1, led by a party of engineers, was to attack before dawn on 3 January 1941 from a start line 1,000 yards from and parallel to the defences. After the engineers had broken down the anti-tank ditch in six places and cut six gaps in the wire the 2/1 was to move from the start line to the first two posts in 25 minutes and in the next 25 capture them. At 0650 hours, when visibility was clear, four troops of tanks were to pass over the crossings made by the engineers in the anti-tank ditch and minefields. One tank troop was to join the 2/1 and advance with it north and north-east enlarging the bridgehead. The other three troops of tanks were to advance with the 2/2 through the breach turn south-east and mop up the posts and batteries along the perimeter. The 2/2 was to advance until it reached a line along the main road running north into Bardia. The 2/3 was to advance almost straight ahead from the point of entry to the edge of the first series of escarpments followed by a squadron of 6th Division Cavalry Commandos in carriers, which was to deploy and form a link between the 2/2 on the right and the 2/3 on the left. The plan envisaged that 16th Brigade would occupy an area some

21. Ulrick letter, 1 January 1941.

8,000 yards long and 3,000 yards deep in an advance with 25 tanks which would be shielded by artillery fire.(22)

A vital factor which had to be established before the Bardia operation was the exact position of the start line and the route back from it to the assembly area. The 16th Brigade's Major Ian Campbell took a patrol forward into the 'featureless desert' to a point in the anti-tank ditch about midway between Posts 45 and 47 where the assault battalions were to enter. By pacing back 1,000 yards at right angles to the Italian front, and tying rifle-cleaning rags on to bushes he made an accurate landmark. His intelligence officer, the 2/2's Lieutenant Ian Ferguson, then laid 5,000 yards of signal wire to mark the route from the assembly area to the start line.(23)

On 1 January 1941, the 2/2's adjutant, Captain Duncan Goslett, outlined the unit's role advising the men that their attached troops would be one platoon each of the 16 Anti-Tank Company and Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. The 2/2 in company with these attached troops would capture all enemy posts between the perimeter and escarpment from and including Post 42, south east to the Capuzzo-Bardia road. The operation had three phases. The first was movement from the Bivouac Area (Kings Cross) to the Assembly Area where the battalion was to stop for 30 minutes for a hot meal and its rum issue. Phase 2 was movement from the Assembly Area to the start line, a distance of 2,000 yards at a rate of 100 yards in two minutes on Campbell's taped line. The third phase was the unit's advance from the start line at a rate of 100 yards in two minutes and 40 yards between sections.

22. G. Long, op.cit., p.156-157.

23. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.59-60.

On 3 January the 2/2 awoke to reveille at 0230 hours. Its timetable had the troops leaving the assembly area at 0530 arriving at the starting line at 0620 where A and C Companies were to cross at 0629, then B 0633 and D 0635. The medical officer, Captain Armati, made special arrangements for the attack, assigning four stretcher-bearers and one bandsman to each rifle company and two stretcher-bearers and one bandsman to the Headquarters group. He also organised his aid post personnel into four teams advising them that their truck and ambulance wagon were to be left at the Bivouac Area and only brought forward after the fighting began. Regimental Aid Post personnel were to follow the troops on foot and establish temporary posts when they were through the breach in the defences. Wounded troops were to be indicated by an inverted rifle.

The men also made special preparations for battle each soldier wearing a woollen uniform and a sleeveless leather jerkin. Because of the cold most also wore woollen underclothes, sweaters, scarves and balaclavas and over the top of all greatcoats with the skirts turned back to allow freedom of movement. Steel helmets covered their heads and respirators hung on their chests. Some carried sandbags around their legs and in pouches, pockets and haversacks each soldier carried 110 rounds of ammunition, grenades and reserve rations comprising a 50 lb load for all. Each Bren carrier had 2,000 rounds .303 for the rifles and 24 grenades as additional requirements for the rifle companies.

Before Bardia the Australians were in a high state of expectancy, poised for victory and busy memorising the phrase 'mani alto', (24) Italian for 'hands up'. On New Year's Day the 16th Brigade diarist observed that the troops were enthusiastic to hear that 3 January was the date set for the attack: 'Whacko being the general reply'. The next day he described the infantry moving up to the assembly point as 'rugged, jesting figures moonetched against the darker background of no-man's land just beyond'. (25) According to Long, when the barrage began at 0530,

The sudden noise, the flash of guns, the sound of shells going overhead and crashing in the darkness had an exhilarating effect, dispelled the tension and produced excitement and confidence. Men began calling, singing and shouting defiance at the enemy. (26)

On its own account the 2/2 went into battle highly motivated and well-prepared. Chilton's welcome promotion three weeks earlier was a positive boost to morale while his sand table model was seen as both an outstanding innovation and effective tool for creating united purpose. In the early seventies the commander himself recalled:

A soldier's and more particularly a unit's first battle is a tremendous experience. The period of greatest tension is the waiting just before the battle begins. That morning I could feel it in the air. It is not just fear - that is always with us but rather a compound of a more basic fear of the unknown. Concern as to whether one will be able to take it. It is not just an individual experience but a mass phenomenon which depending on many circumstances can produce great achievement or panic. (27)

24. 16th Brigade War Diary, 31 December 1940.

25. *ibid.*, 1 and 2 January 1941.

26. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.164.

27. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.58-59.

Noel Park, a non-commissioned officer at the time, wrote in his diary that 2/2's morale was high, the troops keen to uphold 'the proud record of their forebears in World War I'. He noted in particular that young officers 'were excited but determined'(28) not to fail in their first battle.

While high spirits were part of the general atmosphere morale was affected equally in other ways leaving some with unhappy memories of Bardia. In the days leading up to the attack medical officers treated many men with ailments caused by the stresses of pre-battle conditions. Armati wrote that a 'particular stress' was the desert cold, 'the most upsetting thing being the wind which penetrates the thickest clothing'. As well 'practically all' the men had colds and rheumatism was prevalent.(29) These two conditions were recalled by Carl Parrott who spoke in 1982 of the Australians being inadequately outfitted 'to meet the elements'. While many soldiers suffered from cold sores others had hand problems through not wearing gloves.(30) The 2/1's medical officer, Tom Selby, observed that troop morale responded poorly in some cases to the cold conditions. He treated some 'young soldiers in tears' and many cases of 'nervous dyspepsia'. In a letter to his brother after the fighting Selby elaborated:

The morale, owing to the cold caused me a bit of worry with the youngsters and I had kids with strained backs etc. but after they had a hot meal at the R.A.P. they would say "Of course I'm only eighteen you know etc." I fixed most of these coves with talking and Luminal [mild sedative] but it was a bit of a mental strain.(31)

28. *ibid.*, p.59.

29. 2/2 War Diary, December 1940.

30. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983 (Parrott interview).

31. A.W.M. 52, 8/3/1, War Diary 2/1 Australian Infantry Battalion, 23 December 1940 and T. Selby, collection of letters and papers on loan to author, undated January 1941 (Selby letter).

Tom Mawhinney, a corporal at Bardia but later a more senior 2/2 officer, suggested in 1982 that the number of men with the 'jitters' before the fighting began was comparatively small estimating that there was probably one self-inflicted wound per rifle company.(32) Armati's report confirms this impression: he noted that the unit's morale with few exceptions was extremely good. Only two men with a diagnosis of 'anxiety neurosis' were sent out of the line. One had been tearful and shivering with fright since reaching the front while the other had shivered and cried for two days before telling Armati that his 'nerves had gone'. As well four privates had treatment for ~~for~~ self-inflicted wounds.(33)

While fear in battle has been well documented it was not something widely discussed by participants(34). Diaries, letters and interviews however all reveal that some men, if not all, thought about fear, brutality and death before the fighting. Two weeks before Bardia and after his first air-raid experience Williams wrote of the terrible noise that 20 'Itie' bombers made when they dropped bombs a couple of miles from his position: 'One feels so helpless seeing such a packet of death flying at him and can do nothing'.(35) Parrott's first encounter with death occurred when he and another soldier found a dead Italian corporal at the top of the Sollum escarpment about ten days before Bardia. On the body they found family photographs and

32. T. Mawhinney, interview, Grafton, 2 November 1982.

33. 2/2 War Diary, December 1940.

34. A vast literature of combat psychiatry exists but the following are significant: R.L. Swank and W.E. Marchand, 'Combat Neuroses', Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry, Vol. 55, No. 3, March 1946, pp.236-247; L. Bartemeier et al., 'Combat Exhaustion', The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorder, Vol. 104, No. 4, October and November 1946; E. Miller, The Neuroses in War, MacMillan, London, 1940; P. Bourne, Men, Stress and Vietnam, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1970; R. Grinker and J. Spiegel, Men Under Stress, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1963. See also S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1974.

35. Lovett papers.

Christmas cards. The Catholic padre, Paddy Youill, organised a burial party of which Parrott was a member. Only two days later a private, Ernie Elks, became the 2/2's first battle casualty when he died during an air-raid while unloading Christmas supplies in the port of Sollum. Parrott reflected that at the time of these events the irony in the deaths impressed him deeply as Elks had been a member of the burial party for the Italian corporal. (36)

'Living where others would die' very simply defines survival for Paul Torrance in a paper on fear and survival for the U.S. Air Force in 1953. (37) The psychiatrist-historian, Robert Jay Lifton, also describes the survivor as 'someone who has come into contact with death in some bodily or psychic fashion and has remained alive'. (38) According to the Australian psychiatrist, Allan Stoller, in a lecture to 7th Division officers in the Middle East in 1941, the average soldier had to go against everything he had been taught in childhood and adolescence when he fought and killed in battle. In a letter to the author in 1982 Hugh Jackson disagreed with Stoller's theorising pointing to the 'callousness' of youth and of how easy it is for soldiers to become blase about the horrible sights which confront them when fighting. Stoller would have agreed for he did conclude that in the context of normal psychological reactions it would be rare for a soldier not to feel anxiety during battle but 'amazingly as [it] proceeded a tolerance seemed to develop for the abnormal battle environment'. (39)

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36. Parrott interview.
 37. Cited in P. Watson, War on the Mind: The Military Uses and Abuses of Psychology, Hutchinson, London, 1978, pp.307-332.
 38. R.J. Lifton, Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1967, p.479.
 39. A.W.M. 54 Written Records, 1939-1945 War, 804/1/1 and H. Jackson, letter to author, 2 December 1982.

Military historians have long acknowledged the difficulties of writing about battle from the participants' viewpoint. In 1870 the French colonel, Ardant du Picq, wrote that 'action in detail and the individual action of the soldier [in combat] remain enveloped in a cloud of dust in narratives as well as in reality'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ As if to echo du Picq's metaphor some Bardia participants wrote similarly of their limited perception during battle. Chilton recalled in Purple Over Green, that for him as Bardia commander 'the fog of war was very thick indeed'. Although his unit's operation succeeded he wrote in his report that 'signal lines [were] cut by shell-fire or tanks as soon as they were laid, visibility was poor and the situation confused'.⁽⁴¹⁾ During the battle he was dependent on reports filtering back to Headquarters about the position, successes and losses of each company. Selby remembered vividly 'the advancing troops of the next battalion [the 2/2] and the tanks, appearing out of [a] dusty curtain'.⁽⁴²⁾ Writing from the distance of 16th Brigade Headquarters Hoffman described that on the first day of the battle the weather was fine and the sky lined with fleecy clouds but 'the tanks, carriers ... vehicles and ever constant shelling threw up a dust haze that hung over the living, the dead and the dying all day'. As well he wrote of 'many grim scenes', singling out 2/2's D Company for mention. Although the latter's troops were protected by the tanks at the beginning of the attack they came in sight of enemy batteries within 1500 yards of

40. A. du Picq, Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, 1920, p.103, First published in 1870, the year of the author's death in battle. See J. Keegan, The Face of Battle, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1978 for possibly best discussion on writing battle from soldier's perspective. Also J.C. Dunn, The War The Infantry Knew 1914-1918, Cardinal, London, 1989. First published in 1938 in a private edition (500 copies only).

41. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., pp.62-63.

42. Selby letter, undated January 1941.

their final objective: 'As a result, heavy fire was directed on them and before they reached their ... objective they had suffered approximately 10% casualties'. At the end of the fighting's first day the sunset was 'mottled blood and dove grey'.(43)

Selectivity and censorship necessarily filtered accounts of the fighting given by ordinary soldiers but such constraints seem less obvious in diaries. These can provide both an immediacy that no other source duplicates and vivid descriptions. Pat Byers, whose diary began on 1 January 1941, wrote on the eve of Bardia:

Very busy morning getting all our weapons in first class order - issued with hand grenades and cup discharges - everyone on their toes - left our lines under cover of darkness and were transported to within two miles of enemy lines - lay down for 1 hour's sleep but for me sleep is out of the question - zero hour drawing very near.(44)

Mawhinney and his companions 'put in the day fixing up our gear', (45) while Smithers:

Had an easy day, short lecture, footbath, checking up on Bren mags. etc. and examining every round in the mags. After tea we moved out of our position and boarded the transports, lorries rather crowded but better than walking. Very long convoy and rough going while moving up to front. Arrived at our position at 9 p.m. and went to bed.

On the actual day of battle Smithers noted that he 'did not get too much sleep' during the night because of the cold and the

43. 16th Brigade War Diary, 3 January, 1941.

44. P. Byers, diary loaned to author, 2 January 1941 (Byers diary).

45. T. Mawhinney, diary loaned to author, 2 January 1941 (Mawhinney diary).

excitement over 'our first action'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Byers wrote that when the attack began:

the artillery barrage was terrific and the machine gun fire hard to face. Gus was blown over by a shell but was unhurt - the front of my boot was blown off by a machine gun and my scarf was holed with a piece of shrapnel - the [Infantry] tanks done a wonderful job - our section captured a post held by 50 Italians with 3 heavy machine guns. Ted Proudfoot and Steve Dunn were killed that I know of - we reached our objective about 9 o'clock and spent about 3 hours under very heavy artillery fire - my nerves are just about done and I have got a bad attack of the shakes.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Using entries from his diary Selby told his brother of the unexpected things which impressed him during the fighting such as the 'incredible amounts of paper, books and letters strewn everywhere', and the 'small jagged pieces of unexploded shell on the ground'. The shell-fire too was not as noisy as expected and shells 'just seemed to miss one's head and when they went past sparks flew out of them and ... made a sharp crack'. Selby thought it was 'incredible the way one can walk through the stuff and not get hurt', describing how the 'little spurts from the bullets in the dust on either side look like a locust's egg repository on a gum stem'.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Smithers also 'could see the bullets kicking up the dust in front of me and on either side ... some went so close I could feel the wind from them on my face'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In 1985 Alf Stone wrote that the machine-gun fire in his area 'was not shoulder high [but] knee high, so we stepped over it, or thought we did, it was so pretty'.⁽⁵⁰⁾

46. Smithers diary 2 and 3 January 1941.

47. Byers diary, 3 January 1941.

48. Selby letter, undated January 1941.

49. Smithers diary, 3 January 1941.

50. A. Stone, letter to author, 30 July 1985 (Stone letter).

Letters often convey a similar sense of immediacy although some men were conscious of not distressing relatives. Prior to Bardia Ulrick's letters always colourfully described his travels, way of life and feelings about different situations. His first letter after Bardia had few details of the fighting:

I suppose you have been wondering how I went in the stoush. Well to tell the truth, I am pleased to be able to drop you a line. It's pretty wild and woolly while it lasts. The newspapers will be able to tell you more about our doings etc. so I won't do any skiting but you can rest assured that the boys are some scrappers. All the boys from Ulmarra came through with flying colours - Of course someone always gets hurt in this kind of life but its all in the game so don't worry about your son, he's good at looking after himself.⁽⁵¹⁾

Some however wrote more explicitly. Roy 'Woop' or 'Misty' Waters, who was Captain Rhys Jones's batman at Bardia, wrote three letters to his mother after the fighting. In the first she read:

Mother of mine

Dearest Mother, here I sit after our first big battle. By now you will have read and heard of A.I.F. fame and once again we live up to our forefathers' form ... It was on the morning of the 3rd that we went into action. Believe me it was as if hell broke loose. The death and destruction was awful to see. But once the dagoes knew who were coming they through [sic] it in. But not after I lost my boss and another mate. The boss and I were battling side by side when a bullet stopped him. I absolutely went beserk [sic]. But after all mother this is war. The next morning poor Harry Plunkett copped a shell. He had just left me.

In the next letter Waters asked his mother whether she was proud of him when she read of the battle telling her that he was 'very upset' when he last wrote. He promised to make up for the lack of news this time by telling her about the 'funny sides of the Battle' recounting

51. Ulrick letter, 12 January 1941.

the taking of Italian prisoners; the 'spread for dinner' after chasing ducks and fowls and the looting of Bardia. Then in more sombre vein:

I went to the funerals of all the boys and buried the boss. Gee Mother he was a great chap. He was only twenty four. He kept saying to me "She's right mate, it's a good show". It made me very mad when he was shot. I gathered up all his personal things and sent them home. Ernie Tullipan and I buried Harry. The padre and priest read the sermon. (52)

Osbourne's letters offer a rare example of how content could be sensitively tailored to audience. He wrote separate letters to his parents, sending his mother a less candid version of the fighting than his father. As a battalion cook Osbourne had not been in the actual fighting but nonetheless wrote to his mother and sister:

Well we have lost Gordon he was killed nearly a week back in fact a week tomorrow 4th of the month give you an idea of what happened. The action started early Friday ... Bardia had just about fallen when Gordon was killed by a shell poor kid Frank was with him at the time ... Gordon was buried alongside a dago anti-aircraft gun which he & his section had just captured. Johnny & I & George went up and took a photo of his grave at the foot of the gun where he was killed & will send you a photo later if they come out alright. I have most of his personal gear & I am writing to his people today. (53)

A few days later the letter to his father read:

I'll give you an idea of what happened but I don't want any of this letter broadcasted know what I mean Dad. I don't want anyone at home [to know] Frank was slightly hurt or anyone to know how Gordon was killed, savey?

52. R. Waters, collection of letters loaned to author, 6, 18 and 26 January 1941 (Waters letter).

53. Osbourne letter, 9 January 1941.

A 1500 word description followed in which the son detailed how his friend died:

Gordon came through the first day alright & it was at daylight the second morning ... when the section attacked the big dago gun & the section stopped for a moment behind a brick wall of stone which was surrounding the gun & one of the boys was shooting round the corner of the bricks with the bren gun and young Gordon said give me a go I have a good place here & he started shooting over the top, after a lapse of five minutes so the col. decided to move on & some of the boys went round the wall of rock one way & Gordon was in the lead and just got in front of the big gun when over came a dago artillery shell and burst right near his ear & when the boys who was following recovered from the shock & picked him up he was dead, you can imagine for yourself when I say the only part hit was from his shoulders up Dad. (54)

The letter ended with Osbourne telling his father of his disillusionment with the army and his desire to get back to Australia.

In another letter five weeks later Osbourne reflected on his dead friend. After referring to the fact that he had received the cutting about Gordon's death from a Kempsey newspaper he wrote:

You may think me off my dot a bit Dad but I'm quite sane, the other night I dreamed I got into trouble for writing home to Gordon's parents & telling them I have some of his personal gear, I dreamed he was with us & everyone was O.K. and happy, gee how I wish the dream was true I really expected too [sic] find him when I woke up next morning. (55)

While such expressions of grief are rare it is clear from extant sources that others did not take battle-field realities lightly. Many disagree with Jo Gullett's claim that men grieve little for unit members lost in battle. Mawhinney, who wrote notes for the author

54. *ibid.*, 16 January 1941.

55. *ibid.*, 27 February, 1941.

about killing in war, believed that Gullett's assessment of after battle reactions was too facile:

I can't agree with [him] that we did not grieve our dead perhaps we did not grieve in the same way as one would grieve a member of the family but still it was there perhaps there was a need to press on with the campaign and that may have left no opportunity to grieve in the accepted sense.⁽⁵⁶⁾

In 1982 Padre Cyril Read also recalled that while the men responded emotionally to all facets of their lives as soldiers they were affected particularly by battle-field burials. Those who lost close friends were likely to grieve more intensely on the battle-field and suffer the consequences of the trauma later in life, a point also emphasised by Armati. Battle-field burials 'were traumatic for those present', for little in the men's previous experience prepared them for the stark reality of seeing their peers buried in convenient, temporary cemeteries in the place of battle. While some men would have attended military funerals in Gaza, and others, parish church funerals in Australia, these services were far removed from burials at the scene of the fighting:

When you get on to the battlefield you're in a different set-up altogether ... when you saw bodies being brought back on the trucks wrapped in blankets and that was Bill and that was one of the Lovetts ... there was no doubt about it, many of those boys were shaken. Everything that happened was giving them a shake-up of course but this especially because they were cobbers.

56. H. Gullett, Not As A Duty Only, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976, p.28. T. Mawhinney, notes for author in response to reading paper, M. Barter, 'The Poor Bloody Infantry: 2/2 Battalion A.I.F.' presented at Military History Conference, Australian War Memorial, February 1982 (Mawhinney notes).

Read's main concern at the burials was to create as much dignity as possible for the men and to choose a text to comfort them. He reflected that the men usually showed little emotion outwardly but reminded himself that they were soldiers with other campaigns ahead. Read did however find unforgettable one instance of an officer's reaction to the news of a friend's death:

... I remember John Dunlop ... I was fairly well up in fact [and] they sent a message to me from Brigade Headquarters "Tell the padre to come back - he's too far forward". I said "I'm not going back. I'm staying up here with these boys". And I was ahead of some of the follow-up troops and I came across John Dunlop. And he said "What's the news, Padre?" and I said ... "Jones is killed". And I can see John Dunlop's reaction now because he was very close to him. And that's it you see, just like that.(57)

The medical officers also observed the soldiers' reactions to battle realities, Armati and Selby both agreeing about the treatment of wounded and dead. They spoke in separate interviews of their reliance on stretcher bearers and aid post teams, whom they believed risked extra dangers when treating and carrying the wounded back to safety.(58) In a letter to his brother Selby praised the way the ordinary soldier supported him in difficult situations with his concern for comrades and his sense of humour. He recounted one occasion on which he went to treat wounded in a wadi:

I had the breeze up but the two coves who had come for me used to say "you bastard" every time a bullet whizzed past and we actually laughed ... When I got to the little dug-out "X" I found a shell had landed on some of our chaps. They were dropping everywhere around ... An Italian doctor had stopped the bleeding and couldn't do enough for them.(59)

57. Padre C. Read, interview, Brisbane, 9 September 1982 and Dr L. Armati, interview, McMahons Point, 27 September 1982 (Armati interview).
 58. Armati interview and Dr T. Selby, interview, Cremorne, 30 May 1983.
 59. Selby letters, undated January 1941.

Armati on the other hand wrote in his medical report of some Australian doctors who refused to treat Italian wounded.

At the Tobruk operation, where the terrain and Italian defences were similar to those at Bardia, the 2/2 had 'an improved version' of the the 2/5's role at Bardia. In order to guard the flank of 19th Brigade it had 'to fan out after entering the perimeter and deal with three groups of Italian guns in the triangle bounded by the perimeter, the Bardia road and the El Adem road.' Mackay and Major-General Berryman, who both realised the dangers 2/2 troops faced, assigned three troops of tanks to Chilton, who again instructed all ranks on the operation's details, although the Tobruk sand table model was nowhere near as detailed as that from Bardia, due to lack of information. 'Each rifle company had to advance along each of three lines of guns, each being supported by a troop of 'I' tanks in such a way that each company had an independent role.'

According to Long by the time the 2/2 entered the perimeter at the start of the operation, 'a cloud of dust whipped up by bursting shells and the wheels of trucks ... hung over the point of entry'. The troops moved at a fast walk, with tanks following 'into this fog', and 'in the dust and dim light' the infantry failed to meet up with the tanks and each advanced independently. The 2/2 marched and fought over 3500 yards in two and a half hours meeting its objective at 0910 hours with three companies on the Bardia road and the other on the El Adem road. (60)

60. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.76-79. and G. Long, op.cit., pp.223-224.

Understandably the edge of first battle excitement was missing from the Tobruk preparations but one initiate, Roger Rye, wrote to his parents:

I am scribbling this in the half dark before we go into action ... in the battle for Tobruk I am writing this last note to be sent back in case I do not come out. This will be my baptism of fire, but with the rest of the boys I am looking forward to it cheerfully. Two of my mates were killed at Bardia. Will avenge them to night. Don't fret about me. If I go [it is] in a wonderful way and for a good cause. Just remember me as I was at my best and look after yourselves.(61)

Byers wondered whether the 'dagoes' were expecting them and if so what 'sort of welcome' awaited them.(62)

After the capture of Tobruk Waters expressed his relief at the lighter casualties. Then in the face of concern for his safety by everyone at home he reminded his mother that he had always said 'if we are to die here we will'. He also asked about his dogs and noted that dancing, one of his favourite hobbies, was a thing of the past. 'We dance now,' he wrote 'to the tune of lead'.(63) Waters' friend Byers also reflected on his experiences noting he was a 'guide for a burial party [which] found two ... dug graves and buried them'. On 29 January his entry began 'my birthday and I feel much older'.(64) Ulrick again offered no details of the fighting to his father: 'I suppose you have heard all about Tobruch [sic] and have been wondering how I fared. Well I am OK and as fit as a fiddle - the desert can't keep a good man down'. In a second letter he asked whether 'the papers have been telling you what smart fellows we are. Mr Menzies was here the other day and told us the same thing'. Menzies himself

61. Cited in *ibid.*, p.73.

62. Byers diary, 20 January 1941.

63. Waters letter, 28 January 1941.

64. Byers diary, 23 and 29 January 1941.

thought that they were 'friendly boys wise now in terrible things'.(65)

Armati had a lot to say after Tobruk, writing in his report that many of the reinforcements were men he had sent out of the line previously for physical or psychological unsuitability for action. Citing Armati's letter to the Medical Board the diarist also notes that the reinforcements were 'probably undesirable' as they were those 'recently sick, recently wounded or recently [in] detention barracks'. Armati's letter questioned the Board's decision about the reinforcements' fitness for duty as most had feet problems, and others had conditions which caused him grave concern, especially one officer with epilepsy.(66) In 1982 Armati could not bring to mind readily the details of his 1941 correspondence but he did remember two incidents, 'one involving an officer, and the other ... a sergeant where they either had epileptic fits or were suspected of having them'. In the case of the sergeant Armati decided that he should be evacuated:

I can remember the position quite clearly, because if I had not had a table between me and him I don't think I'd have gone into another battle. He was very upset and I quite understood. I thought he was a fine fellow, but he was having fits, and I just thought that under the emotional stress of battle he might never face up to it.

Armati said that in the case of the officer it was 'slightly different' and that he had been coerced by his commanding officer to diagnose epilepsy even though:

65. Ulrick letter, 31 January and 15 February 1941. Notation from Menzies' diary cited in D. Day, Menzies & Churchill at War, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1986, p.52.

66. Letter filed in 2/2 War Diary, January 1941.

it was a bit against my medical judgement, but I was put in the position where I was the one ... in the hot seat, because if it did turn out that he [had] epilepsy, and did have fits in action ... it would have been very serious ... and reflected badly on me. So having been ordered I really had to obey that order whatever my medical inclinations were.

As Armati reflected, battalion histories understandably leave out such realities 'because the heroic tends to get more emphasis than the bad things'. He however still remembered his anger about the reinforcements:

I was terribly upset that some of [them] ... who had come ... had not been given time to learn even how to survive ... several of the wounded and dead I came across were reinforcements that had joined us that afternoon. I was very cross about that. Whether I went into print on that one or not I don't know. I can remember that verbally I had a few things to say.

One other reinforcement was a man who had been sent out of the line before Bardia for 'literally scratching at the ground' in fright. The night before the Tobruk action the man approached Armati:

When I came out of ... the evening meal there was this chap waiting outside the tent. He said "Could I see you sir. I'm sick". So I took him back to the R.A.P. tent. He in fact pretended he had venereal disease using condensed milk or something like that to make it appear he had a discharge ... I was well aware of what he was doing and so I said "You'll have to go back immediately".(67)

While official and unit historians obscure the realities of fear, trauma and death through the process of heroic self-justification, they suppress almost entirely one other battlefield reality, that of

67. Armati interview.

narcosis. While John Keegan has documented well the foot-soldier's ready access to alcohol, and other drugs, during battles the subject probably rates with venereal disease and mental illness as matters to be most concealed from public attention. According to Keegan soldiers in distant as well as more recent wars have been no strangers to alcohol before, during and after battle.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The Italian/Australian experience at Bardia and Tobruk fits this pattern, and while alcohol was restricted officially for the Australians, some undoubtedly came by it unofficially. Osbourne wrote to his mother of a family friend who had been sent out of the line at Sidi Haneish. Responding to questions that his mother had passed on from a cousin in Australia he wrote:

... we have not saw or herd [sic] of him since he went back from Sidi Enish [sic] that was just before we came into action Mother (don't let on he never came as far as Bardia whatever you do) I think I let the cat out of the bag by saying it was his teeth which sent him back to hospital but it won't do you any good to know what really sent him back, you may develop some funny ideas after my last remarks so I'll tell you he drank two bottles of gin at Sidi Enish [sic] and went back with the lining burnt off his gut now you know but don't mention a word to anyone who should or should not know.⁽⁶⁹⁾

The rum issue was also controversial, Long dealing with it in a footnote as C.E.W. Bean had done before him for the 1st A.I.F. Long notes that the 2/3's commanding officer was the only 16th Brigade commander to 'wisely' issue rum to his men before they slept after the fighting. The others, who were concerned that the troops were cold and tired, issued it under supervision before the attack began. Many officers agreed that it had been a 'mistake' to issue the rum before

68. J. Keegan, *op.cit.* See also R. Holmes, Firing Line, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1986 pp.224-253.

69. Osbourne letter, 28 February 1941.

the fighting. In so doing the 2nd A.I.F. ignored a 1st A.I.F. principle that rum be issued after action even though some 16th Brigade commanders had 1st A.I.F. experience. Mackay is said to have disapproved of the rum issue at Bardia but he did not countermand the order then nor later at Tobruk, but at the second operation 'pains were taken to ensure ... no man had more than his fair share'.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Whatever the discrepancies between stated policy and actual practice many troops seem to have received a rum ration before they fought and some also at other times. According to Long 'the men ate a meal and drank their rum'⁽⁷¹⁾ at 0230 hours. Hoffman wrote that 'ALL RANKS [sic] carried their rum issue carefully husbanded against the bleak, early morning start'.⁽⁷²⁾ While uncertainty exists as to the rum's strength, in 1981 the 2/3's Bob 'Hooker' Holt dismissed the 'big deal' over the rum claiming that it had to be bitterly cold before the men received a ration and that the amount 'would not have been enough to befuddle a teetotaler'.⁽⁷³⁾ O'Leary also thought it was 'anaemic rum [which] did little to blunt the bite of the cold'.⁽⁷⁴⁾

According to 2/2 sources the unit received its rum at the beginning of battle. It was full strength and had an obvious effect on the troops. Smithers, a professed non-drinker, notes how he came by two portions:

The barrage was terrific, like one continuous rumble of thunder while the flashes from the guns lit up the horizon. While this was going on the rum ration was issued. [I] did not care for the taste of it but managed to get it down. The chap alongside me would not drink his and offered it to me. I refused it and then

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70. G. Long, op.cit., p.164 and C.E.W. Bean, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol.III, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1929, pp.639-640.
71. G. Long, op.cit., p.164.
72. 16th Brigade diary, 3 January, 1941.
73. R. Holt, From Ingleburn to Aitape, R. Holt, Sydney, 1981, p.37.
74. S. O'Leary, op.cit., p.43.

a shell landed rather close to us. I then changed my mind and drank it.(75)

Mawhinney wrote: 'had rum issue and at them'.(76) Ulrick, who had written previously to his father of the rum which was 'nearly H₂O', wrote after Bardia that it had improved '100%', and that it had nearly 'blown [his] head off'. He put it in his water bottle 'which had been tasting rum ever since'.(77) Roy Lovett, of a Bren carrier platoon, recalled that the 'issue of S.R.D. 330P kept us warm for some hours after', while Armati complained of his 'misfortune'(78) at missing out on the rum ration before the Tobruk operation after he and his personnel marched five miles to the starting area.

Some were more explicit about the effect the rum had on their behaviour during the fighting. In a letter to his mother Waters told her that he had no doubts that the rum made him 'callous and bloodthirsty'.(79) Byers thought that the rum gave him 'a lot of much needed courage', while Stone claimed in 1985 that he would never have been able to get in and out of the anti-tank trap without the 'double issue of rum' that his platoon commander gave him.(80) 'Butch' Gordon recalled that D Company got a tankard of rum to share as they lay prone before the attack: '"Put this into your guts brother" said Lofty Stafford. [The rum] was as thick as syrup and was supposed to steady our nerves. I felt numb after that swig, then came the order to advance'.(81)

75. Smithers diary, 3 January 1941.

76. Mawhinney diary, 3 January 1941.

77. Ulrick letter, 12 January 1941.

78. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.60. and 2/2 War Diary, January 1941.

79. Waters letter, 6 January 1941.

80. Byers diary, 3 January 1941 and A. Stone, letter to author, 30 July, 1985 (Stone letter).

81. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.61.

The availability of alcohol in the battle area was not confined to the rum issue as the Italian Army had plentiful supplies. Parrott's most vivid impression of Bardia after the fighting was that of a 'valley of cognac' (82), as thousands of cases of abandoned Italian cognac graded in three strengths, lay strewn over a wide area. Don Fairbrother and Adrian Wilson wrote of the 'plenteous supply of chianti and other liquor at every habitat occupied by the lowliest Itie private', and that the attacking Australians had access to these supplies. (83) Ulrick told his father that on the second day of the fighting he saw 'George Roberts ... [who] shoved a great bottle of Dagoë plonk at me, but she's too sickly for me'. In another letter: 'You should have seen some of the cognac we found, is she fire water, a sip is enough to flatten anyone'. (84)

Byers' diary told of the many occasions on which he was drunk. On 4 January he found some cognac and 'celebrated our victory'. On the 6th he 'got very blind on cognac and did not recover until dark'. Two days later, as company runner he stayed up all night to assist the sergeant major who had injured his foot on a booby trap. The young soldier made up for spending the night awake by 'finding the rum issue - hit myself pretty hard with it and finished up rotten'. After the capture of Tobruk he was company runner through the day and night and was 'just about shook to pieces and covered in grease - but alive and happy - good tucker and plenty of wine'. On the 29th, his birthday, he found 'a 56 gallon keg of wine' and had a party with friends. Two

82. Parrott interview. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.201 for claims by an unnamed commander and medical officer that the troops' conduct was 'exemplary' in face of large quantities of alcohol, the regimental police also confiscating some 1,200 gallons in one day.

83. D.N. Fairbrother and A.S. Wilson, 'The War in the Desert', in A.J. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.29.

84. Ulrick letter, 12 and 31 January 1941.

days later in a different mood he wrote: 'Rotten sandstorm and life is very miserable ... Woop and myself got pretty full'.⁽⁸⁵⁾

Another feature of the operations was the surrender of the Italian Army, and the prisoners in their tens of thousands left lasting impressions with the Australians. Smithers, who was wounded on the first day at Bardia, nonetheless wrote of the capture of Italian soldiers at one of the gun-posts:

[They] started to come up from below with their hands up and we searched them and sent them back to the rear. I found a grenade in the pocket of one of them and when I took it from his pocket he snatched it back, saying something in his own language. Thinking he was going to blow us both up, and the safety catch on the rifle being on, I was just resigned to having to use the bayonet on him when the grenade came apart, it was full of cigarettes instead of explosives much to my relief. The next [Italian] was only about 17. He was shaking with fear and white as a ghost and had been wounded on the hand. I felt sorry for him and gave him a smoke, tried to tell him that he would be alright and there would be no more war for him.⁽⁸⁶⁾

Parrott remembered the Italians after their surrender as 'a navy blue line across the yellow desert', and later in the prison compound as 'cold, caged and hungry'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Ulrick told his father of how amusing it was to see '6 Aussies with about 3,000 [prisoners] looking for someone to give them to. I never saw so many docile Dagoes in my life'.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Frank Delforce wrote to a friend's sister that he was 'guarding the ities instead of fighting them [but] I would rather be fighting them than guarding them and that's fair dinkum'.⁽⁸⁹⁾ In 1982 Caling disagreed with claims that the Italians were poorly treated, remembering them as 'happy and playing football'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Mawhinney also

85. Byers diary, 4-31 January 1941.

86. Smithers diary, 3 January, 1941.

87. Parrott interview.

88. Ulrick letter, 12 January, 1941.

89. Osbourne letter, 18 February 1941.

90. Caling interview.

claimed that although the Australians 'had problems with the vast numbers of prisoners' it could never be regarded as 'chaos or panic'.⁽⁹¹⁾

The Allies however had been unprepared for so many prisoners and crammed them into inadequate enclosures. While a dust-storm persisted for days the Australians responded to the task of guarding, feeding and clothing the distressed Italians. Chilton's report on the prisoners described one enclosure, which housed 20,000 soldiers without their officers, as a 'completely unorganised and panic-stricken rabble'. Chilton came across many who had been without food and water for hours:

I found 200 to 300 lying on the ground outside a small building in which an Italian doctor was working. They appeared to be dead but apparently they were acute cases of exhaustion and thirst and I think nearly all recovered. The first attempt to get water into the cage ended in a wild stampede. I had not thought a crowd of men could so resemble a stampeding herd of cattle. Capt. Caldwell (whose company was duty) managed to obtain concrete tubs filled with water and to some extent ... regulate the rush ... The sanitary conditions were indescribable. After we had fed and watered the prisoners the greatest possible efforts were made to provide trenches and [to] insist on their use. Drastic punishment was meted out to offenders [and] I don't know how we managed to avoid a major epidemic.⁽⁹²⁾

Roger Rye recalled that some instances of ill-treatment and bashing of the 'more frantic prisoners' angered many Australians. 'The scene ... in the P.O.W. cage with Italians tormented by hunger and thirst and the duststorm was most distressing and has stayed in my memory'.⁽⁹³⁾

After relieving the 2/7 in its guarding of the prisoners on 26 January the 2/2 set about reducing the time spent feeding them to five hours by installing water tubs and employing Italian non-commissioned

91. Mawhinney notes.

92. Cited in G. Long, op.cit., p.239.

93. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.82.

officers to organise their own men. Eventually 2/2 guards ensured that every man had at least a great-coat or a blanket and his own water-bottle. The Australians also raised the Italian s' morale by encouraging them to sing, and in turn they sang to their prisoners, Caling remembering that it was an Australian padre who organised the choir.(94)

Some stories about the prisoners and their captors were transformed in the retelling. One about a 2/2 man who threw a grenade into the prisoners' cage gained acceptance as a 2/2 truth. As the story is told a bereaved soldier threw the grenade to avenge his brother's death at Bardia. In 1982 Caling named the grenade thrower claiming that he had done it because he was 'crooked' on an unfaithful wife. The man was a 'hood' and possibly drunk at the time. And while Caling emphasised that he was by no means certain of the facts he pointed out that some 2/2 men hold to the belief that the man killed his wife on his return to Australia. Parrott also believed that the grenade throwing episode was not motivated by grief. While Parrott failed to mention anyone by name he claimed that the 'men who threw the grenades' were drinking at the time and were sent back to Australia soon afterwards.(95)

For many men Bardia was a 'howling success' with morale afterwards even 'cock-a-hoop'.(96) Caling, 'the man who rode the General's white horse' reflected that a man 'was unlucky to be killed'.(97) For those who lost friends the images were less heroic.

94. Caling interview.

95. Story told to author at 2/2 battalion reunions by various sources. Also Caling and Parrott interviews.

96. D. Fairbrother and A. Baird, interview, Port Macquarie, 7 June 1983.

97. Caling interview.

D Company's Delforce told a friend that he had 'been in two battles now ... and by the sights I saw in them it makes my blood run cold'.(98) Osbourne as we have seen became disillusioned by the war after his friend's death at Bardia. In a letter to a friend after Tobruk he wrote about the reinforcements:

... of course we have to feed these fellows [who] has never seen action & they are here amongst the dagoe rifles, ammunition & hand grenades & they are firing & letting these off & do we go crook they make your nerves jump but these fellows haven't saw action and the bloody fools nearly blew themselves up yesterday ... We have not seen an air raid for just on a week now & I wish their [sic] was a raid tonight then these fools would realize what it is like.(99)

The same man could write in lighter vein in another letter of the fun he and others were having dressing up in Italian naval uniforms.

... everywhere you go or look the boys are done up in sailors suits ... Johnny and I ... got ourselves a bran [sic] new satin navy dinner suit each and I'd bet we'd pay anything up to twelve quid for it back home & we have a white sailor's suit and navy one each, dago boots and a navy officer's cap we wouldn't call the king our uncle the past two days.(100)

Historians and participants alike suppressed the realities of the fighting at Bardia and Tobruk. While some men felt uninhibited in letters home many others followed Ulrick's principle. In 1982 he wrote: 'I guess no soldier worth his salt would worry his home folks by having a "winge" about his conditions ... no matter what his private thoughts or express loud and clear when cold, miserable and

98. Osbourne letter, 10 February 1941.

99. ibid., 13 February 1941.

100. ibid., 28 January 1941.

hungry'. Ulrick's concerns had not changed in 40 years. In a letter of late December 1940 when he wrote to reassure his father that a wounded brother was well he eschewed 'the menace of rumour's both [those] at the front and home':

I was talking to ... one of Nupe's cobblers out of transport and he said [he] was good, probably holding a nurse's hand back in Alex. You are probably worrying like hell about him but I assure you there is no need. We traced most of the wild rumours that have been going around down to Errol who writes some queer bloody letters home from all accounts. It seems there are as many rumours at home as we have here ... I suppose you and all the other parents are worrying like steam about us and our health. Don't believe anything you hear because if you don't hear from us for a while it will be because we are out of stamps. I am using my last one on this letter, the same with "Sully" on the one to his Ma.(101)

Tom Harvey agreed with Ulrick about the tendency of most to avoid discussing realities whenever they wrote to family and friends. In 1982 Harvey told the author how surprised he had been when some time after the war he read the published correspondence of the First World War poet, Wilfred Owen. What puzzled him most about Owen was his intimacy with his mother and the frankness of his front line revelations to her. On Harvey's return to Kempsey after the war his family neither talked of the war, nor asked the son about his experiences even though the father was a 1st A.I.F. veteran.(102)

The tendency is to suppress discussion of mutilation and death in battle. Mourning rituals however are very much part of war remembrance mythology even if heroic language blurs the starkness. In the language of Anzac eulogies battles are 'glorious', death is

101. A.J. Ulrick, letter to author, 19 April 1982 and Ulrick letter, 26 December 1940.

102. T. Harvey, interview, Coffs Harbour, 8 July 1982.

'ennobling', 'dutiful' and the 'supreme sacrifice'.⁽¹⁰³⁾ And while the purpose of such tradition is intended to comfort and provide avenues for grief it would seem that for some the experience of battle does not always concur with heroic images. In action a soldier might have witnessed a variety of responses ranging from apparent fearlessness to grovelling in the earth in fright. Then afterwards when the realities of death, wounding, fear, cowardice, looting and drinking are all shrouded in euphemisms, the survivors' internal reactions become subordinate to heroic mythologies. Even Bean, who deplored 'exaggerated heroism' in war reporting, believed that there was still plenty of heroism in war: 'it teems with it, but it has been so overwritten that if you write that a man did his job people say "Oh there's nothing heroic in that"'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

The corporate picture of Bardia and Tobruk presented by Purple Over Green necessarily swallowed up the realities of individual experience. While a sense of unity and high morale were the ultimate goals of the 2/2 the group interpretation of the two operations often obscured the variety and range of individual reactions. Battles as short periods of intense activity receive most attention in later histories. Both the intensity of the experience and the perception that it has significance historically guarantees its importance over more mundane aspects of army life. But even as the operations were in progress the process of selective perception shaped the way individual

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103. Common inscriptions on memorial stones at Bomana War Cemetery, Papua New Guinea and other veterans' cemeteries. For discussion of mythmaking and language see P. Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, Oxford University Press, London, 1975. See also D. Craig and M. Egan, Extreme Situations: Literature and Crisis from the Great War to the Atom Bomb, MacMillan Press, London, 1979; L. Langer, The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1975; and T. Des Pres, The Survivor, Oxford University Press, New York, 1976.
104. K. Fewster, Gallipoli Correspondent: The Frontline diary of C.E.W. Bean, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p.157.

soldiers recorded and remembered the experience for themselves. On the collective level the combined processes of anecdote sharing and public reportage placed yet another layer of meaning on the experience leaving the men with two levels, or more, on which to remember the fighting: the one influenced by individual perception, the other by collective history-making.

Nearly fifty years on, however, ~~on~~ many veterans reflect more on the paradoxes of their battle experience and ponder the way history-making overtook some of the realities. To take just one instance some now believe that attempts to establish the actual title of the song they sang going into battle, or even the veracity of the story, seem trivial when compared with the reality of that first day of battle. Stone, who was wounded in the first hour of the Bardia attack, also losing his sergeant, recalled in a letter to the author in 1985:

Irrespective of what was sung, as we were advancing in extended line I could not hear instructions issued to me by Sgt. Coleman the noise was so loud I had to move backwards and forwards and yell to repeat orders. I can assure you there weren't any songs in our section. (105)

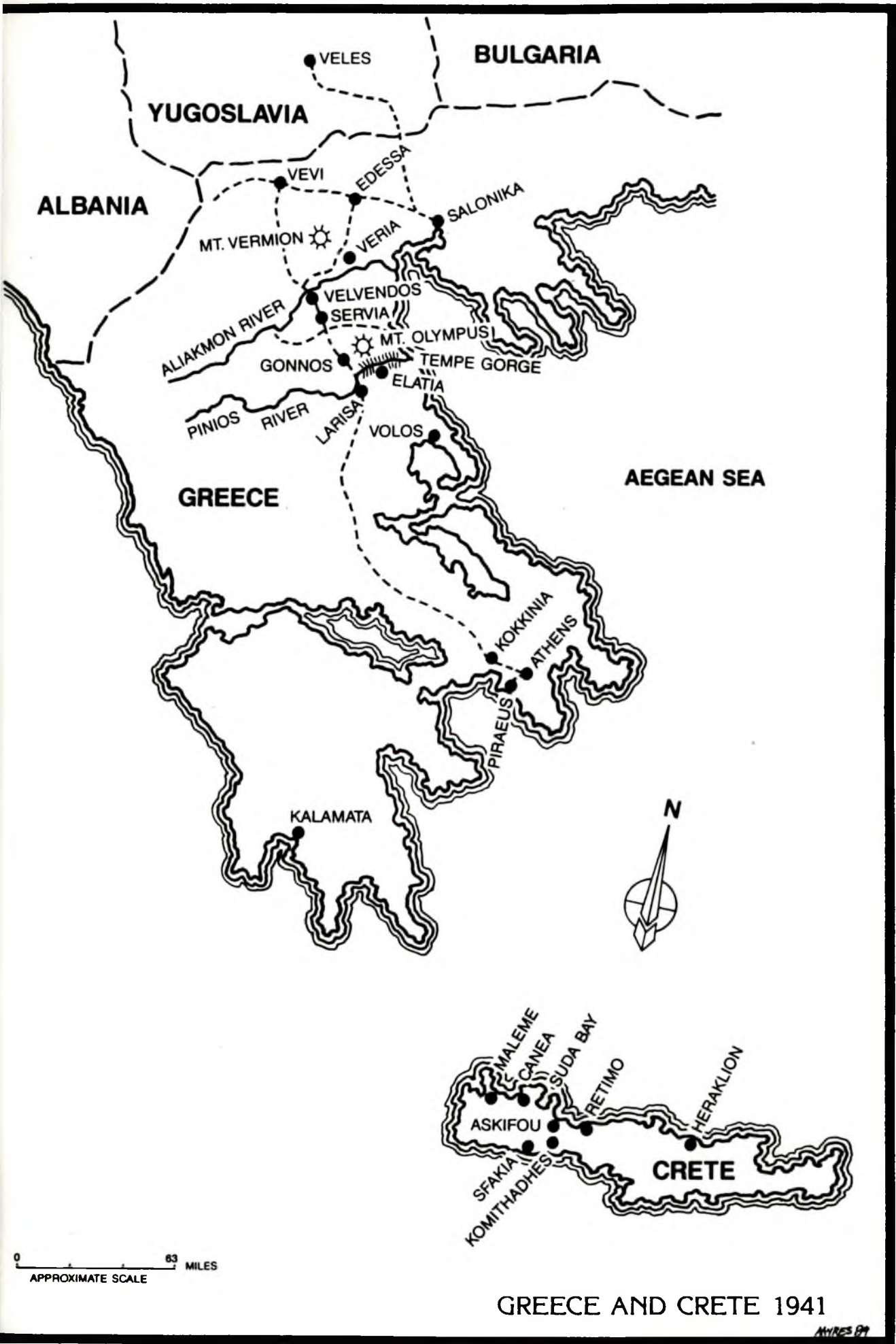
CHAPTER FOUR

DEFEAT IN GREECE AND CRETE

MARCH TO MAY 1941

Defeat at the hands of the Germans in Greece and Crete followed on quickly the 6th Division's success in North Africa.(1) In March 1941 some 58,000 Allied troops began to arrive in Greece to take up defensive positions in the north eastern mountain ranges. By the middle of April they withdrew in the face of German air and ground superiority. The Germans, who invaded Greece and Yugoslavia on 6 April, entered Athens three weeks later, only days after the formal Greek surrender and the Allied decision to evacuate its force. Naval evacuations, which began on 24 April from beaches in southern Greece, carried some 50,000 troops to safety but others either made their own way to units in Palestine through Turkey and Cyprus or became prisoners of war. Then on 20 May German paratroopers landed on Crete and quickly overcame Allied troops, most of whom had been landed there from Greece. In another withdrawal and more evacuations the navy took many troops to the Middle East, but as in Greece, some became prisoners. Of the 16,000 soldiers captured in the two campaigns 5,000 were Australian.

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1. The following details are from G. Long, Greece, Crete and Syria, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Chs. 1-13, 1953, pp.1-319; G. Long, The Six Years War, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1973, pp.51-103 Ch.4; J. Hetherington, Air War Against Germany and Italy, 1939-1943, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1954, Ch. 4, pp.76-107.



GREECE AND CRETE 1941

AMRES 89

Italy invaded Greece on 28 October 1940 activating a guarantee of support that Britain had given to Greece when Italy occupied Albania in April 1939. In response to Italy's attack the British sent Greece four R.A.F. squadrons which went immediately into action against the Italians in Albania. Then in November Britain stationed an infantry brigade and 4,200 anti-aircraft gunners on Crete while placing air-force ground staff and depot troops in Athens. Initially the Greek army withstood the Italian thrust into its territory but by January 1941 14 of its total of 21 divisions faced 19 Italian divisions on a 100 mile front, 20 to 30 miles within the Albanian border. The Germans at that time had 12 divisions and a sizable air-force in Rumania, making it increasingly obvious to the Allies that Hitler would eventually send his army southwards into Greece through Bulgaria, either to achieve his own objectives in the Mediterranean or to support Italy.

In February, acting under instructions from the Chiefs of Staff in London to send maximum aid to Greece, General Wavell formed 'Lustreforce', which comprised a New Zealand Division, the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions, 1st Australian Corps Headquarters, the British 1st Armoured Brigade and an Independent Polish Brigade Group. On 22 February at a meeting of British and Greek political and military leaders in Athens General Papagos, the Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army, requested that nine British divisions with air support reinforce the four divisions of his East Macedonian Army, which he wished to withdraw from an area south of the Bulgarian border. The Greeks, who were uncertain of Yugoslavia's intentions in the event of a German attack, planned to leave fortress troops only in eastern Macedonia and to man the Olympus, Veria and Edessa passes in the Vermion range with 35 of ^{their} own battalions and whatever troops the British could offer.

For their part British commanders thought that a Greek force of five or six divisions and the four which they offered from Egypt had 'a reasonable prospect of establishing an effective defence against German aggression in the north-east of Greece'. On the German side an army of 20 divisions - a force code-named 'Operation Marita' - was assembled to conquer Greece and Yugoslavia.

Australian political and military leaders had virtually no part in the decisions which committed their troops to Greece. Although extant sources fail to reveal the total communications between the British and Australian governments, it is clear that Britain planned the campaign in secrecy bypassing Australia and the other dominions in any authentic discussions. In recent studies historians have judged both Blamey and Menzies to have failed as decision makers in events leading to the Greek campaign. David Horner reveals that while Blamey expressed disapproval of the campaign on many occasions he failed to act decisively in his communications with Menzies and the Australian War Cabinet.⁽²⁾ John Robertson also concludes that because of 'reasons ranging from the highest notions of honour to sheer incompetence', Australian leaders missed the opportunity to bar the deployment of their troops in Greece. In his view Menzies and the War Cabinet reacted inappropriately to the gravity of a situation which committed Australians to a doomed military venture.⁽³⁾

The 2/2, only one of the 350 units, sub-units or detachments sent to supplement the Greek Army, was one of the first to take up

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2. D.M. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, Ch.4., pp.65-103. Also for Crete pp.104-108.
 3. J. Robertson, Australia at War 1939-1945, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1981, p.42.

defensive positions in north eastern Greece on what was known as the Vermion-Olympus Line.⁽⁴⁾ The unit, which sailed from Alexandria on 18 March, arrived in Piraeus harbour four days later. With other 16th Brigade units it spent two days on leave in Athens before travelling by train to Larisa. By 27 March the unit reached Servia where Mt. Olympus could be seen in the east, the Aliakmon River flowing below in the north. During its week's stay at Servia senior officers reconnoitred two forward positions, one at Vevi, which was the north western approach into Greece from Yugoslavia. The other was at Veria Pass, the north eastern approach from the direction of Salonika. And while the 16th Brigade relieved Greek units at Servia other units of the British force continued to arrive at Piraeus but the Allies were by no means prepared for the German attack. At the beginning of April the New Zealand division, which was almost complete, was concentrated east and north of Olympus and the British 1st Armoured Brigade was at Edessa. Of the Australian contingent only two-thirds of the 6th Division had arrived, the 7th staying behind in the Middle East. The German advance on North Africa at the time of its drive on Greece and Yugoslavia prevented the Polish Brigade and Australia's second division from joining 'Lustreforce'.

On 6 April the 16th Brigade left Servia to take up positions which were 30 miles northwards at Veria Pass where the Australians relieved units of the Greek 12th Division. The 2/2's positions were in some cases 3,000 feet above Veria village, with even higher peaks towering above them. On the 8th, the day following the Luftwaffe's

4. Details for the following paragraphs are from G. Long, op.cit., (Greece, Crete and Syria) pp.33-130; C. Green, 'Grecian Disaster' A.J. Marshall (ed.) Nulli Secundus Log, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, pp.31-42; and S. Wick, Purple Over Green, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978 (2nd ed.), first published 1977, Ch.4, pp.88-121.

destruction of Piraeus harbour, the 2/2 took up battle positions in which its headquarters was some 6,500 feet above sea level commanding a panoramic view of the Salonika plains. Two days later the Germans broke through on the unit's north western flank threatening to cut it off. Immediately the unit followed scorched earth policy destroying documents, surplus food, equipment and ammunition, but the arrival of countermanding orders left the troops amid the ruins of their equipment until the order for a general withdrawal came from Brigade Headquarters 24 hours later. Then on Good Friday, 11 April, as part of the newly formed 2nd Anzac Corps under Blamey's command, 16th Brigade withdrew in stages from Veria, travelling 36 miles on foot over mountain ranges and the Aliakmon River to Velvendos. In the 2/2 Headquarters Company withdrew first with B and C Companies followed on the next night by Battalion Headquarters, the Regimental Aid Post and A and D Companies.

On Easter Sunday the men reached the fast-flowing Aliakmon which they crossed by punt. At Velvendos they received orders to move on to Servia where on the 15th they heard of the German breakthrough on the defences of the 21st New Zealand Battalion at the northern end of Tempe Gorge. This event threatened the entire Anzac Corps as the Germans were poised to control Larisa, the junction of all roads on which the retreat was being made. The task of holding the Germans at Tempe Gorge until the rest of Anzac Corps withdrew from the Olympus-Aliakmon Line fell to 16th Brigade. The 2/2, as the most forward battalion, marched for ten hours from midnight to meet transport which carried it through Larisa to Tempe Gorge. On 18 April the Germans, who had moved southwards from the town of Gonnos, attacked the Australians in two drives, one from down the gorge, the other from across the river. Although the fighting began in the early

morning the main attack on the 2/2 took shape in the late afternoon. By 1845 the unit's positions were untenable forcing it to withdraw. 2/2's casualties were 11 killed in action, four died of wounds, 46 wounded and 118 prisoners of war.⁽⁵⁾

Some 2/2 men faced the Germans again on Crete, but until Britain's decision to evacuate Greece there had been no plans to defend Crete, even though like Cyprus and Malta it had strategic importance in the Mediterranean. In April 1941 the island's main defence was the British 14th Brigade, which comprised a battalion each of the Black Watch, the Yorks, the Lancasters and the Leicesters, who were all at Heraklion on the *north* coast. On 25 April 5,000 troops from Greek evacuations joined them. Later another 20,000 arrived so that eventually some 30,000 Allied troops were assembled. Then on the 29th New Zealand's General Freyberg, who was on his way to Egypt, found himself appointed commander of all forces on Crete.

Another few days following, the 2/2's Major P. Cullen arrived at Heraklion with 122 men from various A.I.F. and New Zealand units, including seven officers and 65 other ranks from his own. Cullen anticipated evacuation to Egypt, but as German air attacks over Crete increased and threatened shipping, he received orders to take up defences at Suda Bay. There Cullen's group had 'a grand reunion' with another 2/2 group of A Company and Headquarters men, who had been on the Costa Rica, which sank while on its way from Greece. At this time Cullen formed the 16th Australian Infantry Brigade Composite Battalion, excluding only the 2/1, which went with the 2/11 (19 Brigade) to defend the Retimo aerodrome. The make-shift unit comprised 16 officers and 427 other ranks of whom the 2/2 had nine officers and 180 other ranks. Its medical officer was the 2/1's Tom

5. S. Wick, Purple Over Green, p.121.

Selby. The 17th Brigade's 2/5 and 2/6 Battalions also formed a composite unit, both then coming under the command of Colonel C.E. Cremor, commander of the 2/2 Field Regiment and acting Brigadier.

The campaign on Crete involved just under a quarter (189) of 2/2's ranks who fought at Tempe Gorge, and as the main German attack occurred some distance from their defences, they did not engage directly in battle. On 26 May the 16 Composite Battalion covered the retreat routes and embarkation beach of troops who were withdrawing from Maleme and Canea. By the morning of the 28th the troops themselves at Suda Bay disengaged and retreated along the southern road which wound upwards for 3,000 feet then descended to the plain of Askifou. There Freyberg ordered that some units fight a series of rear-guard actions to hold off the advancing Germans until they themselves could disengage and embark. After the evacuations, which occurred on four consecutive nights, Colonel T.G. Walker, the 2/7's commander and most senior officer on the island, surrendered Crete to an Austrian officer in the village of Komitadhes. 2/2's casualties, which all occurred after the formal surrender, were two killed, six wounded and 49 taken prisoner.⁽⁶⁾

For many Australian soldiers the Greek and Cretan campaigns placed them briefly in a world of ancient and heroic imagery. Even defeat could be seen to connect them historically with the epic wars which had been fought on the same terrain. For the 2/2 in particular the battle at Tempe Gorge took on heroic proportions in spite of its defeat and disintegration as a fighting unit. In his 1946 article,

6. ibid., p.140.

'Grecian Disaster', Charlie Green, a C Company platoon commander in Greece, wrote that although Tempe Gorge was a German victory it was an 'individual success for the 2/2' as it denied the Germans access to Larisa until Anzac Corps was through. Pride also derived from the fact that the 2/2 'plus some disorganised Kiwis and two splendid batteries of N.Z. artillery had held a Hun Mountain Division [12,000 men] and a Panzer Brigade [250 tanks] for a day'. Of the rear-guard actions fought by some 2/2 groups during the withdrawal Green described the one at Thermopylae as 'the finest of the war' for 'the thought of a split battalion didn't deter these men for both here and later at Corinth Canal they upheld with brilliance the examples set by the Battalion at [Tempe Gorge]'.⁽⁷⁾ It was however impossible for the 2/2 to salvage any satisfaction from its role on Crete. In 'The Calamity of Crete', also published in 1946, Allan Baird and John Dunlop, two of the composite battalion's senior officers, wrote that what happened was 'another tragedy, another defeat, where there should never have been a fight'.⁽⁸⁾

In official and unit histories the realities of defeat tend to be obscured by emphasising the fighting qualities of the men, the casualties sustained and the troops' exemplary conduct during the withdrawals.⁽⁹⁾ While most accounts fall short of actually denying

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7. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.41. According to Herodotus the invasion of Greece by the army of Xerxes moved by way of Gonnos see G. Scarlett, 'How Far Was Strategy Determined By Geography in the Great Persian War?', University essay, June 1949, loaned to author by Mrs J. Scarlett whose husband was in Greece with the 2/1 Field Regiment.
 8. A.H. Baird & J.W. Dunlop, the 'Calamity of Crete', in A.J. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.61.
 9. For a selection of A.I.F. unit histories with differing analyses of the Greek and Crete campaigns see S. Wick, *op.cit.*, Chs. 4 and 5, pp.88-148 ; D. Hay, Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, Ch.3, pp.135-194; K. Clift, War Dance: A Story of the 2/3 Aust. Inf. Battalion A.I.F., 2/3rd Battalion Association, Sydney, 1980, Chs. 4 and 5, pp.113-171; S. Trigellis-Smith, All the King's Enemies, 2/5 Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1988, Ch.3 pp.83-110.

the realities of military disintegration they do reflect the ambivalence that many felt between pride for what they had achieved and pain for what they had lost. Perhaps many more felt like the 2/1 Field Regiment's 'Hans' Anderson who criticised his own unit's attempt to portray Greece. In May 1947 he wrote to Grahame Scarlett that he felt that the Greek campaign was being treated 'too lightly' as it was for him 'the worst fortnight or so that I have spent and you haven't painted the horrors sufficiently'.⁽¹⁰⁾ Gavin Long, who was in Greece with the British force as a journalist for Australian morning newspapers, drew on a mass of inter-Allied, Greek and German documents to tell the Australian story. While his account attempts to reveal the complexities of a military withdrawal in a campaign which was run by several separate command structures, his emphasis finally was on the competency of the Australians and their unbroken spirit. Of the 'critical day of 18 April', when the men faced defeat on the ground and ceaseless air activity, Long wrote:

... there was no danger of depression or panic seizing the force partly because of the example of leaders and partly because of the coolness and dogged stamina of the fighting men. Thereafter discipline became more rigidly observed not less and spirits rose though in defeat.⁽¹¹⁾

In the light of evidence on high command conflicts which Horner puts forward it would seem the official historian's claim needs reassessment. Not only did many high-ranking commanders criticise Blamey's performance as commander in Greece, but in the post-mortems following both campaigns, each of the forces had criticisms of the others. Of most significance for this study some Australian

10. G. Scarlett, letter on loan to author from Mrs J. Scarlett (Scarlett letter).

11. G. Long, op.cit., pp.129-130.

commanders, as well as being critical of their own troops' indiscipline and loss of fighting spirit, alleged that the 21st New Zealand Battalion tended to panic and that its troops did not hold on for long enough at Tempe Gorge. General Mackay alleged that the 1st Rangers Battalion of the British 1st Armoured Brigade was 'in a poor state of fright' at Vevi. The Australians for their part received poor coverage from the British and most notably in the Commander of the British Force's report which claimed that 'the battle discipline of the 1st Armoured Brigade and ... the New Zealand Division was particularly high [but] that of the remainder [the Australians] was not so good'. The report and a subsequent investigation of it created much controversy. The Chiefs of Staff in London ordered the second report's destruction but 'one copy was torn in half and kept in the files'. Blamey also recommended, after seeing the report himself, that the 'extraordinary unbalanced document' be destroyed.⁽¹²⁾ Similarly the troops on Crete came under scrutiny from high command. During correspondence with Long in the early fifties Freyberg wrote of the 'disorganized rabble' during the withdrawal on Crete: 'I will never forget the disorganisation and almost lack of control of the masses on the move as we made our way slowly through that endless stream of trudging men'.⁽¹³⁾

In March 1941 the 2/2 had been on leave in Alexandria for the first time in two months when its troops heard of an impending move. And while the new destination was concealed from the troops it was

12. D. Horner, op.cit., p.98.

13. G. Long, op.cit., p.253.

well-known to the civilian population. On the eve of 18 March provost personnel rounded up the troops by entering cafes and announcing that 16th Brigade was to return to camp. Posters in the streets also displayed the move even though such practice contravened security regulations.⁽¹⁴⁾ When the unit embarked next morning only two men were absent without leave. Some however must have only just made the ship as Roy Waters told his mother that 'a big line-up' had their 'just deserts' from Colonel Chilton on departure morning. And though the penalty for returning late was a week's pay and confinement to barracks, 'we didn't mind owing to being on the boat'.⁽¹⁵⁾

The unit and one 2/1 company set off from Alexandria in high spirits in a mule transport, the S.S. Bankura, which had to be cleaned by a party of 30 men before Chilton allowed the troops on board. Travelling conditions were far from comfortable and as there were no kitchen facilities the men either had to cook meals on deck or live on hard rations. Pat Byers, who noted on 17 March that he 'entrained for lord knows where', observed later that there was a 'hell of a crowd on board'⁽¹⁶⁾ all sleeping and smelling like sardines in the hold. Apparently the unfavourable conditions and some Italian air attacks during the voyage failed to check the troops' enthusiasm. Indeed Green wrote that the unit's morale 'was never better'⁽¹⁷⁾ after its success in North Africa and on the trip to Greece where many looked forward to the 'chance to prove [their] mettle against Hitler'.⁽¹⁸⁾

14. C. Green, op.cit., p.32.

15. R. Waters, collection of letters loaned to author, 14 May 1941 (Waters letter).

16. P. Byers, diary loaned to author, 17 and 18 March 1941.

17. C. Green, op.cit., p.31.

18. Waters letter.

Greece in early spring captivated the Australians, who on their arrival in Piraeus travelled by New Zealand transport to camp Daphne No. 2. Waters told his mother that:

when the shores of Greece came in view we all crowded the sides eagerly seeking a view ... British planes escorted us into the harbour where we were greeted by crowds of Greek people ... The harbour echoed with cooees from our boats.⁽¹⁹⁾

Byers thought Daphne was a 'lovely place', adding 'thank God there will be no dust here'.⁽²⁰⁾ Roy Lovett remembered the camp, which sat among olive trees and houses, as the 2/2's 'prettiest'; and 'as every third house was a ... shop selling that wonderful wine Mavro Daphne it was even more pleasant'.⁽²¹⁾ Waters wrote that 'the smell of pines and a cool breeze from the mountains made new men of us',⁽²²⁾ while Jack McCarthy 'enjoyed [his] nice clean bed on the grass... and was soon asleep with the wind in the trees'.⁽²³⁾ Green perhaps summed up the feelings of most:

Our first impressions [of Greece] were good and we didn't have to change them! ... Instead of waking up with eyes, ears and noses full of sand we breathed pure crisp air with the scent of flowers. Flowers! - we hadn't seen them since leaving Australia. After months of desert glare, the landscape at Daphne was a dream come true. The troops stood and gazed at the natural gardens full of shrubs and flowers which scented the breeze; at the grasses which made a swishing noise as [they] walked through - I'm sure many men ⁽²⁴⁾ actually pinched themselves to see if they were really there.

19. ibid.

20. Byers diary, 21 March 1941.

21. R. Lovett, collection papers and articles on loan to author.

22. Waters letter.

23. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.90.

24. C. Green, op.cit., p.34.

Olivia Manning, who with her British broadcasting husband fled the German advance through the Balkan states, described the Athens of March 1941 in much the same way as the young Australian officer. In her novel, Friends and Heroes, she wrote:

March ... was a time of marvels. The British troops were coming in force and the splendour of the new season came with them. The men were wonderful in their variety. As the lorries drove in from the Piraeus bringing Australians, New Zealanders and Englishmen ... the Greeks shouted from the pavement, "the Wops are done for. When the snow melts we'll drive them into the sea".

The population's euphoria matched the surrounding countryside which 'dazzled with the reds of anemones and poppies, with wild hyacinths and lupins, acanthus flowers and asphodels'. Athens was 'a garden [where] flower shops packed to the doors with flowers threw out such a scent the streets were filled with it'.⁽²⁵⁾ In his first report on 6th Division troops Kenneth Slessor also wrote: 'it was violets, violets all the way for the first Australians who drove through [Piraeus]. Their trucks were filled with violets, oranges, nuts and sweets ...'. The men were 'in a country that might be a piece of Australia towed across the world'.⁽²⁶⁾

Greek hospitality also impressed the Australians. Reg Blain, a B Company platoon commander, told his mother of the 'marvellous welcome which was a pleasant change [from] what we had been used to'.⁽²⁷⁾ Waters enjoyed 'dancing with the beautiful girls' on his first day's leave believing that 'they sure [lived] up to history regards goddesses'. Of his second day in Athens: 'What a day we had

25. O. Manning, Friends and Heroes, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1974, p.230.

26. C. Semmler (ed.), The War Despatches of Kenneth Slessor, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1987, pp.139-140.

27. R. Blain, copy of letter loaned to author by R. Lovett, undated May 1941 (Blain letter).

... Wine, women and song. Gee we could have wept when we had to leave for camp. The people were home itself'.⁽²⁸⁾ Tom Harvey of A Company's 7 Platoon, recalled in 1962 that he and a friend were so taken with Athens that they went absent without leave to do more sightseeing. And while Athens affected them the Athenians themselves made an even greater impression on the men who 'felt at home for the first time since leaving Australia'.⁽²⁹⁾ Jack Smithers, who arrived about a week later than the main 2/2 body, also told his mother that Greece was 'the best country we have been in since leaving Australia'.⁽³⁰⁾ His diary noted his meeting with some Greek soldiers at a cafe where he and his companions were with a Greek civilian guide.

He told us that a party of Greeks near bye [sic] was having a final fling as they had to go into the army the next day. Some ... came over to our table ... but we could not understand the language ... the guide explained that they were thanking us for coming to Greece to fight for them.⁽³¹⁾

The train which carried the 2/2 to Larisa comprised only one small passenger wagon, which carried 'the C.O. and his young gentlemen'.⁽³²⁾ The troops had to ride in freight wagons, where they were seen by Green to resemble 'sheep rather than human beings'. It was also difficult to accommodate the men in the wagons for some 'under the influence of Grecian wine' insisted on taking last glimpses of the countryside. As Rex Moore put it: 'in charge of baggage and

28. Waters letter.

29. T. Harvey, 'Greece: 1941', Stand-To, Vol. 7, No. 5, May-June, 1962, pp.1-7.

30. J. Smithers, collection of letters on loan to author, 21 May 1941 (Smithers letter).

31. J. Smithers, diary on loan to author, 31 March 1941 (Smithers diary).

32. Unnamed private cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.91.

drunks. What a day'.⁽³³⁾ From the troops' point of view Waters observed that the sight of the cattle-trucks crammed with two platoons each made the men's spirits sink, 'but bottles of cognac were produced and who cared'.⁽³⁴⁾ For Byers sleep was 'absolutely out of the question'⁽³⁵⁾ as there was standing room only.

On their northwards journey the Australians marvelled at snow-capped mountains, quaint villages and traditionally-dressed peasants, many like Waters feeling that it was 'scenery unsurpassed in our travels'. The train stopped at one point 'to make way for a crowded refugee train [which was] anxious to look at famous Aussies'.⁽³⁶⁾ What most impressed Byers were the flowers showered on them by young children.⁽³⁷⁾ Young girls were said to have thrown lilacs and buttercups at Allied soldiers while the boys ran along the road calling out 'Engles' and 'Zeeto ee Australia' - long live Australia.⁽³⁸⁾

The 16th Brigade's arrival at the bombed township of Larisa brought the troops face to face with the real purpose of their visit to Greece. Although it was to be another three weeks before the 2/2 saw action at Tempe Gorge, harsh conditions made their period of battle preparedness far from comfortable. The men had a 'thoroughly miserable' time digging the frozen ground and living in holes which were half full of water. Food was scarce but the cold conditions greatly increased the men's appetites so that 'the tinned bacon [which was] so unpalatable in the desert [was] delicious in the snowy upland

33. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.34 and R.M. Moore, diary on loan to author, 1 April 1941 (Moore diary).

34. Waters letter.

35. Byers diary, 24 March 1941.

36. Waters letter.

37. Byers diary, 25 March 1941.

38. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.32.

slopes of Veria'.⁽³⁹⁾ As they had done previously at Bardia the cold conditions demoralised the men tending to exacerbate the many irritations of army living. The medical officer, Leo Armati, who was with the unit in Greece but not Crete, recalled in 1982 that typhoid inoculations, which the troops had at Servia, 'couldn't have done them much good'. In his view the troops in Greece were 'exposed to far more than battle stresses'. While the marches over the mountains impaired their physical fitness prior to battle other unspoken anxieties and a loss of confidence in higher planning strained their emotions. Armati and other officers were well aware of the 'pathetic' imbalance between the German and British forces. But the ordinary soldier could only guess at the logic behind the sudden changes that occurred in the unit's position and the orders it was given.⁽⁴⁰⁾

During the 2/2's first two weeks in Greece Byers' frustrations found expression in his diary. On 1 April, after noting that he was in a party which carried ammunition up the Servia slopes, he wrote:

Nearly busted myself and when I got up on the top I was very wild with things in general. A [reinforcement] officer tried to stand over me but I bailed up and declared on him - looks as if I am really in trouble for the first time - ah well if they push it I have made up my mind to go "bush" properly - to hell with them all - if ever a man was sick of everything I am that man and I would give everything I possess to be a free and happy civilian - had a go at Capt King for a transfer to any other unit but got wiped cold - damn them all again.

The next day there was 'a big panic about paratroopers' then on the 4th a

39. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.35.

40. Dr L. Armati, interview, McMahons Point, NSW, 27 September, 1982.

lovely sunny day [was] spoilt by a big blitz about tents - they made us roll our tents and everyone has a bad cold - the boys are very hostile about it ... and refuse to work. I'm with them and be damned [sic] to them all.

On the day of his typhoid inoculation Byers noted that yet another 'day [was] spoilt by an injection - arm very stiff and sore it seems to me that the army are never happy unless they are doing something to me'. He recorded that the troops had been given a lecture on German tactics, adding 'I don't like the sound of having to face 90 ton tanks but I suppose it has to be done'. On the day that Germany invaded Greece he wrote of being awakened at 0330 hours and prepared for a move:

[we] raced around getting everything ready but of course the Army never do anything right and we are still waiting. Had a sleep in the sun and a chicken for dinner - grilled him over the fire like a goanna ... transport 50 miles - very miserable trip, full platoon and all our gear on one 30 cwt truck - spent very miserable night dug in a ploughed field ... blankets all wet [because of rain] and everyone seems to be in rotten tempers - the boys are very short with each other tonight. ⁽⁴¹⁾

Others responded to the harsh conditions with optimism. Smithers, who rejoined A Company and his old platoon and section at Servia on 2 April after convalescing from a leg wound, had a 'wonderful reception being welcomed by all the old faces and felt very happy to be back "home" ... after 3 months' absence'. There were 'a lot of new faces' and a new officer. Two days later, after being on patrol with 8 and 9 Platoons, Smithers described the spot where he looked out for parachutists and enemy planes.

41. Byers diary, 1-6 April 1941.

The most marvellous view I have ever seen is from the top of this mountain, everywhere we look there are mountains and just below is a valley cultivated and some small villages scattered around. Some of the mountains have no snow on them now because of ... spring and warmer weather, while on others snow can be seen in patches. Mt. Olympus however seems to be all snow and is quite near us. (42)

Smithers' platoon heard about the invasion by being 'awakened at 4.30 and told to be ready to move out at 5 a.m. ... as Germany had started war on Greece at the Bulgarian frontier at a place called BELES [sic]'. On the truck journey which Byers thought so miserable, Smithers found everyone in high spirits and singing for most of the way. Waters thought that the 'heavens had fallen down' during the previous night, but next day 'although we were wet through spirits were not dampened'. (43)

Don Peirce, a C Company sergeant, described in his diary the 2/2's arrival at Veria, the men having climbed five miles to their positions which were 'on the tops of mountains away from any roads'. Each man carried his rifle, equipment, respirator, haversack, big pack and three blankets and a great-coat over a mule track which was 'rough, narrow, wet and slippery'. The troops travelled for several hours with five minute breaks every half hour before reaching their platoon areas. Where C Company stopped:

There was snow everywhere ... [and] the ground was so wet it made it hard to get a spot to camp ... but eventually I tied two blankets together lengthways, and with a few forked sticks and cross pole, I assembled a small tent for Harry [Lovett] and I. That night, though it rained, we slept quite well as we had Harry's valise under us. (44)

42. Smithers diary, 2 April, 1941.

43. Waters letter.

44. D. Peirce, diary excerpts, 'In and Out of Greece with the A.I.F.', Nulli Secundus, Vol. 37, No. 2., April, 1986, p.40.

Two nights later after an intervening snowfall 16 men shared the makeshift tent.

Conditions at Veria could not have offered the Australians a more complete contrast from those of Cyrenaica. Long uses the 2/2 as a model to illustrate the circumstances of battalions 'then digging in above the snow-line'. The unit's wide dispersion to cover all possible approaches added greatly to the many problems already posed by mountainous terrain. It took three hours to climb from one end of 2/2's positions to the other then a further two hours to its headquarters. In such conditions the normal telephone equipment for a battalion of eight telephones and eight miles of cable was inadequate although one 16th Brigade unit made good use of 23 telephones and 25 miles of cable, belonging formerly to the Italians in Libya. Another difficulty was poor communication between the Greeks and their English speaking allies but the 2/2's George Caling, who spoke fluent Greek, acted as interpreter for Chilton and other senior officers. As well the Australians were surprised by the Greek army's primitive equipment and lack of tactical knowledge: Chilton instructed his company commanders to find new defensive positions as he considered those already prepared by the Greeks to be tactically unsound.⁽⁴⁵⁾

According to the men themselves at Veria they suffered from fatigue, the cold conditions and a lack of hot meals as they 'waited for a week in drizzling rain for the Germans to appear'. The men's trenches ran around a snow-clad mountain which was covered in mist and

45. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.41. Also G. Caling, interview, Campbell A.C.T., 18 April 1982. Caling's parents were Greek emigrants to Australia prior to his birth.

low cloud for most of their stay. When the cloud lifted for a brief period each sunrise and sunset the men could see Salonika on the horizon, and at night 'the fires which marked the German advance'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ On 9 April when snow began to fall Tom Mawhinney thought that everything was 'cold wet and very dismal'.⁽⁴⁷⁾

It was on that day that the Germans took Salonika after overrunning Yugoslavia and invading Greece through the Axios valley. At the same time British and Greek commanders were drawing up withdrawal plans for their forces. As we have seen earlier the 2/2 was thrown into chaos on 10 April by both the news of the German breakthrough on its north-western flank and the countermanding withdrawal orders. And while it is not clear from extant sources exactly who issued and received the conflicting orders, it seems most likely that confusion arose in overlapping orders coming from separate command structures.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Whatever the origin the orders imposed a wearying march on raw Greek divisions and an onerous task of holding an increasing German force for three days on a thin line of Australian infantry.

According to Long while Blamey's staff opposed a plan which had the 16th Brigade marching 30 miles up one side of a 3,000 foot range and down the other Blamey himself feared that the 16th Brigade would be caught by the Germans if they travelled the main road. Brigadier Allen, who opposed the march, wished instead to transport his men to Kozani and then across the river to Servia where they would have an easy march of five miles to their new position. Blamey however considered the march over the hills safer even if it was exhausting.

46. S. Wick, op.cit., p.92 and T. Harvey, op.cit., p.1.

47. T. Mawhinney, diary on loan to author, 9 April, 1941.

48. For details of various plans see G. Long, op.cit., pp.46-58.

He also thought that the troops would have time to recuperate before they engaged in battle.

For their part the troops renamed Veria Pass 'Panic Mountain' after witnessing the destruction of much-needed equipment and the muddle caused by see-sawing orders.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Waters, batman for Lieutenant Ralph Holroyd, perhaps best describes events from the troops' perspective. In a 50 page letter to his mother, written on his safe return to Palestine in early May, he said:

After the usual panic of our officers we were told to destroy everything but one blanket and a hundred rounds of S.A. Also bury all tucker. We had a level-headed chap over us ... who knew what to do in a crisis. He gave me orders to cook up all our rations for a good meal. Destroying all our surplus gear we left our tents up for the night. On Good Friday it began to snow with a vengeance [sic]. Laying around with nothing to do we decided to have a snow fight. Jack Bailey, Max Sawyer, Bill Donnelly, ? Edwards and myself declared her on. What fun we had. There were the huns trying to demoralise us. In the midst of our fun a runner came for Ralph Holroyd. Hello, She's on we said. Sure enough a CO's conference. When Ralph returned he walked into a barrage of snow balls but being a man among men he took it in good part. Gathering around we heard the worst. We had to march that night up hill and down dale as the crow flies to race the hun.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Smithers was more prosaic. His diary noted that the men had been informed during the afternoon that the Germans 'had cut around us' leaving 16th Brigade with three alternatives: '1. to surrender the whole Brigade 2. to stay and fight to the death and gain nothing 3. to withdraw and possibly fight our way out'.⁽⁵¹⁾

On his safe return to Palestine Blain also wrote to his mother telling her that he wanted to send a cable but as that '[was] equal to

49. C. Green, op.cit., p.35.

50. Waters letter.

51. Smithers diary, 10 April 1941

twenty two cakes' he opted for conserving his money. The best he could do was 'to give the story roughly and copy a few extracts from the diary just as they are written' but he warned not to 'let it get into print'. If his mother did pass the letter around she was to apologise for his spelling as 'my mind only works on the stomach these days'. Blain told of Veria's cold conditions and his dread of the coming of night in the snowy, mountain trenches. He found sleep an impossibility as 'a man lapses into a sort of coma, half asleep, yet conscious of what is going on'. Out on patrol at dawn on 10 April he learned from Greek soldiers that Salonika had fallen.

Enemy aerial activity continues throughout the day [Larisa] is now a mass of activity and the roads are packed with evacuees whom the Huns constantly machine gun from the air. The Boss comes down in the evening with news "The Huns have broken through on both sides and we must prepare for a thirty mile withdrawal through the mountains and the possibility of a swim of the [Aliakmon River]'. We have to dump all our gear bar five days' rations, our arms and fifty rounds per man.⁽⁵²⁾

Others also had vivid impressions of that fateful day. McCarthy wrote in his diary that the men slept in threes fully dressed with snow-covered boots protruding from the bottom of blankets. They were also 'wet and frozen' all day, and as they were ordered not to light fires, their meals were cold bully beef and biscuits.⁽⁵³⁾ Peirce and his men 'sat quietly in [their] tent discussing what it would be like in a German prison camp' after their platoon commander delivered the news of the breakthrough. One man's dry humour however impressed Peirce and helped to dispel the gloom for the others:

52. Blain letter.

53. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.92.

Dixie Duggan was leaning with his back to the entrance of the tent and we heard crunch! crunch! crunch! as someone approached in the snow and just as the flap was lifted Dixie said quietly and solemnly 'Come in Hun'. Well, if we didn't laugh, it woke us all up to ourselves and we started a singsong. Twice the tent fell in with the weight of the snow and [the] whole landscape was white and a beautiful sight.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The juxtaposition of hardship and beauty continued to impress the troops during the withdrawal from Veria to Velvendos, and in many accounts the men mingled their feelings of fatigue and *fear* with their feelings of awe for the snow-laden and majestic surroundings. On 11 April Moore wrote: 'All snow & bright moonlight. One of the most beautiful scenes I have witnessed'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ On the following night Harvey with 7 Platoon 'filed on to a track fantastically outlined with frost. It was beautiful; but after a mile or so the heavy going and our cumbersome load turned our minds to our own problems'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The platoon's three donkeys failed to survive the march, and when one fell over a cliff, Harvey and two others were sent to recover its load. Smithers told his mother that the soldiers 'looked like a lot of ghosts walking along as everyone [was] covered with snow [and] even our rifles looked as though they were painted white'. His diary noted that the men's greatcoats were frozen stiff: 'I had to exert some pressure to straighten my arm and the bottom of my greatcoat [hit] against my leg as tho' it was made of wood'. Smithers also wrote of the withdrawal's first night as a

very hard climb as [the] road was frozen and very slippery and we were all heavily loaded. By the time we ... climbed to the top of the range the full moon had come out and shining on the snow

54. D. Peirce, op.cit., p.42.

55. Moore diary.

56. T. Harvey, op.cit., p.2.

it seemed light as day. We were very relieved to start descending ... but soon found it almost as hard as climbing owing to the difficulty of keeping our feet on the icy surface ... nearly everyone slipped at some time or other.(57)

Waters, who appreciated the company of his donkey on the climb, wrote that the men were 'stonkered' when they reached the bottom at daylight. It had been a sight to see them 'all strung out winding over the mountains' and although the trek had been 'tough going', making the men's 'movements ... automatic', Waters confided to his mother that 'a water bottle of cognac' helped him along. For Moore it was: 'my birthday and what a day'.(58)

The journey, in which the men marched by night and hid from the enemy by day, exhausted them physically and mentally. Blain told his mother that 'moving over these slippery mountain tracks heavily laden at night with an empty stomach is about the nearest approach to Hell that I know'.(59) Harvey recalled that his company's progress was slow, especially in places where the snow was chest high. The men would climb for a few yards and then fall exhausted into the snow lying there until they summoned the strength to move on. 'Men were lying along the path for a mile'. When Harvey removed his boots after crossing the Aliakmon River his feet were frost bitten, his toe-nails coming off with his boots.(60) By the time Waters' group, mostly 13 Platoon, reached Servia, 'tucker was running short ... and nerves were getting frayed'. The troops hid themselves in a pine forest during daylight hours, from where they watched the Germans crossing the river

57. Smithers letter and Smithers diary, 12 April 1941.

58. Waters letter and Moore diary.

59. Blain letter.

60. T. Harvey, op.cit., p.2.

below them, and as they looked upwards they saw bombs dropping from German planes which 'were like flies in the sky'.⁽⁶¹⁾

Jack Blamey, a nephew of the general and commander of D Company's 18 Platoon, recalled in his small masterpiece, 'Grecian Diary', that villagers fed him and his men on their three-day march with hot milk, boiled eggs and 'the most excellent freshly-baked brown bread'. On the evening of 14 April, the day on which he crossed the Aliakmon and reached Velvendos, Blamey received 'the message which I [came] to know so well and which had become the most unpopular in the world ... Lieutenant Blamey will tell his troops to prepare to move and he will report to Company Headquarters'. That night's march was even more 'gruelling' than the previous one as the troops climbed steep, rock-strewn slopes for several hours before reaching the heights above Velvendos before dawn. Every man had only four hours' sleep during the previous 24 hours because of guard duties, patrols, cooking and the boiling of water for bottles. Blamey also praised his men's ingenuity and bush skills remembering particularly one occasion on which the men were

... famished for the lack of a really decent meal, so in the afternoon one good lad, a bit of a daredevil, roped a calf from one of the many herds roaming the hillsides. His philosophy was, that if we did not have it the Huns would. The lads in my platoon were all country boys from New South Wales, [and] what they did not know about butchering and cooking a calf was not worth knowing ... although the butchers did their work the cooks did not have time to do theirs for, once again, at [0830] came fresh orders to move on.⁽⁶²⁾

61. Waters letter.

62. J. Blamey, 'Grecian Diary', in A.J. Marshall, op.cit., p.44. Originally a letter to Blamey's parents and published in the Wagga Advertiser before being reprinted in the 2/2's inaugural history.

As the troops moved closer to Tempe Gorge they witnessed both the aftermath of the bombing of Larisa and the New Zealanders' clash with the enemy. As they passed a New Zealand Casualty Clearing Station 'some Kiwis were burying dead Jerries and their boys'.⁽⁶³⁾ Blamey's group saw no sign of German ground forces during their march but hundreds of planes, which slowed their progress. 'When they appeared we had to go to ground in the shadow of a bush, tree or rock'. The party also 'averaged three miles an hour on flat roads, but only one and a half ... on the mountain passes'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Harvey's group also was very slow at times: 'one stage of six miles took us six hours'. When the troops began to hear evacuation rumours they expected to head south but when they boarded the trucks outside Larisa they

turned north ... we were to delay the German advance while defences were prepared in the south of Greece. Seven Platoon dug in that night. The ground was full of thick roots, but we scratched shallow pits and fell asleep. Some fell asleep while digging, even the noise of the patrols clashing with the Germans failed to wake most of us. At day-break we prepared for battle.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Unknown to 2/2 troops as they dug in at Tempe Gorge events in Greece had turned rapidly against the British. On 15 April, the day on which the Germans destroyed 30 British fighters and bombers at Larisa airfield, the commanders-in-chiefs of the British army, navy and air force in the Middle East decided that the evacuation of their force was unavoidable. Long notes that it was also realised about this time that the German attack on the Allies' defences was taking the opposite course to British expectations. They thought that the main German attack would come on the left, particularly against the

63. Waters letter.

64. J. Blamey, op.cit., p.45.

65. T. Harvey, op.cit., p.2.

Greeks, but the Germans in fact concentrated on the right. On the 16th, when the enemy broke the defences of the 21st New Zealand Battalion at the narrow pass of Platamon on the Aegean Coast they continued to drive on the 6th New Zealand Brigade in the Olympus Pass.

It was at this time that Brigadier Rowell issued orders from Blamey's headquarters that the first available battalion of 16th Brigade 'be stopped on the road' so that it could be directed to Tempe Gorge. The 2/2 arrived at the main road at 1000 hours, having marched since 0200 on blistered feet and in worn out boots and torn clothing. Chilton was met by a liaison officer who had orders for him to report to corps, where he heard of the 'disquieting' signals from the 21st New Zealand battalion. Chilton's orders were to take his unit and supporting artillery, which included a battery of field artillery, a troop of three anti-tank guns and the carriers of two Australian units (the 2/5 and 2/11), to the Elatia area in the south west of the gorge. There he was to take steps to hold the western exit for possibly three to four days. Later at Tempe Gorge Chilton met Lieutenant Colonel N.L. Macky, the Commander of the New Zealand battalion, and learnt of his withdrawal and losses. Chilton's troops and artillery arrived later that night.

On 17 April the 2/2 prepared for action in relative calm, which according to Long resulted from the well-conducted withdrawal in which the retiring force moved back 'by carefully planned stages into well-picked positions', demolishing roads and bridges behind it. Chilton, in consultation with Macky and two other New Zealand commanders, deployed the Anzac force in the narrow, steep-sided gorge of five miles even before Allen arrived. The Pinios river, which ran through the gorge, was 30 to 50 yards wide and was flanked on its

north by a railway and on its bank by a road. The railway crossed the river at the western end of the gorge where it turned south towards Larisa. Chilton deployed the New Zealand battalion at the exit from the gorge on the east of Tempe, his main objective being to prevent German tanks from coming from the gorge into the Vale of Tempe. He deployed his own unit to protect the left flank against a German infantry attack from across the river from Gonnos, placing his rifle companies along and astride the western exit at intervals of about 1,000 yards which covered the road, railway and river flats. During the afternoon enemy movement could be seen on the hills across the river while groups of men with pack-mules were on the ridges above Gonnos.(66)

As at Bardia and Tobruk the men's perceptions of the fighting were highly individual. And although Tempe Gorge was for many a second experience of action its divergence from their preconceived notions of battle had for some an air of unreality. As Brigadier Allen wrote:

It was a fantastic battle. Everybody was on top (no time to dig in) and all [were] in the frontline, including artillery, Bren carriers, infantry and various unit headquarters with unit transport only a few hundred yards in the rear. Some confusion could be expected with every weapon firing and aircraft strafing from above. If you saw it at the cinema you would say the author had never seen a battle.⁽⁶⁷⁾

In similar vein another soldier wrote of watching an officer stand out in the open, directing his men's fire, while the men crouched behind

66. G. Long, op.cit., p.95. C. Green, op.cit., p.36-39

67. Cited in G. Long, op.cit., p.121.

shields feeding and firing guns as 'everything the enemy had was pelted at them'. They looked 'like a drawing by someone who had never been to a war - the whole thing was unreal'.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Few 2/2 accounts captured the immediacy of the fighting better than that of Byers. In fact on the eve of battle Byers had escaped from the Germans after being captured while on patrol. On 18 April he wrote:

Huns attacking this morning - chased them back from river. Attacking again as I am writing hundreds of them coming down the pass - bullets flying everywhere and things are not so hot - mortar bombs coming over and Huns advancing across the flat towards us - artillery and carriers have left us and things certainly look blue - Hun tanks broke through just now and we are beaten - everyone has broken and we have headed for the hills - spent half night running and when we had lost them we camped - I have no gear, no bottle and only the clothes I stand up in, no rations at all and very hungry.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Others wrote vividly of moments of terror and helplessness. Gordon Hendry, whose company defended the extreme left flank, recalled after the war that at one stage during the fighting a group of 15 to 20 men fired rifles and light machine-guns at a German tank with no effect. When the tank finally crushed two men 'the feeling of helplessness against the tanks overcame the troops and they began to move back in small parties to the trucks'. Peirce, whose friend and platoon commander, Harry Lovett, was taken prisoner, described his feelings when the Germans finally overwhelmed his platoon:

I was with Curly Whitton and we dashed. I went over on my ankle badly but couldn't stop ... after a few minutes I paused for Curly and he wasn't there. I called him but no answer ... feeling a deserter I raced on alone, hurried by a burst of tommy machine gunfire. Here I think I panicked. I ploughed through

68. *ibid.*, p.120.

69. Byers diary, 17 and 18 April 1941.

water up to my waist, nettles, bushes and anything that got in my way. I scrambled up precipitous ledges but all the way kept as low down as possible because every time I showed myself a shot or two would whistle by. Soon I got out of their range but kept on the same and once fell on my stomach. Water trickled past my mouth and I tried to drink but my breathing was so erratic I couldn't. Up again and on another 100 yds. I saw two more Aussies, something attracted their attention - I made a noise they said but I'm sure it was not possible. Another two minutes and I caught them ... We paused for a few minutes till I could talk and I gathered my senses and again became sane, all my panic and fear gone. I'll never in my life forget that hour of hell.(70)

Moore wrote 'Panic set in and tps. dispersed. N.Z. gunmen were wonderful. At dusk I got 8 carriers out. Lost many trucks'.

Letters, written for the most part on the soldier's safe return to Palestine conveyed similar feelings, but because by then the men's ordeal was over, many could reflect on the ambivalence they felt between fear and relief at escape. Blain wrote to his mother:

I won't go into the gory details you've probably read too much of it now suffice to say we left the river absolutely piled with their bodies. It was useless though they came on like waves of the sea ... So in small parties the survivors of our lines and that of the Kiwis took to the mountains followed by streams of bullets and bursting mortar bombs. We were without overcoats food and blankets and exhausted with the lack of sleep and food.(71)

Waters also told his mother that the river was 'chock a block with dead bodies' but that 'Jerry had guts'. Another four pages describes the action at Tempe Gorge, and at one point after recounting that he and two friends shared a bottle before the fighting, he wrote:

70. Hendry and Peirce cited in G. Long, op.cit., p.120. Peirce diary also reprinted in Nulli Secundus, Vol. 37, No. 3, June 1986, p.41.
71. Blain letter.

By now things were warming up the Jerries had our range to a tee, lobbing mortars amidst our area we were well occupied keeping low. Also the notorious Luftwaffe [was] after blood. Not to be deterred we gave them something for their corner. Anti-tank guns had moved up and where [sic] ready to blast away at his tanks. Behind our flank, Jerries were filtering through on to the river. This was covered by our mortars M.G.s and rifles spraying leaden death along its shores.

Waters, who saw his officer killed at Bardia, revealed that his 'boss' in Greece was also lost to him:

He asked me to wash out a pair of sox but I told him to go to hell as there was a war on. Not to be worried he washed them out in his tin hat while being machine-gunned. Little did he know that he would never wear them again. (72)

Holroyd was wounded and taken prisoner.

Frank Delforce, who escaped via Crete, wrote in June 1941 to a fellow A.I.F. man in the Middle East of his time in Greece. Delforce, who lost a close friend at Bardia, wrote of Tempe Gorge:

... it was here where I became a bren gunner in a bren carrier and believe me mate I got all the revenge I wanted as our lads mowed the bastards down like sheep, but they kept coming over wave after wave and we mowed them down but we got the Battalion of Kiwis out that the Hun had surrounded ... during all this we were bombed and machine-gunned from daylight to dark by swarms [sic] of hundreds of planes but I felt quite safe inside the carrier (and a bottle of rum I had done no harm). (73)

In the withdrawal that followed the fighting the men climbed precipitous, rock-strewn slopes while under fire from enemy tanks, mortars and machine-guns. Some hours later, when some of the troops surveyed their former positions from the top of overlooking mountains

72. Waters letter.

73. F. Delforce, letter in collection of letters and papers loaned to author by E. Osbourne.

they saw the battle still in progress, being fought by carriers and those parties which had not escaped.

It was a grim scene. As darkness fell we could see the Huns attending our wounded whilst the remains of our carriers burned a red glow below.

Three German tanks knocked out by New Zealand attack guns were blazing in B Company's area, an indication that the Hun did not have the tank battle all his own way. Two companies of the 2/3 Battalion ... arrived late afternoon ... [taking] up a quick defensive position some distance to the rear of D Company ... during the night the enemy poured thousands of rounds of tracer in the direction of their positions.⁽⁷⁴⁾

On 19 April Byers headed a page in his diary '1st day on the run' and wrote:

Slept very cold - up before dawn and on our way again - have had nothing at all to eat and I feel very weak ... plenty of planes about looking for us - no sign of Hun following us ... got some food in a village - begged it off some girls and it certainly hurt but belly must be fed - nearly run into Hun tanks about dark but took to the hills again and dodged them - bedded down after marching for 23 hours - I now know the meaning of the word tired and miserable - we certainly must look sights but we are alive.⁽⁷⁵⁾

On the same day Smithers travelled by New Zealand ambulance to a dressing station with a group of wounded soldiers. At one point 'some NZ engineers who were mining the road ... gave each of us a nip of pure army rum [and] a cup of tea'. At the medical post 'our wounds were dressed and Field Medical cards ... attached to our uniforms'. Two days later at the British 26th General Hospital Smithers and the other patients heard about the planned evacuation.

74. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.41.

75. Byers diary, 19 April 1941.

No one seemed to know where we were going, just at dark we boarded trucks and had a very cramped ... ride to Athens Station, getting lost a couple of times. After waiting for some time we boarded the train and were packed like sardines into cattle trucks. We were given bread, margarine and sardines ... the train commenced its journey about midnight.⁽⁷⁶⁾

The experience of escaping brought mixed reactions. Blain revealed the extent to which his morale fell in his diary extract of 21 April:

They allow us to light fires to cook our small supply of potatoes (most of us have already eaten them raw). We move on again and by this time I am almost too weak to walk. One foot is a mass of blood blisters and a scratch on my ankle has festered badly. We are advised to destroy our arms for it is useless to put up a fight if attacked as we have practically no ammunition. I hang on to my rifle, suicide will be better than starvation if a man gets too weak to walk.

Blain, who was suffering from a severe chest infection, had difficulty breathing in the high altitudes. He told his mother that the Greeks, who had been warned by German pamphlets not to help the Allies, prepared feast after feast for him and his companions. They also showed great concern for his illness and in one village Blain had to submit himself to an 'old bloke' who rubbed his back with hot tumblers and methylated spirits. As Blain's party moved on through other villages he was surprised to find that news of his ailment preceded him and that there were carers, with all kinds of remedies, awaiting his arrival. On 29 April when the party arrived at a small town on the island of Mylitene the people gave them 'a great welcome and turned on the grog' while at the next port of call the people went 'absolutely mad'. The whole town turned out on the wharf and the

76. Smithers diary, 19-21 April 1941.

police had to force a pathway for the Australians and New Zealanders whom the people showered with flowers, cigarettes and open hands. The police billeted the soldiers with Greek families but as Blain noted 'since it is about a year since I have slept in a bed ... [I] cannot sleep'.(77)

Byers' record of his nine and a half week escape from Greece reflects his expectations swinging like a pendulum in response to the fugitive situation. After the battle of Tempe Gorge he marked each day in his diary by the number of days he was 'on the run', and even though he served the entire war, his last entry was on Sunday 29 June, his 68th and last day on the run. For consecutive entries in April he wrote 'Anzac Day ... and what a pickle we are in - relying on the people for food and praying for a british [sic] boat to appear and pick us up - have decided to rest today as the feet are very sore and we can't walk far'. On the 26th, when he and his friends slept in a church they were 'just a wee bit downhearted', but on the following day they were a 'miserable party ... snapping at each other like dogs'. On the 28th his thoughts turned to home and he wondered if the missing list had appeared, adding 'I'll bet the folks are frantic'.

On the 29th Byers observed that 'others [were] talking of surrender but not our mob'. Then on the following day he wrote:

fifteen have given themselves up to the tender mercies of the Huns - we have decided to live in the bush just as long as we possibly can before facing the idea of a prison camp ... things certainly look black for us and we don't seem to have the bottler's chance but while there's life there's hope.

A visit from Helene, who was one of many Greeks who housed, fed and arranged boats for Byers and his companions, raised their spirits as

77. Blain letter.

she was 'definitely against the idea of us giving ourselves up so it only strengthened our desire for freedom'. During the first two weeks of May Maria and other Greeks set Byers' group up in their own house with food, prompting the young soldier to write 'the morale of the fugitives is high indeed'.(78)

Undoubtedly the amount of time individual men spent on the run and the degree of their deprivations greatly influenced perceptions about escapes. Those who made relatively short journeys to freedom without the loss of group members were likely to assess their experience in optimistic terms and remember it favourably. Blamey was one for whom Greece held blitheful and heroic images. And while the letter he wrote to his parents from Greece contained the details of his 'nightmare' he nonetheless exulted in his adventures. His opening paragraph set the tone for the next 10,000 words:

I am sitting under the trees behind the schoolhouse at Irlous, a pretty little village by the sea somewhere in the northern end of the island of Ubeoa, which extends along the eastern coast of Greece. My back is against a large, shady tree and my greatcoat is under me. I have on my army pants and a rather dirty flannel shirt which has been my only underwear for 14 days. Of course, I still have my identity disc tied around my neck on an old bootlace. My tunic is beside me for the midday sun is hot. A glorious red beard adorns my face and I swear it is the best ... in the company for I have not shaved for some weeks. I have just made some tea in an old jam tin and I shall write to my heart's content for it is only 1 p.m., the day is pleasant and we shall be here until late in the afternoon.

At one point he wrote of the way in which danger and deprivation affected his perceptions:

I discovered that with this terrific marching and lack of sleep and weariness I was becoming very sensuous in my moments of leisure. I think this is the word to describe the intense

feeling I got out of various things. To smoke a cigarette, to eat a huge meal, to drink a can of beer - or milk for that matter, to bask in the sun for ten minutes, or, most of all to see one of the glorious landscapes, or stretches of coast-line in which Greece abounds was sheer delight. Never before had I enjoyed the natural beauty of the country around me as I did in those days. It used to give me intense pleasure to sit near a village in twilight with the red sunset glimmering through the trees and watch the simple villagers moving about. Little jokes made by the men, which in normal times pass unheeded were now laughed at uproariously during these days and nights of hard marching.⁽⁷⁹⁾

Many others reflected on their adventures with similar feelings most agreeing with Green's observation that those who escaped owed much to the Greeks. In 1941 the Greek population faced starvation because the Germans commandeered 60% of the region's food supply. But as Green observed, 'in the tiny villages tucked away in the mountains, the Greeks ... gave what they had to our men'.⁽⁸⁰⁾ It seemed to Blamey and his companions 'that when the women at one end of the village saw us walking at the other ... they ran inside their little white houses, hard-boiled their eggs and gave them to us as we passed for they were too hot to hold in our hands'.⁽⁸¹⁾ Harvey, who wrote in 1962 of how some Greeks were beaten and killed for assisting Allied troops, recalled later that he and a friend, Col Skerret, left one family's shelter as soon as they realised that they were being fed to the detriment of small children.⁽⁸²⁾ Mawhinney also recalled that the Greeks treated the Australians with 'great kindness and respect' while Reg Burgoyne believed that the men could not have been treated any better in their own country in similar circumstances.⁽⁸³⁾

79. J. Blamey, *op.cit.*, p.48.

80. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.42.

81. J. Blamey, *op.cit.*, p.49.

82. T. Harvey, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7 and interview, Coffs Harbour, 8 July 1982.

83. T. Mawhinney, notes written for author, July 1982. R. Burgoyne, interview, Newcastle, 5 November 1982 (Burgoyne interview).

The Allied defeat caused great suffering for many but none were more shattered than those who did not escape. The Germans captured many 2/2 men at various points on the escape routes, mainly along the eastern coast. The wounded at Tempe Gorge and elsewhere, however, had no means of escape and reluctantly some men had to leave friends on the battlefield. In 1982 Burgoyne recalled that he and two members of his platoon, Jack Gunning and Dougal McPherson, tried to help their platoon commander, Lieutenant J.R. Brackenrig, get away from Tempe Gorge. He remembered that the platoon held its position until 1800 hours and then withdrew. The men decided to stay with Brackenrig, who had a gunshot wound in his shoulder, hoping to move him to safety under cover of darkness. From their hidden position they heard the Germans singing as they made camp for the night. Their adversaries, said Burgoyne, had something to sing about as 'they'd won a good victory over us mugs'. Brackenrig was unable to move because of intense pain in his shoulder so the others bandaged the wound and prepared to leave him: 'it was no good us all staying in the bag, so we gave him a whistle - he had a watch and we said "Now give us a half an hour to get away and blow the whistle and they'll look after you - they did and he finished up P.O.W. in Germany'.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Some of the wounded who managed to get away from the fighting found it difficult to continue their journeys because of wound complications. As Green observed, 'some of our wounded still trudged along as best they could [and] Greek women in tears would do what they could to relieve their pain'.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Blamey told of a Greek who helped his group and of the wounded Australian in the same man's care.

84. Burgoyne interview.

85. C. Green, op.cit., p.42.

Blamey's party met the Greek outside Volos where he warned the Australians against certain capture if they continued to the town, directing them instead eastwards around the gulf. When Blamey heard of the sick Australian he left his party to see him:

To my surprise it turned out to be the young batman of a friend of mine. He had been hit at Moskohon on 18 April and was in a bad way. His arms and legs [were] so swollen and stiff ... he could hardly move them. We were compelled to leave him behind as he could not possibly walk and there was no transport ... He gave me his wife's address and some personal papers to send to her if he did not get back. Sadly I left him in the care of those good people. I gave them a ~~500~~ drachma note and they promised to do what they could for him. ⁽⁸⁶⁾

In 1982 Jack Ulrick, who sustained a chest wound at Tempe Gorge at '9 a.m. on 18 April' recalled how he felt when he was wounded:

... I thought I was dying [I] thought that was it. And I went down swearing - swearing a treat, terrible language. I can remember it ... You see I was [lying down] firing at the goons ... and a mortar bomb come over and landed on the back slope of the hole we were in ... luckily most of it went that way but enough come back to whack three of us. We all got hit. Of course, natural reaction like a rabbit that's shot - you stand up, jump up. Well, I jumped up on the edge of the hole and walked about, I suppose five paces. There was [a] tremendous ringing in my ears ... I remember staggering five paces then the whole place [went] black and spinning. Then I remember being on my knees, then flat on my face ... as my knees hit the ground I thought 'Well I've bloody well had it - that's it'. And I started to swear and [as] I was swearing I went unconscious. I would have died with a terrible curse on me lips ...

Ulrick discovered he was a prisoner-of-war at the 2/5 Australian General Hospital on 28 April, the day following Greece's capitulation. A few days later, when he and the other patients realised that the nurses and some medical staff had been evacuated, they felt abandoned.

86. J. Blamey, op.cit., p.51.

[Becoming a prisoner] was the last thing anyone thought of - it was really the low card in the deck. Here I was almost dead [and] I hadn't passed this tremendous crisis of pleurisy and pneumonia [which] might have helped make me a bit crooker. I suppose that was the big low in my life. Here we were badly wounded ... and when we became prisoners it finally sank in. We thought 'well that's bloody lovely. Here's the mob, they've gone - they've cleared out, they've left us here". That was our feeling - we'd been left behind, the mob had gone. And I think if the Jerries had asked us then we would have joined their flamin' army.⁽⁸⁷⁾

From its outset the campaign on Crete seemed even more hopeless than the one in Greece. Troops who landed there from Greece felt lost until senior officers arrived and organised the remnants of various A.I.F. units into identifiable groups. The 2/6's Francis Gorman wrote in his diary that 'men of all different regiments have been dumped on the island with no-one in charge ... and we look like finishing up anywhere in the world. We have damn little tucker and no blankets'.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The 2/7's Ken Atock, who was to die in July as a prisoner of the Germans, wrote to his mother on 1 May that it was 'rather amusing to see everyone from the Colonel down eating their meals out of an empty milk tin with the aid of a couple of biscuits'.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Burgoyne and some 2/2 companions chose Crete instead of Turkey as a destination as they feared internment in a neutral country: 'we didn't want to be out of the war, we wanted to get back - when you're a soldier overseas your only home is your unit and you get lost without it'. After Crete's capitulation Burgoyne spent a

87. A.J. Ulrick, interview, Grafton, 2 & 3 November 1982.

88. Cited in D. Hay, *op.cit.*, pp.178-179.

89. A.W.M. 54, Written Records War 1939-1945, DRL6372. Personal records of K. Atock, letter, 1 May 1941.

short time in a prison camp before escaping and living on the island under the protection of Cretan villagers. Reflecting on the campaign in 1982 he summed up what many others thought:

Crete was actually a disaster. [The British] had made no preparations. They had no ammunition. They had no arms. They had no equipment. They had no clothing. They had no planes. It was a disaster waiting to happen and it happened.⁽⁹⁰⁾

Dunlop and Baird found conditions primitive on their arrival at Heraklion. Most of the troops from Greek evacuations were without clothing, blankets and basic toiletries. Even when supplies started to arrive blankets were scarce and the men slept in groups of six or more to warm each other during the cold nights. They also made makeshift tents from olive branches, which they laced together, and obtained food by bartering with the local population for eggs, milk and vegetables. Finally when clean towels and clothes arrived the men bathed in the Mediterranean to remove body lice and burned their filthy garments, continually worn since before Tempe Gorge.

The 16th Brigade Composite Battalion, which comprised three understrength companies, under the command of two 2/2 captains and one from 16th Brigade Headquarters, took up defensive positions in Suda Bay near Kalives in early May. As its commander, Cullen, had not heard from either 16th Brigade or 6th Division Headquarters in Egypt since his arrival on Crete, he arranged that Dunlop embark for Egypt with nominal rolls in case the men in his charge were posted as missing. But events on Crete were to prevent his departure. When invasion seemed imminent the unit had responsibility for 'a possible landing beach, the main road to Heraklion and also the road to

90. Burgoyne interview.

[Sfakia] on the south side of the island'.⁽⁹¹⁾ Burgoyne recalled that many felt at the time that it was 'absolutely ridiculous' for the 'odds and sods' which made up the composite battalion 'to look after the beaches and so many bloody miles of country' explaining that the unit's ranks comprised 'cooks and clerks [of whom] some could shoot and some couldn't'. In his view it was

a horrible thing ... we were only a depleted battalion and all we had was out-of-date equipment. I never had a water bottle. Never had a tin hat. Never had a greatcoat. Never had a blanket that was mine. And that was the theme of our armaments. We had a Hotchkiss gun [from] ... World War I with a strip magazine [but] we had no strips for it. We had a Vickers Machine Gun [but] had no tripod mounting for it. We had a 3-inch mortar but had no base plate for it and that was our armament.⁽⁹²⁾

According to the adjutant, Duncan Goslett, the unit's morale was good at first, but after 'a week or so of being mucked about by experts it began to wear thin'. The situation only improved when General Weston of the Royal Marines, Freyberg's second-in-command, relieved the composite battalion of its 'hopelessly stupid tasks' and gave them more realistic defence positions. Apparently morale improved when the men felt part of a fighting force again. Stand-to at 0500 hours resumed and as tools and wire became available 'much digging went on and the tempo of defence seemed to ... [quicken]'. It was also estimated that between 443 men the unit had '2 Vickers machine-guns, 4 Hotchkiss, 2 Lewis, 10 Brens, 12 Tommy Guns and one 3-inch mortar less base-plate and 1 rifle per man'. Between the unit's two defence localities the men had two 600-gallon water tanks

91. A.H. Baird and J.W. Dunlop, op.cit., p.61.

92. Burgoyne interview.

and eight days' rations. As Goslett wrote, 'the battalion now felt it could give a good account of itself'.⁽⁹³⁾

The German attack on Crete opened on 19 May when 'the Luftwaffe had a field day in Suda Bay'. Large formations of aircraft made more than a dozen separate attacks so that

By nightfall a thick pall of smoke hung over the Bay. Many ships in the harbour were burning and the unloading of freighters was at a standstill. The night itself was quiet, too quiet. It was the lull before the storm. When dawn broke on the 20th the Battalion's worst fears were realised. By 0700 hours the air was filled with German fighters strafing with cannon and machine-gunning any targets that presented themselves.⁽⁹⁴⁾

Although the 2/2's area came under attack twice the main targets were Maleme Airport and Canea. As noted previously 2/2 troops did not engage in battle during the invasion, a fact which frustrated them at the time and continued to be an issue after the war. Stan Wick wrote that in the light of many factors the 'men of 16 Comp. Bn. could have turned the tide at Maleme, on which the whole campaign hinged, for if Maleme had been held the Germans may have abandoned the invasion'.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Instead, as Burgoyne recalled, the troops were 'bombed and machine-gunned and half-starved and all the rest of it' without having a 'decent fight'. He also thought that morale deteriorated badly during the withdrawal and that 'it was an army in defeat then'.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Wick, who was wounded and taken prisoner on Crete, confronts in Purple Over Green Freyberg's criticisms about troop performance on Crete. He explains that the men, who had little control over events,

93. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.128-129.

94. A.H. Baird and J.W. Dunlop, op.cit., p.65

95. S. Wick, op.cit., p.131.

96. Burgoyne interview.

lost their sections or platoons during the withdrawals. In the darkness and confusion they were 'mercilessly pounded by terrifying Stukas which dive-bombed and machine-gunned the one central road from morning until night'. In the narrow passes the men had often nowhere to go for cover and could only flatten themselves against the high cliffs or dive off the road into rocky gullies. While it was 'very easy to condemn these leaderless men', many critics seemed to overlook the realities of their conditions:

... there was an acute shortage of food ... water and ammunition and many of the troops were ... starving and plagued by thirst ... the long march had brought them to the limit of endurance. There was no water supply on the south coast except one unsanitary well and this was continually machine-gunned. Besides, if you did not have a water bottle to lower down on a rope, it was no use going to the well ...⁽⁹⁷⁾

Burgoyne recalled that he and others were instrumental in getting water to those who were thirsty but too 'bomb-happy' to leave their covers. He and his friends, he said, were also frightened but had not reached the point which prevented them from carrying out their jobs or helping others who were injured or suffering acute anxiety. Burgoyne defined the state of being 'bomb-happy' as

when you get really frightened. If you see planes going over and they bomb you and bomb you and machine gun you, you get very nervous and that's what you call "bomb-happy" ... a lot of them were "bomb happy" and I think nine people out of ten would be ... when subjected to a certain amount of it.⁽⁹⁸⁾

Allan Walker wrote that prior to the invasion of Crete Brigadier Vasey sought the co-operation of the medical services in 'disposing of those

97. S. Wick, op.cit., p.134. See also G. Long, op.cit., pp.23-255.

98. Burgoyne interview.

men who in the opinion of the commanding officer affect adversely the morale of others in the face of attack' noting that 'about 6 per cent' of the men evacuated at this time came under that category.

Walker also wrote of the evacuations of the sick and wounded. On 28 May British Headquarters in Crete ordered that 'no walking wounded will be permitted to start [the withdrawal] who have not a fair chance to finish the route'. Of the sick and wounded who were gathered at Sfakia, a small fishing village with a beach 150 yards long and 20 yards wide, many showed 'signs of fear and anxiety' because of frequent air attacks. Medical personnel were stretched to capacity to offer these men not only the minimum comforts of food and water but also reassurance:

Not only the sick and wounded suffered severe trials of body, mind and spirit. Even the fit men felt keenly the toil of their weary journey, menaced by attacks from the air which increased the number of wounded, and even added to the injuries of men wounded already. Over them brooded the uncertainty and frustration of an embarkation which for many would never be realised: only in utter weariness could they lose themselves in sleep. (99)

Many wounded soldiers lay unattended for days. Burgoyne recalled that he and two friends assisted a New Zealand officer who had 'a terrific bullet hole through his shoulder'. The three Australians between them had no first aid experience but using instruments from a captured Italian medical kit they removed huge maggots from the three day old wound, before bandaging it and carrying the New Zealander to Sfakia. At Sfakia there were 'a few thousand troops ... holed up in the hills ... waiting for Pommy ships'. (100) According to Goslett's

99. A. Walker, Middle East and Far East, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1953, Ch.13, pp.271-295.

100. Burgoyne interview.

report a Greek civilian doctor tended the wounded and dying at the beach. He did 'what he could with a plentiful supply of aspirin and a few shell dressings'. (101) The Catholic padre, Paddy Youill, was seen to have played an inestimable role in raising troop morale on the evacuation beach. (102)

More than two thirds of the 2/2 group on Crete found passage on British ships or made their own way to freedom. The first evacuation on 28 May took all the forces at Heraklion and the wounded at Sfakia. On the following night eight ships took off 6,000 troops while on the 30th 2,000 embarked, including Freyberg and 160 of his staff. On the fourth night another 6,000 left. Selby, who was on the Phoebe, later wrote that 'no sooner were we on board than the convoy pulled out and we learned that it was the last barge on the last ship on the last night. It was horrible to think of the ones we had deserted'. In a second letter from Palestine he wrote:

The thrill on deck at 30 knots with a 15 ft. stern wave when you have spent 3 days curled up in a cave listening to enemy machine-guns and mortars has to be experienced to make one believe that it is better than the after examination feeling. (103)

Wick, one of those left behind, wrote that in the early hours of 1 June word of the surrender 'spread like wildfire'. At dawn thousands of disappointed men gazed out to sea and watched the last ships disappear over the horizon to Egypt. As 2/2 men stood contemplating their uncertain futures the Germans strafed the area killing two of their number and wounding six. Burgoyne recalled that

101. S. Wick, op.cit., p.129.

102. See ibid., p.129. Also Dr T. Selby, collection of letters and papers loaned to author, 5 June 1941 for praise of Youill.

103. S. Wick, op.cit., p.138-140 and Selby letter.

surrendering 'wasn't a very nice feeling' and that none of them liked 'going into the bag'. He was among those who had volunteered to 'man the heights while the last boats go out on the last night', but ... got left behind with 'no food ... no ammunition [and] no hope'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

First and foremost the debacles in Greece and Crete meant the loss of a sense of cohesion through individual close-knit units, a situation in which many men were inclined to see themselves as part of a very amorphous A.I.F. The anecdote about a legendary 1st A.I.F. man serving with the 2/3 captures the feeling of many others involved in the withdrawal. The story has it that when the 2/3 'formed one, long, single line on either side of the road with the companies mixed up, higgledy piggedly' one soldier asked 'Arthur Carson, D.C.M., M.M., M.I.D.', if he knew where his platoon was, and the reply came 'get down here son there are no platoons now just A.I.F.'⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Men from other units, who had arrived in Greece just before or soon after Germany's invasion, responded incredulously to rumours which filtered down to them. Gorman noted on 15 April, two days after the 2/6 arrived: 'just got word that the NZs and Aussies are mowing the Hun down in droves up there. Got them bottled in a valley according to a Greek officer'.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Scarlett told his brother that the 2/1 Field Regiment waited for a couple of days at sidings while hospital trains and train loads of troops passed them on the way back.

104. Burgoyne interview.

105. R. Holt, From Ingleburn to Aitape, R. Holt, Sydney, 1981, p.99.

A similar version of the anecdote is in G. Long, op.cit., p.120.

Carson was in the 2nd Battalion A.I.F. during the First World War.

106. Cited in D. Hay, op.cit., p.143.

We knew something was up and alarming rumours spread like wildfire - 16 Brigade surrounded - 8 Bn. [Mackay's force] cut to pieces - finally 2/1 Fd. Regt. wiped out. We laughed then and disbelieved the lot but still we knew all was not well'. (107)

Separated from the larger unit many men formed smaller cohesive groups. In 1982 Chilton observed that although the episodes in Greece and Crete were relatively short they were significant events in the battalion's life. Lasting friendships were forged from the sharing of danger and deprivations. (108) For his part the battalion reveres Chilton for 'literally [being] the last to leave his ship' in the perilous situation at Tempe Gorge. (109) And unlike their previous campaigns the men were not isolated from the population. Close contact with and even utter reliance on Greek and Cretan civilians increased a sense of community in the crises but at the same time made the men newly aware of battle realities. Waters warned his mother not to let his brother:

join up or leave Aussie ... because after seeing what the Huns are like and there [sic] tactics [I] hope they never bowl over England. You have no idea Mum what the people go through. [They] ... used to cry and tremble with fear every time German planes flew over. The kids and women were panic stricken. (110)

Smithers wrote of a Greek tailor who took him and other wounded to his house for a meal becoming agitated when they offered him money for his trouble. While the soldiers were there '... Jerry dropped some bombs on the village and the Greek's wife was very frightened. We tried to

107. Scarlett letter.

108. Sir F. Chilton, interview, Clareville Beach, 30 March 1982.

109. S. Wick, op.cit., p.99.

110. Waters letter.

console her and she eventually calmed down. We could see through the doorway the bombs dropping from the planes'.⁽¹¹¹⁾

The lack of R.A.F. support during both campaigns was by far the most significant external factor influencing troop morale. A study of Australian servicemen at Tobruk in 1941 found that troops under continual enemy bombardment with no aerial support from their own side were likely to become more demoralised than if support from the air was evident. Although the troops in Greece and Crete spent a relatively short time under bombardment, when compared with the months of siege experienced by those in Tobruk, they had the same sense of abandonment when there was no aerial support. Unlike dug-in troops however those in Greece and Crete were either on mountain ranges, or on the open road easily exposed to bombardment. And while such conditions were dangerous they nonetheless provided the troops with never-to-be-forgotten battle scenes. Often they watched opposing units clash while at the same time watching aerial clashes. In Crete some saw clashes with ground troops and paratroop landings.⁽¹¹²⁾

Australian commanders were also highly critical of the lack of R.A.F. support. Brigadier Charrington, the British commander whose 1st Armoured Brigade supported the Australian and New Zealand units at Tempe Gorge wrote to his daughter on 29 April 1941:

111. Smithers diary, 25 April 1941.

112. A.W.M. 54, Written Records, War 1939-1945, 481/12/120, 'War Neurosis at Tobruk' by Lieutenant-Colonel E.L. Cooper and Captain A.J.M. Sinclair, Australian Army Medical Corps. A censored version of the report appeared in The Medical Journal of Australia in late 1941. See also R.L. Swank and W.E. Marchand, 'Combat Neuroses', Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry, Vol.55, No.3, March 1946, p.236-247 for excellent discussion on the ramifications for a soldier of losing his position in the constellation of his social group during combat.

There will I fear be a lot of muck dragged up over the whole expedition ... the Australians (with some justice) demand a full enquiry as to why the promised air support they had insisted upon before allowing their troops to participate was not forth-coming ... I don't know whether they could have spared more aeroplanes, the Australians are terribly bitter about it. (113)

The ordinary soldier's disillusionment with Britain is clearly evident in letters and diaries. Many like Waters had their faith in the R.A.F. 'shattered'. Others like Blamey felt the evacuations beginning on 24 April were a 'travesty' of Anzac Day: 'the second Anzac corps [sic] chased out of Greece after a fortnight's fighting'. Unaware of higher planning and remote political decisions the infantry judged the air situation by what they saw. On 15 April Smithers noted: 'the R.A.F. has been conspicuous by its absence' surmising that it probably had not had time to establish itself in Greece. Byers simply observed: 'none of our planes about'. As more days passed the men's feeling of impotence increased:

We no sooner [got] here than those cursed bombers have found us again ... We are well dispersed under rocks and bushes just now. But this is over the fence. Travel all night packed like sardines with no sleep and harassed all day by these swine is enough to get on anyone's nerves ... if we were to see a British plane now the shock would just about knock us out. (114)

The Australians found German air superiority both demoralising and an insult. While Green observed that the crowded roads during the withdrawals were a 'bombers paradise' Peirce graphically described how at one time some 70 dive-bombers almost playfully performed together,

113. Cited in D. Horner, *op.cit.*, p.97.

114. Waters letter, J. Blamey, *op.cit.*, p.55, Smithers diary, 15 April 1941, Byers diary, 14 April 1941. Gorman cited in D. Hay, *op.cit.*, p.175.

their only danger being to crash into each other. And although the raids usually caused little damage Peirce felt that 'it breaks down morale lying dogo under a bush watching it and the opposite effect on the morale of their own troops is what really does the damage'. By the time of Tempe Gorge the men did not even expect aerial support. As Green wrote:

At about 1130 hours on April 18 we heard once more the ... familiar distant roar of aircraft engines. It was useless to look and see whether they were ours. We looked helplessly towards the heavens and counted them as they appeared from a heavy cloud bank. There were 45 plus escort. (115)

Scarlett wrote of the 'helpless anger' in watching 27 Stukas bomb and machine-gun fellow Australians. Ernie Osbourne told his mother of the 'beating 2nd A.I.F. troops gave Jerrie' on the ground but 'he gave us the works in the air [and] that is how he drove us out of Greece'. (116)

Whatever the differences in individual experiences in Greece and Crete the defeats left all with a sense of abandonment. Those who were taken prisoner lost all while those who escaped reflected more on British incompetence. Finding refuge with companions after his flight from the devastation at Tempe Gorge Peirce wrote:

The last words spoken before we slept were from Bill [Donnelly] 'Damn the British Govt. With two fighter planes and two [Infantry] tanks we could have still been there' and they were the sentiments of everyone ... Fancy a month in the front-line with often as many as 80 German bombers in the sky at once and seeing an average of 300 planes a day and yet not one British

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115. C. Green, *op.cit.*, p.36 and D. Peirce 'In and Out of Greece with the A.I.F.', *Nulli Secundus*, Vol.37, No.3, June 1986, pp.38-39.
 116. Scarlett letter and E. Osbourne, collection of letters and papers loaned to author, 20 May 1941.

tank. We had carriers yes but 100 carriers are not worth one I tank as we had in Libya . . . One tank is worth 1,000 carriers. Oh! Damn the British Govt. (117)

In Crete too the lack of aerial support compounded feelings of helplessness already induced by lack of preparedness and a scarcity of equipment. Burgoyne believed that along with the Australians the New Zealanders, Maoris, 'Pommies' and 'Pommy commandos' on Crete were

... good fighting troops ... but of course they had no equipment. They were out-gunned and outshot. We saw a few planes [on] two or three days and I think that two or three left ... You could count a hundred planes with crosses on them any day you liked to name. You could look up and say 'Oh gee there's another flock'. A hundred was nothing at one time. (118)

117. D. Peirce, op.cit., p.42.

118. Burgoyne interview.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECONSTRUCTION; GARRISON DUTIES

SYRIA AND CEYLON, THEN HOME

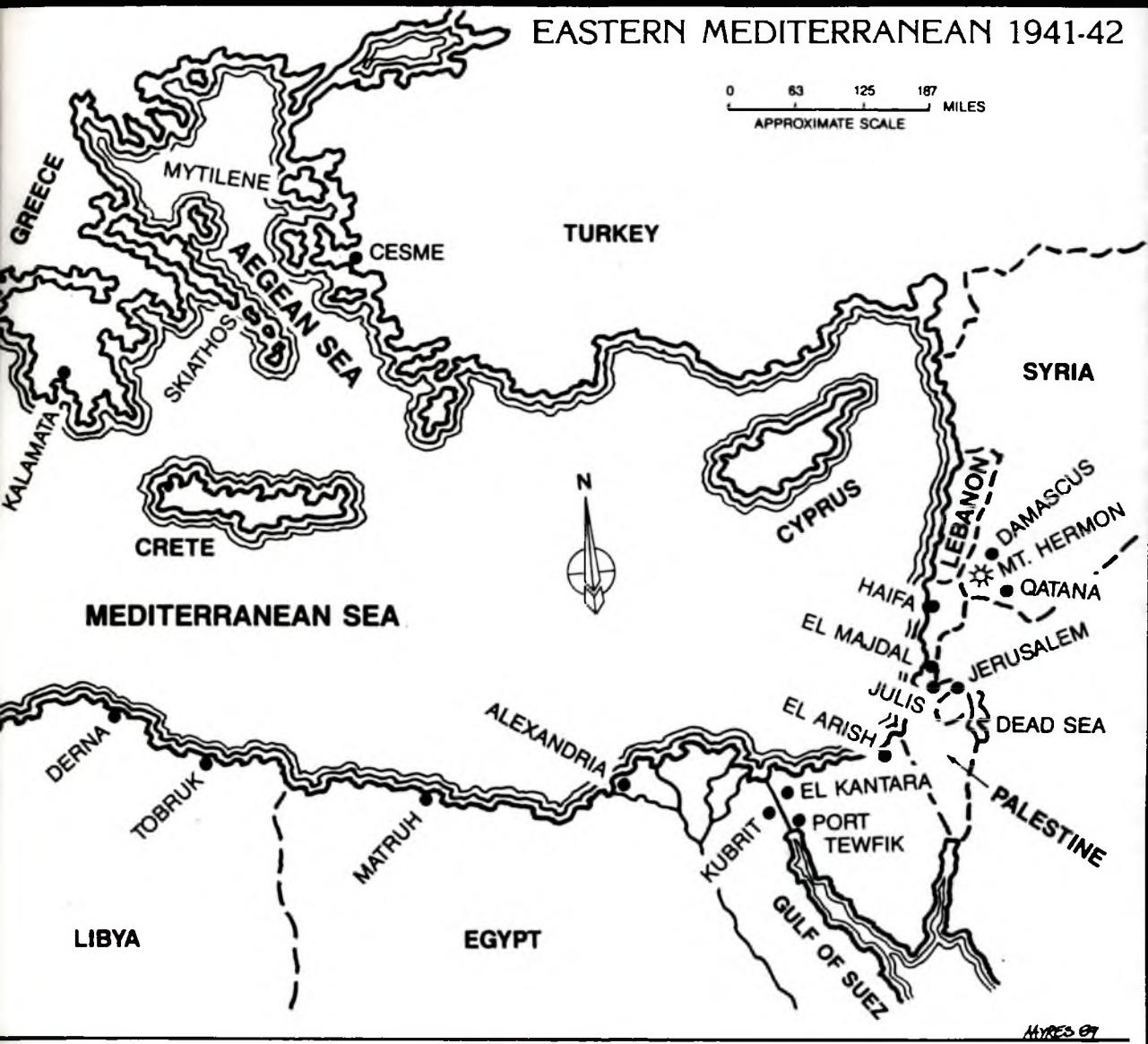
JUNE 1941 TO AUGUST 1942

After Greece and Crete and until the time of the 2/2's departure from the Middle East in March 1942 the unit saw many changes. Internally both reconstruction and reinforcement so altered its social composition that only a core of the original battalion remained. Externally Australia's changing directions in defence as a result of the Pacific War brought the men home and into a theatre which had not existed when they left Australia three years previously.

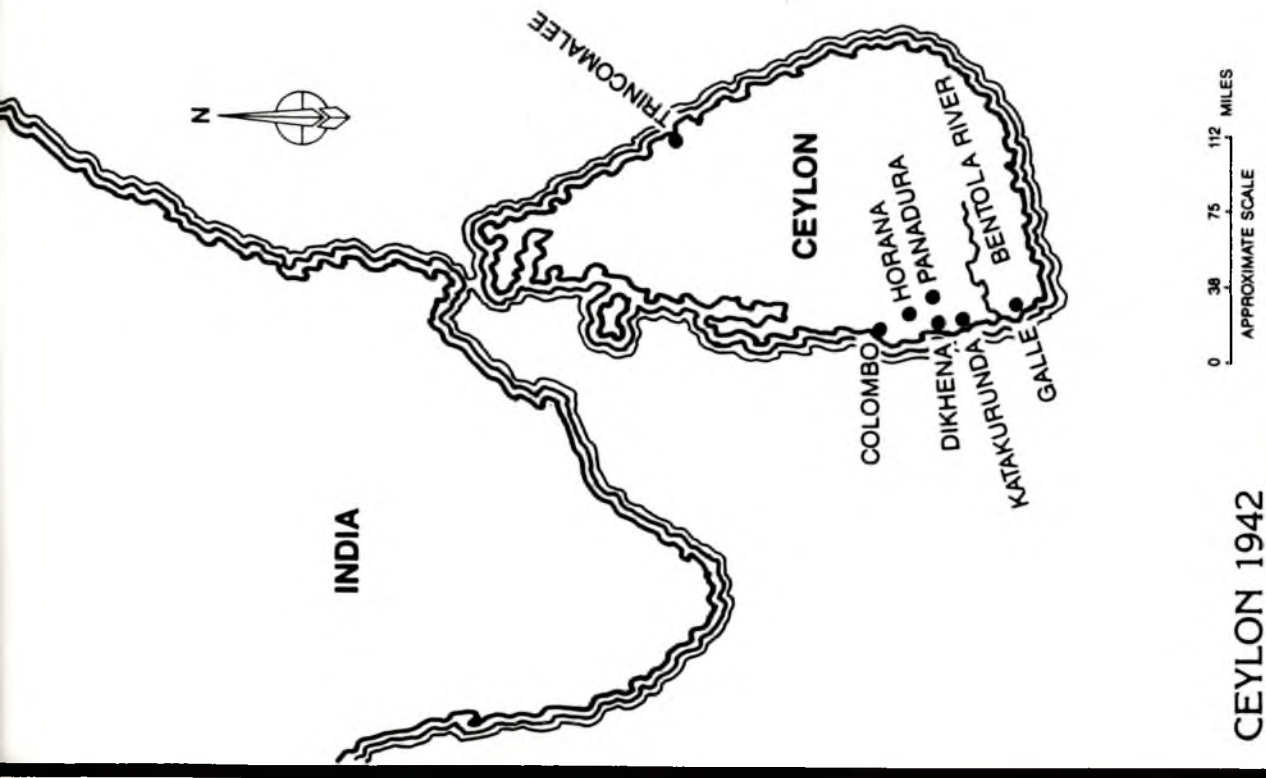
2/2 men took varied amounts of time to reach their destinations after the capitulations in Greece and Crete. After the fighting at Tempe Gorge some 2/2 groups planned an organised withdrawal in Greece being involved in rear-guard actions covering Anzac Corps' withdrawal.⁽¹⁾ The unit's main body comprising B Echelon, D Company, the Regimental Medical Officer and his staff and some of the Carrier Platoon and Headquarters Company retreated south towards the evacuation port, Kalamata, actually arriving safely in Palestine by 30 April. Other smaller parties which fled over the mountains hoping to join the main

1. S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978 (first published 1977), pp.142-181. Also G. Long, Greece, Crete and Syria, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962 (first published 1953) details many escapes, pp.185-191.

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body found the Germans controlling all roads leading to the south. Many others travelled eastwards to the Aegean Sea reaching Palestine by various routes and means. Similarly, after the fighting on Crete groups of varying sizes escaped capture and found their way to the battalion.

Colonel Frederick Chilton himself arrived in Julis at the end of May accompanied by 48 2/2 men some of whom he had been with since his escape from Greece; the others he met on his travels through Turkey and Cyprus. Kenneth Slessor, who filed two despatches expressing concern for Chilton's safety, wrote that he finally sailed to freedom with 300 of 'his men' in the Norwegian tanker, Alcides, which also carried 68 Norwegians, who had skied across the border in Sweden, then flown from Stockholm to Moscow finally finding their way down through the Black Sea to safety.⁽²⁾ Another large 2/2 group missed going to Crete when a Greek sea captain had insufficient fuel for the journey, but provided them instead with a caique and enough oil to sail to Cesme in Turkey. Arriving there on 3 May the Australians sought assistance from the British Vice Consul, Mr Noel Rees, and Colonel C.E. Hughes, an Australian official working with the Imperial War Graves Commission. On the following day yet another group arrived in Cesme having sailed from Skiathos and Mylitene so that on the 4th the two parties left Turkey together in the yacht, Kalamara, bound for Cyprus. Arriving there five days later they rested at the Regimental Barracks before travelling to Palestine reaching Julis on 20 May. Many other groups, bigger and smaller, took similar and equally

2. C. Semmler (ed.), The War Despatches of Kenneth Slessor: Official Australian Correspondent 1940-1944, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1987, 'Chilton at Panios', pp.170-172 and 'Colonel Chilton's Escape', pp.182-183.

colourful routes to freedom, many arriving at Julis dressed in peasant and shepherd costumes.

Those men who failed to escape, 118 in Greece and 49 on Crete, instead made a westwards journey ending up in various prison camps in Germany and Austria. Of those captured in southern Greece most went to a temporary camp at Corinth. Set in a sandy area of 15 acres it contained old stone buildings and verminous wooden huts with poor ventilation. While the prisoners slept on stone floors without blankets the only attention to sanitation was a 200 yard long open trench latrine. On Crete the Allied prisoners went first to Skines, near Canea in the northern part of the island, where conditions were similar to those at Corinth: 'the stench ... surrounding the camp was overpowering [as] many bodies lay unburied until prisoners were set to work as burial parties'.⁽³⁾

Eventually the Germans moved both the Corinth and Skines inmates to Salonika in northern Greece to a camp known as Frontstalag 183, a 'foul' place from where escape was difficult especially for men weakened by dysentery and lack of food. Stan Wick, one of the hapless 'kriegsgefangeners' recalled in 1977:

Then came the horror trip to Germany or Austria up through Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Austria-Hungary to one of the many Stalags. Every P.O.W. vividly remembers this trip when parties of 1,000 or more were herded into cattle trucks designed to hold 40 men but usually had 60 ... with 3 or 4 days rations for a [10 day] journey. Some ... ate all their food the first day and then just starved. Doors were padlocked, but unlocked once every 24 hours for the men to perform their natural functions. The prisoners piled out and had to squat in a circle surrounded by armed guards. Necessity forced men to cut a hole in the floor of the carriage and take turns using it. There were generally two very small windows, high up and barred. Everyone

3. See Appendix 'Prisoners of the Germans and Italians' in B. Maughan, *Tobruk and El Alamein*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1968, p.775. For 2/2 prisoner-of-war accounts see remarkably detailed chapter in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.149-179.

could not lie down at the same time because of the cramped space and sleep was difficult especially for wounded men. [Some] in desperation shouted at the guards, demanding to be let out, but the standard reply was "Befehl est Befehl" (orders are orders).⁽⁴⁾

In 1982 Jack Ulrick spoke about the various journeys he and other wounded made to reach their final destination. Firstly on 18 April after his wounding at Tempe Gorge, Ulrick went by truck to the Casualty Clearing Station. Travelling on a hospital train on the following day he received a cut to his face during a German bombing raid: 'everybody evacuated the train who could barely crawl'. That afternoon ambulances took the wounded to Athens. 'That was a wild and woolly flamin' ride ... wasn't just a convoy of ambulances ... it was guns and trucks and what-have-you [and] the road was getting heavily strafed by the Jerries'. Up until that time Ulrick's medical attention consisted of a bandage to his chest wound and 'a couple of shots of morphine'. The medical orderlies withheld fluids from those with serious injury but finally Ulrick pleaded with one to allow him to suck a water-soaked handkerchief. Ulrick also lost his boots and had the man in the stretcher above vomit all over him.

The decision by some of the doctors of the 2/5 Australian General Hospital at Kokkinia to stay with their patients instead of being evacuated with the nurses 'was a wonderful thing' brightening the prisoners' otherwise bleak prospects. After leaving the hospital patients travelled by boat from Athens to the 'hell hole of Salonika' before going by train into Europe.

... that was another hell of a trip. I think we were eight nights and nine days in one of those ... ordinary box cars ... freight cars ... not even straw on the floor, nothing just bare

4. ibid., (Purple Over Green), pp.151-153,.

boards. One thing it did do, it cured everybody's dysentery, because we had nothing to eat anyway. No water much. We dehydrated a bit there. Always remember a big bloke next to me a big Aussie fellow ... always trying to get ... lice out of his beard.(5)

Finally in October Ulrick arrived at Lamsdorf in Silesia near the Polish border. Wick was one of other 2/2 men at Lamsdorf while others were in selected camps throughout Germany and Austria, including Cloister Haina for disabled prisoners and Colditz Castle, renowned for its incorrigible escapees. Unlike their counterparts who returned 'home' to Julis the 2/2's prisoners-of-war then began lives of indetermined servitude.

'So few of us left': Regrouping

The common purpose, which so united the 2/2 before Greece, foundered in the early regrouping period. And although veterans seemed reluctant to talk about this period in interviews it is clear from the unit's own account that many facets of battalion life faltered until a new sense of community emerged. According to Wick the 2/2 'licked its wounds' for a while before slowly gathering strength. And far from underestimating the effects of failure on the previously cohesive unit, Wick spelled out clearly some of the tensions which surfaced on the men's return. The most immediate had to do with recriminations among the officers who were seeking to identify the source of an 'every man for himself order' which many believed had been given in the closing stages at Tempe Gorge. Duncan Goslett, who was adjutant at the time, claimed in Purple Over Green that 'no such order was ever issued from Battalion Headquarters and that such an order would have

5. J. Ulrick, interview, Grafton, 8 November, 1982.

been quite improper'. Other officers were silent except for one of the originals, Arch McLellan, who wrote in his diary at the time that morale was 'lower than usual'⁽⁶⁾ because of bitterness over the disputed order.

While it is unlikely that questions about the order will ever be settled some men hold to the belief that it was given. Roy Lovett, who was among the first to arrive at Julis, wrote some 27 years later in Anzac Day articles for a Lismore newspaper that towards the end of the fighting at Tempe Gorge the men had been told it was 'every man for himself. No one knows where the orders came from but when the German tanks were only 100 yards away and we had nothing to stop them we wasted no time in moving back'.⁽⁷⁾ While others did not claim in so many words that such an order was given they nonetheless made it clear that confusion reigned at the end of the fighting. Reg Blain, B Company's platoon commander, told his mother in May 1941 that he was 'given orders to evacuate as best we could'.⁽⁸⁾ Frank Delforce, who had been in both Greece and Crete, wrote to an A.I.F friend in the Middle East in June that 'when the big hun [sic] tanks broke our line it was every man for himself and we hardly lost a man in the get away'.⁽⁹⁾ More than twenty years later Tom Harvey recalled that towards the end of the fighting his platoon commander sent him to warn an outlying section of the imminent retreat:

I had almost reached their pits when the cry of "Tanks!" went up and the section came running towards me. For a moment we stopped and we stood looking towards platoon headquarters. Private Ogle had just returned from Company headquarters with the news that it

6. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.181.

7. R. Lovett, collection of articles and unpublished papers loaned to author. (Lovett papers)

8. R. Blain, letter, undated May 1941. See Lovett papers.

9. F. Delforce, letter, 21 June 1941. In collection of letters and papers loaned to author by E. Osbourne.

had vanished. Lieutenant Adler disinclined to order an immediate retreat was on his way to investigate, however, we had no time to consider our next step as we could hear the roar and clatter of tanks coming down the road. We ran for the gully. (10)

A second and perhaps more serious dispute left the men divided for some time. A discrepancy between officer and other rank leave allotment not only caused widespread discontent but also disrupted training programmes. On the return to Julis officers had seven days' leave to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, the other ranks one. It is not clear why such inequality existed but extant sources reveal that many opposed the unfair treatment. Chilton, who eventually intervened on the soldiers' behalf, possibly because of increased absent without leave offences, pointed out to his superiors that one day's leave was useless to men who were 'exhausted and in many cases "nervy" [from] lack of food and sleep and the continual strain of unopposed enemy air attack'. (11) Responding to Chilton's submission the authorities organised recreational activities greatly improving the leave problem by the end of July. By then 'all ranks had had a good leave, had spent their money and were ... in a happier frame of mind and more receptive to training'. The men's general feeling was that 6th Division command did not appreciate their physical and mental fatigue; 'it was not that the men needed pampering but they needed rest and relaxation to make them receptive to training and immediate leave to all ranks would have made for less disorganisation in the long run'. (12)

Impressions about morale at this time vary. In 1982 Leo Armati recalled that the loss of 'good morale was a transient sort of thing'

10. T. Harvey, 'Greece: 1941', Stand-To, Vol.7, No.5, May-June, 1962, p.3.

11. A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion June 1941.
(2/2 War Diary)

12. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.183-184.

and due to a 'great tiredness' more than any other factor. The men were 'surprisingly resilient' and the battalion recovered well. Amati, who was among the first to reach Julis, did agree however that the delayed return of some members hindered cohesion for some time. Those who returned earliest were also in 'better shape'⁽¹³⁾ than the late-comers, many fitter men regretting they missed the Syrian campaign. George Caling also questioned the unit's negative account of regrouping remembering himself that there was 'a lot of laughing'⁽¹⁴⁾ over the different escape stories when friends got back together again.

Others remembered the Julis homecoming with less joy. In 1970 Lovett wrote that he and others in the first evacuation party were horrified on their arrival at Ikingi Maryut in Egypt to discover that the unit's total strength was 110 all ranks, Lovett himself believing, albeit mistakenly, that his brother died of wounds at Tempe Gorge. From his bed in a British hospital on Crete Jack Smithers also heard that 'only 135 men left in my BTN. hope it is untrue but I know the Brigade got knocked about'. Finally on reaching Julis Lovett found:

... quite a few familiar faces of our old mates who missed out on the trip to Greece because of wounds and illness. I will never forget the look on their faces when they found so few of us left. They were not ashamed to cry and believe me we were far from laughing.⁽¹⁵⁾

Reinforcements joined them almost immediately and when the 'stragglers from Greece appeared from nowhere much time was spent comparing notes and finding out what happened to old mates'.⁽¹⁶⁾

13. Dr L. Amati, interview, McMahons Point, 27 September 1982.

14. G. Caling, interview, Canberra, 18 April 1982 (Caling interview).

15. Lovett papers and J. Smithers, diary on loan to author, 30 April 1941 (Smithers diary).

16. ibid. (Lovett papers).

Carl Parrott was another who well remembered the lowered morale of this critical period. In 1983 he recalled that some senior commanders played an important part in either bolstering or deflating troop self-confidence. In early June when many units were still very much under strength Brigadier A.S. Allen, who commanded 16th Brigade in Greece, visited the troops at Julis, asking them to huddle under the shade of trees before speaking to them about their part in the failed campaign. He urged them 'not to feel bad' about their performance as Anzac Corps was placed in extremely difficult circumstances in which its troops acquitted themselves well. As Parrott remembers it at a formal parade a few days later Lieutenant-General Iven Mackay, Commander 6th Division, addressed the troops (possibly non-commissioned officers only). While men stood to attention in the hot sun, which caused some to collapse, the general 'proceeded to tell us what dogs we were'.⁽¹⁷⁾

Military disintegration in Greece left many pondering failure. Roy Waters, who was part of the group on board the Kalamara, wrote to his mother on his return to Julis of the shame he and his companions felt when they were on the run in Greece and that it 'rankled'⁽¹⁸⁾ their pride. Waters was 'dumbfounded' when he first heard of the Greek surrender and the troop evacuations. Even Caling, who prefers to emphasise the happier moments of the post-Greece reunion, admitted that being run out of Greece left him with a 'sense of loss'.⁽¹⁹⁾ In

17. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983. The same or a similar incident is cited in D. Hay, Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, p.205.

18. R. Waters, letter, 14 May 1941.

19. Caling interview.

Field Marshal Sir William Slim's view this feeling could hardly be avoided by defeated soldiers. In a much-quoted paragraph in his memoir, Defeat into Victory, he suggests that while defeat is bitter to the common soldier it is trebly bitter to his general. The British commander, himself defeated in Burma, believed that a soldier could rationalise that he had done his best whatever the outcome in battle but in defeat a commander can know only that he had failed in his duty which was to secure victory. (20)

Apparently Mackay took the defeat in Greece badly, thereafter seeking to rectify the shortcomings in his own troops. In early May he recommended that unit commanders organise close-order drill, bayonet training, games and swimming to restore the men's physical and emotional strength. Mackay also outlined steps for a crackdown on the playing of 'two-up' which he believed was on the increase and affecting troop discipline adversely. (21) As we have seen previously Mackay was only one of many senior commanders who criticised troop performance in Greece and Crete. And while Mackay praised the Australian soldier publicly, in private he believed that 'Australians had little to be proud of' in much of what happened in Greece, complaining of men who only thought of self-preservation. In June 1942 he told Long that Australians 'had broken in Libya, Greece and Crete (as)... the penalty of years of pacificism'. (22)

And while the 2/2 did not have the opportunity to respond directly to the general's criticisms it came to quite different conclusions about its performance. In fact in interviews most men

20. W. Slim, Defeat into Victory, Cassell and Company, London, 1956, p.121.

21. G. Long, op.cit., p.547. Also I. Chapman, Iven G. Mackay, Citizen and Soldier, Melway, Melbourne, 1975.

22. D. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.99.

avoided describing their experiences as defeats, seeing themselves instead as miscast losers. On his tour of garrisons in Syria in late November 1941 Slessor also found this view dominant among A.I.F. men.⁽²³⁾ In the 2/2 even though the two campaigns caused the men great suffering there was still pride in achievements because the men:

... felt that their personal initiative had been put to a hard test ... [by fighting] in operations for which they were ill-equipped, outnumbered and overwhelmed from the air. They felt that enormous and valuable experience had been gained and that given air parity and equality of number on the ground, trained men could throw back the Germans whenever they met.⁽²⁴⁾

Whatever the men understood about the military consequences of their division's failure they nonetheless recognised that it changed forever the units they had known so well. Jo Gullett perhaps spoke for many when he expressed his grief for the loss of his unit's former vitality:

A battalion at full strength is an imposing sight but reduce it to half its size ... and the trappings of its strength flap sadly around the shrunken body like a uniform on a skeleton ... We had to face it. The beautiful battalion we had known was gone like our division ... and we would have to make another.⁽²⁵⁾

'Just Reinforcements' - Reconstruction

Although reinforcements continually joined A.I.F. units their presence seemed more obvious after Greece and Crete. In early June 1941, when the Cretan losses were added to those of Greece, the 2/2 and six other

23. C. Semmler, op.cit., p.261.

24. S. Wick, op.cit., p.182.

25. H. Gullett, Not As A Duty Only, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976, p.66.

units began to regroup. Three (the 2/1, 2/7 and 2/11) had lost most of their men on Crete while the remaining four (the 2/2, 2/4, 2/6 and 2/8) were reduced to about half establishment size. Then on 17 and 18 June the 2/2 and 2/3 each transferred 100 men (20% non-commissioned officers) to the 2/1 which then numbered 72. By the end of the month the 2/2 in similar fashion to other units doubled its own ranks to 708 including 33 officers and 675 other ranks of whom 250 were reinforcements. In September another 178 joined the unit at El Arish. Then in February of the following year 289 arrived at Beit Jirja bringing the unit in line with 'Operation Stepsister' which demanded that all A.I.F. units be made up to full War Establishment plus 1st Reinforcements before leaving the Middle East.⁽²⁶⁾

In the absence of precise data about 2/2's reinforcements of the period June 1941 to February 1942 only tentative conclusions can be drawn about their origins. Impressionistic evidence suggests that the unit's recruits continued to be New South Welshmen before Greece but that afterwards they came from both N.S.W. and other States. Arthur Pick, who joined the 2/2 in October-November 1941, wrote in 1985 that men in his group, the 11th Reinforcements, came mainly from N.S.W. including the Northern Rivers, the Riverina and other places such as Woy Woy from where he himself enlisted.⁽²⁷⁾ He also noted that the unit had men from Western Australia and Tasmania before it left the Middle East but these could not have been many, as a breakdown of X-numbers (prefix according to State) in the unit's nominal roll shows

26. Details about losses, regrouping and reinforcements are from S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.182-183 and 2/2 War Diary. Also The First At War: The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, The Editorial Committee, the Association of First Infantry Battalions, Sydney, 1987, p.210 and K. Clift, War Dance: The Story of the 2/3 Aust. Inf. Bn. 16 Brigade 6 Division, 2/3rd Battalion Association, Sydney, 1980, p.187.

27. A. Pick, letter, 9 November 1985 (Pick letter).

that only 10% of unit members in the entire period of the war were from other States: 204 Victorians, 74 Queenslanders, 16 South Australians, nine Western Australians, five Tasmanians and one from the Northern Territory. (28)

Just how representative this distribution by state was of other 6th Division units is not clear. The 2/6 estimates that 20% were from interstate by the time it returned to Melbourne in August 1942. (29) Its sister battalion, the 2/5, however comprised mostly Victorians at that time, although 188 reinforcements from New South Wales joined it in early October 1942. (30) Another 2/5 publication agrees partly with 2/2 impressions about regional recruitment policy. In his memoir, Rough Infantry, published in 1985, Cam Bennett wrote that in the early days of the war 2nd A.I.F. units had taken recruits from 'certain areas even suburbs'. And though this policy continued for some time it 'was later altered so that when we left the Middle East we never again got reinforcements from our own State'. (31) Unlike the 2/5, which was recruited originally from industrial suburbs in Melbourne, the 2/2 seems to have continued to receive recruits mainly from N.S.W., even if not from its original recruitment area. In 1982 two former 2/2 commanders thought the change from strict regional selection aimed to avoid big losses from single districts as had occurred in the previous war. (32)

28. S. Wick, op.cit., pp.343-369.

29. D. Hay, Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, p.235.

30. S. Trigellis-Smith, All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion, 2/5 Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1988, pp.187-188.

31. C. Bennett, Rough Infantry, Warrnambool Institute Press, Melbourne, 1984, p.121.

32. Sir Frederick Chilton, interview, Clareville Beach, 30 March 1982; Sir Ivan Dougherty, interview, Cronulla, 29 March 1982.

Whatever their origins reinforcements faced the unquestioned pride of 'originals' on their arrival in the Middle East. And while the veterans themselves have reflected little on this issue other evidence suggests that most recruits experienced a rough passage from training to established battalion. A.I.F. and militia conflicts are well known but far less has been said about the conflicts between A.I.F. men themselves. The sardonic term 'deep thinkers',⁽³³⁾ which some in the 6th Division applied to later divisions and reinforcements, reflected the disdain of some 1939 volunteers for their fellows but undoubtedly not all judged them harshly. Jo Gullett, and perhaps many in the 2/2 and other units, felt that the reinforcements after Greece were 'the more thoughtful and responsible' men who because of marriage or other commitments were not motivated solely by adventure. Gullett believed that the reinforcements eventually became 'good soldiers' but that after Greece his unit was 'pitched always on a slightly lower key. Too many reckless, flamboyant and powerful faces were missing'.⁽³⁴⁾ Waters put it another way: 'the rude new men are not the same as the ones gone'.⁽³⁵⁾

Others regretted the passing of the pre-Greece era because regrouping brought other unwelcome changes. The transfer of experienced 2/2 and 2/3 men to their sister battalion 'caused a great deal of heartburning [when] mates split up'.⁽³⁶⁾ Indeed the 2/2 transferees indicated what the move meant to them, wearing a miniature

33. Origin of term not clear but it implies a less fervent motivation on the part of those who look longer to join the A.I.F.

34. H. Gullett, *op.cit.*, pp.68-69.

35. Cited in O. Green, 'The Name's Still Charlie', unpublished manuscript, biography of C.H. Green, original 2/2 officer.

36. B. 'Hooker' Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, R. Holt, Sydney, 1981, p.115.

purple and green colour patch above their new 2/1 patch for some time.⁽³⁷⁾ Some four decades later Don Peirce recalled that while he enjoyed the rest of his service with the 2/1 he never identified with it as strongly as the 2/2. 'That was my battalion [and] after Greece and Crete it just wasn't the same'.⁽³⁸⁾

Originals who stayed with the battalion may have been like Smithers and taken reinforcements in their stride. Smithers, who returned firstly to Palestine's camp Kilo 89 on 7 August after a four month convalescence with a shrapnel wound, found the camp 'full of reinforcements doing intensive training'. He also met up with a friend who had recently arrived from Australia with the 2/1's reinforcements. A few days later he was an acting corporal on a night manoeuvre with 11 reinforcements and 'returned to camp ... convinced that the new men and officers had a lot to learn yet'. As a now twice-wounded veteran (Bardia and Greece) Smithers returned to Julis on 16 August, joining 8 Section, 9 Platoon of his old A company which he had been with since his enlistment in November 1939. There were 'many new faces' but he had a busy time being welcomed by all the 'old hands'. His company still seemed 'very much under strength'⁽³⁹⁾ and many familiar faces were missing.

Undoubtedly reinforcements have their stories but few have told them. Pick, who sailed from Sydney in the Queen Mary with 8,000 other troops in mid-1941, joined the 2/2 as a signaller in Syria. In 1985 he recalled that although the originals 'accepted the reinforcements well' he was always aware of the 'subtle differentiation' between professional and apprentice until he became fully absorbed into the

37. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.183.

38. Cited in P. Charlton, The Thirty Niners, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1981, p.200.

39. Smithers diary, 7-16 August 1941.

'life of the unit'. In turn he saw the recruits that came after him as 'just reinforcements' (40) until they too were integrated battalion members.

Two 2/2 officers, both originals, outlined some problems that recruits faced. In 1983 Don Fairbrother and Allan Baird, who both supervised training for reinforcements at various stages in their careers with the 2/2, agreed that some 'originals' treated reinforcements poorly. Although the men's recall of dates and other details was imprecise they had no trouble bringing to mind that they 'worried like hell' over the way 'originals virtually cold-shouldered' newcomers. The 'unhappy situation' however improved when new policies came in at the training battalions for, as they saw it, much of the ill-feeling towards recruits derived from practices at early units. Each A.I.F. brigade in Palestine had its own training battalion from which it took 'raw recruits' directly from Australia. Although a 2/2 recruit at that stage was not officially in the 2/2 he wore the unit's colour patch and had instruction from its officers. This initiation process was 'a shambles' in the early days of the war as the established units tended to regard the training battalions as avenues for transferring 'people they didn't want'. Conditions only improved when a 'senior officer' at 16th Brigade Headquarters removed the 'undesirable officers' and replaced them with 'good instructors'. From then on the improved training for officers and troops alike at the training units helped to overcome some of the problems of the earlier days when 'reos [were] treated as second-class citizens'. (41)

40. Pick letter.

41. D. Fairbrother and A. Baird, joint interview, Port Macquarie, 7 June 1983. The senior officer referred to was possibly the 2/2's original commander, Colonel George Wootten, who assumed command for the Reinforcement Depot in Palestine in December 1940. Wootten was given the appointment in order to free Corps Headquarters of the
(cont. over)

The 289 reinforcements who arrived at Beit Jirja from the 16th and 20th Infantry Training Battalions in February 1942 seemed to have caused most unease in the existing unit. On their arrival they were formed into a special Reinforcement Company so as to prevent overloading in existing companies. And even though the new company had a core of senior veteran officers as instructors, it had settling-in problems. In 1982 Ray Torrington, a reinforcement before Greece, recalled that the 'poor things'⁽⁴²⁾ were isolated from the main battalion, camping some distance from its lines and having mainly reinforcement officers. Another indication of the company's social as well as physical ostracism was the War Diary observation that they 'seemed to have been willed from various jobs not requiring stamina or initiative' and that their general standard of training and discipline 'was low'. From such a beginning assimilation proved difficult for the Reinforcement Company so much so that its company commander recommended that it be known as E Company hoping that the name change would lift the men's morale. And although relations improved between the veterans and recruits a touch of resentment persisted, for even though the latter 'overcame many difficulties and found an interest in life ... there was always the feeling that they were reinforcements and not part of the Bn.'⁽⁴³⁾

In the early seventies Allan Donnet recalled that as 'a quiet cove and slow to mix' he found it hard to find his place in E Company. Of the two groups forming the company Donnet believed that that from the 20th Infantry Training Battalion:

41. (Cont.)

problems of streamlining the training for recruits who were arriving in the Middle East not having fired a rifle or undergone any other elementary training. See G. Long, To Benghazi, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, p.123.

42. R. Torrington, interview, Belmore, 15 March 1982.

43. 2/2 War Diary, March 1942. D. Fairbrother was the Company Commander.

... comprised mostly no-hopers, ack-willy merchants, gents with two left legs, corns and carbuncles ... with a few exceptions a pretty drack mob.... the 2/2 [was] quick to size them up. E Coy. was summoned to mount battalion guard and consisted of 20th I.T.B. men. Fortunately I was not on that guard - it was by far the worst ... I ever saw. [When] E Coy. was again called ... for guard duty ... 16th I.T.B. men set about putting on a really good show and I was the only 20th I.T.B. [man] ... included ... I was the 'ugly duckling' and the one who would b- the show. But they did not know that I had had special training in guard duty and had been a member of a Special Middle East guard before coming to the 2/2 ... It was on this guard that I met Paul McMahon, an old 2/2 [member] and a man I'd known in civvy street, so [he] was a ray of sunshine to me in this new battalion. (44)

Athol Bell, Regimental Sergeant Major at Beit Jirja, also wrote some thirty years later:

I ... recall with shame the reception we gave E Coy ... Those unfortunate wretches whose only crime was that they enlisted voluntarily to help us when ... we were being belted from all sides. Despite the fact that we were losing badly, these lads came forth and at least expected us to extend the right hand of fellowship and a warm greeting. That was not to be done. They were paraded, tiraded, promulgated, investigated and castigated, inspected like cattle and then tolerated only until they could 'prove' themselves. (45)

'All in all a lovely place': Recuperation

Life was not all conflict for the 2/2 in this period and its move to Egypt in mid-August 1941 helped the men regain unit harmony. The two month stay at El Arish, amid palms and only 400 yards from the beach, did much to stimulate flagging esprit de corps. El Arish's setting and plentiful water supply made it a popular bivouac area for past armies including Napoleon's in 1798 and more recently the Australian Light Horse in the First World War. According to Frank Burley, a 2/2 Intelligence Officer throughout the war, El Arish was a pleasant

44. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.427.

45. ibid., p.428.

surprise for the troops after the train journey across the arid Sinai desert:

... all of a sudden the coast was there and the train pulled into a siding ... a typical wog station on one side and the sparkling blue of the Mediterranean on the other. Even better things were in store ... for on pulling out of the station the train entered an oasis of cool shady avenues created by majestic date palms.... Our battalion area was located in the ... date oasis with the companies distributed around both tactically and with reasonable thought to access ... the surf. All in all a lovely place, the hottest day was cool inside the avenue of palms, and by liberal use of water tankers the dust problem was overcome.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The palms provided the men with as many dates as they could eat when the fruit ripened and Arab boys sold them peanuts near the camp and on the beach.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Although El Arish was mainly a recuperation camp the men guarded local installations. They also manned a five mile perimeter of outposts, erected to prevent thieving, particularly that of rifles by the local population which lived about a mile inland in the village of El Arish. Daily life at the camp consisted of routine, sport and simple pleasures. Reveille was at 0600 hours followed by a swimming parade at 0615 then after breakfast drill from 0800 to 1100. The afternoons were free except for a compulsory sport parade at 1600 at which time there was swimming again or medicine ball.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Restricted leave and the absence of local recreational facilities increased the men's appreciation of the battalion band which entertained them regularly on the railway embankment. As the bandmaster, Albert Lee, recalled many years later 'we were able to give a great deal of

46. ibid., p.185.

47. Smithers diary, 4 October 1941.

48. ibid., 18 August 1941.

pleasure to many as the sound carried a long distance into the date palms'. (49)

Many men must have visited Cairo from El Arish; from Smithers we have a lively account of what such a visit could entail. On 1 September he and a friend left El Arish by train for seven days in Cairo where they stayed at the Victoria Hotel. On the first day the men joined a sightseeing group with whom they visited the 'principal mosques and citadels' during the morning, the pyramids in the afternoon. At night they 'strolled about the city' and went to the Opera Cinema. Smithers, who greatly admired the Empire Club which was next to his hotel, wrote that it was 'for all Empire troops' and 'very nice place with both roof and tea gardens, restaurent [sic], bandstand in tea garden, open air cinema and billiard room'. Everything was 'modern and very clean and well patronised by the troops'. Two days later Smithers travelled the Nile to the Delta Barrage. On the launch he bought Australian beer and cigarettes and had 'a very enjoyable day' with some South African and Australian nurses. After the launch trip he had 'a very exciting ride ... the streets were crowded yet our driver drove the bus as fast as possible ... hardly ever taking his hand off the horn ... we missed people and traffic by inches'. Smithers' final days in Cairo were spent 'visiting the various cinemas, shopping and getting [his] photo taken' before making the 'long, weary journey' (50) back to El Arish.

In mid-September as reinforcements arrived and rumours increased about a move to Syria training stepped up. A gruelling marathon which involved the troops (in full gear) in a forced march of three and a half miles through soft sand tested their fitness. D Company's 18

49. S. Wick, op.cit., p.423.

50. Smithers diary, 1-8 September 1941.

Platoon won, covering the course in 53 minutes: Smithers' platoon took 57. The race was 'very hard going' and they all returned in 'a state of collapse'.⁽⁵¹⁾ By the end of the month the troops resumed a full weapon training programme using rifle, grenade, Bren and Tommy guns. Then in early October the Egyptian Army relieved them and they departed for Khassa, near Julis, spending only a few days there before making a long-rumoured journey to Syria.

'Syrian Interlude': Garrison Duties

While the Syrian campaign involved only the 7th Division and two 6th Division (2/3 and 2/6) units its ramifications affected the entire A.I.F. in the Middle East. In June 1941 when the Australians gathered in Palestine to count their losses after Greece and Crete the A.I.F. was far from General Blamey's ideal of a national force led by national commanders. Indeed at the beginning of May Blamey thought that British policy so far had scattered Australian troops 'to the four winds'.⁽⁵²⁾ Subsequent events did little to improve the situation, for while the 6th Division reeled from its campaign in Crete, the 9th and one 7th Division brigade were in Tobruk, the rest of the 7th was in Mersa Matruh and the 7th Division Cavalry Regiment in Cyprus. Then in early June, without consulting Australia, British high command chose the Australians previously mentioned to lead an assault on Vichy French troops in Syria, which had been a French protectorate with Lebanon until France's capitulation. The

51. ibid., 27th September 1941.

52. See D. Horner, op.cit., pp.108-111.

Australians fought alongside the 5th Indian Brigade and a Free French Division against a Vichy French army of six regiments of regular soldiers including one Foreign Legion unit, one combined unit of colonial and metropolitan troops, four African units and some 10,000 Eastern Mediterranean troops.⁽⁵³⁾ The 2/2 received orders at the end of June to go to the Syrian front line but missed the campaign by a matter of days when a truce on 12 July cancelled its departure orders.

At the beginning of 1941 the preservation of Syria was seen by the British as crucial for the protection of the Suez Canal and Middle Eastern oil-fields. But when Britain finally decided to attack Syria on 8 June, only a few days after it had quashed a revolt in Iraq, it did so when its stocks in the Middle East had slumped. Greece, Crete and the reversals in North Africa had halved its available ground troops and left its navy with two battleships, three cruisers and 17 destroyers. Its airforce had 250 aircraft of which 50 were obsolete. These forces had to cover an immense area of operations, pitted against a German/Italian fleet of more than three times its own strength. Ironically at the time of the British invasion few Germans remained in Syria as Hitler's policy changed to one of denying Britain any pretext for invasion. As well the hasty British move proved to be unnecessary when the Germans invaded Russia on 22 June ruling out the possibility of an Axis offensive on the eastern flank of the Mediterranean for some time. Nonetheless in five weeks of fighting the Australians had 1600 casualties including 416 killed.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Such an outcome in Syria increased Blamey's awareness of British ineptitude,

53. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.470 and C. Green and D. Fairbrother, 'Syrian Interlude', in A.J. Marshall (ed.), *Nulli Secundus Log*, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, p.69.

54. *ibid.*, (Greece Crete and Syria) Ch.15, pp.320-332; Casualties p.526.

strengthening his resolve to gather his troops into a more compact force.⁽⁵⁵⁾ And although the A.I.F. in the Middle East had a brief period of unification towards the end of 1941, events in December were to disperse them even further in the following year.

In October 1941, under British command, the 2/2 provided garrison troops for the newly formed Ninth Army, formed to defend the Syrian pathways to the oilfields and Suez Canal. On the 16th when the troops left Khassa by train they transferred at Haifa to trucks which took them through mountainous country to the Damascan plains on to Qatana, about 15 miles south west of Damascus and near the base of the 9,000 foot Mt Hermon. In an area known as Sausage Wood the 16th Brigade's battalions, together for the first time since Greece, dug in and took up defensive positions. Qatana's 'dry, rocky and barren'⁽⁵⁴⁾ terrain failed to impress 2/2 troops accustomed to the palms and sea breezes of El Arish. The 2/1 history however says its troops greatly appreciated the 'pleasant camp', set 'high in the mountains near rippling streams and farms of deep red soil'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ And while Slessor also admired Syria's rugged beauty, comparing it with Arthur Streeton landscapes, Smithers noted that the troops had had a 'crowded but fairly comfortable journey' from Haifa, viewing scenery which was interesting at first but dreary later. Qatana's 'treeless, stony and mountainous' position at 3,000 feet made conditions cold at night but during the day the men could see far southwards.⁽⁵⁷⁾

55. D. Horner, op.cit., p.111.

56. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.69; and The First At War, op.cit., p.215.

57. K. Slessor, op.cit., p.190; and Smithers diary, 16-18 October 1941.

When the 2/2 took over from the 2nd Battalion Black Watch at Qatana Syria was under Australian Army control, except for one sector which the Free French governed. The unit's specific tactical role involved the construction of two elaborate defensive positions, Qatana Fortress and the Gap Position which had to be virtually 'chipped out of rock', engaging the troops in much digging, blasting and the laying of thousands of yards of wire. And as 'hard work is never interesting in retrospect' few impressions of Syria survive.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Life was not all work however and the men's drudgery was relieved by frequent sojourns to Beirut and Damascus and the provision of other luxuries. The Australian Service Canteen which the troops recognised as the best in the Middle East provided them with beer, cigarettes and other amenities. A mobile bath enabled each man to bathe weekly while mobile cinemas brought regular entertainment.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Another monotony breaker was the rotating assignment of 2/2 companies to Mezze Barracks in Damascus, the previous home of permanent French garrisons. On these visits a soldier discarded his dungarees to become a 'big, bronzed Australien'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Then as the weather chilled in November, forcing the men to wear their great-coats continuously, the Salvation Army padre's visits to the troops on guard duty earned him their unending praise. And while the men enjoyed the padre's soup, coffee and biscuits they also relied on his truck wireless for the B.B.C. news.⁽⁶¹⁾

As 1941 drew to a close significant events in and out of the unit punctuated the troops' stolid routine. At the end of November they farewelled their 'beloved C.O.', Chilton, who had seen them through

58. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.70.

59. S. Wick, op.cit., p.188.

60. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.70.

61. 2/2 War Diary, 11 December 1941; and Smithers diary, 15 November 1941.

three campaigns. Both his tactical skills and personal attributes won him the respect of every man in the unit. The men welcomed equally however his successor, another original, Major C.R.V. Edgar, for his 'bluff [and] hearty' (62) forthrightness. Then in early December, only days after the news of the end to the Tobruk siege, news of the Japanese attacks in the Pacific reached the Middle East. Extant sources suggest that some Australian troops received the news lightly, Long noting that 'relatively few' (63) unit war diaries recorded the event, the 2/2 being among them. On the other hand Slessor thought that a 'quiet confidence' marked the Australian soldiers' reaction. From Cairo on 12 December he wrote:

Two things comfort and reassure these [men] so far from their own country - first, the information that Australia is well-prepared to defend itself and will not be taken by surprise; second, the knowledge that they themselves are helping to protect their own homes by sticking at their job in the Middle East to the finish. (64)

Some 2/2 men thought that when Japan entered the war and rumours were rife about moves to Burma, India or Australia, 'the "Jap menace" ... seemed remote indeed'. (65) The 2/3's historian observed that Japan's entry had 'not much initial impact on ... the 2/3 or any of the Australians in the Middle East' while Bob Holt recalled that the best that had come out of Japan's attack was the news of a return to Australia. (66) Two 2/2 men commented on the Japanese attacks. Rex Moore noted that 'Japanese bombed Hawaii and every U.S.A. Island' while Smithers wrote:

62. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.70 and S. Wick, op.cit., p.190.

63. G. Long, op.cit., p.550.

64. C. Semmler, op.cit., p.269.

65. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.72.

66. K. Clift, op.cit., p.246 and B. Holt, op.cit., p.139.

Heard tonight thru [sic] sigs that Japan is at war with USA and Britain, big sea battle is on between them and the Japs tried to get Singapore and Malaya but were repulsed. Also heard that HMAS Sydney previously reported missing with all hands has arrived in Singapore with her wireless out of action due to engagements with enemy raider which she sunk.

A few days later news reached them of the sinking of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse off Singapore but there was 'not much yet on Japan's losses'. (67)

Christmas again emphasised the men's separation from home. From all accounts however A.I.F. troops, who were finally together again in the Middle East (Syria, Palestine and Lebanon) and away from battle fronts, enjoyed their second overseas Christmas more than the previous one despite the region's most severe winter for some time. While snowstorms raged over parts of Syria and Palestine heavy snow fell in places which had not reported it for 15 to 20 years, including Beirut and Jerusalem. While such conditions were known to 2/2 'originals', who at that time numbered about 250, falling snow in Syria on Christmas Day delighted many including those who were like 'school-children throwing snow-balls and making snowmen'. (68) The troops also enjoyed liberal supplies of food and alcohol. And while the unit's Christmas stocks of wine and rum were plentiful the men had been warming themselves for some weeks against Mt. Hermon's winds with 'our now favourite S.R.D. rum' and other potent concoctions. (69) Christmas Day saw some officers celebrating at the French Club while others waited on the troops in mess tents serving them turkey, pork, plum pudding and other dishes. Throughout the meal the officers

67. R. Moore, diary on loan to author, 8 December 1941 and Smithers diary, 8 and 12 December 1941.

68. 2/2 War Diary, 25 December 1941.

69. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., p.71.

endured 'a variety of raucous ditties and much good-natured banter'. Afterwards the troops continued the merriment in their tents with 'liberal quantities of bottled beer'.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Others had more sober impressions. Smithers, who was on 16th Brigade Detention guard duty during Christmas week, noted that conditions were cold and snowy and that mud was ankle-deep outside his tent:

Xmas dinner arrived about 3 p.m. One turkey among 23 men. Also beer and Xmas hampers [which are] same as last year. Everybody disappointed at mail not turning up and also at being on duty for Xmas. Rest of Coy. had a very good time, good tucker, officers waiting on men etc. Prisoners tried to bluff their way out of the jail a couple of times but guards were determined that they would not and kept their rifles loaded. Prisoners soon quietened down when they saw guards meant business.

On Boxing Day Smithers found the Qatana camp covered in mist and his tent decorated with streamers. On New Year's Eve the A Company officers joined the platoon's celebrations drinking with the men for a while. And even though 'everybody had a good time' the excessive beer consumption eventually caused 'the usual drunken arguments'.⁽⁷¹⁾ At midnight some soldiers fired their rifles.

Two days later Syria's most severe blizzard in many years covered everything with ice and snow confining the troops to their tents for four days. The snow fell up to seven feet in places, the men sleeping fully clothed despite their six blanket ration. In Fairbrother and Green's graphic description:

The blizzard reached a ferocity which might disturb an Arctic Explorer. Somehow the rock-strewn area we occupied did not seem a fit setting for snow as pictured from memories of Greece. Man,

70. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.191.

71. Smithers diary, 25-31 December 1941.

beast and vehicle alike were grounded; our world stood still. Communications ceased to function [and] the talk of defeating frost-bite and hunger was paramount. We have weird recollections of battling through a howling gale, stung by driving snow and icicles which glued the eyes to blindness. Mittens and balaclavas caked with ice combined to give us an uncouth ferocious appearance.

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Some carried rations and 'tots of rum' to others by crawling on their hands and knees because of the 60 mile per hour winds, and while the latter eventually subsided on 4 January the thaw reduced the countryside to a bog interrupting normal battalion routine for another two weeks. (72)

Some missed the blizzard as they were among those parties which had special leave to visit 'the beauty spots and health resorts of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Beirut, Baalbek, Damascus, Aleppo and Tripoli'. Some A.I.F. men were also 'on skis under the snow-covered cedars of Lebanon [while] others in the heart of Christmas country

72. C. Green and D. Fairbrother, op.cit., pp.71-72.

[seized] the chance to share in the picturesque ceremonies of Bethlehem'.⁽⁷³⁾ Smithers, who left Qatana on New Years Eve in a leave convoy taking soldiers to three destinations, went to Tel Aviv. His stay was memorable for his reunions with many old friends including one who had been in hospital with him after Bardia. Another shared a tent with him in a convalescent camp after Greece and a third was his old Quartermaster, Sergeant Gildersleeve, 'who ... escaped from Crete a month ago'. Smithers also 'thoroughly enjoyed' seeing several films including 'The 40,000 Horsemen', an Australian film of the Light Horse in the previous war, and the 1939 classic 'Gone with the Wind'. He also visited a friend in Gaza Hospital and during a round of Tel Aviv cafes met 'an old A Coy. chap' as well as some Greek soldiers who entertained him and his friends with Greek songs. On 10 January he noted the snow which had fallen in his absence. And while A Company received many parcels there were none for him adding: 'it is exactly 2 years ago today since we left Australia'.⁽⁷⁴⁾

After leaving Syria in January the troops returned once again to Palestine where they spent four weeks at Beit Jirja.⁽⁷⁵⁾ As always however they were unaware of their ultimate destination, the diarist noting that rumours had it that 'places as far apart as Iceland and China were [the unit's] next battle stations'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Wally Ward, an officer at the time, wrote that while it was 'doubtful ... if any of us thought seriously of Ceylon as our [next] destination ... Madagascar had quite a few supporters'.⁽⁷⁷⁾ The hiatus at Beit Jirja created an even more speculative environment, Smithers observing:

73. C. Semmler, *op.cit.*, p.275.

74. Smithers diary, 31 December 1941 - 10 January 1942.

75. 2/2 War Diary, 18-20 January 1942.

76. *ibid.*

77. W. Ward, 'Stand-to in Ceylon' in A.J. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.75.

[We] will not be in this camp long. Soon be embarking in boat, many chaps betting we will be going to Burma, everyone is of the opinion that we are going somewhere in the far east. Thought we might be going back to desert earlier but does [?not] look like it now.

As the rumours continued the betting on the destinations had Burma, Australia and the Western Desert 'about even but now quite a lot of money is being laid on Aussie'.(78)

Eventually on 7 March the troops made their final journey in the Middle East leaving Beit Jirja in civilian buses which took them to El Majdal where they boarded cattle trucks for El Kantara. After crossing the Suez Canal the Australians travelled by train to Kubrit in Egypt from where the entire 16th Brigade departed three days later. A 20 truck convoy took them to Port Tewfik from where a steam launch transferred them to the H.M.T. Orontes. Then in company with the H.M.T. Otranto, which had 17th Brigade on board, the former sailed from Port Suez. Suggesting the extent to which rumour plagued the journey Smithers noted on the second day out that the crew told some troops that the Orontes was bound for Bombay where the men would transfer to 'a big ship either "Queen Mary" or "Queen Elizabeth" then go to Australia'. That night Durban was named as the port of the assumed transfer and as the ship was heading south east at sunset Smithers judged that the latest piece of information 'must be true'. Then on the 18th when the Orontes finally sailed from Aden, after lying at anchor for three days, as the ship travelled east Smithers wondered 'if our destination is Ceylon or Bombay'. Then three days later after a lecture on Ceylon he wrote: 'so that seems to be our destination ... will probably reach there Wed. morning'.(79)

78. Smithers diary, 6-8 February, 1942.

79. ibid., 11-21 February 1942.

Much had happened to the course of the Second World War since the 2/2's previous visit to Ceylon. The turn around in Australia's strategic position had forced its Labor leader, John Curtin, to turn more towards United States protection than that of Britain. Historians seem agreed that in late 1941 and in the early part of the next year, when Australia's leaders sought to forge policies which would give them a greater say in the use of their troops, Australia's standing as a small nation in a complex alliance hindered their task.⁽⁸⁰⁾ It seems too that no matter how eager Australian leaders might have been to protect their troops, the intricacies of inter-Allied negotiations and the speed of Japan's Pacific conquest, sealed the fate of many as negotiations continued. Two 8th Division brigades, the 22nd and 27th, surrendered with the British when the Japanese took Singapore on 15 February 1942. Various other forces suffered similarly as the Japanese progressively occupied most countries in the region of former British, Dutch, French or Portuguese administration, threatening as well Australia's own ~~protectorates~~^{mandates}, Papua ~~and the Mandated Territory of~~ New Guinea. Within three months of Japan entering the war 22,000 Australians became prisoners.⁽⁸¹⁾

Bringing the troops home from the Middle East was more successful but nonetheless controversial. While much confusion long surrounded the details of the 7th Division's diversion to Burma while en route to Australia, David Horner suggests that the bitter dispute between Britain and Australia may have been due mainly to diplomatic muddling. In mid-February, when the 7th Division with part of the 6th

80. See D. Horner, *op.cit.*, pp.141-167; J. Robertson, *Australia At War 1939-1945*, William Heinemann, Melbourne 1981, pp.77-82.

81. H. Nelson, *Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, 1985, p.4.e

(Headquarters and 19th Brigade) was at sea bound for Dutch-controlled Java, Winston Churchill, without consulting Curtin, redirected the Australian convoy to Burma in the hope of saving Rangoon. Following Churchill's action Curtin sent strongly-worded cables, although some believe these were drafted by the Foreign Affairs Minister, H.V. Evatt, because of Curtin's ill-health at the time. On Churchill's command the convoy turned back arriving in Adelaide between 10-28 March except for the 7th Division's advance guard, which fell into Japanese hands after its arrival in Java on 17 February. As we have seen the 6th Division's 16th and 17th Brigades left the Middle East in early March, sailing directly for Ceylon. They had been offered to Churchill by Curtin after the Burma refusal on the understanding that two brigades of the British 70th Division, then in India, would relieve them in a few weeks allowing them to return to Australia. Curtin also agreed to another British request, which Churchill backed with a promise of an American division (the 32nd), for Australia to leave its 9th Division in the Middle East.(82)

Ceylon and the Return to Australia

The voyage to Ceylon, which for some was a return journey, took the troops closer to the equator. Black-out procedures closing all portholes caused conditions to be hot and cramped.(83) As far back as Aden the 16th Brigade diarist wrote that despite the unpleasant

82. D. Horner, op.cit., pp.155-162; J. Robertson, op.cit., pp.77-82; D. McCarthy, South West Pacific, First Year, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, pp.1-34 and J.D. Dedman, 'The Return of the A.I.F. from the Middle East', Australian Outlook, Vol.21, No.2, August 1967, pp.151-164

83. Smithers diary, 24 March 1942.

conditions the troops were 'in good heart'⁽⁸⁴⁾ due to the community singing, quiz competitions and debates which were held in the evenings. And although ship's orders forbade gambling it was apparently 'very popular'; Smithers at one time having in his care '25 Pounds sterling for one chap, his accumulated earnings from two up'. On 23 March after a debate in the sergeant's lounge the Salvation Army padre 'gave a very interesting lecture on Australian poets. After much coaxing he read one of his own [one] that he had composed after hearing the news ... about the loss of H.M.A.S. Perth near Java'.⁽⁸⁵⁾

When the ship finally docked at Colombo Smithers observed that their sister ship the Otranto, which arrived a few days earlier, was close to their stern and there were in the harbour 'the most ships I have seen in one place' including Dutch, Norwegian and 'quite a few' warships.⁽⁸⁶⁾ After disembarking the troops travelled by train to Panadura and then by transport to their new camp, Dikhenā, near Horana village, 30 miles south east of Colombo. The unit was now in the 'heart of a thick rubber plantation close to virgin jungle',⁽⁸⁷⁾ the troops writing of coconuts, pineapples, bananas and mangoes and 'wonderful ... green, fresh' scenery. They also saw elegant homes, thick tropical vegetation and flowers such as frangipani and red hibiscus. The move to equatorial waters also brought the Australians into contact with mosquitoes, centipedes, fireflies, heavy rains and a steamy atmosphere. And although the ground in the rubber plantation was covered with leaves, grass, green creepers and fern providing much shade there was no wind making it 'rather humid'. Smithers found that the

84. A.W.M. 52, 16th Brigade War Diary, 8/2/16, 13 March 1942 (16th Brigade War Diary).

85. Smithers diary, 23 March 1942.

86. *ibid.*, 25 March 1942.

87. 2/2 War Diary, March 1942.

main topic of conversation at night now is snakes and as we are all a bit windy about them some amusement is often caused when one chap will touch another chap's bare leg with a stick causing him to start a great commotion.⁽⁸⁸⁾

At Horana drinking water was scarce and the troops' bathing and laundry facility was a stream bordering a rice field.

Before the Australians arrived three brigades (two Indian and one local) defended Ceylon. On 18 March Major-General A.J. Boose, the A.I.F.'s commander in Ceylon, found the island ill-prepared for both the influx of troops and the expected enemy attack. On their arrival his brigades took up defensive positions in the island's south west corner which was seen as the most likely place for a Japanese landing. The 17th Brigade was at Galle. Of the 16th the 2/1 defended the aerodrome at Katakurunda, the 2/2 was on a line east from Colombo and south to the Bentola River while the 2/3 was inland at Ratnapura.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The troops had only been in position for a few days when on Easter Sunday, 5 April, and again four days later, the Japanese, who had a large naval force in the Indian Ocean, attacked Colombo and Trincomalee. Although ground damage was minimal Allied shipping suffered badly and both sides lost heavily in the air.⁽⁹⁰⁾ While the attack had a 'big psychological effect on the ... population'⁽⁹¹⁾ in Ceylon the troops appeared to be less worried. As the 2/1 Battalion wrote: 'history records that the foray by the Japanese carrier

88. Smithers diary, 27-31 March 1942 and W. Ward, op.cit., p.76.

89. D. McCarthy, op.cit., pp.77-79.

90. ibid., p.79.

91. W. Ward, op.cit., p.77.

fleet ... had far more serious results than the units in Ceylon were aware of at the time'.⁽⁹²⁾

During their second stay in Ceylon the troops had time for more lasting impressions but as is the case for so many periods when the unit is not fighting few sources survive. 16th and 17th Brigade histories convey generally that the Ceylonese were friendly and that the troops enjoyed both their leave and the climate which left many suntanned and healthy. On his arrival in Ceylon Smithers observed that in temperatures averaging 87 degrees Farenheit 'higher class [women] natives dress European fashion [while] the lower class generally wear a "Sarong" with sometimes a shirt or singlet'. The 'male natives who dress European fashion seem to favour white suits of very light material'. On leave in Colombo on Anzac Day Smithers found the shops clean and modern and 'as good as any in Sydney' but food scarce. At Dikhenā the villagers sold 'delicious tea' and cakes and in contrast to the men's experience of other countries the prices were not put up as soon as they arrived.⁽⁹³⁾ In May when news of tea rationing in Australia reached Ceylon 'even the smallest village shop was able to provide tea in wooden boxes and the necessary calico wrapping for export ... at 2 rupees [40 cents] a pound'.⁽⁹⁴⁾

Apparently the troops had many dealings with the Ceylonese near their camp. The 2/1 notes that some villagers laundered uniforms for the troops. And while the 2/2 makes no mention of similar services being done for them Smithers wrote of the villagers continually approaching the men near the camp to sell them fruit. He himself was

92. The First At War, op.cit., p.230.

93. Smithers diary, 25 and 31 March and 25 April 1942.

94. S. Wick, op.cit., p.201.

on good terms with a 12 year old boy who brought him and others newspapers every morning.⁽⁹⁵⁾ At Kalutara B Company's officers were made honorary members of both the Senior Officers and Town Club, a tennis court and cricket ground also being at their disposal. In a cricket match between the locals and the 2/2 team the latter won by 20 runs.⁽⁹⁶⁾

It seems however that senior command did not encourage friendly relations between the troops and local people. On 12 May in a memorandum to company commanders the adjutant, Captain John Dunlop, asked them to warn the troops about familiarity with 'natives', citing in particular the Australian habit of calling the locals 'George' and the latter's reciprocal adoption of the custom. Dunlop reminded the commanders that:

"Familiarity breeds contempt" is an old saying but nevertheless a true one especially as we again happen to be in a country where the majority ... are of different colour to ourselves and furthermore have in the past been used to treating the British with every courtesy and respect.⁽⁹⁷⁾

Ward however suggests that the Ceylonese themselves had preconceived notions upturned:

One very hot day a local tea-planter and I were watching a mob of Australians filling lorries with gravel for roadmaking. They were stripped to the waist and gleamed with sweat. In a circle around them were about fifty natives gazing at these fools working in the midday sun. The planter turned to me and said "You know, old boy, these jolly natives are amazed to see white people working. Really, they've never seen it before! I wonder what effect it will have on them after you go?"⁽⁹⁸⁾

95. The First At War, op.cit., pp.238-239 and Smithers diary, 29 April 1942.

96. 2/2 War Diary, March 1942.

97. 2/2 War Diary, 12 May 1942.

98. W. Ward, op.cit., p.80.

Rumours about the troops' departure from Ceylon began almost immediately on their arrival but as they had done previously in Syria the men worked hard building defences against an enemy which failed to reappear. Following the raids of early April 2/2's rifle companies had separate areas of responsibility for a short period before returning to Horana for jungle training. And while the troops understood in broad outline that jungle conditions were 'completely revolutionary'⁽⁹⁹⁾ from those in the desert they met their new tactics with some bemusement. Smithers' company (A) went on several route marches and after the first of ten miles the troops returned to camp very hot and 'wet ... with perspiration'. During their stops however the locals either climbed coconut trees to offer them coconut milk or gave them 'nice cool water from their wells':

[One] Thursday night we went on a compass march thru plantations and across rice fields, pitch dark much amusement [sic] caused by chaps stumbling down holes into trees and falling over in the paddy fields. We got "bushed" at one stage and a native showed us the way back ... with his torch.

A few days later after a 20 mile march A Company troops were 'very footsore and weary' but during their dinner break in a rubber plantation they bathed in a stream. After buying coconuts, pineapples, mangoes and bananas they 'stayed for about 2 1/2 hours resting [and as] one chap had some coffee ... we boiled the billy'. On yet another march the men enjoyed the popular meal of baked beans while some killed a cobra. On 18 April when the company experimented with river rafts there was a crocodile scare, though it turned out to

99. ibid., p.79.

be a large goanna, Smithers finally noting that it was the first anniversary of the Tempe Gorge battle.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

The 2/2 sailed from Ceylon on 14 July in the 8,000 ton coal-burner, the City of Canterbury, with 11 other ships. Once on board Smithers noted that the City of Canterbury had been in several perilous expeditions including the Dunkirk evacuation. It was also the last ship to leave both Crete and Singapore having had in its lifetime '20 misses from bombs'. On departure day all were 'anxious to leave', news also reaching them of the 9th Division's action at El Alamein. Increased vigilance for enemy attacks slowed the journey to Australia as did stormy weather giving the troops rough passage through the Indian Ocean. On 20 July after exchanging their British escort (the Gambia) for an American carrier (the Phoenix) they moved into their 'roughest weather ... yet', the change not only increasing seasickness numbers but forcing the men into slacks and sweaters.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

As the City of Canterbury approached the Australian coast the troops could hardly contain their excitement. The men first saw land on 3 August, their enthusiasm rising as they saw 'more and more of it',⁽¹⁰²⁾ for the rest of the day, anchoring in Port Phillip Bay that night. On the following morning reveille was 'superfluous',⁽¹⁰³⁾ the men rising early to jostle for positions along the ship's rail. As

100. Smithers diary, 8-18 April 1942.

101. ibid., 14-20 July 1942.

102. ibid., 3 August 1942.

103. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.203.

soon as it was light the City of Canterbury pulled anchor and made its way to the dock:

... as [it] pulled into the wharf a military band began to play 'There's a boy coming home on leave'. We disembarked at 1200 hrs and boarded a train that was waiting on the wharf. Train pulled out about 1400 and as we rode thru Melbourne, the people waved to us and shouted 'welcome home'. (104)

The remainder of the convoy arrived from Fremantle on 7-8 August. After disembarking the troops travelled by train to join the earlier arrivals at Mangalore camp, about seven miles from Seymour, some 66 miles from the city. The 16th Brigade diarist wrote that while the troops were 'quickly tented, fed and issued with extra blankets to combat the extreme cold ... nothing could worry these men camped for the first time for years amidst gum trees in Australia'. (105)

The New South Welshmen left Melbourne for a fortnight's home leave returning to Sydney for the 16th Brigade march. On 5 September 'almost half a million cheering people lined the streets of Sydney' while streamers and confetti 'rained unceasingly on the marching men'. 2nd Battalion veterans from the previous war 'set up a cheering post opposite David Jones in Elizabeth St and contributed in no small way to the volume of cheering and applause'. (106) Eric Hewitt wrote that when the troops met the 'avalanche of ticker-tape, confetti and streamers' it made them feel that the city had turned it on 'good and proper - with a carnival spirit never seen since the days of World War 1'. (107) The Sydney Morning Herald described the two mile column of marching troops as 'a magnificent picture of virile Australian manhood

104. Smithers diary, 4 August 1942.

105. 16th Brigade War Diary, 8 August 1942.

106. 2/2 War Diary, 5 September 1942.

107. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.213.

... tanned by the Mediterranean sun'. Blamey, who was on the saluting base at the Sydney Town Hall with several other dignitaries is supposed to have said:

these are men who have done a great job everywhere and who have responded to every call made upon them. They are as good as any troops anywhere; they have built up a great record of military service; that is something that you can only get in actual battle experience. (108)

Banner headlines claimed: 'A.I.F. heroes' had a 'Broadway welcome'. (109)

The impression that all who marched were campaign veterans was far from the reality. Since its departure for the Middle East the 2/2 and other units had been transformed from top to bottom. As we have seen earlier Major Edgar became the 2/2's third Commanding Officer in late 1941. Of the unit's other officers only four (including Edgar) were originals who joined at the unit's formation, three received commission from the ranks before leaving Australia and 13 were original privates receiving commission overseas. Of the remainder, four had been with the unit for 18 months, six for 12 and six for less than 12. When Leo Armati, the medical officer, left the unit in May 1942 his replacement was Captain A.E. McGuinness, previously with the British Army in France. Of the 809 other ranks who sailed from Sydney in January 1940 only 236 remained. Of the reinforcements 81 had been with the unit for two years, 81 for 18 months, 280 for 12 and 197 for

108. Sydney Morning Herald, 6 September 1942.

109. Newspaper cuttings filed in 16th Brigade War Diary, September 1942.

six. Thus of those marching less than one third were 'originals' while more than half had been with the 2/2 for twelve months or less. Of the 573 missing 'originals' some were battle casualties. Up until August 1942 64 men had been killed in action or died of other causes and 148 wounded, including both 'originals' and reinforcements. The 169 imprisoned in Europe were mostly 'originals' as was probably the case with the 100 2/1 transferees. (110)

The 2/2 had left Australia at a time when German successes in Europe were inconceivable. When it returned home almost three years later the nature and scope of the Second World War surpassed all that had been expected. Indeed Japan's conquests in the Pacific had no precedent in warfare. (111) By March 1942 Japan controlled an area running some 9,000 miles from the Indian/Burmese border through the Netherlands East Indies and New Guinea to the Gilbert Islands and further north to the Kurile Islands, leaving Australia very much isolated from its nearest friendly neighbours, the United States and India, which were both without the power to halt Japan's aggression. The Americans, who were 3,000 miles away could not match Japanese sea, land and air resources, and India had sent its best forces to the Middle East, Malaya and Burma while raw divisions defended it at home. (112)

Despite its own precarious position Australia had virtually no say in the higher direction of Allied planning for the changing war.

110. The statistics about originals are from 2/2 War Diary, August 1942. Casualties from S. Wick, op.cit., pp.370-374.

111. For a lucid account of this period see J. Robertson, op.cit., Chs. 9-13, pp.77-114.

112. ibid., p.77.

By mid-January 1942 America and Britain decided that victory in Europe had priority over the Pacific. In early March Roosevelt and Churchill arranged for the global division of strategic responsibility for the war into three main areas and those relating to the South West Pacific Area (S.W.P.A.) concerned Australia most. Then on 17 March the American general, Douglas MacArthur, became Supreme Commander of all Allied forces in the Pacific on his arrival in Darwin following his defeat at Baatan. On 25 March when Washington informed Australia of its plans for the S.W.P.A. - the region including Australia and the areas north and north east of it and as far as and including the Philippines - its leaders requested only minor alterations, the most notable being the inclusion of Australia's west coast and adjacent seas in the defended area. Other agreements between the United States and Australia stated that no Australian troops could be moved from Australian territory without their government's consent and that Australia had the right to veto the use of its troops in operations that it deemed inadvisable. The commanders of Australia's three services also had the right to communicate freely with their own government even though they were MacArthur's subordinates.

Australia's impotence at higher levels of war planning contrasted sharply with its own governmental flurry after the Japanese attacks in December. In fact Australia's military leaders had looked to the reinforcement and defence of their own territory long before the Japanese made their moves, Mackay's appointment as General Officer, Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces on 5 August 1941 beginning this task. An order of battle for the A.I.F. and A.M.F. in mid-January 1942 reveals that N.S.W. had 105,200 troops, Victoria 82,750, Queensland 35,800, South Australia 20,400, Tasmania 12,450 and Western Australia 14,300 totalling 270,900. Darwin, which had remained under frequent

air attack following the 19 February bombing, was reinforced with two brigades, mainly militia and some American. About the time of the 7th Division's homecoming more Americans arrived in Australia bringing the army total to 400,000. Then in early April the American 41st Division arrived, followed by the 32nd in mid-May. Blamey, who was then Commander-in-Chief of Australian Military Forces (A.M.F.) as well as Commander of Allied Ground Forces (under MacArthur), had an army which comprised his three A.I.F. divisions (6, 7 and 9) eight Home Forces and the two American divisions. Of the A.I.F. 110,337 were in Australia, 35,622 were still in the Middle East, 584 were in the United Kingdom, 12,417 were in Ceylon and 5,156 were at sea. An additional 3,000 were stationed between New Caledonia, Port Moresby and Portuguese Timor. (113)

While some Australian leaders had predicted the confrontation with Japan the ~~war was for most Australians~~ ^{early part of the war was} Europe-centred ~~until~~ ^{before} the Japanese attacks in the Pacific. This attitude was perhaps even more evident among those who left their country in early 1940 to spend the following three years in the Middle East with the British Army and other empire troops. In letters and diaries however 2/2 men reveal little about their interest in politics or the war's progress. The concerns of most during the period from Greece until their departure from the Middle East were those things that affected them directly in their daily lives. What mattered most were changes in group living and basic creature comforts. Indeed the men filled the pages of their

113. D. McCarthy, op.cit., pp.133 for details of reinforcements for Australia's defence and D. Horner, op.cit., pp.141-167 (Ch.7) for defence policy decisions.

letters with battalion routine, the numbers of letters which they either wrote or received and what they had done on leave. But Greece, Crete and the imprisonment of many were turning points for some. By mid-1941 many men were receiving letters from the parents of those listed as 'missing in action'. As always the soldier's letters to those in Australia sought to reassure them of his own well-being and of an optimistic outcome for the missing. A growing awareness of the war's realities also made it increasingly harder for some to suppress a sense of estrangement from home and disillusionment with the war in general. In June 1941 Ernie Osbourne, then of Headquarters Company, wrote to female relatives after his arrival in Palestine from Crete:

Well Joan we have lost George ... I can't say how ... but he has been posted missing and probably prisoner-of-war ... so you can see how worried we have been and another thing we wrote home [telling] them he was with us and it will come out in the papers back home [that] he is missing ... so what will be the best for us to do.

A few weeks later he wrote again to say that there was no further news of George noting that he and the Kempsey boys were only 'blown up once or twice' for sending the misleading cable: 'we can't worry about that because we have worries of our own and pray for his safety. We are all O.K. Tommie, Frank, Johnny, Nugget and I'.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

Eventually some of the 'missing in action' turned up bringing relief for friends and reassuring news of others. In mid-September Smithers wrote to his mother about Reg Burgoyne's escape from Crete: 'he was able to tell us about most of the chaps from our coy. who had been reported missing and we were relieved to hear they were practicly [sic] all alive and well and prisoners of war'.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The disasters in

114. Osbourne letter, 14 June 1941.

115. Smithers letter, 16 September 1941.

Greece and Crete also made others more conscious of their own survival. In October Osbourne wrote to his father about his transfer to a Railway Construction Company telling him: 'not regretted one minute of it. Yes, I learned a lesson and not frightened to admit it ... I am now on the right track for a return ticket'. Then on 7 December his thoughts were not on the Japanese attacks in the Pacific but on how to get a memorial notice inserted in the Macleay Chronicle for his friend Gordon Dixon who died at Bardia. As well his mother and sister were to arrange for a wreath to be placed at the Cenotaph in Sydney. (116)

While some A.I.F. correspondence of late 1941 reveals a waning interest in the 'so-called cradle of civilization',⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Others continued to write enthusiastically of sightseeing and shopping in places such as Cairo and Damascus. Most however devoted much of their letters to thanking people for gifts and detailing what had been bought for those at home. In one letter Smithers thanked his mother for a parcel 'containing the socks made by Mrs Ford's sister and the mittens from Owen's mother', noting that 'the opening of parcels is a big event in the Army' and whenever one arrives 'everybody crowds around to see what is in it and offers to lend a hand to open it'. In September 1941 he wrote:

That malt you sent is very welcome, I generally have some each meal. I wore mittens in action at Bardia and again in Greece and now that the cold weather is coming on again it looks like I might wear them in action again. They are very handy as we can

116. Osbourne letter, 3 October and 7 December 1941.

117. See especially A.W.M. 54, Written Records War 1939-1945, DRL 6372, Personal records in respect of Private James Kenneth Atock, 2/7 Bn. A.I.F. Served in Libya, Greece and Crete. Taken P.O.W. Killed 13 July 1941. The collection comprises three parts 1) letters from Atock to mother, 2) letters to Mrs Atock when son was reported missing, 3) letters of sympathy to Mrs Atock when son's death known some seven months later.

handle our weapons with them on whereas we would have to take gloves off. I received 2 scarves in Lysaghts parcels and I still have the balaclavas Laurie knitted for me and which I wore in Greece, so I am well prepared fr the cold weather. I would like an indelible pencil (for marking my clothes and equipment) in the next parcel you send and sweets of any description are always welcome. (118)

Far more difficult to assess is the effect that the regrouping period had on the unit as a whole. What is clear though is that Greece and Crete saw the passing of the original battalion ending an era in the unit's experience. Defeat also eroded both the enthusiasm and confidence which the North African victories inspired. Up until Greece the battalion stood for unity and success, hard won by the long training in Palestine. Greece and Crete revealed that Allied invincibility was barely a veneer and that failure in battle had dire consequences. The 2/2, as one of those most affected by the 6th Division's disintegration, could not escape the period of let-down and disorganisation which followed.

Low morale and uncertainties over future roles exacerbated social tensions in the unit but especially at the time of the largest intake of reinforcements. Significantly this occurred as the men left an established theatre of war for a new one. Undoubtedly 'originals' never felt the same about the post-Greece battalion, nostalgia always peppering their memories of the North African and Mediterranean campaigns. The various camps in Palestine, Egypt and Syria also held a special place in memories. For those who went to Europe as prisoners the pre-Greece battalion was all they ever knew, and as most were 'originals', their identification with the 2/2 after the war was to be especially poignant.

118. Smithers letter, 21 September 1941.

Most however were new men who had not seen action and perhaps the 16th Brigade diarist was referring to these when he wrote:

The opportunity for which the Bde has been waiting ... may soon be realised. Many ... personnel had recently expressed their wish to return home for a short period of leave and then be given the opportunity to meet an enemy which constitutes a more immediate threat to their shores. (119)

CHAPTER SIX

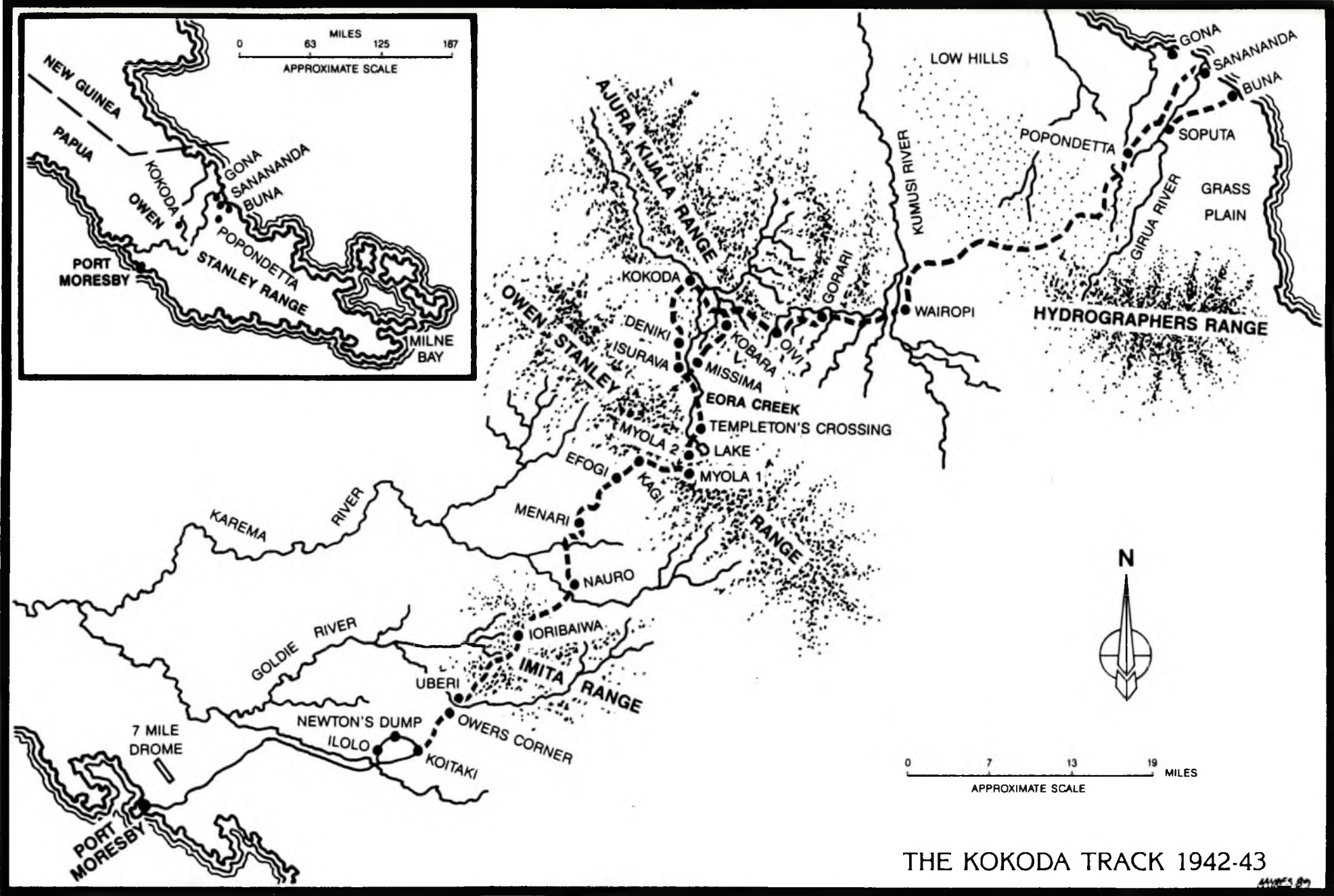
THE PAPUAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1942

The 2/2 left Australia in September 1942 to join the six week old fighting in Papua. The unit's arrival, along with that of others of the 16th (2/1, 2/2 and 2/3 Battalions) and 25th (2/25, 2/31 and 2/33 Battalions) A.I.F. Brigades, marked the beginning of the campaign's sixth phase, a counteroffensive in which the Australians climbed back over the Owen Stanley Range while the American 32nd Division (126, 127 and 128 Regiments) advanced from the south-east on the enemy's bases at Buna and Gona.⁽¹⁾

The brigade's deployment, both then as part of Major-General A.S. (Tubby) Allen's Australian 7th Division, was Allied command's response to increasing pressure on Port Moresby by both land and sea. About six weeks earlier, when the enemy first landed on the northern coast at Buna and Gona, command had sent two A.I.F. brigades from south Queensland: the 18th (2/9, 2/10 and 2/12 Battalions) and 21st (2/14, 2/16 and 2/27 Battalions), the former joining Allied forces at Milne Bay, the latter reinforcing the 30th militia Brigade (39th, 49th and 53rd Battalions) most of which was retreating from Kokoda in the Owen Stanley Range.

1. The following details are from D. McCarthy, South West Pacific Area First Year: Kokoda to Wau, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, Chs 4-7, pp.108-254; G. Johnston, War Diary 1942, William Collins Australia, 1984, . Excellent introduction by David Horner, pp.1-6; V. Austin, To Kokoda and Beyond: The Story of the 39th Battalion 1941-1943, Melbourne University Press, 1988, Chs. 3-7, pp.53-161. J. Robertson, Australia At War 1939-1945, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1981, Ch.16, pp.138-149.



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The reversal in Japanese fortunes, which occurred as the 16th and 25th Brigades entered the fighting, turned the tables in the Papuan campaign. On 9 September when Brigadier K.W. Eather's 25th arrived in Port Moresby, two weeks ahead of Brigadier J.E. Lloyd's 16th, it went immediately into the range and was well along the Kokoda Track at Menari when the latter began its journey. Unbeknown to the Allies General Horii had received orders on 18 September demanding that his Nankai Shitai (South Seas Force) make a fighting withdrawal to the Buna, Sanananda and Gona beaches. The enemy, who faced scarce and ever-dwindling supplies because of the diversion of resources to Guadalcanal, pulled back from Ioribaiwa Range on 26 September. Notwithstanding their about-turn the Japanese engaged their pursuers in a series of bitter actions at various points along the range before reaching their well-defended beach-head. The Australians, who also had supply problems, nonetheless followed their opponents into the swampy, coastal plains after a 2/31 platoon occupied Kokoda without a fight on 2 November. Just as the Allies were anticipating victory strong Japanese resistance at the coast forced them to increase their fighting strength. The Australian 21st and 30th Brigades rejoined the campaign along with units of the American 32nd Division.

When enemy resistance ended finally on 23 January 1943 the six months of fighting had exacted a high price from all. Of the 20,000 Japanese soldiers sent to Papua 13,000 died compared with the 3,005 deaths of 33,000 Allied troops. Of 6,500 Australian casualties 2,165 were deaths, of which more than half occurred at the beaches. Of 2,000 American casualties 930 died. (2)

Historians agree that vital strategic errors at the highest levels of SWPA command affected the fighting in Papua adversely.⁽³⁾ According to Horner MacArthur first expressed his dissatisfaction with the campaign's progress in early September, telling his Washington superiors that the Japanese were better jungle fighters than the Australians. He repeated his concern to Curtin on 17 September persuading him in a secret telephone conversation to send Blamey from his headquarters in Brisbane to Port Moresby but Blamey's presence in New Guinea created much controversy. On 28 September he stripped Lieutenant-General Sydney Rowell of his post as commander of all forces in New Guinea, replacing him with Lieutenant-General Edmund Herring. The incident, which had Blamey and Rowell airing their differences bitterly in the public domain, remains one of the most controversial in Australian military history, for as many saw it, Rowell's dismissal resulted from concern over the strategy which ultimately brought about the enemy's first land defeat of the war at Milne Bay on 6 September.⁽⁴⁾ American marines however covet this claim for their victory over the Japanese at Bloody Ridge on Guadalcanal seven days later.⁽⁵⁾

3. ibid., Ch.16, pp.138-149; Also D. Horner, Crisis in Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat 1941-1943, ANU Press, Canberra, 1978; D. Horner, High Command Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, Ch.9, especially pp.215-221 and J. Robertson and J. McCarthy, Australian War Strategy: A Documentary History 1939-1945, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985, pp.357-380.

4. D. Horner, op.cit., (High Command) pp.215-221.

5. C.J. O'Brien, a retired Marine Corps captain and combat correspondent, first drew my attention to this point. See also C.J. O'Brien, 'Bougainville: Then and Now', Leatherneck: Magazine of the Marines, Vol.LXXII, No.10, pp.7-10. Author served in rifle company in Bougainville and covered American operations in Guam and Iwo Jima as correspondent. S.E. Morison, The Struggle For Guadalcanal August (Cont. over)

Then at the end of October Blamey relieved Allen of his 7th Division command, in similar circumstances to those of the Rowell dismissal. In Allen's place Blamey appointed Major-General George Vasey. The former's removal at a vital stage of the fighting followed a complaint from MacArthur about the slow advance in the mountains. Allen emphasised in his reply to Blamey that only those who were in the field could understand the difficulties. Ironically, as was the case for Rowell, Allen retired from the fighting just as his troops were achieving the results that MacArthur demanded.

Much also has been written of Australian unpreparedness in New Guinea and its influence on both the command and execution of the fighting.⁽⁶⁾ Historians apportion equal blame to MacArthur and Blamey for their misreading of the enemy's overland advance but single out the Australian for his poor judgements about Port Moresby. Blamey repeatedly ignored advice which urged a significant reinforcement of the garrison and the appointment of more able leadership. Prominent among the general's advisers was Frederick Shedden, Defence Department Secretary and a member of the Advisory War Council. In late September 1942 in a report on Australia's policy towards Port Moresby Shedden concluded that the Army had been remiss about reinforcing 'such a vital place'⁽⁷⁾ with militia rather than A.I.F. troops.

5. (Cont.)

1942 - February 1943: History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol.V, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1975, p.130 writes that it was 'one of the crucial ground actions of the Pacific War'.

6. See especially D. Horner, op.cit., D. McCarthy, op.cit., R. Paull, Retreat from Kokoda, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1958.

7. D. Horner, High Command, p.217.

Poor military judgements reflected the ignorance of many about New Guinea. Prior to the Pacific War Australians generally, and for that matter the rest of the world, knew very little of the large island which archaeologists now believe has been inhabited for 30,000 years, possibly 50,000.⁽⁸⁾ In 1939 much of New Guinea was as it had been before the advent of European explorers, missionaries and commercial traders. In fact inland exploration which began in the late nineteenth century occurred in the Central Highlands as late as the 1930s. Previously colonial control extended from ten to forty miles inland with borders running through an unexplored interior, which many assumed uninhabitable because of the huge mountain chains extending the island's entire length. As the recently published First Contact reveals such widespread ignorance led to many fanciful accounts. Perhaps the most outlandish was that of the French sailor, Tregance, who in 1876 sold an unsuspecting publisher an incredible story of his journey through inland New Guinea, and his escape from cannibals on the northern coast. More than fifty years later two Australian gold prospectors, Mick and Dan Leahy, proved the seaman's notions wrong but European perceptions of an exotic but barbaric New Guinea proved hard to erase.⁽⁹⁾ And while piecemeal information worked to exaggerate pre-war perceptions William Stanner observed in 1953 that some 'drawing-room pioneers [tended to underemphasise] the natural savagery of the New Guinea scene'.⁽¹⁰⁾

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8. The Macquarie Illustrated World Atlas, Macquarie Library, Sydney, 1984, pp.221-225.
 9. B. Connolly and R. Anderson, First Contact: New Guinea Highlanders Encounter the Outside World, Viking Penguin, Melbourne, 1987, Ch.1, pp.1-18. The authors' documentary by the same name which used footage of the Leahy brothers' films of their meeting with the Highlanders was nominated for an Academy Award in 1984.
 10. Cited in D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.41.

The 2/2 heard of its move to New Guinea on 9 September while some troops were still on homecoming leave.⁽¹¹⁾ After a hurried preparation for what was for some a second overseas departure in less than three years the troops travelled by train from Sydney to Brisbane. Then on the 13th their American troopship, the John Steele, sailed down the Brisbane River, docking in Port Moresby eight days later. The men spent a few days around the town before travelling to Koitaki Plantation some 22 miles north on the Sogeri plateau. There the unit took over from the 36th Battalion of the 14th militia Brigade which then left for Uberi, a point on the southern side of Imita Range, to relieve the 21st Brigade's 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions. Then on 4 October the 2/2 left Koitaki for Newton's Dump via Ilolo. From there it marched to Owers Corner setting out along the Kokoda Track a day behind its 16th Brigade Headquarters and the 2/3 Battalion but two days ahead of the 2/1.

The 2/2's journey through the mountains to country in the vicinity of Kokoda took four weeks, the march to the coast just as long again. And while the unit's trek along the now well-defined course of the Kokoda Track etched place names on the memories of participants forever, many place names themselves passed into oblivion with the ending of the war and Papua New Guinean independence in 1975. As well, while many contemporaries knew the names of the various

11. The details for 2/2 movements and other statistics are from H. McCammon and C. Hodge, 'The Kokoda Trail', and J. Dunlop, 'The Sanananda Track', both in A.J. Marshall (ed.) Nulli Secundus Log, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion Association, Sydney, 1946, pp.81-98; S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978, (First published 1977) Ch.8, pp.213-264; D. McCarthy, op.cit., pp.254-335. Also AWM 52, 8/2/16, War Diary 16th Brigade HQ, September-December 1942 (16th Brigade War Diary) and AWM 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, September-December 1942 (2/2 War Diary).

staging posts and battle areas, almost as household names, either through personal correspondence or press notoriety, confusion exists in sources, both official and other, regarding accuracy in spelling and other details.

The unit's first port of call was Uberi at the base of the 3,000 foot Imita Ridge, which the troops climbed and descended on the following day using its massive wooden stairway, the so-called 'Golden Stairs'. On 6 October they climbed Ioribaiwa Range staying at Camp 88 that night before moving on the next morning to Nauro, one of the many areas used by Allied aircraft for the dropping of supplies, the planes being known popularly then as 'biscuit bombers'. After resting for a day the troops went on to Menari where Eather had his headquarters and where Allen visited the unit. Next the men made the ascent to Efogi before reaching the flattened, dry lake area, Myola, which had the route's best dropping ground, a good water supply and suitable conditions for medical evacuations.

From Myola onwards the unit engaged the enemy at regular intervals. On 20 October at Templeton's Crossing - named for a deceased 39th Battalion officer and soaring at its highest peak to 7,500 feet - the 2/2 led a 16th Brigade attack on the crossing while at the same time relieving three 25th Brigade units (2/25, 2/33 and the attached 3rd militia Battalion) which had engaged the enemy a few days previously. The unit had 17 killed (including three officers) and more than 30 wounded. The unit's first casualties had occurred on the preceding day when 9 and 11 Platoons were on reconnaissance patrols.

After leaving Templeton's Crossing as 16th Brigade's reserve battalion the unit followed the other two down the precipitous path to Eora Creek. Then on the 23rd the 2/1 opened an attack on heavily

defended positions at the main Eora Creek crossing. Five days later when the 2/3 took over from the 2/1 Major I. Hutchinson led both his own men and a 2/2 company under Captain Bruce Brock in an attack on the enemy's right flank. On the following day the 2/1 and 2/3 forced enemy elements off Eora Ridge ending resistance at that point on the track. The 2/2 had another 17 killed and up to 20 or more wounded.

Leaving Eora Creek the unit made its next camp at Alola. At the Alola junction the 16th Brigade took the right hand track taking the troops towards Abuari, Missima and Oivi. The 25th went to the left in the direction of Isurava, Deniki and Kokoda. After passing through Kali and Siga and making the 3,000 foot descent into the Yodda Valley 2/2 troops settled at Kobara. There they heard news of the 2/31's occupation of Kokoda. Then following a few days respite from enemy activity the unit engaged in perhaps its fiercest action when it followed the 2/3 into an enemy stronghold at Oivi, fighting for six to seven days before the Japanese withdrew. At the same time the 25th Brigade with the 2/1 attached to it secured Gorari.

After resting at Gorari for two days the troops began their seven day march to Sanananda. Crossing the Kumusi River at Wairopi on 15 November they headed for their destination but weariness compelled the troops to stop at Popondetta four days later, handing over to the American 126 Regiment. When the 2/2 resumed the journey it moved off with the 2/3 with orders to relieve the 2/1 which had engaged the enemy with heavy losses on the Sanananda Track. While unit sources are unclear for individual statistics at Oivi and Sanananda the 16th Brigade diarist's census of 22 November shows that it had a further ten killed and up to 50 or more wounded after leaving Eora Creek. Later in the campaign the unit lost two company commanders, D Company's Jack Blamey, who died as a result of stray American mortar

fire and C Company's, A.K. Bosgard, who died from enemy fire as he guided reserve platoon men to their positions at Sanananda. The bombing of the 2/4 Field Ambulance's dressing station at Soputa on 27 November also killed four of the unit's wounded.

Like most other 16th and 25th Brigade units the 2/2 was under strength on its arrival in New Guinea having 33 officers and 637 other ranks (178 below establishment). The Left Out of Battle (L.O.B.) personnel and some carrier and mortar men who stayed behind reduced the actual numbers of those going into the campaign to 26 officers and 528 other ranks. In early December, at the end of six to seven weeks of fighting and another four of waiting for relief, only 73 remained but even some of these were flown to Port Moresby with malaria before the unit's official evacuation from Popondetta on 18 December. In total the unit had 64 deaths including both those who died in action and those who died of wounds or other causes, 138 wounded and between 280 and 300 evacuated sick. (12)

Unlike previous campaigns the one in Papua took the Australians into a world which seemed to have little connection with their past experiences. And while veterans and novices alike recoiled at the strangeness of their new environment the former perceived most sharply the differences between Papua and other battlegrounds. In the Middle East the A.I.F. had trodden virtually in the footsteps of their fathers, and then in Greece and Crete, despite failure, they had

12. The establishment and casualty figures have been worked out by using those cited in S. Wick, Purple Over Green, pp.213-242, and D. McCarthy, op.cit. Sources vary on the number left in the unit at the very end of the campaign so the one cited by the acting commander, J. Dunlop, op.cit. p.98 is given.

fought as Anzacs and derived some satisfaction from linking themselves historically with the epic struggles of Western civilisation. In Papua however nothing was familiar and even though the men fought technically on Australian territory, closer to home than ever before, the country and its people were most alien to them. In Papua too the Australians faced for the first time an enemy who was not of the Western World and who was perceived then to come from the 'far east'.⁽¹³⁾ Also for the first time part of the 6th Division was under the command of another division and as well the A.I.F. had new fighting partners: their own militia, the Americans and 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels'.⁽¹⁴⁾

The nature of the fighting also differed in every respect from that done by the A.I.F. in North Africa, Greece, Crete and Syria. The grand deployment of massed bodies of men had no place in New Guinea.⁽¹⁵⁾ There actions rarely involved more than 20 to 30 men who met in sudden encounters. Jungle warfare also depended on 'intense and constant patrolling [and] whoever held the tracks held the ground'.⁽¹⁶⁾ This shift in tactical emphasis also brought platoon commanders to prominence. As Peter Charlton writes New Guinea was 'a war for and of the junior leaders': instead of the great tactical exercise of desert fighting there was 'a series of bloody struggles

13. See M. Barter, 'Images of A Revolution: Aspects of Western Newspaper Reporting During the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-1949', B.A. Hons. Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1978 for discussion of pre-war Western perceptions of Asia.
14. The sentimental name given to the carriers in Papua, and other parts of war-time New Guinea. Hank Nelson's film, 'Angels of War' looks at the war from the perspective of the carriers and others who assisted both the Allies and Japanese during the war.
15. D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.306.
16. S. Trigellis-Smith, All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5 Australian Infantry Battalion, 2/5 Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1988, p.192.

between frightened and sick men up and down a country of primitive terror'. (17)

Others saw the campaign as a struggle for all against 'relentless nature'. The Australian journalist, Osmar White, who accompanied Damien Parer, the photographer, on the Kokoda Track later wrote in Green Armour that New Guinea was where 'white men slipped and slithered, panted, plodded, sweated, bled, sickened, dropped and died in a sodden and crinkled hell of mountain, forest and swamp'. (18):

If much of [the book's] space is devoted to observations on the nature of the country in which battles were fought and comparatively little to the descriptions of battles themselves then that is because the margins of South-East Asia, in terms of human experience, proportioned that way. (19)

Ironically Kokoda's inspired place in Australian war mythology belies what is known of the fighting. Indeed so powerful is Kokoda Track imagery, as exemplified in Parer's 'Kokoda Frontline', (20) that 'Kokoda' has come to represent in popular perceptions all the fighting in New Guinea in 1942. The names of many other battle places, both in the mountains and at the beaches, barely evoke recognition. Contemporary press reports created the impression, which persists to the present, even in a recent publication for school children, (21)

17. P. Charlton, The Thirty-niners, The Macmillan Company, Melbourne, 1981, p.229.

18. A. Walker, The Island Campaigns (Vol III of Official History Australian Army Medical Corps), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957, p.15.

19. O. White, Green Armour, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1945, p.25.

20. The Academy Award winning documentary shown in Sydney as early as beginning September 1942. Parer was killed in action on 17 September 1944 while filming American troops in operations on Peleliu Island east of the Philippines.

21. See M. Browne, The Kokoda Campaign, Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1985. For an examination of contemporary newspaper accounts see G.F. Brown, 'Kokoda: Myth and Reality', B.A. Hons. Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1971. Also A.D. Robertson, 'Problems of Supply

that the Australians halted the Japanese invasion of Australia in the Owen Stanley Range in one of the decisive battles of the Pacific War. In the fifties McCarthy, and others, left no doubt as to the realities of the fighting and the extent of official bungling. Such evidence however did not counter the heroic sentimentality which long before the war ended attached itself to the name 'Kokoda'.⁽²²⁾ Lesser known aspects are that the Japanese defeat was wrought by superior Allied resources, particularly in the air, and that only one ^{Australian} infantry unit, the 39th militia, actually fought the Japanese at Kokoda itself.

Unit histories were unusually candid presenting a far less heroic picture of participants than was evident in previous campaigns. One of the best, The Fightsoldiers, portrayed vividly the shame and terror many had felt for much of the campaign. Others were even more blunt. As the historian of the 55th/53rd militia Battalion, part of which had been removed from the fighting as unfit for action, wrote:

The Kokoda Trail became world famous for many reasons but will always be remembered by the 53rd ... as the place where they were made the scapegoats for the many and varied mistakes ... [of] many and varied people.⁽²³⁾

For its part the 2/2 had little to say about individual experiences in Papua. In 1946 Hugh McCammon and Charlie Hodge thought that 'it would waste space to talk of the discomforts and trials of the early days on the track'. Instead they concentrated on the unit's

21. (Cont.)

Encountered by the Australian and Japanese Forces on the Kokoda Trail and the Question of Morale', B.A. Hons. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1973.

22. D. McCarthy, op.cit., R. Paull, op.cit., and O. White, op.cit., to name the most influential.

23. W. Crooks, The Fightsoldiers: The Story of the 2/33 Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., in the War of 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1971 and E.M. Budden, That Mob: The Story of the 55th/53rd Australian Infantry Battalion, F.M. Budden, Sydney, 1973.

role in various actions drawing on two 1944 A.B.C. radio interviews with two of its members. Writing of Sanananda in the same publication John Dunlop had difficulty defining the unit's role explaining that although it 'had nothing spectacular to perform [what it did was] as fine as anything it had done or is likely to do'. Later the unit's expanded history failed to enlarge the perspective of earlier accounts relying heavily instead on McCarthy's official volume for its story. (24)

Perhaps the virtual absence of letters and diaries led to the veterans' reliance on established evidence. But it is also clear from interviews that for many New Guinea was an extremely difficult subject to impart to those at home. Even to the present veterans are hesitant to speak of their experiences and for those who do it is painful revelation. Many, like the mortar-platoon sergeant, Carl Parrott, recalled that New Guinea was a 'great shock ... [and] something not easily compared with what had gone before'. (25) George Caling, who was promoted to sergeant before Papua, thought that the war in the desert was 'fun' but then spoke more gravely of New Guinea, admitting that a recurring nightmare for him was of his first action in the Owen Stanley Range. (26) Jack Smithers, who kept a meticulous diary up until New Guinea, loaned a 1943 Smith's Weekly article to the author explaining that it would 'show ... exactly what we suffered'. (27)

Contemporary sources, however scarce, confirm the veterans' long-held impressions. In February 1943 Roy Waters had been in three campaigns when he wrote a 50 page account of 'The Kokoda Trail' for

24. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.81; J. Dunlop, op.cit., p.93; S. Wick, op.cit., pp.213-264.

25. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983 (Parrott interview).

26. G. Caling, interview, Canberra, 18 April 1982 (Caling interview).

27. J. Smithers, interview, Newcastle, 9 June 1983 and 'The Buna Trail', Smith's Weekly, February 1943, (Smith's Weekly).

his mother. He told her that the unit's 11 weeks in Papua were 'the toughest any human being had been asked to endure'.⁽²⁸⁾ The Australian journalist, George Johnston, who covered events in Papua from February to December, mainly from Port Moresby, also observed in his diary that A.I.F. veterans had told him that New Guinea was 'a hundred times worse than anything they've been through before' and that it was the 'toughest battlefield in the world'.⁽²⁹⁾

While much is now known of the present Papua New Guinea's dramatic topography and variable tropical climate, before the war maps were virtually non-existent and other knowledge scant.⁽³⁰⁾ According to McCarthy all that was known of the Owen Stanley Range - named for the nineteenth century British explorer - was that it ran down the centre of Papua having 8,000 to 9,000 foot peaks in the middle as well as some of 13,000 to 14,000 feet. Lieutenant H.J. Kienzle, a miner and planter of the Yodda Valley, was one of a few in the territory with intimate knowledge of the country between Iloilo and Kokoda. Such ignorance led to many inaccurate descriptions of Kokoda's location when the Japanese invaded, many referring to the fighting area as the 'Kokoda Pass' or 'the Gap'. But the imagined space was really the lowering of the mountain silhouette where the valley of Eora Creek cut into the Yodda Valley south of Kokoda. At the place itself there was

28. R.S.M. Waters, letter loaned to the author after 2/2 Battalion Association's annual reunion at Newcastle in November 1984. The letter bears the title 'The Kokoda Trail' and is actually dated February 1942 (Waters letter).

29. G. Johnston, *op.cit.*, p.98.

30. *The Macquarie Illustrated World Atlas*, *op.cit.*, pp.221-224 and D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, especially Ch.2 pp.34-83.

an administration post, a rubber plantation and the only aerodrome in Papua between Port Moresby and the northern coast.

The Kokoda Track, which was also known to straggle the entire range, was considered by an air-conscious, expatriate population as being passable to only its inhabitants and trained district officers. The track, which became a 'trail'⁽³¹⁾ to many through the influence of the American press, stretched via a network of other tracks from points on the northern coast, such as Buna, Sanananda and Gona, to Owers Corner in the south. The probably ancient pathway followed the rise and fall of the mountains contrasting in its development with modern constructions which rely on surveying in terms of levels. Significantly too a foot journey from the northern coast to Kokoda took the climber along tracks which led gradually to an elevation of 1500 feet whereas the same journey from Port Moresby posed far greater difficulties.

Travelling conditions were primitive even before the men reached the mountains. ^{According to contemporary intelligence sources,} the only sealed road before mid-1942 was the one from Port Moresby to Koitaki.* From there it became a track which then deteriorated steadily until it became a 'trail' beyond Uberi. So circuitous was its course that it turned a straight-line journey of 100 miles into a gruelling trek of 145 track miles. Travellers also replaced the concept of distance with that of 'walking time' and each person's 'walking time' in the Owen Stanley Range, and elsewhere in New Guinea, varied according to individual capacity and condition. Before the war an expatriate crossing the mountains carried only a

31. D. McCarthy, op.cit., refers to the Kokoda Track. V. Austin, op.cit., p.81, is the only unit historian, as far as the author is aware, to make this point. As he wrote 'the term ... was coined by an American journalist in Port Moresby and was widely used in newspaper accounts of the Owen Stanleys Campaign. But for the troops the 'Trail' was the 'Track'. G. Johnson, op.cit., refers always to 'the Track' in his text. * See footnote 32.

stick and a firearm as carriers took his supplies. A heavily laden foot-soldier, unaccustomed to the rugged conditions, took about three times as long as the pre-war civilian. Those travelling times also increased when he moved tactically through an area, when there were food shortages, or when he was ill. (32)

Eloquent descriptions of the Kokoda Track exist but as William Crooks observed in 1971 their poetry and excitement seem far removed from the men's memories of their own ignorance and misery at the time. (33) The Assistant Director General of Medical Services, Dr F. Kingsley Norris, whose teams erected shelters every seven to ten miles along the route, wrote one of the best accounts despite his belief that the track defied description. In a much-quoted section of his campaign summary he shows how battle conditions greatly exacerbated the contrasts between the jungle's splendours and its gloomier aspects. As the men climbed through the unmarked territory always fearing the enemy's presence they also had to contend with the stench of decaying corpses, both those of humans and horses, as well as that of rotting food and human excreta. The climatic variations over quite short distances because of varying altitudes also increased discomforts. The torrential rains which fell at midday or during the night reduced level areas to 'puddles of putrid black mud' while in the high ridges mist and rain created a 'foetid forest grotesque with moss and glowing phosphorescent'. (34)

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32. British Naval Intelligence Division Geographic Handbooks, (Pacific Islands Section), Vol. IV, Western Pacific London, 1945, pp.104-5. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.50. and S. Wick, op.cit., p.208 for map illustrating 'walking times Kokoda Trail'.
33. For perhaps the best and most comprehensive description of the Kokoda Track see D. McCarthy, South West Pacific First Year, pp.108-110.
34. AWM 52, 11/1/19, War Diary, Assistant Director Medical Services, 7th Australian Division, January 1943 (Medical War Diary).

When the track left the mountains it branched out into various subsidiaries, winding through forty miles of lowlands to the Buna-Sanananda-Gona beachhead, country Blamey described as 'about as vile ... as any that exists'.⁽³⁵⁾ Although undeveloped in present Papua New Guinea Buna was before the war a government station, Gona an Anglican mission. The country was essentially swampland, comprising mangrove swamps near the sea and sago palm farther inland, as well as having extensive patches of sharp, shoulder-high kunai grass. While boggy tracks criss-crossed the entire region the only proper road ran about twelve miles inland from Sanananda to Popondetta where better drainage allowed the construction of an air-field. During the wet season the first four miles of road leading out from Sanananda became an 'impassable quagmire'.⁽³⁶⁾

The enemy's coastal defences rendered the natural conditions even worse. Within a clearly defined perimeter some 9,000 enemy troops, including 4,000 reinforcements of October/November, defended a section of what Blamey again called 'this filthy low country of the coastal plains'.⁽³⁷⁾ The Japanese fortification system which was in position as early as September consisted of hundreds of bunkers dotted around a triangular-shaped perimeter of which the base stretched some twelve miles along the coast from Gona in the west to Cape Endaiadere (Buna) in the east. The triangle's apex was the junction of two tracks, the Sanananda and Killerton, situated some four miles inland from Cape Killerton. The Japanese made the bunkers from foot-thick interlaced coconut logs which they reinforced with sheet iron and oil drums, the

35. Cited in J. Robertson and J. McCarthy, op.cit., p.373.

36. S. and L. Briggs, The 36th Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945: The Story of an Australian Infantry Battalion and its Part in the War Against Japan, St Georges English Rifle Regt. Association, Sydney, 1970, p.28

37. J. Robertson and J. McCarthy, op.cit., p.376.

latter being filled with earth and sand. The bunkers were impervious to small-arms fire and sometimes even bombardment. To detect them was also extremely difficult as earth, rocks, palm fronds and quick growing vegetation obscured them thoroughly even from a few yards. Ironically too the malarial infestation of the area provided the enemy with a natural barricade.⁽³⁸⁾

Even though a move to New Guinea was more than a slight possibility for the 2/2 in August/September 1942 its sudden deployment came as a 'distinct shock', and with 'none of the excitement usually attendant on a move of this Bn.'⁽³⁹⁾ Waters told his mother that when the men stood on parade at Wallgrove Camp in Sydney to hear 'what was doing from the C.O.' their feelings were mixed. There was also 'feverish activity as we prepared to leave our land again'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The 16th Brigade's farewell from Brisbane was also more sober than that from Sydney in January 1940. Instead of crowds of cheering well-wishers the troops faced striking wharf labourers who were demanding overtime pay for loading ships after midnight. When they boarded the 10,000 ton cargo ship, the John Steele, the men had few comforts, sleeping on planks in the open holds.⁽⁴¹⁾ The 16th Brigade diarist, who shared their berth, noted that even though conditions were poor 'no one to date has been heard to express anything but jocular remarks'.⁽⁴²⁾ Expressing some ambivalence however Waters told his mother that he and his friends were 'very silent and deep in

38. V. Austin, *op.cit.*, pp.189-190.

39. 2/2 War Diary, 8 September 1942.

40. Waters letter.

41. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, p.81.

42. 16th Brigade War Diary, 13 September 1942.

thought' as the ship sailed down the Brisbane River and that out at sea that night they 'settled down with heavy hearts and morale high'.⁽⁴³⁾

Townsville was the ship's only port of call and the troops missed seeing the Great Barrier Reef islands because of heavy rain. On entering enemy waters the vigilance for air attacks prompted Waters to write '... but let them come. Hadn't we beat the Jerries in Greece and Crete and these Yellow B--- couldn't frighten us'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Echoing similar sentiments the 16th Brigade diarist noted that most on board

... philosophically accepted that we have a nut to crack, but there is no indication that it ... [will be] a harder nut than Greece and Crete ... One heartening indication is that all are anxious to 'get there' and try for themselves this much vaunted 'Jap' and although not underestimating his prowess and success as a jungle fighter, at least placing themselves on par with him and betting on themselves to win.⁽⁴⁵⁾

New Guinea at first sight greatly disheartened the Australians. When their ship entered the harbour and approached its only wharf the men saw the half-submerged Macdhui, a casualty of Japanese bombing. As Waters wrote: 'the boys crowded the rails to see this front line of Aussie. The Tobruch of the pacific [sic] ... what a sight greeted us, here was Port Moresby ... What a God-forsaken hole it looked ...',⁽⁴⁶⁾ McCammon and Hodge also observed that the 'gaunt, stark, uninviting, Pacific port' quickly dispelled romantic notions of 'swaying palms, dark beauties and soft sands'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Another surprise that night was Port Moresby 'ablaze with lights' baffling in particular those with long experience of black-out conditions in the

43. Waters letter.

44. ibid.

45. 16th Brigade War Diary, 14 September 1942.

46. Waters letter.

47. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.82.

Middle East.⁽⁴⁸⁾ An air-raid on the second night, while the men were at the Seven Mile Aerodrome, brought to life some of the rumours about the Japanese being spread by resident militia, the so-called 'Mice of Moresby'.⁽⁴⁹⁾

After the trip to Koitaki the diarist noted that the troops had had a 'rough' ride over roads which were in 'bad condition ... even primitive in places'.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Waters told his mother that he and friends were 'loaded into a big Yankee Boong's truck' for the trip to the plantation:

... passing out of Moresby over roads worse than any ever we had traversed. Dust, why it was Libya all over again ... we were amazed at the work which was going on ... Giant graders churning up new roads and Uncle Tom's boys toiling away reminded me of the Swanee River.⁽⁵¹⁾

The 2/2 say little about Koitaki but its topical setting was a 'welcome and interesting change' for the 36th Battalion after Port Moresby's heat and dust.⁽⁵²⁾ Waters remembered Koitaki for its 'beautiful water' and the 'Owen Stanley's [standing] out in the distance amid misty clouds'.⁽⁵³⁾

Unlike their predecessors, who wore khaki uniforms and accessories as well as slouch hats into the fighting, the counteroffensive troops dressed in green.⁽⁵⁴⁾ ~~while the 2/2 gives the~~

48. Waters letter.

49. The term was coined by militia men themselves, a sardonic reversal of the 9th Division's term 'Rats of Tobruk' given to them by Lord Haw Haw.

50. 2/2 War Diary, 25 September, 1942.

51. Waters letter.

52. S. and L. Brigg, op.cit., p.42.

53. Waters letter.

~~counteroffensive troops dressed in green.~~⁽⁵⁴⁾ While the 2/2 gives the impression that the distribution of new uniforms was straightforward Crooks wrote that the Australian Army Ordnance Corps dyed the uniforms in Sawyer stoves while 'one simply stripped naked, moved over to a Sawyer issue point dumped ones own khaki picked up equivalent sizes wet or dry and put them on'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The new slacks were American style with a front pocket in the left trouser leg for a field dressing and emergency ration. The men also traded their felt hats for steel helmets and over all wore a water-proof gas cape. Waters' only comment was that he and a friend Cec Fenn 'had some fun dying clothes which finished up well camouflaged indeed'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In 1989 Bruce Brock recalled that 'the dye poured [from his garments] as soon as they became wet'.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Other preparations included the selection of L.O.B. (Left Out of Battle) personnel. The concept, introduced after Greece and Crete, provided the unit with the nucleus of another in the event of heavy losses. L.O.B. personnel were to send stores and mail forward to the front line and to care for the wounded on their return to Port Moresby. The rest of the men spent their time working out the most suitable load to take into the range, and as each soldier had to carry his rifle with 50-100 rounds of ammunition and two grenades, toilet and other requisites were reduced drastically. Each soldier probably ended up carrying much of what McCarthy details for the 25th Brigade.

54. Details of the 2/2's preparations are from D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.244; S. Wick, op.cit., p.216; H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.82.

55. W. Crooks, op.cit., p.144.

56. Waters letter.

57. B. Brock, notes for the author, 11 April 1989. Brock wrote the 4,000 word account of his experiences on the Kokoda Track after reading a draft of this chapter. He died at the age of 82 in early May 1989 (Brock notes).

Items included five to six days of rations (both hard and emergency), half a blanket, a ground sheet, soap, toothbrush, half a towel, half a dixie and a water bottle. As well one shaving kit served three men.

The 2/3's Ken Clift claimed that every 16th Brigade man carried 90 lbs. on to the Kokoda Track but other estimates of 50 to 60 are more accurate. 2/1 men carried 'about but not less than 55 lbs' while Walker had the load for everyone at 54.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Waters worked out that those who had 'Tommy machine guns' (Thompson sub-machine)

... carried 10 box mags loaded each with twenty rounds of ammo. This [was] about 12 1/2 lb and with the gun of 10 ... was a fair load on its owner. Then again there was all the other gear half blanket, change clothes, dobbin, [sic] socks & our emergency rations and bully and biscuits. This you can see made up a load of about 60 lbs for all ranks. Not a bad effort for a white man when a boong carrier's load is only 40 ...⁽⁵⁹⁾

McCarthy agreed that 'the soldiers ... were generally more burdened than the carriers' but that the troops' situation improved when the efficiency of supply drops increased some time after 16th Brigade entered the campaign.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Whatever their respective loads fairly strict guidelines governed what the soldiers and carriers took on. The 25th's Brigade's carrier allotment, which probably differed little from that of the 16th, was 90 carriers for Headquarters and 40 for each battalion. In addition each carrier group had an Angau⁽⁶¹⁾ representative with it supervising

58. K. Clift, War Dance: The Story of the 2/3 Aust. Inf. Bn. 16 Brigade, 6 Division, P.M. Fowler and 2/3 Battalion Association, 1980, p.285; The First At War: The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Editorial Committee, The Association of First Infantry Battalions, 1987, pp.254-255, and A. Walker, op.cit., p.70.

59. Waters letter.

60. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.265.

61. Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit which operated throughout war providing welfare and legal services for the indigenous population.

work and guarding employment conditions. Generally the carriers relieved a unit of its heavy weapons and ammunition, its reserve ammunition, up to five loads of medical supplies, cooking utensils and its signal equipment comprising up to six telephones and six 108-wireless sets. Other equipment which they helped with when circumstances required included picks and axes (two for each unit) and machetes and spades (60 of each for each unit).

The carriers also assisted in the supply of the battalion from the forward dump area which was usually half a day's march to the rear. In times of action however the carrier's employment conditions interfered with his ability to carry supplies as they specified that he camp some two to three hours from the rear of the unit where he was not open to enemy attack. Also at such a distance his noise and campfire were out of the range of enemy detection. Nonetheless the fighting created added carrier responsibilities as each stretcher-patient required eight bearers or more to deliver him to the nearest dressing station, a journey usually requiring 12 to 14 hours.

Relieved of the unit's heavy armour and equipment the soldiers divided amongst themselves its normal stock of weapons. Each company had its assigned number of machine guns, bayonets and grenades as well as each unit having a three-inch mortar with 24 bombs and a Vickers machine gun with 3,000 rounds of ammunition. When carriers were available they took the three-inch mortar and bombs but at other times the mortar crew with the assistance of Headquarters Company men or men from other rifle companies carried them. The same applied to the Vickers machine gun and its two or three belts of ammunition. In each section the Bren gun was carried in turn by section members who also shared the carrying of its ten magazines. The gunners in each section carried the two sub-machine guns plus five magazines and 50 loose

rounds for each gun. The mortar men took the two-inch mortar which belonged to each platoon while the platoon members shared the 12 rounds of mortar ammunition.

A 2/2 legend born in Papua has to do with the unit's departure from Owers Corner. Battalion folklore has it that when the men left on 4 October MacArthur and an entourage of three Australian generals (Blamey, Herring and Allen) as well as the Minister for the Army, Mr F.M. Forde, farewelled them. As the story goes MacArthur on his first visit to New Guinea, arrived at Owers Corner as Lloyd and his brigade prepared for their climb. MacArthur is supposed to have told Lloyd: 'by some act of God your Brigade has been chosen for this job. The eyes of the western world are upon you. I have every confidence in you and your men. Good luck. And don't stop'.⁽⁶²⁾ While McCammon and Hodge wrote in 1946 that MacArthur's voice rang out 'in that eerie jungle away up at the jeephead ... confidently and reassuringly as though he were back home at Little Horse Rock, Arkansas'⁽⁶³⁾ it is likely that 2/2 troops missed seeing MacArthur at close range, if at all, for as we saw earlier they left Owers Corner a full day's march behind Lloyd and those who were with him.

Most accounts have MacArthur and his party at Owers Corner on 3 October. Having arrived in Port Moresby on the 2nd, he spent 'about an hour' at Owers Corner on the following day then left on the next not to return for the rest of the campaign. Johnston notes that when

62. Cited in D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.280.

63. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83; S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.216-217. The latter describes both the unit's departure on 4 October and MacArthur's visit on the preceding day without drawing attention to the discrepancy.

MacArthur arrived on the 2nd he had 'the roads from the seven-mile drome lined with American troops standing to attention ... fighters overhead and his car escorted by an armoured car with guns manned, and pointed everywhere!' Later that month Johnston recorded his anger over false news reporting in Papua:

... everybody is incensed at new censorship bans including MacArthur's personal censorship of Stone's [articles] on his visit here which have been slashed to ribbons to convey the impression (a) that he went right up to the front line (which he certainly did NOT) and (b) that this was NOT his first visit to New Guinea.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Waters, who failed to mention MacArthur's visit in his letter, probably best described the troops' departure despite his own technical errors:

Pulling out on Sunday the 5 Oct we headed for Owens [sic] Corner by truck which was as far as we could go by transport ... Leaving our truck at Newton's Hump [sic] we saddled up and hit the trail. Well was it hot that day. Perspiration ran riot and we were soon wringing wet up hill and down dale along a road the engineers were working on. Boy the going was tough till we ... warmed up spelling 10 min. to the hour we made good time ... Arriving at Owens Corner we had a brief spell watching the flying fox in action swinging supplies across the gorge to Uberi.

When the troops made camp that night their 'battle songs [filled] the air'.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Then on the next night a YMCA representative conducted a community sing at Camp 88.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Optimism faded however as conditions along the track became apparent. At Ioribaiwa from whence the Japanese withdrew the troops

64. See D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.250 and G. Johnston, op.cit., p.103 and 110.

65. Waters letter.

66. 2/2 War Diary, 5 October 1942.

found the abandoned equipment of the opposing armies and other telling evidence.

Lonely crosses marked the resting place of many an Aussie and unknown soldier. This started to bring the grim realities of war to the men who had not been through the mill but to the old hands it only made us more determined to kill or be killed.⁽⁶⁷⁾

The crosses on the crude graves carried a rough etching of the soldier's regimental number as well as his steel helmet. Flies were also a problem and sick men from 25th Brigade units, on their way back to Port Moresby, told advancing troops that dysentery and fever awaited them further up the track.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The unit diarist noted the camp's 'unhealthy state' and the padre's burial of an Australian soldier's corpse which had been found beside the track.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Rain and mud distinguished the men's journey from Owers Corner to Myola. Brock recounted that the previous occupying troops 'had churned the earth till it was almost like porridge [and] with the tenacity of glue', noting too that it 'soaked through the men's parts [sic] and clothes until they seemed to weigh a ton'.⁽⁷⁰⁾ According to the unit diarist incessant rain made the preparation of hot food and the erection of tents almost impossible.⁽⁷¹⁾ His 16th Brigade counterpart wrote of the 'wretched conditions' in which the mud clung knee-deep and the nights were extremely cold. Efogi, the camp before Myola, was a 'bleak spot high above the clouds with rain beating down'.⁽⁷²⁾ Of the same point on the track Waters wrote that it was 'wicked & often tortuous' and that he and others 'slipped and

67. Waters letter.

68. Smith's Weekly.

69. 2/2 War Diary, 9 October 1942.

70. Brock notes.

71. 2/2 War Diary, 13 October 1942.

72. 16th Brigade War Diary, 14 October 1942.

slithered along'. As well the 'numerous dead Japs who had been left unburied ... were on the nose and didn't improve the going'.⁽⁷³⁾

The Smith's Weekly diary noted that by the time the men reached Efogi they had spent hours climbing up steep and slippery grades which had no footholds:

[There is] a pile of men for miles some hundreds of feet above, others hundreds of feet below ... The track is deep with mud and in places men are lying at full length in an effort to regain their breath after a particularly hard pinch ... Half way up [one] hill we were above the clouds and the scenery was beautiful but we were too fatigued to appreciate it. A case of head down looking for the next safe foothold.⁽⁷⁴⁾

As they climbed even higher the men could look down on the summits of mountains they had already crossed.

[I] will never forget the climb to Efogi North - though not the steepest it was the most painful and over-tired and aching muscles just had to be driven. The physical strain had been unimaginable and yet here we were just travellers. We were to experience much worse a little later when we had to face the enemy.⁽⁷⁵⁾

The troops coped with the conditions in various ways. On top of Ioribaiwa Range, where 'everything was so soggy and rotten that 40 foot trees ... could be kicked over', some men '... too tired to sleep ... just sat in the rain and waited for dawn so they could start walking again'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Others slept in the nude rather than remain in wet clothes, for the climatic conditions severely tested the battalion's clothing: 'for days on end the continual saturation by

73. Waters letter.

74. Smith's Weekly.

75. Brock notes.

76. G. Johnston, op.cit., pp.92-93.

either sweat or rain means that the men are rarely dry'.⁽⁷⁷⁾ At a spot just before Ioribaiwa Brock managed to sleep on the 'vertical landscape' by making a 'small somewhat horizontal platform of thick mud' using his bayonet.⁽⁷⁸⁾ What impressed Waters was the men's parched mouths and their eyes stinging continually with perspiration because of the lack of water on the long, hard climbs. Many shaved their heads to counteract the heat generated by the steel helmets while some nailed bars to the soles of their boots to help them stand erect on the slippery tracks. One unit ran a 'two-bob sweep',⁽⁷⁹⁾ on the last man to make camp while most relied on their nearest companions to keep them going.

Supply problems however dominated everything in the campaign. Evidence that this was so for the enemy too was the discovery of both emaciated Japanese bodies and Australian corpses with strips of flesh missing from them. On 18 October 14 Platoon's commander, Geoff Coyle, wrote that while on patrol he saw some decomposed bodies, both of Australians and Japanese, the flesh appearing to have been 'mutilated by hungry animals'. 16th Brigade records show that 2/2 Intelligence personnel first reported Japanese cannibalism on 21 October.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Johnston had written a few days before that that the discovery of dismembered bodies and 'the remains wrapped in leaves was evidence that natives ... had reverted to cannibalism',⁽⁸¹⁾ but Japanese documents later revealed that it was enemy troops and not the local population. The diary of one enemy officer told of his troops, who were almost starving, digging in native gardens for yams and taro and

77. Smith's Weekly and 2/2 War Diary, September summary.

78. Brock notes.

79. Smith's Weekly.

80. 16th Brigade War Diary, 11 and 21 October 1942 and G. Coyle, diary on loan to author, 18 October 1942 (Coyle diary).

81. G. Johnston, op.cit., p.109.

eating roots and grass. Some even 'resorted to eating the flesh of dead Australians'.⁽⁸²⁾ And while the Australian supply position was better than that of their opponents it was still extremely difficult causing much hardship. In his October summary the diarist wrote that supplies lessened and became more erratic after Myola and that that combined with the terrible conditions made the campaign to date 'in every way the most strenuous' in the unit's history, trying 'the most robust ... troops'.⁽⁸³⁾

7th Division medical records confirm the diarist's impressions. Even men in peak condition suffered severely from the physical effort involved in the climbing. Lieutenant-Colonel F.N. Chenall, the commanding officer of the 2/6 Field Ambulance at Iloilo, recommended to his superiors after visiting medical posts in September that: 'only men in A1 condition be sent [forward] to fight under these conditions and that ... training in [Australia] be made harder'.⁽⁸⁴⁾ The 2/2's medical officer, A.E. ('Mac') McGuinness thought that a 'striking feature' of the campaign was a man's age in determining his ability to tolerate New Guinea's 'peculiar' hardships. Those who managed best were in the 21-30 years age group with 35 as an upper limit. Older men also tired very quickly as did those with knee-cap problems.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Participants themselves described the phenomenon of 'laughing knees', a condition resulting from reverse tension on legs during descents. As Waters put it 'on climbing ... one used to wish for escalators and

82. Cited in A.D. Robertson, *op.cit.*, p. 44

83. 2/2 War Diary, October summary.

84. AWM 52, 11/12/15, War Diary, 2/6 Australian Field Ambulance, 21 September 1942 (2/6 Ambulance Diary).

85. Captain A.E. McGuinness, 'RMO's Report on N.G. Campaign 4/10/42-10/12/42' in Medical War Diary, January 1943 (2/2 RMO report).

curse the [mountains] ... going down ... one's legs used to tremble and shake'. (86)

Inadequate nutrition also reduced the men's ability to endure the rugged conditions although cases of true malnutrition were rare. The daily diet of bully beef and biscuits was far below energy requirements. Even the emergency ration caused men to lose strength quickly forcing them to cut short patrols and fighting engagements. In 1957 Walker wrote that the standard emergency ration 'was satisfactory when it could be obtained', but more often than not the men were without the required rations and in times of increased exertion they craved carbohydrate foods such as dried fruits, milk powder and chocolate. Some medical officers instructed their men to suck salt tablets daily to relieve limb cramps and abdominal discomfort. The 2/16's medical officer has written in a recent memoir that the combination of a poor diet and the lack of mineral supplements, particularly potassium, led to hallucinations and mental confusion in many soldiers on the Kokoda Track. McGuinness noted that the troops were always hungry when they arrived at aid posts which had scarce food stocks. (87)

Many 2/2 men recalled being 'perpetually hungry' and scrounging for as much local food - yams, pawpaws, taro root, sweet potato and cucumber - as they could find to supplement their 'one tin of bully beef and half a packet of dog biscuits per man per day'. (88) As early as 25 October the 16th Brigade diarist noted the 'very poor' ration situation while the 2/2s observed on 1 November that the men's failing condition and the unreliability of supply drops had been a concern for

86. S. Wick, op.cit., p.219 and Waters letter.

87. A. Walker, op.cit., p.72; 2/6 Ambulance Diary, 21 September 1942; H.D. Steward, Recollections of a Regimental Medical Officer, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp.131-132 and 2/2 RMO Report.

88. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.88.

the commander, Colonel Edgar, 'for some time'. On the following day the unit would have been without food except for the 'native vegetables obtained ... and carried many miles by the troops'. The unit was without rations for many other November days, some troops getting by on food from villagers. On 8 November 'comforts' arrived including '3/4 oz. tobacco ... 1/2 cake soap, 1 handkerchief, 1/2 pkt P.K. [per man] and 18 lbs. cake for the Bn'.⁽⁸⁹⁾ At that time the unit also received 'the famous 8-commodity ration', its first diet change since leaving Port Moresby but 'immediately we ate this new "luxury food" we got violent diarrhoea'.⁽⁹⁰⁾

The supply situation was said to be worst from Uberi to Wairopi, but as the A Company platoon sergeant, Caling, told the A.B.C. in 1944, even though the troops were better off in the plains they were constantly hungry. 'At one stage between Wairopi and Popondetta - we [were] so hungry we ... gnawed green paw-paws and sweet potatoes. I personally (though it seems funny to think of it now) chewed grass I was so damned hungry.' After the fighting at Sanananda Caling received a parcel from home containing '12 ounces of tobacco, paper, and matches', commodities which were 'better than first prize in a lottery as we had been without a smoke for weeks'. His company commander also offered a tin of powdered milk as a prize in a sniping contest for the platoon which 'bagged the biggest number of Japs'.⁽⁹¹⁾ Waters, who with a friend took the wrong turn at Wairopi, found some pigeons as he made his way along the Gona track. '[The birds] were plentiful here so I decided on some pigeon pie. Knocking

89. 16th Brigade War Diary, 25 October 1942 and 2/2 War Diary, 1 and 8 November 1942.

90. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, p.88.

91. G. Caling, Transcript of interview loaned to author. ABC recording unit visited Atherton Tableland in July 1944 (Caling transcript).

over a couple I made what was to us both the most delicious pigeon soup I have ever tasted'.⁽⁹²⁾

While hunger resulted directly from inadequate nutrition, emotional factors played their part. In 1982 the signaller, Arthur Pick, wrote that a feeling of intense hunger always accompanied his episodes of fear. He remembered three such occasions vividly, the first being of a time when he filled his section's water bottles at Eora Creek. Just as he started to fill the bottles the Japanese began firing a mountain gun from a ridge on the opposite side of the creek.

The first [shell] dropped down the creek from me and each after that stepped closer. I did not feel fear, only an urgency to find protection. The only protection ... was an over-hanging rock and somehow I squeezed myself into the overhang. The next shell landed on top of the rock. The [other shells] moved ... up the creek but I stayed ... in my little over-hang until [it] had ceased ... Before I found ... the overhang and during the shelling I felt a very strong hunger. After I regained my fox-hole the hunger disappeared, or rather it returned to normal shortage-of-food hunger.

On the other two occasions the intense feeling of hunger accompanied Pick's fears about crossing fast-flowing rivers. In these instances he had two fears to overcome, the enemy and his life-long aversion to putting his head under water. The first episode occurred while Pick was out on patrol. After crossing the river, encountering the Japanese and returning with one man wounded Pick's hunger 'was so great that I ate a full packet of biscuits within ten minutes of rejoining the unit and [they] were very dry and very hard'. The second occasion was the unit's crossing of the Kumusi River at Wairopi where the bridge had been blown up. There were two ways of crossing the 100 yards of swiftly flowing water, which was flanked by 15 foot

92. Waters letter.

banks. The men could go either by the flying fox or by a line of logs which had been lashed together end to end being supported by two overhead steel wire ropes. To cross by the latter the men stepped on to the logs and then grasped an overhead wire in each hand, moving slowly along the logs while carrying full gear. Waiting to cross,

My fear of the water kept drawing me to the river bank, watching the men slowly moving down, along and up the line of logs. I knew I would have to walk the logs and when I saw a large tree drift down and strike [them], almost knocking men off into the water and death, I knew I would not survive. When we were ordered to the fly-fox I was almost sick with relief. The same feeling of insatiable hunger occurred, and persisted even after having crossed safely on the flying fox.⁽⁹³⁾

Others also described the dangerous crossing. Waters, who stepped on to the logs after giving his pack to a carrier, avoided looking down for fear of giddiness for 'the only way was to shuffle ... and hang on. Was I glad when we reached the other shore. A well earned smoke eased the nerves'.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The men's fears were well-founded as many Japanese soldiers drowned crossing the Kumusi including their commander, Horii.⁽⁹⁵⁾

Dysentery also sapped the men's energy. From all accounts the sanitary standards of both armies fell well below par, especially in the mountains, resulting in the spread of bowel disorders in epidemic proportions. The men's exhaustion and weakness from illness caused them to be unusually careless about hygiene. Even when medical personnel enforced standards at the dressing stations and supervised the building of fly-proof latrines 'there was little or no sanitation practised along the track'.⁽⁹⁶⁾ The men also suffered psychologically

93. A. Pick, letter to author, 7 April 1982.

94. Waters letter.

95. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.330.

96. A. Walker, op.cit., 71.

for there was loss of dignity in having to excrete continually 'before the eyes of your fellows'.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Contamination of water supplies was another major problem. As Brock recalled the army failed to cater for even the basic things to do with hygiene such as supplies of toilet paper. But the most notable omission was that of water sterilising tablets in the quantities demanded by the conditions.⁽⁹⁸⁾

The dysentery, which ranged from mild diarrhoea to true bacillary dysentery with the passage of blood and mucous, was caused by both the 'dreadful' living conditions and the monotonous diet of hard biscuits and almost indigestible tinned beef of high fat content.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Even the emergency ration had a 'great loosening effect on the bowels', inconveniencing those troops on patrols for five to six days.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Brock recounted that at the time of his involvement in the Eora Creek action his medical condition deteriorated to such a point that he had to defaecate about every half hour, forcing him to be sent back 'a couple of hundred yards to where there was a big tree with huge curtain roots and a clear view of the track leading down to the bridge'. His eventual evacuation resulted from his eating the 'contaminated contents' of a tin which had a small crack in it from its 'biscuit bomber' fall.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Malaria and other tropical diseases contributed greatly to the high ratio of sick to wounded. And while it was known in 1942 that quinine provided protection against the disease the doctors had limited knowledge and no equipment for diagnosis in the field. In late September, anticipating the 16th and 25th Brigade's arrivals at

97. W. Crooks, *op.cit.*, p.150 in a particularly sensitive passage on the trials of the Kokoda Track.

98. Brock notes.

99. Major J.R. Magarey's report on 21st Brigade units filed in Medical War Diary.

100. 2/6 Ambulance Diary, 21 September 1942.

101. Brock notes.

Kokoda, Norris requested that mosquito nets, cream and 60,000 quinine tablets per week be flown to Kokoda so that the troops could start malarial prevention from 10 November onwards. The failure of these stores to arrive resulted in large numbers of men being evacuated with primary malarial attacks. Even when the quinine arrived it was hard to store as it disintegrated in moist conditions. Mosquito, as well as other mite bites also resulted in severe skin lesions for the men who scratched them continually. (102)

Malaria first occurred in noticeable numbers in the 2/2 at Soputa. And although the men had their first dose of quinine there no other preventative equipment arrived. Caling recalled that after the fighting at Sanananda the remaining troops 'spent about fourteen days in [the jungle] with our numbers dwindling down each day with casualties from Jap snipers and malaria'. There was also 'a tradition that a man could [not retire from the front line] until his temperature rose to 103 degrees'. (103) In 1983 Parrott spoke of the same fever policy believing himself that it emanated from MacArthur. When Parrott retired from the Sanananda fighting with malaria and dysentery he walked alone, stumbling in a delirium, towards the dressing station at Soputa. When he awoke some 24 to 48 hours later he found two doctors standing over him, examining his abdomen and discussing the size of his spleen. He also realised that many other soldiers lay on the grass around him, all eventually finding accommodation in tent flies at Soputa's makeshift hospital. (104)

102. A. Walker, op.cit., p.70 and Medical War Diary.

103. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.92 and G. Caling transcript.

104. Parrott interview.

Battle and such disease-ridden conditions seem incompatible and yet soldiers on both sides fought in actions which were 'fierce and costly'.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ The Templeton's Crossing and Eora Creek actions had severely wounded men who required difficult evacuations with the stretcher-bearers often coming under fire. McCarthy attributed the high proportion of killed to wounded to the 'closeness of the fighting' which was often hand-to-hand and reliant on bayonet and grenade charges more than artillery shelling.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Much has been written of the Japanese soldier's determination in Papua, and other theatres, but to face such an enemy the Australians themselves acquired skills which hateful conditions inspired.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ What adjustments jungle warfare required from the troops can be gleaned from one of Vasey's directives to unit commanders. According to the screed the Japanese, as well-trained jungle fighters, were 'like tigers, cunning silent and dangerous'.

One does not expect a live tiger to give himself up to capture so we must not expect the Japanese to surrender. He does not. He must be killed whether it is by shooting, bayoneting, throttling, knocking out his brains with a tin hat or by any other means our ingenuity can devise. Truly jungle warfare is a game of kill or be killed and to play it successfully demands alertness of all senses, but particularly of ears and eyes. The latter must not be focussed on the next footstep but continually looking all about including upwards into the trees.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

105. A. Walker, op.cit., p.65.

106. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.306.

107. 16th Brigade, War Diary, 23 October 1942.

108. See D. McCarthy, op.cit. and A.D. Robertson, op.cit. for detailed accounts of Japanese soldiers' role in Papua; G. Caling loaned the author his copy of 'extracts from the screed' which was signed on 28 September 1942 by Captain D. Fairbrother, A Company's Commander.

Rarely do soldiers discuss the nature of their fighting with outsiders. The 2/6's 'Jo' Gullett wrote however that the fighting in New Guinea had 'the character of an exercise in extermination [rather than that of] a war'.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ While the author did not explore this subject in depth with any 2/2 veterans other sources suggest that the Australians had a determination as grim as their opponents. On 28 October, after the Japanese withdrawal at Eora Creek, the 16th Brigade diarist observed that 'the Japs cannot stand up against the bayonet'.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Relaying what he knew of the encounter to his mother Waters wrote: 'we ... heard that the 2/1 were still hammering away at the Jap and the 2/3 were trying to encircle him. They succeeded late one evening and cleaned out a pockett [sic] of about fifty ... with the cold steele [sic]'.⁽¹¹¹⁾ Jack Davis, whose cartilage problems forced his retirement after Templeton's Crossing, expressed his ideas more clearly in verse:

Prisoners few are taken
 In the jungle war we fight
 'Cause we meet 'em at close quarters
 If you see 'em first - you're right
 But if upon the other hand
 He spots you creeping round
 'Tis then another Aussie lies
 Sprawled out upon the ground
 Those Japs are very hard to find
 The jungle is so dense
 So when you move 'tis slow and sure
 While every nerve is tense.⁽¹¹²⁾

109. H. Gullett, Not as a Duty Only: An Infantryman's War, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976, p.113.

110. 16th Brigade War Diary, 28 October 1942.

111. Waters letter.

112. A copy of the poem given to the author by J. Davies in 1982. First published in the Sydney Sun 1944.

Others also noted the stresses induced by jungle warfare. McGuinness wrote of 'the constant sense of strain' which resulted from the enemy being almost always unseen.⁽¹¹³⁾ The 2/6 Field Ambulance Officer, L.H. Joseph, wrote that while the jungle's intensity led to claustrophobic feelings its eerie quietness had the men in a state of constant alertness.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ As the Smith's Weekly author put it the jungle's noises made a 'peculiar sound ever coming closer to us and in the distance a faint reply. We had our rifles at hand with safety catches forward'.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ In 1988 Coyle still remembered how the men lived constantly with the knowledge that 'at any moment sudden or agonising death' would strike from short range. They also feared the consequences of being seriously wounded where only basic medical attention could be given.⁽¹¹⁶⁾

The men faced their first fight after more than two weeks on the Kokoda Track. And from all accounts the fighting's sudden, furtive and brutal nature increased with successive engagements.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ The Templeton's Crossing attack of 20 October involving all companies simultaneously was the only such one in Papua for the unit. On the eve of the fighting in black-out conditions in the Regimental Aid Post company commanders heard that A and C Companies were to secure the high ground on the right flank to protect B and D's attack which would occur along two parallel spurs which ran from the high ground to the

113. 2/2 RMO report.

114. Cited in A. Walker, op.cit., p.69.

115. Smith's Weekly.

116. Coyle diary, also notes written for author in October 1988.

117. See especially D. McCarthy, op.cit., and G. Johnston, op.cit., p.120.

main track. So rudimentary were maps and other equipment that the battalion commander 'drew the axis on the back of a message form'.(118)

The enemy defences immediately beyond Templeton's Crossing were in forbidding country.

... the track from [the crossing] followed the right-hand side of the great Eora Creek ravine ... [and] then rose high up the mountainside through the dripping bush until even the roar of the torrent below could be heard no more. Nothing could be seen from the track except the rain forests pressing in. It was broken by upward rearing ridges which cut across it at right angles as it made its way over the torn side of the mountain and before it fell steeply down again to the water.

On the morning of the 2/2's attack:

... a cold gloom hung over the mountains. Water was dripping from the sodden trees and falling soundlessly on a sodden carpet of mould. Captains Ferguson and Baylis, whose companies [B and C] were to do the wide outflanking movements, were on the move from [0800], Ferguson leading. The 3rd [militia Battalion] provided guides to pilot them clear of its right. Ferguson then moved on a bearing of 70 degrees, his men behind him in single file as they made their difficult way up the slope through the cold wet bush. The dank odour of tropical decay hung heavy in the air. High up on the slope they swung left and moved painfully towards their assembly area. By [1100, the planned start time] Ferguson was in position on the most-forward spur, Baylis ready on the parallel spur on his left as they faced west towards the Japanese positions. On the hour the two companies went into the attack, moving deliberately down the slope over broken ground and through thick bush.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

Coyle, then C Company's commander, noted that the 'battle for Templeman's [sic] Crossing' began on time, 'the Japs contesting their positions bitterly'. There were heavy casualties: '70 officers and men killed or wounded'.(120) Ted Bennett-Bremner of the Vickers

118. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, p.84.

119. D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, pp.281-282.

120. Coyle diary 20 October 1942.

Platoon, which was a temporary C Company rifle platoon for the attack, wrote of the actual fighting seeming 'all so unreal'.⁽¹²¹⁾ Frank Burley, a private in the Intelligence section, and attached to B Company for the attack, recalled for the A.B.C. what he had seen of the day's events 'from the comparative safety of Company Headquarters'. While he would long remember the day for its 'intense excitement, great physical hardship and nervous strain' he said his account was necessarily fragmentary for 'as it is almost two years since the event ... only salient times remain in my memory; parts of the day were as years while the day as a whole seemed a matter of an hour'. Under fire at one point he spent what he felt was 'an eternity of some seconds behind what I considered the smallest tree in New Guinea'.⁽¹²²⁾

Waters, who by then was no stranger to the loss of close associates in action, told his mother of the Templeton's Crossing outcome:

Our casualty returns came through and were not the best. About 80 casualties but my memory slips me with the amount killed. We lost more of quality than quantity. My old china plate, Skinny George, copped his lot and our old gang was getting weeded out. Sapper Tanner, Reg Blain and a few more old hands had gone and it is funny they say old soldiers never die they fade away. No doubt we were slowly fading but leaving behind A.I.F. battle traditions.⁽¹²³⁾

McCammon and Hodge painted the 'desolate scene' of the fighting's aftermath:

121. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.227.

122. Full transcript of interview first cited in H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, pp.85-86.

123. Waters letter.

... our own and enemy dead lying in grotesque positions, bullet scarred trees with the peeled bark showing ghostlike, our own lads digging silently. And with the coming of darkness came the rain, persistent and cold, ... in this atmosphere we settled in our weapon pits ... At night we could hear the Jap chattering and moving about. (124)

When the fight for Templeton's Crossing ended that for Eora Creek began but the dramatic and even more forbidding topography of the latter gave the Japanese their most favourable conditions for defence between Port Moresby and Kokoda. (125) As we have seen only one company-size 2/2 group was in the planned fighting at the Eora Creek bridgehead. The rest of the unit held various defensive positions along the track leading to the crossing. As Coyle noted on 22 October 'our position exposed to strong Jap forces holding Creek area. I have instructed section commanders to ensure all personnel make use of every available piece of cover, we could be in for a rough time'. (126)

McCarthy describes the backdrop for what were now to be several harrowing days for the entire unit. The 'deeply sunken and gloomy gorge' had swirling water which foamed as it made its way around huge boulders that lay in the bed of the stream flowing down from Templeton's Crossing to meet a tributary coming in from the south east'.

Just above the junction [of the two water flows] a bridge crossed the tributary and just below it a second bridge crossed the main flow. As the track, after rising and falling over humps and razorback spurs, approached the first crossing, it passed over a bare ridge and through a few miserable native huts [Eora Creek Village], plunged precipitously down the forward slopes, crossed the first bridge then followed the echoing floor of the gorge briefly before it twisted west to cross the second bridge. It

124. H. McGammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.86.

125. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.287.

126. Coyle diary, 22 October 1942.

[then] scrambled north again, crossing a slight widening of the creek valley through broken ways and a little further on thrusting up the scarred side of a mountain so steep that the crags seemed to overhang it. To the right of the track as it crossed the creek forbidding cliffs rose. To the left ... broken country reared high, tumbled and scrub-covered, to sweep upwards in an arc of turbulent hills and crevasses into a thrusting feature north west of that point and across the track farther on. (127)

And as one Japanese war correspondent wrote 'there was neither night or day in the ravine; it was always pale twilight, and everything looked as though it were deep under water. And in that eternal twilight numberless bodies of men scattered here and there ...' (128)

While the 2/1 pushed forward against heavy enemy opposition at Eora Creek the 2/2 'was strung out, in single file on the track' under constant enemy observation and fire. McGuinness set up his aid post on a 'most exposed portion of the ridge' caring for several killed and wounded. (129) On 23 October Coyle wrote that the 'usual morning mist' covered the area and that he only became aware of his platoon being under attack when there was 'a disturbance amongst the under-growth, foliage, leaves etc moving in all directions'.

This is followed by ear-splitting explosions, the previous days predictions are spot on, we are under mountain gun and mortar attack. My next recollection, I am lying on the ground, I have a stinging sensation in the left hand which is bleeding, I have a more serious problem, I am experiencing chest pain, however my concern is somewhat lessened in the knowledge that I have been hit in the vicinity of the left shoulder blade. It appears we have some serious casualties this indicated by frantic calls of "stretcher bearer" and the cries of [other] wounded. (130)

127. D. McCarthy, op.cit., p.287.

128. Seizo Okada, special correspondent in New Guinea cited in ibid., p.305.

129. S. Wick, op.cit., p.229.

130. Coyle diary, 23 October 1942.

Just as they had renamed a harrowing location in Greece, 'Panic Mountain', the troops coined a more appropriate name for the exposed ridge at Eora Creek. As Waters told his mother:

We were [now] in reserve but well in range of [the enemy's] 4" mortar and mt. gun. Digging ... holes we spent a cold & sleepless night. Next morning we advanced farther down the ridge to take up new positions, ... our rations were low and we were living on emergency [ones]. Nerves were getting frayed ... A Coy were forward and took a pasting from mortar fire and snipers in the creek. The 2/1 R.A.P. had been done up and things were middling. A strong fighting patrol was sent out from our Bn ... They were to be out for five days ... While they were away we were still hammering away at the Japs. It was still raining on & off & a very heavy mist covered the slopes. How miserable we were on Jittery Ridge. (131)

It was at this time that Allen received MacArthur's message via Blamey that the campaign was moving too slowly. In 1989 Brock recalled that while he was a patient in 5th Casualty Clearing Station he saw a document which was being passed as the original of the exchange between Allen and Blamey:

Allen's reply was as accurately as I can remember it "In order to fully and correctly appreciate the numerical superiority of the enemy, the difficulties of the terrain and the problems of supply it is necessary to come sometimes near the frontline". (132)

Johnston noted after a press conference that Allen was 'furious' about MacArthur's request to hurry the advance as well as 'his hints that the Australians are not fighting'. (133)

131. Waters letter.

132. Brock notes. Brock recalls the essence of the original document so well that its inclusion here seemed fitting. See D. Horner, Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat 1941-1943, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, p.210 quotes Allen 'If you think you can do any better come up here and bloody try'.

133. G. Johnston, op.cit., p.120.

The period of relative calm before the fighting at Oivi brought the men to the end of the Owen Stanley Range. Following their crossing of Eora Creek in single file by means of a lone fallen tree they marvelled at the prettiness of Abuari, the first unspoiled village they had seen along the track. From Missima, another 'pretty spot full of flowers', the men saw Kokoda in the distance but it was 'not the Kokoda we ... dreamed about, but a few battered huts and a plantation'. Waiting for supplies at Kobara the troops saw village women and children for the first time. Eventually American planes dropped rations on 3 November, the troops moving on that same day. (134)

The unit's strength at Oivi was some 300 men nearly all of whom had dysentery. Many had to be evacuated, including among them Edgar and Lloyd, who it was noted had 'constantly visited the forward troops during the fighting'. (135) On 5 November when the 2/2 and 2/3 with the 3rd militia Battalion in reserve first came up against the enemy, they did so about a mile from Oivi as the Japanese controlled the approaches to the village from high ground on either side of the track.

Oivi was another costly encounter for the unit. B Company's 11 Platoon lost its commander and 12 Platoon had 13 men left after experiencing heavy fire. After the heavy casualties of the first day the forward troops 'were dug in less than 50 yds from Jap. positions'. As McCammon and Hodge described events the conflict between the Australians and Japanese became one of dug-in troops having

134. 2/2 War Diary, 1 November 1942.

135. H. McCammon and C. Hodge, op.cit., p.88-89.

'hate-session[s]' with each other every morning. As they had done previously however the enemy withdrew leaving the now much depleted 16th and 25th Brigades to follow on. (136)

Oivi however was the end of the line for Brock whose debilitating dysentery forced him to retire. Recounting his last 48 hours or so in the campaign he wrote:

My condition was rapidly deteriorating and after a vain attempt to storm a cliff marking the boundary of our position a militia unit [3rd] was sent in to take the pressure off my flank. We had no tools to dig in and water was some distance away and could only be obtained at night. A day or two later a runner brought a message and reaching the place where I was lying, stood up and like a fool I did so too - a Jap sniper from the cliffs above got him through the head - blowing bits of [it] on to my face. He was dead in a very few minutes.

Later on his arrival at the Kokoda dressing station medical staff removed Brock's rotting clothes, the skin on the soles of his feet coming off with his socks.

A native boy was given sixpence to wash my Yank wind-jacket and that was my sole item of clothing when several days later I was flown back to hospital at Moresby in a 'biscuit bomber' with no door. Hell, I was still blue from cold when I arrived at 5th CCS ... On Xmas Eve I was loaded on to the 'Duntroon' and sent back to Aus. for a long period of hospitalization. (137)

For those men left in the unit the long march to Sanananda at first brought relief then further privations. On 12 November the troops bathed, put on fresh clothes and boots and had three hot meals.

136. H. McCarmon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, p.90 and 2/2 War Diary, 5 November 1942.

137. Brock notes. The author's father, wounded at Buna on 31 December 1942, had a similar fate travelling to Australia wrapped in a grey army blanket.

But as McCammon and Hodge observed 'Here, too, we got application forms [for] ... the new official book Soldiering On ... [which] caused a lot of sardonic humour'.⁽¹³⁸⁾ The journey from the Kumusi river onwards took the men into hot, humid conditions and worsened every day. As we have seen rations were non-existent at this stage forcing many to retire, 57 on the 17th alone by Norris' orders. For those who continued the march, contrary to what they had expected, 'the natives were very friendly handing fruit and sugar cane to [them] ... and often assisting in the crossing of streams'. By 19 November the unit asked 'for a spell' for as the diarist wrote: 'our Bn which had led the advance since Kobara ... [was] very weary and tired'.⁽¹³⁹⁾

Sanananda brought only more illness, including now malaria, battle wounds and death. Although the unit's four companies entered the fighting in an effort to relieve 2/1 and 2/3 companies they achieved little. As Dunlop observed A and B Companies made an attack from the left of the track and C and D from the right but while 'both forces made gallant attempts ... they could do no more than make limited penetration and dig in on the enemy's flanks'.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ As A Company's Caling later told the A.B.C. for the next two weeks the men dug in and lived in waterfilled weapon pits with orders to harass the enemy as much as possible. Only 50 of the company's 116 (six officers 110 other ranks) who had left Port Moresby in early October remained in the unit.⁽¹⁴¹⁾

Indeed similar losses occurred in the unit's other companies. As Purple Over Green observed by late November 'battalions had become companies and companies ... platoons'. Malaria exacted an increasing

138. 2/2 War Diary, 12 November 1942 and H. McCammon and C. Hodge, *op.cit.*, p.91.

139. 2/2 War Diary, 16 November 1942.

140. J. Dunlop, *op.cit.*, p.93.

141. Caling transcript.

toll on already weary, disease-ridden troops, the acting commander, Major Adrian Buckley, being evacuated in early December. Of the 100 men left all suffered from fever and dysentery resulting in a debilitating weakness which made some 70-80 of them incapable of carrying their own weapons from the line on 10 December, the day of their relief by the 2/3.⁽¹⁴²⁾ At this point the men owed much to medical intervention. On 30 November Norris had advised his superiors in 7th Division Headquarters of the troops' deterioration, urging their immediate evacuation. Later he wrote of the 'woeful' wastage in the veteran 16th and 25th Brigades, also estimating that of the 13,300 7th Division troops sent to the six months of fighting there were approximately 1,500 deaths, 2,500 wounded and 6,500 sickness evacuations, the ratios being three killed to five wounded and three wounded to five evacuated sick.⁽¹⁴³⁾

The losses, particularly those at the end during the fighting at Sanananda, seemed just as futile to the men. And while the unit was not engaged in any further fighting, it observed closely the efforts of its relief units. Noting the 127 casualties of one day's fighting the diarist concluded that 'nothing was gained for such a large loss of life and men wounded'. The loss of the two 'tried and experienced' company commanders was also 'a blow the unit could ill-afford'.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Waters told his mother that after Sanananda the battalion's strength was about

80 all ranks [but] ... again good men had to die. Men ... of the calibre of old Harry Honeywell who eventually found one with his name on it. Capt. Bosgard also passed in his dixies. Also Capt.

142. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.242.

143. Medical War Diary.

144. 2/2 War Diary, 21 November 1942 and December summary.

Jack Blamey of D Coy. & numerous other first grade soldiers. (145)

Of all the indignities of the Papuan campaign the men remember most the plight of the dead, wounded and sick. McGuinness wrote of the medical officer's need to:

walk as the unit personnel and still be ready for action at any moment and for dressings at the end of the day and in the morning. He and his staff must nurse and drive on the weary in most circumstances to the day's destination and at night nurse any wounded held, making beds from the trees and using bully beef tins as urinals. Cases must be evacuated early, walking or by natives, so that the RMO can be prepared to move on.

Experience also taught him not to have the aid post too near the front line, because even if a carry took five minutes longer it was better to dress a wounded man 'in comfort knowing that the man ... [had] a feeling of safety and security'. As oral morphia was of 'little value' McGuinness recommended that senior stretcher bearers be trained to give morphia by injection to reduce 'much suffering'. (146)

In the closed and isolated environment the medical officer's role assumed greater significance. In 1983 'Butch' Gordon, a stretcher-bearer on the track before his retirement through illness at Sanananda, recalled that he shed tears 'without embarrassment' for the men he buried in the Owen Stanley Range. Of McGuinness he wrote:

[He] was to me and all the men a kind outstanding man in action, his coolness, calmness under the most distressing moments was unatural [sic]. He never stopped behind a hillock for cover it

145. Waters letter.

146. 2/2 RMO's report.

was always as far up as possible to be with his men ... He was deft with his fingers ... no wound was to [sic] big for him to handle and many a man from various units owe their life to him ... What I've seen him do with shattered limbs with determination in front-line actions with nothing but branches made into splints ...

Even though before the war McGuinness was a 'Harley Street specialist' he 'never put on the old school tie with us always witty and moral[e] building'.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ As Bob Durrant wrote the medical officer in Papua was 'not only a doctor but a padre, mother or father to many seriously wounded who called out in their delirium ... many a soldier was cradled in Mac's arms during his last few moments'.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾

Curiously very few sources describe the men's reactions to their meeting with the various tribal groups in Papua. Many however praised the 'natives' or 'boys' who carried the wounded and dying to field hospitals. Coyle, who was taken back to Myola after his wounding at Eora Creek wrote of 'those wonderful native bearers' while many doctors thought that 'without them the evacuation of [wounded] would have been hazardous if not impossible'.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ They were 'excellent' stretcher-bearers having the ability to carry stretchers over seemingly impossible barriers while at the same time giving the patient a comfortable ride.

The care which they show the patient is magnificent. Every need which they can fill is fulfilled. If night finds the stretcher still on the track, [the stretcher-bearer] will find a level spot beside the track and build a shelter over the patient. They ... make him as comfortable as possible, get him water and feed him if any food is available. They sleep faced each side of the stretcher and if the patient moves or requires any attention during the night it is instantly given. The labour of carrying was extremely arduous but ... never shirked and the natives

147. A.T. Gordon, letters to author, 27 June and 12 July 1983.

148. Cited in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.412.

149. Coyle notes and Major R.J. Humpherys' report in Medical War Diary.

practically never left the patient until they had brought him to his destination. (150)

As Waters told his mother the 'Fuzzy Wuzzy angels earnt our undying gratitude as they carried our wounded boys along the torturous [sic] track to Myola [amazing] us with [their] agility and ability to carry such loads'. (151)

Very much like the experience in Greece the continual movement of troops from one area to another along the many pathways brought men from different units into close contact with one another. Parrott, a patient in the 200 bed tent hospital at Soputa at the time of its destruction by Japanese bombing, recalled that he and others, though ill, were advised by doctors on the morning of 27 November that they were to return to their units at the front the following day. (152) During the afternoon however Japanese planes circled the hospital, their uneventful departure causing the patients much relief as believed the clearly displayed red cross had saved them from attack.

As Parrott remembered it the planes circled again at the same time on the following day this time making the attack. Thirteen Japanese Zeros bombed and strafed the vulnerable dressing station, sited as it was in 'a completely open clearing'. While sources vary on casualties Walker notes that the 22 killed included the hospital's two doctors, five other medical staff and patients of whom four were 2/2 men. The more than 50 wounded included patients, field ambulance staff, hospital visitors and 'natives'. Johnston believed that three war correspondents were among the wounded, and that 'one theory

150. Unidentified medical report in Medical War Diary. (Not Norris)

151. Waters letter.

152. Parrott interview. For official accounts of the air raid see, A. Walker, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83, D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.399 and D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962, p.667-668.

[explaining the enemy's action] is that [the Allies] have accidentally bombed the Japanese hospital at Buna'. Parrott, who still wonders about the scarce documentation on Soputa in official histories, heard the same retaliation rumour. (153)

Whatever the enemy's motives Parrott long remembered the aftermath of the bombing. His most vivid memories of the actual bombardment were the tent pole snapping, the immense heat of the blast, himself clinging to his groundsheet and the cries of those around him.

Alongside my shelter a man was calling "Help me mate help me" he was sitting holding his legs or what was left of them, the muscles hanging down in strips and his feet were apparently gone. Nearby were two dead men lightly clothed and wearing shorts as most ... [did for the heat], the black muddy soil seemed to have been blown into their skin.

In the absence of medical supervision Parrott and others, who knew little first aid, bandaged the wounds of the injured. Parrott remembered well that the men's morale seemed to improve with the application of the bandages regardless of whether they were put on correctly: 'it was good to see the looks on their faces when the wounds were covered'. But after the hardships of the Kokoda Track the deaths at the hospital were for him the more unacceptable:

[On the following morning] I remember having some breakfast still in a dazed condition (I suppose) and noted the bodies wrapped in grey army blankets all lined up nearby. Flies [sic] hovered around them and in the remains of the Hospital area they swarmed

153. A. Walker, *op.cit.*, p.82 and D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.399 concur. G. Johnston, *op.cit.*, p.141 claimed that several more were killed and wounded. Initially 7th Division medical records greatly underestimated the casualties.

over the empty ground sheets some of which contained pools of blood. (154)

What surprised Parrott and others most after the Soputa bombing was the apparent change in official medical policy. The doctors who examined the surviving patients advised them that they were to be evacuated to Port Moresby as 'they were not fit enough to go back into action, that they had taken enough'. So 'everyone was ordered to be evacuated to Moresby by plane. We were even taken ... [to Popondetta] on jeeps ... It seemed unbelievable after months without wheeled transport'. (155)

2/2 troops, veterans and novices alike, left Australia in September 1942 considering themselves fit and feeling confident of at least an equal fight with the enemy. Some 11 weeks later the unimagined realities of waging war in jungle conditions against a determined enemy without adequate supplies, appropriate medical provisions and suitable transport for the evacuation of wounded and sick had taken their toll. In the succeeding four decades the veterans' unwillingness to speak about their privations allowed the enduring mythology of the Kokoda Track to flourish. In popular perceptions the Australian soldier fought bravely against the odds in the Papuan jungle bearing his difficulties without complaint, even with a super-human dignity. Historians too in that time did little to stem the tide of popular belief.

154. C. Parrott notes written for author, 7 June 1988. Although written exactly five years after the interview (not taped) the detail in the notes matched the interview transcript remarkably well.

155. Parrott interview and notes.

The veteran s' long silence on Papua's realities is understandable however in the context of the immense physical and psychological stress noted in this chapter. Those who shared their memories with the author, either in interviews or letters, and in some cases for the first time since the events themselves, reveal again that reactions to fighting conditions are highly individual and tend to work against the formation of collective impressions. But as we have seen in previous campaigns, most notably those of Bardia and Tobruk, the unit's need for a corporate view in the retelling of events tends to suppress idiosyncratic views. Having been denied the expression of their own experience some men live with two sets of perceptions of particular events, often juggling the discrepancies between the heroic images of their unit account and the inner realities of their own memories. And in Papua where the nature of the fighting eroded even the symbolic ideal of communal action individual experience became even more simplified in history-making, a much wider mythology reducing the fighting of many units at many places to that of Australians on the Kokoda Track. As had happened previously however the process of distorting perceptions was underway as the events occurred. As White put it in 1945:

no war correspondent can ever tell unpalatable truths soon enough to do any good. Once news sources are officially controlled by censorship no individual writer can deflect by as much as a hair's breadth the impact upon the public mind of the tale wartime leadership wants to tell. But history may judge the relationship of dead facts. (156)

And laying bare the facts does not deny the men who fought in Papua the essence of Kokoda Track mythology which honours their

156. O. White, op.cit., pp.67-68.

endurance in the dreadful conditions. Much has been written of the courage, humour and bonding of troops from all units but similarly, as for other campaigns, there was evidence of self-inflicted wounds and other ways of not coping with the extreme situations.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ And even though both the 2/2 and 16th Brigade diarists wrote in their campaign summaries of a morale that never wavered, undoubtedly they meant by that time what Dunlop called 'the guts of all ranks in sticking to the job'.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Indeed Parrott spoke of the low morale in mortar platoons resulting from the terrible accidents caused by mortars which had been damaged during 'biscuit bomber' drops.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ The realities demanded that the men's spirits suffered but as Waters wrote after the Oivi fighting:

we had just about had it ... the boys were hanging on with determination and sheer guts. Hagged [sic] and gaunt unshaven faces with eyes sunk in gave them a defeated look but apart from this they still managed the old grin and usual crack.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

And for those who finally shared their painful memories, after puzzling for long about the gap between the public account of the campaign and their own private experience, much has been unburdened. As Brock concluded in 1989:

Writing this [4,000 word account] has caused an unbelievable mental agony as there are some parts of the campaign I do not wish to ever go through again but flogged myself into ~~it~~⁽¹⁶¹⁾ for the sake of seeing it recorded as seen by a participant.

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157. All the documents referred to in this chapter contain passages, sometimes very moving, on the ability of the soldiers to bear such suffering cheerfully. There is much debate on self-inflicted wounds evident in the medical reports examined by author. See A. Walker, *op.cit.*, p.35 for his summary of the doctors' reports.
158. 2/2 War Diary, December 1942 and 16th Brigade War Diary, December 1942; J. Dunlop, *op.cit.*, p.95.
159. Parrott interview.
160. Waters letter.
161. Brock notes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REGROUPING AND RECONSTRUCTION

ON THE ATHERTON TABLELAND

JANUARY 1943 TO DECEMBER 1944

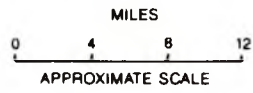
General Blamey named the Atherton Tableland in northern Queensland as the 6th and 7th Divisions' training and rehabilitation centre on 3 January 1943.⁽¹⁾ Set at just over three thousand feet above sea level, some forty miles inland from Cairns in one of Australia's most rain-soaked areas, the region was seen to cater well for jungle training and the troops' need for a long period of restitution following the casualties, sickness and taking in of reinforcements in Papua.

In the early months of 1943 the 6th Division, which ceased to exist as such for a while in 1942, comprised the 16th, 17th and 19th Brigades under the newly-appointed Major-General J.E.S. Stevens, previously commander of the 7th Division's 21st Brigade in Syria. Of the three brigades however only the 16th, with the 30th militia Brigade attached to it, was on the Atherton Tableland. The 17th was still in action in New Guinea, the 19th in Darwin. Within the broad frame of army policy at that time the 6th and 7th Divisions' concentration at Atherton was part of a plan for building up an offensive force for future overseas service. Then in February when the 9th Division returned from the Middle East it joined the other two A.I.F. divisions in northern Queensland, the three then forming II

1. The following details are from G. Long, The Six Years War, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1973, Ch.8, pp.223-260; G. Long, The Final Campaigns, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, Ch.4, pp.73-88.

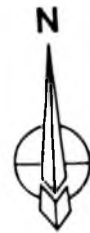
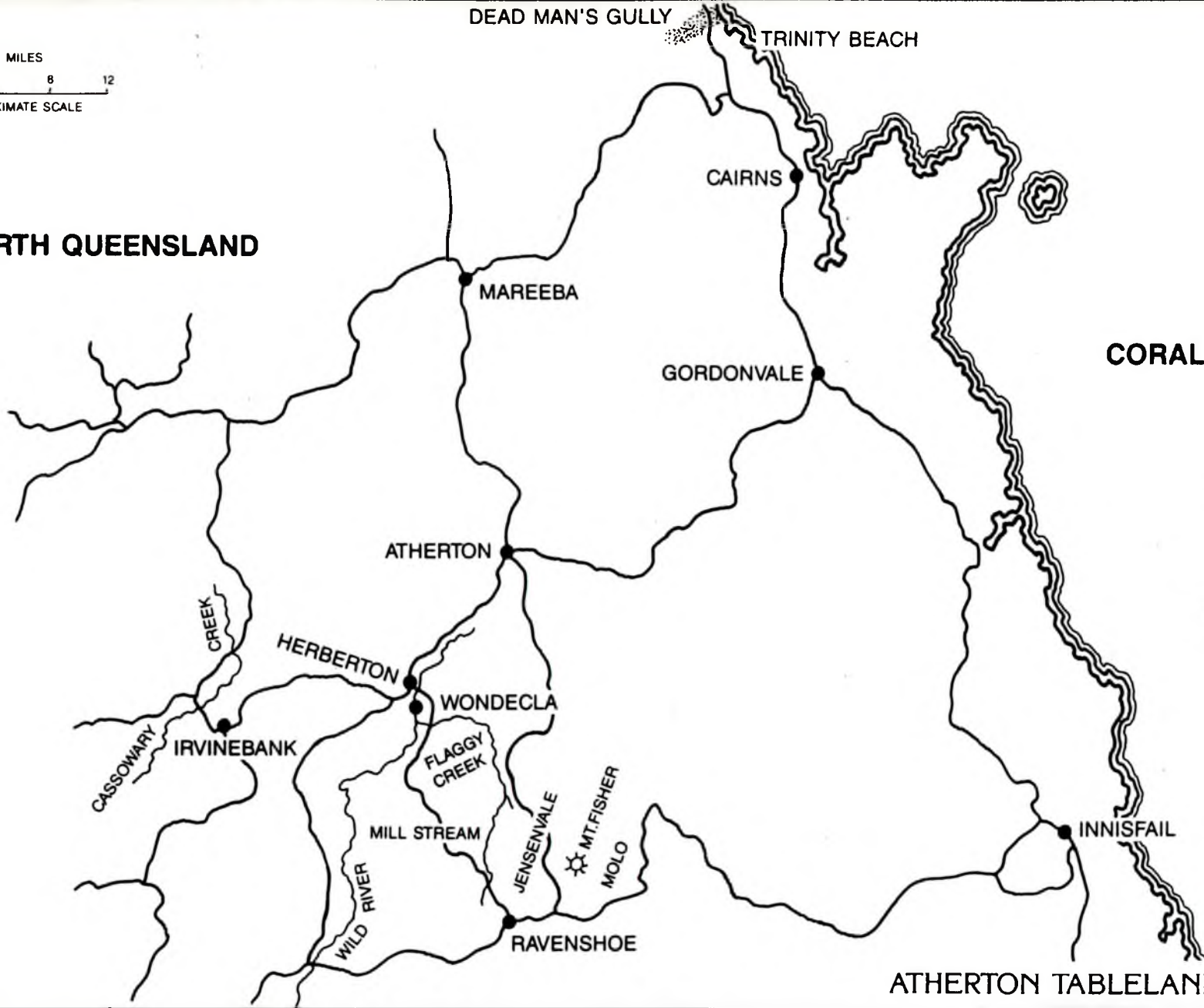
DEAD MAN'S GULLY

TRINITY BEACH



NORTH QUEENSLAND

CORAL SEA



ATHERTON TABLELAND 1943-44

AYRES 09

Australia Corps under Lieutenant-General Leslie Morshead, the 9th's commander during the previous two years.

In January 1943 much was changing in the Australian Army with the merging of the A.I.F. and C.M.F. (2) Twelve months previously the suspension of the policy which allowed C.M.F. volunteers to transfer to the A.I.F. followed Japan's entry into the war and the subsequent need for full establishment in the home defence force. Then in May the Minister for the Army, F.M. Forde, announced a new scheme whereby a militiaman could enlist in the A.I.F. acquiring an 'X' number and wearing its distinctive badge but at the same time remaining in his own C.M.F. unit. The ensuing flow of enlistments from the C.M.F. produced a further order at the end of July establishing that any militia unit having a 75 percent quota of volunteers would be classified an A.I.F. unit.

Paul Hasluck, who charted the Army's policy changes over this period, observed that other practices blurred the distinctions between the two forces, even though the process was unintentional in some cases. Most notable was the practice of allocating surplus A.I.F. volunteers to C.M.F. training depots when C.M.F. transfers in the opposite direction stopped. By April 1942 10,000 A.I.F. served with the C.M.F., the numbers increasing to 17,250 in June. Soon too militia volunteers outnumbered A.I.F. so that in May 1942 of the 384,975 men in Australia's land forces, both in Australia and New Guinea, nearly two-thirds were in C.M.F. units including 14,400 A.I.F. At the end of October, although the ratio of C.M.F. volunteers to A.I.F. decreased, the army comprised 171,246 A.I.F. and 262,333 C.M.F. And while pay and other benefits had been brought to parity in the two

2. The following details about enlistments are taken from P. Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970, pp.326-52.

forces the militia's inability to fight beyond Australian territory, because of the 1939 Defence Act provisions, posed a formidable obstacle to unity.

Then on 18 November Curtin's surprise introduction of proposals for changes to conscription effectively ended the segregation in service between the two forces. Despite opposition, which came from within the Labor Party as much as from non-Labor parties, the revised policy, the Citizen Military Forces Act, became law on 19 February 1943 allowing militiamen to fight in a newly-drawn-up South West Pacific Area Zone, prohibiting any involvement north of the equator. Ironically however Australia's loss of prominence in operations against the Japanese prevented the bill's provisions ever being enacted. And although Australian troops continued to carry the S.W.P.A.'s military burden in 1943, as they had done so in the previous year, the bulk of operations was in the hands of the Americans by the first quarter of 1944.⁽³⁾

Much had happened in Allied political and military circles during 1943 to bring the about-face in the S.W.P.A. On 19 January 1943 the Pacific War's fifth priority rating at the Casablanca Conference on global strategy warned Australian policy makers of the war's slow ending and the need for far-reaching reconstruction particularly in man-power distribution. Australia at that time maintained in proportion to its population an army much larger than Britain and Japan, a situation demanding a reduction in the number of its front line formations as providing reinforcements to keep them on a war footing was an increasing difficulty. Also of grave concern was the extremely high wastage rate of troops due to tropical disease, a factor greatly influencing the army's decisions about divisional

3. G. Long, op.cit., (Final Campaigns) p.5.

reconstruction which resulted in the disbandment of many units. The eventual scaling down of the armed services throughout 1943-1944 reduced the army's 12 divisions of late 1942 to 8 in September 1944 and 6 in 1945. (4)

While debate still surrounds some aspects of Australian war strategy in the years 1939-1945 historians agree that General Douglas MacArthur greatly influenced Curtin and the War Cabinet on changes to conscription and the retirement of Australian troops from the S.W.P.A. (5) David Horner's study best reveals how MacArthur set about displacing Blamey as Commander of Allied Land Forces resulting in the reconquest of the Phillipines, and elsewhere in the northern Pacific, being almost solely an American effort. The complex and mostly secret communications between Allied leaders often left the lesser partners, such as Australia, in the dark and living with uncertainties as to their role in bringing the war to an end. Specifically for much of 1943 Australian military commanders pondered the future of their infantry formations but Blamey's directive of 23 December, informing them that the Americans were to take over in New Guinea, defined their course for a while at least. (6) The statement, which followed a War Cabinet decision of 1 October, established that the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions would comprise 1st Australia Corps, with the latter two returning from operations in New Guinea to the Atherton Tableland, joining the 6th once again for training and rehabilitation. II Australia Corps comprised three militia divisions, the 3rd, 5th and

4. *ibid.*, p.34.

5. See D.M. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, Chs 9, 10, 11 & 16, pp.178-281 and 370-377. Also J. Robertson, Australia at War 1939-1945, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1981, Chs 13-18. G. Long, op.cit., (The Six Years War) pp.223-260.

6. G. Long, The Six Years War, p.351.

llth, which were to undertake garrison duties, training and rehabilitation in both Australia and New Guinea.

The 2/2 began its life on the Atherton Tableland on 23 January 1943 when a small group of unit veterans and 250 reinforcements arrived at an army depot, some three miles from Ravenshoe.⁽⁷⁾ The veterans, who had been discharged from hospitals and malarial centres in New Guinea before their voyage to Australia, went on leave as soon as they registered at Ravenshoe while the reinforcements stayed behind to prepare a camp.

The first leave parties, comprising those who left New Guinea at the end of 1942, arrived at Ravenshoe in early February but recurrent malarial attacks caused many of those returning to be evacuated to hospital. Then in early March the unit abandoned the Ravenshoe camp for Wondecla, near Flaggy Creek and the Herberton Racecourse, even though the reinforcements had done much to clear the first site. In April, despite the delayed return of many officers through sickness and other causes, the commander, Colonel Edgar, filled the senior postings and began some training. In the following month battalion numbers swelled considerably so that by 23 May for the first time in twelve months the men took part in a Divisional Parade in the presence of the Corps Commander, Blamey, their Divisional Commander, Morshead, Stevens and a crowd of civilians. On the following day the

7. Details about 2/2 movements during 1943-1944 are from A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion January 1943 - December 1944 (2/2 War Diary) and S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978, (first published 1977) Ch.9, pp.245-264.

Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, visited the troops and inspected their training ground.

By mid-year the unit was at more than half strength and experiencing some stability as a result of slowing sickness rates. Then events at the end of June and early July changed it profoundly. At a battalion parade on 21 June the men farewelled 'Boss' Edgar, who had been with them since November 1941. This much-admired commander, now promoted to brigadier to command the 4th militia Brigade at Milne Bay, was popular with the troops, having earned a reputation for straight and often bawdy talk in the style of the Australian general, George Vasey.⁽⁸⁾ After Edgar's departure, for which the troops lined the roads leading out of the camp, Captain Alan Baird assumed acting command amidst speculation as to the successor's identity. Then on 5 July, only two days after the 2/2 had absorbed part of the newly-disbanded 39th militia Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel A.G. Cameron, who previously commanded the 3rd militia Battalion in Papua, arrived to become the unit's fourth and last commander.

In the second half of 1943 the troops trained harder and took part in various brigade and divisional exercises including some with specialist American units. The II Australia Corps exercise on 11 July, west of Wild River and south of the Herberton-Irvinebank road, involved the 16th Brigade, 7th Division and an American parachute battalion acting as Japanese paratroopers. In the following month the 2/2 went to Deadman's Gully, a camp north of Cairns, to take part in amphibious training with the American 592 Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. There the troops had preliminary training in river crossings, bridge construction and the handling of reconnaissance craft before practising embarkation and disembarkation on various

8. ibid., p.249.

amphibious vehicles on the beaches surrounding Cairns. Then in October the men travelled to the Jungle Firing Range at Jensenvale to watch an artillery demonstration by the 2/3 Field Regiment. November brought another Divisional Parade and further training in the crossing of water obstacles, each rifle company spending three days on the Millstream. While most were on leave over Christmas, the first at home for the 'originals' since 1939, 63 men stayed behind in the charge of a lone officer, ridding the camp of a plague of fleas as well as engaging in construction work.

Training, exercises and organised sport set the pattern for life on the Atherton Tableland in 1944, a year which began with a 16th Brigade march through Sydney, Cameron leading a 2/2 contingent of 27 officers and 244 other ranks. Gathering again at Wondecla in late January the troops faced new and varied training methods. And while jungle training pre-dominated there was also emphasis on co-operation with tanks and artillery, particularly when practising attacks against bunkers. In February the unit travelled to the country around Molo and Mt. Fisher for exercises. Then in March Cameron spent two weeks in New Guinea while the troops competed in a 6th Division gymkhana on the Herberton golf links. The month of April saw every 16th Brigade platoon taking part in the three week long 'Free for All' Patrol Competition. In the following month the unit held training and exercises away from Wondecla again, this time in the Cassowary Creek and Irvinebank region. In June as part of a toughening-up programme the troops went on a series of route marches. Drill parades increased for the officers in preparation for yet another Divisional Parade on the Herberton Racecourse. At this gathering on 17 July, the day before many left for home leave, Blamey promised the troops that action was not far away. Then at a muster parade on 4 September the

troops heard the warning for draft overseas. Evidence that the move was underway came in October with the formation of an Advance Party of 20 under Baird, and following its preparations, it left Wondecla on 3 December the rest of the battalion following six days later.

While my research does not establish accurately the number of reinforcement intakes and the composition of each one during this period various data build up a picture of the unit's virtual transformation. In January 1943 the 250 reinforcements under the acting commander, Captain J.J. Harrison, formed the unit's foundation until leave personnel returned.⁽⁹⁾ By mid-1943 the battalion had 32 officers and 503 other ranks being 306 under strength. Then the absorption of the 39th Battalion increased its numbers but not to the excess establishment of 56 officers and 809 other ranks which Stan Wick claims in Purple Over Green.⁽¹⁰⁾ The 39th Battalion's historian, Vic Austin, who first drew attention to these figures was of the impression that less than half of a possible 375 ex-39th men joined the 2/2 at Wondecla. As he put it in a letter of 2 July 1982

The total paper strength of the 39th Bn. just prior to disbandment may well have been 24 officers and 351 O.R.s but certainly those numbers never became part of the 2/2 Bn. because many (perhaps half) of the 39th's O.R.s did not have 'X' [overseas service] numbers, i.e. they were still 'chockos' and therefore could not be incorporated into an A.I.F. unit.⁽¹¹⁾

9. 2/2 War Diary, 10-31 January 1943.

10. S. Wick, op.cit., p.251.

11. V. Austin, letter to the author, 2 July 1982.

Austin's completed research revealed that no more than 140 were ever part of the unit and that of them 120 were present at the actual hand-over on 3 July. The other 20 or so were either on leave or in hospital. (12)

Other sketchy details reveal that batches of reinforcements arrived periodically and that the usual process of transfers and discharges occurred. The War Diary noted in March 1944 that some newly-arrived reinforcements were 'all young men 19-20 years of age'. July records show that two groups arrived, one of 49 from the 3rd Australian Division, the other of 36 rejoining the unit from the disbanded 6th Australian Division Carrier Company. At the same time another group of 7 (one officer and six other ranks) from the Australian Shore Fire Control Party was attached to the unit. Then indicating what might have been a similar pattern in other months the War Diary summary of October noted that there were 32 releases to industry, 11 medical discharges, 13 transfers and three defined as illegal absentees. (13)

By November 1944 the unit had 43 officers and 801 other ranks. While this total exceeded establishment it did not of itself indicate the extent to which the battalion's composition had changed. By far the most telling piece of evidence revealing the scope of the unit's reconstruction since Papua was the group photographs of May 1944 showing the remaining 79 'originals' (8 officers and 71 other ranks). (14) Evidence that the same process occurred in other 16th Brigade units was the finding of a 2/1 Battalion census of July 1943 that only 24 of the 200 6th Division 'originals', who transferred to

12. V. Austin, letter to author, 8 June 1988, accompanying notes on draft manuscript.

13. 2/2 War Diary, March, July and October 1944.

14. S. Wick, op.cit., p.259.

it after Greece and Crete, still remained after New Guinea, 18 from the 2/2's draft, 6 from the 2/3's.⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus while significant changes had occurred in the unit previously, most notably after Greece and Crete, the nature of the reinforcement after New Guinea marked a completely new era for the battalion as not only did 'originals' then comprise only about one-tenth of its composition but the top position in the unit as well as approximately one-fifth of the reinforcements came from the militia and Victoria.

The 2nd A.I.F.'s historians, official and unit alike, mostly neglect the 6th Division's period of regrouping and training on the Atherton Tableland when in fact it constituted for some units, including the 2/2, their longest stay in one place during the entire war. In what seems a surprising omission the 2/2's founding historians completely ignored the two year span between the Papuan and Aitape-Wewak campaigns. Then Purple Over Green covered the period by drawing mainly on official histories and various articles on the 39th militia Battalion by Colonel Ralph Honner.⁽¹⁶⁾ And although some recently published unit histories shed a glimmer on some of the issues affecting Australian infantry units at that time they do so more by

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15. The First At War: The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion, The Association of First Infantry Battalions, MacArthur Press, Sydney, 1987, p.348.
16. See A.J. Marshall (ed.) Nulli Secundus Log, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946 and S. Wick, op.cit., Ch.9, pp.245-264.

providing connective tissue for missing portions than by filling lacunae in established evidence.⁽¹⁷⁾

As well personal documents, which have been scarce for other periods in this study, barely exist for the Atherton Tableland. Even in interviews with the author many 2/2 veterans seemed to bypass the period in their recollections, perhaps reflecting the format of remembering already set for them in their unit's histories. This lack of attention to the period is understandable however when placed in the context of traditional military history. Soldiers, and those who write of them, assign more significance to periods of action than they do to those of inaction. Perhaps just as important is the fact that the soldiers' recollections of dull periods in their past experience are vague and generalised as most peoples' are. At the same time the lack of knowledge about life on the Atherton Tableland belies the complexities being dealt with by A.I.F. units during the last two to three years of the war.

The 2/2's period of regrouping after New Guinea started differently from that after Greece and Crete and yet some similarities mark the two episodes.⁽¹⁸⁾ When the first group of 63 'survivors' left Port Moresby on 30 December 1942 on the HMT Tasman, with other 16

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17. See D. Hay, Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6 Australian Infantry Battalion, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, pp.375-410 for perhaps the best examination. Also S. Trigellis-Smith, All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5 Australian Infantry Battalion, 2/5 Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1988, pp.251-264; V. Austin, To Kokoda and Beyond: The Story of the 39th Battalion 1941-1943, Melbourne University Press, 1988, pp.227-236, and The First At War, op.cit., pp.342-367
18. Again details of 2/2 movements from 2/2 War Diary and S. Wick, op.cit., Ch.9, pp.245-264.

Brigade personnel and the 2/4 Field Ambulance, they sailed to Brisbane calling in at Cairns and Townsville. The men sunbaked and rested for the entire voyage and also ate well from the supplies of fresh meat and vegetables which the commanding officer purchased in Australian ports. Arriving in Brisbane on 8 January the men went to the Yerrongpilly Reception Camp where they received pay, clothing and other rations before going on 14 days' special home leave. Those from northern New South Wales left first by special train on the following morning while that evening the rest boarded a Sydney-bound train which carried them into the city on 10 January, being the third anniversary of the unit's departure for the Middle East.

No written records describe the men's reactions to their homecoming but George Caling, who was in the first group to leave Port Moresby, told the author in 1982 that the men had been overwhelmed by the army's care of them in Brisbane. What surprised them most was the army's waiving of the men's signatures for clothing and other rations as well as the serving of extravagant meals, which were presented smorgasbord style instead of being 'dished out in the usual army fashion'. As Caling put it, the men 'could not believe their eyes or believe it was the army' and as a result of this 'over-feeding' he arrived in Armidale looking so healthy and suntanned that he had difficulty convincing his family and friends of the realities of the Papuan campaign. As he added 'They didn't believe the Kokoda Track could have been so bad when the men could look so fit'.⁽¹⁹⁾

Many of course were very ill, either through disease or injury, and their delayed and uneven return to the Atherton Tableland prolonged the establishment of battalion strength for some time. Those who succumbed again to malaria on their return did so at such a

19. G. Caling, interview, Canberra, 18 April 1982 (Caling interview).

rate that the diarist observed that while the unit's strength on paper increased, in reality it 'remained almost stationary' because of the malarial evacuations, including among them the commander, Colonel Edgar. Even the troops who resumed battalion duties were far from fit, being unable to commence a full training programme. In April malaria was 'still a menace', the men's reduced fitness curtailing some training exercises, specifically the assault and obstacle course which many failed to complete, particularly towards the end when they had to attack bayonet dummies. On 30 April medical opinion about the 'general unfit condition of the troops' influenced the decision which halved a proposed 40 mile route march.⁽²⁰⁾

While malarial casualties decreased gradually it was to be March/April 1944 before the diarist recorded rates as low as three to four weekly. During much of 1943 sickness rates, including many other diseases besides malaria, greatly influenced the pace of training and the introduction of sport. Mid-year when malarial casualties were still 'fairly high' the toll being taken by strenuous training reduced sporting activities. In the following month the occurrence of eleven malarial cases after a battalion exercise prompted the diarist to comment that training needed to be stepped up to increase the men's fitness as the 'exercise had proved more strenuous for [the] troops than expected'.⁽²¹⁾ At that time medical opinion also postulated that stress and unfitness led to malarial relapses in some troops.⁽²²⁾ Then the coming of 1944 saw a marked slowing in malarial rates, so much so that by April football accidents were causing the 'greatest wastage'. Finally in July malarial evacuations reached the 'low level

20. 2/2 War Diary March and April 1943.

21. *ibid.*, June and July 1943.

22. A. Walker, The Island Campaigns, The Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1951, p.235.

of one', a pattern which continued until November, at which time the medical officer judged the battalion to be extremely fit, the only evacuations in that month being accidents and three cases of scabies.(23)

Unlike their regrouping in the Middle East, where the men returned to the familiarity of a well-loved camp, on the Atherton Tableland the veterans came to camps which reinforcements carved out of rugged country. As well the disruptive pattern of leave and sickness returns could not have been the best conditions for creating cohesion but the move to Flaggy Creek, coinciding as it did with an improved weather, seems to have been welcomed by all. It also provided the unit with an opportunity to have reinforcements and veterans working side by side establishing living quarters. As the diarist wrote:

The climatic conditions ... have been ideal ... the days ... clear and crisp. Within a month the [area] has been transformed from a typical bush paddock to a carefully planned camp with as many modern conveniences as could be expected in such a northern area.

The individual companies used many of their parade hours during the month to prepare their areas 'even ... making coy. vegetable gardens in the centre of [the] camp'.(24)

Other features of battalion life took shape slowly. The battalion band started its reorganisation in March despite the absence of its 'original' members who were 'scattered far and wide due to injuries and sickness'. The diarist noted that the new band played 'a few selected marches' at parades during April but he rated its

23. 2/2 War Diary, April, July and November 1944.

24. ibid., March 1943.

performance poorly against the old band's standard.⁽²⁵⁾ In the first few months other recreations were scarce, the troops having virtually no facilities and very little local leave. The Salvation Army's huts at least provided letter-writing and reading facilities. Entertainment other than sport was not well catered for until the opening of the 16th Brigade cinema in January 1944. Before that mobile cinemas visited the camp from time to time and there was also the local picture theatre.

Sport took on greater significance in the isolated conditions but even that got underway slowly. November 1943 saw the beginning of a 6th Division cricket competition and in the same month the 2/2's team beat a local team by 180 runs. By the time the troops returned from Christmas leave many sports had been organised, including boxing, football, and swimming. Both regular competitions and special events such as the March gymkhana created competitiveness and goodwill. Writing of the gymkhana, which involved the men in athletics, cycling, wood-chopping and sawing, as well as a cooking competition, the diarist observed that the troops recorded 'good times' running on prepared tracks without shoes. D Company's 18 Platoon won the drill competition while B Company received the Holmes Shield for coming first overall, with D Company a close second and Headquarters third. Then, giving a rare glimpse of battalion camaraderie, the diarist concluded his summary: 'as night fell each Coy. gathered around a bonfire built close to where its kitchen had been and conducted a ... sing-song until 2200 hours'.⁽²⁶⁾

25. ibid.

26. ibid., March 1944.

Initially training had to be geared to the men's reduced capabilities while at the same time emphasising skills which had been found wanting in Papua.⁽²⁷⁾ A commanding officer's conference on 25-26 March 1943 had outlined the syllabus for the weapons and jungle training. Then on 3 April an administrative instruction put the training aims clearly, the top priority being the men's achievement of a high standard in weapons use as the 'basic essential for battle efficiency'. The assault and obstacle course aimed to 'harden all ranks' equipping them for battle conditions as did the practice of camouflage and concealment under tropical conditions. Night training, which lasted for two hours on two nights of the week included such things as silent movement, listening, the effect of wind, adjusting to the different degrees of light and maintaining direction. The route marches in full jungle marching order were to prepare all ranks, including cooks, drivers and other supporting personnel for jungle warfare. The programme also included close order drill which sought to instil discipline and smartness because, as the document observed, 'the best parade ground soldier is invariably the best man under battle conditions'.

In line with stated policy the battalion concentrated on weapons use during the first month of training. Employing the 'bull ring' system, which had small groups of men moving from one designated area to another, the company commanders supervised the allocation of men into 40 squads of approximately ten with the most senior in each acting as the leader. Each company was responsible for a particular aspect of the training with Headquarters taking grenades; A 2" mortar and unarmed combat; B light machine-guns; C sub-machine guns,

27. Details about training are from the 2/2 War Diary, April 1943.

camouflage and concealment and D rifle and bayonet. The men started their day at 0715 hours with a company parade, ending it at 1635 with an hour and a quarter lunch break in between. The day's training comprised eleven 35-minute periods being broken by five minute rests during which time the men moved to the next training area. A bugle sounded five minutes prior to a period ending and then again at the end. A single note denoted the commencement of the next period.

While the Atherton Tableland training introduced the men to many new facets of warfare perhaps the most significant was education about tropical diseases. Allan Walker noted in The Island Campaigns that both research and education in tropical medicine intensified in the years 1943-45 in response to the alarming seven percent wastage rate among Australian troops fighting in the hyperendemic regions of the S.W.P.A. (28) The troops, who had received no such instruction before Papua, were to become just as familiar with the use of prophylactic drugs and accessory equipment, as they were with the more tactical aspects of jungle training.

War Diary notations indicate that the practice and supervision of preventative measures consumed much of the unit's time. (29) And while the prevalence of malaria commanded the diarist's attention he also wrote in detail about scrub typhus prevention. On one occasion in August 1943 on the unit's return from its amphibious training around Cairns he attributed the men's clean bill against the disease to their strict adherence to precautions, comparing them very favourably with the previous unit's record of 42 cases. Then in March 1944, when the 2/2 took part in exercise 'Douglas', it tested an anti-mite lotion.

28. A. Walker, op.cit., Ch.12 pp.247-298. See also chapter on malaria in Clinical Problems of War, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, pp.62-164.

29. 2/2 War Diary, August 1943 onwards.

The men slept in impregnated clothes as it was thought that many scrub typhus cases in other units resulted from the men removing their clothes at night. On their return to Wondecla the men attended the Regimental Aid Post where the unit's fourth medical officer, Captain H.H. McLennan, used a magnifying glass to examine each man for mites, ticks or other bites, but none were found. The diarist also noted that sandflies were a problem and that the mosquito repellent MARY (dimethyl phthalate) was effective for one and a half hours.

Eventually anti-malarial parades were an integral part of battalion routine. In May 1944 daily anti-malarial parades, in which the troops ingested Atebrin tablets under supervision, were included in the 59 mile march to Gordonvale. As well the troops hung mosquito nets at night 'to accustom themselves to the necessary precautions'.⁽³⁰⁾ Indeed by the time 6th Division units left for New Guinea for a second time the authorities viewed breaches in prophylactic codes very seriously. On 16 October 1944 in a lecture to 6th Division officers Stevens informed them that in future operations the contracting of malaria and scrub typhus would be treated as self-inflicted wounds. He also warned that skin diseases would be rife in the new operational areas and that a reduction in the high wastage rate through disease depended very much on the enforcement of exacting health standards.⁽³¹⁾

The merging of A.I.F. and militia in the 2/2 was by far the most significant event on the Atherton Tableland and yet little is known of the men's reactions in either unit. Wick wrote in Purple Over Green

30. ibid., May 1944.

31. ibid., 16 October 1944.

that while some 2/2 men 'tended to look down on the newcomers as "chockos"', the 39th's fighting record in New Guinea allowed its troops to 'hold up their heads in any company'.⁽³²⁾ While that may have been so most in the 2/2 in July 1943 would have been unaware of the 39th's existence let alone its history. As John de Teliga, himself a reinforcement to the 2/2 in 1941, told the author in 1982 'we knew nothing about the poor devils'.⁽³³⁾

The 39th Battalion, which with the 3/22 and 49th made up 30th Brigade under Brigadier S.H. Porter, reached the Atherton Tableland on 14 March 1943 after fifteen months' continuous service in New Guinea. Only two days after its arrival at Wondecla it heard of the 30th Brigade's inclusion in the 16th Brigade and 6th Division. After a brief settling-in period the men left by train for Victoria for a fortnight's leave. When they gathered again at Wondecla their strength was some 200 men. Then on 25 May the 39th received notice that those men who had not volunteered for service with the A.I.F. were to go to a drafting depot. And while most officers and non-commissioned officers were A.I.F. enlistments, as we have seen previously more than half of the other ranks were still militiamen who had no intention of transferring to the volunteer force. Most of the latter eventually went to the 36th militia Battalion remaining with it until the end of the war.⁽³⁴⁾

The 30th Brigade's disbandment at an early morning parade on 3 July completely surprised its troops. When they returned to their own lines after the parade and Morshead's speech, their own commander, Ralph Honner, addressed them in an emotional farewell. Then after the

32. S. Wick, op.cit., p.250.

33. J. de Teliga, interview, Canberra, July 1982.

34. Details of 39th Battalion movements are from V. Austin, op.cit., Ch.12, pp.227-236 and A.W.M. 52, ..., War Diary, 39th Militia Battalion, July 1943.

midday mess parade those men who had volunteered to the A.I.F. received orders to break camp and prepare for the transfer to 16th Brigade. Austin, who was in the 39th's D Company, wrote:

In full marching order we formed up in a single column ... and marched off to Flaggy Creek where the 16th Brigade, 6th Division was camped. Most of us 'other ranks' had scarcely grasped what was happening until we neared the 2/2nd Battalion's lines and sighted their ... flag. The order was given to march at attention and their band which had formed up by the roadside to meet us, struck up 'Colonel Bogey' and played us on to their parade ground where Colonel Honner handed us over to the acting C.O., [Alan Baird].⁽³⁵⁾

As Austin observed the reception was 'cool but correct'. The 2/2 absorbed the 39th by allowing its companies and specialist platoons to join their corresponding number in the unit. At the same time the 49th Battalion went to the 2/1, the 3/22 to the 2/3.

Cameron's arrival only two days after the amalgamation of A.I.F. and militia also carried great significance as his appointment ended the succession to that post from within the battalion. Curiously however there is scarce documentation about this momentous event in the unit's history: even the diarist noted incorrectly the new commander's arrival on the same day as the 39th men.⁽³⁶⁾ Wick wrote that even though Cameron had come to the 2/2 with a credible fighting record in the eyes of the men he had 'three defects'. He was an 'importation', he had not been to the Middle East and was regarded still as a militia officer, or as many veterans referred to him in interviews with the author, 'the Chocko C.O.'.⁽³⁷⁾ The appointment of

35. V. Austin, notes accompanying letter, 2 July 1982 (Austin notes).

36. The 16th Brigade's diarist records Cameron's appointment on 3 July so possibly therein lies the confusion. See A.W.M., 8/2/16, HQ 16 Infantry Brigade, 3 July 1943.

37. The term was used by many men in discussions with the author at several 2/2 Battalion reunions during the period November 1981 to April 1983.

the very popular 'original' officer, Charlie Green, as Cameron's second-in-command greatly satisfied the other 'originals'.⁽³⁸⁾

In contrast to 2/2 feelings the newly-incorporated 39th men seem to have viewed Cameron's arrival as a 'twist of fate'⁽³⁹⁾ welcoming the fact that he was a Victorian and had commanded them briefly in the early days of the Papuan campaign. Unlike other 16th Brigade unit commanders Cameron allotted ex-39th officers and non-commissioned officers postings according to rank within the 2/2. Apparent discord in other 16th Brigade units prompted Arch McLellan, to write in his diary at the time:

The 2/2 ... is the only battalion ... where the men from 30 Bde. have held their rank and taken over from originals. The 2/3 ... took the most extreme action in that the C.O. [Col. I. Hutchinson] refused to set the new officers even over junior officers and required all other ranks to hand in their rank or get out. The C.O. of [the] 2/1 ... Col. Cullen took the middle course of keeping originals in their postings and carrying the newcomers as supernumerary until they could be absorbed.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Battalion folklore, as expounded to the author informally at various unit reunions, promoted the idea of a trouble-free incorporation of the 39th into the 2/2. Given the known antipathy between A.I.F. and militia during the war however the reality must have been quite different.⁽⁴¹⁾ While scarce documentation makes an assessment of the merging very difficult it seems from extant sources that the transition had its troublesome moments for both groups. Austin, who eventually joined 2/2's A Company told the author in 1983

38. S. Wick, op.cit., p.249.

39. V. Austin, op.cit., p.234.

40. Cited in S. Wick, op.cit., p.252.

41. Many 2/2 veterans were willing to speak at reunions about controversial issues but felt disinclined to do so in planned interviews.

that at the time of its dissolution the 39th had had a strongly developed sense of unity, the loss of which caused it much pain. The 39th men, whose average age was then probably about 20, also had been in awe of the Middle Eastern veterans who seemed so worldly in contrast to their own youthfulness and travel inexperience. As Austin put it: 'they seemed men, we were only boys'.⁽⁴²⁾ He believed too that the 2/2's time with the British Army and its adoption of their practices and drill set the A.I.F. apart from the militia who had had only elementary training before they went into action in New Guinea.

Reflecting on the sensitivities which exist to the present between the two units, Austin wrote in the 39th's history in 1988 that the 'complete integration of ... ex-39th men ... was achieved only as a result of the hardships and dangers shared during the [later] Aitape-Wewak campaign'. Privately however he indicated far more clearly the tensions which existed between the two groups. In notes for the author in 1982 Austin wrote that 'complete acceptance ... was a lengthy process' during which time 'vibes' were often 'not good':

Strangely, it was the longer-serving members of the Battalion, men who had been in action in North Africa, Greece, Crete and New Guinea, who accepted us more readily whereas the more recent arrivals⁽⁴³⁾... who had never been in action seemed more resentful of us.

Most resentment centred around the fact that the 39th was a militia battalion. The fact too that the 39th's non-commissioned officers retained their rank blocking promotion for 2/2 men was another source

42. V. Austin interview, Melbourne, July 1983 (Austin interview). Austin's impression about the militiamen's age confirmed by the finding of the Barry Commission on the Cessation of Papuan Civil Administration in early 1942 that the militia in 30th Brigade had an average age of 18 1/2 years. See D. McCarthy, South-West Pacific Area First Year, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, p.44.

43. V. Austin, op.cit., p.235, Austin notes.

of discontent. Austin, as well as other 39th men, also believed that their Victorian origins made them 'foreigners' in the eyes of the New South Welshmen. As some quipped during a discussion with the author at a 39th Battalion reunion in Melbourne in 1982: 'They were the Australians we were the foreigners'.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The finding that tensions existed between A.I.F. and militia in the 2/2 is hardly surprising knowing that antagonisms existed between A.I.F. enlistees themselves. The men's hesitancy also to reveal what may now seem just petty unpleasantries is also understandable when more than four decades of maturity and reflection separate the actual events and judgements about them. Eventually some 39th men made lasting friendships with some in the 2/2, perhaps rendering a completely open examination of early tensions more difficult. As Austin reflected in 1983 the climate of A.I.F./militia rivalry during the war conditioned the 39th to be very sensitive to its amalgamation in mid-1943.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Nonetheless writing in his unit's history some years later he observed that the transferees benefited greatly from having their own officers guide them through 'the stressful experience of absorption'. And despite the difficulties the 39th managed to retain some of its individuality in at least one area of 2/2 life by its formation of an Australian Rules football team which played in the 6th Division's competition. Even though the rugby enthusiasts from New South Wales and Queensland regarded the Victorian code 'as something

44. Author attended the 40th anniversary of the 39th Battalion's annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne ('Kokoda Day') on 8 August 1982, and an afternoon tea at the Bank Rowing Club afterwards.

45. V. Austin interview.

of a curiosity' it helped the 39th men preserve 'a certain feeling' of their own identity.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Morale appears to have been a problem generally for units on the Atherton Tableland but again the lack of reliable evidence makes a 2/2 assessment extremely difficult. In his final volume Gavin Long writes of discontent in the 2nd A.I.F. observing that it occurred most in those units which had developed a strong sense of independence during three years' service abroad. Indeed, his opinion is that these men found it hardest to reconcile their feelings of isolation and neglect with their former feelings of pride about being in the forefront of Australia's contribution to the war. It was during the period in northern Queensland that many A.I.F. veterans came to see Australia as a 'bludger's paradise' wherein the civilians, who seemed to care little for either the war or the army, prospered at the soldiers' expense.

The Atherton Tableland's remoteness also greatly intensified the men's feelings of isolation and paranoia. The soldiers had only occasional and brief sojourns to the southern states and even when they were on leave they tended to congregate together either to share their common experiences or to berate the gains being made by civilians in their absence. While Long believed that some A.I.F. grievances had their basis in reality he concluded that many also resulted from the men's own sense of frustration. By October 1944 many units had been out of action for long periods, the longest being the 6th Division's 19th Brigade which had seen action last in Crete in May 1941. The 6th Division's other two brigades had been out of

46. V. Austin, op.cit., p.235.

fighting areas for eighteen months or more while the 7th and 9th Divisions were also in the middle of their longest period of inaction since 1941.

[these] were years of anti-climax for a big proportion of the men who had enlisted in the first two years of the war. By early 1944 the 'Second World War' had lasted longer than the first, the Americans had ... taken the lead in the South West Pacific [and] the Australians were in the background.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The A.I.F. was not alone in its woes. While army policies in 1943 had sought to direct a harmonious merging of the A.I.F. and C.M.F. many new measures backfired, creating dissatisfactions in both forces rather than forging a common identity.⁽⁴⁸⁾ By far the most controversial change was the cross-posting of newly-commissioned officers from the A.I.F. to militia units. According to Long the assignment of A.I.F. personnel to C.M.F. units aimed to both provide experience and promote understanding between the volunteer and conscript forces but in practice it seems to have done neither.

In July 1943, around the time of the disbandment of some militia units, the cross-posting policy established that a lieutenant graduating from an Officer Cadet Training Unit could not return to the unit which had recommended his promotion. Long concludes that A.I.F. commanders 'deplored' the arbitrary way in which higher command implemented the policy, with some graduating officers actually hearing of the change in policy while still enrolled in a course. No documentation records the reactions of any 2/2 officers who might have been caught in this situation, but Tim Fearnside of the 9th Division's 2/13 Battalion recalled in his memoir, Half to Remember, that he and

47. G. Long, *op.cit.*, pp.79-81.

48. *ibid.*, For a full discussion of the policy Ch.4, 'Leaders and Men', pp.71-78.

three friends, who were at a three month course at Woodside in South Australia, were taken completely unawares by the introduction of the new policy. He and his companions left the Atherton Tableland together by train some weeks earlier but had they known that they were not returning to their own units they 'would have jumped out again as one man'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Long notes that the policy, designed to improve the general standard of officers throughout the army, ignored both the desire of non-commissioned officers to obtain commissions within their own units and the reluctance of commanding officers to lose their best men to other units. As Fearnside put it finally, the new policy tended only to lower A.I.F. morale while doing nothing to create goodwill in the militia units.

Evidence from other sources suggests that Long's picture of an unsettled A.I.F. on the Atherton Tableland is no doubt accurate. The 2/6 described itself as a 'dispirited battalion' at Wondecla, citing increased A.W.L. rates as an indication of dissatisfactions.⁽⁵⁰⁾ A 2/3 private, Bob 'Hooker' Holt', describes in his memoir, From Ingleburn to Aitape a telling happening. At one time on the Atherton Tableland, he says, the 7th and 9th Divisions responded to their feelings of being treated like dogs by barking as such at Retreat. The practice 'took on like wildfire' in the three veteran divisions: 'Faintly at first you could hear the yapping and barking from faraway units and then louder until it reached our camp. We would take up the call and then it could be heard fading away in the distance'. The barking sounds, which the authorities did their best to stamp out,

49. G.H. ('Tim') Fearnside, Half to Remember: Reminiscences of an Australian Infantry Soldier in World War II, Holland Publishing Co., Sydney, 1975, p.170. Fearnside cites the 2/2's Tom Blamey as one of his companions but Blamey died of wounds in Papua in late November 1942.

50. D. Hay, op.cit., p.382.

'died a natural death' but Holt believed that like the sounds of baaing sheep of mutinous French units, who believed they were being led to the slaughter in the First World War, the phenomenon, while it lasted at Atherton, indicated the men's feelings clearly.⁽⁵¹⁾ A Routine Order of 7 October 1944 about disturbances at the Brigade picture theatre, where picquets were already in place, also indicated general unrest. As the Brigadier's edict read:

The recent disturbances and disorderly conduct of personnel at the ... Theatre are viewed with concern and a repetition of such will result in disciplinary action being taken against personnel directly responsible. Whilst it is appreciated that these disturbances are not solely the fault of members of this Bde. - their occurrence is a direct reflection on personnel of 16 Aust. Inf. Bde.⁽⁵²⁾

As we have seen, 2/2 historians tend toward silence on controversial issues influencing life on the Atherton Tableland. But one incident referred to by several of its veterans possibly throws light on problems of morale and leadership, or just plain boredom. According to a time-tabled and succinct record in the War Diary, the unit's A Company 'refused to carry out its duties' on the morning of 9 November 1944. On the previous day the latter's performance at a Battle Inoculation Course, a preparation for action using live ammunition, was the subject of a conference between Cameron and the Brigade Commander. That evening at 2230 hours 'two unidentified men' attacked the company commander in company lines. On the following morning Cameron and other senior officers discussed the attack and the disciplinary action to be taken before requesting A Company to parade. Following its refusal to comply with the order the second-in-command

51. Bob 'Hooker' Holt, From Ingleburn to Aitape: The Trials and Tribulations of a Four Figure Man, R. Holt, Sydney 1981, p.173.
 52. 2/2 War Diary, October 1944.

Green, took the Orderly Officer with him to inspect the company's lines before requesting the men to parade to explain of their behaviour. Also at that time a new company commander was appointed. At 1330 the Brigade Commander conferred with Cameron again and as the diarist put it 'A Coy. resumed work' at 1400 hours.⁽⁵³⁾

In various but independent interviews with the author several men of different ranks described what happened on 9 November as a 'rebellion', 'strike', 'riot' or 'incident'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ According to the veterans' accounts, which filled out the bare outline in the War Diary and more or less corroborated each other, A Company's refusal to parade resulted from senior commanders requesting that its members do so by wearing only their great-coats over their naked bodies, although Austin, recalled in 1988 that it was a blanket he was asked to wear.⁽⁵⁵⁾ As the story goes the assaulted officer, believing he had scratched one of his assailants, was hoping to identify the offender during the inspection of unclad men. After breakfast the company refused a second time to parade, on this occasion with pack and equipment, the company 'to a man' refusing to leave company tent lines despite a procession of commanders 'up to the Brigadier'⁽⁵⁶⁾ trying to coax them into obedience.

Whether the event had any lasting significance for battalion morale is highly conjectural. But significantly perhaps, the men who readily volunteered the information about the events of 9 November greeted the author with silence when, after War Diary records corroborated interview material, she attempted more searching enquiries. According to Cec Litchfield, the first to broach the

53. *ibid.*, 9 November 1944.

54. Interviews took place in Canberra, Sydney, Newcastle. Informal discussions took place at reunions in Sydney, Newcastle and Ballina.

55. V. Austin amendment to draft manuscript, 6 June 1988.

56. P. Hooper, interview Newcastle, 10 June 1983 (Hooper interview).

subject in an interview in 1982, the assaulted officer was the source of much anxiety amongst the men as he either caused the company to be lost or to be last into position on manoeuvres around Atherton. Litchfield was at pains to explain that the men had no personal animosity towards their company commander but they did question his competence as a leader, their doubts and fears increasing with the announcement of a return to New Guinea. Litchfield, who claimed that he was 'one of five' who knew the details of the attack, went on to suggest that A Company paid for its recalcitrance in the Aitape-Wewak fighting by being sent on more patrols than other companies and thus suffering the unit's highest casualties for that campaign.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Typically individual perceptions about what happened, and whether repercussions followed, varied according to either the interviewee's involvement in the 'incident', or the rank he held at the time. In 1983 Peter Hooper, who was then the Company Sergeant Major, recalled that the more senior officers 'grilled' him about the attack, believing that he both knew the offender's identity and was protecting him. In fact, he said, he only discovered the man's identity nine years after the war. Caling, who was Company Sergeant Major prior to Hooper was in hospital in Brisbane at the time of the 'incident' but recalled that from what some of the men told him in letters he always felt that he could have defused the situation had he been there as in his view the ringleaders were 'hot heads' requiring careful handling. Jock Hetherington, a long-time A Company member told the author at a reunion that the 'Chocko C.O.' banned A Company from the canteen after the 'strike' making it also go on 20 mile route marches with full pack and equipment as disciplinary action for its mutinous behaviour.

57. C. Litchfield, interview, Canberra, 8 February 1982 (Litchfield interview).

Others refute such claims as 'wild imagination'. Baird, who was second-in-command at Aitape-Wewak discounted entirely the notion of A Company's victimisation. Austin who read a draft account of the incident for the author in 1988 agreed with Baird's view that no repercussions followed the company's refusal to obey orders on the Atherton Tableland. And while he thought that claims about canteen bans and route marches were fanciful he did agree that anxieties about poor leadership instigated the affair: an 'incident in some form or other was almost inevitable and may have even been welcomed by some of the senior officers'. (58)

Other indications of battalion malaise appeared in War Diary records about two to three weeks before the A Company affair but again conclusions must be highly conjectural. The 2/2 seems to have received its most severe criticism in mid-October following the 16th Brigade exercise, 'Moomin', in which the unit made a night attack over difficult country through another battalion's lines. The diarist wrote that the exercise had been a 'failure' because of poor preparation, inept leadership from junior commanders and troop apathy. At a 16th Brigade post-mortem for all officers, the brigadier criticised the 2/2's 'chaotic' attack emphasising three main errors: congestion at the forming up place, noisiness and bad language and the Intelligence Officer's contravention of a Brigade instruction which resulted in the sky-lining of some troops. Stevens, who was also at the meeting, addressed the officers on their responsibilities warning the inefficient among them of 'on the spot' demotions for unacceptable

58. Hooper interview, 6 June 1983, Caling interview, J. Hetherington, Ballina reunion 1982 and then at the one in Newcastle 1983, Austin amendments to draft manuscript, 6 June 1988 and A. Baird and D. Fairbrother, interview, Port Macquarie, 7 June 1983.

behaviour citing the 'many cases' being paraded before him for actions resulting from excessive drinking.

Then at two conferences on the following day, one for the officers, the other for sergeants, Cameron expressed his surprise at his unit's 'reversal of form' reiterating some of the points which umpire reports raised. Orders had not been broken down by sub-unit commanders and sentries disregarded security measures. Platoon commanders also were remiss about security allowing some troops to carry reading material during the exercise. As well all ranks neglected the 'finer details' of hygiene. Cameron concluded by pointing out that officers had 'failed dismally' to maintain control, a situation which could only be reversed by an insistence on 'the paying of courtesies at all times [and] the elimination of the tendency to familiarity between officers, N.C.O.s and men'. Finally the diarist noted that at a repeat performance of the exercise on 23 October the battalion silenced its critics with a carefully planned and well executed performance, Cameron being pleased with the 'tightened discipline'.⁽⁵⁹⁾

The 2/2's reconstruction after Papua changed the unit even more significantly than after Greece and Crete. While many originals left the unit at the time of the mid-1941 regrouping the command structure remained firmly in 'original' hands. Indeed the two commanders of the 1941 to 1943 period, Colonels Frederick Chilton and C.R. 'Boss' Edgar, are still revered in battalion memories; Chilton, who never acquired a nickname, for his gentility and Edgar for his down-to-earth and often

59. 2/2 War Diary, 14 and 15 October 1944.

bawdy approach with the men. Cameron's appointment and the incorporation of militiamen into the unit truly ended the reign of the 'originals'. While it is clear that such developments met much disapproval from within the ranks conclusions about their significance for the battalion are impossible. Lack of reliable evidence combined with the men's fear of transgressing battalion loyalties has lead to a situation where it is possibly best to leave well alone.

Much of the evidence also suggests that social tensions erupted when life on the Atherton Tableland teetered on utter boredom. In 1982 Cec Litchfield said he only understood some time after the war that it was the boredom that sent so many men 'ga-ga'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Beyond what is presented here however the men's recollections are either extremely hazy or fearfully guarded. The fact that some only remember the 'strike' may simply mean there was not much else to remember amid the daily routine in isolation. Many men of course did not contribute their views and they may have a different story to tell. An answer to the question of whether the A Company affair had wider ramifications for the conduct of leadership in the unit will probably never be known. At battalion reunions the men made it clear that their militia leader, in their eyes, never measured up to the three former original commanders. Cameron however cannot be judged on hearsay evidence and questions remain about whether disappointment over his appointment reflected on his abilities or on the prejudices of battalion members.

As for the 39th men their story is inextricably linked with the 2/2 but they remained true to their 39th Battalion identity. Stan Challis, a member of the Battalion Band after his transfer to the 2/2 in August 1943, perhaps summed up the situation best:

60. Litchfield interview.

I think that the 39th Battalion men would put that Unit first and 2/2nd Battalion next. This is proven on Anzac Day when they march with their original unit. However some of them march with their unit to the shrine, then walk back and join the 2/2 Battalion when they come along. (61)

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE AITAPE-WEWAK OPERATIONS

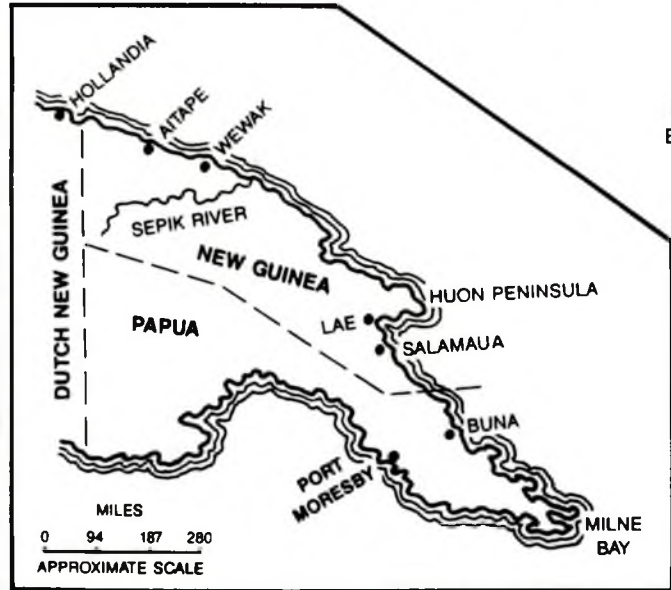
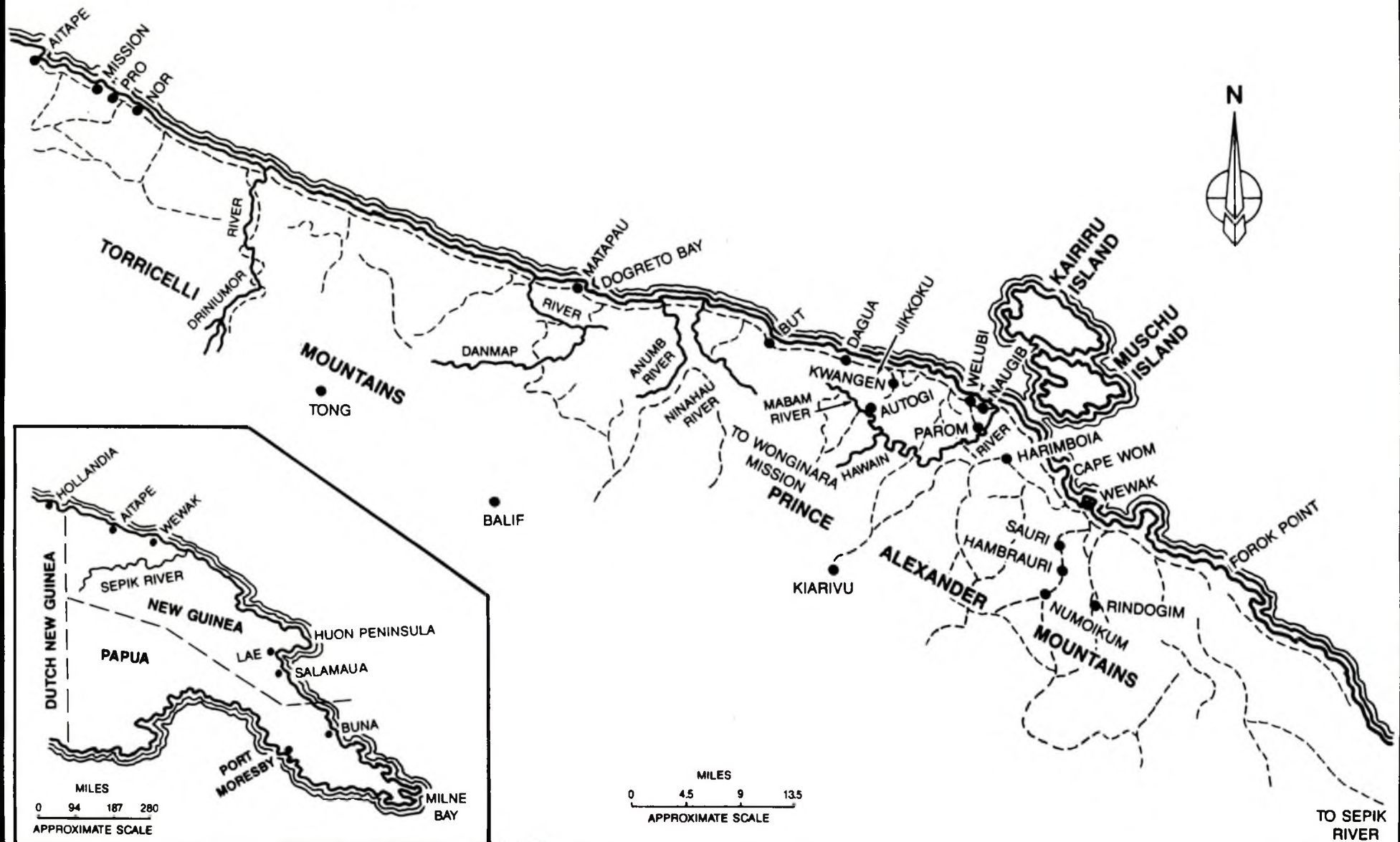
DECEMBER 1944 - SEPTEMBER 1945

The Australian 6th Division under the command of Major-General J.E.S. Stevens, and unified as a fighting force for the first time since Greece, began relieving the American 43rd Division (Sixth Army) at Aitape in October 1944. For the next ten months the Australians went on the offensive, with support from Nos. 7, 8 and 100 RAAF squadrons, against some 35,000 enemy troops of Lieutenant-General Adachi's 18th Army in the Aitape-Wewak region of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The 3,000 square miles of operations covered a 70 mile coastal stretch from the Driniumor River to Forok Point (Aitape to Wewak), a ten mile southern stretch from Wewak and a 45 mile easterly advance inland from Tong to Kiarivu.⁽¹⁾

Since defeats at Lae and Salamaua in 1943 and early 1944 Adachi's 20th, 41st and 50th Divisions had retreated westwards from the Huon Peninsula dispersing their troops widely in the mountainous and heavily populated Aitape-Wewak region. Vast areas of swampland at the mouth of the large Sepik River prevented any substantial enemy group from moving very far south of Wewak, effectively containing the retreating force. In April the American landings at Aitape and Hollandia brought no response from the enemy. Then in July after

1. The following details about the Aitape-Wewak operations are from 'Sixth Australian Division, Report on Operations, Aitape-Wewak Campaign, 26 Oct 1944 - 13 Sep 1945' a copy loaned to the author by S. Trigellis-Smith (6th Division report); G. Long, The Final Campaigns, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, Ch.11, pp.271-281; E.G. Keogh, The South West Pacific 1941-45, Grayflower Productions, Melbourne, 1965, Ch.9, pp.393-428.

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failing in a counteroffensive at Aitape, Adachi made his headquarters at Wewak along with that of the 50th Division while the 20th was at But, the 41st at Balif, west of the Anumb River. In addition some 2,000 army troops were with the 3,000 strong 27th Naval Base Force on Muschu and Kairiru, two small islands off the Wewak coast, while another 5,000 unarmed base and service troops were in Wewak's southern reaches living off the countryside.

Formal command for Aitape-Wewak passed from the Americans to the Australians on 26 November although the latter had had tactical control of their troops since the beginning of the month. The Americans, who were on their way to the Philippines, had held the beachhead with relative ease since their quashing of the counteroffensive by allowing the Japanese, cut off from all supplies, to 'wither on the vine'. This passive approach contrasted sharply with that adopted by the Australians, who on their arrival began a programme of aggressive patrolling, which some believe sought to harass and destroy the enemy entirely.⁽²⁾ The operations, which ended formally with the Japanese surrender at Wewak on 13 September, resulted in some 9,000 enemy deaths and 296 prisoners-of-war, nearly six times the Australian casualties of 442 killed and 1,141 wounded. Disease also took its toll on both sides, the 6th Division having 16,203 sickness evacuations. Most Japanese prisoners after the surrender required medical care.⁽³⁾

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2. S. O'Leary, To the Green Fields Beyond: The Story of 6th Division Cavalry Commandos, Wilke Group, Brisbane, 1975, p.301.
 3. G. Long, op.cit., pp.385-86. The 6th Division report differs slightly on the number of Australians killed as well as wounded and has 7,200 enemy deaths. Also Allied intelligence reports underestimated the enemy force by about 5,000.

Until as late as October 1944 Australian political and military leaders assumed that their First (6th, 7th and 9th Divisions) would be deployed alongside Americans in the Philippines and the invasion of Japan.⁽⁴⁾ When events proved otherwise and General MacArthur assigned four Australian divisions (one A.I.F. and three militia) to what were virtually conquered territories in the South West Pacific Area (S.W.P.A.), operational commanders interpreted their tactical roles from directives coming solely from General Blamey.

Attempts to define the S.W.P.A. operations in conventional military terms have always met with difficulty.⁽⁵⁾ From the outset however contemporaries raised questions about the precise nature of the fighting. A January 1945 Canberra Times headline initiated one of the longest parliamentary debates of the war on a significant military issue.⁽⁶⁾ And while historians agree on the fighting's futility many draw back from judging finally either the wisdom of Australian strategy or the blameworthiness of the leading military protagonist, Blamey.⁽⁷⁾ But even as the operations progressed the dissent raging in the parliament and press forced the Army chief to make public his current policies and practice. His explanations that the operations were as necessary politically as the campaign in the Philippines, and

4. D. Horner, High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy of 1939-1945, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, Ch.17, pp.382-410.

5. G. Long, op.cit.; A. Walker, The Island Campaigns, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957; E.G. Keogh, op.cit., Ch.9, 'The Mopping-up Campaigns', pp.393-428 and J. Robertson and McCarthy, Australian War Strategy 1939-1945: A Documentary History, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985, Ch.26, 'The Mandate Campaigns', pp.401-416.

6. Canberra Times, 10 January 1945. Headline read 'Will anyone knowing the whereabouts of Australian soldiers in action in the South West Pacific Area please communicate at once with the Australian Government?'

7. G. Long, op.cit.; J. Robertson, Australia at War 1939-1945, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1981, Ch.9, 171-182 and D. Horner, op.cit., pp.382-410.

that Australia had a duty to 'liberate the natives'⁽⁸⁾ in her mandates, were not wholly convincing to many.

The issues did not recede with the war's ending. In a Melbourne newspaper article of 22 August 1945 Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Howard questioned the fighting's efficacy. Howard, the former head of the A.I.F.'s Historical Records Office in the Middle East and a prominent figure in press relations during the New Guinea phase of the war, clearly outlined the contradictions of the policy which conducted 'mopping up' operations in Pacific 'back areas' when in fact the surrender of Japanese was a 'forgone conclusion' long before the Australians took command. The reconquest in 'heart-breaking country' engaged some troops, particularly those in New Britain and Bougainville, in 'virtual exploration ... through areas which no white man had ... visited'. Noting the imbalance in the casualties Howard concluded:

... now comes the end to our War of the Islands. It is the same end by surrender which MacArthur envisaged 16 months ago. The difference is there are a few thousand less Japanese to surrender than there might have been if we had not insisted on waging active war. There are a few hundred more dead Australians. Maybe they would have died anyway ... on the shores of Luzon [in the Philippines]. That would hardly have comforted their relatives but their sacrifice would have achieved more direct progress on the road to Tokyo and so increased the historic input of the gallant tragedy of their passing.⁽⁹⁾

Retrospective assessments found the issues no easier to resolve, official historians writing with notable constraint. While Allan

8. D. Horner, High Command, pp.382-410 for examination of policies.

9. Full text of article 'Was our War in the Islands a Wasted Effort?', cited in J. Robertson and J. McCarthy, op.cit., pp.414-416. For Howard's biographical details see G. Long, Greece, Crete and Syria, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962 (first published 1953), pp.559-560 and D. McCarthy, South West Pacific Area First Year, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, pp.225-26.

Walker noted the 'far from passive, or even purely defensive'⁽¹⁰⁾ role of the Australians Gavin Long thought that even though two nations would uphold the New Guinea operations 'as examples of splendid fortitude'⁽¹¹⁾ questions about their conduct would always remain. Expressing much the same view, Colonel E.G. Keoygh, a veteran of the First World War and an army administrator of the second, wrote: 'Nothing that [Adachi] did or attempted to do necessitated an Allied offensive'.⁽¹²⁾ Recent publications revived the debate. The most controversial, because of its link with a television documentary of the same name, is The Unnecessary War. It argues that while contemporaries saw the 1945 offensives as politically misguided they were in fact the sole prerogative of the generals: 'the war of Sir Thomas Blamey'.⁽¹³⁾ A recent memoir of the Bougainville fighting also asserts it was 'a useless and unnecessary campaign'.⁽¹⁴⁾ Other studies reveal complex inter-Allied strategic decisions, made as they were both with an eye on future outcomes and without the benefit of hindsight.⁽¹⁵⁾ Most recently David Horner has suggested that on balance strategically, and however unpalatable to the detractors of the policies, the New Guinea and Bougainville offensives were 'probably necessary'.⁽¹⁶⁾

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10. A. Walker, op.cit., p.344.
 11. G. Long, op.cit., (The Final Campaigns) p.387.
 12. E.G. Keoygh, op.cit., p.408.
 13. P. Charlton, The Unnecessary War: Island Campaigns of the South West Pacific, 1944-45, MacMillan Australia, Melbourne, 1983, p.2
 14. P. Medcalf, War in the Shadows: Bougainville 1944-1945, William Collins, Sydney, 1989 (First published in 1986 by the Australian War Memorial), p.94.
 15. J. Robertson, op.cit., pp.173-176 and D. Horner, op.cit., pp.382-410.
 16. M. McKernan and M. Browne (eds.), Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace, Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, 1988, p.295.

The 2/2, as part of 16th Brigade and under its second-in-command, Major Charlie Green, was one of the last 6th Division units to reach Aitape in the closing days of 1944. Having arrived in November those of the 19th Brigade (2/4, 2/8 and 2/11) were more than half way down the coast towards Wewak while the 17th (2/5, 2/6 and 2/7), which came in early December, was inland in the Torricelli Mountains.⁽¹⁷⁾

When the unit landed at Aitape it went temporarily to a camp at the site known as Pro Mission. Ten days later it moved a few miles east along the coast to Nor where it made preparations for a forward move.⁽¹⁸⁾ On 20 January Green and an advance party travelled to Matapau, some 40 miles from Aitape, relieving the 2/4 of its reserve role. Five days later Colonel Alan Cameron returned to the unit following his time at the Beenleigh Tactical School in Queensland, joining the advance party on the following day. The torrential rain, which caused widespread flooding in the Danmap River area, prevented the rest of the battalion from moving to Matapau for another two weeks.

Not unlike its experience in Papua the 2/2's stay in New Guinea introduced the troops to many exotic-sounding place names which only the presence of warring armies brought to prominence. The New Guinean names however were predominantly local, with some reflecting the territory's former German occupation. Original maps of the American Army Engineers Corps detail the hundreds of villages as well as the

17. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.274.

18. Details about 2/2 movements and operations are from A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, 'The Coastal Drive to Wewak', A.J. Marshall (ed.), Nulli Secundus Log, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion,, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946, pp.120-126; S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978 (2nd ed.), first published 1977, pp.268-299 and A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, December 1944- August 1945 (2/2 War Diary).

network of roads, tracks, rivers, creeks and hills connecting them. The maps also show the tendency of opposing armies to bestow their own names on existing topographical features.⁽¹⁹⁾ Australian troops added to the process, naming the bridges and roads built by their own engineers, 'after places in the Middle East; Bagush, Sollum, Barrani, Giovanni ... Athens and Larisa'.⁽²⁰⁾ Another troop custom was to name strategic knolls after platoon commanders.

After spending six weeks or so in reserve the 2/2, as the leading 16th Brigade unit, began a period of intense activity on 20 February. Then in mid-March, about the time of Green's promotion to command the 2/11, Cameron extended both the scope and degree of his unit's patrolling over the Ninahau River. Over a three day period ten platoon-size patrols set out from the battalion, clearing the forward area so rapidly, that they led the way for the rest of the unit to make two relatively easy coastal drives to But and Dagua. The unit secured the airstrips at both points and provided the Allies at the former with an improved landing inlet for supplies. Towards the end of the month the unit directed its operations at clearing the remainder of General Nakai's 20th Division from Dagua's southern foothills. Again several platoons took part in what is known as the Tokoku Pass Action, even though both Australian and enemy troops knew it more commonly as Jikkoku Pass, the area dominating the route to Wonginara Mission and one of the enemy's main lines of communication. The fighting involved the capture of three knolls - the later-named

19. American Army Engineer Corps maps in 6th Division report. Also 2/2 War Diary, March and April 1945.

20. G. Long, op.cit., p.314.

Chowne, Jap and Low knolls - on the then map-marked 1410 Feature - resulting in three significant actions, the most notable being that of A Company for which Lieutenant Albert Chowne received a posthumous Victoria Cross.

In April the unit continued its advance with orders to occupy the Autogi-Kwangen area in the hills north of the Mabam River. Then on the 15th following its relief by the 2/1 the unit occupied a further two villages, before crossing the Hawain River, the last important natural obstacle impeding the advance to Wewak. C Company's troops, who stayed in the advance with the 2/1 clearing Kwangen and other villages, including the unmapped Harimboia, were the first to cross the river in assault boats with the 2/4 Armoured Regiment's B Squadron. At the same time the other companies secured positions to complete the bridgehead.

For the next two months the unit was mostly in a reserve and defensive role, moving in mid-May to Cape Wom where, as part of 19th Brigade, it protected communication lines and provided working parties for the maintenance of the brigade group. In June 2/2 companies dispersed widely from Cape Pus to the Wewak aerodrome defending both that stretch of country and its communications against enemy infiltration. Then on 18 June, when the 2/1 relieved it once again except for C Company's occupation of Sauri village, the 2/2 supplied working parties for the unloading of supplies at Cape Wom and troops for patrolling in the surrounding area. At the end of July the unit relieved the 2/8 at Hambrauri, taking the lead in the 16th Brigade's inland advance, occupying the Numoikum and Rindogim village groups by 7 August. Shortly afterwards the announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender ended the Pacific War. In total the unit had

54 deaths and 132 wounded in action, the highest casualties for a 6th Division infantry unit. It also had some 300 evacuated sick. (21)

For many 6th Division troops, particularly the longest-serving veterans, the Aitape-Wewak operations were a disappointing way to end the war. After the tedium of the Atherton Tableland many men looked forward to being in the fighting again only to find their expectations foundering in the face of their obviously needless task. For just as many others however the offensives against the Japanese provided a chance to exercise military skills against a feared enemy whatever the inconsistencies of higher policy. And whatever private antagonisms there may have been towards the conduct of the operations there is no evidence to suggest that the Australians ever contemplated laying down their arms in mutinous revolt. On the contrary, despite the controversies, once the divisional machinery was in action, each individual unit, from the largest to the smallest, depended for the whole to function on the men in each of them supporting each other. Not unlike the experience of the Australians in Vietnam some two decades later, those at Aitape-Wewak were there at their government's behest. Regardless of the political and military mismanagement of their deployment, as the soldiers saw it, they had a duty to perform and a loyalty to their peers to uphold.

And even more than in Papua an ever-decreasing group size defined that loyalty and the allegiances that bound individual soldiers to each other. In the Middle East and up until Greece the men had readily thought in terms of belonging to the battalion or the

21. ibid., p.385. Also S. Wick, op.cit., p.298 and 6th Division report.

division. Then after the 6th Division's disintegration in Greece its infantrymen, and others, rued the loss of its pre-Greece identity, seeing its passing as the end of an era. Green could write then of the battalion ceasing to exist as a fighting unit⁽²²⁾ Then in Papua, although not well-articulated by unit members, the troops began to see their fighting life more in company terms. Separated also from the rest of 6th Division the brigade assumed significance as a unifying entity. Finally in Aitape-Wewak where more often than not 'actions [were] no more than 1 platoon',⁽²³⁾ that smaller group took on much of the symbolic importance that had once been the battalion's only. No longer did armies meet armies but instead small groups of men set off from the battalion to search out the enemy and destroy him. Even in planned actions the size of the fighting group narrowed the unit's perspective of its achievement. As Baird and McCammon wrote of A Company's role at Jikkoku:

[Its troops] wrote an immortal page in our Battalion's history. Two platoon commanders ... were killed and the third ... wounded ... Pte. McLelland and Sgt. Austin also rose to extraordinary heights of heroism. But casualties were heavy and several men who had fought in every Divisional action since Bardia and Tobruk fought their last battle here. Among these were Ptes. Kable, Conway and a super soldier, OX166, Private 'Syd' Chambers. 8 Pl. now ceased to exist as a unit.⁽²⁴⁾

2/2 veterans have least to say about the unit's most controversial fighting. While extant sources suggest that many in the 6th Division were highly critical of the operations as they progressed direct

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22. C. Green, 'Grecian Disaster', A.J. Marshall (ed.), Nulli Secundus Log, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney 1946, p.41.
 23. 2/2 War Diary, 1-13 March 1945.
 24. A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, op.cit., p.123.

evidence in the form of letters, diaries and oral testimony is scant. Possibly the silence reflects lingering doubts about the campaign's legitimacy or it may also stem from the rigid censorship which at all levels stifled a sense that the action was significant. As Geoff Coyle wrote in 1988, 'the general feeling concerning [Aitape-Wewak] was that it was a rather useless political exercise, just a waste of lives, which had no bearing on the outcome of the war'.⁽²⁵⁾ And while many unit histories assert the obvious about the strategic value of the fighting they draw back from assessing either command's conduct or troop morale. Most unit historians defer to Long's account which criticises Blamey and discusses troop despondency. Some recent publications however spell out clearly what distinguished Aitape-Wewak from other campaigns. The main aim was 'to destroy the enemy not to capture territory'. In that sense it was 'not a battalion war nor even a company war' where the commander's role, so crucial to tactics previously, was relegated to a relatively minor one of counselling the more junior officers involved in the fighting.⁽²⁶⁾

The 6th Division's operations involved its brigades, supported by tanks and artillery, in two simultaneous advances towards Wewak, one coastal the other inland. Objectives were the capture of Adachi's Headquarters and denying the enemy access to food-producing areas. As Shawn O'Leary wrote 'the battle for Wewak was not between forces deployed on open ground. The Japanese had burrowed like rabbits and

25. G. Coyle, letter to the author with attached documents, 22 November 1988 (Coyle letter).

26. S. Trigellis-Smith, All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion, 2/5 Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1988, p.270 and D. Hay, Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, p.490.

the Australians had to worry them out like ferrets'.⁽²⁷⁾ Most sources claim that enemy troops were in poor condition, virtually 'self-sufficient prisoners',⁽²⁸⁾ living off local vegetable gardens, the exception being the 16th Brigade operations report which said 'in most cases [the enemy] was well clothed and well equipped [appearing] to have an adequate supply of rations'.⁽²⁹⁾

The Australians probably felt prepared to meet the climatic conditions at Aitape-Wewak but New Guinea's unusual topography presented unique problems. The area's two main features were a high coastal dividing range and a constant succession of coastal rivers intersecting a flattening plain which stretched from the divide to the sea. The former ran within a short distance from the coast, ranging from a few miles near Wewak to twelve miles as it neared Aitape. Two mountain ranges formed the watershed, the steep and rugged Torricelli Range, with ridges of nearly 5,000 feet, steep gorges and heavily wooded, and the less precipitous Prince Alexander Range. On the southern side these fell sharply into the Sepik River valley feeding the numerous coastal streams on the north coast. After heavy rain these streams flooded readily becoming wide, deep and dangerous in places and often changing course. The rainfall varied from 90 to 100 inches a year and as that portion of the island was three degrees south of the equator the temperature throughout the year averaged 32 degrees Fahrenheit during the day, at night with humidity always high.⁽³⁰⁾

27. S. O'Leary, op.cit., p.332.

28. Unnamed veteran cited in P. Charlton, op.cit., p.1.

29. E.G. Keough, op.cit., p.274 and A.W.M. 52, 8/2/16, War Diary, H.Q. 16 Infantry Brigade, Report on Operations, January 23-May 8 1945, (16th Brigade War Diary).

30. See G. Long, op.cit., pp.271-272 and A. Walker, op.cit., pp.345-346.

The coastal strip which confined 16th Brigade's activities had very poor roads, 'timbered with light scrub akin to secondary growth and with some patches of sago swamp'. The existing tracks, both those along the beach and immediately behind it, were either of a loose sandy surface or of thick clay soil which turned into a quagmire in wet conditions. The rivers, subject to violent flooding, carried large quantities of driftwood. Only foot traffic could cross the ranges which rose quickly to heights of 1,000 to 2,000 feet having very steep northern faces with narrow razor backed ridges. Throughout the area of operations villages of 50 to 200 people were scattered mainly in the fertile valleys which also drew the supply-starved Japanese. (31)

The 2/2's departure from Cairns No.3 Pier on 19 December 1944 was even less ceremonious than the one from Brisbane more than two years previously. Even though most thought they were bound for New Guinea the strictest censorship surrounded A.I.F. movements. The troops removed their colour patches and stopped speaking to civilians. As well the sending of letters or telegrams through civilian channels was prohibited, one soldier incurring a five pound fine for such a breach. All unofficial documents identifying the unit were destroyed before departure.

The unit, comprising 35 officers and 1099 other ranks, sailed from Australia in the United States transport ship, the Jane Addams. On the third day at sea Green informed the troops of their precise destination and probable future roles. The men however were not

allowed to mention New Guinea in letters until 9 January 1945 and even then they were not to specify precise whereabouts. Orders directed that 'in correspondence mention may be made that a member is enjoying plenty of swimming, but no other references may be made to unit's location'. As well the troops were not to mention American troop movements or casualties, other than their own.⁽³²⁾

Unlike previous voyages life on the Jane Addams, though crowded, offered the men varied menus of a high standard as well as other unaccustomed amenities. The unit's sixth Christmas passed without the usual celebration, although the ship's padre, as well as the unit's own, conducted carol singing and church services while Green read the King's traditional message over the public address system. On Boxing Day when the ship anchored off the 'bleak, sandy, coconut-lined'⁽³³⁾ Aitape coastline, in seas swelling under the influence of north-western monsoons, it was another four days before the men disembarked. The congestion in the seas surrounding Aitape resulted from both a shipping shortage and the lack of docking facilities so that when the troops left the Jane Addams, carrying most of their gear on them, they scrambled down nets to landing barges. After leaving the latter they waded ashore in two to three feet of water to step on the island of New Guinea, many for a second time.

The proportion of 16th Brigade officers and other ranks who had seen action in Papua was fairly high because of the absorption of 30th militia Brigade in July 1943. And not only did the three battalion commanders all have Papuan experience, and in that role, but as well most highly ranked officers ~~had been~~ campaign platoon commanders.⁽³⁴⁾ By

32. Details about 2/2 movements are from S. Wick, op.cit., pp.266-299 and 2/2 War Diary, December 1944 - February 1945.

33. A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, op.cit., p.120.

34. G. Long, op.cit., p.296.

early 1945 each unit also had a varied collective experience. Without identifying it, Long drew on the 2/2 to illustrate both the pattern of senior officer promotion in the AIF and the experiential profile of a 6th Division unit by the time of Aitape-Wewak. Of the unit's 36 original officers one was then commanding a division, three brigades and three battalions while seven others had first or second grade staff officer positions. Of the remainder eight had been killed in action, six were prisoners of war and four were in other units leaving only two still in their battalion of origin with a sprinkling of original other ranks. Of the reinforcement officers 16 joined after Papua, so that

... although the unit itself had not been in action since [late 1942] in the previous years it had fought in Africa, Europe and New Guinea, and ... now contained also a few veterans transferred from units with different histories, so that in it were men whose experience included service in England in 1940, in Libya ..., Greece, ... Tobruk, on New Britain in 1942, in the early fighting around Kokoda, the subsequent advance in the Owen Stanleys and the long costly fight at Buna, Gona and Sanananda. (35)

The 2/2's first camp was near the site of a former Protestant mission settlement. As the troops moved in Americans in an adjacent graveyard were exhuming bodies and placing them in coffins for transportation to the United States. While Charles Hodge never forgot the stench of 'this grisly operation' (36) others recalled that their allies' presence softened the bleak surroundings.

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35. *ibid.*, p.76, Major-General G. Wootten commanded 9th Division. Of the brigadiers F. Chilton commanded 18th Brigade, I. Dougherty 19th and C.R.V. Edgar the 4th militia Brigade. The battalion commanders were Lieutenant-Colonels P. Cullen with the 2/1, C. Green the 2/11 and G. Cox the 2/4.
36. S. Wick, *op.cit.*, p.268. The Americans had 450 dead from their July encounter with the enemy.

Our camp was not palatial, but it was better than most ... owing to the scrounging activities of the advance party.... A bottle of whisky ... netted us one battered Japanese truck, several heavy, durable tarpaulins, great quantities of timber and all sorts of odds and ends in rations and camp equipment. The Americans ... were so generous ... we hardly had to steal from their dumps.⁽³⁷⁾

The move to Nor brought problems for hygiene maintenance. Water for drinking and bathing had to be chlorinated because of the high water table, a feature which also prevented digging for refuse and sanitation pits. As an alternative the engineers devised a scheme using 44 gallon drums, which had been sunk in mounds of earth. Burning destroyed the waste in the temporary latrines. The flooding of parts of the camp when a nearby creek broke its banks during the Danmap River crisis resulted in the men dining in temporary messes on the beach.

Little is known of the social relations between the unit and local population, except for a sprinkling of 'pidgin' words in its histories. Standing Orders for 3 January however specified rules of conduct for the two groups. While only labourers on official working parties could come into the camp the surrounding villages and supporting gardens were out of bounds to all ranks except those on special assignments or those with Angau (Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit) approval. When a soldier had permission to visit a village, if his rank was below non-commissioned officer he took an officer with him, but then only went when it was convenient for his hosts. Angau also supervised trade between the troops and villagers providing the unit with a price list for the many handmade items including baskets, beads, bows, arrows, canoes and grass skirts. And

37. A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, op.cit., p.120.

while a soldier could not exchange his army rations for goods his acceptance of village food and vegetables carried health risks. For the same reason patrols refrained from camping in villages because of primitive sanitary arrangements. Finally the need was stressed for a friendly stance towards the civilians, who were seen to have a vital role in operational matters. At the same time there was a ban on the over-familiar practices of 'giving lifts' to labourers, or allowing those who had official permission to ride in motor vehicles, to sit in the front seat. (38)

As we have seen the most significant feature of the Aitape-Wewak operations was small group patrolling. From the outset the 6th Division's aggressive policy sought to correct the deficiencies of American intelligence gathering. Since June 1944 Angau units had patrolled from Aitape deep into enemy territory with the Australian Intelligence Bureau (A.I.B.) to gain information, establish patrol bases and protect villages, tasks they continued with 6th Division assistance. Soon after the 2/2's arrival A Company's commander, Captain A.J. 'Jock' Marshall, took a long-range reconnaissance patrol over the Torricelli mountains, around the enemy's left flank. The six week long patrol, known as 'Jockforce' and comprising A Company men, had with them six 'police boys' and three carriers. As it moved through the 2/5's lines the patrol received its supplies from a specially assigned Beaufort Bomber. Communications with 6th Division Headquarters were by carrier pigeons and ground-to-air signal to

38. 2/2 War Diary, January 1945.

planes of 100 Squadron R.A.A.F. Locals previously hostile to patrols allowed Marshall's group to pass unhindered.

Brigadier King's decision in early March to advance on But instead of waiting for adequate road construction heralded the 2/2's period of intense patrolling. Specifically A and B Companies had the task of assessing what opposition lay between the Australians and But after crossing the Anumb River into 'tiger country proper'.⁽³⁹⁾ Each patrol, both in this period and later had very specific objectives, the results being logged and signed by the patrol leader. Meticulous details also show that acute observation and unceasing anticipation for action defined the nature of these small forays away from the battalion's base. And while patrols could return without casualties more often than not the searching missions in villages and garden areas resulted in Australian wounded and dead as well as enemy casualties. Typically too a patrol might have reached its destination without coming into contact with Japanese but then be ambushed on its return journey. 'It was that sort of war.'⁽⁴⁰⁾ On 2 March, when 13 Platoon had the unit's first casualties the enemy opened fire from a range of ten yards, killing the two leading scouts, a sergeant and the platoon commander.

Platoons formed the basis of most patrols but one of Cameron's earliest instructions recommended that only three to four men actually be sent on reconnaissance at any one time. A smaller group was likely to be more effective when gathering information. Urging too that scouts lead from a greater distance he wrote:

39. A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, op.cit., p.121.

40. ibid., p.125.

If the section crowds forward behind the scout the work of the latter is impossible. It is inevitable that noise will be made by a larger body of men thus attracting enemy attention. This is happening ... Hence the impression that there is "no future" for the leading scout. On the contrary an Australian scout operating intelligently and unencumbered by his cobbers has better than an even break against the Jap.(41)

Lieutenant K. Ferguson's 7 Platoon patrol of 12 March was typical of those probing the country around the Ninahau River. Ferguson took 39 A Company men on an 11 1/2 hour fighting and reconnaissance assignment. His orders were to clear the area of enemy; report on the river crossing, gain topographical information about the country east of the river, assess enemy numbers and movements and collect intelligence data including such things as documents, clothing and equipment. The patrol returned intact having killed three Japanese while another escaped. Among other details the report noted that where the men crossed the Ninahau, at a width of 18 feet and a depth of three, the current ran at approximately ten miles per hour. Pit pit (bamboo type vegetation) extended for 200 yards over the terrain immediately east of the river preceding a swampy area with low undergrowth. After that the men moved into high jungle with moisture under-foot. Signs of the enemy were two pair of tracks, one of a man wearing leather boots the other rubber and both leading eastwards. Although intelligence gathering yielded only one light machine-gun the troops found a freshly dug weapon pit on the east bank of one creek and two American vehicles with the engines removed on the opposite bank.(42)

41. 2/2 War Diary, February 1945.

42. *ibid.*, March 1945. Numerous patrol reports filed in each month's War Diary for period of operations.

Symbolically the unit's most significant fighting occurred at the Jikkoku Pass between 24 March and 6 April resulting in heavy casualties and achieving the 6th Division's first Victoria Cross as well as other bravery awards. Coyle, second-in-command of A Company at the time, remembers the 25 March fighting as 'the fiercest and most determined in the history of 2/2 Bn.'⁽⁴³⁾ In mid-March the capture of But and Daqua had given the Australians control of the coast but the enemy, comprising 20th Division headquarters and some 500 troops, still held the country on the right flank. Long best describes the difficult terrain:

Above Daqua the mountains rose steeply from the plains towards the dominating 1410 Feature - so steep in places men had to clamber using hands as well as feet. The track then followed a razor-back ridge only about five feet wide with an almost vertical fall for some distance on either side, the steepness of the descent being obscured by the dense bush thrusting upwards on each flank. This razor-back led to a knoll - a little plateau about 50 yards in diameter. Thence the track fell and ... rose again to another small knoll which formed the summit of Feature 1410. The track then descended in a series of steep slopes connected by level bridge-like razor-backs to the Mabam River.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The Jikkoku Pass, 'perfect ambushing country [and] not unlike Bulli Pass' marked an increase in enemy resistance and the severest fighting at Aitape-Wewak since the 6th Division's arrival.⁽⁴⁵⁾ As we have seen the fighting's tactical significance lay in its clearing the Wonginara Track, the lateral route from the coast to an enemy line of communication. On 24 March 2/2 patrolling established that the enemy held the pass in strength, B Company's 11 Platoon digging in and

43. Coyle letter.

44. G. Long, *op.cit.*, pp.319-320.

45. *ibid.*, p.327 and A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, *op.cit.*, p.123.

occupying the 1410 Feature. Cameron's plan for the following day was for A Company to move through the entrenched platoon and attack enemy positions further along the ridge to clear the area and cut the Wonginara Track, before turning northwards to meet up with D Company. Although A Company platoons made two attacks on the 25th, capturing the first knoll but being forced to withdraw from the second, it took another two weeks of A and B Company attacks, with support from air strikes, artillery and mortar bombardment, to complete the operation.(46)

Because of Chowne's Victoria Cross 8 Platoon's capture of a small, New Guinea hillock is the best-documented individual action in the unit's history, eye-witness accounts showing remarkable agreement.(47) Chowne's 1945 honour however posed immediate problems for the battalion's interpretation of its own achievements. Prior to the Aitape-Wewak operations Marshall had written a prologue for the unit's honours and awards:

It is possible that no other Battalion in the armies of the Empire has done so much fighting for so few decorations; its ribbon discipline ... one of the most notable things about ... [it]. Within limits a good regiment may gain as many Honours as it likes. It needs only to do a good job in action, possess a medal-minded C.O. and Company Commanders - and an adjutant with journalistic ability ... Then ... in roll the ribbons ... (48)

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46. 2/2 War Diary, March 1945 for very detailed information about several of the platoon actions.
47. See *ibid.* Also V. Austin's account compiled by 8 Platoon survivors in S. Wick, *op.cit.*, pp.280-282. Author also examined sworn statements by Private A.E. Mason, Lieutenant K. Ferguson, Captain M. Derbyshire and Sergeant J.H. Smithers, (all signed by Colonel Cameron) in Chowne's personal file at Central Army Records Office, Melbourne, in July 1983. Chowne's citation for his Military Medal at Finschafen on 25 October 1943 is also in the file.
48. A.J. Marshall (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.101.

Maintaining that the 2/2's rigid, even harsh, standards worked against its members gaining awards Marshall pointed to the lack of significant honours at every level of the battalion. Later in a postscript he observed that Chowne's gallantry was such 'that no citation could hide it'. Many, he said, 'foretold that [he] would get a Victoria Cross or a white wooden one. We grieve with his wife and parents that he had to get both'.(49)

While Baird, the second-in-command, and McCammon, the adjutant, wrote after the campaign that A Company's 'fearless determination, courage and spirit made a legend in the Battalion' they did not explore whether in fact the Victoria Cross came to the unit through individual effort or improved administration. Clearly 2/2 records for Aitape-Wewak are superior to those of any other period. The intelligence officer, Lieutenant J. Smiles, kept 'a war diary of unusual completeness and clarity' while McCammon had an 'untiring attention to detail'. It is said that Cameron himself was possibly more conscious of awards than previous commanders, one medical officer recalling that a widely held view was that Cameron was committing his men to impossible situations hoping to get a bar for his Papuan D.S.O.(50)

Whatever the background to the 2/2's achievement of a Victoria Cross, bravery awards are more often than not matters for contention. Lionel Wigmore's examination of award distribution reveals that the First World War yielded far more Victoria Crosses than the second. Charlton also raises the question of whether the number of awards at any given time correlates with the domestic/political atmosphere,

49. *ibid.*, p.127.

50. See A. Baird and H. McCammon, *op.cit.*, p.124, G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.322 and 2/2 War Diary, April 1945, also Dr M. Truscott, interview, Yamba, 3 November 1982 (Truscott interview)

noting that six Victoria Crosses, two for each operational area in the South West Pacific, went to recipients after the public and parliamentary criticism of the Australian presence in the islands.(51)

The men themselves add little to the debate although ambivalence runs through their memories of Chowne and the mythology he inspired. As with all other 2/2 legends a discrepancy exists between that defined by the structure of battalion mythology and that understood by the men who had closer contacts with Chowne. While the survivors of 8 Platoon, and other A Company men, revere Chowne for his fearlessness they also admit his actions were sometimes perplexing. Chowne's fanaticism about hunting Japanese led him to return from patrols with the bloodied ears of Japanese as proof of the numbers he had killed: the 'macabre sock-wrapped souvenirs' referred to by Baird and McCammon in 1946. On the day before Jikkoku Chowne is supposed to have told his runner 'I'll get you a V.C.' Others tell of him being 'like a cat on a hot tin roof, bursting for action' on the morning of the attack. Chowne's wife is supposed to have had a premonition about his death, claiming too that he took his honours lightly.(52)

What is perhaps most significant about the unit's account of 8 Platoon's action is that it is fraught with inaccuracies. The platoon members were not all long-serving veterans as some accounts imply, and Chowne captured Chowne and not Jap Knoll. B Company took the latter on 2 April. Chowne himself, already the recipient of a Military Medal, transferred from the 2/13 on 7 October 1944. Another reinforcement

51. G. Long, *op.cit.*, p.581; L. Wigmore, (ed.) *They Dared Mightily*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, and P. Charlton, *op.cit.*, Ch.12, pp.161-171.

52. Informal discussions with various 2/2 veterans at reunions. Also A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, *op.cit.*, p.121. Item about Chowne's wife in *Guinea Gold*, cutting filed in 2/2 War Diary, September 1945.

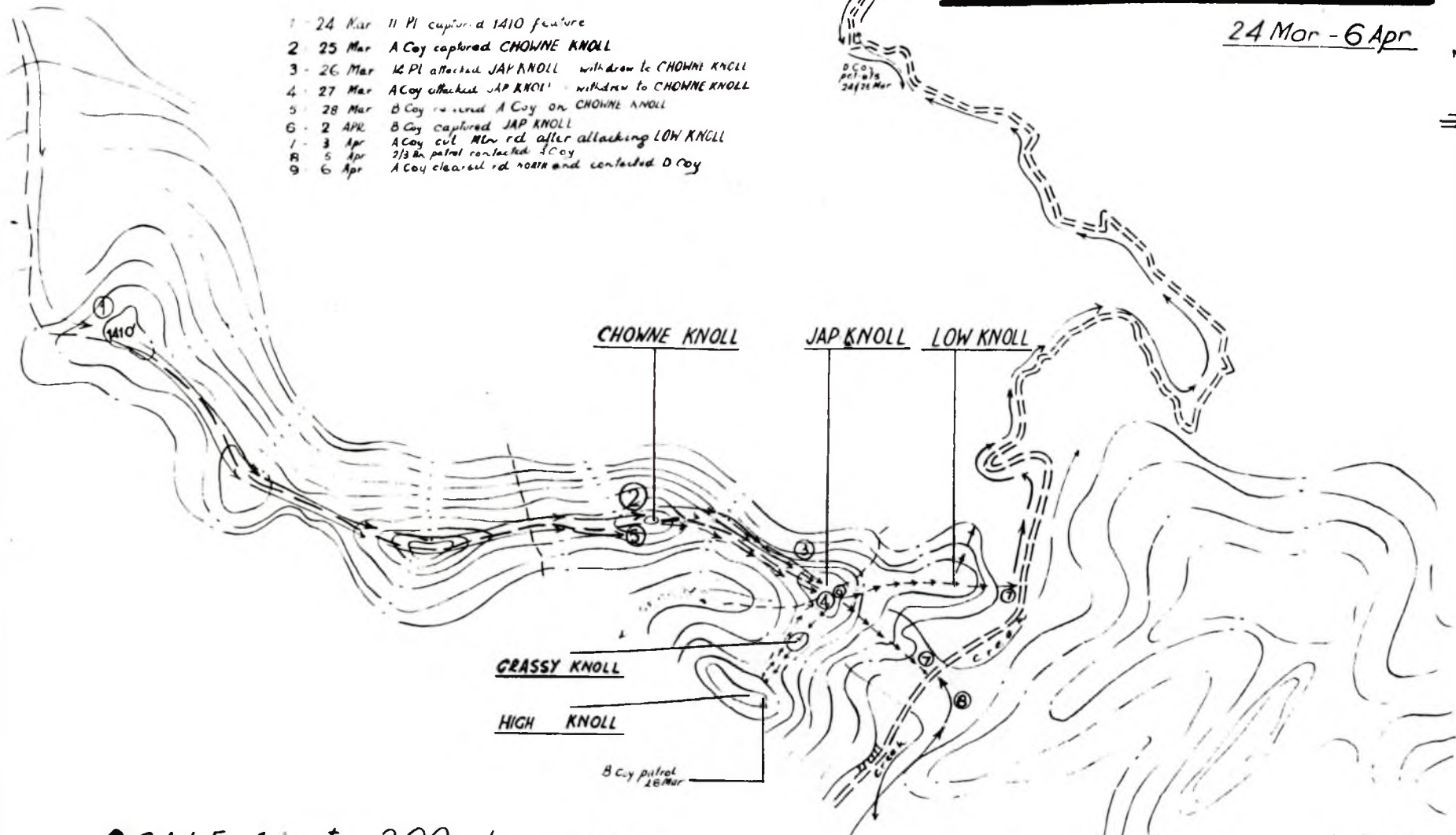
APPX "B"

DIAGRAMATIC SKETCH OF OPERATIONS

JIKKOKU MTN PASS AREA

24 Mar - 6 Apr

- 1 - 24 Mar 11 Pl captured 1410 feature
- 2 - 25 Mar A Coy captured CHOWNE KNOLL
- 3 - 26 Mar 12 Pl attacked JAP KNOLL - withdrew to CHOWNE KNOLL
- 4 - 27 Mar A Coy attacked JAP KNOLL - withdrew to CHOWNE KNOLL
- 5 - 28 Mar B Coy re-joined A Coy on CHOWNE KNOLL
- 6 - 2 APR B Coy captured JAP KNOLL
- 7 - 3 Apr A Coy cut Mtn rd after attacking LOW KNOLL
- 8 - 5 Apr 2/3 Bn patrol contacted J Coy
- 9 - 6 Apr A Coy cleared rd north and contacted D Coy



SCALE 1 in to 200 yds approx

From A.W.M.52, War Diary,
2/2 Australian Infantry
Battalion, April 1945.

officer recalled that no one 'knew him really well'.⁽⁵³⁾ In fact Chowne's platoon-sergeant and others were ex-39th Battalion men, some of whom provided the substance for Vic Austin's account of Jikkoku in Purple Over Green. And while questions about Chowne's motivation remain it is clear that some men felt forever in his debt. As Austin wrote:

During the advance along the coast [Chowne] gained the total confidence of his men and it was in large measure ... the confidence he inspired that the assault on the knoll could be ... carried through with such dash ... Though he was killed early in the assault it was his leadership even after death that helped carry his platoon forward to the objective.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The team-work which the fighting's aftermath inspired also impressed the medical officer, H. McLennan. He and his stretcher-bearers reached A Company's position after 'climbing [for three hours] in darkness over very rough hills and along ridges'. Following generous doses of morphia and luminal the wounded had 'a quiet night'. McLennan packed one man's bleeding abdominal wound only to find next morning the dressing soaked with urine suggesting a ruptured ureter. The carrying of the two dead and three wounded began at first light.

The greatest care was exercised when carrying [the men] up almost sheer cliff faces, along slippery ridges no more than 18" wide in parts and down slippery deep declines to the bottom of the 1410

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53. H. Jackson, letter to the author, 14 November 1982 (Jackson letter).
 54. A.H. Baird and H.G. McCammon, op.cit., p.123 do not make it clear that they are writing about A Company and not just 8 Platoon; S. Wick, op.cit., pp.280-282 incorrectly states that Chowne's platoon captured Jap knoll. See also P. Charlton, op.cit., p.79 for selective quoting which fails to distinguish Chowne's platoon from others of A Company at Jikkoku on 25 March 1945. See G. Long, op.cit., 321-325 for more accurate version and L. Wigmore, op.cit., p.258-261 for Chowne's citation and biographical details. Also 2/2 War Diary, March 1945 for details and map.

feature where Mr G. JONES [Salvation Army] representative was waiting with hot coffee and biscuits ... Lt. Noel PARKS [sic] 11 Pl. on ... 1410 ... made sweet tea for the patients ... from [their] own water and sugar ... In addition [Park] sent a team of his men every time to help bearers up the steep ridge leading to the 1410 feature.

When the carry of four hours ended the man with the abdominal wound was in better condition than when he started. Finally he and the other wounded went by jeep ambulance to the 2/7 Field Ambulance dressing station. The men said of McLellan himself that he entrusted much to his junior officers and other ranks 'his idea being to ensure that the [medical] service would carry on in the event of the R.M.O. being wounded or killed in action'.(55)

Despite the veterans' silence it is clear that morale suffered severely at Aitape-Wewak. In April 1945 the Acting Minister for the Army, Senator James Fraser, visited the troops at Aitape and But during a tour of the three operational areas. Only one of his two subsequent reports, that on equipment, was tabled in parliament forming the basis of debate on the campaign's efficacy. The second report, dealing mainly with troop welfare, was not tabled possibly because of criticisms it directed at Blamey or the unease it may have created for families. As Curtin told parliament on 24 April when refuting charges about inefficient equipment, they were 'unfair' to

55. Medical report in 2/2 War Diary, March 1945 (Medical War Diary) and S. Wick, op.cit., p.413.

both the 'gallant troops' and the 'peace of mind of their relatives at home'. (56)

One of Fraser's interviewees at Aitape wondered why the 'lads' had out-dated equipment for a campaign which could have been fought by trained native battalions if indeed it would not have been best to leave the Japanese to themselves. The 6th Division, he told Fraser, were 'first-rate troops given a second-rate job'. (57) As McLennan also observed of the 2/2 as early as March:

Some long service soldiers continually and loudly complain that they have "had it" and this has undoubtedly upset some new soldiers, a few of whom developed a well-marked neurosis due to a feeling of insecurity among their mates. Another potential source of lowering morale is the general ignorance among the troops as to what good will come of this campaign when they feel they could be doing a more positive job in some different theatre ... (58)

In mid-May Roy Waters, who was no longer with the 2/2 but Green's batman in the 2/11, wrote: 'Never was I so fed up with this so-called "mopping up campaign"'. (59)

The malaria controversy was by far the most distressing for all concerned, Walker noting: 'its reverberations shook the 6th Division, and are ... yet potent to evoke discussions'. The 16th Brigade probably suffered most. In May 1945 its morale plummeted when it supposedly had 65 per cent of all malarial cases of Australian troops

56. A.W.M 54, Written Records, DRL6643, 23.11, Blamey Papers, Memorandum from Chifley to Blamey cites sections of Fraser's report and Curtin's speech in parliament (Blamey paper).

57. Blamey paper.

58. Medical War Diary.

59. Waters, diary on loan to author, 17 May 1945. Diary in the form of letter to his mother written in small Japanese note book.

serving outside Australia. That news combined with even more stringent anti-malarial precautions greatly eroded troop confidence. Even before the Aitape-Wewak outbreak of malarial casualties the men followed a rigid tablet-taking procedure, an officer actually placing the Atebrin tablets in each man's mouth. Then, after inspecting open mouths to ensure that the medication had been swallowed, the officer signed a roll book. Even on patrol a platoon commander followed such procedure signing an anti-malarial precaution form at the bottom of his patrol log.(60)

Inexplicably, from the troops' point of view, the daily Atebrin dose was reduced from two tablets to one on 21 March, McLennan's report noting:

The incidence of fevers rose sharply ten days after ... Also the troops were fighting harder, getting less food and water and with the continual fear of death in front of them fevers occurred although ATEBRIN was still taken faithfully.

Up until 29 March no fever cases were evident but the 27 evacuations between 30 March and 8 April convinced McLennan that 'one tablet was insufficient'. The 'very malarial conscious' troops, on Atebrin continuously for the previous seven months, were also very dissatisfied with the dose reduction. In May when the number of fever evacuations rose to 233 McLennan wrote:

despite much controversy no solution was found ... troops continue to report pyrexia [fever] of unknown origin and to return with relapses of malaria after treatment. General resistance appears to be low. In general health could not be placed higher than 'fair'.(61)

60. A. Walker, *op.cit.*, p.360; 2/2 War Diary, March-June 1945.

61. Medical War Diary, March 1945.

The failure of anti-malarial measures concerned commanders at all levels as they had been charged with the responsibility of having no malarial casualties. In fact 6th Division medical officers were not to diagnose suspected cases as such. In 1983 Dr Tom Selby, commander of the 2/7 Field Ambulance at Aitape-Wewak, told the author that he did not wish to expose himself to a 'slander action' by revealing details. He did however confirm the 6th Division ban on malarial diagnosis recalling that in one instance:

... one of my doctors came to me and said "I've got a case of cerebral malaria. What will I do?" I said "Give him intravenous quinine, that could save his life and send him back to Aitape". And I got a blast from this doctor, I'll never forget - I can see him ... what right had I to diagnose malaria in ... frontline units and so on ... he wanted the division to have no malaria even though he was prepared for this bloke to lose his life. And this was a fellow so well in with top-notch people ... All I can say is that he had a wonderful obituary notice [but to me] he was the most evil man I met in my life.(62)

In 1982 Dr Max Truscott, a 2/1 Field Ambulance company commander at Aitape-Wewak, well remembered 'the great smear campaign' levelled at 16th Brigade over malarial casualties. Indeed Brigadier King took Truscott into his confidence when King himself contracted malaria. Truscott, four years with the 2/1 mobile surgical unit, told King that 'even brigadiers are not immune to mosquitoes' promising to give him quinine and not record malaria on his medical sheet. As King confided to Truscott 'I came to you because some of these new bastards wouldn't understand'. Much of the malaria controversy arose from the insistence by the British malarial specialist Brigadier Sir Neil Fairley, that the disease could be controlled by one Atebrin tablet daily. In the face of this not being so criticisms were directed at

62. Dr C.H. 'Tom' Selby, interview, Cremorne, 30 May 1983 (Selby interview).

troop morale and laxity in anti-malarial procedures. As Truscott remembered it one high-ranking British officer, an author of tropical disease textbooks, charged that 16th Brigade troops were 'malingering', as 'morale is such that the men will do anything to get out of it'. As Fairley was overseas when the malaria presented at Aitape-Wewak Brigadier J.A. Sinton visited the area expressing surprise that one Atebrin tablet daily did not suppress the disease. But Truscott remembers that 'some CO's were ready to knock him down' for his views. In the end 'it was hard to challenge a high-ranking officer who was also a tropical disease expert'.(63)

The troops themselves knew little of the contentious scientific issues surrounding the ingestion of Atebrin, but they had their own problems with the drug. Apart from giving the skin an ugly, yellow tinge Atebrin had other side-effects, one uncommon skin eruption being 'one of the best kept medical secrets of the war'.(64) In 1982 Dick Watts told the author about Japanese propaganda leaflets which claimed 'Atebrin makes you impotent'. The Americans, he said, responded with a pamphlet showing a sultan and his harem, the caption reading 'Its Atebrin that keeps me going'.(65) In fact Truscott pointed out that it was the malaria and not its treatment that was linked with impotency and fertility problems. He also recalled the 'frustration' that many men felt over the 'very disturbing' allegations of 'non-observance' of anti-malarial procedure. Some officers responded by increasing their Atebrin dose but with unfortunate consequences. In particular Truscott remembered the evacuation of two 2/2 platoon commanders with psychotic reactions following over-zealous ingestion

63. Truscott interview and 2/2 War Diary, May 1945.

64. A. Walker, *op.cit.*, p.368.

65. D. Watts, interview, Newcastle, 5 November 1982.

of Atebrin. One man was convinced that he was General Blamey while the other became withdrawn staring into space.(66)

In June a move to Wewak Point and the reintroduction of two Atebrin tablets daily resulted in decreased malarial evacuations. And it was only after the war that it became known through medical journals that a malaria strain relatively resistant to Atebrin was 'proved beyond doubt' to exist in the area of 16th Brigade's operations where its troops succumbed so readily to the disease. In fact research by Fairley at the Cairns experimental centre established the existence of the Atebrin resistant strain as early as June 1945 but as Walker notes the administrative problems associated with admitting such a fact far outweighed questions of science.(67)

While illness other than malaria, especially skin infections, affected many troops some aspects of medical care were an improvement on Papua, not the least being blood transfusions at the scene of the fighting and better transport. War Diary summaries also reflect increased awareness of factors affecting morale noting such things as 'battle weariness' and 'battle stress'. While other supply problems were contentious the worst for the men was clothing, affecting greatly the acquisition and subsequent healing of skin disorders. As early as February Cameron warned the troops to take care of their clothes 'darning or patching wherever possible' because of the shortage. In May, after noting that 255 men were without the required two pairs of trousers the diarist wrote:

66. Truscott interview.

67. A. Walker, *op.cit.*, pp.360-370 for discussion of clinical and administrative policies affecting the controversy and 2/2 War Diary, June 1945. See also A. Walker, *Clinical Problems of War*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, Ch.7, pp.62-164.

The clothing of troops can only be described as scandalous. Men are forced to borrow a change while their only outfit is being washed. Small men are wearing large trousers [which are] ludicrous and uncomfortable. Whilst others have outfits so worn and mended that they afford little protection.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Waters wrote 'done some washing but seeing we only have one set of clothes had to leave them on. Felt much cleaner if no drier'. At a later date he mused: 'I could do with a change of clothes as these are filthy. One has to wash them without soap and put them back on to dry. No wonder I have a cold. But I suppose we must grin & bear we have no option'.⁽⁶⁹⁾

News of Japan's imminent surrender reached 2/2 men as they faced their 'most intense' opposition in the operations. On 11 August Cameron issued a message to all company commanders advising them to cease 'hostilities' and to avoid further Australian casualties, Corporal H.R. Ellis being the unit's last fatal casualty on that day. Officially Blamey's 'Order of the Day' *dated* the 8th announced the Japanese capitulation. Coyle, who was by then B Company's commander notes on his copy of the order, signed on the back by all company members, that 'you may say some were very fortunate to be in a position to sign anything' as they were in readiness to launch an attack when the surrender news arrived.⁽⁷⁰⁾ And as Baird and McCammon note the men mostly accepted the news quietly. 'The only emotion seemed to be unspeakable relief'.⁽⁷¹⁾

68. 2/2 War Diary, February-June 1945.

69. Waters diary, 13 and 19 May 1945.

70. Coyle letter.

71. A. Baird and H. McCammon, op.cit., p.126.

Another month passed before a 2/2 group of 11 officers and 70 other ranks represented the unit at the formal surrender ceremony. On 13 September an assembly of 3,000 comprising personnel from every 6th Division unit stood to attention on the Wom airstrip to watch Adachi sign his army's surrender and hand over his sword to Major-General H.C.H. Robertson, a recent replacement for Stevens. Those absent from the ceremony listened to a broadcast of the proceedings. Ten days later the unit, at a strength of some 646, held a memorial service for its 54 Aitape-Wewak dead, representing just under one-third of its total war dead. The unit also claimed 500 Japanese dead for its 186 battle casualties (deaths and wounded in action) while 'most of the remainder ... suffered some tropical disease or other'⁽⁷²⁾ even if not requiring evacuation to the mainland.

The paucity of material from 2/2 veterans themselves makes conclusions about the Aitape-Wewak phase very difficult. While other evidence suggests that the men suffered privations and were generally jaded with the war the wall of silence within the ranks raises questions about memory and the perceived significance of events. As we have seen critics canvassed doubts about the S.W.P.A. operations and no doubt the controversy reached the troops. Indeed the 2/1's commander, Colonel Paul Cullen, a 2/2 original, addressed his troops as early as mid-January 1945 telling them there was 'some misunderstanding as to whether or not this is a real campaign'.⁽⁷³⁾ In 1982 Hugh Jackson, 18

72. *ibid.*, p.126. Also 2/2 War Diary, August and September 1945. Copy of Memorial Service Programme in C. Baker, collection of papers given to author at Ballina, September 1982.

73. The First At War. The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45, The Association of First Infantry Battalions, Sydney, 1987, p.371.

Platoon's commander who was severely wounded at Jikkoku, believed the symptoms of 'stress and doubt' raised by Walker in his medical volume 'were not sufficiently apparent to be significant'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Jackson's evacuation however preceded some of the more contentious happenings in the unit.

Lack of significance may not have been the only influence on memory. While some researchers trust the vivid recall of men in action much psychological evidence questions the reliability of the soldier as witness to his own actions. John Steinbeck wrote that 'men in prolonged battle are not normal men. And when afterwards they seem ... reticent - perhaps they don't remember well'.⁽⁷⁵⁾ In November 1982 Jackson wrote:

I suggest combat is not always a period of intense activity with a positive start and finish but is generally a period of activity with a 'smoky' start but positive finish. For instance I have a very clear picture of the area at the bottom of Tokoku Pass where I was wounded in '45 and qualified this when Charlie Hodges and I revisited the place two years ago. I can remember in detail our first sighting of the Japanese position that day about 200 yds away, and our immediate subsequent action. The next clear picture [is of] when we were about 5 yds from their forward holes. But I have no clear memory of the track between the Company perimeter and the bottom of the Pass, nor the route we took between the 200 yds and 5 yds positions. Time is also beyond my memory except that we left the Company perimeter early in the morning and the action didn't stop until late afternoon. There was (and still is) a broken down Japanese service vehicle just off the track near the bottom of the pass ... Hodges had no recollection of this truck when we went back ... and yet I know he moved right past it in '45 on his way with 17 Pl. to attack the Japanese camp about 100 yds away - that was during our first attempt at the Pass and ... 18 Pl. was right behind 17 Pl.⁽⁷⁶⁾

74. H. Jackson, letter to author, 10 July 1982 (Jackson letter). See A. Walker, *op.cit.* (*Clinical Problems of War*), pp.703-705.

75. J. Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War*, Corgi Books, 1961, p.124. Jackson's response followed his reading of Steinbeck's quotation in the author's seminar paper. See also S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Under Fire*, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1947. A study of fighting behaviour of American units in the Pacific War.

76. Jackson letter, 14 November, 1982.

Whether details about the terrain stayed in the soldier's memory seemed to be determined by other factors. As Jackson surmised:

If one was on a reconnaissance patrol but unavoidably became involved in a fight perhaps one's memory ... would be more acute - I don't know. I have no memory at all of the positions we dug during the campaign except 4 rather vaguely ...

1. At Matapau, two young soldiers thought they heard Japanese in the scrub one night, which proved to be pigs ...
2. At But when we were briefly under shell and mortar fire and one of the [Quartermasters] was killed ... by a tin of food from a 'biscuit bomber'.
3. At Sowom where we caught a Japanese right on our perimeter.
4. Back from the ~~bottom~~ of Tokoku Pass where we were shelled for quite a while.

Whether or not the men remember the details of their patrolling and fighting they long cherish the bonds which developed between them. As we have seen by the time of Aitape-Wewak the unit comprised many who had not shared campaigns previously. Truscott recalled that some officers maintained morale in their platoons despite the obvious difficulties. He spoke particularly of the 'fresh-faced' Noel Park who was a 'tremendous inspiration' to the 'battalion blokes who were by then very hard to impress'. Jackson, who transferred to the 2/2 from the 2/4 Armoured Regiment in early 1944, saw action for the first time with 18 Platoon. He attributes his closer associations with the 2/2 to this experience.

Men may consider themselves a team before going into action but it is not the same nor as closely knit as afterwards. Perhaps action is the final culling when the individual's character becomes known without any doubts ... Regardless of what business or social standing may differ between men who have seen action together, or shared a traumatic experience at some time, they

77. ibid.

have a rapport for the rest of their lives that cannot be duplicated by any other circumstance. (78)

It is what Austin also meant when he wrote of ex-39th men only feeling completely integrated into the 2/2 'as a result of the hardships and dangers shared during the Aitape-Wewak Campaign'. (79)

78. Jackson letter, 11 April 1982.

79. V. Austin, To Kokoda and Beyond: The Story of the 39th Battalion 1941-1943, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p.235.

CHAPTER NINE

DEMOBILISATION

General Blamey's demobilisation scheme, approved by the Minister for the Army in March 1945, had an elaborate point system of eligibility for discharge from the army. A serviceman received two points for each completed year of age at enlistment and an additional two points for each month of service. Having dependants gained him a further point for every service month. In practice this meant that at 1 October 1945 a married man, who was 30 at the time of his enlistment in a 6th Division unit, acquired 276 points. These men were commonly referred to as '5-year personnel'. At the other end of the scale a man without dependants who was 20 when he enlisted two years prior to October 1945 accumulated only 88.⁽¹⁾

In early August 1945 the Australian Army numbered some 383,000 of whom 23,000 were women. Of those serving forward in Pacific areas 53,000 were in New Guinea and New Britain, 32,000 in Bougainville and the Solomons, 72,000 in Borneo and Morotai and 20,000 still in Japanese captivity. In general demobilisation involved maintaining an 'Interim Army' while discharges took place. The Interim Army took care of the occupation of enemy-held territories, equipment and the administration of demobilisation itself. Although the point system mostly determined the rate of discharges individuals could apply for delayed discharge or an early return to civilian life. The latter could be for several conditions including compassionate grounds. By early September the authorities worked out that to keep the Interim Army at a strength of 46,500 only men with 178 points or more were

1. G. Long, The Final Campaigns, The Australian War Memorial Canberra, 1963, pp.581-583.

eligible for discharge. Gradually as units became 'redundant' their low priority men transferred to Interim Army units. Then when the latter were no longer required surplus personnel merged with the Post-War Army.

After the ceasefire in mid-August the 2/2, at a strength of 756 (31 officers and 725 other ranks) made camp at Dallman Harbour, near Cape Pus. During the next few months the unit maintained a semblance of battalion routine but now with quite different emphases including among them education. Men could attend courses in English, Mathematics, Bookkeeping, Shorthand and Mechanics. Also added to duties was the guarding of Japanese prisoners in two compounds at Wewak and Wirui. Little is known about the men's reactions to their captives but the Routine Orders of 9 November warned that:

a too free and easy attitude is being adopted towards Japanese working parties. The Japanese 18 Army is a defeated army which committed many atrocities and this must be remembered by all ranks. Any relaxation of discipline or friendly treatment will be regarded by them as weakness. [The] compounds are out of bounds for a distance of 100 yards to all ranks except those on duty.

One of the main recreational activities was the 6th Division yachting regatta in November creating 'great interest to all troops'. The 2/2's entry, 'Sweet Fanny Adams', skippered by the medical officer, Neil Creswick-Jackson, fared poorly in the trials but later improved. (2)

2. A.W.M. 52, 8/3/2, War Diary, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, September-November 1945 (2/2 War Diary).

2/2 demobilisation actually began before the official surrender ceremony. On 1 September a 2/2 group of 96 men (8 officers and 88 other ranks) comprising all 5-year personnel sailed from Wewak in the S.S. Katoomba, among them 44 'originals'. Thereafter the unit saw a succession of departures of high priority men and the subsequent influxes of troops from other 6th Division units. In early October 2/2 privates with 200 points or more exchanged places with a similar number of 2/11 men with low priority, a process continually underway with various other units until the 2/2's own departure from New Guinea.

The unit's redundancy notice and warning of a move to Australia arrived on 14 November. The last 2/2 party of 43 (4 officers and 39 other ranks), under the command of the adjutant Lieutenant A.N.O. Permezel, left New Guinea with some 200 men from various other units. Indicating the fluid state of troop movements between units at this time those with the 2/2 cadre, and under its command, were mostly from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. This composite group left Wewak in the T.S.S. Taroona on Christmas Eve bound for Brisbane. Disembarking on New Year's Eve the men first went to a Chermside camp before some left the party. One week later only 30 2/2 men travelled by train to Sydney and then to Ingleburn Camp. Over the next five weeks or so the remainder marched out one by one until a nucleus of three supervised the store reconciliation and other administrative duties. On 15 February the handwritten entry in the War Diary read:

Full clearance for WET stores, Finance Records and Office Equipment granted by HQ/NSW LOC Area thus finalising the affairs of 2/2 Inf. Bn. NX84273 Lt. A.N.O. Permezel and 2 OR's marched out for demobilisation.(3)

3. ibid., Demobilisation statistics taken from files September 1945
- February 1946.

Some 2/2 groups did detour service before discharge. On 10 October a 2/2 A Company of mixed personnel (5 officers and 128 other ranks) went to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya). Its role was to protect R.A.A.F. installations in the event of armed insurrection during the Indonesian independence struggle. The men's two month tour of duty was peaceful allowing them to return for disbandment at the end of December. Eighty 2/2 men, (3 officers and 77 other ranks) elected to go to Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. For some men, discharged before the point system came into operation, the formation of the Battalion Association was their link with former comrades. As early as July 1945 the secretary, Corporal Bill Devine, wrote to Colonel Alan Cameron:

Our objective in forming the Association is prompted by ideas and ideals that as we think; We are the Best Battalion in the Best Army in the World. And we want to keep that friendship going which is the ⁽⁴⁾only worthwhile ideal ... worth retaining out of the chaos of war.

For other 2/2 men demobilisation meant a trip home from the other side of the world. Victory in Europe marked the end of the war for those taken prisoner by the Germans in mid-1941. But as 2/2 prisoners-of-war were not together during captivity their releases and journeys to Australia were by no means uniform. Jack Ulrick's liberation from the Germans actually came in early May 1945 when the captors 'turned loose' a large working party of some 400/500 'mixed allies'. During the previous two months Ulrick had been on the road

4. ibid., 16 July 1945.

'sleeping in barns and picking up other working parties' as he travelled with his German guards ahead of the Russian advance into Czechoslovakia. After being freed Ulrick boarded a refugee train only to be warned of the danger of travelling in it. On 13 May Churchill's victory speech was broadcast in Prague where everything was in chaos with no power and scarce water. Ulrick spent that night with Russian officers in the Hotel Ambassadors before travelling the next day on the first train to run from Prague to Pilsen.

In the early hours of the following morning Ulrick heard an American voice. The Americans, who had a unit for handling Allied prisoners-of-war, drove him and others to Regensberg in Austria. At the Regensberg Aerodrome the Americans loaded the ex-prisoners-of-war, in batches of 25, into DC2 cargo planes for the journey to Rheims in France. Flying at low altitudes the men had 'a good view of [the] destruction of towns and thousands of tank tracks'. At Rheims American doctors and dentists examined the men. Then after delousing the ex-prisoners dressed in American uniforms for their trip to England in R.A.F. Lancaster Bombers. At the Eastbourne reception camp in Sussex the prisoners changed into A.I.F. uniforms.⁽⁵⁾

From Eastbourne one month later Ulrick wrote to his father:

We are on our way at last ... so don't write to the above address again. We had a great night out last night, Bill Boorman, Bill Wright, Paddy Darcy, Len Diamond (Grafton), Arthur Ellem (Woolganya), Ron Pattermore and myself went into town and hit the hops. It was my first meeting with the two Bills so you can imagine our feelings, I had not seen Bill Boorman since Mersa Matruh ... We are all coming together, Paddy, Bill & Bill and myself ... so you see the old town will receive three of us in

5. A.J. Ulrick, collection of letters and photographs loaned to author. Ulrick supplied a chronology of his movements before and after his capture by the Germans. Collection also contains the Australian Army's letters to Ulrick's father following his enquiries when he had two sons 'missing in action' (Ulrick letter).

one hit ... Well Dad I'll soon be there, so get in a few flasks and prepare the fatted chook.⁽⁶⁾

Ulrick sailed from England on 18 June in the S.S. Oronsos. On his arrival in Australia he went immediately to Ulmarra to spend three weeks with his father. Returning to Sydney mid-August Ulrick went firstly to the Sydney Showground then to Ingleburn Camp for medical examinations. Finally he left the army from the Sydney Showground on 5 September telling his father, 'I am now Mr. again, my paper was handed to me today'. Ulrick also had an appointment for an interview for a P.M.G. (Telecom) position on the following day. The 'civvy' doctor passed him as 'absolutely A1' although he was told then he would always need glasses.⁽⁷⁾

In 1982 Ulrick recalled that it was some ten years after his return to Australia that the war 'caught up with me'. He had nightmares, suffered from severe migraines and passed through a period of anxiety. His job as a P.M.G. supervisor may have exacerbated pre-existing tensions:

... most of the mad coots working for me were all in the war ... They were a pretty wild mob. But then as the years rolled on they all got married and they all had kids you know we all did ... this wild bunch that hit the country, you can imagine it you know. Blokes from the Air Force and infantry units and artillery and they all migrated to the line staff of the P.M.G. Department. We were 100 per cent, almost, ex-servicemen. But they were good, you know, never done the nasty on me. But I was good to them too.

Ulrick said his personal instability lasted for about five years but that one of his friends 'went of his bloody noggin altogether'. Dr Max Truscott (whose practice was then in Grafton) 'was very good. He

6. Ulrick letter, 15 June 1945.

7. ibid., 5 September 1945.

understood. He knew what we were going through'. Although Ulrick had tranquilisers for a while neither he nor Truscott thought they were effective.

I don't think any real ex-serviceman ever gets rid of his bad dreams. What happens they get less and less but you still get them ... When we got back here and we thought back - all the narrow squeaks you'd had - anything could have happened, which didn't worry you then you know like you're walking around in a place like Bardia and Tobruk - tremendous stuff flittin' around - bullets whistling past. And that didn't worry you then because that was part and parcel of what you were doing at that time. But later on - like me favourite dream was me rifle would never fire. No matter how hard I pulled the trigger it wouldn't go off. You know silly things like that. Then you couldn't get the clip of bullets to go into it - when you loaded it they flew out instead of going in.⁽⁸⁾

Not being able to share his experiences was the hardest part for Ulrick. His wife and children knew belatedly of his life as a soldier and prisoner-of-war. His brother who had escaped in Crete was his only confidant. In 1982 Tom Mawhinney told the author 'You know, I've never sat and had a heart-to-heart talk with any of those guys who were prisoners ... and known what they really did'.⁽⁹⁾ Ulrick and other ex-prisoners have long-regretted the fact that when people learn of their prisoner-of-war status they assume that they were in Japanese captivity.⁽¹⁰⁾

For Ulrick, and other 2/2 captives, four years of their memories took shape in Europe and with men they probably never saw again. Frank Perrin, a British soldier, who worked with Ulrick in a Polish

8. A.J. Ulrick, interview, Grafton, 2 and 3 November 1982 (Ulrick interview).
9. T. Mawhinney, interview, Grafton, 2 November 1982.
10. A. Stone, interview, Newcastle, November 1982. Also J. Hadwell and B. Behan at Ballina Reunion, 11 September 1982. See also G. Page, 'NX 250 Lieut. K.H. Loftus, 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion, Sixth Australian Division 1913-1968'. Poem about author's uncle who became a prisoner-of-war on Crete, in Nulli Secundus, Vol.36, No.4, August 1985, pp.33-40.

coalmine for 15 months from 1943-1944, wrote in the late fifties:

Those days [seem] something of a dream to me and I sometimes have difficulty in believing that it wasn't all something I read about - and from this you will gather that my present life is quiet, reasonably comfortable and mainly uneventful ... You will remember I expect that I was in a bank in 1939 and during our 'Gefangener' days I couldn't tolerate the idea of going back to it. I remember for instance spending hours, days, months, wandering around the wire with Jack Bowditch, planning quite seriously the fruit farm which we were going to start somewhere near the hills north of Adelaide. Well at least we passed away a lot of time without boredom even if the farm only materialised in our imagination. For I am still in the Bank ...

Ulrick and Perrin had not corresponded since the war's end. The letter continued:

Have you managed to keep in touch with any of those assorted characters? They were a good crowd weren't they? I shall be most interested to hear what news you have (or had) of any of our mutual friends ... How did you get out of Germany? And what did --- but I find I am bristling with questions and I don't know what you know, or whether you know what I know. As for myself and the balance of the ... mine party, we, of course, had that jolly little walk from Poland through Czechoslovakia to Western Germany with the snow and the potatoes, and eventually - after about 700 miles - we ran into an American tank 'reccy' unit coming the other way. On the journey we did a spot of work building up the railway at Regensberg ... and we had ... our fair share of unfortunate incidents ... I was particularly sad when after some chaps had been foraging in a barn for something to augment our scanty food a 'trigger happy' Jerry loosed off and 'Buck' (you will remember him in the top hut) was shot. He died shortly afterwards calling for his wife and it shook me more than many other deaths I'd seen.

Perrin concluded:

I often reflect that it wasn't all bad by a long way, and we had quite a lot of fun at times. In our best days at the mine we must have, for instance been pretty fit. I'm not sure how I would stand up now to filling a dozen one-ton trucks of coal underground, and then without turning a hair scoffing a bowl of

spuds and immediately charging outside for three or four strenuous games of hand ball. And those home-made concerts gave us a lot of laughs - particularly in rehearsals where a guy named 'Joe' something often had me rolling on the floor.⁽¹¹⁾

Other veterans, including medical officers, spoke of the difficulties facing men when adjusting to civilian life.⁽¹²⁾ Arthur Pick, ten months in hospital after the Kokoda Track, did not return to the 2/2. In 1982 he recalled that freedom was hard to handle.

... you take after five years of being told what to do every minute of the day. Told what to read - you're not [really] its just put in front of you. But every action in every part of your life is controlled and dominated by the army and then suddenly you're a free man again ... Sometimes I think the American slaves must have felt the same way because you've got to think for yourself and there's nobody to say "Come here" and "Do this". You've got to decide for yourself. It does take quite a lot of time before you realise that everything depends on yourself. It's a strange feeling but you get over it after a while.

Pick also had a period where he was 'very trembly ... and found it hard to make decisions'. Talking his problems over with a commando who was at the Dieppe landing helped him understand that it was 'delayed action nerves' from 'bottling everything up and afraid to show fear ... That's all gone now of course. Its probably only a matter of time that can handle it'.

Pick believed that many others felt as he did but that suppression of fear was proper in the circumstances.

11. In Ulrick letter collection, from London, 22 February 1958.

12. See interviews: Dr L. Armati, McMahons point, 27 September 1982, Dr C.H. 'Tom' Selby, Cremorne, 30 May 1983, Dr M. Truscott, Yamba, 3 November 1982. Also Padre C. Read, Chermside, Qld, 9 September 1982.

Of course the newcomers asked the old ones: "What's it like when you first go in?" And they'd say "Oh I can't describe it". Or "the second's the worst - the first one's not so bad the second one's worst because you know what's coming. The first time you don't" ... Apart from that nobody discussed it. Everybody knew the probabilities ... That's all there was to it. Job that had to be done. No matter how you talked about it - short of shooting yourself in the foot you had no way of getting out of it.

Being in action and surviving alongside those who did not made Pick a 'fatalist'.

Undoubtedly the men's ability to cope with civilian life varied immensely but for many the distinctiveness of their war experience remained with them as a separate part of their existence. In 1982 Sheila Preston spoke of her deceased husband's heavy drinking and violent outbursts. She believed that his war experience had been the 'big thing' in his life: 'for Peter it was as if nothing ever happened after the war'.⁽¹³⁾

13. S. Preston, Woden, ACT, 26 May 1982.

CONCLUSION

... but though our deeds enrich
A nation's saga, and we join the band
Of ancient heroes - though we break with swords
A great oppression and greater wrong
Stumbling along uncertain paths towards
A time when laws are just and peace is strong
Though we give freedom to the race of men
Yet who will give us back Ourselves again.⁽¹⁾

The 2/2's experience during the years 1939-1946 illustrates that a wartime battalion is far from a close-knit permanent group. The unit's social configuration changed many times but most substantially in mid-1941 after Greece and Crete and again in 1943 after the Papuan campaign. Although reinforcement occurred throughout the unit's existence it was at these times that strains on cohesiveness were most evident. Co-existing with these processes was the nurturing of a battalion tradition which drew on myths from outside the group's experience as much as those from within. Thus for participants historical significance lay in identification with the unit and its position in the 2nd A.I.F. And while the battalion ideal of communal effort can be seen to sustain group members in their isolation from home and country during the war, it may also obscure the reality of the group's experience, especially when the unit projects the public image of itself. The battalion is not one unchanged group which has lived the history in its entirety. Rather it consists of a sequence of individuals who carry within themselves a kind of collective memory of the unit's significant happenings. Only one and a half per cent of

1. A. Turner, 'The Soldiers' in I. Mudie, Poets At War: An Anthology of Verse by Australian Servicemen, Jindyworobak Publications, Melbourne, 1944.

members actually served the entire war while just over a quarter (26 per cent) maintained links with the battalion after the war.

The 2/2's recruitment in late 1939, tied as it was to that of the 6th Division, remains part of an enduring myth. The veterans' silence on the issue contributes as much to the persistence of the 'economic conscript' stereotype as does the bulk of hear-say evidence. Research for this study showed that up to 18 per cent of the original 6th Division had ill-defined occupations as taken from attestation papers. While most did not state they were unemployed the figures suggest at least very unstable employment conditions. Confident assessment of the numbers of unemployed in original 6th Division units may not be possible. The most promising sources - the files on individual soldiers - are not all available at present: in any case if they were, to analyse them would be a very large study in itself. It would also need to be illuminated by careful analysis of the 1939 employment situation in the relevant recruitment areas.

What of motives for enlistment in 1939? Much evidence suggests that many 2/2 originals volunteered in the spirit of their fathers. British values still influenced the outlook of many pre-war Australians and none more so than those who felt compelled to support Britain in a European-based war. While present generations are generally unsympathetic to such a response what is often overlooked is that the dominant world view pre-1939 was that of Western democratic nations. The four hundred year tradition of Western superiority in Asia and Africa had yet to be wholly undermined and European states were not divided into East and West. Thus when Australians responded to the call to arms they did so for the empire like their fathers before them. And while C.E.W. Bean can be said to have created ideas and traditions about spiritual bonds between the two A.I.F.s those

bonds were in many cases real and had developed spontaneously. More than half of the men of this study had close affinity with a 1st A.I.F. veteran. Others saw the war as an opportunity to better themselves or escape boredom. For yet others youthful exuberance led to a decision which later was long-regretted.

Living almost the life of a peace-time battalion for much of 1940 the 2/2 achieved fitness and a sense of identity. While it is said that action cements bonds within groups in an army unit the 2/2 appeared most cohesive before its first battle. Undoubtedly the unit's long preparation and the freshness of the taskforce contributed to the feeling of well-being. While external influences, such as drill, exercises and parades helped to instil pride men at all levels perceived that training and discipline changed them from an assortment of individuals into a cohesive group, skilled in the soldier's various trades. There was a sense of tradition too through the re-enactment of World War I manoeuvres. Training could be appreciated for its own sake, 'a morale builder on its own'.⁽²⁾

The evidence about social relations during this formative year is fragmentary. But one thing that is clear is the high degree of respect afforded commanding officers, even if the men did not always show it to those further down the chain. Ivan Dougherty, who deputised for Colonel Wootten during the early months, had a reputation for fairness and going to extraordinary lengths to defend the troops in his care: 'if "the Doc" handed out any punishment it was certain that it was merited'. Dougherty himself however thought that sometimes when a private was on a charge it was the officer who

2. Sir J. Dunlop, letter to author, 26 July 1982, now deceased (Dunlop letter).

needed to change places with him.⁽³⁾ So what of the legendary indiscipline of the Australian soldier? This aspect also needs further enquiry as the tendency to incorporate original 2nd A.I.F. men into the folklore of the 1st seemed more evident in the first year of the war. As Sir John Dunlop wrote:

There was for a time a continuation of what was known as the Smith's Weekly syndrome, all about Australian soldiers being undisciplined, sloppy in dress and ... drill and so on. There was a story that ... an English sentry ... complained to his Guard Commander that an Australian-armed party had marched past him and that [while] he paid the proper compliment ... "[they] took no notice of me whatever". The officer is supposed to have replied, "You were lucky Thompson, Australians usually throw stones".⁽⁴⁾

Sorting out the reality of hierarchical relations in the unit is also difficult especially when most views are influenced by hindsight. As Dunlop wrote about attitudes to morale as they existed in Palestine in the early part of the war:

One needs to remember we are talking about conditions as they were 40 years ago, long before our present day interest in and experience with improvements in industrial relations, worker participation and the like. In that training period ... we very much ... inherited the British Army system that officers and other ranks did not mix ... [In the end] it comes down to what one's definition of morale is. All I can be sure of is that if I had to do it all over again what I was supposed to be doing in 1940 I would do it differently to the way I did it then.⁽⁵⁾

The first battles of January 1941 began the 2/2's own symbolic tradition. Victorious action generated ideas about success through high morale and unit preparedness. Inescapably too individual unit

3. G.H. Fearnside and K. Clift, Dougherty: A Great Man Among Men, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1979, p.20 and Sir I. Dougherty, interview, Cronulla, 29 March 1982.

4. Dunlop letter.

5. ibid.

success was synonymous with that of the 6th Division and 2nd A.I.F. Until Bardia and Tobruk the latter had drawn on 1st A.I.F. associations to sustain its legitimacy. The two successful assaults against the Italians in Libya set 2nd A.I.F. men on their own historical path. Following the well-established tradition of war reporting however the 6th Division's actions at Bardia and Tobruk entered the public domain as well-orchestrated, communal affairs. The 2/2 still wears the mantle of one of the most enduring legends of the Second World War: that Australians smoked and sang as they crossed the barren desert towards the Italian defences.

The heroic Bardia legends however were not entirely accurate and left out much of what happened. While the variations in responses of hundreds of men will never be known some had their preconceived notions of war shattered by seeing its realities. What is also clear is that the men did not idealise battle conditions. Indeed most of the letters and diaries examined had associations with battle-field deaths. And like the holders of letters and diaries none of the interviewees were contributors to the unit's previous accounts of the battles. As the veterans reflected on Bardia and Tobruk they showed a remarkable willingness to contrast what they knew and remembered with the more heroic accounts of newspapers and existing histories. Divulging such information usually meant discussing many hitherto taboo subjects in military history but men of all ranks showed their capacity to do this without losing self-respect. Depictions of their communal action may have been distorted in history-making but the process in their eyes neither diminished the significance of their own experience or their links with the 2/2.

Greece and Crete marked a watershed in the unit's existence ending the dominance of the 'originals'. Coming so soon after victory

the defeats in the Mediterranean greatly undermined the 2/2's newly-found ideal of success through concerted action. Generally the defeats failed to inspire an A.I.F. mythology but in present popular perceptions the Tempe Gorge fighting revives the 'spirit of Gallipoli forbears'. On 25 April 1985 Sydney's Daily Mirror wrote:

Almost every Australian was a hero [at Tempe Gorge] though none covered himself with more glory than Sgt. Geoff Coyle of Newcastle. Seeking to outrange the German mortar barrage Coyle tried the strategem of applying extra charges to his own platoon's mortars and using methylated spirits to keep the barrel cool ... One battalion, the 2/2, from Newcastle and the northern rivers ... suffered crippling losses ...⁽⁶⁾

The 2/3's Ken Clift also thought the 2/2 had the 'hottest spot' in Greece, it and his own unit being 'badly mauled'.⁽⁷⁾ In fact the 2/2's total casualties were light when compared with those of some other 6th Division units in Greece, and later in Crete. In 1988 Coyle himself confirmed his mortar detachment's deadly efficiency at Tempe Gorge but also felt that the 'complete story' needed telling.

In previous operations [Bardia and Tobruk] I had discussed with other NCO's, including our armourer Sgt. in the event of extra range being required ... the feasibility of removing secondary charges from smoke bombs and using them as additional charges, thus increasing range. This practise [sic] we considered a risky operation because of the possibility the more severe set back could cause a PREMATURE explosion. This theory was later proved correct in the [New Guinea] campaign where ammunition was dropped by parachute from aircraft. The sudden jolt on landing ... activated the fuse mechanism, the bombs became armed and when used in operations, on receiving the setback prematurely exploded with tragic results to the mortar crews, needless to say this method of delivering ammunition ceased forthwith.⁽⁸⁾

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6. The Daily Mirror, 25 April 1985 and G. Coyle letter to author, 25 July 1987 with copy of article (Coyle letter).
 7. K. Clift, The Saga of a Sig: The Wartime Memories of Six Years Service in the 2nd A.I.F., K.C.D. Publications, Sydney, 1972, p.46.
 8. Coyle letter.

While historians tended to play down the realities of defeat in Greece and Crete the participants met them directly. For the most part what they had to say supports David Horner's evidence in High Command: there was panic and confusion in some Anzac units during the withdrawals in both campaigns. The truth or otherwise of the allegations directed at Australian and New Zealand soldiers is beyond the judgements of this thesis. Any future attempt to examine them must surely assess the soldiers' actions in the context of prevailing military attitudes to battlefield stresses. In the face of German superiority the concerns of 2/2 men were with survival and escape. Those who failed in the latter faced the overwhelming experience of captivity. The intensity of the experiences, both of those who escaped and those who were captured, were deeply felt and individual, never to be forgotten by those who survived as formative elements in their lives. The range and variety of these experiences could not easily be embraced by a sense of communality as the most extreme case - that of the prisoners-of-war - underlines: after all they spent more than twice the time of their nominal membership of the battalion in physical and psychological worlds completely separate from that of their comrades.

Sadly at a time when so much attention has been given to Japanese prisoners-of-war the Australian captives of the Germans have been totally ignored by historians since Barton Maughan's appendix in Tobruk and El Alamein.⁽⁹⁾ Unusually among A.I.F. units the 2/2 had a prisoner-of-war for its historian, the school teacher, Stan Wick, who died shortly after Purple Over Green's publication. This study looked at the captive experience in the context of the battalion's war time history. When the 169 men, mostly originals, failed to escape in

9. Dunlop letter.

either Greece or Crete they did not return to the unit, except by their membership in the post-war association. Even this relationship with the 2/2 is fraught with ambiguity as most ex-prisoners also belong to prisoner-of-war associations. In 1982 Jack Ulrick reflected on the way much of what happened to him as a prisoner-of-war remained internal and separate from his post-war life. When he and his fellow ex-servicemen talked amongst themselves at Telecom in Grafton they used to say to each other 'Now take you for instance. When you walk down the street ... you seem an ordinary person. No one knows of all the adventures you've had'.⁽¹⁰⁾

Reconstruction in mid-1941 began a long period of readjustment for the 2/2, its reinforcement barely complete when it left the Middle East in March 1942. Even though sources are scant for this period they build up a picture of the old battalion regaining strength and joining forces with the various batches of recruits. Indeed by the time the 2/2 reached Australia in August 1942 more than two thirds of its ranks were reinforcements. The lowered morale of the early period is understandable in the context of losses and uncertainty over many who were reported as 'missing in action'. Undoubtedly the mistrust of commanders at all levels created ill-feeling but other evidence suggests the men's resilience in getting on with life in spite of the difficulties. As Dunlop wrote: 'It is true that we were a bit disappointed that ... we had not done better against the Germans. But I believe any such "self-blame" was swamped by losing confidence in "higher command"'.⁽¹¹⁾

10. B. Maughan, Tobruk and El Alamein, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1966, pp.756-822.

11. A.J. Ulrick, interview, Grafton, 2 November 1982.

Certain places in the regrouping phase however hold special memories for battalion members. The lush surroundings of El Arish, the traditional repose for tired soldiers, helped to quicken the tempo of battalion life. And while most of the evidence about the relations between 'originals' and 'reos' suggests tensions between the two groups the influx of new men at that time probably played a significant role in lifting esprit de corps. As John Baynes suggests losses in a unit can inadvertently raise morale:

a soldier gets less and less eager to fight the longer he stays in the battle area ... Men become tired of war and armies which are always in action tire as well. The only way to avoid this is by being replenished with new men. The unpleasant truth is that heavy losses lead to big reinforcements of fresh men.(12)

But as Athol Bell wrote in 1977:

If our Association is not as big as it should be we have ourselves to blame. Admittedly over the years we have grown tolerant and wiser and the barrier has diminished until it is almost non-existent, but first impressions stick, and if I were a reinforcement I would certainly take a long time to forget my ... welcome to the battalion ... Many tributes have been paid to the originals. Here is one now to those gallant followers, ... and with this tribute my humble apologies for my share of their maltreatment.(13)

The Papuan campaign took the 2/2 into a completely different war. In two and a half months of what might be called continual action the unit had 64 deaths, the same number it had during two years and nine months' service in the Middle East and Ceylon. And while the all-embracing term Second World War covered all conflicts of the six

12. J. Baynes, Morale: A Study of Men and Courage, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1967, p.101.

13. Quoted in S. Wick, Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945, Printcraft Press, Sydney, 1978 (first published 1977), p.429.

year period Middle Eastern veterans forever divided their experience of the war into that in the desert and that of the jungle. The two were not the same war.

And if in previous campaigns communal mythologies at battalion or divisional level stifled individual expressions of battle realities then a national mythology swallowed them up in Papua. The Kokoda Track's place in Australian war mythology is undisputed and yet when the deprivations of the men's existence in Papua are placed side by side with over-simplified legends the gaps are notable. 2/2 men who offered their views on the campaign did so because they felt that for too long history-makers and others had got it wrong. While it is also wise to treat participant accounts with due scepticism this study found that individual memories of intense experiences do not seem to be shaped so readily by external factors. It happened several times that interviewees forgot what they had recounted about certain incidents, later writing to the author about them. The shape and texture of the accounts was usually identical to those of the interviews. Individuals may have shaped their memories over time but the memories remained essentially true to the original experience. Understanding these processes in memory has significance for historians. Instead of judging all remembered experience to be entirely fictional historians can perhaps fruitfully explore the way people integrate memories of historical events into the fabric of their lives and suggest ways that those happenings changed them from the inside.

Papuan participants were also well aware that they were not super-human. As Dunlop, who survived the campaign as acting commander, said:

... the New Guinea campaign provides the best support for Jo Gullett's observation that a [battalion] reaches its full "state of grace" when among other things it is near but never quite mutinous. We were that in New Guinea. It became a matter of our belief that MacArthur was mad, was asking of us the impossible, but that we would show the so and so that Australian soldiers could do it.(14)

For others Papua ended their association with the 2/2. As Tom Harvey recalled in 1962 he had no desire to go back to a battalion which had 'none of his old mates. Apart from this I was physically and mentally incapable of another jungle campaign'.(15)

The ramifications of the 2/2's reconstruction in 1943 have probably never found true expression. Nowhere does the ideal of battalion unity shroud the tensions that must have existed, especially between A.I.F. and militia. The men themselves are reserved about suggesting what influence the presence of militiamen, who were also Victorians, had on the character of the new battalion. Indeed so pervasive is the influence of 'originals' in the formation of ideas about the battalion and its history that others have contributed little. During the war, when most articles were written, originals saw the aims of Nulli Secundus Log as being:

First, to preserve in permanent form Battalion history and records so that future unit historians will have at least some firm base to work from. Secondly our original ranks had been depleted and so the magazine would provide a medium whereby reinforcements should know what manner of Brigade in which they were serving and something of the sympathies and traditions of the Regiments.(16)

14. Dunlop letter.

15. T. Harvey, 'Greece: 1941', Stand-To, Vol.7, No.5, May-June 1962, p.31.

16. A.J. Marshall (ed.), Nulli Secundus Log, The 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., Sydney, 1946.

This is not to suggest that 'original' contributors, some of whom died during or soon after the war, consciously excluded reinforcements. In fact the second history, Purple Over Green, was the product of a committee effort. In 1981 Ian Morrison, the president of the Association and himself a reinforcement of 1941, told the author that those writing the history eschewed contributors who pushed an individual view as the battalion stood for a team effort.⁽¹⁷⁾ The restrictions that community structure imposes on the transmission of a group's own beliefs and values have long been observed by those studying oral traditions. As Jan Vansina wrote in 1961: 'group testimony is always minimum testimony' because it 'stems from one single tradition which is preserved by the whole group and its recital is under public control'. In this way such group testimony acquires 'the character of an official statement' while at the same time being a 'minimum' statement, as 'some of the group members may know fuller details about some of the facts not included in the account'. Other studies about the cultural transmission of ideas suggest that the language and norms of a society also impose a certain structure on group and individual accounts of historical events.⁽¹⁸⁾

Significantly least is known from the veterans' viewpoint about the Aitape-Wewak operations. But when the unit's 54 dead from them are added to the 64 of Papua they constitute two thirds of the 2/2's total war dead. Clearly the Pacific War took the greatest toll on the unit and yet its history is skewed towards the one in the Middle East. Such a slant is understandable when the range and depth of

17. I. Morrison, interview, Eastwood, 15 August 1981.

18. J. Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, Aldine Publishign Company, Chicago, 1965 (First published in French in 1961), p.28. See also P. Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975.

activities in the unit's first period are analysed. In reality only five to six days of planned fighting occurred, even though the hardships of Greece and Crete added variable periods of stress to individual men. For many service in the Middle East added up to what one A.I.F. man described as 'a life of extreme quietness punctuated with days of intense excitement', and until individual men saw action for the first time they felt more like tourists than soldiers at war.⁽¹⁹⁾ The jungle campaigns on the other hand were not so pithily defined, although frustration and boredom no doubt had their place, especially at Aitape-Wewak when uncertainties about the war's ending influenced psychological outlooks.

Still it is not easy to explain the men's reluctance to talk about Aitape-Wewak. One important influence on their reticence to explore misgivings or poor treatment may be the very public debate on the operations during the last decade. In the face of such strongly-expressed arguments it may be difficult for some to contrast these views with their own, and what they actually felt at the time, indeed if they still remember clearly enough. Hugh Jackson, the only veteran in this study to examine his experience at Aitape-Wewak in any depth, showed that memories of even significant events are sharpened by the unusual. Jackson himself was severely wounded and such stress must have influenced his memory of place and time, even though these processes do not seem to have been explored very far by psychologists.⁽²⁰⁾

19. A.W.M. 54, Written Record 1939-1945 War, DRL 6372, Personal papers of K. Atock, 2/7 Battalion. Letter of friend to mother of Atock's capture in Crete, and A. Pick, letter to author, 1982.

20. H. Jackson, letter to author, 11 April 1982.

What the veterans' silence may also reflect is a life-long reluctance to question authority. Even high-ranking men were loath to be critical of their superiors' conduct of the war, even when they perceived discrepancies at the time. Both Sir Frederick Chilton and Sir Ivan Dougherty expressed regret at not having committed their views to writing after the war. Neither man kept a diary but each sees the opportunity he lost in not being more outspoken closer to the events: Dougherty because of the 'many inaccuracies' he observes and Chilton because of his disappointment in the way recent history is 'made'.(21) Other 2/2 men also find themselves caught between contradictory points of view. They cherish what they had as members of an infantry battalion but hindsight often leads them to look more critically at some aspects of their 2nd A.I.F. experience. Many might agree with Carl Parrott that they were 'mugs'(22) but at the same time have the feeling that to declare such a forceful opinion would be a transgression of battalion loyalty.

Clearly the end of hostilities was not the end of the battalion and its ideals. To the present the Battalion Association lives for those veterans who draw sustenance from its bonds. The Association cares for the sick, consoles widows and sees wherever possible that battalion representatives attend a member's funeral. But what of these identities formed in wartime conditions? Some men declare that their relations with other members are 'closer than family'. They can meet after years of separation and take up with one another as though they had been with each other days ago. Others speak of the way their identification with the 2/2 seemed to strengthen many years after the war. George Caling said R.A.A.F. men in the Armidale district often

21. Sir F.O. Chilton, interview, Clareville Beach, NSW, 30 March 1982.

22. C. Parrott, interview, Newcastle Battalion Reunion, 6 November 1982.

expressed their envy that A.I.F. men had something tangible to belong to. A.I.F. men themselves also observe that while many were in uniform during the war 'only a handful knew what the front line was all about'.(23)

Eric Leed in No Man's Land comes closest to explaining what the men themselves have to say about the otherness of the front line soldier's identity. Leed suggests that many soldiers see their war experience as some kind of initiation whereby they learn secrets that cannot be communicated to the home society, many declaring that the 'war made men of us'.(24) 2/2 men who said similar things to me were usually at a loss to explain their statements. Chilton thought that the war was a 'tremendous experience', but added 'I don't know why really. Can't say why'.(25)

According to anthropological notions initiation prepares an individual for reintegration into society, usually at an elevated position. Leed sees the veteran of front line service as someone fixed in passage in a peculiar state of 'homelessness': the skills he learned in war are not easily translated into those required at home. And instead of being able to integrate his war experience into his civilian life the veteran forever lives out his war identity in his veteran group. Leed also suggests that the end of the war only begins a process whereby a veteran's war experience is framed, institutionalised, given ideological content and relived in political as well as fictional forms. Symbolically what is also significant is that the ceremonies of post-war associations celebrate the psychological state of the front line soldier as it was at war. The

23. G. Caling, interview, Anzac Day reunion, 25 April 1982.

24. E.J. Leed, No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979. See especially Chapter 6, 'The Veteran Between Front and Home', pp.193-213.

25. Chilton interview.

stress in ritual however is on the positive aspects of wartime associations: that of camaraderie and the reverence for dead comrades. The negative or dehumanising aspects of war tend to be obscured in the process of emphasising the benefits of belonging to a well-loved community.

What Leed has to say about the possible consequences of this all-embracing identification with the battalion is also instructive, particularly when the men themselves formulate similar ideas to those of his to explain their bonds with one another. For Leed the turning of individuals to the battalion for all psychological nourishment has its double-edge: 'to identify with the battalion at war and with the narrow circle of one's comrades [is] to open a large, vertiginous emotional drain and to begin a seemingly endless process of mourning'.(26) From what I have observed and what 2/2 men tell me this bereavement can be a life-long affair, reinforced in the marches, memorials, rituals and structure of their Association. Whether members consciously recognise it or not the Association is in many ways a vehicle for continual mourning. In the Association newsletter, Nulli Secundus, the obituary section, 'Last Post', includes not only the death notices of 2/2 members but also their relatives. Men say that when their copy of 'Nulli' arrives they immediately check the 'Last Post' to see 'who has gone'.(27) An individual member's death notice usually carries a vignette of his life and reports on where the funeral was held and which 2/2 men were present. Significantly the ex-medical officers, Drs Leo Armati and Tom Selby, who have both been on the appeals tribunal for repatriation benefits, spoke of the men's

26. E.J. Leed, *op.cit.*, p.210.

27. A view expressed many times over by veterans at reunions and in interviews.

increased need for the comforts of their battalion associations as they grow older. (28)

On public occasions, such as Anzac Day, it appears to outsiders that veterans celebrate, even glorify, their friendship and fighting experiences. Reviving the spirit of camaraderie is only part of what brings soldiers together on significant days, particularly that marking the formation of their unit. Just what makes the bonds so lasting and so immune to erosion in the post-war period is something not easily unravelled by social scientists of all persuasions. The theory of primary group cohesion can only go part of the way. Leed suggests that any understanding of the identities formed in war must come to terms with the fact that they were formed beyond the margins of normal social experience. In 1982 Arthur Pick said much the same when he spoke of the difficulty people have in understanding front line soldiers, especially their ability to cherish the experience.

You forget that it's a not normal experience. For those who were lucky enough to come out quite healthy - something worth looking back on ... That's a contradiction itself. Because it is normal for those circumstances at that time. But it's not normal as far as daily life is concerned. If you go round shooting anybody here, you'd be behind straight away. But ... in those circumstances, you're put there to kill people. Just the circumstances at the time. Most people - well I wouldn't want to go through it again. It's against my nature - I like co-operation not opposition. It's very hard to describe - to give you the nitty-gritty of feelings at times like that ... Also ... I think it's that 'not normal' part that really binds the people of one unit together - during and after the war as well. That's what the reunion is all about now. (29)

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28. Dr L. Armati, interview, McMahons Point, 27 September 1982 and Dr C.H. 'Tom' Selby, interview, Cremorne, 30 May 1983.
29. A. Pick, interview, Lawnton, Qld, 10 September 1982.

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8/2/16, 16th Australian Brigade, October 1939 - August 1945.

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11/1/19, 7th Division, Assistant Director Medical Services (in Papua), October 1942 - January 1943.

11/12/13, 2/4 Australian Field Ambulance, October - December 1942.

11/12/15, 2/6 Australian Field Ambulance, August 1942 - January 1943.

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In 1983 following a request to examine 1,500 2/2 Battalion personal files to gain information from attestation forms the author had permission to examine 500 files. The sample comprised the first 500 2/2 files in alphabetical order with an additional 50 randomly selected.

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- Moore, R.M., diary and notebooks from Middle East officer-training schools loaned to author.
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Private Correspondence

This category includes those letters written to the author by veterans during the course of the research. The correspondents listed below provided through their writings substantial information and sometimes comment on draft chapters.

Brock, B., 4,000 word letter about Papuan campaign written less than one month before Brock's death in May 1989.

Dunlop, J., Sir, letters June/July 1982 including transcript of one tape. Original who received commission before leaving Australia. Acting commander at end of Papuan campaign then left 2/2.

Gordon, A.T., letters April-July ~~1982~~

Jackson, H., letters April 1982 - September 1983.

Pick, A., letters April 1982 - July 1983.

Interviews

As a preliminary step to individual interviews with 2/2 and 39th Battalion veterans the author attended the following unit reunions:

2/2, Newcastle, 7 November 1981.

2/2, Clarence House, Belmore, 25 April 1982.

39th Battalion, Melbourne, August 1982.

2/2, Ballina, 11 & 12 September 1982.

2/2, Newcastle, 6 November 1982.

Also 2/2 Belmore, 25 April 1985, 2/2 Belmore, 25 April 1988.

Dr L.V. Armati, McMahons Point, NSW, 27 September 1982. 2/2 Regimental Medical Officer, November 1939 - May 1942.

Mr V. Austin, Melbourne, 20 July 1983. Transferred to 2/2 in July 1943 on the disbandment of 39th militia Battalion. A Company platoon sergeant in 1945.

- Miss M. Bathgate, MacLaren, NSW, 3 November 1982. Nurse with 2/5 Australian General Hospital in Greece.
- Mr A. Baird, Port Macquarie, NSW, 7 June 1983. Original officer, second-in-command Aitape-Wewak.
- Mr C. Baker, Ballina, NSW, 11 September 1982.
- Mr A. Bell, Yamba, NSW, 3 November 1982
- Mr R. Burgoyne, Newcastle, NSW, 5 November. Original, served entire war, private to sergeant.
- Mr F. Burley, Ballina, NSW, 11 September 1982. Intelligence officer throughout war.
- Mr G. Caling, Campbell ACT, 18 and 20 April 1982. Original, private to sergeant, discharged before Aitape-Wewak.
- Sir F.O. Chilton, Clareville Beach, NSW, 30 March 1982. Original officer, 2/2 Battalion Commander December 1940 - November 1941. Commander 18th Brigade 1945.
- Mr G. Coyle, Newcastle, NSW, 9 and 10 June 1983. Original private, commissioned in the field (Greece) at 18. Discharged from army with rank of major.
- Mr J. de Teliga, Canberra, ACT, 20 July 1982. Reinforcement.
- Sir I. Dougherty, Cronulla, NSW, 29 March 1982. Original second-in-command until May 1940. Commander 19th Brigade 1945.
- Mr D. Fairbrother, Port Macquarie, NSW, 7 July 1982 and 7 June 1983. Original officer.
- Colonel D. Goslett, Normanhurst, NSW, 31 May 1983. Original officer, adjutant 1940-19??
- Mr A. Goudge, Newcastle, NSW, 7 November 1981. Original private, German prisoner-of-war April 1941 - July 1945.
- Mr H. Gullett, Tharwa, ACT, 19 October 1981. 2/6 Battalion.
- Mr T. Harvey, Coffs Harbour, 4 July 1982. Original private, left 2/2 after Papuan campaign.
- Mr J. Hetherington, Ballina, 11 September 1982 and Newcastle 5 November 198?. Original, private to sergeant.
- Mr P. Hooper, Newcastle, NSW, 10 June 1983. Original, Company Sergeant, Major Atherton.

- Mr C. Litchfield, Curtin, ACT, 8 February 1982. Private.
- Mr R. Lovett, Ballina, NSW, 11 September 1982. Original.
- Mr I. McKenzie, Newcastle, NSW, 4 November 1982. Original officer.
- Mr T. Mawhinney, Grafton, NSW, 2 November 1982. Original private to Regimental Sergeant Major, Atherton Tableland 1943, discharged August 1945.
- Mr I. Morrison, Eastwood, NSW, 15 August 1981. President, 2/2 Battalion Association.
- Mr E. Osbourne, Kempsey, NSW, 3 July 1982. Original private.
- Mr C. Parrott, Newcastle, NSW, 5 November 1982 and 9 June 1983. Original private to mortar-platoon sergeant, served entire war.
- Mr A. Pick, Lawnton, Qld, 10 September 1982. Reinforcement November 1941.
- Mrs S. Preston, Woden, A.C.T., 26 May 1982.
- Padre C.A. Read, Chermside, Qld, 9 September 1982. Original padre until after Greece.
- Dr C.H. 'Tom' Selby, Cremorne, NSW, 27 August 1982 and 30 May 1983. Original 2/1 Regimental Medical Officer and with 16th Brigade Composite Battalion on Crete. Commander 2/7 Field Ambulance, Aitape-Wewak 1945.
- Mr J. Smithers, Newcastle, NSW, 5 November 1982. Original private to sergeant, served entire war.
- Mr A. Stone, Newcastle, 4 November 1982. Original private, German prisoner-of-war April 1941 - July 1945.
- Mr W. Travers, Canberra, ACT, July 1985. Original officer.
- Dr M. Truscott, Yamba, NSW, 3 November 1982. Company commander, 2/1 Field Ambulance Aitape-Wewak 1945.
- Mr R. Torrington, Belmore, NSW, 14 August 1981 and 15 March 1982. Secretary 2/2 Battalion Association. Reinforcement before Greece.
- Mr A.J. Ulrick, Grafton, NSW, 2 and 3 November 1982. Original private, German prisoner-of-war April 1941 - July 1945.
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