



No Lost Battalion – by John Lack

A book review by Andrew Mason

This book was a fantastic read. It offers a narrative that introduces hostilities in the Pacific during World War 2 and how it all came about. It explains how the Australians entered the war – what theatres the Aussies were initially involved with and in particular the 2/29th Battalion during the conflict.

The Australian 2/29th were a group of tough blokes who fought their way down the Malay Peninsula through a host of battles including Muar and Parit Sulong. These guys fought ferocious battles pitted against greater numbers of enemy with superior air power and artillery. They fought valiantly but had to retreat with other units and battalions to the final bastion of Singapore. One Victoria Cross was won during those battles and many lives of the 2/29th lost.

There is always a story within a story and one such discussion occurs around a Lieutenant Ben Hackney of the 2/29th. With the hasty retreat the Australians were making on the Malay Peninsula – they opted to leave the wounded behind and trust their care to the Japanese save entire Battalions being captured. It turns out that the entire 8th Division surrendered a couple of months later but of those 145 men left behind – only 3 were known to survive the ‘care’ entrusted to the Japanese. All were machine-gunned and bayoneted to death mercilessly and treated like dogs by their captors – ones that were not killed by gunfire were burned to death in a petrol bonfire.

Lieutenant Hackney was bayoneted 11 times and managed to survive – a story within a story. (You can understand just by this paragraph why some men came back mentally scarred and most unforgiving).

There are numerous quotes mingled throughout intertwined with the narrative from former members and this adds some great anecdotes to the book.

If you want to read an account of one tough Battalion whose men fought hard and tough in Malaya and Singapore and then survived the privations of captivity on the Thai-Burma Railway – then this is it.

Personally I have ready dozens of books on the Pacific War and this would be one of the best.