

## Anzac Spirit- John Brooks Clark (SX11925)

The British declaration of war saw Prime Minister Robert Menzies declare that “Australia was also at war”<sup>1</sup>. Young men from around the country enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), one from a small farming town in the Mallee, who swapped his hand piece for a rifle, John Brooks Clark (Figure 1)<sup>2</sup>. Unaware of the journey that was before him, the farmer from Lameroo would serve in two conflicts as the war expanded and Australia’s security became threatened. During his service he experienced the intense heat and dust of the Middle East as well as the rugged tropical jungle that lay in the depths of Papua New Guinea. However, this journey did not lead him home, he is one of the thousands of men who did not return from the “campaign that saved Australia”<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 1 John Brooks Clark, age 29, service number SX11925.

Clark was born to Isaac Emanuel Clark and Daisy Clark (nee Turner) in Murray Bridge, on September 13, 1912. He was the youngest of ten children with two brothers and seven sisters.<sup>4</sup> He lived in the small town of grain and sheep, in the Murray Mallee of South Australia. Clark completed his schooling in his hometown of Lameroo. After school, Clark showed eagerness to get into the workforce, learning a variety of trades, working as a shearer, wheat lumper and a labourer around the local Lameroo district. News of a war reached the small country town on September 3, 1939. At the time, Lameroo was still feeling the hurt from World War One, which claimed the lives of 20 men, one quarter of the town’s population<sup>5</sup>. However, young men like Clark were not deterred by the legacy the war had left and were still willing to do their bit for their country. At 29 years of age, Clark enlisted in the AIF at Murray Bridge. On arrival at Wayville on March 24, 1941, he joined the 2/10 Battalion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Division- a division that would see him travel across the seas, to serve against two different enemies.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2: The Queen Mary chartered Clark’s battalion to their first point of service.

More than 12,000km from his homeland, Clark was deployed to the Middle East to begin the first part of his service. He boarded a train at Oakbank, South Australia on June 26, 1941. First, he was to travel through Murray Bridge, Horsham, and bypassed Melbourne on route to Sydney. Clark was ferried out to the *Queen Mary* (Figure 2) - a warship that chartered thousands of troops to

their war destination. The ship was to become a target of Clark’s first enemy, Adolf Hitler, who set a “£250,000 reward to the submarine captain who could sink the Mary, as well as the Iron Cross.”<sup>7</sup> He sailed down the East Coast of Australia and across the rough Australian Bight. After a short stay at Fremantle, he underwent what he described in his journal (Figure 3) as “an uneventful trip” that anchored his battalion in Port Tewfik, Egypt, July 25, 1941. His first



Figure 3: Clark’s detailed diary upon enlistment March 24, 1941.

<sup>1</sup> Anzacportal.dva.gov.au. 2020. *Enlisting In The Australian Forces During World War I | Anzac Portal*. [online] Available at: <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/military-organisation/enlistment>> [Accessed 22 May 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Vwma.org.au. 2020. *John Brooks CLARK*. [online] Available at: <<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/597471>> [Accessed 22 May 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Theaustralian.com.au. 2020. *Subscribe To The Australian | Newspaper Home Delivery, Website, Ipad, Iphone & Android Apps*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/editorials/a-battle-that-saved-australia/news-story/7c59f7d6e427931a147310cc7497a232>> [Accessed 21 May 2020].

<sup>4</sup> FamilySearch. 2020. *Alice May Clark (1892-1983) • Familysearch*. [online] Available at: <<https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LK7C-X1Y/alice-may-clark-1892-1983>> [Accessed 13 April 2020].

<sup>5</sup> FOGDEN, A., 2020. *Small Town Lost A Quarter Of Its Men*. [online] The Examiner. Available at: <<https://www.examiner.com/story/3018305/small-town-lost-a-quarter-of-its-men/>> [Accessed 20 May 2020].

<sup>6</sup> Memorial, T., 2020. | *The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56053>> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

<sup>7</sup> Dailytelegraph.com.au. 2020. *Secret Of Luxury Liner’S War Service Tragedy*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/today-in-history/queens-marys-war-service-tragedy/news-story/71ad9e065c8f655d32aac729c7caba69>> [Accessed 20 May 2020].

experience 'at war' began in Tobruk, which involved a conflict with German soldiers. His battalion played a significant part in "holding out against a combined and sustained assault" by the German Africa Korps and the Italian Army.<sup>8</sup> Clark documented his interactions with the enemy:

"Now mother, Tobruk is a hell of a town  
The jerries are watching for us all around  
When we arrived here we thought we were safe  
Until up came the lightwaffle and started to strike  
There followed a rumour the roads cut behind  
And jerry has guns round us has lined  
So now that we're here it seems we must stay  
Till they push up from Sollum and relieve us some day  
But worse than the air raids is the grit and the sand  
It's really more than a fellow can stand  
The cooks aren't expert at savoury things  
They feed us on bacon and bully you see  
And sometimes we have fish for a change for our tea."

Clark's journey continued when his battalion travelled by truck to *Kantara Military Base*, then to Gaza by train where he "...had the first squared meal in 24 hours"<sup>9</sup>. Clark marched from *Dimra Military Camp* to join the battalion in *Kilo 89*, a military camp in Palestine on September 20, 1941. Here he was put on guard at *Brigade Head Quarters* on September 22, "... there was evidence of fighting in the last war"<sup>10</sup>. Clark left Aleppo by motor convoy to the Turkish border and was put on guard at the railway station, he remained there until early 1942. His service in the Middle East came to an end after 6 months and 14 days. His battalion had been withdrawn from the Middle East following Japan's entry into the war. Clark was recalled back to Australia where he sailed on the ship *Nieuw-Amsterdam*, "...a Dutch boat of 35000 tones and the best boat I've been on including the *Queen Mary*"<sup>11</sup>. After arriving at Bombay on February 19, he was then transferred to the *HMT Nevasa* on the February 21, where he sailed in convoy with three other boats on escort for Colombo. After a short stay in Colombo he left on March 6, now with seven in convoy and three escorts where he "struck rough and wet weather after crossing the equator", he finally reached Fremantle on March 20.<sup>12</sup> Upon arrival Clark was given two afternoons leave before sailing again on March 22. Five days later, he arrived in Port Adelaide on Friday, March 27 and boarded a train straight to Sandy Creek with his service in the Middle East now behind him. Clark was given ten days leave.

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<sup>8</sup> Vwma.org.au. 2020. *2Nd/10Th Infantry Battalion*. [online] Available at: <<https://vwma.org.au/explore/units/10>> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

<sup>9</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>10</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>11</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>12</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

A new task, a new destination, and a new conflict. Clark received news that he was being deployed to a different part of the world to take on a new enemy. Australia was under threat of an invasion and Clark's battalion was one of many tasked with pushing the Japanese back, they were deployed to Papua New Guinea on *SS Both a Dutch Ship*.<sup>13</sup> Clark arrived at Milne Bay on August 12, 1942, where the Japanese were ready to strike. Clark's battalion found themselves stationed on a snake like trail, known as the *Kokoda Trail*, where many Australian soldiers suffered the gruelling conditions it presented. Kokoda is situated amongst the mountains, passing through 100 kilometres of thick jungle. Soldiers were often unable to see the enemy as they were so well camouflaged in the jungle's surroundings, which made it easy to ambush units as they were advancing the track<sup>14</sup>. When the battalion arrived at New Guinea, they set up camp at "quite an interesting place camped in a coconut plantation." Muddy, with steeping hills and many rivers, Clark immediately noticed the differences from the sand and dry heat he had experienced during his service in the Middle East. "It is about the first place I've been to that is as good as I expected or rather not

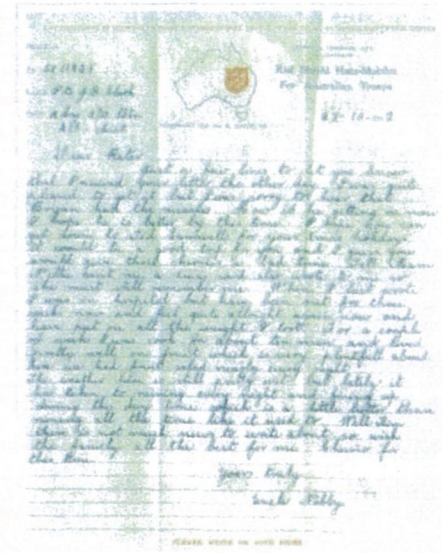


Figure 5: letter home to family.

as good for its really an unpleasant place, very wet very hot and steamy with all sorts of creepy crawly insects and snakes"<sup>15</sup>. The battalion later landed at Milne Bay in the south east of Papua, at 3.00am on August 25. The enemy was situated only 5 miles up coast, the 2/10<sup>th</sup> prepared for their first confrontation with Japanese soldiers. "That night we marched up to fighter drome and the next afternoon went up to meet them. We were attacked on evening of 27th Aug and arrived back at Milne Bay 5pm 30th Aug."<sup>16</sup> The soldiers faced another battle amongst the 'unhealthy environment', with many falling ill to malaria, dysentery, scrub typhus, and dengue fever.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, for Clark the



Figure 4: Service and Casualty Form.

conditions got to him, he caught dengue fever, and found himself in hospital on his birthday where he would spend the next 14 days (Figure 4). "Still in hospital but pretty right again, looks like re-joining unit any day now"<sup>18</sup>.

Proving he could not be beaten; Clark was sent back into action. "Have been treated extra well. Due to leave today 30th Sept weather permitting. Left Milne Bay by plane and landed in Tufi Bay, enjoyed the trip immensely<sup>19</sup>." After some days, Clark's battalion found themselves setting up camp along the coast. "Dug in section positions along the beach of Collingwood Bay. Have been doing the cooking for the mob. Quite a good spot plenty of paw paw and bananas and crocodiles round the camp every night. The fruit is to be had for a handful of biscuits<sup>20</sup>."

<sup>13</sup> Trail, T., 2020. *The Battle Of The Kokoda Trail*. [online] Nationalgeographic.com.au. Available at: <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com.au/australia/the-battle-of-the-kokoda-trail.asp>> [Accessed 12 May 2020].

<sup>14</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>15</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>16</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>17</sup> Anzacportal.dva.gov.au. 2020. *Malaria And Dysentery | Anzac Portal*. [online] Available at: <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/kokoda-track-1942-1943/events/jungle-warfare/malaria-and-dysentery>> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

<sup>18</sup> Anzacportal.dva.gov.au. 2020. *Malaria And Dysentery | Anzac Portal*. [online] Available at: <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/kokoda-track-1942-1943/events/jungle-warfare/malaria-and-dysentery>> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

<sup>19</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

<sup>20</sup> John Brooks Clark, diary (1941-1942)

Along with sister battalions, 2<sup>nd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 2/12<sup>th</sup>, Clark's battalion prevented the Japanese from taking the Milne Air Base. A significant success which came at a large cost. The battalion's position had been cut off by the Japanese. Clark's last act of duty was trying to defeat the Japanese at Buna and Sanandana, a task that saw 113 Australians killed and 205 wounded. Clark was killed in action by a Japanese Sniper in Buna on December 26, 1942, age 30. His body was never recovered but in memory of his death his name is located on the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Memorial Wall along with 742 soldiers (Figure 6) <sup>21</sup>. There is a total of 3126 Australians who are buried in Papua New Guinea. Even though he never made it home to share his experiences and stories from his service, his detailed documentation has allowed those who knew him to understand his encounters with war in the Middle East and the Pacific. A service and life that will continue to live on through those who survive him.



**Figure 6:** Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery, where Clark's name is on Panel 3.

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<sup>21</sup> Cwgc.org. 2020. *Cemetery*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2014300/port-moresby-\(bomana\)-war-cemetery/](https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2014300/port-moresby-(bomana)-war-cemetery/)> [Accessed 22 May 2020].

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## PART B:

The Anzac Spirit is comprised of characteristics such as courage, perseverance, mateship and resourcefulness that is displayed during wartime. Clark displayed all of these during his service in World War II, but at the foremost were courage and perseverance. Courage is shown with bravery in tough situations where Clark had to leave his family to serve his country and adapt to different challenges that he had never faced before. Perseverance means not to give up and despite having difficulties in achieving success, Clark's commitment to his battalion through two different theatres of war saw him pay the ultimate sacrifice.

Clark displayed courage through his willingness to leave his family and hometown of Lameroo at the age of 29 to enlist for war. Courage was displayed in the contrasting environments and through the challenging conditions he endured. With the same attitude he had prior to the war in regards to upskilling himself, Clark was brave enough to try many different roles other than being a soldier while on duty, which included: guard at the Railway Station and ammunition dump, and a cook for his fellow soldiers. Clark's battalion travelled through many towns and crossed various borders. Blistered feet, sleepless nights, and the constant sound of air raids, and living in the grit and sand in the Middle East was not enough to deter Clark. After this experience in the desert, Clark was again deployed to another conflict, Papua New Guinea. He had the courage to brave an enemy that was often hard to be seen amongst the jungle's density, as well as the creepy crawlies and the poisons they passed onto the soldiers who came across them.

In addition to courage, Clark also demonstrated his ability to persevere through the conditions and situations that were presented to him throughout both theatres of war. After arriving on Australian soil from the Middle East he was deployed to Papua. Clark was able to adapt to different environments during his service such as the hot, dry, and dusty conditions in Tobruk to the snow in the Middle East and the very hot, wet, and steamy tropical jungle that lay in the depths of Papua New Guinea. Lieutenant-General Tsutomu Yoshihara said, "In the Kokoda battle their (The Anzac) qualities of adaptability and individual initiative enabled them to show tremendous ability as fighting men in the jungle, they were superb". This statement relates to as he also had the perseverance to fight through and adapt to the situations as they presented. Even with illness like dengue fever *which* he had caught during war.

During his service, Clark demonstrated characteristics from the Anzac Spirit that allowed him to show courage through the different roles he was allocated and conditions he encountered. Without the characteristics of perseverance and courage, Clark would not have been capable of continuing his service to his battalion which he did faithfully until the end.