

2/1 FIELD REGIMENT CLUB

KIBBLES POST

APRIL 2009

President

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ST IVES NSW 2075
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Treasurer

O Pearce
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VALE

AF Bell	RR Clarke	NA Grosvenor
NL Pedersen	J Slater	EA Wood

Received from the Hon Secretary, John Hynes:

Again, some familiar names and faces but three other names not readily recalled.

EA Wood

Ted Wood was one of three only remaining original officers. At various times he was intelligence officer and troop commander.

He is well remembered for, in Greece, endeavoring successfully (in company with “Hans” Andersen the adjutant) to locate the guns, under chaotic and dangerous conditions.

After our return from the M.E. Ted’s career became a very mixed one – postings, ranging from Land H.Q. in Melbourne to various American/Australian H.Q. units in Papua, New Guinea and the Philippines.

At all times however, he remained at heart, a “gunner” loyal to his regiment both during the war and post-war years. We miss his sage advice.

Joe Slater

A member of “Eddie” section 6th Div. Sigs, Joe joined the regiment at Moresby late ’42 or early ’43. As with all “Eddie” section men posted to the regiment, they became and remained “gunners” as also happened to 43rd Light Aid Detachment (LAD) men.

Joe was a top signaler who for many years was also a devoted attendee at Anzac Day reunions

Reg Clarke

Reg joined at Moresby 1942/43 becoming an “AC” in the same batter as his brother “Rex” who “marched out” some years ago. A quiet, courageous soldier.

The names – Grosvenor, Pedersen and Bell are taken from {“Reveille” but as said, are not remembered in any detail.

I would appreciate any information held by our readers.

ANZAC DAY 2008

Another memorable day graced again by the female attendees – the wives, widows and other female relatives and friends who came to remember and to help create memories of men and occasions otherwise long forgotten. Fifty two attended – members 19, visitors 29, wives/widows 4.

The only “blot” on the day was the inclination of two young males to settle a “difference of opinion” (shades of the 1946 1st post-war reunion at Paddington Town Hall). Not appreciated by the “old and bold” at seventy odd years on!

Following the Annual General Meeting the following were elected:-

President

Rex Olsson

Vice-President

Alec Moroney

Hon. Secretary

John Hynes

Hon. Treasurer

Ossie Pearce

Committee

Gordon Craig

George Horwood

Ron Hartmann

Attended Function Anzac Day 2008

Members

R Ausburn (x)	R Kennedy	O Pearce
H Collins	M Lardelli	A Summerside (x)
M Currie (x)	C Mitchell	H Taylor (x)
N Day (x)	A Moroney	L Walker (x)
R Hartman	H Oldenburgh (x)	G Horwood (x)
F Hodgson (x)	R Olsson (x)	
J Hynes (x)	G (Tony) Pazzi	

(x) Marched - Note: Two of the above not in photograph



Wives/Widows

Mrs B Moroney	Mrs B Hanson
Mrs E Brown	Mrs A Summerside

Visitors

Brian Collins	Robert Hudson	Jon Mitchell
C Crowley	Vicki Jones	Bruce Kneale
Terry Dwyer	Garry Hall	E Hanson
Karen Howard	Andrew Horsley	Warren Fuller
Lorraine Pearce	Elizabeth Thurston	Travis Morgan
Pieta Hartans	Kevin Currie	Bruce Crowe
Sue Morgan	Bob McArthur	David Lambourne
Bill Lawson	Heath McManus	Andrew Lambourne
Cheryl Lawson	Blake McManus	Colin Pazzi
Alan Hudson	Don Walker	



2/1st Field Regiment Banner held by Cadets from Sydney Boys' High



The "Executive" – from left, Ossie Pearce (Treasurer), Rex Olsson (President), John Hynes (Secretary) – we are prepared to be replaced by eager volunteers!!

Donations

K Godfree	Mrs Betty Brown (3 times)
D Shepherd	Ms Joy Wallach
D Blair	Ms B Kennedy
RE Elliot	Mrs P Kitchen
B Cruickshank	Mrs B Hanson
EA Wood	Mrs E Thurston
M Lardelli	Mrs P Salter
H Pike	Mrs A Fuller
A Noble	Mrs B Black
G Fricke	Mrs E Miles
J Stewart	
C Ballatine	
N Day	
R Olsson	
J Hynes	
F Hodson	
T Dwyer	
A Moroney	
O Pearce	
G Pazzi	
R Hartmann	
G Horwood	
W Lawson	
M Currie	
A Summerside	
H McManus	
R Ausburn	
AJ Monten	

Total Amount of Donations: \$1548.00

Statement of Income and Expenditure
2/1st Field Regt. Club Association
Year ended 30th June 2008

<u>Year 2007</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Year 2008</u>
1873.00	Donations	1548.00
45.93	Interest	58.00
<u>2897.00</u>	Anzac Day Function	<u>2050.00</u>
12593.18		13017.18

Expenditure

20.00	6 th Division Assn. Fee	20.00
200.00	Donation: Banner Party	200.00
	Anzac Day – Sydney Boys High	
115.00	Kibbles Post – printing, postage	
	Maintenance of photocopier	372.80
<u>2897.00</u>	Anzac Day – food, drink etc	<u>2980.00</u>
<u>3232.00</u>		<u>3572.80</u>

Cash Book Summary

Balance (2007)	9361.18
Plus: Income	<u>3656.00</u>
	13017.18
Less: Expenditure	<u>3572.80</u>
Credit	<u>\$9444.38</u> as at 39.5.98

Bank Statement as at 30/6/08

Cr. \$9644.38 which includes \$200
Unpresented cheque (since presented)

Ossie Pearce
Hon. Treasurer

From Hon. Secretary:

From Hon. Secretary:

ANZAC DAY 2009

The Luncheon will be held at the same location as last year (i.e. The Marque Hotel) at Railway Square (Cnr. George and Quay Streets) from 11.00 am to 4.00 pm.

The committee warmly welcomes female relatives and friends.

Charges will be \$30.00 per head for members and widows. For all other visitors, male or female, \$45.00 per head.

As to the March, I can only report having attended two meetings of the March committee with one more meeting to come.

Over 50 WWII units were represented and in the main it was agreed the March was deteriorating into a “descendants” dominated affair with the unit members fading away with participants “strolling” not marching. Representatives of “descendants” and strangely a few 8th Div units strongly argued against “descendants” marching at the rear despite the success of WWI descendants who currently march at the rear.

I emphasized that 2/1st Field Regiment marched up George Street as a regiment solemnly remembering those who marched the same route in 1940, 1942 & 1944 but who will march no more.

I proudly stated that we marched as a disciplined, formally dressed group who observed all regimental courtesies (e.g. saluting the cenotaph and the Governor at the Town Hall).

At no time did I or the others denigrate the “descendants” and their desire to be with their relatives’ comrades.

On Anzac Day 2009 I think the matter will be resolved on the basis that if we have ten members marching we will have ten descendants marching as our “minders”.

The essential factor surely is that this is a commemorative March, not a romanesque “bread and circuses”.

From Hon . Secretary

In the last issue of “Kibble’s Post we published the first half of Marshall (“Nugget”) Currie’s story, ending with the return of the Regiment to the Pacific and two more campaigns.

We now include the second half of “Nugget’s” story, together with the first half of the Steve Jack story, as dictated in Steve’s last days, to his nephew.

Also included is Ted Fulton’s daughter (Elizabeth Thurston) story of a much more recent trip she made to Wau and surrounding area. Elizabeth walked the tracks, ridges and sad by-ways traversed by Ted and by 1st Bty men later, almost 70 years ago but her photos stir memories of those memorable years of 42/43 and 44/45.



“The front rank (members only) on Anzac Day 2008 with Henry Oldenbergh lurking behind “Blue” Walker’s left shoulder. Here’s hoping we can repeat on Anzac Day 2010”

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

The previous issue of Kibble's Post published the first installment of my recollections of service with the Regiment. It covered some memories of our period in Palestine and North Africa. This final installment contains a few recollections from our time in New Guinea. All this happened over 60 years ago, so any other opinions on what happened would be interesting. It's worth recording them before memories grow too dim.

Prime Minister Curtin recalled us from the Middle East to help defend Australia's north. The Japanese menace was mounting in the Pacific, and the fall of Singapore had spooked Australia. The Regiment left Suez on March 11, 1942 on the Dutch ship *Westernland*. We stopped at Aden for supplies of food and fuel. I remember a few of us seeing the native crew on a small boat loading a cargo of meat onto our ship. We didn't like the thought of those dirty and unkempt fellows in their rags and bare feet handling our food. Although not supposed to leave the ship, a half-dozen of us decided to do something about it. We clambered down the gangplank, brushed aside the natives and took over the loading of the meat. Afterwards we were paraded before the captain, and expected the worst. We thought we were in serious trouble for disembarking without permission. Instead he presented each of us with a cold bottle of beer and his thanks for our initiative.

Rumour was that Ceylon would be our next stop. A Japanese fleet was heading toward the British naval base there. Sure enough *Westernland* was diverted and we arrived in Colombo harbour on March 25. On April 4, bombers from the Japanese fleet attacked Colombo. They probably wanted to 'do a Pearl Harbour' on the British fleet, but Churchill was awake up and had moved most of his ships to Addu Atoll, some 600 miles away to the southwest. Even still, that day in Colombo harbour the British lost an aircraft carrier, and I believe two cruisers, two destroyers, and many RAF planes. But RAF Hurricanes did bring down many of the Japanese bombers, which were not protected by their own fighters. In any event, the Japanese fleet withdrew, and so the threat to Ceylon was gone. We remained there however, for about three months, training in jungle warfare. For us sigs, suspending cables through the treetops was a big change from rolling them out across the rocks and sand of the desert. Stringing them through the trees rather than laying them on the ground meant less chance of cables being disturbed or sabotaged. But the work had its risks. Once, high above the ground, I placed my pliers on a tree branch while I drew through a length of cable. Hearing a noise, I looked back just in time to see a monkey swing off through the tree with my pliers. John Hynes grinned heartily as I leapt from branch to branch trying to catch the monkey. I never did

A note from John: "Nugget" claims I "grinned" – what an understatement. I was behind him in deep jungle and heard an absolute uproar ahead, unusual in the jungle – people shouting and screaming. I came on a scene. A troop of baboons (particularly nasty small apes) had "Nugget's" pliers and were literally jeering (certainly screaming) at him.

He was abusing them and throwing rocks in an endeavor to get his pliers back. They were throwing full coconuts at him, guaranteed to crack his skull. I blew fulltime, awarded the pliers to the baboons and gave my pliers to "Nugget".

Peace descended on the jungle scene. Little did we know that some six months later in a jungle scene far removed we would be facing at Gona – not only dangerous coconuts but far more dangerous products.

One time Bert Sunley and I, after hanging some cables through the trees, were walking back to our maintenance truck when suddenly two large elephants appeared out of the jungle heading our way. Now the local tea plantation owners had warned us to be wary of elephants in the jungle. Many were dangerous, having wandered off plantations, back into the jungle, and gone wild again. If any approached us, we were advised to walk slowly towards safety. Never run. This could excite them and they might chase you down with dire results. Now Bert was a big bloke with giant steps. Even when he walked slowly, it was hard for me to keep pace with him, with my little legs. I had to break almost into a run, so as not to fall behind. Well of course my rapid movement attracted the attention of the elephants. They started moving faster and faster toward us. Luckily, our driver Bob Brindley quickly summed up the situation and reversed his truck back our way as fast as he could. The elephants were gaining and we would soon be overtaken. It was a bloody miracle that we scrambled on board just as two great trunks came thrashing down on the back of the truck. Bob took off like a bullet and fortunately we outran them, Bert and me banging about in the back of the truck, thankful for a narrow escape.

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

Another day on manoeuvres in the hills around Kandy, our convoy came across a group of native Ceylonese standing in a circle at a respectable distance around a king cobra. The king cobra is the world's longest venomous snake, and can kill a man with a single bite. It feeds on other snakes, including pythons! The natives are afraid of them, sensibly enough, but reluctant to kill one, believing that its mate will hunt you to the ends of the earth seeking revenge. They are perfectly happy though, for anyone else to kill one! Now within the regiment, I had a bit of a reputation for killing snakes. I'd grown up in the bush and probably told a few too many stories of my exploits. I'd even boasted of an ambition while in Ceylon, to kill a king cobra. Well, words come back to haunt you! Someone said, "Righto Nugget here's your chance." A gunner thrust a bayonet into my hands. Bert threw a stick at the cobra, injuring its back and pissing it off. Now it was really ready for a fight, its head swaying angrily about some four feet off the ground. It stared at me, poised to spring. I approached cautiously, bayonet stretched out in front. That bayonet seemed pathetically short. I tried to recall my *thrust and parry* training. I swung at him, backed off a little, and swung again. I found that each time I did this I was able to judge his spring and get a little closer for my next thrust. Using the bayonet like a sword I finally managed a fatal swipe just below his head. My ambition was fulfilled.

While we were in Ceylon, the main Australian force had returned to Australia and gone on to New Guinea. We remained uncertain of what we would be doing. There was talk of using us to try to repel the Japanese from Sumatra. This never eventuated, and just as well. The last lot were massacred during the Japanese invasion and capture of Sumatra a few months earlier. Eventually we headed out for Australia, and after a week's leave in Sydney went straight up to New Guinea. While in Sydney I met my future wife for the first time. Our courtship was our regular correspondence while I was in New Guinea!

We arrived in Port Moresby on September 25 1942, three months after the main AIF force. Earlier the Japanese had come down the Kokoda Track to within just fifteen miles of Moresby. Our Militia did a brave job holding them back till the fresh, experienced AIF troops arrived from the Middle East and began to push the Japs back to the east coast. Our guns couldn't be used in the steep mountain terrain along the Track so we marked time training in jungle warfare. I remember a Liberator returning from a bombing mission circled low over our camp in some sort of trouble. The undercarriage clipped the trees and it crashed into telegraph wires just a few hundred yards away, bursting into flames. Bodies were thrown out and scattered all about. Some poor fellows were still alive, trying to get away, but it was hopeless. We could just watch them writhe in agony in the intense heat. One bloke came down in a parachute but just got tangled and burned with the flaming wreckage in the telegraph wires. No one survived.

One day our driver Ron Hennessy was working on his truck, heating his soldering iron on a Primus stove when it exploded, and he was covered in burning kerosene. It was a terrible accident, and despite urgent medical treatment he died a few days later. We had just run a fifteen-mile cable out to the coast, where we were on enemy submarine watch. I got a call to get back quickly to Moresby, to blow the bugle at Ron's funeral. I quickly shaved and dashed off to the ceremony. I played the first call, stood to attention for the twenty-minute sermon, and played the last call. Then I promptly fainted. An officer caught me as I collapsed, and was startled to find me standing in a pool of blood. I had cut my lip while hurriedly shaving, and playing the bugle had opened up the cut. Blood had been running down my chin and neck the whole time, pouring down my uniform and into my boot, which was now overflowing. I had not felt it, being saturated with sweat in

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

the sweltering tropical heat. I was weak with the loss of so much blood. They carried me back to camp, where doctor Beck administered a full pannikin of overproof rum. I heard later that I staggered about telling everyone to get stuffed but that they had to put up with me as they were told, "Leave Nugget alone, he's an 'official drunk.'"

Our infantry pushed the Japs back over the Owen Stanley Range, down past Kokoda and almost to the east coast. They were exhausted, but still faced the tough job of pursuing the Japs right back to their original beachhead along the Gona-Sanananda-Buna coastline, and ultimately dislodging them from the island altogether. We were asked to provide artillery in support of these objectives. It was a formidable task, as the Japs were solidly dug in with virtually impregnable defences, intending to hold on to their positions, if needed to the last man. And they were landing fresh reinforcements. It was decided to fly our guns over and begin pounding the Japanese defences to soften them up in preparation for the arrival of our infantry. The boongs began clearing an airstrip for us at Popondetta while we trained for a fortnight in a procedure to assemble our guns and start firing within minutes of landing. This would unnerve the Japs by creating an immediate impression of a substantial allied presence. I was in F Troop, 51st battery, and we were selected to go first. We felt honoured. We flew across in American C47s, a military transport version of the DC3. It was the first time Australian guns had moved into battle positions by air, so we became the First Australian Airborne Artillery Troop!

We weren't expecting the swampy ground we struck at Popondetta airfield. We had four planes – one for each gun with its crew. Our first plane landed, but got bogged taxiing to its designated position. We were delayed about 40 minutes while the natives pulled it out with ropes. The remaining three planes - I was in the second - landed quickly without incident. Our training in rapid assembly paid off as within minutes of landing, each gun was firing into the jungle in the general direction of the Japanese. We must have taken them by surprise and caused them much confusion. While our guns fired the airfield was all action. A constant stream of planes landed with infantry reinforcements and supplies. Each plane left quickly, making room for the next. I was in our maintenance vehicle with another sig, waiting for instructions. We had no communication lines out yet – we were just firing point blank into the jungle. As our infantry came down off the Kokoda Track they were told to head for the sound of our guns. We were not ready for what we saw as they strayed in. They'd been fighting in the jungle for weeks without adequate food, sleep or shelter. They were exhausted, and practically starving, looking like underfed POWs. We had brought some supplies for ourselves, including some bread and butter and jam. We grabbed it and made jam sandwiches for the poor bastards as they staggered in from the jungle. They wolfed them down. You could see the gratitude in their eyes for the feed and the friendly faces. That was enough to make a hardened soldier cry. It was one of my most emotional experiences in the war. We were so glad we could at least provide a rallying post of sorts as our boys straggled in from the end of the Track.

That night there was harassing fire all about as we sat quietly waiting for daylight. It was very dark. I lit a cigarette. Suddenly a voice in the blackness called out "Pom Currie." Pom was my nickname at school and I had not heard it since. I was amazed when an old schoolmate from Kandos, Geoff Naisby, stepped out from the darkness and greeted me. He just happened to be walking by and was glancing through the darkness in my direction at the instant I struck a match, illuminating my face. It was the most incredible of unlikely coincidences. Geoff said "Hi" then moved on. He was an infantryman heading for Gona. I had not seen Geoff since school days. I never saw him again.

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

At daybreak we set off along the Sanananda track, supporting our infantry pushing the Japs back towards the coast. We arrived at an observation post that had recently been captured from the retreating Japanese. It was about 100 feet up in a big tree. About six of us made off to a nearby river to wash ourselves. We really were filthy. We stripped naked, and the warm water up to our waist felt good. Suddenly a Japanese Zero appeared overhead. Spotting our group, he circled around for a run at us. The others made a mad dash for the shore and the thick jungle cover. By the time the Zero returned they had all made it. All, that is, except me. I was still in the middle of the river, doubled up in agony with stomach pains. Couldn't move! The Zero opened fire and bullets sprayed all around me. I should have been cut to bits, but not one bullet hit me. I would not be so lucky on his next run. But fortunately for me, he never came back. Not so lucky for some others. The Zero had spotted our 2/4 Field Ambulance Main Dressing Station a little further downstream. Even though it was clearly marked with red crosses, he bombed and strafed them, killing about 20 of our medical staff and patients, and wounding 50 others. Some were actually on operating tables at the time! An infantry medic told me later that my own paralysis in the river was probably an acute attack of appendicitis. Great timing! By nightfall I'd recovered, and was making a bed on some soft ground I found at the base of our observation post in the big tree. Alan Noble called out "Don't sleep there Nugget, we just buried a bloke on that spot." I went without a soft bed that night!

As a signaller, when not laying or maintaining cables, I worked with forward observation officers, relaying target information to the guns. I was working with Ernie Wade when he took sick and was relieved by Tiny Hewitt. Our observation post was a tall palm tree near Gona village. Tiny shinned up the tree each day, watching a Japanese machine gun post called 'The Big Tree.' He stayed up the tree all day, continually attacked by ants. He came down only after dark, to avoid being seen and shot by snipers. Meanwhile, I was lying in a trench filled with water, with only my head above the water level, from daylight to dark. Tiny would call out instructions for me to relay to our guns, so they could aim for the Japanese post. On our first night together, Tiny and I slept under the tree. I rolled over in my sleep and seconds later a coconut fell from the tree, landing between my head and Tiny's, on the spot where my head had been a moment before. It made a huge dent in the ground. If I hadn't moved when I did, they'd have planted me under that tree! The next night we were careful not to sleep under any coconuts!

Each day artillery shells screamed over our tree and automatic fire filled the air, bullets buzzing all about us in the jungle foliage. Our Wirraways flew overhead dropping fifty-pound bombs around the Japanese positions. But the Japs wouldn't budge from The Big Tree. Our 39th battalion was spearheading the attack. They had done a great job on the Kokoda Track pushing this far. Increasingly frustrated in their attempt to dislodge the Japanese from their positions around The Big Tree, they threw everything and all hands into their effort. Even the cook from company headquarters was given a gun. As he raced past my position to join the action, he threw his haversack on the ground next to me and called out, "Keep an eye on my haversack, Sig." Off he went and merged into the firing that was going on all around me, from positions no more than 50 yards from my trench. The Japanese were using explosive bullets. They would explode inside your body on impact, and make a real mess of you. As I lay in my water pit relaying observations from Tiny, I could distinctly hear little explosions whenever a nearby object was hit. One found the cook's haversack and exploded in it, shattering his gear. When he returned, I told him what had happened. We inspected it, and it was clear that the bullet had been travelling in a direct line for my head. If he had not dropped his haversack where he did, I would have been kaput. I have a lot to thank that cook for.

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

Despite three days of hard effort, our infantry could neither capture The Big Tree nor get around it. The Japanese machine gun fire was just too intense. On the third afternoon, Tiny noticed the Japs around the machine gun post were wearing gas masks. He told me to relay this to Brigade HQ. I told the senior officer there and heard him say 'Shit! Our respirators are still down in Moresby'. No wonder he was alarmed. It now appeared the Japanese intended to use gas against us, and our masks were left behind. The officer ordered me to send Tiny to him immediately. He wanted to question him first hand. I said, "Sir, if he comes down from the tree he'll be dead from sniper fire before he hits the ground." "Well, get him here as soon as he comes down tonight." It was against instructions to move about at night, but that evening Tiny followed our cable to Brigade HQ.

With Tiny gone, I decided to spend the night with a nearby infantry outpost, for safety. I took my phone and walked soaking wet to their trench on the edge of the jungle, overlooking the beach. On the way I met a Lewis gunner who joined me to spend the night there too. He had taken his gun out of action for repair, and it was too late in the day to return to the front. The infantry outpost was a round trench, kind of like a doughnut ring, perhaps fifty yards from the water's edge, facing the ocean on the eastern coastline near Gona village. There were six infantrymen so with the Lewis gunner and me there were eight of us. We settled in for the night and took turns on watch. My first watch was early in the night. I had painted white marks on the focus rings of my binoculars, so even in near darkness I could set them accurately for my eyes. Through them I thought I saw some kind of movement between our position and the water's edge. It appeared as though small turtles were moving slowly along the beach. Some of the objects appeared quite close. I was puzzled and instinctively suspicious of any unexplained movement. I was not quite sure what I was seeing, but it didn't look right.

I quietly passed my binoculars to the Lewis gunner, next to me in the trench. He peered out intently, then returned the binoculars, nodding his head to indicate it was the enemy out there. Silently, by touch, we relayed an alert around the trench. When all were ready for action the Lewis gunner signalled, stood up, aimed his gun and said, "Here goes!" He had not actually used the gun since repairing it, so he just hoped it would bloody well work. It did! He fired with long scooping motions, aiming the start of each burst a few yards in front of us and then lengthening the range, so as to finish the burst down on the beach at the water's edge. We had completely surprised the Japanese. They had no cover and their casualties were devastating. There was sporadic return fire, but they had no chance to organise any real resistance. Every now and then one of them would manage to lob a hand grenade into our trench. Thank God for the excellent training of the infantry blokes. Each time, one would find the grenade where it dropped and throw it back.

In time I noticed something else that disturbed me. Out in the water I could see faint glowing objects that seemed to be moving southward, as if in a pattern. It was subtle but as my eyes accustomed I could make out the moving shapes of dim light quite definitely. Movement in seawater can cause a phosphorescent glow, apparently by stimulating the luminescent properties of tiny sea creatures. It occurred to me I might be seeing Japanese soldiers swim past in the darkness, to get around us. I fired a couple of shots at one of the shapes, and it disappeared. Then another, with the same result. "What are you firing at Sig?" I explained what I thought was happening. The others agreed. "That's a good idea Sig!" So from then on we all took pot shots at the moving, glowing shapes.

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 2

Spasmodic firing continued all night. By dawn our ammunition was nearly spent. The Lewis gunner and I set out for company HQ to get some, while the infantrymen stayed on alert. We picked our way through a jumble of Japanese bodies. The Lewis gunner was in front of me with a Thompson automatic for our protection. A few yards out he turned towards me to speak, just as a Japanese soldier was up on his elbow, aiming a gun at my back. The Lewis gunner gave him a full burst, and I had another narrow escape. When we returned with the ammunition, our infantrymen had counted forty-seven dead and dying Japanese around the trench. There were probably others further out. We found out later the Japs we killed were from the defences around The Big Tree, trying to evacuate under cover of darkness. Apart from our heavy gunfire and the fifty-pound bombs dropped by our Wirraways, they had been plagued by the stench of dead bodies all around them. The reason for the gas masks was now clear. They could no longer stand the smell of rotting flesh. Later I saw many bodies around The Big Tree. The Japanese wouldn't collect their dead while fighting, or let us collect ours. One sight I never forgot was the body of an Australian with strips of flesh cut off his buttocks. The flesh was in a cooking pot, still warm. They had certainly left in a hurry. We took off this poor fellow's meat ticket and, in a weird twist, found he was a Western Australian chap who had been running a book on who would be first in his unit to 'have his bum cut off and eaten!'

As a signaller you were always aware of the threat of ambush. The Japanese would infiltrate our area, cut our wires, lie in wait till we came out to repair the break, and pick us off. We lost a lot of good blokes this way. We soon developed a method to counter this. We would tee in to a disrupted cable at selected spots in the open, safe from ambush, and leapfrog in wide arcs till we narrowed down the length of line affected. Depending on the situation, we might lie in wait to 'ambush the ambushers.' (We learned the Japs couldn't keep quiet for long – eventually they would make an indiscreet sound giving up their position). Alternatively we might run a parallel cable around the break, re-establishing our connection. It's funny the things you remember. Once, Frank Smith's brother Harry was flown over from Moresby as a replacement because we had lost so many sigs. Normal policy was never to assign two brothers in the same area, but we were desperate. Well, poor Harry lasted only a couple of hours before the Japs got him too. Probably he wasn't sufficiently warned of the danger and how to deal with it.

The Big Tree silenced, our infantry continued on toward Gona. When I returned to our OP Tiny wasn't there. I guessed he was still at brigade headquarters, and waited for further instructions. I began feeling a bit off colour and conscious of a climbing temperature. I had bought a thermometer in Sydney, having heard about the problem of Malaria in New Guinea. Sure enough I was 100° and rising. I told the gunners I might have a bout of Malaria coming on. Some other blokes were also getting sick with it. Next day we were told that if we could make it down to the airstrip, we would be flown to a hospital at Moresby. "Just head for the noise of the plane engines." We staggered off, a sorry sight, making for the engine sounds, going as the crow flies, cutting through swampland, wading through slushy swamp water up past our waist. We were buggered by the time we got to the planes. My temperature was now 106 degrees, and I was delirious. The airstrip was in swampy terrain and the sodden ground made it difficult and dangerous for aircraft to take off. American and Australian planes landed pretty much continuously with supplies and reinforcements from Moresby. The American planes would mostly take off empty, giving a better chance to get airborne in the risky conditions. Our pilots were more flexible, and would ferry the injured and sick back to Moresby. They would take as many as 12 or 14 blokes. Despite my delirium I managed to wander on board an Australian plane along with a bunch of other blokes. The pilot

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said there were too many of us. Four or five of us would have to get off, or he couldn't get enough lift to leave the ground. Nobody volunteered to go. Anyway, we all had feverish temperatures and weren't with it, I suppose. There was a standoff. Finally the pilot agreed to give it a go. He got some natives to lift up the tail of the plane and revved the engines to full power before they moved the chocks and he released the brakes. The natives, of course, were nearly blown to the shithouse. The pilot gave her full gun and the plane lurched forward furiously. Moments later we felt the undercarriage touching the treetops and thought it was the end for us, but luckily we had enough momentum to carry on. We got safely to Moresby, where we were taken to a convalescent camp.

I recovered in time to rejoin the Regiment for a period of home leave. In Sydney I got married, visited family and unloaded sugar on the Balmain wharves. We did a few months training on the Atherton Tableland and went to Cairns to board a 10,000-ton Liberty ship bound back for New Guinea. As well as us, the ship was to carry a full load of ammunition – artillery shells, aerial bombs, light ammunition. Loading was almost complete when a sling broke high in the air, spilling crates of .303 rifle rounds all over the wharf. Boxes broke and bullets went all about. The Wharf labourers refused to pick them up, believing it too dangerous. There was a standoff as the Captain insisted they finish loading the vessel. A machine gunner on board decided to break the deadlock. He fired a few rounds in the air, then pointed his machine gun toward the wharf. He yelled out, 'Pick up that ammunition now, you bastards!' 'Be buggered, it's too dangerous.' He fired a couple more rounds a bit lower, called out something unprintable and aimed his gun in their general direction. They promptly co-operated and we got away! I must say, travelling on a ship full of ammunition felt a bit like being camped on top of a bomb!

The trip back to New Guinea was uneventful. We landed at Aitape, far to the east of our previous action. Our ship moored a few hundred yards out and we climbed over the side and down rope nets into barges. Our guns and vehicles had already arrived, and we were driven to our camp, located on a coconut plantation. A Brisbane businessman flew bundles of Sunday papers over each week and dropped them to us Aussie troops in the Aitape area. We had to swim out for them if they fell in the ocean.

We had to push the Japs back from Aitape to Wewak. Progress was slow against enemy resistance, through dense jungle and constant torrential rain. I recall making protective sleeves, to safeguard family photos while wading or swimming across the many deep rivers and overflowing creeks in our path. I would cut out pieces of clear Perspex (once, from the goggles of a downed Japanese fighter pilot) and stitch them together with the copper strand from a piece of Don 3 signal cable. I would place the photo between the pieces, and to make it watertight, seal the edges with glue I got from an RAF chap. Letters, packages and photos from home were among our most precious possessions.

Once towards nightfall I was crossing a creek with another sig mate, when a jagged object went through my boot and into my foot. I managed to pull it out. It was a piece of steel concrete reinforcing mesh. Our bloody engineers had placed it there to give our infantry vehicles traction crossing the creek. A spike from its edge had turned upwards with traffic, pierced the tongue of my boot and went into my instep. Soon my foot was quite sore to walk on and as we were unsure of our position, we decided against laying any more cable. In any case it was getting dark and we were not supposed to lay cable at night. We didn't know if we were in front of or behind our own infantry. So we sat down and waited till daylight to minimise the risk of ending up in the Japanese held area.

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As dawn broke we could hear the muffled sound of voices in the jungle. We peered cautiously through the foliage and saw two Japanese soldiers. Suddenly alert, we froze, our Owen guns ready. It appeared they hadn't sensed our presence. They seemed relaxed, rifles slung over their shoulders. Each held a biscuit and was drinking from a paper cup of coffee. Then we saw the Salvation Army bloke there with his coffee urn! What on earth he was doing alone in the jungle, giving goodwill coffee to Japanese soldiers, we couldn't imagine. We looked at each other and hesitated. We couldn't shoot them, could we, with him there doing God's work? And if we started something they might shoot him. We let them finish their coffee then coughed discreetly, hoping to spook them into leaving. They looked in our direction warily, and seemed uncertain. Then carefully, with no sudden movement, they graciously bowed to the Sally, and with a final curious glance our way, withdrew smartly into the foliage. When they were gone, we broke from our cover and went over to the Sally, who thanked us profusely and poured us a coffee. We learned from him that, as we had suspected, we were probably out in front of our infantry. It was just as well we hadn't gone on any further in the night!

My foot was extremely painful now. After the coffee I got my boot off to inspect the damage. My foot exploded like a football! There was no way to get my boot back on and I couldn't walk without it, so I was in real strife with no idea what to do. Just then an infantry chap turned up in a jeep. He saw my foot, the size of a balloon and said, "Shit!" or something like that. Luckily, we were near the Wewak airstrip. He drove me there and we found a Douglas DC3 about to take off. The infantry chap ran up to it, rapped on the fuselage and called out something. After exchanging a few words they lifted me up into the plane and we flew back up to Aitape. I was put in a makeshift military hospital for nearly two weeks. When my foot had gone down sufficiently I was taken to a little island just off the coast, close to where we had unloaded from our ship on our arrival.

After a few days on the island I could walk, and was keen to rejoin the regiment. In the fortnight I was laid up, our infantry had broken through to Wewak. The Regiment was with them. I got a lift on a big supply barge ferrying food down to the front line. We went non-stop to near Wewak and pulled in to unload on May 7 1945. I left the barge and someone told me the Regiment was just up ahead. I could hear the guns firing, and started walking toward the sound. Soon I could make out the F Troop guns, and was delighted to see my mate 'Punchy' Seabrook in his pit behind the nearest gun. I always made for Punchy's gun when I returned from laying a cable or from a maintenance run. He was a good bloke, always looked after me. I started walking over to him. I became conscious of planes circling about overhead. They were friendlies though, American Lightnings. So I took no notice. Then suddenly they started dropping bombs and strafing our gun positions, and there was mayhem. Just ahead of me, Punchy had got up out of his pit, and was standing at its edge. A bomb exploded there and blew him to bits. Another minute and I'd have been there, shaking his hand. Or if I were a just minute earlier, I'd have been killed with him. Nearly 50 men, infantry and gunners, were killed in that senseless raid. Our regiment alone lost six men and fifteen wounded.

Now, for the first time since Palestine, our Regiment had all 24 guns together. We had been split up, supporting infantry units at different places along the coast. After capturing Wewak all our guns were in a line, firing into the surrounding foothills where our infantry hunted the remaining Japs. The hilly terrain made our job as signallers difficult. We were forever going up and down steep grades, maintaining communications between gun positions and observation posts. Once, dark set in before I could get back. The infantry had orders to shoot anyone moving about at night. I didn't want to be out all

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night so I took a chance and came in singing *Waltzing Matilda* at the top of my voice. Luckily someone called out "Is that you Sig?" and I was allowed through.

One particular Jap gun up in those hills was out by itself, a 'one out Charlie' we called the *breakfast gun*. It fired a few rounds at us each morning as our breakfast truck arrived. We were in open country and they had full view of us. They had this gun hidden in a tunnel in a cliff face during the day, and we didn't know its exact location. One morning Bernie Anley waited for the puff of smoke when they fired the gun, and using a compass noted its position on the map. The next morning we were ready. All 24 of our guns were registered onto that spot, and when the *breakfast gun* fired, every gun responded with several rounds, right on target. Later that day, laying cable up in the vicinity, I inspected the mess we made. There was nothing left of that gun, or any other bloody thing!

It's been called a bastard of a place, and if you were there you know why. The Japs were the enemy from hell, brutal and fanatical, ready to fight to the death. You saw dreadful things and lost great mates. There were tropical diseases, flies and mosquitos, incessant rain and lack of sleep or proper shelter. If you didn't have malaria you had the runs! We had a shortage of clothing for most of the last campaign, and how glad I was near the end of it to get a second pair of trousers. On a positive note I'll never forget the boongs. I'll never know how they got our supplies up and down impossible hills, and evacuated our wounded on stretchers, keeping them level on the steepest inclines, keeping flies off the poor bastards by fanning them with a big leaf. We couldn't have done without them!

For some time we had felt optimistic that the war was winding down. It was over in Europe, and the Japanese were being pushed back throughout the Pacific. Finally, word came through on August 15 that Japan had surrendered. It was over. We were jubilant. It was now just a matter of time, of waiting to go home. It should have been a time of great relief and celebration. Unfortunately however it wasn't over for us yet. There were rogue Japanese fighters out in the hills who refused to accept the end of hostilities, and would not surrender. While waiting for ships to take us home we were sent on patrols to capture or kill them. Quite a few of our brave and experienced men died on these patrols, a terrible and unnecessary waste with the armistice already signed. Why the patrols were ordered I don't know – perhaps to occupy us until ships arrived to take us home. I was lucky enough to be one of the first to head for home. A 6-year service record and my marriage earned me enough points for demobilisation priority. I shipped out in early September and was discharged at Sydney Showground on October 11. I met up with my wife that same afternoon, and started a new life with no idea what to expect.

When I think of my service with the Regiment, many things come to mind: there was discipline and discovery, fears, fun and friendships, and horror. I was young, not quite a man, though hardened by the tough years of the depression. The Regiment rounded out my education, moulding my character, mostly I think for the better. It taught me how you handle hardship and mateship with courage and compassion. What strikes me most, though, is how bloody lucky I was. I had so many close shaves, so many narrow misses, that I can only feel lucky to be alive and to wonder at the slim chance of it. I might have been killed by a cobra, a coconut, bombs or bullets, a dozen times or more. Surely I should have been – even a cat has only nine lives. Others, no doubt more deserving than me, due to their courage and contribution, didn't make it. Good blokes gone, tragically. Yet, like the struggling batsman who survives one dropped catch after another, I am still here. I've had a long life, a good life with much to be thankful for, and still much to look forward to. I am indeed a 'lucky little boy.'

D.A JACK'S STORY (as told to his nephew shortly before he 'marched' out)

This is the story of NX 8743 Sergeant DA Jack of the 2/1st Field Regiment.

When the war broke out in 1939 I was in the permanent Garrison Artillery. I was stationed at Fort Wallace and Fort Scratchley and when we got the order to confront Germany, my mate, Ted Gamble, and I we were down in the magazines shifting 60 shells up and stacking them ready for the hoist up to the guns, if the guns had to go into action we had two six inch guns there and two more six inch guns being on temporary mountings at Fort Wallace, and we had a 9.2 in the process of being mounted there – it was nearly completed but when we got this order to confront Germany we were down in the magazines and we were talking and Ted said to me “well it looks like there’s a war on Steve, what are we going to do?” “Well I said that we are regular army and by rights we should be the first to fight before any other volunteers and things were formed, so I said I’m going to write an application when we knock off here and volunteer for an expeditionary force or AIF if one is formed”. So Ted said “Right, I’ll do the same thing” and when we came off duty we sat down and wrote out our applications to join an AIF or whatever.

So we put them into the Battery Office and our Battery Co9mmander, Major L.E.S. Barker, MC from the First World Ware, he was very pleased “what do you know, out of all these men there’s only two of my boys who have volunteered to go overseas” so we were white-haired boys from then on and anyway it wasn’t very long before they pulled about twenty of us out to go down, mainly NCOs’, to North Head and do a crash Infantry course, so we could go and instruct on it with Lewis guns, rifles and tactics and general training of infantry.

So it wasn’t very long, a couple of days, when the course was over we were sent to Ingleburn just outside Sydney and we were dispatched to several units as instructed. I was sent and Ted Gamble my mate, we were both sent to the 2/4th Battalion in the 16th Brigade and we formed a close alliance with the 2/4th BN. Anyway we’d been out on a two day bivouac and we were just marching off the parade ground and Ted Gamble was standing just beside me and he said “you got trouble Steve”. I said “what sort of trouble mate?” “You look over there at that staff car standing on the edge of the road”. I looked over and God here was my father getting out of it.

Captain JJ Jack AIC Instructional Core got out and I thought ‘you’re right Ted, I have got trouble’ and he marched over to Major Winning on the company parade ground. I was in Headquarter Company then, I was Platoon Sergeant of the Vickers and General Small Arms Instructor. So next thing I was called out and I march over and I saluted and all Dad said to me was ‘get in the car’, and I said ‘what for Dad’. He said, ‘you’re going over to the 2/1st Field Regiment’.

I said ‘no I’m not, I’m going with the 2/4th Battalion’. He said ‘no you’re not, all Jacks have been artillery men since time immemorial. All your uncles and everyone else have been in the heavy siege brigade in the First World War’. He said ‘your only 18, you know’ and he said ‘I won’t stop you going’, he said ‘I was stopped in the First World War from going with the siege brigade because the General said ‘you’re more useful here to your country instructing than you are going over there to fight in the heavy siege brigade so if you volunteer I get one more application to vol’ he said ‘and you are going to be in big trouble’ so anyway he had to stop there as he was down there in Melbourne at that time.

The next thing that happened he marched me over to the 2nd Battery 2/1st Field Regiment and introduced me to, oh I’ve forgotten the Battery Commander’s name, and several other officers there. He knew them because they had come from the 9th Field Brigade and a lot of the regiment had come from the militia field brigade and they all knew Dad because he had been the Brigade Quartermaster and Chief Instructor for the 9th Field Brigade. Of course I had an open door for me and I was transferred in against my will. I knew if I wanted to go overseas I had to do what he told me so I finished up in the 2/1st Field Regiment. I think that was the best day of my life and I landed in with a couple of other blokes from the 9th Field Brigade and we became very good mates, Bill Bowie and ??? and old John Stanley, the four of us became very good mates, right through the war and after.

We settled in. I settled into the 2/1st Field Regiment in Battery Headquarters as Small Arms Instructor, especially on the Lewis guns which I had been very well trained in. We had no use for Vickers but we had a use for Lewis machine guns and so I was Battery Headquarters Small Arms Instructor. Next thing we had to march through Sydney and everything was moving, and then we went on a train and we went down to Darling Harbour and we boarded the SS Orford one of the P&O Liners which hadn't been converted to a troop ship. It was still a tourist boat and everything was laid on and we settled in there and it wasn't long before we sailed out the entrance of the harbour and joined up with the escort and other troops. We had the 2/1st Field Regiment on the Orford and it was a very nice boat, we had a hospital and a field hospital on board as well, although we never had any contact with them anyway.

Oh we had the battleship Ramillies and just about all the RAN as escorts and a few other naval vessels as well, and we sailed off across the bite to Perth first and we picked up some more transports on the way to Perth. We were amazed to look at all the streets in Perth, they were wide. There's one bloke cracked a joke "if you want to get to the other side you got to take a packed lunch with you". But they were beautiful wide streets and a very nice city.

Anyway we finally got back on the boat and we all headed off across the Indian Ocean to Colombo. Of course we did a lot of small arms training on board and especially with the Lewis gun which not many knew a great deal about. I had been specially trained in it in the permanent artillery so I was the Lewis machine gun instructor for the voyage. I had a cabin with Neville Freeman and I had all my Lewis guns for instruction purposes packed in the cabin with me. We finally got on the move and sailed across the Indian Ocean, the weather was quite pleasant at that time and we never hit any big storms.

We landed at Colombo and we had a couple of days leave there and then we all went back on board and took off then for Aden. We pulled in at Aden and I was amazed to see all these six inch naval guns, they were everywhere, stuck back in caves and rocky holes and it was well defended from an attack from the sea because it was a naval base in those days. From there we went on towards Egypt, sailed up the red sea and into the Suez Canal, we sailed about half way along the Suez Canal to El Kantara and there they had landing ramps put down onto decking that we could walk on. We walked ashore at El Kantara and we marched about half a mile and then we boarded a train and took off right through Palestine, headed for Qastina. All the little Arab boys were running around the train with bags of oranges selling them for 15 mils and of course everyone had a bag of oranges. It got that bad in the finish everyone had belly aches and the Dr, Dr Rex Becke, RMO, put all of us on no more than a dozen oranges a day.

We pulled into El Majdal Railway Station, then we were taken by bus to our new camp at Wastina. The English troops had erected all the tents for us, they were all white tents EP IP, the type of tent that used to hold 14 men and the Sergeants had one that used to hold 6 each. We had everything, quartermaster's stores, it was very well organised and we settled in there. Of course we never had our guns then, they were 18 pounders mark fours and 4.5 Howitzer pre war stuff from the First WW. They were in very good order, they were very well maintained that that's what we started off with. We never had the Ford VI Marmon Harrington, we had 3 tonner Morris 6 wheelers, all wheel drive, they weren't very powerful, not like the Marmon Harrington, because they were only a 4 cylinder and that was our transport. They had a few utilities, like little tillies with wooden backs and sides, with canvas tops on them and that was all the staff vehicles.

We carried on there for a few months then we got some leave into Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, of course we made the best use of them. Then I had to go. I was sent to a small arms weapon training course at Sarafand in Palestine. So I marched into there as a student but we all had to take our 303's with us so....I had quite a nice 303 too, a Lithgow Lee Enfield and we had to put them in the rack in the guardroom every night and we had to sign for them when we pulled them out. If we went anywhere we had to carry it with us even if we went on leave for a day into Rishon or Tel Aviv, we had to carry our 303's with us.

Anyway we did this small arms course, and when we finished our course they took us all down to the rifle range at Rishon and all the students lined up on the bank at the back of the rifle range and there was a mound in the front where everyone used to get on there and shoot. They had a rifle range, only about 100 to 150 yards away and they had china plates, whole china plates dotted all over the mound and that was the target. I was sitting on the bank there watching them, oh the pommies were terrible shots, they'd fire but you wouldn't see any plates jump in the air. Of course there was a lot of Top Brass and red tape standing up on the mound just along from us a little bit too, and as I was watching the shooting I was talking to a New Zealander sitting alongside me and I said "these bastards, the Germans and Hitler, will be pretty safe when these bastards get at them", and oh you wouldn't credit it everybody heard me and I shriveled. The next thing the Camp Commandant of the school said "now we will hear from our Australian candidate" so I stood up, saluted, carried my rifle down settled in on the mound and they gave me so many rounds to fire. Of course I was a bloody good shot in those days and every time I fired one of those chine plates shattered or jumped in the air. I banged away then I turned around rapid and I blazed away and every time there was a plate busted.

Then I got to the Lewis gun and I started to fire with it, and every time I fired lots of plates were going everywhere. Next was the anti-tank rifle, oh they were a useless weapon. A five shot magazine bolt action repeater, that's all they were, with a half inch round in them. All they were good for was shooting at small stuff, like they'd knock a hole in an anti-aircraft gun carrier but that was about their maximum. A lot of good men got killed thinking they could stop a tank with one of them and I was never very happy with them. In fact I didn't like them at all, I think they were too small, too light and too slow a rate of fire and with only five shots in the magazine, but every time I fired a shot a plate went in the air. Finally I finished that shooting. I stood up, saluted and marched back to my position on the mound and sat down there, then I heard a voice from one of those officers with all the brass hats that were standing up behind us "well the Germans are in for a rude shock when they run into this bastard!" Of course I shriveled up.

Anyway after that we went back to camp and when they were doing rifle aiming practices they used to put a rifle up on the stand, then the Instructor would sight upon a target then he'd turn to me and say, "is that right Sergeant Jack?" and I'd say "oh no, just a little bit to the right and a little bit lower down" until I could just see a light, a cigarette paper of light come between the top of the foresight and the rear sight and that's what we called a fine sight and you don't miss inaudible, so you can shoot a kangaroo through the head at 300 yards like that. Anyway from then on I was accepted as a marksman.

As I said before, the pommies were terrible shots. They'd never ever fired anything much, or had much training, there was the odd one that was a good shot but most of them weren't. All they could do was just lie there and blaze away. So when I finished there I went back to the regiment and the next thing we were finished our training on the 18 pounders and 4.5 Howitzers. The 2/2nd Regiment turned up from Victoria and the 17th Brigade and they had no equipment and as we had finished our field training in 18 pounders and 4.5 Howitzers, which were quite good guns even though they were 1914-18's vintage, we had to hand them over to the 2/2nd Regiment.

Then of course we had no guns, but they were having trouble with the Egyptians at that time. They had the only anti-aircraft gunners that could man the anti-aircraft guns down in Cairo and they were holding it over the pommies that they only had gunners. At the anti-aircraft they said "well that's no trouble, we've got two regiments, two Australian regiments in Palestine, we'll shift them down here and they can take over the guns", of course they didn't but the 2/1st Field Regiment and the 2/4th Battalion, the 19th Brigade they had finished their training and they handed all their gear over to the, I think it was the 18th Brigade coming back from England. So they formed two artillery regiments and mixed us all up together, X and Y anti-aircraft artillery. We didn't mind that because we got a go at these Bofors and oh we loved them. Two pounder Bofors automatic, a man stood up on top and rammed a clip of 5 2 pounder shells and jammed them into fire hole, they went down, they fed in and fired automatic like a machine gun, oh they were a beautiful gun too, we liked them.

We also did training on the 3.7's. They sent us to Haifa and part of X Regiment went up to Acro just to train on the 3.7's up there. Where we were, 3.7's were all around the oil refinery at Haifa, 100's, huge silo tanks full of petrol and diesel and what have you and they used to pump it across from Iraq in big pipelines and there they used to refine it and have it ready to pump into everything else. We were camped at the old hospital there and we were all on parade one morning and the next thing happened as we were standing on parade about 27 or 30 Savoy 3 motor S79 bombers came droning overhead and over the top of them were a lot of Italian fighters, CR42's weaving backwards and forwards and our adjutant was standing on the verandah and he said "there you are men, that's Britain's power in the air for you". Next thing we could hear their bombs whistling and they were bombing the refinery. The tanks were exploding and going up in smoke and flames and the anti-aircraft gunners were down there, they were the British Officers on recognition instruction. They thought the planes were Wellington Bowlers but they were Italian bombers, they destroyed the oil refinery. They started firing then and we knew it wasn't Britain's power in the air but they finally unloaded all their bombs and took off.

We didn't stop long in the old hospital, we moved out the next day and as the sun was gone up on the top of Mt Carmel and we camped at the foot of Mt Carmel just outside Haifa.

We weren't there very long when they sent us down to Egypt and we were still X and Y regiment down there, us and the 2/4th Battalion. We formed a long personal association with the 2/4th Battalion and the next thing that happened they suddenly decided to still train for a while on anti-aircraft guns. It served a purpose, a political purpose, so after that they reformed the regiment and the 4th Battalion and they packed us off to El Amiriya, no to Ikingo Mariot, and while we were there we received our new 25 pounders. The 2/5th Field Regiment drivers bought them down from Cairo and delivered them to us and we had about 3 weeks to become acclimatized to the new 25 pounders, we loved them, they were beautiful guns and we were fully equipped. We had our Ford V8 Marmen Herrington gun tractors again and all our Houghton shoe utilities and what have you and our number 43 LAD (light aid detachment) they moved in with us. They were a very efficient detachment too, all technicians and what have you.

So then suddenly we got an order to move as the Germans and the Italians were coming down from Libya and they came down hell fire pass and at the foot of the mountain they were in Egypt. Next thing the 7th English armoured division, the Desert Rats, they attacked them at Sidi Barrani, oh they just about whipped the Italians. They withdrew, they got such a hammering and in the meantime we were packed up and ready to go to Mersa Matruh and then from Mersa Matruh we advanced. We weren't allowed to carry any excess baggage, we had to just come down to our basic bedding and clothing and that was all. So we started off from there and headed towards Sidi Barrani, the Italians were great road builders and they had already started to build a formed up road with broken up rock and everything towards Mersa Matruh. They intended to come down, they'd tarred it and had an asphalt road, but we were clumping and clashing and bouncing over these stones and then someone found the side track all lovely and smooth, damp sand seeping through from the Mediterranean, the water used to seep through there so we moved out onto that and we could travel at 40 miles an hour along there then. We finally arrived at Mersa Matruh, at Sidi Barrani and here it was 7th British Division that come in behind them and belted the hell out of them and there were tanks, and small crews of tanks lying around that had been shot up and destroyed, bloody machine guns and everything....because the Italians had shot through, headed back to Bardia and the 7th British Armored Division chased them.

We started looking around at things but we didn't go too close to some of the tanks...they were stinking...dead bodies still in them and so we never had much to do with that.

We camped there the night and next morning we went uphill past the Salum looking out across Salum Bay and we travelled up this, oh it was a good pass, all cement, all asphalt and big holes that had been blown out of the wall from shells and bombs. We reached the top and we went through Mussolini's victory Gateway at Fort Capuzzi. We pulled up there and we were looking around because the Navy had been shelling Bardia and there were a few 6 inch shells. I recognized them from the CPBC (common pointed ballistic cap) that we used to use in the coastal artillery, but they had to hit on their nose to explode and these had landed on their side and ricocheted along, and all scarred drips on the side of the shell, but they didn't explode. They had to hit on this armored point to make them explode.

So the Navy, they'd been, they'd come off a light cruiser those shells and we travelled through a bit further, then we waited while the gun position officers went forward and they shipped first battery first and it went up. They made a mistake here. They realized they put first battery into a, what they called a defensive area for Italian artillery, they could fire straight into it, and so they left first battery in there and second battery went further to the left and because I was in E Troop then, because we used to be 6 4 gun troops, but we never in the regiment, but 3 troops were battery and then they realized they never had enough inaudible equipment to handle the extra number of troops, so they reformed us into 6 gun troops. They disbanded F Troop and C Troop, split C Troop up amongst first battery and F Troop up amongst two battery, so I finished up in E Troop there. We settled into the position there and then we started firing at targets, in Bardia of course the Italians replied very angrily.

Then we had a session what we used to call the morning hate. We would open up early, blaze about 20 rounds per gun away, hit somewhere in Bardia, and then when we had fired our required number we dug in....we all dived into our slit trenches to wait the return and it was a hot return too. Bloody shells bursting all over us and around us everywhere, and behind, just behind us, oh about only about 300 yards was a 6 inch battery of the 7th Medium Regiment. English, so its 60 pounders or 4.5 gun howitzers and all long range stuff and 6 inch howitzers and of course it was funny, we either get called up to the command post at night and given our programs and the times for the next morning hate, so one night there, a pommie gunner came across from the Medium Batter, 6 inch battery, and he came across and was sitting up having a cup of tea with us and talking and blathering away like most pommies do, and then he said 'what time you opening up in the morning Sergeant?'

I'd just been called up to the command post and given the times and everything else and number of rounds and the time I was to open up, so I told him the correct time I had there, and next morning they opened up before us....they were cunning buggers the pommies. They opened up before us, hid themselves away and took to the bloody slit trenches because when we opened up the Italians could see our gun flashes and the 25 pound had a nasty crack, it used to hurt your ears and the next thing they started firing back at us, well we couldn't knock off, we had to sit there and take it and the pommies were sitting back in their slit trenches laughing. We woke up to what had happened so we had to crunch our gun pits, we couldn't leave the guns and when our time came for firing we opened up...oh and blokes were all...some of my gunners were getting very, very touchy, they were getting ready to run with all this shell fire coming back, and I'd abuse them and stand over them.

I stood over one bloke with a rammer, and anyway we fired our quota off and went for cover. Bunny Roach said to me the next day "I thought you were going to hit him with the rammer Steve" and I said "it was very close Bunny". He said "he was driving us all mad with his chatter and his mumbling and going on". He was a reinforcement that had come into us from the 6th Division Cavalry and we called him "Lugs" because he never ever stopped talking, he was an ear basher. So Bunny said "you'd better get rid of him Steve, because he had us that stirred up we were ready to run", and I said "oh right" so I went straight up to the command post and told them the story and said "look, we're better off just the five of us than with the extra bloke, we can handle it". After I told them the story of what he was like, "he nearly had my gun troop ready to run, I had to stand over them to stop them running away from the guns and heading for the slit trench" they transferred him back to the wagon lines with the excuse they needed another driver. We were relieved to see him go, he was a pain in the arse. After that first morning with him there panicking we knew we couldn't trust him again, he wasn't worth the risk, he was ready to run and he was taking the rest of the gun crew with him, only I stood up there and bellowed at them because they were a good reliable gun crew.

Next thing we were moved to the barrage position for the next day's attack on Bardia. We had to move at night, no lights for anything, so we packed up and got our tractors and guns all hooked up, pulled out of the gun pits and moved around, several miles, round to the left flank on Bardia. Then we started to dig in again and oh God, every time we started to dig gun pits, my gun in particular would go down about a foot all over and then right in the middle where the firing platform had to go was a dirty great big rock. We picked and flogged and sledge hammered at it for hours and in the finish we got it free and it took all the gunners off the five guns with drag ropes to drag it out of the gun pits and then we left it to lay on the ground in front...anyway dawn was coming, the blokes were away for hours carting ammunition that they'd stacked away for us. It bought our quota up and we got all the smoke ammunition for the troop because I was the only one that had ever handled timed fuses on 18 pounders, the other bloke had come from howitzers...and they weren't conversant with a timed fuse, so I had to give one of my gunners who had done them on 18 pounders, my bombardier, I made him responsible for setting the times fuses. I was the only gunner in the troop that had a key to set the times fuses in our tool boxes, none of the others had it, and as I say we were very short of technical equipment when we went up the desert.

Well time came and we were all ready and in our pits, we were all exhausted from the digging all night but then the 51st Royal Artillery was on our left flank and we could hear their fire orders coming down because we were laid and ready, and next thing I hear "the 51st regiment fiiirrrre!" then I heard "the 2/1st Field Regiment fiiirrrre!" and we fired a split second after them and we started pounding Bardia and selected targets. It was the 51st Regiment RA and the 104th RHA, the Royal Horse Artillery, the 2/2nd Field Regiment and the 7th Medium Regiment, and the 2/1st Field Regiment with 25 pounders and the Second Regiment had our old 18 pounder mark fours and our old 4.5 howitzers, they were good guns but they weren't modern and they weren't as effective and as efficient as a 25 pounder, but they never had the equipment to equip it at all, so we started the barrage and we were thundering away there for it seemed to be hours and daylight crew came in and I had to go out of action for a few minutes to empty all hot cartridge cases out of the gun pit. We were falling over them and staggering around them so I had to go out of action just for a couple and I looked up and I could see right around like a semi circle around Bardia was just a ring of fire and thundery explosions because the Navy was shelling too, the Navy, with 2 fifteen inch gun Monitor Terror and Gun Boats xxx and lady birds and the Queen Elizabeth 16 inch guns and the 15 inch guns and oh I forget how many cruisers with 8 guns and 6 inch guns and destroyers standing in close with 4.7's.

They were all firing and the ground was just vibrating and all these gun flashes and the shell explosions and the dust and the cloud moving up, it was a very impressive sight and they could hear it back in Alexandria. They knew the attack had started, all the rumble and the explosions and the gun flashes and the glow in the sky from the exploding shells, everybody knew what was starting. Anyway daylight came and we got orders to cease fire and prepare to advance, so we packed up everything as quick as we could and pulled the guns out of the gun pits and hooked them up on the tractors and we advanced. We moved right forward, right up onto their barbed wire and across tank traps where the engineers had blown them down we could cross them and Bardia was just about finished because we advanced and when we got right up we were shelling and the barrage had given me such a pounding that I was deaf.

I couldn't hear the fire orders so I told my Bombardier, Woods to crouch down behind a gun and he plugged his ear and he could hear. I had no ear plug but oh my ears...I was deaf...and it's effected me for the rest of my life too just about...so I put the Bombardier in charge, I put him in number one, he was a very efficient Bombardier old Alf Woods, and another Lance Bombardier Roy Lopez, he was a good gunner too. So I did number 2, all he had to do was open and close the breach, and he didn't have to think what he was doing, he didn't have to hear, all he had to do was rip the breach open and when a shell went into it, close it and wait for it to fire and smash it open again. I was a very good number 2 too, I could open the breach on full recoil and red hot shells, cartridges fly out and the sound there was, on the barrage it was terrific, but anyway, we advanced forward, got right up on the wire and the Italians had barb wire fortification and we were firing from there onto reserve targets.

Next thing I was standing there, and over the sand hills in front of us was like a big black stream of oil running over the top of the hill and running down the sand hill and I was 'my God we've hit an oil well, that's what it is' but it wasn't because as they got closer it was Italians surrendering in the thousands...I forget how many thousand prisoners were taken there at Bardia but it was a lot and they outnumbered all of us by quite a few and I know they got about 40,000 Italian prisoners, they captured about 400 guns, field guns, and anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns and they had these Berita 20mm anti-aircraft guns. We used to sit on the gun pits at night and watch them, when the Bristol Blenheims were bombing Bardia we'd see the Gladiator planes going over the Hurricane flights going up and then all these breed of machine guns...er...anti-aircraft guns would open up and the tracers, all tracers were just floating up in through the air and then exploding with a bright flash. It was like watching a Guy Fawkes day with all the fireworks, so we were interested spectators in that, all these Italians surrendering, terrific. They intercepted a message from the Italian General in Bardia, he called on his air force to destroy the artillery, as they were creating havoc with all the artillery and the guns. So next thing overhead came about 27 Savoys, 39's, 3 motored, tri motor bombers, loaded with bombs and a few fighters up above them weaving around, well they dropped their bombs right on the column of their own prisoners of war coming out, marching out, and a lot of them died by their own air force.

Anyway Bardia had fallen and we were next placed to go to Tobruk. We started off at night running a convoy, no headlights, no moonlight to see what we were doing and we pulled up behind what we thought was one of our trucks, but it never moved and it stood there and I got out and walked around to see what was wrong with them and it was an Italian truck that had broken down and they deserted it and left it. We were out of the convoy and there were a few behind us so I went around, Blackwell and I, we had no windscreen in the trucks, we took them out because we didn't want the sun to reflect off them and give us away, but the wind was so cold blowing in we'd tied a bit of canvas right across the front between the driver and me and we settled down there with this sheet of canvas up to our chins and we weren't getting the wind freezing us because God it was cold...when the sands of the desert go cold they certainly grew cold at Bardia because it was around Christmas time. So that night we took off for Tobruk and it was a helter skelter race, we were flat out driving in the dark, just a little bit of moonlight starting to show and no headlights and it was a nice tarred road anyway and we were heading towards, we had about 80 miles to go and several young drivers in the regiment turned over in this mad helter skelter, but we were lucky, I had a bloody good driver in old Billy Blackwell, and we finally came to Tobruk and that was as far as we went that night.

Tobruk is Part 2 of this story.

A pilgrimage to 'the Ghost of Black Cat Pass', Wau, Papua New Guinea

By Elizabeth Thurston

I left Sydney at 7.30 am on a cold morning in July on a flight packed with shivering pilgrims returning to Papua New Guinea from World Youth Day. Many had come from New Britain where I grew up and we were soon chatting like *wantoks*. But I was setting off on my own pilgrimage and, instead of a Bible, I was carrying the war diary of my father Ted Fulton – destination Wau in Morobe Province.

As I buckled my seatbelt on AirNiugini flight 108 from Port Moresby to Lae, a local business man sitting next to me voiced surprise that we were on time. "You're lucky – it's known as the 'one o late'!" It seemed we had no sooner reached cruising altitude when our plane banked to port, and the sharp outline of the Salamaua peninsula came suddenly into view. The swirling clouds, usually so impenetrable over the Owen Stanley Ranges, parted to show the green peaks of mountains stretching as far as the eye could see. Far below, the Markham River wound through the valley folds like a giant python. I tried to imagine Nadzab airstrip rushing up to meet us, as it must have been 65 years ago – swarming with khaki military personnel and reverberating with the sounds of Dakotas, Liberators and Fortresses.

In January 1943 United States Air Force B-17 E Flying Fortress 41-9234 – otherwise known as "the ghost of Black Cat Pass" - had been skilfully crash landed by pilot Lieutenant Ray Dau just out of Wau. It had been hit first by anti-aircraft fire while bombing Lae harbour and then suffered relentless attack from the Japanese Zeros. But in Ray Dau, the United States had an extraordinary pilot and the story of the ill-fated Fortress is one that involved my father. I had come to see it for myself.

Tim Vincent, from Wau Adventures, was easy to spot as I entered the terminal and with him was Phillip Bradley, author of the critically acclaimed *Battle for Wau* (Cambridge University Press). We had a three-hour drive ahead of us and as we crossed the Markham Bridge the light was already fading. By Zaneg it had gone. We wound higher and higher up through the Bulolo gorge and around the mountains – the only sound was the rushing torrent of the Bulolo River to our right. July is the wet season and heavy downpours had turned the unsealed road to Wau into a quagmire of lakes and craters. I clung to the back of Tim's seat as we rattled and splashed and Tim would occasionally stop to wipe the mud off the headlights. This was definitely adventure tourism!

Wau Adventures is run by Tim and Danielle Vincent. Dannielle has spent her life in PNG and Tim is an ex Australian army officer, who fits the country perfectly. They are passionate about the Wau-Bulolo Valley and its tourism potential – especially for trekkers looking beyond the Kokoda experience.

Morobe Province has a colourful history from the time of the first gold rushes at Edie Creek near Wau in the 1920s. Come the war and the region was the scene of a different

activity. Phillip Bradley's book gives a fascinating account of the heroic battle for Wau. Played out in a landscape of dramatic mountains, misty valleys, and the baking kunai grass of the lower slopes, a small band of Australian soldiers, led by Captain Sherlock, from Kanga Force, held grimly on to Wau defending its airstrip against vast numbers of Japanese until vital reinforcements could be landed.

I unpacked Dad's diary and over dinner and a glass of wine we looked at the entries for January 1943. Ted Fulton had been gold prospecting in the Sepik before war was declared. In 1939 he joined the A.I.F. and served as a gunner in the Middle East and Greek Campaigns. But because of his knowledge of the country, when the Sixth Division was sent to New Guinea he was posted behind enemy lines as a forward observation officer with ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit]. He was to collect intelligence through a line of communication and persuade the local people to side with the Australians. He had just spent days walking the precipitous Bulldog Track and was in Wau organizing supplies to continue on to the Sepik when around midday on 8 January he saw the B-17 "coming slowly up the valley at 2,000 feet". The crew were throwing out ammunition and equipment as the plane, losing height, disappeared into the mountains in the vicinity of Kaisenik.

Rescue parties were sent out from Wau and Corporal John Smith, together with the people from the village of Kaisenik, was first to the crash site. The Americans' relief was immense because they thought they had ditched in enemy territory. Sadly, the tail-gunner, Sergeant Henry Bowen, died on the mountain. My father, who had also been sent to locate the survivors with flasks of hot coffee, helped bring the injured party back to Wau. He writes...

"Some of the carriers were scared of being in the dark with a body. I reassured them and pushed onto the swing bridge where I found Corporal Mills with the injured [airman] on a stretcher. Crossing the narrow swaying bridge in the dark was extremely difficult. I went ahead with the torch while two natives held the wires apart to stop the bridge swinging too much...Progress in the dark was very slow and required extreme caution as slipping off the narrow path would have had fatal results...the going was very bad but the carriers did an excellent job with the stretchers; there was a minimum of shaking despite the fact they had to feel their foothold all the way...Our rescue mission had brought back one dead, four stretcher cases and four walking wounded." The injured airmen were flown to Port Moresby on 10th January by the Australian RAAF pilot, Flight Lieutenant "Arch" Dunne and the B-17 remains exactly where it came down 65 years ago.

Early next day we drove to the spot where we would begin the trek. It is impossible not to surrender to the mood and beauty of the mountains that circle Wau. Emerald green and blue ridges melt into the sky and a cool silver mist rises through the pine trees in the morning. Cascading streams and wild orchids complete the canvas.

We stopped first at the village of Kaisenik because I wished to meet the people whose fathers had tenderly carried the stretchers alongside Ted. I showed them his photo taken during the war and this caused much interest as we compared stories of that fateful night.

I stood on the swing bridge and looked toward the mountains. Tim had supplied me with a backpack, water bottle and walking stick and Abraham, from Kaisenik, went ahead with the machete, cutting steps into the slippery mud to help me as we climbed ridge after ridge up and down through kunai grass, rainforest and jungle. "How" - I wondered aloud - "Did they ever carry those stretchers through this country in the pitch black?" The sense of anticipation was palpable. We crested the last ridge and there it was - on a sloping bank at the head of Black Cat pass, the B-17 lying like an enormous broken bird.

United in the silence of the landscape, we sat on the giant wing and looked down the valley mentally retracing the flight path over the tree-tops. With profound skill and a miracle, Ray Dau and his co-pilot Donald Hoggan had brought the crippled fortress to where it now lies. The two starboard engines were knocked out and Dau was unable to gain altitude. He says, "I knew it was just a matter of time, so I began to look for a soft place to set her down. We glided in on the side of a mountain at about 110 miles an hour and, as luck would have it there were no trees...so we slid along into a crash landing."* We marveled at his cool-headed courage and the sacrifice of tail gunner, Henry Bowen, who lost his life fighting till the bitter end. Lieutenant Albert "Bud" Cole was hit by shrapnel many times and Robert Albright died in hospital six days later. Every member of the crew of 41-9234 was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart.

In my back pack I had brought Ted's diary and letters from Ray Dau and Donald Hoggan, who live in Arizona and California. They are the last survivors of the crew and they have never returned to Wau.

Ray Dau wrote to me, 'Your father earned the respect and thanks of our B-17 crew for the rescue operation...' Donald Hoggan wrote, "I want to express my gratitude to your Dad, not a day goes by that I don't think about some phase of my life spent in New Guinea during the war."

If he were alive, Ted would reply that he was only one of many who helped with the rescue that night. He had shared a moment in wartime with the village people from Kaisenik and they, with true courage and compassion, were there when Ray Dau and his men needed them most.

*Dau interview with Justin Taylan

Footnote: Ted didn't know it at the time but his sixth Div mates were just behind him in the battle of Wau - only three weeks after he had been there.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY ELIZABETH THURSTON

Tim Vincent found this plaque which had been removed from its base by locals. He keeps it at home till a “thrift-free” solution can be found.



Elizabeth Thurston with the plane at the crash site

John Dyson

44 Elevation Drive

Wongawallan

Qld 4210

Email dysonjk@bigpond.com

Mr John Hynes OAM

1203/281 Elizabeth Street

Sydney 2000.

Dear Mr Hynes,

Re. 2/1 Field Regiment. Lt John Charles Dyson.

I refer to my late father who was a member of the Regiment . I have copies of his war records and also a copy of the book Six Years in Support. Also an article appearing in wartime written by Norris Jones who unfortunately passed away before the article appeared and so I could not contact him.

I have been trying to any one who may have known my father with information as to his troop etc. And thought you may be able to point me in the right direction..He was hard to miss at 6 foot 4 inches and was known as Jack.

As a matter of interest I have several photos of him with other members of the regiment and groups of offices that I would be happy to share with anyone interested.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Dyson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Dyson. Ex C Sqn 1st Armoured Regiment. Vietnam 1968.

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JJH;BHB
Wednesday, 28th January 2009

John Dyson

44 Elevation Drive
Wongawallian
QLD 4210

Dear John Dyson,

I have your letter (undated) regarding your late father and his service with 2/1st Field Regiment.

I have enquired of a broad section of the remaining members of the Regiment but to no avail – also examined our original nominal roll, also to no avail.

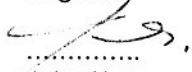
Your father's surname does "ring a bell" with me but it is only vague.

Your reference to Norrie Jones puzzles me. Norrie (now "marched out") wrote about our 1st Battery in the "Battle for Wau". This was published in "Kibble's Post" (our "Newsletter" and subsequently in a war memorial publication. Your father, if in 1st Bty, was not with the Bty. at Wau.

However, I will endeavor to have your letter published in "Anzac Day 2009 Kibble's Post".

This might produce some response from our members. Sorry I can't be more helpful in your quest.

Regards,


.....
John Hynes
(Hon. Secretary)

Editor's Note: *I would like to thank the Committee for their kind invitation to be their guest at this year's Reunion Luncheon but unfortunately my husband and I will not be able to attend as we will be travelling back from Yarrawonga situated just south of the Victorian border, where we hope we will be able to attend a dawn service. I am sure for all the members, spouses and descendents of the 2/1st Field Regiment it will be a memorable and most enjoyable luncheon and we look forward to being able to attend in 2010.*