

= 2 / 6th Battalion ( Australia ) =

The 2 / 6th Battalion was an infantry battalion of the Australian Army that served during the Second World War . Raised in October 1939 as part of the all volunteer Second Australian Imperial Force , the battalion formed part of the 6th Division and was among the first troops raised by Australia during the war . Departing Australia in early 1940 , the 2 / 6th were deployed to the Middle East where in January 1941 , it took part in the first action of the war by Australian ground forces , the Battle of Bardia , which was followed by further actions around Tobruk . Later , the 2 / 6th were dispatched to take part in the Battle of Greece , although their involvement in the campaign was short before they were evacuated . Some members of the battalion also subsequently fought on Crete with a composite 17th Brigade battalion , and afterwards the battalion had to be re @-@ formed in Palestine before being sent to Syria in 1941 ? 42 , where they formed part of the Allied occupation force that was established there in the aftermath of the Syria ? Lebanon campaign .

In mid @-@ 1942 , the battalion was withdrawn from the Middle East to help face the threat posed by the Japanese in the Pacific . A period of garrison duty was undertaken in Ceylon between March and July 1942 , before they arrived back in Australia in August 1942 . Following this , the 2 / 6th deployed to New Guinea in January 1943 , fighting around Wau and then advancing towards Salamaua during the Salamaua ? Lae campaign . They were withdrawn to the Atherton Tablelands for rest in September 1943 and subsequently did not see action again until later in the war , when they were committed to the Aitape ? Wewak campaign in late 1944 . The 2 / 6th remained in New Guinea until the end of the war , and was disbanded in February 1946 , after returning to Puckapunyal the previous December .

= = History = =

= = = Formation and training = = =

The 2 / 6th Battalion was raised at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds on 25 October 1939 , as part of the all volunteer Second Australian Imperial Force , which was raised for overseas service at the start of the war . The battalion 's motto was " Nothing over us " , which it adopted due to a popular Coles advertising slogan of the time which used the words " Nothing over 2 / 6 " . The colours chosen for the battalion 's Unit Colour Patch ( UCP ) were the same as those of the 6th Battalion , a unit which had served during World War I before being raised as a Militia formation in 1921 . These colours were purple 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 .

In early November , after it had started concentration , the battalion ? consisting at that stage of just a small cadre force of officers and non @-@ commissioned officers drawn mainly from several Militia units including the 14th , the 23rd / 21st , the 29th , and the 46th Battalions ? was moved to Puckapunyal , Victoria . While there , it received a number of drafts of recruits and was brought up to strength . With an authorised strength of around 900 personnel , like other Australian infantry battalions of the time , the battalion was formed around a nucleus of four rifle companies ? designated ' A ' through to ' D ' ? each consisting of three platoons .

A short period of rudimentary training followed under the tutelage of members of the Australian Instructional Corps . This was completed by April 1940 , and that month the battalion ? under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Godfrey , a First World War veteran who had previously commanded the 23rd / 21st Battalion ? embarked for the Middle East on the transport ship Neuralia , departing from Port Melbourne and sailing via Fremantle , Colombo , Aden and the Suez Canal . At this time it was attached to the 17th Brigade , which was assigned to the 6th Division . Recruited from Victoria ? although at various times the battalion 's composition was boosted by recruits from other states ? the 17th also consisted of the 2 / 5th , 2 / 7th and 2 / 8th Battalions .

= = = Middle East , Greece and Crete = = =

Upon their arrival in mid @-@ May , the battalion established itself around Beit Jirja , and completed its training at various locations in Palestine and Egypt . In early January 1941 , the 6th Division was committed to the fighting in Libya , and the 2 / 6th took part in the first action of the war by Australian ground forces , the Battle of Bardia , during which they fought against Italian forces . The battalion 's involvement in the battle was meant to be limited to creating a diversion for the main attack , but in the end proved to be its most costly , resulting in 22 killed and 51 wounded . This was followed by further actions around Tobruk later in the month , attacking across the Bardia ? Tobruk road towards the harbour through Wadi ed Delia during the 6th Division 's assault . Afterwards , the 2 / 6th was transported to El Gazala , 45 miles ( 72 km ) west of Torbuk , where they continued the advance to Derna and beyond in late January , advancing on a two @-@ company front during which they clashed briefly with Italians from the 86th Regiment , capturing over 400 . In February , the 2 / 6th detached personnel to garrison the towns of Barce and Benghazi before moving to Mersa Matruh , where they received new equipment , in late March 1941 . Casualties during this period were 24 dead and 75 wounded .

In early April 1941 , the 6th Division was dispatched to Greece , where they fought a very brief campaign following the German invasion of that country in the middle of the month . Overwhelmed , the Allied forces were forced back over the course of several weeks during which the 2 / 6th took part in several desperate rearguard actions and withdrawals during which the battalion lost 28 men killed and 43 wounded . Finally , they were evacuated by sea at the end of the month , but amidst the confusion a large of the battalion 's personnel ? 217 personnel from all ranks ? were captured , while others were landed on Crete , instead of Alexandria in Egypt , after the ship on which they were sailing , the Costa Rica , was sunk . On Crete , 13 officers and 202 other ranks from the 2 / 6th were organised into a 17th Brigade composite battalion along with men from the brigade 's other battalions less the 2 / 7th . They subsequently fought unsuccessfully to repulse the German invasion that came in May , after which many more became prisoners of war .

The battalion 's losses in Greece and Crete were heavy , totaling 30 dead , 54 wounded and 353 captured . As a result , the 2 / 6th had to be re @-@ formed in Palestine and brought back up to strength with reinforcements before it was dispatched Syria in December 1941 , to join the Allied garrison that had been established there as occupation force at the conclusion of the Syria ? Lebanon campaign against the Vichy French . In early 1942 , the Australian government decided to bring the 6th Division back to Australia to help bolster its defences following Japan 's entry into the war . Consequently , in March the battalion embarked from Suez on the transport HMT Otranto , bound for Australia .

= = = Ceylon and New Guinea = = =

On its way home , the battalion ? along with the 16th Brigade and the rest of the 17th Brigade ? was landed on Ceylon due to the perceived threat of a Japanese invasion there . The battalion remained there for five months , constructing defences and conducting jungle training at various locations including Lake Koggala , Weligama , Matara , Tangalle and Hambantota . After the threat of invasion passed , the battalion eventually returned to Melbourne on the transport HMT Athlone Castle , arriving in early August 1942 , at the height of the fighting along the Kokoda Track in Papua .

A period of reorganisation and training followed as the battalion was prepared for the rigours of jungle warfare . The battalion concentrated at the Nagambie Road Camp in central Victoria initially , but in late September moved to Greta in New South Wales . In October , after a period of intense training , the 2 / 6th was moved to Brisbane from where , on 13 October 1942 , they embarked on the Dutch merchant ship Bontekoe , bound for Milne Bay for the first of their two campaigns there against the Japanese . After arriving at Milne Bay , where the 17th Brigade was held in reserve , on 19 October they remained there until January 1943 , when the battalion embarked upon the MV Pulganbar and several smaller coastal vessels and moved to Port Moresby . From Moresby , they were airlifted to Wau on 14 January . During the battalion 's time around Milne Bay , they had

suffered heavily from malaria and over 300 men were in hospital at the time the battalion deployed to Wau ; consequently , it was severely understrength by the time it went into battle . Nevertheless , throughout late January 1943 , the battalion was heavily involved in the Battle of Wau , then afterwards took part in the advance on Salamaua , during which it fought several key actions , including the fighting around Lababia Ridge in late June , before supporting the landing at Nassau Bay and the Battle of Mubo in July and then taking part in the fighting around Mount Tambu and Komiatum Ridge in August . During the fighting the battalion sustained casualties of 59 dead and 133 wounded .

In late September 1943 , the 2 / 6th were withdrawn to Australia for rest , sailing from Milne Bay on a Dutch transport , the Bosch Fontein , landing in Cairns . They spent the next year training at Wondecla on the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland prior to their final campaign of the war : the Aitape ? Wewak campaign . Arriving at Aitape in December 1944 , the 2 / 6th spent the remainder of the war ? a period of eight months ? carrying out a " mopping up campaign " to clear the Japanese from the surrounding areas , conducting a series of patrols and advances through the Torricelli and Prince Alexander Ranges , advancing to Maprik in the early stages of the campaign , and then helping to capture the town of Yamil 6 miles ( 9 @. @ 7 km ) to the west , clearing a series of jungle ridges in the process before continuing the drive inland towards Ulunkohoitu in an effort to pin Japanese forces down while the 2 / 7th Battalion conducted a wide sweep towards Kiarivu . Losses during this campaign numbered 37 dead and 85 wounded .

The war came to an end in mid @-@ August 1945 following Japan 's surrender in the wake of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki . At the conclusion of the fighting , the 2 / 6th remained in New Guinea , concentrating in the area around Wewak . The battalion 's strength was slowly reduced as personnel were repatriated back to Australia individually for demobilisation based upon a formal points system . On 13 December 1945 , the battalion 's remaining personnel sailed for Australia , eventually returning to Puckapunyal . As the battalion 's personnel were slowly demobilised or transferred out to other units its strength decreased rapidly until it was finally was disbanded on 18 February 1946 . Those personnel who were not discharged were transferred to other units for further service .

During the war , a total of 2 @,@ 965 men served with the battalion of whom 179 were killed and 335 wounded . Members of the battalion received the following decorations : four Distinguished Service Orders , 15 Military Crosses , five Distinguished Conduct Medals , 35 Military Medals , and 63 Mentions in Despatches .

= = Battle honours = =

The 2 / 6th received the following battle honours :

North Africa , Bardia 1941 , Capture of Tobruk , Greece 1941 , South @-@ West Pacific 1942 ? 1945 , Wau , Lababia Ridge , Bobdubi II , Mubo II , Komiatum , Liberation of Australian New Guinea , Maprik , Yamil ? Ulupu , Kaboibus ? Kiarivu .

These honours were subsequently entrusted to the 6th Battalion in 1961 , and through this link are maintained by the Royal Victoria Regiment .

= = Commanding officers = =

The following officers commanded the 2 / 6th during the war :

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Harry Langham Godfrey ( 1939 ? 41 ) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Wrigley ( 1941 ? 42 ) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick George Wood ( 1942 ? 45 ) ;

Lieutenant Colonel David Arion Collingwood Jackson ( 1945 ) .