

January 25, 1993

Attention: The Editor

Fifty years ago as a member of the 1st. Marine Division, USMC, after the invasion of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, we were guests of the Australian government and the great city of Melbourne.

I speak for myself but hasten to add that when I have talked to other Marines of the division throughout the years we seem to always remember and discuss the people of Melbourne and agree that we owed a debt of gratitude to them for their kindness and hospitality.

Enclosed is a writing that I trust is self explanatory and will not in any way offend anyone at this late date and label me as an ugly American.

My admiration for the people of Australia is boundless and sentimental.

It is probably too long to be published if you have a section of letters to the editor and that is acceptable to me.

In that case thank you for what your people did for me many years ago.

Very truly yours,

Jesse

Jesse
Captain, USMC, Ret.

*The last was found
in the computer so
"I gave it a go"!*

*Copy for Rachel
Jensen - 17 March
1994*

(Signature)

A personal tribute to the people of Melbourne, Australia

History records the date as January, 1943, fifty years ago, yet my errant memory still whispers to me, "Yesterday, it was only yesterday," when the 1st. Marine Division descended on Melbourne in Victoria, Australia.

From the Solomon Islands, and the hell that was Guadalcanal, we came emaciated, hollow-eyed, malaria ridden, newly acquainted with the horror of war and sick of killing.

This was not the same "spit-and-polish" 1st. Marine Division that had sailed from the States in early 1942. We had changed.

This was a combat division of ragged ass marines whose thin veneer of civilization had been tested on bloody beaches and sweated off in steamy jungles.

When we disembarked in Melbourne, time was needed. Time to recover and to heal before we faced your friendly people whose customs, manners, and mores differed from our own. But in a world at war there is never enough time!

In our confusion when granted liberty, we acted like young males have done since time immemorial. We forgot our manners and swaggered out to change the town.

In the pubs we were often loud, and unruly, demanding "cold" beer or ale flaunting your own drinking customs.

In the theaters we insisted that the proper name of your "dress circle" was the "balcony," and monopolized the best seats.

In your coffee shops and restaurants we ordered steak, steak and eggs, and then more steaks wolfing them down to the last tasty morsel while complaining to each other that "Down Under" everything tasted like ram, lamb, sheep or mutton.

Stateside replacements arrived to fill our combat decimated ranks and field exercises dominated our days and nights curtailing liberty as we prepared for the inevitable next landing.

Gradually, we began to better understand Melbourne patience and forbearance of our boorish attitudes.

War for us had not begun until December 7, 1941 with Pearl Harbor, but for Australia, it began in 1939.

Your troops proudly called, "The Rats of Tobruk," were engaged in war long before we arrived in Melbourne.

It finally dawned even on a dunce like me, that we were being treated as you hoped and prayed that your own would be should they survive to be billeted in a land abroad.

From that point forward, when I attended your theaters I proudly stood tall beside you when the strains of "God Save the King" rang through the halls!

And with gusto, but sadly off key, I sang along when "Waltzing Mantilda" rattled both the ivory keys of old pianos, and my heart.

Never wanting to forget, I memorized the name of every train stop between the crowded Collins Street Station in Melbourne and Camp Balcombe at Mt. Martha where we were encamped.

I shared cigarettes.

I even tried to like your brands, and when offered a warm beer with the admonition to "Give it a go, Yank," I gave it a go!

I still have the stained and tattered books (from much reading) that three lovely Australian lasses shared shillings to buy for my birthday in Melbourne.

One is titled, "Barrack Room Ballads," by Rudyard Kipling famed poet of England our common motherland, and in his poem called, "Tommy," he writes:

"We aren't no thin red 'eroes, nor we aren't no blackguards too;

But single men in barricks, most remarkable like you;

An' if sometimes our conduct isn't all your fancy paints;

Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints."

Dreams never die.

However, reality forces me to conclude that I shall never have the opportunity to express my gratitude, my respect, and my thanks in person to the good people of Melbourne, Australia, hence this writing.

Very truly yours,
JCL
JCL
Capt, USMC, Ret.,

