

# MEMORIES STIRRED BY ANZAC DAY

The following article has been sent in by Monte Reid, of Cessnock. Monte was an original 2/1st, but later spent three and a half years with the 2/2nds and, naturally, these latter years are fresher in his mind than the earlier years.

He has written this article in an endeavour to share these memories with you, whether you be 2/1 or 2/2, for are we not members of the one association?

We are most grateful to Monte for this excellent article and if he can stir your memories, just put them on paper and send along to us.—The Editors.

## DEAR FELLOW PIONEERS,

Greetings and best wishes to you all! It was good to join with you in the march this year. So many familiar faces were there, but, unfortunately, so few remembered names. Sometimes I feel ashamed that so many of those whom I knew so well for such a long time are just so many Pioneers, and not individuals any longer. This worries me and, more than anything else, makes me regret the passing years.

Some time ago I met a Mr. Les Taylor and found to my delight, that he had been a "Y.M.C.A." man during the war, being stationed with the 2/24th Bn. Of all the unsung heroes of the war I feel that the men of the Red Shield and Red Triangle Huts are the most deserving of reward. As I spoke with Les, my mind turned again to those so often uncomfortable days when I, as so many others, was in need of a word of comfort, of encouragement, of advice, or for just someone different to talk to, and sure enough, not far away would be one of our friends with a happy smile and the ever welcome cup of coffee.

There was a very definite reason for us being where we were, whether it was from a sense of adventure, or of patriotism, or to escape from some previous situation, or even the prospect of conscription, and over all the knowledge that there was a common enemy who had to be defeated to ensure the safety of our land; but with these men of the "Sallies" and "Y", they were in uniform for one, and only one, reason, and that was to serve us in the way that was most natural to them, by unselfish personal service.

Recently I was able to read the story of the 2/48, and I also read again our own story, and as always I was struck by the fact that such books are rather cold affairs with very little of the warmth that makes a unit the interesting collection of people that it is. This of course is inevitable, for so much of the personality of men cannot be incorporated in a factual history. The editor of the 2/2 Pioneer Story has done a good job, even though there are some notable omissions, and one of these I wish to write about later. In these few pages I will try and present some of the impressions I gained while a Pioneer.

## WELCOME BY GENERAL GEORGE VASEY

I was most interested to read some time ago of the visit that Jim Field made to Ravenshoe—I was also envious, for I have always wanted to re-visit

those places where we spent so much time and energy in preparing for the work that was ahead. Many memories flooded in as I read Jim's letter, and none was more vivid than that of the day we first met General George Vasey. We had moved to the parade ground, and I guess those who were there will still remember the way in which he welcomed us to the Division, and the uncompromising way in which he outlined the work that we would be doing with him.

Never one to pull punches, he spoke to us in his usual down to earth language, and I feel sure that in that one speech he enlisted every man on his side. On one other occasion I had contact with him when he again demonstrated his feeling for the ordinary soldier. We were working at Dumpu, and one day as the two Maynard Brothers were struggling up the hill above the lakes, along came the General in his jeep with some Staff Officers, and although there was no room for more passengers, he stopped the jeep, told his staff to move over, and the Maynards to climb aboard. One did not argue with George Vasey, so Terry and Arthur climbed aboard. What a blow when his plane crashed and he was lost.

## UGH! POWDERED EGG

One of the identities I remember from Ravenshoe was the Officers' mess Cook. For much of our time there, we, in common with the rest of the Bn., were enjoying (?) egg powder. Our so often meal was bread soaked in watered powder, and fried, and, although rather boring when served every day, rather enjoyable now and then. However, one night we were to have a visit from some of Division and Brigade, so Major Tope went to Cookie and asked him as a special favour in view of the occasion, if it would be possible to prepare some interesting dish for dinner. Cookie agreed, and so it was with a sense of anticipation that we assembled for the meal with our visitors. At last in came the main course, and we all looked with great eagerness to see what had been prepared to whet our appetites. There on a huge plate was an equally huge stack of—yes there it was—FRIED BREAD. I thought there would be murder done there and then. At least the visitors saw the funny side of the incident, but then, they probably were not living on egg powder.

I guess 5 Platoon will always remember a training march the battalion did to the jungle training area. On this occasion they had been given the task of carrying the spares of the Sig. Platoon. For many weary

hours they had struggled up and down hills and creek beds with those unwieldy baskets the sigs. used, and at last camp was reached. Meal time arrived and everyone received whatever food had been prepared for them and were content. Everyone, that is, except the sigs. For out of those baskets that had been full of so important spares came tins of fruit and other delicacies that had been kept for just such an occasion. Once again there was murder in the air.

## INTRODUCING LT.-COL. "BIG" JOE LANG

One of the outstanding personalities prominent throughout my army life was Lt.-Col. Joe Lang. I met him first at Greta when he came to us on exchange for a time. Then later, when those of us of the 2/1st who had been seconded to the training Battalion, had transferred to the 2/2's, he became our CO. Big in personality, he was big in play, and certainly in his ability as a soldier, as well as being just plain BIG.

Known to all and sundry as "Joe", many of the incidents in which he was involved, in any lesser man would have been just plain ridiculous, but with Joe were merely a means to an end, and as evidence of this, let me tell you of the day that he and the Adjutant were out at the jungle area on a recce. Both were on motor bikes, but when the time came to return to camp, it was found that the CO's bike had broken down, and as it was almost evening, the prospect was rather dim. The bike that Gordon Bellmaine was on was a small BSA, and this had a faulty headlight. Any other two men would have been in a quandary, but not our fearless leaders.

Much, much later, the camp sentry saw coming down the road toward the entrance, a light which had the appearance of being carried by a drunk, for it was wobbling all over the road. Then to his surprise it turned into the camp and his startled eyes saw that it was a motor bike ridden by the CO. This of course was not an unusual sight, but the thing that was unexpected, was Gordon Bellmaine clinging to the C.O.'s back, and as well, he was holding out in front of the rider's nose, a hurricane lantern. This had apparently been borrowed from a timber cutter. What a shame no one in the unit had a colour camera. Surely, this was a ridiculous sight, and yet, not really, for it merely illustrated the resourcefulness of Joe.

In the same vein one could mention the day that we reached Kirklands, on the Markham. While we were waiting to cross the river, and

wondering how many Japs there were on the other side, the C.O., being very hot, but certainly not bothered by the coming clash with the enemy, dived fully clothed into the river to cool off. Ridiculous? Certainly, but would we have had him any other way?

And I can remember him a few days later at "stand to" charging around the lines, all six foot-odd and 17 stone, and in his hand, like a toy, his Smith and Wesson pistol. And then a week or so later, as we went down the Markham to Lae, remember his famous signal to Division: "The 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, less two rifle companies and elements of Headquarters Company, are advancing on Lae." There he was, in the lead with me on one occasion, and as he made a terrific swipe at the wait-awhile vines with a razor sharp butcher's knife, he took off part of his hat brim and missed his ear by a whisker. This was our C.O.!

#### "JOE" INFORMS GENERAL HE WILL BUILD ROAD

Perhaps the seemingly most ridiculous action of Joe occurred at Dumpu. We had just come out of the hills at Levatts Post, ostensibly for a rest, when Joe came to see me. The advance on Shaggy Ridge was at a standstill, for the distance that supplies had to be carried was beyond the resources of Divvy. A few days earlier, I had made a survey to see if a possible alternate route was in fact a possibility. My negative report had been accepted by Division without question, and it looked as if a stalemate had been reached. There was only one obvious route to follow, but the Engineers had stated that it was not possible to build a road over such rough terrain without heavy equipment, and this was unavailable. I do not know what went on at Division, but this I do know—Joe came to me and said that even though the Engineers had branded the road as impossible at that stage, he had told the General that we would build it. Just like that. That day I was to go with him and look over the general area, the next day I was to peg out the route, and on the third day we would commence work. And that is how it all turned out.

Without any measuring or levelling device at all I pegged out what appeared to me to be a suitable road for jeeps and next day we started the job. Later the Engineers returned with a small bulldozer and took over construction. Just after this I went to hospital with malaria, and when I returned a month later I found a well-used road and one that appeared to follow my "survey" exactly.

I would say without fear of contradiction, that the greatest single contribution that this Battalion—at least in its resurrected form—made toward the war effort was the acceptance of the challenge to build this road, thus showing that it could be done, and yet, in the Pioneer Story, for some strange reason, not one line appears about it. The editor has included so many trivial items, and yet this has been left out. The event was of such importance to the overall war effort, that the official War History

records the fact that "the 2/2 Pioneer Bn. accepted the challenge and commenced to carry out the work". So once again an apparently ridiculous action of the CO had paid off.

#### JIM DERRICK IN ACTION

When I was reading through the Story of the 2/48th, naturally the name of Jim Derrick was prominent, and this brings to mind a certain patrol on Tarakan, that Alan McInnes took part in with our new CO, Col. C. Davis. What an outstanding soldier he must have been in his younger days, but no doubt by this time his abilities were somewhat dimmed. On this occasion he and his men were on a ridge behind our lines, when they came across an infantry patrol. This patrol was then stationary, no doubt with good and sufficient reason, but the CO thought they should be moving faster, and being the CO, said so in no uncertain terms. Alan had recognised the patrol leader and tried to shush the CO, but this was like a red rag to a bull, and only added fuel to the fire. However at last the patrol having apparently made up its own mind that it was time to move, went on. Alan then asked the CO if he was aware of the identity of the leader. "No", replied the CO, "but he should have made a move quicker". On being informed that he had been watching Jim Derrick in action, the CO, without turning a hair, said "Oh, good show, good show".

I guess we all remember those days at Cairns, especially the way Col. Davis always tried to help his men in every way possible. How the Provosts must have hated him, for, over and over they would bring our Pioneers from the town and parade them before the C.O., presenting what must have appeared to them to be an open and shut case, and the C.O. would turn to them and say: "Case dismissed, insufficient evidence." I often wondered if he ever tried these tactics in any of his pre-war court cases as a lawyer.

#### UNTRAINED, PERVERSE, CANTANKEROUS RECRUITS

Just one final thought, this time to express my admiration of those Company Sergeant-Majors who knocked us into shape at Greta. I now work with a group of about 150 men, and as I look at them, I see again us as we must have appeared to the CSM's, when we entered camp as raw recruits. Untrained, perverse, cantankerous, not really keen to be disciplined or bow to authority, in only a few short weeks those experts had made us into polished, well turned out soldiers. How proud we were as we marched through Dubbo, and how our hearts responded to those shouts of acclamation from the enthusiastic crowd. And then my mind turns to another parade in another place many thousands of miles away, and just about twelve months later. We had come out of the desert after nine months, and were holding our first Bn. parade in Palestine.

We had gone into Libya with over 1,000 men, and yet as we stood now on

that parade ground, I counted about 400 only; there was scarcely a complete uniform amongst us, we were unkempt and dirty, and yet in those ranks of ragged troops there was one great difference between Dubbo and Palestine—then we had thought that we were good, now we knew that we were.

#### "IF IT CAN BE DONE, THE PIONEERS WILL DO IT!"

Finally, as I close, let me appeal to you, the members of our Association, to give every possible assistance and encouragement to those who are endeavouring to keep the members together. What a worthwhile job they are doing, and I guess there isn't much thanks handed out. Let us continue to keep alive that spirit that was a feature of our Battalion during the years of conflict: the spirit that led men like Joe, and Clayton, to say, and believe, "If it can be done, then my men will do it".

Yours for old times sake,

MONTE REID

#### SPECIAL INVITATION

It is the desire of the Association that a special invitation be extended to Dulcie Thomas, Geoff Benfell and Lyn Hobbs and anyone else who feels that they would like to attend our Wreath Laying Ceremony on the next Anzac Eve. We realise that there are a lot of people who would like to remember someone in this way on Anzac Day, so we extend this invitation to all who would like to join us for our Wreath Laying. You will be notified in the Pioneer News of the time and date, if you will just remember you have the invitation.

Wally (Desso) Page

#### LAST POST

We are indebted to our Welfare Officer, Jack Collis, for sending along the following information regarding the passing away of our fellow members:—

NX56238 Pte. P. M. BALL, 2/1.  
 NX45219 Pte. E. R. PELGRAVE, 2/1.  
 NX52224 Pte. C. D. WILSON, 2/1.  
 NX23490 Pte. P. HOWELL, 2/1.  
 NX51765 Pte. G. GARLAND, 2/1.  
 NX39842 Pte. A. J. SHEATHER, 2/1.  
 NX33117 Pte. J. W. STAMP, 2/1.

#### SEVENTH DIVISION

#### 4th ANNUAL REUNION

#### RAMSGATE R.S.L. CLUB

SATURDAY and SUNDAY  
 14th and 15th OCTOBER, 1967

For further details contact

#### SYDNEY:

C. Sandison, 40-4128  
 F. Alexander, 59-7261

#### NEWCASTLE:

M. Quinn, 24 Queen Street, Waratah

#### DUBBO:

T. Mead, c/o R.S.L. Club

#### LEETON:

M. Roberts, c/o R.S.L. Club