



TIM HARROWELL AND HIS DAD RICHARD AGED 99 AND 10 MONTHS AT HOME IN MONGARLOWE.

Richard's war

Richard Harrowell will be celebrating his 100th birthday a few days after this BWD goes on sale

I was called up in June 1941 to join the 17th Militia Battalion, two months before my 21st birthday and six months before the sudden Japanese attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii.

It was so unexpected and quite a shock seeing that Japan was on our side in the First World War. Prior to the Japanese attack, it didn't look like anything was going to crop up between Australia and Japan — our only worry was the war in Europe.

Australian units were involved with fighting in the European theatre, and suddenly to have the war switched from there to our own doorstep was a terrible shock to everyone. Units that were fighting in the Middle East had to quickly return home to reinforce the army here, ready to repel any invasion. War clouds had been hovering around since the early days in 1938 and 1939.

My parents realised like everyone else that war was imminent with Hitler after he'd invaded Poland and Churchill declared war on Germany. It was our time then as far as Australia was concerned to join our side in the fighting and to go and fight overseas. Even prior to the war as the situation in Europe deteriorated my brother John was at Middle Head in the Coastal Battery training and my older brother Jim was at George's Heights learning all about a light anti-aircraft gun.

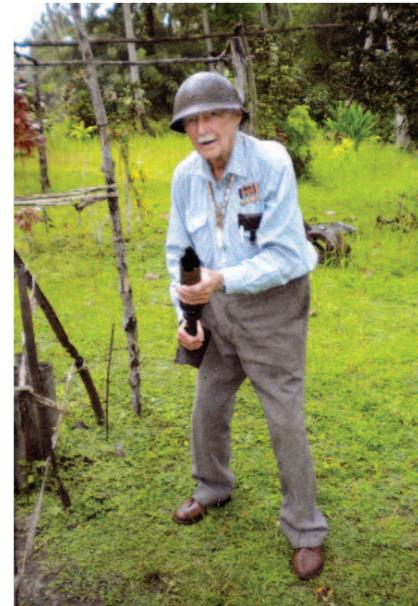
As soon as war was declared against Germany on the 3rd September 1939 they couldn't join their AIF units quick enough. One left for the Middle East on the *Orion* and the other in the *Queen Mary*. I wanted to get into an IAF unit as soon as I could. You had to be 21 but could join with permission from your parents but I had been prepared

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WALKING AMONGST FALLEN COMRADES AT PORT MORESBY.



SENT OVER



DICK POSING WITH A MORTAR BOMB.

to wait until I turned 21 and then to be called up.

After Japan had come into the war, all the beaches on the east coast of Australia were barb-wired. Our first job in the 17th was to barb-wire Manly Beach. We spent about a week doing that from North Steyne to Fairy Bower.

As soon as my birthday came around, I joined the AIF and was posted from Ingleburn Camp to the 2nd/12th Battalion, who'd fought in the Middle East, ending up at Tobruk, before being returned to Australia. So the unit I joined were well seasoned troops and it was great being amongst those chaps that had fought in the Middle East.

I remember one chap called Dusty Harris, and he thought that the fighting in the Middle East was bad enough, but with the jungle you couldn't see your enemy because they were all under cover. In the Middle East, he said, at least you saw where they were sometimes, unless a sandstorm came up, and obliterated the scenery.

We went up to New Guinea in an old coastal steamer called the *Katoomba*. It took us up to Milne Bay, at the bottom end of New Guinea, where there had been a battle when the Japanese landed there but were beaten back and forced to withdraw. The battalion I was there to join was on an island called Goodenough Island, off the east coast of Papua New Guinea in the Solomon Sea.

The battle for Milne Bay had finished about two months earlier by the time I arrived on the *Katoomba*. I then completed my training on Goodenough Island.

The Japanese were still on the Kokoda

Track but had been beaten back and forced to retreat to where they had first landed at Buna, Gona and Sanananda coastal villages. It was our job then to get up there and try to drive them out of those three places.

Just after Christmas 1942, three navy corvettes, the *Colac*, the *Broome*, and the *Warrego*, picked us up from Goodenough Island before dawn, and took us to a place called Oro Bay, a coastal area, on the coastal Solomon side of New Guinea, before Buna, and took us to the front. We would have been sitting ducks for any prowling Zero fighters — 700 troops in three small vessels. As soon as we arrived, we went up to the Buna staging area where the battalion assembled, ready for the attack at Buna, to clear the enemy from the coastal villages.

We took up positions on the edge of a very large coconut plantation called Giropa Point — it was about 3:30 in the morning. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible, in an extended line just lying in the Kunai grass — not sleeping, no way.

Our attack started at 8 am, and I was wounded at about three in the afternoon.

I thought I might have made it 'til the end of the day, and then suddenly — bang — this mortar bomb landed in front of me.

Luckily it was on the right hand side, so all of my left hand side's all right.

RICHARD, GRANDSON RICHARD AND PHIL HARROWELL AT THE BOMANA CEMETERY.



But the last wound is up in the shoulder, and I thought, that's not far from my right eye and I could have lost it from a piece of that mortar bomb. The main problem was my stomach where gangrene eventually developed and that was put me on the dangerously ill list. But I was very lucky and when I'm dressed, you wouldn't know there's anything wrong with me.

Behind us, before our attack, the 2nd 5th Field Artillery were firing over the top of us with 25 pounder guns. You'd hear the shells going over, whoosh, and bang, crump, in the middle of the coconut plantation. They kept this up for a good twenty minutes to half an hour. A lot of shells went over the top of us.

When they finished, a company of three inch mortars started landing their mortar bombs in this coconut plantation. So, by the time 8:00 came along, we thought the enemy mightn't be that big a problem. So we moved out with four General Stuart tanks in front of us and some Vickers machine guns firing into the plantation, in an extended line. And that was when things started to happen. Even though we thought that the mortars and the 25 pounder guns might've softened the blow, there were still a lot of Japanese there. The battle noise was terrific.

A lot of the enemy were up in the palm trees, snipers, and my close friend Dusty was killed almost next to me by a sniper. He was a chap who had been in Tobruk and fought the desert war. He came from Tasmania, from Launceston and he was a great friend. Our casualties of the day were 64 killed, and 126 wounded.

After I got hit by the mortar bomb I spent time in an American hospital called the 23rd Portable. The doctor in