



WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

QX1181

2/9th Battalion

**Australian Imperial
Force**

**By Syd Telford and
Lynette Argus (nee
Telford)**

The first thing that struck people meeting Sid Telford for the first time was his stature -- there was plenty of it. Although his brothers Frank and Archie were big men, Sid, standing at 6 feet 4 inches (193cm) tall with a physique to match, cut an imposing figure. In true Australian fashion, he was given the nickname "Tiny".

Born at Allora on 4th November 1910, Sid was the eldest son of Andrew and Sarah Elizabeth Telford (nee Cox). Together with Frank and Archie and his sisters May and Rosie, Sid grew up on the family farm "Glenrock" in the Spring Creek district, between the eastern Darling Downs towns of Clifton and Allora.

Along with his brothers and sisters, Sid was educated at the small Spring Creek Upper State School where one lone teacher taught all grades.

After leaving school, he worked on the family farm which was a mixed operation involving

dairying and pig and poultry raising as well as agriculture.

A keen sportsman, he excelled in cricket and tennis and also enjoyed a game of rugby league. He was a popular figure throughout the district and was a regular attendee at the local dances.

For a big man, he was reportedly very light on his feet and a good dancer. Some petite or smaller women would claim that their feet never touched the floor while Sid was whirling them around the dance floor.

Various stories have been told about Sid over the years and some of those are repeated here to provide an insight into the likeable, larrikin nature of the man they called "Tiny".

One evening, Sid was having a shave when Len Chard arrived to take him to a dance. He told Len "I'll have a bath and I'll be there"it was only when he got to the dance that he

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Teacher and pupils of Spring Creek Upper State School c1920. Sid is fourth from the right in the back row beside brother Frank (third from right). May and Archie are in the front row (fifth and second from the right).



Spring Creek Cricket Club, Allora and District premiers 1937-38. Sid and Frank Telford are in the second back row (third and fifth from the left). Jack Gilmore is seated at the left of the front row.

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Before the War: Farm workers Archie, Sid and Frank Telford with their cousin May Cox



Sid Telford (on right) and neighbour Tom Gibson with their kangaroo dogs at the Gibson family property "The Glen" in 1939

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realised that only half his face had been shaved.

On another occasion, Sid, Frank and Archie arrived home on horseback at 4.00 in the morning after a big night out at a dance at Pilton. They had all just got into bed when the sound of their father's feet hitting the floor in the next room, accompanied by his loud call of "Cows, boys", had them scrambling back out again. The milking would have been slow that morning.

Playing cricket at Spring Creek one day against an Allora team, left-handed bowler Archie Telford was being sledged by a couple of brothers in the opposing team. Sid, not one to stand by and see his young brother treated in that way, walked over to one of the offending batsmen and told him to pull his head in. When the batsman later related the incident to his mates in Allora, he said "I nearly shit myself when that big bastard walked over".

In another game, a rather overweight fielder in Sid's team made little effort to catch a ball that came his way. As the ball sailed over his head, Sid yelled out: "Rise, bugger it, rise!" While Sid always did his best at any sport he played, he did regard enjoyment of the game as more important than winning or losing.

In the 1930s, the young men of the district would gather at the Spring Creek Hall, situated on the corner of Spring Creek Road and the New England Highway, for a weekly get-together. One night someone brought along a pair of boxing gloves. Sid and Archie decided to have a spar with each other but it soon became fair dinkum. The referee, Bill Dalton, had great trouble pulling them apart. When they had all cooled down, Marty Byrne asked Archie what started it. With a laugh, he replied: "The big bastard stood on my toe".

On another occasion, Sid was attending a tractor field day in neighbour Bill Doyle's paddock. A baby B tractor had its motor running when it was accidentally knocked into gear by two young fellows who were sitting on it. The tractor took off and the startled boys didn't know how to stop it so they steered it towards an open gateway where four-year old

Graham Stallman happened to be standing. He almost certainly would have been killed had Sid not grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and pulled him to safety as the tractor's tyre brushed the young boy's leg.

Sid's positive, outgoing personality was tested one day when he had to work with a man who was very pessimistic. No matter what the subject, this man always had a negative view. As the day wore on, Sid had finally had enough and he said to this fellow: "Good God, man. Can't you see the sun shining and hear the birds singing in the trees?"

At a Mock Deb Ball, Sid joined other young men of the district and dressed as one of the debutantes. A competition was held to guess who the mock debs were. Everyone thought the trembling bouquet Sid was carrying was part of the act but, in fact, it was for real. He was as nervous as a genuine debutante.



Sid and Jack Gilmore ready to make their debut

It was a time long before television when communities made their own fun. However, the rigours, disappointments and joys of

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Australian country life were soon to be severely impacted by world events.

The people of Europe had been on tenterhooks for some time with the rise to power in Germany of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party for short). The uneasy peace that existed was broken when, following Germany's annexation of Austria, the Nazis invaded Poland on 1st September 1939.

As a result of that invasion, and Hitler's refusal to comply with an English and French ultimatum to withdraw his invasion force, Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September.

That same evening, Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, made an historic speech on national radio. "Fellow Australians", the Prime Minister began gravely, "it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that in consequence of a persistence by Germany, and her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that as a result Australia is also at war....."

Unlike the First World War, enlistment in Australia's armed forces was slow initially. However, Sid Telford was among the early volunteers to sign up to do his bit for King and country. As the eldest son in the family, he may have felt duty-bound to go to war, leaving his brothers and sisters to help out on the farm in what were essential occupations to help feed the nation.

He may also have felt a sense of adventure in going overseas and, at 28 years of age, seeing sights and having experiences quite different from the daily routine of farm life.

Whatever the motivation, we do know that Sid was in Warwick on 3rd November 1939 where he completed and signed his Attestation Form for enlistment in the Australian Army. Sid's close friend, Glen Davis, originally from Monto but well-known in the Allora-Clifton district, had enlisted two weeks earlier. Sid was given service number QX1181.

On the following day, Sid joined other new recruits in a tented camp at Redbank, between

Brisbane and Ipswich. Sharing a tent with seven other recruits, each man was issued with a straw mattress or palliasse, a ground sheet and two blankets.

SPRING CREEK

FAREWELL TO PTE. S. TELFORD

A large and enthusiastic crowd attended at Spring Creek Hall on Tuesday night to bid au revoir to Pte Syd. Telford of the Second A.I.F.

During the evening, Mr. J. Dalton paid a tribute to Syd and spoke in very eulogistic terms of his popularity and his good qualities and wished him luck.

His remarks were endorsed by Mr. K. Byrne, a neighbour of Mr. Telford's.

Mr. J. Gilmore also spoke on behalf of the sporting bodies.

Mr. J. Dwyer, Sr., on behalf of the residents of the district presented Private Telford with a very fine wristlet-watch, and a wallet of notes.

Private Telford responded and thanked all those present for their good wishes and kind remarks.

The audience then joined in heartily singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and the National Anthem.

Miss O'Sullivan's orchestra provided the music for the dancing.

At the close of the evening all joined in singing "Auld Lang Syne."

Miss Mary Dwyer was the secretary of a very enthusiastic committee of young people who organised the function.

Private Syd. Telford has the honour of being the first man from Spring Creek to join the 2nd A.I.F. and he is also likely to retain the honour of being the biggest.

Article from the *Clifton Courier* on a farewell function held for Sid Telford when he joined the Army

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On 13th November 1939, the recruits were formed into the 2/9th Battalion and Sid was one of those proudly dubbed “the originals”.

The 2/9th Battalion, together with its sister Battalions, the 2/10th and 2/12th, formed the 18th Brigade under Brigadier-General Leslie Morshead. The Battalion consisted of four rifle companies (A,B,C and D), Battalion HQ, a HQ Company and a Support Company.

Each day commenced with an early morning parade followed by a march or run before breakfast and recruit training for the rest of the day. The two local pubs were well supported by many of the recruits at night.

Australia's unpreparedness for war was highlighted by a shortage of many items including weapons, equipment, clothing and personal items. When the early uniforms did become available, they consisted of a khaki outfit and slouch hat, which the recruits referred to as “a giggle suit”. The trousers had no pockets. This was an apparent attempt to break the recruits of the unmilitary practice of putting hands in pockets.

Sid was allotted to the Transport Platoon which was part of HQ Company. Glen Davis joined C Company.

On 18th December 1939, the three battalions of the 18th Brigade left their camp at Redbank and departed in three trains for Rutherford, just outside Maitland NSW, where they arrived the next day.

Sid had been given a small pocket diary for the calendar year 1940 by the Abernethy family whose farm adjoined his parents' property “Glenrock”. His first diary entry records that he was on leave in Sydney where he saw in the New Year at Luna Park, before visiting Manly later in the day. The daily routine at the camp was centred around training. Sid's diary records that, on Friday 5th January, the Brigade was inspected by General Blamey and the following Sunday was spent on leave in Newcastle.

On 12th January 1940, the 18th Brigade relocated to Ingleburn outside Sydney where

they occupied huts recently vacated by the 16th Brigade which had embarked overseas.



The long and the short of it: Sid “Tiny” Telford and some of his mates in the 2/9th Battalion at Ingleburn

On the following day, Sid took leave in Sydney where he attended a Sheffield Shield cricket match between New South Wales and South Australia.

His time at Ingleburn was spent largely on training and night manoeuvres, as well as leave in Sydney, until trucks became available on 25th January. Then his truck training was interspersed with route marches, rifle drill and trench digging.



Sid, in his “giggle suit”, stands beside a Chevrolet truck in the Transport Platoon

Having obtained his truck driver's licence on 7th February, Sid became involved in convoy work transporting men and equipment to and from various locations in and around Sydney.

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Sid and his cobber visit the Archibald Fountain in Sydney's Hyde Park

While at Ingleburn, Sid sent a letter to Kath Pleash of Hendon. Kath was being courted by, and would later marry, Sid's youngest brother, Archie. In the letter, Sid said that he spent

every Saturday and Sunday in Sydney. "Nothing like having a good time while you are here", he went on to say. In reference to Archie, he enquired as to whether "that chap from Spring Creek" still called in to see her. He also informed Kath that a concert was held at the Ingleburn camp nearly every night. "I haven't given them a yodel yet. Suppose I'll have to one of these nights," he added.

During late February, six days pre-embarkation leave in the soldier's home town was granted to each man. Travel time was added on to the leave so granted. Sid started his leave on 4th March and, travelling by train via Wallangarra, he arrived at Clifton at 10.30 a.m. on the following day.

Sid's diary records that he spent his leave "knocking about home" and visiting friends and relatives including his aunt, Rose Telford, the Byrne family and Pat Dalton.



Sid's family came to Clifton Railway Station to see him off following his pre-embarkation leave in March 1940.
From left: Frank, Archie, Rosie, mother Liz (seated in car), Sid, May and father Andy

On the Saturday night, he went to a dance in Allora and, on Sunday, attended a cricket match to watch his old club play. He also fitted in visits to Warwick and Toowoomba.

On 13th March 1940, he was back in Ingleburn, resuming motor transport lectures and motor drill. While on leave in Sydney, he met up with the two Dwyer sisters, who were also from

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Spring Creek, on a number of occasions. They all attended the races together on Saturday, 13th April.

Sid's diary records that tin hats and respirators, to be used in the event of gas attack, were issued to the troops on 21st April and respirator drill began the next day in preparation for their embarkation overseas on Sunday, 5th May.

In the days leading up to embarkation day, Sid was kept busy transporting equipment and containers to the wharf at Circular Quay.

There at Number 4 wharf on 5th May, soldiers of the 2/9th Battalion boarded the Cunard liner *Mauretania* which had been requisitioned for war service as a troop carrier. As the ship moved down the harbour in grey drizzle, spontaneous cheers, cooees and songs broke out from both sides of the harbour.

Once outside Sydney Heads, the *Mauretania* was joined by the *Queen Mary* and four other vessels carrying the remaining troops of the 18th Brigade and the 17th Brigade that was heading for overseas with them. The flotilla was escorted by the naval cruisers *HMAS Australia*, *HMAS Canberra* and *HMS Leander* and headed south and then west on their way to Fremantle.

Sid noted in his diary the ship's passage past Wilson's Promontory and Port Phillip Bay, while engaging in rifle drill and physical training. Having crossed the Great Australian Bight, the ship docked in Fremantle at 12.30 p.m. on Friday, 10th May and the Battalion was granted shore leave from 1.30 p.m. until midnight. Sid spent the night attending a ball.

On the following day, the *Mauretania* left the dock and anchored offshore to provide an opportunity for other troop carriers to dock and discharge their troops on leave. To keep the Battalion busy through that day, a tug-of-war competition was held onboard. Sid noted in his diary that HQ Company won. There are no prizes for guessing whom the anchor-man might have been.

The *Mauretania* was a new ship, having been built in 1939, and this was its first convoy assignment since being requisitioned for war

service. Although modified to carry troops, many of the fittings of a luxury cruise ship remained and the men of the Battalion were able to enjoy hot and cold water, well-cooked food and a cold beer in a well-stocked bar onboard. Of course, they had to pay for the latter.



Sid got up close and personal with a slithery reptile during a visit to Sydney's Koala Park Wildlife Sanctuary

When the convoy left Fremantle at 12.45 a.m. on Sunday, 12th May, the troops were oblivious to where they were heading and to the military considerations that were presently in process. The actual destination at that time was the Middle East. However, on 10th May, the Nazis had invaded Holland, Belgium and

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Luxembourg and it also seemed likely that Italy would enter the War as a German ally.

Given the strong Italian presence in North Africa, the British Government warned that, if the 17th and 18th Brigades landed in Egypt, equipping them would be more difficult and suggested that they should divert to the United Kingdom. The immediate decision was taken, however, to continue towards the Middle East for the present time. This decision was later changed and the 17th Brigade continued to the Middle East while Sid and the 18th Brigade diverted to the South African port of Cape Town. The troops were aware that they had changed course but were still kept in the dark as to their destination.

Training, including boxing and athletics competitions, continued onboard and Sid also engaged in map reading and rifle drill during this time. He also took his turn at sentry duty.

Sid also noted in his diary that a military funeral had taken place on board the *Mauretania* at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday, 25th May. Private Francis Keilar became the Battalion's first loss when he died from influenza pneumonia and was buried at sea.



RMS Mauretania was refitted and painted grey for its role as a troop carrier

The convoy reached Cape Town at 10.00 a.m. on 26th May and the troops were granted shore leave. As a goodwill gesture, the local authorities allowed the pubs to stay open while the troops were there and some of the locals stopped to pick them up in their private cars to show them the sights of the city.

Sid took his leave on the following day and recorded that he "knocked about town" in the

morning and went for "a car drive" in the afternoon.

There had been an outbreak of disease, namely pneumonia, mumps and rubella, on the *Mauretania* during the voyage from Australia to Cape Town. Overcrowding and a lack of adequate hospital and isolation facilities were believed to have led to the outbreak. The situation was relieved by the transfer from other ships in the convoy of eight New Zealand nurses and six medical orderlies before the convoy left Cape Town.

Sid's diary records that the ship pulled out of Cape Town at 8.30 a.m. on Friday, 31st May and "crossed the line" (the Equator) at 4.00 p.m. on the following Wednesday. Days on board continued to be taken up by rifle drill, map reading, physical training and competitive sports.

The convoy arrived in the port of Freetown in Sierra Leone on 7th June where the ships were sealed from dusk until dawn to guard against infection by mosquitoes. After re-fuelling, the ships left the next day and the information was finally released to the troops that they were heading to the United Kingdom.

The convoy was now in dangerous seas and began to zigzag to reduce the risk of damage from submarine attack. Life belts were worn at all times and each ship's machine guns were manned continuously.

After passing up the west coast of Ireland, the convoy turned east towards the Firth of Clyde in Scotland where it was joined by Sunderland flying boats providing further protection. On 14th June, the British battle ship *HMS Hood* and the aircraft carrier *HMS Argus* and eight destroyers also joined the convoy.

On the following day, the convoy passed through the wreckage of a British ship which had been torpedoed only the day before. Sid also noted in his diary that a submarine was sighted that morning. An hour and a half later, the troops saw a British oil tanker on fire and slipping stern first into the sea, having been sunk by the same submarine.

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On Sunday 16th June, the convoy sailed into the Firth of Clyde where they were welcomed by the Lord of the Admiralty and the Under Secretary of State for the Dominions who read a message from the King (George VI).

Sid and his Battalion mates disembarked from the *Mauretania* at Gourock, about forty kilometres downstream from Glasgow at 8.30 p.m. on the following day. The transfer from ship to dock was made on a ferry which still bore the battle scars of its participation in the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk some three weeks earlier.

The welcome from the local people was ecstatic. France had just surrendered to the Germans and the sight of such a large contingent of Commonwealth troops provided a much-needed boost in morale. The troops travelled to Glasgow by train where the Battalion band played *Loch Lomond* and *Annie Laurie* while an enthusiastic crowd locked arms, sang along with the Australians and danced in the streets.

During a twenty-minute stopover in Edinburgh around midnight, volunteers on the platform gave each man a pint-size cup of tea and a packet of food, fruit and chocolates. Continuing south with blackout curtains drawn, Sid recorded that the train passed through Newcastle, the place of his father's youth, at 4.00 a.m. on 18th June, arriving at Salisbury in southern England at 5.00 p.m. that afternoon. From Salisbury, the soldiers travelled by bus to Lopcombe Corner, situated between Salisbury and Winchester and about 32 kilometres north of Southampton.

The accommodation at Lopcombe Corner consisted of eight-man tents and the remainder of June was spent in developing the hastily erected camp. According to Sid's diary, he spent much of his time digging trenches, filling in drains and applying camouflage to the tents to make the camp more difficult to see from the air. The need for high security was brought home strongly to the men the day after the Battalion arrived when they could see the fires and hear the din of a heavy German air raid on the major shipbuilding port of Southampton.

Sid's diary note for the day was: "Big air raid quite close to camp. More trench filling".

Training now focussed on re-hardening the men following their long sea voyage. Tuesday 25th June 1940 saw Sid spend the day doing bayonet drill and trench digging, followed the next day by "a route march to Broughton".

On 27th June, the Battalion was issued with eight trucks. Sid then attended driving school at the British army training camp at Perham Downs from 2nd to 11th July, after which time he passed his driving test and received an authority to drive from the British War Office.

Army Form A. 2038.
Identification Card for Mechanical Transport Drivers.
THE WAR OFFICE.
The undersigned Pvt 1181 SIDNEY TELFORD S.
(description) 2/9 A.I.F.
being employed on Military Service, is hereby authorized by the Secretary of State for War to drive a motor car, lorry, motor cycle or other mechanically propelled vehicle when on Government duty.
Sidney Telford
Signature of Holder. I. J. G. P.
Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War.
Available from 9-7-40 to 2/9/41
(12477) Wt. 86302/8 100,000 11/39 A. & E. W. Ltd. Gp. 698
(12851) Wt. 39777/277 300,000 12/39 " " " Forms/A.2038/4

While Sid was at Perham Downs, the Battalion was inspected by King George VI on 4th July. Sid had his first look at London during a thirty-six hour leave on 15th and 16th July. Australian troops on leave in London could receive overnight accommodation at Westminster Hall, next to the Abbey. In a letter to his good friend and neighbour Arthur Abernethy, Sid wrote: *I've had quite a good look around London, no doubt it is a huge place. My one ambition in life was to see London. Now I am satisfied.*

He also took the opportunity to visit the family of Jim Ball who had emigrated to the Clifton district where he met and married Sid's cousin, Evelyn Telford. Jim's people had a grocery store in the Hampshire town of Aldershot, located some sixty kilometres south-west of London.

At this time, a lot of Sid's training was based around map reading. Due to the fear of a German invasion from early July, all road signs had been removed and drivers needed to be careful that they did not get lost.

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[Map by Frank Argus]

Map of Scotland and England showing the locations mentioned in the text

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On 26th July, Sid had an adverse reaction to a bee sting and spent the night under observation in the Military Hospital at Tidworth.

Much of Sid's time was then spent on transporting troops to and from various Battalion military exercises – “stunts” as they are called in Sid's diary – around the district. Rapid troop movement by vehicle, in response to any reports of airborne landings by the enemy, had to be practised constantly.

Following church parade on Sunday, 4th August, he received a visit from Jim Ball's family who had travelled out from Aldershot.

As well as his transport duties and truck maintenance, Sid's training now shifted to gas drill and shooting rifles and a Vickers machine gun. On 13th August, his diary records a visit from the German Luftwaffe when nine planes dropped six bombs on the field next to the camp, leaving huge craters up to four metres deep. The Battle for Britain was at its zenith and the men of the Battalion often watched the dogfights taking place in the skies above them.

On Wednesday 4th September, the camp was visited by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who inspected the 18th Brigade and addressed the troops.

On the following day, Sid commenced six days' leave. After visiting London and Bournemouth, he caught a train to Newcastle. He then went to Shotley Bridge to visit the boyhood home of his father, Andrew Telford. There he met and stayed with his cousin, Tom Britton, the son of his uncle, Thomas Scott Telford, his father's eldest brother. For whatever reason, the children of Thomas Scott Telford had been given the surname of their mother, Mary Britton.

In a letter to his parents, Sid reported on his visit to Shotley Bridge: *I had a wonderful time up there. No wonder you have happy memories of that place. I went to a dance there and enjoyed myself to the utmost. They are a gay lot up there. Give you a wonderful time. I met quite a nice girl up there, she often sends me cigarettes and chocolates and also received a cake the other day. I don't mind*

them feeding me up. Jim's people send me a cake every week.

Sid's “nice girl” was Yvonne Carruthers, an attractive young lady from Consett, and they commenced a relationship that would continue by correspondence for the duration of Sid's military service.



Yvonne Carruthers. Sid carried this photo with him in all his travels



The Blue House, Shotley Bridge, where Sid's father, Andrew Telford, was born. Photo taken in 2011

On returning from his good time at Shotley Bridge, Sid called on the Ball family at Aldershot. In the same letter to his parents, he

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recalled the visit this way: *They (the Ball family) have been extra good to me. The last time I went there I arrived about 10 o'clock at night. They were out and an air raid was on. I banged on the door but could get no reply. I thought they must have been in the air raid shelter at the back of the house and no way of getting to the back. So I decided to have a camp on the door step. Had just dozed off when they came along. Had been down to Southampton seeing their relations.*

Sid's diary entry for that day was: *Staying at Jim Ball's people. Heavy air raids over London. Many killed.*



House at 3 Backstone Burn, Shotley Bridge, where Andrew Telford lived as a child. Photo taken in 2011

During September, British Intelligence believed that a German invasion was imminent and the troops were placed on high alert. Sid and the other drivers were instructed to carry their rifles and forty rounds of ammunition when taking their trucks outside the camp.

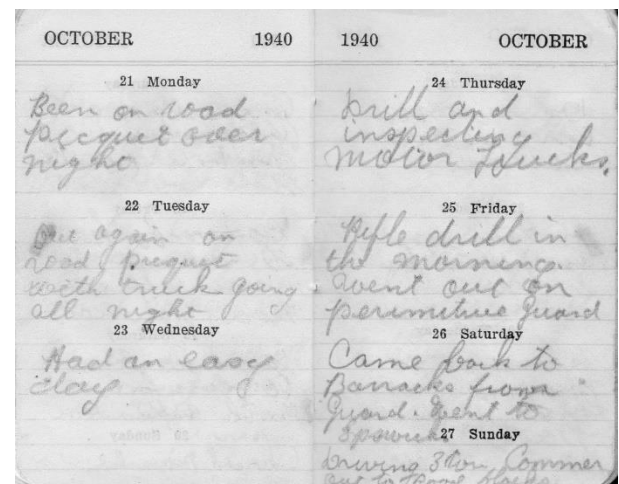
On 14th October, the 18th Brigade moved from their tented camp at Lopcombe Corner to Meeanee Barracks, outside Colchester in Essex, north-east of London and close to the coast. Here they were responsible for the defence of that particular sector.

The move from tents into barracks provided the men with some additional comforts like electricity, warm beds and sheets and pillows. Sid wrote to his parents at the time: *It has just begun to rain, but am nice and cosy sitting*

beside a nice warm fire in my quarters. So therefore it can tear down as hard as it likes.

Sid took his turn on picquet duty, manning road blocks and tank traps outside Colchester. To guard against the German tactic of impersonating locals, the picquets were directed to ignore orders from any officer they did not know and to shoot to kill anyone who disobeyed their instructions or tried to escape.

King George visited the Brigade again for a march past on 30th October. A guard of honour was formed by the 100 tallest men in the Brigade. The King moved slowly among the troops and expressed his gratitude for their presence at an extremely difficult time.



Page from Sid's pocket diary

On 11th November, Sid spent the day loading and transporting equipment and materials to the Colchester North Railway Station in preparation for the Battalion's next move. With the aerial Battle of Britain now done and won, the threat of invasion of the British Isles had passed. The 18th Brigade was now required in the Middle East.

Sid was in the advance party that left Colchester on 14th November bound for Glasgow where he spent the next two days at the King George V Wharf helping to load the Battalion's equipment and belongings onto the troop carrier *HMT Strathaird*.

The *Strathaird* left the Firth of Clyde on 17th November in a flotilla containing nine other ships. The *Strathaird* was smaller and had

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none of the comforts of the *Mauretania*. The sleeping accommodation was hammocks suspended precariously above the mess tables in what would normally have been the ship's hold.

Sid recorded that he spent 25th November on sentry duty at the submarine lookout post. The troops were also introduced to the Thompson sub-machine gun (Tommy gun) and intensive training was provided on its maintenance and use.

The convoy reached Freetown in Sierra Leone on 29th November and resumed the voyage two days later.

The week commencing Monday, 2nd December saw Sid and his mates in training for a tug-of-war competition to be held onboard. The 2/9th had entered three teams and two of them won their first heat. The final was held on the Saturday and was won by the 2/9th Battalion's A team. For his efforts, Sid received a prize of a three shilling (thirty cents) open order to be cashed at the ship's shop or canteen.

Sid recorded in his diary that, on 9th December, the water was filled with "shoals of dolphins and porpoises".

The convoy reached Durban in South Africa at 11.30 a.m. on 12th December. Sid was granted leave from 6.00 p.m. until midnight and, naturally enough, spent his time attending a dance at the Athlone Gardens.

On the following day, Sid was on permanent picquet duty on the ship while the rest of the Battalion conducted a march past for the Mayor of Durban in hot and steamy conditions. He had a further day's leave on 14th December and visited the Old Fort, the beach and the Indian markets.

At 7.00 a.m. on 16th December, the convoy left Durban and headed northward along the east coast of Africa, with Sid and his Battalion crossing the Equator for the third time. In his diary, Sid noted the extreme heat that had him sleeping on the deck.

On 24th December, Sid recorded that he was mess orderly for the day and there was a

"terrible lot of sickness" on the ship. The two diary entries, however, were totally unrelated. An influenza outbreak had hospitalised 133 officers and men.

Christmas Day, which, two months earlier, Sid had been planning to celebrate at either Shotley Bridge or with the Ball family at Aldershot, was spent in the Gulf of Aden with a church parade and communal singing onboard the *Strathaird*. An extra allocation of beer, apples, nuts and cigarettes was made to the men.

As the convoy made its way through the Red Sea, onboard training continued in preparation for what lay ahead. Sid attended lectures on desert driving and received further instruction on handling the Tommy gun and Bren gun.

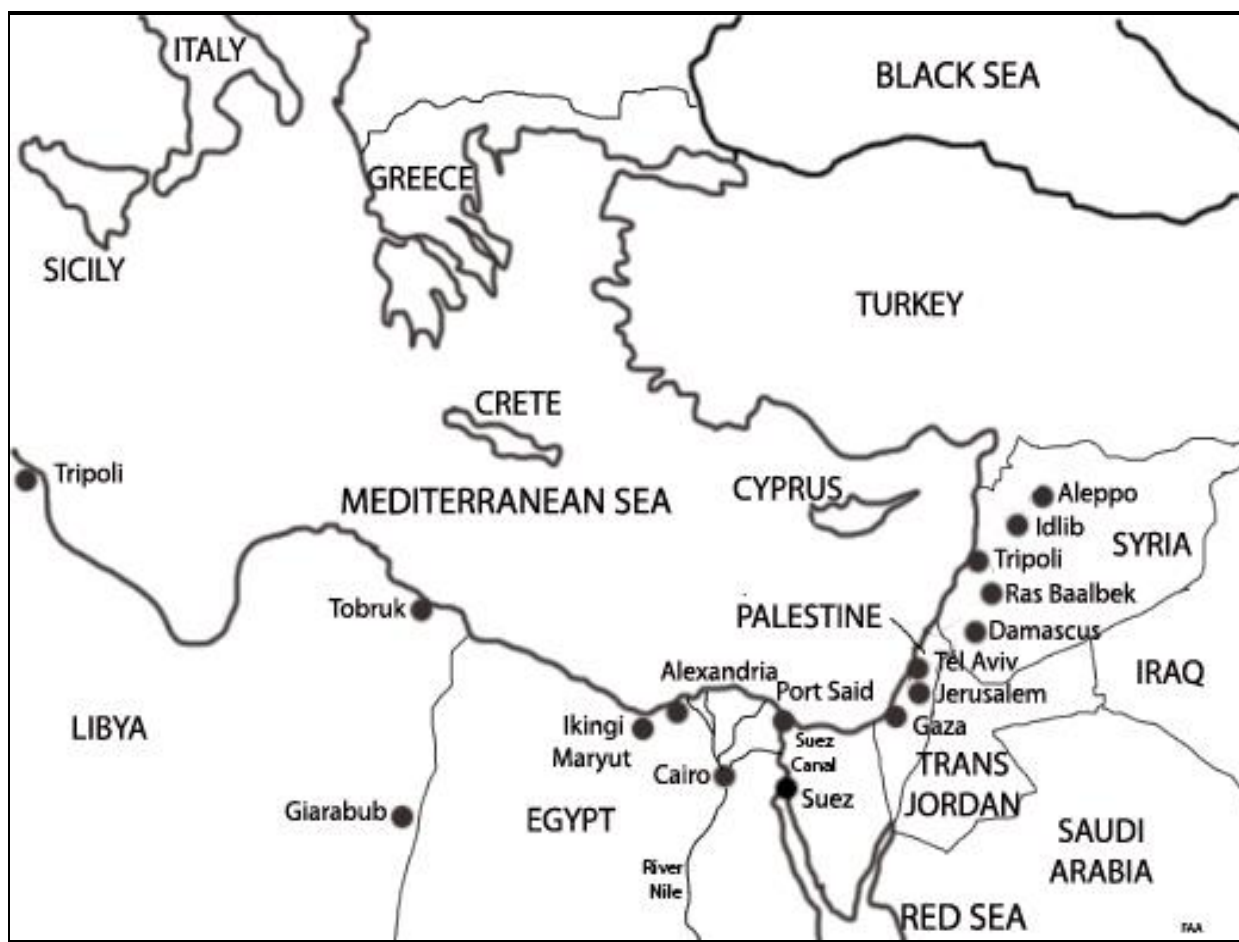
The convoy passed through the Suez Canal on 29th December and arrived at Port Said that evening. Leaving Port Said at 5.30 p.m. on the next day, they pulled into the wharf at Alexandria at 7.00 a.m. on the following morning. In the final entry in his 1940 diary, Sid recorded: *Disembarked at 4.30 p.m. for Ikingi Maryut about 18 miles (31 km) from Alexandria. Came out in boxcars. Arrived here at 9.00 p.m. Marched 2¼ miles (4 km) from station.*

Another member of the Battalion noted in his diary: *Every time the train ground to a halt, which seemed to have been every hundred yards, the gyppos (Egyptians) would swarm around to sell everything from "eggs-a-cook" and "orangees" to bottles of so-called rum, spelt Rhum, and brandy at 2/6 (25 cents) a bottle. One bottle of either held more fights than was needed to destroy the entire Italian North Africa Army.*

New Year's Day of 1941 arrived with the Battalion establishing its desert camp. It must have seemed a world away from Sydney's Luna Park where Sid had celebrated the event just twelve months earlier.

Except for the odd palm tree, the flat desert country surrounding the camp was treeless. The camp was mainly made up of tents with a few wooden buildings for kitchens.

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[Map by Frank Argus]

Map of North Africa and the Middle East showing places mentioned in the text

These were irregularly spread out over a wide area as a precaution against air attack. Tents were dug into the sand and the troops slept below ground level as a further safeguard against any offensive from the air.

Sand storms were frequent and a source of great discomfort with their ferocious hot winds carrying tonnes of sand. There were no bathing facilities at Ikingi Maryut and the troops had to march about five kilometres to El Amiriya for a weekly shower in ice cold water. In spite of these hardships, morale was high and the troops were looking forward to their first assignment in their new location. In a letter to Arthur Abernethy, Sid wrote: *Well old colt you'll be surprised to know we are in Egypt. Here to clean the wops (Italians) up and believe me we are just the lads to do it. "Till the*

sands of the desert grow cold." Well we are right amongst it.¹

Another deprivation for soldiers serving overseas was their inability to be present at traditional family celebrations. Sid would have been a notable absentee when Archie married Kath Pleash on 25th January 1941 and Rosie married Jack Gilmore, who was also serving in the Army, on 8th March of the same year.

The routine of training, guard duties and enduring the regular sand storms was interspersed with twenty-four hour periods of leave in Alexandria. In the same letter to Arthur Abernethy, Sid advised: *On our way here we called in at Durban. Had three half-days leave till midnight. Had a wonderful time. Enjoyed myself to the utmost. Went to a dance one night at a place called the "Athlone Gardens",*

¹ "Till the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold" was a popular song of that era.

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a big open-air place. Don't mind telling you I had a good time there. I also saw Port Said and paid a visit to Alexandria. The last mentioned is not a bad town but full of foreigners. "It is a bit on the nose". We have some fun with the Gippos and Arabs out here. You see I do a fair bit of driving and I get about a good bit. All day long you'll see the natives herding their goats and a few knuckle-boned sheep about places where I can't see anything growing and the donkeys are used mainly for carrying water up to their native humpies. There is plenty of camels but Indians are mainly in charge of them.

On 4th February, the Battalion marched to El Amiriya where the troops boarded a train for Alexandria. Here they embarked on an Irish ferry, the *Ulster Prince*, with a rumour circulating that they were headed for Greece. The actual destination was the Libyan harbour town of Tobruk, with the ferry departing Alexandria at 2.00 p.m. Three hours later, the *Ulster Prince* was ordered back to Alexandria as the enemy had laid mines in Tobruk harbour and along the coast. The Battalion returned to Ikingi Maryut and began re-erecting their tents at their previous campsite.

On 7th February, the Battalion received a brief visit from General Blamey, in company with the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, who inspected the troops.

A rapid British advance through enemy-held territory some months earlier had isolated 2,000 Italian and Libyan soldiers in the Libyan oasis town of Giarabub, about 30 kilometres from the border with Egypt. The town was heavily fortified with walls four metres thick and well protected with twenty-six artillery guns and one hundred machine guns. The perimeter was surrounded by barbed wire entanglements.

Taking this stronghold would be the first action involving Sid's Battalion. The Brigadier in charge was keen to blood the whole 18th Brigade but a shortage of vehicles made this impossible. The 2/9th was chosen to lead the attack, accompanied by D Company of the 2/10th Battalion.

On 17th March, the Battalion arrived at Ain Melfa, about 30 kilometres west of Giarabub, following an uncomfortable ride in trucks with Sid and the other drivers having to negotiate a desert scattered with rocks. Following a thorough reconnaissance of the area, it was decided to launch a surprise attack from the south-east through swampy terrain.

On the afternoon of 19th March, the trucks moved out with B and C Companies on board. The marshy ground proved difficult with the vehicles being bogged regularly. However, they reached their first objective by 4.00 p.m. where they were subjected to artillery and machine gun fire. The trucks carrying C Company advanced further to where they could see a group of knolls where 400 men were solidly entrenched in hollows cut into the rock and protected by wire and minefields.

While under fire, the lead platoon reached the wire, advanced to the nearest knoll and found that the enemy had recently left in a hurry. In another position, only one soldier was found manning a 44mm gun.

No further advance could be made on the following day due to a severe sand storm that seriously reduced visibility. Preparations were made for the Battalion to attack at dawn on 21st March, firstly to capture the group of knolls inside the wire in the south-east corner and then to move forward and capture the town of Giarabub.

The attack was to be preceded by a ten-minute artillery barrage to be provided by English units. The barrage would then be raised to the second objective while the infantry moved forward to take the first one.

C Company assembled 50 metres from the wire and lay there in the faint moonlight, waiting for the guns to open fire. Unfortunately, the artillery unit had found their range the day before when a strong tail wind was blowing. On this day, there was an even stronger head wind and, although a compensating adjustment had been made to the range, the estimate proved to be insufficient.

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The first shells rained down on the Australians who were frantically trying to seek cover by scraping into the sand, and praying. Twelve, including the Captain of C Company, were killed and another twenty were wounded by the “friendly fire”.

Immediately the barrage had ended, the troops were on their feet and moving forward towards their first objective. Within hours, they had overcome all resistance there, with 200 enemy killed and a similar number taken prisoner. At 10.00 a.m. they began their advance towards the town. By this time, the defending Italians had had enough. The Australians entered the mosque at 10.30 a.m. and the fort at noon where they received a warm welcome from the local indigenous population, the Senussi.

The Italian flag that had flown over Giarabub was replaced by the black over blue banner of the 2/9th Battalion.



Jubilant members of the 2/9th Battalion hoist their banner over Giarabub

Around 600 prisoners, including the Italian commander, had been rounded up. That evening, the troops were issued with a six-millilitre rum ration to relax and enjoy as the adrenalin from the day's action began to subside.

In the course of the action, the Battalion had lost sixteen men killed in action, with eighty-seven wounded and five later dying of their wounds. Among those killed was Private Glen Davis, Sid's mate from Monto.

We can only wonder at Sid's thoughts as the men had the sorrowful task on the following day of burying their dead in the sands of a foreign country. Each man was placed in a separate grave. Stones were placed on top with a simple cross inscribed with his name and service details.² As the brief, sad ceremony was in progress, enemy planes arrived and dropped several bombs. They were wide of their mark, however, and no damage or casualties were recorded.

When the Battalion returned to Ikingi Maryut on 27th March following their first action of the war, they were honoured in a welcome by their sister Battalion, the 2/10th, whose band played them back into camp.

On 4th April, the 18th Brigade was on the move again – this time to the Libyan Mediterranean town of Tobruk. In their push to take Egypt and the strategically important Suez Canal, the Axis powers needed to shorten their supply line with a port closer to Egypt than the west Libyan port of Tripoli where their equipment, men and supplies were presently landed. The port of Tobruk was clearly in their sights. The Allies objective was to hold onto the port of Tobruk which the British had taken from the Italians some months earlier.

Most of the Brigade travelled to Tobruk by sea on *HMT Thurland Castle*. However, some moved by road in a convoy of trucks. Presumably, Sid was driving one of those

² In July 1944, the remains were recovered from Giarabub and transferred to Halfaya Sollum War Cemetery.

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trucks which made their final run into Tobruk at night without lights. Most of the traffic they encountered was heading east, in anticipation of the arrival of German General Erwin Rommel's feared panzer divisions which were advancing quickly from the west.

Tobruk's defences included an outer perimeter, known as the Red Line, which was some 50 kilometres in length and formed a semi-circle with Tobruk town at its centre. The perimeter was marked out by wire, anti-tank ditches and a series of concrete posts built below ground level by the Italians when they occupied the site. In all, there were 128 such posts in two rows. The forward posts were 750 metres apart with the others 500 metres to the rear and in between the forward posts.

Immediately on disembarking from *HMT Thurland Castle*, the men of the 2/9th Battalion set off on a forced march to their designated section of the outer perimeter. As the trucks were still on their way from Ikingi Maryut, they had to carry their weapons, ammunition, equipment and personal gear as they marched for roughly sixteen kilometres in the heat of the day and into the night. On arrival, they occupied twenty-one of the defence posts.

Inside the Tobruk perimeter, there were now around 31,000 Allied troops, including 24,000 fighting troops.

On 11th April, the Australian 9th Division took responsibility for the outer perimeter and the 18th Brigade, which was the only brigade of the 7th Division in Tobruk, was given a reserve force role. This was a time-honoured military strategy that involved being on standby and ready to move in to any situation where a front-line force was being overrun by the enemy.

By this time, Rommel had secured every road leading into Tobruk and, on the landward side, the garrison was virtually surrounded. The harbour itself was subjected to intensive, regular bombing raids.

Prior to his first attack, Rommel had leaflets dropped, encouraging the troops to surrender and giving an undertaking that soldiers waving

a white handkerchief would not be harmed. Not surprisingly, no one accepted his offer.

The first attack came at 4.45 a.m. on 14th April when Rommel's tanks breached the outer perimeter. An intense battle was then fought over the area of the breach and, by 7.30 a.m., the German tanks were in full retreat. The 18th Brigade, in its reserve force role, was not needed.

Throughout April, the Battalion stood in readiness almost every day as reports were received of enemy incursions into the perimeter. Although never required, the effects of the ongoing tension on men's nerves should not be underestimated.

Although not in action, the Battalion was not free from casualties. On 22nd April, around ninety artillery shells landed in the Battalion area, killing three soldiers and wounding three others. One week later, a dive bomber attack claimed the lives of four Battalion members and wounded six more.

Apart from the ever-present threat of death, life in Tobruk was not easy. Regular sand storms made breathing difficult and fleas, scorpions, rats and flies were a constant irritation. Fiercely hot days were followed by freezing temperatures at night. The brackish water had a foul taste and the food consisted mainly of bully beef, dry biscuits and tinned vegetables.

An appreciation of the stoicism of the Australians, and their constant use of humour to get them through, can be gained from author Peter Fitzsimons' book, *Tobruk*, where he quotes from a letter written by a soldier to his mother: *I'm proud to be an Aussie. There's something different about them. The Hun (Germans) fights with grim determination, the Tommies (English) fight by numbers, but the Aussies tear about like kids at a picnic, swearing and laughing the whole time.*

Following a successful enemy incursion into the outer perimeter on 30th April, the front line was pulled back in that area to create, in military terms, a salient. The 2/9th Battalion was given the task of defending in the centre of

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the salient, the most dangerous place in Tobruk at that time.

In addition to their defensive role, the Australians adopted a policy of sneaking forward every night to gather intelligence and inflict as much damage on the enemy as they could in lightning raids. German casualties became so great that Rommel was ordered by the German High Command in Berlin not to launch a major assault without their approval. This forced him to change his approach to one of containing and strangling the Tobruk garrison.

The British traitor, William Joyce also known as Lord Haw Haw, made regular propaganda radio broadcasts from Germany. He ridiculed the Allied soldiers at Tobruk and described them as "rats caught in a trap". The troops adopted the name with great pride and the legend of the "Rats of Tobruk" was born.

The role of Sid Telford and the Transport Platoon in the defence of Tobruk was as vital as it was perilous. The only way that supplies could come into the Tobruk garrison was by sea. British vessels would make the hazardous voyage from Alexandria to arrive in Tobruk at night. At the blacked-out dockside in Tobruk harbour, the ships would be unloaded quickly using only the light of the moon and stars and be on their way again before the dawn. In spite of these precautions, many ships were sunk by enemy aircraft and submarines.

In his book *Tobruk*, author Peter Fitzsimons wrote: *Even after the munitions, food and so forth had been safely deposited on the wharves by Tobruk Harbour, there was still an enormous job o'work to be done to get the crucial supplies out to the front lines. Almost around the clock, a fleet of trucks ground its way down to those docks to be loaded up, whereupon they would growl and roar their way up the escarpment to any one of a hundred forward positions that might be assigned to them --- and being obliged to take their chances with enemy artillery while still aware of just what sections of the road it was best to go full throttle on. (One soldier would fondly*

long remember the instructions from the truck driver to him and his mates as they were about to be carried to forward posts across a patch of ground where German artillery fire was frequently heavy. 'So if youse blokes put yer heads down,' he said, 'I'll put my foot down, and we'll see how we go!' Jesus, they were game bastards.)

At the celebration of Jack and Rosie Gilmore's golden wedding anniversary in 1991, an elderly guest who had served with Sid told Syd Telford: "In battle, Tiny Telford was a brave man. He would always get through with supplies when others couldn't or wouldn't."

At Tobruk, Sid formed a friendship with Rockhampton-born Ron Berry whom he referred to as his "little mate". After the War, Ron Berry was asked about Sid. He wrote: *Sid (Tiny) Telford was a close mate of mine. I first became associated with him in Tobruk, the second week in June 1941. I had a four-week stint on the front line as a range taker. This position became redundant and I was to join the Battalion Transport Platoon. Tiny was a member of that Platoon. He was in charge of a 3 ton Chev truck doing all the heavy loading. A powerful man, stood about 6 feet 2 inches maybe taller. Weighed around 18 stone in top condition. His strength was tested when we had a job hurriedly dispersing 44-gallon drums of petrol to prevent loss by enemy action. Petrol was our most valuable commodity, for about this time we had only about three days supply in reserve. It would take two of the average sized fellows to load a 44 on to a truck but Tiny would have none of that. He loaded those 44's alone. Roll the drum to the side of the tray of his vehicle, place the top rim of the drum over the combing and heave that drum onto the tray. We littlies tried but no hope.*

In a letter dated 22nd August 1941 to Sid's family at "Glenrock", Mabel Ball in Aldershot said that she had only received two letters from Sid in the past seven months. She continued: *His last letter arrived in England Tuesday morning July 22nd. He said he had just received my Christmas parcel and everything was OK. Evidently it arrived at an opportune time as his rations were running low and he was eating dry*

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biscuits. The pudding was fine and not everyone has eaten Christmas pudding on a battlefield and that he hadn't had much time for writing as he was in the middle of a dustup. He was well and fine at time of writing.

For security purposes, strict censorship rules prevented soldiers from identifying, in correspondence, exactly where they were or precisely what they were doing. If intercepted, such information could be valuable to enemy Intelligence.

On 22nd August, the 18th Brigade was relieved in Tobruk by the 1st Polish Infantry Battalion. As the troops arrived back by ship in Alexandria Harbour, the naval ships there formed a guard of honour which was much appreciated by the members of the Brigade. On disembarking, they moved to El Amiriya Staging Camp where each man was issued with two bottles of beer, a welcome treat after four months of temperance in Tobruk.

Three days later, they moved to a new camp at Kilo 89 near Gaza in Palestine. All ranks were forbidden from going into Gaza but leave soon became available to see the sights of Cairo, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Free from the constant threat of impending death, the troops had time to rebuild their strength in a relaxed atmosphere that included proper showers, beer at the camp canteen and a daily swim. Games of two-up also proved very popular. On 11th September, the Brigade had a visit from Lieutenant-General Blamey who informed them that they would soon be going to Syria.

That movement occurred on 22nd September when their truck convoy crossed the Jordan River into Syria and they took over from a British regiment at Ras Baalbek, midway between Damascus and Tripoli.

The French colonies of Syria and Lebanon had been under the control of the Vichy French³. The British were concerned that they would allow the Germans to establish a base there

from which to make an attempt to invade Egypt and take the strategically important Suez Canal. In June and July 1941, while the 18th Brigade was defending Tobruk, its sister brigades in the 7th Division, together with Indian and Free French forces, had made a successful pre-emptive strike to invade Syria and Lebanon and wrest control of those countries from the Vichy French. In the process, the Australians had lost 416 killed and 1,136 wounded.



Sid and his Battalion mate Len Stern took time out in Tel Aviv to have their photo taken

Although the fighting was over when the men of the 18th Brigade arrived in Syria, the political situation there was extremely volatile. The troops were warned to be very cautious when it came to personal safety and the security of weapons and documents. Damascus was off limits to all ranks while on leave.

While the invasion and occupation of Syria had reduced the likelihood of a German assault

³ When Germany captured France in June 1940, the Nazis occupied the northern three-fifths of that country. They allowed the remaining two-fifths to be administered by a French Government based in

the town of Vichy in the south of France. The Vichy French Government was sympathetic to the Nazi cause and cooperated fully with them. After the War, the Vichy French leaders were executed.

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through there on Egypt, an invasion through Turkey was still seen as a possibility. As a counter measure, the Turkish-Syrian border had to be secured.

On 5th October, the 2/9th Battalion moved by train to Aleppo where they boarded trucks for the sixty-five kilometre journey south-west to Idlib, a former French army post fortified by stone walls, bastions and guard towers. D Company and Sid's HQ Company were billeted in the town, with the other rifle companies in the French barracks.

At the border, the task was to guard against any German invasion from Turkey and to prepare defensive positions for a larger Allied force, should it be required at a future time. The whole Brigade participated in digging a massive anti-tank ditch around thirty kilometres long across a river valley. Various demolitions were installed on railway tunnels and viaducts, to be detonated to slow down any German advance that might occur, and these had to be guarded at all times.

A friendly relationship was established with the Turkish Frontier Guards and the troops were allowed to cross the border and socialise, if invited.

On Armistice Day (11th November), the 2/9th Battalion represented the 18th Brigade in a march past in Aleppo. On the following day, the Battalion celebrated its second anniversary since formation with an inter-company sports meeting. Sid's HQ Company won the Shield with A Company second. Members of the winning teams each received an open order worth two pounds (\$4.00).

Winter brought with it a high degree of discomfort and potential for illness with wet, muddy conditions on the coast and deep snow drifts in the mountains. Snowball fights soon lost their novelty for the Queenslanders as their tents slumped under the weight of another snowfall. The men had to be careful that long periods of standing in mud and water did not result in frostbite, trench foot or chilled feet.

A wet Christmas Day was celebrated with an excellent meal, washed down with two bottles

of beer per man, and Christmas hampers from the Australian Comforts Fund.

Japan's entry into the War with its surprise attack on the American naval base in Hawaii's Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 represented a direct threat to Australia. The Australian Government wanted its experienced fighting men back for home defence.

On 11th February 1942, the Battalion embarked from Suez on *Nieuw Amsterdam*, destination unknown. Many men thought they were returning to North Africa but their immediate destination was Bombay (now known as Mumbai) in India.

In fact, the whole 7th Division was destined for Sumatra but the situation was changing rapidly. The fall of Singapore on 15th February, followed shortly after by the bombing of Darwin and Port Moresby, changed the focus of the country's war effort to the defence of Australia.

Australian Prime Minister John Curtin wanted the troops back in Australia. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, with the support of American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wanted them to divert to Burma to save the oilfields there. Curtin insisted that the troops come home. Churchill and Roosevelt asked him to reconsider.

The Battalion arrived in Bombay on 19th February and transferred to a smaller, less comfortable troopship *SS Takliwa*. The troops not on duty were then given twelve hours leave to explore the city. On the following day, the ship moved into the harbour where it lay at anchor until 25th February when it left, bound for Colombo in Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka).

Reaching Colombo on 1st March, the ship remained there while the political wrangling over its final destination was being sorted out. The ship left Colombo on 6th March with *HMAS Canberra* and two corvettes as escorts. After heading west for several hours, the convoy turned south, bound for Fremantle. Curtin's persistence had won the day.

Just after 9.00 a.m. on Friday, 20th March, the convoy sailed into port and anchored off

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Fremantle. All troops not on duty were given leave until 11.00 p.m. in Fremantle and Perth. On 22nd March, the convoy left for Port Adelaide where the troops disembarked on 28th March and travelled by train to their camp at Sandy Creek near Gawler, about forty kilometres from Adelaide. As the men left the ship, representatives of the South Australian Comforts Fund were on hand to provide cigarettes, apples and cake.

Two days later, the Battalion's vehicles and carriers arrived from the Middle East on *HMT Taiien*. The wharf labourers were on strike and refused to unload the vehicles. In view of this, the Sergeant who led the Battalion detail sent to retrieve the vehicles, arranged for the ship's crew to work the winches while his own men attended to the unloading. When the leader of the wharfies protested fervently and, despite several warnings, tried to intervene, the

Sergeant's patience ran out. Picking the ringleader up by the armpits, he took him to the edge of the wharf and dumped him in the water. When the other wharfies complained saying that he couldn't swim, the Sergeant responded: "Well you had better go and rescue him". For his actions on the day, the Sergeant received from his superior officer an official reprimand, quickly followed by a private commendation.

On arrival in Australia, the men were permitted to send to their families the following standard message in a telegram at Army expense: *Arrived safely in Australia. Looking forward to seeing you when leave is possible.* Although the message was brief and Sid's location kept secret, his family would have been very relieved to know that he was safely home and that they would be seeing him in the not too distant future.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

RECEIVED TELEGRAM
The first line of this telegram contains the following particulars in the order named.

Office of Origin. *Sans Origine* Words. *22* Time Lodged. *retained* No. *3*

Remarks. *Arrived safely in Australia looking forward to seeing you when leave is possible*

To *Mrs A Telford Spring Creek Bluffton*

phoned 11:00 am

Telegram sent by Sid to his family advising that he was back from overseas. Note the French notation "Sans origine" (without origin) designed to keep the 18th Brigade's location secret

For the South Australians in the Brigade, seven days leave to visit their families was granted

immediately. Men from other States would have to wait.

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The focus for the Battalion now was physical training. The first route march was held the day after they arrived at Sandy Creek. This quest for superior fitness was driven by the Malayan experience which had shown that the Japanese were physically fitter than the Australians.

Over Easter, most of the troops were granted leave to spend time in Gawler or Adelaide. Any who were short of money were allowed to stay at Adelaide Oval where their quartermaster was on hand to provide straw mattresses and blankets.

While the troops were returning on the troop transports from the Middle East, American General Douglas MacArthur had been appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the South West Pacific Area and Australian General Thomas Blamey appointed Commander, Allied Land Forces.

It was Blamey's contention that any Japanese invasion of Australia would start with an assault on the north coast followed by a southward advance, rather than a direct attack in the critical area between Newcastle and Melbourne. While recognising the importance of holding Townsville and Brisbane, he did not believe, with current resources, it was possible to hold the vast area in between those two cities. He intended to progressively hold the area north of Brisbane as more resources became available. Under this strategy, the entire 7th Division, including the 18th Brigade and Sid's 2/9th Battalion had to move immediately to a new base in northern New South Wales.

On the evening of 15th April, the Battalion boarded three separate trains and commenced a four-day move to Tenterfield where they arrived on 19th April. At every stop in-between, regardless of the time, local women were waiting with hot meals for the soldiers.

Home leave could now be approved for the New South Welshmen and southern Queenslanders. Just before dawn on 24th April, Sid and 349 others were bussed to Wallangarra where they boarded a train for their respective leave destinations in

Queensland. The seriousness of the situation at the time was illustrated by the instruction that the troops going on leave had to carry their arms and equipment with them.

No doubt Sid would have received a warm welcome when the train arrived at Clifton, not only from his family but also from friends and neighbours throughout the district. In the absence of a diary, we can only speculate at how he might have spent his leave but it is not inconceivable that he might have attended a dance or two, spent time working his young fillies that he enquired about in a letter home, and regaled family and friends with stories of his adventures and the exotic places and people that he had seen. Certainly, Yvonne would have been mentioned more than once. The bad experiences he probably kept to himself.



Sid Telford on home leave at "Glenrock" with full pack, including rifle and tin hat

By early May, Sid was back in camp at Tenterfield. On 17th May, a Battalion reconnaissance party left Tenterfield to select a suitable site for a new camp in the Kilcoy area of Queensland. The site selected was near

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Mary Smokes Creek on the northern side of the road from Kilcoy to Woodford.

The rest of the Battalion followed by truck on 24th May, travelling via Wallangarra, Stanthorpe, Warwick, Gatton, Lowood and Esk. Such was the perceived threat of imminent invasion that the trucks had their canopies rolled back so that air and ground protection could be maintained throughout the journey.



Sid, holding a food parcel prepared by his family, boards the train at Clifton to return to camp following home leave

During stops, the vehicles dispersed under cover and strict track discipline was employed to minimise damage in the event of an air attack. While at the camp at Kilcoy, Sid and his fellow drivers had to ensure that any vehicle not in use was parked under a camouflage net and all parked vehicles were at least one hundred metres apart.

On arrival, the Battalion had to build its own facilities on the virgin site and immediate work was started on digging storm drains and slit trenches and erecting tents while the engineers constructed ablution blocks and kitchen facilities. The tents were covered with nets and splattered with mud to disguise them from the air.

The 7th Division was being deployed in this area to counter the possibility of a Japanese incursion advancing into south-east

Queensland from the north. For its part, the 2/9th Battalion was given responsibility for the Gympie-Kilcoy-Caboolture region and numerous training exercises of two to five days duration were conducted in that area.

The troops found Kilcoy itself to be a friendly place. The local Country Women's Association organised working bees to mend the soldiers' clothes and perform general sewing tasks. Many residents provided temporary accommodation for the wives and children of soldiers based in the area. For social activities while on leave, the men were restricted to dances, races and the two pubs in town.

Advice came through on 27th May that, due to manpower shortages, troops from rural areas could apply for three weeks leave without pay to go home and help out on the farm. Known as Seasonal Leave for Seeding Purposes, troops taking this leave were subject to recall at 24 hours' notice. Sid availed himself of the opportunity to assist his family with the work at "Glenrock" and took his Seasonal Leave from 11th June to 2nd July.

Back at Kilcoy, the training was unrelenting with many route marches. One four-day excursion saw the troops march from Kilcoy to Caloundra and back with overnight stops at Beerwah (twice) and Caloundra.⁴ Following one day's rest, the troops were off again on a three-day march on bush tracks through the mountains. The men would be superbly fit for their next assignments.

No pre-embarkation leave was possible before the troops left their Kilcoy camp for Brisbane where they boarded the troop carrier *SS Bontekoe* at the Newstead Wharf. On 15th August, the ship entered Milne Bay on the south-eastern tip of the then Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea and deposited its human cargo on the wharf at Gili Gili at the head of the bay.

In January of 1942, a Japanese military force of 15,000 had overwhelmed an Australian

⁴ At that time, Caloundra's surf beaches were fitted with barbed wire, with a machine gun post at either end of King's Beach.

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garrison of 1,400 at Rabaul on the island of New Britain which was part of New Guinea and, at that time, part of the mandated territory of Australia. At Rabaul, the Japanese established a significant military base from which to wage war in the south-west Pacific.

In July 1942, an invasion force from Rabaul landed at Gona on the north coast of the New Guinea mainland and established a beachhead which included the neighbouring villages of Sanananda and Buna. From here, they would attempt to capture Port Moresby and isolate Australia from the Americans.

When the 2/9th Battalion arrived in Milne Bay, other Australian battalions were fighting hard to halt the Japanese advance over the Kokoda Trail from their northern beachhead bases at Buna and Gona. Following the failure of their attempt to take Port Moresby by sea in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese were now attempting to cross the rugged Owen Stanley Range in their quest to capture Port Moresby.

The purpose of the 18th Brigade in Milne Bay was to reinforce the garrison recently established there to protect the airfields in that area. The Australian Army's 7th Brigade, comprised of militia units including Toowoomba's own 25th Battalion, had arrived to form the garrison at Milne Bay on 11th July.

The airfields at Milne Bay provided the Allies with an important strategic base from which to not only protect Port Moresby but also to launch air strikes on the enemy based at Rabaul without having to make hazardous flights over the Owen Stanley Range. Allied Intelligence was also acutely aware that the airfields at Milne Bay would be an attractive acquisition for the Japanese in their efforts to capture Port Moresby.

The Australian Army soon found that their trucks were unsuited to the poor condition of the roads in New Guinea and the constant rain that fell there. The Transport Platoon was disbanded and its members re-assigned to the Battalion's four rifle companies. In the words of Ron Berry: *The Transport Section was reduced to about 5 vehicles (normally about*

32). I was the only utility driver and, as it was proved conventional motor vehicles were practically useless in the mud of New Guinea for there was only one near all-weather road prepared, Americans with 4x4's and 6x6's provided for most of our needs. Tiny along with the rest joined up with the Infantry. I was drafted to Battalion HQ so I was not to see him for a while.



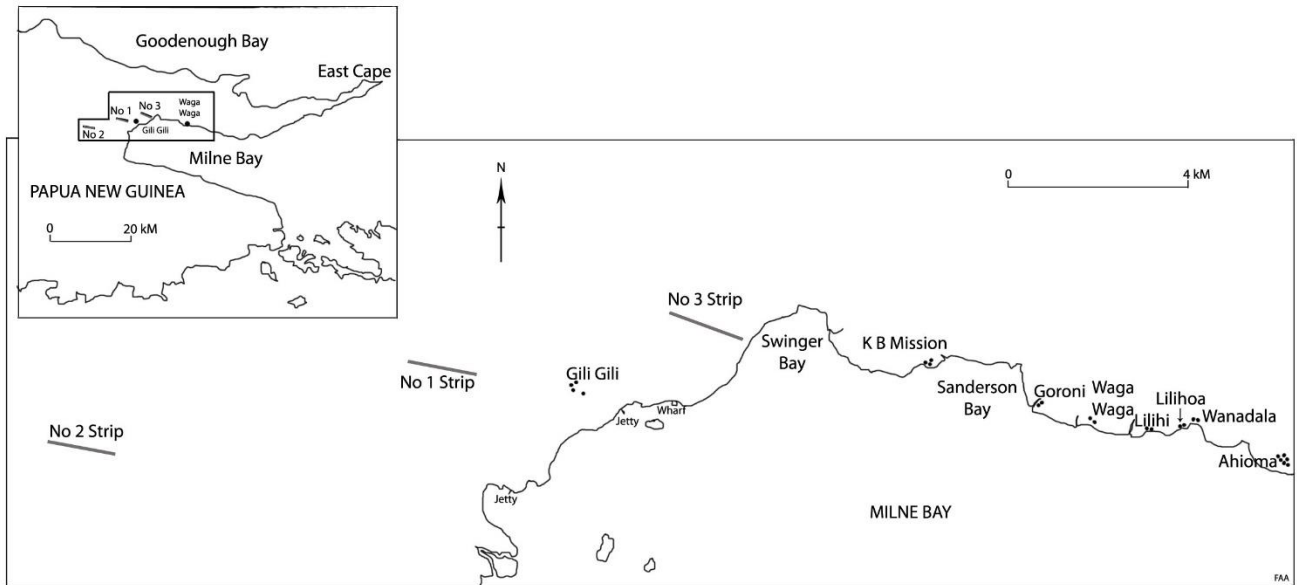
[Australian War Memorial photo]

The only road along the narrow coastal strip on the northern shore of Milne Bay – August 1942

Unfortunately, records are not available that would show definitely to which of the four companies (A,B,C or D) Sid was re-assigned. It is recorded, however, that he was appointed to the rank of Lance Corporal on 25th August, the same day that the Japanese arrived in Milne Bay.

Sid's 2/9th Battalion was deployed in the area of No. 1 Strip (also known as Gurney Field) which it was their responsibility to defend. Up until now, they had been working long hours building roads, unloading ships at night, laying steel strips on the airfield and patrolling.

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD



[Map by Frank Argus]

Map of Milne Bay - August 1942. Today's town of Alotau nestles around Sanderson Bay

Battle positions were dug around the perimeter of the runway. At that time, No.1 Strip was the only operational airfield with the other two still under construction. On the night of 25th August, the Japanese landings came. They had intended to land at Gili Gili but, in the darkness, had mistakenly come ashore at three places east of there near Ahima, Wanadala and Waga Waga. Due to persistent cloud cover impeding their aerial reconnaissance, they had also underestimated the size of the Australian force at Milne Bay and only landed around 2,000 of their own troops.

The locations of the Japanese landings were in the area being defended by the militia units of the 7th Brigade, which included the 25th Battalion. Those units bore the brunt of the initial stages of what became the Battle of Milne Bay. The close proximity of the Stirling Range ensured that the battle would be fought on the narrow coastal strip on the north shore of the Bay.

During each night, Sid and other members of the 2/9th Battalion patrolled their area of responsibility near No. 1 Strip but made no contact with the enemy. Throughout this time, they remained on full alert and slept in their battle dress in readiness for any eventuality.

The Japanese saw their first objective as capturing No. 3 Strip which, although still under construction, they mistakenly believed was No. 1 Strip.

The air cover provided by the RAAF's 75th and 76th Squadrons, based at No. 1 Strip, restricted the Japanese to attacking at night. They adopted a strategy of lying low through the day and advancing their line under cover of darkness. In spite of stout resistance from the defenders, slowly but surely and using tanks as support, they were pushing the 7th Brigade back along the north shore of the Bay.

The 2/9th's sister Battalion, the 2/12th, was called up to assist the 7th Brigade and, on the night of 31st August, repelled a relentless attack on No. 3 Strip, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. On the following day, the 2/12th launched a counter-attack. As they passed through the bodies from the night's battle, they were instructed to bayonet or shoot any enemy soldier whom they suspected was not dead. In the words of a member of the 2/12th Battalion: *From the beginning we had to contend with Jap snipers who lined the road, either lying "doggo" along the roadside and pretending they were dead or perched up in trees or camouflaged behind bushes. We lost an officer through a dog's trick on the part of the Japs. Lying across the strip were dozens of dead Japs, killed in the*

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

*previous night's action by mortar and artillery fire. As our officer crossed in the vanguard, a Jap, apparently wounded, cried out for help. The officer walked over to aid him and, as he did, the Jap sprang to life and hurled a grenade, which wounded him in the face. From then on, the only good Jap was a dead one, and although they tried the same trick again and again throughout the campaign, they were dispatched before they had time to use their grenade.*⁵

The rule was to kill or be killed in this particular theatre of war where a desperate enemy was conditioned to die for their Emperor rather than bring shame to themselves and their families by surrendering or being taken prisoner.

On 1st September, Sid's 2/9th Battalion moved to a staging area at Gili Gili wharf. On the following day, they moved by lugger to KB Mission to take over the advance from the 2/12th Battalion which had established itself there.

On 3rd September, they began their push forward through the mud and slush, ever alert for any contact with an enemy who could be concealed anywhere in the jungle foliage that surrounded them. The lead companies came across, and joined in, a fierce battle being fought by members of the 2/12th Battalion. By the end of the day, they had gained considerable ground but the cost to the 2/9th had been eight killed and twenty-eight wounded.

By 8.30 on the following morning, members of the Battalion had reached the village of Goroni, just beyond which the Japanese had established a strong defensive position. A number of fierce exchanges ensued before the Battalion's advance was held up by three well-placed machine gun posts.

⁵ From diary of Sergeant Arthur Traill as recorded in *In the Line of Fire* p. 92

⁶ While attending a function some years ago, Lawrence Telford was approached by a lady who asked if he was related to Sid Telford. When he replied that he was Sid's cousin, she introduced

It was here that Corporal John French, from Crows Nest and a former student of Toowoomba State High School and Technical College, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for single-handedly taking out all three machine gun posts. Unfortunately, he was killed in the process.⁶



Corporal John French VC memorial at Milne Bay

At the end of that day, the Battalion had lost a further seventeen killed and thirty-four wounded, with five of those ultimately to die of their wounds.

On the following morning of 5th September, the sun appeared for the first time since the Battalion's advance began and they pressed forward once more. One patrol reached Waga Waga without any enemy contact. C Company was brought forward to occupy the area while

herself as John French's sister and told Lawrie: "John said if they needed supplies at the front and Sid Telford was bringing them, they knew he would always get through".

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

A and D Companies continued to advance eastwards.

About half a kilometre past Waga Waga, the forward companies were caught in an ambush, suffering significant casualties. That afternoon, in preparation for a counter attack, RAAF planes were called in to strafe and bomb the Japanese positions while a mortar and artillery barrage was also used. When the infantry subsequently advanced through the area, all they found were Japanese bodies. Any survivors had withdrawn. The Battalion now occupied the main Japanese bases at Goroni and Waga Waga.

During the night, Japanese ships entered the bay and the sound of boats operating from ship to shore could be heard by the Battalion troops in the area. However, what they thought might be reinforcements arriving was actually the sound of an enemy evacuation.

The 2/9th Battalion troops had fought the last major engagement of the Battle of Milne Bay and, in doing so, inflicted the first land defeat of the Japanese in the War. This victory dispelled the myth of Japanese invincibility and boosted the morale of all Allied troops operating in the Pacific theatre.

The operation now became one of mopping up enemy soldiers stranded by the evacuation. On 6th September, the Battalion continued its advance to Lilihoa and Ahioma, engaging in several skirmishes with Japanese stragglers on the way.

No Japanese were encountered on the following day and reports were received that the natives were returning to their villages. On 8th September, the Battalion withdrew to Gili Gili to rest following an exhausting week of fighting to the death in extreme conditions. Each theatre in which the Battalion served had its own environmental challenges. In New Guinea they included malaria-carrying mosquitoes, tropical diseases, incessant rain, leeches, any number of insects, scorpions, rats, tropical heat and falling coconuts.

In all, the 2/9th Battalion lost twenty-nine killed and eighty-six wounded in action at Milne Bay.

Seven more subsequently died from their wounds and 308 were hospitalised with tropical disease.



Lynette Argus and Syd Telford at the Battle of Milne Bay memorial at Alotau, Milne Bay, in 2017

On 24th October. Sid was promoted to the rank of Acting Corporal. In this role, he was leader of a Section of nine other men. Patrolling continued in earnest to mop up any remaining Japanese and the natives were helpful in reporting their presence.

On 7th November, training commenced on the operation of the Australian-made Owen sub-machine gun which was being trialled to replace the Thompson sub-machine gun (Tommy gun) currently used by the Battalion. In November and early December, the focus of activities returned to training with 128 reinforcements joining the Battalion on 7th December.

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

The men were hoping to be sent home for Christmas and that was General Blamey's original intention. However, other events taking place in New Guinea were to interfere with that plan.

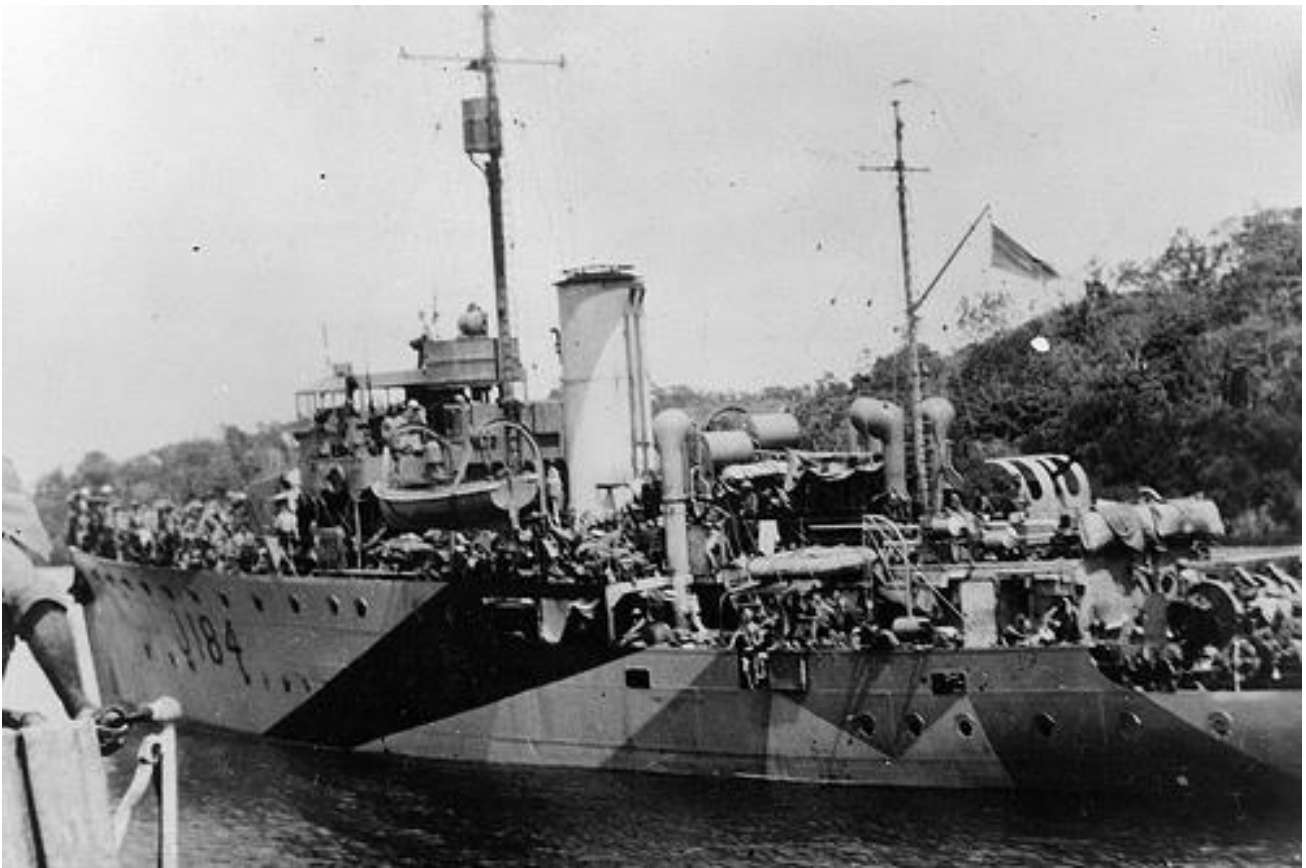
The Kokoda campaign had seen the Japanese advance along the Trail as far as Ioribaiwa, about thirty-two kilometres from Port Moresby, from where they could actually see the lights of the town. However, heavy casualties, combined with an over-stretched supply line, forced a withdrawal of the Japanese forces. A protracted and bloody ongoing battle with the Americans on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands also reduced their capacity to reinforce their Kokoda campaign. They retreated back along the Trail to their beachheads at Gona, Sanananda and Buna on the north-east coast.

The 16th and 25th Brigades of the Australian 7th Division pursued the retreating Japanese to Gona and were given the task of clearing the Japanese positions there. This they achieved, albeit with heavy losses, by 9th December.

The American 32nd Division, approaching from the south-east, was given the same role in respect of Buna and nearby Cape Endaiadere. However, they became bogged down, their gains being so minute that General MacArthur removed his front-line commander, telling the American General who replaced him to "take Buna or not come back alive".

Australia's General Blamey, obviously disappointed with the inept performance of the American troops, informed Prime Minister Curtin that, in spite of the large number of American soldiers in the area, it seemed inevitable that the major responsibility for clearing Buna would fall on the Australians. Sid and his mates in the 18th Brigade would not be going home for Christmas. Sadly, many of them would not be going home at all.

On the evening of 12th December, the 2/9th Battalion boarded the Australian Navy corvettes *Ballarat*, *Broome* and *Colac* in Milne Bay to take them to the Buna-Cape Endaiadere front.



Members of the 2/9th Battalion congregate on the deck of *HMAS Ballarat* during the voyage from Milne Bay to Oro Bay. The photo was taken from the deck of *HMAS Broome*

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

The corvettes were not large vessels and the troops had to gather on the decks and try to get whatever sleep they could. The convoy left Milne Bay at 3.00 a.m. on the following morning and hugged the coastline as it sailed in dangerous waters towards Buna.

Around midnight on the same day, the senior officers and some HQ staff were put ashore near Cape Sudest to make arrangements for the disembarkation of the troops. At 2.45 a.m., a report was received that a large Japanese convoy was heading towards Buna. Leaving the officers ashore in pouring rain, the Australian corvettes headed south in a hurry. Fortunately, the officers were able to avail themselves of the hospitality of the Americans before moving to Boreo to await the arrival of the rest of the Battalion.

In the area of Cape Nelson, the corvettes waited close to the coastline until the following afternoon when they initially headed further south to fool any Japanese coast watchers that might have seen them. After forty-five minutes, they turned north again to Oro Bay, about thirty-two kilometres south of Buna, where Sid and the other Battalion members disembarked at around midnight. As they lay on their ground sheets in the mud among the leech-ridden mangroves, it rained constantly and morning could not come quickly enough. After a rough breakfast, they began their march in full battle order towards Buna. With no track to follow, they were forced to walk through the soft sand at the water's edge.

Some of the shorter men needed the help of mates like Sid to help them keep their heads above water as they crossed the Samboga River where the water was chest-deep. They also encountered a number of fast-flowing creeks and swamps. As dawn broke on 16th December, they finally caught up with their commanding officer and HQ staff.

The Japanese at the northern beachheads of Gona-Sanananda-Buna were ensconced in bunkers constructed from forty-four gallon drums filled with earth and palm logs that made them virtually impervious to artillery fire.

The bunkers were overgrown with fast-growing native vegetation that provided perfect camouflage. On many occasions, the first indication that Allied troops received that a bunker was there was when enemy fire emanated from it.



Inside of a typical Japanese bunker at Buna. The small space between the top of the drums and the log above them was ample for use as a firing slit

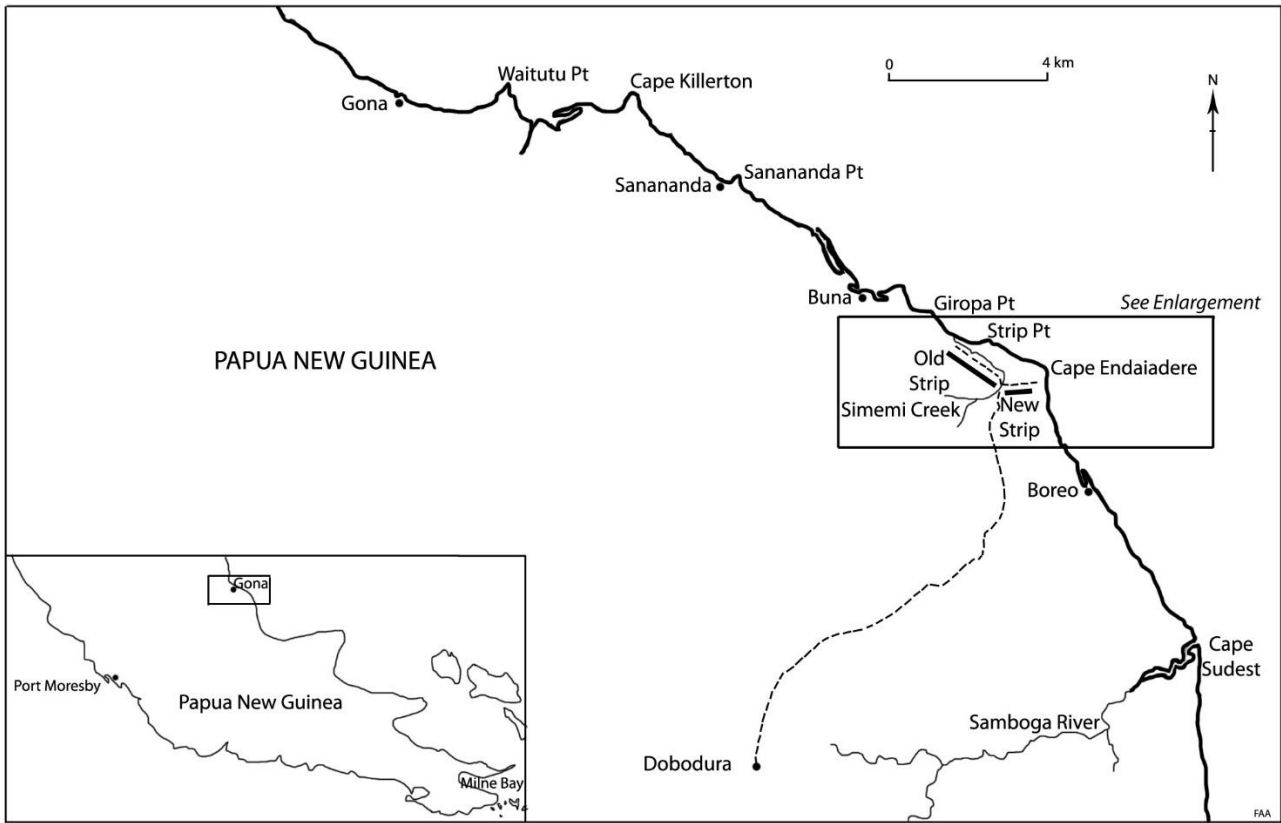
Each bunker was positioned so that it provided mutual fire cover to the bunkers around it and the inhabitants therein were prepared to fight to the death with no thought of surrender.



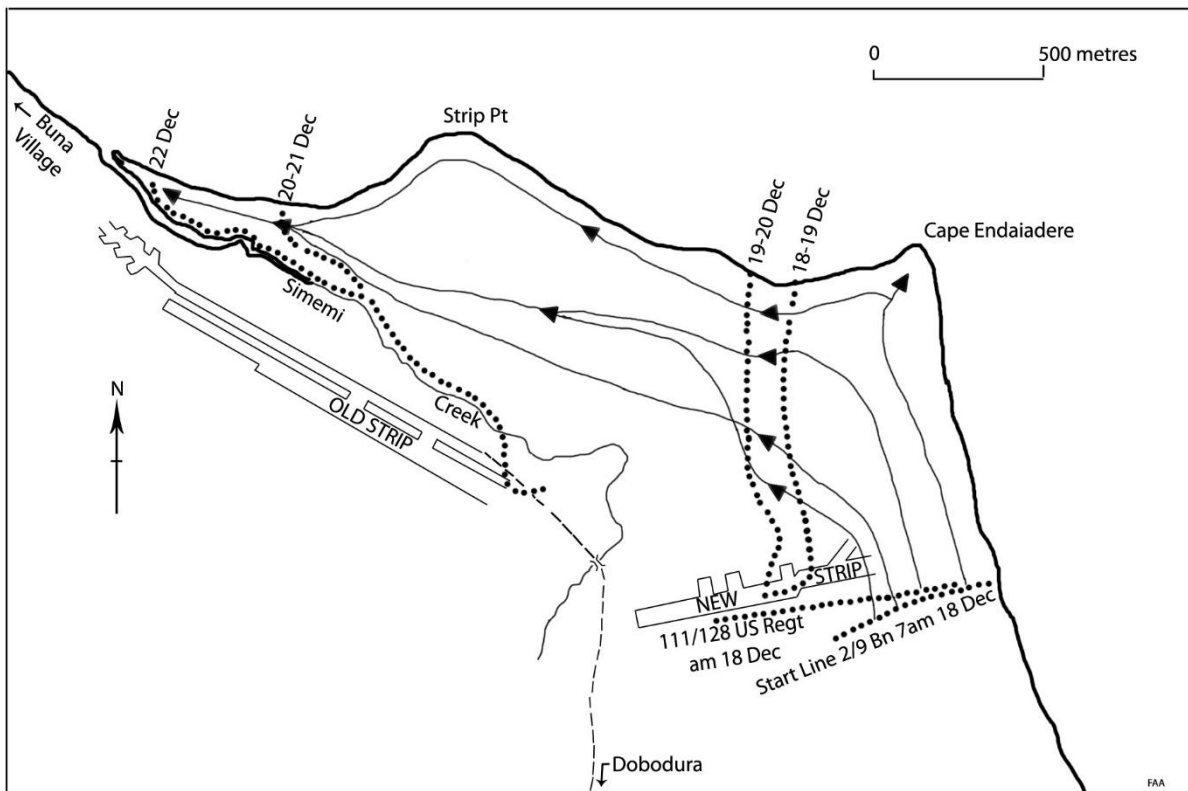
Remains of a Japanese bunker at Buna in 2017

This was the very dangerous situation facing Sid and the men of the 18th Brigade in the hot, humid, rain-drenched New Guinea summer of 1942. Each of the three Battalions of the Brigade was given a separate objective as part of a coordinated plan to clear the area.

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Map of Gona-Sanananda- Buna area of New Guinea



[Maps by Frank Argus]

Map of area captured by the 2/9th Battalion between 18th and 22nd December 1942. The dotted line in front of the Battalion's start line on 18th December represents the front line where the Americans had been "bogged down" for the previous five weeks

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The 2/9th Battalion's orders were: *To attack and capture the area bounded on the right by the coast to the mouth of Simemi Creek and on the left by a line through the east end of New Strip and the west end of Old Strip thence north west along Simemi Creek to its mouth.*

For the task, the infantry would be supported by eight M3 General Stuart light tanks of the 2/6th Armoured Regiment. The attack was originally scheduled for 17th December but the Battalion commander successfully argued that his men needed a rest following their gruelling trek from Oro Bay the day before. The time for the assault was put back twenty-four hours and the men spent the day preparing their weapons and themselves for what lay ahead. It was on this day that Ron Berry, who was serving in B Echelon doing the dangerous work of bringing food, ammunition and other supplies from the coast to the front lines, met up with Sid whom he had not seen for some time.

Ron recalled: *I met up with Tiny the day before the attack. He was in possession of an Owen light machine gun which resembled a revolver in his larger than normal hands. He was loading up with more than 1,000 rounds of 9mm ammunition. We referred to him as a mobile fortress.*

By late afternoon, the men of the Battalion were in their assembly area, some 800 metres south of the start-line established by their commanding officer. At nightfall, the noise of an artillery barrage was used to drown out the sound of the tanks manoeuvring into their positions in readiness for the morrow. This was the first time the Allies had used tanks in New Guinea and they wanted it to be a fear-inducing surprise for the defending Japanese.

At 6.00 a.m. on the following morning, the Battalion moved forward through the American positions to their start-line as their commanding officer gave his final instructions for their advance: *Do not stop, keep going forward. If*

you stop, you will die. If you want to live, don't falter. Keep pressing to their bunkers.

What happened next can best be described by a soldier who was there⁷: *At 6.50 a.m. the Vickers guns opened up which, in unison with the artillery and the mortars, provided a concentrated barrage. A promised air strike did not eventuate because of bad weather. At 7.00 a.m. I was a spellbound onlooker to actions the likes of which I had never witnessed before – or have witnessed since – as the tanks moved forward into a barbarous inferno ahead of the walking-paced infantry. The roar of their engines added to the crescendo of noise from both Vickers and enemy machine guns and a wall of small-arms lead – it was like nothing the 2/9th Battalion had experienced. The sky seemed to rain debris as small pieces of undergrowth and bark floated down like confetti, and the repeated crack of bullets and chatter of automatic weapons and explosions close by, the acrid smell and eye-irritating smoke from discharging weapons and grenades, added to the extreme discomfort experienced by the men. Soldiers were dropping like sacks. There appeared to be utter confusion, but among all the chaos, the courageous men moved resolutely forward. One American general described the scene as one he had never seen before and never expected to see again, while the tank crews described the advance as 'men going in for a cup of tea' – such was the soldierly bearing of the 2/9th.*

The battle had commenced in a coconut plantation and the Vickers guns were used to spray the tops of the trees to eliminate any snipers concealed there. Flares launched from Very pistols and hand signals from the infantry pointed out the bunker targets for the tanks while the advancing soldiers threw hand grenades through their firing slits, all the while under constant fire from a resolute and desperate enemy.

⁷ Recollection of Bill Spencer, 2/9th Battalion, in *In the Line of Fire* pp.97-98

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Casualties were as immediate as they were devastating, particularly for the Battalion's C Company which, with no tank support, had lost 46 of its 87 men in the first ten minutes. Those remaining had no alternative but to lay in wait in the short kunai grass until tanks were available.

The other three companies were making good, if costly, progress against a ferocious and well-entrenched enemy. At 1.00 p.m., they took a rest and made three tanks available for C Company. At 2.00 p.m., C Company went into action with Bren guns clearing snipers from the trees, tanks firing armour-piercing rounds at bunkers and the infantry hurling hand grenades. Within half an hour, eleven bunkers had been destroyed and the enemy cleared from the other five.

By nightfall, all companies had attained their respective objectives for the day. The Battalion, together with a platoon from the US 128th Infantry Regiment, had secured a line from a point on the coast about 450 metres west of Cape Endaiadere to the eastern end of New Strip. That success, however, had not come cheaply. The fighting on that first day had cost the Battalion eleven officers and 149 men killed or wounded, about one-third of its total strength. To cover the losses, C Company was replaced in the line by a Battalion from the US 128th Regiment and a company from the 2/10th Battalion was placed under the command of the 2/9th Battalion.

On the following day, Battalion burial parties searched a battlefield littered with bodies to recover their dead. It was during this exercise that Sid was accompanying stretcher-bearer, Private Charles Thilthorpe, when Thilthorpe was shot by a sniper, twice through the thighs and once through a muscle in his chest. With those injuries, Sid could not manage to carry him back by himself and left to get assistance. By the time Sid and the help arrived back, it was getting dark and Thilthorpe was not there. It seemed that he had crawled away and been shot again in the process. In the morning, they found his body. He had reached the track and is believed to have lost consciousness but, in

the darkness, a tank had run over him during the night.

On the morning of 20th December, the Battalion continued its westward advance towards Simemi Creek. Sniper and mortar fire were the main threats as they battled their way through sago swamps and heavy undergrowth in the plantation. In the early afternoon, further losses were suffered when they came upon enemy positions which were part of a new defensive line to which the Japanese had withdrawn.

After an unsuccessful attempt to penetrate the Japanese line, the Battalion withdrew for the night and formed its own defensive line, just 500 metres short of their final objective of Simemi Creek. The swampy ground was not conducive to digging in for the night so the men cut down palm trees to form a rough barricade. Ron Berry and the men of B Echelon had managed to bring forward from their position at Cape Endaiadere a hot meal and hot tea that was much appreciated by the frontline troops. Three days continuous fighting with little sleep was taking its toll on the exhausted men, half of whom had to remain awake and alert during the night in case of any counter-attack on the part of the Japanese.

On the following day, the Battalion was given time to rest and reorganise in their new positions. There was no rest for the enemy, however, as their positions were strafed and bombed by American planes. Mopping up patrols continued in the areas the Battalion had taken the day before and the Battalion lost a further four killed and six wounded in clearing the area of Japanese fighters. One of those wounded was Sid's mate, Ron Berry, who had linked up with an infantry patrol.

On the morning of the 22nd December, the Battalion gathered at their new start-line for a renewed advance on the enemy's position. The objective for the day was to capture the tongue of land leading up to the mouth of Simemi Creek and establish a bridgehead over the creek. To achieve this, they would have four tanks in support. Following the customary artillery and mortar barrage with Vickers guns

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

flailing the treetops, the men moved forward. Little resistance was encountered at first. A machine gun attack on A Company resulted in two deaths, including Owen Davis, brother of Sid's mate, Glen Davis, who had lost his life at Giarabub. A further five were wounded in the same skirmish.

During the morning, the start-line and Battalion HQ were bombarded by shells from a Japanese anti-aircraft gun that was being used in a ground defence role. It claimed a further twenty casualties.



This Japanese ant-aircraft gun, which was also used for ground defence, remains at Buna in 2017, a silent witness to the carnage of December 1942

The Japanese fought fiercely as the Battalion advanced and the casualty list continued to grow. By 5.00 p.m., however, the whole peninsula had been captured except for a strong enemy defensive position on a small island at the mouth of Simemi Creek. The

exhausted men dug in for the night along the creek and the beach.

During the night, hundreds of artillery and mortar rounds fell on the Battalion as they sheltered in their shallow holes and further casualties were incurred. One of those casualties was Corporal Sid Telford who was sheltering under a tree when it suffered a direct hit from a shell. The resulting shrapnel tore into Sid's right leg and another piece hit him near his left eye.

After rendering first aid, the stretcher bearers took Sid back to the casualty clearing station at the rear. After receiving further medical treatment, he was carried some fifteen kilometres to the makeshift airfield at Dobodura by native porters, the legendary Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.



Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels carry a wounded soldier from the battlefield at Buna

Sid was then flown to Port Moresby where he was admitted to the 2/9th Australian General Hospital, located in the hills, seventeen miles (twenty-seven kilometres) from the town itself.

A nursing sister⁸, who arrived at the Hospital while Sid was there, described the conditions prevailing at that time: *The Hospital had 1,200 beds under canvas but, at the time, had 2,000 patients. The overflow were on stretchers under the beds. It was a hectic time.....By the time men reached the 2nd/9th they often had putrid fly-blown wounds, they were in states of extreme exhaustion and their clothes in tatters. Medical patients far outnumbered the*

⁸ Margaret Ewart @
battleforaustralia.org.au/Nurse.php

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

wounded, almost ten to one, many had dreadful malaria rigours, they were debilitated and exhausted, with a variety of medical conditions including dysentery or scrub typhus which caused semi-consciousness and heart failure and required vigilant, continuous nursing.....The arrival of the wet season did not help. Tents leaked, wards became 'bogs' and beds sunk into the mud at all angles.

In spite of the appalling conditions, the Hospital staff of twenty-nine medical officers, seven other officers, 275 men of other ranks and 112 nursing sisters were dedicated to doing their very best to treat and look after the stream of brave Australian soldiers who kept on coming their way.

Sid's leg wound was serious and the surgeons made a decision to amputate the leg at the knee as gangrene had set in. This is believed to have occurred on Boxing Day, 26th December. Sid was obviously in a bad way and the Army sent a telegram to his parents informing them of his critical condition. The telegram did not reach them until 1st January.

In spite of the amputation, the gangrene continued to spread and, on 29th December, Sid underwent a further operation to remove most of his thigh. He died later that day. For a horseman who loved to dance, losing a leg would have been absolutely devastating.

On 6th January, his distraught family's worst fears were realised when a further telegram notified them of Sid's passing. It has been said that it was just as if a dark cloud had descended upon the Spring Creek district as the sad news spread around that Sid would not be coming home. Friends and family alike were united in their sorrow at his passing.

Sid was given a military funeral with Ron Berry, still recovering from his wounds, and five other 2/9th Battalion members as pall bearers.

He was buried in the Bomana War Cemetery outside Port Moresby. His grave is located in Block B, Plot 1, Row 5, Grave 27

Naturally, Sid's grief-stricken family had more questions than could be answered in the few brief lines of a telegram. They were desperate

for information about the circumstances surrounding his death. Sid's sister, Rosie Gilmore, wrote to Allora man Frank Clarke who was serving in Port Moresby with the Australian Army's 2/1st Motor Ambulance Convoy Platoon.

In his reply, Frank Clarke wrote: You asked me to find out as much information as possible. Well Rosie I found out as much as I could as soon as I heard that Sid had passed away. As a matter of fact, I had a chap in my ambulance one day who was wounded the same time as Sid. He told me all about it. Sid had been brought down from the front by plane two days before this chap. So I went straight to the Hospital to see him. But I was too late by a day. A cobber of mine who was stationed at the Hospital took Sid to the operating theatre and he said that Sid was as cheery as could be and did not seem to be suffering pain at all. But he must have taken a bad turn later.

He was doing a wonderful job when he was hit. Two of his Section had been wounded and Sid went out to carry them in. He brought one chap in and was returning for the other chap when he was hit by mortar gunfire. He was evacuated to hospital by plane that very day where he was attended to by some of Australia's best surgeons. So you can be assured that everything possible was done for him. That is one certain thing Rosie. The medical service up here are doing a very good job. There are about one hundred and fifty nurses in one hospital. After losing such a man as Sid who was so dearly loved by all, one fully realises the grief that is brought to many homes by this War.

In their search for information, the family also enlisted the help of their local Minister. The Reverend's involvement elicited a response from Lieutenant Fergie Lindsay who had been Sid's platoon commander when he was in the Transport Platoon.

In a letter dated 5th March 1943, Lieutenant Lindsay wrote to Sid's parents: *I must first apologise for having left this job so long, However I trust you will forgive me as it is certainly a job I am sorry to have to do at all.*

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

T.O. 41A. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

**FOR A QUICK REPLY
SEND A TELEGRAM
(PLEASE TURN OVER.)**

**RECEIVED TELEGRAM.
URGENT RATE.**

The first line of this telegram contains the following particulars in the order named.

Office of Origin: *Warwick Legent 49-1* Words: *6-27* Time Lodged: *1/6 opening fee paid* No: *1/1/43*

Remarks: *Postal acknowledgement delivery* To: *Mr. Andrew Telford*
This message has been received subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. *Glenrock*
The time received at this Office is shown at the end of the message. *Spring Creek*
The date stamp indicates the date both of lodgment and of reception unless otherwise shown after the particulars of time lodged.

Personal. Acting Corporal Telford wounded
I regret to inform you that QX1181 Acting Corporal
Sidney Telford has been wounded in action
& is seriously ill. The Minister for Army
extends sincere sympathy.

8 P.M.

Telegram from the Army informing Sid's parents that he had been wounded in action and was seriously ill

T.O. 42Y. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

THIS TELEGRAM HAS BEEN RECEIVED SUBJECT TO THE POST AND TELEGRAPH ACT AND REGULATIONS. THE TIME RECEIVED AT THIS OFFICE IS SHOWN AT THE END OF THE MESSAGE.

TELEGRAM

THE DATE STAMP INDICATES THE DATE OF RECEPTION AND LODGMENT ALSO, UNLESS AN EARLIER DATE IS SHOWN AFTER THE TIME OF LODGMENT.

Office of Origin: *Warwick 57/1* No. of Words: *310p* Time of Lodgment: *8* No: *5493*

Personal
Mr Andrew Telford
Glenrock
Spring Creek Clifton

It is with deep regret that I have
to inform you that QX 1181 Acting
Corporal Sidney Telford on the twentieth (29th)
December 1942 died of wounds and desire
to convey to you the profound sympathy
of the Minister for the Army
Minister for the Army
55p

Telegram from the Army notifying Sid's parents that he had died of his wounds

ON ACTIVE SERVICE Deaths of Cpl. S. Telford and W./O. W. Thomson

CLIFTON: Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Telford, of "Glenrock," Spring Creek, have received advice that their son, Corporal Sidney Telford (32), had died of wounds received on active service in New Guinea on December 29 last. A native of Spring Creek, deceased was educated at the Spring Creek Upper State School, and later worked on his family's property at Spring Creek. He took a keen interest in cricket and tennis. He enlisted in the A.I.F. in October, 1939, and sailed for England on May 5, 1940, and was there during the big "blitz." He spent furlough at his father's old home at Newcastle. Later he saw service in the Middle East, taking part in the battle of Jarabub. He was one of the "Rats of Tobruk" and was there for seven months. He also saw service in Syria and returned to Australia in March, 1942. He spent short periods of leave at his home at Spring Creek, and after about four months in Australia went to New Guinea and took part in the fighting at Milne Bay and the capture of Buna. One of his closest friends was Private Glen Davis, of Monto, who was well known in this district. Private Davis paid the supreme sacrifice during the fighting at Jarabub. Both enlisted the same day. Corporal Telford's parents possess a number of souvenir gifts received from him whilst abroad. As a tribute to his memory the flag was flown at half-mast at his old school throughout last Thursday. The flag of the Clifton R.S.S.A.I.L.A. was also flown at half-mast at Anzac Oval, Clifton. He is survived by his parents and two brothers, Messrs. Frank and Archie Telford, and two sisters, Miss May Telford and Mrs. Jack Gilmore (whose husband is on active service), and all of whom reside at Spring Creek.

The Clifton Courier spread news of Sid's passing

I had intended to let the matter stand over until I arrived back in Australia, but on seeing a letter from your parish clergyman, decided to go right ahead and give you any information I could regarding Sid.

He was, prior to Buna, a member of my Platoon (Transport) but, on the unit going in to action in country where transport was almost

impossible, he, with his section, went to a Rifle Company. Sid, I might add, was probably the most popular lad in the unit and his untimely end was a great shock to us all. On the night of December 22nd while in contact with the enemy, Sid was wounded in the leg (right) and also a piece of shrapnel near his eye. He did not seem to be in much pain and, when being carried out, remarked to the boys carrying the stretcher that he felt sorry for them having to carry him. This was typical of "Tiny" and I, among others, was wondering how long the hospital staff would be able to keep Sid when he began to feel himself again. However, he was brought by air to "Moresby" and the next news we received was to the effect that he had passed on. His personal belongings have been sent to base and will, in due course, be sent on to you. I would ask you to accept my very sincere and deepest sympathy in the loss of such a great son. I had known "Tiny" since we sailed for England in 1940 when I was a Private myself and we were the closest of friends till the day he went out of the lines. In all three Battalions of this Brigade, he was known as "Tiny" and I would say, without fear of contradiction, that he was the most popular man in the 18th Brigade. May he R.I.P.



Some of Sid's possessions that were returned to his family

On 10th July 1943, the Commonwealth Government's Directorate of Graves Registration sent to Sid's parents a photograph of the temporary memorial that had been placed on his grave at the Bomana War Cemetery. The photograph was accompanied by a letter advising that the temporary memorial would be replaced by a permanent

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

memorial immediately circumstances permitted after the cessation of hostilities. The letter went on to advise that: *Arrangements have been made for all war graves to be maintained for all time in such condition that the sacrifice has warranted.*



Photograph of Sid's grave sent to his parents in 1943

The grief surrounding Sid's death was not confined to Australia. In 1943, Rosie wrote to Yvonne Carruthers in England to inform her of the situation. Excerpts from Yvonne's reply of 1st June 1943 show the depth of feeling that she had for Sid. After offering her condolences to the family, she wrote: *It is with profound regret that I received your letter telling me of your darling brother's death. I knew him only a short while but grew to love him dearly through our correspondence.....Try and remember this, Rosie. He was the bravest of boys and gave his life for us that we may live in peace..... I feel a sense of desolation now knowing I can never meet him again on this earth. I have all his letters which I treasure and*

his photograph and am left with memories of what might have been.....

Included with Yvonne's letter was a letter from her mother. In her letter, she wrote: *We are all broken hearted to hear of dear Sid's death.....Let me say here and now, Rosie, how we all loved Sid. It may seem strange to some people, but not to us, he filled our home with sunlight the moment he entered. How I teased him because he was so big.....Poor Yvonne has got a terrible shock because she loved Sid so. She read all his letters and cables, read some passages out to me and, Rosie dear, there's no doubt that darling Sid was just as much in love as Yvonne was. I wish you could read his letters, so sincere, affectionate, and full of hope for them both to be together in the future.....They could have been so happy.....*

The War that brought them together had so brutally and cruelly destroyed any plans that they had for the future.

For his service, Sid was posthumously awarded the following Campaign Stars and War Medals:

- Africa Star
- Pacific Star
- 1939-1945 Star
- Defence Medal
- Australian Service Medal; and
- War Medal 1939-1945



Sid's medals (from left): 1939-1945 Star, Australian Service Medal, Defence Medal, Pacific Star, Africa Star, War Medal 1939-1945

For his sacrifice, Sid's name was added to the war memorials in both Allora and Clifton and also inscribed on the Wall of Honour at the Australian War Museum in Canberra.

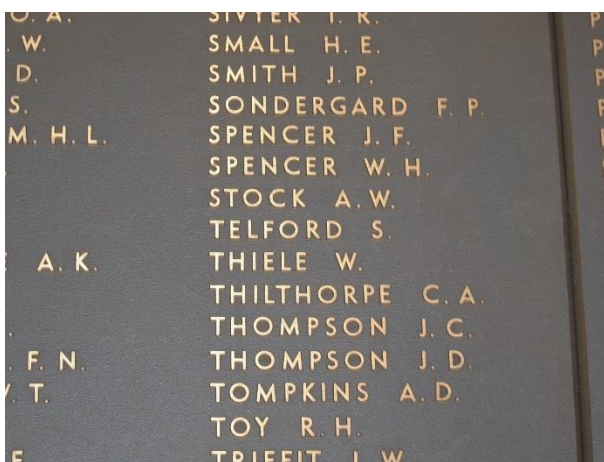
WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD



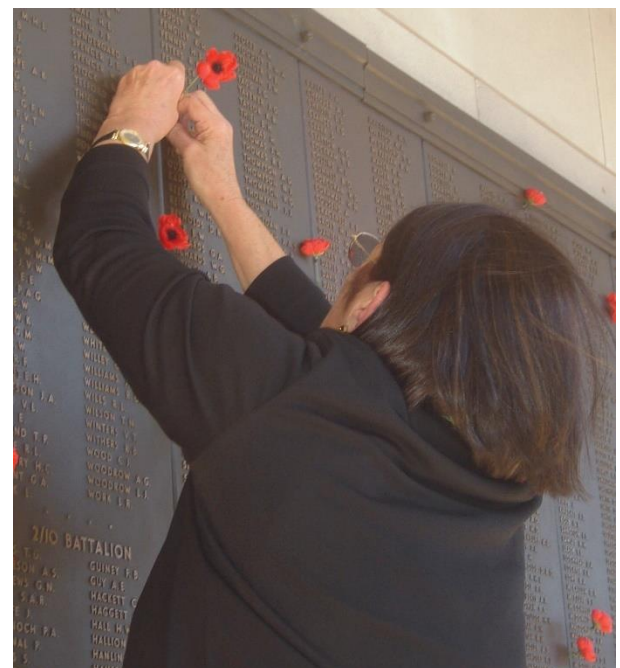
War Memorial at Allora



War Memorial at Clifton



Wall of Honour at the Australian War Museum in Canberra. Sid's name is among those of his mates from the 2/9th Battalion who also paid the supreme sacrifice in World War II



Lynette Argus places a poppy beside the name of her Uncle Sid on the Wall of Honour at the Australian War Museum in 2005

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD



Sid's headstone in the Bomana War Cemetery



Lynette Argus and Syd Telford lay a cross and red poppy at the grave of their Uncle Sid, following the Dawn Service at Bomana War Cemetery on Anzac Day 2017



Bomana War Cemetery, Port Moresby

WAR SERVICE OF SIDNEY TELFORD

TELFORD, Sidney, QX1181.—In proud & loving memory of our dearly loved Son & Brother, Corporal Sidney "Tiny" Telford, 2/9th Battalion, A.I.F., who paid the supreme sacrifice at Buna, New Guinea, December 29th, 1942, returned Middle East and England.
Not one day do we forget you, Sid.
In our hearts you are always dear.
Loved, remembered, longed-for always.
As it dawns the third sad year.
A wonderful Son and Brother.
Too dearly loved to ever be forgotten.
Inserted by his loving Mother, Father, Sister and Brother, May & Frank.

TELFORD.—In memory of our dearly-loved Brother & Brother-in-law, Sidney Telford, QX1181, 2/9 Batt., who died of wounds received in action at Buna, 29/12/42, after serving in the M.E.
"His duty nobly done."
Kath and Arch.

TELFORD, Sidney, QX1181.—In proud & loving memory of our dearly-loved Brother, Brother-in-law, & Uncle, S d., who paid the supreme sacrifice at Buna, New Guinea, December 29th, 1942.
The passing years can never change
Our thoughts of one so dear,
Fond memories linger every day,
Remembrance keeps us near.
Inserted by his loving Sister & Brother-in-law, Rosie & Jack, & little Niece & Nephew, Pamela and Sidney.

TELFORD, Sidney, QX1181.—In proud & loving memory of our dearly-loved Brother & Brother-in-law, Sid, who paid the supreme sacrifice at Buna, New Guinea, December 29th, 1942.
Our family chain is broken.
One loving link is gone.
But memories will always linger
As long as the years roll on.
Inserted by his loving Brother and Sister-in-law, Archie and Kath.

Roll of Honour notices in the *Courier Mail* of 29th December 1945, the third anniversary of Sid's passing

Sid might be gone but he would never be forgotten. His family would speak of him often and make sure that their children knew all about their Uncle Sid. They loved to hear the stories of his larrikin nature and zest for life. "It's as though we all knew him even though we were denied the opportunity of ever meeting him", one said recently.

Through this story, the younger generations of the family might also get to know Sid and regard him with the same reverence as his nephews and nieces. Lest we forget.

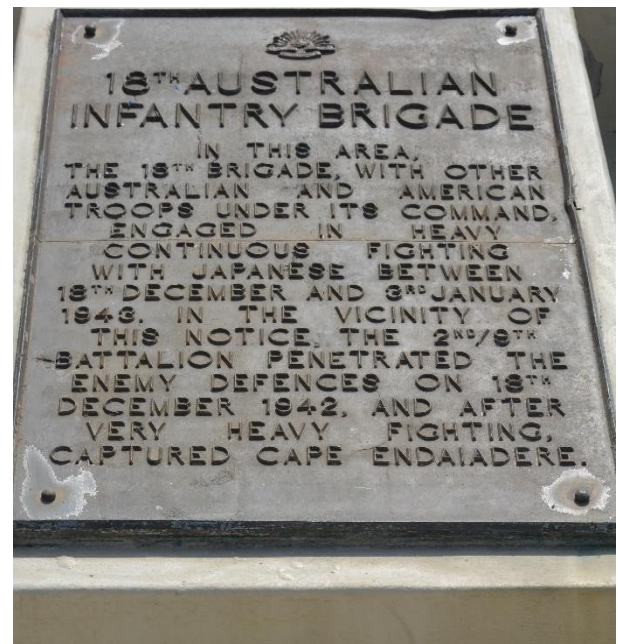
ENDNOTE

The 2/9th Battalion followed in the footsteps of Queensland's 9th Battalion that gained Battle Honours at Gallipoli and in Egypt, France and

Belgium during World War I. Their exploits earned them the title "The Fighting 9th".

In a letter to Arthur Abernethy before the 2/9th Battalion went into their first action, Sid wrote: *The 9th is full of Downsmen. It is a Queensland Battalion. "The Fighting 9th". Hope we keep the reputation up.*

They certainly achieved that and more. Following their heroic and costly success at Buna, the Battalion went on to fight at Sanananda and participate in the victory there on 22 January 1943. In February, they returned to Australia for rest and further training in jungle warfare at Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tableland.



Memorial to the 18th Brigade at Buna

The Battalion returned to New Guinea in August 1943 and, in January 1944, fought with distinction in the Battle of Shaggy Ridge and later in Borneo. The Battalion finished the War with the enviable reputation of having never given up an inch of ground that they had taken from the enemy and never having a single man taken prisoner. They also had the distinction of being involved in the first land defeats of both the Germans (at Tobruk) and the Japanese (at Milne Bay).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Much of the information in this story has been drawn from the work of Gordon Dickens in his book *Never Late: The 2/9th Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945* which is generally regarded as the comprehensive history of the Battalion

REFERENCES

The information provided in this history was obtained from the following sources:

- *A Salute to the Fallen*, Brian O'Grady
- *In the Line of Fire*, Rex Sadler and Tom Hayllar, Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd 2005
- *Never Late, The 2/9th Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945*, Gordon Dickens, Australian Military History Publications 2005
- *Tobruk*, Peter Fitzsimons, Harper Collins Publishers 2006
- Service file of Sidney Telford QX1181
- Pocket Diary of Sidney Telford QX1181 for 1940 calendar year
- Undated letter from Sidney Telford at Ingleburn Camp to Kath Pleash of Hendon, via Allora
- Letter dated 20th September 1940 from Sidney Telford in England to Arthur Abernethy
- Letter dated 30th October 1940 from Sidney Telford in England to his parents
- Undated letter from Sidney Telford in Egypt to Arthur Abernethy
- Letter dated 19th August 1941 from Mabel Ball, Aldershot, England to Sid's family
- Letter dated 15th January 1943 from Frank Clarke to Rosie Gilmore
- Letter dated 5th March 1943 from Lieutenant F.J. Lindsay to Sid's parents
- Letter dated 1st June 1943 from Yvonne Carruthers in England to Rosie Gilmore
- Undated letter from Yvonne Carruthers' mother to Rosie Gilmore

THANK YOU

Thank you to those family members who provided photographs, letters and other materials for inclusion in this story. Your assistance is very much appreciated.