

CHAPTER 2

To the Northern Territory

On the entry of the Japanese into the war, the 7th Battalion was still encamped at Balcombe on the Mornington Peninsula, about sixty kilometres from Melbourne. The battalion was immediately placed on a war-time footing and allocated a defensive position in the Dandenong area, about sixteen kilometres due east of Mordialloc on Port Phillip Bay, and twenty-four kilometres due north of Watsons Inlet on Western Port Bay. This position formed part of the overall defence of Melbourne some thirty-two kilometres to the north west.

The move to this position was completed by 15 December, 1941 and at the time the posted strength of the unit was 36 officers and 376 other ranks. Troops were coming and going at a fast rate, with recruits being engaged in basic training and the remainder occupied digging weapon pits, and setting up barbed wire entanglements with trip wires out in front. This type of activity continued through to 25 January, 1942 when 440 other ranks were marched out to the 8th Battalion. The troops remaining were kept busy putting further recruits through their paces and revetting and finishing existing projects.

By 2 February, word had filtered down through the grape vine that a move was soon intended, but the destination was yet still unknown. All eighteen-year old lads were then transferred out to the 38th Battalion.

On 5 February, the 7th Battalion received its first AIF reinforcements. Several hundred of these men, who had enlisted for overseas service on or about 7 December, 1941 had been undergoing basic training at a village close to Bacchus Marsh, some forty kilometres from Melbourne. This place was called Darley, and will be remembered by all who did their training there. On 2 January, 1942 most of these troops were entrained at Bacchus Marsh and headed for Port Melbourne, where most thought they were on their way to the Middle East.

Unfortunately, much to their dismay, they were embarked on the Paddle Steamer "Weeroona" and sailed for Port Arlington, Queenscliff, Ocean Grove, Point Lonsdale, Portsea and Sorrento, there to join other troops who had been digging trenches in the sand dunes. A further shock was in store for them, for after about five weeks of further basic training, on 5 February they were transported to Dandenong to join the 7th Battalion. To say that this was a disappointment at the time would be a great understatement. To have volunteered for service overseas, and having enlisted in the AIF for that purpose (Militiamen were restricted at that time to serving in Australia and PNG) it was a gross insult to be posted to a

Militia unit. It certainly did nothing for their morale, but when, falsely as it turned out, they were advised they would be going north and into action within a few weeks, most reconciled themselves to their fate. Some though, went AWL.

This certainly was a busy time for the Administrative and Quartermaster staff. Other units, then in camp along the Mornington Peninsula, had called for volunteers to join the 7th. Men were therefore arriving at all times during the day and night. They came from other infantry battalions such as the 5th, 6th, 14th, 23rd, 32nd and 46th, and all had to be brought up to date with their "Q" issues.

Those personnel who had not had leave for some time, and who could be spared from duty, were despatched on leave. Then on 14 February a movement order, code-named "OVERLAND" was released authorising 7th Battalion to proceed overland by rail and road to 7 Military District in the Northern Territory.

Trucks and equipment were still arriving at the battalion from Ordnance Depots and being allocated to various companies, but finally personnel from A Coy, some from C Coy together with a platoon of E Coy, detachments of HQ Coy and some BHQ elements were ready to move.

On Monday morning, 16 February, 1942 the epic journey began. The first draft consisting of 275 men, with their equipment and vehicles, moved out of the area by road to Dandenong railway siding where they entrained. Reveille was at 0330 hrs with breakfast being served at Spencer Street railway station, after which the draft moved on again via Geelong to Ballarat for lunch, Horsham for the evening meal, then on to the Adelaide Showgrounds for breakfast before once again moving on to Terowie. Capt Vic Iredale, OC A Coy, was the Officer-in-Charge of the first draft, which was also accompanied by the Commanding Officer, Lt Col R.M. Sadler, DSO, MC, VD.

At Terowie, the vehicles accompanying the draft were loaded that evening for on-movement to Alice Springs. These vehicles were to be accompanied by their driver and relief driver on the flat-tops of the narrow gauge railway. After an overnight stop the troops boarded the antiquated carriages of this railway, and "iron" rations were to be available consisting of "bully" beef and "dog" biscuits. This was the norm, except when the train stopped at Quorn for lunch. Here a great feast was organised by the womenfolk of the town, and was greatly appreciated by the men. All troops who subsequently passed this way were dined in the "Royal" manner, and will never forget the hospitality of the people of Quorn.

It was also the norm, when travelling these slow moving trains through this area, for troops to obtain a billy of hot water from the engine driver to make a brew of tea.

There were three other drafts to depart in this manner, before the whole battalion was on the move. The second draft, under command

of Capt J. Hughes, MM, consisted of D Coy, HQ E Coy, and HQ Coy details. The third draft, commanded by Capt K. Blaby, consisted of the remainder of C Coy, a platoon of E Coy, HQ Coy details and BHQ elements. The fourth and final draft was led by Capt V. Ellis and contained B Coy, a platoon of E Coy and the remainder of HQ Coy and BHQ.

It was during this journey that the battalion learned of the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese on 19 February, 1942.

The arrival at Alice Springs afforded an overnight rest for the troops, and enabled the vehicles, which were to be driven by unit personnel to Larrimah, to be unloaded.

Reveille was quite early the following morning, and after breakfast, prepared by the cooks of the staging camp at Alice Springs, the convoy of over seventy trucks was ready to move.

The troops were loaded into three-ton trucks, with about eighteen men to each, and driven by personnel of the Australian Army Service Corps, for the tedious trek over a barely definable track that followed the telegraph line through the scrub. It was hot and dusty and because of the urgency (an invasion of Australia was thought imminent), there were no routine stops made. It was go as fast as possible, and should one need to answer the call of nature, it was down with the trousers and perch over the tailgate of the moving vehicle, hoping for the best! As time went on and the bore water took its effect, this was no mean feat to accomplish. One vehicle driven by Private Bill Norris actually overturned, injuring a number of the occupants.

The first night out from Alice Springs, after having travelled approximately 300 kilometres, camp was made on the side of the track at Barrow Creek. Similar progress was made for the next two days until the convoy arrived at the railhead of the Darwin rail line at Larrimah. Those who travelled this journey will no doubt recall names like Tea Tree Wells, The Devil's Marbles, Tennant Creek, Banka Banka, Renner Springs, Elliott, Newcastle Waters, Dunmarra and Daly Waters.

On 24 February the first draft entrained on the now defunct, but well known "Leaping Lena" at Larrimah for Noonamah, an area located some forty kilometres from Darwin. After numerous stops for water for the engine, and a swim for the troops in the Adelaide River where the draft was held up, due to the engine being required for another train bringing refugees south from Darwin, the ultimate destination was finally reached at 1930 hours the following day. There was no accommodation available for the men, so they spent the night under the stars. Fortunately it did not rain, even though it was in the middle of the "wet" season.

In the Northern Territory there is hardly any difference between the Summer and Winter climates, the seasons being divided into only "Wet" and "Dry." The temperature is hot and humid through-

out the entire year, and a variation of only one hour of daylight between the seasons occurs. During the "Wet" from November to May, the daily downpour can be almost relied upon, making the entire countryside practically inaccessible. Creeks become torrents and what roads there were at the time, became quagmires. The humidity increases and the nights become warmer, with bugs and mosquitoes in abundance. And so it was to these conditions, that members of the 7th Battalion were introduced on their arrival at Noonimah.

The battalion was allotted to the 23rd Brigade, which at the time was commanded by Brigadier E.F. Lind, who had been in command of the brigade from its inception at Bonegilla in 1940. Units of the brigade were originally the 2/21st, 2/22nd and 2/40th Infantry Battalions, but were at this time either fighting for their lives on Timor, behind enemy lines, or had perished in the initial onslaughts on Ambon and Rabaul.

The task of setting up camp for the remaining drafts to follow was the first priority, but with the "Wet" season in full swing, the heat and humidity was taking some getting used to. Shortage of rations did not help the situation, and tempers were getting a little frayed at the edges, nevertheless by the time the second draft had arrived, the camp area was better than it had been.

As if to celebrate the coming together again of the battalion in its new location and environment, after a long and sometimes uncomfortable arduous journey of around 4000 kilometres, a severe tropical storm hit the area on 29 February. This made the total of 1037 all ranks of the unit wonder what was next in store for them.

It was not long before platoon training was in full swing, with all spare time available taken up in the construction of a sports ground. The training was now being entered into with much more enthusiasm by all concerned; it was realized that the war situation was most serious, and that there should be an attempt by all ranks to get in more training to fit themselves for the, as was thought, imminent invasion.

On 5 March, Captain J. Thompson and 20 Platoon of E Coy were the advance party of the first of many moves to be made by the battalion during its tour of duty in the Northern Territory. Before the move, however, Maj Osmond, second-in-charge of the battalion at the time, had an idea of setting up a canteen for the troops, but was at first frustrated by the absence of any official finance being available. It appears that on the occurrence of the air raid a few days earlier, all Bank Managers in Darwin had gathered up their securities and cash, about £300,000 worth (nearly half belonging to the Commonwealth Bank which payrolled the troops in the area) and hurriedly left Darwin for Alice Springs. It is said, that even a week after their managers had departed, the staff had had no word from them. Three weeks later, all staff were employed in labour

gangs, cleaning the streets of Darwin, and would probably have been still there three months later, had it not been for one of the clerks hitch-hiking to Alice Springs, and demanding some attention.

The financial problem for Maj Osmond and the 7th Battalion was temporarily overcome by borrowing the sum of one hundred and forty pounds from the officers and NCOs, thus enabling a small but effective canteen to be established.

Arrival of the first batch of mail on 2 March was a great morale booster. This, coupled with the fact that a concert party arrived to put on a show, even though it rained, did much for general feelings.

The troops were now settling in to their new environment, with digging trenches, forming roads throughout the camp area, and bayonet training thrown in for good measure keeping them busy.

Night manoeuvres were introduced about this time, which in turn introduced everybody to the local mosquitoes. The mosquito repellent issued by the "Q" Store, had a citronella base, and it seemed to attract rather than repel. It was most ineffective, with the exposed parts of the body becoming targets for the mosquitoes, using their sting so proficiently. Nights in the bush, and on guard, were an absolute hell.

To further enhance the training schedule, and to act as some sort of entertainment, a boxing tournament was organised. This resulted in Pte Knight defeating Pte Sydney, Pte Deacon defeating Pte Wilson, Pte Rose fighting a draw with Pte Mayne, Pte Chambers defeating Pte Sword, Pte La Rose defeating Pte Roe, Pte Rowe defeating Cpl Sutherland, and Pte Buckley winning from Pte Barnes. All who watched reckoned the night's entertainment was quite a success.

The first picture show to arrive in the area on the evening of 8 March was greeted with much enthusiasm, but as is the case with most armies, one should be wary when things start to get comfortable. Here was no exception, for the first of the many moves the battalion was to make in the next eighteen months, was ordered for the very next day. This move was only thirteen kilometres further up the main highway towards Darwin. At first the site didn't impress, but a swim parade to the Elizabeth River close by made things quite different.

Another boxing tournament was held on 14 March. This was also the day the battalion was honoured by the visit of Major General Sir Iven Mackay.

Results of the boxing were:

Pte Brainwood defeated Pte Deacon, Pte Belshaw defeated Pte Fenton, Pte Young drew with Cpl Vidler, Pte Jones defeated Pte Dougherty.

Rain interrupted further bouts, but not before Ptes Colbert and Baily, two heavy-weights, gave an exhibition in the manly art of self-defence.

Rations were still in very short supply, with cigarettes and tobacco being extremely scarce, but the "smokes" situation was relieved by the issue of one ounce of tobacco per five men, and six only ready-made cigarettes each. Non-smokers, of which there were a few, were in great demand. However, on 19 March a further issue at the rate of one ounce of tobacco per man, followed by another issue a few days later had the situation under control.

On the night of 24 March, the first of many working parties moved out of camp at 2315 hours, and headed for the docks in Darwin. The job was to unload a convoy of ships, which had been forced back to port by the war situation having deteriorated in the area in which they were bound. This was to prove a bonanza for the men of the 7th; the cargo contained, among other things, cans of Californian cherries, peaches and other items not previously seen in this area. Needless to say, the men rose to the occasion, and soon had their share of the contents.

One story relating to this era, surfaced during the compilation of this history:

After scrounging tinned fruit and vegetables etc, from the available sources when on a working detail, it was the normal practice to take these items back to our defensive area for future use.

Our particular method for storage was to dig a hole, line it with a wooden box, place our "goodies" inside and place a lid over the top. The cache would then be covered with grass and twigs as camouflage. Remembering that the grass was usually close to two metres high at this time of the year and quite prevalent throughout the entire area, it was quite a good means of storage.

Imagine our consternation, when returning to camp one day, to find the entire area had been cleared of grass by burning. Our first thoughts, naturally, were for our cache of "goodies". World War 3 would have commenced right there and then, if we could have found those responsible for the fire, because our entire store was ruined.

It was not long before another move was in progress. This time a little further up the road towards Darwin to what was to become the defence area, in the event of an invasion. Enormous holes were dug in the ground reminiscent of the trenches of World War I. No structures above ground level were permitted, so during the entire period spent in this location, troops slept on the ground in their allocated areas. Working parties were still being carried out, but in between time holes had to be dug, weapon pits established, and scrub cleared from the front of all defensive positions.

Further working parties to the town area of Darwin were still being supplied by personnel of the 7th Battalion, and these were mostly for unloading ships, or unloading trucks plying between ships and the various stores areas in the Darwin area. They were quite popular with the troops, for they were the source of augment-

ing the meagre rations. The supply of foodstuff through the normal channels consisted of mainly rice, and a commodity called herrings in tomato sauce. It was referred to as "goldfish," "shark repellent" or "dog's vomit" and at the best of times would have been rather unpalatable, but to have this dished up for nearly every meal, every day, for a lengthy period was very hard on the palate. It is difficult to say how many such consecutive meals were served up to the troops, with the cooks excelling themselves by thinking up different menus to include rice. For instance: boiled or fried rice mixed with herrings in tomato sauce for the main course, followed by boiled rice or rice pudding for dessert. To this day, at reunions or other gatherings, figures like 98 to 150 consecutive meals of "goldfish and rice" are quoted.

The CO of the battalion, Lt Col Sadler, had been acting Brigade Commander since the departure of Brigadier Lind, resulting in Maj Osmond acting as CO. OC of companies at this stage were: Capt McInnes, HQ Coy; Capt Iredale, A Coy; Capt Ellis, B Coy; Capt K. Blaby, C Coy; Capt Hughes, D Coy and Capt Thompson, E Coy.

Capt Hughes and his company were soon to move out to Darwin, to be attached to 7 MD for the defence of that headquarters. Night patrols by remaining members of the battalion were commenced to locations known as the Twin Sisters Water Hole, and Marlow Lagoon. At about this time, the Ack-Ack Platoon farewelled their Platoon Commander, Lt G.A. Jones, and Lt Scholtz marched in to be appointed IO. He replaced Lt Crothers who was allotted to C Coy.

When Brigadier Dougherty arrived, exercises at the battalion level commenced and were designed to improve the physical standard and stamina of the troops, and to practice officers in receiving and carrying out orders. On one such exercise, to add realism to the occasion, the Japanese made an air attack on the area through which the battalion was moving (close to the RAAF Base in Darwin).

Night patrolling was still being conducted and had been extended to include the Wells Creek area, in the vicinity of the Elizabeth River. On one of these patrols, Very lights were observed, and further patrols were organised to investigate, but nothing unusual was found. Listening posts were set up, but although the lights were again observed, still nothing was found.

It was now getting on towards the last week in April. D Coy had rejoined the battalion and it was time for another move, this time to a previously occupied site, further down the track. To sleep in a tent again was quite a luxury, but the duration of the stay at this location was rather short, for the area had been earmarked for the construction of one of the many airstrips to be built along the north-south road. This area was later to become Livingstone Field, named after Lieutenant John D. Livingstone, a P40 pilot of 9 Squadron

USAAF, who was the first casualty at the newly constructed strip. He overshot the strip after being damaged in a "dog fight" with a Zero. He smashed into the trees and died in the resulting inferno.

Other airfields to be constructed in the area were Sattler — the first one encountered when proceeding south from Darwin. It was named after Flt Lt Sattler, 13 Squadron RAAF, whose unescorted Hudson bomber was lost over the Banda Sea, north of Timor on 13 January, 1942. 13 Squadron was stationed at Laha in Ambon, at the time, but between the 20th and 31st of January, 1942 the battered Hudson Squadrons (2 and 13) were flown out, taking nearly all the air crews and ground staff back to Daly Waters in the Northern Territory. In May, 1942 they were relocated at RAAF Base Darwin and the newly constructed Hughes Field, respectively. Hughes Field was named in honour of Lieutenant C.W. Hughes who was killed at Darwin on 19 February.

Strauss Field was the other airstrip just north of Livingstone, on the same side of the road. It was named in honour of Captain A. Strauss, USAAF, also killed in action against the Japanese, and another P40 pilot.

It was common practice for members of the battalion, when camped in close proximity to these airfields, to count the number of planes, both fighters and bombers, on take-off, and to recount them on their return. Also, on many an occasion, members of the battalion had a grandstand view of the "dog fights" between P40s, and later on, Spitfires, and the Japanese.

An incident that occurred at one of these airstrips is probably worthy of mention:

"When proceeding along the main North-South Road on the back of a truck, travelling towards Darwin, during a day when an air raid on Darwin was occurring, one of the many things I still remember about being in that area took place.

At a point where the road runs parallel with the airstrip, then known as Livingstone Field, I and the blokes on the truck were amazed and, to say the least, somewhat apprehensive, to see an aircraft flying low, straight down the road towards us, gradually losing height as it came.

Our driver must have seen the aircraft at the same time as us, for the truck lurched to the left and came to a sudden halt on the airstrip itself.

The Kittyhawk did a wheels down emergency landing on the road and rolled to a halt right opposite where we were now standing. Everybody raced over to the aircraft as the pilot slid back the canopy over the cockpit and commenced to climb out. I could only marvel at the coolness of the fellow as he said, "Has anybody got a cigarette?"

His aircraft had been damaged in a dog-fight with a Zero and he had headed for the closest and most convenient place to put it down."

After departure from the Darwin area of 49 Fighter Group USAAF, 76 and 77 Squadrons RAAF occupied Strauss and Livingstone fields until replaced by 452 and 457 Squadrons RAAF respectively, with their Spitfires. 54 Squadron RAF also served in the area and operated from Sattler Field.

Again reappointments were being made to the officer structure. Lt Col Sadler announced that he was being promoted, and was to take up a new appointment as the Commander of the L of C Area. Maj Osmond was again acting CO. Lt Keens was relocated from D Coy to HQ Coy. Capt Hughes left the unit to go south. A few days later Maj Osmond also departed south, then Maj J.N. Henry marched in and was appointed 2 i/c of the battalion and therefore Acting CO. Capt Lang was moved from Transport to 2 i/c A Coy, and Capt L.I. Hopton marched in to take up the appointment of OC D Coy.

A note in the unit war diary at this date states that Cpl Alan Joy was placed in charge of all plumbing, and that part of 9 Platoon A Coy would be detached as a working party, under Lt M. McGlynn to proceed to Larrimah. Here they would be employed unloading vehicles arriving from southern and eastern States via Alice Springs and Mt Isa. The platoon remained in this location until early July.

One little anecdote that came out of this sojourn, is a story of four members of the platoon who had been detached from the main camping area to a location some four hundred yards out in the bush. It was their duty to man an anti-aircraft, light machine gun detachment, which consisted of one single tent and a Hotchkiss mounted on a tripod in a circular pit close by. It is important to mention here that the Hotchkiss was not familiar to many at the time, and had been used in World War I by the Light Horse units. It was certainly not a weapon that any of the four members concerned in this saga knew anything about.

Our four heroes had been sitting around their area for about a week, just playing cards and "spine bashing" as was the favourite pastime of the day, when their peace and quiet was rudely interrupted by a head appearing at the door of their tent shouting, "Action Stations!" One of our heroes, who was sitting furthest from the door, and who was a little hard of hearing, replied, "We haven't got your flamin' axe," whereupon the figure at the door of the tent made more of its bulk visible, to reveal it was none other than the RSM, turning purple in the face and finding it difficult to contain his rage. He once again shouted, "Action Stations," galvanizing one of the crew, at least, into action by racing out of the tent to man the gun.

This gallant soul sprang into the pit, grabbed the cocking handle of the Hotchkiss and pulled it to the rear to cock it, but to his amazement, and much consternation of the RSM, the working parts dropped out the rear of the gun fell in a scattered heap on the ground.

Our four reluctant heroes were immediately relieved of their cushy job and returned post haste to the rest of the platoon unloading trucks. Following this episode, the entire personnel of the

camp gained more experience with the Hotchkiss on the firing range the next day!

On returning to the battalion, now camped at the Bagot Road area adjacent to the Darwin RAAF Base, members were to find that many changes had taken place in their absence. One of the most effective changes to occur at this time, was the appointment of VX11 Lt Col J.A. Wilmoth as the CO.

On 17 March, 1942 General Douglas MacArthur, on his way to Melbourne from the Philippines, landed at Batchelor Airfield. He was soon to take up his command as Supreme Commander, Allied Powers, South West Pacific Area. His new command structure was finalised on 18 April, 1942, but in the meantime the planning staffs had considered the threat to the north. The Australian Chiefs of Staff identified three likely moves by the Japanese against Australia: south-east from PNG to the east coast of Australia; south-east from N.E.I. (Netherland East Indies) to Darwin; south-west from N.E.I. to West Australia. It was estimated that the attacking force would consist of two divisions, supported by four aircraft carriers carrying 200 planes, plus heavy cruisers and one hundred shore-based aircraft from their bases at Koepang, Ambon and Namlea. This attack was estimated to occur between the last week in March and the first week in April.

Counter measures required to stem this invasion was estimated to be at least three aircraft carriers with escorting heavy cruisers, destroyers and a submarine squadron; one Army division plus strong anti-aircraft defences; three fighter squadrons and perhaps seven other type squadrons.

It is interesting to note that a greater part of the air reinforcements did arrive in Darwin, but none of the proposed Naval force. However, a new Army Commander was appointed — Maj Gen Edmund Herring, former GOC 6 Div AIF, left Adelaide on 27 March, 1942, a little more than a week after arriving back from the Middle East to take up his Command, henceforth known as Northern Territory Force, and this covered the whole of north-west Australia from the Kimberleys to Mt Isa. He had been given greater authority than previous commanders, with the promise of more troops and increased supplies. He had an awesome task ahead of him, on the face of what was believed to be imminent invasion. His methods to achieve some rapid changes could be described as herculean; ruthless replacement of suspect officers; introduction of AIF veterans, Brigadiers R. King and I.N. Dougherty, as Commander of 3rd and 23rd Brigades respectively; dissolution of the old 7 Military District Headquarters, and immediate redeployment of his forces, coupled with a vigorous training programme.

By the time the 19th Brigade moved into the area in May, 1942 General Herring was reasonably satisfied that his men would fight.

With the troops becoming more and more acclimatised to the environment, sport of all kinds flourished. Football was most popular, but cricket, boxing, swimming, athletics and tug of war, being some of the other kinds which became routine features of everyday life. On Monday 7 June, 1943 Northern Territory Force sponsored its most ambitious sporting project — a picnic race meeting at Adelaide River. Brig Potts chaired the race committee; horses were borrowed from the Herbert Brothers' Station at Koolpinyah and Humpty Doo.

Thousands turned out to bet and watch the Bulldust Stakes, the Staff Scurry, the Navy, Army and Air Force Handicaps, and the Northern Derby. All proceeds went to the POW Fund.

General Herring, concerned at the low morale of his command, gave new impetus to the efforts of people like the Presbyterian padre, Chris Goy, who obtained his own projector and showed films. As many as 600 troops would attend a single screening. Mobile film units were later added to the entertainment circuit, and the 6th Division Concert Party visited the area.

The lot of the men was gradually improved, but it was a male only area, and the lack of female companionship made life rather lonely and monotonous. In the early days, it was exciting when the Japanese were over fairly regularly, and for a short while when an invasion was expected, with little time to worry about flies and mosquitoes. It wasn't a tough life compared with the combat areas of New Guinea, but at times it sure was boring.

Many a time troops would hitch a ride as far as 50 kilometres just to see a picture show, and then fail to get a ride all the way home necessitating walking and arriving back at camp at some ungodly hour of the morning.

In the meantime, a commando-type platoon, under Lt H.F. Knights was formed from C Coy personnel, and proceeded to Winnellie for an arduous, but interesting training course. It was 18 May before they were to return to the battalion. On that same day, A Coy proceeded to Noonamah as a working party for a period of eight days. They were, of course, less their 9 Platoon whose members were still at Larrimah.

On the day A Coy's duty at Noonamah ceased, a battalion parade was held for the purpose of calling for volunteers from the CMF personnel to enlist in the AIF. From January, 1942 as a result of Japan's entry into the war, Militiamen had not been permitted to transfer to the AIF. When this situation was revoked, and when applications were finally issued to individuals to encourage them to join, there followed months of official "rangling" as to the form the new regimental numbers for these personnel would take. At first it was proposed to prefix the existing numbers with the letters "VXM". When this was severely criticised, a direction was issued

that the letters "VX" would be used, and that 1,000,000 would be added to the original "V" number. This idea was wisely abandoned when it was realised that V12346 would become VX1012346. Finally it was conceded that those enlisting would get a "VX" number from the normal block of AIF numbers.

This haggling, plus the belated arrival of what was felt should have been the initial decision of the government, at the beginning, was unfortunate and harmful, as it discriminated between CMF and AIF, in many minds.

That there did exist two separate types of enlistment and thus two separate armies, is something that should never have arisen in the first place. The term "Chocolate Soldier" resulted from this, a rather derogatory term that caused more discontent amongst both Militiamen and AIF personnel of integrated units, than any other single thing.

At this stage it is prudent to say that there was a steady rate of enlistment of CMF members from this time onwards. On the other hand, the term "Choco" was to change from derogatory term, to a title to be proud of. Some men were determined to retain their original "V" number, just to show that here was one matter on which the Army could not order them to change. Not even the C-in-C could make them volunteer, and they were going to revel in this freedom. Whether there were any such thoughts or action from men of the 7th Battalion is not relative to this narrative, but should there be any personnel in this category, one should take one's hat off to them for their determination.

31 May saw other departures from the unit. Padre Milligan gave his last sermon at Church Parade, and Lts Knights and Scholly departed having been reclaimed by their former unit.

Officer appointments as at 1 June were:

CO — Lt Col J. Wilmoth

2 i/c — Maj J. Henry

Adjt — Capt C. Jones

IO — Lt D. Healy

SO — Lt K. Neville

Company Commanders:

HQ Coy — Capt W. McInnes

A Coy — Capt V. Iredale

B Coy — Capt V. Ellis

C Coy — Capt K. Blaby

D Coy — Capt L. Hopton

E Coy — Capt J. Thompson.

This was also the day B Coy moved out to Noonamah as a working party, and one platoon from each of the other companies moved out to Pine Creek. Working parties were now a normal part of the daily routine.

7 June could be earmarked as a day to remember, for it was on this day that a fierce bush fire broke out on the eastern boundary of the camp area. Eventually approximately 500 men were utilized before the fire was brought under control.

Two days after this incident, C and D Coys moved out to the Byno Bay area on exercise. They were followed two days later by A and B Coys. On their return to camp at the completion of the exercise, they were informed that another move to the Fortress area was to commence on the following day. The 7th Battalion moved into an area vacated by the 19th Battalion at Bagot Road, adjacent to the RAAF Base, and were to remain there until relieved by the 8th Battalion on 19 July.

During the month of June, General Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander, Allied Land Forces, South West Pacific Area, suggested that Timor should be either recaptured or evacuated, only to be told by MacArthur that resources were not available. In December the Americans themselves briefly considered an attempt to retake Aru, Tanimbar and the Kai Islands. Then on the 7th of that month, the Australian CGS, Lt Gen Sir John Northcott, noted that a divisional operation for the recapture of Timor was under consideration. By this time though, all available strength was being committed at the savage battles of Gona and Buna in PNG, and it was apparent that the line of advance by the Allies would continue through that area, and not N.E.I. This spelt the end for guerilla operations in Timor and, though not immediately apparent, the end of Darwin's chances of becoming a major war base.

Maj Gen Herring ended his term of Commander in the Northern Territory on 11 August, 1942 and went on to greater things in PNG. He was succeeded in turn by Maj Gen J.E.S. Stevens (August 1942 to March 1943) and Maj Gen A.S. Allen (March 1943 to October 1944).

In July, 1943 the field force in the Northern Territory reached a strength of three infantry brigades (12th, 13th and 23rd), plus the 6 Cav Regt and 2/8th Independent Field Company.

The men of the 7th Battalion, however, were oblivious to all this and moved back to be part of the 23rd Brigade. The 39 Mile Camp was to be permanent home until 25 March, 1943.

During the next eight months, normal infantry training was carried out, with frequent battalion and brigade exercises, necessitating marching long distances over long periods. One such exercise lasted for six days and was considered by all who participated, to be the "daddy" of them all. Working parties were also a familiar form of duty. One such party consisted of thirty-five men from each of A and D Coys, and thirty from E Coy, under the leadership of Capt Vic Iredale, being utilised to attempt to bring the Southport track up to "wet weather" standard.

Then came the day when the unit lost some of its best known officers. Some of them were nominated to proceed to the 23rd Brigade Training Battalion in New South Wales as instructors. They were: Capt V. Iredale, Capt K. Blaby, Lt B. Benton, Lt Hanlan, Lt L. Donald, Lt T. McCarthy and Lt C. McLeod. Seventeen NCOs were to accompany them.

Australian Rules football was always a great way to build "esprit de corps" throughout the unit, and offered a chance for the battalion team to show off its prowess. On 29 November, the 7th Battalion team met a team from 2/8 Tpt Coy AASC. The final scores were 7 Bn — 7 goals 11 behinds, to the Tpt Coy 9 behinds.

Around about this time, it was notified to all ranks that the RAAF was urgently in need of personnel, and was calling for volunteers from all units to be enlisted in that service. Thirty-four men of the 7th made application and were subsequently given a medical examination and IQ test at Noonamah. It is not recorded how many were actually inducted into the RAAF, but it is known that Bob Summerville and Ken McMasters were successful. Both went to Canada with the Empire Training Scheme.

One other aspect of training that probably stands out in the minds of those who participated, and that is the beach landing exercise conducted in Darwin on Mendal Beach during the month of December, 1942. This exercise lasted for over a week and necessitated the participants being billeted at Larrakeyah Barracks. It didn't last long enough though, as far as the troops were concerned, for the Barracks did offer sleeping accommodation indoors and eating in proper messes, sitting at tables on chairs — quite a luxury. Some members will remember running foul of the Portuguese man-of-war that frequented the waters thereabout.

Christmas came and went, with the usual Army tradition of the officers serving the troops at dinner. On Boxing Day a cricket match against the 8th Battalion took place. The scores of 92 runs and 7 wickets for 85 (dec) by 8 Bn, and 101 and 3 wickets for 77 by 7 Bn, resulted in a win for our battalion. Cpl Bob Taylor scored 25 runs and Cpl "Skinny" Sutherland 48.

One of the better jobs to come the way of the 7th was when on 30 December, one hundred men were required to form a construction team to erect a rest camp at Berry Springs. The camp was ready for occupation by 15 January, and the remainder of the battalion moved in for a week's rest.

Yet another Australian Rules football match was played, this time against Advance HQ on 28 January. 7 Bn had a field day winning 22 goals 23 behinds 155 points, to 3 goals 1 behind 19 points. It is well to remember that besides football and cricket, the battalion had men interested in many other sports. One such event was the tug of war which was made up of some big men. The coach of one of these teams was W02 McRae and included Sgt R. Hudson,

Sgt R. Downey, Cpl J. Harr, Pte W. Norris, Pte S. Block, Pte R. Ferrari, Pte R. Morris, Pte P. Delaney and Sig A. George. They were successful on many occasions.

Back again to cricket when a match against 103 Anti Tank resulted in another win for 7 Bn by 7 wickets and 7 runs. Yet another game of football was the much talked about game against 2/11 Fd Regt who considered themselves invincible. Much money changed hands as a result of this game, with the Artillery wondering where they had gone wrong. Our battalion won 15 goals 10 behinds 100 points, to 5 goals 4 behinds 34 points. Goal kickers for 7 Bn were: McEniry (5) Spears (4) Hubble (3) Sutherland (2) and O'Donnell (1).

A week of guard duty for one officer and thirty other ranks relieved the monotony of the normal training that was being carried out continuously. It was considered that one was rather lucky to be selected for these detachments.

A list of officers and their appointment as at 3 April, 1943 reveals that there were a few shortages on the establishment:

CO — Lt Col J. Wilmoth

2 i/c — Maj J. Henry

Adjt — Capt C. Jones	3 Pl — Lt A. Burgess
IO — Lt D. Healy	4 Pl — Capt R. Leabeter
Sig O — Lt K. Deller	5 Pl — Lt C. Adams
TO — Lt D. Edwards	6 Pl — Lt R. Keens
OC HQ Coy — Capt W. McInnes	10 Pl — Lt J. Duncan
OC A Coy — Capt O. Leng	12 Pl — Lt K. Neville
OC B Coy — Capt R. Roberts	13 Pl — Lt H. Smith
OC C Coy — Capt W. Cameron	14 Pl — Lt M. Elliott
OC D Coy — Capt L. Hopton	15 Pl — Lt P. Hart
2 i/c A Coy — Capt A. Shearer	16 Pl — Lt A. Crothers
2 i/c B Coy — Capt R. Gunn	17 Pl — Lt F. Longmore
2 i/c C Coy — Lt L. Norman	18 Pl — Lt C. Griffin
2 i/c D Coy — Lt L. McKinnon	A/A Pl — Lt J. Turvey
Det to HQ NT Force — Capt V. Ellis	
RMO — Capt A. Mears, AAMC	
Chaplain Class IV — Chap F. Fry	

Lt I.M. McKenzie was to march in from 2/108 AGT Coy AASC — to be appointed 9 Pl, A Coy on 19 April.

It was from 3 April that the battalion became an AIF unit, having attained the necessary 75% AIF enlisted personnel on strength. The summary of AIF and CMF was now:

AIF — 25 offrs 482 ORs

CMF — 3 offrs 162 ORs.

The unit was now designated 7th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF).

The football team celebrated this event by defeating 19 MG Bn, 13 goals 3 behinds 81 points to 8 goals 8 behinds 56 points. And again, this time at cricket, by 5 wickets and 37 runs. Cpl "Skinny" Sutherland took 3 wickets for 25 runs and Pte Ron Zeirsch, 2 wickets for 9 runs. Cpl Spears made 44 retired, and Cpl Horrie Hubble, 27. Another cricket match against 2/13 Fd Amb resulted in a first innings win by 5 wickets.

It was time for another move, and considered by this well trained, super fit, efficient body of men as a welcome change to their normal routine existence. It was undertaken with great aplomb. The term "Mobile" as affixed to modern day units of the Australian Army was certainly appropriate to this unit!

The cricket team was successful in winning the 23 Brigade cricket competition by defeating 11 Anti Tank, who scored 105 in their first innings, and 133 in their second. 7 Bn scored 186, and 2 for 59 respectively. Cpl "Snowy" Sutcliffe scored 55 and S/Sgt Laurie Jorgenson 34. Cpl Spears took 6 for 38 and 4 for 19.

Maj I.R. Duffy now marched in to the unit from 107 AGH, and was just in time to participate in a GOC's parade.

Unfortunately, this was the period when the battalion suffered its first fatality. On 28 May, 1943 Cpl George C. Clifford, a section leader of 9 Pl, A Coy suffered a fatal heart attack whilst playing football on the old civilian aerodrome in Darwin. He was interred at Berrimah, but his grave is now located in the war cemetery at Adelaide River. The second fatality occurred only about six weeks later when Cpl Les. G. Gange died on 9 July, 1943. He also is interred in the war cemetery at Adelaide River.

By 13 July, the time spent in the Fortress area had run out, when the advance party departed to rejoin the 23rd Brigade at the 39 Mile Camp. By the 17th the move had been completed.

The battalion enjoyed another period of relaxation at Berry Springs Rest Camp from 25 July. During this period a reconnaissance was conducted to the Cox Peninsula for the purpose of making corrections and adding detail to existing maps.

Yet another opponent for the yet undefeated football team was found in the form of 28 Aust Inf Bn who had recently arrived in the area from West Australia. They were members of the 13th Brigade consisting of the 11th, 16th and 28th Battalions, who later served in New Britain. Unfortunately the 28th Battalion was no match for the 7th and the final scores will speak for themselves. 7 Bn — 20 goals 22 behinds 142 points, to 28 Bn — 3 goals 5 behinds 23 points.

By 31 July the battalion had received a number of new officers — Lt L.W. Paech, Lt S.J. Brindley, Lt J.J. Perry and Lt G. Rush were graduated from OCTU. Marched in from units of 13 Brigade were Lt R.B. Phippard, Lt K.R. Burkett and Lt J.H. Walkenden. Lt K. Robson had joined from 8 Bn, and Lt W.A. Kuhne had been appointed IO.

The occasion of a battalion parade was the opening of a Canteen by the then Governor-General of Australia, Lord Gowrie. The following is an extract from a report by a journalist in attendance:

"SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA — His Excellency the Governor-General opened the first serviceman's club to be built in the Northern Territory. Nothing so elaborate or commodious as this club has appeared in any other operational area in Australia. In many respects it eclipses even the largest of the city hostels.

Built and equipped by Canteen Services at a cost of 20,000 pounds, it is intended primarily for troops who are cut off from recreation huts and other amenities of the larger centres. These men live and train unbrokenly in semi-tropical bush, with few comforts and only slender resources for entertainment and recreation. The club will provide them with far more than they could have hoped for — with more, indeed, than the average soldier can find anywhere.

With its ice-cream bar and soda fountain, its cafeteria, there one can buy grills, hamburgers, fish and chips, and such delicacies as asparagus on toast and salmon mayonnaise; its fern-hung dining room and lounge, large enough to seat 400 men at a time, and its wonderfully equipped recreation room. It is one of the most astonishing sights that the territory has to offer.

Standing in 10 acres of its own ground, it is laid out under palms and gums in the form of two wings. One is given up wholly to the games. There are three billiard tables, two badminton courts and half a dozen table tennis sets, and every other conceivable indoor game.

500 Meals at a Sitting: This wing leads to the soda fountain and cafeteria, both of which are on most modern lines. The soda fountain has a serving capacity of 5,000 drinks and 70 gallons of ice-cream a day, and the cafeteria can supply up to 500 meals at a single sitting. A plate of ice-cream or a glass of ice-cream soda costs one penny, and the men will be able to buy a three-course meal including a grill for a shilling. Needless to say, Canteen Services does not expect to run the club at a profit. The cafeteria joins up with the wing which contains a dining room and lounge. The dining room is bright as an ordinary military mess as it could be. Brightly coloured tables, which will seat four at each, are overhung by small palms suspended from cross beams and the open sides of the wing give a view of the palms which surround the entire building.

The lounge is provided with chairs and writing tables.

A concert and picture theatre is being built nearby, and it is even hoped to construct a swimming pool. The grounds already contain a sports oval, near which hot and cold showers are being installed.

The club is a personal triumph for Lt Janson of Maroubra Beach, Sydney, the officer in charge of Service Clubs in the territory. He was one of the small group who suggested it seven months ago, and it has been built largely to his design. Among those who have helped him in planning and equipping the club are Sgt Ivan Baker of Glenelg, Sgt Ron Brockman of Busselton, and Cpl Pat Sullivan of Lismore.

Two more clubs are being built in the north-west area on a similar basis, and one of them will be opened before the end of the month. An officers' club is also nearing completion."

It is worthwhile mentioning that as soon as all this began to happen, 7 Aust. Inf Bn (AIF) was relieved in the Northern Territory. For nineteen months in the area, apart from the few picture shows and travelling concert parties, the battalion had to rely on the YMCA, Red Shield tent or hut for recreational purposes, the facilities of which were rather sparse.

On 13 September, 1943 the whole battalion was transported to the Daly River area, in the vicinity of the Mission, for a few days

rest, before the first draft departed from Adelaide River by road and rail for the southern States.

On the way south from Adelaide River, where John Wilmoth said farewell to his battalion before taking up his new appointment as Commandant, OCTU, Woodville S.A., it was a vastly different situation from that which prevailed on the way to the Northern Territory in February, 1942. By this time the entire surface of the highway had been widened and sealed with bitumen. The transports available for movement of troops were the semi-trailer type and much more comfortable to ride in. There was the added luxury of being able to stop every fifty minutes for a rest. Overnight camps had been established at convenient intervals, where the troops on arrival could shower, have an evening meal, with breakfast in the morning before setting out on the next leg of the journey.

The first draft consisted of A and C Coys, and movement from Adelaide River was on 22 September, 1943, for the 400 kilometre journey to Larrimah for the first overnight stop.

On arrival at Alice Springs, all marvelled at the organisation of kit bags, withdrawn all these months before, being reunited with their proper owners. Winter dress was also issued to the men at this point.

Another memorable happening was on the arrival at Quorn, where again the ladies of the town turned on a sumptuous meal. This action apparently happened for all troop trains passing through this town.

After a few days in Adelaide, all drafts came together for on-movement to Melbourne and 24 days glorious leave. After an arduous, and for the most part monotonous tour of duty, everyone agreed that leave wasn't hard to take.

In comparison with the original figure of 1037 all ranks who departed Melbourne in February, 1942 the posted strength of the battalion on returning to Victoria after nearly twenty months in the Northern Territory was 28 officers and 644 other ranks.

As a result of a general election for the Federal Government on 21 August, 1943 the Australian Labor Party was returned to government with a majority in the Senate, the first time Labor had enjoyed such an advantage since 1916.

During this election campaign, the government promised to reduce the size of the armed forces. Even in the previous year, it had become apparent that Australia could not support an Army of 12 divisions, and an Air Force of 73 squadrons. So when the War Cabinet met on 1 October, 1943 it decided to drop the 73-squadron plan, and to release 20,000 men from the Services and 10,000 personnel from munitions and aircraft industries.

On completion of the period of leave, further personnel from the 7th Battalion were released to return to the land, or to essential industries. Coupled with this action and the announcement of reduc-

tions to occur in the services, a very strong rumour spread through the battalion that the unit was to be disbanded. However, the rumour was proved false when Lt Col G.M. Norris, a former member of 2/6 Inf Bn was appointed as CO.

Before this chapter closes on the Northern Territory, a couple of incidents from members' own personal recollections are produced.

From Lt L.W. Paech: During one of the many platoon exercises that we carried out in the NT, many miles from nowhere, my platoon was moving through the bush, when to our immediate front we heard strange noises. Not knowing what to expect, I directed one section to the right and one to the left in a circling action, whilst I, with the remaining section proceeded straight ahead.

It wasn't long before we came upon a bunch of men wearing what appeared to be Japanese uniforms. We were about to set upon these strange looking people, when hurriedly from out of the bush bounded an Australian sergeant, to quickly explain that the group was not what they appeared to be, but members of an island raiding party, training in preparation for a mission to the islands to the north of Australia."

From Jack Stevens of 14 Pl, C Coy: "One of the things that is still present in my mind from the days spent in the Northern Territory, is when the Japanese were sending over their night bombers. As we were camped very close to the end of one of our airstrips, we would be woken up with a jolt by the sounds of gun fire. It seemed that when our fighters gained altitude, they would fire a burst of their guns to make sure they were working.

When we got used to this racket, we would stand outside the tent and watch the proceedings. Of course we could only hear the planes, but had a good idea where the action was by following the tracer bullets through the air. Quite a show."