



MELBOURNE'S MARINES

The First Division at the MCG
1943



Alf Batchelder



THIS PLAQUE
RECORDS THE FACT THAT
THE FIRST REGIMENT
OF THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
WAS BASED AT THIS SPORTSGROUND
IN 1943 AND LOOKED ON IT
AS THEIR HOME

IT ALSO ACKNOWLEDGES WITH GRATEFUL
THANKS THE MAGNIFICENT HOSPITALITY
THEY RECEIVED FROM
THE PEOPLE OF MELBOURNE



UNVEILED ON 25TH OCTOBER 1977
BY
COLONEL MITCHELL PAGE, U.S.M.C.



MELBOURNE'S MARINES

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MCC Library Volunteer



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THE CANAL

*And when he gets to Heaven,
To St. Peter he will tell:
Another Marine reporting, Sir,
I've served my time in Hell.*

• • •

Washington was cold as President Franklin Roosevelt arrived on Capitol Hill to address Congress. His voice echoed America's mood of indignation:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of Japan ... I ask that the Congress declare that since the dastardly and unprovoked attack by Japan ... a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

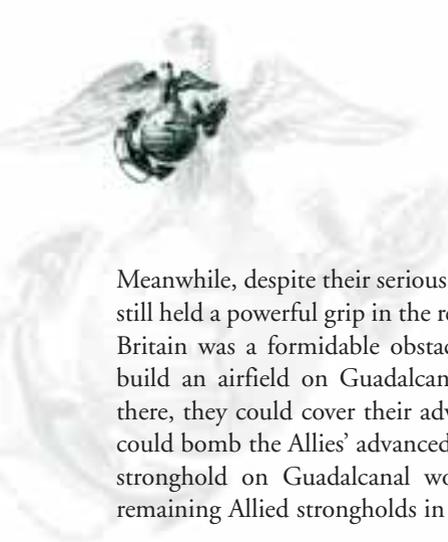
In Philadelphia, Jim Donahue had heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbour over the radio. He quit his job and enlisted in the Marines. Homer Curtis signed up a day later. So did Frank Harvey, who was celebrating his 21st birthday. Jim Wilson, a farm boy from Alabama, had to wait until he turned 21 on December 31 so that he could join without his parents' approval. In Kentucky, Fred Harris had no desire to wait that long. He was only 16 when he managed to enlist. Dr. Herbert Keyserling USN had been with the First since October, while Carl Seaberg had been a Marine since 1938.

The eager recruits and those already serving came together in the First Marine Division, which had been activated aboard the battleship USS *Texas* 11 months before. In the urgency that followed Pearl Harbour, they recognised that routine training tasks from scouring mess gear to stripping rifles in the dark made sense. As General Vandegrift put it:

Suddenly a great many men realised that they knew not a damn thing about war, that a few of us professionals did, and that their chances of returning safely would improve if they learned what we offered them.

Alexander Archer Vandegrift had been a Marine since 1909, with service in Nicaragua, Vera Cruz, Haiti and China. In January 1942, his men began battalion training, followed by regimental manoeuvres in February and March, with landings on the Atlantic coast. Each exercise showed improvement, but Vandegrift felt that there was still 'much to be desired.'¹ In May, he led the Division, the first Marine division ever to leave United States shores, to the South Pacific for further training and acclimatisation.





Meanwhile, despite their serious setbacks in the Coral Sea and at Midway, the Japanese still held a powerful grip in the region. Their presence in the Solomon Islands and New Britain was a formidable obstacle to any Allied advance northward. Their move to build an airfield on Guadalcanal presented a serious and immediate danger. From there, they could cover their advances in New Guinea to the west; to the south, they could bomb the Allies' advanced base at Espiritu Santo. In the longer term, a Japanese stronghold on Guadalcanal would threaten Australia and New Zealand, the last remaining Allied strongholds in the South Pacific.²

Admiral Ernest King therefore decided that Guadalcanal had to be taken. The landing would be the first major American offensive of the War and the country's first wartime amphibious operation since 1898. Since Major General Vandegrift had been told that his Marines would not see combat until early 1943, he was appalled to learn late in June that they would be facing the Japanese in five weeks. His pleas for a delay for further preparation resulted only in the offensive being postponed a week.³

On August 7, 1942, the First Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal. At his disposal, Vandegrift had a solid core of seasoned Marines, men who knew their weapons and tactics, supplemented by untried recruits with, at best, eight months in uniform. Given the crucial importance of the island, the clash with the more experienced Japanese could be nothing but bitter, leading the noted historian Samuel Eliot Morison to write that:

Guadalcanal is not a name but an emotion, recalling desperate fights in the air, furious night naval battles, frantic work at supply or construction, savage fighting in the sodden jungle, night broken by screaming bombs and deafening explosions of naval shells.⁴

By later standards, the landing on Guadalcanal was primitive. Moreover, the wharf labourers in New Zealand had gone on strike, forcing the Marines to attack with only 10 days' ammunition and other 'items actually required to live and fight.' Since the Marine Corps used army equipment and didn't get new issue until the last GI got his, the leathernecks went into action with weapons of World War I vintage.⁵ Jim Donahue's diary emphasised the difficulty of the struggle once ashore:

The jungle is thick as hell. The Fifth Regiment landed first and marched to the airport. We went straight through and then cut over to block the escape of the Japs. It took three days to go six miles. Japs took off, left surplus first day, which was done away with.

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The second day was murder. All along the way were discarded packs, rifles, mess gear and everything imaginable. The second night it rained like hell and the bugs were terrific. The Second Battalion (First Regiment) had reached the Lunga River ...

The third day we came back. The Japs had beat us in their retreat. We took up beach defence positions. We have been bombed every day by airplanes and a submarine shells us every now and then. Our foxholes are four foot deep. We go out on night patrols and it's plenty rugged. We lay in the foxholes for 13 to 14 hours at a clip and keep firing at the Japs in the jungle. As yet, there is no air support. The mosquitoes are very bad at night. The ants and flies bother us continually. The planes strafed the beach today. A big naval battle ensued the second day we were here, which resulted in our ship, the *Eliot*, being sunk. All of our belongings were lost.

As Sergeant James Hancock put it, the destruction of the ship meant that 'We had just the clothes on our back.'⁶ Private John Joseph was less sanguine about the loss of the *George F. Eliot*, which was 'hit by a Jap plane that crashed into it and later that next day had to be sunk as our Navy pulled out and left us high and dry.' The sighting of an enemy fleet leaving Rabaul led Admiral Fletcher to withdraw his three aircraft carriers. Deprived of air cover, Admiral Turner then sailed away, taking with him 'most of the landing force's supplies - its sandbags, howitzers, coastal defence guns, most of its ammunition, and all but eighteen spools of its barbed wire.' For the present, the Japanese held sway at sea.

During a rainstorm early on the morning of August 9, Lou Imfeld and his buddies on Guadalcanal were wakened by the apparent sound of thunder. Instead, they were witnessing a naval battle off Savo Island. In only 40 minutes, the Japanese sank four Allied cruisers: USS *Astoria*, USS *Quincy*, USS *Vincennes* and HMAS *Canberra*. Over a thousand American and Australian sailors died. One Marine, Bill Turner, explained the situation bluntly: 'This was a disaster for our campaign - the enemy controlled the surrounding waters for six to eight weeks after the loss.'⁷

Of those left clinging onto Guadalcanal, William Manchester wrote that:

The typical Marine on the island ran a fever, wore stinking dungarees, loathed twilight and wondered whether the US Navy still existed. He ate mouldy rations and quinine. He alternately shivered and sweated ... If he was on his way back to the line, he struggled through shattered, stunted coconut trees, scraggy bushes, and putrescent jungle, clawing up and down slopes ankle-deep in mud, hoping he could catch a few hours of uninterrupted sleep in his foxhole. Usually he was disappointed ...⁸



Memories of Guadalcanal from the collection of John Fialkowski.



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When Lyle Gibbons returned home to Lapeer, Michigan, late in 1943, he said that:

Few people back here can imagine what it would be like to go for four months and only take your shoes off two nights during that time; or wait for three weeks for a bath and then take one with all your clothes on in a creek. Or sleep on the ground for four months and many times in a foxhole half full of water; or eat rice and fish heads until you turned a bright green when you saw them; or shove dead Japs out of the way so you could find room to sit and open your field rations; or to smell the stinking, rotten odor that comes from the bodies of dead Japs – and smell that same odor day after day and night after night . . .

In recalling the harrowing routine of Guadalcanal, John Joseph emphasised the basic determination of the First Division:

The “Canal” was as bad as it has been written by many historians. We were equipped with World War I rifles and weapons, no supplies, no medical supplies and no air or sea support for a long time. We were constantly patrolling and the Japs were constantly landing troops out of our reach. Then they would attack and when they did they met the same fate regardless of what regiment, battalion or



PFC Ed Merva and Corporal Dick Lyons enjoy a break.

company they hit. We dug in and were determined they would not drive us out, and we weren't about to surrender. Regardless of what they threw at us we took it, subs laid off shore and shelled us as did cruisers. If a float plane flew over and strafed us we knew the cruisers were around. When the Jap Fleet laid off shore and bombarded us that was horrendous but we were still there.

Still there. But staying there would be far from easy. As Lyle Gibbons put it, 'The Marines were more than anxious to meet the Japs in a daylight battle but the opportunities were rare because the Japs were never around when the sun rose. They always picked a dark, rainy night to attack.' On August 21, at Alligator Creek, the Japanese began what became known as the Battle of the Tenaru River. Jim Donahue was on patrol in a party of 12:

About 3 a.m. hell broke loose and the Japs started to cross the stream. I want to forget all about it. My buddies being shot and blown apart ...

By winning this small action, the Marines gained a new perspective of their enemy. After Tenaru, they no longer regarded the Japanese soldier as 'invincible' but very mortal indeed.⁹ Nevertheless, Jim Donahue found that the Japanese threat remained very potent:

They bomb every day. Our fellows went out to the airport on working party. When air raid signal sounded, they went to a ravine. One of the personnel bombs landed and killed three, seriously wounded two. It was a horrible blow to us. Cameron was one of the best men in the Corps. I was going to visit him when we got home. The way our men are getting killed, I wonder if any of us will get back.

In the months after the landing, Donahue and his comrades became only too aware of the Japanese code of total resistance and defiance to the last man. The Americans were forced to adopt the same outlook and become as ruthless as their enemy. Prisoners were rarely taken. As a 20-year-old working in Philadelphia, Jim Donahue had no inkling that, within a year, his life would be so transformed that he would ask in his diary:

"How does it feel to kill someone?" You don't stop to think. There is a man intent on killing you so you kill or be killed.¹⁰

Donahue survived several close calls. After a bombing raid, he wrote:

Again, I can thank God for letting me live. We were digging three alternate gun positions in case the Japs break through. We were not given any condition. Suddenly, Fisher spotted 30 Jap bombers just about over us. We grabbed our helmets and ran like hell. Where we were running, I do not know, just trying to get out of reach of the bombers. It can't be done, because no one knows where

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they are going to bomb. Magno and I finally spotted a small foxhole and we dove in. Just then we heard them dropping. All the time I was repeating 'Hail, Mary.'

Another raid apparently brought death so near that the young man chose not to dwell on the details.

Seven Jap planes bombed us today killing six and wounding 43. I was very, very close. God was with me.

Jim Wilson came to a similar conclusion after a bullet hit his helmet. The shrapnel went into his back, where one piece remained, as it was too close to the spine to remove. After he was hit, Jim remained where he was for two hours, until the area was quiet. Earlier, a friend who tried to go back to 'safety' was shot - Wilson could never forget the sound of the bullets hitting the man's flesh.

Through September and October, despite all the efforts and sacrifices, the goal of taking the island from the Japanese remained. Jim Donahue described the start of another advance:

Lt. Benson called us all together. We have tried four assaults on Japs at Kokumbona and all have failed. They are dug in and planes have to get a direct hit to kill any. Artillery is the same way. The only way to get them is with mortars, so we are doubling up. We will take eight mortars. Every man will have a hand grenade. 2nd Bn is the spearhead and it must push and drive. The Japs have to be killed and we gotta do it. It will be a tough job. The reason given for failure of the last attempts was due to men stopping to bring their wounded buddies in. God be with us.¹¹



Remembering the Fallen:
a memorial service on
Guadalcanal in December 1942.

John Joseph wrote that eventually 'things began to go our way, more troops came to reinforce us and the fleet came out to fight. We got a lot more air support and it was a new ball game. Still a lot of fighting but we had more men, more firepower and more to eat.' By early December, Jim Donahue had hopes that a respite of some sort might be at hand. He wrote that 'Just when it is beginning to look like we will never get off this island, things take a turn for the better. There is a rumour that [General] Vandegrift said that the First Marine Division is through fighting in the Solomons ...' It seemed too good to be true, and pessimistically Jim concluded that 'We will probably go back to the lines soon. Good scuttlebutt never comes true, but the bad always comes true. I have never seen it fail.' Happily, he was wrong. John Joseph, by then a Private First Class, recalled that 'On December 8th we were pulled off the line and went into a rest area on the beach where we had a lagoon to bathe in - too many sharks in the bay. Then on the 23rd we went aboard the SS *President Johnson* which took us to the New Hebrides.'



The 5th Regiment prepares to evacuate Guadalcanal. John Tuzee and Dick Lyons are in the foreground.

After suffering 14,800 killed or missing and 9000 dying of wounds or disease, the Japanese abandoned the struggle for Guadalcanal on February 9, 1943. American losses totalled 1598 killed and 4709 wounded; 1152 Marines had died and 2799 were wounded. By the time the Army relieved the Marines, 95% of the original landing force was unfit for combat, mostly through malaria. For the Japanese, it was a staggering defeat. James Hancock said that they 'were overconfident and underestimated the unyielding determination' of the Marines: 'This was the top line of

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professional soldier in the Japanese army and they were so convinced that they could overrun us that they just threw all caution to the wind, which was very unfortunate for them.' Jim Wilson was particularly proud of the fact that the Marines had won their victory with antiquated equipment. Lieutenant George Codrea, aged 24 when he won the Navy Cross on Guadalcanal, explained the victory in terms of the calibre of the Marines. He said that the men in the ranks were 'spirited, courageous, they were absolutely tough and I don't think the Japanese met anything like that in World War II before.' As a leader, he found that 'All I had to do was point them where to go and they went. You didn't have to shove them. You just had to tell them what had to be done. Period.'¹² Major General Alexander Vandegrift, the Division commander, had the last word:

We struck at Guadalcanal to halt the advance of the Japanese. We did not know how strong he was, nor did we know his plans. We knew only that he was moving down the island chain and that he had to be stopped. We were as well-armed as time and our peacetime training allowed us to be. We needed combat to tell us how effective our training, our doctrines and our weapons had been. We tested them against the enemy, and we found that they worked. From the movement in 1942, the tide turned, and the Japanese never again advanced.

In the early days of the Guadalcanal campaign, the Japanese had also suffered a serious setback on the eastern tip of New Guinea, where the Australians thwarted their effort to move inland. Field Marshal Sir William Slim later observed that:

Australian troops had, at Milne Bay, inflicted on the Japanese their first undoubted defeat on land ... Some of us may forget that, of all the Allies, it was the Australians who first broke the spell of the invincibility of the Japanese Army.

Historian Peter Charlton has written that while Slim's tribute was 'true and generous', the Australian Governor-General 'did not go far enough to recognise the achievements of the men of the United States Marine Corps at Guadalcanal; achievements which helped the Australians at Milne Bay. Both actions contributed to Japan's first defeats ...'¹³

As the First Division sailed from Guadalcanal, they took with them the mental scars that would prevent Jim Donahue from discussing the war or even admitting that he had kept his diary. It would be close to half a century before Jim Wilson could speak of his experiences. Only when a grandchild asked him to visit his class did he break his silence - even then, his emotions overwhelmed him three times. In their four-month stand, the men of the First Division had displayed a gallantry in the face of overwhelming odds that ranks them with the most renowned warriors of history, from

the Greeks and Persians at Thermopylae, the bowmen of Agincourt to the men of Pozières and Dunkirk.¹⁴ Vandegrift proudly told them that 'at all times you have faced without flinching the worst that the enemy could do to us and have thrown back the best that he could send against us.' From this, the men left Guadalcanal with a spirit they had not possessed back in August. James Hancock said of this special bond 'You never have to speak about it, but it's there. It's a spirit of cohesion that binds a unit together and binds people together.'

While such closeness provided an inner strength, the bodies of the evacuated Marines were weak. Hancock recalled that, for much of the campaign, he had lived on 'two meals a day, eating mostly captured Japanese food, very wormy ... but very nutritious.' According to George Shaffer, 'The men were in really bad shape. I went from 145 pounds to 120, and that was about the same for everyone.' Many were even worse - Dave Powers, from Richmond, Virginia, lost 47 pounds, while one of his friends, weighing 240 pounds in his prime, dropped to 170.¹⁵ Indeed, some were so weak that they were unable to climb aboard the *President Johnson*:

We were so out of shape from malaria, etc that the first three guys up the cargo net to board the ship fell backwards into the landing boat. The Coast Guard coxswain in charge of the boat backed off and went to the ship's ladder and tied up. The officer of the deck waved him off and got the royal finger salute and up the gangway we came. One look at us was enough for him to change his mind. We were in bleached-out faded two-piece Marine Corps combat fatigues, torn, frayed, and wild-eyed. He was lucky he didn't find himself tossed overboard.¹⁶

The ship sailed the following morning. For John Joseph, his trip aboard the *President Johnson* does not bring happy memories:

It was a converted passenger liner but a scum bucket. On Christmas when we were in line for chow we had to pass the galley. The cooks were pulling huge roasted turkeys out of the oven. Not for us - officers and ship's crew. We got good old canned corn beef. All hell broke out and the Colonel promised us that we would get a holiday dinner when we got to Espiritu Santo. Lt. Colonel Pollack was a great leader and we respected his word and sure enough on the second day we did have a turkey dinner and two cans of beer per man.

Herbert Keyserling was more fortunate. He left Guadalcanal aboard the *West Point*, which had only been completed in 1940 as the transatlantic liner *America*. He recalled that 'between a hot shower and a meal topped off with ice cream, I was in "hog

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heaven'. For those sailing aboard the *American Legion*, there was a lucky escape - Sergeant Fred Guarino, then aged 22, tells how 'a Jap sub fired two torpedoes at the ship but both missed ...'

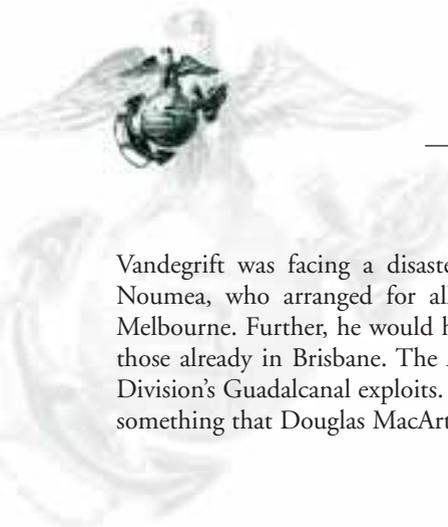
According to George Shaffer, the 5th Regiment of the First Division left Guadalcanal 'a couple of weeks ahead of us and went to Brisbane where we were all to stay'. The early arrivals were sent to Camp Cable, but before long 'most of them were in the hospital. They were ... dropping in the streets, malaria was taking over the whole unit.'¹⁷ Marines on ships arriving later did not even go ashore. From the decks of the *Lurline*, Carl Seaberg's main memory of Brisbane was of a stretch of water that was 'almost white with thousands of large Man-of-War jellyfish' while Shaffer's only experience of the city came 'one night when a few of us went down the anchor rope.' He felt that 'Brisbane really didn't look like much from the little we saw.'

Carl Seaberg claims that part of the problem in Brisbane was that 'The US Army, because of its love for the Marines, planned to place us in a very wet swampy area.' Some 45 miles from town, with limited transport, it was so bad that some remarked 'Hell, if this is the best they can do, why didn't they leave us on Guadalcanal.' Fortunately, '...someone got smart as the area would have killed the Canal vets.'¹⁸

Indeed it would have. On December 21, Major General Vandegrift was told that his men were 'smack in the centre of an anopheline mosquito area - the same malaria-bearing breed we encountered on Guadalcanal ... The troops would infect the mosquitoes which would in turn reinfect the troops, a vicious circle which offered no local solution.' Vandegrift sought General Douglas MacArthur's permission to move his men 'to a new location'. Officers sent to Sydney 'with orders to travel on ... if necessary to find the right place' recommended 'the Melbourne area'. Possibly, another factor shaped the search for new quarters - it has been suggested that, after some 'wanton destruction' at Camp Cable, the Marines were moved from Brisbane 'to keep them from tangling with returning and arriving US Army units ...'¹⁹

On January 1, in Port Moresby, MacArthur authorised the First Division to move, but that was all:

No transportation facilities are available in the Southwest Pacific Area to effect the move which will have to be carried out by shipping made available from the South Pacific area ... the already overburdened railroad facilities of Australia cannot cope with such a movement without jeopardising operations upon which our forces are now engaged.



Vandegrift was facing a disaster with his men. He turned to Admiral Halsey in Noumea, who arranged for all troops sailing from Guadalcanal to disembark in Melbourne. Further, he would have America's largest troopship, the *West Point*, move those already in Brisbane. The Admiral explained his action as a tribute to the First Division's Guadalcanal exploits. Nevertheless, 'Bull' Halsey would have relished doing something that Douglas MacArthur had denied was possible.²⁰

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In 1939, in the first weeks of World War II, the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had expressed the view that sporting events should continue to be held:

The man to display fortitude was he who preserved as far as he could his all round daily life in time of uncertainty. Australians must not become victims of obsession, or give themselves up to any form of hysteria, however popular ... Thank God there is plenty of room in our life for laughter and games, as well as for serious things.²¹

Throughout 1940 and 1941, therefore, the Melbourne Cricket Ground continued to host first-class cricket and League football. In addition, the Ground was used for a number of war-related events. In February 1940, there was a cricket match between the Second AIF and the Third Division. In August, a VFL Patriotic Premiership was held, with all proceeds going to patriotic funds. The contest, billed as the first time that all twelve teams would appear on the one ground on the same day, was won by St Kilda. Three months later, Prime Minister Menzies performed the Opening Ceremony of the First Athletic Championships of the Australian Fighting Forces, with the Army's Lieutenant Don Bradman making the Declaration of Loyalty. In August 1941, the VFL conducted another Patriotic Carnival, but by then it was becoming harder for Australians to escape the seriousness of the war and its growing impact on their existence. The Melbourne Cricket Club's Roll of Honour listed nine names, with several other members 'reported either as missing or prisoners of war.'²²

In October, the Menzies Government collapsed. For some time, it had been divided and unable to provide effective leadership. Over the next four months, the new Prime Minister, John Curtin, faced the worst series of crises in Australian history: after its encounter with the German raider *Kormoran*, HMAS *Sydney* was lost on November 19; the Japanese attacked Malaya and Pearl Harbour in December; with the fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, the AIF Eighth Division was lost; four days later, Darwin was bombed. These events confronted Australia with two nightmares it had

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long dreaded: a hostile Asian power was on the march, and the defence shield which Britain had long provided was now in tatters.

In the midst of these disasters, John Curtin outlined in the Melbourne *Herald* policies which were to shape profoundly the immediate history of the Melbourne Cricket Ground:

Without inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.

Then, in February 1942, Curtin announced the conscription of all of the nation's resources, human and material, for 'the purposes of war' and introduced regulations which enabled the government 'to require the use of any property in the Commonwealth for the prosecution of the war.'²³

Even before Curtin spoke, officers from Military Headquarters inspected the Melbourne Cricket Ground with a view to using the stands on the northern sides to house troops. After MCC secretary Vernon Ransford contacted the Ground's Trustees on the subject, it seemed that the Army might reconsider its plans. Late on the afternoon of April 2, Ransford was stunned to receive notice that 'the whole of the Ground was required for Commonwealth purposes as from the 7th day of April 1942' and that the MCG was to be handed over to the Port Quartermaster, United States Armed Forces in Australia.²⁴

Since February 2, 1942, units of the United States Army Air Forces had been stationed in Melbourne. Some of these were now quartered at the Ground, which they re-named 'Camp Murphy', but they were gone by November 7, when the Ground was declared to be the home of RAAF's No.1 School of Technical Training. However, the 1500 personnel did not move in until early December.²⁵ Possibly the intervening period was used to make some necessary alterations. The Department of the Interior erected nine hot showers in the ground level lavatory at the western end of the Pavilion. Sadly, this luxury did not extend to the Old Public Stand, where 21 cold showers were installed, with another 12 in the Outer Concrete Stand. Fortunately for those facing these torrents of cold water, the RAAF vacated the MCG on January 5, 1943, 'as it was required for occupation by US forces.'²⁶

The first wave of Marines moved in a day later. The Ground became a hive of activity. Vernon Ransford reported that:



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A Ground at war: a RAAF Beaufighter over the MCG and its boarded-up stands in 1944.

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Additional works to provide all necessary sleeping and messing accommodation for 3600 troops were commenced on Tuesday 5th ... and such rapid progress was made that most of the works were completed by Saturday 16th ...

The secretary's outline of these works provides the most comprehensive description of the wartime Melbourne Cricket Ground. All the seats were removed from the lower tier of the Grey Smith Stand, and alternate rows from the top tier, with double and triple-decker metal bunks being screwed to the wooden floors. These provided accommodation for 600. The entire area had to be wired to provide electricity. Tarpaulins enclosed the front of the Stand. One of the players' dressing rooms was used by some sergeants as sleeping quarters, with the other being used as one of several Quartermasters Stores. Administrative Offices were located in the Tea Rooms, while the Bar became a Wet Canteen for NCO's.

In the Pavilion, the Camp Commandant took over the VCA Room as an office. The rest of the building was used for messing and sleeping accommodation for the officers. At various points, guards prevented 'all but officers from going into the Pavilion', though other ranks were permitted to use the bar on the ground floor as a Wet Canteen. Mercifully, they were given access to the nine hot showers installed during the RAAF's occupation.

At the western end of the Old Public Stand, over the Tea Room in the Members Reserve, the seats were removed to accommodate 125 men. Curiously, only the western side and one tier of this stand were blocked off to the top. Four other tiers were blocked only to the 'height of the pillar collar', probably to ensure that the inmates had plenty of ventilation. The Tea Room was a Dry Canteen which, Ransford noted, was an 'exceedingly busy section of camp'.

Further east in the Old Public Stand, the RAAF's cold showers remained. Ten were in the ladies' retiring room and the latrine near the Gymnasium held the others. Each section contained ablution tables. The Gymnasium was used by the dentist and medical officers, while the public Tea Room served 'as a reading and recreation room in charge of Padre Olton' to whom Ransford loaned an old piano and 81 wooden chairs. According to the Secretary, this room was 'always full'.

On the lower level of the Southern Stand, officially termed the 'New Concrete Outer Stand', double-decker bunks accommodated 1000 men 'between Bays 1 and 2 to 7 and portion of 8.' (At that time, the numbering system for Bays in the Southern Stand began with Bay 1 at the eastern end.) The front of the lower level was enclosed with asbestos cement sheeting, which was also used to block the back to a height of six feet. Bays 8 to 15 provided messing accommodation for 1600. Asbestos cement sheeting enclosed this area in the front, 'with 15-inch fly wire' at the top. In the upper level,

Bays 2 to 16 provided sleeping accommodation for 2000 'by means of double-decker bunks (metal) placed same way as seats. These bunks have 2 short and 2 long legs to provide for concrete rises and are clipped on to the seats by two brackets. The seats are not damaged in any way.' Four rows from the front, the upper tier was blocked with 'asbestos cement sheeting 16 ft. high ...' At the back, masonite sheets, four feet high, were tied to the woven wire which covered the openings.

Three kitchens were built off the roadway under the Southern Stand. One was equipped with gas, but the others used fuel. While these were being constructed, cooking was done 'by means of field kitchens located in the area at the back of the scoreboard.' Also in that section were two mess rooms, 'fly-wired with seating accommodation for 400 men', as well as two cool rooms and refrigerated store rooms. In various sections of the latrines, 64 hot and cold showers were installed, along with several ablution tables fitted with mirrors for shaving. A 3000-gallon hot water boiler, manned by three certificated AIF men, provided 'ample' hot water for the officers in the Pavilion.

Vernon Ransford, always at pains to protect the Melbourne Cricket Club's interests and assets, was pleased that all the alterations were achieved with little real damage. His concerns were shared by the Camp Commandant, Lieutenant Merles, whom he felt 'has been most helpful in many ways and I feel certain that MCC interests will be safeguarded whilst he is at the Ground.' Nevertheless, an air of pessimism tinged the secretary's outlook:

In view of the large amount spent in these additions and alterations, it is quite possible that the Ground will be used by the Authorities for some time. I understand that the US people are desirous at present of using it as a rest Camp for troops from the front line.²⁷

Gerald Healy was among the first Marines housed at the Ground. A member of the 3rd Battalion's First Platoon of Regimental Weapons Company, he recalled his welcome in Melbourne as 'a fantastic event'. From the pier, the Marines boarded a train for the trip to the MCG. Somewhere along the route, 'people put tables across the tracks, which stopped the train and we partook of wonderful cold beer.' Everywhere, there were 'people hollering, school kids hollering, and most of the people saying "You Marines are now 'Our Boys'.'" ²⁸ A week later, John Joseph and his companions in the 2nd Battalion disembarked from the *Tryon*, to be met with equal enthusiasm at Richmond:

A small Australian band played music on the pier ... We boarded trains and after a brief ride got off and formed on the platform of an elevated station across from a factory that had hundreds of girls hanging out the windows waving and cheering. We in turn enjoyed it very much, to say the least.

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Carl Seaberg arrived with much less spectacle:

After unloading in Melbourne, those of us going to the 1st Service Battalion were taken by truck to the Melbourne Cricket Club Ground.

Scuttlebutt suggested that the units lodged at the Ground were there because they were led by the First Division's senior regimental commander. Colonel Clifton B. Cates was a World War I veteran who commanded Combat Group B, to which the First Regiment of the Division belonged. George Shaffer, who 'rode shotgun in his Jeep' on Guadalcanal, describes Cates as 'a General MacArthur type ... an outstanding officer and a great man ... brilliant and fearless.' It was a common judgment. In March, Clifton Cates returned to the United States. As a Brigadier General, he led the Fourth Division at Iwo Jima; then, ahead of 39 other generals, was appointed Commandant of the US Marine Corps. In January 1943, Shaffer and Dick Lyons shared the impression that Cates 'had first pick of quarters for his men.' Other regiments went to Ballarat and to Balcombe, where the Division was presented with a Presidential Citation for its deeds on Guadalcanal.

Whatever the particular reason for their presence, 1650 Marines arrived at the Melbourne Cricket Ground at 3.15 on the afternoon of January 6, 1943. Vernon Ransford reported that they 'immediately took up their quarters.' Within three weeks, the MCG held 3600 troops, including 184 officers.²⁹

In Brisbane, an officer had described the men as 'ragged, still dirty, thin, anaemic, sallow, listless.' Fred Guarino explained that Guadalcanal had left the men 'undernourished and dehydrated.' In Melbourne, all of these problems remained. A British colonel who watched the 7th Regiment arrive said that, in the Middle East, he had never seen men 'as tired or as worn'. The doctor in charge of the US Army's 4th General Hospital told General Vandegrift 'Had I room I would suggest we send this whole regiment to the hospital. Lord knows they look as if they need it.'³⁰

The worst cases, of course, were sent to the 4th General Hospital (now the Royal Melbourne). John Joseph spent 12 weeks there with hepatitis and ulcers on his legs that left permanent 'scars, indentations'. In Dave Powers' company, only four out of 144 did not contract malaria. Severe cases like Jim Wilson, Dick Lyons and Frank Harvey went to hospital, but others, eager to enjoy Melbourne, hid their symptoms. Robert Leckie recalled that it was not uncommon 'to see ... a hardy sensualist huddling against a lamp-post, face whitened, teeth chattering, tunic clasped tightly about his shivering body looking for a taxicab to take him back to camp and a cot in sick bay.' (In many

cases, locals unfamiliar with the tropical disease concluded that the victims were drunk, though Jim Wilson admits that, at times, their conclusion was correct.) As late as April 1943, 3000 First Division men were still suffering from malaria.³¹ For Jerry McConnell, full recovery took years. He was shipped home in September 1943 after several spells in the 4th General, but 'attacks kept coming back and for several more months I was in hospitals in California and then transferred to a hospital in New York, closer to my home in the East.' His malaria 'plagued' him for 'about ten more years, but with less frequency and severity each passing year.'

In Melbourne, another problem emerged. Dick Lyons recalled that 'Each man was issued nine Australian wool blankets. If I remember correctly, we used five blankets as a mattress and the others for cover.' However, John Joseph says that 'a lot of men got scabies after receiving them due to some not being properly fumigated.'

Once the Division was settled in, Major General Vandegrift was ordered back to Washington. On the way, he visited MacArthur in Port Moresby, apprehensively expecting some unpleasantness over his appeal to Halsey in getting the First to Melbourne. Instead, MacArthur surprised him with a smile and outstretched hand:

'Vandegrift, what are you going back to the States for? To become President?' I looked him in the eye. 'General, I thought maybe you would know why I was going back.' He recoiled slightly, then recovered. 'No,' he said, 'you were dead right in taking your division to Melbourne.'³²

In Washington, Vandegrift briefed his superiors about the lessons of Guadalcanal. On February 4, he was summoned to the White House, where President Roosevelt placed the Medal of Honor around his neck, for his 'tenacity, courage and resourcefulness' on Guadalcanal and for 'the gallant fighting spirit of the men under his inspiring leadership'.

Apart from 'wonderful', the most common word used by veterans about the first days in Melbourne is 'Heaven'. Jim Wilson felt that, after the tribulations of Guadalcanal, living in the 'bleachers' of the Southern Stand, with its exposed ends, was 'Heaven'. Describing the lack of privacy there, John Joseph said that the double-decker bunks produced 'a real close knit atmosphere, as you could be sound asleep and someone with a few too many would lurch into you and wake you up, ... but after Pistol Pete, "Washing Machine Charlie", the Jap fleet, it was Heaven.' [*Pistol Pete was a Japanese 150mm howitzer; Washing Machine Charlie was a marauding Japanese aircraft.*] Al Cook varied the theme, describing the 'great roofed-over seating section' that housed the 3rd Battalion as 'paradise'. Such views offer a surprising contrast to those of the Royal

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Australian Air Force personnel who later used the MCG. Almost to a man, they speak first and foremost of the bitter cold. Curiously, the Melbourne chill figures less prominently in Marine recollections. To Carl Seaberg, though, it was a powerful memory:

I remember Melbourne being cold and very damp. I wore long underwear, Aussie wool sweaters and six or eight wool blankets on my cot. I would crawl in bed (we had no heat) and shiver for 15 minutes until the bed dried out ... it was like crawling into a tub of ice water.

The MCG's image as 'Heaven' was undoubtedly aided by the absence of tight discipline in the first weeks. John Joseph says that:

The first month was sort of open gate policy. The bed was there, food and lodging but little or no obligation to stand muster. Whoever was in stood roll call. Forty guys would 'Yo, here, yes, present' to any name called. 'All present and accounted for, sir'.

Then there were the extensive facilities - the Ground was 'all set up with plywood shielding our living quarters from the elements ... The shower and toilet facilities were great and mess halls were plentiful and even the Brig was big ... all the conveniences needed in one compact area.'³³ The Brig was not without inhabitants. According to Al Cook:

The clank of ankle-chained prisoners marching lockstep to chow became familiar music in the lower halls three times a day. The same chains heard at shower times attracted little attention. Bread and water and solitary confinement men took their rations in their cells.

On the first few nights in Melbourne, the 'wet' canteen under the Pavilion, 'a large room with tables and a long bar', was 'jammed'. Perhaps this was the canteen known as the 'Slop Shoot'. Some enjoyed their bottled liquor outside in Yarra Park. One night, Robert Leckie was caught without an opener. His female companion had clearly known such a predicament before. Saying 'Don't fret, Yank, here's a go', she removed the bottletop with her teeth.³⁴ George Shaffer points out that not all of the drinking involved liquor:

Something of a surprise was experienced by the locals who were serving the drinks that first day. A large percentage of the Marines in the 1st Regiment were still in their teens. We had not had any fresh milk in six months or so. Those fellows poured down milk in astonishing quantities. It was probably the thing that started us on the road to recovering our weight and strength and health.

Lou Imfeld agrees: 'Although I admit to a fair amount of drinking there, nothing tasted better than the first quart of milk that I finished in one sitting.' Some nights, the latrines were unusually well-patronised - dice games played there saw 'thousands of pounds Australian' change hands between midnight and dawn. In the well-stocked Post Exchange, the 'PX', the Marines 'learned about Cadbury's chocolate and how to handle Australian money ...' Next to it was the Infirmary, 'a sterile spot to be avoided at all costs'. Actually, it had a variety of names, including the 'Clap Shack', which apparently had nothing to do with applause.³⁵



At the MCG, it was evident that the cohesive spirit of the Marines remained strong. On the way from Guadalcanal to Brisbane, Colonel Bill Twining, the Division Operations Officer, had designed a First Division shoulder patch, with the stars of the Southern Cross on a blue diamond. In the middle, a red '1' bore the word that forever defined the First Division: 'Guadalcanal'. In February, with the full support of General Vandegrift, the patches went on sale to the men. As the Division re-equipped, it was feared that, after the hardships of 'the Canal' there would be a shortage of metal uniform emblems, the famous globe and fouled anchor of the Marine Corps. A quartermaster officer reported that 'To our great pride, we discovered that, although many of the men lost nearly every other personal possession, they had kept their emblems.'³⁶ After a couple of months at the MCG, John Joseph saw another instance of the Division's group spirit. At the main gate, he encountered Lieutenant Commander Gallagher, the Navy chaplain whom he had met when sailing from Guadalcanal on the *Tryon*. Father Gallagher had requested a transfer 'to the 2nd Battalion after he heard that there was only one chaplain for the whole Regiment. He left a clean ship to come and serve with us in the infantry, a true hero in our eyes or just as nuts as we were ...'

The issuing of new uniforms was an important step in the Marines' rehabilitation. John Joseph says that initially they received a makeshift uniform, an Australian Army "Ike" style jacket, with green uniform trousers. Then, once 'we polished and dyed our boondockers we were ready to see the town.' Sightseeing was not the only item on the agenda. After the men were paid and issued with ration books, Joseph adds, 'the beautiful girls of Melbourne beckoned ...'

Downtown was only a short trip away. Those on official liberty left the Ground through the front entrance. At the back of the Southern Stand, a gate near Bay 19

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enabled others to slip out.³⁷ Some of the favourite ports of call were close to the station and the tram stops. Fred Guarino enjoyed the 'good food and good beer' that helped rebuild his strength:

I remember Young and Jackson's, and another pub called Hosie's ... The pubs closed at 6 p.m., so we would go to dinner and you could drink more beer until 8 p.m. A restaurant called Ricco's was one of our favourites.

Frank Harvey and his platoon had their evening meal 'almost every night' at Luigi's Restaurant. Carl Seaberg found 'a nice hotel restaurant' which served 'very nice pancakes with powdered sugar and fresh lemon.' Adding to his delight was the availability of 'steak and eggs for breakfast'. The Americans were less enthusiastic about mutton, which they were frequently served at the Ground and almost everywhere else. George Shaffer explained their problem:

Now, we do not eat mutton in this country. We have lamb chops, leg of lamb, rack of lamb ... but no mutton. One would think none of the lambs ever grow up. We have lots of sheep - but no mutton ... By the time we got the mutton on our tray, it was something less than warm. If one had the nerve to try it, it tasted very much like taking a bite out of a bar of soap.

Al Cook found the mutton 'good and plentiful', confessing that 'we slowly grew fat on it.' Nevertheless, he was thrilled when a Red Cross rehabilitation program sent him to 'a vast, very posh, hotel-like structure with attached golf course' at Mt Martha for 12 days:

The adventure cost me a pound and several shillings for lodging and meals, including silver, white linen tablecloths and napkins and salt and pepper. Also, one of those rare positive negatives: a blessed absence of coarse mutton. Sweet civilization. How I loved it.

Away from the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the Marines found a city that was only too willing to welcome them. They went roller skating at Wirth's in St Kilda Road. For 'tuppence', they took tram rides to St Kilda, where they went to the beach or Luna Park or skated on the ice at the St Moritz. They met their dates 'under the clocks' at Flinders Street and saw the kangaroos and koalas at the Zoo. At Young and Jackson's, they drank in front of the painting of Chloe. They wandered the banks of 'the so-called "Dirty Yarra"' and strolled through the gardens near the Shrine. At the Trocadero, they danced to the big-band music of Frank Coughlan. At the Palm Grove, Bob Gibson's orchestra played similar tunes, alternating with the First Marine Division Band.³⁸ A real treat



Frank Near and his buddy
Messner on the Yarra Bank.

came in September when Artie Shaw's Navy Band arrived to entertain American servicemen. John Joseph, 'a big city kid' from Massachusetts, was impressed by 'going to some of the most beautiful movie theatres I have ever seen.' One Sunday, outside St Patrick's, he met a controversial figure from World War I: Archbishop Daniel Mannix. At a Presbyterian church 'downtown', Carl Seaberg noticed that 'halfway through the service my feet got very hot as I had them on a hot heating pipe.' One pair of Marines frequented another place of worship at Flemington, where they backed 'six or seven horses in every race.' Once, they did exceptionally well, earning £697 from a five-shilling bet.

Collectively, Melbourne expressed its enthusiasm for the First Division when they paraded through the streets. John Joseph claimed that:

No outfit ... ever experienced the welcome we got as we paraded not once but three times through the streets of Melbourne ... New York City couldn't compare with them. We had it all, confetti, ticker tape, wall to wall cheering people, Australian fighter planes overhead and our division band leading the way with my Company, G Co., 2nd Battalion first in line and Gunnery Sgt. Red Smythe in the colour guard carrying the American Flag and Sgt. Spillane as a colour guard. We really stood tall!

On an individual basis, Robert Barton felt that Melburnians were 'the most friendly, generous and loving people I have ever encountered', while Homer Curtis said that 'The people were wonderful to us, the next best thing to being home.' Joe Rosato recalled that 'every day at 1630 we were out on liberty and at each gate of the MCG people were vieing (sic) to take us to dinner or home or just to talk with.' He was welcomed by a family in Northcote, 'good, solid people'. It was said that Dick Lyons 'probably knew more of Melbourne's 400 by their first names than any other Yank there.' Mrs Marie Buesst agreed to mind until after the war an oil seascape that he bought at the Athenaeum Gallery.

At the Brighton Beach Baths, 15-year-old Pam Speechley invited George Shaffer back to her home in New Street to meet her mother:

Her mother was a wonderful and gracious person. Pam had a brother named David Speechley. Shortly before we met, David, who was a pilot in the Australian Air Force, was killed over Germany. They were feeling his loss greatly. I continued to make trips to Brighton Beach, and as the weather cooled, Mrs. Speechley



On February 22, 1943, members of the 1st Regiment's Headquarters and Service Company pass the Melbourne Town Hall saluting base during the First Division's parade to celebrate George Washington's Birthday. *Australian War Memorial Negative Number 029395.*



Large crowds turned out to show their enthusiasm for the First Division in the parade for George Washington's Birthday. *Australian War Memorial Negative Number 043644.*



George Shaffer at the home of the Speechley family in New Street, Brighton. In front of a rhubarb crop, Mrs Speechley tries unsuccessfully to conceal her apron behind George's back.



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invited me to stay overnight and occupy David's room. She would arise early and light the heater and warm the water for me to shower. She would make tea and scones, and I would run to the station to catch the early train.

Shaffer was not the only Marine to be welcomed by the Speechleys. The family still enjoy the tale of one young man agitatedly summoning Pam Speechley to the dining room, 'where there was a sponge cake sitting on the auto tray in readiness. He pointed to the icing and said he guessed some flies must have got stuck in the icing and died there.' Ignorant of the delights of passionfruit icing, he urged Pam to remove the 'flies' before her mother saw them. 'Scotty' Henderson loved sitting in front of the Speechleys' fire-place, poking at the embers. Mrs Gwen Speechley asked 'Is it very cold where you sleep?' It certainly was - the unfortunate Henderson had 'the very top bunk at the very top of the Grey Smith Stand.'

Carl Seaberg met 'some wonderful people in the St.Kilda area' whose son was serving in Africa. They invited him to their home, where he found, to his delight, that 'they had a fireplace in each room and burned coal briquettes. Also the hot water was supplied by a small heater heated by burning small pieces of wood.'

Dr Herbert Keyserling was invited 'to the home of Dr Leon Jona for the Passover Supper along with two of the other Jewish doctors.' He also spent an enjoyable afternoon of tennis at the home of Mr Lindsay Mildred:

I had to buy a racquet and tennis shoes, but that was a great investment as it turned out to be 'mixed doubles' with two charming young ladies provided by our host. They were Barbara Hayden-Smith and her sister Jean, both reasonably good players. It was a nice diversion.

John Joseph made 'many wonderful contacts with great families' spending weekends in Kew at the home of Dr Thomas Spring. Others invited him to the races and home to dinner. Several Marines found their way into country Victoria. At Kangaroo Lake, near Swan Hill, Lyle Gibbons and Lloyd Trinks went swimming, fishing and duck-shooting with the Argyle family. Ian Argyle recalls that some of the Americans had trouble pronouncing names of aboriginal origin, with 'Manangatang' proving too difficult for most.



John Fialkowski contemplates the joys of cycling.



The men of G Company of the 1st Regiment's 2nd





...d Battalion outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground.





Happy times at Kangaroo Lake.

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Wherever they roamed, most Marines echoed John Joseph's conclusion: their hosts were all 'real wonderful people who opened their homes and treated us as family.'

Some enjoyed the tastes of home life so much that those possessing what Jim Wilson termed 'private means' rented flats 'where they entertained girls and enjoyed booze.' The warmth of their reception in Melbourne gave the city a special and enduring significance to the Marines. As a chaplain explained:

Melbourne was all the men of the Division hoped it would be, and more. It became to them the symbolic civilian environment, and it remained so until the end of the war simply because they were never again to see, at least until the peace treaty was signed, anything like what they'd call civilization.³⁹

As Robert Barton points out, the sentimental attachment to Melbourne owed much to the fact that 'a good share of us were still teenagers (I was 18) and thus experienced our first love affair.' Living at the MCG meant that 'one could be in the heart of the city in about ten minutes. In the city were the pubs, girls, restaurants, girls, shopping, girls, etc.' Joe Rosato enjoyed strolling along the Yarra Bank 'with whichever young lady who would even glance at me.' One of the families that John Joseph met 'had two beautiful daughters':

A buddy of mine "Skip" Spies got me to double-date for the First Regiment Ball. He was dating Marcia, so I dated Prudence her sister. Skip came down with malaria and couldn't go but I did and we had a great time. The versatile Division Band performed and it was a gala affair, Grand March and all.

One very youthful Marine knew Margaret from Mordialloc, who 'had everything Chloe had ... It wasn't the best kept secret. She filled in all the girls she worked with ...'

After a while, a more settled style marked the Marines' relationships with Melbourne girls. One captain noted that:

... they had chosen their favourite girls and some had begun to 'go steady'. Their money was running out, liberty hours were stricter, and through a combination of necessity and desire, they spent quiet evenings at their girls' houses and took



Robert Barton

longer and more frequent walks in the parks and on the beaches. There were many engagements and a few marriages.⁴⁰

After the war, Ed Barker returned to marry Peggy Tudor, 'a lovely girl known as the Mannequin of the Microphone, the Girl with the Golden Voice'.⁴¹ Two Australian Red Cross girls adapted Bob Hope's 'Thanks for the Memory' to capture the romantic mood of the times:

*Thanks for the memory
Of castles in the air
Fingers in my hair
Of Collins Street
And kisses sweet
And those medals that you wear
How lovely it was.*

*Oh many's the time that we've flirted
I don't think that we'll ever regret it
I know I shall never forget it
I loved you so
But there I go.*

*Thanks for the memory
Of evenings in your clubs
MPs around the pubs
Of drunks and fights
And dreadful types
And whirling jitterbugs
How lovely it was.*

*Thanks for the memory
Of troops who'd been in strife
Kids who enjoyed life
Of love affairs
And foolish cares
And photos of your wife
How lovely it was.⁴²*

Their wartime relationships left bittersweet memories for many in the First Division. After half a century, Joe Rosato still remembered 'a lovely girl' who lived in Northcote. Not long before he died, Homer Curtis wrote that:

One name ... important to me is Erica Potter. A wonderful lady, I never did know where she lived ... I still think of her often. I think at that time she was 18, I was 22. I will never forget her ...

In 1993, the happily-married Bob Barton wondered about Shirley Pearce, his wartime friend from Footscray. He sought help from the *Herald Sun*, explaining that 'my only intentions are to correspond, as I have been curious as to her whereabouts and welfare for many years.' A picture showed Shirley as a stunningly attractive young lady. Two days later, the paper reported that she had died 45 years before, aged only 28.⁴³

Two weeks with a family in Cohuna gave Jim Wilson 'the most pleasurable memories of my life.' He had fallen in love with the daughter of his hosts. Without informing her of his intentions, he applied to get married, but abandoned the idea, believing it would

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be wrong to marry and then return to the dangers of war. Time convinced him he was right - a friend who married a Victorian was killed shortly after hearing he was the father of twins. (In 1991, Wilson found his sweetheart and her family. They appeared on television - under the eye of her slightly jealous husband.) Frank Harvey married his girlfriend from Windsor a few weeks before the First Division moved out. Unfortunately, the marriage 'did not last past 12 years but we remain friendly and still exchange Christmas cards.'

Almost as soon as he arrived in Melbourne, First Lieutenant Andy O'Rorke of the 3rd Battalion's Headquarters Company fell in love with an American Army nurse at the 4th General Hospital. They 'saw much of each other for eight months', going to the movies, the beach, and some favourite restaurants. They 'occasionally stopped in the Cricket Grounds bar, had drinks, sat at a table there



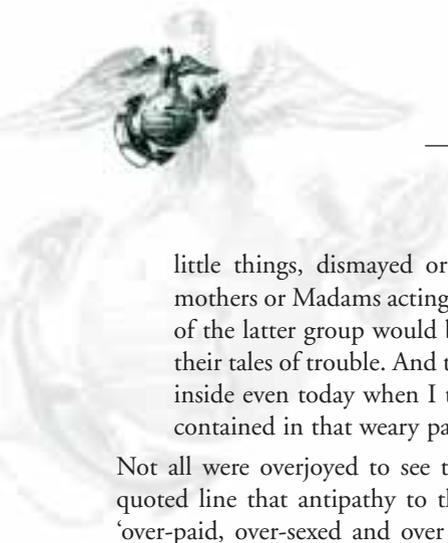
A happy moment in the Myer garden for Anne and Andy O'Rorke.

doing crossword puzzles, talking ...' The nurses used the Myer mansion in Toorak, 'where we spent our "spare time", occasionally slept there, cooked meals there, had dances there, the place was ours in '43. Andy and I had many dinners there, danced there. We loved the place ...' A month before the First Division moved north, the couple were married. Anne O'Rorke never saw her husband again. At Cape Gloucester, he contracted typhus fever and died in an Army hospital in New Guinea in February 1944. Her recollections, written over 50 years later, end on a melancholy note:

Andy, Melbourne, etc., are on my mind daily - I don't hear from former 4th General people any more - I attended two reunions of the Association ... but didn't see anyone from Melbourne days ...

While the relationships of the Marines brought many happy moments and memories, Al Cook tells of the sorry spectacle outside the MCG in Yarra Park:

Adjacent to the main gate, in a small room on the left going out, sat the Grounds communications room with its very old switchboard and related equipment. The room's only window was heavily screened, and the Marine on duty at that post often conversed through the screen with passersby. These were almost always Ladies of the Night operating round the clock, and sometimes other girls, pretty



little things, dismayed or frightened or both or neither, together with their mothers or Madams acting as mothers, seeking out individual Marines. Members of the latter group would be advised to find and regale the unit's Chaplain with their tales of trouble. And they did. Poor girls. Poor Chaplain. I tend to hurt deep inside even today when I think of the amount of genuine emotional desolation contained in that weary parade. Again, poor Chaplain.

Not all were overjoyed to see the Marines in Melbourne. However, the frequently-quoted line that antipathy to the Americans stemmed from the fact that they were 'over-paid, over-sexed and over here' is an oversimplification. Jerry McConnell tells how, as he headed for Melbourne, 'being only 18 years old and away from home for more than seven months, four of which were on Guadalcanal, the mention of Christmas made me very lonesome for home in the USA.' Such youngsters, still recovering from the enormous stress left by their epic battle, were not only homesick but needed to blow off some steam. Fred Harris turned 17 on Guadalcanal. His reminiscences provide some background for understanding the situation brewing in Melbourne:

Almost none of our enlisted men were from a social class above the lower middle class. All our officers were from the east coast elite. Most of us came from a long line of poorly or uneducated and many had parents who spoke little or no English ... A few like myself were from the Appalachian Mountain region - the most illiterate section of America, then and now ...

It was the attitude of the Aussies that impressed me the most. After three years of war and the enemy just over the horizon, the people were buoyant, living for the day. Compared to the little isolated part of the world I was born in, Australia was the most advanced nation on earth. For many of us, Melbourne was day one... I dearly loved the pub scene. I liked to be in one - any one - when it opened and in one - any one - when it closed. In my Kentucky mountain community, all the patrons packed guns and didn't hesitate to use them. It wasn't the safest place in town. Such an atmosphere discouraged the law-abiding ... I was a mostly unregimented Marine. I was attracted to bright lights (such as they were in wartime) and music like a moth to an open flame.

Few Marines were wilder than George Shaffer's buddy Cornell:

...Thankfully, he was not my only buddy. I may have been his, only because most people wouldn't have anything to do with him ... Whatever was expected, he would figure how to do the unexpected ... He used to say being a private was the best deal in the Marine Corps. He said when you are a private, they can't do anything to you. He didn't need more money because he stole whatever he needed.

As they tightened military decorum, orders came out to the effect that we must salute every officer we met on the street ... Well, this simply was not Cornell's way. When we walked down the street and met an officer, Cornell's right elbow would remain tight against his right hip. He would then bend his head way down to meet his hand. The officer would wheel around and call him back and upbraid such a performance. Cornell would say 'I was wounded in battle, sir, and I can't raise my arm.' 'Oh!' - and the officer would pass on. Now it would have been far easier to have given a snappy salute, but that would have been passing up the opportunity to thumb his nose at authority.

We used to ride the train free ... Pay? Never. We boarded a second class car where the seats had loose leather-covered cushions. There were only two other people in the car. Two girls. Cornell ran the length of the car and opened every door. As the train passed a crossing and people were waiting to cross, he would sling one of the cushions over their heads. By the time we arrived at Brighton Beach, there was not a cushion left in the car.

Because of the chow offered at the mess, we took all the meals we could at the Red Cross cafeteria. In Cornell's case, 'took' is the right word. He would move down the line and stuff food in his pockets and in his jacket, and by the time he got to the cash register, he had only an apple on his tray. He would steal anything from anyone.

Shaffer emphasises that modern outlooks should not be applied to 1943 behaviour:

We were in our late teens and early twenties. We had survived five months' combat experience and stinking living conditions on Guadalcanal. We had seen many of our friends die. We knew we were headed back to more combat as soon as the Division personnel were healthy enough to return to the islands. "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" was a justifiable attitude. Life was pretty cheap and money was only something to purchase enjoyment. I spent \$1500 of my pay and back pay and left there broke. In today's dollars, that would be about \$15000, but I bought a lifetime of memories ...

The potential volatility within the men of the First Division was, of course, not unusual among men at war. Nor was it expressed only in youthful high-spirited behaviour. Al Cook relates that a 'crazy drunken' major was shipped home for attacking a guard on duty. Most obviously, though, the tension surfaced in the Marines' relationship with Australians in uniform. As one Digger explained, it only needed 'a

few loud mouthed idiots on both sides who could not hold their liquor' to cause a boilover. Joe Rosato admitted that 'we had a few arguments' with Australian troops 'angry at us for dating the young (and some not so young) ladies.' On Saturday February 13, a series of brawls in Melbourne developed into 'one of the city's worst incidents'. For the first time in a decade, mounted police were brought in to quell violence as 'soldiers, sailors and civilians of both nations, and probably others, joined in fighting a "Battle of Melbourne" ...'⁴⁴ Possibly, this was the clash described by George Shaffer:

One day word came to us that the Aussies had put out a notice that all Marines were to be off the streets by 9 p.m. This was taken as an invitation to be down town. There resulted a riot. It was really a huge fight between the Marines and the Diggers. One Marine was brought into sick bay with his finger bit off. I hope it was not his trigger finger.

When the First Division paraded through the streets to celebrate Washington's Birthday on February 22, the American Consul, Eric Dickover, noted 'a degree of resentment against the Americans ... among the lower classes.' Things were not improved when members of the Australian Ninth Division returned on February 26. They were met on the pier by the First Marine Division Band playing 'Advance Australia Fair', 'Waltzing Matilda' and other welcoming tunes. Given the rumours and enemy propoganda that the Ninth had heard about the American presence, it was a thoughtlessly-planned reception.⁴⁵

While the Australian troops were pleased to be back on home soil, they were, to an extent, strangers in their own land. In their absence, a social revolution had occurred. In 1943, it was the returned Diggers rather than the locals who best appreciated how much Melbourne had changed. In the *Argus*, Sheila Ryan observed how, 'before the war, if you saw any man in uniform, he was either a bandsman or a tram man' and 'the only coloured people on the streets were an occasional Australian aborigine or a Chinese'. In the fourth year of war, things were very different:

The only men who do not wear a uniform are those doing essential work. Once the streets of Melbourne on a summer's day were crowded with gaily clad girls, men in sports suits; but now only a few pretty frocks are to be seen among the khaki, navy and Air Force blue of the men and women of the Services. Hatless and stockingless are the girls these days. And do you remember how once any girl who wore slacks or long trousers was gazed upon with horrified curiosity? Now,

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girls' trousered legs are as common as stockingless ones. Wonderfully built American negroes, Javanese, Chinese in uniforms, oddly and brilliantly dressed lascars, strangers from the northern islands, are a part of the crowds on the streets of Melbourne, and English, American, Australian, Dutch, French, Javanese and native tongues chatter happily.

Not only did the roads carry less traffic, but the few vehicles in use looked 'quite ungraceful, with their gas producers attached to their backs, sides or engines.' Now, men who 'used to ride to and from work in a spacious car' found themselves 'frantically fighting' to board a packed tram where it was 'strange having a woman ordering you to stand out of the gangway'. Women were even driving taxis and selling papers on the corners. Empty shops were everywhere:

You realise that the former tenants are now engaged in important work, but the sight of the many vacant shops arouses a feeling of loneliness in you. Once they were bright attractive places that you liked to call in upon ... All these changes, and the closed-in windows, the trenches and the air-raid shelters, the posters and the women of sad eyes in bright faces, indicate to a stranger that Melbourne belongs to a country at war.⁴⁶

The Marines' Assistant First Division Commander, Brigadier General William H. Rupertus, felt that the Melbourne of early 1943 required a more carefully considered approach to American relations with Australian troops. He delegated the task to Captain Leon Brusiloff, who was in charge of the First Division Band. Brusiloff was perhaps one of those who recognised that a shortage of beer had contributed to the tensions, so he suggested a beer party, with the proviso that the liquor be served in paper cups, 'just so some character doesn't throw a bottle in the air and hit somebody.' Even more controversial was Brusiloff's request that no Military Police attend the gathering. Faced with a situation that would prove either a massive triumph or a major debacle, Rupertus decided to back Brusiloff's plan.⁴⁷ The party was scheduled for Sunday March 14. A week beforehand, the *Argus* announced that 'US servicemen will entertain Australians on the Melbourne Cricket Ground', adding that:

Most Australians now in Melbourne will welcome this opportunity of getting together with American servicemen at an informal gathering which begins at 7 p.m. when refreshments of the most appreciated type will be served until 10 p.m.

For the Australians, entry was to be by invitation only. The *Argus* explained that the limited capacity of the MCG meant that 'the American authorities have been compelled to limit entry to those who have served in battle zones.' Servicemen from operational



For the March 14 'Get Together', a stage was erected in front of the Public Stand on the northern side of the Ground. On the right, the Globe of Death awaited the Daredevil Durkins and their motor-cycles. *Australian War Memorial Negative Number 029616.*



The Marines' Band entertained some of the early arrivals. *Australian War Memorial Negative Number 029618.*



'Roll Out The Barrel!': in front of the Grey Smith Stand, Marines and Australian servicemen were served beer in paper cups. *Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria.*



Jerry McConnell of the 1st Marines Regiment said that 'What was expected to be a brawling donnybrook turned out almost to be a drunken "love-in", as Aussies and Yanks ... just couldn't have been nicer to each other.' *Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria.*

areas who had not received invitations were asked to contact the Artillery Depot in Batman Avenue on M4542, extension 133, 'whereupon an invitation will be issued.'

On March 9, preliminary arrangements for the 'Get Together' were completed at a meeting between 11 American and Australian officers:

The Australians will be met by US troops when the gates open at 6.30 p.m., and will be provided with refreshments and a band will play between 6.45 and 8.45, while theatrical artists will provide entertainment from 9 to 10.30, and this portion of the entertainment will be broadcast through national stations and by short wave to America and Britain ...

In addition, printed souvenirs, bearing the motto 'US Forces Welcome Australian Forces', were to be given to the Australians, and 'extra trams have been arranged so that everyone at the function will be able to get home by them or make the necessary connections with trains ...'

Activities designed to promote better Australian-American relations preceded the MCG party. On radio station 3AR, American performers and ABC artists were featured in a series of broadcasts entitled 'Hi'ya Digger'. On Saturday March 13, a gymkhana arranged by US forces was held at Mornington oval, with a baseball match starting proceedings at 10 a.m. In the evening, there was a 'Comrades in Arms' dance at the Melbourne Town Hall. The *Argus* advised that 'Each serviceman is entitled to bring one woman partner with him.' On the Sunday afternoon, 'a swing band concert', featuring Claude Carnell's band, was held in the grounds of the Lawn Tennis Association at Kooyong. At the same time, an American servicemen's band played at Box Hill.⁴⁸



Cheers! Aussies and Yanks in happy mood. *Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria.*

Many of the Australians arrived at the Cricket Ground well ahead of the advertised 6.30. Before the entertainment began, they joined in games of softball and football. In all, more than 9000, including 4500 Australian servicemen, attended. On the arena, Yanks and Aussies lined up for paper cups of beer. In front of the Grand Stand on the northern side, 'right where Bradman used to send his famous square leg hits', an enclosed stage

had been erected, with a banner bearing the words 'Hi'ya Digger'. Reporter Frank Dexter wrote:

Right on the Test wicket sat a US band, one that has been doing great work for patriotic funds ever since it has been in Australia. On the boundaries ... there were queues of US and Australian servicemen marching steadily towards barrels of beer, slopes of frankfurts, hills of hamburgers, and mountains of bread rolls.

Gladys Moncrieff and Max Oldaker, stars of *The Merry Widow* at His Majesty's, were among the performers on stage. Early in the evening, 'Our Glad', as the famous Australian soprano was known, sang three songs, including 'I Was Dreaming' and her celebrated 'My Hero', for which 'the boys did not fail to join in the chorus.' Later, more than 20 servicemen took part in the 'Tall Story' contest. Entries had been slow initially, probably because the organisers wanted written entries of not more than 150 words to 'reach the Artillery Depot before noon on Saturday.'⁴⁹

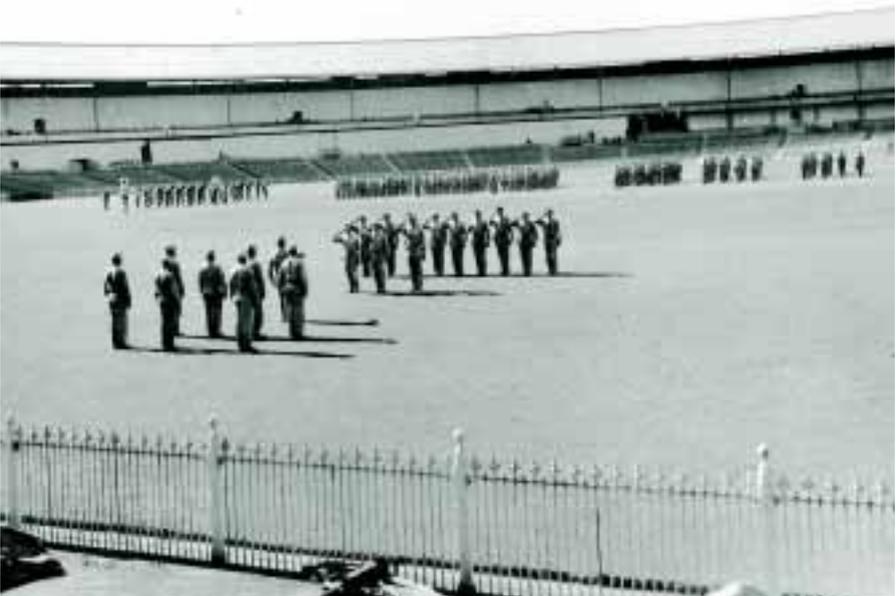
The winner in the Australian section was Leading Signalmán Laurie Swift of the Navy, with a yarn about British aircraft carriers being faster than American ones: 'As long as our carriers keep up with the aircraft we reckon they're going fast enough.' Sergeant Marvin J. Swanson won for the Americans, claiming that he had once thrown turpentine over a moose; stung, the animal then backed against a tree 'and rubbed and rubbed and rubbed until all that was left of him were those horns that you see decorating my den.' While both men received silver cups, Sergeant Swanson was given a £5 War Certificate as 'the greatest liar in the American forces'. Most of the stories were 'excellent', but the *Argus* felt the nature of some prevented publication, though 'there were no blushes at this gathering because ... the girl from Gundagai and her sisters from all points north and south were not at this party.'

The official entertainment ended with a complete performance of *Strip for Action*, which had just opened at the Tivoli with an 'All Star Cast and Beautiful Girls'. *Truth* hastened to assure its readers that the show was not as 'provocative as its title'. Its star, Jim Gerald, had just returned from two years entertaining troops in the Middle East. Though most of the acts were familiar to Tivoli regulars, they were 'sufficiently amusing to collect a cheer or two.' Some new faces were the Tivoli Swing Sisters whose vocal talents had been discovered 'in an Australian factory'. Despite their humble origins, the girls 'could shame the Andrews Sisters in appearance and rhythm.' Commenting on the performance at the MCG, the *Argus* said that:

The ballet was a riot, and so was Daphne Lowe, a featured vocalist at the Tivoli. Then there was that one and only ball on the boundary - the globe of death, in which the Daredevil Durkins did amazing things on motor bikes.



During a parade on the arena, Lord Gowrie, Governor-General of Australia, and Colonel William J. Whaling, commander of the 1st Regiment, take the salute in front of the Pavilion.



The parade, as seen from the Pavilion. The partially-enclosed New Concrete Outer Stand (later known as the Southern Stand) clearly offered plenty of ventilation to the Marines housed there.

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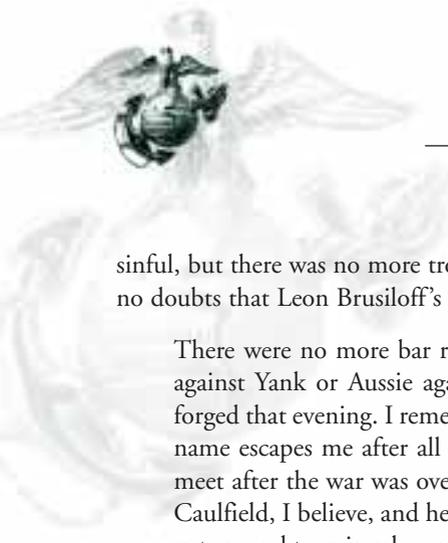
After it was all over, MCC secretary Vernon Ransford looked 'sadly at his Test cricket pitches' and sighed, before remarking with a grin, 'But it was worth it.'⁵⁰ However, the servicemen kept going. Jerry McConnell says it was 'the party to end all parties':

What was expected to be a brawling donnybrook turned out almost to be a drunken "love-in", as Aussies and Yanks, anxious to show each other that they were all cut from the same swath of courage and that both sides had suffered at the hands of the *real* enemies, just couldn't have been nicer to each other. Many mixed groups broke off and, with arms around shoulders and the ever present cup of beer in hand, sang 'Waltzing Matilda' at least 500 times that night. There were many other songs as well, but 'Matilda' was the number one hit of the evening. The only breaks taken were to refill the beer cups or to get a quick frankfurt or hamburger.

George Shaffer says that the festivities 'lasted most of the night'. Arm in arm, men of both sides sang 'Roll Out The Barrel'.⁵¹ Frank Near said that dawn brought an unprecedented sight: '... when I looked out from my bunk all you could see was Aussies and Marines passed out' on the arena. Sensing that the spectacle desecrated 'sacred ground', Shaffer remarked of the bodies 'scattered around on the infield grass, "It was



Dick Lyons holds the flag at a medal presentation ceremony in front of the MCG's Concrete Stand.



sinful, but there was no more trouble between ours and theirs.” Jerry McConnell had no doubts that Leon Brusiloff’s scheme had been an unqualified success:

There were no more bar room brawls in pubs after that night, except for Yank against Yank or Aussie against Aussie. Many new and lasting friendships were forged that evening. I remember one such bond made with a young soldier whose name escapes me after all these years. We agreed to keep in touch and perhaps meet after the war was over. He was from one of the surrounding communities, Caulfield, I believe, and he invited me to come and meet his family. Before I ever got around to going, he unfortunately was notified that his unit would be leaving the country again. In later years, I truly regretted my lack of follow-up with him. We really hit it off well together.

The ‘Whing-ding’, as George Shaffer called it, was one of the rare occasions that the Marines were allowed on the Ground’s playing surface. Conditions for use of the arena had been laid down soon after the Division arrived. On January 16, Colonel Cates wrote to the Melbourne Cricket Club requesting permission to use the arena ‘for drills, ceremonies and recreations.’ After consultation with the Match and Ground Committee, approval was given for use of the playing surface for ‘Regimental Ceremonies and approved recreation’ at the discretion of the MCC curator, Bert Luttrell.⁵² John Joseph says that, with the grass being ‘off limits ... it was a much longer walk around the field to visit the “slop shoot”.’

The oval was used for the USO show given by comedian Joe E. Brown. For one ceremony, the grass was a trifle less than immaculate, with small tufts right in front of the saluting party. Dick Lyons recalls with some amusement his involvement in an award ceremony on the Ground. He was surprised to see his name listed among the men ‘who were to fall out the next day to receive medals.’ For hours, he says, ‘I racked my brains trying to remember what I had done on Guadalcanal to deserve a medal.’ Finally, he had his answer: ‘When I fell out with the heroes the next morning I was given the flag to hold! I had the honour of serving as the Colour Guard.’

In mid-year, Major General Vandegrift and the Lord Mayor of Melbourne requested approval to use ‘the playing arena at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (Camp Murphy)’⁵³ for a grid-iron match. This match, played for the Division Championship on Friday July 2, was not the first time the Ground had hosted American football - in 1908, during the visit of the Great White Fleet, teams from the USS *Kentucky* and USS *Minnesota* had played there. For Fred Harris, based at Mt Martha, the match between

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Members of the First Division parade on the MCG before the Division Championship football match played between the 1st and 5th Marines on July 2, 1943. In the background, tarpaulins indicate that the inhabitants of the Grey Smith Stand had even less shelter than those quartered in the New Concrete Outer Stand.

Australian War Memorial Negative Number 043639.

the 1st and 5th Regiments would be his only visit to the Ground. It was not a prospect that enthused him or his buddies:

On the occasion of the football game, we boarded the steam train at Mornington and rode it to Frankston, where the cars were hooked to an electric engine for the trip to Melbourne ... Attendance was compulsory. We went out a few days before and located a spot where we wouldn't miss each other in the crowd and skipped out before the game started. I still don't know which team won - didn't care then, don't care now.

The relationship between the Marines and Bert Luttrell regarding use of the arena went well, culminating with a citation appointing him 'by direction of the Major General Commandant ... as a Sergeant Major in the United States Marine Corps.' The document listed his expertise as 'Agronomy (Grass Grower)'. It has been claimed that the Marines also honoured MCC secretary Vernon Ransford by naming their quarters 'Camp Ransford'.⁵⁴ However, in MCC Committee Minutes for 1943, the Ground is referred to as 'Camp Murphy'. In George McMillan's First Division history, published



Honorary Sergeant Major Bert Luttrell is presented with his citation.

shortly after the war, the name 'Camp Ransford' does not appear - McMillan always refers to the 'Melbourne cricket grounds', which seems to have been the name generally used by the Marines. Among the many 'Old Breed' men who have contributed recollections to the MCC Library, 'Camp Ransford' is unknown - indeed, very few were even aware of the name 'Camp Murphy'.

As Herbert Keyserling recognised, the relaxed atmosphere of early 1943 'could not last'. Major General Vandegrift intended to rebuild the Division gradually:

Once the troops were rested and partially restored to health, we returned to them their pride, first by disciplinary drills - the old close order drill - and then by short hikes getting longer and longer, working into small unit training and progressing to amphibious training ...⁵⁵

The process, well underway by the time Vandegrift returned from Washington at the end of March, was boosted 'as replacements from the States arrived ... the Division was restored to full strength.' With the routine becoming 'much more regimental', the 1903 single-shot bolt-action 30-calibre Springfields used on Guadalcanal were replaced with new M-1 Garand semi-automatics which could fire eight rounds.⁵⁶ By mid-April, Vandegrift was pleased to note that 'our motor transport is in far better shape than it was when we left the States ...' No detail was being overlooked:

... our people in the supply section here have redesigned the water tank so that more than one man can get water at a time. In fact, there are twelve spigots and

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a major spigot for stock pots. That was one of the crying needs on Guadalcanal - the inability to rewater a battalion in a rapid manner.⁵⁷

For new arrivals like Otto Melsa, it was a busy time:

As a CW Radio Operator in a light tank crew, we landed in Melbourne and I was stationed at Ballarat for about five weeks. Then I was sent to Mt. Martha for some physical training, then to the Cricket Grounds in Melbourne ... I was thrilled and excited to be a part of preparing for offensive action against an enemy.

Melsa was not yet a combat veteran, so probably those who had served on 'the Canal' did not totally share his enthusiasm. John Joseph endured daily hikes with the 2nd Battalion's G Company, 'leaving the Cricket Grounds and passing through the suburbs and further ...' In F Company, Frank Near went to Ballarat for two weeks' training. Fred Guarino says that the Regiment 'also had a camp at Dandenong and we rotated, two battalions in the cricket grounds and one out.' Attached to the 3rd Battalion as a general medical officer, Herbert Keyserling USN moved in 'mid-winter' to the 'rather crude camp' 20 miles out of town at Dandenong. After weeks there on field exercises, 'We returned to Melbourne on foot to let us know how the Japanese made a "forced" march.':

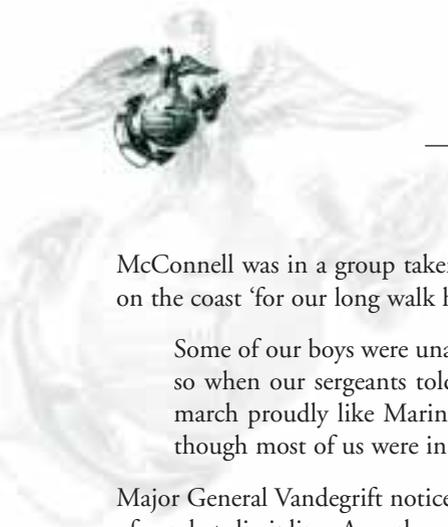
The march started at night. The only rations we were allowed were a canteen of water, a handful of rice, and a tablespoon of raisins. During the march of 20 plus miles, we stopped for five minutes rest every hour, with one break for cooking our meal of rice and raisins, and then a half hour nap. I was really proud to have walked the entire distance, although there was a Jeep Ambulance cruising back and forth picking up the stragglers.

On such long hikes, John Joseph was sustained by the support of the local people:

They were always thanking us ... Even though we felt we were expendable, we had their support and that was real and genuine. They cared about us and we cared about them and it put new meaning into the reason for training. The hikes ... were never monotonous or uneventful. They never seemed to get tired of waving to us or smiling. God bless them all.

Jerry McConnell had similar feelings:

The meagre rations we were given ... were augmented (secretly) by wonderful Australian farmers who I remember slipping us eggs, bread, crackers, cookies, fruit and other things. I'm sure those good people went without many necessities to get those things to us. I've never forgotten their kind and unselfish generosity. That must have been a hardship for them.



McConnell was in a group taken aboard an Australian destroyer and ferried to a spot on the coast 'for our long walk home' of 75 miles. It was hard going:

Some of our boys were unable to finish the hike, but I remember the last mile or so when our sergeants told us to hold up our heads, throw out our chests and march proudly like Marines as we entered the city. And by God we did - even though most of us were in pain.

Major General Vandegrift noticed that, in training, the Division displayed a high level of combat discipline. As early as April 14, he noted:

Our night landings are made without noise, without verbal orders and without the rattle of equipment. One of our landings was made against the headland at one o'clock in the morning most successfully. One of the Australian generals, when I showed him the place of landing the night before, insisted that it could not be done.⁵⁸

Amid the hardships and increasingly serious tone of the Division's activities, lighter moments still surfaced. One night while camping, McConnell was thrilled to see 'what I thought was a kangaroo for the first time ...' Excitedly he pointed the creature out to an unimpressed farmer who drily informed him that it was 'Just a bloody wallaby, not a 'roo.' Carl Seaberg was driver for Lieutenant Colonel Doyle, using 'a 1940 Ford Station Wagon with a wood trim body and the steering wheel on the US driver's side ...' After negotiating the difficulties of driving 'on the proper side of the road and how to make a right turn from the left side of the road', he enjoyed 'a nice fast drive back over the winding hilly roads' which were 'much like the back roads of Pennsylvania.' At Doyle's request, he also spent a couple of nights 'working with the Bobbies to catch bootleggers selling Scotch and beer at high prices ... They gave me a litre of B&W Scotch for helping them.' In the 1st Regiment's Headquarters and Service Company, George Shaffer worked in an office located 'in a large head (men's room)'. He found that, at times, no amount of effort could satisfy the brass:

The desks were pushed against the doors on the toilet stalls. Word came down one day that we were to have an inspection by the General. We spent days making the place as spotless as possible. The day arrived and the General marched in, followed by his entourage. While we stood at rigid attention, he took about three steps inside the door of the "office". Looked up and down the room and said, "This place looks like a shit house." He wheeled and left, and that was the extent of our inspection.



RETURN TO COMBAT

Finally, it was time to return north to the war. General Vandegrift had left in July to take charge of the First Marine Amphibious Corps. His deputy, Brigadier General William Rupertus, took command of the First Division, which began leaving its various camps around Melbourne in September. Carl Seaberg's last day at the MCG was memorable for the wrong reasons. As he lined up to depart, the First Sergeant gained some revenge for a previous conflict 'by having me run and pick up all the fire buckets empty and stack them in front of the company. Just typical chicken shit but I was too smart to disobey orders ...' Melbourne's 'gracious, sharing and hospitable' people had led Jerry McConnell to consider the city his 'far-away home' and 'when I departed it was with deep and genuine sorrow.' One man is still deeply moved by the recollection of his departure:

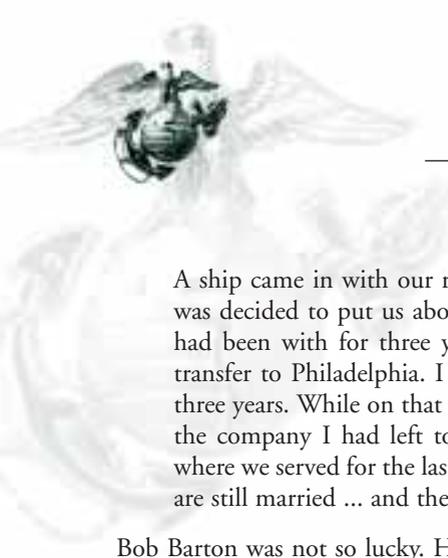
When we left your shores we got a movie-only send off. The shores were crowded with waving people, the band playing, and when the ship cast off the crowds broke through the police lines and ran down the pier to see us closer for the last time. I am 80 years old now, sitting in an easy chair and the tears are running down my cheeks as I write this. I guess I'm sentimental but those memories never fail ...

Fred Guarino said that 'no unit was ever treated better' than the First Division in Melbourne, adding 'I can't think of enough words to describe our time there. It was surely one of the best times of my life ...'

On Friday October 15, 1943, Vernon Ransford reported to the MCG Trustees that '... the American troops moved out at the end of last week.'⁵⁹ George Shaffer claimed that 'the Marines left the Cricket Ground in at least as good condition as they found it.' He was among the last to leave, sailing off to Townsville with the 1st Regiment:

We never left the ship, and it was beastly hot. We went on north, a convoy of seven ships following an Australian cruiser. We wound through some islands until we arrived at the staging point Goodenough Island.

At Christmas, 'just a year since we left Guadalcanal,' the First Division made an assault landing on Cape Gloucester, New Britain. Apart from the fighting, Jim Wilson remembers the Cape's heavy rains. Bob Barton says that by mid-1944, about 40 per cent of the Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester veterans, 'having been overseas for 24 months, were shipped back to the States.' George Shaffer was one of them:



A ship came in with our replacements and would be returning to the States. It was decided to put us aboard, and we sailed for the USA. I left the company I had been with for three years. From San Diego, I received a 30-day delay in transfer to Philadelphia. I went home and saw my parents for the first time in three years. While on that leave, I met ... and married a girl who was working in the company I had left to join the Marine Corps. I took her to Philadelphia where we served for the last year of the war. That was in November 1944, and we are still married ... and they said it would never last.

Bob Barton was not so lucky. He spent two months practising with the new men 'to form a cohesive unit' before going into action again:

On September 15th, 1944, we hit the beach at Peleliu. Though few people know of Peleliu it was one of the toughest and most costly battles fought in the South Pacific. Our 1st Regiment suffered over 80 per cent casualties in six days ...

Jim Wilson said that Peleliu made Guadalcanal seem like 'a walk in the park.' Charles Kelty went into Peleliu anticipating 'a piece of cake' that would be over in 'two or three days'. Instead, 'That battle just about wiped out the 1st Division ...' Kelty was still angry 50 years later: 'Taking that island was a mistake. They could bypass it with no trouble without a cost of one life of a young Marine. This was the biggest mistake made in WWII ...' Peleliu sparked equally forthright opinions from Bob Barton, who felt that 'we were almost wiped out' because of 'poor planning, poor leadership, a very poor job by the Navy of softening up the defences and a tenacious bunch of Japs who were very well dug in (many, many pillboxes) and well trained.'

Jim Wilson recalled Peleliu's 115°F heat, with soldiers passing out from heat exhaustion. Once, when he collapsed, a medical orderly thrust salt tablets in his mouth: 'It was just like a transfusion.' Frank Harvey was shot by a sniper on the second day and was evacuated to a hospital ship. 'In a way I was lucky ... as the fighting there was very bad. My company commander, Captain Everett Pope, received the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery ...' Gerald Healy was hit by a 'determined' Japanese sniper using 'dum-dum' bullets:

He shot me in the arm, shot my sergeant in the face, grazed my brow and eye, and finally put a bullet along my right side. I lay on the beach after a morphine shot several hours, woke up, and was put in a small landing craft which took us to a Liberty ship a small distance from the beach. They hoisted the boat up by crane and the men on board carried us to made-up operating rooms and I had the broken-up bullets removed.

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After Peleliu, more of the Guadalcanal veterans were sent back to the United States. Bob Barton finally 'got to go home after 29 months overseas.' Charles Kelty remained in the Pacific, training 'to hit another island': Okinawa. In that three-month campaign, 'the 1st Division again lost a lot of young Marines killed and wounded ...' Even that was not the end for the First Division, Kelty says: 'When the war ended my outfit went on to North China ...'

The Division was the first USMC division to depart for foreign service after the outbreak of the Pacific War and it was the last to return home. In between were Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa, campaigns ranked among the worst of World War II. Small wonder that the days when the First Division was quartered at the Melbourne Cricket Ground came to be regarded as 'Heaven'. Dick Lyons said his time there was 'one of the happiest periods of my life.' At reunions, Bob Barton says, much of the talk still is about Melbourne: 'The ole boys all agree that it was the best liberty port in the world ...'

POSTSCRIPT

Six Marines received the Medal of Honor for deeds on Guadalcanal. Six decades later, only Colonel Mitchell Paige survived. Born to Serbian parents in Charleroi, Pennsylvania, he recalls growing up in a region where the Depression made 'everyone ... so poor.' With higher studies therefore out of reach, the 18-year-old Paige joined the Marines in 1936. On October 26, 1942, he was in charge of 33 Marines protecting an airfield against an onslaught of 1000 Japanese. His Medal of Honor citation tells what followed:

... When the enemy broke through the line directly in front of his position, Platoon Sergeant Paige, commanding a machine-gun section with fearless determination, continued to direct fire of his gunners until all of his men were either killed or wounded. Alone, against the deadly hail of Japanese shells, he manned his gun, and when it was destroyed, took over another, moving from gun to gun, never ceasing his withering fire against the advancing hordes until reinforcements finally arrived. Then, forming a new line, he dauntlessly and aggressively led a bayonet charge, driving the enemy back and presenting a breakthrough in our lines ...

Over 900 Japanese died in the assault on the airfield. Six weeks later, a Field Commission elevated Paige to Second Lieutenant. Like so many of his buddies in the 7th Regiment, he arrived in Victoria weary and sick. At Balcombe, on May 21, 1943, Mitchell Paige received the Medal of Honor from General Vandegrift. He retired from



In a parade at Mt. Martha in May 1943, the legendary Lieutenant Colonel Lewis 'Chesty' Puller leads eight members of the First Division to the reviewing stand. On the left of the group is second Lieutenant Mitchell Paige, with Platoon Sergeant John Basilone beside him. Both men were about to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. *Australian War Memorial Negative Number 61034.*

the Marine Corps in 1964, with a service record that also listed the Philippines, China, Cuba, Cape Gloucester, Pavuvu, Japan and Korea. In retirement, Paige researched such fields as miniature rocketry, signal distress kits and inflatable tents. His final combat experience came in Vietnam, where he was involved under orders from President Johnson.

Over the years, his pace has not slackened. In fact, he has become something of a legendary figure. The fictional tale presented in the 1967 film *First to Fight* was based on his Guadalcanal experiences. In 1998, a widely-marketed limited-edition model depicted him in action with a machine-gun. In his many speaking engagements, Mitchell Paige stresses that 'the men in my platoon earned part of my medal ...' In view of their sacrifice, he zealously pursues those who falsely pose as highly decorated heroes. His crusade has uncovered over 200 impostors. At 81, he joined a California government task force to review health care in veterans' homes. In 2000, he was one of 50 Medal of Honor recipients supporting George W. Bush for President.

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In the history of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Mitchell Paige holds a special place. In October 1977, 50 Marine veterans watched him unveil the plaque which reminds all arriving through the Cordner Entrance that in 1943 the First Division saw the MCG as much more than a sports stadium. It was regarded 'as their Home', a haven where they renewed themselves.

As the ranks of The Old Breed grow thin, the plaque bearing Mitchell Paige's name becomes an increasingly significant link between Australia's most historic sporting institution and the oldest and most decorated division of the United States Marine Corps.



MCC President Sir Albert Chadwick and Colonel Mitchell Paige at the unveiling of the First Division plaque in the Pavilion in October 1977.

NOTES

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– *Alf Batchelder*

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United States Marine Corps

Serial No. 3416 —First Section, First Marine Division,

Date 200 21 —First Marine Force,

—JULY 1, 1945—

ARMY LETTER

By the Honorable of the Major General, Honorable, is hereby approved &
—JULY 1, 1945—

in the UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS _____ and to it is hereby
available and eligible to discharge the duties of this position by doing so, performing
all manner of things otherwise belonging to it, its entire staff and equipage, all
Noncommissioned Officers and enlisted men heretofore assigned to its station, as its station,
and to its personnel and follow such orders and directions from time to time as the staff
may receive from the Commanding Officer or other superior Officer as may here, according
to the rules and discipline of the Corps.

Type _____ "PROBATION" _____

Rank _____ ADJUTANT (First Lieutenant) _____

Authority _____ Bureau Letter of Instruction 2000, Sep 15, 1940. _____

—JULY 1, 1945—
General MacDONALD, Major General, U. S. A.

Commanding First Marine

No. _____
Serial No. _____
Date _____

Approved

10-2000-10



Melbourne Cricket Club

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MELBOURNE'S MARINES

The First Division at the MCG
1943



Alf Batchelder



The mock obituary notices that appeared after England's shock loss to Australia at The Ground. Top: *Cricket: A Weekly Record of the Game*, August 31, 1882. Bottom: *Sporting Times*,



This is where the photo caption is going to be when some text has been provided.



The Ground and the surrounding suburbs c.1944.