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Sabretache



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EDITORIAL

August saw the centenary commemorations of the outbreak of the First World War in full swing. One of the first of these took the form of a service in Glasgow Cathedral to mark Britain's entry into the war on the 4th of that month. It was covered live on ABC television and included a historical commentary by Australian presenters and appropriate analysts interspersed with on-the-spot interviews with UK PM David Cameron and Australian Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove among others. It looked like shaping up into a fairly humdrum affair full of predictable generalisations about the war and its consequences, rounded off with the usual religious observances. What saved the event for me was the inclusion of a number of personal stories among the preliminary material, and within the service itself of extracts from contemporary memoirs and diaries, some of them read by appropriate current service personnel.

It proved to me yet again that while statistics and other facts about war can often merge into a haze of information that very quickly loses its impact, the experiences of individuals involved in these events can help restore our perspectives. The power of the personal story was brought home even more forcefully by my part in editing the autobiographical work of 27th Battalion member Russell Colman, which my co-editor Claire Woods describes in an article in this issue. Colman may not be a completely typical representative of the AIF, but his insightful observations and intelligent comments speak eloquently about the effects of the war on the civilian-turned-soldier, as well as bringing the era sharply back to life even after a near century.

Fortunately, producers and writers have long recognised the potential of the individual voice to move readers and audiences, and August has also ushered in a number of TV programs which draw on this for their inspiration. Local productions vary from a soapie about nurses to a dramatised documentary series that brackets a range of Australian lives during the war. This latter sheds some very interesting light on the home front as well as the battlefield, and in particular reveals the disparity of opinions that existed about Australia's involvement in the war. From an international source comes a similar show drawing on fourteen diaries kept by people caught up in the conflict, including Adelaide-born Ethel Cooper, an extraordinary woman who found herself stranded in Germany while studying music there, and unable to escape until the Armistice. A comparison between these two shows demonstrates very clearly that while Australians had much to endure during the war, we were very fortunate not to have to suffer the horrors and privations of invasion and occupation on the one hand, and the starvation and shortages brought on by military action on the other.

Regardless of whether any of these presentations has appeal for readers of *Sabretache*, we certainly share much of their concern with the individual side of history as with its large-scale aspects. There are also plenty of outlets opening up for expressing those interests. As an example, I recommend a look at the RSL Virtual War Memorial site described under this issue's 'Page and Screen' column. Congratulations are due to State Deputy President Steve Larkins, RSL SA, for his vision and hard work in instigating the site, which points the way ahead as to how commemoration might evolve in this digital age. But there are many similar initiatives under way in other states and institutions as well, providing ever-widening opportunities for research and writing. This centenary period is the perfect time to get involved.

Paul Skrebels

THE OVER-EXPANSION OF THE AIF IN 1916 – EFFECTS AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES THEN, IMPLICATIONS NOW

John Donovan¹

Introduction

In 1916, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was expanded from eight infantry brigades (seven of which had fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula) to 15 brigades in five divisions. Further expansion was considered in 1917, and preliminary steps were taken to raise the 6th Division, but this was never completed. This expanded infantry organisation, together with the 13 regiments of light horse and the Australian element of the Imperial Camel Corps (ICC),² produced a force beyond the capability of the nation to support. The AIF struggled with ongoing reinforcement crises for the remainder of the First World War, while Australian society was torn by the two conscription referenda.

This article examines the over-expansion of the AIF, considers the scale of forces that Australia could have maintained under various conditions, and reviews the implications for the AIF and the nation. It describes briefly the New Zealand and Canadian experiences, and suggests alternatives that might have been considered at the time. Finally, it offers some principles for current leaders.

The Expansion Program

In January 1916, after the evacuation of Gallipoli, the 1st and 2nd Divisions and the 4th Brigade concentrated in Egypt, joining the 8th Brigade, which arrived too late for the Gallipoli campaign. Lt Gen Sir Alexander Godley, temporarily commanding the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC Corps), and commander of the AIF while in that position, estimated that after the three divisions of the ANZAC Corps had been brought up to strength by the reinforcements available in Egypt, there would be some 40,000 Australian and New Zealand troops still available. To these could be added another 50,000 troops promised by Australia and some 12,000 reinforcements expected each month.³

Godley proposed to form additional divisions from these troops. The 1st and 2nd Divisions would remain in the ANZAC Corps, with a New Zealand division formed from the original New Zealand Infantry Bde, the New Zealand Rifle Bde that was then arriving in Egypt, and another brigade formed from reinforcements. Two new Australian divisions, to which would be added a third new division formed in Australia from the promised 50,000 men, would be formed into an Australian Army Corps.⁴ The Australian government had offered three divisions additional to the 1st and 2nd in November 1915, but the form of the new contingent had not been finalised by January 1916, when Godley made his proposal.

¹ John Donovan lives in retirement near Coffs Harbour, where he writes book reviews and the occasional journal article. He has also edited many books on aspects of Australia's military history. His duties during more than 32 years in the Defence Department ranged across scientific intelligence, force development, human resources and personnel policy, and financial resources and programming. His Bachelor of Science degree did not help him with this article, but his nine years as an active Army Reservist piqued his interest in the subject.

² The ten Australian companies of the ICC were later converted to become the 14th and 15th Light Horse regiments, See H.S. Gullett, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol VII, The AIF in Sinai and Palestine*, University of Queensland Press reprint, St Lucia, 1984, pp.211, 640

³ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol III, The AIF in France, 1916*, University of Queensland Press reprint, St Lucia, 1982, p.32

⁴ Bean, *Vol III*, p.32

Godley suggested that the ANZAC Corps and Australian Army Corps be organised into an army under its own commander.⁵ The staff of the new Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF), Gen Sir Archibald Murray, suggested instead that an Australian and New Zealand Training Centre and Base be formed to handle the extra men.⁶ Murray, however, backed the plan for an Australasian army, which might help him protect Egypt against an invasion from Sinai, and would also provide ‘as large and efficient a force as possible, available for a strenuous campaign in France’.⁷ Lt Gen Sir William Birdwood also favoured the proposal to form an Australasian army when he returned to Egypt from Gallipoli. Birdwood borrowed Brig Gen Brudenell White from Godley to plan the expansion. However, to the disappointment of Birdwood and many members of his staff and the wider force, the War Office rejected the proposal to form an Australasian army, and the two proposed corps were named I and II ANZAC Corps.⁸ White prepared and published some 50 ‘Circular Memoranda’ that prescribed in detail the actions to be taken during the expansion.

Four additional brigades were required to form the 4th and 5th Divisions, which took in the 4th Bde (released from the New Zealand and Australian Div by the arrival of the New Zealand Rifle Bde and formation of the third New Zealand brigade), and the 8th Bde. The new brigades were formed by splitting the battalions of the 1st to 4th Bdes, each generating a ‘parent’ and a ‘pup’ battalion in the process. The separate parts were brought up to strength using reinforcements. Splitting the original battalions was not a popular option, but Birdwood insisted on it. The first of White’s memoranda was dated 12 February 1916, and detailed the process for splitting the original 16 battalions to form the 45th to 60th Bns.⁹ They became the 12th to 15th Bdes, while the 9th to 11th Bdes, comprised of the 33rd to 44th Bns, were formed in Australia for the 3rd Division.

While the process of splitting did provide a core of experienced personnel in each new battalion, Bean estimated that ‘nearly three-quarters of the men in both “veteran” and new battalions were now reinforcements’.¹⁰ The training standard of the reinforcements varied. Some had never handled a rifle before, discipline was lacking, and many did not have a full issue of clothing. Training was disrupted by requirements to provide personnel to form machine gun companies and pioneer battalions, and units were unable to get even six to eight weeks of uninterrupted training before moving to France. The training deficiencies were clearly demonstrated by the 5th Div at Fromelles.

Providing sufficient artillery was difficult, particularly as the Western Front divisional establishment had 16 batteries, 12 of field guns and four of howitzers.¹¹ This was almost twice the nine-battery establishment of the two existing Australian divisions, which had no howitzer batteries.¹² Provision on the Western Front scale for the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Divisions would require almost quadrupling the Australian artillery available in Egypt, from 18 to 64 batteries.¹³ With four artillery pieces in each battery, this would give each division 48 field guns and 16

⁵ Bean, *Vol III*, p.33

⁶ Bean, *Vol III*, p.33

⁷ Bean, *Vol III*, p.34

⁸ Bean, *Vol III*, p.39

⁹ Bean, *Vol III*, pp.40-41

¹⁰ Bean, *Vol III*, p.54

¹¹ Bean, *Vol III*, p.37

¹² Bean, *Vol III*, p.37

¹³ Bean, *Vol III*, p.37

howitzers.¹⁴ This process took no account of the artillery needed for the 3rd Div, nor the additional medium and heavy artillery and survey units that were vital elements of operations on the Western Front.

It was decided initially that the Australian divisions would remain on the lower artillery scale.¹⁵ This decision was reversed at the end of February 1916, when ‘Murray decided that the Australian and New Zealand artillery must be brought up to the scale adopted for all “New Army” divisions then proceeding to France’.¹⁶ The artillery being raised for the 4th and 5th Divs was transferred to the 1st and 2nd Divs to bring them closer to the new establishment. These divisions, however, had to raise their howitzer batteries from their ammunition columns.¹⁷ The artillery for the 4th and 5th Divs was then raised *ab initio*.¹⁸ As a result, that of the 5th Div was poorly trained when called on to support the division at Fromelles in July 1916, with ‘ill consequences’.¹⁹ The training of infantry battalions was further disrupted to provide drafts of up to 100 men to expand the artillery in each division to 15 batteries (still one howitzer battery below the full Western Front establishment).²⁰ This provided twelve batteries of field guns and three of howitzers, a total of 60 artillery pieces in each division.

The 2nd Div began its move to France on 13 March 1916, just over a month after White’s first memorandum; the 1st Div followed on 21 March. The 4th and 5th Divs arrived in France in early June, less than four months after their formation. Except for one regiment that moved to France as the I ANZAC Corps cavalry, and part of another, which served with a New Zealand mounted rifles regiment as the II ANZAC Corps cavalry, the light horse remained in Egypt with the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade. The 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Divs entered the line in France progressively from April 1916. The 2nd Div moved forward on 7 April, and was replaced by the 1st Div in mid-April. Thus, less than two months after White’s first memorandum, the 1st Div, heavily disrupted by the changes, was in action. The 4th Div moved into the line in late June, and was relieved by the 5th Div on 10 July. By five months after White’s first memorandum, all four divisions had served in the line. Offensive action began soon after.

The first to attack was the 5th Div, at Fromelles (19 July 1916), an attack that generated the largest number of casualties in a 24-hour period in Australian history. The division’s performance at Fromelles confirmed its poor state of training, with men throwing grenades without pulling the pin, among other problems.²¹ The biggest problem, however, was with the combat support troops: there were gunners who had never fired a shot and trench mortar troops still waiting for their weapons. Next to attack was the 1st Div at Pozières (23 July 1916), where it fought bitterly to push the Somme offensive forward to the Pozières windmill. The 1st was relieved in the attack by the 2nd on 27 July, and the 4th Div relieved the 2nd on 5 August. All four divisions had participated in a major attack within six months after White’s memorandum. By contrast, the 1st Div had landed at ANZAC more than eight months after it was raised, and the 3rd Div, which began arriving in Britain in July 1916, did not move into the line in France until 22 November 1916. Its first major attack was at Messines Ridge (7 June 1917), more than a year after it was formed.

¹⁴ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol V, The AIF in France, December 1917-May 1918*, University of Queensland Press reprint, St Lucia, 1983, p.681

¹⁵ Bean, *Vol III*, p.37

¹⁶ Bean, *Vol III*, p.63

¹⁷ Bean, *Vol III*, p.64

¹⁸ Bean, *Vol III*, p.64

¹⁹ Bean, *Vol III*, p.64

²⁰ Bean, *Vol III*, p.55

²¹ Roger Lee, *The Battle of Fromelles, 1916*, Big Sky Publishing, Sydney, 2010, p.169

While Bean praised the 4th Div for its actions at Mouquet Farm, less than seven months after Godley proposed its formation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the two new divisions (and, for similar reasons, the 1st and 2nd) were inadequately trained, and were put into combat sooner than they should have been. More than 28,000 Australian casualties were incurred at Fromelles, Pozières and Mouquet Farm between mid-July and early September 1916.²² Responsibility for the over-expansion can be spread widely. The British wanted the largest possible force in Egypt *and* France. Birdwood and Godley undoubtedly shared this desire, but their motives might have been tinged with self-interest. Godley might well have hoped for a corps command, which he soon received. Birdwood might have hoped to gain command of the proposed Australasian army, but it did not eventuate, and he had to wait until May 1918 to take command of the Fifth Army.

The principal architects of the expansion seem to have been Godley and Birdwood, supported by Murray; White's administrative genius made it happen, in a time-frame that was challenging at the time, and would probably not even be achievable now. The influence of Australian political and military authorities in Melbourne seems to have been limited. Pearce and the CGS, Col Hubert Foster, seemed more concerned about who would command the new divisions and brigades than the long-term viability of the proposal. Pearce seems to have been a hands-off minister, who did not involve himself in the detailed administration of his department.²³ While he thus avoided the excesses of his Canadian counterpart, Sir Sam Hughes, he missed opportunities to ensure that the AIF was well managed, such as were taken by the New Zealand Minister for Defence, Sir James Allen.

Neither the Department of Defence in Australia, nor the Military Board, seemed to inquire into the expansion actively, nor did they seem to inquire into likely casualty rates on the Western Front, to enable them to provide guidance to Birdwood and White. White provided the administrative efficiency necessary to make the expansion happen. However, he does not seem to have sought advice from Australia on the feasibility of the promised reinforcement figure of 'about 12,000 per month'.²⁴ White seemed to overlook the importance of resource availability on other occasions. After the war, he participated in a committee on the military defence of Australia.²⁵ Despite guidance from Pearce that 'finances were straitened, and therefore any scheme must be within reason', this committee proposed a peacetime army of 130,000 predominantly part-time personnel, an unlikely objective in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.²⁶

On balance, Australian political and military leaders (who included Birdwood as the commander of the AIF, and Godley as acting commander when the expansion proposal was first mooted) were more at fault than the British. Pearce seemed not to be involved in detailed

²² The Australian government purchased the Pozières windmill site, and a memorial was built there to the 23,000 AIF casualties suffered around Pozières and Mouquet Farm between late July and early September 1916, and the other Australian casualties on the Somme later that year.

²³ For more on Pearce's aptitude and approach to the Defence portfolio, see John Connor, *ANZAC and Empire: George Foster Pearce and the Foundations of Australian Defence*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2011

²⁴ Bean, *Vol III*, p.32

²⁵ This group, which also included Generals Monash, Chauvel, Hobbs, McCay and Legge, produced the *Report on the Military Defence of Australia by a Conference of Senior Officers of the Australian Military Forces*, 1920, AWM1, item 20/7

²⁶ Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901-2001*, Oxford University press, South Melbourne, 2001, pp.88-92

planning, and neither Foster nor the Military Board provided any note of caution to Birdwood and White. They, in turn, apparently did not seek more information on the recruitment situation in Australia, nor on the wastage rates being experienced on the Western Front, even as casualties rose and recruitment declined during 1916.

The New Zealand Approach

The original New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) comprised an infantry brigade of four battalions and a mounted rifle brigade of three regiments, plus an independent mounted rifles regiment. These units were based on New Zealand's four regional military districts, and were linked with units of the New Zealand Territorial Forces. They were titled the Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Battalions or Mounted Rifle Regiments respectively. The original New Zealand infantry brigade was doubled in early 1916, also using a technique of splitting battalions. The new units became the 2nd Auckland (etc) Bns, and the original units became the 1st Auckland (etc) Bns. The new 3rd New Zealand (Rifle) Bde, recently arrived from New Zealand, was used to complete the New Zealand Division.

The New Zealand reinforcement system, for which conscription was introduced in 1916,²⁷ enabled the division to be 'nearly always kept at full strength'.²⁸ Once the expansion of the NZEF was agreed, 'the Territorial system of recruiting based on district quotas was adjusted to a national monthly recruiting target'.²⁹ On enlistment, volunteers 'were enrolled then sent home to await call-up in batches of 2000 at monthly intervals' for training and despatch overseas.³⁰ This provided a regular flow of reinforcements to the NZEF each month. This system ensured that on 11 November 1918 the New Zealand Div was 17,434 strong, backed by 10,000 trained reinforcements in France and Britain and 10,000 more under training in New Zealand.³¹ It was then the strongest division in the British armies on the Western Front.³² In contrast, on 31 July 1918, the average strength of the five Australian infantry divisions was 10,561.³³

In late 1916, New Zealand was asked to raise a second division. Sir James Allen, the Minister for Defence, and Maj Gen Sir Andrew Russell, commander of the New Zealand Div, resisted this request. The War Office had advised New Zealand in 1909 that annual wastage in a major war could be 65 to 75 percent; when this was added to first reinforcements of 10 to 15 percent for each unit, Allen realised that New Zealand might need to replace almost its entire deployed force annually.³⁴ Allen was 'determined to eke out the resources that were available', with the priority being the maintenance of the NZEF at full strength.³⁵ He would not permit unchecked expansion, unless convinced 'beforehand that there were sufficient reserves of manpower in New Zealand to sustain the increase in strength'.³⁶

As a compromise, the 4th New Zealand Bde was raised in 1917, with newly raised 3rd battalions

²⁷ Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*, Reed Publishing, Auckland, 2004, p.68

²⁸ Glyn Harper, *Dark Journey: Three key New Zealand battles of the Western Front*, HarperCollinsPublishers, Auckland, 2007, p.333

²⁹ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.66

³⁰ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.67

³¹ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.69

³² Harper, *Dark Journey*, p. 151, Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.298

³³ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol VI, The AIF in France, May 1918-Armistice*, University of Queensland Press reprint, St Lucia, 1983, p.484

³⁴ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.56

³⁵ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.68

³⁶ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.64

of the four regional infantry units.³⁷ The brigade served in the II ANZAC Corps attack at Gravenstafel in October 1917, alongside the I ANZAC Corps attack on Broodseinde Ridge,³⁸ but was disbanded early in 1918. The personnel were used as reinforcements, and to form three entrenching battalions as a divisional reserve.³⁹ New Zealand did not need to reduce the number of battalions in a brigade from four to three, as happened in the British army, and some divisions of the AIF. The New Zealand system of successively numbered battalions bearing regional designations might have made disbandment of the 4th NZ Bde less traumatic than the disbandment of the individually numbered Australian battalions. However, the 4th NZ Bde's limited period of front-line service probably also contributed.

By November 1918 New Zealand had sent almost 101,000 men to the war. This number equated to replacement of the approximately 20,000 strong NZEF each year.⁴⁰ This total was within the resources of New Zealand's population of just over one million. At 19.35 percent of the total white male population, it significantly exceeded the 13.43 percent recruited in Australia.⁴¹

The Canadian Approach

The initial organisation of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) was chaotic, largely the fault of the Minister for Militia, Sir Sam Hughes. A plan prepared in 1911 'called for composite units to be drawn from all the regions of Canada'. This was modified in 1913 to a system based on mobilising existing militia units. Hughes scrapped both plans, and completely new units were raised, as in the AIF.⁴²

The CEF was also over-expanded. During the war around 260 Canadian infantry battalions were raised and sent overseas, but most were used as reinforcement pools. Four Canadian divisions served on the Western Front. A Canadian 5th Div was raised and sent to Britain, but successive commanders of the Canadian Corps declined to move it to the front, using it instead as a depot division to keep the four deployed divisions up to strength. A Canadian cavalry brigade (which included one British regiment) also served on the Western Front. Only one battalion that had served in action was removed from the order of battle during the war (the 60th, disbanded in early 1917 for lack of francophone reinforcements).⁴³

In early 1918, the British suggested that a two-corps Canadian army of six divisions (each of nine, rather than 12, battalions) might be formed,⁴⁴ but Lt Gen Sir Arthur Currie, the Canadian Corps commander, refused. He 'believed that the gain in real fighting strength would have been minimal because of the increased number of rear area troops necessary to maintain an army and ... there was still a shortage of trained staff officers'.⁴⁵ Currie pointed out that there would be an increase of an army staff, an extra corps staff, two divisional staffs, and six brigade staffs,

³⁷ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.68

³⁸ Harper, *Dark Journey*, p.51

³⁹ Entrenching battalions were advanced sections of the divisional base, organised as battalions to undertake works near the line, and as immediate reinforcements. (Bean, *Vol III*, p.177)

⁴⁰ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.69

⁴¹ Bean, *Vol VI*, p.1098

⁴² J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and keeping the Peace*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2002, pp.55, 56

⁴³ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.128

⁴⁴ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.129

⁴⁵ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.130

but a gain of only six battalions.⁴⁶ He preferred a four-division corps with sufficient support troops and reinforcements. Some of the necessary staffs and battalions could have come from the 5th Div, the Canadian depot division in Britain, but Currie was reluctant to accept those. This was probably in part because the son of the former minister, Garnet Hughes, whose military capacity was unproven, commanded the 5th Div.

By 1918 the Canadian Corps was the strongest on the Western Front. Its divisions retained 12 battalions (as did the New Zealand Division), giving them 12,000 infantry at full strength, compared to 8100 in the reduced British (and Australian) divisions. They also had additional support troops, secured through Currie's insistence that he command a well-supported corps of four divisions rather than the proposed Canadian army of two corps. Canadian divisions each had three engineer battalions, compared to the three companies in other divisions; they also had a pontoon bridging company, and their machine gun battalions were three times the strength of their British counterparts.⁴⁷ There was a labour battalion assigned to each division, sparing the frontline battalions the carrying and digging duties that fell to the AIF's infantry battalions.

The use of artillery was a key element of the Canadian Corps' success. The Corps' General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery commanded all the artillery in the Corps during some phases of operations, while command (including of additional field artillery and some heavy artillery) was devolved to divisions on other occasions.⁴⁸ The indirect fire support provided to the Canadian Corps was also on a higher scale than the general level. The artillery brigade of the disbanded 5th Div was retained and deployed to France, and an extra corps field artillery brigade was added. The Canadians also had extra heavy trench mortar batteries.⁴⁹ A Canadian officer, Lt Col Andrew McNaughton, became the Corps' Counter-Battery Staff Officer in January 1917, responsible for locating and destroying or neutralising the enemy's batteries.⁵⁰ He made the Canadian Corps' counter-battery work the model for the Western Front.⁵¹ The Canadian Corps also had its own flash spotting and sound ranging sections, which assisted in the location of hostile battery positions.⁵² McNaughton later became commander of the Canadian Corps Heavy Artillery, the executive arm of the counter-battery staff.

Canada's enlistment total was held back by the reluctance of its francophone population to enlist. While no accurate figures are available on the total number of francophone enlistments, Quebec, with some 27 percent of Canada's population of around 7.2 million in 1911, provided 14.2 percent of CEF enlistments, many of whom undoubtedly came from the anglophone minority in the province.⁵³ When the flow of reinforcements became inadequate after the capture of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, the government decided to impose conscription. After a bitterly fought election campaign, military compulsion came into force in January 1918.⁵⁴ By the end of the war, some 47,500 conscripted soldiers had proceeded overseas, and just over

⁴⁶ Shane B. Schrieber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War*, Praeger Series in War Studies, Westport, 1997, pp. 20, 21

⁴⁷ Schrieber, *Shock Army of the British Empire*, p. 24

⁴⁸ Schrieber, *Shock Army of the British Empire*, p. 22 and Appendix

⁴⁹ Schrieber, *Shock Army of the British Empire*, pp. 22, 23

⁵⁰ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 108

⁵¹ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 109

⁵² Alan H. Smith, *Do Unto Others: Counter Bombardment in Australia's Military Campaigns*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2011, p. 155

⁵³ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 75

⁵⁴ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, pp. 126, 127

24,100 had joined units in France.⁵⁵ By then, the personnel of the disbanded 5th Div had also joined the reinforcement pool used to maintain the Canadian Corps.

By November 1918, some 458,000 Canadians had been sent overseas or were undergoing training. This was 13.48 percent of the total white male population of Canada.⁵⁶ The number of troops Canada deployed overseas assisted in keeping units up to strength, but problems developed towards the end of the 'Hundred Days' from 8 August to 11 November 1918, as numbers in battalions declined and the high tempo of operations exhausted the infantry. By November, 'the effectiveness of the [Canadian] corps' infantry battalions began to falter'.⁵⁷

Limits to Australia's Military Capacity

Bean records that almost 332,000 Australians served overseas during the war, from a population of around 4.7 million.⁵⁸ This was 13.43 percent of the total white male population, similar to the Canadian proportion, but significantly below the 19.35 percent recruited in New Zealand.⁵⁹ This number was not adequate to maintain in operations a force ultimately comprising five infantry divisions and a corps cavalry regiment and part of another on the Western Front, as well as four and two thirds mounted brigades in the Middle East.

Based on the New Zealand and Canadian experience, the volunteer personnel actually sent overseas during the war were sufficient only to maintain three divisions (of 12 infantry battalions) on the Western Front and the mounted force in the Middle East. Based on the New Zealand experience with conscription, Australia could have maintained four such infantry divisions on the Western Front and the mounted force in the Middle East, but only if conscription had been introduced by the end of 1916.

While recruitment in Australia was still strong in early 1916, for Birdwood and White to expand the AIF in Egypt to four divisions without the certainty that conscription might have provided, and with another division to be formed in Australia, was an act of faith. Even with conscription, it is unlikely that a force of five infantry divisions on the Western Front and the mounted force in Palestine could have been sustained.⁶⁰ As with the Canadian experience, the introduction of conscription in 1918, after the second referendum, would probably have been too late to increase significantly the flow of reinforcements.

The Effects on the AIF

The reinforcement estimates that justified the doubling of the AIF soon proved optimistic. While Godley had expected some 12,000 reinforcements each month, recruitment exceeded this level on only three occasions between December 1915 and November 1918. January, February and March 1916 together produced some 56,000 recruits, but from then until the end of the war, monthly recruiting exceeded 10,000 on only two occasions, and 5000 on six

⁵⁵ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.128

⁵⁶ Bean, *Vol VI*, p.1098

⁵⁷ Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.140

⁵⁸ Bean, *Vol VI*, p.1098

⁵⁹ Bean, *Vol VI*, p.1098

⁶⁰ This problem was not confined to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Britain raised 76 infantry divisions during the war, of which 65 served on active fighting fronts; the others remained in Britain, and some of them were probably never complete. In 1918 several of the deployed divisions were effectively withdrawn from active service for lack of reinforcements. Other divisions in the Middle East received a high proportion of Indian infantry battalions, to replace British battalions that could no longer be maintained. (Martin Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You: Expansion of the British Army Infantry Divisions 1914-1918*, Leo Cooper, Barnsley, 2000)

occasions, all during 1916.⁶¹ This decline in the number of new recruits had effects on the manning of the AIF that were particularly felt during the later months of 1918, when heavy casualties and fatigue saw battalions dangerously undermanned and exhausted.

By the time the AIF entered offensive operations on the Western Front in mid-1916, the supply of reinforcements to maintain its strength was already falling, and units relied on rest periods away from the line and returning sick and wounded to re-build. The failure of the two conscription referenda in October 1916 and December 1917 should have removed any hope that the decline in recruitment could be reversed, and provided the triggers for the Australian government to consider the future strength of the AIF, after seeking advice from Birdwood. Australian authorities, both in Melbourne and the leaders of the AIF, failed to consider the implications of this decline and make consequent adjustments to manpower and force structure planning. This left the fighting elements of the AIF on the Western Front to manage dwindling reinforcements and a slow decline in numbers of frontline troops.

The provision of officers was another problematic area for all the Dominion forces, and for the British themselves. The British staff in Egypt had commented that the 'Australian Training Dépôt in Egypt has always found the greatest difficulty in producing officers of any value and non-commissioned officers of any sort at all'.⁶² During the expansion, officers were sought from better-educated men serving in the ranks, including in the light horse. Some commanders were so robust in their search as to cause complaints, such as by Brig Gen Duncan Glasfurd, commanding the 12th Bde, that some 'C.O's and even Brigade commanders exceeded the limits of courtesy and common-sense by sending emissaries to [the lines of the 12th Bde] to offer my officers better positions in other units'.⁶³

The provision of officers continued to be a problem in France. By August 1916, a 1st Bde report noted that '40 new officers have been promoted from the ranks ... though the new men are very good men few are of what used to be known as the officers type'.⁶⁴ This suggests that, even before the full impact of the Western Front casualty rate was felt, a wider (and presumably more egalitarian) range of candidates for commissioning was being tapped, an early pointer to future problems in an over-expanded force.

Despite all of these problems, the 6th Div was partly formed in England in 1917 following a request from the War Office (which in May 1916 had opposed its formation⁶⁵), but it was never sent to France.⁶⁶ The 6th Div was disbanded in September 1917 to provide reinforcements. After the German offensives of March/April 1918, personnel pressures came to a head, and battalions could not be kept up to strength. Between 21 March and 8 May 1918, when it helped stem the German offensives, the AIF suffered more than 15,000 casualties.⁶⁷ Between 8 August and 6 October 1918, its final campaign, the AIF suffered over 21,000 casualties.⁶⁸ Enlistments in Australia totalled fewer than 29,000 from January 1918 to the end of the war.⁶⁹ Filling the gaps in the ranks therefore depended on the return of sick and wounded men. If the war had

⁶¹ Joan Beaumont (ed.), *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001, p.109

⁶² Bean, *Vol III*, p.33

⁶³ Bean, *Vol III*, p.54

⁶⁴ Dale Blair, *Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2001, p.56

⁶⁵ Bean, *Vol V*, p.5, f/n 5

⁶⁶ Bean, *Vol V*, pp.15-17, 544

⁶⁷ Bean, *Vol V*, p.657

⁶⁸ Peter Pedersen, *The Anzacs: Gallipoli to the Western Front*, Penguin, Camberwell, 2007, p.446

⁶⁹ Beaumont (ed.), *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*, p.109

continued into 1919, it seems unlikely that the AIF could have maintained as many as three divisions in the field, even if the number of infantry battalions in each brigade had been reduced to three.

During winter 1917-18, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) reduced the number of battalions in its brigades to three.⁷⁰ When later applied to the AIF, this change culminated in the disbandment 'refusals' (to use a tactful word) in the later part of the year. The first units were disbanded between late April and the end of May 1918, when the 'names and part of [the] staffs [of the 36th, 47th and 52nd Battalions were] transferred to the training battalions of their brigades in England'.⁷¹ Their men were transferred to other units of their brigades. The men of the three battalions accepted this artifice. When, however, the next battalions were selected for disbandment in late September, the reaction was stronger. The 19th, 21st, 25th, 37th, 42nd, 54th and 60th Bns were selected for disbandment under the same system. One commanding officer was relieved of his command after an intemperate response; some units maintained their structure under junior soldiers, others pleaded for one last chance. Only one battalion gave way, with the 60th responding to a personal plea from Brig Gen 'Pompey' Elliott. Elliott was disgusted when he learned the next day that the other battalions would be allowed to go intact into what eventuated as their final battle.⁷²

New Zealand historian Christopher Pugsley has recorded the effect on morale and discipline in Australian units that were declining in strength.⁷³ Combat exhaustion impacted on sickness and discipline rates in grossly under-strength units, and Elliott recorded that the men 'did not have the same spirit at all as the old men we had'.⁷⁴ The continued decline in battalion strengths eventually contributed to mutinies by men of the 59th Bn⁷⁵ and the 1st Bn⁷⁶ in September 1918. Another adverse effect was that the shortage of personnel prevented the formation of units that could have improved the effectiveness of the Australian Corps in 1918. Unlike the Canadian Corps, which developed its own counter-bombardment organisation, the 'Australian (and New Zealand) artillery missed such an opportunity'.⁷⁷ A proposal 'to form a corps topographical company of 170 all ranks with sections at each division did not proceed'.⁷⁸ A later suggestion that a topographical battalion be raised 'was also shelved for lack of manpower'.⁷⁹ Other specialist units, such as flash spotting and sound ranging elements, were apparently not even considered.

The doubling of the AIF was a great administrative achievement by Birdwood and White, but their actions did not take into account the difficulties of maintaining the force they had forged. Australian units provided little of the AIF's logistic support, and each additional Australian division required logistic support from the BEF. The decision to raise the 6th Div suggests that the authorities in Australia, Birdwood and White, and the War Office, had not understood the

⁷⁰ Bean, *Vol V*, pp. 20-21

⁷¹ Bean, *Vol V*, p.658. For the effect of this disbandment on the men of one of the affected battalions, see Craig Deayton, *Battle Scarred: the 47th Battalion in the First World War*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2011, pp.261-71.

⁷² Bean, *Vol VI*, pp.937-940

⁷³ Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, pp.256-57

⁷⁴ Ashley Ekins, *The Australians at Passchendaele*, in Peter Liddle (ed.), *Passchendaele in Perspective, The Third Battle of Ypres*, Leo Cooper, London, 1997, quoted in Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.68

⁷⁵ Bean, *Vol VI*, p.875

⁷⁶ Bean, *Vol VI*, pp. 933-34

⁷⁷ Smith, *Do Unto Others*, p.6

⁷⁸ Smith, *Do Unto Others*, p.23

⁷⁹ Smith, *Do Unto Others*, p.23

long-term implications of the reinforcement problems of 1916, and the failure of the first conscription referendum in October 1916. These implications finally sank in after the failure of the second conscription referendum and the heavy casualties at Passchendaele, but decisive action to resolve the resulting problems was not taken.

Effects in Australia

The two conscription referenda divided Australian society politically, and their effects are discernible today. They involved fierce political argument, and eventually the Labor government of Prime Minister W.M. ‘Billy’ Hughes split over the issue, forming a pro-conscription Australian Nationalist Party. This had long-term political and military implications. The Labor Party was thereafter an opponent of conscription, particularly for overseas service. While the government of Prime Minister John Curtin was able to pass the *Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act 1943*, to allow conscripts to serve in limited areas outside Australian territory, the opposition to conscription during the Vietnam War was an echo of the events of 1916 and 1917.

Possible Alternatives

A range of possible alternatives existed that might have enabled units to be kept closer to full strength. One suggestion by the British in late 1916, that Australia should increase the monthly level of reinforcements to 16,500 and also provide a special draft of 20,000 men, however, seems to have been quite detached from reality, even had the conscription referendum passed. The drop off in enlistments was too severe for this to have been realistic. By early 1916, Birdwood, Godley and White should have been aware of the Western Front’s heavy demand for reinforcements, and the imperative for troops to be well trained before posting them to battalions about to go into action. The first priority in March 1916 should therefore have been development of the Australian administrative and training structure recommended by Murray’s staff.⁸⁰ This would have enabled the training of the reinforcements then available in Egypt to be completed before they joined operational units.

A training and administrative structure was developed later, in Britain,⁸¹ but extra training for the reinforcements in Egypt would have prepared them more adequately for battle than posting partially trained men to units re-constructing themselves after being split, or building themselves from the cadres provided by their parent battalions. Once a training and administrative structure had been established, the many untrained and partially trained reinforcements in the Middle East should have been placed under its control. It is unlikely that enough trained reinforcements would then have remained available to form both the 4th and the 5th Divs, as well as bring the 1st and 2nd Divs and the 4th Bde back to full strength.

Alternative 1: Restrict the AIF to four divisions, raising one more in Egypt, and one in Australia

An AIF of four infantry divisions and (ultimately) 15 light horse regiments would have been a larger commitment on a population basis than the four divisions and two cavalry regiments that Canada deployed to the Western Front. It would have been a similar scale of commitment to New Zealand’s single division and four mounted rifles regiments, which required conscription to be maintained. Under this option, only the minimum additional forces to complete a new division based on the 4th and 8th Bdes would have been raised in Egypt in 1916. This would have been one additional infantry brigade, possibly based on the 4th Bde, which had

⁸⁰ Bean, *Vol III*, p.33

⁸¹ Bean, *Vol III*, ch.VI

representation from all states in its battalions. Artillery, engineers, and other supporting arms and services would also have been required for the new division, and pioneers, machine gunners and additional artillery for the 1st and 2nd Divisions.

An alternative to splitting the battalions of the 4th Bde would have been to convert some of the light horse to infantry. Canada dismounted six Canadian Mounted Rifles units, and formed them into four infantry battalions, which retained CMR titles.⁸² The British later pursued this path with some success when raising the 74th (Yeomanry) Division in 1917, amalgamating 18 yeomanry regiments to form 12 infantry battalions. Under this alternative, six of the existing 13 light horse regiments could have been converted into four infantry battalions (retaining light horse titles and emu plumes). This would also have reduced the demand for light horse reinforcements. Seven regiments would have remained mounted, sufficient to provide a corps cavalry regiment for I ANZAC Corps and two mounted brigades to join the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in an ANZAC Mounted Division.

Under this model, the raising of the 3rd Div in Australia could have continued. After the 3rd Div arrived in Britain, it functioned as a *de facto* depot division in late 1916, giving up some 2800 personnel to the other divisions in August, and being warned that a further 5460 might be taken in mid-October.⁸³ In an unsuccessful attempt to influence the outcome of the first conscription referendum, British authorities suggested that the 3rd Div might be broken up before it had seen front line service.⁸⁴ After the failure of the first conscription referendum in October 1916, however, the 3rd Div arguably should not have been deployed to the Western Front, but should either have been broken up, as the British had proposed, or remained in Britain as a depot division.⁸⁵

Once five infantry divisions were deployed on the Western Front, their maintenance became an ongoing problem. After Passchendaele, consideration was given to disbanding the 4th Div, however, it was instead planned to use it as a depot division.⁸⁶ This plan lasted for only three weeks before the division was returned to the line at Péronne.⁸⁷ The 4th Div frequently seemed to miss the opportunity to rest and absorb reinforcements, moving after Bullecourt to join II ANZAC Corps for Messines, and moving back to I ANZAC Corps for Passchendaele. Unsurprisingly, two battalions from that division were selected for disbandment in May 1918 after devastating losses sustained while helping to halt the German Spring Offensive.

Alternative 2: Leave two divisions in Egypt, to defend the Suez Canal and later take part in the Sinai/Palestine campaign

If the expansion to five infantry divisions was seen as politically essential, then leaving part of the Australian infantry in Egypt might have enabled the flow of voluntary enlistments to suffice. Divisional establishments, particularly in artillery, were lower in Egypt than on the

⁸² Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p.88

⁸³ Bean, *Vol III*, pp.866-67

⁸⁴ Bean, *Vol III*, p.866

⁸⁵ After the 3rd Div had been committed to battle, any attempt to break it up to reinforce the remainder would have been fraught with the same problems that were encountered in 1918 when battalions were disbanded, as would any attempt to break up the 5th Div after it was crippled at Fromelles. There would also have been difficulties in breaking up units from the smaller states, like the 40th Bn from Tasmania and the 43rd from South Australia. The 40th Bn was the only all-Tasmanian battalion, even though that state contributed elements to the 12th, 15th, 26th, 47th, and 52nd Bns. Losing its only 'full' battalion could have affected recruiting in the island state.

⁸⁶ Bean, *Vol V*, p.4

⁸⁷ Bean, *Vol V*, p.19

Western Front, as were battle casualty rates once active operations began against the Turks. This alternative would have eased the reinforcement problem. As the newest and least trained divisions, the 4th and 5th would have been the obvious choices to remain in Egypt, but other divisions would still have been needed for the Western Front.

In April 1916, there were four British First-Line Territorial divisions in Egypt (the 42nd, 52nd, 53rd and 54th), all of which had fought in the Dardanelles. Murray originally placed the Australian divisions last in the order for movement to France, ‘because they [were] the most backward in training and discipline’.⁸⁸ The four Territorial divisions, however, ‘were short of men and, in most cases, less well staffed or commanded’.⁸⁹ That said, all four had been on full-time service since August 1914, and all had served in action. They had their divisional artillery, albeit at a lower scale than required on the Western Front, while the 1st and 2nd Divs were expanding their artillery, and the 4th and 5th Divs were in the process of raising theirs *ab initio*. The Territorial divisions should have been better prepared than the 4th and 5th Divs, and two of them could have been substituted for two Australian divisions, which would man the Suez Canal defences while completing their training.⁹⁰

The 1st and 2nd Divs, with the New Zealand Div, would have gone to the Western Front as I ANZAC Corps, to fight the main enemy in the main theatre of war. Godley, as commander of the NZEF, would have had to transfer to France with the New Zealand Div, removing his immediate opportunity to gain a corps command, just as Birdwood had to wait for his army command. The 3rd Div would have joined them late in 1916, as it did in reality. After Gallipoli, leaving some Australian infantry alongside the light horse to continue the fight against the Turks might have been considered appropriate in Australia. Moving two fewer divisions to France would have reduced transport times from Australia for their reinforcements, releasing shipping for other purposes. Indeed, following a suggestion by the AIF Surgeon General, Neville Howse, VC, Birdwood proposed in 1918 that all of the Australian infantry divisions could be transferred to the Middle East. Howse believed the climate there was ‘more suitable for Australians’, and ‘the Australian divisions would be more effective there’.⁹¹ The decline in reinforcements from Australia might also have been balanced by a lower sickness rate. Transport of reinforcements from Australia would have been faster, releasing shipping for other purposes.⁹²

Bean suggested that the ‘humiliation of making such a confession of weakness [an inability to continue fighting on the Western Front because of personnel shortages] would have been deeply galling to many Australians’.⁹³ Australia’s allies, however, would have been well aware of the reinforcement problem, which was also affecting them, so this does not seem a sufficient

⁸⁸ Bean, *Vol III*, p.62

⁸⁹ Bean, *Vol III*, p.62

⁹⁰ At this time there were five British divisions (the 10th, 22nd and 26th New Army, and 27th and 28th Regular, sisters to ‘the incomparable 29th’, serving at Salonika. The 10th had served at Suvla Bay, the others on the Western Front before being moved to Salonika. These were all arguably better prepared to move to France in April/May 1916 than the 4th and 5th Divs or the Territorial divisions. Two of the Territorial divisions in Egypt could have been sent to the relatively quiet Salonika front, releasing the 27th and 28th for France. There were also several Second-Line Territorial Divisions still in Britain, which had been formed by mid-1915. The experience of the 61st Div at Fromelles demonstrates, however, that they were no more ready for active service than the 4th and 5th Divs. (Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You*)

⁹¹ Bean, *Vol V*, pp. 32-33

⁹² Bean, *Vol V*, pp. 32-33

⁹³ Bean, *Vol V*, p.32

reason to reject the proposal.⁹⁴ The German offensives of March/April 1918 removed the proposal from consideration before a decision was made.

Alternative 3: A regimental organisation?

A different approach to organisation might have assisted. Bean expressed regret that the AIF had been raised as individual battalions, rather than as regiments, which exacerbated the difficulties of disbanding units.⁹⁵ Canada used a similar battalion system, but it was established practice for most to be broken up for reinforcements as soon as they arrived in Britain. The smaller deployed Canadian force, both absolutely and relative to population, enabled its divisions to retain 12 battalions in 1918. The New Zealand system of raising regional units named for military districts, and based on its Territorial Force, seemed more successful than the Australian and Canadian 'New Army' systems. It seemed to make disbandment of the battalions in the 4th NZ Bde comparatively painless. Even in 1916, however, changing the AIF to a regimental system might have produced a similar reaction to that in 1918, as unit titles with which troops identified closely after Gallipoli would have been changed.

An existing alternative that might have been employed was the system the British used to raise Second-Line Territorial Army units. A First-Line Territorial battalion (say the 4th Royal Blankshires) would provide the cadre for a new unit. The original unit would renumber as the 1st/4th, and its newly raised Second-Line battalion became the 2nd/4th. Contraction simply involved the two battalions re-combining as the original 4th Royal Blankshires. Under such a system, the original 1st to 16th Bns would have become the 1st/1st to the 1st/16th, and the new battalions the 2nd/1st to the 2nd/16th. As with the British Territorial First and Second-Line battalions, reduction by recombination might have caused fewer morale and command problems. Use of this system would have maintained a closer link between 'parent' and 'pup' battalions, even had contraction not become necessary.

Amalgamation of battalions could have been used in 1918, as the British did. As an example, the 5th and 6th Royal Welsh Fusiliers produced Second-Line battalions early in the war.⁹⁶ They ended the war amalgamated as a single 5th/6th Bn.⁹⁷ Indeed, when Gellibrand discussed the disbandment of the 37th Bn with its men, one point he elicited was that the 'amalgamation of two battalions would be less keenly felt than the extinction ... of one of them'.⁹⁸ As an example of this system, the 60th Bn, selected for disbandment, could have amalgamated with another battalion of its brigade (the amalgamated 57th/60th Bn served in action during the Second World War). If 'Pompey' Elliott could persuade the men of the 60th to disband, he should have had little trouble persuading them to amalgamate, and retain some of their unit heritage!

Implications for Today's Leaders

What lessons can leaders of the Defence Organisation today learn from the AIF's experience? While many can be identified, there would seem to be six principal implications. First, ministers must ensure that they understand the full resource (personnel, financial and materiel) implications of proposals put to them by their military advisers. This will require them to

⁹⁴ In late 1917, Russell had hoped that the New Zealand Division might move to Italy with Plumer, but this did not happen (Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience*, p.281)

⁹⁵ Bean *Vol V*, p.658

⁹⁶ Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You*, p.112

⁹⁷ Ray Westlake, *The Territorial Battalions, A Pictorial History 1859-1985*, Spellmount Ltd, Tunbridge Wells, 1986, pp. 120-21

⁹⁸ Bean *Vol VI*, p.939

understand the assumptions behind those proposals, and if necessary to demand the information necessary to gain that understanding. Sir James Allen understood the implications of the likely casualty rate on the Western Front for the NZEF in a way that seemed to escape Pearce for the AIF.

Second, ministers must involve themselves in the administration of their department. They should leave technical matters to their military advisers, but supervise carefully, using the old adage ‘trust, but check’. Sir Sam Hughes interfered in the CEF to such an extent that Canada eventually had to establish a separate department overseas to remove the administration of its expeditionary force from him; Pearce was detached to the extent that an over-expanded force could not be maintained, while financial scandals plagued his wartime administration.

Third, military leaders must be confident that the full personnel, financial and materiel implications of proposals they put forward have been considered, and will be achievable within the level of resources that could realistically be made available to the Defence Organisation. They must not allow personal considerations to influence their actions (Russell and Currie both rejected proposals that could have led to their promotion)

Fourth, military leaders must ensure that the appropriate range of supporting arms and services is provided to deployed forces. If adequate resources are not offered by the minister/government, they must explain the implications of the shortfall, and establish the *military necessity* for such support to be included, or provide options that are achievable. Canadian divisions each had three field engineer battalions, rather than the three companies of other divisions in the British armies in France, and a wider range of artillery support. Australia disbanded some field artillery brigades when the Western Front establishment was changed in 1917.⁹⁹

Fifth, morale is a function of command; commanders at all levels must ensure that their superiors are aware of matters affecting morale, and take all practicable steps to resolve those matters.

Finally, while there are good reasons to maintain units under-strength or at cadre levels in peacetime, units deployed for operations must have their establishment of trained personnel and equipment. They must be maintained at or close to those strengths while on operations, or risk a capability gap that could affect the overall mission.

Conclusion

Australia was not well served by its senior political and military leadership during the First World War. In Australia, Pearce, the Defence Department, and the Military Board, did not seem to understand what was happening in the AIF overseas. They seemed to focus more on meeting demands from the War Office and Birdwood, without questioning how those demands would impact on Australia’s national interests. When the conscription referenda failed, the political and military leadership did not re-assess the size of the force that could be supported by voluntary enlistment, and order adjustments.

The Australian authorities overseas, principally Birdwood, did not make sound decisions about the scale of force they could deploy. When it became obvious that the force they had developed could not be supported, they did not advise the Australian government to reduce it to a

⁹⁹ Bean, *Vol V*, pp. 681-82

supportable level. The problems of morale and indiscipline that plagued the AIF, particularly over the last few months of the war, were ultimately their responsibility. Today's leaders must do better.¹⁰⁰

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SERGEANT TIMOTHY WILLIAM McCRISTAL: PASSIONATE SOLDIER, SOCIALIST AND REPUBLICAN

Peter Hopper

Timothy William McCristal was one of the most colourful and controversial figures in the labour movement in NSW during the first half of the 20th century. He had fought in both the Boer War and the First World War and was wounded at Gallipoli in August 1915. This had a major impact on his life after he arrived back home in April 1916.

He was born at Bellingen (NSW) in 1881 and was attracted to the labour movement as a timber worker. His large family, with an Irish Catholic background, was well known in the district. As a young man William served with the local Irish Rifles (Volunteer force) for 12 months before enlisting in the Boer War. With the outbreak of this war, William, as he liked to be called, was enlisted in B Squadron, 2nd NSW Mounted Rifles as a Trooper (Service No.261). He was just 20 when he departed from Sydney in March 1901, arriving in Port Elizabeth the following month. He served under the command of Lt Col H.B. Lassetter in western and eastern Transvaal throughout 1901. In June his unit successfully captured Gen De La Rey's convoy of 106 wagons carrying supplies, ammunition, and a large number of cattle.¹ In October they went on to capture 1000 Boer prisoners in east Transvaal. In total William's unit lost 2 officers and 23 others during their time in South Africa. In May 1902 he returned home and arrived back in Sydney on 4 June 1902. He then married Kathleen Carney the following year and they had a son, Leonard.

William now lived and worked in Raleigh, not far from Bellingen, where he was born. Raleigh was a timber-working town in the Mid North Coast region of NSW, just south of Coffs Harbour. In September 1907 he was assaulted by John McNally, a neighbour, and had the matter brought to court.² The magistrate ordered the two men to settle the dispute peacefully outside the court and McCristal ended up withdrawing the charge. *The Worker* described him as 'an energetic and untiring worker for Labor principles'.³ In September 1907 he was the Labor candidate for the seat of Raleigh in the NSW state election. He only polled 8.6% of the vote and came last behind the sitting member and an Independent Liberal. He advocated the abolition of the office of Governor and the Upper House of parliament in his election platform.⁴ This was no doubt far too radical for the time but it indicated the first of his republican leanings.

His wife Kathlene died in 1910 and he moved to Sydney to find work on the wharf. In October he stood as a Social Democrat in the NSW state election for the seat of Pymont, an inner

¹⁰⁰ I am grateful for advice received from Roger Lee, Dr Andrew Richardson and Jerry Bishop while drafting this article.

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¹ Craig Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902* Oxford UP, South Melbourne, 2002, pp.210-11 and 393

² *The Raleigh Sun* 27 September 1907, p.3

³ *The Worker* (Wagga, NSW) 25 July 1907, p.15

⁴ *The Raleigh Sun* 6 September 1907, p.5

Sydney suburb.⁵ The seat was retained by John McNeill, the Labor candidate, who had held it since 1902. As a member of the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union, McCristal then developed a friendship with William Morris Hughes who had become its Secretary in 1899. In September 1913 they were both involved in promoting a strike by the wharf labourers. *The Evening News* ran a story about this in which it maintained that McCristal and Hughes were part of a group of 'red flaggers' and a 'source of endless worry to the union officers'.⁶ It went on to label both McCristal and Hughes as 'socialistic gentlemen'; McCristal took offence at this and unsuccessfully attempted to claim £1000 damages from editors Christopher Bennett and Walter Jeffrey for this alleged libel.⁷

With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, William, like so many other Boer War veterans, was quick to enlist in the AIF.⁸ He was 33 and named son Leonard as his Next-Of-Kin, and was now living at 'Ortona' in Kingston Road, Camperdown (4km SW of Sydney). His military experience in the Boer War ensured that on enlistment he was placed in A Squadron, 1st Light Horse Regiment, once again as a Trooper (Service No 181). It is interesting to note that he described himself as a 'Free Thinker' on his enrolment form alongside 'Religion'. This was a clear indication of his individualistic nature.

He departed Sydney with his unit on 20 October 1914 on board HMAT A16 *Star of Victoria* and disembarked in Egypt on 8 December. His unit went into action at Gallipoli on 12 May 1915. It mounted an attack on the Turkish position known as 'The Chessboard' as part of the August offensive on 7 August. 200 men from his unit were involved, 147 becoming casualties. It was in this attack on that William was wounded when hit by a bomb that exploded, striking both his legs about 15cm above the knee. He was taken out of action and sent to No.2 Australian General Hospital at Gezira (Cairo) in Egypt where he underwent surgery to remove fragments of shrapnel from his right thigh. He spent 11 weeks in this hospital before being discharged on 21 October. He found it difficult to walk properly and his officers thought he would be more use back in Australia to help in recruiting. Capt Lawry from his unit wrote to him in December 1915 praising his courage and suggesting he should return home. A letter from his doctor in hospital at Heliopolis reported that 'he is suffering from impaired movement of the right leg due to severance of tendons and muscles by fragments of shrapnel'. He also mentioned that William was not likely to be fit for active service again. William's son received word that his father would be returning home; he was put on board HMAT *Argyllshire* in Egypt and arrived back in Melbourne on 4 April 1916.

Word of William's leadership skills obviously reached Senator G.F. Pearce, Minister for Defence, who had written to Army HQ on 10 February 1916 stating that William 'was a leader in the trade union movement in Sydney before he enlisted'. It went on to state that he was 'a good speaker' and 'was well-balanced'. It finished with the observation that he 'would carry great weight with the working class in NSW'. This was followed up with a letter from Colonel Dodds from his unit stating that William 'would make a good Recruiting Sergeant'. Word about McCristal had also reached as far as the Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes. In July 1916 he suggested, in a note to his Minister of Defence, that McCristal 'be utilized as a recruiting sergeant in NSW.' Hughes had been a personal friend of McCristal during their time together at the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union. Recruiting throughout Australia had begun to dwindle

⁵ *The Evening News* 4 October 1910, p.1

⁶ *The Evening News* 9 September 1913, p.7

⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 April 1914, p.7

⁸ His WW1 record can be viewed online at: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/Imagine.asp?B=1941481&I=1&SE=1>

from the monthly peak in July 1915 when 36,575 men had volunteered, to 9914 in October.⁹ By December it was still languishing. William, no doubt, was to be used to remedy this situation. A promotion to sergeant was to be an added incentive to attract him to the cause.

For the first two or three months after his return from the war McCristal responded positively to his new role as a Recruiting Sergeant in the NSW Recruiting Campaign. On 28 June, however, he was discharged from the AIF on health grounds (permanently unfit) and by July had stopped addressing crowds. On 10 August 1916 the Commandant of 2nd Military District noted in a letter that McCristal no longer wished to take up duty as a recruiting sergeant. McCristal later revealed that he was not opposed to encouraging young men to fight overseas but he objected strongly to conscription being used as a means of doing this.¹⁰ It was around this time that Prime Minister Hughes first suggested that he was seriously thinking about introducing conscription for overseas service.

McCristal had become President of the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union after his return home from the war. On 27 August 1916 he wrote to Senator Pearce complaining about an alleged misappropriation of funds by the committee of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) in NSW. He assumed that the federal government was financially supporting the RSSILA. He claimed that bribes had been paid for the position of president. What really upset him was the fact that the new president was a civilian, not a returned soldier. Pearce replied to his letter on 5 September 1916, stating that the RSSILA was not assisted financially by the Commonwealth government, and, as a result, no action could be taken.

By this time McCristal had become a thorn in the side of the federal Nationalist Government led by Hughes. He was now living in Woollahra in Sydney and was a regular speaker against conscription. This was the reverse role the government hoped he would take. Hughes had been Secretary of the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union from 1899 until 1916 when he was expelled from the Labor Party and the Union. McCristal had played a key role in his expulsion from this union. In February 1917 McCristal was nominated by the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union to represent it in the selection ballot for a Labor candidate for West Sydney in the House of Representatives.¹¹ The seat was won by Con Wallace (Labor) who defeated Gideon Gillespie (Nationalist), and represented another snub for Hughes.

McCristal's opposition to conscription continued through to August 1917 when he, along with Ned Riley, were arrested and charged with making seditious utterances at a public meeting in the Sydney Domain on 15 August 1917. It was alleged that

in the presence and hearing of 2000 persons, he did unlawfully, wickedly, maliciously publish, utter, announce, and declare in a loud voice, concerning the Government established by law within the State, Our Lord, the King and his liege subjects, the following amongst other words:

All Kings, Governors, bosses, and Parliamentarians are parasites, fattening on the backs of the workers. These parasites will not suffer in wages or wealth through this strike. Now, men, what would you do to a bug or a flea if you were to find one on your back or in your shirt?

A Voice from the Crowd: Kill it.

McCristal (continuing): Yes that is the answer. We have to destroy the parasites who are living on the backs of workers. The time has come when every man should know his neighbour and see

⁹ Robert Bollard, *In The Shadow of Gallipoli*, Newsouth Books, Sydney, 2013, p.76

¹⁰ *Northern Star* (Lismore,NSW) 1 November 1952, p.1

¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 February 1917, p.7

that he has the wherewithal to do it. I didn't go to the other side to fight for love of King, but so that I could get the necessary knowledge so that when the time comes I will be able to stand side by side with my fellow unionists in the great fight against the parasites, and even though they kill some of us we will still fight on.¹²

Both McCristal and Riley were committed for trial on 16 November 1917 at the Criminal Court in Darlinghurst where William was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour in Goulburn Gaol. The judge had declared that McCristal was 'an absolutely disloyal man' who set out to promote 'dissension' in the community. At his trial, Dean Talbot, the Anglican Dean of Sydney, spoke in his defence, claiming McCristal was 'a legal and straight man whom he had known for 18 months'.¹³ Dean Talbot had strongly opposed the use of non-union ('scab') labour in an attempt to break the bitter 1917 general strike in NSW in August-September 1917. Despite McCristal's war record that stood him in good stead during this trial ('a unanimous recommendation for mercy' was read 'on account of his past good character and his past military career') he received a rather severe punishment for the offence.

McCristal served his nine months in prison and emerged a bitter man. In November 1919 he was the unsuccessful candidate for the House of Representatives seat of Cook in NSW. He represented the Industrial Socialist Labor Party (ISLP), and with only 1562 votes, came third behind James Catts (Labor) with 14,559 and George Holt (Nationalist) with 7248.¹⁴ In August 1921 McCristal nominated as a candidate (Independent Labor Party) for a by-election for the seat of West Sydney in the House of Representatives. The ALP candidate was W.H. Lambert who was also the Lord Mayor of Sydney at the time. Lambert won with 7857 votes from A.S. Henry (National Party) with 5237 votes. McCristal only polled 430 votes (3.1%), ahead of the Taxpayers' Association candidate with 186 votes.

In 1922 William wrote and had published a booklet attacking PM Hughes, titled *Sensational exposure of WM Hughes, PC, Prime Minister of Australia: the Windsor eviction*.¹⁵ In this he outlined the story of how Billie Hughes evicted a family from a property he owned in Windsor in 1911. Richard Bellinger, a failed dairy farmer, had lived on the property since 1909. Bellinger and his family and their property were forcibly removed. Bellinger successfully appealed against Hughes for a breach of agreement and assault and was awarded £255. In the booklet McCristal referred to Hughes as 'one of the meanest and most cruel champions in Australian history'. He also referred to him as 'the little imperialistic conscriptionist'.

In September 1922 McCristal was successfully nominated for president of the Waterside Workers Federation in NSW. This body had advocated the use of violence against non-union labour on the wharves in Sydney. In March 1922 he also stood unsuccessfully for the seat of Sydney in the NSW election as a candidate for the Industrial Socialist Labor Party (ISLP).¹⁶ This same year he was once again back in court for encouraging a strike on the waterfront. He had been taken to court by the Graziers' Association and was convicted and fined £10 and costs and ordered by the judge 'not to repeat the offence under pain of imprisonment'.¹⁷ By now such an admonishment would have been water off a duck's back for McCristal.

¹² *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 November 1917, p.8; also 'Australian Strike', *Fielding Star* vol.13, Issue 3343, 12 September 1917, p.4

¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 17 November 1917, p.9

¹⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_results_for_the_Division_of_Cook_\(1906-55\)#Elections_in_the_1910s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_results_for_the_Division_of_Cook_(1906-55)#Elections_in_the_1910s), p.7

¹⁵ The booklet was published by T.W. McCristal, 1922 (61 pages, price one shilling)

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_New_South_Wales_state_election,_1922

¹⁷ *Recorder*, (Port Pirie, SA) 27 September 1922, p.1

In 1925 McCristal once again stood unsuccessfully as a Labor candidate for the seat of Ryde in the NSW parliament and received 903 votes. Five candidates were elected by proportional representation. Four Nationalist Party candidates and one ALP candidate were successful.¹⁸ In 1932, at the age of 51, McCristal continued his fiery opposition to the conservative governments at both state and federal level. He got into a physical conflict with James Pearsall, a sub-tenant of his, and was charged with occasioning bodily harm. Pearsall had called McCristal a ‘Communist’ and threatened ‘to get the New Guard to tar and feather’ him. Pearsall had been served with a notice to quit the house he was renting from McCristal at Beecroft. McCristal successfully appealed against this charge and was acquitted.¹⁹

The following year on 8 February 1933, McCristal attempted unsuccessfully to sue the *Sun Newspapers* for alleged libel in their coverage of his fight with Pearsall. He wanted £5000 in damages. The Full Court in NSW ruled against him due largely to his financial position (lack of funds) and the judge quashed the conviction and fine.²⁰ In 1934 he stood as a candidate for the federal seat of Cowper, a seat held by Earle Page (Country Party). This time he was the official Labor candidate and he polled well. It was retained by Page (30,921 votes), from McCristal (10,321 votes), with Hereward Kesteven from the Social Credit Party in last place (6958 votes).²¹ In 1937 McCristal unsuccessfully attempted to become an Independent Labor candidate in the federal election. He had previously been selected as the Labor candidate, but the ALP executive had subsequently refused to endorse his nomination. His turbulent past may have cast him as a liability.

In August 1943 he stood as the ‘Soldiers Citizens and War Workers Labour Party’ candidate for the seat of West Sydney in the federal election. This was Billie Hughes’ old seat that he had held from 1901 to 1917. McCristal only received 352 votes and finished in last place.²² This party had been formed to get better conditions for returned men and had nothing to do with the long-established Returned Sailors’, Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA). McCristal no doubt found the League far too conservative for his liking. In May 1944 he stood again, this time as a candidate for the Australian Labor Movement (ALM) for the seat of Oxley in the NSW election.²³ He came second last with just 722 votes. In 1947 he was back again standing as an Independent for the seat of Marrickville in the NSW election. It was won by the Labor candidate Carlo Lazzarini with 14,032 votes. McCristal gained 5650 votes, which must have been most satisfying.²⁴ This was perhaps his most successful electoral performance although there were only two candidates contesting the seat. The choice was between the ALP candidate and the ‘left-leaning’ McCristal.

In 1948 McCristal had moved politically to become a Republican. He was now a farmer at Stoney Creek, near Taree (200km south of Coffs Harbour) in NSW. He was fined £30 for having made a false statement in a pamphlet (published by the Australian Republican Party) that was likely to mislead electors at the Coogee by-election.²⁵ This party had been formed to combat Catholic Action in the Labor movement. McCristal maintained that the new party’s

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_New_South_Wales_state_election,_1925

¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 January 1932, p.5; *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate* (Parramatta, NSW) 11 February 1932, p.6

²⁰ *Cootamundra Herald* (NSW) 8 February 1933, p.1

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_Australian_federal_election,_1934#New_South_Wales

²² *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 August 1943, p.7

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_New-South_Wales_election,_1944; and *Sydney Morning Herald* 29 May 1944, p.5

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 May 1947, p.4

²⁵ *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga, NSW) 29 June 1948, p.2

platform included establishing a republic like the United States. The Senate and State parliaments would be abolished and politicians would give their services for free. The seat was won by Kevin Ellis (Liberal). McCristal did not contest this election but was successful in appealing against the fine.²⁶

In the landmark 1949 federal election that saw the defeat of the Chifley Labor government and the return of Menzies as Prime Minister, McCristal was back in the fray. This time he stood as a Republican for the House of Representatives' seat of Grayndler. Fred Daly was the successful Labor candidate in this seat. Final figures were Daly (ALP) 25 622, Donald Clark (Liberal) 11,299, Henry McPhillips (Communist) 920 and McCristal (Republican) 349.²⁷ In 1950 McCristal nominated as a candidate for the Republican Party for the seat of Gloucester in the NSW election that was held on 17 June. He polled only 180 votes and finished in last place.²⁸ In 1951 he stood for the seat of Grayndler (NSW) in the federal election that took place on 28 April. This seat was won, once again, by Fred Daly (ALP), with 23 038 votes. He defeated Roy Squire (Liberal) with 8398 votes. McCristal (Republican) gained 977 votes while Daley had recorded a swing of 6.5% in his favour.²⁹

In 1952 McCristal received much publicity for attending the funeral of Billie Hughes who passed away at the age of 90 on 28 October 1952. Thirty-six years prior to this McCristal had been instrumental in the sacking of Hughes from the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union. In 1952, however, he came 250 miles to attend the funeral and was quoted as saying that although Hughes was 'wrong on conscription', he 'had contributed much to Labor's cause and had been a great Australian'.³⁰ It is to McCristal's credit that he was able to recognize Hughes for his positive role in the labour movement. His antagonism towards Hughes, so evident during the conscription period and during the 1920s, had mellowed somewhat.

In 1953 McCristal once again stood as an Independent for the seat of Marrickville in the NSW election. He polled 3484 votes. The only other candidate was the successful ALP candidate (Norm Ryan) with 15,475 votes. The Liberal Party did not contest this safe Labor seat.³¹ His next attempt at gaining office politically was in 1954 when he nominated as a Republican Party candidate for the seat of Leichhardt in a by-election for the NSW government. Polling took place on 20 March 1954. He polled poorly (319 votes) and had to forfeit his £25 deposit.³² Two months later he stood for the seat of Grayndler in the federal election. Once again it was won by Fred Daly (ALP) with an increased majority (26,495 votes) from Kenneth Innes (Liberal) with only 7288 votes. McCristal stood as an Independent and received just 702 votes.³³

The following year there was yet another federal election held on 10 December 1955. In the seat of Grayndler there was a Communist candidate who polled 3218 votes, ahead of McCristal (Independent) on 586 votes. Fred Daly (ALP) won the seat with 24,151 votes from Ian Chisholm (Liberal) with 12,258 votes.³⁴ In 1956 he stood as a candidate for the Republican Party in the seat of Marrickville (NSW). He came last (602 votes) behind the Communist Party candidate Adam Ogston (652 votes). It was won by the ALP candidate, Norm Ryan (12,093)

²⁶ *The Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser* (NSW) 15 September 1948, p.3

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_results_for_the_Division_of_Grayndler#Elections_in_the_1940s

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 June 1950, p.5

²⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 30 April 1951, p.4

³⁰ *The Northern Star* (Lismore, NSW) 1 November 1952, p.1

³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 February 1953, p.5

³² *Sun-Herald* (Sydney NSW) 21 March 1954, p.1

³³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 May 1954, p.5

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 December 1955, p.2

who kept Ian Chisholm (Liberal) (6352) at bay.³⁵ In the 1958 federal election for the federal seat of Grayndler, McCristal once again stood as an Independent and came last with 586 votes. A DLP and a Communist Party candidate also stood. Fred Daly (ALF) once again won the seat from Evan MacLaurin (Liberal). Hal Alexander, the Communist Party candidate, polled surprisingly well with 3218 votes.³⁶ In 1962 he tried again, for the last time, to win the seat of Marrickville in the NSW state election. It was won by Norm Ryan (ALP). McCristal (Independent) came third and in last place.³⁷ He was now 81 and was worn out. He passed away at the age of 83 on 24 June 1963 at Repatriation General Hospital in Concord. His Death Notices referred to him as the beloved husband of Fanny, who lived at 56 Hercules St, Fairfield in Sydney.³⁸ On 25 June 1967 she wrote seeking William's Gallipoli Medal. In her letter she stressed the point that her husband had been discharged from the Army *due to medical unfitness, not to misconduct*.³⁹ She had now moved into Epworth House in Witherill St, Leichhardt.

Between 1909 and 1962, a period of 53 years, McCristal contested twenty different elections. Eleven were for seats in the NSW parliament and nine were for House of Representative seats. He was unsuccessful in all his attempts. He stood as an Independent in seven of these, as a Republican in five, as an ALP candidate in three, as an Industrial Socialist Labor Party candidate in two, and once for the Independent Labor Party, the Soldiers Citizens and War Workers Labour Party and the Australian Labor Movement. He contested nine different electorates in his twenty attempts. He had four attempts at the seat of Marrickville (NSW State Parliament) and five at the seat of Grayndler (House of Representatives). It would be difficult to find any other Australian with such a record of varied electoral attempts over such a long period.

Although his role as a Recruiting Sergeant in 1916 had come to an end with the introduction of the conscription debate, by this time he had already encouraged many other young men to enlist for the war. His three younger brothers, for example, all followed his lead. Frank served with the 30th Battalion in France.⁴⁰ Edward, the youngest, served with the ANZAC Provost Corps and was wounded at Gallipoli on 30 June 1915, five weeks before William was wounded.⁴¹ John served with the 33rd Battalion and was gassed and wounded in France.⁴² Fortunately all the McCristals survived the war and returned to Australia.

William's Death Notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (26 June 1963) referred to him as a former member of the 1st Light Horse Regiment, with no mention of his life as a timber worker, wharf labourer and farmer. He was proud of his service with this unit at Gallipoli and during many of his electoral campaigns he liked to be known as Sergeant McCristal. His service record as a soldier was embodied in his roots; his political leanings as a socialist and republican came second.

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³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_results_for_the_District_of_Marrickville

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_results_for_the_division_of_Grayndler#Elections_in_the_1950s

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_New_South_Wales_state_election,_1962

³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 26 June 1963

³⁹ See war record of T.W. McCristal, *op.cit*

⁴⁰ Frank McCristal, Service No.1805, Enlisted 2/9/15 Age 24:
<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=1941520>

⁴¹ Edward Thomas McCristal, Service No.438, Enlisted 22/8/14 Age 28:
<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=1941477>

⁴² John Patrick McCristal, Service No.3350, Enlisted 19/6/17, Age 33:
<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=1941478>

BEST SHOT OF VICTORIAN MILITARY FORCES MEDAL

John Rogers

Michael Downey wrote about the Best Shot Medal for the Victorian Military Forces in the April/June 1986 issue of *Sabretache*.¹ This article simply expands on Michael's information with recently discovered details of the recipients, as well as clarifying some confusing issues.



Fig.1: Zebina Lane's First of Five Best Shot Medals
(Source: Museum Victoria / Photographer: Jennifer McNair)

In the 1800s skill in civilian rifle shooting was encouraged by the Victorian colonial government with musketry competitions. The government provided rifle ranges, funding, arms, ammunition and rail travel vouchers to and from practice, etc. The aim was to ensure that a large number of trained men were available in the event of the colony facing an external threat.

At the same time, skill in musketry in the permanent forces and militias was fostered by encouraging excellence with various rewards such as badges, medals and trophies. Men in the full-time and part-time naval and military forces were required to undertake the trained-soldier musketry course. This course included:²

- Firing over five distances
- An Advance and Attack course
- Volley firing from 400 to 500 yards
- Firing five shots within 50 seconds at 200 and 300 yards
- Firing ten shots at 500 and 600 yards from any position

¹ *Sabretache*, vol.27, no.2, April/June 1986, pp.25-26.

² *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 June 1901.

Any man who achieved a score of 120 or more, out of a possible score of 220, was classed as a marksman and received a Marksman Badge. The man with the highest score in the company received a Best Shot in the Company Badge, while the best shot in the regiment received a Best Shot in the Regiment Badge. These badges were worn on the left arm for the year following their award. The Sergeant of the best shooting company was awarded the Best Shooting Company Badge which was worn on the sergeant's right arm.



Marksman Badge
(Photo: AWM/06892)



Best Shot in Company Badge
(Photo: AWM REL/12646)



Best Shot in Regiment Badge
(Photo: www.diggerhistory.info)



Best Shooting Company Badge
(Photo: www.diggerhistory.info)

Fig.2: Trained-Soldier Musketry Course Badges

Although winners were announced prior to the musketry year of 1892-3, there does not appear to have been any special badge for the best shot in the Victorian Naval and Military Forces. This oversight was rectified when the man achieving the highest score of all military participants in the colony received the locally designed and struck silver medal, known as the Best Shot of the Victorian Military Forces Medal. This medal was awarded annually from 1892-3 until 1900-1. It was worn on the right breast on all occasions in uniform until the following year's medal had been issued.³ Although nine medals are recorded as having been presented, there were in fact only five recipients. Zebina Lane won the medal five times while Edwin Jewell, G. Hawthorn, C. Pierd and Con Burrow won it once each.

The Best Shot medal has the same obverse as the Type II Victoria Volunteer Long and Efficient Service medal. The simplified stars of the Southern Cross are on a plain cross with the motto *Pro Deo et Patria* (For God and Country), in the garter surmounted with a crown. The words 'Local Forces Victoria' surround the central design elements. Whereas the Long Service medal bears the words 'FOR LONG AND EFFICIENT SERVICE' on its reverse, the Best Shot medal instead has the words 'BEST SHOT OF VICT. MILITARY FORCES' on its reverse. Whereas the Long Service medal has a small scroll below the words, the Best Shot medal has the scroll

³ *Victorian Government Gazette*, 17 August 1894. p.3378

above the words, so as to leave room for a date to be engraved at the bottom of the medal. The Best Shot medal has a blue ribbon and the Type II suspender.

| Best Shot Medal Winners | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Musketry Year | Winner | Details | Score |
| 1892-3 | Edwin C. Jewell ⁴ | Impressed – EDWIN C. JEWELL, LANCE CORPORAL, F COY. VICT. RANGERS. Engraved – 1894. ⁵ | 184/220 ⁶ |
| 1893-4 | Zebina Lane | Impressed – ZABINA LANE, SERGT. B COY. VICT. RANGERS. Engraved – 1893-94. ⁷ | |
| 1894-5 | Zebina Lane | Sergeant B Company Victorian Rangers. ⁸ | |
| 1895-6 | Zebina Lane | Sergeant B Company Victorian Rangers. ⁹ | 199/220 |
| 1896-7 | Zebina Lane | Sergeant B Company Victorian Rangers. ¹⁰ | 207/220 |
| 1897-8 | G. Hawthorn | No. 1625, Private, 2nd Battalion Mounted Rifles. ¹¹ Kerang Detachment, I Company, Mounted Rifles. ¹² | 201/220 |
| 1898-9 | Zebina Lane | Sergeant B Company Victorian Rangers. ¹³ | 200/220 |
| 1899-1900 | C. Pierd | Sergeant, Rosedale section of the Rangers. ¹⁴ | |
| 1900-1 | Con Burrow ¹⁵ | Colour Sergeant, 3rd Battalion. Ballarat. ¹⁶ | |

Inconsistent Dating

Two of the three known Best Shot medals have the recipient's name, rank and unit impressed on their rim. Sergeant Zebina Lane's first of five Best Shot medals has the date 1893-4 engraved on its reverse. Some confusion has been caused by Lance Corporal Edwin Jewell's medal having the date 1894 engraved on its reverse. From newspaper reports we know that

⁴ *The Argus*, 11 May 1894, p.5.

⁵ *Sabretache*, vol.27, no.2, April/June 1986, p.25.

⁶ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 February 1894, p.2.

⁷ Museum Victoria.

⁸ *Mornington Standard*, 30 May 1895, p.3.

⁹ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 December 1896, p.3.

¹⁰ *The Mafra Spectator*, 1 April 1897, p.3.

¹¹ *Bairnsdale Advertiser & Tambo & Omeo Chronicle*, 20 August 1898, p.2.

¹² *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 May 1898, p.3.

¹³ *Williamstown Chronicle*, 11 August 1899.

¹⁴ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 20 July 1901, p.6.

¹⁵ *The Ballarat District Citizens & Sports 1916* by M. M. McCallum, Tulloch & King, Ballarat, p.17 lists Con Burrow as winning the Best Shot of the Victorian Military Forces for the years 1900-2. *The Argus* of 6 June 1902 only lists him as the Best Shot in the Battalion. It is likely that the Victorian Military Forces Best Shot medal was discontinued after federation.

¹⁶ *The Argus*, 1 November 1901, p.9.

Edwin Jewell won his medal for the 1892-3 musketry year.¹⁷ A possible explanation as to why Edwin Jewell's medal was dated 1894 is that the Type II dies were not ready to be used until the 30 April 1894.¹⁸ When Edwin Jewell was presented with his medal in May 1894, it was presumably engraved with the current year's date by mistake.

The Godfrey Medal

Although two of the three known Best Shot medals were impressed and engraved, the third known medal, which was last sold at auction in 2006, has no markings. As this third medal was obtained from the Godfrey family, it was assumed to have been awarded to James J. Godfrey of the Queenscliff Battery. However, the winners of the Best Shot medal have been identified for every musketry year from 1892-3 up to 1900-1, and there is no mention in the press of anyone named Godfrey winning the best shot medal. It is therefore more likely that the 'Godfrey medal' was either an unissued medal, which would explain its lack of markings, or that it was actually awarded to one of the five known winners, and not to James Godfrey.

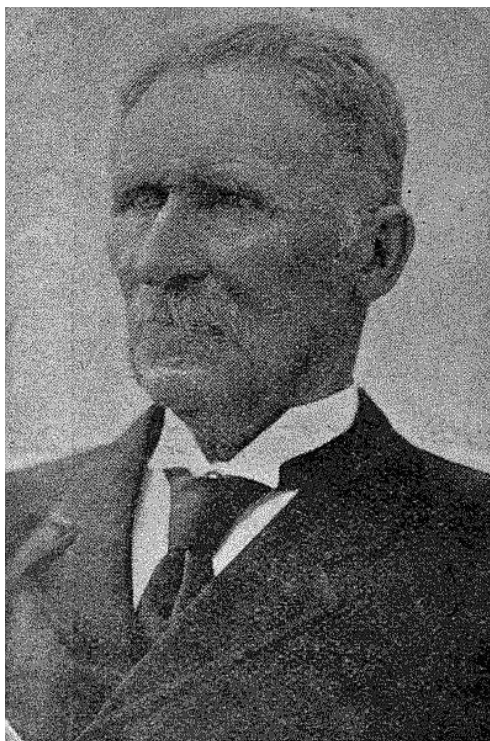


Fig.3: Zebina Lane (Shown in 1900, aged 70)

Not only did Sergeant Lane win the Best Shot Medal five times, his 1896-7 score of 207 was the highest of the known winning scores. Lane won his last medal in 1898-9 at the age of 69, six years before suffering a stroke in 1904, and his death two years later. (Photo: The Australasian, 21 July 1900)



Fig.4: Edwin Campbell Jewell

Served in the 1st Victorian Contingent in the Boer War. Invalided home to Australia in 1900 and awarded a pension.¹⁹ (Photo: Ancestry.com)

¹⁷ *The Argus*, 11 May 1894, p.5.

¹⁸ R.D. Williams, *The Victoria Volunteer Long and Efficient Service Medal 1881-1901*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1976.

¹⁹ Boer War Nominal Roll, Australian War Memorial.



Fig.5: Arthur Charles (Con) Burrow (Shown in 1884)

Joined the Grenadier Guards aged eleven as a drummer boy in 1868. Served in the Egyptian campaign and was present at the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir. Served as an Instructional Sergeant Major with the Victorian Military Forces, mainly with the 3rd Battalion in Ballarat. Returned to Britain and completed 21 years with the Grenadier Guards. Re-joined the 3rd Battalion in Victoria in 1889 and won a number of musketry competitions. Served in the Great War as Drill Instructor for the Home Defence Corps.²⁰ (Photo: Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria)

The author is keen to learn further information of any of the Best Shot Medal recipients. He may be contacted at John@JohnRogers.com.au

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AS YOU WERE ...

Feedback from Readers and Contributors

Phil Rutherford writes:

- Having finally cleared the mess from my desk I have been able to return to the March 2014 edition of *Sabretache* and remind myself of why I had left it open at the article on Hospital Ship *Grantala*: it was to respond to a question posed by the article's author, Rohan Goynes. The author asks why the nurses aboard this ship have not been honoured by a mention on the Nurses Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra. From my research the answer is because the nurses were not officially part of the Australian war effort – they had simply turned up at the docks and volunteered their services to the medical staff on board. As the article states, the positions they filled were those which were supposed to have been taken by Royal Navy personnel. They were simply civilian nurses who wanted to contribute their services. I don't have access to the names of these volunteers but it is possible that they may have been members of the New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve who, in the days after the Boer War, had been created as part of the new Commonwealth forces. These were civilian nursing staff who undertook part-time training in such things as first aid and staffing field hospitals, and instructed stretcher bearers and others required to support the medical teams. In their haste to volunteer their services they were actually outside of Australia when the Australian Army Nursing Service was mobilised as part of the Army Medical Corps and first headed for England (only to disembark in Egypt). I have not seen any direct evidence of this, but I assume that the failure to include them on the Nurses Memorial is because officially Australia did not despatch nurses with the Hospital Ship. I hope this has been of some assistance.

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²⁰ McCallum, *The Ballarat District Citizens & Sports 1916*, p.17

SOCIETY NOTICES

‘Gallipoli’ Special Edition of *Sabretache*

The Special Gallipoli edition of *Sabretache* will be launched on 9 February 2015 at the Royal Military College Officers’ Mess, Duntroon from 10.30am. The Federal President has invited His Excellency, Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor General of Australia, to launch the edition.

The editor is still willing to consider submissions to the special edition. Articles may be of any length up to c.5000 words, but should be directly relevant to the Gallipoli campaign of 1915.

Rohan Goyne, Federal President

Australian Instructional Corps Nominal Roll

It may be of interest to other members of the Society that I have constructed a nominal roll of the Australian Instructional Corps from a series of official records (the Army does not have a nominal roll of the AIC because it was a ‘posting unit’). Currently I have recorded over 1700 names (the corps had a posted strength of 600, all warrant officers classes 1A, 1 and 2). A recently found record of ‘Qualifying Courses at the School of Musketry and later the Small Arms School’ (courtesy of The Infantry Museum, Singleton) is providing still more information about AIC members. I am, of course, willing to share this information, and may be contacted via the editor.

Roland Millbank

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PAGE AND SCREEN

Resources for the Researcher and Collector

- **Andrew Davies** is an online producer with ABC Radio National. He has published an article titled ‘Padres: Australia’s WW1 Military Chaplains’ which he hopes might be of interest for the MHSA. It can be accessed here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/padres-australias-wwi-military-chaplains/5649194>

- The Returned and Services League of South Australia & the Northern Territory (RSL-SA/NT) have created a unique Virtual War Memorial. This project has been the culmination of over two years’ hard work and combined efforts from many major historical sources. Between 1914 and 1918 many servicemen went over, never to come back. We remember them by engraving their names on memorials found all over our nation. However, times have changed, and as such, remembrance ideals must change with the generational shift. The RSL Virtual War Memorial enables the connection of a person’s service profile to many other sources, allowing rich and informative character studies to be constructed that can then be read online. It also offers the opportunity for Australians everywhere to get involved and capture important stories so as much as possible can be preserved for future generations. The RSL Virtual War Memorial has been specifically designed to capture the stories of ordinary men and women whose extraordinary service and sacrifice is not currently profiled in official histories. The website will display visual imagery of each subject, a history of their time in the armed forces, as well as personal written contributions from those veterans themselves and family members. The website can be accessed at

<http://www.rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au>

Christopher Luong, Public Relations Officer, RSL South Australia

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CANVAS, WOOD, WIRES AND TYRES: THE STORY OF No.1 SQN, AFC IN PALESTINE 1916-1918 – PART TWO

Neil Dearberg

With Romani won, the Turks retreated towards Palestine. The railway, water pipeline and telegraph re-commenced their journey eastward. The first joint air-to-ground support had proved a brilliant success, and the Australian leadership had shown how men, horses, camels and aeroplanes might be employed to fight desert warfare effectively.

An Airman's Life

The pilots, observers and ground crew of No.1 Sqn AFC and No.14 Sqn RFC had exceeded expectations, without casualties up to this point. Their coordination with mounted troops, artillery, naval forces and between themselves created the cement for ongoing operations. But soldiers in the desert had no friendly villages to return to at night, no warm girls for company and no romantic taverns as in France. Instead, they contended with Bedouin tribal lore, typified by looting and theft from the dead and wounded, mindless of welfare and kindness. Flies, fleas, scorpions, snakes, spiders were their companions; brackish water, unfamiliar local food, illness, diseases their comforts; heat, wind, dust, sand storms their tormentors. This was one of the worst environments white soldiers could fight in.

Unsurprisingly, the horse and camel men showed interest for these ne'er-before-seen flying machines. Aware that aircrews went home to clean sheets, mess-cooked meals and a cold beer, volunteers queued to join the AFC. These had first-hand knowledge of mounted tactics and terrain; they were experienced observers. The recruiters understood them, especially those with backgrounds in hand/eye skills: sportsmen, musicians, horsemen, tradesmen. They made wonderful replacements for those British observers who had, by necessity, fulfilled that role till now.

Onwards

Romani behind, El Arish and Gaza sat at the end of the Sinai desert and gateway to the plains of Palestine. In between were numerous Turkish occupied villages and towns. Late August to early December was consolidation and gradual advance by Gen Murray's Egyptian Expeditionary Force; the railway, water pipeline and telegraph continued; much of Murray's experienced infantry was withdrawn to France, replaced by little trained and inexperienced Territorial soldiers. Indian Lancers replaced British cavalry. Squadron replenishments continued, other than good aeroplanes, as did training of the newly recruited airmen.

Aircrews of No.1 Sqn and No.14 Sqn (then the only two squadrons in theatre) were called upon to spot the entrenched positions of enemy artillery, machine guns and trench systems. Photography, bombing, spotting Turkish reinforcements, message dropping to the very feet of land forces, artillery and naval gunfire direction became regular tasks. Further east in today's Saudi Arabia, in October 1916 Lt T.E. Lawrence joined the Northern Arab Army of Emir Feisal as British Liaison Officer. His fame, along with Australian air, ground and sea support to 'Lawrence of Arabia' was yet to come, as it was for other British officers as significant but less famous than Lawrence.

German airmen were also active. They received new Rumpler aircraft that were faster than the BE2c and could fire forward through their propellers. With superior speed and firepower it is

surprising that their airmen did not take that advantage to the British and Australian aircraft. Even when chased, these Germans outpaced the chasers rather than fight. Our blokes claimed it was because they were more aggressive and daring – perhaps so.

As October headed into early December, air support led the mounted forces to capture several key towns and villages and knocked at the gates of El Arish. ‘An important patrol by Lieutenants Roberts, R.M. Drummond and W.J.Y. Guilfoyle on October 25th encountered no anti-aircraft fire over El Arish, and discovered signs of diminished strength in the Turkish force there.’¹ This was significant as over the next four weeks Gen Murray’s aim, which became Gen Chauvel’s task, was to capture El Arish. On 20 December air patrols reported the towns of El Arish and the nearby Maghara abandoned. The mounted troops occupied those key towns that night, without a shot fired. Two days later ten aircraft from No.1 Sqn supported the Anzac Mounted Division attack on nearby Magdhaba; it fell. The path into Palestine was opening. Attention turned to Gaza and Beersheba, the Turkish railhead and German airfields.

The German squadron had its own difficulties. All its equipment had to be brought 5,000 miles from Germany. Resupply over a broken Turkish rail system, long and rough road distances, inadequate transport, no shipping ports, antagonism between Turkish and German staffs, and lack of inspiration of German air crews far from their comforts of home, provided some advantage for the AFC and RFC. Although enemy aircraft presented few troubles, anti-aircraft fire was thick over targets. Equally, the climatic conditions played havoc with engines, machine guns and aircraft fittings. Many were the forced landings. Chauvel himself was involved rescuing downed airmen. In July 1916 he wrote his wife:

I have just come back from a ‘stunt’ ... [W]e also rescued an aeroplane which had come down in the desert. That is the third we have helped in during the last few days. They have to take them to pieces and pack the bits on camels. The camel that gets the engine does not appreciate it!! When they come down in the desert they sometimes have to walk as much as 30 miles back to our lines.²

Similar rescues by ground forces, as well as landings by mates, became commonplace and many an airman was saved death or capture through mateship and courage.

Squadron Life

As the advance through Sinai continued the airmen supported long-range mounted patrols of camel and horse. It worked two ways. Aircraft provided ‘eyes’, bombed, photographed and resupplied. In return, ‘flying corps mechanics accompanied mounted units with supplies to set up advanced landing grounds’.³ This enabled our aircrews to see far behind the enemy’s front line and provided extensive strategic and tactical advantage despite their inferior aircraft. This advantage expanded with improvements in photographic equipment, bomb sightings, wireless for ground contact with artillery and mounted troops, innovations in dropping supplies to the mounted troops and training of former horse and camel men into flying roles. As 1916 closed, new aircraft dribbled in. The Martinsyde, a single-seat aircraft but with a bigger engine and 150mph speed rather than the BE2c’s 115mph, gave some advantage. And it had two Lewis guns for extra firepower. But, only one per Flight!

Flying aircraft was one thing; procedures on landing were quite another, and vital. Once the

¹ F.M. Cutlack, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, vol.8 *Australian Flying Corps*, 11th ed, pp.43-44

² A.J. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, p.73

³ M. Molkentin, *Fire In The Sky*, Allen and Unwin, 2010, p.71

pilot and observer dismounted, ground crew whose day, or night, was about to start would set upon them.

‘How’s the engine, sir?’ asks the engine-man ... ‘Rigging all right, sir?’ from the riggers ... ‘Guns and gears all right, sir? No stoppages?’ from the Armourer-Sergeant ... ‘Your Lewis ok sir?’ (to the observer) ... Then pilots and observers glance over the wings with the rigger to see if any bullets or pieces of Archie (anti-aircraft fire) have struck them.⁴

These encounters were followed by a debrief between pilot and observer, then with the Sqn Recording Officer, with cameras off to the Photo Section and other intel distributed. Then refuelling ready for the next crew out.

Squadron commanders changed frequently. Capt Rutledge left to go to England in May 1917. Capt Dicky (as his fellows called him) Williams, C Flight Commander, was promoted Major and Squadron Commander, of the yet to be concentrated squadron. ‘He did not swear, smoke or drink – yet he was boss of a crack Australian squadron! Also, his sense of humour was remarkably under-developed ... Dicky was not only popular but he was deeply respected throughout his squadron.’⁵

Each aircraft seemed to have its own ‘personality’:

Machines are like horses in this respect – although they may be brothers and sisters, they differ greatly. Just as it is sometimes hard to believe certain horses are by the same sire, so characteristics of certain machines differ greatly, although they are of the same type and built in the same factory.⁶

For this reason, pilots were not allowed to ‘own’ an aircraft for fear they may take one set of habits to another aircraft that did not require similar treatment, where crashes or failed missions could result.

In December the previously scattered Flights of No.1 Sqn finally came together. They really were No.1 Sqn AFC and would remain so. Despite hostilities, an ‘esprit’ developed between opposing airmen. One of many occurrences was on 8 March 1917. While six of our bombers were out dropping their loads, one lone Fokker dived at their airfield, scrambling two planes to retaliate. Expecting bombs the groundies dived for cover. A message bag fluttered gently, with two letters from captured airmen plus one for a captured German pilot; the German then departed. Next day, the British flew over the German airfield, dropped a thank you note and apologised for chasing the intruder. While this apology was happening, Captains Williams and Baillieu were bombing another German airfield at Ramleh.

Every now and then the airmen would receive ‘time-off’ and fly back to Cairo for rest. But sometimes the larrikin couldn’t resist the chance to ‘buzz’ the Arab dhows on the Nile. With promises not to do it again, they did it again! Australians didn’t like the ‘Gypos’ whom they regarded as cheats and swindlers, and sport is sport. Tennis, swimming and a beer were also popular. Relaxing in the Empire Soldiers Club (established by the Australian ladies Alice Chisolm and Rania MacPhillamy) with ice cream and good food, games and letter writing material, books and all-rank integration, all eased a jaded mind.

⁴ Lt L. Sutherland MC, DCM, *Aces and Kings*, John Hamilton, London, p.12

⁵ *ibid* p.54

⁶ *ibid* pp.16-17

Onwards To Gaza and Beersheba

The Turks retreated from El Arish in an orderly manner, into prepared positions at Gaza. On the coast of the Mediterranean Sea it was a largish town, splattered with gently waving palm hods and mud buildings along the beaches. Well hidden amongst these were Turkish artillery, machine guns and thousands of soldiers. Water was abundant and the Turks well entrenched. Gaza had to be captured before the advance could continue. Gen Murray mysteriously transitioned his HQ to Cairo and appointed an inexperienced Gen Dobell as Commander Eastern Force to take Gaza.

To prepare though, identifying and neutralising gun emplacements were essential to protect an assault by infantry and mounted troops. This was a job for airmen. Recon, photographing and bombing Gaza continued but guns were hard to find, the foliage being so thick. And the smart gunners didn't fire back so not to give away their positions. The Turkish Army HQ and the German squadron were at Beersheba to the east. Their aircraft had to be taken out lest they interfere with operations against Gaza. On 11 November the whole of No.1 Sqn performed the largest bombing mission yet undertaken by British forces. This created considerable damage to tents and buildings but most of the aircraft were undamaged. Following, in February 1917 Capt Murray Jones bombed Beersheba, destroying three aircraft while Captains Williams and Baillieu bombed the airfield at Ramleh, destroying more.

In March 1917 Dobell ordered the attack on Gaza without adequate knowledge of enemy dispositions. The attack had almost succeeded with Anzac horsemen in position late in the day. Dobell's communications were faulty; he failed to recognise his likely victory and ordered a withdrawal. Dobell was replaced and returned to England. Gaza 1 was lost. General Philip Chetwode was appointed Commander, Desert Column with Gaza still to be captured. The next attack came in April, orchestrated by Murray, out of touch in Cairo. This was worse than the first attack. Airmen played a critical part reporting Turkish movements and directing the safe extraction of mounted troops. Murray wore the defeat, was replaced and returned to England.

General Sir Edmund Allenby arrived to command in June 1917 with orders from the new British Prime Minister, Mr David Lloyd George, to capture Jerusalem by Christmas. Gaza stood in the way. As Allenby arrived the Arab Army, with Lt T.E. Lawrence, captured the port town of Aqaba at the head of the Red Sea. Lawrence, adorned in flowing tribal Arab gown and sandals, descended into Cairo, implored Allenby to support the Arabs, and so created a right flank protection for the EEF. Aircraft, crews and mechanics from No.1 Sqn and No.14 Sqn formed 'X' Flight and went to Aqaba as part of a build-up of British forces to support that right flank, disrupt the Turkish supply line from Damascus to Medina along the Hejaz Railway and keep the Arab Army from turning upon the British

Allenby restructured his force. He created the Desert Mounted Corps, promoted Chauvel to Lieutenant General (the first Australian to reach this high rank) to command it, created the Anzac Mounted Division and promoted the Kiwi, Chaytor to Major General to command that. General Chetwode approached Allenby with a new plan. Capture Beersheba *then* move on Gaza from its less protected flank. Allenby agreed. June to October became a time of reinforcement, preparation, reconnaissance, deception and training. Air operations intensified with the aim to suppress German air superiority by destroying aircraft on the ground or in the air; not easy with poor aircraft. Yet the airmen stuck to their task, minimising German air effect. Aerial photos showed an attack from the east would be little hindered by barbed wire and unfinished trenches. On 31 October a mounted charge by the Australian Light Horse captured Beersheba. A week later Gaza was captured. In both cases there had been major cooperation

between airmen, artillery, infantry and horsemen.

Beyond Gaza into Palestine

Late 1917 saw a build-up of allied air strength.

No.1 Sqn began to receive the long awaited RE8 together with an improved Martinsyde with a more powerful engine ... [C]onsiderable successes were achieved against their immediate foe by bombing attacks against several aerodromes. This resulted in the destruction of a large number of enemy aircraft on the ground.⁷

The Turks continued their orderly retreat. The Germans withdrew north to Ramleh. No.1 Sqn and No.14 Sqn continued their recces, bombings, strafings, photography. Patrols extended beyond Jerusalem, into Biblical Bethlehem, Jericho, Nablus, Haifa, the Dead Sea, Amman and attacked the supply routes.

Jerusalem was captured, after more than 730 years of Muslim rule, on 9 December 1917 without a shot being fired within the ancient city, sacred to the world's three main religions – the Turks had abandoned it. This was an early Christmas present to the British PM and public. In Jerusalem malaria, venereal disease, drunkenness and general 'good fun' became troublesome. 'It was not surprising that some of the soldiers, after so long in the desert, got out of hand...not all of them were content to see the Holy Places and ponder the view from the Mount of Olives.'⁸ But locations for leave were limited.

In the meantime a pilot's life and reputation were sometimes enhanced. Lt Stan Muir had a dog-fight with a German Rumpler around 17 December. Muir's plane got shot up, such that one wing had to be replaced. The only spare was unpainted and white. Painted wings were brownish. Next time up with his motley wings, his aggressive flying style so stressed the enemy pilots they gave him wide berth thereafter. More pilots wanted one white wing.⁹

New air reports showed existing maps bore little resemblance to the terrain. The whole front line had to be remapped so No.1 Sqn was tasked to air-photo over 600 square miles. They accomplished this in two weeks, despite fogs, clouds and enemy fire. The ground forces lapped up these accurate maps. In March 1918 No.1 Sqn was finally equipped with the best of WW1 aircraft, Bristol Fighters. This gave the AFC equality with the RFC (now the Royal Air Force) and almost complete dominance of the air. Dicky Williams was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and given command of 40th Army Air Wing RAF, giving him a strike force of No.1 Sqn and three squadrons of the RAF. Promoting a 'Colonial' officer to command British servicemen was extraordinary; perhaps the Australian pilots looped-the-loop with astonishment and testimony to their Dicky. Major Addison took over command of the squadron.

Airdrops were next to be tested, but in a crisis. During the failed 'raid' on Amman in May 1918, the Australian Mounted Division was under great threat and in retreat: 'the initiative had passed firmly into Turkish hands, ammunition was running short, Hodgson's brigades were living off the country and, thanks to the resourceful D.D.M.S. Colonel Downes, badly needed medical supplies were dropped from the air'.¹⁰ In this retreat the AFC stood by their mates:

⁷ C. Schaedel, *Men and Machines of the Australian Flying Corps 1914-19*, Kookaburra Technical Publications, 1972, p.17

⁸ Hill, p. 139

⁹ Molquentin, p.75

¹⁰ Hill, p.150

‘William’s squadron in which many former Light Horsemen were flying gave maximum support to their comrades on 4 May. Although their role was reconnaissance, every plane took off armed with bombs to harass the enemy and at every opportunity they attacked with their machine guns’.¹¹ This support allowed 4th Light Horse Brigade to fight another day.

Armageddon

Allenby’s task was to annihilate the Turks. Spring brought the EEF’s advance and the Turks’ retreat north. Airmen continued spotting Turk movements. And now they were called upon to ferry senior officers and take them on spotting missions. Williams took Chauvel on several reces and a whole new appreciation overtook Chauvel. Such flights were faster and more revealing than mounted patrols and the by now preferred Light or Armoured Car patrols used by Allenby, Chauvel and other formation commanders. The Flying Corps had a future.

Summer in the Jordan Valley was preparation for Allenby’s annihilation of the Turks. Intel gathering, planning, deception, training, resupply and destruction of enemy aircraft were the order. Temperatures over 50°C, impregnating dust, limited water, malaria, cholera, fleas, disgusting food, thermals unfavourable to aircraft – all assaulted bodies and minds. From May through September they suffered yet continued. Machines and men gathered photos, spotted Turkish movements, fought German aircraft until there were few left; the AFC and RAF dominated the air. At the same time, our airmen strafed and bombed trains, supply columns and Turkish forts in the Arab Army area along the Hejaz Railway. In July Lieuts Fysh and McGinness (who would come home to establish QANTAS) bombed a 2,000-camel and 500-cavalry column, scattering them like startled locusts.

The Battle of Armageddon (or Megiddo) commenced on 19 September. At the forefront was Capt Ross Smith. There was only one Handley-Page bomber in the theatre and Smith, among all the pilots in the now five British and one Australian squadrons in Palestine, had been selected by General Salmond, the British Air Commander, to fly it. He dropped sixteen 112-pound bombs on the telegraph station and railway yards at El Afule, destroying both. This knocked out the Turkish communication system and field commanders were unaware a major offensive had commenced. The German Commander, General Liman von Sanders, narrowly avoided capture in the confusion.

Lawrence, on 22 September, called for help to suppress attacks on his Arabs by a few German aircraft still flying. Pilots Ross Smith, Peters and Traill with their observers were stationed at his camp at Azrak, a 2,000-year-old Roman fort in the east.

It was breakfast time with the smell of sausages in the air. We sat around, very ready: but the watcher on the broken tower yelled ‘Aeroplane up’... Our Australians, scrambling wildly in their yet-hot machines, started them in a moment. Ross Smith with his observer, leaped into one, and climbed like a cat up into the sky. After him went Peters.

The Australians destroyed several of the invaders and, in Lawrence’s words, ‘Ross Smith was back, and gaily jumped out of his machine, swearing that the Arab front was the place.’¹² Ross Smith would again impress Lawrence and the Arabs when he piloted the Handley-Page to resupply the Arab Army. Smith received seven awards including the MC and Bar, DFC and two Bars, AFC, and was knighted post-war for services to aviation. He tragically died in a crash in 1922.

¹¹ Hill, p.151

¹² T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1926 edn, repub. Penguin, pp.639-40

The German air force was destroyed. The AFC and RAF had total domination. The retreating Turkish and German forces were bombed and strafed relentlessly. In Wadi Fara, a valley where the retreating Turkish 7th Army was trapped, many pilots reported their horror as they bombed and strafed a beaten mass of humanity. Conscience fought duty; duty won. The 7th ceased to exist. Damascus was captured. The advance to Aleppo continued and it was captured. On 31 October the Turks capitulated and an armistice began. It was over. No.1 Squadron AFC was now legendary.

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The following is an extract from No.1 Sqn, AFC Diary, pp.38-39, held at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra:

Address by General Allenby to No.1 Sqn, AFC, prior to their return to Australia

Before the Squadron embarked, it was inspected by the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Edmund Allenby, G.C.D., G.C.M.G., who expressed a wish to personally address the officers and other members of the unit prior to their return to Australia. On February 19th he journeyed from Haifa to Kantara a distance of about 250 miles, with this special object. In addressing the Squadron on parade, General Allenby said:-

'Major Addison, Officers and men. It gives me considerable pleasure to have this opportunity of addressing you prior to your return to Australia. We have just reached the end of the greatest war known to history. Today we see our enemies so thoroughly beaten that it will not be possible for them to renew hostilities against us. The operations in this theatre of the war have been an important factor in bringing about this victorious result. The victory gained in Palestine and Syria has been one of the greatest in the war and undoubtedly hastened the collapse that followed in making this achievement possible. You gained for us an absolute supremacy of the air thereby enabling my cavalry, artillery and infantry to carry out their work on the ground practically unmolested by hostile aircraft. This undoubtedly was a factor of paramount importance in the success of our arms there. I desire therefore, to personally congratulate you on your splendid work. I congratulate not only the Flying Officers, but also your Mechanics for although the Flying Officers did the work in the air, it was the good work on the part of our Mechanics that kept a high percentage of your machines serviceable. I wish you all 'bon voyage' and trust that the peace now attained will mean for you all future happiness and prosperity. Thank you and good-bye.'

Decorations, No.1 Sqn AFC*

- 1 VC
 - 1 DSO
 - 1 OBE
 - 18 MC
 - 20 DFC
 - 2 MM
 - 9 MSM
 - 3 AF MSM
 - 39 MID
- 2 foreign awards

* AWM, War Histories, WW1, No. 1 Sqn AFC

MISSION TO KERGUELEN: AN AUSTRALIAN MILITARY OPERATION IN THE SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS IN 1941

Rohan Goyne

The genesis for the article came from the memoirs of Australia's Antarctic pioneer Dr Philip Law, *Antarctic Odyssey*, where Dr Law refers to his expedition to establish an Australian base on Heard Island and stopping over at the Kerguelen Archipelago. In the introduction to the chapter on Iles De Kerguelen, Dr Law notes that HMAS *Australia* visited the island in 1941 to lay sea mines to deny the enemy use of the main harbours of this Sub-Antarctic island.

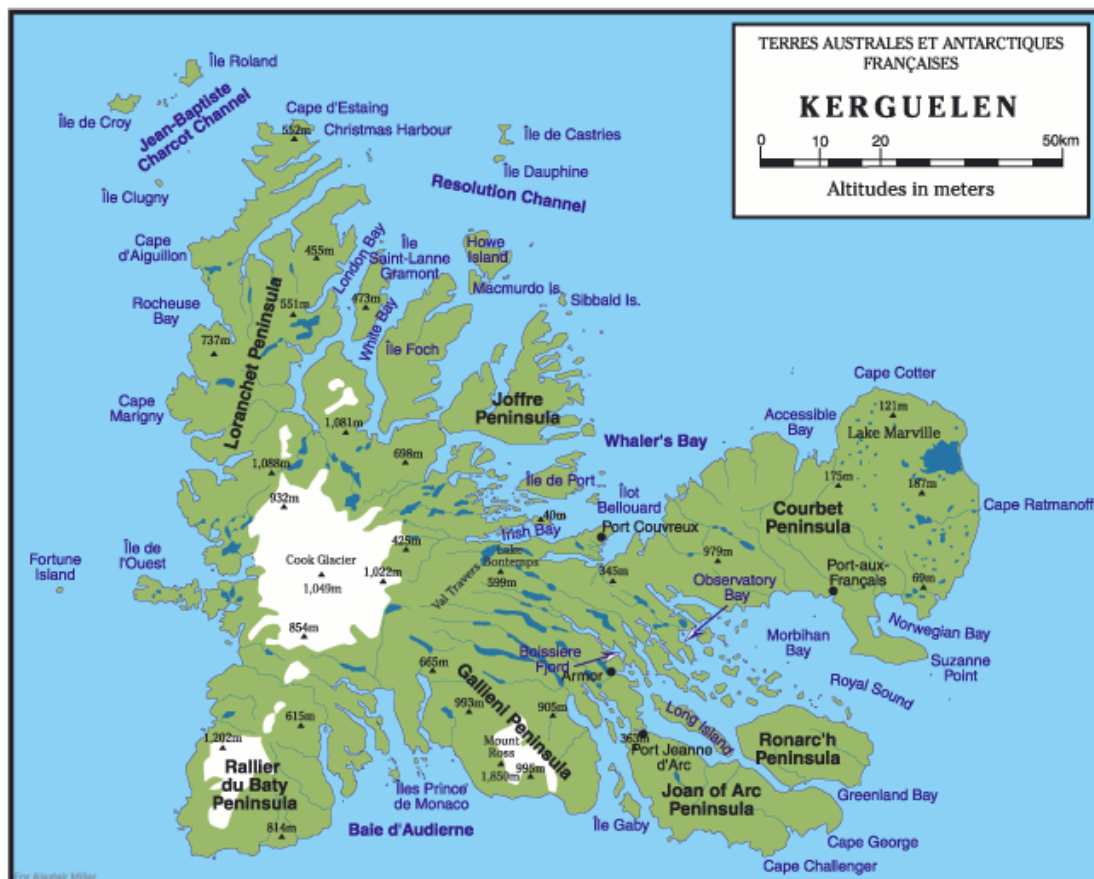


Fig.1: Kerguelen Island (web.uvic.ca/~stucraw/kerquelenmaps.html)

The official history records HMAS *Australia*'s operation in the Kerguelen as 'For the rest of the year she was on escort and patrol duties on the South Atlantic Station, this period including a brief visit to Kerguelen to seek for possible German raiders.'¹ For example, the official history also records that the German raider *Komet* was present at Kerguelen in March 1941.

On the 1 November 1941, HMAS *Australia* under the command of Capt G. Moore arrived at Kerguelen Island and proceeded to undertake a sweep of the island to detect if there was any evidence of the activity of German commerce raiders utilising the island's sheltered harbours as refuges whilst undertaking offensive operations against allied shipping lanes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

¹ G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945 – Series 2 Navy, vol.1*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957, p.511.

On the strength of her investigations HMAS *Australia* laid magnetic mines in four locations at the entrances to the harbours of Kerguelen Island.² HMAS *Australia* particularly laid sea mines at the entrance to the old French whaling station at Port Jeanne d'Arc which is shown on the map of the island (fig.1).



Fig.2: HMAS Australia, 1937

(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMAS_Australia_Oct_1937_SLV_straightened.jpg)

The strategic importance the German Navy placed upon Kerguelen Island is represented by the German plans to establish a meteorological station on the island as late as May 1942. The German raider *Michel* transferred a meteorologist and two radio technicians to a supply ship which was to transport them to Kerguelen Island to establish the station. Whilst in transit the orders were countermanded, so the plan was never put into action and the effectiveness of the sea mining operation conducted by HMAS *Australia* – as to whether the mines could deny enemy shipping access to the secure anchorages on the island – was never tested.

Subsequently, the continued presence of the magnetic mines laid by *Australia* was reported by Phillip Law in 1949 as affecting the passage of the Landing Ship Tank, HMAS *Labuan* whilst making a landing at Kerguelen. The ship was supporting the Australian Antarctic expedition to the continent, which was led by Dr Law:

*The passage to the anchorage were hazardous, for the mines laid in 1941 by HMAS Australia had blocked the normal entrances and the ship was forced to pass through a narrow gap 120 feet wide between two rocky islets.*³

The continued presence of the sea mines is reported in the literature associated with the island as recently as 2008.

The tradition of the Australian Navy operating in the extremes of the Southern Ocean in World War 2 continues today in missions such as the recent search for the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370.

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² ADM 1/12148, Review of Kerguelen Sea Mining by HMAS *Australia* 1941-1944, National Archives of the UK.

³ Dr P. Law P, *Antarctic Odyssey*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1983, p.53.

MAKING OR FINDING A WAY: ALBURY'S OWN – THE 2/23RD INFANTRY BATTALION DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Joseph Morgan

The 2/23rd Infantry Battalion was one of thirty-six infantry battalions raised as part of the Second Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF) during the Second World War.¹ Assigned to the 26th Brigade, upon formation in July 1940 the battalion initially formed part of the 7th Division, but following a reorganisation was moved to the 9th Division. Raised in Albury, New South Wales, the battalion was known as 'Albury's Own' and fought in North Africa against the Italians and Germans, taking part in the Siege of Tobruk, defending the port for eight months in 1941, before undertaking garrison duties in Syria. In 1942, the battalion fought around El Alamein, before being repatriated to Australia in 1943 where it was reorganised for operations in the South West Pacific Area against the Japanese. Later, it joined the Salamaua-Lae campaign, before taking part in the fighting on the Huon Peninsula. It was withdrawn to Australia in early 1944 and remained on the Atherton Tablelands until mid-1945 when it took part in the fighting on Tarakan, which was its final campaign of the war. The battalion was disbanded in February 1946, at Puckapunyal, Victoria.

Formation and training

In mid-1940, Australia had been at war for nearly a year, but few if any of her soldiers had seen combat; indeed, it would not be until January 1941 that the first large formation of Australian troops would go into battle.² The initial shock of war had seen the nation raise a 20,000-strong division – the 6th – for overseas service with the 2nd AIF, the all-volunteer force raised to fight overseas.³ A second division, the 7th, had been authorised in February and a third, the 8th, had begun forming in April 1940. In May, the war situation had worsened when the Germans had launched an assault in Western Europe that saw them complete a lightning advance through France and Belgium and drive towards the English Channel. The threat of an invasion of the United Kingdom resulted in an influx of volunteers for the 2nd AIF in Australia, while two other brigades were also established in the United Kingdom. Eventually, in September 1940, the Australian government decided to use these extra brigades to raise a fourth division within the 2nd AIF, designated the 9th.⁴

The 2/23rd Bn came into being on 22 July 1940 at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, under the command of Lt Col Bernard Evans, formerly the commanding officer of the 57th/60th Bn. Upon formation, the battalion was assigned to Brig Raymond Tovell's 26th Bde along with the 2/24th and 2/48th Bns.⁵ With an authorised strength of over 900 men of all ranks, the battalion was formed on the new British Army infantry establishment that was based around four rifle companies – each of three platoons and designated A to D – and a headquarters company that consisted of signals, anti-aircraft, mortar, and pioneer platoons and a carrier platoon that was eventually equipped with 13 Universal carriers.⁶ The battalion also later raised its own band, equipped with pipes and drums provided through public donations and gifts, under the command of a sergeant who had been a civilian bandmaster before the war.⁷

¹ Excluding the four machine-gun and four pioneer battalions; there were nine infantry battalions raised for each of the four 2nd AIF divisions.

² Kuring 2004, p.119

³ Grey 2008, pp.145-47

⁴ Johnston 2007, p.6; Kuring 2004, p.117

⁵ Share 1991, p.3

⁶ Ryan 2003, pp.13-14

⁷ Share 1991, p.6

Evans was provided with significant latitude in forming his command, personally selecting his officers.⁸ These men, who had all volunteered to transfer to the 2nd AIF, came from a number of Victorian Militia units including the 6th, 22nd, 29th and 57th/60th Bns.⁹ By the start of August, several soldiers arrived to fill headquarters positions, and various specialists such as the medical officer and quartermaster, posted in. On 13 August, Evans and his staff moved to Albury, New South Wales. The 4th Recruit Training Bn (4 RTB) had been established at the Albury Showgrounds and the 2/23rd drew its first recruits shortly after arrival. The first draft included a small group who had been selected by Evans as potential non-commissioned officers. As the month progressed, more men marched-in and on 20 August, the main body of the battalion – some 709 men, the majority recruited from Albury – were transferred from 4 RTB. A final draft of 250 men arrived a week later from a training depot at Colac, bringing the battalion up to a strength of 28 officers and 950 other ranks. At this time, the citizens of Albury offered Evans the title of ‘Albury’s Own’ for the battalion, and basic training began at the Albury Showgrounds. The battalion also adopted *Aut inveniam viam aut faciem* – ‘We shall either find a way or make one’ – as its motto.¹⁰

Resources were scarce during the battalion’s formative period – indeed some of the specialist equipment would not be received until they had arrived in the Middle East and could access British supplies¹¹ – and the situation was so bad initially that the battalion had to borrow rifles from the Albury Grammar School’s cadet corps to mount its first guard.¹² After initial training was completed, the battalion moved to nearby Bonegilla, just over the border in Victoria, marching 12 miles through the town with bayonets fixed. While there, more advanced training took place and on 3 November, after the battalion had been warned out for deployment overseas, the 2/23rd was presented with its colours, which were then laid up in the Albury Town Hall for safe keeping. On 16 November, the battalion entrained at Wodonga, and moved to Port Melbourne where they boarded the converted passenger liner *Strathmore* and embarked for the Middle East.¹³

The Middle East

Sailing via Fremantle and Colombo, after transiting the Suez Canal the battalion disembarked at El Kantara on 16 December.¹⁴ They then moved to Dimra, in Palestine, where the 26th Bde concentrated for the first time and a period of further training began. In February 1941, the 26th Bde was transferred to the 9th Div as part of reshuffling the more experienced brigades – the 18th and 25th – to the 7th Div and moving the less experienced brigades – the 20th and 26th – to the 9th.¹⁵ The following month, the 2/23rd moved to Libya as the 9th Div relieved the 6th. At the end of March when the Germans and Italians went on the offensive, the British Commonwealth forces were pushed back east towards Egypt in what became known as the ‘Benghazi Handicap’, and in early April the 9th Div was committed to the defence of Tobruk as it was surrounded and cut off.¹⁶

⁸ Share 1991, p.3

⁹ AWM52, 8/3/23/1: 2/23rd Battalion War Diary July-December 1940

¹⁰ Share 1991, p.4

¹¹ Kuring 2004, p.117

¹² Share 1991, p.436

¹³ Share 1991, pp.12-18

¹⁴ Share 1991, pp.18-22

¹⁵ Johnston 2005, pp.2-3; Johnston 2002, pp.2-3

¹⁶ Kuring 2004, p.127

For the next eight months, the 2/23rd moved around the beleaguered port's perimeter.¹⁷ Firstly, they defended a position on the western side, astride the road to Derna, where they formed the brigade reserve just inside the outer perimeter that had been established.¹⁸ They remained there until May when they relocated to the Barida Road in the eastern sector. Between July and August the 2/23rd moved to the Red Line in the south east near the El Adem Road and then to the Salient on the south-western portion of the perimeter. While in the western sector, the battalion took part in two significant actions: firstly, on 22 April, when they launched a daylight raid on Italian positions,¹⁹ and then on 17 May when they put in a counterattack with tank support on the northern flank of the Salient.²⁰ Their stay in the east was quieter, albeit punctuated by extensive patrolling beyond the perimeter, but the battalion's period in the salient resulted in its heaviest fighting. They were deployed there for two separate periods: 20 August to 9 September and then 17 September to 3 October.²¹ Finally they were relieved by a Polish battalion moved to Pilastrino. Shortly afterwards the 9th Div was withdrawn from Tobruk by sea from the port and transported back to Alexandria at the request of the Australian government.²² During the siege, the 2/23rd lost 78 men killed, 150 wounded and 79 captured.²³

For the remainder of 1941, the 2/23rd recuperated and trained in Palestine at a camp in Julis.²⁴ In January 1942, after the 6th and 7th Divisions were chosen to return to Australia following Japan's entry into the war, the 9th Div was transferred to Syria and Lebanon where the 2/23rd Bn joined the Allied garrison that had been established there following the capture of the area from Vichy French forces during the Syria-Lebanon campaign.²⁵ They remained there until late June when, following a German and Italian advance in the Western Desert, the 9th Div was transferred hurriedly to El Alamein, west of Alexandria, to help halt the Axis advance into Egypt. They would subsequently remain there for four months and would take part in heavy fighting around El Alamein.²⁶

In mid-July, the 2/23rd took part in an attack around Tel El Eisa. Positioned along the railroad that ran parallel to the Matruh road near the coast, the plan was for the battalion to advance south-west from the high ground around a position known as 'Trig 33' and capture a cutting around two heights known as 'East Point 24' and 'West Point 24'.²⁷ The first attack was put in on 16 July and, accompanied by British tanks, the battalion took the cutting and then pushed on to secure the rest of Tel el Eisa Ridge, inflicting heavy casualties on the defending Sabratha Division and taking over 600 prisoners.²⁸ Heavy fighting ensued, in which the 200 men that were committed suffered nearly 50 percent casualties, and were subsequently forced to withdraw.²⁹ Defensive outposts were then established around the cutting and another attack was undertaken on 22 July. This met with more success, resulting in the Australians taking and holding the cutting, albeit at considerable loss for the 2/23rd, which suffered over 200 casualties,

¹⁷ '2/23rd Battalion' retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp

¹⁸ Share 1991, p.44

¹⁹ Wilmot 1993, p.120

²⁰ Wilmot 1993, p.186

²¹ Share 1991, Map p. 51; '2/23rd Battalion' retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp

²² Johnston 2002, p. 59; Share 1991, pp.147-51

²³ Johnston 2002, p.248

²⁴ Share 1991, pp.151-54

²⁵ Kuring 2004, pp.131-33; Johnston 2002, p.65

²⁶ '2/23rd Battalion' retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp

²⁷ Share 1991, Map, p.162 & p.182

²⁸ Bates 1992, p.165

²⁹ Johnston 2002, p.86

including all company commanders and the battalion second-in-command, Maj Gil Urquhart, who was killed.³⁰ The losses were significant, and although the Germans withdrew from the Tel el Eisa Ridge,³¹ the 2/23rd had to be reconfigured into a headquarters and two rifle companies. They remained in the line until early August, when they were relieved by elements of the 2/15th and 2/17th Bns, and moved back to Qasaba on the coast for rest.³²

A lull period followed as both the Allied and Axis forces assumed defensive postures.³³ During this time the battalion was visited by the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and undertook intensive training.³⁴ Between August and October the fighting around El Alamein was characterised as mainly static warfare; from September the Allies began preparing for their own offensive, and on 22 September 26th Bde moved forward again to the coastal sector and relieved 20th Bde. The 2/23rd mounted patrols and manned forward positions while it was rebuilt, receiving reinforcements and extra Vickers machine-guns.³⁵ The offensive was launched in the last week of October, starting on a line that ran south from the Mediterranean, cutting the coast road and railway line west of Tel el Eisa.³⁶ On the night of 28/29 October, the 2/23rd was committed to the fighting, tasked with passing through the 2/13th and 2/15th Bns and capturing the main road north of ‘Thompson’s Post’, advancing to the battle aboard Bren carriers and British Valentine tanks of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment. From the outset things went awry, with many of the tanks hitting ‘friendly’ mines, and suffering heavily from German anti-tank guns; casualties amongst the 2/23rd were high – over 200, of which 29 were killed – nevertheless, inspired by Evans’ leadership, the battalion eventually managed to advance over 1,000 yards: the assault, although falling short of securing the road, forced the Germans to commit further forces. For their actions, the battalion was personally congratulated by Maj Gen Morshead, commander of 9th Div.³⁷

In early November 1942, Maj Reg Wall assumed command of the battalion on promotion to lieutenant colonel, after Evans was elevated to command 24th Bde.³⁸ After 24th Bde took over from the 26th, the battalion spent the month away from the front. In December, the Australian government requested that 9th Div return to Australia to take part in the fighting against the Japanese and the division was withdrawn from the line while waiting for shipping to become available. The 2/23rd was withdrawn to Palestine and late in the month participated in a divisional-parade at Gaza Airport. Throughout January 1943 preparations were made for the voyage back to Australia, and late in the month the 2/23rd embarked upon the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, departing the Suez Canal on 1 February and sailing south through the Red Sea. The journey across the Indian Ocean lasted a couple of weeks, with Fremantle being reached on 18 February. Two days later, the ship continued its voyage to the eastern states, reaching Sydney on 25 February, where the 2/23rd’s personnel departed for 21 days’ leave.³⁹

New Guinea

At the end of the leave period, the battalion was re-constituted at Seymour with the first drafts

³⁰ Johnston 2002, p.86

³¹ Bates 1992, pp.210-11

³² Share 1991, pp.198-201

³³ Kuring 2004, p.134

³⁴ Share 1991, p.202

³⁵ Johnston 2002, p.92; Kuring 2004, p.134; Share 1991, pp.207-08

³⁶ Johnston 2002, Map, p. 110

³⁷ Share 1991, pp.216 & 219-25; Johnston 2002, p.119

³⁸ Share 1991, pp.228 and 247; Johnston 2002, p.148

³⁹ Johnston 2002, pp.134-40; Share 1991, pp.238-43

returning as early as 21 March. Ten days later, the battalion – now at full strength – marched through the streets of Melbourne as part of 9th Div's official welcome home. In early April 1943, they moved by rail to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland where they undertook further training and were reorganised for jungle warfare ahead of their next campaign: New Guinea.⁴⁰ The reorganisation resulted in the reduction of the battalion's authorised strength by about 100 men, as well as the introduction of new weapons such as the Owen submachine gun and the deletion of the anti-aircraft and carrier platoons, which were replaced by a Vickers machine-gun platoon.⁴¹ In July they moved to Cairns where amphibious training was undertaken with the Americans, after which the battalion received orders to deploy. Embarking upon *Manoora*, on 4 August the 2/23rd landed at the large Allied base at Milne Bay – the scene of a stunning victory for the Australians the previous year⁴² – conducting a mock amphibious landing as they came ashore. After establishing themselves in a camp nearby, they conducted further training with the US Navy to prepare for their debut in the Pacific theatre.⁴³

Throughout 1943, the tide of the fighting in Pacific had slowly been turning towards the Allies and by early September, the Allies sought to capture Lae, as it offered a harbour and an airfield that could be used for future operations against the main Japanese base around Rabaul. The plan called for a two-pronged drive with the Australian 7th Div moving via air to Nadzab, which had been secured by the US 503rd Parachute Regiment, and advancing on Lae from the west through the Markham Valley while the 9th carried out an amphibious landing – the first by an Australian force since Gallipoli in 1915⁴⁴ – at two beaches, designated 'Red' and 'Yellow', on the coast 29 km to the east.⁴⁵ For the landing, the 2/23rd was temporarily detached to 20th Bde, which formed the initial assault force,⁴⁶ and on early on 4 September, the 2/23rd embarked upon a number of Landing Craft Infantry (LCIs), aiming for Red Beach as part of the fifth wave. The landing was virtually unopposed from the shore, but as the LCIs completed the run in they were strafed by a flight of Japanese fighters before three bombers dropped their payloads, damaging one LCI and scoring a direct hit on another, which was carrying the battalion headquarters: a number of casualties resulted, including the battalion's commanding officer and one of its company commanders who were both killed.⁴⁷

Following the loss of Lt Col Wall, Maj Eric McRae temporarily assumed command.⁴⁸ He would command the 2/23rd through the initial stages of the Huon Peninsula campaign, remaining in the position until mid-October 1943 when he was replaced by Lt Col Frederick Tucker, who had previously served in the 2/48th Bn. Tucker would subsequently hold the position until 8 February 1946.⁴⁹ Despite the attack, the rest of the landing craft made it to shore and the battalion was able to shake out and reorganise itself, while patrols were sent out west towards the Buso River. Returning to the command of 26th Bde, in the early afternoon the battalion set out from the beachhead, striking west and advancing along the coastal plain,

⁴⁰ Share 1991, pp.243-51

⁴¹ Kuring 2004, pp.175-76; Johnston 2002, p.143; Share 1991, p.248; Palazzo 2004, p.94

⁴² Coulthard-Clark 1998, pp.227-29

⁴³ Share 1991, pp.252-56

⁴⁴ Dexter 1961, p.329

⁴⁵ Kuring 2004, p.181; Coulthard-Clark 1998, p.241

⁴⁶ Share 1991, p.256

⁴⁷ The sources consulted provide various numbers. Share 1991, p.259 gives nine killed and 45 wounded amongst the battalion. Johnston 2002, p.148 states that there were 28 casualties, of which eight were killed, while Dexter 1961, p.332 says seven killed and 28 wounded.

⁴⁸ Dexter 1961, p.336; Share 1991, p.260

⁴⁹ 'SX10310 Frederick Alfred George Tucker' retrieved on 7 January 2014 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/people_1080618.asp

traversing thick jungle and kunai grass. By the end of the first day, it had crossed the rain-swollen Buso River and established itself within a perimeter on its western bank, where it sent out patrols to contact the neighbouring 2/17th Bn. The 2/23rd was initially unable to locate the 2/17th in the thick jungle, but at last contacted it via signal cable.⁵⁰ After this, the battalion's advance west towards Lae developed into a series of treacherous river crossings and hard slogs and advances through the jungle; beyond the Buso there were four major rivers for the Australians to cross and many smaller creeks.⁵¹ As it advanced through the Singaua coconut plantation and passed through the village of Apo the following day, the battalion detached B Company to proceed north towards the Burep River, while the rest of the battalion continued west. The Bunga and Buiem Rivers were crossed, but due to the difficult terrain a halt had to be called short of the objective, which was the Burep River, while a platoon under Sgt Don Lawrie was sent out to the river's mouth to act as early warning. The next day, 6 September, the 2/23rd made contact with the Japanese for the first time.⁵²

Responding to 9th Div's advance along the coast, a Japanese company advanced towards the battalion to attack. Alerted to their presence by Lawrie's platoon who sent two runners back to battalion headquarters after sighting the approaching company, the battalion rose to meet the threat, launching its own attack just before the Japanese arrived. Coming under heavy mortar fire, over the course of several hours it fended off the attack and inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese. The 2/23rd had suffered a number of casualties in the process – two killed and 15 wounded⁵³ – including the 16-year-old Pte Billy Harrison, who was killed by a Japanese sniper.⁵⁴ Having been beaten back, the remnants of the Japanese company, numbering about 60 men,⁵⁵ came up against Lawrie's platoon. They launched a total of six assaults on the platoon, which fought back desperately under Lawrie's leadership throughout the afternoon and into the evening. Their lines remained unbroken, but as ammunition ran low at 10pm, amidst a heavy downpour, Lawrie led his platoon away from the position to return to the battalion. They had lost four men killed and had to leave one of their wounded, who was too injured to move, behind to be recovered later.⁵⁶ Lawrie was later awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions and was promoted in the field to lieutenant a week after the action.⁵⁷

This was to prove the most significant action of the 2/23rd's involvement in the advance to Lae. The Japanese company, despite having been overwhelmed, had managed to delay the 9th Div long enough for the rain to fill the Busu River, the last major obstacle keeping them from Lae. While it was not enough to prevent the fall of Lae, it kept the majority of 9th Div on the wrong side of the Busu for the better part of a week, and held up them long enough to allow the 7th to beat them into the town, which fell on 16 September. It also allowed a large part of the Japanese garrison time to escape north-east overland onto the Huon Peninsula, which was 9th Div's next destination.⁵⁸

On 22 September, elements of the division landed at Scarlet Beach, north of Finschhafen, and after meeting stiff opposition succeeded in establishing a beachhead. The size of the Japanese

⁵⁰ Share 1991, p.263

⁵¹ Share 1991, Map p.269; Johnston 2002 p.149

⁵² Johnston 2002, p.150; Share 1991, pp.264-65

⁵³ Share 1991, p.275

⁵⁴ Share 1991, p.271

⁵⁵ Johnston 2002, p.150

⁵⁶ Share 1991, p.276

⁵⁷ Johnston 2002, p.151; Share 1991, p.285

⁵⁸ Share 1991, pp.277-89; Johnston 2002 pp.151-52; Kuring 2004, p.182

force in the area had been underestimated and initially only 20th Bde was deployed.⁵⁹ The 2/23rd and the rest of 26th Bde undertook labouring tasks unloading ships until late October, when they were brought in as reinforcements in response to a strong Japanese counter-offensive. On 20 October the battalion landed north of Scarlet Beach, having sailed via Langemak Bay the previous evening. That night they harboured up at the western end of the Heldsbach Plantation, beneath the gaze of the forbidding height of Sattelberg where the main Japanese forces had established their base. For the remainder of the month, the 2/23rd was assigned to the role of divisional reserve, carrying out extensive patrolling operations before being committed to the fighting in earnest in the first week of November, when 26th Bde, now under the command of Brig David Whitehead, relieved the 20th.⁶⁰

As the Australians regained the momentum, 26th Bde, supported by Matilda tanks, was tasked with capturing Sattelberg, before a further drive was made towards Wareo. Replacing the 2/15th Bn, on 3 November the 2/23rd was initially tasked with defending Kumawa four miles inland. Between 3 and 17 November, extensive patrolling was undertaken between Sisi and Kumawa before the battalion joining the advance on Sattelberg.⁶¹ Stepping off from around the Quoja River, the battalion advanced first to Sisi and then took up defensive positions around 'Green Hill',⁶² before moving on to 'Steeple Tree Hill', which was secured on 21 November after overcoming heavy opposition. For his actions during the attack, pressing home an individual assault despite being wounded eight times, Sgt Percy De Forest was posthumously nominated for the Victoria Cross.⁶³

The 2/23rd then advanced west along the Sattelberg Road towards 'Turn Off Corner', before striking north towards the 3200 feature.⁶⁴ In the afternoon of 24 November, the battalion took part in the final assault up the steep slopes of the Japanese stronghold around the Sattelberg mission, but was checked before the position was finally carried by a brilliant individual effort by Sgt Tom Derrick of the 2/48th. After Sattelberg, the 2/23rd continued the advance inland, leading the brigade over inhospitable terrain made worse by heavy rain. Supported by the 2/24th who acted as stores carriers, they advanced through Masangkoo, Fior and Kuanko, before raising the Union Jack over Wareo on 9 December.⁶⁵ After this, responsibility for pursuing the withdrawing Japanese fell to 4th Bde, and the 2/23rd had a relatively quiet time for the remainder of the campaign, although they continued to follow up the advance and send out patrols. In late January 1944 at Sio 9th Div was relieved by the 5th, which continued the advance towards Saidor, while the 9th began returning to Australia.⁶⁶ It had been an arduous, grinding campaign, and while casualties were lighter than those suffered in the Middle East,⁶⁷ arguably it had been harder as the men had not only had to battle a hardened, competent enemy, but also one that expected and gave no quarter. In the steep, fetid, and unforgiving jungle terrain, where disease was as potent an enemy as the Japanese, they had been reduced to the basest level of existence with all but the barest of necessities.⁶⁸

⁵⁹ Johnston 2002, p.153

⁶⁰ Kuring 2004, pp.182-83; Share 1991, pp.292-96; Johnston 2002, p.161

⁶¹ Share 1991, pp.297-313

⁶² Dexter 1961, p.618

⁶³ Share 1991, p.301. De Forest was nominated by his platoon commander, but the award was later downgraded to a Mentioned in Despatches.

⁶⁴ Dexter 1961, p.639

⁶⁵ Share 1991, p.315-23; Johnston 2002, pp.181-82; AWM image 061687

⁶⁶ Kuring 2004, p.184; Johnston 2002, p.184

⁶⁷ Johnston 2002, pp.248-51

⁶⁸ Johnston 2002, p.184; AWM52 8/3/23/43-46: 2/23rd Infantry Battalion War Diary: October 1943 to April 1944

Tarakan

Arriving in Brisbane on the transport *Anhui* on 21 February 1944, the troops were sent on home leave. On 15 April the 2/23rd concentrated at Spencer Street Station in Melbourne and entrained for Ravenshoe in Queensland, where they would begin the process of re-forming.⁶⁹ A long period of frustrating inactivity followed as the shifting fortunes of war combined with inter-Allied politics to reduce the role of Australian troops in the Pacific.⁷⁰ Consequently, the battalion would not see action again until May 1945. In the intervening period, the 2/23rd was retrained and rebuilt: many men were transferred or discharged in this time, and by early May the battalion had only 113 of its 1940 originals. Indeed, the turnover was so high that for more than half the battalion, the final campaign would be their first combat experience.⁷¹ Finally, in early April 1945, they embarked for overseas, bound for Morotai, an island in the Moluccas, where the Allies had established a forward base ahead of operations to recapture Borneo.⁷²

After completing a series of rehearsals on Morotai, the 2/23rd, as part of the reinforced 26th Brigade Group, was committed to Operation Oboe One. On 1 May, they carried out an amphibious landing on the island of Tarakan – defended by over 2,000 Japanese⁷³ – off the north-east coast of Borneo. The 2/23rd led the brigade's attack, landing at Green Beach on the right of the Allied lodgement, near the jetty opposite several large oil tanks that had been destroyed in the pre-assault air attacks. Coming ashore aboard American-crewed LVTs, the plan had been for the vehicles to deliver the troops across the beach, but a seawall halted their movement, and the troops were forced to disembark in the mud. In such conditions, progress off the beach proved difficult and it could have spelt disaster, but luckily Japanese opposition at that stage was virtually non-existent due to the heavy pre-invasion preparatory bombardment.⁷⁴ It did not last long, though, and after traversing their first objective – 'Tank Hill' – they pushed on through thick vegetation about a kilometre inland where they made first contact with the enemy, coming under heavy fire from a number of pillboxes. These held up the advance, but by the end of the day, the 2/23rd had secured all its first-day objectives except the 'Milko' feature where heavy fire checked further movement. Nevertheless, a strong beachhead was secured and over the course of the next few days the battalion captured Milko and then slowly advanced east inland up the 'Glenelg Highway' towards the Pamusian oilfield. On the second day, they took 'King's Cross' and then pushed on towards Tarakan Hill, tasked with securing the high ground overlooking the beachhead. Slowed by increasing Japanese resistance, the battalion made several unsuccessful attempts on the hill before managing to secure one of its spurs – 'Hospital' – on 4 May with the help of several Matilda tanks. On 5 May they were relieved by the 2/3rd Pioneer Bn and subsequently switched to the left of the 2/24th Bn, and in the afternoon they sent patrols along 'Snag's Track' out towards the airfield, which was secured shortly afterwards.⁷⁵

The capture of the airfield and securing of the town represented the attainment of the campaign's main objectives, but nevertheless the fighting continued in earnest in the steep country beyond the township. Throughout that period the Japanese defenders used all means to hold the Australians up, employing booby traps, mines, and even suicide raids, and in the densely vegetated jungle, each position had to be 'winkled out' individually and often losses

⁶⁹ Share 1991, pp.340-42

⁷⁰ Johnston 2002, p.192; Keogh 1965, pp.393-434

⁷¹ Share 1991 p.342; Johnston 2002, pp. 186-89

⁷² Share 1991 pp.349-50; Kuring 2004 p.200

⁷³ Johnston 2002, p.192

⁷⁴ Share 1991, p.363; Keogh 1965, p.441

⁷⁵ Johnston 2002, pp.199-208; Keogh 1965, pp.441-43 ; Share 1991, pp.359-77

were incurred.⁷⁶ After their earlier exertions, the 2/23rd enjoyed a brief period of rest in mid-May around the airfield, before joining actions to take the ‘Margy’ feature, which proved a hard nut to crack before it was finally secured on 31 May after an assault supported by heavy aerial bombardment. The following month, they joined the final assault on the Japanese stronghold around Fukukaku. The 2/23rd occupied ‘Joyce’ in the middle of the month,⁷⁷ and about a week later, the 2/24th secured the final objective. At this point, organised Japanese resistance melted away, as small groups took to the jungle. Mopping up operations began, as the Australians began patrolling across the island looking for isolated pockets of resistance. The 2/23rd was assigned a sector in the centre, between the airfield and Juata oilfields,⁷⁸ and patrols occupied the battalion up until the end of July. Contact with the enemy continued throughout this time and on most days they would clash with the enemy. Finally, as the war came to an end, combat operations ceased in August.⁷⁹ The final chapter of the battalion’s war cost them 162 casualties including 48 dead; the battalion’s final fatality came on 20 July.⁸⁰

Disbandment and legacy

The demobilisation process began even before the end of hostilities, with the first 2/23rd men being repatriated to Australia in July. Others soon joined them or transferred to other units for further service depending upon how many demobilisation points they had earned.⁸¹ While they waited, from October, the 2/23rd undertook a program of sports and education and training on Tarakan. On 6 December, the unit’s cadre embarked upon the *Stamford Victory*, arriving a week later in Brisbane where they were briefly housed at Chermside before entraining for the journey south on 20 December.⁸² They arrived at Puckapunyal two days later and the unit was finally disbanded there on 17 February 1946.⁸³

A total of 3,187 men served in the battalion during the war;⁸⁴ of these 244 were killed in action, 52 died of wounds and three died from accidents, while a further 766 were wounded and 103 became prisoners of war.⁸⁵ For its service, the 2/23rd Bn was awarded the following battle honours: North Africa 1941–42; Defence of Tobruk; The Salient 1941; Defence of Alamein Line; El Alamein; South-West Pacific 1943–45.⁸⁶ The following decorations were awarded: three Distinguished Service Orders, one Member of the Order of the British Empire, 11 Military Crosses, four Distinguished Conduct Medals, 19 Military Medals and 49 Mentions in Despatches.⁸⁷

After the war, the battalion’s colours were laid up at St Matthew’s Church in Albury. In 1991, a fire swept through the church and destroyed them; on 1 September 2013 a new chapel within the church, housing a stained-glass window representation of the colours, was dedicated to the

⁷⁶ ‘2/23rd Battalion’ retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp; Keogh 1965, p.443

⁷⁷ Johnston 2002, pp.216-17

⁷⁸ ‘2/23rd Battalion’ retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp

⁷⁹ Share 1991, pp.380-425

⁸⁰ Johnston 2002, p.250; Share 1991, p.421

⁸¹ Share 1991, pp.424-28

⁸² AWM52, 8/3/23/76: 2/23rd Infantry Battalion War Diary October – December 1945

⁸³ Share 1991, p.428

⁸⁴ Aplin, Greg, ‘2/23rd Australian Infantry Battalion’, New South Wales Parliament Hansard: Private Members’ Statements, 1 September 2010, p. 25002, retrieved 20 August 2013 from: <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20100901010>

⁸⁵ Johnston 2002, p.274. The Australian War Memorial provides slightly different figures: 320 died of all causes and 773 wounded.

⁸⁶ ‘2/23rd Battalion’ retrieved on 7 October 2013 from http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11274.asp

⁸⁷ Johnston 2002, p.253

2/23rd Bn.⁸⁸ A memorial plaque was unveiled at the Australian War Memorial earlier on 22 February 2013, honouring the 318 men from the battalion who are listed on the World War 2 Roll of Honour at the memorial.⁸⁹ The surviving members of the battalion held their 70th, and last, reunion on 25 August 2010, but the Scots School in Albury, formerly the Albury Grammar School, ensures that the battalion's spirit continues on: each year one of its students marches under the 2/23rd Bn banner on Anzac Day, and a memorial plaque has been erected on school grounds as a reminder of the bond it formed with the battalion during its formation.⁹⁰ The Australian Army Museum at Gaza Ridge Barracks, South Bandiana, in the Albury-Wodonga Military Area, also houses a large collection of items relating to the 2/23rd that can be viewed by the public.⁹¹

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⁸⁸ Jones, Howard. (2013). 'Chapel Honours 'Albury's Own'', *The Border Mail*, 2 September 2013, p.7

⁸⁹ 'Honouring Albury's Own', *The Border Mail*, 23 February 2013, p.34

⁹⁰ Norton, Heather. '2/23rd Battalion Tribute: 70 Years From Their Beginning on Gillespie Oval' retrieved 20 August 2013 from: <http://www.scotsalbury.nsw.edu.au/news/2010/08/25/223rd-battalion-tribute>

⁹¹ 'Army Museum Bandiana' retrieved 7 January 2014 from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.party-1461048>

THE FORMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY

Dr J.K. Haken

During the 1890s movement towards union of the Australian Colonies occurred. Following intercolonial conference and a referendum, Royal Assent for the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia was given on 9 July 1900. Events followed quickly, a proclamation of 17 September 1900 indicating that the Commonwealth of Australia would be formed on 1 January 1901. All the former colonies possessed Military Forces and Defence became a Commonwealth responsibility. To allow an orderly transfer of responsibility, many departments, including the Department of Defence were effected on 1 March 1901.¹

A Defence Act was drafted in 1901 by a Conference of the former Senior Colonial Military Officers. This Act was not supported by Parliament and was withdrawn on 26 March 1902. A new act was prepared passed into law and assented on 1 March 1904.² In the interim the Commonwealth Forces operated under the former Colonial Legislation, the respective Acts being:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>New South Wales</i> | <i>The Military and Naval Forces Regulation Act 1867 and Amending Act</i> |
| <i>Victoria</i> | <i>The Defence and Discipline Act 1890</i> |
| <i>Queensland</i> | <i>The Defence Act 1884 to 1896</i> |
| <i>South Australia</i> | <i>The Defence Act 1895</i> |
| <i>Western Australia</i> | <i>The Defence Force Act 1894</i> |
| <i>Tasmania</i> | <i>The Defence Acts 1885, 1889 and 1893</i> |

The General Officer Commanding appointed on 26 December 1901 was Maj Gen Sir E.T.H. Hutton CB KCMG ADC, a serving British officer and former General Officer Commanding New South Wales Military Forces (1893-1896) and the Canadian Forces (1898-1900).³ The first task of Maj Gen Hutton was to integrate the individual former Colonial Forces into a unified and cohesive Commonwealth Force, a task effectively completed during 1902 and 1903. The re-organisation was carried out and gazetted by Corps.

The Royal Australian Artillery dates from 1 July 1902,⁴ the title 'Royal' having previously been granted on 24 July 1899 to the artillery forces in New South Wales, which were styled the New South Wales Regiment of Royal Australian Artillery.⁵ The Artillery was to consist of two batteries of Permanent Artillery and eleven companies of Garrison artillery, together with Regimental Staff, the School of Gunnery, Instructional Staff and District Gunners.

After Federation the former Colonial Engineers were integrated to form the Corps of Australian Engineers to date from 1 July 1902,⁶ and to consist of (a) a permanent nucleus, consisting of Fortress Engineers and Permanent Submarine Miners, which was to be allotted to the states required; (b) militia and partially-paid companies, including Field Engineers, Submarine Miners, Electric and Telegraphers. The Permanent Engineers received Royal Assent on 27 September 1907 to become the Royal Australian Engineers;⁷ the Militia did not receive the

¹ New South Wales Government Gazette No.91, 1500, 20.2.1901

² Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.1, 119, 20.2.1904

³ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.5, 54, 31.1.1902; The Military Forces List of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1 February 1904

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.571, 483, 12.9.1902

⁵ New South Wales Government Gazette No.719, 6678, 5.9.1899

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.58, 606, 12.12.1902

⁷ MO 284/1907

honour until 31 January 1936.⁸

An Unattached List dated 16 December 1902 was gazetted on 19 December 1902 to include those who held commissions in the former Colonial Military Forces or served in South Africa.⁹ The Military List dated 1 February 1904 contained hundreds of names.¹⁰

The Australian Army Medical Corps was formed, effective 1 July 1903 to include the existing Medical Services of the Military Forces of the former Colonies. A small Permanent Instructional cadre was to be in each state, together with Militia and Volunteer Staff. A Reserve of Officers included those who held a commission in any of the Colonial Medical Services and other practitioners willing to serve.¹¹ The Australian Army Nursing Service was formed, effective 1 July 1903, as a voluntary body to provide nursing services as required.¹²

The Infantry Forces of the former Colonies were reorganised by the Commonwealth, effective 1 July 1903, to consist of 12 Australian Infantry Regiments and 21 other battalions, including the Sydney University Rifles.¹³ At the time of the reorganisation the National Guard in New South Wales was disbanded. Following the Commonwealth and before the organisation of 1 July 1903 there were two regiments disbanded in Queensland.¹⁴

The Light Horse was reorganised, effective 1 July 1903, to consist of 17 regiments with six in New South Wales, five in Victoria, three in Queensland, two in South Australia and one in Western Australia. The Light Horse reorganisation was amended in Victoria and Western Australia on 28 November 1903. Mechanisation eventually superseded the Light Horse, and in 1942 all the existing Armoured and Light Horse Units were amalgamated to form the Australian Armoured Corps, now the Royal Armoured Corps.¹⁵

On 1 July 1903, establishment figures for all units and parts of units were published. Both New South Wales and Victoria Military Forces possessed Service Corps, which were amalgamated and formed the Army Service Corps, effective 1 July 1903 (15).¹⁶ The vast majority of forces were in New South Wales and Victoria and thus the Commonwealth Forces were concentrated in these highly populated states.

In the Commonwealth organisation no mention is made of Signals. The Australian Corps of Signals was formed on 12 January 1906 and existed until 12 July 1912 when it was absorbed by the Australian Engineers, before being re-raised several decades later.¹⁷ Maj Gen Hutton, although a controversial figure who resigned in December 1904 after continual disagreements with the Government, must be regarded as the father of the Australian Army.

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⁸ R. McNicoll, *The Royal Australian Engineers 1919-1945*, vol.3 *Teeth and Tail*, Corps of RAE, Canberra, 1982

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.59, 618, 19.12.1902

¹⁰ The Military List of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1.2.1904

¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.65, 865, 21.11.1903

¹² Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.35, 396, 25.7.1903

¹³ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.38, 451, 8.8.1902

¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.68, 879, 28.11.19

¹⁵ ALHQ AO 8/1942 cited in G.R. Vazeny, *Reorganisation*, self-published c.1965, p27

¹⁶ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No.35, 387, 25.7.1903

¹⁷ P. Dennis, J. Grey, E. Morris, R. Prior and J. Bou, *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 2008

COLLECTORS' CORNER

THE AMF SECOND WORLD WAR EMERGENCY RATION

Graham Wilson

One of my current research projects is the history of Australian Army rations, food, cooking and catering. An interesting fact that has been revealed by the research conducted is just how advanced Australia's military rationing research and development was during the Second World War. For example, it is now clear that the Australian Military Force (AMF) O2 ration was the world's first 24-hour military ration pack. It is also of interest to record that the British Army turned to Australia for the development and production of the 24-hour 'Pacific Ration Pack', which was distributed to British troops in South-East Asia Command.

Research has put me in contact with a number of interesting, helpful and informative people who have been enthusiastic supporters of and contributors to my project. Late last year one of these contacts, a retired Warrant Officer Cook RAN, sent me an e-mail telling me that he had recently come across a Second World War vintage tinned ration pack that he had inherited from

his late uncle and which he believed had been issued to his uncle at Tobruk. When my friend asked if I would be interested in having the item I immediately said 'Yes' and asked how much. Not surprisingly, my friend said 'Nothing' and even paid for registered postage from Tasmania.



My friend's description of the tin was somewhat vague, despite several email inquiries about dimensions, so in the end I just had to patient (while hoping that I was soon to be the proud recipient of an unopened O2 ration). In the end, the item that arrived is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Fig.1: The AMF 1943 Emergency Ration tin, showing the lid with ring-pull opener.

The 1942 campaign in New Guinea had been a steep learning curve for the AMF in terms of feeding front-line troops. Despite a number of (often legitimate) complaints, the army actually went to great lengths to ensure that its men, even those in the front line, received properly cooked hot meals, fruit, juices and freshly baked bread products as often as possible. This wasn't always possible of course and in this situation the army was forced to fall back on the old staples of bully beef, 'dog biscuits', cheese, jam and tea. The problems presented by this solution included lack of nutritional balance; monotony; and bulk. The last issue was not a minor one, considering the nature of the terrain the New Guinea campaign was fought over and the normal loads carried by soldiers.

It was this problem of providing rations that were palatable, relatively easy to disburse, and easy to carry and use by soldiers who could not be provided with proper cooked meals that spurred an intense research and development process in Australia from early 1942. One of the results of this was the AMF 1943 Emergency Ration. This was the result of a three-way project between the AMF, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR – the forerunner of the CSIRO) and MacRobertson's Steam Confectionery Works (a famous Australian

confectionery company founded in 1880). MacRobertson's in fact received the original contract for production and supply of the ration, with some items sub-contracted out. After extensive operational trials in Northern Australia in 1942 and early 1943, the Emergency ration began to be issued to troops in New Guinea from about May 1943.

Fig.2: The AMF 1943 Emergency Ration tin, showing the base.

As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, the Emergency Ration was packed in a flat, green painted metal tin, which measured 10.7cm x 14.5cm x 2cm. The ration was meant to be carried in a shirt pocket and had rounded edges to prevent fabric damage. The lid was fitted with a ring pull which opened the tin similarly to a contemporary sardine tin. Instructions on opening were printed on the top of the tin, while instructions on when to use the ration and the requirement to immediately report the use were printed on the base. It appears that in the Second World War the troops, at least in the AMF, were treated as more grown up than their First World War counterparts – no nonsense apparently about 'iron rations' not to be touched without an officer's order!

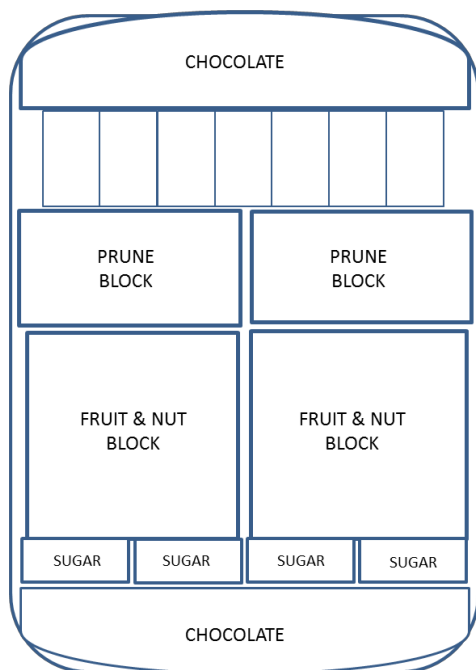


Fig.3: A schematic view of the contents of the ration tin. The ration consisted of:

- 2 x chocolate bars
- 7 x caramel sweets (shown below the chocolate bar at the top)
- 2 x prune blocks
- 2 x fruit and nut block
- 4 x sugar tablets
- 4 tea tablets
- 6 x salt tablets

Unfortunately, the only image of the inside layout of the packaging that I could locate is copyrighted. However, with a little computer magic, I was able to create the line drawing shown at Figure 3. The tea tablets (not shown) were packed in the space in the left-hand side of the tin and the salt tablets (not shown) were packed in the right-hand side.

Records indicate that the 1943 Emergency Ration was quite popular with consumers, the only major complaint being that after a time the ration became 'too sweet', although this was usually addressed by mixing this ration with O2 Field Ration as well as the bully beef and dog bikkies fall-back.

Along with the O2 Field Ration, the AMF 1943 Emergency Ration was a major advance in 'combat feeding' and a fully Australian effort. As a collectable, the Emergency Ration in unopened condition appears to be incredibly rare; a comprehensive search of online militaria outlets has not turned up a single one. Opened tins do occasionally pop up for sale, however, the lowest priced example I have located was on sale for \$AUD 50.00 (which I certainly wouldn't consider paying for an empty tin!). To say that I am happy to have an original, unopened AMF 1943 Emergency Ration in my collection would be a magnificent understatement.

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Michael Treloar

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THERE AND BACK WITH A DINKUM: DISCOVERING A WORLD WAR 1 MEMOIR

Claire Woods

When W.R.G. Colman penned an account of his experience in the 27th Battalion during World War 1, he surely would not have anticipated that eighty years later, his words would be published and read by a wide audience across Australia. In 1934, Russell Colman (as he was known) responded to a call from the RSSILA, Victorian branch, (the forerunner of the RSL) seeking submissions of novels from those who had ‘served abroad during the Great War’ and which depicted ‘the life of Australian soldiers during the war, and their reaction to the environment through which they passed’.¹

Colman did not win. That honour went to Jack McKinney for his novel, *Crucible*, which was duly published.² Colman deposited a copy of his manuscript, *There and Back*, with the Australian War Memorial. He had written it with the pseudonym ‘Dinkum’ and only later had he noted his identity in a quickly-made annotation on the frontispiece of the bound manuscript: ‘Enlisted as Pte W.R.G. Colman 2552, 6th Reinforcements 27th Bn A.I.F. Finished up Lt. W.R.G. Colman M.C. 27th Bn. A.I.F.’ This accompanied his dedication: ‘To all Dinkum Diggers who served in the Great War’.

Working one day in the Research section of the AWM, on a project about the 27th Battalion, I called up a document from the archives labelled as a Private Record. I had expected a relatively slight document as these often are – perhaps a diary fragment or letter; perhaps a slight autobiographical record. So to see a substantial document, a leather-bound carbon copy manuscript of a novel by a South Australian soldier from the 27th was quite a surprise. This began the adventure for my colleague, Dr Paul Skrebels, and me as we decided to make sure this record found an audience. We felt that it warranted publication, not only because it was by a South Australian soldier of the 27th but also because it seemed to us quite a remarkable first-hand account of what it meant for a young man to leave his civilian life and become a soldier, serving on the Western Front until the Armistice in 1918.

Our first task – after asking colleagues at the AWM to read the manuscript and confirm our opinion of its quality – was to seek copyright clearance from Colman’s family. Here was the first hurdle because the only address available was that of his next of kin, his mother, listed in his Army record at the time of his enlistment in 1915. However, rather like undertaking a treasure hunt, seeking clues at every stage, we trawled newspaper records, telephone directories and obituaries in professional journals until we made contact with one of his grandsons. The family was pleased to help us with the project, and generously offered us his photo album, his original field notebook and his personal diary (both carried on the Western Front), and the original handwritten manuscript of the novel.

With these valuable items to hand, we began the painstaking task of reading, editing, and annotating the novel. We decided to produce an edition of this book, which would illuminate the narrative for today’s readers. Many allusions and points, place names or military terms or references needed additional information, so we have provided extensive research annotations. We hunted for photographs, not only from Colman’s personal album but also from other sources, to help illustrate the text. We also provide introductory and research material to set the

¹ *The Argus*, 31 December, 1934, p.9.

² J.P. McKinney, *Crucible*, Angus and Robertson, 1935.

account in the context of other novels of the interwar period. Finally, we thought it important to allow Colman's voice in the immediacy of events to emerge through publishing a transcript of his personal diary, which he started when he arrived in Heliopolis base camp in December 1915 until he was seriously wounded on the Somme, in 1916. The novel follows this diary closely, and then continues with his admission to hospital in England, his recuperation, and then the extended period back at the Front through to the end of the War.

A further task for us as researchers was to provide short biographical notes for as many of the characters appearing in the narrative. This was not a straightforward task, because Colman, in his effort to maintain the fictive elements of the account, adopted the practice of creating fictional names for the men with whom he served and whom he depicts in *There and Back*. However, we were able to 'decode' his system relatively easily, finding that his simple device was to use initials of first and last names. Thus, by searching embarkation records, nominal rolls, and army records to account for individual movements as well as the 27th Unit War Diaries, and the Unit History, we have been able to discover who, where and what individual personnel are key to the story. The biographical notes are therefore intended to be a resource for other researchers, community or family historians.

Colman's precise and detailed description of what it meant for him to become a civilian soldier carries the story. He is a thoughtful commentator not only on the mundane aspects of soldiering but also the big issues of the day, such as conscription, discipline in the army, and Australian larrikinism and the soldiers' disinclination to salute or knuckle down to what seemed to many young volunteers to be unreasonable rules and regulations. He is very clear about his aim as a writer and that was to produce a plain and unvarnished account of what it meant to be in the PBI – Poor B. Infantry. He was also firm in his intention to create for the reader a view of the routine life of the soldier, as much as to paint the scenes of events or stunts 'up the line'. As he says in his Foreword, 'Without desiring to be critical, many war books that have been written, appear to be overdrawn, and too much full of blood and thunder, without touching on the ordinary routine of life that took up most of the time'.

This he does. But he also gives the reader vivid descriptions, with an immediacy and drama that is compelling, of being 'up the line'; of being in the trenches, the first-time experience on the firestep, of billets, of raiding parties, of hazardous duckboard journeys on fatigue duties, and of less hazardous football games played on muddy shell-pocked fields. The description of his journey out of the front line to a casualty clearing station when he was severely wounded with his face turned to pulp, racing to beat a gas attack, being blown into a shell hole by a nearby blast, until he can reach some element of safety, captures the reader with its brutal clarity. He can evoke the immediate horror while at the same time offering a considered reflection on his feelings and his fears.

Central to the narrative is the friendship of the main character (Colman calls himself Jack Carlton in the narrative) and his mate George Linklater (his real best friend, Graham Holland Leaver – 10th Bn). They are schoolboy friends, begin university, and enlist in the 27th together after one term as students, only being separated when the reinforcements waiting in Egypt are allocated to fill gaps in the units evacuated from Gallipoli. Colman/Carlton keeps an anxious eye out for Linklater/Leaver throughout their time on the Western Front, reflecting on friendship, life and death, and the seeming futility of the combat in which they are both engaged.

Thus, Colman takes the reader with him from the cricket pitch at his school, through the recruiting drives and enlistment, the first journey overseas, the front line of the Western Front, hospital repair and recuperation in Blighty, back to France and Belgium, and home to a life after soldiering. He is forthright in his opinions, yet considered in his reflection on what a young man of eighteen experienced in the maelstrom of the Great War. He understates his own activities while offering a clear-headed account of the impact of army life on the ordinary 'swaddie'. His description of the event for which he was awarded the Military Cross 'for skilful and fearless leadership' as his citation states, in July 1918 at Villers Bretonneux, is forceful and vivid. Yet, he makes no reference to this honour. The Unit History, however, saw fit to provide a full account of this action, as did the Official History.³



Left: Portrait of Russell Colman taken shortly after being commissioned 2nd lieutenant, November 1917 (photo courtesy of the Colman family).

Colman draws the account to a close in a final chapter, when he journeys to a reunion of the 27th Battalion. In this chapter he makes an interesting move as a writer. He forsakes the fictional names of the men in the story and instead names them for who they really are. He brings the story into the present (that is, the 1933/34 present). This allows him to create the mood of the interwar years, involving for him not just the memories of the Great War, the companionship of his fellow civilian soldiers, but also his fears for the future and the threats to Peace that were clearly evident in Europe.

Colman was a 27th man, thus one of the Dinkums, as the Battalion was known, and thus he styled himself as the author. We therefore, thought it right and proper, to provide a slightly

revised title for the complete edition of his book. *There and Back with a Dinkum* is, my co-editor and researcher and I feel, an exceptional view of young civilian who went for a soldier and became a man in the experience of the Western Front. Nearly a hundred years ago when Colman enlisted, he could not have imagined that his story would still be read. It was a privilege to make sure that it was published and that it did not languish unread.

*

Publication details:

W.R.G. Colman, *There and Back with a Dinkum*, Presented and edited with additional material by Claire Woods and Paul Skrebels, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2013. See <http://www.scholarly.info/book/365/> for further information.

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³ W. Dollman and H.M. Skinner, *The Blue and Brown Diamond: A History of the 27th Battalion Australian Imperial Force 1915-1919*, Lonnen and Cope, Adelaide, 1921, p.142. C.E.W. Bean, *The AIF in France 1918: The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, vol.6, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1942, pp.349-52.