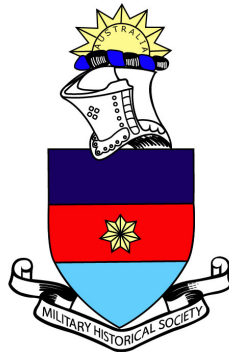


Military Historical Society of Australia  
*Sabretache*



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## EDITORIAL

Readers of *Sabretache* may also be familiar with the organisation Families and Friends of the First AIF (FFFAIF), which produces its own fine publication, *Digger*. While *Digger* deals largely with subject matter relating to Australian service personnel of the First World War, two articles appeared in the March 2012 issue of the kind I would dearly love to see submitted to *Sabretache*, and which I can't resist mentioning. One raises the question as to who really discovered the ancient Shellal Mosaic in Palestine in 1917, now on display in the AWM. The article is a nice piece of original investigative work by someone who is not a professional historian, and appeals to the frustrated archaeologist in me. The other concerns a copy in the writer's possession of Eric Wren's unit history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn AIF, *Randwick to Hargicourt*, which was formerly owned by a veteran of the 3<sup>rd</sup> who assisted Wren in compiling the work. The volume is full of marginal comments by the veteran on people and events described by Wren, which the writer of the article lists in full together with the relevant extracts from the text. The result is a unique and fascinating insight into the broader attitudes and contexts behind the more formal versions of history with which we are usually presented.

I point out these two articles not only because they are particularly interesting and praiseworthy in themselves, but also in a bid to stimulate similar contributions from MHSA members. At the risk of sounding like a cracked record (now there's a saying fast being consigned to the dustbin of history!), I repeat my mantra: 'The stuff of history is all around us.' I wonder at the sorts of artefacts and documents readers may have lying around in shoeboxes, attics and sheds which, once brought into the light of day, might generate articles of a similar nature to those I've just described. And what about resurrecting those notes and sketches made ages ago on a topic of military interest? Drag them out, assemble them into an article, and send it to me for publication.

Having said all that, I've been delighted with the number and range of articles being submitted lately, several of which are presented here. Readers will notice the decidedly biographical theme running through this issue; I didn't initially set out on that path, but having received a number of such pieces all within a short time, I decided to bring together as many as possible in the one issue. The result, I'm pleased to say, is a clear demonstration of how biography, even within the narrow field of Australian military history, can be an excellent vehicle for covering a broad range of topics – from racial politics to battlefield behaviour – over a timeframe spanning many different conflicts. I would also draw readers' attention to the quite substantial Book Reviews section in this issue, the majority of which investigates Australian publications. Certainly the local market for military history appears quite healthy, despite the global financial situation, and review copies of the latest products keep turning up. Anyone willing to help out in the review process should send me an email indicating their specific areas of interest or expertise, along with a postal address.

Finally, there are two important items in the Society Notices I urge you to look at and act on. One concerns the 2012 MHSA conference to be held in Canberra in September. The other is the all-important matter of membership renewals, which are due on 1 July. I'm aware that it has been past custom to include a renewal form with the June issue of *Sabretache*. However, please bear in mind that the Society is currently operating without a Federal Secretary or a membership officer, and that there is only so much that your hard-worked Federal Council (not to mention yours truly) can fit into a day. While I have no doubt that Branch officers will be doing their utmost to ensure that their own charges will renew promptly, corresponding and institutional members may need to take an extra step or two to ensure continued receipt of the journal. With that in mind, I look forward to the continued sharing of *Sabretache* and all it has to offer over the coming membership period.

**Paul Skrebels**

## CHINESE-AUSTRALIANS IN THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCES BEFORE 1914

Alastair Kennedy<sup>1</sup>

### *Prologue*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the United States of America and four major British colonies - South Africa, Australia, Canada and New Zealand – attracted immigrant labour from southern China. The push-pull factors included the economic depression in China caused by the interruption of the profitable land and sea trading routes based on Canton after loss of the First Opium War (1839-42) to the British, civil disorder caused by the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) and the discovery of gold, firstly in California and then in Canada, South Africa and Australia.

When the Californian Gold Rush petered out, Australia, which until then had received few Chinese immigrants (mostly shepherds, agricultural workers and domestic servants), became the favoured destination of large numbers of single male Chinese indentured labourers heading for the newly discovered goldfields. Most came as ‘sojourners’ with the aim of making sufficient money to return as rich men to their home villages in China. But, as the gold became less easy to mine, it was more difficult to afford the return passage and many turned to other forms of employment that increasingly brought them into conflict for jobs with the white settlers. Each colony adopted restrictive measures, mostly based on the so-called ‘Natal model’, with the twin aims of curbing further immigration and reducing the Chinese population as rapidly as possible.

Not until well after the Second World War did these restrictions begin to lift: in Australia the most oppressive measure, the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, was not repealed until 1968. But, despite the official policies of racial intolerance, persecution and social exclusion, the Australian-born children of the Chinese settlers volunteered in increasing numbers to defend Australia by joining its Defence Forces before, during and after the First World War.

Rarely in the historiography of pre- and post-Federation Australia has there been mention of those Australian-born Chinese (and thus British subjects) who enlisted in the Colonial and Commonwealth Defence Forces before the First World War. This article tells the stories of some of those Chinese-Australians who served Australia in the colonial campaigns overseas and at home in the Colonial and Commonwealth volunteer and militia units before 1914.

### *Who should defend Australia?*

In the early days after the arrival of the First Fleet the principal threat to security was perceived as coming from the transported convicts. This was countered initially by the presence of three companies of Royal Marines, then the specially formed New South Wales Corps, and then a series of British regular army regiments. The different British units rotated between the United Kingdom and Australia or New Zealand – for which the Colonies paid the British Government – most going on for a tour of duty in India before returning home. This practice continued until September 1870 when the last British unit was withdrawn.

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<sup>1</sup> Lt Col (Retd) Alastair Kennedy MBE is a former British Army officer now a citizen of Australia. He is a member of the MHSA ACT Branch and a volunteer guide at the Australian War Memorial. He is in the process of completing a book, *Chinese Anzacs*.

From 1814 some of the Colonies formed their own small volunteer units. These were unpaid and provided their own uniforms; the government provided weapons, mostly obsolete British Army muskets and rifles, and ammunition. Conditions varied from state to state, but in general, the qualifications for enlistment were as those set out for The Victorian Mounted Rifles: a British subject between the ages of 18 and 35 (or 45 if he had served in an Imperial unit), able to ride and a good shot, and 'likely to make a good soldier'. Although not set out in official documents, it was unthinkable to arm men who were not of European descent. As one correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald* said during the debate in 1896 on whether an Irish Corps should be allowed in the Militia, 'Australians were busy laying the foundations of a new nation and its army must not be split along racial lines. Would the matter end', he asked, 'with the Chinese and Italians demanding national corps? If it did', he feared, 'it would begin the disintegration of Australia'.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Sudan Campaign 1885*

#### **Sgt John Joseph Shying**

One of the earliest Chinese to arrive in Australia has been identified as Mak Sai Ying, a carpenter on the MacArthur property at Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta. Within a generation the family name had been anglicised to Shying.



*Left: Sgt John Joseph Shying, Artillery Detachment, C Coy NSW Volunteer Rifles (photo courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Shying family papers).*

The Sudan Campaign of 1885 occurred when the British sent a force to avenge the death at the hands of the Mahdi's followers of General Gordon on the steps of the British Embassy in Khartoum. New South Wales sent a contingent to assist the British. Sgt John Joseph Shying, the grandson of Mak Sai Ying, had enlisted in A Company, Sydney Battalion, NSW Volunteer Rifles in January 1864. By March 1885 he had become a sergeant with the artillery detachment which accompanied C Company of the NSW Volunteer Rifles contingent to the Sudan. However, their guns were judged to be too heavy for the African conditions and these were left behind; on arrival with their own Australian horses they were issued with British 9 pounders.<sup>3</sup> He returned safely in June and went back to his work at Henry Arnold's

drapery store in Oxford Street. When he died in August 1900, at the age of 56, his daughter Mary Violet described him as a Civil Servant, Stores Department; he is buried in the Roman Catholic section of Rookwood Cemetery.<sup>4</sup> His nephew served in the First World War, returning with a British war bride.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Editor, 'The Irish Rifles', by Edward Knapp, architect, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 28 February 1896, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> When they left Africa to return to Australia the British Government made them a present of these guns which they took with them back to Sydney.

<sup>4</sup> A family history of the Shying family is available on the internet under the title 'An Alien in the Antipodes' at <http://www.multiline.com.au/lbv1/Stories/Shying.htm>.

## *The late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Militias*

### **Mei Quong Tart**

There were also some westernised Chinese-Australians who joined the rifle clubs, militias and volunteer corps that flourished in Australia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of these was Mei Quong Tart, the Sydney Chinese-Australian businessman who was made a Mandarin of the Crystal Button by the Chinese Government for his services to the Chinese community in Australia. Apart from having a Scottish wife, playing the bagpipes and running very successful tearooms in Sydney, he also joined Sir George Dibbs' National Guard in October 1898 when Mafeking was under siege during the Boer War. The unit's primary role was to defend Sydney in case of foreign invasion but its principal task was to escort contingents to the quay for embarkation for South Africa. His choice of unit was inevitable, as the commander of the New South Wales Militia, Major Knight, was well known for his refusal to allow anyone with what he called 'a foreign accent' to enlist.<sup>5</sup>



Quong Tart was also a keen supporter of the war effort in South Africa and included patriotic exhortations to support Australian troops there in his advertisements for his products. His tearooms in Sydney were popular places to farewell the troops about to embark for the war and he and his wife, Margaret Scarlett, organised a special function for the volunteer nurses who had been left out of the official departure celebrations.

His son Arthur Malcolm Quong Tart enlisted in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF in Holsworthy in August 1915 and went with his unit to France. He was wounded in action at Pozieres in July 1916, hospitalised with shell-shock and returned to Australia for medical discharge.

*Left: Photo of unknown origin of Mei Quong Tart (reproduced courtesy of the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, Quong Tart Collection, print no. P00835 QT008).*

Other Chinese-Australians who joined the militia included William Coto<sup>6</sup> from Sale and George Kong-Meng from Longwood (both served in the Victorian Mounted Rifles and George may have served later in the 8<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regt); both had white Australian mothers. George was one of the two sons of Lowe Kong-Meng, a prominent merchant and a Chinese community leader in Melbourne. None served overseas and George had the ignominy of being turned down by the Recruiting Officer when he tried to enlist in the AIF in

<sup>5</sup> R. Travers, *Australian Mandarin: the life and times of Quong Tart*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1981, pp.108, 135, 158.

<sup>6</sup> Morag Loh and Judith Winternitz, *Dinky-Di*, Australian Government Printing Press, Canberra, 1989, p.13, with references to Melbourne *Evening Standard* 2 and 6 February 1900, as well as Coto Family papers.

1916 as being ‘not sufficiently of European descent’, despite his previous militia service and the fact that his brother was already serving on the Western Front.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Boer War 1899-1902*

#### **William Tanko**



In the Australian records of the Boer War a search of the Boer War Nominal Roll shows only one name of obvious Asian origin, that of Trooper William Tanko from Quirindi, NSW.<sup>8</sup> In January 1902 he joined C Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Commonwealth Horse (NSW), a post-Federation unit. He is shown here in a pre-embarkation photo taken in Sydney and printed in the *Sydney Mail* on 8 February 1902. He is the man with the dark complexion in the centre left of the photo.

*Left: William Tanko, 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Commonwealth Horse (NSW), Unit Embarkation photo in Sydney Mail 8 February 1902.*

He does not appear to have enlisted in the AIF so may have been turned down on the grounds of age (he would have been 34 by then and appears in the Voters Lists as a shearer on Oakwood Station, Charleville, Qld in 1913) or, perhaps more likely, because his skin was too dark. Although his birth is recorded in Murrurundi in 1879, the only other time his name appears in official records is in the NSW census of 1901, when his father James Tanko is described as ‘possibly born in Japan?’ – so perhaps he is ineligible for inclusion in this article.

#### **Thomas Hackney Wong**



*Left: Trooper Wong, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, 1901 (Wong Family photo).*

There was one Chinese-Australian who joined the NSW Mounted Rifles intending to join the detachment in South Africa – Thomas Hackney Wong of Tuena, NSW – but the war was over before his unit embarked. He was of mixed parentage, his father being Wong Sat who had arrived in New South Wales in July 1867. His mother was Amelia Elizabeth Wong nee Hackney, originally from Manchester, England; her parents had

<sup>7</sup> There have been stories in the press and elsewhere that he was eventually allowed to enlist in 1917 but there is no evidence to support this claim.

<sup>8</sup> P.L. Murray, *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1911, p.174.

come to Bathurst in the early 1850s where they became landowners. She married Wong Sat in Goulburn in 1864 and they lived at Tuena – where Thomas was born in July 1867 (his birth name is shown as Thomas Hackney Ah Set Wong) – until the 1870s when Wong Sat became a naturalised Australian and they started to acquire properties in the Laggan area, between Goulburn and Bathurst. Thomas was the youngest of nine children and was indentured as a blacksmith in Goulburn. In 1906 Thomas married Ethel Mullins, a young woman of Irish origin and two of their sons served in WW2. Thomas was too old to serve in WW1 but lived to be 102, dying in September 1969.

### *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland (Kennedy) Regiment*

#### **Band Sergeant Fred Affoo**



In the book *Crossed Boomerangs* can be found the story of Band Sgt Fred Affoo, an Australian-born Chinese, who served with 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland (Kennedy) Regiment between the South African Wars and the First World War.<sup>9</sup>

*Left: The Kennedy Regiment Band in Charters Towers, 1911. Fred Affoo seated at centre (photo courtesy Hinchinbroke Shire Library).*

It is not certain when he joined the regiment but it seems likely to have been between 1904 – when he is first shown on the Charters Towers Electoral Rolls as a musician – and 1908 – when he is described in regimental records as Band Sgt at the 1908 annual camp in Townsville. He also led the regimental band when it marched the companies down Flinders Street to the docks on 4 August 1914 to sail as part of the Northern Queensland Expeditionary Force to Thursday Island to act as a defence force against invasion. Five hundred volunteers from the battalion, known later as *The Dirty 500*, were renamed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment and sailed on from there to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, all returning to Townsville in November of the same year. Many went on to volunteer for overseas service and fought at Gallipoli.

Fred and the band did not accompany the troops to Thursday Island and, as it seems he was never formally enlisted in the Commonwealth's regular forces, there are no records of his service in either the National Archives or the Australian War Memorial. In 1917 he moved from Charters Towers to Longreach to take over his sister's picture and photographic shop. In Longreach he became bandmaster of the Kennedy District Band from 1917 to 1935, when he and his wife retired to Gympie.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Robert Burla, *Crossed Boomerangs*, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus NSW, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> A detailed history of the Affoo family is contained in Kevin Rains, *Cedars in the West*, Snap Printers, Ipswich, 2011.

### **Trooper Soon Hing**

There was at least one other Chinese-Australian serving in the Kennedy Regiment before the First World War. This was George Soon Hing, younger son of Mrs Mary Shanks Soon Hing of Townsville. As with Sergeant Affoo, it has not been possible to trace his pre-war enlistment papers in the Queensland State Archives but his name appears on the Nominal Roll of the 500 volunteers from the Kennedy Regiment on Thursday Island who formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regt and sailed on to Port Moresby in late August 1914. After their return to Townsville he was discharged from his overseas service engagement but eventually re-enlisted for service in the AIF in February 1916, having initially been refused because of his ‘under chest’ (sic) measurements. He went on to serve with 15<sup>th</sup> Bn on the Western Front where he was wounded in action but returned safely to Australia in 1919. On enlistment – like his elder brother James Albert who had enlisted a year earlier, also in 15<sup>th</sup> Bn but was killed at Gallipoli – he changed his family name from Soon Hing to Sooning. Later in life he is shown on the Townsville Electoral Rolls from 1919 up until 1954 as George Soonhing, ‘upholsterer and mattress maker’, living with three of his brothers in the family house in Livingstone Street; he appears never to have married.

### ***Epilogue***

These are probably only a few documented examples of Chinese-Australians in the Australian Defence Forces before the First World War. There may have been others who enlisted, particularly in the South African wars, and whose names are not yet known. Some Australians, like Breaker Morant, had made their own way to South Africa and enlisted in British units. Others, particularly those of mixed parentage, enlisted under their mother’s maiden name (if she was of European descent) or an alias, making it very difficult to identify their ethnic origin. Perhaps it is significant that the majority of those of Chinese descent who enlisted, both before and during the First World War, were only half-Chinese, having, like William Coto and George Kong-Meng, English or Irish mothers.

My research to date, based on the pioneering work of Morag Loh and Judith Winternitz, Gilbert Chan and the Nomchong family, Mary Boland and the La Trobe Chinese Heritage at Australian Federation (CHAF) project at La Trobe University, plus many other family historians and academic researchers, has enabled me to identify to date a further 194 Australians with Chinese ancestry who enlisted in the AIF in WW1. All but a very few had mothers of European descent. Many enlisted under an anglicised version of either their mother’s maiden name or of the family name, so much so that there will be many I have missed. Should any reader wish to check a family name against my database I would be very happy to oblige – contact me at [alastairken@gmail.com](mailto:alastairken@gmail.com). The full story of what happened to these men and their families (including the British war brides they brought back to Australia) during the War and afterwards in the difficult times between the wars will be told in my forthcoming book, *Chinese Anzacs*.



## ‘YOUR LOVING SON, TED’: LETTERS FROM THE TRENCHES

Suzanne McWha<sup>1</sup>

A photograph taken in 1955 is a celebration of a man retiring from the famed Myer Emporium, Melbourne, after thirty-six years service in the ticket-writing department: Mr ‘Ted’ Mackley. With time his hair has thinned, his hand looks a bit knobbly with arthritis but his eyes are bright and twinkling. What is not evident, Ted has only a stump of a left arm. Dangerously ill, suffering from gangrene as a result of a shrapnel wound, Ted had the arm somewhat crudely amputated above the elbow as a life-saving measure in France in 1917. Ted, christened Edmund (*b* 1890), was repatriated to Australia having done his duty in the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF as machine gunner.

For Ted, like many Australians, Australia’s entry into World War One was ‘sudden’. On the day the paper boys screeched the news and handed out the *Herald Extraordinary*, Ted was working with his father in the family butchery business in Ascot Vale. The family lived modestly and worked hard. However, Ted was a man bent on adventure beyond the boundaries of Ascot Vale. Prior to the war he had worked his way to America as a steward on the ocean steamer *Ventura*. The war offered him another working holiday to ‘see some more of the world’. He signed up and commenced writing a series of letters to, predominately, his mother. Eighty-three letters exist.<sup>2</sup> The content of the letters allow for a construction of his war experience. In addition, the letters, paper incised with ink or pencil, are also a testimony to Ted’s war experience.

The letters were written between March 1915 and April 1917. Today many are very fragile and foxed, creased and torn, providing evidence of the passage of time. It is obvious there are missing letters. Mail delivery ships were enemy torpedoed or deliberately allied sunk to support the war effort. For example, the Christmas mail delivery boat that left Gallipoli in 1915 was of necessity sunk to create a breakwater for the all important Allied transport ships that were being bucketed in a storm. Occasionally, mail delivery could be delayed when a mail steamer was ‘quarantined’ due to communicable diseases.<sup>3</sup> Many letters were simply never delivered. In Ted’s case, received letters and postcards were forwarded to other family members to maintain links between relations and friends scattered across a world wracked with war. The humble, old-fashioned paper letter had the power to maintain bonds between people separated by circumstance and distance.

Ted’s letters are written on paper of varying sizes and quality. Particularly at the front line of fighting, writing paper, like food and water, was often difficult to acquire. From Gallipoli, Ted requested family send writing paper and envelopes along with Australian newspapers. Some women in Melbourne were appalled at the lack of writing facilities for men on active service. They complained to the much harangued editor of *The Argus* and took matters into their own hands. With the war-initiative of women of the day they set up a collection depot in Melbourne for writing paper and envelopes to ensure vital written communication continued between the northern and southern hemispheres. In addition, the Australian Young Men’s

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Suzanne McWha is a freelance art and cultural historian with a doctorate in professional research and an interest in giving a voice to 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial women in Victoria. She has had an article published in *AWM Wartime* on the women who gifted items to the troops in 1915. She is also a nurse and intends to research diaries held by the State Library of Victoria written by nurses who went to succour the troops.

<sup>2</sup> Photograph and letters are privately held.

<sup>3</sup> William Francis, Letter, 4 April 1915, State Library of Victoria, MS 11290.

Christian Association erected writing rooms and provided paper for troops who were resting behind the lines of battle in Europe.

The need for emotional contact from home through the written word has been well expressed by Sgt Maj Bert Hosking of Moonee Ponds. He wrote: 'you have no idea what it feels like to get a letter from one's old pals at work. I read your letter through about six times ... It is simply ... bonzer'.<sup>4</sup> Training at Broadmeadows Camp, Will Dodd admonished his 'lady friend' for not writing every day. It was 'rotten to expect a letter and not get one'. 'Don't let it occur again'.<sup>5</sup>

Enlisted in a British regiment, Australian Lewis Nott was of the belief that a 'tiny wee note' could carry 'just as much love and thoughts' as a lengthy letter.<sup>6</sup> Underage Jim Martin, fighting at Gallipoli, wailed that he had not received a letter from home since he left Australia on 28 June 1915. As a last plea to family he concluded: 'Write soon as every letter is welcome here'.<sup>7</sup> Motor Ambulance Officer Roy Whitelaw told his mother there was nothing worse than being without a letter and watching his 'chums creep away with smiles and letters'.<sup>8</sup> A 'loving husband' sent his wife a postcard from Tel-el-Kebir lamenting: 'I would dearly love to get a letter. I have met chaps here who have had no letters for nine months'.<sup>9</sup> He had not had a letter since he left Australia five months previously. Suffering from measles and in need of his mother's succour, Austin Condon wrote from his isolation hospital in Heliopolis, Egypt, moaning that the 'postal system is simply rotten'.<sup>10</sup> The letter was a vital antidote to social alienation from home. Ted Mackley was constantly concerned with the reception and sending of letters.

Handwritten letters were more than a source of information. They were consolation. Kith and kin could be reassured a much loved and cherished person was 'still going strong'; in other words not a prisoner, wounded or dead. Such letters had the power to set many a family's mind at rest for the short term. In contrast, the type-written paper cablegram delivered to the family home, typically by the parish priest, was usually a deeply wounding letter of inconsolable grief.

Some of Ted's letters are brief notes, while others are very detailed according to the amount of available paper at the time. The length of letters was also governed by 'reportable' news. Life in the trenches could be very boring, with not much happening, or very lively, according to the degree of action. The news content was also governed by the knowledge the letters were intercepted by a military censor who obliterated words with a thick pencil or simply a scissor bite into undesirable text. As is evident in the latter case, Ted was very ingenious. Detailed information in letters sent from France and Belgium reveals they have obviously skipped the censor. This was probably achieved by giving the letter to a man going on furlough to England. The letter was subsequently given to a civilian who was exempt from military censorship. Simply, the letter was just popped into civilian post. The transmission of information via letters to significant others, in wartime, could be complex.

<sup>4</sup> 'Our soldiers', *Essendon Gazette*, 18 January 1917, np.

<sup>5</sup> Will Dodd, Letter, 17 March 1915, State Library of Victoria, MS 9859.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Nott, *Somewhere in France: the Collected Letters of Lewis Windermere Nott*, Pymble, HarperPerennial, 1996, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Martin, Letter, 4 October 1916, in Anthony Hill, *Soldier Boy: the True Story of Jim Martin the Youngest ANZAC*, Ringwood, Penguin, 2001, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Whitelaw, Letter 5, December 1915, State Library of Victoria, MS 11676.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Howse, Postcard, 19 July 1916, State Library of Victoria, PA 01/49.

<sup>10</sup> Austin Condon, Letter, 31 July 1915, State Library of Victoria, PA 02/82.

The laconic information in Ted's letters is a series of snapshots that give a rich glimpse into Ted's world at war. Through comments on food, weather, landscape, living conditions, training, combat, leisure, family issues, comradeship, humour and lament, the reader can build a very positive psychological profile of Ted. In addition, the physical letters are in themselves a record of life on active service at war. Some are stained with the water and mud of the trenches. Others have been mutilated by the censor's scissors. In some letters the physical writing is poor due to the hand-wrenching cold in the trenches or the slip of a hand with the roll of a ship. Narrative has been dashed off, short and sharp, to 'catch' the out-going military mail. Other letters contain sentences that have been brutally interrupted, even abandoned, by external events such as exploding bombs. One endearing letter has an image of a bowl of roses that has been 'appliquéd', glued-on, to the top left hand of the sheet of the paper. This particular letter is possibly an example of a loving sister having forwarded writing paper to the Front at Gallipoli.

The structure of the sentences and formal punctuation in the text is frequently below the standard of the day. The narrative content of the letters was never intended to be available for public scrutiny. They were written with an immediacy equivalent to an informal mobile text conversation between well loved people. Very early in his correspondence Ted notably makes the ghastly point that every letter could be the 'last'. The essence of the letters is not literary but emotive. Love, care and concern for family, friends, community and country resonate strongly throughout the content of the written word. Ted viewed the sum of the letters as a personal diary to be held in trust by his mother, Emma. She lovingly kept the pages to individual letters together with paperclips or sewing pins and in one instance the letter pages have been stitched together with fine household twine of multi-coloured twisted strings. Some have more modern silver metal paperclips to keep the pages together. This is testimony to the generations of the family keeping the letters intact.

Ted's letters to his mother allow for a reading of his journey through war. The Broadmeadows Camp was 'hard' in terms of training and sleeping. Training to dig trenches was rewarded with a bed on unforgiving ground in a tattered tent. With abrupt notice and no farewelling relatives Ted was marched to Port Melbourne with a back-breaking back pack, rifle and a kit bag carried under his arm. *Euripides*, the steam transport ship, served good food but the living conditions were cramped. The sea transport to the seat of war proved tedious and boring. It was not the adventure Ted had experienced on the *Ventura*. The training ground of Heliopolis was unseasonably hot and windy, the food poor and the exotic attractions of Cairo irresistible. Sea transport to Gallipoli fuelled the desire to fight. Life in the trenches of Gallipoli was essentially a forage for food, clothing, physical comfort and dodging perpetual bombardment. It was a fine craft to survive life in a ditch in the firing line. Evacuation from Gallipoli resulted in a stony march through the island of Lemnos to a much welcomed thermal bath where Helen of Troy, of antiquity, reportedly once bathed her seductive body.

Ted was transported back to Tel-el-Kebir, Egypt, sixty miles from the distractions of Cairo. He was subsequently sent to the Zeitoun School of Instruction to learn to operate the Vickers machine gun, at which he excelled. Then, Ted was put to work. With sand in his eyes and a parched throat he dug, and dug, and dug to trench the unremitting sand in the Canal Zone of the Arabian Desert. With no enemy appearing the preparations for war in this region were abandoned.

Arriving at Marseille, Ted found France a delight, but the trenches of Pozieres and Mouquet Farm were a fright. Mud, slush, rain, freezing temperatures, inadequate food and clothing rations, bombed landscapes and lack of reinforcements was not Ted's idea of a 'holiday'. He became disillusioned with the British system of war and yearned to return to Australia. Instead he arrived at the British hospital, Etaples, France where he was treated for a 'twisted' ankle. Swiftly he was readmitted to the action. Instead of a well-earned furlough in England he was sent to the 'less active' trenches of Belgium before being returned to 'hot shops' in France. The 24<sup>th</sup> Bn was one of those 'badly chopped up' in the battle for Bullecourt. On 12 May 1917 Ted received the wound that took him on 'holiday' to a ditch in the road, where he queued to have his wound dressed. The medical support team were overworked, caked with blood and could only use water for drinking. No letter survives to testify to Ted's travel through the war medical system and his return to Australia. But he did survive.

After a period of recuperation in England, Ted arrived home to a warm welcome on Sunday 10 March 1918. As he had mentioned in a letter to his mother, he had no stomach for returning to butchering. His war experience had left him with a distaste for 'blood and guts'. Also, the lack of a left arm made his pre-war occupation untenable. However, the hand that wrote the loving letters to his mother earned him a livelihood under the care and concern of philanthropist Sidney Myer.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Ted became manager of the ticket-writing department.

Ted married, lived at Ascot Vale, had two children and seven grandchildren. He spent his retirement indulging in his passion for gardening and maintaining a manicured springy couch lawn, both being a symbol of success. A heart-attack on 23 February 1963 was fatal and Ted was buried, as he wished and hoped, in his much cherished homeland, Australia. The photograph represents more than a man being given the 'golden handshake' after thirty-six years of writing tickets to seduce customers to purchase. Behind the 'good luck and many wishes from [his] many friends in the store' is Sidney Myer, who took on the responsibility to nurture many maimed returned soldiers.

### Editor's note

*WWI Embarkation roll entry shows:*

6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion  
(Embarked at Melbourne, Victoria, on H.M.A.T. A14 "Euripides," 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1915.)

Head-Quarters Details

20	Mackley, Edmund	Private	age 24	trade Butcher	Single, etc.
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*WWI Nominal roll entry shows:*

20	Pte MACKLEY Edmund	2 <sup>nd</sup> MG Bn	enl. 8/2/15	RTA 20/12/17
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<sup>11</sup> See Michael Liffman, *A Tradition of Giving: Seventy-five Years of Myer Family Philosophy*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2004.

## **BRAVERY BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY: WALTER KARRI DAVIES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR 1899-1902**

**Hugh Rethman<sup>1</sup>**

The Australian Contingents which participated in the Boer War demonstrated to the world that the quality of Australia's fighting forces was second to none. However, they were not the only Australians involved in that conflict. Many served in Volunteer units raised in South Africa. It is impossible to say precisely how many men were involved, but it must have been several thousand. These men also served with great distinction, for example the first conspicuous act of bravery in the war was effected by an Australian serving in one of the Natal volunteer regiments.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the general public tends to associate these volunteer regiments with Breaker Morant and the Bushveld Carbineers. New evidence of the British tendency to blame colonials for their own inadequacies suggests that even that case should be revisited. However, this article is not about Morant. It is about a man who should be one of Australia's great heroes, Walter Karri Davies.



Karri Davies was born in Adelaide in 1867. In 1875 his family moved to Western Australia where his father established a substantial business as a timber merchant. Karri was a good sportsman and a brilliant student, becoming in due course a consulting engineer and was involved in major engineering projects around Australia. In 1893 he contracted blood poisoning, which totally incapacitated him, and to restore his health it was suggested he take a sea cruise. He chose to go to South Africa and once there visited the new boom town of Johannesburg. He realised that the developing mines and railways provided a wonderful opportunity for the family firm. He set up in business as a timber merchant in Johannesburg and in no time ships were plying from Australia to South Africa laden with karri and jarrah timber for the new mines, railways and harbours. He was given the nickname 'Karri', an appropriate name for a man who was tall and strong. Later he formally changed his name to Walter Karri Davies.

In Johannesburg, Karri was appalled by what would today be called the human rights abuses of the Transvaal government and was drawn towards the Reform Movement. With other Reformers he was arrested after the Jameson Raid in January 1896, and after a farcical trial he and 62 others were sentenced to two years' imprisonment, which could be avoided if they paid a fine of £2000 and signed a petition. Though able to pay the fine, Karri and a close friend, Aubrey Woolls Sampson, refused to do so or to sign the petition, as they felt that this

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Rethman is a barrister by profession, born in Natal of old settler stock. His family was involved in many of the events described in the article. He has written a book, *Friends and Enemies*, which is a history of the Natal campaign drawing on British sources and local books and documents. He lives in Suffolk, UK.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Dr Robert Buntine had emigrated to Natal and served as a medical officer with the Natal Carbineers. On 17 October under heavy fire, he treated and brought back to safety a wounded trooper. He received no official recognition because he acted without orders!

might lend legitimacy to the policies of the Transvaal government. At the same time they wished to draw attention to the fact that Britain had assisted the Transvaal in a deceitful trick to persuade the defendants to plead guilty.<sup>3</sup> Much to the embarrassment of the Transvaal government they went to prison, the first prisoners of conscience in the modern world.<sup>4</sup> Conditions in the Transvaal prisons were appalling, but their resolution never faltered for a second. After they had served 14 months of their sentence, President Kruger, using Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee as an excuse, released them unconditionally.

After the Jameson Raid, the Boer Republics began to build up an arsenal of modern weapons far beyond what they would require for their defence, and openly talked about bringing the whole of Africa south of the Zambezi River under their control.<sup>5</sup> By June 1899 it was obvious that the Boer Republics were planning to attack the Cape and Natal. To meet this threat, Karri, Aubrey and some of their friends decided to raise a mounted regiment to be known as the Imperial Light Horse. On 21 September 1899 formal consent for its formation was granted by Britain. Apart from its establishment costs (horses, uniforms and saddlery) the Imperial treasury would pay the regiment's expenses. The regiment was to have no more than 500 men, and the commander had to be a British officer. Because the British establishment believed that to give a rifle to a colonial was to give a rifle to the enemy, they were armed with obsolete single shot rifles without bayonets. Recruiting began immediately in Natal. Because of Karri and Aubrey's popularity, over 5000 men applied to join the regiment, which placed them in the fortunate position of being able to pick and choose recruits.<sup>6</sup> Col Scott Chisholme of the 5th Royal Irish Lancers was appointed commander. Supporting him were Woolls Sampson and Karri Davies each with the rank of major, 25 executive and other squadron officers, and 416 other ranks.

Training began at once under NCOs from the British Army. The regiment consisted primarily of colonials, among whom were a substantial number of Australians. Some were refugees from the Transvaal, others came to Natal as cattlemen bringing horses and cattle for the army, while yet others had in more peaceful times emigrated to Natal. On 16 October 1899 five of the regiment's six squadrons entrained for Ladysmith and the front. The Boers had declared war on 11 October and at dawn on the following day their mounted commandos began their invasion of Natal. On 20 October a Transvaal commando advancing from the northeast cut rail and telegraph links between the main British base at Ladysmith and its subsidiary base further to the north at Dundee. With Free State commandos approaching from the northwest, the British commander, Gen White, decided to attack before the two groups of Boers could link forces. Scouts had ascertained that the Transvaal commandos were at Elandsplaagte, a railway station about 17 miles from Ladysmith. Gen Sir John French was given command of this operation, his orders being to clear out the enemy, repair the railway line and restore telegraph contact with Dundee. To carry out this task French was given the five squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse, some Natal Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Field Artillery equipped with six obsolete 2.5inch muzzle-loading guns. Half a battalion of British infantry plus railway engineers and a telegraph section would follow by train.

French with his colonial volunteers left Ladysmith early on 21 October, and by dawn had reached a vantage point about one and a half miles from Elandsplaagte station. Ahead lay a

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<sup>3</sup> V. Sampson and I. Hamilton, *Anti-Commando*, London 1931, pp.96-97.

<sup>4</sup> These tactics were subsequently used by the Suffragettes and M. Gandhi.

<sup>5</sup> Notably Transvaal Attorney-General Jan Smuts promised at the start of the war to create a Boer Republic of all land south of the Zambezi River.

<sup>6</sup> G.F. Gibson, *The Story of the Imperial Light Horse*, G. D. & Co, 1937, p.19.

broad valley along which ran the road and railway line to Dundee and northern Natal. To the right of the station could be seen a line of hills which rose a couple of hundred feet above the valley floor and which were at right angles to the railway. On the left was the towering peak of Jonono's Kop at the foot of which were some smaller hills. Patches of mist still hung about the higher ground. Concealed in these hills near Jonono's Kop was Col Schiel with his German Commando and some Free State Boers, watching.<sup>7</sup>

E Squadron of the ILH under Capt Knapp was sent ahead to see if it was possible to outflank the Boer right. Possibly a fortuitous patch of mist concealed their departure, as Schiel appears to have been unaware that they had left the main group. Anxious that there should be no delay, French decided to test the enemy's defences. The artillery unlimbered and fired a salvo at the station which caused some damage to railway stock while leaving the Boers unscathed. The Boers now sent their reply. Firing from a position well beyond the range of the little Natal guns and near the hills to the right of the station, the Boer artillery immediately disabled the Natal Artillery's ammunition wagon. French decided to withdraw beyond the range of the Boer guns and to telegraph Ladysmith for reinforcements.

While withdrawing, Karri Davies noticed that Knapp's squadron was continuing down the valley apparently unaware of the order to retire. A sergeant and a trooper were sent to warn Knapp to fall back on the main column immediately. They had not gone far before a brisk fire was opened on them. The trooper was hit and fell from his horse. The sergeant managed to remount the wounded trooper and the two came back as quickly as they could.<sup>8</sup> Watching through his glasses, Karri saw Knapp's squadron beginning to disappear behind the station and Boers could be seen moving in the same direction, apparently with the intention of entrapping them. Karri, without showing any regard for his own safety, immediately set off at a gallop along the wide valley in full view of the enemy. As he came into range, heavy fire was opened on him. To those watching it looked suicidal, but by a miracle neither horse nor rider was hit. Once through the danger zone Karri was able to locate Knapp and by taking a wide detour, lead the squadron back to the main column.<sup>9</sup> Knapp's squadron were to play a full part in the action which occurred later in the day.

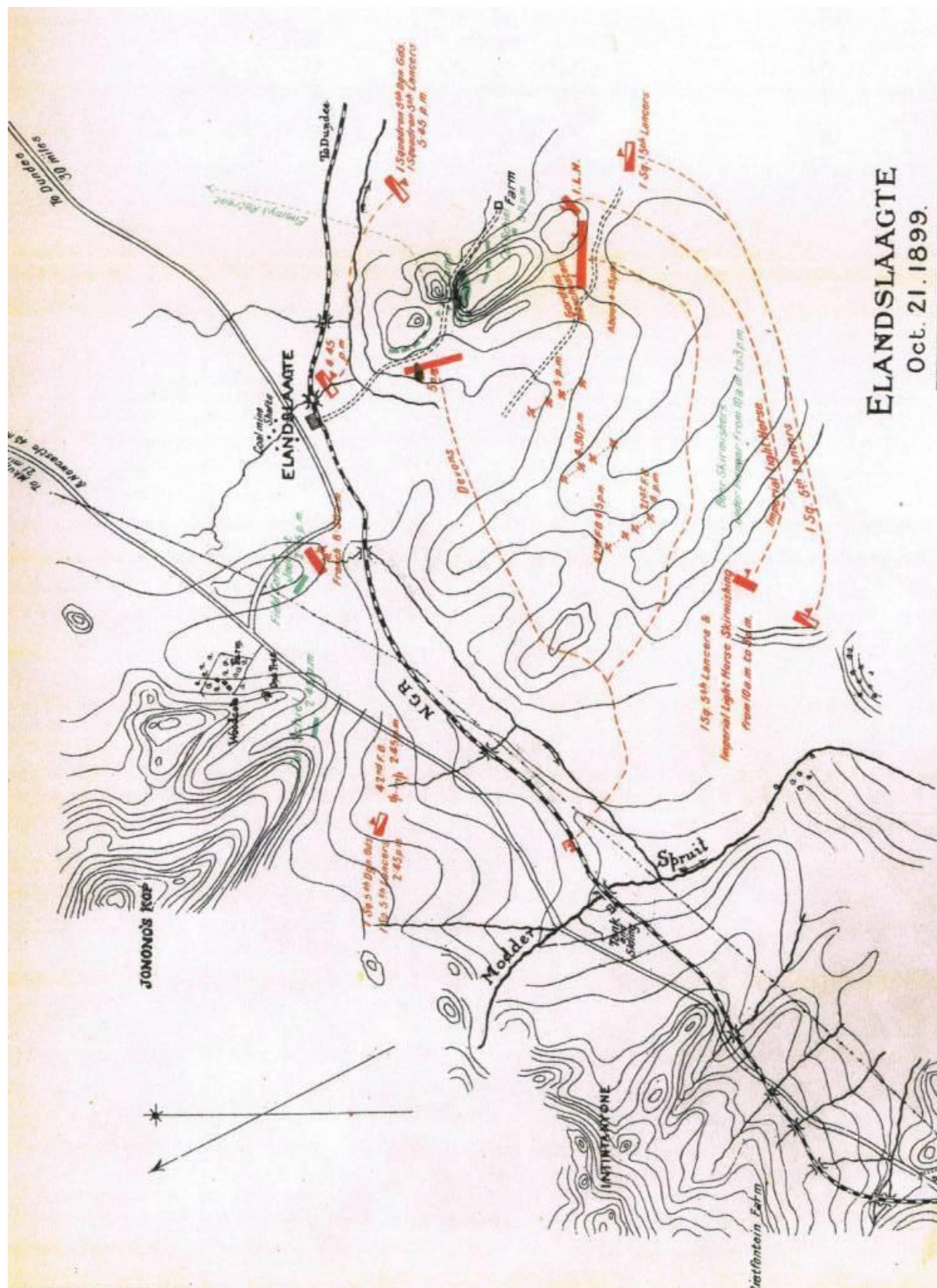
Gen White responded promptly to French's request for reinforcements. Twelve companies of regular infantry supported by 18 modern guns and three squadrons of regular cavalry were immediately sent to Elandsplaagte. By 3pm the British were ready to attack. Two squadrons of the regular cavalry were placed on the left to cut off any retreat by the Boers along the Dundee road, the other remained in reserve. The infantry, in extended order, were to take the hills from which the Boer guns had earlier in the day fired on French's force. The ILH, now dismounted, formed the right wing of the infantry. With the artillery raking the Boer position, steady progress was made until they were about 800 yards from the crest of the hills, when increasing fire and declining cover forced them to check. At about 5pm a violent storm broke and they began a final series of rushes towards the enemy. With lightning and thunder adding to the cacophony of the battlefield, and despite the rain, the slippery mud, and relentless enemy fire, the advance continued until they reached the crest of the hills. The Boers now counter-attacked.

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<sup>7</sup> Col A. Schiel, *23 Jahre Sturm und Sonnenschein in Süd-Afrika* [23 years of Storm and Sunshine in South Africa], Leipzig, 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

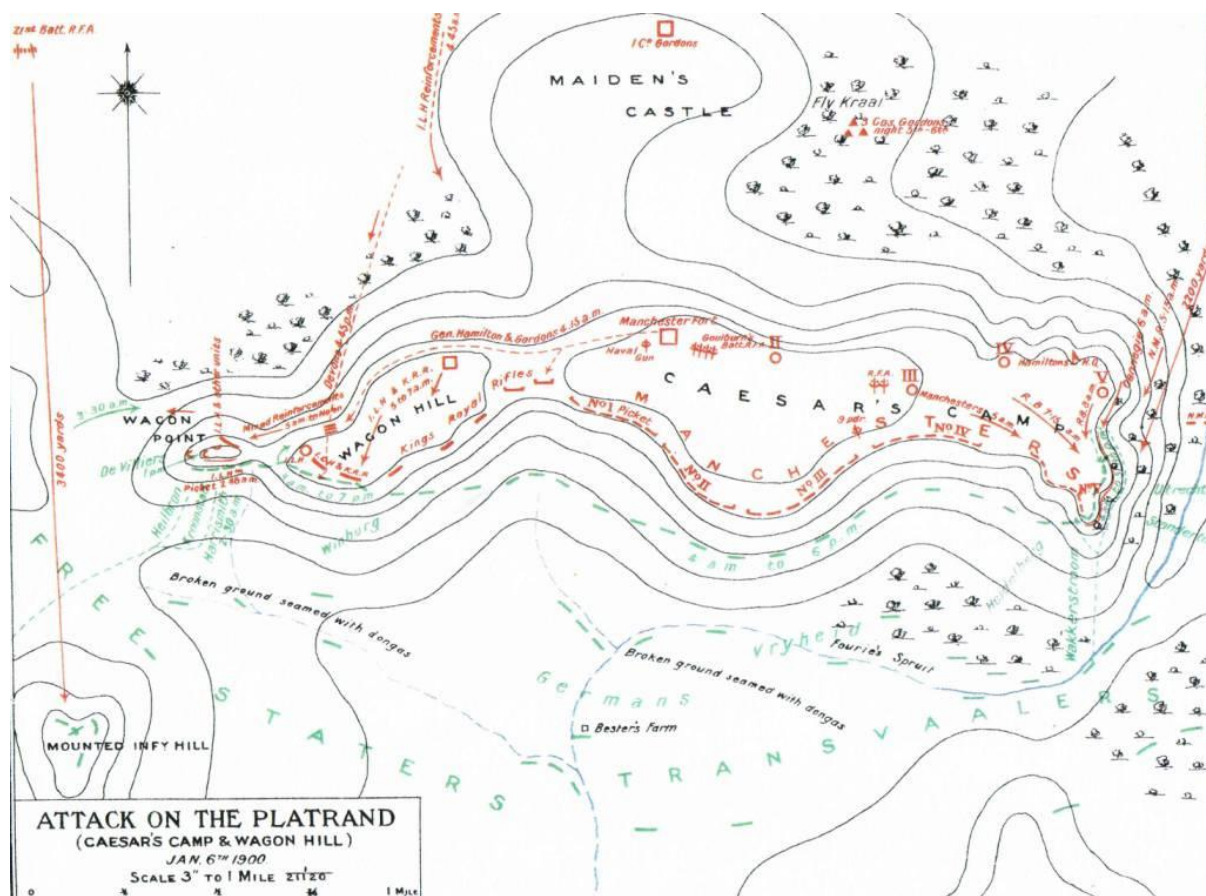
<sup>9</sup> Anonymous diary discovered among ILH papers in Afrikana Museum Johannesburg which solved the riddle as to how Knapp's squadron escaped entrapment.



**Note on the maps of Elandsplaagte and the Attack on the Platrand**

The two maps are from Leo S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa War 1899-1902*, vol.2, Sampson Low, Marston and Co, London. They are out of copyright, the topography is accurate, and the disposition of the different units involved reasonably accurate.





At the start of the advance Col Scott Chisholme had placed himself at the centre of the ILH with Woolls Sampson leading on the left and Karri on the right. Because they were on the extreme right, Karri's squadrons did not climb the hill but instead went round its south-eastern extremity. We shall return to them presently. The British infantry had lost many of their officers during the advance and when the Boers counter-attacked they began to retreat in confusion. Seeing what was happening, officers from the ILH went among them and by rallying and reorganising them stopped the retreat. The counter-attack petered out and Boer resistance collapsed. In the advance Col Scott Chisholme had been killed and Aubrey Woolls Sampson had his hip shattered by a soft-nosed bullet. For their part in restoring order among the regular infantry two officers in the ILH, Charlie Mullins, a solicitor from the eastern Cape, and Robert Johnstone, an Irish International rugby player who had settled in Johannesburg, were awarded the Victoria Cross.<sup>10</sup>

We left Karri's squadron advancing against the Boer left flank where they came across a farm with several outbuildings. As they approached, heavy fire emanating from the farmhouse was opened on them. Realising that the Boers in the farmhouse constituted a threat to the British flank and rear, Karri ordered it to be taken. Through a curtain of Mauser bullets they charged and as they did so the man next to Karri fell, shot in the leg. Realising the man would be lying in an exposed position and would be unable to crawl to cover, Karri picked up the trooper and carried him to the nearest shelter, one of the farm's outbuildings. On reaching it, Karri put his shoulder to the door and pushed into the darkened room. As he lowered the wounded man onto the ground, something made him look round. A yard away stood a big Boer with a Mauser pointing at his head. 'Drop your gun or I'll blow your brains out!'

<sup>10</sup> Gibson, pp.36-37.

shouted Karri. At the same time another voice cried, 'Don't shoot! It's Karri Davies.' The Boer lowered his rifle and a big smile spread over his face as he looked at the cane Karri was pointing at him. It was the only weapon Karri ever carried.

Looking across the room, Karri saw a wounded Boer whom he recognized at once. It was Matthys Human, who had been clerk of the Pretoria gaol when Karri and Woolls Sampson were prisoners. During their 14 months in gaol they had become friends and Human had done what he could to make their lives a little less uncomfortable. For a few moments the bedlam of war was forgotten, to be replaced by smiles, friendly greetings and handshakes, as introductions were made all round.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile the ILH had surrounded and taken the farmhouse and Boer resistance had come to an end. Darkness descended but the rain continued. Karri, with only a few weeks' training behind him, was now in temporary command of the regiment. He organised search parties to bring in the wounded, and in the cold and rain they worked through the night bringing in the casualties of both sides. When Karri was finally able to return to base he received a message that Gen Sir John French wished to see him. Sir John told Karri that he knew of his ride through enemy fire to rescue Knapp's squadron and how later in the day he had carried a wounded man to safety. In these circumstances he intended to make a strong recommendation that Karri be awarded a Victoria Cross. Karri's response must have astonished Sir John. He asked the General not to put his name forward because he had given an undertaking to serve without honour or reward, and would therefore be unable to accept such an award. Capt Knapp in his report stated that had it not been for Karri's action his squadron would have been badly cut up. His report was submitted to the regimental commander, who happened to be Karri, so it went no further.<sup>12</sup>

In due course Col A.H.M. Edwards of the 5th Dragoon Guards was appointed commander of the ILH, which proved to be a fortunate choice. On 2 November 1899 the Boers completed their investment of Ladysmith. The greater part of the British Natal Army was now under siege. Karri served with distinction throughout the siege. He played a prominent part in the two of most important military engagements of the siege, namely, the destruction of a Boer artillery position on Gun Hill on 8 December 1899, and the Battle of Wagon Hill on 6 January 1900. The first action was a night-time sortie by colonial volunteers who crept stealthily up a hill and on reaching the summit, someone shouted 'Fix bayonets,' and another voice shouted 'Give them cold steel.' This ruse threw the sentries into a panic and played a major part in the success of the action. Of course being colonials they didn't have a bayonet between them. After the war a dinner was held in Johannesburg for Field-Marshal Lord Roberts. When the Field-Marshal was returning thanks he turned to Karri and congratulated him on his timely bluff in calling on his men to fix bayonets. Karri at once corrected him: 'It was not me, sir, it was Colonel Edwards.'<sup>13</sup> Today Edwards is generally given credit for the bluff and Karri credit for the reference to cold steel.

The engagement at Wagon Hill was the only determined attempt by the Boers to break through Ladysmith's defences. Two months into the siege, poor food and unhygienic living conditions were exacting a heavy toll on all, and by the new year sickness had reduced the ILH to fewer than 200 capable men. Before dawn on 6 January 1900, about 700 Boers attacked a section of the perimeter manned by two squadrons of the ILH numbering no more

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.33 and diary referred to in n.9. Matthys Human sent to St Helena as a POW.

<sup>12</sup> Diary referred to in n.9.

<sup>13</sup> Gibson, p.72.

than 70 men. Though heavily outnumbered, the line held, enabling those squadrons of the ILH which were off duty to rush to their assistance. The struggle which began before dawn was to continue till dusk. Men from both sides lay hidden among the rocks, often no more than 10 yards apart. An advance from one rock to another four feet away was a major gain. With men on both sides moving in this way, continual concentration was vital and even then luck played a big part. A rock which had previously concealed a deadly rifle would become innocuous, while another which had been harmless all morning would suddenly spout death. Even presumed shelter did not ensure safety, as marksmen would fire at a nearby rock and rely on the ricochet to hit the concealed enemy. The tiniest mistake could be fatal. On this hot summer's day, among the scorching rocks, with their obsolete rifles, this band of colonials fought on until the Boer commander, distressed by the casualties his own men were suffering, decided to retire as soon as night fell. From time to time British units arrived at the front line with orders to drive the Boers off the Hill. Despite warnings from the ILH, the officers launched bayonet charges against the enemy with the predictable result that all were either killed or wounded. The ILH lost several men trying to bring wounded British regulars back to 'safety'.

Col Edwards had throughout been in the forefront of the firing line, moving among his men, checking their requirements and where necessary giving orders. He was wounded in the neck and shoulder and a little later in the buttocks. Though protesting, he was taken out of the firing line and carried back to the dressing station. Command of the Regiment now devolved on Karri who followed Edwards' example, checking the position and requirements of his men until he too was wounded. Like Edwards he refused to leave the front until, weakened by loss of blood, he had to submit and was carried down to the dressing station.<sup>14</sup> With dusk approaching the Devons arrived and made one last desperate bayonet charge. The Boer rearguard inflicted appalling losses on them before fleeing into the night. The Devons had driven the Boers off Wagon Hill.<sup>15</sup>

Of the 200 Light Horsemen who took part in the action, 29 were killed or died of wounds, and 31 were wounded. A posthumous VC was awarded to Trooper Albrecht of D Squadron, and four officers received the DSO. Around the Empire the courage of the British regulars and their bayonet charges were lauded by all. Even Queen Victoria expressed hers and the Empire's gratitude for the part played by the Devons. No mention was made of the Imperial Light Horse. Col Ian Hamilton, the British commander on the field that day, in an attempt to correct this omission, wrote an official letter to Col Edwards in which he stated, 'No one realises more clearly than I do, that they (the ILH) were the backbone of the defence during that long day's fighting. Please make this quite clear to the men. To have been associated with them I shall always feel to be the highest privilege and honour.'<sup>16</sup> Sadly two years later, when the political wind was blowing in a different direction, Hamilton, in a letter to his friend Winston Churchill, wrote about Karri and his comrades: 'You have no idea what arrogant insolent devils you will discover as soon as Mr. Boer has lost his Mauser'.<sup>17</sup> He had apparently forgotten who saved his and the British Army's reputation on that hot summer's day at Ladysmith.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp.79; 109.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. J.D. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*. Quoted by Gibson, pp.109-112. Kestell was chaplain to the Boer's Harrismith Commando. Gibson, p.105.

<sup>16</sup> Gibson, p.105.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton Papers, King's College London.

Karri made a rapid recovery from his wound and was soon back on duty. Throughout the long days of the four-month siege he was indefatigable in his efforts to maintain the morale of the troops and civilians. In the early days he organised cricket matches and athletic meetings in which both the military and townspeople participated. A few weeks before Christmas it was noticed that he was buying up all the toys in the town. Karri was organising a Christmas tree party for the children. On Christmas day 250 children emerged from their dugouts to receive their presents. It was a wonderful party and all were pleased to see the smiles and happiness of the children, though some noticed how pale and pinched their young faces were after the two months of privation and bombardment they had endured. Henry Pearse of the *Daily News* noted how Karri's 'long imprisonment with his brother officer Sampson in Pretoria, far from embittering him against humanity in general, has only made him more sympathetic with the trials and sufferings of others'.<sup>18</sup>

On 28 February 1900, a squadron of the Natal Carbineers and the 6<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the Imperial Light Horse broke through the Boer lines and the Siege of Ladymith was raised. Reunited with their 6<sup>th</sup> Squadron, the ILH rested, re-equipped, and were transferred to the northern Cape. In consideration of their bravery at Elandsplaagte and Wagon Hill they were provided with modern rifles with magazines.<sup>19</sup> Starting from Kimberley on 4 May 1900, the ILH with other colonial units set off for Mafeking, 250 miles away. On 16 May 1900, Karri led the relief column into Mafeking and the British Empire went wild with delight. Baden-Powell became the hero of the hour.

After Mafeking Karri's role in the war changed. Both Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener recognised his considerable organisational and engineering skills and co-opted him to carry out various tasks, from ensuring railways were functioning to designing and building bridges. Such was the confidence they had in his ability and integrity that they both gave him a power of attorney, stating, 'All officers of H.M. Forces, Government Officials and others with whom he may come in contact, will do anything he wishes to facilitate his work'. Lord Kitchener appointed him to act as his Representative on several Commissions. In August 1901 the Prince of Wales (the future King George V) en route from Australia to Britain, while in Natal sent a message to Karri expressing his disappointment that they had been unable to meet.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of the war, Karri was offered a knighthood in recognition of the services he had rendered during the conflict. Characteristically he asked to be allowed to decline the honour because he had undertaken to serve King and Country without honour or reward.<sup>21</sup> When his father died in 1913 he returned to Australia. In WW1 he was appointed British agent on the American west coast where he not only served British interests with distinction but was also able to raise Australia's profile with the Americans. Karri died suddenly at Broadstairs, Kent in 1926 survived by his wife and daughter. In an obituary published in the London *Times*, an old comrade from his Imperial Light Horse days, Maj Percy Greathead, wrote, 'He was the kindest-hearted thing that ever happened. I doubt whether he ever said or thought an evil thing about anybody on earth. He had a fine even temper and a wonderfully stable character. With all that he was a man of iron determination, and altogether a magnificent personality.'

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<sup>18</sup> H.H.S. Pearse, *Four Months Besieged*, London, 1900, p.82.

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, p.106.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Prince George of Tech in ILH Papers, Afrikana Museum, Johannesburg.

<sup>21</sup> Obituary published in the London *Times* and in Johannesburg, 30 Nov. 1926.

## FROM GALLIPOLI TO DETENTION: THE SAD CASE OF PTE DAVID CROSBY

Peter Hopper<sup>1</sup>

One of the worst injustices meted out to an Australian soldier during the First World War was that suffered by Pte David Crosby. He was originally from Liverpool in the UK and migrated to Australia in 1911 at the age of 18. He was working as a carpenter in Townsville when he decided to enlist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Expeditionary Force to help capture German New Guinea in September 1914. Unfortunately his ship *Kanowna* was forced to return to Townsville on 18 September on account of industrial trouble caused by the firemen on board. Undeterred by this he decided to re-enlist, and this time he joined the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion as a Bugler. It was with this unit that he found himself at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. He is reported to have been in the second boat to land and remarkably he survived unscratched. However, on 20 May 1915 he was badly wounded and lay unattended for 28 hours before being rescued. As a consequence of this he received the following wounds:

1. Perforation (18 inches) of the abdomen (bayonet wound)
2. Shot through the groin and right elbow
3. Broken wrist and finger
4. Fractured knee
5. Bullet embedded in chest and liver

He was then admitted to Valletta Hospital in Malta on 24 May 1915. From here he was moved to a hospital in Manchester and then to the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Hertfield, Middlesex on 19 August 1915. He was then discharged from this hospital on 17 September 1915 and was sent home on the hospital ship *HMAT Suevic*. It set out from Plymouth for Australia on 8 October.

The Field Officer commanding the troops on this ship was Maj E.A. Drake Brockman (11<sup>th</sup> Battalion). In his report into the incident involving Crosby he referred to 'a lack of discipline and rebellious tendencies among the men'. This was a common problem on ships returning to Australia during the war.

On 5 November 1915 the men in C Ward were ordered to be quiet. They refused, and as a consequence Sgt J.A. Gardiner ordered them to come on deck and, as a form of punishment, clean the decks. David Crosby was one of the first to refuse the order and was charged with wilful defiance of authority. He was incensed by this order and called out to the others around him at the time, 'Don't go on deck. Stick together!' Driver E.J. Dixon was then ordered to go on deck by Lieut C.E.M. Brodziak, who had also been wounded at Gallipoli. He also refused and was immediately placed under arrest. At his trial Dixon claimed that he had been given only ten seconds to respond to the order before being placed under arrest. He was later found not guilty because there was some doubt as to whether he heard the initial order. Crosby, on the other hand, was arrested and faced two charges: (i) wilful defiance of authority and (ii) inciting to mutiny. His Field Court Martial took place three days later on board the ship on 8 November. He was found guilty on both charges and his pay was stopped immediately from this date. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, the charges to be served

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hopper is a retired History Honours graduate from University of WA. He specialises in researching Digger discontent during and after the First World War. Several of his articles have already been published in *Sabretache*.

concurrently.

Maj Drake Brockman later (19 November) admitted that Crosby was not the instigator of the disturbance, but he maintained that at the time ‘the necessities of discipline (on *HMAT Suevic*) required a very speedy trial and punishment’. It was clear, therefore, that Crosby was to be made an example of in order to deter any further breaches of discipline. As there was no further trouble on board the ship, Drake Brockman later wrote, ‘the trial and sentence had the desired effect’.

On his arrival back in Australia on 20 November he was moved to a military hospital in Randwick, Sydney, and placed under arrest. About the end of December 1915 Crosby contacted the Queensland Premier, Mr Ryan, to explain his case, asking him to intervene on his behalf. He maintained that he had been unfairly sentenced to two years’ imprisonment by an unconstitutional court for what he regarded as a trivial offence. He claimed the court martial did not meet the demands of common justice. He had been given inadequate time to prepare his case. He also maintained that his defiance of the order was due to a fear of permanent injury due to his delicate state of health at the time. The doctor on board the ship had already admitted that he was unfit to undergo detention due to pulmonary haemorrhage. He had also unsuccessfully applied for a retrial.

His case was taken up by the MHR, Mr F. Anstey, who reported it to the Minister for Defence, to seek justice. He claimed that Crosby was suffering from haemorrhage of the lungs, a bullet in the liver, and, was in general poor health. He maintained that he had not been in a sound mental state when he used the words which incriminated him. Anstey also felt that imprisonment for something that he said was an atrocious sentence.

Mr Anstey’s plea to higher places was eventually successful. The Attorney-General’s Department took into account the fact that the officer (Drake Brockman) who convened the court martial recommended that the sentence should be reconsidered with a view to its reduction, ‘taking into account Crosby’s past service’. On 5 February 1916 Crosby was released by order of the Military Board and two days later the Federal Executive approved the necessary warrant for the remission of the sentence. As a result he was at last a free man after three long months in detention.

Following this ordeal Crosby recovered his health, got married and moved to Mercadool Station near Walcott, NSW where he worked as a jackeroo. Surprisingly he then decided to rejoin the AIF. One would imagine that after his bitter experience he would hardly want to re-enlist. He did, however, at Narrabri, NSW on 28 November 1916. He was now 24 years old and his newly acquired riding skills gained him a place in the 6<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regt. He did not serve overseas again and lasted only five months in this unit before being discharged as medically unfit. Little is known of his remaining years although he did apply for his medals in 1920 when he was living at Tarcutta, NSW. He died on 2 December 1939 at the age of 47.

David Crosby’s military record in the First World War was notable not just for the fact that he had been wounded at Gallipoli and had been convicted of a mutiny. He served in three different units and thus had three different service numbers. On 8 August 1914 he was serving on garrison duty at the War Station on Thursday Island. He then joined the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, a small volunteer force formed to capture German New Guinea. He was discharged from this unit on 18 September 1914 with the rank of private (service number 1994). When he served at Gallipoli with the 15<sup>th</sup> Bn he held the rank

of Bugler (as number 124). He was once again a private (trooper) when he served with the 6<sup>th</sup> LH Regt under number 3287. This in itself was a remarkable achievement. However, for a man who was so badly wounded at Gallipoli his court martial and conviction was an atrocious reward. His response to this through re-enlisting later in 1916 testifies to his true allegiance and loyalty to Australia.

### References

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National Archives of Australia

<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=3467994>

(Army Records for David Crosby No 124 and No 3287)

National Archives of Australia

Proceedings of Field Court Martial – No 124 Pte David Crosby 15<sup>th</sup> Bn AIF

Series A471 Item 1315 CROSBY D (Private): Service Number – 124 – 1st Australian Army C...

Barcode 209403 (42 pages)

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## VALE, MONTY WEDD

*Sabretache* wishes to acknowledge the passing of Australian military history identity and former member of the MHSA, Monty Wedd OAM, on 4 May 2012, aged 91. The following information is derived from a notice received from the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society:

Monty Wedd was an illustrator by profession and produced the book *Australian Military Uniforms 1800-1982*, and during the lead-up to the Bicentenary commenced an illustrated strip, 'The Making of a Nation', which was published in the *Daily Telegraph* and later published in two volumes. He was very generous with his time and knowledge to the RAAHS, RAA and Army, producing illustrations when required. This included the artwork for the School of Artillery Centenary envelope. His knowledge of Australian uniforms was unsurpassed, including assistance to Peter Oppenheim while researching the old Chowder Bay site for the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. His private collection of Australian memorabilia, which he set up as a museum at Williamstown, was one of the best in the country, especially the military uniforms and artefacts, and even included a Japanese tank from Milne Bay.

The Society extends its condolences to Monty's family and friends. May his contribution to Australian military history be long remembered and appreciated.

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## ALFRED HENLY BRYSON: AN ADELAIDE CONNECTION TO THE DEFENCE OF LUCKNOW

Trevor Turner<sup>1</sup>

On the evening of Sunday 23 November 1913 there passed away Mr Alfred Henly Bryson at Adelaide's bay-side suburb of Glenelg. His expiring peacefully in his sleep at the age of 64 signalled the end of a fascinating story and a link with a significant event in military history – one that had begun at the siege of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny of 1857-59.<sup>2</sup> As a small boy of only eight years of age Alfred Bryson had actively participated in the defence of Lucknow from 29 June to 22 November 1857. He later received, albeit 53 years after the event, the Indian Mutiny Medal and clasp 'Defence of Lucknow'! This was rare distinction indeed.<sup>3</sup>

Alfred's father, Alexander, described as a former Sergeant-Major in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, had taken service with the East India Company. On going to India he had joined one of the native regiments, and served through the Sikh War of 1845-46. Alexander then married Miss Marion Kavanagh at Dehrah in 1846.<sup>4</sup> Alexander and Marion were to have five children, Alfred being their third, born at Naini Tal in July 1849.<sup>5</sup> His father later resigned and, it seems, for a time worked as an artist. At the inducement of his brother-in-law he then took an appointment as a member of the Oudh Civil Commission at Lucknow. After several years of service Alexander was about to leave the city to return to England with his family when the mutiny broke out.<sup>6</sup>

Alfred's father immediately volunteered for service and was appointed a volunteer sergeant in Radcliffe's Horse, under Captain Radcliffe of the 7th Bengal Light Cavalry, and almost immediately was engaged in the disastrous action and retreat at Chinhut. Here the British force suffered a severe reverse, losing some 118 officers and men, including the commander of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Colonel Case. However, Alexander Bryson distinguished himself on several occasions at Chinhut with bold acts of courage and initiative, and was highly regarded. He was in fact described by his brother-in-law, Thomas Kavanagh, as

Serjeant Major of the Volunteer Cavalry, for which office his experience and intelligence, and his manly bearing, made him the best fitted of the troop. Many who were in the Upper Provinces of India will doubtless remember the lively and handsome young artist who took their likenesses. He grew tired of this occupation, which often separated him from his family for half a year at a time, and I induced him to accept service in Oudh, where his talents and industrious habits were sure to advance his fortune.<sup>7</sup>

Upon return to Lucknow and the commencement of the siege, Alfred's father was placed in command of a dangerously exposed outpost known as Sagos Garrison. The building comprising the post was a flat-roofed house, with no protection from the fire of the enemy, who were located in elevated loop-holed houses only 40 paces away. It was found necessary to barricade the roof with sandbags, while a sharp musketry fire was kept up by the rebels.

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Turner is a former South Australian, born and raised on Kangaroo Island, now living in Sydney. He recently retired after 38 years in the Regular Army.

<sup>2</sup> *Adelaide Advertiser*, 25 Nov 1913, p.11; *Adelaide Register*, 24 Nov 1913, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> *Adelaide Register*, 10 Nov 1910, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> *Times of India*, 'Domestic Occurrences', Marriages, 11 Aug 1877.

<sup>5</sup> *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce 1849*, Births section, 15 Aug 1849.

<sup>6</sup> T. Henry Kavanagh, *How I Won the Victoria Cross*, London, 1860, p.23.

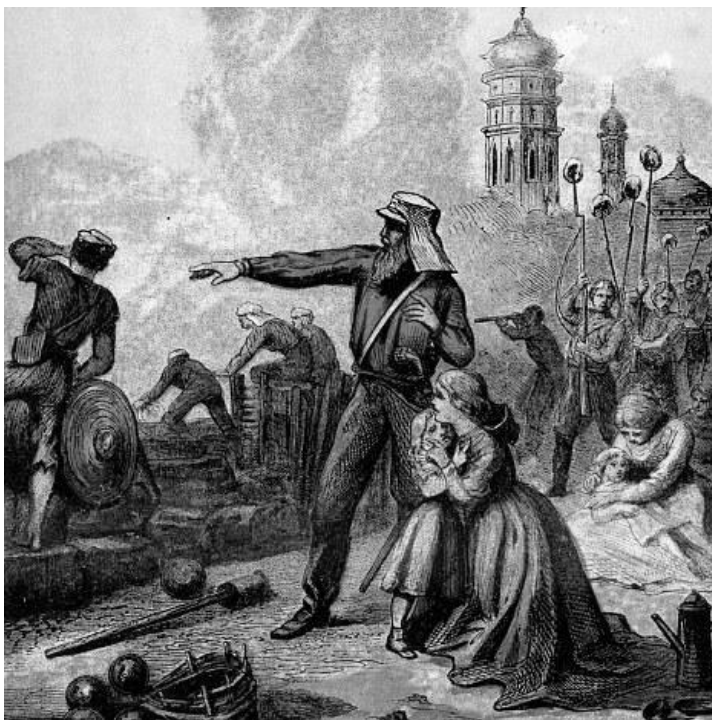
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp.19, 10 and 23.



The last sandbag had been placed in position, when Alexander Bryson, in strengthening a noted weak spot, was about to descend when a bullet pierced his head, and he fell dead. It was not till night time that his companions could venture out to retrieve his body.

Speaking of the tragic occurrence, L.E. Ruutz-Rees, in his *Diary of the Siege of Lucknow*, states:

Thursday, July 19 — Poor Bryson, one of my best friends here, shot dead through the head. His poor wife is distracted, and treasures up his last words. He had left her this morning gay and jovial, as he always was, and jestingly told her when she begged of him not to expose himself too much, that the bullet had not yet been moulded that was to hit him. The fire constantly kept, up on his (Sago's) garrison, and particularly on the narrow passage which leads up to the Judicial Garrison, was so hot that his body could not be removed for many hours, for the evening was bright with a dear moonlight. Mr. McGrennan, a friend of ours, proposed that a



party of volunteers should carry his body to the hospital, expressing his conviction that no bullet would hit us while engaged in such a good work. And so we carried him up the steep passage slowly and carefully, and bullets fell all around but never touched us. Poor Bryson, he was a noble and gallant fellow, an excellent husband, a fond father [one of his four children also died during the Defence], and a staunch friend. A practical philosopher, he was always gay and smiling, hospitable and kind to all. As Sergeant of the Volunteer Cavalry, and every day during the siege, he behaved as a gallant and true-hearted volunteer should.<sup>8</sup>

Alexander Bryson's services were later mentioned in despatches by Brigadier John Inglis, the garrison commander.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Kavanagh describes the Bryson family's plight:

Bryson's services were so conspicuous that he obtained honourable mention in the report of the defence of Lucknow, and his widow received from the Government a pension of thirty six pounds a year! He left three sons, who are being educated from the funds collected for the relief of the sufferers by the mutiny in India, and it is thus to the benevolence of the public that they are indebted for support and education, which the Government grant of £19 a year would not have afforded, except in a station of life for which their excellent father was not reared.<sup>10</sup>

With his father now dead, Alfred and his family were placed in the care of his uncle – his

<sup>8</sup> *A Personal Narrative of the Siege of Lucknow from its Commencement to its Relief* by Sir Colin Campbell, by L.E. Ruutz-Rees, *One of the Surviving Defenders*, 1858, p.134.

<sup>9</sup> Kavanagh, op.cit., p.24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

mother's brother – Thomas Henry Kavanagh, an Assistant Commissioner in Oudh. His uncle was soon to become the famous 'Lucknow' Kavanagh, one the first civilians to be awarded the Victoria Cross. Kavanagh would later volunteer for the dangerous duty of proceeding through the besieged city to the camp of the Commander-in-Chief, for the purpose of guiding the relieving force to the garrison in the Residency. This he did with great success.

So desperate was the situation during the siege that, along with the other boys belonging to the La Martiniere Boys School, young Alfred Bryson was impressed into service by the military authorities. The senior boys of La Martiniere, aged between ten and fifteen years, then bore arms in defence of the Martiniere Post at the Residency. The younger boys, including Alfred, were employed in duties including attending the hospital; fanning the flies off the wounded, to emptying the waste pans and grinding corn with round stones to assist in making bread. They were also required to run often perilous errands – as the garrison was exposed to an almost continuous fire – and carry ammunition and water to the defenders. Others boys were seconded to domestic duties in place of the native servants who had deserted. Thirty-six boys were so employed, with twelve boys working twelve-hour shifts on a diet that consisted mostly of mutton and buffalo-head soup. The senior boys, besides their military duties, also kept watch during the day until their masters came on duty at night, stood sentry with the soldiers, and took charge of digging waste disposal pits and supervising the work of the younger boys. The La Martiniere boys were also critical in erecting a semaphore on the Residency tower. This enabled contact between the besieged forces and Sir Colin Campbell's relieving column in mid-November. Incredibly only two boys died, both of dysentery, during the siege, and two were slightly wounded.<sup>11</sup>

Relief eventually came. On the night of 27 November 1857 the heroic garrison quietly marched out, ending the siege described by Sir Colin Campbell himself as

The magnificent defence made by a remnant of a British regiment, Her Majesty's 32<sup>nd</sup>, a company of British artillery, and a few hundred Sepoys, whose very presence was a subject of distrust, against all the force of Oudh until the arrival of the reinforcement under Major-General Sir James Outram and Sir Henry Havelock.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately young Alfred survived the terrible conditions and dangers of the siege, unlike his younger brother William, who had also died, aged 5 years. Alfred often related in his later years that as time wore on he and his young companions grew quite oblivious to the dangers with which they were surrounded.

After the mutiny Alfred Bryson attended Bishop Cotton's college at Simla, and subsequently graduated from the University of Calcutta. He served for three years in the Jutogh Cadet Corps (Simla Volunteer Rifles), and then entered the Indian Civil Service, being appointed to the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, under Col J.T. Walker RE, in 1869. He assisted in conducting the topographical survey of Cambay and Baroda, and was with Col J.R. McCullough RE, employed in carrying out a series of levels from Bangalore to Raichore. He was also engaged in the final series of the Principal Triangulation of India and its connection with the trigonometrical survey of Ceylon. He married Grace Ellen Shaw at the ME Chapel, Richmond Town, Bangalore on 30 September 1877.<sup>13</sup>

In 1885 Alfred was transferred to the Military Finance Department. After 25 years' service

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<sup>11</sup> *Adelaide Register*, 23 Dec 1922, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

with the Indian Government he retired to a pension and, for health reasons, came to South Australia in 1895. He settled at Burnside in Adelaide and interested himself in fruit and olive growing. He was, for about eight years, the local secretary to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and was also a prominent member of the South Australian Justices' Association.<sup>14</sup> Alfred also regularly gave lectures on the 'Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857', complete with lantern slides, in support of charity events in and around Adelaide. These were much anticipated and well attended.<sup>15</sup>

Alfred was also an active member of the South Australian Corps of Veterans, and was always prominent at the many gatherings in which the corps participated. In fact, it was with the assistance of this association and the Governor of South Australia, Admiral Sir Day Hort Bosanquet, a great supporter of the corps, that in late 1910 Alfred eventually received from the British War Office the Indian Mutiny Medal and clasp, 'Defence of Lucknow'. He not only received his own medal, but also a posthumous one for his father, Alexander.<sup>16</sup>



The Indian Mutiny Medal was approved in 1858 for issue to officers and men of British and Indian units who served in operations in suppression of the Indian Mutiny. Although initially sanctioned for award to those troops who had been engaged in action against the mutineers, in 1868 the medal was extended to those who had borne arms or who had been under fire, including those members of the Indian judiciary, the Indian civil service, and other citizens who took an active part in the fighting – including the La Martiniere School boys. The clasp 'Defence of Lucknow' was awarded to the original defenders and to the relief force commanded by Sir Henry Havelock. This is a particularly rare medal and clasp combination.

This medal and clasp was also awarded to the principal, masters and schoolboys from La Martiniere College. The one awarded to George Schilling, Principal of La Martiniere College during the mutiny, sold for £3300 at auction in London in March 2005.<sup>17</sup> Alfred's father's medal, which he had received with his own in 1910, was also sold at auction in London in 2004 for £2,900. The medal was described as an 'Indian Mutiny 1857-59, 1 clasp, Defence of Lucknow (Mr. A.H. Bryson) slightly later impressed naming, fitted with contemporary silver ribbon brooch, lightly toned, extremely fine'.<sup>18</sup> One now wonders what became of Alfred's medal. Alfred Henly Bryson, an eight-year-old defender of Lucknow, was afforded a military funeral at the West Terrace Cemetery in Adelaide.<sup>19</sup> His devoted wife Grace passed away aged 85 years in 1939.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *Adelaide Advertiser*, 18 May 1911, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> *Adelaide Register*, 10 Nov 1910, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> Dix Noonan & Webb: Auction of HEIC and British India Medals, 2 March 2005, lot 65.

<sup>18</sup> Dix Noonan & Webb: Auction of HEIC and British India Medals, 17 Sept 2004, lot 99.

<sup>19</sup> *Adelaide Advertiser*, 25 Nov. 1913, p.2.

[Illustrations from Wikipedia Commons derived from contemporary sources.]

## A HARD JOB TO FIND OUT WHO I AM

Dianne De Bellis<sup>1</sup>

Over 3,000 Australian soldiers were court martialled for Absence without Leave (AWL) or desertion, some more than once. Of these, 121 were sentenced to death by firing squad. Some were punished with Field Punishment no.1 or Field Punishment no.2. Most were imprisoned but none were executed. The Australian government had raised the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) to support the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), but had not handed over complete control to the British. Promulgation of the death sentence had to be signed off by the Australian Governor-General under Section 98 of the Australian Defence Act 1903. The AIF was a volunteer army and while initially there was a rush to join up, there was subsequent difficulty in providing the numbers requested by the British. A conscription referendum was planned. The then Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, considered that any news of the execution of deserters would negatively affect the referendum and so recommended that the Governor-General delay signing off the death penalties until the Cabinet had considered its position on the death penalty. This was a political decision, not a compassionate one.<sup>2</sup> Hughes wanted to fulfil the British requests for more men and maximise the chances of a yes vote in the conscription referenda.<sup>3</sup>

So there were no Australians executed for desertion. Their sentences were remitted to anything between two and ten years of penal servitude or imprisonment with hard labour and in some cases commuted after a year or so. The death penalty formed a vital component in the British High Command's approach to discipline. 'The death sentence was the ultimate disciplinary weapon available to British courts martial and there can be no doubt that the High Command considered it an essential component in the maintenance of discipline'.<sup>4</sup>

### 2592 Pte Harry Frith, 55th Battalion<sup>5</sup>

Pte Harry Frith of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was accused of deserting His Majesty's Service when on active service.<sup>6</sup> At Pozières on 17 August 1916, he left the firing line at the front without permission. He was arrested at Amiens on 7 October 1916 by the Military Police. There is no record of his activities during this absence of nearly two months. In the AIF for just over twelve months, this was his second recorded episode of desertion. Earlier in that year he had also gone AWL from the 55<sup>th</sup> Bn and had been posted as a deserter from that battalion. All in all he had several periods of AWL as well as some time in hospital after being wounded.

Pte Frith was a serial absentee. All the evidence points to his being both opportunistic and deliberate in his absences. At twenty-seven years old he was well practiced in a variety of illegal activities. After he was arrested he told Sgt Napper of the Military Police, 'they will have a hard job to find out who I am and how long I have been absent, as I have nothing on

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<sup>1</sup> Dianne De Bellis is currently a PhD candidate at UniSA researching Australia's involvement in World War 1. She is finding and telling the stories of Australian soldiers who deserted and received the death sentence.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives of Australia Series A6006, 1917/7/25 and Australian War Memorial Series AWM27 363/28 Item 1146896.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Glenister, 'Desertion without execution: decisions that saved Australian Imperial forces deserters from the firing squad in World War 1', Honours dissertation, La Trobe University 1984.

<sup>4</sup> G. Oram, *Military executions during World War I*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> The following information about Pte Frith is from his service record and the records of his court martial. These records are digitally stored in the National Archives of Australia.

<sup>6</sup> National Archives of Australia Series B2455, Frith, H.

me', and indeed he was not wearing any cap badge or regimental insignia. Also when searched no pay book or disc was found on him. He was however wearing an MP brassard: a large arm-band that clearly identifies a military policeman. Early in 1916 he had a two-month training period in the police of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Here he undoubtedly learnt much to give him confidence in evading capture during his later exploits. His absence from the 55<sup>th</sup> occurred a few days after returning from this training.

Frith was well known as a potential deserter. Sgt Millard of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn was told by Cpl Murray that Frith was trying to get out of the trench. He had frequently told officers and other ranks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> that he had previous service with the AIF in Egypt in 1914. He claimed he was discharged in February 1915 as undesirable, re-enlisting in Australia later in 1915. He had joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn with reinforcements after the action of Pozières in July 1916. He must have turned up with a credible story to then be attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Training Battalion before being transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The day before his desertion he had absented himself without leave in Albert and was brought back by Military Police.

On 17 August, A Company was lying in the support trenches at Pozières. Sgt Millard walked the length of the trench and could not find Frith. He was looking for him because he had been told that Frith was trying to get out of the trench. Cpl Ogilvie was NCO in charge of No 2 Platoon of A Company. He had received orders to prepare to move to the front line. Pte Frith was one of a fatigue party away. At Pte Frith's court martial Cpl Ogilvie stated:

When he returned I told him to prepare to move to the front line, he reported back to me with his equipment on and asked if he could go to the latrines. I said 'Yes, don't be long and report when you come back'. I received the order to move off, Private Frith was not there. I then walked down the trench which my company occupied. I looked all around but could not find the accused, I then reported his absence to the Platoon Officer. There was not a latrine in my company lines. I visited the nearest latrines to look for accused. I reported his absence to Lieut Robb. I personally warned accused to move to the front line.<sup>7</sup>

Pte Frith was prepared to tell his side of the story.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> August after coming from fatigue in the front line I was ordered by L/Cpl Ogilvie to be prepared to move to the front line which I did. About ten minutes afterwards I asked him if I could go to the latrine. He said 'Yes'. While at the latrine a shell came over and I was buried. I was dug out and taken to the nearest dressing station, finding no doctor there I was taken to Casualty Corner. I remember no more until I found myself in Amiens and I was afraid to come back again. The latrine I went to was about one hundred yards from Cpl Ogilvie's dug-out. It was the nearest one. I was there about one minute. I do not know where I was sent to after leaving the dressing station at Casualty Corner. I was in Amiens all the time I was away. I was not in hospital. I have no knowledge of being in any hospital. I do not remember anything for two days after when I found myself in Amiens. I was afraid to report back to my unit on account of being punished. I did not think they would believe my story. I did not make a statement to the Military Policeman who arrested me. I am also on the strength of the 55<sup>th</sup> Battalion. I was in a paddock at Amiens when I came to my senses. It was two of the First division Engineers who dug me out when I was buried. I do not know who they were.<sup>8</sup>

He was also confident enough to cross examine Cpl Ogilvie, perhaps hoping to imply that Cpl Ogilvie had not searched thoroughly for him. However, as his defence was that he was absent through being buried by a shell, this seems like a futile attempt. His defence of 'not

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<sup>7</sup> National Archives of Australia A471, 22280.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

remembering' was a common one, and it was probably prudent to not construct a story that could be tested for the truth. The court was not convinced by Pte Frith and found him guilty of desertion. He was sentenced to suffer death by being shot.

The Brigade commander, Gen N.M. Smyth, recommended that the sentence be carried out. No one had believed Frith's story. His Commanding Officer was of opinion that he deserted deliberately due to cowardice. A search was organised when he was found to be absent. It was generally considered among men in his platoon that his claim of being buried was false, as no trenches were found to have collapsed near his platoon. Stretcher bearers could not have taken him away within the hour or so before the platoon went forward because there were none in the vicinity. His sentence was confirmed by Gen Rawlinson but because it was unable to be carried out, varied to ten years' penal servitude, which was then commuted to two years' imprisonment with hard labour.

After eleven months in prison, Pte Frith was released with the remainder of his sentence suspended. Rejoining the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn in Belgium, he had within a month made another attempt to go AWL. However, this time he was only absent for one hour before being apprehended. He was found guilty and sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour with the unexpired portion of previous two-year sentence to be served concurrently. After spending the next year in military prison, Frith was released to rejoin the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn in March 1919. In April he went AWL again and was awarded 28 days' Field Punishment no.2 and forfeited 38 days' pay. In July he was caught stealing a gold watch and £1.15.0 and this time was convicted by a civil court. As a previous conviction for felony in 1906 was taken into account he was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour. After serving twelve months of his sentence he was released in July 1920, with the unexpired portion of his sentence remitted, and he embarked for his return to Australia. Discharged from the AIF as 'Services No Longer Required', Harry Frith was not entitled to a war pension. Nor was he eligible for war medals due to his conviction for desertion.

Pte Frith is an example of the type of Australian soldier that the British High Command found so frustrating. His constant infractions supported the argument that discipline in the AIF was less than satisfactory and could be directly attributed to the lack of the death sentence in the AIF as the ultimate disciplinary weapon.

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## **AS YOU WERE ...**

### **Feedback from Readers and Contributors**

Capt Tony Walker's double-barrelled article 'Two Australian Military Firsts: A Personal View' in the March 2012 issue, not surprisingly perhaps, managed to stir up some counter claims. Former Cpl Donald Lawie, Hon. Piper, Queensland Cameron Highlanders, 61<sup>st</sup> Battalion AMF/AIF writes concerning the part dealing with 'The First Defeat of the Japanese':

- I refer particularly to Capt Walker's claim that the action at Milne Bay was not the first defeat of the Japanese. He bases his claim on the fact that the Japanese thrust towards Port Moresby had been blunted by 39<sup>th</sup> Bn, the Papuan Inf Bn, 'and others'. He counts this as a defeat. General Horii's South Seas Force was certainly utterly defeated in their

aim, but not until January 1943. The final remnants of Gen Horii's force were killed or evacuated from the Papuan north coast by 22 January 1943. That is the date of their defeat. The Japanese were still a potent attacking force until they halted before Imita Ridge on 18 September 1942.

The Japanese Special Naval Landing Force came ashore on the north coast of Milne Bay on the night of 25 August 1942 and was immediately engaged by soldiers of the 61<sup>st</sup> Battalion AMF. Australian forces included 7<sup>th</sup> Bde AMF, 18<sup>th</sup> Bde AIF, 75 and 76 Squadrons RAAF, supporting artillery and a unit of US Engineers. The Japanese landing force was decisively defeated and their last survivors were evacuated by sea on 6 September 1942. Their Aim: to capture, hold and develop an airbase at Milne Bay, and they failed. They were defeated twelve days before Gen Horii's force stopped their southern movement down the Kokoda Trail. (Refs: Gavin Long *The Six Years' War*, 1973; Baker & Knight *Milne Bay 1942*, 3rd ed. 1992.)

Gordon Maitland responds to both parts:

- Capt Walker's 'The First Defeat of the Japanese' hinges on the significance of the word 'defeat'. I admire his advocacy of the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn, and there wouldn't be an Australian who doesn't admire that battalion; however, what it achieved, significant though it was, just doesn't measure up as a 'defeat'. If it did, then it calls to notice the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Bn's massacre of the Japanese during its ambush at Gemas. Sadly the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn is pipped at the post irrespective of whichever interpretation of 'defeat' is used.

I refer to Capt Walker's other provocative article, 'The First Australian Victoria Cross'. The Australian Army History Unit is about to publish my book *The Army's Honours and Awards*. When writing it I was aware of Bisdee, Wylly and the gazette dates, and I chose to write, 'The first Australian soldier to win the decoration was Lieutenant N.R. Howse' – despite my usually trying to avoid the word 'win', as it smacks of good fortune in a ballot. Well done Captain Walker for sticking up for Bisdee! The article makes me feel guilty for not mentioning him. Unfortunately his advocacy leads him to claim that 'Bisdee was the first Australian-born recipient', whereas it was actually Mark Sever Bell who, as a member of the British Army, earned his in 1874 during the Ashanti War.

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## SOCIETY NOTICES

### **STOP PRESS: Biennial Conference of the Military Historical Society of Australia**

**PLEASE NOTE** that this year's conference, hosted by the ACT Branch, has been brought forward to Saturday 8 - Sunday 9 September 2012. [Originally scheduled for November, the conference date has been changed to enable participants, should they wish, also to attend the international history conference, 'Kokoda: beyond the legend', which will be held at the Australian War Memorial on Thursday 6 - Friday 7 September.]

No theme has been set for the Society's conference – it is hoped that a wide range of military history topics will be covered. Anyone interested in presenting a paper at the conference should contact the ACT Branch President, Ian Stagoll [[ian.stagoll@gmail.com](mailto:ian.stagoll@gmail.com)].

aim, but not until January 1943. The final remnants of Gen Horii's force were killed or evacuated from the Papuan north coast by 22 January 1943. That is the date of their defeat. The Japanese were still a potent attacking force until they halted before Imita Ridge on 18 September 1942.

The Japanese Special Naval Landing Force came ashore on the north coast of Milne Bay on the night of 25 August 1942 and was immediately engaged by soldiers of the 61<sup>st</sup> Battalion AMF. Australian forces included 7<sup>th</sup> Bde AMF, 18<sup>th</sup> Bde AIF, 75 and 76 Squadrons RAAF, supporting artillery and a unit of US Engineers. The Japanese landing force was decisively defeated and their last survivors were evacuated by sea on 6 September 1942. Their Aim: to capture, hold and develop an airbase at Milne Bay, and they failed. They were defeated twelve days before Gen Horii's force stopped their southern movement down the Kokoda Trail. (Refs: Gavin Long *The Six Years' War*, 1973; Baker & Knight *Milne Bay 1942*, 3rd ed. 1992.)

Gordon Maitland responds to both parts:

- Capt Walker's 'The First Defeat of the Japanese' hinges on the significance of the word 'defeat'. I admire his advocacy of the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn, and there wouldn't be an Australian who doesn't admire that battalion; however, what it achieved, significant though it was, just doesn't measure up as a 'defeat'. If it did, then it calls to notice the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Bn's massacre of the Japanese during its ambush at Gemas. Sadly the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn is pipped at the post irrespective of whichever interpretation of 'defeat' is used.

I refer to Capt Walker's other provocative article, 'The First Australian Victoria Cross'. The Australian Army History Unit is about to publish my book *The Army's Honours and Awards*. When writing it I was aware of Bisdee, Wylly and the gazette dates, and I chose to write, 'The first Australian soldier to win the decoration was Lieutenant N.R. Howse' – despite my usually trying to avoid the word 'win', as it smacks of good fortune in a ballot. Well done Captain Walker for sticking up for Bisdee! The article makes me feel guilty for not mentioning him. Unfortunately his advocacy leads him to claim that 'Bisdee was the first Australian-born recipient', whereas it was actually Mark Sever Bell who, as a member of the British Army, earned his in 1874 during the Ashanti War.

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## SOCIETY NOTICES

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The conference will be held at the *Hellenic Club in the City*, 13 Moore St, Canberra, which is at the same location as the former RSL Club where the year 2000 and 2002 Society's conferences were held. The fee for the conference, and for the conference dinner to be held on the Saturday evening, has not yet been determined. However, it is anticipated that the total cost to financial members of the Society will not exceed \$100.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Renewals for the 2012/13 membership year are due on 1 July.

### Membership Costs

**Branch membership:** NOTE: Branches include a small additional surcharge in the subscription to cover local administrative costs.

- ACT Branch: individual member \$40, family membership \$45
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- QLD Branch: individual member \$45, family membership \$50
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- TAS Branch: individual member \$35, family membership \$40
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- VIC Branch: individual member \$45, family membership \$50

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Military Historical Society of Australia  
PO Box 5030  
GARRAN ACT 2605  
AUSTRALIA

Or direct deposit to:

MHSA Federal Account: BSB Number 803205 and Federal account number 20538555.  
Reference details should include organisation name and INSTCOR to denote corresponding member.

If you direct deposit, please forward membership form and copy of deposit receipt to the Federal Treasurer, MHSA, PO Box 5030, GARRAN, ACT, 2605, AUSTRALIA

## WARTIME FATE: A JIGSAW OF INSIGNIFICANT FACTORS

Daryl Moran<sup>1</sup>

*'Saboteur, you are not permitted a bed,' shouted the 'Red Cross' officer to me as I lay dejectedly on the floor of the small unheated room ... 'You will be sent up to the Castle and SHOT!' ... So I was left to spend the night fully convinced by now that I was to be shot, having been regarded progressively as a 'terror fliieger', 'spy', 'agent' and finally a 'saboteur'.<sup>2</sup>*

Flt Sgt Thomas Leslie Fielder (410646)

How did a member of the RAAF, a young Australian dairy farmer from Cockatoo, near Melbourne, find himself in an Italian cell under threat of being shot? What jigsaw of seemingly insignificant factors had conspired to lead to the young airman's predicament? In the case of Flt Sgt Tom Fielder, five separate pieces of a puzzle came together to bring him face to face with this death sentence.

Nineteen-year-old Thomas Leslie Fielder began his RAAF career on 31 January 1942 at No.1 Initial Training School at Somers, Victoria before postings to Parkes, NSW for training as a Wireless Operator and Gunner (WAG), and then to 26 Course at No.2 Bombing and Gunnery School at Port Pirie in South Australia. This training was a prelude to service overseas; he sailed from Melbourne on 15 January 1943 bound for San Francisco, and then went by train to New York before sailing on the *Queen Elizabeth* to Great Britain.

Tom was posted to No.7 Gunnery School at Stormy Down in South Wales, and then sent to RAF Millom to undertake advanced radio work. As a member of 59 Course for a four-month training period at Bomber Command's 21 OTU Moreton-in-Marsh base located to the north of Oxford, it was here that he had

the thrill of a lifetime. Just a few WAGS at a time were taken down to a large hangar to examine for the first time a real bomber – a Wellington! I stood in awe under the nose of that Wellington and my blood was tingling as I climbed the ladder into the nose and took my seat for the first time at the Marconi radio set behind the pilot.<sup>3</sup>

Following his introductory flying training Tom and others were 'crewed up' and trained together prior to being posted to a squadron for active service. Although figures vary, it was well known that air crews faced a high possibility of death or serious injury during their training. This was brought home to Tom's crew by the experience of another crew who shared their barracks hut. One night Tom and his crew returned from a training flight to find the other men in a state of high excitement.

Peter's crew had had an engine fire and were forced to abandon the aircraft. We could hardly believe our ears. While we had sedately flown our cross-country route, they had faced an emergency and been obliged to make that heart rending decision to jump with a parachute. They had all landed safely and in fact flew again the next day as if nothing had happened.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Daryl Moran is a member of the Victorian Branch of the MHSA and is currently completing an MA at Monash University. His thesis is entitled, 'A Noble Son of Empire; The Short Life of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt WHC Buntine, RFC, MC'. The article printed here is based on the memoir written by his father-in-law, Tom Fielder, which although previously published privately, Daryl believes, justifiably, that the story deserves wider recognition.

<sup>2</sup> T.L. Fielder, *I Flew, I Fell, I Survived: The story of an Australian Aircrew Prisoner of War*, M. Tucker Publishing, Traralgon Vic, 1999, p.150.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.64.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.75.

This incident had a deep effect on the airmen as it had been impressed upon them that in the case of a real mid-air emergency, the crew only had seconds to react in order to save their lives. Everyone had to be well prepared for any possibility. In addition, Bomber Command had been informed that it was quite common for the Germans to find dead Allied aircrew lying near the parachute that they had not buckled correctly, causing them to fall out of the harness upon their descent. Tom's crew members were all certainly cured of their bad habit of leaving the bottom two parachute straps unbuckled, no matter how much discomfort they suffered.

Tom's crew were now at the end of their training and were posted to RAF 40 Squadron based near Tunis in Libya for raids in their Wellington bombers against the Italian mainland. At this stage of the war, the Allied invasion of Italy was progressing at a painfully slow pace as German resistance proved difficult to break. The role of 205 Group Wellingtons and therefore 40 Squadron, was to disrupt the German supply routes and to further cause the collapse of their resistance. After their first raid on 26 November 1943 against a railway bridge to the north of Rome, and a second five nights later against the railway marshalling yards in Pontassieve, Tom's crew joined the rest of the squadron when they relocated to the Italian mainland.

Moving to Foggia Main Airfield in southern Italy on 31 December 1943, they pitched their tent and tried to make the best of the situation given the atrocious weather conditions. Being the middle of winter in Italy it was wet, freezing cold, windy and often there was snow on the ground. To add to the men's frustration, each day they were briefed to fly an operation only to have it cancelled at the last minute due to impossible flying conditions.

By the morning of Friday 7 January 1944, weather conditions at the airfield were so bad that as a result of their tents being flooded again, the men were trucked to dry accommodation at the bomb-damaged Foggia University. This provided a chance for them to undertake some domestic chores such as washing clothes, drying out wet and stale clothing and enjoying a hot shower. Tom discarded his heavy clothing, the contents of his pockets and some equipment including his RAAF ID dog tags on to his bed and was still in the shower a few minutes later when the call came, 'Ops on, transport in ten minutes'. The men frantically scrambled to get dressed and run to the kitchen to collect a thermos of coffee and some sandwiches. Racing out of the shower, Tom hurriedly pulled on another pair of heavy trousers over his light drill pants, slipped into his inner flying suit and ran to the kitchen to collect his rations before eventually making it to the plane just in time for take-off.

Five seemingly insignificant and unrelated factors now came together to make the completed jigsaw puzzle leading to a critical and life changing day for Tom.

January 7<sup>th</sup> 1944 was the pivotal point in my life. Everything that went before came to a climax on that day. But no words on paper, no photographs or any collection of documents can truly record the experience of those incidents; the mental stress, the physical shock and strain, the sudden change of fortune that were inflicted on me that day.<sup>5</sup>

Their target was an aircraft factory on the northern outskirts of the city of Reggio Emilia, north-west of Bologna in northern Italy. Flying a course north-west and parallel to the Adriatic Sea ensured that they kept clear of the front line and well-defended German areas. Turning inland, they kept in the bomber stream and completed their mission with the bomb

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.131.

aimer successfully delivering their lethal cargo.

The first part of the jigsaw puzzle now came into play. The plane having bombed the target and circled the burning factory, Tom's duty was to deliver several bundles of propaganda pamphlets down the extended flare chute. The chute projected far enough outside the plane to ensure that any objects that were launched would not hit the fuselage of the aircraft. Unfortunately the special handle to retract this chute was not in its holder and Tom could not find it in the darkness of the plane, as it was most likely lying on the floor among a heap of assorted equipment.

The second piece to the jigsaw had been left behind by a visiting pilot on a previous flight. Earlier in the day during a pre-flight check Tom had noticed an extra parachute on the first-aid bunk near his wireless post, but had not removed it or told any of the other crew members of its presence. In the haste of preparing for and undertaking the mission, the presence of the extra parachute seemed to be a very trivial matter.

The third jigsaw piece was to prove critical to the unfolding events and was something Tom had been concerned about before. He had flown in a Wellington aircraft to Italy from Tunis some three weeks before and on a pre-flight inspection of the plane's exterior, he had noticed that the emergency escape hatch had been covered with a large sheet of fabric glued across the outside of the plane. When he questioned the ground staff he was told that it had been done to stop the hatch vibrating loose and being lost in flight. A sealed door such as this would mean that the crew would have no emergency exit from the plane. To a practical farm boy such as Tom it seemed to be a simple matter for the ground crew to adjust the tension on the door handles to prevent this happening. However, in the haste and disorder of the move to Italy and the conditions of settling into a new environment, he was unable to pursue the matter of the repair any further.

The fourth piece of the puzzle now came into play and was of the crew's own doing. After some considerable minutes of flying away from Reggio Emilia, Tom suddenly heard the pilot exclaim that he could see snow-capped mountains ahead, when he should have expected to see the Italian coastline as they retraced their reciprocal flight path south back to Foggia Main. They realised with horror that they had been flying due north instead of on a southwards course home. Hurried calculations and a rapid turn-around found them alone in the Italian night sky, separated from the rest of the formation and desperately trying to conserve fuel as they wandered over a fortified area. Anti-aircraft fire began to explode ever closer to the plane and shrapnel peppered the fuselage as the pilot tried to take evasive action. They were now flying about twenty miles south of Bologna on a long cross-country flight leg rather than the shorter original course via the Italian east coast. The pilot also advised the navigator that he had to reduce power and lose height to use as little fuel as possible.

Through all this drama Tom had been listening to the conversations on the intercom and he felt a great sense of helplessness at the developing situation. Remembering that the flare chute was still extended and causing a great deal of drag on the plane's progress he decided to try and retract it, in an attempt to further conserve fuel. Discarding his parachute at his wireless post to enable greater ease of movement, he got down on his hands and knees and began to crawl on the floor of the aircraft to try to find the missing handle amongst the scattered equipment that lay at the bottom of the plane.

Suddenly the plane shuddered with a violent explosion from nearby AA fire and it fell into a

steep dive as the pilot fought to regain control of the stricken craft. Being away from his wireless post at this critical moment, Tom fortunately came upon the spare parachute on the first-aid bed and fighting against the motion of the plane, he hastily put it on, remembering to buckle it correctly. It was then that a feeling of the deepest dread filled every fibre of Tom's being, as he realised that this was the very airplane he had been concerned about some weeks before, the Wellington with the sealed escape hatch!

Remembering the experience of their friends who had had only six seconds to evacuate from their burning plane, Tom decided to try to break the seal on the escape hatch in case his crew also had to parachute to safety. Holding onto the guide ropes above his head he tried to kick the hatch open, to no avail. Then fate took a hand as the pilot recovered control of the plane and pulled it out of the dive. Standing above the hatch at this point, the G-forces exerted at the end of the dive caused Tom to black out; his body was thrust through the sealed escape hatch, breaking it open as he fell. He came to his senses with a shock; with no noise from the engine and an icy wind on his face, he quickly realised that he was outside the plane and falling through the sky.

Four of the five seemingly unrelated and insignificant factors had all played their part in Flt Sgt Tom Fielder falling through the freezing Italian night sky to an uncertain fate beneath him. The compass error had precipitated the chain of events; the missing handle had led him away from his safe post at the wireless; the sealed escape hatch had proved literally to be his downfall; the parachute left behind had been his saving grace. But as he fell towards the cold Italian earth, it is absolutely certain that the furthest thing from his mind would have been the fifth factor in the jigsaw puzzle and the critical importance it was going to have on his immediate situation in the coming days. For, given the immediate urgency and danger of the events around him, it had not entered his thoughts, concentrating as he was on just making a safe escape in his parachute.

Tom pulled the ripcord and the chute immediately opened with such force that his right boot was jerked off. The chute was madly swaying, the harness was hurting him and looking around him he realised not only that his plane had disappeared, but that he was rapidly approaching the ground. Narrowly missing some trees, he landed heavily in a drain in a small paddock, the impact jarring and hurting his exposed right foot. Sitting in a shocked and dazed condition, Tom gradually became aware of a small light that kept rising and falling in intensity as it approached him. Eventually he could see that it was an armed soldier with a hand dynamo torch. While his attention was focused on this man, he was suddenly and roughly searched for weapons by another soldier and therefore did not notice the other eight or nine well-armed soldiers surrounding him in the darkness. Dragged to his feet and forced across the ploughed field by two soldiers, he noted that they seemed to be as scared as he was himself. He slowly understood that his life had reached a turning point and that in a short matter of minutes his status had gone from RAAF flier to prisoner of war.

Taken to a nearby local public hall, he was seated on a box on a table in a back room and thus was able to observe at close quarters the fifty or so sullen looking people, mainly women, who had quickly gathered to view the prisoner. An English-speaking Italian doctor examined his right foot and assured him that he had suffered nothing more severe than a badly sprained ankle. After about an hour a German officer and two armed soldiers arrived and Tom was escorted across the road to a school building where he was fed some bread and coffee. At the same time he was soundly berated by the officer as an 'English terror-fleiger'. A bed was found for him and under armed guard he settled down to try and make some sense of his

situation. The next day he was taken to a large house in Bologna and apart from receiving food and water was locked in his room and left completely alone for the next three days. This served to heighten his anxiety as he considered his situation. By now he would have been posted Missing in Operations, and the thought of the agony awaiting his family and girlfriend back home only increased his misery. How had this all come to pass? What had happened to the plane? Had it survived the explosion or had it crashed somewhere?

The next day brought some relief as he was taken in a covered van to another large building where he was housed in a medium-sized room with a bed, stool, a bedside table and a heater. The door was locked behind him and he removed his inner flying suit, making it into a pillow and settling down on the bed to try to catch up on the last three sleepless nights. Almost immediately he was hustled away by a guard who told him that there was someone who wanted to see him.

Not believing that this was possible given his plight, he was surprised to be greeted by a man who approached him with a smiling face and an outstretched hand of greeting. The 'Red Cross Officer' inquired as to Tom's health and asked him if there was anything that he needed. The officer said that by completing a form, he could confirm a few details so that he could notify Tom's parents through the Red Cross organisation that he was safe and well. At this suggestion Tom's mind harked back to the lectures he had heard in his training about not becoming too conversational or familiar with one's captors, as it was all too easy to inadvertently reveal vital information. Tom replied that all he could reveal was his name, rank and serial number, and the 'Red Cross Officer' nodded in agreement and said that after lunch he would return to collect Tom's completed form. True to his word the officer returned after Tom had eaten a meal of sausage, bread, soup and coffee.

When the 'Red Cross Officer' returned he was perturbed to find that Tom had only completed the basic details of the form. He then read out Tom's name, rank and serial number and quietly requested that he remove his RAAF ID dog tags from around his neck merely to confirm what had been written on the form. At that moment Tom's heart sank as he remembered that in the rush to prepare for the raid he had left them on his bed in the barracks. The fifth piece of the puzzle now fell neatly into place. His interrogator saw his discomfort and so the questioning began to take a more serious tone. He brushed aside Tom's explanation and even the fact that his name and number was stencilled on his air force clothing. Dismissing the young Australian's protestations, the 'Red Cross Officer' now abandoned any pretence at friendliness and raised his voice and became abusive, accusing Tom of being a saboteur, who had been dropped behind the lines to wreak havoc on the German positions. Working himself into a frenzy, he directed the guards to return Tom to his cell and once there he continued to direct his furious tirade at the prisoner. Ordering the guards to remove any furniture from the small room, he railed at the young airman who by now could only cower on the floor in a corner of the cold cell.

'Saboteur, you are not permitted a bed,' shouted the 'Red Cross' officer to me as I lay dejectedly on the floor of the small unheated room. As he left the room and locked the door he repeated the threat he had hurled at me earlier. 'You will be sent up to the Castle and SHOT!' So I was left to spend the night on the floor of a small, cold, dark, cell bemoaning the fact that I had left my warm quilted inner flying suit in the other room and fully convinced by now that I was to be shot, having been regarded progressively as a 'terror flieger', 'spy', 'agent' and finally a 'saboteur'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.150.

Following a sleepless night and under the cover of darkness, Tom was driven away by the guards in the back of a covered van. He truly believed that this was to be his last morning on earth and now realised the significance of the five seemingly insignificant factors that had combined to determine his fate; that of being captured and shot as a spy. He had not been out of his clothes for days and had neither washed nor shaved since the morning of his last flight. Eventually the van arrived at a fine manor house in the country with a long avenue of trees, an impressive entrance hall and wide marble staircase. Soldiers filled the hall and saluted the many high-ranking German officers moving through the building.

Fearing the worst, Tom was taken up the marble staircase and ushered into large and ornate office.

At the far end, in front of a window, was a huge polished desk and seated behind it the most impressive personage I had ever seen. For there in the chair sat a bareheaded German officer of very high rank in full dress uniform. The escorting officer with me, who proved to be an interpreter, stood to attention and saluted. I was directed to a chair at the desk and so the officer and I sat facing each other. I tried to maintain some semblance of dignity and neither saluted or cringed. But what a pitiful spectacle I must have been, with only one boot.<sup>7</sup>



*Left: A photograph of Flt Sgt Thomas Fielder taken at Stalag Luft IVB prison camp (private collection).*

The interpreter fired a barrage of questions at him, but being a lowly WAG there was little vital information Tom could have supplied. The tone of the questioning did lead him to believe however, that the Germans really thought he was a spy or saboteur without proper ID who had been parachuted behind their lines. Mumbling incoherently after each question, Tom tried desperately to convince his captors that he was the dumbest and stupidest prisoner they had ever seen. After quite a series of these interchanges, unbelievably his position changed dramatically for the better when the high-ranking officer gave a frustrated shrug of his shoulders and motioned for the guards to take Tom away. As he left he was given the impression that he had just been in the presence of the Commander in Chief of German Armed Forces in Italy, Field Marshal Kesselring. This most senior officer had clearly come to the

realisation that the bedraggled prisoner in front of him really was just a lowly Australian airman and not a saboteur. Clearly Flt Sgt Fielder was of no further use to him.

Although relieved not to be shot as a spy, Tom still faced a journey that found him at Stalag Luft IVB at Muhlberg north of Dresden in central Germany for the rest of the war. The jigsaw of seemingly insignificant factors had come together to seal his wartime fate. Ahead of him lay 16 months of imprisonment, a daring escape and subsequent recapture by the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.153.

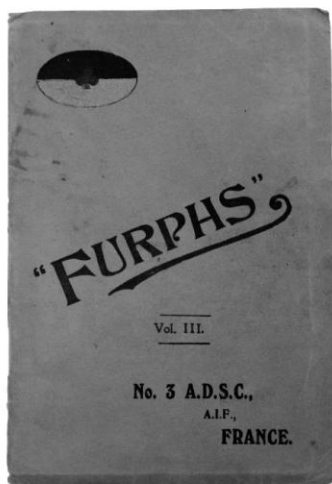
Germans. Held as a prisoner of the Russians at war's end, he escaped again and met up with American forces before eventually returning to Australia in September 1945. He married his girlfriend Peg Bailey and took up dairy farming at Numurkah in the Goulburn Valley area of Victoria. They had a son and two daughters, one of whom is married to the author.

Tom's Wellington bomber and the crew all survived the explosion of the AA burst and returned safely to base where they reported the mysterious disappearance of their WAG. The crew stayed together for the duration of hostilities and despite some dangerous episodes, including a ditching into the sea, survived the war. In the 1990s Tom met up with surviving members of his former crew and revisited many of the sites of his capture and imprisonment in Europe, and subsequently self-published his memoirs. He passed away in 2002.

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# Michael Treloar

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## THANK GOD FOR WAR DIARIES: RESEARCHING LT HENRY JOHN BEATON, AIF

Peter Epps<sup>1</sup>

Some years ago I purchased a WW1 medal group with, as a lot of medal collectors say, ‘just another foreign gong’. The group consisted of a 1914-15 Star named to 716 Gnr H.J. BEATON, 1/F.A.BDE. A.I.F., the British War Medal and Victory Medal named to Lieut H.J. BEATON A.I.F., and an unnamed Belgium Croix Civique



Second Class (Silver) with 1914-1915 Bar in its original case. This was in a mail auction catalogue and was listed as ‘The only one awarded to an Australian soldier during WW1’.

The circumstances of the group originally coming on the market were known to me, as I was one of the members of the MHSA WA branch that was involved in a militaria display held at the Dianella Scout Hall in WA some years before. During that weekend, one of the members was approached by a lady whose great uncle was the recipient of the group and after some conversation, she gave the group to him, as she had no family to pass it onto. He did some research, which was very difficult back in those days, as the only way to obtain any information from the Army Records was to be a relative. So to cut a long story short, the group was sold and a few years later ended up in the aforementioned mail auction.

Once the group was in my hands I wanted to prove that the recipient had been officially awarded the Belgian medal and why he was awarded it in the first place, by discovering a citation or recommendation. I wrote to the Australian War Memorial (AWM), which could not help, as no papers regarding the award had survived; and to *The West Australian* newspaper which has a ‘Can You Help’ section. As a result, the lady who handed the group over originally, contacted me and I asked her if she would apply for the Anzac Medallion and a copy of his service papers, she being his only relative, which she kindly did. She also found his original overseas service chevrons – four blue and one red – a 1<sup>st</sup> Div Field Artillery colour patch, a 12<sup>th</sup> Army Bde Artillery colour patch, and his unofficial 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery metal badge, but alas no photo of him.

I obtained his service papers from the National Archives Australia, which were a great help as they told me all of his service history – or so I thought. The award of the Belgium Croix Civique was noted in his papers and dated 7 Sept 1918 but no *London Gazette* (LG) date was

<sup>1</sup> Peter Epps joined the Society as a Junior in 1966 and has been a member ever since. He was State President of the WA branch for approximately 15 years, and was made a Life member in 2000.

given. As I now knew the approximate date, I scoured the LGs but to no avail. The 1920 Officers List also listed the medal. Kerry Bulow's book, *Foreign Awards to Australia* (2000), lists the medal but as a non-gazetted award from the 1920 Officers List. Kerry also states that this was the only one awarded to an Australian. So at least one thing was proven: that the auction house had been correct in their statement.

*Right: Beaton's original insignia, as described in the text. The unit patches are in the artillery colours of red and blue.*



An internet search with every combination I could think of finally came up with 'Hendrik's Medal Corner' site, which is in Belgium. After explaining my predicament, Hendrik went to great lengths to help me, eventually finding the Belgium equivalent of the LG dated 14-20 July 1918, which stated that Lt Beaton had been awarded the Croix Civique Second Class with 1914-1915 Bar. He also supplied the following information:

This decoration, in five classes, was based on the Civil Decoration which had been instituted in 1867. On 18 May 1915 King Albert I instituted the Civil Decoration 1914-1915 whereby the original royal monogram (2 intertwined letters L – King Leopold) was retained owing to the war situation. This 1915 Decoration differed from the 1867 issue on three points: the ribbon, the crossed swords and the bar '1914-1915'. A few 1915 Civil Decorations were awarded by the Belgian government, then in exile in the French town of Le Havre.

On 12 December 1918 the proper Civil Decoration 1914-1918 was instituted, having the monogram 'A' for King Albert and the bar '1914-1918'. The five classes, which had remained unchanged throughout the Decoration's life-span, were the 1st and 2nd Class crosses (resp. gold and silver) and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Class medals (gold, silver and bronze).



*Left: A clipping from the Belgian gazette in Flemish, listing as 'Artikel 1' the award of the Civic Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class to Lt Beaton.*

Hendrik informed me that the Croix Civique was awarded to civilians or non-combatant military personnel for bravery, not under fire, similar to the British Commonwealth George Medal. But once again the citation for the award was not available because Hendrik said that if Beaton was from Belgium, there would be a file on him, usually with a photo, but as he was a foreigner, nothing was kept other than the Belgium equivalent of the *London Gazette*. Hendrik even posted all the information available about Beaton with photos on his

own web site with a request for help. That is when my research seemed to have gone as far as possible.

Then, as the title to this article states, ‘Thank God for War Diaries!’ The AWM has most of the WW1 war diaries (WD) online, and I recently started checking out my Aussie medal groups, starting with the officers as they seem to get more mentions in WD than NCOs or privates. After checking my infantry officers, I started with Beaton and the WD for 4<sup>th</sup> Aust Field Artillery Brigade (FAB). I thought I may get a few hits on his name when he went on courses or when he went to hospital as stated in his service papers. But when I got to the entry headed ‘Brigade Routine Orders By Lieut Colonel C.A. Callachan, DSO Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Aust FA Brigade, Appendix 93 164, dated Sept 17<sup>th</sup> 1918’, there it was:

His Majesty the King of the Belgians has awarded the Belgian Croix Civique to Lieut H J Beaton, 12<sup>th</sup> Battery AFA, in recognition of the part played by this officer in rescuing on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1918, several persons of Belgian nationality from a house in Calais which had been demolished by an enemy bomb.<sup>2</sup>

All those hours of searching paid off very nicely and Hendrik was correct in his statement that it was for gallantry but not in a military situation.

One thing I did notice while searching through the 4<sup>th</sup> Aust FAB WD was that occasionally in the appendix, there were lists of infantry soldiers who had participated in trench raids that the 4<sup>th</sup> FAB was supporting. They gave rank, name, number and battalion. So I realised that you don’t just research the infantry battalion WD, but also the artillery brigade, as you never know if the infantry member you are researching may be listed as a participant of a particular raid that the infantry battalion WD does not list.

As stated previously, the service papers were a great help, but then I searched the National Archives WA and found Beaton’s medical file, which he had filled in when claiming a pension after the war. This was so much more revealing than his service file in that it took up 23 foolscap pages of his disabilities caused by his wounds and illnesses. It gave the names of the places where he was wounded, names of any witnesses and whether or not he left the line to go to a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) and maybe onto hospital.

The following is a short summary taken from his service record held at the National Archives of Australia.

Henry John Beaton was born in London on 17 April 1884 and was employed as Assistant Electrical Engineer with the GPO in Sydney when on 14 September 1914, at the age of 30, he volunteered for service abroad with the AIF His prior military service consisted of 6 years service with the London Royal Garrison Artillery Volunteers. On enlistment, he was given the regimental number 716, as a Gunner in 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Bde. The medical examiner found him to be 5 feet 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches tall, weighing 140 lbs, of fair complexion and having blue eyes and brown hair. His religion was stated as Presbyterian.

He sailed with the brigade from Sydney on 18 October 1914 and disembarked at Alexandria 5 November. The brigade camped and trained in Egypt until 6 April 1915, when it embarked for Lemnos, arriving 10/11 April. During this time he was promoted bombardier on 8 March 1915. Henry along with 3<sup>rd</sup> Bty was aboard HMT *Cardiganshire* and landed at Gallipoli on

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<sup>2</sup> AWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Aust Div. 74/492 of 30.8.1918.

25 April 1915. During May 1915 he received a bullet wound in the right arm but remained on duty. He was admitted to No.1 CCS with enteritis on 2 August and rejoined his unit on 5 August. Promoted provisional corporal on 8 September, he disembarked at Alexandria from *Ulysses* on 22 December 1915. I can only assume he stayed until the end of the Gallipoli campaign, as there is nothing else stated in his service papers.

On 21 February 1916 Henry Beaton was transferred to the 4th Division Artillery and posted to 101<sup>st</sup> Battery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Howitzer Brigade at Tel-el-Kebir, where he was promoted temporary sergeant on 10 March. A fortnight later, on 25 March, he proceeded to join the BEF, arriving in Marseilles on 1 April 1916. His temporary promotion was confirmed on 5 May 1916 and Sgt Beaton returned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Brigade on 15 May. He apparently 'did his bit' in France all through 1916 and until 18 April 1917 when he was taken to hospital with 'debility'. After six weeks of treatment, he returned to duty and on 3 July was detached for duty as an Artillery Instructor. He returned to his unit on 28 August.

Beaton was commissioned as second lieutenant and transferred to 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Artillery on 27 October 1917. Taken on the strength of 11<sup>th</sup> Battery on 3 November but transferred to 4<sup>th</sup> FAB on 6 January 1918, he was promoted to lieutenant on 1 March 1918 and was detached to Salvage School on 19 March. On the 20 March, I now know he was in Calais because of his 'citation'. He rejoined 4<sup>th</sup> FAB on 25 March and left the unit on special Anzac leave on 16 September 1918. He embarked for Australia on the *Kaisar-i-Hind* from Taranto, Italy, reaching Australia on 23 November 1918. He was discharged from the AIF on 28 January 1919, hence his overseas service chevrons, four blue and one red. His service papers state that the three times he was admitted to a Field Ambulance (FA) or CCS was when he was ill; there is no mention of wounds. However, in the service papers there is his medical report on his return to Australia which states, 'GSW Rt forearm May 1915 (remained on duty)', and 'GSW Head April 1917 (hospital)'; a bit confusing to say the least.

In his medical record, when he was applying for a pension post war, 1935-37, he states that he was wounded or gassed four times. Three of these were treated in the lines but he remained on duty. One was on Gallipoli with the GSW to the right forearm (which gave him trouble for the rest of his life and was the reason for the pension application). Then in early November 1917, while serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Artillery in Hannebuk Wood (Ypres sector), he sustained a slight touch of gassing and was treated in the lines. At the time he was acting Battery Commander, being the only officer left and the personnel at the gun position reduced to five men to man six guns! A few days later, on 9 November his position was shelled and he was blown up by a heavy German shell and buried; after twenty-four hours rest, he resumed duty. His statements to the medical board include the names of the officers or doctors who either witnessed or treated him and the exact location he was gassed/wounded; for example, 'about 200 yds north of Birr Cross Roads on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1917. This statement could be verified by Capt Perkins, Chaplin, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class, who will recall my return to the wagon lines of the 11<sup>th</sup> Bty, A.F.A. near Dickebusch'.

In May 1918, at Villers Bretonneux, he was again subjected to gassing and treated in the lines. Once more, in September at Cleary on the Somme River, he was gassed and this time was blinded for about six hours. He was treated in the lines by the Regimental Medical Officer. His service papers state that on 18 April 1917 he was admitted to 3<sup>rd</sup> FA and then onto No.47 CCS with debility and that he rejoined his unit 16 May 1917; but his statement in the medical record says, 'In April 1917 I was concussed and sustained a shell wound of the head, and was treated for six weeks in No 47 CCS'. His medical record is very

comprehensive and gives a huge amount of extra information on his war service that his service papers do not mention.

After returning to civil life, Henry Beaton resumed his professional activities but over the years suffered from bad health due to his wartime experiences. He never married and died on 30 June 1956, aged 72. He donated a Webley & Scott Mk1 Self Loading Pistol: Royal Navy, to the Australian War Memorial, which he had picked up at Cape Helles in 1915.<sup>3</sup>

### Acknowledgements

I must thank the following for their help in researching Lt Henry John Beaton:

- Hendrik of ‘Hendriks Medal Corner’, <http://users.skynet.be/hendrik/index.html>, without whose help I would have had to spend many more hours than I did searching through the 4<sup>th</sup> FAB war diary
- the very helpful staff of The National Archives of WA and my very patient wife

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## A SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AT ISANDHLWANA



The Queensland Branch recently received this photograph from an Australian currently living in the UK, and have forwarded it to the journal, certain that many readers will find it of interest. The grave is that of Lt Edgar Oliphant Anstey, located in Woking, Surrey. Says our correspondent in answer to ‘why he was buried in England when he was killed in Africa’: ‘because he was an officer; his family would have the finances to preserve and bring back his body’.

The inscription on the plaque reads:

*Here lies the body of / Lieutenant / Edgar Oliphant Anstey / 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot / Born 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1851 / at Highercombe, South Australia / Killed in action 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1879 / during the final stand of the / 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment in the / Battle of Isandlwana [sic], Zululand, South Africa. / Aged 27 / Faithful unto death, / he was one of the last to fall. / The only casualty of Isandlwana / buried in Britain.*

*Thought to have been the first / South Australian to die in an overseas battle.*

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<sup>3</sup> See the AWM website for details of this item: <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/RELAWM11334.001>

## MT PAINTER – AUSTRALIA’S ROLE IN THE MANHATTAN PROJECT?

Rohan Goyne<sup>1</sup>

This article will examine the role of Australia in the Manhattan Project (the Allied project to develop the atomic bomb) and the elements around it. A painting by Max Ragless sparked the research journey which culminated in this article. Ragless was an official war artist under the scheme and his area of work was the home front. As part of his work, he painted the workings at the Mt Painter uranium mine in the Northern Flinders Range in South Australia.<sup>2</sup> This painting was exhibited as part of an exhibition of his work shown in the Second World War Gallery at the Australian War Memorial.

### The search for uranium ore

The Manhattan Project involved a worldwide search for uranium ore which could be refined to provide U235 material which was necessary for the critical reaction to produce a nuclear chain reaction. The search for a secure source of uranium ore was one element in the Manhattan Project, which was one of largest undertakings of the Allied war effort during World War Two with a total cost of one billion dollars.

The search was a worldwide effort which British archival records indicate extended as far afield as Antarctica and neutral Portugal. Eventually enough material was located from deposits in the Belgian Congo, but while the search was being undertaken, Allied attention turned to known Australian mines at Mt Painter and Radium Hill in South Australia. Both of these mines had been working uranium mines before the war so Allied planners knew of the deposits. Mt Painter, North of Arkaroola in the Flinders Ranges had been a working uranium mine from 1910 to 1931.<sup>3</sup>

### Curtin’s Prime Ministerial Fiat

The Australian Prime Minister John Curtin was in Britain for the Empire Prime Minister’s meeting in May 1944. He was briefed by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer John Anderson about the urgent need to increase production of uranium for Empire and War purposes.<sup>4</sup> Curtin sent a cablegram to Acting Prime Minister Forde on 17 May 1944 providing the substance of Anderson’s briefing, and particularly Mt Painter:

It is recommended therefore that first consideration should be given to the thorough prospecting of the Mount Painter deposits with a view to ascertaining the existence and extent of higher-grade ore at depth. ... On the basis of such information a decision can then be made as to whether development of Mount Painter would be justified ...

John Curtin exercised his prime ministerial fiat to engage Australia in the provision of uranium ore as the raw material for nuclear weapons production in the Manhattan Project without the matter going to the then War Cabinet or Labor Caucus. This quite momentous decision does not rate a mention in David Day’s definitive biography of Curtin, *John Curtin –*

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<sup>1</sup> Rohan Goyne is the current Federal Vice President of the Military Historical Society of Australia and he has contributed several articles to *Sabretache* since 2005. He describes himself as a ‘recreational military historian’. This article was the subject of a lecture to the ACT Branch of the Society in May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au) (site accessed 20 June 2010).

<sup>3</sup> G.M. Mudd, ‘The Legacy of Early Uranium Efforts in Australia 1906-1945’, *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 16, 2005, pp.178-181.

<sup>4</sup> [www.infor.dfat.gov.au](http://www.infor.dfat.gov.au) (site accessed 1 January 2010).

*a Life*.<sup>5</sup> I would argue this is a significant omission given the potential end use for uranium ore from Mount Painter. This action was prior to the formation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), but similar action today (as outlined by Curtin) would lead to sanctions and Australia being considered a rogue state by the international community.

Curtin's fiat also provides the basis to argue that the timeline for Australia's search for the atomic bomb actually began in 1944 with the provision of uranium ore for defence purposes and not as Reynolds argues in his book *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb*,<sup>6</sup> that the timeline for Australia's search begins in 1949 with the Menzies Government.

John Anderson in his cable to Curtin on 21 June 1944 confirms the British Government's desire to purchase any uranium ore from Mount Painter:

I have little doubt that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom will wish to ask you to arrange for all uranium concentrates produced in Australia to be sold to them for the defence purposes of which you are aware. Indeed, I am ready whenever you wish to consider with you the nature of the arrangements which might suitably be made for this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mount Painter is Reopened**

The British Government agreed to fund the initial work to reopen the Mount Painter uranium mine to determine the viability and the extent of the uranium deposit at the site up to the sum of £45,000.<sup>8</sup> Work commenced on reopening the mine in June 1944 under the direction of the South Australian Department of Mines. The reporting arrangements included monthly reports to London about the progress being made at the site. The one remaining archival file reveals tension between the SA Department of Mines and the Commonwealth Minerals Survey Office based in Canberra throughout the project about the rate of progress.

Samples of the ore from the mine were sent to the Minerals Survey Office in Canberra for testing via railway bag. The Minerals Survey Office was located in the Census Building in Canberra on the site presently occupied by the GPO in Alinga Street in Civic. Those tests confirmed the suitability of the samples for weapons production. Indeed, archival materials confirm that one of the railway bags containing ore samples was lost in transit between the mine and Canberra. The same archives do not confirm whether the bag was ever found.

The secret nature of the Manhattan Project was less so at the margins where the correspondence between the Commonwealth Minerals Survey Office and the SA Department of Mines were unclassified. In contrast, the cables between Curtin and Forde were classified as top secret. In July 1945, the Commonwealth reported to the British Government that approximately 2000 pounds (c.900 kilograms) of uranium ore was available from Mount Painter.<sup>9</sup> Once refined, this ore would have produced 6.5 kilograms of U235. In comparison, one kilogram of U235 was required for the Hiroshima bomb.

### **The Case of the Missing Files**

The National Archives of Australia's catalogue lists five files in a series covering the workings at the Mount Painter mine in South Australia from 1944 to 1945. Unfortunately,

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<sup>5</sup> David A. Day, *John Curtin: A Life*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb*, Melbourne UP, Melbourne, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> [www.infor.dfat.gov.au](http://www.infor.dfat.gov.au) (site accessed 1 January 2010).

<sup>8</sup> [www.naa12.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa12.naa.gov.au) (site accessed 1 January 2010).

<sup>9</sup> [www.naa12naa.gov.au](http://www.naa12naa.gov.au) (site accessed 1 January 2010).

according to Archives the forerunner of Geoscience Australia destroyed three files in the series covering the period for the majority of the operation of the mine. The crucial final report to the British Government was contained on the final file in the series in the last five pages. The reasons for the destruction of the files are lost to history, as also is their contents to provide further primary source material for this story.

In conclusion, a number of matters clearly stand out: Firstly, Australia was willing to provide uranium ore for weapons production at the decision of John Curtin alone. Secondly, the timeline for Australia's search for the atomic bomb can be advanced six years to June 1944 when Curtin made the decision to provide uranium ore to Britain. Thirdly – an enduring mystery for the conspiracy theorists – why were three crucial files destroyed by the forerunner of Geoscience Australia? Finally, there was an apparent lack of security in Australia as evidenced by the unclassified correspondence the Minerals Survey Office and SA Department of Mines on the reopening of the Mount Painter uranium mine.

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## COLLECTORS' CORNER

### Can anyone identify this badge ...?



... asks Rod Pratt: 'I have a reproduction of what I assume is a helmet or shako plate (as it's too big for a glengarry badge) relating to the Queensland Volunteer Force (or perhaps later the Queensland Defence Force). It is not described in any of the standard reference guides for pre-Federation badges I've seen. The original plate was probably brass, but this reproduction was cast in lead-pewter and painted black.

'It is 115mm in height by 76mm at its widest and clearly has the word QUEENSLAND centred inside a Maltese Cross which is surmounted by a QVC. Its reverse has two horizontal lugs to hold it in place.

'Does anyone know about the plate this reproduction was made from such as when and by whom used?'

Any information welcome; send to Rod Pratt, PO Box 841, Caboolture QLD 4510.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Peter Englund (trans. Peter Graves), *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War*, Profile Books, London, 2011; ISBN 9781846683428; hardcover, 532 pages, 66 photos; RRP £25.00**

Between 2014 and 2018, many countries will commemorate the centenary of the First World War. In Australia, the Anzac Centenary 2014-2018 commemorative program will encourage Australians to reflect on the past and acknowledge the sacrifice of their ancestors. *The Beauty and Sorrow* will be an important book for those who want a richer understanding of what the war meant for those who lived through it. Peter Englund is a Swedish historian and Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, the group which awards the Nobel Prize for Literature. *The Beauty and the Sorrow* is his first book about the First World War. Inspired by his experiences as a war correspondent, Englund wanted this book to be about what it was like to experience the First World War. The book is the collective diary of twenty people caught in the conflict. Each diary entry is a mini chapter. Each year of the diary is divided into sections, which commence with a handy chronology so that the diarist's individual accounts may be fitted within the wider narrative of the war. Laura de Turczynowicz, the American wife of a Polish aristocrat, kicks it off, when on 2 August 1914 she is woken by the news that war is declared. It ends on 13 November 1918 with Pal Kelemen, a Hungarian cavalryman returning in fear to his home, Budapest, a city in chaos.

Englund's *dramatis personae* brilliantly capture the enormity and multiplicity of the First World War. The wartime experiences of men and women, civilian and military, old and young, from almost a dozen different countries are represented, as are a number of theatres of war including those lesser known – the Eastern Front, the Alps, the Balkans, East Africa and Mesopotamia. This, together with its unconventional structure, frames the picture of war from many different perspectives. For those wanting the Australian experience, William Henry Dawkins, a twenty-one-year-old army engineer at Gallipoli and Olive King, a twenty-eight-year-old driver in the Serbian army, are part of this story. *The Beauty and the Sorrow* is a case where the sum of many parts is greater than the whole. The common experiences of this diverse group of characters highlight vividly the broader narrative of the First World War. War is an adventure until it becomes an endless hell. Widespread deprivation and everyday injury, death and destruction transmute a generation. Fear and courage and love and faith are redefined. The conflict changes the world.

Despite its cleverness, *The Beauty and the Sorrow* must, like all histories, be judged ultimately on how well they tell the truth about the past. Englund's reportage style can be disconcerting in regard to this. The book, though, is based on the sources left behind by these people: memoirs, letters and diaries. For instance, the stirring account of Paolo Monelli's involvement in the defence of Monte Tondarecar ends with Monelli's own journal entry for that day: *Non é passato* (He did not get through). Englund acknowledges that readers may wonder how one phrase in a diary can provide a picture of a day's fighting. The footnote makes clear that this account came from a range of sources including Monelli's own book about his war experiences.

Interesting and well-placed footnotes add to the richness of this book. These often reaffirm that this is a book about how the war was experienced, not how it came to be understood. While Harvey Cushing, an American surgeon, can see the problems soldiers are having with their feet, we learn that 'trench foot' is yet to be named in 1915. Likewise in 1916, Michael

Corday, a French civil servant, hears about a new war machine being used for the first time. Developed in secrecy, the tank was initially described as being a 'water tank' to transport water to troops. Maps would have really added to *The Beauty and the Sorrow*. Englund makes you care for his *dramatis personae* but given the geographical diversity of settings it is at times difficult to place them. It would have been pleasing not to have to second-guess where the action was taking place.

Lastly, the Australian experience of the First World War is given special recognition by Englund, as the book is

Dedicated to the memory of Carl Englund, Private in the Australian Army, Service Number 3304, 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Division, 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion, Fought at the Battles of Messines and Passchendale, 1917, Died in the fighting outside Amiens, 13 September 1918, His place of burial unknown.

I have been unable to find out the link between Carl and Peter Englund. From an Australian perspective it is poignant that this landmark book is dedicated to an Australian soldier of the First World War. The book itself, though, dramatically reminds us that people from many different countries and backgrounds shared the sacrifices of that conflict.

**Rohan Goyne**

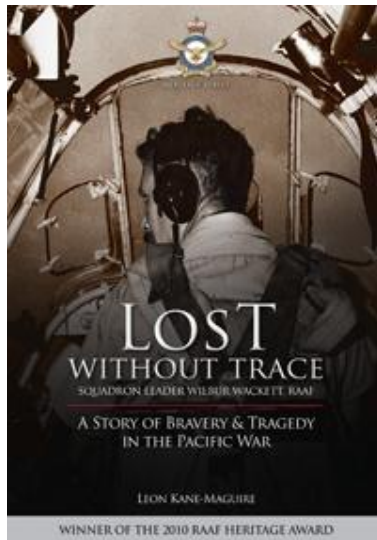
***'Over and Out!': Sam's Story. The Private War Diary of Captain Samuel Cutler, Army Air Corps, US Forces in Australia 1942-1944, ed. Robert S. Cutler, Xlibris Corporation, 2011; ISBN 9781456816223 (hardcover; also softcover and ebook), 264 pp, many photos***

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Sam Cutler joined the US Army Air Force. *Over and Out* is a memoir of his experiences as one of the initial cadre of officers who went into battle in defence of Australia during the Second World War. In February 1942 Capt Cutler and his men were based with the Eighth Air Force at Bangor, Maine. On 18 February 1942 they boarded the RMS *Queen Mary* in Boston and set sail for Sydney. When they arrived on 28 March, Cutler and the 8000 others of the US Army Air Force were encamped at Randwick Racecourse. On 24 April they set out by train to Townsville, some deploying at the Antill Plains airbase, while others including Cutler were stationed at Woodstock air base, adjacent to the highway linking Townsville with Charters Towers, where still other US Air Force personnel were stationed.

In May 1942 Cutler was sent to Port Moresby; while there his wartime diary was safeguarded by the Townsville librarian. In November 1942 Cutler was deployed to Brisbane where Gen MacArthur had his headquarters in the AMP Building (now the MacArthur Museum). In 1943 Cutler was reassigned as liaison officer for the new Army Rest Camp in Mackay, where he organised the American Red Cross R&R centre for battle-weary servicemen airlifted from New Guinea. In September 1944 Cutler, promoted to major, returned to the USA by ship, reaching San Francisco on 12 April 1945. He died on 6 August 1990 at the age of 86. His diary was rescued by his son Robert Cutler who edited it in order to document his father's impressive wartime service. Some 300 handwritten pages of his father's words have been turned into 17 chapters; included are rare photographs and background information related to the daily entries, plus war news updates at various points to put the diary entries into a wider perspective. I am sure many Australians will enjoy reading this fascinating wartime story of Capt Sam Cutler, US Army Air Force.

**Darryl McIntyre**

**Leon Kane-Maguire, *Lost Without Trace. Squadron Leader Wilbur Wackett, RAAF: A Story of Bravery and Tragedy in the Pacific War*, Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, 2012; ISBN 9781920800642; hardback, 243pp, b&w photos; RRP \$25.00**



The biennial RAAF Heritage Awards were established in 1987 to foster an interest in the history of service aviation and enhance RAAF records. Awards are given for outstanding achievements in literature and art, and assistance is given to those undertaking historical research. As well as a generous prize, the literary award includes publication of the winning manuscript. These memoirs, biographies and historical accounts have added considerably to Australian air force knowledge. *Lost Without Trace*, which won the 2010 award, is a welcome addition to the RAAF's publication program.

Leon Kane-Maguire was one of Australia's most respected scientists and, as well as over 175 scientific papers, he had written or co-written three RAAF squadron histories. He died in January 2011 and never saw his final work in print. *Lost*

*Without Trace* is a biography of Wilbur Wackett, son of Lawrence Wackett, who flew in the Australian Flying Corps during the Great War and founded the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation. Wilbur followed his father's footsteps into the air force and served with 2, 24, 75 and 31 squadrons. With 75 Squadron, he participated in the New Guinea air campaign during which he was shot down. Barefooted, he spent a month crossing Papua's rugged terrain, avoiding capture, to return to his comrades at Port Moresby. In September 1944, 23-year-old Wilbur's Beaufighter crashed in the Northern Territory. Evidence was later discovered that Wilbur and his navigator had survived, but there was no sign of what had become of them. The bulk of this biography deals with Wilbur's background, training and RAAF service, but the heart is his loss in September 1944 and the aftermath.

I enjoyed *Lost Without Trace* but I have one concern and one criticism which I will get out of the way so I can give it the praise it deserves. Firstly, heritage manuscripts are supposed to be 55,000 words, although longer manuscripts may be considered. *Lost Without Trace* is just under 60,000 words (including standard preliminaries). With such a tight word limit an author must make hard decisions about what to include and what to omit; the ruling doctrine must be, 'if it does not specifically relate to the central subject, leave it out'. My concern is that Kane-Maguire did not make the best use of his word limit when he included large extracts from non-Wilbur material. For example, blocks of scene-setting recollections should have been pared to a few descriptive sentences, and a handful of survey paragraphs would have served better than the pages describing the fall of Rabaul when Wilbur – a recent posting to 24 Squadron – was in Townsville. My other criticism is no fault of the author: it is the lack of an index. I believe an index is essential for any historical work.

And now to the praise. Kane-Maguire's literary talents are obvious in *Lost Without Trace*. He had the support of Wilbur's extended family and competently draws on their archives and other available source material. The text is well written and sparkles with Wilbur's letters and diary extracts. His whimsical sketches are a charming and enlightening addition. It is a shame that Wilbur did not write more as there are large gaps in his diaries, but they are largely filled by drawing on recollections and the historical record. The danger in quoting letters in their entirety, as Kane-Maguire has done, is that the incidental can distract from the important.

Where few contemporary witnesses remain, however, they become an essential gauge of personality and character. In including Wilbur's letters almost unedited, Kane-Maguire has allowed Wilbur's personality to shine through. His enthusiasm for his flying and RAAF work is vivid, and I for one was glad to read of the exciting and mundane in his service career. Perhaps Wilbur's account of his difficult trek across Papua could have been shortened but, penned shortly after his return to Australia, it is a significant document and through it the reader gains a clear impression of the hardship Wilbur – and other evaders, for that matter – endured during the long and dangerous walk home through Japanese territory.

I always find 'last letters' moving. With the benefit of hindsight, I cannot keep the knowledge of what-happens-next from my reading of them. And so it is with Wilbur's. It is to his parents, and, as he congratulates them on their silver anniversary, he shows clearly the depth of his love for his young bride. He touches on the pride and love for his daughter who he will never see, and we feel his stoic sadness that he is missing out on her growing up. His joy in flying is briefly encapsulated when he proudly declares that 'I have my own kite now and she's a little honey.' The final poignant request – 'do not worry about me I'll be OK, and home again before you know where you are' – is heart wrenching. This is one letter that needed to be published in full.

Wilbur's story resonates. He never returned home. His body was never found. We share the Wacketts' pain, their frustration at the dearth of official information, Lawrence Wackett's desperate attempts at string-pulling to find out more, and the ultimate despair of not knowing what happened. We grieve at the continuing loss for the Wackett family: the deaths of Wilbur's daughter when she was only fourteen months old and wife Peggie at a young age. The Wackett family only learned in 1980, by chance, that Wilbur had survived the crash and Peggie, who died in 1956, never knew. We wonder at how vital grief-assuaging information and relics were not passed on when first discovered. In piecing together what happened to Wilbur after his September 1944 combat, Kane-Maguire has provided closure for Julie, Peggie's daughter from her second marriage, and Wilbur's extended family. Leon Kane-Maguire's posthumous literary gift is a fine biography and a fitting memorial to Wilbur. Recommended.

**Kristen Alexander**

**Colin Campbell, *More Bang for No Bucks*, Camp Bell Press, Canberra, 2011; ISBN 9780987072009, iv+92 pages, 78 photos plus maps and diagrams; RRP \$27.50**

In June 1967, concern about gaps in the defences of the 1 Australian Task Force base at Nui Dat led to the formation of an unusual unit without precedent in Australian combat history. Officially designated 6 Troop, A Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment, it consisted of a battery of six M108 self-propelled (SP) 105mm howitzers borrowed from the US Army in Vietnam at no expense to the Australian government (hence the book's slightly odd title). The loan was for six months, when it was expected that Australian Centurion tanks would arrive and take over the armoured role. Given the ad hoc nature of 6 Troop, and the fact that SP guns represent both armoured vehicles and artillery, it's perhaps to be expected that personnel consisted of detachments from 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry and two artillery regiments. Less expected is the fact that nearly half the crews came from the two infantry battalions currently on tour with 1 ATF, 2 RAR and 7 RAR. Even more surprising is that the nominal roll of 6 Troop constituted a grand total of 35 all ranks, making *More Bang for No Bucks* surely one of the more exclusive Australian unit histories ever published.

Author Colin Campbell was the unit's second and final commander, and he has managed to produce something which, for a small book, packs almost as big a punch as its subject matter. Succinctly and clearly, he takes us through the formation, composition and service of 6 Troop, including the debt it owed the US 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment, the renowned 'Blackhorse' Cavalry – a 'super regiment' made up of all arms of service including SP artillery – for training in the use of the M108s. He even manages to satisfy the curiosity of us uniform and insignia tragics in describing how personnel usually wore lightweight aviation overalls with black RAAC berets sporting their parent corps badges, and how the unit designed and painted its own unit badge on its vehicles. At the same time Campbell refers throughout the text to the fine collection of personal photographs assembled in the middle of the book, and illustrates a number of points through small but useful maps and diagrams.

In addition, the narrative pays homage to the one foray by the Australian army into its own SP gun, the Yeramba of the 1950s, fourteen of which were constructed out of obsolete M3 Grant hulls and leftover 25pdr guns, but which never saw active service. There are also full specifications for the M108, which turns out to have been quite a rare vehicle itself, in that it was manufactured only during 1962-63 before being superseded by the M109 armed with the heavier 155mm gun. There is also a comprehensive glossary, a nominal roll, and a satisfyingly detailed list of endnotes which reveals *More Bang for No Bucks* to be a thoroughly researched and well supported study. This is a book which should appeal to anyone interested in Australia's involvement in Vietnam, unit histories, and military hardware generally, and is highly recommended.

**Paul Skrebels**

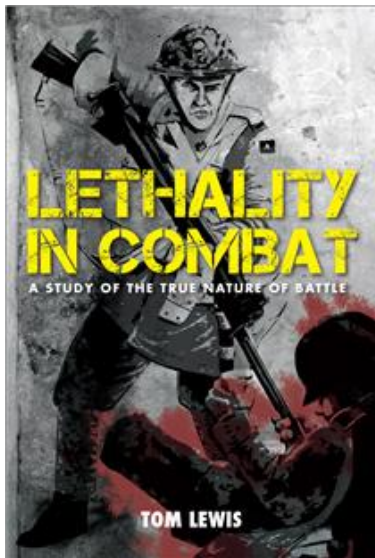
**Terry Smith, *Training the Bodes: Australian Army advisers training Cambodian infantry battalions – A postscript to the Vietnam War*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport NSW, 2011; ISBN 9781921941016; hardback, 224 pages, RRP \$34.99**

The period dealt with in Terry Smith's book is a little-known part of the Vietnam War. I spoke to many Vietnam veterans who knew next to nothing about the Australian Army Training Team and the Cambodians. Smith provides a detailed background on the involvement of the AATV and its new role in training the Cambodians, especially after the Australian Task Force had vacated its main base at Nui Dat. The book explains the reason why the Cambodians were used and why the training camp was located in Phuoc Tuy Province. The author is well qualified to write this book. He served as an infantryman for 30 years and volunteered for service in Vietnam. This included training the Cambodians when he was posted to the Team, which was made up of both Australians and New Zealanders.

The book is well researched and generally easy to follow. It includes a comprehensive bibliography, endnotes, maps, illustrations and a nominal roll listing the Team members posted to train the Cambodians. Almost all those posted were senior NCOs or officers with many years of training and a high degree of professionalism. The only negative comment I would make is that those of us who are not military-minded might find it necessary with all the abbreviations and acronyms to turn frequently to the glossary of terms for definitions. On the whole, however, I would recommend *Training the Bodes* to any enthusiast interested in the activities of the AATV.

**Michael English**

**Tom Lewis, *Lethality in Combat: A Study of the True Nature of Battle*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport NSW, 2012; ISBN 9781921941511; hardcover, 368 pp, RRP \$34.99**



*Lethality in Combat* is an argument for the redrafting of certain passages of the Geneva Convention in the light of the realities of contemporary combat. It is also a response to the body of literature that calls into question the behaviour of the ‘warrior’. Lewis’s main targets are Joanna Bourke’s *An Intimate History of Killing* and Lt Col David Grossman’s *On Killing*. The text is pervaded with the view that Western governments and societies cannot condemn and/or neglect the soldiers that protect them.

The book falls into three main sections. The first deals with the killing of soldier-combatants in war; the second with the killing of prisoners; and the final section with the killing of civilians. Lewis’s methodology is to select an aspect of his subject, for example Combat Euphoria (ch.2), then to cite personal accounts that describe this experience, and then arrive at conclusions. These personal narratives are drawn from memoirs, diaries and other records of soldiers’ experiences of war. A large proportion of the book is taken up with quoting these experiences or paraphrasing them. The main text is preceded by a short introduction that states his premise, a discussion of sources, acknowledgements and a brief glossary. The book closes with a short conclusion.

The weight of Lewis’s argument is carried on the content of the personal narratives he has selected. He does not adequately address the limitations of this material. When he does talk about them he claims that soldiers only self-censor for legal reasons; to avoid condemnation for their actions; or because the reader will not understand their experiences. He does not consider that the experiences may be too traumatic to be related adequately. If he did, it would undermine his idealised image of the effective warrior. He does not consider the nature and construction of memory and how that impacts on the retelling of events and experiences. There is a growing body of literature on this topic, of which Alistair Thomson’s *Anzac Memories* and Robin Gerster’s *Big-noting* are two fine Australian examples.

Lewis fails to address the cultural and historical context of the passages he quotes from and how these forces impact on soldiers’ recollections. On p.11 he writes, ‘the book’s methodology is to examine accounts of combat, reject them if they seem false, and use them to suit the three main areas of discussion of the work’. This is a remarkable admission for a historian. While many historians may do just this, few would admit to considering only the material which they agree with and ignoring, or not addressing, that which might compromise their opinions. His misuse of sources goes beyond mere selection. Frequently he quotes a passage and then only highlights the content that supports his views, while ignoring telling words or phrases that might suggest an alternative or more complex interpretation.

When, for example, he states that ‘Grossman is wrong’, he does so partly on the strength of a misreading of a statistic Grossman cites. The subsequent analysis by Lewis of these numbers is therefore rendered meaningless. On many occasions he illustrates a point by saturating the reader with examples drawn from many different eras and widely differing circumstances. He

hopes that weight of evidence will prove his point. Too often these stories contradict each other or are too conditional on their situation. The result simply confuses the reader.

The library of war reminiscences is huge. It is easy to find examples of events that will support any proposition. Only a detailed analysis of these memories will provide informative insight. Lewis does not do this. He uses stories to illustrate, not illuminate. All the material he draws from comes from readily available sources that would be familiar to anyone with an interest in military history. His analysis is simplistic and narrow and adds nothing new to the field of study of men in combat.

Lewis's conclusions are therefore naive and inadequate. He calls for the Geneva Convention to be rewritten to reflect 'the truth of battle' but he does not state which parts of the Convention need reforming, neither does he suggest how it should be redrafted. He states that the killing of prisoners is commonplace and at times a necessity and that therefore the soldiers responsible should not be charged with a crime. His argument here is that the frequency of a crime, or its circumstance, justifies it. He fails to understand the distinction in law between the word 'charged' and 'convicted' or the capacity of a court to consider circumstance. Frequency has never been a valid legal defence.

He argues that revenge is a positive motivating force for a soldier; that is it good for unit cohesion and that it makes a soldier more effective. He goes on to say that soldiers who kill prisoners while consumed by this passion are doing what anyone in their circumstances would do and so their actions should be ignored. After a lifetime of counselling many hundreds of American Vietnam Veterans, Jonathan Shay MD, PhD, wrote two books on these veterans' experience of the war and their return to America. In *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, Shay addresses in detail the lust for vengeance and its impact on the individual. In his conclusion he writes,

Allowing a berserk, revenge-driven soldier to return to battle is to send him to probable death and knowingly to send out a man who cannot distinguish atrocities from acceptable military conduct. He has lost the capacity for restraint. If the soldier survives physically, he is certain to be gravely disabled from participation in civilian society – probably for life.

Consider the actions of Staff Sgt Robert Bales in Afghanistan when comparing these two responses to the same condition.

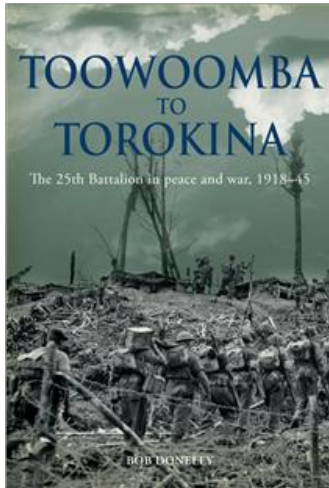
Lewis considers the soldier only in his combat setting. He does not see the wider context in which the actions of that soldier take place. A soldier's actions will impact on the rest of his individual life and on his life within his community. Soldiers are surrogates for the society that sends them to war. What they do, the society does also. A soldier's actions will mark the history of that society for the length of its own memory. Such a subject is too important to be addressed in the banal manner in which it is treated in Lewis's book.

**John Savage**

**Bob Doneley, *Toowoomba to Torokina : the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion in peace and war, 1918-45*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport NSW, 2012; ISBN 9781921941580, hdbk, 448 pp., RRP \$34.99**

Author Bob Doneley records the history of 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Darling Downs Regiment, from its evolution from the 11<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Regiment in 1918 to the final campaigns in the Pacific in 1945. The first chapter covers inter-war training activities, annual camp details, commanding officers, government policy towards compulsory military training and subsequent recruitment, and associated rifle clubs. December 1939 saw the announcement of

the reintroduction of compulsory military training (national service) to replenish the militia after the formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF. War in the Pacific resulted in the call up of universal trainees and militia on full-time duty for the duration of the war. After training and a role of Queensland coastline defence, the 25<sup>th</sup> Bn was deployed to Papua in July 1942.



On disembarking at Milne Bay these infantry were employed as labourers rather than conducting crucial training. Later, Brig Field ordered patrols and the battalion received its baptism of fire on 4 August under a Japanese air raid. The unit's defence of Milne Bay against the Japanese land invasion in late August is told from interviews, letters and memoirs of battle voices. A critical stand by Sgts Stan Steele's and Joffre Ludlow's platoons of C Company between the Japanese and No.3 Strip delayed the advance of the Japanese long enough, preventing them from assaulting the air strip before the defences were ready. On the night of 30-31 August the Japanese failed in a frontal attack across No.3 Strip due to intense Australian and American fields of fire. Maj Gen Clowes' (Milne Bay GOC) planned counterattack and advance culminated in Japan's first defeat in a land battle.

After Milne Bay the battalion was deployed to Porlock Harbour, Papua, and then spent most of 1943 training at Donadabu. In December the battalion returned to Australia after 17 months' service overseas. While at the Atherton Tablelands Lt Col Edward Miles DSO relinquished command to Lt Col John G. McKinna. The battalion was sent to Madang in July 1944 and employed on work parties. Nearly two years after Milne Bay the unit commenced patrols west of the Sepik River. On 19 February 1943 the government had passed the Militia Bill which allowed militia units to serve anywhere south of the Equator in the Pacific. The battalion sailed for Torokina in November 1944. Next month it attacked Pearl Ridge in central Bougainville, capturing the objective after two days and which was described by official historian Gavin Long as 'one of the outstanding feats of arms in this campaign'.

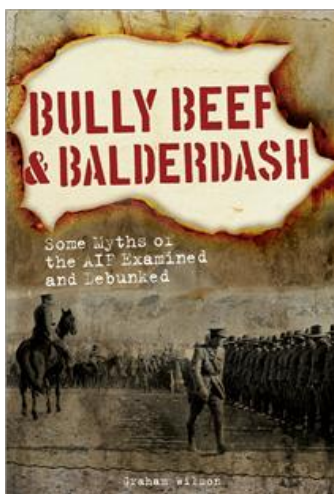
The battalion then moved to the southern sector of the island, advancing along Buin Road, constantly incurring casualties. Eliminating three Japanese weapon-pits and then a Juki machine gun post, Corporal Reg Rattey was awarded the VC for his actions. In a rare major counter-offensive at this stage in the war, two Japanese regiments repeatedly attacked the battalion's defensive position at Slater's Knoll over Easter. Surrounded, A Company joined by survivors of B Coy were threatened with being overrun and annihilated. The timely arrival of two platoons of D Coy and a composite HQ platoon with three tanks of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Armd Regt relieved the besieged.

As a minor criticism, I felt a more detailed map of the area of operations in southern Bougainville was warranted. The troops of the 25<sup>th</sup> Bn were involved in unusually heavy fighting in the central and southern sectors of Bougainville. The author could have examined the significance of this more, particularly Slater's Knoll, on the battalion and the enemy. The men's attitude towards the campaign could also have been discussed. The work is completed with a roll of honour, nominal roll, citations, extensive endnotes and index. This book is a fine testimony to a proud militia battalion with WW2 campaign honours and awards comparable, if not superior, to 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF units. It is a welcome addition to Australia's repertoire of unit histories.

**Brenton Brooks**



**Graham Wilson, *Bully Beef and Balderdash: Some Myths of the AIF Examined and Debunked*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport NSW, 2012; ISBN 9781921941566; hardcover, 600 pages, many photos and tables, bibliography and endnotes; RRP \$34.99**



This is a clever book. Ostensibly it's another addition to the growing list of material being produced around the theme of 'mythbusting' – and a good example of this emerging genre it is: highly informative, impeccably researched, and deftly narrated. In actuality it turns out to be as much a compendium of the AIF as it is an exposé, and perhaps will prove even more valuable in the long term as the former than the latter.

Among the First World War myths the book tackles are some well-known ones, such as of light horsemen disobeying orders by shooting their faithful horses, the Walers, rather than handing them over to the locals in the Middle East; of Anzacs rampaging through the 'Wozzer', the red-light district of Cairo in 1915, administering rough 'colonial' justice; and of AIF recruits being predominantly bushmen with so many innate skills that they barely required training to turn them into crack troops. I won't spoil things by revealing what author Graham Wilson has to say on such myths, but not surprisingly he busts them all wide open, and very convincingly, too. Other subjects covered are less familiar, such as the bizarre story that the photo portrait of VC winner Lt A.E. Gaby was taken posthumously – that is, of his corpse!

However, it's in dealing with the less specific, more 'attitudinal' myths that this book's real value comes to the fore. So when, for example, it discusses the popular notion – here in Australia at least – that the Allied effort at Gallipoli consisted largely of Anzac troops with some assistance from other nationalities, not only are we confronted with evidence that Anzacs constituted only a third of all the Allies present on the peninsula, but we are presented with as comprehensive and concise an order of battle of the campaign as is likely to be found anywhere. Readers already familiar with Wilson's contributions to *Sabretache* will be aware of just how fond – and how capable – he is of making very precise and finely tuned lists of units. It's a passion and a skill he carries over into *Bully Beef and Balderdash*, so that across a number of chapters he manages to provide a complete overview of every unit of the AIF, including non-Australian support units. In a similar vein, in discussing misconceptions about the diet of frontline soldiers, we get a full analysis of the ways the AIF conducted supply and victualling, including tables listing exactly what its troops were fed. In busting the myth apparently prevalent in certain Catholic circles that VC recommendations to soldiers of that faith were officially quashed, Wilson takes the opportunity to catalogue awards to Catholics of all nationalities since the medal's inception.

These lists for me are the book's added strengths, and for which it will maintain its place on my reference shelves. But no less worthy is the method by which the author has gathered his information – and has carried out the entire mythbusting process itself: by sheer dint of close research through resources such as war diaries which, as he rightly points out, are freely available to anybody with the desire to pursue the issues for themselves. And if at times Wilson's style is a little too insistent – a veritable literary terrier snapping at the reader's heels – it's because he knows that the significance of myths to our constructions of identity and nationality will make few of us dare or even bother to question them, although question them we must. So while I hesitate to trot out the old line about 'Every home should have one', *Bully Beef and Balderdash* is a book which anyone fed up with the drivel pouring out of

the popular media about Australians at war, and who wishes their children, and their children's children, to be proud of our military heritage for the right reasons, should own.

Paul Skrebels

***90 Years of the RAAF: A Snapshot History*, Royal Australian Air Force, Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, 2011; ISBN 9781920800567; softcover, 325 pp.; RRP \$50.00**

This is a large, weighty book, lavishly illustrated in a magazine-type format where each page has a photo with an accompanying paragraph of text. Celebrating ninety years of one of the world's oldest air forces, the book is divided into nine sections reflecting on the RAAF's nine decades. The foreword, by the Chief of Air Force, makes it clear this is not a traditional comprehensive history but a 'snapshot' format which includes all aspects of RAAF activity. Given the quality of the publication, it is difficult to imagine such a project would be commercially feasible in the modern environment. Indeed, the foreword implies that the purpose of the book is to educate currently serving RAAF members. This it does in a very attractive and easy to read way; in true 'coffee table' fashion it can be picked up and any part read for just a few minutes at a time – there is no traditional narrative linking each page.

Gathering and choosing the material for such a book must have been a Herculean task. From the point of view as a reader who regards themselves as reasonably well schooled in RAAF history, I was pleasantly surprised to find the material both engaging and informative. The 'snapshots' have been well chosen and are a truly fresh approach to the subject – many histories of the RAAF have been produced in recent decades, often on anniversary occasions. This presents the subject in an entirely new manner, and the editors should be congratulated for producing something new and interesting regarding a subject that has been broadly 'done' many times.

Given the 'snapshot' approach, you cannot be critical of the exclusion or inclusion of any particular item. But I was interested, for example, in how the mammoth subject of WW2 and the 1940s decade was presented. Aside from the 'glamorous' aspects of aerial warfare, I was interested in how two important but rather sensitive issues were treated or indeed included at all. Firstly, the Jones/Bostock feud is mentioned and it is admitted that it effectively split the RAAF and greatly weakened the organisation. Arguably, however, Jones gets treated roughly. It is noted that he attended the Japanese surrender ceremony onboard USS *Missouri*, but Blamey only invited Bostock to sign the surrender document. This is true but out of context as it fails to mention other naval and army officers were also present but were not asked to sign. In 1992, the death of Jones is mentioned alongside a rather gaunt photograph. He was noted as the last surviving chief of any WW2 military service. However, the paragraph concludes with the strongly worded statement that 'his impact on the RAAF has been assessed as "surprisingly slight" because of his uninspiring personality and mediocre skills as conceptual thinker'. Harsh words indeed! And possibly at odds with Peter Helson's 2010 biography of Jones by the same publisher.

The second example is the 'Morotai Mutiny', which does receive a brief mention. Aside from these most basic of tests, if there is a deficiency, the incredibly brave but wasteful Hudson operations at the start of the war do not receive adequate coverage. This may be due to the lack of photographs during this critical period, a problem with any publication that seeks to relate history via illustrations. Similarly the huge EATS bases, which transformed various

regional centres in Australia, are hardly mentioned at all (save for a famous photo of two ‘piggybacked’ Avro Ansons).

With so much to cover in WW2, naval cruisers and 9 Sqn appear over-represented. There are at least six photos on this theme, including double-page spreads on HMAS *Australia* and HMAS *Sydney*. Similarly, there are two separate references to Japanese submarine-launched ‘Glen’ floatplane reconnaissance flights: probably over-done given the scant cover on other subjects. However, this is possibly nit-picking and arguments could easily be mounted for or against any particular subject requiring inclusion in such a broad tome. Overall the editors have done a good job. They are clearly on top of recent research as well. The 1943 painting of a Wirraway famously downing a Zero is included, but it is correctly noted that the victim was instead most probably a Japanese Army Ki-43 ‘Oscar’ fighter.

Really, given the primary purpose of the publication, such arguments are admittedly ancillary. Probably like most of the readers of this review, my own personal interest is in ‘history’. I follow current ADF matters in the media, but I don’t pretend to be fully abreast of recent operations. Thus the chapters on the last few decades are most illuminating. Among other things, it shows an incredibly active and diverse force even during so-called ‘peacetime’. Two things stood out in particular. One was the ‘operational’ deployment of small groups of specialists, such as air traffic controllers, to dangerous and rarely heralded areas such as Somalia. The other was the changing nature of the RAAF. At the start of WW2 there were no dedicated air transport squadrons. Nowadays, high technology transports such as C-17s are most definitely at the ‘sharp end’ of the RAAF, and at least one such aircraft is celebrated with an all-female crew.

Overall this book is welcomed for its fresh new approach. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive RAAF history and is not. But it does relate many of the hard won traditions and culture of the RAAF in a most engaging way. Recommended.

**Peter Ingman**

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Email your contribution ([editor@mhsa.org.au](mailto:editor@mhsa.org.au)) or contact the editor with your idea.

Here’s your chance to get published and to contribute to the pool of knowledge and resources in our field at the same time.

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