



St George's College

PERTH · WESTERN AUSTRALIA

PETER RENBURY JACOBY

21 APRIL 1917 TO 30 OCTOBER 1942



Peter Jacoby did not have to travel far to enroll at St. George's College. His parents lived at 100 Mounts Bay Road, where his father, Arthur Wellington Jacoby, was the General Manager of The Swan Brewery. Peter was the only child of Arthur and his wife, Ethel Jacoby.

Peter was educated at Christ Church Grammar School (1923-29) and Hale School (1931-35) where his leadership abilities were exceptional. A prefect, he was named Captain of School, and was also captain of the

football team, captain of the athletics team (winning the 440-yd sprint in the 1935 and 1935 Inters), a member of the swimming team, and captain of the rifle team. Although he did not have a heavy physique, Peter was the school boxing champion and was so successful that at one exhibition event a boxer had to be impressed from outside the school fraternity in order to compete with him. He was also the junior sailing champion of the Royal Perth Yacht Club.

In 1936 he enrolled in the Faculty of Law at The University of Western Australia and studied there for two years, the second of which he spent at St. George's. Josh Reynolds tagged him "the jovial Peter Jacoby." At the same time he served as a Lieutenant in the City of Perth Militia Regiment.

Peter's academic results were not particularly good, and in 1938 he moved to Malvern in Victoria where he worked as an adjuster of fire losses in the insurance industry. He enlisted in the A.I.F. at Caulfield the day after his 23rd birthday.

By June 1940 he was in a troop convoy of almost 8,000 Australians being sent to the Middle East to join the 6th Division, but these reinforcements were diverted to Britain via South Africa. After some reorganisation, the 2/31st, 2/32nd and 2/33rd battalions were formally initiated on 28 October 1940, the only three Australian battalions to be formed in the United Kingdom. Peter retained his commission, as a Lieutenant in the 2/32nd.

Their Brigade, the 25th, trained at Tidworth and Colchester and in January 1941 it sailed on the *S.S. Franconia* for the long voyage via Freetown and Durban to Port Tewfik, reaching Egypt on 3 March. The battalions travelled by train to Palestine where they were brought up to full strength with a fourth rifle company. By April the war in the Western Desert had turned against the Allies, and the 2/32nd was transferred to Tobruk to reinforce the 9th Division. From 27 April to 4 May, units of the 2/32nd were transported by sea to Tobruk, and it was here that Peter was introduced to the tactic of aggressively patrolling no-man's land, beyond the semi-circular outer defence line of concrete pill boxes. For his actions, he was mentioned in despatches.

Captain Jacoby survived the five-month Siege of Tobruk as a company commander, and on the night of 23 September 1941 the 2/32nd left Tobruk and sailed to Alexandria. From there, it transferred to Palestine and then Lebanon for rest, training and garrison duty.

By July 1942 Germans and Italians had reached El Alamein in Egypt, about 70 miles from Alexandria. The 9th Division was consequently rushed to the El Alamein area and orders for the first attack were issued on 7 July. Moving inland from the coast, the attack began on 17 July at 2.30 am. The 2/32nd captured its initial objective but the Germans resisted fiercely and counter-attacked with tanks.

The 2/32nd suffered heavily: nearly half its number were killed or wounded and almost 200 became prisoners of war, but once again Peter survived the hostilities. The fighting continued for several days. On 4 August the 2/32nd was relieved and moved back to a position astride the Alexandria–Mersa Matruh road to rest.

The initial task during the general Allied offensive from 23 October to 4 November was to deceive the Axis forces by faking an attack. The 2/28th and 2/43rd raided enemy lines, while the 2/32nd directed a smokescreen and placed “dummy soldiers” in no man’s land.

This was a risky tactic, and on 30 October Peter Jacoby – by then the officer commanding B Company - was wounded by two sniper bullets while out on patrol. Several members of his battalion waved a white towel and the Germans stopped firing, allowing him to be carried to a sangar (a small, temporary sandbagged fortification), but he died from his wounds in less than an hour.

Alamein was the turning point of the North African war, and by 6 November the Axis forces were retreating. Peter Jacoby had played his part. He is buried at the El Alamein Military Cemetery.

“The Battle of El Alamein will make history, and you are in the proud position of having done a major part in that great victory. Your reputation as fighters has always been famous, but I do not believe that you have ever fought with greater bravery or distinction than you did during that battle when you broke the German and Italian armies in the Western Desert.

Now you have added fresh lustre to your already illustrious name. Your losses have been heavy indeed, but war is a hard and bloody affair, and great victories cannot be won without much sacrifice.”

General Sir Harold Alexander, addressing the 9th Division
22 December 1942.

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“Nothing that we can write here could add to the esteem in which Peter was held by all who knew him.he left behind him, both here and at the University, many friends; and in their memories he will remain as the young, forceful, enthusiastic, jovial Peter who gave all that he had for his country”.

The Dragon, 1942 (attributed to Francis Burt)