

GREEK CAMPAIGN

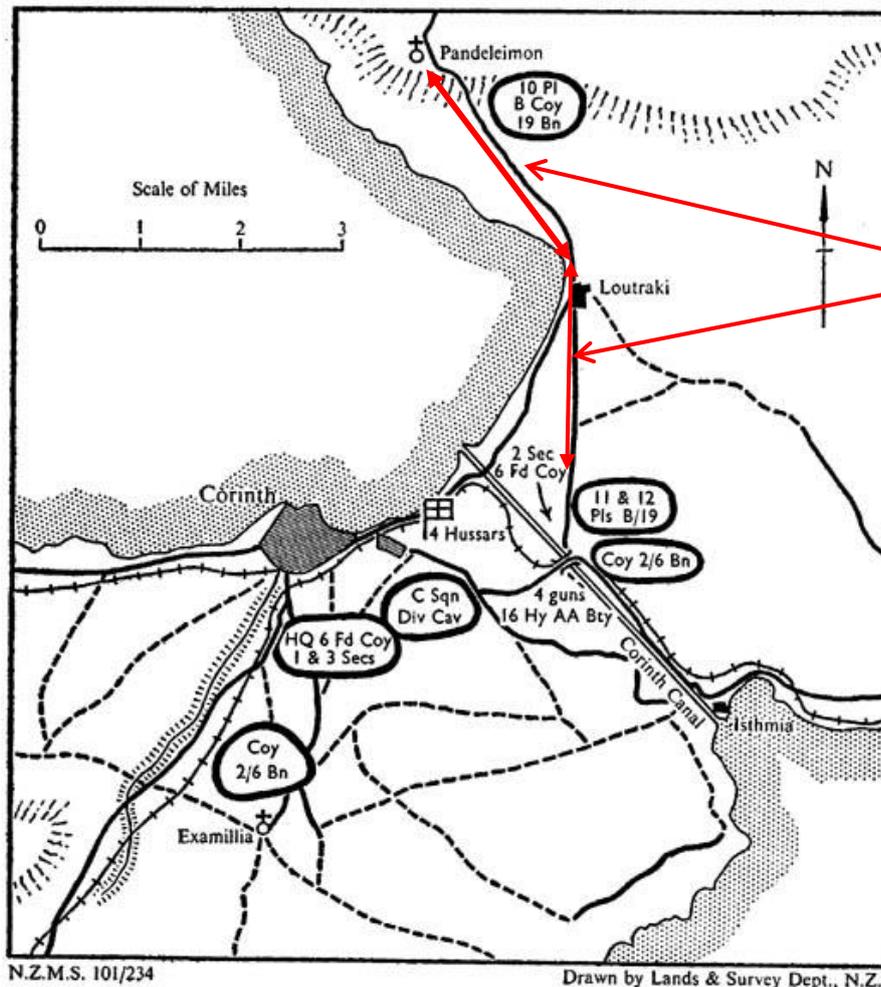
Lance-Sergeant Jack Dean, 292 Field Company, Royal Engineers

Jack's Story in Greece

Jack and his Section, under Captain Young, arrived in Piraeus Harbour, Athens on 30th October 1940, well in advance of the first landings of the main Allied 'W Force' who did not arrive until March 1941. At the Otley WW2 Archive Centre, Jack's collection includes a photograph of him in Athens on his birthday - 8th March 1941. Another photograph states its location as "Phaleron and Athens" but is undated.

Jack's Section of 292 Field Coy were initially allocated to support of the RAF in improving, upgrading and repairing the few usable Greek airfields. Later they, and other arriving Sections, were utilised to aid active fighting Brigades in forward deployments as the tactical military circumstances demanded (including HQ Section). As such they were dispersed geographically and were required to perform a variety of functions including maintenance and repair of roads and railways and subsequently - during the withdrawal phase - demolition of the same.

The Staffs Evening Sentinel quotes 292 Coy RE as being deployed on "demolitions" during the withdrawal phase of the campaign. This is also corroborated by Jack's widow. Unfortunately we do not know exactly where he was deployed at any given time and/or what actions he was involved in until 25th April, except to assume that it involved the airfields used by the RAF and latterly in demolition work to stem the German advance southwards. On the 25th it is highly likely that his Section was attached to the New Zealand 2nd Division 6th Field Coy (or possibly B Coy of 19 Battalion), somewhere just to the north of the Corinth Canal in the vicinity of the village of Loutraki.



CORINTH CANAL POSITIONS, 26 APRIL 1941

Sapper Alan Slocombe, 292 Field Coy HQ Section furnishes us with a little background information. After involvement in actions in the north of mainland Greece, and the ensuing repeated delaying rear-guard demolition operations on the way south again, Alan gives us two enlightening statements regarding the defended location in which Jack was taken prisoner.

- 1 From a personal communication “Some of us were detailed off to help the New Zealand Engineers at the Corinth Canal bridge – I’ll not forget the German Paras.”
- 2 From ‘Tell Them We Were Here’: “Soon we were on the retreat again, and after crossing the Corinth Canal (we did some work here with the New Zealand Engineers) were soon on the run again (eventually to Kalamata).”

Sapper Ken Millington adds . . . “After 3 weeks in Athens, where we were feted by the locals, we moved to Northern Greece to hold back the invading Germans. Almost immediately we were in retreat having only clapped out tanks to fight with. There was no air cover and all in all it was the most terrible situation to be in.

My job was to blow bridges after our troops had safely crossed. I remember one instance when hanging from the upright of a bridge fixing explosives, a German plane spotted me and came towards me all guns blazing then came back to have another go. I definitely thought I was going to die that day. I remember saying a prayer that my Mother would know I had gone swiftly and cleanly. But it was not to be and I continued this mad rush south. Sheer chaos everywhere. British, New Zealand and Australian troops were all involved in this hell.

They were all making for Kalamata where they hoped ships would carry them to safety. I didn’t get that far. I arrived in Corinth where two German soldiers informed me that for me, the war was over.”

Iris Dean’s recollection of her husband’s account states that: “He was captured in Corinth. He was in the Royal Engineers and a squad had been sent up into the hills north of Corinth to blow up some bridges. As they made their way back South, they found they were trapped north of Corinth because the bridge over the Canal had been destroyed (by the New Zealanders??) to halt the German movement to the South.”

**From Wikipedia – Battle of the Corinth Canal, 26 April 1941
(from a German point of view)**

“The paratroopers under the command of Lt Teussen stormed the two still functioning AA batteries at the South end of the bridge, while the German engineers had reached the North end of the bridge and began to remove the beforehand planted explosive charges. **The assault on the bridge was over and North of the Isthmus of Corinth, the paratroopers managed to capture the field with the defending Allied forces being either killed or captured.** By this time General Alfred Sturm ordered Hauptmann Gerhart Schirmer to pursue the enemy and conquer the nearby towns of Argos and Nauplia which were defended by British troops from the Isthmus Force consisting of 4th Hussars with three light tanks, a New Zealand company and the New Zealand Cavalry squadron. They were however no match against their attackers and the towns soon fell into German hands.

*The battle ended up wounding 158 German soldiers with 63 being killed in action and 16 missing in action. **Allied casualties remain unknown but the Germans claimed to have taken 921 British and Australian soldiers as well as 1,450 Greek soldiers.***” (See the photographs below).

Jack Dean was one of these.

Another little date mystery:

Jack used to tell his wife Iris that he was captured on 29th April – exactly four years to the day before his liberation from Stalag 383 at Hohenfels, Bavaria (but see Part 4). On the other hand, on a note in his WW2 Archive collection he had written in his own fair hand “I was captured on the 25th April”. However, we know for certain that is impossible because the German *Fallschirmjäger* airborne assault didn’t take place until the 26th April.



The assault begins



The Bridge is taken - German Paratroops storm the crossing heading south



The Bridge is blown - eventually demolished by the Allied defenders



The first British & Anzac troops are taken as Prisoners of War, cut off on the north side of the Canal - Jack Dean and Ken Millington will soon join them, if not in there already.



Two more Tommys captured . . .



. . . and more.