

The Australian Soldier

With ever-present tea cups, Diggers in Syria wait for tucker.

By Sgt. LaFAYETTE LOCKE
YANK Staff Writer

AUSTRALIA—When Pvt. Victor Stephan, an AIF veteran from Kingaroy, Queensland, jumped off a truck in Greece and raced for the side of the road while German Stukas dive-bombed his unit, he didn't think he'd ever be back in Australia droving cattle again. But one day recently he—on leave in Sydney—was taking his girl to a movie and making plans for a cattle station after the war.

Pvt. Stephan is one of thousands of Diggers in the Australian Imperial Forces who have and are seeing action all over the world; and are making plans for the future just like any GI or Tommy or Red Army man. In this war the AIF has fought in every theater in which British forces have been engaged. It especially distinguished itself at El Alamein in the North African campaign and in the Papuan and New Guinea campaigns.

Pvt. (his army spells it Pte.) Stephan was wounded in the leg when those Stukas struck at Lamir Pass in Greece and was evacuated to Crete. When the going got tougher and Crete was about to fall, he and many other wounded were evacuated again, this time to Alexandria, Egypt. Later he re-joined his outfit, had a leave in Cairo, went to Syria and wangled a couple of passes to Jerusalem.

"Cairo's a good soldier town," says Stephan. "The pubs, I mean those places where you can get a drink and maybe dance, stay open nearly all night."

Like any other soldier overseas, he bought souvenirs and mailed them to his two sisters and to a brother who has a farm back in Queensland.

Stephan is in a battalion band in an infantry division. He's 25 years old now, and he started playing the cornet in the local band when he was 18. His battalion's band stuck pretty much to their music while they were stationed in Syria and later for five months in Ceylon, but when the outfit was in action—and Stephan's outfit has seen plenty of it—they worked as





In a New Guinea foxhole AIF infantryman on the left fires an Australian invented Owen gun. His comrade mans a Bren gun.

stretcher bearers and carried rations and ammunition to the front lines.

When the Aussies were pushing the Japs back down the trail from the Owen Stanley Range, Stephan had some pretty narrow squeaks, but the time he was most worried, he says, was when he got lost during the fighting at Sanananda with five wounded men on his hands. He was joined by a sergeant in the medics—also lost—and after two days of wandering about in constant danger of Jap snipers they got the wounded back to an aid station.

Six months in New Guinea and now Stephan's unit is posted back in Australia. He wears four blue overseas chevrons on the right sleeve of his tunic and the Africa Star ribbon over his left pocket.

Men of the AIF wear one overseas chevron for embarkation and one for each complete year of overseas service. New Guinea rates as overseas. The Africa Star ribbon is an award similar to the campaign stars on the U.S. Army's theater ribbons. It was instituted by King George VI for British forces who served in Africa between June 10, 1940, date of the entry of Italy into the war, and May 12, 1943, when the North African campaign ended.

As a private, Stephan draws \$31.50 a month. That's on a basis of six shillings, sixpence a day. There are three specialist grades for privates which draw 7/6, 8/6 and 9/6 a day. Corporals in the AIF get 10/6 a day, sergeants get 11/6 and staff sergeants get 12 shillings. In other words, it's a bob a day for each additional stripe except for staff sergeants.

An Australian staff sergeant wears a crown above his three sergeant's stripes to indicate his rank. There are no techs or masters in the Australian enlisted ranks.

After six months of service, or upon date of embarkation overseas if before that time, a Digger also gets two shillings a day deferred pay. He never sees this until he gets his discharge, but all the time he's in the army his deferred pay is drawing 3½ percent interest as if it had been deposited in a savings account.

Also upon completion of the first six months of service a private may be recommended by his CO to receive "proficiency pay" of an additional sixpence a day. This does not go to privates with specialist ratings and is designed to act as an incentive for buck privates to stick to the straight-and-narrow.

STEPHAN is paid every two weeks instead of once a month. He always carries his paybook with him, and if away from his unit on leave or on DS can present it at any AIF Leave and Transit Depot and be paid up to date without wading through a lot of red tape and vouchers.

Since he is single Stephan collects all of his six bob and a zack a day. If he were married, 3/6 a day would go to his wife. The Australian Government would add to this another 4/6 a day. Here's how the schedule of daily allowances paid by the Australian and United States governments to soldiers' dependents stack up:

	Wife	1st Child
Australia	4/6	3/-
United States	3/11	1/8
	2nd Child	Each succeeding child
Australia	2/-	1/6
United States	1/5	1/5

When an Australian soldier packs his gear in his kit bag and gets posted overseas, he doesn't get any additional pay for foreign service, but he gets what he considers a damn good break regarding his income tax. Any Australian soldier overseas is exempt from tax. In addition to that, the day he sails from Australia all income tax due for the previous 12 months is wiped. If he's already paid it, he gets a rebate from the government. This tax exemption lasts until three months after he returns to Australia, and when he does start paying 250 pounds of his yearly pay are exempt. Dependents' allowances are also exempt.

Here's something to consider, though. When an Australian soldier is living in camp in Australia the government values his keep at two shillings, five pence a day. The soldier pays tax on this so-called subsistence pay, though he never collects a penny of it in cash.

A Digger who wants to go to OCS—they call it OCTU or Officer Cadet Training Unit—can't put in for it himself. He has to be selected and recommended by his immediate superior officer. After that he gets bucked up through several personal interviews with higher brass before he is finally approved, then he's off for a three-months' course no simpler or easier than our own OCS. With his commission, the new "leftenant" puts two "pips" on his shoulders.

At the same time, selected NCOs in his old outfit are probably attending any of a number of NCO schools conducted by the AIF. These are refresher courses designed to make NCOs into instructors—or just better NCOs. The individual schools range over everything from baking to commando tactics.

Yanks sometimes are confused when Diggers refer to themselves as sappers or bombardiers. This, like their color patches, is an indication of the type of outfit they're in. A sapper is a private

A.I.F.

The wide upturned hat brim denotes the fighter from Australia.



in the engineers. Transportation privates are called drivers. Privates in the artillery are, understandably, called gunners. A corporal in the artillery is a bombardier but all other NCOs are called by the established names.

Aussie sergeants carry themselves well. They eat in a separate mess from the privates and corporals. In most sergeants' messes in established camps in Australia a man can find a wet canteen and a ration of beer.

Most Aussie infantrymen carry the British Lee-Enfield .303 rifle, a bolt-action, magazine-fed 10-round job. But up in the jungles of New Guinea they'll tell you their favorite weapon on a patrol is the Owen gun. In an established position, like defending a pillbox, they'll choose the Bren gun every time. The Bren weighs about the same as a BAR. The Owen gun was invented by an Australian and is manufactured in Australia. Another well-liked automatic weapon is the Thompson submachine-gun. This is gradually being replaced by the Owen, however.

The AIF is entirely a volunteer army and enlistments didn't start until after Britain declared war in 1939. The Diggers are a bunch of file clerks, farmers, insurance salesmen who have proven that with the right thing to fight for any man can be a good soldier. When the war's over they want to go back to their jobs, but while it's on they'll "give those Nip and Jerry blokes a fair cow of a time."

Pvt. Stephan wants to go back to droving cattle. The girl he's engaged to thinks it's a good idea, too, and they're hoping he can be droving his own cattle. One thing is certain — Stephan swears he won't sell a single head to anyone making bully beef.