

Letters & Photos concerning Ernest Newbould's service in the 55/53 Battalion

The author was Rex Marden

- SENDER -
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30-4-02

Dear Jim,

After our phone conversation on Sunday 29th I recieved your letter today so I will endeavour to give you the best outline of the 55/53 Battalion which your father was a member and I was also and hope the enclosed photos should be a great help also - Bill Franks who lives at Gorekan not far from here and also in the same 'Machine Gun Platoon' as your father and of course knew him was able to give me the photo with NO.4 on the back of that photo. Bill agreed with me in saying your father was a quiet and reserved type of chap who played his part as a member of the M.G. platoon as well as any others did. Your father would have joined the 55/53 Bn. at "Alligator Creek" near Townsville in 1943 and placed in the M.M.G. (medium machine gun) platoon together with some other chaps from Victoria who had done training on the Vickers machine gun before hand. The platoon consisted of about 30 men with four Vickers guns numbered No.1, No.2, No.3 & No.4. I was in No.1 section and so was Bill Franks. Your father would have been in No.3 or No.4. section.

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The M.M.G. (medium machine gun) platoon was a part of Headquarter Company. Other platoons in H.Q. Coy were signals, Mortar & Pioneer Sks.

All those platoon in H.Q. Coy could from time to time be attached to any of the other companies in the battalion, these being A, B, C & D rifle coys.

I am sorry that I can't help in giving you any information about any little incidents regarding your father other than being a quiet never any trouble and did what he was asked to do.

I was sorry to hear your father had passed away early in 1975 after so much illness beforehand.

I had malaria quite a few times (about 7) after being in New Guinea and in and out of hospitals and convalescent camps from time to time but had no effects of malaria after the war.

Sananda Buna + Gona areas in New Guinea was my toughest experience with so many casualties all around. But I guess I was indeed one of the lucky ones. Jim seeing I could not fill you in with a lot about your Dad so I have written out a lot of the history of the Battalion he served in during the war. I think the photos will be a great help to you.

Remember no payments necessary. - Yours - Rex Marden

① - Some of the history of the 55/53 Bn -
to the best of my own knowledge.
Up to 1941 the 55/53 Bn was known as
one Battalion.

In Nov. 1941 the 55/53 Bn were unlinked and
became two separate units.

In Jan. 1942 were sent to Port Moresby.
With little or no real or specially jungle
training we sent forward to the Kokoda
area in Aug. 42. where their first
contact was made with the enemy and
suffered some casualties which included
the commanding officer Col. Ward.

In October 1942 the 55th Bn and the 53rd Bn
were linked together once again as the
55/53 Bn.

By Nov. 1942 the Japs had retreated from
Kokoda & mountain areas to their bases
at Buna, Gona & Sanananda on the east
coast of N.G. opposite Port Moresby.

The 55/53 Bn was airlifted to from Port Moresby
to the above Jap held areas where attacks
were made against the enemy by other units
of the Aust. Army and the 55/53 Bn also, plus
an American unit. That was early in Dec 1942.
All units had a lot of casualties as the
Japs were well dug in and being in that area
over a long period knew it well.

2 Battalion History

The 55/53 Bn casualties in the Buna Gona + Sanananda area were 238 killed + wounded.

After being relieved in the above areas the unit was flown back to Port Moresby in Jan 1943. Then returned to Australia in Feb 1943. by boat (The Duntroon)

After disembarking at Cairns the unit was taken up to the Atherton Tablelands for a couple of weeks before taken to Sydney for well earned leave.

After leave the battalion was being stationed at "Alligator Creek" near Townsville where reinforcements were brought in to bring the unit up to strength again.

(This Jim is when your father Ernest Newbold would I reckon, joined the 55/53 Bn)

From Townsville was up to Cape York just near the tip of the cape (about 30km) to a place named "Jacky Jacky" and it was also close to a R.A.A.F air strip. I dont really know why we were sent to Jacky Jacky but most of the unit thought we may be going on to Borneo.

From Jacky Jacky we (The 55/53 Bn) we all on our way down to Brisbane by boat (banberre or Katoomba which were troop ships) The boat we were on struck an uncharted reef so we were taken off and spent 3 day on Thursday Island.

3

- Battalion History -

When the Battalion finally arrived in Brisbane we were then stationed at Strathpine for some time and used to go on leave to Brisbane and suburbs.

Early in Dec 1944 the 55/53 Bn as part of the 11th Division embarked at Brisbane and went to Bougainville which is the largest island in the Solomon group, and took over from the American 148th Regiment at Torokina on the west side of the island. A few months earlier the American Marines had successfully landed and cleared this area of Japanese who retreated to the hills in the centre of the island with Japs still in the north and south of the island.

The three battalions of the 11th Brigade which were 55/53 Bn 26th Bn + 31st Bn, took turns at harassing the Japanese by aggressive patrolling. The 55/53 Bn carried out about 36 of these such patrols and accounted for 107 enemy but lost men themselves in those actions.

These patrols took part in the centre part of Bougainville known as the Numa Numa area. The unit later took part in the same type of patrolling etc in the north end of Bougainville clearing the area and although accounting for quite a few of the enemy unfortunately lost about 10 men killed and some wounded.

4 - 55/53 Battalion History -

Early in August the Australian Command ordered all offensive movements to cease, as the end of the war seemed imminent. After the two atomic bombs had been dropped on Japan the Japanese surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on 8th Sept 1945. After the surrender the 55/53 Bn were moved to the large Japanese base in Rabaul on New Britain and carried out occupational duties until the unit finally returned to Australia for demobilisation in May 1946.

P.S I saw Trevor Harper on Anzac Day - as a matter of fact I went down with him by train from Wyong to Sydney when we went to the March and told him I had some photos I would send to you.

We enjoyed the day but the numbers of us are a little smaller each year - about 40 to 50 this year but it is good to get together for a dinner with those who can still attend.

Rex

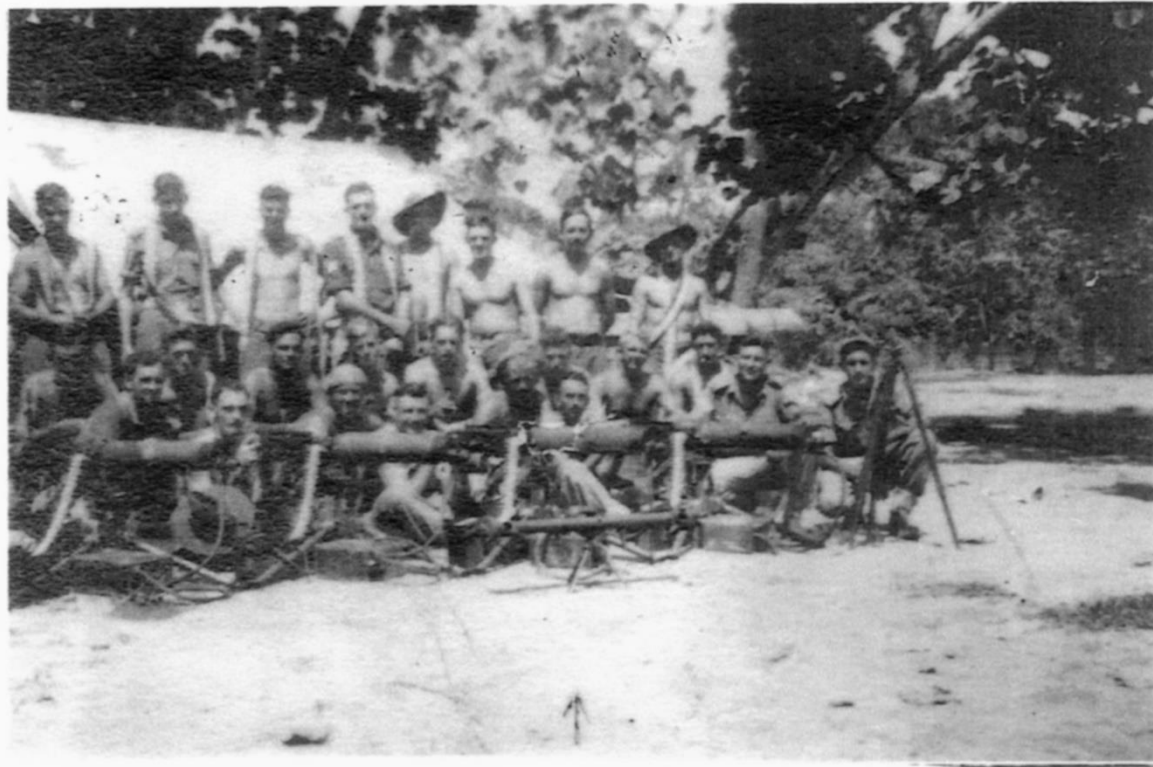


① LT. BILL M^cDONALD, BOB BRUNTY, ? WRIGHT. KEN WILLIAMS.
BILL MOON, ? MITCHELL, BILL EVANS, ERNEST NEWBOULD,
CLEVE SAWTEL, REX MARDEN, JACK DRINEN,
SGT. JACK MOORE, ? TAYLER, WILBUR MATHEWS.
BOB WILSON, KELVIN STOKES, CPL ?, TOM WATSON



(2)
⑧ SOME OF THE MMG PLATOON AT 'ALLIGATOR CREEK'
NEAR TOWNSVILLE. ERN NEWBOULD IN FRONT NEXT TO
TALL EDDY ROSS. I AM 3rd LAST FROM END OF LINE.

From REX MARDEN

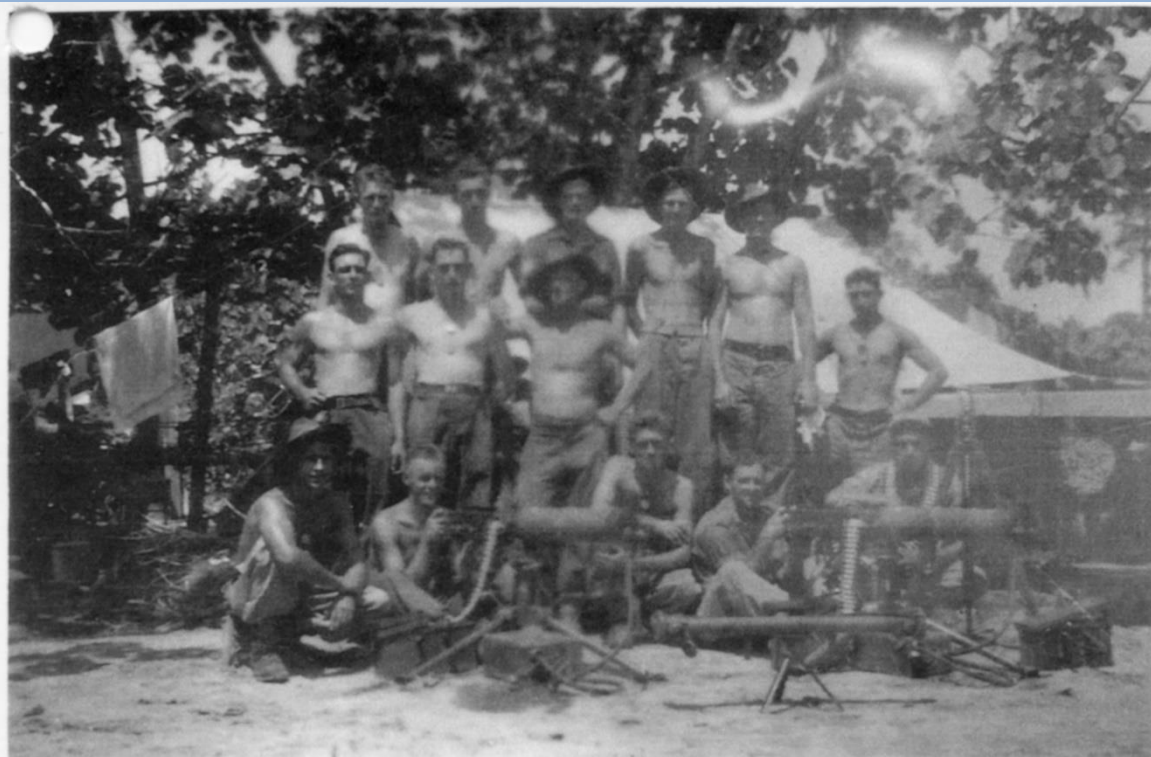


③ 55/53 BN MMG PLATOON

E. NEWBOULD IN FRONT ABOVE ARROW, BILL FRANKS ON RIGHT,
BEHIND TRIPOD. A COUPLE OF OTHERS INCLUDING MYSELF
WERE CUT OUT ON LEFT. FROM REX MARDEN.



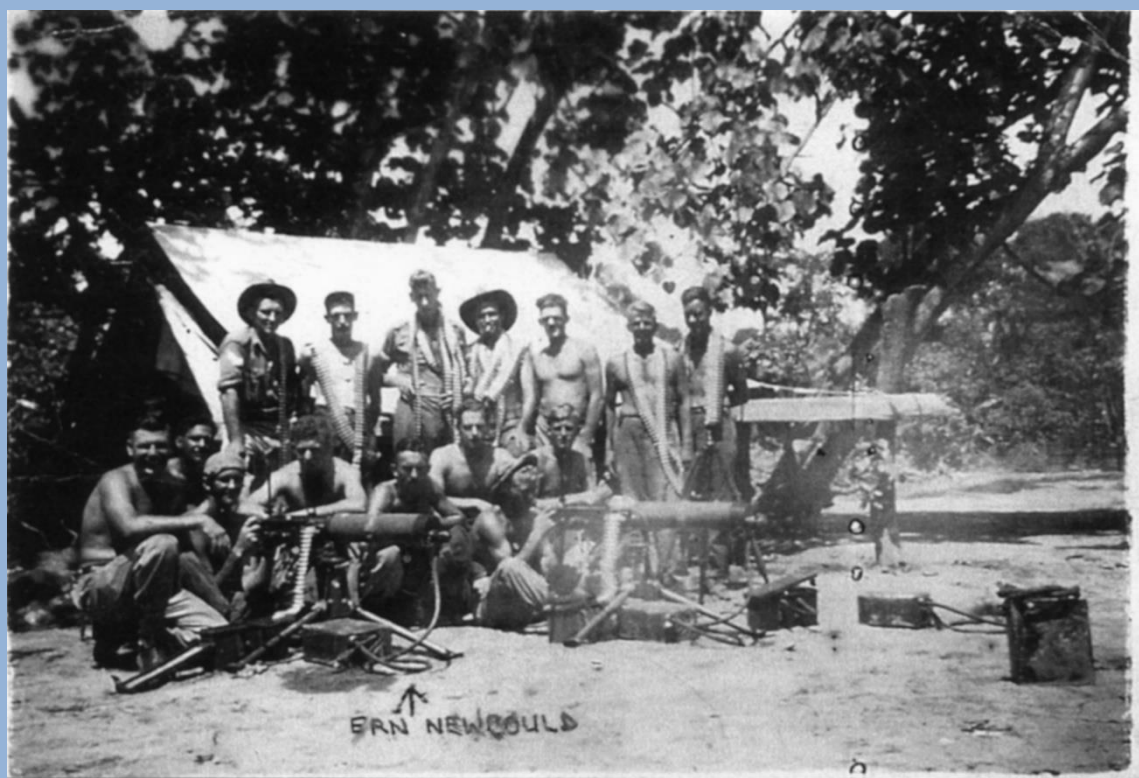
4/ ✓ E. NEWBOULD . C. McCLEAN . CURLY DENNET ,
(?) FROM BILL FRANKS



SOME OF MMG PLATOON
55/53 BN

TOP ROW
WRIGHT, DICK LANDEL, BERT CHAMBERLAIN, LEN ?
WILBUR MATHEWS, KELVIN STOKES.

2ND ROW REX MARDEN, C. McLEAN, JACK DRINAN
TOM WATSON, BOB WILSON, ? MITCHELL, "CURLY" DENNET, BILL FRANKS.



4th MACHINE GUNS

HQ COMPANY

MACHINE GUN PLATOON

PHOTOS FROM

REX MARDEN

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BILL FRANKS 55th/53rd

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY