

## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

*Every unit has its fair share of "characters" and over a period of time Jack Coates 2/1 has, with his remarkable memory, put pen to paper. The following are stories of the "good old days" of army life, and personalities, and we are sure they will bring back memories to former 2/1sts, particularly long-time members of the battalion.*

### WALLY THOMPSON – A LEGEND

Wally Thompson was a bright cheerful soul, about eight stone, head of black wavy hair and a black moustache. Part aborigine, he had been a drover, Gulf country to rail heads, aged about 30, but hard to say.

He could ride camels like he rode horses, superbly. Twelve Platoon adopted him and called him "Sporty". Jack's section was blessed to get him. Lieut. Jack Riley was Platoon Commander, Greg Noris (later died of wounds) Sergeant, Len Smith was Corporal with Jack Coates as the Lance Jack. Wally was illiterate, his section mates would write his letters, particularly thank-you notes to the Comforts Fund of the unit thanking them for canteen orders, socks, balaclavas, etc.

As members of the unit in Palestine would remember, Australian bottled beer was only a shilling at the wet canteen and therein lay Wally's problem. Len Smith and Coatsy used to have to watch him like a hawk. The beer was in cases of 48 bottles, so the occupants of the tent would pool their money, cart it back to the tent and when finished put the case and straw back at B Coy kitchen.

At one stage in Palestine, Wally even decided to take on Major (later Colonel) Brown. Overhearing a remark in a line-up for dinner which included the words "as the Ace of Spades", Wally no doubt thought it was aimed at his colour. Up went the dukes and he danced around like a terrier inviting Major Brown to "put 'em up". Wally was short with a mighty temper and Major Brown very tall and barrel-chested, so it must have been quite a scene.

Came the Siege in Tobruk and Wally was invaluable. On patrol with rarely a compass, black night, no moon and heavy cloud meant no North Star to guide us back – no worries, we had Wally. Throughout the Siege he was his usual unworried self, never complained, readily accepted patrol duties and there were dozens over our five tours of front line time.

At another period during the Siege, a bomb was dropped on the No 5 Wharf, Pontile D'Aosta (named after Mussolini's son-in-law the Duke of Aosta) right in the middle of the T-shape wharf. So repairs were needed. In addition to 12 Platoon, some dozen or so Senussi Arabs were taken on strength, their No. 1 man spoke excellent English and was really black and full of cheek. Jack Griffiths was in charge of Senussi, so he acquired a khaki boiler suit for head Senussi, painted three stripes on the arm and paid him two tins of bully beef and two packets of biscuits. The others were paid one of each. This No. 1 man ran the show and gloried in it. One day "Griffo" and No. 1 Senussi were in job conversation when Wally chipped in, so the black Senussi told Wally "be quiet SAMBO". Well, the blue was on, Wally yelling "don't call me Sambo, you black bastard" and into him. After some minutes the Senussi took off with Wally after him. The platoon were in fits. Some two hours later Wally returned and some two days later Senussi also came back, still in his boiler suit, 3 white stripes up. The job on the wharf was never finished.

Back home in Australia, Wally did not show up after leave and was posted A.W.L. There were quite a few missing from all companies. Eventually, Wally was found, brought back and received two weeks field punishment at Churchill, a tough Field Punishment Centre near Ipswich. The "Rosellas" (Military Police), so called by their red and green colour patch, gave him a hard time and we never saw Wally again. All efforts to track him down failed.

In later years on a holiday in Broken Hill, Jack Coates stayed at a pub "Willyama" which at that time was the only pub that allowed aboriginals to drink in the public bar. They were also allowed rooms in galvanised huts in the yard of the hotel. Jack was allowed to buy them drinks and in conversation asked the Boss drover if he knew Wally. He did, and said Wally had been droving up north after his time in the

army, but had gone back to the tribe, had a wife and kids. Jack Griffiths also heard later he was somewhere around the Riverina on a farm. No one has seen or heard of him since.

Come the Hereafter, we might meet him in the Spirit World and do a patrol or two.

### THE GINGER WOG OF JULIS

Anyone who was ever at Julis camp would have known him. Very fair gingery hair with pale skin, about early to mid 20's. He called on us and wanted to join us – "me Australie, my daddy Light Horse". He sold us oranges and grapefruit from a citrus orchard nearby. We were allowed to pick up windfalls, as were Ginger and his mates. They would bob up everywhere, doovers, route marches with their call 5 for 5, 10 for 10, oranges very sweet, very clean, very Quais. They were the famous Jaffa oranges, and the currency was in MILS, 1 1/2 mils, about three pence.

When we came out of Tobruk we camped at Kilo 89 for a month or so, then to Hill 69 alongside Julis. Up bobbed Ginger, still claiming a "Light Horse Daddy", and Jack believed him too.

### EARLY DAYS AT GRETA CAMP

Jack's home town of Balmain was well known for the odd bods, so he was well prepared for the 2/1st Pioneers at Greta during June, July and August of 1940. "Wolf" Cross ate anything, "Aspro" Dowling was always at the R.A.P. after a fix, "Corn Sacks" Thompson, no matter what the topic of conversation, told us how many sacks he could sew in an hour. The "Black Copper" – he could fight. Needed to, our 10 Platoon had Jack Keegan who would take to him anytime. Nothing for them to mix it in the middle of B Company parade ground. A few were always drunk – there was a plonk shop over the railway line on the Maitland Road, and it was well patronised. Semlitzky, Tom Crowe and the four Cheshier brothers were all good judges of a drop. Over at the main gate in wooden huts were 1st reinforcements to 6th Division. They sailed early August and the row could have been heard in Newcastle.

The camp was known as Silver City, so called by the new galvanised huts gleaming in the sun. Jack Griffiths and Jack Bertram would remember well. 12 Platoon at the bottom of B Company lines were known as Tal's babies, Harry Talberg was platoon sergeant when Greg Norris went to O.T.C. Mostly young blokes except for six old hands. Two of them were Corporal Jack McCracken, one of Newcastle's own and Cecil John Westacott of Campsie. Cecil was out of work and had enlisted to feed his six "jammy-fingered kids". When anyone said the A.I.F. could afford to pay another General with the allowance Cecil was drawing he would become very upset.

After weekend leave, at Lights Out, they would harmonise songs – one he remembers "My Own Iona". Then it would be "13 more nights after tonight home to Mumma – you beaut". Both came home from the Siege in Tobruk, and Jack has very fond memories of them. Two great blokes who helped Jack Riley and Greg Norris handle the tearaways.

Others remembered well by Jack were Gordon Osborn, a fine officer and a good bloke, Phil (Champ) Bright and Jack Lloyd (later commissioned), Bert Murray (later C.S.M.) and Harry Showers, a bush lawyer who used to tutor anyone up on a charge. All good men and a credit to any unit.

**BILL LEWIS** 2/2 Sent in an article from the "Diary of NX18655, Dvr F.G. Mathieson" ex-2nd Division A.A.S.C., also in reference to the writer's early days in Greta. He mentions it as being a brand new camp – in two sections, silver city and chocolate city. The latter was mostly infantry. The 2/1 Pioneer Battalion were on one side of the writer's lines and a supply company the other. The A.A.S.C. bugler was very unpopular when he sounded Reveille, so one night "someone" filled his bugle with porridge. He was not amused.

The writer said "the 2/1 Pioneers next door have a great band, 36 piece. They wake up everyone at 0530 hrs. marching up and down between their own lines. We just lay there and listen to the music. It's great. The Pioneers train hard and are good soldiers, tough as nails, glad they are on our side".

## NEW TREASURER

At the November Committee Meeting, Don Crawford was elected as Treasurer of the Association and the Executive and Committee were unanimous in their praise of Don for accepting this position vacated on the death of Vic. Whiteley.

Don already has the role of looking after the 2/2nd Banner and organising the two wreaths for the Wreath Laying Service so we say many thanks to Don for accepting this extra task.

## SICK PARADE

**CLEM MORONEY** 2/1 of Carramar was in Liverpool and Baulkham Hills hospitals in July for a broken thigh which he sustained after a fall at home. He was then transferred to Lady Davidson at Turrumurra where he was visited by Max and Peg Herron.

**JACK DOLAGHAN** 2/1 of Malabar was in Lady Davidson in July in the same ward as Clem Moroney with a shoulder problem – also visited by Max and Peg.

**DAVE WELLER** 2/1 of Bomaderry was in Nowra Hospital in July and then moved to Prince Alfred for an operation.

**JACK TOOKER** 2/1 of Chatswood was in hospital in July for a few days with bronchial trouble.

**JACK LAMERTON** 2/1 of Liverpool spent some time in hospital in July with a leg circulation problem and was visited by George Tolmie, George Walker and Max and Peg Herron.

**ROY LEVY** 2/2 of Revesby was in Bankstown Hospital in August with a pacemaker problem and was visited by Jack McDonagh, Don Crawford and Bob Ginnane.

**ERN JAMISON** 2/1 of Gladesville is 93 years of age and was in Concord Hospital with a broken hip. He was then moved to Lady Davidson Hospital at Turrumurra on 29th September, but his wife had phoned on 19th October to say he is now at home. He was visited by Bill Tasker and Jack Tooker, who learnt from Mrs Jamison that their grandson is a keen follower of Ern's army life and would be eager to march on Anzac Day to represent his grandfather.

**KEN STUART** 2/1 of Turrumurra was in hospital in August, but was later moved to Nazareth House, Bobbin Head Road, Turrumurra. He had been visited by Cyril Amies, Jack Kerlake and Jack Tooker who had a good talk with Mrs Stuart and promised to visit again at a later date.

**BILL ROBERTSON** 2/2 of Randwick was in hospital in October but is now recuperating at home. He was visited by Frank Gillian and Mary Lloyd.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT, 1998

It is always a pleasure to report another successful year, but this year was tinged with sadness, recollecting the 45 members who have died since our last annual Meeting, including our co-patron Colonel John Williams.

The Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Cenotaph on 24th April was well attended by members and relatives.

The Anzac Day march saw both battalions down in numbers as hips, knees etc are feeling the years, but they still turn up for the lunch.

The dinner at the Occidental was most successful with an attendance of 95 and all enjoyed the lunch and afternoon snacks.

Our Association has an Executive that is excellent in conducting all our business so well and on behalf of all members I would like to thank them for their effort.

The Pioneer News remains the lifeline of our Association and even though it is posted to all states and distant country areas, it gives us all a feeling of togetherness. – **ALLAN McINNES**

## WAGGA REUNION statement of Income and Expenditure:

RECEIPTS			
Advance deposits	\$451.00		
Balance paid	966.50		\$1417.50
EXPENDITURE			
Wagga RSL	\$838.75		
Uranquity Hotel	432.00		
Refund deposits	67.50		
Chapel donation	79.25		\$1417.50