

SIXTH DIV CAV SALUTES THE SEVENTH DIV CAV

A SIXTH DIV CAV SALUTES THE SEVENTH DIV CAV (Cav Capers, November 1968) Its a long time ago now, but do you ever spare a thought for the days when our brother Regiment was the 7 Div Cav? I think that most of us (if we think of them at all) mentally say... "7 Div Cav, that sthe mob who meet at the Metropole Hotel every Anzac Day".....but have you ever considered what a really hard frustrating time this Regiment went through during the war years? Formed in May 1940 with members from NSW and Qld, the entire Regiment came together for the first time on board the "Queen Mary" on 27/12/1940. When they arrived at Dimra in Palestine, they had leather equipment and no vehicles. Then things began to look up for a while when Major S Morrison from 6 Div Cav arrived and endeavoured to form a special tank group from members of the 7 Dav. They were to use captured Italian M9 tanks. The group was about to take over these tanks from the Charing Cross dump at Cirenaica, but just at that time the Italians invaded Greece, and the tanks were sent to the Greek army, who were short of tanks. This resulted in a fairly long period of inactivity for the special tank group.....the waiting around period that every soldier knows, and this prompted the following piece of doggerel, which some poetic sould wrote up on the wall of the cook-house. "Lost, perhaps forgotten, in this whirling world of strife Banished to the desert, perhaps for b...y life We all love our little unit, Special Tanks I have in mind But as Wavell said to Blamey, we'll leave the behind We'll leave them in the desert, in the burning heat an dust, We'll make the b.....stds like it, let their b.....y transport rust One day many long years later, someone digging in the sand Came upon a square of paper, clutched in a dead man's hand. It was ragged, torn and rotten, and on it the ink had run, It read "Routine Orders, by SA Morrison". At long last a move was made to Helwon, and here in about Feb 1941, the 7 Cav Regt were fully equipped with light tanks and full war establishment equipment, and were awaiting further orders. 6 div Cav Regt were encamped nearby. At this time Rommel began his offensive and a Division Cavalry Regiment was required to move up the desert to play its part in the campaign. Thus the situation was: - 2 Cavalry REgiments..... one experienced in desert warfare but nequipped, and the other Regiment inexperienced, but fully equipped. On the toss of a coin, the 6th Divisional Cavalry Regiment took over the 7ths equipment, and went up the desert again. 7 Div Cav then accepted spotting duties on the Suez Canal and detached its gunners to the Royal Tank Corps gunnery school at Abbassia to be trained on British A9 and A11 tanks (later known as Christie Cruisers). This did not last long however, as events were happening thick and fast.... Greece fell, then Crete, and by early May, 7 Cav were sailing for the Island of Cyprus on the Polish ship "Warsaw", there to play a defensive role. Even though Cyprus was never actually invaded in force, the Island came in for its share of bombing raids, with the Germans flying from Rhondes to Syria (to support the Vichy Frency, by now engaged in the Syrian campaign) and back again. The Island therefore tended to be a target both coming and going. Later on back in Palestine, the Regt left for Teipoli in syria by road, again with no equipment, their tanks having been handed over to the 3rd Hussars at Nicosia (cyprus) on 16th august. Arriving on the 18th, they took over from 6 Div Cav, who in the meantime had been engaged in the Syrian campaign. Included in the takeover were six french Hotchkiss tanks. In late Novemeber the 7th Cav moved to Aleppo. Snow fell on December 6th 1941. At Aleppo the unit was quartered in German barracks, and from here some members volunteered for the Ski patrol, then being formed at the famous Cedars resort. The 18th Brigade relieved 7 Cav in Jan 1942, and the Regt moved back to the french barracks at Aleppo, where aftr a spell it was relieved by the 9th Div Cav Regt on 16th Jan. 7th Cav then moved back to Palestine, by this time the Japanese having entered the war, and 7th Cav eventually embarked on ships for new theatres of war. The 7th Cav was despatched to Java, but three days out of India was recalled, as the convoy preceeding it had landed its troopos just before the end of organised resistance in that area. It would appear that at this time the discussion between Mr Chruchill and Mr Curtin took place on the recall of Australian troops to support General Slim in Burma. However Mr Churchill bowed to Mr Curtins' demands, and the seventh Division was sent back to Australia. They arrived in Adelaide about the middle of March, and the 7th Cav went to a place called Sandy Creek, out of Gawler. The Regt was at this time equipped with British Bren gun carriers, and vehicles and these were all assembled at Sandy Creek. Then the Regiment was ordered to take its vehicles to Smithfield and hand them over prior to being re-equipped with Australian vehicles. The AFV's crews pleasure was dampened when it wa found that because of faulty engine components, the Australian bren gun carriers were immediately GOURNDED. The Regiment was left with no alternative but to continue training on Infantry lines, and lessons learned in Malaya were put into practice. The unit then moved to Glen Innes in NSW, then onto Landsborough in Queensland, and from here a special tank was given to the unit to see if the far north of Queensland could support and army, living off the land. It could as was ably demonstrated by the special "Cobb force", testing various items of standard army equipment en route, and maintaining radio contacts all the way, even from the tip of Cape York Peninsula, with the nubur 11 radio sets. In Sept 1942 the Regt embarked (with its still grounded carriers) on the SS "Katoomba", and sailed to New Guinea. Landing at Port Moresby, they then moved to Mitsubishi Lane, where the carriers were finally grounded and chained to trees, whilst the Regt took over an Infantry role, and dug defenisve positions for the expected attack on Port Moresby. When the threat to Moreseby had passed, the Regt moved to MacDonalds Farm at Ioloa. In December they emplaned for Poppendetta, and were in action on the Sanananda track on the 19 Dec 1942. This was the Regiments blackest day, many casualties being sustained, including the Commanding Officer. Due to poor intelligence reports from the Americans in the area, the track was supposed to be "lightly defended" but it was later found that at the time there wee upwards of 200,000 Japs in the area. After heavy fighting the Regiment was finally relieved by an american battalion on 25th Jan 1943. Of the 420 men who went into action, casualties were as follows: 54 killed in action, 1 died of wounds, 67 wounded, 3 died of Scrub Typhus, 243 Malaria. When the Regiment embarked for transport back to Australia, its full strength was 47. Back in Australia the Regiment was reformed from these men and elements of various independant companies. The old 7 Cav therefore became the 2/7 Australian divisional Cavalry (Commando) Regiment. This is only a very sketchy outline of the History of the 7 Div Cav,.. prompted by recently receiving a copy of "Short History of the 7 div Cav", written by Norm Grinyer, but I

think you will agree that this Regiment had to put up with a lot of disappointments and many frustrating and heart breaking episodes during their service, but nevertheless those that remain still manage to come up smiling when we see them occasionally, and as evidence their excellent small Assn paper "Bulletin". Therefore next time you meet a 7 Cav man, shake him by the hand and buy him a drink.Â Â Fred Wilkins