

QX7051 William George Lawley

Compiled by Kenneth William Lawley

England, Scotland, Palestine, Tobruk, Syria, El Alemein, Borneo.

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DRAFT

Introduction

The following story illustrates **George**'s Army service and is written to show how his movements fit in with the overall flow of World War II and the activities of the various units he served with. As he was in two different theatres of the war and moved from the infantry units to the service corps units sometimes the context is hard to follow. The following table shows his actual transfers during the period.

| Period | Divn | Unit | Location |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Enlisted 1 Apr 1940 | 2 AIF | Rec Depot | Kelvin Grove, Brisbane |
| 1 Apr to 30 Apr 1940 | Northern Comd | 20 th Depot Coy | Enoggera Camp, Brisbane |
| 30 Apr to 5 May 1940 | Eastern Comd | | NSW |
| 5 May to 17 Jun 1940 | 6 th Divn | 2/9 th Bn | HMT Queen Mary at sea |
| 17 Jun to 12 Jul 1940 | 6 th 25 th Bgde | 2/9 th Bn | Gourock, Scotland to Lopcombe Cnr, England |
| 12 Jul 1940 to 3 Jan 1941 | 6 th 25 th Bgde | 71 st Bn | Tidwirth, England |
| 3 Jan to 10 Mch 1941 | 9 th 25 th Bgde | 2/32 nd Bn | HMT J19 at sea to M.E |
| 10 Mch to 22 Nov 1941 | 9 th 25 th Bgde | 2/32 nd Bn | Palestine, Tobruk |
| 22 Nov 1941 to 4 Jan 1942 | 9 th AASC | Amn Coy | Middle East |
| 13 Jan to 30 Jun 1942 | 9 th AASC | 10 Coy | Middle East |
| 30 Jun 1942 to 24 Jan 1943 | 9 th AASC | Amn Coy | Middle East |
| 24 Jan to 27 Feb 1943 | 9 th AASC | Amn Coy | HMT L1 at sea to Sydney |
| 27 Feb to 9 May 1943 | 9 th AASC | Amn Coy | |
| 9 May 1943 to 16 Jun 1944 | 9 th AASC | 2/156 AGT Coy | |
| 16 Jun 1944 to 23 Apr 1945 | 9 th AASC | 2/14 th T'port Pl | Atherton, Townsville |
| 23 Apr to 1 May 1945 | 9 th AASC | 2/14 th T'port Pl | General McRae at sea to DNG |
| 1 May to 19 June 1945 | 9 th AASC | 2/14 th T'port Pl | Morotai, DNG |
| 19 June to 1 Oct 1945 | 9 th AASC | 2/14 th T'port Pl | Borneo |
| 1 Oct to 3 Oct 1945 | | 1 BSA DD | Labuan, Borneo |
| 3 Oct to 15 Oct 1945 | | 1 BSA DD | Manoora at sea |
| 15 Oct to 16 Oct 1945 | | 1 BSA DD | Brisbane |
| Discharged 16 Oct 1945 | | | Brisbane |

On the 3rd September 1939 Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared that Australia was at war with Nazi Germany. In October, the Army was split into four Commands (e.g. Northern Command) and General Blamey was put in charge of the new 2nd AIF, the 6th Division volunteer expeditionary force. The Division was to consist of the 16th Brigade with four battalions from NSW, (2/1st, 2/2nd, 2/3rd, 2/4th), the 17th Brigade from Victoria, (2/5th, 2/6th, 2/7th, 2/8th) and the 18th Brigade from Queensland (2/9th and two companies of the 2/12th), South Australia (2/10th), West Australia (2/11th) and Tasmania (other companies of the 2/12th).

Military leaders were in no great haste to recruit for the expeditionary force as there were no huts built to house them yet. They built camps for the 16th (NSW) Brigade at Ingleburn, 17th (Victorian) Brigade at Puckapunyal, 18th (Qld, SA, WA, Tas) Brigade at Greta in the Hunter Valley.

AASC

An integral part of the Army was the Service Corps and in World War II the AASC story is one of a combination of expansion cluttered by ongoing changes of policy and casual changes of Unit names caused both by the alterations to the command and administrative structure of the Army, and by Service Corps decisions on what seemed to be a good idea at the time.

In 1939, AASC field units were organised on a single commodity basis - supplies, petrol and ammunition, regardless of the previous war's experience of the cost of inflexibility in having dedicated units to meet widely fluctuating demands for each commodity.

On the 9th January 1940 the first large body of the 2nd AIF, 16th Brigade, left Sydney for overseas with the 17th and 18th Brigades to follow in April and May.

William George Lawley enlisted for Army service at the 2nd AIF Recruiting Depot, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane on the 1st April 1940. At the time, he was 20 and listed as an unemployed labourer. He then spent a month with the 20th Depot Company Northern Command before transferring to the Eastern Command based in N.S.W.

On the 5th May 1940 as part of the third convoy of the AIF for Palestine he embarked from Sydney on H.M.T X4 (Queen Mary). His convoy was held at Fremantle for a few days, as there were concerns that Italy would enter the war and passage via the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean would be too dangerous. On the 15th May, the Australian Government was advised that the third convoy was being diverted to Capetown and then on to England rather than Palestine. Four weeks later, on the 17th June 1940, they arrived in Gourock, Scotland. Gourock is on the Firth of Clyde about 50 kilometres west of Glasgow.

England

To the men of the Australian force that arrived in the United Kingdom in June 1940 and departed the following November and January, the experience was one to be long remembered. Most of them had never seen England or Europe before and would not again, and the fact that for half a year they helped to garrison England against possible invasion gave the adventure a special quality.

Politically the presence of Canadian, Australian and New Zealand soldiers in England in that time of danger probably had a greater importance than their numbers justified. Yet so empty was England of trained men and even of such arms as the Dominion forces brought with them, that they made an appreciable addition to the defending army.

Thirteen British divisions, including three for which no artillery could be provided, had been in France when the German Army attacked on 10th May. They had lost practically all their equipment. By the end of June, although there were twenty-five divisions in Britain none was fully armed. Mr Churchill has written that the armies were known to be almost unarmed except for rifles. There were in fact, hardly five hundred field guns of any sort and hardly two hundred medium or heavy tanks in the whole country.

The ability of this army to defend Britain was not tested because the Navy commanded the seas girdling Britain and the Air Force defeated German efforts to gain control of the air. In the air battle the principal role was to be played by Fighter Command which included (in July when the Battle of Britain opened) fifty-nine squadrons-armed chiefly with Hurricanes and Spitfires of which eight were forming or reforming and a majority had been heavily engaged in fighting on or over the Continent. On the 16th June, the French Government gave in to the Germans and asked for an armistice.

The Australian force which had disembarked at Gourock on the Clyde on 17th June from the liners *Queen Mary*, *Mauretania* and *Empress of Canada* (three other liners carried the New Zealanders in the same convoy) included just short of 8,000 officers and men. They comprised approximately one-third of the 6th Division and the Service Corps troops raised with it, plus some 450 infantry reinforcements for that division, a force which, when equipped, might have been assembled to form a strong brigade group.

The convoy also carried a great part of the signals, *army service corps* and ordnance troops of the 6th Division. On 18th June, this hotch-potch force began to reach Salisbury Plain where it established itself in a camp well equipped with bell tents, marquees and huts. Their headquarters were placed at Amesbury Abbey, a stately home among pleasant gardens; the 18th Brigade at Lopcombe Corner; and the remainder of the force near Tidworth. The task was begun of preparing the force to take its part in meeting the German invasion that then seemed imminent.

On the 18th Brigadier Wynter was informed that he had been appointed to command the Australian force in the United Kingdom. The new commander faced a difficult problem of organization, complicated by the fact that his infantry and machine-gunners had only rifles and machine-guns, his artillery no guns, and vehicles and technical gear were lacking. Wynter took into consideration that it would be long before he received full equipment for his artillery and technical units, yet that his force might be required to fight at short notice, though armed, perhaps, only with machine-guns and rifles. Consequently he decided to form a second infantry brigade, establishing three new battalions by using his infantry reinforcements and reducing the strength of his artillery regiments, his machine-gun battalion and particularly his technical units, which were disproportionately large even for a force based on seven battalions.

By the 22nd June, his plan for reorganising the force had been outlined and the War Office had agreed. His field force now included two infantry brigades, two field batteries, two anti-tank batteries, two companies of engineers, a machine-gun battalion and ancillary troops. Wynter considered that the improvised brigade would be "in reasonable shape" within a month. Its battalions consisted principally of officers and men hitherto trained in artillery, army service corps and other units. To the infantry were transferred, for example, 450 men of the army service corps, 276 from the machine-gunners, and 384 from artillery. By thus adding 1,300 technical troops to his 459 infantry reinforcements, he was able to give each of the three new battalions a strength of about 600; each had only three instead of four rifle companies.

At first, the new battalions were numbered 2/28th, 2/29th, 2/30th, but as these numbers had already been allotted to battalions that were to be formed in Australia, they were then numbered 70th, 71st, 72nd. In July 1940, **George Lawley** was transferred from the 2/9th

Battalion at Lopcombe Corner to the 71st Battalion at Tidworth. Finally, in October, they were renamed 2/31st, 2/32nd, 2/33rd, and considered for territorial purposes as having been raised from Northern Command, Southern Command and Eastern Command respectively.

One of the principal difficulties was to find officers and particularly staff officers. Fortunately Wynter had with him a handful of staff officers of A.I.F. Headquarters and I Australian Corps, and there were at Australia House in London some Australian liaison officers, notably Colonel Bridgeford, an able and widely-experienced soldier who had recently been at the Imperial Defence College; he was appointed to command the new brigade, that George Lawley was now part of, which was numbered the 25th Brigade. The 18th Brigade contributed some officers and men to the new battalions; twenty-one subalterns came from the infantry reinforcements; most of the other officers from artillery and technical units.

The four months which the force spent on Salisbury Plain were strenuous and exciting. Both in the County of Wiltshire and on leave, when they went as far afield as Scotland, the Australians were received with warm hospitality. On 4th July, the King spent a day inspecting them on parade and in training. On 13th July, as George was transferring to Tidworth, the force came under fire, and the A.I.F. suffered what appears to have been its first battle casualty. A German bomber appeared out of low cloud and, as it passed over the lines of the 2/9th and 2/10th Battalions, fired 300 to 400 rounds at the tents and huts. Only one man from the 2/10th Battalion was wounded.

Within a few days of their arrival on Salisbury Plain a school was established for training infantry leaders—a step especially necessary in view of the transfer of gunners, engineers and others to infantry battalions; and a number of regular British N.C.O's were obtained as instructors. Equipment was received at a slow rate that distressed the troops but was inevitable in a country which had denuded even training schools to arm the British Expeditionary Force in France. Early in July, Brigadier Morshead (whose men then had only fifty rounds per rifle) visited the ordnance store at Tidworth himself and obtained seventeen Bren guns and twelve anti-tank rifles for each of his battalions.

On 26th July part of the force, though still so ill-equipped, was given an important role in the defence of Southern England. The 18th Brigade, with artillery, the machine-gun battalion and other troops attached, became the Southern Command Striking Force, if a mobile striking force was needed, or alternatively the reserve to V Corps. If used as Southern Command Striking Force it was anticipated that one complete field battery would be added, also two or three of the Mobile Striking Columns raised in the Salisbury Plain area. In this event, HQ Australforce will go into the field and assume command. Wynter regarded the 25th Brigade at this stage was suited only for a local protective role in the Salisbury Plain area.

In August, the Luftwaffe began large-scale bombing attacks on targets widely spread throughout Britain, including the military encampments. By 15th August the Australian area had been bombed, though without much effect, on three consecutive. However, the transfer of the force to the Middle East, where (as General Blamey was emphasising) its units were urgently needed to complete the force of which they were part, was already under discussion and, on the 23rd, General Wynter ordered the reconstruction of the anti-tank regiment and the return of enough gunners to the field artillery regiment to bring it to full strength. And

welcome news was received from Army Headquarters in Melbourne that the *25th Brigade* was to be considered no longer an improvised formation but a permanent part of the A.I.F.

In the midst of these discussions, the Prime Minister, Mr Churchill, (on 4th September) visited the Australians, greatly to their satisfaction, and gave them one of his rousing addresses, eloquent but earthy, stirring yet humorous.

By this time, preparations for the opening of the long-awaited German invasion were evident and on Saturday 7th September the bombing of London proper opened and it appeared that seaborne attack was near. The code word "Cromwell", meaning "invasion imminent", went out to the Southern and Eastern Commands and units of the Australian mobile forces were placed on one hour's notice to move.

On the 17th, Mr Churchill told the anxious Commons at a Secret Session that 1,700 self-propelled barges and 200 ships could be seen on the other side of the Channel. However, though the British leaders did not then know it, the crisis had already passed. On the 15th the *Luftwaffe* had made its strongest daylight attacks and had lost fifty-six aircraft (at the time the Royal Air Force believed that 185 had been brought down), and thereafter its attacks waned. On the 17th, the day of Churchill's speech to the Secret Session, Hitler had ordered that the invasion be postponed indefinitely and, in a few days, the assembled shipping began to move away. If the invasion had been attempted in September the enemy would have encountered a far stronger army than the disorganised, ill-armed force of June.

During the crisis of September, the role of the 18th Brigade was to prepare to deal with German parachute troops landing on Salisbury Plain. It was not until 23rd September that the Australian force, in common with the remainder of the army in Britain, was ordered to stand down. Meanwhile its proposed departure from England began to appear more remote, and on 16th October it was transferred to Colchester in the Eastern Command, where the 18th Brigade was allotted the defence of that garrison town, and the *25th Brigade*, now better trained and equipped, was made mobile reserve to XI Corps, with the task of counter-attacking an invader landing at Harwich, Frinton, Clacton or Mersea in Essex along the east coast of England.

On 29th September, General Wynter was informed by Army Headquarters in Melbourne that it had been decided to form a fourth AIF division, the *9th Division* using the force in the United Kingdom as a nucleus, and that he was appointed to command it. In November the 18th Brigade embarked, again at Glasgow, leaving the *25th Brigade*, now commanded by Brigadier Wardell, at Colchester.

The 18th Brigade reached Alexandria in the Middle East on the 31st December. The *25th Brigade* with *George's 2/32nd battalion* embarked from Gourock in Scotland on H.M.T J19 on 3rd January 1941 and reached its camp in Palestine on 10th March. The departure of *George's* unit, which had arrived in the United Kingdom as the 6th Division "the third convoy", had become "Australforce", and then departed as the nucleus *9th Division*.

Formation of 9th Division AASC was much the same, as part of it was built up in England from the units diverted there. Part of these units were converted to infantry, the remainder formed HQ AASC 9 Div and 9 Division Supply Column, which arrived in Syria in December 1940 and were completed by 9 Division Petrol Company and 9 Division Ammunition

Company on their arrival from Australia in March 1941 as George's 2/32nd unit arrived from England.

Also, in 1941, the AASC/AIF divisions in the Middle East informally returned to a composite structure in which column headquarters commanded two to five companies, and companies commanded two to five platoons - transport, supplies and workshop. The nature and size of the task determined the number, mix and employment, so there was no scope for ammunition units being idle when ammunition expenditure was low, similarly for fuel supply.

This decision to follow the UK ASC change in 1941 to the system of building up companies of appropriate specialist platoons lasted until 38 companies had been raised (the number in World War I), after which it all became too hard and transport and composite units became general transport (GT) companies numbered in the 100 series. Many supply units in the lines of communication and base areas were organised in new and odd ways raised and named in a haphazard way, often called by whatever name came first to someone's mind, rather than establishing a systematic and logical system of titles and organizations.

Tobruk Defence

Australian troops had captured the Libyan port of Tobruk in late January 1941.

The 9th Division survived a siege on the port for 242 days until late December 1941 when they were relieved. They gained the title of the Rats of Tobruk. The Australians at Tobruk saved the British Middle East campaign from total collapse.

Tobruk AASC

The AASC component of the Tobruk garrison was more than equal to the task, comprising HQ AASC 9 Div, 9 Div Amn Coy, 9 Div Pet Coy, 9 Div Sup Coln and 7 Div Sup Coln, with also under command 309, 345, 346 and 550 Res MT Coys RASC; additional RASC base units under the UK 76 Base Sub-Area included a base supply depot, bulk petroleum storage company, reserve petroleum depot, field bakeries and butchery, cold storage depot, plus two DIDs and two FSDs.

The static nature of the defence of Tobruk had two major effects on the AASC units: firstly replenishment of units was effected by unit collection from static detail issue depots for food, fuel and ammunition; and secondly the surplus of transport elements so liberated was available for other employment or evacuation from the garrison.

After the initial attacks had been contained, garrison commander Maj Gen Morshead, concerned to establish the maximum depth in the fortress, decided to raise an infantry battalion from the ranks of 9 Div AASC, though difficulties with support weapons changed this to four infantry companies and a carrier section.

On 27th April A Coy and the carrier section commanded by Capt J.C. Taylor relieved 2/43 Bn in 24th Brigade's sector in the east of the line, occupying 4,000 metres of the perimeter covering the Wadi Zeitun from the coast in to the head of the wadi on the Bardia Road, with first 2/23 Bn, later 2/43 Bn, on its right. It was to hold this position until immediately before the relief of the Australian troops began in September, the longest stint in the forward line by any unit in the garrison, and a factor recognised by Morshead in scheduling the order of return to Egypt. B Coy was held by 24th Brigade in reserve until returned to its functional role in July. C Coy was first held in depth at Fort Pilastrino in the Blue Line, then was absorbed into 2/15 Bn, and D Coy (less 10 P1) into 2/13 Bn, both of which saw heavy fighting in the early assaults and subsequent attacks to eliminate the Salient, taking heavy casualties. D Coy's 10 Platoon was formed into a carrier platoon under 18 (Indian) Cavalary Regiment at the western coast of the perimeter, then with 2/1 Pioneer Bn as part of 20th Brigade which also had C and D Coys, while 7 Div Sup Coln supplied a medium machine gun platoon for the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers.

The garrison was thinned out in July. The four RASC transport companies were evacuated, replaced by three formed from the AASC. No 1 Troop Carrying Coy, from B and part of A Inf Coys AASC commanded by Capt W.L. Day, was allotted to 18th Brigade to give it mobility for its counter-penetration role. No 2 Troop Carrying Coy from C and D Inf Coys AASC commanded by Capt J.N. Duncan similarly provided mobility to the reserve battalion of each brigade in the line. The third, Area Transport Coy from 7 Div Sup Coln under Capt H.C. Thompson, was used as general transport in the base area. A Vehicle Reception Depot was formed by Capt C.H. Locke in place of the evacuated 76 VRD RASC, and the British detailed issue depots were replaced by 9 Div Sup Coln, the departing ADS&T 76 Base Sub-Area handing over ADS&T responsibilities to CAASC 9th Division.

It is therefore apparent that the kindest reading of an RASC historian's statement that 'throughout the siege, the RASC with some AASC assistance ran supplies, transport, petrol and ammunition' is that it applied only in part and only to the first part of the siege.

Although A Inf Coy occupied a battalion's worth of perimeter, its time in the line was fairly quiet as anticipated, the rugged approaches to its area not being likely to attract any major assault. It was not, however, without its moments: on the night 30 April/1 May a German raid on A Coy's Post Z80 was turned away in a fire fight; its carrier section 'patrolled adventurously' and provided part of the supporting fire for a sortie on 13 May by a company of 2/43 Bn and a troop of tanks along the Bardia road, a debacle in which the AASC carriers helped screen the withdrawal.

Meanwhile the remainder of the garrison's AASC and RASC had settled into the routine of support, running the base, air attacks on their positions and running the gauntlets of fire in moving about their tasks.

The range of these tasks was wide and often unusual. 9 Div Amn Coy published *Tobruk Truth*, issued with the rations to counter rumours and enemy propaganda. Ammunition duties, between meeting the expenditure peaks in repelling assaults on the fortress, included the disposal of Italian ammunition, much of it unsafe and the cause of several casualties to the unit.

Unloading stores in the port was a hasty affair, the RAN's 'Scrap Iron Flotilla' running the air blockade and having to be turned around within an hour at night; CAASC Lieut-Col J.A. Watson had to raise a port detachment and impose strict transport control to ensure effective discharge in the time available, and Sgt E.S. Hodgson was attached to the Base Sub-Area staff to supervise the tug and lighter crews working the harbour.

Relief of the 9th Division by 70th (UK) Division began for the AASC with arrival of the Polish ASC to take over the Area Transport Coy in late August 1941, but a new Res MT Coy had to be formed from the two troop carrying companies to handle movement of the incoming and outgoing divisions through the port. A Inf Coy came out of the perimeter into the reserve line on 9th September, then a month later was tasked with operating the prisoner of war compound, but was relieved immediately and evacuated in the first wave at Morshead's direction on 12th October. HQ RASC 70 Div and its units were in control by 21st October and the main body was evacuated by sea under air attack to Julis Camp in southern Palestine, leaving a rear party of 70 to follow.

Watson had had under his control nearly two and a half thousand men, a thousand vehicles, several food, fuel ammunition and vehicle depots and workshops, plus a wide range of peripheral duties, as had his men and those detached in the infantry, cavalry, machine gun, rail and medical transport, port and water transport details. The galloping grocers were nothing if not versatile, and did not need elaborate command structures to manage those massive resources, relying on energetic, relatively junior officers to fulfil both routine and independent tasks while controlling significant bodies of men and equipment.

On the 22nd November 1941 George was transferred to Amn Company ASC 9th Division.

Japanese successes in the Pacific brought things to an abrupt termination. The 8th Division (less a brigade group and its corps troops slice), sent to Malaya from February 1941, was in captivity within a year. Against Churchill's relaxed attitude that Australia could be recaptured later if necessary, the Curtin government recalled 6th and 7th Divisions to form a corps in Java as part of the ABDA Force, but the premature fall of Singapore and then Java pre-empted that force's establishment; the alternative British demand for diversion of 7th Division to Burma was refused, saving its loss there.

The 9th Division, with a small slice of corps troops, remained in the Middle East to fight at El Alamein a year later then returned to the recapture of New Guinea and Borneo. The 6th and 7th Divisions, with most of the AASC Corps Troops, returned to Australia and were committed to the defence of Papua and the subsequent offensives in New Guinea and the Islands.

The first half of 1942 was taken up by the 9th Division, after its relief from Tobruk, in retraining and refitting in preparation for the battles ahead. In January 1942 the divisional supply column, ammunition and petrol companies finally converted to the composite system, becoming 10, 11 and 12 Companies AASC, each with 3 transport platoons and a composite platoon for supplies, petrol and ammunition duties.

In January 1942, George was detached for special duties for six months with the 10 Company AASC rejoining his unit on 30th June 1942.

Meanwhile the 7th Division had taken Syria in July 1941 and remained on garrison duty until relieved by the 9th Division after its release from Tobruk from mid January 1942.

After conclusion of the Syrian campaign, although there was a garrison task sideline, activities centred largely on reforming 1st Australian Corps as a properly constituted formation to meet the original objective, as was eventually achieved in World War I, of having all Australian troops under national command and fighting as an entity. It had been a parallel objective of the British command to keep 'colonial' formations at the lowest level possible to facilitate their dovetailing into the British structure, and this tug of war had been active from the beginning, sometimes for urgent operational necessity, but always resisted by Blamey.

Now the three divisions were out of contact, the situation in the Middle East had stabilised, and 1st Armoured Division was training and equipping in Australia to join 1st Corps and give it the punch necessary for operations in North Africa. But the other side of the coin was mobility, so the miscellany of AASC non-divisional units was restructured to form a corps troops transport column to resupply the divisions, a corps troops column to provide direct support to the mass of corps troops units, and a troop carrying column able to lift a division at a time.

This aggregation of transport numbering over a thousand task vehicles was the greatest assembled in one command in the history of the AASC, but was not used in operations as Japan's entry into the war resulted in the recall of the 6th and 7th Divisions to the defence of Australia. Movement of 1st Armoured Division was cancelled, only 9th Division remaining in the Middle East to provide infantry backbone for the breaking of Rommel's power in the Western Desert.

By the end of June, 1942, the Axis Forces had advanced to Alamein, and Rome and Berlin Radio were jubilantly proclaiming the imminent fall of Alexandria and the Suez Canal. Field Marshal Rommel had publicly declared that he now held the key to these vital points and it would be only a matter of days before all resistance in Egypt had ceased. The British Eighth Army was a worn and depleted force and was now holding a defence line only seventy miles from our great Mediterranean naval base. The Axis had achieved a spectacular success by the rapid reconquest of Cyrenaica and subsequent advance into Egypt, but the very speed of the advance had proved a limiting factor and the enemy had now to pause, reorganize his forces, and bring up supplies for a further assault.

The month of July 1942 saw a change in the pattern of war. The arrival of the Australian and New Zealand Divisions fresh from training in Northern Syria had enabled the initiative again to pass to us. By the end of July, the *Ninth Division* had participated in four actions and a wedge had been driven between the enemy flank and the sea. Thousands of prisoners had been taken and heavy losses inflicted in killed and wounded. The front had been stabilized and from offence, the enemy had reverted to defence.

Conditions to the *Ninth Division* were a familiar reminder of the months spent defending the perimeter of Tobruk. Patrol and harass was the normal routine, augmented by the ceaseless

battering of our 25-pounders. By October, the Eighth Army had been built up and strengthened. Plans for a major British offensive were taking shape.

In the north, Thirtieth Corps was to attack with four infantry divisions which were, from the coast running south: *Ninth Australian*, Fifty-first Highland, Second New Zealand, and First South African Divisions, and to seize the area of the Miteiriya Ridge and the ground 8 km to the north and hold this area running through the enemy defences and gun areas, thus establishing a bridgehead through which the British armour could pass.

On the Ninth Divisional flank, 24th Brigade was given the task of defending the Division's own defence lines in the coastal sector and carrying out a diversionary operation designed to draw the enemy attention and fire. Zero hour was set at 2200 hours on the 23rd of October to permit full use being made of the hours of darkness to capture the bridgehead and pass the armour through.

The heaviest artillery concentration yet seen in Africa opened the Eighth Army offensive on the night of the 23rd. Ranged along the whole front, 800 Allied guns opened fire on the enemy lines. On the Corps front, the night was brilliant with gun flashes and the ground shuddered to the tremendous concussion as the 400 guns of the Corps shelled known enemy gun positions. Twenty minutes later, the barrage came down on his defended positions. Coincident with this our infantry advance commenced, and by 0100 hours the 2/24th, 2/17th and 2/15th Battalions, which had participated in the initial attack, had reached and were firmly holding their first objective.

The second phase commenced at 0055 hours with the advance of the 2/48th and 2/13th Battalions. On the right, the 2/48th Battalion advanced steadily for 1500 metres and then ran into strongly wired posts protected by minefields and anti-personnel mines, but after hard fighting its objective was finally gained. Behind the 2/48th Battalion, the 2/24th Battalion was reorganizing and the tireless sappers were clearing a way through a series of seven minefields that lay between the starting line and the brigade objective. On the left the 2/13th Battalion, which was to have advanced with supporting tanks from the 40th Royal Tank Regiment, advanced unsupported when the armour was held up by minefields. After advancing about 1700 metres against minor resistance the battalion ran into strongly held German positions but took them and gained its first objective.

The 2/48th Battalion was to attack astride the track leading to Trig 29 and capture the spur. Following this, the 2/24th Battalion was to attack northeast to capture the area known as Fig Garden. The advance of the 2/48th Battalion commenced at midnight on the 25th of October supported by timed artillery concentrations the battalion rapidly reached and cleared the intermediate objective. The mobile company then swept forward and under cover of the noise of the artillery reached and completely surprised a large enemy force on the spur and the spur was captured. While the 2/48th was exploiting, the 2/24th Battalion launched its attack at 0400 hours.

German reaction to the loss of Trig 29 and the valuable switch-line of the enemy defences to Fig Garden was violent. On the 26th of October, he shelled 26th Brigade heavily while attacking 20th Brigade with tanks and infantry. A tank and infantry attack was driven off by 2/13th Battalion aided by artillery fire. Enemy infantry attempted to dig in but were prevented

from doing so and finally were driven off with the assistance of our supporting tanks. Later a heavy attack was mounted against the 2/17th Battalion positions but this too was repulsed and heavy losses were inflicted. The Axis command was making desperate efforts to retrieve the vital ground. On the 26th Brigade front, simultaneous attacks were made against the 2/48th and 2/24th Battalions but after reaching our wire were driven back.

To appreciate conditions under which the 9th Division was fighting it is necessary to visualize an undulating, hard, stony, gradually rising desert broken by occasional swells and low ridges. The only vegetation consists of a low, scrubby, prickly bush commonly known as Camel Thorn, which grows in the shallow, barren soil. Distances between opposing defence lines were frequently thousands of metres and to advance without being observed during daylight was impossible. The smallest hump or declivity provides the site for a defence position.

The so-called line of defence is really a series of small heavily manned strongpoints generally sited behind barbed wire entanglements and protected by individual minefields. Protecting the whole series of strongpoints which constitute the line are large, carefully sited and laid minefields frequently hundreds of yards in depth. For the infantry to reach an objective it is often necessary to advance two or three thousand yards across open country before reaching the belt of minefields through which gaps must be quickly prepared by sappers before tanks and vehicles carrying supporting weapons and consolidation stores can be moved forward and the advance continued finally to come to grips with the enemy.

During the advance, the attacking force is subject to the concentrated firepower which a modern army can bring to bear. The task is not completed even when the objective is finally reached and taken. The attacking force must then be able to exploit through the area surrounding the position to clear the enemy from nearby points which may command or menace the ground taken.

The featureless terrain provides almost no landmarks. A burnt out vehicle, a rude stone cairn or the remains of a mud wall of an ancient Arab building, may constitute the only guiding points during an advance. To describe an objective in geographical terms is generally impossible. It is purely an objective, a pocket of enemy dug into the ground and strongly protected by weapons and mines.

At this stage, the Army Commander began to feel the need for more infantry and it was therefore decided that-

- (a) 152nd Highland Brigade would relieve 20th Brigade, which in turn would release 26th Brigade enabling it to stage a second attack northwards.
- (b) The First South African Division would relieve the Second New Zealand Division allowing the latter to move into reserve.
- (c) The Thirteenth Corps would cease attacking in the south and hold the front as lightly as possible, thus releasing the Seventh Armoured Division and as many infantry brigades as possible for the battle in the north.

On the night of the 26th/27th of October, the reliefs by the 152nd Highland and the 20th Australian Brigades took place. The major object of the attack was the cutting off and capture of a section of the enemy between the northern flank of Thirtieth Corps and the sea.

The *Ninth Division* was to attack northward capturing the area including the main coast road, keeping pressure on the enemy, and opening up the tracks south of this area for more direct maintenance of the division. For the operation, the division had under command British armour and New Zealand and British artillery and anti-tank guns.

The attack commenced before midnight on the 28th of October and by the early hours of the morning 2/13th and 2/15th Battalions had gained and were holding their objective, but the 2/23rd Battalion, supported by tanks, had met strong and unexpected resistance shortly after crossing the start line. Although this was overcome the delay caused prevented the continuance of the plan that night, and the completion of the final phase was postponed until the following night and subsequently to the night of the 30th/31st of October. The fighting had been hard and bloody, the attacking forces encountering extremely heavy small arms fire supported by intense artillery fire. During the following day, the enemy sought to reduce our gains by launching counter-attacks with tanks and infantry but these were repulsed. During the same period, the "dog fight" was continuing to the west in an effort to secure a passage for the armoured divisions but no decisive result had been achieved.

The third northward attack by the *Ninth Division* took place on the night of the 30th/31st of October to complete the previous advance and to cut off the enemy by establishing a line northward to the coast. The advance commenced before midnight and the 2/32nd Battalion rapidly reached the area of the railway and main road. The 2/24th and 2/48th Battalions commenced their advance southeast while the 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion attacked northward. Both attacks were pushed through with heavy casualties, but as they had not sufficient strength to hold the areas gained, the battalions withdrew to the area occupied by 2/32nd Battalion.

In desperate attempts to break our line attacks were launched from the north, north-west and west, but our positions were held. On the night of the 31st of October/1st of November 24th Brigade relieved 26th Brigade (less 2/23rd Battalion which remained under command of 24th Brigade) on the northern flank thus strengthening this flank, while 26th Brigade took over the 24th Brigade defences in the coastal sector. Violent German counter-attacks continued throughout the 1st of November. The enemy repeatedly formed up and battered our positions with tanks and artillery, but again his frenzied attempts to regain the lost ground failed, although the division was suffering heavy casualties.

Meanwhile British Forces had advanced and the Army Commander decided to stage a further infantry attack finally to penetrate the enemy defences. The attack was made on the night of the 1st/2nd of November by two British brigades under command of the New Zealand Division, and by British armour. On the night of the 2nd of November all battalions of 24th Brigade mounted strong raids against the enemy positions. The fighting was bitter and casualties were suffered by our own and enemy forces. Fourteen prisoners were taken. Our sharp return to the offensive came as an unexpected shock to the enemy. A break-through had been finally effected and on the 4th of November Tenth Armoured Corps passed through in pursuit of the Axis armies. That night the 24th Brigade established a line to the sea.

This concluded twelve days of intensive fighting on the divisional front. The enemy resistance had been crushed and his efforts were now directed at extricating as much of his battered force as possible. His main defences had been broken and his armies were being

rapidly swept back along the coastal road by the advancing tanks and guns of the Eighth Army. The long push that was ultimately to end in the capture of the whole of the Axis armies at the tip of the Tunisian Peninsula had now begun.

Of this fighting the British official report on the Battle of Alamein states: "*The Ninth Australian Division* put up a magnificent effort. They fought themselves and the enemy to a standstill, until flesh and blood could stand no more. Then they went on fighting." This was the last action in which Australians fought in the Middle East, and it was fitting that the *Ninth Division* should participate in the final victory.

El Alamein

They were concentrated at the El Alamein defensive line by 11th July with 101 GT Coy from the departed Corps Troops Transport Column and 345 and 462 GT Coys RASC. Another addition was found to be a necessity. A Divisional Troops Company to look after the non-brigade units and corps units operating permanently with the division -this was raised by milking each of what was termed the brigade group companies and 101 GT Coy. The divisional staff still did not properly understand the use of the composite system, allotting companies to brigades, as opposed to each company supporting one third of the division, so forcing a shortfall that was not intended to exist. It was not until the very eve of the battle that the confusion of trying to coordinate into a divisional effort three companies, each claimed for priority by a brigade, was recognised, leading to a hasty reversion of them to control by the CAASC.

Preparations for the defensive battle of Alam Halfa, then the following offensive battle of Alamein, included the stockpiling of five days of commodities to cope with the usual German attempt at armoured encirclement. Fuel was supplied by RASC bulk tanker direct to most divisional units, with reserve stocks held in 44 and 4 gallon drums, until reversion to packed fuel replenishment through petrol points was made on the eve of the battle of Alamein. Issue of rations to units was effected through the new clockface method, where unit vehicles were loaded from vehicles positioned tailboard out in a circle. Water was issued through water points to unit water trailers and containers, with a divisional reserve in cans. 101 GT Coy under Maj A.H. Singleton was involved in building up reserves for the battle, particularly ammunition in early October.

All this was facilitated by the static nature of the defensive line and the steady build up, in Montgomery's usual way, of a large margin to ensure success. As part of an elaborate cover plan Capt E.P. Brandwood of 11 Coy took most of the Division's domestic vehicles on a 3 day trek south, stirring up as much dust as possible. Brigades drew hard rations regularly so that this would not become a warning of an impending attack, and gun ammunition reserves delivered into the forward areas, some of it prepositioned in front of the forward defended localities ready for use in the advance, was carefully camouflaged before morning.

Opening the attack on 23 October 1942 with 900 guns along the front created the anticipated drain on gun ammunition, which had been prepared for in the build up. In 9th Division's area 101 GT Coy had done that job in advance and now had the capacity for troop lifting, shuttling

battalions to their forming up places, often under artillery and small arms fire. The efforts of the four divisional companies were notably unspectacular in execution, which reflected the careful preparation, high state of training and cool execution of tasks on time and under fire during the battle.

Montgomery's 'crumbling operations' on the coastal sector in the middle of the battle, largely carried by 9th Division, created a heavy load in troop lifts and delivery of ammunition into the fighting area, and the flexibility of the composite system in a time of low food and fuel usage came to the fore. While the AASC companies were spared the heavy toll on the infantry, divisional commander Morshead was unequivocal in his appreciation of their 'excellent work', Watson receiving a DSO.

By 4 November, the enemy withdrawal was in full swing and the companies had moved forward to operate from the Tel el Eisa station area. The following day they were tasked to lift 151st Infantry Brigade forward, ammunition and rations being dumped on the ground. This was then changed to supporting an advance by 20th Brigade, but this and then another troop lift task were cancelled to make 9th Division available for its foreshadowed return to Australia, a need subsequently accentuated by the failure of the American division sent to Papua as a *quid pro quo* for the 9th's retention in North Africa.

When this confusion had ended, the companies were left with the task of recovering unexpended gun ammunition of 9th and 51st Highland Divisions to depots, then were returned to Palestine to prepare for return home, the heroes' welcome given to 9th Division which had been denied to 6th and 7th Divisions on their return in the less leisurely period of the early Japanese threat, and training for the assault on Lae, Papua New Guinea.

The breakthrough at El Alamein during the first days of November 1942, in which the *Ninth Australian Division* participated, was a fitting prelude to the last and greatest battle of the Cyrenaican campaign. Four times the tide of battle had surged across Libya before the British Forces launched the fifth and decisive drive to clear the Axis powers finally from Africa.

Some of the places George went on leave were Tel Aviv, Haifa and Tiberias (on the Sea of Galilee) in Palestine. (Now Israel)

After almost two years in the Middle East, on the 24th January 1943 George left there on the ship 'L1' and arrived back in Sydney, Australia 27 February 1943. Unfortunately George's father died on the 3rd February 1943 while he was travelling back from the Middle East. The ship was docked in Perth W.A at the time.

Doris Tappenden and George met up again during the war when he returned from the Middle East and went to the surgery where Doris was working to let her know that he was back in town. She had previously thought that he was missing in action. She asked him to drive her team to a vigaro game at the Deagon Racecourse.

In May 1943, George was transferred to the 2/156 AGT (Australian General Transport) Company. He then did a 1-month driver/mechanic course with the 1st Australian Army AASC School and qualified. In July 1943 he was detached for duty to the 2nd Australian Army Corps Motor Transport Pool. On the 28 January 1944, he was moved out from the L & T.D

Townsville to the 13th Australian Personnel Staging Camp and on the 4 February 1944 was moved out to the 2nd Australian Army Corps Receiving Camp.

*On the 15 February 1944, only ten days before getting married, he was cited by the Army for an offence (conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline) and was admonished on return to the 2/156 AGT from leave on 14 April 1944. He was married to Doris Ethel Tappenden on the 25 February 1944. They were married at St. Alban's Church, Auchenflower, Brisbane by Rev Darryl Price Cassidy, Church of England. They went to 'Rockview' Kirra for their honeymoon before **George** headed back to Townsville. Between now and leaving for Borneo he was stationed in the Atherton Tablelands at Tolga, Ravenshoe and Redlynch near Cairns.*

The shift of Australia's defence centre of gravity as the Japanese forces moved on Papua New Guinea caused major modifications: 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions changed from desert to tropical roles; the 5th and 11th Divisions were raised and with 3rd Division were later also converted to jungle warfare establishments, with a consequent saving of half of AASC strengths. The armoured and other infantry divisions remained in Australia on normal establishments. The AASC reached its peak of nearly 54,000 men in 1943, thereafter declining along with the rest of the Army to the end of the war. It was the second largest corps after the Infantry, comprising about 12 percent of army strength.

Activities in north Queensland were initially centred on the Mount Isa railhead with a supplementary road haul supporting Northern Territory Force. The focus then switched with the arrival of two brigades at Townsville in May 1942 followed by the returning Middle East divisions which, after landing at Adelaide, were being assembled in the north for acclimatisation and training for tropical warfare.

Pressure generated by the Japanese capture of the north coast of Papua and New Guinea and advance through Kokoda drew the 7th Division into Papua almost immediately, then 6th Division. But the toll of the campaign resulted in the progressive return of each of the divisions committed there for recuperation, reformation and retraining, plus 9th Division on its return after the Alamein battle in North Africa.

Blamey's desire for a northern base for training and recuperation for the New Guinea operations, and to have a centre which kept such a large concentration of men away from the potential troubles of population centres, led to selection of the Atherton Tableland, originally planned for two, then three divisional base areas at Ravenshoe, Wondecla and Kairi, the occupation of which commenced in early 1943.

Initially Headquarters 2nd Corps was set up to control these divisions, then replaced by 1st Corps as the 3rd, 5th and 11th Divisions replaced the 6th, 7th and 9th which were to refit and prepare for amphibious operations in the expected foray to the Philippines with US forces. The north of the state became a vast training ground for tropical warfare plus specialist training on the coast for amphibious and jungle operations. Some of the divisions spent over a year at a stretch there, and developed a considerable semi-permanent infrastructure.

Immediate support of these formations was provided by their integral divisional AASC and corps troops as a normal part of their responsibilities, but a considerable base infrastructure,

involving many of the units mentioned previously, was required both for bulk holding of stocks and to provide supplies and transport, in an area stretching from Cairns to Ayr, in support of the divisions' deployments for training exercises along the coastal jungle strip and beaches.

In the third quarter of 1944, fewer Australian troops were in contact with the enemy than at any time since the few weeks that elapsed between the relief of the siege at Tobruk and the opening of the war against Japan. Most of the divisions of the Australian Army were re-training for the final effort in 1945 in which every division would be involved. *In June 1944, George was graded as a Group III Driver Mechanic and transferred to the 2/14th Australian Transport Platoon AASC. In December 1944, he relinquished the Group III Driver Mechanic position at his own request. Also in December his daughter Carol was born.*

RAASC operations in the South West Pacific were considerably different from those in the Western Desert, the mobility considerations giving way in an area of extremely poor communications to an emphasis on establishing maintenance and reserve stocks and using any feasible means of moving them to the users. The character of the bricks thus changed to supply depot platoons to handle all three commodity stocks, transport platoons equipped with the type or mixture of vehicles suited for local conditions.

Borneo

As the US forces moved west across the Pacific Australians were increasingly used as the mopping up troops in little reported battles. *On the 23 April 1945, George embarked at Townsville on the 'General McRae' for Morotai in Dutch New Guinea (23/4/45 to 1/5/45).* Morotai is a small island in the Moluccas about 250 kilometers north of the Equator and had been retaken in September 1944 by a US Army amphibious landing as one of the potential bases for operations against the Philippines. In April 1945 the A.I.F plans were to invade Borneo after the American bombers had knocked out the airfields and oil installations there.

Morotai now became the base for Australian operations in Borneo and possible further ones in Java or Malaya, and became the home for an uncomfortable cluster of static and transiting headquarters - those of Blamey's Advanced Allied Land Force which MacArthur no longer recognised other than for Australian units, 1st Corps, 7th Division, 9th Division, the beach groups and 1st Base Sub-Area.

Of six planned amphibious assaults three were finally confirmed: Oboe One - Tarakan, Oboe Six - North Borneo and Oboe Two - Balikpapan. While there was a substantial obligation and justification to regain the territory and liberate the population in Australia's territories in New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and the North Solomons as the Americans were doing in their Philippines colony, the landings planned against the bypassed Japanese forces in Borneo were not nearly so well justified, leaning rather on a desire to give two Australian divisions the active task denied by their exclusion from the invasion of the Philippines.

From an Australian logistics viewpoint they represented the most ambitious commitment in the South West Pacific since the attack on Lae: the AASC troops were not as numerically

great as those assembled for mobile operations for the Australian Corps in the Middle East but they had finally not been committed to operations.

For the Borneo operations supplies and transport support was split between three echelons - the normal divisional AASC units which at supplemented jungle scale now comprised two general transport companies and a supply depot company, plus the division's slice of specialist corps troops; a beach group which received the maintenance and buildup supplies until the base units could be established; and a base sub-area which also absorbed the beach group transport, rations, ammunition and fuel supply units into its structure when it could be landed.

The Oboe One assault at Tarakan by 26th Brigade Group of 9th Division was launched on 1 May 1945, with the primary mission of securing an airfield to support the later Oboe landings. It was the smallest of the Oboe operations and something of a test bed for the larger ones to follow. HQ AASC came ashore on the second day and established itself in the 2nd Beach Group area. Unloading was hampered by the beach approaches, LSTs remaining offshore with their cargo having to be lightered ashore rather than beaching and being unloaded directly over the beach.

The Beach Group supplies and transport got ashore by day 2, and on day 3 half of the brigade supply depot and transport platoons were established; all units were ashore and stores unloading completed within two weeks. Resistance had ended by 22 June, but the difficulty experienced in reconstituting the badly damaged airfield precluded its use during either of the succeeding Oboe operations, so this operation proved to be little more than a costly rehearsal for those later landings.

Oboe Six landed the remainder of 9th Division from 10 June at Brunei Bay, Labuan and Muara Islands. Brunei Town fell on 13 June, Labuan and Muara 15 June, Seria oilfield and the mainland one at Lutong were captured a week later. Divisional troops under CAASC Lieut-Col J.H. McLennan comprised HQ Comd 9 Div AASC, 2/142, 2/156 GT Coys each of three platoons, the first of 2½ ton, the second ¼ ton trucks, and 2/6 Sup Dep Coy of six platoons; 1st Beach Group including 2/166 GT Coy, 2/240 Sup Dep P1 and 57 BIPOD P1; and 8th Base Sub-Area including 2/102, 2/106 GT Coys, the latter being equipped with DUKWs, 2/26 Sup Dep Coy, 13, 15 Fd Bking Pls, 62 BIPOD P1, 4 Bulk Pet Storage P1 and 1 Port Det.

The divisional troops were regrouped to tailor them to each landing force, each brigade group having a composite company in direct support for the landing to ensure the unity of control of the supply and transport duality in the early confused part of the operation. Three hours after the 24th Brigade Group assault wave hit the beach at Labuan 2/156 GT Coy landed with 2/28 Sup Dep P1 to open the AP, Sup P and PP for the brigade. Seven hours later 2/142 GT Coy with its transport platoons was landing to support divisional troops. 2/6 Sup Dep Coy's landing with 20th Brigade Group on Brunei was delayed until the second day, but the build up flowed after that. In the follow up waves, the bakeries were in production on day 5, bulk storage tanks and vehicle refuelling, road tanker and watercraft filling points were operational on days 11 to 13. Then followed a long period of consolidation as the area roads, accommodation and port facilities were developed for what proved to be an extended occupation.

But by the fourth day when the landing craft had been cleared and cargo ships began unloading, the unit settled down to a steady 24 hour clearance of about 1,200 tons a day with a capacity of 2,000 if the Engineer docks operating companies unloading the ships had been up to it, and were interrupted only by an enemy party's suicide attack on its position on day 12. The scattered nature of the operation, with several subsidiary landings and operations, meant a dispersal of the divisional resources. As had happened in earlier operations under the basic tropical scale of a supply depot company and one or more general transport companies, the need to operate dispersed areas led to each company headquarters controlling a mixed group of supplies and transport units. Nor was the concept of segregation of GMC and jeep transport into different companies any more viable, here or elsewhere. Each area generally needed its slice of food, fuel and ammunition units, and needed a mix of vehicles, to cope with the different tasks which arose.

On the 19 June 1945 George's 2/14th Transport Platoon embarked westwards from Morotai on LST 574 for British North Borneo. The divisional AASC was regrouped so that HQ 2/6 Sup Dep Coy with two transport and two supply depot platoons operated AP (Ammunition Point), Supply Point and Petroleum Point at six locations for 20th Brigade Group on the mainland; HQ 2/156 GT Coy the same in four locations for 24th Brigade Group on Labuan Island, and operated a local railway; HQ 2/142 GT Coy with six transport and two workshop platoons served divisional troops, resupply loading and watercraft unloading at Labuan, while two supply depot platoons originally with this company were reallocated directly under HQ CAASC to operate divisional troops delivery points.

The last, largest and the riskiest operation was Oboe Two involving the full 7th Division in landing at Balikpapan on 1 July 1945. Missing from the lineup was Australian amphibious platoon, part of 1 Trk Amph Sqn which had been trained for these amphibious operations but withdrawn as the Americans did not want strangers mixed in with their two amphibious tractor battalions which were to provide the tracked amphibians required for the assault. CAASC Lieut-Col H.D. Murphie landed one hour after the first wave, but was preceded by 235 and 11 Sup Dep Pls from 2nd Beach Group and 7th Base Sub-Area, in 13 minutes after the assault to get the FSD ready to receive the initial stocking and meet any early demands.

The brigades came ashore with their own reserves, but half of 2/7 Sup Dep was on the beach 80 minutes after the assault to support divisional troops, forty minutes later 2/10 Sup Dep P1 arrived to set up for 25th Brigade, and an hour later half of 2/34 Sup Dep P1 landed to support 21st Brigade. The remainder of the units staged in, usually preceded by their reconnaissance parties, a lesson well learnt from Oboe Six.

Demands on transport were well below capacity. From 2/153 GT Coy, equipped with jeeps and trailers, 2/7, 2/8, 2/9 Tpt Pls were attached one to each brigade, one being held for divisional reserve. They were landed loaded with ammunition and unit stores, and were used for ambulance, reconnaissance, radio carriers and supplementing unit transport. A vehicle from 2/7 Tpt P1 landed seven minutes into the assault was believed to be the first ashore in the operation. Advanced HQ 2/6 GT Coy landed after an hour to prepare for its first unit, 2/10 Tpt P1 equipped with 2½ ton GMCs, in less than two hours later.

The remainder came in progressively over the following four days, hauling ammunition to the guns, water to units, assisting in beach clearance and then into the general maintenance of the division, with vehicles on 24 hour days and drivers 12 hour shifts in the early stages. 2/108 GT Coy with 2/2 ton GMCs loaded with ammunition landed with the immediate task of ammunition resupply, but was not over committed for its subsequent beach clearance task, a combination of slow ship unloading, poor beach and periods of rough weather resulting in low and spasmodic landings of cargo, varying from 600 to 2,000 tons on various days.

The war was ended by the Americans dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August. The Japanese surrendered 15 August and signed the document on 2 September 1945.

While still in Borneo, George had accrued enough points from overseas service to apply for a discharge from the Army, and did so on the 25 September. This was approved on the 29 September and on 1 October 1945, he was transferred to Labuan Island near Brunei on the west coast of North Borneo. On the 3 October 1945 left Labuan on the 'Manoora' arriving in Brisbane 15 October 1945. They were trucked straight from the ship to a staging area at Clapham Junction near Moorooka. A week later, on the 23 October 1945, he was discharged at Redbank after 5 1/2 years.