

= 14th / 32nd Battalion (Australia) =

The 14th / 32nd Battalion was an infantry battalion of the Australian Army which served during the Second World War . It was formed in September 1942 by the amalgamation of the 14th and 32nd Battalions and was assigned to the 6th Brigade , 4th Division in Geraldton , Western Australia . The battalion served firstly in Australia and then later New Guinea , being employed mainly on garrison duties , before being transferred to the 5th Division and deployed to New Britain late in the war where it took part briefly in the Australian containment campaign on that island . In April 1945 it returned to Australia for rest and re @-@ organisation and was disbanded later that year without seeing further combat .

= = History = =

= = = Formation = = =

By mid @-@ 1942 , an over mobilisation of Australia 's military forces resulted in a manpower shortage in the Australian economy . In order to rectify this situation , the Australian government decided to amalgamate and disband a number of units from the Militia in order to free up their personnel and return them to the civilian workforce . As a result , on 12 October 1942 , the 14th and 32nd Battalions , which had been undertaking garrison duties around Geraldton , Western Australia , were amalgamated to form the 14th / 32nd Battalion . Upon formation the battalion adopted the territorial title of the " Prahran / Footscray Regiment " and was assigned to the 6th Brigade , 4th Division .

The battalion 's personnel were drawn predominately from the 14th Battalion , although 164 officers and men from the 32nd who had volunteered to serve under the same conditions of the Second Australian Imperial Force , were transferred to the 14th / 32nd at this time . As more than 65 per cent of the battalion 's 996 personnel volunteered for overseas service , the battalion was designated as an Australian Imperial Force battalion , meaning that it could be sent outside the territorial limits imposed by the Defence Act (1903) .

= = = New Guinea and New Britain = = =

After this , the 14th / 32nd Battalion was moved to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland , to undertake amphibious landing and jungle warfare training in preparation for deployment overseas . In July 1943 , they were sent to Port Moresby , New Guinea , where they once again filled the role of garrison troops for almost a year , operating between Buna , Gona and Nassau Bay . In 1944 , under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Caldwell , who had previously commanded at company @-@ level in Greece and the Middle East , the battalion was attached to the 5th Division and on 4 November the 14th / 32nd Battalion , forming the vanguard of the 6th Brigade , carried out an amphibious landing at Jacquinot Bay on New Britain .

Although opposition to the landing was expected , the 14th / 32nd Battalion arrived on the beach and found that the Japanese defenders had withdrawn further down the coast . This allowed the battalion to concentrate on the task of establishing a beachhead and unloading stores . This task was made more difficult though by a torrential downpour on 6 November , nevertheless they were eventually able to establish themselves around Pal Mal Mal Plantation and patrols were sent out to locate the Japanese . By 10 November , patrols reached the Esis River and after contacting locals it was found that the Japanese were withdrawing towards the Gazelle Peninsula , where it was estimated that about 93 @, @ 000 Japanese were stationed . Due to the size of the Japanese garrison , as the rest of the 5th Division began to arrive on the island , it was decided that the Australians would undertake a campaign of containment rather than engage in offensive operations . As a part of this campaign , the 14th / 32nd Battalion was assigned the task of advancing 75 miles (121 km) along the coast from Jacquinot Bay to Henry Reid Bay . With no roads and only narrow

tracks , the going was difficult and in order to improve mobility the battalion used barges to carry out a series of landings as they advanced through Sampun and Lampun , passing around Wide Bay , before reaching Kalai Plantation in mid @-@ February 1945 .

At Kalai the battalion moved into the Kamandran Mission where they received intelligence reports of a force of about 200 Japanese occupying a position at Gogbulo creek . Fighting patrols were sent out , but no contact was made , although evidence of occupation was found indicating that the Japanese were moving back to a defensive position to the north of Mavelo river . Before they could launch an assault , however , the battalion was relieved by the 19th Battalion and on 28 February the 19th crossed the Mavelo . Following this the Japanese withdrew back towards the mountains around the Waitavalo and Tol Plantations , and in early March an attempt was made to force a crossing on the Wulwut river . After initially being turned back by intense Japanese mortar and machine @-@ gun fire , the 19th made a successful second attempt , forcing the Japanese back further towards Mount Sugi and Bacon Hill .

As orders were passed for an attack to be made on this position , the 14th / 32nd was brought up to relieve the 19th . The Japanese position sat atop a 600 @-@ foot (180 m) hill which rose steeply , up to 45 degrees in some places , from the jungle below . In preparation , the 14th / 32nd occupied a number of positions around Bacon Hill and at 9 : 55 am on 16 March 1945 the attack began with two companies , ' B ' and ' D ' , attacking under the cover of an intense artillery barrage provided by elements of the 2 / 14th Field Regiment , with direct fire support being provided by ' A ' and ' C ' Companies from the high ground surrounding the hill . The Japanese defences were well @-@ prepared though , and machine @-@ gun and mortar fire from well @-@ sited positions soon pinned down two platoons from ' B ' Company . In order to regain momentum , a flanking move to the left was undertaken by ' D ' Company , but after two hours they too came under intense machine @-@ gun fire as they attempted to round Mount Sugi and attack the Japanese from the rear , forcing them to dig @-@ in to the north of Bacon Hill . At this point the situation became quite desperate for the attackers , and a number of Australian platoons found themselves embroiled in an intense battle . Finally , late in the day , after having lost 10 men killed and another 13 wounded the attack was called off . The attack was resumed early the following day with two companies attacking from the north and digging @-@ in on the eastern approaches to the hill while two platoons clambered up the steep western slope amidst heavy Japanese mortar and grenade attacks . By nightfall the Australians , who had lost a further six men killed and 17 wounded , were in control of most of the position , although two Japanese positions were still holding out . On 18 March the attack was resumed and finally , by 3 : 00 pm , the last Japanese had been cleared from the hill .

Following the battle , the battalion continued patrolling operations beyond the Waitavalo ? Tol area but no further contact was made . On 21 March when they were relieved once more by the 19th Battalion . A week later , on 28 March , the 13th Brigade began to relieve the units of the 6th Brigade , and over the following fortnight the transition took place . On 12 April the battalion returned to Kalai where they received the news that they were being returned to Australia for rest and re @-@ organisation in preparation for further operations . On 7 May 1945 they embarked upon the troopship Duntroon , arriving in Brisbane a week later .

= = = Disbandment = = =

With the war seen to be coming to a close , the Army decided to disband the 6th Brigade and its component units , and as a result , the 14th / 32nd was disbanded on 21 July 1945 , while at Loganlea . During the war the battalion lost 31 men killed or died on active service and a further 46 wounded . Members of the battalion received the following decorations : one Distinguished Service Order , one Order of the British Empire , one British Empire Medal , two Military Crosses , one Distinguished Conduct Medal , one Military Medal , and seven Mention in Dispatches .

= = Battle honours = =

For their service during the Second World War , the 14th / 32nd Battalion received the following

battle honours :

South @-@ West Pacific 1942 ? 45 and Waitavolo .