

MERV A. SCRIVEN

A Soldier in the Making

In January 1953 he ambled into the Personnel Depot at Guildford, Western Australia. He was in The Army now. First stop was the Orderly room for documentation. Then the Quartermaster's Store for kitting out. 'What size are you? this size will do'. said the Quarter-Master's assistant. Boots, brown, made in 1942, to be raven oiled black before first parade next day, slouch hat and beret, both too big. The khaki webbing was to be blanco-ed, for it was shabby, the buckles and badges polished too, for it was old war-time tarnished gear. On parade next day he had never seen such a bunch of misfits, the baggy uniforms maximising the oddity. It was back to the Q Store to change most of the gear that did not fit. (Nothing's changed. Ed)

Shortly he was on a Troop train, joining 1st Royal Australian Regiment personnel returning to Enoggera, Queensland. As his destination was Wagga Wagga, NSW, then onwards to Kapooka Silver City, 25 kilometres out of town, he was bundled into trucks by Corporals, they are his future instructors. He was a part of the draft, which by ballot, comprised conscripts from all over Australia.

What a shock to Merv's system when he reached No 1 Training Battalion! The Nissen huts were hot in summer and cold in winter. All huts had to be inspected, blankets folded according to the regulation pattern. They were inspected each morning by a white gloved Junior Officer searching for dust, using the finger test.

Next day commenced with garden duties at 0530 hours (5.30 am), Physical Training at 0600 hours, breakfast at 0700 hours from a Willeys Mobile Cooker and on parade at 0800 hours for inspection. They marched to the Regimental Aid Post for immunisation, checked by the dentist, doctor and their hair cut short, Army style. The normal day began with Field training, rifle drill and then night patrol. Each day was much the same, except that each facet was gradually intensified.

There were the truck trips to the RAAF base at Uranquinty, near Wagga, to learn swimming, wearing a full kit, clothes and all. There followed a forced march of miles and miles, just to tackle an assault course at the end of the day. Then it was over and there were the Salvos with refreshments. GOD BLESS 'EM!-

At Kapooka in summer he fought bush-fires. You can imagine on a hot day, standing for hours on a Commanding Officer's weekly Parade, recruits fainting and left where they fell. In winter it was cold and muddy. That's when he learnt the leopard crawl with real bullets passing overhead. Ouch.

Out in the weather on night guard duties, 2 hours on, 4 hours off, it usually rained and was bitterly cold, the wind whistling through his overcoat. The Orderly Officer challenged at various intervals during the night and morning.

On the walls of the Kapooka Guard Hut one soldier has recorded his feelings with this poem:-

They say this Kapooka is a wonderful place,

But take it from me it's a blooming disgrace,

At six in the morning you're kicked out of bed,

At six in the evening you're fairly near dead.

There are Sergeants and Corporals, and lance-jacks as well,

Who have b..... all to actually tell.

With hands in their pockets they bellow and shout,

About things that they know nothing about.

Bless 'Em All.

Three and a half months later DISCIPLINED soldier 5/2563 marched out to a unit far from his home State of W.A.