

# How Lae battle was won

## Corporal tells of 55-mile trek to meet paratroops

"We felt very proud to be pioneers."

In these simple words a corporal sums up his unit's feelings about its part in the battle for Lae, when an A.I.F. Pioneer Battalion, after a 55-mile trek, crossed the Busu River and contacted paratroops on Lae aerodrome.

**H**IS is one of several letters, published in this week's "Letters From Our Boys," from men who have been in the fighting in New Guinea in the past few months.

"After a week's preparation, moving all our gear across two rivers by boat, getting our native carriers on the job, and in general attending to a thousand and one minor details, we were ready," writes Corporal I. F. Dodd to his wife in Gladsville, N.S.W.

"We moved up about four to five miles to our real starting point, and on my birthday, September 2, commenced the 55-mile march, which has had so much publicity.

"In reality, it was just as tough as it sounds. In open, flat country on good food, 55 miles in four days would have been just a hop, step, and a jump.

"But when you consider that it was for the most part along a rough jungle track which could only be negotiated in single file, through mud, swamps, and over hills up to 2000 feet high, and that during the four days we lived on one tin of 'bully' and one packet of biscuits per man per day, it is hardly to be wondered at that we were all glad when our goal was in sight.

"We carried anything between 60 to 80 pounds per man, and even though our loads are lightened a little by the way in which we carry them they become pretty heavy.

"Consider then the natives, carrying loads sometimes up to 100 pounds up hills at times nearly perpendicular, awkward loads, too, cases of rations and ammunition, huge coils of rope, and assault boats, just to mention a few items.

"We were now at the banks of the river where our job would really commence.

"Everyone was serious that night, silence, and no fires—all of us wondering just what was in store for

us the following day.

### Paratroops land

"AS a matter of fact, dawn broke just about the same as it always does, but the suspense was still there.

"Just about 10.30 a.m. the balloon went up.

"First of all came medium and heavy bombers, strafing and dropping their 'eggs' on the other side of the river. Above them flew a blanket of hundreds of fighters, then two planes swooped down, and laid the smoke screen.

"Just then—over our heads—came the transports with their loads of paratroops.

"I cannot do justice to the picture these men made. As they dropped from their planes their chutes opened, billowed, and floated gracefully to earth.

"Their landing was the signal for us to start our crossing.

"The river itself is about 800 yards across, most of it about waist-high, and, although it was running fairly strongly we were able to wade to a sandspit about 70 yards from the other side. This distance was covered by a pontoon bridge.

"Not long after we were all across and had made contact with the paratroops only to learn that our Nippon 'friends' had flown.



**JUNGLE DAMPER** being made by Sig. L. Davey, of Wangaratta, Vic. He uses crushed biscuits for flour, coconut shell for a mixing bowl, and a copy of *The Australian Women's Weekly* for a mixing board.



**LANDING FLAG** left behind by the Japanese at Nadaab airstrip is now used to signal our planes. Lieut. J. Sandell, of Middle Park, Vic., fixes the flag to an improvised flagpole. Dept. of Information photos.

"After crossing the river we had to travel five or six miles to the air strip, which was our first objective. More tramping through jungle and crossing countless streams until we reached the strip in time to dig in for the night.

"We were on the job at daybreak again, and in four hours the first message was sent to the outside world: 'You can bring the planes in.' In less than two hours, to the accompaniment of much cheering, the first of a steady stream of transports landed on our drome.

"It was not long before the troops

parts landed on our drome.

"It was not long before the troops were pouring in and moving forward to our final objective.

"What opposition the forward elements of our battalion struck were dealt with in a very efficient manner while our company itself received a message of congratulations and thanks for a magnificent job from the Commander-in-Chief.

"Practically overnight our battalion has made a name for itself, and I do not think I am being unjust to the other troops when I say that upon our shoulders rested the

success or failure of the whole show.

"When we heard the radio news

and read the papers we felt very proud to be pioneers.

"We have made a great hit with our Allies here, and if you are a pioneer you're the tops with them.

"And just quietly, we are honored to be able to call them friends. They are all grand fellows.

"When we first arrived here and things were rather bad. I have seen many of them share their last tin of rations or last cigarette with us.

**Driver J. Vincent to his cousin, Miss B. Edwards 13 Audrey St., Balgowlah, N.S.W.:**

"MY platoon and another were attached to an Air Transport Company, which has the job of dropping supplies to the boys up in the front lines.

"I had a go at the dropping, and it was a great experience, flying up over the mountains right up to the most forward area where our boys are getting into the Japs.

"We were able to look straight down on the place where the fighting was actually going on, though, of course, we could not see any, as it was thick jungle below.

"Some of the supplies are dropped by parachute. Others just come up in bags and dropped from the plane.

"When the pilot gets into position to drop, a green light comes on, and a buzzer sounds.

"While it is on you have to push and shove the bags for all you can, holding on with one hand.

"The door is open all the time, and as soon as you get rid of one heap you have to work like the dickens getting another one in position. It is sure a hectic half-hour."



**BAKING OVEN.** Markham Valley model, made from a dehydrated mutton tin. Pte. A. Cockburn, of Five Dock, N.S.W., places a three-minute damper in the oven.

**A gunner with a survey battery to a friend in Lidcombe, N.S.W.:**

**T**HE war has been going four years to-day, and it's also my birthday.

"I have had a good birthday present, the first letters for six weeks, a total of seventeen. Another present was a cake of soap.

"We are at a river for a few days, and have washed our clothes for the first time for a month, also had our first bath for a month.

"It may not sound much to you, but to me it is a new life, after being wet and cold all day for weeks on end and our clothes on the nose with mud and perspiration.

"We all looked like ghosts, as we had not had any sun for six weeks."

**W/O. J. H. ("Mick") McGowan to his mother, Mrs. J. H. McGowan, South Grafton, N.S.W.:**

**J**UST before the big surprise attack on the Japanese at Lae, my mate, George, two others, and I were to be a surprise party and a forward guard in case any of the Jap snakes were waiting for us on

Jap snakes were waiting for us on the way.

"There was a fairly good creek running right through the Japanese lines, so George and I decided to follow it, while our other two mates followed each side of the creek, in case we were surprised before we got to the enemy's huts and installations on the aerodrome.

"Just as we came to the end of the creek two big searchlights flashed on, and we had a narrow escape as they gleamed all round us. But luck was with us, and we proceeded on to our targets.

"Now we were right in the enemy's territory, and not a shot had been fired so far. So we picked out two big hangars where we could see aeroplanes by the light of the moon and let them have it—all we had, Mills bombs, machine-guns, everything, and that was the signal for the attack to begin.

"Bullets were whizzing everywhere. Just as we were withdrawing a Jap got me in both legs with a burst of machine-gun fire, and I am still in hospital.

"Doc says I'll never have the use of my legs again, but it was worth it, for next day the Japs were cleaned right out of our area and half of them were killed.

"I only wish I was back in battle-dress now, instead of lying here in hospital all day."