

# Battalion Long Distance Runners

The Battalion is an excellent breeding ground for fine runners as has been proven many a time in Battalion and Brigade-competitions. Until this year, these 'jays' never had the opportunity to take their talents any further afield as other sportsmen often do.

On 9th August, Capt Doerfmann, Sgt Blok, Pte Brown and Pte Hatcher, competed in the famous Sydney City to Surf Race and later, with the addition of Lt Gallegos, ran in the Albert Lake Relay, Melbourne, on 19th August.

By way of preparation, 'enjoyable' sessions up and down Castle Hill, to the university and back and other assorted 5-15km runs became the daily norm. Additionally, a strict diet was adhered to. The value of these six weeks proved invaluable, we appeared to have endless energy in the cooler southern conditions.

The morning of the City to Surf greeted us with grey skies and drizzly conditions. Even our plastic garbage bags that we wore did little to keep us northerners warm. The race was to start at 10.00 a.m., however, it was necessary to be at the start line by 7.00 a.m. to secure a competitive start. Thereafter followed a highly amusing three hours, the nights one sees at this event are amazing!

Immediately prior to the start, some 4000 preferred runners were positioned in front of us. These all qualified by completing the event in under 54 minutes the previous year. These runners made it impossible to run in the clear for about 1.5km due to the congestion. Fly those in the crowd behind that stretched across six lanes for over a kilometre, some of those could not even cross the start line until 15 minutes after the starting pistol.

After a scenic 14.5km that took us down William St, through the Kings Cross underpass, along Old South Head Road, up Heartbreak Hill - Rose Bay/Vaucluse and around into Bondi Beach, we finished 3rd in the uniformed team division. Times were: Capt Doerfmann, 49 min. 19 sec.; Sgt Blok, 51 min. 10 sec.; Pte Brown, 52 min. 57 sec. and Pte Hatcher 53 min. 53 sec. Not a bad effort coming 'from the pack'.

Between this event and the Melbourne Lake Relay we beat the pavement for many more kilometres around Sydney's southern beaches, Centennial Park and South Head. Something in the order of 25km per day was seen. Again, this proved invaluable as most of it was run over very hilly ground promoting great stamina.

On a very cold Wednesday morning, we set ourselves under a 'palm tree' in the midst of a wintry Lake Albert, Melbourne. Each of us, dressed in several track suits, wondered how we would survive the cold, perhaps the lads from Townsville were way out of their element.

Major General D.C.J. Daigton, GOC Log Comd, started the event at 8.30 a.m. Each of our five runners had to complete the four laps each in succession. Sgt Blok started our challenge and lined up along with 88 other starters from all three services and government defence departments.

It quickly became apparent that we had a good chance of winning the event. After even lepping the first lap, Sgt Blok handed over to Lt Gallegos who, after a mighty effort, put us 55 sec. ahead. Pte Hatcher and Brown continued the form and after our first lap were ahead by over three minutes, we held this throughout most of the second lap.

One of the remarkable aspects of the race was the wave of public support we received, we were truly the 'popular favourites' having made the effort to come so far. Our success also brought tales of our backup support, professional masseurs, strappers, hotel accommodation and full TA, a very far cry from our primitive lodgings in the OSU Watsonia-discharge-cells and the shade of a palm tree!

As the race proceeded, our lead was slowly whittled away by 8/12 Mdm Regt, the only other team in contention. Over the last 70km the lead see-sawed continuously to the delight of the many hundred onlookers. Our last runner, Capt Doerfmann left 1 min. 19 sec. after the last 8/12 Mdm Regt, but even after catching up much ground finished 19 sec. behind the better team on the day.

Our loss by such a small margin after 100km was a bitter pill to swallow. The average lap time of the winners was 16 min. 27 sec., we finished 0.8 sec per lap behind. Even though, we still remained the popular favourites. This was enthusiastically and wholeheartedly confirmed at the bar during the presentations that followed, our first beers and heavy food in over seven weeks. Perhaps next year we can win the day in all respects.

