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Newspaper Archive

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GRAFTON ABORIGINE

Went Walkabout At Front

KNEW TOO MUCH FOR COLONEL.

Tired of army routine, an aborigine with the A.I.F. in Syria went on a walkabout. He was Pte. Jack Patten, of Grafton.

It took military police five days to catch up with him.

Pte. Patten was haled before his colonel, and this is his account of what took place:

"I felt like a man about to be hanged. The Colonel had the reputation of being a rigid disciplinarian, and he seemed to be looking very hungrily at me.

"He asked me if there was any reason why I should not be fined £5 or 28 days. I knew my defence would have to be good.

"'Colonel,' I said to him, 'I must refuse to accept the fine, because I do not think you have the necessary psychological understanding of my case.

"'I am an aborigine, and I have been thrust into an environment which is strange to me. Discipline is, for me, something quite new.'

"At this point, the Colonel looked very dangerous.

"'And what is the Army to do without discipline?' he wanted to know.

"I said: 'I wish to quote Professor Elkin, for many years Professor of Anthropology at the Sydney University. He co-operates with the Commonwealth Government on matters relating to aborigines.

"'Professor Elkin has recommended that an employer should never detain an aborigine when he wants to "go walkabout."

"'He also lays it down that the aboriginal mentality normally is dormant after 11 years of age.

"'In the circumstances do you think a fine of £5 would be just?'

At this point, the Colonel gave in

and only "admonished" the culprit.

Cultured Pte. Patten is the president of the Aborigines' Progress Association. For years he has fought for better conditions for his people.

After two years' service in the Middle East, and "being blown up a couple of times," he was sent home with a damaged leg.

He has just left the 113th Military Hospital to return to his wife and six children at Grafton.