

Part A

Private Clement Kwaterski

By Montana Foster

*'When war broke out in 1939 a lot of young men from the district enlisted... Some of them distinguished themselves as heroes, while others like me served in different theatres and came home just as we went in...'*¹

Born on the 23rd of November 1922 in Lolez, Poland, Clement Kwaterski would grow up ready for a world at war.² Raised mostly by his father, a former Navy officer, and combined with a tough, country childhood, 'Clem' earned a certain toughness, developed bush skills, and established a self-assurance that served him well during his service in Papua New Guinea.³

When he was two years old, Clem, his parents and three siblings migrated to a small farm near Pildappa Rock in Minnipa, South Australia. Five more siblings were born into the family before Clem's mother passed away; Clem was just twelve. Six siblings were later sent to live with friends in Gawler, while the remaining children stayed to help on the farm.

Clem travelled with his siblings to Minnipa East School, each day by horse and cart, until the age of fourteen. After school, time was spent *'always picking stumps, or clearing scrub.'*⁴ It was on the farm that Clem developed his persevering attitude and self-assurance in shooting. On Sundays, Clem went out shooting to pass the time, collecting rabbit and fox skins for pocket money; he had his own rifle by the age of fourteen and was renowned locally as a *'crack shot.'*⁵ His life on the farm also taught him discipline, stating *'I used to get up at 5.00 am to feed my team of six horses, have breakfast and then harness the team to a drill [to finish] the 250 acres of seeding.'*⁶

When the Second World War (WWII) broke out, a Voluntary Defense Corps was established in Minnipa. Clem and his brothers would ride their bikes into town frequently as part of the force. This experience proved useful to Clem during the war, as he learnt about parade grounds and could tell his *'right foot from left foot,'* something he found many struggled with later at basic training.⁷

At the age of eighteen, Clem was tired of *'working on the farm for nothing'* and set out to enlist.⁸ With his impressive skills and fondness for shooting, he aimed to be a gunner in the Navy or Air Force, but his father refused to sign his papers. Clem ended up in the *'poor, bloody infantry'* instead.⁹

On the 10th of June, 1942, Clem received his notification to report to the Wayville Army Depot to commence training for fulltime service.¹⁰ It was quite an experience for the country boy as he travelled by rail car and then boat to reach Adelaide. Clem describes *'it was a bit of a shock getting to Port*

¹ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

² Virtual War Memorial. 2019. Clement KWATERSKI. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/5732993>. [Accessed 14 May 2019].

³ Kwaterski, Clement. (2019) Interviewed by Montana Foster for ANZAC Spirit Prize Essay. 26 March 2019.

⁴ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

⁵ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

⁶ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

⁷ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

⁸ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 1

⁹ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

¹⁰ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 3

*Adelaide and seeing all the big buildings.*¹¹ Upon his arrival at Wayville, Clem came across a group of men yelling, 'you'll be sorry!'¹² As one could imagine, this was not a reassuring experience for a young man reporting for duty for the first time!

After medical clearance, Clem was sent to a training camp at Tanunda before being transferred to Sandy Creek and later Woodside. The cold weather came as a shock to some of the soldiers who were billeted in large, shared huts. Those who snored during the night would often find themselves outside on the frosty ground the next morning.¹³

Clem was chosen to do an officer's training course after he blitzed the Test of Elementary Training. He declined, stating that he was staying with his mates, who he had developed close friendships with. Clem was skeptical of 'text book officers' and had no interest in becoming one.¹⁴

When basic training was finished, the men were sent to Carbalah, a six-week jungle training course, or the 'six-week bludge,' as Clem described it.¹⁵ The soldiers were taken out to catch and cook yabbies. Clem was already proficient in survival skills such as living off of the land and reading his surroundings; these skills had been taught to him by indigenous Australians living on the farm. Though he respected the value of these skills, he felt that they had 'learned nothing,' however this was an important time for developing close friendships.¹⁶

Assigned to the 25th Battalion, Clem was sent to Papua New Guinea as reinforcements after the Battle of Milne Bay. The battalion was raised from the Darling Downs region in Queensland, making Clem one of the few from interstate.¹⁷ At the Donadabu rest camp, Clem joined C Company, the 15th Platoon, 8th Section, along with three other South Australians.¹⁸ A lot of swimming and sport was played at the camp for fitness, and Clem was selected to do a sniper's course. He was a natural and enjoyed the orientation lessons and bush craft. Despite these enjoyable moments, Clem realised the danger he found himself in as a soldier after their party was ambushed by a group of Japanese men. Clem's friend and forward scout, Private Jim Kelly, was killed.¹⁹ A few days later, a Japanese soldier was killed wearing Kelly's uniform and belongings; despite the familiar uniform, the party trusted their instincts that something was wrong.²⁰

C Company underwent a barge landing at Hansa Bay in June 1944 before advancing up New Guinea's north-west coast, aiming for the Ramu and Sepik Rivers. A fellow platoon had been watching a Japanese outpost, and it was their job to relieve them. The rough terrain of New Guinea, mixed with its unfamiliar climate meant that what was intended to be a half-day journey became a much longer trek that proved to test the endurance of the men: *The distance we had to walk to relieve this group was about four miles . . . we didn't get there [until] almost dark the next day, with nothing to eat in between . . . I was one of the fittest in our group but . . . [I] had to sit and rest [often].*²¹ The terrain and climate were not the only aspects of the environment to threaten the men; describing a mission

¹¹ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 4

¹² Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 4

¹³ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 5

¹⁴ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 8

¹⁵ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 5

¹⁶ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 5

¹⁷ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 7

¹⁸ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 6

¹⁹ Virtual War Memorial (n.d.), *Private Jim Kelly*, online: [<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/634747>] accessed 14 May 2019

²⁰ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 7

²¹ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 8

where he and his fellow soldiers were sent in canoes to protect a village from further attack, Clem said: '*...a large crocodile would be sunbaking on the bank . . . as we went past they would slide into the water and you could feel their backs rub the bottom of the canoe. It takes a lot to frighten me but I was scared.*'²² Clem, refusing to get back in a canoe, was forced to walk back to camp.

One day during a patrol Clem was his company's forward scout, a role Clem knew was extremely dangerous, '*I was involved in 5 ambushes . . . the forward scout was always killed.*'²³ As he was walking, Clem noticed fresh tracks in the dirt and warned his men. They carried on another fifty yards until Clem saw some bushes move; the Japanese were waiting for them. The men fell back and instead ambushed the oncoming Japanese. If Clem had not been so attentive, it surely would have been a slaughter. This was not the only time Clem's bush skills, developed on his family farm, came in handy. While on sentry duty one night he heard a twig snap in the distance. Clem waited before throwing a grenade in the direction of the noise. When the grenade did not explode, he threw another. The next morning, they found a dying Japanese soldier nearby.

An Australian base had been established near Buin in an attempt to break the Japanese stronghold there. In May 1945 the base was captured by 2,500 Japanese soldiers, with Clem and his fellow men taken as prisoners. They remained prisoners for four days, with nothing to eat. On the fourth afternoon, it began to rain heavily. Clem and his fellow ANZAC men were instructed by their commanding officer to pack their gear; if it was still raining by dark, they would attempt to escape. '*It was that dark . . . rain pelting down, I had to hold the belt of the chap in front of me.*'²⁴ Their plan was ultimately successful; as the Japanese sheltered from the downpour, the men made it to a nearby camp, much to the surprise of the soldiers there, who believed the men had been massacred.²⁵

Clem survived the war, which ended shortly after his escape at Buin. He moved back to Minnipa but often returned to Queensland to reunite with his mates from the 25th Battalion. He attended 25 reunions before they were discontinued.

After returning to work on the farm, Clem married Joan Emes in 1946 and together they had four children.²⁶ Leeland, the eldest, continued his father's legacy as a military officer and fought during the Vietnam War.²⁷ Clem's legacy is also continued in Wudinna, at the Stanley Park War Memorial, which he helped build.²⁸ He also attended local dawn services until old age stopped him. Clem now resides in Trudinger Aged Care facility in Wudinna Hospital.

²² Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 7

²³ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 8

²⁴ Kwaterski, C., (n.d.) *My War Services*, self-published, pg. 13

²⁵ Kwaterski, Clement. (2019) Interviewed by Montana Foster for *ANZAC Spirit Prize Essay*. 26 March 2019.

²⁶ Information from newspaper clippings *Community Profile: Clem Kwaterski and Reflecting on War Service*, sourced from the Wudinna archives

²⁷ Virtual War Memorial | Leeland John KWATERSKI. 2019. Virtual War Memorial | Leeland John KWATERSKI. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/498972>. [Accessed 14 May 2019].

²⁸ As found from photos in the Wudinna archives

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Photo: *Choosing the Lump of Granite from Granite Mine – Mt Wudinna*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

Photo: *Denis Boylan; Clem Kwaterski and Maurie Bartley*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

Photo: *Humble Beginnings – Stanley Park*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

Photo: *Lions Project sign in place also two granite pillars at entrance*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

Photo: *Loading Slab Monument*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

Photo: *Maurie Bartley working with Clem Kwaterski*. 1998. Sourced from Wudinna Archives on 26 March 2019.

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