

# OH, ME RAGIN' THIRST!

By JOHN HARNETTY, C Coy., 2/1st

This tale is sure to earn the condemnation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, but it's about Pioneers in various places coping with the delivery of their favourite commodity . . . grog!

Grog, as you know, is often dear to the Digger's heart. It's the oil that flattens out the turbulences of a C.S.M.'s liver. It's the gentle balm that brings a great big smile to the dial of the most flint-fisted of quartermaster sergeants.

It's the Ambrosia that makes even the most home-minded Dig remark lightly, albeit wistfully, "Gawd! Ain't it a lovely war?"

Grog, to the average Pioneer, came in sundry forms.

If you were one of the skulls and boasted stars, copper-oxide or better, you got it in the Officers' Mess, and swamped it down in vast immoderate quantities on Dining-In Nights.

If you were a sergeant, the Sergeants' Mess, hallowed by long tradition, was prepared to slosh it out to you — on payment of the prescribed fee.

To the Digger, it was available all too illiberally and all too seldom. Does anybody remember that dreadful flat beer we used to get from Cairns? It was hogwash, viewed in retrospect, but it still was beer — beer, the font of forgetfulness, the harbinger of bright dreams and desolate hangovers.

Does anybody remember that anisette which was carted around in large jars the night we reached Tobruk from Sol-lum?

It looked like sump-oil and tasted like the Wrath of God, but the hardier of the troops drank a bit of it just the same.

It's also recalled that that same anisette had a most distressing effect on the system.

Many of the boys, as I recall it, went for the old Hally's Comet after unwise ingestion of this stuff.

How about the Alicante sold by the Wogs at Kilo 89 and Hill 69? That was poison in spades.

I wonder if any of the vigilantes are still around who helped Captain John Riley stuff a consignment of it down its vendors' throats, and watch them kick as though they'd been hit by arsenical poisoning?

What of the all-too-rare S.R.D.; (Nobody has ever been able to tell me exactly what those initials stood for, but Seldom Reaches Destination will do as well as anything else).

It was good stuff, if you drank it quickly before the bottom smouldered out of your mess-tin. Some rum for your tum!

Then we come to the era of Jungle Juice — the true, the blushful (?) Hippocrene, distilled by such masters of the art as "Three-Course" Kelly, who was a genius at the technique of the metal worm and the fermenting mash.

"Three-Course" made a good brew, they say. I think few of our bods ever sampled it because the Yanks had a lien on it.

Having seen the Yanks drink some revolting types of gutrot in my time, it strikes me that the Kelly brew would never have copped a blue ribbon at the Easter Show, but the Yanks liked it.

Of course, since the Yanks drank torpedo juice, wood alcohol, canned heat and other vitriolic beverages, Kelly's Redfern Redeye must have tasted quite mild.

As far as I'm concerned the best drop of home-brew I ever had was with old Ernie Greenwood, babler-sergeant of C Coy.

It will undoubtedly be remembered that Ernie, with his worthy confreres, Cec, Hart, Snowy Lloyd, Arthur Neuss and others, was a real cordon bleu when it came to the art of food.

I wonder where the haemorrhagic old byblow is these days?

And his jungle juice, cherished in clear-glass Winchester bottles purloined from some A.A.M.C. depot, was a fine old vintage when we got it.

It's my recollection that Ernie nursed his brew from Balik to the Lampasoean without getting a drop shaken, tea-leaved or swiped.

Came the night of the Japanese surrender and Ernie bunged her on!

It was a choice drop — not the lucent drops tinct with cinnamon that you'll read about in Keats, but a good drop of White Mule withal — and we enjoyed both the occasion and Ernie's liquor.

I also recall awakening the next morning with a head the size of a freely-bouncing atomic pile, wondering who'd put the long-dead crow in my north-and-south while I was asleep — or unconscious.

That's a brief story of Grog and the Pioneer. Anybody else got any reminiscences?

Of course, one mustn't forget the Birra Cirene filched from a Libyan brewer by the Sig. Platoon.

And there were the casks and casks of bitter red wine found in odd places around the North African littoral.

R.S.M. Herb Talberg kept a cask of it in a handy position for quite a while. It was very tasty while it lasted.

## In Passing...

• **NAT GOULD**, B Coy., 2/1st, sent a short note with his sub., and asks to be remembered to all his old comrades.

• **DOUG. TURNER**, of Condong, Tweed River, per medium of his good wife, also sent along a welcome donation. Many thanks, Doug.

• **"BOMBO" BROWN**, B Coy., 2/1st, is still with the P.M.G. Dept. at Bourke, and asks to be remembered to Alf Carter and Jack Hyde and the boys from Kyogle. Thank you, Mrs. Grange, for penning the letter to us, and for the donation on "Bombo's" behalf.

• **OS THURLING**, Sig. Plat., 2/1st, of New Lambton, sends along his sub. and says he is very pleased with the manner our new Editor, Bob Lake, is producing the "News." Thank you, Os, for your kind remarks. Recently, Os installed a phone at Jack Bertram's house at Hamilton, and you can imagine the time lost by the P.M.G. on that job.

• **JIM IRELAND**, Don Coy., 2/1st, sends along six names of new members and a donation — thank you, Jim. Working for the Repatriation Dept., in Brisbane, Jim would welcome a visit from any Pioneers passing through.

• **GORDON WALSH**, B.H.Q., 2/1st, of Ryde, writes in to say he recently had a holiday at Evans Head and Casino. "Good fishing, beautiful weather, plenty of refreshments and good company, all combined to make a perfect holiday" were Gordon's own words.

At Casino, Gordon looked up Joe Leis and had a real session together. Joe passed on the news that the "Villian" Cyril Duncan, B Coy., had his leg smashed badly when a tree fell and pinned him down for six hours. The ambulance man said he had never seen anyone with so much courage as Cyril, for he did not grumble or groan once. He is now up and about on crutches. Shortly after this his son, aged 15, died suddenly.

Thank you for your welcome letter, Gordon, and for the donation from Joe Leis and Nev. Schaeffer.

• **FRED WHEATON**, H.Q. Coy., 2/1, of Dorrigo, and his charming wife, recently had a pleasure cruise to Suva, and we heard in a "round about" way that they had an excellent time. Perhaps you may find five minutes to tell us about it one day, Fred. Don't forget to give "Lakey" and the boys a ring when in Sydney next time.

• **JIM ROBERTSON**, Sig. Pin., 2/1st, of Wentworth, has not written for some time and some of the boys have been inquiring as to how he is going — drop Bob Lake a line, Jim, then all the world will know what you are doing.

• **VIC WHITELEY**, H.Q. Coy., 2/1st, of Riverwood, was forced to resign as Editor of 'Pioneer News' recently, owing to business commitments. This was indeed a blow to his fellow committeemen. Vic was a most regular attender of meetings and has come forth with some terrific ideas. At a recent committee meeting all members praised Vic's work of the past, and we do hope some time in the near future you can see your way clear to return to the fold, Vic. Many thanks for the wonderful work you have done for the association. Kind regards to you and Peg from all your mates.

• **GEORGE PERRY**, 2/2nd, of Eastwood, sent along a map showing in detail the Seige of Tobruk, for which we are grateful, George. We may use it in part at a later date.

• **CHARLIE VICKERS**, C Coy., 2/1, of Campbelltown, carried out the mighty task of selling all the raffle tickets on Anzac Day, netting a considerable income for the association. Thank you for the job you did, Charlie.

Only a week before Anzac Day, Charlie's youngest daughter was married, and we offer our congratulations to the two newly weds.