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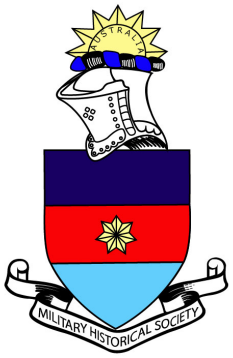

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MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA
VICTORIAN BANCH
INAUGURAL COBBY ORATION
COBBY – AN EXEMPLARY WARRIOR

Air Marshal I B Gration, AO AFC (retd)

Firstly, speaking as the Patron of the Military Historical Society, may I say how delighted I was to learn of the Victorian Branch's initiative in instigating an annual military history oration – the Cobby Oration. Their initiative is entirely consistent with the objects of the Society set out in our Constitution, viz: 'the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; and the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects.' And, as a bonus for Victoria, there is the possibility of harvesting that interest in the form of new members. To link the concept of an annual oration with a famous and distinguished military aviator son of Victoria is equally a master-stroke which, as a retired air force chief also from Victoria, I entirely endorse.

I am also honoured to be invited to give this inaugural oration. Cobby's life, both within and beyond his Service career, provides a striking example of inspirational leadership. Tonight I want to dwell on the characteristics which seem to me essential for an effective leader to possess, using Cobby's story as an example. Accordingly, I have titled this oration 'Cobby – an Exemplary Warrior'.

I have used the term 'warrior' advisedly because I want to emphasise that leadership characteristics are not just the concern of generals and admirals but, rather, apply to all ranks thrust into leadership roles; indeed, in a broader sense, apply to all walks of life, not just to the military. But, in Cobby's case of course, his example was first seen in war where the characteristics were relevant to warfare in the field, with its singular aspects of unrestrained aggression, danger and death spread over an extended period. Hence my use of 'warrior'.

Well, what are the characteristics I am talking about? Much has been written and debated about leadership characteristics, especially in the context of modern business management. Tonight I am restricting myself to consideration of military leadership during war; although, as I have already hinted, most of the relevant characteristics have equal resonance in peace, as demonstrated by Cobby in his employment beyond the air force.

My list of essential military leadership characteristics during war include:

- Firstly, sufficient luck to survive long enough to develop inherent characteristics.
- Then, overt expertise in one's role, based on skill and the ability to learn from experience.
- Backed by demonstrable honesty and integrity.
- Accompanied by a physical and influential aura – or charisma – which some exude but most do not, so as to inspire followers to follow trustingly and willingly. (You will now realise that I am a believer in inspirational leadership.)
- So as to create confidence in followers that the leader knows what he is doing.
- A demonstrable awareness of unit place in the wider scheme of things; that is, of those who provide support within the unit, and of the unit's role in supporting the superior authority and adjacent units. In air combat this would be called 'situational awareness'.
- An aggressive attitude and courageous - in the sense of facing known danger resolutely.
- Intelligently creative and flexible.
- Caring at a personal level, and modest.

No doubt many of you would wish to add to or subtract from that list, but I believe that these traits capture the essence of military leadership. Note also that the list is probably relevant in any leadership situation, especially if you believe in the inspirational concept.

Let me now address Harry Cobby as a warrior.

Arthur Henry Cobby was born in Prahran, Melbourne on 26 August 1894. While at school he joined the Army cadets and, at age 18, was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 46th Infantry (Brighton Rifles) militia, transferring later to the 47th.[1] At the outbreak of war in 1914 he attempted to enlist in the AIF but his employment as a bank clerk – a reserved occupation – precluded that. Eventually, however, he convinced the Governor of the Commonwealth Bank to release him and, on 4 December 1916, he applied for pilot training at the Military Flying School at Point Cook. He was successful and, on 23 December, joined the Australian Flying Corps.[2]

Initial training at Point Cook was rudimentary and, in Cobby's own words, 'the flying times were negligible' and then only in box-kites.[3] On 17 January 1917, he embarked for England, disembarking on 27 March 1917.[4] He then spent the next eight months in further training for his wings, flying several different aircraft types, and suffering en-route his first crash following an engine failure, as a result of which he was hospitalised for three weeks.[5] Soon after qualifying for and being awarded his wings, he joined his new unit, 4 Squadron AFC, and sailed for France on 18 December 1917.[6]

In his book, *High Adventure*, Cobby describes how inadequate was the preparation for combat for the pilots of 4 Squadron. He said:

> My total flying time, both instructional and solo, was about 12 or 13 hours, and this on six or seven different sorts of aircraft ... Some attempt certainly had been made to give prospective pilots of our new Australian squadrons a brief term in France before forming up, but they were either shot down, invalided home, or were not available for some reason or other when we moved off. We were novices almost to a man.[7]

You will recall that my list of essential leadership traits was headed by the need for good luck so as to allow survival while gaining combat skills. Cobby's starting point as a 'novice' – as he put it – emphasises why such a learning period is so critical. Today's air forces go to extraordinary lengths to prepare pilots for combat with realistic training rather than relying on good luck. The USAF's Red Flag exercises, in which the RAAF regularly participates, lead the world in this respect.

To emphasise the luck factor, it is worth noting that 4 Squadron's first casualties in France were not the result of enemy action but a formation collision in which three aircraft and their pilots were lost.[8]

Cobby's first combat mission occurred on 9 January 1918 and his flight's first loss 'over the line' soon followed on 13 January. On 3 February, he obtained his first kill when he was part of a section of three which attacked and destroyed three German DFWs. He was obviously learning fast.[9]

Over the next month 4 Squadron tasking altered to a mainly ground-attack role, with fewer scout tasks deep in enemy territory. On both sides formations also grew, often exceeding ten or more, rather than the three or four originally used. This was the case for Cobby on 20 March when he led two formations of five aircraft each on a sector reconnaissance in anticipation of a German 'big push'. The mission was almost entirely negated by an extensive ground mist but, by chance, it

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1 National Archives of Australia, Series B2455, Arthur Henry Cobby, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920, pp. 21,13.
2 Ibid. pp. 4, 16.
3 *High Adventure*, A H Cobby, Kookaburra Technical Publications Pty Ltd, 1981, ISBN 0 85880 044 6, p. 24.
4 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 4, 17.
5 Opt. cit. *High Adventure*, pp. 29, 30.
6 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 4, 17
7 Opt. cit. *High Adventure*, pp. 35.
8 Ibid. p. 39.
9 Opt. cit. High Adventure, pp. 39, 41, 42.

gave Cobby and his flight their first 'do' with Richthofen's celebrated Circus. It also gave Cobby two more kills: an Albatross and a Fokker Triplane.[10]

On 21 March, the anticipated German 'big push' began and 4 Squadron was heavily committed to ground attack which exposed the aircraft continuously to ground fire of all sorts, with many aircraft suffering severe damage; and, because of the low altitude, leaving little opportunity for air combat. However, on 10 April while Cobby's flight was en-route for a bombing task, a German Albatross scout unexpectedly presented itself head-on to Cobby:

> There was just time to press both triggers and to dive under him to get out of his way. He went down into the cloud in flames, but I had hit the pilot, as he had almost jumped backwards out of the cockpit when I fired.[11]

By the end of April, the 'big push' was halted and 4 Squadron resumed its normal offensive air patrols.

By now Cobby was frequently leading formations of his flight and on 14 May, in recognition of his aggressive talent and leadership, he was appointed temporary A Flight commander.[12] On 20 May, he led a formation of nine aircraft 'over the line' when they encountered two Pfaltz scouts apparently covered from above by a further 18 scouts. 'The temptation was too great' he said and dived to attack. 'One burst from about 50 yards was enough to put my opponent into an uncontrolled spin'.[13]

On 25 May, his promotion to Captain came through confirming his appointment as Flight Commander.[14] By this time he had achieved 19 aircraft kills and four balloons destroyed, and was proud of the fact that he 'had not lost a pilot over the lines, nor had once been wounded while he was leading'.[15] He was also more than half way through his operational tour – although, of course, there was no such concept at that time. So it might be useful to check how his performance to that point matched my list of essential warrior traits.

He had certainly had the good luck to survive long enough to develop his combat potential. And there was nothing in his record to suggest any questioning of his honesty or integrity. His good looks, physical presence and modest account of his off-duty high-jinks reflected the possession of real charisma in the eyes of his followers. His mastery of his Camel and his air combat skill were evidenced by his score and his continued survival, which in turn inspired confidence in his ability amongst his fellow pilots and ground crew. And underlying that mastery was the 'sine qua non' of all pilots, and especially fighter pilots, the possession of situational awareness in the air. And in the broader sense too of being aware of his military surroundings, Cobby understood well his squadron's role in support of the ground forces, and quickly analysed weaknesses in the German air tactics. As to his personal approach to air combat, Cobby's account in his book *High Adventure'* repeatedly reflects an aggressiveness in his desire to take the battle to his enemy and, in the sense that I have already defined courage, to face known danger resolutely. As for the last of my listed traits – compassion and modesty – his writings show particular concern for the compassionate handling of those pilots who, for whatever reason, had to be repatriated prematurely; and also for the intelligent mentoring of new pilots during their introduction to real combat. Finally, throughout his book there is not a trace of 'braggadocio' or 'gilding the lily'. His is the story in simple words of a young man thrown into a new, exciting but lethal form of warfare at which he, somewhat to his surprise, excelled.

In short, as measured against my list of warrior traits, Harry Cobby was already unquestionably an exceptional combat pilot and a natural leader in that milieu. But were those qualities recognised by his commanders? To answer that rhetorical question let me now resume the story.

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10 Ibid. pp. 48, 49.
11 Ibid. p. 27.
12 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, p. 17.
13 Opt. cit. *High Adventure*, p. 62.
14 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, p. 17.
15 Opt. cit. *High Adventure*, p. 63.

On 3 June, Cobby was nominated for award of the Military Cross. Coincidently, the *London Gazette* of that date announced the creation of the Distinguished Flying Cross as an air force equivalent of the MC. Thus, on 2 July, the award appeared in the gazette as one of the earliest Australian DFCs. The citation read: 'a very gallant and successful fighter and patrol leader setting a fine example to the squadron'. The official gazette records 'acts of gallantry and distinguished service, conspicuous service rendered, and gallantry in flying operations against the enemy'.[16]

For actions in late June, Cobby was awarded a bar to his DFC. The 21 September gazette citation read:

> An officer whose success as a leader is due not only to high courage and brilliant flying, but also to the clear judgement and presence of mind he invariably displays. His example is of great value to other pilots in his squadron. During recent operations he shot down five machines in 11 days, accounting for two in one day.[17]

Also, for further successes during July, Cobby received the second bar to his DFC. The citation of 21 September reads:

> One evening (15 July) this officer, in company with another machine, attacked five Pfalz scouts, destroying two; one fell in flames and one broke up in mid-air. The officer who accompanied him (Lieutenant H.G. Watson) brought down a third machine out of control. While engaged in this combat they were attacked from above by five tri-planes. Displaying cool judgement and brilliant flying, Captain Cobby evaded this attack and returned to our lines in safety, both machines being undamaged. A determined and most skilful leader, who has destroyed 21 hostile machines or balloons, accounting for three machines and two balloons in four days.[18]

By any measure, the achievement of two bars to the DFC was a rare recognition of combat success. During WW I there were only three pilots to receive this distinction: two of whom were Australians – Cobby and Ross Smith. Moreover, only six Australians have ever been awarded triple DFCs: those two in WW I, three in WW II and one in the Malayan Emergency. But there is more.

On 2 November, Cobby was made a companion of the Distinguished Service Order. The citation reads:

> On 16 August this officer led an organised raid on an enemy aerodrome. At 200 feet altitude he obtained direct hits with his bombs and set on fire two hangars. He then opened fire on a machine which was standing out on the aerodrome. The machine caught fire. Afterwards he attacked with machine gun fire parties of troops and mechanics, inflicting a number of casualties. On the following day he led another important raid on an aerodrome, setting fire to two hangars and effectively bombing gun detachments, anti-aircraft batteries, etc. The success of these two raids was largely due to the determined and skilful leadership of this officer.[19]

I might add that these two raids were maximum efforts, with up to 90 aircraft involved (18 from each of three RAF squadrons and two AFC squadrons). You can imagine the coordination required to get such a large formation over the target and attacking in turn without losing a single aircraft; and repeated the following day on a different target with the same devastating result.

To return to my rhetorical question, the decorations speak for themselves. Cobby's skill as a pilot, his effectiveness in combat, his aggressive and courageous attitude, and his inspirational leadership were unquestionably recognised by the authorities as well as his peers. And to 'add icing on the cake', on 8 November 1918 Cobby's name was included in General Haig's personal list of those he 'mentioned in despatches'.[20] There is no doubt that Harry Cobby displayed all the traits of a successful tactical leader. As well, he was an authentic 'ace', achieving the highest score of 'kills' in the AFC (29 aircraft and 13 balloons).[21] He was never shot down by the enemy. He suffered only three aircraft

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16 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 10, 30.
17 Ibid. p. 11.
18 Ibid. p. 12.
19 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 14.
20 Ibid. p. 15.
21 *Australian Fighter Aces 1914-1953*, A.D. Garrison, APSC&AWM, 1999, ISBN 0 642 26540 2, pp.65, 67.

accidents: one as the result of an engine failure, one when forced to land in fog, and one when landing in an open field when he was up-ended by a concealed ditch. He was proud of his record for losing so few of his charges over enemy lines. And he was never seriously injured. All of this was achieved in just nine hectic months of combat. By any measure, he was, indeed, an exemplary warrior.

Cobby's war ended on 14 September 1918 when he was posted to Leighterton as Wing Fighting Instructor.[22] He was not looking forward to the experience. As he said:

> I tried every conceivable way possible to get out of it but without avail ... The prospect of being chased around the sky by enthusiastic, but only partly trained, pilots was not pleasing. France was dangerous enough, but England seemed more so. The last two fighting instructors had been killed in the air in collisions, and the prospect of passing out in that manner was not inspiring.[23]

Nevertheless, he took up duty on 30 September and immediately undertook intense training to achieve his A1 instructor rating. He arrived back at Leighterton just in time for the Armistice. He eventually departed England on 6 May 1919.[24]

I am now going to pass quickly over the next twenty or so years to focus on Cobby as a senior officer in the RAAF during World War II.

Back in Australia Cobby transferred to the Australian Air Corps and then, on 31 March 1921, to the newly created Australian Air Force, soon to become the Royal Australian Air Force. There followed two squadron commands, the second of which (3 Squadron) he handed over to then Squadron Leader W. Bostock, of whom more in a moment.[25] Cobby was promoted Wing Commander on 1 May 1933 and appointed Director of Intelligence. In 1936 he retired, but remained on the Reserve in the Citizen Air Force. He joined the Civil Aviation Board as Controller of Operations. At the outbreak of war in September 1939 he rejoined the RAAF, and on 25 July 1940 was promoted to Group Captain and appointed to be Director of Recruiting. On 25 August 1942 he was appointed to be Air Officer Commanding North-Eastern Area, headquartered in Townsville.[26]

On 7 September 1943, Cobby was a passenger in a Catalina which crashed on landing at Townsville. Although injured himself, he risked his life in helping to rescue two other survivors despite the presence of unexploded mines aboard the aircraft. On 10 March 1944, his award of the George Medal for 'outstanding bravery' was gazetted.[27]

After recovering from his injuries, he was appointed Commandant of the Air Force's Staff School in January 1944. On 16 June 1944, he was made a Commander of the British Empire for his 'conspicuous service as AOC North-Eastern Area'.[28]

In August 1944. Cobby was appointed AOC 10 Operational Group, soon to be renamed 1 Tactical Air Force. What followed was one of the saddest affairs in the RAAF's history of higher command. I don't wish to dwell unduly on what came to be known – erroneously – as the 'Morotai Mutiny', but you will need to understand the background if you are to grasp the incongruity of a brilliant WWI tactical leader being removed from commanding one of the RAAF's most important WWII fighting formations because of his perceived failure to fulfil his command responsibility.

Firstly, the higher command of the RAAF had been in turmoil since the posting to the RAF of Williams in 1939, culminating in the posting of Bostock to command RAAF Command under General Kenney of the USAAF and the appointment of Jones to be Chief of the Air Staff.[29]

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22 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 31.
23 Opt. cit. *High Adventure*, p. 91.
24 Opt. cit. B2455, Cobby, pp. 34.
25 Arthur Henry Cobby, *Air Base Richmond: the story of the RAAF base on the Hawkesbury*, Derek Roylance, RAAF Base Richmond, c1991, pp. 36,37.
26 Cobby, Royal Australian Air Force 1938-1942, Douglas Gillison, p. 588.
27 Cobby, *London Gazette* 36418 p. 1165.
28 Cobby, *London Gazette* 36566, p. 2873.
29 *How not to run an air force*, Norman Ashworth, APSC, 2000, ISBN 0 642 26550X (Vol 1) and , ISBN 0 642 26550 8 (Vol2), Volume 1, pp. 5, 101, 107-108, 121-124.

Bostock was senior to Jones before the latter's appointment, and the division of responsibility between operations and administrative support required close cooperation between the two incumbents. However, the personal antagonism between Bostock and Jones was such that RAAF operational effectiveness was never fully achieved in the Pacific war; and this fact was widely recognised by unit commanders of RAAF Command and others.[30]

Secondly, with the agreement of the Australian government, MacArthur, in 1944, had allocated responsibility for the isolation and defeat of the Japanese in the New Guinea, Borneo and East Indies to the allied forces (primarily Australian), whilst the US forces advanced to the Philippines and beyond.[31] Understandably, this was disappointing for the RAAF fighter squadrons especially as they felt, correctly, that the real war was passing them by. (Japanese air power was effectively extinguished south of the Philippines by mid-1944. The last Japanese aircraft shot down by an Australian was on 19 June 1944.[32])

Thirdly, it was the view of the unit commanders of 1TAF that the tasking of their aircraft against the immobilised but still dangerous Japanese pockets was unproductive and wasteful of aircrews and aircraft. To this end, on 23 January 1945 Group Captain Wilf Arthur (OC 81 Fighter Wing) took to Cobby - commander 1TAF - a 'balance sheet' of target damage achieved set against the considerable expenditure of pilots, aircraft and resources which, Arthur believed, showed convincingly that the tasking was decidedly unproductive and unnecessarily wasteful.[33]

Arthur felt that Cobby was appreciative of the analysis, as he (Cobby) asked for copies and wished to discuss the matter with his senior staff officers. In his evidence to the subsequent Barry inquiry, Cobby described how review and analysis by his staff satisfied him that things were not as bad as Arthur had made out; and, as a consequence, he instructed that this analysis be discussed with, or sent to, Arthur (who was at that time based at Noemfoor).[34]

Cobby, himself, took no further action on the matter. Apparently he felt that the broad operational concept outlined by 13th Air Force headquarters on behalf of General Kenney required 1TAF to maintain pressure on the isolated Japanese forces so as to ensure their containment; and he believed that the tasking ordered by Gibson, his senior air staff officer, was appropriate in the circumstances, notwithstanding Arthur's 'balance sheet'.

By March 1945 Arthur, having heard nothing from Cobby and seeing no change in the 'unproductive' tasking, began discussing with his like-minded friends and fellow commanders the need for some dramatic action which would cause the RAAF to review the side-lining of RAAF operations and employ the RAAF forces more productively in the drive towards Japan. This group of eight officers thus decided to seek permission to resign *en masse.*[35] Accordingly, on 20 April all eight submitted identically-worded applications to the Commander 1TAF.[36]

Cobby subsequently said he was surprised by this action, especially as the conspirators refused to give him any reasons for their action, other than to assure him that it was not directed at him personally. He immediately advised Jones because of the administrative and political implications, and Bostock because of the likely disruption to the imminent Oboe operations to recover Borneo. Bostock in turn advised Kenney.

Bostock was first on the scene at Morotai, interviewing each of the conspirators in turn. Apparently he felt that he could address the problem within 1TAF, and tried to dissuade the officers from pursuing the resignation path. However, he only succeeded in getting them to replace the word

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30 *Power plus attitude*, Alan Stephens, C'Wealth of Australia, 1992, pp. 64-68.
31 Ibid. p. 69.
32 Opt. cit. *Australian Fighter Aces 1914-1953*, p. 70.
33 *The Barry Report*-Part II Dealing with Morotai Mutiny, pp. 115, 198.
34 Ibid. p.118
35 Ibid. p.107
36 'Clearing the Augean Stables' The Morotai Mutiny, Kristen Alexander, *Sabretache* vol XLV no 3 September 2004, p. 15.

'forthwith' with 'at the end of current operations' (meaning Oboe).[37] He therefore drafted a long message to Jones, assessing the discontent within 1TAF and recommending that Cobby be relieved of his command and the two senior staff officers (Gibson and Simms) be replaced. After discussing the contents with Cobby, he dispatched the message forthwith.[38]

Jones arrived in Morotai on 25 April but, without any stated reasons from the conspirators, could not understand their motives. Kenney happened to be at Morotai that day and asked to see the conspirators. Jones was upset that Bostock had brought Kenney into what Jones saw as a national problem which was his to deal with, and he threatened to court martial the conspirators. When Kenney heard of this threat he told Jones bluntly that he - Kenney - would support their defence in the most public way![39]

Jones agreed with Bostock's assessment that Cobby had failed in his command responsibilities (by losing touch with his units under command and failing to recognise or address the evident loss of morale); and that the two senior staff officers (Gibson and Simms) were the immediate sources of 1TAF discontent both from their abrasive and autocratic manner, and the fact that they directed the wasteful operational tasking. Jones decided to replace all three and took this recommendation back to the Australian Government. Gibson and Simms were posted almost immediately, and Cobby was relieved by Scherger on 12 May.[40]

The Government also set in train a Commission of Inquiry, with Mr Justice Barry as Commissioner. The Inquiry began in mid-May and the Commissioner submitted his report in August. The Commissioner found that the conspirators were justified in their concerns about the wasteful tasking within 1TAF, and that Cobby had failed in his command responsibilities.[41] But by then the war was over, the immediate problem had gone away, and the players got on with the peace.

Cobby resigned his commission on 19 August 1946[42] and returned to his pre-war employment with the newly named Department of Civil Aviation, firstly as a regional director then in 1954 as Director of Flying Operations, with his old friend 'Dickie' Williams as the Director-General. Cobby died on 11 November 1955, aged 61 years.[43]

Let me now quickly return to my list of essential traits for inspirational leaders. The key question is how to reconcile Cobby's perceived command failure at 1TAF with his proven tactical leadership in WWI. I believe, as Commander of 1TAF, he lapsed in his 'situational awareness', failing to stay in touch effectively with his subordinate commanders and troops. But why he made these errors of judgement at the critical time in 1945 we can now never know.

Cobby's performance as AOC North-Eastern area in 1942-43 was apparently effective, but the Bostock/Jones relationship had not yet become a significantly adverse factor at that time, and the relegation of Australian forces to a 'mopping up' role was still in the future. However, by 1944-45 both circumstances were adversely affecting the morale of RAAF Command and especially 1TAF. Early in his 1TAF command Cobby had observed how difficult it was for an operational commander whose administrative support was separated from his operational authority.[44] Nevertheless, these adverse circumstances do not explain Cobby's loss of touch with his troops.

In my opinion, Cobby made three mistakes which hindsight might consider to be in the nature of errors of judgement.

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37 Opt. cit. *The Barry Report*, p. 134.
38 Ibid. pp. 135-137.
39 Opt. cit. *How not to run an air force*, Volume 2, p.312 Extracts from Kenney's Notebooks 1944-1945.
40 Opt. cit. *The Barry Report*, p. 141.
41 Ibid. p. 198.
42 Opt. cit. Cobby, http://www.awm.gov.au/people/142.asp
http://www.ww2roll.gov.au/script/veteran.asp?ServiceID=R&VeteranID=1204618
43 Ibid. http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080045b.htm
44 Opt. cit. *Air war against Japan*, George Odgers, p. 297, 298.

Firstly, when Arthur approached him in January 1945, Cobby failed to recognise the significance of one of his senior wing commanders approaching him directly with a detailed document of wasteful tasking. Cobby was aware of 'discontent' amongst his squadrons, but failed to appreciate the depth of concern reflected in Arthur's approach.[45]

Secondly, the command import of the 'balance sheet' contents also seems to have been lost on Cobby. Kenney's operational instructions through 13th Air Force to 1TAF had been purposely general, allowing AOC 1TAF, in particular, flexibility in tasking.[46] Thus Cobby - as commander - was responsible for the missions (wasteful or otherwise), and whether or not his senior staff officers were in fact the tasking generators. When Cobby's staff provided an analysis which suggested a less dramatic view of the operational losses, Cobby apparently concluded that, although the tasking was obviously frustrating to the pilots, it was necessary to fulfil the operational objective required by 13th Air Force. This conclusion was never really tested, but Commissioner Barry subsequently found that the tasking was certainly wasteful and Arthur's approach in January was 'a useful starting point for a judgement of the worth or otherwise of the operations the Wing was carrying out'.[47]

Thirdly, Cobby chose not to explain his conclusion personally to Arthur; instead instructing his staff to convey the staff analysis and rationale to him. Such delegation may have seemed routine to Cobby at the time, consistent with his belief that Arthur's concern was understandable but not warranting any change. However, hindsight suggests that, if he had discussed the matter further with Arthur and recognised the depth of concern felt by the squadrons, he could have modified the wasteful tasking while still meeting the overall 13th Air Force operational objective of suppressing the beleaguered Japanese. This would almost certainly have satisfied the immediate concern about tasking, especially with the imminent shift of effort to the Oboe operations.

Faced with Bostock's damning assessment of 1TAF's discontent[48] (albeit based largely on hearsay!); and, in the circumstances at the time, of a 1TAF liquor-trading scandal with the associated court martial of two senior officers, the resignation request of eight senior officers, and the beginning of the Oboe operations, Jones really had no alternative but to relieve Cobby of his command and post out the offending senior staff officers. Even so, both Jones and Bostock subsequently spoke highly of Cobby's overall command abilities and performance. And the Americans too thought sufficiently of Cobby's contribution to the allied air effort to honour him with their Medal of Freedom with Bronze Palm.[49]

On that positive note may I now conclude by drawing together Cobby's lifetime achievements. All the evidence supports the recognition of Cobby as an outstanding leader at the tactical level in WW I. He was a recognised 'ace', with the highest number of aircraft kills in the AFC. And he was an authentic Australian hero who filled the physical and legendry expectations of the Australian people at that time. Measured against my list of essential personal traits, he had them all.

Moreover, he served his nation for the whole of his working life: firstly with the AFC, then with the RAAF in its infancy, then with the Civil Aviation Board, then back into the RAAF for WWII, and finally with the Department of Civil Aviation until his sudden death. It is therefore entirely appropriate that such selfless service to the nation should be commemorated annually by an oration named in his honour. Accordingly, I congratulate the Victorian Branch on its initiative in creating this commendable event, and am honoured to have presented the inaugural 'Cobby Oration'.

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45 *Report of Proceedings* (Barry Inquiry), p. 545.
46 Opt. cit. *The Barry Report*, pp. 168-170.
47 Ibid. pp. 116, 119.
48 Ibid. pp. 135-137.
49 Opt. cit. *Australian Fighter Aces 1914-1953*, p. 72.

LIEUTENANT deNEUFVILLE LUCAS, 40TH REGIMENT:[1] A BIOGRAPHY

Anthony F. Harris

This is the story of, perhaps, an unspectacular man, a soldier who experienced both garrison posting and war, volunteering and public service. It is not an altogether new story, but a life that has been told in part previously though never in full. The choice of the subject is simply that, for this writer, his name over the past few years has kept cropping up. Research commences on a subject and that unusual name, deNeufville, crops up. A later attempt to research another topic and 'that name' appears again, and so on. The origins of 'that name' are obscure, though the likelihood that it derives from a Huguenot refugee family is very high.

In the October-December 1980 edition of the Society journal *Sabretache* – coincidentally the same edition that this writer had his first brief article published – there was a similarly short paper by Robert Williams based on an account located in a British newspaper, the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* of 4 February 1857. [2] The article recounted an incident, no doubt drawn from a contemporary Australian newspaper, which took place at Melbourne's Prince's Bridge barracks during the garrison occupancy of Her Majesty's 40th Regiment of Foot. Prince's Bridge barracks are believed to have been a temporary barracks, possibly utilizing existing buildings, on the eastern side of St Kilda Road. They replaced the old Spencer Street barracks and were used pending the construction of Victoria Barracks on the western side of the road. In brief, an Ensign of the regiment went on a rampage with a pistol, murdering the Regimental Medical Officer who was recuperating from an accidental fall, then wounding two of his brother officers before taking his own life. One of the wounded officers was the subject of this paper, Ensign deNeufville Lucas.

deNeufville Lucas was born on 11 January 1832, a son of Mr Robert Lucas, a barrister of London. [3] Details of Lucas' schooling have not been traced but he attested into the 40th Foot as Ensign (without purchase) on 17 August 1855 at the age of 22½ years. [4] Just a few months later he was posted to join his regiment in Australia, arriving in Melbourne aboard the *Epsom* in July 1856 in the company of at least three of his brother officers, Thomas Ormsby Johnston(e), Russell Harris Keith (*sic* – more on that name a little later) and Vere Fitzmaurice Pennefather, two of whom (Keith and Pennefather) became involved in the incident referred to here. [5]

Detailed accounts of the barracks rampage were recorded not only in the Melbourne newspapers but also in Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth and of course subsequently in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. The incident was reported thus:

> His Excellency the Governor held the usual half-yearly inspection of the troops in garrison yesterday. At the Princes Bridge Barracks, when the 40th Regiment was paraded, it went through various evolutions. The inspections being over the officers retired to their quarters, and Ensign Pennefather and others engaged in familiar and friendly conversations. Shortly afterwards, between 12 and 1 o'clock, Ensign Pennefather rushed out of his room with a six barrelled revolver in his hand, and

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1 Despite most written instances of the name being spelled using the upper case 'De', the author has followed the few examples of his signature i.e. 'deNeufville'.

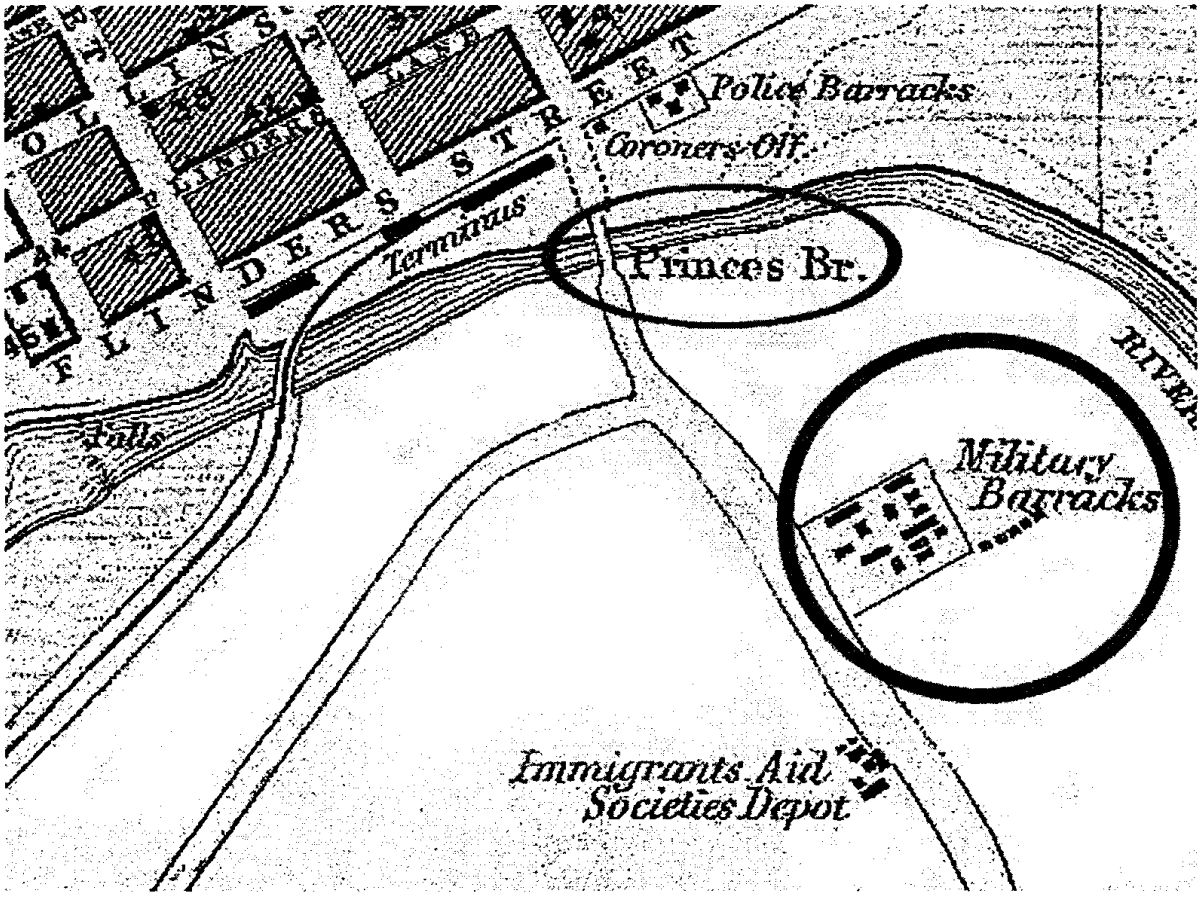
2 Robert Williams, 'A British Officer Runs Amok', in *Sabretache*, Journal of the MHSA, Vol. XXI, Oct-Dec 1980, No.4, p.35

3 Obituary, Adelaide *Observer* (newspaper), Sat. 27 November 1897, p.43, col. d-e

4 *London Gazette* (LG), 17 August 1855, p.3130

5 PRO Vic, *Index to Unassisted Inward Passenger List to Victoria 1852-1923*

meeting, just as he got outside of the house, Ensign Keith, he presented the pistol and fired at him. The bullet passed through Ensign Keith's cheek and came out at the back of his neck. At this time Dr. McCauley was seated in an arm-chair on the grass in front of his quarters, reading. In consequence of an accident he met with since by falling from the gallery upon the vestibule of the Theatre Royal, the doctor was an invalid, and his crutch lay at his side. After firing at Ensign Keith, Pennefather ran to where Dr McCauley was sitting, and placing the pistol on the doctor's mouth, he fired, and the bullet passed out at the back of his neck. Pennefather then looked round as if anxious to find someone else to shoot, when Ensign Lucas ran forward to wrest the pistol from him. On seeing him approach Pennefather shot him in the jaw. With a maniacal 'Ha Ha' the wretched man then placed the pistol at his own head and fired, the bullet entering the right temple. Such, as near as we can learn, are the brief but shocking incidents of this disastrous affair. [6]



Location of Princes Bridge Barracks on what is now St Kilda Road. The Victoria Barracks was later built approximately on the site of the Immigrants Aid Depot.

Apparently Dr McCauley (in some reports M'Cauley and M'Auley) died immediately, while Ensign Lucas was severely wounded and Keith dangerously so. Ensign Pennefather lingered for about nine hours before he died while Lucas eventually recovered from his 'severe' injury, although the bullet remained embedded in his tongue for the next eighteen years. [7] It must be pointed out here that although the preceding report just quoted refers throughout to 'Ensign Keith' this is an error; the Ensign in question was actually named Veith (as noted by Robert Williams) and this is confirmed by both the Army Lists of the time and the regimental Muster Rolls of the 40th Regiment. The inquest on the deceased officers took place on Thursday 23 October in an apartment of the officer's quarters, the subsequent finding of the jury being 'That

6 Obituary
7 ibid

the deceased Vere Fitzmaurice Pennefather, had died from injuries inflicted by his own hand, whilst in a temporary state of insanity'.[8] There are some newspaper observations and correspondence questioning whether the inquest had any justification or expertise for declaring Pennefather insane or deranged but nothing of substance resulted. The burial of the officers was quite an occasion with practically the whole of the regiment (less those sick or on duty), the band, the firing party and even the Governor's carriage following the bodies.[9] Pennefather and Doctor McCauley were buried side by side in the old Melbourne cemetery that now lies beneath the Victoria Markets.

Despite being severely wounded, Ensign Veith was reported as sitting up in bed and conversing freely the next day and his continued improvement was fully expected. However, Veith disappears from the Army Lists under the 40th Foot very soon after being shot but he shows up again a couple of years later being appointed a Lieutenant in the 15th Foot (without purchase) on 5 October 1858.[10] It is quite possible that he was out of action for a while but he likely returned to England and picked up his career again in a different regiment for a fresh start? However, his further service must be the work of another researcher while we now go back to the career of deNeufville Lucas.

It was not until the Monday following the incident that Ensign Lucas is reported as '...going on favourably, and is able to speak'.[11] Lucas' health continued to improve and he remained in the service of the 40th. He was subsequently transferred to Adelaide with No.3 Company on the *Havila*, arriving on 13 April 1858 when it relieved the detachment of the 12th Regiment bound for Melbourne, thence Sydney to replace the 77th Foot posted to India.[12] Lucas was promoted to Lieutenant (without purchase) on 28 October 1858[13] then, about eighteen months later, he married 22 years old Catherine Holroyd, a sister of Inspector Henry Holroyd of the South Australian Police Force.[14] The marriage took place at Trinity Church on North Terrace (often unofficially referred to as Adelaide's 'Garrison Church') and Lt. Lucas formally notified the War Office of his new situation on 26 June 1858 'with a view to facilitate the settlement of any claim that may be made on behalf of the officer's family, in the event of his death'.[15]

Although a serving garrison officer, with the resignation of Lt. H.L. Williams of the Volunteer Military Force (VMF), deNeufville Lucas was able to secure a Staff appointment to the VMF as Sub-Inspector of Musketry, still maintaining his regular army rank.[16] While Williams' resignation does not appear to be published, Lucas' appointment was gazetted on 16 May 1861, although the *Gazette* wording actually reads 'Sub-Instructor'.[17] This post was to lead to a fairly long though interrupted involvement with the Volunteer forces in South Australia. His appointment put Lucas frequently in the public eye. He was seen at many functions involving the volunteers, such as rifle matches, parades and reviews, levees and similar occasions, as well as travelling to country districts around the colony to classify and drill volunteer companies located outside the greater metropolitan area. On the 13 June 1861 he took part in a rifle match between the First Adelaide Rifles (volunteers) and the 40th Regiment, the volunteers winning by 247 points over 216. Lieut. Lucas shot with the regulars and, at the after-match dinner, Lucas

8 *The Argus* (Melbourne newspaper), Frl. 24 Oct. 1856, p.4
9 *Argus*, Sat. 25 Oct. 1856, p.5
10 LG, 17 Sept. 1861, p.3746
11 *Argus*, 27 Oct. 1856, p.5-6
12 State Library of SA (SLSA), *Adelaide Times*, Mon. 12 April 1858, p.2 col.a
13 LG, 4 Nov. 1859, p.3952
14 BDM (SA), Bk.42 1860, No.3158, p.42. See also The *Register* (newspaper), Personal Notices (Marriages), 9 June 1860
15 The National Archives (TNA - Kew, UK), WO 25/3242
16 State Records of SA (SRSA), GRG24/51/87
17 *South Australian Government Gazette* (SAGG), 16 May 1861, p.419

responded to the toasts to the 40th, all details being quoted in the press and again keeping him in the public eye. [18]

A week after the rifle match Lucas was tasked with classifying the Free Rifles Corps, an auxiliary company of the VMF. The corps comprised mainly relatively wealthy men and dedicated rifle shooters who had a declared preference in using the expensive and privately purchased Terry breech loading rifle as opposed to the standard Enfield muzzle loader used by the 'ordinary' volunteers. Lucas refused to classify them unless they used the Enfield. Not having any on issue the company could not comply and 'they were excluded from class-firing altogether'. [19] The Free Rifles company was an anachronism within the volunteer movement but this is not the time to discuss its peculiarities. However, a fine paper on the corps was published in an earlier edition (1982) of this journal. [20]

A month later again Lt Lucas left Adelaide on the coastal steamer *Ant* bound for Robe (or Guichen Bay) in the South-East of the colony. The purpose of the visit was to put the Robe company of volunteers through their class-firing and drill requirements over the following 4 or 5 days and is just another example of the duties Lucas had to attend to. The Robe volunteers equated themselves well on this occasion and at the conclusion thanked Lt Lucas for his interest and 'the uniform gentlemanly conduct he has shown'. They also expressed the hope that they would see him again the following year. [21]

Lieutenant Lucas was himself no slouch as a rifleman. As a final example here of Lucas' activities with the volunteers, at the SA National Rifle Association's annual meeting of 1861 there was a competition for South Australian volunteers only. Out of the 341 entries shooting over 500 and 600 yards we find Lt. Lucas participating, coming in at 15th place with a score of 10 points over the two ranges, the highest scorer achieving 13 points. [22]

It was not long before Lt. Lucas was called into active service. Parts of the 40th had been called in from Melbourne and Hobart for duties in New Zealand during April 1860 due to Maori unrest and over the next two years or so they saw considerable action. By 1863 the continuing struggles led to the remainder of the troops stationed in Australia to be largely withdrawn and transferred to New Zealand as reinforcements. Between September and November 1863 all detachments of the 40th Regiment, with the exception of a few men in Tasmania and Victoria, were withdrawn and concentrated in New Zealand. On hearing of his imminent posting to New Zealand, in late September 1863 Lucas applied for a lodging allowance to be paid to his wife and family as 'I am necessarily put to a great expense in maintaining a separate home for them (his family) in South Australia'. The docket is annotated 'The Cabinet regret that they are compelled to decline the application'.[23] The company stationed in Adelaide left on 9 October 1863 (including Lt. Lucas, who's resignation of his Inspectors appointment with the VMF is dated the following day). They sailed on the barque *Nightingale* and arrived in New Zealand on 5 November. [24] This left Adelaide with no garrison troops on station so most of the garrison's duties then devolved upon the local police or prison guards. It was to be almost exactly three years before garrison troops were restored to the colony with the arrival of a company of the 14th Regiment on 5 November 1866.

It is not clear just where Lucas served in New Zealand, but his service entitled him to, and he was awarded, the New Zealand medal. However, Lucas returned to Adelaide in the first half of

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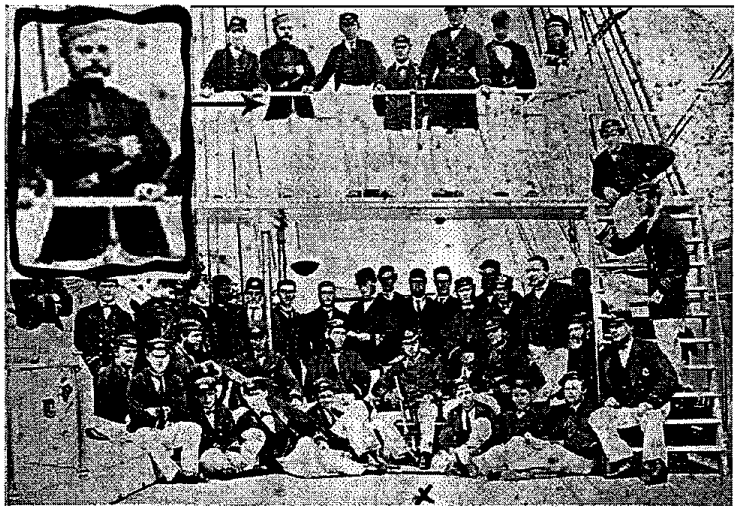
18 *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 June 1861, p.3
19 *Advertiser*, Thurs. 20 June 1861, p.2
20 Franklin Garie, 'The South Australian Free Rifles', in *Sabretache*, Vol.XXIII, July-Sept. 1982, p.21
21 *Advertiser*, Fri. 6 Sept. 1861, p.2
22 *Advertiser*, Fri. 1 Nov. 1861, p.2
23 SRSA GRG24/51/124
24 Smythies, Raymond H.R., *Historical Records of the 40th...*, Devonport, 1894, XVIII, p.396

1866 where his wife was waiting for him. It is not known if any or all other officer's wives accompanied their husbands to New Zealand but there is no doubt that Catherine remained in South Australia. Only eight soldier's families were allowed to accompany their husbands, leaving behind '18 wives and 35 children, most of whom will be without their usual means of support'. [25] A local committee was being formed to care for them and it is believed that these were mostly the families of those men who had married without the Army's consent.

On Lucas' return he picked up an appointment as Provincial Aide-de-Camp to Governor Sir Dominic Daly, gazetted on 24 May 1866 [26] then, five months later, Lt. Lucas retired from the army by sale of his commission on 30 October 1866. [27] However, he maintained his situation as ADC to the Governor until 2 March 1868. [28] During this period as ADC to the Governor Lucas again was regularly in the public eye and frequently mentioned in the press, performing many duties from simply supporting the Governor on formal occasions to delivering personal messages or gifts on behalf of His Excellency. Formal Government House levees, Vice-Regal theatre attendances, parades and picnics; all were part of Lucas' scene. He was ADC to one Governor (Sir Dominic Daly) for nearly two years and one Acting Governor (Colonel Hamley, 50th Regiment) for about 8 days after the death of Sir Dominic. Lucas was also closely connected with duties related to the visit of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh in 1867. In fact, during the visit of Prince Alfred, Maj. Lucas, now promoted to Honorary Major on the Staff of the Volunteer Military Forces, effective from 22 July 1867,[29] acted as his Aide-de-Camp. An obscure little reference states: 'the Duke...sent...through Major Lucas, his aide-de-camp, a handsomely bound volume of the *Early Years of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, with the Prince's autograph, 'Alfred' in the title page'. [30] At the time of writing no photograph of Lucas has been located which, given the enormous growth and popularity of the craft during the 1860's, may seem surprising. The press was always on hand to report on Vice-Regal activities and commercial photographers abounded, yet no images of Governor Daly with his ADC, politicians, his family or others of his entourage appear to survive. On a personal level, could it be that Lucas was disfigured by his wound in some way and avoided having his photograph taken? However, there are one or two photographs of the visit of Prince Alfred in 1867 and one in particular, aboard the *Galatea* may be of interest. [31] Among all the naval personnel we see one military officer. Could this possibly be Major Lucas in his role as the 'borrowed' ADC to the Duke?



H.R.H. Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, with officers of the *Galatea*. Could the lone army officer be Maj. Lucas, his 'borrowed' Aide-de-Camp? Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: PRG 280/1/38/75 – Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh aboard the *Galatea*, 1867.

25 *Register*, 12 October 1863, p.2, col.g
26 SAGG, 24 May 1866, p.503
27 LG, 30 Oct. 1866, p.5705
28 SAGG, 5 Mar 1868, p.313
29 SAGG, 22 July 1867, p.713
30 *Argus*, Tues. 3 Dec. 1867, p.4-5
31 SLSA, PRG 280/1/38/75

In the *South Australian Police Gazette* of 30 August 1867 there appeared another of those instances where 'that name' appeared again. Apparently deNeufville Lucas had some property stolen, though from where we are not advised:

> Stolen, at Adelaide, between Saturday, 29th June, and Monday, 1st July, 1867, the property of D.N. Lucas, one scarlet tunic, regulation buttons, 40th Reg., buff facings, gold lace (much worn), silk lining throughout; knitted silk crimson sash, tassels, &c.; one pair black uniform trousers, red piping; one scarlet waistcoat, gold braid (rather worn); one blue cloth jumper (fatigue), hooks and eyes down front; also a gentleman's satchel, black soft leather, lined with green. Can be identified.[32]

The theft is not mentioned again and there is no suggestion that the property was subsequently recovered nor any prosecutions laid. A tease for collectors here perhaps – could it all still be in a trunk or box in an attic or cellar somewhere?

In 1869 the New Zealand medals were issued. deNeufville Lucas duly received his medal though his has the undated reverse because he had resigned from the army before the medals were issued. Lucas' medal came onto the Australian market recently (July 2007) when the suggestion was made that the recipient (or medal?) may have Eureka connections.[33] However, as Lucas had not even enlisted in the regiment until well after the Eureka incident, which occurred on 3 Dec. 1854, and he did not arrive in Australia until about a year and a half afterwards, there can be no possibility of a link to the Ballarat uprising.

Between 1870 and 1873 Lucas held the joint posts of Assistant Staff Officer (with the rank of Major), Enrolling Officer (that is, for enrolling volunteers) and also Storekeeper to the VMF, then in 1874 became Government Storekeeper on the VMF Staff (possibly simply a bureaucratic re-naming of the duties he had previously been performing) and this was the post he held until 1880. It seems that his formal relationship with the Volunteer movement ceased at this point, though he continued working in the Public Service, taking on the position of Records Clerk in the South Australian Railways based at Adelaide Railway Station between 1880 and 1891.[34] He was then transferred from Adelaide to the Islington Railway Workshops a few miles north of the city where he continued as Records Clerk until his demise in 1897.

From reaching the age of 60 years in 1892, deNeufville Lucas had to annually reapply to continue to work as he had reached the civil service's compulsory retiring age. Then, during 1897 he began to take sick leave; in June, one month, rather ominously suffering from a 'throat affliction'; a little later, 15 days, then another month and finally placed on sick leave with full pay until his death on 21 November 1897 aged 65 years.[35]

deNeufville Lucas, late Lieutenant, 40th Regiment, passed away at his home on Fisher Street, Fullarton as a result of carrying Ensign Pennefather's bullet in his tongue for eighteen years, a wound that became cancerous, causing death by epithelioma of the pharynx. Mr Lucas was buried in the nearby Mitcham Anglican Cemetery where 'that name', DeNeufville, can be found on a number of headstones, a name now carried by descendants or relatives both male and female.[36]

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32 *South Australian Police Gazette* (SAPG), 30 Aug. 1867, p.4
33 CJ Medals, Sale Catalogue No.10, 21 July 2007
34 SRSA, GRG42/131 Vol.1, p.131 & Vol.3A, p.48 (microfilm)
35 Op cit, Vol.4, p.89 (microfilm)
36 Mitcham Anglican Cemetery, Blythwood Road, Mitcham SA, Plot No. 0346

FARM BURNING:
AN OVERVIEW WITH A CONSIDERATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN TROOPER'S PERSPECTIVE

Robin Droogleever
(Anglo-Boer War Study Group)

My interest in this controversial subject stemmed from an incident in the campaign history of the 3rd Victorian Bushmen Contingent during my research for *That ragged mob* – the regimental history of the two Victorian bushmen contingents in the Boer war. The heady days of their confrontation with the enemy at Koster River and Elands River siege were in July and August 1900 and for the months thereafter the Boers were mere shadows in the veldt. The Bushmen's column commanders used them to destroy Boer property, and by November 1900, the Bushmen finally decided they had had enough of this and refused to continue with the campaign. It was nothing short of mutiny and presented a face of the Australian volunteers I had not expected to see. Fortunately wise heads prevailed among the officers and the whole issue fizzled away, though not without some fall-out.

The treatment of civilians and their property is covered in The Hague and Geneva Conventions, and when the Boer war broke out in 1899, these rules of war were supposed to apply. But rules of war agreed by politicians are not necessarily going to be supported by their military colleagues while a war is being fought, and it seems that from our point of view one element of the Geneva Convention came under threat during the course of the Boer War, namely that 'Civilians must not be subjected to collective punishment and reprisals', through the creation of what was to be known as refugee or concentration camps. I suppose it can be argued that the establishment of refugee camps was a humanitarian act and not one of collective punishment but the enforced re-location of families and the consequent high death rate in these camps, seems at odds with the concept of humanitarianism.

Let us go to the start of this war to understand the developments that took place with regard to this topic.

When war broke out between the two Boer states and the British Empire in October 1899 everyone expected it to be over by Christmas but the Boers surprised everyone by invading the British colonies of Natal and Cape Colony and for the first four months were on the offensive. They then allowed themselves to be bogged down in a number of sieges at Kimberley, Mafeking and Ladysmith, thus allowing the arrival of British reinforcements which turned the tide. When a Boer army surrendered at Paardeberg and their forces were defeated in Natal at the end of February 1900 it seemed that the war would shortly be over. The occupation of their capitals, Bloemfontein on the 13 March and Pretoria on 6 June convinced many that the war was indeed now over.

On 15 March, Lord Roberts allowed the Boers to return to their farms providing they took the oath of neutrality and surrendered their arms. Many took up this offer and it was in this climate of surrender that the Australian Bushmen Regiment arrived in the Western Transvaal. Men spoke of life being like a stroll down Bourke Street. But there were ominous signs. Major Thomas of the NSWCB noted that many of the weapons being handed in were old Schneiders and flintlocks and Martini-Henrys – there seemed to be very few of the new Mausers that had been issued to the Boer commandos. Furthermore, where were the leaders? It seems that a few die-hards would be continuing the fight.

Then in July 1900 a number of spectacular successes occurred when small bands of Boers inflicted defeat on British patrols and communications. Boers broke their oath of neutrality and returned to their units. The British saw this as a treasonable act and Lord Roberts allowed his column commanders to take whatever action they deemed effective to punish the transgressors.

It is worthy of note to mention that during the open period of warfare till June 1900 Lord Roberts had insisted that there be no looting of towns or homes by his troops. By and large this was adhered to and the letters home by Australians in the early contingents reinforce this. But when the guerrilla campaign began a whole new scenario opened up and at first Roberts was caught by surprise. The Boers dispensed with the concept of an army and focused instead on smaller units which were encouraged to operate within their local district. It was hoped that by fighting for their homes and land a fresh determination would prevail, but new tactics were also devised to fit the new strategy. These new forms of fighting by the Boers included the effective use of cover and darkness (or poor light) and a hit-and-run tactic which the British saw as cowardly, but Boer numbers were nearly always in the minority and the new philosophy was not to occupy territory and to hold it at all costs but to inflict the greatest amount of damage with the least number of casualties. An essential component of this new form of warfare was to utilize the scattered farms and small Boer villages as places of refuge and of supply, and this now became a focus of British attention in order to weaken the resolve of the commandos to pursue a guerrilla war.

Lord Roberts did permit the destruction of farms as early as March 1900. This was limited to those farms where snipers had operated under cover of a white flag. The destruction of farms multiplied when Lord Roberts in June 1900, allowed his field commanders a free hand in order to discourage attacks upon the railway and telegraph lines which were the lifelines to his advancing armies. At first only those farms near the point of attack would be destroyed but when it was seen that this did not deter the Boer saboteurs, destruction was extended to the district. When it became necessary to widen British control by spreading over the countryside, British convoys became the target, and the garrisons left behind were also vulnerable. Officers commanding the columns used their own judgement on the punitive actions to be taken. Homes were being burnt down simply if it was known that a male member was out on commando. The destruction of farms resulted in criticism from parliamentarians in Britain as well as from European nations such as France and Germany. Lord Milner, the High Commissioner, expressed concern at the "indiscriminate burning" and even a number of Roberts' column commanders began to question what was policy and what was not. General Broadwood on 12 November 1900 asked Roberts to clarify the situation. From September to November 1900, 521 homes had been destroyed. Roberts, sensitive to the growing criticism, spoke of a 'misunderstanding' and specified on 18 November that farms could only be burnt when the home has been used to fire shots from; for punishment for the destruction of a telegraph or railway line in the vicinity and when the house has been used as a base for raids. He forbade the burning of homes simply because the owner or his sons were on commando. Significantly in December 1900 and January 1901 only 14 farms were destroyed.

When Kitchener replaced Lord Roberts as Commander in Chief in December 1900 the focus shifted to the destruction of supplies. What was not wanted by the Army was to be destroyed. This still did not save the farmhouse. In a country where there were few trees inevitably firewood was seen as an essential supply, and fence posts, sheds and the homes were stripped for this. Whatever way you argue the farm burning was soon to pick up momentum once again.

Kitchener's policies of destroying supplies forced the Boers to attack supply wagons, and in a short period of time quiet areas soon became unsettled. The war took on a vicious punitive nature from both sides. The Boers did not tolerate the wanton destruction of animals and crops and fodder, and took their anger out on pro-British Dutch and many English farms as well as the

ever-available supply convoy. It was known that many British soldiers, including Australians, were uncomfortable with the task of destroying animals and farms. Letters home were published and the news got back to South Africa.

Because the farms now lost their means of survival, it became necessary to move the inhabitants into some location where they could be fed and housed – hence the start of the refugee camps. These were called by a number of names: Government laagers, refugee settlements, concentration camps. They were first introduced in December 1900. All men, women and children of districts where known bands of Boer commandos were operating would be brought into these laagers. The nature of the camps changed from voluntary access to obligatory restraint. Although there were no fences, the imposition of the 'pass' system ensured most remained. Besides, the destruction of homes left the Boer families with nowhere else to go.

Kitchener's ruthless policies failed to bring the commandos to the peace table, and the war dragged on. Farms continued to burnt, women and children continued to be rounded up and sent to the refugee camps and soon epidemics swept through the camps resulting in terrible loss of life, particularly among the children.

Most Australian soldiers believed the Boers to be a backward people as a result of propaganda, but their opinions changed once they were in the country. When the first Australian units came out in November 1899 their first impressions of the Boers were largely favourable. Support for the war in the Australian colonies was not unanimous. Nevertheless, the soldiers who sailed for South Africa were determined to do their duty. Letters home spoke positively about the quality of life and good facilities in the towns. Rural life as expected, was tougher and living conditions basic, sometimes primitive – no different from Australia.

However as the guerrilla campaign took hold, the nature of fighting changed and with it developed a negative attitude towards the Boers. Propaganda and rumour reported outrageous crimes committed by Boer commandos such as the murder of prisoners, abuse of the white flag, ignoring the Red Cross, firing on ambulance wagons and so on. Some of this may have been true – for both sides.

Australians disapproved strongly with the hit-and-run methods of the commandos and many letters home voiced their criticism. They wanted the Boers to stand and fight. Convoys, small patrols, and garrisons, scouts, railway and telegraph lines were all targeted by Boer commandos. There was always the prospect of a bullet in the back if you were on patrol or guarding a convoy. Farms were being used as storage points for food and ammunition and it became necessary to search every residence. Add to these factors those Boers who surrendered, handed in their weapons, took the oath not to fight, but then later disregarded the oath and returned to the battle zone when it suited them, and one can understand that there would be many Australians who would have little sympathy for the Boer and his family. Corporal Arthur Fitzhardinge of C Squadron NSWCB wrote as early as August 1900 of burning farms being "rather an exciting pastime".1

Most of the outspoken comments against farm-burning were to be found in the early stages of the guerrilla war (June to December 1900) and not surprisingly those who felt uncomfortable about it were largely men from the rural districts who knew what sacrifices had to be made to build a farm. It is known that many officers both British and Australian, made deliberately weak attempts to set fire to a property knowing that once they were gone, the Boers could put out the flames and thereby save the property. This was particularly prevalent during those months in 1900 when the women were not rounded up and sent to the camps but were left on the veldt to watch their property burn. Captain Howard Wilson of the 4SAIB, on 28 August 1900 wrote:

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1 *Queensland Times*

> I have seen enough of the effects of warfare to last me a lifetime. Such destruction of property; such weeping of women and children. For instance, we get sniped at from a farmhouse, and are ordered to go and burn it down. We go and find that the snipers are gone, and there are only women and children there, and they say that the snipers have nothing to do with the place. You say you cannot help it – that your orders are that they must clear out and you have to burn the place down. They then burst into tears and tell you that there is a sick child in the house. You go in and find that such is the case...The other poor children stand around, and without the slightest sound you see the tears streaming down their cheeks and you know they are innocent, and have nothing to do with the war. A big lump comes to your throat and you can see that your men feel the same as you do, and cant burn that home down for the sake of these dear children... and you spare the home."[2]

The magnanimity of Australians was recorded by Sergeant Cecil Davis of the 3VBC when he remembered one particular farmhouse near Warmbaths (north of Pretoria) where the inhabitants were three women and four children who begged for food.

> They seemed to be having a hard time," he wrote. The Bushmen gave them food and left the farm intact. A week later they entered a farmhouse near Hebron to find that the only occupant was a little girl. Her mother was dead and her father was with the commandos.[3]

Most men did as they were told, but confided to their family that they did not like it. Trooper Tom Morris of the 4VIB wrote

> I suppose you think this is a bit rough, but it is good enough for them as these houses belong to men who handed in their weapons and swore allegiance to the Queen, but now are traitors and fighting against us again, so it is the only way to fix them.[4]

Captain David Ham of the 3VBC probably sums up the majority point of view: Moral dilemma versus Duty, when he wrote in November 1900 that he

> had the unpleasant task of turning the women and children out of their homes and burning their houses ... I pitied the women and children who knelt before us and begged and prayed that their houses and food might not be destroyed, but it was an order and my finer and humanitarian instincts had to be sacrificed[5]

Negative experiences impacted strongly upon a regiment's attitude e.g. the shooting of three NSWCB in October 1900 near Ottoshoop at a farm flying the white flag, saw little sympathy for Boer families by the Citizen Bushmen after that.

As the war progressed there seemed to be less compunction to question the morality behind decisions; the men wanted to get the war over as quickly as possible, and if it could be shortened by destruction of property then it was wise to follow that path. Tom Thomson of the 3VBC was one who accepted this. On 7 September 1900, he wrote that in three weeks the column had destroyed about 50 farm houses.

> It seems a great shame to do it but it is the only way to bring them to their senses. I often wonder how the farmers of Victoria would like it. I thought very hard at first but think nothing of it now.[6]

And yet two months later men of the 3VBC were standing firm against the practice.

The larrikin element among the Australians enjoyed the petty theft or 'commandeering' from Boer homes and some odd items were taken as keepsakes, such as letters written in Dutch which nobody could understand, a violin which nobody could play, and women's hats which were soon

2 Chamberlain & Droogleever, *The War with Johnny Boer*, p. 42
3 Droogleever, *That Ragged Mob.*
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Droogleever, *That Ragged Mob*

adorning their heads until the officers had them removed. Most items commandeered were food and essential equipment.

When new drafts of Australians arrived in March/April 1901 it was a different war to that of a year ago and there undoubtedly was a different attitude to the question of farm burning. Many men of the previous contingent had become war-weary and as a consequence there was a corresponding lack of compassion for the Boer and his family: Trooper Arthur Mackin of the 3VBC remembered a "rough and ready trooper nicknamed Deadwood Dick by his comrades, singing Home Sweet Home to a piano that had been dragged out of the building before it was set in flames."7 Lieutenant Douglas Rich of the 6QIB wrote in June 1901 about "the thrill of destruction" 8 while burning farms in the Eastern Transvaal. Trooper George Horsburgh of the 4QIB was unforgiving. He wrote "This is the only way to treat these wretches ... If I had my way with them I would root up and burn down every farm we come across."9

Furthermore, the war was being fought with greater bitterness and ruthlessness by both sides. Colonel Nicholas Kelly of the 4VIB, angry with sniping from farmhouses, stated that

> if a shot comes from the vicinity of a house we immediately swoop down, burn it and level everything to the ground. And this of course is having a beneficial effect on the snipers.10

By May 1902 the Boers still in the field were referred to as Bittereinders and when surrender was forced upon them as a result of peace being declared many refused to live under British rule and emigrated. There was great anger directed against those Boers who had surrendered (Hands Uppers) and even more so against those traitors who had joined the British forces. This too became a lasting antagonism and was known to have divided families for generations.

The end of the war came on the 31 May 1902. The Boers agreed to a conditional surrender. The uneven struggle plus reports of the high death rate in the camps among their families, forced them to accept the situation.

When they returned to their land and saw the devastation; then waited in vain for a family which had been decimated by disease in the camps, the bitterness was directed against the British for allowing these things to happen. 26,370 women and children died in the 40 camps. Put into perspective, 21,942 British soldiers were killed or died of disease in this war.11 The anger and sadness is still with the Afrikaners 108 years later.

Did farm burning bring about an early end to the war? The answer is most likely yes, but like many efficacious practices that have been used before and since to force an enemy to ask for peace, the long-term consequences were not foreseen.

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7 Ibid
8 Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War*, p. 201
9 Harvey, *Letters from the Veldt*, p. 128
10 Wallace, *Australians at the Boer war*, p. 288
11 The figures come from *The Times History of The War*, Index, p. 25. Australian deaths in Australian units numbered about 600.

THE COURTNEY FAMILY THROUGH PEACE AND WAR

By Ron Austin, RFD ED

Military service in regular or militia forces has been a long-held tradition in some British families. In Australia one well known example of family military tradition is that of the Leane family of South Australia. In Victoria the Courtney family provides an example of that tradition of dedicated military service that dates back to the Peninsular War and through the generations to Gallipoli and Arnhem.

The progenitor of this military dynasty was John Courtney, an Irish farmer and soldier, who was born in about 1788. John Courtney served as a company sergeant with the 97th (The Earl of Ulster's) Regiment of Foot in Wellington's Army during the Peninsular War. On 19 August 1808, the 97th Foot arrived in Portugal, and within two days it was involved in the successful action against the French at Vimeiro.

Thomas Wilson (1833-1906) & James John Courtney (1838-1907)

News of the employment opportunities that now existed in Australia due to the exodus of workers to the gold fields reached Ireland, a country then under British rule. Ireland during the potato famine of 1845-49, was a land of much suffering with unemployment, malnutrition and even starvation commonplace. The news of the gold find and promising employment prospects prompted thousands of Irishmen and their families to emigrate to Victoria in the mid-1850s. One of these settlers was 22 year-old Thomas Wilson Courtney, the family's eldest son and main bread winner. Thomas who had been a member of the local Cavan Militia, soon found employment as a school teacher in Cheltenham, Victoria. Two years later his younger brother James John also migrated to Victoria where he met and married Mary Baxter, daughter of Captain Benjamin Baxter ex 50th Foot.

In 1863, Thomas and his teacher wife moved to Castlemaine where Thomas took up his appointment as Headmaster, while James took up teaching at a school near Kyneton. Both brothers served in the volunteer Castlemaine Corps. The Victorian Military Forces led by Colonel Dean Pitt was an enthusiastic, but ineffectual organisation as each volunteer corps was an independent body, its effectiveness largely depending on the enthusiasm of its citizen officers. Bob Marmion notes:

> Unlike the Imperial troops, the Volunteers were civilians in soldiers' uniforms. The Corps were essentially gentlemen's clubs, with only the outward appearance of military discipline.

In 1870 Staff Sergeant John Courtney sought a commission which started a maelstrom of intrigue involving the commander of the Castlemaine Corps, the local press and State Forces Commandant, before being finally resolved in favour of Courtney. Over the coming years both brothers served in the Castlemaine Corps as officers. In 1875, the first of a long string of re-organizations commenced that bedevilled the part-time army for the next 100 years. 1884 saw the emergence of a militia system and the disappearance of the Volunteer Corps and the forced retirement of the Courtney brothers.

Thomas John Courtney (1858-1922)

Born in Melbourne in 1858, Thomas joined the Castlemaine Corps in 1874 and in 1882 joined the St. Kilda Artillery after he returned to Melbourne. Commissioned in the 1st Battalion Victorian Rifles in 1885, by 1891 Thomas John Courtney had been promoted to captain. As part of the re-organization that followed Federation, Major Courtney joined the 6th Australian Infantry Regiment and in 1905 the first qualifying course for promotion to lieutenant-colonel saw Thomas and his two brothers Richard and James qualify along with Lancelot Fox Clarke who had won the DSO in South Africa. Following the 1912 re-organization and earlier introduction of Universal Training, Thomas John

Courtney became CO of the 63rd (East Melbourne) Infantry. When war erupted in August 1914, he desperately sought an AIF appointment but this was not available due to his age - 56. His contribution to the Army was however, quite significant - he commanded the local 17th and 15th Brigades and when he reached normal retirement age his service was extended. He also served as OC Troops on several voyages and in one of those amazing twists that frequently happen in the Army, in October 1918 he was sent on a one-month musketry course. The wisdom of an officer of his senior rank, with his service extended beyond retirement age, attending such a course raises the question whether or not it was a useful expenditure of time and money. Nonetheless, Colonel Courtney not only qualified but officially attained - 'Good results'. In September 1919, he formally handed over command of 17th Brigade and retired as Honorary Brigadier-General.

James Henry Courtney (1864-1947)

Born at Castlemaine in 1864, James Courtney served in the Castlemaine Corps as a boy drummer then as a private. He entered the teaching profession, but continued with his military studies being commissioned in the 1st (West Melbourne) Battalion in 1885. In many ways the military career of James Henry parallels that of his elder brother, Thomas John. A brigade exercise conducted at Mordialloc in 1890, required the 1st Battalion to board a train at Princes Bridge railway station at 8.53 am and return by a 5.40 pm train. With each man issued with 20 rounds of blank ammunition, the battalion practised in outpost work, then a trench exercise before undertaking a formal attack on an enemy position. The sheer brevity of the training was perhaps a reflection of the time/pay allocated to units by the Victorian Government at that time. By 1898 James Henry had reached the rank of major and in 1903 was CO of the 5th Infantry Regiment and by 1912 was the CO of the 64th (City of Melbourne) Infantry.

With the raising of the AIF underway, Courtney, who now commanded 16th Brigade, unsuccessfully sought an AIF appointment:

> I am desirous of obtaining a command in such Force. Should the Brigade commands be allotted to officers senior to myself, I would be prepared to serve as a Battalion Commander.

Although not given the desired command Courtney held numerous posts in addition to his Brigade command, he was Secretary of the State Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, and also Camp Commandant at Broadmeadows. When he disagreed with an order to demobilize any Citizen Forces officers at Broadmeadows aged under 23 and forcefully stated his case about how useful the young officers were, he was replaced a month later by an officer who was junior in rank and also older. One officer wrote to Courtney's wife describing the colonel's removal as 'criminal stupidity'. However, an officer of Courtney's ability was soon given another task, that of examining NCO candidates for officer training at Duntroon, in addition to still commanding his brigade. He finally relinquished the latter post in 1919 and retired in 1923 as Honorary Major-General.

Charles Arthur Courtney (1869-1966)

Born and raised in Castlemaine, Charles Arthur Courtney studied in Scotland and gained a medical degree at Edinburgh University. During his teens Courtney had served in the Queenscliff and North Melbourne Artillery Batteries, and in 1904 he was commissioned in the 9th Light Horse Regiment. In the 1912 reorganization Captain Courtney was OC of the 19th Light Horse. When war broke out, the Ballarat doctor chose to temporarily forsake his chosen profession and enlist in the AIF, joining the 4th Light Horse Regiment and being given command of C Squadron. Charles after many years of service as a citizen soldier obviously thought that by serving in the Light Horse he would encounter some 'real soldiering'. Another squadron OC was Captain Leslie Maygar, VC.

Once in Egypt the Light Horse soon accustomed themselves to desert conditions, Courtney writing:

> We pity the infantry - for uphill and down dale thro' sands and sand & very tiring - even our horses have to be nursed.

His letters to home were often frank, containing comments such as:

> The 7th & 8th went to the Canal to meet the Turks but returned today without doing anything. I can't say why they were sent, certainly not from any superiority over others for they're a rough undisciplined mob, they knock about camp like a lot of firemen and I really wonder what they'll do in France. The tag end of them has given a bad name to Australia, our chaps are angels from heaven compared with the infantry and the Lord knows they are not that. Also Godley is very fond of show parade, music etc. General Birdwood in charge of the whole is a small rather effeminate man, from appearances I wouldn't go nap on him as a leader. Nor on General Maxwell either. General Bridges is working his staff to death by his shifting and vacillating ways.

The Light Horse reached Gallipoli in May and his comments provide some insight into how some of the senior officers were perceived, e.g. the 5th Light Horse:

> Their officers no good in the trenches, no discipline, no training, their charge is just a rush, some not even fixing bayonets. The 2nd Brigade are all frightened of McCay: 6th LH are good, 7th LH a rabble.

By mid-year the 4th Light Horse was occupying trenches at Ryrie's Post and in August Courtney commanded the combined squadrons holding Lone Pine on a 48 hour rotation. Although recommended for an award for his work at Lone Pine, no such award was given. On 20 September 1915 Courtney suffered from bad concussion as a result of Turkish shelling. This led to his evacuation to England. Upon returning home he transferred to the AAMC and commanded hospitals in Australia from 1917-18 and in 1919 he took up the post of Senior Medical Officer for the Repatriation Department in Melbourne, becoming very much involved in War Pensions Administration. During the late 1930s Courtney worked as a doctor in the Solomon Islands and at Palm Island. He seemed to be infected by a wanderlust and in the 1950s was working as ship's doctor on cargo ships sailing to Singapore. He died in 1966 aged 97.

Richard Edmond Courtney (1870-1919)

Younger brother of Thomas John and James Henry Courtney, Richard graduated as a lawyer from the University of Melbourne in 1897. Like his brothers he was a keen citizen-soldier having served in the Castlemaine Corps and in 1899 obtained a commission in the Senior Cadet Battalion. Upon being promoted to major in 1906 Courtney transferred to the Victorian Rifles and in 1912 became CO of the 51st (Albert Park) Infantry. In August 1914 he was selected by Colonel John Monash to be CO of the 14th Battalion, AIF. Following all too brief training at Broadmeadows, the 14th Battalion sailed for Egypt where it trained in the desert for the next few months. Courtney and his troops came ashore at Anzac on 26 April and soon took up positions on Second Ridge at a spot forever to be known as 'Courtney's Post' after the 14th's CO. After a Turkish attack on 1 May had been repulsed, Courtney noted that the Turks retired in great disorder losing many casualties.

The greatest test of the Australian defences came on 19 May when hordes of Turks attacked the posts along Second Ridge. Courtney's Post held firm with minimal losses. It was here that Lance Corporal Albert Jacka of the 14th Battalion won the Victoria Cross. It was only a few days after the subsequent armistice that Courtney who had been struggling with illness for some days, was evacuated to hospital. It was not immediately realised that the demanding Gallipoli conditions and the strain of command particularly upon older officers, had taken such a heavy toll of Courtney's health that he would be unable to resume his command. For his efforts at Anzac Courtney was awarded the CB. In a letter Courtney wrote 'the 14th maintained its record that no living Turk entered an Australian trench'. Courtney's performance and that of the 14th Battalion has come under some scrutiny in recent years with suggestions being made that Monash had lost confidence in Courtney's command. These matters have been addressed in the book.

Evacuated first to Malta and then England, Courtney recovered his health sufficiently to take up the post as OC Australian Troops at Weymouth Depot. Returning to Australia in June 1916 he took up

the post of Acting Commandant of 5th Military District (WA), a post he held for almost three years. In 1919 Courtney collapsed and died from a brain haemorrhage attributable to his war service.

Charles Wilson Courtney (1896-1978)

A son of James Henry Courtney, Charles had served in the Cadets since 1909 and by 1914 had reached the rank of Sergeant-Bugler in the 51st Infantry commanded by his uncle Richard. By 1915, after having passed an officers' school run by Colonel Tivey, Courtney was serving as Adjutant of the 1st Reinforcements Battalion at Broadmeadows Camp. By late 1917 he was a 3rd year medical student, and had managed to pass his exams for promotion to captain - surely a quite remarkable feat to combine his medical studies with military studies and duties. In December 1917, he joined the AIF and was soon posted as sergeant in the 7th General Service Reinforcements. By the time he had undertaken another officer training course and reached France, the war was over. He returned to Melbourne in 1919 to complete his medical degree, but in later life he confided that it was always a matter of regret that he had not arrived in France in time to see some fighting.

Courtney then served in the 5th Battalion from 1921 but after three years decided to switch to the AAMC. His employment in the Repatriation Department saw him relocate to Western Australia where being a very accomplished piper he later played a prominent role in the formation of the 16th Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia) in which he served as company commander.

Geoffrey Charles Palliser Courtney (1900-1975)

Although the first child born to Charles Arthur did not inherit his father's love of the bagpipes or kilts, he did want to serve in the AIF. Enlisting at the age 17, he managed to serve for five months before it was discovered that he was underage. Undeterred, a month later and now 18, he successfully re-enlisted in August 1918, but did not proceed overseas. A keen sportsman he represented the University at rowing and football, later graduating as a doctor in 1925. Deviating from the family tradition of Army service, Geoff Courtney joined the Royal Australian Navy as a doctor where he served on several ships over the next five years. During the 1930s, Doctor Courtney worked in the Pacific Islands including Nauru and also at Palm Island.

When World War 2 began in 1939, Courtney rejoined the RAN and served on HMAS *Manoora* which was involved in the hunt for the German supply ship *Scheer* and later in the sinking of the Italian *Romolo*. In November 1941, Courtney was discharged from the RAN due to lung problems. He then relocated to Tasmania where he worked as a doctor until 1969.

Thomas Richard Brian Courtney (1911-2001)

Born at Learmonth, Victoria, it was almost inevitable that Dr. Charles Courtney's child would be either in the medical or teaching profession, and probably serve sometime in the Army. It later emerged that Brian, would become a doctor and serve as a soldier - not in the Australian Army however, but in the British Army.

As well as achieving a Double Blue in Rowing and Rugby, Brian also excelled at tennis and shooting. After graduating Brian worked as a doctor in the Western District town of Penshurst. Probably the most fascinating of all the Courtneys, in 1939 Brian sought to enlist as a doctor in the Australian Army but was rejected on the basis that the Army did not need doctors and that the war would not last long! Unfazed by that ridiculously optimistic assertion Courtney booked a sea passage to England and soon after arriving there joined the RAMC as a lieutenant. In his new uniform the fledgling British officer was a handsome figure - tall, strapping and his frank personal diary shows him to be very much a man for the ladies. Those who have read any of George MacDonald Fraser's novels will see similarities to the main character - Harry Flashman.

Life in the 128th Field Ambulance in 1940-41 was a confronting experience for the young officer who noted after one exercise:

> The time to make mistakes is in practice ... When bright ideas are completely ignored they are in future choked at birth.

His views of the RAMC were frank:

> I think the RAMC is bloody awfully run with gross waste of medics by mis-use ... Bloody awful with OCs who can't get out of the ways of 1914-1918.

Courtney's opinion of his CO was little better:

> (Crockford) is going mad again. He really is a boy scout trying to run the show as a man scout, place full of low mentality soldiers instead of a medical unit.

Promoted captain, Courtney at last found a challenge to his enthusiasm and energy when he was transferred to the 11th SAS Battalion located in Cheshire. Having completed his parachute jumps he was given the post of DADMS of 1st Airborne Division. In 1943, he was seconded to the Australian Army which was in the process of forming airborne units. It was ironic that the Western District doctor had been sent from England to instruct Australians in the medical procedures and equipment necessary in an airborne unit. This secondment saw him travelling around Australia and also New Guinea. It was while he was flying over Salamaua that his aircraft was chased by a Japanese Zero. In New Guinea Major Courtney met personalities such as Major-General Stan Savige and Captain Jo Gullett (2/6th Battalion). He described the conditions thus:

> I learned much re difficulties of supply methods and country to be encountered ... bloody hot sticky exhausting walking.

By 1944 Courtney was back in England and posted to 133rd Para Field Ambulance. Frantic preparations were in hand for Operation 'Market Garden' which saw the British 1st Airborne Division drop at Arnhem on 18 September 1944. In what was his 25th jump Courtney landed safely near Arnhem, but within a few days he was captured by the Germans. His detailed account of the total confusion on the battlefield during the days after landing and then of life in a series of German POW camps is a fascinating one, but time does not allow for elaboration in this forum. Suffice to say the Germans were probably glad to be rid of such a troublesome doctor at war's end. He briefly returned to duty with the 172nd Field Ambulance but was 'demobbed' by late 1945. After a stint working in British hospitals, Courtney returned to Australia where he obtained a position as Deputy Director Medical Services in the Repatriation Department in WA. Brian Courtney died at the age of 90 - an individualist who experienced life to the full and upheld the Courtney family tradition both as a doctor and as a soldier.

Alasdair Wilson Courtney (1936 -)

Son of Dr Charles Wilson Courtney, Alasdair was a keen piper who joined the 5th Battalion, Victorian Scottish Regiment and in 1957 did National Service at Puckapunyal. He later qualified as a teacher and upon moving to WA served in his father's old unit, the 16th Battalion. He was CO of Perth's Scotch College Cadet Unit for 20 years and had a positive impact on the cadet movement in that State. It was the enthusiasm of Alasdair Courtney in providing photos, diaries, letters and documents that provided the impetus to write this book about one of Victoria's most notable military families.

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SAVING AUSTRALIA? THE 25TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION AT MILNE BAY, AUGUST 1942

Bob Doneley

Introduction

The Battle of Milne Bay in August 1942, while not as widely known as the Kokoda Track, was a key battle in the struggle for New Guinea. Fought by both AIF and Militia battalions, the battle stopped one of the two-pronged Japanese attacks on Port Moresby, and saw their first defeat in a land battle.

One of the three militia battalions involved was the 25th Battalion (Darling Downs Regiment), raised in Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. The men who served in the battalion, both volunteers and conscripts, served with distinction in New Guinea and Bougainville and then returned home to their farms, shops and small businesses. They said little of what they had seen and done and, although well known in Toowoomba, the 25th Battalion's role at Milne Bay is little known outside the region.

This paper seeks to redress some of that shortcoming, and to highlight the effect that the actions of small units and groups of men can have on a battle, and even a war.

The beginnings of a Battalion

As part of the Universal Training Scheme, introduced in 1911 following the Kitchener Report into Australia's defences, an infantry regiment was raised in Toowoomba. The 11th Australian Infantry Regiment (AIR) – the Darling Downs Regiment was headquartered in Toowoomba and, at its peak, numbered some 1,450 men. The Great War forestalled the plan to raise a Citizen's Army and, with the AIF serving overseas the main focus of Australian defence, the Citizen Force was almost left to fend for itself.

By 1918, after four years of war, interest in the Citizen Force was dropping off rapidly. In an attempt to increase recruiting and attendance, the Government moved to create links with the AIF by re-naming Citizen Force units with "*the names of the battalions from their respective districts, which have earned renown on European battlefields.*" On 1 October 1918, the 11th AIR was split. That part of the regiment east of Toowoomba became the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Pioneer Regiment. The remainder, including Toowoomba, was re-titled the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry Regiment (2/25 AIR). The first battalion of the Regiment was still in France – the 25th Bn AIF.

The lack of interest in the Citizen Force continued after the war, and there was little interest in a proposal to form seven Citizen Force divisions put forward by General C.B. White, the new Chief of General Staff. With the failure of the Kitchener Plan in mind, and with the huge debt owed by Australia to Great Britain after the war hanging over its head, the Government did not see defence as a big priority. However, it did decide to follow through with much of White's plan and announced in September 1920 that the Citizen Forces would remain the mainstay of the Australia's defence. The Permanent Forces "would be maintained only in sufficient strength to administer and instruct the citizen forces, and provide a nucleus for certain technical services". But money was still tight defence spending was slashed continually over the next decade. The Permanent Force and the Citizen Force were pared back, annual camps were suspended in all areas except major cities and towns, and rural training centres were closed. Number dropped until units were only a quarter of the size they had been.

The battalion was now known as the 25th Infantry Battalion (the old title of 2nd Battalion, 25th Australian Infantry Regiment being dropped in a reorganization of the unit in early March 1921). The battalion still wore the colour patch of the "old" 25th Battalion, AIF – a black over blue diamond. The Rising Sun badge, made famous by the AIF, was to be worn on the hat and collars.

In October 1929, the newly elected Labor Government announced plans to abolish compulsory military training, suspend training camps, and allow conscripted recruits to take their discharge immediately. This had long been a Labor Party policy, and the new Government wasted no time in implementing it. The disbandment of conscription went ahead on 5 November 1929. The Government did give an undertaking that a replacement for compulsory service would be implemented, and that the system of volunteers serving in the military would not be affected by the new changes. It was announced that the new militia would consist of 35,000 officers and men, down from the current 48,000. The new system was to take effect from February 1930. Enlistment in the militia was now open to men aged 18 to 40 years. They could enlist for an initial period of three years, and then extend their service by one year at a time. Training would consist of 16 days annually, to be done as eight days continuous training in camp and the remainder in full days, half days and night parades at the Drill Hall. Courses, schools and classes could be done as additional training for those selected for specialist training or promotion.

Like all other Citizen Force battalions, the 25th Battalion saw its strength drop dramatically at first – only a small number of volunteers remained, with a small cadre of permanent Australian Instructional Corps officers and NCO's providing instruction and administration. A review conducted in late 1929 of Queensland units found that, while practically 100% of officers and 60% of NCO's were determined to continue their service, only 25% of the men opted to enlist under the new system.

Other events also took their toll on the militia. The Great Depression (1929–1935) had a major impact on the army. Members of the Permanent Forces were forced to take periods of leave of up to 14 days each quarter without pay. Massive unemployment saw fewer volunteers able to give up their time, and the militia's strength dropped even further. It became increasingly difficult to maintain the level of expertise required in an infantry battalion. Unable to maintain four battalions in each brigade, the Defence Department decided to amalgamate some battalions. On 1 July 1930, the 25th Battalion was linked with the 49th Battalion (The Stanley Regiment) to become the 25th/49th Battalion.

The effects of the Depression and the Labor Government's antipathy to defence saw Australia's army seriously depleted and weakened at this time. This improved slightly in the mid-1930's, but the Government's focus on defence remained with the Royal Navy and Singapore. But the officers and NCO's of the 25th Battalion were determined to regain their own identity and conducted intensive recruiting campaigns. On 1 October 1934, with numbers rising, the linked battalion was split and the 25th Battalion once again formed a battalion in its own right.

In July 1936, the Australian Government authorized a rise in the training strength of the militia to 35,000. This increase in the Army's strength allowed the 25th Battalion to recruit strongly, and the battalion was nearly at full strength by the end of the year. It remained at this level until 1939.

Outbreak of War

In 1939, life in the Battalion continued much as it had for the last two decades. Although the newspapers of the day were full of the situation in Europe and China, training did not intensify or become more urgent. On 2 September, the *Toowoomba Chronicle* carried a list of parades for the next few weeks and a report on the Rifle Club's reunion. The next day Australians listened

to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announcing that Great Britain had declared war on Germany, and that "as a result, Australia is also at war."

On 5 September, warning that conscription (now known as national service) for Australia's home defence was obligatory for eligible males, the Government directed that militia units would go back into camp for one month as soon as camps and training areas could be readied. The 25th Battalion entered camp at Enoggera in Brisbane on 4 October. It was during this camp that the Government announced the formation of a Second AIF. The Battalion lost many officers and men who promptly enlisted in the new force. In December 1939, the Government announced compulsory military training for single men and widowers to make good the reduction in militia numbers due to enlistments in the AIF and training exemptions. As the news from Europe worsened, Australian men flocked to the colours. Many of those who - for any one of a number of reasons - could not or would not join the AIF, joined the militia.

Throughout 1940 and 1941 members of the militia were required to attend several three month camps. For the 25th Battalion, these camps were held at Redbank, Toowoomba and Chermside. The Chermside camp was held in late 1941 and, on its completion, a cadre of officers and NCO's were placed on Full Time Duty (FTD) and posted to the camp at Cabarlah (just north of Toowoomba) to administer the battalion's training.

On 8 December 1941, came the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, Hong Kong and Malaya and that Australia was now at war with Japan. Existing members of the battalion were immediately called up for FTD and went into camp at Cabarlah, and eligible men who had registered for service received their call up notices later in the month; many entered camp just two days before Christmas.

Over the next seven months the battalion trained in several different locations – Cabarlah, Caloundra, Eumundi and Townsville – before embarking for Milne Bay in mid-July 1942.

Fall River

Milne Bay can be found on the very tip of southeast Papua. It is some thirty kilometres long and, at its widest point, eighteen kilometres across. The Stirling Range surrounds the head of the Bay on three sides, running down towards the shore but leaving a thin coastal strip of coconut and rubber plantations, villages, mangroves and swamps. At the head of the Bay is a large coastal plain with the most stable soil in the region. In 1942 this was a coconut & copra plantation, headquartered at Gili Gili where several small jetties enabled ships to berth. From Gili Gili a narrow track, wide enough for one vehicle only, ran along the north shore through Rabi, KB Mission, Waga Waga, and Ahioma and on to the East Cape. Other tracks crisscrossed the whole area.

In early 1942, General Douglas Macarthur, the Supreme Commander (South West Pacific Area) harboured ambitious plans to start the drive back to the Philippines. To do so, he intended securing Port Moresby, recapturing Rabaul, and establishing bases to extend air coverage to the north. He directed that one such base should be established at Milne Bay. From there, allied aircraft could range to the north while, at the same time, providing flank protection to Port Moresby.

Unfortunately the Japanese did not intend to fit into MacArthur's plans. Recognising that Australia was the most likely base for further Allied counter-offensives, they wanted to cut the lines of communication between the United States and Australia. Capturing the Territories of Papua and New Guinea was integral to this plan. The Battles of Midway and the Coral Sea had thwarted Japanese plans for a seaborne attack on Port Moresby, but Macarthur ignored intelligence that the Japanese now intended to attack Port Moresby overland from two directions – the north and the east. Milne Bay had become a Japanese objective.

In June 1942, American engineers commenced construction of the first airstrip. Two companies of the 55th Battalion (a militia unit stationed in Port Moresby) and an anti-aircraft battery provided their security. But by July the Japanese intentions were being becoming clearer, and the decision was made to reinforce the garrison. Macarthur had earmarked the veteran 7th Australian Division (then in Australia) for the recapture of Rabaul, leaving only militia units available as reinforcements. On 7 July, Brigadier Field received orders to move the 7th Brigade, then at Townsville, to Milne Bay and to assume command there. Field and his advance party embarked on 9 July. On his arrival Field found No.1 airstrip nearly completed, but the network of tracks in the area a muddy shambles. Few maps of the area were available, and two more airstrips were still to be constructed.

Field quickly assessed what tasks lay ahead of his men. No. 1 Strip was nearly complete, but needed more work to lay down "Marsden" matting – steel mesh laid over the ground to give the aircraft some grip in muddy conditions. A second strip was to be constructed near Waigani. Maps had to be prepared, unit areas and store dumps had to be established, the network of tracks had to be improved to handle the increased traffic, and the surrounding areas had to be patrolled to provide security. Little time was available for much needed training.

However, Field also recognised that his raw militia troops needed to do more than work parties if they were to meet the Japanese. He ordered patrols (both fighting and reconnaissance) into the surrounding jungle, with the dual purpose of familiarizing his men with the jungle environment and also obtaining intelligence – especially updating maps, choosing likely ambush sites for future fighting, and looking for evidence of Japanese attempts to penetrate the area.

Work on the strips progressed well. On 19 July, Group Captain Bill Garing (RAAF) landed his Tiger Moth on No.1 Strip, flying in from Port Moresby. Three days later the first of the Kittyhawks of No. 75 and 76 Squadrons, RAAF arrived. The remainder landed on No. 1 Strip on the 25th. On 29 July, a shot-up A24 Dauntless dive bomber landed on No. 1 Strip.

Aircraft of a different type arrived on 4 August – four Japanese Zero fighters and one Val dive-bomber swept in from the sea, strafing the Kittyhawks on No. 1 Strip. One Kittyhawk on the ground was destroyed and several damaged, but a patrolling Kittyhawk of 76 Squadron shot the Val dive-bomber down into the hills west of the strip. Anti-aircraft machine-guns of the 25th Battalion, posted along the edge of the strip, returned the Japanese fire, the first time the 25th Battalion had been in action. Several more air raids followed over the next few weeks, met with determined resistance by the pilots of 75 and 76 Squadrons.

On 13 August, Major General Cyril Clowes arrived to take over Milne Force, as it was now known. Clowes was a professional soldier who had served in the First AIF as an artillery officer, and he had commanded the Anzac Corps Artillery in the Greek campaign in 1941. His HQ staff were still in transit from Sydney, so he spent the next week getting to know the area and his units and making his plans. On 22 August, he was able to relieve Brigadier Field as Commander Milne Force.

The 18th Brigade (AIF) had begun to arrive on 12 August. Consisting of the 2/9th, 2/10th and 2/12th Battalions, it had just returned from the Middle East where it had participated in the Siege of Tobruk. Its men were highly trained, well disciplined and fit. More importantly, they knew what it was like to be under fire. They were a tonic to the relatively inexperienced men of the 7th Brigade.

Clowes disposed his units according to their experience and likely tasks. The 7th Brigade, assessed earlier as suitable for a defensive role, was given the task of defending against a seaborne landing along the northern and southern shores of Milne Bay. No. 3 Strip was placed in its area of responsibility. The veteran 18th Brigade, although tasked with defending No. 1 & 2

Strips and the rear of Milne Bay area, was also given the directive to hold itself ready for a counterattack in any direction.

On 24 August, there were two Japanese air raids on the strips, one in the morning and one in the early afternoon. Although not realised at the time, these raids were in preparation for the events of the following night. The 25th Battalion at this time had D Company and a machine-gun platoon (20 Platoon) at Wedau on the north coast and two platoons of B Coy on patrol between Gili Gili and Wedau. The remainder of the battalion was in defensive positions in depth along Route 7 just north of No. 1 Strip. At this time the battalion strength stood at 38 officers and 949 other ranks.

The Battle of Milne Bay

While Clowes made his dispositions according to his assessment of the most likely Japanese plan of attack, the Japanese made their own preparations. Their plan called for two approaches: the main thrust a seaborne landing at Rabi (where the Japanese believed the airfield to be located) and a secondary landing at Taupota followed by an overland approach to Milne Bay. Both attacks were to be launched simultaneously.

The main body consisted of Japanese Marines: the 5th Kure Special Naval Landing Force, the 5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force, the 10th Naval Landing Force and the 2nd Air Advance Party. It sailed from Rabaul early in the morning of 24 August in two transports with escorting cruisers and destroyers. This convoy avoided detection by taking an indirect route, aided by a front of bad weather. It was not spotted until early the next day, first by an RAAF Hudson and later by coastwatchers, north of Milne Bay. Later that afternoon a Hudson bomber and Kittyhawks of 75 and 76 Squadrons attacked the convoy almost due east of the mouth of the Bay. Although the attack damaged several ships, it was not enough to stop the convoy's approach and, with nightfall, contact was lost.

Better luck was achieved with the second body. A detachment of the 5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force had left by Buna in several barges, en route for Goodenough Island. They landed there on 24 August, intending to have a short rest before launching their attack on Taupota. But coastwatchers had been plotting their movement and the next day Kittyhawks from 75 Squadron destroyed the barges on the beach, stranding the Japanese marines on the island. The threat from the north had been removed, although Clowes did not know it at the time.

At 5.00 am on 25 August, the 25th Battalion stood to, a part of its normal morning routine. As the light grew it could be seen that the day was cloudy, with light rain falling all over the area. At 6.30 am the first patrols went out – a platoon from B Coy moving over the Stirling Range to Dogura, and a section-strength patrol to search for a crashed plane.

But Clowes now knew that an attack was imminent. He briefed his unit commanders at 1.00 pm, and all units were alerted. It was, however, too late for D Coy of the 61st Battalion; based at Ahioma, they had been ordered that day to pull back to the main Battalion position. Unaware of the Japanese approach they embarked on two small luggers – and sailed right into the Japanese invasion fleet. Quickly sinking one of the luggers, the *Bronzewing*, the Japanese fleet continued on and began landing troops in the area east of Waga Waga just before midnight. The 25th Battalion could hear naval gunfire throughout the night, with the fire landing on the shore between Gili Gili and Rabi. Unknown to the Japanese at the time, they had disembarked some five kilometres east of their planned landing site. This was to have fateful consequences for them.

The Japanese immediately began advancing west along the coast, slowed by a delaying defence fought by Capt Bicks of B Coy, 61st Battalion. At dawn on the 26th, Bicks' company was in a defensive position around KB Mission. By now estimates of Japanese strength had risen from

150 men to 1,000 men. But with the sunrise came the RAAF Kittyhawks. Their relentless strafing of the Japanese barges, their base and stores, and their troops gave the Australian infantry a breathing space and relative freedom of movement during daylight hours. Every infantryman who served at Milne Bay speaks glowingly of the RAAF pilots of 75 and 76 Squadrons.

That morning Lt Col Miles (CO 25th Battalion) was ordered to send a company forward to support Bicks in a planned counter-attack around KB Mission. Accordingly, C Company moved forward and joined Capt Bicks just west of the KB Mission. The plan for the attack called for Bicks' B Company (61st Battalion) to attack along the inland side of the track, while C Company (25th Battalion) attacked along the coastal side. The attack would be supported by Kittyhawks and artillery fire. But the Kittyhawks were held up, and the attack did not begin until late afternoon. At 4.45pm Kittyhawks strafed the area in front of the Australians, and then a short barrage was fired by the 25-pounders of the 2/5th Field Regiment. Co-ordination between the two attacking companies was poor, and even the actual objective appeared to be unclear.

With night falling, under attack, and with an unknown number of Japanese and tanks to his front, Bicks decided to call off the attack and pull both companies back to positions that had been prepared west of Motieau Creek. Confusion arose as to how far to fall back, and C Company (25th Battalion) pulled back initially to Rabi (where they were attacked again by the Japanese), and then right back to No. 3 Strip, leaving Bicks and his men alone on the Motieau Creek. Later that night the Japanese attacked Capt Bicks' position and he withdrew his men to the Gama River. The same night another Japanese convoy was seen in the Bay, and it was believed that fresh troops were being landed. This attack had cost the 25th Battalion 3 men killed and 2 missing.

While all this was occurring, Brig Field had ordered the rest of the 25th Battalion forward from Gili Gili to take over the defence of No. 3 Strip, and the 2/10th Battalion (under command of the 7th Brigade at this time) to move through the 25th and 61st Battalions to counterattack and clear the north shore. The 61st Battalion was withdrawn to Gili Gili for a well-earned rest. Lt Col Miles made his dispositions for the defence of No. 3 Strip. He placed two companies (A and C) forward of the strip at Rabi and Kilarbo, and the remainder of the Battalion in defence immediately behind it. The two platoons from B Company that were patrolling the hinterland and D Company (less a platoon left at Wedau) were force marching back to Milne Bay, but would not be back for another few days.

Originally Lt Col Dobbs (2/10 Battalion) had intended to advance on the 27th August to Rabi, strike northeast and then come down onto KB Mission. When he heard that the Japanese had landed more troops, Dobbs changed his plans and moved directly along the coastal track to KB Mission. He arrived there in the late afternoon of the 27th, and settled into a defensive position for the night.

At 8.00 pm that night the 25th Battalion men, crouched behind tree stumps and logs along the track, heard the sound of battle from KB Mission. The firing increased in intensity, but after four hours it began to subside. Unknown to the Battalion at the time, the 2/10th Battalion had been attacked by two Japanese tanks and infantry. With no anti-tank rifles and sticky bombs that malfunctioned in the humidity of the jungle, the South Australians were virtually defenceless against the tanks. After fierce fighting the 2/10th was split in two and overrun. One group withdrew into the hills to the northwest and eventually worked their way back to Australian lines two days later. The other group withdrew back along the track, fighting all the way in isolated clashes in the jungle night.

As the sound of fighting drew closer, the men of A and C Companies stood to, ears and eyes straining to make sense out of what was happening to their front. Lt Woodrow's platoon, on the

Gama River, was the first to come in contact with the withdrawing Australians and advancing Japanese. Although Woodrow had been told that the 2/10th would strengthen his defence lines, none of the withdrawing men would stay with him. In the confusion, and with the Japanese tanks attacking his position, Woodrow withdrew his men back to Rabi.

It was now the early hours of 28 August. Capt Ryan (OC A Coy), at Rabi with another platoon, was linked by a telephone line to Battalion HQ at the Strip. He also had been unable to rally any of the withdrawing 2/10th Battalion, and was now faced with the task of holding back the Japanese who had just crushed an experienced AIF battalion. Lt Col Miles ordered him not to attempt a stand, but to withdraw inland and harass the enemy if possible. The Japanese infantry were preceding their tanks, and were hot on the heels on the withdrawing 2/10th Battalion men. Unable to distinguish Australian from Japanese in the night Capt Ryan opened fire, only to find that there were Japanese already behind him. After a brief clash, Ryan took the two platoons with him and withdrew to the north. His assessment of the situation was: *"it would have been criminal folly to attempt an ambush or raid in the darkness of the jungle that night."* After running into large numbers of fresh Japanese troops when trying to move back beside the road, Ryan took his men into the hills to await daylight, and then moved west until they met up with the 61st Battalion on the northwest end of No. 3 Strip later the same day. (The third platoon withdrew back to C Company at Kilarbo.)

Two anti-tank guns under Lt Acreman (101st Anti-Tank Regiment) were sited between Rabi and Kilarbo. The anti-tank guns were covered by Sgt Ludlow's platoon (C Company), who had placed men on either side of them. When the Japanese spotted the guns they lit up the area with a flare, put down heavy fire on the gun's position (killing one of the gunners), and then attacked it with infantry. Ludlow's men were forced back, leaving the anti-tank guns exposed. Lt Acreman tried to move his guns back but they bogged on the muddy track. He then disabled the guns before abandoning them. Ludlow's platoon and the anti-tank gunners then moved back to Kilarbo.

But the Japanese were right on their heels, and soon C Company was fighting for its life. Men from different platoons, stragglers from the 2/10th, and the Japanese – all were hopelessly mixed up in the dark. The fighting was confusing – close quarters and in the dark. No one was sure who was who, and it is possible that some of the Australians who died that night were shot by other Australians. C Company was ordered to fall back to No. 3 Strip.

Sgt Stan Steele's platoon (only 16 men) now stood between the Japanese and the strip. The RSM (WO1 Ken Barnett), armed with two revolvers, rallied some of the men from both A and C Companies by the simple expedient of threatening to shoot the next man who tried to withdraw. These men joined Steele in an area that had been cleared as a dispersal area for aircraft on the strip. It was now 5.00 a.m. and Steele, now joined by Ludlow and 16 more men, was determined to make a stand. Sgt Ludlow placed his men into an all-round defensive position on Steele's left flank and the two depleted platoons made their stand.

The Japanese repeatedly tried to cross the clearing but Steele's and Ludlow's men, aided by a Vickers Gun from the strip, beat them back each time. Both Joffre Ludlow and Stan Steele won their Military Medals here for their leadership and individual heroism.

After three hours Steele and Ludlow ordered their men to withdraw. Attacked six times by some 200 Japanese, they had killed some 40 – 50 of them and delayed the Japanese advance for three crucial hours in the darkness, preventing them from rushing the strip before the defences were ready for them. No Australians had been killed, although one man had been wounded in the lower back by a bullet. Waiting only for final stragglers from the 2/10th Battalion to move through their position, L/Cpl Errol Jorgensen, L/Cpl Lew Wise and Pte Ron Davis used their

Thompson submachine guns to cover the final withdrawal, finally retiring over the strip themselves.

With the onset of daylight Japanese activity ceased – the Kittyhawks patrolling constantly made any movement in daylight hours suicidal. The Japanese troops that had landed on the night 25th-26th August had been in constant action for over 48 hours now – fighting by night and under air attack by day. They were exhausted and their morale was shaken by their failure to capture No. 3 Strip quickly. During the day of the 28th they laid up in the jungle, resting and reorganizing. The Australians took this opportunity to strengthen their defences of the strip.

> The paramount importance of the recently cleared No. 3 Strip, as defence line, was now very apparent. It ran roughly north from the Bay shore, for 2,000 yards and averaged 100 yards wide. Clearing of the ground was complete, but the surface was boggy near the Bay, making it difficult for tanks to cross. The defenders had a broad and clear field of fire, confined at one end by steep hills and the other by the water of the Bay. A barbed wire fence ran down the middle of the strip and mines had been laid along the eastern edge. The enemy could advance no further without crossing this open space, and it was here that the Allies were waiting.

Lt Col Miles had been given the responsibility of organising the strip's defence. The 25th Battalion held the line from the Bay to the track, while the 61st Battalion, ordered forward from Gili Gili, took up positions on Stephen's Ridge on the north-western end of the strip.

The night of the 28th was quiet; one mortar was in action firing at targets of opportunity, but otherwise there was no activity. The next day patrols from the 25th and 61st Battalions probed as far as Rabi. Although evidence of Japanese atrocities was discovered, the most significant find was the two Japanese tanks – bogged and abandoned near Rabi. A patrol was sent out to destroy the tanks, but the demolition party that was to accompany them did not arrive. The patrol returned with the tanks still intact.

Although the tide of the Japanese advance had been slowed, a fresh impetus was about to be provided. Late in the afternoon of the 29th a new Japanese convoy was sighted, and later that night 568 men of the 3rd Kure Special Naval Landing Force and 201 men from the 5th Yokosuka Force were landed. The fresh troops were keen to attack that night, but the officers of the 5th Kure persuaded them to wait till the next night, to allow their men more time to rest and recover. That night Japanese warships entered the Bay and shelled the area around Gili Gili. This was to occur on an almost nightly basis for the next week or so.

Lt Aub Schindler, the mortar platoon commander, was ordered to lead a patrol on the 30th August to immobilise the tanks. They were able to locate the tanks and blow their tracks off with explosives.

Clowes had planned for a counterattack by the 18th Brigade to begin at dawn on the 30th. Word of the Japanese convoy arriving on the 29th forced him to cancel those plans until he knew the Japanese intentions. When no further Japanese attacks materialised that night, he ordered the counterattack to begin at dawn on the 31st August. In the meantime reinforcements, including extra Vickers guns and American halftracks with 50 calibre machine guns, continued to flow into the front line along the edge of No. 3 Strip. The amount of firepower now lining the strip was truly impressive.

The night of 30–31 August started quietly. On the Australian side of the strip men peered nervously into the dark. Everyone knew an attack was coming, but no one knew when or where. Sometime after midnight a clang was heard from the other side of the strip: Captain Ryan (A Company) immediately fired a flare which exposed the Japanese assembling directly opposite his position. At about the same time other flares went up and practically immediately there was a curtain of tracer bullets firing down the strip from the machine guns sited at the North Western end.

The Japanese 5th Kure had formed up in ranks in the area bordered by the eastern edge of the strip and the track. Into this area the Australians (and Americans) poured a hail of concentrated small arms and machine gun fire. Then Lt Schindler's mortars commenced rapid firing into the same area. The Japanese were so close that they heard the calls for more ammunition and were able to enfilade the track back to the rear. The ammunition party then had to run this gauntlet of fire twice – going back and coming forward. Nevertheless, the mortar platoon stuck to their task and continued firing without let up. The range from the mortars to the Japanese was only about 250–350 metres. Bert Miles, of the mortar platoon, recalled:

> In the jungle mortars are very dangerous. Because of the trees we had to get very close to the front line troops. Normally we'd be 500 or 600 yards behind, but we were only about 50 feet from where the infantry were dug in. From the waist up you were exposed and as soon as they saw the muzzle flashes they put the 'woodpeckers' on us.

The flash of the mortars firing attracted considerable Japanese fire, but nevertheless Herb 'Hammy' Hamilton of the Signals Platoon maintained communications between the observation post and the mortars by running constantly between the signals pit and the mortar pits under heavy fire. Bert Miles, and many others, think that Hammy was one of the real heroes of the battle.

The Japanese returned fire and, with both the Americans and the Japanese using tracer, the area was lit up like daylight. Noel Jones (A Company) later wrote:

> All hell broke loose. Everything that fired started firing... Next to me was an American half-track with its bullet proof shield, one 0.5 calibre and two 30 calibre machine guns. The hail of fire going from that, from the tracer bullets, was something like I'd never ever seen in my life before. And everybody else along the line was going away like that.

Casualties were not just on the Japanese side. They returned the Australian and American fire vigorously, and casualties began to mount on the Australian side of the strip – three men were killed and 12 wounded.

Three times the 3rd and 5th Kure formed up and tried to cross the strip. Each time they were met by a hail of fire, and each time the attack wilted and crumpled. Frustrated by their failure to succeed with a frontal attack, a group of Japanese tried to outflank the strip by moving north. There they encountered the 61st Battalion on Stephen's Ridge and were beaten back. The 25th Battalion mortars had switched their fire to support the 61st Battalion, adding to the Japanese confusion. Just before dawn three bugle calls sounded from the western side of the strip, and the Japanese faded into the jungle. The attack on No. 3 Strip was over. For the next few hours only the groans of the wounded and isolated shots from snipers came from the Japanese side of the strip. Then came a series of pistol shots, the groaning stopped and silence fell. The Japanese had killed their seriously wounded and left the battlefield to the Australians.

Clowes' plan for a counterattack could not have been better timed. The 2/12th Battalion had already made their plans to begin their advance on the morning of the 31st. They left Gili Gili at 6.30 a.m., and their lead company, D Coy, reached the strip at 9.00 am. Lacking artillery cover, and mindful that the 25th and 61st Battalions believed that large numbers of Japanese were still on the other side of the strip, they asked the 25th Battalion Mortar Platoon for two minutes of rapid fire. This was readily complied with, and at 9.09 a.m. D Coy, 2/12 Battalion crossed the No. 3 Strip to take the fight to the Japanese and regain the initiative.

The rifle companies of the 2/12th, one after the other and in extended line, crossed the strip and the cleared area beyond, and entered the jungle. On the way they came across numerous dead and wounded Japanese. Some of the wounded shammed death, only to fire at the Australians as they passed. After a few such incidences, no mercy was shown, and any Japanese body not obviously dead was shot or bayoneted. Snipers and small ambush parties were scattered

throughout the area to slow the Australian advance: they all received the same treatment. The Japanese could not halt the 2/12th, and by late afternoon the Battalion had reached KB Mission, inflicting heavy casualties on the Japanese as they went.

The next day, 1 September, Brigadier Wootten (18th Brigade) requested that the 7th Brigade secure the area behind his advance. Accordingly B Company (25th Battalion), C Company (61st Battalion), a detachment of 25th Battalion mortars and a machine gun platoon (E Company, 25th Battalion) moved forward across the strip to secure the area between the strip and the Gama River. B Company advanced beyond Rabi, relieving a company of the 2/12th Battalion, and formed a defensive perimeter on the Gama River. (On the night of the 1st September, in torrential rain, the B Company detachment on the Gama River was twice approached by Japanese parties that had been cut off by the 18th Brigade advance and were trying to withdraw. On each occasion the Japanese were engaged by small arms fire, and driven off.)

It was starting to dawn on the men of the 25th Battalion just what they had achieved. For the next week the 2/12th and the 2/9th Battalions steadily drove the Japanese back until, on the 6th September, organised Japanese resistance ceased. These two AIF battalions, veterans of the Middle East, displayed fighting qualities second to none and the laurels for the final victory at Milne Bay rightly belong to them. But the 25th and 61st Battalions had done what they were asked. They had slowed and finally stopped the Japanese advance. Without their determined resistance it is likely that the Japanese would have reached No. 3 Strip on the first or second night. Without Ludlow's and Steele's determined stand on the night of the 27th August, No. 3 Strip may have been taken that night, with possible disastrous consequences for the Australians.

The 25th Battalion had lost eight men killed and ten wounded (two of who subsequently died as a result of their wounds). Several members of the 25th Battalion were decorated after the battle:

Distinguished Service Order	Q21602 Lt Col Edward Samuel Miles
Military Cross	Q22853 Lt Aubrey John Schindler
Military Medal	Q22716 Sgt Joffre James Ludlow Q22003 Sgt Stanley David Steele QX35164 Cpl John Cameron Warren
Mentioned in Dispatches	QP2365 Warrant Officer Class 1 Kenneth Clive Barnett

What had been achieved? For the first time since Pearl Harbour, the Japanese had been defeated in the Pacific in a land battle. Milne Bay had been secured, and the eastern approach to Port Moresby was safe. At the same time Australian troops had stopped the Japanese advance over the Kokoda Trail, safeguarding the northern approaches to the port. New Guinea, and therefore the communication lines to Australia, was safe, although three years of bitter fighting lay ahead before New Guinea was cleared of the Japanese. Milne Bay and Kokoda were turning points in the Pacific war, and marked the start of the long march to Tokyo.

The effect on morale, both at home in Australia and elsewhere in the world, cannot be overlooked. In an oft-quoted passage in his book, *Defeat into victory*, Sir William Slim (GOC 14th Army, Burma) said:

> We were helped by a very cheering piece of news that now reached us, and of which I made great use as a morale raiser. In August and September 1942, Australian troops at Milne Bay had inflicted on the Japanese their first undoubted defeat on land. If the Australians in conditions very like ours could do it, then so could we. Some of us may forget that of all the Allies, it was the Australian soldiers who first broke the spell of invincibility of the Japanese army; those of us who were in Burma have cause to remember.

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SMALL BUT IRRITATING BITES: THE AGAS OPERATIONS OF 'Z' SPECIAL UNIT IN BORNEO 1945.

Dr Kevin Smith, OAM

Forty-four soldiers of Z Special Unit, mainly young Australians who had volunteered for hazardous duties, served on one or other of the five clandestine Agas operations in Japanese-occupied British North Borneo, in 1945.[1] Their unit was part of Australia's highly secret Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), strongly influenced by British advisors, which in turn reported to the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) of General MacArthur's General Headquarters (GHQ). There were a number of SRD operations in Borneo, the first of which was Python (October, 1943—June 1944). Other Borneo operations were the extensive Semut activities in Sarawak, as well as the minor but equally hazardous operations Politician, Crocodile, Platypus, Stallion, Squirrel, Apple, Robin and Optician.

In 1942, 1,495 members of the 8th Australian Division had been sent from Changi to Sandakan, followed a year later by another 503 while fourteen others had been left at Kuching en route. In all numerical calculations in regard to Sandakan there are discrepancies, caused for example by such confusing facts as a few AIF members having been shipped out to Jesselton with British POWs or others having arrived from Java. There was even a NSW jockey who had been riding in Malaya and joined the Malayan Volunteer Force. My own tally of known survivors and known deaths, however, yields a reliably testable figure of 2,030 Australian servicemen who were POWs in Borneo. These included one Red Cross, one RAAF, one RANVR, and two RAN. 1,812 of these Australians died or were murdered, while only 218 survived to return home.

At the beginning of 1945, a month before the first march by prisoners to Ranau, there were almost 1,700 Australians still alive at Sandakan and almost another 200 still alive after dispersal to Kuching, solitary at Outram Road Gaol, and escape to the Philippines.

Agas 1

Captain Ray Steele who had been a POW and escaped to the Philippines in 1943 reported to General Blamey upon reaching Darwin in March 1944. He carried a letter to the Minister for the Army written by Sergeant MacAlister Blain MP, Federal Member for the Northern Territory, who was still a POW. Here was a significant impetus for the idea of a rescue operation.

During May 1944, an outline plan for a commando insertion on the west coast of British North Borneo was being prepared within SRD as a reconnaissance for OBOE 6 landings at Labuan and nearby areas by the 9th Australian Division. The return of the Python group in June 1944 added to the Army's awareness of the Sandakan POW camp and gave further impetus to SRD's secret initiatives for a rescue.

An SRD memo in mid-July 1944 indicated that planning for Project Agas would take place when British Major Gort Chester returned from his post-Python leave.[2] Rather too much reliance and authority were being placed, on the mission-wearied Chester who had really reached his limits during Python. Nor was any great sense of urgency within SRD to be inferred from the memo.

Accordingly, Chester outlined a scheme for his September return to British North Borneo, establishing a base near Kudat on the west coast for the OBOE reconnaissance and later making contacts with east coast natives at Sandakan and Tawau to ascertain the location and condition of

1 Agas is the Malay word for sandfly.
2 NAA A3269/12 Item J31

POWs on the east coast with a view to rescue or assistance to escape. In early August 1944, an SRD memo went to AIB requesting approval for this scheme.

On 22 August, a reply to SRD from AIB requested a re-submission of Chester's scheme, to be an October Agas insertion. On 25 September, it went back to MacArthur's GHQ for final approval.

Sandakan on the east coast, the focus of any rescue, was almost 300 kilometres as the hornbill flies across the most rugged terrain of mountain, jungle and swamp, from any proposed Agas base in support of OBOE 6 on the west coast. The evidence here is clear that the two main purposes of an Agas operation were already tearing it apart in two opposite directions. Furthermore, an October implementation for a proposal that went to the vast GHQ on 25 September was surely somewhat unrealistic.

On 14 October, Chester impatiently and crankily asserted that he could no longer wait for GHQ approval. Therefore the Agas Project in its present, form would have to be cancelled, and January 1945 would now be the earliest possible date.[3] He cited the November onset of the monsoon season as the reason for necessary delay. Yet Chester himself had led the Python insertion at precisely this same time a year earlier. I have been on both the east and west coasts during the monsoon season and would not consider the monsoonal wet in Borneo an obstacle to commando reconnaissance operations. GHQ approved the deferment until January. Time and lives were passing as Chester's delaying influence prevailed.

The day after Christmas 1944 an eight-man Agas party assembled at Mt Martha prior to proceeding via Fremantle to Darwin. Agas departed Darwin on 16 January 1945 aboard the US Submarine Tuna. Chester's second-in-command believed that insufficient details were well co-ordinated before departure and that the party leader failed to keep SRD headquarters informed of arrangements he had made personally.[4]

Even though the Agas plan had been for an insertion between Kota Belud and Kudat, what seems to have eventuated on Chester's initiative was that the insertion was directed farther south to Kimanis Bay, close to where Chester had been pre-war manager on the Lok Kawi Estate. As the submarine approached the long, sandy desolate beach in heavy rain apparent, radio masts were sighted a short distance inland. This evidence of enemy activity in the area gave cause for the entire mission to be aborted and the Agas team were returned all the way back to Australia. Much later it was learned that the 'radio masts' sighted through the squall, were two burned and leafless trees.

What can be said of Gort Chester? Earlier in the war he was a captain in the King's African Rifles during the Abyssinian campaign. He served with Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) and had then been involved in early planning for the Operation Jaywick assault on Singapore Harbour. To a number of the young men of Z Special he was indisputably a father figure. He was generally highly regarded by his men for a notably charming manner and most pleasing smile. Many of those serving with him have commented upon his thoughtful and considerate attitudes. Jack Sue said of him 'Gort Chester had a charisma of his own ... I never met anybody who spoke of Gort in terms other than good'.[5] Skeet Hywood found him 'pretty intense ... but was easy to get along with ... he could swear like a bullocky'.[6] No comments were forthcoming on his tactical skills or wisdom.

However despite an apparent sense of humour he was known to have a short, fuse. He was impatient and given to expressive explosive outbursts of temper. He found it difficult not being in full personal control of events. In the stressful final hours of Python with hopes of extraction diminishing by the minute, not as young and fit as the others, he was almost at the end of\ his tether with physical and

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3 NAA A3269 Item Al
4 NAA A3269 Item Al Reconnaissance Report 28/1/45 by AK 189 Major N. Combe
5 Sue J. Blood on Borneo (Sue, Bayswater, 2001) p. 151.
6 Hywood A. Correspondence 10/2/04

mental exhaustion. He talked to Stan Neil about taking his 'L' pill and said to him 'don't know why I don't ask you to shoot me.' Neil, certainly no admirer of his leader, commented shortly after the war during a late night visit to Princes Nightclub in Sydney, 'I don't know why I didn't'.[7]

Chester, influenced by his SOE background and contacts, was too keen to become involved in the sabotage and action he believed was more readily on offer on the west coast.

Following the return of the Agas team, the mission was immediately reactivated. Chester and Combe[8] conducted an aerial reconnaissance of Labuk Bay and its hinterland on 18 February 1945, planning to avoid this time a direct west coast insertion. An SRD document, dated 24 February, noted that Chester had reported 'Sandakan ... appeared ... evacuated'.[9]

From this point onwards explicit planning for a separate rescue mission disappeared from all SRD documents. A land reconnaissance for it was however still an objective of Agas I and was subsumed within early plans for an Agas II operation. Following the aerial reconnaissance, a second sortie of Agas I departed Darwin on 24 February, once more aboard Tuna, and surfaced about ten miles offshore in Labuk Bay on 3 March. The seven-man party paddled their rubber inflatables ashore near Cape Tagahan and some distance upriver. They set up a temporary camp on waterlogged ground and by 10 March had made radio contact with SRD's station in Darwin.

Soon the Agas operatives were reconnoitring in their folboat kayaks the numerous river estuaries along the western and southern shores of Labuk Bay, making several friendly contacts with local people. Radio operators[10] remained on duty at the mudflats camp, while those on folboat expeditions sought information. On 4 April 1945, based upon allegedly reliable information from a native chief, SRD Intelligence Report No. 65 stated, 'All signs indicate an enemy evacuation of Sandakan'.[11]

Very soon thereafter the entire party moved north even farther from Sandakan to Jambongan Island. There a training base was set up for 150 native guerrillas, while Chester received further reports on Sandakan from Chinese and native agents. Greenwood has tellingly suggested that it was considered far too dangerous for Agas men to venture close to Sandakan.[12]

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7 Neil S. Conversation with author 26/4/05, supported by Neil's notes based on a conversation with W.A.C. Russell 5/2/90 who had been present at the night club visit, and on the author's phone, conversation with Russell 3/1/10.

8 Major N. Combe had been pre-war a District Officer and magistrate in British North Borneo.

9 Australian Archives A3269/12 Item Mlb

10 F. Olsen who had previously served on Python, A. Hywood and J. Greenwood

11 NAA A3269/12 Item Hl

12 J. Greenwood Correspondence 6/11/03. A. Powell, *War by stealth*, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. 282, suggests that no attempt was made by Agas to carry out a detailed investigation of Sandakan.

On 20 May, Chester was extracted to the Morotai headquarters of First Australian Corps, where he persisted in again asserting that there were no prisoners remaining at Sandakan.[13] At this time, a week before the second march to Ranau, there were almost 700 Australians still alive at Sandakan.'

Major Sutcliffe, Chester's second in command now assumed command of Agas I and led most of the group south, with six reinforcements, adopting a more aggressive approach towards the enemy. The Agas sandflies began to, inflict small but irritating bites, and a new operational base was established, at Sungei Sungei. Japanese troops were killed by the Australians and heads were taken by some of their native irregulars. Sutcliffe began reporting on the movement of POWs from Sandakan to Ranau, but seems not to have investigated further the few hundred prisoners, ill and starved, their huts burned down by their captors, whom he reported as being left at Sandakan.

His main aim was to advance inland and by 14 August he, with four others, was close to Narawang on the Ranau plateau. The war had ended, and they were ordered to return to Keniogan for extraction, but Neil and Russell did not return immediately.[14] Neil reached Ranau and Russell reached Narawang. They were the first Allied soldiers to follow in the tracks of those ill-fated men on the 'death marches'.

Agas II

Let us go back now to early 1945. By 5 February 1945, plans had been established by SRD for an Agas II operation comprising four widely separated parties, to be inserted at Beaufort, Jesselton, Sandakan and Kudat.[15] Plans for the Beaufort and Jesselton reconnaissances soon faded from the schedule.

The Sandakan party, code-named Kingfisher, would be the reconnaissance for a rescue operation. Captain 'Jock' Sutcliffe was designated as leader with the experienced and reliable Sergeant Neil as his second-in-command. They would be inserted by submarine and proceed to set up a base camp on the north bank of the Gum Gum River, close to Sandakan.

By the time Agas I had departed Darwin on 24 February, Kingfisher had ceased to exist as a separate operation. It was claimed for sixty years that Kingfisher was aborted because General MacArthur declined to provide aircraft for the 1st Australian Parachute Battalion for a Sandakan rescue. My research reveals that there is no evidence to support such a contention. We can certainly look at Chester's negative report on his flight over Sandakan six days before that Agas I departure to find some direct reason for the discontinuance of planning for Kingfisher.

Late in April an Agas I incursion had been made at Lokopas, a large mainland village and by 1 May a central signals station was set up there by Olsen and Greenwood, later moved to Pitas during Agas II.

The five-man Agas II insertion by parachute at Lokopas on 3 May 1945, led by Major Nick Combe, became an operation solely focused on Kudat. It was an operation explicitly in support of the 9th Australian Division in its forthcoming assault farther south on Brunei Bay and Labuan.

Over the following weeks nine more Z operatives would arrive for Agas II and this particular sandfly began to bite quite severely. Raids were launched on Banggi Island, Pitas and other locations around Marudu Bay. As the war came to a close there were several savage minor actions on the Kudat Peninsula, notably at Dampirit and Pituru. When the Z Special Unit men with their guerrilla comrades advanced to Kudat, the Japanese had fled, and the town was taken without a shot being fired.

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13 SRD Intelligence Report No. 147 21 May 1945: 'There are no PW left in Sandakan. All are now reported to be at Ranau.

14 S. Neil had also served on Python and Stallion. W.A.C. Russell had also served on Shrill I in the Celebes and Mosstroops in New Guinea.

15 NAA A3269 Item A1

Agas III

Even though preparation for Kingfisher had tragically evaporated, Blamey had not entirely given up hope for a rescue operation. In June, far too late as we know now, he sent the intrepid Major Rex Blow into the Sandakan area on reconnaissance for an unspecified rescue possibility. Blow's report dampened that hope.

However, Lieutenant General Morshead's First Australian Corps, headquarters, with Blamey's support, acted on the possibility of a rescue of

those prisoners who had been sent to Ranau. It was believed that there were still 300 alive at Ranau.

Morshead's initiative was impeded by a visiting British SOE officer, [16]16 and as a result resources for a rapid rescue deployment to Ranau were not immediately forthcoming. Nevertheless by 8 July, after several frustrating delays, a resolute Flight Lieutenant Geoff Ripley[17]17 accompanied by Sergeant 'Skeet' Hywood[18]18 and four native constables set off on a long trek to walk from Pitas to Ranau through remote and almost inaccessible country.

As with each of the Agas operations, one would need several days to tell the full story. It can be read in my Escapes & Incursions, the only publication telling the full stories of Python and Agas operations in North Borneo.

On 8 August, one month after leaving Pitas, and a day after the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Ripley's party was at Lansat near Narawang when they received news of two POWs who had escaped from the Ranau compound. Only one of these survived and was brought into Narawang.

The war was over, but not on the Ranau Plateau, when on 18 August RAAF Flight 200 dropped seven reinforcements for Agas III, and on 24 August three other surviving escapers were brought in. There were only four survivors of the 385 who had completed the 265 km. of the 'death marches'[19]19, while two others survived of the many who had attempted escapes early in the marches.[20]20

An interesting meeting occurred in August when an Agas III member[21]21 walking along a jungle track near Narawang met up with Sgt. Russell of Agas I. Exactly sixty years later these two old soldiers met again in the same locality.

After receiving very attentive medical care, it was another month before the four rescued survivors were flown out by Auster aircraft on 20 September to Labuan Island and eventual long lives back home. By 21 September, the Japanese troops in and around Ranau had been disarmed and they formally surrendered on 23 September.

Agas IV

It was clear that the war was almost over in Borneo with the assured success of hard-fought AIF landings at Tarakan (1 May), Brunei Bay and Labuan (10 June) and Balikpapan (1 July), when four members of Agas IV landed by PT boat on 14 July at Semporna accompanied by three former members of the North Borneo Armed Constabulary. Soon an RAN whaleboat and its crew of four joined them.

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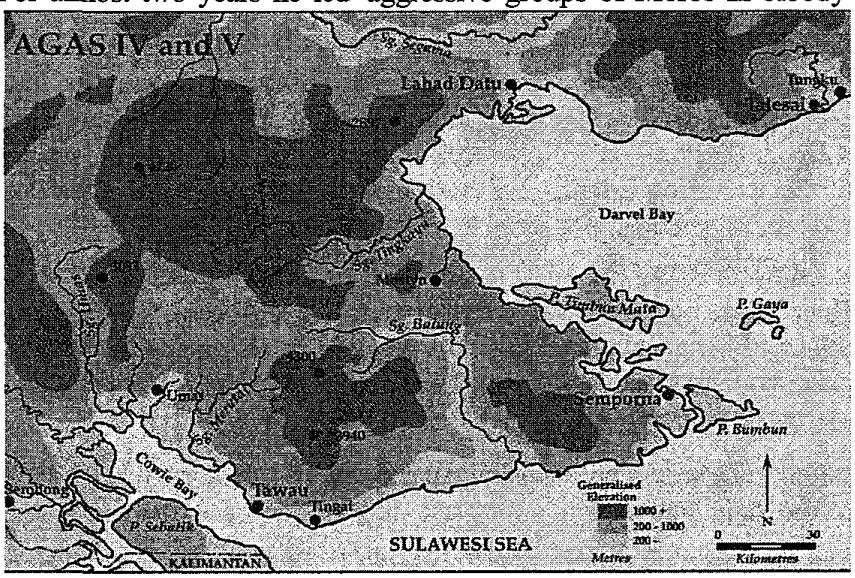
16 Powell p. 283 citing Lt. Colonel Champion's 'Visit to Australia'.
17 Ripley had previously been on Operation Crane north of the Celebes.
18 Hywood had recently been on a Stallion operation, following his Agas I service.
19 The four survivors were Bill Sticpewich,, Keith Botterill, Nelson Short and Bill Moxham.
20 Owen Campbell and Richard Braithwaite.
21 Sergeant. Norm Wallace, now of Mordialloc.

The leader of Agas IV was Major Rex Blow, former prisoner of war who had escaped to the Philippines in 1943 where he linked up with the guerrilla fighters of the US forces in the Philippines. For almost two years he led' aggressive groups of Moros in bloody combat against the Japanese.



Agas IV based at Semporna engaged in harassing attacks on Japanese, outposts in the vast hinterland of jungle and rivers, in rescuing several civilians who had been held prisoner, and in recruiting guerrilla fighters who were trained to give the enemy more irritating bites. Agas IV was, a lively, adventurous operation which continued on until early October 1945.

Agas V

The final wartime exploit of Z Special by three members supported by five natives was inserted by PT boat at Talesai on 7 August. They were led by Captain 'Jock' McLaren, former POW late of the Philippines where, he too had become a renowned guerrilla leader.

Agas V set up several jungle hospitals or dressing stations, recruited native saboteurs prepared for armed revolt in that heavily garrisoned area, and encouraged farming on an increased scale to overcome local food shortages.1 It was a busily active month, involving several contacts with the Japanese. An Australian white ensign was boldly flown high on a coconut palm as if to proclaim, 'Come and get us if you're so inclined'. Early in September Agas V was ordered to join Agas IV at Semporna for eventual extraction by Catalina aircraft.

Major General Willoughby, MacArthur's senior intelligence officer, considered the five Agas operations to be among SRD's more successful operations.[22] Powell suggests that while Agas operations were politically successful, they were of little direct military value.[23] Of course SRD did not set up operations to determine final strategic military outcomes. They were tactical in their purpose, conducted on a very limited scale. The men of Agas were dedicated to their tasks. They were, and are, proud of their involvement with Z Special in Borneo. Agas II, III, IV and V were successful in delivering small but irritating bites upon the enemy. Agas I achieved similar success eventually, but its failures in regard to Operation Kingfisher were an Australian tragedy.

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[22] AWM 59, Operations of AIB, GHQ SWPA, Vol.4 p. 102.
[23] Powell, p. 279.

SOLDIERS OF BCOF

Lieutenant Colonel Neil C Smith, AM

Introduction

Dr Jim Wood, who is with us now in the audience, got it right when he used the term *The Forgotten Force*. This, the title of his fine work on the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, says it all with regard to the Australians who served in the Force during a most uncertain and potentially hazardous period. My aim is to put a name to each and every Australian soldier who served with BCOF. To provide an overview of history of BCOF in general, and those who served in particular, I will now screen a piece I wrote and delivered for TV.

TV Presentation

A TV piece followed which put Australia's BCOF commitment between 1946 and 1952 into perspective. A chronology of events and significant historical issues were presented while many individual personnel and/or their families who served in Japan were examined.

The BCOF History

We can summarise the history of BCOF as follows:

- Two days after hostilities ceased we told the UK we would participate in a British Commonwealth Occupation Force for Japan with the aim essentially of demilitarizing Japan.
- Our troops started to assemble in Morotai.
- Early agreement to the command of BCOF by an Australian, under overall US command was obtained.
- The formation of a BCOF was announced 31st January 1946 comprising British, Australian, Indian and New Zealand personnel from the three services. (*Soldiers of BCOF* clearly only addresses the Army which was located mainly in Kure and Hiro).
- On 21st February 1946 the main body from Morotai started to arrive in Japan. It was based on 34th Brigade (4750 personnel) plus support troops (5000).
- Demilitarization tasks commenced immediately and covered matters such as repatriation of POWs, processing of returning Japanese military personnel, general law and order and disposal or rendering safe of munitions and explosives. Note the casualties and gallantry awards associated with this last aspect alone.
- During 1947 there was a general winding down of the BCOF commitment by the British especially.
- Later in 1947 Australian families (perhaps as many as 700) began to arrive in Japan to join their serving husband and fathers who were serving. They played a great role in returning life in Japan to normalcy. These people currently are a strong lobby group for recognition of BCOF service.
- By 1949 only the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australia Regiment and 77 RAAF Squadron at Kure and Iwakuni were left of the Australian BCOF commitment. (About 2750 personnel)
- On 31st March 1950 the Australian government decided to withdraw most personnel from Japan.
- Before the major Australian units could withdraw the Korea Conflict erupted in June 1950 and the remaining Australians were quickly committed as part of a United Nations requirement.
- BCOF was disbanded on 28th April 1952 when the Peace Treaty with Japan was ratified. Other organisations remained in Japan as part of the Korea commitment.

The Need for Recognition

The need to remember BCOF more appropriately continues. This is necessary as.

- It was our first occupation of a sovereign state defeated in war.
- It was undertaken in a hazardous and unknown warlike environment and casualties were suffered.
- It was achieved with a succession of Australian leaders commanding a joint Commonwealth force.
- Veterans and their families plus officialdom need a first stop to identify those who served in like manner to the World War Two Nominal Roll.
- It realized a unique opportunity to secure a lasting place of influence in our region.
- It enabled the UN to be better placed to respond quickly and effectively to the Korean conflict.

What recognition is needed?

- Medals and the usual benefits. Such is beyond the scope of this presentation.
- A Nominal Roll. We simply do not know who served in BCOF. Despite representation from BCOF associations there has been no progress. Indeed, recent 'advice' from a senior Government representative was for the BCOF Association to ask its members who served and to compile their own Nominal Roll.
- There is no official list of fatalities. Even the Australian War Memorial has no information on this aspect.
- Historians and others are not aware of what units, etc served in the conflict and should similar Occupation Forces be required, there is a dearth of related detail to assess for future needs.
- Veterans and their families continue to lobby for the above.

Current Situation

My work on BCOF can be summarized as follows:

- About 19000 Australian Army personnel have been identified. The data base lists them alphabetically by name, number, rank, main BCOF unit and significant remarks such as fatal casualties.
- About 70 Australian Army units are identified.
- Fatal casualties numbering three figures are identified.

Conclusion

I have completed the Army BCOF Roll. If necessary I will publish this as I have the (Army) nominal rolls for the Korean War, Malayan Emergency, Indonesian (Borneo) Confrontation, Malay Peninsula and many other similar projects. I am in no hurry to do this and remain disgusted with the interest shown in some quarters. I have the data base here today and you are welcome to check any names of interest to you.

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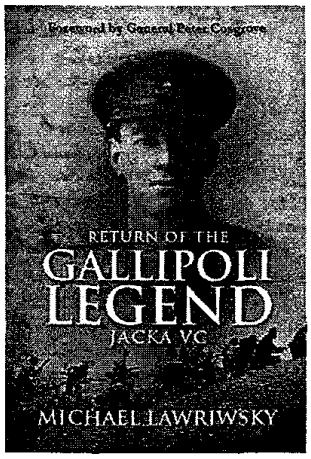
NEW RELEASES

Publisher's information on recent or forthcoming publications

Michael Lawriwsky. *Return of the Gallipoli legend: Jacka VC*, Mira Books, Chatswood NSW, 2010, ISBN 978 1 921685 64 4, ill., maps, ports, 455 p. See http://www.gallipolilegend.com/



A hero returns home to a country that is riding high on victory and bolstered with pride. But anyone who has experienced war knows it can never be left behind. Return of the Gallipoli Legend continues the story of Albert Jacka VC – soldier, legend and friend. In this meticulously researched account of a hero and his comrades-in-arms, Michael Lawriwsky explores the human cost of war. Coming home is bittersweet and the memories and experiences of war are never forgotten, irrevocably changing the world view of the soldiers who returned to a nation on the brink of The Great Depression. It is through the eyes of Albert Jacka VC that we catch a glimpse of how survival away from the trenches becomes an emotional battle on the home front. Michael Lawriwsky vividly describes the baptism of fire Australia's young soldiers faced when they were called upon to sacrifice all for King and country on the battlegrounds of Gallipoli, the Somme, Bullecourt and Polygon Wood. The price paid by the soldiers and their families is one that will echo through generations.

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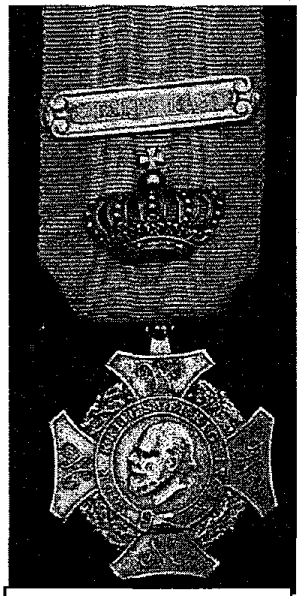
TIMOR TRIUMPH: HNIMS *Tjerk Hiddes* at Timor – 1942

Graham Wilson

The Dutch Expedition Cross with clasp TIMOR 1942; its link with Australian military history.

In 1869, King William III of The Netherlands, who was anxious to have some form of recognition to bestow on his soldiers and sailors to acknowledge their hard service in the Indies campaigns, established the Cross for Important War Actions (in Dutch die Kruis voor Belangrijke Krijgsverrigtingen), more commonly known as the Expedition Cross or Expeditie-Kruis. The first campaign clasp for this interesting medal was backdated to 1846. The very last clasp authorised for this medal, 'TIMOR 1942', went to Dutch soldiers serving alongside Australian commandoes on Timor and to Dutch sailors who went to their assistance.



Expedition Cross with clasp BALI 1849 and Honourable Mention Crown

Therein lays the tale of a medal that is inextricably linked with Australian military history.

As is probably more than well known to this audience, in 1941 the British, Dutch and Australian forces in the Indies and Malaya were girding themselves for the expected onslaught of the Japanese. The bulk of Holland's overseas empire consisted of the Netherlands East Indies and with the Japanese attack expected soon the decision was made to reinforce the Indies with British and Australian troops. In particular, it was decided to reinforce the garrison on Timor, an island with a number of good airfields within 500 miles of Darwin and expected to be a priority target for the Japanese.

For the western half of the island this presented no diplomatic problem as this was Dutch territory and it was planned to base an Australian brigade group, code named 'Sparrow' Force, on this half of the island. To this end, the 2/40th Australian Infantry Battalion, the planned nucleus of the brigade group, along with elements of brigade headquarters and some brigade troops arrived at Koepang, in Dutch Timor, in December 1941.

The eastern half of the island, however, presented more of a problem as it was a colony of neutral Portugal. Allied command knew that Japan was not likely to let Portugal's neutrality stand in the way of acquiring the excellent port and air facilities at Dili and Bacao. For their part, however, the Portuguese were adamant that no foreign troops would be garrisoned on Portuguese territory. The Portuguese attempted to forestall Allied intentions by reinforcing the colony from its African garrison. This move came to nothing, however, as the Japanese, following the commencement of hostilities in the Pacific, refused to guarantee safe passage for the ships carrying 800 Portuguese troops from Africa to Timor and the ships turned back. The Portuguese now bowed to the inevitable and, under strong protest, allowed the deployment of the Australian 2/2nd Independent Company and some supporting troops, plus about 200 Dutch troops under Lt-Col van Straaten, onto East Timor.

As we all know, it was all too little and too late. When the Japanese invaded Timor on 19 February 1942, despite initial strong resistance, the Allied forces around Dili in Portuguese Timor were forced to withdraw into the mountains, while the 2/40th Battalion and most of the rest of 'Sparrow' Force were forced to surrender. About 290 survivors of the Force, including the force commander and his headquarters staff and some Dutch troops, managed to withdraw east into Portuguese territory and link

up with the 2/2nd Independent Company. For the next 10 months, the Australian and Dutch troops on Timor, aided by sympathetic Timorese natives and with the tacit support of many members of the Portuguese community, carried out a gallant guerrilla campaign against the Japanese.

It is not my intent in this short paper to discuss this campaign, as it not the actual direct subject of the paper and has been well and truly covered elsewhere. Suffice it to say that by late 1942, despite many successes and despite eventually receiving direct support from Australia via the perilous 'Timor Ferry' run, the surviving members of 'Sparrow' Force were exhausted and at the end of their tether.

An operation to reinforce 2/2nd Independent Company with the fresh 2/4th Independent Company unfortunately resulted in the loss of the RAN destroyer HMAS *Voyager* on 23 September 1942. This event, plus the parlous physical state of the members of the 2/2nd Company, led to the decision to withdraw that unit back to Australia.

To this end, the RAN corvette HMAS *Armidale* was despatched on its last tragic voyage on 30 November 1942, its planned mission being to extract 2/2nd Independent Company and land 65 additional Dutch troops to reinforce van Straaten.

Again, I am not going to go into the details of the loss of the HMAS *Armidale* or the tragic after events of the sinking, as these have been covered exhaustively elsewhere and are not the direct subject of the paper.

The loss of *Armidale*, however, convinced the Naval Officer in Command in Darwin that the task of maintaining contact with the guerrillas on Timor was too hazardous to entrust to the small, lightly armed and relatively slow vessels which had until them been shouldering the bulk of the burden of this task. With no assets of his own, Commodore Pope, the NOIC Darwin, turned to Commander South-West Pacific Area and requested a destroyer.

As a result of this request, at midnight on 4 December, 1942, Lieutenant Commander W.J. Kruys, Royal Netherlands Navy, captain of Her Netherlands Majesty's Ship (HNlMS) *Tjerk Hiddes*, then lying alongside at Fremantle, was handed an urgent TOP SECRET signal. *Tjerk Hiddes* was ordered to make for Darwin at best speed, there to receive further instructions for an unspecified mission.

The ship that lay at Fremantle that December night in 1942 was not the ship that the Royal Netherlands Navy had originally intended to commission as *Tjerk Hiddes*. That ship actually lay on the bottom of Rotterdam harbour, in far off Holland.

Before the Second World War, the Dutch navy had been a somewhat unbalanced force, consisting of half a dozen cruisers, some submarines and a small force of torpedo boats and gunboats. This force was eminently suitable for coastal protection and colonial peacekeeping, the two main tasks of the pre-war navy, but was unsuitable for the war that was looming in Europe. With war in the offing, the Dutch naval authorities set about establishing a destroyer force to complement the rest of the fleet and redress the balance.

Among the ships ordered were the three destroyers of the 'Callenburgh' Class, laid down in 1938-39 and scheduled for commissioning in 1940. Comparable to the Royal Navy's 'Javelin' Class, the three 'Callenburghs', which were to be named *Gerhard Callenburgh, Tjerk Hiddes* and *Isaac Sweers*, were nearing completion at Rotterdam when the Germans invaded the Low Countries in 1940. Attempts were made to tow the three ships to England to prevent them from falling into German hands but only *Isaac Sweers* made it. Beaten by the swiftness of the German advance, the Dutch navy scuttled *Gerhard Callenburgh* and *Tjerk Hiddes* at Rotterdam. Unfortunately, while *Tjerk Hiddes* was destroyed by the scuttling, efforts in the case of *Gerhard Callenburgh* were less successful and she was eventually salvaged and repaired by the Germans and commissioned as *ZH.1*.

As an aside, none of the 'Callenburghs' survived the war. *Tjerk Hiddes* was, as noted above, reduced to a useless hulk by scuttling. *Isaac Sweers* was completed in England and commissioned into the Royal

Netherlands Navy, only to be torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean by a German submarine in November, 1942. Finally, *Gerhard Callenburgh*, which was now serving the *Kriegsmarine* as the *ZH.1*, was sunk by the Royal Navy off the French coast in June, 1944.

With their country overrun by the Germans, the remnants of the Dutch navy that had managed to get away to England began to rebuild. As part of this process, in 1941 the Netherlands Government in Exile purchased two brand new 'Javelin' Class destroyers from the Royal Navy, HM Ships *Noble* and *Nonpareil* (sister ships to the RAN's famous 'N' Class). The two ships were laid down in 1939 at the yards of Denny & Brothers at Dumbarton in Scotland. Commissioned in 1941, the ships, which had a complement of 183, displaced 1,690 tons, were 348 feet long and were armed with 6 x 4.7" guns, 1 x 4" AA gun, 6 x AAMG and 5 x 21 " torpedo tubes. Depth charge racks were later added. Their Parsons geared turbines developed 40,000 SHP, giving the ships a rated top speed of 36 knots.

While the ships were originally commissioned into the Royal Navy, they saw very limited service under the White Ensign, transferring to the Royal Netherlands Navy in October, 1941. On transfer *Noble* was commissioned as HNlMS *Van Galen* (named after a Dutch warship that had gone down fighting in 1940) while *Nonpareil* became HNlMS *Tjerk Hiddes.*

Her Netherlands Majesty's Ship Tjerk Hiddes

The ships immediately went to work on convoy escort and anti-submarine duties and in November, 1941 *Tjerk Hiddes* sunk a German U-boat off Norway. Next month, however, following Japan's entry into the war, she and her sister ship were ordered east to reinforce Dutch naval units in the Indies. Arriving too late to take part in the disastrous fighting in the Indies the ships diverted to Australia and became part of the Dutch forces being rebuilt there. Most of 1942 was taken up with convoy escort in the Indian Ocean and in September T*jerk Hiddes* and *Van Galen* along with the Dutch cruiser *Jacob van Heemskerk* took part in the invasion of Madagascar. On successful completion of this operation, the three Dutch ships were detached from the Eastern (i.e. Indian Ocean) Fleet and despatched back to Australia for service in the South-West Pacific Area.

Tjerk Hiddes arrived in Fremantle late on the afternoon of 3 December 1942 following an extended patrol. In anticipation of a few days alongside for maintenance, Lieutenant Commander Kruys had given most of the crew liberty on the night of 4 December. His first order on receiving the signal ordering his ship to Darwin was: 'Krijg de bemanning terug naar het schip. Ben klaar om bij oh vijf honderd ter varen' Or, in English: 'Get the crew back to the ship. Be ready to sail at 0500.' The fact that *Tjerk Hiddes* sailed from Fremantle on time and only one crewman short (he later caught up with the ship) is testimony to the professionalism of the captain and crew.

While the reason for the ship's orders to proceed to Darwin were not revealed at this stage, all aboard would have realised that the reason was important as at that time it was unusual for a lone ship to

make the dangerous transit to Darwin in the face of heavy Japanese air activity. *Tjerk Hiddes* was in fact spotted by a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft one day out of Darwin and shortly after was attacked by a squadron of bombers from Timor. Although Commander Kruys manoeuvred his ship successfully to avoid Japanese bombs, he was forced to jettison his depth charges for fear that a hit or near miss on the stern would detonate the charges and cripple or sink his ship.

Arriving in Darwin on 7 December, ironically enough, the first anniversary of Japan's entry into the war, *Tjerk Hiddes* picked her way through the wrecks in the harbour to secure and await further orders. Although Commander Kruys received detailed orders, the crew was still kept in the dark; the only clue to their mission the six collapsible boats which were delivered to the ship. Kruys, who had attended a small boat course at the British Army's Commando School in Scotland, took the opportunity of the short stay in Darwin to drill his crew in erecting, launching, landing and loading the cantankerous little collapsible boats.

Tjerk Hiddes departed Darwin on the afternoon of 9 December and once clear of the harbour, the captain informed the crew of their destination and mission. Commander Kruys had received fairly flexible instructions from Commodore Pope. While the time and place for the rendezvous with the Allied troops on Timor were fixed, the method of getting to and from the rendezvous in one piece was left up to the ship's captain. Commander Kruys had no reason to discount the difficulties involved, especially considering the earlier loss of HMA Ships *Voyager* and *Armidale*.

The captain counted on three advantages, however, to offset the probable hazards:

- Firstly, while in Darwin, he had been given a copy of the Japanese aerial patrol schedule, which had recently been recovered from a downed Japanese aircraft. While RAAF intelligence believed that the schedule would probably be changed, Kruys, who had served many years in the Far East before the war and had some knowledge of the Japanese military, believed that the schedule would not be altered without convincing evidence that it had been compromised.
- Secondly, he was both familiar with the waters around Timor and confident in the accuracy of the pre-war Dutch charts he would be using and which had been compiled by a former class mate of his at the naval academy.
- Finally, he had the utmost confidence in his ship and crew, describing them a number of years later (when he had become a Vice Admiral) as the best crew on the best destroyer in the best navy in the world - a somewhat extravagant claim but one difficult to refute.

In order to avoid Japanese air patrols listed on the captured schedule, Kruys at first steamed his ship due north after leaving Darwin. At dusk, the ship turned sharply westward and increased speed to 30 knots, with the crew at battle stations, in which condition they would remain the whole time until the ship returned to Darwin.

Racing through the darkness, *Tjerk Hiddes* arrived off the rendezvous point some time before midnight on 9 December. In Darwin, Kruys had been advised to lay a mile or two offshore but he replied at the time that this would mean that the boats would take far too long to get to the shore and back, running the risk of the ship still being close ashore at daylight when the Japanese patrols were due over. Instead, trusting to his own knowledge and the excellent charts of his classmate, Kruys decided on the extremely risky move of running as close inshore as he could get. Following this plan, *Tjerk Hiddes* steamed directly for the rendezvous point at 30 knots until the echo sounder placed her about four miles offshore. The ship then went ahead dead slow with the anchor run three shackles out as a sounding lead. This manoeuvre enabled *Tjerk Hiddes* to approach to within less than half a mile of the shore, just outside the surf line.

Sighting the agreed on signal on the dark beach, the ship hove to and the collapsible boats were assembled and launched. The first man ashore waited apprehensively on the dark beach until he was approached by a lone figure, which asked in English: 'Did you come to pick us up?' The relieved Dutch sailor replied that they had and shortly after the personnel to be evacuated began to fill the

beach. The sick and wounded were taken off first, followed by about twenty women and children, in all 300 people being taken off the beach in three trips.

Having embarked her 300 passengers, *Tjerk Hiddes* departed just before dawn and made a 400-mile full-power dash for Darwin, mostly in broad daylight, with all crew at action stations and a large number of passengers crowded on her decks. They never sighted any Japanese planes, however, and in fact Kruys' gamble had paid off and the Japanese did not change their patrol schedule until March, 1943, bang on time!

Reaching Darwin on the afternoon of 10 December, *Tjerk Hiddes* began preparations to make a second run to Timor to take off 2/2 Independent Company. This run was delayed, however, when she was deployed towards Timor to take part in the tragic and fruitless search for the 80 survivors from HMAS *Armidale* who had been left on the ship's rafts when the ship's whale boat and motor boat had departed to try and get help. Despite the best efforts of *Tjerk Hiddes* and the other ships and aircraft involved in the search, the rafts were never located and the men on them, Australian and Dutch, remain listed to this day as 'missing - presumed lost at sea.'

Returning to Darwin on 14 December, *Tjerk Hiddes* resumed her preparations for her next run to Timor and departed on this mission on the afternoon of 15 December. The ship and her crew repeated their previous flawless performance, lifting off the entire 2/2 Independent Company as well as a number of Dutch and Portuguese personnel and being well away from Timor and on her way to Darwin before midnight. While once again no Japanese aircraft were sighted, this trip saw combat of a sort in a battle of wills between Commander Kruys and some of his passengers. With 600 people aboard the ship and the crew closed up to action stations, the three cooks required assistance in preparing meals for everybody. Unfortunately, the Australian commandoes felt that they deserved something better than potato peeling on their first day out of the jungle and refused to lend a hand. To this Commander Kruys replied that the Australians would either peel spuds or go hungry.

He won.

Tjerk Hiddes made her third and final Timor run on the night of 18 December, 1942. By this stage, despite the very real dangers, the trip had almost become routine and the ship picked up her last load of passengers, 300 Portuguese refugees, including a number of women and children, and returned them safely to Darwin.

Her mission now completed, *Tjerk Hiddes* left Darwin on 19 December and returned to Fremantle, arriving back there on Christmas Eve. In three weeks she had:

- fought off an air attack
- steamed almost 7,000 miles
- taken part in an extensive sea search for the survivors of HMAS *Armidale*
- in a dangerous and sensitive operation, lifted almost 1,000 people from a hostile shore and returned them safely to Darwin.

The ship, her captain and crew had nobly upheld the centuries old traditions of the Royal Netherlands Navy and for his part in the operation, Lieutenant Commander Kruys was later awarded the United States Legion of Merit.

To round off the tale, with the Dutch withdrawn and the Australian commandoes faced with increasing Japanese pressure, headquarters decided that the risks to the troops left on Timor far outweighed any possible further advantage. The bulk of 2/4 Independent Company were evacuated on 9 January 1943 by the destroyer HMAS *Arunta*. A small observer party of 10 men was left behind but these too were withdrawn on 10 February, bringing to a close the saga of 'Sparrow' Force.

Now, *Tjerk Hiddes* and, especially, her epic voyage to and from Timor in 1942, make an interesting story in their own right. Her flawless performance in a hazardous and difficult mission to Timor is an

example of what can be accomplished by a combination of good ship, good crew and good captain and an example of how speed, daring and professionalism will almost always pay off.

This, however, now brings us back to the Expedition Cross.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, in 1869 King William III of The Netherlands had established the *Kruis voor Belangrijke Krijgsverrigtingen* or 'Cross for Important War Actions', more commonly known as the *Expeditie-Kruis* or 'Expedition Cross' as a form of recognition for the service of Dutch sailors and soldiers in the Indies campaigns. The first campaign clasp for this interesting medal was backdated to 1843.

The *Kruis voor Belangrijke Krijgsverrigtingen* is not to be confused with the *Oorlogsherinneringskruis* or *War Commemorative Cross*, the Dutch medal for World War Two. This medal is often to be found in Australian World War Two medal groups, an action that is against the laws of both the Commonwealth of Australia and the Kingdom of The Netherlands. The reason for the similarity between the two medals is that the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina revered the memory of her tragic father, King William III, and wanted the Expedition Cross to continue is use as the standard Dutch campaign medal for World War Two. Eventually talked out of this by her advisers, she still managed to have the final design of the War Commemorative Cross resemble as closely as possible the medal that featured her father's image.

A total of 33 clasps were authorised for the Expedition Cross:

BALI 1846
BALI 1848
BALI 1849
BORNEO 1850-1854
BONI 1859
BORNEO 1859-1863
GUINEA 1869-1870
DELI 1872
ATJEH 1873-1874
ATJEH 1873-1876
SAMALANGAN 1877
ATJEH 1873-1880
ATJEH 1873-1885
ATJEH 1873-1890
TAMIANG 1893
ATJEH 1873-1896
ATJEH 1896-1900
KORINTJI 1903
DJAMBI 1901-1904
GAJO EN ALASLANDEN 1904
ATJEH 1901-1905
MIDDEN SUMATRA 1903-1907
ZUID CELEBES 1905-1908
FLORES 1907-1908
KLEINE SOENDA-EILANDEN 1905-1909
ATJEH 1906-1910
ATJEH 1911-1914
W.AFD.BORNEO 1912-1914
N.GUINEA 1907-1915
CERAM 1915
TIMOR 1911-1917
W.KUST ATJEH 1925-1927
TIMOR 1942

It is interesting to note the number of clasps authorised for service in the troublesome region of Aceh, in northern Sumatra. As can be seen from the list, the very last clasp authorised, listed at the bottom, was 'TIMOR 1942'.

This medal and clasp went to the crew of the Tjerk Hiddes and the members of van Straaten's force of NEI troops, who were all awarded the Expedition Cross with clasp 'TIMOR 1942' in 1946. They were the last Dutch service personnel ever to receive this interesting campaign medal, the statutes for which were cancelled in 1949.

Following standard Dutch practice, the medals were issued un-named but were accompanied, again standard Dutch practice, by an impressive, illustrated certificate referred to as a 'brevet'. The brevet carries the medal recipient's number, rank, name, ship or unit, and the name and date of the clasp. The brevets for army and navy, signed by the commander of the Netherlands East Indies Army, the KNIL, or the Minister of Marine, respectively, are visually quite different.

My initial interest in the story of the Tjerk Hiddes was sparked by a naval brevet (minus, alas, its medal) named to a crewman from Tjerk Hiddes, which came into my possession some time ago, but then later parted company.

I do, however, have an Expedition Cross (minus, alas, its brevet) with the clasp 'TIMOR 1942', and it is shown in the illustration below.

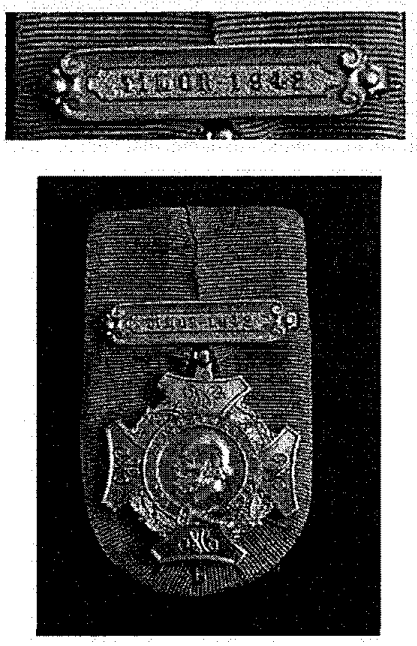


Illustration 3a

Expedition Cross with clasp 'TIMOR 1942'

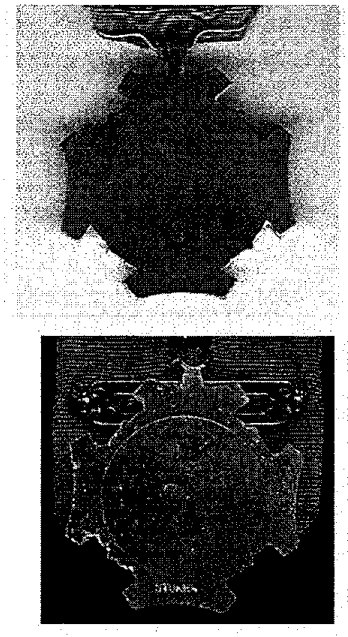


Illustration 3b

Expedition Cross reverse, standard (top)
Expedition Cross reverse, Stokes (bottom)

Shown next to the Expedition Cross with clasp 'TIMOR 1942', top right is an image of the reverse of a standard cross. Note that this is blank. Over the years, there were a number of different strikes of the Expedition Cross, not out of the ordinary for a medal with such a long life span. However, one common feature of all is that the reverse is totally blank - except for one version.

Looking at the bottom right image of Illustration 3, which is the reverse of the Expedition Cross with clasp 'TIMOR 1942', it can be seen that a maker's name has been impressed into the bottom of the lower arm of the cross. The medals issued to van Straaten and his troops and Lieutenant Commander Kruys and the crew of *Tjerk Hiddes* in 1946 were struck here in Australia, in Melbourne actually, by the well known Australian firm of metal workers 'Stokes' and, as is highlighted on the illustration, unlike the Dutch manufactured versions, has the maker's mark stamped on the reverse.

This makes this version of the Expedition Cross quite rare and eagerly sought by collectors.

It is common in the English speaking world to dismiss the Dutch military effort in World War Two, largely due to the fact that the nation surrendered very quickly in 1940. This is a very shallow view, as German records reveal how shocked they were at the level of resistance put up by the Dutch forces, and that resistance would have gone on had the Germans not carried out a calculated exercise in frightfulness by the bombing of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940 accompanied by a threat to the Dutch Government to do the same to other Dutch cities if the country did not surrender. The Dutch Army and Navy did not surrender because they were out fought, they surrendered because they were ordered to do so by a government not willing to risk thousands of pointless innocent casualties.

Even so, Holland fought on in exile, the superb performance of *Tjerk Hiddes* being an excellent example of this.

As both a military historian, and a medal collector, the fact that the very last version of the Dutch Expedition Cross ever issued was issued in connection with Australian military

operations and that the crosses themselves were manufactured in Australia and, uniquely for this interesting medal, bear an Australian maker's mark.

A very close and very real connection with Australian military history I would say.

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SOCIETY WEBSITE

www.mhsa-org.au,

Federal Council needs to update the Society's Website's content! Peter Shaw, our Webmaster, is doing a great job managing the technical aspects but now we need someone to look after the content. Federal Council is seeking expressions of interest from members willing to volunteer as our website content manager. He or she would work with the Webmaster to ensure the Website is fresh and modern and that content is up-to-date, as well as with the Federal Secretary and Branch Secretaries to source (and coerce!) content. He or she would also act as a portal for members wishing to contribute content.

If you are interested in the challenge of updating the Society's website and keeping it up-to-date, please contact Kristen Alexander, the Federal Secretary on fedsec@mhsa.org.au or phone 02 6258 7348 (business hours) to chat about the challenge or to submit an expression of interest. EOIs should be in by 31 October 2010.

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LONG TAN AWARDS

Harry Smith
former Commander Delta Company Long Tan 1966

My name and Long Tan recognition being a myth, have been quoted in the 6RAR Honours and Awards article in the June *Sabretache*, and in not a very favourable light. I seek the right of reply, given there is always two sides to any story. My side is that I did not seek an Australian Unit Gallantry Citation (UCG) for my former Delta Company 6RAR, just one MM and 8 MID that should have been approved in the belated 1998 End of War Review, plus three awards to men of supporting units. They were again rejected by the 2008 and 2009 Reviews on the ground of nil formal documentation, known to have been destroyed by senior officers, rather than being filed.

Author "Missio" claims anonymity. It so happens the completely irrelevant and illogical mention of campaign medals features almost word for word in a "most revealing" 150 page Departmental dossier sent to me by former Prime Minister John Howard in late 2007. Among other derogatory statements, one folio claims I was mistaken in stating that CO 6RAR was not at the battle, as it was "recorded" he moved out and fought his battalion against an enemy regiment. Another folio quoted Chief of the Defence AVM Houston April 2007 as objecting to any more awards or a citation (Vietnamese CGCP) for Operation "Smithfield" (Long Tan). Also, a file indicated the Department of Prime and Cabinet would request the Attorney-General to investigate international sovereignty laws that might prevent the incoming ALP Government from approving the offered Vietnamese Unit Citation (CGCP) for my company. It seems "Missio" is pursuing similar themes.

At the outset I would like to mention the excellent 1974 Military Historical Society book by Ian Barnes on the subject of awards in Vietnam. It casts dark shadows on the awards system, noting "those furthest from the action were first to claim awards" and "there was a proliferation of high awards" to senior and staff officers "for meritorious service or just commanding a unit". Ian Barnes rightly suggested "the lowest award for gallantry should have taken priority over the highest award for good service" and that the 1966 reduced quota (less than half for Korea) "caused each unit to jealously guard it's figures" (rather than be apportioned across the force in theatre, as in the UK Regulations we used). On a unit quota basis, at one MID per 150 men per six months, my Company was not entitled to one MID, let alone a decoration at 1 per 250 men.

Thus, in Vietnam, of 726 Imperial awards, only 22 medallic awards went to private soldiers in the firing line, while, for example (and contrary to the UK Regulations) senior Army officers were awarded 25 DSOs; RAAF 10; and RAN one; 36 in total, plus one for AATTV Major Pat Beale, along with many other awards ranging from 6 CB, 12 CBE and 13 OBE to 34 MBE. The DSO regulations required *"conspicuous leadership and gallantry in combat with the enemy"* at Major and Lt Col level, and for more senior officers, *"leadership over a period under fire entailing gallantry being also necessary"*. Apart from Major Pat Beale and a few COs, it is very difficult to reconcile how every one of eighteen Battalion Commanders, an Artillery Regiment Commander, five Task Force Commanders, ten RAAF officers and one RAN officer were awarded the DSO while not one was awarded to deserving Company Commanders in combat, such as those who fought the Coral, Balmoral, and Binh Ba battles, let alone Long Tan.

The still-controversial Vietnam Awards system saw HQ AFV Saigon receive more awards than individual infantry battalions. Observers suggest the only gallantry in Saigon was escorting lovely local ladies to the cinema. AATTV, the most decorated unit, deservedly received 113 Imperial awards, including 4 Victoria Crosses, 2 DSO, 6 MC, 20 DCM and 15 MM, among 990

men, an excessively high ratio, near triple the awards allocated to battalions under the same quota system.

AATTV also received the Vietnamese Unit Gallantry Citation (CGCP) and US Army Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC), although it never fought as a unit. Fifty men of AATTV received the US Presidential Unit Citation for being with the US 5th Special Forces Group. AATTV also received some 600 Vietnamese and Cambodian awards and some 350 US Army awards. 8RAR received the CGCP for a "series of operations". Not one Victoria Cross was awarded in the Nui Dat Task Force in eight years, despite many extraordinary acts of gallantry and losing some 500 young men killed. If I had my time over I would have cited two of my men for the Victoria Cross, one being my CSM Jack Kirby.

In this debatable awards scenario, my Company of 108 men, with regimental artillery fire support, fought an iconic battle against a reinforced enemy regiment of 3500 troops, causing them to withdraw, thwarting their planned attack on the Nui Dat base that night. Let me clarify the awards situation for my former company for Long Tan. I was ordered to submit urgent recommendations for Imperial awards on 21 August, told Canberra wanted to placate the public outcry at the loss of so any young soldiers, mostly nation servicemen. After being directed to remove four, CO6RAR accepted 16 AF W3121 Citations for 6 decorations and 10 MID. He added the MC award for my command, later temporarily upgraded to DSO, before downgrading back to MC.

The December 1966 Long Tan "Immediate Awards" List, delayed in Theatre for six weeks (contrary to Regulations) while awards were "moderated" (or manipulated), was headed by the Brigadier Task Force Commander with a DSO for *"his able personal direction of the Battle"*. D Coy was given four medals and five MID. The now-legendary company battle was relegated to a MC action, the MC normally being awarded at Platoon level in most past conflicts, and also in Vietnam, in 25 platoon actions. My two surviving officer platoon commanders were downgraded to MIDs. A posthumous MID cited for my 11 Platoon commander KIA disappeared.

As to foreign awards, they were offered to my former company by the Vietnamese and US Armies. A week after the battle, we were told the President of Vietnam wished to give the Task Force 22 medals, of which 13 were allocated to my company. As we lined up for the parade on 2 September 1966, we were told "no medals, Canberra had rejected them". An embarrassed Vietnamese General presented cigar boxes to officers, cigarette boxes to NCOs, and "dolls" to the soldiers. Three days later we received Australian newspapers with headlines "*Vietnamese medals given to our soldiers*". Most recipients and their medals were named. Obviously, documentation was given to AFV Saigon by the Vietnamese Government. AWM Archive files record US Army individual awards were also offered in late August 1966, but rejected.

I was debriefed at HQ FFV2, the joint Vietnamese and US Army HQ in Saigon. I was told by a US Army Colonel "they" were considering a unit citation for my Company. A Vietnamese Army Colonel said "they" would match it. In May 1967, I was called to the palatial mansion of the Vietnamese Ambassador to Australia, President of the Senate, and Minister for Defence, Tran Van Lam, a very senior Minister. He apologised for the embarrassing debacle with the "dolls" and gave me the National Order 5th Class medal that I was to have received on 2 September (as in the Media), as a token from his Government ahead of formal approval. He told me the awards were being processed in Canberra as the Australian Government had since agreed to accept foreign awards after the "dolls" debacle. Some 650 Vietnamese, 43 Cambodian and 350 US Awards were then accepted in subsequent years, ours not made retrospective by Canberra.

Tran Van Lam also indicated his Government intended to award a Unit Citation, as told to me at HQFFV 2 in Saigon in 1966. He gave me a CGCP emblem, an early larger-type with plastic rain cover. Even though "Missio" quotes the CGCP was not created until January 1968, just seven months later, might I suggest the very high-ranking minister and the senior officers at HQFFV2 knew "it was in the pipeline", and that advance or sample CGCP emblems were obviously available.

We came home in June 1967. My Company was awarded the US Presidential Unit Citation in 1968. We had lost 17 KIA and 23 WIA at Long Tan; another 1KIA and 10 WIA in an IED blast in November 1966, and 4 KIA and 13 WIA in a friendly fire accidental artillery shelling in February 1967. Over the year I lost 23 KIA and 47 WIA, 70 casualties out of a nominal strength of 120. At Long Tan we fired 10,300 SA rounds and called in and directed over 3500 artillery rounds, plus a USAF air strike. The enemy left 245 bodies and three WIA on the battlefield, with another 50 or so in shallow graves just to the east. October 1966 captured enemy documents indicated 275 Regiment, alone, had lost 500 KIA and 800 WIA. In 2006, Chinese Army records stated eventual enemy losses were 1500 killed or later died from wounds in jungle hospitals.

I do not intend to go into detail about the outstanding courage and heroism exhibited by my young men, at all levels, especially in the forward sections, mostly NS men, while they fought off successive suicidal battalion attacks. The enemy comprised 275 Regiment of three regular battalions, reinforced with 806 NVA battalion and D445 and D400 Provincial battalions, plus support units, a total of at least 3500 troops. I also mention the belated APC Reaction Force, comprising 3 Troop and A Coy 6RAR, had its own battles en route, 1000m south of D Coy, hastening the enemy withdrawal. It deserved more recognition than given. The Troop received two awards, but none were given to A Coy, despite a gallant dismounted assault by 2 Platoon.

Ironically, the Task Force Commander had been advised the enemy 5th Division of 5000 troops was advancing to attack the Nui Dat base, but reports of enemy movement were dismissed as ARVN patrols. Secret Sig Int reports of the 275 Regt HQ radio approaching at 1000m a day to east of Long Tan were dismissed and not passed down to battalion commanders or patrolling companies. I was not told 275 Regiment "could have been" east of the Long Tan rubber, which it was, preparing to attack the Nui Dat base in conjunction with 274 Regiment in the north, on the night of the Col Joye-Little Pattie concert, the main event for 18 August.

After coming home in June 1967 I was posted to 1 Commando and got on with life. In 1976, I left the Army following a serious injury on my 499th freefall jump when CI of the Army Parachute School, and embarked on a lifestyle of sailing. In 1996, after the 30 year secrecy period, I obtained various documents via the FOI. I found I had been cited for the DSO but downgraded to MC the same day COMATF had been cited for the DSO on 2 October 1966, and that set in motion a domino effect in which my two platoon officers were downgraded from MC to MID.

While I asked nothing for myself, I sought the unapproved Imperial awards for my men, two MC, one MM, and eight MID. I became aware of the belated 1997-98 *End of war List Review* and asked they be included. I was told there were no original citation forms on file. Eight one awards were reconsidered and approved by the review, with six of those further upgraded by the 1999 Tanzer Review. I was told by General Peter Phillips of the Tanzer Review that I should seek an independent review, and I set about obtaining such, meeting with continual opposition from Canberra. I added two men of A Coy 6RAR and one of the Armoured Troop who had also been deprived of recommended awards. If original citation forms had been filed for later review, a normal post-war process, rather than being inexplicably destroyed by senior officers, there is little doubt they would have all been approved along with the other 81 awards in the 1998 Review.

We also sought the Vietnamese awards we were offered in 1966-67, in the media for recipients and loved ones to see. These were not figments of my imagination. In 2004, the Government approved the Vietnamese medals on the basis of new policy of "proof of offer". I cannot argue the merits of "Missio's" criticism about the various degrees of the Cross of Gallantry being unauthorised. Suffice to say Ian Barnes book lists 52 Gold Star, 124 Silver Star and 133 Bronze Star versions in some 610 Vietnamese awards, with more being approved circa 2000-2004.

In August 2006 former Prime Minister John Howard called me to his office where the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence DVA Bruce Billson told him there was more evidence to support the CGCP and a further review of Imperial awards. In 2007, the Prime Minister convened the Long Tan Review that reported in 2008. The Review saw fit to upgrade my MC to the new DSO equivalent, Star of Gallantry (SG), and my two officers were upgraded from MID to the new Medals for Gallantry (MG), all of lesser intrinsic value than the Imperial awards. The other awards were not approved due to no original forms. The report discussed a "Unit Award".

The new ALP Government then approved the Vietnamese Citation, CGCP, on tangible "proof of offer". Agreeing the finding of the 2008 Review as to individual awards was inconsistent compared to the two officers upgraded without original MC forms, it referred the 12 unresolved awards to their new Defence Honours Tribunal in April 2009. That 2009 Tribunal rejected approval of the awards as the TOR still required documentary evidence, yet it was well known in Canberra circles there were no forms on file, so the negative outcome was predictable. In discussions, the Tribunal Chairman stated he could, quote: "cast the net wider". Australian unit citations had been mentioned in 1997 and again in the 2008 Review, but I had never specifically requested one. But I submitted to the Tribunal that "if 1991 Australian unit citations were now to be considered for the Vietnam war, they should be given to all units which were involved at Long Tan", ie. D Coy; APC Troop; A Coy; B Coy platoon; RAAF crews and passengers; Artillery, etc. right down to the USAF strike pilots. In addition, they should also be given to units that fought the Coral, Balmoral and Bin Ba battles.

Thus the 2009 Tribunal award of the UCG to just my Company, in isolation, is seen by many in the veteran community as being unjustified. It seems to be "a peace offering" for upgrading one RAAF award but not the 12 Army individual awards. However, the UCG does not go to three of the 12 men on the review list, not from my company. That is regarded as unfair. Legal advice suggests the tribunal report is flawed and could be challenged in court when the new legislation to legalise it's operation is enacted.

Looking again at the *Sabretache* article, page 43, let me suggest that service/campaign awards have nothing to do with gallantry recognition. I note some soldiers coming back from Afghanistan have five medals for five months service (one a month), so let's forget campaign medals. Turning to Delta Company awards on page 44, 13 individual foreign awards are really not applicable in this argument when 990 AATTV men received some 950 foreign awards.

Also, page 44, the Imperial awards to Delta Company, which undoubtedly fought the iconic main battle, finished up with only half those recommended. Was the MC a suitable award to recognise the nature of the now-legendary company action? I am not interested, as was the 2008 Review and "Missio", in padding out the company figures with the two DSOs for senior officers not at the battle; two awards (DFC and DSM) to the RAAF (two of two pilots), two awards for the NZ artillery party (two of three men) and the two awards to the APCs. My company fought the main battle, directed the devastating artillery fire, and caused most of the enemy casualties.

Despite jargon about the DSO awards for COMATF and CO6RAR being recognition for good service, it is recorded the brigadier was credited with "his able personal direction of the battle". The DSO for CO 6RAR included "he moved out immediately with an armoured force, took firm

and effective control of the battle and fought his battalion against an enemy regiment". His citation for his Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry (CG) included "his personal presence and calm control of the battle inspired confidence in all ranks and enabled the battalion to inflict an overwhelming defeat on the enemy"? Given he was not at the two APC Force encounters and the D Coy battle, arriving with my Company after the enemy had withdrawn, these citations written by seniors could be considered by a Court of Law as being tantamount to perjury.

As to pages 45, etc. regarding 6th Battalion WW1 1914-18. I do not think this has anything to do with Vietnam Imperial awards 1962-72. Like Foreign awards, the comparison is of no value.

As to the Vietnamese Unit Citation, CGCP. The proof of offer was not just based solely on my word, quoted by "Missio""as the memory of a self-interested person", but on the word of the high Vietnamese Minister reiterated in letters in late 1999 when he was located in Canberra by the Director Australian War Memorial (who, circa 2004-2006, was also outspoken in AWM *Wartime* magazine and other articles in recommending further recognition for my men). The proposed award is mentioned in the 1993 AWM Official History, page 564, as "a Vietnamese citation was rejected by the Australian Government in accordance with policy". Only this year the Hon Mike Kelly AM MP advised me author Paul Ham had uncovered further evidence in cables between the two Governments in his research for his excellent book *Vietnam, the Australian War*. That was considered as part of the evidence in the alleged unauthorised Rudd Government approval 2008.

I cannot comment on all the detail about Vietnamese awards on Pages 46-47. Suffice to say that in 2004, the awards offered to my men and listed in the media in 1966, substituted by "dolls", 13 of the 650 formally accepted by our Government in years after Long Tan were approved by Canberra under the new policy of "proof of offer" designed to cover many undocumented awards.

"Missio" has not mentioned that Defence Adviser Fallen advised in writing on 18 December 2000: "the Government acknowledges the Republic of Vietnam intended to make a number of individual awards as well as a unit award of the Cross of Gallantry with Palm to Australians involved in the Battle of Long Tan". Is that not formal Canberra admission of offer? The Rudd Government obviously agreed.

Concluding on 1966 Imperial awards, "Missio" quotes various statements by the 2008 Review Panel, but not other findings, Report pages 24 and 25, that:

- The processes of handling awards in 1966 were "immature".
- Had COMATF General Mackay not been back in Australia his considerations of recommendations may have been different.
- The quota as it applied in Vietnam led to the lowest ratio of awards to combat forces in any of our conflicts. (The AFV quota was reduced by over half on 16 August 1966 but not approved by London until 1968. It can be argued it should not have been implemented until 1968).
- The significance of the battle was not appreciated at the time.
- COMAFV award decisions were affected by this combination of circumstances, resulting in awards which did not conform to the level of recognition which might otherwise have been expected from a military engagement of the type and scale of Long Tan.

Having said all this, the 12 unresolved awards have still not been approved for the lack of documentation which had been destroyed by senior officers. We accept there were problems with awards in Vietnam and there is now a new awards system since 1991, but I and my colleagues simply require the same justice for these men that was given to the 81 recipients of the 1998 Review. Nothing more, nothing less. Given the precedent set by the 2009 Tribunal, we also seek reconsideration of Australian Unit Citations for units which supported us at Long Tan and for other significant battles in Vietnam, such as Coral, Balmoral and Bin Ba. These would go a long way to improving the abysmal recognition of units which fought and sacrificed for our nation.

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