

**AWM52**  
**2nd Australian Imperial Force and**  
**Commonwealth Military Forces unit war**  
**diaries, 1939-45 War**

**Item number: 8/3/70**

**31 Infantry Battalion & 31/51**  
**Infantry Battalion**

**1939 -1941, Brief History**

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WAR DIARY

The following is a brief history of 31. Bn from the outbreak of the present war, 3 Sept 1939, up to the time of Japan entering the war in December 1941.

Lieut Colonel F.R. North, M.C., D.S.O., was commanding the battalion at the outbreak of war having Maj. W.J. Hern as his second-in-command and T/Q.M. and Hon. Lieut A. Skinner A.I.C. as his Adjutant. ~~THE~~ The 31st Battalion Area comprised the following detachments:

Townsville	-	H.Q. Coy and D(S) Coy,
Ayr, Home Hill and Proserpine	-	A Coy
Charters Towers and Bowen	-	B "
Ingham	-	C "

On 4 Oct 1939, 31 Bn marched into camp C11 at Showgrounds, West End, Townsville with Maj. V.F. O'Neill as M.O. and a strength in camp of 930. Lieut. R. Garlick, A.I.C. had taken over Adjutant and Q.M. of the Battalion as from 1 Oct 1939.

At this stage was carrying out normal training and in addition supplying Security Guards at the following places in T'ville Area. These were instituted in August.

Ordnance Stores	-	North Ward, Townsville
Magazine Hill	-	South Townsville
4 TO	-	" "
4QQN	-	Cape Cleveland
Brookhill Magazine	-	Brookhill
Aerodrome	-	Cluden Townsville.

Courses were arranged by N. Comd. and on 4 Oct 1939 the 31 Bn Signal Section went to Enoggera for a course which finished on 17 Oct 1939. Courses for Weapon Training, Rifle Wing, M.M.G. Tactical etc were also held at which the Battalion was represented.

During camp C11 3TAB Inoculations of personnel were carried out. Personnel were inoculated at weekly intervals. This proved to have severe reactions and subsequently Medical Standing Orders laid down an interval of 14 days.

Camp C11 terminated on 4 Nov 1939 and tps returned to their respective centres. Home Training Parades were instituted until the Bn Cadre was again called into camp (S5) on 22 March 1940. The main body moved into, camp on 9 April 1940. This camp was held at Miowera for three months and was the first and only Brigade Camp held during the present war. The camp had a widening effect on all ranks especially officers as they began to foster a Brigade outlook. Units in camp were 11 Inf. Bde. H.Q. under the comd Brig. J. Craven, (assisted by his B.M. Maj. Marlan and Staff Captain R.F. Burlingson); 31 Bn under Lt. Col F.R. North; 26 Bn under comd of Lt Col. H. Murray; and 51 Bn under comd of Lt. Col. H. Harris. This was the first camp on this site and large working parties were ordered to build the Rifle Range, under supervision of B.M.G.O. Maj. B.J. Douglas, construct a dam across Miowera Creek and improve existing roads. The dam proved to be an excellent piece of work and assured the water supply for Camp S5. Water was later to become a serious problem in this Area as will be shown later in this diary.

During Camp S5 great strides were made in training. Lieut B.D. Strange was at this time Adjutant of the Battalion, having been appointed in Jan 1940. During the 3 months, training was constant and progressive, and due to it being a Bde Camp the training culminated in Bde manoeuvres including the defence of the town of Bowen approx 15 miles from Miowera.

This camp was marked by the fact that early in April a cyclone

struck the camp area. 91 tents ( 12'x 14) were blown down and three marquees. The blow was followed by 7 - 10 days heavy rain during which time training was at a standstill. The Bn parade ground was covered by 18 inches of water. The tented area was on sloping ground and apart from innumerable rivulets was free from the bulk of the storm water. On the advice of the M.O., the C.O. authorised several rum issues during the period and the return of normal weather conditions found the Bn fit and ready for training again.

On 15 May 1940 the Bn suffered its first big loss of officers to A.I.F. Maj. Marlan, B.M. 11 Inf Bde, was given comd of 2/15 Bn A.I.F. and honoured the Bn by accepting the following officers to serve with him:

Lieut B.D.Strange	Lieut R.A.Suthers	Lieut L.Snell
Lieut W.C.Heatley	Lieut E.M.Christie	Lieut D.Whalley.
Lieut T.P.Davies		

The C.O. arranged that Coy training for the time set for the departure of the draft should be carried out in vicinity of Miowera Rly Station, and also organised the attendance of the 31 Bn Band, so that the farewells of these men were accompanied by the cheers of the assembled Bn and the stirring strains of the 31 Bn Regimental March "John Peel". At time of writing ( Jan 1942) these officers were all still fighting fit, two having received promotion to Captain, Capt B.D.Strange and Capt R.A.Suthers. These were not the first officers to enlist in A.I.F. as Lieut H.Richards, Lieut A.G.Suthers, and Lieut P.J.G.Stratford had joined early in the War. (Vide list of officers enlisted in A.I.F. Appx A).

As Lieut B.D.Strange was Adjutant of 31 Bn, the C.O. had to find a replacement and he chose the previous Adj't's brother, Lieut S.O. Strange as Adjutant. The appointment was confirmed as from 3 July 1940. At time of writing, Lieut S.O.Strange was still Adj't having been promoted in June 1940 to the rank of T/Capt.

Camp S5 broke up on 23 Jun 40 and once again the members with the exception of the staff returned to their homes and civil occupations, Strength marching out being 33 officers and 651 other ranks.

During the subsequent few months large numbers of personnel were transferred to Class A Regt Reserve which depleted the active strength of the Unit considerably. However this reserve was abolished early in 1941 and all reservists were transferred back to Active List as from 1 Feb 41. These transfers entailed a great amount of ~~work~~ staff work and during this period due to staff members being new and inexperienced many errors were made which caused considerable work during first six months of 1941.

At the termination of Camp S5, the Miowera Area was opened up as an A.I.F. training Depot. 52 members of 31 Bn were discharged to Depot. This depot was closed on 25 Aug 1940 and the majority of the 52 were returned to their Unit.

Early In August 1940 the Bn suffered a severe loss but at the same time was honoured by the fact that the Commanding Officer, Lt Col F.R.North was appointed to the command of the 11 Inf Bde. Maj. H. Bubb was then administering comd and on 19 Sep 40 the Bn Cadre moved into Showgrounds, west End, Townsville for a pre camp course, with a strength of 23 officers and 127 other ranks. On 8 Oct 1940 the Bn cadre moved to Miowera and remainder of Bn was called into camp on 10 Oct 1940. As from 1 Oct 1940, Maj B.J.Douglas was administering comd of the Bn. The strength in camp as on 10 Oct 1940 was 718 other ranks.

During this camp all ranks received vaccinations for small pox and also further inoculations against TAB, these having been first administered in 1939 Camp at Showgrounds, Townsville. Inoculation for tetanus was also administered. Vaccinations was administered in 3

reactions

points on the left upper arm. The ~~xxxxxxxx~~ were most severe in many cases, there being about 300 confined to their beds. The medical officers report on this may have had some weight as an order was issued soon after to the effect that the vaccinations would be applied to one spot only.

For both camps at Miowera, the Picture Show at the camp proved a wonderful boon and it was well patronised.

During this camp the water was drawn from the Bowen supply being brought out by rail and pumped up to the camp site; strict orders regarding use and misuse of water were issued from time to time with the result that the requirements were kept to a bare minimum.

The training during this camp was progressive and useful culminating in Bn manoeuvres on 16/18 Dec 1940. These were not an outstanding success as far as tactical brilliance was concerned but much valuable information was gained. The Brigadier attended the Bn Manoeuvres.

During the camp several social functions were held in Bowen and in both Bowen and Proserpine the lads were very well received and catered for.

Camp S 11A broke up on 18 Dec 1940 and the rear Party cleaned up the site in an excellent manner. This was the last camp to be held in this area up to time of writing (Jan 42).

Christmas 1940 passed and New Year 1941 was ushered in. This was to prove a momentous year in the history of the 31 Bn and the whole A.M.F.

On 24 Mar 1941, 31 Bn entered camp at Show Grounds, Townsville under the command of Maj O.A. Beattie who was appointed to the command early in March 1941.

During Camp S9, it became apparent that troops were being placed on something like a war footing. Pay Books were issued, all members were medically boarded and wills were compiled. Strength in camp as on 24 Mar 1941 was 31 officers and 826 other ranks. This strength rose to about 860 then gradually fell to the marching out state on 21 Jun 41 of 32 officers 631 other ranks.

Training was again carried out from Recruit Tng to Individual and Collective Training, culminating in a grand Bn exercise in conjunction with Bde H.Q. and V.D.C. This exercise took the form of the defence of Townsville. 31 Bn successfully defended Townsville from the Sea but the enemy (V.D.C.) were successful in capturing the aerodrome.

These exercises completed the camp and the Bn marched out on 23 Jun 1941.

As the war situation became graver, it became apparent that it was the ~~intention~~ intention of the government to call up a cadre for full time duty and on 22 Sept 41 the Bn cadre consisting of officers, warrant officers, N.C.Os. and 101 O.Rs. moved into Sellheim.

Intensive cadre training was carried out separately for officers and N.C.Os. By this time the unit had received about 50% of establishment of M.T. so that when orders were received to return to Showgrounds, Townsville, large quantities of stores were sent overland by M.T. The Bn cadre moved on 23 Oct 41, personnel by ~~train~~ train. Both train and M.T. convoy ran to schedule and the whole move was carried out in an excellent manner.

Tng was continued at Showgrounds, Townsville. Organised games were carried on twice a week for several weeks. during the month of November. These proved a great boon to the officers and men, but were

discontinued when Japan entered the war early in December,

This ~~xxx~~ diary is continued in more detail ~~at~~ from this point in War Diary which was commenced on Japan's entry into the War.

10 FEB 1942

*Therby*

Capt.

Adjutant 3<sup>d</sup> Bn.

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31 Infantry Battalion Brief  
History from 1939 to 1940 .