

2/1st REMINISCENCES BY MONTE REID

Dear Brother Pioneers,

As I read the last issue of the "News" I was taken with a sense of nostalgia for those years we spent around the world together—especially those times in Tobruk, when we, as a unit, assumed our rightful place in the Army—when we grew up, as it were, and became a unit in spirit as well as in name. I wish that many of our boys would send in their contributions about those days, that we might be able to re-live and recapture the atmosphere of our existence as it was then.

As an original 15 Pln., 2/1st, I, of course, have seen many come and go, and there have been those who have made some outstanding impression; and, of course, there have been moments that also live on in the memory when all others have faded.

It was with this feeling in mind that I started to jot down some of my thoughts on the subject. And where better to start than Greta. One night, namely 3rd June, 1941, the time about 8 p.m., into Silver City "marched" a group of very tired and apprehensive recruits after the trip from Sydney. Not only were we tired and cold, but very hungry, for the cut lunch provided by the authorities at the Showground had been very stale and most unappetising to our civilian stomachs. Then, as we came into camp we heard for the first time, "You'll be sorry," and this did not add to our comfort. Then we experienced, also for the first time, the spirit that was to go with us through many days and years together. We were treated to a stew, but what a stew—I am sure that never a stew tasted as welcome as that one. We were able to settle down on our palliases at least with a full stomach, and somehow the Army did not look quite so bad.

And of those days at Greta, one figure stands out, a man whose name I have not seen in print in any issue of the "News." I refer to Sergeant-Major Smith, and who could forget him—certainly none of "C" Coy., for if ever a C.S.M. lived for his company, it was Smithy. Who could forget the way he boasted that HIS company could do anything and how he was always trying to create records that no other company could break.

FINE BODY OF MEN

Greta is over and my thoughts turn to Dubbo. I am sure all 15 Platoon will remember the march through the main street. We were a fine body of men then, at the end of our initial training fit and eager. 15 Platoon was led by that fine young soldier, Kev. Morahan, a man whose keenness certainly was not measured by his stature. Behind Kev. were his three section leaders, Bill Simpson, Bill Broad and Bob Pratt. As these three were each over six feet, it was no wonder the young ladies on the sidewalks made remarks about Kev., much to his disgust, of course.

I wonder how many of us look back on the trip on the "Johann de Witt,"

and remember the days as we cruised through the Indian Ocean. Do you remember the balmy evenings when, as we prepared to be closed down for the darkness in the stinking belly of that ship, we made our way for an hour to the bows and there, as the band played as only our band could play, we listened to our favourite Kiwi, Parkinson, as he sang, "Now Is The Hour," and how we all joined in with the Dutchmen as we sang "Windmills Turning."

DUST STORM AT AMIRIYA

The weeks passed and one could make mention of the mud and the 50-odd nightly guard at Julis, and the dust-storm at Amiriya, as we experienced our first taste of desert; the trip to Sollum, and so on.

Suddenly the air was full of rumours of Germans, and as "C" Company repaired the Derna Road, one day we saw some planes fly over and quite seriously wondered what the black crosses stood for. One day we were innocently filling the hole in the road, and the next the Germans were using the same road and we were safely inside the wire at Tobruk. And then I had the doubtful pleasure of taking out "C" Company's first patrol along the Derna Road. My orders: to go out 3000 yards, across 1000 yards and return to our lines. That was what we did, and every man in our platoon can testify to the fact, as also could the Germans no doubt, that every step we took was heard back in our lines, for we wore our issue boots and the desert was covered with stones. All other patrols, of course, wore sneakers.

It was a few nights later that Laurie Raward met his death on a somewhat similar mission.

INTO THE SALIENT UNDER FIRE

One name stands out very noticeably in the next few months that followed—a man who became known as "Sea Water" Edwards. Some of his eating habits were not of a class that would have been acceptable at Princes, but there was not a man in "R" sector who did not come to admire him and his efforts as, day after day, he laboured to supply each man with a daily ration of sea water, that we might have at least an apology for a daily wash. For many hours each night his truck could be heard toiling up the escarpment with its precious load.

Standing out in this period was Corporal Len Rodda. What a career he had had. Up and down, private to corporal and back to private like a yo yo, yet always with a word of encouragement for us in our time of need. When our platoon advanced into the salient and dug in under fire only to find next day that we were in the middle of a minefield, and when our two supporting Bren carriers were blown up, it was Old Rodda who dashed across to the crew's assistance—alone, coolly and without any hesitation.

BATTALION PARADE, PALESTINE

And so on through the long and unhappy days, until at last we found ourselves back in Palestine and our first battalion parade. Where now were the brave Pioneers who had marched so proudly through Dubbo? We went into the desert about 1,400 in number, on that first parade after the desert I counted approximately 400. And what a sight we were—ragged and virtually unwashed, but at last filled with a sense that there was at last some hope in the world.

And what next? Well, I transferred to the 2/2nd, and that is another story, but I would like to pass on just two names to you—two men who were as alike as salt and cheese, but both left me with a happy feeling that I had spent some time in their company.

The first was Harry Tope. Many times we in the 2/2nd had reason to rebel against him and some of his rulings, nonetheless I feel that every man at least recognised his value in his chosen field of "Q." On our march from Tsili Tsili to Nadzab, Harry organised the loads that each man could carry, and although most of us started out with far in excess of those loads it was not long before we were glad to strip ourselves to our basic requirement, exactly as had been laid down. Vale, Major Harry Tope

And now for the last name—one Bill Everett. Over in Western Australia we acquired some replacements and one of these was a retired bank manager. We did not know his age, but it must have been great, and he had joined the Army to destroy some Japs on behalf of his two grandchildren, then he was prepared to die happy. We tried to place him in many positions in the unit, until at last he was made a battalion runner. On that march to Nadzab we were short of numbers, so Old Bill was asked to go along. On the way to Nadzab we had to cross a range of very steep hills and all of us crawled up on our hands and knees. As we reached the top, we virtually collapsed, to recover before staggering on. I had the privilege of being behind Bill; he lay for a few minutes on the ground, then, getting to his knees, he looked around at the surrounding country and said: "My word, what a marvellous spot for a golf course." Old Bill, wherever you are now, I salute you.

THOUSANDS MARCHING—INSPIRING SIGHT

And so to Anzac Day, 1962. I see your kind reference to myself in the "News." This year I did not take part in the march, but took my eldest daughter along to see it from the sidelines. This is the first occasion that I have done this, and I consider it one of the most profitable one-and-a-half hours that I have ever spent. I would, without hesitation, recommend that each Association member watch the march at

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least once in his lifetime. We become so used to the idea that we are Pioneers that we tend to lose sight of the fact that we were, after all, only a small part of a mighty whole. If we were proud of our part in the war effort, then we would be doubly so to see what a mighty effort it was on the part of our small country. To stand on the footpath and see the thousands still proudly marching past was an inspiring sight.

Please excuse the typing—if I had written it you would have been in difficulty reading it, but my typing, like my soldiering, is only average. I don't expect to see this in print, but may I say how proud I was that on 3rd June, 1941, I was sent to the 2/1 Pioneer Battalion, how much I enjoyed the years we were together, and how much I have enjoyed putting these thoughts down on paper. Thank you.

Yours for old time's sake,
Monte Reid.

WE WANT JOHN HARNETTY

Many members have written and some have telephoned to say the last issue of the "Pioneer News" was the best to date, and that they thoroughly enjoyed the articles by John Harnetty. They have stated John's articles have given the paper a lift and they would like to see more of his articles.

The editors will pass this on to John and hope he can help us out once again when he has the opportunity.

1963 PROGRAMME

COUNTRY SMOKO

Saturday, 23rd February, 1963
At Port Macquarie R.S.L.

WREATH LAYING CEREMONY

Wednesday, 24th April, 1963
March departs corner Pitt and Hunter Street, Sydney, at 7.30 p.m.

ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, 24th April, 1963
After the Wreath Laying Ceremony
To be held at the Returned Soliders' Club, Elizabeth Street, Sydney, at 8 p.m.

ANZAC DAY RE-UNION

Thursday, 25th April, 1963
at

THE CASTLEREAGH HOTEL

50 PARK STREET, SYDNEY
Corner Castlereagh and Park Streets
Meal to be served after the march

The above is the programme for 1963 to date, as supplied by the Social Committee from their meeting held on Saturday, September 15.

Please write these dates in your diary and then you will not miss meeting your friends of war years.

ANZAC DAY DINNER INCREASE

The cost of the meal at the CASTLEREAGH HOTEL on Anzac Day will cost 10/6 as compared with 5/6 per head at the Sussex.

At the last Committee Meeting this caused dissention among the members and the Social Secretary invites the members generally to write to the Editor voicing their opinion as to the best way to overcome this increase.

2/1 - 2/2 PIONEER BNS. ASSOCIATION

will hold a

Country Smoko

**AT THE RETURNED SOLDIERS' LEAGUE CLUB
PORT MACQUARIE**

ON SATURDAY, 23rd FEBRUARY, 1963

• DINNER 12/6 — Commencing at 6 p.m.

FRIENDS OF 2/1 - 2/2 PIONEERS ARE ALSO CORDIALLY INVITED

The Association has had many inquiries in the past as to why they have not conducted a Smoko in the country. To date this has been practically impossible to organise from the Sydney end, until recently when Fred Wheaton and Merv Rees, of Dorrigo, were in the Port Macquarie R.S.L. and discussed the matter with the manager, Mr. Harry Butler.

From here it went before the R.S.L. committee and our own committee, and we are happy to announce that Mr. Butler and his committee are right behind us and will attend to our every need. All we have to supply is the members, and the indication at a recent committee meeting was that nine out of the thirteen members present would be definitely attending.

This Smoko is mainly being organised for our country members, so if nine out of thirteen Sydney members can attend, then the country should roll out in force.

CATERING ARRANGEMENTS

In order to facilitate catering arrangements by the R.S.L., we would like members to fill in the form below and send with their 12/6 to the Secretary before Friday, 25th January, 1963.

The Club is at our disposal for the week-end for other facilities, such as meals at a nominal cost, showers, etc. Sleeping accommodation could also be provided for 30 to 50 persons.

TRANSPORT

If requiring the company of other Pioneers, transport arrangements could be organised through the country representatives of the Association who are listed below.

NEWCASTLE: Jack Bertram, 247 Lawson Street, Hamilton; MACLEAN: Alec Cameron, Wharf Street, Maclean; TAREE: Fred Brooks, Boomerang Street, Taree; COFFS HARBOUR: Allen Crute, High Street, Woolgoolga; KYOGLE: Bill Hoffman, 4 Groom Street, Kyogle; GRAFTON: Harold Leese, 134 Turf Street, Grafton; CASINO: Colin Scholes, 30 Beith Street, Casino; LISMORE: Eddie Weston, 127 Tweed Street, North Lismore; DORRIGO: Fred Wheaton, Cedar Street, Dorrigo; GOSFORD: Alwyn "Nip" Kearsley, Palmgrove, Ourimbah; SYDNEY: Max Herron, 3 Enoggera Road, Beverly Hills, the Secretary, is handling the Sydney train bookings and money for fares would have to be in before 25th January, 1963, to make a block booking. However, individual bookings could be made if desired.

Train details from Sydney are as follows: Depart Sydney Friday, 22nd February, 1963, at 8.15 p.m., arrive Wauchope Saturday, 23rd February, at 5.15 a.m.; Depart Wauchope Sunday, 24th February, at 10.19 p.m., arrive Sydney Monday, 25th February, at 6.40 a.m. Return fare, 2nd Class, as at October, 1962, Sydney to Wauchope, is £4/14/3. (There is to be an increase in November, 1962, so please check before forwarding any money.)

As there will not be another issue of "Pioneer News" before April, 1963, this is the only form of notification for the Country Smoko—so, make a note of it NOW!

PLEASE FILL IN THIS FORM — USE BLOCK LETTERS

Christian Name..... Surname.....

Unit..... Coy..... Platoon.....

Address.....

I enclose 12/6 herewith for catering.....

I will be attending your Country Smoko.....

I will be travelling by Train/Bus/Car.....

I will contact your Country Representative, Mr.....
in order to go in a group.

I will make my own transport arrangements.....

POST THIS NOW, WITH YOUR 12/6