



I was born on 16th May 1917 in 27 Vernon Street, Woolahra, NSW. My parents were William Frederick Thirgood, and Ethel Thirgood and an older sister Jean 4 years older than me, an elder brother George 2 years older than me, my younger sister was born on Anzac day 1923 in Balmain, 6 years younger than me.

When I was 10 years old my parents took the family into town to watch a parade through the city of Sydney. It was the occasion of the opening of new federal parliament by the duke and duchess of York. As the troops marched by I saw a unit out in front were officers holding what I called knives, they were swords, I said when I grow up and I going to be one of those carry one of those knives. Well I did grow up and I did become an Officer, but by that time swords had been dispensed with.

I joined the militia in 1936 and spent 3 years with the Engineers where I learnt a lot about various functions Engineers do but I realised I could never be commissioned in that Unit as you had to be an architect or an engineer. So I transferred to the 45th Australian Infantry Battalion. The C Company I was in was lead by Captain Duffy. They had drills at Arncliffe every Thursday night and we had camps and so forth. By the time the war started I was the exalted rank of Lance Corporal.

On the Monday morning, war being declared the night before by Menzies, I got a telegram telling me to report for duty the day before! Well I eventually got to Arncliffe but then I didn't have any equipment, but some at home, went home to pack and went into camp at Happy Valley, NSW near Marounba. Happy Valley was where the unemployed lived when there was nowhere else to go during the depression. And that was it virtually till the end of the war. We were in and out of camp at various times and they finally got to camp full time.

After a fortnight at Happy Valley, we came out of camp and then we went into a month at Menangal Park. After Menangal Park I was sent for two weeks to an Officers training school further out somewhere. Then it was Christmas. My commission came through in March 1940. The unit went into camp for 3 months. We had a fortnight in camp, training NCOs and Officers. Then we took charge of a group of UT's which they we called. They were a group of 21 year olds who'd been called up to do 3 months training. We went through all the usual things which they had to learn, marching, rifle drill and all that sort of stuff. They finished up the camp and 3 of us went to see a Brigadier in charge of the 2nd 20th Brigade, to see if we could get into the AIF as an Officer. You couldn't just go and join you had to be selected. And the Brigadier said to us, he had the 3 colonels of the 2nd 18th, 19th and 20th battalions before him; He said "how come you weren't selected before?" We said "our CIO wouldn't let us; he didn't want to lose his officers". It was after that interview I got a job. The Brigade Officer rang up and offered me a job with the Brigade. Later I was posted to the 2/18 Batallion.

I joined the Brigade at Walgrove Camp and we were there a month or so and we were transferred to Ingleburn and after being there some time we went into Bathurst. After being at Bathurst from about November to the end of January, we were informed we were on final leave and we were going overseas. We all knew where we were going, it was a dead secret. They had different uniforms from the others. It was Malaya. Anyway, after our final leave we came back to camp and went by train to Piermont and got on a ferry which took us out on the Harbour to the Queen Mary and went right past the Balmain wharf where I used to catch the ferry to work.

Well we got on the Queen Mary and I thought this thing will never rock. Weren't we wrong? And off we sailed. Just before we sailed, little boats came over, waving, calling out "where's Johnny, where's Jack and all this sort of thing. And the boys were throwing notes over to their parents and others. Somebody yelled out "when do we sail?" Just at that second a voice came back "Thursday at 2 o'clock" Where are we going "Singapore". So much for secrets. We sailed out of Sydney Harbour escorted by a destroyer and we sailed south of Never saw land again until we got to West Australia. Couldn't go ashore there because we couldn't park anywhere, we were out in the middle of the Harbour.

And after waiting 2 or 3 days, we were joined by 2 other transports with troops on, and we sailed out into the Indian Ocean and we were escorted by an Australian vessel. Half way through we were joined by a British destroyer met us and we stood up and it was a marvelous sight, not even seen by a seagull. As we circled these other boats and the troops and nurses lining each side of the boats, cheering one another. A wonderful sight, they sailed on to the Middle East and we went to Singapore. And like the British navy when we got in close they slowed up because they were due to arrive at 6 o'clock. So we got to Singapore and we saw a biplane coming down to meet us. Someone said that's the Air Force!

So we went to barracks training and we met British officers and troops and Malayan troops. We saw the Bren gun for the first time and seeing as we hadn't seen them we all trained on them and so forth. After six months I came home with a batch of sick troops. I escorted them, and unwanted troops. Unloaded them from a Sibajack boat. Which had come back to Australia to get some more troops. And we were the only ones on the boat. Anyway, they unloaded us at Perth. And after a week or so waiting, we got on the Katoomba and other passengers and I sailed to Adelaide Melbourne and Sydney where we disembarked. I never got back to Malaya thank goodness.

Later on I was posted to Norfolk Island with a unit of 150 which was half Australian and half Norfolk islanders. Our job there to protect the cable station which was the only link between us and America. After 3 or 4 months they sent over 150 CCC, Civil Constructors Corps. They were men too old to serve or wouldn't serve with the called up troops. Their job was to build an airstrip on Norfolk. That's where they wanted to fly lease/lend planes out to Australia. It was the only place they could put them down which was safe. And having done that, they shipped us back to Australia. At the same time the Australian and New Zealand Governments gave the defense of the Pacific, Norfolk Island, and Tolagi and going East. That was their defense area and ours was everything north of it. So home we went. We thought we were pretty good. They left 1500 Kiwis there to protect the airstrip and the rest.

After another long wait, I finally got my posting back to my "family", to which I belong, that was the 15th Australian Infantry Battalion. They were at the time in New Guinea, had been in Milne Bay, and had mopped up there. The 2nd Twelfth were there, and they had cleaned the Japs up... they were the first to beat the Japs anywhere. That was before the trail over the mountain, Kokoda.

Anyway after a 3 day trip from Brisbane to Townsville, I got a flight out of Townsville to Milne Bay flying for the first time in my life. Just on dawn, saw the sun rising from under us. Got to Milne Bay and then had to wait to get forward to where my unit was. Finally after a week of mucking around I got on a boat and took us to Morobe. I got off the boat and asked where's the 15th Battalion? They said "round the corner", so I went in and met my new CIO., Lt. Colonel Amies. This was at breakfast time. I told him all the history and he said "right, let's have some breakfast. I'm posting you to Don Company. You'll like the CIO, he's a likeable Company Commander, Don Provin. He's not here, he's up front somewhere looking around, but you'll meet your two officers and your sergeant. You'll have 17 Platoon." So down I went and I met Merv Mackerill and Alan Struss they were both Lieuts. They said "when were you commissioned?". I told them and they weren't very happy because they were about 3 years junior to me. Which caused lots of trouble later on. Then I met my platoon and the job was to get to know them. My sergeant was a beauty, Gordon Oxborough. Really good, we were very,very good friends.

Of course with the men, I had to get to know all them and see that they knew how to use every weapon in the platoon. The platoon was 43 men when it's full numbers, which it seldom was with sickness. With me, an Officer, my Batman, and EY Rifleman, and 3 sections, 3 corporals, 3 Bren guns and 2 Owen guns per section. I had to make sure each one of those men knew how to use every weapon. Particularly with machine guns. You had to put the machine gun on automatic and fire 5 rounds and stop, practice that for a while and then you had to fire one round and stop. The idea of that was to not let the enemy know you had a machine gun, but think it was a rifle. They all had to learn how to throw hand grenades. I had a Batman to look after all my needs so I could have time to do the same for each one of my men.

So I had about 3 weeks teaching them that, to make sure they knew it. We got on a barge and they lobbed us at a place further up towards Tamboo Bay where we were going. And the next morning I met my Company Commander for the first time. I knew the Sergeant Major by sight and I said "who's the Company Commander round here?". I said "my god, him?" he was a dreadful looking bloke. His name was Scrub Provin. He had a funny neck and he used to gobble ?.....yes a scrub turkey up in Queensland. He answered to the Nickname of "Scrub".

Anyway we took off the next morning and walked to Tamboo Bay, full marching order. Full marching order was packs on your pack, containing 3 days rations, ground sheet, spare boots and trousers and spare everything you needed and gas cape and half man tent. Two of you could get them together to make a two man tent. Gas capes was one of the best things of the lot. Not for gas but for keeping the rain off. One of the best things we used during the war.

Anyway, when we got to the river, it was too deep to ford. C Company went round through the surf. Knowing how to float a rifle and your gear across the river - I showed them how to do this, having learnt this with Engineers. In your rifle butt there was a pull through which was about 2 yards long. Get your ground sheet, put your rifle and some sticks and things in it, put your boots around your neck tied with the laces, and anything else you wanted in there, tied it all up through the holes in the groundsheet. Then you put it out and she floated. So you'd get across the river, pushing it in front of you. Those who couldn't swim had to be helped across. Anyway we all got across the river and so I showed my men and the Company, something which they didn't know! Anyway we all got re-equipped and headed off and finally we got to Tamboo Bay just before dusk. It was about a 25 mile hike.

When we got there we were in camp amongst some 152nd American unit commanded by Colonel Elliot Roosevelt, they called themselves the junglers. A couple of days after being there, the CIO sent for me and said I want you to take your platoon out on this hill up here. The yanks had shot a nip up there. Find him and camp for the night. So out we went, full marching orders as usual. Found the place but not the dead Jap. So we camped for the night. That gave me the opportunity to really get to know my men. First thing I did was sit them down in a formation of a triangle, and I put a bren gun in each point of the triangle, aiming down the front of each section. And I said "now this is a wall of fire". With two Owen guns in the middle and the rest of them with their rifles. In the centre was myself, my batman, my sergeant and an EY rifleman. An EY rifle was a rifle that fired hand grenades. They were 7 second hand grenades, different to the ordinary hand grenades, which was 5 seconds, because they had to go up in the air and come down. You put a blank in the chamber and you put a cup on top of the rifle, and into that you inserted a 7 second grenade and took the pin out of it, it had a clip on it which you adjusted where you were going to fire it. Press the trigger and up went the hand grenade.

So there we camped for the night. It wasn't quite dusk. And here these men of mine were talking "Oh, wall of fire, never seen this before". So that was a getting to know you thing, gave me a bit of kudos. I had been pretty well trained by then, it was 6 years since I joined the Army so I knew a bit. At night we never moved about, stayed put and didn't react to Japs calling out "where are you Jack?" etc. If necessary we'd throw a hand grenade at them, but never used our automatic weapons, unless under attack.

We came back to camp and reported to the CIO. A couple of days later he sent us up Mt. Tamboo with a few others. Mt. Tamboo was about 4,000 feet high, it felt like it, and the steps were about 2ft 6" deep to get up, slipping and sliding. And the 42nd and 47th Battalion had joined with the 17th Brigade who had come down from Waw and joined up and chased the Japs out of there. Between them they took Mt. Tamboo. Just before we got there, not far from the top, there's a Sally bloke there with an urn going with hot coffee, it looked like mud. thin mud. He said "Righto boys, take what you want, but think of your mates." It tasted great. I'll never forget that. I've always loved the Sally's since then, because they were close to the fighting.

The original plan of action was for the 15th Battalion to go right round the left, passing the 42nd and 47th, and come round the other side of Salamoia on the hill there and that meant we'd have the Japanese trapped inside Salamoia. The 9th Division were to land the western side of Lai and the 7th at Nadzab, which they did. But the American 162nd Regiment who had the task of coming straight up the coast wouldn't move. They didn't like being under the command of Australian officers, and that was proved before. They just wouldn't move the buggers. So the General took our Battalion from under control of the Brigadier, which he didn't go much on but he had no say in it, and pushed up straight up the coast. And when we came down from Mt. Tamboo the CO Col. Amies met us and said "OK boys you're going into action tomorrow from Roosevelt Ridge, remember keep low, keep your heads down when you go in. They're crook shots, they all shoot high.

So we got up on the hill and joined Provin and the rest of the Company, and the plan was to send Dougie Matthews. Doug had a brother in C Company; they were both Sergeants from the Middle East and came to 15th Battalion before I got to them. They never put brothers in the same platoon; or in the same Comopan, but separated them. And Scrub said "righto, tomorrow, Doug's taking his Platoon, just before dawn, up this mountain and we will attack this crest, right on the top of this hill. And we were following marching. That happened, he went just before dawn. We had our breakfast and followed, dragging phone lines, shocking damn things, make a noise ... give your position away, but that's all we had for communications. Got message back on the phone, "got up to knoll which was about 50 - 70 yards around us in a circle, before the final objective which was another 300 ft above me further up the hill, along this ridge that ran through, right down to the bay which was occupied by the Japs. So he occupied it and then we still had to get up this hill, with all our equipment on our backs. Then we got a telephone message "been attacked at" Scrub, mad bastard he was, said "righto men, packs off and run". So we dumped our packs and everything, except for water bottles, and went up this stinking hill, mountain... whatever it was... never knew how high it was, pretty high.

We got up and pushed a few Japs off there and helped Doug. Settled ourselves down there with nothing but ammunition and water bottles. And the original plan also was ... we had a F.O.O (Forward Observation Officer) and 2 American signals to come up with us and 25 pounder American artillery to support us. And they were supposed to put a barrage on top of the hill before Dougie went in.. Well they weren't there. They were half an hour or so behind. We settled down and Provin said to Dougie "right up you go" and Dougie gave him a hard look and took his men up and then Provi said to me" you support him and go in behind in". Doug went up and started a blue up there and I came in behind him. I sent one section round to the left of this position, one from the right and straight through the third in the middle. It was a track via the scrub. This knoll was scrub, kunai and trees and there was only one way through the middle and that was attack straight at it.

My section went through there and by the time this happened there was a bit of muck flying around from up on the hill and unfortunately the forward scout went down and they all went down behind him in a line. And here they all were laying in a row, in one straight line. And I'm pleading with them to get up and said "you don't get up and they'll clean you all up in one burst of a machine gun. Come on get up, get up," They wouldn't, and I couldn't get round them and couldn't get past them, on the other side there was a bloody great tree stopping me. I could hardly walk on their bodies to get through, and then something went past me like a crack of a bull whip, hell of a crack, and I threw myself sideways with shock. Then I sat up, I

was bloody wild. Matter of fact, it was a funny thing, I was indignant, that's how it was ...
"you're not supposed to do that?"

Anyway somehow I convinced the blokes to get up and they spread out and we were right, and came in behind Doug to support him. He could not go in and eventually and belted back. I can still see a big rugged Queenslander, who went past me, Bren gun in one hand. His hair had been parted by something, blood streaming down his face, and eyes were blurry, and his language would've embarrassed a bullock driver, honestly. And gradually they came through one at a time. Doug came out; he was shot through the thigh. He met his brother going down the hill. He said "I got a blighty, George". Blighty was what the First World War veterans used to say in France when they got shot, because they'd be going back to England. They all knew what that meant. Unfortunately he died on the operating table that night.

Anyhow I sorted my blokes out getting round the post and we heard a hell of a row going on. And it's Provin and this Yank FFO and his two signalmen and he's abusing the hell out of him, why wasn't he there etc. And I'm standing there, and he said "OK Les you take over, you'll need them in the morning, because you're going in", and walked off from this Yank who's mouth was wide open! I said "righto" and the Yank said "Less what do you want" He used to call me 'Less'. I said "That hill for a start, I want you to range your guns on top of that, because its too hard to see where we're going with trees all over it. So he ranged these 24 guns one at a time on top of the hill. Then he said "now what else would you like" and I said "a DF Task (Defensive task) is a barrage in front of you in position where you die in. As the guns were not right behind me but to the left, the barrage was coming across our front. After the Yank has ranged in all the tasks. He said to me would you like to see Battalion one round on the top of the hill. I said yes, ad it was bloody beautiful to watch and hear,

So I managed to get the barrage laid across our front on an angle, which means between our line and their line was a V, and that happened to be pretty good the next day. "And what else, do you want some harassing fire?" I don't like harassing fire because it kept your own troops awake, but we didn't worry about that, we simply got no sleep anyhow. So we might as well give them some. So harassing fire at different times all night long until dawn, then the barrage was to come down. We had to go in under the barrage and hopefully do what the fellows from the 1st World War used to tell us, 'lean on the barrage". But you go in with this thing in front of you and they'd lift and then you'd race in and try to rid of their trenches before they got back in them.

Anyway that didn't happen, because we're having our breakfast ready to go; and suddenly mortar bombs dropped on the Company. And in they came. Somebody said "did you see that Jap waving his sword". I said "he didn't last long". We had in front of us a number caught in the thing... We yelled for artillery and said righto "where do you want it Les, on the hill?" I said "Knock that bloody Mortar out". So he did that and brought it down in front of us. Our blokes fought them off and sorted things out and C Company came up the hill to support us. I could hear Provin on the phone screaming his head off to the CIO. He was about 5 yards away behind the bushes, here he is with snot & blood from his eyes to his chin, talking on the phone, "The Sergeant Major is unconscious, one man dead, Alan Struss wounded.ww". I though Oh Shit, so I took charge. Provin kept saying "get down Les get down" and said "I can't get down, all the holes are full" so he said "kneel down"... I could see the machine gun bullets going through the Kunai and the angle from the ground up, so I crashed under that and threw and hand grenade and I think I might have blown up a machine gun, but I don't know that was never proved.

C Company came in and that was the end of the battle. We had 3 Sergeants, Gordon Oxborough and Bob Bennett and this other bloke, I can't think of his name. Before we went in, this other bloke, big tough guy, big mouth! And I don't know why but Bob Bennett wasn't liked for some unknown reason, I don't know why, he didn't like to talk. This other bloke was lying down the bottom of the trench saying "go on boys, get into it" ... that finished him. Bob Bennett came out a bloody hero, he came past me, bayonet fixed, with blood all over it. I said "did you bayonet someone?" He said "No"; I said "well you've got blood on your bayonet". His front was one of the main attacks. From then on his men idolized him. After that if we were going somewhere and Bob said you couldn't, we wouldn't go.

This is when I had the first blue with Major Lack. He came up to take charge of both Companies. And they bung another attack on this hill and we were beaten them back again. And as they lay in a line down the bottom of the trees, facing up the hill, with no field fire in front of them. They were about 50 yards in front of us. We had all the control from where we were, that was our field of fire. And Lack's communicated to him "Colonel Amies who unfortunately broke his ankle and couldn't walk, he had to rely on what's going on up front. Lack turned round and said to me and a chap from the Second 17th "Hold that ground" and I said "Rubbish. Can't hold that ground, when you're firing up hill." Come and have a look. No he wouldn't get out of his bloody hole; he was behind a bamboo bush. "Its only 50 yards, come and have a look" Not on his life he wouldn't go in the bloody hole, bastard. So I took his phone from his hand and said "Sir, Thirgood, we can hold that ground from where we are" He said "why can't they hold it there?" I said "because they're on the edge of the trees, firing uphill and they haven't got a field of fire" He said "Oh that's different. You've got the field?" "Yes, we own it." "Don't lose any ground" "we wont, Sir" "Give the phone back to Lack". . That episode didn't do Lack much good.

A couple of days later... our blokes hadn't had a drink for two days ... they were bringing water in jerry cans, and Lack's cut these bamboo things down, hollowing them out and was pouring water into them for keeping water, half of it spilling on the ground. I said "gees, we want that for my blokes who haven't had any water for a couple of days. I abused him again." So we were enemies for the rest of the war. And that's it. Then they relieved Don Company down to the bottom of the Hill.

During the attack on us that next morning .. Don't know the number we killed ... its in official history. But we captured 3 of their machine guns; one was no good it was blown up with a hand grenade. The other two were Ok and we soon found out how to use them. We placed them in a position which confused the Japes when they attacked again. We all knew the sound of our own machine guns and so would the Japs know theirs of course. So where we had them placed they wouldn't know whether they were shooting as us or shooting at them. That was good. Anyhow eventually we were relieved.

A couple of Notes. When Matthews came out of the hill, this little straight bugger, if you can imagine an iccream cone, it came down both sides and then a couple of dips and went up the other sides, and the ridge rang right through from the sea right back to Tamboo. The Japs occupied the lot and we were trying to break it. A platoon from A Company got up the coast and captured the point right over the sea, knocked the Japs off that, and they, the Japs in pillboxes etc, were occupying a ridge up to where we were. After Dougie Matthews came out there was an account of one bloke we left behind by the name of Green. Provin and I were discussing someone would have to go and find him. Before we got anywhere with that he

appeared at the trees just in front of our field of fire and we all yelled out “Greeny, come on, come on”.

He had a water bottle in one hand and nothing else. He stepped forward a couple of paces and fell flat on his face. Our stretcher bearer; we had a stretcher bearer in each company who was a medical man, raced out and I followed him. Buckley (our medical man) picked him up and we carried into the perimeter. His brother was in my Platoon, as I said before, they didn’t put brothers in the same platoon. Buckley said to me stop Greeny, stop him, don’t let him see, he was coming up. He stood in front of him and physically stopped him from getting past. We knew he was going to die but we lied to him, Buckley said he’ll be alright. You go and sit down and don’t worry about it. He didn’t see his brother. His brother was covered in blood and so was I from carrying him in. anyway unfortunately he died.

The Yank FOC came over to me, “we’re going down now, being replaced by Australian Artillery, can I have this machine gun, because he was mad on souvenirs”. It wasn’t any bloody good anyway, it had been blown up. “ Yes” I said. Away he went.

Then we were relieved and went down the hill. We had a swim in the ocean, clean up and so forth. I was near the cookhouse and they gave me a piece of fruitcake. Bloody oath, was that tremendous, I can still taste it. Beautiful.

After we had been sorted out for a couple of days. The CIO sent for me and said “look, the Yanks have shot a nip over here, and I want you to take your Platoon up here. Find where they shot this Nip and continue up and try to get onto the Ridge, which was probably a mile west of where we were attacking. If you get onto that Ridge you can come down onto this hill we were attacking and we’ll bring a barrage on it. You and C Company can attack it together. So we went up to this spot where the Americans shot a Nip and we found the dead Nip.

By this time it was lunch time, so we had a feed. Still dragging these damn stinking phone lines, so talked to the CIO on the phone and said “righto we are just about to move off and see if we can get up to the top of this hill”. I had this Very light, if I got into trouble fire. Being a green light, it would signal to bring artillery down. We moved about 10 yards and somebody fired a shot. That gave our position away, I was hoping for a surprise. Good patrolling, you sneak in and go in quick, that was the bloody end of it as far as I was concerned, our position had been given away.

Next thing I know the signalman says you’re wanted on the phone, the CIO wants you. “Did you fire a green very light?” I said “no I didn’t Sir, don’t put any artillery down here. He said Col Amies had told them to contact him before they opened fire” He said “well, we’ll keep going”. So we set down along this track, it went straight up the hill, very steep. Our forward scout usually patrolled ... first scout, second scout, second leader then me. Forward scout said “there’s a pillbox ahead” I said “keep going, you haven’t been shot yet”. Anyway we crawled up this hill and got over the top of the perimeter and I raced around to take a look at it all. There wasn’t a bloody Jap in sight.

You could see where they’d had ash from their fires from cooking or whatever they were doing. They’d gone. I reckon they’d had at least 100 men there. I was so glad they weren’t there. Anyway the CIO said “Righto, keep going down to this other position” I said “righto”. So we moved another 20 yards and there was a little perimeter that would have held about 9 men and a ladder up a tree. I said “I’m not going up there and expose myself” but I could see right down

into Dot Inlet, into the cookhouse. They could see for bloody miles and see everything that went on. So the CO said leave a section behind with your Sergeant and continue, so I did.

Eventually got down and there it was as plain as day in front of me, this hill, and not a soul on it. I said to the CIO "I can see it" He got very excited, and apparently he had the General and everybody, listening to what was going on. I said "I am going to take it" so we walked in and took it. Not a bloody soul, they'd all gone. It wasn't till some time later that I realised that the shot that was fired was a green very light fired by the Japs and that was their signal to withdraw.

The CIO got very excited and he said "well you fired some shots and the Japs ran away" I said "No Sir, I didn't fire any shots." I wasn't going to lie in front of my men. "But you did fire some shot?"

"No, I didn't" I said. I realised he was trying to paint a picture, which they do, and everybody was listening. "But you did" he said. "If you say so Sir". He said "You stay on the line and listen to this". You could hear reports coming through, all along the ridge all the way through back to the 42nd Battalion, "Nips, gone. Nips, gone" and that was it. I said to him "what about our gear" He had said to us "we'll get you your gear up to you somehow. You'll have to come down and get it. There's no-one here, we're all moving" So we had to come back down this stinking hill again and pick our gear up and pack up and start again.

*Footnote: Official history says, "after an Artillery barrage, a platoon from C Company attacked and took the Hill. This did not happen.

All the trees were blown down off the top of the Hill. I stoo and looked down into "C" Company position and smiled with delight as I could see Major Lack clearly in his hole.

We came through Salamoia alongside an airstrip which had anti aircraft 10 yards all along and about a mile out and they had bullet holes and canon shells all through them everywhere. We got up onto Kila Ridge. I took my pack off and tried to walk but legs jumped, the reflex reaction from the weight on my shoulders. So we stayed there for a day or so and then we moved off. The Japs had all shot through. We were about 24 hours behind them. Some had got out by barge, the others headed out towards Salamoia through the swamps, and we followed them. Two barges took C Company & Don Company further up to a place near Sugarloaf, a big knoll sticking out. And that's where we finished up.

C Company did a landing and Major Jennings said "You come and stand with me". I know why, they get a bit nervous and they want someone to stand beside them. Anyway telling the men to keep their heads down. C Company landed and spread out, and my men followed them. And we'd landed slap bang in the middle of the Japanese perimeter, not a bloody soul there. Whether they saw us coming or not, you wouldn't know. But you couldn't have hit it more centre if you tried.

By the time I got there every hole was full and I had to lie on the ground. Then we moved off the next morning to Sugarloaf where we camped for the rest of the exercise. C Company went further up to the lagoons, almost on the banks of the Markham River, down from Nadzab. From then on for the next couple of months we chased the bloody Japs around swamps and goodness knows what. We all got the shits from drinking water and all that sort of stuff. Anyhow Provin came back and we got rid of this Company Commander, Captain Lou, bloody hopeless, Couldn't make his mind up for two minutes what he wanted to do. Provin and I got on well, so that was alright.

The natives used to tell us what was going on. We went out to one village where they reported Japs were in there. We lined the perimeter just outside this village, fixed bayonets. I said "we're going fix this mob this time". Anyway, had this native bloke we were using as a batman, sent him into the village and he came back and said no-one there so we didn't bother. Went back to camp and the boys nick named me "oh shit lets do em" That was one nickname, the other nickname I got was "Japan man".

The food was dreadful. Supplies were slow coming in. This native boy had a canoe and he'd go out in this swamp further down the river, full of sago palms. He'd get there, paddle along, pick a spot, I'd chuck a hand grenade in there and he'd go in and pick the fish up. Another time some native village where we stayed a few nights, the Chief came long and said all the Japs are gone. Apparently they'd all drowned.

So then we came into Lae, and occupied it. It was October. All we did then was unload boats and unload 3 shifts 24 hours a day working parties. Finally we came home June or July, 1943. We were re-equipped and re-inforced. We were down to our task strength battalion 1100 men through sickness, wounded or killed. We were reinforced with 19-20 year old AIF volunteers who'd been through Kanungra. The policy those days was to send them where they're needed. Used to send them from whatever State they came from but not now. We got reinforced from West Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland . So we were up to full strength. We eventually got sent to Bougainville.

It was at Strathpine where our Unit was reformed and our CIO Col. Amies was transferred somewhere else and we were waiting for a new one just home from Middle East. Major Lack was in charge. He said to me "I'm going to transfer you to A Company" I said "No, you're not, I'm not going there. I don't know those blokes. These are the fellows I fought with; I'm going to stay with Don Company". He wanted to promote Clarrie Wort, which happened later. Alan Struss was Captain, OC Don Company also with Clarrie 2IC.

"You're going!" So we had another bloody blue, and that's when I had to go. So when I got to Bougainville, we were up there as an advance party, I was presented with a platoon of 43 blokes I didn't know. Well I knew a few of the old A Company blokes but not much about them hadn't fought with them. And these new men were all green young blokes, 19 or so, and that was a problem. Once again thanks to my mate, Mr. Lack.

What I didn't realize at the moment I was that I was senior to Major Lack. I got my Commission before him and a number of other Officers knew and that was causing problems. CIO Col Amies, after the first stouch at Sugarloaf, said I want to promote these two people to Captain and I have to get your permission. You better not hold out" I said "Sir, I won't do that. I've only been in the Battalion 5 minutes, if you say they deserve their promotion they should get it; I won't stand in their way". He said "Ah, that's good" I said "are you satisfied with my performance?" He said "Yes, I am" "Will you think about me and promotion" He said "Yes, I will". Despite that he promoted a few more.

Finally, the last one he promoted he said to me "you are now the senior Subultern". That meant everybody was junior to me. I didn't know that Lack was junior. Until I got promoted to Captain they couldn't have their ranks substantiated and the same with the Major, he couldn't have his rank substantiated. One or two of them when the War was over wanted to put their name in the Phone book, Major this and so forth. You don't worry about your Juniors -

Anyway another bloke, Padre Bill, told me about one who was always stirring something up. I got my promotion when the War finished. That was that.

Graeme Rutherford came to us when we were in Lae about May 1943. He came to Don Company. He was about 6'4", bloody great feet and all the rest of it. He was one of these blokes who wanted to be just a good soldier. His father was the Secretary of the SEC in Melbourne. His mother was a social climber, Graeme wouldn't have a bar of it. We became good mates. We went in a walking race.

Teams of 4 from the 3 Battalions on a one day competition. It was part of Brigade Sports Day with various competitions. There were 3 battalions, 4 per team. Anyway, Graeme came in second. I cracked the field up and put them off him for a couple of hours. Anyway then Don Company went up to Nadzab. While we were up there I met a bloke I knew before. He was a Liaison Officer with the Yanks and he'd been there that long he had a yankee accent. He didn't recognize me, I recognized him.. One day he raced around and said "Look can you help us; we have a plane down in the River. The pilot and co-pilot are on the tailplane and it's being washed away. I had a native canoe and someone else came with me. We went downstream and I send another patrol down by road to where there was a native camp. And these planes were flying around us, waving at us saying 'come on, come on'.

We came around this bend and saw the tail plane. It only had the Pilot on it. The native directed the canoe towards him and we rolled him onto the flat raft between the outrigger and the canoe. Asked him "where's the co-pilot" and he said he had swung out to the right side to pick up a life raft which the planes were dropping and was swept downstream. Anyway we turned the canoe and eventually got back to the native camp. We got on the phone and got ambulance came to take him away.

We went with this Pilot into Hospital and asked about the Co-pilot. They hadn't heard anything, so we said we'd go down and find him. Graeme and I went down the next day. There was an island in the middle of the river, the Pilot had got ashore and got back home. We didn't know about that. While we were there we picked up a life raft and out of that we got some fishing gear and a floating torch (which we had down the shack years later). So it wasn't until the next day we found out what was going on. We went to see this bloke in hospital. This Australian Lieutenant came down and said "what can we do for you, the Yanks want to know. We can't give you any grog." Fags will be alright, we said, so we got a carton of fags. .things were going alright and the next we knew we got relieved, we were back to Lae and they sent another Company up there. They got all the goodies and we didn't.

So Graeme and I used to knock around together. So when we came home and got reinforced they shifted me out of Don Company to A Company. And then they sent 6 or 8 Officers up to Bougainville as an Advance Party and Major Lack was in charge of us. Well did we have some fun? He'd say we're going this way, and we'd say "no, we're going that way". He couldn't do a damn thing with us; nobody would take any notice of him. When the battalion arrived and we set up camp, he had the new CIO, Lt. Col. McDonald, and couple of others to back him: it was a bit different.

We then relieved the Yanks. The Yanks had taken this bite out of Torokena to build an airstrip to bomb Truck and Rabaul with their aircraft. The Nips had attacked them a number of times. The Yanks blew the cripes out of them and buried thousands with bulldozers. The war had virtually stopped up there. And they were just watching one another that's all. Every time the Nips would move, the yanks would pound them. Anyway our job was to go down to take Buin

for General Kanda who was the general in charge of the southern part anyway. He was the General in charge of this Regiment that raped NanKing in 1936. The Jaba river .. we relived the Yanks there. When you do security in these places you send patrols in between Companies and they have pickets in front of them, watching. And we moved in with these Yanks, set up camp amongst them and I went out to see where the picket was. He was a Yank sitting on a deck chair, one of those canvas deck chairs, reading a book, pistol in his lap. That was the picket. Their security between Companies walked up and down the beach. Hopeless. .anyway there wasn't much going on. Both sides stood off one another

We took over, we moved over the River, and started the bloody war again. Moved down a certain distance and had a few shells shot at us. Didn't see a great deal of action. And Don Company, moved down ahead of us, down the beach. They had this useless bloody sergeant with them (which we talked about). The Nips got in behind them and attacked them, and apparently they had one of our Owen Guns, which confused our blokes. They were on these beaches where there wasn't much surf, just a lip of a wave, the sand at high tide would drop away, and there'd be a little cliff about anything up to 2 ft deep and you could crawl beside this and be out of sight. Nips were behind Graeme's Patrol and our base and the river causing trouble. And this useless bloody sergeant, he should have done it later.

Graeme was in charge. He went and crawled beside this sand cliff to where rest of the Nips were and hurled a couple of hand grenades in. The Bren gunner laid about 15 of them down in a row. Graeme got hit with a burst hand grenade and schrapnell rolled up his chest through to the wall of his stomach. A bullet hit the backside of his rifle, cut it in half and went through his hand and lodged in his shoulder. He'd always wanted to be a surgeon. And that meant he never did.

He had a chap with him who got him back to the perimeter. They didn't have any medical stuff so they sent a pigeon back with a message to send help and medical supplies. This must have been about 3o'clock in the afternoon. Lietenenant Moore and his Platoon tried but couldn't get in. I heard about it. I got into trouble over this. I said to the Company Commander, they're my men, I'll talk to those blokes down there, they'll let me in. I'm going to take my Platoon down there and get them out. He said "No you can't". I said, "Well I'll bloody well go myself". He said "I'll tell a sentry to shoot you if you do" that was his exact words. So I was stymied and not very happy about this. The next morning they sent a barge down just off-shore and got them out in this barge. The nips had shot through of course. Got Graeme back to hospital. His nerves were shot. Graeme had laid in agony without morphine all night. He asked his men to shoot him, they wouldn't. They wrapped a hand grenade up in cloth and tried to knock him out but failed!

What that stupid useless Sergeant should have done was driven the Japs off. But that was him. He did nothing. The next morning when we had a Platoon Commanders meeting with Company Commanders and the 2IC told us what happened. I kept asking nasty questions, why didn't they do this, that etc. He wasn't too happy with me and the Company Commander. I could see the others looking at me, the Company Commander moved off and Merv Mackrill took over. This is exact words "I'm your friend and a friend would tell you shouldn't carry on like that. You were wrong. The first time he came down here (Tasmania) I said to him "Yes, I was" Anyway that put my Company Commander off-side.

The A Compoany then moved further down Motupena Point. We carted rations in to C Company who were up a track inland a bit. After that we moved down further and relieved Don Company, saw Gordon Oxborough as we went past.. He said "where's your Beret?" I told him I

had lost it somewhere. He said “take mine, somebody will shoot you!” He was fair dinkum, remembering my nickname “Japan Man“. So I wore it.

After an artillery barrage we moved through a Jap perimeter, they’d gone. We proceeded for another 1,000 yards or so. We were shin deep in water, clean, clear river water. We set ourselves up in a perimeter, by cutting down banana palms for a bed with mosquito nets over us. A medical person from Brigade HQ or somewhere came down to inspect our situation. As a result of his report, we were ordered back to the Jap perimeter which we had taken.

I was mad as a hatter because we had to give back to the Japs the 1000 yards or so we had taken. So I was stamping about and stomped onto what I thought was a grave. I went down to hips in the hole. I pulled a leg out to find it covered to the hilt in Japanese shit. I took one look and jumped into the river and washed it off. No-one looked at me expecting another outburst of rage. Then I saw the funny side of the situation and burst out laughing. The whole Company joined in. Our morale rose sky high as a result. I remember what old 1st World War diggers said “sometimes when things are pretty bad, your sense of humour will come to your aid”.

The Battalion which we relieved went back to Torokena. And we were up into the mountains round the place. And according to the usual routine, everybody has to practice with each weapon. And this day the Company Commander set up a shooting range across a bit of a gully. And all the men had to use the Owen gun and practice with it. He said “there you are, way you go”. He left and I had these blokes lined up and instead of changing equipment I just had them put the magazines behind them on the ground. When they’d emptied one, clear the gun, turn round pick a new one up and keep on firing. I was teaching them how to fire a single shot on automatic. You put your gun on automatic and fire 5 shots, then you press the trigger quick control one shot.

Now the purpose of this is to not disclose to the enemy the fact that you have a machine gun in your hand. They think you’ve got a rifle. So we’re all doing that and I said to these blokes. “when you’ve finished that mag, turn round, pick another one up and go on firing. And there was a bloke down the other end and I turned sideways yelling at him “single shots, single shots and all of a sudden I had got one in the leg.

What happened was that armourer found out later on, that the Owen guns bullets weren’t covered with metal they were leaden on the outside and the spring of the magazine was weak and the last one or two rounds wouldn’t go clean into the chamber. When that happened, the leaden bullet would hit the side of the chamber and put a nick in it and it didn’t matter how many times you did your ‘press, pull back, press’ which was a safety precaution, it wouldn’t go in because of the nick. If you bumped the side of the gun it would go off. As this young bloke bent down to pick up his spare mag, he’s obviously bumped the side and it went off and shot me through the leg. That was it,. I ended up in hospital with Graeme. He sat beside me for two days and nursed me. As he was walking around bent over double, they called him Kong. The wounds he had in the guts did that.

Anyway eventually Captain Oxley came down. He was an Adjutant then. The Court of Enquiry heard what happened and I saw the first Court of Enquiry Report. The CIO, Colonel McDonald, didn’t like it that much, he said do it again, he was looking to blame me. Anyway the Armourer finally did it, he blamed the bloke with the gun and me. Anyway that was that. I went up to Con Camp and I eventually came back to the Unit. Graeme got B Classed and he was working in a unit unloading boats - navies. He wouldn’t have a bar of that so got a

discharge and went back to Melbourne to finish his university career, where he was training to be a Doctor.

In 1947 Graeme rode a bike down from Launceston to Hobart. Drove it into the shop in North Hobart. I saw this bloke laying a bike down in the gutter. He had this old Kakki shirt and trousers on. He rode half way to Oatlands and slept with the navies overnight and then ridden to Hobart. He came up and stayed with me in our little flat, went into Hospital, saw Fran. He was sitting one side and me the other. When we left one of the woman said "my word your husband is attentive". Which one do you think is my husband? She said which one and it turned out it was Graeme. Everytime Fran moved he would adjust her pillow. So we made him our first child, Vivienne's Godfather. He eventually got his degree.

Didn't earn much while studying he used to sweep out trams at night for money. Then he went to hospital to do his things. I used to ring the hospital and leave a note to meet me in a certain pub when I went over there.

I met his family and stayed one night. He went to bed early one night and they said what happened and I told them. They didn't know, he wouldn't tell them. I said he should have been decorated.

Anyway he got his medical degree, became a Dr. and eventually jointed the Army again and became a Regimental Medical Officer with a Unit and went to serve in Korea as an RMO. Then became a Major in charge of a field hospital, AGH in Seoul. Came home, got married, had a couple of girls. But he never got over what happened and eventually they split up, he and his wife. He was drinking too much and so forth. And he used to come over and see me and I'd go and see him. But he just sort of died of a broken heart, because no body wanted him. He used to say to me "you are my firm base". He used to talk like that. That was my mate.

Going back to Bougainville: when I got back to the Unit after coming out of Con Camp, I went to see the CIO and I wasn't terribly happy with him because he was after me. I knew he'd been given a kick in the bum by the powers that be over something to do with me. I'd said to him, "Look, I'm sick of this business of being pushed around. I want a job being 2IC of a Company." He said "I haven't got any vacancies for a Captain". I said "I'm not asking for Captain, I want to do the job. B Company haven't got a 2IC." "Alright" he said "you go there" So I did Anyway I was only there one night. Oxley got belted in the leg, he was the Adjutant. They moved him out. And Merv Mackrill, they made him Adjutant and Clarrie Wert, 2IC of A Company, a Captain, now made OC Company. They moved me back to A Company as 2IC and that's where I remained for the rest of the War. However as a Lieutenant I had to take out fighting patrols because I was on roster. And I took a lot of them out. I had a certain amount of success.

Anyway the job of a fighting patrol is not to lock in battle. It's to go out in front of your position and clear everybody out of it in front of you and between you and their lines and do this consistently. The blokes in the 1st World War said there was no such thing as no mans land, it was their land and they owned everything right up to the enemy lines. And that was our job. There was a nasty piece of territory called the 'Bad Lands'. These Queenslanders have names for everything. The Bad Lands have American baddies in them (from Comic books), pretty nasty. We used to patrol these things regularly. Fighting patrol's job is not to lock battle, but to sneak through quietly, remembering the element of surprise, and our blokes were pretty good at this, they could sneak through the jungle and creep up on things. When you did you'd

find out what they were doing, go in quick and knock them off and get out. We also had with us support of 18 x 3" mortars and 25 guns. We had Morse code in those days. What we'd do, we'd chuck a weight up a tree, as an aerial and Morse signal back to Battalion and the F.O.O. would range these guns in and do what we wanted. Then we'd shoot through back to base and often run into something going back and knock them off.

Anyway the CIO said to me one day "Les, you're going down the Bad lands. You've got support? "Artillery and mortar." He said "you've got a squadron of planes" I said "Oh jees". And you know what, I went out that day and I searched every inch of the bloody place, and I couldn't find them ... anywhere. And that wasn't long before the War finished. When we got back, there was a creek through Battalion headquarters and Don Company. That's where we'd wash at night time. Anyway, we're washing away and one of the blokes said "So and so him, he goes looking for them" "I said, I thought that's what it's all about, isn't it?"

The 15th Battalion was a Militia Unit. Militia Units were know as 'Chockos' We weren't AIF units, but we didn't mind that. Most of them belonged to the AIF anyhow. We used to get, when we went out of Fighting Patrols, a F.O.O., Forward Observation Officer, they came up from Artillery Regiment behind us. And his job to range the Artillery back positions for us. Anyhow this bloke came in this morning about 7 o'clock and we were going out, and he was moaning and groaning, and I said "what's the matter with you?" and he said "Well fancy having to bloody well go out with the Chockos." And I said "Well, just hang on a minute, Cock. Don't you bloody well call me a Chocko, I was probably in the AIF before you. And most of these blokes are in the AIF and they are seasoned soldiers. And you bloody jokers, went to the Middle East, come back and you haven't a bloody shot until you got here in Bougainville, not once. And you arrive here....that's all you know about fighting.'

Anyhow, out we went, We went over the river, patrolling around and we didn't get into any trouble. He came back to the ford, to cross, I sent a Section over and they got over alright, no trouble, and set up. So I came over with the second Section and this F.O.O Officer, and we had a Pigeon (we used pigeons in those days) in a little cardboard box which the Signalman carried. We were nearly over the other shore and 3 machine guns opened up from down the river a bit. Naturally we all went down on our knees with our heads above water. And finally we got over the other side, and the Corporal in charge of the Section said "want some more ammo for the guns" and walking round sorting things out. And here's this bloody F.O.O., he was spewing his guts up. He'd just bent down to get a mouth full of water and the machine guns opened up. He wasn't too good. I said "what do you think of Chockos now. He never said a bloody word.

We had another Bren gun and we opened up where we thought these blokes might be. I looked across the river and the Sergeant pointed further upstream and I waved, come on over. So they came over. And the machine guns shot but they never hit one of them. Talking to one bloke from Western Australia, I said "I never saw a shot". He said "It's a wonder, they were about a foot behind your head". And when we came back to camp, everything was alright.

Another Episode. There was a Provo Lance Corporal joined us. I said "what are you doing?" He said "I joined the Infantry, I'm sick of the Provos, I want to be with it". He went out on a Fighting Patrol and he got shot through the shoulder, just a crease. He was out and we always liked to see anybody wounded, get out of the bloody thing. Anyway, away he went, and a couple of days later and Airman came in, looking for him. I said "what are you doing?" He said "I'm engaged to Slim's sister, where is he?" I said "He's alright, he's back at base, he's wounded. So that was alright and he went off.

A few days later, in comes Slim. I said “what the hell are you doing here?” “I’m right I’ve been discharged” he said “Give us a look at your wound” I said. And he’s got this bloody thing through his shoulder, still got a scab on it. I said “well, you shouldn’t be here,” anyway he went to his Platoon. He was a Lance Corporal. The Sergeant was taking this Platoon out this day, and Slim fronted up. I said “where do you think you’re going?” He said “I’m going out on Patrol” I said “No you’re not, you’re not going out”. “Oh yes I am” “Oh no, you’re not” This went on. “If my men are going out, I’m going out with them”. I thought about it for a while and eventually “oh well, bugger it”.

Anyway he went out and the river was in flood, he and another bloke, and the Sergeant, crossed the river at this place and got washed downstream. The Sergeant belted in after. Then the three of them got across the river and one of them lost his gun. So they walked up one side of the river and the patrol walked up the other side until they came to the ford. There Slim stood on a bomb, a mine. It killed him. The Sergeant was badly wounded up his side so naturally we helped him across the river. And the next day they went out and got Slim’s body. You know I still regret I never stopped him. But that’s War for you isn’t it.

Then the War was over. This Airforce bloke came back and asked “where is Slim?” I didn’t know where to look, I was looking around and he said “what’s the matter, what’s the matter” and I had to tell him. And he stayed for a while with the troops. I regret that, very much, that I didn’t stop him. I could have ... but ... maybe I couldn’t have.

Before that when we were coming across the river, the signaller had a pigeon and that was in a little cardboard box. And while I was sorting things out I said “where’s the bloody pigeon” No-one could find it, we never did know where it went. In our Battalion HQ was a reporter for Smith’s weekly.

He came over and he asked about this pigeon. He wrote up a story which appeared in Smith’s weekly and I got a copy of it. The signaller’s wife gave me a copy of this; I’ve got it at home. And he writes up a story of this pigeon. Wouldn’t go back to base, because he’d fallen in love with a female pigeon at Base. Therefore we took him out with us. He’d come back to base with any messages. And he went on like this about where did he finish up, with the Japanese, or drowned, or what?

Anyway, then another nasty thing happened. It had been raining for weeks, absolutely pouring, and all our trenches filled up and I had to sleep on the ground. Jack Sinclair was another good mate of mine, and he was out with, might have been, B Company, with a Fighting Patrol and he done down this Bad Lands spot. And leading this Patrol down a track which he shouldn’t have been doing? He was killed. They got out and left him there, they couldn’t get his body. The result of that whoever was in charge of all the operations, said “no more Fighting Patrols. Its too wet and we’re not getting more Officers killed, Just Security Patrols round the perimeter”. So that was it.

The next day the CIO had those orders. He rang Clarrie and said “Send Thirgood out with a Platoon of men and see if you can get Sinclair’s body”; because he knew he was a mate of mine. “and tell him he’ll be ambushed”. I said to Clarrie “I’m not bloody stupid, I know we’ll be ambushed, don’t you worry about that.” So we went out armed to the bloody teeth. We got down where we thought he might have been. The men were getting tired, and I saw some

movement in the bush and said "Hold here" and they did that and the forward Scout said "there's a track here and there's footprints on it."

We pulled back about 20 or 30 yards away from the track. One of my little Owen gunners in front of me said "Nip, Nip, Nips". I said "where?" He said "There" .. I said "Hit 'em!" He did and all hell opened up down the bloody track and 'cause they could hear this back at Battalion HQ, the CIO said to Clarrie said "what the bloody hell is Thirgood doing down there? I told him not to fight". I said "get out behind me" They took off behind me and I was standing there on my bloody own. Fortunately all of that stuff's going on down the track 10 yards away. So we took off and got back to Camp. That must have been a mile away, but they were still firing madly by the time we got back there. We never got Jack's body. It was brought in after the War finished. The War finished shortly after that. That was that.

The only other episode to report is, on this Friday night after they dropped 2 atomic bombs; I'm asleep in my hole, my Batman alongside me. I always slept with my 38 pistol alongside my head under a mosquito net because your rifle's not much good in that situation. Some of the Officers turned their 38's in, but I didn't I kept mine for that reason. I woke up and heard a noise, and thought "bugger it". So I sat up from under the net with this pistol in my hand. I could hear this noise coming towards my hole, and I started to get puzzled. I thought, hang on a minute, he was making too much noise. Then a head appeared, I had it lined up and a voice said "Les?" I said "Is that you Clarrie?" He said "Yes" I said "You stupid bastard, I nearly blew your bloody head off. What are you doing here in the middle of the night?" He said "the war's over". Company HQ were in connection by telephone line with Battalion headquarters, and they used to listen to the BBC news at 12 o'clock and it came over that Japan had asked to declare the War over.

He eventually convinced me and the next morning the boys were saying "You stupid bastards, you were arguing whether the War was over last night". So that was that. The next morning after the news came through about Japan's surrender, CIO sent for me. There was Merv Mackerill and some other bloke, might have been Petrie. He said "down the Bad lands, Les." I said "Oh yeah, pigs arse". And while they're doing that they fiddled with my collars and put 3 pips on my shoulders. I knew it was coming through, because it takes a month or two to come through. So, that's when I became a Captain.

There you go it took six years of War to get it, but it was worth it in the finish.

We made contact with the Japs over the river. We made them swim the River and talk to us. Wouldn't salute them, wouldn't shake hands with them or anything. There was a Corp Officer down there with them and they kept going home so the Colonel said "go down there and take charge of this Platoon. And I had a telephone right back to base. If I wanted to talk to one of the Japs about something, I signalled over .. this bloke was apparently a Count: he spoke pure English, or pure Australian! One of our blokes was a wool classer before the War came down to have a look one day and he recognized him. He'd been over here buying wool. That was interesting that was.

We had an American born Japanese Sergeant in the American Army with us as an Interpreter. He didn't mince any words with them either. And eventually General Kanda was supposed to come through us today. Our General was ready to sign the Peace I was woken up about 4 o'clock in the morning by this American Jap "I've got a message" I said "what is it?" He said "General Kanda is not coming up today" I said "why Not?" He said "It's just what he said" I said

“what did you say?” He said “I told him, he had to come up, they’re his Orders, and that was it” I said “why did you say that?” He said “Because our General said we’ve got to see that everybody obeys his orders”. I said “fair enough, OK” So the Jap pissed off over the River with this message telling Kanda to get his arse up here. So at 6 o’clock I got through on the phone direct to the General’s Headquarters and got the Orderly Officer and told him what happened. He said “You said that?” “Yes, of course I did” I said. “How come you said that?” “Well because my simple instruction was that the Japs had to obey what our General said, and that’s all there was to it”.

The Orderly Officer was not impressed! Anyway about 10 o’clock the phone rang the General said congratulations. They sent a boat down and got Kanda the next day, he never came through us. And when he came in to sign the Peace.

What had happened, all these Generals in the Australian Army were trying to get first in to sign up. Kanda had come though to sign up today but his commander in Japan had ordered him to sign up the next day, so he knew he had to obey. And he did the next day. Our General really dressed him down. And said “you’re not an honorable man and furthermore, if you ever disobey another command of mine, you’ll be in trouble “ And that’s all I heard about that.

Another day I took a patrol deep down south, skirting the Bad Lands. We crossed a track and disturbed a Jap who ran off yelling. We turned East and came to the Mivo River. We skirted the track alongside the River. I saw a Jap who appeared to be looking across the ford. He went back into the scrub.

We then moved west away from the Mivo and heard someone chopping. It was a Jap who intended to eat the green stem near the top. We shot him and moved in. I tried to finish him off but my Owen gun jammed. The FOO finished him off. We decided to get out fast, under a fusillade of Machine guns we weren’t hit by anything and got back to camp, while bathing I notice that one man had a bullet hole through his beret.

On closer inspection I could see a swollen vein on his scalp. It was not a nice feeling to have lead a patrol weaponless, carrying an Owen gun that refused to fire. It wasn’t my weapon, I had a 303 Rifle so I swapped my Batman for his Owen gun when ever I went on patrol. As apparently I had been patrolling for weeks carrying an Owen gun that didn’t fire. I hadn’t checked on my Batman’s weapon to see that it would work.

I met Fran and went back to Base and talked the Doctor into sticking me into Hospital because I had a papaloma on my foot. So I missed the first boat back to Brisbane. Major Petrie and I were the first two out of the Unit because we were the longest serving and they came home in priority.

As the CIO and the rest of them were walking around calling me Mr. Thirgood. I’m a civilian, no bugger it, would you call me Captain”

So I got in this Hospital and the Provo’s turned up and said “what are you doing in here?” I said, “What do you think I’m doing in here, I’m in hospital”. “You missed the boat “ they said. “Yes I know” I said. So a month later I had to get on the boat and I did. And it was the Katoomba and took us down to Brisbane. I heard a call “Captain Thirgood, you’re wanted on the gang plank”. It was the bloody Provo’s to make certain I didn’t get off the boat.

I had four trips overseas. Served from 4/9/39 till November 1945.
I have just realised that whilst any of my men were under my direct control I never lost one killed or wounded

NB: from Vivienne:

Dad's mate in recent years was the late Alec Campbell, the last Anzac to pass away. Alec gave Dad the 15th Batallion flag for safe keeping several years ago.

Alec was in the 1st World War in the same 15th Batallion, so the flag was very special to the Batallion. Dad proudly marched carrying the flag every year until the last couple, when his grandson Ben carried it for him and Dad marched alongside. He was preparing to again march with Ben carrying the flag this year, 2007, but instead ended up in hospital the night before Anzac Day. R.I.P. Dad.

