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## **TEACHERS' NOTES**

**By Adrian Threlfall**

*Reg Saunders: An Indigenous War Hero* explores the life (1920–90) of the first indigenous Australian to become an officer in the Australian Army: Captain Reginald Saunders. From his early life growing up in the rural Western Districts of Victoria to active combat in some of the major battles of the Second World War and the Korean War, to the issue of race and discrimination in Australia, Reg's story will enable students to explore these and many other important issues of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Australian history. So this work is a valuable resource for the Australian Curriculum, especially with regards to History, but also English, as well as Media Arts and Visual Arts.

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## *Knowledge*

- Students will be able to understand the reasons for the outbreak of the Second World War and why Australia was involved.
- They will follow the chronology of the Second World War and gain a better understanding of global geography by looking at the places Australians fought in the various theatres of operation in the Mediterranean, North Africa, Middle East and South West Pacific.
- They will gain greater understanding of Australia's relationship and alliances with Great Britain and the United States of America.
- They will explore the place of indigenous Australia in the Australian military, and more broadly in Australia, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## *Skills*

- Chronology, terms (2<sup>nd</sup> AIF) and concepts (race, discrimination)
- Historical questions and research
- Analysis of sources, both primary (archival, interviews) and secondary (books)
- Perspectives and interpretations
- Explanation and communication

# HISTORY

The Year 6 and 10 history curriculum in particular are directly linked to the subject matter to be found in *Reg Saunders*. Year 10 students study Australian history from the end of the Great War (1918) to the present day, with a particular emphasis (depth study) on the Second World War. The text sections that follow are taken from the Australian curriculum link below. This includes the status, roles and attitudes towards indigenous Australians during the 20th century and the importance of the Second World War to Australia, and its role and position in our region and with regard to great power alliances (Great Britain and the United States of America).

The bibliography at the end of *Reg Saunders* provides many useful sources for teachers and students to explore. In particular the Australian War Memorial website contains a wealth of primary source materials enabling students to follow up events mentioned in *Reg Saunders*.

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/history/curriculum/f-10?layout=1>

## **Year 6 Content Descriptions**

### *Historical Knowledge and Understanding* *Australia as a nation*

Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrants, women, and children (ACHHK114)

The contribution of individuals and groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and migrants, to the development of Australian society, for example in areas such as the economy, education, science, the arts, sport. (ACHHK116)

While the *Reg Saunders* graphic text only briefly touches on the Great War, the Treaty of Versailles and the interwar period with the rise of various fascist and militarist regimes around the world directly leads to the Second World War. It is therefore difficult to contextualise and understand the outbreak of the Second World War without an understanding of what came before.

## **Year 9 Level Description**

### *The Making of the Modern World*

The Year 9 curriculum provides a study of the history of the making of the modern world from 1750 to 1918. It was a period of industrialisation and rapid change in the ways people lived, worked and thought. It was an era of nationalism and imperialism, and the colonisation of Australia was part of the expansion of European power. The period culminated in World War I 1914–18, the ‘war to end all wars’.

### *World War I (1914–18)*

Students investigate key aspects of World War I and the Australian experience of the war, including the nature and significance of the war in world and Australian history.

## **Year 10 Content Descriptions**

### *Historical Knowledge and Understanding* *Overview of the modern world and Australia*

The following content is taught as part of an overview for the historical period. It is not intended to be taught in depth. An overview will constitute approximately 10% of the total teaching time for the year. Overview content identifies important features of the period (1918 to the present) as part of an expansive chronology that helps students understand broad patterns of historical change. As such, the overview provides the broader context for the teaching of

depth-study content and can be built into various parts of a teaching and learning program. This means that overview content can be used to give students an introduction to the historical period; to make the links to and between the depth studies, and to consolidate understanding through a review of the period.

### *World War II (1939–45)*

Students investigate wartime experiences through an in-depth study of World War II. This includes a study of the causes, events, outcome and broader impact of the conflict as an episode in world history, and the nature of Australia's involvement.

An overview of the causes and course of World War II (ACDSEH024)

- The experiences of Australians during World War II (such as Prisoners of War (POWs), the Battle of Britain, Kokoda, the Fall of Singapore) (ACDSEH108)

[View additional details about Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia]

- The impact of World War II, with a particular emphasis on the Australian home front, including the changing roles of women and use of wartime government controls (conscription, manpower controls, rationing and censorship) (ACDSEH109)

[View additional details about Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability]

- The significance of World War II to Australia's international relationships in the 20th century, with particular reference to the United Nations, Britain, the USA and Asia (ACDSEH110)

[View additional details about Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Intercultural understanding, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia]

- Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACDSEH104)

## **ENGLISH**

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/curriculum/f-10?layout=1>

By year 9 students are expected to be analysing a variety of texts, including graphic ones, and examining various genres, including graphic novels and non-fiction works. In particular ACELT1635, ACELY1742 and ACELY1745 are relevant to the *Reg Saunders* work.

## **Year 9 Level Description**

The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy. Teaching and learning programs should balance and integrate all three strands. Together the strands focus on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating. Learning in English builds on concepts, skills and processes developed in earlier years, and teachers will revisit and strengthen these as needed.

- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)
- Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts (ACELY1742)
- Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts (ACELY1745)

## **MEDIA ARTS AND VISUAL ARTS**

The third and final link is to Media Arts and Visual Arts in particular Years 5/6 and Years 9/10. The Australian Curriculum PDF found on the link below explores in more detail the stories of and representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that can and have been used.

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/the-arts/media-arts/learning-in-media-arts>

## REG SAUNDERS, 1920–90: SUMMARY OF BOOK

Reginald Walter Saunders was destined to be a soldier. His father Walter Christopher George Saunders had fought with the 10<sup>th</sup> MG Coy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, 1<sup>st</sup> AIF during the Great War, while his uncle William Reginald Rawlings had won a Military Medal fighting with the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion in July 1918. In fact many of the Saunders, Lovett, McDonald and Rose families – both male and female – have enlisted and served their nation in time of war. As his daughter Glenda recalled ‘they were warriors, the Gunditjmara people from the Western Districts of Victoria’.

Born at Purnim on the Framlingham Aboriginal Reserve (near Warrnambool) in 1920 Reg Saunders, his brother Henry James (Harry) Saunders, who was born in 1922, and their dad Chris soon moved to live on the Lake Condah Mission inland from Portland (their mother had died in 1924 only days after giving birth to a baby girl. The baby also died). Both boys went to school until they were 14 years old and then, as was standard at the time, left to work full time. Reg’s first job was in a saw-mill, as his father was a timber-cutter and both boys had helped their father in his trade. On weekends during winter Reg played Aussie Rules, as his father had before him. In summer it was cricket. Like most country boys at this time he fished, hunted and was very comfortable in the bush. The whole district was shocked when the Black Friday Bushfires of January 1939 raged. For the Saunders the destruction of their saw-mill in Portland was a big setback. The family, like many others in the Portland region, worked desperately to fight the fires, but to no avail. Greater change was afoot, however, as events on the other side of the world came to a head.

Very few people in Australia were surprised when, on 1 September 1939, war broke out. Those more politically aware had seen this coming for years. While it is still a subject of great debate, many trace the German invasion of Poland to the terms of the Versailles Treaty that followed the Great War in 1919. Be that as it may, the storm clouds had been gathering over Europe, at least since the Italian fascist Benito Mussolini and his Blackshirts had come to power in 1922. Seeking to recreate the Roman Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century he had greatly increased the size of the Italian military and hoped to turn the Mediterranean Sea into *Mare Nostrum* (‘our sea’ in Latin). Libya, an Italian colony, was now ruled brutally.

In 1935 the Second Italo-Abyssinian (present-day Ethiopia) War broke out when the Italians invaded from Italian Somaliland and Italian Eritrea. The Italians were soon victorious and Abyssinia was annexed to form part of the new super-colony: Italian East Africa. This incident, combined with the brutal Japanese military offensives in China – in particular, the Rape of Nanking – exposed the weakness of the League of Nations, which, although it condemned both as atrocities, was able to take no effective action. When the Spanish Civil War began in 1936, Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, the Nazi German leader, assisted the Spanish fascist forces of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in attacking the democratically elected Republican forces. Once again the League of Nations was exposed as a paper tiger, with many nations

interfering militarily or economically in the war. The conflict ended in 1939 with victory for the fascists. It had also proven a very useful training ground for the Nazis – lessons learnt by their air force and army would be put into even more devastating action during the early stages of the Second World War.

Reg was 19 in September 1939 when the Second World War broke out. He wanted to join the Air Force and submitted an application that came to nothing. He later discussed enlisting in the army with his father, who convinced him to wait for six months as the rumours flying around said that it would all be over by Christmas. Six months came and went and as Reg said 'the duck season was over so there was no more shooting to do except the war. So, away I went'. He walked to Portland and enlisted on 24 April, 1940, just 10 days after the 2/7<sup>th</sup> had departed for the Middle East. Reg would join them there later in the year as a reinforcement. The many Aboriginal men who had served in the Great War also inspired Reg: 'So they (the six Lovett brothers and his Dad and uncle) were the sort of fellas that inspired me. And a lot of them were my Dad's old friends who I knew. So there were ten or a dozen Aborigines [who were veterans of the First AIF] that I grew up with. I was a baby and they were men, of course. They inspired me ... they were great fellas'.

On 10 May 1940 the German *Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War) attack was launched with assaults on France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Phony War was over and recruiting in Australia increased as the seriousness of the situation became apparent. Within weeks the three Allied nations had surrendered and the survivors of the BEF and French Army were being evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk. The various nations of the British Empire were alone.

Soon after Reg joined, his younger brother Harry also signed up, much to the consternation of both Reg and their father Chris. Being 17 and six months, he realised he wouldn't be able to fool the recruiters in Portland so he packed up and went to Melbourne. On his second attempt he got in, using his nickname of Harry Saunders. While Reg would join the Victorian 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 6 Division, Harry would also serve with a Victorian battalion, the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Bn of 7 Division. Reg and Harry (and many hundreds of other Aboriginal soldiers) had managed to avoid the Directive from PM Robert Menzies to the Departments of the Army and Navy dated 25 February 1940 that 'persons not of substantial European origin or descent' were prohibited from enlisting. While not solely focused on Aboriginal Australians they were clearly one of the main groups affected by this ruling. Luckily for them and many others, the policy was ignored, overlooked or interpreted differently at recruiting stations. It is thankful this was so or Australia would not have had the services of two of its finest soldiers during its most dangerous period.

On 10 June 1940, Mussolini, presuming that Hitler's forces were about to defeat both France and Britain after the Nazis successful invasion of France a month earlier, had thrown his lot in with the Germans and declared war on Britain and France. This put the British forces in Egypt and the Middle East in grave danger. On 13 September 1940 an Italian force crossed the

border, heading towards the critically important Suez Canal. The Western Desert Campaign had begun. Due to the presence of the powerful Italian fleet, it was extremely hazardous to send convoys from Britain through the Mediterranean to Egypt. As a consequence, many of the reinforcements came via the Indian Ocean – in particular those from Australia, New Zealand and India. On 9 December 1940, Western Desert Force under British Major-General Richard O'Connor attacked the Italians at Sidi Barrani pushing them back into Libya. The Italians took refuge in the fortress town of Bardia awaiting the British response. It was the Australians of 6 Division who were tasked with taking this formidable objective.

Meanwhile back in Australia, Reg's leadership qualities were soon apparent to his comrades and within six weeks he was promoted to lance-corporal and in three months was a sergeant. In September 1940 Reg sailed for Palestine as a reinforcement for the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Harry would follow his brother six weeks later as an original member of 2/14<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The brothers would meet again in the Holy Land, a far cry from the rolling hills around Lake Condah Mission. It was while at Beit Jirga, Palestine, with the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Training Brigade that Reg Saunders became a household name throughout the Australian Army. As Sergeant of the Guard, Reg had been called upon to deal with a drunk, unruly Australian soldier who had been picked up AWOL by the MPs in the 'back streets of Jerusalem' (Gordon, p. 11). Saunders ordered the drunken private outside his cell for a wash. He refused, hurling racial abuse at Reg. Unable to get the soldier to obey him, Reg eventually removed his webbing and shirt with Sergeant's stripes before a short and brutal brawl followed. Reg won, dragged the soldier outside to the tap, washed him down and then half-carried him to his cell. Thus was the legend of Reg Saunders born.

Soon the training would end as the Australians would lead the drive to push the Italians back into Libya. On Christmas Day 1940 the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn was patrolling the wire outside the Italian fortress town of Bardia as they reconnoitred the defences they would soon have to assault. At 4.15am on 3 January 1941 the Australians were at the start line and the artillery began to fall at 5.30am. The first Australian Army action of the Second World War had begun. With support provided by British Matilda tanks of the Royal Tank Regiment and after some ferocious early fighting, the Italians were eventually defeated by 5 January 1941. It was a stunning victory, one of the first telling Allied successes of the war. The 2/7<sup>th</sup> had fought valiantly and now joined the pursuit of the retreating Italians, next being held up outside Tobruk. Soon after they captured Tobruk, reinforcements would arrive, among them was Reg Saunders. He would have his first taste of war whilst brushing his teeth and shaving at Mersa Brega when the 2/7<sup>th</sup> was strafed by Messerschmitt ME-110s. He frantically threw himself to the ground, rapidly digging a hole with his tin hat. He escaped unscathed, as did most of his mates, but one man was horribly wounded with his lower jaw shot away. Reg tried to help him but it was no use, he was too badly injured. 6 Division's part in this campaign was almost at an end due to decisions made thousands of miles away.

Mussolini's forces were also fighting in Greece with almost as little success as in North Africa. In March 1941 Hitler was forced to send aid to his fellow fascist leader as the Italians were being defeated by the much smaller but more resolute Greek army. On 2 March 1941 Lustreforce was despatched in convoy across the Mediterranean to the Greek port of Pireaus. The ANZACs were reborn in the Second World War and Australian General Thomas Blamey would command them. On 6 April 1940 German forces invaded Greece from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. With almost total air superiority and supported by battle-hardened armoured formations, the German forces, including SS Divisions rapidly pushed the rag-tag Allied formations backwards. Although temporarily held at several passes (including most famously Olympus, Servia and Brallas Pass), under constant air attack and with no armoured support, it was impossible to hold the Germans for long. The Australians and New Zealanders fought valiantly, most notably, in an echo of an ancient battle, at Thermopylae, but it was in vain. The Corinth Canal was seized by German airborne forces in an attempt to cut off the retreating Allies reaching the evacuation beaches of the Peloponnese. On Anzac Day 1941 Reg and his mates were sheltering in an olive grove in company with New Zealanders waiting the Royal Navy. The next day they would come and the 2/7<sup>th</sup> (among other Australian forces) would embark on the *Costa Rica*.

She left Kalamata harbour at dawn on 27 April 1940 under Luftwaffe air attack. The Australians brought their weapons to bear and a wall of Bren and Vickers gun fire clawed at the Stukas, Junkers and Messerschmitts. Eventually, just short of the island of Crete, the Germans were successful. A Stuka dropped a bomb under her stern and the *Costa Rica* began to sink. Evacuation was orderly and Royal Navy destroyers (Hereward, Hero and Defender) came alongside to evacuate the survivors. The battle raged around the Australians as they were brought ashore at Suda Bay that evening. The battalion spent the next few weeks recovering and preparing defences for the expected German onslaught.

Harry Saunders and his mates in the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Bn were continuing to train on the other side of the Mediterranean in Egypt. A few weeks later in June 1941 they too would be thrown into battle, this time against the Vichy French in Syria. A hard fought and costly six-week campaign would end in Allied victory.

On 20 May 1940 Operation Merkur (Mercury) burst upon the island of Crete as thousands of German *Fallschirmjager* (paratroopers) and glider-borne troops landed. Fierce fighting broke out, with many of the German troops killed as they drifted down or soon after landing. Cretan civilians joined in these attacks and this led to vicious German reprisals after the battle. On 27 May 1940 the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn was involved in one of the most successful attacks of the Crete Campaign at a little known place called 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (named after the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, RE, who had been stationed in the area previously), between Suda (Souda) Bay and Galatas. The Australian and New Zealanders in the area, fed up with retreating and being bombed by the Germans, put in an exhilarating bayonet attack that routed a German force, leaving several hundred dead

enemies in its wake. After this the German troops did not push the rear guard that covered the retreat through the White Mountains down the Imbros Pass to Sfakia as hard as they could have – fearful of another thrashing, the ANZACs always believed.

After the 2/7<sup>th</sup> was not evacuated from Crete in early June 1941 Reg, along with many hundreds of other Allied soldiers took to the hills. He spent the next eleven months evading capture due to the assistance of Cretan civilians, who put their lives at great risk. Many thousands of civilians were executed by the Nazis over the course of the war as reprisals increased and the search for evaders continued.

In mid-1942 Reg and 80 other Allied soldiers were evacuated to Egypt. He sailed for Australia, had a reunion with his father and rejoined his unit in Queensland. He attended the Australian Army Jungle Warfare training centre at Canungra (Queensland) and departed with his unit for New Guinea. In November 1942 he received the sad news that his younger brother Harry had been killed in action with the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Battalion as they advanced towards the Beachheads.

For the second half of 1942 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was training in Queensland alongside their fellow 17 Brigade infantry battalions, the 2/5<sup>th</sup> and 2/6<sup>th</sup>, soon to be deployed to New Guinea. Once again strategic decisions taken in far-off locations would determine where they would fight. After the Japanese had successfully captured New Britain in early 1942 they had then launched an amphibious landing to capture Lae and Salamaua on the Huon Gulf in New Britain. The Australian forces had retreated inland to Wau a pre-war gold-mining town, which could be supplied by air. Due to assaults launched by 'Kanga Force' based at Wau, the Japanese High Command decided to launch an operation to remove this threat once and for all. Because of the good work of Allied code-breakers Blamey knew what the Japanese intended and decided that he needed to get there first. On 4 January 1943 17 Brigade was ordered to move from its training area at Milne Bay, Papua for Wau. The shortage of transport planes (a theatre-wide issue) meant that it was impossible for the whole of 17 Brigade to arrive at once. The 2/6<sup>th</sup> arrived first, followed by the 2/5<sup>th</sup> and then, on 29 January 1943, the 2/7<sup>th</sup>. 17 Brigade with artillery support and Allied air power turned the Japanese back after fierce fighting. In early March 1943 the Japanese tried again but most of the convoy was sunk in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

17 Brigade served for most of 1943 in the Wau-Salamaua Campaign, where Reg's bushcraft skills proved extremely valuable. Not a single man was lost on any patrol that Reg led. Eventually his superiors recommended that he attend Officer Candidate School. While there he became great friends with one of Australia's greatest Second World War soldiers, Tom 'Diver' Derrick. Reg passed the three-month course with flying colours. As the first Aboriginal to be recommended for a King's Commission the selection panel sent

his papers to the Chief of Army, General Thomas Blamey for his view. He replied that as long as the commander of his battalion was happy to have him as an officer then, he (Blamey) could

see no reason why he should intervene. Reg therefore became Lieutenant Saunders and, in a change to standard procedure, was returned to his original unit. So too was Derrick, rejoining the S.A. 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Reg (and the majority of the Australian Army, due to differences of opinion over how best to employ the AIF) spent most of 1944 training in Queensland. On 16 November 1944 6 Division arrived in New Guinea, spending the rest of the war pushing the Japanese back in the Aitape–Wewak Campaign. 16 and 19 Brigades advanced along the coast, with 17 Brigade leading the assault inland through the high ground of the Torricelli Mountain Range. Towards the end of the war in the Prince Alexander Range Reg was hit by Japanese MG fire and was convalescing when the war ended.

Although he returned to Australia as a war hero to a grateful nation, Aborigines still lived on the margins of society and he could find only fitful, menial jobs and he and his family lived in rundown seedy dwellings. When the Korean War broke out he immediately re-enlisted and was soon a company commander in charge of more than 150 men. His colour was not an issue for the men under his command. But once again on his return he faced the same treatment as all other Aborigines: menial jobs, poor pay, sub-standard accommodation and being barred from entering pubs and other establishments. This was a disgraceful situation to face an Australian hero. Eventually he would find his most important role, in the newly formed Office of Aboriginal Affairs, where he could shape policies towards his people and work towards a better future for all of Australia's original inhabitants.

# BIOGRAPHIES OF KEY FIGURES

## General Sir Thomas Blamey

Blamey had served throughout the Great War, finishing as Chief of Staff of the Australian Corps which was under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash. He continued in the Regular Army after the war, but in 1925 became Chief of Police in the state of Victoria. When the Second World War broke out he was appointed to command the first Australian division to be raised, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF. When the government decided to raise another division he was then given command of the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). When the Pacific War broke out with Japan's attacks on 7 December 1941, Blamey was recalled to Australia and became Land Forces Command. This brought him into constant contact with, and occasionally conflict with, the egotistic US commander General Douglas MacArthur. Blamey also had to contend with the competing demands of manpower issues on the homefront that troubled the Australian Prime Minister John Curtin, as well as MacArthur's sidelining of Australian forces, as MacArthur did not want anyone else to share the glory and the limelight.

## Prime Minister Robert Menzies

Menzies is Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, initially from 1939–1941 and then from 1949–1966. Menzies was a lawyer and entered Parliament in 1928, thereby serving the nation for nearly 40 years. He was attorney-general in PM Joseph Lyons' United Australia Party government in the mid to late 1930s. Upon Lyons' death in April 1939, Menzies was elected to lead the party. He was therefore PM during the first two years of the Second World War (announcing to the Australian people on 3<sup>rd</sup> September that 'it is my melancholy duty to ...') and had to oversee the despatch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF to the Middle East and England. Sailing to England in February 1941 in an attempt to increase the British military presence at Singapore, he became embroiled (with British PM Winston Churchill) in the War Cabinet decisions to send a force to Greece. He allowed 6 Division to be part of that force, despite having reservations. Tensions continued to build in Australian federal politics and on 29 August 1941 Menzies stood down. This did not improve the fortunes of the UAP and, when the two independent members of the minority government switched sides, the Labor leader John Curtin became Prime Minister. In 1949 he would return to power when the Liberal Party defeated Ben Chifley's Labor government.

## John Curtin

A long-time trade unionist and left-wing member of the labour movement he came to prominence as a staunch opponent of Australian involvement in the Great War. He argued that socialism was the only way to prevent imperialist wars that saw the working classes of all

nations slaughtered. He fervently opposed PM Billy Hughes' attempts to introduce conscription in 1916 and 1917. Later that year he moved to Perth. He entered Parliament in the same year as Menzies: 1928. He would be troubled by alcohol all his life, at times observing long periods of abstinence, but eventually falling off the wagon again, usually during times of great stress.

Throughout the 1930s he and the Labor Party struggled to improve the lot of those suffering during the Great Depression. With the storm clouds gathering over Europe he was one of those who agitated about the threat of a powerful Japan to Australia's north. On 7 October 1941 he was sworn in as PM.

The first few months after the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and Malaya were traumatic ones for everyone, but none more so than Curtin. He was involved in dramatic tussles with Churchill and the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt over the 'beat Germany first' policy those two leaders had agreed to and also the return of Australian forces from the Middle East. In February 1942 Churchill had tried to divert the returning 7<sup>th</sup> Division to Burma. Against the wishes and advice of Churchill, Roosevelt, Menzies and the UAP Curtin had stood firm and insisted that they return to defend Australia. It was a pivotal moment in our history. Throughout the rest of the war Curtin had the very difficult task of balancing multiple demands on the home front and at the front line. He developed a good working relationship with both Blamey and MacArthur although many people have argued he ceded too much authority to the Americans. As a very junior partner in the Allied war effort it is, however, difficult to see what else he could have done.

Eventually the struggle took its toll and over the first few months of 1945 his health deteriorated. On 5 July 1945 he died, arguably another casualty of the war (Geoffrey Serle, *ADB*, 1993). He would be remembered as one of the great Australian Prime Ministers.

## **Thomas Derrick**

Derrick was probably the most famous Australia soldier of the Second World War, the equivalent of Albert Jacka of the Victorian 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the Great War. Born in Adelaide to a working-class family he struggled through the Great Depression mostly working in Berri on orchards. He enlisted in the 2/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion in July 1940 and fought with 9 Division in all its battles and campaigns, from Tobruk and El Alamein to Sattelberg and Tarakan. Awarded the DCM and VC he arguably (like Jacka) deserved at least two bars to his VC. A bit of larrikin who liked a drink, he met Reg on the same Officer Candidate Course and they became close friends. They communicated by letters until Derrick's death during the Tarakan operation in May 1945. The whole of 9<sup>th</sup> Division mourned his loss.