



How first the time is passing. Last week it was the new millennium arriving now, we have planted our foot well into it.

So I thought I would look at our beginning.

55/53rd Battalion (New South Wales Rifle/ West Sydney Regiment)

After the First World War the defence of the Australian mainland lay with the part-time soldiers of the Citizens Military Force (CMF), also known as the Militia. The Militia was organized to maintain the structure of the First AIF and kept the same numerical designations. Consequently, Militia units were also known by the name of their shire. Thus Sydney's 53rd Infantry Battalion was the "West Sydney Regiment" and the 55th Infantry Battalion was the "New South Wales Rifle Regiment". During the 1930s, little was spent on defence and the Militia had few volunteers. Thus, in 1937 the 55th merged with the 53rd Battalion, forming the 55th/53rd Infantry Battalion. However, it was separated again in October 1941.

While both battalions served in Papua in 1942, the 55th and 53rd had very different histories. The 55th demonstrated good potential for active fighting. However, the 53rd did not fare well when it went into action for the first time along the Kokoda Trail. It was thereafter disparagingly referred to as "that mob".

Having fought the Japanese back along the Kokoda Trail, the Australians attacked the Japanese in their heavily defended positions in Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. After Buna and Gona were captured, the 16th Brigade attacked Sanananda but made little headway. It was decided to move the 30th Brigade, composed of the 55th/53rd, 36th and 49th Battalions, into the assault. The 55th/53rd soon lost its stigma during the hard fighting at Sanananda and on Bougainville that ensued.

On 5 December the 55th/53rd was flown from Port Moresby, over the Own Stanley's, to Popondetta and Dobodura. They marched to the Sanananda Track, relieving the 16th Brigade on 6 December. The 30th Brigade went into action the next day.

Early on 7 December the 55th/53rd B Company made a small attack against Japanese positions to divert enemy attention from the 49th's main attack against Sanananda.

The remaining 55th/53rd joined the 49th in the main battle. However, both battalions could not penetrate the strong Japanese fortifications and suffered heavily: the 55th/53rd had 130 casualties, including killed, missing, and wounded; the 49th took 229 casualties, more than half the battalion's fighting strength.

From the next day and until 19 December, the 55th/53rd patrolled the fringes of Japanese positions in an attempt to draw their fire and make the Japanese deplete their ammunition supplies. On 19 December the 55th/53rd and 49th made another unsuccessful attack on Sanananda but this time with less casualties – 108 men from the 55th/53rd killed or wounded. The 55th/53rd resumed patrolling and, on 26 December, supported the 36th in another attack. Had the 36th been successful, the 55th/53rd would have followed the 36th and helped to consolidate the captured ground. This did not happen. Once again the Australians could not penetrate the Japanese defences. The 55th/53rd was relieved in early January 1943 and moved to a new position at Gona. Sanananda was not finally cleared and captured until 21 January. The 55th/53rd returned to Port Moresby at the end of January.

On 2 March the battalion embarked for Australia on the transport ship Duntroon and reached Cairns three days later. The 55th/53rd then travelled to Ravenshoe, approximately 220 km south of Cairns, where the men were given leave. In April the battalion moved to Townsville, where it briefly joined the 12th Brigade and then the 3rd Brigade in July. The battalion was employed in garrison duties and work parties in Townsville and the surrounding area.

In December 1944 the battalion sailed from Brisbane to Torokina, the Australians' main base on Bougainville. This time the 55/53rd joined the 26th and 31st/51st Battalions as part of the 11th Brigade. The brigade was responsible for the Northern and Central Sectors. The 31st/51st went to north Bougainville, while the 26th moved into the Central Sector. The 55th/53rd moved into position between Torokina and the 26th, in the Laruma River area.

In February 1945 the 55th/53rd relieved the 26th from their positions in the Central Sector. "Comparatively quiet", was how one veteran described their time on Pearl Ridge compared to the battalion's previous campaign at Sanananda. The battalion sent out regular patrols and there was frequent contact with the Japanese, but it did not fight any large engagements and was relieved in mid-March.

On 6 April the 55th/53rd moved into the Northern Sector, where they again relieved the 26th Battalion. The 55th/53rd was to continue the advance from the Soraken Plantation to Pora Pora and beyond. This they did, occupying Pora Pora on 4 May and then Ratsua. By 11 May they had cut across the Bonis Peninsula, eventually reaching Ruri Bay and establishing the Ratsua–Ruri Bay line. This effectively contained the Japanese to the Bonis Peninsula, the northern most tip of Bougainville.

The 55th/53rd established the line with constant patrolling. However, from mid-April Japanese resistance intensified, infiltrating the Ratsua–Ruri Bay line and continually shelling the Australians. The terrain was also wearing down the battalion, as the men had to patrol through leach-filled swamps and fast-flowing rivers. Exhausted, the 55th/53rd was relieved by the 26th on 19 May. The 55th/53rd returned to Torokina.

After the Second World War, Brigadier John Stevenson, the commander of the 11th Brigade, made a special effort to single-out and praise the 55th/53rd, aware of the battalion's sensitive history as "that mob". So too did Lieutenant General Stanley Savige, the Australian commander on Bougainville, who congratulated them for doing an "all-round splendid job" and closed with the sentiment that the "55th/53rd Battalion will do me".

In September 1945 the battalion embarked for Simpson Harbour in New Britain, where it joined the Australian force garrisoning Rabaul and was completely reorganised. Many veterans were discharged and replaced with men whose original units had been disbanded or with young, fresh reinforcements. The battalion remained on Rabaul until May 1946 before it finally returned to Australia.



How fine are our brave fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, cousins,
and nephews as the march pass for this is the spirit of Australia.

Where mateship is the nature of the day and for all the following
days to come for it is not something that can be taught in is inbuilt
in our nature.

But it is all to sad for we all grow old and pass away but our spirit
of them with thanks will always reign high.

The support group which is your group will always maintain the
inspiration that you gave us and the commitment to remember

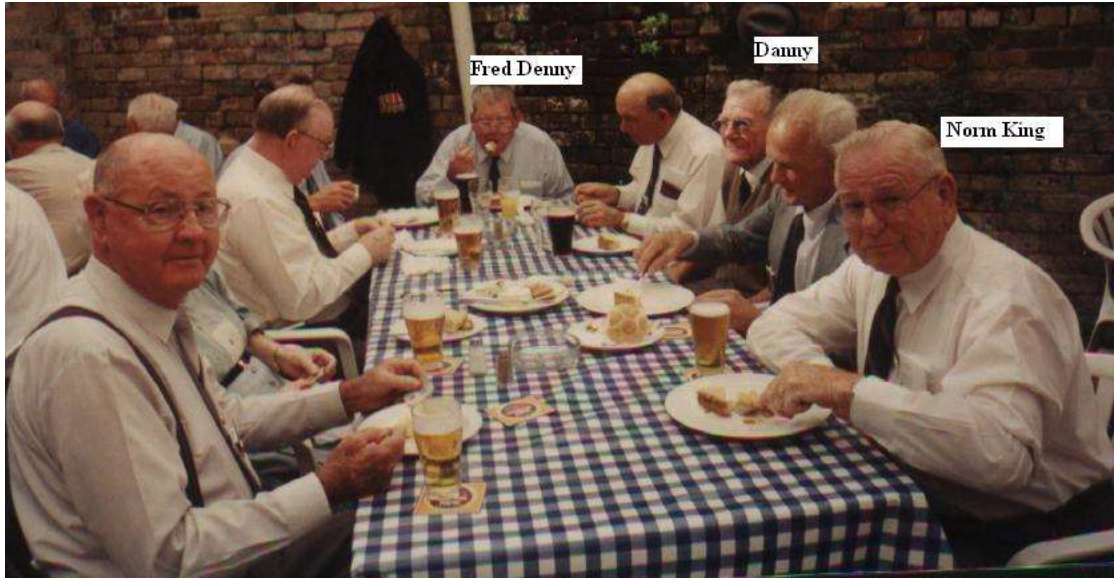
LEST WE FORGET.

The Mob in bygone days renewing their mateship and a few good

yarns, unbelievable story that must be believed for some of them would make a novel of true heart felt experiences celebrated with mates and family.

There is without a doubt a few good “ LEMONADES” shouted around the table on ANZAC DAY and REUNION DAY for it is a Australian tradition that must at all cost be upheld with vigour.

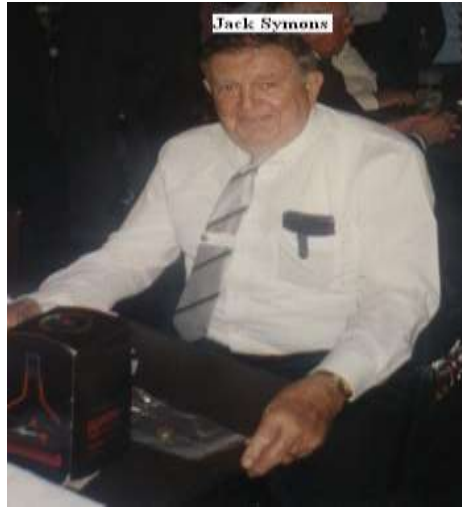






Charles Jennings

Jack Stevens



Jack Symons



Cec McKinnon



Alec Bell

Padre Hugh



Bobby Quinn



Sam Jones

Laurie



Ray



Warwick Davis



Alice King
Peter Wright 2002

We will remember them

KOOKA'S CORNER

A flying saucer landed at a gas station on a lonely country road. The two space aliens inside seemed completely unconcerned about detection; in fact, the letters "UFO" were emblazoned in big, bold letters on one side of their shiny craft. As the station owner stood and gawked in silence, paralysed with shock, his young blonde attendant nonchalantly filled up the tank and waved to the two aliens as they took off.

"Do you realize what just happened?" the station owner finally uttered.

"Yeah," said the blonde attendant. "So?"

"Didn't you see the space aliens in that vehicle?!"

"Yeah," repeated the blonde attendant. "So?"

"Didn't you see the letters 'UFO' on the side of that vehicle?!"

"Yeah," repeated the blonde attendant. "So?"

"Don't you know what 'UFO' means?!"

The blonde attendant rolled his eyes. "Good grief, boss! I've been working here for six years. Of course I know what 'UFO' means 'Unleaded Fuel Only.'"





Dear Mum & Dad,

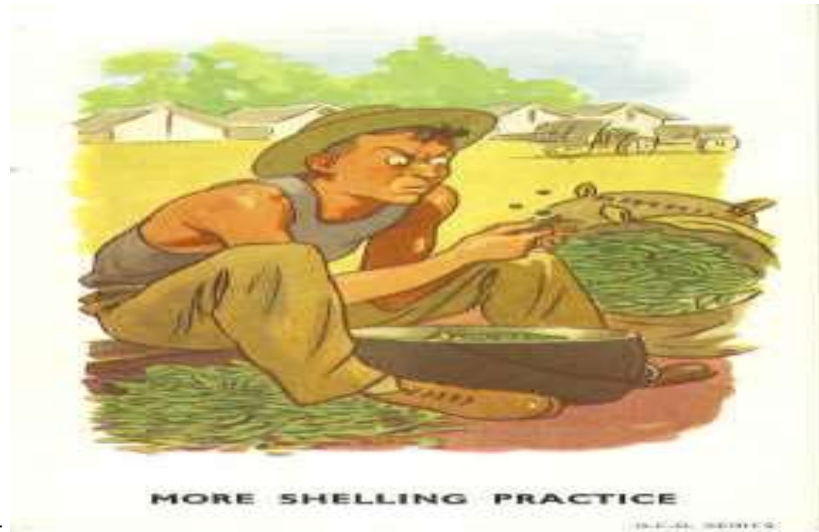
I am well. Hope youse are too. Tell me big brothers Doug and Phil that the Army is better than workin' on the farm - tell them to get in bloody quick smart before the jobs are all gone! I wuz a bit slow in settling down at first, because ya don't hafta get outta bed until 6am. But I like sleeping in now, cuz all ya gotta do before brekky is make ya bed and shine ya boots and clean ya uniform. No bloody cows to milk, no calves to feed, no feed to stack - nothin'!! Ya haz gotta shower though, but its not so bad, coz there's lotsa hot water and even a light to see what ya doing!

At brekky ya get cereal, fruit and eggs but there's no kangaroo steaks or possum stew like wot Mum makes. You don't get fed again until noon and by that time all the city boys are buggered because we've been on a 'route march' - geez its only just like walking to the windmill in the back paddock!!

This one will kill me brothers Doug and Phil with laughter. I keep getting medals for shootin' - dunno why. The bullseye is as big as a bloody possum's bum and it don't move and it's not firing back at ya like the Johnsons did when our big scrubber bull got into their prize cows before the Ekka last year! All ya gotta do is make yourself comfortable and hit the target - it's a piece of piss!! You don't even load your own cartridges they comes in little boxes and ya don't have to steady yourself against the rollbar of the roo shooting truck when you reload! Sometimes ya gotta wrestle with the city boys and I gotta be real careful coz they break easy - it's not like fighting with Doug and Phil and Jack and Boori and Steve and Muzza all at once like we do at home after the muster.

Turns out I'm not a bad boxer either and it looks like I'm the best the platoon's got, and I've only been beaten by this one bloke from the Engineers - he's 6 foot 5 and 15 stone and three pick handles across the shoulders and as ya know I'm only 5 foot 7 and eight stone wringin' wet, but I fought him till the other blokes carried me off to the boozier.

I can't complain about the Army - tell the boys to get in quick before word gets around how



bloody good it

Your loving daughter,
Sheila