

AIRBORNE TROOPS OF RAMU VALLEY

Maj-Gen Vasey's Tribute

"I would like to pay tribute to the courage, skill, and determination of members of the Second AIF," Maj-Gen G. Vasey, commander of the 7th Division, said yesterday in an address to the Legacy Club. "I have told a few politicians whom I have met recently that it is my pleasure and responsibility to look after these men now, but it is yours to look after them after the war, and I trust that you will do so."

Speaking on "Australia's First Airborne Division," Maj-Gen Vasey said that air-borne operations were different from sea-borne operations, in that only a small number of troops could be landed by air at first, the number to be increased later. By sea arrangements were made to land a large number very quickly.

When it was decided to use air-borne troops in New Guinea, it was recognised that airstrips would first have to be provided. When the US Parachute Regiment was first sent in they were supported by an Australian pioneer company and a field artillery company, who were landed some distance away. After a five days' march they arrived on the airfield within a few hours of the parachutists having jumped.

It was thought that fierce resistance would be met, but the operations were completed much quicker than was expected. The idea of being air-borne was not fully appreciated by the troops, as was indicated by one unit providing a Christmas card, on one side of which was depicted air-borne troops, with the words, "Australia's First Air-borne Division," and on the other, troops climbing up a precipitous hill, carrying a 70lb pack, and the words, "Air Borne Like Hell."

"I cannot talk about air-borne operations in New Guinea without saying how much we owe to the 5th US Air Force for its co-operation

saying how much we owe to the 5th US Air Force for its co-operation and skill," continued Maj-Gen Vasey. "By completing its task ours was made possible. I have the greatest admiration for all they did for us. Their troop-carriers made 60,000 soldier trips, and not one man was lost, which is an incredible record."