

55 | 53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association—
Support Group
ORDERLY ROOM REPORT
March 2024 (1-2024)
Website: 5553battalion.com



55/53 Aust. Inf. Bn. Association
("The Mice of Moresby")

*In association with the 55th & 53rd
Infantry Battalions 1st A.I.F.*

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Peter (Gerard) Williams D Company
20 Jun 1923- 25.10.2017



Presidents Report March 2024

Dear Members and Descendants,
Presidents Report

ANZAC DAY 2024

As we lead up to Anzac Day 2024 the Battalion is seeking support from all members and descendants to be present under the Mice Banner on Anzac Day.

We will this year be requiring everyone to register with us on the day for insurance purposes please see me to sign our marching register.

Form up will be at the Martin Place & Phillip St., opposite Lindt Café from 8.30am onwards for a 9-9.30 am walk off .

NSW RSL will keep us updated if there any changes to the above schedule.

Medals are to be worn on right chest.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership for 2024 is \$20 per person the committee is working hard in the background at all times to keep the history of the battalion alive 7 days a week. We are scanning in Soldiers files digitally to the website it's a great resource .Have you visited ?

FRANCE/NEW GUINEA

Due to lack of interest from members and descendants the trip to the western front with Kokoda historical for sept 2024 will be postponed. Big thanks to Dave Howell for his support of the battalion and arranging the itinerary for this trip; we will revisit it at a later date when some of our members are more financial.

Rob Denny
National President
Mice of Moresby
55/53 Battalion Association & National Support Group Inc.

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ANZAC DAY ARRANGEMENTS

Anzac Day Sydney March Commences 0930hrs.

- It's essential that everyone who intends to march with the Battalion is registered with the committee, so please contact Rob Denney **0437 818 834** or Peter Dowling on **0419 631 953**. **(it a requirement of our insurance provider).**
- Meeting Place is Martin Place & Phillip St., opposite Lindt Café from 8.30am. Look for the Mice of Moresby 'Gold Marching Banner'
 - A cadet unit will carry parade banners.
 - Contact Rob Denny or myself if you can assist.
 - Ready to form up at 0930hrs – step off will be determined by martial.
- NSW RSL Rules are:
 - It's not a parade, it's a March.

- No colourful clothing, no carrying photographs, or wearing historical uniforms - nothing political.
- lounge suits, Medals.
- Be prepared for any weather.
- Fallout in Liverpool Street. Move to the side of road immediately.

Reunion Lunch

- Arrive at The Great Southern Hotel from 1130hrs.
- Seating at 1220hrs.
- Lunch will be served at 1230hrs.
- Cost \$35.00 adults – Children under 12 years \$10.00 (see form at the end of this newsletter).

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Secretaries Report March 2024

Dear friends,

This will be the last ANZAC edition of the 55 | 53rd Battalion Newsletter and Orderly Room Report. In future a notice will be sent to all members concerning the Anzac Day march and reunion. In October each year the Orderly Room report will continue to be published as long as I am able to do so.

The photo on the title page is that of Peter (Gerard) Williams of D Company 55/53 Battalion who was part of the disastrous battle at Sanananda on 19th December, the worst day of his life. where he witnessed most of his section being killed or wounded. A few months before he died, he told me his story. I recorded it and many thanks to Glenda Johnson (daughter of Bill aka Bert Johnson of D Company), who has put in an enormous amount of time transcribing the four-hour long interview. Sometime soon an edited transcript will be available on the website. Glenda has been researching the struggles Australian soldiers had at a place on Sanananda Road called 'Huggens Roadblock.' In a future edition we hope to include an article on the battles that occurred at this place.

This Orderly Room report includes Alec Bell's pilgrimage back to New Guinea and Sanananda in 1995. If anyone has a portrait photo of Alec? I would be grateful to have a copy, I would like to include an article about him in future. Does anyone know where his descendants are; so that I can get in touch with them.

I have also included a copy of an excerpt from Bill McLeod's story about 'My Battalion' in Milne Bay. If anyone has a copy of the whole story that could be incorporated into the battalion archives?

Finally, I have included a story about **Captain NORMAN BERESFORD LOVETT**, Winner of the M.C. and bar and the Croix de Guerre, serving in the 53rd and 54th Battalions 14th Brigade, 5th Division 1st AIF.

PODCAST Principles of War

Finally, I recommend to all interested in the story of the battalion must to have a look at the Podcast series 'Principles of War' by James Eling. This is brilliantly researched, highly recommended listening. Check it out.

<https://theprinciplesofwar.com/kokoda/94-the-53rd-battalion-on-the-kokoda-trail/>

<https://theprinciplesofwar.com/podcast/96-the-53rd-battalion-and-the-battle-of-isurava-during-the-kokoda-campaign/>

<https://theprinciplesofwar.com/podcast/99-the-death-of-a-co/>

<https://theprinciplesofwar.com/podcast/the-battle-of-isurava/>

<https://theprinciplesofwar.com/podcast/the-39th-battalion-on-the-kokoda-track/>

Peter Dowling
Hon. Secretary
0419 631 953

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Membership 2024

At the AGM in February, it was decided to resume the payment of membership fees. The Membership fee is \$20.00 per annum (from 1 January to 31 December each year.). If you have not yet paid your membership for this year, or renew for next year, we encourage you to do so. Only financial members can vote at meetings of the Association. The form below has a section that members can complete and send to the Treasurer Keith Smith.



Anzac Day 2024 Edition

RESUME- 53rd Battalion WWII

In January 1942 the 53rd Battalion became known as DARWIN FORCE . Six weeks later embarked - not for DARWIN, but to PORT MORESBY, arriving on the 3rd January 1942. The next few months saw demands for work parties not only from the Army, but from the Navy and Air Force as well, plus constant piquet and sundry other duties to such an extent that the Battalion's defensive and attacking programme was neglected almost to the point of coming to a standstill.

The end of July saw "B" and "C" Companies ordered forward to KOKODA area and on the 10th August, they relieved the 39th Battalion at UBERI. By the 20th August "B" Company had arrived at NAURU and began to patrol the defended forward localities of the 39th Battalion in the direction of DENIKI. The first contact with the enemy was by a patrol led by Lieut. Campbell. Probing patrols along tracks leading to KAILLE, MISSIMA and DENIKI continued until early September, when the Battalion was ordered back to MYOLA.

It is necessary to appreciate that during the rapid advancement by the Japanese at this time, and with their ability to implement speedy encircling tactical moves on contact, that there was generally a state of confusion regarding the location of the enemy forces. Such being the situation, the 53rd Battalion suffered a further serious blow when it's commanding officer, Lt.-Col. Kenneth WARD, together with Lieut. Logan and Private Foster, were killed when attempting to regain contact with his forward positions.

The 53rd Battalion was part of the famous battle for Isurava involving the 39th Battalion, 2/16 Battalion and 2/16 Battalion. During this battle the battalion was located on the Kokoda Track near Alola. The Japanese infiltrated the lines of the 2/14 battalion and upon the withdrawal of the 2/14 the situation for the 53rd Battalion was untenable. In the process at least 25 soldiers were cut off from their unit during the withdrawal. For the full story there will be a copy published in full on this site at a later date.

A group of 20 were able to escape the Japanese positions and returned to Owers Corner that took over two weeks. Another off group under Captain Trevor King were also able to avoid capture and headed west then south arriving on the coast three weeks later. The War Memorial in Canberra has an Audio interview with Trevor King. (<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C87971>)

Early in September the 53rd Battalion as ordered back to Myola then Efogi, Templeton's Crossing and eventually to Port Moresby.

Over the next few days the battalion was ordered back through Uberi and then on the 12th September was again ordered back, this time to the 30th Infantry Training Battalion where they were immediately relegated to working parties, guard duties, coast watching duties, and the making of any plans for training was impossible.

Reinforcements for the 39th Battalion were required, so 100 of these men were recalled, re-armed and sent forward to become part of the all-conquering 39th. This militia battalion was to go on and add to its glory in the mountains and again in December at Gona and points west of Gona later on. The 53rd Battalion blended well with their new battalion and fought equally well as did the 53rd personnel who became part of the composite 55/53rd Battalion. This composite battalion proved itself in the fight at Sanananda, Gona and still later at Bougainville. Forty members of the 53rd were posted to the 36th Battalion and served with this battalion with distinction.

On 26th October at a parade of the battalion members were informed that the unit would be amalgamated with the 55th Battalion. The 53rd Battalion at this time had a strength of 17 officers and 225 other ranks. On 25th October officers of the 55th Battalion visited the 53rd Battalion to finalise the amalgamation details. This day saw the completion of exactly one year of

service as a battalion and it was a great pity that the battalion was not given the opportunity to show that it could have added to the 53rd Battalion's proud First World War record and history. After one short period of action the battalion ceased to exist. The 53rd Australian Battalion lost its identity.

(Extracts with taken from The book "That Mob" (written by NX143807 Lieut. F.M. Budden, 55/53 Battalion) with kind permission of his son, Brian Budden).

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How things have changed in 30 years the following is copied from Mice of Moresby Members Bulletin of October 1995. Have a look at the Battalion Website under Orderly Room reports. We remember Alex Bell and Trevor Harper who prepared, and distributed over 250 copies by mail up to 4 times a year. A great responsibility. As we approach ANZAC day, we remember all those who served with the Mice of Moresby, almost all have now have died.

'AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS' 1945-1995 VETERAN PILGRIMAGE TO PAPUA-NEW GUINEA (by Alex Bell)



Following the association's endorsement of my nomination for the pilgrimage to PNG due notice was received by letter that it would be in order for me to make final arrangements for participation in preparation from that time until sailing date 29th June included:-

1. Receiving the necessary clothing issue for the trip.
2. Completion of medical requirements.
3. Tour itinerary to study.
4. Completion of passport and visa documentation.
5. Attendance at a briefing session for NSW veterans.

The diary presented at this stage is in summary form which I believe acceptable too much, too soon could cause some confusion and maybe for some a little boring ...however I am more than happy to go into more detail if requested.

At the International Terminal Sydney during the morning of Thursday 29th June with the winter sun gleaming, 117 members comprising 'Australia Remembers' P.G. War veterans pilgrimage group gathered to be 'checked aboard' the Russian cruise ship 'Mikhail Sholokov'.

A wonderful sendoff ceremony featuring the N.S.W. Police Band and supported by an impersonating 'Andrews Sisters' trio belting out the tunes of the 40's provided stirring entertainment. After a number of necessary speeches some of the older veterans danced with youngsters dressed in the uniforms and fashions of that era. At the stroke of noon the 'Mikhail Sholokov' slipped its moorings and in the presence of the 'Bounty' and 'Krait' and under escort of fire boats with helicopters overhead made its way out through the Sydney Heads.

Interestingly the pilgrimage group of 117 included 7 ladies and in all represented a fair mix from all states of Australia as well as an equally fair proportion of the three services -- Army (80), Navy (10), Air Force (14). Added to these numbers was a special group (13) comprising War Widows, Angau, AWAS, Coast Watchers, Mariners, Hospital Ship Staff, AANS, together the Pilgrimage Chaplain none other than our very own Rev. Roy Wotten (53 Bn) from Blue Bay who was without any doubt a very popular member of the group and a good friend to all.

Nine days of this well planned thirteen-day pilgrimage period (29th June - 11th July) were spent in travel to and from New Guinea whilst the other four days were occupied in consecutive daily port visits to Pt Moresby, Milne Bay, Oro Bay and Lae (in all 32 hours spent ashore).

During the forward six-day sea voyage from Sydney to Pt Moresby the itinerary featured three important stops.

30th June - Event 1- late afternoon:- Veterans assembled on the observation deck for a ceremony to commemorate the tragic sinking of the hospital ship Centaur on May 1943. The ship had

stopped 9.3 miles due east of Cape Moreton lighthouse directly above the Centaur resting on the seabed. The stationary ship heaves in the swell and veterans stand in silence with the last rays of the sun slanting across the deck. As the final note of the Last Post fades into the silence the ship's siren wails in mourning for her sister lying in the depths below.

1st July - Event 2- 11 am: - The ship berths at Hamilton St Wharf, Brisbane to take on board our Queensland contingent of veterans. We are given a farewell luncheon at Eagle Farm, returning to the ship, departing to the tune of well wishers singing "There'll be Blue Birds over the White Cliffs of Dover", whilst vintage World War II aircraft flying overhead in noisy tribute.

3rd July - Event 3- am: - This morning the ship stops out at sea off Townsville to commemorate the Battle of the Coral Sea. Considering the limited Australian involvement in this engagement the occasion is understandably less emotionally charged than the Centaur ceremony. However, we were well aware of the importance of this sea battle which denied the enemy the opportunity of gaining possession of airfields in Southern Papua and thereby the probability of regular bombing of the coastal towns of North Queensland.

Much of the remaining time on board as we approached PNG was spent with veterans getting to know each other, being interviewed by the media & the War Historian, having final medical checks and being briefed by administrative support staff on forthcoming events associated with the pilgrimage.

5th July. It is 7am and the ship has already tied up at the wharf at Pt Moresby. From the observation deck we are aware of a number of new buildings 7 and 8 levels higher than the surrounding bungalow type residences on the hillside and so it seems that in all other ways very little has changed since 1942... From the other side of the ship, we note that the harbour still sparkles crystal clear and the Macdhui still displays herself above the waterline almost in an attitude of defiance ... The heat is already beginning to envelope us like a wet blanket. Once ashore under police escort we proceed in mini busses towards Bomana Cemetery, on the way passing Murray Barracks and Jackson airfield . . . Still the same potholes in the road ...clouds of dust ... smelly open drains . . . plastic bottles and other rubbish littering the roadside. NOTHING HAS CHANGED. Bomana is, by contrast, an oasis of tranquillity and beauty, with rows of white headstones, carefully trimmed lawns, and huge shady trees. The ceremony is extremely moving and later we have time to move among the graves ... and I find time to identify many of the hundred or more 53rd, 55th, 55/53 members who rest here in peace ... Afterwards we adjourn to the residence of Australian High Commissioner for a luncheon reception and at precisely 2pm we are once again on board and under way bound for Milne Bay.

6th July. We enter Milne Bay to dock at idyllic Alatau ... Once on shore we climb into 12 seater busses for the short drive to the Sacred Heart Cathedral . . . the heat is stifling . . . on arrival we are given a warm welcome from the locals as we enter the dim interior of a most sensible un cathedral like building where the fanning breeze drifts through the open sides to help cool the locals and the sweaty guests ... a brief service is held to unveil three stained glass wall panels installed as a memorial to those members of units who served in the area and did not return. We then went on to **Turnbull airstrip** arriving at the memorial which marks the end point of the Japanese advance. This area is fringed by kunai grass and shortly beyond that the jungle ... after a wreath laying ceremony, we returned to the John French V.C. memorial located approximately 1 km east of Alatau, again we paid our respects with a wreath laying ceremony. We then managed a 15-minute break into our itinerary to visit the local native marketplace ... An odd mixture of local vegetables, artefacts, etc and would you believe popcorn, fairy floss, and plastic packets of lime powder, the latter to add flavour to the ever-popular beetle nut. We had feelings of regret in leaving Milne Bay so soon ... A somewhat charming place and the natives so friendly.

7th July. An early morning arrival at Oro Bay from where we were quickly moved by motor transport to Popondetta ... Another wonderfully colourful welcome by locals in their spectacular national dress. It was here that I met up with that wonderful Fuzzy Wuzzy Raphael Oembari who in addition to wearing his service medals also had pinned to his chest his Hon . Member 55/53 Mice of Moresby badge. Now 83 he is very frail and has to be supported wherever he moves , added to which he has a heavy continuous cough. He was delighted to meet me and in his own way of communicating passes on his greetings to all. After another very special service in the presence of a tremendous crowd we moved into groups nominated for visits to Kokoda, Buna, Gona, Rabaul, and Sanananda ... I opted for Sanananda. The 45 km motor trip from Popondetta to Sanananda took approximately 1 hour. Fortunately, the army had already been along the track and cleared it sufficiently for the mini to veer, tumble, and rock its way to the village, where we were greeted with a ceremony that could only be described as a "ritual spectacular". Dramatic, colourful, and obviously enacted to display their loyalty and friendship towards their Aussie brothers. The missionary choir sang for us ... including their National Anthem followed by us joining them in the Australian National Anthem ... and would you believe it they upstaged us by continuing with the second verse singing it beautifully whilst we mumbled and choked our way through it.

The ceremony of remembrance here at this spot in New Guinea indeed had a deep and profound effect on all present We had lunch with the villagers ... distributed gifts around ... and the children as always ... bright, cheerful, and pleasantly cheeky ...they had a real ball with us.

On our return from the village, we stopped at Huggins Road Block Memorial for a few moments of serious contemplation during which time I examined a rough sketch map (repeat a rough sketch map drawn 12th Dec. 1942) that was the C.O.'s copy of the area. I then determined roughly where our positions during December '42 possibly could have been, and on my own I silently offered a prayer on every member's behalf Once more we went aboard the Mikhail Sholokov and set sail for our next and final port of call.

8th July. Early morning the ship ties up at Lae where it is raining. Again, the veterans group is broken up into two main parties to proceed to Madang and Wewak ... Our group stayed in Lae to visit memorials in town. Two of which commemorate the victory raising of the Australian flag by the 25th Brigade, 18th September 1943. Later that afternoon all veterans assembled at Lae Cemetery where again a large group of locals joined for this special service, which was a fitting finale for the time we had spent in New Guinea. The wreath laying ceremony was another unforgettable experience.

9th July & 10th July. This was our sailing time from Lae to Cairns.

11th July. We docked at Cairns early morning, cleared customs without any hassles while our heavy luggage was taken care of by our ever-attentive service support group. We were then taken to Cairns RSL for an arranged local tour followed by a luncheon. Last minute telephone numbers and address details were quickly exchanged between veterans, who were then moved in groups to the airport for flights to their separate destinations.

Ps. . . . Grateful thanks are extended to Minister for Veteran Affairs Mr Con Sciacca and the administrative and service support personnel for their many kindnesses which far exceeded our expectations and made our pilgrimage tour an outstanding event of a lifetime never to be forgotten.

Pss Personal research included.

1. Obtaining of Unit grave data for Bomana Cemetery
2. Contacts with our schools at Popondetta and Wewak
3. Our Memorial plaque for Sanananda
4. Our Interest with Memorial plaque at Buna

5. Contacts with 39th, 49th Inf and 7 Div Cavalry Assns.

Psss Finally I express my personal thanks to Mr Geoff Pryor of the Media Liaison group for certain diary reference material.



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Extract from 'My Battalion' by Bill McLeod

The following is an extract from a book entitled 'My Battalion': by Bill MCLEOD; some recollections of his time with 'C' Company, 55/53. First published in the Orderly Room Report of 2004 (Photos: courtesy of Reg Chard)

Milne Bay 1942

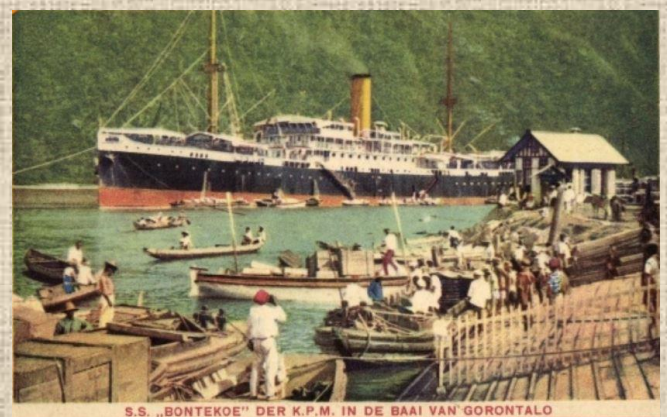
By June 1942 the Australian Army realised the danger of a Japanese landing at Milne Bay on the eastern tip of the island of New Guinea. A force was formed to proceed there to prepare defensive positions plus a detachment of American engineers to build an air strip at Gilli Gilli for fighter planes. 'A' and 'C' Companies of the battalion were ordered to prepare for a move on this special secret mission. A section of 'E' Company (Machine Gun Company) was also to accompany us. 'C' Company commander Captain Hugh Griffin was in charge of the whole contingent. No troops, other than the two company commanders, had any idea of our final destination.

All of the troops involved had to attend a special dental parade and the dentist was given instructions to extract any suspect teeth and no fillings were to be carried out. Now we realised that we were destined for some isolated area. It might be appropriate to mention that the dentist surgery consisted of an eight-man tent with wooden plank flooring. The tent housed the dentist, who was always a commissioned officer, and his assistant, a soldier with one or two stipes. The rest was furnished with a dentist chair and cabinets and what always amused me in my army days was the dentist drill which operated by foot pedal by the dentist himself.

The whole of 'C' Company lined up in a circle outside the dentist tent and we went in one by one. The troops with sound teeth left in line for inspection whilst others, like me received a needle and instruction to remain in the circle. I waited so long the effects of the needle began to wear off, I pulled out of the line. But I got caught and so left the tent minus one tooth.

All of the troops involved in this secret mission were lined up in full battle dress ready to proceed to Port Moresby wharf. The battalion padre said a few words of comfort and his final prayer went something like this:

"Please God, look over these young men wherever they were going. We know, Oh Lord, that some may never come back", etc. I had my head bowed in respect for the prayers and when he said those words I glanced up at my mates, met their eyes and many of them frowned but did not say a word. The majority of us were only 18 years of age. When I arrived at the wharf, I was confronted with this rusty ship called the 'Bontekoe'. We had a strong feeling of being expendable. The old ship and the young soldiers might not come back.



Once out at sea we worked out that we were sailing east by the position of the hot sun and we were soon informed that our destination was Milne Bay. If the Japanese landed here, we would be the only troops to defend the area. The movement was so secretive the area of Milne Bay was code-named "Fall River" and that is where our letter and parcels were sent care of the Australian Army Field Office, Fall River.

The crew of the ship were mainly Lascar seaman, dark skinned, who spoke very little English. Luckily the voyage was uneventful but I can still see in my mind that rusty old tub. The heat was oppressive reflecting off the steel hull.

Milne Bay was an isolated part of the island of New Guinea, sparsely settled with coconut plantations, native villages and mission establishments. Inland from the Bay itself was swampland and dense tropical jungle. My first impression of the was one of beauty of this tropical place. Coconut palms grew to the edge of the sea and the Bay was calm with clear blue/green water. High mountain in the near distance, dimmed with the after shower mist, rose sharply out of the jungle.

The natives were curious and friendly. They had never seen so many soldiers before. Their previous contact with white people had been mostly plantation owners and the missionaries. They smiled a lot and loved singing. The majority of the women moved around bare breasted as in Port Moresby. To me the area was my idea of a tropical paradise one would see on a holiday pamphlet. It was a pity that this place was a breeding ground for mosquitoes and it was not long before we became victims of malaria and dengue fever.



Milne Bay: Where we spent our first night



Milne Bay: Lever Bros Coconut plantation

Once ashore we were designated our respective defensive positions, which were amongst the coconut plantations. The trees were very tall and had been planted in straight rows, Copra was mainly derived from these trees.

The Australian troops got along well with the American engineers who immediately began to construct the air strip. This was an area called Gilli Gilli. We had found out previously that the yanks did not muck around when there was a job to be done. No red tape stood in their way. We observed them darting from one palm tree to the next, placing explosives underneath each tree and then they were blown out of the ground. The plantations were kept clear of jungle vegetation as it was only a matter of bulldozing the fallen trees to either side of the proposed strip. After the ground was levelled by graders, metal strips were locked into each other to form a metal mat on the ground so the planes would not bog in the soft earth and mud. The air strip became operational in record time and eventually the Royal Australian Air Force squadrons 75 and 76 used it flying Kittyhawk fighter planes. We often went to the nearby strip to watch the planes going out and returning on fighter patrols.

Before we left Milne Bay, we watched aircraft dog fights over our area.

The happy natives mixed in well with our troops, particularly the children. You could not get rid of them. We always treated the natives well. Some were grouped into work parties and generally performed the jobs well for rations, mainly cigarettes and tobacco. The troops brought cartons of American cigarettes from the canteen and those commodities were exempt from tax, so they were very cheap. The natives smoked thick plug tobacco, made into cigarettes by wrapping the tobacco in newspaper. They chewed beetle-nut which caused their mouths and teeth to become reddish/black in colour.

Both 'A' and 'C' Company officers mapped out vital slit trench positions in the vicinity of Gilli Gilli, Kobele (KB) Mission and Rabi Village. Nearly every day there would be a shower of rain to cool things down a bit and the mist

would hang around the mountains. The defensive positions and maps made out by officers under the direction of Captain Griffin were to prove invaluable later when they were used by another Australian AIF and Militia troops when the Japanese made a sea landing at Milne Bay on 25 August 1942, By their heroic performances they fought the Japanese to a stand-still and caused them to have their first land defeat of the war, from which they never recovered. Milne Bay was the turning point of the war for the Australian troops in the South Western Pacific area.

The situation was so bad just after we arrived at Milne Bay, I looked out into the Bay and wondered when they would come.

Tents were not erected as we were ordered not to show ourselves from the air. Natives helped to build shelter huts for us to blend into the environment. Before the arrival of the Australian Air Force fighters, Japanese reconnaissance aircraft appeared overhead. They came in very low and not far above the coconut palms. I could see red circles on their planes and the pilots were clearly visible. They knew we were there by the construction of the air strip and the activities at the wharf. They made no attempt to fire on us nor we on them as we did not want to give our defensive positions away at this stage. Information was received one day that a large Japanese convoy consisting of troop transports and naval warships were sighted in the Bismark Sea and heading south towards us. At this stage it was assumed that Milne Bay was its destination. So here we were, just the same as other Australian troops who met the Japanese on the Kokoda Track, with a couple of infantry companies ready to meet the invaders.



I was issued with a Boys Anti-tank rifle to be used in conjunction with my .303 rifle. This anti-tank rifle was over five feet in length and weighed about 36 pounds. It fired a long bullet, similar to .303, when it was fired it kicked like a mule. I enquired as to my role when and if they landed and I was ordered by my officer to fire at the enemy barges and sink as many as possible and when we were overwhelmed, as we knew we would surely because of small numbers, we were to take to the jungle and hills and try and make our way back to Port Moresby. This would have been a daunting task because the way was through mainly untracked jungle for a distance of about 400 kilometres. Luckily for us the Japanese convoy headed towards Lae at the last moment, and we were left alone for the time being.



Our two infantry companies were ordered back to Port Moresby to rejoin the battalion just prior to the landing of the Japanese at Milne Bay on 25 August 1942. Our job had been completed. Before we left, Milne Bay had been reinforced by the Queensland Militia 7th Brigade and the AIF 18th Brigade. Together with the RAAF, Anti-Aircraft Batteries, Artillery Regiments, Naval personnel and American engineers they fought the Japanese to a standstill. After a bitter struggle with no quarter they (the Japanese) were forced to evacuate Milne Bay. Few prisoners were taken.

When we returned to Port Moresby, we took up positions at Bootless Bay in the middle of an air raid; but that is another story ...

Bill McLeod

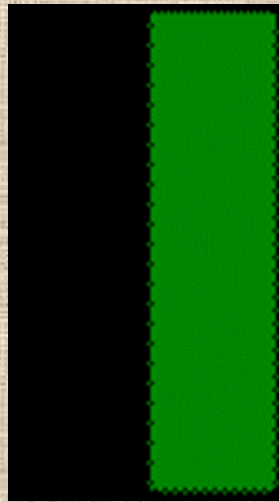
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DID YOU KNOW

The very first prisoners of war held by the Japanese were released from Santa Tomas in the Philippines on 3rd February '45. The First US Cavalry smashed through the walls surrounding the camp in full darkness and took the Japanese commandant and staff into custody and released the starving prisoners. Documents seized confirmed that the Japanese had orders to liquidate all prisoners at the time they left the camp. The camp held 3,000 Americans, 90 Australians, 50 Canadians, 600 British, 8 Dutch, 25 Polish, plus women and children.

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53rd & 55th Battalions part of 14th Brigade 5th Division 1st AIF

The men who served in WWI were in the main ordinary civilians when they left Australia in the troop ships. Upon enlistment/attestation men were assigned to a reinforcement group of between 150 and 160 individuals. There were up to 12 groups of reinforcements for each Battalion. The 53rd Battalion comprised reinforcements for the 3rd and 17th Battalion. Many served at Gallipoli. They had limited training before embarkation, Life in the Army was introduced to them while on the 6-week voyage to Port Said or Plymouth (England). Those who disembarked at Port Said, travelled overland to mainly camps in northern Egypt. After evacuation from Gallipoli a decision was made to double the Army strength, the 5th Division was then formed. Soldiers were then allotted to an infantry battalion, part of the 5th Division. The real training started then. On completion of hard training in late June the 5th Division

sailed from Alexandria to Marseilles in a massive convoy. From there they travelled north to the Somme and went into action at Fromelles on 19th July 1916.

At the end of the Gallipoli Campaign troop ships sailed to ports in southern England where they commenced training in Brigade Training Battalions in Somerset. It was hard gruelling work. Their trainers were hardened wizened veterans of the Boer War. After passing out after training the soldiers were sent to France to their allocated battalion. They were then taken on strength in 'the Field' and went into action almost immediately. The losses on the front line were so horrific that there was a constant stream of inexperienced soldiers hopping over. Many did not survive the first month in the front line. The below is the story of one soldier who survived until the battle of Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918. This is his story.

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AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P04080 005



Norman Beresford Lovett MC & Bar (19.10.1891-9.4.1918).

Norman Beresford Lovett was born at Wongarbone, near Dubbo on 19.10.1891. He was the eldest son of 14 children of Emma and Frederick Samuel Lovett. His father was a Public-School teacher at Wongarbone, (20 years), Kingsdale, and Maryvale in central New South Wales. His brothers Eric and Clifton Lovett also served in WWI in the first ALF.

- 1st Light Horse Regiment Gallipoli bef. 28.5.1915
- Wounded in action Gallipoli (gunshot wound right leg) 28.5.1915.
- Rejoined unit at Gallipoli 19.9.1915
- Transferred to 3rd Battalion 12.1.1916.
- Transferred to 53rd Battalion Tel-el-Kebir Egypt 12.2.1916.
- Wounded in action Fromelles, France 19.7.1916.

- Rejoined 53rd Battalion 31.9.1916.
- Detached to 14th Brigade Dec 1916.
- Awarded Military Cross for conspicuous bravery at Fromelles 19-20.7.1916.
- Awarded Bar to Military Cross 5.1.1917.
- Taken on strength 54th Battalion 13.6.1917.
- Awarded Belgium Croix de Guerre 19.1.1918.
- Killed in action Villers-Bretonneux 9.4.1918.
- Buried: Aubigny British Cemetery 1 ¼ miles southwest of Corbie.

SERGEANT N. LOVETT. Mr. F. Lovett, of the Public School, Maryvale, has received a letter from his son, Sergeant Norman B. Lovett, who is fighting for his King and country at Gallipoli. The letter bears the date of 19th September, and states that the lad is in good health, and, further, that he took part in that memorable battle on 8th. August. His regiment was given the task of holding an important position at all hazards, which it did successfully, but not without heavy casualties on their own side, though much greater on that of the enemy. He says that for 2½ hours it was nothing short of an inferno. The carnage was beyond description. However, when the order 'to charge' came, says Norman, "how we did it, and with what result". No doubt it has been told. Thank God I was one of the few who came out without a scratch. It was grand to see how the boys stuck to their work, and gained a considerable amount of ground, extending our front for many miles. In places we were forced to retire in consequence of, but only for a short time, for we rallied and retook the position, and have been holding, and intend to hold it, too. In the work of entrenching in a case of this kind we have all to do 'our bit' with the pick and shovel. But we don't mind that. After that battle many of us were afflicted with diarrhoea, and were forced to retire to the base camp for a few days to recuperate. I am O.K. now, and hope to get orders to rejoin my regiment to-morrow. He further adds that he has only had two letters from home, and those were of a very early date. He seems to be aware of many local doings, which proves that papers reach him more regularly than letters. (*Gilgandra Weekly (NSW : 1915 - 1929), Friday 19 November 1915, page 16*)

Captain NORMAN BERESFORD LOVETT, Winner of the M.C. and bar and the Croix de Guerre, who was killed in action in France on April 9, was in his 27th year. He was in charge of Bearbong School, and was one of the first to enlist in the '1st Light Horse roll'. He left Australia on October 10, 1914, his 23rd birthday. Training in Egypt, he fought in Gallipoli, and was wounded. He returned and remained till the evacuation. To get to France he left the Light Horse and joined the infantry as second-lieutenant on June 2, 1916. On July 14, 1916, he was selected Australian representative at the Grand Review, Paris, when representatives from the Allied troops took part. He stood with a representative of Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa behind the President's chair, and with him took the salute from the men. At Fromelles he was wounded in the hip, but refused to leave his men, and fought on till daylight before returning to camp. The enemy counter-attacked, and he gathered slightly wounded men and men about the camp and drove them back. For this he got the M.C. and for conspicuous bravery later he got a bar to the Cross, and later was decorated with the Croix de Guerre. (*Sydney Mail (NSW : 1912 - 1938), Wednesday 12 June 1918, page 8*)

BAR TO MILITARY CROSS. The award (equal to a second Military Cross) has been conferred on Lieut. Norman Beresford Lovett, M.C. (N.S.W.). Australian Infantry, for "having carried an important message through a moat intense hostile barrage, thereby barring a critical situation." The Military Cross was awarded to Lovett (then a second lieutenant) on September 26, 1916, "for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in action. Though wounded while heading his platoon in the attack, he continued fighting all night. He returned at daylight to have his wound dressed, but as the enemy developed a counterattack, he disregarded his wounds, and organised a party of wounded men and stragglers to resist this attack. He set a fine example of coolness and courage." From (*Observer (Adelaide, SA : 1905 - 1931), Saturday 31 March 1917, page 38*)

Croix de Guerre (Belgium) was promulgated 'Commonwealth Gazette' No. 133 Date: 21 August 1917

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55|53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association and National Support Group

2024 ANZAC Day Luncheon

Thursday, 25 April 2024

Dear Friends

You are cordially invited to attend our 2024 ANZAC Day Luncheon on Thursday, 25 April 2024.

Venue: the Great Southern Hotel, 717 George Street, Sydney.

Time: the luncheon will be served at 1230 hours, with seating by 1220 hours. You are most welcome to arrive earlier (from 11:30am onwards).

Cost: \$35.00 per adult and \$10.00 per child (to age 15).

RSVP: the RSVP date is **Monday, 22 April 2024**. Please complete the form below and either post to the Treasurer, Mr Keith Smith, 5 John Miller Street, Ryde NSW 2112 **OR** send via email at keithsmith48@hotmail.com. Your assistance is kindly requested to complete your RSVP as early as possible and post/email so that your attendance details are with Keith by the RSVP date to allow for finalisation of numbers, catering and seating.

Payment: the form below covers **1. Luncheon attendance / 2. optional 55|53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association Membership / 3. optional contribution to Association funds:** in addition to completing the form for the luncheon attendance, you may wish to also use it to join or renew Association Membership (optional) - fee of \$20 per calendar year for 2024; and/or to make a contribution to Association funds (optional and applicable only if 2024 fees not yet paid).

Payment options: indicate direct payment on the form and pay into CBA Bank Account: BSB 062 606 / Account No. 2801 9947 (please use your name as a reference) **OR** indicate cash payment on the form and pay (to Keith) at the luncheon.

My contact details, if needed, are email miceofmoresby@live.com.au / mobile/text 0419 631 953. Keith's mobile number, if needed, is 0417 469 425.

Kind regards

Peter Dowling, Secretary

55|53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association and National Support Group

1. 2024 ANZAC Day Luncheon Acceptance

Name: (please print) / Contact number:

Number attending in my party: adults..... / children (up to age 15)..... / My total cost for luncheon: \$.....

Special dietary requirements):

2. **Association Membership (optional):** I wish to: join the Association / renew my Association membership (please tick your option). The fee is \$20 per calendar year for 2024.

3. **My donation to Association funds (optional):** \$.....

Total amount payable: \$.....

Payment options: direct bank deposit..... / cash at luncheon..... (please tick your option).