

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA

From Roscrea to New Guinea

John Letsome Moten
and Murray Moten D.S.O., C.B.E.

by Liam Doran

September 2013

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**FRONT COVER: Portrait of Brigadier Murray Moten by Geoffrey Mainwaring, 1946,
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BACK COVER: John Moten's grave at Dartmoor, Victoria.

Cover design by Dick Conroy

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Acknowledgements

When I was a boy my mother often spoke of great uncle Johnny who, she said, had been transported for shooting at Mr. Roe. I wondered what the incident was, and what happened to him afterwards in Australia.

Years later when working in the *Nenagh Guardian* newspaper, I was reading through the 1845 file, and found a lengthy description of the shooting at Theophilus Roe, of Ballykelly and the subsequent trial.

Then in the early 1990s Ken Morton from Victoria was researching Michael Morton who was transported for ten years in 1847, for stealing a cow, and I supplied him with the details of Michael's trial from *The Guardian* files. Ken provided me with details of John's marriage in 1860 and the names of his children. Thanks, Ken, for giving me the start I needed.

The internet has been a great boon. One day a few years ago I looked up all the references to the name Moten. Many were black Americans, but one caught my eye - Brigadier Murray Moten, 17th Australian Infantry Brigade in World War II. The reference stated his son John had served as head of ASIO, Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation, 1988-1991. I had the feeling that there could be a family link.

I wrote to John, sending him the family details that I had, and the 1845 incident and trial. I was delighted when John wrote back, saying that, yes, it was his great-grandfather. He sent me the journal kept by his grandfather, John, (1867-1957), which stated that John Moten had come out to Australia from Roscrea. John and his wife Anne visited Roscrea in September 2010 for the first time, and I showed them the places associated with the family. On their second visit in 2011 I mooted the possibility of telling the story in a book.

John and Anne have been enthusiastic, making what they have available to me, and always willing to answer my queries. This book would not have been possible without their great input. When one is thousands of miles away in Ireland, researching the career of an Australian officer is a challenging task. I have to acknowledge the help and support I have received from the Australian War Memorial in Canberra with this project. Permission to quote from the official histories and reproduce maps, to quote from the war diaries of 2/27 Battalion and

17 Infantry Brigade, and to use photographic images, has helped me immensely, and I express my deep gratitude to AWM. I appreciate also the help and advice of Craig Berelle, Assistant Curator, AWM,

I also thank my relative, Lt. Col. Guy Moten for permission to quote from his essay on Kanga Force and 17 Brigade in New Guinea under Murray Moten. Lt. Col. Gavin Keating very generously made relevant chapters from his 2005 study of General Savage, *The Right Man for the Job* available to me, as well as important maps.

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Thanks also to North Tipperary Leader Partnership for financial support to the publication.

The Guardian, Nenagh, have done an excellent job in printing this book. Thanks especially to Michael Hegarty and Paddy Brennan.



Foreword

When my father, Doug McEwen, joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1939 it was because the Army could give him a job and hope. Both were in short supply for working class children like Doug whose families were suffering through Australia's Great Depression of the 1930s.

As was the case with so many Australian veterans of World War II, my father did not speak much about his war service when he finally returned home in 1944 after duty in the Middle East and the Pacific. Like most Australian soldiers, he did his job and did it extraordinarily well and never sought accolades. He valued the mateship he found in the 2/27th Battalion AIF and told me once, when he was in his '90s and just before he died, that he never regretted joining the army and 'would do it all again' if he could. I am unsure if he rarely talked about the War because he did not want to or because no-one really asked.

One of the few things he would readily volunteer was the quality of his commanding officers. A few, he said, were incompetent or, worse, "show ponies" who treated their men with disdain. Their slights were never

forgotten. Many, however were unpretentious, thoughtful and clever soldiers. They were true leaders who earned respect and deserved it. Their stories are not so well remembered.

These are the humble, dedicated and courageous men whose contributions have been sadly neglected but should be honoured. They are the heart of our military history, of all military history.

Men like Brigadier Murray Moten CBE, DSO , who grew up in rural and remote South Australia, worked as a messenger boy in the post office and as a bank clerk and was a “citizen soldier”, a militia man who found himself commanding the 2/27th Battalion in the Middle East. Moten was in charge of young men who, like my father, had joined up not necessarily for heroic or patriotic reasons but for the chance of a better future and probably for the adventure. They were moulded by leaders like Moten into a respected, mature and determined fighting force. A magnificent, courageous Battalion, the 2/27th went on to win many battle honours in the Middle East and the Pacific.

I was surprised and very pleased when the author contacted me to say he was writing this book about Brigadier Moten. An Irish journalist writing about a book about a South Australian soldier and Australian military history seemed a little incongruous. It just goes to show that our writing of history is never complete and that history touches all of us, everywhere. There are always more stories to collect, more lessons to be learned. When Moten and his men fought together in the sands of Syria they taught us that ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

My thanks to Liam Doran for telling a story that needed to be told.

Anne McEwen

Senator for South Australia
Parliament of Australia

July 2013

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA

CHAPTER ONE

Transported for Life

In its issue of February 26, 1845, the *Nenagh Guardian* had a report from its Roscrea correspondent stating that Theophilus Roe, Esq, “residing at Ballykelly, within about five miles of this town, and in this county, on Friday morning received a Rockite notice, of a very heinous description, threatening him with immediate death, should he not give up, within six days, some lands at Skirke, Queen’s County, which he had taken about two years back from Mr. Price, the agent over the Estate and from which the former tenant had been ejected for non payment of rent.”

The Guardian asserted that Mr. Roe “will not be intimidated by such mandates, though the Rockites seem determined, if possible, in this instance, to enforce the orders of their ribbon code, having about twelve months back committed several outrages on his property, such as breaking ploughs and farming utensils which were left outside by night. The cowardly assassins are afraid to attack Mr. Roe personally, well knowing that at all times he trusts in God, and keeps his powder dry”

The following issue had a statement from J.R. Price, the Agent over the estate, refuting the statement that the previous tenant had been ejected for non payment of rent, and pointed out that the lease had expired by the death of the last life, Dr. Harte, of Portarlington and that the lands had been surrendered voluntarily, with all rent paid up.

Threatening notices were the most numerous type of outrage in Tipperary in the 1830s and 1840s, usually affixed by night to the house of the person being warned. Rarely were they sent by post. Daniel Grace¹ in his study of crime in pre famine North West Tipperary, says that out of 255 threatening notices issued between 1837 and 1841, only four were sent by post. The same week that Theophilus Roe received his threat, Joseph Walpole, of Monadhreid, Borris-in-Ossory, also received a threatening letter, and *The Guardian* reported that both had been posted in Roscrea.

Many of these notices were unsigned, but some were issued under such names as Captain Rock, Captain Starlight, Captain Terry Alt. We do not know

if the notice to Theophilus Roe was signed, the term “Rockite” would suggest Captain Rock.

The Guardian in its issue of March 15, 1845, listed the calendar for the Nenagh Spring Assizes. 63 cases of crime in North Tipperary were listed, nine of murder, two of manslaughter, five of firing at with intent to kill, armed assault on houses by night 12, and two of highway robbery being the most serious. It commented:

“We cannot flatter ourselves, or our readers, by the assurance that ALL the weighty crimes committed in North Tipperary appear on the face of the above calendar. On the contrary, if we assert that one third of the outrages, murders and homicides, perpetrated in the last seven months, do not appear in this list, (awful as is that amount) we shall be decidedly within the mark. It is not, therefore, to be taken as a necessary consequence, that if we have a heavy calendar, we shall have all the perpetrators of crime now before the legal tribunals of the country for trial and judgement. No. If such fortunately were the case there might be some hope of a cessation from guilt by the punishment of offence.....If there was a possibility of restoring peace and good order to Tipperary, or of reclaiming her sons from evil doings, by the just and wholesome chastisement of the laws, and of the legal authorities in this country, we would never wish to see any extraordinary stringent or coercive measure introduced for that purpose. But when we recollect the atrocious deeds that have been perpetrated, not only for a long period of years, but even within the short period of the last seven months, we shudder at the idea of what again may be enacted. Alas! We fear that there is little hope or chance that Tipperary will change its character for crime, as there would be of the leopard changing its spots”².

The outrages continued, and in its issue of March 4, 1846, *The Guardian* devoted a full page to a table of crime in North Tipperary from March 1, 1845, to Feb. 28, 1846, which included no less than ten murders.

Theophilus Roe, following the threatening notice, carried pistols with him whenever he travelled from Ballykelly. It was fortunate for him that he did so. On Saturday May 17, 1845, about 4 a.m. he and his son, James, set out from Ballykelly, travelling in a gig. There is a long avenue into Ballykelly, and about 300 yards from the house, a shot was fired at them. Several slugs lodged in the backs of their heads - one ball passed through Mr. Roe’s hat. “The second man was preparing to fire, when Mr. Roe at the same time pulled two pistols out of his pocket which were loaded with ball, giving one to his son, who immediately jumped over the ditch into a wheaten field, where he met two men, one armed



Remains of Moten homestead at Callahill. (Photo: Michael Sheedy).

with a gun, the other with a blunderbuss, when they ordered him immediately to stand back, upon which he fired at one of them; at the same moment his father also fired at them when they ran away in the direction of the grove of Timoney, belonging to John D. Hutchinson, Esq.”³

Mr. Roe felt unwell, and went home. However, his son borrowed a double barrelled gun from a neighbour, Richard Kennedy, of Spafield, and pursued them, followed by a servant named Whelan. Another servant, Reilly, ran into the stable at Ballykelly, mounted a horse without bridle or saddle, and rode to the police stations at Garran and Timoney.

The Garran police set out and ran in different directions; one man, Sub Constable James Hallaran, went towards Timoney to inform the police there, suspecting that the culprits might have gone in that direction. However, Constable Dyer and SubConstables McGill and Armstrong from Timoney, with Roe’s servant, were already in pursuit. They came in view of them near Timoney grove. The two men had divided, each running a different course. “Sub Constable Hallaran got a view of him a long distance off, and perceived him armed with a gun, and running towards him, so he concealed himself in a ditch, and loaded his carbine. In a few minutes the fellow, whose name is John



Rocky Hills Probation Station (today)

Moten, came within a distance of forty yards of him; he jumped out of the ditch and called on him (Moten) to surrender; which he refused doing. He gave chase, both running at a very quick pace for a considerable distance - at last when Moten found Sub Constable Hallaran gaining ground upon him every field, turned round, stood, and immediately said to Hallaran (who was about fifteen yards distant from him) "we will have a fight for it" at the same time presenting his musket and taking deliberate aim, still advancing towards him, fired, the contents of which, a ball having struck the carbine which Hallaran held in his hand a little below the lock, when he (Hallaran) finding to advance was rather dangerous and fearing an attack from a second man, fired and shot Moten, the ball passing through the upper part of his thigh; he then ran to arrest Moten, who struck him several blows with his musket and knocked him down. Hallaran recovered himself and knocked Moten down, and upon Hallaran drawing his bayonet and threatening to stab him if he would resist, Moten surrendered, and Hallaran brought him to Timoney police barracks, about a mile distant"⁴.

Meanwhile Constable Dyer, Sub Constables McGill and Armstrong, along with the servant boy, were pursuing Patrick Brien, the second man, through the groves around Timoney. Brien threw off his shoes and headed for Clonmore bog, near Errill. Here he was captured and brought also to Timoney barracks. Here he was searched by Dyer, who found some fine canister powder in his pocket; when Dyer searched Moten he found a paper with shot in it, and another paper with some leaden slugs, home made, a powder horn and some coarse powder. He also found Moten's hat and gun in the field. *The Guardian* said that Moten was from Cullahill, County Tipperary, and Brien from

Clonmore, Queens County.

Drs. Kingsley, Woods and Powell attended the Roes, who were stated to be in no danger and would recover. “The medical gentlemen entertain some doubts as to the recovery of the wounded man, Moten. About two hours after their arrest, Moten’s father came to Timoney barrack, to see his son, and said, “I hope you acted a man and will die so - you would not be my son if you did not” and he replied, “I acted a man and will die one”. When Moten was placed lying on a door outside the police barrack and about to be carried into town on the shoulders of four policemen Moten’s sister, a girl of about 21 or 22 years of age, laughed at him several times in the presence of a crowd of people. Sub Inspector Morgan and a party of police escorted Moten and Brien into the Bridewell about 12 o’clock on the same day”⁵.

They were brought before William H. Birch and Frederick Lidwill, J.P.s, and Joseph Tabutheau, Superintending Magistrate. After identification by three people, they were committed to stand trial at the summer Assizes in Nenagh. The following morning six men from the Ballykelly area were arrested on



Convict Road

conspiracy to murder Mr. Roe. Later on Sunday evening Brien went with the police to Garran Castle where he had concealed his blunderbuss.

Investigations by the local magistrates continued on the Monday. According to *The Guardian*, “Brien, one of the captured assassins, has unfolded a frightful and widespread conspiracy, on which six persons still remain in custody....The assassins were hired to effect their bloody deed, not being in any way connected with the land, or related to the late occupier. If you refer to *The Guardian* of the 1st March last, you will there perceive a letter from J.R.Price, Esq., the Agent over the estate, contradicting a statement made in a preceding number that the former tenant was ejected; it is quite true that he had not been ejected, nor had there been any notice served to that effect. He quietly gave up the land and was grateful to Mr.Roe for taking it off his hands - which only still more helps to show the extent to which the wild spirit of revenge is carried on amongst the North Tipperary peasants. Mr. Roe is rather better this evening than yesterday, but still unable to leave his bed. The wounded man Moten still remains in a very precarious situation, though hopes are entertained of his recovery”⁶.

He seems to have recovered fairly quickly, for the *Nenagh Guardian* of June 4 was able to report that he had been transferred from the Roscrea bridewell to Nenagh, to await his trial at the forthcoming Summer Assizes. On June 18 it reported that Sub.Constable James Hallaran had been promoted to Constable, 1st class, by the Inspector General of Constabulary, for his courageous arrest of John Moten⁷.

Whatever the talk of a “frightful and widespread conspiracy” only two were to stand in the dock at the Assizes. 19 year old John Moten was charged with firing at Mr. Roe, with intent to kill, and Brien with aiding and abetting. Moten was further charged with firing at Sub.Constable Hallaran. They pleaded not guilty.

An application to have the trial postponed owing to the absence of two material witnesses for Moten, was refused. After thirty jurors had been challenged by defence solicitor, Mr. Egan, the following jurors, all North Tipperary gentry, were sworn - Wills C. Bennett, Solomon Cambie, James Willington, jun. Benjamin Hawkshaw, Paul Molloy, Henry Franks, Charles Wilkinson, Thomas Ely, James Fleetwood, Joseph Boyd, George Maunsell, Robert Thorne.

In those days defendants did not give evidence on their own behalf, so once the prosecution witnesses had given their evidence, the jury retired. It only took them four minutes to return with a verdict of guilty. The judge, Baron



Catholic church in Warrnamboul where John and Mary were married

Pennefather, told Moten and Brien that they had been found guilty of a very serious crime, “and I will say you have been found guilty on evidence that could not have left a doubt as to the truth on the mind of anyone who attended the trial. And what is the crime of which you have been found guilty? It was not owing to your good intentions that the shot which was fired by one of you on the morning in question did not deprive the two persons you fired at of their lives- the father and son who were going on their lawful business to a fair - you must previously have determined on the commission of that crime; and you determined to put it into execution at an hour when there was every possibility that you would not be identified in that execution, but the arm of the Almighty protected your intended victims and has contributed to give you up to punishment; the wounds that were inflicted by you in firing that shot did not deprive either of them of life, although it wounded them both; it did not



Mumbanner School - attended by John's children.

prevent the young man with admirable courage and steady perseverance from following you and finally overtaking you, or causing you to be overtaken by the ministers of justice; when one of those ministers came up to you, Moten, you turned on him when he approached you with the great courage which he displayed- the courage and fidelity he owed to his Queen and his country - you turned and fired at him, but he advanced on you and finally succeeded in taking you into custody. He did so with a most praiseworthy courage and not with the dastardly spirit which prompted you to take away the life of a man who had never injured you. The assassin works in darkness, and his deeds are evil; he does not possess the courage of a man. You have been brought to justice; every thing that could be done was done by your counsel. I have left the question of your guilt up to the jury, they have found you guilty of a crime that must confine you to a distant country for the rest of your lives - for the person that attempts to take away the life of another must not be permitted to remain in this country. The sentence of this court is that you be severally transported for life”⁸.

On August 3 an order was received for transmission of prisoners, and nine prisoners, including John Moten and Patrick Brien, were sent under police

escort to Dublin. Here they were held until September 23, when they were placed on the prison ship, the Samuel Boddington. Commanded by Henry Tamlott, it was a 669 ton vessel, built for that purpose at Whitby in 1841. Travelling by the Cape of Good Hope, it reached Tasmania (Van Diemens Land) on January 18, 1846. The convict records show Moten to be quiet and orderly, and that he could read and write. He was 5'9" in height, fresh complexion, with brown eyes and hair.

Most of Moten's sentence was served at Rocky Hills Probation Station in Northern Tasmania. According to the report of Acting Administrator, C.J. Latrobe, in 1847, this station is situated about forty miles from Cambelltown and the west coast of a deep bay enclosed between Maria island, the Schoutens and peninsulas to the north and the main shore of Van Diemens Land."⁹ The prisoners were the subject of an experiment in convict management. They were not to mix with other prisoners who might "contaminate" them and would gradually move up in station given good behaviour. But Rocky Hills did not live up to the grandiose plans for the improvement of convicts. The station was badly managed and the convicts were usually dirty, hungry, inadequately clothed and usually idle. Crime and depravity were to be found at all Probation Stations, but a local judge, Montague said of Rocky Hills, "a worse community never existed on the face of the globe"¹⁰.

It was not without its difficulties. He absconded on May 7, 1846, but was only at large for 24 hours. For this he was sentenced at the Magistrates court in Swansea to eighteen months with hard labour, and to be removed to a penal settlement. I understand this to have been the convict settlement at the Cascades.¹¹

On April 16, 1847, he was found in a hut, away from his work, with a quantity of potatoes, and for which received a month's imprisonment. A second offence a week later brought another three months.

While he seems to have coped with his situation, Patrick Brien's health declined, and he died in hospital in Launceston in November 1849.

We lose track of John Moten after 1852. He seems to have absconded, and headed to Victoria, where many had headed because of the discovery of gold. He is heard of next in 1862, when he married Mary Doyle at the Catholic church in Warrnamboul. She was a native of Carlow, born in 1835. They settled initially at Merino- Henty and there were six children of the marriage.

Catherine was born in 1863, Thomas in 1864, Mary in 1866, John 1867, Elizabeth 1869, and Susan 1871. It is while here we first find him referring to himself as John Letsome Moten; his father was Thomas Letsome Moten, and

the double surname has been carried down through the generations in the Roscrea area (my late mother was Kathleen Moten Letsome)

Apparently he did not tell his children the reason he had come to Australia. According to his son John, who wrote an autobiographical memoir shortly before his death in 1957, “my father came to Australia in 1848, shortly before gold was discovered. His first years were spent in Tasmania, but the gold rush in Victoria in the early fifties soon attracted him, and he went there. I believe he did fairly well, but in those days money was spent by most people nearly as fast as it was made and my father was a poor man all the time I knew him”¹².

After a few years at Merino the family moved to Salt Pans Creek, where John bought a farm of about 100 acres, near the confluence of the Wannan and Murtagh rivers. He had a setback, when one harvest the barn was destroyed by fire. About 1872 he sold the farm to a neighbour, and took up another farm at Dartmoor, about twenty miles from the border with South Australia. He found work also as a carrier, but his health family moved to a smaller 35 acre holding about half a mile away. John died on September 1, 1878, and is buried in Dartmoor cemetery.

¹ Daniel Grace, *Crime in Pre-Famine North-West Tipperary*, Tipperary Historical Journal, 1996.

² *Nenagh Guardian*, 15 March, 1845.

³ *Nenagh Guardian*, 20 May, 1845.

⁴ *Nenagh Guardian*, May 20, 1845.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Nenagh Guardian*, 18 June, 1845.

⁸ *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 July, 1845.

⁹ Latrobe, report, 1847

¹⁰ Information to Anne Moten, Glamorgan-Spring Hill Historical Society

¹¹ Swansea Court records, courtesy Glamorgan-Spring Hill Historical Society

¹² Journal of John Moten, Unpublished Mss.

CHAPTER TWO

Railway John

After her husband's death Mary struggled on with the farm, keeping about 20 cattle, some of which were milked, younger ones would be sold to make money. As soon as they were old enough to leave school, Catherine and Mary went out to service. Thomas ran away briefly to join a travelling show, then took an apprenticeship as bootmaker. After completing it he trained as a teacher, and taught in a number of schools in Victoria. Early in 1881 Mary left her widowhood to marry William O'Connor, a boundary rider at the Rifle Downs Station, who lived beside the Stokes river, about ten miles from Dartmoor. It seems the marriage was not a very happy one, and they were apart after a number of years. In the will she made in November 1891, she left him the paltry sum of two shillings sterling.

According to John, "about eighteen months after my mother married she left her husband and returned to her own place at Mumbanner. They were never reunited. He sold a mare without my mother's authority and kept the money. The mare was supposed to be mine, as my father verbally gave me a mare which was afterwards exchanged for this one. At the exchange the receipts were made out in my mother's name. I spoke of suing O'Connor for the money but was told by a policeman that I could not as he was my guardian. Then I said something to the effect that I would when I became 21. However I did nothing."¹

Young John had strenuously opposed the marriage, "I determined I would not say at home, so on July 24, 1881, I left, - cleared out- bolted if you like. I made no arrangement to go to anyone, had no food or money and only the clothes I stood up in"². It was as he said, "a rather mad thing to do as it was in the middle of winter. I had some idea of reaching the sea and going for a sailor. Remember I was not quite fourteen. I knew nothing of the country I was going to or the people either"³. The Glenelg river was in flood and he could not cross it on a log. The nearest bridge was at Dartmoor, about five miles, but he did not want to cross there as he was known at Dartmoor. He headed towards Casterton, about thirty miles.

Not until Monday afternoon did he eat anything, and that was some gum from wattle trees. He slept that night among ferns. He reached Casterton on the Wednesday. A Chinaman he knew gave him half a dozen apples. Sunday, August 1, he reached Mount Gambier, in South Australia. He met a few people on the way, but none spoke to him. The next day he was still walking he met a man travelling in a dray with his two children. After a few questions John told him the truth of his adventure. The man's name was Fred Knight, and he told him to get up in the dray. His house was at German Creek, about five miles away, and he worked as boundary rider at Moorak station.

John lived with the Knights for about three weeks. Fred arranged a job for him then with a Mr. Earl, a market gardener at Allandale. He stayed working with him until late 1883. Then after brief odd jobs around Mount Gambier, he went to work for an aerated water and cordial manufacturer named Jaeger. He was to work with him for seven years. "My work was principally delivering goods and collecting empty bottles, packing and unpacking for other towns, bottle washing, assisting in the manufacture and besides that I did what I was told. Among other things I milked as many as three cows. At least three quarters of our trade was with hotels. I was a teetotaller all the time. I met a few who gave me a bit of barrack, but generally I got on well. Mr. Jaeger was a man who treated me fairly and I will always remember him with respect. He had a



Quorn Railway Station



Lyndhurst

wife and three sons and four daughters.”⁴

He left Mount Gambier in June 1891 to work in Von Alpen’s store. Von Alpen was German, and most of his customers were German. John did not like him- “boastful, self opinionated, a fault finder and a bully”- and left after nine months. He went to Adelaide and was out of work about eight weeks when he got a letter from the General Traffic Manager of the Railway to call to his office. He went, and was told he would be taken on as a probationary porter. He was told to go out to Port Augusta to see the Traffic Superintendent. He was to spend the rest of his working life on the railway.

His first posting was to Quorn, a junction about 25 miles inland from Adelaide. Here he was one of six porters under the stationmaster, Mr. Richard Stuart Ross. “Mr. Ross was to me a peculiar man. In the first place I think he had a high sense of duty and tried to do everything in the best interest of the Department. But he had a quick temper and was not always just. Worse than that, if he had a grudge against a man, that man could do nothing right.... for my part I got on fairly well with him, at least till I left Quorn.”⁵

In 1895 he contracted typhoid fever, and spent five weeks in the Port Augusta hospital. One of the nurses there was Maude Murray, who would become his wife. He moved to Lyndhurst in the north east of the state in September 1896 as porter in charge. The railway had reached here in 1882, and it was busy station for loading wool. After a short time he moved again to Hawker, at the northern end of the wheat district, but also again a wool loading centre. He considered it “the hardest station I was ever at.”⁶

He married Maud Murray on June 9, 1898, at Port Augusta, and their first son, Murray John, was born June 3, 1899, and a second son, Frederick Doyle, on January 14, 1901. While at Hawker there was an accident on the railway.

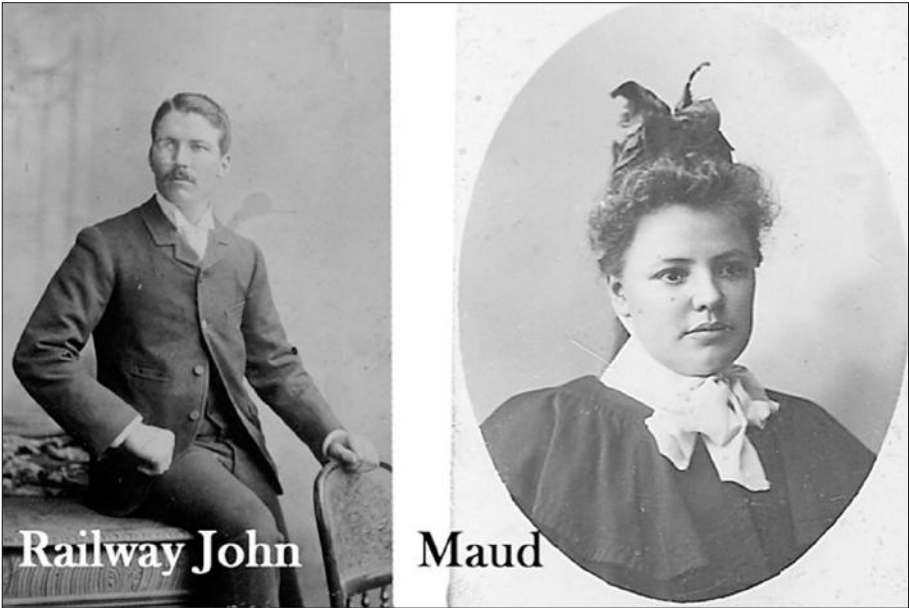
“A train was due to load 11 vans of cattle. Thinking the train would be only made up of empty vans, I pulled off the signals to admit the train and then set the points for the goods shed siding. Then I went away to another pair of points about 150 yards way thinking to stop the train there by hand signals and turn it into stock loading siding. But the train had in addition to the stock vans, sixteen trucks of coke for Warrina. The result was when the driver came around the corner he saw the signals set for him to come on, and he did not try to check his train. The grade was all down hill, and from where he first sighted the signals about 1 and a half miles. I asked Will Paterson who was with me, to run and turn the points I had set for the goods siding. He started to run, but something went wrong with his boot and he stopped. Served me right, as I should have gone myself.

Meanwhile, I tried to stop the engine with a hand signal, but the man on the engine saw it too late, found he could not stop his train which went on into the goods siding, colliding with trucks that were standing there, damaging four of them, two of them very badly. Luckily none left the rails. The result for me was that I was suspended for eleven days, and an enquiry was held and I was reduced in pay for three months. This was a bad mistake on my part, or as the Superintendent said, “a gross breach of rule” and perhaps I owe it to my friends at Hawker that I did not get the sack.”⁷

While he worked in the north of South Australia in Quorn and Hawker stations, he handled and saw, the movement of vast quantities of wheat. Until the late 1800s South Australia was the grain bowl for the colonies. Hawker was 41 miles north of Quorn, and he said of his time there that, “they did not always get much wheat. Perhaps on average they would get a good harvest once in seven years.”⁸

Quorn is about 200 miles north of Adelaide and 30 miles inland from Spencer Gulf.

The country about the town is, dry, sparsely vegetated and only suitable for light grazing. Temperatures can range from an average of 55 degrees F. in winter to 95 degrees F. in summer. Average rainfall is only about 11.5 inches annually. Quorn became the junction of the lines from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie in West Australia, from Port Augusta north to Oodnadatta, and in 1917 to Alice Springs. Huge amounts of wool and wheat passed through the station, which is now by passed by the main east-west and north south lines.



He left Hawker for Port Augusta on January 16, 1901, and in 1904 was transferred back to Quorn, before becoming signalman at Gumbowie. He was there only about seven months, before going on promotion to Winininnie. Meanwhile his wife and sons had taken up residence in Adelaide. In November 1907 he got word that Maud was seriously ill with pneumonia. He got leave, and went to be with her, but she died on December 8, aged only 34.

The house was sold, and his two boys went to live with his brother Thomas, and his wife Emma, at Kingsley. They already had six children, a seventh, Colin, had died on May 15, 1907, aged 4 - so the move was bound to be only temporary, and Thomas was about to become head teacher at Torrens Vale, where his wife would be postmistress.

He went back to Winininnie, but was there only two months when he was promoted to foreman at Pirie. Here he was reunited with Ross, but things didn't work out. Ross made it clear he did not want him as foreman. After a fortnight there was a clash, and John asked the Supt. to either give him his old job or a guard's job. He was sent to Cutana, about 50 miles west of Broken Hill, in remote, semiarid country. Nothing is left of it now. His two boys joined him after a while, living in a tent, and travelled to school by train in Mingary., nine miles away. Mingarry in 1915 claimed to be the busiest station in the world, with 100 steam trains a day passing through to Port Pirie with ore from Broken

Hill mines.

In December 1910 he was transferred to Mount Gambier, which is only about ten miles from the Victoria border. He married Mabel Elsie Monk on October 4, 1913. She was a school teacher. 1920 brought him to Peterborough as guard. Meantime he had passed the clerical examination, and applied for a vacancy as office in charge at Mount Mary, and was successful. January 1927 brought him to Hilton, a suburban station on the Glenelg line. This line was closed in 1930, and he found himself back in Adelaide for a while, in the ticket office and parcels office. Then he was appointed clerk at Eden, and from there he retired in 1932.

His mother died in 1922, aged 87. She had struggled on with the home place, John and Thomas giving her what help they could until she got the old age pension. In her last years she was an invalid, and her daughter Susan lived with her.

Religion, he wrote, always played a part in his life. "My father and mother were both Roman Catholics, and, of course, I was brought up to be one too. But churches were not handy to where I lived as a youngster, at the Dairy (Mumbannar) three services (Mass) were held each year in private homes. I have attended these and I have confessed to a priest and taken communion. However, when I left home at 14, and got to Allandale, I was among Methodists. There were also Presbyterian and C. of E. Services but no R.C. unless very rarely in a private house. I started to go all three Protestant services and to the Presbyterian Sunday school and considered that I was no longer belonging to the R. Catholics. Then when we moved to Mount Gambier I went to the Methodist church and Sunday school except when I took a fancy to go to some other church.

I think I went to the R.C. church four times but have not been in one since. Then the Salvation Army came to Mount Gambier and I joined up with them. I stayed with them for five years and then I had a difference of opinion with a Capt. Sharp. The out come was that I left the Army and returned to the Methodist Church. And have been with them ever since. I taught in the Sunday school and did a little preaching when I was young. But I did not stick to preaching long."⁹

In a note on June 9, 1953 he wrote- "I have just finished reading the Bible for the 19th time. I read each chapter ten times as I went along. Doing so helped me to understand better what I was reading. I also memorised 202 chapters to date (about 40 of them psalms)."¹⁰

He also had a love of Shakespeare, memorising the whole of *Hamlet* and

the *Merchant of Venice*, and much of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. The whole of Shakespeare he read through several times.

In 1947 he was in hospital for five months. He went there on May 19 and had operations in relation to the bladder and prostate gland His 80th birthday on September 26 was spent in hospital, most of the day, he recalled, he was vomiting. He returned home on October 16. On April 23, 1949, his second son, Frederick, died suddenly on the Golf links at Peterborough, aged only 48. He was unable to attend the funeral, and was represented by his other son Murray. Then on September 14, 1953, Murray died following a heart attack sustained nine days earlier. He did attend the funeral, very pleased with the military funeral, “to me a grand and spectacular affair.”¹¹ He himself passed away on August 6, 1957.

¹ John Moten, Unpublished Journal.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Moten, Unpublished Journal.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



CHAPTER THREE

Murray John Moten

Murray Moten, elder son of John and Maud, was born on July 3, 1899. Most references to him give his place of birth as Hawker, South Australia, where his father was porter, but research by his son, Christopher, in 2002, show he was born in Quorn and spent his early years there. Interestingly, too, among items in the War Diaries for October 1940, I found a telegram of good wishes from the Mayor of Quorn to Murray as he was about to embark for the Middle East with his battalion.

He started school, aged 5, in Quorn, on July 7, 1904, (entry 636 on the school register). His brother, Frederick, joined him on February 2, 1906 (entry 772 on register).

He was there until the summer of 1907, when his father was transferred to Gumbowie. From here he went to school in Hammond, until early 1909, when he was re enrolled at Quorn on February 1, 1909. With his mother deceased, he was living with W.L. Hudson, store assistant in Quorn, who is listed as his guardian. He was stated to be in Grade III. After a year, he changed to Nunvala, between Black Rock and Peterborough. His father was now at Cutana, and able to provide a home for his two young sons.



Lt. Moten 1925



Kathleen with children Kathleen, Margaret & John

Murray now went to school in Mingary, travelling by train. In December 1910 there was a further move, as John was appointed to Mount Gambier, and it was here that Murray got the rest of his education. In January 1915 Murray started work as a messenger at Mount Gambier post office. His stay in the position was only six months, as he then obtained a position as a junior clerk with the Savings Bank of South Australia at its branch in Mount Gambier. Fred took on the messenger position, and held it until he got appointed junior porter on the railway at Millicent.

The First World War was then on, Australians were fighting on Britain's side. Murray decided to volunteer when he reached 18 in 1917. His father would not give him permission to leave Australia until he was 19. However, Murray was rejected at the medical examination. Perhaps it was fortunate, given the carnage that was the Western Front.

He returned to the Savings Bank, and was appointed to Adelaide. He kept up his military interest in peacetime, and was commissioned as Lieutenant in

the 48th Battalion, Australian Militia Force, on July 1, 1923. On January 6, 1926, he was promoted to Captain, and Major on May 29, 1929. That year the 48th had the honour of proving a guard of honour to the Duke of York, the future King George VI, when he visited Adelaide.

With the amalgamation of the 43rd and 48th, he became its Lieutenant Colonel and Commanding Officer in December 1936.

In the meantime, he had married Kathleen Mary Meegan, (1897-1983), a well known concert violinist, on January 19, 1926, at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Port Adelaide. She was daughter of Patrick Meegan and Mary Anne (nee Garnaut). Their first child, Kathleen Margaret, was born in 1931, John would follow in 1933, and then Christopher in 1941. He was elected President of the Bank Officials of South Australia in 1934.

World War II broke out in September 1939, and Australia, as 25 years previously, allied herself to Britain. The following May the 6th Australian Division were on the way to the Middle East. A new Division, the 7th, was formed, and one of its three brigades was the 21st, comprising the 2/14th battalion from Victoria, the 2/16th from Western Australia, and the 2/27th from



Jens Hotel Mount Gambier, where Murray and Kathleen met

South Australia. The choice of Commanding Officer for the new 2/27th fell on Lieut. Col. Moten, and he was appointed on April 26, 1940.

Speaking in the Australian Senate in 2009, Senator Anne McEwen, whose father was one of the first to join in May 1940, said that the 2/ 27th was “uniquely South Australian. It was a battalion which served Australia with esteem and pride.”¹

John Burns, in his history of the 2/27th, described the C.O.-

“Colonel Moten was one that relatively small band of Australia’s citizen soldiers who had prepared themselves during long years, in the face of public apathy and even ridicule and open hostility, against the day when their country would surely need their services. Undeterred, he soldiered on through 21 years of citizen force training, steadily studying every available phase of soldiering that his absorbent, methodical mind could lay hold upon. He became in 1936 the first citizen soldier in South Australia to command a battalion without having prior experience of actual war, and by the outbreak of war of 1939-45 had acquired a well deserved reputation as an organizer and military tactician of brilliant quality. It was, therefore, no surprise to those who knew his character and had note of the military lore stored in his mind when he was appointed to be commander of the 2//27th Battalion, even though there were numerous candidates who had already distinguished themselves on the field of battle.

Burly in build and quiet in manner at all times, he quickly impressed the soldier as being a man of inflexible determination, devoted to the military of loyalty, justice and honesty in endeavour, and possessed of an unflinching sense of duty. His orderly and efficient mind proceeded from task to task in steady, planned progression, and the men quickly noticed that things were done properly at the first time of asking, without need for later revisions and adjustments, which latter can be the bane of a fighting man’s existence if the controlling mind is not sure and certain in execution.

These things they appreciated, and in return they gave him their respect and trust which were destined, in Syria, to deepen into a warm affection and pride in their possession of him as their commanding officer. No leader gets more.”²

Reporting on his appointment, the *Adelaide News* said that Lieut. Col. Moten “will try to make the Second 27th Battalion representative of all the infantry units in South Australia, each of the four companies being commanded by officers from the 10th, 27th, 43rd and 48th Battalions, and men from each of these militia units being kept together in the same company. It is known that many of the militia are willing to transfer to the A.I.F. providing their units are



Murray and Kathleen's Home at Woodville

kept intact. The Second 27th will probably comprise 40 officers and 750 men in other ranks. Some officers and a number of NCOs are expected to be called in about May 11.

Col. Moten said today that he would reserve some vacancies for commissions for men who would secure promotion through the ranks.”³

Training was to take place at Woodside camp in the Adelaide hills which was being extended to accommodate the new unit, and would be their home for the next five months. Lt. Col. Moten arrived here on May 7, 1940. He was very familiar with the camp, having been there regularly on weekends during 1938 and 1939.

Major A.B. MacDonald was appointed second in command, and though only in the post for four months, he was of great assistance in establishing the unit administration on a sound basis. For his company commanders Lt. Col. Moten chose men well known to him, and they proved to be excellent choices, and each would himself reach that rank during the course of the war. Major Alexander Pope had been commissioned into the 48th battalion as a young man, and when the call came to join the 2/27th was commanding the 43rd /Battalion,

with the temporary rank of Lieut. Col. He reverted to Major to join Murray Moten. After Major MacDonald transferred to the 20th Brigade, he became second in command.

Captain Duncan McPhee came from the 48th, where he had served since boyhood. Captain John McKinna was with the 10th Battalion when Lt. Col. Moten called him. Captain Cedric Isaacson, from the 27th, was an Adelaide lawyer. One of Lt. Col. Moten's appointments was not from South Australia. Capt. J. G. Dobbs was a 40 year old from Queensland, who had seen service in France in World War I. He had served with Lt. Col. Moten for a time in the 48th, and in Queensland was a company commander in the 9th Battalion. Lieut. Maurice Austin, of the Staff Corps, still in his early 20s, arrived as the first adjutant of the 2/27th.

Rev. C. R. Whereat was appointed as unit chaplain. He had fought in World War I with the Worcestershire regiment, and was ordained in 1931. He was Rector of Victor Harbor, Adelaide, from 1933. He would be awarded the M.B.E. in 1941.

Murray Moten, with some of his senior officers, formally marched in on May 10, 1940. That evening's papers brought news of the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries. On May 12 the Premier of South Australia, Hon. Thomas Playford, visited the new camp. He had served with the old 27th in World War I and he expressed amazement at the contrast between the primitive conditions he and colleagues endured in their training camp at Mitcham. According to the *News*, there were commodious new timber and iron dormitory huts and steam cooking ranges that provided three hot meals a day. Tea at Mitcham had consisted of bread and jam. Thanks to his interest, and the generosity of Adelaide citizens, the battalion was early equipped with binoculars.

The officers' wives formed themselves into a Welfare Club, with Mrs. Moten as President. They organised a dance at Myer's Apollo in Adelaide on September 14, and 500 attended, with proceeds going to purchasing drums for the battalion band. Among the aims of the Welfare Club were the provision of comforts for the men, help for the womenfolk, and the establishment of a unit of the Fighting Forces Comfort Fund.

Officers and men were issued with equipment on the morning of 13 May, after which Col. Moten addressed them. Training got under way, disrupted by a violent storm on May 16. "When 800 men are physically fit, when they have been trained in the technicalities of their weapons, when each man has faith in his own team, and all the other teams around him, and when each man has in his innermost heart the offensive spirit, then 800 men can be truly called a

battalion. Colonel Moten and his senior officers were aware of these things. As each draft moved into camp, raw and newly enlisted, the men were put through an initial training course.

The filling of the ranks occupied about two months, and there was not sufficient time at the C.O.s disposal to be able to allow much of it for the extended military training of the later drafts. The recruit training officer, Lieutenant Lukyn, was consequently obliged to cram an increasing amount of instruction into their willing heads, and to work their willing physiques even harder as he endeavoured to bring the standard of the sixth draft up to that of the first draft so that by a given date the whole unit would have reached a reasonable uniform standard of training. However, he succeeded, though only by a prodigious effort on his part and by his assistants.”⁴

The battalion had only Lewis guns as their automatic weapons, for the more modern Bren gun had not yet been issued to Australian soldiers,- he requested in May that two be issued in May for training as soon as possible- but the riflemen soon absorbed the skills necessary, and when the Bren did become available later on, they were easily able to adjust to it. Likewise with mortars, where the mortar companies only had the old fashioned mortars, and did not get the modern mortar with dial sights until Palestine, though he had requested it on July 15, stating that training would be restricted without it. The anti tank gun also was not available to the men at Woodside.

Still the training was intense, and by August Col. Moten felt it was advanced enough to commence collective training, and that month company commanders took their men on three day treks, during which they were exercised in various aspects of warfare, which would stand them in good stead later in the war.

There was an outbreak of coryza in the camp in mid July, with 94 men ill, 54 of whom were hospitalised. After a week the number hospitalised was down to 36.

On September 3 General Lavarack, commander of 7th Division, inspected Woodside, and exercises being carried out by the companies who were on march to Kanmantoo.

Senator McBride, Minister for the Army, visited the camp on September 6.

The Day of National Prayer called by King George VI at the end of May following the Dunkirk evacuation was observed, and at a conference next day Col. Moten was told the battalion might have to be ready to go overseas by the end of July. However, it would be October before they would leave.

On October 4, 1940, he led his men and other troops - 1400 in all - in parade through the streets of Adelaide. The new battalion band headed the parade, and

the privilege of marching with fixed bayonets, normally the preserve of the Adelaide Rifles- was accorded the 2/27th Battalion by the Mayor. Thousands thronged the streets, and prior to the march the men were served lunch by the ladies of the Cheer Up society, Afterwards at the camp 1400 packets of cigarettes were presented by the Schools Patriotic Fund to the men.

On October 19th the 2/27th left Woodside by train for Port Melbourne, and the following day sailed on the *Mauretania* for Egypt, in convoy with the other troopships *Queen Mary* and *Aquitania*, escorted by *HMS Perth*. There was a two day stop at Freemantle, where men were allowed ashore. Here two men went AWOL. In his report on the voyage, Col. Moten said that apart from this incident discipline was excellent and favourably commented on. Training continued daily on board ship. On October 24 he lectured the men on Italy and the Italian army.

Bombay was reached on November 4, and the men disembarked, going by train that afternoon to Deolali camp. Here the three battalions of 21 Brigade were together for the first time. The 2/27th played the 2/14th at football, and 2/16th at cricket, losing both. They left Bombay on November 10 on HMT *Takliwa* for Egypt. On this leg of the voyage, according to the medical report, there were nine cases of mumps and three of pneumonia among the men. On November 25 Port Suez was reached and the ship sailed up the canal to El Kantara. From here it was overland to Palestine and the new camp at Julis.

¹ Australian Senate, 20 March, 2009.

² John Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, 1960.

³ Adelaide News, April 1940.

⁴ Burns, *Ibid*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Into Egypt

Four months were spent in Palestine training at Julis. By the middle of January Col Moten felt that the inter unit training had progressed enough to integrate with full brigade exercises. He himself went on a week long course in combined operations at the Suez canal on January 25. John Burns commented that “it may be of interest to those who are aware of Brigadier Moten’s brilliant military career to learn that this was the only school of instruction he ever attended. In the many subjects that must be mastered before a soldier can hope for success in commanding a brigade, he was practically self taught”¹.

There was a five day exercise in the Hebron Hills from 17-22 February, and a three day one in the south which honed the soldier’s skills. Further exercises took place in March.

Then in early April 1941, orders were received to embark for Egypt. On the evening of 9th April, the tents were struck, and at midnight they left by train for El Kantara. They arrived at Kantara East at 4 am on April 11, then crossed the Canal by ferry, followed by a train journey across the Nile delta. At 3-55 pm on April 12 they arrived at Ikingi Maryuh, an army staging camp about 15 miles from Alexandria.

“What a dump” records the war diary, “rolling sandhills, nothing else, no canteen, camp left in a deplorable condition”². For John Burns, it was “a shocking place, filth, flies and a hellish khamsin for the whole of our stay. Life was most unpleasant, and certainly not conducive to good soldiering.”³

Next day was hot and listless, “more wind and dirt” according to the war diary. Easter Sunday, April 13, the dirt was getting worse. The men got paid, but couldn’t spend much as there was no beer to buy at camp.

Murray Moten was not with the battalion at this stage, being temporarily in command at 21st Brigade. Major Pope was acting C.O. in his absence. He returned on Easter Monday as orders were received for the 2/27th to move to Sidi Haresh. He went on ahead by motor transport, the battalion following by train, and had to endure lengthy delays due to engine break down before finally

arriving at their destination, two New Zealand soldiers taking over from the Egyptian staff.

Initially the battalion was sent forward into the desert to help defend the Bagush Box, an eight mile long area, with the particular task of protecting water supply. "No pen could describe the conditions existing at this position- if we thought that Ikingi Maryuh was filthy and a place of rolling sands, well we were mistaken- it was paradise compared with Bagush" Burns declared⁴. However, their stay at this inhospitable spot was short. Later on in the day they were ordered back, to prepare to move to Mersa Matruh

Here they were to relieve men of the Royal West Kent Regiment ("The Buffs"). The battalion was in situ by 2 am on April 17. Here they found themselves living under ground, in dug outs and trenches. Next day they had their first taste of battle conditions, as a few mines exploded in the vicinity, "the only casualties were a few camels"⁵. Bread and cheese replaced hard tack on the rations. On the 20th, Rev. Whereat managed to get the men some beer from the NAAFI, "and on Hitler's birthday too!"

The battalion was boosted by the arrival on 24th of three Australian Bren gun carriers, to bring the number up to six. That day a member of the Royal Engineers was killed by a mine, the first fatality in the area. On 25th, there was an air raid over Mersa Matruh, with nine bombs dropped. The battalion suffered its first fatality of the war on April 29, when Private W. H. Fagg was killed when a mine exploded in front of his position. The previous evening's mail had brought the news that his wife had given birth to a girl.

The battalion continued to be under aerial attack, with the worst on May 3, when eleven bombs were dropped. One man was slightly injured. There was severe khamsin wind on May 6, but it did not deter Colonel Moten from carrying out experiments with Molotov cocktails on the perimeter. Men were roused up early on March 15, with air raid warning, sound of explosions, and searchlights. All that day there was plenty of aerial activity. Eight bombs were dropped at 5 am on May 17, with no casualties. Col. Moten was at a Brigade meeting on the night of 20th, returning with the news that the battalion were to be ready to leave Mersa Matruh at twelve hours notice. Despite a sandstorm on 25th that lasted till the afternoon the battalion were ready to set out, dugouts cleared and kit packed, handing over the camp to replacements from South Africa's Botha Brigade. Next day they were on board the train, getting a meal on board, and buying extra items from traders at various stations en route. Kantara was reached on the morning of 26th, and it was farewell to Egypt. They crossed Suez, and then the train to Gaza, and from thence to the village of Kfar



Murray on parade October 1940. (Picture from John and Anne Moten).

Yezquel in Palestine, which was to be their home for the next week or so.

For the men, it was a welcome change from desert conditions “It seemed to put them in excellent heart for the strenuous weeks to come... during this week they were able to obtain plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables which was very beneficial to all” Capt. Harbison, the M.O. reported. They were able to have bacon and eggs for breakfast on May 28, and had a three hour route march for all companies, in warm, fine weather. That night A Company, assisted by other troops, put on a concert, in the village institute, with a large number of local inhabitants attending. The following afternoon there was issue of new clothing and equipment to some men, the store ran out of supply early.



*023139 - Syria. 1942-01. Sx5201
Chaplain C.R. Whereat MBE, of the
2/27th Australian Infantry Battalion.*

Another three hour march took place that morning. At 4 pm the battalion band, using instruments supplied by local inhabitants, played for the changing of the guard for the first time since leaving Dimra. There was another concert that night by A Company in the village institute, which was attended by local inhabitants, who themselves demonstrated several of their folk dances. A three hour march was again held on May 30.

June 1 was Pentecost, and church parades were held. Some of the men were invited that evening to a neighbouring village to celebrate the feast. Others were entertained the following evening to high tea by local inhabitants, and on June 3 the good community relations continued with a soccer match against the locals.

However this relatively quiet period was ending. A decision had been taken to invade Syria, held by Vichy French, and the Australian 7th division, of which the 2/27th was part, was to play the leading role. A glorious chapter in the history of the battalion was about to be written.

¹ Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, 1960.

² AWM War Diaries, 52/8/3/27/23.

³ Burns, *Ibid.*

⁴ Burns, *Ibid.*

⁵ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/23.

CHAPTER FIVE

Invasion of Syria

Germany's swift overrunning of Greece and Crete in May 1941 posed a great threat to Britain in the Middle East. Adding to it was the territory of Syria/Lebanon, a French mandate, under the control of the Vichy government, and sympathetic to Germany. After the fall of France in June 1940 it was agreed that the terms of the Armistice would apply to Syria.

Britain, with difficulties in neighbouring Iraq, declared that it would not allow Syria to be occupied by any hostile power. A German occupation of Syria would pose a major threat to Britain's interest in Iraq, and ultimately to India. On May 3, 1941, Admiral Darlan, the Vichy Foreign Minister, met German officials in Paris, and agreed to supply arms and munitions from stores in Syria to Iraqi rebels, and to allow German and Italian planes to refuel at Syrian airfields. Three days later he ordered General Dentz, the commander in Syria, to allow the use of the airfields. He also told him to resist any British attack. Darlan met Hitler at Berchtesgarden, who expressed himself happy with the agreement, and told Darlan that the Vichy French might keep their colonies after the war if they defended them, otherwise Germany would take them.

It was reported on May 12 that German planes were alighting in Syria, and Britain responded by bombing Damascus airfield on 14-15th, and the airfield at Palmyra a few days later. Preparations for an invasion of Syria were being made, and General Blamey told the Australian government that it might be necessary to send the Australian 7th division as part of the invasion force. Prime Minister Menzies gave his consent on May 29.

The Syrian campaign was short, only six weeks, but it was a tough one, and the 2/27th played its part. "The fighting was of a more bitter nature than most experienced by AIF troops to the period- the terrain of the country was rough and rugged, much after the Gallipoli peninsula style, and ideally suited for defence; its advantages were skilfully exploited by the French forces, including many regular units of the famous Foreign Legion.

The troops had been well indoctrinated with Vichy and German



AWM 007004 - 1941-04-07. Officers of the H.Q. Staff of the 21st Bde. Front row l-r: Lt. Col. McDonald, Lt. Col. Moten, Brig. Stevens, Lt. Col. Cannon. Back row l-r: Capt. Challen, Capt. S. Toms, Capt. Godsall, Maj. C. Finlay, Capt. Buckler.

propaganda; they were well equipped and supplied; they knew the country well. They outnumbered Allied forces quite considerably and had the advantage of mortars that outranged ours; they had appreciably more medium artillery, for which they had pinpointed almost every square yard of the country. Their transport was well organised and adequate- even down to mules for mountain warfare. Although not modern, their tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles were too heavy for anything the Allied forces had in the field and until the closing stages of the campaign enjoyed an air superiority that was staggering to the infantryman- so strong indeed was the French air support that our naval forces were compelled at one stage to withdraw from their supporting role. Against all these superiorities our men – and all men of the A.I.F. – triumphed, largely by skilful and inspired leadership on all levels, good training, -physical fitness and determination, and because of pride in the national tradition established by the First A.I.F., and, in the 2/27th Battalion, a grim determination by all members to keep the name of the 27th Battalion and honoured one.”¹

The invasion of Syria commenced on June 8,1941. The 2/27th, with

supporting groups, formed MOTCOL, under the command of Lieut.Col Moten, and this column was to move up north along the coast road. The supporting groups comprised the light tanks of A Squadron, 6th Divisional Cavalry, 8 Battery, 2/4 Field Regiment; 6 Anti Tank Battery, 170 Light A/A Battery- both of these less two troops; 1 Section, 2/6th Field Engineers, 1 Company, 2/6th Australian Field Ambulance, and A Section, 5 Reserve M.T. company.

At 11.30 pm on June 6 MOTCOL commenced its night move to the assembly point area at Al Humeima. This was completed by 5.30 am, and digging and camouflaging completed by 6am. During the day the battalion remained under cover. Following a brigade conference at 11am, orders were issued stating that the 21st Brigade were moving in on day one to seize the aerodrome at Beyrouth (Beirut), and the eastern and northern entrances to Beyrouth between Zaajar and Artellias. MOTCOL were to seize these two entrances.

Reveille was at 03-30 am on June 8. The advance of MOTCOL was held up as the French blew up the road near Iskandoun. To 17 Platoon of D Company under Lieut. Rudd, fell the distinction of being the first of 2/27 Battalion to engage the enemy in action. It was advancing as vanguard to the battalion, with a detachment of 6 light tanks, reconnaissance party engineers



1941-06-03. Syria. The beginning of an attack made by the 2/27th, Australian Battalion from the plains below El Ardun. This attack led to much bitter fighting which culminated in the capture of the heights and the subsequent upon, and capture of the Town of Saïada.

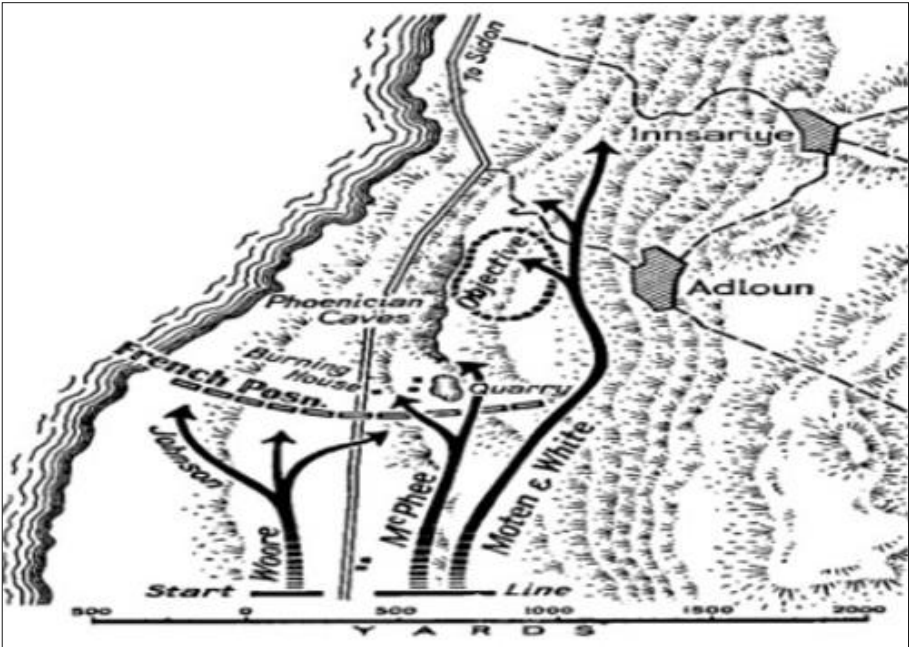
and two anti tank guns. Lieut Rudd found that the village of Naquora had been taken by the 2/14th, so he pushed on ahead to its northern outskirts, where the 2/14th was being held up from enemy fire from higher ground. He decided to attack, moving behind the light tanks. The enemy were forced to retire, suffering five killed, while Rudd's men had only one wounded. Having accomplished their task, the platoon returned to MOTCOL.

Early next morning the battalion and the others in MOTCOL moved to a point just south of Tyre, which had been taken by 2/14th. D company were sent forward to assist the 2/16th, who were having difficulty forcing a crossing of the Litani river, where the bridges had been destroyed. The company began crossing by boat, a slow process, as only six men could cross at a time. Eventually they made it across, and secured their objectives. 18 Platoon, under Lieut. Jacobs, surprised a large party of the enemy- about 90- taking them prisoner, and releasing 20 British commandos who had been taken prisoner the previous day. Lieut. Rudd and his platoon surrounded a platoon of legionaries, black soldiers under a white officer, and Rudd successfully negotiated their surrender.

At 07-15 on 10 June MOTCOL assumed role of advance guard for the brigade. Moten sought assistance from two destroyers lying near shore, to deal with French AFVs whose approach had been reported. "Good work was done by the Navy"² was the note in the war diary. A pontoon bridge had been erected to replace the demolished bridge, and at 09-50 Moten sent A Company forward between the foothills and the main road. It came under intense machine gun and rifle fire from entrenched positions high up in the hills. In a particularly hard day they cleared several positions, capturing 22 machine guns and six mortars. The Company suffered seven casualties, including one private killed.

At 2130 Moten and his headquarters staff arrived at the start point for the attack on Adloun and village south of Adloun, which with Innsariye was to be the next objective. It was to be the first time the whole battalion were involved together since coming to the Middle East. An artillery barrage from the 25 pounder guns of the 2/4th Field Regiment, lasting 25 minutes, signalled the attack. C Company, under Captain Moore, moved on the left flank, B under Capt. McPhee, on the right, while A (Capt. White) were to follow B, pass through and advance to the final objective, the Phoenician caves west of Adloun. H.Q. were to follow A Company, while D were in reserve.

Both C and B companies came under heavy fire at close range. A trip wire caused a building to blow up, it had been used as an ammunition and petrol dump, and thus illuminated the area. It caused two casualties. Meanwhile



From Long. Vol. 2, Ch. 19. p326.

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Capt. White and A Company, accompanied by Moten and the Battalion HQ, swung to the right to avoid this area, and pushed on to its objective beyond the caves, without opposition. It was now 0330, and learning that the other companies were engaging the enemy about three quarters of a mile back, Moten saw the opportunity arising to encircle the enemy. He ordered Capt. White to advance to high ground overlooking the side road, while he took up a position on the coast road with battalion HQ and reserve platoon to block any escape.

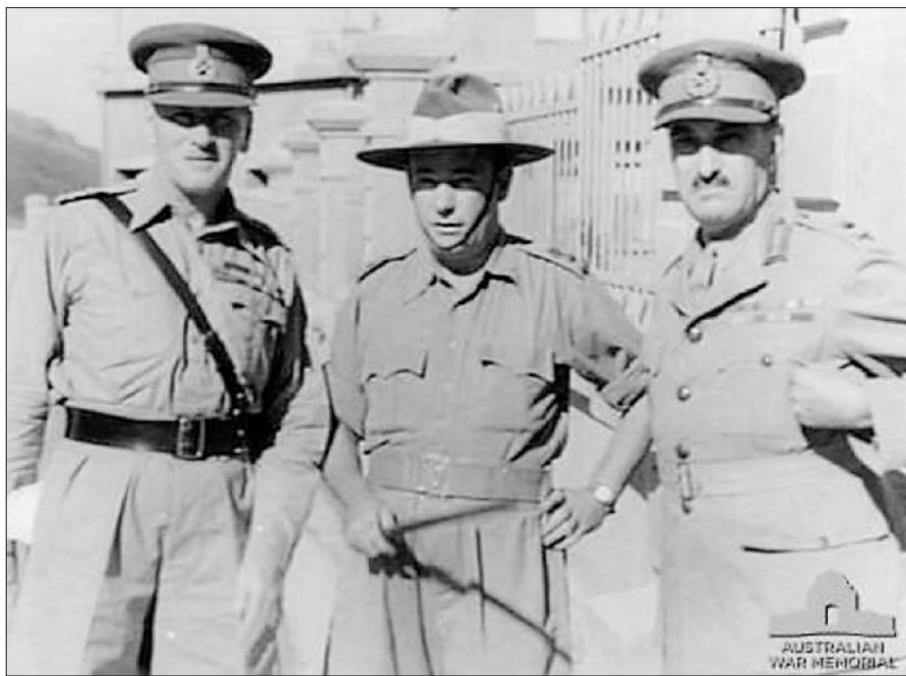
C Company had a hard fight. Capt. Whoore was badly wounded, five privates were killed. But the objective was achieved, about 40 of the French Foreign Legion were captured. B Company arrived at its objective at 0145. By dawn the last enemy pockets had been cleared. Soon after a very proud Moten walked along the coast road to meet the companies. "He had every reason to be proud, for the men of 2/27th had stuck to their guns and pushed on in the face of extremely heavy opposition. The French had equal numbers with 2/27th, were well dug in, had their weapons most skilfully sighted and manned by veterans of the Foreign Legion, blooded in action many times previously. A new spirit was born in the battalion, - a great team spirit that only comes when

the game is played hard and successfully, and when all sections of the team have proved they can rely one on another.”³

The battalion had a day to rest. That night a conference of all 21 Brigade commanders was held at MOTCOL, and at 2130 orders were issued for further advance north. The 2/14th were to lead the attack over the river Zahrani. Their progress was slow, coming under machine gun and mortar fire. Brig. Stevens, the Brigade C.O, then ordered Moten to take over the task of advance guard, and at 0535 On June 12 the battalion moved up to 2/14th headquarters. D Company were sent forward at 1100 as first support to 2/14th, with C Company following soon after. D Company crossed the river safely and reached the top of the hill. C Company met heavy opposition and were pinned down for some time, but the advance continued, with C and D searching the hills, and some 50 prisoners were taken. Moten had been following events closely and called up A company, who were in reserve, and a quick reconnaissance was made for an attack on Saida (Sidon). A Company were made the vanguard, and set out behind a detachment of cavalry carriers at 1345. While en route the enemy shelled the road, and the men had to get out of their transport. They also had to contend with dive bombers, and one plane which crashed among the company caused several casualties, including one dead.

Early in the afternoon Moten ordered Lieut. Fawcett and the carrier platoon forward. They came under attack, and after a lengthy exchange of fire with enemy positions, advanced and attacked the French holding the bridge. Some sixty prisoners were taken. Wishing to spare Sidon and its historic buildings, Brig. Stevens asked Moten to go forward and try to negotiate with the French. John Burns recorded Moten's account of what happened-

“I set off to parley, plus the white flag, on a sidecar of an abandoned French motor bike outfit, which the interpreter attached to the battalion (Lieut. Barker) had acquired. We had not proceeded more than 400 yards down the road when an unfortunate Wog woman ran out of a native house alongside and collected the bike fair in the midribs. She screamed wildly and was dragged for 10-15 yards along the road before Barker could pull the bike to a standstill. We lifted her out from under the bike and proceeded to carry her back to the house. At that moment “the rude enemy had a shot at the olive branch”, in fact they pumped a good measure of lead down the coast road, and I dived with the woman, who smelled to high heaven – as only Wog women can-into a drain along the side of the track till the storm abated. In the confusion Barker got the bike going and bolted back to safety leaving me with the woman. As I took stock of her, I found she was dead, having been shot through the head. My ever



1941-08-29. Hammana. Left to right: General Auchewleck, Lieutenant Colonel M. Moten and General Lavarack.

faithful batman, Tommy Tucker, came running down the road to see if I was alright, and after a while we dashed across the road into the sand dunes along the beach and made our way back to the battalion in a series of wild short rushes in the most Woodside manner, and apart from being scared stiff were none the worse for our adventure.”⁴

Brig. Stevens then decided it would be necessary to take Sidon by force, and gave the task to the 2/16th, who had been held in reserve. Two companies of the 2/27th, which had got to Darb es Sim during the night, were to guard approaches from the east. They were weary, having little rest since crossing the frontier, were on the south bank of the Sataniq, running through the hills to the east of the road. Murray Moten had concluded on June 12 that a frontal attack should be avoided, instead they should go through the hills to Miyeoumiye and reach Sidon from the east. The two companies had been out of contact, and it was not until the afternoon that a patrol from HQ located them.

The Brigadier ordered the remainder of the battalion to move on to a steep

ridge overlooking Darb es Sim and attack from the east. They set out about 4 pm, a difficult march through the hills in darkness, often in single file, and under occasional aircraft fire. They reached it at 0400 on 14 June, very tired. The attack was to commence at 09-30.

Three platoons under Major Isaacshen set out for their objective, a building called the Monastery, in Miyeoumiye. Two came under heavy fire, a third led by Sergt. McPherson, got to the wadi without loss, turned away from a blockhouse which was concentrating the fire, and got into village from the east. He had only seventeen men, but they surprised the French, 24 surrendering. A further ten surrendered in the village. Four Foreign Legionaries were killed in a brief action with a patrol. Forty pack mules were found, indicating the French planned to withdraw.

The other platoons suffered heavy casualties from very accurate machine gun fire, among them Lieut. Rudd, who was killed. Acting on Sergt. Macpherson's report that the French were abandoning the village, Moten moved the battalion forward into the village without opposition on the morning of June 15. A patrol sent out at 0900 to Mar Elias found no French there, and at 1330 the American College clear also. He now felt that Sidon itself was clear. Sergt Johns got a captured motorcycle, rode into the town and up the main street unchallenged. His bike broke down, but he forced to Syrians to guide him out, and reported back. Moten then entered the town with some of his staff, met the mayor, who said the French were gone, and begged to ownhave the shelling of the town from ships at sea, and field guns stopped. Moten commandeered a taxi and went to Brig.Stevens to inform him. Stevens arrived at 1600 on June 16, took over from the mayor and proclaimed martial law.

That evening the battalion bivouacked north of Sidon" Troops settled down for their first real rest" stated the diary. At 0900 next day Moten carried out a reconnaissance of forward areas. Operations in the coastal area had at this stage slowed down somewhat pending clearing up of positions around Merdjayoun and Djezzine.. "An uninterrupted nights rest was had by all... troops were beginning to recover from the reaction of battle"⁵. Patrols brought back prisoners- A Company on 19th two deserters from the Foreign Legion, a Greek and a Spaniard, while on 22nd C Company brought in three more deserters, and valuable information was obtained from them on enemy positions. Five deserters, all Spanish, surrendered on June 29.

Moten attended a brigade conference on the morning of June 17, and that afternoon he outlined to battalion officers the likely future work of the battalion. In the evening a French naval vessel appeared off shore and opened



MERDJAYOUN. © AWM. From Long, Vol 2, ch 19, p. 386.

fire but was driven off by artillery. Moten at this stage was unwell, but still carried out his full duties. There was the welcome boost of reinforcements during the last week of June, 4 officers and 77 men from Palestine on June 22, 6 officers and 39 men on June 24, while one officer and 15 men arrived on June 28. During the month the battalion had suffered 97 casualties, including 24 killed. The battalion's next major engagement was to be the battle for Damour, the climax of the Syria- Lebanon campaign.

¹ The Brown and Blue Diamond at War, 1960.

² AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/26.

³ Burns Ibid.

⁴ Burns Ibid.

⁵ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/26.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



Sidon, Syria 1941-06-03. Australian soldiers who have constituted themselves “kings of the castle” take possession of this ancient edifice built by the Crusaders on a hill overlooking the ancient city. (AWM 008263)



AWM 010550 - The 2/27th Battalion marching towards the Village of Hammana en route to their camp in the Barracks just outside the village.

CHAPTER SIX

The Battle of Damour

The aim had always been to drive along the coastal area to Beirut, the largest city in the Lebanon and seat of French administration. It was also the main military base. But in the path was the town of Damour, 24 km. from Beirut, and it was clear that the battle for it could be the most decisive of the Middle East campaign. General Dentz, the Vichy commander, had declared his intention to defend Beirut at all costs, but if Damour was overrun, how strong would that resolve be.

The Vichy forces held very strong positions on the Damour river. The coast road to Damour went along a narrow shelf between the sea and high ridges which were intersected by wadis until it got to the Damour river. The narrow shelf had many orchards and banana groves. Taking Damour would give a clear run at Beirut.

On June 27 a patrol from A company of 2/27th had got as far as Hill 394, which had a great view of the Damour gorge and beyond the river. They came under fire from three machine guns and had to withdraw. Two days later Moten with his intelligence officer, Sgt. F.S. Burr went on reconnaissance of Hill 394, "with a view to preparing the ground for the coming night attack, and of the Damour river defences with a view to further advances"¹ and saw how valuable it could be overlooking the Damour gorge. He decided it should be seized that night. Thus Capt. Nicholls set out at 2200 with two platoons, supported by two detachments of 3 inch mortars, and advancing over the steep hills got to the slopes about midnight. Meanwhile there was artillery support, ranging on the objective for an hour. One of the platoons, under Lieut.T.D.Mullighan, got round the eastern side of the hill unobserved and climbed the steep escarpment from the rear. Five Vichy, all Foreign Legion were taken by surprise and surrendered. The second platoon acted as mopping up party. The platoon then dug in on the southern side of the hill, and established an observation post on the summit. They came under artillery fire for a few hours. Capt. Nicholls returned with the other platoon and prisoners, and reported the taking of the hill. Brigadier Stevens ordered that they should

keep out of sight by day on the south side, and sit on the top at night.

Lieut. Mullighan would be killed in action on July 7. He was 24 years old.

Moten went out on reconnaissance of enemy defences from the forward observation posts, which took all day. He was again out the following night on the same mission. The battalion companies remained concealed in their positions, engaged mainly in making observation of enemy defences and movements, reconnaissance patrols being carried out at night. Vichy artillery shelled on July 1, but none landed directly on company areas. Australian artillery was brought up in the afternoon and some enemy guns were put out of action, and an ammunition dump destroyed

Reconnaissance of river crossings was deemed important by Brigadier Stevens, who wished to avoid a head on attack, but instead to capture the heights to the east of the Damour orchard area. A patrol led by Lt. Geddes of 2/27th, managed to get down a track to within 40 yards of the Vichy sentries guarding the bridge, and returned safely. Lieut.Sims was given the task of finding a crossing over the Damour also. He took out a platoon on the night of



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

008410

008410 - Australian soldiers of B Company, 2/27th Battalion, AIF, resting during a route march in sandhills close to the city.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



From Gavin Long, Vol 2, Greece, Crete, Syria. p482. © AWM.

July 1, and after a three hour march reached El Batal. He told his sections to spread out and look for an old track marked on a French map. They were to meet up again after four hours. One of the sections ran into a French patrol and suffered the loss of an NCO, who was killed. When they met up again, with no track found, Lieut. Sims sent all the platoon back, except a sergeant and a sapper. At dawn the trio moved out, and after climbing round the side of the hill found a mule track. They then stayed all the day there, and noted the French positions. At darkness they set out on the return journey, crossed the main road to the river and filled their water bottles and ate some leeks growing nearby, their first food in 24 hours. Moving close to the bridge unseen by the sentries,

they saw it was not primed for demolition. They arrived back at battalion at 6 am on July 3.

For this action 24 year old Sims was awarded Military Cross. He would finish the war with the rank of Major. As a result of the intensive patrolling by the company, Moten could inform Brigadier Stevens that the 2/27th awaited orders to attack across the river.

The attack began shortly after midnight on 5-6 July. Artillery opened fire on the Vichy positions at 0035. A Company of 2/27th, under Captain White and Lieut. Sims, were the first off. They had set out at 2100, and after a three hour march reached El Batal, and rested there for an hour. They were expected to follow the goat track, cross the Damour and then reach the objective, El Boum. Near dawn the leading platoon, led by Sims, was only about a quarter of a mile from El Boum. When they got to within 100 yards of the village, Sims ordered his men to fix bayonets and charge into the village. There were only a few enemy there who fled, leaving several mortars behind. Sims secured the village, and the rest of the company under Capt. White, after some difficulty, joined them. Moten had been watching progress with binoculars and on seeing the platoon enter the village, immediately signalled Brig. Stevens.

D Company had set out at 2035, and reached El Batal. They were setting out from there when Vichy artillery opened fire, killing 21 year old Lieut. Grant, and seriously wounding Capt. Rice. Sergt. Macpherson managed to contact HQ, and was told by Moten to gather the men and continue on. Meantime Lieut. Thomas, the only other officer, had been reorganising the men. Lieut. Lee arrived with C Company, and saw that D company was not now able to achieve its objective of reaching El Boum, and so his company would take on the role.

When D Company had failed to reach El Boum by 0700, Capt. White decided to press on without it. There was no opposition at the western end of the track, but at the eastern they ran up against a strong enemy position. Lieut. Geddes and an NCO were killed. Capt. Lee and his company arrived in support, and used mortars on the enemy positions. Eleven of the enemy were killed, and seventeen taken prisoner.

After this Lee decided to press on to the next objective, Er Roumane. His company came under fire from three Vichy machine guns. However, he felt it would be only a delay tactic, that they would withdraw by night, which proved to be the case. He sent a platoon to hold the important Hill 560 on the right.

Moten was now in the process of moving his HQ to El Boum, and at the river crossing spoke by phone to Nicholls, who was at El Boum since 8a.m..



AWM 128951: Hassaniye, Syria. 1941-06. At 21st Infantry Brigade Headquarters are, left to right: Major C. H. Finlay, Brigade Major; Lieutenant-Colonel M. J. Moten, Commanding Officer 2/27th Battalion; Colonel J. A. Chapman, General Staff Officer I, Headquarters, 7th Division; Brigadier J. E. S. Stevens, Ed, Commander 21st Infantry Brigade; Unidentified.

On receipt of Nicholls report he told him to press on to the final objective, Hill 512 overlooking the village of Daraya. This was achieved at 2235 on July 6. So Moten could be well pleased with the 2/27th work, they had secured the corridor through which 17th brigade was to advance to cut the road out of Damour to the north.

During the night the companies consolidated their positions, while early on July 7 the 2/14th took on the function of advance guard duty, taking the wadi of Nahr Daquon in front of C Company, while later the 2/3rd and 2/5th moved up to advance ton the north. The 2/27th was to assist the further advance of the 2/16th through engaging enemy posts ahead of 2/16th through fire and fighting patrols, at the same time ensuring that the vulnerable right flank was not in danger. There was shortage of drinking water, which had to be carried up from the Damour river through El Boum to the various positions, the water carriers

coming under fire from French artillery. Ammunition supply was tight also.

In the afternoon Moten ordered Capt. Nicholls to send out a fighting patrol, moving towards the 2/16th area, but also crossing 2/14th, who were engaged in attacking the French on Hill 225. Lieut. Katekar led this patrol, and the French suddenly found themselves having to deal with them as well. The French machine guns hindered progress, and Lieut. Katekar sent back a runner seeking artillery support. This proved effective, and he led his patrol along the ridge to Hill 225, and by dusk the French defence began to collapse. There were small pockets of resistance, and Lieut. Mullighan, second in command, was killed. By midnight the enemy had been routed, with 18 killed and 28 prisoners.

At 1345 Moten sent his Intelligence Officer, Lieut. Dean, to Hill 560 to see if he could from that high feature, see the position of enemy guns that were shelling the battalion from the north east direction. Dean returned at 2215 and reported the enemy was digging in on the eastern side of Hill 560. This was grave news, because from this position the Vichy force could observe all the corridor, and could threaten with long range fire. Moten ordered Lieutenant Lee, with B Company who were now at Er Roumane, to drive them from this position. One platoon from B Company was to attack from the west, while a platoon from D company would do so from the south. Lee reached Hill 560 about midnight, but his men came under heavy fire. He tried again with an extra platoon, and got within 180 yards of the Vichy position, but no further because of the enemy fire. They held this position, believing that the hard pressed Vichy would surrender once day dawned. At dawn a Vichy officer came under a white flag and sought peace terms, but suddenly there was a volley of hand grenades as the enemy attacked, but were beaten off with rifle and machine gun fire.

Another French attack by about sixty soldiers threatened Lee's HQ. As a result of intense enemy shelling the battalion HQ was moved to the western slopes of El Boum.

Moten sent forward reinforcements, as the French attack lasted some six hours. At 0700 B Coy., less one platoon and D company concentrated west of Hill 560, pinning down the enemy but unable to shift them. A platoon from A Coy, was sent as further support, and at 1440 the remainder of A Coy. were ordered into the attack. This attack was made at 2000 and went on fiercely until 0100. Later the force which had been attacking the HQ now estimated at 150-200, were seen to be withdrawing. From prisoners it was learned that the counter attack was being made by 1/6th Foreign Legion and 29th Algerians. These had arrived from Greece five days previously. When darkness fell it was



The original graves of members of the 2/27 Battalion, all of whom were killed or mortally wounded whilst advancing on Vichy French positions near Damour, Syria, in June 1941. The identified graves are, from left to right: unidentified; SX2830 Lance Sergeant Harry Waye of Glossop, SA, died of wounds 13 July 1941, aged 32 years; SX2916 Captain John Howell McLean Price of Renmark, SA, killed in action (KIA) 13 June 1941, aged 40 years; SX3674 Private Francis Joseph Galloway of Dunleath, SA, KIA 14 June 1941, aged 28 years; and VX46177 Temporary Warrant Officer Class 2 James Pringle Williams, 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion, of Maryborough, Vic, KIA 16 June 1941, aged 40 years.

decided to try again at Hill 560. Moten arrived at company positions at dawn on July 9. He felt that the Vichy might have withdrawn completely after such intense battle, and sent patrols forward. These found the hill unoccupied, with many Vichy dead. The D campaign had seen the 2/27th fight superbly though casualties had been heavy 27 killed, including five officers, and 109 wounded.

Damour itself was vacated by the enemy on the night of the 8th July, the 6th Cavalry regiment entered it to find it empty of troops. The previous day the 2/3rd Battalion and the 2/16th had outflanked it to the east, and some companies of 2/14th had advanced westwards from Daraya. The road to Beirut was cut that day. With Damour in Australian hands, Beirut, thirty kilometres away, was under immediate threat.

General Dentz, the Vichy commander, was under no illusion as to his

perilous position. His headquarters had been moved to Aleppo, and on July 8 he had approached the U.S. Consul at Beirut about negotiating an armistice. On July 12 the French plenipotentiaries met the Allied commanders at Acre and the armistice was signed.

Brigadier Stevens wrote to Kathleen Moten the next day-

“The Syrian campaign which has engaged our attention for the past five weeks has now concluded and peace reigns supreme again in this very beautiful country.

During the whole of the campaign your husband has done a really marvellous job. He has abandoned that aloofness which, unconsciously I think, he adopted towards his men and has proved himself a real leader. He and his battalion have answered every demand I have made on them in a grand way and the inspiration has undoubtedly come from him.

I have had the pleasure of listening to many eulogies of him from his officers and men and there is no doubt that his true worth, his courage and ability are now fully realised by his men.

He is very fit, tho’ not so rotund as when he left Adelaide, he has not, by any means faded to a shadow. His spirits are very high.

I thought perhaps you would like to hear of him from one who has a great admiration of his ability as a soldier”

While A Company remained in occupation of Hill 560, C Company moved to the Daraya spur, B occupied the bridge area in Damour Valley south of Ain Mikhal, and D Company on the Beit Ed Dine road. “All companies enjoyed a day of well earned rest” stated the War Diary for July 11, though D company’s area was mistakenly machine gunned by an Allied plane. Fortunately there were no casualties.

Moten left for two days leave, with Major Dobbs taking command of the battalion. However at 2230 on July 11 a message was received that hostilities would cease at 0001, and Brig.Stevens contacted him suggesting that he might postpone his leave and rejoin the unit. He returned at 1645 and ordered battalion HQ, along with A and C companies to move to the Damour River, south of El Boum. B Company, less one section with an A/A gun, and D Company also moved back. The battalion was now enjoying a well earned rest, “troops devoting time to bathes, washing clothes and generally cleaning up. B Company’s camp was “continually pestered with small children until they eventually discovered the weight of an Aussie boot with a large leg inside it.”²

The battalion was moving to new position at Hammana. Preparations for movement were completed early on July 16. At 0930 Moten presided over a



1941-10-02. Near Hammana. The battalion bugler of the 27th playing the last post at sun-down as the troops disappear over the hill on their way back to camp.

meeting of company commanders. They were informed that the future policy of the battalion in Syria was defined as one of occupation and protection. Details of the next move were outlined and instructions issued. The Battalion HQ closed at 1340, advance guard left at 1345, and full battalion at 1350. They arrived at Hammana at 2145. Throughout the route the local inhabitants were friendly and welcoming.

At 0600 on July 17 the Battalion prepared to formally take over the military zone from the Vichy force. The hand over took place at 1400, with ceremonial guard from the Vichy force and D Company, as the representative of the French force formally handed over command of the military zone to Moten. The Battalion HQ was established an hour later, and the men occupied the barracks and took charge of stores. Then the task of ascertaining situation of dumps and factories began, and adequate guards appointed; accounting stores taken over, and proper cleansing of the barracks began also.

For B Company this was not a pleasant task. Lieut. Magorey reported-“On our arrival it was easy to see that black troops had previously been in

occupation. Everywhere there were bugs and flies, hopping and crawling amongst the dirt and filth. Latrines, cookhouses, drains, everything was filthy. Regular fatigue periods were held to clean up this area. Gallons of disinfectant were used, and still the hopping and crawling continued. Finally the assistance of Forward Hygiene Section was called in, but their efforts seemed only to stir up the ire of the little creatures. However, in their anger, they exposed themselves to risks never before undertaken, and this enabled our men to combat them more or less successfully.”³

Over the next few days the Battalion continued garrison duties, providing guards for munitions dumps, and patrolling roads and villages in its area of



Captured Vichy flag Syria



Jericho, Palestine. 1942-02. His Highness Abdullah, The Emir of Transjordan, with Major-General E.F. Herring on his left and Brigadier M.J. Moten, right, at a 6th Australian Division Military Review.

responsibility On the afternoon of July 20 the Battalion paraded and were reviewed by Brigadier Stevens, who congratulated them on their performance in the Syrian campaign, and their smart appearance on parade. Major General Lavarack, Commanding Australian forces in the Middle East, also visited.

First soldiers went on leave to Beirut on July 21, leave was on a phased basis, 10% initially left Hammana by Battalion transport. Moten himself went on leave on July 23, and Major Dobbs took over command. Moten returned on July 29, but left almost immediately to take over 21st Brigade, in the absence of Brigadier Stevens. He spent a week in this role, rejoining the 2/27 on July 7.

His grandson, Lieut.Col. Guy Moten has written-

“Moten’s opportunities and experiences in the deserts of the Middle East would serve him well in the rugged jungles of New Guinea. He was able to display initiative and use the knowledge gained years earlier when applying the art of tactical manoeuvre. He learnt the benefits of extensive reconnaissance, the security afforded from fighting patrols, and the value of exploitation of night for operations. In return he demanded fortitude, endurance and discipline from his men and his continued contact with the troops gave



008250 - 1941-06-03 AWM. Syria. Advance Infantry patrol of the 2/27th Australian Battalion move forward to occupy the heights overlooking El Ardun.

him personal knowledge of his units real fighting capabilities. During the

Syrian campaign he was able to work with elements of the RAN and RAAF and this experience would prove beneficial, particularly in employment of bomber aircraft in the defence of Wau.”⁴

One who served under Murray Moten as a young cadet in the 48th Militia, and later with the 2/27th was Ray Baldwin, and he recalls-

“In 1938-39 I was a young Regimental Cadet in the 48th Militia. I was new to the game at 16-17, but Murray was my Commanding Officer. While serving in that battalion we went into a series of three months camps. It was then that volunteers were called for to join the 2/27th. The battalions first Commanding Officer was Lieut. Col. Murray Moten, SX2889, and I joined as Private, SX2905.

As C.O. he quietly gained the respect of all in the battalion. He was not a bombastic man in any way, and under his leadership and guidance the battalion became an efficient unit when the battalion went into action in the Syrian campaign. He proved to be a good leader and his tactical knowledge was

evident. The battalion record in the campaign was sound and this was all due to his leadership.”⁵

On December 27, 1941, he was promoted to full Colonel and temporary Brigadier, to command 17th Brigade. His leadership in the capture of Sidon and Damour were recognised on February 12, 1942, with the award of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). The citation stated- “To effect the capture of Saida in the face of a well organised and determined defence which blocked any progress along the road, it was necessary to turn the position from the right flank. On June 13, therefore, Col. Moten was ordered to take his battalion into high ground and capture Merjiyun. The terrain over which the battalion was forced to move was extremely difficult, and during the move forward it was dive bombed and machine gunned , and came under artillery fire.

Due to Col. Moten’s drive and initiative, the position was captured on June 14 and the battalion taken forward into such a position as to force the



026334 -6, - Melbourne, Australia. 1942-08-28. Scene during the march of the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade recently returned from the Middle East, through the City of Melbourne.

abandonment of the Saida defence. On the morning of June 15 Col. Moten perceived that the Saida garrison had apparently withdrawn, and immediately sent a patrol into the town. During these two days his example, initiative and leadership contributed very largely to the abandonment of the Saida defences. This officer also showed excellent leadership, gallantry and devotion to duty at the battle of Damour.”

¹ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/26.

² AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/30

³ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/26.

⁴ Lt. Colonel Guy Moten, Unpublished Essay, 2006, Kanga Force and 17 Brigade under command of Brigadier Murray Moten, New Guinea, 1943.

⁵ Ray Baldwin, To the Author.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The New Enemy

Japan had been on the Allied side in the 1914-18 war, and in its aftermath was allowed to keep the German territories in the Pacific in the Carolines, Marshall and Marianas which it had seized. But Japan was a country with aspirations for expansion in the Pacific, and with increasing militarist domination of government, these aspirations took on reality from the 1930s. First came the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and from 1937 that with China.

The Pacific colonies of Britain, France and Netherlands had the tin, oil and rubber that Japan needed, and the outbreak of the Second World War provided the opportunity for expansion. Japan had entered the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in September 1940, and with France and Netherlands having capitulated to Germany, and Britain fighting on alone, the drive southwards seemed very attractive in 1941. Of course, there would be the likelihood of war with the United States, for any drive south would have to include the Philippines as well.

The Japanese needed to make a pre-emptive strike against the U.S. Pacific fleet based at Pearl Harbor, and this took place on December 7, 1941. This is not the place to tell the story of that fateful day which brought the U.S. into the war. As they swept into the attack at Hawaii, the Japanese that day were simultaneously attacking Hong Kong, Philippines and Malaya. On December 10 the British battleships Prince of Wales and Repulse were sunk off Singapore. The same day the Japanese captured the American possession, Guam, and next day invaded Burma. On December 23 Wake Island fell.

The way was now open to attack Dutch East Indies.

Australia, well aware to the threats posed by Japanese expansion ambitions, had joined the U.S. in declaring war on Japan following Pearl Harbor. As the threat increased, the government wanted Australian forces serving abroad back defending the homeland, and this led to confrontation with Churchill, who felt that their priority must be in the struggle against Germany. In a speech on December 27, 1941, Curtin declared-

“We refuse to accept the dictum that the Pacific struggle must be regarded

as a subordinate segment of the general conflict.. By that is not meant that any one of the theatres of war is of less importance than the Pacific, but that Australia asks for a concerted plan evoking the greatest strength at the democracies' disposal, determining on hurling Japan back.

The Australian Government therefore regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the Democracies' fighting plan.

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I am making it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links with the United Kingdom. We know the problem that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength. We know that Australia can go, and Britain can still hold on.

We are therefore determined that Australia shall not go, and we shall exert all our energies towards shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings.”¹

The threat increased early in 1942 with the fall of Ambon. This island 580 miles north of Darwin, situated strategically between New Guinea, Celebes and Timor, had been a Dutch possession since 1605. There were 2600 Dutch troops there and in response to a request from the Dutch East Indies authorities, a battalion of Australian troops and part of 13 squadron RAAF had been sent there in December. The first Japanese air attacks were made on 6-7 January, then a major attack from two carriers on 24 January, and landing of troops on 29 January. Some 20,000 Japanese landed, and the island was over run. In a foretaste of what was to come later in the war, 300 Dutch and Australians were executed. 75% of POWs from Ambon died in captivity.

Singapore fell on 15 February 1942, with 130,000 Allied servicemen, including 15,000 Australians, were taken prisoner. Prime Minister Curtin stated next day-

“The fall of Singapore can only be described as Australia's Dunkirk... The fall of Dunkirk initiated the Battle of Britain. The fall of Singapore opens the battle for Australia. What the Battle for Britain required, so the Battle for Australia requires... Our honeymoon has finished. It is now work and fight as we have never worked before”

On February 19, 188 Japanese planes bombed the city of Darwin, with 243 people being killed, and the city of Broome was bombed on March 3, with 70 killed. Five days later Japanese troops landed at Lae and Salamua in New Guinea.



Map reproduced by permission of Darwin City Council.

17th Brigade during early 1942 was stationed at Jericho in Palestine, expecting to be redeployed home to help defend Australia. With General Herring Brigadier Moten attended a shooting exercise by 2/2 Artillery on Feb. 2. “From an infantry point of view the shooting was not very satisfactory. It appeared too much time was taken on getting on targets.... It took one battery 27 minutes to get on target...A battery did get on target within 3 minutes. Shooting at night was good.”²

Next day, when shooting a barrage in support of infantry, it fell 400 yards to the right, except by one battery. “Some guns failed to lift off for the start

line for the barrage and would effectively have shattered any infantry attack.”³

Brigadier Moten carried out his own Brigade training exercise on 13-15 February. 2/5th Battalion carried out the first exercise. “It was not entirely satisfactory as it appeared that officers required a lot more training in tactics”⁴ Carriers were provided for the troops by other battalions, “generally badly handled, no thought being given to practical handling to get best results. One phase of the exercise well done, control by section leaders particularly good”⁵. The 2/6th followed, “they greatly profited by the mistakes made by 2/5th and gave a much better performance”⁶. It was noticed that many of the officers were not physically fit, when sent to Brigadier Moten for orders “they arrived physically distressed”⁷. At the conclusion of the exercises they were warned that unless they kept fit, their services would not be required. The 2/7th gave the best performance, “greater dash and better standard of leadership.”⁸ The War Diary commented that “all units require more practice with carriers as there is no understanding as to how they should be used.”⁹

On March 1 the Brigade was informed that it should be ready to move at 18 hours notice. Later in the day the message was sent that March 3 would be the date. The 2/5th were the first to commence moving, followed by the 2/6th the following day. “During the night many idle rumours were flying about among the men as to the future destination of the Brigade. The recent trend of events in the East had keyed up troops to a pitch where they believed they would be returning to Australia at the earliest possible moment.”¹⁰

On March 8 the brigade was at El Kantara, familiar to men of 2/27th battalion. Here they were to have a meal before crossing the Canal. However, they had to remain in the transit camp there, as there was no news of the Brigade’s deployment, because of the changing Far East situation.

Next day, Brigadier Moten met Major General Boase, with Brigadier Lloyd, commanding 16 Brigade, and was informed that the two Brigades, now to be known as Boase Force, were going to Ceylon to replace British troops moving to Burma, and would be defending the airfield at Trincomalee. So on March 10 most of the troops boarded HMS Otranto at Suez, except for 2/7th, who boarded HMS Westerland. Moten inspected the ships and found everything satisfactory. He arranged for increased troop deck ventilation and more lavatory accommodation for the men. HQ personnel were to be quartered in hammocks on one of the decks. At 1400 hours instructions were received that they were to pull in at Port Sudan. The understanding was that they were to remain there until convoys assembled and move out then under escort.

They left Port Sudan on March 13, and headed for Aden. On the short

journey troops washed clothes and dried them, draping over the rigging. There was no shore leave, and on March 16 the *Otranto* sailed on alone, without escort. After an uneventful voyage, it arrived in Colombo, Ceylon, at 0730 on March 21, pulling into the inner harbour, where the battleship *HMS Royal Sovereign* and cruiser *HMS Enterprise*. were moored. Early next morning Moten led a reconnaissance party, proceeding by car to Meligama, where he met officers of 8th Punjabi Regiment, from whom the 17th would be taking over. In the afternoon the party went to see Kookala and Galle areas, and also Bussa Camp.

On March 23 more reconnaissance took place, this time to Aktrussa to see possible sites for mobile reserves. At the police station he was told that water was plentiful in the area and wells could be dug without difficulty. Food was available locally, though meat was scarce. Next morning the advance party set out in transport provided by the 16th Brigade. The remainder of the personnel left the ship in the afternoon and after a gruelling march in the hot sun reached Colombo Fort station. "First impressions gained were of a colourful land, peopled by a friendly native population and a blazing sun which seemed to penetrate down to the soles of the boots. The natives appeared a much cleaner type than those previously encountered in the Middle East. The intelligence shown by children indicated a higher standard of education."¹¹

However, the climate began to affect the troops-

"After half a winter in the mountains of Syria, the troops were finding it hard to become acclimatised to the humid heat of Ceylon. Several cases of cases of tinnea and chafing due to extreme perspiring were noticed. It is now almost impossible to sleep out in the cool night air owing to the torrential thunderstorms which spring up nightly."¹²

Moten himself was confined to bed for a few days with a fever, thought to have been caused by insect bites. Returning to duty, he announced that he intended to form a Jungle Training School in the Galle Fort area. It was to commence soon with 40-50 students, concentrating on weapons training, unarmed combat, drill and an elementary study of Japanese tactics as appeared to be from reports based on recent operations in Malaya. He also planned a new school for officers to cover tactical training, jungle warfare and platoon/section leadership. 20 officers at a time would attend a three day course, and it was hoped to have all officers in the Brigade through the course in 12 days,

The south of Ceylon had heavy jungle suitable for training in jungle warfare. "We had no established doctrines to guide us, no one with the foggiest idea how to start"¹³ he would recall later. He selected six officers as the Jungle

Training Team- two Infantry Majors, one Engineers Captain, one Artillery Major, one Medical Major, and one RAF Squadron Leader. All were top notch training men, with sound tactical knowledge, all pre war militia officers of some years standing, except the artillery Major, who was Staff corps, and all had been successful commanders in Libya, Greece, Crete and Syria.

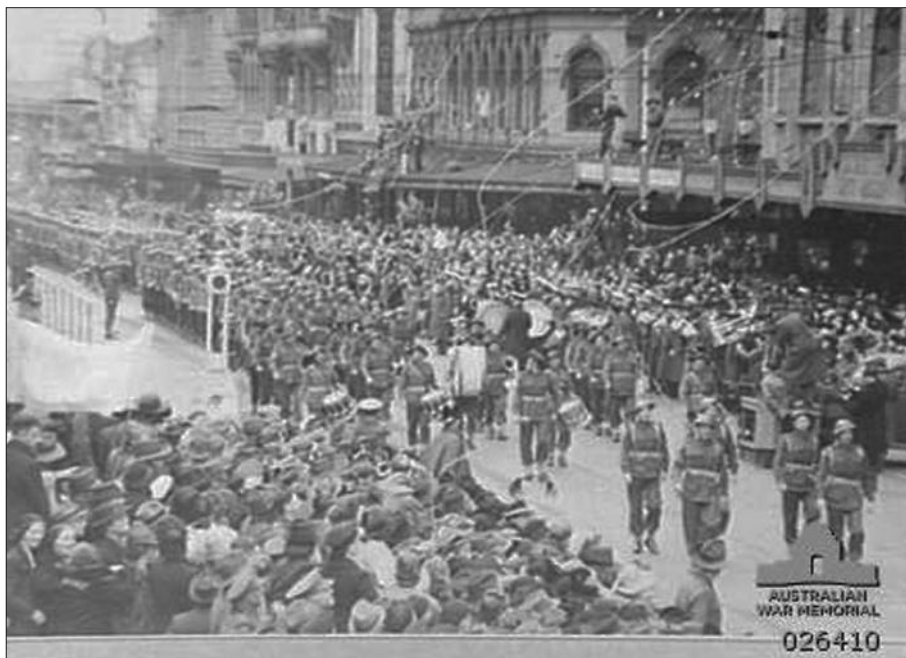
They spent a fortnight, day and night, examining and sifting the mass of material which kept pouring in from Malaya. They summarised their efforts under four headings- accounts of successful Jap actions; unsuccessful ones (few); accounts of successful British actions; unsuccessful ones (many) There was no effort to analyse the reasons for failure of friend or foe.

The Junior Jungle Training School was then formed, directed by the Jungle Training team, the objective- to study jungle tactics for a platoon. The students were company and platoon commanders from every arm of the service. The course was to last four days, at the end of twelve days every company, platoon and equivalent commander would have gone through it.

The Senior Commanders Jungle School had as its objects Battalion tactics, students were commanders of all units, lasting 14 days. There were tactical exercises in weapons training and discussions, followed by Battalion two day exercises with troops.

Moten summarised the conclusions from the schools. (1) There is no black magic about jungle warfare; (2) the broad tactical doctrines expressed for our training in open warfare in the Middle East still applied (3) jungle warfare provides certain tactical conditions which demand special considerations- (a) reconnaissance limited both from ground and air; extensive patrols- accurate reports; (b) fighting at shorter ranges- mastery of weapons; (c) once troops leave roads or tracks movement slows up considerably, situations develop slowly, information takes longer to obtain (d) offset – takes longer to get counter measures under way.(d) these difficulties applied equally to friend or foe;(e) the jungle was a friend not a foe to troops trained to recognise it and use it as such. (4) each unit- platoon, company or battalion- may by reason of its limited vision in the jungle and restricted fields of fire be unable to support its neighbouring company or battalion.

As a result of this, he said, there will be a tendency for units to get isolated both in attack and defence. The answer was to adopt the old idea of a Square which in effect is a perimeter with all round fields of fire, both in attack and defence. Each square is entirely self contained as regards supplies, food, arms and water, and capable of sustained action if temporarily cut off or isolated from its neighbours, a perimeter whose flanks could not be turned because it



Melbourne, Vic. 1942-08-28. The Commander of the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade, Brigadier M.J. Moten, DSO, leads his brigade past the saluting base in their march through the city of Melbourne following their return from the Middle East.

had no flanks, a system of perimeters each of which could be relied on to hold its ground if enveloped. Finally, the principles of war applied equally in the jungle as in open war.

“These issues became the basis of our training doctrine. It was on these lines we trained- and we trained hard. It was on these lines we fought when we met the Japs over the next three and a half years, and 17 Brigade saw a good deal of jungle fighting- more so than any other Australian Brigade, and throughout the methods employed were uniformly successful against the Jap.”¹⁴

On June 24 the Brigade had a visit from the Duke of Gloucester. He was very relaxed, and instead of just driving through the line of troops, got out of the car and walked among them. At lunch he asked many questions about Australia, and asked Moten about people that he could only have met for a short spell there, showing that he had a great memory.

The Brigade’s term in Ceylon was coming to a close, they were to be replaced by 32nd Indian Brigade, and the formal handover was on July 4. On July 11 troops were aboard HMS Athlone, part of a convoy being escorted by

the cruiser HMS Gambia. “As every indication pointed to Australia being journey’s end, the troops were in the best of spirits at the thought of seeing the homeland once more. We leave Ceylon with the sincere hope that the lessons learned and experience gained will be invaluable in the days to come when we enter the tropics and meet the wily Jap.”¹⁵

The ship arrived at Port Melbourne on August 4, and the men were delighted to be told that they would be given 14 days leave as soon as possible. On August 9 disembarkation began, and there were amusing scenes as men staggered to buses and trains carrying large loads of souvenirs and boxes of tea, the latter being much appreciated by their families. Moten himself was the guest of the Savings Bank of South Australia at lunch in Hotel Oriental, Adelaide, on August 19.

Ten days later came the great parade through the streets of Melbourne. 300,000 lined the streets as Brigadier Moten, D.S.O, led the 17th Brigade and other units’ march. The Governor, Sir Winston Dugan, took the salute outside the Town Hall, joined by General Blamey, Allied Commander, S.W.Pacific; the Lord Mayor, the Prime Minister, and Minister for the Army. It was a proud and emotional moment for Kathleen Moten, who had come up to be reunited with her husband.

¹ Melbourne Herald 27 December 1941.

² AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/53.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/53.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Staff College Lecture 1948.

¹⁴ Staff College Lecture.

¹⁵ AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/57.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Into New Guinea

After the furlough the brigade assembled at Nagambie camp in Victoria. Here they were told that move north would be delayed due to congestion of troop traffic on the railways. Not until September 17 could they leave Nagambie for the training camp at Greta in New South Wales, where they would replace the 16th Brigade. Reveille that morning was at 0300, and they travelled by troop transport to Mangalore station, leaving there at 0720. They travelled north on a minor line to avoid the congestion. At the state border they had to change rail gauge, this was completed during lunch. When they reached Jerildarie in the Riverina, the local people entertained them to afternoon tea. The evening meal was had at Narrandera, and they left there at 2100. The last leg, 93 miles, was to be painfully slow, taking over nine hours.

Moten met Brigadier Lloyd, Director of Staff Duties, in Melbourne, and was given the opportunity to read a confidential report by Chester Wlomot on conditions in New Guinea, as a result of which action was taken to address certain weaknesses in equipment. He travelled on the train to Sydney with Major General Chapman who showed him a letter which outlined problems that 16 Brigade had experienced. A list of equipment necessary for New Guinea, especially in camouflage was made.

At Greta the Brigade was involved in a training demonstration exercise which left Moten unimpressed. "We were visited by certain jungle training experts at the head of the training team teaching the Gordon Bennett theory of jungle warfare. In a demonstration of the Bennett theory, 17 Brigade were used as guinea pigs, for HQ of II Army and Divisional Brigades of New South Wales and Queensland. The exercises lasted eight days and from onlookers' point of view, a fine show.

The tactical doctrine expounded was, to my way of thinking, completely unsound and conflicted with the accepted principles of war, in which I firmly believed, and still do. I sought an early opportunity to place my views before the C.G.S. and General Berryman, as a result of which the Bennett training team was suddenly disbanded and a jungle training expert posted to me as third

in charge.”¹

On October 2 the Brigade learned that its destination was Milne Bay, where a Japanese invasion attempt to break through to attack Port Moresby had been defeated. Milne Bay, with its three airfields, was a vital position in the defence of Port Moresby, and the Japanese attacked on August 25. The struggle lasted until September 7, when the Japanese withdrew completely, the first occasion so far in the war they had done so. Their abortive attack cost them 625 dead, while the Allied dead were 181, -167 Australian and 14 American.

The Brigade left Greta by train for Brisbane on October 4, and were there until October 9, when they sailed on the S.S. Both, as part of a convoy. It was a Dutch ship with Dutch officers, and an Australian “Union” crew, “who were ill mannered and untidy and subsequently caused trouble on several occasions.”² Moten himself flew to Port Moresby on October 12, and there met the G.O.C, General Blamey, General Herring, commanding New Guinea forces, and Major General Vasey, commanding 6th Australian Division

From Port Moresby he flew into Milne Bay, where Major General Clowes told him that 17 Brigade would be required to take over part of the defences until the ultimate role of Milne Bay was decided. Brigade headquarters was set up in a large house at Gili Gili near Milne Bay. One of the first decisions taken was to arrange with Major Goble, the jungle training expert who had been appointed, to conduct a jungle training school for junior leaders, the students to learn all about jungle plants, native for the skinning of bush pigs, and other useful accomplishments. It had been noted that the condition of Japanese prisoners brought in recently after being at large in the jungle since the Milne Bay operation showed they were not at all experts at living off the country. A prisoner brought in on October 24 weighed only four stone. He said there were ten others in the area, and a platoon was sent out to round up these strays.

Moten went out to find the jungle school on October 28. Eventually finding it after being stuck in the mud, he felt that Major Goble had missed the point of the whole scheme by his selection of the location of the school, that although he had gone far enough away, he had not penetrated far enough into the jungle. This was to be corrected in future schools.

The ensuing weeks were without great incident. “The flap was over – most Japs had been cleaned out, there were isolated parties around the east end of the bay, and 17 Brigade were employed to clean them out. There were small isolated platoon and company shows, many days hard marching through the jungle, extensive patrolling and careful housekeeping arrangements. These

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experiences were valuable topping off to our training.”³

Moten departed 17 Brigade on December 19 to take administrative command of 11 Division temporarily, an appointment lasting until January 10, 1943. Soon he was to face his sternest test so far as a leader.

¹ Staff College Lecture 1948.

² AWM War Diary, 52/8/3/27/61.

³ Staff College Lecture.



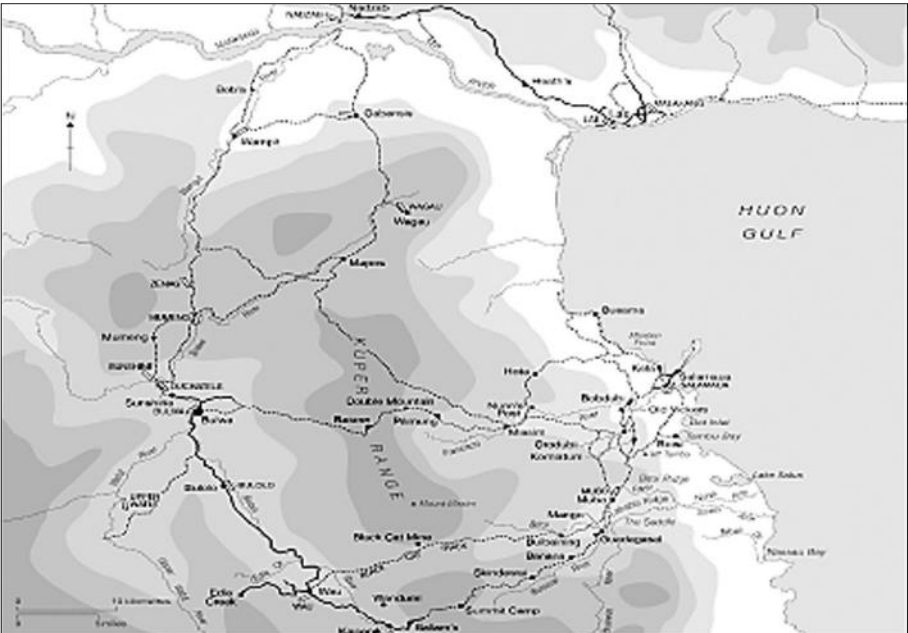
*The Territories of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Sea. © AWM
From Dexter, New Guinea Offensive, p29.*

CHAPTER NINE

The Battle for Wau

Wau is a town in New Guinea, 150 miles from Port Moresby, situated in a valley about 4000 feet up. During the 1920s and 1930s there was a gold rush there. Miners cleared the area, built houses, workshops, laid on water supply and electricity. They also built two airfields, one at Wau and Bulolo. These constituted the main means of reaching the Wau valley.

The airfield at Wau posed a challenge to any aircraft. It was a rough grass strip, with a steep slope. Aircraft could approach it from the North East only, landing uphill and taking off downhill. The mountains are high- reaching up to 13,000 feet, so aircraft had to fly between them. Adding to the difficulty was



Map courtesy Australian Govt. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, cartographer Keith Mitchell.

that mornings tended to be cloudy, followed by showers, so that most days only four or five hours were good for landing or taking off.

Both Australians and Japanese recognised its strategic importance. The Japanese had landed at Lae and Salamua in March 1942, and attempted to get control of New Guinea. But they suffered setbacks at Gona (Nov.22-Dec.9, 1942) and Buna (Dec.18-Jan. 2, 1943, and realised that while Wau, only 40 miles from Lae and Salamua, was held by the Australians, these two bases would be under threat. Reinforcements were sent from Rabaul in New Britain. The convoy was spotted by Allied planes on January 6, and two ships were sunk and up to fifty Japanese planes destroyed. However, a substantial number of troops were landed at Lae.

General Blamey, commanding the Allied forces, was aware of the potential Japanese threat of advance on Wau, and on January 9 he informed Moten that 17 Brigade was to go to Wau. It would take over Kanga Force, which comprised the local New Guinea Volunteer Rifles and the 2/5 Independent Company who had been flown in from Australia in early 1942 and were trained commandos. Kanga Force had been engaging in guerrilla warfare, carrying out a number of raids on Japanese posts, most notably in June 1942 on Salamua, when fifteen Japanese were killed. The name Kanga Force was retained for the new formation. The task was to hold the airfield, and threaten Salamua and draw as many Japanese troops as possible into that area and away from Lae.

Two regiments of 51st Japanese Division had arrived from Rabaul to Lae, and were moving by foot and barge down the coast to Salamua. A third regiment was still at Rabaul but due to join the others. The concentration of these troops was interpreted as intending to move on Wau, so that Blamey was anxious that Wau should not fall into Japanese hands.

A Hudson bomber brought Moten to Wau on January 9, to make reconnaissance pending operations in the area, returning at mid day on January 13. Next day flights of troops to Wau began at 0300. The 2/6 Battalion was involved, and 12 planes, each carrying an officer and 15 other ranks, took off during the day. One plane crashed taking off, injuring three soldiers. Planes on January 15 were forced back due to poor visibility over the mountain ranges. Moten was on one of the planes that had to return.

Five planes took off at 0735 on January 16. The first one landed at 0845, the second an hour later, showing that visibility and landing conditions were not good. The pilots of the other three planes would not attempt to land due to the conditions, and returned to Port Moresby with personnel and stores. Again Moten had to return.

The new Kanga Force commenced to function that afternoon. The first patrol, C Company, under Major Jones, with 4 officers and 81 soldiers, moved out from Wau towards Black Cat Mine to patrol that track and give early warning of any Jap movement on Wau.

January 17 saw eight planes, with personnel and stores, land safely at Wau. At the third attempt Moten got there. 2/6 Battalion now had 23 officers and 343 other ranks at Wau. C Company reached Kaisinik Creek and had bivouacked for the night, the men reported to be on the point of exhaustion at this stage from the gruelling march.

Japanese, estimated at 300, were reported in the Saddle area, and A Company, under Captain Sherlock, were ordered to move out to the Mubo track next morning.

Ten planes arrived over Wau on the morning of January 18, the first two landed safely, the third crashed about 200 yards north of the airstrip. It is thought that the crash was due to a pilot not used to the airfield, attempted approach at too low an altitude. Eight died as a result of the crash. The other planes landed safely with stores and personnel. No planes came on January 21 and January 22, but 31 planes got through with stores and personnel on January 23. Next day Moten was informed there would be no planes available on January 25, advice would be signalled when further planes would be available.

The first indications of enemy movement toward Wau was on January 22, when a report was received that an enemy patrol about 50 strong was observed moving from the Bitoi River towards Black Cat. A fighting patrol of 55 was sent out to obtain latest information and act on own initiative. 200 Japanese were reported in the Mubo area on January 23, again heading toward Black Cat. Moten had placed 2/6 battalion to guard known approaches. B Company were to go to Skindiwau to help the 2/5 Independent Company regain the Saddle area, which had been occupied by the Japanese since January 18; D Company to Bulolo- covering approaches from Salamua area, Missum and Lae, via Snake valley; A Company to go to Ballams, and patrol to Wandimu; two platoons of C Company to go to Black Cat, and patrol to House Copper. The remainder of 2/6 Battalion were to defend Wau airfield.

He told Staff College students in 1948 that he had decided to give 2/5 Battalion responsibility for the Mubo -Wau valley; 2/6 the Bulolo valley, and have the 2/7 at Wau as Brigade reserve.

On January 26 it was reported that the Japanese had opened up a new track, with staging camps sufficient for 150 men, to the east of Black Cat. "They were avoiding our patrols, and apparently preparing the way for a main striking



AWM 014377123 - 1943-03-03. Washing day at Wau. A peaceful domestic scene showing native servants with their copper set up by one of the creeks that tumble into the Bulolo River, doing some washing for the Army. The boulders that look so harmless in the picture were a constant hazard to the defenders during the Battle for Wau, because of ricochet bullets.

force, with Wau as the objective. There was evidence of continuous forward movement along the new track. Enemy troops known to be operating in the Black Cat area exceeded 300” Moten urged New Guinea Force to expedite the arrival of remaining troops, to deny the enemy the high ground overlooking. He planned to take the offensive against the enemy in the Black Cat area on January 28, assuming these troops had arrived. A signal from NGF on January 27 indicated five flights would be operating next day. These would carry troops, rations and stores.

The situation increased dramatically on the morning of January 28. At 7-05 a.m. information was received that the enemy were attacking Captain Sherlock and A Company south of Wandumi, since 4 a.m. The Japanese were estimated at 70, and were equipped with mortars. They appeared to be moving from Wandumi to Ballams, and a platoon was sent out to help Sherlock. He reported that he had two men killed, and other casualties had been sent to Crystal Creek. They were “holding them nicely, the only disadvantage was that



AWM 044268: Wau, New Guinea, 1944-09/10. (Left to right); Lt -Col G.A. Bertram G (Operations) NGF Lt-Col Anderson, Hq Royal Australian Artillery NGF, Lt-Gen I. Mackay, Brig M.J. Moten, Comd Kanga Force..

the Japs were above them.”¹ At 9-05 he reported the immediate front was quiet. He was considering an attempt to encircle to the right of Wandumi when the new platoon would arrive, though this would be slow. He required further supplies and native carriers to evacuate the wounded.

Lt. Col. Wood reported at 1145 that the patrols he had sent out should be in the vicinity of Wandumi. Meanwhile Moten had been anxiously awaiting the arrival of the planes, and at 1055 sent a message asking where they were, that weather conditions were perfect at Wau. Two did arrive, but at 1358 N GF sent a message saying that there would be no more flights that day, due to weather.

Though the platoon did arrive at 1400, Sherlock’s position was becoming more and more precarious. The Brigade War Diary describes it in detail-

1445hrs- Sherlock reported that the Japs had made a counter attack with hand grenades and light machine guns. He was badly in need of water and would require men at Wandumi soon.

1450hrs- Lt. Col. Wood reported that 1200 hrs his company was near Wandumi, but no contact had been made with Sherlock or the enemy.

1455 hrs- A message received from Sherlock said he was cut off and looked like being overrun. He was advised that all help possible was being sent. Lt. Col. Wood was advised, and ordered to hasten his company that moved to this area, at all speed to Sherlock’s aid.

1510hrs- Sherlock reported things very hot, any help may be too late. One of his platoons was over run, and he was countering now.

1525hrs- In view of the gravity of the position, a signal was sent by Moten to NGF- Enemy attacking in force Wandumi about four miles from Wau. Our company isolated this area, sending company from Wau to support. No reserve force left in Wau. You must expedite arrival of troops to this area.

1540hrs- Sherlock reported that he had little ammunition left, and he was out of mortar ammunition. The Japs had two machine guns trained on them and casualties were high. They had captured their original position by counterattack and thought the Japs were weakening, and that they would have a good chance of holding them. Only 40 men were left.

1700 hrs- A message was received from Sherlock saying “the game is on again”. The Japs were now engaging their position very severely with grenades and mortar bombs.

1823hrs- Sherlock’s last message- “Don’t think it will be long now. Close up to flank and front, about 50 yards”. He was now down to 18 men out of his original 70.

He decided to pull back, and get his men across the swollen river. As he

reached the other side he was killed by enemy fire. His brave stand at Wandumi had gained precious time in the defence of Wau.²

At 0300 on January 29 Moten was informed that every effort was being made to get planes to Wau. All troops would arrive ready for action. A later message stated that 30 planes would be landing, with men, rations and ammunition. The first six landed by 0950, and by the evening some 60 planes landed bringing a much needed 814 men. They were deployed into action immediately on arrival.

Earlier there had been rifle and mortar fire from the Japanese from 0615 to 0815, firing intermittent. Some forward elements of the enemy succeeded in crossing the Big Wau Creek and were within 5-800 yards of the airfield. Moten sent Major Leahy's company from 2/7th forward close to Leahy's farm, where they killed 15 Japanese. Next morning the Japanese attacked early in force just before dawn. Walker and others were forced back as the enemy got to within 400 yards of the airfield, but regrouped and with support, counterattacked on the flank, and the enemy were mown down. Moten reported to headquarters- "attack driven off, enemy retiring in direction of Crystal Creek, 150 Japs killed, regret no prisoners. We have situation in hand."³

At 1300 he was requesting direct air support, two flights of Boston bombers to bomb and strafe the retiring enemy. His situation was improved by the arrival of a section of the 2nd Field Artillery Regiment, bringing two guns. These commenced firing at 1130 with great effect. A shell fired to help with ranging landed in an ammunition dump near Leahy's Farm, killing many Japanese. The Boston bombers were also doing good work, strafing enemy concentrations near Crystal Creek. A group of several hundred Japanese seen marching from Leahy's Farm came under fire from Walker's company, from the air and from the guns. Around the airfield there was intermittent fire from small parties of snipers until mid afternoon. The Japanese were now mainly on the defensive.

That night Moten sent a report to the GOC of New Guinea Force-

"Heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy to day, not less than 300 killed. Artillery and direct air support most effective. Morale effect on our troops grand, our casualties today light. In view of strength of opposition encountered my present force inadequate for the task...losses and vulnerable details make effective strength here two Battalions to hold large perimeter and to keep enemy beyond effective range of drome ...Consider one additional Battalion and one machine gun company necessary to hold present opposition."⁴

On January 31, 28 survivors of the fight at Wandumi made it back to Wau and brought the news of Capt. Sherlock's death. Many felt he should have been



AWM 015229 - New Guinea. Wau-Mubo Area. Cooks at a forward camp prepare a meal for troops passing through to their battle stations, on the Mubo track. Left to right Ptes. K. Lewis, of St Kilda, Victoria, J. Thomas of Perth, J. Mathers, of Moonee Ponds, Victoria, and Nx67270 Bruce Leslie Hallett, of Bondi, N.S.W.

awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. His heroism and that of his men had bought critical time in the defence of Wau.

More troops and equipment were flown in on Feb.1, bringing the strength to 2900 men. Engagement with the enemy was becoming sporadic. A Company that evening surprised a party of Japs and killed an estimated 15-20 of them.. Next day Major Muir, who had come in with the Wandumi survivors, guided a flight of Boston bombers over the Wau area to bomb and strafe Jap HQ in the Crystal Creek area, but found there was an impenetrable cloud over the valley. The bombers therefore continued on and bombed and strafed the Mubo area before returning to Port Moresby.

General Herring, G.O.C, New Guinea, sent Moten a signal at 1130 on Feb.3 asking what general dispositions and plans were for clearing the enemy. Moten said 2/5 Battalion and 2/7 Machine Gun Battalion were on airfield defence at Wau, 2/7 Battalion patrols were pushing south east towards Crystal Creek, and



1943-03-03. Wreck that saves lives. This battle scarred ambulance built with galvanised iron and scrap material saved many lives in the battle for Wau. It carried scores of men, some badly wounded from the hospital to the air strip, to be flown to Moresby. The seats were taken out of the station wagon type of body, and two stretchers were accommodated on one side. A seat of boards on the other accommodated sitting patients. The ambulance was salvaged from the creek near Bulolo. (Negatives by Capt. Clarke).

north east to Bulolo River. Unable to locate enemy strength in valley but his patrols very active and small pockets dug in. 2/3 Independent Company were clearing up timber country between airfield and Bulolo River, remainder in reserve. He had two companies of 2/6 Battalion in the Black Cat area operating along the Wandumi track, who would be attacking enemy forces at 1500 hrs. He considered the protection of Wau airfield now secure, and as soon as composite companies arrived for static defence he would release 2/5 Battalion, Machine Gun Company and part of 2/7 Battalion for offensive operations.

On the morning of February 6 the Japanese mounted an air attack on Wau. Nine enemy bombers and strong fighter escort flew over Wau at 1030 am/. At the time four Douglas transport planes were on the ground and five others in the air. Luckily Allied fighters were over the area, and a dog fight lasting half

an hour ensued. One of the Australian Wirraways on the ground was destroyed. One stick of bombs along the strip caused several casualties but little material damage. Another hit the building used as a signal office, killing three, one of whom was American. It was thought that two Zeros and one bomber were destroyed, and one Zero and one bomber probably destroyed. Later the Japs made a second attempt, but were intercepted over the Black Cat and were severely mauled, the final tally being 26 enemy planes destroyed.

It was one of only attack from the air on Wau. The Japanese were withdrawing from the area, and there were only sporadic encounters. The Operations Summary for Feb.12 recorded that 2/5 Battalion patrols to Crystal Creek, Magnetic Creek and Kuali Creek “found many enemy dead, some of whom had committed suicide. All Japs found were at starvation point”⁵. A Company found one Australian soldier with his hands tied and his eyes gouged out. His body was unrecognisable” Moten sent a signal to Markham Observation Post- “Enemy in Wau area has been defeated and is withdrawing back towards Mubo. Our troops are pursuing along the Black Cat track and new Jap track which is between Black Cat and Skindewai tracks.”⁶

On February 13 the body of Capt.Bill Sherlock was found, still clutching his rifle. Another patrol recovered the body of Capt.Pearson, drowned while crossing the Bulolo river. That morning Major General Sir Ivan Mackay flew into Wau, made a general inspection of Battalion HQ and with Moten visited battle areas. Patrols were still engaging Japs heading south to Mubo, 33 enemy were reported killed in two skirmishes on Feb. 14.

The second air attack on Wau was on March 9. 26 bombers, with fighter escort of 12 to 20, attacked at 1225.”The raiders came in flying in perfect formation of 3 Vs in a V at about 15000 feet. Bombs were dropped along the side of the landing strip but the strip remained serviceable. Extensive damage was done in the Transport Pool and 2/8 Fd. Company areas. Casualties were three killed, including one native, and ten wounded. Throughout the day delayed action bombs continued to explode in the area. Communications were badly disrupted for some time afterwards.”⁷

On March 24 Moten took the unusual step of removing one of his Battalion commanders. He had been concerned about the general performance of 2/5 Battalion in recent weeks, and on March 24 he informed Lieut. Col. Daniel Starr, its C.O., that he was being relieved of command for the following reasons-

Consistently ignoring instructions from Kanga HQ; failure to make close contact with enemy forces with his patrols and therefore allowing an inferior

enemy force to escape him at Buibaining-Waifali-Guadascascal; he had been given definite instructions regarding ammunition reserve for artillery and targets which they would engage. /The ammunition reserve had been allowed to drop to 4 r.p.g instead of 200 r.p.g., and all instructions on this subject had been ignored. In reply to a signal, he gave assurance that anti malarial precautions had been taken. It was found that the men did not even have mosquito nets. On March 24 he had not made a start on defensive positions in the Buibaining- Waifali area. There was evidence of laxness in the entire administration by HQ 2/5 Battalion.

All these points resulted in Brig.Moten losing confidence in Lt.Col.Starr. G.O.C, N.G. F, agreed that Lt.Col.Starr should lose his command. In consequence of the low state that 2/5 Battalion had been allowed to get into, both in training and organisation, they would start to withdraw from forward area for complete reorganisation. They would be replaced by 2/7 Battalion.”⁸

As his replacement, Moten sought Lt.Col. Thomas Conroy, of 2/32nd Battalion. “A strong forceful personality with a sound knowledge of the job who was expected to put 2/5 Bn. on its feet again. It was considered that, fundamentally, 2/5 was still a good Battalion.”⁹

Starr was appointed to command 58/59 Battalion of 15th Brigade, in April 1943, but again there were problems, and he was relieved of command on August 13, 1943.

“The Australian Command did not appreciate the significance of the battle at the time. With three infantry divisions in New Guinea, Wau had been saved by only one Australian Brigade. The battle for Wau was the last forward movement of Japanese forces in the South West Pacific theatre of war, yet Moten’s force had stopped it.”¹⁰

But there would be little rest for Moten and his men. The Japanese held Mubo, fifteen miles away to the North, and Salamua, twelve miles north east of Mubo, on the coast.

¹ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/72.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/75.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Lt. Colonel Guy Moten Essay, 2006.

CHAPTER TEN

To Nassau Bay

The Japanese in New Guinea paid heavily for their attack on Wau, leaving 1400 dead in their retreat. The remainder had retreated to Mubo. “Our task now was to hold what we had gained, and to endeavour by threats to draw more and more troops into this area from Lae”, Moten recalled in 1948, “for the next four months we held the line of the Saddle waiting for 7 and 9 Divisions. No man’s land was two miles forward of our base. No Jap moved without our knowledge and our moves were hidden by our screen of patrols. Patrols reached a high degree of efficiency.”¹ He opted for offensive patrolling to control the area, and thus threatened the enemy garrison at Salamua

No man’s land to which he referred was the southern slopes of Observation Hill, Garrison Hill, Mubo Valley, Vickers Ridge and a small section of Labadia Ridge between Australians and the Japs in the Green Hill – Pimple area (see map). The Japs had dug in well, but made little attempt at taking the offensive, so that the Australians were in effective control of No man’s land.

He had decided that the danger of attack from the Japanese was now likely to come from Markham area rather than Mubo. He put the 2/6 to cover approach from Markham, the 2/5 to face Mubo (relieved early April by 2/7), and the 2/3 Independent Company to Missim. Lt. Col. Guinn, who commanded the 2/7, came up with a plan that a company, supported by air, mortar, artillery and machine guns, could take out the enemy in the Green Hill- Pimple area, and on April 22 Moten told him to go ahead.

On April 23 General Savage, now in command of 3rd Division, dissolved Kanga Force as an independent force, and subsumed it into 3rd Division. It must have been disappointing for Moten, who could have expected an extended Kanga after the success at Wau. However, he retained command of 17 Brigade.

“Savage believed Moten was disappointed that he had not been given command of an enlarged Kanga Force after his defence of Wau. Moten was also in the difficult situation of commanding Savage’s old brigade, which did little to help the situation. Furthermore both men possessed markedly different

temperaments... despite their differences and initial problems both were to work amicably together for the rest of the campaign.”²

Next day a company of 2/7 Battalion attacked the Pimple and Green Hill, assisted by mortar fire. Planes had bombed the Japanese position, but the enemy were well dug in and the attack failed. Another attack failed next day. Two further attacks, the latter on May 7, also failed. The Pimple was a razor back hill, with precipitate sides; the enemy were dug in well, and close to heavy timber, and were not cleared out by air attack. On May 9 the Japanese counter attacked here, and the company was pinned down for two days until it was relieved. Moten had visited the forward positions on April 30, and in the War Diary recalled that the 2/7 attacks on the Pimple had great difficulty in taking full advantage of close support from air strikes and artillery. Our troops were unable to establish positions to give supporting fire... movement to the right was difficult owing to the cliff face and dense undergrowth.. the enemy on the front and left had machine gun posts skilfully sited covering all approaches... the undergrowth outside of the fire lanes was a tangled mass of vines impossible to get through without the use of slashers.”³

In his report, Capt. Tatterson, of A Company stated that “during the period of encirclement A Company never flinched and when the opportunity arose gave the enemy more than they expected, The enemy when hit squealed like stuck pigs.”⁴

Meanwhile the 2/3 Independent Company had been doing well, it had discovered that the Japanese were only lightly holding Bobdubi ridge, and drove them off a part of it on May 3, and repulsed attempts to dislodge them. On May 11 a patrol found the ridge abandoned, quickly took it over, and began firing on the enemy positions on the opposite ridge. The Japanese reacted, and a full scale attack forced the Company off the top of the ridge on May 14. Three air attacks followed, there were no Australian casualties, and the third attack hit the Japanese lines.

The Japanese made more air attacks in the following days, Wau airfield being raided on May 17, 22 bombers accompanied by 20 Zero escort bombed and strafed the area. Casualties were light. 200 bombs were dropped, but the airfield was still serviceable. The Brigade HQ had been moved forward from Wau, following instructions from Savige to Moten. There was another air attack on June 6, with two of the bombs dropping on the airfield, but it remained still serviceable.

On May 27 Savige was told to establish a beach head at Nassau Bay where an American battalion would be landed, and the task of reconnoitring Nassau



Wondecla, Qld. 1943-10-06. Group portrait of Officers of the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade. Left to right:- Front row:- Vx51042 Lieutenant L.R. Gordon; Vx44800 Lieutenant R.M. Stewart; Qx4525 Captain V.H. Tutt; Nx101315 Major G.C. Darling; Sx2889 Brigadier M.J. Moten, CBE, DSO, Ed; Dx853 Major S.L.M. Eskell; Vx3805 Captain A.R. Ross; Vx111079 Captain J.F. Kellock; Vx44865 Lieutenant W.B. Proposch. Back row:- Vx10226 Captain K.L. Broughan; Vx35629 Lieutenant T.W. Ashton; Vx52872 Lieutenant J.R. Toone; Vx1554 Lieutenant A.E. Berrisford; Vx15751 Lieutenant J. Syder; Vx27088 Lieutenant H.J. Coughlan; Captain McEwen, Salvation Army.

Bay area and ensuring that the landing would be unopposed was to be given to 17 Brigade. On May 30 a patrol had set out for Duali but couldn't make headway in the jungle and swamp, and that the only way would be along the beach. The War Diary noted that the Duali- Nassau Bay area was one of the worst malarial/elephantiasis areas in New Guinea, that mosquitos bit through shirts and trousers, and that mosquito nets were not always possible to erect at night due to tactical difficulties.

Moten sent out a second reconnaissance under Lt. Burke and Sergt. Ellen on 8 June. This time, hacking their way through the swamp, found a clearing 100 yards from the coast, ran right down to the beach. It was estimated to be

suitable for the American landing craft, provided there was cover provided by a waiting Australian platoon. Burke reported this back, so Moten could now prepare his plans. Two days later, at a meeting attended by General Berryman, the Deputy Chief of Staff; Generals Savige and Herring, and Colonel McKechnie, who would command the 1/162 American Battalion, he outlined the plan for covering the landing and the attack on Mubo.

He saw the operation being carried out in five stages. Firstly, the Americans would establish a beach head at Nassau Bay, and have protective support from the company of 2/6 battalion, clear out any enemy from immediate villages; secondly, the 2/6, with a company from 2/5, would capture Observation Hill and the ridge between Bui Savella and Kitchen Creek, with concurrent capture of Bitoi ridge by the Americans; thirdly, the Americans and 2/6 would capture Green Hill and the Pimple; fourthly, the 2/5 would occupy Mount Tambu, and link up with 15 Brigade, while the final phase would involve clearing the enemy south of the Francisco river.

Moten's plan was agreed to, and he gave McKechnie a copy of Burke's report, and told him of the plans for the American arrival, that Burke and his men would be at the bay on June 29, that bombing and strafing of Duali area would commence, and there would be diversionary action by two Australian platoons to draw the Japanese away from the beach area.

In the meantime Moten had to deal with a determined attempt by the Japanese to capture Labadia Ridge, which lasted three days. Initial exchanges on the afternoon of

June 20 with a patrol saw nine Japanese killed and eleven wounded, with only one Australian injured. Next morning the Japanese attacked again in strength, but were repulsed. Moten ordered reinforcements forward, as the attack increased in intensity. A bayonet attack was halted ten yards from the Australian position, and the men fought with great determination to keep the Japanese at bay. As the attack lessened towards nightfall, the Japanese had lost around 100 killed and wounded, with the Australian casualties were 9 killed and 9 wounded- a tribute to the courage and tenacity of the small band. The struggle continued on June 22, successive attacks being repulsed, 54 being killed or wounded, with just one Australian being killed.

The morning of June 23 saw the Australians have artillery and mortar support, with the mountain guns, which shelled the Pimple and Jap Track area between 9-45 and 11 am, proving particularly effective. By early afternoon the battle for the ridge was over. The Japanese had lost another 20 dead.

It was a notable Australian success, Moten considered it a classic example

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



Wau, New Guinea. 1942-07. Near Crystal Creek. Left to right: Lieutenant Colonel P. D. S. Starr, Brigadier M. J. Moten

of how well dug in, determined troops can resist heavy attacks from a numerically superior enemy. “Our troops in Lababia Base totalled 80 and when joined by C Company of 2/6 Battalion totalled 150. It is conservatively estimated that 750 Japs attacked our perimeter. Our casualties were 11 killed and 12 wounded. Enemy casualties were estimated at 200.”⁷⁵

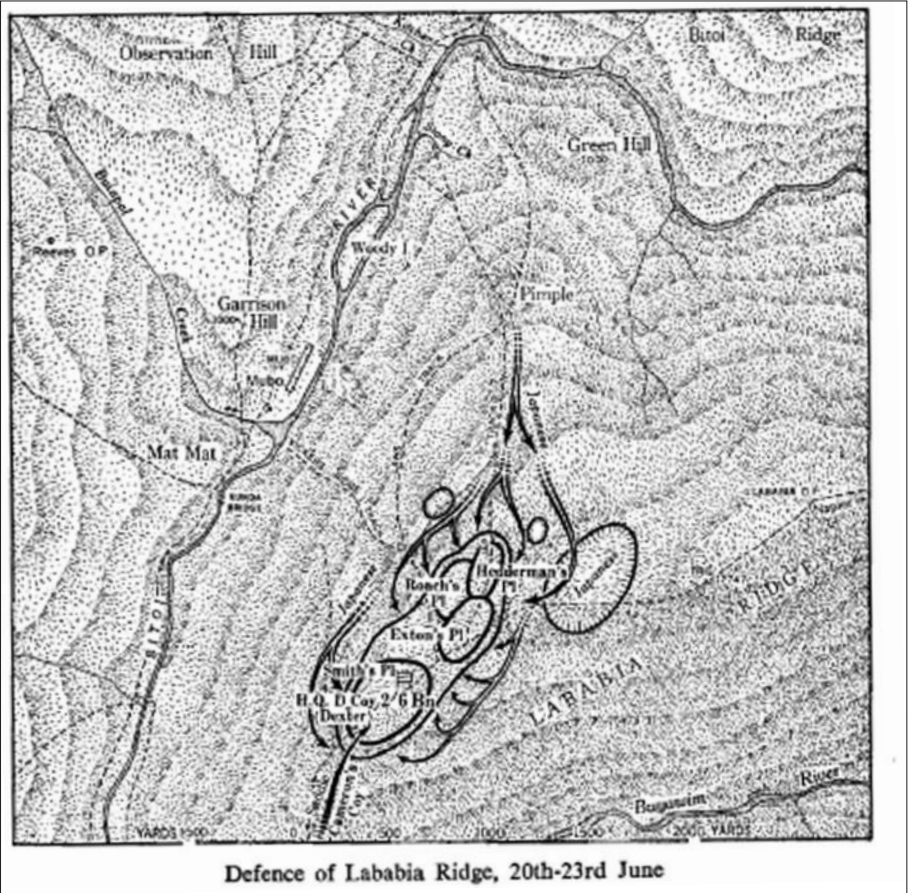
The Americans set out for Nassau Bay on June 28 in poor weather conditions, with rain and heavy waves. On shore the Australians had the prearranged landing lights on for about half an hour before the landing craft started to come in. The landing was a bit of a shambles. The leading PT boat overshot the beach, and had to turn back, in doing so several of the boats carrying the first group got detached, and time was lost. The second group was now arriving, and crossed in front of them, nearly causing a collision. 17 Brigade War Diary for June 30 records-

“At 2100 the following information was received from 41 US Division via 3 Australian Division. Approximately 740 US personnel landed on Nassau Beach prior to 0130 on June 30.....Surf at landing was reported to be 10-12 feet high. 19 LCVs landing in the first two waves, but only one LCV returned to the staging area at Mageri Point. The third wave of 11 LCVs were unable to land, 6 returned to the staging area, 5 are still unaccounted for....There were no casualties during the landing, but much mortar, ammunition, wire and other equipment was lost at sea. Radio sets were submerged and not operating”

Moten did not know what was happening during the landing because of the damaged radio sets. The Australian patrol, long used to battle conditions, which had set up the landing lights, had to tell several Americans to stop smoking and talking loudly and to get them off the beach and into defensive positions. On June 30 American companies moved northward. A platoon came under fire, and lost four men killed. The men returned to the beach. That night, they apparently thought they were being attacked and in the darkness, there was indiscriminate firing, resulting in 18 Americans killed, and 27 wounded.

The battalion commander only managed to land on July 1, and the Americans had done little patrolling to locate the enemy, McKechnie complained of his force being the victim of “considerable misfortune”. General Savage was annoyed at the situation on the beach, and instructed Moten to issue orders to McKechnie as to one of his own commanders, and to report any failure on McKechnie’s part to obey orders. He also urged General Fuller, commanding U.S. 41st Division, to tell McKechnie his forward elements must begin to move from the beachhead to the assembly area.

“The scanty reports received by Savage and Moten under emphasised the



Map, Dexter, New Guinea Offensives, p78 ©AWM

actual confusion at the beach head. Moten had attempted to ring McKechnie at Nassau Bay on the night of 1st July. A long conversation ensued with the American signaller at the end of the line, the gist being that he could not fetch McKechnie because anyone who moved would be shot, and in any case he was closing down about 9 pm as soon as he had heard the BBC news.”⁷

A headquarters and supply area still had not been established by July 2, and troops and supplies were still at the beach head. 17 Brigade War Diary noted—“they appeared to be very slow in starting and had dug in with a small perimeter. They appeared reluctant to start anything until their artillery and remainder of infantry arrived.”⁸ Japanese bombers strafed Nassau Bay that

afternoon, but little damage was caused. The headquarters and three companies began to move out towards Napier on July 3, assisted by the 2/6th, but they were slow, carrying a lot of gear and, unlike the Australians, not used to hard jungle marches.

That day a battery of the U.S.218th Field Artillery Regiment, and other detachments arrived at Nassau Bay, and spirits were lifted as the guns began shelling enemy positions. The American strength was now 109 officers and 1648 men. A jeep track to the assembly area had to be constructed, but tractors and bulldozers got bogged down in the mud, and Savige told Moten to get the Americans working with picks and shovels.

This provoked a tirade from McKechnie, who told Moten the loss of over half his landing craft and not being able to get men, guns and supplies in on schedule had held him up severely. He didn't think it tactically sound, with Japanese around, to leave his base, in order to have all his troops 8-10 miles inland, with no supplies. Troops at the assembly area would be out of rations next day, and there were no native carriers available to him. "To be very frank we have been in a very precarious position down here for several days and my sending the rifle troops inland was contrary to my better judgement". He said that troops had gone inland "stripped to the bone", without heavy weapons, mortar and machine gun ammunition. "Therefore, these troops are in no position to embark on an offensive mission until we are able to get food, weapons and additional ammunition up to them" General Fuller had advised him not to embark on offensive operations unless adequately supported by artillery and heavy weapons, "I must advise you at this time that it will be impossible for me to comply with the orders as they now stand".⁹ He suggested the orders be changed, that he could not and would not sacrifice lives to meet a time schedule, and did not plan to leave the beach until it was secure and supplies were adequate.

Moten forwarded the letter to Savige, and told McKechnie that arrangements were being made to drop supplies to Col. Taylor at the assembly area on July 5. He told McKechnie that Bitoi ridge was not occupied by anyone except Australian patrols, who were waiting for the Americans to take over. Heavy machine guns could not be used up there, but mortars would be useful. The one good thing emerging was that McKechnie consented to Moten dealing direct with Col. Taylor. Moten arranged for 100 boy loads of ammunition from the beach and 1000 rations from 17th Brigade to be delivered to Taylor.

But Moten suggested to Savige that General Fuller should be asked to send an officer to relieve McKechnie of responsibility for organisation at the beach.

Savidge spoke to General Herring, and then replied to Moten:- “ I have placed McKechnie under your command, and he must obey orders and instructions issued by you” Savidge began to get on well with McKechnie, and it was actually Fuller himself that McKechnie fell foul of later.

- ¹ Murray Moten, February 1948.
- ² Gavin Keating, *The Right Man For The Job*, 1996.
- ³ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/86.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/86.
- ⁶ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/88.
- ⁷ Dexter, *New Guinea Offensives*. p102.
- ⁸ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/172/89.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



AWM 093956 - Ulupu, New Guinea, 1945-07-10. Brigadier M.J. Moten, Commanding Officer, 17 Infantry Brigade (1), speaking to Private L.T. Donchi (2), and Private D.G. Rewell (3), member of 16 Platoon, D Company, 215 Infantry Battalion. The men are enjoying two days' rest after their success in destroying the Japanese position on the main Ulupu Ridge.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Operation Doublet

17 Brigade was to be the main advance force in Operation Doublet, which was to capture the Japanese stronghold of Mubo and link up with the advancing Americans from Nassau Bay. Australians and Americans would then advance to take Mount Tambu. While the plans for the operation intended attacks by the Americans on the coastal side and 15 Brigade, the main thrust would be from Moten's men.

He had intended to start on July 5, but delays with getting the American battalion inland, the start was delayed by two days. In the first phase, he had three companies, A and B Companies from 2/6 Battalion, and C Company from 2/5 involved, their objective to take Observation Hill, which overlooked Mubo. At 0840 on July 7 A Company under Capt. Stewart, moved to the starting position, followed by C Company under Captain Morse at 1040, and B Company under Captain Gullett at 1100. Moten sent a message expressing his complete confidence in their ability to take Observation Hill and open the road to Salamaua.

A heavy air strike on Observation Hill and adjacent areas by Mitchells, Liberators and Fortresses began at 0930 and was reported to be faultless. "The spectacle as witnessed from the dropping ground on Guadagascal ridge was most impressive. The entire Mubo valley was enveloped in a thick pall of smoke a few minutes after the strike commenced, broken only by sheets of flame flashing across the valley as the Liberators dropped their heavy loads. All bombs, with the exception of four which by some unexplained mishap were dropped in the Buisaval river behind Guadagascal ridge, were in the target area, and it seemed impossible that anything could live through that terrific bombardment. Approximately 120 aircraft, including escort and the irrepressible Wirraway were in the air over the Mubo area at the one time and over 100 tons of bombs were dropped. The bombing and strafing ceased at 1040 with the dropping of three signal flares."¹ Moten and his HQ had a grandstand seat on Guadagascal ridge where every phase of the attack could

be observed.

The American Taylor Force had commenced moving from the River Junction at 0700, and were on the rear slopes of Bitoi ridge by 1500. Gullett reached his first objective by 1340, without opposition, and reported that Morse had also met no opposition. But Stewart, who was to capture the southern slope of Observation Hill, met heavy enemy fire. He captured one position, but was halted by another a short distance further on at 1730, and having had a man killed, and three wounded, decided to hold for the night. One of Morse's patrols had a brief encounter with the enemy at 1630, killing five.

Moten considered that all told, the day's operations were most successful.

Next day the companies were engaged in skirmishes with the enemy, but had not made much head way. Ten Japanese were killed. During a morning air strike, one of the Australian positions was accidentally bombed and strafed, one man was killed, and the bridge over the Bitoi destroyed. The pressure began to tell, however, and by 11th there were signs that there were signs that the enemy were withdrawing. Next day this was clear. A platoon of the 2/5th passed through many defensive positions just an abandoned. Three large huts and food not long opened were found. Further on a large camp with accommodation for 700, and freshly cooked food, indicating a hasty withdrawal. The Pimple area, which had long been a problem, was also found to be abandoned, 25 pill boxes and 50 weapon pits were found.

The Americans directed artillery fire against Japanese positions on high ground at the head of the Bui Kumbul on the morning of July 13, to deadly effect. The American companies reported finding hundreds of Japanese dead. A very happy Moten sent the message to Divisional headquarters, in cricket parlance- "WOODY is clean bowled 0900; GREEN HILL 1140; Yanks now batting on the BUIGAP; no further scores to luncheon adjournment."²

General Herring knew he needed a coastal base for supply to the 3rd Division, and to which he could bring in more artillery to use against the Japanese, who feared artillery more than anything. Tambu Bay was the only place suitable where artillery could be positioned and shell the Japanese positions at Salamaua. They could not be brought up the jungle tracks from Mubo. He met McArthur on July 3 and got his permission to get another battalion of 162nd Regiment for the move. Two days later he met General Fuller, of the 41st American Division, and General Savage, and discussed the plan to move this battalion along the coast, and put artillery there. Since Fuller was responsible for supplying McKechnie Force operating under Moten, and men intended to move up the coast, allied to the fact that Savage had his

impression the new battalion would be under his command, and that coastal operations would be directed by the 3rd Australian Division. However Fuller was clear about what was decided, and to his artillery commander, Brigadier General Coane, who had been appointed to lead the American advance up the coast, he stated he would have command “of all troops in the Nassau Bay-Mageri Point-Morobe area, exclusive of McKechnie Force,” and “be prepared to conduct operations north as directed by G.O.C, New Guinea Force, through this headquarters”³.

Savige sought clarification of the position on July 12, and, Herring stated “for clarification of all concerned, all units of Mack Force are under operational control of 3 Australian Division” Savige seems to have taken it to mean that his division commanded all of 162 Regiment, not merely McKechnie Force. In the coming days, this was to cause a lot of difficulties in the ensuing few days, and particularly for Murray Moten.

On July 8 Major Archibald Roosevelt had arrived with the third Battalion of 162 Regiment at Nassau Bay. Born in 1894, he was son of former President Theodore Roosevelt, and cousin to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He had fought in World War 1, which he was wounded. After Pearl Harbor he had sought a return to the army, and President Roosevelt had given him a commission early in 1943. A very opinionated individual, he would after the war, be associated with right wing groups such as the John Birch Society.

Moten was quickly to feel the brunt of his wrath. Savige had planned a move to the north, and put Roosevelt under Moten’s command. On receiving orders from Moten, he issued a frosty response-

“Regret cannot comply with your request through McKechnie Force dated July 14, as I have no such orders from my commanding officer. As a piece of friendly advice your plans show improper reconnaissance and lack of logistical understanding. Suggest you send competent liaison officer to my headquarters soon as possible to study situation. For your information I obey no orders except those from my immediate superior.”⁴

He also contacted General Fuller-

“I received orders by 17 Australian Brigade that I was assigned to 3 Australian Division. I also received orders from 17 Australian Brigade to perform a certain tactical mission and have informed them that I am under command of 41 Division and will not obey any of their instructions. If you are not in accordance with this action request that I be relieved of command of III Battalion. In my opinion the orders show lamentable lack of intelligence and knowledge of situation and it is possible disgrace or disaster may be the result

of their action.”⁵

Savige told McKechnie and Roosevelt that the instructions were that Roosevelt’s battalion was under the command of McKechnie force, at present under the command of Brigadier Moten. Roosevelt’s reply was haughty-“ I do not recognise this signature. I take orders only from the commanding general of 41 U.S. Division and will be careful hereafter to certify his signature”⁶. On receipt of this, Savige wrote to General Herring that there was “a confused and impossible situation which makes it impossible to co ordinate operations. The position as understood at this headquarters is that the Roosevelt combat team has been placed under operational control of 3 Australian Division for employment on the coast north of Nassau bay. Roosevelt now refuses to obey orders issued by McKechnie.... Matter of most urgent operational necessity that clarification of operational command of Roosevelt combat team be made and that Roosevelt be informed accordingly by 41 U.S.Division.”⁷

McKechnie told Moten that confusion was due to 3 Australian Division and 17 Brigade not having received copy of instruction due to communication difficulties. He also apologised for Roosevelt’s replies, paid tribute to co operation between U.S. and Australians, and hoping that Moten would recognise the difficulties Roosevelt had been put in due to the confusion in command situation. Herring consulted General Fuller’s Chief of Staff, and then told Savige that “41 Division desires that McKechnie retain control of American troops moving inland and agrees that this force should operate under operational control of Moten as in the past, 41 US Div has sent Brig.Coane to control ops for coastal operations. In view of the rapidly changing situation this force forthwith under operational control of 3 Division”⁸.

David Dexter has written – “In his earnest attempt to maintain cordial Australian – American relations and to seek a formula satisfactory to Australians and Americans, Herring had the ill-fortune to have his orders misunderstood by his Australian divisional commander”⁹. But whatever Savige’s misunderstanding, the arrogance of Roosevelt, only back in uniform a few months and newly arrived in New Guinea, is breathtaking. Moten, when he met General Berryman on August 9, told him that Savige was having to fight Herring as well as the Americans.

Gavin Keating, in his study of Savige, says- “A close study of the two critical complaints made against Savige, that he misunderstood the instructions concerning the objective of his operations and the command authority over the Americans, suggests that these could more properly be directed towards Herring and his headquarters” He went on to state- “In fact, it would seem that

Herring, Savage's immediate superior, was himself largely responsible for these troubles and conflicts. In the final analysis, Herring's failure to provide firm and clear instructions created confusion and mistrust when they were least needed. Perhaps the greatest criticism that could be levelled against Herring and his headquarters was that they failed to visit the forward area, and therefore failed to appreciate the conditions"¹⁰. Herring resigned his command of 1 Australian Corps in February 1944 to become Chief Justice of Victoria.

Following this, Savage laid out Coane's role. It was to secure a bridgehead at Tambu Bay by sending companies north from the coast; having secured the bridgehead, to land the rest of Roosevelt's men and artillery, and have artillery target the Komiatum area/ Coane was to maintain close liaison with Moten, and a liaison officer, Captain Sturrock, was sent by Savage to Coane's H.Q.

Attacks by two American companies on July 22 on what was known as Roosevelt ridge were unsuccessful, and the companies fell back to their original position, and again on 24 July. Captain Sturrock was having difficulty fulfilling his role. Roosevelt was still intractable, resenting any Australian suggestion or advice. Sturrock reported that the only way he could get information was by listening to phone conversations at the battalion H.Q. "The organisation at battalion Headquarters stinks. If the show continues as it is now going I cannot see them getting very far."¹¹ Australians were further annoyed by Roosevelt planning and carrying out a landing on Labadia island, without authority or cooperation of 3 Division, which considered occupation of Labadia neither desirable or necessary.

Moten's instructions were to engage and destroy the enemy around Komiatum. The first task, using 2/5th battalion, was to take Mount Tambu. On the afternoon of July 16 A Company captured the lower slope, which had pill boxes and weapon pits. During the night the enemy made six counter attacks, using mortars and machine guns. A searchlight from Salamaua directed the attacks. It was estimated that 120 mortar bombs were thrown. Enemy dead during the night were estimated at 30. Early next morning D Company arrived to support, bringing fresh supplies and ammunition, and 3 inch mortars. The enemy again attacked that afternoon, but were repulsed. Supported by the mortars, and mountain guns, A company cleared out an enemy pocket, and gained another 100 yards. According to the War Diary, enemy casualties were now estimated as 82 killed and many wounded, while Australian casualties were 6 killed and 13 wounded.

Early on July 19, after torrential rain, the enemy mounted an attack on D Company's position, but failed, leaving 21 dead. A further attack was launched



Goodview, New Guinea, 1943-08-10. The General Officer Commanding, 3rd Australian Division, observing Japanese positions in the Komiatum Area from A "D" Company forward observation post. Left to right:- Vx:12728 Sergeant J. W. Hedderman DCM MM, 2/6th Battalion; Vx:3829 Captain H. L. Laver, Officer Commanding "D" Company, 2/6th Battalion; Vx:166 Lieutenant Colonel F. G. Wood DSO; Sx:2889 Brigadier M. J. Moten CBE, DSO, ED, Commanding 17th Australian Infantry Brigade; Vx:13 Major General S. G. Savige CB, CBE, DSO, MC, ED, General Officer, Commanding, 3rd Australian Division.

in the afternoon at 1500hrs. D Company moved up to support A Company, while a company of Col. Taylor's Americans took over their position. The enemy were estimated to be at battalion strength. Again after a fierce battle they were repulsed. They were estimated to have suffered 350 casualties, while the Australians lost 14 killed and 25 wounded.

Moten sent a congratulatory message Lieut. Col. Conroy of 2/5- "Please convey to Capt. Walters, O.C. A Company and the men of A Company my sincere congratulations on their magnificent defence of Mount Tambu. The success of our future operations against Salamaua depends on our retaining Mount Tambu, and if this were to pass back into enemy hands much of the good work of the Australian and American troops in the Mubo area would have

been nullified. We are proud to know A Company 2/5 Battalion”

Over the next few days patrols probed enemy positions in the area, and from these it was learned that the Japanese were firming and extending their defences. Savage told Moten that artillery would shortly be on the coast, and not to make any advance without it. Artillery did fire on Mount Tambu early on 24th, and attempts were made again to capture it, but without success. Moten was at the front line on July 26, and was amazed at how his troops had got so far, and considered the terrain rougher even than Mubo. The enemy had many pillboxes and it would take heavy artillery shelling to dislodge them. On his return he planned another attack by the American Taylor Force, to take place on July 30.

That morning artillery again shelled the area prior to the attack. Again the Japanese could not be dislodged from their strong position. 20 Japanese were killed, while the Americans suffered five killed and 35 wounded. Because of the failure of the attack, 3 Division felt that the enemy positions on Mount Tambu be isolated and their supply reinforcement line cut.

¹ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/89.

² Ibid.

³ David Dexter, *The New Guinea Offences*.

⁴ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/89.

⁵ Dexter, *op. cit.*

⁶ Keating, *op. cit.*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dexter, *op. cit.*

⁹ Dexter, *op. cit.* p40.

¹⁰ Keating, *op. cit.*

¹¹

CHAPTER TWELVE

Taking Mount Tambu

General Savige went to Moten's headquarters and after discussing the situation with him issued an outline plan to take Komiatum and isolate Mount Tambu by an encircling 17 Brigade movement. The 42nd Battalion from 29th Brigade, which had recently arrived, would be part of this, completing the encirclement by occupying Davidson Ridge. It was envisaged that US Coane Force would take Roosevelt Ridge, and 15th Brigade would carry out supportive offensive operations in their area.

Moten's troops were carrying out extensive patrols, endeavouring to find a suitable route to Komiatum. "Moten realised that he must block not only Komiatum Ridge but also the other two ridges which led north and north east from Mount Tambu."¹ He himself moved his headquarters from Guadagascal on August 2 to the junction of Bui Eo and Buigap creeks, which brought him about 500 yards of the Japanese held ,

Meanwhile on August 4 the 2/5 Battalion had engaged in a day long fight with the enemy at Goodview Junction. 28 Japanese were killed, and 7 Australians, before the 2/5 were forced to withdraw after heavy counter attacks. Four of the 2/5 deaths had unfortunately resulted from a wayward mortar fire aimed at enemy pillboxes but landed in their forward position. It was becoming clear that the enemy were intent on strengthening their position in the area.

On August 9 Moten issued instructions for the operations of the newly arrived 42nd Battalion. The intention was for it to defend the ridge east of Komiatum Ridge and the line of control Mount Tambu to Boisi. The tasks were –"to prevent supplies and reinforcements reaching the enemy in the Mount Tambu area from the North east or North, and to prevent his escape from that area; to establish and maintain contact with the enemy in the Mount Tambu area, and to prevent his movement from Mount Tambu to the North or North east without our knowledge; by aggressive patrolling towards Mount Tambu constantly harrass the enemy to protect the West and South West flank of the TambuBay beach head, and protect the line of control from Tambu Bay to Mount Tambu. Occupation of the ridge East of Komiatum to be made as

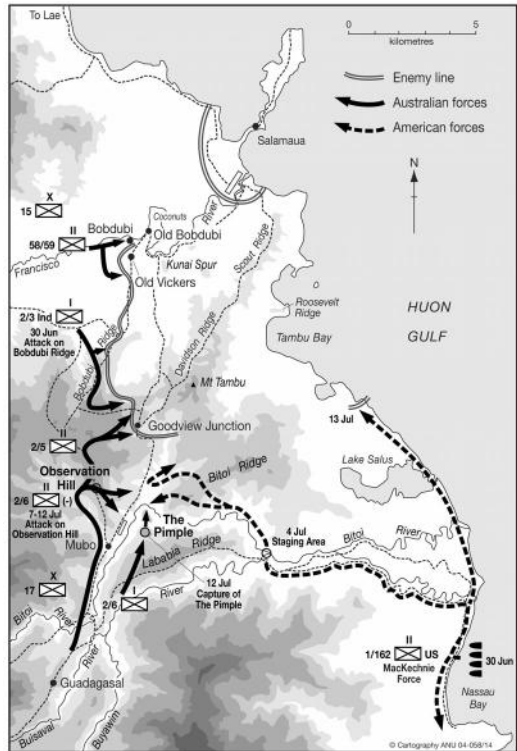
silently as possible to prevent the enemy from discovering the ridge was occupied.”²² He assigned D Company from 2/5th Battalion to assist in siting weapons, preparation of defences, and patrolling.

The 42nd were on the move early on the morning of August 11 for the objective, Davidson Ridge, and next day had dug in, two companies on the ridge itself and two more at the junction of Davidson and Scout Ridges.

Savage visited Moten on August 6, and at the meeting Moten outlined his plans to clear the enemy from Mount Tambu-Goodview Junction area. Savage gave his approval to the plans, with the attack scheduled for August 15. Moten and Savage went forward on August 10 to Goodview Junction, viewing the terrain from all vantage points. They discussed with Lt. Col. Wood, 2/6 Battalion C.O, the difficulties troops were having in getting a suitable route into Komiatum. Savage and Moten went over the plans again on the evening of August 12, which Savage later wrote: “were knocked into shape by the by the fifth member of my team, the invaluable Wilton.”²³

Through early August the battalions patrolled and had skirmishes with the Japanese. From what was learned from these patrols, Moten was able to issue his orders on August 12, the 17th Brigade would encircle and destroy the enemy through capture of Komiatum Ridge, simultaneously keeping pressure on the enemy from the south, with the Americans taking Roosevelt Ridge. The attack was now to commence on August 16.

The plan envisaged the 2/6 Battalion having the main task of taking the



Map Courtesy of Lt. Col Gavin Keating



Goodview, New Guinea. 1943-08-10. Senior officers on the track to Drakes Observation Post. They are:- Sx2889 Brigadier M. J. Moten CBE DSO ED, Commanding, 17th Australian Infantry Brigade (Left); Vx13 Major General S. G. Savage CB CBE DSO MC ED; General Officer Commanding 3rd Australian Division (right).

south end of Komiatum Ridge; 42nd Battalion, supported by 2/5 battalion, were to hold Davidson Ridge, prevent the enemy getting supplies or reinforcements, give machine gun support to the 2/6, and guard the track from Boisi to Mount Tambu.

The II/162nd American Battalion had a tremendous success on 13-14 August, driving the Japanese from Roosevelt Ridge, killing about 120. This attack saw the first use of Bofors anti aircraft guns in the campaign, proving very effective in destroying enemy pill boxes in advance of the advancing troops.

The attack got off to a great start, two companies of 2/6, moving along the newly discovered track to Komiatum, attacked at 0600, and within an hour had secured their objective. Artillery support had been very effective, with 500 rounds being fired in the half hour prior to the attack. With Komiatum falling, the Japanese who occupied the ridge made counter attacks over the next few days, but were repulsed. Artillery fire again proved effective and on August

19, the American battalion took Mount Tambu unopposed.

17 Brigade continued to engage the enemy. 2/7 Battalion were deeply involved in the Osborne Creek area. One company on June 21 captured 25 weapon pits, but their second attack ran up against well defended pill boxes. The battalion also engaged with the enemy at the junction of Komiatum-Bobdubi- Salamaua tracks. The Japanese were reported to be fighting their withdrawal step by step, and suffering heavy losses. A Company of 2/7 were on the track next day, and some of the Battalion were reported to be within 1000 yards of Salamaua airfield.

On June 23 2/6 Battalion commenced their long march out from Goodview to Tambu Bay. The War Diary noted – “The Battalion presented a unique sight as they carried out what was probably one of the strangest sights in military history, that is, an entire Battalion marching in single file. For the most part, men travelled light although souvenirs of Jap origin were much in evidence. Morale was in most cases high and the men felt that they had earned a breathing spell after a terrific job well done. For seven months those men had been almost continually in touch with the enemy.”⁴

General Savige sent a message to Moten- “I am in receipt of a signal from the Cin C and GOC, NGF, conveying satisfaction and congratulations to all ranks involved in recent operations. The successful action in defeating the enemy in the Mount Tambu- Goodview Junction area was accomplished by the veteran Australian 17 Infantry Brigade within its immediate area. It was aided considerably by the successful preliminary action on Roosevelt Ridge by 162 US Regiment and on the Coconuts by 15 Aust. Inf. Brigade. This aid was strengthened further by the splendid fighting of 15 Australian Brigade in their actions designed to provide strong supporting aid during the battle. 1 Battalion battalion, 162 US Regiment fulfilled an important role in containing the enemy in the Mount Tambu area from which they jostled him. The support of 42 Battalion, 29 Australian Infantry Brigade to Laver Force is praiseworthy. The gunners played a worthy part in smashing enemy forward defences and harrassing enemy forward areas and rear installations day and night. Engineer parties supporting infantry in forward areas and those on track construction helped considerably.....Should any credit be mine I owe it to their commands and their staffs for their brilliant leadership and unstinted co operation, and to my troops for their determined fighting and endurance of hardship s far beyond that which any man should be expected to endure. The honour is yours and I thank you all for the loyalty, skill and self sacrifice you have given.”⁵

in support of 3rd division- delivering a total 1996 tons of bombs. The large build up of artillery in July, which included two US artillery battalions and one Australian battery, necessitated the formation of a centralised command that became a component part of the divisional headquarters. The 2,510 round fire plan designed to support Moten's attacks against Komiatum and Mount Tambu, so essential to the infantry's success, was planned by this element. The complex logistical requirements to support the fighting, including thousands of native carriers, air transport, parachute drops and sea supplies, were also all centrally controlled through Savage's headquarters. The detailed tactical planning may have been conducted at Brigade level and below, but the coordination so critical to success was a divisional responsibility."⁶

17 Brigade were to get a respite from the New Guinea campaigns. On September 20 they sailed from Milne Bay. For the first time in fifty weeks they were going back to Australia. Moten was not with them, he was suffering from malaria and was hospitalised at Milne Bay. The troops landed in Queensland on September 23, and went into camp in Wondecla. Then in mid October they were given 24 days leave, to commence from the day that they reached the Leave and Transit Depot in the capital city of their home state. It was leave well earned.

The Brigade were accorded the honour of a march through the streets of Melbourne on November 18. "Rarely has Melbourne turned out in such force for a march" commented *The Australasian* on November 27, "as the famous 17th Brigade marched through the city streets in bright sunshine. Wearing green jungle uniforms and khaki felt hats, these great fighters (who have fought in every theatre of war where Australians have been engaged, with the exception of Malaya) presented a colourful and stirring spectacle, and the crowd, stirred to rare enthusiasm, reacted to the spectacle with wholehearted cheering and applause". Lord Gowrie, the Governor General, took the salute at the Town Hall.

Always the student of military matters, Moten wrote a report on the lessons learned by 17 Brigade in the Wau- Salamaua area from April 23 to August 24. In it he noted that the Jap invariably selected high ground for his defensive perimeters. The area selected was usually on a razor back ridge which made, by terrain alone, any attack except a frontal attack extremely difficult. Automatic weapons formed the basis of his defensive fire. These were always well sited and were mutually supportive.

"On Mount Tambu it was observed that some riflemen were used as a mobile reserve within the perimeter which being hard pressed by our troops.



With General Savage marching through Melbourne, November 1943. AWM 134886.

Fields of fire are cut, but only sufficient growth is cut to make fire and observation possible. These fields of fire are therefore not obvious to reconnaissance patrols, but by experience our troops have learned to look for, locate and avoid the thinned out undergrowth in these fire lanes.

It is not unusual to find barricades built around defensive perimeters. Attacking troops, when encountering these barricades, naturally tend to move around each end. Each end of these barricades are covered by automatic weapons. The Jap did not use light or heavy mortars to any extent throughout the campaign. This may be due to difficulties encountered by him in moving these heavy weapons and his inability to maintain adequate supplies of mortar bombs. When mortars were employed, they were used spasmodically and appeared to be fired at random.

The Jap is an untiring worker and devotes much time and labour in the preparation of his positions. Overhead cover is invariably provided for all weapon pits, which are reinforced by logs. These are commonly known as "pill boxes" which is really a misnomer. These strong weapon pits resist a direct hit by a 3" mortar bomb. All weapon pits are connected by communication

trenches.

In the Mount Tambu area, where the Japs were subjected to heavy and consistent mortar fire, the overhead cover on weapon pits comprised of up to four layers of heavy logs. Dug outs were also developed, the weapon pits in the FDL having sleeping quarters 8 ft. below the surface. A Jap HQ had elaborately constructed living quarters and office some 20 ft. below the surface. Many one man weapon pits were cleverly sited in the roots of large trees. The likelihood of such weapon pits being hit by artillery or mortars is extremely small.

The Jap showed no tendency to an aggressive defence. Once in a position he was content to remain in his defences, and made little use of fighting and recce patrols. On the larger scale the Jap defences were broken at Mubo and Mount Tambu for the following reasons-

(a) Lack of depth in his defences.

(b) Failure to secure his flanks and L of C. He relied on the mountainous and seemingly impenetrable nature of the country to afford natural protection. His defeat has proven that there is no such thing as impassable country to determined men.

(c) Failure to adequately overcome the difficult Q. problems. At all times the Jap appeared to have an abundance of ammunition, but very little food, medical supplies or ordnance stores.

(d) By cutting off his supplies by the occupation of positions astride his L of C the enemy was forced to abandon his well prepared defensive positions and come out into comparatively open country to fight.

(e) Our troops gained a moral ascendancy over the Japanese in the early fighting at Wau in January and this was retained throughout. They were better trained and equipped than the Jap. They had complete mastery of their weapons, were skilfully led by their junior leaders, were keen, imaginative and quick “on the draw”, their jungle craft had been learned in a hard school of bitter experiences and had risen to a high pitch of efficiency. In combat with the Jap our men were ruthless and merciless. The Jap knew this and feared them.”

¹ Dexter, New Guinea Offensives, chap.7

² AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/89.

³ Keating, op. cit.

⁴ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/89.

⁵ Savage to Moten.

⁶ Keating, op. cit.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Final Campaign

Moten was on unspecified service over the next few months, making several trips to New Guinea. The malaria again returned, and he was hospitalised from January 24 to February 10. On his return from New Guinea he was assigned to the training camp at Wondecla, in Queensland.

For his outstanding service in New Guinea the previous year, he was honoured with C.B.E. (military division) on April 27, 1944. The official notice read “His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to appoint the undermentioned officer to be “Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire”, C.B.E., for great leadership of Command- SX2889 Col. (T.Brig.) M.J.Moten, DSO, ED)”

The E.D. (Efficiency Decoration) is a distinction introduced in 1892 by Queen Victoria, awarded for a minimum of 20 years service. Moten had been awarded the D.S.O. in February 1942 for the Syria campaign with the 2/27th Battalion, and in May 1943 had been awarded a Bar to it for service in New Guinea.

Three days earlier, on April 24, Major General Berryman, Commander of 2 Aust.Corps, had written to congratulate Moten on the 17th Brigade performance in the Mubo- Salamaua area, having read Moten’s report for April – August 1943. “In my opinion the experience of 17 Inf. Brigade in operations with a long L of C in mountainous country with very little artillery support, mark a definite stage in the progressive and successful application of our tactical teaching. The report gives examples of successful and unsuccessful company attacks and shows the great value of a company fighting it out in a defensive position, even when surrounded for several days. The defeat of the enemy forces at Mubo and Mount Tambu – Goodview Junction, show in methodical progression, the necessary steps in preparation, planning and execution”¹.

He was recalled to New Guinea at the beginning of November 1944, arriving at Aitape on November 16. The jungle training school which he had organised for November 6-9 had to be cancelled. On arrival at Aitape he went

to the Divisional HQ for talks. According to the war diary, the enemy at this time had been cleared from the coastal area west of the Danap river and were now based along the coastal area from Danap river to Wewak and Sepik. They were known to patrol south of the Torricelli mountains, but their morale was described as low, and food position in some areas desperate. The 6th Australian Division were taking over from the 43 US in December.

General Stevens had set up the Divisional HQ at Aitape on November 8, and issued general instructions. The 19th Brigade were to relieve a regiment of the 43rd US on the Drimimour, while the 17th would relieve units of 43rd, with 16th held in reserve. On November 23 he submitted plans to cut the enemy line of communication, and drive them from east of the Danmap. 17th, while occupying main line of resistance for local defence of Aitape and Tadj, would when sufficient troops were available, would relieve 2/7 squadron at Tong, and patrol east to Mesu.

To firmly secure the Tong area, Moten set up Piper Force, under Major McBride. Its task was to relieve 2/7 squadron, ensure that the Tong area was rid of enemy and establish bases at Musimbe and Musu. It included two companies of 2/5 Battalion, and Moten told McBride “to keep his force mobile, make good use of air support and not become involved in set piece attacks”². It set out on December 16, and despite flooded rivers, was at Tong on December 20.

It had its first contact with the enemy on December 27, when a patrol came on a party of Japs who were foraging in a native area, and killed 15 of the 17. On December 30 another patrol killed 3 Japs, and no casualties were suffered in either incident. Meanwhile back at Brigade camp at Aitape, troops didn't get their usual Christmas dinner on December 25, as the supplies of turkey and ham failed to arrive. “However, the cooks made a very creditable effort with what foodstuffs were available, two bottles of beer per man were issued”³. Officers as traditional acted as waiters for the men. Comfort fund hampers were issued later in the day.

Next day there was a ceremonial guard of honour for the departing commander of the U.S. 172 Infantry Regiment, Colonel George E. Bush. He sent a letter of thank to Moten- “Now the time has come for the departure from this station of 172nd Infantry Regiment, I wish to thank you and your commnd for the many services you have rendered us. Believe me, sir, the association has been most pleasant and it is my hope that it may be renewed again in the near future. You have my assurance that if I or the members of this Regiment can, at some time or in some way, be of assistance, we should consider it a



AWM 128792 - Construction of the airstrip at Hayfield, New Guinea, by pioneers of the 2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion with help of about 200 natives. 1945. Picture from John and Anne Moten

privilege to do so.

The members of 172nd Infantry Regiment join me again in wishing you and the members of 17th Australian Infantry Brigade a pleasant and victorious New Year.”⁴

As 1945 dawned, the Japanese strength in the Torricellis was estimated to be between 1800 and 2100 men. The biggest concentration was around Perembil, where an estimated 800 were believed to be. 2/5 Battalion of 17th Brigade, under Lt. Colonel Buttrose, had the task of dealing with them. At Perembil, the enemy had a strong position on a ridge which could only be approached up a steep slope. Capt. Cameron led a company against it on January 3, and succeeded in driving them out. However, the enemy made counter attacks, before being finally repulsed, leaving 19 dead. The company had one man wounded.

The attack had been aided by an air strike and mortar fire. Concern had been expressed that air strikes could alienate friendly natives. 2/5 Battalion were informed that the pilots were aware of the presence of friendly natives, and that they would not take offensive action where there was a possibility of hitting such natives or huts. Permission was given to pilots to fire only on

enemy sighted during missions.

With supply becoming a problem- only one aircraft was available to drop supplies- Moten told Buttrose that until the supply position improved, the Battalion was to adopt a defensive attitude, with aggressive patrolling. A patrol through Sumil on January 8 killed 20 Japs. Another patrol near Asiling killed three. Natives killed five Japanese also. An air strike was poor, only burning two huts. Six Japanese were killed by a patrol on January 10.

That day Moten attended a demonstration by 2/6 Battalion to show effectiveness of 2" mortar flares and incendiary grenades for illuminating an area forward of defensive locality. Flares could be fired by electric content in parallel or series, or by cord control on trip wire principle. Moten thought the flares were of value and could be used. On January 12, with the supply chain improving,- an extra plane had been put on -Moten told Buttrose to establish contact with commandos in the Hambrini area, and to advance south of the Amuk river, to the Nanu river and Peinandu. Patrols could move in to the deep south.

From January 18 patrols were making contact with the enemy and inflicting losses. 6 were killed by a patrol on January 19, 7 including two officers on January 20, and 14 killed on January 24. The patrols were aided by strikes by Beaufort bombers. Unfortunately two of these crashed into each other on January 23, with nine of the ten crew members being killed.

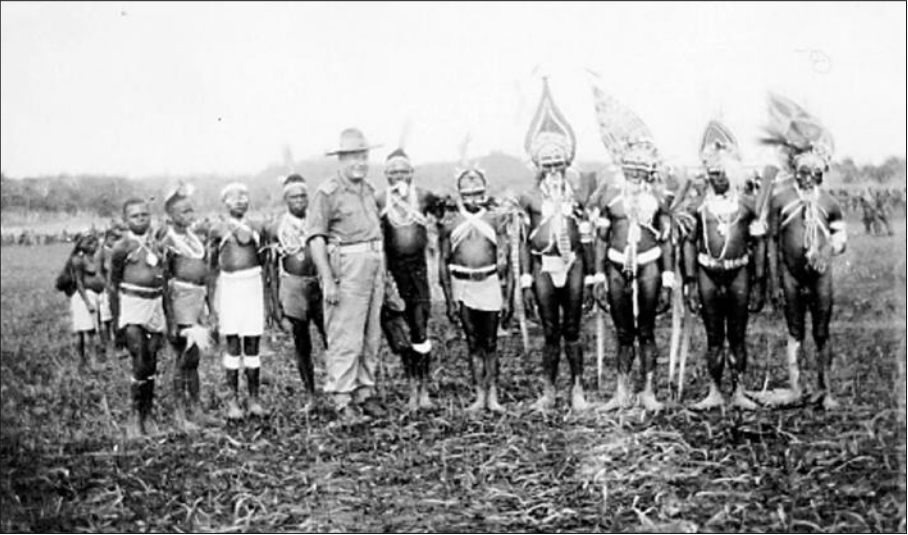
From 6th Australian Division headquarters, Major General Stevens wrote to Moten-

"I am very impressed and pleased with the work of your 2/5 Australian Infantry Battalion. The manner in which it has gone about its task, the damage it has inflicted on the enemy at a negligible cost and the successes it has achieved in co operation with the RAAF point to sound control, careful planning and a high morale.

I would like you to pass on to Colonel Buttrose and his unit my sincere congratulations and thanks and my best wishes for further successes."⁵

Moten stated on February 1 that the intention was to maintain advance until Salata, Balif and Mumango village areas were cleared, then switch south towards Sinahu area. Patrols were to be maintained from the west to Apos villages area, till such time as a further company could be brought into the area. The intention was then to drive east through Maprik to Yamil, Kairivu area.

The Australians were not the only ones the Japanese had to contend with. When a patrol entered a village on February 1, they found six partly eaten Japs tied to a tree. Salata was cleared on February 2, two enemy being killed. Seven



Moten with natives at Sing Sing in Maprik

Japanese were killed by patrols on February 3. Next day the village of Wurtha was cleared, with twelve Japanese killed, the only casualty the patrol suffered was one native sentry being killed. This pattern continued over the ensuing days. February 13-14 were particularly good days for 2/5 Battalion patrols- 26 enemy killed on Feb.13, and 28 on February 14, while their own losses were only two killed.

February 20 was the best day of all, with patrols accounting for 34.

A patrol on February 17 brought in five Japanese prisoners, and 14 Indians who had been captured in Malaya in 1942, and brought to New Guinea to work as carriers.

Major General Stevens paid a farewell visit on February 28. He commented on his “agreeable association” with Moten when ever they had served together. He expressed gratitude to the officers for their loyalty and remarked he would take away the pleasantest memories of the 17th Brigade.

Patrols were again active during the month of March, cleaning out enemy positions. There were a number of counter attacks by the enemy which were repulsed. On March 20 following a report from Kanaka natives that a “high officer” had his headquarters on a ridge in the Maprik area, a special patrol from a company of 2/7 set out to attempt to capture him, believed to be L.General Mano, commander of 41 Japanese Division. The patrol clashed with

sentries guarding the area, killing ten of them, but there was no sign of the general. Natives reported he had moved out of the area the previous day.

The War Diary listed the total known casualties in 17th Brigade area to March 31. The enemy had 1060 killed- 924 by the troops, and 136 from air strikes, with 110 wounded. The Brigade had 28 killed and 85 wounded. April saw similar activity , with the total enemy killed up to 1296, of which 125 were attributed to natives. They had their own method of counting, a knot was tied in a piece of twine. For 17th Brigade, natives “acted as efficient guides and sentries for our patrols; they built huts, headquarters, medical posts and jungle tracks for our use; they cleared and cleaned the villages; buried the enemy dead; had voluntarily aided our indentured labour lines, and had assisted to evacuate our wounded across the difficult mountain jungle country.”

Native labour was vital in the construction of an airfield. Moten had flown over the area and chosen a site about eight miles from Maprik. The new strip, called Hayfield, was ready to accept its first plane on April 24, when an Auster landed. “The landing of the plane created a stir among the hundreds of natives working on the construction of the strip. The majority of them had never seen a plane on the ground. The boys and the marys paused in their clearing and the monkeys in their gathering of handfuls of earth to fill holes, to chatter excitedly around the plane. When told that they would have to work hard so that a bigger plane could land, they returned with a will to work. However the spirit of energy didn’t last long, and they soon returned to their casual stroke”⁶.

Moten missed the opening of the strip, as he had gone down with dengue fever on April 20. Lt.Col.Wood took charge until he felt sufficiently well to return on April 27. The enemy continued dogged resistance. On May 6 mortar bombs, believed to be 81 mm, were fired into D Company 2/7 Battalion’s position, killing two and wounding 3. Two days later flame throwers were used for the first time against an enemy held village. The tactic proved effective, the enemy fled and many huts were burnt. Two days later it was used again to clear a village, the enemy again fleeing before the flame, this time leaving even food packs behind.

On May 3 a party of 42 Japanese, including its commander, Lt.Col.Takeshita, former C.O. of 41 Division Mtn.Artillery, surrendered to a patrol. With him were a Captain and 3 Lieutenants, and they approached under a white flag. They were brought to Brigade Headquarters, where Lt.Col.Takeshita, through an interpreter, told Moten that after being driven out of the Lakinga area in March 1945, he decided to surrender to save the lives of the remaining men.

“This was the first time in the experience of the Brigade against the Japanese of an organised surrender of a unit. In the Wau- Salamaua campaign where the enemy were very aggressive, any POW taken were usually in an emaciated condition or incapacitated in some way and unable to prevent their capture. Although the enemy in this campaign had been surrendering in ones and twos, they had been until this incident mostly ORs (other ranks). The officers still maintain their fighting spirit and the discipline maintained by them is sufficient to deter most of them from surrendering.”⁷

The enemy prisoners were sent to Aitape by plane on May 16. Two Sergeant Majors in the group volunteered to stay and broadcast to their compatriots urging them to surrender.

There was a big celebration on May 12, as natives from surrounding villages and numerous evacuees from Jap occupied territory gathered together for a “Sing Sing” to celebrate the liberation of Maprik area. “Gaily decorated natives with elaborate head dress ran past the HQ to the chant of their tribal songs. The “Sing Sing” commenced at mid day and continued to the throbbing of the drums and the singing of the natives until daybreak the next day. Indentured boys working as carriers were given a holiday and came in from the battalions to join in the festivities.”⁸

Though the war in Europe had ended in May, the fight against Japan still went on. 17 Brigade continued its labourious task of mopping up in New Guinea. The enemy still offered dogged resistance, and had to be cleared out village by village. June had the highest number of enemy killed- 411- since the start of the campaign. The Australian casualties were 23 dead and 64 wounded during the month. A Jap sniper was responsible for four of the dead from a patrol on June 4. He was located later in the day in the top of a native hut. The use of gelignite bombs by the enemy was becoming quite common. Improvised land mines were laid on tracks in two places in 2/5th Battalion area, and a blast bomb was thrown into A Company’s perimeter on the night of June 21.

Natives working with A Company, 2/5th, surprised an enemy platoon, killing 13, including two officers, and capturing fourteen rifles, 5 swords, numerous documents, and one prisoner. “Native co operation with this company has been excellent since this company first arrived in the area. Information has been most reliable and the aggressiveness of the natives outstanding.”⁹

The Commander in Chief, General Sir Thomas Blamey, Lt.General Berryman, and Major General Stevens visited 17 Brigade on June 16. They landed at Hayfield in a C-47 and were then ferried to Maprik by an Auster and

a Tiger Moth, where they were met by Moten. After discussions with Moten in his office, they inspected the area. The visit lasted one and a half hours, then they returned to Wewak.

The struggle to clear out enemy positions continued in July. Patrols killed 58 Japs on July 3, and by July 31, no less than 749 Japs were killed, whilst the Brigade suffered 32 killed and 68 wounded. But the struggle was slowly drawing to a conclusion. With the increasing number of prisoners and captured documents, an additional interpreter was assigned to Moten's headquarters on August 8, and a special surrender leaflet was prepared, addressed to Japanese 41st Division soldiers, containing a special message to them. This brought a quick response the following day, when an officer and 15 men surrendered. They had the leaflet, and observed the instruction to come in between 0600 and 0800 hours. The officer instructed his men to surrender. The reasons given were the hopeless state of the army, lack of food and ammunition.

News that Japan had begun negotiations for surrender was picked up at Moten's headquarters at about 2215. This caused a stir, and a number of people gathered to hear the BBC on the wireless forty five minutes later. Next morning, due to the apparent changed situation, Moten issued instructions to units under his command, excluding 2/7 Infantry Battalion, who had been out of contact since the previous evening, that "hostilities had no way ceased, that risk of loss of lives was to be minimised, having due regard to the normal security of the units. The policy being to engage the enemy with long range weapons and make such protective patrols as were necessary."¹⁰ Artillery fire was increased, 860 rounds being expended during the day.

A Captain and 12 soldiers surrendered to 2nd New Guinea Battalion that morning. An unusual amount of personal effects was carried by the men, indicating a growing realisation that they would be treated as prisoners of war if they surrendered. A further 10, including a captain, surrendered on August 13.

Word of Japan's official surrender was heard at 0900 on August 15 in a broadcast by Mr. Attlee. No additional measures could be taken, the units had been given instructions as to policy, and until a surrender of the enemy in the area was completed, little difference could be made.

A message was dispatched to General Nakai, Commanding 20 Division, via natives, who brought a reply on August 18 to 2/7th Battalion. This note, on being translated read- 1. Received your message. 2. Our army is acting under command of senior officer and we have received neither orders nor reports as



AWM 096216 - Cape Wom, New Guinea, 1945-09-13. Lieutenant-General Adachi, Commander 18 Japanese Army in New Guinea, formally surrendered to Major-General H.C.H. Robertson General Officer commanding 6 Division, in a ceremony held at Cape Wom Airstrip. Shown, Major-General Robertson taking over the parade from Brigadier M.J. Moten on his arrival at the airstrip.

yet, therefore we are determined to continue with present resistance until such an order is received.”¹¹ 2/6 Battalion later contacted through natives two Japanese officers who were given a note for General Nakai asking him to come immediately to the nearest unit lines or to send a responsible emissary to negotiate surrender conditions.

That same day B Company 2/5th was attacked with blast bombs and grenades, suffering two fatalities. One of the enemy was killed. The War Diary on August 19 noted that “there are indications the Japanese in this area know of the surrender of their government to the Allies but have no official word from their higher command to lay down their arms”¹². A reply from General Nakai was received on August 22. It stated that “liaison between your army and our army HQ is being carried out and each and all forces under Army HQ will abide by the decision on the said matter. Therefore your message has been sent to Army HQ. Until there is an order from the higher authority, the lesser command officers cannot go into your lines as suggested.”¹³

On August 23, 6 Australian Division circulated a message received from General Adachi stating that the Japanese had been ordered to cease fire but would not lay down their arms until the result of the Manila conference was conveyed from central government via command Singapore. The cease fire order reached troops in the Mount Alexander Range area on August 22, and was expected to reach Lower Sepik and Ramu areas by August 25. On receipt

of orders to lay down arms, Lt. General Yoshimara, Chief of Staff, 18 Army, would be sent to confer with Division Command.

So the wait dragged on. On August 28 General Nakai sent a message stating he was acting under orders from 16 Army HQ and could do nothing until ordered from that HQ. Not until September 13 did General Adachi and his staff formally surrender at Wewak. Moten attended the surrender ceremony. With the war over, Moten tabulated the total casualties in 17 Brigade area. For the month of August 230 enemy had been killed, while Brigade casualties were 14 killed and 12 wounded. For the period December 1944 to August 16, 1945, Japanese killed were 2888, while the Brigade had 125 killed and 303 wounded.

Moten had health problems during October, having to go for medical treatment. He was appointed to temporary command of 6th Australian Division, as Major General Robinson was transferred to 1st Army. On November 4 he went by launch to Muschu Island, accompanied by Brigadier Martin, and two interpreters, to interrogate senior officers of the interned Japanese 18th Army, and get a broad outline of Japanese operations November 1944 to August 1945. Maps from 17 Brigade report on operations assisted in the interrogation. They were received by General Nakai and his staff. Moten interrogated senior officers who were directly opposed to 17 Brigade. Lt.Gen. Yoshimara, chief of staff, indicated he would willingly draw detailed report on Japanese operations in the period November 1944 to August 1945.

¹ Berryman; letter to Moten.

² AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/112.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bush to Moten.

⁵ Stevens to Moten.

⁶ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/119.

⁷ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/124.

⁸ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/119.

⁹ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/126.

¹⁰ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/130.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ AWM War Diary 52/8/2/17/130.

New Guinea Journey*

By Brig. M. J. Moten, CBE, DSO, ED

I have just returned from an interesting hike to Tong, a small village on the south side of the Torricelli Mountains. The party accompanying me comprised Maj. Logan, of Divisional staff, Lt. “Taffy” Walsh of Brigade HQ staff, an escort of 1 NCO and five others, three batmen (including the inimitable Tommy Tucker) and four cooks who were to be left at staging points en route, to provide hot meals for troops who would follow us over the next few days.

We went some miles east along the coast towards Wewak in a jeep and upon arriving at Yackamul, stayed the night with a W.Australian Battalion. Next morning at daylight we set off walking due south, an hours march (all distances here are measured in terms of time) to Yackamul mission station, where we picked up nine Kanakas to carry our supplies and gear- “catchem cargo”- and two native police boys to guide us to our destination.

Our party, now grown to 27 persons, moved off up to the bed of the Harech River which twisted and turned to the foothills and then entered a deep, narrow gorge. This we were to follow for the next two days. The hard sandy river made easy walking where the stream had spilled itself over the flats and coastal swamps before entering the sea, but as we progressed further inland and the river banks were more clearly defined and the waters more restricted, we crossed and re-crossed what became a fast flowing river and at times our only means of progress was by wading up the river itself for hours at a time.

Fortunately there has been no rain for several days and the water at most was three feet deep. At the end of our second day of our trip, a torrential rain storm pelted down without warning and troops following us a days march behind were caught by the fast rising flood waters and many of the men were swept bodily down stream. Were it not for the help of the native boys who went quickly to their rescue some of our lads undoubtedly would have been

drowned. Some were badly knocked about and a considerable quantity of stores, arms and equipment were lost. The losses, however, were made up a few days later by the RAAF parachuting replacements to the troops struggling up the slippery mountain slopes below.

Very tired, we made camp the end of the first day at a village, deserted by the natives when the Japs first came into this area, and still unoccupied. Then followed the cleaning of rifles, a bath in the river and a change into some dry clothing heavily treated with an oil preparation as a protection against scrub typhus, a hot meal prepared by the cooks, the posting of sentries, and then we tried to get some sleep. The corrugated bamboo bunks thickly covered with ferns and other greenery, and hastily prepared by the natives on our arrival were hard and uncomfortable and in any case, most of us were too tired to sleep.

We were away again early before sunrise next morning and patiently slogged up this fast narrowing stream for another six hours, meeting no sign of human existence. Thirty minutes walking and then ten minutes halt "to catchem wind", and so on throughout the day.

The native police boys were marvellous the way they shepherded us across the difficult places. They are magnificent physical specimens mostly recruited from Sepik River head hunters. Intelligent, patient and gentle as children they show no trace in their make up of their former pastimes.

Our journey so far had taken us well up into the mountains. All the way up river we were steadily climbing. We clawed our way up small waterfalls and cataracts and when this was not possible, left the river and clambered over the huge boulders and clung tenaciously to the narrow ledges on the sides of the gorge. From time to time we plunged along a jungle path leading away from the river which doubled back to meet up a little further on.

By mid day we had left the river and started to climb in earnest. It had commenced to rain heavily by now and our way was made more difficult by the greasy slopes of mud which made footholds hard to find. Two hours later we had made it to the top of the ridge thoroughly soaked by the rain and exhausted by our efforts. This brought us near the end of the day as a short walk along the top of a narrow back ridge took us to Nialu, a small native village normally inhabited by about eighty people. The war, however, had caught up with them and all the able bodied "boys" had been recruited to "catchem cargo" for the army, leaving only the old men (larpoons bugger-up finish), the marys, the monkeys (young boys) and the picaninies to look after the gardens and keep the home fires burning.

The Luluai or headman (usually a hereditary chieftain) and the Tultul (a government appointed official who speaks good “pidgin” met us at the entrance of the village, having learnt of our pending arrival by their own “bush telegraph”. Unknowingly, we had been under observation for some hours and our progress accurately reported. The Luluai escorted us in state through the village where grinning teeth shone in the darkened doorway of windowless huts. We were then taken to the house Kiap (pronounced Keeap) or the house erected for and used only by visiting government administrative personnel. Kiap means, in a sense, government, and its derivation lies somewhere around “the people who wear the cap.”

Despite the fact that the war had imposed food restrictions by the government taking away its breadwinners, these hospitable people wanted to give us fruit, paw paw, coconuts and bananas, but we politely but firmly refused. I explained to the Luluai as best I could that “plenty soldier three pela hundred” would be passing through his village in the next few days, and could he “fixem house sac sac aladem soldier catchem sleep”. The old boy called to another village over on the next ridge and soon the drums were carrying the message further into the mountains. By morning boongs and marys were streaming in from all directions, some carrying timber or sac sac or Kunda vine and soon they set to work with much chatter and vigour to “buildem house”. Many of them had apparently forgotten to bring their clothes but that didn’t appear to cause them any embarrassment and we afterwards learned that by nightfall “the house im o finish” and the first of our troops to arrive that afternoon slept under shelter.

In this little outpost of empire live two Australian soldiers whose job it is to collect and guard supplies of food which are dropped from the air by the RAAF, so that troops passing through may be decently fed with hot meals before commencing the next and most difficult part of the journey. We left two of our cooks to assist them with this feeding problem.

Over the next stage one really gets down to the climbing business with a vengeance. Steps cut into the mountain side are laced with timber and as you toil upwards hour after hour, little wonder your knees tremble, your heart pounds like a steam hammer, your mouth gets hot and dry and your clothes drip with perspiration. You go through mentally the items you have in your pack and your pockets and note the things you’ll leave home the next time or discard before you take another step.

It rained most of the morning but we felt warm despite the altitudes we were reaching. We kept plodding one foot in front of the other knowing that once

we stopped it would be hard to get going again.

Feeling very sorry for ourselves we arrived about midday at the village of Muasum where a halt was called and we boiled the billy and make tea. There again the bush telegraph had announced our coming and the Luluai was waiting to greet us. After a short pause we were off again. We had by now crossed to the south side of the mountain and our way lay along the easier slopes of the far side. We passed through Saop, a bigger and cleaner village than anything we had previously met and as the recruiters of native labour had not yet created a local manpower problem we accepted and enjoyed the coconuts and bananas the grinning unclothed people thrust upon us. Another hours walking brought us to Tong and our destination.

Until the advent of our troops Capt. Cole of ANGAU and a handful of native police boys had been hanging on to this speck on the map. Twice marauding bands of Japs in search of food had driven them off and burnt their huts and only recently Cole and his party had returned to carry on with the job of observing and reporting Jap movement

Sympathetic natives travelled days to bring Cole news of Jap activity. An endless stream of boongs came in to "make talk belong Kiap". His influence spreads many days journey beyond his official territory. Natives come in to "make court" about their tribal disputes, their hunting and trading problems and their matrimonial triangles. From what I have seen, I judge their standards of morality and fair dealing are much higher than most of their white skinned brothers (and sisters). Cole distributes rough justice, food and tobacco impartially and maintains the prestige of the white man and the government in places where these things really matter.

All next day was spent in collecting information which would help us in our future operations. Native tribesmen came from remote districts to pass on what they knew. Some brought their kinsmen, weird, ferocious looking beings with their foreheads shaven and richly decorated with shells and beads, while their hair at the back was long and plaited. Some looked on white men for the first time and no doubt thought us queer cattle. Most had pierced their noses and ears with the tusks of the pig and adorned their bodies with disfiguring scars of tribal patterns. Others, old in the ways of war, asked for grenades so that they could settle a few private scores of their own and "Japan man killem e die". Some brought in a knot of plaited human hair with numerous knots tied in it. Each knot accounted for a Jap and the method of disposing of him was graphically described. Some came to collect their wages in coin, food or tobacco or to "make paper" (enter into a contract) to work for the Kiap for two



AWM 093958 - Ulupu, New Guinea, 1945-07-10. Brig M.J. Moten, Commanding Officer, 17 Infantry Brigade (1), explaining first hand to the members of 16 Platoon, D Company, 2/5 Infantry Battalion, their future in the general advance.

years. Each has implicit trust in the Kiap and knew he would get just treatment. All were eager to help us drive the Jap from this territory.

The Japanese in the area shot the natives on sight, they burnt his villages, robbed and destroyed his gardens and killed his pigs. When the Japs first appeared, the natives, warned of their approach, “went bush”, but now they confidently return and rebuild their villages where we have re-established control.

My mission completed, I set out on the following morning with a depleted party for the return journey. A handful of our troops under Major Ian McBride had arrived before we moved off and all that day we passed tired troops but with cheery grins struggling with their heavy packs along the mountain trail. Some had been cut off from their fellows by the swollen river and had to make camp until the water subsided. They now pushed forward to catch up with their

mates and by nightfall should all be at Tong where they will have at least one day's rest before moving on again.

The track back was no less difficult than outgoing, but already some organisation was being established along the route. Additional accommodation - cook houses, hot showers for troops in transit either way were being prepared at the staging posts. Separate huts to stage casualties on their way back to the coast were in the course of construction, and in the next few days would be staffed by medical orderlies. Coffee stalls manned by Salvation Army and YMCA personnel were functioning at out of the way places. A jeep track into the foothills has been located and would be improved, and as far inland as they could proceed, a fleet of jeeps awaited our return and cut two hours walking off the end of our journey. Back along the coast we sped to the camp where we were greeted by a bumper Christmas mail- the greatest morale booster the people back home can provide. The administrations of a barber, a chiropodist and a masseur, a hot bath and clean clothes helped me look back on the trip more kindly.

** Typewritten MS, no date, probably early 1945, courtesy of John and Anne Moten.*

Mubo Trail*

Much has been written about the notorious Kokoda Trail trodden by Australian troops to ultimate victory at Buna and Goma. Another epic has been written in the annals of New Guinea trail blazing by the troops who slashed, fought and cursed their way over the track from Wau to Mubo.

It will always be a subject for controversy between troops who have covered either or both of those trails as to their relative demerits. Admittedly the Kokoda Trail climbs over the mighty Owen Stanley Range, but for sheer seesawing through seas of mud in fever ridden jungles, the Mubo Trail must be considered one of the worst roads ever covered in the history of the Australian Military Forces.

From the time the Japs were driven back from Wau, leaving behind over a thousand dead, the troops of a Victorian Brigade trudged many times back and forward over the track to the forward defence lines in the Saddle area overlooking Mubo. Many of these made a one way passage. To these men Australia owes a debt that can never be repaid. But their comrades do not forget. By the time this story is published they will be avenged a thousand fold. Along the trail are many cairns with names firmly engraved in the memories of the soldiers who sheltered under their kinai and paper roofs.

Crystal Creek, a musical name, but the scene of bloody slaughter during the battle for Wau. Along this stretch of track a bulldozer took the place of burial parties in disposing of Japanese dead. A finger post, adorned with a Japanese skull, points into a deep and gloomy jungle recess with the ominous words "To the Slaughter House".

Wandumi, where A Company of 2/6 Battalion held off a pouring horde of Japs for twenty four hours on the first night of their break through into the Wau- Bulolo valley. The heroic stand of this company when completely surrounded materially assisted in the saving of Wau.

Ballams, a peaceful spot high up in the hills, commanding a wonderful view

of the Wau valley.

The long climb up to the Summit before the construction of the motor road will never be forgotten. The dripping jungle closing in over the trail while troops struggle for a footing in the knee deep mud.

MacDuffs, a gloomy staging camp well hidden in the jungle with Skindewai village an hour's march away. Perhaps a glimpse of sunshine at Skindewai, where the jungle has been partially cleared. The native name of Skindewai, denoting a house built of wood (dewai) and roofed with bark, the skin of the tree, is typical of the native simplicity in naming an object. The seed of a tree is known as "picaninny dewai"

The next spot up the track, Neil's Crossing, lying in the bottom of a deep gorge, a welcome resting place at "Smoky Joe's" Salvation Army coffee stalls. On a general downhill trend is House Banana, where a subtle change takes place in the country and the vegetation assumes a more tropical appearance. The gorges lose nothing in depth, but here and there a glimpse can be had of the country ahead. Cane and bamboo (mambu), with an odd banana plant, take the place of the tangled mass of creepers and vines in the undergrowth.

The strange configuration of the country between the Bitoi and Buwayim rivers swing in together and are thrust apart again at the Saddle by mighty Lababia Ridge. The gloomy track up Lababia Ridge where many fierce engagements took place between the enemy and each battalion of the Victorian Brigade in turn.

Strategic Guadgascal Saddle, overlooking the Mubo landing ground in the Bitoi valley, and in the distance the commanding height of Mount Tambu, later to be the scene of fierce fighting, in which the Fighting Fifth (2/5 Battalion) were deeply involved, on the approaches to Salamaua. The names of the feature commanding Mubo became all too familiar to the weary footed Australian troops who unceasingly patrolled their grim, forbidding heights. MatMat Hill, Garrison Hill, Observation Hill, Vickers Ridge, Green Hill, and the unyielding death trap- the Pimple. All those names will live. Some will look back with horror at the memory of ordeals experienced there; others with pride at the task accomplished.

Like Kokoda, the problem of evacuation of wounded presented a nightmare to the medical services. Here one must say a word of praise for that indispensable being - "the Boong", and his master ANGAU (Australian New Guinea Administration Unit) who so patiently supervised the movements of the "Boong Line". Without the boong and his blanket many seriously wounded men would have perished on the trail. Only the most serious of cases were



AWM 093962 - Ulupu, New Guinea, 1945-07-10. Brig M.J. Moten, Commanding Officer, 17 Infantry Brigade (1), and party, moving down Ulupu Ridge to inspect forward positions occupied by the battalion.

evacuated thus, for one stretcher case meant the employment of twelve natives, and those carriers were precious. Rations and ammunition in forty pound loads had to be brought in by those same boys. Later in the campaign supplies were dropped from the air by “kai bombers”. Australian troops were deeply grateful

to the American pilots of transport planes who daily risked their lives in unarmed planes over high mountain peaks with many “a rock in them thar clouds” and always the chance of a Zero sitting on their tail, to bring food and supplies to the ground troops. Walking wounded made their weary way back to the dressing stations here they would rest for a few days before continuing the long, long trek back to Wau.

Melbourne saw the same grim faced men march through the city streets on their return from the Middle East in August 1942. If they could have seen these men trudging along the Mubo Trail they would have witnessed a widely different picture. Instead of immaculate service dress and tin hats, bedraggled jungle greens, yellow to the waist with mud, and battered felt hats. Puggarees and all the familiar trimmings of a parade ground soldier had long since gone by the board. Rotting, heeless boots and drenched shirts were the rule.

On the alternative trail to Mubo via the Black Cat Mine, Waipali and House Copper, conditions were even worse. Hell could hold no terrors after after the Waipali track. A gradual improvement was made on the track via Skindewai as the jeep head crept forward under the supervision of Australian engineers. Battalion pioneers were released for the back breaking work of corduroying. In a country of immense gorges and frequent landslides, it often happened that the work of days would be swept to the bottom of an inaccessible gorge in a matter of minutes. At the time of writing the foot track by Skindewai has been greatly improved since the first patrols ploughed their way through.

In the days when the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade were known as the mysterious “Kanga Force”, holding the strategic Wau- Bulolo Valley at the time of the Jap attack on Wau Drome, (Due to the fact that 17 Brigade on their journey from the Middle East, “disappeared” for four months into the jungles of Ceylon to take part in what is now known as the “Battle for India”, and that they again “disappeared” from Milne Bay to become the legendary “Kanga Force” defending Wau, a popular name, which is likely to stick was coined by an Australian newspaper- “The Phantom Brigade”) the main scene of activity was the trail to Mubo via Black Cat, Waipali and House Copper, and on the new cut Jap track entering the Wau valley at Wandumi.

In his retreat from Wau the wily Jap lost all his cunning in a disorganised flight over the same track by which he advanced. Hot on his heels came the men of Kanga Force, now reinforced from the small garrison which so gallantly defended the airfield, in a hard hitting, fast moving group of death dealing jungle fighters.

On this track many fierce ambush encounters took place as the foodless Jap



AWM 128805 - Kiarivu, New Guinea. 1945-09-12. Lieutenant General Hatazo Adachi, Commander of the Japanese XVIII Army, leaving the headquarters of 2/7th Infantry Battalion. On the first stage of the journey to Wewak for the official surrender ceremony. A native carrying party has been provided for him owing to his ill health and are carry him in the litter in which he arrived at the 2/7th Battalion position.

who had by this time expected to be living off the fruit of the land in the fertile Wau valley, . found himself starving and fought desperate rearguard actions to stem the tide of the Australian advance. Frightful atrocities were committed on the bodies of lone Australian soldiers who fell foul of these ambushes. Bodies were found horribly mutilated and so gave rise to a slogan that became almost a tradition of the campaign, (much to the annoyance of Intelligence, thirsting for prisoners for information)- “Australians, take no prisoners !”

A classic example of Japanese arrogance, curiously inverted in this case, was found in a captured order for the retreat from Wau. In the closing paragraph, after giving the order of march, the Jap Commander states blandly, “I will be “ADVANCING” at the head of the column”. The jungle is already closing over the Jap track with its nauseating odour of human decay. Soon it will be no more than a memory to the men who travelled its gory path.

For many months Mubo and its commanding features was the front line, if such a term can be applied in jungle warfare, where patrols could pass within twenty yards of each other without making contact with, or knowing of the others presence.

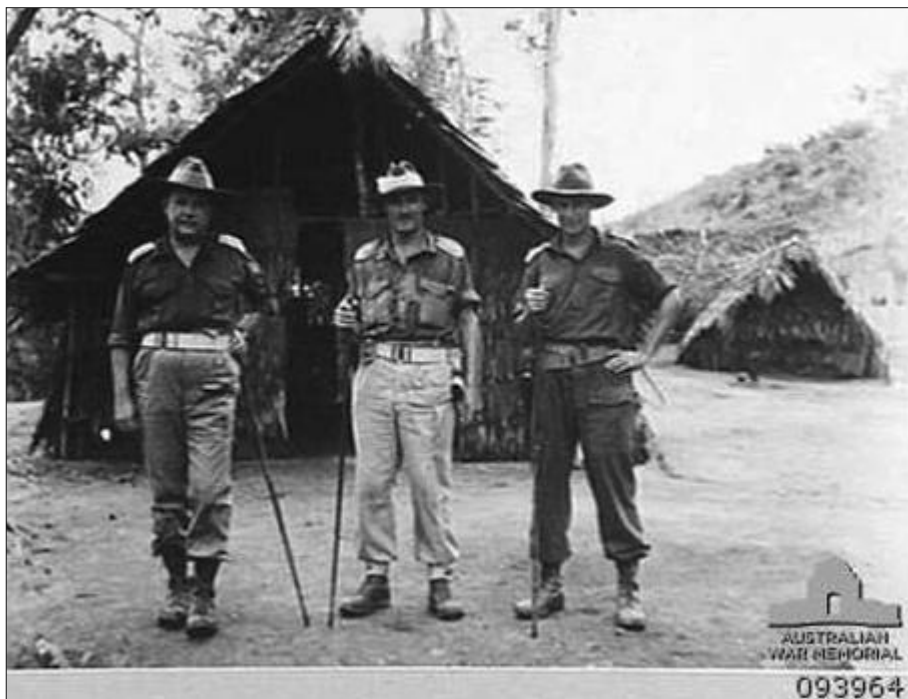
Outstanding in the battle for Mubo were the attacks by companies of 2/5,2/6, 2/7 Battalions in turn on the "PIMPLE", which after many casualties inflicted by the enemy, assumed the proportion of a "Carbuncle". In this case the name Pimple, a subsidiary feature of Lababia Ridge, is a misnomer. In reality, the Pimple is a sharp razor back feature, jungle clad, with precipitous sides, found later to be literally honeycombed with log pill boxes and weapon pits.

A few days ago a Japanese battalion launched a fierce and determined attack on D Company of 2/6 Battalion who were acting as a containing force to the Pimple. In this attack the Japanese came within fifty yards of repeating the performance of a few weeks ago, when for 48 hours, they completely encircled A Company of 2/7 Battalion, at that time endeavouring to capture the Pimple. The gallant defence of D Company 2/6 Battalion will go down in history as an outstanding example of the unyielding stubbornness of Australian troops in the face of overwhelming odds. For at this time, impending operations made it absolutely imperative that the position be held to safeguard our entire line of communication. As an American soldier who had fought with the Aussies at Buna said, "As long as these guys have a blazing Tomny gun in their hands, they don't seem to care if they live or die!"

No need to repeat to these men the classic order of a British Lieut. found in a pill box at Passchendale in the last war- "If the section cannot remain here alive, it will remain dead, but in any case, it will remain". The position was held, and 100 dead Japs remained to fertilise the already luxuriant jungle growth. One Australian private soldier, since recommended for a high decoration, is accredited with the superhuman performance of killing 34 Japs single handed in this action.

Japs were heard to call out in English, as they did in the jungle of Malaya, "We are Japan man, we willl win!". This time they did not win, and troops of the Australian 6th Division added their contribution to the big pay off for the fate that befell their brothers of the 8th Division. The Company suffered grievous casualties amongst their small band, but to reiterate, the position was held.

To men such as these the people of Australia owe a debt, the magnitude of which is beyond comprehension.



AWM 093964 - Ulebilum, New Guinea, 1945-07-10. Brigadier M.J. Moten, Commanding Officer, 17 Infantry Brigade (1), with Lieutenant-Colonel J.A. Bishop, Headquarters 6 Division (2) and Lieutenant-Colonel A.W. Buttrose, Commanding Officer 2/5 Infantry Battalion (3), during a tour of the Yamil Area.

As this is written, an avalanche of destruction is descending on the Mubo valley. Allied bombers are pouring high explosives to the extent of one hundred tones on Japanese positions in the narrow gorges. Australian troops of the 17th Brigade are sitting keyed up on the start line - there is a whisper, "The Yanks are coming"- but- that is another story.

** Written by Sergt. A. O. Shiels, under nom de plume, "Kanga" Typewritten MS. from 1943 courtesy of John and Anne Moten.*

Epilogue

With the war over, Moten served briefly in temporary command of 6th Division, November – December 1945, relinquishing command of 17th Brigade on January 1, 1946, and was placed on the Regimental Supernumerary List. He had a high regard for the men of the 17th – “Napoleon once said that the finest troops in the whole world were his Old Guard. He never saw 17th Brigade”¹. On April 4, 1946, he was appointed to command the AMF component at the London Victory March. It was a signal honour well



*Moten (left) with Field Marshal Montgomery and Sir Thomas Playford, Premier, South Australia.
(Picture from John and Anne Moten).*

deserved, and a remarkable twist of history- a century after his grandfather had been transported, he was leading Australian soldiers on parade in London.

But promotion to higher rank was denied him. Despite his obvious talents, he was not raised to a General in the post war army, to his death he was still a temporary Brigadier. Was this because he was not a product of staff college, but had come up through the militia?

He returned to life as a bank official, and was appointed General Manager of the Bank of South Australia in 1952. Maintaining his militia links, he was appointed to the command of 9th Brigade CMF, and to be honorary Colonel of 27th Battalion. In 1953 Field Marshal Slim was appointed Governor General of Australia, and his ADC would have to be an Australian. Fittingly the honour was conferred on Murray Moten.

But he was not to hold the position for long.

On September 5, 1953, he collapsed while attending the 27th Battalion Ball at Torrens, and died nine days later in hospital. According to the *Adelaide News*, his illness was caused by overwork and strain. He was given full military honours at his funeral.

Let the final word be with his grand son, Lt. Col. Guy Moten-

“Brigadier Moten was a succesful and effective commander during times of peace and war. He engaged with the enemy during the most critical aspects of the New Guinea campaign and his troops bore the burden of much intense fighting. His personal and professional experiences in civil and military employment developed his own command style that would see him lead with distinction throughout the changing climate of the war.

His command effectiveness is self evident; the Japanese were not only soundly defeated but completely destroyed. Regarding developments in military practices of recent times (the revolution in military affairs, asymmetric warfare, globalisation, multi dimensional battlespace) it is reasonable to deduce that Moten would have been as successful a commander today. At its heart, soldiering can be a personal, physical and emotional affair played out on the battlefields amidst the harsh realities of combat and commanders must excel in this climate.

Do all of us realise just how much we owe these men... and thank God for their courage and endurance and self sacrifice”².

¹ 17 Brigade Magazine 1944.

² Lt. Colonel Guy Moten, OP. CIT.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



GOVERNMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA

14th September, 1953.

Dear Mrs. Moten

My wife and I were shocked and grieved to learn this morning of the death of your distinguished husband. We offer you and your children our very sincere sympathy in the tragic loss you have suffered.

Everyone in the Commonwealth sphere who had the privilege of knowing and working with Brigadier Moten had the highest respect and liking for him, and although, as you know, I had not known him for very long, I shared in this opinion. Perhaps the knowledge of the esteem and high regard in which your husband was held will be of some small consolation to you and your children in your bereavement.

Yours sincerely
W. J. Slim

Mrs. J.M. Moten,
17 Stanley Street,
Woodville,
ADELAIDE, S.A.

Condolences from Governor General

Remembering Murray

Sons John and Christopher recall life with their father

Before the War Murray read widely on military matters and the librarian at Keswick Barracks, the headquarters of the 27th Battalion, recalled that Murray had borrowed every book in the library. John remembers his father going off to Woodside Army Camp most weekends. Murray was preparing for the war he knew was coming. John recalls going to Woodside with the extended family for a special event, the presentation of the 2/27th Battalion's colours, which John presented.

In the Woodville home two almost identical Japanese swords hung on a wall. John and Christopher recall a story about Kathleen getting a telegram from Murray, who was then in New Guinea, advising her that he was sending a parcel of swords, that they were valuable, and requesting that she take great care of them. Money was always tight in the households of the men at war, and she sent a reply that Murray should forget about the swords and just send the money. The swords are now in the Australian War Memorial, whose curators have identified them as ceremonial swords. Murray told the family that that a sword was presented to him privately by a Japanese officer at the end of hostilities, a day or two before the formal surrender of the Japanese in New Guinea. Murray was complimented by the officer on his conduct of the campaign.

Murray told the story of an American General visiting Murray at his headquarters in New Guinea, who admired the three swords hanging in his hut. Murray gave the US General one of the swords. A few months later Murray was visiting some of his men in hospital. One of the patients had a copy of Life magazine, and on the front cover was a picture of the same U.S. General showing the sword to his grandson

During his trip to the Victory Parade Murray managed to travel to Berlin and he visited Hitler's bunker. He was shocked by the level destruction he saw and concluded that recovery would take decades. Murray was away for four months and travelled each way with the Army Contingent on HMAS



Murray with Kathleen, Christopher, Kathleen, Margaret and John.

Shropshire.

After the war, as well as holding the position of General Manager of the Savings Bank of South Australia, Murray was a member of the Imperial War Graves Commission, which met in Melbourne regularly. He was on the committee of Angorichina Hostel in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, a hostel for soldiers suffering from tuberculosis and president of the Naval, Military and Air Force Club in Adelaide from 1950 – 1952.

His wife Kathleen had a wide circle of musician and singer friends who would frequently gather at the Woodville home for musical parties. Not to be outdone, Murray would produce his recorder and play along. He was also a superb dancer and his nieces all claimed him as partner for their Debutante dances.

Murray was a keen gardener and when he was not at Woodside he worked in the Woodville home garden on weekends both before and after the war. As well he enthusiastically built concrete walls and paths, constructed an orchid house, a rockery and barbecue, often with son Christopher's help. He learned from an expert at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens the secrets of growing the Australian Tree Fern, no mean feat in Adelaide's hot dry climate.

The day Murray had his heart attack he worked hard in the garden, then attended a dinner at Government House with Field Marshall Sir William Slim for whom he was Honorary Army Aide de Camp. Following the dinner, daughter Kathleen Margaret accompanied Murray to the annual ball of the 2/27th Battalion of which Murray was Honorary Colonel. His wife Kathleen was playing in the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra at the Adelaide Town Hall that night. While dancing with Kathleen Margaret, a fifth year medical student, she recognised he was having a heart attack. He was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

Son John came from Melbourne, where he was working and studying, to visit his father following his admission to hospital and returned to Melbourne on the Melbourne Express train a week later. That night Murray had another heart attack and died. A family friend arranged for the train John was on to be stopped and John to be transferred to the train travelling in the opposite



Melbourne, Vic. 1946-04-18. Senior officers talking before commencement of the Victory Contingent March. Left to right: Brigadier C. Prior; Lieutenant Colonel T. A. Goyne; Brigadier M. Moten and Lieutenant General H. T. Robertson.



Ulupu, New Guinea, 1945-07-10. Brig M.J. Moten, Commanding Officer, 17 Infantry Brigade (1), examining a Japanese sword captured by 16 Platoon, D Company, 2/5 Infantry Battalion, during their taking of Ulupu. AWM 093957.

direction, back to Adelaide.

At Murray's funeral Padre Whereat, for whom Murray had great respect and affection and who had been Padre to the 2/27th at its inception, told the story of the young soldier who was to be court - martialed for failing to obey orders to go into battle. Murray spent all night talking to and counselling the young soldier. The next morning the young soldier went into battle beside Murray and never looked back. His court-martial was cancelled.

Christopher was born in January 1941, after Murray left for North Africa so Murray did not see Christopher till the 17th Brigade came back from Colombo in July 1942. When Murray died Kathleen Margaret was 21 and studying medicine. John, 19, had a Commonwealth Government Cadetship to study Aeronautical Engineering and was two years into a BSc, a prerequisite for Aeronautical Engineering at Sydney University. Christopher was 12 and attending Christian Brothers College, Wakefield St, Adelaide. Later John completed a Masters degree at Cranfield, UK, Christopher studied medicine

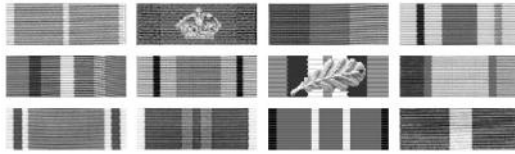
and became a GP as did Kathleen Margaret.

After Murray died, his widow Kathleen was in financial straits. There was no superannuation from the bank or pension for army service. Some months after Murray died it was discovered in wartime medical records that he had had a heart turn in New Guinea. As a result, Kathleen was awarded a War Widows Pension, which gave her some permanent financial security, together with her income from music teaching and orchestral playing. The Department of Veterans Affairs paid Christopher's university fees, textbooks and instruments, even train fares. The Department told Christopher "We are here to do what your father would have done for you".

After the war John recalls that Murray would work or read till late each evening. For over a year Murray worked on a detailed book about his war experiences. When it was finished he destroyed it because he had been critical of some senior officers and said that as they were still alive he could not publish. While this is an understandable decision it is a source of regret for those who later have tried to study and write about the conflict of WW11 as Murray's insights would have been most interesting.

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA

Brigadier M.J. Moten CBE, DSO & Bar, ED



Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)

This Order was formed in 1917 by King George V to reward service to the British Empire in the United Kingdom and abroad. Originally having only a Civil Division, a Military Division was added in 1918 to acknowledge distinguished military service of a non-combative nature. The Order has five classes of appointment in each division and a medal of the Order. In descending order, the classes are:

- Knight/Dame Grand Cross (GBE)
- Knight/Dame Commander (KBE, DBE)
- Commander (CBE)
- Officer (OBE)
- Member (MBE)
- Medal (BEM)

Awarded 27 April 1944, for actions in New Guinea, Pacific Area



Distinguished Service Order (DSO and Bar)

Instituted in 1886 by Queen Victoria, originally for military officers only for 'distinguished services under fire or under conditions equivalent to service in actual combat with the enemy'. From 1901 to 1972, when the last Australian to receive the DSO was announced, 1,018 of this award were made to Australians over the major conflicts, along with 70 first Bars and a single second Bar.

*First awarded 12 February 1942, for actions in Syria, Africa
Bar awarded 18 May 1943, for actions in New Guinea, Pacific Area*



Mentioned in Dispatches (no post-nominal)

A member Mentioned in Dispatches for service during World War 2 wears a bronze oak leaf emblem on the ribbon. Only one emblem is worn no matter how many times a member may have been 'mentioned'.

*First awarded 12 February 1942, for actions in New Guinea, Pacific Area
Subsequent award 6 March 1947, for actions in the Pacific Area*

FROM ROSCREA TO NEW GUINEA



1939-45 Star

Awarded for six months service in an operational command during the period 3 September 1939 to 2 September 1945.



Africa Star

Awarded for a minimum of one days operational service in North Africa, west of the Suez Canal between 10 June 1940 and 12 May 1943 and in Syria between 8 June 1941 and 11 July 1941, and for operations in Abyssinia, Somaliland, Eritrea or Malta.



Pacific Star

The Pacific Star is awarded for a minimum of one days operational service in the South West Pacific Theatre of Operations between 8 December 1941 and 2 September 1945.



Defence Medal

Awarded for six months service in a prescribed non-operational area subject to enemy air attack or closely threatened, in Australia and overseas, or for 12 months service in non-prescribed non-operational areas.



War Medal 1939-45

Awarded for 28 days full time service in the period between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945. A member Mentioned in Dispatches for service during World War 2 wears a bronze oak leaf emblem on the ribbon. Only one emblem is worn no matter how many times a member may have been 'mentioned'



Australian Service Medal 1939-45

Awarded for 30 days full-time or 90 days part-time service in the Australian Defence Force between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945



KGV1 Coronation Medal

This medal was issued to commemorate the coronation of King George VI on 12 May 1937.
(6,887 awarded to Australians)



QEII Coronation Medal

This medal was issued to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953.
(11,561 awarded to Australians)



Australian Defence Medal

Awarded for the completion of an initial enlistment period, or four years of service, whichever is the lesser. Service to be completed post 3 September 1945.



Efficiency Decoration (ED)

Instituted in 1892 by Queen Victoria, it is awarded for a minimum of 20 years service (within the terms of the regulations).

Courtesy Lt. Col. Guy Moten.