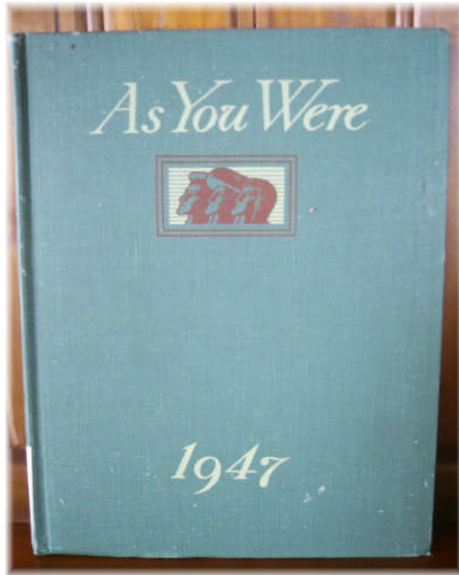


As You Were 1947

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As You Were

A CAVALCADE OF EVENTS WITH THE
AUSTRALIAN SERVICES FROM 1788 TO

1947

Published by

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As You Were 1947

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A CHEEKY ACTION AT ENDAU BAY

By J. E. MACDONNELL, R.A.N.



AFTER the tragedy of *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* off Malaya, destroyer *Vampire* carried out routine convoy work for five weeks. Her run was from Singapore down to Java and the Sunda Strait, bringing up more troops and supplies to help stem the yellow hordes sweeping, irresistibly it seemed, ever southward.

Then once again the Army called for assistance from the sea.

A landing force had been sighted going ashore at Endau Bay, on the east coast of Malaya. Torpedo bombers were despatched north, and *Vampire* and the British destroyer *Thanet*, eager for a chance of retaliation, leaped up the coast to cope with the new threat.

The two boats sighted the jungly promontory south of Endau Bay about six in the evening. They steamed straight out to sea to wait till the moon went down.

Neither *Vampire* nor *Thanet* knew what was inside that narrow-necked harbour with the green jungle edging its waters—and neither cared. Those were desperate days. Their chances of getting out were just about nil, but they were sure they'd do some damage before they went. So, with the moon slipping down over the rim of the sea, both ships headed in for the landing place.

Two shadows in the blackness of the night, completely darkened, the destroyers slid in through the harbour mouth.

Almost at once *Vampire* sighted two enemy destroyers ahead, fine on the starb'd bow. They were barely moving, and were so close the Navigating Officer, also the torpedo control officer, whispered his orders as he trained his sight on the leader's bridge.

He had to be quick, for *Vampire* was almost past. In quick succession he sent two torpedoes on their way. They waited. Nothing happened. The range was so short that both fish had speared right under the enemy bottom, not having regained their correct depth-setting.

And still they weren't seen. All eyes strained into the darkness. *Vampire*, leading, sighted another destroyer 3000 yards away,

lying before half a dozen bulking shapes which they knew for the troopers. *Vampire* loosed another torpedo. This time the Japs saw the tube's flash and a challenge flashed peremptorily across the water. There was no reply.

An instant later all hell was let loose inside that enemy harbour. A searchlight turned on little *Vampire* and all around her the water spouted with the fall of salvos, discoloured a dirty brown at the base with bursting H.E. The destroyer to port, which had been missed by the last torpedo, opened up with full broadsides, joined almost at once by the first two sighted and guns from ashore.

The two British ships were illuminated perfectly as they dashed round the harbour, zig-zagging desperately under the hail of fire. No narrative could do justice to the intensity of the action that was now joined, or give full coherence to the events of the utmost violence crowding in on each other from all sides at once.

The Navigating Officer, working with forced calmness on his chart under the weather dodger, navigating the ship at full speed in a cluttered harbour whose greatest depth was five fathoms, paused to ask the Signal Yeoman: "Why aren't we firing?"

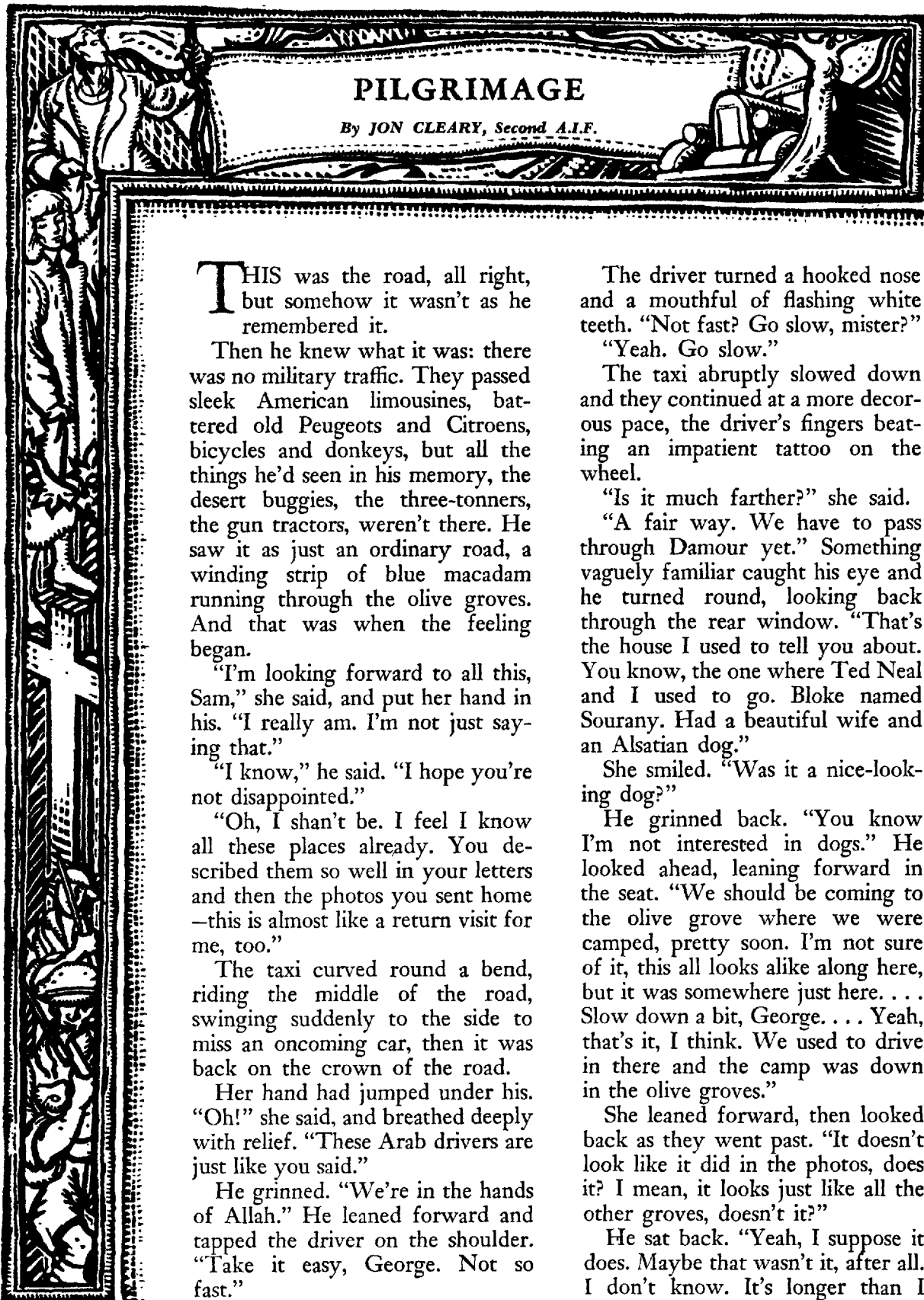
"We've been in action for the last five minutes," came the surprised reply.

Now he listened, he heard the blast of the guns all right. But he'd been so concentrated on his work, so tensed by his responsibility, that the sound till then had not registered.

Just then *Thanet*, still in correct station astern, caught a shell in her boiler-room. She blew up with a great burst of escaping steam. Slowing down, heeling acutely to port, her crew had time to abandon her before the gallant little ship slipped under, still vomiting steam.

Vampire, still steaming flat out, burned a smoke float on her fo'c'sle. The thick whitish vapour streamed out astern brilliantly silver in the searchlight's glare. Then her captain conceived the idea of dropping the float. It was undoubtedly this that saved her.

Thinking there was another Allied ship in



PILGRIMAGE

By JON CLEARY, Second A.I.F.

THIS was the road, all right, but somehow it wasn't as he remembered it.

Then he knew what it was: there was no military traffic. They passed sleek American limousines, battered old Peugeots and Citroens, bicycles and donkeys, but all the things he'd seen in his memory, the desert buggies, the three-tonners, the gun tractors, weren't there. He saw it as just an ordinary road, a winding strip of blue macadam running through the olive groves. And that was when the feeling began.

"I'm looking forward to all this, Sam," she said, and put her hand in his. "I really am. I'm not just saying that."

"I know," he said. "I hope you're not disappointed."

"Oh, I shan't be. I feel I know all these places already. You described them so well in your letters and then the photos you sent home—this is almost like a return visit for me, too."

The taxi curved round a bend, riding the middle of the road, swinging suddenly to the side to miss an oncoming car, then it was back on the crown of the road.

Her hand had jumped under his. "Oh!" she said, and breathed deeply with relief. "These Arab drivers are just like you said."

He grinned. "We're in the hands of Allah." He leaned forward and tapped the driver on the shoulder. "Take it easy, George. Not so fast."

The driver turned a hooked nose and a mouthful of flashing white teeth. "Not fast? Go slow, mister?" "Yeah. Go slow."

The taxi abruptly slowed down and they continued at a more decorous pace, the driver's fingers beating an impatient tattoo on the wheel.

"Is it much farther?" she said.

"A fair way. We have to pass through Damour yet." Something vaguely familiar caught his eye and he turned round, looking back through the rear window. "That's the house I used to tell you about. You know, the one where Ted Neal and I used to go. Bloke named Sourany. Had a beautiful wife and an Alsatian dog."

She smiled. "Was it a nice-looking dog?"

He grinned back. "You know I'm not interested in dogs." He looked ahead, leaning forward in the seat. "We should be coming to the olive grove where we were camped, pretty soon. I'm not sure of it, this all looks alike along here, but it was somewhere just here. . . . Slow down a bit, George. . . . Yeah, that's it, I think. We used to drive in there and the camp was down in the olive groves."

She leaned forward, then looked back as they went past. "It doesn't look like it did in the photos, does it? I mean, it looks just like all the other groves, doesn't it?"

He sat back. "Yeah, I suppose it does. Maybe that wasn't it, after all. I don't know. It's longer than I

A TOROKINA HAND-OVER

By ERIC FELDT, R.A.N.



FROM the bridge of the sloop the peak of Mount Bagana stood out clearly to the eastward, a spire of smoke above it in the still morning air, its base hidden in the mist which covered the coast. In the starboard corner of the bridge, the Asdic chattered confidently. Soon an amorphous blob on the grey sea resolved itself into a buoy, and a little later a light blinked from the grey shroud of haze on the shoreline. With confidence course was set for entering harbour.

A little over a year before Torokina had been taken by a swift amphibious assault; a defensive perimeter established against which three thousand Japs had immolated themselves vainly. Airstrips had been cleared and the air over Rabaul had been dominated, allowing the war to pass on to the front doorstep of Japan. Fifteen thousand Japanese troops still held the jungles of Bougainville, disputing possession with the Second Australian Army Corps, which had taken over the land fighting. Now the U.S. Navy was to move on and we, a party of thirty officers and ratings, were to take over the Northern Solomons. The command would be wound up, leaving the R.A.N. to carry on the naval functions of the area. Preliminary arrangements had been made by the Navy in New Guinea, under whose orders we would serve.

Busy days followed. Signalmen, W/T staff, coders and L.C.V.P. crews were placed with their American opposite numbers to learn the local hazards, liaison officers from Emirau, Green Island, Treasury Island and Munda were despatched to their ports, while equipment, involving much paper work, was taken over under Lend-Lease.

Americans, in general, affect a disinclination for ceremonial, but I suspected the Commander of having a secret inner regard for it.

Acting on my belief, I suggested to him that we should make a small ceremony of the replacement of one flag by the other. He was enthusiastic, as it was the first case of its kind as far as we knew.

On the day we cleared lower deck and the Commander, his officers and a number of enlisted men roughly equivalent to our own attended. The denim-clad Americans formed two ranks; the khaki uniforms of our ship's company extended the lines. Officers fell in before their men. As eleven o'clock drew near, I called our ship's company to attention, saluted the Commander and reported to him as the senior officer, a little courtesy which his expression showed he appreciated. The Commander "shunned" his own command and gave the order to sound off. His bugler sounded "Taps", then "Colours", as Old Glory came slowly down and the White Ensign went up, pausing halfway, while the photographers recorded it. Then the Commander made a short speech, no flight of oratory, but friendly words from a good heart.

After we dismissed I asked the Commander to my tent for a drink. There must have been nostalgia in him as he sat in his own familiar chair under the parachutes while I opened the bottle. It popped satisfactorily and I explained that the occasion merited the wine of honour.

The transfer of command was complete. It had been a very minor affair in a world war. No fate of nations hung on its success or failure, no great movements were involved, no great principles were at stake. But the ships were kept moving without interruption so that in our small corner the war went on. And the fact that we, of different nations, could work together without ill-feeling or recrimination, in harmony and with a high regard for each other's Service, was a happy symptom in a tired world.



THOSE SUDAN DAYS

By TOM GUNNING, *New South Wales Sudan Contingent*



WAS a member of the New South Wales Contingent that went to the Sudan in 1885.

It is all history now—recorded mostly in yellowing newspaper files and coldly impersonal narratives. But as an “old soldier” who was privileged to be among those 750 men, I carry in my mind some unforgettable memories which, in the light of the ever-changing methods of warfare, become all the more vivid.

War as we knew it in 1885 was a thrilling affair. There was free discussion and speculation on all phases of the project, and the day of embarkation brought all this excitement to a noisy climax in Sydney as we marched through the streets to Circular Quay.

We were eager to be off to this mysterious Sudan where 50,000 Arabs were embarrassing Britain at an awkward time. Ours was no under-cover-of-night departure; no slogans advising people to seal lips and save ships. Quite the reverse. We had passed through medical examinations; we had been bellowed at on the parade ground; we carried our old rifles, complete with saw-edged bayonets—and all this was rounded off by the glorious feeling of wearing the splendid scarlet and blue uniform. In short, we were soldiers, and Sydney shouted it from the housetops. London papers published pictures of our fêted departure.

On the water at last—and Army life aboard a troopship is one experience which doesn't appear to have changed greatly since.

One of our first shipboard jobs was to dye our brilliant white equipment and pith helmets with the only medium available: tobacco juice. This was probably the introduction of the science of camouflage into Australia's military life and a foreshadowing of the days when jungle green was to become fashionable for soldiers!

Another interesting point about our personal equipment was the charcoal water filter carried by each man. This item consisted of a canister of charcoal granules with a tube attached, with which the water was sucked

up through the filter unit. In addition, a pair of special goggles was issued to combat glare and dust. When not in actual use, they were usually slipped up on to the helmet, giving one the appearance of a modern speedway rider.

Our canteens were well stocked with tobacco and a small range of other necessities, but whatever was lacking in the matter of things to buy, was more than compensated by the fact that everything was free! These goods had been gifts to the contingent by firms and individuals, and there was plenty of everything.

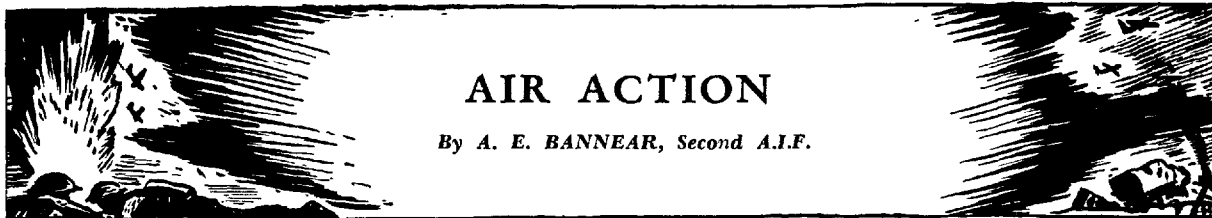
Iberia, carrying the infantry, arrived in Suakin harbour on 29 March. Established at this important Red Sea port was the Guards Brigade commanded by General Graham and we were longing to meet and mingle with these famous soldiers. During disembarkation, however, our feelings were somewhat ruffled to hear such remarks as: “Blimey, Bill; these ‘Walers’ are *white* blokes!”

The “Walers” were soon put to work though, after donning khaki jacket and trousers and shin-length gaiters of canvas. The tunic was fitted with a long pad of cloth running down the back to cover the spine as protection from sunstroke. Another flap of material hung from the back of the helmet to shelter the neck.

It was a rough and tough country and, as expected, terribly hot. At halts it was useless trying to sit on the ground, which meant that during daylight everything from “smokos” to eating was usually carried out at “the stand”.

The rebel leader in this area was Osman Digna, who had fled to Tamai, some twenty-one miles away. The New South Wales Contingent was detailed to accompany an expedition to occupy the position. This operation was duly carried out and the Australians had their first taste of the enemy, who, incidentally, were known as “Fuzzy-Wuzzies”. It took another war to change the Sudan soldier's conception of that term.

These dark gentry were exceedingly nasty customers and, surprising as it may seem, they were equipped with better arms than the



AIR ACTION

By A. E. BANNEAR, *Second A.I.F.*

TWENTY-FOUR Hurricane fighters cruised leisurely over our heads one mid-morning during the vital stages of the Battle of El Alamein. Down in the southern sector another twenty-four were patrolling.

On the earth there was a lull in the fighting, while both sides consolidated their gains and losses. One troop of field guns of the 2/7th Field Regiment were firing spasmodically at opportunity targets. In holes and on the sand men were resting. I sat yarning to members of a New Zealand Bofors crew who were waiting orders to move forward.

Then it happened! A mad one hundred and fifty seconds of dramatic action. Out of the brazen sky above the guns twenty-one hook-winged vultures slid down—dark diving shapes amidst a rising crescendo of sound. “Stukas!” barked the gun sergeant. “It’s on.”

The patrolling Hurricanes had just turned over the coast and were heading inland. We yelled unheard to the aircraft above and shouted directions. The planes flew sedately on.

Then the squadron leader sighted the enemy aircraft; his hand moved quickly to the throttle controls and swift instructions came from his lips. The Hurricanes increased speed with a quick rising snarl of engines and turned towards the diving Stukas.

Out over the guns the leader of the German planes had reached the end of his dive; we watched with fascination the black bombs leave the bomb rack. Earth and smoke erupted. By this time our fighters had closed

in with blazing guns. All was mad confusion. From above more than fifty ME 109G escort fighters dived into the fray. Then twenty-four British reinforcements arrived from the south.

Out of the smoke six fighter-bombers of the Luftwaffe screamed towards us. A squadron of tanks on a low ridge, two hundred yards south, was their target. But the tanks were safe. The whistling, tearing bombs exploded across our area. In an instant all interest in the air battle was lost; we flattened to earth as splinters and blast mushroomed out. A New Zealand officer on the road was caught in the paralysing blast, jagged shrapnel through his head.

By this time the fighting aircraft had reached zero feet and were intent on getting home. A wheeling ME, some forty feet up, crossed the sights of a twisting Hurricane. The tearing sound of twelve Browning machine guns was deafening. In turn, a Messerschmitt caught a Hurricane in its sights—cannon popped and aerial M.Gs snarled. At this stage six dark-blue Spitfires came up to follow “Jerry” home.

The show was over: dazed white-faced men struggled to their feet to gaze into the smoky dust after the disappearing aircraft.

In the space of two and a half minutes, nineteen of the twenty-one Stukas went down in flames; seventeen fighters, both British and German, were burning or twisted masses of metal; several soldiers were killed; many vehicles were scarred by splinters and bullets.

“All clear,” said the gun sergeant.



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 - look for others who lived in the same place or street
 - who was the postmaster or police officer in the town?
 - how often and at what time did the coach arrive in town?
 - what churches were there and what time were services held?
 - what other activities were there in the community?
 - look for others who had the same occupation or other interests

All of this and more may be available in a seemingly mundane book such as a directory. Learn much of the background of life at the time, even if your ancestor is not listed there.