

# Battling the elements

By COURTNEY TODD

From oppressive heat to sub-zero temperatures, this Digger had to fight the weather as much as the enemy during 16 years of service

**D**ON Davies served with Australian forces in WWII, Korea and the Malayan Emergency.

He enlisted in 1943 as an artilleryman in the army and served in New Guinea and Borneo with the 9th Division.

During his time in the Pacific he was assigned to an infantry section as an Observation Post Signaller.

"One day I was slogging along a very muddy track with a heavy wireless on my back and thought I might as well join the infantry," he said.

"When the war finished they called on volunteers to go to Japan for the Occupation.

"We got there in February 1946. Initially people in the battalion were those serving in the south-west Pacific when the war finished."

In Japan, Don transferred from artillery to infantry and became a part of the Third Royal Australian Regiment. He was in Japan when the Korean War kicked off.

"We were ready to come back to Australia. The battalion was very much run down and there were only 400 of us," he said. "We didn't get to Korea until September."

Don served as a rifleman in an infantry section during the Korean War.

"We didn't go to defend a democracy against communism because South Korea was not a democracy in any way at all. It was a brutal dictatorship," he said.

"It was the first time that communism had been halted - I think that made it worthwhile.

"It was bitterly cold. We were told it was the coldest winter in 60 years. About 5000 Americans were taken out with injuries caused by the cold.

"The clothing we had was totally unsuitable. We were wearing a field service dress similar to the one worn in WWI.

"We knew it was going to be cold, but not as cold as it was.

"And we didn't realise the American performance would be as bad as it was. The exception to that was the Marine Corp, which was very good."

Don said the North Korean forces weren't that effective early on in the war.

"But when the Chinese came in it was a completely different campaign. The Americans didn't handle the Chinese intervention very well at all," he said.

After the tropics of New Guinea and Borneo, the Korean War was a big contrast and the only good thing was they weren't subjected to air attacks - except from one aircraft.

"On the way up to the peninsula there was an aircraft we called Bedcheck Charlie that came around at about nine o'clock at night and dropped what we thought were mortar bombs," he said.

"That was the only air attack we had."

After the end of the Korean War, Don decided to remain with the Australian Army.

"I came back to Australia at the end of 1951 and in 1953 I went on loan to the British Army in Malay," he said.

"I spent two years there advising on counter-insurgent operations.

"I got out in 1959 and came up here [Darwin] in 1965 to get back to the warm climate. Korea gave me a strong dislike of the cold."

After a few years in Darwin Don was "badgered" into attending an ANZAC march by RSL member Frank Geddes.

"I became involved with the RSL after that," he said.

Don believes ANZAC Day is significant not just for those who served, but for all Australians.

"ANZAC Day, April 25, is the first time Australians and New Zealanders had made a name for themselves as separate nations," he said. ●