TALES OF THE SECOND SECOND

BY RAY AITKEN

FOREWARD

It has been said that a foreword should be written after the text. However, this one is being written first and will not be revised either for syntax or content.

Tales of the Second Second is not in any sense a history. A chronicle or the military exploits of the 2/2nd Independent Company has already been published and this, together with the official History of the War in the Pacific, should provide sufficient coverage.

Should the following, in the words of Thucydides, be judged useful, it will not be as a chronology. Though the pattern followed seeks to keep events in the order of their happening, failure in this regard is likely. It is twenty-five years since these actions took place and one's memory tends to dim. Further, the many verbal retellings of the more internally famous happenings may distort and exaggerate.

Perhaps what has been written would have had more purpose immediately after the 2nd World War. That it should be written at all is simply the result of shipboard boredom. For this reason and because some of the best tales have been suppressed to avoid pain to unit members, of whom there are fortunately still many very much alive, there is a necessary lack of coherence.

My purpose has been only to record that which may help to recreate in memory the youth, the fears, the verve and dash, the humanity and sometimes the inhumanity and perhaps above all the humour and resilience of my comrades under arms of more than a quarter of a century ago.

In a number of places the catholic reader will find it annoying to notice the singular collective nouns of Section, Unit and Company followed by 'they' rather than 'it'. While the grammar is indefensible the intention is sound and is used to try to convey by implication the difference between collective action as a Unit and collective action as a group of individuals.

This is strictly a personal recounting of experience. It is not a unit record. No research has been undertaken and for this reason more than any other it might properly be called a record of Four Section of B Platoon rather than Tales of the Second Second. I can only crave the indulgence of my good friends of A, C and HQ and plead the greater emphasis put on Four Section arises from the fact that I served in it and know more about it. It might well be considered a fairly typical Section and its exploits and its men pretty typical of all.

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On board Galileo-Galilee
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PREFACE

In the beginning was the Word. It was never really discovered with whom the word actually abode. We received it from its prophets and it proved to be a gospel of murder and sudden death.

A British Military Mission brought the message to Australia; a message based on the proposition that there was a place for unconventional people and unconventional methods of warfare. The concept of modern commando squadrons came into being as a result of a number of semi-related factors. The commandos of deWett, delaRey and Smuts had caused a rethinking in certain British regular soldier minds, the work of Lawrence in a later War, the astonishing success of German trained saboteurs in 1939/40 and the simple pragmatic fact that England needed military success, however small, all played their part in the rise of the idea of a small, highly- trained, fast- moving raiding units. Lessons had been learned during the Spanish Civil War which led to a new faith in the oldest method of war – the hit and run of the guerrilla.

The English, too, have sold for so long an image of a mild and sporting people that they have come to accept it as a true picture of their national nature. This acceptance has been cemented in history by the fact that their only real civil war is noted as much for the humanity exhibited on both sides as for its political significance. Such an image overlooks a very pertinent fact. There abides, in the English upper classes particularly, a very fine sense of ruthlessness, particularly ruthlessness under adverse conditions which negates the popular image of English gentlemen. One might term this as 'planned ruthlessness' for there is nothing fortuitous about it. It is never accidental and is generally professed and taught as part of a logically based programme to achieve a given result. It is an accepted premise of certain British military thinking that the end definitely justifies the means and that since war is total and horrible the most expedient approach whether it be horrible or not is the one that should be followed.

The impact of Robin Moore's 'Green Berets' in the States might leave the impression that the methods used by Special Services are new. Only the weapons are new. The methods are the same as those drilled into British Commandos immediately after the Phoney War. The only difference appears to be that though the British would have been prepared to take risks and to be equally callous of the sanctity of human life, it is doubtful if they would have sacrificed native agents with quite such abandon. They would have prejudiced few operations to save a life but since they were taught to regard human beings as weapons in the same way that a sub-machine gun is a weapon, it is probable that they would have regarded a successful agent as one to be treasured for future use in another theatre of action.

CHAPTER 1.

When the Australian Government accepted British specialists for the training of Australian and New Zealand commando squadrons, the only provisos made appear to have been that the personnel involved in the formation of an Independent Company be volunteers who were to be given the opportunity of re-volunteering for special service. It was to be the aim, though not a hard and fast rule, that each man be unmarried, have no dependents, next-of-kin and be under the age of thirty three.

To this end the special recruitment officer Lt. Col. Scott travelled to the general recruit training areas in each state to interview potential recruits. While he was busy in this regard Colonel Muirhead, Captains Michael Calvert and Spencer-Chapman were at work setting up a special high security training camp on Wilson's Promontory. The 'Prom' had the appeal of ruggedness of terrain, absence of population and was capable of being shut off from mainland intrusion with a minimum guard.

Scott meanwhile was interviewing hundreds of vague volunteers who in most cases were anxious to escape the general boredom of infantry training. He asked such questions as could they drive a car, sail a yacht, fly an aircraft, drive a train, navigate a ship, swim, ski etc. etc. By and large he was most concerned about acquiring officers and NCOs to form the cadre of future Independent Companies. However, he also interviewed a number of other ranks, hinting at swift promotions and high adventure for it was reasoned that while the selected officer cadre (both commissioned and non-commissioned) was in training, it should be free of the time-consuming job of camp fatigues and accordingly it was an opportunity to recruit a percentage of slaves who by their calibre would still be suitable material to form the nucleus of riflemen for the new companies. The misrepresentation which occurred at this time led to some later heart burnings. However this method of staffing a training camp was ample insurance for its necessarily tight security.

The cadre for the lst Australian Independent Company, predominately from N.S.W., entered the Promontory area in early 1941 to be joined shortly afterwards by the West Australian cadre for the 2nd and the officers and NCOs for the 1st New Zealand Company.

Calvert and Chapman and their staff had completed the crash training of officers for the 1st and were able to concentrate on the indoctrination of the unsuspecting sandgropers and Kiwis.

Calvert was a dedicated engineer soldier of solid build and forceful speech. He was convinced of the efficacy of guerrilla tactics in modern warfare. He was a fanatic in respect of demolitions and at a later date, chiefly as a result of this fanaticism became 'Mad Mike' of Chindit fame and later still Major-General Calvert DSO and Bar of the Army of India. His book, 'Chindit', is an account of some of the more spectacular adventures of that most unorthodox force.

Spencer-Chapman, a man of entirely different stamp, was an imaginative amateur soldier. A schoolmaster by profession, he brought to his soldiering an English cultivated accent which at once awed and fascinated the Australians, and a love of field craft and the intelligent military use of terrain. His background included considerable academic erudition and his more specialised experience took in exploration of Greenland with the late Gino Watkins and some Himalayan climbing. After the fall of Singapore he remained in Malaya to

train guerillas, rising to the rank of Colonel. How well he succeeded is amply illustrated by the fighting capacity of many of these guerrillas when they later became the enemy during the 'troubles' on that Peninsula.

Chapman's book, 'The Jungle is Neutral', gives an account of some of his exploits during this period and one chapter "Double Escape' is not only a brilliant tale of high adventure but an equally brilliant literary gem, amply illustrating his mastery of emphatic understatement.

It is not possible to capture in words the glory of Chapman's accent. It is perhaps sufficient to record that all who heard it still remember his opening remarks to the cadre of the 2/2nd. Picture a tall rangy officer standing upon a dais with his chin thrown forward so that his shock of hair sloped backwards, his slightly buck teeth uptilted at an angle of forty five degrees so that every movement of the tip of his facile tongue showed against the ivory white. Dress this officer in the kilt and accoutrements of the Cameron Highlanders with a dirkin in his sock and you have a sight to remember. This same officer, with glorious 'a,s', the world's shortest possible 'e,s', a 'cr' as produced by pigeons and a pronunciation of the word 'Australian' only equalled by Her Majesty must now be made to say, "It may seem strange that I, an Englishman, have come so far to teach Australian bushmen field craft." The wonder of this sentence has caused it to be repeated with varying success by every surviving member of the 2/2nd cadre on a great number of convivial and wildly reminiscent occasions. For the writer, still marked with his personal if national twang, no mimicry can ever reproduce the wild joy of the original. The rest of the lecture was probably of equal calibre but it is gone. Only the first and last sentences remain.

"As well as field craft, I am responsible for P.T. (say it very quickly, carefully make the 'e's' very short indeed. It may be useful to spit a little on the final Tee). Today I contemplate only a short run from Tongue Point and back."

When Chapman made his first remarks, my seat mate Colin, a lieutenant of longstanding acquaintance who possesses the most startling cold blue eyes of any man I know, (they are fortunately no indication of character) had prodded me in the ribs and said, "How would he be for a queen?" Now he slid his blue eyes to the wall map and being a quick reader of contours, said simply enough, "Do you see it?" "Yes", I answered. "It looks like a bit of a hill." "Hill be _____. It's a bloody great mountain."

We set off over the ridge with a kilted Chapman, full of running, leading the way. He was followed by Jerry, then a notable high jumper and although older than most of us, very fit indeed. Colin and I struggled to the forward slopes of the ridge and put our field craft to good effect in a Melaleuca thicket where we retained an excellent view of the track so that we could rejoin the pilgrimage on its return. It is on record that only Jerry kept on Chapman's heels for the full return journey and even he thought it was a little steep for a first run.

We came down the hill a lonely couple to be greeted by the sight of a very fresh looking Chapman seated in a cane chair with a large beer in his hand.

"How'd he be for a queen, Col?" I asked. Colin gave me the full treatment of his blue eyes, raised his hand simulating a blow and said, "Never say that again." It is doubtful if anyone ever did. Colin was not often wrong but his assessment in this instance had been very far out indeed.

Australians may be exasperating people. They have strident voices, tell improbable stories and have inordinate love of country which frequently makes them less acceptable to people of other lands. They are insubordinate (except in battle), argumentative and frequently illogical. They drink too much and brawl too much and are still taken up with sets of customs and rules which are juvenile and stultifying. All these things they do and are, but they are not slow learners.

On Wilson's Promontory they were quick to learn that officer or NCO alike they were in fact the slaves of Peter. Peter was the school Sgt.Major and came from a misty city named London, or so he said. He was a very easy man to placate. All you had to do was 'dooooble', when he said 'dooooble' and you were generally pretty safe. He did tangle with Lieutenant Jim one day and his remarks indicated both his philosophy and his power. As he said himself, "You're an officer, Sir, and when I see you I'll salute and pay due respect to rank, but by God when you are in my squad, Sir, you'll snap to attention when I tell you to and come like a little puppy when I whistle." There was no more trouble. We learnt a lot from Peter. He was a fine soldier and a forthright man and as the Scots have it, "May his lum aye reek."

Training went forward apace. The art of demolitions and field craft and the meticulous knowledge of weapons bred a new confidence and perhaps a new smugness. We learned the gentle art of booby trapping. We studied the formulae for destruction. We memorized these formulae and then learned to double the charge wherever possible and make destruction certain. We learned too the diabolic theories on which guerrilla warfare is based. The efficiency of stranglehold and garrotte. The fact that a solid kick in the genitals is more effective than a hearty blow; the efficiency of a razor blade stitched into the sole under the toe-plate of a military boot. The potential use of poison and the reason for dispensing with salute in sniper country. These were drilled and re-drilled.

The study of pull switches, pressure switches, mines – both sea and land – became as much an academic study as a practical one. Indeed this was a University of Warfare. Through it all showed the great belief both Calvert and Chapman held in the necessity for a commando soldier being many sided, almost in a Renaissance sense. Every man was to be highly skilled in weapons, radio, signalling, map reading, cartography, unarmed combat, field craft, night fighting and so on. Yet the emphasis was always on demolition. To this end, on one occasion we left the Promontory in the dark of night and mounted a mock attack on the railway bridge at a town called Fish Creek. Since we eventually exploded a great deal of detonating cord and scarred a few piles, after successfully 'necking' the sentries it was not surprising that the local papers carried stories of sabotage and attacks from German submarines. In this area of Victoria there still live people who believe to this day that an unsuccessful enemy attack was made on the Fish Creek Bridge. To Calvert and Chapman the perfection of movement and the fact that no civilian 'sprung us' as the Australians say was a proof of efficient training and a promise for the future. Stunts of larger duration were mounted on the 'Prom' itself. We got what Chapman called our 'mountain legs'. We attacked the New Zealanders. They attacked us. During the booby trap period no toilet or latrine was safe and careful inspection was always necessary. Several careless cadets and one somewhat disliked instructor found themselves lying on pillows for weeks while the M.O. conducted daily sessions with the forceps removing carbon from their lacerated private anatomy.

We were singularly free of accident, though one of us, Mal, would find it hard to agree. He lost one hand and most of his sight in a ‘night attack’.

It was work and learn for the Officer NCO cadre. For the O.R’s it was simply work and of course of the most menial and to them the most debasing kind. They wallowed in discontent and only the flow of beer in the canteen, a reasonable mail service and their continuous nightly contact with males of the cadre prevented a minor mutiny. It did, however, sow the seeds of future trouble within the company itself. The whole concept of using soldiers who were both volunteers and re-volunteers, as permanent fatigues could only have worked without friction if some confidence had been placed in them on initial recruitment. Had they been paid the compliment of being told of their fate in the first instance, it is probable that all who mattered would still have come, but in different frame of mind and with less inbuilt resentment.

Some of the discontent among these troops led to unusual verbal situations. One incident may show their nature. The Camp Commandant, now deceased, was a delightful old soldier named Major Stuart Love. Love was full of years and philosophy and liked nothing more than a chat with the oppressed O.R.s On one occasion shortly after dawn broke he came upon Boyo and Andy carrying full ‘rose bowl’ from the canteen to the latrine. To the uninitiated a rose bowl is a sanitary pan placed outside the canteen to cope with the needs of soldiers who are increasing their liquid intake and hence output. “Good morning boys”, said the Major, “How are things going?” “Put ‘er down Andy”, said Boyo in his slow drawl. “Good morning Major. You asked how things are going. There must be no doubt about these bloody West Australians. They’ve gotta send right across the bloody continent to get a decent shithouse fatigue and by decent I mean one wot doesn’t flinch when it splashes and one wot don’t wash its ‘ands to go to mess. Pick ‘er up Andy. Good morning Maj!” Old Stuart stood in the grey dawn rocking backwards and forwards on his stick and holding his side with his free hand. It was amply clear why he enjoyed his chats with the boys.

Vale Boyo and Andy. Boyo passed away at home a short time ago. He was a prospector and mine worker and figured prominently in the Kalgoorlie race riots of the 30’s for which the Australian Government paid indemnity to Mussolini. Boyo paid with all he had – time. Andy sleeps on a mountain somewhere in Timor. Mast headed and all alone, 133 empty .303 shells testified to his training and his type.

The great day came. The cadre graduated and spent its leave in Melbourne Town. Since at this time the Australian soldier was what enemy propagandists called ‘five bob a day murderers’, the nature of the leave for other than officers was necessarily restricted. The military man is sometimes adaptable by nature, but even so it was a little disconcerting to walk into a pub and discover that the two barmen were two of our lads. They spent their leave being free with a number of fringe benefits, they were paid wages and the proprietress had two attractive daughters.

The Imp and Ray were adopted by Bill a farmer on holiday who was excellent company, had a fast car and an abiding interest in race horses. It was a good leave. Free transport and course entry passes allowed them to see Melbourne and parts of its hinterland. The only sour note was the astonishing rate at which Bill lost money and indeed the size of sums involved. It didn’t seem to worry Bill any, so the boys decided it didn’t matter. They were a little startled a week later to read of Bill’s very purposeful suicide with a shotgun. Still, even

civilian Australia was an odd place in 1941 and as the Imp remarked, “Bill had a bloody good embarkation leave!”

The cadre returned to the ‘Prom’, moved into new quarters at Tidal River and formed itself into the command structure of a Commando, largely by self-selection. A Commando at this time was somewhat like a dehydrated battalion. Its essential parts were three platoons plus a signals and specially trained engineering section and a H.Q’s group. With first reinforcements, because of probable wastage, the total came to about 327 men. The CO was a Major with a Captain as his Adjutant and a Sgt. Major to control the normal liaison between the CO and his NCO’s and general company discipline. The platoons were commanded by a Captain with specialist staff including a Platoon Sergeant, signallers and a medical orderly etc. The platoons were re-divided into the effective fighting units known as Sections. Sections were two Subsections each of eight men with a Section Corporal. The Section commander was a lieutenant.

It was considered that the likely operating commando unit particularly as to minor raids would be either the Section or the Subsection. Seniority as to Officers and NCO’s was considered important to ensure known replacements for casualties of command personnel. Indeed, Lance Corporals were appointed within the Subsections as soon as the unit moved on active service. Generally speaking, the lines of promotion were well-known and secured even further down the line so that in a unit which had been trained to expect a short life, albeit an interesting one, there never would be delay in the acceptance of command or doubt about who was to take such responsibility.

It was this structure to which new troops were introduced at Tidal River. There had been intense lobbying by junior officers and NCO’s amongst the fatigue personnel who had arrived with the cadre and already ‘knew the score’. These soldiers were sought after because the methods used in their choice had been the same as the cadre and they were considered the cream of the flock.

Section Leaders attracted these troops with varying degrees of success. For example, No. 4 Section of B Platoon Lieutenant Tom, Corporals Mick and Ray had acquired eight men, that is one complete subsection before the new ‘hand-picked’ troop’s arrival led to further lobbying and ‘picking on the faces’. To continue the example of 4 Section, Ray recognized Eddy, an acquaintance of civilian days. Eddy was with seven mates and the eight became the Second Subsection in a sort of package deal.

Training started immediately along cadre lines. However, a parsimonious Government or LHQ had begun to restrict the material used so that unfortunately, particularly in regard to demolitions; much of the training was by precept rather than example. It soon became evident too that the hand picking of the troops had not been as originally planned. The hand picking had been left to training battalion CO’s and some at least of these had done what they considered hand picking to their own advantage.

At the risk of being accused of a certain insular and national pride, it should be pointed out that it speaks well of the Australian soldier that many of these ‘misfits’ should have soon become such efficient soldiers as to render recognition of the old from the new impossible.

The 2/2nd had its share of failures, as all army units have, but there were no more failures amongst the new draught on a pro rata basis than there were in the cadre and its appendages.

The Company trained into an effective fighting unit which causes Calvert and Chapman to voice their approval.

However in the early days the lack of general discipline caused some misgivings. On one occasion Calvert who had been demonstrating specialised use of demolitions to the New Zealanders arrived home to the 2/2nd camp where he lived. He had been using Ray, a corporal from the 2/2nd as the straight man in his demolitions act. They turned the corner of a mess hut to watch Colin's section rifle drilling under Ted, one of his corporals. Ted had a personal reputation as a parade ground soldier (perhaps it was no fluke that he has one now as a soldier in battle). On this occasion he was having little success. His troops were either not giving the thing their attention or indeed it may be that at this time, some at least lacked the basic skills. At any rate Colin addressed his troops.

One remembers the initial horror with which Chapman particularly had regarded the normal language of the Australian soldier. Calvert was less sensitive and indeed gave some indication of a secret fascination. He had not however even at this late stage been introduced to the fearsome heights that some of our members, ever otherwise Officers and Gentlemen, could really reach.

"Look at you", said Col. "You're up and down like a harlot's drawers. You're all over the place like a mad woman's shit. I never saw such a bloody useless lot of left kneed, left armed, useless bastards in all my bloody born days". George, a hook nosed soldier on the left flank, moved forward slightly and said in very firm tones, "I'm not going to take that from any bastard". Said Colin, tearing at the upper buttons of his tunic with the devious idea of dispersing with his Officer's stars, "If you're _____ fair dinkum take a _____ pace forward. If you're _____ not, fall back in the ranks." George, who was later to prove he was frightened of very little. Had one of those rare moments of grace which in the army are often responsible for saving a situation. He hesitated a moment and then with exaggerated military precision snapped back into his place. Col immediately dismissed the parade making his remarkable forward hand salute which always ensured that he was unable to see out of his right eye. He stood, a lonely, if irate figure on the parade ground watching his troops to their tents.

Calvert who at this stage had collapsed in the door of the mess hut murmuring, "My God, oh my God", now gasped, "He's a friend of yours Corporal. Speak to him, I want to know more". Ray stepped quietly to Colin and touched him on the elbow. "Were you dinkum yourself Col?" he asked. Colin spun, blue eyes flashing viciously and then with a generous smile said quietly, "I don't _____ know Ray but I'd have _____ soon found out if the bastard had taken a pace forward." Calvert, now in control of himself, writhed a little in the doorway, rose to his feet and said, "Thank you Corporal" in very meek tones and without acknowledging a salute, set off like a slightly drunken sailor for the Officer's mess.

It becomes necessary now to introduce two unlike characters who were however inseparable. These two were known as Paddy and The Flea. Paddy, of Irish Australian descent, was an enormous soldier tipping the scales at a steady twenty one stone. On active service he contracted recurrent malaria with the rest of us and dropped to a paltry eighteen or nineteen stone. Pat had been around. He was full of worldly experience, particularly in manual worker society and he was equally full of the devil and troublemaking. Without his knife blade intelligence and his puckish Irish quick wit he would have been impossible to tolerate. However, though he fermented most of the internal troubles which multiplied the

problems of administration his continuous humour so often lifted morale that he had his place and thought he is long gone, the 2/2nd was the richer in legend for his membership.

The Flea, Pat's close follower, was an ex hurdle jockey of jockey proportions, though weight and build had long since put the saddle behind him. His feet normally formed a forty five degree angle which gave him a somewhat odd stance. He had an infinite capacity for alcohol, becoming drunk with very little, but not much drunker after enormous quantities. He idolised Pat and the sentiment appeared to be reciprocated though few kind words passed between them and they lived in a perpetual state of mild to violent disagreement.

Though it took a re-setting of the machines to make shorts and shirts to cope with Pat's dimensions, he was "fairy footed" and carried himself on parade as a model soldier. However when real disagreements took place, generally as a result of liquor, The Flea took an evil delight in profane allusions to Pat's weight and general proportions. Under these circumstances conversation tended to rise to the following standard. "Shut up you great mismade bastard." "Ah," Pat would say, clubbing The Flea on the top of his bullet head with a great ham like hand, "Mismade is it? You dirty little insect with your quarter past nine feet." These altercations always drew an audience. There was a great deal of showman in Pat, and Eric (The Flea) was an efficient and receptive 'straight man'.

These two had many great moments in 2/2nd history but perhaps none were to excel an occasion in Western Australia when The Flea rose to great heights. At the time both men were in an infantry training battalion commanded by a famous Western Australian soldier known as Major Mitchell in the records, but as The Cockatoo to his troops. The nickname was singularly appropriate. The officer's family name, together with his arm rank, made up the common name of a large white member of the parrot tribe. On parade his voice took on true Major Mitchell overtones. His, "Batt-all-yon, att en sha", was a command to remember. Early one morning the Battalion stood to ease before The Cockatoo waiting for this command. Immediately to their right, front troops could see the ubiquitous Flea staggering home through the Acacia trees. The Flea paused, surveyed the troops and noticing that all were in fatigue clothing, realised that his late arrival would be noted since he was clad in battle dress. With a swift appreciation, The Flea stripped off his tunic, hung it on a stump and tottered to the left flank of his normal platoon only to receive ribald admonition from its giant 'right marker'. The Major watched The Flea's arrival in horror and simply commanded into space, "Arrest him."

The Flea was duly arrested but his legs gave way and he slipped onto the dust of the parade ground. "Leave him there until the Battalion marches off", shouted The Cockatoo. Then, drawing himself up to a great height and swelling more like a pigeon than a parrot, "Batt-all-yon". From his strategic position in the dust little Eric found the situation made for him. "Att ten sha", he screamed as the C.O. drew breath, and a thousand men sprang smartly to attention.

In other times when The Flea came under some verbal pressure from his fellow soldiers and on occasion reached a stage of alcoholic depression, it was Paddy's wont to raise his morale by saying, "Never mind me foine insect. 'Tis not every common soldier tho' has called a battalion to attention." Whereat The Flea's pink eyes would twinkle and glow in happy memory and his spirits would raise and his repartee would become sharper and more colourful.

The 2/2nd was particularly blessed with pugilistic ability. We had our heavies, our middles and our lightweights –amateur and professional, plus a considerable sprinkling of amateurs who through not interested in competition, were capable of extending their more experienced comrades. Amongst this group was Leon, a character not destined to remain with us but to serve a well-deserved term in gaol in Adelaide. Leon had something of a reputation as a light-heavy, little sense of sportsmanship and a considerable ego. On one occasion at Tidal River he was sparring with 'Spence' a fine little lightweight, who though suspect in years, enjoyed a reputation for his past professional success. Leon slipped one or two hard blows through Spence's guard. Spence who had a continuous and not unattractive impediment, danced off, saying, "Wwee are only sssparring Leon." "That's alright," said Leon. Spence danced some more while he digested the nature of this remark. Then he turned to shoulder slightly and said, "You asked for it" and unleashed a right like the kick of a frustrated mule. Leon took it slightly under the chin, not quite on the point. He teetered a moment while the forces of gravity adjusted to his unnaturally erect stance, then slid forward on his face and rolled over. Spence was at once conscience-stricken and amazed. "He asked for it," he said, "Bbut the bbbastard mmust hhave a ggglass jjaw."

The 2/2nd completed its training on the Promontory with a series of full-pack mountain climbs. The most memorable of these was the climbing of Mount Latrobe which towered above the camp to about 3,600 feet. The enormously destructive Victorian bush fires of the late thirties had decimated the big timber of the slopes. The vines and minor shrubs had re-established in almost tropical profusion but every few feet a giant eucalyptus trunk barred the path and since these trunks were slippery, the continual negotiation with full pack and weapons was a taxing experience.

In the camp area the temperature was higher than normal and strangely for the Promontory, heavily humid. Round the peaks of Latrobe however, was driven sleet and on her small flat top there was even a promise of snow in the air. It was not surprising that the Company developed an astonishing number of colds and a case or two of pneumonia immediately after the climb.

For Pat, with his great weight, the climb must have bgee3n agony. Pat's major weakness as an active soldier was his vulnerability to skin chaffing. His major strength was to make light of it. On this occasion he carried his rifle slung, tore out a stout sapling and used it throughout the climb as a staff and prop. Just short of the peak stood Frederick Spencer Chapman observing progress. Chapman was not one to bandy about the first names of O.R's but on this occasion since Paddy was such a well-known identity, he relaxed. "What's the stick for Pat, the snakes?", he asked. Pat flicked somewhat bloodshot eyes to the right and without delay, and no acknowledgement of rank said, "No. Let the _____ snakes get their own _____ sticks", and struggled over the last false crest.

No more remains to be told of Tidal River save an all rank celebration in the OR's mess to mark both the departure of Calvert and Chapman for other duties and the departure of a fully-trained 2/2nd for leave and then presumably for war service. The night was a memorable one. During the course of training, Freddie (Spencer Chapman) had given a series of illustrated lectures on the climbing of (_____). One of the most dramatic moments in these lectures dealt with the fall of Chapman's Sherpa Meeno into a crevasse. Chapman could say the word 'crevasse' with an accent that implies at once beauty and fear. The particular reference went something like this: "And there to my astonishment was little Meeno held only by the life line in the centre of the crevasse." Pat, amongst his other attributes possessed

an excellent memory and a reasonably faithful ear for accent. He chose this occasion to give a paraphrase of Chapman's most important lecture. He applied Chapman's format to the Latrobe climb. Only the matching sentence to Meeno's predicament lives in memory. "And there to my great bloody surprise was the poor little bloody Flea (with a beautiful short 'e') hanging by his bloody bootlaces in the middle of a bloody stinkin' great rock hole."

His reception was deafening. Freddie led it. Indeed he made a graceful speech of thanks in which he reproved himself for his arrogance in wrongly thinking that his own experience should not have had such like counterparts so far from the Himalayas.

The liquor flowed, the stories multiplied and the night wore on. The final remarks were from Calvert. He too paraphrased, "Never", he said, "save tonight, have I been called 'Mike you old bastard' so often by so many and liked it so much." Some very sorry soldiers of all ranks wended their way home to their tents and for the first and last time on the Promontory the morning bugles blew after daylight and not before.

Chapter 2.

The Company went on leave. Home to sunny Perth with a final briefing on security and a definite instruction to tell no-one of the nature of the unit or its training.

After the initial hibernation of the first few days, basking in family admiration, those members residing in the city reappeared on the streets. The normal meeting place was the long saloon bar of the Australia Hotel. At any hour of the day between 9 am and 9 pm fifty plus soldiers of the 2/2nd could be found there. Company members were already preferring to find solace within their own group, a tendency which in later years was to become almost a way of life.

The war was still too young for the uniform to have lost its glamour in this the least military minded of cities. The barmaids were efficient and attentive. Top cope with the race turf information needs of the boys they placed their personal portable radio on the bar. On about the fifth day of leave the radio, then high priced and rare, disappeared. Although at least one of our members was a professional thief in civil life, it is certain that the theft was none of our making. There was a great deal of recrimination amongst the lads but it was on the core of carelessness and failure to keep efficient watch. There was a continuous interchange of civilians amongst us – fathers, brothers, friends and habitual bar flies who claimed to know someone who knew someone else. They came and went in an endless stream. In the mid-forenoon of the day after the radio incident there appeared a personable young civilian who took little time in infiltrating. Someone recognized him or perhaps with a certain perception looked 'at his boots'. At any rate the word that he was a demon (a detective) was passed swiftly up the bar. The prevailing habit was 'workers' club rules'. Each soldier placed enough money on the bar to cope with his own needs and each minor

group swept the coin into a central pile for the convenience of the barmaids who attacked it after each round and drew attention to the need for replenishment.

Our guest, apparently unaware of it, received much of his refreshment 'on the cheap'. He was subjected to attack by a never ending wave of brilliant conversationalists while others attended to the aim of ensuring that his glass was never empty, yet seldom quite full. As the day wore on he began inadvertently to enter into the spirit of the thing and to answer the admonition that he was 'dragging his feet', with a will. By early evening the singing started. When the final words crashed out, he would drain his glass which had begun to grow subtly in capacity and to thump it onto the bar as if demanding a refill. It seems clear at this stage he had lost the initial aim and was identifying himself with a group of young men whose social behaviour was probably dictated by a subconscious escape from the thought that if normal expectations prevailed, few would see another leave in the Australia bar. He was also pitting himself against a great deal of steady training in the handling of alcoholic beverages, and he was in the hands of the most vocal group one could imagine, but a group with considerable training in 'close mouth tactics' regarding the main chance. From the moment of recognition, no comment was made about the guest. He was introduced to incoming members with grace and charm and only a flick of the eyes ever indicated that he was the 'pigeon', the selected target. The word 'demon' passed in the sanctity of the toilet was the only explanation ever given. The whole incident might have been considered a demonstration of training, telepathy, mutual understanding, or indeed a practice run for more significant occasions in more politically dangerous situations.

When the lights flickered we assisted out our weaker members and organized taxi transport. Our uninvited guest who had lost the powers of both speech and locomotion was propped against a fire hydrant and left to the tender care of his 'beat' comrades, or, what is more likely, his patrolling superiors. Next morning could only hold suffering quite imaginable for him.

With rehabilitation and the late development of a civilian conscience some of us sometimes wonder whether the fact that we have never seem this gentleman in Perth would indicate that he is back in the uniformed branch in some remote belt town or whether he found another and less vulnerable occupation. Should he read this, let him take some pride for he contributed to the cementing process, the mental binding and singleness of purpose without which an active service unit is only 'a mob'.

Leave ended and rumours of imminent embarkation became rife as we returned across the great treeless plain. In Adelaide however we found ourselves at Wayville Show Grounds camped in a great shed which was Motor House on Show days. The Wayville Trotting Course, though small, is famous and still in operation. This suited the unit since the easiest way to avoid an entrance fee to any entertainment is to live permanently on the proprietor's side of the turnstiles.

Wayville provided no security for a continuation of unorthodoxy in training or indeed terrain suitable for such training. This lack of suitable training ground multiplied the amount of leave given and limited activity to parade ground drill. The increased leave brought its attendant absentees and the increased repetitive drill brought its disgruntled frustration. It was hard for a group trained in the unconventional to accept the continuously mundane. Out of this grew a number of situations which while not calculated to improve general discipline contributed more to cohesion, at least in the OR's section.

Beer was sold in Adelaide in ‘flagons’. These were fine half gallon glass bottles suitable for the ‘take home beverage’. So many flagons began to appear in Motor House that it was necessary for the preservation of military uniformity to instruct that these ‘empties’ should appear on the left of the palliasse, and in line.

One case of absenteeism caused a little friction. The Flea ‘turned up missing’ as the saying then was. Further, he timed his eventual return for an evening when his own section was on guard at the main gate. He was much too incapacitated to be carried to the sleeping quarters and he was put to sleep in the guard tent. Shortly afterwards a youthful and somewhat difficult Lieutenant who was acting as Officer of the Day made a somewhat unexpected examination of the tent and noted The Flea’s presence. He castigated the Corporal of the Guard for failure to report the presence of ‘the prisoner’. The Corporal talked back a little. The Flea, waking and feeling a little refreshed, judged the atmosphere as unfriendly and taking advantage of the gate sentry’s interest in the altercation between the Corporal and Orderly Officer, slipped through the gate and returned to the city. On his second round the Officer again examined the tent and informed the Corporal that he was reporting to the CO the guard’s ‘failure to do its duty’. Big Pat who now manned the main gate, signalled for a relief, leaned his rifle in the shadows and flagging a taxi he made a quick trip to The Flea’s favourite hiding place. He returned in a short space of time with the protesting ‘dirty little insect’ and cast him into the guard tent with dire threats of act. What in fact he said was, “If the little bastard shoots through again I’ll break his bloody back legs and push him over a precipice”.

On his third round the Lieutenant was accompanied by the Adjutant. “Lieut. Reports you have lost a prisoner Corporal”, he said. “No Sir”, said the Corporal. The Adjutant at this stage, known a little unjustly as ‘The Saint’ and given slightly to being a trifle pedantic, asked in somewhat mean tones, “Do you imply Lieutenant does not report you have lost a prisoner, or, no you have not lost a prisoner?” The Corporal who in civilian life was a member of the pedantic profession said in dubiously respectful tones, “Sir, I can have no knowledge of what Lieutenant may or may not have reported, having been here on guard when the report was made. I was therefore replying by implication. No, I have not lost a prisoner”. “Lieutenant reports you have lost a prisoner Corporal. How do you account for that?” “I am not able to do so Sir”. “Are you saying now that you have lost a prisoner?” “Oh no, Sir. I have lost no prisoner”. “Then where is Private (The Flea)?” “As far as I know Sir, Private (The Flea) is asleep in the guard tent. I have been on my normal round of sentries, but since the tent sentry is an efficient soldier I feel sure he would have effectively prevented any attempt on the part of Pte. ------ to escape. In fairness to Pte.------, Sir, he surrendered himself at the gate and has shown no desire to escape”. The Flea’s voice, still somewhat inebriated called from the tent, “Why don’t you all stop bloody gabbing. A man’s trying to sleep”. “Is that the man Pte. ----- Corporal?” asked the Adjutant. “I think so Sir. I’ll check”, said the Corporal. The Adjutant preferred to check himself and for a few moments his voice was heard castigating The Flea for the nuances of insubordination in his most recent remark. “Cripes, Sir”, said The Flea, “I didn’t know it was you Sir. I thought it was some other gabby bastard”. The Adjutant backed out of the tent, “We may discuss this matter at a later date Corporal”, said the Adjutant. “Certainly Sir”, said the Corporal mildly while saluting vigorously. They never did discuss it, at least not until considerably after 1945. The Lieutenant in question later had a slight nervous breakdown. One wonders whether some mental difficulties in adjusting to disappearing and reappearing prisoners contributed in any way.

Our colour patches of a double red diamond caused some troubles. We were not permitted the usual privilege of boasting about our unit. Once in a bar in the late Afternoon a slightly merry soldier asked, "What's your unit Sport?" On receiving the reply, "The Mobile Bath", he showed disbelief and some aggression. A general fracas ensured. The 2/2nd was never light on 'muscle', and although slightly outnumbered, they were not really outweighed and by the time a 'man in blue' appeared in the door, only double red diamonds were left standing. A Corporal who had been backed into a corner and found himself not singly engaged by but dint of using boots as well as hands was now free of assailants. At this stage Doug who early in the fight had simply clasped his arms around the necks of two opponents and joined his hands in front now dragged his charges to the Corporal and said, "Hook these two bastards for me". The Corporal who despite the use of the boots still retained vestiges of a conscience, demurred. It was unnecessary in any case as on their release both soldiers fell to the floor of their own volition. This was not surprising as one poor soul had his tongue hanging out. Later Doug was heard to remark of the Corporal, "I don't really trust that bastard. He might be a bit sissy".

Food presented difficulties, or it would have done so were it not for the friendships of Adelaide civilians. Orderly Officers may have been efficient as to the holding of prisoners but for a considerable period they were distinctly insensitive to the fact that most of the unit cooks had given up cooking. Our cooks, with one exception, were better soldiers than cooks. The one professional cook was at this time otherwise engaged and his place in the scheme of things had been taken by the next in line of command. This warrior was known significantly as Hash, but even he had ceased to stir his diabolical mixtures. The reason was rum.

The 2/2nd unlike most units of the Australian Army carried its own rum ration. At Wayville the rum had been stored in an arc mesh and sisal craft quartermaster store. Quartermasters are not normally trusting souls but it is a near impossibility to make a physical check of liquor stored against a back wall and enmeshed in a shoring network of explosives, grenades, Bren guns and booby traps. A physical assessment was easier for unauthorised personnel and after a quick night reconnaissance and a little wire cutter work, the rest was easier still. The South Australian Government was suffering from a peculiarly democratic problem. There was in that delightful State an over supply of milk. The Army was fair game. To Army buyers, great quantities of fresh milk appeared a reasonable augmentation of an otherwise dull army ration. Accordingly milk far in excess of the normal needs of non-water drinking troops began to appear in the cookhouse in the early hours of every morning. By tossing out a few pints at the top of the can and introducing rum by a standard number of bottles, a sensible proportion was soon established on the trial and error method. Thus it became a truism that in the cookhouse it was easier to get sustenance for the spirit than for the body. For the general run-of-the-mill troops the beverage was of offer at meal breaks and smoko's and it kept their morale high until they could wrap themselves around traditional Australian steak, eggs, mushrooms and tomatoes in the city of churches at eventide. For the cooks, the cans stood with unrestricted invitation and as a result they lived in a never-ending state of semi-coma. Of them all, only Hash, a tall cadaverous man, managed to retain a perpetual erect if wind affected stance, though even in his case the blood-red of his eyes attested to the peace of his soul.

It had to end. The ration itself had limits and no command sleeps forever. There came the day when water bottles were carefully searched and not all who fell were lowly privates. However those judged the most nefarious culprits were few and the final Orderly Room hearing of evidence was somewhat memorable. The CO, Allan, a most impressive and

somewhat wordless Officer sat at his desk. On the table before him rested a bottle containing perhaps a quarter of a pint of the original Navy medal winner. Addressing himself to Taffy, a soldier who still showed signs of weeks of bliss, though it must be admitted that this was his normal state even when the issue was not free, the CO asked, "Have you ever had rum like this in Adelaide Signaller?" Taffy reached for the bottle as quickly as his current physical state permitted. The CO with admirable presence of mind snatched it away in a fine strategic withdrawal and asked Taffy in harsh tones what he thought he was doing. "Well," said Taffy, "I can't tell unless you let me try a drop". Having swallowed the double entendre the CO gave an impassioned address on the reasons for the 2/2nd's special rum issue. "This" he said, "was rum we were supposed to fight on. What do you suppose we should do now?" No one answered and Taff obviously conscious of the conversational vacuum cast his bleary eyes on the occupants of the orderly room and offered advice: "Seein' there's so few of us and so bloody little rum Sor, don't you think we ought to boomp it off between us?" Draw the veil. No command should be subjected to the unanswerable logic of he who is without shame and conscience.

The advantages of getting in free to the Trots by being 'in' in the first place were not always appreciated. Take the case of Mick the B Platoon Corporal; a spectacular figure of six feet five or so, his duty it was to drill The Flea now incarcerated and whose sentence was definite periods of rifle drill punishment. One evening as Mick was giving The Flea 'the works', a stream of civilian Trots fans poured through the 2/2nd lines. "Look," cried The Flea to a group of attractive young ladies, "Look what the big bludger is doing to me. Are you going to stand by while a damn giant sets on a free white Australian half his size? Look at the size of the big bludger". The young ladies addressed a few telling remarks to Mick. "Words won't help", warned The Flea. "The big bludger will just go on knockin' me about. Don't leave me. He's terrible when no one's lookin'. I'm frightened as hell of him". The young ladies moved forward with considerable purpose and a white-faced Mick withdrew The Flea to the safety of Motor House and its long rows of palliasses. Here it was his intention to have The Flea 'work out his time'. However by this time the 'insect', pleased with his command of an awkward situation, was in a near hysterical state, swelled up with pride and choking with emotion, so that he was now incapable of co-ordinated movement. He was returned to his 'cell' to cry himself to sleep.

The recognition within the showgrounds of an ex West Australian breaker of horses and trainer of trotters led to a little information seeping into the company ken. It was payday and the horse started favourite and 'won like a train'. The trainer was questioned regarding form by the stewards incensed by the size of the coup. However he bore no apparent resentment and admitted to the ownership of a galloper which was 'going off' the following Saturday at Victoria Park. The horse in question was a little grey mare called Telemeter. A very select group of tight-lipped 2/2nd members took 'the roll' to Victoria Park. They had been assured of at least tens but the best price showing on the bookmakers' boards (a refinement with which West Australians were then unfamiliar) was 7:1. "What about our tens Pat?" someone asked. "Just wait," said Paddy. A benign bookmaker carrying a bag with the legend 'J.C.O'Brien' was talking to a couple of gentlemen of the cloth. "We will wait," said Pat "'til he's finished with the Holy Fathers and then we'll try Jesus Christ O'Brien. Should the initials run true to form he'll be a friendly soul". Clad in shorts, shirt, long socks and gaiters, with a friendly smile wreathing his great round face he raised a left hand clasping a two shilling piece to Mr O'Brien and said in a brogue only his mother could have owned, "Mr. O'Brien Sor. Sure and what price could you be givin' a poor soldier about Teller-meet-her Sor?" Mr. O'Brien answered smile with smile and with a gesture of the times said, "Ten to

one to you Digger". "Thank you very much Sir", said Pat pushing up a firm right hand with note enfolded, "I'll have a hundred to ten". Stowing his ticker into his paybook pocket Pat led his group to the rails while Mr. O'Brien watched his departure in a somewhat pensive mood.

Telemeter ridden by Bob Carling, a leading Adelaide jockey, won by seven lengths. The members of the 2/2nd were good gamblers but to test fate again when the Union Hotel and the rest of the group called so clearly was not their way. A taxi was indicated – let other punters deal with Mr. O'Brien for other races.

The Flea had been holding about thirty pounds of mutual 'safety money' and when the punters entered the coolness of the bar he was very much in the chair. "Set 'em up again", he chortled. "Will you look at the dirty little insect. He's treating all and sundry, friends, allies and strangers with the very money we entrusted to the bloody little animal for safe-keeping." Then Pat waxed philosophical, "Ah well," he said, "let's put a good face on the thing. We're nicely in front and can afford to humour the little beast. You'll need three more Flea". "A moment", said The Flea, and then in plaintive tones to a massive 'chucker-outer', "B-barman, these big bludgers have been tryin' to bludge beer off me all day. Wot about chuckin' 'em out?" Only the protestations of some of The Flea's more stable guests saved the situation and Pat managed to get in his usual telling blow on the top of The Flea's head.

Money in quantities was a rare commodity in our Unit and it appeared a pity not to live it up while solvency and plenty were with us. For this reason, a large and varying band of mixed ranks descended on one of Adelaide's better class hotels demanding dinner. The proprietor looked at the group, considered rejection, looked at his plate-glass and admitted us.

The Flea was suffering somewhat from his efforts as host during the afternoon and on being seated, he brushed away large quantities of knives and forks, placed his folded arms on the table, put his head down and went quietly to sleep. The effect of this on the rest of the diners was remarkable. People from other tables found it difficult to concentrate on their food and it is probable that some dyspepsia must have resulted.

Pat ordered consommé for himself and The Flea. The Flea's bowl was placed just out of reach of his hair near the centre of the table. When the fish arrived, Pat considered the thing had gone far enough and woke the Flea in the traditional manner, saying mildly and in dulcet tones in deference to the place, "Wake up you bloody little insect and eat your soup".

Near the main door of the room stood Pierre, a real, live, French wine waiter. When one required red wine it was politic to move two or three hairs in one's eyebrow and Pierre would bring an attractively designed script surrounded by a silver scroll. A low-voiced suggestion or two from Pierre might be made, a whispered acceptance by the customer and then with the use of even less eyebrow hairs Pierre would summon a napkin-armed flunkey to whom he, never you, would relay the order. Pierre was a masterpiece of what is correct and one sensed his horror of deviation and deviants. His reserve and dignity of presence were monumental but on this occasion he was to be tested. For when The Flea woke at Pat's command he sat up shakily and surveyed the vaulted dining room. Almost at once his stare focussed on the rigid splendour of Pierre. "Hey sport," he crowed, "bring on the plonk". The silence in the dining room hit one's ears like a thunderclap. It was a pregnant and rolling silence and for a long time none dare break it. Then slowly there came a little flutter of whispers and all was back to normal, while a chastened Flea, with a ringing head, ate his soup. (Though how he

found room for more liquid is beyond the ken of man) Pat talked in a raised voice as though to cover for the social gaffe his underling had committed. A word for Pierre: not by one movement, not by the movement of even one eyelash did he acknowledge the horrifying request. He stood rigidly and unchanged near the door.

We did not go to dinner in such strength again. There were no more Tell-er-meters. In any case it is probable that the manager would have risked his plate glass in future. Still the magnitude of this evening was designed to make up for the many, many evenings which would be missing later. It did not break up early and it was well into a new day when Pat suggested "We mustn't forget our mates, particularly the guard". A quick visit to an all-night delicatessen was the order of the day. Behind the solitary counter was a twenty year old brunette with a perpetual pout on her lips and eyes like cloudy agate. That she was a shop assistant seemed strange, as neither her manner nor her manners seemed to suit the situation. The fact that she had a job at all was probably fortuitous and attributable directly to war-caused over employment. She stood before cheeses and hams and her hands rested on a cool glass compartment in which reposed several crayfish.

Pat's manner was always impeccable in mixed company and indeed tended to be more attractive and more circumspect when he had 'wined' well. His smile remained and showed appreciation and good fellowship as brusqueness from the other side of the counter developed to unpardonable rudeness. The mound of foodstuffs grew and with every addition the young lady's curtness accentuated. When the transaction was completed and payment made, The Flea, who had an inordinate liking for the table, pointed out that the order lacked salt. Pat, recognizing the justness of the suggestion and therefore, for once, not resenting it from this source, smiled at the lady and said, "Sure that's right, Miss. We have no salt". "Salt's a penny a pound", snapped the young lady in what even for her was pointedly abrupt. "Right", said Pat, and unshipping the still not inconsiderable 'roll', he peeled off a five pound note and flattened it on the counter with his mighty right hand. "Thank you very much Miss, we'll have five pounds worth. Flea, my fine insect, charter a fleet of taxis". The Flea rolled to the door and with questionable grammar said, "What's the taxis for?" "To take home the salt, you misguided midget", said Pat. The girl snatched a six pound bag of salt from a shelf, slammed it wordlessly on the counter and disappeared behind a curtain. There was no charge for the salt.

There are other tales of Adelaide not all plain sailing. Trained men ready to fight are difficult to hold out of action. Discontent literally stewed and Pat with his inbuilt capacity on such occasions fermented it by the readiness of his wit and the 'again the government' quality of his nature. The Commando so often fell into error at this stage that one would have thought that it had failed to appreciate the lessons Calvert had so forcefully drilled.

One glaring example of lack of awareness of the dangers which beset the command structure was a famous entraining practice which was placed in the hands of Wimpy, our Sergeant Major. He was not all a bad little man though it is doubtful he really understood his necessary role in a Commando. His liaison with either NCO's or O.R's was practically non-existent. In any unit this is bad and in the tight smallness of a commando it is doubly so. He had some previous experience in training lads in voluntary militia days and he tended to use the methods used with post-adolescents with his new charges who, though perhaps only one age level later, were old in respect of sin and experience. His methods were therefore outstandingly unsuccessful.

When we practised entraining we were told to imagine a train pulling onto the parade ground. When it stopped one of the Privates of each Sub-section was to open the door and hold it. He was to file in after his seven comrades, leaving the right-hand window seat facing the engine for the Sub-section Corporal. Wimp was convinced that provided we 'used our imagination' we would soon get the hang of it. It was in fact the most stupid exercise ever devised by man. It seemed to all of us at the time that when the authorities gave a man command, they removed his brains leaving him only a capacity to play with fire.

One remembers that when Pat got into the 'train', he opened another door and prepared to micturate on the parade ground. The Sgt. Major was horrified and demanded to know what Pat thought he was doing. When that soldier pleaded that he was the victim of a 'vivid imagination', it put paid to any remaining vestige of seriousness the practice might have retained.

Chapter 3.

We did however entrain at last. We left Adelaide by train for the North and the boys, though near enough flat-broke, were in high spirits. Indeed when our train passed the prison and our ex-member Leon was seen hoeing a strawberry patch, joy and high spirits knew no bounds. Leon received an ovation far superior to anything he had ever received in his days of following 'the square ring'.

The train was not equipped to cope with the feeding, ablutions and toilet needs of troops so night stops were made. One of these was at Terowil. By dint of much mustering, enough funds were found for some little festivities in the town. There was insufficient to provide food superior to army fare, and after Adelaide, considered so necessary. Now around Terowil there are a good many thousand sheep, so some B Platoon warriors ran one down, broke its neck and barbecued it. By a singular quirk of fate the sheep proved to be half its proprietor's flock. It was one of two pet lambs belonging to the local bank teller. Civilian protests brought forth a witch hunt and, as ever, Pat bore some of the brunt. "This will cost you two pounds ten, Private", said the C.O. "Fifty bob for a bloody sheep, Sir?" said Pat,

"You wouldn't be alleging that the bastard was favourite for the local show?" "It wasn't a lamb as you indicated earlier", said the C.O., "It was a four tooth". "Well, Sir", said Pat, "Don't be telling me that the bloody things were gold-plated".

Our arrival at Alice Springs was a sad affair. There is nothing so depressing for a soldier as to be without funds in a strange town. Ray produced three shillings and sixpence, the total remaining wealth of Four Section. With phenomenal luck, Pat ran this up to seventy shillings playing Housie Housie and we had enough to look again on cold amber fluid for a short space.

We 'embussed' in some rugged-looking military road trucks commanded by a Convoy Officer of most shockingly efficient, dictatorial type. Each morning as the mercury climbed, the troops would climb into the dark canvas maw of the trucks, furnace like in nature. Only when the last man was on board, praying for movement and whatever breeze such movement could bring, would the Convoy Commander inspect his drivers. The wait for the troops inside the trucks was positively hellish. This and other evidence of ill-treatment led to an altercation between the Convoy Officer and The Bull (B Platoon's O.C.) at one of the overnight stops. The Bull was both vocally and physically able, and the Convoy Officers' improvement in attitude thereafter was quite astonishing.

Overnight stops were at station homesteads where the army had established staging camps because water was available. At Barrow Creek there was some trouble over soldiers swimming in the station water supply but for drama the overnight stop at Baka Baka must bear the palm.

B Platoon was 'down on its luck'. No money remained and for troops who had been living on grog and who had thus formed mild to violent addiction, a liquorless jolting through clouds of desert dust was only excelled in agony by a liquorless evening to follow. Having showered and changed in the gathering dusk, they were bored and suffering.

"Let's look at camp standing orders," said Pat. "They're a trap for young players". We read in a stolid boorish way, appreciating nothing and learning nothing. Not so Pat. "Do you see it?" he said in hearty tones. "There it is in for all to see. No beer will be kept in the camp fridge. This applies to all ranks". A quick snipping of arc mesh and we were in. The lock on the fridge was a joke for men of our training. There they were, bottle after bottle of them, with the clear frost upon them. On a rack above them reposed a large roast turkey. It was a wild turkey bustard. Against the advice of Pat, a late supper of cold beer with turkey slice was served. Pat regarded the taking of the turkey as theft. He did not mind 'theft' as a steady thing, but in this situation he thought there were subtleties involved which made the 'lifting' of the bird a true crime whereas the purloining of the beer was simply a matter of principle: a public-spirited action designed to assist Area Command in the administration of Camp Standing Orders and on a personal note, to demonstrate that such orders were in very truth 'a trap for young players'.

Pat could not have been more clearly vindicated. At 0300 hrs. Wimp came through the tent lines bellowing for a snap parade. In varying degrees of nudity lines were formed. The ground was covered with Bindi Bindi, a small burr with multiple spikes. Loud protests came from 'Lud' on the left flank that he was being pushed out into the "_____prickles". A few anaemic electric bulbs glowed and Allan the C.O. appeared. When comparative silence again reigned, he addressed the Company in these words: "Someone has stolen a turkey from the camp fridge. I want to know who was responsible. The turkey was for your breakfast". A

loud gale of uncontrollable laughter shook the troops. Apart from the unlikelihood of any soldier (outside the US Forces at a later date) ever seeing the inside bones of a turkey, this was so slight as to render the C.O.'s statement even more ludicrous than the loaves and fishes effort of sharing one Australian Bustard between three hundred and twenty seven men

It has always been the secret regret of one B Platoon Corporal that he was not sufficiently quick-witted to seize his moment of glory. All he had to do was call from the dark, "This is Corporal X B Platoon, Sir. I have a Commonwealth reputation as a conservator of fauna. If the Bustard was a bustard I want the name of the man who shot it as I am prepared to lay charges both under civil and military law". Ah, what a chance to live in Company legend was there lost.

It was left to 'Halsie' to express in quick abrupt and forceful terms the general discomfort and anger at being wakened for such frivolous purpose. He took no evasive action, was easily and quickly identified and stepped out with the set of his shoulders still showing his frustration. 'Ted', who didn't see eye to eye with 'Halsie' and was far from being one of his fans, was upon this occasion entranced by his courage and the aptness of his remarks. In a great booming voice he now called, "Good on you Halsie, you've got guts anyway". The C.O. saved a little from the wreck by commanding, "A guard will now be placed on the fridge. The guard will be made up by the engineers and this man with guts." Another great wave of laughter swept the Company before it dismissed.

It seems a pity to detract from one of the few occasions the Unit laughed 'with' the C.O. but it remains a fact that much of the laughter stemmed not from his final words, but from the fact that at this time the engineers, unjustifiably as it transpired had a reputation for being slightly 'on the side of the angels'. Further, there was an ironic twist since it was well appreciated that they had smelled neither beer nor turkey.

The trip to date had been through largely desert but at long last the tree line appeared in the distance and we knew that we were approaching tropical Australia proper. We made a stop at Elliot. To tired and dusty soldiers the clean lines of a staging camp seemed unfamiliar. It was a spotless camp. We were unused to such an appearance. Staging camps at this time, even the few on the road through 'the Centre', seemed to attract the dregs of military effort. Frequently on arrival one noticed that the camp personnel were just as dirty and certainly more insensitive than the transit troops. All this was changed at Elliot. It offered almost hotel service. A transit soldier stepped out of his clothes at the showers, received a piece of soap and was handed a clean towel at the other end. The food was the product of good and imaginative cooks, and, wonder of wonders, their fatigue clothes and aprons were clean.

No soldier was left in doubt of where to go or what to do. It remained one of the finest camps imaginable. The men who staffed it were largely of an older generation. Perhaps few are left. We knew no names so it is impossible to record appreciation but one imagines that it would be sufficient reward to know in one's own mind that one had served at Elliot. It was the solitary gem in the staging camp field and as a place is only as good as the men in it, Elliot was very good indeed

We disembarked from the trucks at Mataranka and after spending the night entrained on the three foot six gauge to Katherine. Katherine was to be our home for a number of weeks. There we built a substantial camp which became the future site of a military hospital on the

bank of the river. Katherine is a town full of history and legend. It had at this time two hotels known at least amongst the troops as Sheaf's and The Blood House. Despite orders that no soldier should leave the lines, a small group soon appeared in Shea's offering wrist watches as security. It was told that Australian soldier credit was good in The Territory and that settling day would be pay day. The initial group called on Mr. Shea after pay day to make sure he had not suffered in his lend-lease gesture. "I'm worried", he said. "Don't worry", said the spokesman, "we'll see that it's covered". "Covered be damned", said Shea, "What do I do with all the dough that's over?" We were good customers. Mr. Shea's business multiplied several fold. He deserved it for he was a very great man.

One must not give the impression that Shea's was the only hotel. It was certainly the most attractive. However, The Blood House had charms of its own. Not the least of these was its proprietress who was an elderly lady of intense drive and considerable unorthodoxy. On one occasion she had a difference of opinion with a soldier from the 2/4th Pioneers. "Don't you show your head in here again or I'll bloody well blow it off" she said, waving a .455 pistol. The following evening the Pioneer went over for a drink. She met him at the door and said, "You put one foot on my door sill and I'll shoot it off". The Pioneer who had courage and a sense of righteousness put the toe cap of his boot on the edge of the step, whereupon the lady punched a round into the timber close to his big toe. The Pioneer was no fool and he realised that when faced with the odd and somewhat illogical it is better to give a little. Accordingly he 'shot through' up the main street making like a Stawell Gift runner. The old lady stepped into the street and whizzed three quick shots over his head which increased his speed appreciably.

A little later in the evening the Town Picket NCO found the Pioneer refortifying his nerve in Shea's. "Ah," said the Corporal, "still around. When last I saw you, you seemed to be in a bit of a hurry". "Bloody old bitch", said the Pioneer, "The first round passed me opposite the Post Office and I passed it when I turned in here".

The Town Picket was being marched up the road early one warm morning. As he passed The Blood House the front step was occupied by one of the young lady workers and the yardman. They showed no interest in the Picket. "What about a ------?" said the yardman conversationally, indicating fairly direct lovemaking. "No, you bloody animal", said the lady, "it's too --------hot". They were hardened men the members of that Picket but this fine disregard for convention had its effect. The Picket NCO later reported that it was the smartest impromptu eyes left he ever saw and that though all 'Tommy trained' in marching, there was great difficulty afterwards in keeping step. Xavier Herbert captured the heart of Katherine in his "Capricornia". How he would have loved to have been in the Picket that sunny day.

The 2/2nd Command found the approach of its members to hut building and concrete work somewhat disconcerting. Trained as they were to chains of command they took little time to adjust to the sight of Privates and NCO's slaving vigorously while being directed by a lowly Private frequently with his hands in his pockets. The senior officers indeed had not accepted the nature of specialisation as readily as the men despite their training. This was particularly so in the case of Little Mick. Later he was to become an NCO in the field but at this time he possessed no rank, and a series of orderly officers evinced astonishment, and some even resentment, to find him in command. However, the troops eventually won their way and builders and the experienced concrete makers took over with spectacular results.

Another source of friction was the order that shirts should be worn at all times. All ranks resented this but shoed a certain toleration until the rood shut out the sun. Then came the sand-cement and concrete mixing. Since all soldiers did their own washing, they were naturally protective of their shirts and desired to keep them as clean and dry as possible. In Territory heat while mixing concrete this was a vain hope. The following conversation was a recurrent cause of what Chapman always referred to as 'bloody-mindedness'. Officer to NCO, "That man is without a shirt". NCO to Officer, "Yes, Sir". Officer to NCO, "Tell him to put it on." NCO to soldier, "Put on your shirt". With the departure of the Officer shirts came off again and were hung up to dry.

One feature of life at Katherine was the night guard duty. The guard was mounted with full military precision and was inspected and reinspected. It used to form up at the foot of the lines, march up to the Officers' Mess in front of which it formed up for inspection before moving to the gate to relieve the guard on duty. One day the guard was given an impromptu band to aid the march. As it came up the lines, the 'rose bowl' fatigue which was taking out the 'rose bowls' against the demands of the night, marched behind the guard using the bowls as drums. Their turn-out was every bit as good as the guard itself and far more likely to attract attention. It was significant that Pat was the right marker. The Four Section Corporal, reputedly in charge of the fatigue, watched from the shelter of the hut judging that if anybody wan ted him they would undoubtedly send for him. "Where's the Fatigue Corporal?" screamed the Orderly Officer. Voice from the ranks: "He's been taken ill, Sir, and has gone to seek a relief NCO". Thus did mateship and loyalty so often go hand in hand. It is true at any rate that the Corporal in question was at the time taken by certain paroxysms of pain.

On another day, as the guard marched past the Officers' Mess after being inspected, there was applause from the Mess led by the MO, an old soldier who should have known better. This sort of applause is for civilians only. The troops knew this even if their Officer did not. That night, since soldiers are very like children, the main topic of discussion was the awful social and military gaffe perpetrated. Perhaps the best comment was, "The bastards don't know nothing about nothing". This reminded the writer of his Uncle who always claimed that he went to school with a lad who when asked by his teacher to define the biblical 'bearing false witness' said it was "when nobody does nothing and somebody runs and tells".

The guard incident was just one more nail in the coffin of the Katherine command. 'Bloody-mindedness' was widespread and some form of mutiny appeared likely. When a minor mutiny did occur, its origin was unbelievably simple. A Four Section Corporal had his Section outside the Q Store to draw the necessary tool for sand digging for more concrete. The store was slow and inefficient. Four Section stood at ease in the sun. Bill, sho had handed in Corporal's stripes to join the 2/2nd as a Private, gave a smart command, brought the Section smartly to attention and marched to the shade of a tree. The Corporal, in a childish fit of pique, marched it back again and stood it in the sun. The thing might have stopped there had not Four Section's Lieutenant, also with some childish pique, observed the incident and ordered a little 'drilling' in the sun; the two Corporals and the Lieutenant taking turns in command. The wasted time was approximately twenty minutes.

When the bugles blew, Four Section downed tools. The Lieutenant said there was to be another twenty minutes digging. No soldier picked up a shovel. The Lieutenant then gave each soldier an individual order to go on digging and received the standard answer of "No, Sir" from all but one of the Section. The deviant was known as The Duck. His deviation was not from the general purpose, it was just that his denial of his Officer was more forceful and

colourful. The Section fell in and marched home. Charges were laid and the Orderly Room held. The Lieutenant and the two Corporals were chief witnesses. There was no denial from the troops. The penalty for definite refusal to obey, a serious military crime, was light for most – a red entry of five pounds. In good army tradition scapegoats were needed so Bill, or just a rumour. Bill, who had marched off the Section and hence was judged as a first cause, received 28 days detention, as did The Duck simply because he had embellished his denial.

When the Corporal, who had also been a first cause, returned to his hut after seeing to the departure to Adelaide River Gaol of the malefactors, he found his wallet open on his bed with a note protruding. It read, "We owe you two quid. Left you ten bob. Unless you're carrying the rest of your 'roll' on you, you're a poverty-stricken bastard. Signed, The Duck. PS Took four pounds tobacco. Thanks." A sadder and wiser Corporal was now aware that there was little profit in knowing mutineers and no real justice in military law.

Inaction made the prospect of future troubles more certain. Old Pat talked sedition to a receptive audience, while The Duck and Bill served out time he should have been allotted. Another fear came to the Company. On the grapevine it was heard that there was a possibility of the Company being 'mounted' and turned into a Territory Patrol Unit. Col had been briefed to acquire horses and saddles – the thing was not just a rumour. Nothing could have suited this Unit less. It was trained and designed for action and could only be happy putting its specialist skills to use. And then Pearl Harbour.

L.QH. immediately changed the projected role of the Company and it entrained. Such was the organisation at this time that Victoria River Downs steers had spent the night in their open trucks. In the morning they were turned out and the 2/2nd turned in. No effort was made to clean the trucks and the safest place was sitting on the rails which being narrow, to say the least of it, were a little taxing on soldiers' buttocks. Under normal conditions, this would have produced howls of rage and every avenue of military procedure would have been explored for loop-holes to admit effective protests. Such is the measure of a soldier's make-up and the lure of high adventure, that all was accepted with laughter and jocularity. 'Those stupid bastards' had overnight returned on the one hand to their status as fellow members and mates, and on the other to the image of Officers and gentlemen. The old spirit of camaraderie and comradeship of southern leaves was now abroad again but this time in a true military sense.

On the way north we picked up The Duck and Bill. This manoeuvre was effected by The Bull. Despite his three shoulder stars he thought like any other member and with an equal lack of conscience. In his mind he considered it better to lose these two members in battle with the Japs than by boredom in military gaol. With a series of standover tactics, half-truths and a couple of false declarations, he arranged their release and they rejoined us amidst ovation. Apart perhaps from two or three senior personnel, we were glad and relieved to have them back and the only apparent recrimination was when a certain Corporal said, "Kick in some Capstan Duck or I'll break your bloody neck. You can't have smoked it all".

Chapter 4.

We sailed on the 'Zealandia' to Koepang. In the convoy was the Westralia carrying the 2/40 Battalion – chiefly Tasmanians under command of a steady old Victorian soldier named Co. Leggett. Equipped as we were with Thomson sub-machine guns and Brens, we were horrified to find that our Apple Island allies had old 'bull ring' Lewis guns. The Lewis always had its share of stoppages but after this First World War machine gun had been subjected to continuous stripping and re-assembling by thousands of troops, it ceased to be a matter of whether they would stop, rather it was a matter of could they fire? Still the 2/40th seemed to value them and it was not our problem. Value them they did for while we were tied up in Darwin a difference of opinion occurred between the 40th and the stevedores of that port.

Darwin lumpers at this time were noted for some aggressive qualities. Criticism of any kind generally meant 'sit down'. The lumpers were loading the 40th's Lewis's by the easy process of dropping the boxes into the hold. One burst. A red-headed and youthful sergeant from above remonstrated. A gentleman in authority blew a whistle and work ceased. Said the gentleman, "If you don't like it, come down and load the bloody things yourself". Civilians never get used to the fact that an army is a dangerous animal. They deal so often with fellow civilians who have similar values that they cannot conceive a group in which these values have been trained out. He is a very brave man who issues challenges to sailors and a very foolish one who fails to realise that a challenge to a member of a fighting unit is a challenge to all its members. In any case, a battalion is twelve hundred men!

The 40th came down to complete the loading with a glad cry. They came down rails, lines and through space. The redhead hit the deck first and not waiting for assistance he began cleaning unnecessary civilians from the deck by the simple expedient of dropping them overboard. His companions followed suit and the last of the Lewis guns were lowered with loving care. The box in the hold was re-assembled and all was again quiet. It was interesting to note the mild academic interest shown by the members of the 40th in the fact that one of the lumpers couldn't swim. That was a good Unit, the 40th. It was a pity that under-equipped it was to be pitted against thirteen thousand fully-equipped Orientals who possessed control of sea and air.

We landed at Koepang and took place in stages. We were to occupy Portuguese Timor. No-one was sure whether the Portuguese would welcome us or fire on us. We were about to occupy neutral territory without the invitation or consent of its administrators. After the occupation had been effected, Churchill was to call it an act of realism on the part of Australia. To us it was a job of work, the worse only because it was unpredictable.

A and C Platoons and H.Q. Staff landed at Dili, the capital of the colony. A few days later they were joined by B which came up from Koepang on a Dutch coaster called Cenopus. B Platoon was anxious to leave Koepang. They felt left out and time hung heavy on their hands. During this period there occurred a famous game of Bridge. The foursome were Tom, Mick, Ray and Pat.

At a time when Pat's hand was spread upon the table and Mick was struggling to make six diamonds as a result of his partner Pat's consistent overbidding, his partner offered a comment, "Well, sure the whips will be cracking soon and it won't be the likes of you three who will be giving the orders". Four Section members enjoyed playing or watching and Pat had a captive audience, a thing he loved. "Who'll it be Pat?" asked Mick without change of expression. "Oh, perhaps somebody older and more experienced". "Somebody like yourself, Pat, perhaps?" said Mick with a very definite change in his voice. "Could be, could be", said Pat. "I tell you Paddy", said Mick, "you'd better not disobey any order of mine". "And", said Ray, in somewhat heated if conversational tones, "if you disobey an order of mine in the field, I'll take the second pressure on you without giving it a thought". "Would you shoot a man in cold blood?" asked Pat. "You know I would", said Ray. "Would you Mick?" asked Pat. "You know that too", said Mick. "And you, young Tom", said Pat to his Lieutenant. "Would you be after shooting me in cold blood?" Tom made the most telling statement of all. "I wouldn't have to", he said. "These two would have you dead Paddy". There was a long silence. Mick showed no further interest in the cards. All three sat and watched Pat. Suddenly, with a becoming smile, he broke the tension. "Is there anything you three kind gentlemen would be wantin' me to be doin' now?" he asked. "Yes, bloody well stop overbidding", said Mick and led a club from the dummy.

It is possible that from that moment a new understanding was born. Though he was soon to be taken on to H.Q's staff, Pat's first love was always Four Section and B Platoon. Very soon the 'whips were to be cracking' and Pat was to return to the Section for a short space. When B Platoon arrived in Dili on the Canopus, (on which Pat caused a disturbance by bathing in the captain's bath and being caught there by that irate fat man), it found itself somewhat the poor relations. The landing in Dili had been uncontested but A and C had the salutary experience of wading ashore with rifles and bayonet and each man had felt the 'butterflies in his belly'. In a somewhat remarkable attempt to avoid incident, those rifles had been empty. One wonders what the result might have been if the frequent demands of the Portuguese Commander to be permitted to resist the landing had not been refused by the Governor. This experience had enough of the 'real' in it to have made A and C the old soldiers and 'The Big Bad Bold Boys of B Platoon' (to steal a label from the Unit Poem) were now the beginners.

They camped in a coconut grove on the edge of the air-strip with the rest of the Company. Rumours were rife that Capitan da Costa, the local army chief, had broken with the Governor and having withdrawn to the mountain garrison town of Aileu, was preparing an attack with his troops and tens of thousands of fierce native spearmen.

We received many stupid orders in the 2/2nd and we did many stupid things. The most stupid order was that which now instructed us not to fraternise with the natives and thus frustrated our attempts to learn the language. The most stupid thing was to camp in the plantation exposed to ravenous anopheles. That stay on the flat was to secure for us the remarkable figures of one hundred per cent malarial casualties.

One good thing happened in Dili. We began to run out of rations and as a result were forced to begin to rely upon the produce of the country. The contacts made with Porto Administration and with the native population were to stand us in good stead in the hard months to come.

The standard of food and general inaction brought on another crop of 'bloody-mindedness' which the command did little to quell. Comforts were undoubtedly few and the paucity of world news left us wide open to a flock of pessimistic rumours; though it is doubtful that the rumours of December 1941 could possibly have been more black than the realities.

When the Company had landed, they had been joined by two hundred and fifty or so of the Dutch Army of Indonesia. These troops established themselves in the town with more comfort than the 2/2nd enjoyed. They also rounded up the surplus Japanese citizenry on the island and incarcerated them in a stone building near their quarters. Most of these Japanese were civilians though some were the crew of an ancient Jap patrol craft which had been shot up and driven ashore by Australian aircraft. In all, they numbered twenty two. Most of them were held in a single room.

An NCO of the 2/2nd was peering at the 'zoo' one day through a barred window in the side wall. The prisoners sat with folded legs. Despite their lack of space, they left an area clear of bodies round one of their number who, dressed in immaculate white, was immersed in a book. The NCO could see that the book was a bible, and in English. The Japanese raised his eyes to the window, smiled, and said in unaccented English, "The Black Hole of Calcutta must have been a similar situation, don't you think?" To the NCO's horror this was the Japanese Consul in Dili. Like all the Consuls of this town he proved to be a spy as well as a Consul. After the occupation by his national army, he appeared in uniform with the collar insignias of high rank. Quick protests by the Australians and considerable pressure on the Dutch authorities secured the Consul's release. He was placed under house arrest and confined to his quarters. This recognition of the diplomatic niceties was to rebound to the advantage of at least one Australian, namely, our own Consul.

The wife of the Japanese Consul was permitted daily shopping excursions. To this end she was called for each afternoon by an Australian NCO and two tommy gunners in a two pony gharry. The lady was attractive in appearance but seemed to nurse a monumental contempt and hatred of all Australians. She acknowledged no salutes and refusing the NCO's hand, always offered, she sprang up and down into the vehicle like a gazelle. It was assumed that part at least of her reserve and complete wordlessness arose from lack of a common language. An incident occurred on the last day of her escort which seemed to explode this idea. As she descended from the cart in the main shopping area, a half-caste citizen of bedraggled appearance spat on her dress in passing. "Deal with that", said the NCO. A sub-machine gunner clubbed the citizen neatly over the head with the barrel of his tommy gun and he was left on his face in the street. Half an hour later, the NCO stood to attention at the garden gate and gave the habitual salute. As the lady passed between the gate-posts she gave him a charming smile and said, "Good afternoon Corporal, and thank you very much indeed". As the NCO later remarked, "She was a bloody little bitch but she 'knew the score'." This from an Australian soldier is an accolade for to 'know the score' is to be worthy of real respect. Wherever she is, we wish her well. She carried herself in difficult times with a dignity worthy of the wife of a diplomat, even a military diplomat.

Fraternisation with the natives, though strictly forbidden, did occur. Unfortunately most of the natives who were to be found near the 2/2nd camp were sophisticated town dwellers and a poor exchange for the general run of the Timorese population.

One of the sought after missions in Dili was to be Consulate guard. Our Consul, David R, had a feeling for people. He always looked after the sentry's inner man. His idea of a good guard was one who liked to lean his rifle in a corner of a comfortable living room, sprawl in an easy chair, drink whatever was placed in front of him and provide an audience for David's steady monologues on the ineptitude of Porto Administration and its utter dependence on 'amarha'. David, too, was later to appear in a changed uniform and rank but that was after many months of privation when he was at last returned to 'Australia del Espiritu Santos', which to him remained a much more sanctified place than the colonies of those who named it.

When B platoon first landed, David called it in to blow a safe which still lay in the hold of the Japanese Patrol boat already mentioned. B Platoon's NCO's present were very loathe to use precious explosives for this purpose and Lud and Mitch, both with heavy manual labour experience, attacked the safe with sledge and bar. David spurred them on with promise of free grog. For himself, he had visions of a quick return home with Japanese code and cypher books. The dust rose, the sweat poured, pieces of metal and sawdust insulation flew. Finally Mitch managed to burst a hinge, the lid pressed in, cleared its locks, and Lud levered it out and up with a long bar. The lid swung up and over and hit the hold deck with a great clang. Inside was a single unit – a rusty pair of long-nosed radio pliers. Those Nips may have gone over the side in a hurry when the aerial cannon shells came aboard but they were seamen and had done the right thing first. The final shutting of the safe may have tickled the captain's sense of humour. The joke was appreciated less by Mitch, Lud and Consul David, in about that order.

Rations were sparse and a total lack of sugar was causing the sweet tooths grave discomfort. Sugar was known to exist in considerable quantities in the Porto Customs House. There was talk of explosive but one of our NCOs produced a set of small instruments from his pay book cover and sugar began to reappear in a multitude of interestingly diverse repositions.

Success at the Customs House led the troops to consider another lurk. We had been without pay for too long. The Bank of Dili seemed to offer a solution. The main doors and gates were considered to be the province of our specially skilled NCO who worked entirely by 'feel' and required no tell-tale lights. The vault on the other hand was obviously a noisy demolitions job and it was thought that the best method would be a fairly substantial charge of plastic high explosive so that the job could be done as quickly as possible. However, while the thing was still in the planning stage and while necessary materials were being put together, the 2/2nd Commando decided to move the Company to more distant camping areas. Thus an international incident of some magnitude was avoided almost accidentally.

It should be made clear that it was not the money which the conspirators found attractive. In any case it would have quickly found its way into a few hands via the 'two up' school. The real draw was the glory of independence. The thought of conducting a Company pay without the aid of L.H.Q. was so attractive as to render it almost irresistible. The sugar issue had been good but to organise a 'real pay' that would have really been something. All of us regretted our inability to carry out this splendid coup though it might have compromised our

image somewhat. At a later stage, the Timorese were to give us the honoured title of 'Emma la nauc', literally 'those who do not steal'. It was a proud label. However it is doubtful if the Timorese would have understood the repugnance an Australian feels for the thought of robbing a simple people, or his mates. Nor could they have understood the different set of morals he accepted as valid when tilting at authority. The Australian soldier has two sets of values. One set is almost civilian. The other, purely military. They appear to be understood only by other Australian soldiers since they tend to negate the concept of a sort of fundamental 'honest man'. Should the philosopher ask, "What is the good life?" the Australian is without an answer. He is forced by his national character first to pose a question, "Where?" he will ask. If the point of the question is misunderstood, he is, to put it mildly, astonished that anyone should be so naïve as to think that there are not the widest range of relative values, truths, behaviours patterns and environments.

The Australian is not uniformly loved. He is a brash arrogant extrovert who tends to devalue the possessions of others in comparison with his own. Like the Texan, he tends to value things for their bigness. He frays the nerves of nationals of older countries. His youth in inter-cultural relations is not his excuse. Indeed he tends to make none, so confident is he in his extroversion. Perhaps he has only one real saving grace – his interest is ever 'people' rather than 'things' and he is continuously dedicated to his concept of a 'fair go'. Altogether even when the last proviso is included, it is not a pretty picture and it is probably just another mark of national egotism that the writer had been uniformly proud of 'being one of the poor bastards' for the last half century.

Before the splitting of the Company and the removal of the platoons to country residence, there occurred a wonderful Company parade. The lack of amenities was becoming more evident to members as the Christmas period approached. A little 'bully beef' remained and it was evident that Christmas dinner was going to be 'M and V', or 'bully beef' and 'gold fish'. This thought sapped the morale and raised the 'bloody-minded' spectre. It was reinforced by the refusal of town leave. The result of this refusal was to say the least of it, catastrophic.

On Christmas Eve the troops seeped into the town by various means and routes. By evening it was impossible to form a guard for the various appointments at camp and air strip. It was significant that the guard on the ammunition dump was made up of the Lieutenant and two NCO's from Four Section. Perhaps it is also significant that in the course of the evening all three saw their share of Dili. Indeed it appears to have been tacitly assumed that the order refusing leave was 'strictly for the birds'; and that their purpose in ensuring at least one sentry on the dump stemmed from their personal fear that someone might prove a danger to the material they loved, and a recognition too of the fact that they were 'getting a few more bob' for accepting responsibility than were the private soldiers of their section.

The festivities in Dili were exciting. The Javanese of the Dutch forces were very friendly with their allies. They had access to seemingly limitless supplies of Bols gin. Most Company members were beer drinkers and the enforced stay at the strip had sapped their capacity. The spirits worked fast. Some of our younger members were of necessity dispatched (or dragged) home. One, John-George, ostensibly a member of the Picket, as a result of an access to spirits, animal and Bols combined, managed to fire a burst of Tommy gun four-five slugs down the street, fortunately without adverse effect on the population.

When the Command, which despite its morale-destroying order was being feted by Porto and Dutch officers, became aware that the great bulk of the Company now occupied the town

it made efforts to repair the situation and clear them out. The Adjutant showed particular perspicacity here. He assumed for the purposes of the necessary operation that all reasonably sober members were on official duty and that 'crime', in the military sense, and absence without leave commenced from the beginning of the clearing plan rather than from the leaving of camp. Thus these personnel became a series of official Pickets and began to round up the troops.

The Pickets had their difficulties. Situations were fraught with some danger and called for tact. For example, one NCO in 'clearing' the main brothel was subjected to a knife attack by the 'madame', a white Russian cum oriental girl of the same age as her charges. She chipped a little skin off his chin giving him a somewhat delicate spot for all future shaving. It is probable that like many Timorese citizens she was seeking drama rather than the taking of life. At any rate the NCO showed most commendable restraint. One of his soldiers placed the lady's arms on either side of a coconut tree, holding her wrists firmly. Another unshipped his bayonet scabbard and wielded it to some purpose on the appropriate part. She was left holding her tail and sobbing, a much wiser girl with perhaps an inbuilt allergy to the use of knives.

The following morning the most memorable of all parades was held. We formed up in two previously prepared groups facing each other. To the southward stood the 'bad boys' – those who had failed to return to camp orders and had been unlucky enough to come within the ken of officers engaged in the cleaning up process. Northwards stood the 'good group'. While most of them were more or less equally guilty by having responded to instruction and commonsense, they were considered to be 'white washed'. The first group though larger in actual numbers was somewhat less military in general appearance.

The CO appeared through the palms and passing from man to man in the front rank began to question them. With few exceptions under these circumstances to such questions as, "Were you found in Dili drunk?", or "Were you found in the main street at 2 am without a leave pass?", it was the habit of members to spring to attention and say simply, "Yes, Sir." This method was more or less standard. Any other tended to prolong a parade, serve no purpose and to cause innocent mates discomfort in the hot sun. The responsibility for the length and nature of the parade rested squarely on the shoulders of the CO. As a result of his natural chagrin at the blemish to the image of his unit in a strange land, he cracked under pressure and began to interpolate original questions. This was inexcusable. Military methods were well-known, traditional and efficacious. Original derivations can only cause trouble and the CO's ship was soon beating under a heavy wind off a lee shore.

All went reasonably well until the CO asked a signaller a very pointed question. "You, Signaller _____" (who had been found naked in bed with a native woman, a fine altercation still well-remembered and much admired) he said, "What have you got to say for yourself?" The signaller knew the rules and despite the unusual form of the question sprang as well to attention as his state allowed saying, "Nothing, Sor". The CO passed to the next man and since he was 'standing off' a little for obvious reasons, the signaller naturally assumed that a whisper to his mate would be unheard. The CO caught the movement of his lips out of the corner of his eye. He spun around and said, "What did you say Signaller _____?" The signaller sprang to attention. He was a forthright honest man and he told the truth. "I said a good ____ Sor". His reply indicated a lady of considerable charm. Not it is understood that in the British Army guardsmen are so trained that such incidents produce no reaction. British soldiers are unsmiling on parade. This was not so in the 2/2nd and a mighty animal howl of

enjoyment rose from both groups. The Officers off to the left of the main parade reproduced another historic situation when ‘even the ranks of Tuscany would scarce forbear to cheer”.

One would have thought that our CO would have realised that it was the framing of his original question which had produced this unfortunate result. Quick thinking here would have saved further entertainment. Allen, our CO, was a rather dour man and no flash of inspiration saved him from his fate. Passing to Boyo he said, “And you Pte _____, I suppose you were with a woman too?” Now Boyo, who appears elsewhere in this chronicle, had lived as a prospector in areas peopled by aborigines. Like most West Australian bushmen he had an intense and blind colour bar. Boyo would have seen no difference between a Prince of Old India and an aborigine hunter. He certainly saw no difference in the Timorese. His reaction was immediate and distinctly menacing. He slouched forward, his big hands rolled into enormous fists, “Are you insinuatin’ that I’d ____ a gin?” he said. “Because you’d bloody well better not”. How the CO might have recovered ground from this controversial contretemps was never resolved. He was saved from a problem of his own making for at this stage a loud voice was heard calling on God and the CO to take the poor suffering soldiers out of the sun and allow a dedicated worker to return to his chosen duty of selfless service to his mates.

Our vocal comrade proved to be a Corporal cook in the extreme grip of the grape. It must be pointed out that he had not previously given too many examples of his selfless service, particularly in Wayville, but it was apparent now that his heart had always been in the right place. His words were so colourful that they provided the CO with the straw for which he must surely have been grasping. “Arrest that man”, commanded the CO> In the course of this change of front a few more stable spirits had tugged Boyo into the front rank where they had him safe under verbal duress. An unfortunate NCO was detailed to the arrest. He won honours on the field of battle and on the playing field but it is doubtful if he ever attempted a more difficult job. He wasn’t in fact the first NCO detailed for the task but our cook had shown signs of resistance and had demanded to be arrested by his particular mates. Now as he was physically and a little urgently assisted from the parade ground, the cook turned his head towards the ‘criminals’ and addressed the parade. “Look at them”, he said with great depth of feeling. “’Eroes, bloody ‘eroes every one of them”. There was a little more of the parade but the real meat of it was over. We had had a surfeit and our ribs were to ache for days as they ache now in memory.

The immediate effect of this parade though damaging to the CO was of considerable military importance. Gone for a time was the danger of being ‘bloody-minded’. Men who are ‘bloody ‘eroes’ and can recreate in their mind’s eye the very moment they received their splendid title are no longer short of morale. What a job you did that day my lad.

Chapter 5.

We removed ourselves now to the country. ‘A’ Platoon went to the hills along the Dili – Aileu Road at a place called by the Australians Three Spurs. ‘C’ Platoon were at Tibar, a cactus walled village near the junction of that road and the coast highway. ‘B’ Platoon drew Cactus Flat, a hot salt encrusted area on the coast road, but to the west.

When it was realised that despite triangulation and despite the cost of their production, the maps of Porto National Geographic Society were hopelessly inaccurate, particularly as to distance, an attempt was made to right the matter. A series of compass traverses were put into hand and it was discovered that one ‘ Dusty’ had a skill in cartography.

Porto Timor is very mountainous. The territory is in rough measure about one hundred and seventy miles long but had a widest measurement of about fifty across. If it is realised that within these measurements it rises to almost ten thousand feet in twenty two miles, it can be seen that it is pretty steep. Indeed Geordie of Four Section expressed it well in a ‘bloody-minded’ moment when he said, “A man has to be born with one bloody leg shorter than the other to live comfortably in the bloody country and you’ve gotta be careful not to get the bloody short leg downhill”.

The Timorese themselves are distinctly conditioned by their mountains. They describe really heavy-going simply as ‘Sai Tune’, which means only ‘up down’. On the other hand their concept of ‘flat’ is a strange one. Ask a Timorese to describe a piece of land which only requires, say, a thousand climbs and descents each of say, four or five hundred feet per day’s march and he will invariably say, ‘raitecic’ which means level ground. We found this clash of training and concepts vastly nerve-wracking. The compass traverses gave one sub-section of the unit a solid lesson in the dangers inherent in unfamiliarity with terrain. The traverse was being made up a river which on the coast was a broad dry stream with a single viable creek amongst the sand. As the Section climbed, the stream became a fast running half-leg deep affair between rocky walls. The traverse was made in a practical if primitive manner. A single soldier with a bayoneted rifle slung across his shoulder would march ahead until an obvious turn in the stream would mean that further progress would render him invisible to his fellows. The soldier with the compass would take a reading on the bayonet and one of his fellows would ‘book’ it. The members of the Section would then pace the leg silently and on reaching the first soldier would compare notes. One of their numbers would remain at the beginning of the leg. This provided a sight for sight for ‘back bearing’. It may sound a very rough measure but these soldiers were highly skilled in ‘yard stepping’ and variations were

slight and differences of opinion rare. A continuous bearing taking on all recognizable features right and left of the legs from both its extremities permitted a triangulation insurance policy against major error.

On the day in question it was drizzling in the lower reaches of the river while southward high in the mountains were heavy black clouds with thunder rolling continuously. Looking down the way it had come the Sub-section could see a large flock of goats being driven across the wide sandy delta near the sea. Though ant sized their multi-colours showed clearly against the white of the sand.

Suddenly Geordie who was carrying the 'front bayonet' shouted a warning and commenced to claw himself up the almost vertical slope to his right. The rest of the Sub-section took violent evasive action in the same manner. No-one other than Geordie really knew the source of the danger and no doubt each member was full of the possibilities of contact with additional members of the crew of the radio patrol boat who rumour had it still hid in the hills.

Down the great rocky gutter of the river came a wall of water. In its path it rolled large boulders and on its crest and within its maw it carried giant eucalyptus trees with roots still carrying the red stains of mountain earth. In the centre of the torrent was a deep regular furrow, but its sides reached higher and higher up the mountain walls, sweeping them clean of earth and vegetation and licking hungrily at the amazed Sub-section which remained glued to the mountainside just out of reach, clinging desperately to its weapons and the hillside and watching upstream with intense foreboding.

The flood subsided, or rather partially subsided in a matter of four or five minutes but enough of it remained to make return down the river bed impossible. Indeed the way down now had been swept completely bare of soil or vine and was too slippery to permit of a return in any case. The only way out was up and we climbed vigorously through virgin thickets and thence to cultivated gardens and finally to a hills road. The flood had delayed our return to camp and added immeasurably to our journey. The only advantage was that the downhill winding road was easygoing and we made light of it.

The sky was now clear and the light faded quickly. When we reached the river where the coast road crossed it we found it was impossible and still too fast to be capable of negotiation either by endless chain-wading or by swimming. By following that part of the delta still dry to the sea we hoped to manage a crossing where the gradient would be negligible. However, at the beach the stream was still too deep and too fast. Hungry men seldom tolerate being marooned for long and as the evening was so clear and well lit by the moon we waded into the sea and finding the perennial sand bar made a crossing no more than shoulder deep. We knew that the coast road touched the beach just short of the camp and we preferred the hard sand at the water's edge to the long march up the delta and along the rutted road.

We proceeded with little caution and somewhat higher spirits until startled by a number of ghostly figures which appeared suddenly out of the surf and with cries of relief sped past us up the beach into the coastal scrub. We never discovered what percentage of the flock survived or indeed if the goatherd proved as hardy as his flock. Knowing Timorese it is highly probable. If he did one wonders what were his thoughts as he took that wild tumbling ride down the delta and out to sea.

That night in the steaming quiet of Cactus Flat, Geordie who could undoubtedly claim to have saved his Sub-section, also claimed that as he fought his w ay up the slope the wild water had gone very close to sucking off his right boot. When he later told the story it became his right foot and later again he mentioned a pain in the shoulder due to the fact that the water, having taken possession of his rifle butt, had stretched and twisted the sling and hence wrenched his shoulder. Geordie had, and has, thank God, the great innocent eyes of the successful poker player. He is a factual and indeed phlegmatic reporter on all major issues but he has too the marks of one who 'never spoilt the ship for the sake of a ha'pennorth of tar'.

One other fact about our new home was brought abruptly to our notice. Some members of the Platoon discovered a native lying in the shade of a bush by the roadside. He was in a feverish state and his right hand appeared to be one great blood blister. The blister was infected and it was obvious that if indeed the hand did mend there was a distinct possibility that the fingers would join together and form a web. We were later to see this phenomenon many times but when we saw our first we lacked the necessary means of communication to understand the reasons for the state of the hand. The native was brought to our excellent medical orderly, Allan, and he released the great mass of black blood, slit away the surplus skin and generally cleaned up the mess. Sulphanilamide powder and a dressing completed the job.

Palmintorie is a method of punishment which is little short of diabolical. The 'criminal' is hitched to a post and the hand to be beaten is noosed and pulled out. The Portuguese have no capital punishment but he who wields the Palmintorie still rejoices in the title of executioner. The instrument of torture is a hard wood bat with a long handle. The bat is generally about seven eighths of an inch thick and five across and through it are drilled a number of one eighth to one quarter inch holes. The application of this flat bat to the hand causes immediate blistering under the holes. Continuous application produces larger and larger blisters until all become one. In 1942 it was allotted by the magistrates for comparatively minor crimes. It is to be hoped that its use is now banned. Apart from the essential bestiality of the thing, it is a truism of human relationships that anything which lowers the human dignity of the governed necessarily lowers the dignity of the governors in like or greater degree.

We were not aware that at the time of our medical treatment of the native we could have caused one more international misunderstanding. The Porto authorities inclined to the view that anyone aiding a criminal before or after punishment was guilty of at least implied criticism of the administration of Porto Timor. We had no wish to fall foul of the authorities. We were to live on their bounty for too long.

Malaria now struck. The cartography ceased forthwith. Had the Japanese put forward their programme by as much as ten days they could have had Timor without a shot. Most of our members were incapacitated and with high fever.

We at Cactus Flat took a little time to adjust to the disease. All units have their share of malingerers and even the best of soldiers tend to malinger during 'bloody-minded' periods. It was only when Allan our R.A.P. Corporal began to see the general nature of the malaise and when news began to seep through from Three Spurs that our fellow platoons were hard hit that the serious nature of our casualties were brought home to us.

Fortunately there was a reasonable supply of quinine which while not up to the standards of later synthetics was still an admirable control. Further, we had been taking prophylactic doses and for this we were now rewarded. Earlier there had been trouble in administering the tablets as word had swept round that their regular use became an addiction and destroyed virility. Some members had gone to great lengths to avoid the dose and a few had been reasonably successful. We all suffered but the back-sliders suffered now in even greater measure.

In the early stages, duty personnel were a group of proud men while their comrades lay on their sweat-wreathed groundsheets. As the sick recovered they took the places of these others who now fell by the wayside. The grand night in Dili reaped its harvest and many of the Christmas Eve revellers were the first stricken.

Only one form of malaria is found in Porto Timor. This is benign tertian recurrent malaria. Cure at this time was impossible. Death was uncommon but the disease had a very debilitating affect and could recur every few weeks or even days. We learned to live with it. There came a time when we could no longer spare quinine for daily dosage. The stricken soldier would take one enormous dose, sweat it out for from twenty to forty hours and then get on his feet and go back to work.

One glorious result of malaria was to force the people at Tiber and Cactus Flat into the hills. To be reasonably free of re-infection in Timor it is necessary to get above the anopheles line which is at about three thousand five hundred feet. Even a few hundred feet, owing to night winds across the ridges, is reasonably safe provided one does not pitch camp beside a buffalo wallow. This may sound like shutting the stable door after the horse is gone, but although we all had the malarial parasite in our blood, the re-stirring of the thing by the entry of a new infected proboscis was to be avoided wherever possible.

'B' Platoon moved up a spur to a native village known as Mal il Ho. Her HQ was firmly established. It was a good position at the junction of three great ridges with a maximum height of about two thousand feet. Four Section moved along one of those ridges to the Porto Posto and village of Bazaar Tete. We made contact with the Chief Posto Caesare Marerarrate and his family and though he protested his neutrality and indeed tried to stick to it, he did advise us that in his opinion the forward slopes of the great mountain Koot Lau would make a good camp. He was right.

We threw ourselves into camp building. On Koot Lau at a place known as Nun turi Pu we saw the wonder of the Timorese 'tudic badaian'. Tudic is a knife or chopper, badiaian means carpenter. It is an expressive title.

A swarm of little brown men carried ai boort (big timber) and bamboo to the crest of our ridge. Here in a grove of fig trees they fashioned the framework of mess hut and sleeping quarters. The tables and beds were made of bamboo. A Timorese takes a length of giant bamboo and hits it in a regular fashion with his catana or tudic. He pierces it with a series of slits perhaps half an inch apart and six or seven inches long. When the slits cover the whole length of the bamboo, he makes a single cut from end to end and then opens out the pipe and presses it flat with his feet. A Timorese bamboo of six inches diameter thus becomes a table top of at least twenty two inches. Stretched a little across its width and hitched down with bamboo skin ties it dries out flat and springy. It makes a good bed and a usable table top.

Great progress was made in learning the language and much of our success was directly attributable to the friendship and unfailing patience of our work foreman, Luis. This statuesque young Timorese with the finely chiselled features and aristocratic nose of his caste should have been by right of inheritance the king of Bazaar Tete. Unfortunately in 1912 a revolt against the Porto rule occurred and Luis' uncle had been a prime culprit. His father had been suspect and as a result the Portos had deposed the royal family and suppressed its rights. Every Portuguese including Morera Ratu, a conservative reporter, continued to assure us that Luis, while a valued friend of the Portuguese and certainly of royal blood, was now completely devoid of power. We often needed workforces of natives and Chef Postos frequently supplied ten of the twenty promised and then as a rule a few days late. We had no such trouble at Nun Turi Pu. Indeed once in much more adverse times two members of Four Section, Charlie and Ray, had need of a great number of carriers in double quick time. They took their problems to Luis. He stepped to the side of a ridge and spoke to a farmer in his maize field below, "Holla emman rainulu mai" (call up sixty men), he said in mildish tones. The farmer passed the message round the ridges, adding the name of Luis. A few minutes later from the couple of hundred who appeared, Luis chose the required thirty, dismissing the rest with smiles of approval and an easy familiarity. He had no power! Facetiously one might think that the Porto deposes, but only the Timorese disposes.

The Timorese need some introduction. It is popular to suppose that they are of the normal Malay stock and enjoy a close relationship with the Koepanger. This is a very shallow supposition and overlooks most of the evidence. Few anthropologists have worked among them and no really suitable theories to explain their presence and the nature of their dialects has been produced save that of a single Portuguese named Martinhoes. He believes that the people should be generally spoken of as the Tetums. Tetum is the language spoken. He considers it is probable that the Timorese high up on their mountains resisted a great series of invasions which as a rule passed them by, and dissipated themselves in Dutch Timor or in other islands.

The Timorese can hardly claim race purity now. They often do but the colony has been ruled by Europeans for nearly five hundred years. The Arab traders arrived before the Europeans and though they speak Tetum like the rest, they still exist and call themselves Arabi. The Chinese have been the island shopkeepers for centuries. Even the 1912 Revolution which was suppressed by African battalions from Mozambique has left its mark. Mixed blood people are common and some of the coastal natives bear striking resemblance to Malays. Also, Porto Timor is divided from what is now Indonesian Timor only by a river and a mountain range. In Indonesian territory live people of somewhat similar physical appearance but they are Malay speaking. The present day Tetum speaking Timorese may be in some danger of their identity. However there is no doubt that the old race still persists. The upper-class Timorese of the high mountains are a race apart both physically and in their philosophy.

The language Tetum we were assured by Portuguese was designed by the early missionaries to provide a common tongue. There is no evidence to support this, and Capell a highly-skilled linguist at the Australian National University, discounts it. Tetum is an original language. It may have been used by missionaries. It was not designed by them. It may predate Portuguese.

Tetum is an economical language. It would be inadequate for any literary purpose but it is reasonably adequate for normal communication. Many dialects are spoken but Tetum is the

lingua franca and its structure is so similar to the dialects that even a primitive dialect speaking Timorese is soon able to make his way in it. Many of the nouns in Tetum are drawn from Portuguese and Malay. Most of these are the names of things which have appeared on the island in the last thousand years. The name for a pony for example is kuda, as it is in Malay. For 'troops' one uses the Portuguese 'astropas'. We regretted this Portuguese word for there are nuances of the formidable and frightening in the words 'astropas Japanese' not to be found in the Australian phrase 'bloody little nips' or in the
Timorese normal simplicity of 'Japan'.

For the most part Tetum depends on the present tense and to indicate the past, one interpolates the word 'ulic' meaning before. 'Ecos' which means 'after' gives the future. In our early days, failure to notice these subtleties caused considerable confusions. For the most part however Tetum was very good to us. The terms 'iha' or 'la iha' became very useful. They mean 'here' or 'not here' or, in the context of asking for food, 'have' or 'have not'. One remembers in belt-tightening times a thousand occasions when to the question, "Montolo iha ca la?" (are there eggs or not?), we received the frustrating answer of 'la iha Tuan'. But for those thousand times of extreme frustration there was always the heart-warming one when the answer came out as 'iha'.

It would be unfortunate to give the impression that the Timorese are one people. There are a number of tribes and dialects. In the main mountain fortresses above Dili and stretching southward over the back-bone of the island, live the Mambai. This tribe is one of extreme variation in sophistication and in primitive survival. The Mambai remain the people with the drive and their dialect, also called Mambai, provides the basic structure for official Tetum. The spearmen of the Mambai first resisted the Portos and then carried them to colonial supremacy. The spears have not been 'racked' forever. Most of the revolts have been Mambai inspired.

The members of this tribe have a striking characteristic. They are uniformly inquisitive. They have a reputation for this amongst their fellows and amongst neighbouring tribes. However, no-one speaks of this. Not, it is true, out of any wish to avoid offence, but because the Timorese are an economical people with an economical language and they have found a way of avoiding the need for endless explanation and description. The tribal name tells the whole story for all time and correctly suns up the outstanding facet of the national character. The word 'Mambai' means literally, "What is that?" and the tribal members are certainly consistent "What is thats".

We found the Mambai quite delightful. They are natural bandits, at least in their thinking, and despite the obvious military superiority of the Japanese, great numbers of Mambai were long-suffering and loyal in the service of Australians. They formed the bulk of our servant force. Each Australian soon acquired an unpaid volunteer batman who did all the menial tasks of washing and carrying so that he might increase the fighting efficiency of his particular 'Tuan'. These Criados (servants) were youthful adventurers who found outlet for the surge of hot blood within their veins not normally permitted by the Portos in less troubled times.

When one associated with a loyal Mambai, the loyalty was unquestioning. On the other hand, disloyalty and open enmity for the Australians later in 1942 arose chiefly amongst sections of the Mambai. They are an oppressed people who desire nothing more than action of some kind and they took whatever opportunity offering. It would be better to have one

Mambai at one's side than three of any other tribe but the reverse is also true. It is not politic to have Mambai as opponents.

South of the main Mambi strongholds live the Noga Noges. They are somewhat lighter-coloured people sometimes of singular facial beauty. Their nature is one of sunny good fellowship. A Mambai might betray you but he was never late for an appointment. A Noga Noga is too kindly as a person to betray one but his undertaking to be at the rendezvous at two o'clock could mean any hour of the twenty four and possibly any day of the week. They were an intelligent and intelligently unreliable, lovable people. The Mambai were not as a rule unfriendly to the Noga Nogas because in fact it was hard to dislike any Noga. However, they smiled when they were mentioned.

Jokes on Timor are frequently of the 'shaggy dog' type. They are seldom impromptu and generally traditional and repetitive. The Mambai, amongst their own people, always referred in dialect to the Noga Nogas as 'Be rua Noga' (Two day Noga Nogas). The Australians showed little interest in the appellation. When all is said and done, when one's soldiers with a people known as 'What is that', it comes as little surprise if other peoples have equally unusual titles.

After the war 'hotted up' and 'Astropas Japaneses' were abroad in the hills, Four Section found itself on a knife blade ridge watching a long line of ant-like figures moving on a neighbouring one. Said Ray to his criado Mau Lere, "Timores ca Japanezes ca?" (Timorese or Japanese or?) – the hanging final 'or' left the possibility of something else again. "Impresta occult Tuan?" (May I borrow your glasses, sir?) said the Mambai with some excitement, realising the military importance of swift identification. Mau Lere peered through the binoculars at the distant figures and then with a cheery chuckle he returned the glasses to the Australian. "Be rua Noga dit", he said, still laughing (Only 2 day Nogas). "What's so funny about Noga Nogas and why '2 day Nogas' in any case?" asked Ray. "Well," said Mau Lere, "It's a rather long story. We all know that the Australians are pretty good people of great strength and courage. They are even a little 'puffed up' about it. It is not my wish to decry them in any way at all. It just so happens that I am a Mambai, and since I am, I know that the finest specimen of mankind is a Mambai. Now being such it follows that the production of future Mambai is a slow business taking as a general rule full nine moons. No doubt it takes almost as long to produce the best type of Australian. However, as to those chaps on the next ridge, it would be a poor sort of man who could not fabricate one of those in a couple of days. For this reason," Mau Lere continued, 'shooting through' lest he receive a semi-affectionate clout on the ear, "we continue to identify them as Two Day Nogas, so that people may the more readily understand their character".

The Mambai have developed a healthy agnosticism. This probably results from a clash of theologies. Many Mambai are now Christians but the great bulk of the tribe is not. They have also ceased to practice their older religious forms. In many villages the 'Umah Lulic' (Holy House) remains but it is rather as a museum than a place of worship.

"In the beginning", the Mambai say, "we prayed to the old spirits for the good of the crops and the coming of the rains. The crops grew or they did not grow. The rains came or did not come. When the Portuguese arrived, we gave up the spirits and prayed to Jesu Cristi. The crops grew or did not grow. The rains came or did not come. After observing this inconsistency over a long period, we decided to give the whole matter up. Now we notice that the crops grow or do not grow and the rains come or do not come just as they did of old.

We have found, however, that the introduction of some water to the maize by way of bamboo pipe from the streams above seems to save us a lot of time formerly spent in prayer".

The Ah De of the East, unlike the Mambai, are much given to spirits. The 'Umah Lulics' are nicely preserved and in continuous use. In 1942 when a revolt occurred against Porto rule, the Ah De remained loyal and took the field on behalf of the Government. They took heads as of yore and hung them from a bamboo rail in the village square. Under each head they placed a half coconut shell bowl full of rice and cracked maize. This was to provide food for the spirits of the dead to fortify them for a long trip. The grain was protected from the village fowls by a permanent guard. In the night it was thought that the nutriment was sucked from the grain by the hungry spirits still reposing in the heads above. After dawn, the blood-stained grain was tossed out in the square to free the bowls for normal village use. The hens rushed in and gorged themselves.

The Ah De found this situation vastly amusing. Man, woman and child danced with excitement and laughter. "Manu malucu. Manu malucu", (The fowls are mad) they cried over and over again. "Se mac malucu iha ne?" (Who's crazy around here?), asked that stolid Mambai agnostic Mau Lere.

At Nun Turi Pu, word arrived which changed Australian thinking. The Portos were bringing troops to garrison their own island. They had accepted the representations of the Australian Government and were now prepared to deny the island to the Japanese and preserve their right to neutrality by actively defending it if necessary. Our occupation was to draw to a close.

Out went the Sections to 'traverse' routes into Dutch Timor so that the Company might withdraw by land. As far as Four Section was concerned, Lieutenant Tom left for the great Namura Plains to the south west to examine the crossings of the mighty Lois River. Mick continued to garrison Nun Turi Pu, while Ray left with Big Pat and Bill to map the route from Bazaar Tete to Boibau over which it was likely that B Platoon would withdraw.

Pat, who had suffered as a result of the Christmas Eve roubles, had for too long been a HQ member. He welcomed this return to those who 'loved' him. His redrafting to the Section came almost accidently on the express command of the CO. It was known amongst the troops at Rauluco, the HQ camp, that the 'old man' still possessed a bottle of whisky. Paddy, who was on sentry duty, was kneeling beside his snoring Commanding Officer at about 0200 hours trying o investigate the valise beneath the bed. The CO woke. Quick thinking was needed and this was Pat's particular province.
There are lights moving in the valley, Sir", said Pat. The CO rose swiftly and made an appreciation of the situation. Fire flies were plentiful and a number of trees, several miles distant, glowed and flickered in the dark. A patrol cursing in it half-wakened state, went out but found nothing. However the CO was most impressed with Pat's vigilance and with his wide-awake manner and military promptitude. He commended him and Pat realising his advantage, sought clarification of his position at HQ and the period of time he was likely to stay there. The CO had come to regard Pat as a recalcitrant prominent appendage of his staff but now keenly aware of his remarkable rehabilitation, he granted him the privilege of returning to Four Section. Pat had his gear on in a jiffy and was out of the camp quickly as he knew that even august military minds have been known to change.

The traversing and surveying patrols were rationless, as by this time we were living entirely 'off the country'. We had little money. Most of it was morally Mick's as he had made a 'killing' at 'two up', but realising the problems of the Unit he had unshipped a substantial roll and made it available to the authorities of B Platoon.

The lack of rations in a peaceful Timor was not a very serious matter as Command had managed to organise co-operation with the Portuguese on promise of eventual payment. The Portos in turn had undertaken to honour any legitimate 'surat' (receipt) presented by a native. In any case, particularly as regards small patrols, the unfailing hospitality of a simple people and the Portos equal if somewhat more flamboyant goodwill always ensured a well-planned patrol of at least 'one good feed per day'. To this end, Ray decided to go on a forced march to Boibau in one day and after camping the night there to 'traverse' on the slower uphill return journey over two days, for it was known that at Boibau was a Governmental Experimental Station with a rehabilitated communist exile as its chief. The 'Granza' was designed to experiment in possible new crops for the island but, in fact, had degenerated into a plantation growing those crops already established.

Morera Ratua had given Ray an expressive picture of Manuelo Caviscalou the manager of the Granza. He was a 'deportado', that is to say he was exiled to Timor for life as a result of taking part in one of the several communist revolutions which had occurred in Lisbon. There were a number of Deportados on Timor. Some were independent farmers but for the most part they had some form of semi-governmental job and though looked upon as lower in status than the official Portos, were still very important people.

The trip to Boibau was without incident and the Granza residence proved to be a great white building with a flight of broad white steps before the main door. On the top stood a man so thin and tall in his white tropical suit as to give the impression of making a third pillar. His aquiline face was stern and forbidding. He nodded graciously enough when the Corporal saluted, but it was Pat who carried the day. Raising his right hand in clenched fist, he literally shouted "Bon dia Comrade". The stern face of the Portuguese lit up like a lamp and he crashed out a return greeting. "That's the bloody way to get through to these bloody commos mate", said Pat to the Corporal.

Like most deportados, Caviscalau had a Timorese wife. In fact, he had several. The house was full of delightful children of varying shades but all showed promise of great height. Manuelo himself was above six feet six. Also in the house was the Timorese wife of the Dili butcher.

The three Australians showered and while this was happening their sweaty shorts and shirts and underclothing were washed, dried and pressed and returned to the bathroom. Pat spent the waiting period in the bath, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

The meal served that evening was a five course affair with good wine and equally good coffee and brandy to follow. For soldiers who to conserve food and disguise some of it, normally sat down to thick greasy stew, it was manna from heaven. Our host had no English and our Tetum was still confined to food and place names.

After dinner, Pat who was out of training as a result of HQ inactivity, and Bill who had a slight attack of malaria 'hit the hay'. Ray and Manuelo stayed up with the brandy until the small hours with a pad and pencil each and with a Porto-English, English-Porto dictionary,

sliding from one to the other between the brandy glasses. The discussion, dictated by the host, was strictly political. "Are there facisti in Australia?", printed Carrascalao. "No", printed Ray, perhaps with a little tongue in cheek. "What about BHP?", asked Carrascalao. Only the limitations of the method of conversation prevented the Corporal from trying to re-establish the image of Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd.

It was a long night and in the pre-dawn the house was in uproar. Manuelo shook the troops awake. The "telephoni – Dili – Astropas Japanezes". Out of this spate of words rendered more unintelligible by the fact that the butcher's wife screamed continuously, "Patron, Oh, Patron", (since her husband was still apparently master in his own house), we gleamed the disquieting news that the Jap had landed in Dili and taken the air strip and town. The telephoni was now defunct, so we could get no more. "What about the traverse?" asked Pat. "To hell with the bloody traverse", said Ray with some petulance. "Mick is on that ridge like shag on a rock with half a Section. We are going back and we are going to make the climb in half a day". "Spoken like a bloody man", said Pat.

Pat and Ray never really saw eye to eye. They played together but always with some misgivings on the part of each and there had been in the past considerable friction. They were never to have another cross word but time was unbelievably short. As the three began the climb, they passed the entrance to a plantation path. In the gap in the hibiscus hedge stood the long figure of Carrascalou. Solemn-faced as suited the seriousness of the occasion, he raised his clenched fist, stood rigidly to attention and intoned his final blessing. "Victoire comrades," he cried. "Victoire", cried the three, swept up in the joy of the moment. It speaks well of them, one likes to think, that they retained control until they rounded a corner. Here they collapsed by the side of the track for a rest period after what must have been the shortest patrol 'leg' in history. The wonderful mental picture of three such physically ill-assorted companions marching to launch a victorious attack on the Japanese Marine Corp. was so rewarding that it continued to fortify them for the mountain struggle ahead.

For Ray, who was reasonably free of fever and had his 'mountain legs', that trip was something of an ordeal. For Bill, running a high fever and wanting to lie down and die, it was another story. For Pat, it must have been a real agony as he drove his great legs up and up the steep and slippery track. There was no whimpering. Towards noon they found it necessary to relax their pace as Bill was now at the staggering stage. However, they slipped down the little mountain trail to Nun Turi Pu and found the camp in a ferment of excitement. However strangely enough it was the patrol which was best supplied with news of Dili.

Chapter 6.

From the higher slopes of Koot Lau it was possible to see a number of Japanese vessels lying off Dili. Smoke shrouded the town and one great black column rose to great heights.

It was known that Two Section of A Platoon, which had provided the air strip defence, had been engaged or had engaged the enemy. It was not known if any members of Two had survived, though it was thought that Gerry, the Section's Lieutenant, had managed to get back to the Company somewhat the worse for wear.

We were to learn later that when a few shells crashed into Dili, the Dutch force Commander, Col. Van , had failed to make a reasonable appreciation of the situation. Bernie, our Adjutant, (who at this stage ceased to be The Saint for all time), had a report from Two Section reporting that the strip was under attack. He rushed to Col. Van and asked for a general order to repel the night attack. The Colonel had no plan. "It is a submarine", he said. "It will be gone by morning".

When Gerry again acquainted Bernie with the fact that he was still being subjected to heavy attack, it seemed reasonable to deploy the Javanese. However the Commander had no such plans and the fight for Dili accordingly deteriorated.

At this stage Herbie returned from an unauthorised visit to Dili and the mark of his state lies in the fact that he wandered across the air strip as if he owned it, seemingly unaware of the nature of the new situation. However, such is the effect of changed environment and such was the trained conditioning which had taken place, that Herbie was able to make an immediate metamorphosis from a staggering reveller to a fighting soldier.

At the strip the Japanese made a technical error. Despite the small numbers opposed to them, they were slow in launching a full scale operation. A deep drain between the strip and our old lines in the plantation now swarming with Nipponese presented some obstacle. The Japs tried to cross it by way of our palm track bridge. Two very determined soldiers sat in the ditch with sub-machine guns, 'mowed' the enemy and proceeded to fill the ditch with Japanese bodies. One Jap who was successful in getting across was seen to be crawling on hands and knees round the edge of the platform. Kevin, a Two Section Corporal, jumped on this little hero and despatched him with the bayonet. The Section Bren Gun emplaced in a sand-bagged pit continued to fire across the ditch until others of the enemy got within grenade throwing distance and with their noisy, Bakelite grenades succeeded in killing one gunner and fracturing the shoulder of the other, effectively knocking him out so that he later became an easy capture and remained a prisoner until the end of the war, though on a later occasion he was almost rescued or killed. You will be able to make your choice when that incident is described.

It became obvious that help from the Dutch was not forthcoming and that nineteen men, even such as these were, could do little against an army. Bernie managed to get a message through with a fortunate Two Section runner, to 'blow' the strip and withdraw.

When Tex went to his exploder to carry out the essential pre-evacuation measure of setting off the long-set cratering charges, a Nipponese was found bending over the wiring. He was dealt with quickly. Two Section was already on the move, racing across the strip in the general direction of Dili. Members were aware of the position of the charges. Thus when Tex set them off they were able to run between them though hammered by shock waves and flying clay, and Tex himself was able to follow on his particularly short legs through the subsequent haze of dust and smoke. The explosions temporarily disconcerted the enemy and their fire slackened so that all the fit members of Two Section made their escape. It was the night of the 19th/20th of February 1942. Two Section still had its problems; it was lost, divided and far from home.

The Dutch Force put up only token resistance. After daylight, the Japs applied steady pressure and only the Dutch Vickers Gun Company did well. Commanded by a young Lieutenant de , this small unit resisted while ammunition and guns lasted. The Javanese infantry showed little spirit and less desire to fight. It was never possible to hold Dili with such a tiny force and the enemy had enormous superiority. We learned subsequently that he had thirteen hundred men ashore in the first hour and he could have thrown in an additional Brigade within a day. Allied troops in Dili numbered less than three hundred. A score or so of these were 2/2nd. It is a matter for some regret however that the Jap should have had such a resounding victory at such small expense.

Communications were feeble in our Company. It is true that we possessed Inter-Platoon radio links but we had no reliable link with Dili. This was to cost us dearly. Our one motor bike despatch rider was shot off his bike next morning and the last link was severed. After token resistance, and particularly when the machine gun resistance was knocked out, the Javanese began surrendering out of hand the show was over. So poor was our information that Nine Section in the hills not far away could see the ships and had seen the smoke of gun fire. There was no news of the battle. Assuming that the disembarking men were the new Porto garrison, Nine commandeered our solitary ration truck and made for Dili. Seeing a battalion of soldiers marching along the road, they tooted the horn and drove on. The men in the back of the truck were hardly aware of the awful fact that here was the enemy when they were stopped. Their captors showed the normal insensitivity of Japanese troops and it was very late in the proceedings that they realised that Nine Section NCO's were arming the Section with weapons from within the truck. Before Nine could go out in a blaze of glory, all members were effectively disarmed, wrists were bound behind and the Section marched down the road. At this time a solitary Dutch Vickers was still in action and when the guard on the prisoners came under indirect fire, the prisoners were lined up in front of a drain and each was shot neatly through the back of the neck. One, the smallest man in the Section, survived. He lay in the ditch unconscious but alive.

That evening the Japs returned, bayoneted the bodies in the back of the neck and untied bandages to acquire wrist watches. Keith, who was now conscious, pressed his mouth into the mud and received the bayonet thrust in his turn. He again lost consciousness. When he recovered, probably the next morning, he was aware of enemy troops above him. Taking no precautions whatsoever, he leapt from the ditch and ran. A native worker in a maize crop tripped him up and gave him a smart tap on the head with a pinch bar to prevent his making a noise. He half carried and half dragged him through the maize to a neighbouring Umah. When Keith came to he found himself in the hands of one of the world's great ladies. She was Timorese and a descendent of a great warlike people. She however dealt only in compassion. At this writing she still lives, very old and frail, but still dignified and poised.

She hid Keith successfully from the Japanese house search, with the certainty of death for both of them if he were discovered. She dressed his wounds using commonsense rather than medicine and when the phase of the moon permitted, she smuggled him out on a pony and into the mountains to the Company.

Keith still carries two scars on his throat and two on the back of his neck. He apparently carries no mental scars to prove how the human spirit can triumph and what Remarque called 'the spark of life' persists. When a man has been executed twice and retained his will to live and succeeded, he may be judged to have been well tested. If illustration were needed, Keith's subsequent activities would provide it. The 2/2nd judged that he had 'had enough'. They did not reclaim him after hospitalisation. His efforts to rejoin were in vain. He therefore qualified himself as physically 'A' and saw active service with an orthodox regiment. Such are the salt of the earth and ordeals simply serve to strengthen their character.

In the meantime, Two Section disorganised and disjointed was faced with the task of getting out of Dili with those members of the Javanese soldiers who still had the stomach for running away with the hope of fighting another day. Most of these troops, that is those with the stomach, were not Javanese but Menadonese. The people of that particular tip of the Celebes are the Ghurkas of the southern hemisphere; and since they despise the Dutch in any case, they were the more ready to resist doing anything which a Dutch officer might contemplate, with the solitary exception of one, Lieutenant Max, whom they idolised.

Gerry, the Two Section Lieutenant, had become divided from his Section. Indeed, it is probable that at this stage he imagined he had 'lost' it in a very real and tragic sense. He made his way into the hills and finally arrived 'home' considerably knocked about, carrying a wound, but more troubled by some very serious abrasions received in his climb under more or less continuous fire.

The men of Two needed all their skill to make their way out of Dili. They soon discovered that the Jap had made an encircling movement and had established offensive posts in the foothills. However they made reasonable progress and though under sporadic fire from below, were doing well when they found themselves held by a machine gun above them. The only way out was up and through the enemy. He commanded an excellent field of fire and before him was a large area of flat rock with a water-scored gutter in it. Up this escape route Joe made his way with only occasional cover from view and fire. That he got to within grenade throwing distance shows the kind of tenacity for which this particular soldier was well known. A quick charge up the slope followed and this motley mixture of Two and 'Dutch' were over the first false crest. As yet they were far from out of the wood. As they gained height, they were visible from below and flanking posts of Japanese had targets of opportunity. Speed lent by fear and the training experience in the use of 'ground' carried them through and within half an hour they were in the hills proper, menaced only by pursuit. In happier times Joe was to receive a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions in this withdrawal. However for the rest of us, as for Joe, the real reward was to have retained for the Company a fine, more or less intact, fighting Section. We could ill afford a man, let alone one of our Sections.

It was necessary now to make a new appreciation of the general situation. The Jap had occupied Dili in force and was there to stay. It was unlikely that he would be satisfied for long with occupation of the couple of miles of steaming coastal strip. Indeed there was soon evidence that his probing patrols were pushing along the coast road and it was simply a

matter of time before he would occupy the hills. A decision was made at this point which was to seriously affect the effectiveness of the Company as soon as the Jap applied the pressure. This decision was to destroy the heavier equipment.

At Nasuta and Three Spurs, the engineers were ordered to destroy the equipment. The explosion at Three Spurs took the leaves from the trees for a considerable area. In that blast went grenades and demolitions material which should have been dispersed into the mountains many weeks before. Later, when the Japs appeared serious about coming up the Hills Road, a similar debacle took place at Railaco in which radio sets and plastic high explosive went up with a bang. Most of the PHE incidentally came down again unexploded in buckled tins so 'safe' is this explosive. For a time things remained relatively quiet. The Japs were supposed to have an outpost on the flat at Tibar. A forced march by B Platoon to eliminate this had no successful result. The Japs had certainly been in Tibar but had evacuated it a day earlier and a beautifully staged night attack only resulted in wearing the B members down to the knees and frightening the already panic-stricken native residents into a state of nervous collapse. The march back was a nightmare and Four Section, which had an additional half days march, was very grateful to regain its eyrie at Nun Turi Pu.

The Jap probed along the plain and busied himself in the construction of a new aerodrome. Then from the Op's (observation points) at Mal il Ho five trucks full of soldiers were seen to proceed westward along the coast road. This meant that early Company attempts to 'blow' the bridge across the Comoro River, close to Dili, had either been ineffective or the repairs had been completed.

At first it was considered that Japanese intentions would be to occupy the village of Bazaar Tete. The trucks however sped past this crossroads and it was soon seen that his object was Liquica, a coastal town to the west. Liaison by runner from Nun Turi Pu to Mal il Ho resulted in The Bull instructing Four Section to ambush the returning trucks and thus deny transport to the Nips. He himself was to leave Mal il Ho with an additional fighting Section and rendezvous at a bend in the road a couple of miles west of the Bazaar Tete coast road junction.

Twelve of the nineteen at Bazaar Tete went down the spur to the sea. Two flat wooden 12" x 12" boards had been prepared by a Chinese carpenter and it was intended to place a pressure switch between them, plus a four plug gelignite charge to blow a front wheel from the leading truck.

The Bull's Section failed to arrive at the rendezvous, as being unfamiliar with the rugged nature of the ground, it had not made good time. It is true that it arrived after the ambush was set but contact was not effected and thus only One Section felt certain of its position in what was about to follow. Tom set his ambush in twos. That is to say, he placed his men in pairs on opposite sides of the road with the charge laid in the road between the pair furthest east – that pair being Tom himself on the sea side of the road with Ray on the hill side. In theory the charge was expected to stop the front truck in its tracks. Should the truck carry troops, Tom would spray them with Tommy gun fire while Ray was to toss a grenade into the back and then switch his attention with rifle and bayonet to the expected driver and relief driver in the cab.

The ambush was a hopeless failure. The pressure switch affected by seawater in an engineer's pack when the Company originally waded ashore at Dili, filed to explode. Tom

attempted to stop the first truck with his Tommy gun but also failed. The gun fired one round and jammed, bringing a string of hoarse expletives from its operator. Ray took time to unship his now unwanted grenade and managed to get only one round away. It is true that this flattened a back tyre but the truck proceeded on its way bumping at great speed along the dark road to Dili. Despite continuous fire from the ambush, the shattering of wind shields and the burst of grenades, the three immediately following trucks sped through relatively unscathed. Norm, a Sub-section Lance Corporal was a few feet above the road on the side of the cutting. The Platoon HQ group unbeknown to the rest of us were coming down the spur and someone tossed a grenade. It did not succeed in its intention to destroy a truck but the blast effectively removed Norm from his perch and his subsequent remarks led to a contact of at least one member of Four Section with The Bull's group.

The last truck was unfortunate. Mitch, suffering a sense of frustration, dropped into the middle of the road and directed a stream of rounds directly at cab and engine of the oncoming vehicle. It slid off the road into a group of rocks by the sea. The doors flew open and a couple of little men leapt out and sprinted down the beach into the dark followed by shrieking lead.

Despite the ambush failure, Four Section's spirits were high. It had visions of driving up the road in state to Bazaar Tete. The truck, alas, had a broken axle and destruction was immediately decided upon. Geordie bayoneted the tank. Ray ran up the road and returned with the erring charge. Petrol poured over the ground. "Who's got a match? said Tom. "I have", said Ray, "if you can find a man bloody well stupid enough to use it". "Do it with a grenade", said Tom. Geordie took Ray's rifle and the Section moved away up the road. When Ray had reverted to a rifleman in the early part of the ambush, he had repinned his grenade and placed it in the pocket of his trousers without replacing the pin. He now reached for the grenade with his left hand because he had four plugs of gelignite in his right. There was an ominous lick as the pin caught on the pocket lining and a smell of burning. He clawed it out as best he could and made a double crossed handed throw, lobbing the gelignite into the truck and the now very alive grenade into the petrol pool. It was a seven second rifle grenade but two seconds of its life at least had been spent in the pocket lining. However such are the wings of fear that Ray had caught up to the Section and was reaching for his rifle from Geordie's shoulder when the explosion occurred. The truck burned magnificently and was completely destroyed.

A quick check of numbers indicated one short. Norm was missing. A search of the ambush positions failed to reveal his whereabouts. The Section turned homewards with a sense of loss. It was decided to risk Japanese counter-action rather than cope with the long ridge of the spur in pitch dark. Accordingly, we followed the coast road in the wake of the four trucks which had escaped and walked from the crossroads via the highway to Bazaar Tete. Once on the Hills road, frequent rests were needed. We worried about Norm as one of the Japanese spare drivers had made great play with a machine pistol. During one of these rests Geordie, who with Ray was rather a close friend of Norm within the Section and had been unduly silent, whispered that he thought he was wounded in the leg. It was too dark to see properly, so a match now so rare as to be reserved only for lighting fuses, was squandered. He had a thin sliver of shrapnel embedded in the calf of his right leg and was bleeding a little. The shrapnel was twisted and needle thin and was probably a piece of the thread from the base plug of a grenade. It was pulled out with a twisting motion and Geordie was rather 'leg pulled' about the 'serious' nature of the wound. (Norm, Geordie and Ray conducted a sort of competition in experience and for some weeks afterwards Geordie was

often heard to remark that others could say their piece “when they have been wounded in action”).

The Section was relieved to be back on Nun Turi Pu, little realising that the remainder of the night was to be its last ever in those pleasant surroundings. The night itself was not without incident as Big Pat reported that he was being bombarded with rocks as he stood on guard under a large fig. An investigation with our ‘last feeble torch’ showed a small family of monkeys stripping green figs from the boughs and hurling them at the unfortunate sentry.

Dawn brought a pleasant surprise. Norm limped in to camp having struggled up the spur. He had been briefed a little by The Bull and he told us that native reports said that Jap Infantry were climbing steadily up the spur from Liquica.

A three man patrol set out to investigate and soon ran into a number of breathless natives who were racing to safety a few hundred yards in front of the Nipponese. Tom deployed his Section. He had a permanent OP which was manned at this time by Eddie. The OP was in an excellent position over the track up Koot Lau from Bazaar Tete. He sent Norm off with several natives and all surplus gear. Mick’s Sub-section manned the knife-blade ridge above the camp, while Ray’s crouched in the figs near the camp itself.

A Japanese officer and two riflemen appeared in the village square below. More quickly surrounded the houses and soon Moreratat was seen being interrogated before his Porto. Other citizens were questioned. There was much waving of arms on the part of all and many pointed in the general direction of Koot Lau. We were sure the Japanese were being given an accurate path to Nun Turi Pu. Every citizen of Bazaar Tete knew the exact position of our camp, yet neither the Portuguese Commandant nor the two Chinese businessmen nor any of the natives betrayed us.

The Japs formed up and began to climb along the Boibau track. We were able to count them for the first time. There were 126. “What I can’t get”, said young Allan, who was given to pessimism, “is what the hell are we doing here? Singapore’s gone, Jakarta gone and we don’t even know if Australia is still there. The Company’s running around the hills like rabbits. Here we are, eighteen men, waiting for 126 Japs to come and eat us. They’re the only concrete thing around the place. You can count those bastards. What should we do now?” Pat, who was digging a bit of a hole behind a tiny rock so that he might have some cover for his great bulk said, “Sure, we ought to be writing to Smith’s Weekly. They say they’re the Diggers’ Friend”.

At first we thought the Japs would bypass us and that we would be able to follow and attack from behind. However they turned up the track which led past our O Pip toward the town of Ermera. Tom therefore decided to attack them while still had a height advantage. He directed his lower Sub-section to get behind the enemy and immediately attack. When these soldiers reached the edge of the timber they found that only about a score or so of the enemy were still in view as the main body was hidden by a roll in the ground. Even this tail was fast disappearing. The rifles roared again and again and the end of the Jap line was swept from the ridge. The Sub-section turned and ran, using the ridge as cover. They passed Mick and his men and took up positions above them, looking down at the enemy. This was to prove much more safe than the lower position.

When the first shots were fired, Eddie, from his observation post and superior position, began picking 'targets of opportunity'. Unfortunately this was to expose his position. A Japanese Officer leaned against the bamboo pipe-line on the track and directed fire with a series of loud shouts.

Four Section had a decided advantage. Its first fire had been lethal and Eddie's subsequent careful selection of targets had somewhat disconcerted the attack. However the enemy numbers assisted them and they came swarming up through a maize crop to the attack. The main body of Australian troops turned the first attempt with a powerful and steady fire. In this moment or two, a single enemy soldier rose from the maize and drew a steady bead on a rifleman who was thumbing fresh rounds into his magazine. A snap shot from Eddie far above took the Nipponese in the head and sent him backwards down the slope with his two-toed jungle shoes high in the air. Eddie was sprayed with rounds from below and the ligament was punched neatly out of his shoulder knocking him out of the fight. This was a sad blow and it destroyed our effective flank fire for Eddie was an artist with the rifle and had been able to pick off those of the enemy who were getting too close to the Section for comfort. Now there occurred something which destroyed the defence of the ridge. A single Japanese made his way to the top of the ridge low down on the right flank where he had an excellent view of Mick's Sub-section. Unfortunately, he was armed with a captured Dutch Schmeisser and thus a 32 round magazine. He opened fire killing Mitch the Bren gunner instantly. He wounded Pat several times in the body, put a high velocity round through Mick's calf and the remains of the burst struck young Allan in the chin, removing much of his lower jaw. Charlie, the smallest man in the Section, had a charmed life. Two rounds chopped off the corners of a basic pouch, another cut through his right shoulder strap, one lodged in his rifle butt, two more tore through the sling and one slit his shirt across the back – he was unscratched. Aware of his casualties, Tom gave the order to retire, himself going to the Bren and removing the breach block. Charlie, unaware of the evacuation, continued to fire. "You'd better stop", Pat said, "it's over. Look there". Charlie looked and saw the most successful Jap of all trying to fit a new magazine to his gun. Charlie's action was reflex. He did not raise the rifle but fired from the hip. The round took the Japanese between the eyes. At Pat's urgent request, Charlie bit the splay off the pins of two grenades for him and then, again at Paddy's groaned insistence, left the ridge.

The Section, complete with wounded, were now on the Mal il Ho track, hanging on the opposite side of Nun Turi Pu to the Japs. Charlie's descent was miraculous. He flew down the one in two gradient with his rifle held high, twenty foot leaps from boulders into the grass below. He rolled, he twisted, he turned, and in a final leap he landed on the track on both feet with his rifle still held high.

Tom instructed Ray to remain and deter the Jap from possessing the sky-line, while he shepherded the wounded towards Mal il Ho. Lud, with a Tommy Gun joined him and they watched the knife blade. The Japanese were wary. They too had received a battering. It was a long time before the distant crump, crump of Pat's grenades was heard. The Big Man had preferred a quick and enemy taking end to interrogation and a slow death.

We were to miss Pat for a long time but he never really left us. His humour and wit and the multitude of situations he created remained a buoyant legacy wherever the 2/2nd gathered. A hundred men at least can repeat to this day verbatim much of the legend that was Pat. It is the kind of epitaph he would have most wanted.

When it was evident that the Section was well on its way, Lud and Ray withdrew. They were soon to find Bob trying to stem the blood from Allan's chin with a field dressing. The muscles of Allan's tongue had relaxed and it was difficult to find a place to put it. We finally managed to swathe it in a field dressing and to tie the dressing over the top of his head.

Allan showed no signs of wanting to move. He refused instructions to get on his feet. Bob and Ray remonstrated with him unsuccessfully and finally Ray settled the matter by using his size nine boots to kick him onto his feet. Once up, Allan kept going. As he crossed a landslide be began shedding his saturated webbing. "No, Allan", screamed Ray, for he had visions of the loss of a hundred or so rounds and two invaluable grenades down that frightful slope. Allan rebuckled the webbing. Training is a wonderful thing. Ray had to run along the track to catch him and divest him of the webbing. Allan made it under his own power to Mal il Ho to the care of his namesake RAO Allan, our Medical Corporal, who began his life-saving work immediately.

In the meantime Tom, certain that the Jap would follow, laid an ambush with the four or five men considered still fit, at about the half-way mark between Nun Turi Pu and Mal il Ho. When the ambush was set, Ray who still had Allan's webbing, found himself vomiting violently. Bob, a hardened bushman ever more concerned for the welfare of others than his own, crawled to Ray's position and realising that it was not all nervous reaction but almost certainly due to the violent stench of human blood, took possession of the webbing and dragged it to his own position. It was a source of amusement to the others and a fine lift in morale for Ray when a few minutes later Bop leaned far out over his rock cover and vomited violently. When he regained control, he cast the webbing a yard or two down remarking, "The bloody thing's a bloody death trap".

Our ambush was in vain. We were not to know it but the Jap, after burying his dead hoping to recover them later for burning, continued on his way towards Ermera. His march was to be not without incident as he was to fall into the tender hands of A Platoon on the way. In the mean time, we of the ambush received word that B Platoon was going to withdraw to the high mountains, carrying its wounded as best it could. Apart from the deterioration in the tactical position of Mal il Ho, it was realised that medical aid was necessary for young Allan and that our MO was far to the south. Only the skill of the RAP Allan was keeping the Four Section rifleman alive; there was to be no plasma and no transfusion apparatus in Porto Timor.

Nightfall was now imminent and the withdrawal was taxing. A final halt was made on the bank of the Railaco River chiefly to rest the wounded and weary Four Section and to wait for dawn as the Jap was still in the hills. Since it was known that a few 'odds and sods' were in the area, and they were likely to try to join us because there is safety in numbers, sentries were told to be circumspect in their attitude to attempted entry of the perimeter from the hills. However since the river side was judged to be enemy territory, they were to fire on anyone approaching. A few minutes later Tom, using Alec of Five Section as a runner, was returning from the southern end of the camp and a conference with The Bull, when they both fell into the river. They were unable to get up the bank where they had fallen. The river was comparatively dry so they proceeded the easy way out. Right above them Lud was stationed with a Tommy gun. Bob was the sentry further down and Ray standing beside him said irreverently, "Here's bloody Tom disobeying orders", as the two figures were not sky-lined but blotted into the background by the dark timber on the opposite side. Without challenge, he fired a quick burst. Alex went smartly to ground. Tom did also but for a different reason.

A Four fire slug had punched straight through the flesh of his thigh. A yelled command from Ray prevented further mayhem. This was a true military accident caused in reality by a trick of the light and an order which proved vulnerable because of the nature of the terrain. However such is the line of succession that from being Junior NCO at dawn, Ray was the Section Commander by midnight.

Next morning it rained heavily and low clouds gave excellent cover. Food was non-existent but cloud and mist proved good friends. We proceeded by the Sai Tun (up down) method towards the mighty Glano River which we now knew would be in wild flood.

The Platoon came down at last within sight of the river and rested in a sparse thicket of Mallee-like eucalyptus of six feet or so. It was now afternoon and the sky had cleared. We were disturbed to see a long line of the enemy a few hundred yards away proceeding down a neighbouring ridge with flag born on high and a mounted officer near the front of the column. Our hope lay in not being seen. In the course of the afternoon we had acquired one small goat which had been used to make soup for the wounded (fed through a grass straw to young Allan) and divided into seventy or so portions for the rest. A kid is a small animal and Four Section, unfed since daylight the day before, sucked the pieces of bone and at the risk of their teeth, masticated it and finally swallowed.

In this situation any engagement must surely have resulted in the loss of the wounded. A tight perimeter was formed and a couple of forward listening posts put out. It began to drizzle again on our slope but the enemy just across a little valley were bathed in sunshine. We lay quietly with NCO's crawling here and there to confer with the OC or to check their sentries.

Young Allan lay on a stretcher in the middle of the half circle and when Ray crawled past he signalled that he wanted a grenade. Ray bit off the splay on the pin and gave him one. Young Allan smiled as well as a man with half a face can smile. He deserved his life that young man. He was to go on proving that the spirit has no peer.

At this piquant moment in the Platoon's career, one of the listening post riflemen got himself 'turned around' as the bushmen say, and seeing a prone soldier he took to be one of the enemy, fired upon him. The soldier fired back. Neither shot had any effect and a couple of very profane NCO's saved a further battle. It may seem almost impossible to believe but the Jap column so short a distance away proceeded without investigation. There was a shout or two from the column but no hostile movement was made. When we came to know the Jap patrols we were to realise that so many of their soldiers opened fire on deer, buffalo, goats or the odd native resident when one of them broke off on a foraging expedition, that a couple of rifle shots did not readily disturb their commanders. We helped to tighten their discipline for them in later days by making the way of the foraging party a very arduous one. The enemy column passed from view and the Platoon moved further towards the river. We knew that no crossing would be possible until the following day. A camp was made in some deserted huts above the raging river.

By morning the weather had improved and a river crossing was considered possible. It would not have been normally but starvation is a great driving force. We had acquired two ponies. One was essential for Tom as he was quite unable to walk. The high velocity Jap round had torn the muscles in Tom's leg, not going clean through but taking a long trip up his leg before leaving him. His great height and the pain from his leg made him get off the pony

whenever possible. When it was re-offered he generally said, “Bugger the bloody kuda”, and began to climb on one leg until the pain proved too much for him.

Eddie marched steadily with his arm tightly slung. When Eddie had hit the track at Nun Turi Pu with drooping wing, he had asked Bob where he was wounded. “In the shoulder”, said Bob. “I know that, you bloody clot”, said Eddie, “Where’s all the damn blood coming from?” “Well”, said Bob, “You’ve got a little nick in your ear”. “The dirty little disfiguring yellow bastards, where’s my bloody rifle?” quoth Eddie with great heat. Such is the pride and the illogical arrogance of man that he was more concerned about a U-shaped notch in the lobe of one ear than debilitating wound, the effects of which are with him yet.

The Glano crossing was not easy. As a general rule the gradient in Timorese rivers makes it impossible to cross at greater depths than a couple of feet. The practical measure in use was that knee deep was a safe crossing and waist deep a very serious risk. The Glano was waist deep at least. The endless chain method worked, though a number were swept off their feet to be towed back by their fellows. The wounded, more particularly Allan, were another problem. We were forced to more or less ‘sail’ him across in his stretcher. As usual he retained his good humour and looked on the crossing as a rather good joke.

We climbed up the mountain side and though starving, we felt some sense of achievement as we realised that the great mountain ranges in front of us might offer sanctuary and an eyrie from which it would be possible to hit back. Our immediate aim however was food. With considerable effort and close to the end of our resources we collapsed in the courtyard of the great coffee plantation of Ifoo.

The Bull, his Officer and Ray, whose Tetum was now assuming usable proportions, went to the residence of the owner, one Calvalheira. They requested news of the Japanese and were pleased to find that they had not occupied Ermera a couple of miles to the east although their planes had bombed it. Indeed the many-pronged Japanese attack had been unsuccessful and they had withdrawn to Dili sadder and perhaps wiser. Our personal enemies of Nun Turi Pu had lost six officers and twenty six men against our two killed and three wounded. (The ratio of killed to wounded could be considered an apt comment on the singularly lethal effect of a .303 inch round as opposed to one of 6.5mm). They had lost another twenty or so when ambushed by ‘A’ Platoon without the satisfaction of inflicting serious casualties on the Australians.

Signor Cavalheira was quite prepared to feed the Australians and he looked with friendly eyes on the group of five or so at his door. “How many men have you, sir?”, he asked in Tetum. His eyes narrowed ever so slightly when Ray as The Bull’s mouthpiece answered, “Huitonula recin nain signor”. (That is seventy six, sir) To his undying credit he immediately began shouting orders. Timorese came running with wood for fires. Others cut the throats of two great pigs while still others peeled and washed a hill of sweet potatoes. The fires roared and the pigs sizzled. By the time our starving comrades were sufficiently recovered from their climb to sit up and take notice they were able to gorge themselves on their first meal for three days, give or take the unfortunate ten pound kid.

Ifoo was a pleasant place. Food was plentiful and the Platoon needed a rest but the wounded must go on. Despite the best efforts of RAP Allan, some of these wounds were looking angry. In Mick’s case particularly, the wound appeared to be infected. It remained a fact that despite the great Tommy gun slug which had cut its way through Tom’s thigh, the

wound caused less repair trouble than the tiny hole in Mick's leg. Perhaps the drainage was better in Tom's case.

In the morning on bull bellies we followed the track of the telephone from Ifoo towards Villa Maria. It was a wonderful route. Although the track was not in top class condition the slowness of the grades made marching almost a pleasure. Or was it perhaps yesterday's roast pork and mornings of hot maize and pork cracklings which coloured one's attitude to the track?

We were still 'Jap conscious' and proceeded with extreme caution once we hit the main road from Ermera to Hatulia. We were particularly careful as we passed Villa Maria, a minor Posto calculated to become famous in Company records. The Bull had scouts out ranging far ahead so that in the event of contact with the enemy, whom we still imagined to be in the mountains, any contact would be at a distance and there would be warning enough to allow the wounded to be detached from the Platoon.

Norm, Geordie and Ray were met on the broad reaches of the road by Lieutenant Archie. Archie gave and took news and then followed back to the main body of the Platoon to report to The Bull. Arch was still under an intense emotional strain. To be a Section Commander who receives news that his Section is non-existent in one stupid accident is a very telling experience and fourteen of his eighteen men, with both NCO's, had been in the ration truck execution. Now to add to his distress he heard of the loss of Pat and Mitch. Archie had been a consistent admirer of big Pat, and Mitch had been a personal friend. His face now showed that he felt that the Japanese offensive had been aimed at him personally.

The town of Hatulia held a large body of Company Troops and 'B' Platoon swelled the numbers. Our MO, no longer a young man, was still to the south. A runner set off for him and the MO crossed the Morobo River in flood and heavy rain to get to 'young Allan'.

Next morning Ray, to whom 'young Allan' was a personal problem from his own Sub-section, sat on the steps of the hut in which many hours of operating had taken place. Roger the MO ever irascible, and now worn out with the river crossings and vein tyings, stepped from the door. His blood-red eyes bore testimony to his sheer physical exhaustion. He looked at the NCO. "Get your bloody head up Corporal and get about your bloody business. He'll probably live and in any case, you're sitting about the doorstep getting in the road won't bloody well help him". He was a very great man our MO, though as aptly summed up earlier by Pat – 'a cantankerous old bastard'.

Roger's main concern with Young Allan had been to ensure that if ever he returned to Australia and the ministrations of good plastic surgeons, his jaw would be in a condition which would make such surgery possible. The only part of Allan's lower face remaining had been his lips. These would obviously dip if unsupported. The MO split the lips and sutured them into less affected parts of the face. He trimmed the jaw bones, removed broken teeth, tied off blood vessels, repaired a slit in the tongue and generally cleaned up a fearful mess. If one realises that RAP Allan, a highly skilled RAP Corporal, had worked for many hours on that jaw previously it will be understood that the wound was indeed frightful.

It will remain a monument to the unfailing skill of the MO and of RAP Allan that Young Allan walks around today with no obvious marks of his ordeal. When he did eventually arrive home in Australia he spent long months in hospital while parts of his hip bones were

grafted in to make a new jaw structure; a great sausage of flesh slowly ‘hedge hopped’ from his more meaty parts via his side to his chest like a slow-moving loop bug. Finally it was attached to his new jaw, wrapped around and shaped, with none of the scars and skin masks which were known in the plastic surgery of earlier wars.

Allan has written a tribute to his surgeons. It was published in one of the annual army collections. He called it Timor Souvenir Khaki and Green. The account is notable for its sincerity and its temperate language. It makes light of his personal ordeal. What modesty prevented him saying more can be recorded now. It was not the wonderful skill of first, RAP Allan, and then the brilliant hands and unswerving purpose of the ‘cantankerous old bastard’ which kept ‘young Allan’ alive. Rather it was the work of these two combined with Allan’s indomitable will and his refusal to feel sorry for himself. When he demanded a grenade in the ‘stand to’ above the Glano he showed how he intended to live or die. Even when incapacitated he remained what he had always been, a trained soldier of the 2/2nd and as such he admitted to himself the possibility of death but never the possibility of personal defeat.

Chapter 7.

There now occurred a memorable officer conference at Hatulia. There was even talk of surrender amongst some. A few more conventional thinking officers found it hard to visualise a gypsy role for a fighting unit although this was the very role for which we were especially suited. Heated words were spoken and solid opposition to the thought of surrender came from Bernie, The Bull and others which fortunately carried the day. The Company would soldier on.

It is as well for the subsequent history of the Unit that this was the course decided upon. Any other would have caused a schism which would not have redounded to the honour of the Australian Forces. While the officer conference took place, a discussion amongst the OR’s showed that few of them were prepared to accept a surrender order and that had it been given, a great ‘breakaway’ movement would have occurred.

The 2/2nd was a right Unit but its members were essentially individualistic by nature. This attitude had been reinforced by a training designed to create a body in which each man when called upon could act as a single operative. Thus a surrender order at Hatulia could only have been partially effective and an attempt to enforce it would have ended in bloodshed. We of the lower ranks of ‘B’ Platoon were intensely aware of this danger but such was our faith in

that rugged individual The Bull that no-one was surprised, though all agreeably relieved when he returned to us and quietly announced the decisions reached.

B Platoon was anxious to obtain information regarding the tactical situation in its former area and further it was considered necessary to check on any ammunition and gear which might have survived and escaped the attentions of the Japs. Accordingly, while the bulk of the Platoon began to disperse to the newer areas allotted, The Bull decided to make a quick return to Mal il Ho to investigate. It was typical of the man that he chose to make this excursion himself. He took with him his batman Tom T., Norm and Ray. The latter two were to visit Nun Turi Pu to check on the status of that area.

The return to Mal il Ho produced no incident. The Mal il Ho natives were delighted with the return of 'Capitan Boort' (The Big Captain) and had done a good job in hiding all surplus gear and in removing as far as possible the more obvious marks of Australian occupation. Using a soldier's trained eyes, The Bull was able to point out work left undone and the villagers set about it with a will. Mal il Ho was on a main ridge and was certain to be subject to Japanese attention. It was essential therefore to avoid compromising the village both for the safety of its residents and to provide future Australian sanctuary. The people of Mal il Ho were low class Timorese of poor appearance and little charm but they were Mambai and as such in the months that followed they successfully resisted Japanese interrogation.

Norm and Ray proceeded to Bazaar Tete as quickly as possible and were soon on the slopes of Nun Turi Pu. They found two beautifully cared for graves on the knife blade of the ridge. (They were later to be 'rocked' up and to acquire crosses at the head) On the slope below in a great depression was the mass grave of the Japanese with six neat separate graves above it to mark the greater status of the officer dead.

Lujis appeared to assure the Australians that all gear was safe in a hut in the valley and that it was continuously under guard. Further, a valiant Timorese had crawled through the grass and acquired the Bren gun which was unfortunately still without a breach block as Lieutenant Tom has cast this into the high grass of the slope and it was not recovered.

What amazed the two Australians was the shot by shot description at least a dozen Mambai could give of the whole Nun Turi Pu engagement. They could describe the whole thing. We who had been so conscious of the enemy had remained quite unaware that we had had such a prying and receptive audience. Indeed one Mambai who had viewed the battle from a rock hole on Koot Lau remarked that if he had been armed with a Rilat (rifle) instead of a bow he could have eliminated the 'fitho da puta meran' (a nice mixture of Portuguese and Tetum meaning yellow son of a harlot who had caused the bulk of our casualties. In this event he could have substituted for Eddie in the OP and denied the Japanese access to the upper ridge. Under these circumstances, in his opinion the Australians would have 'mati hautu' i.e. killed the lot. His eyes were moist with vain regret. The Mambai are an astonishing people. It was this warrior who seeing the Australian withdrawal had wriggled down through the grass and stolen the Bren gun from the very feet of the enemy. Others of his kind had removed surplus rucksacks from the Four Section mess while the actual battle was taking place. Another had filched the rifle which Eddie had been unable to carry, while yet another had wriggled to Pat's side and taken his. The weapons were now in the hut with the rest of the gear.

Luis evidenced a quiet pride in his men. He smiled at them and they grew appreciably taller. We asked the tearful Bren gun thief why he had taken these awful risks. He said we were 'amigo belu', in either language it was 'friend'. Then he produced a strange proposition redolent with colour bar. "Australi mutan. Timorese metan. Se mac harona emma mean", (Australians are white. Timorese black. Whoever heard of a yellow man?).

Luis told the Australians of one unfortunate result of the fight. When 2 Sub-section had moved down the hill and chopped the Nipponese rear from the slope it had produced an odd theory in the mind of the solitary surviving Jap officer. He was convinced that the end of his column had been subjected to long-range rifle fire from the village and Posto of Bazaar Tete below. As a result of this improbably theory, improbable because the airline distance was better than a thousand yard, he had sent a fighting patrol in force to Bazaar Tete and arrested the Chef Posto and taken him to Dili for interrogation.

Norm and Ray descended to Bazaar Tete. Signora Moreartu was in a near hysterical state and was so upset that she failed to remember that in the past she had used French to communicate with Ray. She wept continuously and could not bring her mind to anything but Portuguese. Not so her children, a girl aged thirteen and a boy aged eleven. These children had been in and out of the Australian camp in happier days as daily welcome guests. They were lovely kids. Dolores, with a poise and carriage worthy of a much older person, now swept her mother into the house and left her to the care of her own Timorese amah. Caesare conferred with Luis and native sentries were despatched to guarantee early warning of any Japanese movement. Dolores returned and insisted that the Australians stay for a meal. It was with regret that they settled for a good wash telling her that their schedule was tight and demanded an early return to their Commander. This was not in fact quite the truth but having already compromised Morearatu by accident they were anxious to avoid compromising his wife and children. Instead they chose to carry some food away with them.

With a native carrier force and some ammunition and clothing it now became necessary to return to Hatulia. The Bull was naturally eager to see his new Platoon areas and to assume personal command since his second-in-command Tom was still incapacitated with his leg wound. For these reasons he and Tom T. pushed on hurriedly, leaving Norm and Ray to bring the gear from Mal il Ho. They were to 'pay off' the Mal il Ho carriers at Hatulia and acquire a new group there because few Timorese wished to journey amongst strange tribes.

When it came time to dismiss the friendly people of Mal il Ho it was a touching moment. One Timorese of middle years (perhaps 25) kept returning and emitting a stream of voluble Mambai dialect. It was to appear later that this was a subtle approach calculated to confuse rather than communicate. He was not a beauty this Timorese. His shins were bowed forward and the mark of childhood malnutrition and earlier tropical ulcers had left their skin shiny and hard like the pad on a goat's knees. His feet were flat, almost webbed, the sure sign of a mountain climber. He had only one beauty – his teeth. Unlike many of his countrymen, he chewed no betel nut. His teeth were regular and gleaming white and when he smiled the whole of his homely face lit up, his teeth shone anew and his eyes sparked; in those moments he was a singularly handsome man. Long afterwards in an Australian hotel bar Bill noticed a very handsome young man with gleaming teeth. "When that bloke smiles", he said, "he looks like Ray's Mau Lere". However when Mau Lere's face was in repose, he was not the most ill favoured Timorese ever seen but rather the most unfavoured.

When Lieutenant Tom saw Mau Lere for the first time he laughed most heartily and said, "My God Red, that's about what I would have expected you to turn up with". Tom called Ray 'Red' for no obvious physical reason but rather for some radical tendencies recognised in his military behaviour and an indication of some belief in the proposition that 'its comin' yet for a that'. It was a semi-affectionate title. He called him other things at other times and in other places.

At Hatulia Ray tried hard to 'shake' Mau Lere. He was not anxious to acquire a shadow and certainly not one as unprepossessing. How wrong can you be? He gave up the unequal struggle. It was significant that not until two days march from Hatulia did Mau Lere begin to speak fluent and imaginative Tetum which was his second preferred tongue. Thus were unswervingly loyal, uncomplaining, courageous Mambai criados acquired.

Norm and Ray had already been persuaded to add one native to their group. This was Nicolai Gonzales, a Timorese schoolboy of about fifteen from Irrametta. His uncle, the chief, was anxious that Nicolai escape to the high mountains with the Australians. He was a very intelligent lad of high class with a wonderful sense of humour. He was to remain Norm's shadow and criado throughout our stay on Timor.

Leaving Hatulia we were on the lower hills to the south on the fringe of the great grass plain. It was a hot and steamy trek and comparatively foodless and the carriers were taxed to the outmost. We made our first night camp in miserable rainy conditions. Norm managed to shoot a 'wild' goat and this provided the meal.

We made our way by ridge and valley, across rivers, down slippery kuda trails to our aiming mark of Hatu'uda. Here we were amongst friends indeed for here was Four Section firmly established with a half-repaired Mick in command. The carriers were dismissed and a Hatu'uda group took the gear on to the town of Same and The Bull. Hatu'uds was a wonderful Posto and for several days Norm and Ray were able to indulge their malaria and shiver the fever out.

Hatu'uda was possessed of other characters besides those of Four Section. The Chef Posto was Jose Eduardo da – da – da – da – da alva da Silva – Marques. The blanks serve to show the wonder of his name. To the Australians he was always Joe Marks and he rejoiced in the title. He was a young man given to the good things of life and his attitude to his native charges, unlike that of many Chef Postos, was excellent. He was obviously well-loved and his life was a joy to him.

He possessed a sturdy Timorese racing pony with a mouth like iron and certainly no armchair ride, as the writer well knows, but the animal had the heart of a lion. He was called, inappropriately the Australians though, Samurai, and he was fed and groomed and exercised and fed and groomed and exercised ad infinitum. In an administrative emergency Silva-Marques had made a journey to Dili over the great back bone of the island in a single day. He had returned on the next day to Hatu'uda. No other horse we saw on the island could have made such a journey in such time.

Francisco, the King of Hatu'uda, was a cunning old Mambai of great status and personal wealth. He had the Mambai pride of race and had made a trip to Portugal by sea in the early months of the war. The ship he had travelled on had been subjected to aerial machine-gunning in the Mediterranean. Francisco had remained on deck filming the attack. One of

his compatriots filmed him as he worked his camera and the pride of Francisco's collection were those shots which showed decks entirely empty save for a solitary Timorese with a camera filming against a background of diving planes. He took special delight in showing these to Portuguese and if one were ill-advised enough to ask, "Where were the crew?", Francisco would say resignedly, "Ah, Jesu Cristi – I never managed to find out but they all came back later". He was a lovable old boy and his understanding of Australians was immediate and automatic.

He took us deer shooting. It was not a very sporting affair. He had two beautiful 25.20s and he did his shooting by spotlight. One walked along the broad tracks in the grass and at frequent stops several natives wielding six cell Winchester shooting flashes would pin the deer in the beam. The fortunate Australian shooter would put the crossed hairs of the scope sight on the deer and gently press the trigger. When the animal fell, a great wave of excited natives would race off into the grass each eager to be first to the kill. Australians used to spotlight from fast-moving vehicles after fast-moving targets, found it a dull business but it provided us with the most beautiful of all the meat in the world and after a steady diet of buffalo, pig, fowl and goat, it was very acceptable indeed.

The most voluble and valuable official person at Hatu'uda was Quibere, Grand Vizier to Francisco and jack-of-all-trades to Joe Marks. He was a cheery old rogue who Joe said was in every 'racket'. He was unfailing in his courtesy to the Australians and made sure that their commissariat never suffered. Doubtless he 'took his cut' from the unfortunate vendors.

Every afternoon a rope was brought into the spotless Posto Square and a tug-of-war was held. It was agreed, after a trial and error period, that the greater weight of the Australians made even sides unfair. It was arranged that the Australians should field a team of no more than nine, whilst the Timorese would number ten with a limit of eleven if this proved one-sided. Some of the contests were very physically tense indeed but took place with great goodwill and spirits. Francisco, out of courtesy to his country's uninvited guests, supported the Australians both vocally and with folding money. Joe Marks on the other hand was always in support of his little brown charges. He screamed instructions and encouragement and when the strong pull of the Australians showed signs of taking effect, he was never above attaching himself to the Timorese end. The contest often ended in 'no result and all bets off' as the audience was divided in its loyalties and often enough the Australian end would be joined by the criados and some Hatu'uda natives, while man, woman and child attached themselves to the other end. The tug line was forgotten and one group would pull the other all over the courtyard mid shrieks of laughter and yells of encouragement. Over it all would be heard the bell-like voice of Joe Marks screaming the Tetum equivalent of 'up the Hatu'udans'. It was a wonderful 'home', full of wonderful people and very far removed from the realities of military struggle. The Jap was far to the north and Hatu'uda was the peaceful, laughing, joyous place one hopes it became again after 1945.

For Ray it proved a short-term holiday resort. The Bull sent orders for him to appear in Same for special work. He arrived to receive his orders to take a single soldier of his choosing to proceed to Mal il Ho and Bazaar Tete and to use his best beguiling manner to obtain the services of enough carriers to bring out the surplus platoon gear. It was of particular importance to secure the Mal il Ho radio. After the destruction of equipment at Three Spurs and Railaco, the Company was without the material for its current major project which was to build a transmitter and re-establish contact with Australia. Further, clothing was wearing out quickly and the shirts and shorts at Mal il Ho were needed.

Ray's choice of soldier was Charlie, the tiny aerialist of the Nun Puri Pu slope. Charlie, despite malaria, remained surprisingly fit. His reactions as a rifleman had always been reflex and he was phlegmatic as to discomfort and long marches alike. It proved a good choice.

When The Bull asked Ray for an estimate of time necessary he was told that ten days would suffice. In this case the Japanese did the 'disposing' and it was twenty eight days later before the two soldiers rejoined their Platoon.

The two Australians plus Mau Lere climbed from Same, up the great valley towards Maubisse (an inland post) just to the south west of the main inland town of Aileu. The pace was forced as all were for the moment free of malaria. The only stop made was at the great Same Saddle. This gave a view to the south of the coast and the sea and to the north one looked over Maubisse to Aileu. From this point they turned west making for Mount Ramelan, the highest peak of the island. It was their intention to proceed via the hanging valley of Htubulico to Letofoho and thence to Glano.

They camped their first night in a 'friendly' village on the eastern slopes of Hatubulico. For the first time in Timor they felt doubt about the natives as these wild-eyed hillsmen seemed wary and just a little menacing. Mau Lere always carried Ray's .455 pistol and this night he sat up with it. Their feelings were not without some foundations as it was from this area that the later revolt against the Portuguese was to erupt. The seeds of rebellion were already sown and no doubt the natives were suspicious of all Europeans.

The small party made the climb into Hatubulico the following morning and spent the night there. At this time the Chef Posto was da Silva whose daughter Brendalina was the most personable eligible young European on the island. Brendalina had been in Ermera when the Japanese had paid their first visit to the town shortly after "B" Platoon left Ifoo. The Japs made themselves at home and their senior officers had demanded and received hospitality at her own. The Jap officers were courteous enough but did not prevent their troops from commandeering furniture for fires as it was raining heavily and the furniture provided a ready source of dry fuel. Brenda was a hot-tempered young Latin who had accepted the loss of chairs and tables with rising anger. When she discovered that the Japs had wrenched the lid off her piano, she 'did her block' as the Australians say. Without thought of the consequences, she appeared on the verandah beside the officers who were still dining, with a sixteen gauge shotgun. The two Japanese carrying the piano lid ran hurriedly down the slop but Brendalina 'browned' them with both barrels of quail-shot in their meaty parts. The officers roared with laughter and admiration. One of them quietly disarmed Brendalina and wrapped the shotgun around a verandah post then still writhing with mirth they rose as one man and bowed to her in appreciation. Their manners were wasted on Brendalina. She was finished with Japs for all time as her face flushed with rage and her eyes flashed when the story was retold. She saw no humour in the situation and was cross with herself because in her haste and anger she had snatched quail instead of buckshot.

At this time, Brendalina had a 'thing' about one of our reinforcement officers known as Teneti Jack. The Tenenti was a plausible rogue of considerable presence and carriage. Brendalina's image of him was that he was the individual hero of the Company and that while he stayed on the island the Japs were in imminent danger of defeat. This was not at all our opinion of The Tenenti but emotional interest is notoriously blind. Charlie and Ray had a morning dip in the creek which coming from the peaks was icy cold. They found it rather

disconcerting to have Brendalina conduct a conversation with them from a short distance away while they bathed. She removed herself a little while they dried and changed and then conducted them to breakfast.

Hatubalica at about eight thousand feet had many acres of splendid peaches. Despite Brendalina's supervision of the Posto culinary department, it was peaches and cream which claimed most of the attention of Charlie and Ray. They had eaten them for dinner and now they had them for breakfast to the utter astonishment of the omelette eating da Silvas.

Within a couple of hours climb from the Hatubalica Posto it became evident that the early morning dip had been unwise. Charlie in the throes of a serious malarial attack was staggering. In a short time he became delirious and Ray was forced to load Mau Lere with his equipment and apply a fireman's lift to Charlie. The wisdom of choosing the smallest man in the unit seemed apparent but as events were to prove, it could work only one way. A few miles up the valley a small village of native huts made a rest possible. Charlie was now back in possession of his faculties but he was still unable to walk. The urgency of their mission was considered such that Charlie was left in the village. The natives promised to make every effort to get him mounted and into Letfoho by morning.

It might well be asked why a pony was not issued for each soldier. Horses, even sturdy enough to bear a European, are not scarce on the island. Indeed they far outnumber the people. The answer lies in the fact that even one full day on a pony resulted in loss of 'mountain legs' and the following days would produce agony in climbing for little result.

Ray pushed on to Letfoho arriving in the early afternoon to find several Porto refugees staying at the Posto. Among them were Deolindo da Carnacao who had previously made contact with the Australian mountain dwellers. He was part of an impromptu spy ring which included Patrichn Luz, a radio officer from Tibesse, Dili's only suburb, and Juan Vierra a police officer. These three and some others had been in the habit of sending out obscure messages regarding Jap intentions and movements with the self-chosen code names of Meat and Potatoes, Tea and Sugar, and Coffee and Milk. Deolindo was now on the run. As far as he knew, Pat Luz and Vierra were still in Dili but his position had become compromised and he was getting out while the going was still good. While Ray drank Porto Vino in the Posto, more refugees arrived.

Charlie, now much recovered, had arrived on a kuda and sat in a corner very much impressed with Porto manners. On the arrival of a new refugee and his family and entourage, all rose to their feet including the Australians and the newcomers moved around shaking hands. A few moments later they would wish to see the unsaddling of ponies and would shake hands again. Returning, the whole business would be repeated and they would sit. A few minutes later for reasons perhaps as simple as toilet, they would rise and shake hands again and leave, returning in a few minutes to repeat the handshake routine. Charlie was still far from well and the continual rising and standing, sitting, rising and standing, began to fret his nerves. When one refugee who had been a main cause of the 'Jack in the Box' effort remained in the room for about ten minutes the Australians at any rate were agreeably surprised. However, after much Porto vino had flowed, the refugee rose to his feet and shook hands and left the room. "Do you think", asked Charlie with a short repetitive whisper, "that the bastard's gone for good? And if he comes back, do you reckon the rotten bastard will wash his hands before he comes?" It was an appropriate question and one which had been taxing Ray's mind for some little time.

Moving meant moving on and information said Ermera was clear and that it would be possible to cross the Glano east of Ermera without fear of interference. This day, as Charlie was reasonably sound, a forced march was made. Speed was necessary as Mau Lere's information, usually far more reliable than the multitude of stories gathered from the Portuguese, indicated a Japanese intention to occupy Ermera. The shortest way to the Australian objective and obviously the least vulnerable was to cross the Glano at or near the bridge just east of Ermera and by Sai Tun method then directly to Mal il Ho and then to Bazaar Tete or possibly direct to Bazaar Tete. However on topping the bridge over Ermera and the Glano an enemy convoy of trucks could be seen on the road approaching the bridge. The convoy was several miles distant and stationary, possibly for a meal break. Moreover, it was obvious a forward movement on the part of the Japs would seal off the crossing at this point. With the tireless Mau Lere in the lead they skirted to just south of the Ermera township and crossed the road to Ifoo on the run. They sped down a long spur to the river. Above them they could see the flash of windshields. The Jap had crossed the bridge and was on his way to Ermera. The trucks were again stationary and heavy fire could be heard.

It is necessary now to digress a little and to follow the Jap rather than Charlie, Ray and Mau Lere. When a Jap exploratory foot patrol had approached the bridge, it had investigated the farm of one Julie Madera, a Filipino-Timorese-Porto mixed blood of Mambai philosophy but Latin heat. The two Jap soldiers who climbed down to the farm were much attracted by Julie's fine flock of geese, the only flock of its kind in Timor. The Japs began to shoot the geese and Julie appearing from his house protested vigorously and gesticulated wildly. One of the Japs fired on him. Julie leapt inside, stripped his .22 semi-automatic Mauser from the wall and despatched both Japs with shots through the head. The rest of the enemy patrol opened fire on the far. Screaming warnings to his Timorese and calling on them to follow him, Julie took to the long grass. Once he had cover from fire he began deterring the Japs from following while his servants with their great skill in use of ground caught up. Julie was wont to declare proudly that he lost only his geese and no human beings and had the satisfaction of getting two Japs at the farm and he was certain of one other from the patrol. Apparently he did not consider his home any considerable loss, although the Japs had fired it immediately. Julie developed a not unnatural hatred of the Japanese. He joined B Platoon at the first opportunity and served with it through its stay on the island.

As the Japs approached Ermera they ran into a text book ambush. The Section in attack had stationed two men low down in a creek crossing where trucks would have to slow. The two were to make their escape under the cover of fire from above. The trap succeeded and the truck stopped. Immediately the Section above concentrated heavy fire on the troops in the back of the truck. The two on foot who had killed the occupants of the cab now swept the tray with Tommy gun fire. Most of its burden of troops were quickly dead and the ground ambush pair made their way up the slope. They were pursued by fire from the Japs behind who had disembussed. Above them was A Section Corporal Scotty who was directing his fire with care. He was anxious to reclaim his men and to be certain of doing this it was necessary to use his fire power largely as a screen for them. He was fortunate that he had with him one Doc, formerly a professional kangaroo shooter, who was a remarkable rifle shot and this was to be his day.

The members of the 2/2nd numbered no fearless men. We were probably all equally frightened. Our reactions to danger were variable and some of us sought to 'cover up' and hide fear under a bold face. This is often more easy for those in command since their minds

are occupied and in any case they know when an action would end because they could end it when they saw fit. This was never so for the riflemen. He was a practitioner who must do what he was told and wait for the order to fire or to cease fire. He was subject to a thousand fears and a thousand doubts. At any rate, Doc possibly less than any man in the Company made little excuse for his fears. He never 'covered up', and by any number of mannerisms evidence his doubts and his pessimism. On this occasion he subjected Scotty to an endless stream of recrimination and protest. With his rifle shivering in his hands he would say, "Get us out of here. They'll be all round us. Come on, get moving. We can't stay all day. You'll get us all bloody well killed". Scotty, a phlegmatic member of his race, took not the lightest notice but continued to wait for an enemy soldier to expose himself to view. Immediately this happened, Doc's rifle would rise in rock steady hands, the explosion would crash and Doc would exclaim with wonder and appreciation of his own skill, "That's another bastard". Doc killed twelve Japs with twelve carefully aimed rounds that day. He was and is a very brave man. The term 'fearless' is an idle frivolity. All human being are fearful. The brave are those who despite a multitude of fears 'soldier on'.

When Scotty took his Section out of action, he did so under intense long-range fire from below. As it struggled up the mountainside, its members hearts almost bursting, from trees and bushes brown hands swept up the Bren while brown arms wrapped themselves round the most physically spent as they lifted the Section over the false crests to mountain safety. "Diac Coo" (better than good – superior to excellent), screamed the Mambai, filled with awe and wonder at this moat visible and tangible Australian success.

The Timorese in an ambush position is an interesting phenomenon. He has a racial horror of being the only one afraid. "Tuan", he says, "ita taun?" (Are you frightened?) "Han tauc tein", you reply. (Fearful in the sense of requiring a visit to the toilet) "Diac", he says "Han hanessan". (Good, I'm the same). With this left to his morale he flattens by your side with a wide grin on his face and he never moves again till you move or you tell him to. If he's acting as number two on a Bren he will lie on his back if the terrain makes it necessary to do so and he'll answer the command of "mag-on" or "mag-off" with well-oiled efficiency. Though he can see no action, he has faith. His job is putting magazines on a Bren gun, not watching the enemy.

The morning after the ambush the Japs who now occupied Ermera in force returned down the road with two vehicles loaded with hibiscus blooms. Standing in the body of the trucks were white-robed figures who strewed the road dramatically with blossoms. We understand that when a couple of unfeeling Australians O.pipping the ceremony emptied several of these 'priests' out of their trucks, Japanese anger knew no bounds. The Australian soldier is by nature somewhat insensitive and in this case they probably reasoned that a people who fired on native children were not really entitled to cry armistice.

Charlie, Ray and Mau Lere, distinctly pleased with themselves, were now safely across the Glano. They had beaten the Jap to the Ermera Ifoo Road by a wide margin and while his occupation meant returning by night with an unwieldy 'train', they were confident of bringing it off. They climbed out of the Glano almost gleefully and when they approached the old B Platoon 'stand to' position they were to say the least of it disconcerted to hear rifle fire ahead. Through the glasses soldiers could be seen lying in the shrub eucalyptus of the next slope. It was impossible to identify them, though they were probably Japanese. They moved carefully closer to them for their numbers and dispositions had to be investigated since they were on the very track it was hoped to follow and certainly barred that desirable

path. It was a great relief to identify The Imp with a small group of Five Section. He was proceeding to Masuta to join his OC who had established on O Pip there.

The rifle fire heard was from a Japanese patrol which appeared to be moving west, no doubt with the intention of eventually swinging south to the Glano and thence to Ermera. The Imp was anxious to trace their movement before going on to Nasuta, so Charlie, Ray and Mau Lere left him to his problems and made a wide swing to the east making good progress and reaching Railaco River crossing at dusk. The Railaco was bone dry but the way was barred by an enormous 'carau siac' (a buffalo bull suffering from sexual frustration). They were loathe to shoot the animal for they wanted no noise and further when all said and done the bull belonged to some poverty-stricken farmer. By playing cat and mouse with the bull, since there were three of them, they eventually managed the crossing although Mau Lere made it only by 'the skin of his teeth' up the steep bank and rolled laughing on the top.

The buffalo had delayed them and now tired out they pushed up the Irremetta valley arriving at the village in the mid-evening. In the dark it was no pleasant trip. At Irremetta they found 'Smash' with his engineer section. 'Smash' owned the slowest drawl and the most colourful speech of any of our members. He had just received a memo from the engineers officer Don asking for explanation of a number of unauthorised night explosions in his area. His reply was before him on the message pad. It was to the effect that what with straying jeeps and a section on a steady diet of maize, there were more unauthorised night explosions than he had the men or the time to investigate. Fortunately Ray and Smash understood each other.

Smash was disturbed about the Japs progress south. He had hoped to deny them the use of trucks by rendering the road to the Glano impassable. Now, instead of being in a position to command the road, it was obvious that he would need soon to move or he would find himself in a trap. "I'll think about it", he said. It was rumoured amongst his men that Smash did not sleep. He certainly kept late hours and appeared to be awake at odd and possibly at all times.

The climb out of Irremetta to Mal il Ho and towards Bazaar Tete took very little time. But the physical state of the two Australians slowed their progress to a crawl. Mau Lere was still 'full of running' but his friends were very slow indeed and it was evening before Bazaar Tete was reached.

Once again our good friend Luis appeared from nowhere, already acquainted by his efficient intelligence service of the party's approach. He led them down to the hut in which the stores were gathered to be challenged out of the dusk by a hoarse voice and a broad-bladed spear, for here was one Manuelo, a Mambai warrior stationed as permanent guard. He was overjoyed to renew contact for he had been chief foreman in building the Nun Turi Pu camp and a prime mover in retrieving our gear. A Mambai challenge is very startling and completely in keeping with the tribal pride in verbal economy. "Hateta ca mati", said Mauelo (speak or die), - we spoke. Luis said that he had taken the liberty of concentrating much of the Mal il Ho equipment in this general area and that he had now sent for some more with the emphasis on anything which might be considered radio gear for he understood that this was now much needed. So much for our vaunted close-mouthed security.

Luis had most disquieting news. One of his men was working under instructions as a spy for Sheik Imetta, a young Arab who had taken service with the Jap leader as leader of a native intelligence system. It is doubtful if the 'Sheik' was anything but a self-taken title and

Imetta was Timorese in all but blood. He was apparently an adventurous spirit and in the early stages had been anxious to assist the Australians but being a quick-tempered individual he was now 'getting even' for the fact that he had been spurned by Unit Authorities during the 'no fraternisation period'. At any rate, Luis' man had successfully infiltrated Sheik Imetta's group and as a result was not only cognisant of native espionage but in some respects, of Japanese intentions. He had assured Luis that the enemy was aware of the Five Section O Pip at Nasuta and planned to deal with it with despatch, but with some circumspection so that they might effectively surround it at night. They were also aware of the presence of another small party of Australians and believed that this party was returning to Bazaar Tete area to obtain grain food. (Apparently the Jap still had the idea that most of the island's food came from the foothills. Nothing could have been further from the truth).

Luis was of the opinion that a return across the Glano was impossible and that a wide sweep should be made across the Laneli at Boibau and by way of Hatulia to Atsabe. Ray, who was conscious of the time factor, talked glibly of night crossings of the Glano and the Ermera Road. Luis was adamant. His words were courteous enough but the tenor of his words was always the same. If his men were to be used, they were going by the safest possible route and as swiftly as possible. The human pack train was mustered to proceed by way of Boibau.

Before leaving for Boibau, Ray had another and more difficult task to perform. He had to acquaint Lieutenant Allan (Five Section) art Nasuta that he was in grave danger and should pull out immediately. It was a delicate position. 'B' Platoon OC, The Bull, did not take lightly to junior officers who withdrew from their posts, nor was it considered army ethics for Corporals to be interpreting intelligence reports and acting on them. However, 2/2nd soldiers were taught to be individuals and accordingly, Ray sent the following message: 'Reliable native reports Jap about to make attempt surround your Section. Way across Glano secured by the enemy. Suggest you pull out immediately. Can use your help to protect my pack train. Will wait two days Bazaar Tete for you to catch up. Will be personally responsible to The Bull'.

Five Section failed to put in an appearance in the given time and the pack train left at dawn on the third day. It was significant that Lieutenant Allan delayed his departure until the third day when enemy movements on the coastal strip became obvious. He was apparently more wary of the reactions of our OC than he was of the actions of the enemy. Those reactions at a later date were direct and cutting. Ray, for example, was asked when he had decided 'to promote himself to the planning staff?' However, such is war; the movement was amply justified since two hours after Five Section evacuated Masuta, the Jap was on The Saddle in strength from three sides.

The gear train sped down the Boibau track as fast as really heavily burdened carriers could move. By ten in the morning it came under continuous surveillance from the air by an ancient enemy medium bomber. The Bazaar Tete Mambai were magnificent. Some broke quietly down side tracks as if to appear small groups making for the villages. Others stood on the ridge and waved excitedly to the plane. Still others on each occasion the plane appeared knocked Charlie and Ray into the grass beside the track and sat on them laughing heartily and screening obvious soldiers from binoculars above with their brown and somewhat odorous bodies.

Late afternoon found the train not quite within reach of Boibau but within easy reach of the native rest hut a couple of miles above it. Ray chose this stage to develop 'malarial staggers', and little Charlie was anxious to return an early favour by attempting to carry him. The weight discrepancy proved too great and Ray made the last few miles half carried and half dragged by Charlie and Mau Lere acting in concert.

When the rest hut was reached, Ray gave Charlie instructions to leave him and Mau Lere and try a night crossing of the Laueli. Having given these orders, he lost consciousness for several hours. Charlie later pleaded his lack of Tetum and his inability to rouse the carriers as a reason for his disobedience. Both were unlikely reasons. Charlie's Tetum was fair enough and he was a good handler of labour. At any rate, it was of little moment for by about 10 p.m. Luis arrived with Five Section and by dosing Ray with quinine he was able to get on his feet. The Laueli crossing was effected without fear from the air.

Luis took his departure after giving very positive commands that his carriers were to bypass Hatulia. Our deposed prince had a wonderful ear for news and it was a grateful group which looked up next morning from the long grass of the plain to see the main street of enemy troops. At this stage, Luis was crouched on the side of a ridge watching a file of enemy infantry swinging along the Boibau track like bloodhounds in pursuit. Luis was well aware that the train was now safely in the long grass screened tracks and making good time towards Atsabe sol he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had completely outthought the enemy. He now took himself back to the track and returned to Bazaar Tete to wait and watch and think as he always had done. Both Luis' appearance and his actions always bore the polish and assurance of a king and despite politics, that indeed is what he was. Many Timorese took a more active part in the war against the Japanese. This was not for Luis. His concern and his duty lay with his own people but at the same time he managed to throw a number of spanners into the works of 'emman mean' (the yellow man) and had there been a Luis in every province of Porto Timor, the way of the 2/2nd would have been a very easy one. He was 'Belu Mambai', a Mambai Friend in very large capitals.

Astabe is a Posto on a mountain and the climb into it from the south west is very steep indeed. We were in duty bound to dismiss the carriers from Bazaar Tete and raise a new train in this town for the long trip to Same. Atsabe was an official HQ's town and its administration that is, its Australian administration, was largely in the hands of the Company Sgt. Major, although our Medical Officer was here at the time. The Sgt. Major was in telephonic communication with the Company Commander and he now took it on himself to delay the train's further progress. Lieutenant Allan intended pressing on with Five Section but was persuaded to leave The Imp and three of his men behind to assist with the train when it should be allowed to go forward. Ray took the opportunity of circumventing some of the delay by 'shipping out' about a third of the gear surreptitiously with Five Section.

The Sgt. Major disliked anything which savoured of independent action and since B Platoon represented a very independent position of the Company, he now had his opportunity to pull a very small portion of it into line. Frequent demands for the gear to be moved were always met with the stock answer that the CO would 'do the deciding'.

There was a great deal of rumour around Atsabe at this time. Morale amongst the HQ troops was not high and fears were numerous. Also a few Malay-speaking natives had begun to appear from time to time. They were treated with great suspicion as it was said that they came from Dutch Timor, although it is more likely that they were Porto Timorese from near

the Lois River banks. Either they were displaced persons or in the pay of the enemy and rumour had it that they were living off the country. Their presence led to an incident which could have ended in bloodshed.

One night Charlie, Ray and The Imp were wakened by a native's screams. Rushing out of their hut they found a giant criado named Africano seated on the stomach of a struggling Timorese. Mau Lere had the protrate native by the hair while he sought to force up his chin to enable him to cut his throat. Mau Lere was incensed and was saying sombrely, "Assu saiona. Hau nian tuan toba". (Shut up dog, my boss is sleeping) Charlie kicked the knife out of Mau Lere's hands and we salvaged the unfortunate beneath Africano's great weight. We gave him to Sgt. Major, reasoning that the CO could 'do the deciding'. He had been trying to steal a bag of rice. Mau Lere sulked for several days. We were in error he told us. He kept exhibiting his skinned knuckles from Charlie's kick and he refused to speak to Charlie for about one week.

One morning rumour became fact at Atsabe. A figure was seen staggering up the track from the direction of Hatulia. When it came closer it could be seen to be one, Rip. Rip's face was a mask of blood and he was banging himself against the trees beside the track as he climbed. Three or four Atsabe personnel went slipping and sliding down the track to meet him. "What's up Rip?", asked one. "I'm blind", gasped Rip in hollow tones. The soldier placed both his thumbs under Rip's eyebrows and lifted them. "By Christ," cried Rip gleefully, "I can bloody well see". He had been struck on the temple by a rifle round, presumably almost spent and it had followed bone and skin right across his forehead leaving him at the other temple. This had resulted in his eyebrows dropping and together with the blood of which there was ample, and the pain which must have been excruciating, he had been convinced that the bullet had 'scored him' across the eyeballs. He was understandably relieved.

Rip brought news that one, Gerry, had been shot through the leg and had been left in a hut nearer to Hatulia. Rip had heard rifle fire near the hut but since he had been unable to see, his report was fairly vague. The MO was anxious to obtain assistance to get to Gerry and approached The Imp and Ray. They as a result of enforced inactivity were now as fit as any walking malarial cases could ever be. The Sgt. Major hearing the plot raced to the telephone. In a moment he had successfully circumvented 'independent action'. Orders were given for the 'train' to proceed to B Platoon HQ at once. The MO was to remain in Atsabe and he was called to the phone to speak with the CO personally.

The release of the train should have produced jubilation. The reverse was the case. The two NCO's moved rather purposefully on the little Warrant Officer with some forceful and angry words. The result might have been a minor military contretemps had not the MO slammed down the phone in high dudgeon and said to Ray, who was the larger of the two, in very irate manner, "Don't touch the little bastard Ray. If you want him clouted, I'll bloody well do it for you". Now all this was perhaps another example of how hard it was for personnel from orthodox units to adjust to changed values, changed conditions and the crying need for independence of action in an independent Company. It is not harsh criticism of our Sgt. Major but it is necessary to record the fact that certain of our senior personnel never did adjust and while they might have been good soldiers in more sedate and regularised units, they were unhappy in ours and we were unhappy with them.

The Sgt. Major was left standing alone with only a sense of righteousness to enfold him. The rest of us were equally certain that he and the CO were wrong. They were certainly out of tune with the times. However we now had a quick demonstration of how some, at least, of our senior personnel had adjusted to the need for independent action. "You two get about your bloody business as you were told", ordered our glorious 'cantankerous old bastard' as he pulled on his equipment. "As for me, they can bloody well court martial me if they want to because I'm going to get that boy out". And he set off down the track towards Hatulia.

The return of the pack train to Same was effected without much trouble. It was slow progress, so slow indeed that The Imp and Ray were able to return one dark night up the ' wall of death' outside Ainaro to light a creek crossing in flash flood with the feeble rays of a borrowed Porto torch while the MO and his carriers with Gerry groaning on his stretcher fought their way across.

The Imp and Ray had ponies and they suggested that their older superior mount one for the ride downhill. "To hell with the bloody kuda", said the MO, with neither thanks nor other acknowledgement. He was a very consistent man and though Gerry walks with a limp and has had some bone grafts, he like many more of us are about the place to talk about it as a result of that cantankerous old bastard's good offices and perhaps too, his bad temper.

The pack train arrived at Same to a fairly irate Platoon Commander twenty eight days after two soldiers and a Timorese had climbed into the mountains on a ten day mission. Ray and Charlie returned to Hatu'uda to find the Section with orders to move to Same next day. At least they knew the way. Such is army life.

Chapter 8.

Some mention has been made of a group of natives who may have crossed the border from Dutch Timor. It now becomes necessary to report upon a much more important group which did so. When the Japanese landed at Koepang, they did so in force. A number of parachutists were dropped to assist the landing but unfortunately for them their drop took place within sight and sound of the defenders. The result was that within a matter of minutes a surviving parachutist became a museum piece. However, the Japanese put so many ashore in their first wave that they soon outnumbered the defence by better than ten to one.

Koepang held at this time the nucleus of 'Sparrow Force' designed to be eventually of better than brigade strength with the equipment, artillery and specialist personnel to operate as an independent brigade. However in February 1942 .....