

# WHAT MAKES A FIGHTING MAN?

By John Harnetty, "C" Coy., 2/1

## PIONEERS — AND OTHERS — TELL ALL THE YARNS THAT REMAIN EVERGREEN

On Anzac Day, old hands were out again for the 51st honours for "The One Day of the Year", and many tales of old campaigns were retold, and many old friendships renewed. Age has taken our hair, our teeth, our litheness of limb, but these are things we'll cherish until that last Last Post.

Some old hands had to give the march away because they can't make the distance these days. They had to cherish their memories in front of the TV or the radio, perhaps in company with some old cobbers to share the toast to those who stayed somewhere far from home or who have gone to their final haven with the flag on the coffin-lid.

The Last Post has sounded for many. It was never intended to be the music of sorrow. It really isn't. Its triumphant ending takes away the sombreness, the poignancy of its opening strains.

But it sounds often. So let's honour the dead and remember the living.

Australia's history of foreign wars doesn't go so far back as history runs. It begins with the Sudan Contingent, the South African War, World Wars I and II, Korea, the Malayan Emergency, and now Vietnam.

But in fewer than 70 years Australians have stacked up quite a respectable showing. The Sudan, South Africa, The Peninsula, Neuve, Chapelle, Pozieres, Passchaendale, The Marne, Greece and Crete, Sananda, Buna, Gona, Milne Bay, Jezzine, Merdjejyoun, Sidi Barrani, Gemas, Bardia, Tobruk, Timor, Singapore, El Alamein, Tel El Eisa, Mechili, Balikpapan, Labuan, Kaepyong. Get a service gazeteer.

Your memory wouldn't help you, even if you were a dozen Barry Joneses. They've been in a hundred and then a hundred places. They haven't always been victorious, but they've never failed to make a bloody impression on the other bloke.

### WHAT MAKES A DIGGER?

He's generally not a cold-gutted blood-letter who loves killing or destruction for their own bitter sakes.

He's usually the type of bloke whose most warlike act in times of national peace is to growl about the Government's shortcomings over this or that. Or, if he's properly roused, he might threaten to do a contradictory neighbour at a sporting fixture.

He comes from all ranks of life. In peacetime he may be a bank clerk, a bushman, a shearer, an engine driver, a barrister, a pub roustabout, an architect, a plumber, a farmer, or just a plain drifter.

The Australian hard case is more prone to wry humour than to savagery. But when the shot's on, he undergoes a dramatic change of character. He can play for keeps when he thinks it's necessary.

The late Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel, with whom the 2/1st had some acquaintance, had a wholesome respect for Australians. So he should have. They were the chief tools in wrecking his plans for a triumphal march into Cairo. Tobruk was the fly in his tactical ointment.

But while Tobruk is generally regarded as an Australian show, let it not be forgotten that the fighting prowess of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers' Machine Gunners, the staunchness of the men of the Royal Horse Artillery, and the dauntless courage and dash of the Poles of the Carpathian Brigade all had a bit to do with it.

They held Tobruk and hung up the Afrika Korps for precious months. Rommel's star faded when Montgomery smashed him at El Alamein, and our sister battalion, the 2/3 Pioneers, played an epic role in that show.

The Middle East was soon over for the Second A.I.F., and they had to turn their attentions to keeping the Japanese out of Australia. They had a new ally, led by General Douglas MacArthur, who made the simple avowal, "I shall return."

### AUSTRALIAN — CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

He had good company for his untried American troops. The Australian proved himself just as capable, resourceful and high-spirited in the jungle as he had been—win, lose or draw—in the Western Desert, Syria, Greece and Crete.

Many of those who could get there appeared on the big Monday on Anzac Day. Our own old lot may not have been as dense as in former years, but there were plenty to make a good showing.

The battle honours still were there. Without the panoply of uniforms, you saw the same types of blokes who went away. Maybe a bit heavier in the girth, stiffer in the joints, with kids as old as they were when the bugle blew not far from a generation ago.

But they were still much the same in character as they were when war called them.

Lots of people have wondered what makes the Digger tick. His qualities of humour and contempt for adversity are important. He believes Australia's the greatest country in the world, but lots of people have the same not unpraiseworthy habit.

He may be more mischievous than malicious—but experts say there's some mysterious alchemy that makes this normal, intensely human character into

a very demon when the real stoush is on. Why it is, we don't know. A whole college of psychiatrists couldn't hope to put their fingers on it.

However, in the flesh he bears no resemblance to troops of an Irish regiment being inspected by the Duke of Wellington just before the Battle of Waterloo.

It's gone down in history that Wellington said to one of his aides: "Do you ask me if they look as though they will instil fear into the enemy? That I know not! But, before God, sir, they terrify me!"

## NEWCASTLE "RATS" ON THE JOB

I knew the minute I stepped into the hostelry on Saturday, I could "smell a rat".

Only in the better sense of the phrase, of course.

Sure enough, there he was, holding court at one end of the bar—Jack Griffiths, president of the Newcastle branch of the Rats of Tobruk Association. With him as henchman was the treasurer, Dick Seddon, and benignly surveying the goings on from his wheelchair, ex-P.O.W. Toby Smart.

Joining in the reunion were locals Peter Bell, "Banjo" Martin, Bill Hoffman and the irrepressible "Jacko."

### SCOURGE OF THE ENEMY

All one-time members of the 2/1 Pioneers and the scourge not only of the enemy, but the Australian "brass" as well.

Missing were two other locals, Ray Smith and Jim Hall, but at least they were there in spirit and their absence gave a good excuse for another round. FROM TOBRUK TO THE PACIFIC

As the talk ranged from Tobruk to the Pacific Islands and the doings of a quarter of a century ago, I couldn't help but think of what a wonderful job Jack Griffiths and Dick Seddon do every year by spending Christmas taking their invalid mate around the State to visit old friends.

While I was there the fun was fast and furious, but eventually the party had to end. The last I saw of the group was when they made a dignified exit, swaying slightly in the breeze and ringing out their moustaches.

"Kyogler".

(Reprinted by courtesy "Kyogle Examiner.")

### FROM THE EDITORS

Bob Lake and Max Herron wish to thank correspondents and reporters for the many news items sent along for this issue.

We have retained articles from Bob Burnside, Harry Montague and John Harnetty for future issues, with the hope that you three gentlemen do not mind.