

FRED RATCLIFFE

Son of Jack 2/1 deceased

10 Thomas Street
PICNIC POINT 2213
7 April 1998

Mr M. Herron
3 Enoggera Road
BEVERLY HILLS 2209

Dear Mr Herron,

It has been nearly 2½ years since I last wrote to the Pioneer Battalions Association and enclose a cheque for \$30 for the Pioneer News and a contribution to funds.

Recently, my wife and I went on a short 'family tree' researching trip up north of Bathurst and when we called in to the Gulgong Museum and immediately met an old friend and a Pioneer, Albert Barton. Albert was looking pretty fit.

For those who might have suffered at the hands of my mother's cooking or letter writing during the war, I regret to advise that she died 2 October 1996. While going through some of Mum's hidden treasures, I came across the enclosed "Camp Life as I Saw It" written by Dad in 1940. I thought it may be of interest to his fellow Pioneers who were in camp at Greta and Dubbo at that time and it may bring back some old memories. I've typed it just as Dad wrote it so please pardon any spelling or grammatical errors, especially as Dad was able to fit it on fewer pages (and smaller) than what I've typed on.

I hope the weather for Anzac Day turns out to be pleasant and I wish you all a very happy reunion.

Yours sincerely

F. Ratcliffe

Fred Ratcliffe
(youngest son of Jack Ratcliffe
NX45230, 2/1 Pioneers)

*Peg answered this letter
in July P/News - said we
would include the notes in
a series on Personalities & Memories.
20/4/98*

NX45230-JACK RATCLIFFE 2/1

*Wounded Libya 26/1/1941
served N.G.
Died 1946*

*Copy of letter
attached*

*Have read the notes on Jack's camp
days at Greta and Dubbo which brought
back memories of his stay in both
these camps.*

*Many thanks to Fred for typing out the
diary of Jack - will pass the notes around
to some of the Pioneers still around such
as Gordon Finlay, Vic Whiteley who remember
Jack.*

CAMP LIFE AS I SAW IT

The previous nine weeks having been spent in a Receiving Camp at Broadmeadow Showground, we were looking forward to a transfer to a unit. After a few false alarms and false starts we were picked for a unit in Greta camp.

We got away to a false start, but after a delay of a couple of days we left the "Old Home" on a bright and sunny Thursday afternoon, 22nd August 1940, at 1200 hours and entrained at 1535 hours at Hamilton station and arrived at Greta station at 1635 hours and then a steady march for 2½ miles to the camp where we arrived at 1700 hours.

After a lot of bunkum we were allotted to Companies. I was drafted to "A" Company, 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, and then we had a good feed, which by the way we were beginning to feel like something to eat. After tea we had to get straw in our beds, somebody pinched it and a search party was organized to find same, which they did after a few hours searching. The next few minutes was given to a very hectic time by everyone concerned. After filling beds we made same and retired at 2100 hours.

Friday morning was given up to getting our equipment such as rifle, tin helmet, gas mask, etc, and then we had the job of putting rifle equipment together, after a lot of abuse it was completed. In the afternoon we were given the once over on the parade grounds and then a spot of drill. The rest of the battalion went on a big route march of 25 miles. Another chap and myself had a test for transport driving and passed the test O.K.

Saturday morning was taken up with cleaning the hut and windows. The afternoon was off. A few of the boys had a very merry party in the hut, a few bottles and a sing song. A couple of boys went into West Maitland at night time and went on the ?? and had a night out, picked up with a couple of ladies and slept with them and had a good time, well we presume they did and arrived in camp in time for Reveille with a sore head.

Sunday morning wrote a few letters. Sunday was a good boy, church twice, morning and night. Had a sticky at the visitors, not a soul I knew, some nice lines in camp. Watched the change of the Guard, a sight worth watching. The band entertained the visitors with a selection of marches and melodies.

Monday, "A" Company was astir early, we were awake at 0415 hours and took to the train which left Greta at 0715 hours, arrived Adamstown station at 0815 hours. Marched through the shopping centre to the range for a shoot. The shoot commenced at 0900 hours and finished at 1330 hours. Incidentally it was my first shoot from a military rifle, didn't do too bad, 106 points out of a possible 150 points. Had stew for dinner and marched back the same way we came, the only difference being we were given a spell outside the pub at Adamstown Railway and given a chance to have a refresher and needless to say the pub was well patronized for a short while. Arrived in camp at 1630 hours. Band to meet us. Bed at 2030 hours.

Tuesday morning there was no coffee as the cooks were absent after a night of making whoopee and the boys wouldn't go on P.T. Parade. After a lot of arguments the boys were dismissed. One to the boys. Whilst on parade later in the morning we saw the rest of the boys from Broadmeadow going through to Tamworth camp. We were sitting on the fence, near the line, like a lot of cockatoos. On a short route march in afternoon over hills and dales finishing up at Greta station to meet "B" Company on their return from the range at Adamstown. A rumour was spread through the camp that final leave was on at the weekend and the boys went mad, playing tug-o-war with one anothers' pyjamas, one can guess what happened to them. When they were informed otherwise the moans were loud and long. It was a broadcast from 2SH.

Wednesday was taken up with cleaning up and parades. This was the best day of the week, it being pay day. The boys were looking forward to this great event with longing eyes as money

and tobacco were as scarce as hens teeth and they were on the hum, but with poor results. Issued with colour patches, real soldiers now. Boys playing crown and anchor, the banker is looking very sick. Early to bed 2030 hours for tomorrow we journey to the big smoke on our 5 days leave.

Thursday morning early to rise 0500 hours, breakfast and then on the train, leaving Greta at 0715 hours and home waking the wife at 0800 hours. 5 glorious days to make whoopee. A bad start, raining like the dickens. This illustrious and enlightening yarn is closed for the next 5 days and it will resume at 2400 hours on the 2nd September 1940. An important item of interest occurred on Sunday 1st Sept 1940 at 0338 hours, noisy sister in law arrived home from her vacation in the far north of NSW. No peace at home now as she is about the biggest torment I know, but she is a dear.

Tuesday 3rd Sept 1940. Wasn't going to resume till midnight, but the train journey is worth mentioning. I caught the train that left Newcastle at 2110 hours and after a fast trip arrived in West Maitland at 2200 hours. A bus took me to camp arriving at 2335. A very fast trip, taking about 2½ hours to cover about 30 miles, fast travelling. The boys were on their best behaviour, only stopped each train 3 times at the camp. Pickets all over the place but the boys were cunning, they advanced in a bunch and not in ones and twos as in previous occasions. Pickets not game or didn't want too as they were looking in the opposite direction, nobody detained. The boys all had good times over the week end by all accounts and by the looks of some of them, plus sore heads.

Tuesday morning. Compliments paid to No 10 Platoon by the R.S.M.. He wanted men for a "Farewell Guard". He said No 10 was the best platoon in "A" Company and he would have liked to take the whole platoon in the Guard. He took 4 instead of the 2 he intended to take. Letter from Marge, but it was stale news as she was home at the week end, but it was reading matter. On the business end of an axe, chopping wood for the cook house. A change from drill. Issued with an extra pair of colour patches and a housewife, that finishes me with regards to equipment. Colour patches for o/coat. 2SH news. To Dubbo on Monday, leave Greta at 1800 hours via Werris Creek, arrive Dubbo 0900 hours, and march through the town. Remains to be seen whether this news is correct. Wrote a letter to Paddy and then to bed. Cold as charity and raining a little. To bed 2030 hours.

Wednesday started off with P.T. Parade, real good this morning, warms one up as it was cold as charity. Started on gas drill and putting on of gas mask in emergency, had hardly started when we were taken to the A.M.C. depot for a blood test for blood transfusion record, as we are ear marked for the time being. Had a lovely stew for dinner. A couple of boys had a real good party over the week end, they broke into the Sergeant's Mess and stole all the beer and 18 pounds beside, so the sergeants are unlucky for their beer for mess. Also in Sydney at the week end, 5 of the boys took an 18 gallon keg off a brewery lorry standing outside of a pub and placing it in a taxi and buzzed off, returning the barrel later on in the day and empty of course. Wild lads. Gas and bayonet drill for a while this afternoon and then went on manouvres near Greta town, a lot of mucking around and then home for tea. Wrote a letter home.

Thursday morning very cold and PT soon warmed us up. After breakfast learning how to pack equipment for Monday. Rest of the morning given to gas drill and rifle drill. In afternoon on 8 mile route march with full equipment that we will be wearing on Monday. Letters from home and Katoomba. Watched the survey troops march out of camp en route to Cowra camp. had a great tea with plum duff and custard, very nice. Some of the boys are going around with their gas respirators on, and by gee they need them too because there is some very foul air hanging about. Peeled mushrooms and then had a hot shower whilst they were cooking and then had a bonser supper, mushrooms and toast, very delicious, a great luxury for a common old private. A big argument about how to open beer bottles without losing any beer, the corporal seems to have the best idea of them all, put cork in mouth and hit bottle on the bottom and the cork flies out through the back of the neck and of course the beer flows straight down the neck, will have to try it. Some of the tales that are told in this hut are very witty, but to my sorrow and

yet relief are not allowed to be put in writing, very hot ones. Cheerio folks, bed time, see you all again tomorrow.

Friday morning, I think it is the 5th September 1940 as I didn't keep a record of the date, only the days. Drill and a Battalion Parade, Battalion addressed by Brigadier Keating, a lot of sprouting on behaviour when the troops arrive in Dubbo. After Parade we were inoculated, she was hot stuff, knock some of the boys flat, didn't feel too good myself. Transferred to Head Quarter Company as M.T. Driver. After affects of needles. Another Parade in afternoon at 1800 hours, troops addressed by "C.O." of the 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion, Victoria. First meal at HQ, real good, "Hotel Australia", lettuce, tomato, beetroot, onion, cucumber and potato mash and bully beef. Went to silent pictures at the YMCA hut, real old shows but it filled in a few hours.

Saturday morning drill and a lecture, the boys still feeling the effects of the needles, everybody going around like a chicken with a broken wing. Washed huts. An essential parade for soldiers at 1100 hours before the MO. Washed a few clothes. In afternoon sports for 2 hours and then watched rehearsal of ceremonial guard, Scottish band in attendance. Collected mushrooms and cleaned them and took them up to the cook house. Another good tea. Boys playing 500 and talk about cheats. Mushrooms and potatoes and toast for supper. I found out something today that has puzzled me for a long time re Scottish kilts. A lance corporal just came in and saw what we had for supper and he said he thought it was a cafe he had entered, not a soldiers hut. Soup has just been brought in for supper.

Sunday is a day of rest. Reveille blown at 0700 hours. No PT Parade this morning. Blowing a hard westerly and of course plenty of dust with it, very uncomfortable on church parade which was held at 0930 hours. Padre spoke very well on the shortcomings of some of the troops and he wished that the troops make a good impression on arrival at Dubbo and when they leave he hoped the same feeling of friendship would still be there. After church parade a rehearsal for the "Big Parade" in afternoon at 1015 hours. After lunch waited for the family whom I was expecting to come up, wind had dropped slightly. The wife brought some things up to eat, cake, etc which was enjoyed for supper. At 1600 hours the Battalion paraded for the dedication of two side drums for the band by the padre, and then the Ceremonial and Farewell Guard. People came from Sydney and the surrounding districts of Maitland to witness this parade, which was carried out very well by the boys of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion. Had tea with the wife and family and after they had left, wrote a couple of letters and then a shower which was very nice after the windy day. No troops allowed leave so the boys made merry in the camp with the assistance of the Battalion Band and the Bag Pipes. The two bands marched all round the camp playing popular tunes and the troops in all manner of dress or undress marching behind them, they made whoopee. Bed at 2130 hours.

Monday the camp arose at the usual time and after breakfast got our gear packed. Helped in QM Store and then loaded and unloaded beds and kitbags and gear for the officers. had a cold shower and then tea which was at 1645 hours and we were issued with a sandwich, 2 biscuits and a couple of scones. Left the camp at 1745 hours and given a great farewell by the boys that were left in camp, and incidentally have had their final leave, good luck to them. Arriving at Greta station some of the boys had to load the kitbags etc into the train. The biggest muddle up occurred when the troops were to get on the train, instead of allowing a few onto the platform at a time, all the troops were allowed on at once and the officers didn't know what they were doing. Left Greta station 1845 hours, the boys played cards and sang till we arrived at Werris Creek, where we were issued with coffee, which was very nice seeing it was after midnight. It has been a glorious day and night, a big change from Sunday.

Tuesday, a great trip from Werris Creek to Dubbo, a real express train, stopping everywhere for trespassers such as sheep, cattle and horses on the line. Then the stations we stopped at, the fireman had to get out and set the signals and points for the train to proceed and then after the train has passed them, the guard had to reset them, which occupied about 10 minutes at each stop. Arrived in Dubbo at 0900 hours and marched to park opposite station where we dumped our rifle and gear, then we were taken to the Victoria League hut opposite and had a light meal

of a bread roll and saveloy and a cup of tea. Left park at 1030 hours, marched through Dubbo and we were given a great reception by the people and then marched out to the camp 5 mile away where we arrived at 1215 hours, very dusty and tired. All we have seen up to date is black gins, willy willies, dust clouds and red dust. What o the party when the wind blows hard as the dust is 6 inches deep around the huts. No conveniences such as hot water, lights or tables in mess room. Had a search party for our gear and in bed at 2145 hours.

Wednesday arose very much fresher than when I went to bed, had a fairly easy time cleaning up and then packing gear away in our QM Store. A general change over of Captains, HQ Co has "A" Co Captain. Had a night in Dubbo, not a bad town and the people I spoke to seemed very nice. A lovely day in regards to the weather.

Thursday, fell for the job on checking over the lorries re oil, water and tyres. In QM Store and then made some paths around QM Store. A very windy day with plenty of dust flying about. Shifted quarters again, I hope we are settled this time. Boys are making the camp look pretty. "D" Co has the Pioneer colours done in river stones under a rising sun, looks very nice and real. Had tea in our own mess room, great after the muck we have been getting in "C" Co's mess room where we have been eating since we arrived here. Five troops had their colours ripped off by the Colonel for misbehaving themselves with a black woman. Still blowing a gale, very much like rain, overcast.

Friday, very windy, in fact a rough night with a few light showers. Making paths in front of huts and a couple of gardens in front of QM Store, ground like cement. A change in the weather, raining heavily with wind. Today is the best day in the week, pay day. A funny thing I have noticed about pay day is that everyone seems to be very short of money and tobacco. I dunno which is the worse, Dubbo dust or Dubbo mud, walk three yards and one is one foot higher, never wear the boots out while it is raining. It is cold as charity now, a big change from yesterday. Was going to Dubbo tonight, but owing to the weather I will postpone the trip till tomorrow. Today, Friday 13th is supposed to be unlucky but it proved lucky for us as we haven't done any work this afternoon, stayed in huts and read books and papers. A big argument going off at present about leave, two companies have had 2 lots of leave whilst the other two have had only one. The boys are going to see about getting two lots of leave at once, what o the party if it comes off.

Saturday, the weather is just as hot today as it was cold as yesterday, very changeable weather up here. Working in cook house in morning as a mess orderly, not a bad job for a while. I dunno which is the worst, Dubbo dust or mud, one thing the dust is easier to get rid of. Mud on mess room floor inches thick, scraped up by spade. Went to Dubbo in afternoon and had a good tea in there, did some shopping at night, bought a camera and a few other things. Seems strange to be shopping on Saturday night. In the night, mate and myself did the rounds of the pubs sticky beaking at the drunks, very disgusted to see the way the troops acted. Came home at 1530 hours. Had a bit of trouble with some of the boys from "A" Company in their hut. A corporal was picking on the men and we tried to pacify him but to no avail. Cleaned boots with metho.

Sunday a lovely big frost, very cold, in cook house again in the morning. A lovely day, fine and warm. Heard the corporal that was making the row in "A" Company was arrested. Did our weekly washing, very hard to do with cold water. Went to town in afternoon, went to friends place for tea and then went to church. Charlie Mewitt has a rival for pulling faces when singing etc up here. Church never came out till 2130 hours. Home at 2230 hours.

Monday, working on lorries in morning, rechecking tyres, etc. Fell for job as relief driver all day. Took lunch out to "A" Company who was on route march, they were 8 miles out. Went to Dubbo in afternoon to meet some troops who didn't turn up. Late for tea owing to going to town. Dust is back with us again. Corporal from "A" Company lost stripes and got 20 days in Holdsworthy. The boys make a big change in camp in week, planted trees, made paths, etc.

Tuesday, much the same as Monday re lorries. Took lunch out to "B" Company on route march, 5 miles out. New boys came up today, some in our hut. "3WC" news re final leave on Friday. Played cards at "A" Company boys, 500 was the game.

Wednesday, working on lorries again, tested for M.T. licence and passed OK, a pretty good test. Very windy and dusty, Colonel McKillacuddy had troops paraded at 1630 hours on Battalion Parade ground and broke the news very gently that leave was cancelled owing to the battalion going on final leave. Cheers. Went to Dubbo at night and to the opening of the Salvation Army Red Shield, which was officially opened by the Colonel of the 2/1st Pioneers, our band rendered several items. Arrive back in camp at 2230 hours and by this time the boys were well lubricated and very merry.