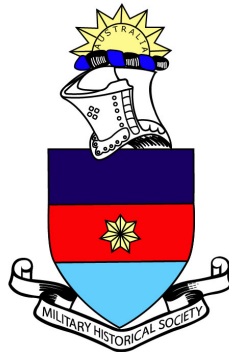


Military Historical Society of Australia
Sabretache



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EDITORIAL

In February this year the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Senator David Feeney put out a media release announcing that as a result of the findings of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal set up to investigate *Unresolved Recognition for Past Acts of Naval and Military Gallantry and Valour*, the Australian Government has decided that ‘no Victoria Cross (VC) will be awarded posthumously for any of the 13 individuals who were the subject of the recent Inquiry’. The individuals concerned are Gunner A.N. Cleary, Midshipman R.I. Davies, Leading Cook F.B. Emms, Lieutenant (later Captain, later Senator) D.J. Hamer AM DSC, Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick, Lieutenant Commander R.W. Rankin, Able Seaman D.J.O. Rudd DSM, Ordinary Seaman E. Sheean, Leading Aircrewman N.E. Shipp, Lieutenant Commander F.E. Smith, Lieutenant Commander (later Commander) H.H.G.D. Stoker DSO (Royal Navy), Leading Seaman R. Taylor, and Captain H.M.L. Waller, DSO and Bar. The tribunal ‘received 166 submissions relating to the 13 names provided by Government and a further 174 submissions nominating an additional 140 individuals and groups’, with the inquiry lasting ‘almost two years’. Not only did the tribunal recommend that ‘No action be taken by the Australian Government to award a Victoria Cross for Australia or any other form of medallic recognition for gallantry or valour to any of the 13 individuals named in the Terms of Reference’, but it ‘also decided that an alleged precedent for a VC was not a sufficient basis for recommending a retrospective honour. It came to the conclusion that no two cases were the same, and that commanders and committees which recommend honours do so solely on the merits of the individual case’.

No doubt the decision has been met with dismay by some and relief by others, but given the continuing capacity of the debate over the merits of one of these individuals, Pte Simpson, ‘The Man with the Donkey’, to generate steam – not least among our own membership – there is also little doubt that in some circles the matter won’t end there. Regardless of one’s opinion on the issue, however, one of the articles in this edition of the journal draws our attention to a group of men whose service has been much more neglected than the subjects of the inquiry. Dr Dale Kerwin’s study of the Indigenous Trackers who served in the Boer War is a tribute to their abilities, sufferings and devotion; but just as importantly it reminds us of the gross injustice of a system which excluded a whole race of people from mainstream Australian society, the consequences of which we are all still facing today. So while some efforts are being made to memorialise Aboriginal service in the two world wars and other conflicts, Dr Kerwin’s article demonstrates that there is much more to be done in that regard.

In the Society Notices is the announcement of this year’s *Sabretache* Writer’s Prize, which I would encourage all budding contributors to consider entering. The winner gets automatic publication in a subsequent issue of the journal, but a number of the other entries also find their way in by virtue of their depth of research and quality of writing. If you’re not up to a full-blown essay, however, please consider contributing to the As You Were ..., Collectors’ Corner or Book Reviews columns, or indeed any short article on a military topic. Finally, you will have noticed a change to the external appearance of *Sabretache*. This is not change for its own sake, but has been brought about by the considerable difficulty in sourcing suitable card stock for a different cover every year. By adopting a plain cover with a coloured strip indicating the particular volume, we hope to maintain consistency from issue to issue, while keeping production costs to a manageable level.

Paul Skrebels

THE LOST TRACKERS: ABORIGINAL SERVICEMEN IN THE 2nd BOER WAR

Dale Kerwin¹

There are 50 Aboriginal trackers who have entered my life. Over a ten-year period they have trespassed my dreams, my daily conversations, my research, and they have intruded on my musings. I was introduced to these men while working for Mr Neville Bonner in the late 1990s when he was the Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board in the Queensland Government. He told me a story about four Aboriginal trackers who went from Palm Island to the Boer War in 1899. These trackers were filed away in my memory with other stories told to me by my Elders, of Aboriginal people who contributed to Australian histories but never get mentioned in the telling of history from the colonial period. Who are these men, what were their names, where did they come from, what contingents did they serve with, what were their feats? Did they come home and if not why were they left in South Africa? I have asked these, along with many other questions, of the historical record left from that period in the Australian Archives. This is what I found: a shared history.

When the war began on 11 October 1899, Australia, a collection of five colonies of the British Empire (the Northern Territory was governed by South Australia), did not hesitate to offer troops: 'A total of 16,175 volunteers were accepted to fight overseas', from the colonies and the Commonwealth of Australia (Wallace 1976, p.2). The Australian population at the time of this war was a little over 3,500,000 people. The Aboriginal population in 1899 was approximately 40,000 and it is not known how many Aboriginal men went to this conflict. The logical place to find out was the Australian Boer War Nominal Rolls. However, as the historian David Huggonson (2007) has pointed out, 'unlike World War 1 records, the Boer War nominal rolls contain no physical description of the soldiers, making Aboriginality more difficult to confirm'. Huggonson also states that 'the Imperial Bushmen Contingent drawn from Queensland contained mixed race men as some were recruited from Burketown in far North Queensland' (Huggonson, personal letter 13 April 2007). As evidence of this a telegram was sent from the Police Magistrate, Burketown, 'enquiring if half castes are acceptable as recruits for Imperial Bushmen's Contingent' (Series number: MP744/11 (MP744/11), control symbol: 1900/2878).

I begin this story with a short history of the lead-up to the war and the Black Trackers' relationship with the armed services of Queensland. This relationship mirrors what was happening around the country with the use of Aboriginal trackers as Native Mounted Police in the mid to late nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth century.

The historical record

To consider why Aboriginal people have been left out of the historical record until recently, I first need to explain the legislation that was operating in Queensland 1899 and Australia after Federation in 1901. In Queensland *The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* came into force as a statute of the Queensland Parliament. The major thrust of this legislation was to move all Aboriginal people of Queensland onto Government- and Church-run missions – or as Aboriginal people call them, concentration camps. Further to this, care for all Aboriginal people was managed by two men known as Chief Protector and

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Assistant Protector, and up until 1903 the Act was administered by Chief Protector Archibald Meston and Chief Protector W.E. Roth.

The 1897 Act divided Queensland into two sections, North and South, each of which was administered by a Chief Protector. It should be remembered that these two men had the final say over all Queensland Aboriginal people's lives. They decided who could marry, they controlled the movements of all Aboriginal people, and they controlled all Aboriginal wages on behalf of the State of Queensland. Aboriginal people had no say in how they lived their lives. The Act also outlawed Aboriginal cultural practices; in fact all aspects of an Aboriginal person's life were managed by this Act and the various people empowered by law to oversee and enforce it. The Act was basically designed for protection and segregation; it was an authoritarian rule by a dominant society. Each colony of Australia had similar protection and segregation laws to Queensland's legislation for Aboriginal people.

These laws continued even after Federation in 1901. Aboriginal people had no rights and no rights to vote. Aboriginal people could not hold positions of authority or work in public administration, could not open bank accounts, or own land. Aboriginal people were subject to special laws, as stated in the Australian Constitution, drawn up in 1901, section 51, sub-section (xxvi), where laws applied to 'people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws'. And with regard to the extent and size of the Aboriginal population, section 127 stated, 'In reckoning the numbers of people in the Commonwealth, or State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted' (Sawer, 1988, p.48).

In reality, Aboriginal people in Australia were considered to be less than human, and to be inferior not only to the white Australians but all people that came to Australia. They were not viewed as worthy of acknowledgement or being recorded in any of the mechanisms of remembering. This narrative will go some way towards humanising a shared history and writing the untold history of the contribution made by the Aboriginal men to Australia's involvement in the 2nd Boer War, 1899-1902.

It's War!

The Queensland Colonial Government was the first Australian government to offer troops to the British War office. It was reported in the tabloids that the Toowoomba contingent was given a send-off at a gala event at Toowoomba Town Hall: 'During the evening the members of the Toowoomba contingent were presented with a flag by a lady, who is an Australian Native' (*Brisbane Courier*, 17 October 1899, p.5). The 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent sailed from Brisbane on the *Cornwell* on 1 November 1899 with 262 men and 284 horses. In all, Queensland sent 2,913 men, but it is unsure if Aboriginal men are included in this figure.

On 20 January 1900 the 2nd Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent sailed from Brisbane on the *Maori King*, with 154 men and 178 horses. In an article in *The Queenslander* called 'Letters from a Mother', the author describes the parade of the troops on their way to the *Maori King*:

Altogether it seemed a rather dismal parade: no military band, and only a few flag decorations. But the M'Adoo Georgian Minstrels made a point by following in the wake of the troops, supplying the much-needed inspirit music and an unexpected comic element also. A conjurer headed the black contingent, dressed in blue breeches and scarlet jumper, and a suave cap, performing wonderful antics with a long rifle. He made it gyrate like a Catherine wheel, and

spin in the air like a top. The coloured ladies followed, dressed in the height of fashion, very much like the pictures one sees in Comic Cuts. (20 January 1900, p.125)

To Track

In 1870, the last of the British Imperial troops left Australian soil; each of the Australian colonies had sufficient troops in their ranks to mount a defence of the colonies. The fear that Russia would invade drove each colony to enlist regulars and volunteers and build forts such as Fort Lytton at the mouth of Brisbane River, Queensland. This fort was completed in 1884. By mid-1885 the talk of war with Russia had evaporated. However, six years later a state of emergency was declared in Queensland, and volunteers were called on to join military units. The colony of Queensland was being threatened by the 'Shearers Strike' of 1891. The armed striking shearers gathered in large camps, with the epicentre of the strike being in Barcaldine in Queensland. The Queensland government sent police officers to the strike, accompanied by the Native Mounted Police Trackers. The Queensland government also ordered troops to support the police to enforce civil law, and this saw the 1st Queenslanders regiment deployed at Barcaldine.

In charge of the 1st Queenslanders was Colonel G.A. French who also served in the 2nd Boer War and was reported in dispatches and accounts of the day as making use of Aboriginal trackers. In one instance he did so in the rescue of a lost officer of the Queensland contingent who, through the assistance of 'a black tracker ... was eventually discovered in a badly scared condition (Lesina 1899, p.7). Typically, the Native Tracker is rarely named in such accounts. It is apparent that Col French would have taken Black Trackers with him to avoid getting lost on the veldt, which has terrain similar to the Australian landscape. Further, in December 1899 Archibald Meston (The Southern Chief Protector of Aboriginal people in Queensland), wrote to the Queensland Premier Hon. R. Philp, offering to

Organise and lead a small body of fifty bushmen, expert horsemen and dead shots, to accompany any further troops sent from Queensland to South Africa. The body, Mr. Meston points out, could act as guerrilla fighters and scouts, his opinion being that a properly organised and reliable body of scouts has been the most serious necessity in the war from the beginning. The Premier has, it is understood, replied to Mr. Meston to the effect that the offer has been referred to the defence force authorities. (*Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1899, pp.5-6)

By the end of 1899, the Australian contingents were in action, relieving the siege of Kimberley. Two hundred men of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, posted to scouting duties, were involved in relief efforts and had several skirmishes with the Boers. Col French led a cavalry unit that included the NSW Lancers, Queensland Mounted Infantry, and NSW Medical Corps in pursuit of General Christiaan de Wet. His contingent also saw action at Koodoosrand and Paardeberg in February 1900. On 29 May 1900, French's contingent took Doornkop, a Boer outpost. Interestingly, when the Boers captured Prieska, a letter published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, written by Cpl A.E. Smith of the NSW Mounted Infantry, describes how 'They locked up all the police in the gaol and one of them got out and so did our black-tracker'. Smith further adds 'I heard that 500 Mounted Infantry and artillery are being sent up from De Aar to strengthen us, so that we will be alright. I have just passed our black-tracker going back to Prieska for news (24 February 1900, p.10).

Albert 'Banjo' Patterson was a war correspondent for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* during the Boer War. He was attached to (the British) General French's column and for nine months was in the thick of the fighting. He provided Australian readers with detailed accounts of the progress of the war in which the Australians were engaged. In an article

printed by the *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill) on 12 May 1900, he writes about the Bushmen's Corps:

One of the Australian regiments brought over a black tracker, and was going to do great things with him. One day news came in that the supply wagons had gone astray. 'Very well,' said the captain, 'send in the black tracker!' 'Please sir, he's lost too!' was the discouraging answer. (*Barrier Miner*, 12 May 1902)

Col French was reported as saying 'that the conditions of warfare in South Africa were such that only by extreme mobility had he been able to meet the Boer with tactics similar to their own, and that was certainly a quality which the proposed contingent would possess' (*The Brisbane Courier* 8 January 1900, p.4). This required mobile horseman and men who could read the tracks left by the Boer commandos for possible ambushes. Aboriginal trackers were the logical men to employ on this task.

The Yarramen (horse)

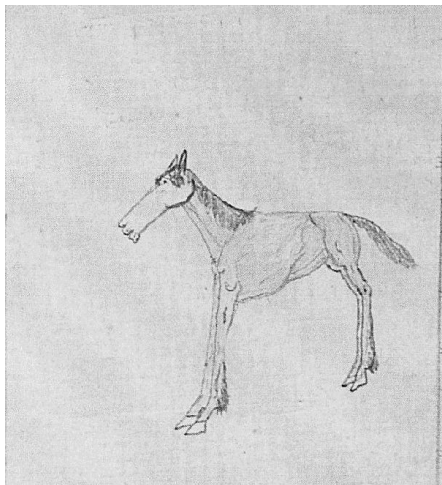


Fig.1: Drawing by Charlie Flannigan, Aboriginal stockman and jockey, of a horse (Yarramen), 1890. (Reproduced by permission of the South Australian Museum)

The Australian horses that went to the Boer War were predominantly Walers, which is an Australian breed of horse. Aboriginal men and women learnt to ride the horse and it was adopted into Aboriginal culture throughout Australia. 'Aborigines became highly successful horse breakers and as members of the Native police, their skills as horsemen was complemented by their bush skills, making them a formidable adversary' (Maynard 2002:3). Aboriginal stockmen were naturally gifted riders; they could navigate by the stars, knew the Aboriginal routes and had a keen sense of direction in daylight. Aboriginal people could track missing people and stock. Aboriginal stockmen's knowledge of the landscape made them indispensable members of any droving team.

The use of Aboriginal people as trackers and Mounted Police (Black Trackers) has a long history in Australia. In 1825 in Queensland, Commandant Captain Peter Bishop of the penal colony, Brisbane Town, paid Aboriginal people tea and sugar to bring in absconders and bushrangers (O'Neill 1978, p.16). In the late 1830s, Aboriginal Mounted Police (trackers) were attached to the border police who consisted mainly of discharged convicts and soldiers. The trackers attached to the border patrols were mainly used to track their own, as Aboriginal people fought a guerrilla war and attacked settlers across the frontier.

In Queensland, as in other colonial states, Aboriginal Mounted Police were used to head hunt Aboriginal leaders of the resistance. Over time a tracker's role had expanded from tracking and finding lost and missing people and stock, to tracking for criminals and identifying and capturing Aboriginal people who were considered troublemakers or criminals (O'Brian 1960, p.37):

Aboriginal trackers were able to live off the land, they lived with the land; the trackers knew how to be one with the land, they moved through it as a spirit and silently, leaving no trace that they were following fugitives. The land tells the tracker the path the fugitive took: every rock, blade of grass and leaves speak to the tracker. The land betrays the fugitive; a tree branch brushed aside betrays the fugitive by the salt from his sweaty hands crystallising on the foliage.

Unidentifiable marks left on the floor of a creek bed betray the fugitive. The tracker knows the land; it has nurtured the tracker from birth. (Kurt Noble, pers. comm. 17 November 2007)

The value of Aboriginal men as members of the police force was soon recognised. Aboriginal men could live off the land and they were ruthless and skilled hunters. Black trackers excelled at hunting men, and Aboriginal men proved themselves to be natural horsemen. However, they were paid less than their white counterparts. In 1848, the first official Native Police Corps was formed in Queensland in an effort to counter the significant offensive that Aboriginal warriors were mounting (O'Brian 1960, p.37). Shortly afterwards, the Mounted Native Police Corps was established, and became an effective tool for dispersing large gatherings of Aboriginal people throughout Queensland.

By 1899, the Aboriginal Mounted Police were part of the very fabric of the Queensland Police force. It would be highly likely that the Black trackers saw service in the mopping up campaign after the siege and capture of the city of Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. The trackers would have quickly adapted themselves to the environment of the South African landscape. The trackers would have also adapted themselves to the style of fighting, as it would have been similar to the guerrilla war they fought against Aboriginal warriors in Australia for their colonial masters. However, the landscape, although similar to Australia in some respects (that is, dry semi-desert, treeless plains) would have been unfamiliar. It would have had a different spirit of place and would have spoken in a different whisper to the trackers. They would not have known the stories of the land and they would not have known how to relate to the land. However, a Black tracker's training and skills would have transferred across the sea to this alien landscape – the kopjes and open veldt – which had a different Dreaming and spirit story that the trackers had to learn to read.

By 1901, as we know from the experience of the First World War, Aboriginal men were signing up to serve overseas as fettlers and horse handlers. As reported in the *Age* on 18 July 1901, Lord Kitchener sent a request to Prime Minister Barton requesting good trackers (Series number A8 1901/30/12). An article published in the *South Australian Advertiser* on 8 January 1902, titled 'Aborigines for South Africa' suggested that 'King Jacky of Turramurra, and King Tommy of Binalong, aforementioned warriors bold and lusty, could be advantageously employed in South Africa' (p.8). Ministerial correspondence from the war department and Prime Minister's department 1901-1902 to Kitchener in Pretoria attests to the fact that trackers were organised and sent to South Africa. Mr Willis, a stock agent, was given the responsibility to organise the trackers/bushmen, and horses and equipment (A8, 1902/25/71). On the 18 March 1902, Barton wrote to Kitchener stating that 'Willis will despatch 50 Bush Trackers by the *S.S. Euryalus* carrying a consignment of horses for the High Commissioner, and due to leave Sydney about the 24th instant' (Barton 1902, A8, 1902/25/71). The *Euryalus* departed Sydney on 14 March 1902 and arrived in Durban on 21 April 1902.

The shipping manifest for departure and list of passengers of the *Euryalus* lists only four men (along with the horses), described as tradesmen and stock agents. Logic would suggest that a cargo of 200 horses would require more than four men to feed, water and care for them while on route to South Africa. A number of hustlers or horse handlers would be necessary, and it is my assertion that these men were Aboriginal trackers who weren't named on the passenger list. This silence pervades all the records. John O'Sullivan, in his *Mounted Police in NSW*, writes that over 50 members of the NSW Mounted Police served in the Boer War and that they 'were unsurpassed as horsemen' (p.126).

Individual Black Trackers

A story that has been retold by Kennedy in *The Black Police of Queensland* (1902) is reproduced below as reported in the *Kalgoorlie Western Argus* (4 November 1902, p.43) in its- ‘Notes from London (From Our Special Representative)’:

The best of Mr. Kennedy’s tracker stories is the record of an actual test to which a black named ‘Billy’ was put. Five officers, some afoot and some others mounted, started in different directions, ‘Billy’ being meanwhile locked up. On being released the black took one track after the other. He described how and where: one officer had dismounted to light his pipe, how another had been thrown and caught his horse within a mile, and how a third had tied his horse to a tree and climbed up, how one of the pedestrians had become lame – and how he had walked in his socks. The truth of the tracker’s interpretation of such signs as he had seen them was confirmed by the officers. The author shows that ‘Billy’ not only used his eyes. He drew inferences. He was an inductive logician.



Fig.2: Freddy King of the 1st ACH 1902 (photo of the contingent in Australian Town and Country Journal, Saturday 15 February 1902, p.31)

In 1902, *The Sydney Morning Herald* headlined ‘Two Black Trackers Taken’: ‘two black trackers, E. Davis and F. King [see Fig.2] were taken on their strength’ (p.7). Freddy King served with the 1st Australian Commonwealth Horse. He would have sailed out on the *Custodian* or the *Manchester* – merchant ships bound for South Africa on 16-18 February 1902. Both King and Davis saw action at the Natal border and West Transvaal. Neither men are recorded in Murray’s nominal roll for the Boer War.

A cultural heritage mapping report from Tasmania, *We who are not here: Aboriginal people of the Huon and*

Channel Today, recorded oral histories from the local Aboriginal people. Robyn Friend recorded this story:

Billy Miller, he was Charlie’s brother. Big fat fellow. He gave me a beautiful knife. He got it from the Boer War –

cause I got on pretty well with him ... Now old Billy Miller wasn’t black but dark. Beautiful complexion he had ... We use to fish together, and he would tell me stories about the war, and old days. (Friend 1992, p.66)

Billy Miller is also not recorded in the nominal rolls of the 2nd Boer War; his service details are left out of the historical records. However, he is remembered by his community in Tasmania. On the other hand, Alexander Paul Murdock from Tasmania is recorded in the rolls. He is listed as a private and served with the 1st Tasmanian Contingent. Not much is known of Murdock after he returned from service (Murray 1911, p.550).

For over 20 years Aboriginal communities have recorded their communities’ personal histories through the medium of Cultural Heritage Mapping projects. Cultural Heritage Mapping projects are important – Aboriginal communities are now recording biographical details of people who have contributed to the fabric of local and regional histories. They tell the human histories of people and are based on oral histories and archival resources, such as the story of Billy Miller from Huon in Tasmania. Suzanne Kenny (2002) published one such cultural heritage report on the *Mount Tomah: Darug Aboriginal Connections* for the

Aboriginal people from the Western Sydney area. The survey used a combination of oral histories through interviews, newspaper reports and archival sources. In recording the oral histories she writes about the 'Warrior tradition of the Darug' for both the Darug men and women who served in the Australian armed forces and colonial forces of NSW.

Kenny provides personal details of two men who served in the colonial forces. One of these is Gerome Locke was 'great great grandson of Yarramundi and son of Maria Locke. Gerome served in the NSW volunteer Rifles during 1880s and in the First World War' (Kenny 2002, p.15). It is possible that Gerome went to the 2nd Boer War, but there are no details of him serving in this conflict. However, Kenny provides details of Trooper William James Stubbings, service number 1533, of D Sqn of the 3rd NSW Mounted Rifles. Stubbings went to the Boer War with the 3rd NSW Mounted Rifles' B and D squadrons (Kenny 2002, p.15). B and D squadrons left Sydney on 15-17 March 1901, on troop transport *Maplemore* with 1017 troopers and officers and 1000 horses. The 3rd NSW mounted Rifles served in South Africa from April 1901 to April 1902 and saw action in the Orange Free State, East Transvaal and at Langverwacht (24 February 1902).

In addition to the recording of oral histories, there are Aboriginal families who remember the stories told from the Elders among their family members who distinguished themselves and added to the fabric of Australian history. For example, Ms Virginia Wyles, an Aboriginal woman from Townsville, tells a story of her great grandfather George (Jack) Madigan who enlisted for the 2nd Boer War. Ms Wyles told me that her grandfather had a skin disease that made the pigment of his skin pink. The Boer War nominal rolls show his enlistment details as blue-eyed and skin colour as flesh. His service details are that he enlisted in the 7th Australian Commonwealth Horse in Queensland, rank Private, service number 311; there is no other physical description of him. Ms Wyles has told me he is buried at the new Ingham cemetery. Ms Wyles' parents buried George Madigan in a pauper's grave in approximately 1969. There is no headstone to remember him or to remember his service. Jack sailed out on 19 May 1902 and arrived in back in Australia on 2 August 1902, but did not see any action due to the ending of the war on 31 May.

Craig Wilcox (2002, pp.39 and 330) includes an account of Aboriginal serviceman Robert Charles Searle (pp.39/330). His details are service number 9, rank private, unit 4th Western Australian Mounted Infantry Contingent (Murray 1911, p.417).

With the cessation of the conflict and the signing of the peace accord, troops returned home. However, a large number of Australians who joined the various contingents in South Africa requested repatriation back to Australia. In 1907 George Valder, Commercial Agent for New South Wales in South Africa, was sent to repatriate distressed Australians back to Australia. He spent three months in South Africa and details his activities. In his *Report on the Repatriation of Australians from South Africa (1907)* to the Australian Prime Minister, he lists the names of all people, the Steamers, and those from Australian states who were repatriated. He also reports on Aboriginal Australians (and several half-castes) wishing to be repatriated under the heading of 'The Colour Question'. Valder details the issues with the *Immigration Restitution Act 1901*, for repatriating Aboriginal Australians to Australia:

As the Immigration Restriction Act states that coloured persons from Australia cannot be allowed to return, unless they have, prior to leaving the commonwealth, obtained a permit; I advised these applicants accordingly. (Valder 1907, pp.17-18)

Valder writes to Prime Minister Alfred Deakin seeking advice on the issue, to which the Deakin replies that ‘all coloured persons born in Australia must obtain a special permit from the Commonwealth, before they could be permitted to land’ (Valder 1907, pp.17-18).

Conclusion

‘Queensland Soldiers Leave for Boer War’. Brisbane, November 2, 1899; when the history of Queensland comes to be written, the event of yesterday will stand out prominently as one of the most patriotic movements ever by one of Britannia’s colonies’. (*Queensland Gazette* 1899, vol.3 no.16)

For the better part of the twentieth century Aboriginal people were not legally citizens of this country under Australian law. Federation of Australia in 1901 and past Australian colonial policies had the effect of disenfranchising Aboriginal people from their own country. We can see this in Valder’s report of 1907, which identifies several Aboriginal troopers who went to the 2nd Boer War before federation but had to get permits to return to Australia simply because they were Aboriginal.

To this day, the story of the Mounted Black Trackers who fought in the Anglo-Boer war has not been written. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the men went to this conflict as regulars and as trackers. These men endured the same conditions as the other soldiers. They proved on the field of battle that they were equal to their fellow servicemen. They were intelligent; they were able to reason and combine their training as mounted soldiers with their traditional initiation. They combined their knowledge of bushcraft, Aboriginal lore, and the traits of humans to locate hidden traps and hunt for their quarry. After the hostilities in South Africa had come to an end, it is not known whether Aboriginal trackers returned home or were left stranded in South Africa. By the decree of the then prime minister of Australia, Edmund Barton, and the newly adopted *Immigration Restriction Act, 1901*, their repatriation would have required a special permit and there is no evidence that this was issued. The fact that the Aboriginal trackers could have paid their own fare back to Australia is unimaginable, as they would have been poorly paid. As yet their status as soldiers is undetermined so their pay scale is also unknown.

These Aboriginal trackers were sons, brothers and uncles. It is possible they were even fathers. And they were all Australians. As with many other unknown soldiers, their story needs to be told. Australians have a debt to pay by remembering them and their contribution; the story is part of our shared history that should be known and acknowledged by all Australians.

As members of the armed services these Aboriginal trackers were treated as equals to white servicemen, probably their first experience of equality. However, once their service ended their status as second-class citizens returned. They would have endured the same prejudice, bigotry and discrimination they experienced before enlisting to serve their country. Australians owe a debt to all Aboriginal people who served their country. Those who did not return gave their lives so that our Australian way of life and values could continue. Some may have given their lives in the vain hope that conditions for Aboriginal people at home would change.

Many of the Aboriginal men and women who served in the Australian armed services did so with distinction as trackers/scouts, as light horsemen, pilots and nurses. It is not known how many Aboriginal men or women served in the Anglo-Boer war, but records in the Australian

War memorial indicate that ‘400-500 Aboriginal men and women served in the First World War. In the Second World War as many as 6,000 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders served as enlisted servicemen’ (<http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/aborigines/index.htm>).

Aboriginal men also served in Korea, Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam. Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women serve their country as enlisted men and women.

Nulpar cungle cooba (We will remember)

Gerome Locke is my name
 Australia is my Nation
 Blacktown is my dwelling place
 And heaven is my expectation
 When I am dead and in my grave
 And all my bones are rotten
 This little card will show me
 When I am quite forgotten.
 If I this card do lend to you
 And you off me do borrow
 And when you are thoroughly looked at it
 Please return it to some tomorrow

A poem written by Libertine (Nellie) Locke on the back of the photograph of her brother which was taken when he was a member of the NSW Rifles in 1880 (in Kenney 2002, p.15).

Aboriginal men who went to the 2nd Boer War

Confirmed

John Alexander Barnes, Pte 493 C Coy NSWIB (Murray 1911, p.96) (born Tolmie) – provided by David Deasey, Victoria

Arthur Wellington, Pte 925 5VMR (Murray 1911, p.286) – provided by David Deasey

George Madigan, Pte 311 7ACH – provided by great great granddaughter, Virginia Wyles

Robert Charles Searle, Pte 9 4WAMI (Murray 1911, p.417) – confirmed by Peter Bakker

Alexander Paul Murdock, Pte 116 1Tas (Murray 1911, p.550) – provided by Colleen O’Leary

E. Davis, Tracker NSW (*Sydney Morning Herald* 17 Jan 1902 p.7)

F. King, Tracker NSW (*Sydney Morning Herald* 17 Jan 1902 p.7)

Williams James Stubbings, Trooper 1533, D Sqn 3rd NSWMR, Darug (Murray 1911, p.134)

Unconfirmed

M. Grogan, Pte 330, 4QIB (Murray 1911, p.486)

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GEORGE PATTERSON: NSW SUDAN CONTINGENT AND TRANSVAAL CONSPIRATOR

Trevor Turner¹

Many former members of the NSW Contingent to the Sudan in 1885 later rose to some prominence and reputation in both military and civilian circles. Most, however, simply disappeared into the hum-drum of daily life, their Sudan experience being the highlight of an otherwise ordinary life. Then again, some men appear to have had an adventurous spirit and moved from adventure to adventure. One such man was George Patterson, late colour sergeant and private (in that order) of D Company of the NSW Sudan Contingent. However, George Patterson remains something of an enigma. Unlike other members, he does not appear in any published list or roll of the contingent prior to embarkation.

The *Sydney Daily Telegraph* of 3 March 1885 states:

Yesterday, the roll calls, showing the actual names and strength of the infantry, which embarks to-day, was completed. Two more Bandsmen were sworn in, and two Privates, one for D Company and one for C Company, whilst 59 men were discharged as 'unfit for the service required'. No doubt a good many men were disappointed at this unexpected turn of fortune's wheel at the last moment; but a choice had to be made, and the weakest inevitably went to the wall. The names of these men have been taken from the sub-joined list and the names of four new recruits added, so that the following will stand as a correct statement of the Infantry Forces.²

It would seem from the above that George Patterson was the last private enlisted into D Company. Accordingly, perhaps, this is why his name does not appear in the 'subjoined list', nor any other published list of the NSW contingent at that time.

No Attestation and Enrolment form could be found for Patterson at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.³ The only information on George Patterson comes from the *NSW Sudan Contingent Regimental & Contingent Orders* and the *NSW Sudan Contingent Medal Roll*. 506 Private George Patterson enlisted into the NSW Sudan Contingent at Sydney on 2 March 1885 and was allotted to D Company on the same day. He was promoted provisional Colour-Sergeant on the following day, and was notified in Contingent Orders. The contingent sailed the same day, 3 March 1885, from Sydney aboard the chartered ship *SS Iberia*.⁴

George Patterson's provisional appointment as colour sergeant and those of the other initial provisional colour sergeants of the contingent were formally notified in Brigade Orders of 7 March 1885. They were Pte J.P. Liggins from 23 February 1885, Pte A.J. Brady from 27 February 1885, Pte George Patterson from 2 March 1885 and Sgt W.C. Shipway from 3 March. Only Liggins remained a colour sergeant upon the contingent's return. On 16 March 1885 Brigade Orders further notified and confirmed that the regimental number allocated to provisional Colour Sergeant George Patterson was 506.

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

² *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1885.

³ AWM 2 [2] Attestation & Enlistment forms – NSW Sudan Contingent.

⁴ AWM 10 NSW Sudan Contingent Regimental & Contingent Orders, SS *IBERIA* Feb-April 1885, p.24. WO100/68 NSW Sudan Contingent Medal Roll.

It was also notified in Brigade Orders of 7 March 1885 that all provisional appointments of NCOs in the NSW Infantry and Ambulance Corps were to be submitted with recommendation for confirmation or otherwise by Commanding Officers on 23 March. However, this date was amended by Brigade Orders of 17 March 1885:

With reference to para 6 of B.O. of the 7th inst the Officer Commanding NSWI will call upon Officers Commanding companies to furnish a nominal return of provisional non com officers stating if in their opinion they consider them fit for their present positions. The officer commanding the infantry after adding any remarks he may think necessary, will transmit these returns awarded to date to the Brigade Office by the 15th ... instead of the 23rd instant indicated in the Brigade Orders above quoted. This extension (?) of date should not prevent the name of any man found unfit for the rank of N.C. Officer being at once brought forward in view of his reverting to the ranks. All provisional N.C. Officers who are finally recommended by the Regimental Authorities and Commanding Officers of companies if practicable will be called upon to pass an examination prior to their appointment being so confirmed and will be distinctly warned in a Regimental Order to this effect. The subjects viz, Detail of duties, Duties on Guard and Picquet, Drill, as in field exercises, and Rifle exercises, will also be notified in Regimental Orders. It is obvious also that certain educational tests will be necessary.⁵

Things did not go well for George Patterson. Several paragraphs later there appears the following entry in Brigade Orders, page 51, paragraph 4, of 19 March 1885:

The provisional appointment of Color Sergeant George Patterson NSWI is hereby cancelled & he will revert to private from this date.'

It is not clear if George Patterson was not recommended to retain his rank and therefore not able to attempt the test, or if he simply failed those tests.

In fact, 506 provisional Colour-Sergeant George Patterson and 505 provisional Sergeant Charles Reginald Poole, both of D Company, are the only two members of the contingent listed in Brigade Orders as having their provisional rank cancelled and reverting to private following the notice of the required recommendations and examinations – though clearly others followed. Provisional Sergeant Henry Guersin had his rank cancelled by Contingent Orders on 7 March – only five days after sailing. However, it is also noted that the provisional ranks of Sgt Shaw and Cpl Runnegar, of the Ambulance corps, were confirmed on 23 March in Brigade Orders.

Provisional Sergeant James Meenan was then appointed provisional Colour-Sergeant, D Company, on 20 March 1885, 'vice Patterson reverted to ranks'. Thirty-six-year-old Meenan had been a former Drill Instructor and colour-sergeant with the 1st Regiment, NSW Volunteer Infantry prior to embarking with the contingent. His new provisional rank was also not confirmed and Meenan eventually returned to Australia as a sergeant with D company. Sgt Meenan was present at the parade held at the Agricultural Society's grounds, Moore Park, Sydney on Saturday, 13 February 1886, to receive his Sudan Medal and clasp 'Suakin 1885' from the Governor of NSW – as was former provisional sergeant, now private, Charles Poole. However, Pte George Patterson was not. As quickly as he had arrived on the Australian military scene, George Patterson had disappeared.⁶

On 15 May 1899, eight Johannesburg Uitlanders or 'Outlanders' (expatriate workers) – seven Englishmen and a Dane – were arrested by the Boer police at Johannesburg for boldly

⁵ Ibid., p.27.

⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February 1886.

conspiring to enrol 2,000 men for military service against the Transvaal Government. The alleged intention was that these secretly enrolled men were to be armed in Natal, then return to the Rand, and at a given signal seize and hold the fort at Johannesburg for twenty-four hours, pending the arrival of British troops from the nearest colony. Significantly, all the arrested conspirators were represented by the Boers as being former officers of the British Army.⁷

Those accused were stated as ‘Colonel’ Richard Floyd Nicholls and ‘Captain’ George Patterson, with ‘Lieutenants’ Charles Agar-Ellis, John Allen Mitchell, Edward James Tremlett, Robert Poole Hooper and Jan Fries. Of these accused ‘officers’ only Hooper has been identified as having previously held a commission.⁸ Many initially viewed the affair as one trumped up by the Boer police and that the men arrested were simply irresponsible nobodies with fictitious military titles fixed by the Boers; that this had been done with the intention of discrediting the British government in the eyes of the European and international powers. The news of these arrests, however, caused great excitement throughout South Africa – and briefly, around the world.⁹

The Transvaal Incident – or ‘The Army Plot’ as it was called – caused questions to be asked in the British Parliament.¹⁰ The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Joseph Chamberlain, in the House of Commons on 19 May 1899, regarding the Transvaal arrests, confirmed that all of the men arrested, excepting Tremlett and Fries, were formerly non-commissioned officers in the British Army. He stated:

I received last night the following telegram from Sir Alfred Milner: British agent report, following are names prisoners: Richard Floyd Nicholls, 37, miner, Cornishman; George Patterson, 40, Irish; both are ex-Non-Commissioned Officers British Cavalry; Charles Agar-Ellis, 27, ex-Colour Sergeant British Infantry, Englishman; John Allen Mitchell, 46, ex-Sergeant-Major Royal Horse Artillery, Englishman; Edward James Tremlett, 30, civilian, Englishman; Robert Poole Hooper, 46, ex-military man, served in India and Matabeleland as Non-Commissioned Officer; Jean Pries, 40, Dane. Prisoners charged with high treason, brought before Landdrost’s Court yesterday, remanded formally for fortnight. I have no other information, except that President Kruger stated to Mr. Greene that there was no proof that the persons arrested had been officers in the British Army, and that in any case the incident would not be allowed to disturb friendly relations. I may add that the President of the South African League has publicly repudiated, on behalf of the league, any connection, direct or indirect, with the enlistment of persons for any purpose whatever in any state or colony.¹¹

The confirmation that President Kruger had no proof that the prisoners were former British officers, and that the incident would not be allowed to disturb the friendly relations existing would be critical to the outcome.

The two principal accused self-styled officers, ‘Colonel’ Richard Floyd Nicholls and ‘Captain’ George Patterson, were later stated in court to have seen service in the British Army – Nicholls in the Zulu War, of which no record can be found, and Patterson with the ‘Australian Soudan Contingent’. This previous Sudan service by Patterson was re-affirmed

⁷ *Kansas City Journal*, May 17, 1899.

⁸ WO 100/77 Medal Roll BSA Company – Matabeleland & Rhodesia.

⁹ William Harding, *War in South Africa and the Dark Continent from savagery to civilization: The strange story of a weird world from the earliest ages to the present, including the war with the Boers*, 1899, pp. 339-341.

¹⁰ G.N. Van den Bergh ‘Secret Service in the South African Republic 1895-1900’, *The South African Military History Society Military History Journal*, vol.3, no.2.

¹¹ HANSARD, Commons Sitting, London of 19 May 1899.

by the detective who arrested Patterson. He deposed in court that ‘the prisoner Patterson was an Australian, and was a member of the New South Wales contingent, which volunteered for Imperial service and went to the Soudan in 1885.’¹² It was also stated in court in evidence given by co-conspirator Edward Tremlett that Patterson was ‘a former member of the NSW Contingent to the Sudan’.

Following a lengthy and intensive investigation these men – all British subjects except for Fries – of whom Nicholls and Patterson were the main accused, were arrested on charges of espionage and conspiracy. At the beginning of 1899 the Transvaal Police claimed there were strong indications that Patterson was recruiting Uitlanders in Johannesburg for an assault on the fort and mounted police barracks which were to be held until military aid from outside the Republic arrived. This was described by many as nothing but an unimaginative re-echoing of the aims of the failed Jameson Raid of 1895, and apparently unfounded rumours of such plots were common. Because of this, it was claimed that Patterson was initially subjected to no more than routine inquiry. It was further claimed by the Boers that Patterson’s plotting were not limited to back-room talk. His was an active movement involving secret meetings, recruitment, fund-raising, and attempts to obtain plans of the fort from disgruntled former police officers. He had, allegedly, also gathered a small amount of correspondence relating to couriers, arms and ammunition, and the dispatch of British army officers to take charge.¹³

However, the evidence was weak and when the preliminary court hearing was concluded all the ‘conspirators’, with the exception of the three principals – Nicholls, Patterson, and Hooper – were discharged. Significantly, when brought into court for the first time it was reported by many observers that, far from having a military bearing, the prisoners, almost without exception, had the appearance and air of adventurers and loafers!¹⁴ The charge of conspiracy, on which these three remaining men were committed for trial in Pretoria, was then reduced to one of ‘exciting to riot’, but this also was soon abandoned. Tremlett, Ellis and Mitchell had become State witnesses and testified against Nicholls and Patterson. It seems from the court transcripts that they were actively working against the group and each other from the very outset.¹⁵

The whole affair became quite discreditable and confused. There was a great deal of subterfuge and intrigue. It was then claimed, as had been alluded to previously, that these men, including George Patterson, were spies and agents in the service of the Transvaal Government. It became apparent to many that the Transvaal Government had sought to make the impression that the British War Office was engaged in a conspiracy against the South African Republic. The Johannesburg correspondent of the *London Morning Post* reported that

facts had arisen since the arrests of the ‘former British officers’ on charge of conspiracy to promote a rising in the Transvaal, left no doubt that the alleged plot was ‘engineered by Boer officials to divert attention from the real demands of the Outlanders’.¹⁶

In an attempt to prove George Patterson’s pro-British sympathies his private letters were also taken when he was arrested by the Boers. However, these papers dealt with purely private matters. They held no bearing on the case, but were still read at his trial. These letters of Patterson’s were several years old and were from a number prominent people whom

¹² *The West Australian*, 13 June 1899, p.5.

¹³ Van den Bergh, op. cit.

¹⁴ Hon David Mills QC, *The English in Africa*, Toronto, 1900, p.265.

¹⁵ *The West Australian*, 25 July 1899, p.5.

¹⁶ Harding, op. cit., p.341.

Patterson had once known. These included Lord Rosebery, the British Prime Minister from 1894 to 1895, a man who held strong political views on Africa. There was also a telegram from Cecil Rhodes in respect of a cure for horse sickness! Clearly Patterson was a man who had enjoyed the confidence of many influential people – and probably took advantage at every opportunity.¹⁷

It transpired through the courts that Patterson was a true adventurer and not driven by any genuine or deep founded moral ideology. He was in fact in the pay of Mr D.E. Schutte, the Commissioner of the Transvaal Police. It was revealed that almost from the very beginning of the proceedings taken by the Transvaal Police that Patterson was in their pay and was to receive substantial payment for his assistance, particularly for every concealed firearm which he might discover.¹⁸

The events, as they were uncovered, displayed quite clearly, as was broadly hinted at the time, that the Transvaal Government never truly believed in the so-called plot, but jumped at the opportunity – even if it did not create it – of drawing a red herring across the trail of the troublesome and continuing ‘Uitlander’ grievances. In fact, international opinion was correct – that the conspiracy was primarily one created by the Boer officials, in which Police Commissioner Schutte was the prime mover. Eventually Schutte was forced to resign, particularly when it was found he had implicated President Kruger’s son, for his own purposes, in the conspiracy.¹⁹

During the course of their trial these conspirators were identified and described from a number of sources, in a confusing blend of fact and fiction. None of the accused men’s stated backgrounds were at any time verified to a satisfactory level, including Patterson’s. They were simply dismissed with vague and unsubstantiated references such as ‘formerly of the Lancers’ or ‘formerly non-commissioned officer in a cavalry regiment,’ and ‘ex-colour-sergeant in an infantry regiment’. It appears this was a deliberate attempt to maintain the confusion and deception by the Boers. The details gleaned on the conspirators – both fact and fictional – are summarised as follows.

- Richard Floyd Nicholls. Age 37. A miner describing himself as a ‘colonel’, claimed to have been a former non-commissioned officer in a cavalry regiment. He was a Cornishman and born at Perranuthnoe, Cornwall in 1862, but also claimed to be a citizen of the United States of America from Michigan. He was further described ‘as one of those Cornish miners who flocked to the Rand in its early days’. He was also stated as previously being a member of a Cornish Volunteer corps, and was a member of the Salvation Army. It was also claimed that he had previously served in the Zulu War.
- George Patterson. Age 40. Described as an Irishman and ‘formerly non-commissioned officer in a cavalry regiment,’ and also as ‘formerly of the Lancers’ and by the *New York Times* as ‘a butcher and labour agitator’. He was also stated by the Boer detective who arrested him, and his co-conspirator Tremlett, as ‘a former member of the NSW Contingent to the Sudan’. Patterson was in fact the chief ‘conspirator’ and puppet master.

¹⁷ Mills, op. cit., p.266.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.270.

¹⁹ *The New York Times*, 23 May 1899.

- Charles Agar-Ellis. Age 27. Described as an Englishman and ex-colour-sergeant in an infantry regiment. Ellis is also alleged to have been, until recently, a private detective at Johannesburg. It was suggested that he may have been the detective who unearthed the plot and that he was also an informer.
- John Allen Mitchell. Age 46. Stated to have been an Englishman and ex-sergeant-major in the Royal Horse Artillery, and lately a store-keeper. It was also stated that Mitchell had been, at one stage, reduced to the state of a pauper and had survived by begging!
- Edward James Tremlett. Age 30. Born in Kent, England in 1868. Initially described as being English of a non-military background. It was later believed that Tremlett may previously have held a military commission as captain of volunteers in Cape Colony, as it was stated that he was often addressed as ‘captain’ prior to his involvement in this affair. At the time of his arrest he was a mining agent. He was also described as a ‘secret agent’ and was in the pay of the Transvaal police. No man by this name has been found in the medal rolls for colonial units in South Africa.
- Robert Poole Hooper. Age 46. Stated in court to have been an Englishman and ex-non-commissioned officer in India and Matabeleland and now described as a carpenter. In fact Hooper had served as a lieutenant in the First Matabele War 1893-94 with Raaff’s Column, and is listed on the British South Africa Company’s medal roll as being entitled to the medal for the engagement at Singuesi. Hooper had been born in Norfolk, England in 1853, the son of Reverend Robert Poole Hooper. He had been educated at Uppingham School, Rutland, from 1866 to 1869. Originally commissioned into the 1st Royal Lanarkshire Militia in 1871, he later served as a lieutenant with the 13th Regiment, Prince Albert’s (Somersetshire Light Infantry), from 1876 to 1885. Returning to the United Kingdom after his release with the other conspirators, Hooper appears in the 1901 census as being a resident at a boarding house at Belton, Lincolnshire. He was then aged 48, and described as being single and ‘living on own means’. He died in 1921 in Devon, aged 68.
- Jean Fries. Age 40. A Danish subject, but also referred to as a former sergeant.

The only ‘innocent’ from among the entire group of ‘conspirators’ appears to be the naively self-styled ‘Colonel’ Richard Floyd Nicholls – a puppet of Patterson. It appears that Nicholls, and his genuine sympathies for their alleged cause, had been used by Patterson to give the affair an air of credibility. Nicholls emerges from the trial and intrigue as the only genuine and honest man in the group. He was an ordinary miner and an idealist, with a keen interest for military affairs. He no doubt entertained a genuine idea of forming some kind of organisation for the protection of the non-Boer residents in the Transvaal and was easily manipulated by Patterson.

Soon released from gaol, all the conspirators quickly disappeared. Only Hooper could be found as having immediately returned to England. However, the innocent or naive idealist, Nicholls, did not remain so for long. He enlisted almost immediately upon the declaration of the Boer War. He initially served as 528 Sgt Richard Floyd Nicholls with the Imperial Light Infantry. Whilst a sergeant with the Imperial Light Infantry he also served from 1 October 1900 to 1 May 1901 with the Provisional Transvaal Police. Upon the disbandment of the

Imperial Light Infantry he re-enlisted and continued to serve as a sergeant with the Imperial Light Horse. Further service followed as a trooper in the Commander-in-Chief's Body Guard.

For his long and difficult war service Nicholls received the Queen's South Africa Medal with clasps 'Orange Free State', 'Transvaal', 'Relief of Ladysmith', 'Tugela Heights' and 'Laing's Nek'. He also received the King's South Africa Medal with clasps 'South Africa 1901' and 'South Africa 1902'. This was difficult and hard service indeed. Nicholls eventually returned to England where he died at Hammersmith, London, on 21 June 1933. None of the other conspirators has yet been positively identified as having service in South Africa with any irregular unit – but that is not to say they didn't.

Due to the common nature of his name, nothing further has yet been found as to the fate of George Patterson – late of the NSW Sudan Contingent and Transvaal conspirator. He is not listed among those Australians who served during the Boer War from units raised in Australia – though it is very likely that such a motivated man and ready opportunist did serve again in the war with a South African irregular unit. There are no annotations or indications on the NSW Sudan Medal Roll to indicate that George Patterson received his medals. Tantalisingly, a G. Patterson also served in both the Imperial Light Infantry and the Commander-in-Chief's Body Guard. Unlike Nicholls, it is doubted any service Patterson may have rendered in any unit would have been as hard-serving and selfless.

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WO 100/77 Medal Roll BSA Company – Matabeleland & Rhodesia.

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CAPTURE IN THE DESERT: 3 ANTI-TANK REGIMENT AT MECHILI 1941 AND ALAMEIN 1942

Katrina Kittel¹

*This is no story of heroes, but of plain common ordinary men,
Who came from the farms - cities and towns
To fight for the so-called freedom of men
Remember the war in the desert
Back and forth – in and out – to and fro
Both sides took thousands of prisoners
Your luck was out an' behind wire you'd go*

Harold Sanderson, NZ 18th Bn²

Frank Sharp would have felt the frustration swirling in his head. There he was, in the North African desert, at the old fort of Mechili, about fifty miles south of Derna, Libya. It was 8 April 1941. Not long before, he had narrowly escaped bullets fired at a truck that he was in. This WW1 decorated veteran was confronting the German officer before him, in yet another world war and at another faraway place. 'I am sorry to be taking prisoner a man of your age,' Frank was surprised to hear. Quick with his retort, and with just enough dollop of optimism, Frank quipped, 'When we win this bloody war, you come to Australia and I'll buy you a beer.'³ The German officer was never to forget the words of this Aussie prisoner.

Frank, together with his son Keith, were now prisoners of war, 'in the bag'. Their troop, together with Indian soldiers, had stayed on to battle the attacking German Army. The story of the part played by this Australian troop of 3 Anti-Tank Regiment at Mechili in its rearguard action is just one of many gallant stories in our desert warfare history. April 1941 at Mechili, and July 1942 were periods of strong memory to those gunners and officers who were taken prisoners of war, handed over to the Italians by their German captors, in what was considered to be an Italian theatre of war in the North African desert.

Fighting alongside father and son Sharp were five from Moree – Ron Fitzgerald, Ron McIntosh, Lloyd Ledingham, and brothers Carl and Paul Carrigan. The five had enlisted together on 26 June 1940 at Moore Park in Sydney. Like most of the young men who enlisted, they felt long on enthusiasm, but short on knowledge of the future that they were going to meet.⁴ Two Humphries men from Wee Waa had lined up to enlist the day after the five from Moree, on 27 June 1940, at a recruitment centre closer to home at Tamworth. In the queue behind George Humphries was Lloyd Moule, from Deepwater. George Humphries became a gunner, as would his brother, Hilton, who would strike up mateship with fellow layer on their gun, Alan 'Snow' Garbutt, from Wingello. Alan was not to forget that his mate

¹ Katrina Kittel's interest in this area of research developed from the experience of her father, a 2/3rd Anti-Tank Gunner who was captured at Ruin Ridge, El Alamein in 1942. The experience of escaped Australian POWs in Italy is now her research interest, with the view to writing a book on this area. She completed a double History Major in her undergraduate studies, has a Master's degree, and works on a casual basis as a librarian at the University of Newcastle.

² Harold Sanderson, extract from *War*, 1968 poem, courtesy of the Sanderson family. Harold served with the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and was one of the Kiwi POW evaders in Italy.

³ Don Sharp, personal communication with the author, 2011. Don is son to Frank Sharp, and brother to Keith Sharp. The German officer came to Australia post-war and successfully located Frank Sharp for 'that beer'.

⁴ Cate Carrigan, *Italy to the Alps: A wartime odyssey*, unpublished manuscript. Cate is daughter to Carl Carrigan and niece to Paul Carrigan.

Hilton was killed during their rearguard action at Mechili. Alan honoured his mate by naming his son Rex Hilton.⁵

Gunner Colin ‘Ted’ Coppock, another Moree man, was clearly not happy about their plight at Mechili. Despite big German tanks closing in, and ammunition nearly spent, Ted defiantly gave a typical Australian exclamation in reply to his wounded mate who pleaded that it was time they gave up. Ted should have listened to his mate; within hours, he was caught in fire, killed in action. Another fallen gunner, Edward Howe, was being taken away to a makeshift hospital in the fort, and he called to his mates for a drink. Bombardier from Mudgee, Vince Rayner, was also wounded in the same barrage but he made sure Edward was to get his drink. Despite best efforts, Edward succumbed to battle that day.

Meanwhile, Lt Cant took over the Boyes anti-tank rifle, alongside Gnr ‘Bluey’ Baptist.⁶ Antiquated weaponry was not helping their efforts, and ‘the elephant gun out of Clive of India’s time’ was no exception.⁷ The barrel had become so hot from the firing that they could not hold the bolt to close it. Bluey homed in on the problem by picking up a stone from underfoot, and banged it shut. The Mechili anti-tank soldiers were feeling the sting of battle. Yet, with a bit of luck, badly wounded Gnr Joe Potter tried to uphold his reputation as the wildest driver in the desert. Joe, in his battle-worn truck, got a group of seven men out of the line. As he lurched the wounded truck through enemy lines, every tyre was riddled with bullets. With one badly injured arm, Joe relied on Lt Charlie Johnson to change the truck gears, until the motor gave out altogether. The truck was spent, and Joe was not faring so well either. In the middle of nowhere, raising a white towel to approaching armoured vehicles seemed the only way out.⁸

It was not going to be an easy few days of fighting. Fire was heavy and sandstorms brewed. The function of an anti-tank regiment was to protect the infantry from tank attack. But at Mechili, the 3 Anti-Tank regiment was only half strength, with only Headquarters, 10th and 11th Batteries available. The regiment’s 9th and 12th Batteries were scheduled to join them later. Later was going to be too late, however. Gnr Dick Gill was aware of latest intelligence that German panzer divisions were now in Libya under the personal command of General Rommel.⁹ The Germans were not running the risk that North Africa could come under control of the Allies. In fact, requests had been sent in by the Germans, and from Rommel, for the Allies to give up. Rommel’s messenger was bluntly told by the recipients what he could do with his message. Why should they be worried? After all, Australian intelligence believed that it would take two to three months for the ‘unprepared’ German troops to acclimatise to the desert heat!¹⁰ Leaflets dropped by Germans to suggest surrender to the Allies were used by the men as toilet paper, and typically, complaints were made as to lack of softness.

⁵ Rex Garbutt, personal communication 2012. Rex is son to Alan Garbutt.

⁶ Col J.N.L. Argent, *Target Tank: The history of the 2/3rd Australian Anti-Tank Regiment, 9th Division, A.I.F.*, Parramatta, 1957, p. 64. The 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment is the official designation of the unit; however; the author here uses 3 Anti-Tank Regiment, which is the version preferred by its veterans (Barry Willoughby, pers. comm., 13 Jan 2013).

⁷ Phil Loffman, interviewed by Brian Wall for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45, S00557, transcript of oral recording, AWM, p.6.

⁸ Dick Gill, unpublished manuscript, pp. 21-22. Courtesy of family of veteran Nicol Lawrie, as provided by Dick Gill.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Argent, op cit, p.48.

This first action of 3 Anti-Tank regiment on 8 April 1941 had brought 100 of its men together in a new but unwelcome bond as battle casualties. Five of their men had been killed, and others were cared for at field hospitals. This new batch of POWs, many of whom were suffering with wounds, were handed over to the Italians, to go behind the wire of Italian camps before the end of 1941. Other 3 Anti-Tank gunners and officers, who had not yet met this fate, remained to serve in the desert for a longer haul. The desert environment was to become increasingly familiar over coming months. It was not considered too bad by some. It could even remind them of home, a bit like Longreach in a bad year.¹¹ Col Jack Argent, 'Silver John' to his 3 Anti-Tank men, was chuffed that his officers had become experts at desert navigation, and that never once was a troop or section lost on their way across the desert at night.¹² Like their own adaptations and knowledge of the desert, the Aussies should have realised that the professional German army was not going to do things by halves. The German Afrika Korps planned ahead for the North African desert by training in hot houses. For all, water was a real problem. No matter how long the Aussies spent in the desert, a dixieful of water to last all day, to wash, shave, clean the feet, and to drink, was still a bit grim.¹³

Before Mechili 1941, Australian men going 'in the bag' had been low in number, but the tide was to turn. The desert battles of 1942 would swell the number. In the late days of June 1942, a long convoy of 9th Division returned to the Western Desert, the country in which it had learned to fight.¹⁴ The war in North Africa was becoming more critical for the British Eighth Army. On 26 June 1942 the Australians began moving south, through Syria and Palestine to Egypt. With the rushed transfer to the Alamein 'box' commencing in secrecy, the men had initially hoped that the movement meant that they were now heading out of the desert, and home. As they approached the Suez Canal ports, the convoy's destination became clearer. They were heading back to the desert.

*Old Rommel had us on the run, the news was far from hot,
... So we came back to the desert, well known in days of yore,
We met the Hun at Alamein close by the Meddy shore,
... While history repeats itself, now we're once more in the game,
Will the form displayed in '41, this year be just the same?
If so, then Rommel's stonkered, what'er the plan he weaves.*¹⁵

Aiming to confuse enemy spies, the Aussie troops replaced their slouch hats with tin helmets. Even their boots had been disguised. It must have worked as the German spies thought they were South Africans disguised as Australians! In this high summer, the troops wearing only shorts, boots and tin helmets would endure temperatures akin to Longreach or Kalgoorlie in a bad year. It was best not to wear underwear, as the seams would harbour fleas and lice. Navigation from tent to toilet could disorient a man in that terrain and dust.¹⁶ By the end of June, the battered Eighth Army was holding a new line running south of El Alamein, a forlorn railway station near the coast, barely 90 kilometres drive from Alexandria. It was the 'last ditch' before Cairo. Insignificant on the map, Tel el Eisa, 'Hill of Jesus', and El

¹¹ Peter Bosgard, AWM PR82/174.

¹² Argent, op cit, p. 137.

¹³ Jack Wauhop, interviewed by Brian Wall for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45, S00512, transcript of oral recording, AWM, p.11. A dixie was a utensil used for food and water.

¹⁴ Mark Johnston and Peter Stanley, *Alamein: the Australian story*, Oxford UP, Melbourne, 2002, p.47.

¹⁵ Extracts from a popular ditty by 9th Div, 'Ali Baba Morshead and his twenty thousand thieves', cited in Argent, op cit, p.174-75.

¹⁶ Johnston and Stanley, op cit, p.47.

Alamein, humble railway sidings, were to become place names of significance.

On 25 July 1942, General Auchinleck issued an order. 'You have done much', he commended the men for halting Rommel's army, '... but I ask you for more ... If we can stick to it, we will break him'.¹⁷ An attack on 'Ruin Ridge' (Sanyet el Miteiriya) was part of this extra demand, and it involved a night attack through minefields. The demand came at short notice, sounding fairly straightforward. On Sunday 26 July 1942, the wind in the west blew the fine sand over the battlefield, but the heat of the day gave way to a chilly night under clear skies. The night attack started as a brigade attack by crossing the start line at midnight, in bright moonlight. Ruin Ridge was successfully seized by 2/28th Bn and support troops, including the 12th Battery of 3 Anti-Tank. The West Australian 2/28th Bn had 'gone up the guts' to make the main attack, with support by the anti-tank guns carried on the trucks of 3 Anti-Tank regiment. Once the objective was reached, they began to dig in. The whole battalion area was under heavy fire, and to site the anti-tank guns in the dark was difficult, despite the shining moon. In addition to the captured Italian Breda light machine guns, the Australian artillery included Brens, Bofors, bayonets, and Boyes anti-tank guns.

In that now familiar but dreadful rocky desert, the digging in to obtain some measure of shelter was tough. Only shallow trenches could be made. Sparks would fly off their picks as they dug in. It was too bloody rocky in this patch. The men who had sandbags found they could not fill them. In their trench, sand would not move as quickly as 3 Anti-Tank gunner Doug Frame and Sgt Bruce Templeman would have liked. To give his trench mate a breather, Doug offered to swap places with Bruce. Bruce was the one who copped a shell, and in the random draw of battle survival, battle in the desert took the life of this well-respected 23-year-old sergeant from Sydney.¹⁸ The luck was beginning to run out for this troop of the so-called 'Lucky 12th' Battery.¹⁹ For battle veterans, memories cannot numb the horror of war. Such memories are enough to rationalise the many years for those veterans who chose to remain silent. Memories from Alamein, Tobruk or Mechili held their grip. It was driving a gun carrier over the head of a young enemy soldier at Alamein that was to haunt farmhand from Bundanoon, driver and gunner Col Booth – one battlefield memory shared with his family.²⁰ Sometimes, it is only later in life that the full horror hits home to the men who were there.

At Ruin Ridge, the best laid plans of the 9th Division had gone horribly wrong. Vehicles that should have brought forward ammunition were blown to pieces. Three company commanders were wounded. British support was stalled. Bright moonlight contrasted with barrages of artillery fire. Burning vehicles lit the night horizon like bushfire.²¹ It seemed as if every vehicle involved was blown and burning. The gunners would have shared the fear that the morning was not going to be easier than was this dreadful night.

¹⁷ Peter Stanley, *Remembering 1942: Ruin Ridge, 26-27 July 1942*, presentation beside the Roll of Honour, AWM, 28 July 2002. <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/remembering1942/alamein/transcript.asp>.

¹⁸ Ian Templeman, pers. Comm., 2011. Ian is brother to Bruce Templeman. Ian had opportunity to meet with Doug Frame, post-war

¹⁹ Dubbed the 'Lucky 12th' due to its fortunate run leading up to the July battles at Alamein, on 26/27 July 1942 fourteen of so-called 'Lucky 12th' were killed in action, or died of wounds, as did Bruce Templeman. Four more men, falling into the hands of their captors, were to be killed during transport to Italy or to die soon after.

²⁰ Col Booth is the father of the author. Col, like many veterans, shared selective memories with family, and suffered long-term anxiety and health problems due to battle, captivity, and as an evader.

²¹ Phil Loffman, cited in Peter Monteath, *POW: Australian prisoners in Hitler's Reich*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2011, p.55.

In the early light on the 27 July, Col's mate Sgt Ian Hocking called out to fellow sergeant, Don Walter, to swing his six-pounder gun around to cover the front. A semi-circle of tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, and all sorts of vehicles were facing them. It looked like 'cockroaches coming in across the hills'.²² Ian Hocking and Capt Jimmy Allen were keen to determine whether it was Pommies or Jerries driving the tanks that were now seen milling around in the distance. Could this be the support that they hoped for, or something else?

It had been a long night but Don Walter did cover the front, knocking out five tanks. To Ian Hocking's horror, after they were about 100 yards out, a shell ricocheted up underneath the Morris convertible carrying Ian and Jimmy, penetrating Jimmy Allen's back and out through this stomach. Jimmy rolled out the side of the door-less Morris. Ian hit the brakes, and hearing someone yell, 'Keep going, we will look after him', he sped off again to the right flank to follow those mysterious tanks. About 1000 yards out, Ian fell right into the hands of Italian soldiers. Probably the only one in his regimental battery to be captured by the 'Ities', and not the 'Jerries', Ian would often cop this jibe on Anzac Day reunions.²³

In this early light, the counter-attack was back on, as Jerry woke up. The ridge hotted up quickly with continuous shelling and mortar bombing. At 0900hrs radio contact was regained, just in time for the battalion to report that it was in trouble. The Australians were battling enemy tanks from three directions. Those approaching tanks carried big black German crosses, and they fanned out on entering the wadi, picking off infantry units one by one. To make it worse, the British support was nowhere in sight. As the men waited for the expected tank and artillery support, they were left with one portable wireless in operation. Most signal trucks had been knocked out on the minefield. Ammunition was running out.

Ian Hocking, now a prisoner of war, saw from a distance the soul-destroying sight of his fellow Battery troops laying down their weapons, as they too surrendered to German forces.²⁴ By 10am, 12th Battery knew that their days as combatants were over, whether they liked it or not. Their commander accepted the inevitable, and surrendered to prevent the wounding of more of his men. When the dust had settled, casualties were counted and stragglers were collected. For the 'Lucky 12th' Battery, 44 men were missing, mostly wounded, including several officers, and 14 had been killed or died of wounds.²⁵

The heroic defence by 2/28th Bn, the 12th Battery gunners and other support troops on Ruin Ridge was over. Hundreds of men were marched out in sixes amid a heavy barrage coming from their own side, unaware that they were sending down fire on their own men. According to Colin Weekes, 'We had to trot right through the whirling shrap. It was here that poor old Peter Norton-Knight got a bit in his back and old Pop Ryan a piece in his heel'. Colin had his own close call with a piece of 25-pounder shell, about 8 inches long, that spun close to him at stomach level: 'I've never pulled my tummy in so quickly as I did then'.²⁶

For the POWs, to be taken prisoner was more than a low point; it was an unshakeable sense of shame. They hung their heads in shame, humiliation and frustration. The rationale of the men to serve their county in battle, and to keep serving, seemed lost. Amidst the gut-wrenching frustration was the shock and grief that some of their fellow soldiers, mates, had

²² Phil Loffman, interviewed by Brian Wall, op cit, p.9.

²³ Ian Hocking, cited in Phil Loffman, *POW*, 1995, p.146. Jimmy Allen was a Captain in the 2/28th Bn.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Argent, op cit, p.188-89.

²⁶ Colin Weekes, unpublished manuscript, Part B. Courtesy of Colin's son, Martin Weekes.

lost their lives on the desert battlefield, or were carted off as casualties, in moments that could not be forgotten. For the exhausted and shattered troops, this early phase of captivity was another test of strength: 'You can quite imagine how we felt as we were herded into 3 tonners, packed like cattle ... We almost died that night, because we were so overcome'.²⁷

Indeed, during the years of captivity ahead, the manifestations of their war would wax and wane, and evolve into circumstances for which they may not have been trained at Ingleburn or Northam. In their early weeks in transit camps, including the euphemistically named 'The Palms' at Benghazi, and during subsequent transport to Italy, the conditions were more than enough to worry the men: 'I got out and put my hands up and the old expression is, "For you, the war is finished"'. What a lot of crap. The war only started. This was just the beginning.²⁸ The Germans took advantage of this being regarded as an Italian theatre of war: 'Send them over to Italy and they will feed them and guard them'.²⁹ The rest of their war awaited them.

The 3 Anti-Tank men captured at Mechili 1941 had been 'settled' into their Italian POW camps for over a year before their mates arrived from the July 1942 battles at Alamein. The new arrivals swelled the numbers in Italian camps, in particular the large Anzac camp PG57 Gruppignano, notorious for its vicious and vindictive Colonel Calcaterra. In the following April, fortune would see a number of the 3 Anti-Tank men drafted from Gruppignano to working POW farms (PG106) in the rice growing Vercelli region, near Milan. Escape and evasion was frequently contemplated. After five months in the Vercelli working camps, such opportunity arose with the promulgation of an Armistice between Italy and the Allies, 8 September 1943. With the Armistice came turmoil, and the long-awaited opportunity to get outside the wire. Murmurings of the Armistice had filtered through the camps, and decisions were tossed about – whether to stay put and await Allied help, to head south to reach Allied Lines, or to head for the hills – the Swiss Alps. For many, the hills beckoned: 'That false armistice was just a matter of deciding to go and we went, so that was our escape, nothing dramatic. Then that's when our war started ... We left the camp with their blessing ... and headed towards the hills'.³⁰

The prisoners still at Gruppignano were without options. Following the promulgation of the Armistice, the Germans rounded up the internees of large camps such as PG57, the officers' camp at PG78 Sulmona, and more isolated working camps, to transfer POWs to Germany. Most of the 3 Anti-Tank men captured at Mechili and Ruin Ridge were transferred from to German-occupied territories. Illustrating that escape and evasion could happen at any stage, there were those such as father and son Frank and Keith Sharp who managed to escape en route to Germany, and head for Switzerland.³¹

Heading to the hills was for many, a fortunate choice. A small number made it safely to Allied lines. Of the Mechili group, sixteen made it to Switzerland.³² The names of a handful of 3 Anti-Tank POWs in Italy do not appear on German camp lists, or as arrivals in Switzerland. Perhaps they remained in safe shelter with peasants or partisans, or found other

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Phil Loffman, interviewed by Brian Wall, *op cit*, p.9.

²⁹ Lloyd Moule, *The Australians at War Film Archive – Transcript*, 1285.

<http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/interviews/1790.aspx>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Keith Sharp, 'Escape to Switzerland', *Stand To*, January 1952.

³² Veteran Bill Rudd's extensive research is published as a web publication at www.aifpow.com and includes incomplete ANZAC Nominal Rolls of escaped POWs, including the recorded AIF POW arrivals in Switzerland.

means of survival, until war's end. There were similarly varied outcomes for the Ruin Ridge captives. Several men were killed during transport to Italy on the torpedoed Italian freighter, *Nino Bixio*, or died soon after arrival. A few successfully reached Allied lines. Four 'Lucky 12th' gunners captured at Ruin Ridge – Col Booth, Peter Erickson, Claude 'Gus' Gibson, and Colin Weekes – would indeed find luck, to carry them safely into Switzerland in late 1943. Col Booth and Peter Erickson crossed the Alps with Ross Wycherley of the 2/24th Bn and two POWs of South African and British nationality.

Whereas some escaped POWs headed swiftly for the hills, a number took their time. Fortune and opportunity intervened on the journey. Italy 1943 was a turbulent battlefield. The men left the routine of the POW camps to enter a hotbed of civil hostility, German and Fascist patrols, and the Italian Resistance. A 'strange alliance' developed between Allied evades and the Resistance, as the partisans brought disciplined and desperate soldiers to their cause, for the shorter or longer duration.³³ The award of Italy Star was an honour for a small number of POWs who spent considerable time fighting with the Resistance. 3 Anti-Tank Gunner Alan 'Snow' Garbutt was one recipient.

The Alpine frontier was at once a pathway to freedom, but it was also a passport to hell. It was as if those mountains were the final hurdle, the final test, to the gruelling years of service that led them to those foothills. Years of desert, captivity and evasion led to this choice. The sheer beauty of the frontier was not lost on the men, but it was not the time to savour it. If they stopped, they could freeze, or be recaptured. If they moved too quickly and carelessly, their evasion could end in an Alpine crevasse. Luck saw them over the mountains, even the most inhospitable. Weather could be kind to their plight, including the fog that offered invisibility from the ever-watchful patrols. Would they have headed for the hills if they could have foreseen the hazardous nature of that terrain, or if they had previously experienced thigh-deep snowdrifts in their Australian upbringings in Sydney, Moree and Kalgoorlie?

The stories of the 3 Anti-Tank men taken POW at Mechili and Alamein, to become prisoners in Italy, have much to tell us. There was more to Alamein than the oft-quoted 'battle of Alamein', as the October Alamein battle has often been depicted. Similarly, the dominant discourse speaks often of the significance of a place called Tobruk. 'Ruin Ridge' and 'Mechili' are spoken of much less. The 3 Anti-Tank men involved in action at Mechili in 1941 and El Alamein in July 1942 are representative of outcomes of Australian service in North African campaigns of WW2. Gallant soldiers were killed in action or seriously wounded. Brothers fought side by side. Men were of youthful age, or older like Frank Sharp, Herbert 'Pop' Ryan and Ernest Winter. The men of 3 Anti-Tank witnessed the randomness of fortune in war. Strong bonds were formed with regimental mates, and those from other units, alongside them in battle or in POW camps. Every man needed a trusted mate, among whom were those fortunate to survive battle, albeit wounded, but others who were to die during transport to Italy or in POW camps.

For 3 Anti-Tank POWs in the Vercelli region, their varied outcomes were to parallel those of the thousands of other Allied escaped prisoners: shelter by brave peasant families, living on low rations, involvement with partisans, lying 'doggo', heading for the neutral sanctuary of Switzerland, or to Allied lines. Our men would cross paths, or join paths, with their POW counterparts of other nationalities, including British, New Zealanders, South Africans, Indians, Cypriots, Palestinians and Poles. Stories of escaped POWs inform us that evasion

³³ Roger Absalom, *A Strange Alliance: aspects of escape and survival in Italy 1943-45*, Olschki, Florence, 1991.

was equally taxing, if not more so, on physical and psychological resilience, than experiences behind camp wire. Although it is the POW experience *behind* barbed wire that dominates the discourse of wartime captivity, it is being *outside* the wire as escaped prisoners, that the men found themselves beyond the rules of the Geneva Conventions, and into new battle territory.

Fraternity with Italian ‘foes’ was a key strategy to successful evasion. Italian civilians risked serious repercussions for sheltering POWs, yet stories abound of hospitality granted by the poorest of peasant families.³⁴ A number of 3 Anti-Tank men returned to Italy post-war, to renew contact with those who had sustained and assisted them through times of mutual battle in a war-ravaged country. The experience of our veterans in the hands of the Germans and Japanese has been a dominant part of the discourse surrounding Australian POWs during WW2. We need to acknowledge also that more than 2000 of the AIF were prisoners in Italy. To bring the stories forward of those who were prisoners and evaders in Italy, and to glean a wider understanding of the historical and human context of their plight, is to give these men the honour to which they are due.

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The <i>Sabretache</i> Writers’ Prize 2013
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Now open for entries

Conditions of entry:

- The prize is open to Society members only
- Entries must consist of an essay of 3000 to 4000 words
- The topic must be Australian military history, based in part on primary sources

\$500 will be awarded to the entry judged the best by a panel.

The winning entry will be published in *Sabretache*.

Entries should be sent in digital format to the Federal President at
fedsec@mhsa.org.au.

Entries close 30 June 2013.

³⁴ Stories of New Zealand POWs with Italian Resistance and civilians parallel the experience of AIF POWs. See Susan Jacobs, *Fighting with the enemy: New Zealand POWs and the Italian Resistance*, Penguin, Auckland, 2003.

THE COLO WAR: BRITAIN'S LITTLE WAR IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Rohan Goyne¹

During a family holiday to Fiji in 2010, I became aware of the Colo War, which occurred, in the then independent Fiji in the nineteenth century. This is in keeping with the recent editorial in the June 2012 *Sabretache* in which Paul Skrebels highlighted that military history is all around us, we only have to look. I did not expect to find a military history vignette whilst on holiday in Fiji.

The Mt Tavuni hill fort located outside the town of Sigatoka on the Coral Coast was the scene of one engagement in the Colo War which post-dated the ceding of the islands to Britain in October 1874. The site can be visited on tours from most resorts on that coast. The ceding of the islands had occurred without reference to the Colo chiefs who ruled over the interior villages and lands.

This article will provide an overview of the principal actions and events of the Colo War of 1876.

The Colo War 1876

The colonial records indicate that the Colo War began on 12 April 1876 when a combined Colo attack on eight Christian villages around the Mount Koroba area on the Nadi-Nadroga border on the Fijian Island of Viti Levu. Colo forces advanced quickly, securing control over an area west of Nasaucoko, in essence surrounding the colonial garrison.²

The Colo army's next objective was the town of Burua, which if it had fallen would have opened the entire coast between Cuvu and Nadi to the Colo army. The town held and the Colo force turned its attention to the village of Nadromai, approximately six kilometres from Cuvu. On 17 April, an attack was launched on Nadromai thus establishing a front to the north of Nadroga. A further front was opened with a simultaneous assault to the east on Batiri villages.³ The villages were located on the eastern bank of the Sigatoka River south of the Tavuni Hill Fort (which dates from the Iron Age). The attacking Colo forces came from the villages of Tavuni, Nadrara, Nokonoko, Vatuvoiko, Koroivatuma and Bukutia.

All the Christian villages in the vicinity were burnt and a number of women and children were killed. The reports on the number of combatants who were killed in the fighting suggest that five Colo warriors and between six to twenty Nadroga warriors were killed⁴. The relatively small number of casualties on both sides reflects a common Fijian war practice which has the burning of a village to symbolise conquest and not the unrestrained massacre of prisoners. The Colo strategy was to cut the Nadroga forces' main supply, communication and lines of retreat to the Nadi Coast.

The counter strike by Nadroga forces was forthcoming. On 18 April 1876, Nadroga forces drove up the eastern bank of the Sigatoka River, forcing Colo warriors into the Mt Tavuni

¹ Rohan Goyne is the current Federal President of the MHSA and has contributed several articles to *Sabretache* since 2005. He describes himself as 'a recreational military historian'.

² Gordon 1897, 1:432.

³ Despatch 88, 6 May 1876, 76/7546, CO 83/10, PRO.

⁴ Gordon 1879(a), 1.

Fort, the ruins of which are situated about four kilometres from the town of Sigatoka today. The Fort was quickly captured, as were the towns of Nadrala and Nokonoko. The towns were promptly burnt, forcing the Colo forces to withdraw to the strongholds of Bukutia and Koroivatuma.

On 24 April, a third front opened in the centre of the main island, Viti Levu at Tatuba. The killing of three Tatuba men provided the colonial force which had been bottled up at Nasaucoko with the opportunity to venture forth and intervene in the conflict. A force was sent to Tatuba and Wala villages to secure them. The force returned on 26 April and advised the Colonial Governor, Carew, that the villages had been secured and many of the enemy killed or put to flight.

Carew reported to London that ‘these savages have now received such a severe check upon the head of the river to the mouth, that I believe they will no longer be able to act on the offensive’.⁵ However, Carew’s optimism was greatly overstated, with most of the villages that were secured and then burnt actually empty, with the Colo warriors undertaking a classic guerrilla-style campaign. The Colo forces would disperse and then regroup in other locations on the island.

At the end of the month, Carew dispatched his nephew Arthur Gordon to oversee military operations on the coast. However, the local coastal chiefs had assembled a force of approximately one thousand warriors who operated independently of the colonial administration, because their services were not paid for by the state but rather secured through tribal loyalties to certain chiefs. To launch the military campaign had cost the Colonial Governor a mere thirty-two pounds and ten shillings, which was to cover the cost of his nephew’s twenty bodyguards.⁶

The southern force established themselves at Navalili and proceeded to assault the towns of Bukutia and Koroivatuma, which were subsequently destroyed. The survivors retreated to Matanavatu, an extensive cave system which had fresh water, food stocks and a large arsenal. Both sides considered the cave system to be nearly impregnable. However, a lapse by the sentries at the main entrance allowed southern forces to secure it. A short sharp action followed in which thirty-eight Colo warriors and two southern warriors were killed.

The capture of Matanavatu proved the turning point in the Colo War, with over 1,200 occupants being captured and so breaking the back of the Colo forces on Viti Levu. The Colo forces were subjugated and by the end of 1876 the Colo War was over. After the Colo War, Gordon referred to it as his little war and it has become known as ‘Gordon’s Little War’.

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The staff of the Museum of Fiji, National Library of Australia and the National Archives of the UK are acknowledged for their generous assistance in the research journey with this article.

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⁵ Carew to CS, 26 April 1876.

⁶ Gordon to Shaw-Lefevre, 6 July 1876.

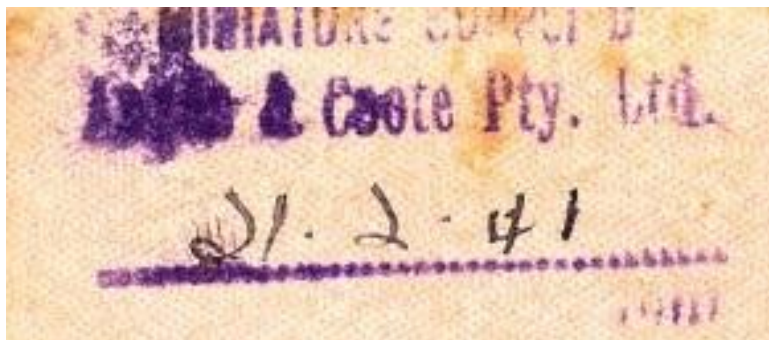
AS YOU WERE ...

Feedback from Readers and Contributors

Don Wright was intrigued by Tony Walker's assertion in December 2012's 'As You Were ...' column, regarding the issue of the miniature 'Returned from Active Service' badge, that 'A soldier needed to show his discharge certificate, which was stamped to show that the miniature had been purchased.' Don says:

- As I have never seen a Discharge paper like this, I would be most interested to obtain a copy showing that the miniature had been purchased.

Tony duly responded with this image from just such a discharge paper, which has been stamped to show the issue of the badge. The wording is 'MINIATURE SUPPLIED / Angus & Coote Pty. Ltd.' with a date of 21 February 1941 in ink:



Angus and Coote was, of course, the renowned firm of jewellers which manufactured the RAS badge (and many other military items besides). For good measure, Tony includes an image of the rear of the badge with the maker's details marked.

Tim Lyon writes concerning Keith Richmond's article 'Zhukov and Manstein: Great Captains of the Eastern Front', which appeared in the December 2012 issue:

- I was most interested to read. I have always been a big fan of Manstein, and by an amazing coincidence I have just been preparing a talk on The Battle of the Donetz (referred to by Keith as 'the third battle of Kharkov'). Consequently, there are a few comments I would like to make. Keith writes of 'General von Brauchitsch OKW (Army High Command).' I am sure this was just a typo, but OKW stands for Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (English: Supreme Command of the Armed Forces). General von Brauchitsch was Commander-in-Chief of the Army and head of the OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the Army)).

Later in his article, when describing the third battle of Kharkov, Keith writes that 'Faced with the loss of Kharkov by the SS Panzer Corps in mid February 1943, Hitler sacked the SS General and flew to Manstein's headquarters at Zaporozhe on 17 February to sack Manstein, but Hitler held his hand.' However, it is not true that Hitler 'sacked the SS General'. The real story is much more interesting and is well explained by David Downing in *The Devil's Virtuosos: German Generals at War 1940-5* (p.143), as follows: 'the commander of the SS Panzer Corps, Paul Hausser, was of stronger stuff than Paulus. Despite a direct and twice-given order to hold Kharkov to the last man – an order reinforced by his immediate superior Lanz – Hausser reacted to the quasi-encirclement of his forces in Kharkov with an order for immediate break-out by the one remaining exit ... Hitler's fury at this disobedience of the supposedly ultra-loyal SS

was partly mollified by the obvious strategic advantages which accrued from it and which became almost immediately apparent. Nevertheless a head had to roll. It was Lanz's.'

I am not aware of any evidence that suggests that Hitler 'flew to Manstein's headquarters at Zaporozhe on 17 February to sack Manstein' (Keith may have found this evidence but he does not footnote this sentence). In fact, Army Group B did not hand over command of the Kharkov area to Manstein's Army Group Don until after the withdrawal of the SS Panzer Corps from Kharkov (see Manstein, *Lost Victories*). So Manstein was hardly likely to be the target of Hitler's fury (although Colonel-General von Weichs, the commander of Army Group B, must have been very nervous).

Keith's description of the battle of the Donetz (the third battle of Kharkov) is a little off the mark. This may be a result of the published maps of the battle, which had me fooled for a while. There are a large number of these maps (I have found seven) and all of them have errors (some significant). The commonly published maps appear to be sourced from either *War Maps* by Simon Goodenough or the *Atlas of the Second World War*, edited by Brigadier Peter Young and cartography by Richard Natkiel. Even the maps in Manstein's *Lost Victories* are not completely correct. I suspect that Manstein had the maps prepared for him and didn't bother to check them. Or perhaps the publisher had the maps prepared and never showed them to Manstein. In any case, they do not tally with Manstein's text. I noticed this problem with the maps when the presentation I was preparing didn't make sense, even to me, the author. I then spent a great deal of time and effort tracking down what had actually happened in the battle and determining which maps (or parts thereof) could be relied on. Gen Hollidt and the Sixth Army are a good example of the confusion caused by these maps. Hollidt commanded Army Detachment Hollidt for most of the battle, which was renamed Sixth Army (which had surrendered in Stalingrad on 30 January 1943) towards the end of the battle. Some of the maps label this formation as Army Detachment Hollidt throughout the battle while others label it Sixth Army throughout the battle. However, there was never any 2 Panzer Corps in the German Army.

The battle (briefly) went as follows. On 20 February, the SS Panzer Corps (then part of Army Detachment Kempf) attacked south from Krasnograd and captured Pavlograd. Army Detachment Kempf held defensive positions to the west of Kharkov. On 22 February, 4th Panzer Army (now comprising the 48th Panzer Corps and the SS Panzer Corps) attacked north slicing through the rear of the Soviet 6th Army and 1st Guards Army. On the same day, 3rd SS Panzergrenadier Division Totenkopf (under command of Army Detachment Kempf) attacked eastwards and linked up with the 4th Panzer Army south of Kharkov by 6 March. Hitler visited Manstein at Zaporozhe on 10 March (we are all friends now that we are winning). 4th Panzer Army continued its advance north, with the SS Panzer Corps recapturing Kharkov by 14/15 March and the 48th Panzer Corps passing to the east of the city. On 15 March 1st Panzer Army joined the offensive and attacked northwards towards the Donetz River. By 18 March, Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland had captured Belgorod and 4th Panzer Army, Army Detachment Kempf and 1st Panzer Army had all closed up to the Donetz River. While all this had been happening, Army Detachment Fretter-Pico, which had been surrounded south of Voroshilovgrad when the Soviets launched their offensive, broke out and fell back across the Mius River, the line being held by Sixth Army (formerly Army Detachment Hollidt).

Later in his article Keith writes, ‘Many critics see Manstein as a deeply flawed genius whose faults became glaringly obvious when he abided by Hitler’s orders and did not force Paulus to blast his way out of Stalingrad.’ This opinion is attributed to Antony Beevor and M. Stein. Keith then writes, ‘When he failed to force Paulus to break out, he was prepared to follow Hitler’s orders and act as a loyal subordinate so as to pursue national military objectives’ (attributed to Seaton). I am not sure what the phrases ‘did not force Paulus’ and ‘failed to force Paulus’ mean in military terms. Keith may have inadvertently given readers the impression that Manstein did not order the Sixth Army to break out of Stalingrad, which he most certainly did. Heinz Schröter, *Stalingrad*, (p.145) provides a good summary of the build-up to the order: ‘Every day, by teleprinter and telephone, Army Group Don had been asking Supreme Headquarters for authorisation for Sixth Army to break out of the encirclement. It had become a verbal battle.’ This does not sound very like Manstein abiding by ‘Hitler’s orders’. Manstein’s order for Sixth Army to break out was issued on 19 December and the actual order is in Appendix IV of *Lost Victories*.

What happened after that is well explained by Downing (pp.127-128): ‘In practical terms this came down to Sixth Army’s role in its own relief. There were two phases to the operation: “Winter Tempest” and “Thunderclap”. The former involved the establishment of a corridor through which Hoth’s four hundred supply-laden lorries could be funnelled to Sixth Army. The latter involved the evacuation of the pocket. Both phases demanded action by Sixth Army; the first an exertion of pressure on the Soviet ring from inside as Hoth attacked from the outside, the second a phased withdrawal from the city. To Manstein these two phases were inseparable, rather like a man’s left leg preceding his right leg through a door. Hitler, on the other hand, wanted Sixth Army to place one leg out whilst keeping the other firmly in position inside the house. Consequently Paulus, denied permission to move both legs, refused to move either. This vicious circle spun round and round for a week while Hoth clung precariously to the Mishkova line and the Don front to the west yawned wider and wider.’ It is certainly true that Manstein took no action against Paulus when he declined to obey the order he had been given. Beevor in *Stalingrad* (rather pathetically, I think) plays the armchair general with regard to this incident. He roundly condemns Manstein for not doing something but is completely unable to suggest any action he might have taken.

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OBITUARY

Air Commodore James Baird Coward AFC, RAF. One of The Few

As a flight of Nazi bombers were returning to France, they encountered No. 19 Squadron’s Spitfires. Flying Officer James Coward saw a Dornier and lined up for a ‘beautiful shot’ but, he later recalled, ‘when I pressed the firing button absolutely nothing happened’. His guns had jammed. Then, ‘I suddenly felt a hard kick on the shin. I looked round and I saw my bare foot sitting on the rudder pedal’. His shoe and sock had disappeared; his foot was hanging by the ligaments. He didn’t have time to think about the pain because his Spitfire was diving out of control. ‘I was sucked out of the cockpit and my parachute got caught and I was trapped. I was dragged back along the fuselage, my trousers had blown off and my foot was banging around my knee’. He pulled the ripcord and found himself alone in the sky. As he descended, he remembered experiencing ‘the most wonderful feeling of peace until I suddenly looked down and saw my blood pumping out red spurts’.

He used his helmet wireless lead to tie a tourniquet to staunch the blood – this saved his life. Upon landing, he was accosted by a young lad with a pitchfork, and after ‘pleasantries’, was whisked to Cambridge Hospital where his left leg was amputated below the knee. It was 31 August 1940 and he awoke to find a heavily pregnant wife at his bedside. His first words to her were, ‘Hallo, Cinnie. I shan’t play Rugger again’. James Coward’s Battle of Britain career was only brief but he was one of the 2940 or so men who were awarded the Battle of Britain Clasp to their 1939-45 Star. He will always be remembered as one of The Few, indeed one of the last of The Few.

James Baird Coward was born in Teddington, Middlesex on 18 May 1915. He was educated at St John’s School, Leatherhead. As a 15-year-old he went to work in his father’s office. He hated it. He desperately wanted to fly. When he was 21, he applied to the Royal Air Force and was granted a commission on 16 October 1936. After training, he was posted to 19 Squadron, based at Duxford. Two years later he was in the cockpit of the RAF’s sleek new monoplane – the Spitfire. He was thrilled to be flying fighters and later recalled, ‘it was a lovely aeroplane’. On 29 December 1939, he married Cynthia Bayon. Their marriage was to last over 70 years.

After recovery, James was posted to Winston Churchill’s staff, where he was in charge of ensuring the Prime Minister’s safety from air attack at Chequers and Chartwell. After promotion to squadron leader in late 1941, he was appointed flight commander at an operational training unit at Aston Down. Further command appointments followed and in 1944 he moved to the Air Ministry in charge of operational fighter training.

James Coward’s service in the RAF did not end in 1945. After staff appointments and an attaché posting to Norway, he was Wing Commander Flying at the Meteor Advanced Flying Training School. On 1 January 1954 he was awarded the Air Force Cross for demonstrating the dangers of inverted spinning and correct recovery on Meteor jet aircraft. In 1960, Group Captain Coward joined the British Defence Liaison Staff in Canberra, a posting he and Cynthia thoroughly enjoyed. Returning to the United Kingdom in October 1962, he was appointed Air Officer Commanding Air Cadets and in May 1966 took up the post of Defence Attaché in Pretoria.

The Cowards retired to Australia in September 1969 where two of their four daughters were already resident. They lived in Canberra for over 40 years in one of the first passively heated houses in the Territory. Paying homage to his favourite aircraft, he erected a Spitfire weather vane which served as a landmark to visitors walking down the battleaxe drive. James Coward loved life intensely. He never let the loss of his leg hamper him. He skied until his 90s, thinking nothing of possible risks. He also enjoyed dancing and would often don a kilt for an evening of highland reels.

Air Commodore James Coward AFC, RAF (Retd) died at Yass on 25 July 2012 with Cynthia holding his hand. He had recently celebrated his 97th birthday. James is buried at Michelago beside two of his daughters who predeceased him. He is survived by Cynthia, his two youngest daughters and many grand and great-grandchildren.

Kristen Alexander and Air Commodore (Retd) Mark Lax

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THE FIRST THREE DAYS: MEMORIES OF THE ANZAC LANDING

Paul A Rosenzweig¹

Mervyn Herbert took his Port Adelaide lads to the Middle East in 1914 and then on to Gallipoli, although he left the Peninsula just a few days later courtesy of a Turkish sniper. But he was present throughout the critically important first three days – he had endured the waiting and had witnessed the landing, the rush inland, and the beginning of the legend of Anzac. While war correspondents competed to publish their romanticised accounts, Herbert was one of the first to record his experiences while they were still fresh in his mind. Herbert's words, direct from the Dardanelles, were among the first first-hand accounts to be published in August 1915.

Herbert



Fig.1: A pre-war photograph Mervyn James Herbert, published with his casualty notification in the South Australian Advertiser in 1915.

The military service of Major Mervyn James Herbert was first documented in *Sabretache* in 1986,² based on the British War Medal and Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service Medal which had survived his death in 1964. There were two positive outcomes from that paper.

Firstly, there was an offer to trade Herbert's 1914-15 Star (ironically, the reunification of broken groups had been encouraged in an issue of *Sabretache* the previous year), so Herbert's group became more substantially complete given the significance of his Gallipoli service and could be properly mounted for display (fig.2). And secondly, based on that research (before the digitisation of service records) a descendant of Herbert's was able to claim the 1965 Anzac Medal, giving the family a tangible means of honouring Mervyn Herbert's wartime service. It has since been found that Herbert twice described the Anzac landing – first whilst recuperating in an Egyptian hospital after being wounded just days after the Gallipoli landing, and secondly to a reporter after being evacuated and returned to Australia aboard SS *Ballarat*.

Three years before the Gallipoli landing, Mervyn Herbert was at the prime of his life: newly married and newly commissioned with command of his own rifle company. Herbert had been born in Melbourne on 15 September 1887, the first child of Robina and Ralph Herbert of South Ballarat. His grandfather was James William Herbert, whose brother Harry was a miner in Sandhurst (now Bendigo) who volunteered for the 1st Waikato Regiment in September 1863, and then served in the 3rd Waikato Regiment and the Imperial Commissariat Transport Corps. James, Harry or possibly both became pioneer settlers and much of the family remained in New Zealand until the lure of gold brought some back to Victoria. An unrelated Murray Herbert living in Adelaide met Mervyn Herbert after World War 2:

¹ Paul Rosenzweig is a medal collector and non-professional military historian and biographer, who has contributed to various Australian historical journals and Defence publications over the last thirty years.

² Rosenzweig, P A (1986) 'Furthest inland at Gallipoli'. *Sabretache*, XXVII (April-June 1986): 37-40.

During my conversation with this man, he told me that he came from New Zealand and it was either his father or grandfather that was eaten by the Maoris. I cannot now recall which.³

Mervyn Herbert's father was Ralph Henry Herbert, born in Ballarat in 1871 and given the nickname 'Harry' in honour of his uncle. Ralph grew up in New Zealand but later returned to mine gold in Ballarat; he served nine years in the volunteer forces and two years in the Australian Field Artillery. Ralph and Robina had one daughter (Hazel) and five sons (Mervyn, Clifford, Henry, Ben and Cyril): three of the boys served in the Great War as also did Ralph, as a Corporal in the 2nd Tunnelling Company AIF. Mervyn Herbert grew up in New Zealand, gained a Diploma in Horticulture in Ballarat and was a member of the Victorian Scottish Regiment from 1907.

From 1911, Herbert was at New Glenelg in Adelaide, a member of the 1st Battalion, South Australian Scottish Infantry which paraded on the Torrens Parade Ground, down the hill from Government House, on an old quarry site beside the Torrens River taken up in 1870 and formally handed over to the South Australian Defence Force in 1893. Two days after his marriage to Dorothy Matilda (nee Royals) on 26 August 1911, Herbert was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Under the Universal Training Scheme he was Officer Commanding 'F' Company, 78th Infantry Battalion ('Adelaide Rifles'): confirmed as a 2nd lieutenant on 28 December 1912, promoted to lieutenant on 31 January 1913, and promoted to captain on 16 July 1914. From 16 April 1914 Mervyn Herbert was employed by the Department of Defence as Area Officer for Prospect, supervising and providing assistance to units administering the Universal Training Scheme.

To Lemnos

Herbert was one of the first company commanders personally selected by Lt Col Stanley Price Weir VD for the 10th Infantry Bn, appointed as Officer Commanding D Company at Morphettville Training Camp on 19 August 1914. In a portrait photograph of the original officers of the 10th Bn which has hung for many years in the old drill hall at Torrens Parade Ground, Mervyn Herbert is seated in the front row, second from the right.

Herbert's D Company was primarily composed of men from Port Adelaide; his two platoon commanders were 2nd Lieuts David Todd and William Frayne, both Adelaide-born clerks. Frayne was a member of the Caledonian Society, and Todd completed his education with seven years in Scotland. Both had been corporals in the South Australian Scottish from about 1909, they had served together in the 76th Infantry ('Hindmarsh Battalion'), and they were both commissioned on 28 October 1912. The 10th Bn history records the familiar chronology: full battalion strength (eight rifle companies) was reached on 31 August, musketry training in the Adelaide foothills commenced on 3 September, the Battalion's Colours were presented by the Governor of South Australia on Morphettville racecourse on 19 September, and on 20 October it departed from Outer Harbour aboard HMAT A11 *Ascanius*, formerly of the Ocean Steam Ship Company Ltd of Liverpool. *Ascanius* formed up with the First Contingent at King George Sound in Albany and set sail on 31 October, third in line on the port flank with HMAS *Sydney* as escort.

At Mena Camp, distinguishing flags of purple over saxe-blue identified the 10th Bn lines, and distinguishing colour patches matching these pennants were issued on 15 April 1915. Herbert

³ Mr Murray Herbert, Pers. Comm. 2 April 1984.

now rests in the AIF Cemetery in West Terrace, Adelaide with the purple over blue colour patch of the 10th Bn AIF on his headstone. When the battalion changed to four rifle companies on 2 January 1915, D Company absorbed G Company, with Capt Felix Giles becoming Herbert's second-in-command. Herbert gained two new platoon commanders from G Company – 2nd Lieuts William Perry from Broken Hill and Noel Loutit from Adelaide, both compulsory trainees under the Universal Training Scheme and subalterns in the 82nd Infantry ('Barrier Battalion') and 78th Infantry Bn ('Adelaide Rifles') respectively.

Three months before the landing the 3rd Brigade was selected by General Bridges as the covering force for operations in the Dardanelles. Thus began their journey to Kasr-el-Nil barracks, Alexandria and Mudros harbour via the transport HMS *Ionian*. On 4 April, the battalion was formally advised that the 3rd Bde would be the landing force for operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and disembarking and shore landing rehearsals took on a renewed urgency. Herbert described the increase in intensity during the last three days, culminating with the fervour of 24 April:

At last day has dawned. After eight long weeks of weary ship life and tedious waiting, coupled with incessant landing practices under all sorts of conditions, our Third Brigade heaves one sigh of relief, and says 'only another meal aboard'. What matters it even if we are going to lose 70 per cent of our strength, as the pessimists predict. Have we not been chosen as the covering brigade - the place of honour? Are we not the envied of the envious. Could Australia feel the pulse of her representative divisions this day, the name of 'Australian Tourists' would be cast for ever into oblivion. There is a strong current of suppressed excitement – a stern resolve to do or die in the attempt. Wavering there is none. Buoyancy of spirits – even amongst serious faced officers – everywhere.

On that day, Herbert and Giles took their 'D' Company aboard the *Ionian* to Imbros Island:

The scene in the harbour is unparalleled. There are battleships, clean cut and stately, moving out to their allotted stations – cruisers pregnant with possibilities, destroyers moving like lightning in line ahead formation, twisting and gliding in and out amongst the transports like things of life. From somewhere the strains of a band come floating across the water. In the whole of the fleet not a man is below who is unemployed, every inch of deck space is crowded with pulsating life.

On our own transport (The *Ionian*) suddenly ordered bustle occurs, half of our battalion has to go on to the Prince of Wales for landing purposes [B and C companies]. Battalion headquarters accompany them. The necessary change is carried out with no confusion or hesitation, the preliminary rehearsals have been too well practised. The remaining half battalion look on, goodbyes are waved; we will not meet again until we land on the Peninsula, and who knows what the night may bring forth.

Slowly the transports begin to leave the harbor some to go east and some to go west of the island. Johnny Turk is to be hood-winked as long as possible, but all have their allotted rendezvous. There are 90 British transports here containing troops, innumerable supply-ships, oil steamers, repair boats, etc. etc. Occasionally one catches sight of a submarine making outwards on business bent. Then our turn comes to weigh anchor and move out. One had come to almost hate the ship which has been our home for so long.

Slowly we steam towards the east accompanied by two guardian destroyers moving through the gathering dusk till finally we anchor off Imbros Island, where we can just

discern a number of other grey shapes congregated. Tea is sparingly partaken of. One feels it is sacrilege to think of food at such a time.

That night, with the tension slowly but perceptible increasing, D Company transferred from the *Ionian* to the destroyer HMS *Scourge* for the landing:

No lights are permitted; the men bring their equipment up on deck and where possible lay it down in ordered lines. Lifebelts are stacked in convenient places, nothing is left to chance. The men stand around and chat in low tones. At one end of the ship a group is indulging in part singing, the musical tones gaining in harmony by their semi-suppression. Few think of sleep.

As Herbert went aboard HMS *Scourge*, he entered into ‘the next three days’, the longest three days of his life:

At midnight the two destroyers – the *Foxhound* and the *Scourge* – range alongside, and then the left half battalion commences to disembark. The men have previously been told off into boat parties for both sides of the destroyers, and without noise or confusion 400 men are rapidly transferred to each destroyer. Each boat party has an officer and senior N.C.O. in charge of it. In twenty minutes the last man is aboard and each destroyer having taken on tow 6 boats from the transport pushes off.

The men again take off their equipment, which by the way weighs something like 70 lbs as we are carrying 300 rounds of ammunition and five day’s rations, as well as the usual small kit. Word is passed round that plenty of hot coffee will be available shortly and as the night has grown chilly this is duly appreciated. We are still steadily moving eastwards but are not due at our landing place for three hours yet. We try to sleep.

Herbert noted that each of the boats contained two boxes of ammunition, 12 picks, 18 shovels and a fair number of sandbags. Soon after midnight one of the towed boats fouled the propeller, and then later two further boats turned over.

We are now within sight of the Peninsula, and every heart is beating faster. Down at the entrance to the Straits we can see a searchlight moving slowly backwards and forwards. Ahead there is a brilliant star just peeping over Sari Bair. It looks like a signal lamp, but we are not discovered yet. In front, in the rear and on both sides of us there are black shapes moving swiftly towards the shore. Not a light is to be seen – not a sound to be heard save the ripple of the water past our bows. Closer and closer we get. Will they see us? Surely they can see us now?

The minutes pass like hours. We pass the deeper draught vessels, who are unloading their gallant freight into the boats ready to be towed ashore by the pinnaces. What are the Turks doing? Perhaps we have struck an unwatched piece of shore? Almost as the heart leaps gladly at the thought a light flashes and pop-pop-pop-poppity poppity pop pop, and the Australians are under fire for the first time. Boom!!! Boom!!! And the fort on our right has opened fire. A boat upside down surrounded by floating struggling men swirls past with the current. ‘Life boat’s crew away!’ is the order from the destroyer’s bridge and in less time than it takes to tell the lifeboat has been lowered and is being rapidly pulled to the rescue. There is a tendency among the men to man another of the remaining boats, but theirs is sterner work, and a steady ‘Stand-fast men’ from the company commanders has the desired effect.

To Gallipoli

Two companies from each battalion of the 3rd Bde formed the spearhead of the Landing Force. The troop-carrier HMS *Prince of Wales* took B and C Companies of the 10th Bn as close as possible and at about 0100 this half of the battalion transferred to rowing boats which had been brought alongside, and then her small steamboats took the 'tows' of three boats each to the shore. Firing from the hilltops broke out as the tows were cast off and the boats carrying the first six 'battleship' companies came onto the coast. About 30 minutes after the first light of dawn at 0400, the men of the 'Fighting Tenth' landed on the tiny beach north of Gaba Tepe, midway between the two promontories called Ari Burnu and Little Ari Burnu. Fighting through to what was later named Plugge's Plateau, the two companies waited for the 'destroyer' companies to catch up for a reorganisation.

While this was occurring, the 'second instalment' of the Landing Force was coming ashore. Now three boats short, Herbert was fortuitously offered a ride ashore on a naval barge:

'Landing party man the boats' and the first three details are quickly away and pulling for the shore. The bullets are spattering on the ironwork of the destroyer, and the men are ordered to lie flat on the deck. The gun on the shore has been silenced by the *Prince of Wales*, but a perfect fusillade is coming from the cliffs.

It is still dark and a steam pinnace having mistaken our craft for another comes alongside towing a large barge. Their coxswain has been wounded and while they are putting him on board the destroyer we commandeer the barge, which takes the balance of the part company. The navy men yell 'Good-bye and good luck' and the pinnace pulls us off towards the shore. We have lost two men whilst loading the barge and these two unfortunates who have never had the chance to fire a shot are left on the Scourge.

The tows were dropped back in long strings behind the destroyers. In view of the loss of the three boats, the captain of the destroyer decided to get as close to the shore as possible and the naval steam-boats then led the rowing boats ahead to land. They were again landed north of Gaba Tepe, more widely dispersed than the battleship boats but this time in the correct order with the 10th Bn companies in the centre. Taking the B and C Companies' landing point as the centre of the 10th Bn's axis, A Company came ashore from HMS *Foxhound* just to their south on the beach now known as Anzac Cove, while D Company landed further north on the northern face of Ari Burnu itself.

It is rapidly getting lighter and as the heavily laden barge nears the shore it becomes the target for every Turkish rifle in or out of range. Suddenly within a few yards of the shore the pinnace turns, and the barge carried by its own momentum, goes on, only to stick on a reef in about four feet of water. To hesitate is death and the command is 'Overboard, lads and follow me'.

Several have already been hit, but the balance with a yell, leap over, and though the water is fairly churned with bullets, manage to wade or swim ashore.

At Outer Harbour in Port Adelaide in August 1915 he recalled with pride to a reporter from *The Advertiser*:

The landing of the Australians on the Peninsula was a wonderful thing. It was just breaking day when the troops got ashore. Our lot went off from the transport on a barge. There were 125 men on it. The barge stuck on a small reef, and we had to jump in and wade ashore in 4 or 5 feet of water.

The 10th Bn was at the centre of the brigade, as Herbert told the press:

We were in the first landing party. The 10th Battalion provided 2 companies as a covering party for the general landing. They lost very heavily. Twenty-one officers were wounded or killed in the first 2 days.

Ashore

As they landed, Capt Herbert noted: ‘the Turks could be seen running for their lives on our immediate front’. He sent forward one of the two scouting parties which reached the furthest inland, reaching the Third Ridge just south of Scrubby Knoll. Then the men of D Company dropped their packs, fixed bayonets and stormed up the steep, scrub-covered approaches to the cliff-tops, driving the Turks away. Herbert later recalled to the press: ‘The Port Adelaide boys deserve great credit for the part they played’. He continued in his hospital-bed narrative:

We run inland to where the dips in the ground shelter us, and we take off our packs. A second’s rest to gain breath and on again. And then – the most demoralizing climb that man could be put to, over-weighted with clothes, loaded with ammunition and food, enfiladed on both flanks and facing a heavy frontal fire and meeting extreme difficulties in finding foothold. Yet not a man faltered. We had simply to get there.

At last the crest, one short mad rush, and those unfortunate Turks who had dared to wait were no more. Then the coo-ees rang out to let those in the rear know that the hill was won. Another breather, and each one discovers that he was pouring with perspiration and had a throat like brass; but we knew it was courting disaster to touch our water bottles, when no one knew where the next water was coming from. A few minutes more to organise and then to push on.

Brig MacLagan’s intention after landing was for the 3rd Bde to force its way up the narrow tracks and precipitous gullies to the scrubby heights overlooking the beach, to fight through to the Second Ridge, and then to seize the Third (or ‘Gun’) Ridge. Herbert and Giles reformed their men into platoon groupings on Plugge’s Plateau and then moved eastwards, into the steep branch of the valley which the Turks had largely vacated. The walls were steep, harbouring Turkish snipers: ‘Owing to the rugged nature of the ground we could not get at the Turks on our flanks and our casualties were heavy from their fire’. Reaching the northern portion of the 400 Plateau, Herbert’s company was bounded on its right by a steep wall known as ‘The Razorback’. From this seaward lobe, the side of the 400 Plateau curved northwards ahead of the 10th Bn where it joined MacLaurin’s Hill, the beginning of the Second Ridge. The valley was bounded on the north by Braund’s Hill, a spur of the Second Ridge.

At around 0600, Herbert led D Company eastwards from Shrapnel Gully over the foot of a spur of Braund’s Hill to the north, moving slightly ahead of the 9th Bn. Within the valley was a steep old track, winding up to a gap at the head of the valley and leading into a gully on the northern side – apparently this had been used by the Turks to move to and from the coast. After some later improvement by the Australians, this track and the valley it ran through became known as ‘Bridge’s Road’. Herbert continued his recollection:

A message from our Brigadier was passed up from the beach, ‘Get the next ridge and dig in’. A strong firing line was immediately pushed forward, followed by the supports and after some strenuous sliding and climbing the next ridge, which was a commanding one was made good.

The gap at the head of the valley, where the Second Ridge joined the 400 Plateau, was too narrow to establish an effective trench so it was later barricaded with wire obstacles – this gap and the gully over the Second Ridge which it led to became known as 'Wire Gully'. By this time the headquarters of the Turkish 27th Regiment, in a reserve position at Eceabat on the eastern side of the Peninsula, first became aware of the landings.

By 0700, the battalion was making the steep climb at the head of Bridge's Road towards the edge of the 400 Plateau. It took them three hours to fight through to the Second Ridge, a mile inland from the coast. Herbert later told the press that his men had behaved splendidly: 'They showed exceptional dash. The fellows of the 10th Battalion were really responsible for holding the main ridge'. The forward elements began digging in across the northern portion of the 400 Plateau crest, with D Company on the extreme left (north) at the junction of Braund's Hill, MacLaurin's Hill and Wire Gully. His narrative continues:

A message was sent forward to some of the more eager platoons to 'Hold on while the main body digs in'. And we dug in.

No one had attempted to carry picks and shovels out of the boats, in view of the stiffness of the climb, so we had only our entrenching tools to work with. As the ground was soft and moist, some really good cover was obtained before the Turks returned to counter-attack about an hour later.

On the 400 Plateau, the companies were organised in preparation for an advance across Legge Valley to occupy Scrubby Knoll on the Third Ridge. By now, two battalions of Sami Bey's 27th Regt had been mobilised to stem the Australian advance, and their presence at Scrubby Knoll was now visible to members of the 10th Bn.

We were then subjected to a terrific fusillade and bombardment, which lasted without intermission night or day for five days. But it was too late, for the occupation of the famed impregnable Gallipoli Peninsula was an accomplished fact.

The battalion dug in at the 'Wheat Field' overlooking Johnston's Jolly, forming a definite front line across the northern 400 Plateau crest south of MacLaurin's Hill: from A Company southernmost on the right (north of Lone Pine) through B Company, C Company and then D Company on the left, with Herbert's left flank covering the entanglement of wire obstacles in Wire Gully.

'Stretcher-bearers wanted on the right'. We had now been under fire for four hours and had no intention of leaving the position we held. 'Stretcher bearers wanted on the left'. The cry urgent and insistent continually arose from the firing line, and was passed along and returned with redoubled insistence. Stretcher bearers there were brave fellows, who ignoring the Turkish snipers, went boldly with the firing line and endeavoured to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded who could not walk or crawl back to comparative safety in the rear of the lines, giving first aid to those who were able to leave the firing line. Yet in the bullet swept zone we occupied, many a brave lad met his death whilst in the execution of his errand of mercy.

It was while they were digging in that Capt Herbert sent forward a second scouting party (Pte Arthur Blackburn and L-Corp Phil Robin) to watch the company's flank and the valley to their front. Aware of the brigade and battalion commanders' intentions, Blackburn and Robin scouted over the Third Ridge and actually went beyond Scrubby Knoll, which was further

inland than any other Australian, and nearest anyone came to the objective of the expedition⁴.

The opportunity to push forward was lost though – at 1000 the Turkish 27th Regt counter-attacked from Scrubby Knoll, over and around the foothills, and the heavy and continuous exchange of rifle and machine-gun fire continued.

‘Stretcher bearers wanted on the right!’. Again some mother’s devoted son has formed a billet for a bullet, perhaps his second or third wound, for our boys are brave beyond words, and will not give in until forced to do so! Some loving husband has said goodbye to wife and kiddies for ever. ‘More ammunition wanted!’. The cry is the most frequent one.

The 10th Bn engaged the Turks from its line extending along the 400 Plateau and when a midday Turkish attack seized most of the eastern portion of the 400 Plateau, the 10th Bn line held firm. It was about this time the idea of an advance to the Third Ridge was abandoned, and all advanced parties were called back to the Second Ridge line which was considered tenable. On the 400 Plateau, Herbert’s company was firmly embedded to the north supported by an 11th Bn machine-gun, and the line was similarly fixed at its southern extremity at Bolton’s Ridge, but until nightfall Bean recorded that there was never an established line. From this time the Turkish 19th Division was redistributed and the whole ANZAC force was confronted by Turks in greatly increased numbers.

We must retaliate, it is our only means of shortening the war. The Turk, heroic fighter and foeman worthy of our steel, has not yet been shaken and presses our flanks hardily. He now has three divisions fighting strenuously to drive our division into the sea. He is held up by our boys by sheer courage, an indomitable determination not to go back, and often a great amount of pure bluff. Our situation is precarious at times, but we win through.

As Turkish artillery began engaging the exposed Australians, Herbert spent the afternoon establishing his individual rifle pits. A Turkish counter-attack at 1600 was successfully repulsed, a second at 1700 was also successfully repulsed, as were further attacks during the night. By nightfall, D Company’s Wire Gully position was one of a series of outposts along the ridge line which the landing force was clinging to. Between this and the southern crest of the 400 Plateau there were advances and withdrawals all day, and many were killed or left wounded in the scrub or in the gullies and spurs. Herbert recalled that first night they spent on Gallipoli:

Night falls and the groans of the wounded who have stifled their panic-stricken voices whilst daylight lasted, now become audible above the sound of incessant sniping. The horrible fear of being missed by the stretcher bearers and left in the scrub becomes an obsession and almost drives one insane.

As Monday 26 April dawned, a relatively definite front line of trenches existed, and any uncertainty as to its viability was shared by the Turkish command, unsure where to direct a counter-stroke. This was to be a day of reorganisation and consolidation, despite the almost point-blank enemy fire. While others in the region had to move forward to align their positions with the 10th Bn, Herbert spent the day reinforcing his defensive line and trying to deepen and connect the shallow rifle pits. He told the press on his return to Adelaide:

⁴ Rosenzweig, P A (2005) ‘The Chase: Anzacs on the Third Ridge’. *Australian Army Journal*, II(2): 227-235 (Nov-Dec 2005).

The Port Adelaide boys always had a reputation for daring. They were always considered to be good engineers and they got ready the primary trenches now being held by the troops over there.

It was a day of mixed emotions: fear and fatigue featuring prominently, swilling around with a desperation not to fail, buoyed by the expectation that these were temporary rifle pits dug as a prelude to the great advance to the Third Ridge.

On Tuesday 27 April, a Turkish advance was made in late morning over the southern portion of the 400 Plateau. Remnants stayed behind in the gullies and unsuccessfully attacked across the Wheatfield as they had done the last two nights. Herbert said that the Turkish snipers were good shots, but the general average of the Turks were not efficient with the rifle: They are anything but good shots. I was under fire for three days before I was wounded.’ He wrote that many had fallen because of the accuracy and determination of the snipers:

The enemy appeared to have a ‘dead set’ on all officers and non coms. One had only to open his mouth and give an order and he would be a marked man for the rest of the day.

A general counter-attack by Turkish reinforcements on 27 April was broken up by guns from the warships off-shore. It was whilst directing the fire of D Company near Wire Gully during that third afternoon that Capt Herbert received gunshot wounds to the shoulder and hand. His injuries were inflicted by a Turkish sniper, who had observed the officers’ dugouts and maintained an incessant fire upon them. Herbert told the press:

Bullet got me in the left shoulder and on the right hand. You see I have lost a little finger. Still, I’m not complaining. I reckon I’ve been jolly lucky. The snipers got me. They discovered the position of the officers’ dug-out, and they kept at us for five or six hours.

Temporary Captain William Frayne, one of Herbert’s original platoon commanders, was similarly killed by Turkish sniper fire, at the ‘Lone Hand’ on 6 August: ironically, he was shot through the head while attempting to locate a Turkish sniper through his field-glasses. Herbert wrote to Frayne’s parents in Adelaide: ‘An excellent Officer, well liked by his men, for whom he always had the greatest consideration, and I had learnt to have the utmost confidence in him’⁵. In his recollection of the landing written in hospital, Herbert described the sensation of being shot:

What is it like to be hit? One’s first feeling is that of having been suddenly struck by a cartwheel on the move. If on a limb one involuntarily grabs for the member, with a feeling that it has been blown off. Then in the action that follows, one curses his unfortunate luck in no uncertain terms. Yet one is glad that the strain of wondering when you are going to get it is over. The capacity for getting hit without contracting a vital injury is exemplified in the case of a private who received no fewer than seven bullet wounds in the Gaba Tepe fight and survived them all. Head wounds are not necessarily fatal, even when the bullet penetrates the skull from one side to another.

Herbert walked back to the beach, and Felix Giles assumed command of D Company. Herbert noted the attitude amongst the casualties:

It is a sad procession that troops down to the first dressing station, fitted up in an abandoned Turkish shelter hut. Here the stretchers are laid down gently, for the

⁵ Lock (1936), p. 174.

Australian is capable of almost motherly feeling towards his fellow men. Those who have not already received it get a temporary dressing, and are sent off to the beach, are loaded into lighters and taken to the various boats detailed for hospital duties. Here everyone is affected with profound admiration for the gallantry of the wounded, who, now the fear of a lonely death on Turkish soil is removed, become wondrously cheerful.

Finally, after four days of continuous fighting, the 10th Bn was relieved during the night of 28 April by the Royal Marine Light Infantry. The battalion withdrew to Shell Green, on the south of the ANZAC position at the head of Shrapnel Gully and they slept there overnight. That night, Captain Herbert was amongst those evacuated from Anzac Cove.

All day long the lighters carrying their sadly battered freight have been travelling to and fro between the ships and shore, sniped at by unfeeling Moslems, shelled by artillery from the fort, in imminent danger of being riddled by machine guns, often forced to take shelter behind larger steamers owing to the intensity of the fire.

Once on board the Ship the more desperately wounded are taken in hand at once, and every effort made to dress the wounds and alleviate the intense suffering which is being so cheerfully borne.

From a landing strength of 29 officers and 921 other ranks, the roll call at Shell Green on the morning of the 29th accounted for 13 officers and 380 other ranks present. Herbert entered hospital in Alexandria on 29 April, requiring the amputation of a finger. He later reflected that the way in which the surgeons, nurses and orderlies worked thirty hours on end and sacrificed personal comfort through that time of stress 'is a tribute to the manhood and the womanhood of our nation'. He was listed in the second Casualty List of the war:

When a representative of 'The Advertiser' called on Mrs Herbert on Sunday evening she had not been notified of the injury to her husband, and was almost prostrated on hearing the intelligence.⁶

Herbert went to a Convalescent Depot in Alexandria in June, and then back to Australia at the end of July. During this time, seven of his original D Company soldiers wrote to him:

As we have heard definitely that you are not returning to us, we wish to express our regret, and hope that you will make a speedy recovery. You, no doubt, sir, have heard of the gallantry of the old 'Don' Company, and in your disappointment at not being able to return to us we hope it has been some consolation to you. There have been two DCMs gained by the 10th Battalion, and it will please you to know they are both men of your old company, namely Privates C P Green and Lance-Corporal J C Weatherill . . . In conclusion we thank you for your sound instruction in the past, and our sincere wish is that when we return we shall see you well.⁷

Herbert was the third original 10th Bn officer invalided home when he arrived at Outer Harbour on 3 August. The following day he addressed a recruiting meeting in the Adelaide Exhibition Building at the invitation of the Governor Sir Henry Galway. After he was declared fit, Herbert went to the Middle East as Ship's Adjutant on HMS *Morea* and was Musketry Officer at the ANZAC Depot at Zeitoun. On 26 November he rejoined the 10th Bn AIF at Lemnos and went with them to Alexandria and Tel-el-Kebir, where he transferred to

⁶ *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 3 May 1915.

⁷ Letter to Major M J Herbert, 23 July 1915: cited by Lock (1936), p.184.

the newly-raised 50th Bn AIF in February 1916 as Officer Commanding B Company, promoted to major on 12 March. One of his platoon commanders gave the following testimonial in a letter home:

I have got the next platoon, No.5, which is the first in 'B' Company whose OC is Major Herbert, the best company commander in the Battalion and a jolly fine chap to boot and I am considered lucky in being under him.⁸

Herbert's war progressed from the Suez Canal Defences (Serapeum and Gebel Habieta) to Fleurbaix (6 June), the capture of Pozières (23 July) and the attack on Mouquet Farm (14 August) where the popular company commander was again wounded. He was the Battalion Second-in-Command at the Ypres Salient, and from October 1916 served in the UK (Commanding 13th Infantry Training Bn at Codford 1916-17; Permanent President of Courts-Martial, HQ AIF Depots in the UK 1917-18; and the Overseas Training Brigade, Longbridge, Deverill). During this time he had the privilege of being Escort to His Majesty King George V at the opening of Parliament in London on 7 February 1917.



Fig.2: The re-united medals of Major Herbert, including the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service Medal (George V issue) issued to him in 1924.

Herbert returned to Port Adelaide as Officer Commanding Troops on the former Orient liner HMAT A67 *Orsova* on 8 January 1919. He returned to his home at New Glenelg, with his wife and three children, and was

employed by the Department of Defence as Area Officer for the Wallaroo-Moonta-Kadina district. He served briefly in the 5/27th Inf Bn AMF, and transferred as an Honorary Major to the Unattached List on 1 April 1920, and then as a Major to the Reserve of Officers on 1 April 1925. By this time he had settled at Moorook on the River Murray as a vigneron.

*

For his performance at the Gallipoli landing, Herbert was Mentioned in Army Corps Routine Orders on 29 June 1915:

The Army Corps Commander has very much pleasure in publishing the names of the Junior Regimental Officers, Warrant Officers, NCOs and men, in the attached supplement, which have been brought to his notice for having performed various acts of conspicuous gallantry or valuable service during the period from 25th April to 5th May, 1915. He cordially thanks them for the good work they have performed, which more than ever testifies to their devotion to duty towards King and country.

⁸ Letter from Pat Auld, 13 March 1916: cited by Freeman, R R (1991) *Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred. A memorial history of the 50th Battalion AIF 1916-1919*, Peacock Publications, SA, p.6 [used with permission of the author].



Fig.3: The mounted miniature medals worn by Major Herbert, including the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers' Decoration (George V issue) which issued to him in 1925.

1924 (fig.2). He then received the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers' Decoration the following year, which he wore on a brooch of miniatures (fig.3). At the time of his funeral in 1964, the 76-year-old Herbert from West Croydon was called, 'one of SA's best known Army officers of World War I'.⁹ Of note, he was the last surviving company commander of the 10th Bn who had landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. In the notes he had penned in Egypt, Herbert had reflected on his role as a leader and commander:

One realises how cruel and bitter war really is when one is confronted with all manner of wounds, some injuries unspeakably ghastly. To maintain a cheerful face to one's men when one sees the good fellows that have been trained for months, with whom one has become familiar, towards whom one acts as a father, to see these gallant men shattered – lifeless – with faces inexpressibly calmed turned upwards towards an inexorable sky, that is even now laden with messengers of death, is to ponder on the awful iniquity of a ruler who dares to defy his Maker and plunge the whole world in a war so devastating.

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⁹ *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 17 August 1964.

INCIDENT ON THE RIVER: A TALE OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN GARRISON

Anthony F. Harris¹

Following Edward J. Eyre's incredible exploratory expeditions across the head of the Great Australian Bight, he was given the opportunity of taking land in an area along the Murray River which had caught his eye when overlanding stock into the infant province from New South Wales. Unfortunately, subsequent overlanding parties had experienced considerable conflict with the Murray Aborigines (in many cases instigated by the overlanders) and Eyre was appointed Protector of Aborigines and Resident Magistrate of the area with a view to protecting the stock routes and interceding between the local tribes and white settlers.² The settlement was known as Moorundie (later briefly known as the Village of Sturt), situated about 6 miles (9½km) south of present-day Blanchetown and about 65 miles (105km) as the crow flies north-east of Adelaide.

Early in November 1841, barely a month after its arrival in the colony under the command of Capt George Villiers Butler, a party of the 96th Regiment consisting of a sergeant and 12 men was detached from Adelaide to support the Resident Magistrate and the small local police presence should any anticipated conflict be too much for them to handle.³ The men were expected to live under canvas 'for some time...'⁴ but a barrack was built in the first few months of the detachment's arrival. The settlement was on the west bank of the Murray River 'near the Great Bend' close to Eyre's selection.

The 12-man detachment left Adelaide for Moorundie on Tuesday 2 November 1841⁵ under the charge of 849 Sergeant James Gurney and included:

994	Pte David Breadon [Breaden?]	1327	Pte Henry Parnell [Pownall?]
784	Pte Samuel Davis	1065	Pte Andrew Scott
1152	Pte William Dilly [Dilley?]	1383	Pte William Walker
343	Pte Richard Fanning	1456	Pte Robert Wilkinson

The other four men of the 12-man detachment at this time have not yet been specifically identified.⁶ Also present at Moorundie was Cpl William Finlay of the Royal Sappers and Miners, who was probably sent with the 96th to assist or supervise the building of the barracks. About 12 months later Cpl Finlay was to lose his life at Moorundie, being drowned in the river when trying to retrieve a wounded duck.⁷

There is little evidence to explain the activities of the detachment while on the river. Occasional patrols into the bush perhaps, no doubt a guard on the Courthouse when in session; but more likely they were simply used as an occasional pool of labour. As an example of the latter, one of the soldiers of the 96th, while at Moorundie, volunteered to act as

¹ Tony Harris is a retired State public servant and a collector and researcher interested in the military history of South Australia. He has been a member of the MHSA for over 40 years and is a Fellow of the Society and current Secretary of the SA Branch.

² SRSA GRG24/4/4 (E) pp.120-1

³ op cit No.367, p.137

⁴ ibid

⁵ op cit No.389, p.146

⁶ Cross-referencing these names with the Muster Rolls of the 96th Regt. show inconsistencies with those given in the Moorundie Court records

⁷ *History of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners*, T.W.J. Connolly, 1857, Vol.II, p.559 App.IX

a sawyer in between his guard duties to temporarily replace a civilian tradesman. He then successfully applied to be paid at tradesman's rates following a recommendation from Mr Eyre.⁸

However, some records of the court at Moorundie exist and it is these that give a little information about the extra-curricular activities of the troops.⁹ In this instance, on the evening of 5 September 1842 Sgt Gurney was visited by Lance Corporal of Police J. Paynter between 9 and 10pm, who reported that a keg of wine had been stolen from his hut and that he suspected Ptes Fanning (sometimes recorded as 'Hanning') and Wilkinson of taking it. Gurney made a search but makes no mention of finding the keg, saying only, 'There was no disturbance at this time ...', but that 'Afterwards they got tipsy and were ... fighting and quarreling among themselves, Fanning and Wilkinson the most active in the disturbance'. L-Cpl Paynter, together with Constables Carter and Wilson, tried to secure Pte Fanning, he being identified as the most objectionable in the fracas. Paynter states: 'I ... made (Fanning) my prisoner. He did not resist me but the other soldiers got in between me and the prisoner making a general mischief and saying they would not allow him to be made prisoner and it was quite impossible for me to take him away and secure him.' Police Constable Wilson stated: 'The prisoner ... was pointed out to me ... and I was ordered to handcuff him. I took him prisoner but he resisted and tore my shirt. He was very tipsy'.

Constable Wilson went on to say: 'Private Dilly struck me with his full force and threatened that either my bloody guts would be at his feet if the prisoner [Fanning] was taken or that he should lay at mine'. Constable Wilson was able to name Breadon, Davis, Scott, Dilly, Walker and Wilkinson as being present and also stated that 'Sergeant Gurney was there trying to preserve order and order them into quarters but they disregarded him'. Gurney also states that he saw no blows struck, nor heard any threats of personal violence, but he did say that 'It is normal for the military to be in Barracks at nine o'clock. I ordered them into the Barracks but they would not obey at the time'.

Although these court reports only specifically refer to Pte Fanning being called to the bar, the records suggest that probably all of the named soldiers were present in court. Pte Dilly had Constable Wilson recalled for cross-examination, saying, 'I wish to ask how I could let his guts out with nothing but my fist', to which Wilson replied, 'I saw no weapon with Dilly'. No other soldiers questioned the witnesses, but Dilly did admit to striking Constable Wilson.

So all in all it seems that there was a jolly old donnybrook that night by the river and no doubt a few sore heads and bones next morning. When it came to the court appearance and subsequent sentencing:

The Court found Wilkinson, Fanning and Scott guilty of being drunk and disorderly and fined them respectively five shillings each. Private Dilly is found guilty of an assault upon the Police in the execution of their duty and fined Five pounds. The four prisoners respectively refused to pay the fines imposed and were committed by Warrant to Gaol, the three men Wilkinson, Scott and Fanning for seven days each and the man Dilly for 3 months. But as there is no gaol at the Murray 24 hours is given them to make payment prior to their being forwarded to Adelaide. Sergeant Gurney being responsible for their appearance at Court tomorrow at eleven o'clock.

On 7 September the soldiers who were fined the previous day were brought into the Court escorted by Sgt Gurney. Neither Dilly nor Fanning were able (or prepared) to pay the fines

⁸ GRG24/90/361

⁹ GRG4/133. All quotes and names of personnel from the 'incident' come from this source.

imposed and were handed over to the police to be taken to Adelaide Gaol. Ptes Scott and Wilkinson both stated they would pay the fine and Sgt Gurney was made responsible for the payments (presumably it would be deducted from their pay?). Records of the Adelaide Gaol show Dilly charged with 'rescuing a prisoner and assaulting a Police Constable in the execution of his duty'. Dilly was eventually discharged on 8 December 1842; Pte Fanning was charged with 'being drunk and behaving himself riotously'. He served his seven days and was discharged on 13 September.¹⁰

Apart from the initial search for the stolen keg of wine, that aspect of the fracas seems to have played no further part in the incident. As for the detachment, its number was reduced to one sergeant and seven men by mid-1845 until finally being withdrawn by April 1846, shortly before the regiment left the colony.¹¹ Very few remains of the settlement of Moorundie can be seen today and the site now lies within the boundaries of Portree Station.

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SOCIETY NOTICES

The *Sabretache* Writers' Prize 2013

The competition is now open. For details please see the notice on page 29 of this issue.

Special 'Gallipoli' Edition of *Sabretache* 2015

Federal President Rohan Goyne is proposing the production of a special edition of *Sabretache* to coincide with the 100th Anniversary of Anzac. It will have a print-run of 1000 copies, and will appear in addition to that year's usual four volumes. Rohan will be seeking funding from the Anzac Centenary Committee, which is calling for proposals for suitable projects, to produce the edition. This notice is by way of an early call to interested members to start research and planning for articles for possible inclusion in the edition. More news will follow in due course.

MHSA Conference 2014

David Geck, Secretary of the Queensland Branch, informs members that the next MHSA Conference is to be held in Maryborough, Queensland over the Easter Weekend 2014. The conference will run from Friday 18 to Monday 21 April. This is just to give people plenty of notice to start planning their trips; David will send more details in due course.

'To the Fallen' Concert

Member Elizabeth Hobbs is also a singer with the Adelaide Harmony Choir. She draws our attention to a concert which the media release describes thus: 'a year prior to the centenary of the start of World War 1, Adelaide Harmony Choir will present a concert on the afternoon of Anzac Day to celebrate peace. The concert music will reflect the feelings of ordinary people striving for peace and remembering those who give their lives for their country and people.' It will take place on Anzac Day at 2:30pm in the Wesley Uniting Church, Kent Town, Adelaide. South Australian members (and, of course, anyone visiting from interstate) wishing to attend should contact the Choir for ticket information at marluc@picknowl.com.au.

¹⁰ GRG54/23. It would appear that the travelling time from Moorundie to Adelaide (possibly 2-3 days), was included as part of the seven-day sentence

¹¹ GRG24/4/9 (H) p.308

Military Vehicle Pamphlets

Michael Firth's keen interest and detailed research into armoured fighting vehicles has led to his producing a set of pamphlets, each dealing with one particular AFV employed by the Australian Army. There are ten in the series, with subjects including the Matilda, Stuart, M113 and others. Interested readers can contact Michael directly at mdfirth@westnet.com.au.

NEW BOOK RELEASE

Australian Eagles. Australians in the Battle of Britain

By Kristen Alexander

The odds were high and the cost was great, even if they survived.

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The Battle of Britain was the world's first great air battle. Fought between 10 July–31 October 1940, it was a turning point of the Second World War.

Australian Eagles tells the stories of five Australian pilots and one adopted Australian who successfully defended Britain against the Luftwaffe onslaught. They rank among the nearly 3000 men known as 'The Few'.

Heroes all who faced death daily: Jack Kennedy of Sydney (Spitfire and Hurricane pilot of 238 Squadron), Dick Glyde of Perth (Hurricane pilot of 87 Squadron), Tasmanian Stuart Walch (Hurricane pilot of 238 Squadron), Des Sheen of Canberra (Spitfire pilot of 72 Squadron), John Crossman of Newcastle (Hurricane pilot of 46 Squadron) and English-born James Coward who retired to Canberra (Spitfire pilot of 19 Squadron).

Three of the Australian Eagles were trained by the RAAF. One escaped death three times, one lost his leg, and four died. Kristen Alexander vividly describes their training, combat and victories. She sensitively explores the impact of their achievements and loss on those who loved them. She also covers how they are remembered, more than 70 years after their great aerial battles.

AUTHOR: Kristen Alexander's articles have been published in *Wings*, *Sabretache*, *Aviation Heritage* and the *Canberra Times*. Her *Clive Caldwell Air Ace* (2006) and *Jack Davenport Beaufighter Leader* (2009) were published to great acclaim. *Jack Davenport Beaufighter Leader* was included in the RAAF Chief of Air Force's 2010 Reading List. In 2012 she won the Military Historical Society of Australia's 2012 Sabretache Writers' Prize.

TWO VIGNETTES OF TRAGIC HEROISM

Ken Wright¹

THE GALLIPOLI SONATA

Born on the killing-ground of Gallipoli, a violin sonata disappeared only to suddenly reappear in 2009 and take its rightful place in the Australian music scene. Who was its creator and what story did the sonata tell of its existence?

When Sub Lieutenant Frederick Septimus Kelly, Royal Naval Division, wrote a beautiful violin sonata in G major during August 1915 in a trench on a Gallipoli beach, he could never have imagined it would not only be played at his memorial service but would become a valuable piece of Australian history ninety-five years later.² The sonata was penned for Jelly D'Aranyi, a young Hungarian female violinist in London whom Kelly had met in 1909 when she was 16. Their common passion for music bound them together in concert almost immediately and they regularly played music and performed on stage together. Kelly is reputed to have treated D'Aranyi more like a sister but over the next few years of their professional relationship, she fell madly in love with him.

Kelly was born in Australia and educated at Sydney Grammar School, then went to England to study at Eton College. After graduating from Eton he was awarded a Lewis Nettleship musical scholarship at Oxford and attended Balliol College. During his time at Oxford he took up sculling and became an excellent oarsman, winning many prestigious competitions, including Gold for England at the London Summer Olympics of 1908 as a member of the Leander crew in the coxed eight. Also while at Oxford, Kelly became president of the university musical club and a leading spirit at the Sunday evening concerts at Balliol.³

Kelly had a natural flair for music and had learned to play the piano at an early age, performing Mozart and Beethoven to such a standard that after leaving Oxford, he entered into the world of music he was so passionate about and where his obvious talent could be expressed to the full. He made his formal debut as a pianist and composer with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1910. He returned to Sydney in 1911 to play many of his own compositions, then returned to London to give a series of concerts. Experts predicted a great future for this virtuoso composer and pianist, but sadly the dogs of war were about to be unleashed.

When England declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, there was a surplus of about 20,000 to 30,000 men from the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Fleet Reserves who could not be assigned to a ship-of-war. The men were formed into the Royal Naval Division comprised of two Naval Brigades and a Brigade of Marines to fight on land rather than sea. Called 'Winston's Little Army' after its founder Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, the RND comprised eight naval battalions named after famous British naval commanders Anson, Benbow, Collingwood, Drake, Hawke, Hood, Howe and Nelson, plus

¹ Ken Wright likes writing about little-known military subjects, and has been published in Australia, UK, New Zealand USA, South Africa and Canada. He is currently the Australasia correspondent for *Britain at War*.

² A sonata is a musical composition for one or more solo instruments, one of which is usually a keyboard instrument, and usually consisting of three or four independent movements varying in key, mood and tempo.

³ Additional information from Therese Radic, *Race Against Time: The Diaries of F.S. Kelly*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2004.

the Royal Marine Brigade of four battalions from the depots at the ports of Deal, Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. The naval character and unit compositions of the RND would eventually change over the course of the war due to heavy casualties as more army infantry battalions were included.

Kelly, like so many thousands in England and throughout the Empire, volunteered for service for King and Country. Commissioned as a Sub Lieutenant in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, he joined the Drake Battalion of the Royal Naval Division to begin training as an officer. Kelly's organisational skills came to the attention of higher command and he was assigned, under protest, to the position of Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General to the battalion. The Ottoman Empire had sided with Germany and the Turkish government was about to be challenged by force of arms. When rumours spread that the Naval Division was to embark for the Dardanelles, Kelly, not wishing to be left behind, requested and was granted permission to go and was placed in charge of 5 platoon, Hood Battalion. The RND was part of the Gallipoli expedition that, with the possible exception of the Crimean War, was the most poorly mounted and ineptly controlled operation in British military history.

To the Turks, it was no secret that foreign troops were preparing to invade their homeland. It was not a matter of when but where. The Turkish High Command had time to prepare their defences and watched with amazement as Allied forces comprising mainly of British, Australian, French, New Zealand and Indian troops began the invasion by landing on the beaches of Gallipoli. Among the British forces at Cape Helles were five battalions of the RND. They stood out from the rest of the British forces. Petty officers instead of sergeants, leading seamen for corporals, could grow beards, had anchors stencilled on their equipment, attended sick bay instead of regimental aid post and were 'adrift' instead of absent without leave. Leaving these minor differences aside, they were a valuable contribution to the Gallipoli campaign. On 4 June during the third battle of Krithia, Kelly suffered a gunshot or shrapnel wound to his right heel. After a spell in hospital in Alexandria and promotion to lieutenant, Kelly returned to Gallipoli and on 7 January 1916 was one of three men to remain at an observation post while the Allied troops went about their highly successful night evacuation from the Gallipoli Peninsula. They were also the last to leave. Lt Kelly, Capt Weller and Temp Lt Riley, both of the Royal Marines, were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their service on the Peninsula.

By the end of the disastrous campaign, there were very few naval men left and the RND was redesignated the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division on 19 July 1916 and no longer under the authority of the Admiralty. The division moved next to the killing grounds of the Western Front and the battle of the Somme. After a week of a non-stop artillery barrage, the Germans were supposed to have been obliterated. The noise of the barrage was said to have been heard in faraway Kent. One officer is reputed to have told his men before they went over the top that they would be able to light their pipes and march all the way to Pozieres without seeing a live enemy. The first Battle of the Somme began 1 July 1916 and as the Allied forces began their attack across a landscape mutilated by 1,500,000 shells towards the German lines, the enemy machine guns opened up. Trials at the British School of Musketry in Kent showed that at 600 yards two German *Maschinengewehr* 08 guns could wipe out roughly 1000 men (the equivalent of an full-strength battalion) if they didn't go to ground. And 'wipe out' they did. The British, French and Colonial troops lost approximately 20,000 killed and 40,000 wounded or missing on the first day and the slaughter would continue for another three and a half months.

On 1 November Lieutenant-Commander Kelly was mentioned in dispatches and on 13 November he went into action with the men of the 63rd Division with other elements of British and Canadian forces in the battle of the Ancre, which was the final phase of the first Somme battle. In peacetime Kelly had studied music in Germany, but this was wartime and now the Germans killed him as he was leading Hood Battalion in a successful attack on a machine-gun emplacement which threatened to hold up the whole advance. The men of the Royal Naval Reserve eventually broke through the German lines, taking Beaumont and to their left, the 51st (Highland) Division swarmed into the remains of Beaumont Hamel.

On 18 November, the British Commander in Chief Sir Douglas Haig decided that enough had been achieved and the following day, the battle of the Somme was declared over. An area of approximately 120 square miles (193 square kilometres) had been taken but the butcher's bill was enormous. In three and a half months of fighting, according to various sources the German casualties were between 350,000 and 500,000, with the British and French losing roughly 600,000. World War One, often described as the 'war to end all wars' would continue to sacrifice the youth of a generation for another two years.

Lieut-Cdr Frederick Septimus Kelly DSC, aged 35, Hood Battalion, Royal Naval Division, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve is the only Australian buried in the British Cemetery at Martinsart, not far from where he fell. Fortunately, his rich legacy of compositions to the world of music has been archived for posterity. They include Two Songs, Op.1 (1902); Waltz-pageant Op.2 for piano, arranged for two pianos (1905 revised 1911); Allegro de concert, Op. 3 for piano (1907); A Cycle of Lyrics, Op.4 for piano (1908); Theme, Variations and Fugue, Op.5 for two pianos (1907-11); Six Songs, Op.6 (1910-13); Serenade for flute, harp and strings, Op. 7 (1911); String Trio (1913-14); Two Preludes for organ (1914); Elegy, In Memoriam for Rupert Brooke for harp and strings (1915); Violin Sonata in G Major 'Gallipoli' (1915); Piano Sonata in F minor, unfinished (1916).

With the passage of time, interest in Frederick Kelly faded into virtual obscurity until January 2009 when Chris Latham, a violinist and director of the Canberra International Music Festival in Australia, read about the Gallipoli sonata in Kelly's recently discovered war diaries. After some excellent detective work, he found the violin sonata in Florence, Italy, with Jelly D'Aranyi's grandniece (Jelly D'Aranyi never having married), and brought a copy back to Australia. The Gallipoli Sonata, thought to have been lost forever, has now not only taken its rightful place in the Australian music repertoire but has helped revive interest in Kelly, the man, the musician and the soldier and hopefully, the daring exploits of the Royal Naval Division with whom he fought and died with. In Bisham, Berkshire (UK) where Kelly lived, there is a memorial sculptured by Eric Gill near the gates to Bisham Abbey commemorating Kelly's particular sacrifice.

SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT

In the over context of World War Two, the contribution of small groups of people tends to get neglected, which is a natural but often annoying part of human nature, as there is more to read, more exciting adventures, great battles and extreme exploits to share with the bigger countries. In this case, spare a thought for the men from Norway who used their Motor Torpedo Boats to great advantage against the Germans who had occupied their country.

In 1940, British Commando units were formed following Winston Churchill's call for 'specially trained troops of the hunter class who can develop a reign of terror up and down

the enemy coast.’ Their early successes and some alleged atrocities so incensed Hitler that he drafted and issued the infamous *Kommandobefehl* or ‘Commando Order’ which reads in part,

I therefore order from now on all enemy troops which are met by German soldiers while on so-called Commando raids, even if they are soldiers in uniform, to be destroyed to the last man, either in battle or while fleeing. It doesn’t matter whether they are landed by ship, plane or parachute. Even if they want to surrender, no pardon is to be given on principle. Should single members of such Commandos either as agents or saboteurs reach the Wehrmacht e.g.; through the police of the occupied countries, they are to be handed over to the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) and executed. They are not to be kept even temporarily, in military custody or POW camps. I shall have all Commanders and Officers who do not comply with this order court-martialled.

The SD was a security department of the SS responsible for foreign and domestic espionage. This order had no effect on the Commando and Special Air Service operations but did cost many lives including some who were not members of those units.

When Germany invaded Denmark and Norway in April 1940, the Shetlands, a group of islands about 100 miles (160 km) north of Scotland and 225 miles (360 km) from Norway and geographically located between the North Sea and the Atlantic, became the first line of defence for Britain. The German Air Force and naval ships from bases in Norway and Denmark could threaten Allied merchant shipping and the Royal Navy base at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. Extension of ground radar cover northward and north-eastward from Scotland became a priority.⁴

One of Shetlands’ wartime links with Norway began when a Norwegian naval unit nicknamed the ‘Shetland Bus’ was set up by Britain’s Special Operations Executive. About thirty fishing vessels were pressed into service to sail covertly between Lerwick, the Shetlands capital and main port, and western Norway carrying military supplies, intelligence agents and instructors to the Norwegian resistance and return with refugees and any prisoners. In total, eighty trips were carried out with a loss of ten boats and one hundred and four lives. Towards the end of the war, the United States assigned three submarine chasers to take over from the fishing boats and no more lives were lost.

Then there were the Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB) of 30 Flotilla. Built out of plywood and measuring 115 feet (35.0520 metres) long, powered by four Packard twelve cylinder 1,250 bhp supercharged petrol engines with a top speed of 32 knots. These boats need a crew of three officers and thirty/thirty two other ranks. Armed to the teeth with heavy weapons, the ‘D’ Class Fairmile Motor Torpedo Boats and the Motor Gun Boats played havoc with enemy shipping in both home and foreign waters. In the European theatre of operations, these coastal craft operated mainly in the narrow waters of the Channel and the stormy North Sea where they were used to land or pickup secret agents, ferry refugees back to safety, conduct landings and disrupt enemy convoys. The crews came from various nationalities including British, Canadian, Dutch, New Zealanders, and Australians but in the North Sea area, crews were predominantly Norwegian, with the officers mainly drawn from the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

⁴ Iceland had also been of great concern to the Allies as prior to the outbreak of WW2, Germany sent representatives to Iceland to negotiate for the establishment of air bases there. They were refused but Britain, realising the potential threat of an invasion of Iceland by Germany and the possibility of establishing Air Force and U-Boat bases there, sent, on 10 May 1940, codenamed ‘Operation Fork’ a force of Royal Marines, Canadian troops and the Royal Navy to occupy Iceland. Although this was a blatant violation of a neutral sovereign country, it was deemed necessary at the time to protect Allied trans-Atlantic shipping.

For the MTBs from the Shetlands, fuel was always a significant problem on every patrol as the shortest round trip from the Shetlands to Norway and back was approximately 400 miles (643.47 km) at maximum continuous speed. Anything outside this operational range required additional fuel to be carried on deck in 4-gallon (15.142 litres) cans. This arrangement of having tins of fuel on the deck was regarded by the crews with dislike and apprehension as it not only restricted the use of guns but it was a great fire hazard if under attack.

When MTB 345 arrived in Lerwick in May 1943, it was an object of intense interest. One of two experimental Thornycroft designs, 345 was only 55 feet (16.7640 metres) long, displacing 16 tons (14.515 metric tons) and powered by two Whitwell Thornycroft engines which could bring her to a speed of 50 knots. Armed with two torpedo tubes, machine guns and two depth charges, it only required a crew of seven. In the unwritten tradition of calling a boat 'She', her disadvantage was that the fuel capacity limited her operational range and she could only make one single crossing of the North Sea without either being towed back or supported by another MTB which could refuel her. To offset the range disadvantage, it was believed by those higher up the command chain, because of its small size and low draft, the boat could easily be camouflaged and when attacking would be very difficult to detect.

MTB 345 and her all-Norwegian crew, except one from the Royal Navy, made her first patrol in June 1943 supported by fuel and provisions brought over by MTB 653. Incredibly, she patrolled for 12 days mostly in daylight, camouflaging as necessary for rest and maintenance. To the great disappointment of the crew, no contact with enemy shipping was made. The next naval operation by 345 began 24 July departing Lerwick with MTB 620 in support, with orders to torpedo any enemy shipping and to lay mines off the Norwegian coast. The crew consisted of Lieutenant Alf Andresen commanding, Petty Officer B. Kleppe, Leading Stoker A. Bigseth, Able Seaman J. Klipper, Able Seaman G.B. Hansen and Able Seaman K. Hals, Royal Norwegian Navy, and Leading Telegraphist R. Hull, Royal Navy. MTB 620 was commanded by Lt Prebensen.

As soon as they arrived off the Norwegian coast, they started transferring the extra fuel from 620 to 345 prior to any Germans finding them again, as they had been spotted by a German aircraft earlier that morning. Before the transfer was complete, a Blohm and Voss seaplane appeared and started firing at them. Gunners on 620 returned fire and the plane left, trailing smoke. Lt Andresen, possibly not wanting to risk both boats in the event of another attack, ordered 620 to go back to Shetland. MTB 345 was now in a bad situation; without enough fuel to continue the operation or return to Shetland, it was forced to take refuge in a narrow coastal opening near Oldeøy. Fortunately, Lt Andresen knew about some nearby hidden fuel dumps which had been left earlier by other MTBs, but as their exact locations eluded him, he set a course for Aspøy where he knew there should be one. Andresen made contact with the local people he knew and finally found the fuel supply he desperately needed. The problem was, the fuel was the wrong octane and therefore useless.

Until something could be sorted out about the situation they were in, 345 remained hidden in a small fjord at the island of Aspøy in Solund until July 28, when the crew were alerted by a lookout that three German planes were approaching. As they started to circle the area, small German patrol vessels also arrived, surrounding the hiding place and trapping the MTB's escape. An enemy landing party came ashore and began a fire fight with the MTB crew and although the seven crewmen returned fire, they were in a hopeless situation. With three men wounded, one seriously, Lt Andresen surrendered. Before they were taken prisoner, one crew member tried unsuccessfully to set fire to the boat. The prisoners were taken aboard one of

the German naval vessels which, at the time, were under the overall command of Admiral von Schrader. The prisoners were taken to Bergen and on orders from Admiral von Schrader's staff, were interrogated by *Kapitänleutnant* Fanger, a naval reserve officer who at that time treated his captives as normal prisoners of war. The interrogation ended in the early hours of 29 July and Fanger forwarded his report to the Intelligence Branch in Bergen stating that no information of value had been gained. He also said the men were ordinary naval crew in uniform and should be treated as prisoners of war.

The captured crew members were then transferred to Ulven concentration camp near Os outside Bergen and placed in the custody of *Obersturmbannführer* Hans Wilhelm Blomberg of the SD. The Ulven camp's nearby rifle range was regularly used as a place of execution. A meeting took place between Blomberg and von Schrader and a copy of Hitler's 'Commando Order' was produced. Von Schrader told Blomberg that in accordance with the order, the prisoners should be interrogated again by the SD and summarily dealt with. The SD official tasked to carry out the interrogation reported to his superior officer a similar report to Fanger's; nothing of importance was gained and in his opinion, the prisoners should be treated as POWs. Despite Fanger's and the SD officer's recommendations as to the MTB crew's military status, they were taken to the rifle range the next morning and shot one by one by an SD firing squad. Their bodies were then secretly taken to a deepwater fjord south of Bergen and disposed of in the 'usual way'. This entailed sinking the bodies with a depth charge attached which detonated, or was detonated, leaving no trace of the murder.⁵ This was a tragic end for men who, for some reason, became victims of the infamous 'Commando Order'.⁶ After the war, to honour their memory, two memorials were erected, one at Ulven where they were executed and another at Aspøy where they were captured.

In the overall conduct of Allied operations during the war, the boats and men of the 54 MTB Flotilla wrote distinguished pages in the records of the Royal Norwegian Navy.⁷ Their efforts and sacrifice played a small but significant part strategically in tying down vital enemy resources that were sorely needed elsewhere. They got up close and personal with the enemy on the sea, and lost five MTBs and nineteen personnel killed, including the seven executed. The enemy losses were eighteen merchant vessels, one U-Boat (damaged) one auxiliary AA cruiser, three M class minesweepers, three armed trawlers and four aircraft shot down. The number of enemy personnel lost is unknown. The badly damaged U-Boat (U637) limped back to base and took no further part in the war.

Special thanks for permission to quote from the Shetland history website <http://www.shetlopedia.com/>

Recommended reading

The Norwegian MTB Flotilla in Shetland. www.shetlopedia.com

Bryan Cooper, *The Battle of the Torpedo Boats*, Pan, 1970.

Leonard Reynolds, *Dog Boats at War*, The History Press. London, 2009.

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⁵ *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol.VII. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp.145-148. Affidavit Relating to Execution of British Crew of Torpedo Boat No.345, Norway. July 1943.

⁶ The Gestapo Commander in Bergen, Hans Wilhelm Blomberg was arrested in 1945 and brought in front of an Allied court in Oslo in December, and sentenced to death mainly because of the treatment of the crew of MTB 345. He was executed at Akershus 10 January 1946.

⁷ In early August 30 Flotilla was renamed 54 Flotilla.

COLLECTORS' CORNER

SCHOOL OF INFANTRY BADGE



I acquired this badge a few years ago, but still haven't discovered when it was manufactured and worn. The badge is 50mm high by 35mm wide, all in gilding metal except for the red enamelling in the King's (Tudor) crown and on the circlet and scroll. A wreath surrounds crossed SMLE rifles, with SCHOOL OF INFANTRY on the circlet and AUSTRALIA on the scroll.

The reverse is flat, with two lugs (loops) for fastening and the name of the manufacturer, Pitcher, in very small letters. The size of the badge and method of fitting would suggest a headdress badge, but it isn't illustrated in Jeff Cossum's books on the subject, nor have I seen it anywhere else. Nevertheless, I'm sure some of our members or readers know about it, and I would be very pleased to hear from them.

Paul Skrebels

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Have you come across a recent book, magazine, DVD or website which you think may be of interest to readers of *Sabretache*? Why don't you write a review of it (anything from 300 to 1000 words) along the lines of the reviews you see below. Email your contribution (editor@mhsa.org.au) or contact the editor with your idea.

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