

THE WAR DIARY OF PRIVATE R. H. EDWARDS OF THE 52nd BATTALION,
39th BATTALION AND THE 2/1 AUSTRALIAN FIELD AMBULANCE.

5th AUGUST 1941 to 2nd FEBRUARY 1946.

Called up for Military Service on the 5th August 1941. Was in camp for three months, went into full time service on the 17th December 1941 with the 52nd Bn.

Volunteered for the 39th Bn. on the 25th Jan. 1942 from Seymour: Came down to Royal Park same day, stayed there for two days getting all our new equipment. I managed to get home both nights.

On the 28th Jan. I entrained on the first part of my journey to Queensland. Had tea at Wangaratta 6.30 p.m., arrived Albury 8 p.m., changed trains, and left 8.30 p.m. for Sydney. Breakfast Moss Vale 9 a.m.

29th Jan. Arrived Sydney 11 a.m., left soon after, and arrived Newcastle 2 p.m. for dinner. Left 2.45 p.m., arrived Merris Creek 9 p.m., arrived Tenterfield 8 a.m. for breakfast. Changed trains again and left 9 a.m. 30th for Toowoomba, arriving 3 p.m. here and de-trained, and with the rest of the lads, were led up the main st. by the local Pipe Band, but it was not much of a march, as we had too much gear to carry. We were marched up to the local showgrounds. We were the first troops that had been camped there, and the townspeople gave us a great welcome. We were camped in horse stalls, but they were clean and we were quite comfortable. After tea time, cobbers and myself went for our first night out in the town. On the way up in the train the three of us had agreed to stick together, what ever came. Had a few drinks in turns, and then went to a dance, and had a very enjoyable time, though we didn't know all the dances, but we were soon taught them.

On the 2nd Feb. we were put into our Companies, and found out who our Officers were. We were lucky, as we had one of our own from the 52nd Bn. and he knew most of us. The day was spent in getting settled down, which we eventually did. Went to another dance on Saturday night, after borrowing a pound from our Sgt. also had a great time there. We started training pretty heavy in the daytime, but all our nights were free. Money was our greatest problem until payday, which was not for a week yet, we just had enough in our books to pay our debts on pay day. It was an open camp until 12 o'clock of a night, but some of the boys got a bit over the fence while drinking, and it was cut down to 10 p.m., but we were having a great time, plenty of beer, and long marches of a day, we were all feeling in great nick in no time. Our C.O. tried to cut out all our night leave, but we use to get over the fence and come in the same way.

The following Friday after our arrival we went to a dance, and there I met a very nice girl, Lucy was her name, we had quite a few dances and I asked her if I could see her home. She wouldn't let me at first, as my cobber was taking two married women home, and she wanted me to go with them, but I managed to persuade her, that I wanted to take her home, and she gave in to me, and I took her home. She was with a married friend and her husband anyway, and made a date for the following night, which I kept, and we had a good time. When it was time to go home, I took her arm and she said "what again", and I said "I hope so". I was in for quite a surprise, I thought I had taken her home the night before, but tonight she let me take her right home to her door. She said she was not game to let me see her home the night before, as she did not know me well enough. Anyway it took much long to say goodnight this time, and before I left I had the promise of another date for the Friday night dance. At this time Ray was getting on with the married women. I took her cobber out and had some fun with her, but I did not like her very much, I would much rather Lucy.

Training was still on, some of it was pretty hard, no talk of going away, but we expect to anytime. I won the shooting match today, with 98 out of a possible 100. On Friday night I met Lucy again, and had a real good time, there was no protest this time when I asked to take her home, and we made arrangements to meet on Sunday evening and to go for a walk, which we did, and we both enjoyed ourselves. I was beginning to think that I had met the right girl. I met her people who are very nice, and they gave me a very nice reception. Altogether, I had a wonderful time in Toowoomba, but all good things have to come to an end, and we had word that we were going up to Selheim, which is near Charters Towers. Needles to say I spent as much time with Lucy as I could the last week, and I really think she likes me a lot. Her people do anyway.

APRIL 16th - We entrained once again, leaving about six o'clock. Lucy saw me off, with a few tears, and I didn't feel too happy myself, as neither of us knew what was in front of us. We travelled all night and had breakfast at Bundaberg, dinner at Gladstone, and tea at Rockhampton, where we stopped for a couple of hours. The three of us are still together. We got some addresses of some girls who said they would write to us. I don't know if we will write to them or not yet.

On again, breakfast at Mackay, dinner at Bowen, and tea at Townsville 8.30 p.m., and arrived Selheim at 11.30 p.m. 19th April, and had to settle down once again, this seems to be an awful place, nothing here at all, we go into Charters Towers on leave nights, I have had three letters from Lucy lately, also one from her Mother. We are not doing much training here. Today the 2nd of May I had some bad news from home, my dear Grandmother passed away. She had just celebrated her 73rd birthday. Have had a lot of letters of sympathy, also one from Lucy.

4th May was detailed to act as provost today, to go after some chaps who had gone A.W.L. but we didn't find them, as we didn't look very hard, and we had a nice day, it is a great War so far. 5th May unloading ammo from trains. This continued until the 14th, when we went cutting poles until the 20th, which is pay day. In the afternoon we were in my tent playing cards, our officer was with us, and he had his revolver on. They had orders to load them the night before, and he is to teach us how to unarm anybody who had one. One of my cobbers came up behind us, and took the revolver from his holster, and not knowing that it was loaded, he pulled the trigger, and shot the Lieut. through the chest. He died almost at once, the bullet went right through him, and came out where I was leaning against him, and I just felt it. They arrested my cobber on a charge of murder, and things looked pretty black for him. Later in the evening, quite a few of us were taken out into the bush, as there were thought there were Jap spies sending flares up. We are taking turns in watching for them. In the daytime we are sleeping or playing cards. We stay out here for a week, when I am summons to appear in Charters Towers Police Court, as I have to give evidence for my cobber. I never want to go into a witness box again, but my evidence cleared my cobber, and he is now a free man again. We are here for two more days, when we go back to camp. I am on guard duty tonight, but about 8 p.m. I and four of my cobbers are called out, and told to pack everything as soon as we can, as we have to catch a ship in the morning. We know nothing of where we are going or what we will have to do, all we know is that we have to man machine guns on the ship. We arrive on the wharf about 3 p.m. and go on board, and promptly go to sleep. When we wake up we are miles out to sea. 3rd June - we are sailing up the coast of Queensland, we are escorted by some planes. We still do not know where we are going, but we are having a great time, good food, and we are catching up on some sleep, not much card playing, the ship is a Dutch, and is manned by a Phillipin crew. We can't make head nor tail of their talk yet. I am on watch daily, from 12 to 4 and at night the same. Found out where we are going, it is Port Moresby, we expect to reach there on the 6th. the water is very smooth, no seasickness as yet.

June 6th; landed Port Moresby this morning, don't think much of the place yet. There is an air raid, and we are standing by the guns, while the ship is zigzagging everywhere, was to make a hand target from the air, but the flares are not near us and we can hear them drop on the Drôme, which is about 9 miles away. We went ashore about 9.30 a.m. to see some chaps we knew, who were already on the Island. After a lot of walking, and getting lifts we eventually found them, and were they pleased to see us. They asked us hundreds of questions, all of which we tried to answer. Talk about hills, I have never seen anything like them, they go straight up and down, but we had to leave, and get back to the ship, as some of the others want to get ashore. When we got back we played cards with some of the crew. We are getting on very well with them now, they have started to unload the ship now, and we should be away from here by tomorrow, some of the houses are well knocked about by bombs, though not as much as we thought.

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The 39th M.G. have a pretty good name around here, have a couple of Jap. planes to their credit, also the ack ack which have bought down quite a few Nip bombers. Left P.M. 6.30 a.m. on the 8th June for our return journey. The sea is very rough. I was very near sea sick for a while, but it has worn off now. It is now 10.30 a.m. and we are completely out of sight of land, it has been raining and is pretty dull. Tuesday 9th the sea is very rough, very nearly seasick, some of the boys are, but I am still able to keep my breakfast down by a big effort.

10th June no change in weather, have not been sick yet, don't think I will be now. The boys are not eating yet, the food is too rich for them, the name of the ship is the "Japane".

11th we are having a pleasure cruise now, it is lovely sailing along, with hardly a ripple on the water. We are coming down the coast inside the reef there are quite a lot of Islands, and they look very nice, just about the most beautiful sight I have ever seen, when the sun is setting behind them.

June 12th the water is a bit rough this morning, and we have no Reef to protect us. We should hit Brisbane about Sunday. I hope we stay there for a couple of days, as I might be able to see Lucy. It is now 10 a.m. and I am watching the coast, just about opposite Bundaberg, the sea is still very rough, also the coast line. Had a very interesting voyage so far.

Sat. 13th the sea is a lot calmer, and we are able to walk about without staggering, which is quite a change, starting to enjoy ourselves again.

Sunday 14th Have just started to come into the bay and river, on which Brisbane is situated, we can see little towns all along the coast, we have to anchor about 30 miles out and wait for the pilot to come on board and guide us in. 15th Monday The pilot has just come on deck and while I am writing we are slowly moving again, will dock about 10 a.m.

Well, we have docked at Bretts Wharf and we can see a fair bit of Brisbane, we will soon be going ashore, then I will have to find a pay office so that I can send some wires, one to Merle and one to Lucy telling them that I am back in Aussie again. Have sent all my wires, and have been to the pictures, also had a good feed of steak and eggs and tomatoes, which tasted very good. I am going back to the ship now to sleep.

Tuesday 16th. Well we didn't stay long in Brisbane, we left 8.15 a.m. and now believe we are on our way to Newcastle, couldn't get up to see Lucy and so very disappointed, as I was looking forward to seeing her again, but if we keep going south I might be able to get home and see my sister, which will make up for not seeing Lucy. The sea is getting a little rough again now and will be for some time.

Wed. 17th still following the coast down, sea is very calm now just like a pleasure cruise. Had some drill this morning, manning a five inch gun, also vickers, had quite a lot of fun.

Thurs. 18th arrived in Newcastle, went ashore this afternoon, found a pay office then sent wires home, also one to Lucy and posted each a letter I am going ashore tonight to a dance. Fri. 19th had a good time at dance, didn't take anybody anywhere

the ship into dry dock this morning, and I went ashore again, I looked up some old friends who were real glad to see me, will see them again tomorrow

Sat. 20th went with friend to see lights, then to a dance, then back and said goodbye, got on board about 1 a .m.

Sun. 21st. left for Sydney at 7.30 a.m. arrived 3.30 p.m. went ashore and had a look over Sydney again.

Mon. 22nd. Didn't go ashore until night, saw a show and came back.

Tues. 23rd went and looked up Mrs "Mre" who I knew when I was going to school, she was very pleased to see me. Come back about 8.30 p.m. and went to bed. Wed. 24th just a lazy day, had a few drinks.

Thurs. 25th the same as yesterday.

Fri. 26th pulled out into the Bay 7.30 a.m. and anchored until 2.30 p.m. then left Sydney.

Sat. 27th A bit of a swell running, have some more on board, to look after Anti Sub gun, they are all sick.

Sun. 28th Weather good just keeping watch.

Mon. 29th Just passed Brisbane, we are 70 miles out to sea, which is calm.

Tue. 30th Payday for crew, plenty of gambling for them now.

Wed. 1st July weather pretty good, big ring around moon, might be some dirty weather ahead. Thurs. 2nd Arrive Townsville 11 a.m. but only stopped an hour, couldn't get off to post some letters. Fri. 3rd very nice going just now can't see very far because of haze. Sat. 4th becoming more rough. Sun. 5th had a very rough night, can hardly stand on deck. We lost all our food. The steward put it on the table and then there was a big wave, the boat tipped, and it all went on to the floor, but we got some more. Couple of boys sick, so had good breakfast. Arrived Port Moresby 6 p.m. anchored in bay. Mon. 6th had an air raid about 8.15 a.m. .. no bombs closer than a mile, could see 24 planes, but they were too far away for our guns. Two alerts in three hours. Tues. 7th Another raid this morning managed to get a few shots at some planes, heard after that one was brought down, but don't know by who. Two more raids during days, and bombs were dropped all about us, but only one close, about 12 feet away. I hit the deck pretty hard, and was nearly deaf, but only one chap was hurt. Wed. 8th all quiet getting unloaded. Thurs. 9th Left P.M. 6.30. Sea is quite calm, have two chaps on board, one very sick. Fri. 10th Having a very quiet trip nothing happened. Will reach Townsville Sunday. Sat. 11th Nice sailing. Sun. 12th. Anchored at midnight, ship waiting until wharf cleared. Mon. 13th. Went in the wharf this morning and started to unload. Going into town to have a walk around. Tuesday 14th Getting a cargo of airforce gear on. Looks like Port Moresby again. Wed. 15th received our long awaited mail from Selheim today there were 22 letters for me - was I pleased to receive them, as I had been waiting for a letter from Lucy, also from home. Have just found out that the R.A.A.F. gear belongs to Bluey Truscott's Squadron. Thursday 16th expect to pull out today. Have 45 more on board. We will be pretty crowded this trip. Left jetty 2.15 p.m. anchored in Bay to wait for a convoy. Friday 17th Still in Bay expect to sail tonight for somewhere near Lae. Saturday 18th. Left Townsville 10 p.m. sea very calm. I will be going on watch in 2 hours time, but we do not expect anything to happen just yet. Sunday 19th Had to wait for 4 hours for an escort. Heading for a new place this time, as we are not on the same course as P.M. Monday 20th Sea is a bit rough today. A lot of the chefs on board are sea sick, should see land tomorrow. Tues. 21st Come in sight of land this morning. We are now going thru the Antic Coxade Straits, which is better known as the Samar Straits. It is very pretty, it is about the nicest trip we have had yet. It is 40 miles up the Bay, to where we are going. Tied up at the jetty 1 p.m. but left again very soon, as there is a scare on, we are going in a big hurry. Wed. 23rd Still going away from the Bay. 2 p.m. changed course again, and we are now heading back to Milne Bay, will arrive sometime tomorrow. Thurs. 23rd July Arrived back at 2 p.m. and started to unload our cargo. We went ashore, and managed to get some natives to climb coconut trees and get us some, which we enjoyed. Friday 24th Still unloading. I have been playing cards all day, as it has been raining, and too wet to go ashore. I lost this morning, but got it back this afternoon. Saturday 25th Left Milne Bay this morning at 7.30 a.m. for Townsville. Was pleased to get away, as we were scared all the time, as there are reports that the Japs are not far away. The Coral Sea Battle has just finished. We sailed not very far away from it, when we had to get out of the Bay last Wednesday.

Sunday 26th JULY Still going good, and nothing to report, looks like a good trip home. We are getting sick of the rich food, or the way it is cooked. We bought a lot of our own last time. Monday 27th Nice and calm, looking out for Jap Subs. - Hope we don't see any. Have been having some drill on our 3.7 Anti Sub. Gun - fired a couple of shots, also had some practise with our smaller weapons. Tuesday 28th Arrived Bowen, which is just below Townsville. Went ashore about 5 o'clock, with some of the crew. Had quite a few drinks, and then to the pictures, also saw a dance or two, but didn't have any. Back on board about 12.30 a.m. Wednesday 29th Went ashore all day, saw some of the sights, pictures again at night, there was an alert about 12 and some talk about Jap planes being over Townsville. There were a couple of bombs dropped, but no damage. Thursday 30th Arrived Townsville, very nice trip of eight hours. Friday 31st Docked 10 a.m. We went ashore and got paid, as I was broke after my stay at Bowen - more sight seeing at night. We are beginning to be known now, and people ask us what kind of a trip we had. Saturday AUGUST 1st Stayed on ship and wrote letters, posted them at night. Saw pictures. Sunday 2nd Took on more troops, and pulled out at 3 p.m. and started our trip to Gillie Gillie, which is off Milne Bay. Monday 3rd Just nice. Have just come off watch. Tuesday 4th Sea a bit rough. Some of the boys not too good. Wednesday 5th Landed at our destination 10 p.m. anchored out in the Bay. Thursday 6th Docked at 10 a.m. Air Raid at 3 p.m. Saw a couple of Jap. planes. Friday 7th Just finished unloading. Another raid. One ship sunk in Bay the 'MACHDHUR'. Hope I don't see any more bombs coming down. Saturday 8th On our way back to Port Moresby. Will arrive this afternoon. Sunday 9th Caught up with convoy 11 a.m. We are now headed for Townsville again. Monday 10th Sighted land at 9 a.m. this morning. We are just going thru the Reef. Tuesday 11th arrived Townsville and docked 10 a.m. Here we were told that we had to get off the ship by 2 p.m. as our voyage was finished. Very sorry to leave the old ship, also the crew, who were good to us. We were taken out to Clouidon, about 3 miles away, but came back into town at night. Wednesday 12th put on train for Selheim this morning and arrived back in our old camp at 5 p.m. where we received a great reception from our cobbers, and we were kept busy telling them our adventures. Thursday 13th Went on guard, didn't like it very much. Friday 14th We who had been away tried to get home leave, but couldn't. Gee we were disappointed, we all talked of going a.w.l. - if somebody had of started we would have all went, but we decided to stay. We also decided to join the A.I.F.

SATURDAY 15th Joined up today, and sworn in once more. Hope to get my VX number soon, also had some letters today. I am not on the best of terms with Lucy at present, but hope to get things straightened out soon. Sunday 16th Wrote letters all day. We have all been warned for draft, and expect to move out tonight about 1 a.m. It is very cold now. Monday 17th Went on board ship at 7 a.m. this morning, and sailed once again at 9 a.m. Will not be coming back so quick this time. I will soon know this route now, as this is my ninth trip. Tuesday 18th Nice and quiet, quite a lot of gambling going on. We are on a Dutch Ship, of which I can't pronounce the name "....." Wednesday 19th Still quiet, just about sick of cards. We had the job of manning the ship's guns, but we did more sleeping than watching.

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THURSDAY 20th AUGUST Arrived Port Moresby 7.30 a.m. - left ship by corvette 7 a.m. We were then taken by truck to Luw Levels, which is about 20 miles inland, and about 30 miles from P.M. - here we met quite a few of our old coppers who were just coming back from their first go at the Japs. Friday 21st just getting fixed up, no work. Saturday 22nd Went for a route march this morning. Just about knocked up, had a swim with all our clothes on, and felt a lot better. Had a lecture in the afternoon. Sunday 23rd Had an easy day. From 24th to 30th just training, boy am I losing some perspiration. A couple of months of this and I will be a grease spot. Had two letters from Lucy, and one from Merle, thru the week. Still training 4th Sept. on the 5th we moved camp. We are now camped near an aerodrome. About 12 noon, we pitched our tents. In the afternoon we did not do anything, nor for the weekend.

Monday 7th Sept. We went for our first real route march, pretty tough going, as we are going up and down pretty steep hills, and I was just about knocked up, when we got home. One of my best coppers from the 52nd Bn. got skittled yesterday. He was a great chap. About this time there were quite a lot of raids, anything up to 25 bombers would come over, but there was never very much damage done. We are still doing some tough training. We moved camp once again. I am having a lot of trouble with my beds. Beds are not supplied by the Army, and we have to make our own, and material is pretty scarce. I am afraid I am more often on the ground than not.

Saturday 19th There was a big air raid this morning, when over 30 bombers came over. They dropped somewhere near 300 bombs, but only hit some fuel, which made a big smoke, also a couple of Kittyhawks, but that was all. Wednesday 23rd We have moved camp once again. We are up in the hills now, a lot closer to the Nips. The guards will be a bit harder now. It is very nice where we are camped at present, right on a high bluff. Of course we do our training up and down the bluff, and boy is it steep. Saturday 26th Have been digging quite a number of new trenches, they must think the Nips will come across here, but we have heard that they have been stopped, but only just in time. If they had kept on coming, I think I would have been finishing this back in Aussie, as the plans were made for our evacuation, anyway. We will have to push them back across the range again, most likely do a bit of that myself.

OCTOBER Saturday 3rd Have finished these positions here, will be moving to another area today, have had a little bit of action, where some Nips tried to get in our lines one night. We drove them out, and chased them for 7 to 8 hours, caught up with them, and quite a few of their coppers and had to get out as best we could. One chap didn't, and another got wounded, but I am still all in one piece.

Saturday 10th Have been on the alert this week a lot, getting a bit tired now, also been out on patrol since last Monday. Ran into a few Nips and got a couple. We had no casualties. From Saturday 10th to Thursday 15th Went out on patrol twice. Had a go at the Japs and got back. We accounted for 15. When I arrived back there was a letter from Lucy and Merle. Things are fixed up between us again. All well at home. We are moving camp again today, back to 12 mile Drome, and then on to Bootless Bay, so we might be able to have a swim in the sea. We are hearing a lot of rumours about going home. I wish they were true. Went out on patrol last night.

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OCTOBER

Saturday 17th Went out on patrol this morning, contacted the Japs, had a mix up for a while, would have been wounded with a bayonet only for a friend who skittled the nip first. We got four of them this time with our "Owens". Returned at 8 p.m. with one man wounded.

Sunday 18th Had a spell today, but out again at night to a position which we have to hold all night so it looks like no sleep.

Monday 19th Had a bit of a scare last night, as the Nips threw a few grenades at us, but we didn't get hurt, though we had the wind up all night. Our relief has just arrived. Home again now. I have just written home, and to Lucy. We have been told there will be no more patrols for us, for some time, so we are fairly happy, but there is plenty of work, as we have to dig more new positions. I have a brengun now, and have to carry it everywhere I go. There are two of us in little tents, but they are not much good when it is raining, which is pretty often.

Saturday 31st Still digging all the week, nearly finished.

Monday 2nd NOVEMBER Have moved again. I guess if they filled all the holes up with water that we have made, the dammed Island would sink, can't say it would be any loss either.

DECEMBER 1st There has been plenty of digging lately, the last lot of positions, we had to sleep in and live in for 48 hours. Am not feeling too good. A lot of chaps getting Malaria, hope I miss out. Have just got word that we will be moving any time now. Looks like another goat the Nips, I hope I am as lucky as last time.

December 2nd Have had word to pack up, which we have done, we are going over by plane. December 3rd Went to the Drome this morning, and flew to a place called Pependitto, then had to walk about 22 miles through mud up to our knees. I knocked up once, but managed to catch up by night fall, but a lot of chaps didn't. We went straight into the front line, but didn't do any fighting that night, or next day, though we fired a few shots.

DECEMBER 6th My birthday today - very nice, there was a big attack this morning. I lost two of my mates, I got a whack on the head, and had a sleep for a couple of hours. I am having a lovely Birthday, I got a Jap. for breakfast.

December 7th I took over a Vickers M.G. this morning, so feel very pleased with myself. There are still 3 of us from the Boat Crew, out of five, one killed, and one wounded so far. I hope that doesn't keep up, or my turn will come soon. I expect to go in with the Vickers in the morning, and look for Snipers. We are still attacking but not getting very far, have had no sleep for three days, or a shave for a fortnight. Our Casualties are pretty heavy. Can't keep this up for long.

December 8th Went in with the Vickers this morning, fired just on 1,000 rounds, had quite a bit of fun, it was just daylight, came out 45 minutes later without loss.

December 9th Didn't do any fighting today, had three hours sleep. DECEMBER 10th Expect to take Gona West today, timed to go in 3.30 p.m. (later) Well that's that, we are where the Japs used to be. I don't know how many I got, for sure. We have to go somewhere else now. Pretty hard going today, we marched thru mud up to our knees for five hours. Have had less than 15 hours sleep since we came over. Have just about (had it). Might have a wash tomorrow, as we have not had one yet. I feel awful.

December 11th Have taken up positions and waiting for Japs to come, can hear them not very far away, looks like another tough night, with no sleep. December 12th Well we got some last night, but I didn't have a hand in it. Spent a sleepless night, everything pretty quiet today.

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13th Haven't been dry or had a wash for 10 days. Another quiet day. December 14th Things are starting to happen this morning. Nearly got blown up with a shell from our own artillery, a piece landed about three feet from where I was, and covered me with mud. We are going in again this afternoon, so I hope I will be able to finish this when I come out, wish I could get a letter from Lucy. December 15th Went into action 5 a.m. it was murder, we withdrew into our holes which were full of water. December 16th Still in holes, we are pinned down properly, bullets are wizzing everywhere, no food today. December 17th I was taken out and made a Sniper, as the other chap had been wounded, had some fun for three days. Managed to get 19 out of 20 shots. December 20th I am feeling pretty sick now, have the shakes and shivers. We took the position at last, a bit costly to both sides, we buried just on 800 Japs, and quite a few of our own. I can hardly keep my head up now, but there are quite a few worse than me. Got our mail yesterday, and I took it up the tree to read and got a bullet thru it. December 21st Sick as a dog, but I have to keep going, we are on our way to Sonanandra, but don't think I will make it. December 22nd Called in at M.D.S. after I went out to it, had a temperature 105 degrees, put straight on jeep ambulance, and taken to Popanditte drome where I stayed the night and shivered. December 23rd I don't know very much about the next 2 days. Arrived in hospital 4 p.m. Xmas Eve. I do not remember the plane trip back across the Ranges. December 29th. Feeling a lot better, have been told that I will be going home in the first hospital ship that is in, also told I had the first stages of Black Water Fever, that is why they are sending me home.

JANUARY 5 1943 I am already to leave Hospital, just waiting for the Ambulance to take us to the ship. Went on board at 3.30 p.m. and sailed at 6 p.m. The best sight I ever saw the last of N.G. fading away in the distance. January 6th Sea nice and calm and the food is good will be getting back some of my lost condition soon. January 7th. Just lying in my bunk or up on deck in the sun, I am feeling better now. January 8th Arrived Townsville this morning, and put all the Yanks off, left again at 5 p.m. heading for Sydney. The name of the ship Katumba. January 9th Having a lovely trip. This reminds me of when we were on the "Japara" going backwards and forwards. January 10th Went to Church this morning and enjoyed the Service. All is well. Expect to reach Sydney on the 13th January, which we did. Arrived Sydney 7.30 a.m. We disembarked on to a hospital train, we are now heading for Bathurst, which is over the Blue Mountains, arriving about 4.30 p.m. We were then taken by Ambulance to hospital. It is great here. We are getting looked after like kings. I am feeling pretty well now. Looking forward to going home on leave. Se stayed in hospital until the 5th FEBRUARY, when we went to Sydney, where we were put on train for Melbourne, where I was given 14 days leave, on which I had a great time. Had to report back to Royal Park and left for Sydney again on the 25th FEBRUARY. Hanging round Sydney Showgrounds for a few days, got sick of it, and decided to go A.W.L. to Toowoomba to see Lucy. Went and made inquiries regarding trains, bought a ticket to Gosford for 3/6d. and travelled all night until 2.30 p.m. At Glen Innes, which was as far as the train went there were Provost on the station, so I had to get off the wrong side of the train ~~XXXXXX~~ and go around the town so as to miss them.

I got onto the main road, got a lift for 5 miles then had to walk for seven or eight after that.

I got a lift into Tenterfield, arriving 3 a.m. on the 4th MARCH 1943. Slept until daylight, then started to walk again, and then got a lift in Warrengarra arriving there about noon, there were no trains leaving, so walked to Lyra which is 7 miles over the N.S.W. border, waited until 10 p.m. for goods train, had to walk a little way, but mistook the railway line, and walked up a ramp, which abruptly came to an end, and I fell about 25 feet down to the line below, knocking myself out. When I came to, I found I had quite a bit of skin missing on my face, also a badly cut finger. I didn't know where I was for some time, but managed to crawl into a truck and so went on to Warwick, which is about 40 miles from Toowoomba. Arrived Warwick 3.30 a.m. and left the train and got on to the road again. I did quite a lot of walking, but managed to secure a lift or two, and finally arrived Toowoomba about 2.30 p.m. on the 5th March.

I went to a friend's place, Mrs. Pengelly, who gave me a cup of tea, and then I had a shave and haircut. After that I went up to Lucy's. She was not at home when I arrived, and her mother did not recognise me for a while, but she was very pleased when she did. Had to wait for Lucy to come home, but went to sleep in a chair.

When I woke up she was standing looking down at me. She was real pleased to see me, and quite surprised, but she made me go to bed very early. I was not sorry either, as I was very tired. I spent a very enjoyable 12 days with them, and found out that Lucy was just a good friend, and I found out that we would only be good friends. Her Mother and Dad treated me like a son while I was there.

Started my return journey on the 17th MARCH. Caught a goods train, which was very slow, taking all night to cover 140 miles.

Arrived Warrengarra 7.30 a.m. 18th, then walked about 2 miles along the Tenterfield Road, when I got a lift into Tenterfield, there was not a train leaving until 1 o'clock so I had a meal and a sleep, and then caught the train to Glen Innes, arriving there about 5.30 p.m. Decided to wait till 10 p.m. and catch the Sydney Express. I bought a ticket which cost me 1/11d. just as well I did, as the M.P.'s were on the train, and I had to produce my old Ships Pass, which I had freshly dated while at Lucy's. It had them puzzled, but they said it was alright, and was I pleased, as I didn't want to get caught just then.

Had a fair night's sleep and arrived Sydney, arriving 1.10 p.m. on the 19th MARCH. I had dinner, and sent Lucy a wire, also wrote to MERLE, then went out to Showgrounds, and told them I had been away for ten days I should have told them I was there all the time, they would not have known any better, and I would not have been in any trouble. They gave me a ticket to Bathurst.

Caught a train 7.25 p.m. arrived Bathurst 1 a.m. 20th MARCH. It is very cold here, had to find my own way out to Camp, which is eight miles out. I arrived 3 a.m. feeling very tired, had to find 39th coppers, made a few inquiries, and found their hut. Curled up on a blanket, with my overcoat for a pillow and I went to sleep. Woke up next morning, my coppers were pleased to see me, and wanted to know where I had been, so I told them. I didn't do anything in the morning, but got put on a charge sheet in the afternoon, then had two days of doing nothing.

On Monday 22nd MARCH I had to go up before the C.O. He said he would let me off lightly, and only fined me 5 pounds and forfeited ten days pay. My finger is still giving me some trouble, I will have to get it seen to before long.

18/8

Tuesday 23rd I was issued with all new gear, and spent the rest of the day putting it all together.

Wednesday 24th March I went out on Parade this morning, and dropped my rifle a couple of times, and then told them that my finger was too sore to hold it, but they would not believe me. I kept doing the same thing for nearly a fortnight. I had been going on sick parade pretty regular, and at last they took notice of me, and gave me seven days no duty. At the end of that time there was still no change, so I was sent to Hospital at Bathurst, from there I was sent to the 103 Convalescent Depot for treatment. Have been here for ten weeks, and have been having a wonderful time, going to town every day, plenty of beer, and some nice girls to get around with. I have had to send home for some money several times, but managed to get enough. My finger is still getting treated, but is just about the same.

JUNE I went up to my old home town last weekend, they gave me a welcome home. My partner received a nice bouquet, while I, a lot of nice words. Was discharged from the Depot on the Wednesday 23rd JUNE, and went to C.D.D. in Sydney where I had to move needles and have a kit inspection. Went to Newcastle for the weekend, had a great time, came back, and then had the bad luck to have my whole kit bag stolen while I was away seeing if a telegram had arrived saying I was granted some home leave, but I am still waiting for it.

Wednesday 30th. Supposed to be on draft to Liverpool today, but it has been wiped, so I am off to town now.

1st JULY Arrived Liverpool today, I am still waiting on the telegram about my leave, but have just about given up hope. Have been here at Liverpool for over a week now, but have been warned for draft tomorrow, have been granted 24 hours leave in the City. Still spending money, have spent just on 55 pounds since the middle of April, so will be glad to get away from here.

Came back this morning 9th JULY, and told draft not going until night, so I am going to have a few hours sleep, as I had a very hectic night, last night. Taken into town about 6 p.m. and put on a train at Central, pulled out 8.30 p.m. there are only six of us in the compartment, so we are not too crowded.

Arrived Brisbane 6.57 p.m. Friday night, Trucks were waiting to take us out to a Camp called Yereonderpilly, where we are to sleep tonight. Had tea, then saw a concert, and then to bed. Got leave next day at 1 p.m. I didn't have much money, so I only had a look around Brisbane. I was shouted to the pictures, which were not bad, got back to Camp just after midnight. Warned for draft on Sunday morning, but there were no trains, so a cobbler and I went for a walk, but were back in camp and in bed by 10.30 p.m. Warned for draft North this morning, but do not go until night, so had to stay in camp all day. Caught train 10.15 p.m. on the way to Townsville, it is now 10.45 p.m. 12.7.1943.

Arrived Wandeele 18th JULY and drafted into 2/1 Aust. Field Ambulance on the 21st JULY, 1943. Started to learn medical work. It is fairly interesting so far. There are plenty of stunts, route marches, and building bush hospitals wherever we may be.

Home on leave for Xmas, 31 DAYS. HAD A GREAT TIME.

Arrived back on the tablelands 20th JANUARY, 1944. Getting very sick of the Army, but it doesn't look as if the war is going to end for some time yet.

From FEBRUARY TO JULY we did nothing but stunts. Had plenty of lectures. Passed my exams for extra 6d. a day, in March 1944.

Have been having a bad trot at gambling lately, but managed to get it all back in one night. Haven't done much since. I have seen Lucy a couple of times, but can't get her to make up her mind.

Had leave in July and arrived back in Cairns 6.9.1944. I am sitting on the beach writing this up, and am going to see an old friend of Mrs. Cameron's, a Mrs. Wallace. She is getting pretty old now, just on 80. Left Red Bank at 9 a.m. 7th Sept. for the last stage of my journey back to camp at "andeela. Had the luck to get my old kit bag back from New Guinea while I was in Brisbane last time, and took it up to Lucy's and left it there, where it will be quite safe, and I will know where it is. When I arrived back in Camp, was warned for overseas draft, but we don't know when; but we have an idea that our next Camp might be in the Philippines, which should be alright. Carried on with the same training.

It is now NOVEMBER, and the training is still the same. We are starting to pack up the Q. store now. Some Bn's. have already gone, but I think we will be the last to go.

DECEMBER Plenty of work packing up now, it is funny where all the gear comes from. We will have about 80 tons when we leave here. Well here it is the 6th and I have had my BIRTHDAY. Sorry to say I got just about full, as some of the boys got a couple of bottles of gin and gave to me. Didn't feel too good on the 7th, so went down the beach and had a good sleep.

XMAS, and we are still here, but will be gone before the end of the month. Had a very nice Xmas dinner, and tea, Turkey, and all kinds of poultry, also plenty of ham and meat and plum pudding, and best of all plenty of beer. There were some fights, and one chap, just about went mad, and took to the C.O. with a carving knife, He is now in the lock up, and waiting for court martial.

27th Leaving Wandeela tonight, one would not think there had ever been a camp here, and everything is cleaned up. The trucks have all been loaded, and some of the boys have already gone with them, to load onto the ship. Entrained at a quarter past 12 a.m. and arrived Cairns for breakfast., then went straight on board ship, the "City of Mexico". We are pretty crowded, we pulled out 9.15 a.m. and once more, I am watching the shores of Australia fading away.

Having a very calm trip. We have no escort, passed Milne Bay about 7 p.m. second day out, then headed up the coast of N.G. We know where we are going now. ARRIVED AITOPI 4th JAN. 1945. We had to climb over the ship's side by rope ladders to get into the barges, which are to take us ashore. ARRIVED in our new Camp 2.30 p.m. on the 6th JAN. We went for a swim in the surf, and saw where the Yanks had landed the July before, also saw some Jap. pill boxes, but we had seen them before at Gona. These boxes had been burned out by flame throwers. Came back and went to a Yank picture show, which was not bad the "Merry Monakams" Nothing much doing next day, so I wrote a couple of letters. It is now 12 noon 8th JAN. From 8th Jan. to 15th Feb. we had a pretty easy time. On the 16th Feb. we got word that we were going up to the front, and left next day 17th, with everything we possessed, and went about 40 miles by truck, where we camped for the night. I was on guard from 2 a.m. till 4 a.m. but everything was very quiet. The next day 18th, we started to march, and boy was it hot. We marched for two days before we caught up with the 2/8th Bn. which we were to be attached to. We then had a days spell, and then went up with the Bn. and I helped to carry our first battle casualty of this Campaign on the 21st FEB. 1945.

Plenty of work in the next month, as we were with a Bn. all the time. Had some very hard carries, as there are a lot of hills around here. The advance is going pretty well at present, the engineers can't keep up with the Inf. as all the roads have to be remade by them. We had a couple of days spell on the 19th and 20th MARCH, and then on again. I was with the forward troops when Butt Drome was taken. So far B. Coy. has brought in just on 400 Casualties. We are told that we have been doing a good job, and we are very popular with the Bns. who do not like A. Coy. of our Field Amb. and they are always pleased when they know what Coy. of stretcher bearers are going in with them. We are by ourselves at present, just B. Coy. We have our own A.D.S. and have to keep things moving. A couple of hours guard every night, is still starting to tell on us, and we are all starting to get a bit tired.

Received a letter from Lucy on the 2nd of APRIL 1945, telling me of Wally death. Sent her a telegram of Sympathy.

MERLE is very sick at present. I have only written a couple of letters home in the last two months. Went in to take a hill on the 5th April. It was pretty hot for an hour or so, and I got a couple of scratches from a Nip and his rifle, but an Inf. chap got him before he hurt me too much. Had a piece of plaster on my forehead for a couple of days. On the 7th April, I received a telegram from home, saying that Merle had been operated on and that she was very sick, and could I get home. I tried all day, but all I received was sympathy. I had a talk to my C.O. but he said he couldn't do anything without a Dr's. certificate, so I sent a wire asking for it but it will take a fortnight to get back here. In the meantime I was sent back to my post, as we are very short handed. I don't go much on my chances of getting home, so I hope everything turns out alright.

8th. 9th APRIL. Still no word from home, I am pretty worried.

10th. Letter from Bonney today, MERLE is not doing too bad, but I am still trying to get home. 11th APRIL. We are having a couple

of days spell at present, which we badly need. Had a look at the small Cemetery today, and saw where there were quite a few of my cobbles from the 39th Bn. buried. There are a lot less of the old bunch now.

I have helped and carried quite a few of them out. 12th. Still no work but expect to go in again soon. 13th. Still no more letters from home

Wish I could get home to see MERLE. 14th. No work yet, and no word from home. 15th Letter tonight. MERLE still very sick, treating her

with Penicillin. 16th. Wrote home today. News from front line not so good. 7 killed yesterday, and they called this a mopping up Campaign.

17th. Another five killed. 18th. Going up in the morning.

19th. Went in with the Inf. today, fired my first few shots of this Campaign. Think I hit a Nip, but not sure, but I had to take cover,

and get a wounded chap out. I received no praise from the Corp. O.C. for getting him out. The nights are the worst as they are hard on the

nerves. 24th. Out again. 26th. Looks like another long march in a couple of days out behind the ranges. 27th. Moved Camp near beach.

28th. Going into the hills tomorrow. 29th & 30th. About the hottest time we have had so far. We received our first Casualty. Trevor Plummer

got killed last night, couldn't get him out, and had to leave him there with another dead chap. Had a letter from home today, MERLE not too

bad. My application for leave knocked back. It is raining like the devil at present, and we are all wet thru.

1st MAY 1945. Another bad day today, too much lead flying for my liking didn't get any sleep last night, as the Nips are only 60 yards away, and they are throwing grenades at us, so I am keeping well down in my hole.

My nerves are starting to go now, but everybody else's are the same. 2nd MAY 1945. Still the same, wet thru for three days now. Don't look like getting out yet. 4th. Had no sleep again last night, and it is still raining, and the Japs. are everywhere. Found Plum's. body today, after an attack to clean up the hill, which we did - the little cows had cut him up, taken out his heart and liver, and cooked and eaten them. We are all feeling pretty sore about it.

I got myself an Owen Gun last night, so I will feel a bit safer now. Anybody would think I was an Infantry chap instead of a Stretcher Bearer.

5th. Well, thank goodness that is over, our relief came up this morning, and we are going out for a spell again. I said quite a few prayers last week, and they were answered. On our way out we were ambushed. I forgot all about being a medical orderly, and I was out in front. A chap along side of me got one thru the chest. I fired a few shots, and then started to dress the wound. By this time we were out away about 20 yards, and the O.C. had to get the chaps together and come and get us back out. There were 4 Bren Guns, and 11 Owen Guns, and they stood shoulder to shoulder till we crawled out. I was just about all in, as he was a big chap, and couldn't help me much, but he thanked me, and that helped somewhat. I lost my gun in the scrimmage, so I didn't have to carry that ~~but~~. The Japs. were still there, and there was quite a lot of lead flying about. I grabbed the wounded chap's rifle, and had a few shots, and I know I hit one in the arm.

We are back on the coast again now, but don't know how long for.

There was a very nice letter from General Stevens pinned up on the board, telling us five what a good job we had done. There was a D.C.M. and M.N. won in that 6 days, so we didn't do too badly.

Nothing doing at present.

THE WAR IS OVER IN EUROPE. Might not be so very long before it is all finished now.

Had a letter from Lucy today. She is going to marry a Yank, so that's that. 14th JUNE 1945. Having a spell at present, looks like I have had my last go at the Japs. Have not done very much in the last month.

15th JUNE. Had a couple of Stretcher carries lately. We have taken Wewak and Dove Bay. It is only a matter of time now, out till the end of the month, when I went to a Commando Squadron. Had two more casualties, one shot thru the back, and one in the eye, but both O.K. Plenty of patrolling with Commando troops out nearly every day, get one or two Nips now and again. We have the Native Police Boys with us, who save us getting into a lot of trouble. I think they can smell when there is a Jap. close.

26th JULY. Still with the troop, have worn out a pair of boots while I have been here. Will be going down to the beach tomorrow, for a week's spell. Went up to the Fld. Amb. today, and had a yarn, stayed for two days. Will be back with the Troop 31st JULY.

Up in the hills again, but things are very quiet, the war is nearly over. Russians are coming down on the Japs. and the Atomic Bomb. Well the good news has come thru, but we are still in our positions, but will be going out in a day or two, back down on the coast again, and the coppers and I have been told we can go back to the Fld. Amb.

The C.O. thanked us for our work and we were put on a barge, headed for Wewak. We arrived back in Camp that night, and were told we were exempt from duty for a fortnight. All we did was eat and sleep, and swim, and lay in the sun.

26

We think we might be home for Xmas. Hope it is right. The points system is starting to work now, but we still think we will be home for Xmas. Well that settles about being home for Xmas, the Bomb has just fallen, all those with points below 157 are getting transferred to the 15th Fld. Amb. and we are going in the morning. I have just written to MERLE, telling her.

Well we are down in our new Camp, but we all reckon we are not going to do any work, as we are all very crooked on things. Had a pep talk by our new C.O. today, and he told us that this Camp will be what we make it, and that he will not be hard on us, as all the work will be divided out, and there would only be about 4 hours work a day. I was put on the wood heap with five other chaps. It is not bad work, and a chap gets some exercise.

We stayed there for just on 6 months, making arrangements for Xmas. I am on the Welfare Committee. I also give out the beer of a Thursday. We have Japs working around the Camp now, and I think next week I will be getting some for the wood heap. I have 12 Japs working now, and they do nearly as much as the 6 of us used to do. All the others are swimming all day. Life is generally pretty cosy just now. Had a very nice Xmas. 4 of us saved up our beer for over a month, and we just about got full Xmas Eve. Also Xmas Day. Couldn't do any work between Xmas and New Year.

Today the 2nd of January 1946, I had to go and get a saw bench, which I did, also an engine to run it. The next day I set it up and it worked. It would be a lot easier to saw by an engine than by hand. I also had a Jap. Wireless, which was very handy, as we use to get all the news. I have got a big heap of wood chopped now.

They have the new party list out now, and I am on it. I will have to see what can be done about getting off it. I was paraded to the C.O. this morning, and I told him why I wanted to get home, and he said alright, I could go, as long as I had enough wood chopped for a month, as I was the only one who could use the bench. Needless to say the wood was chopped up.

At last we were told the name of the ship that we were to go home on "ORMISTON", and there were just on 700 of us. My number was 449.

We left New Guinea, Wewak 24th Jan. 1946 and arrived Brisbane.

We had a great trip thru the City in open trucks, and the people gave us a wonderful welcome.

Left Brisbane for Sydney on the 1st Feb. 1946 arrived 3.30 p.m., and left for Melbourne at 6.25 p.m.

Arrived 12 Noon 2nd Feb. 1946 where Aunty Beat, Uncle Les and Toots were waiting to meet me. Went to the Hospital in the afternoon, and saw Merle, and was I glad to see her, and she me.

And then I arrived 6 p.m. on the 2nd February 1946, after an absence of eighteen months.

FINNIS.

Taken from the hand written transcript by Betty and Faye Robjant,
February 1994.

6 MEDALS

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