

In this edition—Small Units Stories—N.Z. VC Winners**The North Australia Observer Unit**


With the threat of an invasion of mainland Australia in **1942**, a secret unit of mounted troops was formed to keep surveillance on our northern coastline. The new

unit, named **“The 2/1 North Australia Observer Unit”**, comprising 500 men and their aboriginal guides, was charged with the near impossible task of watching our coastline from Wyndham in the west to Cape York. Unit members were widely dispersed across the north and operated in very small groups of around section strength, manning fixed observation posts, or conducting roving mounted patrols. In the event of an invasion (which never occurred), these patrols with their portable radios were expected to shadow the enemy advance into northern Australia and attack only where guerilla tactics provided an advantage.

Richard and Helen Walker, In their book, “Curtin’s Cowboys”, gave the impression that the NAOU was just an undisciplined bunch of bushrangers who rode over the north led by an “academic”, their CO, Maj. Bill Stanner. In actual fact, the unit was highly disciplined as it needed to be to keep a 24 hour a day watch over our coastline and survive in the remote outback. If an invasion had occurred the NAOU needed to tag along behind the Japanese at a distance, reporting on it. The NAOU would hang in there until the campaign ended or they were all killed or captured. There would be little chance of casualty evacuation or normal re-supply, therefore, the men needed to use their bushcraft skills and live off the land. It was if the Light Horsemen were back in the saddle with the purchase of over

1,000 “walers” for use by the mounted patrols. These new mounted horsemen were nicknamed “knackeroos”, a combination of jackaroo and knackery.

A unit HQ was established in Katherine with Company HQs being located at Roper Bar W.A. (A Company), Ivanhoe, W.A. (B Company) and Gregory Downs, Qld., (C Company). Port Moresby had been expected to fall by September-October 1942 so the unit’s preparations were hurried.

Even though horses were used by the men on roving patrols, trucks were still needed to carry stores from the Katherine HQ to the outlying Company positions. The unit had a total of 38 3 ton “Blitz” wagons, 6 motorcycles and 15 bicycles. Due to the dust and rough roads it was usual for around 40% of the vehicles to be in the workshops at any given time. The drivers faced up to 1,600 km long round trips to the Company positions with no repair facilities whatever for a breakdown.

The unit also possessed a considerable number of water transport vessels, including ketches, luggers, schooners and motor launches. Many of these vessels were wrecked during their service in the north. They were sunk in storms, sunk in flooded rivers or broke down and had to be withdrawn. The logistical problems of supplying rations, ammunition and all others supplies to the outlying Companies and watching posts in the rugged far north was unbelievably immense.

An incident occurred one night at the Roper River outposts when the Nackeroos fired burst with a bren gun at S/Ldr Thomson’s boat, the *Aroetta* which had failed to respond to recognitions signals. One of the Aboriginal crew was injured when a wood splinter from a bren gun bullet pierced his shoulder. S/Ldr Thomson commanded a force of Aboriginal warriors, (the NTSRU) and was often at loggerheads with the men of the 2/1 NAOU.

A blot on the character of the NAOU occurred when a group of men from Roper River’s A Company, stole a “Blitz” wagon, rations, fuel and a fuel voucher book and went AWOL (sounded a bit like desertion). They drove down to Brisbane and handed themselves over to the Military Police and then faced a Court Martial. By late 1943 it was clear that the threat of an invasion had diminished to the extent that officers and men were being re-assigned to units in New Guinea and elsewhere. The unit was finally disbanded on 27 March 1945.



THE NACKEROO UNIFORM AND WEBBING WORN BY
L-R: JACK WILLIAMS, CLIFF ROWE, BOB EMMETT, ALF TOWNSEND, TIP CARTY

THE IMPERIAL CAMEL CORPS

The Brigade was formed in **January 1916** and attached to the Desert Mounted Corps to deal with a revolt of pro-Turkish tribesmen in Egypt's Western desert. The first four companies were recruited from Australian infantry battalions recuperating after Gallipoli. Four battalions were eventually formed and included men from Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. There were four regiments: the 1st and 3rd were Australian, the 2nd was British and the 4th was a mix of New Zealanders and Australians. At full strength, each regiment had around 770 men and about 920 camels. Horses were also used but needed water every day, whereas, a camel could carry around 150 kilograms and go without water for up to five days. The camels, which were initially transported from India and Egypt could travel from 5 to 9.5 kilometers per hour. From **1917 to 1918** the Camel Corps advanced through Palestine as part of the British Expeditionary Force, and took part in the attack on Beersheba and the battles of Magdhaba, Romani, Gaza and Rafa. The men of The Camel Corps were rough and rather undesirable in character, but in battle they proved to be inventive and effective. Aboriginal men, rejected by the Light Horse Regiments, were able to fight with the Camel Corps. The Brigade was supported by a mountain artillery battery, a machine gun squadron, Royal Engineers, a field ambulance (camels), and an administrative train, (camels, camels and more camels). When the fighting advanced from the Sinai into Palestine, the change in terrain led to the disbandment of the ICC. The Australian troops then formed the 14th and 15th Australian Light Horse Regiments.

A poem by Major Oliver Hogue, Imperial Camel Corps

You're an ugly smellful creature, You're a blot upon the plain,
I have seen Mohamed beat you, And it gave me little pain.
You're spiteful and you're lazy, You'd send a white man crazy,
but I reckon you're a daisy When Turks come out again.
You're head is most unsightly, and so is your humpy back,
I hear you roaring nightly, When you're loading for the track,
You're bow-legged and you're bandy, but in this desert sandy,
It's as well to have you handy. You're a mighty useful hack.
You shake me something cruel When you try to do a trot,
I've got to take my gruel, But you make it very hot, I've
somehow got a notion, That your humpty-dumpty motion,
Is worse than on the ocean. It's a nasty way you've got.
It's a sun-scorched land, the East is. So we need you when we trek,
My old pad a better beast is, But he'd soon become a wreck.
You thirst a week unblinking, And when I see you drinking,
You always had me thinking, Lord, I wish I had your neck.

AWM Photo: PO3631.007

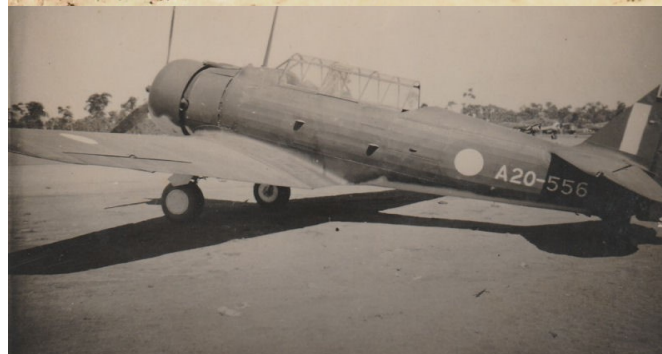


The above photo is a great shot of the Australians of the Imperial Camel Corps lined up in the desert.

RAAF Repair and Salvage Units

Repair and Salvage Units (RSUs) were formed early in 1942 to help overcome the acute shortage of aircraft and a high incident of crashes. This was a consequence of inadequate airfields, inexperienced pilots, plus the confusion and haste associated with the need to prepare for and meet a rapidly advancing enemy. Several RSUs were formed, however, I can't determine exactly how many but the number could be as high as 26-27. The units which operated in Queensland were numbers 1, 3, 5, 10, 12, 14 and 22. RSUs 10 and 12 were sent to New Guinea and operated in several areas including Milne Bay, and Morotai. Many other units operated all over other parts of Australia.

The essential work of these units was to retrieve and repair crashed and damaged aircraft to operational status. If this was not possible they were tasked to strip the crashed aircraft for spare parts to be used on other aircraft. These two photographs show Wirraway A20-556 before and after repairs were made.



Reflecting on one hundred years,
 since ANZACS first became;
 There's much that is now different,
 but much that stays the same.
 There's still a price for liberty,
 so we can choose our path.
 There are those who go to war and
 pay on our behalf.
 There still are those who sacrifice
 and leave loved-ones behind.
 So we can have the right to vote and
 speak what's on our mind.
 There still are those who face a foe and
 fight in foreign lands.
 In hopes that we'll be terror free and
 safe from evil hands.
 There still are those who take a wound and
 live with daily pain.
 Their battle is a lifelong thing;
 their price for freedom's gain.
 There still are those who give their lives
 and break their happy home.
 There still are grieving boys and girls—
 and partners all alone.
 So keep in mind our wounded vets
 and families of the lost.
 They're still the ones who bear the bulk
 of freedom's daily cost.
 Remember freedom has a price—
 we're in our soldier's debt.
 Remember to remember—
 lest we all forget.

LEST WE FORGET by Ian Coate

Thank you to our soldiers
 for standing at the front.
 There is a cost to freedom,
 which you must bear the brunt.
 We don't always appreciate
 the duties that you've done.
 But do your job in spite of us;
 ignore our ignorance.
 Defend us in our time of need
 with constant vigilance.
 For without you there,
 to bar the pass,
 Enemies will get through.

ANZACS THEN, ANZACS STILL I. Coate

Our ANACS are an honoured group—
 They have two nation's pride.
 Today we have so much because;
 they fought, they bled, they died.
 The ANZAC soul can still be found,
 in those who choose to serve.
 Courage, humour and mateship,
 are values they preserve.
 Our diggers all deserve respect;
 there's few that have their skill.
 They proved that they were ANZACS then,
 They prove they're ANZACS still.

THE LIGHT HORSEMAN by Ian Coate

Australia has a legend that through her sons lives on.
 Born from amidst the colonies; a horseman thereupon.
 He derives from hardy stockmen; a yeoman cavalier.
 He's been tested under fire; a man with little fear.
 To most countries he has traveled; through many wars he's been.
 He's by far the strangest soldier the world has ever seen.
 He's a rider; he's a fighter; a rogue; a gentleman.
 He's the devil with mobility; a fearless guardian.
 With loyalty beyond reproach that one should never spurn.
 This man's respect is not a thing that you may easily earn.
 He's always unpredictable and lives a life of whim.
 He doesn't take it seriously; it's all a game to him.
 He's a reckless man, a braggard, but in truth he's earned his due.
 There is little that he says that he can't ever do.
 While time has changed the horseman's job to a different art.
 And years have passed since last they charged;
 he's still the same at heart.
 Even though his steed has altered,
 he knows when things get grim.
 The spirit of the Light Horseman will always ride with him.

OUR DUTY IS DONE by Ian Coate

For freedom's sake we've been to war, on duty's principal.
 From present day back to the Boer, we've paid the price in full.
 We've fought in countries far and near; on land, on sea and sky.
 For longer than a hundred years, we've waved loved ones goodbye.
 We've paid the price; our duties done. It's time we had some leave.
 Finally we can rest in peace, now freedom is achieved.
 What a reunion it will be— so many mates to meet.
 The finest Digger's jubilee—united and complete.
 So remember all our service, honour the price we paid.
 Maintain those freedoms that we've won, is how we'll be repaid.

LESSONS NEVER TO BE IGNORED by George Mansford

On this very special day when flags fly and bugles cry,
 Stirred are reflections of desperate bloody conflicts gone by,
 Faint echoes of proud, defiant songs which helped us bind,
 Images of final farewells,
 where forced smiles masked troubled minds.
 Sweet memories of those who stepped forward to answer the call,
 Once more are our vows never to forget such brave spirits
 who gave all,
 Today lessons of war inked in books are rarely read,
 Etched walls of stone salute our dead.
 New names added when Mars creates another cruel season,
 Familiar sobs from a new grieving generation seeking reason,
 Official speeches are often prepared by unknown scribes
 at public cost,

Forgotten are warnings that precious freedom is slowly being lost.
 When will we learn that the price of peace is to be prepared for war?
 Not huffing and puffing or meek excuses and shrugging what for?
 In our new found space age, distance and time from threat is naught,
 We must shed blinkers;
 and quicken needs for readiness to be sought.
 If we remain meek, and shun threats to our way of life;
 far away or within.
 Then brace for terrible turmoil which apathy
 and political neglect will bring.

Corporal Cyril Royston Guyton Bassett, NZ Divisional Signals, 1NZE



Date of action: 7 August 1915 (Gallipoli, Turkey)

Date of award: 15 October 1915

Cyril Bassett was the first New Zealand serviceman to win a VC during the First World War. He did so for distinguished conduct during the August 1915 offensive at Gallipoli. During the ferocious battle for Chunuk Bair, he and a handful of companions laid and repaired a telephone wire to the front line in full daylight and under heavy fire. Bassett's decoration was the only VC awarded to a 1NZE soldier during the Gallipoli campaign. He was subsequently brought to notice for further excellent and most gallant work connected with the repair of telephone lines by day and night under heavy fire. Bassett was later promoted to Lieutenant and after the war remained as a reserve Officer. During WWII Bassett worked in New Zealand, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel with command of the Northern Military District Signals. The Bassett VC Memorial trophy is awarded annually to the Royal New Zealand Signal Corps' most outstanding Corporal.

Sergeant Donald Brown, 2nd Battalion, Otago Infantry Regiment, 1NZE



Date of action: 15 September 1916

(near Flers, France)

Date of award: 14 June 1917

Donald Forrester Brown was the 1NZE's first VC recipient on the Western Front. On the opening day of New Zealand's Somme campaign, **15 September 1916**, Brown charged and captured key enemy machine gun positions, helping New Zealand forces to push through German lines.

His full citation reads: For most conspicuous bravery and determination in attack when the company to which he belonged suffered very heavy casualties in officers and men from machine gun fire. At great personal risk this N.C.O. advanced with a comrade and succeeded in reaching a point within thirty yards of the enemy guns. Four of the gun crew were killed and the gun captured. The advance of the company was continued till it was again held up by machine gun fire. Again Sgt. Brown and his comrade, with great gallantry, rushed the gun and killed the crew. After this second position had been won, the company came under very heavy shell fire, and the utter contempt for danger and coolness under fire of this N.C.O. did much to *keep up the spirit of his men. On a subsequent occasion in attack, Sgt. Brown showed most conspicuous gallantry. He attacked single-handedly a machine gun which was holding up the attack, killed the gun crew and captured the gun. Later, whilst sniping the retreating enemy, this very gallant soldier was killed.*

Lance-Corporal Samuel Frickleton, 3rd Battalion, 3rd NZ (Rifle) Brigade, 1NZE

Date of action: 7 June 1917

(Messines, Belgium)

Date of award: 2 August 1917.



Samuel Frickleton continued:

Scottish-born miner Samuel Frickleton earned his VC during the attack on Messines in Belgium on **7 June 1917**. With his battalion pinned down on the outskirts of the village by heavy machine-gun fire, a wounded Frickleton rushed forward and single-handedly destroyed two machine-gun posts with hand grenades. He then led his men through the village, clearing out Germans lodged in the ruins and other prepared positions.

His full citation reads: For most conspicuous bravery and determination when, with attacking troops, which came under heavy fire and were checked. Although slightly wounded Cpl. Frickleton dashed forward at the head of his section, pushed into our barrage and personally destroyed with bombs an enemy machine gun and crew which was causing heavy casualties. He then attacked a second gun, killing the whole of the crew of twelve. By the destruction of these two guns, he undoubtedly saved his own and other units from very severe casualties, and his magnificent courage and gallantry ensured the capture of the objective. During the consolidation of the position he received a second severe wound. He set, throughout, a great example of heroism.

Private Henry Nicholas, 1st Battalion, Canterbury Infantry Regiment, 1NZE

Date of action: 3 December 1917

(Polderhoek, Belgium)

Date of award: 11 January 1918



Henry Nicholas earned his VC during the New Zealand attack on Polderhoek Chateau on **3 December 1917**. A carpenter from Christchurch, Nicholas had already been awarded a Military Medal (MM) for bravery. During the advance, he distinguished himself by single-handedly attacking a German strong-point. Using hand grenades and a bayonet, Nicholas overcame the enemy garrison, killing 12 Germans and capturing another four.

His full citation reads: For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack. Pte. Nicholas, who was one of a Lewis gun section, had orders to form a defensive bank to the right of the advance which was subsequently checked by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from an enemy strong point. Whereupon, followed by the remainder of his section at an interval of about twenty-five yards, Pte. Nicholas rushed forward alone, shot the officer in command of the strong point, and overcame the remainder of the garrison of sixteen by means of bombs and bayonet, capturing four wounded prisoners and a machine gun. He captured this strong point practically singlehanded, and thereby saved many casualties. Subsequently, when the advance had reached its limit, Pte. Nicholas collected ammunition under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. His exceptional valour and coolness throughout the operations afforded an inspiring example to all.

In mid-1918, while in England on leave, Nicholas was invested with his Victoria Cross by the King. After his return to the front in September 1918, the Canterbury Regiment was charged with holding the town of Beaudignies, a short distance from Le Quesnoy. On 23 October a German patrol blundered into Nicholas's post on a flank guarding a bridge over the River Ecaillon. During this skirmish, Nicholas was killed by heavy machine-gun fire from the high ground of Le Quesnoy. He was posthumously awarded the Military Medal for his bravery during this action.

Content for these articles has been sourced from the pages of NZ Victoria Cross winners on the New Zealand Government History website. More stories in the next "Bugle edition".



THE BUGLE NEWS PAGE



Australian Naval Cadets (ANC)

TS Koopa

The Australian Navy Cadets (ANC)

is a leading national youth development organization, with the character and values of the Royal Australian Navy, founded on a strong community partnership, fostering and supporting an ongoing interest in the Australian Navy.



TS Koopa is located at Kalamakuta Drive, Sandstone Point and provides 13-18 year old members of our community with the opportunity to experience adventure and fun as the cornerstones of Naval Cadet activities, while developing valuable qualities of self confidence, working in a team environment and developing a "Sense of Community."

Some of the activities undertaken in 2023 have included ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day Parades for the Bribie and Beachmere RSL Sub Branches. Participation in the PCYC Regional Games conducted at the Sandgate PCYC. Participation in the Emergency Services Expo held on Bribie Island and the Caboolture Heritage Centre Open day. A number of weekend, overnight Camps at TS Koopa were also conducted in conjunction with other Navy Cadet Training Units. Camp activities included sailing, power boating and kayaking in the passage.



The dedicated staff of TS Koopa would welcome enquiries from anyone interested in learning more about joining the Australian Navy Cadets at TS Koopa. We are also looking for parents or members of the community who may be interested in working with the team as a "Defence Approved Helper."

Contact details: Phone: 0428 720 109

LEUT. Garth Schmith, Commanding Officer.

email : garth.schmith@navycadets.gov.au



RSL Bribie Island Sub Branch Inc.

Scattered showers and the threat of more rain during the morning did not have much affect on the numbers at this year's Remembrance Day Service. Innovations this year were military band music and wartime melodies played before the Service commenced and the placing of the "Ghost Soldiers" to form a guard of honour for the Catafalque Party.



The President and the Board of the Sub Branch take this opportunity to wish one and all a very "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." The office will be closed from Noon Friday, 15 December until 9am Monday 15 January 2024. There will be a general meeting and, bar-b-que on the 10th of December and the last function for 2023 will be the 3 hour meet & greet on the 15th from 4pm. Drive safely if you are going away and we look forward to seeing you at general meetings in 2024.

All 12 photos taken on Remembrance Day can be viewed in the photo galley on the Sub Branch website.

<https://www.bribierslsubbranch.org.au>

All past editions of "The Bribie Bugle" can also be found on the website.