

= 2 / 5th Battalion (Australia) =

The 2 / 5th Battalion was an infantry battalion of the Australian Army that operated during World War II . It was raised at Melbourne , Victoria , on 18 October 1939 as part of the Second Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF) , attached to the 17th Brigade of the 6th Division . The 2 / 5th was one of only two Australian infantry battalions to fight against all of the major Axis powers during the war , seeing action against the Germans and Italians in Egypt , Libya , Greece and Crete , and the Vichy French in Syria , before returning to Australia in 1942 to fight the Japanese following a period of garrison duties in Ceylon , where it formed part of an Australian force established to defend against a possible Japanese invasion .

Following its return to Australia , the battalion was re @-@ organised for jungle warfare and took part in two campaigns in New Guinea . The first of these campaigns came in 1942 ? 43 when it was involved in the defence of Wau and the Salamaua ? Lae campaign , and then again in 1944 ? 45 when it took part in the Aitape ? Wewak campaign . Following the end of the war , the battalion embarked for Australia on 1 December 1945 and disbanded at Puckapunyal in early February 1946 . Its battle honours are maintained by the 5th / 6th Battalion , Royal Victoria Regiment .

= = History = =

= = = Formation and training 1940 ? 41 = = =

Following the outbreak of World War II on 3 September 1939 , the Australian government announced the decision to raise the all @-@ volunteer Second Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF) , since the Defence Act precluded sending Australia 's part @-@ time military forces overseas . As part of the force , the 2 / 5th Battalion was raised in Melbourne , Victoria , on 18 October 1939 and began to receive its first intake of men on 2 November 1939 when it moved to Puckapunyal . Many of the battalion 's initial recruits came from the Victorian Scottish Regiment , a Militia unit associated with the 5th Battalion , which had been raised as part of the First Australian Imperial Force during World War I. The battalion 's first commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Cook , although he was replaced as commander by Major Hugh Wrigley before the battalion went into combat , as Cook was considered too old to lead troops in combat .

Along with the 2 / 6th , 2 / 7th and 2 / 8th Battalions , the 2 / 5th formed the 17th Brigade , and was assigned to the 6th Division , the first infantry division formed as part of the 2nd AIF . The colours chosen for the battalion 's Unit Colour Patch (UCP) were the same as those of the 5th Battalion . These colours were black over red , in a horizontal rectangular shape , although a border of gray was added to the UCP to distinguish the battalion from its Militia counterpart . With an authorised strength of around 900 personnel , like other Australian infantry battalions of the time , the battalion consisted of four rifle companies , from ' A ' to ' D ' , each consisting of three platoons . These companies were supported by a battalion headquarters and a headquarters company with six specialist platoons : signals , pioneer , anti @-@ aircraft , transport , administrative and mortars . The battalion also had a regimental aid post attached . The battalion 's personnel assembled between November 1939 and April 1940 , undertaking basic training in Australia before embarking for the Middle East on 14 April 1940 aboard the transport HMT Ettrick from Port Melbourne .

= = = North Africa , Greece and Syria 1941 ? 42 = = =

The battalion arrived in Egypt on 18 May 1940 , and joined the 17th Brigade 's other two infantry battalions in camp at Beit Jirja . A further period of training in Palestine followed before the battalion took part in the fighting against the Italians in Libya in January ? February 1941 , during which the 2 / 5th was involved in attacks on Bardia and Tobruk , as the Australians went into battle for the first time . During the fighting around Bardia , the battalion 's commander , Wrigley , was seriously wounded in an artillery bombardment , and was temporarily replaced by Major George Sell , as the

battalion was committed to the fighting in the second phase of the assault , advancing through the bridgehead that had been established towards the railway switchline . Later , during the assault on Tobruk , the 2 / 5th was tasked with conducting a diversionary attack to the east of the Italian perimeter . The battalion 's time in Libya cost it 32 killed , and 60 wounded .

A few months later in April the 6th Division was sent to Greece in order to defend against a possible German invasion of that nation . The invasion took place as anticipated , although in the end the British and Commonwealth forces were unable to stem the tide of the German onslaught . The 2 / 5th Battalion began the campaign at Kalambaka on 14 April . In a series of withdrawals made necessary by the lightning advance of German forces , it was pushed back all the way to the port of Kalamata , where it was evacuated a couple of weeks later on 27 April 1941 . The battalion lost 21 men killed , 26 wounded and 47 as prisoners of war ; most of the prisoners were drivers who were captured having been unable to make it out in time . The majority of the battalion , consisting of 560 personnel , was evacuated to Alexandria , and from there concentrated in Palestine ; a few ? 74 men ? in the confusion of the evacuation were landed on Crete , where they formed a composite battalion along with other 17th Brigade units and personnel , including about 260 personnel from the 2 / 6th Battalion . These personnel were assigned to Cremor Force in the Suda Sector , and occupied a position around Kalami . They then took part in the Battle of Crete following the German invasion on 20 May , during which the majority of the 2 / 5th personnel assigned to the composite battalion were captured . The battalion 's casualties for the campaign amounted to three killed in action or died of wounds , three wounded and 58 captured . Six men from the battalion are known to have evaded capture during the fighting in Greece or Crete , although one of these was later killed in action while fighting alongside Yugoslav resistance forces . Those that were taken prisoner were eventually moved to camps in Germany or Poland until they were liberated at the end of the war .

In June ? July 1941 , the Australians were deployed to Syria and Lebanon for the campaign against the Vichy French , which was launched by the British in order to prevent the French @-@ held colonies from being controlled by the Germans ; the majority of the Australian forces were drawn from the 7th Division , although the 17th Brigade was called upon to provide reinforcements , detaching the 2 / 3rd and 2 / 5th Battalions . The 2 / 5th Battalion 's initial involvement in the campaign came in mid @-@ June during the French counterattack , when one of its companies went into action around Merdjayoun . After this , the battalion 's main involvement came in early July , when it took part in the Battle of Damour , which proved to be the final battle of the campaign . After a preliminary move across the Damour River , during the final assault on Damour , the 2 / 5th Battalion , in concert with the 2 / 3rd , advanced from El Boum , moving through the 21st Brigade 's position , to cut the road to the north of the Damour , while other forces advanced from the east . In the days following the capture of Damour , the 2 / 5th had continued the advance north towards Khalde on the coastal road to Beirut ; meanwhile , the Vichy commanders sought an armistice , bringing the campaign to an end on 12 July . The 2 / 5th 's casualties during the brief campaign amounted to 41 men killed or wounded . In the aftermath , the battalion remained in the Middle East , serving as an occupation force in Syria and Lebanon until January 1942 . Following Japan 's entry into the war , the Australian government requested the return of the battalion as it was needed for the fighting in New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific .

= = = New Guinea 1942 ? 45 = = =

The battalion departed the Middle East on 10 March 1942 aboard the troopship SS Otranto ; however , on the voyage back to Australia the 16th and 17th Brigades were disembarked in Ceylon , due to fears of a Japanese attack . For nearly four months they were stationed on the island , initially in Galle , around the fort , and then later around the bay , where observation posts and section defensive positions were established . Throughout April and May , the 2 / 5th Battalion endured heavy rains but nevertheless undertook a series of exercises and training . In early July , the battalion finally received orders to return to Australia and , after being relieved at the Galle Fort by the 3rd Battalion , 8th Gurkhas , was transported to Colombo to embark upon the Athlone Castle . On 4 August 1942 , the battalion arrived in Melbourne , having been away for over two years .

A short period of home leave followed , before the battalion 's personnel concentrated at Royal Park for a march through Melbourne . A draft of reinforcements arrived around this time also , incorporating men from New South Wales and several others states . In mid @-@ September , the battalion moved to Greta , New South Wales , travelling by rail through Shepparton , Tocumwal and Newcastle . A brief period of training was undertaken there , during which the battalion 's khaki uniforms were dyed green . During this time , the battalion was re @-@ organised and converted to the jungle establishment ; as part of this process its authorised strength was reduced to around 800 personnel of all ranks . The situation in the Pacific had deteriorated dramatically , and the Australian forces holding out against the Japanese in New Guinea were hard @-@ pressed and desperately in need of reinforcement . Thus in early October 1942 , not more than two months after returning to Australia , the 2 / 5th moved to Brisbane , Queensland , where it deployed to Milne Bay , which had only recently been held in the face of a Japanese landing , aboard the Dutch transport Maetsuyker .

The battalion did not take part in any fighting until a few months later when , in January 1943 , it took part in the defence of Wau after the 17th Brigade was despatched to reinforce Kanga Force . Sailing to Port Moresby from Milne Bay on the MV Duntroon , an advance party of two companies from the battalion was flown into Wau on 24 January to hastily reinforce the small force around Ballams . The remainder ? totalling about 450 men ? arriving on 29 January , after which they secured the airfield , which was now under direct Japanese fire , as the two companies that had arrived earlier were pulled back from Ballams . In early February , as the Australians gained the initiative , the battalion was relieved from holding the airfield , and went on the offensive , attacking alongside the 2 / 7th Battalion , in an effort to push the Japanese away from their positions on the bank of the Bulolo River , around Crystal Creek , to the south @-@ west of Wau . The fighting was intense , and over the course of three days , the battalion lost 27 killed and 31 wounded .

After Wau was secured , the battalion undertook patrolling operations around Mubo , along with the rest of Kanga Force , before joining the advance on Salamaua in support of the 3rd Division , with a view to drawing Japanese reinforcements away from Lae , where a landing was planned for September . The Japanese put up a strong resistance and the battalion became involved in heavy fighting around Mubo in May , before fighting at Goodview Junction and Mount Tambu in July and August as part of actions to secure Komiatum ; around Goodview , two companies were deployed in a holding action and to attempt to outflank Mount Tambu to cut the Japanese line of communication , while the other two companies attacked Mount Tambu itself . Casualties for the battalion between April and September amounted to 34 killed and 95 wounded . As the 5th Division arrived to take over from the 3rd following the capture of Mount Tambu and the link up with US forces , the 2 / 5th Battalion was withdrawn from the line , concentrating around Nassau Bay in late August as the 17th Brigade was relieved by the 29th . After a fortnight of unloading ships around the bay , the battalion was moved by landing craft to Milne Bay , where it embarked on the Liberty ship Charles Steinmetz and the Dutch transport Boschfontein . On 23 September 1943 , the battalion arrived back in Australia , landing at Cairns , Queensland . The fighting in the Salamaua area resulted in the following losses for the 2 / 5th : 94 killed and 165 wounded .

Concentrating at Wondecla , on the Atherton Tablelands in north Queensland , after an extended period of home leave during which time the Victorian and South Australian personnel took part in a march through Melbourne , the 2 / 5th Battalion spent the next year training on the Tablelands along with the rest of the 6th Division . There was also a large turn over in the battalion 's personnel at this time , as it had been severely depleted due to illness during its previous campaign , and it was brought up to strength by April 1944 with several drafts of reinforcements , with the majority coming from New South Wales . To counter boredom and malaise amongst the men during late 1944 , the battalion was occupied with a series of various sporting events and further leave . In the new year , a series of amphibious exercises were undertaken during this time with a view to preparing the battalion for future operations .

Finally , late in the war , the battalion received orders to deploy overseas again . Boarding the Duntroon on 24 November 1944 , a week later the battalion arrived at Aitape in New Guinea . There , the 6th Division took over from the American garrison in order to free up the US troops for further fighting in the Philippines . Following disembarkation , the 2 / 5th concentrated around Tadjil airstrip .

In December , the Australians began offensive operations against the Japanese forces that were operating in the surrounding areas . For the next seven months until the war ended the 2 / 5th undertook patrols through the Torricelli and Prince Alexander mountain ranges , as the 17th Brigade worked to initially establish and hold the Australian base around Aitape , before moving inland towards Maprik and then on to Kiarivu to pursue the Japanese forces that had withdrawn into the interior . Although only intended as a mopping up campaign , it was an arduous and costly period . Consisting primarily of small unit actions which resulted in disproportionately heavy casualties for the Australians , throughout the course of the campaign the 2 / 5th suffered 146 casualties , including eight officers killed or wounded .

= = = Disbandment and legacy = = =

Following the end of the war , the 2 / 5th remained in New Guinea as personnel were posted into the unit from other units that were being disbanded . In September , the battalion was withdrawn from the Koboibus area and flown back to Wewak . The battalion took part in a divisional parade in October while later that month it was declared " redundant " under demobilisation plans , and during this time many soldiers undertook educational or vocational training to prepare them for civilian life while they waited to return to Australia . In November , there was a considerable turn over in the battalion 's troops , as members were posted to other units depending upon their demobilisation priority : these units included the 2 / 1st , the 2 / 2nd , the 2 / 6th , the 2 / 7th , and the 30th Infantry Battalions . After this , the battalion was left with only 108 personnel , all of whom possessed the required points for discharge . Finally , on 1 December 1945 , the remaining personnel embarked upon the transport Duntroon , bound for Brisbane . A brief stay in camp at Chermside , in the Brisbane suburbs , followed before the battalion moved by rail to Victoria . Personnel detrained at Seymour and then moved by road to Puckapunyal . From there the Victorian , South Australian and Western Australian contingents marched out for discharge , leaving behind a small cadre staff .

The battalion was subsequently disbanded in early February 1946 while at Puckapunyal . Throughout its involvement in the war , a total of 2 @, @ 967 men served with the 2 / 5th Battalion of whom 216 were killed , and 390 wounded . Members of the battalion received two Distinguished Service Orders , 14 Military Crosses , six Distinguished Conduct Medals , 20 Military Medals , and 56 Mentions in Despatches ; one member of the battalion was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire and three were appointed Members of the Order of the British Empire . Alongside the 2 / 3rd Battalion , the 2 / 5th was the only other Australian infantry battalion to fight against all the major Axis powers during the war .

In 1948 , the Citizen Military Forces was re @-@ constituted and the 5th Battalion , Victorian Scottish Regiment was re @-@ raised . At the time many of its members were drawn from the 2 / 5th Battalion and because of its territorial and personnel links it was decided that the Victorian Scottish Regiment would take custody of the 2 / 5th Battalion 's World War II battle honours . As a result of the reorganisation of the Australian Army in the 1960s , which saw the disbandment of the regionally @-@ based single battalion regiments and the raising of new multi @-@ battalion state @-@ based regiments these battle honours were inherited by the 5th / 6th Battalion , Royal Victoria Regiment , an Australian Army Reserve battalion based around Melbourne .

= = Battle honours = =

The 2 / 5th Battalion received the following battle honours for its service during World War II : North Africa , Bardia 1941 , Capture of Tobruk , Syria 1941 , Merjayun , Damour , Greece 1941 , South @-@ West Pacific 1942 ? 1945 , Wau , Bobdubi II , Mubo II , Mount Tambu , Komiatum , Liberation of Australian New Guinea , Perimbil , Balif , Yamil ? Ulupu , Koboibus ? Kiarivu .

In 1961 ? 62 , these battle honours were entrusted to the 5th Battalion , and through this link are maintained by the Royal Victoria Regiment .

= = Commanding officers = =

The following officers commanded the 2 / 5th Battalion during the war :

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Page Cook (1939 ? 40) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Wrigley (1940 ? 41) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Roy King (1941) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Daniel Sarsfield Starr (1942 ? 43) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Mayo Conroy (1943 ? 44) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Alfred William Buttrose (1944 ? 45) .