

“A weary business”: The Experiences of 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment during the Static Phase of the Korean War

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The 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) served in the Korean War from March 1952 to March 1953. However, because it did not participate in the major battles of the war the unit is often overlooked by historians. This paper uses the collections at the Australian War Memorial, including unit war diaries, oral histories, manuscripts and other records, showing how soldiers who endured months of unchanging conditions coped with their circumstances. The first section explores life in the line, including the difficulties posed by the weather and living in bunkers, before examining what the static warfare meant for 1RAR, highlighting the strategy of patrolling, being under constant fire, and the risk of minefield accidents. The second section analyses how the unit coped in these conditions by focusing on leadership, the sense of camaraderie and shared identity, and the use of humour. Space limitations mean that a closer examination of mental health at an individual level is not possible, although this would be a fruitful avenue for future research. Instead, this paper contends that spirits remained high during 1RAR’s yearlong tour in Korea because of the combination of intelligent leadership, comradeship, and humour.

Primary source material, including unit war diaries and later oral histories, consistently emphasises that the troops coped well with their conditions. In late July 1952, after at least 58 bunkers collapsed after heavy rain, killing one soldier while he slept, the unit war diary noted that “morale remains high and the men are displaying excellent spirit under extremely adverse conditions”.¹ Disciplinary records also provide insight into the mental wellbeing of soldiers. While the majority of extant provost records for the Korean War do not record disciplinary action at the unit level, the records for February 1953 demonstrate that of

¹ War diary, 1RAR, July 1952, p. 14, Australian War Memorial: AWM 85 2/2: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370472>. The August 1952 war diary records a similar event in the same way, see War diary, 1RAR, August 1952, p. 13, AWM85 2/13: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370473>.

the 13 Australian soldiers apprehended, just three were from 1RAR.² Although this covers a short period, during which 1RAR was in reserve, it nevertheless suggests that the soldiers of 1RAR were, for the most part, psychologically stable at the time.³ This notion is reinforced by the research of Edgar Jones and Ian P. Palmer, who found that hospitalisations for mental health problems in 1 Commonwealth Division, which included 1RAR, declined during the static period of the Korean War, similarly suggesting that the majority of soldiers coped reasonably well with their conditions.⁴

Veterans of 1RAR recalled high spirits in the unit during their time in the line. Staff Sergeant John Samuel Beam, who transferred from 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) to 1RAR in April 1952, described how the men of 1RAR lived “like moles under the ground,” adding that “even then, morale was good, that’s what amazed me”.⁵ Similarly, in an oral history interview, Corporal Norman Goldspink recalled that “morale was great, everyone was a volunteer, did what they were asked and looked forward to leave”.⁶

Literature on Australian involvement in the Korean War has often overlooked the role of 1RAR. The unit’s time in Korea has been seen as relatively unnoteworthy, particularly in comparison with the battle experiences of the other Australian battalions. When 1RAR is specifically discussed, it is often in relation to the strategy of static warfare and the two company raids undertaken by the unit: Operation Blaze in July 1952 and Operation Fauna in December 1952.⁷ Both operations failed in their aim to capture prisoners but were seen as

² Headquarters Australian Army Component, DAPM’s Monthly Report, February 1953, AWM 114 130/1/26 Part 1.

³ War diary, 1RAR, February 1953, AWM85 2/19: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370479>.

⁴ Edgar Jones and Ian P. Palmer, “Army Psychiatry in the Korean War: The Experience of 1 Commonwealth Division,” *Military Medicine*, 165, no. 4, (2000), pp. 256–60.

⁵ John Samuel Beam, interview by Edna Olwyn Green, 22 July 1997, 30.4531.22, AWM S03785: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1115171>.

⁶ Norman Goldspink, interview by Bill Fogarty, 25 July 2002, transcript, p. 15, AWM, S02650: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C989673>.

⁷ See, for example, Colin Khan, “The Reliving of Minor Tactics: Reflections of a Platoon Commander’s War in Korea” in *In From the Cold: Reflections on Australia’s Korean War*, eds. John Blaxland, Michael Kelly and Liam Brewin Higgins (Canberra: ANU Press, 2020) pp. 190–3; John Salmon, “The FOO recalls Operation “Fauna,”” in *Korea Remembered*, eds. Maurie Pears and Fred Kirkland (NSW: Doctrine Wing, Combined Arms

successful at the time as the companies performed well and caused considerable damage to enemy positions.⁸ Although the everyday experiences of life in the line are sometimes described in literature on the Korean War, the specificity of 1RAR's experience is missing, with Australian units often assessed together.⁹ Robert O'Neill's official history of the Korean War, for instance, focuses on operational detail when discussing 1RAR and discusses the Australian soldier experience more broadly without singling out the battalion.¹⁰

1RAR's time in Korea reveals much about the experience of soldiers who did not have any major success in combat, as opposed to 3RAR and the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), which built a shared sense of achievement and identity based on experiences of victory at Kapyong and Maryang San and the Hook respectively.

The Korean War took place between 1950 and 1953. In the aftermath of the Second World War the country had been divided along the 38th Parallel.¹¹ By the late 1940s, a communist government controlled North Korea, supported by China and the Soviet Union, while South Korea was ruled by a government which relied heavily on the United States.¹²

The war began when North Korea invaded its southern counterpart on 25 June 1950. United Nations (UN) forces, including the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia, joined the war in support of the south, while North Korea received assistance from its communist allies in the form of manpower and material support.¹³ From October 1950, the Chinese government sent large numbers of troops to fight in Korea. Notably, 1RAR fought

Training and Development Centre, 1998), pp. 123–36; Gus Breen, "Operation Fauna: December 1952," *Korea Remembered*, pp. 115–22.

⁸ War diary, 1RAR, July 1952, p. 1; Charles Madden, "Australians Superb in First Korea Action," *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 10 July 1952; Charles Madden, "New Battalion Praised for Raid Success," *The West Australian*, 21 July 1952.

⁹ For instance Colin H. Brown, *Stalemate in Korea: The Royal Australian Regiment in the Static War of 1952–1953* (Loftus, NSW: Australian Military History Publications, 1997).

¹⁰ For example Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II: Combat Operations* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Publishing Service, 1985), pp. 243–7, 250–6, 260–5.

¹¹ Ben Evans, *Out in the Cold: Australia's Involvement in the Korean War – 1950–53* (Canberra: Dept of Veterans Affairs and the Australian War Memorial, 2001), p. 4.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 24.

against mainly Chinese troops during its time in the line.¹⁴ The Korean War is generally seen by historians as a proxy conflict of the Cold War, divided along ideological lines and with superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – competing for global dominance.¹⁵

3RAR was the first Australian Army battalion sent to Korea. When the war began, the unit was serving with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF), a multinational taskforce which oversaw the transition to peace in Japan following the Second World War.¹⁶ The early months of the war in Korea were characterised by considerable back and forth movement as each side succeeded in forcing the other back across the 38th Parallel.¹⁷ 3RAR was involved in the major battles of Kapyong and Maryang San during this first phase of the war, in April 1951 and October 1951 respectively.¹⁸

1RAR joined 3RAR in the 28th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade in June 1952 before 2RAR relieved 1RAR in March 1953.¹⁹ 2RAR served in the final battles on the Hook, when the Chinese army launched a major offensive as long-running peace negotiations drew to a close and the truce neared.²⁰ Australian naval and air force units also served in Korea during the war.²¹ The truce was signed on 27 July 1953, although a final peace agreement was never signed.²²

While the early months of the war were marked by substantial movement and large-scale battles, by early 1952 the war had settled into a stalemate.²³ Often compared to the First World War on the Western Front, this period was defined by a lack of movement and an

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁵ See *Ibid*, p. 5–6.

¹⁶ Cameron Forbes, “Fighting in the Giants’ Playground: Australians in the Korean War,” in *In From the Cold*, p. 103.

¹⁷ R.W. Croakley, P.J. Scheipes, E.J. Wright and G. Horne, “Antiwar Sentiment in the Korean War, 1950–1953,” in *The Korean War: An Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition, ed. Stanley Sandler, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 23.

¹⁸ Bob Breen, “The Battle of Maryang San: Australia’s Finest Feat of Arms in the Korean War?,” in *In From the Cold*, p. 206.

¹⁹ War diary, 1RAR, March 1953, p. 8, AWM85 2/20: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370480>.

²⁰ Evans, *Out in the Cold*, p. 8.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

²² O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 215.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 215.

entrenched no man's land.²⁴ Both sides launched occasional raids on enemy hills, while undertaking constant patrols in no man's land.²⁵ This type of warfare was designed to place pressure on the opposition in negotiations, rather than winning the war.²⁶ The war remained largely static until the truce was in place, after which both sides withdrew two kilometres to create the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which is still in operation today.²⁷ It is important to note that 1RAR's 1952–53 tour in Korea took place entirely within the static phase of the war.

1RAR left Australia for Korea, via Japan, in March 1952.²⁸ The unit included new, inexperienced soldiers who had been too young to serve in the Second World War, along with veterans who volunteered as part of K Force, which was specially raised for Korea.²⁹ After undertaking further training, on 1 June 1RAR joined 3RAR and British units 1 King's Own Scottish Borderers and 1 King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the 28th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade.³⁰ The brigade was supported by a New Zealand artillery regiment and an Indian Field Ambulance.³¹ This highlights the multinational nature of the war in Korea, with a variety of UN members involved across the forces that supported South Korea. This was particularly significant for Australia as it moved away from Britain, became closer to the United States, and sought to play a greater role on the world stage.³² 1RAR stayed in Korea until March 1953, serving in front line areas between June and December 1952. As part of the

²⁴ For example, Charles Madden, "Korea Reverts to Trench Warfare," *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 16 April 1952; Eric Smith, interview by Bill Fogarty, 3 July 2001, transcript, p. 7, AWM, S02292: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C969358>; Maurice Austin, Letter to Robert O'Neill, 11 July 1980, AWM 89 F11; Evans, *Out in the Cold*, p. 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, 209.

²⁷ Evans, *Out in the Cold*, pp. 53–5.

²⁸ S.P. Ramage, *Kokoda Secret: Ian Hutchison: Australian Hero* (Wahroonga, NSW: Eora Press, 2014), p. 238.

²⁹ Goldspink interview, p. 3, 15. This was similar to 3RAR, see Evans, *Out in the Cold*, p. 21. For a further discussion of why men enlisted see D.M. Guilfoyle, "From the Rubble," unpublished memoir, AWM, MSS1453.

³⁰ War diary, 1RAR, June 1952, p. 1, AWM85 2/11: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370471>; Ramage, *Kokoda Secret*, p. 244.

³¹ O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 240.

³² Evans, *Out in the Cold*, pp. 2–4.

28th Brigade, 1RAR spent most of its time in the hills just to the south of Maryang San, close to the Imjin and Samichon rivers.³³

Life in the Line

A range of factors influenced the experiences of 1RAR soldiers, including the weather, living in bunkers, and the tactics of static warfare. The extreme temperatures in Korea affected everyday life and operations. Private Des Guilfoyle later remembered the hot Korean summer as “furnace-like”.³⁴ Heavy snow and freezing cold in the winter were even more problematic, as temperatures dipped well below -5°C.³⁵ In later years, 1RAR veterans recalled the cold as one of the most difficult aspects of life in Korea. Corporal Norman Goldspink recounted how it was too cold to get undressed in the winter, so the men would not bathe until they left the line.³⁶ Guilfoyle vividly described how “even the ground was frozen solid and rivers iced up whilst a bone chilling variable wind swept over the barren landscape”.³⁷

The winter weather also created operational risks. The men had to sleep with their weapons to keep them warm enough to work, and standing patrols had to rotate frequently so that the soldiers did not freeze to death.³⁸ The snow also inhibited mobility during Operation Fauna, the second company raid undertaken by 1RAR in December 1952.³⁹ Keith Payne, a young private in Korea who would later be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions in the Vietnam War, recalled how difficult it was to return to the company position after the operation had concluded. He said that the upward slope of the hill was like a “slippery, sliding

³³ Most of the war diaries include details of the positions, for example, War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 69, 6, 9, AWM85 2/16: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370476>.

³⁴ Des Guilfoyle, interview by Bill Bunbury, 1 September 1997, 11.22–11.50, AWM, S01909: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C372914>. See also Goldspink interview, p. 7, 9.

³⁵ War diary, 1RAR, January 1953, p. 2, AWM85 2/18: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370478>. Guilfoyle later said that, with the wind chill, it felt like -20°C, see Guilfoyle interview, 9.15–9.49.

³⁶ Goldspink interview, p. 9.

³⁷ DM Guilfoyle, “Interlude”, p. 1, unpublished memoir, AWM MSS1453.

³⁸ Brian Thomas Lennon, interview by John Bannister, 21 May 2004, 45.54–46.49, AWM, S0326: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1067438>; Guilfoyle, “Interlude,” p. 1.

³⁹ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 262.

ice rink” that soon became mud. It was difficult, he added, to gain footholds, and many men tore their hands on the barbed wire as they resorted to pulling themselves up the hill.⁴⁰

Considering the entirety of his combat experience, Payne concluded that “Korea would be the war with the worst climatic conditions – worst conditions – anti-human comfort that a soldier could ever put up with.”⁴¹

The soldiers of 1RAR lived in bunkers, also known as dugouts or “hutchis”, cut into the side of the hills that characterised the landscape in Korea. Payne described these as being about ten feet in length, around six feet deep, and having around four-and-a-half feet of overhead protection, such as sandbags.⁴² The men improvised to construct bunks in the dugouts using star pickets and other materials.⁴³ Trenches were constructed to connect the bunkers. Much like the trench warfare of the First World War, this kind of primitive living was often accompanied by rats in “plague proportions”.⁴⁴ Life in the bunkers was uncomfortable, and proved to be dangerous. The proximity of the enemy meant that soldiers had to be careful to remain out of view during the day, often keeping to the lee side of the hill or remaining in bunkers and trenches.⁴⁵

Apart from company-sized raids, including Operation Blaze and Operation Fauna, patrols were the primary method of warfare during this period. 1RAR conducted patrols into no man’s land almost every night while in the line.⁴⁶ There were a number of different types of patrol. A memorandum from Major General Michael West, Commander of 1 Commonwealth Division from September 1952, detailed the different types of patrol. Between one and six fighting patrols were sent out each night, each consisting of about 16

⁴⁰ Keith Payne, interview by Bill Fogarty, 21 June 2001, transcript, p. 17, AWM, S02290: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C969354>.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁴³ Goldspink interview, p. 8–9.

⁴⁴ Guilfoyle, “Interlude,” p. 1. See also Henry Francis Rixon, interview by Edna Olwyn Green, 9 March 2003, 48.51–49.58, AWM, S03809: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1115314>; Goldspink interview, p. 9; Guilfoyle interview, 10.13–10.58.

⁴⁵ Goldspink interview, p. 8; Rixon interview, 16.01–16.52.

⁴⁶ Smith interview, p. 8.

members. Additionally, one or two ambush patrols of ten men were deployed to disrupt Chinese patrols and capture prisoners. Approximately two or three reconnaissance patrols of four members sought to gather information. A further eight to 12 standing patrols of two to three men were also deployed to keep watch and support returning patrols. Finally, lay-up patrols saw small groups or individuals make their way into enemy territory to gather intelligence, staying for between several hours and several days. The number and type of patrols varied depending on need: on arrival in a new position more reconnaissance patrols were undertaken to familiarise troops with their new location.⁴⁷ If a soldier went missing, extra patrols would be deployed as search parties.⁴⁸

The constant program of patrolling could be frustrating and tiresome for the members of 1RAR. During the months 1RAR was in the line very little changed – the daily routine continued and the Chinese lines remained unmoved – so there was no sense of progress. Lieutenant Douglas Yeats later highlighted the strain caused by this kind of static warfare, writing, “weeks of constant patrol duty became a weary business, as men spent tense hours, exposed and vulnerable, without seemingly achieving any results”.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, the men coped well with their conditions despite this frustration.

Although the intent of many patrols and Operations Blaze and Fauna was to capture prisoners, 1RAR only succeeded in capturing one prisoner during its time in the line. More tellingly, this single incident was an accident.⁵⁰ On the night of 13 September 1952, a routine fighting patrol led by Lieutenant Peter Cliff (who would be killed in action later that month) encountered an enemy patrol at around 0200 hours.⁵¹ In the resulting firefight, two members

⁴⁷ Major General Michael A.R. West, GOC Personal Memorandum No 12 Patrolling, 16 September 1952, pp. 1–3, AWM89 D1/6, Part 2. See also War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 3, 6, 9.

⁴⁸ For example War diary, 1RAR, August 1952, p. 13, AWM85 2/13, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370473>.

⁴⁹ Douglas Harold Yeats, *From What I Can Remember*, 2001, p. 77, AWM, MSS1997.

⁵⁰ Guilfoyle interview, 13.36–14.42.

⁵¹ War diary, 1RAR, September 1952, p. 8, 12, AWM85 2/14: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370474>.

of 1RAR were killed.⁵² During the chaos, Lance Corporal David McCarthy came across a Chinese soldier who had been separated from his comrades and seized him.⁵³

The capture was seen as a major success for the unit. However, Lance Corporal Gavin “Toby” Ralston later revealed that the prisoner “knew less than we did” and “looked about 15” (see Figure 1).⁵⁴ This was borne out in the G Branch intelligence report on the prisoner. During interrogation, the prisoner claimed that his section had been told to find and bring back two UN mines, to destroy any mines they encountered, and if possible capture a prisoner.⁵⁵ The relatively limited information garnered from the prisoner makes the frustration of members of 1RAR more comprehensible, as they regularly risked their lives in the quest to capture prisoners without results.

Brigadier Thomas Daly, who led the 28th Brigade, was critical of the emphasis on capturing prisoners which came from the most senior levels of leadership. Daly later criticised the strategy as “a disaster” and “uneconomic”,⁵⁶ highlighting the disconnect between the experience of men on the ground and their immediate commanders, and the goals of the most senior leadership. At the same time, however, the strategy of limited warfare, which rested on patrolling, raids, and prisoners, was seen by these senior leaders as the most effective way to pressure North Korea and its allies in negotiations.

Australian soldiers also risked being taken prisoner while on patrol. Like their enemies, the Chinese forces maintained a program of patrols in no man’s land, aiming to capture prisoners and keep pressure on their counterparts. In August 1952, a Chinese patrol captured Captain Phillip Greville and Private Dennis Condon, the only prisoners taken from 1RAR during its time in Korea.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁵³ Ramage, *Kokoda Secret*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ Gavin Ralston, untitled article in *Duty First*, 2001, AWM PR00466 6/89.

⁵⁵ War diary, Commonwealth Division Headquarters, G Branch, September 1952, p. 112, AWM373 WO281/71: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370443>.

⁵⁶ Thomas Daly, interview by David Chinn, 10 July 2001, transcript, p. 20, AWM, S02294: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C969361>.

Figure 1

Herbert Lee Douglas, *Three members of the 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment stand with a Chinese prisoner of war in a dugout in Korea after a patrol, c. 14 September 1952*, Australian War Memorial, LEEJ0601: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1068151>.

Left to right: Corporal Ronald McCrindle, Chinese prisoner – name unknown, Lance Corporal David McCarthy, Lieutenant Peter Cliff.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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On 23 August, Greville, the commanding officer of the Assault Pioneer Platoon, led a group of nine men to repair a minefield fence.⁵⁷ The unit diary records that that they were covered by two protective patrols.⁵⁸ Greville realised that the fence was in worse condition than he had anticipated, and that repairs would take longer than planned. The group's radio stopped working and Greville decided that they would have to return using the same route they had taken to reach the fence. As Greville's party returned it came under fire from a Chinese patrol that had waited to ambush them. During the resulting confrontation, Greville and Condon were taken by "snatch parties".⁵⁹ Both were incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp, suffering harsh treatment at the hands of their captors.⁶⁰ They were released the following August, shortly after the truce had taken effect.⁶¹ While the constant patrolling could be wearing, as Yeats described, each patrol was also vulnerable and had to remain constantly alert, as small errors or misfortunes could have grave consequences, as the capture of Greville and Condon illustrates.

Artillery and mortar fire were a constant feature of life in the line. O'Neill calculated that between June 1952 and February 1953 an average of 125 enemy shells and 66 mortar bombs fell on the 28th Brigade each day.⁶² In November 1952, 1RAR recorded 28 shells, 123 mortar bombs and 296 "unspecified projectiles" in battalion areas in a 24-hour period.⁶³ The artillery support provided to 1RAR against the Chinese forces added to the near constant noise during these periods. Men were regularly killed and injured by enemy fire, enhancing the ever present sense of danger in the line.⁶⁴ Payne remembered hearing the artillery when he

⁵⁷ Philip James Greville, interview by David Chinn, 15 June 2001, transcript, p. 5, AWM, S02289: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C969353>.

⁵⁸ War diary, 1RAR, August 1952, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Greville interview, p. 5–6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 7–8, 10.

⁶¹ 'Duntroon Graduate Released', *The Canberra Times*, 15 September 1953.

⁶² O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 236.

⁶³ War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 14.

⁶⁴ For example War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 7, 9, 14; War diary, 1RAR, 18, December 1952, AWM85 2/17: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370477>.

first arrived in the line and thinking, “My God! What have I let myself in for?”⁶⁵ In an oral history, Guilfoyle recalled how one of his companions broke under the strain of the fire, crawling into an ammunition bay and having to be physically removed by his comrades.⁶⁶ Guilfoyle felt that most of the members of 1RAR were close to breaking during periods of heavy fire, saying “boy, it was mighty hard on the nerves.”⁶⁷

Minefields were another hazard of life in the line. The forward locations of 1RAR’s positions were made up of barbed wire and minefields.⁶⁸ This meant that patrols had to navigate through gaps in the wire and around the minefields as they entered no man’s land.⁶⁹ On arrival in a new position reconnaissance patrols were needed to familiarise the troops with their new location. This was especially important as most patrols took place at night, making navigation more difficult.

In some cases, minefields established by other units were either unmarked or unrecorded, leading to injuries and fatalities.⁷⁰ On the night of 7 November 1952, a patrol led by Lieutenant William “Digger” James accidentally entered an unmarked minefield. One man was killed in the incident, while a further four were wounded. James was among the injured, suffering the loss of one foot. Nevertheless, he continued to command his patrol, overseeing the evacuation of casualties and insisting on being the last to be evacuated.⁷¹ Awarded a Military Cross for this action, he went on to serve as Director of Army Medical Services in the Vietnam War and Chairman of the Australian War Memorial Council.⁷² In addition to the dangers posed by the weather, artillery fire, and encounters with the enemy, minefields were a threat faced by the members of 1RAR.

⁶⁵ Payne interview, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Guilfoyle interview, 16.58–17.10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 16.06–16.58, 17.10–17.30.

⁶⁸ Payne interview, p. 13.

⁶⁹ See War diary, 1RAR, June 1952, p. 6.

⁷⁰ For example War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, pp. 6–7; War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 10, 14.

⁷¹ War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 7.

⁷² O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 254.

Coping with Life in the Line

A number of factors helped the members of 1RAR cope with the difficulty of their circumstances, including intelligent leadership, a sense of camaraderie, and the use of humour. 1RAR benefitted from strong leadership at the division, brigade, and unit level. In 1951, the Australian government informed Major General James Cassels, Commander of the 1st Commonwealth Division until September 1952, that decisions made by the American or UN leadership that appeared “in your opinion not to accord with the object of the United Nations operations in Korea” could be appealed, with the Australian Defence Committee to determine the outcome of such a case.⁷³ This included decisions that seemed to “imperil the safety of Commonwealth troops under your command to a degree exceptional in war”.⁷⁴ As O’Neill notes, while this process was never required, it meant that Cassels had significant leverage in dealing with Australia’s allies.⁷⁵ For instance, when Cassels came under pressure to capture a prisoner every three days, he was able to successfully resist such efforts.⁷⁶ Given the difficulty of capturing prisoners, trying to get a prisoner every three days was unreasonable and would have required an intensified patrolling program, exposing soldiers to more danger.

Adjutant Eric Smith recounted how Lieutenant–Colonel Ian Hutchison, the Commanding Officer of 1RAR until October 1952, resisted pressure to undertake a dangerous raid upon the unit’s arrival in Korea. At the time, the 28th Brigade was commanded by the English Brigadier John MacDonald.⁷⁷ MacDonald wanted Hutchison to conduct a battalion-

⁷³ War diary, 1RAR, September 1952, p. 4; Draft Directive to Major–General Cassels, 22 June 1951, p. 1, AWM89 D1/6 Part 2.

⁷⁴ Draft Directive to Major General Cassels, 22 June 1951, p. 1. While only a draft of the directive was available for this paper O’Neill confirms its final content, see O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 240.

⁷⁵ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 240.

⁷⁶ Daly interview, p. 6.

⁷⁷ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 219.

sized raid, telling him that it was “time to get your battalion bloodied”.⁷⁸ According to Smith, Hutchison’s firm opposition led to it becoming a company raid, Operation Blaze, in July 1952.⁷⁹ Along with Cassels’ refusal to attempt to take a prisoner every three days, Hutchison’s defiance highlights how the Australian leadership prioritised the wellbeing of their men over risky actions with limited chances of success.⁸⁰

By the time that 1RAR arrived in Korea, the Australian leadership had organised for the soldiers to be well-equipped, which helped the soldiers to operate effectively and keep spirits high. The allied forces had been poorly equipped during the first winter in Korea, leading to cases of frostbite and other cold injuries.⁸¹ By the time 1RAR arrived in Korea, however, this situation had been largely rectified.⁸² The introduction of mesh inner soles was particularly crucial. These allowed air to circulate so that sweat did not freeze and cause frostbite during the winter (Figure 2).⁸³ Australia’s British and American allies helped to feed and equip the soldiers, meaning that they were always well-supplied.⁸⁴

The division’s rotation system and Australian leave arrangements were similarly positive for the wellbeing of soldiers, providing breaks from the pressures of the front line. The 28th Brigade alternated with other brigades on the general principle of having two brigades in the line, with one in reserve. Each would spend about 14 weeks in the line, followed by seven weeks in reserve.⁸⁵ Time in reserve was spent training and undertaking other duties, but nevertheless provided welcome respite.⁸⁶ Leave arrangements were generous. Members of 1RAR received five days of leave in the “welcoming wonderland” of Japan after

⁷⁸ Smith interview, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10. MacDonald was not a popular leader with many of his men, see Daly interview, p. 4–5.

⁸⁰ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 240.

⁸¹ Lennon interview, 51.30–52.50.

⁸² Yeats, *From What I Can Remember*, p. 75, 77.

⁸³ Goldspink interview, p. 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9, 12; Payne interview, p. 10; Guilfoyle interview, 8.47, 22.43–23.41.

⁸⁵ Notes on Activity on 28 Britcom Inf Bde Front, Period 30 June 52 to 28 Feb 53, 1953, AWM 89 D1/6 Part 2.

⁸⁶ For example, War diary, 1RAR, October 1952, pp. 59–62, AWM85 2/15: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1370475>.

approximately four months of service, with a further 21 days granted after eight months.⁸⁷

These arrangements were likely a positive psychological force for the soldiers, who during their time in the front line knew that respite was not far away.

Figure 2

Pair of mesh inner soles belonging to Lance Corporal G.C. Ralston, 1 Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, c. 1950–3, Australian War Memorial, REL34727:
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1146764>.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

REL34727

⁸⁷ Guilfoyle, "Interlude," p. 2.

Leadership at the company level also helped the members of 1RAR cope during their time in the front line. Major A.S. Mann, who led B Company during Operation Fauna, was particularly popular and well respected.⁸⁸ Private Henry “Harry” Rixon’s later recollections illustrate how Mann’s style of leadership endeared him to his men. Rixon spoke to interviewer and researcher Olwyn Green, widow of 3RAR’s Commanding Officer Charlie Green, telling her how he had heard that British soldiers would have to leave a pub when an officer arrived, but that when they encountered Mann in a bar in Japan, he “came over and bought us all a drink and sat down”.⁸⁹ Mann did not punish Rixon when he refused to dig latrines, as he was ordered to by another officer.⁹⁰ This friendly and relaxed leadership style contributed to the respect felt for Mann. This was significant during operations: as Rixon said, the men would have “followed him to hell and back”.⁹¹ While this kind of leadership was not necessarily universal, it demonstrates that 1RAR’s leaders could be more informal, which built respect between officers and their men. Mark Johnston noted a similar effect during the Second World War, writing that “the informality of Australian officer/men relations ... undoubtedly made coercion less important in their army than it was in others.”⁹²

A sense of camaraderie and pride in the unit were also pivotal in enabling soldiers to cope with their circumstances. The unit’s year-long rotational assignment was a major factor in the development of strong friendships and a sense of unity within 1RAR. The members of 3RAR, most of whom had arrived in Korea long before 1RAR, were replaced on an individual basis as their service ended.⁹³ This meant that the members of sections and companies changed on a fairly regular basis, beyond the necessary disruptions due to leave arrangements or injury. This may have made it harder to form close relationships. It had

⁸⁸ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 261.

⁸⁹ Rixon interview, 30.38–32.15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 21.10–22.33; also 29.33–30.26.

⁹¹ Rixon interview, 18.46–19.24.

⁹² Mark Johnston, *At the Front Line: Experiences of Australian Soldiers in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 71.

⁹³ Evans, *Out in the Cold*, p. 21.

operational consequences: Daly described how it often meant that 3RAR was not able to perform its duties adequately.⁹⁴

1RAR, however, was deployed to Korea for 12 months from March 1952. The majority of its members trained together, went to Korea together, spent their rotation together, and left Korea together. Naturally, there were reinforcements, injuries and occasional staffing changes, but the overall continuity of 1RAR's membership meant that strong relationships formed between men and with their leaders. This was beneficial operationally and in coping with the everyday dangers of life in the line.⁹⁵ Beam later reflected on how this camaraderie contributed to the psychological wellbeing of the soldiers, saying that they never felt "isolated" or "abandoned"; instead "we developed, through being with all these guys together, having confidence in each other, having come out of so many similar situations previously".⁹⁶ Knowing that the deployment had a clearly defined end date likely also had a positive psychological impact on the men.

Unit pride and camaraderie were fostered by members of 1RAR comparing themselves to other units and nationalities, particularly their Canadian counterparts. During the Korean War, the Canadians had a reputation for poor maintenance of their positions.⁹⁷ This fact was confirmed for 1RAR when it replaced 1 Royal Canadian Regiment (1RCR) at Hill 355, or Little Gibraltar, on 1 November 1952.

The official handover notice, signed by the commanding officers of both units, stated that 1RCR had left the position "complete, slightly worse for wear and tear, but otherwise defensible".⁹⁸ The Australians found that the Canadians had improperly disposed of their rubbish, leaving empty cans and containers outside their bunkers, in full view of the enemy.

⁹⁴ Daly interview, p. 8. See also Thomas Daly, Comments by Lieut-General Sir Thomas Daly on Volume 2, Chapters 9–10, 12 February 1981, p. 1, AWM89 F [13]; O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 227.

⁹⁵ O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 227.

⁹⁶ Beam interview, 31.58–32.30.

⁹⁷ Frederick Roberts, Letter to Olwyn Green, 6 May 2003, PR00466 6/91.

⁹⁸ War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 25.

Commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice “Bunny” Austin, who had taken over from Hutchison in October 1952, was frustrated at this behaviour, later saying that it was a “barely organized rubbish heap” and that the Canadians had “simply chucked everything over the fence in front of their positions”.⁹⁹ 1RAR was able to take pride in its superior standards. Even before this, as the members of 1RAR left the reserve position to replace 1RCR, the unit diary had noted that they wanted to “live up to [1RAR’s] reputation of tidiness and effective hygiene”, suggesting that organisation was already part of 1RAR’s shared identity.¹⁰⁰

The Canadians, who had not maintained the position, had left minefields around their positions unmarked or unrecorded.¹⁰¹ Throughout November, 1RAR dedicated resources to repair defences, improve the condition of bunkers and other infrastructure, and attempt to locate minefields. There were multiple minefield incidents during this period, including the patrol in which William “Digger” James lost his foot.¹⁰²

The Canadian unit had not conducted a strong patrolling programme in no man’s land. When 1RAR arrived at Hill 355, it was to find that Chinese patrols freely came close to their forward defences, apparently unused to opposition.¹⁰³ In response to this threat 1RAR began to patrol heavily, seeking to exercise control over no man’s land.¹⁰⁴ This led to further losses and injuries for 1RAR.¹⁰⁵ However, this strategy also successfully prevented Chinese forces from controlling the liminal area.¹⁰⁶ Given the limited possibilities of static warfare, this was one of the few tactics that would effectively maintain pressure on the enemy and develop a sense of agency in no man’s land.¹⁰⁷ In addition to improving the unit’s defences and undertaking more effective patrolling, it helped to develop the unit’s sense of identity,

⁹⁹ Maurice Austin, Letter to Robert O’Neill, 11 July 1980, p. 2; War diary, 1RAR, October 1952, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Daly interview, p. 14; War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 90–1.

¹⁰² War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, pp. 6, 11, 13, 15, 19.

¹⁰³ Daly interview, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Notes on Activity on 28 Britcom Inf Bde Front, Period 30 June 52 to 28 Feb 53, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Daly interview, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Daly, Comments by Lieut-General Sir Thomas Daly, p. 5. See also Ramage, *Kokoda Secret*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁷ O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53, Volume II*, p. 253.

creating pride and camaraderie. By mid-November the unit diary approvingly noted that “the [general] appearance and layout” of the defences were “resuming normal standards [maintained] by 1RAR”.¹⁰⁸

The use of humour and comfort were also essential in raising the spirits of 1RAR’s troops. The experiences of Christmas 1952 highlight how the members of 1RAR approached their circumstances with light-heartedness, and how steps could be taken within the unit and division to maintain morale. In September, the unit war diary noted that Assistant Adjutant Douglas Yeats was going to Japan in order to buy large numbers of suitable gifts for Christmas, which soldiers would be able to buy and send home.¹⁰⁹ In all conflicts, contact with home plays a significant role in how soldiers cope with combat. In this case, being able to send gifts home likely afforded the men a sense of agency, as they were able to give their loved ones a physical gift. Unfortunately, the diary fails to record whether this trip was carried out.

Chinese propaganda provided welcome levity throughout 1RAR’s time in Korea, especially just before Christmas 1952. The year before, prior to 1RAR’s arrival in Korea, Chinese soldiers had left propaganda leaflets and small gifts on the wire of their enemies in celebration of Christmas.¹¹⁰ This may have been intended to convince UN soldiers of the warmth and generosity they could expect if they deserted to join the Chinese and North Koreans. This was the theme of much Chinese propaganda throughout the year, which stressed that it was an American war and told soldiers that their families were struggling in their absence (see Figure 3).¹¹¹ In the days leading up to Christmas 1952, 1RAR’s leaders started to prepare for possible Chinese overtures.¹¹² Extra fighting and snatch patrols were

¹⁰⁸ War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ War diary, 1RAR, September 1952, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 18.

¹¹¹ Chinese propaganda belonging to Henry Francis Rixon, c.1950–53, PR00466 6/90.

¹¹² Smith interview, p. 9.

added in an effort to ambush the Chinese “Xmas cheer” patrols, as they were called in the unit war diary.¹¹³

Figure 3

Chinese propaganda belonging to Henry Francis Rixon. c.1950–3, Australian War Memorial, PR00466 6/90.

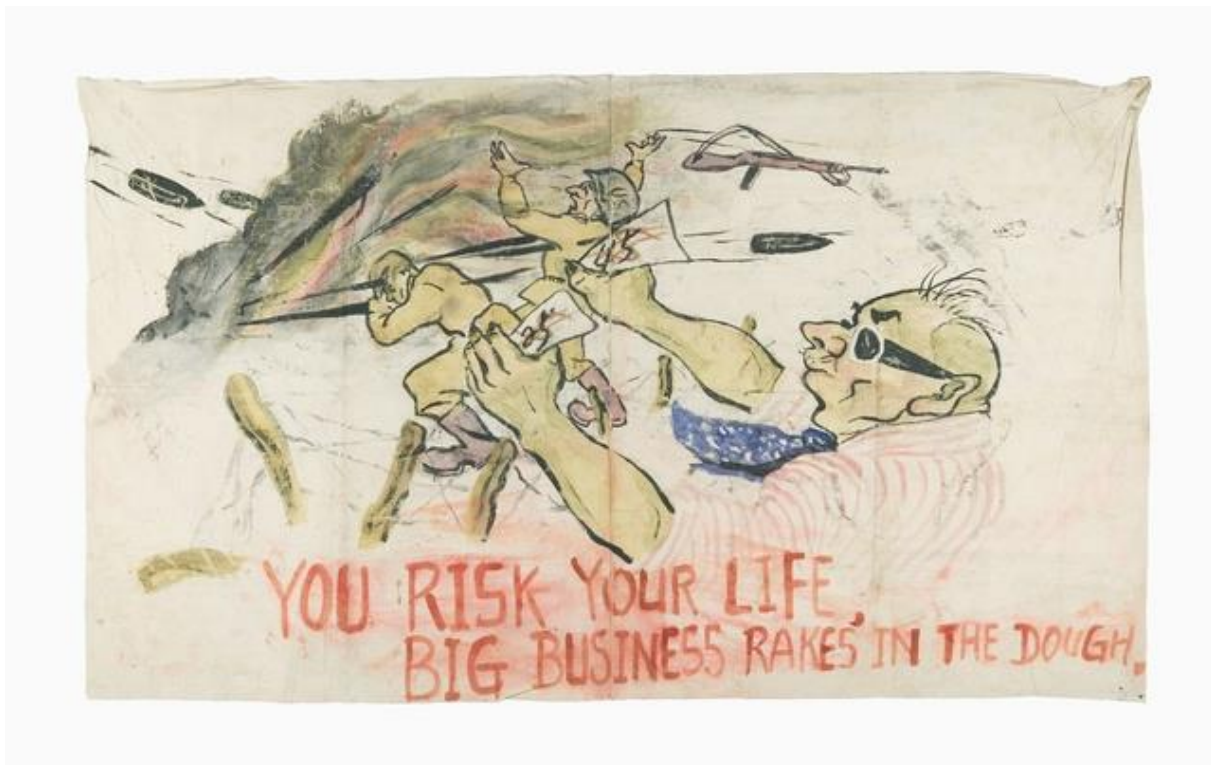


¹¹³ War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 18.

Despite these efforts, Chinese propaganda appeared on 1RAR's minefield fences during the night of 23 December. According to the war diary, this included banners and cards, along with small bags containing gifts.¹¹⁴ Various eyewitnesses later recalled that there were also watches, cigarettes, sweets, and safe conduct passes to encourage defection.¹¹⁵ A banner found at the time, currently on display at the Australian War Memorial, warned the soldiers that “you risk your life, big business rakes in the dough” (Figure 4).¹¹⁶

Figure 4

Chinese Propaganda Banner, 1 Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, Christmas Day 1952, December 1952, Australian War Memorial, REL33153:
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1080384?image=1>.



Regardless of the intent of this propaganda, it was seen as a novelty by the men.

Indeed, the war diary noted that the propaganda left on Christmas had “greater souvenir value

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Robert Hipworth, A Christmas Tree for the First Battalion R.A.R. – Korea, 7 November 2002, PR00466 6/44; Harold F. Silver, Korea 1952 Christmas Eve at the Sharp End, PR00466 6/99.

¹¹⁶ *Chinese Propaganda Banner, 1 Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, Christmas Day 1952, December 1952, Australian War Memorial, REL33153:* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1080384?image=1>.

to our men than any noticeable psychological effect”.¹¹⁷ Attempts to persuade 1RAR soldiers to abandon their efforts, common throughout the year, were similarly unsuccessful.¹¹⁸ Private Fred Roberts recalled broadcasts of messages and popular music, along with the appearance of leaflets, throughout his service. Roberts found that “it was so overdone” that it “became a source of amusement and entertainment”. After all, he said, they “didn’t have gramophones and records, and it was nice to hear the current hit songs from home”.¹¹⁹ The propaganda played a role in keeping spirits high, serving as a distraction, as amusement, and as a souvenir of the war – many men taking examples home with them.¹²⁰

A further incident from Christmas 1952 illustrates how 1RAR’s leaders stayed in good spirits through the use of humour. On Christmas Day, Lieutenant Colonel E. Amy, General Staff Officer for the division, presented Austin with a portrait of Marilyn Monroe.¹²¹ The unit war diary noted the effect on the recipients, saying “the portrait of Miss Monroe serves to remind them that the desire which her lovely form engenders in many masculine minds is equalled, if not exceeded, by the desire of members of this unit to capture a PW [prisoner] on one of our many patrols designed for that purpose.”¹²² While the lack of success could be frustrating, and the daily routines could be wearing, the members of 1RAR were nevertheless able to find humour in their situation. The kind of jesting likely helped individuals cope psychologically with the conditions they faced.

1RAR was relieved by 3RAR a few days after Christmas and returned to a reserve position behind the line.¹²³ This would prove to be its final changeover before 1RAR’s period of service concluded in March 1953.¹²⁴ The timing of the relief meant that 1RAR was able to

¹¹⁷ War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Rixon interview, 49.55–50.59; War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 20, 24.

¹¹⁹ Frederick Roberts, *Remembering I.G. Troth, 1953–1995*, c. 1995, p. 16, PR00466 6/105.

¹²⁰ For example, Chinese propaganda belonging to Henry Francis Rixon; War diary, 1RAR, November 1952, p. 5; Chinese propaganda belonging to James Hamilton Welch, c.1950–3, AWM PR02078.

¹²¹ Or “Marylin Monroe,” as the war diary records, see War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 20.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹²⁴ Goldspink interview, p. 17.

hold belated Christmas celebrations in the reserve position. The soldiers received parcels from the Returned and Services League (RSL) and from the readers of the *Melbourne Sun*, which had organised a campaign to deliver Christmas packages to those serving in Korea.¹²⁵

Photographs from the day show Warrant Officer Class 2 Richard Osborne “Matey” McLaughlin dressed as Santa Claus distributing the parcels and enjoying a beer with Austin (see Figure 5). The unit shared a traditional Christmas dinner.¹²⁶ These celebrations and comforts, as well as the relief of being behind the line, likely contributed to raising the spirits of the members of 1RAR and added to the sense of unity and shared identity.

1RAR departed for Australia aboard the troopship *New Australia* in March 1953, after a series of farewell parties and ceremonies and a visit to the UN war cemetery in Pusan to remember those who could not return to Australia. During its tour in Korea, the unit had suffered 43 deaths, while more than 150 had been wounded, and two taken prisoner.¹²⁷ The unit had faced life-threatening conditions on a daily basis in Korea, from poor weather and unmarked minefields to constant artillery fire and dangerous patrols. However, through intelligent, considered leadership which focused on preserving life, along with a strong sense of unit cohesion and identity and the ability to see humour in their situation, the members of 1RAR were able to cope well with their circumstances. While this paper has been unable to address the relationship between 1RAR and local Koreans, partly due to limited evidence from the 1952–53 tour, future research could assess how this relationship influenced the wellbeing of the Australians. 1RAR returned to Korea in 1954 as part of the peacekeeping forces overseeing the truce, a period which has similarly received little attention from scholars.

¹²⁵ War diary, 1RAR, December 1952, p. 24.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹²⁷ Australian War Memorial, *Roll of Honour*, accessed February 2021, https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people?roll=Roll%20of%20Honour&facet_related_units=1st%20Battalion,%20The%20Royal%20Australian%20Regiment&facet_related_conflict_sort=13%3AKorea%2C%201950-1953; O’Neill, 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment Casualties, date unknown, AWM89 D1/6 Part 2.

Figure 5

Phillip Oliver Hobson, *Santa Claus Chats with Lieutenant Colonel M. Austin of Frankston, Vic, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, 1 January 1953, Australian War Memorial, HOBJ3900: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C373373>.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

HOBJ3900