

PIONEER NEWS

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Official Organ of 2/1 and 2/2 PIONEER BATTALIONS ASSOCIATION

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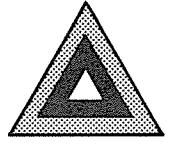
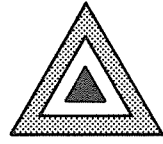
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ROCKY CREEK WAR MEMORIAL PARK

On Sunday 12th August, at the Rocky Creek Memorial Service for the 56th Anniversary of VP Day, the unveiling of eight unit plaques took place, which included the combined plaque of the 2/1st and 2/2nd Pioneer Battalions.

The Rocky Creek Memorial Park is situated on the war time site of the 2/2 and 2/6 Aust General Hospitals on the Kennedy Highway, between Mareeba and Atherton, of which the Custodian is the Atherton Shire Council. They have developed the park and provided the granite boulders and the labour to affix the plaques in conjunction with the Rocky Creek War Memorial Park Committee.

To date forty nine plaques have been unveiled so it was quite an honour and privilege for Max Herron 2/1 and Les Tunks 2/1 to unveil the 2/1st and 2/2nd Pioneer plaque. Also present was Jack Hearn 2/2 of Howlong NSW.

The following is a summary of the history of the two units as delivered by Secretary Max Herron at the gathering of 600 spectators.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

"As Secretary of the 2/1-2/2 Pioneer Battalions Assn. based in Sydney, I am honoured to be here today for the unveiling of the plaque dedicated to both units.

The 2/1st Pioneer Battalion was formed in Sydney in May, 1940, and sailed for the Middle East in September of that year. They served as infantry and engineers in Palestine, Egypt, Libya, the Siege of Tobruk, New Guinea and their final campaign in Balikpapan in Borneo. The surrender of the Japanese forces in the Balikpapan area was taken in their lines on 10th September, 1945.

For their jungle training on the Atherton Tableland the 2/1st Pioneers were staged in camps at Wongabel, Wondecla and then Kairi, attached at various times to both 6th and 7th Divisions.

The 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion was formed in Victoria in May, 1940, and sailed for the Middle East in April, 1941. After several

weeks in Palestine they were on the move to Syria and were involved in heavy fighting until the French sought an armistice in July, 1941. The Battalion then embarked for Java, where several weeks after landing and fighting, they were taken prisoners by the Japanese. The Battalion was then reformed at Wagga in N.S.W. in 1942 and served in New Guinea at Lae, Nadzab and Shaggy Ridge before their final campaigns at Tarakan and Balikpapan.

Whilst on the Tableland, the 2/2nd Pioneers were camped at Ravenshoe, Wongabel and operated as a Beach Group at Trinity Beach.

Both units are now part of history, as are many others, and we thank those members who gave their youth and sadly, in some cases, their lives to make the battalions what they were, units which gave their best at all times either as infantry or engineers. In particular we remember those 400 members from the two units who gave their lives in the service of their country.

We who are left are very proud to have been a member of either unit and our post-war Pioneer Association and before calling on Les Tunks, 2/1 Pioneer of Mareeba to unveil this memorial plaque, I would like to thank the following local people who have been of assistance to me in the preparation of the plaque - Mick Henderson, Les and Lesley Tunks, John Hardy and the Atherton Shire Council. We are also grateful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for sponsorship of our Plaque."

Les Tunks 2/1 then unveiled the plaque by taking away the cloth cover which displayed the two colour patches painted onto calico. This was carried with acclamation by the spectators. Of the eight plaques unveiled it was the 2/1-2/2 Pioneer plaque that was

chosen by the local newspaper

"The Tablelander" to feature a photo showing the Council workers affixing the plaque to a granite rock, in a feature article the week prior to the 12th August.

The plaque, at left is made of heavy bronze metal and is 600mm x 600mm (2ft x 2ft). The three sections of each triangle are in colours of grey, white and purple and are outlined with a gold border which make it very impressive.

The overall cost of the plaque was \$618 of which \$559 was kindly donated by the Dept. of Veteran Affairs Canberra.

CAIRNS-ATHERTON TOUR

By PEG HERRON

When it was first suggested two years ago that an Association plaque be placed in the Rocky Creek Memorial Park, Max and I decided to be there for the unveiling if at all possible - much depending on our health. He had spent such a lot of time and effort in paper work connected with the plaque lay-out and design, that I'm sure he would have been very disappointed if he couldn't make the trip. As I have an ear condition that can be a problem flying, we were faced with the trip having to be made by train - rather a daunting three day journey.

We left Sydney on the Brisbane train on the 7th August and even here could not avoid the Census. The forms were distributed and picked up by special staff all along the route. We boarded the "Sunlander" next morning at Brisbane for the long trip to Cairns. Having a comfortable sleeper compartment, the journey though tiring was quite enjoyable with lovely scenery. Arriving at Cairns late next day, we were met by our ex-A.A.M.W.S. friend Vera Bradley and husband, Ron, who drove us to our hotel on the Esplanade. Many thanks to you both.

Saturday morning, a little weary after the long trip, we picked up our hire car and were soon on our way up the Range to Mareeba. Here we were met by our only Pioneer in the area, Les Tunks 2/1, who took us to his home for a lovely afternoon tea and to meet his wife Lesley. A very enjoyable couple of hours with them and we were off to Atherton to our motel.

Next morning we left for Rocky Creek Park, the "big day" finally with us. We were joined by Les Tunks (unfortunately Lesley was not able to make it). The programme of events commenced at 12.15pm and included military drill, war dog handling, a pipe band and all the old wartime songs. They also had a fly-over of "War Birds" showering the plaque area with hundreds of red poppies. A lovely sight. After lunch, kindly provided by Lesley Tunks, the unveiling ceremony of the eight unit plaques commenced, including the 2/1-2/2 Pioneer plaque by two very proud Pioneers, Max and Les Tunks. Also in attendance were Jack Hearn 2/2 and his wife from Howlong, N.S.W., who happened to be in Cairns on holidays. A wonderful occasion.

On the Monday morning we set out on a day's tour of the old campsites, calling into Atherton War Cemetery on the way. I had collected a bunch of red poppies from the "War Birds" drop on the Sunday and we placed these at the grave of W.O.2 Charlie Gilbert 2/1, who was accidentally killed on 28th December, 1944, at Kairi Camp while preparing a gun cotton explosive demonstration. The War Cemetery is kept in wonderful condition by the War Graves Commission.

From here we proceeded to Herberton and Wondecla where we located the 2/1 campsite marker (complete with colour patch), also the large Igloo hut used during the war for concerts and picture shows - drill too when the weather was bad. This has been fenced and in the process of renovation by a young couple - but I'm sure Max could still hear the ghosts of the past. On from here to Ravenshoe where we found, with difficulty, the 2/2 marker out on the Mt. Garnet Rd.

Tuesday morning drove to Tolga and Kairi and located the campsite markers of the 7th and 9th Divisions, and the 2/1 Pioneers.

We left Atherton on Wednesday and, before heading back to Cairns, we drove out to Trinity Beach where the 2/2 Pioneers were camped and operated as a Beach Group with the Navy. Their role was to train all units in ship to shore landings, including the 2/1 Pioneers.

Boarded the "Sunlander" next morning for the long journey home. A really great trip.

