



Royal United Services Institute of Victoria Inc.

for Defence Studies

A Constituent Body of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia

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Dates for your Diary

26th September – Speaker Luncheon and AGM

16th October – Council Meeting

31st October – Speaker Luncheon

15th November – Annual Dinner

28th November – Speaker Luncheon

12th December – Christmas Drinks

***** All functions and activities are subject to the present security restrictions.*****

Speaker Luncheons

**** Thursday 26th September, 2002****

Major General Michael Jeffrey AC CVO MC

The topic for the Luncheon address will be :-

The Papua New Guinea Defence Force - Problems and Solutions

Ever since its formation, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force has been in a periodic state of turmoil as it has struggled to establish a clear role for itself within an environment of shortage of funds and, at times, poor political leadership – a cause of major concern to Australia.

General Jeffrey, a distinguished former Governor of Western Australia and a soldier of note, recently completed a report on the situation. It will be our privilege to hear this most interesting and timely presentation.

The Annual General Meeting will be held immediately prior to General Jeffrey's talk, at 12-25 pm prompt, after a sandwich lunch commencing at 12 noon.

**** Thursday 31st October, 2002 ******Brigadier Mark Patch****Will speak on:****The Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter****The Army will acquire 22 Eurocopter (Aussie) Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopters.****The Tiger will transform Army's ability to conduct tactical reconnaissance by day or night as well as escorting and protecting Black Hawk helicopters carrying troops and supplies.****PLEASE NOTE: the new 'actual' start time for the Speaker Luncheon is 12pm for lunch, followed by the Speaker at 12.30pm. Cost - \$8-00.*****New Members*** - At the next Council Meeting the following prospective members will be considered:

LTCOL Douglas Bryan	Heidelberg
Mr T Mason	Ascot Vale
Mr Bruce Turner	Elsternwick

Vale

We record with regret the deaths of the following members :

Mr M. McAllister	Mr R. Eldredge	Mr R.G. Oliphant
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From the Secretary - Martin Holme

I continue to enjoy my new role and it is a great pleasure to meet and get to know an increasing number of members.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Annual General Meeting will take place at 12-25pm, on Thursday, 26th September, immediately prior to Major General Jeffrey's talk. You will find the Agenda, President's Report and the Financial Statements in this mail-out.Also enclosed is a flyer for the Annual Dinner on Friday 15th November. I urge your prompt response.**Library News**

The new Library Committee, chaired by MAJGEN Mike O'Brien, has begun the task of reorganising our Library and bringing it and its organisation up to the standard it deserves.

In an effort to accelerate this process we have appointed a part-time Librarian with considerable experience in this field. Bruce Turner has already started and will be working in the Office/Library on most Mondays. It is intended that future newsletters will contain a regular update on Library news and activities.

We will be seeking support from members who are willing to assist in this important and worthwhile task, especially on Mondays. Mike and Bruce will be developing an aide-memoir for those who would like to participate in this rewarding and important challenge. More about this activity in the near future.

President's Message - September 2002

As a President's Report for the Annual General Meeting accompanies this newsletter, I have decided to try and use the President's Message to encapsulate the case pro and con of a US pre-emptive strike against Iraq.

Background

Saddam Hussein a particularly nasty Dictator, a tyrant who aspires to dominate the Middle East and is developing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). That is Nuclear, Chemical and Bacteriological Weapons. Iraq has expelled UN weapons inspectors and has acted in contravention of UN resolutions.

A number of 'Hawks' in the US administration believe that Baghdad should have been seized and Saddam deposed in the final days of the Gulf War, and that the US has 'unfinished business' in Iraq. It may not be unrelated that President George W. Bush (GWB) is an 'oil man' and Iraq controls about 10 per cent of the world's oil reserves.

The Case For a Pre-Emptive US Strike

'Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons soon. The risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of action.' US Vice-President Dick Cheney.

The historian Sir John Keegan has opined on what Churchill would do if in GWB's shoes.

'When it is not a question of if- Saddam acquires nuclear weapons, the moment when he could be crushed without risk to his opponents, or of provoking a wider war, or of truly destabilising the Middle East, will be gone. At the moment Saddam could be toppled quickly, cheaply and without difficulty. The moment will not last. Churchill would see the opportunity and if in power would grasp it.'

The Case Against a Pre-Emptive US Strike

GWB has been behaving like a cowboy. A preemptive strike is against international law and violates the UN Charter. Should the US act in this way, the whole structure of international law and practice will be brought into question. If the US behaves like a tyrant, more will join the cause of Osama Bin Laden.

Saddam maybe an evil dictator, but he is also an Arab and Islamic leader. Unjustified action against Iraq by the US, could unite the Arab and possibly Islamic world against the US and its proxy Israel and start a large-scale Middle-East war, disrupting the West's access to Saudi oil.

Aside from the deaths of US military and innocent Iraqi citizens that will be caused by a pre-emptive US attack, the US does not have a have a credible plan to reconstruct Iraq and contrive a stable democratic regime.

If we accept Saddam's intent with respect to WMD, is US evidence of Iraq's imminent acquisition of nuclear weapons to be believed? The Israeli's, who are a prime target and who have a formidable intelligence agency, do not appear to be particularly concerned. If the acquisition of WMD is a long way off then Saddam's regime may 'all before the WMD are obtained and operational.

Conclusion

Whatever his original intentions GWB's contemplation of a US pre-emptive strike is putting extreme pressure on Saddam to re-admit weapons inspectors, and upon principal UN Countries to stiffen their resolve against Saddam and act in a way acceptable to the US.

The UN is being pressured to act. Without action, the conventions of international law are comfortable but ultimately worthless. Saddam has defied the UN; the UN must respond with decisive action.



Mike Rawlinson

The following article was prepared by Lt. Col. (Rtd) John Moore RFD ED MA(Macq), a member of RUSI Queensland, who sought assistance from material held in our Library.

It is reprinted with his kind permission.

SIXTY YEARS SINCE KOKODA

The last week of July sees the sixtieth anniversary of the commencement of the Kokoda Campaign – a campaign fought to deflect a Japanese threat to Australia and its supply line from the United States. It was a campaign initially fought by inexperienced, under-trained and under-equipped Militia troops upon whom fell the onerous responsibility of delaying the Japanese drive for Port Moresby until battle hardened troops of the AIF could arrive from Australia. The month for which they held was probably the most dangerous month in Australia's history.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 heralded a ten weeks' sweep southwards in which the Japanese captured Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore and most of Indonesia. If New Guinea could be similarly captured, its airfields at Kokoda and Port Moresby would extend the Japanese bomber line to Northern Australia and its supply line from America.

To meet this threat, the 39th and 53rd Battalions were sent to Port Moresby on 3 January 1942. The 39th, which would take the brunt of the Japanese attack at Kokoda to Isurava in the Owen Stanley mountains in Papua, was a Victorian battalion of the Militia – that part of the army which could be sent to Australia's dependencies only, whereas the other part, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) could be sent anywhere in the world. Consequently, the standing of the Militia was considerably less than the AIF, and its troops were derisively referred to as 'chockos'. At Port Moresby, both battalions were employed on construction tasks instead of being trained in jungle warfare with the result that the first time soldiers of the 39th would fire a Bren machine gun would be in the front line against a Japanese attack seven months later.

On 15 March, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters discussed whether or not to invade Australia, but though the navy was in favour, the army was not, and so the alternative decision was made to invade Port Moresby from the sea, but when the invasion fleet was defeated at the Battle of the Coral Sea on 5-8 May, and a further naval defeat occurred a month later at the Battle of Midway, it was decided to take Moresby by landing at Buna and Gona and advancing overland via Kokoda and the infamous

Kokoda Trail. This Trail, primitive, narrow, not always clearly delineated, leech-ridden, with interminable peaks plunging to valleys below, and mostly in heavy jungle, passes through some of the most tortuous and exhausting country on earth – a re-supply nightmare! As the Japanese had already indicated their interest in taking Papua by their occupation of Lae and Salamaua in March, it was decided to send the 39th Battalion along the Trail to defend Kokoda's airfield. The first company to leave Moresby was Captain Templeton's B Company. Under-trained, ill-equipped and inexperienced, it was a very young Company: the average age of one of its Sections was 18 years; consequently some of its members must have been as young as 16. Templeton, a World War 1 veteran, 41 years old though probably older, affectionately known as 'Uncle Sam', a born leader who led from the front, set out with his young soldiers on 8 July, arriving at Kokoda on the 15th. Six days later, the Japanese landed at Buna and Gona and began advancing inland to capture the Kokoda airfield. Lieutenant Colonel Owen, the 39th's Commanding Officer, told Templeton to meet them at Gorari, a half day's march east of Kokoda. There, on the 25th, Templeton set an ambush with Lieutenants Seekamp's and Mortimer's platoons which, though fifteen Japanese were accounted for, had to withdraw to Oivi, two hours from Kokoda. The situation was critical. The Australians were outnumbered by a battle hardened and determined enemy. Templeton's men were exhausted having been on the move continuously for three days. Six were missing and there were no men between Oivi and Captain Dean's Company, four days march away at Kagi down the Track. Owen asked Moresby for A and D Companies to be flown in urgently but as only two planes were serviceable, only one platoon arrived instead of six. At 3 pm on the 26th July, a violent enemy attack forced the Australians into a fifty yard defensive perimeter in which, at 5 pm, Templeton moved to warn Corporal Morrison's section, but was killed. At dusk, the Japanese moved in to kill the encircled Australians. The Japanese had twenty machine guns – the Australians had many fewer. Even so, they beat off the attack with grenades. But exhaustion was now taking its toll on the militiamen and they were falling asleep over their weapons even as the enemy pressed them.

As Colonel Owen at Kokoda had received no information from Oivi, he decided at 11am on the

27th to withdraw his force from Kokoda to Deniki, a few miles down the Track. B Company, however, escaped from Oivi and reached Kokoda at 9 am next day only to find it empty of both Japanese and Australians. Owen realised his mistake and gathered 80 men of the 39th and returned to Kokoda, arriving at 11 am. Here he found the elderly and deaf Doctor Vernon who had been RMO to the 11 Light Horse in WW1, and as the 39th's RMO had not yet arrived, Owen incorporated his services. Little did he know how soon these would be needed, for the 28th and 29th July were to be days which Doctor Vernon wrote later would never be erased from his memory.

By noon on Tuesday 28th, Owen had deployed his meagre force around the Kokoda plateau which, forward of its northern end, has an escarpment which drops down about seventy feet to the airfield valley below. Behind this is a small open space of about 100 yards which backs on to a long rubber plantation through which passes the track south to Deniki. At 2.30 am on the 29th, the enemy launched a fierce attack up the escarpment towards Lieutenant Seekamp's platoon. Close fighting ensued in which the Australians beat them back. Colonel Owen went forward to help Seekamp's men, but was shot through the skull above the right eye. Vernon was sent for. Because of his deafness, he had been sleeping in the Regimental Aid Post (RAP). Major Watson now assumed command, and both he and Vernon carried the unconscious and dying Owen to the RAP.

At that moment, the Japanese rushed on to the plateau, screaming and yelling, so that Japanese and Australians were intermingled in hand to hand fighting on a night-shrouded, mist covered, terrifying ground. Hopelessly outnumbered, raked by fire from both flanks, the little Australian force, now of less than eighty, withdrew to Deniki. In surroundings new and strange to them as well as unkind, this little band of isolated young militiamen had, for a week now, disrupted Japanese plans for a quick drive for Port Moresby. And they had done it on their own, for help was still days away. They had lost their CO, a Company Commander, 2 killed, 7 or 8 wounded with a few missing, and they had faced the best jungle fighters in the world.

At Deniki, at which Major Cameron arrived to take command, they had a day's rest only to be cheered at midday on 30 July to see the arrival of Captain Dean's C Company followed two days later by Captain Symington's A Company. With the arrival on 8 August of Captain Bidstrup's D Company, the 39th Battalion was at last concentrated though E Company was being held at Isurava down the Track.

Now rested and with spirits undiminished, the 39th decided to recapture Kokoda which its A Company entered on 8th August accompanied by its much-respected Padre, Father Earl, who took cigarettes

from dead Japanese for wounded Australians. For two days, 200 enemy tried fanatically to evict them in this second battle at Kokoda, but in spite of darkness, rain, cold and hand to hand fighting in which two Australians caught by the enemy had their throats cut, it was only dwindling ammunition that forced A Company to depart during the night of Tuesday, 10 August for Isurava. The Company had done well for every day's delay to the Japanese caused increasing supply problems. The tide was turning. Japanese Lieutenant Hirano wrote in his diary, "*Everyday I am losing my men. I could not repress tears of bitterness. I struggle against cold and hunger.*" Lieutenant Onogawa confirmed the morbid view: "*Although the Australians are our enemy, their bravery must be admired.*"

Shortly, the newly proven battalion, now commanded by Lt. Col. Ralph Honner, was joined by elements of another militia unit – the 53rd Battalion, and the situation was at last relieved with the arrival of the AIF's 2/14 and 2/16 battle-hardened battalions at Isurava on 26 August. But even these seasoned units soon found themselves being outflanked and hard-pressed by an enemy desperate to reach Port Moresby so as to replenish their almost non-existent supplies.

On more than one occasion over the last days of August, the 39th came to the aid of their AIF brothers until on 5 September, it fought its last action on the Trail in covering the AIF withdrawal from Kagi. The following day, it left for Port Moresby but would soon fight alongside the AIF again at Buna which it entered on 2 January 1943.

For apparently some unknown reason, the 39th was disbanded on 23 July, but it left a legacy of deep respect. Australia possibly owes no greater debt to any of its fighting units than it does to the 39th Militia Battalion, for no other unit has had to stand for so long, alone and isolated, to delay so serious a threat to the security of Australia than did the 39th in its month-long, valiant stand on the Kokoda Trail.

This was unreservedly recognised by the troops of the 2/14 and 2/16 AIF Battalions who, in taking over from them, admiringly described the remnants of the 39th which passed them as they left for Port Moresby as "*those ragged bloody heroes*".

Colonel Honner made the following moving tribute to the battalion of which he was so proud: Although instances of heroism and fortitude in battle are more memorable and inspiring, I would mention one less dramatic episode as typifying the spirit that still permeated the battle as its remnants marched out of its final campaign into history.

When the last Japanese beachhead at Sanananda fell in January 1943, the 39th mustered only seven officers and 25 other ranks. The RMO considered some of these unfit for the next day's

march to Dobodura Airfield. Higher authority refused a vehicle for them, providing transport only for stragglers who should fall out on the march. But in the 39th, marchers didn't fall out, so they marched all the way – for some a long torture on the verge of unconsciousness that only pride and the solicitous support of their mates made endurable. Pale, silent and sweating under the fierce sun, they toiled in the

wake of truck loads of cheering, fresh-looking 'stragglers'; and at last they straightened up to march at attention across the airfield. When an amazed bystander exclaimed 'What mob's this?', he was ignored except by my second-in-command at the end of the line who barked: 'This is not a mob; This is the 39th!'

Synopsis of the Luncheon Address by LTCOL T.R. Beaton (Retd) – July 2002

First Curator of "Hell-fire Pass"

The Burma Railway : Through the eyes of a post war engineer

The epic movie "Bridge on the River Kwai", although an excellent revelation into the suffering and sacrifice endured by POWs in WW2, is yet another Hollywood fabrication based loosely on an actual military event. David Lean of "Lawrence of Arabia" fame, produced the movie from a fictitious novel written by Frenchman Pierre Boulle in 1952. The novel's setting for Pierre's farcical story is on a fictitious railway being built through northern Malaya. David Lean changed the setting for emphasis to reflect factual events when the Japanese Army forced POWs and Asian slave labour to build railways in Siam/Burma, Malaya and Sumatra. Ironically, there was never a railway bridge across the River Kwai. Instead Japanese engineers using POW labourers built two bridges, a flat timber trestle and a steel and concrete bridge, across the River Mae Khlong at a place called Tamarkar near Kanburi in Siam (Thailand). Although a majority of the Burma "death" railway runs alongside the River **Kwae Noi** in Thailand, it never crosses it. Following the popularity of the film however, the Thais had a major tourism problem in the 1960s as they never had a diamond shaped wooden bridge across the Kwai River. Instead they still had in existence a Dutch steel bridge, stolen from the Batavia Railway in Sumatra and re-erected on concrete pylons by POWs, across the River Mae Khlong one kilometre upstream from its junction with the River Kwae Noi. To overcome this anomaly, the Thais simply re-named the section of river running under the bridge – the "River **Kwae Yai**", thereby permitting them to now call the stolen Dutch steel bridge "the Bridge over the River Kwai" to conform to a Hollywood movie.

In reality the Japanese railway engineers forced the POWs to assist with the construction of 688 railway

bridges (680 timber and 8 steel/concrete) over the 415 km of railway built through the most mountainous and disease ridden terrain in SE Asia. They achieved the feat in only 17 months at a cost of over 110,000 lives. The majority being forced Asian workers (90,000 +) who lacked the leadership, strength and medical skills of such wonderful men as LTCOL Sir Albert Coates (Burma), LTCOL Sir Weary Dunlop, MAJs Fagan, Moon Collette, Hunt, (all in Siam) and all the other incredible doctors who stood between the Japanese and Korean guards and the POWs. Despite their most valiant efforts however, an Allied War Graves Team, mainly comprising Australian ex-POWs, searched the entire 415 km of railway from Thanbyuzayat to Nong Pladuk over some three weeks (25 Sep – 10 Oct 45) and found 144 cemeteries containing 10,549 Allied graves. But as a military engineer involved with the railway after the war, it became obvious that it was not a total waste of life and effort as previously claimed by some ex-POWs. Not only did the Japanese use the railway for over 17 months to move an estimated 220,000 tons of stores and ammunition in Burma, but today 130 km of the railway is still in daily use and not just for tourist purposes. Even members of the Royal Thai family who visited the Australian built Museum at Hellfire Pass acknowledge that the socio-economic development of the western border has resulted directly from the post-war usage of the railway. Sadly the remainder of the 300 km of railway in Siam was lifted by the Thais following the British pull-out of Burma in 1948 and the subsequent fear the Burmese may use it to invade Siam to recover lost wealth stolen by the Japanese, who were allied to Siam.