

White over Green

JOURNAL OF THE 2/4 INFANTRY BATTALION ASSOCIATION

PATRONS:

*Major General Ray SHARP, AO, RFD, ED (RL) **** Lieutenant Colonel Vin HALLINAN, OAM, RFD, ED, (RL)*

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German Paratroopers Landing on Crete from Junkers 52 Transports,
20 May 1941.

"White over Green" printed courtesy of Senator Marise Payne, Parramatta, NSW

2/4th Australian Infantry Battalion Honours WWII



-Battle Honours-

- *Palestine:*** July 1940: Haifa: defence of oil storage tanks vs Italian bombers, manning 3.7in Anti-aircraft guns, as X & Y Regts RHA
- *Libya:*** January 1941: Bardia, Derna Wadi, Tobruk, Benghazi
- *Greece:*** April 1941: Vevi, Brallos Pass, Megara
- *Crete:*** April/May 1941: Heraklion
- *Syria:*** 1941/1942: Gjedrie: Garrison Duty
- *Darwin:*** 1944/1945: Larrakeah Barracks: Defence of Darwin
- *New Guinea:*** 1944/1945: Wewak, Wirui Mission

ASSOCIATION MONTHLY MEETINGS

4th Tuesday or Saturday every month except April (ANZAC Day) and December (Christmas)

Venues: (4th Tuesday) Club York 95-99 York St. Sydney 1st Floor and (4th Saturday) South Newcastle Rugby League Club, 46 Llewellyn St. Merewether (Newcastle)

Time: 1100 hrs. Refreshments provided. ALL WELCOME

NEXT TWO MEETINGS: . Saturday 25th July 2020 –Merewether Newcastle, 25th August 2020 Club York.

If you would like to receive the Monthly meeting minutes, please contact the editor.

Battalion Association Ties are available



The price is \$25 per tie if you would like to pick up your tie at an Association Monthly Meeting in Sydney or Newcastle or \$30 posted anywhere in Australia. Please send your cheque to our Treasurer Wayne Finch or make a direct deposit to the Battalion Association's Bank Account and advise Wayne Finch by phone or email, and Keith Morris will send you your tie or ties.

Keys dates for 2020

Saturday 25th July 2020 – Monthly Meeting, Merewether Newcastle.

Tuesday 25th August 2020 – Monthly Meeting, York Club 99 York St. Sydney. TBA

Saturday 7th November 2020 – Association 4th Infantry Battalions Commemorate Remembrance Day Reunion.

Wednesday 11th November 2020 Remembrance Day.

Treasurer's Report

The following have been most generous with their Subscription and Donations: Wendy OH, Brian Johnston (son of NX5367 Walter Johnston), Elizabeth & Merv Nolan , Kaye Whitbread (Daughter in law of NX71359 Arthur Whitbread), Richard Pegg (Son of NX47 Major Ferdinand Pegg), Joe Elkus & Geoff Collins, Col. (Retd) Graham Fleeton (Battlefield History Tours), Maj Gen Ray Sharp (Patron), Christine Maher (Daughter of NX6121 Lt. John Hawkins) Colin & Barbara Brownhill (son of NX8737 Capt. Fitzroy Brownhill) Jennifer Emmerick (Daughter of Past Treasurer NX175596 Bruce Beck), Tom Roach(Son of NX2016 Robert John (Laska) Roach), Ron Seymour (Member of NSAA & son of NX5056 SSR Seymour 2/3rd & 2/1st), Robyn Palmer (Daughter of NX5152 Jack Jocelyn),

From the Editor,

In the past years we have all enjoyed stories and biographical sketches from descendants about their family history of the Battalion members. Please continue to send them in so our 2/4th family can enjoy.

If anyone would like to help with sourcing history of the 2/4th, please contact one of the committee.



Association 4th Infantry Battalions

Patrons: Major General R.J. Sharp AO RFD ED [R]

Major General S.V.L. Willis AM CSC [R]

Advance Notice – Remembrance Day Reunion

Date: Saturday, 7th November 2020 from 11am

At: Sydney Brewery Surry Hills [Rydges Hotel], 28 Albion Street, Sydney

Due to the cancellation of the 2020 Sydney ANZAC Day March, our discussions with the Manager, Sydney Brewery Surry Hills to reschedule our Reunion for Saturday, 7 November 2020 from 11am.

This invitation is for all former and current serving members along with family members to join with us on this occasion to commemorate Remembrance Day 2020. The 4RAR [NSW] Association, the 2nd/4th Association & their members have also indicated an interest to attend and are most welcome.

Warren Barnes OAM

President

I have received a copy of a letter from John & Tom Roach the sons of NX2016 Robert John (Laska) Roach.

The letter has been retyped from the original letter which was sent to their mother from Palestine 15th June 1941

The letter gives his experiences in Greece & Crete.

A letter from Bob Roach to his wife Margaret from the Middle East

(Copied as best I could)

NX2026.

Roach R.J.

2/4 BN.

Khaisa Camp

Palestine

15-June 1941

Dear Margaret

This letter may open your eyes of what goes on over here & I know the papers are not allowed to mention true facts, when you're in action as we have been since January 1st 41 to May 21st with no break & come out of the lines to read the trash the papers print is ridiculous

Well as you know we done our job in Libia but what happened I have no need to tell you. So they pushed us into Greece at a place called Florina right on the Yugoslav border. Well I will give you a few brief details. Firstly our brigade was then consisted of 3000 men, that was the 8th 11th & 4th BN we had the forward position the same as Libia, right, it snowed for four days and the Germans pushed 1000s of men forward and on the left flank. The Greeks gave away here we was surrounded. The 8th BN Victorians through (threw) their rifles. (Page 2) down & run like mad, talk about panic we got out at 4am & retreated back to a position @ Servia held it four — days, the Germans pushed again with their Air Force supporting 80 to 100 planes would be over us all day. So we clear out like mongrel dogs again not knowing where we was going & our morale low.

We came back 60 miles and to Brayloss (Brallos) pass orders were to hold the Germans to the last man, we held them for a week with heavy casualties on both sides & the Germans bombing & machine gunning from the air it was awful. From there we came to a port below Athens across the Corinthian canal and layed low in wheat fields all day with German plane's flying 50 feet up looking for us the strain was terrific on us all. That night at 2 am were ordered on trucks, as all the others got on board before us 4th BN or what was left of the 4th we were to go down the coast 60 miles the brigade giving the colonel \$500 (pounds) and it was every man for himself, but alas 3 destroyers pulled in, so luck was with us we got towed to the ship and on our way (page 3) Two of my mates had compasses and we were going to try and get to Turkey if we could. So we started for Crete and got bombed all way. No ships hit.

So we landed at Crete and went to Heraklion (they had to protect the airport) and took up position, it wasn't long before German planes came over us 20-50 & 100 but I saw 150 one evening. In the blitz you couldn't move if you did your position wouldn't last 10 minutes. So the paratroopers landed as their planes cleared off to give them a go. Wholly hell we killed some. Four days after the smell was awful. There were dead everywhere and we were after more blood. They kept landing troops and supplies and our tucker was 1 loaf of bread to 9 men and 1 tin of beans the same with no tobacco and our nerves high pitched. Me and ~~Wright~~ mate went out one evening to count the dead and see if any snipers would fire on us and found a wounded hun my mate was going to shoot him. (page 4) anyhow I stopped him, the hun had two fingers blown off, shot through the nose and back, hr said to me English I said no Australian, he said comrade water so I washed his lips and got the stretcher bearers. I saw him later and he said God bless you, I took all his belongings, and gave him one photo of his mother and girl, he would of never lived if I knew what some of the huns done to our prisoners stripped them all bare and shot them in the back, Dirty Barsteds

Our position became very hard to maintain as he was landing 1000s of troops every day. So at 6 pm one evening we got ordered to be ready to move was it attack or not we didn't know, but it was to evacuate. You could see the sparkle come to the boys eyes again, so we moved on the boats at 1am. We were bombed next day and at 6am they started our ship got hit at 9:15am, I was asleep, woke up the room and deck was all smoke and fire and water with men rushing trying to get out, I thought here's the bloody thing sinking, and now dying like this, I was going to shoot my self (Dad had a hand gun he took off a German) but we got a port hole open and climbed up the side got on top. There was our comrades burnt to death, fellas lying everywhere, oh it was awful but you soon forget nasty things, we were still getting bombed and trying to see our mates but some of our good pals had a sea burial.

When the planes came over after we would all huddle around the ship and try and sing but couldn't, I went down below deck to try and get my pack and two bodies were floating around in the water, will you ever get me on a bloody ship again, no never, only when the war's over, that's if I'm still alive. If I'm in any more evacuations I'm going through as I've got out of two o k.

Well on another ship in the convoy 150 was killed on ours 50.

This is what is left of the 6th division 5,500 men. 11,500 killed or missing, our BN the 4th 137 originals (out of 1000) left, 8th BN 57 , 11th BN 9 men, will the papers ever print that, no, they or the head of the armies are the greatest bunch of barsteds that ever walked. If we tell you anything in our letters it's cut out early because the bloody galahs are not game to admit the truth. After all these battles we are still training with leave of one day. I took leave for 5 days got found f7-5-8 , why I took it I wasn't going to be a bunny all my life.

Sundstrom the mongrel bred pig told the colonel the other day that Jock, this chap brother is giving — — /his letter and John Hough was amendable to army discipline, why , because you can't find him in action and now he wants us to salute him, we won't, he's marrying a nurse here I pity her, anyhow I'm a slaggy old soldier always clearing AWL or getting out of work but I'm no sucker to them.

Well now we move into Syria when we get equipped, any action is a 100 percent on this training as we can't seem to get a spell, but there's no equipment for us lot, we never get any and I'm fed up with this bloody war.

(page 7) We have no planes here or nothing, well I was talking to a sister up at the AG hospital the other day and 400 casualties came in from Syria there and the papers mentioned nothing about it. We've got no reinforcements here or nothing, I'm betting you Meg if things — — — — — there will always be an England alright, but we won't be British. You read about how we are equipped here in the Middle East well it's all propaganda. I'm no defeatist but I like to let someone know the true facts

Well Meg I've said too much now so had better close, please send this to Alf will you my dear, so cheerio

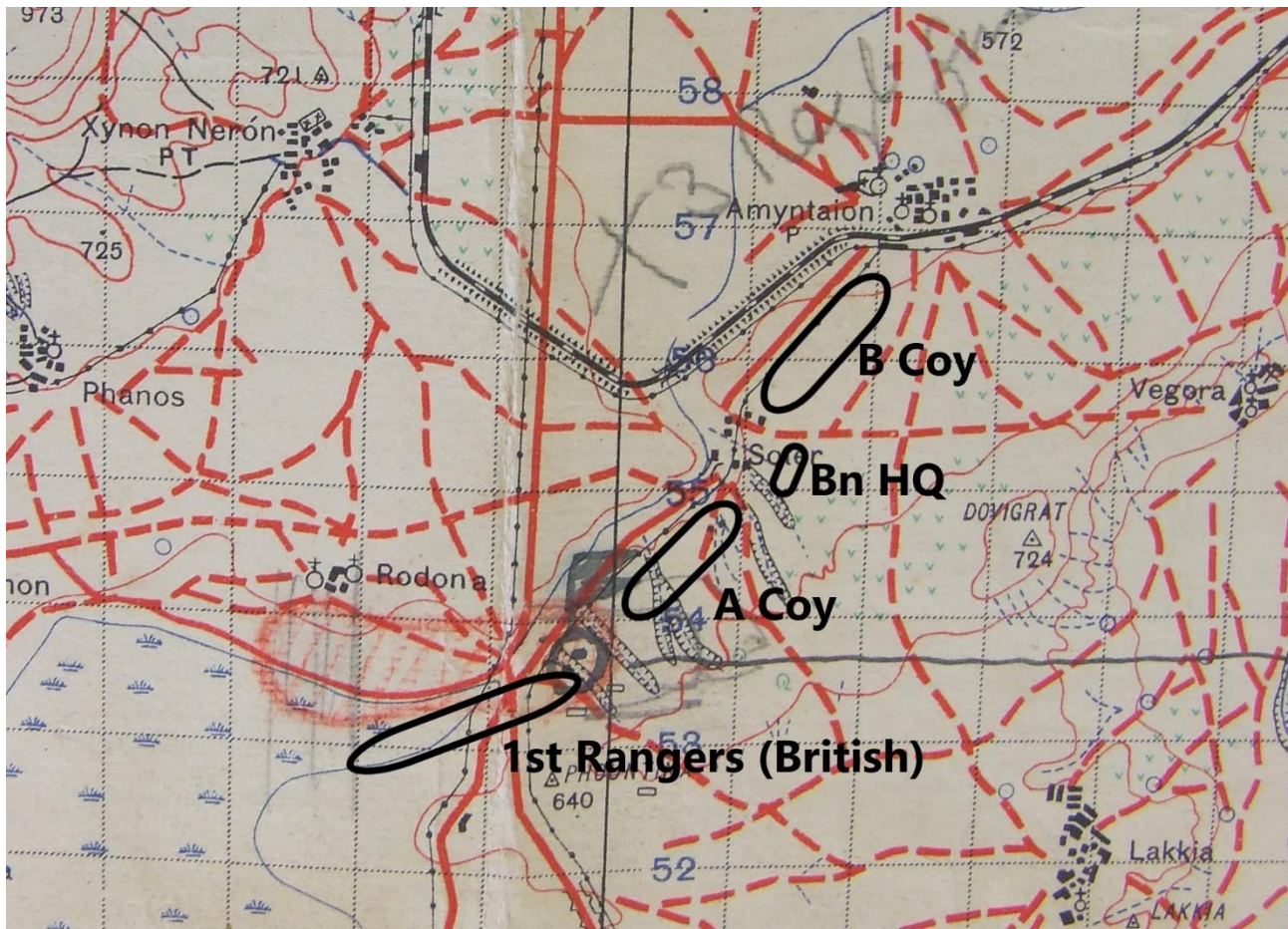
Love

Bob x c x

The Last Stand at Sotir- Who was the 16th Man?

by Elvin Andrews

The 2/4th Battalion was the only Australian unit to be awarded Battle Honours for Sotir. The other units involved in this rear-guard action were British and Kiwi. Sotir is in Northern Greece, in the administrative region of Macedonia. After the defensive line at Vevi Pass had been breached, a quickly organised rear-guard was assembled to delay the enemy's advance. It was positioned on rising ground near the village of Sotir.



2/4th Positions on Sotir Ridge 12th Apr 1941

The Battalion's action at Sotir is well covered in WOG 1963¹ and by Gavin Long². After occupying their allotted sector late on the night of 12th April 1941, the 2/4th were withdrawn at about 8.00am the next morning, however sixteen men of A Company did not receive the order. The most accurate account of the fortunes of these men was written by Alan Manning NX 8596. His handwritten account has been transcribed and is reproduced below in italics.³ The authors explanatory notes appear in normal font in square brackets [].

“I wonder how many of the 2/4th Battalion who were in Greece in 1941 know that they owe the withdrawal on Easter Sunday morning (13th April 1941) from Florina to 16 men of A Coy. [The withdrawal was from Sotir, not Florina. Florina was on the northern

¹ White over Green published by Angus & Robertson 1963

² Gavin Long: Australian in the War of 1939-45 Army Series Vol 2 Greece, Crete and Syria

³ This undated letter was previously published in WOG Journal Vol 68 No6 in 2015

side of Vevi Pass and in German hands by Easter Sunday. The soldiers did not have maps and had little knowledge of the names of the villages in this area.]

On the night of the 12th the Battalion dug-in on a bare hillock facing the main road to Florina [Sotir] village in the distance. They were fired on by patrolling Germans with light machine guns about 10pm but the Germans hurriedly withdrew when fire was returned. At dawn the Germans opened up with machine gun and rifle fire and put in an attack across a green wheat field. But the fire was so intense from the Battalion that the enemy went to ground and was kept there. The orders of the night before was to hold the positions until 9:30[am] when trucks would be back to pick them up. The trucks arrived behind the hillock at 7:30 and the Battalion withdrew, all but the 16 men of 9 Platoon who were on the extreme left-hand flank.

They did not get any orders to withdraw. There was some controversy as to whether they were forgotten or left there for the purpose of covering the withdrawal. What was the loss of 16 if the remainder of the Battalion could escape? Time went on and rifle and machine gun fire was intensified onto the position of the 16. Bren and rifle fire was returned to the Germans which after about 2 hours the Germans went very quiet and, in the distance, could be seen 2 German tanks coming down the road. When they got 300 yards from the 16s position an anti-tank gun opened up on them and knocked them out with three shells- two direct hits and one hit the asphalt road and ricocheted into the side of a tank. Neither vehicle fired a shot after that. But when the German infantry realised their tanks were destroyed, they opened up with everything they had including mortars. There was two bren guns amongst the 16, one manned by Alan Manning the other by Bill Colley. So intense and fierce was the firing that both guns overheated and seized and had to be pulled to pieces and oiled and cleaned.

That was, as one of them said afterwards, the first time that morning his heart hit his boots.

Time was getting on and they began to wonder was the trucks coming for them. At 11:30[am] Jimmy Kirkup said he would go and find out. He left his foxhole and sprinted to the top of the hillock, turned and yelled to get out, they were on their own. Some of them heard what he said, others didn't. He didn't have time to repeat his call, because he disappeared in a blast of mortar shells. Thus, a brave man Jimmy Kirkup died.

Someone in the fifteen left said, 'We'll have to surrender'. But he was cried down by nearly everyone else, especially Bill Colley Coke Benton. Bruce Millard was the only NCO in the Platoon and he said let the boys decide when someone asked him what to do. It was decided to make a break for it. Everyone left their holes together and the German fire was terrific. Jimmy Ryan was killed fairly early in the morning. Nobby Clark was wounded, Bruce Millard was wounded, Alan Manning was captured by staying behind to look after Bruce.

The eleven who made their escape although broken into several parties, reached Palestine after the evacuation of Greece and as far as the writer knows they all survived to the war's end.

The sixteen in the noble stand of holding the German Army for four hours on their own are as follows. Although the writer can only remember 15 of 16 names are

Ernie Evans

Alan Manning

Nobby Clark

Lennie Bloomfield

Coke Benton

Bill Burns

Bill Colley

Bill Facey

Bruce Millard

Ned Gardiner

Archie Quinnell

Jimmy Ryan

Jimmy Kirkup

Ken Kirwin

Joe Reid

Perhaps if some of the survivors was asked, they might remember the name of the 16th. ”

Alan is no longer with us and his query remains unresolved. Somewhere out there in the 2/4th diaspora there is someone who knows the identity of the 16th Man.

WHO WAS THE 16th MAN?

An Email from Colin Brownhill asking about information about his Father

Dear Wayne

I am one of four sons of Capt. Fitzroy Clarence Brownhill (deceased) and hoping to meet up with anyone who knew my father. His regimental number was NX8737. He served with 2/4 Bn in the Middle East.

I would be grateful if this information could be put into the next newsletter.

I thank you for the newsletters.

Kind regards
Colin Brownhill
Vietnam Vet 65/66
East Timor 2001



We held our first Monthly Meeting at the South Leagues Club Merewether on the 27th June after the lockdown. We moved our meeting from Club York Sydney to Newcastle to enable Alf to attend so he was not travelling down by train.

White over Green Website

"As part of a technological change made by the company that hosts our website, our White over Green website (www.whiteovergreen.org.au) had to be transitioned to a new platform in May 2020. As a result there has been some upheaval with the content and a rebuild is underway. This includes the need to manually reload copies of the old White over Green Journals. Please stay tuned for improvements during the coming months. Thank you for your understanding".

Regards

Keith Morris

Historian / Custodian / Public Officer

ASSOCIATION OFFICE BEARERS 2020- 2021

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[illegible]



Battlefield History Tours

Join Battlefield History Tours (BHT) as we follow the WW2 campaign of the 6th Division and the New Zealand Division from the Albanian Border through Greece and on to Crete.

ANZAC Day in Athens

The Battle for Greece and Crete 2021



German paratroopers descend on Crete



German PZ IVs roll into Athens

On the 6th April 1941 the German Army launched its attack against the Greeks on the Metaxos Line and the Imperial Expeditionary Force at Florina. The Allied force was pushed off Greece by 28th April and so began the Battle of Crete. Join our team led by Colonel Graham Fleeton on this memorial tour to Greece & Crete to visit the battlefields where the 6th Division and the New Zealand Division confronted the German Army.

This is a special tour developed for the very special purpose that we hope will, in a small way, ensure that this part of Australia's and New Zealand's history is not forgotten as we visit the battle sites, each with an informative briefing, meet the local dignitaries who maintain our military heritage and pay our respects at the resting places of our fallen. Be with us on the ground at Vevi to observe where the Germans assaulted our men in our Mackay Force.

- ANZAC Day in Athens
- Athens, Corinth Canal, Olympia, Delphi, Meteora
- Presentations at the Battle sites
- Florina, Platamon, Lamia, Mt Olympus, Brallos Pass and more
- Pireaus to/from Crete by Ferry
- Defence of Rethymon
- Heraklion, Maleme
- Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens
- Suda Bay War Cemetery, Crete

As we travel through Greece in our air conditioned coach, you will also see spectacular scenery and the classic white architecture set against the bluest of seas. We enjoy the traditional food and culture of a warm and friendly people. We cruise overnight from Pireaus to Crete at the relaxed pace of the inter island ferry. Our cruise will take you over the same route to Crete as that of our troops in 1941.



Costs: 19 days/18 nights. Based on share twin or share double AU \$6595.00 per person.
Single Supplement additional cost AU \$995.00.

Included in this price:

- Accommodation,
- battlefield tours with historian,
- air conditioned coaches,
- o/n ferry to/from Crete,
- Most dinners except the free nights in Athens,
 - all breakfasts &
 - tour entrance fees.

Not included in this price:

- Air travel to/from Australia,
 - transfers
 - travel insurance,
- laundry and alcohol.
- tour extensions &
- personal expenses
- Tips to Drivers and Guides

** Conditions apply, costs subject to change.*

Further information or to Register please contact:
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