

THE BATTLE FOR CRETE-SOME RECOLLECTIONS BY BILL ALLISON

Bill Allison was with the 20th Battalion and in a letter to the writer dated 3 June 2008, took issue with the statement in the book by Geoffrey Cox entitled, " A Tale of Two Battles, " that the withdrawal of 22nd Battalion on the orders of Colonel Andrews was the reason for the German Victory in Crete.

Bill's letter went on to state that It certainly made the capture of the aerodrome at Maleme much easier for the Germans as in the face of enemy bombing and no air and little artillery support, just some from the Australians, the 22nd had suffered heavy casualties. One of Bill's jobs had been to time the enemy aircraft landing at Maleme. Without any AA defence, a plane was landing roughly every two minutes.

The 18th,19th and 20th Battalions were in position just south of Maleme, with the 20th along and just above the beach perhaps a mile north of Galatas. Colonel Kippenberger CO of the 20th, was ordered to take command of a large composite battalion to defend the village of Galatas while Colonel Jim Burrows took over as CO of the 20th to hold the coast to the north, just south of the Maori Battalion and Maleme.

There had been little news from 5th Brigade at Maleme or from Brigadier Hargest and his troubled battalions and so Colonel Burrows sent Bill along with Phil Speedy to contact Hargest that night to see what was happening. They found him looking very tired in a hut or wagon, Bill can't recall. He didn't know whether Andrews had completed his withdrawal and offered Bill and Phil mugs of coffee.

As they returned to the 20th with their report they saw great flashes of light out to sea and thought perhaps it was the British Fleet firing on the aerodrome at Maleme as they understood the Fleet had been tasked to do this. Instead, the British ships were firing at German landing craft taking troops ashore where they would have landed on the beach below the 20th positions. Fortunately, all the landing craft were sunk.

The next night Bill's 20th Battalion was ordered to counter attack Maleme and drive the enemy off the aerodrome and hold it but they were unable to leave their positions above the beach until an Australian battalion arrived from Retimo to relieve them. The Australians were very late in arriving due to their Cypriot drivers having lost their way. As a result, the counter attack went in late, not commencing until around 0130hrs instead of the planned 2300. Bill describes it as a "hellish" time and in the early morning, the battalion was forced to withdraw with very heavy casualties. Bill along with others, was given the task of guiding the remainder of the battalion to new positions near Galatas. 20 Battalion along with other battalions then became part of Kippenberger's mixed Brigade. They didn't have much sleep and the Germans came on at a terrific rate supported from the air by their fighter planes until Colonel Kippenberger gave the order for a bayonet charge. Bill was stationed at the crossroads to direct the Maoris and later 23rd Battalion supported by two British tanks that were soon knocked out, back to Galatas. The bayonet charge had driven the Germans into full retreat with heavy losses and while they licked their wounds for a day, the NZ forces began their retreat.

On the final day before they were evacuated by the Navy, Bill was kept busy as a messenger conveying situation reports from Colonel Kippenberger to General Freyberg.