

6th September '42"A" Coy 39th BATTALION - ADVANCE TO KOKODA RE-ENACTMENT SUMMARY

As per previous operational orders from N.G.F HQ, all available ranks of 'A' Coy 39th battalion commenced marching from McDonalds Corner to Kokoda on the 25th July at 0800hrs.

All ranks after vigorous training at Sogeri embarked on the available transport at 0730hrs and disembarked at McDonalds Corner at 0745hrs.

At Sogeri camp, the Battalion Stores Unit issued all ranks with iron rations to carry which consisted of the following:-

- 1 tins of fruit/peaches.
- 1 bar of chocolate.
- 1 tins of Braised Steak & Onion.
- 1 packets of Beef Navy Biscuits.
- 1 Toilet Roll.
- 2 packets matches.
- 30 feet length of sash rope.

The all up weight of webbing, large & small packs, ammunition pouches, water bottle (filled), steel helmet & Lee Enfield SMLE was 50 pounds (22kg).

For this re-enactment march, all ranks were provided with a 'A' Coy 39th battalion's soldier's identity to represent for the duration of the march. They were tasked not only wear that soldier's identity discs and to carry their pay book, but also to research and find out as much as possible about that individual soldier...who were these men? Where did they live? Were they married? What happened to them?

The Re-Enactment March commenced with the following soldiers being proudly represented:-

- Lt Robert SWORD VX 100093 (Bob)
- Sgt William 'Bill' GUEST V55242 (Biscuits)
- Cpl Donald DANIELS V66054 (Dan)
- Cpl John Donald McKAY V54065 (JD)
- L/Cpl James Leslie GRANT V210064 (Scraps)

The march from **McDonalds Corner** to **Uberi** was started at a solid pace with Sgt (Biscuits) Guest barking orders and trying to have all ranks march in time. The weather was hot from the start and although the pace was settled, the combination of the pack weight and blistering sun was starting to take its toll with many of the ranks being heavily fatigued.

Lt Bob Sword led from the front, encouraging all of the ranks to keep pushing and we arrived at Owers' Corner in good time and for a much needed rest. At Owers' Corner, we broke out tins of Braised Steak & Onion and hard biscuit to refuel for the last push to our evening objective being Uberi.

After a good rest at Owers' Corner, we put on our P37 webbing & pack, cut some walking sticks and then pushed down the hill towards the Goldie River. With legs aching and shoulders screaming, we reached the Goldie River and started the process of getting all of our equipment & stores across the river. Once across the river, our camp was only a short distance where upon arrival, the men set about setting up the camp, rolling out the bed roll, cleaning weapons & boots. Only after this was completed and to the satisfaction of Lt Sword, the men were allowed to walk down to the Goldie for a wash and swim.

In the evening under the soft light of the Hurricane Lamps, we devoured the evening meal of 'Bully Beef Delight' followed by some dessert of sweetened condensed milk, biscuits and tea. With our stomach full, the men slumped into their bedrolls and quickly drifted off to a deep sleep.

Day Two broke unusually early for Cpl Daniels who at the time of approx. 0200hrs was seen to be packing up his kit and dressing for the day. It was Sgt Guest who kindly advised Cpl Daniels that it was not first light and instead was a 'very bright moon'.

At the real *first light*, we set about breaking camp with the start of the morning 'routine' being squaring away our bedding, morning ablutions, dressing, then loading up on porridge & damper bread. Cpl Daniels was well advanced having had a head start. Cpl McKay was feeling a bit better and we all looked forward to the day's march. According to information received from some men returning back down the track, today's march to **Ioribaiwa** will be tough one with many creek crossings and a tough climb up to the top of Imita Ridge and then to the top of Ioribaiwa Ridge for our nightly camp.

All ranks moved off from **Uberi** in good time and in very high spirits with a steady pace being set. The intelligence received would say that it would be a miracle to keep our boots dry. The push over Imita was a challenge considering the weight each of the ranks were carrying and the hot humid conditions. After a good rest at Imita, we started the steep descent down to the creek system, noting that the lack of rain recently had made the creeks low and we were able to keep our boots dry. Cpl McKay was feeling ill therefore after reaching Ua-Ule Creek, we decided to rest and set camp for the evening and our spirits lifted upon arriving as we received 'three cheers for the 39th' from some civilians encamped at the creek.

All ranks enjoyed the chef's special being 'Maconnachie Stew' consisting of bully beef, sweet potatoes, carrots/onion served with ample rice. Desert was damper bread, jam, tea & sweet biscuits.

Day Three broke with all ranks rising early at first light and started the process again of squaring away our kit and morning ablutions whilst our cooks prepared breakfast being porridge smothered in honey/sweetened condensed milk then followed by damper & jam/tea.

We broke camp and started the march from **Ua-Ule Creek** with our objective being **Agulogo**. We again started the march out of Ua-Ule Creek and started the climb up to Ioribaiwa and it was here that Cpl McKay's illness overcame him which required him to be evacuated to a casualty clearing station (CCS) and subsequently back to specialist medical care in Port Moresby. Everyone within the ranks were saddened at his loss however after sometime, we made it to **Ofi-Creek** where we decided to rest for the night. With heavy hearts, we set camp, cleaned our boots & weapons and devoured our evening meal of "Bully Beef Delight" followed by sweet biscuits, tea and milo.

Day Four broke with some continued sadness from the prior day events however the morning routine had to continue and to lift our spirits of the men, the cooks prepared a hearty breakfast of Baked Beans, damper bread & jam. After a briefing by Lt Sword to the men, it was decided our objective would be **Menari**. This would take us over the top of the Maguli Range and down to the swamp at **Nauro** and then onto **Menari**. The day started well with the men walking at a steady pace and slowly climbing up to the top of the range being some 4300 feet in height. We had been walking for some 2 hours when Lance Corporal Grant (aka Scraps) suddenly took ill and required medical treatment. The medics tried to intervene, but scraps condition worsened and required him to be evacuated to the CCS and then back to Port Moresby for specialist care. Despite the compounded sadness within the ranks from losing two of our ranks within two days, in scraps honour we named a local bird 'The Scraps Bird' due to it's unique call. Baaaaaarf.....Baaaaaarf could be heard though out the jungle. After a period of rest, the ranks continued with the march, up over the Maguli Range and down towards **Agulogo** where it was decided to rest the men and set camp for the evening. The camps cooks dished up a wonderful meal of "Kokoda Curry" served with damper bread/jam, tea & biscuits. Under the lights of the Hurricane Lamps, we reflected on the events of the past couple of days and in particular the loss of two great men. Bob decided to break out the rum ration and we toasted the loss of JD & Scraps - sleep came easily and all wondered what would happen in the morrow.

Day Five started with the weather being clear and our spirits lifted by a hearty breakfast of porridge, damper/jam and tea. The Lt held a briefing and it was decided that today's objective would be **Efogi** which would require a maximum effort to climb up to Brigade Hill and then tackle a steep and slippery descent down to **Efogi**.

With a good feed in our stomachs, we cleared the rest of the swamp and pressed on with great vigour through **Menari**. It was here that we had our first 'contact'. After our well sprung ambush we continued our long slow climb up to **Brigade Hill** which is at an elevation of **4700** feet. In early September 1942, this was the scene of bitter fighting between the Japanese and the three battalions of the Australian 21st Brigade being the 2/14th, 2/16th & 2/27th. The climb up to this elevation was very taxing and upon arrival at Brigade Hill, all ranks were exhausted, but Bob's encouragement kept us going. After a memorial service to commemorate the fallen at Brigade Hill and some lunch of Braised Steak & Onion and warm cordial, the men wearily started the descent down to **Efogi** as heavy rain fell, assisting in a few slips & falls however thankfully no injuries resulting. Tired and dishevelled, we reached Efogi and went about the business of setting camp for the evening however not before cleaning our weapons and boots. The cooks treated our hard days effort by serving up a delightful meal of McConnachie Stew with dumplings with dessert being sweet biscuits, sweetened condensed milk, tea & milo.

It was decided that **Day Six** would be a shorter day with our objective being **Kagi** so that the men could get the opportunity to rest longer, complete much needed washing of our uniforms and field strip the weapons. After breakfast of Baked Beans, Tea & Milo, we set about leaving **Efogi** and started the short but steep ascent towards Kagi. With full load, it was still very tiring, with our pace being slow and methodical. We reached Kagi fatigued but happy to have a longer rest. Weapons and boots cleaned, we set about taking care of ourselves with the washing of shirts, socks & shorts. Cpl Daniels inspected the food stores and requisitioned additional supplies for the rest of our march towards Kokoda. The men caught up writing letters to loved ones, rested weary bodies and thought of home. The nights meal was Kokoda Curry with damper bread.

After a good night's sleep, the men woke at first light on **Day Seven** with our objective being **Eora Crossing**. This would be a big day of over 11 miles (18km) and upon Bob's orders, we were to move out in patrol order, our main packs being carried by our Fuzzy Wuzzy angels to lighten our load and to give us more mobility. After a hearty breakfast of porridge, tea, damper & jam, we moved out with a steady climb out of Kagi to the Kagi Gap being at **6700** feet in elevation. We decided to make a deviation out to the newly established air supply dropping ground named 'Myola' and after taking in the view, we headed north to make our way back to the track and to **1900** for some food & brief rest. We continued on through the large pandanis trees and Moss Forest to reach the highest part of the track on the Owen Stanley Ranges being at **7200** feet. We pushed on through the Kokoda Gap noting that it would take a lot of TNT to stop the Jap as suggested by GHQ. Wearily, all ranks trudged on through Dump 1 and greatfully stumbled into Eora Crossing at approx. **1800hrs**, tired and sore from a big days march. Bob gave permission for the men to wash in the cold waters of Eora Creek before attending to weapons & boots the cold water just being the tonic that sore aching muscles need.

Cooking fires were quickly made and the kitchen dished up something different for the troops being Spam, Beans & Rice with Scones/Jam/Tea for supper. The rum ration was also broken out and the men who couldn't be with us were toasted, as was the King. Sleep would no doubt come easily tonight listening to the rushing waters of the Eora Creek. You would think so!

Day Eight broke with most all the ranks absolutely frozen stiff and suffering from sleep deprivation due to the overnight temperature plummeting. Cooking fires were quickly established and frozen bodies gradually thawed out in readiness for breakfast then the commencement of another big day's march from **Eora Crossing to Isurava**. At **0700hrs**, we moved out from Eora Crossing and slowly trudged over the muddy track towards Eora Creek Village where we had some morning tea before pushing on towards **Alola**. We consumed some tinned peaches at La La Creek before the ascent up to Alola Village was tackled. The ascent out of Alola was taxing with our already fatigued legs became even more lethargic. Every step was torture with the pace being slow but methodical. A quick stop by all at Con's Rock (Surgeon's Rock) then we finally made it to our objective being the Isurava Battle site. We quickly set up our camp and free of our heavy packs, scouted the perimeter and took in the view down towards the Yodda Valley as the sun dipped below the Western ridgeline. We held a brief memorial service to the fallen and then to our great surprise, the camp cooks served up 'Bully Beef Delight' with rice, onion, sweet potato and choko. Dessert was sweet biscuits, condensed milk, damper bread/jam & tea.

Day Nine broke with clear skies above with the night again being cold however all would agree not being a shade on Eora Crossing! Today's objective would be **Kokoda** which is a total distance of approx. **9.7 miles (15.6km)**. The Men went about their business of breaking camp and eating Rolled Oats smothered in condensed milk washed down with the cup of tea or Milo.

At **0630hrs**, we move out making good time to the current day Isurava Village where we had a brief rest before pushing on to **Deniki** where we had some lunch. Our position at Deniki overlooked our final objective being Kokoda which despite appeared to be within arm's reach was still **5 miles (7.6km)** and approx. **2 ½ hours** March. All ranks despite being very tired, many carrying day's old injuries and all having blistered sore feet started the descent down to the village of **Hoi** with great gusto, the thought of finishing of journey & loved ones at home occupying everyone's mind! We pushed through the village of Hoi and briefly stopped on the other side for some photos taken by the Newsreel crew. With this done, the Kokoda Handicap was on!. Cpl Daniels & Sgt Guest quickly reminded Lt Sword that it was not a race and to pace oneself. In no time we reached the outskirts of Kokoda and formed up in Marching Order, Marching together with our Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel guardians under the Kokoda Commemorative Arches and therefore became part of history itself...76 years ago to the day walking into Kokoda representing 'A' Coy of the 39th battalion.

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With the March over the Owen Stanley Ranges being completed and for most letting out a huge sigh of relief to have finished this massive undertaking, the story of the 'Advance to Kokoda' does not end here.

With all ranks being in a very buoyant state of mind, masking the sheer physical exhaustion that everyone was experiencing, we still had a make camp and the camp cooks set about making our nightly meal. It would have no doubt created a mutiny if more 'Bully Beef Delight' was dished up therefore a 'scrounging team' was sent out to the village to acquire something different, the result being sausages & onion which were an absolute treat. This wonderful meal was made even better with the addition of a few cold beers somehow secured from the local Q Store. All ranks eventually retired for the night content & knowing that tomorrow wouldn't require us to walk as we had somehow secured motor transport to take us to Girua where a plane would ferry us back to Port Moresby.

Day Ten was a lovely morning, with clear skies and everyone having a reasonable night's rest at a warmer altitude. This morning's breakfast of rolled oats & damper was snubbed with all ranks quickly breaking camp and embarking onto the motor transport for the 3 hour trip to Girua. Upon arrival at Girua, we secured our weapons for transport and boarded the C47 for the 35 minute flight back to Port Moresby, flying over the same terrain that during the last 9 days we had struggled over.

Our arrival at Seven Mile Drome seemed pretty surreal....we were dishevelled and tired and after collecting our 303's, we boarded our waiting transport for the journey out to Bomana War Cemetery where we were to pay our respect to the 3778 men (and one women) who are at rest.

Upon arrival at Bomana, we tidied our uniforms as we had once special task to perform before heading back into civilian life. **Lt Robert Sword** (Bob as all referred to him as) lays at rest in section **c5 B9** killed in action during the last days of the northern beach campaign. We formed up together with our Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and to the barking of Sgt Guest marched down to his grave site where we held a dedicated memorial service. In what was a very moving eulogy, we observed a minutes silence before all ranks were then allowed to walk amongst these heroes at rest and take in what had been achieved over the last 10 days.

It would be remiss not to thank those who participated in this year's re-enactment trek and like last years, we had an amazing time gaining an experience that is just so unique. At times, we had to pinch ourselves to think that the last time someone was at that certain place and certain time would have been over 76 years ago and would have been the original 39th Battalion men! Part of the experience was having the discipline to looking after and maintain such an iconic weapon being the Lee Enfield No 1 Mk 3 303. To carry this 4kg lump of metal & wood in so many different ways and to

ensure its condition stayed satisfactory despite the jungle conditions doing it's best to destroy this firearm was certainly a challenge. To everyone's credit (even you Scraps), all of the firearms were returned to the PNG Correctional Services in a better condition than initially received - this being our goal. Another huge experience was seeing the reaction of other trekkers that we came across along the Kokoda Track. At times, our group received rousing cheers, many many photo requests and people just wanting to find out about why we were doing this. What was amazing was the reaction of the villagers, not just to us, but to their own Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels dressed as their forefathers were. Large crowds gathered clapping and shaking the hands of the boys - I'm sure I saw a few tears, such was the power of the moment that was created!

A huge thanks must go to **Peter Miller, Fiona, Denise & No Roads Expeditions** in general who facilitated this trek however a huge thanks must also go to **Justin Kibell** who put so many hours into the planning, promotion and daily operation of this special trek.

Cpl. Donald Daniels V66054

(AKA Shane Chisholm - No Roads Expeditions)