

Resource: 'The Official History'

The following selections come from the Official History of the war.

Australia in the War of 1939–1945 is a 22-volume official history series covering Australia's involvement in the Second World War. The series was published by the Australian War Memorial between 1952 and 1977. These excerpts come from:

McCarthy, Dudley (1959). *South–West Pacific Area – First Year: Kokoda to Wau*. Australia in the War of 1939–1945. Series 1 – Army . Canberra: Australian War Memorial.

P. 167 – A comment on the plan for 2/10 Battalion 27 August

At a conference with Field on the morning of the 27th Dobbs decided to move with his battalion equipped lightly “as a large-scale fighting patrol” to Rabi, thence north-east for some miles by way of a back track and finally strike down to K.B. He borrowed additional sub-machine-guns, stripped Captain Brocksopp’s¹ “C” Company (whom he intended to use in the van) of all their Brens, reduced the complement of Brens in Captains Matheson’s² and Sanderson’s³ companies to one a platoon but left Miethke’s company with their full complement; despite the knowledge that the Japanese had at least one tank he discarded all his anti-tank rifles, thinking, probably, that 20 sticky grenades which he had issued would be an effective substitute. He set out with his battalion streamlined to an approximate strength of 500.

When he accepted the reports that possibly 5,000 Japanese had landed, he revised his planning and moved directly along the coastal track towards K.B. Mission. Bicks says that he warned Dobbs that he thought it would be unwise for him to site his battalion at K.B. as the country there was not suitable for defence and could be seen from the sea, and that the Japanese had tanks which they could use in that area. But the 2/10th settled into a loose perimeter defence at the mission just as night was falling.

The men were tired and hungry. Since the first reports of the approach of Japanese ships had been received many of them had made a number of moves as they adjusted their positions, they had had little sleep for two nights, their meals had been unsatisfying and irregular, rain for seven days previously had filled the track deep with mud which pulled hard at their feet. Now they had no tools with which to dig in and they settled in groups of three to await the coming of their enemies.

P. 168 A comment on the start of the battle...

At 7.45 the noise of an engine was heard, and a tank approached through the darkness and the rain, its lights shining brightly. "Put out that —— light!" yelled an Australian, who has never since been allowed to forget it.

At 1950 hours (wrote the historian of the 2/10th Battalion) the silence was again broken, this time by a high-pitched voice chanting in Japanese from the depths of the jungle. The one voice (and a beautiful voice it was) would recite for about one minute, after which the chant would be taken up by a number of other voices, rather nearer to where the 2/10th lay quietly waiting. Upon the second group completing their recitation, a third group, obviously comprising some hundreds of the enemy, and closer again, would sing in sonorous unison. This procedure was repeated three times. Whether it was some form of religious rite, or merely a boasting recital calculated to inspire courage in the chanters and despair in the hearts of the listeners is not known, nor did the battalion ever again hear this type of musical performance.⁷

P.171 The Official Historian's comment on the results of the battle

But, despite such deeds as this, the 2/10th Battalion, a proud and experienced battalion of volunteers, had been thrust back in their first fight with the Japanese—and by forces which, as it was learnt later, were not overwhelmingly superior but which were made of brave and determined men whose plan of attack, centring on the use of their two tanks, worked well. In this fighting the 2/10th lost 43 killed and 26 wounded. About 23 of Miethke's company were among the killed and approximately 20 of his men were wounded.