AWM 54

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
ACCESS STATUS

OPEN

WAR OF 1939-45
Received from:
Section Records
Class. No. 335/41/3.
Indexed 419/1
A.W.M. File SP 720.

Stories of Escapes from Crete,
Statements by
WX 2253 Pte H. Nicol,
NX 3921 " W.A. Sicklen, 2/1 Battalion.
VX 11721 " H.R. Horne, 2/7 Battalion.
Signals Corps 2/11 Aust Infantry Battalion.
J.W. Walker. HQ Coy 2/7 Battalion
C.W Gray, 2/7 Battalion. June 1941.

Escape 1.

E 36

No Military Objection to this page article, as amended
Press Censor
GHQ ME 21/6.

THESE MEN ESCAPED FROM CRETE

RESOURCEFUL DIGGERS

By "Artilleryman."

Little more than a year after he had sailed from Australia with the first West Australian battalion formed this war, Private E.A. Gillies, of North Perth, enjoyed another sea voyage when he escaped from the Isle of Crete in an open boat with sixty-nine other men.

Perhaps it is strange to say "enjoyed" when the company on board had to endure privations and hardships for four nights and three days, but it is difficult to imagine Gillies taking whatever fortune brings without his usual carefree smile.

He wore it when I interviewed him in a rest camp in Egypt, just a few days after landing on the beach near Matruh. "How is it you're not with the other twenty-six Australians who were on board your craft?" I asked. He grinned. "Well. When I got to Alexandria I got leave dropped off for a drink, shave and bath-," he said, and I understood.

Gillies went through the first Libyan campaign before being sent to Greece. His battalion was amongst those to be evacuated to Crete and together with a New South Wales battalion, was stationed near the landing-ground at Retymo.

Escape 2.

When the air-borne invasion of the island commenced parachutists were dropped at Retymo and the main body of them descended right into the midst of the olive trees and grape vines in which the battalion was camped.

"We got about eighty per cent of them," said Gillies but were not strong enough to round up the rest before they dropped re-inforcements next morning. They dug in across the road and down to the beach and we were never able to wipe them out. They cut our communications with headquarters, forty miles away, and we were out of touch. We sent one runner through and he made the return journey safely, but it took him six days in which to do it," he related.

Then followed days of incessant air attacks and guerilla warfare in which the wiles of the Australians were matched against those of the Germans. Many Germans spoke English well and at night would call out, seeking to trap our men. "B Coy., No. 8 platoon, 600, fire," they would shout, or, "Jack, Bill, Harry. Where are you?" but the men had experienced other such tricks in Greece.

"Our supplies were short," said Gillies, "and we used a lot of his own stuff. We captured base-plates for our mortars from him and collected one of his four-inch same.

GP

Then we ~~found his code book and code stripe~~ watched his for air communication. We ~~put out signals~~ did the same and next day he dropped food and medical supplies. Again we ~~put them out~~ tried it and once more he obliged."

"The third time we tried them over he came and dropped a load of bombs instead. We took the hint," said Gillies with the grin he always has for such an incident.

Nearly two hundred prisoners were taken by the battalion and amongst them was the officer commanding the force of parachutists. "He complained bitterly to our C.O. that it wasn't fair that we should have shot his men before they reached the ground," laughed Gillies.

"Their prisoners wanted to know if we were all snipers because we each carried a rifle and one officer wanted to know why we had so many different uniforms. We must have looked a queer lot in service dress, battle-dress, shorts and 'giggle-suits.'"

And so the unequal battle raged until a day or two after evacuation had ceased and the enemy attacked, using overwhelming forces of tanks. Gillies escaped when his battalion commander was forced to capitulate, his battalion out of food and ammunition, and he made his way across the island to the southern beach near Sphakia.

GD

Near the beach he found a party of men endeavouring to ~~launch~~ refloat/ ~~a motor landing craft~~ large ground launch, which had been left high and dry on the beach after the evacuation. It took three days' digging and winching to get the craft into the water and only one motor could be repaired. A plentiful supply of petrol was found at a nearby village but a party searching for food encountered an enemy patrol and an Australian officer was seriously wounded.

The party put to sea at dusk one night and steered due south. There were ten officers and sixty men on board including three Australian officers and twenty-seven other ranks. "We were going fine about three o'clock next morning when we sighted and hailed a submarine," related Gillies. "Everyone was jubilant and shouted out, but," again the grin, "it was an Ity and answered us with a few shots across our bows."

"One of the officers was called on board by an Italian who spoke broken English. After a quarter of an hour's parleying the remainder of the officers were called for, leaving behind only the wounded one. A half-hour later an Italian cast us off saying: "You are free. You may go. We are in danger. We must go," in his poor English.

"It was tense as we drifted away," said Gillies

GD

thoughtfully. Then he smiled. "We all thought they were going to sink us, but they didn't - just submerged immediately."

Sailing on only one motor with the occupants of the craft without food or water, another three days passed before they reached land safely. "We were trained like greyhounds when we arrived," was Gillies' comment.

When I left him he was busy on a fatigue in the cook-house. Soon he will be back with the ~~few~~ survivors and the ~~many~~ new reinforcements to his battalion, passing on the word of advice to the strange, new-comers but he will still have his happy grin, ~~probably bursting when he receives the likely promotion his experience and initiative deserve.~~

: : : : : : : : : : : : : : :

No Military Objection to this 5 page article, as amended
Press Censor GHQ 11/6 MLE

E37

There are many "Bluey's" with the A.I.F. in the Middle East and on board another craft to escape from Crete was "Bluey" Legge, of Mirbin, near Lismore, New South Wales. When he enlisted he was employed driving a baker's delivery cart but he managed to find plenty of time for sailing on the Richmond River and going out to the schnapper grounds in search of fish.

No Military Objection to this
3 page article, as amended
Press Censor 6/11/41

Another Australian on board the same craft as Private K.A. Legge was Corporal H.G. Nugent, of Grafton, New South Wales, who had spent much time on the Clarence River in canoes, sailing boats and speed-boats. When they came together on board a ~~motor landing craft~~ Fitzroy launch with another twenty-four Australians and one hundred and thirteen Englishmen the efforts of these two men were to prove instrumental in the safe arrival of the escaping party.

About forty miles from the African coast the craft ran out of petrol and drifted for eight days with food, water and hope dwindling rapidly. On the seventh day Corporal Nugent, together with two other Australians, one officer and one private, constructed a rude sailing raft and put off only to find it insufficiently buoyant and they were compelled to return to the vessel.

Legge had been looking after the burning of flares hither-to but at this time when things looked so desperate and the first to die of exposure had passed away, he decided to take a hand. With the aid of Nugent he constructed a mast and two sails, a jib and a mainsail, made of blankets sewn together with bootlaces.

The men on board were all very weak by that time and few could help with the work but the unflagging drive of Corporal Nugent and the resourceful "Bluey" saw the craft at last with steerage way and headed landwards at a modest knot or so.

A day's sailing with its constant problem of keeping the awkward craft before the wind brought land in sight and new hope to the exhausted survivors. "Bluey" Legge was then firmly ensconced on top of the wheelhouse next to the officer of the watch and he was master of the situation.

His voluble stream of comment when the wheel's-man allowed the craft almost to lose the wind brought an immediate response from that poor unfortunate and whoops of "Stick to it, Blue," from the other Australians on board. A few more hours' sailing and the craft beached safely.

"I thought we were like the man who fell out of the

boat. We weren't in it," said Bluey when I discussed the construction of the sail with him and Corporal Nugent, "but we had to try something. It was a flat-bottomed ~~craft~~ Launch without a keel and that made it difficult to handle. Once she answered the wheel it was easy to keep her going. Many's the time when we had to sail back from the schnapper grounds when the engine turned it in."

And the survivors on board were wholeheartedly thankful for the presence in their midst of these two men from the Clarence and Richmond Rivers.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

No Military Objection to this 3 page article, as amended
GHQME
Press Censor
2/6

E38

Although there were officers of the Royal Marine Light Infantry on board a third ~~motor landing~~ craft to escape from Crete, a gathering of those on board soon after sailing unanimously elected Private H Richards, of the Lake Grace district, Western Australia, to be their captain for the voyage. The officers were among those enthusiastic for his selection.

There were sixty-seven men on board when the craft left Crete under machine-gun fire from the shore but stopping at a small island en route to Africa, it was decided to reduce the number on board because of the shortage of food and water.

Accordingly volunteers were called for to remain behind and ten stepped forward, including five Australians leaving fifty-two (five Australians) to attempt the hazardous voyage. The island was inhabitated and the men left behind were given all the money carried by members of the company.

Without a map or compass the craft set out and steered due south by the stars and sun until it ran out of petrol about fifty miles from the coast. A sail was constructed out of the scanty material available, a small spar and blankets, but proved of little use and the

Military Objection to this page article, as amended
Press Censor
Aug 7 1942 9 ME

craft drifted for seven days without sighting another ship or land.

A service was conducted on board on the morning of Trinity Sunday and the men managed to hold out by condensing water, until they sighted land the following night. Private Richards recognised the coast as that near Sidi Barrani and when the craft beached just before dawn the next morning the fifty-two men on board found themselves safe behind their own lines.

"Were you a sailor before the war?" I asked Richards. "No," he replied. "I was a farmer but I'd done a lot of sailing and fishing and had been shipwrecked once so the boys thought I was the man for the job."

Private Richards is another valuable man who will soon be back with the survivors and friends of his old battalion.

: : : : : : : : : : : : : : :

Press Censor
No Military Objection to this
2 page article, as amended
GHQME
Press Censor
2/6

E39

Escape 11.

Corporal R.P. Bradfield, of Western Australia, was still weak, but cheerful, when I found him strolling around the rest camp. He had just arrived from Crete with five other Australians after having been at sea the longest of the escaping parties so far to report. His craft had drifted for eleven days after running out of petrol and the men had been without food for the last seven of them.

"I was a patient in the British General Hospital at Canea when the Germans dive-bombed and machine-gunned us for two hours before dropping parachute troops in the hospital area," the Corporal said.

"They took all the walking-wounded prisoners and used us as a screen, making us march in front of them as they moved across to reinforce a party of parachutists who had dug in further inland on top of a hill.

"The Kiwis rescued us but only after we had lost a few who were hit by stray bullets. Eventually I made my way to the evacuation port of Sphakia but being sick I arrived too late on the final night of evacuation. Next morning I was fortunate enough to be one of a party who boarded a drifting ~~motor launch~~ craft and with an English officer and forty-two others we managed to get it going and headed south," he related.

No Military Objection to this 1-page article as amended
Aug 5 1942
Press Censor

After eighty or ninety miles the vessel, like two of the other escaping craft, ran out of petrol and commenced the aimless drifting which was to last for ten days. Eventually the vessel drifted in near Sidi Barrani where it was picked up by a naval patrol vessel.

"We were very glad to see it," said the Corporal, "but most men were so weak they had to be carried ashore. The other five Australians are in hospital and are doing fine."

He was yet another anxious to return to his unit and find his friends once more and I said good-bye to the men to the tune of their questions as to the likely time of their departure.

---/---/---/---

mccartney

No Military Objection to this page or article, as amended
2 Australian GHQ ME
Press Censor
7/1/6

: 7/0/4

VX 22807
Cpl Dallimore G.V.
2/8 Fd Coy.,R.A.E.

E2

27th

During the early hours of April ~~XXX~~ with the rest of our Section, N.C.O's were given final instructions for moving our boys to the beach some 15 miles away for the purpose of being evacuated.With five others I made off to which I thought was our destination;whilst on our march we intercepted a truck which was being driven by Greek soldiers,asking them to give us a lift;they did,but instead of taking the right road,we took entirely the wrong one and eventually found ourselves some 40 miles away at a village called Lavrion.From here we selected a 16ft. sailing boat and made for the seas,our destination being CRETE,sailing S.E. with the aid of a prismatic compass.

All was well till we sighted another craft following us, and ~~XXXXX~~ through binoculars found it was not friendly.Three miles from Kithnos, some 20 miles from the mainland this craft caught us up;it turned out to be the owner of our boat who demanded it back.After a frightful argument both boats made for Kithnos where we intended purchasing food.Within a few minutes of our arrival 5 dive-bombers approached the bay dropping bombs - from this we were safely sheltered.When it was all over the owner of our boat had evidently got word from the inhabitants that there were other troops on this island and that they had boats in another bay some 4 milesaway.Before taking his word and also before parting with our boat I sent a runner with him to investigate.Two hours later he returned with an invitation to join a party of R.E's at dusk.~~XXXXXX~~

On our arrival we found that they had two ketches or kites, ample food and room.That night we sailed safely for Scriphos,Disembarking in the early hours of the morning;the reason being our crew were jittery and would not move in daylight.The following day all parties concerned spent the time in hiding both from aircraft and undesirables.From about 10.30 p.m. until 6.30 p.m. the Boche was over bombing and machine-gunning incessantly during which they sank 4 or 5 kites and putting ours out of action.We were stranded and it looked as though all was up.However,we spent that night and the next day (29th Apr) wondering what our senior officers were doing about our position.Up until 4 o'clock that day all was quiet and uneventful,when at that time a Boche seaplane appeared on the scene flying very low.After hovering overhead for some time it decided to land.It taxied up into the bay,where either side was being manned by machine guns,which we were carrying.This sight was rather a shock at the time for we did not know what to expect next.However,before any of the occupants had time to disembark ,one of our gunners opened fire a little too soon.It scared them for they very soon turned their plane ~~XXXX~~ around and made for it.This episode put us on our feet and made us very wary of paratroops;so for the rest of the day we were posted off over many miles of the island,keeping a watchful eye for any further events.

Good news was received late that evening,another kite had ~~arrived~~ been procured from Grecian refugees,who arrived in port during the evening.At nightfall we all embarked,about 150 in all(including refugees) and made for Milos,arriving there next morning (the 30th).This day was uneventful and at dusk we pulled out for CRETE where we arrived on the morning of May 1st.

G.V. Dallimore Cpl.,
VX 22807.

7/0/4 E3 E4

VX 20154
Spr Williams H.
2/8 Fd Coy R.A.E.

In our hazardous 70 mile trek across CRETE, which we accomplished in three nights and days, the last 30 hours was a nightmare. Before we reached the safety of the evacuation ship, members of our party had to struggle with stretcher cases over precipitous mountain country to the seaport of Spartia (Sphakia).

We had only a packet of biscuits per man for the three days, but besides the "blitz" which was monotonously on us daily, our greatest ordeal was through lack of water. It was often a welcome sight to see an abandoned truck ahead, and there were real shouts of joy when we discovered water and never mind how distasteful it was, in the radiator. If there had been three mouthfuls of water for every man each day most would have reached the embarkation points safely, but many could not go on in the latter stages because of the lack of water.

CRETE was really an island of despair in this regard. On the north side there was an abundance of water, but on the south side, where we needed it most, it was as dry as a desert.

Separated from the other members of the company, my mate and I arrived at the evacuation control point in an exhausted condition. My mate had a shrapnel wound in the heel and I had to help him over the boulder-strewn tracks from one starting point. The officer at the control point told us we would have to wait until later in the night before we could be sent on down to the beach, about 4½ miles away. We, however, decided to make our way independently down a deep canyon. It varied from 500 to 1000ft in depth and the bed of it was so uneven that we fell over several times. We came across an amusing sight in this canyon, Four Greek airmen had commandeered a small donkey and only its ears and tail could be seen outside the pile of gear on it.

We eventually reached Sphakia Cove, but were sent back to some caves and told to be ready to embark on the following night. There was a labrinth of caves in this particular ravine and we shared them with soldiers of all the Allied nations. About 60 Australians and New Zealanders were together and an Australian Lieut called for volunteers that night (May 31st) to shift several badly wounded cases from a ravine lower down and inland. We started off at 8 p.m. and arriving there at 9 p.m. we started on our eight mile struggle to the beach with stretcher cases. My group of four carried a wounded Royal Marine. He had been shot through the back and the explosive bullets had smashed his ribs into his lungs. What fortitude that boy had! Many times we had sudden drops and at others we had to drag the stretcher over the rough ground. Not once did he groan, but he was conscious all the time. "I'm going alright", he would say, "just box on, Diggers".

When we reached the beach a naval officer directed us to the end of the cove. Stretcher cases had to go off last, arrangements being made to get them on with the least possible shaking to them.

Our job was finished when we carried our cases on board. It was ten or fifteen years dropped from my life.

My luckiest escape on CRETE was brought about when I did not rush to get on a truck which had some space available when we were about 20 miles from the beach. My mate and I went on the second truck for a few miles. The truck in front plunged over a steep embankment, eleven were killed and fifteen injured.

Luck more than anything else got most of us alive out of CRETE.

Spr.,
XXXXXXX VX 20154.

E-26

ESCAPE FROM CRETE

STATEMENT BY WX 2253 Pte. NICOL, H.

(Sketches of the route taken in this escape are appended to 2/11 Bn War Diary of Nov 41, from which this report is taken.)

---

1. On 30 May 1941 when we received orders to smash weapons and either surrender or make a break for the hills, I decided to endeavour to escape. I crossed the island in company with a number of 2/11 troops. We arrived at ADG GALENE on the 1 Jun and found a large party of British and Greek troops on the beach. On the night of 5/6 Jun at about 1800 hrs we were captured by a German patrol. The Austrian Officer in command on hearing that we were Australians and volunteer soldiers, passed the remark :-

"You're lucky. There are no volunteers in our army; I'm forced to do this."

2. We were marched to HERAKLION, arriving on the night of 6/7 Jun. There was a vast number of prisoners collected there, and, as we were waiting for a meal, under cover of darkness I escaped. I met a soldier from the Argyle and Sutherland Highland Regiment a few hundred yards from the camp and we hid in a vineyard that night; the next morning some Cretans found us and gave us food and civilian clothing. We travelled south for a few days, walking during the hours of darkness and arrived at the village of MANIFATSO, two miles inland.

3. The inhabitants hid us in caves near the village. By this time there were five of us in the party - two A. & S. H., one Black Watch, an Austrian refugee and myself. The villagers used to bring us food every day, and as time went on we met various other soldiers who were hiding near neighbouring villages. Among these was Capt. Adonis, Greek Navy, who was travelling around getting together sails and other necessary gear in order to refloat a 20 ft boat which was lying on the beach. During this time a German recce plane used to go over some mornings and we observed motor boats flying the Italian flag patrolling on three different occasions.

4. At last all preparations were complete, and with plenty of water and food, eleven of us left on 17 Sep. The party consisted of two A. & S.H. soldiers, two Cypriots, Capt. Adonis, a Greek pilot, two Greek soldiers, a Greek policeman from Athens, the Austrian refugee and myself.

5. The first day out the boat sprang a leak and we had to bail her constantly. At about 1800 hrs on 20 Sep we were picked up by HM Destroyer Kimberley. They told us that we were 40 miles from BARDIA. This ship was escorting troops to TOBRUK. We were taken on to TOBRUK aboard the "Kimberley", and brought back to ALEXANDRIA the next day. We were in ALEXANDRIA for two days and interrogated by Intelligence Officers, then sent to the Citadel, CAIRO. After 10 days there I was sent to Australian Headquarters, and returned to the Unit.

6. All the people at MANIFATSO helped us in every way. Following are two names :
President of MANIFATSO ..... Phelipaki & Stassi Kapelaki, and a Greek soldier, Nicolas, acted as interpreter for us.

(Sgd.) H. NICOL (WX 2253)

7/0/4 E3 E4

VX 20154
Spr Williams H.
2/8 Fd Coy R.A.E.

In our hazardous 70 mile trek across CRETE, which we accomplished in three nights and days, the last 30 hours was a nightmare. Before we reached the safety of the evacuation ship, members of our party had to struggle with stretcher cases over precipitous mountain country to the seaport of Spartia (Sphakia).

We had only a packet of biscuits per man for the three days, but besides the "blitz" which was monotonously on us daily, our greatest ordeal was through lack of water. It was often a welcome sight to see an abandoned truck ahead, and there were real shouts of joy when we discovered water and never mind how distasteful it was, in the radiator. If there had been three mouthfuls of water for every man each day most would have reached the embarkation points safely, but many could not go on in the latter stages because of the lack of water.

CRETE was really an island of despair in this regard. On the north side there was an abundance of water, but on the south side, where we needed it most, it was as dry as a desert.

Separated from the other members of the company, my mate and I arrived at the evacuation control point in an exhausted condition. My mate had a shrapnel wound in the heel and I had to help him over the boulder-strewn tracks from one starting point. The officer at the control point told us we would have to wait until later in the night before we could be sent on down to the beach, about 4½ miles away. We, however, decided to make our way independently down a deep canyon. It varied from 500 to 1000ft in depth and the bed of it was so uneven that we fell over several times. We came across an amusing sight in this canyon, Four Greek airmen had commandeered a small donkey and only its ears and tail could be seen outside the pile of gear on it.

We eventually reached Sphakia Cove, but were sent back to some caves and told to be ready to embark on the following night. There was a labrinth of caves in this particular ravine and we shared them with soldiers of all the Allied nations. About 60 Australians and New Zealanders were together and an Australian Lieut called for volunteers that night (May 31st) to shift several badly wounded cases from a ravine lower down and inland. We started off at 8 p.m. and arriving there at 9 p.m. we started on our eight mile struggle to the beach with stretcher cases. My group of four carried a wounded Royal Marine. He had been shot through the back and the explosive bullets had smashed his ribs into his lungs. What fortitude that boy had! Many times we had sudden drops and at others we had to drag the stretcher over the rough ground. Not once did he groan, but he was conscious all the time. "I'm going alright", he would say, "just box on, Diggers".

When we reached the beach a naval officer directed us to the end of the cove. Stretcher cases had to go off last, arrangements being made to get them on with the least possible shaking to them.

Our job was finished when we carried our cases on board. It was ten or fifteen years dropped from my life.

My luckiest escape on CRETE was brought about when I did not rush to get on a truck which had some space available when we were about 20 miles from the beach. My mate and I went on the second truck for a few miles. The truck in front plunged over a steep embankment, eleven were killed and fifteen injured.

Luck more than anything else got most of us alive out of CRETE.

Spr.,
VX 20154.

T 9

ADDITIONAL PERSONAL STORIES OF GREECE & CRETE

Lost from his unit in Crete, Cpol R J Ryan, (4 W/T Sec) wandered for two days before meeting up with a sig post. A key man in his unit (Cpl Ryan superintends wireless sets) he was believed by his unit to be lost. He had rested with other members of his unit during the evacuation progress, but had slept on after the others had moved forward. After being strafed by German fighters, he decided to try and find his own way out. He dodged from tree to tree, and from rock to rock, until finally contacting the Australian signallers. He was evacuated safely, and rejoined his unit in Egypt.

Of a team of four who went forward in Greece to try and find equipment, one was killed, two were wounded (one of whom was taken PW for 48 hours) and the fourth escaped. Sig J.W.Woods, who was shot through the leg by a sniper, and even then succeeded in crawling to shelter although he was shot at every time he moved from one pock to another. He could not find adequate cover, nor did he have the time to treat his wound. For hours, while trying to extricate himself from a position between cross-fire from our own troops and that of the enemy, he was machine-gunned and sniped at. The irony of his predicament was that Sig Woods thought that, all the time, he was being shot at by the Welsh, who had mistaken him for a Nazi paratrooper.

With the other three Australians, Sig Woods had inspected two German gliders that had been crash-landed in a big ravine. It was during thet time that they first came under fire. A friendly wave of the hand, meant to indicate to the Welsh the presence of Allied troops, only brought a burst of machine-gun bullets. One of the party was killed instantly, and the other three separated and dived for cover.

Sig R. Leopold received shrapnel wound in the back from a mortar but manged to crawl to safety behind a jutting rock. From sheer weakness and exhaustion he dozed off, and was awakened by voices to find himself looking down the barrel of a Tommy gun. A Nazi officer and two soldiers had stalked on him during his sleep. The officer, who spoke good English with a slight gutteral accent, demanded to know where water supplies could be found. He sought information of troop movements and locations. Sig Leopold gave no answers, even refusing to walk a mile for medical treatment. The officer went away, and Sig Leopold made a daring escape during the night. Finally, he and Sig Woods were found by the Welsh, who at first suspected that they were Nazi parachute troopers who had lost their way.

News story

Photos following

E1

How Australians who were taken prisoners of war on Crete sabotaged German petrol they were forced to handle is told by Pte W.A.Sicklen, aged 21, who later escaped from a German prison camp in Salonika and made his way back to Palestine.

Sicklen, who at 19, was one of the first 4,000 to enlist in New South Wales, was one of several hundred Australian prisoners put to work on storing petrol for the Germans after the Australian evacuation had been made.

"The boys may have been prisoners of war," he said, "but they still intended to do their bit. We unscrewed the caps of the drums and allowed the petrol to flow out on the ground. We loosened other caps so that the petrol would leak away in a few weeks".

Sicklen said he emptied six 40-gallon drums and loosened the caps of many more. He said that between them, the Australians must have wasted thousands of gallons at a time when the Germans valued petrol more than food.

Other jobs of the Australian prisoners on Crete were to bury their own and German dead and drag wrecked German planes from the aerodrome at Maleme.

"At Maleme, the German dead outnumbered our own by at least six to one" he said. "There must have been more than 100 plane wrecks on the drome, mostly Junkers 52s. On one occasion, while marching from Retimo to Suda Bay, I saw about 30 planes which my battalion and another Australian battalion had shot down with small arms fire. We were as proud of those as a duck shooter is of a big bag".

Pte Sicklen said that young German parachute troops were their guards while on Crete. They treated the prisoners exceptionally well. It was after his transfer to a prison camp in Salonika that he discovered what he described as Germans who were not fit to be called pigs.

"After a few days there we were so weak from lack of food that we had black-outs when we tried to stand" he sd.

Among the Australians and New Zealanders particularly there was a determination to escape rather than submit to the treatment. Sicklen was one of many who finally got away by crawling 200 yards through a sewerage pipe.

"It didn't take me long to get hold of a suit of civilian clothes," he continued. "I decided then that it was no use spending all my time sneaking from bush to bush. I walked along the road just as I would do in Australia. I passed many Huns, but they never even looked at me. This gave me so much confidence that I decided to see for myself what was going on in Salonika.

"What I discovered was worse than anything I had imagined. The Germans -- and I was now actually rubbing shoulders with them -- were treating the Greeks worse than animals. I saw one little Greek girl, aged about 6, hit over the head with the butt of a rifle. Other children were hit frequently and shots were fired at the feet of women to frighten them.

"The atmosphere seemed to be charged with the hate the Greeks bore their captors. Several Germans have been knifed, but the big flare-up is yet to come".

All commodities were scarce. Pte Sicklen learnt that each Greek family had been rationed to 38 lbs of wheat a year. All shops were practically bare, owing to the Germans having looted the goods. The people were living almost entirely on vegetables.

Sewing machines, bedding and beds themselves had been taken from private homes. Olive oil, once plentiful, was scarcely seen. Sugar, where procurable, cost £1 sterling a pound, and petrol cost £5 sterling a four gallon tin.

Crude oil was so scarce that the Germans allowed the Greeks to run their trams and essential services for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, as they said the machinery used too much fuel.

Pte Sicklen, who took more than three months to reach a British base after his escape, is now being re-equipped, and says he is ready to start ~~off~~ where he left off when taken prisoner.

trotter

Account of NX3921 Pte W.A.Sicklen, of H.Q., 2/1 Bn, of his escape from a German prison camp in Salonika

---

When it was realised that we could not be taken off Crete by the navy and it became obvious that no further purpose was to be served by fighting on, the 2/1 and 2/11 Bns surrendered on 30 May, 41. Both Bns were marched to Retimo, about seven miles from where the surrender took place, and were housed in big buildings there.

On arrival in the afternoon, each man was given a handful of uncooked rice and a handful of raisons to last him on the march to Suda Bay. Our guards were German parachutists and Austrian Alpine troops. They treated us well, and it was not their fault that we could get no more food. There was a food shortage.

Next morning, at five o'clock, we set out on the march for Suda Bay, and arrived there at lunch time the following day. As we passed wells on the road we fell out and drank. Our guards did not attempt to prevent us, as their were so few of them.

At Suda Bay, bully beef which the Germans had captured was distributed in the proportion of four men to one tin. A packet of biscuits was divided between every three men. We were at Suda Bay only a day and a half, during which time all we did was transfer rice and wheat from one store to another for the Germans.

On the way from Retimo to Suda Bay, we passed 20 or 30 wrecked German planes which the 2/1 and 2/11 Bns had shot down with small arms fire. We were as proud of those as a duck shooter is of a big bag.

We were marched to Maleme, where there was no prison camp prepared for us.So the boys just took things in their own hands and went on the scrounge for food. We roamed the hills and looted villages. I came back with nine fowls and half a sheep, and a bag of potatoes. Others brought in pigs, turkeys, and sheep. The place soon looked like a farmyard. The German parachutists who were pretty decent chaps, allowed us to keep the food, and we got to work and cooked it ourselves. These parachutists, many of whom spoke excellent English, ranged in age from 18 to 22, with a few exceptions. They said their qualifications had to be a good family, personal recommendations from their officers, and a good standard of education and physique. I can't say anything bad about those chaps. They talked and debated with us freely, and often gave us cigarettes.

We were six weeks at Maleme. The Germans put us to work burying their dead and our own, handling ~~xxxxxx~~ captured petrol, and dragging wrecked planes off the drome. The place was littered with wrecked planes, mostly Junkers 52.

In the Maleme area the German dead compared with our own in the proportion of about six to one.

The boys may have been prisoners of war, but they still intended to do their bit. While handling the petrol, we unscrewed caps and allowed petrol to flow on the ground. I emptied six 40-gallon drums and loosened the caps of others and allowed the petrol to leak out.

The allowance of food during the six weeks wasn't particularly good, but with that we had looted, our rations were passable.

On about July 8 we were marched to Suda Bay during the night, and in the morning embarked on the ships Arcadia and Salazar. We were taken to Pirius, there trans-shipped, and then taken to Salonika.

We were taken to Strathmore camp on the outskirts of Salonika. We were marched through the streets so that the Greeks could look at what the Germans called the "English gentlemen".The attitude of the Greeks was definitely pro-British. Many Greeks attempted to give us cigarettes, but the Germans either hit them or pushed them away. Here we met the true German.

The camp we were taken to was the filthiest form of hell one could possible imagine. Some of my comrades died of starvation. Dysentery, diarroeah, malaria, and diphtheria broke out during my ten days there.

The Germans would give us no medical supplies. I was so weak from lack of food that every time I stood up I had a black-out. Everyone was the same way. The rations were -- breakfast, sometimes half, sometimes three quarters of an Italian cornflour biscuit with a cup of"tea"made from pepper-corn berries; dinner, a cup of "shadow" soup made from either broad beans which were riddled with beetles and worms, or a cup of of soup made from lentils (if one came last for the meal, he got a cupful of dirt); tea -- 10 men to a 2 lb loaf of bread and a cup of ersatz coffee. The German doctor said he would accept no responsibility for deaths in the camp until the rationwas increased.

Among the Australians and New Zealanders particularly, there was a determination to escape rather than submit to the German treatment. Every little group was making its plans to get away, and weird and wonderful were some of the plans hatched. oo The Cypriots had a pair of wire cutters, and many British trips escaped with them through the cut wire at night.

The Germans were at a complete loss to know how so many were escaping . They knew, of course, that some were getting through the wire, but they realised that all the escapees could not have got out that way.

It was a Greek who put us wise to the best way of escape. He came into the camp and was pouring phenyle down a hole which led into a sewerage pipe. Over this hole was a concrete slab with a ring in it. We asked him whether the sewer was a way out of the camp. His only reply was "hidey", which is Greek for "go".

It was about this time that the Germans sent five of their number, dressed in British battle dress, in amongst us to attempt to find out how the escapes were being effected. The boys realised straight away what was afoot, and surrounded the Germans, refusing to let them go. Then someone threw a punch at one of them, and the rest went for their lives out of the camp.

The same night we decided to attempt to escape. Somehow the Cypriots used to get cigarettes and tobacco smuggled into the camp, and at night they used to form a ring and call " cigarettes and tobacco, ~~exzkzxzzdxz~~ money changed". That night they formed the ring around the ~~zxz~~ concrete slab, and while they were calling about 100 of us lowered ourselves into the drain., in bunches of about 20 at intervals of about five minutes.

The sewer pipe itself was so small that it would permit only an average size man to crawl through it. About 200 of us must have got out that night.

A short distance away from the outlet of the sewer, which was about 200 yards long and took 40 minutes to get through, three of us met two Greeks, who immediately supplied us with a much-needed cigarette -- something we had not had for many a day.

The Greeks took us to his village, supplied us with civilian clothes and a hearty meal. ~~zzt~~ We stayed in the village for about two weeks. After about four days, reaction from the vile treatment we had received set in, and I was in bed in the Greek's house for 10 days. The Greeks nursed me like their own son, treating me with the best they had.

At this time there were eight British escapees harbored in the village.

When I was well, the Greeks advised me to go to Salonika where I might have a chance of escaping from the country. I took their advice. As I was dressed in civilian clothes, I walked along the road just as I would do in Australia. I passed many Germans on the way, and they never even looked at me. However, I was frightened that my blue eyes might give me away, as most Greeks have brown eyes. But Jerry didn't wake up to it.

The Greek who was with me took me to a house in Salonika, where we were cared for for about 10 days by a Greek woman and her two daughters. While living at this house I made it my business to see what the Germans really were doing.

In broad daylight, I walked through the streets of Salonika, brushing shoulders with many a Hun. The first thing I noticed was the scarcity of bread. I looked into the matter and found that the Germans were allowing only about 38 lbs of wheat per year per family.

All shops -- footwear, clothing, and confectionery -- were practically bare owing to the Germans having looted the goods. The people themselves were at the time living entirely on vegetables.

From another source I found out that sewing machines, bed spreads, and even beds themselves had been taken from private homes. Olive oil, once plentiful, was now scarcely seen. Sugar was practically unprocurable. Where it could be bought, it cost the equivalent of an English pound per lb. Petrol was worth £5 English or more a four gallon tin. Crude oil was so scarce that the Germans allowed the Greeks to run their trams and essential services for only an hour in the morning and an hour at night, as the machinery used too much fuel.

The Germans treated the Greek people worse than animals. I saw a little Greek girl, aged 6, hit over the head with a rifle butt, children bashed, and shots fired near the feet of women to frighten them.

I could feel the hate of the Greeks in the air. They were all plotting for the downfall of the German. Several Germans were knifed.

The house at which I was living was raided by the Germans. There were six of us in the house at the time, but we ran all ways and were not seen. I decided the house was too hot and went back to the village, where I was advised to try Ain Ourous (?), where we were told we might find a boat to escape from the country.

Five of us set out along the Stavro road, which was mined by the Germans in case, I think, the British came via Turkey. After five days' travel over road and mountain, we reached Ain Nurous.

A Greek priest we met asked us if we could row. The priest came with us in his own boat, and we made five attempts to row to Imbros. Rough weather forced us back each time, but we made it at the sixth attempt, arriving on September 8.

The Turks arrested us, as it was a military zone. We were taken to a quarantine station, where we were visited by the British Consul. Under a Turkish officer, we were taken to Alexandretta, then on to the border, where wer were handed over to the British authorities.

The Turks, who are very pro-British, treated us in the best manner possible.

Pte W A Sucklen NX8921

trotter

Appendix K.

E21

Escape from CRETE 1 - 10 Jun. 41

by

VX 11721 Pte H.R. Horne 2/7 Bn.

At approxminately 0600 hrs 1 Jun. I heard that our forces on the Island of Crete had capitulated. Lieut Pawson, 2/6 Bn. to whom I was attached, gave us this order, after which he told us that we could either stop there and become prisoners of war or take a chance to get away in one of the barges down near the sea shore. I then found Col. Walker and asked him where the Bn. was. He informed me that they were up in the hills just at the rear of him; so I made my way up towards the Bn. and came across some of Don Coy. and Lieut Catchlove. I started talking to drivers Hansen and Anstis, also Pte's Green and Grosser who said they were going to try and get off in a boat, so I went with them.

We all walked down to the beach and swung left for about four hundred yards to where we had seen a barge pull in. When we got to the barge we found Lieut Day of the Welsh Regt. in charge of it and with a number of British troops.

Between 0730 hrs. and 0800 hrs 1Jun. we left the shore at SPARKIA and headed for sea. About two hours after we left we heard some planes which were bombing and machine-gunning where we had left. We pulled into a small Island off Crete and searched around for a wellfrom which we took on as much water as we could possibly carry. We also came across some Greek refugees on this Island. They killed a couple of sheep for us and boiled them, so we sat down and had a good feed, taking the remainder of the sheep with us back to the boat. We were also given a small quantity of bread by these Greeks. Whilst on this Island we met an Australian sailor named L.Donnelly from the Destroyer "Kipling" which had been sunk off this Island and who thinks he was the only survivor. He joined our party. During the afternoon we heard planes flying aroundso decided to wait till night before we left.

At about 2100 hrs 1 Jun. we left and set our course South to south West making for Derna, as it was the nearest land. Before leaving Lieut Day took all our names and numbers in case anything should happen to us. There were 44 of us all told. Our supplies consisted of one tin of biscuits, 9 tins of Bully Beef, 4 tins of M & V, 2 tins of Bacon and one tin of Fruit, as well as the unexpended portion of sheep. The ration was fixed at one biscuit covered with bully or bacon per day and 4 large spoonsful of water night and morning. The mutton had to be eaten first as it would not keep.

The party consisted of we five Australians :-

VX 1172 1 Pte H.R. Horne
VX 12399 Pte I. Hansen
VX 4681 Dvr A.F. Anstis
VX 4690 Pte J.B. Green
VX 16095 Pte L.L. Grosser

Lieut Day and a number from his Rgt., some Marines and Commondos Tps., and a Greek interpreter named Georgacopoulos.

We had about 80 gallons of petrol in the tanks and this lasted until about 1200 hrs 2 Jun. After we had run out of petrol we rigged up a sail out of a couple of blankets we had on board.

During the afternoon of this day Lieut Day and seven men of his regt. in company with Dvr Anstis and Pte Green of the 2/7 Bn decided to take off in a long boat which we had been towing, to try and get help. They rigged up a sail, and with 4 oars left us about 1600 hrs 2 Jun. heading South. We gave them most of the rations as they had to row, and about 4 days supply of water.

Before the long- boat left we arranged that if either boat was picked up it would report about the other boat being adrift. That was the last we saw of them.

Up to this stage Hansen and two men of the Welsh Regt. navigated our ship doing two hours on and four hours off. After Lieut ~~XXXXXX~~ Day and his party left us Hansen took charge of the ship and control of the water supply. He said he was able to navigate as he had knocked about a lot and done a lot of fishing.

From now on we just drifted along, the wind carrying us South to South West all the time. During th... es

Correction :-

From 2 Jun to 5 Jun we had biscuits only to eat but these gave out on the 5 th. From then on we had nothing to eat, but were able to keep to our ration of water.

...at)

...head

... showing wing lights and we thought it was a Sunderland.

About 8 Jun. some of the Commandos started to drink sea - water. Hansen had a "Tommy Gun" and told them that if they did not stop he would take severe action. This threat effectively stopped them.

We drew some rusty water from the ballast tanks and boiled it but very little of it was drinkable.

On the morning of the 1o Jun. we sighted Land at about 0930 hrs. Later a British plane flew over - head and wesignalled; the pilot, acknowledged our signals and kept ~~kept~~ flying around for a long time. Later we saw four British Torpedo Boats but they were going away from us. Then the plane came over again and dropped ~~it~~ a message to one of the boats. The boat came to our rescue and towed us to land near SIDI BARRANI. We reported to O.C. Torpedo Boat about the long boat in which Lieut Day had left us.

When we landed there was a Company of K.M.R. British troops there and they took us to their camp and gave us every possible assistance and later transported us to the Staging Camp at MERSA MATRUH. We stopped there that night and the next day were sent down on the Hospital Train to 19 C.C.S. at FAYID.

We were kept in the hospital from the 11 Jun until 25 Jun. and were then discharged and given a railway pass to rejoin our Unit. We reached KILO 89 Camp on 27 Jun. and reported to our Unit the same day.

Pte Hansen was taken to another Hospital in Egypt and did not return to Palestine with us. I have not heard of him since.

H. R. Horne

E 20

GHQ ME

30 Jun 41

~~E 20~~

Subject :- Report by Sigman CARROLL
2/11 Aust Inf Bn

Secretary Crete Committee
Maj B. Jones, CSI, 6 Kasr El Nil
MH & I Sec, HQ AIF ✓

Forwarded herewith a transcript of the story told by Sigman CARROLL, 2/11 Aust Inf Bn, to the CO 2/2 Aust LG Bn at MERSA MATRUH.

J. to be copied

E.G.W. Irving
Lt.Col
Aust LO

MATRUH

21 Jun 41

Story told by Signaller CARROLL, S.L. WX 953, Bn HQ. 2/11 Bn

The 2/1 Bn and 2/11 Bn were at Retimo, holding the aerodrome. There were two Greek battalions also, but they disappeared overnight. They left all our centre open when they left, and when we closed in we had to leave most of our area unprotected. That occurred two nights before the collapse. We thought we had everything in hand from the air, but the enemy came by road, thousands of them, on motor-cycles and s,all tanks, all brought by air. At first we couldn't make out what was happening when bullets whistled among us, and thought some of our own chaps were shooting wild. Then after a Coy Comds conference we were given the message : 'The island has capitulated. Destroy all your weapons and run for it or surrender.' Then we woke up what the bullets were. We had a look over the ridge and could see for miles nothing but German vehicles. We had only about five minutes warning of their coming. All our communications had been severed by the parachutists in the first attack. We were using civilian lines along the coast to Canea but the parachutists cut these and we were left without any communication, even to Brigade. We had a wireless set, but it was not too successful. Two of our I section left after a night attack and they got the first reports through that we were holding Retimo. They (Bde) were going to see that we good fresh supplies of ammunition, but nothing arrived. From the first day of the invasion to the end we knew nothing of what was happening elsewhere except reports on the radio we picked up from the BBC news. From the Greeks we got a little infm. News seemed to fly among the Greeks like a telegraph line, and they knew 24 hours before we did that Canea had fallen. They became panicky and left for the south. We tried to stiffen their morale by telling them that warships were bringing reinforcements and ammunition, but they just cleared off. The Germans dropped pamphlets for two or three days saying that they would burn the villages and any civilian assisting the British would be shot. Civilians and all deserted us then. The civilians were very game when the parachutists first came. They jumped up at them with their bayonets and all the civilians were soon armed with German tommy-guns. It became dangerous to move around because you might be shot by the Greeks. They had British officers but they couldn't control them; they just roamed round the hills shooting at anything. It was a remarkable sight when the Germans first came. We saw about 50 fighter planes coming. They dive-machine-gunned us for five minutes. Then the sky became black with troop-carriers. They dropped parachutists and it was a wonderful spectacle. The sky was full of them, all different colours. As they landed they dashed for their own particular colour and all got together. Quite a number were still in their parachute harness, and others were shot in mid-air. Six troop-carrying planes were shot down near us, three fighters and a seaplane flying boat. Three of the troop-carriers still contained their full crew. Others dropped out as the blazing plane was falling. Some were killed and others had broken arms and legs. Others were hanging in the trees. The whole stunt was quite a washout for the Germans. We definitely routed him, and after 12 hours we had him beaten. We buried about 500 dead German parachutists in our area the morning of the second day, compared with about 40 of our own. We must have had about 400/500 prisoners at Retimo, including a Colonel and several Majors. Our C.O., Major Sandover, a young chap of 28, a fine soldier, spoke German fluently, and from them he got the signalling code the Germans used. It was impossible to make any attempt to attack the Germans in our area during the day, because of the enemy aircraft, so we staged night attacks with hand grenades and tommy-guns. Everyone was armed with a tommy-gun. We fought him with his own stuff, and when we wanted ammunition we signalled for it. We had six German sniper's rifles and I can definitely vouch for it that our chaps got 75 Germans in two days sniping. We got them when they were putting out their big indentification strips so that their own planes would not bomb them. These were big white strips with a red swastika on them. The tommy-gun is a beautiful weapon.

/It has .....

It has a clip which, when you pull it back, enables you to fire the gun from the shoulder, and if you slam it down you can fire from the hip. It was simple to operate and you could pull it to pieces in two seconds. The enemy parachutists all carried tommy-guns. They were beautifully clothed and equipped, and everything they had was braned 1940, even to the stockings they wore. They only carried an anti-gas preparation, no respirators, and a bakelite container with energy tablets. Some of our chaps sampled these and they couldn't sleep for a couple of nights. The Germans were under the impression we didn't take prisoners and they would not give themselves up. Some of them hid out for eight days, crouching in the wheat fields and in hollows. We turned the Vickers machine guns on them, sweeping across the wheat, and then just went along digging graves to put them in. Some of the German parachutists were 17/18 years of age, and the average was from 18 to 25. We had all parachutists against us till the last. They didn't get the aerodrome till we had gone, but when we left we had only 22 boxes of SAA remaining. Our artillery was four Italian 75 mm guns and every second shell was a dud. The first five rounds would be got off all right, but from then on they wouldn't get a bang out of the guns, which over-heated. When the gun got hot is seemed to do something to the I-tie shells, and none of them would be any good. But our chaps did some great shooting though they did curse these shells. A seaplane made a perfect landing near us one day, then tipped on its nose. Two shots from the artillery scored a direct hit and she went up in flames. Another time a plane landed near us, carrying 3" field guns for the Germans. I saw the first shot, then heard the officer correct the elevation 10 degrees and the second shell blew the plane up - 20 seconds after landing. Some of our prisoners who could talk English told us they expected two more divisions to land the next day to relieve them. Another said : "There are not many of us left in Greece now - the suicides." They told us their aircraft would drop plenty of bombs on us because their first landing had been a failure. They were confident that in six days we would be laughing on the other sides of our faces, and right to the very day we had to get out. We asked them why they were so confident, and they said : "Hitler has said he would take the island; that is good enough for us." There was nothing slinking about those chaps. They were confident and carried themselves well. We were happy to have given them one setback, but it was only a mere detail. They all wore well cut uniforms like the air force, and each carried four days rations as well as his vitamin stuff.

It was a real shock when we found we had to go. One Company of ours, C Coy, 40 strong, had formed a road-block. We had heard that 300 German motor-cyclists were in Retimo township. Those chaps didn't get the message and they fought it out to the finish. Through our telescope, which we managed to bring from Greece with us, we saw them fighting at close quarters with fixed bayonets. C Coy held them up for an hour and a half before they got past. Once they got past they surrounded them. We kept our guard on the prisoners until the last, then crept away and let them suddenly wake up to the fact that there was no one guarding them. It wasafunny type of warfare. You had no front and no rear; the parachutists dropped right among you. At night when I went out to fix up the lines it was possible that a German might be behind the next tree. Our troops in their night attacks actually entered the German RAP at Pelodona (?) village, and saw at least 200 German casualties there. They had their ammunition dump and HQ under the RAP, and we called on them to remove these or we would shell the RAP. They took it out and moved it further down the road, but our Italian shells bounced on the road and skidded off.

/When we.....

When we were leaving it was left up to us whether we would surrender then or cross the mountains. We asked our Padre, 'Are you going?' He said, 'No. I don't think I can cross the mountains. I'll stay with the wounded.' He sat down with the wounded and waited for the Germans. The Colonel of the 2/1 bn also surrendered at Retimo. Our M.O., Capt Ryan, was a wonderful chap. He won the M.C. in Libya here. He had a big 3-ton Italian truck, and used to take it right up to the very front lines, getting around and attending to the wounded himself and bringing them out. We would say, 'Here comes the M.O's 'flying fortress.' He tried to get some of our seriously wounded chaps through in the truck, and went forward alone, with a Red Cross flag above him, to ask the Germans to let it through with a driver. They turned it back. When they saw him coming they stopped firing and some came out to meet him. They blindfolded him and took him to a room in the village. It was there that he found that Capt Wood and a Lieut of our Bn had been killed in a night attack, blown up by a hand grenade in a room. Capt Ryan is a Queenslander and joined us at Ingleburn.

When we left Retimo we all split up to cross the mountains, joining up again under Major Sandover again on the south coast, where we covered the coastline for 12 miles. There were mostly Australians there, with a few Englishmen of different units. We left on the morning of May 31 at 9 o'clock and at midnight had completed the 40 miles. We had Greek guides, but there were no roads. All we carried were signalling lamps and Verey light pistols. There were no Germans inland but during the day a recce plane flew over and div-machinegunned us. We waited on the coast for eight days, expecting to see the Navy arrive any night for us. There were about 500 of us, remnants of the 2/1 and 2/11 Bns AIF and a mixed lot of Englishmen-Naval Brigade, Air Force, etc. There was very little aircraft over during the days, but on the second night a Blenheim flew down over the top of us, with his lights on. We opened up our signal lamps and tried to call him. He dropped eight bags of ration chocolates and a bag of medical supplies. I signalled that we had at least 500 troops waiting and he acknowledged the signal, said 'Good luck', and then disappeared. That is the last we heard or saw of anything. We waited for eight days, till the Germans caught up with us. We dispersed and took to the mountains. We would come down at night to see if there were any boats or small craft about. We heard of others going and had information from the Greeks that a small boat with 50 or 60 of our chaps had left the island. We got a crew of four and put in for a small boat. The chap wouldn't sell it - he wanted to get away himself to an island 30 miles away but on the afternoon of the evening we were going to leave three of my mates were captured by the Germans when they went to get water. I was left to make the trip on my own. It was a 16-feet boat, pointed at both ends. The mast was well forward and the boom right across. I had to pull down the boom and rig the boat again, otherwise I would not have been able to sail it. I got some crabbing nets and used the netting wire to rig the boat. I found a sail in a disused boat-house, ragged and rotten.

I left Crete on 11 June about 2 a.m. I had got to sea about five miles when I was becalmed and had to turn back before dawn. Every time I found sand where a landing could be made I was fired on as soon as I came within range. After six attempts I had to give up and set off out to sea. A recce plane machinegunned me from the air and put a few bullets in the sail and along the dinghy, but not below waterline. Apparently he thought he had got me and cleared off after two bursts. I had no compass - just laid for the south. I stuck my pocket-knife in the boards and when the sun made a long fine blande I knew I was heading south. It was eight days before I sighted land, but two days out from the land here I ran into a heavy wind. I tried to keep a southerly course by heading the beat across the waves, but two planks sprung. I

/stuffed those...

stuffed those, but after 24 hours she holed and 10 miles out began to break up. I came in on my 2-gallon water tin, which had a third of a gallon left. I floated and swam in. I never thought of sharks - all I could see was the land. It was too high to land where I struck the shore, so I swam along till I found some sand. I surfed in, and the waves threw me up on the beach in somersaults. They were about 30 ft high. I was becalmed for three days in the middle of the Mediterranean, and then I had to limit myself to three mouthfuls of water a day, and a cube of ration chocolate. I had six tins of that with me. All the clothing I had was a pair of trousers, so I waited till my boat came in. It arrived four hours after I did (six-10 miles off!). I salvaged some of the sail and wrapped it round me. I saw two small wireless masts sticking up over a bell-type tent and I started to get round under cover to see who was there. I did not know where I was, but I knew I was east of Sollum, because I could not see the escarpment. I had been up as far as Derna before. I saw two dark chaps, and thought they were Italians. I thought 'I have crossed the ocean for nothing! ' but I was too exhausted to do anything else but give up. Then two other chaps came out, one with Corporal's stripes. I asked them, "Are you Germans?" They said, "Germans be buggered! We're British" They took me and gave me a bottle of Richmond beer and a packet of cigarettes, I thought I was Christmas! It was the first beer I had tasted since leaving Egypt and the first cigarette for nearly a month.

The last I saw there were about 35 men hiding in a monastery on the South Coast. The Chief Prior was prepared to feed them until things had quietened down, and he may be able to procure boats for them. I think there are at least 12 officers and 30 other ranks there. They are a mixed lot, some Australians, some Navy and some Air Force. There are 11 Australians, some 2/1, some machine-gunners. The Germans have liberated the 10,000 to 12,000 Italian prisoners on the island, and they are policing it. When I thought of getting into their hands I determined to get away. The Germans have been very decent. They gave our sick and wounded cigarettes and looked after them. As a rule the patrols consist of two Germans and about a dozen Italians, the Germans giving the orders. They caught our chaps on a large peninsula and closed in until they made them prisoner They got 500 in one day. I think they were taken to the Italian prison camp on the island. I was hiding behind a bush when Major Sandover went out to meet a German officer. Then he went back and brought out the rest of our chaps to surrender. The Germans, as soon as he waw we were without arms, did not fire a shot but called on us to surrender. They knew they had us starved out. There were only Greek peasants and no place to buy anything. I had 16,000 drachmae in my pocket but could not buy even a loaf of bread with it!

We had no medical supplies for our wounded, and we appealed to the Germans and they dropped three containers. A transport plane came over low, with one chap sitting on top with a Red Cross flag. Our own aircraft had dropped several containers of medical supplies, but without parachutes and they were smashed up, except for bandages. We handed in our field dressings, and anyone who had any soft, clean clothing used it to tear into bandages. The German containers had a complete set of operating instruments of all descriptions, and everything we could wish for. They came down in little containers on rubber-tyred wheels, so that they could be quickly dragged away to wherever they were wanted. We had got their Verey light signals through our C.O. and we sent up flares for ammunition and got it. But on the third day the Germans woke up to us and we got six hours of machine-gunning instead.

I don't think any more could have left by boat after I did, because for four or five hours I was looking for a place to land and everywhere I was fired on when I came within range. I think

/it would.....

it would be impossible for anyone else to get away now. A recce plane flies round the island three times a day. All the seaworthy boats cleared off to the islands at the first and left only rowing boats and such. Two of our I section had a crew of seven and a 22ft craft when I left. They were trying to get a sail, but I didn't see them at sea, and I don't know whether they got away.

z This apparently refers to the period at Retimo.

E17

APP (B)

THE ESCAPE FROM CRETE

(As told by Cpl J.W.Walker,HQ Coy,2/7Bn)

During the last days of our stay on CRETE I had a detachment of mortars with C Coy, in a fewd position. On the afternoon of May 31, we were expecting orders to move.

At approx 2030 hrs, rumours were heard to the effect that we were to remain in our position for another 24 hours. Later, Lieut CAMERON informed me that fresh orders had been received, and instructed us to destroy our mortars and be ready to move at 2100 hrs. The time then was 2055 hrs.

After destroying our mortar, we moved out with the platoon to the road where I contacted Maj MILLER, and asked for permission to rejoin my own Coy. It was a rush from then on - the men at times running to keep up with the leaders. We were in single file from the time we left our positions to the time we formed up on the beach. At times, other troops tried to break into the line, and as we neared the beach a number of ENGLISH and GREEK troops were seen, but we did not notice any of their officers.

Coming onto the beach we formed into three, in coys, when the CO told us that the Navy, owing to losses, could not take off any more men, and asked us to stick together as a unit and he would endeavour to find us positions for the rest of the night. Rations had been found on the beach and were split up amongst the men, the time then being approx 0330 hrs, 1 Jun 41.

We had no sooner got under cover when the order came round for pl comndrs to report to Coy HQ. Lt JOHNSTONE, my platoon comdr, soon after gave me the orders that all arms, papers, paybooks etc. were to be destroyed as the troops had surrendered, but also told us that it was a metter of every man for himself, and gave us a general idea of the coast line. After informing my section of these orders I left them and went to Lieut WALKER and Capt HALLIDAY, and after a talk, decided to try and get off the island in one of the motor barges I had noticed on the beach earlier in the morning. I then made for the beach and discovered that some English troops had already found a barge but could not start the engines, and while I was trying to get the engines in working order Lieut WALKER and several of HQ Coy men came on board. Lieut WALKER and myself then started the engines, and on seeing the English Major in charge of the barge, found that he would not wait for Capt HALLIDAY and his party, who were to join us.

We left SPARKIO about 0800 hrs 1 Jun 41, and made for an island which was shown on the map as being about 22 miles away. We arrived at approx 1230 hrs and immediately set about repairing the engines and removing a length of steel rope that was wound around the port propellor. Major GARRETT also organised parties to look for food and water. Water was found, and all water containers filled. All rations were collected from the men, and three cases of biscuits and two of "bully" that were found in the engine room, were split, and the daily ration made up.

The last of the water was brought on board and we pulled out at 2130 hrs on 1 Jun.

We travelled until early the next morning when the steering cable broke and this held up up for about 1½ hrs. About 0630 hrs the petrol began to get very low, so we attempted to run the engines on a mixture of kerosene, crude oil and petrol. The port engine broke down, and later - we ran out of petrol. Then started a period of drifting, flares were kept buning at night, and a double look-out was kept the whole length of the journey. On the fourth day out, a ten gallon drum of petrol was found, and after we had started the engines, the clutch on the second engine broke down. After trying to repair it and failing, we changed the gear box and clutch from one engine to another. This was no easy job owing to the limited space, and to the fact that practically every-one was seasick and weak from lack of food and water. The ration of half a biscuit, with enough bully beef just to cover the surface and a quarter milk tin full of water per day was hardly sufficient to keep anyone on their feet, and the effort to try and do anything was terrible.

Some of the more energetic members were bathing, by lowering themselves into the one and only lifebelt which was tied to the boat.

On the seventh day out, several of the AUSTRALIANS started to built a raft on which they hoped to reach land before us and get help. After building it and tying it to the barge, they waited until the next morning before pushing off, but then found that the rope had snapped, and the raft was nowhere to be seen. Another craft was started that day - by Lieut Mc CARTNEY, Gnr SMITH, and Cpl NUGENT of 2/11 Bn, but it would not float.

The wireless set, which had been fixed up by Lieut WALKER, was too weak, and we held only very faint hopes in this direction. Cordite was taken out of the few rounds of ammn we had left, and used as flares, but we did not get any results.

On 7 Jun 41, several of the men started to condense sea water, using 2-gallon water tins connected by a length of hose, the condenser being placed in a bucket of sea water. The result was 3 gallons of brackish water which was to be used as a last issue.

Sails had also been put up by a Pte LEGGE. These consisted of 12 blankets sown together with boot-laces and SOS put on them with bandages. These sails were of little use until 8 Jun as there was no wind, and also, every time we got out of the path of the wind, some of the stronger men had to get into the water and push the back of the barge around.

I ommitted to mention that on the night of 7 Jun 41 a PALESTINIAN soldier shot himself and his remains were put overboard. The next day (Sunday Jun 8) an ENGLISHMAN died, and he also was buried at sea.

At 1000 hrs Jun 8, a church service was held by Maj GARRETT. It was short, but it did a lot to help us along. At the end of the service a Hurricane flew overhead, but in spite of our frantic signal, failed to see us. This was the third day on which planes had been seen, but they were always too far away.

About this time (1100 hrs) a breeze sprang up. Land was sighted about 1330 hrs and we were very excited and started to get things together. We had no idea what part of the coastline it was and could not see any signs of habitation.

At approx 0130 hrs 9 Jun we landed between SIDI BARRANI and SOLLUM. Patrols went out to look for water, and also to find the road. A well was found about ½ mile away.

Lt Mc CARTNEY and his party contacted some members of the English RAOC and made arrangements for transport to their camp, which was about 3 miles down the coast from SIDI BARRANI. They supplied us with the things we needed mostly, a feed and water.

Later on in the afternoon, transport was arranged to MERSA MATRUH where we were billetted for the night. The town was bombed that night and an Englishman killed.

On 10 Jun 41 we entrained for AMIRIYA, and were later taken to the Transit Camp and given fresh clothes.

The personnel on the barge consisted of

5 offrs 134 ORs

of which 1 offr and 12 ORs belonged to the 2/7 Bn.

(signed) VX4674
J.W.Walker - Cpl,
HQ Coy,
2/7 Bn. (25 Jun 41)

Crete 1 ESCAPE FROM PRISON ON CRETE. E16

Escaping from a prison compound at Alikianou, on the Island of Crete, two Australian soldiers of the 7th. Battalion made their way south across the island, and, siezing a boat, landed at Sidi Barrani after a voyage of ninety hours.

They were.-

VX 4632, Corporal Gordon R.G., and

VX 4712, Private Buchecker H.R.

Both men were from Merbein, in the Mildura district, Victoria, and had been friends for some time before they enlisted in November 1939. They had been through the Libyan and Greek campaigns together and the stories of their experiences on Crete, are identical.

Here is the narrative of Corporal Gordon.-

"About 1,000 hours on the morning of June 1st, the Germans bombed the beach near Sphakia and soon afterwards, their infantry arrived on foot and commenced to round up the men in the area.

Most of the 7th Battalion were taken prisoner, although some had made their way into the hills when our capitulation was announced. Private Buchecker and I were amongst those concentrated near the village of Sphakia and Austrian Alpine troops provided our guard. Separating the officers from the men, they treated us fairly well and saw that we got water.

About 1700 hours on June 1st, we commenced to march back towards the north of the island. Supervision was very lax and often we had no guard with us. The first night we slept near the well where we had drawn water while fighting the last rearguard and next day, we marched to within about six miles of the coastal road. We were given our first food when we halted at nightfall,- a packet of biscuits each.

Next day, when we were near Suda, we had to clear the road to allow heavy German traffic to pass. During this halt of two hours, a continuous stream of vehicles passed us, many of them our own. We saw 13-15 tanks in the column, each about 18 tons. There were two German ships berthed alongside the wharf at Suda. I should say they were about 8000 tonners.

The liberated Italian prisoners, who were marching towards the wharf, apparently for evacuation, were very friendly and gave us food. The Germans were very arrogant towards the Italians, kicking and beating them

if they got in the Germans' way.

Passing through Canea, the route followed was apparently selected to show us the devastation caused by the German bombing. That night was spent in a compound near the old Canea general hospital site. A food issue of a tin of bully beef and three packets of biscuits, to five men, was made by the Germans.

The compound was a very large one into which everyone was drafted, later to be sent to smaller camps. The Austrians were no longer guarding us and the Germans on duty at the compound made demonstrations to show us their fitness and excellent morale.

We remained in the compound area until about 1800 hours. The enemy wished to move us in the heat of the day but after our officers had made representations because of our weakened condition, they agreed to move us that night.

During the day, the guard was very lax and we were able to wander out of the compound in search of food and cigarettes, going as far as one thousand yards away. The attitude of the Germans was expressed by one guard : "If they go away, they will starve." A closer watch was kept on the officers, who were kept within the compound. The same issue of food as the previous night was made during the day.

We marched 18 kilometres to Alikianou, where there had been a Greek prison camp housing 1,000 Italian prisoners. They put 3,000 of us into this camp, Australians and Marines. This was the night of June 4. Officers were in the same compound and prisoners were split up into their own units for rationing purposes. Rations were fair at first and cooking utensils were available. We were given enough food to provide three meals per day, consisting of rice, lentils, beans and a little German concentrated soup, rye bread and bully beef. We found the German food just edible and it appeared to contain little nutriment.

I saw the Commanding Officer of the 7th. Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel Walker, in the compound on several occasions, and spoke to him. He told me of a conversation he had had with the commander of the German battalion of parachutists, whose battalion had been opposite the 7th., at Suda, during the withdrawal.

The 7th. Battalion had made a bayonet charge there and had driven the enemy back about two thousand yards. He asked Colonel Walker to convey

to his troops his admiration for the manner in which they had fought and said that they were the best troops his men had encountered. The German commander explained that they had made the 7th. Battalion march back from Sphakia because they believed that the 7th. had taken prisoners during the charge, and when they could not be found near the beach at Sphakia, they had concluded that the battalion had shot them. This assumption was incorrect and Colonel Walker was able to explain that this was so.

After a day or two, about 70 per cent of the men in the compound were suffering from dysentry. The latrines were inadequate and filthy and the camp verminous. Lieut.-Colonel Walker complained to the German M.O. about the shocking conditions, and was told :' The camp was made for a thousand Italian prisoners. It is good enough for three thousand British.'

Rations became very short after three or four days and there was only one sixth of a loaf of rye bread, per man, per day; sometimes, an issue of a packet of biscuits per man was made instead.

After a week in the compound, the men were nearly starving. The Germans obtained a donkey from the Greeks for their own use and, for safe keeping, put it in the compound with the prisoners. A party of the 11th. Battalion killed "The German A.S.C.," as they named the animal, with an axe, and the carcass was shared by as many as possible.

Colonel Walker told us that the Germans were also very short of food, for he had witnessed a meal which was given to a visiting senior officer. He was visiting the compound to decorate the Germans guarding it, all survivors from a parachute battalion, each with an Iron Cross. The meal was very frugal.

Conditions continued like this until the night of June 16 when we managed to escape. Private Buchecker and I had decided to try to escape, and already, during the previous week, a few men had managed to get away. In view of this, the Germans had announced that anyone caught trying to escape, would be shot.

It was only a single barbed-wire fence, with numerous machine guns sited around it, and at night, there was a constant patrol. We selected an open spot, anticipating that the enemy would not be keeping a close watch there, and at 2105 hours, slipped through the fence un-noticed and made for the hills.

We planned to get arms and if the coast were guarded by the enemy, hoped to ambush an enemy patrol boat as it pulled into the coast, and make our escape in it. Our intention of making our way to the south coast, thence east, was abandoned because previous escapees had headed in that direction. Instead, we decided to make our way to the south-western corner of the island.

Still dressed in our battle-dress, next morning we met an old Greek woman who took us to her house and fed us. This was a fore-runner of the hospitality the Greeks extended us. They indicated that we should make our way south to the Omalous (?) Plains, and gave us food and provided guides, all the way along the mountain tracks which led to the Plains.

We arrived at the village of Omalous(?) after two days, and met two other members of the 7th. Battalion. We stayed at the village for a day and then moved on to Ag-I-Rini(?). There we met a New Zealand sergeant in Greek clothes, carrying two rifles and two Mills bombs. He had located two boats at Suia Bay but the Greeks were guarding them so that they would not be stolen. Leaving the seven men who were with him, he had returned to the Canea district for arms and was then on his way back to Suia Bay, where he hoped to sieze one of the boats. On his return, we heard that he was disappointed, for the Greeks had hidden their boats and his men had dispersed.

Next day we arrived at the coast near Suia and met the two men from our Battalion again. They had found no boats and the local inhabitants were unfriendly. We did not join forces, thinking it better to remain in small groups. That night we moved back to the village of Moni(?), where the inhabitants gave us ample food. The next village we visited was Kosta Jericho(?), where the Greeks made us very welcome. We saw evidence that there had been many of our men through the village.

The Greek telephone system of the locality was still working, and there was no possibility of the enemy surprising us. We stayed at this village for three weeks, during which period we were fed by a very friendly family. About thirty men passed throught the village, during our stay, and all were Australians or New Zealanders, with the exception of one R.E.

The Greeks were intensely patriotic and would tell us only the good news which came over the radio. They were very excited when Germany declared war on Russia and were hopeful that the British would be back in

a few days.

A party of seven men, two Australians, four New Zealanders and one Englishman, purchased one of the two boats which had been hidden at Suia(?), for 14,000 drachmas, and put out to sea. They returned after a day's sailing, believing that their craft was unseaworthy.

The N.Z. sergeant, who had returned to Canea for arms, together with two other men stole the other boat and put to sea. The Greeks told us that they were recaptured at Gavdos, when they landed for water. We watched the habits of the Greeks with the remaining boat, which had been previously sold, and planned to sieze it at an opportune moment.

We noted that they left the oars in it, and we hid food and a mast in the vicinity, but we were unable to find water nearby. The boat was no longer guarded, for we were trusted, but if any other soldiers appeared in the district at any time, it would be hidden immediately. We had avoided attention by not asking for a boat and refraining from talking of escape. The Greeks thought we were content to remain until the return of the British.

We moved to Lavdos(?), a village nearer the coast, on the 13th of July. The inhabitants were friendly and laughed at our efforts to cook. Each day they would confer and decide who would have the honour of entertaining us at each meal.

One morning, they overwhelmed us with their hospitality and gave us a large sack of potatoes, onions, lentils, beans, honey, bread, eggs and olive oil. When we remonstrated at their lavish generosity, they told us of what must have been a rumour - that Mr. Churchill had broadcast a message of thanks to the Greeks for the manner in which they were looking after escaped British prisoners.

They idolized Mr. Churchill. "Big feller Inglisse Churchill say : Caristow," they said excitedly, and would not take back any of the food. When the radio news was not good they would not tell us what was in the bulletin. However, if they had good tidings they would rush up into the hills to tell us.

On the 14th of July, Buchecker went rock-fishing with the Greeks and found a well near the coast, not far from where the boat which we planned to take, was kept. When he returned next day, he told me the news and we decided to try to escape that night. While Buchecker had been absent,

two New Zealanders had arrived in the village and we invited them to accompany us. They agreed, and we made our preparations.

Shortly after dusk, we crept around the village of Suia(?), along the beach and to within fifty yards of the nearest house, launched the boat and rowed quietly away. As the moon had risen, we had to leave our hidden food and mast, but we had sufficient food with us and later used one of the oars as a mast.

Moving around the coast, we filled our water containers, two goat-skins and a bowl, which we had purchased from the Greeks for our wristlet watches. About 0230 hours on the 16th of July, we rowed away from the coast, heading due south so that we would avoid Gavdos Island.

Nightfall on the 16th found us just opposite Gavdos, having rowed all day. A breeze sprang up during the night, and after rigging a sail with a blanket, using an oar for a mast, we changed course to south-east and headed for Sidi Barrani.

On the morning of the 17th, Gavdos was almost out of sight, and the wind continuing fresh, we were making four or five knots per hour. The two top planks of the boat proved to be rotten and we had to stuff the holes with sox. We worked in shifts of six hours, two men on at a time-one steering, one bailing. One of the New Zealanders had a compass but we used the sun and north star most of the time.

On the night of the 17th, the sea became dangerously rough and we had to run due east before it. Conditions were ideal again next day, but the following night , it was rough again and we had to run east once more. Sea water spoiled a lot of our rations and, as little food was left, we decided to go without food next day.

About 1630 hours on the 19th of July, we sighted land. We were sailing due south at the time for the boat was leaking so badly, it was imperative that we reach land. Shortly after sunset, we managed to manouvre through the heavy surf and beach the craft at Sidi Barrani.

Indicative of how the top planking of the boat was in a very bad condition, was that, when some British soldiers endeavoured to help us to beach the craft, one of the planks came away in the hands of one of their numbers. It was probably because of this rotten upper planking that the party who had previously purchased the boat before we escaped, decided that it was unseaworthy and put back to Suia."

macartney

APP L.

E13

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

THE 2/7 BN OF "CRETE" AS I SAW IT. GRAY C.E.

After the bombing of the ship, the Costa Rica on which we were evacuated from Greece, we were taken off on the destroyers "Defender, Horewood, and the Hero, about 2500 Officers and men from various Units , the only Unit having almost its full complesent of Officers being the 2/7 Bn.

The "Costa Rica" being bombed at about 3 on the afternoon of of 27 April 1941.

After being taken aboard the destroyers it was found that during the transhipment one of the men of the 2/7 Bn, Pte F.Kierney was suffering from a badly crushed leg . having been caught between the destroyer and the sinking ship. We were given to understand that our destination after evacuating Greece was Alexandria, but owing to the sinking of the "Costa Rica" we were taken back to "Crete".arriving at Suda Bay at about 6 PM on the same afternoon, April 26 minus arms, equipment, and practically no clothing. The Bn was then marched out along the ~~main~~ coast road East of Suda Bay to where Div H.Q. had been formed, a distance of about 3 miles from Suda Bay where we camped for the night and the next morning of April 28.

During the afternoon of the same day the Bn moved further down the coast road still in an Easterly direction, to a distance of about 12 miles from Suda Bay where we took up our defensive positions and remained until the following Sunday May 4.

During our stay at this particular place we were supplied with some arms and clothing. It was at this time that E Coy was formed , by dividing H.Q.Coy into 3 rifle platoons,also the remnants of the 5th 6nd 6th Bns which were attached to us. On the morning of May 4 The Bn moved still further along the coast, about 14 miles , where we rested in bivouac area over night. Next morning we moved and ~~x~~ took up defensive positions around a village called "Georgeopolis" a small place on the coastline, our work being to guard the coast thereabouts against any landing of enemy troops.

It was at "Georgeopolis" that Lt Carstairs was appointed to act as Town ~~Intendant~~ MAJOR, apposition he held while we were there. The Div prison compound being in charge of, first,LT Walker, then Lt McGeogh.

It was at this stage that the 2/7 along with the 2/I and the 2/II Bns, were brought in to comprise the 19 Bde.During our 13 days patrolling the areaaround Georgeopolis, beyond erection of barbed wire entanglements, nothing of any consequences eventuated.

At this stage the Bn was living on half rations, as they were becoming very hard to procure.

No

It was on Sunday 17 May that the blitz started, from early in the morning till long after sun down, wave after wave of German bombers were seen to pass over the area where we were situated. On the morning of May 18 Malesme and Retimo were bombed, making way for the enemy para-troops, which were landed from troop carrying planes and gliders.

The 2/Ist and 2/II Bns were stationed at Retimo aerodrome, whilst the 28th Maori Bn supported by New Zealanders, also 2 Coys of the 2/3 Bn.

It was on this same day that the 2/7 BN had their first experience of dive bombing on Crete, bombs being dropped over our area during the early morning , otherwise quiet all day until dusk when the Bn was lined up on the road waiting for transport to move(have received orders to stand by and move at a moments notice) The enemy again dropped numerous bombs over our already vacated area, alsom we had our first taste of machine-gunning since we landed on the island three weeks prior to this.

On the evening of the same day May 19 we were rushed up by transport tox take up a reserve position, behind the New Zealanders and Maori's who had moved into a more forward position West of Cania and nearer to the Malesme aerodrome where there was a large concentration of enemy troops. Two platoons of E Coy were required to guard the bridge running over a creek on the Cania Rd and it was here that the daily bombing and machine gunning actually started, but fortunately up to this period there were no casualties and it was not until two days later when the Bn moved up to relieve the New Zealanders that actual contact with the enemy was made.

The Bn remained in a reserve position until the evening of the 21 st May, B Coy during that period going up to reinforce the New Zealanders, Lt MacFarlane being O.C. of the Coy.

On the evening of May 21 C and D Coys moved into their forward position, while slightly to the rear and between those two Coys was E Coy Capt Halliday being the O.C. while A and B Coys were the two Coys in reserve. C,D,and E Coys were flanked on the right by C and D Coys of the 2/8 Bn while further to the right of the 2/8 was the 28 Maori Bn.The forward Coys of the 2/7 remained in that position until the night of May 23 and it was during this period that the enemy tried to advance but C and D Coys drove them back in a bayonet charge, and it was during this encounter that Capt A.Nelson O.C. D Coy was wounded through the shoulder, also Lt Bernard D Coy wounded in the leg, and Lt Mitchell wounded through the arm, and we heard later that on the way back to have his arm dressed,the truck that Lt Mitchell was travelling in was bombed by enemy air-craft and a piece of shrapnel hitting him thereby causing him the loss of a leg, an injury that later on he died from. On the night of May 23 A and B Coys moved forward to relieve C,D,and E Coys the last named Coy taking up B Coys vacated area, while C and D moved further East toward Canie taking up a position to allow the other 3 Coys to withdraw, the withdrawal taking place on the 24

A and B Coys with E Coy remained in their positions, A and B making contact with the enemy with E Coy further back being held in reserve until midnight on the 24 May when the actual withdrawal started to take place, A Coy being the last Coy to do so and through some delay in the forward Coys moving out, A Coy was unfortunate in losing a few of its men.

The first night we withdrew East between Canio and Suda Bay where we rested in a vacant block of land until the first lights of dawn, when the Bn moved into a bivouac area which had been vacated a few days prior to our arriving there by an English Regiment. Remaining in this area until the evening of the same day May 25, we withdrew further back past Suda Bay when we branched off the coast road, more in a Southerly direction, and marching all that night and part of the morning of the 26 we were finally called to a halt were A,B,C, and D Coys were placed in positions throughout this area to fight a rear-guard action with E Coy in reserve position where we remained up until mid-day of that same day , when we recieved orders that we had to move on another 8 to 10 miles to a position behind the "Royal Horse Guards " the English Guards holding that position to allow us to get through. After resting for a few hours in that position, we were again given orders to move, and still taking the same direction a South Easterly course, the Bn marched for the rest of that afternoon and part of the night were we again rested by the roadside for a few hours.

Officers and men were by this time starting to feel the strain of the forced marches and very little rations, some of the men having had nothing to eat for at least two days and many were falling out from the ranks along the road. After we had rested for a few hours we once again recieved orders to prepare to move and in the early hours of May 27 we again moved out until finally we were brought to a halt having come through yet another pass with the 28 Bn Maoris fighting the rear-guard on that same pass. The 2/7 Bn were placed in scattered positions where we rested for the rest of that morning and during the next day. The living conditions during the evacuation up to this stage were very bad, rations being very hard to procure and during the last two days very little water, as we had been travelling through very mountainous countryand very few inhabitants around this particular part of the Island , but during the morning of the 28 May the C.O. Lt Col Walker was fortunate enough to be able to get some rations which were distributed amongst the Bn, water in this particular location being very plentiful. While we were waiting to move out from this area , we were informed by the C.O. of E Coy Captain Halliday that the Bn had been unfortunate in losing the draw as it appears that there were four fighting units at this particular time left on the Island and they all drew to see who would fight the last rear- guard action and while we were waiting for the order to move we could see the enemy quite plainly coming over the hills about two miles away. At last came the order to move and in the evening of May 28 we again moved back and having covered about 7 miles we again rested for the remainder of the darkness just off the road side until day light was breaking, when each Coy was shown to its alloted area, A and B Coy being the most forward with E Coy slightly to the rear of those two Coys, while on the right flank and alongside the road was C Coy, and on the extreme left and also slightly in the rear was D Coy.

This position was held for two days the 29 and 30 May and there being no possible chance of digging in at all on this the Bn last stand on Crete. The country was very mountainous and rocky and the only means of obtaining any cover was by building up a wall of stone around ones alloted area, but as the stones were of a large size it was not possible to obtain to much cover consequently there were more casualities on this action than anywhere else that we engaged the enemy on the Island.

Once again the rations were very hard to obtain and during the evening of the 31 May some rations were dropped from a sea- plane which had been flown from somewhere in Egypt, but water was the worst of all as each man had to make do on half a pint a day and it was very hot at the time some of the troops felt the lack of water very much. Well on the evening of May 31 just as everyone was expecting to move out word came through that we were not moving out that night, and needless to say everyones hopes were completely shattered, but later on the same evening we once again recieved orders but this time to be ready to move at 2100 hrs. So at 2100 hrs on the night of May 31 the Bn moved out on the last 10 mile lap of its destination, "Sparkia" where the destroyers were waiting to take us off.

The track down was very rough being only a goat track so we were informed, the going being very hard and some of the boys were compelled to fall out among them being Sjt Major F.Perren as he was completely exhausted. After we had formed into single file behind various units that were also going to the port of Sparkia and what seemed endless hours we eventually arrived at the water front at 0245 on the morning of June I. After waiting while the barge pulled out to the destroyers on which Capt Fletcher Lieut Lunn, Sjt Major Walker and 8 other ranks of the I Sec , they being fortunate enough to arrive in time to fill the barge up to its carrying capacity, we were lined up by the C.O. Lt Col Walker and informed that to use his exact words; " we are in a spot of bother, as the destroyers were full and were not coming back any more, and as he had been able to scrounge some rations the Bn was asked if they wanted to remain in a group or if any men wanted to split up into their particular body. They were perfectly at liberty to do so but the men decided to remain with the C.O., so after distributing what rations there were and allowing the boys to get a drink of water, we were again taken back through Sparkia to a position where each Coy was given its allotted area for the remainder of the darkness.

After we had rested and some of the boys dosed off for an hour or so we were informed by the Coy runner that the C.O. wished to say a few words and for us to take notice. We were informed that the English Colonel was under orders to capitulate the Island on that day June I, and as he our C.O. had to go with the English C.O. to surrender to the enemy. Colonel advised every man that if they thought x they could get off the Island or hide away in the hills somewhere, to do so as it was every man for himself, but each man was to destroy his own arms. Myself and three other men that had been together right from Puckapunyel decided to take a chance and see if their was any way of getting off the Island or to go back to the hills somewhere. With that idea settled we started down to the well by the water to fill one 2 Gal tin with water that we had picked up in one of the caves. After ~~fill~~ filling this can with water we came back along the waters edge to where some troops were trying to start one of the invading barges prior to trying to get away from the Island and among them (mostly English we noticed) and a few of our own men and also Lt Col Walker who later was credited with bringing the barge safely into the vicinity of "Mersa Matruh."

We also noticed dozens of our men lying in the sand and among the rocks of the cliffs along the shore, we also were joined by another chap who had been with us all along and so after saying Cheerio to those of our chaps that were not asleep we started off back along the coast , our intentions being at this particular time to try and get back to Georgeopolis where we had befriended some of the inhabitants during our short stay there, on the off chance that they may have been able to do something for us. The five of us climbed to the top of the cliff and on looking back could see what was left of the 2/7 Bn scattering in every direction and that was the last we saw of them. But on walking along the edge of the cliff for a mile or so we were compelled to seek cover as 6 enemy air- craft were coming in from the sea and encircling the village over which dozens of white flags were flying. They came over in a dive and bombed and machine gunned for an hour or so, and I greatly fear that a lot of the boys stood a chance of being injured during that period as they paid particular attention to the shore front along which we had seen a lot of our own men lying down .

On starting off again when all was clear we eventually came to some chaps who had managed to secure a barge and concealed it in a cave in the cliffs , so after pooling what rations we had been able to carry, we decided to take a chance in getting off the Island. So with having a guard posted upon the cliff every hour to watch for any enemy approaching to where we lay hidden, we remained under cover all the day until 2130 hrs. On the night of June I. we pulled out from the cave , and there were 53 on the barge, 5 from the 2/7, and 2 from the 2/II, I from 2/3, the balance Englishmen. On our getting clear of the cliffs we were machine gunned by 2 Machine Guns that had been posted right over the top of the cave, but luckily no one was hit, so that the last we saw of Crete and started off on our journey across the Mediterranean, a journey that took 8 days to accomplish with hardly any rations and very little water, finally drifting into land about 4 miles East of Sidi Barrani where we were picked up by an English convoy and taken into the C.C.S. at Mersa Matruh.

CYRIL M. GRAY
VX 5600
2/7 AUST INF BDE.

The 2/7 Battalion on Crete. I saw A. Gray, C. W.
After the Combing of the ship, the "Costaricka" on which we evacuated from Greece, Greece, we were taken off on the destroyers, "Defender, Firewood & the Hero, about 2,500 Officers & men from various Units the only Unit having almost its full complement of Officers being the 2/7th Batt.

The "Costaricka" being bombed about 3 P.M on the afternoon of 27th April 1941.

After being taken aboard the destroyers it was found that during the trans-ship- ment, one of the men of the 2/7th "F" F. Kierney was suffering from a badly crushed leg, having been caught between the destroyer & the sinking ship.

We were given to understand that our destination after evacuating Greece, was Alexandria, ~~being~~ but owing to the sinking of the "Costaricka" we were taken back to "Crete" arriving at Suda Bay at about 6 P.M on the same afternoon, April 27th minus arms, equipment & practically no clothing.

The Battalion was then marched out along the coast road, east of Suda Bay, to where Divisional Head Quarters had been formed, a distance of about three miles from "Suda Bay". where we camped for the night, & the next morning of April 28th.

During the afternoon of the same day, the Battalion moved further around the coast road, still in an easterly direction, to a distance of about 12 mile from Suda Bay where we took up our defensive positions where we remained until the following Sunday May 4th

During our stay at this particular place we were supplied with arms, & some clothing.

It was at this time "E" Coy was formed comprising H.Q. Coy. in No 3 rifle platoons also the remnants of the 5th & 6th Battalions being attached to us.

On the morning of 14th May the Battalion moved still further along the coast, about 14 mile further on, where we rested in bivouac area overnight. next morning moved & took up defensive positions around a village called Georgeopalis, a small place on the coast line. our work being to guard the coast there-about, against any landing by enemy troops.

It was at Georgeopalis that Lt Carstairs was appointed to act as Town Marshal, a position he held while we were there (The Divisional prison compound being in charge of first Lt Walker & then Lt McGeogh)

It was at this stage that the 2/7th along with the 2/1st & 2/11th Battalions were brought in to comprise the 19th Brigade.

During our 13 days patroling the area around Georgeopalis beyond our erection of barked wire entanglements, nothing of any consequence eventuated.

At this stage the Battalion was living on half rations as they were becoming very hard to procure.

It was on Sunday 17th May that the Blitz started, from early in the morning till long after sun-down on that day wave after wave of German bombers were seen to pass over the area where we were situated. On the morning of May 18th Maleme & Retimo was bombed making way for the enemy para-troops, which were landed from troop-carrying planes, also being landed by gliders.

The 2/1st & 2/11th Battalions were stationed at Retimo Aerodrome while the 28th Maori Battalion supported by New Zealanders, also 2 Coys of the 2/2nd

It was on this same day that the 2/7th Bn had their first experience of Hun bombing on trade, bombs being dropped over our area during the early morning, otherwise quiet all day until dusk when the Bn was lined up on the road waiting for transport to move, (have received orders to stand by to be ready to move at a moments notice) the enemy again dropped numerous bombs over our already located area, also we had our first taste of machine-gunning, since we landed on the island 3 weeks prior to this.

On the evening of the same day May 19 we were rushed up by transport to take up a reserve position, behind the New Zealanders & Maoris who had moved in to a more forward position west of Cania & near Hill 60 the Malleme aero-drome, where there was a large concentration of enemy troops.

Two platoons of E Coy were required to guard the bridge running over a creek on the Cania Rd & it was here that the daily bombing & machine-gunning actually started, & for practically up to this period, there were no casualties & it was not until two days later, when the Battalion moved up to relieve the New Zealanders, that actual contact with the enemy was made.

The Battalion remained in a reserve position, until the evening of the 21st May, B Coy during that period going up to reinforce the New Zealanders Lt McFarlane being OC of the Coy.

On the evening of May 21st C & D Coys moved in to their forward position, while slightly to the rear & between those two Coys was E Coy Capt Halliday being the O.C. while A & B Coys were the two Coys in reserve

C, D & E Coys were flanked on the right by C & D Coys of the 2/8th BATT while further to the right of the 2/8th was the 28th Maori Battalion.

The forward Coys of the 2/7th remained in that position until the night of May 23rd it was during this period that the enemy tried to advance. Our C & D 2/7th drove them back in a bayonet charge & it was during this encounter that Capt. R. Nelson OC D Coy was wounded through the shoulder, also Lt Burnard D Coy wounded in the leg & Lt Mitchell wounded through the arm & we heard later that on the way back to take his arm dressed the truck that Lt Mitchell was travelling in was bombed by enemy aircraft & a piece of shrapnel hitting him, there by causing him the loss of a leg, an injury that later on he died from.

On the night of May 23rd A & B Coys moved forward to relieve C, D & E Coys. The last named Coy taking up B Coys vacated area, while C & D moved further east forward Cania, taking up a position, to allow the other 3 Coy to withdraw ~~&~~ the withdrawal taking place on the 24th

A & B Coys & with E Coy remained in their positions, A & B making contact with the enemy with E Coy further back, being held in reserve, until midnight on the 24th May when the actual withdrawal started to take place, A Coy being the last Coy to do so & through some delay in the forward Coys moving out, A Coy was unfortunate in losing a few of its men.

The first night we withdrew east between Cania & Jeuda Bay, where we rested in a vacant block of land, until the first lights of dawn when the Batt moved into a bivouac area which had been vacated a few days prior to our arriving there by an English Regiment.

Remaining in this area, until the evening ~~of May 25th~~ of the same day May 25th, we withdrew further back past Jeuda Bay, when we branched off of the coast road more towards a southerly direction & marching all that night & part of the morning of 26th, we were finally called to a halt where A, B C & D Coy were placed in positions throughout this area to fight a rear guard with E Coy in a reserve position, where we remained up until mid-day on that same day, when we received orders, that we had to move on another 8 to 10 miles to a position behind the "Royal Horse Guards" the English Guards, holding that position to allow us to get through.

After resting for a few hours in this position, we were again given orders to move & still taking the same direction, a south easterly course the Battalion, marched for the rest of that afternoon & part of the night, where we again rested by the road-side for a few hours.

Officers & men were by this time starting

To feel the strain of the forced marches & very little rations some of the men having had nothing to eat for last two days & many were falling out from the ranks along the road.

After we had rested for a few hours we once again received orders to prepare to move ~~moving out again, on~~ in the early hours of May 27th we again moved out until finally we were brought to a halt having come through yet another pass with the 28th Battalion Maoris fighting the rear guard on that same pass.

The 2/7 Battalion were placed in scattered positions where we rested for the rest of that morning & during the next day.

The living conditions during the evacuation up to this stage were very bad, rations being very hard to procure & during the last two days very little water as we had been travelling through very mountainous country & very few inhabitants around this particular part of the Island, but during the morning of the 28th May the C.O. Cob Walker was fortunate enough to be able to get some rations which were distributed among st the Battalion & water in this particular locality being very plentiful.

While we were waiting to move out from this area, we were informed by the OC of E Coy, Capt Halliday that the Battalion had been unfortunate in losing the draw as it appears that ~~that~~ there were four fighting units at this particular time left on the Island & they all drew to see who would fight the last rear guard action & while we were waiting for the order to move, we could see the enemy quite plainly coming over the hills about two mile away.

At last came the order to move & ~~at~~ in the evening of May 28th we again moved back & having covered about 7 mile, we again rested for the remainder of the darkness just off the road-side until day light was breaking when each Coy was shown to its allotted area, A & B Coy being the most forward, with E Coy slightly to the rear

of those two Coys, while on the right flank along side the road was C Coy & on the extreme left & also slightly in the rear was D Coy.

This position was held for two days the 29th & 30th of May & there being no possible chance of digging in at all on this the Battalion had to stand on their feet, as the country was very mountainous & rocky & the only means of obtaining any cover was by building up a wall of stone around ones allotted area, but as the stones being ~~scarce~~ of a large size it was not possible for one to obtain too much cover! consequently there were more casualties on this action than any where else that we engaged the enemy on the island.

Once again the rations were very hard to obtain & during the evening of the 30th of May some rations were dropped from a sea plane which had been flown somewhere in Egypt, but water was the worst of all as each man had to make do on half a pint a day as it was very hot all this time some of the troops felt the lack of water very much.

Well, on the evening of May 30 just as every one was expecting to move on, word came through that we were not moving on that night, need less to say that every ones hopes were completely shattered but later on ~~in~~ the same evening we once again received orders, but this time to ~~stand off~~ be ready to move at 21.00 hrs so at 9 o'clock on the night of May 30th the Battalion moved on, on the last 10 mile of its destination. "Sparkia" where the destroyers were waiting to take us off.

The track down was very rough being only a goat track so we were informed, the going being very hard some of the Coys were compelled to fall on, among them being Sgt/Major J Farren as he was completely exhaust-
ed

After we had formed into single file behind various Units that were also going to the Port of Sparkia & what seemed endless hours we eventually arrived at the water front at 02-45 on the morning of June 1st

After waiting while the barge pulled out to the destroyers on which Capt Fletcher, Lt Lund Sgt Wells, Pte Walker & eight other ranks of the Intelligence Sec. they being fortunate enough to arrive just in time to fill the barge up to its carrying capacity. we were lined up by the C.C. Lt Col Walker & informed that (to use his exact words") we in a spot of bother as the destroyers were full & were not coming back any more & as he had been able to "scrounge" some rations, the Battalion was asked if they wanted to remain in a group or if any men wanted to split up into their particular body they were perfectly at liberty to do so. All the men decided to remain with the C.O. so after distributing what rations there were & allowing the boys to get a drink of water, we were again taken back through "Sparkia" to a position where each Coy was given its allotted area for what remained of the darkness.

After we had rested & some of the boys dozed off for an hour or so, we were informed by the Coy runner that the C.C wished to say a few words & for us to take notice. He informed that the English, Colonel was under orders to capitulate the Island on that day June 1st & as "our C.O." had to go up with the English C.C to surrender to the enemy Colonel Walker advised every man that if they thought that they could get off of the Island or hide away in the hills some where, to do so as it was every man for himself, but each man was to destroy his own arms. Myself & three other men that had been together right from Puckapunyal, decided to take a chance & see if there was any way of getting off the island or to go back to the hills some where near of the way & with that idea settled we started down to the well by the water, to fill one two gallon tin of with water, that we had picked up in one of the caves

After filling this can with water we came back along the water's edge to where some troops were trying to get away from the Island & among them (most English) we noticed a few of our men & also L^t Walker who later was credited with bringing the barge safely in to the vicinity of Villeroche.

We also noticed dozens of our own men lying in the sand & among the rocks of the cliffs along the shore, we also were joined by another chap who had been with us all along, & so after saying "Cheerio" to those of our chaps that were not as keen, we started off back along the coast, our intentions being at this particular time, to try if possible to get back to Georgeopolis, where we had befriended some of the inhabitants during our short stay there, on the off chance that they may have been able to do some thing for us.

The five of us climbed to the top of the cliff & on looking back could see what was left of the 2/7 Battalion scattering in every direction & that was the last we saw of them. On walking along the edge of the cliff for a mile or so, we were compelled to seek cover as enemy aircraft was coming in from the sea, & encircling the village over which dozens of white flags were flying. They came over in a dive & bombed & machine-gunned for an hour or so & I greatly fear that a lot of the boys ~~to~~ stood ~~engaged~~ chance of being injured during that period as they paid particular attention to the shore-front along which we had seen a lot of our own men laying down.

On starting off again, when all was clear we eventually came to some chaps who had managed to secure a barge & concealing it in a cave in the cliff & so after pooling what rations we had been able to

carry, we decided to take a chance on getting off the island so with having a guard posted up on the cliff every hour to watch out for any enemy approaching to where the lay hidden, we remained under cover all through the day until 21-30 hrs. one the night of June 1st we pulled out from the cave there were 53 on the barge 5 from the 2/7 2 from 2/11 1 from the 2/3rd & the balance English-men.

On our getting clear of the cliffs we were machine-gunned by two M.G. that had been posted right over the top of the cave, but luckily no one was hit & so that was the last we saw of Crete & started off on a journey across the Mediterranean, a journey that took us eight days to accomplish with hardly any rations & very little water finally drifting in to land about 4 mile east of Sidi Barrani, where we were picked up by an English convoy & taken back in to the C.C.S. at "Mersa Matruh"

Cyril W. Gray
VX 5600
2/7 Batt