

10<sup>th</sup> April 1991

Dear Laurie,

Here I am again to continue my saga of the war-time 7<sup>th</sup>. I will not deal with the Largo camp except to say it was (I believe) the first militia compulsory call-up for 10 weeks, mid Sept to mid Nov. 1940. None of the recruits were very enthusiastic about it as the war was on the other side of the world and those that were there, were there because they wanted to be there. After the 10 weeks were up, we all went home and hoped that the war would end soon - but it didn't - it got worse.

In March 1941, we got our second call-up for 10 weeks camp, this time at Ingleburn. The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade battalions were there also, to which we were attached. We still had 18 pdr guns and 4.5 howitzers (best war gear, of course) and all the M.T. was impressed civilian (on hire) vehicles. We were in what was known as "F" block, on the southern (or Campbelltown) end of the camp. The huts were a big improvement on the tents of Largo, as was the sewerage ablation blocks. We were issued with standard S.D. uniforms and rifles. Training was more intense with manoeuvres around the Camden - Campbelltown area. We had a regimental "shoot" at Holdsworthy artillery range and a rifle shoot at Holdsworthy rifle range. On another day the whole brigade went to Sydney and a march was held, in support of the launch of a war-loan, through the city streets.

On another day there was a brigade parade in a paddock near the camp. (It was all paddocks round the camp in those days.)

Major Gen. Lloyd, the 2nd Div. Commander, gave an address to the troops of the events

in the middle East and how much volunteers were needed to re-inforce the A.I.F divisions over there. On returning to our lines our C.O., Major Jim Helas (we, disrespectfully, call him 'Nancy') repeated the call and about 3 volunteered at the end of the camp. I volunteered to attend a full weeks extension MT and M.G. Carrier course at Warwilk Farm racecourse which stood me in good stead for promotion later on.

During this camp, we noticed a change in our organisation and identity. The 25, 26, 27 and 107 batteries had disappeared and we became A and B troops of 25<sup>th</sup> Bty and C and D troops of 26<sup>th</sup> Bty (107 Bty became D (Dov) troop) we became the field regiment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade. By now, the regiments strength was approx 400 to 500 men.

The next camp was at Maxellan about Oct to Nov. 1941. I don't know much about it as it was not a full regimental call-up. It may have been a re-inforcement call-up. I still have a training programme of a D & M.T course commencing Mon 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1941 where 32 drivers were to be trained. Chief instructor was Lt. D.T. Bartley assisted by S/Sgt H.V. Amos & Sgt R.J. Kohlhoff and Sgt L.C. Jones. Perhaps, if you see Cassie Rosewear (yes, I remember him) or Charles Bremer, they may be able to fill you in.

As I have already explained, after Pearl Harbour, Wallgrave was the next camp - full time "you're in the army now" and "you'll be sorry"

Except for mess huts and ablution blocks, it was all tents, the whole camp, and no sewer. As far as I was concerned the worst fatigue you could get was pioneer duty, i.e. scrub out the showers and the lutrine "thunder boxes"

Other than a couple of manouvers in the Cambelltown and Richmond areas, there was not much training. They seemed to be concentrating on re-equipping, gun change over, issue of personal gear, a bit at a time as it became available, injections and inoculations, more military type M.T (no more impressed vehicles and, of course, the formation of E+F troops 27 Bty

Now, for a few incidents which stick in my mind. Week end leave was very liberal and regular, but for some unknown reason it was suddenly stopped. The infantry battalions objected strongly and threatened to "march out" en mass. on the Friday afternoon sure enough, they did, with their battalion bands leading the way. Brigadier Cameron chased them in his staff car and caught them up near Prospect. where he implored them to return to camp. He said their action was mutiny. There was a cry from somebody to "take no notice of the old bastard - let's go". And so they did for the week-end. Of course, there was a tattoo roll call that night and next day. The 7th was not involved in these "hi-jinks", thank goodness.

On the following Monday, a brigade parade was called, Brig. Cameron took the diaz and uttered words I will never forget. He said "Somebody called me a bastard, well, some people are born bastards and others acquire the habit. I profess to be neither. Every man who marches out without authority will be summarily dealt with by his commanding officer." And that was that!

Another time we returned from leave

on a Sunday night, the camp had been ripped apart by a severe thunder storm. Tents, blankets and personal gear had been washed & blown into the slit trenches next to the tents and covered with mud. What a mess to come back to at 23.59.

And, finally, one morning (I think it was a Sunday) the coly went out "who wants to go on a Cooks tour of Sydney Harbour." This sounded good, plenty of volunteers, including me. The trip to Sydney Harbour by ferry was delightful on this sunny morning until we got to Pyrmont wharf. "all out, all line up, march in here" and shift this pile of bagged sugar on to the waiting ship, we poor suckers worked all day and we were pretty cranky for falling for the trap. The wharf labourers had gone on strike. A union rep. who came on to the wharf tried to stop us, but he came close to being tossed into the water. That day we learned that "you never volunteer for anything"

Life at East Lakes "battle stations" was a very leisurely experience. After settling into our 4 houses and positioning the guns, daily routines were early P.T. parade, general parade and roll call and afternoon parade. Gunners were drilled on the guns, polished and oiled them, and the ammunition, drivers maintained their vehicles, sigs. maintained and laid wire round the camp and various O.P.s. They used the P.M.G. telephone cables for longer distance to some O.P.s on the beaches. Camouflage nets were erected over the gun pits and parked trucks, and many hours were spent in "scrimming" the nets with bits of khaki and green bag

strips. There was an occasion when Capt Stuckey on an aerial survey of our area returned and told us that the gun position was so well camouflaged that it was invisible from the air.

All of our Ford "blitz" trucks had been issued without canvas canopies, canvas being unobtainable for such things. So, we made our own. Wire netting was stretched over the pipe frames, then several layers of hessian, then flat green paint virtually poured on and brushed in, coat after coat and when it set hard it did the job. Yes, we were not short of ingenuity. We painted the trucks and guns in camouflage patterns too.

Another time we had some continuous heavy rain. The gunners who lived in the gun pit dugouts had a bad time keeping dry. Capt Stuckey went round with some bottles of OP Balm providing some inner warmth. We drew our rations from the Sydney Show Ground. During April 1942 it was decided we needed some MT. NCO's. Six of us (including me) were chosen for an N.C.O.'s course. We were drilled in the usual NCO drills, marching, giving orders, but not gunnery. The two chosen were myself and Bill Schade, one of the A.I.F recruits. He was later promoted to Battery H.Q. MT sergeant. I still correspond with him. He lives in Hay but his health is not too good at the moment. He was one of those who transferred to the Provost Corps. at Tenterfield and served with distinction. He attended the surrender ceremony when Jap. General Adachi signed and handed over his sword.

I cant give you any information about the units at Beacon Hill or Wallongong. You will have to find some blokes who were there to give you details.

Try Ossie Rosevear or Charles Brewster.

The rest of the story I have already told you. Now I will go on to what happened in West Australia.

The W.A. Experience - "not a shot in anger"

July 1942 The regiment detrained at Chellow, round about 8 AM. on the Saturday morning after the 4 1/2 day trip across Australia. We formed up in battens and marched down a bush road, shouldering rifles and kits. There was virgin bush on both sides. Soon we turned into the tall timber where a camp had been built, mess huts and ablution blocks. To our disgust, the tents were childrens play tents, like dad would give the kids for Xmas. Two men and four men tents with Indian heads & feathers painted on the sides. That's how short equipment was. They were not much shelter from the wind, rain and cold. All this and the early morning P.T. parades, and freezing cold showers caused many of us to catch colds. I got influenza and was carted off to Helena Vale (haccourse) C.C.S. and a stay in a convalescent hospital at Narrogin. The move to Min Min, 85 Kms north of Perth, took place in about August while I was absent. When I returned to the unit our own army tents had arrived as had all our guns and M.T. Min Min was a bush camp.

with no huts or facilities, no duck boards, sleep on the ground, but we were allowed to make bush beds from whatever we could "scrounge" to get off the ground.

The infantry battalions were here too, so I'm told but I never saw them. We were scattered all over the place round Yin Yin. There was no leave at all until towards mid September when some leave was granted on a very limited basis. They let a few go at a time, 3 days in Perth. We had a manoeuvre in the bush, but if there was a shoot, I missed it. About November '42 we pulled out of Yin Yin and moved back to Perth, to a camp at Bellevue, near Midland Junction. It was called a rest camp. There was mess huts, open showers with lashed on water, which although cold, used to warm up because the pipes were not covered, and duckboards for the tents. Day leave was granted to Perth at week ends. Dress, while on leave, for all of us was uniform. The M.P.s would "chip" you if you had a button undone.

There was a regimental shoot at Rockingham, and a rifle shoot at Swanbourne range. Our sojourn at lovely Bellevue was all too short and in Nov. '42 we moved 300 miles north to Geraldton area, to a place 8 miles out, Narngulu. Another bush camp, no duck boards, no huts. We had to make our own mess shelters and kitchens out of bush timber, wire netting and thatched with leaves and grass, dry refuse pits and pit latrines. We were issued with canvas shower bags, about one for two tents. The water came

from a bore, carted by the regiments water tankers (known as Q5) The water was a salty taste and half the regiment went down with dysentery, until we got used to it. You should have seen the queues at the R.A.P. tent. It was '42 at Narngulu, we were treated with supplementary rations, chicken and plum pudding served to the troops by the officers and a bit of a sing-song and a few beers after it. At the wet canteen (a caravan) beer was 6 a mug (big or small) It was not long before the TOM BLAMEY glass appeared, which was a beer bottle neatly cut off at the neck and ground in the sand for a couple of hours to smooth the lip.

The camp was surrounded by low tea-tree scrub. The ground was dirty sand and hard gravel. The guns and trucks were scattered and hidden under the low trees and camouflage nets. Pits were dug inside the tents as bomb protection but never needed to be used. Day leave was granted to Geraldton about fortnightly. All outgoing mail was censored. We had a couple of manouvres and a shoot while stationed here. We used to go ~~out~~ out in the bush for a few miles and just shoot. It was all virgin uninhabited scrub. - open range There was no formed roads in that type of country. By now, the regiment was fully equipped with everything a field regiment needed, even 3 Bren gun carriers for OP use. The regiments strength was about 700 men. About March or April 1943 we pulled out of Narngulu and moved back toward Moora



to a place 20 miles west, to Dandaragin

Here, we built our own mess shelters and latrines as before. We were getting good at that now. Dandaragin was a clean camp, with tall trees, white sand and grassed.

The guns and trucks were scattered among the trees which provided good cover.

Nearby was an open paddock on which we marked out a football field with crazy bush timber goal posts. Rugby league was encouraged between the batteries and the infantry battalions. The R.A.P. truck was always on hand and R.M.O. Capt (Dr) J. Smythe was chief jam-bun. He was for some years Chief Medical Officer of Royal Newcastle Hospital. He is now retired and lives in Stewart Ave. Hamilton. N.S.W.

In hindsight, some funny things began to happen at Dandaragin which, I feel, precluded later events. First, was when all N.C.O ranks were confirmed. This was quite a surprise as we were unaware that our ranks were only "temporary" ranks.

Then, the gunners were sent over to 35 Btn to learn a bit about infantry training, but to really prevent any suspicious feelings some of the infantry men came over to the 7th to learn a bit about gunnery. Then, there was the "quick action" stunt. Somebody up among the top brass said the "good books" claimed that a quick action took 8 minutes. Lt. Col. Theleso (our CO) stated this was all rubbish as his regiment could do it in 2 minutes. The Div. Artillery General 1/C (ex Middle East, I think his name was <sup>WHITELAW</sup>)

THIS IS WHAT I WAS TOLD, ANYWAY?

challenge Helso to prove it - so, we did.

In June '43 we moved out of Dandaragan to a camp on the banks of the Swan River, Point Walter (towards Fremantle) which was a lovely camp with mess huts, good clean ablution blocks and latrines. Day leave was granted to Perth at week ends. I remember there was a big march through the city in support of another war loan. ~~The~~ D troop being near the rear of the column, I could see a good deal of the regiment, ahead, every man in step, rifles all at the same slope angle, the columns and ranks, dead straight. It was a grand sight, Lt. Col Helso in the lead, followed by his 2 1/2 Major Florence and the adjutant Capt Anderson, then the 3 batteries led by Majors Rigby, Black & Stuckey respectively. At Pt Walter, more funny things happened. We had amphibious training, rowing long punts around Melville Water, loading and unloading guns on to the punts, assault courses, cliff climbing with ropes. There was no shooting. We wondered "what's all this for?" We were there for about 6 weeks.

In July 1943, the whole regiment, guns & trucks and personnel were loaded on to flat top rail trucks at Fremantle goods yard and railed, via Northam, to Morawa, travelling all night, sleeping in our trucks. Next day, at Morawa we detrained everything and travelled 50 miles in convoy overland to Mingenew. As we moved into the camp position, the 2nd Armoured Divn. with their tanks moved out. They passed us going in the opposite direction. We pitched camp, scatter fashion as usual. There were

no trees, no cover, no huts - nothing, a desolate place. After a few days, more funny things happened. We had to re-pitch our tents in regulation lines, using our gun directors to make sure everything was in line and square. Guns and trucks were re-parked the same way, in lines. There was more football, an athletic meeting and an inter-troop drill competition. We even used to travel to Geraldton, 180 miles return, just to play a football match. Very strange and out of character events.

Then, in August '43 there was the big shoot in the Mulawa area. Being no roads in the range area, we had to go out about a week before and make tracks, then cover the tracks with gravel. Trucks bogged easily in the sand.

The regiments guns were positioned along with 2 other W.A. regiments, - in all - 72 guns. It was a divisional shoot. Lt. Col. Helso was the chief divisional Gunnery Officer. He worked out all the "switches" and the timing when each troop would fire so that the shells

landed simultaneously. There were shoots at selected targets, then creeping barrages, then divisional concentrations on selected targets. Talk about "how to get rid of ammunition".

I managed to get up to the O.P. and saw the final day whole show. It was an awe inspiring sight. Not far away from me was all the top brass of 2nd Division including Lt. Gen. Gordon Bennett, the Division commander. That was the last shoot we had and was some "finale", but still, not a shot in anger.

We returned to Mingeneel, via Greenough,

and spent a day and a night swimming on the beach near where we camped and caught some crayfish. Within a month it was all over. Shed all our guns, trucks and equipment and you know the rest.

Looking back, in hindsight, all those funny things that happened had to do with the disbanding of the regiment. But we had no idea what the top brass were planning. There had been a vague rumour some months before, that we may be returning East, but no one really believed it.

This completes my story of the 7<sup>th</sup> Aust Field Regt. as I remember it 50 years ago. But I will finally conclude by repeating what was said by Major (then Lt) Stuckey at an address to his 107<sup>th</sup> Bty at a smoke when the large camp broke up. He rose from his place and said (among other things) that "the only good thing that came out of war was the comradeship which grew between men"

with best wishes

from

Ted Jefferson