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Hello,

My name is Reg Chard, and at 98-and-a-half-years of age I can't believe I'm sending you a copy of my biography – *The Digger of Kokoda*. After all, it's been almost 100 years in the making. I was born in Sydney on 31 October 1923 – just in time for the Great Depression, World War II, and the reshaping of post-war Australia.

When Pan Macmillan approached me to write my life story I was reluctant to do so because I didn't want to seem to be pushing myself as some kind of 'hero,' because I'm definitely no hero. I've always believed that title belongs to the soldiers and nurses who didn't return home from the war – they're Australia's greatest heroes. What made me decide to write it was knowing there's now only a handful of veterans left from the terrible Kokoda and Beachhead campaigns. I figured my story could (in its own small way) honour the thousands of men and women who gave their all for Australia.

Writing this book made me revisit some wonderful (and not so great) moments in my life as a boy who grew up in the working-class Sydney suburbs of Marrickville and Dulwich Hill as Australia recovered from the scars of World War I. It also took me back to the day when a girl rode past our house on her bicycle and my declaration 'I'm going to marry that girl one day,' was shot down by my mother. She told me to, 'Stop being a bloody idiot and to get inside.' The girl on the bike – Betty – and I married, and in all we spent 75 happy years together.

Through my biography I've also recalled the mates I made in the army – and there were great characters – and the adventures we had. However, it has also forced me to revisit the dark periods of my life as well – especially the horrors of the fighting in Papua New Guinea and learning about the terrible things we humans are capable of doing to our fellow man. I've also relived the heartbreak of losing my Betty and having to find a reason to keep going when it would have been so easy to simply give up.

For all of that, I'm proud of the finished product, and it's my hope you can take something from my life's experiences.

Best wishes,

Reg Chard OAM