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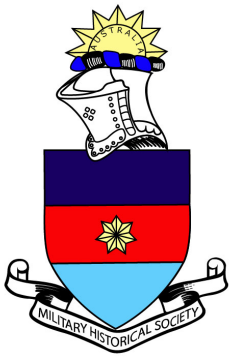
Sabretache



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VOLUME XXX-NUMBER 4

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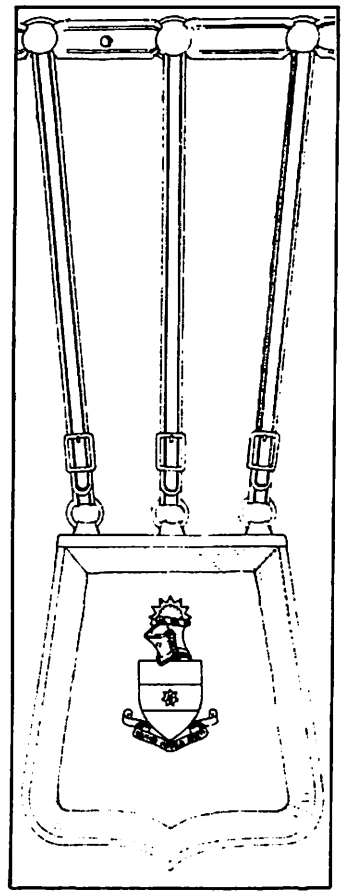


This is my last edition of *Sabretache*. Work and study commitments mean that I can no longer fulfill the editorial duties as well as I would wish to. As mentioned in the last volume, Barry Clissold will be taking over, and I am sure that he will enjoy the support of all members.

Before departing I would like to express my thanks to all members of the MHSA for the support and forbearance that has been shown, particularly through the last year. I have many individuals to thank for assistance and support in my editorial tasks. Thanks are due to Federal President Tan Roberts and Federal Council members. Alan Fraser, my predecessor, was a great help in explaining the intricacies of the editorial process. Our Federal Secretary, Bronwyn Self, deserves the gratitude of all members for her organisation of the packing, mailing and posting of *Sabretache*. Pat Hall, Ivan Lomasney, Anthony Staunton and Col Simpson have all been willing workers in the production and distribution of the Journal and I thank them for their help.

Last, but certainly not least, I wish to thank the many contributors to *Sabretache* over the tenure of my editorship. Consistent contributors, such as Chriss Fagg and Paul Rosenzweig, John Price and the late Bert Denman, as well as those members willing to 'have a go' such as John Fenby, have kept *Sabretache* a viable proposition. I know that Barry Clissold can look forward to similar support for future issues.

Although Bert Denman has now passed away, a considerable quantity of his writing still awaits publication. Three of his shorter pieces are published in this issue. 'The Pompoota Story', in particular, will be of interest to those members who have wondered about Bert's life post-world war one. Ths piece throws an interesting light on one of the more successful post-war soldier resettlement schemes.

The first world war emphasis of this issue is highly appropriate, as we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Australian and New Zealand landing at what is now known as Anzac Cove, on 25 April 1915. The Australian War Memorial is celebrating this anniversary with the development of a temporary display in the existing Gallipoli gallery. This display entitled 'The Riddles of Anzac', focuses on the official historian, C.E.W. Bean, and his 1919 return to the Peninsula. The Memorial has also produced an education kit, 'Gallipoli 75' for use by school groups, and is republishing (in partnership with the ABC) C.E.W. Bean's *Gallipoli Mission*, which chronicles the afore-mentioned 1919 return to the Peninsula.

These activities are but the tip of the commemorative iceberg. Reprints of existing histories such as Moorehead's *Gallipoli* and new works, such as a soon-to-be released history of the RAN's involvement in the Dardanelles campaign, are proliferating. Of special merit is *Gallipoli — A battlefield guide*, published by the Kangaroo Press. Written by Phil Taylor and Pamela Capper, both Victorian teachers, the guide represents the culmination of several years of exhaustive research. Australian and Turkish sources have been used to produce what has to be the essential guide for any visitor to the Peninsula. The Australian areas of interest are, of course, covered in detail but so too is the French and British involvement in the campaign. Highly recommended to anyone lucky enough to be visiting Gallipoli for Anzac Day 1990.

A.E. 'Bert' Denman

The Pompoota Story

It was still in the immediate post-war period of World War 1. To all intents and purposes, the war was over. The Armistice had been declared and almost four weeks after this story opened, the peace treaty was signed at Versailles. It was the King's birthday, Monday June the third 1919.

Three months previously, I had been discharged from the Army, medically unfit and had been granted a pension of ten shillings and sixpence a week. (10/6 or $1.05). A full pension at that time was thirty shillings, or $3.00. For three months after my discharge, I was paid a Repatriation unemployment allowance of £2.0.0. Towards the end of this period I was advised by my elder brother that I could enrol at the Returned Soldiers Training Farm at Pompoota, South Australia. I had then been provided with a free second class ticket on the East-West railway, at that time a three day journey.

I stayed at a boarding house in Adelaide over the week-end and had caught the early morning train to Murray Bridge. I purchased a paper from the station book stall and a single second class ticket at the country booking window.

I chose a corner seat in a smoking compartment on the sunny side of the train, facing the engine. I stowed my luggage, a battered suitcase, a parting gift from my Aunt Blanche in Perth and an army 'sausage bag' containing all my worldly possessions, on the rack above my head. I settled comfortably into the seat, took off my hat and loosened my tie. I pulled the heavy metal chemical foot-warmer a little closer, for there had been a frost and the morning was quite cold. I loosened my waistcoat a little too, for I was wearing a grey, slop made three-piece suit, issued by the army. It was plain to see it had not been made in Saville Row or Bond Street. There were no fractional fittings, but rather three sizes, small, medium and large. Being about average build, I chose a medium, which was a bit tight here and there. To have taken a large size would have been unthinkable and would have fitted like a suit of 'hospital Blues', The material was an inferior tweed, which 'bagged' easily at the knees and elbows. I suppose I should have been more grateful to the government of the day for looking after one of its heroes.

I lit a cigarette and unfolded my copy of the *Advertiser*. But I was more than a little excited at the prospect of joining my family again. I had not seen Mum, or Horrie, or Rene for almost two years. I had not seen brother Ben for more than four and a half years. Our paths had actually crossed once, but neither of us knew at the time. Ben was on a hospital ship in Plymouth harbour, waiting to sail for home. (He had been shot through the ankle at Lagnicourt on Easter Sunday earlier that year.) We disembarked at Plymouth that same day, August 25th 1917. He was a Corporal in the Twelfth Battalion and had intended to claim me for his own unit, had he been returned to France.

Brother Ben was now a trainee at Pompoota. Horrie was an assistant Government storeman on the settlement and Rene was still attending the local school. They all lived with Mum in a wood and iron three-bedroomed trainee cottage. The *Advertiser* didn't tell me much, the war was over and most of the troops were home or on their way. Things were getting back to normal after more than four and a half years of disruption. But there were plenty of unemployed about. I was lucky in many ways that I was going to the Training Farm, there would be plenty to do and in any case I would be back home.

I read a bit more, smoked a little, dozed and thought a lot. Between times, I watched the passing scene with interest. The only other time I passed this way was as a lad, with my Dad, ten years before. But it was at night so everything was new to me. The hills and valleys were green, for there had been early rains. Thin spirals of blue grey smoke rose lazily from cottage chimneys on the lower slopes and the valley floors. There were several long tunnels and two high wooden viaducts, long since demolished, were still in use. The two engines, pulling our train, puffed and laboured until we reached the top of the range and there were several stops at hill stations. The downward slopes from here, were not really steep as they followed the contours, but we did gather a little speed.

Out of the steeper hills now, we stopped at Nairne, where local gladioli growers displayed their colourful blooms. Many bunches of magnificent spikes were disposed of to willing customers. Shortly after leaving here, the 'dog box' carriages began to rock and sway, as the driver clapped on speed across the flattening terrain. During this latter part of our journey, there had been intermittent calls for papers from 'fettlers' working in the permanent way. The haunting voices, were mostly cut off by the wind or the speed of the train, so all that was heard, was pay...pay...as each

man took up the cry. They sounded urgent too, as indeed they were, for ther were no shops in a railway camp. Fettlers and their family lived lonely lives. The men worked hard, the pay was poor and and they received little if any thanks. I rolled up my *Advertiser* tightly and hurled it through the window. There was some thing familiar about those plaintive pleas. They reminded me in no small way of the urgent appealing cries of 's-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-r b-e-a-r-e-r-s' from the darkness of no-man's-land, following a raid or an attack, or from a newly blown in section of trench, or after a sniper's bullet had found its mark. They were memories now, nearly a year old, but only those who have heard that despairing appeal, can appreciate the stark drama of it.

We were nearing the end of our three hour journey now. The frosty night had given promise of a glorious day and it was here. The wintry sun shone thought the carriage windows. We were slowing down now as the train entered the station yard and approached the long platform. With practised ease, the guard stepped from the moving train and shouted 'Murray Bridge, twenty minutes for refreshments'. Gathering my luggage, I placed it near the door of the dining room, then followed the crowd inside and battled my way to the long counter. A scalding hot cup of tea, sugared to my taste, with two equally hot, gravy-filled pies and a huge slab of sultana cake, did much to make up for my rather hurried and skimpy breakfast three and a half hours before. My appetite satisfied, I picked up my belongings and made for the station exit.

A straggle of people would be passengers for the paddle steamer, were making their way up the slope towards the Bridgeport hotel, so I fell in and followed on. Minutes later I stood under the balcony of the hotel, where I stayed one night with my father ten years before, and looked at the scene below. Several paddle steamers were moored at the wharf, some were off-loading wool and or wheat. Others were being loaded with general cargo for places as far distant as Walgett, Brewarrina and beyond. There were bullock drays, carts and trollies and the shouts of the workmen could be heard from where we stood. This and other such scenes would be familiar to me over the next few years, for we were in the throes of a revival of the river boat industry which would last for at least the next decade. It was now down hill for almost for the rest of the way to the wharf, where our boat, P.S. *Murrundi*, was ready and waiting.

Smoke spiralled lazily from her funnel. Steam hissed quietly from polished brass valves and quickly dissipated into the brisk wintry air. People were crossing the short gang-way on to the boat. I followed and placed my gear in the small passenger cabin, then came out on deck to watch the busy scene.

Mail from the city, for Mannum and intermediate river landings had all been stowed away. A couple of deck hands were loading the last of some empty cream cans. An assortment of deck cargo had been stacked in orderly heaps, ready to be off-loaded with a minimum of delay. Overlooking the scene from the side door of the wheel house, was a fairly elderly, rather stooped and sharp featured man. He was Captain Murray Randell, second generation river boat skipper, son of that great pioneer boat builder and skipper of *Mary Anne* fame, the first man ever to put a paddle steamer on our great river system in 1853. Murray Randell, bore extensive scald marks on his face, from an explosion twenty years before. He was at the wheel of the *Tyro*, predecessor of the *Murrundi*, at Handel's landing seven miles below Mannum, when the boiler blew up. The wheel was blown fifty feet up the side of a cliff and the skipper was blown into the stoke-hold.

He wore round gold-rimmed spectacles and a battered felt hat. His waistcoat was unbuttoned and across the front was a heavy silver chain, on one end of which was a silver, double cased hunter watch. For the last few minutes he had repeatedly withdrawn it and looked at the time. Finally everything was stowed and no late passengers were within sight. He stepped into the wheel house, pulled the cord which gave a blast on the siren and we were away. The paddles thrashed as we churned our way toward mid stream and began what was to be for me, the first of many such journeys over the next few years. Two hours later, after an excellent lunch aboard, we approached the main Pompoota landing. I saw my mother, brother and sister Rene, as I had last seen them two years before, from the deck of the troopship leaving Fremantle. Through a misty veil of tears, I was back home again.

'Pompoota' was an Aboriginal word, meaning the 'end of the tide' in allusion to the fact that it was the end of tidal influence on the Murray. The area was named sometime between 1869 and 1884, when it appeared on a map of the Hundred of Burdett. The land was purchased by the State Government in 1909 and appeared in the annual report of the Surveyor General that year. It comprised four thousand acres and the price was almost £15,000 ($30,000.00). It included more than three thousand acres of 'dry highland'. Most of the irrigable swamp land was first class. A small area above the main drainage channel, however, too high to be irrigated, was quite useless.

The Governor's speech at the opening of parliament on July the seventh 1916 announced that an Agricultural Training Farm for returned soldiers had been opened earlier that year. It would provide for the training of one hundred and fifty men, when fully operational. The first batch of trainees arrived on March 21st of that year. The first allocation of land to successful trainees was made in early Feb. 1917 at Wall Flat, a reclaimed swamp area, slightly upstream and partly opposite Pompoota. More prospective trainees arrived at the farm as vacancies occurred. As each man completed the course, he was tested. If successful, he was allotted a diary farm as one became available. A few left, some only after a short stay, feeling they were not compatible. Others, who

received horticultural training on the farm orchard, were allotted a fruit block mainly in the Riverland area of the state.

Those being trained as dairymen, were taught to milk, separate and make butter, how to plow, harrow, to use a mower and a rake. They were shown how to stook lucerne and oaten hay, to build a hay stack and cut chaff. They were taught pig and poultry raising, including 'line breeding'. All vehicles and implements were horse-drawn and there were about sixty horses. They cut down native pine trees on the dry highland, cut them into suitable lengths for fence posts or for rails and 'barked' them. They were shown how to fence and to build stock yards.

Trainees came from practically all arms of the service, except perhaps the Air Force. There was naturally a preponderance of infantrymen, followed by Light Horse, Artillerymen, Engineers, Pioneers, Machine-gunners, Signallers and so on, as typical a crowd really, as one would meet in a war-time convalescent camp. Ages ranged from eighteen to fifty or so.

One young fellow, Kenneth Lisle Malcolm St George Paul Forrester, was a year younger than the author and was on Gallipoli when fifteen. He was commonly and widely known as the 'war baby'. At the other end of the scale was a former prospector who enlisted from the W.A. gold fields at about forty-four. Many of them had been wounded, gassed or injured or had fallen to some war time sickness. Some had seen several years service and all would have been under considerable tension, such as only came with stressful war time service. Quite a number had been discharged medically unfit. It was into this scene, that the writer arrived at the age of almost 19½, about midway through the life of the Training Farm as such.

It was an easy transition into a new way of life, for conditions were in many respects similar to the 'life' I had led for some time until fairly recently. The pay was the same, five shillings a day (for six days only). There was no deferred pay, but the single men were provided with free meals. Each lived in a two man cubicle in a long pre-fabricated hut. He ate his meals in a mess hut/recreation hall. Married men were paid 17/- ($1.70) a week, living allowance. All trainees had to provide their own clothes.

There was no discipline, other than that which was due between the boss and the employee. There was no reveille, no bugle calls or roll calls and no raucous voiced Sar-major to urge us on. We did not have to wear a hat on pay day or salute when they handed it over. We still had to ask for leave which was usually granted on request. But we were not issued with a leave pass, which some hulking great Military Policeman could demand to see. There were no extra fatigues and no work on Saturday afternoons or Sundays except in the dairy, the piggery and the poultry farm. To most of us, even those who had never been hospitalised, the new life was good. Out in the open all day, good food, plenty of rest and the absence of strain was probably the best therapy we could have experienced. Most of us, I'm sure improved greatly in health over the first few months.

It must have been so in my case, as my pension was reduced over the next two and a half years, without having once seen a Doctor, to a mere one shilling and sixpence a week, 1/6 (15 cents). I then received a letter from the Repat, to say a Medical Officer would visit Mannum to review pensions in the area. I would have had to take two days off work, catch the paddle steamer, book bed and breakfast in a hotel and return next day by steamer. It would have taken about seven months pension to find out *if* it would be continued or cancelled. I resolved to cut my losses and let it lapse.

We had, reputedly, the strongest sub-branch of the R.S.L. outside the Adelaide metropolitan area with more than a hundred active members and a high percentage of attendances. We met in the local hall, a stone and brick structure, which served as a church (undenominational), Sunday school, school, dance hall and meeting place. A picture show was held each week, sponsored from Mannum.

Married couples lived in wood and iron cottages, in 'Push back Alley' (so named after some homes were moved back after the 1917 flood), and Honeymoon Avenue because of the number of young couples including war brides. There was a farm butcher and a baker. Cheap butter, eggs, milk and vegetables were available to the married couples and free wood was supplied by the farm management. A grading steamer, based on Murray Bridge, PS *Pyap*, called at sixty river landings, almost to Morgan. The *Pyap* was a branch store of the Eudunda Farmer's C/op. Society. It was virtually a 'universal provider' and what could not be purchased, could be ordered and collected on a subsequent trip. There was no transport on the Farm, except for the odd pony and a couple of push bikes, so that everyone had to walk to the *Pyap* on Monday nights. This was no hardship as trainee cottages were all within about three quarters of a mile. There were no street lights and home illumination was provided mainly by hurricane lanterns or the humble candle. So the Main landing was the focal point on Monday nights where every one gathered. Looking back from the river towards the living areas, the scene resembled a fairyland of bobbing lights, with every little group carrying its own hurricane lantern.

It was at the farm, that the Government of the day, grudgingly made an ex-gratia payment to all members of the services who served abroad, of one shilling and sixpence a day. It was paid from the day of embarkation, until the signing of the Peace Treaty at Versailles on June 28th 1919. It had already been granted by the U.S.A. and to British Colonial troops. Under the strongest of pressure from the R.S.L. a growing power at the time, our Government agreed to pay. It far outweighed the deferred pay which was one shilling a

day from the date of enlistment till discharge. It was not paid in cash except in necessitous circumstances.

Many businesses jumped on the band wagon and cashed bonds for the purchase of furniture, land other items. Insurance Societies too came to the party and took part of the bond in payment of premiums (mostly two years). Many of these later lapsed while the surrender value was still almost non-existent. Most gratuities were paid by 1920, but were not payable until 1924. It was still most welcome however, as few of us really knew it was coming. Those who embarked early in the war, received up to more than £25.0.0 ($50), a very handy nest egg in those times.

We had our own bookies, who laid S.P. odds every Saturday, quite often after the race had been over for some time. There was no way the results could be obtained until the arrival of the *Advertiser* on the P.S. *Murrundi* at midday on Monday. There were two telephones, one at the Post Office (closed over the week end) and in the manager's residence. There were no portable or other radio sets capable of picking up news from Adelaide, so all bets were pretty safe.

There was only one 'sulky' on the farm, so it was most difficult to get to either Murray Bridge or Mannum and return the same day. A farmer across the river from the main landing, had vehicles for hire, a sulky, a buggy (four seater), and a 'drag' which seated about eight. It meant two trips—one to make arrangements. Would-be passengers had first to row across the river and row back on their return. District roads were mostly unmade and not even graded. There was a multiplicity of tracks in and out of the mallee and other native vegetation and they were usually fairly easy to follow but there were many sand drifts which had to be skirted as they were often too deep for the horses to pull through. The day of the motor car had not yet arrived. Until 1922, there was only one, an early model Ford, privately owned by an ex A.I.F. Captain, who was there for a short time only.

By the beginning of 1923, the Training Farm had closed as such. It had served its purpose and there were no further applications from prospective trainees. Several hundred men had been trained in the ways of dairying and horticulture and most had been allotted holdings of their own. The Farm itself had been surveyed in 1922 and had been sub-divided into suitable sized allotments, according to the powers that be. Allotments were made late in the year appropriately to those trainees who were left. The estimates however of what was a suitable size for a dairy farm, was 'way out', by those who should have known better. There were eighteen original settlers. In a few short years the number was reduced to ten. As some left, their holdings were re-allotted, but it was soon realised that the acreage was far too small. Then as others left, their holdings were divided among their near neighbours until the aggregate holdings became more viable. In its original form, after subdivision, Pompoota became the only Soldier Settlement on the Lower Murray.

Much water has flowed under the bridges since, then, including the "flood" of 1931, when Pompoota was the only reclaimed swamp area not flooded (up stream from Murray Bridge) and 1956 when all reclaimed areas along the Lower Murray were inundated. But that is the subject of a different story.

The Australian Uniform

The Australian uniform in WW1 and WW2 for that matter (Tunic only) was nothing to write home about. At the best it was a slop made affair. It did take a second look, to realise it was not made in Bond Street or Saville Row. There were no fractional fittings, only three sizes that I remember, small, medium and large. Humans however came in many other sizes, so there just had to be mis-fits. There were human mis-fits too of course, but no allowances could be made for them, for that would certainly have meant fractional fittings.

Faced with a long line of bewildered raw recruits, on their first day in camp, as they lined up at the door of the long hut, the Quartermaster looked to have no easy job. But he appeared to make it easy although he carried no tape measure.

A quick appraising look at each man as he appeared before him, was enough for him to reach for a jacket and trousers of his estimated size. Passing down the long counter, the hapless individual was next handed a great coat of matching size. There was no cosy fitting room with a cheval mirror, so each recruit had to take the Quartermaster's estimates as correct. At the boot and hat sections, the storeman paid him the courtesy of asking his size. On receipt of this information the R.R. was handed the footwear plus one pair of "bootlaces, leather, troops for the use of" a hat and a chinstrap.

The rest was easy, and in quick succession he was handed two pairs of grey flannel underpants tied at the ankles with a tape, two ditto shirts, two singlets, two pairs of sox, a pair of puttees, a hand towel, a Hussif, jackknife, field dressing, a dixie, knife fork and spoon, a safety razor or a 'cut-throat' with an aluminium blade and a hair brush. Laden with this great armful of material, he found the way back to his hut to sort it out, and wonder why he had joined the Army. The most that could be said about the uniform itself was that it was well-made, roomy, comfortable and warm (in the winter).

However if the recruit had a loving mother, sister or girlfriend handy with a needle, his jacket could be greatly improved in appearance. Or if he could afford it, he could employ a tailor. A diagonal pleat across each side of the chest, a tuck in the sleeves if too long, moving a few buttons and the hook and eye at the neck worked wonders. Tacking down the corners of the bottom pockets and the addition of press studs under the flaps of the top pockets, and the transformation was complete.

Some went even further and had their collars stitched down, the hook and eye moved down so that the collar 'stood up' similar to the collar on the American jacket. But the practice was frowned on by the Authorities.

But some unfortunate fellows had neither a girlfriend, mother or sister who cared enough. Many of these luckless chaps looked neglected in their ill fitting jackets. Some of them sagged at the neck, or were too tight, even with the hook unfastened. If the jacket was too small, the space between the buttons gaped for all to see glimpses of grey flannel shirt. Bulging bottom pockets added to the general appearance of neglect. Some cuffs were too short while others almost covered the hands.

It was the hope of every well dressed digger to own a pair of puttees, by 'Fox' of London. They fitted snugly round the legs, showing their shape to advantage, but they cost about two weeks pay to buy. Two tiny metal tags indicated left and right. These puttees were allowable but, like those issued, had to be worn the correct way, from the bottom and finish on the outside of the knee, and pointing to the rear. There were those who took a chance when on leave. But it wasn't worth it. At any time a big Military Policeman or an officer, could stand over you and make you take them off in public, and put them on correctly.

I was stopped by two MPs in London one cold afternoon and told to do up the hook on my greatcoat, it was too tight so I took it off, but put it on again when I rounded the next corner and kept going. These big chaps wondered why they were unpopular.

It was also permissible to wear a puggaree instead of the plain hat band as issued, so long as it was not too light in colour. Some of the 'lairy' lads left the two top buttons of the jacket undone to show a khaki (officers) shirt and tie beneath. But woe betide if they were seen by an MP or some officers. Boots, other than those issued were not permitted. 'Ox blood' colours were out and so were block toes.

A body of well dressed troops could always be found on any Headquarters Guard. There were usually eight posts, but mostly twenty five men were detailed, with a promise that the best dressed guardsman would 'get off'. The competition was keenest among the younger fellows, who vied with each for the honour. The older chaps however were

more philosophical about it. To most of them it was just another guard, so why all the fuss. So it was 'on' for the young ones to have the cleanest rifle and bayonet, to be the neatest dressed, have the tidiest equipment and the shiniest boots. HQ guards mounted in full marching order, with the pack on the back. Some went as far as to line the sides and front of the pack with three ply to eliminate the bulges and give it the perfect square look. But it was a losing hazard if detected. No-one would be untidily dressed, not even the older blokes. No one would dare be unshaven or have a dirty rifle or boots. Any of these breaches would have led to a charge under Army Act 40 'Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline'.

So all guards were well turned out, but what a sneaky way to do it!

The Australian uniform, first world war

Defaulters

Of all the minor punishments, in the Army, none was so unpopular or so irksome as being Confined to Barracks, or to use its abbreviation, CB.

It sounded all right in itself, as it involved no forfeiture of pay. But it certainly was a loss of dignity and worse still, a curtailment of liberty. Most chaps I knew, would have preferred to have lost a couple of days pay and be done with it. But that would have defeated the object of the exercise, for whoever devised the punishment of CB did not intend the victim to ever forget the lesson, and very few men ever came back for a second serve. Any one who did was a glutton for punishment.

It was ironically referred to by the troops as 'chasing the bugle', which was far more descriptive as that is exactly what it was, answering the defaulter's call at frequent and mostly inconvenient times, mainly at night and in all sorts of weather.

The punishment itself was imposed mostly for those minor misdemeanors, for which there was no specific penalty. They included having a dirty rifle or bayonet, or boots, unshaven, late on parade, giving 'cheek' to an NCO, incorrectly dressed, and so on. They were lumped together under Army Act 40, which covered a multitude of other sins as well. The words 'conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline' were included in each such charge.

A Company Commander, with his limited powers could only order up to seven days. He could however remand the culprit to the Commanding officer who could impose up to Fourteen days. An average or 'normal' sentence seemed to be about three or four days and that was enough for any one. The sentence began on the day of its award, usually at Midday. The next call came at the end of the day's work, but before tea. From then on, the calls came relentlessly every half hour until Lights Out. Each Army bugle call had it's own words, and this was 'You can be a defaulter as long as you like, so long as you answer the call' and was set to music.

You could not go to the camp pictures, or a concert and certainly not to the village. You could be in the canteen, or writing a letter home, yarning with a mate, darning a sock, sewing on a button, lying on your bed or even attending to the wants of nature. You could not play cards for you were not wanted if you had suddenly to rush away and billiards at the YMCA hut were out of the question for the same reason, and you could not even play two-up.

This meant that before the stirring notes of the bugle had died away you would just drop everything and be on your way in a hurry, for to be late would be to incur the wrath of the orderly Sergeant and could even lead to a further imposition and you dare not arrive incorrectly dressed for the same reason. It could be that you had a meet on with a girl in the village and that a good mate would stand in for you and answer when your name was called. This was possible if neither of you were known to either of the duty NCOs. But woe betide, if you were caught out. Each of you would certainly be on a Form (4a charge report) in the morning at the Company Commander's orderly room. It would be equally certain that one of you would be awarded several days and the other a few days extra on top of that which he was already serving.

The offence was entered on a man's conduct sheet and would count as a prior conviction in case of a further breach of the law (same). As I write, I can see them again, after all those years. A wet and bedraggled motley party, standing glumly outside Battalion Headquarters on a dark and stormy night, each man huddled under his glistening rubberised ground-sheet-cape for it is raining steadily. The Orderly Corporal holds aloft a smoky hurricane lantern, as the Sergeant calls the roll in the weak glow of its dim yellow light and ticks off each man's name as he answers. On the command to dismiss, the party breaks off with the sombre knowledge that within twenty five minutes or so, they will all be back again, and again and again until lights out, a mournful prospect indeed. I was once awarded three days CB, at Codford on Salisbury Plains, in the winter of 1917, for not handing back to the orderly room a chit for a dental parade. It was my only recorded offence in two wars. My imposition was spread over a weekend. As a bonus, we were sent to pull turnips in the camp garden on a Saturday morning. It was very frosty and in no time our hands were blue with cold.

Since those far off days, I have seen it from the other side, so to speak. I had the power to award up to fourteen days to some hapless offender in WW2, when administering command of an Infantry Training Battalion in NSW. But I never once awarded the maximum, for in the light of my own experience it was just too awful to contemplate.

Rations

It was the object of our Higher Command to see that troops in the front line had at least one hot meal a day. Meals were prepared at the Unit Field Kitchen or Cookers. Sometimes these were located quite close up to the line, or they could be back a mile or more, depending mainly on the tactical situation.

Rations were taken as far forward as possible to a pre-arranged RV (rendezvous) by the unit's own limbers (a limber was a strongly-built box, mounted on a two-wheeled axle, and drawn by two horses). Here they would be met by ration carrying parties, who would manhandle them the rest of the way to the front line (such ration parties were usually drawn from troops in supports or reserves).

Hot meals were carried in a variety of containers. One of these was commonly known amongst the troops as a 'fantasy'. It was, in effect an out-size vacuum flask, curved to fit the back, with carry straps over the shoulders and a tightly fitting lid, fastened by thumb screws, it held three or four gallons of 'piping hot' stew. These were carried right up into the front line and served individually to the troops. Stew could be kept very hot for several hours and warm for much longer periods. Sausages, rissoles and bacon etc., were carried in 'home made' wooden containers, lined with biscuit tin and insulated with sawdust. These were "knocked up" by the Pioneers and could also keep food hot for some hours and warm for many more.

Jam, usually 'Grosse & Blackwell's' came in 'tins' made of cardboard which could easily be cut with a sharp jack-knife. Each half tin was shared between two men, along with cheese, margarine and bread. The daily bread ration varied from two to four men to a two day old loaf. Bully beef was also shared. Large hard biscuits—hard, hard biscuits were issued to each man. There was also the much smaller 'billy button' biscuits. About the size of a coat button, they were just as hard as the larger variety, but were handy to carry in a pocket for a nibble between meals. All these were classed as dry rations and carried in sand bags. Because of the sharing of rations, the midday meal and often breakfast meant two mates getting together and pooling their resources. Tea and water was always carried in two gallon petrol tins and sometimes wine. Army 'issue' cigarettes, tobacco and socks were also carried in sandbags.

There were two, much sought after items which were not a regular 'issue', at least not in my time. The 'tommy cooker' was about half the size of a treacle tin with a similar tight fitting lid which contained solidified alcohol. By using two rifle bullet clips as a grate, it would boil a dixie of water in about half an hour and could be used to warm up food. By replacing the lid the contents would be able to be used again. The other was 'machonochies ration', a round tin of appetising haricot stew, very popular and much preferred to bully beef, which was sometimes very chewey. Getting rations to the front line (always at night) was a hazardous job at any time. Obviously there was never a light to be seen. Some moonlight nights were a help, providing it was not overcast or raining. The light of a flare was not always reliable. It would light up for a time, throw shadows and die away.

The terrain itself was often most difficult and required a good leader. There were shell holes, old and new, to negotiate, broken and tangled wire, blown in trenches, a smashed limber or wagon, an occasional dead animal, or a forgotten corpse. To make it more difficult there was the odd 'five point nine', a salvo of high velocity 'daisy-cutters' or a burst or two from an enemy machine gun, firing on 'fixed lines' from some distance back, a real and almost constant threat.

On arrival at Company Headquarters in the front line, the various containers would be dumped, together with tins of tea and water and bags of dry rations. Each Platoon would send its own small party to collect its share, soon after the arrival of the main party.

Ration carrying parties, generally did a good job of getting supplies to their mates in the front line. Next week, it could well be the boot on the other foot, and they too could be expected to get the rations up. Iron rations or emergency rations were issued periodically and each man must be in possession of them at all times. They consisted in the main of bully beef and biscuits. They were eaten of course, many times, but had to be replenished as soon as possible. They were carried in a small 'dorothy bag' and fastened to some part of the equipment. When with the Supports or Reserves, troops were closer to their cookers. Eating conditions however were no different, it was either sitting or standing on the ground or on the equipment. Resting troops in rear areas, could supplement their rations in local towns or villages. A favourite dish was fried egg as these were never on the Army menu. A roast was an unheard of luxury. Army diet was good and mostly, there always seemed to be enough to go round.

An alternative approach to rations

'Brewing up', somewhere in France

Les Hetherington

Albert Hetherington, B Company, 31st Battalion, AIF

In recent times several books have been written in Australia which have used the private records of the ordinary soldiers of the first Australian Imperial Force as the basis for their analyses of the First World War.[1] These books have drawn attention to a previously poorly utilised resource—the private donated records held at the Australian War Memorial Research Centre. To a large extent, however, these books were written with the purpose of describing the experiences in war of the men they quoted. Thus, another aspect of the records was included only incidentally in them. This was the personal history or genealogy of the men. Not only the private records but also the official and other records held at the Research Centre can illuminate aspects of the men's lives and their families. Genealogists have tended not to utilize these records (an article on sources in family history listed official military and war memorial records as among the most underutilized in a sample of 200 published family histories[2]). This is to the detriment of their work, as a great deal more than just military information can be obtained from them. It is the purpose of this article to show what is included in the records and how that can lead to a fuller understanding of the individual and his family. The records can also provide clues which lead to other sources, thereby expanding the range of information available to the researcher. That information in the Research Centre relates to hundreds of thousands of individuals, and covers the whole range of Australian military experience, makes it of relevance to many, possibly most, genealogical researchers in Australia.

The simplest way to introduce the types of records held at the Australian War Memorial is to take an individual as an example, using that person's records to build a history of his experiences in and up to the war (in some cases after as well). The example used here is Albert Hetherington, number 440, B Company, 31st Infantry Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. His war was, of course, the first world war.

From 1914 to 1918 416 800 Australians volunteered for service in the AIF This meant that a high proportion of those eligible to enlist were prepared to go to war to defend the British Empire and, they generally believed, their own country.[3] As the main theatres of the war after late 1914 were in Europe and the Middle East, this meant that the only way they could participate was by travelling around the world. 330 000 Australians served overseas during the war, a significant part of that generation of young men. Their reasons for doing so were complex. That 98 per cent of the population was of British descent was a factor, as there was a perception that British interests were Australian interests. But for each man the exact motivation was different, the balance of factors which led to his decision made up of variations in background, attitude, belief and personality. Similarly, the personal histories of the men were a mixture of the common and the unique. In a broad sense their experiences were those of the units in which they served. But each soldier had a story of his own within this larger outline. The history of the whole AIF and that of the individual can be set side by side, with that of divisions, brigades and battalions providing the context in which each soldier lived and often died in his own personal war.

Albert Hetherington

Albert Hetherington was born at Kiandra in New South Wales, and spent his early life and school days there.[4] He was the son of William and Jan Hetherington.[5] Kiandra was a small town dependent on gold mining for its existence, but a pale reflection of the mining camp of thousands who took part in the Kiandra 'rush' of 1860-1861. William was a miner and an active participant in local affairs, but he died when Albert, the eighth of twelve children, was only twelve years old, in 1903. One of an extended family in the area, Albert grew up to initally follow in his father's footsteps, as, in 1914, he was a miner resident at Adaminaby.[6] By the next year, however, Albert was living at Ganmain, a town in the Riverina built around a railway station serving the local wheat farms, and was working as a labourer. Also in Ganmain was Albert's older brother, Arthur, whom Albert named as his next of kin.[7]

From Kiandra to Ganmain is not a long or eccentric journey. However it was not there, or even in New South Wales, that he enlisted. Still giving his home address as Ganmain, Albert joined up on 12 July 1915 at Brisbane. He was then single and 25 years of age, a young looking man of medium height and build, 'neither stout nor very slight' and clean shaven.[8] Because of his place of enlistment he was sent to

Enoggera Camp and eventually put in a mixed Queensland and Victorian battalion, the 31st (although many of the Queensland elements of the battalion—A and B Companies, the Headquarters and the machine gun section—were from northern New South Wales).[9]

At the time of Albert's enlistment, recruiting reached its peak level for the whole war. The men who joined at this time were called the 'Fair Dinkums':

> It was said of the men who rushed to join up when war was declared that they were 'Dinkum Aussies'. the men who joined later, after hearing of the fearful death toll, were called 'Fair Dinkums': men who enlisted even though they knew the odds were against them.[10]

July 1915 was the month in which most enlistments occurred, with 36 575 joining. The Australian Official Historian for the war, C.E.W. Bean, said of them that the news of the Gallipoli landing and the fighting there, and the belief that the war was going badly contributed to this high level of recruitment. Albert simply said that he did not want to miss out on the adventure.[11]

Basic Training

From July to October 1915, Albert trained with B Company at Enoggera. Then, on 3 October, the queenslanders entrained for the trip to Melbourne and Broadmeadows Camp, B Company, the machine gun company and the battalion first reinforcements in one train, A Company and the Headquarters in another. The journey was 'a long and tiresome one', lasting from 10am on Sunday, 3 October until the night of Tuesday, 5 October and involving changes of trains at both borders. By this time Albert had had his home leave, and had gone to Ganmain to see 'the ... boys' there. He had also visited his mother in Sydney.[12]

The battalion continued its training at Broadmeadows and Williamstown Musketry Range through October. On 2 November there was a 'general holiday'[13]—it was Melbourne Cup day. Albert was one of the 87 859[14] people who saw jockey Bobby Lewis, in his second Cup success, ride 8-1 chance 'Patrobus' to a win over 100-1 outsider 'Westcourt'. Among the crowd 'the khaki ... streaked the many hued multitude so plentifully':

> the khaki of the recruit who still had to prove himself, and the khaki of the returned here who had so nobly pointed the way.[15]

Shortly afterwards, on 9 November 1915, Albert and his company boarded HMAT A62 *Wandilla* at Port Melbourne, and at 12.45pm on that day, the ship sailed, carrying Private Albert Hetherington to war.[16]

The Voyage and Egypt

The first hazard that many of the men faced was sea sickness, but this improved after Fremantle, and, as the ship crossed the Indian ocean the daily routine settled into classes, drills, training, inoculations, sports and lectures from the officers. The ship's own journal, the 'Wandilla Wonder', reported euchre tournaments, boxing, and sports including a tug of war, obstacle race, potato race, wheelbarrow race and an egg and spoon race, and included tales of general skulduggery, comments and jokes.[17] The *Wandilla* berthed at Suez on 6 December 1915, and B Company disembarked at 8am the next day, entraining for Helmeih, where the battalion briefly rested before continuing to Ein Ghossein on the night of 13-14 December. There, on 14 December, the battalion took on its first war duty, when it replaced the Rajput Light Infantry in the Suez Canal defences.[18]

It was in Egypt that the battalion suffered its first recorded casualties, although they were not the rest of battle—the whole period of the 31st Battalion's service in Egypt passed without serious incident—but from illness. On 15 December 1915 Private Harry Trulsson and on 25 December 1915 Private A.J. Evans died from cerebro-spinal meningitis.[19]

B Company first took over part of the defensive line on 3 January 1916, at the Serapeum East post. From this time for the next few months the battalion was engaged in guard duty, interspersed with periods of rest, training and leave. As well, the battalion, already part of the 8th Brigade, joined the 14th and 15th Brigades to form the 5th Division.

The soldiers day lasted from reveille at 5.30 or 6am to lights out at around 10pm, and for those not on duty, included parades, musketry practice, inspections and the various tasks involved in establishing and maintaining an army camp.[20] Albert was part of these activities, but one of many who did not attract particular attention to themselves.

France and Fromelles

This quiet period came to an end on 16 June 1916, when the battalion embarked on the troopship *Hororata* at Alexandria, and sailed across the Mediterranean for France. Most of the Australian infantry had preceded the 5th Division, only the Light Horse now being left in Egypt. The voyage passed without incident, and the battalion was in its billets at Morbecque in northern France, having travelled through that country by train from Marseilles, by 26 June. In early July the battalion moved to the front line for the first time, in the Fleurbaix sector, south of Armentieres. The 31st battalion was in reserve at the time and was not required to occupy the front line trenches until preparations began for what became known as the battle of Fromelles, but which the battalion knew as 'Fleurbaix'.

Fromelles is generally considered to have been poorly planned and based on incorrect intelligence about the German defences. Recently, the son of a survivor of the battle wrote that 'it is difficult not to become angry at such ineptitude by the planners concerned and moved by the wanton waste of fine

Private Albert Hetherington, 31st Battalion AIF

young men' in a battle in which 'the lack of real military point' was 'apparent'.[21] Albert may have almost missed the action, as he was 'injured 17.7.16'. However, he was well enough to take part, as the next entry reads 'wounded in action 19 July 1916 at Fleurbaix'.[22] The battle actually lasted through the night of 19-20 July, and resulted in elements of the 31st and 32nd battalions and the 14th Brigade capturing sections of the German front line, before being driven back by German counter-attacks.[23] There were many casualties from artillery fire before the troops left their trenches, and these, of course, mounted significantly when the battle proper commenced. Exactly how and when Albert was wounded is not known, although it is indicated that he made an attempt to rejoin the battalion on 10 August 1916, before being admitted to hospital two days later. The B Company roll book for 1916 (as opposed to the battalion roll book) includes the remark 'wounded (shell shock) Fleurbay', so it can possibly be assumed that he was injured by shell fire.[24]

'Blighty'

A gap now appears in Albert's story, when he is no longer with the battalion. This period ends on 8 November 1916, when Albert wrote to his brother, Cecil, in Australia, from Sussex General Hospital No. 2, Ipswich, England, that 'I am still alive' but 'am going under an operation tomorrow morning'.[25] Such a wound as Albert received was a 'blighty'—it had got him sent to England for treatment and recuperation.

What Albert did in England is not known in any detail. However, by early 1917 he was sufficiently well to return to duty—but not to the 31st Battalion. On 23 March 1917 he was transferred to the 61st Battalion,[26] one of the units in the new 6th Australian Division then being formed from wounded soldiers returning from injuries and new reinforcements from Australia, following a British request for such a division. The 6th Division was not destined to see service in the war, as the casualties suffered by the other five divisions during the middle of 1917 took its complement as replacements and led to its disbandment. Albert found himself once again with the 31st. He was giving his unit a B Company, 31st Battalion as early as September 1917, while he was still in London, although the battalion roll indicates that he was taken on strength on 26 October 1917. By 28 September he had been joined by his younger brother, Reg, and, Albert told Cecil, they were both 'Tray Bon'.[27] Albert also indicated at this time that he was receiving his mail from Cecil through 'Edie'. He advised Cecil that 'Edie sent them'—Cecil's letters—'on to me as soon as she received them so I am certain that it is the quickest way of getting mail through'—in comparison to 'the military' who 'don't care whether one gets mail. . .'.[28] Who Edie was is not explained in any of Albert's surviving letters—she may have been a nurse, a Red Cross worker or an English woman he had met while recovering from his wounds. Reg was also taken on the strength of the 31st Battalion, into A Company on 26 October 1917.[29]

Return to the front

The brothers had joined the battalion shortly after the battle of Polygon Wood, which had, like Fromelles, taken a high toll in killed and wounded. They arrived just as the battalion was to be relieved after several weeks in the front line at Broodseinde Ridge, and moved to the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, this being accomplished by mid-November. At the time this was a relatively quiet area, and so a good one for a soldier to return to after over a year away. Better still, in mid-December the 5th Division was relieved again and this time moved to a rest and training camp, away from the trenches altogether. Christmas was spent away from the fighting, and in January Albert could write that his hands were 'useless from the cold' as they had been out at 'the Rifle Range' where his Company had been 'doing some shooting to keep us in form'.[30]

This pleasant existence lasted only a few days longer, as the battalion was back in the Messines-Wytschaete area by the end of January 1918. Once more, though, there was no major engagement for the unit. As before in October and November artillery fire and patrolling caused a steady flow of casualties. Even when the great German offensive of March 1918 began it avoided the battalion's front. When the 5th Division was sent to the area of greatest danger at this time (the advance had already been checked, however), Albert was not with it. On 24 March he had been hospitalised.[31] He wrote on 7 May, still 11 days before he rejoined the battalion, that 'I have been on the sick list through having got slightly gassed and trench fever but I am practically well again'. Reg was still well and in the line at the time, Albert having received a letter from him the previous day.[32]

The cycle of front line duty and rest repeated itself for the 31st battalion through June and July, and at the end of the latter month the men were enjoying a break from the trenches.

8 August 1918

The 5th Division moved forward again in early August, in preparation for a planned major offensive. The aim 'was to break the enemy frontage on a sector of 11 miles and to advance to a depth of between 10 000 and 15 000 yards in a few hours'.[33] The 5th Division was to take up the attack in its second phase, after the 2nd and 3rd Divisions had advanced from Villers-Bretonneux towards Warfusee-Abancourt.

The 31st Battalion was ready by 5 August, but had to wait until 1am on 8 August before moving first to the assembly trenches near Vaire Wood. There was a heavy fog by 4.20am, zero hour. The battalion moved off at 5.05am, A Company on the right, B Company (with Albert) on the left, occupying a front of about

500 yards. The battalion took over the advance at 5.20am, the officers guiding the troops with a compass because of the fog.

A Company first encountered German troops, attacking a trench, killing 30 Germans, and capturing 6 men and two machine guns. At 6.30am the battalion halted to reconnoitre Warfusee-Abancourt, and was fired upon by German artillery. 7.30am found the battalion advancing around the village. They were accompanied by six tanks at this stage, but around 8.30 five of these were destroyed by fire from a German 77mm battery. More artillery blocked the advance of the 15th Brigade and both A and B Companies assisted the Brigade in silencing these batteries.[34]

At mid-morning the advance was going well, and opposition from the Germans was light. But, at around 10am Albert was hit by shrapnel while in a shell hole with another soldier, and was bandaged and left for the stretcher bearers to take back. The shrapnel had hit Albert in both buttocks, and, although Albert said to another member of B Company at the Field Dressing Station to which he was taken that 'I think I am done', the soldier, J. Moore, replied: 'No you are all right, you will be in Blightly in a couple of days time'. Moore then arranged for the 5th Brigade padre to give Albert some coffee, as he had asked for a drink. It was the last Moore saw of him; proving his own words more prophetic than Moore's, he died as a result of his wounds later that day. The Officer Commanding, 6th Australian Field Ambulance advised that:

No.440 Pte A. Hetherington, 31st A.I. Bn... died from shell wounds in both buttocks at Main Dressing Station on the 8th August 1918 and was buried a Longueau Military (near Amiens) by Chaplain Buckley of 6th A.I. Bde.[35]

The battle in which Albert received his fatal wound was to be the 'schwarz tag' (black day) of the Germany army, the day on which the defeat of Germany by Britain and her allies became almost inevitable, and on which commenced the great advance of the victorious armies.[36]

Albert Hetherington was an ordinary soldier—he won no special awards for bravery, and did nothing to bring himself to the notice of his superiors or the Official War Historian. And yet the records which exist concerning him are substantial, showing in broad outline and occasional close detail what happened to him after he enlisted in July 1915. The records also provide information about his background (residence, occupation, schooling, parents and siblings). There are large gaps in his life story—who was Edie? What happened to him and where was he between August 1916 and October 1917?—which may in part be answered by reference to other sources, or which may never be answered. But it is clear that, despite these gaps, the sources held at the Australian War Memorial provide significant insights into the life of this 'common soldier'—and 330 000 others like him.

END NOTES

1. For example, Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years* (Canberra, 1974), Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs* (Melbourne, 1978) and Suzanne Welborn, *Lords of Death* (Fremantle, 1982).
2. Burkhardt, Geoffrey, 'Methodology and Research Techniques for the Family Historian', *Ancestral Searcher*, Vol.10, No.4, December 1987, pp124-125.
3. Figures in Vamplew, Wray (ed), *Australians. Historical Statistics*, Sydney, 1987, pp36, 39, indicate that that eligible male population did not exceed 1 000 000.
4. Australian War Memorial, AWM 131, Roll of Honour Circulars, 1914-1918.
5. AWM 145, Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918, Army; Imperial War Graves Commission, *War Graves of the British Empire, 1914-1918 War*, France, Volume 16, London, 1928, Cemeteries 294-344, Longueau British Cemetery (303).
6. The sources quoted above—AWM 131, AWM 145 and the *War Graves*—provided information which led to additional sources which refer to Albert and his family, such as births, deaths and marraiges records, electoral rolls, directories, parish records (Albert was christened in the Church of England on 9 February 1891) and local newspapers—the *Cooma Express*, *Monaro Mercury* and *Tumut and Adelong Times*.
7. AWM 8, Embarkation Nominal Rolls, 1914-1918, 31st Battalion; AWM 9, Box 23/1, 31st Battalion roll books; the *Coolamon Farmers' Review* of 30 August 1918 reported that Albert was well known in Ganmain.
8. AWM 8, IDRL 428, Red Cross Wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau files, file for A. Hetherington.
9. AWM 8 shows the origins of the battalion; for its location and composition prior to embarkation see also MSS 162 (18/2), 31st Battalion diary 30 August 1915–8 March 1916.

10. Adam-Smith, Patsy, *The Anzacs*, Melbourne, 1978, pp208-209.
11. Bean, C.E.W., *Anzac to Amiens*, Canberra, 1946, p185; Albert advised his brother, Cecil, of his kenness to join up on a postcard dated July 1915 from Enoggera Camp—the postcard is now in the possession of Cecil's daughter; for the reasons of other soldiers see Robson, LL and Dawes, J.N.I., *Citizen to Soldier*, Melbourne, 1977.
12. Australian War Memorial, PR 86/318, letter dated 7 October 1915; see also MSS 162 for the dates cited.
13. MSS 162.
14. Vamplew, op.cit., p386.
15. PR 86/318, letter dated 8 November 1915; *Australians, The Guide and Index*, Sydney, 1987, p33; *The Argus*, 3 November 1915.
16. PR 86/318, letter dated 8 November 1915; MSS 162, 9 November 1915.
17. Australian War Memorial, troopship serials collection.
18. MSS 162, 10 November 1915–14 December 1915.
19. MSS 162.
20. ibid; also MSS 151, 31st Battalion diary, January-December 1916 and AWM 25, 31st Battalion routine orders for the same period; for the 5th Division see also Ellis, A.D., *The Story of the 5th Australian Division*, London, 1920; unless otherwise stated the account of the activities of the 31st Battalion are hereafter based on these sources, together with AWM 4, 31st Battalion War Diary, Bean and a manuscript at the War Memorial, 3 DRL 5049 (AWM file 749/71/18, papers of Albert David Coxhead.
21. Higgie, Bill, "A Forgotten Battleground" *Canberra Times*, 12 November 1988; for a full description of the battle see Bean, C.E.W., *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Volume III, The A.I.F. in France, 1916, fifth edition, Sydney, 1937.
22. AWM 9, 23/1, Battalion roll book.
23. MSS 151, 31st Battalion diary, January-December 1916.
24. AWM 9, 23/1, 31st Battalion and B Company roll books.
25. PR 86/318.
26. AWM 9, 23/1, Battalion roll book.
27. PR 86/318, letter dated 28 September 1917.
28. ibid; and PR 86/318, letter dated France, 17 January 1918.
29. AWM 9, 23/1, battalion roll book.
30. PR 85/318, letter dated 17 January 1918.
31. AWM 9, 23/1, battalion roll book.
32. PR 865/318.
33. Ellis, op.cit., p322.
34. AWM 4, 31st Battalion diary, 5-8 August 1918.
35. 1 DRL 428, Red Cross wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau Files, file for Albert Hetherington.
36. Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p473.

P A Rosenzweig

The Eyes of the Light Horse

Most people would be aware of the heroism of Sir Ross Smith, heroism which saw him decorated seven times during WW1 and later knighted. To those who have lived in Darwin he is primarily remembered for his pioneering long-distance flight from London to Australia in 1919, at the conclusion of which he landed at the old Darwin aerodrome which is today a major roadway bearing his name. To lighthorsemen however, he and his colleagues were their 'eyes' in the vast sandy expanses of the Middle-Eastern desert, providing important and timely intelligence to the fast-moving mounted troops.

The London-Australia Air Race was actually devised as a means of returning Australian Flying Corps pilots and crews to Australia after the cessation of hostilities. Upon demobilisation of the AIF, the AFC airmen were required to fly their aircraft home, their incentive being a staggering £10 000 prize put up by the Commonwealth Government: it would go to the first aircraft manned by Australians to fly to Australia in less than 30 days before the end of 1919.[1]

Captain Ross Smith was accompanied on what would become a record-setting flight by his eldest brother Keith (co-pilot and navigator), James Bennett and Wally Shiers (mechanics). Lieutenant Keith Smith had also been a pilot during the war but with the Royal Flying Corps and later, the RAF, and had been Mentioned-in-Despatches for gallantry. AUS/275 Sergeant J M Bennett, a motor mechanic, and AUS/8974 Sergeant W H Shiers, an electrical engineer, had both served in No.1 Squadron, AFC in Palestine, and both had been awarded the Air Force medal on June 3rd 1919 for gallantry in their air during the war. Surely such a combination of skill and courage could not be anything but eminently successful in this most daring venture.

They set out from London in their Vickers Vimy G-EAOU on November 12th, and completed the 18 500 kilometre journey in 27 days and 20 hours, arriving in Darwin on 10 December 1919—just 2 days short of the deadline. It was nevertheless a convincing win over their competitors: of the six aircraft which eventually set out, two crashed killing the crews and two others turned back because of difficulties encountered in the flight.

The four were hailed as heroes and were presented with their £10 000 prize-money by Prime Minister Hughes. They then set off for Adelaide, the Smith brothers' home town. Some years later, their Vimy aircraft with its two 360-horsepower Rolls Royce Eagle engines was enshrined at Adelaide airport as a monument to the courage and determination of the foursome.

The aerodrome at which they landed in Darwin on 10 December 1919 was in the suburb of Parap, near the site of the present Olympic Pool. It was Darwin's secondary aerodrome, servicing civil flights from Adelaide and Brisbane, as well as the occasional Dutch flight from the north. In the years after 1919 it was used by numerous pioneer aviators, but in WW2 it served a more vital role as a base for RAAF Wirraways. It suffered severely from bomb and incendiary damage at the hands of the Japanese, but was soon repaired for use as a Spitfire base later in the war. In later years when it became too small for the more modern aircraft it was abandoned and converted into a main road linking the Stuart Highway with East Point Road on the coast. Appropriately, this new road link was named Ross Smith Avenue. An obelisk at the East Point Road end, overlooking Darwin's Fannie Bay, was:

> Erected by the Commonwealth of Australia to commemorate the landing at Port Darwin of the first aerial flight from England, 10th December 1919.

The four pioneers of long-distance aviation were bestowed with further honours. The two mechanics each received a bar to their AFC on 26 December 1919, as well as being commissioned to the rank of Honorary Lieutenant. The Smith brothers were each knighted, being appointed Knight Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (KBE), also on 26 December. This was an award in the Civil Division, the insignia being suspended from a plain crimson ribbon of a similar colour to the ribbon of the Victoria Cross. This can be seen in a fine portrait of Captain Sir Ross Smith prepared for the Australian War Memorial by W.B. McInnes, in which he wears the ribbons of his KBE, Military Cross & Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross & 2 Bars and Air Force Cross together with his

Above: This stone obelisk in Fannie Bay commemorates Sir Ross Smith's pioneering flight from England to Australia, November 12th to December 10th 1919.

campaign ribbons from WW1 (he also held the Order of El Nahda, awarded by the government of Hejaz).

Born in Adelaide on 4 December 1892, Ross MacPherson Smith had enlisted in the Light Horse and served during the early days of WW1 on the Sinai Peninsula and in Egypt with the Desert Mounted Corps. He was commissioned in the Australian Flying Corps and served with Number 1 Squadron as an Observer-Gunner and, from 1917, as a fighter pilot. He soon proved to be as accomplished a pilot as he had been a horseman, with good hands, a quick eye and a sense of recklessness tempered with raw courage. The enemy for too long had held supremacy in the air, and it was Ross Smith and his colleagues that turned the tide.

Smith was wounded during aerial combat on two occasions during 1917 and photographs show him returning from skirmishes with his aircraft riddled with bullet holes. He handled his aircraft like a trooper handled his horse, and in like manner came up to rescue a fellow airman early in 1917: he and his co-pilot, Lieutenant R F Ballieu, landed their aircraft in the desert alongside a burning wreck and flew the downed pilot to safety. For this the two Australians were awarded the Military Cross. The very next day, during a raid over the same target near Gaza, Lieutenant Frank McNamara won the Victoria Cross in a similar but rather more dramatic rescue with the Turkish cavalry hot on his heels.[2] Smith's skill and courage was well recognised, and later in the war he was selected to help Lawrence of Arabia by providing air support for Arab guerillas on the other side of the Dead Sea.

As well as the obviously important role of neutralising enemy aircraft, the Flying Corps also had the vital task of forward reconnaissance, providing intelligence to the commanders on the ground — notably, of the Australian Light Horse. As an Observer early in his career, Ross Smith played a key part in the final clearance of the Turks from the Sinai, a noteworthy and historic milestone in the history of the war in the Holy Lands.

The bloodless occupation of Nekhl by the Australian lighthorsemen saw 'Jacko' swept from the Sinai northeast into Palestine where he was to entrench himself in the Gaza-Beersheba Line, setting the stage for Chauvel's dramatic and decisive victory at Beersheba.

Three columns were raised for the expedition to Nekhl, the capital of the Sinai and former seat of British administration on the Peninsula: a Yeomanry force, a company of the Camel Brigade, and the 11th Australian Light Horse Regiment. An account of the 'stunt' as such Light Horse actions in the Middle east became known, was crudely typed on two foolscap pages by a member of the 11th and kept in his photograph album. The author of the account, who left no record of his identity, has provided us with an interesting insight into the life of the lighthorseman and his involvement in this historic action.

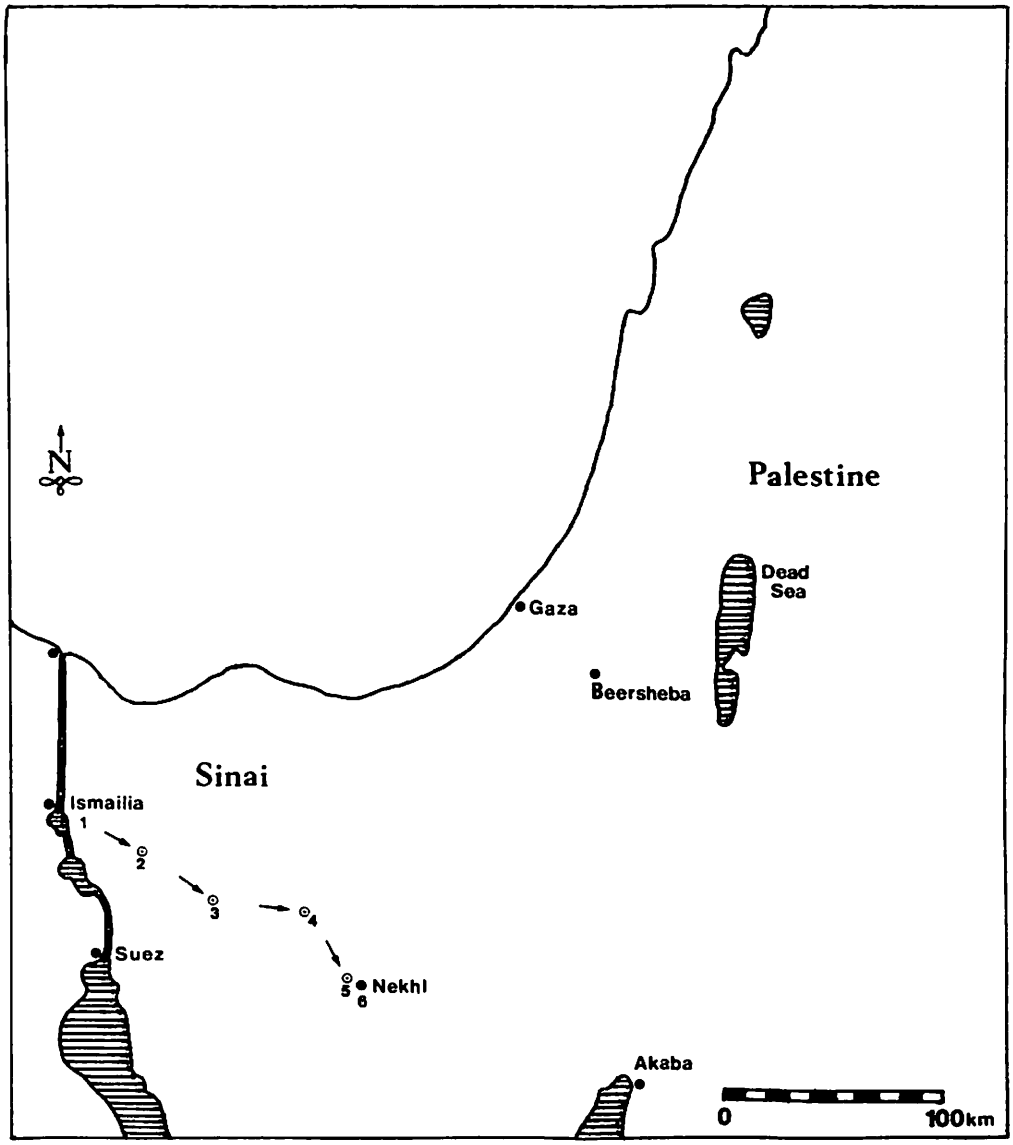
> A modest announcement in the *London Times* dated February 18th 1917 proclaims the evacuation of Nekhl by the Turks and its occupation by British troops. As the ... Regt practically achieved thus unaided and there was no War Correspondent with us I feel called upon to give a brief account of the operations which culminated in the bloodless victory, one chiefly of political importance.
>
> Nekhl is the Capital of the Sinai Peninsula and from it the Province is governed by a British Resident. If you draw a line from the heard of the Gulf of SUEZ to the head of the Gulf of AKABA, and bisect it you will see at once the position of the town which is practically in the centre of the Peninsula.

The three columns raised for the expedition included the author's unit, the 11th Light Horse Regiment which was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William Grant.[3] He had commanded the 11th since raising it in March 1915 for service at Gallipoli where his men had fought as reinforcements for the other Light Horse regiments on the Peninsula. Now they would have their own opportunity to make history. The Official History records that although the garrison was known to be relatively insignificant, three strong fighting units were still deployed:

> the use of so much strength by the British was intended to make a clean and final sweep of the enemy from the Sinai.[4]

Our unknown author continues:

> From our camp, some 20 miles from Ismailia, the distance was 96 miles which is a long distance for a Regt of Cavalry to penetrate into a hostile country devoid of supplies of any sort and very badly watered. Be it remembered that, throughout, all forage, rations and ammunition for the troops had to be transported by a huge train of camels, on the last stage of our journey too, water for man and best was carried in addition on the backs of our despised but faithful ally — the camel.
>
> Camp was left on February 14th and an early start made over the sandhills into the unknown wastes of the desert. Our route the first day lay down the sandy valley of the Wadi Mukshieb (Wadi = river or gully), along the course of which are several lagoons, full only in the winter months, which served as camping places at midday and evening. It was this track that the Turkish Expeditionary Force of 1915 took when they raided the Canal in February of that year. There were many indications of their previous camps in the shape of old water tins and other Turkish refuse.



Above: Map of the Middle East, tracing the route of the 11th Australian Light Horse Regiment in their raid on Nekhl in February 1917, in which they were accompanied by Lieutenant Ross Smith in the role of aerial reconnaissance.

Key to overnight halts:

1 Serapeum, near Ismailia, departed 14 Feb.
2 Wadi Mukshieb, 14/15 Feb.
3 Bir el Giddi, 15/16 Feb.
4 Bir el Themada, 16/17 Feb.
5 Sapa el Hamth, 17/18 Feb.
6 Nekhl entered by a squadron under Captain Munro 10pm February 17; Occupied by main body of 11 LHR 18 Feb.

The column consisted of the bulk of the (11)th L.H. Regt, a wireless detachment and 1600 transport camels fully laden. Attached to our Hd Qrts were several "Joyriders" in the shape of Staff and Intelligence officers, Aeroplane experts, Engineers and others. Overhead our "Cobber"—an aeroplane detailed for our assistance—would come to visit us at least once a day, bringing information, orders and sometimes a newspaper from Cairo.

By midday of our 2nd days' trek we had left behind the sand dunes of the desert and were following up the steep stony "wadis" flowing from the Mukshieb and Giddi ranges. We were gradually mounting and by the 2nd night we reached Bir El Giddi or the Wells of Giddi 1800 ft above sea level. As the weather was showery and the wind exceedingly cold we were by no means elated at reaching such comparatively high altitudes. At night it was bitterly cold even when not wet and at daylight our ground sheet exhibited lumps of ice where moisture had collected during the night.

Bir El Giddi is an interesting spot, a broad shady river bed or wadi, as usual quite dry, but containing a number of stone-lined wells in its course which were full of sweet cold water. The wadi may run perhaps once in 2 years and it then fills the wells which are the only source of water for wandering Bedouin and his flocks. Altho' there are no houses or shelters of any short, Bir El Giddi is quite an important Bedouin centre. On a hillside close to the wadi is a large cemetery, every grave being marked by a line of roughly piled stones among the crevices of which can be found the tributes of sorrowing friends; these include such worthless but pathetic objects as old jam tins, pieces of crockery, beads and even coins.

One interest attached to this desolate country is its historical associations. On this very soil doubtless Moses and his followers winded their wearisome way to the Promised Land. The wells however are of late date and probably Roman in origin dug for the benefit of Roman soldiery in the defence against desert tribes. Hannibal too in his retreat from Carthage is said to have led his army this way and before that probably it was a trade route for the Phoenecians on their way to the gold mines in central Africa.

The spot appears desolate enough this cold February evening swept by a bitter rainy wind and is surrounded by rocky arid hills. At 3am my colleague and myself were awakened by a heavy shower and a flood of icy water swamping the hastily dug "bivvy" in which we had gone for some warmth. We had to get out and join a party of machine-gunners making cocoa around a fire and there we sat till daybreak smoking and dozing.

Our next day's journey was a late one as after the wet night we did not move till 10am. After travelling a rugged pass (the highest point on our journey) we came to an arid stony plateau and just at dark still raining slightly we halted at our next water—Bir (well) El Themada. Here we sat in the dark with the rain fallaing, eating bully and biscuits, all fires being forbidden after dark as we were in hostile country. Themada proved a most cheerless spot and we put in a bad night our blankets being still damp.

The next day we pushed on to Sapa el Hamth (Little Yellow Hills) 8 miles from Nekhl. There was no water here so it was brought in tins by camel. Our aeroplane reported a small body of Turks with camels north and a party was sent off at sundown to intercept them.

The Observer responsible for informing Lieutenant-Colonel Grant of the Turks' presence, and that Nekhl itself had apparently been abandoned, was the Australian airman Lieutenant Ross Smith. Upon hearing this intelligence, Grant sent forward a squadron under Captain C A R Munro to clear the Turks and occupy Nekhl.

Munro had been a farmer at Lismore before the war, and had already gained distinction for his bold leadership during the assault on Maghara on October 15th 1916 when his squadron charged the Turkish entrenchments at the gallop. Now he had been sent forward by his CO to clear the Turks, the young Queenslanders under his command riding with bayonets fixed and eager for action. The account continues: 'This party was fired on, but pushed on and reached Nekhl about 10pm'. The garrison, formerly comprising one officer and 45 men, had been hastily abandoned.

The city was quite empty save for 2 or 3 old Bedouins. The main body however to which I was attached stayed at Sapa el Hamth till 3am when we saddled up with chattering teeth and numb fingers and rode into Nekhl arriving with the dawn. Then we found the advance party and the town free of hostile elements open for inspection—an occurrence taken advantage of by all. I'll swear the mud walls of Nekhl never witnessed such a sight as our khaki clad lads, full of energy after the night ride, running into houses, chasing fowls and pulling over the Turkish and Bedouins' stores that had been abandoned.

Here let me explain that all the Bedouins in Sinai are hostile. At the outbreak of the war with Turkey all loyal Bedouins left the country and were domiciled in Egypt, only those friendly to the Turks remaining.

The 11th Light Horse Regiment en route to Nehkl.

The lighthorseman's despised but faithful ally — the camel.

It would be hard to describe Nekhl and give any adequate idea of what it was like. In the first place it is a fortress and a capital city and yet it is only a tiny collection of some 80/100 one storeyed houses with walled yards clustering round the picturesque old stone Fort which dates from the 15th Century. The surroundings are so devoid of interest that the significance of the town is lost sight of. Just a bare dreary plain without a tree or bush to soften its desolation. To the west some miles off is a line of white and orange cliffs forming the Sapa el Hamth and to the east some isolated rocky enunencies.

By some strange perversion its name means palm trees which I'm afraid really exist in the imagination of the residents. All the houses were in a most extraordinary state of confusion—the earthen floors being piled with heaps of broken cases, old iron including many broken bayonets, rejected stores, rugs, clothes, water tins, tinware, ammunition and all plentifully covered with Sinai dust. This abandonment was not the work of a small garrison which retreated so precipately yesterday afternoon but was broken up by the big force which retreated last December when El Arish fell.

Amongst this refuse the remnant of the Turks has lived in its own filthy fashion and I cannot describe the horrible foul state in which houses, fort and even the Mosque appeared as we entered. We spent 2 or 3 hours poking round and unearthing a few curios from the heaps. The few fowls plus some eggs quickly fell victim to keen Australian appetites. Of more importance was the seizure of considerable quantities of ammunition, 3 obsolete Field Guns and a lot of stores and equipment.

In the meantime during the early hours from daylight on, parties were sent out to scour the neighbourhood for Turks. Evidence of hasty flight could be seen in all directions, piles of blankets, food and grain dotted the surrounding plain and during the day 11 prisoners in all were brought in. About 9am a southern column of British troops operating in conjunction with us, marched in to find the Anzacs in possession.

I was sent out with a party to follow up some retreating Turks, but after an extra 32 miles riding we returned empty handed, altho' we met some Bedouin women who had fled with the Turkish soldiers.

Assisting the lighthorsemen again was their 'Cobber', an aeroplane which seemed to be constantly overhead, prowling the desert like a hungry predator. This aircraft was piloted by Lieutenant A T Cole,[5] with Lieutenant Ross Smith as Observer, and belonged to No.1 Squadron, AFC operating out of Ismailia. There were actually three planes attached to the expedition, but Cole and Smith were the 11th Light Horse Regiment's 'eyes', scouting ahead and delivering intelligence to the patrols. In this instance, Cole and Smith had been scouring the desert beyond Nekhl since dawn and were able to report that there were no enemy in sight.

Continuing with his account of the patrol, and of the Bedouin women:

> We gave these poor bodies some food and water and subsequently they followed us in. One of our lads tried to take their photos but the fugitives were timid at the Kodak and I think they imagined he was going to shoot them.
>
> That night the whole column camped at Sapa el Hamth and to its delight was allowed to build huge fires without fear of evil consequences. The return journey was made under more favourable weather conditions altho' it was still cold. We had a day's rest at Bir el Giddi and were able to sleep, bath and even pay a game of bridge. Camp was reached about 4pm on the 23rd, both men and horses appearing none the worse for a very arduous 'stunt'.

The stunt to Nekhl had bena bit of a disappointment to the Australians who were eager for a skirmish, but their occupation was nonetheless a significant event. The Official Historian recorded that, 'the expedition definitely marked the expulsion of the Turks from the Peninsula',[6] and the *London Times* even recorded the event, although this reported Nekhl's occupation by British troops! The 11th would soon see action though: a deep penetration of the Gaza defences in April, in reserve for the famous assault on Beersheba on 31 October, the capture of Khurbet Buteihah a week later during the Third Battle for Gaza, and finally glory at Semakh.

On 25 September 1918 at Semakh on the Sea of Galilee the regiment had its finest hour, Majors Costello and Loynes seizing the town with a cleverly executed princer attack, each earning the DSO for their coolness, resourcefulness and untiring energy.[7] Major Costello, who had led the gallop onto Khurbet Buteihah, did particularly well on the right flank where, 'after losing two officers and having his horse shot out under him, he beat off a counter-attack'.[8]

The Regiment had a respite after this action, defending the communications at Kuneitra while the 4th and 12th Regiments went on to Damascus to finally clear the Turk from Palestine, the Armistice with Turkey being signed on 30 October 1918.

The 11th Light Horse Regiment had distinguished itself during the war in a series of mounted and dismounted actions and stunts, the latter perhaps testing the endurance and tolerance of the men and horses in preparation for the more arduous and frenzied battles later fought. While lacking some of the glory and dash of a mounted assault, the stunt to

Nekhl had opened the way for the advance of the Light Horse to rid the Middle East of the Turk.

And similarly, while Ross Smith's role in this achievement may seem rather mundane alongside the various citations for gallantry, it was an early demonstration of his ability and further endeared him to his Light Horse colleagues. The cooperation and teamwork of the Australians, the Light Horse on the ground with the Flying Corps' Observer scouting forward, has become a standard practice on today's battlefield, but was a relatively new innovation when Ross Smith and the 11th Light Horse cooperated to achieve the bloodless capture of Nekhl.

End Notes

1. See the Appendix to Cutlack (1942).
2. *London Gazette* 8 Jun 1917, and Wigmore (1963); this was the only VC won by a member of the AFC.
3. Later Brigadier-General W. Grant, CMG, DSO and Egyptian Order of the Nile 3rd Class; commanded the 4th Light Horse Brigade, notably at Beersheba.
4. Gullett (1923) p247.
5. Later Air-Commodore A.T. Cole, CBE, MC, DFC.
6. Gullett (1923) p247.
7. *London Gazette* 8 Mar 1919; citations published 4 Oct 1919.
8. *London Gazette* 4 Oct 1919.

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CUTLACK, F.M. (1942) *The Australian Flying Corps*, Angus & Robertson.

GULLETT, H.S. (1923) *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine 1914-1918*, Angus & Robertson.

WIGMORE, L. (1963) *They dared mightily*, AWM Canberra.

Letters

Brian Gregory
14 School Avenue
Guide Post
Choppington
Northumberland NE62 5DN
United Kingdom

Dear Mrs Bradley,

Firstly, thank you for the information and photocopies of photos on Operations Jaywick (and Romau).

I did not have a deadline as it was personal research — not a project and since I left school in '87 it wouldn't be a school one!

I was hoping you could send me a price list and details of books or badges and uniforms (particularly ties and head-dress types/colours) of the Australian army, RAN and RAAF.

Could you also send me a price list for any dress regulations booklets and a list of the ranks in those services (or are they identical to the British ranks?)

Are they military connections between Australia, Britain and New Zealand.

Finally, could you send me a list of the different colours of ties and prices worn in the services during world war one, two, Korea and Vietnam? Also could you send me a list of the prices for the RAAF and RAN badges; and the 'crown' and 'AIF' (iron and golden) badges of the four wars above mentioned (and descriptions/photocopies).

As I am doing a world war two novel could you also describe for me a civilian/military (photo) ID card and pass. Also do the Australian 'dog-tags' differ to those of the USA?

Please address your reply to Brian Gregory (II).

Yours,

Brian Gregory

Joel Parate
13, rue de la Ferme
4300 ANS (LIEGE)
BELGIUM

Dear Sir,

I am a member of the police in Belgium (Gendarmerie) and I collect all the caps and helmets of the police from every country in the world.

I can't conceal that I would love to have a cap from your country. I'll be very happy.

I sent to the Australian Embassy (here in Belgium) and they gave me your address. They told me you could help me. I hope you will.

I advance I thank you so very much.

Joel Parate

(ed.) Can anybody help Mr Parate?

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