

Relationships between Officers and Other
Ranks in the Australian Army in the Second World War

by

Michael John Pyne

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the relationship between officers and other ranks in the Australian army in the Second World War were not the relationships that many rank-and-file soldiers had expected when they enlisted between 1939 and 1945. These expectations were formed in great part by the Anzac Legend, created between the First and Second World Wars, with the men expecting an army that was egalitarian in spirit, where officers used informal discipline rather than formal military discipline. They expected a certain sense of ‘civilianism’ when not in active combat.

This thesis points to an army with class consciousness and elitism in the officer culture, with increasing officer privilege and control. This control and privilege developed as the war progressed. One of the major reasons for the development of this culture was the different emphasis this army would need to place on the provision of home and forward logistics and support, thus creating an army with a large rear line culture, without the equality of sacrifice of front line service that the army of the First World War experienced.

As a result, relations between officers and other ranks were often strained and many men serving behind the lines felt disappointed and embittered and at times redundant in their contribution to the war effort.

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Michael Pyne

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Without these people, a task like this would be impossible

Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear.

Thucydides¹

They had no idea that the equality they claimed and thought they had already achieved would be like this.

David Malouf²

1 Thucydides, *The history of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 1, Chapter 1, verse 20. Translated by Rex Warner, Melbourne, Penguin, 1952.

2 David Malouf, *The Great World*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1990, p 141.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIF: Australian Imperial Force

ALP: Australian Labor Party

AMF: Australian Military Forces

AWL: Absent Without Leave

AWAS: Australian Women's Army Service

CB: Confined to Barracks

CMF: Citizen Military Forces

CO: Commanding Officer

CP: Country Party

CPA: Communist Party of Australia

GOC: General Officer Commanding

Lt: Lieutenant

MO: Medical Officer

NCO: Non Commissioned Officer

NSW: New South Wales

OCTU: Officer Cadet Training Unit

OTU: Officer Training Unit

POW: Prisoner of War

RAAF: Royal Australian Airforce

RSL: Returned Servicemen's League

RSM: Regimental Sergeant Major

RSSILA: The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia

UAP: United Australia Party

WO: Warrant Officer

INTRODUCTION

In 1965 the Australian historian Geoffrey Serle, himself a veteran of the Second World War, wrote, ‘All armies are abominations: army life is purgatory to any civilised man. The AIF was anything but a democratic institution, but there is a good case for arguing that it was far more democratic than most...’¹ Serle was writing about the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) of the First World War as well as his own experience in the Second World War and this sense of democracy has been an integral part of the Anzac Legend since it was created by C.E.W. Bean² and others during and after the First World War. It led to an expectation of soldiers in the Second AIF and also to soldiers of the Citizen Military Forces, who were commonly known in the Second World War as the ‘Militia’, that they, too, would be members of a more democratic and more egalitarian army than many others and that their experiences, especially behind the front line, would be similar to their fathers’ experiences. They expected that the relationships between officers and other ranks would be based on informal, rather than formal authority.

These characteristics of egalitarianism and democracy were developed by the Anzac Legend out of the First World War and have been a popularly perceived feature of Australian society since. It is Australia’s armed forces who, according to this belief, epitomise these characteristics through the continuation of the Anzac tradition. Whether or not these were characteristics of the First AIF, according to the Anzac Legend, this thesis argues that they were of diminishing presence in the Australian army of the Second World War. If an officer stood up to the ideals of the Anzac Legend, as the men would have expected, he was loved and respected. If he fell short, he was criticised and shunned. The waning of the Anzac ethos was not necessarily because the soldiers were lesser men but because society had changed and the conditions of fighting and serving were greatly different. The purpose of this thesis is to study the experiences of soldiers in the Australian army in the Second World War and see, firstly, if these experiences lived up to

1 G. Serle, ‘The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 24, 1965, p 153.

2 Bean was the Official War Correspondent and later Chief Military Historian for the Australian forces in the First World War. He wrote the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Vols. 1-6, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1924-1941, as well as his single volume *From Anzac to Amiens*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1946

this aspect of the Anzac Legend, and secondly, where their experience varied from the Legend, how this affected the relationships between officers and other ranks.

‘Egalitarianism’ has many meanings in the context of the Australian army of the First and Second World Wars. John Hirst differentiates between two types of egalitarianism, equality of outcome and equality of opportunity.³ An egalitarianism of outcome is impossible, given the different backgrounds of people, some born into advantage and others born into poverty and social dysfunction. It is doubtful if the Australian armies of either world war could have provided this egalitarianism. It is a high ideal for a democratic society; in a hierarchical military organisation, it is definitely not possible. Egalitarianism of opportunity existed technically in that after January, 1915, all men in the First AIF had to enlist as privates and promotion was open to all. However, as with egalitarianism of outcome, a soldier’s social and genetic advantage dictated how far these opportunities could be explored.

We can also add egalitarianism of respect and egalitarianism of pretence. For egalitarianism of respect, a worker had the right to expect respect and a ‘fair go’ from his boss, or his officers. Personal abuse and unfair treatment are not accepted with an egalitarianism of respect. An officer must be a ‘gentleman’ in the purest form of the word. With egalitarianism of pretence, an officer must at least treat the men under him with dignity and a pretence of egalitarianism, to satisfy the norms of the Legend and the larger Australian society. If these norms were ignored, it led to great resentment and bitterness amongst the other ranks.

The typical structure of an Australian infantry battalion in the Second World War in terms of rank can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Typical battalion makeup, Australian Military Force, Second World War. (with thanks to Karl James, AWM)

Battalion	550-1,000	4 rifle companies	Lieutenant Colonel
Company	100-225	3 platoons	Major or Captain
Platoon	30-60	3 sections	Lieutenant

³ John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, Melbourne, Black Inc Agenda, p 149.

Section	9-16		Sergeant/Corporal
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One such battalion was the 2/6th Battalion, recruited between October and November, 1939. Its War Diary shows that in April, 1940, when it was at full strength when it left to go overseas, it was made up of:

Table 2: 2/6th Battalion strength, April 14, 1940

OFFICERS	No.
Lieut. Colonels	1
Majors	3
Captains	9
Lieutenants	23
Chaplains	1
Total	37
Non Commissioned Officers	
Warrant Officers II	6
Quartermaster Sergeants	4
Sergeants	25
Corporals	56
Lance-corporals	2
Temporary Corporals	6
TOTAL non-commissioned officers	101
Troopers/privates	709
TOTAL other ranks	808
Total Battalion Strength	845

(Source: 2/6th Battalion, War Diaries, 14 April, 1940, pp 5-7, Australian War Memorial, AWM52 8/3/6/3).

This means the ratio of officers to non-commissioned officers to privates was 37:101:709. This organization and power structure was very pyramidal in its nature. All official decision making, whether it was at the frontline, in barracks, or in the rear lines, was made at the rank of senior commander (CO) and company commanders. Below them, junior officers carried out their orders with limited autonomy in the front line, and with almost no autonomy in the rear lines. The role of sergeants and section commanders was to carry out the orders of their platoon commanders up the chain of command. At the bottom, the private soldiers had no say in decision making and their 'working environment' was totally dependent on the skills and understanding of the officers above them. It would not be hard to make them unhappy or dissatisfied with their lot. On the other hand, good officers could lead to excellent morale and high efficiency.

There were differences in key aspects of the Anzac Legend from the rank-and-file soldier's experience in the Second World War which affected the way the other ranks perceived their officers. Firstly, the majority of soldiers in the army of the Second World War did not see action.⁴ The number of men required to maintain an infantryman in the field increased dramatically over 25 years. Most soldiers serving in the Second World War were in logistics support or in fighting units like artillery that were often miles behind the front line. They were not exposed to enemy fire as they were in the First World War. The 1st Armoured Division did not see action until the last year of the war, after it had been broken up and attached as small units to infantry divisions in 1943.⁵ The officers of these men in the rear lines did not have to share a fox hole or depend on them in battle. As John Moreman wrote:

The 'Bean tradition' had served Bean magnificently because the subject of his history, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), had been predominantly a *fighting* force with much of its logistical support provided by the British Army. In contrast, the Australian Military Forces (AMF) that waged the campaign in Papua functioned independently and had a sizeable and growing administrative or logistic 'tail'; many logistical troops served in 'the islands'.⁶

The second difference was that this war, for most soldiers, was fought close to home, with long periods of time spent on Australian soil. They were often idle, without direction and very disgruntled, or they were involved in endless training. The third difference was that soldiers in this war could belong to one of two different armies, the volunteer AIF or the largely conscripted Citizen Military Force (CMF), often called the Militia. This had a particular effect in the period up until 1943. The existence of two armies caused divisions between the rank and file of the two armies and between the rank and file and officers of the two armies, especially when, in 1942, integration of the two armies began to take place. Added to this was a change in army policy that meant transfers and promotions did not often see men returning to their original units if they left, which was in contrast to army policy of the First World War when men remained with their units if promoted or returned after recovering from wounds or illness. These differences worked

4 A detailed statistical breakdown of the numbers of frontline to support troops will be given in Chapter 4. However, it is indicative that, according to Mark Johnston, 45.5% of Australians soldiers never left Australia's shores between 1939 and 1945. (Mark Johnston, *The Australian Army in World War II*, Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2007, p 4).

5 Major General R.N.L. Hopkins, *Australian Armour: A History of the Royal Australian Armoured Corps 1927-1972*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Publishing Service, 1978, p 109.

6 John Moreman, 'Most deadly jungle fighters? Australian infantry in Malaya and Papua, 1941-43', (Unpublished BA (Hons.) thesis, University of New England, 1992), pp 10-11.

against a culture of egalitarianism and democracy and led often to a divided army, both between officers and other ranks and between the other ranks themselves.

Historiography of the ‘Anzac Legend’

C.E.W. Bean, in his creation of the Anzac Legend, argued that there was something special about the First AIF, based on a sense of independence and informality of command, which, according to Bean, was part of the reason for what he perceived as their superiority as fighting soldiers.

This is not to say that Bean regarded the soldiers of the First AIF as ill-disciplined; indeed, Bean repudiated those parts of Anzac mythology that lionized ‘drunkenness, thieving and hooliganism’. Instead, ‘it was discipline – firmly based on the national habit of facing facts and going straight for the objective – that was responsible for the [AIF’s] astonishing success’.⁷

Since Bean’s development of the Legend during and after the First World War, the spirit of egalitarianism and democracy has been a central part of the identity of the Anzac Legend.

Carolyn Holbrook points out in her work on the historiography of writing about war in Australia that in the 1920s and 1930s the ‘modernist’ approach to writing about the First World War that appeared overseas in books like Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That*⁸ and Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*,⁹ did not take hold in Australia. She wrote that ‘Despite its devastating consequences, the Great War was also the occasion of Australia’s national epiphany’¹⁰ and so Australia, under the shadow of Bean and still working to establish an identity of a new nation, was happy to stay with the heroic ‘official’ version of history. This allowed the concept of egalitarianism in the Australian army to go largely unquestioned.

Holbrook remarks that ‘Australian memoirists often remarked that the English class system had rendered the average British soldier impassive and unresourceful,’¹¹ thus reinforcing Australian belief in the egalitarian nature of their society.

7 C.E.W. Bean, *From Anzac to Amiens*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1983, p 538.

8 Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, London, Penguin, 1957.

9 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, London, Arrow, 1957.

10 Carolyn Holbrook, *Anzac, the Unauthorised Biography*, Sydney, New South Publishing, 2014, p 90.

11 *ibid*, p 90.

In writing about the world wars the question of relationships between officers and other ranks has rarely been treated as a discrete topic but arises in discussions, especially in regard to the First World War, of the 'Anzac Legend', the 'Anzac Tradition' and the 'Digger Legend'. C.E. W. Bean and other originators of the Anzac Legend such as Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett were most impressed with the Australian 'digger' and strove, in their writing, to praise and make a legend out of this 'everyman' soldier. Bean's account created in the public's mind the image of a free-spirited, bush-hardened, democratic volunteer soldier who was careful in choosing who in authority deserved respect, a soldier who believed in the ideals of egalitarianism and democracy. But, as in all legends, there is a degree of myth and it is here that the critics of the Anzac Legend find their point of criticism.

Interest in the nature of the First AIF was rekindled by Geoffrey Serle¹² and Ken Inglis¹³ in the 1960s. This interest was continued by Bill Gammage¹⁴ in the 1970s. There was now a debate on the whole 'Anzac tradition' and the identity of the Australian soldier in both world wars as well as the Vietnam War. Ken Inglis contributed to the discussion about the way we remember war in Australia in his 1965 article in *Meanjin*,¹⁵ which Serle described as the 'first serious modern discussion of Anzac and the Digger Legend'. Serle and Gammage, like Bean, argue that the First AIF was an army of remarkable men with a spirit of egalitarianism and democracy. While they do not argue for absolute equality between officers and other ranks, they argue for a closeness and general mutual respect.¹⁶ Along with his much later book *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*,¹⁷ which surveyed all of the war memorials built in Australia from the Sudan to the Vietnam Wars, he helped to regenerate interest, not only in the Australian experience of war but also in the way that Australians remember it and in how the Anzac Legend was created in the years towards the end of the First World War and the years after it, and continued throughout the century. Graham Seal's *Inventing Anzac: the Digger and National Mythology*, traces the development of the Anzac myth throughout the twentieth century and how

12 Geoffrey Serle, 'The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism', *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 24, 1965, pp 148-158.

13 Ken Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 24, March, 1965., pp 25-44.

14 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1975.

15 Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', pp 25-44.

16 Serle, *The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationality*, p 149.

17 Inglis, K.S., *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne, University Press, 2005.

it has become enmeshed in the Australian identity and folklore.¹⁸ For Seal, there is more than a legend to define, but he is interested in those aspects which have become mythologised and how they permeate popular thought today.

Jane Ross wrote *The Myth of the Digger* in 1985, a curious title, since she generally supported the independent, egalitarian and democratic concept of the digger in both World Wars, although she uses the word 'myth'.¹⁹ However several historians, described by John Hirst as 'agnostic' when it comes to the Anzac Legend,²⁰ have called into question the truth of the Legend. Lloyd Robson's study of the personal records of soldiers in the First AIF dispelled Bean's concept of the digger as being men from the bush with typical bushmen's knowledge which made them better soldiers. In fact, he showed, the majority of men in the First AIF had urban backgrounds.²¹

Besides Robson, these 'agnostic' or revisionist historians include Joan Beaumont, Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, E. M. Andrews, Dale Blair and Alistair Thomson. They all criticise the Anzac Legend, claiming it is based on chauvinistic notions of Australian manliness as well as claiming it is inaccurate in describing the experiences and achievements of Australian soldiers in the First World War. Joan Beaumont acknowledges that there was a sense of egalitarianism in the First AIF, and she adds that popular belief in this ethos, created by the Anzac Legend, led to expectations in men of the Second AIF that they would have similar experiences.²² This expectation led to a sense of disappointment and bitterness when they did not find that the culture of the army in the Second World War lived up to these expectations.

Beaumont points out in *Broken Nation*, her comprehensive history of Australians in the First World War, that it is not possible to verify empirically that the source of the egalitarian ethos of

18 Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and national Mythology*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004.

19 Jane Ross, *The Myth of the Digger, The Australians in Two World Wars*, Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1985. Ross defines myth, for the purposes of her book, as: '... a legend built up as an ideal-type out of what the myth-makers themselves, for whatever reasons, deem to be the most important features of the experience.' (Pp 12-13). At times the words 'myth' and 'legend' have become interchangeable in popular writing about the Australian armies of the 20th century. It is the blurring of the lines between fact, legend and myth that is at the centre of the historical debate over the Anzac Legend.

20 Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, p 233.

21 L.L. Robson, 'The Origin and character of the First AIF, 1914-1918: Some Statistical Evidence', in *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 15, Issue 61, October, 1973.

22 Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity, 1941-1945*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1988, p 17.

the First AIF was its recruitment of independent men from the bush, as originally claimed by C.E.W. Bean. But, she adds that by World War II, ‘the Anzac myth had become hegemonic in the sense that it seemed natural even to those who were not part of the elites that created it’.²³ She contests claims by the Anzac legend that the Australian army was the critical difference in defeating Germany. She wrote that by September 1918, six million men in 12 armies attacked on a broad front from Flanders to Verdun. ‘It is a statistic that should temper any chauvinistic claims that Australia won the war in 1918. With its five under-strength divisions, the AIF had perhaps between 40,000 and 50,000 men in the field at this time.’²⁴ She added: ‘to single out any one army, or indeed any one of these multiple variables,²⁵ as the factor that “won” World War 1 is to ignore the immense complexity and scale on which this war was fought.’²⁶

Dale Blair’s study of the 1st Battalion, First AIF, gives a valuable insight into one fighting unit that served from Gallipoli in 1915 through to the Western Front at the end of 1918. Blair argues that post First World War conservatives tended to ‘enshrine, mythologise and sanitise Australia’s sacrifice’.²⁷ The Australian army, contrary to the Legend, was not democratic, according to Blair. He says that ‘In reality, class *was* a factor in the shaping of the AIF and democracy *was not* a concept that particularly underpinned or informed martial control in either the British or Australian armies’.²⁸ The Legend, however, created an expectation in the Second World War recruits that in this egalitarian army, a person’s social position and background would not be a factor, an expectation that would be disappointed. E.M. Andrews saw the ‘illusion’ of the Anzac Legend as replacing another illusion – the British Empire. Andrews wrote that ‘as the illusion of the might, wisdom and military effectiveness of the British Empire was weakened by the war, another illusion was to take its place, that of the peculiar fighting qualities of the Australian soldiers.’²⁹

23 Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2013, p 552.

24 *ibid*, Pp 492-493.

25 naval blockades, industrial capacity, air superiority etc.

26 Beaumont, *Broken Nation*, p518.

27 Dale Blair, *Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War*, Melbourne, Melbourne University press, 2001, p 2

28 *ibid*, p 5.

29 E.M. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations During World War I*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p 60.

Alistair Thomson has written a very personal account of ‘living with the Legend’,³⁰ describing what life was like growing up thoroughly immersed in the Anzac Legend, in a military family during the Vietnam War days, with a father who was a senior officer in the Australian Army and both grandfathers having served in the First World War and then re-enlisting for the Second World War. He relates a first-hand evolution of his thoughts about war, from a keen devotee of the Anzac Legend, to an ‘agnostic’ view, then to open hostility to it. He traces the Anzac Legend through the Second World War to the 1990s when Prime Minister Paul Keating spoke about the fight ‘against an enemy to prevent the invasion of Australia’,³¹ attempting to change the emphasis of the Legend from the First World War to the Second World War.

One important contribution Thomson has made to historiographical debate deals with oral history. He writes of the difference between private histories and public histories, and how the two are often inseparable in the mind of the subject, in this case the veterans of the First World War. It is necessary for the researcher to help the subject unpack the memories. But the problem for reliability is that sometimes, the ‘general public memory’, the one promulgated by the media and other interested groups, becomes confused with the ‘particular public’ memory, often the platoon or unit of the subject, with whom he shares experiences and memories of the war, and the ‘private’ memories which often become lost in the public memories. The truth can be hard to find. Thomson sets a blueprint for oral history research by outlining the steps and methodology of his own project.³² Joan Beaumont, whose work on POWs will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, found similar difficulties with oral history when interviewing veterans of the 2/21st Battalion.³³ Oral history can be problematical because of its unreliability and subjectivity but, as Luisa Passerini³⁴ argues, human memories and oral accounts are full of meaning and significance, despite the problems of factual inaccuracy.³⁵

Reynolds and Lake can be seen to be on the far ‘left’ of the revisionist historians. Their book, *What’s wrong with Anzac? The militarization of Australian History*, reflects the beliefs of the

30 Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, 2nd Edition, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2013.

31 Paul Keating, Speech, 26/4/1992, in Keating, P., *Major Speeches of the First Year*, (Canberra, 1993), p59.

32 Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, pp 10-17 and 327 – 342.

33 Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force – survival and leadership in captivity 1941–1945*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988.

34 Luisa Passerini is an Italian historian who worked extensively in the area of oral history.

35 Luisa Passerini, as cited in Holbrook, *Anzac, the Unauthorised Biography*, p 146.

anti-war movement that was born during the days of the Vietnam War protests. They write ‘because we want to do justice to Australia’s long anti-war tradition which was born in revulsion at the terrible cost of war.’³⁶ They question the whole idea of paying homage to the Anzacs of either world war or subsequent wars and want to move the discussion about an Australian identity back to the study of social and political history.

Other historians such as Craig Stockings, Albert Palazzo and Chris Clark also take an ‘agnostic’ approach to the Legend. As contributors to the debate in books such as *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen*,³⁷ they target the myths and false notions of the Anzac Legend. Their approach is disputed by those who support the more conventional narrative such as Mervyn Bendle,³⁸ who has become a controversial conservative academic historian of what might be called the ‘far right’. The ‘history wars’ between Henry Reynolds and Keith Windshuttle which deal with debate over the history of contact between Australia’s indigenous peoples and non-indigenous Australians has now extended to debate over the role of the Anzac Legend in framing Australians’ view of history.

John Barrett’s study of Second World War veterans in 1988³⁹ gives a broad survey of the views of Second World War veterans, while Mark Johnston’s books on the AIF in North Africa and the Middle East and then in the South West Pacific, describe the Second AIF experience both on the frontline and in the rear.⁴⁰ Craig Stockings made a significant contribution to discussion of the Anzac Legend in the Second World War with his book on the Battle of Bardia in 1941.⁴¹ He deals with what he considers to be an over-development of the Anzac Legend’s sense of manliness and he argues that the military achievements of the AIF in both wars were exaggerated and mythologised, while he deals with the question of the sense of egalitarianism and democracy

36 Lake and Reynolds, *What’s wrong with Anzac?*, p viii.

37 Craig Stockings, (ed.) *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, Sydney, New South Publishing, 2012.

38 See Mervyn Bendle in his articles in *Quadrant Magazine* which include ‘Gallipoli: Second Front in the History Wars’, June 1, 2009, ‘The Assault on Anzac’, July 1, 2009 and ‘How Paul Keating Betrayed the Anzacs’, January 7, 2014, as well as and *Anzac and Its Enemies: The History War on Australia’s National Identity*, Balmain, Quadrant Books, 2015.

39 John Barrett, *We Were There: Australian Soldiers of World War II Tell Their Stories*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1988.

40 Mark Johnston has written a series of books on Australian soldiers’ experiences in the Second World War. All those referred to are listed in the Bibliography.

41 Craig Stockings, *Bardia: Myth, Reality and the Heirs of Anzac*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2009.

only in passing. Stuart Braga,⁴² Karl James⁴³ and Garth Pratten,⁴⁴ following on from earlier writers like Jeffrey Grey⁴⁵ and David Horner,⁴⁶ write within a new different school of historiography, diverting attention from the Anzac Legend and the role of the ‘citizen soldier’ to a discussion of leadership and strategy, which they argue is a more realistic and relevant study of the Australian army in the Second World War. Gavin Keating, a serving soldier in the Australian Army, has also written a most enlightening paper about the effects of combat fatigue on soldiers’ morale and effectiveness, officers and other ranks alike, which gives an insight into the causes of soldier dissatisfaction and anxiety which at times is taken out against their officers.⁴⁷ He also gives a comprehensive insight into the pressures and roles of officers in the field. He is particularly concerned with officers from lieutenant colonels down through major, captain and lieutenants.

Questions of egalitarianism and democracy do not feature largely in their discussions, a strong shift away from writing about Australian military history within the context of the Legend. Holbrook, however, sees the discussion as evolving beyond both opposing schools in recent years as writing about both world wars has moved onto a search for family history and the human experience of the individual men and women who served, rather than a blanket praise of the Legend.⁴⁸ She says that this explains a recent marked increase in the publication of personal memoirs and diaries, often published by children and grandchildren of veterans.

Throughout the last three decades popular historians and writers such as Les Carlyon,⁴⁹ Paul Ham⁵⁰ and Peter FitzSimons⁵¹ have continued promulgating the concept of the Anzac Legend in both World Wars and the Vietnam War. Of course, for Jane Ross: ‘The front line is the stuff of

42 Stuart Braga, *Kokoda Commander*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2004.

43 Karl James, *The Hard Slog: Australians in the Bougainville Campaign, 1944-45*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

44 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

45 Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, (3rd ed.), Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

46 D.M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial & Allen & Unwin, 1982.

47 Gavin Keating, *A Tale of Three Battalions: Combat Morale and Battle Fatigue in the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade, Bougainville, 1944-45*, Canberra, Land Warfare Centre, 2007.

48 Holbrook, *Anzac: the unauthorised biography*, pp144-165.

49 Les Carlyon, *The Great War*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan, 2006.

50 Paul Ham, *Kokoda*, Sydney, Harper Collins, 2005.

51 Peter FitzSimons, *Kokoda*, Sydney, Hodder, 2004.

dramatic action; base camps and staff conferences are not'.⁵² Popular historians rarely treat the rear lines in detail, and so, in the Second World War, a great deal of the real experience is omitted. This thesis researches the experience of soldiers in the rear lines, often seemingly idle, and certainly not fulfilling a role promised by those who preached to them the Anzac Legend.

One theme that has only begun to be researched in depth is the experience of Australian prisoners of war (POWs), especially those under Japanese captivity. Rosalind Hearder⁵³, Joan Beaumont⁵⁴ and Hank Nelson⁵⁵ have written about the POW experience and all three have commented on the problems facing the historian of the POW experience and the lack of serious research.⁵⁶ Hearder wrote: 'Operational history has remained at the forefront - the events, strategies, and personalities that shaped the course of the war and ultimately affected its outcome.'⁵⁷ Historians for a long time thought of history of the POWs as being 'static' and unchanging, according to Hearder. It is only in more recent times that this has changed. Beaumont's *Gull Force* and Lynette Silver's *Sandakan: A conspiracy of Silence*,⁵⁸ have given scholars an insight into two major experiences of Australian POWs.

This study studies all facets of relationships between officers and other ranks in the Second World War from both the volunteer and conscripted armies, from frontline troops to POWs to those in the rear line.

52 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 13.

53 Rosalind Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive: Australian POW Doctors in Japanese Captivity*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2009.

54 Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity, 1941-1945*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1988.

55 Hank Nelson, *P.O.W. Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1985.

56 See Rosalind Hearder, 'Memory, Methodology, and Myth: Some of the Challenges of Writing Australian Prisoner of War History', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No. 40, February, 2007; Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force – survival and leadership in captivity 1941–1945*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988; Hank Nelson, *Prisoners of war: Australians under Nippon*, Sydney: ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001.

57 Rosalind Hearder, 'Memory, Methodology, and Myth'.

58 Lynette Ramsay Silver, *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence*, Binda NSW, Sally Milner, 1998.

Methodology and Sources

A historical study of human relationships requires a search for primary sources where, in this case, the veterans express their feelings and remember their past. Of course, there are historiographical problems with such a study. Questions of memory and loyalty to comrades and units create problems for soldiers telling their stories. Men want to be loyal to the code of not saying anything critical about an officer or a fellow-soldier from the same unit as themselves. Both Beaumont⁵⁹ and Hearder⁶⁰ wrote of the problems of reliability of evidence when interviewing POW veterans. Beaumont wrote of survivors wanting to put a positive spin on their experiences, saying that no one ever died alone. They tend to emphasise the sense of mateship. She writes of fading and selective memories; there is little mention of theft, sanitary breakdown or sexuality, all of which are taboo under the code. She says that officers especially want to avoid raising the enmities of the past; most men seem to have a desire to maintain the Legend of mateship, self-discipline and high morale. Another problem is that collective memory often overshadows individual memory so that the 'Legend' takes on the element of truth in their own minds, overshadowing their own recollections. Veterans often assume the accepted collective narrative as their own. And finally, Beaumont mentions the problem of deliberate falsification, sometimes to protect and cover up the actions of themselves or others.⁶¹

Hearder wrote that:

There is ... pressure among ex-POWs not to challenge accepted versions of events or to examine too closely any of the relevant and positive beliefs held by their families that obscure the truth of the indignity and horror of their experience. Doing so would be to risk being ostracised from the only other people that really knew what it was like, in one of the most significant periods of their lives.⁶²

The historiographical problems of dealing with the POW experience are in some ways indicative of the problems in dealing with the experience of all war veterans. Memories fade and become

59 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, pp 2-9.

60 Rosalind Hearder, "Careers in Captivity": Australian Prisoner of War Medical Officers in Japanese Captivity during World War II, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2003, pp 36-44.

61 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, pp 6-10.

62 Hearder, *Careers in Captivity*, p 40.

confused. The collective memory dominates because veterans want to remain true to mates. This author found that different stories were told by men when interviewed alone from the stories told when interviewed in pairs or small groups at events like battalion reunions or funerals. One can only assume that at times there was deliberate falsification, always to protect rather than damage another's or the group's reputation.⁶³

Interviews have not been possible with First World War veterans for some years now since they have all passed away. Veterans from the Second World War are still living and there have been interviews with veterans and some family members for this study. Another source is recollections published in studies done over the years. Because the numbers of Second World War veterans are very thin it has been necessary to read through the existing literature to find comments made to other interviewers and opinion surveyors to supplement personal interviews and broaden the knowledge base. Another source is the invaluable collection of private papers and recorded interviews that sit in the Research Collection of the Australian War Memorial. These letters, diary entries, private memoirs and recorded and written interviews provide a wealth of information.

Besides these sources of information there are many unit histories. These can be valuable but many simply portray an 'official' line that continues the Anzac Legend, presenting the historiographical problems mentioned above. This is particularly the case if the history was written by an officer from the unit. Those written by other ranks are much more frank and open. Particularly valuable histories such as W.E. Hughes' history of the 51st Battalion, later combined with the 31st Battalion to become the 31st/51st Battalion, AIF,⁶⁴ and Colin Kennedy's history of the 3rd Australian Infantry Battalion.⁶⁵ There are also many valuable personal memoirs, published, self-published and unpublished, that give an insight into the thinking of the men at the time. In particular, books such as G.H. Fearnside's, *Half to Remember: the Reminiscences of an*

63 For a detailed look at this issue see Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, pp10-17.

64 W.E.Hughes, *At War with the 51st Infantry Battalion and 31/51st Infantry Battalion (AIF)*, Toowoomba, Church Archivist Press, 1993.

65 Colin Kennedy, *Port Moresby to Gona Beach: 3rd Australian Infantry Battalion 1942*, Canberra: Colin Kennedy, 1992.

*Australian Soldier in World War II*⁶⁶, and Tom Selby's, *Dr NX22*,⁶⁷ give personal accounts and opinions of men and their behaviour at the time.

There has been some significant fiction written about Australian soldiers in the Second World War. Eric Lambert,⁶⁸ Russell Braddon,⁶⁹ Jack Glassop⁷⁰ and George Johnston⁷¹ wrote novels based on their personal experiences or observations where they tried to capture the spirit of fighting men at the time. Lambert and Braddon were Second AIF veterans while Glassop⁷² and Johnston were journalists reporting on the war, which gives their stories credibility even if their information was gleaned, not first hand, but from conversations and interviews with men who experienced the action they describe. These men also describe the army culture at the time, and cast useful light on the way men thought and, for the purposes of this study, the relationships between officers and other ranks.

The story of the men and women who served in the Australian army in the Second World War deserves to be told from all perspectives. This includes those who experienced the terrors of combat to those who endured the horrors of the prisoner of war experience to those who suffered the boredom and idleness of some far flung training or logistics base in remote Australia. All of these stories are important.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 examines the creation of the Anzac Legend during the First World War and how it became central to the Australian identity over the next two decades. The Legend had a marked

66 G.H. Fearnside, *Half to Remember: the Reminiscences of an Australian Soldier in World War II*, Sydney, Haldane Publishing, 1975.

67 Tom Selby, *Dr NX22*, Armadale, Victoria, The Selby Family, 1996.

68 Eric Lambert, *The Twenty Thousand Thieves*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1992.
and *The Veterans*, London, Shakespeare Head Press, 1954.

69 Russell Braddon, *The Naked Island*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1993, first published by Werner Laurie, London, 1951.

70 Jack Lawson Glassop, *We Were the Rats*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1945.

71 George Johnston, *My Brother Jack*, Sydney, Collins, 1966.

72 Jack Glassop was a member of the AIF, serving in North Africa from 1940 to 1943. He worked as a journalist on the army newspaper, *The A.I.F. News*. It was this experience which allowed him to write his novel *We Were the Rats*, published 1944, about the Australians who served in the siege of Tobruk.

effect on the generation of young men who volunteered for the Australian army in the Second World War. This chapter provides a survey of important past and current writing about the creation and continued development of the Anzac Legend from Charles Bean to the current debate between the Anzac 'agnostics' and those who support the older convention.

The chapter provides a critique of the concept of mateship as it applies to the Anzac Legend. It argues that an expectation of mateship amongst soldiers in the Second World War and an expectation of a repeat experience of the Legend, as it was conveyed to them in the years between the wars, would affect the relationships that they would have with their officers.

Chapter 2. Beginning with the 6th Division in North Africa, Greece and the Middle East, Chapter 2 traces their early years of training and combat and their ill-discipline both at home and overseas. This ill-discipline was seen to be their right in terms of the Anzac Legend. However, the chapter shows the development of a different volunteer army with the addition of the 7th and 9th Divisions which began to rein in the poor discipline of the soldiers, who became more professional and more disciplined. The chapter explores the change in promotions policy and the way this changed the culture of the officer corps and how they related to their men. However, there was still an expectation on the part of the rank and file that a sense of egalitarianism would apply to this army. This chapter explores their continuing dissatisfaction with the officer class and a sense of disappointment in the lack of egalitarianism in the culture of the army. Finally, the chapter looks at the first experience of the Militia in their early months of combat and how their experience was very different from the volunteer AIF. It explores the bitterness that the existence of two armies created in the rank and file, and in their junior officers.

Chapter 3 explores the experiences of the army in the South West Pacific theatre from the end of 1942 to the end of the war in 1945. Their army experience would once again be different. The chapter traces the slow evolution of the officer corps into a younger, fitter and better trained one. However, this breed of new officers was in marked contrast to the older generation, many of them veterans of the First World War. While the rank and file might have respected these new

leaders, they did not feel they had the same rapport with them as they did with the retiring class of officers. The disappointment of the rank and file in the failure of the army to maintain the Anzac Legend, as seen in the perspective of the rank and file, is described. This disappointment was particularly strong in the '39ers' or originals of the 6th Division. There is also an exploration of the beliefs of many of the rank and file, as well as civil observers, that the last two years of the war saw the Australian army marginalised and sidelined. Many military historians argue that this was not the case, but the men recall that it was, and this has coloured the way that they recollected the officers, especially their commanders.

Chapter 4 is a study of soldiers' experiences in the rear lines. These may have been men and women who were permanently stationed in the rear or combat soldiers who had periods of time behind the lines. The chapter explores the experiences of the men in transit to the war zones, in the Middle East and in the South West Pacific and then the periods of leave and training they had overseas. The chapter describes one aspect of the men's experience that was very different from the First World War which was the periods of home leave and retraining that men and women had in Australia, often between campaigns overseas. This caused a deal of conflict and anger with combat troops who thought that the ideals of the Anzac Legend were being diluted and that the burden was not being shared equally. There is also an exploration of the disappointment rank-and-file soldiers felt with officer privilege, often, they believed, at the expense of the other ranks. Finally, the chapter explores the role of the Provosts and the bitterness that the contacts the men had with them often created.

Chapter 5 is a study of the relationships between officers and other ranks under the POW experience. It traces the experiences of the men from their training period and then service in Malaya and Singapore until 1942 to their captivity under the Japanese. The chapter explores the problems faced by officers being seen as failed combat officers and the effects this would have on relationships between officers and other ranks. It also studies the problems created by the conditions of captivity, both in Changi and in the work camps, and the way that many officers, in the eyes of their men, did not live up to the ideals of the Anzac Legend.

Chapter 6 explores the experience of men who spent large periods of time during the war in a sense of idleness. This may have been caused by postings to remote areas of Australia in case of Japanese invasion. It might have been caused by extended periods of training and retraining that were caused by changes in senior command decisions in the South West Pacific theatre. The chapter explores the experiences of thousands of men and women in occupations within the army in bases and camps that were very far from any sense of combat. While many of these men and women were gainfully employed, they felt that they were not serving within the model of the Anzac Legend. Officers had access to privileges that frontline officers would not. This chapter looks at the rank and file, already frustrated and angry, who saw their officers not living up to the ideals they expected in an Australian army.

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE RISE OF THE ANZAC LEGEND

Introduction

Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood was the Anzac Corps commander in 1915 and the Anzacs called him 'Birdie', often to his face. One story has him nearing a dangerous gap in a trench when the sentry yelled out:

'Duck Birdie; you'd better _____ well duck.'

'What did you do?' asked the outraged generals to whom Birdwood told the story.

'Do? Why, I _____ well ducked!'¹

This anecdote illustrates one view of the Australians of the First AIF and their senior commanding officer. On its face value it indicates a distinct informality and lack of formal military discipline that many people see as being typical of Australian soldiers in the First World War and it is typical of the image of the Australian soldier that makes up the 'Anzac Legend'. But there are two conflicting schools of thought about the soldiers of the First AIF. The first, the traditional school, sees the army as something very different from the British army of the time, more egalitarian in its character. This view began with the creation of the 'Anzac Legend' by C.E.W. Bean, journalist and Official Historian, who wrote during and after the war, and it was promulgated by others such as Bill Gammage who engendered a renewed interest in the First World War and the Anzac Legend decades later.² A central part of this legend claims that there was an unconventional relationship in this war between officers and other ranks, a relationship variously described as 'egalitarian' and 'democratic'; and that this egalitarianism was one important reason for the claimed success of the First Australian Imperial Force, the AIF.

Opposing this view is a revisionist school of more recent times, whose analysis of the Anzacs John Hirst calls 'agnostic' and who he describes collectively as the 'liberal left'.³ This school of

1 Graham Seal, *Echoes of Anzac: The Voice of Australians at War*, Melbourne, Lothian, 2005, p 41.

2 While the term 'ANZAC', an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, includes those New Zealanders who fought alongside Australians at Gallipoli, the literature between the wars seemed to assume ownership of the term by Australians. Very little was said about New Zealanders and how they fitted into any concept of an Anzac Legend.

3 John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, Melbourne, Black Inc Agenda, 2009, p 233.

writers includes historians such as Marilyn Lake, Joan Beaumont, Peter Stanley, Dale Blair and Alistair Thomson, whose views will be discussed later in this chapter. They see the work of Bean and his peers as mere myth-making and they see nothing exceptional about the soldiers of the First AIF. They claim the creation of the myth began as a propaganda exercise in 1915 to maintain support for the war and to encourage recruitment.⁴ The ‘myth’ was continued into the years after the war as part of a campaign to shore up feelings of empire and patriotism and to give some meaning to the great loss of men with which Australia was forced to deal.

When the Second AIF was raised and the Citizen Military Forces was expanded to meet the needs of the nation after the declaration of war against Germany in 1939, there was a belief on the part of the men who joined, especially the volunteers of the Second AIF, that their army was to be egalitarian and democratic in spirit like their fathers’ army and that they would perform in battle as well as the ‘Legend’ of their fathers’ generation. This spirit would make them see military discipline as being something to endure and to practise only when they believed it should be, because on the battlefield, like the old Anzacs, they would bring a different sort of discipline.

C.E.W. Bean claimed that on April 25th, 1915 ‘a consciousness of Australian nationhood was born’,⁵ a popular theme by politicians throughout the twentieth century. This chapter will study the creation of the Anzac Legend, especially the perceived characteristics of egalitarianism and democracy which have affected Australian generations since the First World War and which have become a central part of the Australian identity. It will illustrate the legacy of the Legend and the expectations it created for the men who were to enlist in the Australian army of the Second World War.

The Creation of the Anzac Legend

4 Joan Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914-1918*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1995, p 169

5 C.E.W. Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol. II, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1924, p 910.

The creation of the Anzac Legend by Bean and others has had a profound effect on Australian society and identity. In the introduction to her first major study of Australia in the First World War, Beaumont poses the question: 'Why study Australia's experience of war?'⁶ She outlines the development of the 'Anzac Legend' and the contribution that this has made to the development of a national identity.

The creation of this character or identity, forged by the experience of war, began in 1915 with the landing at Gallipoli. Bean, along with British correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, reported from the Gallipoli front in glowing terms about the Australians. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett praised the Anzacs and their wounded on that first day of battle. They

rose to the occasion ... In fact I have never seen anything like these wounded Australians before ... They were happy because they knew they had been tried for the first time and had not been found wanting ... There has been no finer feat in this war.⁷

Bean would later write: 'But Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never own defeat.'⁸

John Masefield, reporting from Gallipoli, described the Anzacs as:

the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing they surpassed any men I have ever seen; they walked and looked like the kings in old poems.⁹

This sort of praise was heady stuff for both the Anzacs and the nation as a whole and food for the forces that would create the 'Legend'. This Legend became one that successive generations were expected to follow, in and out of uniform. For historian Frank Bongiorno:

The major features of an ANZAC Legend were discernible very early in the campaign: Australians were bold and ferocious in battle but were unwilling to bow to military discipline. An ANZAC never flinched - if he died it was with a joke, or a wry smile on his face - yet nor would he salute a superior officer...In

6 Beaumont, *Australia's War*, p xvii.

7 *Hobart Mercury* 12 May 1915, as it appears on <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/bartlett.html>.

8 C.E.W. Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1946, p 181.

9 Beaumont, *Australia's War: 1914-1918*, p 156.

the ANZAC Legend, the Australian Imperial Force was a democratic organisation, in which there were friendly relations between officers and men, and anyone could rise from the ranks to a commission.¹⁰

Supporting print journalism were propaganda feature films made during the war. As early as 1915 there were four released with great success. They were Alfred Rolfe's *Will They Never Come?*, *The Hero of the Dardanelles* and *How We Beat The Emden* and J.C. Williamson's *Within Our Gates* or *Deeds that Won Gallipoli*. The next year came *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell*, a highly melodramatic but very successful propaganda film and also in 1916 *Murphy of Anzac* was released, the story of John Simpson and his donkey.¹¹ Between the wars there were movies that began to reinforce the legend of the long, lean, laconic Anzac. These included *Fellers* (1930), starring Arthur Touchert, well known for his role in *The Sentimental Bloke*, *Diggers* (1930), directed by F.W. Thring, father of the famous actor and *Diggers in Blighty* (1933), starring Pat Hanna, who also starred in *Diggers*. By the time *Forty Thousand Horsemen* was released in 1940, the concept of the Anzac Legend was firmly established.

Central to the Anzac Legend was the idea of 'manliness', an issue that was important to many recruits to the army in the Second World War. Bean was concerned with this when he wrote in the first volume of the official history, 'But the high standard of manliness demanded from Australian officers was well sustained (at Gallipoli)'.¹² In the conclusion to this same volume he wrote that the men had a 'vision of Australian manhood', formed partly by the experience of the bush and partly by other social factors.¹³

Several recent historians have noted the importance of this sense of manliness or masculinity in the Anzac Legend. Dale Blair sees the digger stereotype as being 'singularly masculine',¹⁴ while Martin Crotty and Marina Larsson argue that being a disabled veteran in Australia can have its problems because 'the damaged and dependent veteran is an uncomfortable and discomfiting

10 Frank Bongiorno, as cited in <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/anzac>.

11 <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/20/australian-film-propaganda.html>.

12 C.E.W. Bean, *The Story of ANZAC from the outbreak of war to the end of the first phase of the Gallipoli Campaign*, May 4, 1915, Vol. 1, 11th edition, 1941, p 550

13 *ibid*, Pp. 606-607.

14 Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, p 1.

counterpoint to the independent and masculinised hero of Anzac lore.’¹⁵ In recent times feminists and revisionists have been quick to point out the singularly masculine image of the Anzac Legend and Australian society at the time. Marilyn Lake argues that the claim that men had given birth to the nation at Gallipoli denied women’s ‘procreative capacities’. According to Lake, there is only one female figure identified by Inglis on an Australian war monument. This is at Mornington in Victoria and she is a symbolic figure.¹⁶ The generation that would volunteer in 1939 was brought up in this culture of perceived ‘manliness’ and not only volunteering but also performance in battle was seen as integral to this manliness.

Bongiorno sees an irony in this vision of the ‘manly’ digger. He says:

The ‘official’ Anzac Legend, in its celebration of the manly Australian soldier, is ironically a rather asexual thing. A national legend might incorporate a strain of larrikinism, but it could hardly be expected to celebrate sexual incontinence – and the Anzac Legend did not. On the other hand, sexual ribaldry and misbehavior *were* part of a ‘digger culture’ that can be seen as a more demotic – even rough working-class – version of Australian military manhood.¹⁷

Expressions of military manhood will always vary from army to army and from nation to nation. Part of the Anzac self-image was of a laconic and disrespectful citizen-soldier, ‘rough working-class’ in its beliefs and background and so part of the expression of its manliness was to be unconcerned with displays of overt finery, politeness or manners. In fact, as Bongiorno also argues, ‘Some diggers identified the British officer class with effeminacy and weakness, which they contrasted with the martial and sexual prowess of the Anzac.’¹⁸ This laconic working-class image of the digger of the Anzac Legend would, at times, play itself out again with the Second AIF. And the same feelings of manliness would arise, according to Bongiorno who noted that the over-groomed American soldiers in Australia in the Second World Wars brought similar criticism. He wrote: ‘here again is a reprise of a Great War theme where British officers had been

15 Martin Crotty and Marina Larsson in Martin Crotty, (ed) and Marina Larsson, (ed) *Anzac Legacies: Australians and the Aftermath of War*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010, p 89.

16 Marilyn Lake, as cited in Crotty and Larsson, *Anzac Legacies*, p 29. Note: Marilyn Lake’s claim that Ken Inglis, in his landmark book, Inglis, K.S., *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne, University Press, 2005, is not quite accurate. Inglis lists 5 allegorical female forms and 4 real representations on pages 172-175. It is still worth noting, however, that Lake’s point is very relevant because these 9 female representations are the only ones amongst over 4000 memorials across Australia.

17 Frank Bongiorno, ‘The Two World Wars and the making of Australian Sexuality’, in Crotty and Larsson, *Anzac Legacies*, p 85.

18 *ibid*, p 91.

portrayed as effeminate, and pink-faced “Tommys” lacking the hard and bush-bred digger virtues.’¹⁹

One of the major lasting images of the Anzac Legend that is tied in with concepts of Australian manliness is that of the larrikin soldier. The story of the larrikin was an easier story to tell for many veterans, rather than the story of horror and death. Alistair Thomson grew up in a military household. He remembers his grandfather, John Rogers, a veteran of the First and Second World wars talking about the egalitarian nature of the diggers. ‘He kept the sickening memories of war to himself, preferring to tell us funny anecdotes about the bold and cheerful “diggers”, as the Australian soldiers were nicknamed, who scorned military rank and etiquette but were the best soldiers of the war.’²⁰ Thomson says that most of the First World War veterans he interviewed spoke of the AIF’s ‘larrikin behaviour ... a feature of the AIF in which they took great pleasure and pride.’²¹ They considered that an Australian officer was ‘one of the boys’ because he came from the ranks.²²

Bean said that with a system of promotion from the ranks, ‘Anyone watching an Australian battalion on parade felt that in this year’s corporals he saw next year’s sergeants and the following year’s subalterns.’²³ Men promoted from the ranks would be respected by them because they were mates. There was an expectation of egalitarianism by the recruits to the Australian army of the Second World War. If the ‘Legend’ is simply a creation of people like Bean and commentators and politicians that followed him, the assumed qualities of the Diggers – resourcefulness, courage, independence and above all, egalitarianism and democracy - are possibly unfounded. The important point to note, however, is that the recruits for the army of the Second World War, especially the AIF, believed it. And it was the disillusionment with the Legend that many of these men felt, the realisation that, while the Australian army may have seemed more democratic than most, as the Legend claimed, it was not the egalitarian army the

19 *ibid*, p 96.

20 Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p 7.

21 *ibid*, p 39.

22 *ibid*, p 40.

23 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p 537.

Legend had promised; and this would lead to bitterness and anger in many of the Australian soldiers of the Second World War.

Bean's archetypal Anzac had been the assumed consciousness of many Australians and formed the model for these recruits. One aspect of Bean's legend is that the typical 'Anzac' had his roots in the Bush and the egalitarian values that were supposedly created there. Bean travelled to the bush himself as a journalist in the years before the outbreak of war and was most impressed by the men that he came across. Bean saw the sons of immigrants from Britain as descending from 'ancestors [who had] half consciously tried to cast off what they vaguely felt to be elements of inequality and injustice in the inherited social systems of Europe.'²⁴ By 1914, he said that, 'Such class distinction as existed among Australians was perhaps chiefly based on their schools; but comparatively few boys, even from the most expensive schools, thought of entering the war-time army or navy except as privates or ordinary seamen.'²⁵ As for the men of the bush, he said, 'It was to these last (the pioneers and miners) that Australians owed their resourcefulness and readiness to grapple with their objectives even against authority, and also their basic creed, in industry or in war, that a man must at all costs stand by his mate.'²⁶

This description has been challenged by historians such as Joan Beaumont,²⁷ Lloyd Robson and sociologist, John Carroll. Robson's study on the social and employment backgrounds of the First AIF shows the majority were from city and urban backgrounds.²⁸ Carroll argues that mateship is more likely to have developed from the Irish and British working classes, imported to the colonies, rather than developed in the colonies, as Russel Ward and Bean would claim.²⁹ The Anzac Legend was of a soldier of the First AIF who showed a bushman's 'independence' and resourceful behaviour on the battlefield, a soldier who tended to ignore commands if they were thought to be useless, and who despised the English soldiers as 'new chums'.³⁰ Bean wrote after

24 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p 6.

25 *ibid*, pp 16-17.

26 *ibid*, p 9.

27 Joan Beaumont, *Australia's War: 1914-1918*, pp 152-153.

28 Robson, 'The Origin and character of the First AIF, 1914-1918', P 745.

29 John Carroll, 'Mateship and Egalitarianism', in *Intruders in the Bush : The Australian Quest for Identity* John Carroll (Ed.), Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1982 anthology criticism Pp 146-148.

30 'New chum' was the term given to English arrivals in the 1800s and into the early twentieth century. It implied a sense of criticism and felt superiority by the 'natives' – Australian born.

the war that, ‘The crucial attribute of the AIF was its discipline – or, perhaps, the compatibility of its discipline with the initiative and readiness to take risks that marked its men.’³¹ One commonly used argument for these ‘natural relations’ is that the Australian army was the only allied army in the First World War that was made up completely of volunteers, a questionable claim in itself.³²

The Development of the Legend after the War

Even before the end of the war C.E.W. Bean’s *Anzac Book*³³ was as popular at home as it was in the trenches. D. A. Kent wrote that it was the *Anzac Book* that ‘decisively established the image of the Anzac in the popular imagination.’³⁴ Some commentators thought Prime Minister Billy Hughes heavily influenced by this Anzac image and that he was besotted with the Australian soldiers in France, propagating the image himself when he returned to Australia. Deputy Prime Minister, Joseph Cook observed that sometimes Hughes lay full length on the ground, looking into the faces of the soldiers and chewing a stalk of grass. He seemed ‘wrapped up in the men, and was gazing into their faces all the time’.³⁵ People wanted to believe that there was something distinctive about the character of this dominion army with its egalitarian outlook and its soldiers with their dry, sardonic sense of humour and laconic manner off the battlefield. Governments and propagandists generally were keen to exploit this. Memorials in small towns and city suburbs began to appear from 1915, not just as memorials to those who had already volunteered but before the war ended, as recruiting tools. Over the next twenty years the nation would build over 4000 local memorials to their volunteer soldiers.³⁶

31 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, pp 536-537.

32 The question of Australia providing the only volunteer army for the allies in the First World War has been taken up by John Connor, in his chapter ‘The “Superior”, all-Volunteer Army’, from Stockings, Craig, *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, Sydney, New South Publishing, 2012, Pp. 35-49. In this chapter he argues that the largest all-volunteer army of the British Empire forces was the Indian Army, with 1.4 million volunteers. There were others like the South African 1st Brigade, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the British West Indies Regiment and the Irish regiments.

33 C.E.W. Bean(ed), *The Anzac Book*, (3rd edition), Canberra, Australian War memorial, 2010.

34 D.A. Kent, ‘The Anzac Book and the Anzac Legend: C.E.W Bean as Editor and Image-Maker’, *Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 84, April 1985, pp 376-90.

35 L.F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: A political Biography*, Vol. II *The Little Digger, 1914-1953*, London, Angus and Robertson, 1979, in Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2013, p 454.

36 Sir William Deane, ‘Abiding Memories’, in *Eureka Street*, Vol. 9, No.1, January-February, 1999, p 11.

One aspect of these memorials was their appeal to and commemoration of the Australian soldier as the ordinary man, the laconic, informal digger, the citizen soldier who had achieved such success in the First World War. This democratic image was portrayed in the iconography of the many 'white digger' statues, especially in Queensland, with a lack of formal public tribute through statues to the war's leaders. Graeme Davison points out:

Monuments to the great warriors (Sir John Monash) were now balanced by tributes to humble angels of mercy (Simpson and his donkey) and both were outnumbered several times by simple white figures of a digger standing to attention which sprang up in towns all over the continent.³⁷

These monuments would have a marked effect on the minds of the generation that grew up between the wars. The monuments were there for every country and suburban boy to see. In his survey of 3,700 Second World War veterans John Barrett found that over half of those who enlisted in the AIF saw the Anzac tradition as influencing their decision to enlist.³⁸ He wrote:

M.J. McKenna had 'something to live up to', with six uncles killed in the Gallipoli campaign ... SX3995 could still recall the impact of the brass 'A' worn on the shoulders of genuine Anzacs returning to Australia from about 1918 ... 'Smiler' had '...lived in a world of jingoism' centred on Empire loyalty, and he was proud of his brother in AIF uniform, and one-eyed enough to believe that 'the Anzacs saved the empire in World War 1 and would do so again.'³⁹

And VX5416⁴⁰ volunteered because of 'the Anzac story learnt at school and mateship'.⁴¹

Graham Seal also argues that young boys, along with the whole Australian community, were very influenced by what he calls 'spinning a yarn'. By this he refers to 'the usually humorous, often (though not necessarily) apocryphal anecdotes that show the digger in accordance with his own self-image.'⁴² The idea of the laconic, independent minded digger was very much part of a young boy's upbringing in the 1920s and 1930s. This would create a deal of pressure on these men who believed they had a huge reputation to uphold. A veteran of the Second AIF, Jack Lawson Glassop, concluded:

37 Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2000, p.46-47.

38 John Barrett, *We Were There: Australian Soldiers of World War II Tell Their Stories*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1988, p138.

39 *ibid*, p138.

40 Often, only serial numbers are given in Barrett to protect their anonymity.

41 *ibid*, p152.

42 Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and national Mythology*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2004, pp 36-37.

The trouble is the world expects so much of Australians ... They think we all swear like troopers, drink like fish, and fight like wildcats, and that we don't know the meaning of the word 'fear.' We can blame our fathers. It makes it hard for us ... All our lives we've read that when our turn comes we don't let everyone down.⁴³

For Glassop and his mates, 'letting them down' meant an expectation of military success, not just democratic decision making.

Beaumont sees the education system playing a very important part in this process. She argues that from 1915, when the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli, school children were actively 'conscripted to the patriotic cause', producing items to be sent to the front, and raising money.⁴⁴ Honour boards listing past students who had volunteered for the AIF appeared in schools, textbooks told stories of bravery and heroism. Schools became places where children learnt 'God Save the King', the glories of Empire and the even more glorious role that the Anzacs played in defending this Empire. As Beaumont writes, 'Stretcher-bearers, who rescued the wounded at great personal risk, were extolled as the embodiment of the highest form of mateship.'⁴⁵ Lloyd Robson agrees. He wrote that 'Ceremonies such as the annual school day services ... steadily inculcated the digger stereotype in the minds of the impressionable young'.⁴⁶

By 1927 every state and territory had gazetted Anzac Day as a public holiday and before long there would be accepted methods and 'liturgy' for its celebration with the *Last Post*, two minutes silence and the reading of Laurence Binyon's elegy, *For the Fallen*.⁴⁷ As Robson notes, Anzac Day took on an almost religious quality.⁴⁸ Inglis and Phillips conclude that the memorials contained little religious symbolism, that the Legend of the diggers became the religion itself.⁴⁹ For many veterans, it became an outlet for their

43 Jack Lawson Glassop, *We Were the Rats*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1945, p 128.

44 Beaumont, *Australia's War 1914-1918*, p166.

45 *ibid*, p169.

46 L.L. Robson, 'The Australian Soldier: Formation of a Stereotype', in M. McKernan and M. Brown (eds), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Canberra, Australian War memorial and Allen & Unwin, 1988, p 330.

47 Beaumont, *Australia's War 1914-1918*, p167.

48 Robson, 'The Anzac Tradition', as cited in Beaumont, *ibid*, p 167.

49 Ken Inglis and Jock Phillips, 'War Memorials in Australia and NewZealand', in J. Rickard and P. Spearritt (eds), 'Packaging the Past: Public Histories', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 96, April, 1991, passim.

memories and, for some, their anguish about what they had been through. But despite this anguish and the fact that, in Thomson's words, 'Their experiences of brutality and hardship in the war and inter-war years often contradicted Anzac Day orators, (their) memories had been scrambled and entangled by the Legend.'⁵⁰

For the children of the veterans, Anzac Day was a mysterious annual ritual that might help to justify the strange behaviour of some of their fathers and which also planted in their minds the sacrifice and service that they would be called to perform. When war came in 1939, the sacrifice and service would have to be done in the same spirit as their fathers, with sardonic humour and studied nonchalance, as well as some out of the line indiscipline that might pass for egalitarianism.

From 1915 returned soldiers, mostly wounded, were 'regularly paraded on the recruiting platforms becoming the visual of the patriotic cause' and as an 'instrument of coercion' by the pro-conscriptionists.⁵¹ This was a period of great political turmoil, at home and abroad, and by 1917 William Hughes, newly converted from a Labor to a conservative prime minister, was concerned that the politics of the Left did not take over the veterans' movement after the war. Marilyn Lake argues that the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), later to be named the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL),⁵² was given privileged status, that 'a political compact was negotiated between the government and the RSSILA.'⁵³ In return for encouraging veterans to accept government policy they would defend the government from the left wing influences in the demobilised forces and work towards the implementation of government resettlement programs such as war pensions, preference in employment over trade unionists and those who had not served in the war, and soldier land re-settlement schemes. To get this advantage the government of Billy Hughes allowed the Department of Repatriation to

50 Alistair Thomson, 'The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia', in Samuels, Raphael and Thompson, Paul (ed), *The Myths We Live By*, London, Routledge, 1990, p 77.

51 Ken Inglis and Jock Phillips, 'War Memorials in Australia and New Zealand' in J. Rickard and P. Spearritt (eds), 'Packaging the Past: Public Histories', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 96, April, 1991, pp 75-76.

52 The name was officially changed in 1965, but some historians have since seen the terms as interchangeable.

53 Marilyn Lake, as cited in Beaumont, *Australia's War, 1914-1918*, pp 169-171.

‘distribute propaganda of this League’ and to allow the League to recruit men in camps and hospitals in England as well as in demobilisation depots in Australia.⁵⁴ The RSSILA would try in the inter-war years to ‘clean up’ the image of the diggers, to make King and Empire loyalty more important than larrikinism and egalitarianism.

Nevertheless, when the soldiers returned from the First World War there were stories about their larrikinism, lack of discipline and their egalitarianism at the front. Bede Tongs, a New Guinea veteran of the Second World War said that, ‘We lived on war...Dad was in the 13th Battalion, one of the originals...As kids we had uncles that were all in the war ... They mainly joked about their mates and they sang the usual “Rule Britannia” type songs.’⁵⁵ George Maguire, who fought with the 18th Battalion, First AIF, told stories of soldiers gambling on rats swimming along the trenches at Ypres and ‘taking the micky’ out of officers who were a little distant and arrogant or full of their position.⁵⁶ Graham Seal wrote that ‘The folklore of the digger socio-military group ... Specific and easily identified aspects of the tradition are anti-authoritarianism, particularly directed against officers, especially British officers; mateship; irreverence and larrikinism.’⁵⁷ But he contrasts this with the ‘Anzac Tradition’ which is ‘public, inclusive and, implicitly, authoritarian.’⁵⁸ And it was this tradition which was to be assumed by the ‘authorities’ of government and RSSILA. As Martin Crotty and Craig Stockings wrote, ‘Their deeds (of the Anzacs) continued to be glorified in the inter-war years, in no small part by the veterans themselves through the Returned Sailors and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), ably assisted by a complex of politicians, clergy, self-styled patriots, and bereaved relatives who sought a higher meaning for the loss of so many young Australians.’⁵⁹

54 Martin Crotty, ‘The Returned Sailors’ and Soldier’s Imperial League of Australia, 1916-1946’, in Martin Crotty and Marina Larsson, *Anzac Legacies*, p 171.

55 Bede Tongs, interview, 19/9/05.

56 Olive Swift, interview, 5/4/01. Olive Swift is the niece of George Maguire.

57 Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, p 3.

58 *ibid*, p 4.

59 Martin Crotty and Craig Stockings, “The Minefield of Australian Military History”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 1, 2014, pp. 580-591

According to Sarah Gregson, there were serious attempts by the government and the RSSILA to curb any socialist leanings any veterans might have. If it was fine to be a socialist soldier and larrikin overseas, they could not be allowed to behave like this at home. The RSSILA was primarily concerned with the welfare of its members, but politically, it had another role. It fostered nationalism and loyalty to Empire. It transformed the popular memory of the larrikin citizen soldier to the official one of soldiers sacrificing all for king and country. As Sarah Gregson argues:

In a bid to capitalise on the collective potential of returned men and to win working-class soldiers away from working-class institutions, leading members of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) placed the image of brave, altruistic, conservative returned soldiers at the centre of national post-war society.⁶⁰

Martin Crotty disagreed, however, with the notion that the RSSILA had a necessarily capitalist agenda. He recognises the social conservatism of its post First World War policies, but cites several examples of its view that workers should share the profits of industry and that war profiteering should be treated a serious crime. It is valid to see the RSSILA as an organisation that preached patriotism and loyalty, but it is not valid, according to Crotty, to go as far as Gregson does and call it an anti-working-class institution.⁶¹

And while here was a growing conservatism within Australian society, the image of the independent, egalitarian soldier did not easily die. Many men, especially in the Second AIF, expected to find an army like the army their father's spoke of, egalitarian, informal and yet disciplined and successful on the battlefield.

⁶⁰ Sarah Gregson, 'Foot Soldiers for Capital: The influence of RSL racism on interwar industrial relations in Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill', PhD thesis, UNSW, 2003, p 2.

⁶¹ Martin Crotty, 'The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2007, pp 183-193.

Mateship, Loyalty and Larrikinism

Bean wrote that no soldier in the First AIF would want to be ‘the sort of man who would give way when his mates were trusting to his firmness’.⁶² Mateship and loyalty were essential elements of the Anzac Legend. According to the Legend, Australian soldiers have always had a particular sense of mateship and loyalty to their comrades and to their unit. Frank Bongiorno argues that this sense of egalitarianism in the First AIF was due to Australia’s working-class recruits. He wrote ‘...the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was an overwhelmingly working-class army, with an ethos instantly recognisable as such. Its members valued social egalitarianism while accepting the substance of inequality – just like most of the Australian working-class in civilian life’.⁶³ Robson’s study supports this proposition of a working-class army. He found that labourers and industry workers made up 42% of the volunteers, while if we also consider the 21% who were primary workers, mostly farm labourers or shearers, as well as miners, and those workers in domestic service and transport workers, then about three out of every four volunteers in the First AIF were working-class. Only 23% were white collar or professional.⁶⁴ This working-class ethos, when transferred to the army, became what the Legend would class as an iconic sense of mateship.

On this basis the same could be said of the Second AIF. According to statistics provided by an army census of 1941, 60.2% of recruits were labourers, factory hands, agricultural and building workers or drivers, all clearly working-class occupations. Only 24.7% were white collar or professional.⁶⁵ These figures are similar to the First AIF and would indicate that there was not much change from the First World War to the Second World War. The recruits would have had a similar working-class ethos of mateship, egalitarianism and loyalty. When the Anzac Legend spoke of mateship and loyalty, the men who volunteered, in 1939 and 1940 especially, knew what it meant. This sense of mateship was distrustful of bosses and expected that their bosses, in the case of the army, their officers, would treat them with respect. By 1939 ‘mateship’ had become a byword for the Australian identity. The word conjures ideas of egalitarianism, and unquestioned loyalty. In the Australian context it can also mean a licence for larrikinism.

⁶² Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, pp 606-607.

⁶³ Bongiorno, ‘A Legend with Class, Labour and Anzac’, *Griffith Review*, 2015, Issue 48, p 83.

⁶⁴ Robson, ‘The Origin and character of the First AIF’, p 2.

⁶⁵ AAV: MP 508/1, file 304/750/14 at: www.awm.gov.au/journal/j29/civils/.

Beaumont says that mateship and egalitarianism are ‘difficult to test because of their inherent subjectivity’. She says that writing on these topics ‘has tended to lack rigour’, and that ‘Australians have also failed to make the detailed comparisons with other armed forces that might give the conclusions perspective.’⁶⁶ This is a valid point and very little is heard in Australia about German ‘kamerads’, American ‘buddies’ or English ‘pals’. With the creation of Ward’s ‘Australian Legend’ and Bean’s ‘Anzac Legend’, Australian commentators have assumed uniqueness when it comes to ‘mateship’. But, as Barrett wrote about the army of the Second World War: ‘Call it what you will, it was there and strong. It took men in together, or they found it together.’ And he quotes from C.R.B., a respondent who said that ‘those who have not experienced such conditions might not understand, and some might denigrate what we developed: mateship.’⁶⁷ And if Australians in 1939 were not aware of comradeship in other armies, they believed that it was the social cement of their own.

The sense of mateship passed onto the Second World generation by the First World War generation was powerful. For Alistair Thomson’s veterans, ‘Mateship was a sacred memory’. Bean wrote the Australian creed was ‘that a man should at all times and at any cost stand by his mate’.⁶⁸ Colin Turbet, a 2nd AIF veteran put it simply, when commenting on the joy of talking to a mate he served with about their shared experiences: ‘Before you even said it, he knew’.⁶⁹

The unquestioned acceptance by Australians after the First World War of Bean’s ‘Anzac ideal’ had an effect on the men enlisting in the Australian army in the Second World War. They expected to join an army that lived up to these ideals of the Anzac Legend in terms of heightened levels of mateship, group loyalty and a licence to behave like larrikins when the occasion allowed. Barrett says that 46% of the respondents in his study ‘claimed “mateship” as a big factor on their enlistment’.⁷⁰ Some, like R.G.Parry⁷¹ and VX5416 tied it to the Anzac tradition.⁷²

66 Beaumont, *Australia’s War 1914-1918*, p 159.

67 Beaumont, *Australia’s War 1914-1918*, p 159.

68 Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, p 6.

69 Colin Turbet, interview, 5/5/05

70 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 142.

71 *ibid*, pp 118-119.

72 *ibid*, p 152.

Some recruits, such as Leo Cleary, joined with their mates. Working as a tram conductor in 1940 in Randwick, Sydney, he walked down to the recruiting office with several of his mates one day after work and they all ‘joined up on the spot’.⁷³ Barrett cites another veteran A.D.C., who joined up in 1940 with seven of his mates.⁷⁴ Verner Clements told of the death of his mate on the Kokoda Track, killed by a sniper as ‘something I never got over’. He also spoke about the egalitarian approach his platoon had to promotion. When his platoon commander offered him promotion to the rank of corporal, he knocked it back, as did several others because another member of their platoon ‘had a wife and kids and he needed the money more’ and so they told the lieutenant to give it to him. To Clements, this is what mates did.⁷⁵

But mates also got up to acts of larrikinism that lessened the purity of mateship and loyalty. Just as the First AIF had their ‘bad characters’, as described by Peter Stanley⁷⁶, some of Barrett’s respondents saw the ‘dark underside’⁷⁷ of Australian soldiers in the Second World War. Some of the actions of these Second World War ‘larrikins’ will be described in the next chapter but one aspect of the Anzac Legend that appealed to some men, especially the early volunteers to the Second AIF, was the chance to get up to mischief as they had heard their fathers had done. Stories of larrikinism from the First AIF abounded, ranging from good natured hi-jinx to violence, theft, rape and serious vandalism. Enlistments in the Second AIF, especially in the 6th Division, expected that they could be larrikins themselves, and as examples from Chapter 2 will show, this is exactly what they did.

The Next Generation

The army, in the Second World War, would be a place to salvage the lost pride and to re-establish masculine identities damaged by the First World War and by the Depression. The men who would become the rank and file in the Second AIF grew up in a society that had constant visual and emotional reminders of the First World War in the form of wounded veterans, amputees, gas victims and cases of war neuroses. In *My Brother Jack*, a semi-autobiographical

73 Related by Kathleen Pyne née Cleary, was the author’s mother.

74 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 142.

75 Interview 8/7/11.

76 Peter Stanley, *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force*, Sydney, Murdoch Books, 2010.

77 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 333.

account of his upbringing between the wars, George Johnston's main character, David Meredith, describes his childhood home where the house was filled with wounded veterans. He wrote, 'there were quite a few disabled men, still pretty infirm, who suddenly found themselves demobilised and alone and helpless outside the army organisation which for years had enveloped every second of their activities, and with no place to go.'⁷⁸

The Depression added to men's miseries. John Barrett interviewed men who spent their adolescence and early adulthood during the Depression in the bush. They told stories of great hardship. NX43929 left home at 13. He wrote, 'For the benefit of people who did not live in that age, I put these things down. I worked 17 hours a day ... slept in barns with fleas, rats, you name it. Why wouldn't anyone want to join the army?'⁷⁹ F.F. Parkinson 'humped his bluey' from the time he left school until he enlisted in 1939 at age 18. He was 'sick of being out of work and in gaol.'⁸⁰

One of the worst aspects of unemployment was the humiliation that the working class experienced, and in some cases, those from higher classes, as well. McCalman writes that 'An army of outcasts had suddenly appeared, not carrying leprosy or syphilis, but poverty...The unemployed were consigned to a caste – they were the untouchables.'⁸¹ As George Bliss pointed out, when the war broke out in 1939, they were a disillusioned and desperate part of their generation. 'When war broke out in 1939,' he said, 'many of us joined up just to be sure of getting regular food and clothing.'⁸²

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78 Johnston, *My Brother Jack*, pp 13-15.

79 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 93.

80 *ibid*, p 98.

81 Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond, 1900-1965*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p 154.

82 Thomson, *The Myths We Live By*, p 241.

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One of the worst aspects of unemployment was the humiliation that the working -class experienced. McCalman writes that ‘an army of outcasts had suddenly appeared, not carrying leprosy or syphilis, but poverty...The unemployed were consigned to a caste – they were the untouchables.’⁸⁵

The army would be a place to salvage their lost pride and to re-establish their identity and sense of worth through reliving the Anzac Legend. Here they might retrieve their sense of manliness. As George Bliss pointed out they were a disillusioned and desperate part of their generation. ‘When war broke out in 1939,’ he said, ‘many of us joined up just to be sure of getting regular food and clothing.’⁸⁶

Conclusion

Michael Cathcart wrote about the conservative movement that spread amongst many ex-diggers from the First World War, which had been fostered by the RSSILA. He said that, ‘the Australia they had constructed in their minds as the object of their loyalty and chivalry was both staunch and virginal, far removed from the place of decadence and female flirtation.’⁸⁷ In the infancy of the ‘jazz age’ the virginal, idealised wives and sisters they had left behind were often now, in Cathcart’s words, ‘home economists’⁸⁸ or were entering the decade of the ‘flappers’. For these men, Cathcart says, ‘the war had defined their manliness ... For their standards of manliness, traditionalists looked back to the wartime ethos of the diggers and beyond to the older Legends

83 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 93.

84 *ibid*, p 98.

85 McCalman, *Struggletown*, p 154.

86 Michael Cannon, *The Human Face of the Great Depression*, Melbourne, Today’s Australia Publishing Company, 1996, pp 238-240.

87 *Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia’s secret army intrigue of 1931*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble, 1988p 86.

88 *ibid*, p 86.

of the bushmen. Any man who did not volunteer in the First World War was to be discounted from any definition of manliness.⁸⁹

For the next generation of soldiers that began enlisting in 1939, this sense of manliness they learnt from the Anzac Legend was to be expressed by treading the same path by volunteering for the AIF. There might still be a sense of anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism, but it was more subdued and the officer class of 1939 to 1945 was to make strong efforts to protect their formal power and position so that soldiers would behave like soldiers were supposed to behave and officers would be as privileged as they were entitled to be.

The soldiers of the Australian Army in the Second World War had a lot to live up to. The Anzac Legend taught that the First AIF were independent, egalitarian thinking men who shunned traditional forms of discipline, 'played up' when behind the lines, but produced the results in battle when the occasion arose. But while the men of the Second World War knew of the sacrifice and reputation of the First AIF from the official version put forward by successive governments and the RSSILA, they knew little of war from their fathers. These fathers were often disillusioned by their war experience. This we will see in the next chapter; they rarely spoke of their battle experiences, but were happy to speak about the Anzac Legend and its larrikinism and egalitarianism. As a result the men of the Second World army had a somewhat unrealistic image of what army life could be like. Many had an image based on the 'Legend', an image that looked to larrikinism and bravado as the marks of Anzac.

The seeds of change in Australian society were sown a long time before the end of the First World War. While mateship and egalitarianism were seen as the ideals to the men at war, political division was becoming more evident at home, beginning with the conscription debate of 1916 and 1917, which not only dealt with the question of conscription, but defined the political borders which would divide the country for decades to come. When the diggers came home their reputation as soldiers was to become a tool of the conservatives and men of the Empire. Any egalitarianism of the trenches was being lost in the unemployment and disillusionment of the

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p 87.

working-class suburbs and on the soldier settler farms. A growing urban middle class were becoming comfortable in their English sense of respectability and a *nouveau riche* class in the cities was discovering a new form of conservative elitism.

The men who were to serve in the Second World War, while inheriting a lot still from the First World War digger tradition, were a new and different generation in a sadder and more divided country. They would confront a new officer class borne from the elite of the First AIF, determined to not face the indiscipline and anarchy of First World War experience. As the war progressed, the officer corps would become more dominant than they ever were in the First World War and the larrikinism of the 6th Division, Second AIF, would become subsumed by a professionalism often marred by idleness and inaction

CHAPTER 2

SOLDIERS AT THE FRONTLINE 1939 to 1942

Introduction

At the beginning of the Second World War the Anzac Legend played an important part in building the expectations of the new recruits to the Australian army, about army life and the experiences they would face in combat as well as in the rear. There were also expectations in the larger society about how this next generation of soldiers would face the challenges of war. This chapter will trace the changes that occurred, from the enlistment of men who most saw themselves to be in the tradition of the First AIF, the 6th Division, to the introduction of the new Militia units into combat in 1942. The Australian soldier of the Second World War was not necessarily a volunteer, as all soldiers were in the Australian army in the First World War; he might also be a conscript in the Citizen Military Forces (Militia) or a volunteer for the Militia, but only a volunteer to do tropical service to the north of Australia, not to fight anywhere, as was the case with the AIF, in both wars. There were four infantry divisions and one armoured division in the Second AIF and five effective Militia divisions.¹ The differences here will be discussed in detail later, but at this stage it is important to note that we are not dealing with just the AIF volunteer of Legend, but with conscripts and the existence in Australia in the Second World War of two armies with two very different cultures. This was compounded by the fact more than 200,000 Militiamen transferred to the AIF after March 1942.² As a result, there was a change to the culture of the volunteer army which caused a great deal of resentment from the original volunteers.³ Another reservation is the fact that there were other competing interests for manpower in the Second World War. There was a large air force of 216,000, about half the size

1 <http://www.awm.gov.au/units/ww2.asp>. (Gavin Long, *The Final Campaigns*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1963, p 81, maintains that there were 14 effective divisions, not counting the 8th AIF Division lost to Japanese captivity. The number is fluid and depends on one's interpretation of what constitutes a division or its equivalent.)

2 Mark Johnston, *The Australian Army in World War II*, Oxford, Osprey, 2007, p 9.

3 Several veteran writers deal with this issue including Roland Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, Sydney Imprint, 1995, first published as *The Sixpenny Soldier*, Sydney, Collins/Angus and Robertson, 1990 and G.H. Fearnside, *Half to Remember: the Reminiscences of an Australian Soldier in World War II*, Haldane Publishing, Sydney, 1975.

of the First AIF⁴ that drew personnel away from the army, and in an economy of total war, 'essential industries' also made their claims on available manpower.

This chapter will begin by portraying volunteers of the 6th Division. I will argue that they were closest in time and in military 'culture' to the First AIF, with many of their officers having served in the First AIF. The chapter will then go on to explore the animosity that grew between the two armies of the Australian Military Force (AMF), the AIF which included the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and Armoured Divisions and the Citizen Military Forces or Militia. The 6th Division experience saw the beginning of the deterioration of relationships between officers and other ranks from 1939 to 1942. This deterioration was not universal, but it became widespread in the AMF. The rank and file became increasingly disillusioned and embittered with leadership. They thought their leaders were undermining egalitarianism and democracy and thus that they were failing to maintain the Anzac Legend.

Early Perceptions of the Second AIF: the Volunteers of the 6th Division

In the years 1940 to 1942, the experiences and achievements of the Second AIF seemed to the Australian public to show that the Anzac Legend was real. That is, commentators and politicians interpreted Second AIF (Sixth Division) victories in North Africa and Syria in 1941 and 1942 as demonstrating the truth of the Legend. The *Brisbane Courier Mail* wrote, with a great degree of hyperbole, on January 6, 1941, in glowing terms of 'the brilliant feat of arms by the AIF in taking Bardia'. It later continued:

High praise for the Diggers, who have been acclaimed as 'worthy sons of the old Anzacs,' is given in British and American newspapers. Their achievement in breaking through the perimeter of Bardia's defences is described as having given the key to success to the British forces... The fortified line the Australians broke through was comparable in strength with the Hindenburg Line of the Great War...

4 <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww2.asp>.

The infantry went into battle singing 'We're off to see the Wizard of Oz,' and went on singing even when they were under artillery fire.⁵

It seemed, from such reporting, that the Legend that had been created in the First World War was simply continuing into the Second World War.

Reported in similar terms, episodes of heroic resistance at Tobruk or retreat in the Greece campaign seemed to mirror the perceived stoicism of Gallipoli, and the victory at El Alamein seemed to continue the victories of the 1918 final offensive. The *Frankston Standard* reported on May 23, 1941 that 'Australians comprise a large proportion of the garrison of that besieged centre, and reports show that they are putting up a fight worthy of their fathers. Private messages to hand relate deeds of great bravery, of patrols fighting to the death, when, surrender would have been an easy way out.'⁶ Similarly, when the 9th Division returned from North Africa after their participation in the battle of El Alamein in October/November, 1942, the Melbourne *Argus* reported on their march through Melbourne that they showed no flags or banners, which the newspaper commented was appropriate. It said: 'How could they be necessary to those who watched and cheered, and who saw in their hearts the flags and colours that have in this war won new glory to commemorate and continue the battle honours won in the first World War by an earlier AIF?'⁷ In both these newspaper reports a strong link is made between the First AIF and the Second AIF, continuing the Legend.

Men who volunteered for the Second AIF did so, conscious of the public perception of the First AIF and the expectation that they would live up to that perception. John Barrett reported that over half of the men in his study thought that the Anzac tradition influenced their decision to enlist.⁸ Both the First and the Second AIFs were, after all, volunteer armies, and they were made up of men seeking both patriotic goals as well as a sense of adventure. The 'spirit of Anzac', clichéd and stereotyped though it may already have become, was still passed on to the next

⁵ *Brisbane Courier Mail*, January 6, 1941, p 1, as reproduced in Trove, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/44911341>.

⁶ *Frankston Standard*, 23 May, 1941, p 1, as cited in Trove,

<http://192.102.239.158/ndp/del/article/75039510?searchTerm=&searchLimits=1-publicitag=Tobruk>

⁷ The Melbourne *Argus*, 1 April, 1943, p 1, as cited on Trove, 92.102.239.158/newspaper/result?1-publicitag=Tobruk&q=el+alamein.

⁸ Barrett, *We Were There*, p 138.

generation through organisations such as the RSL and through public ceremony and school teaching. The historian Margaret Barter has presented evidence that ‘C.E.W. Bean articulated ideas about the spiritual bonds linking the two AIFs, but those ties were in many cases real and developed spontaneously.’ More than half the men of her study (2/2nd Battalion) had some sort of relationship with a First AIF veteran. These relationships were often family in the form of a father or an uncle, but they also could be men they knew in the neighbourhood or the workplace.⁹ I would only add that while the men of the Second AIF may have had family and other contact with First AIF veterans, it was often the silence of these men about the war experiences and the almost secretive mateship networks of these older veterans that impressed the younger men, rather than their stories and (often missing) wise advice.

Ross argues that the whole nature of the armies from the First World War to the Second World War changed. She wrote that ‘the model (of the Second AIF) is to be attained through regular procedures, through training and conscious emulation and discipline rather than as a quite spontaneous process’, as had been the norm in First AIF.¹⁰ It was this developing loss of spontaneity in the Second AIF after the early days of the 6th Division and later in the Militia that would mark a major change from the First AIF to the Second AIF.

On the presence of the ‘digger’ in the Second World War she wrote:

The digger is still there but there are increasing numbers of anti-digger personnel: the regulars, the conscripted Militiamen, and the volunteer Militiamen. There are more subdivisions within the army, reflecting the specialisation which came with increasingly technological warfare.¹¹

This could be seen from the very beginning when the enlistment rates for the Second AIF were much slower than for the First AIF. In the first six months of the First World War 62,786 men volunteered whereas for the same time in the Second World War, only one-third this number - 21,998 had volunteered. Similarly, for the first two years of the wars the numbers were 188,587

⁹ Margaret Barter, *Far above Battle: the Experience and Memory of Australian Soldiers in War, 1939-1945*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1994, p 247.

¹⁰ Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 116.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 117.

and, 30,796 respectively.¹² Many men saw the defence of Australia from a looming Japanese menace as the priority and wanted to stay in the Militia as it was primarily a home-defence force; others saw the war in Europe as a ‘phoney war.’ According to Grey, some who wanted to transfer to the AIF were not allowed to because of army restrictions for fear of making Militia units unsustainable and yet other men were discouraged by their Militia commanders.¹³ Spontaneity, even in initial volunteer recruitment, was less obvious and once the boisterousness and larrikinism of the 6th Division was played out, the new army was more conventional.

Most of the veterans interviewed for this study had learnt very little from the veterans of the First World War about the relationships that had developed with their mates and their officers. What they knew about the First AIF was from the RSL, the popular press, their schools or the official government perspectives. G. H. Fearnside recalls dreaming of war ‘with romantic notions ... and the idea that officers led their men into the haze of battle with smoking Webleys in their hands and the call of “over the top, chaps!” on their lips.’¹⁴ The reluctance of First World War veterans to talk about the war meant that much of the real experience of the men during their down-time behind the lines was not passed on to the next generation of soldiers. Colin Turbet, a 9th Division veteran of El Alamein and New Guinea, remembers Sundays in Wyndham on the south coast of New South Wales when the First World War veterans would gather behind the milking sheds at social gatherings and talk amongst themselves about the war, but rarely did they talk to their families.¹⁵ What was passed on to fill this gap with the next generation was the official version of the Anzac Legend which was a stereotype of the laconic digger who was also a great fighter and a bit of a larrikin.

Many veterans were so traumatised by the experience of the First World War that they would not or could not talk about any aspect of it. Comments from Second World War veterans about what the First AIF generation had told them are vague and suggest that there indeed was a code of silence by their fathers and uncles. Alan Bewley, originally a conscript who transferred to the

12 Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-41, Official History of Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Vol.1, civil series, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1970, p 399.

13 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 147.

14 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 20.

15 Colin Turbet, interview, 5/5/05

AIF, said that, 'I think on Anzac Day we used to go out and raise the flag. I remember the Wentworth Falls School of Arts with the two German machine guns and three Lewis guns. We were very aware that a war had gone on in 1914 to 1918.'¹⁶ He knew of the official version, but not the personal version from veterans.

Colin Turbet thought it was impolite to ask veterans about their experiences during the First World War. Turbet spoke of a time when a First World War veteran was asked to address a meeting in the New South Wales town of Bega shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War: 'We had a meeting in the town hall once and a veteran was asked to come along and speak at it. Wouldn't you know it, when he had finished some fool just had to get up and ask a stupid question.'¹⁷ Danny Newport said his father, a First World War veteran, 'never talked about the war.'¹⁸ (Herbert) Paul Henningham, a 2nd AIF infantry platoon commander with the 58/59th Battalion, said that if he asked his father, a decorated First World War veteran, about the war, he became angry and said: 'For God's sake, can't we just forget about it?'¹⁹ Again, the gaps were filled in by the official version, initially created by Charles Bean but taken up by politicians and community leaders alike.

The 6th Division was the first of the divisions to be recruited for the Second AIF. Like the First AIF, the Second AIF was to be a completely volunteer army and, as a volunteer army, was seen by recruits and by those who wrote about their recruitment as being more within the spirit of the First AIF, which prided itself on its all-volunteer enlistment. It was also the first to see action and indeed it was the only part of the AMF to be on the frontline until mid-1942. But, increasingly, as the war progressed, there would be fewer frontline soldiers as a proportion of the whole army than there was in the First World War. This would change the vision that Australian soldiers would have of themselves and change the dynamics between officers and other ranks in the army overall.

16 Alan Bewley, interview, 10/2/11.

17 Colin Turbet, interview, 5/5/05.

18 Danny Newport, interview, 5/9/05.

19 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

The 6th Division, AIF from 1939-1941

The first division that was recruited in the Second AIF was the 6th Division. It is worth taking a close look at that division because it is the one that seemed to reflect a popular belief at the time that the men were created within the mould of the Anzac Legend. They provided the bridge between the First AIF and the Second AIF, not only because they were the next volunteer division after the First AIF's 5th Division, but because they satisfied the need of the nation, now facing another horrific war, to recreate the Anzac Legend in which the nation had been immersed since 1918 and to validate in many ways the traditions, military and cultural, this Legend had set. The silence of the First World War veterans left these men to rediscover the experience of a volunteer citizen army for themselves. There were plenty of pre-war Militia men to train them in the basic military skills, but the 6th Division learnt afresh those informal aspects of army life that the nation believed made the First AIF so unique.

For several reasons only five thousand Militia members volunteered for the Sixth Division, fewer than the ten thousand that were expected. One reason was that the AIF were paid three shillings less per day than the Militia; another was that the Militia were not to serve overseas.²⁰ Griffiths-Marsh has commented that 'only a politician could justify the logic of paying troops soon to be exposed to the hell of battle less than those who stayed at home.'²¹

The unexpectedly low proportion of Sixth Division volunteers from a Militia background contributed to that Division's ethos. Many non-Militia recruits for the 6th Division were men off the streets, and according to Labor politician, Eddie Ward, many were escaping unemployment.²² Such men were not already accustomed to military discipline, as those from the Militia were assumed by the authorities to be. As a result, the men of the 6th Division behaved badly, showing themselves to be as wild and undisciplined as the First AIF, especially in the early days in Egypt

20 Stockings, *Bardia: Myth, Reality*, p 31.

21 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 76.

22 Mark Johnston, *The Proud Sixth: An Illustrated History of the 6th Australian Division 1939-1946*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp 11-12.

in 1915.²³ Peter Charlton relates several episodes of misbehaviour before the men of the 6th Division even arrived in the Middle East. These included a report from a 6th Division man, Fred Baynes, who said that on the trip to Ingleburn Camp near Liverpool to begin training, they stopped at pubs along the way: ‘What were they to do with a busload of drunks? Our bus had stopped at every pub from Sydney to Liverpool Camp.’²⁴ Later, men from the 16th Brigade (Sixth Division) burnt down the canteen at Ingleburn Camp because it would not sell beer.²⁵ And when men of the Sixth Division arrived in Fremantle on the way to Egypt, their mischief included carrying a car into the General Post Office, stealing fire engines to collect drunk men so that they could get them back to the ship on time and commandeering and driving trams through the town.²⁶ Peter Charlton writes of similar events in Colombo and Cape Town when the men were given leave as the ship docked on the way to the Middle East.²⁷ Poor discipline among the Sixth Division in Palestine was reported by Gavin Long who wrote that Brigadier Allen ‘issued an instruction on discipline that included examples of “discreditable behavior” such as excessive numbers riding in street gharries, eating and drinking in streets, collars undone, hands in pockets, obscene language’. He also reported on a ‘rowdy demonstration’ outside a new theatre built for the men of the AIF where seats were classified according to rank, or ‘class distinction’ as Long called it.²⁸ When in training in Palestine throughout 1940, they also earned a reputation for larrikin behaviour which was hardly military. Margaret Barter records several episodes that illustrate this. Captain Duncan Goslett, the Adjutant Captain in the 2/2nd Battalion in 1940 in Palestine, believed that, ‘the Australian soldier had a far more casual approach to military discipline than did the “hard core” English soldier who was punctilious in his observance of discipline.’²⁹ B. McGrath wrote of an instance where an Australian in Palestine presented arms to a carload of passing ‘several pukkha sahibs (sic) in a mock salute. One British officer returned with a rude gesture and this led to Australian soldiers’ free-flowing tirade of colourful

23 There are many historians who have given evidence for this unruly, ill-disciplined behavior. These include Mark Johnston, *The Proud Sixth*, , pp 10-12, Peter Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, pp 37-48 and Peter Ewer, *The Forgotten Anzacs* (2nd Edition) Melbourne, Scribe Publications, 2009, pp 7-19 passim.

24 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p 38.

25 *ibid*, pp 41-42.

26 *ibid*, pp 59-60.

27 *ibid*, pp 57-76.

28 Gavin Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: To Benghazi*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1952, pp 74-75

29 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 36.

expletives.³⁰ Such behaviour was understood by those who carried it out as their entitlement to continue the Digger Legend from the First AIF.

Two weeks before the battle of Bardia, which was fought from January 3 to 5, 1941, the 6th Division was praised in the same way as the Anzacs of the First AIF had been praised after 1918. The *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted an 'American Correspondent' who reported that the 6th Division could not be contained. 'A commander told me, "We can't hold them back. They want to repeat their fathers' feats in 1914-18"'.³¹ But if the men of the 6th Division were keen to prove themselves in combat, it would take nearly twelve months of waiting and training before they were tested. When they went into action at Bardia, they were well trained and highly motivated and the campaign from Bardia to Benghazi was a month long run of victories.

Bardia was a great victory for the Sixth Division. Besides the 40,000 Italian prisoners taken, the 6th Division took 26 coastal defence guns, 19 medium guns, 216 field guns, 26 heavy anti-aircraft guns, 41 infantry guns and 145 anti-tank guns, 115 light tanks and 708 motor vehicles. Historians differ in their account of the achievements of the 6th Division. Charlton wrote that,

tradition and sentiment aside, it was a great victory. The Italians outnumbered the Australians and outgunned them. Perhaps they lacked the morale and the will to fight ... But the ease of victory should not detract from its quality. For a first battle, it was well-planned and well-executed. Above all, it was carried out with style.³²

Peter Ewer wrote: 'In military terms, even with these losses (130 killed and 326 wounded), the capture of Bardia was a stunning victory; as an organised force, the 6th Division had barely exerted itself.' Other historians such as Craig Stockings have explained the 6th Division's success at Bardia by reference less to the strength of the Australians and more to the weaknesses of the Italians:

For too many authors brawny, sun-tanned Australian infantrymen found success because they were brawny, suntanned Australian infantrymen. It is as simple and erroneous as that. An innate mix of

30 *ibid*, p 36

31 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/12/1940, p 1, from Trove, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/27949766>

32 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 116

strength, masculinity, courage and initiative somehow inherited from the genetic code of the original Anzacs is answer enough for most.³³

Stockings argues that other factors explain the Australian success: the Italians were poorly led, poorly equipped and unmotivated while the Australians were well led, highly trained and very motivated.³⁴ High levels of motivation and serious training and good standards of equipment created a successful fighting division.

The differences among explanations of the Bardia victory raise the wider question of the role of egalitarianism and democracy in the Second AIF. According to the Anzac Legend, the relationships between officers and other ranks were egalitarian and this ethos contributed to their motivation and morale and thus to their military success. Does the Legend describe the 6th Division? This Division was a motley collection of men. A young officer, Lieutenant Ken Curtis, described them like this:

There were sleeper cutters and timber cutters from the Dorrigo, and cowhands and banana growers from the valley of the Tweed. There were station owners and station hands from frosty New England. There were school teachers and bank clerks from practically anywhere. And there was a sprinkling of hobos.³⁵

They saw themselves as being more in the image of the First AIF than any other division in the Second World War, AIF or Militia. They had a sense of independence born of hard times during the Depression, but like the First AIF, they saw themselves as ‘citizen soldiers’ for whom military discipline was optional at times. The Anzac Legend gave them expectations that they could be ill-disciplined off the parade ground and away from the frontline but disciplined on the frontline. The Anzac Legend told tales of the Battle of Wazzir on April 2, 1915 when the original Anzacs ‘did over’ this red light section of Cairo.³⁶ They were mostly intoxicated and, as a result, poorly behaved. Early days for the 6th Division would prove that they would, at times, exhibit similar behaviour. This was the last generation of Australians to have ‘gone on the wallaby’ in

33 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 4.

34 Craig Stockings, ‘The Anzac Legend and the Battle of Bardia’, from *War in History*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, Jan 2010, pp 88-112.

35 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 39.

36 *Gallipoli Diary*, <https://www.wayz.co.nz/wayzpress/history/gallipoli/april-1915>

any numbers. Many were like ‘Chummy’ Cleary, who, unable to find work in Sydney, left home and headed to central west New South Wales on his bicycle where he found casual work as a farm hand and general rouseabout.³⁷ They were called the ‘economic conscripts’³⁸ because there were claims that many of them enlisted because they had been long-term unemployed as a result of the hard times of the 1930s.

Despite this economic distress, enlistment was slower than was expected, certainly slower at this stage of the war than for the same time in the First World War. This probably reflects a growing wisdom learnt by some from the First World War experience but also confusion about the roles of two seemingly conflicting armies, the AIF and the Militia. Many men had just joined the Militia, as volunteers or conscripts, and were waiting to see how events developed. But many joined the AIF straight away for fairly basic reasons. Gerry Quirk, a 6th Division ‘original’ said that:

red, white and blue patriotism discreetly hid some things...Things such as the dole and ration chips and blokes humping their swags in search of work all over the country and camping in railway yards of every country town until police moved them on. It wasn’t until the first day in the army and, for many, their first good meal for many days that you heard the yell: ‘Bangers and mash...Goodo!’³⁹

One 8th Division man said of the 6th Division, recruited before his division: ‘They were the ones who wanted something to do. Just getting over the Depression. Let’s have a go in the army. I knew two or three rough characters who joined up pretty smartly.’⁴⁰ And Keith Carroll, a lieutenant in the first months of the year wrote in a diary that the 6th Division was made up from, ‘all sorts of men from every possible calling and trade, good and bad but on a casual glance an excellent type of chap showing great enthusiasm and will eventually become good soldiers.’⁴¹

Jo Gullett, in his personal account of his war experiences, also wrote that, ‘the 6th attracted the most adventurous as well as the most restless elements of the community and that gave the

37 Kathleen Pyne nee Cleary, interview, 1992.

38 This term was coined by the Labor MP and wartime Minister for Labour and national service from 7 October, 1941, Eddie Ward. From ‘The Peace Generation’, *The Courier Mail* at <http://www.couriermail.com.au/extras/ww2/unready.htm>.

39 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, pp 20-21

40 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 13.

41 Lt K.A. Carroll, 2/6 Bn, diary, 24/10/39, 3DRL 1003, AWM, as cited in Johnston, *The Proud Sixth*, p 10.

division a unique style and character.⁴² There has been debate about the levels of unemployment in men entering the 6th Division in 1939. Barrett reports that 94% of respondents to his survey said that at enlistment they were 'employed.' This is far above the national unemployment figure in September, 1939 of 10.4%.⁴³ One would expect that employed men were less likely to give up their jobs and join the army than unemployed men. But Barrett suspects that many lied about the 'good jobs' they had given up. Underemployment was another matter. 15% said they were underemployed so that, added to the 6% who claimed they were unemployed, up to one quarter of men admitted to hard times and there probably would have been more.⁴⁴ With their backgrounds of unemployment, underemployment and independent lifestyles, their poor discipline on the ships going over and on shore leave doesn't come as a surprise.

The attitude of men to officers and officers to other ranks in the 6th Division was close to what the Legend had said were the attitudes of men in the First AIF. Many of these men were living in the shadow of the Australian bush and pioneer Legends which helped to form the identity of the First AIF. Many attitudinal changes had occurred between the wars but the evolutionary process was gradual and there were still those more independent and rebellious types who were attracted to this group of 'originals' or 'thirty-niners.' The other ranks of the 6th Division experienced neither egalitarianism of outcome nor egalitarianism of opportunity, as defined by John Hirst.⁴⁵ But they did experience an egalitarianism of respect, or 'rough equality' by many officers, as defined by Jane Ross.⁴⁶ And at the very least, there was an egalitarianism of pretence by other officers. In a few cases, their officers were overbearing and class-elitist as some were found to be in the First AIF, but in most cases, there was mutual respect and even affection and the mutual respect was often a result of their volunteer standing. However, as I explained in the introduction on page 11, the hierarchical nature of army structure did not guarantee that ranks' respect for their officers.

42 H. (Jo) Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only: An Infantryman's War*: MUP, Melbourne, 1976, p 67.

43 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book, 1939*, p 962, as cited at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/1301.01939?OpenDocument>.

44 Barrett, *We Were There*, pp 101-102.

45 Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, p 149.

46 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 61

What makes a 'good officer' in the eyes of an enlisted soldier? Some veterans of the 6th Division defined them. Griffiths-Marsh offered an example of the ideal infantry officer:

Tony Gluth was over six feet tall, blond, and affected a sometimes well-deserved cynicism towards incompetent senior military officers. With a few succinct comments, he could deflate any person who put on airs. On the several occasions I had seen him in action, I was struck by his nonchalant disregard of enemy fire while he quietly issued commands and controlled his platoon. He was one of the best types of Australian infantry officer.⁴⁷

He insisted, 'there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers.'⁴⁸ On the same theme, Ken Clift stated:

It is said that there are no bad troops, only bad officers and I feel there is a lot of truth in this statement. By and large, apart from a few quickly culled out, the 16th Brigade had magnificent officers, both senior and junior. During the war they were to make their mark, not only in the Brigade but throughout the entire AIF. They trained their troops through the Hebron Hills and back at camp like Spartans and although, as is the wont of all soldiers, we grizzled, we were achieving an *esprit de corps* second to none.⁴⁹

Les Cook from the 6th Division was led by officers who were First World War veterans. He described them as, 'in the main a very understanding group of men.' He went on to make the point that in a front line infantry unit, 'Unpleasant officers didn't last long in an infantry battalion. We weeded them out a bit. There had to be rapport between an officer and the men.'⁵⁰

Peter Dornan, another 6th Division veteran, described a good officer as 'a good soldier, tough but fair.'⁵¹ Clift wrote that, 'by and large, our officers were a most competent and gallant lot as was later proved',⁵² while Fearnside described a Lieutenant Logan as 'serious, young and competent',⁵³ and Lieutenant 'John Dunlop was a fine, cool soldier.'⁵⁴ Fearnside described

47 Griffiths-Marsh, *I Was Only Sixteen*, p 187.

48 *ibid*, p 243.

49 Ken Clift, *The Saga of a Sig: The Wartime Memories of Six Years' Service in the Second AIF*, Sydney, K.C.D. Publications, 1972, pp 22-23.

50 Les Cook, interview, 19/9/05.

51 Peter Dornan, *The Last Man Standing: Herb Ashley and the Battle of El Alamein*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2006, p 136.

52 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 9.

53 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 38.

54 *ibid*, p 66.

Major Harry Chilton, appointed to control discipline at Barce after the fall of Benghazi in 1941.

He was a 'most capable and popular officer, a man of great wit and charm'.⁵⁵

In the 6th Division an officer had to have the 'wit and charm' to control and to get the most from his men. The composite model of these descriptions is a junior officer who was capable as a soldier, cool and calm and had a sense of humour, just like the Legendary First AIF officer. He can admit to fear, but still do the job, with a smile on his face, as was the case with Lieutenant J.A.R.K Strong. In a slit trench at Bardia, Barrett writes of a Victorian veteran's experience when Lieutenant Strong said for all to hear, while under intense Italian artillery bombardment: "Is that you shaking, Sar-major?" "Yes, Sir." "No, it's me. Christ, I'm a frightened officer." Laughter from all. For the remainder of the war this great officer did or said something outrageous whenever things were bad, thus relieving the strain.⁵⁶

Sometimes a soldier's judgement could be affected by the action of an officer away from the front line, as well as at the front line. Clift describes a Captain Leo Neil Tribolet:

Trib was a remarkable character, a First World War soldier, native of Tasmania, tough as teak, courage of a lion and a brain like a razor. He was just what the doctor ordered for the J Section mob. In the years ahead we had plenty of reason to be proud of him. Trib had enlisted with us as a private but, because of his undoubted ability as a sig, soon rose through the ranks... He was a good organiser, tough on his troops, extremely generous with his own money when required, scrupulously fair and above all, he would never ask anyone to do something he would not do himself.⁵⁷

Tribolet was also admired because he ignored South African and Provost charges against Clift after a fight in Jerusalem and 'lent him a quid to go to the wet canteen.'⁵⁸ Mark Johnston wrote of officers who had the respect of their men. Johnston described Captain Jim Cameron of the 2/5th Battalion as 'intense and ascetic in his single-minded dedication to war-making, in battle he was efficient and without emotion. He drove his men hard but was said to cry over their losses

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p 45.

⁵⁸ Barrett, *We Were There*, p 6.

⁵⁷ Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 89.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p 91.

after action.’⁵⁹ Lieutenant Ken Perkins was seen by Johnston as one who ‘had risen through the ranks and sustained his men who saw him as a mate.’⁶⁰ Barrie Cassidy, in his biography of his father, Bill Cassidy, who was taken prisoner on Crete in 1941, wrote of his father’s captain at the time, ‘Captain Bertie Baglin, or “Bags” as the troops referred to him, was a pillar of support to his men – clear in his instructions, good natured, not someone who imposed discipline for the sake of it. In return, his men by and large respected his judgement...’⁶¹

Jo Gullett, who was educated at Oxford, was commissioned from the ranks in North Africa after winning the Military Medal at Bardia and suffering extensive wounds. He became a Country Party Member of Federal Parliament after the war. Gullett offered a description of his fellow officers: ‘apart from our devotion to the battalion we had very little in common. Some were very young, others approaching middle age. Some were university graduates, were gentlemen, rich, married or intelligent. Others were none of these things.’⁶² There were class divisions amongst the officer corps. Gullett’s description of the officers’ relationship with the troops is a curious mixture of egalitarian mateship and patronising class exclusivity. On the one hand he says of his batman who died of wounds, ‘We were friends.’⁶³ On the other hand, he speaks of the officers’ mess and the officers’ ward in the hospital in Cairo, as well as Blamey’s houseboats where wounded officers were sent to recuperate, as if they were gentlemen’s clubs and definitely sees himself as belonging to those clubs.⁶⁴ On a train from Ceylon to Madras with one sergeant and 15 men – Gullett dined alone. As a sergeant, it was different. In an interview in 1970 he spoke of his experience as an NCO: ‘I started in the ranks. But as a sergeant ... you are “of” the men, you are not an officer, you live together, you eat together, you sleep together, you know each other very well, you are on Christian name terms and yet you are the commander.’⁶⁵

59 Johnston, *The Proud Sixth*, p 174.

60 *ibid*, p 207.

61 Barrie Cassidy, *Private Bill in Love and War*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2014, p 39.

62 Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only*, p 70.

63 *ibid*, p 77.

64 *ibid*, pp 28-36.

65 Jo Gullett, interview with Mal Pratt on Oral History Program, National Library of Australia, 19/11/1970, on: <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/audiodelivery/apps/?wicket:interface>.

Gullett said Australia was a ‘peasant society as opposed to a sophisticated or metropolitan society and it is to be hoped and expected that we shall grow out of it.’⁶⁶ He was very much a product of the Australian Public (Independent) School system and noted its expectations:

If public schools, in order to advertise the type of man they turned out, published photographs and descriptions of their ideal, Bill would have done very well for a model. He was tall, good looking and excelled at everything considered worth doing at a public school in those days. He was even a very tolerable scholar. He had a good sense of humour, but his greatest charm was that he really believed what he had been told as a boy. He did not cheat, he played the game, he was generous, courageous and fair.⁶⁷

If the Australian army had its share of working-class boys selected from the ranks to be sent to OTUs,⁶⁸ it certainly had its share of ‘upper class’ boys such as Gullett who seemed torn between the ideals of, on the one hand, mateship and egalitarianism, and on the other, having an ‘acceptable’ social and school background. One veteran told Barrett: ‘Some officers and NCOs played on their rank, but in action their attitude changed and they were one of the boys.’⁶⁹

To younger soldiers their officers, especially their commanding officers (COs), could be like father figures. Griffiths-Marsh describes an incident in North Africa in 1941. While sheltering behind a rock while under intense enemy fire,

We were all leading side-on into each other, when I noticed I was pressed up against the CO. My rifle was cradled in both hands, the muzzle prodding his paunch. I gazed out from under my tin hat as he peered from his bushy black eyebrows. He twinkled at me: “Son, is that rifle cocked?” I affirmed that it was. “Is the safety catch on?” With juvenile pride in being a well-trained rifleman, I assured him that it was. “Nevertheless, son, never point your rifle at anybody unless you mean business.” With that, he gently pushed the muzzle aside with the palm of his hand. To youngsters like me, the CO, if he is considerate as a commander, is the father of the battalion.⁷⁰

To others, the CO might be a harsh but respected man. Griffiths-Marsh described his CO on his battalion’s return to Palestine from Crete:

66 Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only*, p 75.

67 *ibid*, p 86.

68 OCTUs – Officer Cadet Training Units are often called OTUs – Officer Training Units. This study uses the shortened version.

69 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 200.

70 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 140.

(The CO) welcomed us back as long-lost brothers, congratulated us on our performance in Crete, warned us of heavy training programmes to weld the battalion together, and finally stated that discipline had become lax. He would not tolerate any untidiness, failure to salute officers, and AWL would bring a most severe punishment. A digger in the rear growled, 'Good ol' Mitch. That bastard's true to form.' We grinned. We were back in the bosom of the family.⁷¹

24th brigade Commander Arthur Godfrey said to his troops in 1940, 'the men of the AIF trusted their leaders and in no case is there even the slightest suspicion that any company, platoon or section of the AIF did not unhesitatingly follow their leaders into whatever lay before them'.⁷² This may have been official policy for the army but it did not always happen this way. There were some junior officers who received criticism from men in the 6th Division. Clift told of the case of an 'incompetent' officer:

Our instructor ... was a very prissy type...He proved a dead loss and after the first barrage was evacuated back to Australia with shell-shock or some other nervous complaint. How anyone could appoint him as an officer in the AIF's first convoy was beyond my comprehension.⁷³

Griffiths-Marsh condemned the presence of a '... cowardly officer' in North Africa in 1941: 'One officer hung back behind his troops, and when approached by his runner, kept screaming, "Go away, go away. You'll draw the crabs"'.⁷⁴ Such men were not considered to be fit to lead in battle.

A good officer, as considered by the rank-and-file soldiers of the 6th Division, was not overly legalistic but pragmatic about military law. This is consistent with the Anzac Legend that, being citizen soldiers, they were all volunteers and so if a law did not contribute towards fighting efficiency, the law was to be ignored or treated as trivial. Barrett writes of a company commander who defended his men against harsh punishment when some 2/23rd Battalion men were given fourteen days CB (confined to barracks) because of: '1 man, drunk, making a row. We all got off. The whole unit stood up and got us off.' His company commander, indignant at

71 *ibid*, p 210.

72 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p xix

73 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 9.

74 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 135.

the sentence, marched the whole company ... to “the big boys” and threatened they would all go on strike.’⁷⁵

Medical Officers (MOs) often had a different perspective from combat officers. Tom Selby, an MO with the 6th Division, thought that NCOs and platoon commanders were the strength of the division.

I learned the most admirable were the corporals, sergeants and platoon-commanding lieutenants. I censored their mail. I knew how they stood in the eyes of their charges; I learned how they mothered their men without spoiling them, and how proud the men were if they had been found to be the ‘best section’, the ‘best platoon’, or part of the ‘best battalion’.⁷⁶

But many thought that the higher the commander’s position, the more intolerable he became. Ken Brougham, a 9th Division NCO, complained in a letter home that while the 2/23rd Battalion’s Tubby Allen, a popular leader and a man who, it has been claimed, was later victimised by General Blamey himself ⁷⁷, spoke to his men under the shade of a tree, General Iven Mackay paraded the NCOs and, according to Brougham:

Our worthy GOC found time to have the few NCOs that were left in the Brigade paraded, and after pounding our ears with our short-comings and keeping us strictly at ease in the hot sun with our tin hats on for three-quarters of an hour, abused us for moving our feet, then for wearing other than issue shorts, shirts and stockings (we only possess one of each and had to wear something while they were being washed). He then gave us rifle exercises because our slopes were not quite correct. You wouldn’t read about it, would you? However, it is something to be taught rifle exercise by a general ... we are off for a nine mile hike now.⁷⁸

Another NCO Barter interviewed said he ‘proceeded to tell us what dogs we were.’⁷⁹

What did the officers think of the other ranks? Barrett quotes 2/5th Battalion Lieutenant G.M. Fry: ‘What he (Fry) valued most in retrospect was “the privilege of knowing so many fine men”’. He claimed that the men in the ranks of the 2/5th Battalion never gave any indication that they

75 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 24.

76 Selby, *Dr NX22*, p 163.

77 For a detailed account of these claims, see Stuart Braga, *Kokoda Commander: a Life of Major-General ‘Tubby’ Allen*, Melbourne Oxford University Press, 2004, p 240.

78 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 153.

79 *ibid*, p 153.

considered themselves inferior to officers. He followed the Australian trend of relying on discipline based on “We will” rather than “You will”.⁸⁰ This fits well within the expectation of the Anzac Legend where men were disciplined and guided by mateship and respect, more than by formal military discipline. Ross wrote of the First AIF:

The main Australian virtue which Bean pointed to as distinguishing the Australians from other armies, was the diggers’ feeling of equality with all other men: not only perceived equality of social status, but equality of competence, initiative and responsibility. This is the thread running through all Bean’s comments on the officer system, the methods of discipline, and success at war.⁸¹

But it was the combination of competence and people skills that won a unit of fighting men over as we can see from this description from Clift:

Russell Reeve was 2/IC of 6Div Sigs on the island (of Crete) and like the good soldier he was, set about getting signals organised. Even under adversity, I always found him a cheerful senior officer imparting confidence because of his competence and understanding of the average soldier under his command.⁸²

And in the long run, as Stockings points out, it was the combination of good leadership, thorough training, quality equipment and high morale that won battles.⁸³ This principle applied not just to the 6th Division, but to the rest of the army to come, if the officers were willing to follow it.

Other Armies

The informality of the officer – other rank relationship was highlighted for men in the 6th Division, just as it had been the First AIF, by comparison with the relationship between officers and other ranks in the British Army. Charlton wrote that, ‘to the independent and egalitarian Australians the British emphasis on rank and file came as a shock.’⁸⁴ The British Army did not often have the ‘egalitarian peer-group system’ that Ross speaks about. Johnston argues that:

80 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 188.

81 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 34.

82 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 80.

83 Stockings, *Bardia*, passim.

84 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 90.

In fact, leaders in Australian combat units could not readily coerce their men into risking their lives. Discipline there was less strict and formal than in the British Army. Usually, any new officer's authority was quickly acknowledged, but some platoons executed sufficient informal pressure to ensure that lazy, selfish officers either left or changed their ways. Moreover, while officers had wide legal power over their men, until these leaders proved their mettle in combat, they themselves were on trial with their subordinates.⁸⁵

He claims that Australian officers in North Africa were often chastised by British officers for not enforcing discipline.⁸⁶ 'Australian commanding officers,' he argues, 'enjoyed strong coercive powers – stronger, for instance, than those of their British counterparts – and this probably counteracted any leniency on the part of their subordinate officers.'⁸⁷ One price for officers to pay was to put up with grizzling or complaining. This was the pressure relief valve for frontline soldiers. One chaplain of a veteran infantry battalion wrote affectionately of the men as 'a body of men who could grumble, curse, fight and generally play the game of life as well as any whoever left the shores of Australia'.⁸⁸ The question of the Australian perception of the relationship between British officers and their other ranks is problematical. The evidence is largely anecdotal and when writers such as Charlton, Ross and Johnston describe this informality, they rely on anecdotal evidence to a great extent which supports this aspect of the Anzac Legend. However, the overwhelming weight of anecdotal evidence does support the informality of Australian officer-other ranks relationships and until qualitative evidence to the contrary is presented, this is all we have on which to base our judgements.

Gavin Long wrote about the attitude of some British officers to Australian 'colonial' officers. Long claimed that many junior British officers, as well as senior British officers had preconceived convictions about the colonials. He wrote that '... those young Australian officers who came closely into contact with British units were at first puzzled and later irritated by the coolness with which officers of some of the British regiments in Palestine received them.' He says that some British officers sought '... in the newcomers some proof of their ready-made

85 Mark Johnston, *At the Frontline: Experiences of Australian Soldiers in World War II*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p 70.

86 *ibid*, p 149.

87 *ibid*, p 152.

88 E.F. Allchin, *Purple and Blue, The History of the 2/10th Battalion, A.I.F. (Adelaide Rifles)*, Adelaide, the Griffin Press, 1958, p 275.

conviction that colonial officers were uncouth and their troops ill-disciplined.⁸⁹ One can only assume that if they treated fellow officers with disdain they would have treated their own ranking soldiers with the same attitude.

Some British officers admired the less formal relationships between officers and other ranks in the Australian army. Sharing a tent with a British officer, Paul Henningham related how one British officer remarked on the way Australian officers managed to maintain discipline while being friends with their troops:

He said, 'You go and drink in the pub with them.' And I say, 'Well, it's not encouraged.' In fact there were frequently orders saying the troops and officers will not fraternise in public bars and the way we got over that was usually finding a private bar and having a few drinks. He said, 'We'd never maintain discipline if we went and stood in the bar with our troops.' And he said, 'Go into an Australian officer's tent and you'll find his batman sitting on his bed, smoking cigarettes but get him on parade and he's as smart as paint. We could never get away with that.' And I said, 'Have you ever tried?' They just assumed that you don't maintain discipline if you don't keep a firm hand on the troops.⁹⁰

Henningham also related an incident when a British Army Company Sergeant Major went into a pub with some Australian officers and remained rigidly to attention the whole time while they drank their beers.⁹¹ Fraternisation between the ranks might be as difficult in the British Army for other ranks as it was for officers. Such informality as drinking with the ranks was not always so easy for Australians. Alan Cleary told of a time when, as a lieutenant in the Militia in the early years of the war, he joined his younger brothers, both AIF volunteers, members of the 6th Division, for a drink in a hotel bar while they were in Sydney on pre-embarkation leave. All three were in uniform when Alan Cleary's CO walked in and saw him drinking with other ranks. He was publicly humiliated by this officer and later disciplined for breaking the officer code.⁹²

Danny Newport described one incident when an English officer was eating with Australian soldiers:

89 Long, *To Benghazi*, p 79n.

90 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

91 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

92 Alan Cleary, interview, 1972.

All our officers ate the same as we did. About English officers, one of our blokes said to the Pommie officer, 'You better hurry up mate, or you'll get nothing.' When the Pommie officer said that they expected their food to be brought up separately, the soldier said, 'This might happen in your bloody army, mate, but not in this one.' Next time he was first on the rank.⁹³

On Crete some 6th Division soldiers became mixed up with British soldiers in their attempts to escape the advancing Germans. One soldier described his experience with British officers: 'We didn't really get on together. They tried to pull the English gentlemen on us and we were only ignorant diggers sort of thing. But we reckoned we were better soldiers than they were, even though they were officers.'⁹⁴

On English subalterns, Griffiths-Marsh describes a young English lieutenant with a polished gold pip on each shoulder and matching fittings on his webbing. 'Young English officers in the field were indeed courageous, but I fear they had little horse-power between the ears where field craft was concerned.'⁹⁵ And during the evacuation from Greece, an English sub-lieutenant was complaining about the use of mattresses on an evacuation ship from Greece. Griffiths-Marsh described the scene:

'I say, chappies, you can't stay there. It's reserved for officers.' With that, Watty (Sgt Major) who was not renowned for his placid temper, whipped around and shouted, 'Get fucked!' His mouth agape, the young man back-pedalled and disappeared... We could not understand the propensity for English officers (unlike our own) to reserve privileged conditions and food for themselves when in the field of action.⁹⁶

For Paul Henningham, the difference was clear. The promotion of the British officer 'was strictly class. I mean if you were a gentleman you went to officer's school'.⁹⁷

It is useful to place the attitude towards the British army in the context of the Anzac Legend from the First World War. Dale Blair argues that soldiers of the First AIF came to enhance their own

93 Danny Newport, interview, 5/9/05.

94 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 138.

95 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 195.

96 *ibid*, p 180.

97 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11. Such comments should be qualified. While it was easier and more likely that a gentleman would go to officer's school in the British Army, in the Second World War, as in the latter half of the First World War, candidates for officer training were selected on merit and men from any class, with the ability, were selected for officer training.

self-images as soldiers by criticising the British. They saw the British as too often failing to support Australian action and as not being as effective as the Australian army. He wrote about the action around the Chipilly Spur in August 1918 when the British on the Australian left flank did not move up and left the Australians exposed. Blair argues there were very legitimate military reasons for the British failure but that the Australians saw it is just another example of British ineptness. Blair wrote that ‘this incident illustrates sharply how rumour and preconceived notions could shape a soldier’s interpretation of his war experience’.⁹⁸ Australian soldiers were only too willing to criticise British troops when it made them look better by comparison, and their judgements were often too easily swayed by the prejudices created by the Legend against the British.

John Laffin described the ‘Legendary’ Australian officer in this way: ‘The Australian officer’s control is complete, though he might exercise it in a way that many a British general could not understand. He does not shout, he seldom punishes, he is never “superior”, he never drives. Above all else, the Australian officer is a leader.’⁹⁹ This is the idealised portrayal of an officer within the Anzac tradition, and Laffin was a very strong supporter of the Legend, but it applies in varying degrees to many of the officers in the 6th Division before the change of promotions policy which would see officer recruits permanently removed from the old units and before many of the units within the division were to languish in Australian camps after their return from the Middle East.

The 6th Division’s experience of the Italian Army in their North African campaign of 1941 also highlighted the contrast between the officer – other rank relationships in the Australian army at the time with another foreign army. Class distinction and officer privilege were the norm in the Italian army and Australians were surprised and amused to see the conditions under which Italian officers lived and fought and their reactions were reminiscent of the reactions of the Spartans at Plataea when they overran the Persian stockade and discovered the luxurious way in which the

⁹⁸ Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, p 152

⁹⁹ John Laffin, *Digger, the Story of the Australian Soldier*, London, Cassell, 1959, pp 170-171.

Persian commanders lived.¹⁰⁰ Griffiths-Marsh wrote that the Australians ‘could not help chuckle at the comic opera of the posturing officers and their bedraggled troops.’¹⁰¹ He described the Italian officers’ and other ranks’ living conditions: ‘They were smaller than us, bedraggled, their boots were of poor quality, and their uniforms grey-green in colour... By contrast, the officers were beautifully uniformed, with padded shoulders, tight-waisted jackets, and highly polished riding-type boots which came up to their thighs.’¹⁰² Later at Tobruk he came across silver cutlery in an Italian officer’s mess, wine decanters, a mirrored dressing table with dozens of bottles of perfume: ‘What flabbergasted Ken and me the most were the gaudy uniforms and Dracula like capes in dark blue satin lined with red. The chest filled with unearned decoration ribbons on the tunics could only have been matched by the Russians or Americans.’¹⁰³ In the mess were tins of sardines, anchovies, goose liver pate, wines, mineral water and an incredible array of tinned fruit. All of this was in stark contrast to the way that officers and men lived in the Australian army on the frontline.

Stockings wrote about the recruitment of the Italian Army: ‘As a result, (of men conscripted from varied regional backgrounds) Italian officers saw visible distinctions as necessary to preserve dignity, officer comradeship and authority of command with naturally uncohesive units.’¹⁰⁴ This, says Stockings, was in contrast to the Australian 6th Division which was made up of:

... motivated volunteers who joined in spite of political indecision, public indifference and obstacles such as reserved occupations. These men wanted to fight overseas from the very beginning of the war.

In terms of attitude, they were poles apart from Berganzoli’s conscripts.¹⁰⁵

‘Australians,’ according to Stockings, ‘did not have the social divisions that divided Italian formations, so the soldier’s peacetime occupation did not indicate his future rank in the army.’¹⁰⁶

100 Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, Book IX, 81-83, passim, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, pp305-306.

101 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 108.

102 *ibid*, p 105.

103 *ibid*, p 133.

104 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 375.

105 *ibid*, p 378.

106 *ibid*, p 382.

Stockings' account of the Battle of Bardia and the performance of the 6th Division provides an interesting illustration of the battle within Australian historiography over the concept of the Anzac Legend. On the one hand Stockings, with his previous comment about 'brawny, sun-tanned Australian infantrymen', is skeptical that the Anzac Legend characterises the Sixth.¹⁰⁷ But on other occasions he points to the motivation and the social background that made the soldiers effective, certainly in the North African Campaign of 1941. He wrote, when comparing Italian officers and Australian officers:

By comparison Australian junior middle-ranking officers, commanding volunteer troops imbued with Anzac-oriented ideas of soldierly democracy, had to be accepted by their men or fail. This was not a matter of 'choosing' to be close. Australian regimental officers could not rely on the authority of their rank alone.¹⁰⁸

Stockings gives credence to the idea that egalitarianism and democracy were an integral part of the social makeup of the Second AIF, but he does not argue that such qualities explain fighting ability. John Hirst wrote when commenting on 'those whose pleasure it is to be agnostic about the fighting ability of our soldiers ... what would change them? If we lifted them from their books and told them that they had to fight a battle with the choice of commanding either an Italian or an Australian battalion?'¹⁰⁹ When compared to the Italian Army in 1941, the Australians were far superior. One possible reason for this, by inference from Stockings' comment, has to be the relationship between officers and other ranks which helped to make the Australian soldiers more motivated and self-reliant. As Charlton commented, Italian officers 'did not concern themselves about the well-being of the men they had commanded. Perhaps this explains the Italian soldier's reluctance to fight and to continue fighting.'¹¹⁰

Promotion Policy

Later AIF divisions to be recruited had many of the features of the original 6th Division but there were changes as the war progressed. Because the 6th Division was a new division and there were

107 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 4.

108 *ibid*, p 375.

109 Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, p 233.

110 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p 133.

no men to be immediately trained in Officer Training Units (OTUs), commanding officers had the privilege of appointing their own officers, as they had done in the First AIF. Prime Minister Menzies had a policy of appointing Militia officers as senior commanders of the AIF while Blamey then appointed Militia men, a majority of whom served in the First AIF, as battalion commanders of the new AIF 6th Division and many of these brought their trusted officers with them from their Militia units.¹¹¹ If there was a need to appoint more junior officers battalion commanders often looked to the new recruits. These men may have had Militia experience or First World War experience or they may have shown talent in training. The important thing here is that, like in the First AIF, these junior officers in the 6th Division were often men who were already known to the soldiers or were beginning with them. They were not imposed on them from other units or from OTUs and so there was in the 6th Division a continuing sense of mateship from officer to other ranks that was a common aspect of the First AIF.

This was to begin changing when the 6th Division reached the Middle East. Johnston writes that ‘in the Middle East in 1940 and 1941, a plethora of reinforcement officers from Australia, and the AIF’s parsimonious attitude towards sending candidates to the British Officer Cadet Training Units (OCTUs), made things difficult for potential officers in training units.’ It was nearly impossible to be promoted in the field in the 6th Division, a radical departure from the policy of the First World War.¹¹² These changes to official army policy affected the troops and the tone of the officer corp. One of these changes was a result of officer promotion policy. An important point made by Bean and others, referred to in Chapter 1, was the fact that in the First AIF, men were promoted from the ranks, often given battlefield commissions. The high rate of attrition in junior officer ranks and the lack of recruits from 1916 onwards made this a necessity.¹¹³ This system of promotion had the effect of putting men in charge of their mates and so maintaining a continuity of trust in leadership at platoon level. Apart from the early days of the 6th Division, this was not often the case in the Second World War, either AIF or Militia. When on the rare occasion it did happen, especially outside of the 6th, the promotions were received with praise by the men. On one occasion, Geoffrey Fearnside, who wrote about the 7th Division, reported that,

111 Long, *To Benghazi*, pp 46-50

112 Johnston, *The Frontline*, p 141

113 Bean, *From Anzac to Amiens*, pp 536-536.

‘at platoon level, we had a new officer, Erwin Pinkney, who had recently been commissioned from the ranks. For me, it was a happy appointment as Erwin and I were old friends, both coming from the same home town.’¹¹⁴ And Sidney Buckley of 2/4th Battalion wrote in response to Barrett’s survey: ‘the original officers were okay, but reinforcement officers thought they were “upper class”. Their coming prevented the promotion of NCOs to officer rank, and when there were promotions in the field (to NCO); poor officers could choose men they liked instead of those with ability.’¹¹⁵ Originally the 6th Division accounted for promotions from the ranks, as Stockings points out: ‘Again, this was neither the product of chance, nor the inevitable result of their Anzac heritage. Mackay’s division deployed to the Middle East with vacancies deliberately kept open in junior regimental positions to allow for promotion from the ranks.’¹¹⁶ He adds that ‘AIF standing orders stipulated that in the nomination of potential officers for new appointments “every consideration”... was to “be given to the claims of other ranks already enlisted”.’¹¹⁷

This policy was not to last as commanders such as Mackay were brought into line with a changing army policy. Men from the 6th Division were rapidly gaining combat experience and many were sent off, after officer training schools, to newly recruited AIF units or Militia units who were soon to come into the line in New Guinea. Gavin Long claimed that the 6th Division provided enough officers for the whole army by the end of the war.¹¹⁸ He wrote that in 1941 there were so many graduates from OCTUs in Australia and the Middle East that there were no jobs for them at the time and they were not commissioned until later on.

In 1916-18 virtually all Australian officers had come from the ranks of fighting units and this policy was, in the Australian force, achieving outstanding success at a time when, in the British Army, officers were still being chosen from the "officer - producing classes" regardless of front-line experience. Yet in 1941 Wardle, a British regular soldier, was urging a Dominion commander to commission his able and fully-trained N.C.O.s. The expansion of the AIF after that time made it easier to find posts for Officer Cadet Training Unit graduates, and Blamey ordered that they be commissioned and posted either to units or to the reinforcement depot.¹¹⁹

114 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 79.

115 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 201.

116 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 381.

117 *ibid*, p 382.

118 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 149.

119 Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1953, pp 556-557.

Ross wrote that these comments from Long ‘...tend to confirm the hypothesis that during the Second World War promotion from the ranks was much less common than in the previous war, and that training, rather than proven fighting ability, was seen to be more important to one’s suitability as an officer.’¹²⁰ One irony was the fact that when reinforcement officers were preferred over NCOs promoted from the ranks, even British officers in Cairo had to urge the AIF to commission NCOs rather than to take inexperienced reinforcements from Australia.¹²¹ These reinforcement officers had no experience and were untested. Many training establishments were created in Australia for the training of officers and it was easier to train them here than overseas. Direct battlefield commissions of the sort that saw Albert Jacka and George Mitchell promoted in the First World War were rarely heard of in the Second World War after early 1941.

In the later years of the war many officers agreed with the new policy. Paul Henningham thought that battlefield prowess was not the only criterion for promotion. He said that:

There was one officer and he was a very good soldier and he had been a very good sergeant and he was sent off and commissioned even though his education was short of what one might expect of an officer. The troops didn’t respect him. He was one of their own, he was a good soldier, but because he didn’t have a slightly superior education, they didn’t regard him as a person who should be commanding them because he doesn’t know any more than we do. It was not that he was better than we are because nobody’s better than anyone else. But he doesn’t know any more; in other words they wouldn’t be able to go to him with a problem and expect to be advised or guided.¹²²

One effect of this change in promotions policy was to foster a sense of officer corps identity and to further separate the officers from the men. While it is true that on the frontline, in desperate and primitive conditions, officers and other ranks were closer than they might normally be, behind the line there was a natural separation. This did not encourage a sense of egalitarianism that was seen by historians such as Bill Gammage as being an integral part of the culture of the First AIF. Mackay had left open the opportunity for promotion from the ranks because this gave him the opportunity, in many cases, to select his own officers, a practice not often available to

120 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, Pp 149-150.

121 *ibid*, pp 151-152.

122 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

commanders of subsequent divisions. While the army later gained by being able to choose men with raw ability or education to be trained, often they lacked experience in the frontline, both as soldiers and as managers of men, and reinforcement officers were often resented and not trusted.

One reason why this change in policy could so easily be followed was that, unlike the First AIF, the loss of officers on the frontline was rarely a problem since junior frontline officers were not lost at a the rate they were lost in the First AIF. As Jack Curry summed it up:

As for promotion in the field in the First World War, ‘The casualties were so great, both in officers and men, they (promotions) would have to come from the man in the field. The Second World War, in my reading, was a different war. North Africa didn’t approach the Western Front. The snows of Russia may have. Certainly there were certain aspects of Kokoda and Northern New Guinea that would not be exactly the same (as the Western Front) in its features, but would have some of the difficulties, but then the casualties on the Kokoda Track were nowhere near as great as the casualties we lost, even in a skirmish or a single battle, on the Western Front.’¹²³

This low casualty rate amongst officers suited the senior commanders well because they could fashion an officer corps to their liking with men who were considered to be ‘suitable’, for whatever reason. This officer corps became more distant from their men as the war progressed and there were fewer opportunities for front line bonding.

Other AIF Divisions, 1939 to 1942

From 1939 to mid-1942 the other three AIF infantry divisions were the only divisions of the Australian army that saw action against an enemy. We will first look at the 7th and 9th Divisions and leave the 8th Division until later since, apart from some fighting in the retreat in Malaya in 1941 and early 1942 until the surrender of Singapore, their experience was mainly as prisoners of war and so their story is very different. Militia units did not begin to enter the fighting until July,

¹²³ Jack Curry, interview, 17/1/11.

1942 when the 39th battalion was sent up the Kokoda Track to secure the north coast of New Guinea around Buna, only to find that the Japanese had already landed.¹²⁴

The 7th and 9th Divisions of the Second AIF still carried a sense of their First AIF heritage but there were signs of change from the 6th Division, changes caused by both administrative decisions with regard to officer promotions policy and a changing self-image of the men in the Second AIF that was borne from an increased professionalism and experience. But officers still earned respect in the same way as they did in 1940 and 1941 in North Africa and the Middle East. Johnston wrote:

The officer's ability to lead, rather than their formal authority, caused men to follow them into frightening situations. It was obedience based on respect and consent, rather than – or as well as – coercion ... The informality of Australian officer/men relations, as well as the volunteer status of most of Australian fighting soldiers, undoubtedly made coercion less important in their army than it was in others.¹²⁵

This was certainly consistent with way the Anzac Legend portrayed soldiers from the First AIF and is consistent with the views of many historians and veterans alike.

Called 'deep thinkers' by the 6th Division originals because they waited longer to consider if they would volunteer, or 'rainbows' because 'they came after the storm', later AIF divisions approached their role with more equanimity and overt professionalism. The nickname for the 7th Division was the 'Silent Seventh', because they served and fought without all the bravado and drama of the 6th Division and without the great victory of the 9th Division at El Alamein. Less has been written about the 7th Division than any of the other AIF infantry divisions. The 9th Division, 'that magnificent Ninth', as Montgomery called them after the Battle of El Alamein (October to November, 1942), earned fame in that battle and went on to fight in New Guinea after they returned from North Africa in 1943. Both of these divisions found that their officers in the first years, from 1940 to 1942, were a collection of 6th Division NCOs who had graduated from OCTUs in Palestine and from Australia or men from the pre-war Militia. It is with these

124 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 179.

125 Johnston, *At The Frontline*, p 71.

men of the 7th and 9th Divisions that we begin to find increasingly more open criticism of their officers.

With the development of the officer corps in the Second AIF and the weakening of unit loyalty, officers were more often seen by later divisions to be elitist and privileged. After their return from the Middle East, the new promotion policies also applied to the 6th Division. An officer in the Australian army in the Second World War was, like in the First World War, likely to be better educated than the other ranks. Philip Masel, the historian of the 9th Division's 2/28th Battalion, wrote that CO John Lloyd's junior officers were 'a fairly representative cross-section of the community but with some weighting in favour of the professions', and that while he called for officers to be loyal to their men, he saw the officers' mess as a preserve for them to mix with their own. He did believe in a sense of egalitarianism within the mess, however. Masel observed that Lloyd liked to 'breast the bar with lowly lieutenants' and he encouraged his officers to drink in the mess.¹²⁶

Sir John Dunlop of the 6th Division became an infantry officer soon after enlisting. He commented: 'In October 1939, when I first saw Brigadier Allen, I only had to say I had been in commercial life in charge of some 15 country commercial travellers ... 20 storemen and packers and ... 20 typists, office boys and the like and I was snatched up as an infantry officer.'¹²⁷ Dunlop was obviously seen to have the talent to lead. Barrett's study found that two-thirds of respondents who were commissioned officers came from the 'completed secondary education or above' category.¹²⁸ Danny Newport, an infantryman, said that, 'officers were stock and station agents, clerks, country blokes with property ... It was no good them being toffee-nosed as no one would associate with them,' but they 'expected to be at a higher rank', a reflection that officers were, generally, seen to be from a more privileged class.¹²⁹ This was the same as in the First World War, as illustrated by the men from the legal profession.¹³⁰ Johnston says that for officers

126 Philip Masel, *The Second 28th*, (3rd Edition), Perth 2/28 Battalion and 24th Anti-Tank Company Association, 2000, pp 4-5.

127 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 9.

128 Barrett, *ibid*, p 85.

129 Danny Newport, interview, 5/9/05.

130 Cuneen, *The Law at War (1916)*, originally cited in Chapter 1.

at the frontline, there was a strong correlation between military rank and educational and socio-economic backgrounds.¹³¹

As with the First AIF, not all officers fitted this model in the Second AIF. Charlie Green's widow interviewed men from three battalions with whom her husband served and with whom he seemed to be extremely popular. He ended his army career as a Lieutenant Colonel of the 3rd Battalion in Korea, after serving throughout the Second World War in the AIF:

Officer and gentleman ... Charlie in some ways didn't measure up; did not come from the gentleman class and had no formal education. His fellow officers no doubt noticed his occasional lapse in grammar and other tell-tale signs. But the soldiers it seems didn't notice. If you drew attention to it they seemed surprised because they hadn't noticed it or considered that it would be an issue: to them he was a born leader.¹³²

Green, at age 25, was the youngest man appointed a CO in the Second World War. He was one of a new breed of officer, young, fit, experienced and highly trained. He also had the touch of a natural leader and was well respected by the men he led. Many felt an affection for him.

Brigadier Frederick Chilton said of him, that even as a platoon commander, when many of his men were older than he was, 'there was never any question of his authority or of the respect in which he was held and the confidence he inspired.'¹³³ His divisional commander, Major General Jack Stevens, said of Green: 'He proved himself a gallant soldier, possessed of sound common-sense, initiative and administrative ability. He exercised a firm and wise respect over his men and had their respect.'¹³⁴ Tom Mawhinney, a Warrant officer in the 2/2nd Battalion said of Green: 'He was a fairly strict officer but then all the good ones were. He was also intensely loyal to his men and did all in his power to get them any extras that may be going.'¹³⁵

Another officer held with similar respect and often affection was Brigadier General Frederick Chilton. At his funeral, one of the veterans of his 18th Brigade, Carl Parrott who said of him: 'He

131 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 141.

132 Olwyn Green, *The Name's Still Charlie: A Remarkable Story of Courage and Love*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1993, as seen in Barter, *Far Above Battle*, pp 248-249.

133 Letter to Green's widow, Olwyn, 9/9/80, cited in Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 240.

134 Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 241.

135 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, P 39.

was an excellent man. He wasn't highfalutin; he was just a good bloke. There are some commanding officers I wouldn't walk five miles for, but I'd go miles and miles for him.'¹³⁶

While for later divisions recruited after the original 6th Division, there was a mixed reaction from veterans about their officers, those in support of, or at least not antagonistic to their officers, seemed to be resigned to their existence. That was part of army life, as it was part of their civilian lives before the war. Class divisions, as such, were expected. Alan Bewley commented that he remembered 'one officer who was a lieutenant. We didn't see a lot of him. Our lives were run by the WO (warrant officer) and sergeant. He (the lieutenant) appeared on pay days. We had no real (discipline) troubles with our unit. A couple of AWLs but that was all.' He describes an officer every morning with the medical parade, ensuring the Atebrin tablets were taken properly. Everybody behaved themselves without drama and no cases of malaria were notified from this unit or their patients. 'We always looked upon them as them and us.'¹³⁷ Gordon Frost's observation was that:

They were up there and we were down here – it was just the way we lived ... I'd say mostly the attitude was you were co-operating but by the same token, some officers were liked and some weren't. It was just their way of dealing with people ... We occasionally saw a brigadier but we were mostly dealing with lieutenants and captains. They had their job to do and they were just passing out orders ... Officers didn't intrude in our lives ... There wasn't a great division between them and us. Mostly, at that level they were sorted out and sent to where they wouldn't cause any trouble ... You're in the army and if that was the way it was, what could you do?¹³⁸

Gordon Frost thought that 'they came from a higher class.'¹³⁹ Les Cook was ambivalent. He said that 'there was a wide range of men from the officer class...from people who were friendly to us, to completely aloof', although he did differentiate between infantry units and 'technical' units: 'Officers in technical units were different – rank did not count as seniority.'¹⁴⁰ This seems to have tallied with the mood in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Ellis Davison, who joined the RAAF in 1941 said that, 'While in school we had to show respect for officers, but when we

136 Obituary for Brigadier General Frederick Chilton, *The Australian*, 9/10/07.

137 Alan Bewley, interview, 2/11/10.

138 Gordon Frost, interview, 1/9/05.

139 Gordon Frost, interview, 1/9/05.

140 Les Cook, interview, 19/9/05.

were stationed, it was much more relaxed – still called officers “Sir”, even if they were dressed in work shorts and singlets like us. NCOs were more likely to be high and mighty.’¹⁴¹ Rank always mattered.

Most officers were incidental to the job and the daily existence of the other ranks, according to Lloyd Boardman. While he agreed that they needed a better education to be officers, ‘they just let us alone generally, but you hardly ever saw them. I don’t know what they did all the time. They might have been playing cards. The sergeants and NCOs did all the work. Corporals are the most under-rated rank in the army.’¹⁴² In the frontline, the officers and men became closer, if only because they depended on each other for survival. But bonds like this were part of the frontline in the First AIF and the difference between the rear and front line situation was described by Captain Charles Edmunds of the Second Battalion, 1st Division, in the First World War. He wrote: ‘How delightful was the comradeship of the trenches compared with the petty jealousies of a reserve battalion.’¹⁴³

At the frontline relations between the men and their officers were closer because they all shared the same rations and they lived in close quarters, and above all, they shared the same dangers.

Ron Burridge, a 9th Division veteran, spoke of the officers he knew:

we had good officers, we respected them, they were down to earth blokes, blokes from the ranks, a lot of them, or the CMF, you know, before the war. And they were down to earth blokes and we were just like mates. I respected them, and so did all the other blokes, they were OK, the officers were good. We had good officers. A couple you didn't like probably, but you avoided them ... Well I'd say they were all good officers, when a bloke is friendly to his mob, you know, he doesn't treat them like - like somebody beneath him. The officers, they treated us the same as themselves, you know, they respected us and we respected them. They all were working-class people, most of them, so they were OK, I got on well with them.¹⁴⁴

141 Ellis Davison, Ellis, 4/5/11.

142 Lloyd Boardman, interview, 27/8/05.

143 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 77.

144 Ron Burridge, interview at: <http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/interviews/1528.aspx>.

A position of importance in the infantry was the CO of the battalion. Most men spoke affectionately of the CO. Burridge spoke of three COs that he served under giving reasons why he thought they were good COs:

Colonel Burrows, he always used to go crook if he caught any of us not wearing a tin hat, but what was he doing up there with a felt hat on? He got hit on the head with a piece of shrapnel, put him out of the war, pretty serious. He came back to Sydney and it was a big loss to us, he was a champion, good bloke. Used to play football with you, come on the field and play with us. A big bloke, he could take it, he was about forty-five I suppose, a decorated man in the First War, well respected, and well, he recovered and they put him in a troop training place in Sydney as a brigadier, I think. And the next colonel we had got killed at Alamein, the first night, and the third colonel, George Calvin, 'Flash George' we called him, dapper, moustache, impeccable, you know? But a nice bloke, he got through it all right.¹⁴⁵

It was the ability of the COs Burridge described to be there on the frontline with the men; to share their dangers and, behind the line, to be part of their day to day existence. Burrows, unfortunately for him, was too much like the men and suffered the consequences of poor personal discipline, but he was seen as 'a champion, a good bloke', because of his humanity. George Calvin may have been 'flash' but his humanity marked him out to the men as a 'nice bloke'. This was what was important, besides their ability to lead.

One AIF officer, Duncan Goslett, commented when asked about saluting in the Australian army:

You don't salute on the battlefield. Saluting and so on is merely something that is an outward sign of respect for the person being saluted. It's initiated by the junior and always returned by the senior with the same respect. Australians didn't like saluting the English but they would salute their own officers by God! Oh my word. They might forget to salute the general but they never forgot to salute their own CO or company officers.¹⁴⁶

Saluting on the battlefield was never an option because it could mark out an officer for enemy attention. But saluting on the parade ground or in camp or on the street when in uniform, as Goslett points out, was a sign that was given by the soldiers to an officer that he had their

145 Burridge, *ibid.*

146 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 36.

respect. It is noteworthy here that Goslett also saw it as a return of respect by officers. The tendency to not salute British officers was a trend carried over from the First AIF but also an indication that they had little to do with them and nothing to gain, as the soldiers saw it, by the procedure.

Barter wrote of another CO, First World War veteran Lieutenant Colonel George Wootten,¹⁴⁷ the first CO of the 2/2nd Battalion, who showed the fatherly personal touch when he reminded sixteen year old Geoff Coyle in Palestine that it was some months since he had written to his mother.¹⁴⁸

A Class Conscious Officer Class

The inter-war years changed the thinking of many men who were junior officers in the First AIF. Many officers who stayed on in the Militia found themselves in a peacetime army that lived on past deeds and who longed, in many ways, for the security of the ‘brotherhood’ of the First AIF. The trenches of the Western Front had given way to the officer’s mess of a peacetime army. There was also a fascination amongst many middle-class Australians with the politics of the extreme Right, a phenomenon seen around the world in the 1920s and the Depression years of the 1930s. These cultural changes would have an effect on the officer culture of the Second AIF, especially considering that many of the officers in the Second AIF were from the pre-war Militia.

Jane Ross argues that the Second AIF did not have the same culture as the First AIF. She wrote that while the Second AIF saw the tradition of the First AIF as ‘a faith ... The regulars had begun to tighten their hold over the system.’¹⁴⁹ But the ‘regulars’ she is talking about were not the permanent army of which there were barely 3,000 in 1939, but the Militia regulars, many of

147 Later he became Major General Sir George Wootten.

148 *ibid*, p 31.

149 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 115.

whom, like Blamey, and Herring, became generals in the Second AIF and had served in the First AIF. Grey writes that of the 37 graduates of Duntroon in 1939 only four were given unit positions, the rest went onto staff and Menzies declared that all operational commands would be filled by pre-war Militiamen.¹⁵⁰ These men had a tradition of an officer corps developed in the years after the First World War and they were more determined that a military model on less democratic grounds was to be forged. This model would include a social division between the officers and ranks and a breaking up of the mateship networks that existed in the First AIF between officers and their other-rank mates. It is to be remembered that Blamey, Moreshead, Herring and many others were involved in right-wing secret armies in the inter-war period and while their belief in democracy is not questioned, their attitude to class and the privilege of rank would affect their use of authority in the army.¹⁵¹ Younger officers under their command could be extremely right wing and patrician in their views as well. Jo (Henry) Gullett, mentioned previously, became a leading anti-communist campaigner and a campaigner against Jewish immigration after the war. He stated in 1947, 'the arrival of additional Jews is nothing less than the beginning of a national tragedy and a piece of the grossest deception of Parliament and the people by the Minister for Immigration.'¹⁵² These men, as was illustrated with Gullett earlier this chapter, were elitist by nature and education and conservative in their politics. Their idea of an officer corps was based on privilege and social class, as much as on ability.

There were many men in the AIF who were bitter about their officers and the position of privilege that they held. The move from frontline to rear line could mean more than just a move from danger facing the enemy to safety behind the lines. Colin Turbet, a 9th Division soldier at El Alamein and later at Lae and Finschafen said: 'One thing I hated was when you heard that the officers weren't fraternising. I didn't think that was right. When you fought with them you mixed with them as equals but back in camp they weren't going to fraternise with you ... a few did but they were ordinary good blokes.' He spoke of one incident when an inexperienced reinforcement officer came to his unit, the 2/3 Pioneer Battalion in North Africa before the Battle of El

150 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 148.

151 This idea has been written about by many historians such as Michael Cathcart but it can also be verified in websites such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography from the Australian National University. Examples of such citations are: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/blamey-sir-thomas-albert-9523> and <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/herring-sir-edmund-francis-ned-12626> .

152 *The Argus*, Melbourne, 12 February 1947.

Alamein, and wanted Turbet to drive him in the night across a minefield. When Turbet tried to explain to him why he wouldn't because of the danger and nearly faced a charge in the process, the officer finally understood, but said Turbet: 'He didn't say thanks or kiss my foot or anything.'¹⁵³ This dissatisfaction was not limited to the AIF and not limited to the first years of the war. It became more frequent and more widespread after the three AIF divisions returned from North Africa and the Middle East, something this thesis will explore in depth later.

Eric Lambert, a 9th Division veteran, wrote an autobiographical novel in which, like Turbet, he was highly critical of many officers. He describes one platoon commander, Lieutenant Crane, whose

manner was a mixture of familiarity, aggressiveness and condescension. To Dick Brett, Crane's unspoken attitude seemed to say: 'I am Kenneth Crane, of the Cranes of Scobie, one of Australia's greatest and richest families. I am your superior in conceivable every way. There is a war on, however, and, unfamiliar as I am with you, I find it necessary to associate with you closely. I intend to be as pleasant about it as possible.' Sometimes, Crane found himself too blatantly talking down; then he adjusted himself by suddenly uttering soldierly profanities, which sounded oddly vile on his lips.¹⁵⁴

And on the question of social class and its implications for the army, Lambert wrote of Crane and his father:

Yet he could not drive them. They considered they had rights that forbade that. What rights did they deserve, really? ... How many times had he heard his father rail against this? ... 'This damned flabby humanitarian tolerance! This talk about "rights" as an excuse to loaf. We're breeding a nation of socialist milk-sops!' Their consciousness as a class seemed scarcely tolerable. This ugly, amorphous but necessary mass! Just as you needed dirt on which to build a marble palace, so you needed men like these to build a state; so you needed them in an army as a vast mindless tide at the front of which men like himself could reach their full heroic stature.¹⁵⁵

There is no mistaking the socialist tones of Lambert's writing and Lambert joined the Communist Party of Australia shortly after the war ended. He was part of a growing group of men at the time called the 'red diggers', Communist Party members or sympathisers who,

153 Colin Turbet, interview, 14/5/05.

154 Lambert, *The Twenty Thousand Thieves*, p 13.

155 *ibid*, p 66.

according to Beverley Symons, had considerable influence in the army at the time.¹⁵⁶ And while few soldiers joined the Communist Party, about 2,500 in all, there was a degree of sympathy in the army for the communist cause and the role of the Soviet Union in the war effort.¹⁵⁷

The Militia

The Militia, until January 1943, when transfers to the AIF were permitted, had its own unique experience as a separate army. Made up initially from pre-war volunteers and later national servicemen, it was expanded dramatically when Australia became threatened by the Japanese in 1942. While 5,000 Militiamen volunteered to transfer across to the AIF in late 1939 and early 1940, the majority, at first, stayed with the Militia and for the first three years of the war the armies operated separately. Blamey was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Force in March, 1942 and both armies then came under his control.

The differences between the AIF and the Militia were material and administrative, on the one hand, and cultural on the other. The AIF was recruited to send volunteers overseas. The Militia was designed as a home defence force. At the outbreak of war it was a part time service but over stages the men became full-time soldiers. Militia soldiers could be 18 year old conscripts, or men who volunteered to fight in the defence of Australia but not overseas. In 1939 AIF volunteers had to be 20 years but by 1943 this was lowered to 18 years, in line with the Militia, although parental permission was required for men under 21 years to go overseas.¹⁵⁸ Pay was a problem until March 1942 when the two armies were combined and pay conditions were made equal between the two branches of the AMF. Initially, the Militia received higher rates of pay¹⁵⁹ but as they left to serve overseas, the AIF received a special allowance that brought their pay rates

156 Beverley Symons, 'All out for the People's War: Communist Soldiers in the Australian Army in the Second World War', *Australian Historical Studies*, 26: 105, 1995, pp 596-614.

157 Tribune, 16 October, 1948, p 8, as cited in Beverley Symons, 'All out for the People's War', from *Australian Studies*, 26:105, p 600.

158 Mark Johnston, at <https://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j29/civils/>.

159 The *Árgus*, 14/11/1939, at: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11276180>.

higher than the Militia,¹⁶⁰ as well as being tax free, which caused angst amongst Militiamen. Other differences that upset included the differences in uniforms and the fact that AIF canteens were ‘wet’ serving alcohol, while the Militia canteens did not.¹⁶¹ Despite the joining the two branches of the AMF together, there was always the impression amongst officers and AIF members that they provided the better fighting units and were preferred by senior command.¹⁶²

The two armies existed in separate divisional units and trained separately. The men of the AIF usually scorned the Militia and there were many incidents of animosity between the two, especially when the Militia went into action in Papua with mixed successes.¹⁶³

The first frontline experiences of the Militia were in Papua in 1942 and later they fought in other areas of the South West Pacific area. Morale and *esprit de corps* were not as highly developed in the Militia as they were in the AIF. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the Militia units were mostly conscripted men or long term Militiamen who did not want to serve overseas. Secondly, they were often poorly trained such as the men of the 30th brigade. This Brigade was made up of the 39th Battalion, who earned a reputation for courage and spirit. But the other two battalions were the 49th Battalion and the 53rd Battalion, men who were described by other Militiamen such as Verner Clements and Bede Tongs¹⁶⁴ as men who ‘would not stand’, meaning, they did not fight well. The 53rd Battalion was made up of men from Sydney’s western suburbs, 104 of whom only had four days in uniform before they were shipped to New Guinea¹⁶⁵ where they did not undergo training but rather worked as labourers on the wharves in Port Moresby. The 49th Battalion had low morale in this time, according to the Australian War Memorial, before going into battle in September, 1942.¹⁶⁶

160 The *Courier Mail*, 3 March, 1942, at: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/50121197>.

161 James, *The Hard Slog*, pp 12-13.

162 Keating *A Tale of Three Battalions* passim. There are several references to the perceived inferiority of the Militia in Keating’s paper, including pp 6, 42 and 58.

163 These differences and the experiences of the Militia will be covered in detail in the next chapter, but for the purposes here, the insulting names given to the Militia like the ‘chocolate soldiers’ and ‘weekend warriors’ and the poor showing of the 53rd Battalion on the Kokoda Track illustrate the reasons why the AIF soldiers treated them with scorn. Unfortunately, the courageous action of Militia battalions like the 3rd and 39th battalions did not, for a long time, counter-balance the poor reputation the Militia held in the eyes of the AIF volunteers.

164 Interviews with Verner Clements, 15/7/05 and Bede Tongs, 19/9/05

165 https://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11966.asp

166 http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11956.asp

These young Militiamen were poorly equipped and poorly trained so that their first experiences of battle on the Kokoda Track in 1942 were often disastrous, with heavy casualties. They were not issued with basic equipment such as a shovel or entrenching tool for digging trenches until well into the Kokoda campaign in 1942. Verner Clements, a member of the 3rd Militia Battalion, said that:

We had to dig slit trenches and fox-holes with our helmets or bayonets. The clothes and shoes dropped off our backs and feet ... For a long time there were only First World War issue 303s and a few Bren Guns that nobody knew how to use ... We had next to no training in Australia. We were totally unprepared for what hit us and we blamed our senior officers.¹⁶⁷

Many of the officers serving in the Kokoda campaign were men who came from the 6th Division and who were selected during and after their fighting in the Middle East and Greece. Officers from the Militia itself were inexperienced alongside these men and there was a sense of division and discord. Many AIF officers appointed to the Militia were not happy with their appointment, objecting to the fact that they were now Militia. Fearnside wrote: 'The reluctance to serve with Militia Units was mostly due to the newly commissioned AIF officers wishing to retain identity with the army they had voluntarily joined, many of them felt that if they were drafted to a Militia Unit the taint of conscription would touch them also.'¹⁶⁸ This reluctance to serve in Militia units often filtered down to the Militiamen that they led, causing bitterness and resentment, and a lack of respect.

Ironically, the first officers in the Second AIF in 1939 and 1940 were all Militiamen from before the war. Some were veterans of the First World War. These men would train the volunteers of the Second AIF, many of whom from the 6th Division would in turn be promoted to officer rank of other AIF units or Militia units that were raised after 1941 which meant lower morale for the officers and Militiamen, as previously mentioned but also for men in later divisions, AIF or Militia, who had less chance of promotion. On the Militia, Dr Tom Selby, a medical officer with the 6th Division said: 'In spite of having good administrators from Duntroon we could not have

167 Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/05.

168 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 176

possibly turned out a force like the AIF without Militia training. AIF officers who had trained in the pre-war Militia or had been promoted in the field were leaders.’¹⁶⁹ However, the Militia soon gained a reputation for being ineffective and not facing up to their responsibilities. Tom Selby said of the conscripted Militia:

They played soldiers, would not fight above a certain latitude, were horrified when the war came below it; they were poorly trained and had a rough time when they met the enemy. The individual soldier is to be pitied, not criticized, except that they might have been better trained if they had joined the AIF. Their HQs were full of bumph.¹⁷⁰

C.W. Waters, an AIF Middle East veteran who later served in Papua and New Guinea, said that when his unit, the 21st Anti-tank Regiment, arrived at Port Moresby they were met by ‘the Militia running off the Owen Stanleys like a mob of sheep with a dog after them.’¹⁷¹

This combination of poor training, poor leadership and poor equipment often meant a poor performance in battle in the Kokoda Campaign. Some Militia units, like the 39th Battalion, the famed ‘ragged Bloody Heroes’ of Kokoda and the 3rd Battalion, handled themselves well, but the AIF had little confidence in the Militia battalions fighting alongside them and the poor performance in the frontline of the 53rd Battalion did not help their reputation, although this battalion’s experience is an example of the poor decision making and ineptitude of higher command. The poor quality of some officers can be seen by this comment from 3rd Battalion Militiaman Verner Clements describing his first action in Papua when his platoon commander hid behind a tree, exposing his men to danger: ‘When the CO found out about it, he (the platoon commander) was gone the next day.’¹⁷² Bede Tongs, a Militia platoon sergeant, also in the 3rd Battalion in Papua, later commissioned in New Guinea after transferring to the AIF, was concerned about officer failure. He described an incident where a company commander left his men and withdrew without organising their withdrawal, something a good officer in the field should never do:

If an officer didn’t stand up (on the front line) he almost condemned himself. On the Kokoda Track we had a company commander and of course the signal wire cut out before we reached our final

169 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 218.

170 *ibid*, p218.

171 Barrett, *We Were There*, p293.

172 Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/05.

destination one day. On the afternoon of the 3rd or 4th day he was told to get out and he left before the rest of the men. And that was the end of that bloke.¹⁷³

Often, an officer who could not cope would remove himself. Peter Jones wrote: ‘One of our captains, a gentle, soft spoken man, decided that his responsibilities were heavier than he could carry. Without announcement to us he quietly left.’¹⁷⁴ The men respected such a man and his ability to make a decision made on selfless motives but their presence did not inspire confidence.

How a man had been promoted was significant to those who served under him. Sandy Hirst from the 9th Division commented about his officers, a comment that reflected upon many Militia officers: ‘The most arrogant ones were already officers before they enlisted – Melbourne Grammar, you know. It was all arranged. The good ones earnt (sic) it in the field, as they did pay.’¹⁷⁵ This description of the men who ‘earnt’ their promotion sounds more like the descriptions of the officers who were commissioned in the field in the First AIF. As Bede Tongs noted, the men promoted from the pre-war Militia were not always what the men would have wanted. He describes an officer who was a public servant in civilian life: ‘This captain wasn’t the best sort of man management chap...He was always a bit of a stand over merchant. They were selected for officer training because of their social standing. Some were commissioned because of their position in civilian life.’¹⁷⁶

As in the First AIF, it was likely that a soldier would be selected for officer training as much because he was confident and well educated, as it may have been because of his battle performance. Promotion was open to all, but those predisposed through life’s advantages or experiences were more likely to perform and be selected. Many soldiers complained about the social standing of their officers, possibly because it was true and possibly because it was the natural lot of a soldier to complain. This was probably exacerbated in the Australian army of the Second World War because of the promotions policy that meant OCTU graduates were often given preference over sergeants acting as platoon commanders. Gavin Long’s comment that the

173 Bede Tongs, Interview, 19/9/05.

174 Peter James Jones, *The Reluctant Volunteer*, Sydney, Australian Military History Publications, 1997, p 31.

175 Barry Dickens, *Ordinary Blokes*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant Books, 1999, p 93.

176 Bede Tongs, interview, 19/9/05.

6th Division supplied enough officers for the whole army is indicative of the fact that many good men were overlooked in other divisions and that many new officers were imposed on their units.¹⁷⁷

Bill Phillip was like the almost 80% of men who joined or were called up into the Militia who transferred to the AIF after the passing of the Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act of January, 1943.¹⁷⁸ He commented that he despised Duntroon officers who he said were ‘upstart young officers who thought they were winning the war.’ ‘Officers,’ he believed, ‘thought they were a class above.’ He held that ‘we (ordinary soldiers) weren’t as good a type as they were, generally’, and that ‘any officers promoted from the ranks were pretty good guys.’¹⁷⁹ One can only speculate why he thought that ordinary soldiers weren’t as ‘good a type’ as officers, but Bill, like many others of that generation, spoke of hard times during the Depression years which he felt had taken a lot of sting out of the working class. We get an indication of these hard times from veterans like Jack Curry who grew up in Newcastle: ‘It made you a little bit tougher, a bit tougher. More realistic. It gave you a sense of belonging...40% of the males in Carrington (Newcastle) were unemployed. Women didn’t work; there was a Married Woman’s Act. It was tough.’¹⁸⁰

Bob Ausburn had a similarly critical view of Duntroon graduates, although he was more politic in his words when he said ‘the Duntroon boys were the hard ones. Some of them were useless and when they took over (in the 6th Division) platoons that had old fighters from North Africa and Greece in them, they had a hard time of it.’¹⁸¹ This difficulty being accepted was to be the case with many ‘reo’ or reinforcement officers. These anecdotal accounts of a few officers cannot be made to represent the whole army, but when one looks at the official policy of officer selection and appointment, we can see that men expecting an army like that of the Anzac Legend would be disappointed. The appointment of officers from OTUs in Australia to frontline units

177 For a description of promotions policy see Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1953, Pp 556-557.

178 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 180.

179 Bill Phillips, interview, 3/5/11.

180 Jack Curry, interview, 17/1/11.

181 Bob Ausburn, interview 9/12/11.

that had experienced NCOs, often acting platoon commanders with experience and the respect of their men, did not inspire the men or add to the sort of 'esprit de corps' that they had hoped for.

Bede Tongs thought there was little difference in quality between AIF officers and Militia officers. He said that if we 'saw an officer and if he had pips on his shoulder he was something special'.¹⁸² Jack Curry served with the Sydney University Regiment and felt that all the officers there were reasonable, which is not surprising when they were leading men mostly of their own class.

In the Sydney University Regiment, they (the officers) were very personable and they fitted in with the soldier, rather than the soldier fitting in with them ... (We had) no trouble with officers, I don't know anybody who did. I don't know anybody who was charged, I don't know anybody who was put in the brig. It was a very happy unit.

When the officers came they were all well educated, all from the Sydney University Regiment; they probably had given them a quick course in officer training. No one came back from the Middle East (until) eventually we had the officer commanding, Major Scott, who I think came from the 7th Division. Relationships with our officers (in the battery) were very good. They were your mates. If you ever had an alert or you had to stand to or discharge a round they came around and they looked after you and they saw that you were okay. They visited you regularly.¹⁸³

But the university regiment was a special case and commanding university undergraduates was different from commanding men off the street. Overall, Curry did not think there was much egalitarianism in the army. He commented on egalitarianism and democracy in the First AIF: 'We got right away from that.'¹⁸⁴

182 Bede Tongs, interview, 19/9/05.

183 Jack Curry, interview, 17/1/11.

184 Jack Curry, interview, 17/1/11.

Conclusion

While a minority of Australian soldiers in the Second World War, perhaps as low as 15%, experienced combat at the front line, they have received the greatest amount of attention in the modern media, in literature and in the political sphere.¹⁸⁵ They have been seen as continuing to embody the Anzac Legend, inheriting the tradition from the First AIF. Therefore, a large amount of the academic and popular literature has been concerned with these men and their experiences.

A central part of this analysis involves a study of the relationships between officers and other ranks in the second AIF, asking whether they were as egalitarian and as democratic as the Anzac Legend has claimed they were in the First AIF, and whether that made any difference to their effectiveness in combat. The Second AIF did begin, with the 6th Division in 1939, where the First AIF left off and the attitudes of these men were often similar to the attitudes of the First AIF in that they were often undisciplined off the battlefield but disciplined on the battlefield, where the Sixth Division had some notable early victories. The Australian public had expectations about the ethos and effectiveness of the Second AIF borne of the inter-war propagation of the Anzac Legend. The Sixth Division's experiences were also similar to the First AIF in that they came under overall British command while fighting in North Africa and Greece in 1941, although Blamey fought for independence of the Sixth Division, a fight which would continue with the 7th and 9th Divisions in the Middle East and North Africa in the campaigns until their return in 1942 (6th and 7th Divisions) and 1943 (9th Division). One result of this was that the 6th Division was an infantry division that relied on British logistical support and so the ratio of support troops to frontline troops was lower than that which occurred as the war progressed in the South West Pacific theatre from 1942 to 1945 when Australia had to supply much of its own logistical support as well as to the Americans in Papua and New Guinea in 1942 and 1943. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

¹⁸⁵ See reference to Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 81 and Griffiths-Marsh, *I was just Sixteen*, p 1, cited earlier in this chapter.

Many of the first-hand accounts of the men when dealing with their officers show mutual respect and the battle experiences for the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions, AIF, were of dramatic defences and, at times, victories in North Africa and the Middle East which the public, press and politicians were keen to attribute to the Anzac spirit. But by the time the 9th Division went into action at El Alamein, there was a growing degree of discontent and complaint about officers from the other ranks. Pratten says that the 9th Division had reached a peak of efficiency and professionalism because of the nature of its leadership, especially the battalion commanders many of whom were young and driven.¹⁸⁶ But there was a cost for this in terms of the Anzac Legend because many of the men serving under these men preferred an informal leadership style, rather than a formal one, a leadership style that the men had come to expect from the Legend.

Many of the officers in the Second AIF fighting in the Middle East and North Africa, from the Commander in Chief down to the platoon commander, showed a liking for officer privilege. This officer privilege showed itself on the ships going over to the Middle East and back, in the base camps and rest establishments, and in the rear lines in North Africa and the Middle East. While this mirrored some of the experiences with the First AIF, the new promotions policy created an officer corps that was more elitist and privileged and did not easily fit the model of the Anzac Legend. As the war progressed, this gap between officers and other ranks would grow, as would the resentment of many of the frontline troops.

186 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 129.

CHAPTER 3

SOLDIERS AT THE FRONTLINE 1943 to 1945

Introduction

The experience of war in the jungles of the South West Pacific theatre would be very different from war in the Middle East and North Africa. Keeping high morale would prove to be difficult in a war that seemed to be bogged down in swamps and jungles, and with a US commander who seemed to be passing the men over. While the army was increasingly becoming better trained, better led and better equipped, there was often a feeling among the men, however justified or unjustified, that their sacrifices were not really warranted. This would place strains on the relationships between the men and their officers.

Gavin Long wrote of the Aitape-Wewak campaign between November 1944 and August 1945:

The conviction that the achievement did not justify the losses and the privations seemed to be far stronger in the veteran sixth division than among the mostly younger and less experienced troops on Bougainville and New Britain... There were many who considered that no essential purpose was being served by these constant bitter platoon and company fights against a stubborn enemy who had shown that he would fight only if attacked.¹

The Kokoda Campaign of 1942 was fought in the spirit of desperation as Australian soldiers felt that they were defending their country from Japanese invasion. But as the war progressed and Australian soldiers were increasingly sidelined by America's General MacArthur and relegated to what the soldiers saw as 'mopping-up' operations in New Guinea, its surrounding islands and Borneo, frontline soldiers became more disillusioned and increasingly saw no purpose in their action, sentiments described above by Gavin Long.

By the last half of 1944 the remaining six Australian divisions were highly trained with many men who had experience in North Africa, the Middle East, the Kokoda campaign, and the New Guinea campaign of 1943. Officers were highly trained, even if many were untested in combat at the beginning of the Borneo and Bougainville campaigns, and commanding officers of battalions

¹ Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 327

were very experienced and professional. The AMF of 1944 was, according to Jack Gallaway, ‘... an elite force capable of assaulting and carrying any existing Japanese-held island stronghold’. He wrote that ‘after five years of war the infantry battalions of the AIF had Military Virtue... Most of the officers and NCOs and many of the private soldiers of the AIF’s 27 infantry battalions and the corps units which served and supported them had been in uniform for four or five years and had fought on a dozen battlefields under all conditions.’² But while they were keen to fight, they would be disappointed with the job they were given.

The situation was not helped by the fact that there was seen to be politics involved in the use or non-use of Australian troops, or in the way that they were to be used. S.E. Benson, author of the 42nd Australian Infantry Battalion’s history, wrote that the decision to use Australians to replace Americans to free them up for the advance on Japan, was ‘a purely political decision’.³ This was not helped by the fact that MacArthur’s Chief of staff Lieutenant General Richard Sutherland saw the decision not to use Australian troops in the advance on Japan as motivated by US domestic and probably Filipino domestic political considerations.⁴ He told Blamey and Lieutenant General Frank Berryman that it was not ‘politically expedient for the AIF to be amongst the first troops into the Philippines’.⁵ All this happened towards the end of a very long war, when victory seemed to be inevitable and soldiers were keen to go home. It was also a time when there were political maneuverings aimed at positioning Australia for the upcoming peace process. Nevertheless, such arguments still fail to see the military imperatives at the time, given that a protracted war to conquer Japan seemed the only way forward.

Despite a widespread feeling by soldiers and many other Australians at the time, historians such as Gavin Long, David Horner and Karl James argue that the campaign was generally worthwhile. Long argues that it was important for Australian prestige that they, rather than the Americans,

2 Jack Gallaway, *The Odd Couple: Blamey and MacArthur at War*, St. Lucia, Queensland University Press, 2000, Pp 195-196.

3 S.E. Benson, *The Story of the 42nd Australian Infantry Battalion*, pp 157-158, cited in Karl James, *The Hard Slog*, p 9.

4 James, *The Hard Slog*, p 20.

5 Berryman diary 7/10/44 AWM PR 84/370, 4, cited in Karl James: *The Hard Slog*, p 20.

were seen at the end of the war by the 'natives' of the areas to have been the liberators.⁶ Horner adds that there were economic advantages, as well as gaining Australia a more important place in peace treaty negotiations after the war.⁷ James claims that, given that the commanders believed that the war would continue until Japan was defeated with conventional weapons, the absolute defeat of Japanese forces on Bougainville would have meant the release of many thousands of Australian men to the manpower-depleted workforce. Like Horner, he believes it gave Australia a guaranteed place of importance at the peace talks that would follow the war.⁸ Many soldiers however did not see the importance of the campaigns of late 1944 and 1945, and this would colour their view of their senior commanders.

The question of whether or not the men wanted to fight in 1944 and 1945 raises questions of evidence: how are we to interpret the opinions of veterans years after the war? On the one hand, to many the action in the South West Pacific theatre seemed to be pointless. On the other hand, many complained about being idle and not using their training and expertise. The next chapter will give details about the boredom of soldiers training on the Atherton Tablelands, or languishing in the desert of Western Australia, desperate to get into the action after months and years of training. In late 1944 and in 1945 they were given that chance and they performed very well in the campaigns of New Guinea and Bougainville. It is true that Blamey and many commanders went into these campaigns vigorously when they could have followed the American example and let the Japanese 'wither on the vine'. But this would have meant many months of garrison duty, about which soldiers would have inevitably complained. Not everyone was unhappy about fighting in these campaigns. Lieutenant Colonel Matthews wrote in his diary in November, 1944, on approaching the frontline: 'They were all smiles & all speak to me, must be the effect of the enemy making all men equal'.⁹ Here was an officer who understood the Anzac Legend, if with some sense of amusement.

⁶ *ibid*, p 71.

⁷ D.M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial & Allen & Unwin, 1982, Pp 408-409.

⁸ James, *The Hard Slog*, p 266.

⁹ Cited in James, *The Hard Slog*, p. 62.

There is also a question of collective memory versus personal memory. When interviewed, most veterans gave a similar harsh judgement on Blamey, based in many cases, on the Koitaki incident of September, 1942 where Blamey insulted the men of the 21st Brigade. He said to them: ‘Remember it’s not the man with the gun that gets shot, it’s the rabbit that is running away.’¹⁰ Only one brigade was present, the 21st; most Australian soldiers were not there, yet it is reported by many as if it was a personal experience. It is possible that personal memory has been taken over here by collective memory. Criticism of Blamey became a common sport with wild, exaggerated rumours about him running brothels and being an alcoholic. Horner wrote about these rumours: ‘An Army leader must set an example with respect to values, and in this area Blamey failed as a leader. While the stories of his womanising and drinking grew with the telling, they demeaned him in the eyes of many soldiers.’¹¹ Few soldiers attest to Blamey’s superior strategic and planning skills but focused on rumours and hearsay gossip about his private life.

These last three years of the war were very different for the Australian frontline soldier from the previous three years. The majority of the fighting in the first three years was done by the AIF in the Middle East, North Africa and Greece. This, like the fighting in the First World War, was conducted a long way from home with no home leave and the culture of a purely volunteer army. When the AIF returned in 1942 and 1943 they faced very different fighting conditions. Not only was there a different enemy and dramatically different fighting terrain in the jungles to the north of Australia, but they could be rotated more regularly and sent back to Australia for further training. The soldiers of the AIF also found themselves fighting alongside the Militia on whom they were used to pouring so much scorn. Many of the ‘old timers’ or ‘originals’ were upset that their ‘Anzac Legend’ ideal of a volunteer army was adulterated by the infusion of Militia. Men selected for officer training were also disappointed to be sent to Militia units and the other ranks were often disappointed to find themselves led by ex-Militia officers with no battle experience.

10 Horner, *Blamey*, p 353.

11 Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, p 571.

Notwithstanding these changes, there was a very different political climate in the Pacific War. Australian soldiers here had a different ally in the United States and they were commanded by General Douglas MacArthur, a man who seemed to attract unashamed idolatry or absolute scorn. As these years progressed the Australian army became more sidelined and there was a considerable degree of resentment and disappointment, much of which was to be directed at their own Australian commanders, as much as at MacArthur.

After restrictions on transfer from the Militia to the AIF were lifted with the passing of the *Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act, January 1943*,¹² members of the Militia were allowed to transfer to the AIF if they wanted to and if they were willing to serve anywhere overseas. This was done to allow Blamey to have more flexibility over the use of his army and to integrate the two armies more since separation was causing huge logistical and morale problems. Also, Blamey had committed many of his AIF men who had new officer commissions to the Militia units and he wanted to use their expertise. Another aspect of this legislation allowed the army to send conscripts to anywhere south of the equator. There was less incentive for Militiamen to stay in the Militia. If 65% of a unit transferred, the unit would be classified as AIF and eighteen Militia infantry battalions did this between 1943 and the end of the war. If there was not the required number, a Militiaman could still transfer and remain in his Militia unit, but be designated AIF. By the end of the war 80% of Militiamen had transferred. In effect, the army from 1943 to 1945 was an integrated one. Although the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions were still called 'AIF' and served as such, they fought alongside Militia divisions and reinforcements of all ranks. From 1943 onwards, troops came from a central pool, although they had to be volunteers in a specifically nominated AIF division. While AIF and Militia divisions fought separately, they often fought side by side and it is possible to discuss their experiences as one combined army from this time onwards, while at the same time emphasising the on-going problems caused by mutual bitterness and anger.¹³

12 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30/1/43, p 8, as cited on Trove, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/17835126>.

13 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, pp 183-184.

Not only did the nature of the fighting for the Australian army change between 1942 and 1945, from North Africa to Borneo, the Australian campaign in the South West Pacific changed greatly from July, 1942 to September, 1945. I agree with Garth Pratten that:

There was no single distinctive manner in which command was exercised over Australian infantry battalions during the Second World War. In their background, conduct and the challenges they faced, Australian COs shared much in common with their British, Canadian and New Zealand counterparts, despite the fact they served in vastly different theatres. The exercise of command over Australian battalions, like leadership, was situational in nature; it changed in response to the battlefield conditions, available technology and the capabilities of their COs, their staffs and their soldiers.¹⁴

Fighting in the South West Pacific

The fighting in New Guinea and the South West Pacific Area, generally, was hard on the infantryman. He had to deal with the heat and humidity, disease, the terrain, as well as the enemy, who was determined and suicidally courageous. Max Hastings wrote of the Japanese soldiers that ‘they were expected to die where they stood. The achievement of these patchwork Japanese forces matched or even surpassed those of Germany’s battlegroups in Europe.’¹⁵ From the end of 1942 until the end of the war, Australians generally showed themselves to be superior to the Japanese because of better supplies and equipment, better training and better leadership; but while the jungles and mountains of Papua, New Guinea and Bougainville might not have provided the glories of the Malayan Peninsula for the Japanese soldier from 1942 to 1945, he was still ruthless and also desperate. A soldier’s life in this theatre could be one of survival in prolonged actions in very inhospitable surroundings.¹⁶ He would be easily given to complaint and frustration if he thought his leaders, the ‘brass’ and the ‘red caps’ and that amorphous organisation, the army, was not providing him with the wherewithal to fight.

14 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p 28.

15 Max Hastings, *Nemesis: The Battle for Japan, 1944-1945*, London, Harper Press, p 57.

16 According to Bede Tongs (interview, 19/5/05) and Verner Clements (interview, 17/5/05), the 3rd Militia Battalion served continuously in New Guinea from the beginning of September, 1942 to early February 1943. This was the longest period served by any Australian unit on the Kokoda Track.

Roland Griffiths-Marsh articulated one complaint that was common and generally justified, especially in 1942 when troops began fighting in Papua and New Guinea. He said that basic things like providing chains for vehicles in the mud did not happen. ‘Many of us recalled our government’s boast of “The Australian Army being the best-equipped army in the world”. For the first time, I began to lose confidence in our leaders.’¹⁷ When soldiers, both Militia and later the AIF, began their Kokoda campaign in July, 1942, no jungle green uniforms were available for them; they were still equipped with desert khaki uniforms including shorts and short-sleeved shirts. This did not act as camouflage and it also made them easy prey to malaria-carrying mosquitoes and scrub typhus, and other tropical diseases. Any scratch could become infected and then tropical ulcers developed. There is real no explanation for the men not being properly equipped with the correct uniform except incompetence. They had desert webbing and leather soled boots that rotted in the swamps and mud of the jungles.¹⁸ Some men tried using leaves to dye their uniforms. The journalist, Chester Wilmot, who had a battle with General Blamey over the sacking of Lieutenant General Rowell,¹⁹ reported a conversation he had with Blamey who

said that they were not (necessary); the khaki had been designed in India as the ideal camouflage for the jungle, and that he had no evidence that this jungle was different from that in India. I offered to provide him with several thousand witnesses who had fought in the country and who thought otherwise.²⁰

Major General Arthur ‘Tubby’ Allen, Commander of Australian forces on the Kokoda Track from August until October, 1942, according to Paul Ham, attributed Blamey’s inability to see the need for or to organise the production and distribution of jungle green uniforms as ‘a simple example of apathy, ignorance and not the keenness to find out.’²¹

Raymond Paull claims that the first AIF unit to go into action in New Guinea, the 2/14th Battalion, was to be issued with new jungle green uniforms. Paull says that some units were given green dye to change the colour of their khaki uniforms and that 100 sets of uniforms, including long trousers and long sleeved shirts, were sent forward by native carriers and arrived

17 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 158.

18 Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/05.

19 Wilmot was critical of Blamey, not only because of his sacking of Rowell, but also because he believed Blamey was guilty of incompetence. Blamey believed Wilmot was plotting against him and cancelled his correspondent’s credentials in November, 1942. Accounts of this conflict can be found in Stuart Braga, *Kokoda Commander*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp 194-232, *passim*.

20 D.M. Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1998, p 324.

21 AWM 3DRL/6643 2/47, as cited in Paul Ham, *Kokoda*, Sydney, Harper Collins, 2005, p 250.

at Myola the day before the beginning of the Battle of Isurava. This was too late for the Militia Battalions sent up to fight the retreat against the advancing Japanese troops.²² This failure did nothing to create a positive impression on the men about their leaders.

For weeks the men on Kokoda were shelled and killed by Japanese mountain guns, small artillery that the Japanese could transport to any part of the track. It was not until September 21, 1942, that the Australians were to have any artillery on the track and this was only two 25 pounders.²³ Australia had no equivalent of the Japanese 75mm 'mountain gun' and getting Australian artillery pieces into place was almost impossible. Johnston agrees: 'The troops were angry at shortages of supplies and reinforcements and then, in the campaign's aftermath, cynical and frustrated by the delays in getting them home.'²⁴ Senator Edward Mattner (United Australia Party) visited New Guinea in 1944 and still believed that their equipment was not up to a reasonable standard. He stated that, 'their equipment is farcical, compared with that of the Americans.'²⁵ And with Australia supplying much of her army's logistics in the Second World War, the men could not complain about British brass hat incompetence as they did in the First World War; it had to be Australian incompetence. In one way, the Australian command in the First World War, because they largely relied on British logistical support, was shielded from criticism from their own men.

Australian troops were short of supplies like American style gaiters and boots, long legged trousers and long sleeved shirts, yet Australia supplied allied countries as well as our own with goods that she could produce in great supply. These included fresh and processed foodstuffs, military clothing, timber, and leather goods. Sydney Butlin wrote in the official history that 'strong pressure was maintained on Australia and New Zealand to meet a high proportion of the needs of the United States forces.'²⁶

22 Raymond Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda: The Australian Campaign in New Guinea, 1942*, Melbourne, Heinemann, 1958, p 114.

23 <http://kokoda.commemoration.gov.au/jungle-warfare/japanese-artillery.php>.

24 Johnston, *The Proud Sixth*, p233.

25 Horner, *Blamey*, p507.

26 Sydney Butlin and James Christopher Lyon, *War Economy, 1942-1945* (1st ed.), Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1977, p 497.

Jungle green uniforms should not have been a problem, nor should entrenching tools, adequate boots and gaiters. Heavy weapons like tanks and fighter planes would be largely supplied by Lend Lease from America as the war developed, although Australian industry produced these under licence or independently from Australian design. By the end of the war, Australian troops were well supplied with all sorts of equipment.

As the war progressed, Australian manufacturing supplied her allies and herself with vast amounts of specialist items of military equipment developed and produced locally. In June, 1943, between 80,000 and 91,000 men and women were employed in munitions manufacturing, producing guns and ammunition for both Australia and the US.²⁷ Australia was also able to produce vehicles for domestic military and industrial use as well as shipping of all kind. Ross Mallett wrote:

Shortages of logistical units forced the Americans to rely on the Australian Army for basic services such as the provision of rations and fuel in 1942 and early 1943, which were supplied free of charge under Reciprocal Lend-Lease. In no other theatre of war was local procurement of supplies by US forces as extensive or important as in the South and South-West Pacific, for Australian reciprocal lend-lease went straight to the most important bottom line of all: shipping.²⁸

So it was clear that a lack of capacity was not an excuse and the men had a genuine grievance against their senior commanders and their political leaders and the bureaucrats.

It would not be just lack of essential equipment in 1942 that would upset soldiers about 'brass hat' decisions. Relationships deteriorated further in the last years of the war and soldiers' views became more bitter and critical as the Australian army was more sidelined by MacArthur and the actions were seen as being more questionable. Griffiths-Marsh saw senior command decisions as lowering morale and effectiveness on the front line. He wrote: 'To split up battalions, brigades and divisions is, from the view of the veteran infantryman, rank stupidity. We always felt more comfortable when our sister battalions were alongside us; they had been tried and tested, and could be relied upon.'²⁹ When Monash tried in late 1918 to split up undermanned fighting units,

²⁷ *ibid*, p 51.

²⁸ Ross Mallett, 'Logistics in the South-West Pacific 1943-1944', The 2003 Chief of Army's Military History Conference, Canberra, 2003, Conference papers, p 102.

²⁹ Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 244.

he had a mutiny on his hands, but Blamey split them up with no such concern; the men in this army, especially the Militia, were much more compliant. Barter received a letter from Bruce Brock,³⁰ a veteran of the 2/2nd Battalion who criticised higher command's grasp of conditions at the frontline. She wrote, 'Brock unequivocally saw higher command's ignorance of field conditions to have been a paramount weakness in campaign planning.'³¹ This, on top of the fact that they saw their campaign in New Guinea towards the end of the war as being 'of no purpose', made the rank-and-file soldier in the South West Pacific theatre very dissatisfied.³²

Boredom was a problem that commanding officers were acutely aware of. Brigadier Arnold Potts said of his men on Emirau, off the coast of New Britain in late 1944: 'Such was their plight that some of the men even volunteered to work in the harbor, unloading ships, to escape the monotony of drill.'³³ Norm Strange, who wrote his own history of the 8th Battalion, AIF, wrote: 'I believe that war could be described as a period of great boredom interspersed with moments of great excitement' but 'we did not experience any excitement on this small island.'³⁴

The spirit of the 6th Division was hit particularly hard. According to Barter the 6th Division veterans thought they were 'first rate troops given a second rate job.' Roy Waters of the 2/11th Battalion said: 'Never was I so fed up with this so-called "mopping-up" campaign.' And the high command treated some problems with a lack of sensitivity, such as mandatory procedures for preventing malaria. The men objected to being demeaned by their officers who had to personally place an anti-malarial tablet on each soldier's tongue every morning, something they thought was a result of mistakes caused by the MOs' infighting, for which the rank and file were blamed.³⁵ Their lack of respect was illustrated in a scene at Lae described by Frank Herbertson which shows the attitude of many soldiers to Blamey. Engineers were stripped to the waist clearing a

30 Bruce Brock was a captain in the 2/2nd Battalion, Second AIF from mid-1941 to mid-1944.

31 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p184.

32 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, as cited in Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 234.

33 James, *The Hard Slog*, p 43.

34 Norm Strange, *The Eighth Battalion (AIF) A Personal and Pictorial Record 1937-1946*, Ballarat, N. Strange, 1996, p 45.

35 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, pp 235-238.

huge pile of stores from the beach. Blamey asked what was going on. Their answer was a sarcastic and disrespectful, 'Well if you don't know, who does? You organised it.'³⁶

Blamey was not only causing problems for those below him, he was also not popular with his own commanding general. If the rank and file, and many senior officers in the army, had known that one of the reasons why MacArthur failed to use the Australian army in the invasion of the Philippines was MacArthur's perceived view of Blamey as being disloyal, they may have been even more incensed. Horner writes that on March 17, 1944, MacArthur told Prime Minister Curtin and his advisor Sir Frederick Shedden that he was intending to 'pair' the 6th and 9th Australian Divisions with US divisions. But in that month he told Curtin and Blamey that he was not going to do this. This was after Blamey and Curtin went to London to discuss the Asia-Pacific war with British political and military leaders. Horner argues that Blamey had hopes for gaining a major command of British Commonwealth troops once the European war was over and British troops were sent in large numbers to Asia.³⁷ On August 8, 1944, MacArthur told British Lieutenant General Lumsden that 'he did not consider that public opinion in America would countenance the first landing on the Philippines being shared with the Australians.'³⁸ This did not worry Blamey; he wanted to spare them for use in his larger British Commonwealth force. There was no question about the ability or readiness of these AIF divisions. They were experienced, highly trained and by now, well equipped troops, keen to become involved in the 'real war.' They were destined, however, not to take part in any major offensive alongside American or British troops.

Australian troops were left with what many of them believed to be a demeaning role and the petty bickering that often occurred with bored and demoralised soldiers. In this atmosphere, the bickering became angry and resentful. If they had been used in the major offensives against Japan, instead of sitting at home in training camps or conducting what they considered to be mopping up operations, such anger and resentment might not have arisen. Instead, many ended the war like Sergeant James Moore who thought officers thought of them as 'worms' and still did

36 Frank Herbertson, interview, Murdoch Sound Archive, AWMS588.

37 Horner, *Blamey*, p 469.

38 *ibid*, p 469.

many years after the war. Moore spoke of 'being insulted by officer bastards not worth spitting on.' He added that the 2/10th Battalion would have been better led, with some exceptions, by NCOs.³⁹ Some men were simply irritated with their officers because of their incompetence, something which would likely have been weeded out under combat conditions, as we saw earlier in North Africa and on the Kokoda Track. This irritation can be seen by this amusing situation with a young over-confident but incompetent platoon commander:

They gave us an officer, a very nice fella, a school teacher, totally devoted to the idea that the two-inch mortar was the last thing in patrol equipment and he made our two mortar men carry it on all our patrols. Now a mortar fires a bomb up in the air but you never saw the sun, the bomb would go up, hit the tree limbs and explode over our heads, and one day it happened. He damned near killed us, that fool. I remember my mate lying behind the log and the bomb landed on the other side of the log after it hit the trees and Fergie said 'Somebody shoot that mad bastard in the arse, quick!.' So we put a stop to that.⁴⁰

Another man complained of an officer who was not up to the stress of battle: 'Our first officer, regrettably, after telling us all the wonderful things he was going to do to all these stinking Japs, a sniper fired twice over his head and he went home a nerve case. If another rank does it they call it "cowardice in the face of the enemy", but that's life.'⁴¹ There were many junior officers, however, who earned the respect, and affection of their men. Private Schacht wrote about the death of Lieutenant Mole, a very popular and respected platoon commander in the Bougainville campaign: '... Mole had died as they carried him up the last stretch of the climb ... They were all crying.'⁴²

The matter of the age of officers, especially battalion COs, became an issue in the last three years of the war. This had a marked effect on the morale of troops, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. British military historian John Bayne, writing about the morale of soldiers, commented that it was 'almost frightening to see how the character of a Commanding Officer can be reflected in the battalion'.⁴³ The appointment of battalion commanders towards the end of the

39 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 197.

40 Peter Medcalf, *War in The Shadows: Bougainville 1944-45*, Sydney, Collins, 1986, p 408.

41 *ibid*, p 408.

42 Tod Schacht *My War on Bougainville*, Sydney, Australian Military Historical Publications, 1999, as cited in James, *The Hard Slog*, p 79.

43 John Bayne, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage - The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915*, London, Cassell, 1987, p 110, as cited in Gavin Keating, *A Tale of Three Battalions*, p 12.

Second World War also caused some dissatisfaction amongst the rank and file. Pratten provides figures for battalion commanders, comparing the AIF against the Militia. In February 1942, the average age of Militia COs was 46 years. There were three First World War veterans for every one non-veteran. By contrast there were only five COs who were veterans of the First World war in the Second AIF at that time, with 22 non-veterans.⁴⁴ The average age was 38 years reducing to 35 in 1945. The average age of new appointments in 1945 was 31.⁴⁵

These younger COs would prove to be difficult for the rank and file of Militia battalions. Many of them did not subscribe to the Anzac Legend's use of informal discipline, something which upset the other ranks. As Keating points out when discussing the reasons for the collapse of morale in the 61st Battalion, a Militia battalion could not be driven too much.⁴⁶ Many observers at the time, including Gavin Long, believed that Militia battalions were less motivated and less effective.⁴⁷ Pratten illustrates these difficulties for the other ranks with examples of tough regimes that were established by the new, young COs. Major Eugene 'Bill' Egan took command of the 6th Battalion in 1942 at the age of 31 years. He immediately instituted a tough regime. One soldier said that 'he turned night into day. – for months we lived out of our packs, no tents ... he had us all buggered.'⁴⁸

Peter Webster, who was appointed CO of the 57/60th Battalion in March, 1945, is an example of a CO who was not popular. Pratten writes: 'Webster was never popular in the battalion, and his "confident superior air" was a striking contrast to the kindly paternal attitude of the previous CO, "Happy Bob" Marston. They often took a paternal attitude towards the men under them. R.S. Corfield, author of the battalion history, wrote, 'no wonder the men who they commanded had such contrasting views of the two'.⁴⁹ This new generation of CO, young fit, experienced, well trained and often ambitious, was not the sort of officer the 'originals' or '39ers', or the Militia, were used to, and given that these new officers were imposed on them from high command and

44 Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 167

45 *ibid*, p 238.

46 Keating, *A Tale of Three battalions*, p 62.

47 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, pp 77-78. Keating also gives a detailed account of the problems of Lt Col. William Dexter, an experienced officer and 'five year man' who had great difficulties with his 61st Militia Battalion. While he suffered from combat fatigue in 1945, the failures of his battalion seem to be at least partly attributable to the failure of the morale of the battalion.

48 Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 176.

49 R.S. Corfield, *Hold Hard, Cobbers. The Story of the 57th and 60th and 57/60th Australian Infantry Battalions*, Vol. 2: 1930-90, Glenhuntingly, 57/60th Battalion Association, 1991, P 194.

were not 'one of their own', as would usually have been the practice in the First World War, the other ranks often found them difficult and so, relations between these officers and the men they led were not always harmonious. Of course, some of the COs such as 'Charlie' Green of the 2/10th Battalion, earned the respect of the men, but the gap in the army of the Australian Second World War between the model officer of the Anzac Legend and this new breed of officer was becoming wider.

Many of the 'originals' and the 'five year men' who volunteered in the early years of the war found that the change in officer promotion policy from the early days in North Africa, where NCOs were selected according to merit and promoted by the CO within the battalion, to a situation that existed between 1943 and 1945, where officers were appointed straight out of OTUs to combat units, often without combat experience, did not live up to the ideal of the Anzac Legend. According to the Legend, men were often promoted on the spot through 'battlefield commissions'.⁵⁰ Ken Clift wrote:

Home politics and the AMF⁵¹ had taken over gradually brushing aside the identity of a magnificent fighting force – volunteers, pure Australian in concept and patriotism – the AIF. Our senior officers, to their eternal shame, had ignored the NCOs and men who had shared five campaigns with them and failed to promote privates who, in courage, sheer guts and experience, would knock NCOs, WOs and, yes, officers who were now being drafted into their proud ranks, into a bloody 'cocked hat'.⁵²

Clift is writing about the commissioning of junior officers, especially platoon commanders.

Gavin Keating gives support to Clift's claim that these inexperienced officers were not always up to the task. He wrote: 'Some doubt must also be placed on the effectiveness of the training regime that was charged with preparing for battle the emerging junior leaders, who increasingly had no previous combat experience.'⁵³ He also said of newly appointed lieutenants to the 7th brigade that 'just over half had arrived as reinforcements throughout 1944. Their average age

50 For a well-known example of this, see George Mitchell, *Backs to the Wall*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2007. (First published, 1937). Pp 132-135. While it was not the only means of promotion in the First AIF, it was much more common than in the AMF of the Second World War. One notable man to receive a battlefield commission in the First World War and to go onto senior command in the Second World War was (Sir) Lieutenant Stanley Savage, whose military career culminated in the command of II Corps on Bougainville in 1945. (See James, *The Hard Slog*, p 5).

51 The term 'AMF' was incorrectly used by many AIF men to refer to the Militia. The AMF was the total Australian army, comprising AIF and CMF (Militia) units.

52 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*: p195

53 Keating, *A Tale of Three Battalions*, p 60.

was twenty-seven'.⁵⁴ The question here was as much a question of would the men show respect or at least a pretence of respect to these young officers.

Pratten believes that the Australian army became a better and more effective army as the war progressed because Blamey and the senior command instigated a policy of 'purging', first the AIF and then the Militia battalions, of older officers from 1942 onwards. This became especially necessary in the South West Pacific theatre because the rigours of jungle warfare in the tropics were too much for older men. The reduction of ages of officers began with the 9th Division in North Africa in 1942 and was very successful, according to Pratten, who said that by January 1943 the 9th Division had developed into a division whose COs were '...arguably among the best trained and experienced in the British and Dominion armies.' The division had '... officers with personal experience of this new war, proven in battle, younger, fitter and more thoroughly trained than any before them'.⁵⁵ Blamey would extend these changes in appointments of officers to the units serving in the South West Pacific.

There was also a notable difference between the age of junior officers of AIF units and junior officers of Militia units up until the end of the Kokoda campaign in 1942. Table 1 shows a comparison of the ages of junior officers in the 39th Militia Battalion and the 2/14th AIF Battalion in 1942:

Table 1: Average age of Junior Officers in the 39th Militia and 2/14th AIF Battalions 1942				
Militia Lieutenants Av Age	Militia Captains Av Age	AIF Lieutenants Av Age	AIF Captains Av Age	Duntroon Lieutenants Av Age
29.9	36 (50% over 35)	26.9	28.2 (5% over 35)	20

(Source for 39th Militia Battalion: Douglas Johnson, *Kokoda to Gona: Mud over Blood, Stories from the 39th Infantry Battalion, 1941 – 1943*, Blackburn, History House, 2006, Appendix: Nominal Roll, in conjunction with www.ww2roll.gov.au.
Source for 2/14th Battalion: J.C. McAllester, *Men of the 2/14th Battalion: The Human Face of a Fighting Unit in the Second World War*, Melbourne, 2/14 Battalion Association, 1990, Appendix: Nominal Roll, in conjunction with www.ww2roll.gov.au)

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 9

⁵⁵ Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 129.

In the 39th Battalion, a typical battalion of mixed pre-war and volunteer Militiamen on the one hand and conscripts on the other, the average age of lieutenants and captains, respectively, was 29.9 for lieutenants and 36 years for captains,⁵⁶ while in the 2/14th Battalion, an AIF unit that fought in the Kokoda campaign at the same time, the respective ages for lieutenants and captains were 26.9 and 28.2 years.⁵⁷ In the Militia units the Duntroon graduates, many only 20 years of age, stood out and were contrasted with the older and less ambitious pre-war Militia veterans. 50% of captains in the 39th battalion were over 35 years of age while less than 5% of 2/14th Battalion captains were over 35. These ages of militia officers were not necessarily a reflection of the ages of officers in the First AIF, on which the Legend is based, but many of these men were First World War veterans or pre-Second World War Militiamen and they had a more informal approach to the position. Bob Holt argues that this applied to the old 'original 39er' officers as well who seemed to get on well with the original other ranks. He mentions Lieutenant Bruce MacDougal who 'ignored' military discipline and as a result, 'it was a very happy training camp.'⁵⁸

The official war historian, Dudley McCarthy, wrote that 'the Militia, however, contained a solid core of outstanding officers and N.C.O.'s, the officers somewhat older than those of the AIF, but including a higher proportion who had served in 1914-18'.⁵⁹ It was these older officers, however, that Blamey was purging. Pratten writes that: 'The experience of the First World War veterans had been critical to raising the 2nd AIF, but it is clear that they had only ever been intended as watch-keepers, until the new generation – trained in the tactics of modern warfare, blooded in battle and fit enough to resist its physical and mental strain – were ready to take command.'⁶⁰

Specialist units like commando units were able to maintain their morale and their respect of officers more easily because they maintained that front line bond that was often missing in units

56 Douglas Johnson, *Kokoda to Gona: Mud over Blood, Stories from the 39th Infantry Battalion, 1941 – 1943*, Blackburn, History House, 2006, Appendix: Nominal Roll, in conjunction with www.ww2roll.gov.au.

57 J.C. McAllister, *Men of the 2/14th Battalion: The Human Face of a Fighting Unit in the Second World War*, Melbourne, 2/14 Battalion Association, 1990, Appendix: Nominal Roll, in conjunction with www.ww2roll.gov.au.

58 Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, pp 182-183.

59 Dudley McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area: First Year: Kokoda to Wau*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1959, pp 29-30.

60 Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p 111.

who spent months and even years in training camps in Australia and because the officers selected were often of a higher calibre. Barrett quoted one man from a commando unit who said that: 'In commando units the calibre of officers and NCOs was outstanding, and the mutual respect high. They ran great risk, showed great courage, and were generally fine officers... They were wonderful people.'⁶¹ Les Erickson, who transferred from the Militia to the Royal Australian Navy in 1943, worked with AIF commandos in New Guinea, taking them in patrol boats to their landing places. He commented that 'the AIF commandoes were more informal, they had a different way of doing things. But that broke down when we went back to our (RAN) unit.'⁶²

Officers' Views

Brigadier Murray Moten said in 1944, that while men appointed as battalion COs were of many different types, they had one thing in common, which was that they had 'strong forceful personalities'. They were more likely to be 'aggressive, impulsive, but exacting in expectations'.⁶³ One such man was Lieutenant Colonel George Warfe, who when newly appointed CO of the 58/59th Militia Battalion, according to Pratten, showed a personal bravery and aggression towards the enemy and in so doing was able to change the character of the battalion. The battalion was in poor shape, according to its MO, 15th Brigade Medical Officer, William Refshauge. There were 13 reported self-inflicted wounds in the battalion while campaigning in New Guinea in 1943. Refshauge said that the battalion was the worst he had ever seen. 'The offrs (officers) were hopeless, morale non-existent.' Brigadier Hammer, their brigade Commander, said that they were 'unshaven' and 'poor as piss'.⁶⁴

Pratten said that besides showing soldierly aggression, Warfe also earned the men's respect by looking after the welfare of his men, setting up forward kitchens to provide hot food to tired soldiers, threatening to 'banish to the utmost weapon pits' any cook who failed to provide at least two hot meals to frontline troops per day.⁶⁵ He set up secure rest areas for soldiers returning from

61 *ibid*, Pp 195-196.

62 Les Erickson, interview, 6/1/11.

63 Pratten, *Australian Battle Commanders*, p 226.

64 *ibid*, p 223.

65 *ibid*, Pp226-227.

patrols and the front line. This model of an officer sounds very much like the model of a First AIF CO, according to the Anzac Legend. An officer had to be tough, competent, brave and think of the welfare of his men. Warfe was one such man in Pratten's opinion. Refshauge said that 'the troops were young and they would follow a leader ... If a leader was keen and enthusiastic the troops would follow him.'⁶⁶ Interestingly, according to A.J. MacFarlane, a soldier interviewed by Pratten, when Warfe took over the 2/24th Battalion in 1945, an experienced AIF battalion, they objected to his methods because they saw themselves as experienced combat troops who did not need this sort of leader.⁶⁷

This points to the fact that different officers were needed for different occasions and different types of men. The Australian army of the Second World War was not an all-volunteer army like the First AIF. Militia battalions could need somebody different from a CO more suitable to commanding AIF battalions. An illustration of this is Lieutenant Colonel Robert Ainslie. When he took over command of the 2/48th AIF Battalion in July 1943, he immediately incurred the wrath of his men. The 2/48th battalion had extensive combat experience, fighting at Tobruk and El Alamein and then New Guinea. By the end of the war the battalion had four Victoria Cross winners. Ainslie immediately took a tough stand and in his first address to the battalion and told them they were not as good as his previous battalion, a Militia battalion. Bob Lewin, a platoon commander at the time, said: 'Since the boys had seen a lot of action while he and his battalion had not, we were a bit incensed'.⁶⁸ Ainslie had immediately lost the respect of the battalion because he had not shown them the respect that they thought they deserved. There was no egalitarianism of respect, or even of pretence. Long was aware of this in November of 1943 when he interviewed men from the battalion and, according to Pratten, even by the end of the war, while he had gained the men's trust, because of his competence, he still did not have their affection.

The two COs preceding Ainslie with the 2/48th battalion, Lieutenant Colonels Heathcote Hammer and William Windeyer, were very different, according to Pratten. Hammer was a hard

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 227.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 231.

⁶⁸ Interview with Henry Coates in J. Coates, *Bravery above Blunder: The Ninth Australian Division at Finschhafen, Sattelberg, and Sio*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1999, as cited in Pratten, *Australian Battle Commanders*, p. 231.

taskmaster, being given the nicknames ‘Sledge’ or ‘Tack’ by his men in North Africa. His training regime was hard and exhausting and he had a personal hands-on approach, including his men in pre-battle briefings, very much in the mould of Montgomery and his inclusive attitude towards the 8th Army. But, despite this, he had a charisma and the men trusted and respected him. An officer did not always have to be liked, but he had to be respected. And he had to respect his men in return. Windeyer was the same. He was patrician by Australian standards, but fair and respectful to his men, satisfying the demands of the Anzac Legend.⁶⁹

Officers were expected to maintain a certain distance from the men. John Dunlop, commenting on his experience, said:

One needs to remember we are talking about conditions as they were forty years ago, long before our present day interest in and experience with improvements in industrial relations, worker participation and the like. In that training period we very much inherited the British system that officers and other ranks did not mix. In the end it comes down to what one’s definition of morale is. All I can be sure of is that if I had to do it all over again what I was supposed to be doing in 1940, I would do it differently to the way I did it then.⁷⁰

Paul Henningham described what he thought made a good officer. He said that a good officer is ‘one who first of all, knew how to obey orders and convey them. The second and most important is that you take care of your men’. At the platoon commander level, ‘You have to know everyone of them; you have to know all about their ... know as much as you can about their family life and be their mother, father, uncle – everything.’⁷¹

He recalled that on the frontline:

You got closer to them because sometimes you were sharing a dugout, eating the same. We were all treated the same. We all looked a scruffy lot. I was not aware of any loss of respect. They still maintained the protocols. But you can’t have squad drill in the jungle. They used to just mooch along in their jungle greens.

But away from the front line Henningham described these ‘protocols’ in this way:

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p 116 and P 232.

⁷⁰ Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 248.

⁷¹ Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

Most of my troops were older than I was. But you have to maintain discipline. My method was to take them off somewhere and say 'Right, now on parade this is how it's going to be. Off parade, while you don't call me by my first name, you can be relaxed, you can approach me about anything you like. But we don't come down to first names. (As for NCOs), if they want to be called Jim, that's fine, but on parade it's corporal and if they give a command you obey them..⁷²

There were times, though, when an officer would live up to the ideals of the Anzac Legend by mixing with the men in an informal way and to showing them that he respected them as human beings. James, in seeing it as being important 'to highlight the human qualities of many of the commanders', wrote about some commanders who went out of their way to mix with the men. Brigadier Stevenson, commander of the 11th Brigade and his officers dined in the Other Ranks' mess for lunch on Christmas Day, 1944, while 23rd Brigade officers waited on the men in the mess on that same day.

Bede Tongs, himself an infantry lieutenant, did not like too much formality. He said that 'good frontline units commissioned some fellows in the field; not many but some.' The rest were sent in from OTUs and he thought this was a shame. He said that 'the infantry officers are special', and that a good officer was 'somebody with some compassion, some man management, to lead by example and to be caring and tolerant towards other men.'⁷³ But the fellows will sort them out too, no matter what their rank.'⁷⁴ Tong believed that officers who came from the OTUs were more likely to be imbued with a culture of military bureaucratisation and officer status. This is in marked contrast to the officers who were given battlefield commissions in the First World War. Tong's view highlights the fact that many men of the AMF, including Tong, a lieutenant by the end of the war did not think OTU graduates were as capable of bringing to the army what the Anzac Legend demanded.

Major F.H. Wood commented on 'the pettiness of surprising people',⁷⁵ meaning officers, not men in the ranks, while a Warrant Officer thought many officers and NCOs did a good job but he

⁷² Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

⁷³ James, *The Hard Slog*, p 268.

⁷⁴ Bede Tongs, interview, 19/5/05.

⁷⁵ Barrett, *We Were There*, p 196

detested 'NCOs (and officers) who were misfits; bullies at first and walked out on us in action. One captain handed over a patrol to me in New Guinea because he didn't know what to do, but afterwards he accepted the credit. He was later sent back to Australia. Battle soon weeded out the undesirables, and they were replaced by proven men from the ranks.'⁷⁶ By a 'proven man from the ranks' he meant a sergeant who would take over as 'acting' platoon commander, but he eventually would be more likely replaced by an OTU reinforcement, newly commissioned. He might be experienced, but the chance was that he would not be. He could be immediately resented if he took over from a popular and capable acting platoon commander.

With the policy of OTU reinforcement officers, there was bound to be resentment of officers by those they commanded. Johnston questions the belief, according to the Digger Legend, that a sense of egalitarianism really existed between officers and the ranks. The comments from above by officers at the time suggest that the egalitarianism of respect, or at the very least egalitarianism of pretence, was all that other ranks could hope for when they considered officers from OTUs. Johnston wrote that 'the evidence indicates that mateship did not really extend between the ranks; even the reciprocal warmth between common soldiers and jovial officers was, to use the family metaphor, less like one between brothers than between generations.'⁷⁷ He uses as an example the narration of an incident where a departing RSM was given a farewell in the Officers' Mess. This, he said, was a rare privilege, a 'unique ... distinction.' He then adds: 'Thus the mateship of Australian soldiers rarely cut across the dividing line between those with commissions and those without.'⁷⁸ If we compare this to the relationship between officers and other ranks in the First AIF where they often came from the same district in Australia, and often knew each other before enlistment, to the relationships in the Second AIF, the change in culture was considerable.

Relationships with Senior Commanders

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p 197.

⁷⁷ Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 163.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, pp 140-141.

Relationships between Australian soldiers and their senior commanders in the Second World War have received much more attention in journals and autobiographies as well as in popular histories than those in the First World War. In that war the most senior commanders of Australian soldiers were British and came in for intense criticism from soldiers because of their perceived incompetence.⁷⁹ One exception, as has been noted in Chapter 1, was General Birdwood who was British but was still popular with the troops because he seemed to understand the character of the Australian soldier.⁸⁰

Australian commanders from Monash down were usually respected and were seen to treat their men well. Monash was an aloof man, not given to mixing with the rank and file but he was respected by his men. Albert Jacka, that extreme example of the 'Anzac Legend', said that under Monash, the men 'went into action feeling with justification, that, whatever might be ahead, at least everything was right behind them',⁸¹ while Peter Pedersen wrote in a biography of Monash that 'his concern for the welfare of his men enabled Monash to make demands on them at which other commanders baulked.'⁸² Fearnside points out that Montgomery in 1942 earned the same respect from his men because, like Monash in 1918, he took the men into his confidence and briefed them all, down to the private soldier, on the action to come. Fearnside said that, 'at Alamein, until Montgomery came, that sort of *esprit-de-corps* did not exist (as it had done at Tobruk). It was a state of affairs he changed quickly, almost magically.'⁸³

Like Montgomery, Second AIF generals in North Africa and Palestine were generally well accepted by their men. They were seen as treating their men with an egalitarianism of respect, as much as any general in an organised army could, and they were interested in the welfare of their men. Some, such as Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead, were popular, although tough and feared by their men. Mark Johnston wrote of an incident when Morshead met a private, the son of a Morshead business associate from civilian life, as they were boarding their ship for

79 Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p 240.

80 There are several references to this in Chapter 1, especially, Graham Seal, *Echoes of Anzac*, p 41, Carlyon, *Gallipoli*, p 343 and Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p 537.

81 P.A. Pedersen, 'General Sir John Monash: Corps Commander on the Western Front', in Horner, D.M. (ed), *The Commander: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1992, p 123

82 *ibid*, pp 123-124.

83 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, pp 142-143.

Palestine. ‘The young man greeted Morshead at the top of the gang plank with, “G’day, Les.” Unperturbed, Ming the Merciless⁸⁴ replied, “Hello, Roy.” This exchange could not have occurred in a British division.’⁸⁵ Similarly, a Private Butler in his diary reported an occasion when Morshead received a good-natured shyacking from troops in Fremantle as he disembarked: ‘You bludger, where’s your leave pass?’ Butler added the comment, ‘the boys have a soft-spot for M. And the old boy just grins like a schoolboy; perhaps he feels the solidarity that exists in the 9th Division.’⁸⁶ A.J. Hill, in his biography of Morshead, wrote: ‘With the soldiers, Morshead was relaxed and informal. The CO who played the piano in the 33rd Battalion’s Mess and played in the battalion’s football team did not lose the common touch when he became a general and famous.’⁸⁷ Hill notes that this is one reason why he had such control over the division and why they were so well behaved when on leave.⁸⁸ But while men acknowledged his compassion,⁸⁹ they respected his discipline and it was Morshead’s success at Tobruk that won the respect and, at times, affection of his men. He was ruthless with discipline, for as he said to the journalist Chester Wilmot: ‘Without it, there is nothing to bind the strong personalities of the Australians into an organised fighting force.’⁹⁰ But, as one of his veterans said at his funeral in 1959, ‘He was the greatest Rat of them all.’⁹¹

Johnston claims that senior commanders such as Morshead, Major General George Vasey, Major general Arthur ‘Tubby’ Allen, Lieutenant General Stanley Savige and Major General Ivan Dougherty ‘won popularity with their troops, albeit mostly for their obvious courage and humanity rather than their tactical ability.’⁹² It could be their modest upbringing that gave them the more common touch.⁹³ Other commentators of senior commanders at the time were not so

84 ‘Ming the Merciless’ was the nickname given to Morshead by his troops. The original character was a villain in the popular cartoon strip of the time *Flash Gordon*. In Morshead’s case it reflected his men’s feelings that he was a hard man, not to be crossed, but they respected his abilities and consideration for them.

85 Mark Johnston, *That Magnificent 9th, An Illustrated History of the 9th Australian Division 1940–1946*, Melbourne, Allen and Unwin, 2002, p 61.

86 Private J. Butler, diary 8/2/43, from Johnston, *ibid*, p 61.

87 A.J. Hill, ‘Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead, Commander, 9th Division’, in Horner, D.M. (ed), *The Commander*, p 201.

88 *ibid*, pp 200-201

89 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 428.

90 Chester Wilmot, *Tobruk: Capture-Siege-Relief 1941*, as cited in Peter Fitzsimons, *Tobruk*, p 328.

91 Fitzsimons, *Tobruk*, p 498.

92 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 123.

93 James, *The Hard Slog*, pp 5-6 discusses Savige and Arthur ‘Tubby Allen’, while Ivan Dougherty was raised by his single parent mother in a poor country town. (G.H. *Fearnside, and Ken Clift, Dougherty: A Great Man Among Men*, Sydney, Alpha Books, pp 5-13).

generous with their assessments, and the views of the rank and file were mixed, as can be seen from these two comments on General Vasey. Barrett reports C.J. Selby who said that:

I remember being only a few yards behind the firing pits at Sanananda, December, 1942, when there was a rustle in bushes behind me, and Major General George Vasey stood there – red epaulets, swagger stick, the lot. There stood a brave man. ‘How’s it going, boys?’ With leaders like that we had to win the war.⁹⁴

Opposed to this view is that of Colin Kennedy who wrote the history of the 3rd Battalion:

After General Vasey landed at Myola he passed us on the track, dressed in Khaki, red hat band on cap, distinctive insignia on shoulder and nothing else to burden him as he strode along while two persons trailed behind carrying his big leather bag with name and army number (VX9) inscribed prominently on the side. He was tall and well fed. Perhaps we should have invited him to camp that night with us, sharing those rations in which he had so much faith. General Vasey’s opinion about rations confirms my belief that the higher the rank, the less the infantryman’s problems are really understood by those who should know better.⁹⁵

But this account seems to be an odd occurrence and Kennedy was not a member of Vasey’s division, although he fought alongside it in a Militia battalion. Horner wrote of Vasey: ‘Vasey epitomised the heroic style Australian commander and leader who, although more common at the bottom battalion level, has been found less frequently at the divisional level.’⁹⁶ D.L Redding, a chaplain who served with Vasey, wrote that Vasey:

knew the very thoughts of the men he commanded. He knew of their work, their difficulties, their trials and disappointments because, as far as possible, he lived amongst them. He talked with them not only on ceremonial occasions – not only in settled camps – but on the jungle tracks and mountain slopes – where the going was hard and tucker poor. He talked with them as a man talks with his friends.⁹⁷

The satisfaction with senior officers diminished as the war wore on with rank-and-file soldiers seeing themselves more as victims of decisions of senior command. They objected to what they perceived to be Blamey’s knee-jerk reactions to criticism, especially from General MacArthur,

94 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 201.

95 Kennedy, *Port Moresby to Gona Beach*, p136.

96 David Horner, ‘Major General Alan Vasey, Commander, 7th Australian Division’, in Horner, D.M. (ed), *The Commander* pp 276-277.

97 *ibid*, p 276.

and what seemed to them, his failure to appreciate the worth of Australian soldiers in New Guinea. Vasey was controversially appointed by Blamey, in October 1942, to replace General Arthur 'Tubby' Allen as commander of the 7th Division. Allen, too, was a popular commander who, according to Horner, 'was loved by his soldiers and was fiercely loyal to his officers and men.'⁹⁸ Blamey took a lot of criticism from the ranks for this decision, as he did for the previous decision to replace General Rowell with Herring. Les Cook said of Blamey:

He was an awful man. He did a lousy thing in 1942, he sacked Rowell. He sacked Tubby Allen... In the whole time, to my knowledge, there wasn't one senior officer from Blamey's headquarters or MacArthur's headquarters who set foot in those mountains to see what the conditions were like. Not one senior bloke came forward in the swamps of Buna and Gona, to Sanananda, to see what it was like.⁹⁹

Men believed he was reacting to unfair criticism from MacArthur that the Australians would not fight. MacArthur said to US General Eichelberger of the Australian 7th Division on 14th September, 1942, 'they won't fight', and he continued to place pressure on Blamey to get results as quickly as possible.¹⁰⁰ Men believed that he made Rowell and Allen the scapegoats.

Not all the senior officers were popular like Vasey or Allen. Danny Newport spoke of a brigadier general he served under saying sarcastically, 'Brigadier Standover. He was a beauty.'¹⁰¹ And Private Hughes of the 2/4th Field Ambulance complained in his diary that 'too many of our boys have been sacrificed owing to blunders of the brass hats', referring to Lieutenant General John Lavarack, Lieutenant Frank Berryman and Brigadier Jack Stevens. None had been up close to view the ground before ordering attacks.¹⁰²

Most senior officers were remote, physically, from their men, especially in Papua and New Guinea, because access was very difficult. Commanders from battalion commanders up were reliant on poor communication and intelligence information because of the nature of the

98 *ibid*, p 263.

99 Les Cook, interview, 19/5/09

100 E.Daniel Potts, and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under, 1941-1945*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, p 71.

101 Danny Newport, interview, 5/9/05.

102 Mark Johnston, *The Silent Seventh, An Illustrated History of the 7th Australian Division 1940-1946*, Melbourne, Allen & Unwin, 2005, p 66.

terrain.¹⁰³ The men understood this but they were unforgiving of their senior commanders who rarely met them anywhere near the front line. Neither Blamey nor MacArthur had been anywhere near the frontline to see the conditions the men had to endure. Senator Mattner wrote at the time that the Commander in Chief should be someone who was ‘game enough to go to the front and see for himself what is taking place’.¹⁰⁴ Ranking soldiers were contemptuous of MacArthur. Clift described the scene with MacArthur’s one venture up the Kokoda Track to Ower’s Corner, beyond which vehicles could not travel. He spoke to Clift’s brigade commander, John Lloyd: “By some strange chance, Lloyd, to you and your men, has been entrusted this momentous task. The eyes of the western world are upon you! Go forward and don’t stop!” He then vaulted into his jeep and roared off, leaving our Brigadier bewildered by the bullshit.¹⁰⁵ Later, New Guinea veteran Jack Gallaway would write of MacArthur after he downplayed the Australian victory at Milne Bay in September, 1942:

Destiny’s Child had never seen New Guinea. He had never viewed its jungles or its mountains; he had never been drenched in a Milne Bay Downpour or walked knee-deep in Milne Bay mud; he had never been bitten by a Milne Bay mosquito or been violently shaken with the ague of malaria. He had no idea of the difficulties presented by the New Guinea terrain and he was ignorant of the effect of the weather in one of the wettest corners of the wet tropics.¹⁰⁶

Blamey won few friends amongst the ranks of the army. David Horner wrote that ‘he was more suited to the 2nd AIF as a whole than to a field command. He was rarely able to inspire loyalty and trust among soldiers ... sensitive to criticism, relentless in the pursuit of personal enemies ... in short, he lacked tact.’¹⁰⁷ According to Horner: ‘Probably the weakest area of Blamey’s performance was his failure to gain rapport with his soldiers.’¹⁰⁸ He gives as the reasons for Blamey’s lack of popularity his tactlessness, insensitivity to personal relations and his seeming tendency to be self-serving.¹⁰⁹ This was not a senior commander who the men felt was treating them with an egalitarianism of respect.

103 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, pp 206-215, passim.

104 Horner, *Blamey*, p 507.

105 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 144.

106 Gallaway, *The Odd Couple*, p 118.

107 David Horner, *Crisis of Command, Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1978, p 12.

108 Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, p 267.

109 Horner does not verify these stories and they may have been rumours, but the fact that the men believed them was enough to tarnish his name in their eyes.

Chester Wilmot, the Australian war correspondent, had a running battle with Blamey for some years of the war. He wrote in a report in November 1942 that ‘by the end of last year (1941) he had lost the confidence of even ordinary troops’.

In two years with the AIF I have come to realise that the Australian Forces are seriously handicapped by the widespread lack of faith in General Blamey. In two years I have heard him denounced in the strongest terms in messes and private conversations by senior officers, who had no interest in supplanting him, by junior officers and by Diggers.¹¹⁰

Blamey cancelled Wilmot’s war correspondent credentials when he became involved in the sacking of Lieutenant General Rowell in 1942.

Many soldiers blamed the senior commanders solely for the ‘unnecessary’ loss of life in 1944 and 1945. They claimed that the mopping up activities allotted to Australian troops in New Guinea, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands was demeaning and unnecessary. Peter Medcalf wrote: ‘It seemed to us to be a useless and unnecessary campaign ... we begrudged every casualty.’¹¹¹ Even officers like W.R. Dexter, CO of the 61st Battalion, had reservations. When considering resigning because of the near disintegration of his battalion’s and his own morale, he said: ‘I thought the fighting in Bougainville futile and unnecessary’.¹¹² The rigours of jungle fighting and the ensuing physical and emotional burnout it caused made the men question the reasons why they were there and how important the action was. As early as 1943 Sgt Edwards of the 2/27th Battalion complained of useless patrols in the Ramu Valley: ‘It’s rocked us and made us rotten on the silly cows who, knowing that the position was there and knowing it to be wired, yet wasted good lives finding out nothing. The ways of the bigwigs are beyond me, I’m afraid.’¹¹³ While these can be explained as just the typical complaining of soldiers, the volume and frequency of comments like this are much greater than anything from the AIF divisions until 1942.

110 Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, p 268.

111 Medcalf, *The Unnecessary War*, P 2.

112 Dexter, ‘The Battalion – My Home’, pp 165–9, AWM PR01182, in Keating, *A Tale of Three Battalions*, p 42.

113 Clive Edwards, diary 18/12/43, in Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 96.

A Divided Army

Another issue that did cause dissent between officers and other ranks in the Second World War was the division between the Militia and the AIF. Many veterans of the Militia say that the coercion to transfer to the AIF was unwarranted and insulting. Many AIF men were promoted to officer positions in Militia units and for many of them, because of the reputation that the Militia had with the AIF, this was considered to be a poor promotion. When a Militia officer who transferred to the AIF was posted to an AIF unit, there was great resentment from the men of that unit. Militia men were aware of this and felt slighted by it. Johnston outlines in detail the problems well in a chapter he calls, ironically, 'a Band of Brothers.'¹¹⁴ He talks of 'AIF combat soldiers, with their belief in government and army plots,'¹¹⁵ and the AIF fearing a loss of identity if they were merged with Militia units.¹¹⁶ The AIF prized their identity as a superior fighting force. It was forged in victories in North Africa and the Middle East and from shared suffering in Greece. Karl James writes that it was 'a legacy of the First AIF's achievements in the Great War. It was the celebration of the superior soldierly abilities of AIF volunteers over conscripted British and American soldiers. Volunteers, it was alleged, enjoyed a stronger *esprit de corps* and would not be reluctant or hesitant in battle.'¹¹⁷

An *esprit de corps* in the Second AIF developed in the same way as in the First AIF, with long periods of time spent overseas, away from home and family. The battalion became their family and the Militia became symbolic of all that was soft and selfish at home. The AIF was also the continuation of the Anzac Legend's egalitarianism and individualism. As Lachlan Grant argues: 'The voluntary nature of the AIF brought with it for many men – whether entitled or not – a sense of individual independence.'¹¹⁸

Upon their return to Australia in 1942 and 1943, their observations of the black market, war profiteering and American servicemen only confirmed their suspicions and the 'chocolate

114 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, pp163-192

115 *ibid*, p192

116 *ibid*, p180.

117 James, *The Hard Slog*, p 4.

118 Lachlan Grant, *Australian Soldiers in Asia-Pacific in World War II*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2014, p 53.

soldiers', who refused to fight overseas, were seen as part of this 'corruption.' Just as the First AIF men found, war creates rapid change and what they left was greatly changed in the few years they were away. Some AIF soldiers even accused the Militia of stealing from them while on the other hand the Militia soldiers were resentful of the AIF units being better equipped and getting more recognition.¹¹⁹

AIF officers were accused of undue coercion in attempting to get Militia men to transfer to the AIF. Alan Cleary complained about being in camp at Singleton, NSW, in the early years of the war and the men being asked on every parade who wanted to volunteer for the AIF. They were encouraged 'to take one step forward.' Many men did volunteer but many refused as a matter of pride. Cleary himself resigned his Militia commission and transferred to the RAAF as the lowest aircraftsman, rather than give into the pressure.¹²⁰ Other Militia men reported similar irritations from AIF officers. Norman Tulloch wrote in his diary from Darwin in 1942: 'All those units who did not volunteer (for the AIF) have had pep talks both collectively and individually by the adjutant.'¹²¹ There were other reports of a strong push for men to transfer to the AIF. William Cameron, who joined the AIF at the beginning of the war, watched his brother, Neil, transfer and recalled in private memoirs that in 1940 there were many Militia men joining the AIF under pressure.¹²² Gavin Long commented in that 'a proportion of the men of the Militia were now taking a perverse pride in not volunteering.'¹²³

As previously noted, 80% of Militia soldiers voluntarily transferred across to the AIF but the denigration of the Militia by AIF officers was something that upset these men. The division of the army into two forces in the Second World War was always going to work against the same *esprit de corps* that existed in the First AIF. This ill-feeling could be seen in the comments of a Field Censorship Report of a Militia Battalion for May 1945 where the Militiamen complained that their campaign on Bougainville was not publicised and that 'it only goes to show how they

119 *ibid*, p182.

120 Alan Cleary, interview, 1972.

121 Norman Tulloch, Diary entry, AWM Record No. PR01048.

122 William James Cameron, Private Memoirs, AWM Record No. PR00031.

123 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 79.

push out the AIF shows and hide the good work the Militia is doing ... It is hardly fair to give the hardest and biggest campaigns ... to the Militia shows and give all the raps to the AIF.’¹²⁴

The pressure to transfer to the AIF could be seen when the 3rd Militia Battalion was broken up in 1943 because of the loss of men through attrition. The men were told that if they wanted to stay together with their mates they would have to volunteer for the AIF and they would be transferred in peer groups. If they persisted with remaining in the Militia they would be sent singly to other units throughout the CMF. The men saw this as a form of blackmail.¹²⁵ One soldier commented, ‘They are determined to remain “chocko” just to show that here was one matter on which the army couldn’t order them about. Not even the Commander in Chief could make them volunteer and they were going to revel in their freedom.’¹²⁶ One angry man from the 55th/53rd battalion wrote in the history of the battalion: ‘... The AIF ... I can be sent anywhere by the stroke of a pen, a bloody politician’s pen, so I can’t see where the magic ‘X’ on my regimental number changes me from something unwanted to an accepted superman overnight ... I’ll fight anywhere they want to send me, but I’ll fight as a bloody “choco” and, if necessary, die as a bloody “choco”.’¹²⁷ This man was writing from the perspective of a man who came from ‘that Mob’.¹²⁸ According to many in the AIF they were the ‘men who wouldn’t stand’.¹²⁹

If the AIF did not think much of the Militia, the Militia at times did not think much of the AIF. Bede Tongs, who transferred to the AIF, later gaining a field commission, commented about AIF officers transferred to the CMF, ‘We got a couple but they weren’t anything outstanding.’¹³⁰ Danny Newport, also a Militia man who transferred to the AIF, commented that the ‘AIF didn’t have much going for them – kicked out of here, there and everywhere’, referring to Singapore

124 AWM 54, Item No. 175/3/4, 1st Field Censorship Report, December, 1944-July, 1945, for month ending 31/5/45.

125 Kennedy, *Port Moresby to Gona Beach: 3rd Infantry Battalion*, p 154.

126 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 134.

127 F.M. Budden *That Mob! The Story of the 55th/53rd (AIF) Australian Infantry Battalion*, Sydney, Fast Books, 1993, as cited in James, *The Hard Slog*, p 100.

128 The 53rd Battalion has been mentioned in Chapter 2. Conscripted and sent to Papua with little or no training, they were sent into battle with poor equipment, inexperienced leadership and poor morale, against a battle-hardened enemy. As a result, they did not fight well. Later joined to the 55th Battalion, they worked hard to restore their reputation and many took a perverse pride in remaining Militia.

129 Verner Clements, 17/5/05. Clements was a member of the 3rd battalion, a sister battalion in the 30th Brigade to the 53rd battalion. Clements referred to the 53rd battalion as ‘that mob who wouldn’t stand’.

130 Bede Tongs, interview, 19/9/05.

and Greece.¹³¹ Militia men strongly defended their reputations but the constant pressure from AIF officers to transfer and the imposition of AIF officers onto their units was a great cause of resentment. It seemed to be a presumption on the senior commanders' part, in the eyes of Militia men, that the Militia was inferior and needed to be led by AIF, something Militia men found insulting. Perhaps there were few grounds for their resentment but it was their perception and so their resentment was real.

Doctor Tom Selby, a veteran of the 6th Division, was full of praise for the Militiamen that transferred to the AIF early in the war:

In spite of having good administrators from Duntroon we could not have possibly turned out a force like the AIF without Militia training. AIF officers who had trained in the pre-war Militia or had been promoted in the field were leaders.¹³²

The majority of original officers in the 6th Division came from the pre-war Militia. Blamey himself had positive feelings about the Militia in Papua and New Guinea. He told Prime Minister Curtin that they were better than American National Guardsmen, the US Army conscript army, when he said to Curtin on 4th December, 1942 that experience had, 'revealed the fact that American troops cannot be classified as attack troops. They are definitely not equal to the Australian Militia, and from the moment they met opposition, sat down and have hardly gone forward a yard.'¹³³

Many AIF officer candidates who were completing their training course were afraid that, on being commissioned, they would be sent to a Militia unit and tarnished with the Militia name. G.H. Fearnside, an original AIF man, later selected for officer training wrote that 'the almost evangelical zeal of the volunteer force, like that of the crusaders, was left in the Middle East', and that was caused in part by the merging of the AIF and Militia.¹³⁴ He said, 'the reluctance to serve with Militia Units was mostly due to the newly commissioned AIF officers wishing to

131 Danny Newport, interview, 5/9/05.

132 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p 218.

133 Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, p 70.

134 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 167.

retain identity with the army they had voluntarily joined, many of them felt that if they were drafted to a Militia Unit the taint of conscription would touch them also.¹³⁵

Even Militia units that became known as effective fighters still faced the odium of being ‘chocos.’ The 39th Militia Battalion, later to come to be known as ‘the Ragged Bloody Heroes’ because of their desperate action in holding back the Japanese on Kokoda until reinforcements could arrive, was disbanded in 1943 because their ranks were decimated by casualties and disease. On 23rd January, 1943, after six months of combat, the 39th Battalion's muster roll was only seven officers and 25 other ranks.¹³⁶ While they were to be reinforced, eventually, the three battalions of the 30th Brigade, all similarly decimated, were disbanded in July, 1943. Those of the 39th Battalion who volunteered to transfer to the AIF were transferred on the Atherton Tablelands to the 2/2nd AIF Battalion, a proud 6th Division ‘original’ battalion. Not only was the new CO, the greatly admired Lieutenant Colonel Allan Cameron, a ‘choco’,¹³⁷ but the men were ‘chocos’ as well, and, according to Margaret Barter, many 2/2nd men would not accept them. One reason for this was that Militia officers and NCOs transferring into the 2/2nd Battalion were allowed by Cameron to keep their previous Militia rank in the 2/2nd Battalion. And younger men were being trained and commissioned without battle experience and promoted over experienced NCOs.

And this was the crux of the problem as it affected officer-other rank relations. Many original AIF men were upset because they believed that it was cutting their opportunities for promotion and they saw that other COs did not allow this. COs had the discretion to maintain Militia rank or not when a man transferred. In the case of the 2/2nd Battalion, the AIF men were upset. Some had fought together through the Middle East and they saw the whole sense of battalion unity and mateship being undermined. They could not respect the Militia officers who had transferred. At the same time, the Militiamen were upset because, although they had fought hard and ‘stood’ against the Japanese, as many of their peers called it, they and their officers were still not good

135 *ibid*, p 176.

136 Ham, *Kokoda*, p519

137 Lieutenant Colonel Allan Cameron was actually an AIF man who was given command of Militia battalions, as well as AIF battalions. His time as CO of the 3rd Militia and composite 3rd/2nd Militia Battalions gave him the reputation in some AIF eyes as being a ‘choco’ man. (<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cameron-allan-gordon-9668>).

enough because they were ‘chocos.’¹³⁸ When the war was over, the 39th Battalion men still preferred to march under their old battalion’s banner rather than with the 2/2nd Battalion, to whom they transferred.

Paul Henningham was a member of a Militia unit at the outbreak of war and later transferred to the AIF when he was old enough, eventually being commissioned an infantry lieutenant. He commented on the divided army and the effect it had on morale: ‘This was tragic because it shouldn’t have happened. They should never have divided them ... At the beginning of the war we just expected that the Militia units we were in would be sent overseas. It was bad policy.’¹³⁹ A divided army did not make for good relationships between officers and other ranks. Officers could be accepted or rejected according to their AIF or Militia status and good men were overlooked for promotion as the armies were merged, leaving the reinforcement officers to cope with hostile men under them.

Conclusion

The campaigns of the South West Pacific theatre would be very different from the campaigns of North Africa, the Middle East and Kokoda. The AMF by this time was an integrated army of volunteers and conscripts, and this alone would make a difference to the culture of the army. It would have marked effects on the relationships between officers and other ranks. As the war developed it would become obvious that there were changes in the officer corps, in the manner in which officers were selected and the manner in which they conducted themselves with their men. While relationships at the frontline would, of necessity, be closer and more attuned to the ‘Digger Legend’, the gap between officers and other ranks would grow. Initially, 6th Division men expressed satisfaction with the quality and behaviour of their officers but as the war progressed this level of approval of their officers began to diminish. The failure of senior commanders to choose men from the ranks for promotion, instead using reinforcement officers

138 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, pp213-214

139 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/2011

trained in Australia, upset men who believed that their battle-hardened NCOs were more able to lead them. And while the army of 1944 and 1945 was a very experienced, well trained, well led and professional army, they were disappointed that, in the last year of fighting, unlike their fathers who fought in the vanguard of the 1918 offensive, they would be relegated to what seemed to them, unimportant and inglorious theatre of the war.

The formation of the conscripted Militia army created divisions, not only between the volunteer army and the Militia itself, but between the officers who were appointed to lead these men and the men themselves because officers were often reinforcements brought in from the AIF and they resented their appointments to Militia battalions. This was obvious to the men. While most officers were respected by the men and while most were undoubtedly good men, many rank-and-file soldiers felt that the officer corps was now a class above them. They felt there was a greater sense of class and privilege in this army than the First AIF.

Nothing did more damage to the relationships than the attitude of some senior commanders, especially the Commander in Chief, General Blamey. His political intrigues and suspected personal indulgences made him most unpopular with the men. He commanded an army that was criticised and eventually sidelined by American General MacArthur and Blamey, unfairly, was seen by the men to be implicit in this. His standing, compared to men of the First World War like Generals Birdwood and Monash, was particularly low in the eyes of the rank and file.

Considering the political pressure that Blamey was forced to endure, this criticism by the men may have been unfair, but it was their perception and so affected their relationship with him.

CHAPTER 4

THE REAR LINES

Introduction

Jane Ross claims that in 1942, 34,000 supporting troops were required to maintain an infantry division of about 16,000.¹ This changed dramatically as the war progressed so that, according to Ross, 60,000 supporting troops per frontline division were required by 1945. Gavin Long cites the figure of 57,000 supporting troops for a division.² With these statistics it would be apparent that the great majority of Australian soldiers were rear line troops. Many were potential frontline troops who never came to see action; 45.5% of the AMF never left Australia's shores.³ Peter Ryan, in his autobiographical account of his fighting in New Guinea, *Fear Drive my Feet*, wrote of the difference between the frontline and the rear line. He narrates that when he was once returning from Kanga Force⁴ in New Guinea to the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit base for medical treatment he was struck by the petty-mindedness of the rear line troops. He wrote: 'In a fighting unit in action there was the comradeship of proved friends, the tradition of things endured together, which invoked a very definite generosity and loyalty.' But the base areas were 'smouldering with stupid and petty personal jealousies, with rackets, extortion of the natives and – worst of all – hostility to outsiders.'⁵

Ryan was a frontline soldier but his experience of the rear line was very different. For most Australian soldiers, the experience was life in the rear, a far cry from the Anzac Legend of the Western Front or Gallipoli or even the drama and hardships of Greece, El Alamein or Kokoda. The range of experiences in the rear was quite broad. The rear lines could mean serving in an Australian city or town base. It could mean serving at a training base or supply base in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory or any other part of mainland Australia. It could mean the place where fighting units spent time upon return to Australia or the supply

1 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 135.

2 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, Vol. 7, p 73.

3 Johnston, *The Australian Army in World War II*, p 4

4 Kanga Force was an Australian Army guerrilla force formed in New Guinea in 1942 to conduct raids and reconnaissance missions against the Japanese.

5 Peter Ryan, *Fear Drive my Feet*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1960, pp 162-163.

depots and headquarters in places like Port Moresby. Initially, this would involve the 6th, 7th and 9th AIF Divisions from the Middle East and North Africa, but later it included AIF and Militia units returning from Papua and New Guinea for rest, reinforcement and retraining. For the purposes of this study, a separation will be made between the rear line experience in war theatres or in the cities and towns or rail, air and sea transport centres on the one hand, and the large training camps, especially in the Atherton Tablelands, on the other. This latter experience will be the subject of another chapter.

This chapter will also explore the experience in rear lines in Australia and the South West Pacific Area. Many soldiers served in these places in a range of transport, supply and garrison units supporting the frontline troops. Men returning from the frontline were able to observe and experience the differences that existed between themselves and their own officers, away from the intimate closeness of the action, as well as the differences that existed between officers and other ranks permanently in the rear. It will be noted how officer positions of privilege and relative comfort were played out in the rear and how these differed from the experience at the frontline where conditions for officers and other ranks were more likely to be similar. It also sheds light on the relationship between the great majority of other ranks and their officers because the great majority spent their war years in the rear.

It is worth noting that periods of inaction for many Australian soldiers in the Second World War, especially during the South West Pacific campaign, were much longer than for those in the First World War. From 1943 onwards there was not the same shortage of men or divisions that the First AIF faced in France and Belgium and there were protracted periods of training and reinforcement in places like the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland. A stark illustration of this is the 6th Division's 19th Brigade. By October 1944 they had been out of action since their evacuation from Crete in May, 1941 - three years and five months, the greater part of this time spent in Queensland, training.⁶ As places of campaigning changed frequently, so old units were withdrawn as the army moved on and new units took their places. Even frontline troops spent

⁶ Barter, *Far above the Battle*, p 215.

extended periods in the rear. But the great majority of soldiers in the army were working in support roles or were in and out of training facilities and the experience of the frontline did not affect them.

The experience of soldiers in the rear lines and in holding and training camps in Australia during the Second World War contradicted soldiers' expectations that their experience would match those of the Anzac Tradition and the Digger identity. Without an enemy to fight and hard times to endure together, there was unlikely to be the same bonding and sense of mateship, especially where pre-existing social divisions already stood between officers and other ranks. As a result, the experience at the rear lines created a more 'conventional' army and more conventional officer and other rank relationships, more like what were perceived by Australian soldiers to be the experience of the British Army, much derided by AIF soldiers in the Middle East.

Soldiers in the rear lines had little opportunity to show those digger characteristics that were believed to be part of the Anzac tradition and believed to be typical of the soldiers of the First AIF. This tradition was popularly believed to be carried on by the men of the North African, Syrian and Greek campaigns in the Second AIF, and later at Kokoda and some of the campaigns after 1942. These legendary characteristics of resourcefulness, courage, independence and above all, egalitarianism and democracy, had no reason to come to the fore, unless in the negative form of poor discipline and absenteeism or in an escape into larrikinism. From an officer's perspective, there was little point in giving up the privileges of rank, enhanced in the rear lines, when the enemy was not at the gates.

Delayed Engagement and the Problem of Discipline: Transport Ships, North Africa, Greece and the Middle East

Initially, the pattern of experiences and behaviour for troops who went to the Middle East and North Africa, was similar to those of the First AIF. Jo Gullett, a 2/2nd Battalion infantryman who was later commissioned, said that an effective battalion requires, amongst other things, 'being near but never mutinous.'⁷ This was the case with the 6th Division whose misbehaviour has already been illustrated and the later 9th Division who earned the title 'Ali Baba's Twenty Thousand Thieves' from Lord Haw Haw on German radio because of their tendency to commandeer anything they came across.⁸ The Second AIF in those theatres fought mostly as a part of British Empire forces and, as such, was under overall British command. Horner details the difficulties that Blamey had in maintaining the integrity and independence of the Australian Corps in the first years,⁹ but much of the logistical infrastructure was supplied by the British and so the Australian infantry experience was similar to that of the First World War in that Australian soldiers in North Africa and the Middle East were more likely to be infantry. But the 6th Division saw themselves as being independent with a unique identity and showed their rebelliousness very early, in acts reminiscent of their fathers.

Some incidents of the early days with the 6th Division in Australia have been reported in Chapter 2, but these continued on the ships on the way to the Middle East and while on leave abroad. Charlton reported that the 16th Brigade 'jacked up' on the Queen Mary because it was too big to dock in Fremantle and they could not get leave, while the 2/12th Battalion smashed up the ship's theatre through boredom. There was no apparent direct reason.¹⁰ Private James Raine wrote to his wife, 'the lads on this ship are getting very restless and it won't take much to get them going and all that is done to stop them is to place more and more restrictions on them, which, of course, is a hell of a mistake, but they'll learn in time.'¹¹ Clift reported similar incidents on the ship going over. A mate, Frank, was in the brig and discovered loose boards and a way out of confinement and how to get to the store of beer. When they were on leave in Colombo, there was a 'big piss-up on cheap "toddy" in Colombo.' All were drunk on the march back.¹² Griffiths-

7 Barter, *Far above Battle*, pp 1-2.

8 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 146.

9 Horner, *Blamey*, passim.

10 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, pp 57-67 passim.

11 *ibid*, p 75.

12 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, pp 11-12.

Marsh recalled a 'beer-raiding' party where soldiers siphoned off beer from the officers' canteen.¹³

Johnston wrote about other incidents at sea that were fought over other ranks' objections to officer privilege and a general expression of class consciousness. Private C. O'Dea of the 2/28th Battalion wrote in a diary entry that 'the advantages of being an officer become more apparent than ever on sea voyages. A 2/28th Battalion soldier complained that "The more I see of the army and boat life, the more I am convinced that this war was put on for officers"'.¹⁴ Tom Selby, a Medical Officer (MO), confirmed that from an officer's perspective, this might be true. He wrote that on the ship over to the Middle East: 'I sat at a delightful table with Dr. Lawrence, the ship's surgeon. The mess was the normal one for the Australian run and the wine list still a connoisseur's choice of French vintages. If this was war, it would do us.'¹⁵

Johnston wrote that O'Dea 'recorded several incidents of tension between men and officers; one in which men burst into a sarcastic "For he's a jolly good fellow" when an officer pushed (his way) through an impromptu concert, and another was when a major was hit and threatened with violence when he was seen to be interfering with a boxing match.'¹⁶ Private J. Butler of the 2/23rd Battalion described in his diary playing deck tennis as 'taboo to the common fry.'¹⁷ It was the preserve of the officers and nurses.

When they arrived there, the perceived incompetence of the officers did not impress. One man, Gunner J. Birney, wrote in his diary in early 1942:

Had to stand around like a lot of apes as usual while the Officers gave us the usual baloney and gave orders and immediately contradict them. Guarantee anyone of 80% of the gunners could have carried

13 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 93.

14 O'Dea, Diary Entry, 29/1/43 in Johnston, *That Magnificent Ninth*, p 139.

15 Tom Selby, *Dr NX22*, The Selby Family, Armadale, Victoria, 1996, p 155.

16 *ibid*, p 139.

17 AWM 3DR 3825, Butler, J. Diary entry, 8/2/43.

out things more efficiently. The more one sees of the officers in charge of us, the more readily comes the explanation of the Malayan and Singapore disasters.¹⁸

Officer privilege was an on-going problem in the eyes of the other ranks. Barter relates a scene when there was a disturbance over the allocation of the best seats in a theatre in Palestine to officers. After the demonstration where soldiers threw oranges at the officers inside, who threw them back, a soldier, Bob Holt, observed that ‘from that time onwards anyone could go to any seat in the theatre providing he had the “filluse” (money) to purchase a ticket.’¹⁹ But this was not to be the norm. The Australian AIF operated in Palestine within a system established and controlled by the British Army where there were bars, restaurants and hotels frequented by officers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem which were out of bounds to other ranks.²⁰ The egalitarianism of the front line only spread to the rear lines if the other ranks enforced it, with all the disciplinary implications that this could involve.

Fights with British troops were frequent. After a fight with the Scottish Black Watch, an Australian gunner said to Lieutenant Colonel W.E. Cremor, of the 2/2nd Field Regiment: ‘If you want to train your bloody regiment, send them to Jerusalem.’²¹ Clift narrates many incidents in Gaza and Palestine in 1940 when he and his signals unit were in training. It seemed that every time he and his mates went on leave to Jerusalem or a local town they came back courtesy of the Provosts and were paraded before their CO. They stole alcohol, became drunk with soldiers they were supposed to be guarding in the brig and tried to sell army respirators to the Arabs.²² One soldier from the 6th Division commented on the situation on the voyage to Palestine and Egypt that in Cape Town: ‘I have never known our CO to say good morning to anyone, let alone talk to them, he’s frightened of them!’²³ And well he may have been frightened of them. The Australians and New Zealanders took Cape Town by storm. Charlton reported one soldier who said that, ‘the Australians were running a good second to the New Zealanders, trying to rip up the place. I saw an Australian driving a steam roller with a New Zealander on the front.’²⁴ It

18 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 120.

19 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 37.

20 *ibid*, p 37.

21 Ewer, *The Forgotten Anzacs*, p 36.

22 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, pp 14-21

23 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 75.

24 *ibid*, p 76.

seems they were living up to that aspect of both Russel Ward's 'Australian Legend' as well as the Anzac Legend where drinking was part of being an Australian male.²⁵

In Palestine, the men insisted on being treated as thinking soldiers, who would obey regulations only if they made sense. Gavin Long wrote that: 'In the Dominion armies, any distinction between officers and men above what efficiency demanded (and it did not demand marking stretches of Gaza Beach 'for officers only') was quickly resented.'²⁶ Clift was involved in an incident where the men openly showed disrespect to officers. This incident involved the arrest of two drunken soldiers who Clift hid from the Provosts. The arresting officer found them and Clift lied to cover them. Here is Clift's account of the conversation:

Corporal Clift: What's the trouble, Sir?

Officer: That NCO, pointing to Tom, has just escaped the picket and is on a serious charge.

Corporal Clift: Just escaped! Impossible! He's been with me for the past two hours and we've been yarning.

Officer: You're a liar, Corporal

Corporal Clift: If you didn't have those pips on your shoulder, I'd belt you in the bloody nose, you fat bastard

... The charges were eventually dropped and shortly after the officer was transferred. He probably wound up in some base job, as it would be hard to imagine him as a successful infantry officer.²⁷

The officer did nothing wrong. The men were being arrested for drunk and disorderly and could only bully their way out. This behaviour stood in contrast to the behaviour of troops later to enlist, especially in the Militia. By then such bad behaviour became rarer, although it was not cut out altogether. The 6th Division saw themselves in the tradition of the First AIF. But part of this was a sense of their 'civilianism',²⁸ a term used by General Mackay to describe their behaviour and another part was an expectation of egalitarianism.²⁹ If the officers 'pulled rank' the men objected. This could have been because they saw themselves as equals, at least within the

25 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed, 1966, pp 100-102.

26 Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-45: To Benghazi*, p 105.

27 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, pp 100-101.

28 This is a term also used by Jane Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, pp 44-46, where she describes the soldiers of the First AIF as seeing the army service as being a part of their civilian lives and employment.

29 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 267.

definition of Jane Ross's 'rough equality',³⁰ but it was also a recognition and an objection to the concept of an 'equality of pretence', as already defined in the Introduction of this thesis. The 6th Division soldiers were, like the men of the First AIF, from all walks of life, having volunteered from the streets. They expected to be treated fairly and when they were not they often rebelled.

The misbehaviour abroad was not something the senior command would ignore and the officers often made themselves unpopular with the other ranks by trying to curb it. Many complaints from other ranks have been recorded and the nature of the complaints does not rest just with officers punishing poor behaviour, it goes more deeply than this. There is resentment and offence taken at officers' attitudes, not just their actions. Major General Gordon Bennett was satisfied that pre-war Militia officers could control the men when he said, 'experience has proved that citizen soldiers can handle our citizen army more efficiently than permanent soldiers. Our permanent officers are trained as staff officers, and not as active soldiers.'³¹ General Mackay, CO of the 6th Division, was not so sure. After the victory at Bardia the men went on a drunken, looting rampage which led to General Mackay's complaint, mentioned previously, that, 'civilianism is beginning to break out.'³² This 'civilianism' objected to officer privileges. Again, on the ship over, troops complained about the conditions on the ships and the relative luxury given to officers. Officers travelled first class with stewards to clean their rooms and sergeants second class with other ranks travelling third class with four to six men per cabin.³³ This was luxury compared to what was to come for the 9th Division. Lawson Glassop, who served with the AIF in North Africa and later became a journalist, wrote a novel about the siege of Tobruk, using information from his own experience and from what he gained from many veterans of that campaign. In this novel he narrated a conversation about the luxury experienced by the officers on the voyage over. There is deep resentment in the tone of the language.

All the officers had their cabins; their accommodation was superb. I asked the boys what they thought about the fact that nine-tenths of the ship was occupied by one-tenth of the men.

'White masters,' snorted Gordon.

'We're fighting for democracy,' said Pat.

30 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 61.

31 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 13.

32 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 267.

33 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p 61.

‘Wouldn’t it rip ya?’ said Eddie. ‘The army can make ya do anything. It can even make ya love the child.’

‘Dunno,’ I said. ‘We’re the little people, and the little people never get a fair go and never will. Sometimes I think if you had an army in which the officers got exactly the same treatment as the men you’d have the greatest army in the world.’³⁴

Even in Tobruk, where no place was considered safe from enemy bombardment, there was resentment about the difference between base troops and frontline troops:

Back in Tobruk (town), Divisional Headquarters and all the other privileged sections are living like kings in deep shelters and consuming the best of food: home-made cakes, best jam etc. In the frontline, where the hard, unpleasant work is done, we have to subsist on bully-beef, bread, possibly meat and vegetable ration, marmite and a very little cheap jam.³⁵

The same feelings were felt on the voyages home. Private Berry, a 7th Division man, on the ship back home recorded in his diary on the 21st February, 1942:

As regards to conditions on this boat and the distinctions between ranks is very pronounced. The men get the usual meal, while officers and sergeants have as much as a seven course meal. They also have beer and spirits, these being denied to the man in the ranks... We are led to believe that we are fighting for a democracy.³⁶

The reference to ‘democracy’ illustrates the way that some in the Second World War questioned the war, its purpose and their own society. Such complaints were rarer in the First AIF, according to the main author of the Anzac Legend. C.E.W. Bean wrote about staff officers in the First World War, ‘with the red band of the staff officer round their caps and the red gorget patches on their collars, (they) were seen hopping round the insecure trenches, or making their way over the top through the scrub, too often for any man to have a doubt as to their willingness to share the dangers.’³⁷ There were those who abused privilege in the First AIF, but according to the Anzac Legend it occurred less frequently in the First AIF. As Ross wrote, ‘there was very

34 Glassop, *We Were the Rats*, p 106.

35 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 131.

36 Johnston, *At The Frontline*, pp 138-139.

37 C.E.W. Bean, Vol. 1, p 551.

little hostility towards officers in general; only towards those who claimed more than their due in respect of privileges, or those who held office for the wrong reasons or were not good officers.³⁸

‘Rank has its privileges’ and the officers of the rear-line army of the Second World War were enjoying them. There was more opportunity in this war to enjoy them since when a unit was behind the lines, or in the case of on a ship at sea, they were a long way from the front and there was no certainty of returning there in the near future. There was no need to ‘muck in’ with the troops since an officer’s survival was not at stake and the officer class was protected by the higher command.

Other soldiers spoke about officer privilege, even approaching the front line. Charlton refers to an unhappy private who complained about senior officers on the train taking troops north in Greece in 1941. Charlton writes that the private complained that ‘the CO and his young gentlemen occupied a small car – the rest, captains down, were in cattle trucks.’³⁹ It seems that in Syria, some such as Griffiths-Marsh questioned the ‘allocation’ of even the best prostitutes to officers and other ranks. Again, they were seen as a privilege of the officers. He wrote about a local man who managed prostitutes and who was bargaining over their availability to Australian soldiers: ‘This ingratiating bludger was hawking a stable of eight prostitutes, so-called French girls and others. I bridled when he said he’d “reserve the French ones for the officers, the others were for the troops”.’⁴⁰

The Greek campaign also produced some resentment from the rank and file. That fiasco ended any sense of confidence many soldiers or junior officers had in their commanders. After Greece, N.B. Campbell wrote in a letter home of ‘that scarcest of things in the AIF – brains. I know I haven’t got many but unfortunately they function enough to get me into trouble with the nitwits above us – one would not employ them to cut the lawn at home they’d dig it up instead. Thank

38 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p100.

39 Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p148.

40 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p218

heavens they spend most of their time in action sweating in holes.⁴¹ And of the AIF Staff, an infantry captain wrote: “The last line of defence brigade”, the famous Tail Sitters of the AIF HQ, which never moves more than five miles from a pub under any circumstances.⁴² And another junior officer wrote of officers at Land Head Quarters of the South West Pacific Area: ‘Those senile simpletons that repose at L.H.Q. for a few hours daily and imagine themselves soldiers.’⁴³

At times, in the eyes of frontline soldiers, all base troops were open to criticism, officers and other ranks together. Fearnside wrote:

Of low caste was that amorphous collection of base troops by whose logistic efforts armies were sustained in the field. They were presided over by hordes of staff officers, rising to exalted rank. They were all humped together, general and bakery hand alike, and branded ‘base-wallopers’. The further away a man served from the front-line, the lower his caste. Manhood was measured by a graduated scale in which danger was equated to distance.⁴⁴

He added that he had ‘seen something of the British Army ... with its rigid caste system’, and didn’t like to see it spread to the Australian army.⁴⁵ Clift was expelled from an officer training course because of his comments about the base troops ‘sitting on their arses ... and (being) worried about which end they folded their bloody blankets!’⁴⁶ Glassop commented on a conversation with a friend about the recreational facilities in Cairo:

‘That’s why so many cabarets in Cairo are for officers only, and you can’t get into Sheppard’s Hotel, the swankiest in the Middle East, if you haven’t got pips,’ said Gordon. ‘A machine-gunner in the Northumberland Fusiliers told me there’s eleven hundred officers at G.H.Q. in Cairo, that there’s a major and a sergeant whose only job is to look after the bloody clocks. The rotten bludgers.’⁴⁷

This matter of the base troops was a vexed issue for front line troops who called them names such as ‘base-wallopers’ and ‘shiny bums’. Griffiths-Marsh commented several times on them.

41 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 121.

42 *ibid*, p 130.

43 *ibid*, p 130.

44 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 64.

45 *ibid*, p 66.

46 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 49.

47 Glassop, *We Were the Rats*, p 191.

He wrote, 'We...will become cynical, envious of the sleek base troops and non-combatants, living like Lords in Palestine, Cairo and back in Australia.'⁴⁸ And after the April 1941 Battle of Veria in Greece he commented: 'I learned at an early stage to resent the base wallah and chairborne troops for their unsolicited and ill-advised tutoring, issued from a safe sanctuary well to the rear of the frontline.'⁴⁹ And later, referring to base troops fleeing in Crete, he wrote:

...progress was impeded by hordes of disorganised and unarmed troops, most of whom were base troops, Cypriot and Palestine labour corps and English base troops, as well as other non-frontline soldiers unaccustomed to the stern imperatives of discipline dictated by frontline conditions...Many had not only thrown away their weapons, they had discarded their water bottles as well.⁵⁰

Officers suffered by association with the whole culture of base troops, but some privates, such as Colin Turbet, targeted officers specifically. He said, referring to officers behind the lines in North Africa, that 'some of them were ruthless bastards. They felt they needed to show their authority so they ride some poor bugger.' And he expressed ironic humour when talking about venereal disease in the Middle East. 'It always amused me that an ordinary bloke – if he got it, he had "a load of Jack", but if it was an officer got it, "he had a strain".'⁵¹ Clift complained of being at 6th Division Signals Headquarters training in Gaza where he was 'being pushed around by would-be promotion climbers.'⁵²

Some officers were aware of the image that they portrayed and strove to correct it. Colonel Duncan Glossop confessed to Barter that, 'as a young man I was doubtless a bloody prig – insufferable type of fellow.'⁵³ But his experiences with many different types during the Depression gave him the ability to talk to anyone. It was this ability to talk to the men as human beings that would make an officer in the rear acceptable to the other ranks. Paul Henningham spoke of a private he had in a training camp in Australia. This man was in endless trouble with sentries and guards and any authority he came across. He was brought to Henningham by the platoon sergeant for punishment for a minor infringement and Henningham was presented with the man's rather colourful 'charge sheet.' He spoke to him at length and discovered that he was

48 Griffiths-Marsh, *I Was only Sixteen*, p 136.

49 *ibid*, p 171.

50 *ibid*, p 198.

51 Colin Turbet, interview, 5/5/05.

52 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 14.

53 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 38.

in trouble on the first day in camp and that his incident made him stand out and so he was targeted by officers and NCOs. Henningham tore up his charge sheet and counselled him on trust and loyalty and promised that he would not target him. From this day, because of the informal counselling and advice he received, he was a model soldier, later being promoted to the rank of sergeant. This sort of personalised handling was what often worked.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, such counselling, which was only given informally, still does not equal the ideal of egalitarianism that the Anzac identity of the First World War calls for. This soldier was hounded by authorities in a way that was not part of what he and his mates would have seen as the digger ideal.

But there were those who would always use their position and class-built sense of superiority to dominate the lower ranks. Clift described an officer he came across on his Brigade's period of garrison duty in Ceylon, on the way back from the Middle East:

we were saddled with an OCTU-bred officer. We called him Lord Kitchener! He was objectionable in both breath and manner. With great aplomb he announced to J-Section on parade that he looked like Lord Kitchener, and with great strictness, he intended to behave like Lord Kitchener ... He later hit a soldier on his wounded leg with a swagger stick and all hell broke loose.⁵⁵

It was not just physical abuse that men objected to. Officers sometimes demeaned their men, even when they had been through the trials of the front line. Claude O'Dea wrote in his diary in the Western Desert in 1942 of the army wanting keys to each soldier's kitbags as an insult to privacy: 'There's no doubt about this army for muddleheadness. As far as it is concerned you have no private feelings whatsoever.'⁵⁶

The Rear Line: South West Pacific Theatre

There were many aspects of the South West Pacific Area that were new to Australian soldiers and commanders alike. Neither the First AIF in the First World War, nor the Second AIF until

54 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

55 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, pp 114-115.

56 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 98.

1942, had been responsible for its logistical support. They fought under British command and with British support. When Japan entered the war and Australian troops were transported to Papua, the United States was not ready to contribute the sort of material support it supplied after 1943, when the Lend-Lease scheme reached its full effectiveness.⁵⁷ The New Guinea campaign of 1942 and 1943 was largely reliant on Australian support structures and personnel. Grey states that in April, 1942 ‘there were 46,000 men of the AIF back from the Middle East and a further 63,000 who had completed their training but had not left Australia; to these may be added 280,000 Militia and just 33,000 Americans from all services.’⁵⁸ Grey emphasises that ‘Australia’s manufacturing and agricultural base was called upon to supply the needs of Australia’s own forces, the Americans in SWPA, and the British home front which continued to rely upon foodstuffs from the empire.’⁵⁹ There were no British or American units to maintain and service Australian troops in the battle zones. While, for political reasons, Australians fought under the overall American command of General Douglas MacArthur, Australia had to provide its own support, and so there were many men, a great majority of the men in uniform, according to Griffiths-Marsh,⁶⁰ who were involved in rear-line supply roles in New Guinea and Australia.

The culture of the rear lines was necessarily not based as much on sharing common hardship, as it was at the front line. Questions of privilege and the provision of comforts became more important as men tried to overcome the difficulties of being away from home and the tedium of rear line life. Many potential frontline troops like anti-aircraft gun crews and artillery endured boredom in defence of Australia. Jack Curry, an anti-aircraft gunner in Queensland and later New Guinea said, ‘Charters Towers was an old mining town and you’re out there in the scrub. There’s nobody on the airfield. You don’t know any of the Americans. Those aircraft went out, and came back, went out and came back. What do you do?’⁶¹ Later his unit was transferred to New Guinea where they did the same thing, manning the anti-aircraft barrages. If there was an occasional air raid over Port Moresby, there were minutes of frantic action and then men were back to the tedium of maintenance and doing nothing. Other support soldiers were reduced to the

⁵⁷ Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 195 and Horner, *High Command*, p 287. The United States introduced the Lend-Lease scheme in March, 1941 but it was not effectively operational in the South West Pacific Area until after the Kokoda Campaign in the second half of 1942.

⁵⁸ Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 178.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p183.

⁶⁰ Griffiths-Marsh, Roland, *I was only Sixteen*, p 1.

⁶¹ Jack Curry, interview, 17/1/11.

position of virtual clerks. All this was necessary, but this did not help many of the men involved and as time passed they became more immersed in the tedium of rear line routine. This meant attention to detail and process which, to the man at the front line, seemed unnecessary. It also meant more concern with the comforts of life for which frontline soldiers had no consideration in the battle zones.

Another position of lower class rank was that of the batman. Johnston wrote: ‘The 9th Division inevitably mirrored the inequalities that were inherent in the Australian Army. Officers had advantages in pay, accommodation, food and drink, and were assisted by batmen.’⁶² Johnston saw the institution of the batman as evidence of class divisions within the army and in the larger society. The institution of the batman was probably one of the most class-conscious positions that still existed in the Australian army in the Second World War. Johnston wrote that, ‘this hierarchical edifice had an inescapable logic. It ensured that however friendly officers were, they were manifestly privileged. Perhaps the best example of this class distinction was the institution of the batman.’ And he quotes from references made by officers to their batmen. These included ‘my faithful old batman’, ‘my poor little batman’ and ‘Dear old R. my trusty batman.’⁶³ These phrases are very patronising and while affectionate and intimate, they sustained the master and servant relationship. There were officers who could ‘muck it in’ with their men at times and this was, perhaps, the ideal that some sought. Tom Selby spoke of the time he conspired with his batman to smuggle a dog, the unit mascot, onto the ship bound for the Middle East.⁶⁴ Medical Officers were a caste unto themselves and could be much more intimate with the other ranks.

When soldiers could contrast the front and rear lines, it seemed worse. Many comments from front line soldiers returning to the rear tell of disgust and disbelief. Some of the soldiers in Barrett’s study commented on the difference between their own officers at the front and in the rear. F.D.V. Aran said that ‘relations were “mainly good in action” but “otherwise despised the officers’ petty pomposity” (with notable exceptions) and accepted NCOs with a degree of tolerance as necessary evils.’ Another veteran of Tobruk and New Guinea said that ‘some

62 Johnston, *That Magnificent 9th*, p 140.

63 Johnston, *At The Front Line*, p 140.

64 Selby, *Dr NX22*, pp 152-153.

officers and NCOs played on their rank, but in action their attitude changed and they were one of the boys.’⁶⁵ Johnston related a soldier’s complaint about his own officers once they were back in the rear. He said that they reverted to formality behind the lines:

(The captain) gave a little speech to the men and then explained that discipline in such matters as saluting, dress, etc would commence right away. The dirty cows, their (sic) only too willing to hobnob with the lads and be one of them when it helps to save their hides but now they must climb back to their superior plane once again.⁶⁶

This reversion to class distinction made many other ranks suspicious of their officers and aware of an egalitarianism of pretence. Officers who were permanently stationed in the rear in the SWPA were widely criticised. There was a general feeling amongst front line soldiers that rear line officers deserved little respect.

Peter Ryan also wrote about an incident that highlights the divide between the men at the frontline and the officers in the rear. Ryan, a warrant-officer, struggled back to camp after a guerrilla reconnaissance to be met by a lieutenant who explained that there were separate messes for officers, men, NCOs and Head Quarters staff:

I stared at him. Here were forty or fifty men at the edge of the world, and pretty well on the edge of eternity too; bound together, one would have thought, by every important tie, both of interest and sentiment. And yet, to take their meals, they split into four groups. I could see that John’s sense of personal hospitality was somewhat offended at having to send me to eat elsewhere, but that the system itself was crazy didn’t seem to occur to him.⁶⁷

In another episode, Ryan described a soldier who escaped death in the jungle, returning to the rear lines without even clothes. He arrived out of the jungle stark naked at the base camp. The officer asked for his pay-book. When told why he had none the officer remarked: ‘Good God, man that’s no excuse!’⁶⁸ As the Japanese forces were defeated or retreated, army jobs in New Guinea became safer and they had certain attractions. Johnston argues that some soldiers called these appointments ‘T.E.U.s’, or ‘Tax Evasion Units.’ They applied to men who went to safe

65 Barrett, *We Were There*, pp 199-200.

66 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 143.

67 Ryan, *Fear Drive my Feet*, p 11.

68 *ibid*, p 173.

areas of New Guinea to reduce their income tax because of concessions given to those men who served overseas. This practice upset front line soldiers.⁶⁹

The credibility gap between frontline soldier and rear line officer was great. Ken Clift described the emotions created by this gap. He described a frontline soldier's frustration when pressure was applied over the matter of proper process. 'I said, "What do those shiny-arsed bastards back at Moresby think is going on up here - a bloody picnic? Infantry up to their balls in mud in close contact. Nips only twenty or thirty yards away giving everyone a nice old pizzling ... the pooftahs must be mad".'⁷⁰ Soldiers at the frontline liked to see themselves as fighters in the Anzac tradition, but this Anzac spirit was increasingly being lost by the men in the rear. Without the sense of urgency, without the sense of all 'backs to the wall', as George Mitchell would have seen in the First World War,⁷¹ the temptations for officers with access to the comforts of privilege and the power of authority were often irresistible.

Two things deepened this polarity. The first was that by 1943 half of the men, especially before Militia could transfer to the AIF, were not seen as volunteers by the original AIF volunteers. Even when a man transferred to the AIF 'in the field', many did not consider him a true volunteer. He was not part of the 'volunteer mateship' clique that welded the men of the First AIF together and the original volunteers of the Second AIF together. The second was that the officer corps was not made up of men with field commissions who led men they had previously fought with as equals. Rather, they were men selected for officer training, often with no combat experience, and who were appointed upon graduation from OTUs in Australia. Fearnside complained about this in his autobiography. Commenting on the abuse of reinforcement officers when arriving at postings in Australia, he wrote: 'At the heart of it was the belief, substantially true, that this posting had denied an experienced sergeant or warrant officer his promotion.'⁷² Johnston wrote that inexperienced officers replaced experienced NCOs in the 2/28th Battalion of

69 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 133.

70 Clift, *I Was only Sixteen*, p 152.

71 Mitchell, *Backs to the Wall*, passim.

72 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 178.

the 9th Division and that this battalion was allowed no officer candidates from its lower ranks in the intake of January 1944.⁷³

And finally, even when the war was over and the men were keen to return home, the officers upset them. One soldier wrote indignantly from New Guinea when there were no boats to transport them: ‘The bastards find them easy enough when there’s a blue to go into.’⁷⁴

The Rear Line in Australia

The home front was a strange place to soldiers returning from the frontline. Many did not like the changes that they saw after two or three years away. There were thousands of Americans in the cities, towns and training areas and tens of thousands of rear line Australian troops who were destined never to leave the country or to wait until late 1944 and early 1945 to get the chance. Besides this there was the domestic scene of black markets and workers in ‘reserved occupations’.⁷⁵ The government was forced to pass the *Black Marketing Act of 1942* to curb the worst excesses.⁷⁶ Frontline soldiers objected to what they saw, just as many soldiers returning from France in 1919 could not accept the changes to Australia.⁷⁷ For these returning frontline soldiers in the Second World War, there were still three years of the war to go with more changes happening under their very noses. Griffiths-Marsh describes what he saw in 1944 and his reaction:

Australia, I now saw, was a society of opportunists, wheeling and dealing. Nothing really was in short supply except possibly clothing; everything was obtainable if you had the money... The Australian citizens had become a wink-wink, nudge-nudge society, interested only in intrigues, horse races, football, cricket and beating the system. It was, to me, a betrayal of the men at the front. The gangrene

73 Johnston, *That Magnificent 9th*, p 190.

74 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 98.

75 http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/homefront/reserved_occupations.asp. In 1940 the government published a list of ‘reserved occupations’ that protected industry and maintained a workforce in industries essential to the war effort. From June 1942 this was administered by the ‘Directorate of Manpower’, later called the ‘Commission of Manpower.’

76 <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/homefront/rationing.asp>.

77 Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia’s secret army intrigue of 1931*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble, 1988, p 86.

of selfishness, instant gratification, and the acquisition of money, had polluted my beloved Australia.⁷⁸

Veterans felt that anyone who did not have frontline experience would be ‘tainted’ with the same disease as these ‘shirkers’. Others were seen to be self-serving and ungrateful. Tom Selby referred to men at home in ‘plumb jobs as colonels’.⁷⁹ It is important to see the way that frontline troops felt about rear line officers in the context of this home front situation, not only enjoying the safety of the rear but the privileges of rank as well. It is as important to see the way that rear line troops saw their officers in this context as well. Many of them only ever saw their officers where these officers had positions of privilege and protection.

Griffiths-Marsh had first-hand experience of the corruption when he volunteered to join a special military police unit, the Northern Territory Provost Company, after returning from the Middle East and his battalion was sent to the Northern Territory. He is recorded as transferring to this unit in the 2/8 Battalion War Diary on June 12, 1942.⁸⁰ The company was disbanded on 15 December, 1942, when Griffiths-Marsh returned to his battalion. It was formed primarily to deal with the looting of ships on the wharf, mainly by wharf labourers. Indeed, looting had become a problem in Darwin ever since the town was first bombed on 19 February 1942. The Commission of Inquiry, set up shortly after the first raids in February, 1942 and chaired by Justice Charles Lowe of Victoria, said that ‘on the night of the 19th (February) looting broke out in some of the business premises and sporadic looting occurred thereafter even to the time when the commission was sitting in Darwin. This looting was indulged in both by civilians and members of the Military Forces’.⁸¹ The final report was handed down on 9th April 1942, so, according to this comment by Sir Charles Lowe, looting was still occurring at least until this time.

78 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 261.

79 Selby, *Dr NX22*, p 157.

80 2/8 Battalion War Diary, Australian War memorial 52/8/3/8, 12 June 1942.

81 Sir Charles Lowe, *Commission of Inquiry Concerning the Circumstances Connected with the Attack Made by Japanese Aircraft at Darwin on 19th February, 1942*, p 11, <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>

According to Griffiths-Marsh, looting was still continuing for many months after the first bombing of Darwin and after the official report of April, 1942. Griffiths-Marsh describes a scene when he was ordered to stop the pilfering, looting and theft from supply ships. At times he claims he was attacked by wharf labourers and found evidence of looting by regular provosts. He writes that food that should have been sent to the troops in New Guinea was being stolen en-route through the Northern Territory by transport drivers and wharf labourers.⁸² An examination of the War Diary for the NT Provost Company shows that provosts stood guard over the unloading of many ships and also provided a convoy for the safe passage of the goods to storehouses in the six month period June to December 1942. There is a record of ‘intimidation’ at the wharves on July 7, 1942 and numerous instances of food and other goods being stolen from the Canteen Stores and the Bond Store in Darwin. Some of these stolen food items as well as rifles and ammunition were found at the drivers’ camp of the DMR.⁸³

The question of looting and pilfering in 1942 is a vexed issue with some veterans. Griffiths-Marsh took the high moral attitude of a returned Middle East and Greece veteran. Jack Mullholland, who was stationed in Darwin throughout the bombing as an anti-aircraft gunner, had another viewpoint. He wrote of the need of soldiers to loot as supplies were simply not coming through for months after the initial raids. He wrote about stealing linen from the Darwin Hotel to clean their weapons which had become razor sharp with use and which destroyed any official supplies of linen they had.⁸⁴ He wrote of stealing ducks that would go off as the hotel staff had run away; and stealing chickens to get fresh eggs. Members of his unit stole timber to shore up the gun emplacements and mattresses to lie on. He argued that the town was virtually deserted of civilians and that there was a sense amongst the servicemen that remained that they had been abandoned.⁸⁵ His sympathy for those who engaged in what Griffiths-Marsh called ‘pilfering’ is a plausible alternative and illustrates the problem of judging, retrospectively, the question of ill-discipline.

82 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, pp 247-251.

83 War Diary, NT Provost Company (later to become 12 Provost Company), Entries of theft appear on 4/6/42, 21/7/42, 11/8/42, 12/8/42, 20/8/42, 4/11/42, 10/11/42 (2 entries), 2/12/42, 3/12/42, AWM52/8/2/13, 1942-1942.

84 Jack Mullholland, *Darwin Bombed: An A/A Gunner's Reflections*, Wyoming (NSW), Bookbound Publishing, 2009, pp 151-152.

85 *ibid*, pp153-159.

The controversy over the role of Australian wharf labourers was rekindled by Hal Colebatch in his book *Australia's Secret War*,⁸⁶ where he claims that Australian wharf labourers were guilty of the sort of pilfering that Griffiths-Marsh accuses them of in Darwin in 1942. Colebatch's studies are mainly based on the ports of Townsville and Brisbane from where many of the supplies to Australian and US forces in the South West Pacific theatre were dispatched. However, his claims have been challenged by historians and journalists. Peter Stanley wrote in a review of Colebatch's book that 'Colebatch has left his starting assumptions and his conclusions untested. He is on uncertain ground'.⁸⁷ He says he fails to explain the fact that the alleged actions by the wharf labourers were not connected to the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) and were, in fact, local in nature and against WWF policy in support of the war against fascism. They were not part of a WWF campaign to sabotage the war effort, as Colebatch claimed.

Mike Carlton, a radio and print journalist, says that Colebatch's claims that returning POWs on a British ship, *HMS Speaker*, had their disembarkation delayed for 36 hours by a wharf labourers' strike are based on the evidence of just one claimed witness whose credibility has never been tested. This witness is 'W.S Monks', who Carlton claimed was never a serviceman with the Australian forces and whose identity is a mystery.⁸⁸ William Sackville Monks is listed as an 8th Division POW on the Australian War Memorial's Nominal Roll.⁸⁹ He died in 2014. However, contradicting Monks' and Colebatch's claims, the log of the *HMS Speaker* shows that it docked at Pyrmont at 08.45 on the day it entered Sydney Harbour.⁹⁰ There is no mention of a delay. There is an issue of reliability of evidence here that can be applied to any oral or written evidence, including that of Griffiths-Marsh.

Griffiths-Marsh's view of the army was very caustic. He wrote of the brigadier of his 19th Brigade, James Martin: 'Brigadier Martin had a tendency to treat his subordinates as inanimate

86 Hal Colebatch, *Australia's Secret War: How Unionists Sabotaged Our Troops in World War II*, Sydney, Quadrant Books, 2013.

87 Peter Stanley, 'Australia's Secret (And Unhistorical War)' *The Drum*, 11 December, 2014, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/stanley-australias-secret-and-unhistorical-war/5960090>

88 Mike Carlton: 'The Shoddy, Anti-Union Fiction that Won the PM's Top History Award', 9 December 2014, at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2014/12/09/mike-carlton-the-shoddy-anti-union-fiction-that-won-the-pms-top-history-award/>

89 Nominal Roll, Australian War Memorial, at www.war2roll.gov.au/NameSearch.aspx.

90 'A History of HMS Speaker', at http://www.royalnavyresearcharchive.org.uk/ESCORT/SPEAKER_2.htm#.VIOVbb_Fkcd.

objects – a not uncommon affectation amongst men ill-prepared for office.’⁹¹ He said he was ‘... a small man, irascible, and notorious for interfering in lesser details.’ He claims this led to him being nick-named ‘the Little Corporal,’⁹² not an unusual nickname for an officer in any army since the time of Napoleon.

By this stage, original ‘39ers’ such as Griffiths-Marsh were often bitter from years of army life, and, in their particular case, they were bitter about the fiasco in Greece and Crete in 1941. They held their officers and commanders as responsible for their plight. It was not unusual to see this attitude, and the question here is not so much if they were justified in making such judgements, but how, for the purposes of this study, it reflected on the way that they saw their officers.

Brigadier Martin, who Griffiths-Marsh criticised, was a highly decorated soldier. He was mentioned in dispatches for action in North Africa, he was awarded the Companion of the Distinguished Service Order in 1941 and was later made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1945.⁹³ But Griffith-Marsh saw him as tyrannical and petty, a reflection as much of Griffiths-Marsh’s bitter state of mind, as of Brigadier Martin’s competence or personality.

Griffiths-Marsh was transferred to the intelligence section of 19th brigade headquarters. He noted of his experience in the Intelligence Corps in the Northern Territory: ‘Other views, political and domestic, some favourable, some unfavourable, proved only that the senior officer is as big a whinger as the ordinary digger.’⁹⁴ He lost faith in the ability of officers in this army, when away from the front line, to maintain a principled attitude towards the war. He believed that many of these officers were returned ‘SNARLERS’, or ‘Services No Longer Required’. These men were usually officers who were returned to Australia because they were seen to be unable to stand the pressures of the front line. He wrote on the promotion of what he called ‘cowards’: ‘I knew that

91 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 252.

92 *ibid*, p252.

93 https://www.awm.gov.au/units/people_8468.asp

94 Griffiths-Marsh, *I was only Sixteen*, p 252

the reward for incompetence and cowardice in my army was promotion, and a shift to a safe billet.’⁹⁵

The question of ‘SNARLERS’ was a vexed one for other ranks. Other veterans have written or spoken of ‘SNARLERS’ in similar tones. Verner Clements, a Militia man from the 3rd Battalion, who later transferred to the AIF in the field in New Guinea, spoke of his platoon commander who showed cowardice in their first action on the Kokoda Track. He was instantly withdrawn by the battalion CO. When Clements was back in Townsville, recuperating from jungle diseases in 1943, he came across this same lieutenant, now a captain in a rear echelon support unit. ‘He tried to swing his weight around with me but I soon told him what I thought of him,’ commented Clements.⁹⁶

Clift also wrote about the vexed issue of SNARLERS.

We also sighted a lot of erstwhile AIF junior officers – lieutenants who, after short service in the Middle East, had been sent back to Australia as ‘Snarlars’, i.e. services no longer required. This applied particularly to infantry lieuts, who either could not stand the gaff in action or who were incompetent. To our amazement, these fellows now held exalted ranks of majors, or Lt-colonels in the Militia or Port Moresby, having had ‘Middle East experience’.⁹⁷

Griffiths-Marsh describes home-front officers at a training establishment where he was sent.

In the foyer were several officers in impeccably cut uniforms, resplendent in Sam Brownes, guffawing and gesticulating before two beautiful women in uniform. My mixture of envy and contempt at seeing these base wallahs (a typical reaction of an infantry veteran) was appeased by the females ... I was conditioned by my overseas experiences to expect that the further one retreated behind the frontline, the higher the rank, and more magnificent the uniform.⁹⁸

Philip Masel wrote in his history of the 2/28th Battalion that on leave ‘... the men of the 2/28th had seen too much of the Home Front, too many Base Wallahs, not enough equality of

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p 261.

⁹⁶ Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/2005.

⁹⁷ Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 47.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p 264.

sacrifice.’⁹⁹ Verner Clements was angered by the lack of support he was given by officers when he returned to Australia from New Guinea with malaria:

When I arrived back in Townsville I spent some weeks in hospital with malaria. Finally, they sent me to Sydney for more treatment and rest leave. I was taken to the railway station in a singlet and a pair of shorts. No shoes, nothing else. This is how I travelled to Sydney. The officer at Q stores in Townsville was too lousy to give me even a pair of sandshoes. He was no fighting man.¹⁰⁰

Many returned veteran soldiers similarly felt that they were treated poorly by rear line officers. One soldier compared the dignity of being treated well by civilians while on leave in Adelaide after returning from the Middle East in 1942 when his officers told their billeting hosts to deny soldiers any basic hospitality: ‘They were great people, had us to table, gave us beds and sheets, even though the army officers told them to move all the furniture out and leave the room bare for us. We felt like human beings again.’¹⁰¹ Basically, these men saw the rear line in Australia as thousands of soldiers ‘lurking behind reams of forms and printed orders ... fatten on the fighting man and the country’s money.’¹⁰²

Often overlooked were the soldiers on the home front who never left the country. They made up forty six percent of enlistments in the army.¹⁰³ They became the basis of the large rear army in Australia from 1943 to 1945. Added to their number were the soldiers returning from the Middle East, many of whom were to be downgraded to non-combatants because of injuries and illness. Johnston estimates that of the 120,133 base troops on the Australian mainland in April 1945, 46.5% were classified ‘B’ class, medically unfit for frontline duty.¹⁰⁴ As the war progressed, thousands of soldiers would return from the SWPA, some to be sent back to the war zones in 1944 and 1945. But many did not to return to the active areas at all. Australia’s fighting forces needed large logistical, rear-line support in the Pacific War. For soldiers at the front, or returning from the battle zones, the preponderance of camp dwellers and clerks in uniform was upsetting and overwhelming. They had no place in the digger ideal of the Anzac Legend borne from the

99 Masel, *The Second 28th*, p 158.

100 Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/2005.

101 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 98.

102 Eric Lambert, *The Veterans*, Shakespeare Head Press, London, 1954, p 142.

103 *ibid*, p1

104 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p135

stories of hard times of the First World War. It needs to be pointed out, however, that such judgements were often subjective and unfair. Johnston says that:

The contempt, envy and moral outrage that the front-line soldier harboured towards those further back made for a powerful stereotype, the existence of which helped the combatant to see himself as a morally upright stoic. The image of the cowardly base soldier helped the front-line soldier to regard himself as a man 'taking' the missiles of outrageous fortune with courage and altruism.¹⁰⁵

For as Johnston points out, the 'herculean task of supplying front-line troops was accomplished.' But it is what men see and believe that creates the emotions, in this case, bitterness and contempt, not the logic of it.¹⁰⁶ The problem for the officers in the rear was that they were seen as being the epitome of inequality of class and effort. They were often insensitive to a frontline soldier's needs and sensitivities and became the target of their contempt.

The home front caused many problems for the army. Blamey said that AIF soldiers, especially, were trained and fit 'to the pitch of perfection, and unless we put them into battle, they just boil over.'¹⁰⁷ And civilians knew that many soldiers saw them as bludgers,¹⁰⁸ especially those men of military age who, for reasons often outside of their control such as working in a reserved occupation, did not enlist.¹⁰⁹ Men serving in Australia in the rear lines often saw themselves as not fulfilling the requirements of the Anzac Legend. Often, this was something out of their control; a soldier served where he was sent to serve. Johnston says that many rear-line soldiers felt a sense of guilt at not placing their lives in danger and sharing the burden with front-line soldiers. One soldier, a member of a railway construction force, wrote in his diary: 'One's conscience troubles him a little at times being back here in a back-line unit.'¹¹⁰ So, if the soldiers themselves permanently in the rear lines in Australia did not see themselves in the digger tradition, frontline soldiers certainly were unlikely to see them this way.

105 *ibid*, p137

106 *ibid*, p137

107 H. Gordon, *The Embarrassing Australian*, Melbourne, Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1965, p 78, as cited in Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 141.

108 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, pp 140-141.

109 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, pp 124-130.

110 *ibid*, p 136.

From the first days of the Pacific War, there was, of necessity, a military bureaucracy, as there was in the First World War. Large armies cannot be recruited, housed and trained, put into uniform and transported, eventually to troopships, without a military bureaucracy to organise and carry out such organisation. But this bureaucracy was different from the one that sent men to the First World War. It had the logistical role of supplying its own and allied armies in the field. After the bombing of Darwin and the fall of Singapore and the subsequent capture of the 8th Division, the government and Australians felt vulnerable to attack in the north and the west, and large numbers of troops were stationed in areas that would never see action. An example of this is the AIF Armoured Division who wallowed in Western Australia until the end of 1943 when it was broken up into smaller brigade support armoured units.¹¹¹

For soldiers such as George Beard, the experience of the rear line when he first enlisted was to be repeated throughout the war. In his autobiography as a soldier and POW, Beard describes an incident at a recruit camp in Grovely, Queensland in 1940. Told to report to an officer over an administrative matter, after piercing the officer's tent with a bayonet when ordered to present arms in the presence of an officer, Beard was told to "Get that bloody thing out, you fool". Although I did this without delay, he was not appeased, and continued to yell, "Look what you have done to the marquee, you idiot!" There is no democracy in the army. I had no right of reply.¹¹² This was a typical introduction to army life and it deals with bureaucracy and rear line officers and their seemingly overbearing manner. It also points to the expectation that Beard might have had when enlisting that there was some democracy in the army, as the First AIF diggers were said to have experienced, at least according to the Anzac Legend.

At the same time, life in the rear could be tedious and soldiers grew cynical. Private K. Bishop wrote in a letter to family in 1941, outlining the 'typical' daily routine of a soldier behind the lines. This routine could apply to troops overseas or in Australia.

06.30	Reveille	16.30	Repair to bar
07.25	Rise, bath, shave, dress,	17.00	Leave bar – bar closes at 17.00

111 Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, p 109.

112 George Beard, *The Long Long Road: Isa to the Burma Railroad and Back*, Privately published, Qld, 2000, p 60.

	clean boots, make bed	17.01	Start playing two-up
07.30	Breakfast	17.30	Leave two-up broke
08.30	Parade	17.31	Dinner
08.35	Start work	18.30	Repair to bar
08.36	Finish work	20.00	Stagger away from bar
08.37	Hide somewhere-where	20.15	Enter local picture house
	no one can find you	22.15	Hop into bed
12.30	Return to tent – look	22.16	Start argument on war position
	fatigued	22.30}	
12.45	Lunch	23.00}	still arguing about the war
13.45	Parade	23.30}	
13.50	Start work	24.00}	
13.51	Hide again	01.01	Fall asleep after very heavy day's work
16.30	Return to tent		

113

From the beginning, soldiers would be confronted by rear line officers who they loathed. Clift wrote of his experience in 1939, before embarking for the Middle East, of base officers and provosts inspecting 6th Division troops. ‘No explanations were given to me by either of the Officers (shiny arses they’ll be until the end of hostilities).’¹¹⁴

But it was not just the frontline soldiers who were unimpressed with rear line officers. The officers of the army that stayed behind in Australia did not impress their own rear line men. Right at the end of hostilities Lloyd Broadman described how he had three days left before demobilisation. He was with his fiancée and he missed a train from Menangle in Sydney’s south west to Marrickville. Arriving late at his barracks, he was booked with three days’ pay. He commented:

So they put me on a crime sheet. After four years and I hadn’t been in any trouble of any kind. Loyal service I would describe it and then he puts me on a crime sheet. So I trots up to this captain and he

113 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 134.

114 Ken Clift, *The Soldier Who Never Grew up*, Sydney, Haldane, 1976, p 28.

fines me 3 days pay and confined me to barracks for three days. So that didn't help my opinion of officers after that. He was a proper mongrel that fellow.¹¹⁵

Anzac egalitarianism did not exist in the army of the rear. Broadman saw the gap between officers and other ranks as one of mainly social class. 'It's not that people on the North Shore have more brains than people at Campbelltown, it's just that they are more privileged.'¹¹⁶

Officers who were seen to be there because of their social class often received little respect from their men. Peter Jones commented on an officer early in the war, who 'was overweight, fruity-voiced, and very likely the product of a private school and comfortable upbringing. His patrician manner hadn't endeared him to the men.'¹¹⁷ For some, officers had little to do with their day-to-day lives. Gordon Frost commented that 'Officers didn't intrude, especially when we were out in the scrub'.¹¹⁸ But they were not close mates and there was no sense of that closeness that front line service can engender. Most soldiers made the most of an army life with inequities between the ranks, even if they complained about it vociferously. Barrett's research found that 50% of veterans reported that they 'adapted readily enough, perhaps with some initial difficulty or continuing reservations, yet with little hassle.' Comments from these men ranged from 'loved it' to 'took it as it came' to 'accepted it philosophically' and 'adjusted okay after a while.'¹¹⁹

Provosts and Military Law

The military police created tensions between soldiers and authorities both on the home front and overseas. This usually involved the actions of Australian provosts and at times American Military Police. Even before they left Australia, soldiers complained about the action of the provosts and their officers. Masel wrote that in March, 1943:

The men of the 2/28th also learned to be wary in Perth streets of decoy officers followed by two members of the Provost Corps whose job it was to pick up a soldier who forgot to salute. The men of the 2/28th had been brought up to regard the salute as a salutation – an exchange of greetings between

115 Lloyd Broadman, interview, 27/8/05.

116 Lloyd Broadman, interview, 27/8/05.

117 Jones, *The Reluctant Volunteer*, p 7.

118 Gordon Frost, interview, 1/9/05.

119 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 177.

fine men who spoke the same language. They and their own officers were shocked to find that an expression of comradeship had been turned into an act of servility.¹²⁰

The MPs were very active overseas as well. In Palestine, the notorious 'Jerusalem Gaol', where Australian soldiers were imprisoned for various misdemeanours, was a place to fear. Eric Lambert describes the military prison in *Twenty Thousand Thieves*.¹²¹ With the return of Australian soldiers from the Middle East, these 'Jerusalem Screws' returned and served in military detention centres around Australia, earning the hatred of the men they guarded.

The officers of the Military Police were not blamed by the veterans for the behaviour of the MPs; their own officers were often seen to be to blame for their trouble with the MPs. Leave was the most common issue of contention and many of the soldiers imprisoned in the Old Melbourne Gaol were caught for being AWL.¹²² But in many cases they blame their officers. 'Brian' related his arrest and time served at the Old Melbourne Gaol:

As our former CO was no longer with us we were given a new CO who as soon as we arrived lined us all up on parade and read the riot act to us as he had had trouble with a former company. We knew his former reputation long before he ever got to being our CO. After a fortnight or three weeks with us we were all lined up on parade on the Saturday morning and put on draft and our AABs 83 and pay books were withdrawn. The case was you had no pay book or records. We were to catch the 5pm troop train out of Wagga on the Sunday night. It was an unwritten law that once you served overseas you were entitled to six months back in Australia. We didn't object to going back overseas as we were really only boys in our early twenties. It was when the orderly room clerk came out and told us the CO had gone to Sydney to say goodbye to his family over half the company followed him to Sydney, Melbourne or wherever... After about ten days of AWL I decided to give myself up.

After ten days at Old Melbourne Gaol and the 1st Australian Guard Compound he was sent back to his unit, 'to be interviewed by my former CO who had since returned from Sydney. He ranted and raved for a while and then fined me two pounds. I was confined to barracks for seven days and to 'chase the bugle'.¹²³

120 Masel, *The Second 28th*, p 158.

121 Lambert, *Twenty Thousand Thieves*, passim.

122 Old Melbourne Gaol, *Love, Leave and Larrikins: An Exhibition on the Old Melbourne Gaol During World War II*, Melbourne, National Trust of Australia (Vic), passim.

123 Old Melbourne Gaol, *Love, Leave and Larrikins*, p 6.

This perceived hypocrisy in stopping leave and then taking leave himself was certainly offensive to serving soldiers and seemed to them to betray the Anzac Legend. Another soldier who 'did time' at Old Melbourne Gaol spoke of his treatment by his CO. Neil had been at Milne Bay and was back on leave. He overstayed his leave to get married and was caught by his camp commander in a bus on the way back from his honeymoon in Sorrento, near Melbourne. 'Shouldn't you be back?' inquired his camp commander. 'Yes I've just got married.' 'So did I,' he said, and his CO reported him.¹²⁴ Comments from soldiers included: 'We were treated more like an animal than a human', and, 'the warders or screws as they were known were the worst type of mongrels just like the Gestapo'. 'The warrant officer was called "The Boy Bastard" and was not a nice bloke' and 'the screws were bastards.' One soldier wrote: 'Brutal treatment common in the Old Melbourne Gaol. Bashing and kicking inmates for answering back. I never thought Australians could be so low. My attitude changed to authority after this experience.'¹²⁵

This is in stark contrast to the official image as portrayed in a *Brisbane Telegraph* article of June 4, 1942:

So far as the First Line of Communications Provost Company is concerned anyway, the men selected to undergo special training as MPs are thoroughly investigated for their self-reliance, initiative, tactfulness, aptitude, physique and general character.

Theirs is not always a pleasant job ... The young MPs who are doing duty throughout the whole of Queensland today ... know they undertake their onerous task under the stigma that was left by some "jacks" in the last war. Every soldier knows the type. He was arrogant, blustering and bullying.

These are the traits that the Assistant Provost Marshal (Captain Woods) and his staff are most careful to avoid in the First Line of Communications Provost Company. Today the MP graduates from a special course of study and training that qualifies him to become the guide, philosopher and friend of the soldier. If he does not qualify in every detail there is no room for him in the Company and he is unhesitatingly eliminated ... it is the aim of the Provost Company in Queensland to win the reputation for being a kind of society of friends for soldiers.¹²⁶

124 *ibid*, pp 2-3.

125 *ibid*, pp 1-3.

126 *The Brisbane Telegraph*, from Australian War Memorial, AWM 60 185/1/111.

There is little chance that any soldier saw the MP as ‘guide, philosopher and friend of the soldier’. He represented everything about authority that the soldier did not like and any officer who handed a man over to these for punishment was equally hated. Perhaps if there was any person disliked more it was the British or American MP. One veteran commented on ‘red-cap’ British Provosts in Palestine: ‘We tolerated our own provosts. They were bad enough, but we wouldn’t have a bar of these Pommie Red Caps. They were bastards.’¹²⁷

Conclusion

The Australian soldiers’ experience of war in the Second World War was entirely different from what the Anzac Legend represented as experience of soldiers in the First World War. A lower proportion of soldiers served at the frontline, in the Second World War. There were hundreds of thousands of soldiers, Australian and allied, in the cities and towns and training camps. The black market thrived and officer privilege and rear line comforts were sought after by those who could get them. Soldiers returning from the front line who thought they were living and serving in the Anzac tradition were shocked to find that the sacrifice was not equally shared, that many were having a ‘lovely war’, in the words of the First World War song, a song which describes a society and army divided by class distinction and ignorance.¹²⁸

Class distinctions which existed before the war remained in the rear-line army. Officers usually kept to themselves while other ranks kept to their own. This is not to say that the majority of officers were lording it over their men consciously but they were encouraged in this army and their own officer corps to see themselves as a breed apart. This caused a great deal of division in the army and separated the fighting men from the rear line men and their officers in a way that discouraged egalitarianism and any sense of democracy as it was reputed to have existed in the First AIF.

¹²⁷ Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p 87.

¹²⁸ From the song, *Oh What a Lovely War*, by J.P. Long and Maurice Scott, 1917, as it appears at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/ohitsalovelywar.htm>.

CHAPTER 5:

THE PRISONER OF WAR EXPERIENCE

Introduction

The following passage by Paul Sheehan, the conservative Australian journalist and author, sums up today's popularly held belief in the concepts of mateship and egalitarianism that are said to have existed in the Australian army in all conflicts throughout the twentieth century. They fit in neatly with the continuation of the Anzac Legend many decades after the First World War, and indeed after the Second World War and illustrate how the Legend can distort the facts. In 1998 Sheehan wrote:

In the [Japanese POW] camps the Australians discarded their differences ... and became a tribe, a tribe which was always the most successful group. The core of this success was an ethos of mateship and egalitarianism which not only survived the ultimate dehumanising duress of the death camps, but shone through as a dominant Australian characteristic.¹

It is Australia's armed forces who, according to this belief, epitomise these characteristics through the continuation of the Anzac tradition. Whether or not these were the characteristics of the First AIF, this thesis argues that they were of diminishing presence in the Australian army of the Second World War. If an officer lived up to the ideals of the Anzac Legend, as the men would have expected, he was loved and respected. If he fell short he was criticised and shunned. The waning of the Anzac ethos was not necessarily because the soldiers were lesser men but because society had changed and the conditions of fighting and serving were greatly different.

In this chapter I will examine the experiences of Australian soldiers who were prisoners of war (POWs) in the Second World War, especially prisoners of the Japanese. Simplistic statements like those of Paul Sheehan do not adequately describe how Australian soldiers, officers and other

¹ Paul Sheehan, *Among the Barbarians: The Dividing of Australia*, Sydney, Random House, 1998, p 28.

ranks alike, dealt with their captivity. The conditions for the great majority of these 23,376² men were appalling and were bound to test the altruistic and courageous characteristics of the best of human beings. The relationships between officers and other ranks under Japanese captivity were more consistently strained than in any other Australian theatre of the war. Conversely, some men were able to rise to levels of compassion and courage that might not be seen in combat or in the rear lines. But Australians in Japanese captivity did not necessarily treat their comrades of any rank in an egalitarian manner. From other rank survivors there is a large body of evidence that is critical of their officers, and indeed some officers were critical of their fellow officers. It should be noted here that, for the purposes of this study, POWs of the Germans will not be investigated because, in almost all cases, shortly after captivity, Germans and Italians separated officers out from other ranks and they served their time in captivity separately.³

Before Captivity

The men of the 8th Division, who made up the vast majority of the Australians captured by the Japanese when Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies fell in early 1942, were not unlike their comrades in the other AIF divisions. They were recruited from the same pool of men, they were all volunteers and their demeanour and behaviour before embarkation and after were similar. In the history of the 2/19th Battalion, for example, there are familiar accounts of the men before embarkation being involved in activities like stealing beer from the sergeants' mess at Ingleburn Army camp in 1940⁴ and selling it on the black market or having wild drunken sprees in Bathurst.⁵ Veda Loughnan described the day her husband, Bob, enlisted when he was caught up in the enthusiasm of his mates' enlistment. 'When he found out Jack Whitby had joined up and he bragged that the doctor told him that he was the fittest specimen he had ever seen, nothing would do but that he (Bob) had to get down there as quick as he could and show he was just as

2 http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/general_info.asp. Other figures can be found in different sources. Grey cites the *Australian Year Book*, no 37, 1946-47 and Gavin Long (ed.), *Australia in the War of 1939-45*, Canberra, 1952, which gives a total of 23,059 POWs of the Japanese, of whom 20,920 were from the AMF.

3 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 267. A full study of Australian POWs under German detention can be found in Peter Monteath's, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler's Reich*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan, 2011.

4 R.W. Newton, *The Grim Glory: The History of the 2/19th Battalion, A.I.F.*, Sydney, 2/19th Battalion A.I.F. Association, 1975, pp 33-34.

5 *ibid*, p 19.

fit.’⁶ Bob Robinson was later captured at Singapore and died in captivity in Osaka, Japan. He was like many of the men who enlisted in the four AIF infantry divisions early in the war. Those who knew him regarded him as a hard living, understated man who measured his manhood by the values of his male-dominated society which were reinforced in his generation by the Anzac Legend.

Life for the 2/22nd Battalion at Rabaul on New Britain before captivity was very much the old colonial life with a separation between officers and other ranks. Officers mixed with the plantation owners and colonial officers of the mandated territory. Fred Kollmorgan, from the 2/22nd Battalion, most of whom were captured at Rabaul in 1942, spoke of the time before the invasion when officers mixed with the plantation class: ‘Officers and some of the higher ranks would be invited out to these properties much more than an ordinary private.’⁷ But, as Lachlan Grant states, even ranking soldiers were caught up in the old white colonial culture as well, having servants to wash clothes, shave the men and polish their boots. Grant argues that the ordinary soldiers ‘became aware of their whiteness’.⁸ From Burma an Australian soldier wrote ‘We are living more like kings than soldiers. Right now I have a black boy to clean my boots, make my bed and do the odd jobs’.⁹

Grant’s study on the experience of Australian soldiers in the Asia-Pacific theatre before the Japanese advance in 1942, and during the periods of imprisonment from 1942 to 1945, shows conflicting reactions from Australian soldiers. In Papua and New Guinea soldiers were torn between appreciating of the privileges of their ‘whiteness’ and mixing with the natives on a personal level, something that enraged the old colonial society. The sight of Australian soldiers working side-by-side with Papuans and New Guineans in the hot sun was something the colonials frowned upon as it threatened the mystique of superiority that they had developed.

6 Veda Loughnan, interview, 15/7/05.

7 Fred Kollmorgan, interview, AWMS911.

8 Grant, *Australian Soldiers in Asia-Pacific in World War II*, p77.

9 *ibid*, p78.

This created problems for many Australian soldiers, according to Grant. On the one hand they liked the comforts they received, even as ranking soldiers, while on the other hand, they were offended by the lack of egalitarianism in Papua and New Guinea and Asia. This lack of egalitarianism hit home when the soldiers found themselves excluded from Whites-only clubs in Malaya and Singapore and when they saw the way that Asians were forced to work without any reward beyond a hand-to-mouth existence. The British colonials in Singapore and Malaya thought Australian soldiers were 'too easy going' and 'too familiar' with the locals.¹⁰ When they saw Australians being larrikins pulling rickshaws, it was too much for some of them to bear.¹¹ Hank Nelson wrote that the men of the 8th Division, especially other ranks, found 'they did not like the Empires of privilege, particularly when the lords of empire classified Australians with lesser breeds.'¹²

Importantly, as Grant argues, the inferior position Australian other ranks held within white colonial society led to Australians soldiers believing they were more egalitarian and easy-going than the British, which easily fitted with what they had been told about Australian soldiers in the First AIF in the Anzac Legend, especially when comparing themselves to the British.¹³ When the British and Australian senior commanders left them at the mercy of the Japanese troops in February 1942, many Australian soldiers came to see that the whole class structure of their colonial society and of the army sent to defend it was at fault. It did not take much for the ranking soldiers to begin judging the behaviour of their officers.

Many soldiers on Ambon and Timor, such as Fred Kollmorgan, thought they were ill-prepared for any Japanese invasion and felt that his brigade commander, Lieutenant Colonel Scanlan, a World War 1 veteran, was not prepared for the type of guerrilla warfare to come. Kollmorgan, like many soldiers, could see that they could not hold a Japanese invasion and would need to retreat inland. Scanlan overruled attempts to establish supply dumps inland because this was

10 *ibid*, p 46.

11 *ibid*, p 46.

12 Nelson, *POW: Prisoners of War*, p 11.

13 Grant, *Australian Soldiers in Asia-Pacific and World War II*, p 49.

defeatist thinking.¹⁴ Bill Harry of the same battalion thought their officers were generally under par. He said that no officer 'showed talent, showed ability, showed form.' He thought CO Lieutenant Colonel Howard Carr was 'earnest and sincere, a tryer, but not equipped for that particular appointment.' These commanders never followed the successful practice of Monash in thoroughly briefing their men before action. Harry said that the men were 'never given any indication from higher up about the seriousness of the situation.'¹⁵

Before captivity, these men were like their 6th and 7th Division mates in behaviour. Joan Beaumont describes the behaviour of the 2/21st Battalion before they were captured on the island of Ambon in 1942 as boisterous, ill-disciplined and disrespectful, as seen when booing their commanding officer in Melbourne before departure for Darwin.¹⁶ They damaged trains which transported them to the Northern Territory, they fought with the Militia in Darwin and started rioting when a mate was disciplined.¹⁷ Beaumont ascribes this sort of behaviour to the creation of the Anzac Legend after the First World War.¹⁸ Part of this Legend was to 'play up' when you felt that you were being wasted or not used properly by the higher command. The mood of the rank and file was worsened by the fact that they saw other divisions going to fight the 'real' war against the Germans while they were stuck firstly, at Trawool and Bonegilla in Victoria and then in Darwin.

This misbehaviour was something the Australian army had come to expect, along with criticism of their officers. Stan Arneil, a POW veteran, wrote that, 'the lower ranks of all armies regard it as a right to criticise officers and nothing will ever change that.'¹⁹ In fact, the men of the 2/21st thought well of their CO, Lieutenant Colonel Roach, who was intensely loyal to, and protective of, his battalion. Second in command, Major Ian McRae said that Roach, 'was always held in the highest regard by his officers ... entirely wrapped up in the unit from the day of its formation.'²⁰ Beaumont, who interviewed or received written responses from 83 survivors of the battalion,

14 Fred Kollmorgan, interview, AWMS911.

15 Bill Harry, interview, AWMS908.

16 Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity, 1941-1945*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1988, p 20.

17 *ibid*, pp 20-21.

18 *ibid*, p 17.

19 Stan Arneil, *One Man's War*, Sydney, Alternative Publishing Company, 1980, p 3.

20 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 24.

found that to a man they ‘praised Roach as a “gentleman” fair, kind and approachable.’²¹ He also understood the precarious position in which he and his men were placed in Ambon and he had contempt for higher command who had placed them there. He wrote to Australian Army Headquarters in Melbourne the day before their departure for Ambon: ‘If any of my excellent fellows do not arrive at their destination it will not be a case of “gallant sacrifice”, but of murder due to sheer slackness and maladministration.’²²

But respect for a CO did not necessarily mean perfect behaviour, and a good commander, such as Roach, understood this. Not all COs earned such respect. Bruce Gamble wrote that in Rabaul before the invasion:

It had not taken the men of the 2/22nd very long to realise that Lieutenant Colonel Carr was unequal to the task of running a battalion-size force... At Rabaul he was on his own... Ultimately, Carr failed to gain the respect of his subordinates, who came to regard him as something of a joke. Behind his back they began to call him ‘the Bodger’, slang for a bum coin, a loser.²³

But while Carr stayed with his men, on Ambon, Roach was not to share captivity with his men. He was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel (William) John Scott, a 53 year old veteran of the First World War and a man with a shadowy history with his involvement with the ‘White Army’, a neo-fascist paramilitary group that threatened a right wing take-over of Australia in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴ The manner of his appointment and Roach’s removal was sordid and political. Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee, his commander, thought Roach was a ‘squealer’, a complainer, and was not made of the right stuff to lead an AIF infantry battalion. He wrote to Gavin Long in 1955, commenting on Long’s appraisal of Roach: ‘I think that you have let Roach off lightly, he was a squealer from the moment he got to Darwin ... his final message was demanding that ships be sent to Ambon to take the force out ... As it turned out, I should have left him there to go into the bag²⁵ and saved a good man like Scott for further service.’²⁶

21 *ibid*, p 25.

22 *ibid*, p 37.

23 Bruce Gamble, *Darkest Hour: The True Story of Lark Force at Rabaul. Australia’s Worst Military Disaster of World War II*, St Paul, Zenith, 2006, p 51.

24 Scott’s role has been described in Chapter 1 of this study with reference to Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop*, *passim*.

25 ‘Into the bag’ was a commonly used phrase by POWs of the Second World War and other commentators that means to go into captivity.

26 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 43.

This cynicism reached its peak with the capitulation to the Japanese at Singapore and other outlying posts such as Ambon. The men could see the hopelessness of their position before the invasion and they feared for the safety of Australia. Private Maric Gilbert wrote of the officers in his private recollections of his experiences on Ambon:

Even before we became POWs we did not have a very high regard for them. There were exceptions of course, and two which spring instantly to mind are Lt Col. Roach and Major Ian Macrae, CO and second in-command respectively, of the 21st Infantry battalion, and both true leaders of men.²⁷

After the departure of these two men – Roach to Australia in January 1942 and Macrae to Hainan in October 1942, Gilbert wrote: ‘Left in command at Ambon was a Major Westley, and as far as I am concerned, the less said about him, the better.’²⁸ As far as James Armstrong was concerned, Scott was becoming a useless recluse: On the 21st November 1942 he wrote in his diary: ‘The C.O. has a little hut, built and moved in. He is like a hermit, even his meals taken over to him.’ And on Christmas Day, 1942 he wrote: ‘C.O. gave us a lecture, just the usual lot of rot.’²⁹ Verdun Walsh wrote in a similar vein about going into imprisonment at Changi: ‘The men believed they had been sold out and were bridling against the discipline of not having only Japs over them but also their own officers.’³⁰ Walter Bird wrote in a diary when a POW: ‘Our officers don’t carry the buck, they blame the Malayan command.’³¹

This attitude towards officers was based on their senior officers’ capitulations and this would play a major role in determining the way that other ranks would judge officers under captivity. If an officer was thought to have failed in combat and was in any way responsible for the debacle in which they found themselves he would have great difficulty establishing credibility with the men. The escape of Major General Gordon Bennett, the 8th Division commander, created ill-feeling with some men, but, according to Hank Nelson, most men reversed their opinion and saw him as a battle leader of some stature whose leadership was better than British commanders in the retreat down the Malayan Peninsula.³² But some soldiers such as George Beard, a private, wrote: ‘Rage and hatred was in my mind for Gordon Bennett, our Commander-in-Chief, when I

27 Maric Gilbert, private memoir, pp 19-20, AWM PR03121.

28 *ibid.*, pp 19-20.

29 AWM 89/165, James Armstrong.

30 Verdun Walsh, *Cry Crucify*, Sydney, Val Walsh and Associates, 1991, p 81.

31 Walter Bird, diary entry 22/9/42, AWM PRO1417.

32 Nelson, *POW Prisoners of War*, p 125.

learned he had escaped on the Sunday night.³³ (Dr) Lloyd Cahill described seeing Bennett when he returned from Japanese captivity after the war:

We got in and eventually got up the harbour and, of course, it was quite (an) amazing, extraordinary experience ... Bennett got on the ship. He got on the ship to welcome us back and we were told to go up to the front to see the great man and they just went up and turned their back on him. They gave him the raspberry. It was pretty grim. So he was talking more or less to nothing.³⁴

Strangely, this is in marked contrast to a report of Bennett meeting a similar shipload of returning POWs in Sydney at the end of 1945. Claude Roediger, a POW survivor, said: ‘Gordon Bennett came on to the ship and was absolutely tumultuously welcomed by the boys, a heartfelt ovation.’³⁵ A similar account is given by Returning POW Gilbert Mant who wrote, ‘as they clustered around him and grasped his hand on the deck of the ship, some said there were tears in the eyes of the tough, pugnacious general the Japs had tried so hard to kill ... It was the vindication he wanted most of all: the faith of the rank and file.’³⁶ Others such as I.C.W., his driver in Singapore, saw it a privilege to have served with him and thought he was wrongly accused after the war.³⁷

The historian, Alan Warren saw Bennett and fellow senior commander Duncan Maxwell as ‘unequivocal failures’.³⁸ Weary Dunlop met Bennett after his escape from Singapore and awaiting transport to Australia. Dunlop said that ‘essentially he was an egotist, ... (convinced he was) the only one who could save Australia’. Weary thought he was disturbed and indiscreet in his conversation that night.³⁹ And it was found in a Royal Commission held in 1945 that he had not been justified in leaving his men.⁴⁰

But not just senior officers, the officer class in general often came into criticism from the rank and file at and after capitulation. Jane Ross quotes from Kenneth Harrison who wrote an autobiographical account of his experience as a POW: ‘There were many vociferous complaints

33 Beard, *The Long Long Road*, p 86.

34 Australian Film Archives series “Australians at War” No. 0662, as cited in, Michael Caulfield (ed), *Voices of War: Australians Tell their Stories from World War 1 to the Present*, Sydney, Hodder, 2006, p 325.

35 Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War*, p 556.

36 Cameron Forbes, *Hellfire: The Story of Australia, Japan and the Prisoners of War*, Sydney, Macmillan, 2005, p 487-488.

37 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 253.

38 Alan Warren, *Singapore 1942 – Britain’s Greatest Defeat*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant Books, 2002, p 38.

39 Ebury, *Weary*, p 302-303.

40 This Royal Commission was led by Sir George Ligertwood in 1945.

about the “spit and polish”, and many sincerely objected to saluting officers who had proved abject failures in action.⁴¹ Erwin (Curly) Heckendorf said that, in regard to officers pulling rank in camp: ‘Now that – that didn’t go down well ... anyone who wasn’t good in action, had – got a very poor hearing – after, if they tried to show their authority.’⁴² He spoke of an officer in his company who soldiers threatened to shoot in the back in action. He left the command ‘to his understudy ... He got in a foxhole and gave directions from out of sight.’⁴³ Early in captivity on Ambon, Scott was forced to address the Australians on parade because they were, according to Scott in a report he wrote after the war, openly jeering at officers and laughing at NCOs who tried to get men to work.⁴⁴ Scott believed that hard discipline, of the formal military type, was the best way to keep the men in line. Private James Armstrong from the 2/21st Battalion complained in his diary that he ‘ignored a sergeant and was paraded before the old man (Scott).’ Next day: ‘the result is standing under the flagpole for the day with no dinner.’⁴⁵

Another incident only days after capitulation in Singapore did not add to any good opinion William Parker might have had of his officers. He describes the time when an Australian officer passed the blame for not saluting a Japanese soldier to Parker, who was a private:

We didn’t salute the guard and at the time we had an Australian officer in charge of us. He should have given the ‘eyes left’ but he didn’t. A Jap who was on the road at the time pulled us up. He asked for the ‘Anchow’ (that’s No. 1 in charge). The officer pointed to me so the Jap got me off the truck and belted me with his rifle.⁴⁶

This incident came after several weeks of intense action in the retreat down through Malaya and at Singapore. Many men in the 8th Division proved that they had the fighting qualities that their fellow AIF divisions were portraying in the Middle East and North Africa, despite the fact that they were, according to Grey, ‘poorly trained and often ill-led’. Grey says that the few victories that the men achieved were ‘local victories which merely delayed the Japanese and which were owed to the determination of the battalions involved and the tactical skills of their

41 Kenneth Harrison, *The Brave Japanese*, London, Horwitz, 1968, p 133, from Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 174.

42 Erwin Heckendorf, interview AWMS763.

43 Erwin Heckendorf, interview AWMS763.

44 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 96.

45 AWM 89/165, James Armstrong, diary, 23/2/43.

46 <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/67.htm>.

commanders.⁴⁷ Grey saw Bennett as being ‘quarrelsome and uncooperative with his British superior, General A.E. Percival, and his battlefield performance fell well short of his own boastful declarations.’⁴⁸ As in the Middle East and North Africa, some combat and support officers were found to be lacking, but there was no opportunity to replace or relieve them in Singapore as there was later to be in the intense conditions on the Kokoda Track, as described in Chapter 3 by Bede Tongs and Verner Clements.⁴⁹

There were no reserve AIF officers to use in February 1942 as none of the AIF units had been brought back from the Middle East. Gavan Daws points out that ‘for every trained Australian soldier still free on Australian soil there were two who were prisoner in Southeast Asia.’⁵⁰ Even if there had been officers in reserve in Australia, there was too little time and too much chaos to bring them to Singapore to replace poorly performing officers. The officers at Singapore went into captivity with their men, many with their tarnished reputations as well. The fighting in Singapore had been intense in places and the Australians suffered a disproportionate number of casualties, almost one in ten killed compared with one in twenty for the British and Indian troops.⁵¹ Despite the few intense days of fighting on Singapore where many Australian units performed courageously,⁵² they were cut short in their attempts to emulate their digger mates in the Middle East and North Africa and now they had to contend with the shame and humiliation that this surrender would create. They would easily blame any officers who they believed had not been ‘up to it’.

There were men amongst the ranks who performed badly in Singapore. Grey states such ‘indiscipline ... knew neither age nor nationality’, but of the Australians who misbehaved, it would seem that most came from 2000 reinforcements sent as late as January 24th, 1942. They were poorly trained and lacked the discipline of men who had served for months in Malaya beforehand. And on other islands such as Ambon and New Britain, infantry battalions such as

47 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 170.

48 *ibid*, p 170.

49 Bede Tongs, Interview, 19/9/05 and Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/05.

50 Gavin Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese, POWs of World War II in the Pacific*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2008, p 93.

51 http://www.dva.gov.au/news_archive/Documents/Fall_of_Singapore.pdf.

52 Newton, *The Grim Glory*, pp 207-230 and 298-299.

the 2/21st Battalion did not get to see much action where officers and men could prove themselves. The Dutch commander of the island surrendered within 24 hours of the Japanese invasion and the Dutch, along with the Australians, went into captivity.

This sense of contempt for some officers by ranking soldiers would follow these officers for their time in captivity. Some officers could see the problems that this created early in their captivity and were as offended and upset as their men. After the capitulation in Java, Lt Colonel Arthur S. Blackburn told his officers to ‘take the first opportunity to tell your men that this surrender is not my choice nor that of Gen. Sitwell. We were all placed under the command of the Commander in Chief N.E.I. (Netherlands East Indies) and he has ordered us to surrender.’⁵³

In the Bag – Changi

Nearly all Australian prisoners of the Japanese went through Changi at the beginning or at the end of captivity.⁵⁴ The exceptions were those captured on Java and other East Indies islands. For most, Changi was to prove their easiest time in captivity. This is not to say that their experience at Changi was an easy one, but compared to the experiences of those who later served on the Burma-Thailand Railway or in Japan, Changi was less traumatic and less dangerous.⁵⁵ The most difficult parts about the early months in Changi were, firstly, coming to terms with their situation emotionally and secondly, learning, often the hard way, how to deal with their captors. The Canadian psychologist, Charles A. Stenger, said that when men are taken into captivity they feel stunned. They have a sense of disbelief, of numbness, disgrace and humiliation, as well as fear and anger against their officers.⁵⁶ These sentiments were eloquently expressed by Doug Le Fevre of the 2/28th Battalion, who was captured in North Africa: ‘This was a terrible feeling being a prisoner. The nearest I can describe it is having a good kick in the pants and this is what it felt

53 Brigadier A.S. Blackburn VC, Personal Papers, AWM EXDOC084, from Hearder, *Careers in Captivity*, p 235.

54 <http://www.austhismuseum.mq.edu.au/exhibits/selarang/changi.htm>.

55 <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/changi/> .

56 Charles A Stenger, as cited in Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 77.

like. The whole world had collapsed. After all our efforts; all our mates' efforts; all the loss of life, we had achieved nothing.'⁵⁷

Beaumont said that the men on Ambon felt they had let the AIF down and they feared for the future and for Australia.⁵⁸ One veteran, Harry Jessup, wrote that in the first days of captivity:

Morale was low throughout the camp. The troops, and most officers, thought they had been sold a pup in Singapore, and there was a feeling of bitterness and frustration. Many troops tried to take out some of their bitterness against the officers, and the reaction of the latter soon showed up the good officers from the rest.⁵⁹

According to Grey, some of the men, including the 2000 late arrivals, had not seen any action in Malaya or Singapore. They landed in Singapore and after just a matter of days, 'went into the bag'.⁶⁰ Their sense of shock and disorientation was extreme. Sid King commented that the reinforcements that landed shortly before surrender were inexperienced: 'We got some late reinforcements over. Some of them didn't even know how to load a rifle. They joined up in December and they were prisoners in February ... One of them nearly shot me.'⁶¹

The Japanese gave the Allied senior officers a measure of autonomy in Changi. The day-to-day lives of the men were generally under the control of allied officers. This included decisions about barracks and messes and maintenance of latrines and hygiene, as well as distribution of food and deciding who would go on work parties. Officers could still call parades and discipline their men for breaches of rules. Combat officers, however, often had some difficulty asserting authority over their men. They had to redefine their role, or retire into the background. Their role was to be one of maintaining the camp as best as resources would allow, but also to maintain discipline. Many officers found this new role difficult. Lieutenant George Beard showed an understanding of their predicament: 'It would be wrong, and completely unfair of me, to suggest that all of our Commissioned Officers behaved badly as POWs. They had a most difficult role to fill – more

57 AWMS517 Douglas LeFevre, interview.

58 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, pp 77-78.

59 Harry Jessup, *Changi Diary*, NSW Mitchell Library MLMSS 2799, as cited in Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 59.

60 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 1.

61 Sid King, interview, 15/2/11.

difficult than in combat. Many, I am happy to say, displayed courage and dignity during periods of extreme challenge.’⁶²

Usually this courage involved standing up to the Japanese guards and officers to protect their men. Beard wrote that at the ‘river’ (Kwai River) in Thailand, ‘brave and determined officers made a huge difference to our workload. The officers who stood up to the Japs were often beaten and, I guess those who did not stand up too well can be forgiven.’⁶³ While a prisoner of the Japanese Tom Fardy said of an officer that, ‘Bill Latham was exceptionally handy to us. He stood for us ... and got us in out of bad weather as much as possible.’⁶⁴

But many officers did not hold the respect of their men and their new situation did not help. One officer commented, ‘You were the boss and yet you weren’t the boss.’⁶⁵ Men turned to their Medical Officers (MOs), not trusting their combat officers, many of whom they believed had let them down. Beard described one MO as ‘a prince among men’ and of Bruce Hunt from Western Australia he wrote: ‘On the march he had already shown leadership, which was lacking in some of our combatant officers.’⁶⁶ Hearder argues that one reason for the MOs maintaining the respect of the men was because, in essence, their role never changed. ‘Their burdens were heavy in trying to save lives, yet the continuation in uniform of their civilian profession gave doctors an on-going sense of purpose, a consistent *raison d’etre*.’ She compares this to the aimlessness of combat officers in captivity. And Private Bill Flowers of the 2/9th Field Ambulance, in an interview with Hearder, commented that a distinction between medical units and fighting units became quickly apparent in captivity: ‘we carried on with the work we’d been trained to do, whereas the fighting units suddenly had nothing.’⁶⁷ In another interview, Richards also

62 Beard, *The Long Long Road*, p 71.

63 *ibid*, p 92.

64 Barratt, *We Were There*, p 286.

65 Peter Henning, *The Doomed Battalion, Mateship and Leadership in War and Captivity*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1995 (2/40th Bn), p 182.

66 Beard, *The Long Long Road*, p 91.

67 Rosalind Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive: Australian POW Doctors in Japanese Captivity*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2009, p 125.

commented on the officers, apart from medical personnel, saying that ‘all the other poor fellows were deprived of their responsibility and they just became a bunch of people.’⁶⁸

While these combat officers were not in a leadership role they were trained for, the situation at Changi tended to become similar to their role at a base camp in Australia in peace time. Many officers in the rear line in Australia and behind the front line fell into a lifestyle of officer privilege. This, too, happened in Changi. There was a difference, however, in that the privileges they protected for themselves in Changi were not just an added bonus of rank; they had the chance to save others’ lives if they shared these privileges with other ranks. They ‘earned’ more money from the Japanese than other ranks and they were given extra rations. They could, and usually did, refuse to go out on work parties and had more time and energy to grow vegetables or keep chickens. Ailsa Rolley wrote that on Ambon, Australian officers grew their own vegetable patch, and any other ranks found stealing from there were put in ‘the cage’.⁶⁹ Their maintenance of these privileges and at times their failure to share their extra pay and rations with other ranks, even with men who were desperately sick, was a cause of tension and resentment with the ranking soldiers. Vickers-Bush said, ‘We O.R.s (other ranks) were not nearly as well off as the officers, at no time did we get an issue of sugar or salt ... the only eggs that we got were age-old eggs preserved by sticky, black mud, and these we bought ourselves from the natives.’⁷⁰

Vickers-Bush claimed that some officers were sometimes found to be engaged in petty acts of greed and food hoarding.⁷¹ They were paid more and did not have to work for it. Peter Henning reported a soldier, Alf Williams, who said that the men thought ‘...that our officers with their special pay were able to live fairly well.’⁷² Henning added: ‘Ironically, the implementation of this (Japanese) policy probably made it harder for many officers to retain the respect of their

68 *ibid*, p 125.

69 Ailsa Rolley, *Survival on Ambon*, Beaudesert, Queensland: A. Rolley, c. 1994, as cited in Hearder, *Careers in Captivity*, p 111.

70 Beaumont, *Careers in Captivity*, p 237.

71 *ibid*, p 237.

72 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, p 158.

men, particularly in an environment which lacked the unity of leadership to impose a related general policy of equitable resource sharing, and in which abuses were obvious.⁷³

Hector McIntyre wrote with guarded bitterness in his diary in March, 1942, in reference to a discovery that officers had raided the food supply:

25/3/42 – found salmon rissoles in the officers' Mess

26/3/42 Who ate the 11 tins of salmon opened on the 25th?

After every parade now the Colonel of 2/29th gets a 'boo' from his men, as he is very unpopular.

McIntyre's private papers include a poem written about officers at Changi:

'Not mad just tropical'

The officers may have their fill

Of nectar from the whisky still

The sergeants booze enough to kill

A man that may be tropical

Not so the poor old rank and file

They dread our morals to defile

Lest grog our scattered with beguile

And this does drive us tropical.⁷⁴

Walsh wrote about the segregation of officers and men in Changi and the resentment that this caused. The officers were being housed in a separate building and although the Japanese were guarding the perimeter of Changi, the soldiers were still being administered under Australian Army Regulations:

One officer in particular attracted the ire of Skinny and his mates. The officer knew from the food that he saw that some men were breaking the rules. He confiscated four cans of bully beef after conducting

73 *ibid*, p 158.

74 Hector McIntyre, private papers, AWM PR03310.

a search of the building. This did not go down too well so it was decided to teach him a lesson ...

They procured a bucket and placed it over one of the boreholes of the latrines. It was not long before the bucket was half full. It was removed and Skinny and the men waited until nightfall. With a heave-ho the bucket was thrown through the window.⁷⁵

They actually got the padre!

But the problem for the other ranks was not simply about food and privilege. It was class distinction. Walsh made an interesting comment about a Major Shaw, CO of the 2/12th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers who, when addressing a work party to go into Singapore, told them to behave themselves with the Japanese. Walsh wrote: ‘... and he wanted to ensure that the remaining men in Changi were aware that all are **NOT** equal as POWs.’ (Walsh’s emphasis)⁷⁶ Walter Bird wrote in his diary in October, 1942: ‘One of the infantry lads went home sick and two of his pals wanted him to take their gear home. Up pipes Noel the officer and said, “You can’t do that, each man has to take their own gear home.” They are very charming.’⁷⁷

Henning blamed the maintenance of a class system for much of the tension and lack of respect that other ranks felt for their officers. He wrote that in Changi:

two principles seemed to guide every decision. One, to retain full divisional and regimental officers’ staffs pottering round achieving absolutely nothing useful at all in divisional and regimental officers: two, to preserve the Officers-Other Rank distinction by as many tactless and unnecessary orders as could be devised.

This latter was equally hard on both parties. It meant that officers could not freely mix with their friends who were ORs nor ORs with officers. It meant that ORs were compelled to salute officers whom they had seen cowering in terror at the bottom of a slit-trench as well as those who had done a good job. It meant that ORs were compulsorily stripped of their clothing which (at their own discretion and on their own backs) they had carried from Singapore seventeen miles out to Changi, so that these garments might be distributed to officers who – though they did not work – must, it was deemed, at all times be well dressed. It meant that officers, far from waiting till their men ate and then eating the same food themselves, ate – under orders – in a separate mess and usually before the men.

⁷⁵ Walsh, *Cry Crucify*, p 82.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p 83.

⁷⁷ Walter Bird, diary entry 8/10/42, AWM PR01417.

It meant that officers were allowed to keep poultry, ORs were not. It meant that there was fuel for an officers' club to cook light snacks, for the ORs there was not ... (All this) 'in order to preserve the class distinction'.⁷⁸

Many times the men would refuse to obey an order that enforced the officers' privilege. Nelson comments that:

Another aspect of conflict over priorities concerned POW officers having privileges over other prisoners. In the Australian army, enforced rank differentiation often diminished in captivity. Tom Morris and a group of lower rank Australians for example, disobeyed an order in Changi to build a separate eating mess for Australian officers, believing that it was unnecessary and unfair.⁷⁹

Another incident that highlights the intentional implementation of class difference between the officers and other ranks was Russell Braddon's story of the time when he and fresh inmates arrived in Changi from the Malayan camp of Purdu. They were lectured on discipline by a 'duty officer':

'All right, gentlemen, break off.'

So we broke off. Howls of rage. 'Gentlemen', it appeared, meant only officers, of whom there were just two in our midst: the remainder of us were emphatically *not*, he gave us to understand, gentlemen.⁸⁰

The men objected to this sense of class division. Braddon says that such class distinction included saluting officers and that officers were to be better dressed and fed, and fed separately from the men, to have fuel supplied for cooking and to keep poultry. He adds: 'All of which casts no reflections upon the officers concerned any more than it did upon the men. They were under orders ... to preserve the class distinction by privilege not based on responsibility.'⁸¹ For the other ranks, this was not in the tradition of the Anzac Legend that they had been brought up to believe.

78 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, p 154.

79 Nelson, *P.O.W. Prisoners of War*, p 234.

80 Braddon, *The Naked Island*, p 153-154.

81 *ibid*, p 154.

Another area of tension was racketeering and corruption in Changi. There are many instances when soldiers accused officers of being involved in rackets and unfair play. Private Glen Skewes wrote in his diary:

The Officers have robbed many chaps again with their money; but bigger and more obvious is their terrible daylight robbery of our Gualla Malacca (palm sugar) and oil and biscuits and some tinned fish which we were supposed to get. Oh yes! They had their 4 tins of fish, biscuits and plenty of Gualla and oil before other ranks could get theirs.⁸²

George Beard noted that other ranks were ordered at Changi to put all tinned food into a central reserve:

But on the very first day I was shocked when I realised not everyone supported this idealistic view. I observed a stack of tinned foods under one of our commissioned officer's beds, and demanded of his batman the reason (Yes – batman! Our officers retained batmen even in the shocking conditions experienced in the ill-fated F Force on the Burma Railway) ... Far from happy, indeed rather annoyed, I realised that some at least of our officers regarded themselves as more important than the men they commanded. It was then I made up my mind to do everything within my power to demand and ensure a fair go for myself and other ranks.⁸³

Private Ronald Harper wrote about officer corruption in a diary entry in 1942. Officers moved him and his group out of 'comfortable' quarters in Changi to make room for men with whom he claims they were profiteering. He wrote that the officers thought his group were 'too comfortable'. On the next day he wrote: 'Shifted to new quarters. Thompson now satisfied. Men cramped for room. Same man as mentioned before together with another of his profiteering mates shares larger room and porch.'⁸⁴ Walsh wrote about another incident of corruption and made the comment, 'a Pip and a Red Armband was a pass to a totally different Changi.'⁸⁵ According to Walsh, 'the officers turned a blind eye to those who were willing to sell to them (in

82Glen Skewes, diary entry, 4/10/43 from http://www.changidiary.com/changi_reflect.htm.

83 Beard, *The Long, Long Road*, p 71.

84 Ronald Harper, Diary entry 11/9/42, AWM PR03037.

85 Walsh, *Cry Crucify*, p 137.

the Black Market), but he who refused to sell to them were soon shown that all men were NOT equal in Changi.⁸⁶

Privilege extended to the production and sharing of food. There was not enough room at Changi for every soldier or all groups to grow vegetables or raise chickens. Also, since many able bodied other ranks were taken from the camp to work on the Changi aerodrome in 1943 and 1944, only officers had the opportunity to grow vegetables and raise chickens. When these activities clashed with soldiers' ways of finding extra food, they were upset. Braddon illustrates this point with an anecdote about snails and the officers' poultry. Officers issued a command that:

'O.R.s must not in future eat snails and any snails they do bring back must be surrendered to the officers' poultry farm.' The Reason: The officers' poultry were dying for the lack of just such proteins as snails provide, and from the officers' poultry a percentage of the eggs was supplied to the hospital. We however made a lightning calculation of the number of poultry meals enjoyed by the commissioned men: of the minute fraction of the total number of hospital patients who – snails or no snails to the officers' chooks – received eggs; and of the undoubted beneficial effect upon our own scabby legs and weeping scrotums of snail eating. In the uproarious gale of laughter we rejected the order as absurd.⁸⁷

Not all of the officers in Changi should be placed in the same category. Some earned the respect and affection of their men. Henning wrote: 'As in Java the officers who retained authority and the respect of the men were those who had the moral and physical courage to persist in their efforts to help others.'⁸⁸ An example is related by Walsh who describes a Captain Bourne who was put in charge of a work party outside of the walls of Changi prison:

The selected group of sappers were quite happy with the appointment of Captain Bourne, whom they all considered was a quiet, efficient officer, who had proved himself during the (Malayan) campaign. Moreover, they respected him for his record of not placing any Sapper on a charge sheet, although his opportunities were many.⁸⁹

86 *ibid*, p 137.

87 Braddon, *The Naked Island*, p 248.

88 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, pp 207-208.

89 Walsh, *Cry Crucify*, p 83.

Sid King said of Captain ‘Roaring’ Reg Newton that despite his noise and military bluster, ‘he was a nice fella.’⁹⁰ This opinion of Newton has been echoed by other POWs. William Parker related an occasion when his party walked into a camp at Tampi, on the Burma-Thailand Railway.

As we were marched into camp we could hear “Roaring Reggie Newton” addressing his men. Apparently they had been at Tonshon and made it into a very clean camp and had to leave it and move to Tampi. We were given Tonshon camp. We had a force of about 300, mostly English, a number of Dutch and us, 28 Australians. We sang out to Reggie, ‘Can you hear me in the rear?’, which was a catch phrase of his. He came and welcomed us (28 Australians) like his lost children. He was a very good officer.⁹¹

Lieutenant Colonel ‘Black Jack’ Galleghan, though a tough disciplinarian and stickler for military rule and appearance, earned the respect of many of his men. He is an interesting example of a combat officer who proved himself in battle in the short Malayan campaign before the fall of Singapore and so earned the respect of the men who served under him. In January 1942 he led a successful ambush of Japanese soldiers in Gemas in Malaya, earning the Distinguished Service Order.⁹² It seems that other ranks were willing to tolerate his military discipline and this stickler for form and appearance because they recognized that it contributed to their survival, and they considered him to be fair.

John Tanner, a Changi veteran said of him: ‘Changi was the best camp we’d been in, mainly because it was under Colonel Galleghan. He’d never been subservient to the Japs and had a much better control than the administration of any of the camps we were in, in Java. Even the Jap guards saluted him ...’⁹³ Heckendorf liked Galleghan, who, he said, ‘... had a great asset in the fact that he never berated a member of the OR – other ranks – on parades. He always berated their officer (for letting it get to that stage) ...’ Heckendorf reported that when Galleghan saw the remnants of his own 2/30th Battalion return to

90 Sid King, interview, 15/3/11.

91 Lt. Col. Peter Winstanley, ‘Prisoners of War of the Japanese 1942-1945’, <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/67.htm>.

92 <http://www.awm.gov.au/people/P10676243/>.

93 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, p 277.

Changi after work on the Railway, he openly wept.⁹⁴ It might be pointed out, though, that Galleghan was not always appreciated by his fellow officers and ‘Weary’ Dunlop had a falling out with him over the power of MOs who were not technically senior enough to assume command over combat officers.⁹⁵

There were soldiers who criticized Galleghan’s style. Russell Braddon said that he was ‘conceited and vain’, a man who would become ‘quite hysterical if he were denied by anyone’.⁹⁶ His second in command, Lt Colonel N. McG. Johnston, said that his impact on others was ‘... not always an impact of admiration, often it was quite hostile, but the man’s very personality left no room for half measures.’⁹⁷ Cyril Gilbert said the Japanese respected him because he showed real strength.⁹⁸ Galleghan’s determination to maintain the sense of an army, although in captivity, and to maintain strict military appearance and form upset some of the men at Changi, as we have seen with his administration of the camp’s resources, especially food, and the maintenance of officer privilege.

Evidence from accounts of Australian POWs imprisoned by the Japanese in Changi reveals a difference between their view of officers in general on the one hand and of particular officers on the other. They are happy to praise the attitudes and behavior of individual officers, but there is a great deal of criticism about officers in general because of their perceived greed and protection of privileges.

In the Bag – the Camps

Most of the Australians herded into Changi in February 1942 remained there for some months. From Changi many were organized into ‘forces’ that were sent off to various work camps in

94 Erwin Heckendorf, interview, AWM S763.

95 Sue Ebury, *Weary: The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop*, Sydney, Penguin, 1995, pp 370-372.

96 Nelson, *POW*, p 34.

97 Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War*, p 316.

98 Forbes, *Hellfire*, p 242.

Southeast Asia or Japan. The notorious Burma-Thailand Railway was one project on which they worked. These camps would see a serious deterioration of their living and working conditions and it is here that the majority of the men who were to die in Japanese captivity lost their lives through disease, malnutrition, overwork or cruelty. These conditions would test the mettle of all allied POWs more than Changi would ever do and they would test the sense of mateship amongst the Australian POWs as well as the courage of their officers. The difference between Changi and the work camps is illustrated by a diary entry from Stan Arneil of the 2/30th Battalion. He wrote on returning to Changi from the Burma-Thailand Railway, 'We arrived here last night at 1 am and were bedded down in new huts at Changi at 4 am. We have at last fallen into a prisoner's paradise.'⁹⁹ If Changi was a 'prisoner's paradise', the work camps must have been truly atrocious.

Many officers, especially MOs, were praised in later years by their men. But some officers failed the test. For many survivors of the slave labour camps, it only confirmed in their minds the poor opinion they had of officers, especially combat officers, from the capitulation in 1942. Beard wrote that 'men of the "other ranks" myself included, were unhappy with the performance of some of our combatant officers, especially on the Thai-Burma Railway. We all knew that whereas the other ranks died in their thousands, deaths of commissioned officers were few and far between.'¹⁰⁰ In many units such as the 2/19th Battalion, the senior officers were separated out and sent to Japan to be imprisoned separately or remained in Changi.¹⁰¹ Junior officers were often left to supervise the men and represent them to their captors. According to Walsh, when the 'forces' like 'G Force' were sent away from Changi, they took only junior ranked officers, from Major down. These officers often felt alienated and unwanted in the groups of other ranks, although some rose to the occasion and showed courage and strength.

George Beard noted that junior officers usually had to confront Japanese soldiers when accounting for cases of sickness with their men and not reporting for duty. Some showed firm

99 AWM PR88/076, Stan Arneil, diary entry, 21/12/43.

100 Beard, *The Long Road*, p 161.

101 Newton, *The Grim Glory*, p 528.

resolve standing up to Japanese soldiers.¹⁰² In some units, according to Walsh, it was the NCOs who took over the day-to-day running of the men, including the organization and the rostering of work parties. To some, they were the true leaders and the heroes.¹⁰³ Beaumont supports this idea by pointing out that NCOs were seen as the real leaders. They lived with the other ranks, ate the same rations and led them on their work parties.¹⁰⁴ To others, it was the MOs who were the leaders and life savers. According to Silver, however, not all NCOs behaved admirably. At Sandakan, after nearly all the officers had been removed to Kuching, the NCOs formed a committee to administer their men. Silver wrote that with a few notable exceptions, the NCOs ‘... succeeded in making themselves most unpopular.’¹⁰⁵ Some did this by ‘currying favour’ with the Japanese, hoarding supplies and committing the crime of Lieutenant Colonel Scott at Hainan, handing over men to the Japanese for punishment.¹⁰⁶ There is an interesting disparity of opinion in the writing of the history of Sandakan. One of the survivors, Warrant Officer Bill Sticpewich, has been described by the popular historian, Paul Ham, as ‘decisive and daring’. Ham said he was a ‘raffish fixer and consummate wheeler-dealer,’ with the ‘smarts of Milo Minderbinder, the memory of an elephant and the survival instincts of Flashman.’¹⁰⁷ Silver, on the other hand, says that he had a ‘cosy relationship with the enemy’ that other POWs saw as ‘tantamount to collaboration’.¹⁰⁸ She claims that after their rescue at the end of the war, one of the other six survivors, Bill Moxham, wanted to ‘tear Sticpewich apart... None of those outside the POW circle could ever hope to understand the depth of resentment Sticpewich had engendered among many of his fellow prisoners.’¹⁰⁹

But Silver’s view of NCOs at Sandakan seems to be unusual. Most saw NCOs as the natural leaders, while officers came in for serious criticism by many veterans. One of the curious comments that arises from veterans is that, on the Burma Railway, officers were not seen a lot. Those who stayed at the camps on the Burma Railway became more distant from the men.

102 Beard, *The Long Road*, p 71.

103 Walsh, *Cry Crucify*, p 137.

104 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 143.

105 Silver, *Sandakan*, p 175.

106 *ibid*, p 175.

107 Paul Ham, *The Untold Story of the Sandakan Death Marches of the Second World War*, Sydney, Heinemann, 2012, pp 68-9. Note: Milo Minderbinder was the corrupt black market dealer in Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* while Harry Flashman was the villainous school bully in Thomas Arnold’s *Tom Brown Schooldays* and later became the key character in George McDonald Frazer’s *Flashman* series of novels, published by between 1969 and 2005.

108 Silver, *Sandakan*, p 175.

109 *ibid*, pp 276-277.

Railway veteran Dennis Scanlon reminisces that, 'You'd never see much of the officers. You didn't have much contact with them because you were out working early in the morning and not back until night.'¹¹⁰ Heckendorf said that some were active but 'others we never saw – they took the line of least resistance.'¹¹¹ And Sid King, who worked on the Railway, could not recall many officers there or in Japan: 'On the Railway we had still only just the odd officer, that's all. Lieutenant Sanderson and Captain Newton; they were the only officers I knew with us up on the railway.'¹¹²

One of the reasons that the men saw little of their officers on the Railway and in Japan was that there were fewer of them than in Changi, and the officers rarely went on work parties. Sid King said that 'our officers never went out on those jobs at all. They had the cooks staying back. (The officers) wouldn't go out on those jobs at all. All the Japs wanted was the labour. They didn't really care about it.'¹¹³ But many were very irate and felt that the officers weren't carrying their weight. Barrett quotes a Victorian POW who

... declared his officers useless, with very few exceptions. They kept away from the men on working parties, but were very much around in the compound when the Japanese were few ... We used to say that when the war was over the officers would have to have an operation to get the bed from their backs. They did not have to work but they had better rations. The junior officers who came from the ranks used to say they were not *allowed* to work, but they built up resentment among the men.¹¹⁴

On Ambon, Maric Gilbert claims that one of the reasons why the officers would not go on work parties was that they faced more chance of humiliation at the hands of the Japanese: 'During the early days of the work parties one of our officers would accompany each party, but after one or two were humiliated by having their face slapped in front of the men, Westely ruled that, in future, an NCO would act as leader of each work party.'¹¹⁵ Similarly, Scott stopped officers from going on work parties on Hainan.

110 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, p 208.

111 Erwin Heckendorf, interview, AWM S763.

112 Sid King, interview, 15/3/11.

113 Sid King, interview, 15/3/11.

114 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 205.

115 Maric Gilbert, AWM PR03121.

Barrett does add the point that it was not possible for many officers to go out on work parties.¹¹⁶ It was forbidden by international convention (The Hague Convention of 1907) and the Japanese expected them to remain in camp and organise camp life and arrange work rosters. Some officers became too keen on this part of the job which caused resentment with the other ranks. Walter Bird wrote: 'Major Moulton is reported to have said to the Japs: 'If you tell me what amount of work is to be done, the following morning we can arrange it all at camp and send up the men knowing what they have to do and so, get to work and save time.' All the lads are sour as hell.'¹¹⁷ James Armstrong had a similar complaint about Lieutenant Colonel Scott volunteering the men for work: 'Today our C.O. was heard ask the Japs if they had some work for his men to do, because they did nothing else but eat and sleep. He is going off his head.'¹¹⁸

Officers who did go on work parties were 'one of the boys', popular and respected.¹¹⁹ According to Beaumont, being 'one of the boys' was 'another commonly articulated criterion for a "good officer" and possibly the key to personal authority in the AIF.'¹²⁰ Henning argues, '... there seems no doubt that the real authority of those who accepted the daily rigours of responsibility with work parties increased substantially, outstripping the nominal authority of officers in all except a few instances.' These were often NCOs such as Warrant Officer Reg Hay who, one NCO told Henning, '... was better than any officer'. This was because of his example and effort in combat up to the fall of Singapore and in the camps after that.¹²¹ Beaumont supported this position when she wrote that: 'It was the NCOs who supervised the working parties in the latter months of the war, who shared the huts with the men and who came from similar class backgrounds.' This, she says 'challenges the romantic myth that the AIF was somehow different from other armies.'¹²² Beaumont reports that Scott negotiated early on with

116 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 205.

117 Walter Bird, diary entry 10/10/42, AWM PR01417.

118 AWM PR89/165, James Armstrong, diary, 12/11/42.

119 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 187.

120 *ibid*, p 143.

121 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, p 208.

122 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 143.

the Japanese Area Commander at Hainan in 1942 to allow the officers to remain in camp and grow vegetables rather than go out on work parties.¹²³

There is no uniform experience of officers working or not working under Japanese captivity. Paul Kratoska wrote that, 'Very large numbers of officers were compelled, for long periods, to do manual labour (principally on the Thailand-Moulmein Railway) whilst the remainder did administrative jobs inside the camps. The Japanese declared policy was that all officers must work.'¹²⁴ However, as has been mentioned earlier, Scott negotiated for his officers at Hainan not to work, and many soldiers from across the whole of Japanese captivity reported that their officers did not work, something many found unsatisfactory. Lynette Silver wrote that at Sandakan, officers in B Force were not required to work.¹²⁵ But there were officers who lacked, whether fairly or unfairly, the respect of the men when they did not go on work parties. Henning wrote that:

From the time that the Sparrow Force men arrived at Kinsayok jungle camp, if not before, the fact that officers were not required by the Japanese to supervise work parties but were responsible for general camp administration, meant that an increasing division grew between officers and the men.¹²⁶

As well as dissatisfaction with the officers over the question of work parties, other ranks found fault with officers' privilege. Hearder wrote that:

Richards said that while his CO was an excellent leader who never let officers accept privileges over other men, he was in the minority. Of those officers who did expect privileges because of rank, Richards said 'there were other camps where some of the senior officers took privileges, got better food. Disgraceful conduct, and the only people in the camp willing to look after not only the sick, but also the well blokes, were the doctors.'¹²⁷

123 *ibid*, p 157.

124 Paul Kratoska, Paul, *POW Labour: Allied Prisoners of War on the Railway*, London, Routledge, 2006, p 95.

125 Silver, Sandakan, p58.

126 Henning, *The Doomed Battalions*, p 206.

127 Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive*, p 133.

Beaumont points out some officers had trouble because they had already ‘proved’ their incompetence.¹²⁸ ‘The dilemma for the officers, then, was to discover in this situation, which was very different from any for which they had been trained, the skills required to demonstrate their competence and retain their men’s respect.’¹²⁹

Both Beaumont and Ross explore the nature of military leadership under POW conditions. In Chapter 1, I cited Beaumont and Ross’s distinction between formal authority that derives from the organisations and the power it gives to those up the hierarchy and informal authority that derives from the personal characteristics of the leader.¹³⁰ In the army, not only officers but other men could gain informal authority if their personalities generated that kind of respect. The soldiers of the Second AIF, following on from their understanding of the Anzac Legend, respected informal authority. If formal and informal authority could be married, as in the case of Lieutenant George Mitchell in the First World War or captain John Hooke on Ambon in the Second World War, the position of leadership was at its most influential.¹³¹

An officer might have problems in enforcing formal authority in a POW camp because normal sanctions like demotion, docking pay, or denying leave, could not be used. Extra work and reducing rations would threaten a man’s life and had moral and material implications. Beaumont lists three alternate, radical sanctions: corporal punishment, detention or handing over to be punished by Japanese authorities. Beaumont calls these ‘controversial measures, very much in conflict with the traditions of the AIF.’ These punishments were handed out by men, some of whom were considered to be cowards anyway. Major Macrae on Ambon had to command the Regimental Sergeant Major to order the men to dress, such was the state of disrespect for some leading officers in the 2/21st Battalion and the heightened status of the NCOs.¹³² From the 2/21st Battalion’s experience, when officers were not respected and could not or would not provide the required leadership, others would step in, as Beaumont argues,¹³³ as they did on the battlefields

128 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 59.

129 *ibid*, p 95.

130 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 95 and Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 89.

131 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 268.

132 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 95.

133 *ibid*, p143

of the Western Front or Bardia. Nevertheless, there was disappointment and bitterness when officers were judged as not living up to the Anzac tradition, and in Japanese prison camps many officers evidently found it difficult or impossible to behave according to standards developed in the context of battle.

When officers protected their privileges they were bound to attract the anger and resentment of the men. Barrett wrote that, ‘... it was from ... the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps that some men emerged with an eradicable contempt for their officers.’¹³⁴ One man from the 2/18th Battalion told Barrett that:

relations between the usual run of officers and men in his POW days were poor because, while there was no promotion or increase in pay for anyone else, his captain became a major, retained a batman so that he could be kept in the station of life to which he had become accustomed, and was notorious for putting men on charges. The officers’ better rations did not prevent an Army Service Corps captain pilfering from stores. Nor was that captain punished when his stealing was detected and a group of men petitioned for something to be done about it; on the contrary their own officers forced them to withdraw the petition or be charged with mutiny.¹³⁵

This same man also reported that he ‘saw officers supplied with a covered waterproof dugout while the men slept in a morass, unprotected; and the best he could say was that when his stretcher was coveted by an officer, and a WO was told to get it, the WO refused to do so.’¹³⁶

What might be a worse example was an incident described by Heckendorf:

The officers got better conditions than we got. They – where there was quite a lot of ill-feeling when there was a – as I said, there was only one small portion covered in the huts. And the officers took that and kicked the men out of it. And when they got the new attap¹³⁷ on some of the other huts the officers kicked them out of that and went in there. And it caused a certain amount of resentment and ill-feeling.¹³⁸

Beard also reported an incident around the same time with the 2/30th Battalion when at No.1 Camp on the Railway. When a gale blew the roof off the men’s hut some men camped in heavy rain under the officers’ hut. ‘A junior officer yelled out, “Get out from under there, you are only

134 Barrett, *We Were There*, pp 204-205.

135 *ibid*, pp 205-206.

136 *ibid*, p 206.

137 Attap is a palm that is used in South East Asia to build dwellings.

138 Erwin Heckendorf, interview, AWMS763.

listening to what the officers are saying”. He (the soldier) told him in extremely coarse words where to go.¹³⁹ In another incident Beard describes the self-interested actions of officers when Beard was asked to give up his mosquito net to cover exposed food to stop cholera spreading. Following the officers’ request he exposed himself to mosquito-borne diseases. He wrote: ‘How shocked I was a few days later when I visited the officers’ hut, to observe they all slept under a huge net big enough to protect thirty or so. I felt betrayed.’¹⁴⁰

An interesting comparison can be made of these two reports with a report written by a post-war CMF officer, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Winstanley,¹⁴¹ based on notes of F-Force officers who survived. In this account, as in officer-written unit histories from the Second World War who find nothing to criticise, there is no mention of batmen or stealing huts from other ranks. The officers are portrayed as self-sacrificing and hard-working. There is no doubt that many of them were giving up their pay, volunteering to replace sick men in work parties, supervising work parties and maintaining hygiene in the camps. But one cannot ignore the criticisms of soldiers such as Heckendorf. He diplomatically said that ‘while I don’t hold any resentment, and most coves don’t, some of the officers ... did take protection from their - the position, and survived. There were no officer casualties of course on F-Force and that indicates probably what I say is right.’¹⁴²

The result of officer privilege could be seen in the condition of men returning to Changi from the northern camps in 1943. Nelson wrote ‘there was an observable difference’ between officers and other ranks: ‘The officers might be two stone heavier (approximately 13 kgs) (and) were likely to be standing in boots and uniforms while the other prisoners, after weeks of working in all weathers, were barefoot and dressed in G-strings and tattered shorts.’¹⁴³ Hearder stated, ‘(MO) Captain Victor Brand similarly commented on differences in physique: “when men were having a shower, you could easily tell who were the men and who were the officers ... the men were

139 Beard, *The Long, Long Road*, pp 90-91.

140 *ibid*, p 92.

141 Peter Winstanley, ‘Prisoners of War of the Japanese 1942-1945, The Story of “F” Force’, <http://www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/102.html>.

142 Erwin Heckendorf, interview, AWMS763.

143 Nelson, *Prisoners of War*, p 59.

usually shorter, stunted, less muscular and so on, you could see the difference – a very great difference”’.¹⁴⁴

Having the privilege of being an officer while a POW improved your chances of survival. These statistics from Beaumont give ample evidence that in the 2/21st Battalion the costs of imprisonment were not shared equally between officers and other ranks:

Rank	Ambon			Hainan		
	Number initially in detention	Number of deaths	Percentage of men of that rank who died in captivity	Number initially in detention	Number of deaths	Percentage of men of that rank who died in captivity
Colonel & Major	1	0	6%	2	0	0%
Captain & Lieutenant	21	4 (bombs)	19%	12	0	0%
NCO	103	64	62.1%	43	6	14%
Private	404	304	75.2%	204	56	27.5

(Source: Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 212)

She concluded: ‘Nonetheless it had to be conceded that the differential death rates demonstrate the shallowness of the meaning of egalitarianism within at least this unit of the AIF.’¹⁴⁵

It should be noted that combat officers bore a disproportionate rate of the casualties in the fighting before capitulation. For example, in the 2/29th Battalion, 361 men died during captivity, which included only two officers, or 0.6 per cent of the deaths, compared to 21 percent officer mortality rate in the Malaya campaign.¹⁴⁶ For many, this did not compensate for their behaviour as POWs. As one veteran Bill Fardy wrote in his diary: ‘The officers ought to be ashamed to

¹⁴⁴ Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive*, p 135.

¹⁴⁵ Beaumont, *Gull Force*, pp 212-213.

¹⁴⁶ Hank Nelson, ‘A Bowl of Rice for Seven Camels’, from *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 1989, No 14, p 36.

look men in the face. The rations they get is a damned disgrace. Tonight they had their stew bowls overflowing as usual, but we have the same bowl half full.’¹⁴⁷

The situation in Ambon and Hainan with the 2/21st Battalion illustrates one of the worst POW experiences for Australians under Japanese captivity. Under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Scott, the Australians suffered high casualty rates as Table 2 illustrates. It was in the 2/21st Battalion that some of the worst relations between officers and other ranks were seen. Beaumont attributes a lot of the blame to class differentiation:

no matter how predictable it may have been, the social differentiation between the officers and the other ranks within 2/21st Gull Force meant that when they became prisoners of war in February, 1942, the tensions which captivity naturally created between them were accentuated by differences in class.¹⁴⁸

Beaumont’s study of Gull Force examines the variety of relationships that existed between officers and other ranks in the 2/21st Battalion under these conditions. There were some excellent officers who served with this battalion. In particular, Captain John Hooke, who died in an Allied air raid in February 1943, earned the respect and affection of his men. But there were those officers such as Scott and Westley. A Commission of Inquiry after the war found that: ‘there was a lack of leadership displayed by Major Westley.’¹⁴⁹ Westley’s form of disciplining the men was ‘the boob’ or ‘the cage’, a two meter square open cage.¹⁵⁰ Westley could not go to post-war reunions because of ‘the Boob’. Such ‘cages’, like the one in Kuching, were, according to the men, a crime against mateship.¹⁵¹

Scott became infamous for handing over men to the Japanese for punishment. In particular there was the case of Private Lewis Roy who was punished for using the showers at a time officers were rostered to use them. He was handed over to the Japanese and severely beaten by them and later died from the effects. James Armstrong cites another occasion when Scott handed over men to the Japanese. He wrote in his diary: ‘Some of the boys disobeyed an order and the C.O.

147 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 268.

148 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 29.

149 *ibid*, pp 145-146.

150 *ibid*, p 146.

151 Rolley, *Survival on Ambon*, p111, as cited in Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 149.

handed them over to the Japs, and they put an electric current on them, wet their feet so they would get it properly.’¹⁵² According to Beaumont, these punishments, including handing men to the Japanese, were offensive because officers ‘should command less by means of formal sanctions than by virtue of their own strength of personality and the respect this earned them.’¹⁵³ Beaumont said of Scott: ‘they despised him with a venom that was to last through the rest of their captivity and well after the war.’¹⁵⁴

Another officer who reported Australian soldiers for punishment was Major George Cook at Sandakan who, in July 1944, failing to get the respect from his men at Sandakan that he felt he deserved, began to report breaches of discipline to the camp’s commander Captain Susimi Hoshijima. Cook and some of his men were almost at war with each other. One man, Keith Botterill, who eventually survived the Sandakan ‘Death March’, was accused with two others of stealing the officers’ ducks for which he was given seven days in ‘the cage’. According to Silver, along with other men at Sandakan such as Privates Len Annear and James Bowe, they spent more time in the cage than out of it.¹⁵⁵

Scott was a stickler for discipline. Lieutenant Green, a junior officer in the battalion thought that ‘Scott seized upon what were isolated incidents, giving them an exaggerated importance and the battalion as a whole an unwarranted reputation for lack of discipline.’¹⁵⁶ Beaumont says that Regimental orders do not show a disproportionate number of discipline offences.¹⁵⁷ She cast doubts on the need for Scott’s disciplinary regime, and in an interesting illustration of the Anzac tradition, 17 platoon, the same men who were in trouble for poor discipline in Darwin, voted unanimously to attack the enemy when faced with poor leadership in the face of the Japanese invasion in early 1942.¹⁵⁸ Lieutenant Colin McCutcheon told Beaumont, ‘the ranks “never felt they had a friend in their CO”’.¹⁵⁹

152 James Armstrong, diary 11/5/43. AWM 89/165.

153 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 149.

154 *ibid*, p 182.

155 Silver, *Sandakan*, p 176.

156 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 23.

157 *ibid*, p 23.

158 *ibid*, p 53.

159 *ibid*, p 97.

The situation with the 2/21st Battalion reveals the contradictions of egalitarianism and mateship.

Beaumont argues:

Although they did not articulate it in these words, these ex-prisoners were in effect confirming the reality for them of the Anzac code of egalitarianism. They were criticising their officers for failing in a situation which resembled the frontline more than barracks life, to behave as if all members of Gull Force were of equal rank ... Of course, it might be said that such a situation is perfectly normal in hierarchical military organisations, but it challenges the romantic myth that the AIF was somehow different from other armies and characterised by Monash's 'wonderful understanding' between ranks.¹⁶⁰

Conflict in relationships occurred on Ambon in regard to the growing of vegetables. The officers tended a vegetable garden while the men were away on work parties, 'appropriating' plots originally developed by other ranks. Maric Gilbert wrote that 'The officers were then rarely seen, sticking to their own designated area, declared out of bounds to other ranks. They even appropriated plots which had been established by a small group of fellows after much intensive labour, an action which did nothing to diminish feelings of resentment against officers as a group.'¹⁶¹ The men had their own back by resorting to 'bandicooting' the officers' garden by secretly cutting the roots out and sticking the top back into the ground.¹⁶² Such was the state of relationships between the officers and the other ranks in the 2/21st Battalion.

The question of officers not sharing privileges with the other ranks troubled many officers. After a discussion by officers about the need to share their higher wages and rations and finding strong opposition from some, British Army Lieutenant Colonel Laurens van de Post walked out of a meeting,

in almost the lowest frame of mind imaginable and disgusted at the light in which Australian officers had been shown. Imagine, after a clear statement of the miserable health of the troops and low

160 *ibid*, pp 142-143.

161 Maric Gilbert, AWM PR03121.

162 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 118.

finances, to hear a discussion by officers to whether they would give the help required. Where is the principle “my horse, my men, myself”? The leadership in this thing is disgusting.¹⁶³

Edward (Weary) Dunlop later expressed shame when the smaller contingent of British officers in the camp raised more money and threatened to split their camp away from the AIF camp if things did not improve.¹⁶⁴ The men were quick to see division amongst the officers, as Walter Bird observed: ‘Comradeship does not even exist among the officers. The other night some fritters full of meat were handed to them from the Japs. The Medical Officer and a few others missed. Yes, it’s a great business, the American gangsters have nothing on these brutes. No wonder the AIF stinks.’¹⁶⁵

In Japan, Gerald Rosenberg kept a diary. Again, the issue was food and this was a problem later in their captivity when it might have been imagined that lessons had been learnt. A series of entries shows that the Australian officers’ greed and sense of self-importance caused problems with the rank and file in Japan, as well. In this case the men resorted to embarrassing their officers in front of the Japanese.

Mid 1944: We have in our midst a bunch of individuals who have not as yet, after 2 ½ years captivity, realised that they are prisoners of war ... They look on their life as though they should have all the amenities and comforts of a former life.

28th Sunday – should be a day of rest but the place is in uproar ... To top it off news of an unequal and inequitable division of Red Cross goods to officers alone.

1st. (Wednesday) – Further repercussions on the Red Cross issue. Working parties were issued with M&V (meat and veg) at the rate of 5 men to 1 tin. This was refused by the men and returned en masse with a covering letter to the source of supply, thereby showing the officers up ... This places them in a very bad light.¹⁶⁶

It should be noted, however, that there were combat officers who showed great courage and selflessness and earned the respect of other ranks. There are testimonials to these officers from the men they led. Tom Uren said in 1996 on the ABC:

163 Ebury, *Weary: the Life of Sir Edward Dunlop*, p 350.

164 *ibid*, p 351.

165 Walter Bird, diary entry, 3/6/43, AWM PR01417.

166 Gerald Rosenberg, AWM MSS1737.

I think Leggatt remained the CO at Timor and once we were in prison camp I think that there was certainly some discipline there, and I think some leadership, 'cause everybody respected Leggatt, and certainly respected the officers of the 2nd 40th battalion.¹⁶⁷

J.G. Mellor related an occasion when a Lieutenant Mansfield intervened for a POW who was being bashed by a Japanese guard nick-named 'Hunchback', taking a severe beating himself.¹⁶⁸ This was often the consequence of an officer stepping in to protect his men. It could be the case that they were to engender criticism no matter what their actions were. Many men spoke well of Captain Hooke who died on Ambon. Arthur Deakin said, 'he was so good, even the Japanese respected him. When he was killed the Japanese saluted him. He would stand no nonsense from the Japanese. No other officer commanded Japanese respect.' Leo Manning praised him by saying that, 'he was very honest for a start, a very upright man. He had that knack of looking someone in the eye when talking to him ... He was a gentleman ... He wasn't aggressive. He was a very straightforward sort of man and it would come out, even when he was playing basketball. He would join in, you could iron him out and he'd still get up.'¹⁶⁹ The death of Hooke was a tragedy for the men on Ambon because he was seen to provide true leadership and was contrasted with men such as Scott and Westley, who were seen to fail the Anzac Legend.

An officer's ability to handle the Japanese was the prime consideration in the eyes of the men in captivity. This could be pure physical courage by taking the blows or being more devious than the Japanese, or using skills of diplomacy. Expected to show courage, combat officers were not trained in the other two skills and it took an extraordinary man to lead under the conditions of a POW camp. Also, while the Anzac Legend was built on men enduring hardship and defeat, it was not built on the image of men in captivity. This was new ground for both the officers and their men. Henning summarises that:

... there was also a vast range of behavior exhibited by officers, from the self-sacrificing commitment to the benefit of others, which earned the life-long respect of other POWs, and came close to representing the ideal espoused in the mateship tradition, to something less than that. The essence of egalitarianism in an officer's practice is clearly demonstrated in the written comments of a member of

167 <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/uren/interview3.html>.

168 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 268.

169 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 107.

the 2/40th Battalion soon after his return to Tasmania in 1945, in which he refers to Trevor Sharman.

The ex-prisoner wrote:

‘Sharman’s behavior was always in accordance with the highest ideals of an officer and a gentleman. On many occasions he intervened between the Japanese guards and our soldiers often with success, often taking heavy punishment as a result. Out of his meagre pay as a POW officer he gave away 90% to sick men so that they could buy extra food. He has earned the highest respect of the men under his command and it is with the greatest pleasure that I who have much to thank him for learn that he is safely at home.’¹⁷⁰

Sid King, who knew few officers in the camps, spoke of one of them:

Captain Sanderson was with us all the way through. He was a really nice fella. After the railway I finished later up in Japan; I worked in a copper mine. Towards the end, we wasn’t (sic) allowed to keep anything. Anyhow, the few things I had, Lieutenant Sanderson kept them for me until the war finished. When the war finished he give (sic) them back to me. That’s the way it was.¹⁷¹

Braddon said of his officers on Pudu where they had been locked up in a confined cell in an attempt by the Japanese to force the men to sign a no-escape document:

They were a good lot, those men, we felt a closeness to and affection for them, which no amount of subsequent regimentation in other camps could destroy. They ate our food: lived our lives: worked with us and – in our leisure moments – talked and played with us. They were, or became, men anyone would have been happy to follow – which was not always, in those difficult days, to be the case ... the officers themselves ate their food last and only ate when they were sure that every one of the men had received his ration – a point of military etiquette which I saw in no other camp and which speaks volumes for the calibre of the officers we had with us at Kuala Lumpur.¹⁷²

This was in contrast to the situation, already described by Braddon, when he arrived in Changi and saw a marked separation of officers and other ranks where officers were ‘gentlemen’ and treated in a different way by senior commanders.’¹⁷³

Header interviewed many medical officers and they gave a variety of reactions to the performance of combat officers in captivity. MO Roy Mills praised the CO of the 2/29th

170 Henning, *The Doomed Battalion*, pp 306-307.

171 Sid King, interview, 15/2/12.

172 Braddon, *The Naked Island*, pp 116-118.

173 Silver, *Sandakan*, pp 26-27.

Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Pond, who he said ‘was on the job every day, witnessing what was happening to the men under his control, making appropriate protests at every opportunity, instilling faith in those who served under him.’ Hearder says that:

Several Australian officers joined work parties to save sick men from working, some organised rotation of men in a particular job to ensure fair distribution of the workload, protested on behalf of the men on work parties and often stood between the men and their violent guards. This was not common practice among British personnel.¹⁷⁴

But the greater body of evidence from other ranks is critical of their officers. Many officers were not prepared for the conditions and moral testing that a POW situation might bring and if an officer measured up to the standards of the Anzac Legend, as the men would have expected, he was loved and respected. If he fell short he was criticised and shunned.

Medical Officers

It has already been argued that MOs had a role in captivity that gave them more purpose and a sense of continuity from their previous roles, whereas combat officers lost their role and identity and had to re-establish their position amongst the troops. There is almost universal praise for MOs from POW veterans. Hearder says that MOs ‘assumed a position of power far outweighing their normal military role,’ and that ‘it is not unusual to hear ex-POWs describe their doctors as “gods”.’¹⁷⁵ Barrett received the strong impression that POWs had high regard for their MOs. ‘Some POWs were bitter about their officers (but) among the POWs the doctors usually won high praise.’¹⁷⁶

An MO’s role was already one which lent itself to informal authority. MOs did not have to maintain a high sense of discipline, as combat officers did. They were invariably referred to as

174 Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive*, p 136.

175 Hearder, *Careers in Captivity*, p 19-20.

176 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 199.

‘Doc’ by the men, regardless of their rank and they could move between the men and the officers easily and informally. They had more to offer the Japanese because of their skills and so earned the respect of the Japanese more easily and often could gain more concessions from them, even if it meant pain to themselves. Hearder says, ‘POW medical officers seemed to have the ability to juggle their various roles according to their professional code, one minute “one of the men”, commiserating with their patients and trying to keep their spirits buoyed, and the next, ministering to Japanese and Korean men, considering them just another patient they felt duty-bound to treat.’¹⁷⁷ Captain Lloyd Cahill described his role as ‘a father confessor and mother and everything else.’¹⁷⁸

Tributes for MOs from men long after the war are numerous. Braddon wrote of MO Kevin Fagan, who, when he was lying gravely ill in Changi, had hundreds of men from the Railway bring him valuables of food and medicine. ‘No other man in the entire Malayan force could have won such a tribute of spontaneous treasures.’¹⁷⁹ And of Fagan, another veteran said, ‘Dr Fagan was with us, he was absolutely marvellous, every man of us owes much to him. He was a quiet man, a surgeon, gentle with us and strong with the Japs, Fagan fought like a demon to keep sick men off work parties.’¹⁸⁰ Tom Selby wrote that at the funeral of MO Sam Stenning in 1983 the padre officiating read from a letter sent to him by a soldier who was in captivity with Stenning in Osaka: ‘I could not imagine anyone doing more for us or meaning more to us at the time in camp in Osaka.’¹⁸¹

MOs often took on the role of leaders in the camps, even when there were combat officers present. Often they became aware of the incompetence of the combat officers and they were approached by the men to intervene. On one such occasion, in an incident on a small island off Singapore, narrated to Hearder by an MO (who wished to remain anonymous), a group of men came to him to say that they were considering killing their CO and disposing of his body because

177 Hearder, *Keep the men Alive*, p123.

178 *ibid*, p 128.

179 Braddon, *The Naked Island*, p 224.

180 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War: from Gallipoli to Korea*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1992, p 525.

181 Selby, *Dr NX22*, p 162.

he had become incompetent. Hearder points out that it was of significance that the men came to him and that when he told them not to do it, they obeyed him. But this MO had to step in, 'because there was no one else ... Now (the CO) was incapable of working, but I, the medical officer, I still had to cope. I had to cope with him and I had to cope with the Japanese and I had to cope with the sick, so I became in that case, the major force ... I was the boss and I wasn't equipped for it. I was a medical officer.'¹⁸² Other officers such as Major Bruce Hunt, 'known for his forceful personality and leadership skills "frequently took charge even when combatant officers were present"'. And Hearder wrote that 'Cahill remembered that Hunt "was a born commander even though he was a major (medical) in this camp. ... he just automatically ran the camp although there were senior officers there. But it was Bruce Hunt who did everything".'¹⁸³ One POW said of Hunt: 'He was a fantastic man. He took bashings from the Japs and took abuse.'¹⁸⁴

Often, MOs faced direct danger because of their assumed role of leadership. 'Weary' Dunlop had to face the humiliation and physical abuse of a Japanese guard. A soldier reported that Dunlop, being a tall man, 'the colonel was forced to stand in a 2ft deep hole outside the Guard House so that a fanatical 4ft 6in Japanese could slap the Colonel's face repeatedly to demonstrate his power.'¹⁸⁵ Actions like this, and the one previously described by Mellors¹⁸⁶ of a combat officer taking beatings for the other ranks, elevated any officer, MO or combat, to a position of respect and these officers were seen as living up to the ideals of the Anzac Legend. One thing is clear, though, from nearly all accounts by POWs of MOs and that is that they were universally respected and often held in great affection by the other ranks.

Conclusion

Australian soldiers who served under Japanese captivity between 1942 and 1945 felt that they had great reason for disappointment in the behaviour and performance of many of their officers.

182 Hearder, *Careers in Captivity*, p 229.

183 Hearder, *Keep the Men Alive*, Pp 128-129.

184 Erwin Heckendorf, interview, AWM S763.

185 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 205.

186 *ibid*, p 268.

They were much more bitter and critical than men in other AIF divisions and felt that their officers did not live up to the spirit of the Anzac Legend. They saw little evidence of a spirit of egalitarianism, even an egalitarianism of pretence. There are exceptions to these feelings, but the overall trend in captivity did not always uphold the ideal of the Anzac ideal as many Australians would believe or wish that it did.

One difference in the idea of mateship that emerged in the camps was that, unlike in the First AIF digger tradition, not all men were your mates. This is not to say that they were your enemies, but POWs under the Japanese found that survival often depended on a mate or a 'syndicate' of mates.¹⁸⁷ Beaumont wrote that mateship was exclusive to best mates, especially towards the end of the war.¹⁸⁸ The reason for this was that you needed a close mate or a group of mates to share food, look after you when you were sick, cover you on work parties and be there to confide in when times were particularly difficult.

There was not always an egalitarianism that extended to an equality of sharing and sacrifice on the part of officers, and this led to the great resentment that many veterans express. There is one piece of evidence that flies in the face of the Anzac tradition and the benefits of mateship. It belies Sheehan's claim that Australian POWs were 'a tribe which was always the most successful group'. These are the statistics of survival among all allied soldiers. Beaumont claims that the Australian death rate was 34%, the worst of the allied armies. This was followed by the Americans, the British and the Dutch, in that order.¹⁸⁹ Daws claims similar figures.¹⁹⁰ Australians did not fare better than other allied armies. There are possible reasons for this. One is the loss of 1781¹⁹¹ lives on the Sandakan death march, which was worst single loss of Australian lives in the war and, according to Paul Ham, the worst single atrocity committed against any group of allied POWs by the Japanese in the Pacific War.¹⁹² But all armies lost men on marches and all armies suffered large numbers killed on the hell ships. Loet claims that many of the

187 Maric Gilbert, AWM PR03121.

188 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 141.

189 Joan Beaumont, *The Australian History Centenary of Defence*, Vol. 6, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2001, p 334.

190 Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese*, p 360.

191 <http://sandakan-deathmarch.com>.

192 Ham, *Sandakan*, p 441.

Dutch were Eurasian-Dutch, acclimatised to the conditions and more able to survive.¹⁹³

Whatever the reasons, Australian mateship may have been a comforter but there is no evidence that it saved lives at a greater rate than friendship in other armies. If it had not been for the untiring effort of MOs, universally acclaimed by all POWs, the death rate would have been much higher.

We can conclude with this comment by Beaumont:

The successful officers were not those who, like Westley and Scott, maintained a social distance between themselves and their men, resorting to formal sanctions when their authority was challenged. Instead it was those officers who remained personally approachable and maintained the facade of egalitarianism even when the reality of the army hierarchy and camp life contradicted this who emerged as the figures of respect.¹⁹⁴

Unfortunately for the Anzac Legend and for many of the men who suffered under Japanese captivity, these 'successful' officers were not as numerous as they may have been at the frontline in the Middle East, Greece or Kokoda and certainly on the Western Front of the First World War.

193 Loet Velmans *Long Way Back to the River Kwai: Memories of World War II*, New York, Arcade Publishing, 2003 (Amazon Kindle version cited).

194 Beaumont, *Gull Force*, p 215.

CHAPTER 6:

AN IDLE ARMY

Introduction

Francis (Frank) Forde reported to the Prime Minister, John Curtin in February, 1945 on low morale and widespread grievances in the AMF. He wrote that he saw in Queensland a

deterioration in the morale of the Australian Fighting Forces that had obviously taken place over the past six months. It would appear that this is largely due to their enforced stay on the mainland of Australia with no clearly defined indication as to when and where they may be likely to be called upon to take part in active operations ... I feel sure that if it were not for a feeling of utter boredom and dissatisfaction on this basis, their grievances would not have been so pronounced.¹

Barter wrote:

Disenchantment with the army was a general problem on the Atherton Tableland. It occurred most in those units that had a strong sense of independence from three years abroad. Indeed, in Gavin Long's opinion these men found it hardest to reconcile their feelings of isolation and neglect with their former feelings of pride about being in the forefront of Australia's contribution to the war.²

This was particularly the case for the 6th Division, some units of which saw little action after their escape from Crete in 1941.³ Their experience stands in marked contrast to the experiences of the First AIF.

By late 1943 General Douglas MacArthur was beginning his slow advance towards the Japanese mainland. The plan was to advance from the south while Admiral Nimitz, with his ever-growing US navy, advanced from the east. MacArthur aimed to take back the Philippines before landing troops on the Japanese mainland, beginning with the island of Okinawa.⁴ As commander of the South West Pacific Area he had at his disposal all allied troops, including Australian and Dutch forces. While he was happy to use allied naval resources, he did not use allied land armies in this offensive, although there was, for a long time, a 'promise' or 'offer' to do so in his retaking of

1 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 101.

2 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 215.

3 *ibid*, p 215. The 19th Brigade was out of action from May 1941 until October 1944.

4 Horner, *High Command*, pp307-308 and pp 395-396.

the Philippines.⁵ Horner points out that Australian senior commanders suspected that MacArthur would not use Australians in this offensive.⁶

For Australian soldiers, it was not until weeks before the landings in the Philippines in October, 1944, that it became clear that MacArthur was not ever going to use any elements of the Australian army in his advance on Japan. Instead, the Australian army was to be used in what the rank and file would call ‘mopping up operations’, replacing US army units in New Guinea and islands to the near north of it to keep the Japanese army besieged and so protect the US forces in their rear.⁷ Gavin Long wrote that these ‘were years of anti-climax for a big proportion of the men who enlisted in the first two years of the war’.⁸ By early 1944, according to Barter, the ‘Second World War had lasted longer than the first, the Americans had ... taken the lead in the South West Pacific (and) the Australians were in the background’.⁹

John Curtin’s government was not necessarily unhappy with this plan. It meant that Australian men would not be placed in danger in major offensives and that the government could begin an early demobilisation of the army and save money. It had long been thought by the government that Australia was over-extended in its military activities. In December 1943, following a direction from the government, the War Cabinet issued a directive that reduced the army to three AIF divisions, all to be retrained at Atherton and three Militia divisions were to be given garrison duties in New Guinea and on the Australian mainland.¹⁰ So, an army of six divisions still existed in 1944 and early 1945 and these men needed to be occupied. In 1942, when the Japanese threat to the north was recognised and Australia scrambled to send forces to Port Moresby to contain the Japanese advance, it was decided to establish large scale jungle warfare training facilities in the Atherton Tablelands in north Queensland and Canungra in the south of Queensland. Darryl McIntyre wrote in the Eacham Historical Society Bulletin in 1996 that ‘in November 1942,

5 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 188.

6 Horner, *High Command*, Pp309-312. Horner says that Australian commanders were aware as early as October, 1943, that no Australian units were mentioned for the invasion. He also writes that British naval Captain Alan Hillgarth, Chief of the Intelligence Staff of the British Eastern Fleet, thought that MacArthur was being evasive when asked about the use of Australian troops.

7 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p 187.

8 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 80.

9 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 219.

10 *ibid*, p 188.

General Blamey ordered a reconnaissance of the Atherton Tableland with a view to locating three divisions for jungle training and rehabilitation and to establish a large hospital base to treat troops suffering from malaria and other tropical diseases.' £730,000 was allocated in December 1942 and within six weeks temporary hospital accommodation was in use at Rocky Creek.¹¹

Men returning from the Middle East in the 6th and 7th Divisions, AIF, and later the 9th Division AIF, as well as units from the Militia returning from campaigning in Papua and New Guinea in 1942 and 1943, would be reorganised and retrained on the Atherton Tablelands in the skills of jungle warfare.¹² Because of MacArthur's policy, until they were demobilised or sent to campaign in mopping up operations, these men would spend months, even years, training and retraining. The Australian army was increasingly becoming an idle army and this would lead to frustration, ill-discipline, anger and an increased concern with matters that would seem trivial and petty to a frontline soldier.

A Peacetime Army

While there were still garrison units in New Guinea after Buna and Gona were secured in January 1943 and there was a large scale action on the Huon Peninsular in the second half of that year, the majority of the army was based in Australia, retraining for whatever future campaigns might occur, with or without the Americans.¹³ As was mentioned in Chapter 3, there was a chance of action with the British. In 1944 Blamey and Curtin travelled to Great Britain and discussed the possibility of combined Commonwealth Forces action after the European war finished.¹⁴ The 6th and 7th Divisions had returned from New Guinea and were reforming, refitting and retraining at Atherton in Queensland. Life for the reduced army of 1944 and 1945 was, for many, a life more akin to peacetime army training.

11 Darryl McIntyre, as cited in Henry Tranter, and Elaine Tranter, (ed), *Remembering Rocky Creek WW2*, Millaa Millaa, Eacham Historical Society, 2003, p v.

12 Although Militia units were not initially meant to go to Atherton, in May 1942 Forde announced that CMF volunteers could take an 'X' number and be part of the AIF but remain in a CMF unit. Thus, some became part of those units training at Atherton and Canungra for duty overseas. In July 1942, after a flow of transfers, any CMF unit with 75% transfers would be designated an AIF unit (18 infantry battalions did this). In the meantime, surplus AIF volunteers went to CMF training units. See Barter, *Far above Battle*, pp 206-7.

13 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, pp 187-190.

14 Horner, *Blamey*, p 416.

During this period in Australia life in the army for soldiers of all ranks became a regular camp routine. There were no dramatic encounters on the battlefield and both officers and other ranks became accustomed to life in the army as a full time job. The hard days of North Africa, Greece, the Middle East and Kokoda were over and the effects that these campaigns placed on the relationships between officers and other ranks were also over, for some time, until the mopping up campaigns in the South West Pacific were to start towards the end of 1944.

The army, too, had gone through many changes. Besides Blamey announcing the reduction of the army to six divisions in December, 1943, there was also the effective amalgamation of the Militia and the AIF. Twenty Militia battalions were broken up and their men transferred to AIF units and over 200,000 Militiamen transferred to the AIF by the end of the war.¹⁵ Many of the causes of tension and discontent that were typical of front line soldiers disappeared and soldiers became more concerned with issues of food quality, the availability of beer and when they were to be given their next home leave.

But if it was just a job, it was a job they did not like. An infantry man's letter from the 26th/49th Battalion was noted in a Censorship Report in February 1945:

Here I am stuck up here – doing a useless job – why? I'd prefer to be right in the front line or right out. If any mug ever tells me I am aiding the war effort I'll have much pleasure in calling him a liar. If a person was fighting he'd be doing something concrete and stand a chance of feeling a man. To be fooled about doing useless work – well it's making absolute bludgers of many men here who have manly ambitions.¹⁶

Being part of an idle army was thwarting their 'manly ambitions'. Men could not be part of the Anzac Legend under these conditions and any forces towards egalitarianism that the frontline created were not in effect now. In this environment men became concerned with the petty aspects of life and their complaints were often of a trivial nature. Bob Ausburn, who trained as a reinforcement to the 6th Division, spoke about his time at Atherton:

¹⁵ Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, pp 183-184.

¹⁶ AWM 54, Item No. 175/3/4 1st Field Censorship Report, December, 1944-July, 1945, for month ending 28/2/45.

They looked after us alright. There was good food and plenty of sport and entertainment. We trained pretty hard. The NCOs and the provosts kept us in line, mostly. Sometimes the officers –when it came to charges. We accepted that. That was the army. That’s what they did. There were men arrested for fighting or AWL. They got fined or CB (confined to barracks).¹⁷

Les Cook pointed to an on-going problem with alcohol amongst servicemen: ‘I was seven years with the AIF and never saw a fight between sober men. Keep the grog away from them and they lived at peace with each other’.¹⁸ This problem with alcohol was a serious matter with soldiers in this idle army. For some men alcohol was a critical part of their existence, consistent with the emphasis that Russel Ward placed on the importance of alcohol in *The Australian Legend*. He wrote about the outback tradition of ‘work and bust’¹⁹ and the on-going tradition of Anzac Day as ‘a serious attempt to make it the greatest alcoholic debauch of the year.’²⁰

Alcohol, especially beer, became an obsession with some soldiers such as Bob ‘Hooker’ Holt. He wrote about his experiences as a ‘four figure man’ – someone who volunteered so early that he had only four figures in his X (AIF) number. He served from North Africa in 1940 to Aitape, New Guinea in 1945. His division, the 6th Division, had been in trouble as a result of alcohol from their first action at Bardia in January and February 1941 when they went on a drunken spree with Italian wine they had seized after the battle.²¹ His book places great emphasis on the availability of beer and the effect that alcohol had on their lives and morale. He wrote about stealing beer from a supply train at Atherton and getting drunk while on leave in Cairns, damaging a boarding house where he and three mates were staying.²² He wrote about how he and his mates became so drunk that they spent the night drinking, peeing on each other, fighting and gambling.²³ He was, by the tone of his writing, boastful and proud of these exploits. In one way this lives up to the perceived tradition of the First AIF in that they were known for their lack of discipline²⁴

17 Bob Ausburn, interview, 12/3/11.

18 Les Cook, interview, 19/9/05.

19 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (illustrated edition), Melbourne Oxford University Press, 1978, p 148.

20 *ibid*, p 282.

21 Stockings, *Bardia*, p 267.

22 Bob ‘Hooker’ Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape: The Trials and Tribulations of a Four Figure Man*, Lakemba, R.Holt, 1981, pp 167-168.

23 *ibid*, pp 174-175.

24 Glassop, *We Were the Rats*, p 128.

Wes Olsen wrote of another 6th Division soldier with a problem with drinking: ‘Since enlisting in August 1940, he had been charged with drunkenness (three times), failing to comply with an order, conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline and losing his shovel handle ... To top it off he had been charged with being absent without leave on 10 occasions’. But in true Anzac tradition, Olsen wrote, ‘...when the bullets started flying Gillett was in his element and all his sins were forgotten’.²⁵ These ‘39ers’ or ‘Originals’ believed that they were following in the tradition of the First AIF. And part of this tradition was drink.

The drinking prowess of these ‘originals’ had been established in the Middle East. One brigadier had to issue an order that there would be no drinking on the streets in Palestine.²⁶ And even before that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, men of this division burnt down their canteen at Ingleburn in 1939 because it did not sell beer.²⁷ And by their time in Atherton, 6th Division men from the 2/2nd Battalion were targeted by General Stevens who complained of ‘excessive drinking of 2/2nd men’ and warned of ‘on the spot’ demotions.²⁸

Beer and its availability became for soldiers a symbol or measure of the quality of life, in the absence of military action or anything else more constructive and tangible. W.E. Hughes, in his personal diary of the 31/51st Battalion, complains of beer being available in Townsville for only two hours per day.²⁹ He notes the price of beer at the canteen as being ‘sold to the men at 5% handling charge on top of cost. 1 pint per day.’³⁰ This was made worse, according to Hughes, because ‘the sale of beer in hotels was restricted to about two hours a day although American units seemed to have all the beer they needed.’³¹

25 Wes Olson, *Battalion into Battle, The History of the 2/11th Australian Infantry battalion 1939-1945*, Hilton, WA, Wesley John Olson, 2011, p 306.

26 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 143.

27 Charlton, *The Thirty Niners*, p 41-42.

28 Barter, *Far Above Battle*, p 218.

29 W.E. Hughes, *At War with the 51st Infantry Battalion and 31/51st Infantry Battalion*, p 35.

30 *ibid*, p317.

31 *ibid*, p35.

The infantryman Les Clothier was similarly concerned about the distribution of comforts like beer and tobacco. Clothier wrote in his diary in Atherton in 1943: 'The tobacco is conspicuous by its absence (sic) & the boys are crooked about it. We've had beer twice in a fortnight. 2 pints the first time & a pot this afternoon buckshee on account of today being the unit's birthday. The officers are having a birthday party tonight. I bet they have more than water.'³² This comment about the officers shows a certain pettiness but a complaint that one would expect from other ranks, given their enforced stays away from home, without much opportunity for leave and when they could see that officers were receiving privileges of rank. Officer privilege was still an issue at Atherton. In July, 1943, this concern with beer received another mention in Clothier's diary.³³

One soldier made the connection between the supply of alcohol and the social division between officers and other ranks. He wrote to Barrett: 'I really (sic) think the army was a sort of class society, officers mess, NCO mess, all the cigarettes (sic) they wanted, spirits, beer. Rank and file few cigarettes (sic), beer rations, no spirits, women in their mess not in mens (sic) ... Officers a class above you, aloft, really (sic) not a good fellow to privates. Supreme outlook'.³⁴ Alcohol, to the other ranks, was a measure of the difference between officers and other ranks while at the same time, its abuse would cause other ranks to come into conflict with their officers.

Access to canteens was another issue allied to the provision of alcohol to the troops that some soldiers felt strongly about. Philip Masel of the 2/28th Battalion and 24th Anti-Tank Company Association wrote that little credit '... can be awarded to the Australian Army Canteens Service which often gave the impression that it was Big Business, more concerned with turnover in base areas than with the more modest but less urgent requirements of the fighting soldiers.' There was £3,000,000 profit from the war which was 'an indictment of its policy'.³⁵ Some believe that senior officers were guilty of benefiting from the Canteens Service. There was probably a deal of rumour and innuendo but some soldiers thought that officers were implicated and that this was an act of 'Big Business'. In an allied complaint, another soldier, Jack Fabricus, told of 'the Story

32 Les Clothier diary entry, 1/5/43, AWM PR00588.

33 *ibid*, diary entry 1/5/43.

34 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 204.

35 Masel, *The Second 28th*, p 190.

of the Slaughtered Sausage'. Men complained that the battalion's extra cash allowance for meat was being expended by first giving choice cuts to the officers and sergeants. Here men saw what they believed was officer privilege at first hand.³⁶

Boredom

Frank Hardy, the noted Australian novelist, commented in an interview in 1992 to Beverly Symons about his experience at Mataranka in the Northern Territory: 'They (the men) were so demoralised by the boredom, the sheer boredom...You went through the motions, you were guarding the camp against yourselves. You were just rotting there and you couldn't get leave and you didn't know how long you were going to be there'.³⁷ Jenny Hocking quotes from Hardy:

Mataranka was a unit in perpetual anticipation of transfer, attack and the next drink ... It was vibrant but unhappy, dusty, flyblown and overwhelmingly bored. You were just rotting there and couldn't leave and you didn't know how long you were going to be there. And they actually went troppo – that's where the word 'troppo' started. Blokes would walk across the parade ground and stop and yell out, 'Fuck the army!', and no one would look sideways at them.³⁸

Serving in the Northern Territory had a problem that only the furthest and most remote camps would experience. Warren Stickley, a young Militia soldier in the territory, commented that in Darwin they were bored and had trouble filling in the time. There was no place to go AWL and with the climate, no energy to do anything. And he claims that they only had visits from staff officers in the dry season, never in the wet.³⁹ Mataranka could only have been worse than Darwin.

Norm Strange described the farcical situation at Mataranka at this time when an 'old captain' from the First World War inspected the camp:

Captain: Sergeant, this tent is like a brothel.

36 S. Trigellis-Smith, *Britain to Borneo: A History of the 2/32 Australian Infantry Battalion*, Sydney, 2/3 Australian Infantry Battalion Association, 1993, p 264.

37 Symons, 'All out for the People's War', p 604.

38 Jenny Hocking, *Frank Hardy: Politics Literature Life*, Melbourne, Lothian, 2005, p 31.

39 Warren Stickley, interview, 5/2/11.

Sergeant: Excuse me sir, but it is not like a brothel.

Captain: It is like a brothel.

Sergeant: If this tent was a brothel, sir, there would be women here and they would keep it a B – site cleaner.

We all had a good laugh, including the old Captain, who told them he would be back later and the tent had better be cleaned up by then.⁴⁰

This scene describes the way that the men used humour to deflect the boredom and the fact that some of the officers were sympathetic to their situation. It is an interesting point that when soldiers from the Second World War mention officers from the First World War, as in the case above, they are always mentioned in a positive light. They are seen as friendly and less formal. This is in contrast to the new breed of officers Pratten describes in the 9th Division in North Africa and in the South West Pacific theatre, described in Chapter 3 of this thesis.⁴¹ The army was moving from a culture of informal discipline to a culture of formal discipline.

Boredom was caused by the enforced periods the men had in training camps. Ross makes the point that, ‘some of the factors which militated against leader-legitimacy in the First AIF were greatly increased in the Second: fewer man-hours were spent in front-line areas, far more in training, retraining, travelling or imprisonment. The base-areas were larger and more ubiquitous.’⁴² According to the Anzac Legend officers who served in the First World War were imbued with a sense of egalitarianism and an understanding of notions of ‘leader-legitimacy’. To the extent that this quality was not evident in many officers in the Second World War, the factors described by Ross may be the reason.

Boredom was also a theme of this soldier’s account of his experience at this time. He wrote:

The occasional picture shows were about all we had to break the monotony of living in the bush for nearly two years. I am sure we all went a little ‘troppo’ as the months passed by. Some men walked about the camp with a short rope with a loop on the end dragging behind them attached to an imaginary dog – with the name and all!

40 Norm Strange, *The Eighth Battalion (AIF) A Personal and Pictorial Record 1937-1946*, Ballarat, N. Strange, 1996, p 82.

41 Pratten, *Australian Battle Commanders*, passim.

42 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 169.

On our visiting a mate in another tent, he would take great care when we arrived to 'tie' his dog to a tree, telling him to lie down, good dog, and there the rope with the loop would stay tied to the tree until its owner would undo the rope and set off with the loop dragging behind him.

Another would have an imaginary cockatoo on his shoulder and would talk to it. Others would feed their 'chooks' and collect the imaginary eggs each day.⁴³

Such behaviour was not always lost on their officers. Strange described a 'troppo' cricket match in South Australia on the way south, after being relieved at Mataranka, watched by men going north. This match was played by men miming the actions; there was no bat and no ball. Major Post, an officer with the men going north, with a grin on his face, asked them to appeal against the light when dinner was ready!⁴⁴

It was not just Mataranka where there was acute boredom and isolation. One soldier told Barrett that 'from 1943 my unit was stationed for long periods in Australia and New Guinea with no action, just waiting for our masters to decide to commit us again. New Guinea was stupefyingly boring. I ponder on this and how demoralising it became.'⁴⁵ Andrew Pirie of the 2/5th Australian Commando Squadron wrote in his diary on 14th January, 1944:

One seems to be at the end of the earth here & the scenery is wild & rugged but pretty just the same. The strain is almost unbearable as one has to be continually watching & on the alert, but worse than that is the hot, steaming mosquito-ridden hole. We spend most of our time under our nets & have to sew & button them down to have any peace at all. Here we have 99% boredom & 1% intense fright & believe me the boredom is rotten. We can't stop thinking of home & leave & what we will do when leave comes if ever.⁴⁶

And after the war veterans have spoken about the effects of boredom in these years. Private Litchfield said in an interview with Barter that, 'I only understood long after the war that the boredom itself sent many men ga-ga'.⁴⁷ Allan S. Walker, the author of most of Australian Army's medical histories of the war wrote: 'Of course it is freely admitted that prolonged

43 Strange, *The Eighth Battalion (AIF)* p 89.

44 *ibid*, p 90.

45 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 220.

46 AWM PR00602, Andrew Pirie, diary entry, 14/1/44.

47 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 219.

periods of inaction in an uncomfortable climate cause deterioration of health of the mind-body entity'.⁴⁸

This boredom was a major factor in the poor morale that crept into the Australian army after the major New Guinea campaigns ended in 1943. It was also a contributing factor in relations between officers and other ranks as frustration and anger was directed at officers by many of the men. Frank Forde's comment at the beginning of this chapter shows that this problem of a lack of operational activity was acknowledged by the government. It was also acknowledged by Blamey when he said to troops in April, 1945: 'It is very boring to go on with too much training.'⁴⁹ This may have been designed to ease slightly the ill-feeling towards Blamey that was shown from the day of his 'running rabbit' speech to the 21st Brigade in November 1942. Sergeant John Burns of the 2/27th Battalion wrote about Blamey's visit to 21st Brigade at Ravenshoe, Atherton Tablelands on the 23rd June, 1943 that Blamey 'was faced with men who openly showed contempt and hostility to a man they felt no longer warranted respect, or loyalty, in the position he held.' This was the same brigade he had abused in New Guinea in that fateful speech.⁵⁰ Senator Harry Foll, from the Country Party, reinforced this view when he said on the 28th February, 1945 that the army was 'seething with dissatisfaction' and that Blamey's name was 'not held in that respect, either by the public or by the soldiers, that it should be.'⁵¹ Visits by dignitaries could be received with cynicism and even anger. Sergeant Bill Spencer, writer of the history of the 2/9th Battalion, commented that: 'We endured visits by politicians and those from the upper echelons. Marches-past were held and the usual empty words dribbled into the humble ears of our troops.'⁵²

48 A. Walker *The Island Campaigns*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957, as cited in Barter, *Far above the Battle*, p 219.

49 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 100.

50 John Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War: The Story of the 2/27 Battalion, AIF, 2/27 Bn Ex-Servicemen's Association*, Adelaide, 1960, as cited in Horner, D.M., *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1998, p 412.

51 Horner, *Blamey*, p 507.

52 (Sgt) Bill Spencer, *In the Footsteps of Ghosts: With the 2/9th Battalion in the African Desert and the Jungles of the Pacific*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1999, p 167.

Douglas MacArthur did not escape the cynicism of the troops, either, who called him ‘Dugout Doug’ at Bataan before he evacuated in 1942. These verses from a soldiers’ poem of the time illustrate their feelings about MacArthur and his egotistical grandstanding in the press:

My battleships bombard the Nips from

Maine to Singapore.

My subs have sunk a million tons

They’ll sink a billion more.

My aircraft bombed Berlin last night.

In Italy they say

Our turn’s tonight because it’s right in

DOUG’S COMMUNIQUE.

And while possibly a rumour now,

Some day it will be fact

That the Lord will hear a deep voice one day,

‘Move over, God, it’s Mac.’

So bet your shoes that all the news

That last great Judgement Day

Will go to press in nothing less

Than DOUG’S COMMUNIQUE.⁵³

William Russell, a major in the 2/14th Battalion and author of the battalion history, was explicit when he described that difficult period at the end of 1944 and into 1945. He wrote about the period after the men became aware that they were not to be included in MacArthur’s landings in the Philippines. He described ‘... the period when, after the cancellation of the role in the Philippines, the Battalion had to defeat the dangerous enemies of boredom and stagnation for a

⁵³ Gavin Long, *MacArthur*, London, B.T. Balford, 1969, p119, as cited in Gallaway, *The Odd Couple*, pp79-80.

further five months.⁵⁴ But, he said: ‘There was no slackening in the quality of training, though it was hard to maintain enthusiasm under the circumstances. The end of 1944 and the first few months of 1945 were anxious days for those who did not wish to see the Unit’s proud record suffer through stagnation.’⁵⁵

Thirty-four percent of Barrett’s responders complained of ‘monotonous routine, boredom, hopeless military types, waste and the frustration of not being committed to action’.⁵⁶ One of the worst cases of boredom and its poor effects on morale was the First Armoured Division. This division of volunteers was formed early in the war and sent to Western Australia where many of its units spent the best part of the war. Others were transferred to other isolated parts of the continent. The army feared a Japanese invasion on the west coast of Australia. One member of the unit wrote to Barrett:

Sent to Western Australia, I began 3 ½ years of my life that I have since endeavoured to erase from my mind just because I was kept there all the time. I became an NCO in the magnificent but frustrated division. I returned to the lowest rank possible, that of driver. Still not transferred. Many others tried to transfer out of the division, and some gained their wish, but I was kept there until discharged at the end of the war, embittered.⁵⁷

To make matters worse, he was unable to join the RSL after the war because he was not a returned veteran. Major General R.N.L. Hopkins, the commander of the Armoured Division, wrote:

There was great eagerness throughout the Armoured Corps to get into battle. As 1943 commenced most troops had reached their highest standard of training and were well equipped. Only the 2/6th was actually fighting in New Guinea; of the rest the 1st Army Tank battalion alone had been warned for an operational role. The rest were spread far and wide in their formations from Geraldton in Western Australia to southern Queensland.⁵⁸

54 W.B. Russell, *The Second Fourteenth battalion: a History of an Australian Infantry Battalion in the Second World War*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1948, p 259.

55 *ibid*, p 264.

56 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 191-192.

57 *ibid*, pp 8-9.

58 Hopkins, *Australian Armour*, p 109.

The 2/4th Armoured Regiment arrived in Easter 1943 at Manumbah Creek: 'Here in the heart of Queensland bush thirty miles from any form of civilisation, they were to "brown-off" for another twelve months.'⁵⁹

Hopkins wrote that his men used to sing a parody of the *Marines Hymn*:

When the war is won and fighting's done

Who shall drink to victor-ee?

The only show that's still unharmed

*THIRD AUSTRALIAN ARMoured D-I-VEE*⁶⁰

One major effect of this boredom and idleness was the rise in temper and outbursts of anger, often at officers and NCOs. Captain Laybourne Smith of the 2/3rd Field Regiment wrote in a letter to his wife early in the war: 'The deep dirty underlying reason for putting troops in rest camps has at last penetrated my thick skull. After being here for a fortnight we are all so bored we would fight anything. The troops are really being very good but tempers are short.'⁶¹ In a Censorship Report of 1945 a machine gun platoon sergeant reported that,

This idling around, filling in time as we seem to be doing at the present makes the chaps very quick and fly off the handle. Even in the SGT's tent that we are in we fly at one another over the least little thing. I think we really all feel of a like mind – that is send us away and give us a job or send us on leave. This training on the same old thing day after day nearly drives us crazy.⁶²

Frank Legg, an infantry lieutenant, understood his men. He commented on the training of his men in Queensland: That morning, tired, depressed, hungry and homesick, they had staged a half-hearted mutiny. Most of them were only boys and I was sorry for them. But they were in the army. I had pulled out my .38 and, to get them moving on the slippery track again, threatened to shoot any one of them who was not on his feet in 2 seconds.'⁶³ Some were keen to blame the officers. Lambert wrote about being back in camp in Queensland after leave: 'So we were back

59 *ibid*, p 109.

60 *ibid*, p 109.

61 Letter 17/3/41 as cited in Johnston. *At the Frontline*, p 101.

62 AWM 1 Australian Field Coy Censorship Report, December 1944-July 1945, for month ending 31/1/45, A.W.M. 54, Item No. 175/3/4.

63 Frank Legg, *War Correspondent*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1954, p 13, as cited in Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 171.

in camp, for jungle training, and then the army began to remind us of what it had done and would do again: the maddening, stupefying, soul-destroying monotony; the endless repetition; the slow bemusing torture of regulations; once again the hateful authority of fools, careerists, and brutes.’⁶⁴ These ‘fools, careerists and brutes’ were the officers of whom he later wrote directly: ‘And officers, not the original cause (of an infantryman’s contempt), received our bitter thrusts and deserved them, for they mostly did nothing until it was too late.’⁶⁵ While entertainment and sporting activities were organised by the officers in the last years of the war and no matter how unjustified these criticisms might have been, this is what many soldiers felt.

Barking and other Misbehaviours

One way that the rank-and-file soldiers dealt with their boredom and the frustration was to misbehave in bizarre ways that provided a way to let off steam but also to entertain themselves. One such activity was the famous ‘barking’ episodes which captured the imagination of the men and spread right around the camps in the Atherton Tablelands. Bob Holt from the 2/3rd Battalion of the 6th Division, a 1939 ‘Original’, described the beginnings of this activity:

Some of the men of the other divisions reckon they were being treated like dogs, so at Retreat they began to bark like dogs. The idea took on like wildfire amongst other units in the three Divisions ... faintly at first, you could hear the yapping and barking from far away units and then louder, until it reached our camp. We would take up the call and then it could be heard fading away into the distance ... For mine ... it was all in fun and if the military hierarchy didn’t like it, so much the better.⁶⁶

Lambert used this practice in his novel *The Veterans*, based on his experiences in the war from 1943 to 1945. He described an occasion when their CO ‘crimed’ a man (laid a charge) for barking at the colonel: ‘You’re treating us like dogs. We’re going to act like dogs. Arrh! Arrh!’ When the men guarding this man also barked and they in turn were arrested, the barking and howling spread to the whole battalion, then brigade and finally, division.⁶⁷ This incident in his novel was based on action taken by soldiers at Atherton. It was a sign of their frustration and

64 Lambert, *The Veterans*, p 94.

65 *ibid*, p 96.

66 Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, p 173.

67 Lambert, *The Veterans*, pp 109-114.

anger and their lack of respect for their officers who represented all that they believed had created this situation in the first place.

Les Clothier also mentioned it in his diary. He wrote: 'This camp has that much relaxation & enjoyment for the troops that the boys have been barking and howling for a joke & Bn has gone mad about it.'⁶⁸ Similar incidents had occurred earlier such as one in August 1942 when the CO of the 14th/32nd Battalion, which was being entrained to Western Australia, became infuriated with 'baaing' and 'mooing' noises from his troops when they were placed in goods vans. On arrival, as a punishment, they were all made to march the five miles to the camp. The men were complaining because the officers and sergeants were placed in carriages while the men were placed in goods vans.⁶⁹ Private Holt wrote: 'The army's idea seems to be to make the soldier live like an animal, and he'll fight like one.'⁷⁰

Another similar activity was known as 'ho-hoing'. Les Clothier described a couple of incidences of this. In July 1944 he wrote in his diary: 'kangaroo ho-hoed and later the band was ho-hoed warming up for a "glamour parade" and the BGDE (Brigadier) thought it was for him and he reprimanded the Bn.'⁷¹ Three days earlier he had written: 'This new CSM (Militia) is as popular as a pork chop in a Synagogue. He roars & rants & the boys give him a ho-ho every now & then.'⁷² Lambert referred to the act of ho-hoing. He wrote that 'it was a kind of tribal call of the other ranks of the division. It could be insubordinate and disrespectful. It could be playful. It could be ... a very warm, greeting.' It was something that fitted in with the Anzac Legend of not taking authority too seriously and yet not letting this interfere with their effectiveness as soldiers. Later, Lambert wrote, it was to become a war cry when fighting in New Guinea in the last campaigns of the war.⁷³ Bilney reported that ho-hos greeted the new brigadier of 14th/32nd Battalion in Atherton in April 1943. He promptly banned them.⁷⁴

68 AWM PR00558, Les Clothier, dairy entry 1/5/43.

69 Keith Bilney, *14/32 Australian Infantry Battalion AIF 1940-1945*, Melbourne, 14/32nd Australian Infantry battalion Association, 1994, p 33.

70 Private Holt, diary entry, 21/11/42, cited in Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 93.

71 AWM PR00558, Les Clothier, dairy entry 12/7/44.

72 AWM PR00558, Les Clothier, dairy entry 9/7/44.

73 Lambert, *The Veterans*, p 114.

74 Bilney, *14/32 Australian Infantry Battalion*, p 70.

Officers reacted to their men's situation in different ways. Some were sympathetic to the position of the men. The CO of the 2/11th Battalion, Colonel Sandover, said at the end of March, 1943, after his battalion had been on wharf duties in Adelaide and then posted to garrison duties in Western Australia for over a year:

The comfortable inactivity here, when we might have been playing a most vital role in saving Burma and India or at least having home leave, the red tape and lack of any real war effort even yet by the people as a whole, the 'Americans won't let us down' attitude; all these things will materially affect the morale of the Battalion if we stay here long.⁷⁵

When the unit moved to Western Australia in April, 1942, Sandover wrote: 'The future looks black indeed if we have to stay here. It is all very depressing.'⁷⁶ They were to then spend another 18 months in Queensland before going back into action in November 1944.⁷⁷ Other officers were strict sticklers for the letter of the military law and made themselves very unpopular with their men. Colin Turbet commented on one occasion when he was placed on a charge: 'Seven days pack drill for smoking on parade. I didn't think much of it.'⁷⁸ But this pettiness of officers, as he saw it, rankled him. Bill Moore didn't like some officers, especially COs: 'Some were too strict; they were mongrels. One CO we had went crook about us swearing. There were mutterings from the ranks like "What is he, a poofter?"' But, 'one officer was a member of our cricket team. He was alright.'⁷⁹ This act, in Moore's eyes, gave the officer more 'leader-legitimacy', as Ross would define it.⁸⁰

There are more critical comments than positive in soldiers' diaries and personal records and in interviews with veterans. Some COs resorted to heavy-handed discipline. Andrew Pirie's CO tried to suppress dissent and any outbreak of poor discipline as a result of boredom. Pirie wrote in his diary when stationed in Queensland, 'We are getting rather restless by now & there have

75 Olsen, *Battalion into Battle*, p 234.

76 *ibid*, p 236.

77 http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11262.asp.

78 Colin Turbet, interview, 14/5/05.

79 Bill Moore, interview, 21/4/11.

80 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, p 91.

been a few outbreaks & jail sentences imposed.’⁸¹ Les Clothier was not happy about a new lieutenant and rifle drill: ‘A new lieut joined us today & Johno while on parade told him to get inside of the rifle & have a look at it because he chipped Johno about the rifle being dirty’.⁸² Some officers were looked upon with fear by some, especially young Militiamen. Alan Bewley, a Militia conscript, commented on a young Duntroon officer ‘who was Adjutant, a young guy, probably about 22, and everybody feared him ... He would shout at you and everybody was “yes Sir, yes Sir”’.⁸³ Other men looked upon their officers with contempt. Henry Fawkes said of training officers: ‘Many were dickheads and knew nothing. They threw their weight around. Many came from a privileged background’. And when his Armoured Division was disbanded in 1943, ‘they called a special parade in Perth and issued us with new shorts and shirts. After the parade they took them back from us.’⁸⁴ Bill Moore saw an officer on leave and was contemptuous about his hypocrisy: ‘We respected most officers but one stood out in Greta that we didn’t like. He lectured us on respecting the women but was bad to them himself at a dance we went to.’⁸⁵

Food could also be a matter for dissent in these last years of the war, although most men attested to the fact that it was a lot better than in previous years, in Australia or North Africa and the Middle East. But grumbling about food was a soldier’s lot. Les Clothier wrote in his diary that diet on exercises was ‘4 biscuits and ¼ tin M & V (meat and vegetable) each meal. The boys are going mad about the rations.’⁸⁶ And yet two months later, after spending three weeks convalescing from malaria, he was able to write: ‘This place at present is better than a con. Camp. The food is good and there is nothing to do all day but just sit around and read’. He added that he had two bottles of beer per week.⁸⁷

Les Clothier observed that the officers were bored as well. On 30th July, 1944 he wrote: ‘The officers are all bored don’t worry about the coy at all. When there’s a stunt on we do nothing

81 AWM PR00602, Pirie, A, diary entry, 25/2/44.

82 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 10/6/44.

83 Alan Bewley, interview, 10/2/11.

84 Henry Fawkes, interview, 13/12/11.

85 Bill Moore, interview, 21/4/11.

86 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 13/5/43.

87 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 13/7/43.

about it,⁸⁸ and on 30th October, 1944 he wrote: 'Everyone including the officers are well & truly fed up with the training especially these stunts.'⁸⁹ Norm Strange had some mixed feelings about officers. He described one CO while at Atherton:

While at this Kairi camp in Queensland we received a new Commanding Officer, a LT. Colonel who proved to be a hard taskmaster. He had seen some service in New Guinea. Although his intentions to weld us into a strong fighting unit may have been good, he possessed a nasty manner. I am sure that many of the orders he demanded were never written in any army books and he soon became known as 'Ming the Merciless'.⁹⁰

However, when he described an incident where a soldier stole a bottle of Seppelts wine from the officers' mess and was found outside by the CO, he saw that officers could be reasonable, in a soldier's eyes. The CO asked him what he had and he said he had been a traveller for Seppelts before the war Later, he was called up before the CO when a major covered for him, lying about knowing him as a traveller: 'Yes, I remember you when you represented the firm in the Western District'. Strange wrote: 'Such morale boosting events occurred during our tent camp time in between our periods of living and training in the mountains.'⁹¹ Like many other men at Atherton, Strange was bored and looking for distractions and entertainment. Officers were both fair game in this situation and a fair target for the blame for their predicament. Soldiers in these situations from any army will complain and blame their officers, but the question of how the officers react and how they deal with poor discipline or larrikinism in an Australian army will define the officers' commitment to the Anzac tradition and what sort of importance they place on egalitarianism. It is notable that, by this stage, there is little comment at all from other ranks about egalitarianism and democracy. They had come to not expect it by the time of their period in the Atherton Tablelands.

88 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 30/7/44.

89 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 30/10/44.

90 Strange, *The Eight Battalion, AIF*, p 99.

91 *ibid*, p 100.

Leave Problems

Complaints about leave were the major source of discontent for this idle army. Ken Clift wrote in his history of the 2/3rd Battalion that 'boredom is one of the things one has to reduce to a minimum otherwise there are troops fighting one another and members going AWL.'⁹² From 1943 to 1945 the men of the AMF were usually based thousands of kilometres from their homes which were mostly in the south east of the country. Even men from Brisbane were three days travel from their homes and in units after 1943 which were increasingly becoming composite units, with men drawn from all the states and territories, leave was difficult to organise and difficult for men to access in reasonable time. Gavin Long referred to the soldiers' isolation and the lack of leave when he wrote: 'The fact that even when resting or re-training in Australia most of the fighting soldiers lived on the remote Atherton Tableland, with rare and brief visits south on leave, increased the feeling of isolation.'⁹³

Complaints in diaries, letters and interviews with veterans were more about leave than any other cause and show widespread loss of morale and purpose. For officers, from platoon commanders to divisional COs, absent soldiers, whether it was from going AWL or from legitimate leave, meant that units were not always up to strength and training was less effective. Andrew Pirie was typical of the soldiers at the time who felt the anger and frustration of their situation. He wrote: 'The boys are all ropeable about no leave & all are going AWL on pay-days. All the jails are full, even Holesworthy (sic) & Burke Street. If they would only give us a few days we would be OK & now the Militia are getting all the privileges & the Americans are coming to take our girl friends.'⁹⁴ Les Clothier wrote in his diary: 'There are 5 cpls out here who have asked to be reverted. We've been told that there'll be no Xmas leave. Most of us are fed right up to their neck with this place and shooting thru looks like being favourite.'⁹⁵ Corporal Roy Burbury of the 2/5th Independent Company complained that he had been three years on the Tableland with only two periods of home leave.⁹⁶ Tempers began to fray. Jack King wrote: 'Anyway, we ... had to

92 Ken Clift, *War Dance: A Story of the 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion, AIF*, Kingsgrove, P.M. Fowler, 2/3rd Battalion Association, 1980, p 365.

93 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 79.

94 AWM PR00602, A. Pirie, diary entry, 30/5/43.

95 AWM PR00588, Les Clothier diary entry, 8/12/44.

96 AWM S00919 Roy Burbury, interview.

put our tents up in the bush, sleep on the ground (ground sheet and two blankets) eat in the open, no lights at night or camp comforts. Life was at a very low ebb for us ... all we could do was growl at one another, or go AWOL, which we did pretty often.’⁹⁷

King was a little contemptuous of the training methods which made going AWL more attractive. He described how, in early 1943: ‘Our first lesson was how to row a boat ... I had to sit in the boat with an oar in each hand, on dry land ... learning how to row. The rest of the platoon was lined up watching. I looked at them. They were all trying to hide smiles. It was just too much for me. I burst out laughing and could not stop.’ He was then charged with ‘not taking an interest in lessons’ and sentenced to one week CB.⁹⁸ One can either sympathise with the officer who had to enforce this punishment or criticise him for not turning a blind eye to a trivial offence. Perhaps the latter might have earned this officer some ‘leader legitimacy’ in the Anzac tradition.

Commanders sometimes did little to win the loyalty and support of their troops. Leave was sometimes granted and then withdrawn, as in the case of Henry Fawkes’s Armoured Division in Western Australia. He said, with some hyperbole, that ‘leave was cancelled three times without explanation so the whole unit went AWL.’⁹⁹ Symons wrote that ‘in early 1942 in Western Australia there were strikes against “brass-hatted” stupidity and curtailment of leave. At one army camp, soldiers conducted a sit-down strike for a day and a half, at another 2-3,000 troops held mass meetings and boycotted parades, and a strike occurred at a third camp.’¹⁰⁰ One soldier reported on the attitude of officers when confronted about problems with leave. The standard responses were these statements, which, he said:

have been repeated to soldiers *ad nauseam* as long as there have been mugs in the army.

1. Leave is not a right but a privilege
2. Why did you join up – to go on leave?
3. It’s a pity some of you weren’t under German discipline. See how much leave you’d get then.

97 Olsen, *Battalion into Battle*, pp 237-238.

98 *ibid.*, pp 245-246.

99 Henry Fawkes, interview, 13/12/11.

100 Symons, *All out for the People’s War*, p 601.

4. I had a thousand days service in the last war and only 5 days leave.¹⁰¹

This soldier's tone exemplifies the contempt and anger that these men felt for their officers who not only had to implement the policies of their senior commanders, but, like the officers this man refers to, seemed to support and relish these policies. Griffiths-Marsh saw another side to the leave problem – the lowering of morale and slackening of attitudes. He wrote: 'AWL (absent without leave), and other military offences increased. One digger I spoke with had had Jack, army euphemism for syphilis, twice. He was very proud of this doubtful distinction (and)... boasted his intention to contract another load of the Jack at the first opportunity, as it would keep him out of battle.'¹⁰²

Some officers were aware of the problems these men faced. Gordon Frost's company commander fudged the leave books so that he could go home and see his wife and child.¹⁰³ Others were not so fortunate. Bob Ausburn asked for leave to go home and visit his dying mother in Sydney but leave was refused. He went AWL.¹⁰⁴ Bryan Armstrong was a teenager growing up on the Atherton Tableland in the midst of the army camps. He told the story of an occasion when he was told by the Provosts at Millaa Millaa of diggers who were veterans of the Middle East going AWL because they couldn't get leave after returning from those campaigns. One day Armstrong saw 20 of them 'heading for the coast'. One sold his 303 and 30 to 40 rounds of ammunition for £2.¹⁰⁵ While this might be an extreme way of going AWL, it underlines the breakdown of morale and sense of purpose by these men who had been through hard and difficult campaigns in the Middle East and now found themselves isolated and with no hope of their situation ending. As S.E. Benson wrote: 'The stay at Townsville was something of a test of the men's strength to see anything through. Men felt that the time spent there was being wasted and that the work they did every day was to serve no purpose other than to give them something to do. It was not surprising that many "went through".'¹⁰⁶

101 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 97.

102 Griffiths-Marsh, *I Was only Sixteen*, pp 251-252.

103 Gordon Frost, interview, 1/9/05.

104 Bob Ausburn, interview, 12/3/11.

105 Eacham Historical Society (compilation, no editor named), *Windows 45: Unknown stories of the War Years on the Tableland*, Eacham Historical Society, Malanda, Queensland, 2001, p 35.

106 Benson, *The Story of the 42nd Infantry Battalion in World War II*, p 12.

Confrontations with the provosts while on leave were common. In Cairns on one occasion, according to Holt, men from the 2/1st ‘chased the Military Jacks back to their barracks’.¹⁰⁷ Clift collectively condemned the ‘Sydney black marketeer bastards and Base provosts’ as being anti-digger and anti-frontline soldier.¹⁰⁸ Russel Ward, the author of *The Australian Legend*, was himself a serving soldier in the Second World War. He ended the war as a Warrant Officer II in a psychology unit. He said that provosts were ‘all bastards’, an opinion he was qualified to have ‘especially after living in their barracks with them for two month-long periods.’¹⁰⁹ Solidarity against the provosts was important to the men. Clift described how he was arrested by the Provosts when on leave in Sydney in 1942. His mate, Blue, was with him at the time and had a pass but he would not show it to the Provosts so as to stay with Clift and not have him face the authorities alone. The loyalty between members of the 2nd AIF, especially the 6th Division ‘originals’, was strong.¹¹⁰

Leave also created problems between Australian and American soldiers. Paul Henningham, an infantry lieutenant, remembers Atherton and Canungra as just ‘long periods of training’. He had a deal of sympathy for his men and their anxiety about American GIs. This brought up a common reason for men going AWL when normal applications for leave were not granted:

I remember getting quite a few applications from troops for leave who were told ‘come home quickly, your wife’s playing up or she’s going out with a Yank or she’s been seen with Yanks’. You can imagine the distress ... they probably only married before they left ... Here were these well-dressed yanks with a tie and their uniforms that looked like officers’ uniforms ... they had a lot of money and they got a lot more leave and, of course, there was this myth that they had come out here to rescue us and all of this built up so that when they did get into a stoush there was a lot of resentment.¹¹¹

This was a difficult situation for any officer, but it was more difficult for the anxious men who saw the officers as standing in the way of their relationships with their wives or girlfriends. The length of the training periods at Atherton made the situation much worse. Les Cook commented that ‘the American military police weren’t very popular with our people. They had those long

107 Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, p 173.

108 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 161.

109 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 316.

110 Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p 140.

111 Paul Henningham, interview, 1/4/11.

sticks and I've seen those Colt 45s. You had to back off.'¹¹² Benson said his battalion did not like Americans 'with bulging pockets and privileges allowed him. Australian soldiers objected to the production of knives and pistols in brawls by Americans; it created 'ill-feeling.'¹¹³ The US Consul, Mason Turner, reported in September, 1942 that in North Queensland matters 'reached such a pass that Australians and Americans would rather kill each other than the Japanese.'¹¹⁴ Henry and Elaine Tranter wrote that in Queensland, 'the original practice of carrying Australian and American troops together (on trains) had to be abandoned because they simply did not get on. Some of the boys felt their allies were not pulling their weight in the front line. They had smarter uniforms, were better paid and worst of all, were popular with our girls.'¹¹⁵ Never before had Australian 'manliness' been so challenged; soldiers saw the army and its officers as complicit with Yankee effrontery.

Andrew Pirie showed similar antipathy to the Americans when writing home about a friend who was dating an American Lieutenant:

After all they (the Americans) saved Australia whereas we only lost our souls, coppers & health slogging it out in N.G. to say nothing of the Middle East & Malayan diggers. I've given the game away & as far as I'm concerned the Aussie girls can go to it... The people down south seem to be too taken up in looking after their own ends & trying to get settled in to reap the after war profits'¹¹⁶

The most publicised incident between Australian and American soldiers was the infamous 'Battle of Brisbane' fought over the 26th and 27th November, 1942. The report found the troops involved were mostly from the rear lines: 'It seems, in effect, that one has to come back to rear areas, far behind the firing line, to find men sufficiently inexperienced, untrained or misguided as to indulge in brawls and quarrels with those who are fighting on the same side as themselves.'¹¹⁷

There were other riots in Queensland at Townsville, Rockhampton and Mount Isa. Similar riots in other states also occurred in Melbourne on 1 December 1942, at Sydney's Bondi on 6

112 Les Cook, interview, 19/9/05.

113 Benson, *The Story of the 42nd Infantry Battalion*, p 12.

114 Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, p 303.

115 Tranter and Tranter, *Remembering Rocky Creek WWII*, p 19.

116 AWM PR00602 Andrew Pirie, letter home, 13/3/44.

117 Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, p 306.

February 1943, in Perth in January 1944 and in Fremantle in April 1944.¹¹⁸ As for the Brisbane Riots, Rosemary Campbell says the riots were the frustrated actions of ‘men ill at ease’ trying to redefine themselves in terms of the Anzac Legend in contrast to these stereotypical, flashy, American soldiers.¹¹⁹ In many cases the riots involved AIF men, returned from the Middle East and North Africa, or Kokoda, whose superior manliness was no longer assumed in the face of the American invaders.

Men returning from the Middle East and later, men returning from leave in the south presented a particular difficulty for officers with their levels of absenteeism. The official historian of the 2/6th Battalion called them a ‘dispirited battalion’ at Wondecla in the Atherton Tablelands with increased levels of men going AWL.¹²⁰

The 6th Division was not the only division to suffer from men going AWL. The 9th Division showed similar trends when they were due to return to camp from leave after their return from North Africa early in 1943. One battalion in the 9th Division, the 2/13th Battalion, had in its diary an entry after reassembling at Ravenshoe in May 1944: ‘The Bn strength is only 370, which is about 40%. The camp has an air of hopelessness about it, possibly because the officers aren’t worried, and so it comes down’.¹²¹ Lieutenant Colonel Sandover of the 2/11th Battalion wrote in the battalion diary in May, 1943 that men faced charges for AWL every day: ‘The leave situation and AWL position overshadowed everything else this month. Orderly Rooms took place every day and in some cases lasted for 3 hours or more.’¹²²

118 Kay Saunders, ‘Reassessing the Significance of the Battle of Brisbane’, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* Vol. 15 issue 1, 1993: pp. 70-73.

119 Rosemary Campbell, *Heroes and Lovers : a question of national identity*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1989, p 138.

120 David Hay, *Nothing Over Us: The Story of the 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1984, as cited in Barter, *Far above Battle*, p 216.

121 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, pp 148-149.

122 Olsen, *Battalion into Battle*, p 237.

When Corporal Les Clothier returned after 50 days' leave in April 1943 only one-quarter of the battalion were there.¹²³ Again, after their return from the New Guinea campaign in 1944 the same thing occurred. Clothier made the following entries in his diary:

10/5/44 – '¼ of unit arrived – Must be quite a few of the boys AWL besides a fair percentage of them being in hospital.'

21/5/44 - 'There is nothing much doing here at present. Bn strength is only 370 which is only about 40%.'

2/6/44 - 'This camp gives me the horrors properly.'¹²⁴

Other battalions were similarly affected. On 4th May, 1943 Corporal Phil O'Brien reported that only 150 men from 2/15th Bn reported at the Atherton Tablelands. Many subsequently never reported.¹²⁵

Clothier's reference to men being in hospital was another reality. There was a huge turnover from medical downgrading and discharges after the 1943 New Guinea Campaign, mainly due to tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Ron Gower, who served with the 3rd Militia Battalion on Kokoda and later transferred to the AIF when the 3rd Battalion was disbanded, recollected that 'I spent most of the time at Atherton in the base hospital, recovering from scrub typhus. I hardly ever saw an officer unless it was an MO.'¹²⁶ Barter wrote that in January 1943 the 2/2nd Battalion had, at the beginning of its time at Ravenshoe and later Wondecla, many hold-ups since many men went back to hospital with malaria. Of those who were in attendance at camp then, 250 were reinforcements and the rest were on leave.¹²⁷ Another soldier from the 2/2nd Battalion wrote in his diary that 'the strength of the Bn gradually increased due to personnel returning from leave but the effective strength remained almost stationary due to evacuations to hospital with recurrences of malaria.'¹²⁸ Clift wrote that 95% of New Guinea veterans spent time in hospitals at Atherton with malaria and other tropical diseases,¹²⁹ while Stan and Les Briggs of the 36th Battalion wrote that while at Atherton from May, 1943 there

123 Johnston, *That Magnificent Ninth*, p 186.

124 PR00588, Les Clothier, diary entries.

125 Johnston, *That Magnificent 9th*, p 186.

126 Ron Gower, interview, 19/5/12.

127 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 208.

128 *ibid*, p 211.

129 Clift, *War Dance*, p 360.

were 100 malarial cases per day with a battalion strength of only 200.¹³⁰ Under these circumstances, officers found it very difficult to maintain morale and any sense of unit cohesion while, at the same time, they came under fire from disenchanted men who blamed them for their troubles.

In the Atherton Tablelands some soldiers were given more frequent local leave in towns like Cairns and Townsville. Some commented on gaining liberal leave while others complained of not getting enough. Men of the 2/2nd Battalion complained to Barter that there was little local leave.¹³¹ Another said that: 'We were not privileged to see much of Atherton because it was out of bounds to all ranks; that is except for the Provost Corps who did a good job keeping us ordinary troops from seeing what Atherton looked like. Also, I suppose the young ladies of the town were protected from mixing with any undesirables from the wartime army.'¹³²

However, Malcolm Uren of the 2/16th Battalion wrote that:

Those were pleasant days. Supplies were good and the cooking reasonable. There was little illness and a great deal of comfort. Leave could be taken at towns like Atherton, Kairi, Millaa Millaa and Malanda or more distantly and rather more boisterously at Cairns or Innisfail. Although the daily preparation was for fighting, the war seemed a long way off.¹³³

But Hughes of the 31/51st Battalion, however, wrote that 'the shops (in Townsville) had little to sell and as the Americans were well paid, they purchased most of what was available.'¹³⁴ Local leave was fraught with its own problems and the dissatisfaction with the conditions of leave, along with the presence of the Americans, could bring the men into conflict with military authority. When the 51st Battalion heard rumours that they were shortly to be sent overseas, the 12 hours leave in Townsville they received every three weeks did not seem enough so many went AWL. Provosts patrolled all the trains and the penalty if you were caught was one day's detention for every day AWL.¹³⁵ Another battalion seems to have had leave on average once per

130 Stan and Les Brigg, *The 36th Australian Infantry Battalion, 1939-1945: the Story of an Australian Infantry Battalion and its Part in the War Against Japan*, Sydney, The 36th Battalion (St George's English Rifle Regt.) Association, 1967, passim.

131 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 211.

132 Tranter and Tranter, *Remembering Rocky Creek*, p 15.

133 Malcolm Uren, *A Thousand Men at War: The Story of the 2/16th Battalion AIF*, Melbourne, Heinemann, 1959, pp 187-188.

134 Hughes, *At War with the 51st Infantry Battalion*, p 35.

135 *ibid*, pp 50-51.

week to Atherton and Tolga.¹³⁶ The amount of leave was sometimes very discretionary according to the policy of the CO, something that could cause discontent from one battalion to another.

Officers

The attitude of officers to this time in Atherton and other remote places was ambivalent. It has already been mentioned that some officers were sympathetic to the position of the men. Indeed, many of them were in the same position themselves. Others seemed to be removed from the reality that the soldiers knew. Some of the unit histories have been written by officers in a battalion or unit and reflect that attitude. *The Unofficial History of the 29/46th Infantry Battalion AIF* was written by seven officers, including the CO, and assisted by one private and one sergeant. It glosses over discontent of the men with comments such as: ‘Weekly Battalion parades caused the usual “digger” chorus of complaint, but the men soon realised that the new regime was producing results’, which was bolstered by ‘good clothing, better food and better hygiene’.¹³⁷ Dealing with their living conditions, the history relates that: ‘While at Strathpine, both officers’ and sergeants’ messes flourished as far as rationing permitted. They honoured all occasions worthy of celebration, and did so in the best traditions. The troops’ entertainment was catered for in an excellent recreation hut, presided over by Mr Wilkinson, Salvation Army Officer. There were games, recorded music and a fine wireless set.’ Here is an interesting and benign picture of the men gathered in the recreation hut, innocently having a good time listening to music and playing quoits.¹³⁸ If the men of the 29/46th Battalion were the same as men from other battalions, they would no doubt not have been impressed with the picture of peace and harmony portrayed by these officers.

After no home leave for over a year the history describes how ‘amid scenes of rejoicing the first batch of men left on 17 days of home leave. The many who had to remain at camp over

¹³⁶ Russell, *Militia Battalion at War*, p 140.

¹³⁷ Rupert Charlott (ed), *The Unofficial History of the 29/46th Infantry Battalion AIF*, Melbourne, Halestead, 1952, p 6.

¹³⁸ *ibid*, p 121.

Christmas did themselves well, the Unit organising a first-rate dinner and a fairly generous quota of Australia's favourite thirst-quencher.¹³⁹ This reads a little like a boy's own annual as one is led to believe that these men were happy to spend Christmas in camp. In dealing with the question of men going AWL, the writer describes them as 'unofficially extending their home leave'. This occurred on that Christmas described above after the leave entitlement was reduced from 17 to 12 days. This was a serious matter for soldiers who had to travel for days in each direction just to reach home. But, according to the officers who wrote the history, it all ended with a laugh as

there was a "mass orderly room" and consolidated revenue benefited by more than 1000 pounds. There was, of course, no truth in the suggestion that the CO was "in on the rake-off", though he certainly deserved some form of compensation. Each conviction required his signature – ten times!¹⁴⁰

One might wonder if the men were feeling as jolly about the situation as this officer.

Not all battalions had the same experience. Bilney wrote that in the 14th/32nd Battalion the officers were sympathetic and charge sheets for AWL were scrapped.¹⁴¹ But Russell Mathew's 58/59th Militia battalion did not have as benign a CO. Mathews described a scene when soldiers were being charged for going AWL:

Among the members of the battalion at Atherton in 1944 were many who had an interview with George Warfe for overstaying their leave in Melbourne. They were tried in batches, rather like the aristocrats in the French Revolution and with about as much hope of mercy. At the end of one 'trial' the accused were asked if they had something to say. Corporal B. stepped forward and said: 'Yes sir, I object to being called a 'bludger'. 'Right,' said the colonel, 'You are all fined one pound a day with the exception of Corporal B. He's fined two pounds a day'.¹⁴²

This is the same Lieutenant Colonel Warfe who his MO, Refshauge, described as being a good leader in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The understanding, generous man who contributed to the battalion history seems nothing like the hard man described by Pratten in Chapter 3 or the CO

139 *ibid*, p 7.

140 *ibid*, p 7.

141 Bilney, *14/32 Australian Infantry Battalion*, p 58.

142 Russell Mathews, *Militia Battalion at War, the History of the 58th/59th Australian Infantry battalion in the Second World War*, Sydney, 58th/59th Battalion Association, 1961, p 141.

doling out punishment in the report above. There was no informality of the power relationship in Warfe's command, no 'leader legitimacy' that Ross recognised in the First AIF.¹⁴³

Obviously, some officers were worlds apart from the mind-sets of their men. Lieutenant James Cornwell, from the 183 Supply Depot, Australian Army Service Corps, complained about his batman in a letter home from the Northern Territory in June, 1944: 'The old man is slipping down on his job. Here it is 9 o'clock at night & he hasn't put my net up yet. I'll have to do it myself by the look of things'. In the same letter he wrote proudly about acceptance by his fellow officers:

Well I think at last I have been accepted as one of them by the other officers of this unit... Major Overall (senior major) left us to get married last Saturday and threw a party to celebrate on Friday night. Plenty of booze about. Anyway things progressed to a pretty wild state by midnight & there were only 8 of us left everyone under with the exception of me. Quite a few had retired earlier in the night but I decided to remain ... Quite a few of them evidently noticed it because Dick Brown came up towards me towards the end of the night & said, 'I'm proud of you Jim you're the only reo [reinforcement] officer here everyone has commented on it and I reckon you'll do us'.¹⁴⁴

Lieutenant Cornwell was hardly facing the enemy and had concerns that were far removed from the men in his charge. The idea of an officer sharing hardship with his men in the Digger tradition seems not to have been his concern. Rather, his concerns were based around the failure of his batman to make his quarters more comfortable and gaining the social acceptance of his fellow officers.

Other officers had similar comments to make. Three officers wrote the history of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion. This battalion was stationed at Wongabel in the Atherton Tablelands from November 1943 to May, 1945. This history places emphasis on the experiences of the officers of the battalion. One officer wrote that 'one night in the officers' mess, Padre Stuart Watts enthralled a small group with his views on religion.' Another comment was: 'The officers' log

143 Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, Pp 86- 91.

144 AWM PR01829 James M. Cornwell, letter.

cabin mess was receiving quite a deal of praise from visiting officers.’¹⁴⁵ Their lives in this extended period in north Queensland had become concerned with issues that seem far removed from their men and the war.

The area where officers gained most approval with their soldiers was entertainment and recreation while they were at Atherton. Divisional and battalion commanders knew that they could be training for a long time and that idleness and boredom could be very counter-productive, so they introduced a comprehensive program of entertainment, sport and later, training for civilian life. Barter wrote that for the 16th Brigade, a cinema was opened at Atherton in January, 1944. At the same time cricket, gymkhana, athletics, cycling, wood-chopping, sawing and a cooking competition, boxing, football and swimming were introduced as competitive and recreational sports. As well as that, an inter-unit drill competition was introduced which was very successful.¹⁴⁶ One veteran commented to Barrett: ‘All credit to those commanding officers who devised educational, recreational and sporting programmes to hold men’s interest. The attention that field commanders paid to the welfare of their men has not been properly recognised; it was far superior to the British and American armies.’¹⁴⁷

Russell Mathews listed all the facilities and programs offered to the 58/59th Battalion at Atherton in 1944, provided by CO Warfe, a seemingly enigmatic CO, as has already been discussed. They included kitchens and messes huts, recreation huts and offices and store buildings, a library, a canteen, a unit tailor and bookmaker as well as gravel paths (constructed by the men) and real beds in their tents. Beer rations were 1.1 pints twice weekly and men received a tobacco ration of 3 ounces of tobacco or 100 cigarettes per man weekly. There was a public address system with music, a cinema, sporting facilities and he boasted that everything was clean and whitewashed. On top of this was weekly leave to Atherton and Tolga.¹⁴⁸

Frank Herbertson of the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion praised his battalion CO, Gordon Searle, who he said ‘was a man of wonderful ideas’. When it came to ‘...people being bored, and

145 Gordon Osborn, (Lt), Steve Clarke (Capt) and Bill Jollie (Capt) (eds), *The Pioneers: Unit History of the 2nd/1st Australian Pioneer Battalion, Second AIF*, Sydney, M.D. Herron, 1988, pp 134-138.

146 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p211.

147 Barrett, *We Were There*, p 220.

148 Mathews, *Militia Battalion at War*, p 140.

frustrated, and so on, because of the inactivity of it all ... that's where the battalion shone. Gordon was a great organiser...' His battalion had a hobby shop and £1000 worth of sporting equipment bought in Brisbane.¹⁴⁹ Another Battalion CO who earned the approval of his men was Lieutenant Colonel Hector Binks of the 2/11th Battalion. He knew that a favourite recreation for idle soldiers was gambling on horses. He was also well aware that this was prohibited, but he understood that if bookies were well managed, they could be allowed successfully, so a few were 'given the nod'.¹⁵⁰ In terms of the Anzac Legend, however, one might ask how all this concern for entertainment, playing quoits and being enthralled by lectures on religion, affected their sense of manliness. There was no bravery or shared hardship here, nothing to bind the officers and other ranks together.

'Red Diggers'

One interesting aspect of the army in the Second World War was the development of a group of 'Red Diggers', serving soldiers who were members of the Australian Communist Party (CPA) or sympathisers to their cause. Potts claims that there were about 4000 communists in the Australian Armed Forces during the Second World War,¹⁵¹ but it is possible that they had a lot more unofficial support from soldiers. This was a time of political reflection and rethinking for a lot of people inside and outside of the army. Communism was seen by some, with the 'legitimation' of the Stalinist Soviet Union as an ally of the democratic powers opposed to fascism, to be a relevant and effective answer to the nation's economic problems. Alastair Davidson says that there were 23,000 paid up members of the CPA in 1945 and that electoral support for the CPA had grown from 8,511 or 0.27 per cent of the vote in the Federal election of 1931 to 81,816 or 2 per cent of the vote in the election of August, 1943.¹⁵²

Drew Cottle argues that in civilian Australian society at this time:

149 AWM S00588 Herbertson, Frank, interview.

150 Olsen, *Battalion into Battle*, p 257.

151 Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, p 258.

152 A. Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, Stanford California, The Hoover Institution Press, 1969, as cited in Lee, David, 'Politics and Government', Beaumont, *Australia's War*, p 95 .

The reality of the war economy from the assembly line in Botany, or a Maribyrnong explosives factory, was a class apart from a Darling Point musicale in aid of the Free French, or the sumptuous interiors of the Melbourne Club. The fervent and endless wartime speeches about ‘equality of sacrifice’, ‘national unity’, a ‘common purpose’ and a New Order, did not change those resilient class realities.¹⁵³

Cottle argues that there was rebellion and disobedience in the civilian workforce: ‘Despite the faith many of the working people held in the promises of the Labor government, proletarian rebellion was rife throughout the war. It expressed itself in high levels of absenteeism, go slows and wildcat strikes.’¹⁵⁴ This often caused divisions between soldiers, especially AIF men and the workers at home.¹⁵⁵ Many soldiers were trade unionists in their civilian lives, and as Les Cook said, quoting from a radio interview he had heard, ‘We weren’t soldiers in the AIF, we were heavily armed civilians.’¹⁵⁶ The rise in the profile of the Communist Party during the war years would serve to raise consciousness of social class divisions.

After the Soviet Union’s entry into the war, the CPA saw this as a war against fascism and so supported Australia’s war efforts against the Axis powers. But at the same time, they were keen to ensure that Australian soldiers were not abused or exploited and that their fighting and living conditions were acceptable. According to Symons, Communists claimed that there was “‘widespread dissatisfaction” among the troops in camps around Australia, over pay, food and hygiene, poor standards of equipment and training, and curtailment of leave’, but that ‘the aim was not to “undermine military discipline” or to interfere with officers’ authority but to avoid “unnecessary discontent, unexplained driving of troops, and loss of morale”’.¹⁵⁷

The Communist Party tapped into a sense of discontent amongst troops and used this to improve the cause of their party, as well as trying to do something to improve the soldiers’ lot. They also tapped into a sense of anti-authoritarianism amongst many soldiers that was a by-product of the idleness and frustration of their situation in northern Queensland and other isolated places in

153 Drew Cottle, “A New Order for the Old Disorder”, In Kennedy, Richard (ed), *Australian Welfare History*, Sydney, Macmillan, 1982, pp 264-265.

154 *ibid*, p 271.

155 Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only*, p 94.

156 Les Cook, interview, 19/9/05.

157 Symons, *All out for the People’s War*, p 601.

Australia. Red Diggers were overtly political and encouraged soldiers to make outward expression of their dislike of established class symbols. For example, Symons relates that ‘anecdotes abound about a common practice that occurred throughout the forces (and in civilian life): on film-nights when *God Save the King* and *The Star Spangled Banner* were played with slides of King George and Roosevelt, the cry would go up, “What about Joe?” or “Joe for King”. It was probably initiated by communists but quickly became a spontaneous response’.¹⁵⁸

Peter Medcalf writes that on Bougainville, when at the cinema a picture of the King was shown on the screen, men called out for Stalin’s photograph which the projectionist did. Medcalf wrote, ‘We cheered lustily and resumed our seats. Nobody was really interested in Uncle Joe, but it annoyed the officers.’¹⁵⁹ There is an interesting difference here between Symons’ and Medcalf’s accounts where Medcalf thinks it was all for a laugh and to annoy the officers, while Symons believed the soldiers saw ‘Joe’ Stalin as a symbol of their fight for better conditions. But even if the great majority were not communist supporters, it does indicate that the men were aware that the officer class was unhappy with any communist sentiment expressed and that the communists were seen as representing something against the establishment and for the working class. The men were happy to use this as a way of irritating their officers and showing their disapproval of an authority system that was not just military-based, but, many believed, class-based.

Communism was frowned upon by many in the officer class. There has already been reference to Gullett believing Australia had a ‘peasant society as opposed to a sophisticated or metropolitan society’.¹⁶⁰ Gullett became a Liberal Party member of the federal parliament in 1946, taking over the seat of Henty from his father. He helped to spearhead attacks on communists and left-wingers in the years immediately after the war, including using parliamentary privilege in 1952 to attack particular academics at the Australian National University, saying that the university was ‘more famous for its left wing politics than for its research.’¹⁶¹ Gullett openly confessed to not having

158 *ibid*, p 608.

159 Peter Medcalf, *War In The Shadows: Bougainville 1944-45*, Collins, Sydney, 1986, pp 35-36.

160 Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only*, p 75.

161 <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/cabinet/notebooks/events-issues-1952.aspx>.

anything in common with most of his fellow-officers, let alone his men, after his being given a commission in the 6th Division.¹⁶²

It was not just communists inside the army who campaigned for soldiers' conditions but communists outside, as well. An editorial of the *Worker's Star*, the journal of the Australian Communist Party at the time, 'campaigned collectively and constructively for improvements in conditions, equipment and training methods, for exposure of wastage and officer corruption and, above all, for greater democracy in the form of officially sanctioned welfare committees'.¹⁶³

According to Ted Bacon, a one-time secretary of the Queensland Branch of the CPA:

Successful strikes without victimisation of leaders were far more common than might be imagined by those who believe a military bureaucracy is practically unbeatable. Refusals to parade until food or conditions were improved occurred in almost all training camps ... The communist concept that, for real anti-fascist success, the army must be transformed into a people's army became so widely accepted that even the most anti-democratic commanders were compelled to move cautiously in their dealings with the rank and file.¹⁶⁴

There was a large formal process of organisation with the CPA in the army. O'Lincoln writes that 'on the Atherton Tableland the party held a major conference assembling some 50 branch delegates. The CPA initiated a petition for a "battle bonus" which gathered 250,000 signatures, 50,000 of them from within the military'.¹⁶⁵

CPA members contributed to two publications. One was *SALT* (Sea, Air Land Troops), the official journal for soldiers, sailors and airmen. The second was *Troppo Tribune*, an unofficial publication by the CPA for soldiers. In 1944, *Troppo Tribune* reported that in one unit, after '... a hard struggle in the early stages to win the confidence of the men and the cooperation of the administration [the unit welfare committee] has become a force out of which have developed better conditions, improved amenities and morale, and greater efficiency.'¹⁶⁶ O'Lincoln claims that while the military authorities were not happy with communists working in official or

162 Gullett, *Not as a Duty Only*, p 70.

163 Symons, 'All out for the People's War', p 602.

164 *ibid*, p 612.

165 <http://redsites.alphalink.com.au/cpa-capsule.htm>.

166 Symons, 'All out for the People's War', p 605.

unofficial army journals, they turned a blind eye so long as they supported the war effort.¹⁶⁷

Hardy said that ‘the army knew they were all communists but they tolerated them because their skills of organisation and emphasis on education were “successful in mobilising otherwise bored, landlocked troops”.’¹⁶⁸ Long wrote that *SALT* was censored by the Director-General of Public Relations from June 1943 because of ‘liberal policies’ of the journalists.¹⁶⁹

SALT was edited by Mungo MacCallum (senior), a well known left-wing journalist and one contributor was Manning Clark. Symons wrote that Hardy

particularly remembered a feature article he worked on with Manning Clark, then a lecturer at the University of Melbourne. Hardy had put the idea up to the party branch of doing a Marxist history of society, from primitive communism, slavery, feudalism and capitalism to, inevitably, socialism and communism. Eventually, the managing editor, Mungo MacCallum, gave the go-ahead for an article on ‘the historical development of society’, written by Clark and illustrated by Hardy.¹⁷⁰

Hardy told Hocking that ‘I got the job at *Salt* because the majority of the members of its staff were members of the Communist Party. I got it because the Party branch at *SALT* met and said, Hardy’s a communist, we’ll give him the job.’¹⁷¹ It is a measure of the influence of the journal and the political education of service people at the time that *Salt* had a circulation of 185,000, each to be read by at least three readers.¹⁷² A mark of the heightened political awareness and feeling amongst servicemen was an incident related by Kathleen Pyne née Cleary. At the end of the war there was a family gathering in Bankstown at their childhood home. She had seven brothers in uniform during the war. She recalls two brothers, one a member of the AIF who had spent over three years on anti-aircraft defences at Darwin and was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, while another was a member of the RAAF who was to become a successful

167 <http://redsites.alphalink.com.au/cpaww2.htm>.

168 Hocking, *Frank Hardy*, p 36.

169 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 86.

170 Symons, *All out for the People’s War*, p 611

171 Hocking, *Frank Hardy*, p 36.

172 *ibid*, p 36.

small businessman in later years. She recalls them arguing and then ‘standing toe-to-toe in the front yard, fighting over communist activities on building sites.’¹⁷³

The Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS)

There were 24,000 women who served in the AWAS from August 1941 until 1947¹⁷⁴ when it was replaced by the Women’s Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC). On May 3rd 1945, the first detachment of 385 AWAS women was sent to Lae.¹⁷⁵ Apart from women in the Australian Army Nursing Service, these were the first women to officially serve overseas in the Second World War, although the previous year, five AWAS Intelligence Corps personnel were sent to Dutch New Guinea in June 1944 without official permission.¹⁷⁶ This was a marked change from the First World War when, apart from the nursing corps, women could not serve in the armed forces. Women fulfilled many roles in the army. They included traditional roles like clerks, typists, cooks and drivers to more front-line roles like signals, intelligence, chemical warfare units, radar, search lights and attachments to fixed weapons such as AA guns.¹⁷⁷

Members of the AWAS faced officers of two types. Firstly, there were the male officers and secondly, there were their own female officers who they seemed to get along with, in many cases, better than the men did with theirs. For many AWAS members there was a sense of being looked after by their female supervisors who called them ‘the kids’,¹⁷⁸ a somewhat patronizing term today, but one that sums up the attitude their officers had towards protecting them from danger. Others, though, felt that AWAS officers were more reliant on formal discipline than many male officers. Grace Johansen argues that ‘officers in the AWAS demanded a show of due

173 Kathleen Pyne née Cleary was the author’s mother.

174 Janette Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen: Women in the Australian Army*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2001, p 6.

175 <http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/REL33981/>.

176 <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/structure/awas/>.

177 Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen*, p 6.

178 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1984, p 27.

deference from the female other ranks under them, and this included saluting'. According to an ex-AWAS officer, Molly Peat, officers interviewed by her did not expect to be popular.¹⁷⁹

Their officers feared that the women would be menaced by men. Bomford states that their officers feared their drinks were being laced in other ranks' clubs and that they were often seen as 'officers' playthings'.¹⁸⁰ Complaints were often made by male other ranks that women, initially nurses and then AWAS members, were a possession of officers and had little to do with other rank soldiers.¹⁸¹ Maurice Trigger complained that at Kairi in the Atherton Tablelands, 'the officers – they always seemed to have it good. They were always with the nurses.'¹⁸² This caused bitterness between male other ranks and their male officers as well as with members of the AWAS generally.

Some problems they faced from male officers were problems relating to recognition and acceptance. One member of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) wrote about male officers, 'some of whom were, at first, a little antagonistic and doubtful of the value of an Army Women's Service.'¹⁸³ Bomford wrote that:

AWAS members were grudgingly tolerated because of wartime necessity but were subjected to innuendo: a woman in uniform was not 'natural'. Cartoons about military women ranged from representations of 'cottonwool-headed' women more interested in coiffure than warfare to viragoes no man would want to marry. Some hinted at lesbianism in the services.¹⁸⁴

Molly Peat complained after the war: 'I came from Toorak with a commission. I walked into the orderly room to meet the CO and he said: "I don't want any AWAS officers round here ... I'm sending you out with a Sergeant who will be able to do everything"' and from then on I had a lot of trouble with him.'¹⁸⁵ One AWAS member, 'Beverly', said in an interview with Johansen that male officers and NCOs didn't know how to relate to women in the army ranks.¹⁸⁶

179 Grace Johansen, *The AWAS: A Social History of the Australian Women's Army Service*, BA Honours Thesis, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, 1996, p 17.

180 *ibid*, p 271.

181 AWM 3DR 3825, J. Butler, Diary entry, 8/2/43.

182 AWM S000591 Maurice Trigger, interview.

183 AWM MSS780, as cited in Janette Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen: Women in the Australian Army*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2001, p 6.

184 Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen*, p 25.

185 Johansen, *The AWAS*, p 34.

186 *ibid*, p 40.

The CO of the AWAS, Colonel Sybil Irving, complained that many of the male officers they worked with could not cope with having to deal with women's sensitivities, even though the offended sensitivities were more likely to be their own. Irving related an incident when

Early on, when we were first getting organised and were at Royal Park, the few girls we had hung their washing to dry on a line they had rigged up. Over came a runner from the Brigadier. He would not have his men exposed to such sights! What sights? I went out to see. Four pairs of decidedly plain, army-style, white bloomers hanging up to dry.' Later Irving said that, 'There was the problem of the unmentionables ... Modest sanitary pads were eating up their few coupons. I had to go to the brigadier. When I told him about the problem, he said "You can't speak to me about such a matter! You are not to come to me with such things!"'¹⁸⁷

While it was the CO of the AWAS that had to bear the brunt of the Brigadier's indignation, it stands only as a sign of what all AWAS members had to deal with at various levels. This was a man's army and their very presence was, to some men, an affront to their masculinity and certainly the masculinity of the Anzac Legend. One officer, Jean Wood, commented that 'an extra burden on those early officers was the fact that they were being examined under the microscope of established male army tradition. (We) "had to appear smart, as became officers, yet womanly, as became ladies".'¹⁸⁸

There were problems for AWAS members arising from sexual activity. Molly Bayne wrote in 1943, during the war and only a short time after the creation of the AWAS, that a colonel in the AWAS received only 50.5 per cent of male officer rates of pay as well as no allowance if they were married women. Married men would get an allowance. Female MOs received male rates, which, while it was just, was an anomaly in the scheme of things at the time. Bayne said that, 'women tend to become cynical about the men with whom they work,' and that 'with most women in the services it is not the actual money she is worrying about; it is the affront to her personal esteem.' Other ranks received 'about 66 per cent' of male rates of equivalent ranks.¹⁸⁹

187 Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p 249.

188 *ibid*, p 260.

189 Mollie Bayne, (ed), *Australian Women at War*, Melbourne, Research Group of the Left Book Club of Victoria, 1943, p 20.

Problems relating to sexual activity caused problems for members of the AWAS. Pregnancy or fear of pregnancy with the 'girls' was an on-going problem. Sybil Irving stressed on her officers that it was their responsibility to assist girls. She commented to Adam-Smith: 'The majority of the officers did try. It depended, of course, on the personality of the officer concerned, but many went out of their way to help the girls under them.'¹⁹⁰ But female AWAS other ranks had to deal with an infringement of their privacy in a way that male soldiers rarely did. According to Irving, the women's services had 'Supervisory Personnel' who acted as counsellors as well as a special military police for women. This group was established late in 1943. They were both counsellors to the girls as well as a military police with power of arrest. They were trained at a special school established in Melbourne in 1944 and military regulations were amended to accommodate their role as police.¹⁹¹ They investigated reasons for applications for discharge, to check for pregnancies or simply for those who were 'incurable'. They patrolled streets and public parks, sometimes because of information given by Brisbane Police, looking for these 'incurables'.¹⁹² There was a reason for this, other than mere prudishness or conservative morals of the day; the very reputation of the AWAS was likely to be tarnished by any sexual promiscuity of its members.

Truth newspapers¹⁹³ told stories of trainloads of service women being shipped to Adelaide to keep them out of public scrutiny and have their babies.¹⁹⁴ The same rumours occurred right across the women's services. Rosemary Campbell wrote of rumours of 43 WAAAF 'removed from Australian Officers' beds at the Seaview Hotel and sent to a city gaol', and that 'a whole railway car of pregnant WAAAF had been sent south from Queensland'. Campbell also wrote that it was alleged the deputy mayor of Townsville stated that American servicemen were pushing girls whom they had made pregnant under trucks to save themselves the cost of illegal abortions. According to Campbell these rumours even went so far as to assert that in Brisbane a special maternity hospital had to be built for pregnant servicewomen.¹⁹⁵

190 Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p 289.

191 *ibid*, p 287

192 *ibid*, p 287.

193 *Truth* newspapers existed at the time in several capital cities in Australia and they had a reputation for sensationalism and writing about scandal.

194 Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p 286.

195 Rosemary Campbell, *Heroes and Lovers: a Question of National Identity*, North Sydney, Allen & Unwin Australia Ply. Ltd., 1989, p. 98.

Such reports, incorrect as they were, made life more difficult for AWAS soldiers and their officers. It meant that officers often had to play the role of spy and provost with their other ranks. The *Australian Women's Weekly* came to the defence of Australian women in the armed services. In December, 1942 the *Weekly* reported on a British study of British Women's Services which said that:

War gives rise to many rumours. Vague and discreditable allegations about the conduct of women in the forces have caused considerable distress and anxiety not only to friends and relations at home but to men fighting overseas.

Some of these tales have suggested a high rate of illegitimate pregnancies, others that excessive drinking is taking place.

The magazine points out that the pregnancy rate for unmarried women in Britain at the time was 21.8 per 1000 women in the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) recruiting age group per annum, while for women in the services it was only 15.0 per 1000 women in that age group.¹⁹⁶ Clearly, women in the services were breaking new ground and the path would not be easy.

There was some official fraternising between women of the AWAS and male officers. Private Dawn Clarke was one of several female soldiers appointed to serve at the officers' mess. She commented that 'the officers previously only had batmen looking after them, so having a few young ladies appeared to be a welcome change.'¹⁹⁷ And later, Tranter writes about female soldiers at Rocky Creek, Atherton during the war: 'staff cars were provided to take them on outings to Cairns, Ravenshoe and Townsville.'¹⁹⁸ The relationship between male officers and members of AWAS, as well as nurses in the army, was very different from the relationship between officers and male other ranks. The ability of male officers to 'woo' AWAS service women with staff cars and other privileges was resented by soldiers the way that they resented officers on ships going to and from the Middle East monopolising nurses.

196 1942 'Slanders on service women's morals refuted.', *The Australian Women's Weekly* (1933 - 1982), 5 December, p. 12, viewed 25 November, 2014, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46231977>.

197 Tranter and Tranter (ed), *Remembering Rocky Creek WW2*, p 34.

198 *ibid*, pp 35-36.

The Militia and the AIF

It has already been mentioned that the relationship between the Militia and the AIF was at times very strained. At Atherton, the integration of Militia officers into AIF was to stretch the tension even further. Barter wrote that by July 1943, cross-posting of AIF officers to the Militia and the fact OCTU graduates could not return to their own units meant that there was a breakdown of the morale drawn from traditional unit solidarity because some of the best men were sent away, not to return. It was designed to improve the general standard of officers throughout the army but it ignored the wishes of the men and the experience of the First AIF. The men found it difficult to respect the 'reo' (reinforcement) officers. Some COs were reluctant to recommend men for officer training because they would lose their best men.¹⁹⁹ Fearnside commented that 'in the end it lowered the morale of the volunteer force and there is no evidence that it did anything to increase that of the Militia units.'²⁰⁰

Many believed that these newly appointed battle officers were not as good as their own NCOs and there were some revolts against them. On 9th November 1944, Barter writes, the A Company commander of the 2/2nd Battalion was attacked by two 'unidentified men'. CO Cameron ordered the company to parade in great coats only, to observe an alleged scratch a soldier supposedly received in the melee; the company refused. After consultation with the men, a new company commander was appointed and the men resumed work. Men of the battalion described this as a 'strike', 'rebellion', 'riot' or 'incident'.²⁰¹ The offending officer was a failure in exercises and they feared going into battle under him.²⁰² The incident was not supported only by other ranks. Vic Austin, the battalion historian, wrote that 'an incident in some form or other was almost inevitable, and may have been welcomed by some of the senior officers.'²⁰³ On another level, Lieutenant Colonel Cameron berated officers for lax discipline, such as allowing men to take reading material on exercises, failing in security measures and hygiene, and made

199 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 176.

200 Fearnside, *Half to Remember*, p 170.

201 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 216.

202, *ibid*, pp 216-217.

203 *ibid*, p 218.

the insistence on 'the paying of courtesies at all times and the elimination of the tendency to familiarity between officers, N.C.O.s and men.'²⁰⁴

The appointment of Cameron was not popular. He was an 'importation', not only from another brigade or division, but from a Militia battalion, although he was an AIF officer. He had not been to the Middle East, which was important to this battalion because the 2/2nd was an original 6th Division battalion, and he was still regarded, unfairly, as a 'Chocko CO'.²⁰⁵ This was despite the fact that he was an AIF man and had fought in Rabaul in January 1942 with the 2/22nd Battalion. He was acting CO of the 39th and then 53rd Militia Battalions in August and September, 1942. The 39th Battalion were the 'ragged bloody heroes' who had fought under Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner with such gallantry on the Kokoda Trail. The 39th Battalion was disbanded in 1943 after it was too decimated by its campaign in New Guinea and its 140 survivors who volunteered to transfer to the AIF were used to reinforce the 2/2nd Battalion. Cameron was given command of the 2/2nd battalion after his 3rd Militia Battalion was also disbanded. It was previously unheard of for a Militia CO to be given an AIF battalion. It did not help that he was unpopular with his colleagues or superiors. Pratten says that he was seen as a 'bombast' and as 'unreliable'.²⁰⁶ He gave Militia officers rank according to their 39th battalion position, a decision over which he had discretion. This upset the originals in the battalion, especially the NCOs because it denied them the opportunity for promotion. It did not help that the 39th Battalion men were Victorians and the 2/2nd men were from New South Wales.²⁰⁷

This integration of Militia officers into AIF units caused great resentment and many Militia men found it hard to feel at home in these new units. Men such as Bede Tongs and Verner Clements of the 3rd Militia Battalion, which, as already mentioned, was disbanded in 1943 as well, always saw their original Militia battalions as their home units and attended reunions of these battalions rather than their new AIF units to which they were later appointed and with whom they later

204 *ibid*, p 218.

205 *ibid*, pp 213-214.

206 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders*, p190

207 *ibid*, p 214.

fought. Bede Tongs was later commissioned in his AIF battalion but despite this, always felt more at home with his Militia mates.²⁰⁸

David Hay, historian of the 2/6th Battalion, had a similar argument about this major cause of dissatisfaction:

The loss of respected members of a unit sometimes has its compensations, for example, promotion of other members to fill their places. But it seemed that even this was now to be denied. The reduction in the size of the Australian army had led to the disbandment of several Militia units with the result that there was a surplus of officers and senior NCOs. Thus the expectation amongst the battalion's senior and well-qualified NCOs, that they might be commissioned in the field or promoted to warrant officer rank, seemed likely to be frustrated.²⁰⁹

Hay claims that AWL rates were higher as a result. By end of January, 1943 there were 52 cases of men going AWL and between October 1943 and December, 1944, 123 men had illegal periods of absence, including 23 'Originals'.²¹⁰ In this atmosphere, it was always going to be difficult for new officers, especially those from the Militia, to successfully command men with three years of battle experience and whose mates, or they themselves, had been overlooked for promotion. It was especially hard in an idle army where there was no battle experience to bond the men together, volunteer with conscript and officer with other rank.

Conclusion

It was ironic that the men who trained in the Atherton Tablelands were arguably, by October 1944, at the time the Americans invaded the Philippines, the best trained and the best equipped troops that served in the Australian army in the Second World War and some of the best jungle fighters in the world. Barter wrote that the 2/2nd Battalion received training in an assault course, jungle training, night manoeuvres and route marches. Even the cooks were trained in these

208 Bede Tongs, interview 19/9/05 and Verner Clements, interview, 15/7/05.

209 Hay, *Nothing Over Us*, p 387.

210 *ibid*, p 382.

aspects of fighting.²¹¹ They were also taught in how to deal with and prevent tropical diseases. Another soldier, Sergeant Edwards, commenting on the supply of weapons to Borneo in 1945, said that ‘the army chiefs have at last realised that men will fight better and be far happier when they get good equipment and lots of it.’²¹²

They were positive about their abilities. Malcolm Uren wrote that from February 1943, when the 2/16th battalion arrived at Atherton, there was, ‘jungle training in various forms, but all strenuous and lively ... This time the veterans of the battalion approached jungle training much in the mood of specialists anxious to become perfectionists. To them this was no meaningless drill.’²¹³ Gordon Osborne, author of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion history, wrote that ‘despite long hours engaged in amphibious training, a marked keenness was displayed by all troops and general morale remained at a good standard.’²¹⁴ Maurice Trigger, a Middle East veteran said that by then, ‘we had a terrible lot of faith in ourselves, in our officers. We had sorted the men from the boys.’²¹⁵ These men were primed for action and knew that they were good. Long commented that by 1945, the army was ‘in many respects, at the peak of its efficiency’.²¹⁶ However, there was so much frustration for them. Gallaway wrote: ‘They waited in vain to be given a task, and they were not the only unemployed Australian soldiers. Apart from some limited patrol activity by Militia units garrisoning Madang (in 1944), there were no Australian army units of any kind on active duty.’²¹⁷

They were bored and frustrated. Andrew Pirie wrote: ‘I would even welcome it if we were to go overseas to-morrow – anything for a change & some excitement ... you have no idea how boring it’s been to be stuck up here for so long & have nothing to look forward to. The sooner we get away & flirt with death again the better.’²¹⁸ Their enthusiasm was undermined by the boredom

211 Barter, *Far Above the Battle*, p 212.

212 Johnston, *At the Frontline*, p 112.

213 Uren, *A Thousand Men at War*, p 187.

214 Gordon Osborn (Lt), Steve Clarke (Capt) and Bill Jollie (Capt) (eds), *The Pioneers*, p 134.

215 AWM S000591 Maurice Trigger, interview.

216 Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p 73. Note: More recent writing challenges this contention. Gavin Keating claims that there was a crisis of command in 1945 because the army, and its leaders, were over-stretched. Keating says that ‘Given the complexity of these issues, perhaps the only thing that can be said with any confidence is that the AMF was indeed fortunate that it was not required for the invasion of mainland Japan in 1946’. (*A Tale of Three Battalions*, p 60). But, whatever the situation in Bougainville in 1945, at Atherton in training, the men of the AMF felt confident and ready.

217 Gallaway, *The Odd Couple*, p 196.

218 AWM PR00602. Andrew Pirie, letter 31/3/44.

and pettiness of their existence. Atherton became their home for very long periods and they became immersed in the culture and lack of purpose of an idle army. Issues such as beer rations, leave and going AWL, the anxiety of what the Americans were doing at home in their absence, the petty behaviour and disciplinary actions of many of the officers and their feelings of helplessness to do anything about these issues became the most important things in their lives.

Army policies surrounding leave and training and reinforcements and officer promotion policies made the men suspicious of their officers. Many officers, on the other hand, became immersed in their own officers' mess culture that was far removed from the experiences of their men. They could become elitist and concerned with the pursuit of officer privilege and comforts. Officers monopolised the attentions of serving women in the army and enforced rules which the men thought were trivially unconnected from the preparation of first class jungle fighters. This was not a happy time for other ranks who felt sidelined and isolated and victims of the military system. It was certainly not a time when they felt they were living up to the many virtues of the First AIF. They blamed the high command, they blamed the politicians, they blamed MacArthur, but the only people on whom they could play out their anger and frustration were their own junior officers and their battalion commanders.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the Anzac Legend had a profound influence on the generation of young men who became the recruits for the Australian army of the Second World War. The Legend became the model for the army they expected to join. The experiences of their fathers' generation, as told to them in their childhood, became their expectation of their role as Australian soldiers. In many cases, however, it was not their fathers who told them. Many veterans of the First AIF became silent about their wartime experience, never coming to terms with the horrors of the Great War. Rather, the stories the boys of the inter-war years heard were the 'official' stories, told to them by politicians, by teachers at school assemblies and at the annual ritual of Anzac Day.

When they enlisted in the AMF, especially in the AIF, young men who grew up with the Anzac Legend expected to find an egalitarian army, one where officers treated the other ranks with respect and dignity. They had been told that the army of the First AIF was egalitarian and democratic and that it was their right to expect to be led by an informal discipline, rather than a formal military discipline. This expectation led to a sense of disappointment and bitterness when they did not find that the culture of the army in the Second World War lived up to these expectations. Instead of an egalitarian army, officers and men pulling together in the spirit of the Anzac Legend, they found an army that, from 1940 onwards, was led by an officer class that was more elite than they had expected, and an army that had a very different role to play from the Australian army in the First World War.

This role included more support and logistics than that of the First AIF. While the 6th Division was more like the First AIF, fighting as an infantry force and relying on British logistical support, as the war progressed, and especially when the Australian army began fighting in the South West Pacific theatre, the Army had to provide not only their own logistical support, but during 1942 and 1943, support for the United States troops stationed in the South West Pacific as well. This necessarily led to an army that had a large rear section providing transport, supplies, intelligence and munitions. Serving in the rear, however, was not what the men expected of Anzacs. The men at the front often became contemptuous of the men at the rear, especially the officers. The rank and file saw the men serving in the rear as soft and self-seeking, not sharing

the sacrifices with the men at the front. This was especially the view held by the '39ers' or 'Originals' who had volunteered early in the war. When they returned to Australia from the Middle East they found an army and a society that was a disappointment to them and officers that would not even give them a pretence of respect.

One consequence of this change in role for the army was a tendency by officers to enjoy officer privilege such as better leave and better mess facilities. If they weren't sharing the hardships of the trenches with their men, they fell back on the comforts of their rank. Added to this was a changed system of promotion. Soldiers were rarely given battlefield commissions as was often the case in the First World War; rather, they were selected and sent away for training, to be posted to a different unit. This broke up the mateship networks between officers and other ranks. AIF officers could be posted to Militia units, which often caused further bitterness, both with officers and other ranks, because men in the AIF considered the Militia to be inferior, and between the other ranks of the two armies. The whole question of the existence of two armies, the AIF and the Militia, was cause for bitterness. There was division within the AMF itself, with Militia men objecting to the treatment they received from the rank and file of the AIF and the sense of disappointment and contempt they felt from AIF officers transferred to their units.

Many of the other ranks experienced a feeling of idleness and lack of purpose in the last two years of the war. General MacArthur decided to use Australian troops in holding operations in Papua, New Guinea and the islands to the near north, while US divisions were withdrawn for the advance on the Philippines. Many Australian soldiers believed that they had been sidelined, that the campaigns they fought in 1944 and 1945 were mere 'mopping up' operations causing unnecessary hardship and casualties to satisfy the politicians and senior commanders. There is good argument to say that these actions were worthwhile, and in fact, the Australians performed very effectively and professionally, but the issue here is what the men perceived, rather than what may have been the case. The result was that the rank and file often took out their anger and bitterness on their officers. This bitterness was often made worse when a new, younger breed of COs and junior officers was imposed on these units. They may have been excellent soldiers and leaders, but they did not provide the sort of leadership the men expected within the culture of the Anzac Legend.

Many soldiers spent great periods of 'idle' time, training and retraining for jungle warfare, often in the Atherton Tablelands. In many cases, these were men who had combat experience in North Africa and the Middle East or in Papua and New Guinea. Officer privilege and comforts became an issue here with men who felt that their time and skills and considerable experience were not appreciated and were being wasted. They often took out their anger on their officers and there were episodes of mass disobedience and shows of contempt for officers in the training camps. Men who were stuck in Northern Queensland for months and even years, without frequent leave, were bitter with their officers and disappointed that the army was not providing the experience of the Anzac Legend that they had expected.

For those men who were captured by the Japanese in 1942, relationships with their officers were severely strained. Under the pressures of captivity, disease and cruelty from their captors, they sometimes turned on their officers who they blamed for putting them there in the first place. For the officers, survival became their prime motivation, as it was for all men in captivity, and so they cherished their extra pay, their easier living conditions and their privileges of rank such as better accommodation, clothes and the use of batmen. The men were severely disappointed and bitter with many of their officers who they felt let them down and did not behave as the Legend would have said they should.

In sum, then, and as this thesis has argued, the experience of many soldiers in the Australian army of the Second World War has exposed many of the myths of the Anzac legend to the test of practice and experience. The expectations of the rank and file were bound to be disappointed in an army that, while successfully pursuing a whole war strategy, was very different in many ways from that of the First AIF, creating an officer class that openly enjoyed privilege and a separation from the other ranks. Egalitarianism of outcome and opportunity were not possible for many in this army. Egalitarianism of respect was something the men expected but did not always receive. What many could best hope for was an egalitarianism of pretence, but, as many of the men in this study have shown, this was not always their experience and they were dissatisfied when it was. For many of the rank and file, their experience of the Australian army in the Second World War made them angry and bitter.

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