

NOT THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS NEWSLETTER

— which should please Denny Lien if no-one else — but a slim contribution to ANZAPA February 1983 by unslim John Bangsund, PO Box 80, Brunswick West, Victoria 3055. You'll be getting the Newsletter as well, mind, if Gary Mason makes it back to Adelaide tomorrow.

31 January (early) I have just finished editing a book by Peter Charlton about the New Guinea, Bougainville, New Britain and Borneo campaigns of 1944-5. It's called, aptly, *The Unnecessary War*, and is worth reading even if you normally have no time for military history. I normally have no time for military history but am pleased that, in the line of duty, this book came my way. It has explained quite a few things to me — not least how my father came to be in New Guinea in 1944-5.

Private L.E.G.B. Bangsund, VX101444, came to be in New Guinea because he volunteered, in the first place, but by late 1944 it didn't matter whether men had volunteered for overseas service in the AIF or had volunteered or been conscripted for service in the AMF (which wasn't supposed to leave Australia). By then Australian troops went where they were told, and they were told by MacArthur and/or Blamey. (Charlton's book is largely an examination of the political decision-making, as distinct from military, by Blamey in particular. Our unlamented sometime Governor-General, John Kerr, plays a not-insignificant part in the story. Fascinating.)

I have always known such names as Aitape and Wewak, because my father was there. It's an odd feeling to be editing a book nearly forty years later and suddenly realize that he is one of the unmentioned characters in the story. Charlton quotes someone who wrote about the area:

A strong surf dumps on the beach at Dogreto, so strong that the men ram the LCM or LCT ashore, a loaded truck runs off, and the craft pulls out as fast as it can, before it broaches...

The MDS of the 2/1st Field Ambulance is placed just where the road climbs from the beach to go round the Dogreto headland. A sea of mud, with water carts, three-tonners, ambulances and jeeps keeping it stirred to a fine paste. A little further on the mud, splayed out by the moving trucks, is pouring down the side of the hill like thick soup...

My father was in a Field Ambulance unit, whether the 2/1st or some other I can't recall now, and he told me a few things about his experiences in New Guinea, but not a lot. I can understand why now. He turned 36 there, which I gather made him rather older than most, but it still seems awfully young. I still felt fairly young when I turned 36, during Gough Whitlam's last year in office.

I can't quite explain how moved I was, how so many things fell into place, when I read Charlton's account of the northern New Guinea campaign and realized why my father was there. Something similar happened to me last year, on 2 July, when I stood on a hill in central Victoria with a bunch of university students and listened to Geoffrey Blainey talking about gold-mining.

My mother was born in this part of Victoria. So was her mother, Marie Eugenie Prolongeau, who married Alfred Holyoak in 1900. I never met my grandfather Holyoak; even my mother has few memories of him, because he was a good deal older than my grandmother and was rarely at home. He was a wood-cutter. Now, just as I have known Aitape and Wewak almost all my life, so I have known that my grandfather was a wood-cutter. From time to time I wondered what he did exactly, that kept him away from home for long periods, this wood-cutting.

Blainey explained it all. My grandfather spent his working life cutting timber to be used as pit-props in the gold mines. I wish I'd met him. What tales he could have told!

How lucky we are in ANZAPA to have people like Allan Bray who remember and will tell us such tales! Thank you, Allan, most sincerely, for your story of the old house at Edwardstown. If we ever do a 'Best of ANZAPA' this will just have to be in it.

Cheers! *ALB.*