A VERY PERSONAL WAR

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Getting There

It was Sunday 10 January 1943 but the Sabbath during the war was not a day of rest. We worked hard unloading 304's gear. Some things like 44 gallon drums of fuel we simply rolled overboard. Petrol being lighter than water meant the drums floated and we swam them ashore. Unfortunately, 304's cook, who had followed our Tom Connor's example in acquiring a drum of flour, pushed it over the side and it promptly sank. With help from the natives who dived down with ropes we were able to retrieve it. Tom noted this episode and decided that our precious flour would be handled differently.

Late in the day we went ashore in native lakatois (outrigger canoes) with Padre Rundle who had joined us at Milne Bay. John Rundle had been a Methodist missioner in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands before being evacuated when the Japanese attacked New Guinea. Later when we landed on Goodenough Island I thanked God that John went in with us.

For now I was exploring the beauty of Normanby Island. Its beach was sheltered from wild water as it fronted a large tranquil lagoon inside the coral reef which surrounded it in a huge horseshoe shape. When I stepped ashore I was greeted by excited and happy men women and children. One young man walked with me towards their village. He was carrying a machete by its large red handle. I indicated that I would like to hold it and he willingly handed it to me. Immediately I held it I realised what a wonderful tool it could be where we were going. I asked him, in the smattering of Pidgin I knew, to sell it to me. He agreed and I gave him a shilling. He was delighted with the price but disappointed that the coin did not have a hole in it to enable him to wear it around his neck. I was only nineteen and did not fully appreciate how important that machete was to the native. it was his prize possession used for a myriad of tasks such as cutting bush timber and palms to build huts, clearing tracks through the jungle. killing animals, splitting coconuts, defending himself etc. It never occurred to me at the time but with maturity over the years I have often pondered our deal with regret. Did he understand the finality of the transaction? I had been motivated by the need for such a useful tool and he by the desire to be a big man in the village with his wealth; a paltry shilling

Tired and hungry we returned to the *Tung Song* and made a meal of fruit from the island and slept where we lay on deck. Conditions below deck were appalling. The skipper of the vessel and his mate were British and mostly in an alcoholic haze as they had never wanted to venture into these Japanese-controlled waters. The rest of the crew were Chinese who had been with it when it was a Chinese river boat. It had been chosen for us because its shallow draft might better navigate the many coral reefs around the islands. Below deck were live pigs and poultry; the source of fresh meat for the crew. The smell from the droppings of the livestock combined with the odour of the ships laundry draped across hissing steampipes was sickening. At daybreak on 11 January we headed for tiny Dobu Island in the channel between Normanby and Fergusson Islands. Dobu had been the headquarters of Padre Rundle's mission before he was commissioned as a Padre in the RAAF. He needed to check on the safety of a Tongan missioner, Jonathan Fonua, who had bravely continued to hold the fort on Dobu despite possible attack by the Japanese. Perhaps the Japs regarded Dobu of less strategic importance than the larger islands of the D'Entrecasteaux group such as Goodenough where we were headed and where the Japs had previously landed on its southern coast. We were going to the northernmost part of the island as we intended to set up our operation at Mwananoia, inland from Cape Lahaye.

When we anchored off Dobu we were welcomed by natives in dozens of single outrigger lakatois (canoes) John Rundle and Bernard Katz went ashore to talk with Jonathan and were greeted with affection by the people who were happy to see John alive and well. Little did they know that he would be killed a year later. Satisfied that Jonathan was okay they came back on board and told the by now rather nervy and somewhat intoxicated captain of our little ship that we would proceed to Goodenough Island at first light next morning. Whilst it would be safer to sail that night under cover of darkness it was not possible because of reef-ridden waters. With hindsight I can understand the captain seeking solace in a bottle. It helped him to cope with the ever-present fear that his ship might be sunk and his crew killed. As a wartime merchant seaman he had no doubt already experienced the hazards of enemy-controlled waters and it would ill behove us naive nineteen-year-olds to criticise him.

Leaving Dobu at dawn we headed northwest through Dawson Strait around the south of Fergusson Island and into the Solomon Sea. We were continually on the lookout for any Japanese ships, subs or planes. Not

that we would provide much of a threat to them as our heaviest weapon was the twin-barrelled .50 inch calibre machine gun mounted on the stern of our little 558-ton ship.

We were very lucky as the only activity in the sea was from streams of flying fish and schools of large manta rays which behaved like subaqueous birds as our boat scattered them. The Japanese were obviously concentrating their forces to the east of us on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands where they were heavily engaged in bitter jungle fighting with the Americans. It would be another month before that battle was won by our allies in February 1943.

At 1700 hours we entered the shallow waters of Mud Bay and, although this was about thirty kilometres short of our intended destination, the captain of the *Tung Song* refused to take the boat any further north, and demanded that we unload at first light next day. A strict blackout was enforced that night as Japanese planes were flying overhead on their way to attack Milne Bay and other targets on the New Guinea mainland about 120 kilometres south of us. We realised then that we were that distance ahead of any friendly forces and that distance inside Japanese territory.

In the darkness we mingled with the natives who John Rundle had brought aboard. I felt it was imperative that we quickly learn to converse with them. Whilst Padre Rundle had told us how to treat the natives with firmness and fairness, he had not as yet dealt with the language. He emphasised that we must always be the boss and have their respect. An example he gave which I still remember was if a native is coming toward you along a narrow jungle track, don't leave the track, make him get off and give way to you. I guess this came from years of experience of the colonial methods of controlling subjugated people.

The native assigned to me was a young lad probably about thirteen by the name of Kasiki (pronounced Kah~SeeKee). We sat together in the dark and I asked him as best I could to give me the local names of important items such as food, water, bananas, coconuts, birds, fish etc. As he gave me a word I wrote it in my little pocket note book feeling my way as I could not see the paper in the dark. I wrote according to the sound of each word. I still have that battered little book and it illustrates my untidy writing caused by the total darkness. My young brother John came to mind and I told Kasiki I would call him John after my brother. Thereafter he was happy to answer to the new name.

A few of us went ashore in the morning looking for a suitable landing site. The edges of Mud Bay were thick mangrove swamps with voracious hordes of mosquitoes and sand flies and hundreds of amphibious fishes about 10 centimetres long preying on the insects and tiny crabs. These fish commonly known as mudskippers spent most of their time out of the water on the mud flats and only occasionally hopped into a puddle. The area was quickly ruled out as a site to unload our gear.

John Rundle knew of a better place a few kilometres further north at Beli Beli. He and Bernard argued with the skipper and he eventually reluctantly agreed to take us there. Apart from the possibility of enemy attack he was concerned about the dangers of coral reefs which our maps showed were particularly hazardous at Watutu Point which we would have to round. John spoke to the natives who had local knowledge and found two who knew the way through the reefs Standing at the bow of the ship they successfully guided the skipper as he slowly steered around the point. I remember him making careful notes as we passed through the narrow passage and him saying "I need to know how to get back out of this bloody place when we unload you poor bastards".

Beli Beli was ideal. There was a small stream emerging from the jungle and the trees overhanging it provided excellent cover from any prying aircraft. We ran a line from ship to shore, pushed our prepared raft over the side and shuttled our supplies between the boat and the bank of the stream. The fuel drums we floated ashore but Tom made sure his precious drum of flour went on the raft. The ship's boat was used for the larger crates of radar equipment The seamen refused to man the steam winches which were needed to hoist these crates over the side as they said that was a job for stevedores. Fortunately a couple of our blokes had some knowledge of steam powered machinery and lifted the crates into the boat.

The loaded boat was manoeuvred into the small stream and the crates were slung ashore using a block and tackle attached to a conveniently overhanging tree limb. We set up a temporary camp at this fresh water stream and finished unloading by 1300 hours on 13 January 1943. SS *Tung Song* immediately departed so that the Japs attention was not drawn to our landing site and for the safety of the ship.
Around us was thick jungle and one of our blokes said we would have no hope here against Jap troops. In my ignorance I told him we were well armed and would be able to defend ourselves. We had a Bren gun, three

Owen guns, a .50 light ack-ack gun, our 303 rifles, 38 Smith & Wesson revolvers and plenty of hand grenades. Whilst we knew how to use these weapons, we had no infantry training. Eddie and I also had our own .22 rifles which although not military weapons were to prove invaluable in augmenting our monotonous and meagre rations.

We dug ourselves hip holes and slept on our groundsheets. It rained that night and although we used our waterproof gas capes for cover we were well and truly drenched by morning. This was overcome as we stripped to the waist in the tropical beat to deal with the problem of moving a further 20 kilometres up the coast. It also overcame the danger of wearing any badge of rank; Japanese snipers tended to take out first those showing any insignia of rank. They shot to wound rather than kill so that other men coming to assist the wounded were kept out of action and also provided easy targets.

Shorts, boots and socks and a slouch hat became our standard dress from then on. Around my neck I wore my metal dog tags (identity discs) and my rosary beads. Each man had two dog tags or dead meat tags as some called them; one was octagonal shape and the other was circular and both had stamped into the metal your name, number, religion, blood group and RAAF. If a man was killed one tag was placed where he was buried, if that was possible and the other attached to his personal belongings. My rosary beads had an unexpected effect when a short time later I came face-to-face with the Japanese.

Sandflies and mosquitoes feasted on us as we toiled in the tropical heat and little wild bees infested our backs as they drank our sweat. With native assistance the two mission launches were located and soon working thanks to our engine fitter Jack Groome.

It started to rain as we loaded one launch with nontechnical gear. Led by Padre Rundle, an advance party set off for Cape Lahaye, the northernmost point on Goodenough Island. A native was positioned at the bow to guide us through the coral reefs. He had extensive local knowledge and excellent eyesight but he was not helped by the weather. It was the cyclone and north-west monsoon season and the rain was now wind-driven and incessant. Slowly he guided us for about twelve miles (twenty kilometres) through the dangerous channels among the maze of reefs to the beach at Cape Lahaye. The weather aided us as it hid our movements from any prying Japanese aircraft.

Padre Rundle and Bernard Katz went a short distance inland to the village of Kwaiboga where they received an enthusiastic welcome. All able-bodied people in the village were recruited to help establish a camp for us and to carry goods inland a further three kilometres to the chosen site for the radar.

We each had a tin of bully beef, some hardtack biscuits and a water bottle. That night after this sumptuous meal we dug hip holes in the jungle floor and spread our groundsheets for a bed with gas capes for cover from the rain. Although we were very tired, sleep did not come easily. The strange jungle noises, the relentless mosquitoes and the earlier sighting of huge inquisitive tree pythons were not conducive to complete relaxation. We were fully clothed and wore canvas gaiters around our ankles above our heavy boots to protect against the myriad of creeping crawling creatures that inhabit the jungle floor. The worst of these were scorpions which were quite numerous.

The complete and utter blackness of the jungle night was only relieved when one of us lit a smoke. Fortunately we had wax vestas for matches as ordinary wooden matches were useless in the damp humid conditions. The vestas were in small rectangular waterproof tins. Thank God we had them. Turns were taken as sentries but we could see nothing and no one would have been able to see us. If you did smoke you lit the cigarette and smoked it using your felt hat or steel helmet to hide the light.

At daybreak we were awakened by natives bearing bananas and paw paws which we enjoyed as breakfast instead of the other rations brought from the beach such as tinned baked beans, M & V and hardtack biscuits. I was delighted to see Kasiki was with the natives who had walked overland the twenty or so kilometres from Beli Beli. Thank God we had the launches and did not have to make that same trek through the jungle carrying all our heavy gear and arms and ammunition. It was hard enough going the three kilometres from the beach to the doover site Bernard had chosen. We never used the word ‘radar’ and always referred to the operational gear as the ‘doover’. Members of the unit other than the radar operators and mechanics were never told what went on and were never allowed inside the doover.

The site was ideal as it was within a huge expanse of man-high kunai grass to its front and thick jungle to the rear at the foot of a 2,566 metre mountain thus effectively camouflaging the installation. It gave an arc of sweep for our radar beam of more than 200 degrees to the north toward the major Jap bases from which they

would launch their air attacks. Our position in the Jap-controlled Solomon Sea would prove to be a thorn in their side as their heavy raids came from Rabaul and Gasmata on the island of New Britain to our north enabling us to give up to an hour warning to Allied bases on the mainland of New Guinea.

Some three hundred metres further inland within the jungle we chose a well-hidden camp site near a clear running stream. Padre Rundle organised the natives into a carrier team to bring the rest of our equipment along the track from the beach and a building team to erect our native-style huts. We were amazed how quickly the natives worked using the raw materials available. Their women wove palm fronds into panels for roofing and sidings while the men cut poles and erected the framework of two large huts for living quarters and another for a cookhouse, mess and store. It rained incessantly but they carried on clearing the undergrowth and building. No nails were used or available and they secured all joints by tying them with lawyer vines.

We turned our hands to hygiene matters and dug latrines. Some of us were still suffering from dysentery and we knew the importance of this job. I had experienced bouts of diarrhoea and bleeding since arriving in New Guinea on 15 December 1942. The need for clean drinking water was imperative and we each had small tins of water-purifying tablets These we added to our water bottles which gave the contents a chlorinated taste. Fortunately, later on, Barney Toomey, our medical orderly, had a test kit and we found our mountain stream was free of harmful organisms. A lower pool in the stream was used for ablutions and washing of clothes and we drew our drinking water from a higher section to avoid any contamination.

It was with great delight that we eventually occupied our huts which seemed luxurious after sleeping rough on the jungle floor. Drains were dug around these quarters and even though the rain continued the dirt floor was fairly dry. Air flow was reasonable as the sidings were only waist high leaving an open space of about a metre below the roof.

We each had a folding camp stretcher, a blanket and a sand-fly net. This net was essential as an ordinary mosquito net would be useless in keeping out the tiny flying pests and small anopheles mosquitoes which carry malaria. The blanket was never needed for cover but instead was folded in half and used as a mattress on the stretcher. We slept nude and ensured the calico parts of the net were tucked under the blanket. Our clothes and boots were taken inside this canopy for safety together with our firearms. If boots were left on the ground overnight they could be chewed by large rats or invaded by scorpions. I had scrounged a kapok-filled life-jacket from one of the boats we had been on and this provided me with a pillow.

Our supplies included three hurricane lamps but these were needed for operational purposes so we devised our own lighting. A hole was made in the lid of a screw-top jar and a piece of rope was threaded through into the jar filled with kerosene. These lights proved invaluable and were kept alight twenty four hours a day as matches other than wax vestas were useless in the moist tropical conditions. The permanent flame lit our cigarettes and whatever fire was needed for cooking; in addition the fumes to some extent discouraged mossies.

A few days later an intense tropical cyclone hit the island but we continued to operate the doover under difficulty. It was a struggle rotating the large antenna array by hand into winds of incredible force. I came off duty and eventually made it to camp through the torrential wind-driven rain. To my horror I saw our hut was wrecked. A huge tree had crashed across it and demolished everything beneath it. All our belongings were saturated and Bob Lawson's stretcher was crushed into the ground. Fortunately Bob was on duty as he surely would have been killed had he been on his bed. When the cyclone passed we set about repairing the damage; first to the doover then the campsite. Within two days the natives had rebuilt our hut and it was good to get back on a stretcher after sleeping on wet ground.

We had not long reoccupied our native hut when other denizens of the jungle decided that our woven-palm-leaf home was even more attractive than their jungle home. Representatives of the tropical food chain from the largest to the smallest joined us. They included pythons, lizards, rats, scorpions, large spiders constructing extremely strong webs, skinks, ants of all sizes and the inevitable mosquitoes.

Outside, in the black of night, there were often noises indicating other creatures who, thankfully, had not moved in. Lying under your net you were aware of all noises before exhaustion-induced sleep took over. After the Japs became aware of our presence the pre-sleep tension increased as did the listening for sounds of broken twigs or anything that might indicate footsteps. I envisaged a Jap creeping in on us in his split-toed rubber boots and silently slitting my throat. It was pitch black inside and out as we had devised a means of hiding our little flame after dark. We punched bayonet holes in the side of an upturned empty four-gallon

drum and placed the little jar on the ground inside the drum and surrounded it with palm leaves some distance from where we slept. The night was as black for the Japs as it was for us.

Initially operators worked four hour shifts but we soon changed that to six hours 2359, 0600,1200,and 1800. If you were on the midnight shift the camp guard woke you at 2330. You dressed in total darkness and with arms and ammo and wearing felt hat with steel helmet slung on the back set off for the doover. In the inky blackness the only means of finding the way was to keep one hand on the single wire telephone line strung about six feet above and at the side of the track which ran the 300 yards(metres) from camp to wireless tent. Each time was different. Mostly it was raining. Some nights were uneventful but others could be scary if you happened to encounter a tree python or walked into a newly spun web of a bird-catching spider. The worst offence was to lose touch with the telephone wire. If this happened the only thing to do was stay put until discovered by the next man to come along the track. This involved passwords before contact and swearwords about carelessness. We had been told that the passwords we used could not be pronounced by the Japs but learnt later when we had Jap prisoners that some of them could.

We had five guards who were usually rostered three on and two off. The three on duty were allocated one in the camp area, one near the doover and one in a slit trench near the wireless/plotting tent. This latter position also guarded the track leading to our site and covered it with a Bren gun. They were instructed to fire three shots from their 303 rifle in the event of any perceived threat. If this happened then the rest of us with our arms and grenades went to prearranged positions with emphasis on protecting the doover and keeping it operating.

Whilst our camp site was blacked out and silent and about 300 metres away this was not so at the doover area. Radar and wireless operators and our fitter on duty in that area were very vulnerable. Of necessity lights were needed and there was the ever-present noise of our petrol-electric power units. In addition we used small Briggs and Stratton two-stroke motors to charge the radio batteries. It was accepted that those unfortunate enough to be on duty in the event of a Jap attack were expendable. Their first priority was to explode the demolition charges to destroy the doover and escape as best they could.

Some months after leaving 305 I learned that all 29 of us who landed on Goodenough Island on 13 January 1943 were regarded as expendable by the higher brass who deemed it tactically necessary in the interest of overall planning to place a radar station some eighty miles inside Jap controlled territory. I can now understand and accept that the decision in the circumstances of that time was in the best interests of Allied air defence, and I can only thank God that we survived. Some, though not killed or wounded, still carry mental and physical scars and illnesses from the experience.

The book *Secret. Action of 305* which Norm Smith and I wrote contains a lot of detail regarding the operation of 305 and it is not my intention here to repeat that. My aim is to tell my own individual story and convey the feelings, emotions and impressions of a young man who spent his years from the age of eighteen to twenty two in the Air Force. I have already recorded some of the time before Goodenough Island and now want to deal with my own face-to-face encounter with the Japanese and the horrors of the real war.

Reality Bites

When we first arrived off the coast of Goodenough we were amazed at the dense jungle which covered the island from the mountain in the centre right down to the shoreline. I was standing on the bridge of the *Tung Song* with fellow radar operator Ray Burton and I remember he turned to me and said "We would have no hope in there against the Japs". In my total ignorance and buoyed by youthful confidence I replied "We’ll give them a run for their money with our array of guns and ammo and grenades". How stupid! .I knew nothing of the jungle-fighting skills which the Japanese army and marines had already perfected in their southward conquests. It would not be long before I changed my view.

Eddie Collon and I had been together since Radar School at Richmond and had become good mates. We arranged to work the same shifts and share the same off-duty hours This had been our practice since we first went to Stradbroke Island in April 1942. It was there that we honed our rifle skills, not only with our 303's, but also with our own private 22s. My 22 was a single-shot long-barrel which I bought from Stan Whitfield, a fellow graduate from Richmond. It was a real bargain. He only asked seven shillings and sixpence and threw in 350 rounds of ammunition. The barrel could be removed from the stock which made it easy to stow out of sight in my kitbag. I never envisaged when I bought it how useful it would become in augmenting our rations on Goodenough.

Our basic rations were canned bully beef, baked beans, M & V (supposedly meat and vegetables but referred to as ‘muck and vomit’), pilchards (known as pregnant goldfish because of the gritty egg roe). We also had hardtack biscuits which we reckoned were left over from the first World War. They were okay if you soaked them in boiling water and a little golden syrup which was also used in place of sugar when boiling a brew of tea. In retrospect I think we fared pretty well when you think of the poor bastards who starved as prisoners of the Japs.

With our 22s, Eddie and I went walkabout with one of our natives and we would be joined by other natives from a local village. Together they would lead us to where birds were roosting and point out those they regarded as good ‘kai’. Our boy would say "Tabauda number one kai." meaning top quality food. Eddie and I became adept at picking off such kai from the tree tops. Colourful birds were plucked on the spot and the feathers adorned the natives heads. Back at the village we were given fruit and yams in exchange for the birds. The natives cooked the birds on an open fire and offered me a portion. Out of courtesy I felt obliged to accept this number-one kai. It was like trying to chew a piece of burnt rubber. Fortunately, Kasiki was with us and he was looking on enviously. He was delighted when I gave him my piece of burnt bird and I was equally delighted to be rid of it.

We paid little regard to the possibility that there could be Japs in the vicinity who might hear our shots. Events would soon change this freedom.

Another supply of fresh food was provided by our hand grenades. With a couple of natives we would trek down to the beach where they had a lakatoi (a single outrigger canoe). The two of us went with them in the canoe as they searched for a school of fish. Once a school was spotted I pulled the pin on a seven second grenade and dropped it amongst the fish. The shrapnel from the explosion made little dull thuds on the bottom of the canoe. Stunned fish came floating to the surface and the natives dived in and threw the catch into the lakatoi. There were sharks circling the catch but this never seemed to worry the natives. I soon learned that they feared the large saltwater crocodiles far more than sharks. If they had the slightest suspicion that a croc was in the water or on the shore nearby they would not launch a canoe. Crocs can move so fast. I saw one lying like a dead log on the bank of a small stream when it suddenly leapt into life and with amazing speed raced in the direction of some prey. After that I shared the native respect for the beast. Natives helped us carry the catch on the long walk back to camp. As we passed through their village, and to the delight of the women and children, we gave them all the fish that were surplus to our needs. Thereafter we had ready volunteers on fishing trips.

Downstream from where we drew our water and washed our clothes and ourselves the mountain water dropped over a waterfall into a deep pool which I discovered was an ideal cool swimming hole, Not content to just swim I decided I would like to explore beneath the surface by using a gas mask as diving gear. I did this by removing the can from my gas mask and attaching its hose to another length which I tied to a piece of wood for a float so that about six inches of hose was above the surface of the water. To take me down I carried a large stone which I could drop when I needed to come up. The experiment was a failure. Beneath the water it was difficult to drag the air down and as I sucked harder the front of my chest seemed to cave in. When I surfaced there was a pronounced hollow in my chest which had not previously been evident. I now knew why air is pumped down to divers.

One of our blokes had false teeth which he used to astound the natives by pretending that magic enabled him to take them out of his mouth and place them on his hand for all to see. They brought friends from far away to marvel at this magic. The false teeth were, of course, necessary for our mate to eat. It caused him great distress one day when, skylarking near the waterfall, a bump knocked his teeth into the pool. Being anxious to help, I dived in without thinking of the downward force of the waterfall. It took me straight` to the bottom and I cracked my nose on a rock but by sheer good luck I saw his teeth and grabbed them. He was very grateful but said “What have you done to your bloody face?" The scar from that episode is still there as a reminder of my boyish stupidity.

These careless forays were less frequent once the Japs knew we were on the island. One night on the midnight shift I picked up an aircraft about eighty miles and 60 degrees to the cast. It then moved out of range and reappeared at 90 degrees. It disappeared again and I next found it at about 120 degrees. This cat and mouse exercise continued through the night until the Jap had completed a full 360 degrees around our position. Obviously he had a signal measuring device on board which enabled him to roughly plot our position. Eddie was on our plotting table and the information was progressively transmitted in Morse to Milne Bay.

I duly reported this in the morning and later in the day my suspicions were confirmed when a lone Jap Zero headed straight towards us and circled around our area for about ten minutes at a low altitude before climbing and heading north for Casinata. We all kept under cover in the jungle and ensured that no shot was fired at the Zero. I don’t think he spotted us or the doover because the next day nine Jap bombers came over and dropped their loads a good distance away.

The Japs needed to know whether or not they had knocked us out and sure enough that night another signal-measuring aircraft did the 360 degree search again. This really put us on the alert as a land attack by the Japs was now a distinct possibility.

On future walkabouts we were much more wary. We left our 22s back in camp and carried a 303 and an Owen gun. Kasiki and two older natives accompanied us and we sent one of them ahead as a scout It was very hot and there was nothing more refreshing than the cool clear juice of a green coconut thrown down from a tree scaled by Kasiki. On one of these ventures we came upon a dummy camp occupied by two natives. The Australian army who were now at Vivigani some twenty odd kilometres from us had set up tents and dummy guns made from tree trunks and saplings. It was the natives who made it look occupied by burning cooking fires and hanging discarded army clothes on washing lines.

These two caretaker natives told us horrific stories of Japanese atrocities on native villagers believed to have given information to our people. Men had their tongues cut out so they couldn’t talk and women and children were hamstrung to prevent them running away. After we had established contact with the army at Vivigani we were given similar accounts of enemy atrocities from soldiers who had seen such things in other places where the Japs had been. This added to our already deep loathing of the enemy and ripened into intense hatred which was expressed later when burying dead Japs.

Plots of hostile aircraft heading for points south of us and cast over the Solomon Sea were becoming more frequent and the raids were heavier. As many as a hundred planes in one raid on Milne Bay. Smaller raids occurred on Goodenough and it was obvious that the Nips were still looking for us.

It therefore came as no surprise when one evening just on dusk a very frightened native ran into our doover area yelling "Japan man come, Japan man he come, many Japan man he come." We tried to calm him but he was highly agitated and very frightened and it took him some time to eventually tell us "Big ship, many Japan man on beach, many guns."

Trying to make sense of this information we assumed that the "big ship" was a Jap transport landing invasion troops. It was now pitch dark and more natives arrived and one of them in excited pidgin English indicated about two thousand Japs had landed from a large troop transport, and were on the beach about five kilometres from us. We immediately alerted the army Drake Force at Vivigani some twenty two kilometres away and set about organising our defence positions.

Thus began a night of great tension and anxiety. We kept the doover operating in spite of the noise of the power supply which was sure to be a help to the Nips. Two operators and a mechanic with a demolition charge remained on duty and the rest of us went to our prearranged slit trenches each with arms and two hand grenades. Personnel records, code books and classified papers were gathered and readied for destruction. Radio contact with Milne Bay was maintained with difficulty and when I suggested that it would be a good idea to consider sending a couple of Catalinas to rescue us I was told they could not risk the loss of aircraft.

About 0200 hours three warning shots were fired from our forward position. We cocked our arms, checked our grenades and prepared for the worst. We were greatly relieved when an army platoon preceded by a friendly native arrived. The platoon was led by Captain McWaters and with the native guide they had force-marched twenty-two dark kilometres to our position in full battle dress. They were extremely tired and McWaters had a calming influence on all of us when he said "We can’t do anything until daylight, so let’s have a well-earned sleep." He also said "First thing in the morning get the boongs to cut down that bloody kunai grass; it's high enough to provide cover for the Japs.'(The term "boongs" was never used in any derogatory way by any of us and we would never have survived without these ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angels’.)

He was right about the two-metre-high kunai grass. We thought it helped by hiding the doover but, as he explained, "The bloody Japs would be right on top of you before you knew it. We need a clear field of fire so the bastards will have to attack over open ground." He also got Bernard Katz to agree that we shut down the doover and the noisy motor. This was done at 0430 hours. The ensuing silence made us even more alert as

did the impending daylight. We could now hear the slightest sound and every cracking twig was an alarm.

The Japs were expected to attack at daybreak but we had no idea in what numbers. Just before dawn it was decided that a patrol in strength was necessary to see what we were up against. Captain McWaters sent his number two, Lt. Baker, with the platoon and native guides in the direction of the beach.

We remained on full alert and Bernard, on instructions by radio from Milne Bay, ordered the destruction of classified documents, codes and any written material which might be of use to the enemy. Bob Lawson and Keith Blundell were given this job and they lit, a fire in a deep creek bed in the jungle well away from our defensive positions and out of sight of any prying eyes. They showered everything with petrol to ensure a good fire but unfortunately amongst the papers were a few rounds of ammunition. When these exploded we thought it was the commencement of the attack and feared the Japs had got in behind us. How happy we were when Bob came and told us what had happened. Because of the Geneva Convention. Eddie and I had to dispose of our 22 rifles - such arms and their bullets were internationally banned and we had no doubt that if caught with them we would be executed by the Japs. I wrapped mine and the ammo in my gas cape and buried it about 30 metres east of our hut. Its remains are probably still there.

At this time Norm Smith was sitting in the doover with his rifle and bayonet on his lap and a box of wax matches ready to light the fuse to the demolition charge and then make a dash to the nearest slit trench. At 0900 hours there was an anticlimax when a runner arrived with the news that Lt. Baker and his men had surprised the Jap landing party and killed all but three who were taken prisoner. The Japs had terrorised and taken over a native village near the beach. Most of the natives escaped into the jungle when the Japs raided their food garden. Two of these escapees were invaluable to us as they gave more accurate accounts of the number of the enemy and the types of arms they were carrying. Thus, when Lt. Baker left our position with his patrol, these two led him through the jungle on a track known only to the natives. It brought them to a position where they could lie doggo on the edge of the village and watch any movements. The only Japs they saw were two sentries patrolling the village clearing but the natives knew by finger count there were about. forty others. Our blokes waited until these emerged. When they did they went through a mini parade drill then sat in a group eating their morning meal while the sentries guarded them. On Lt. Baker's order, two of his men shot the sentries and others charged through the sitting Japs with Bren and Owen guns blazing followed by more using rifles and bayonets. Thirty seven enemy were killed and three were captured.

These three were blindfolded so they could not see the doover when brought back to our position. We were given custody of them and took them to our camp where we placed them under guard in a small area enclosed by large fuel drums. Some of our blokes went with Lt. Baker to bury the dead and were impressed when he stood everyone to attention in respect for the dead.

My whole attitude to the war changed when I came face to face with the prisoners. One of them did not disguise his hatred and told me "Hurry Up! Hurry Up! All Japanese soldiers want to die." He was a fearsome-looking man, very tall and robust with a few days' growth of jet-black beard. I expected all Japs to be short and he frightened me. Given the slightest opportunity he would attempt to kill regardless of his own life. Hatred oozed from his every movement and expression. My naive youthful sense of adventure changed into an anxiety and fear of what lay ahead should we encounter more Japs. When I gave him a tin of pilchards he attempted suicide with the lid of the can.

The other two prisoners were also in awe of him and bowed whenever he spoke to them. I suspected he might be an officer and noticed he had a badge of rank on each collar of three stars on a red background. When we took them to the creek for a wash I removed one of these which I still have as a souvenir. When I checked in my *Australian Soldiers Pocket Book* I discovered he was a 'Superior Private'. Such was the subservient structure of the Jap military that he could demand obedience from "First and Second Class Privates" and inflict physical punishment. Even in our presence he belted the others across the face with his open hand.

Next day four of us made our way to the beach where we found the large steel landing barge from which the Japs had come. The natives had told us that "many Japan man he come" from a "big ship". This we believed was the ship and the men were those killed and captured in the village. The barge showed signs of bullet damage and on closer inspection I saw a .5 armour-piercing bullet protruding from the steel anchor shaft. It was one of ours and must have come from the many Allied aircraft we had seen flying low and to the north in the past couple of days. The forty Japs had escaped and came ashore fully armed and ready to fight.

It was 9 March 1943 and that day Bernard was told for the first time of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea which

had raged for the past few days. On 1 March our aircraft located fourteen enemy ships on a westerly course about 100 miles west of Rabaul. It was a large convoy of eight transports and six destroyers. The Jap intention was to reinforce Lae on 5 March and Madang on 12 March. We were told that on 2 March our planes attacked as the convoy approached Vitiaz Strait, shortly before dark. At 9.30am on 3 March a force of RAAF and American planes rendezvoused over Cape Ward Hunt and headed for the convoy. They were intercepted by Zero fighters. Ultimately, for the loss of six Allied aircraft, eight enemy transports and four destroyers were sunk and twenty Zeros destroyed. For days after, Beaufighters, Bostons and Mitchells swept the waters of the Huon Gulf destroying barges and rafts crowded with Japs who had escaped.

Over the following days many Japs arrived on our island. Most were unarmed survivors in rafts or lifeboats but some were armed but too weak to fight as they had been exposed to the blazing tropical. sun for many days. There were many dead bodies and lots of wounded. The shame of defeat must have been too much for one officer as his uniform was neatly folded with his sword lying on top of it and his naked body on the raft where he had suicided with his Luger. I took this 9mm automatic pistol and a mate took the sword. The pistol was handy as I was carrying an Owen gun which shared the same calibre ammunition. With the help of natives we gave him a decent burial and marked the grave for future reference. He was a lieutenant and I handed over his papers and rank badges when we returned to camp.

The condition of some of the wounded was appalling. I will never forget one we lifted from a boat whose both knees were welded together. A bullet had driven the bones from one knee into the other. He was conscious and must have been in terrible pain not only from that but sunburn had lifted the skin from his face exposing bone. We handled him gently and I prayed God would help him. Just as we had organised native carriers to take him back to camp he looked at me and groaned and died. God had been merciful.

When I saw what days adrift on the sea could do to a human being, I made a wish that I never be wrecked at sea. Some of the bodies we could only commit to the deep as they were completely bloated and blue and almost transparent. In easing one off a raft his body came apart like an enormous blue jelly. Thousands of leatherjackets tore into the bodies, devouring all flesh. I swore I would never eat that species of fish again and to this day I feel uneasy when I see a leatherjacket.

Our off-duty hours were now devoted to rounding up stray Japs and burying the dead. The hatred for the Japs which had been engendered in us by the authorities and our own knowledge of enemy atrocities was evidenced when we were burying one. As we laid him in the grave, one of our blokes took a large rock and slammed it down on the Jap's head yelling "Cop that you little yellow bastard". Although I understood the emotion it sickened me that we had been reduced to that level.

One prisoner had a large tropical ulcer on his back and I had a look at it where he was sitting. I indicated that I would help him. I was dressed only in shorts boots and socks and wore my dog tags and rosary beads around my neck. He pointed at the beads and then pointed at himself and said what sounded like "me Christian". We had recently received some sulphanilamide powder which we were told was a wonder drug. I went to our medical orderly to get some and it took a lot of persuasion before he let me have it. Cleaning a knife with methylated spirits I scraped the ulcer clean and applied the powder.

Over the next three days the improvement was remarkable, not only in the ulcer but in the attitude of the prisoner. He could speak some English and answered, as best he could, all my questions. We had radioed for help to take the prisoners off our hands and at the end of the three days we were signalled that a torpedo boat was on its way to collect them and to augment our rations which had been depleted feeding the prisoners as well as ourselves.

I escorted my Jap friend on the long walk to the beach. Whilst we were there awaiting the boat he opened up and talked freely. He told me that when they left Rabaul they were very excited as they believed they were headed for Australia and their landing destination was Port Stephens. Some of our planes flew over the beach and he asked me what the roundels under the wings were. I told him these were Australian planes and he looked puzzled. He said "No Australian planes only Amelican (sic) planes". We parted and shook hands when he left and I have often wondered if he survived the war or whether he finished up in Cowra and was involved in the breakout from that prison camp when so many died.

Japanese soldiers died for their Emperor and it was a disgrace to surrender, therefore no risks could be taken when encountering one. Even if one appeared to be unarmed and came with hands in the air he could have a grenade or some other weapon attached to his back. Our drill was to order them at gunpoint to lie face down. This was okay if they were only wearing the folded cloth over their genitals and otherwise naked except for

split-toed rubber boots. More care was needed if wearing a uniform which could conceal a knife or other weapon. A number of them carried a hollow length of bamboo about a foot long and three inches in diameter. It was useful in the jungle as it was lightweight and being plugged at both ends was waterproof. In it they carried a pay stick, a prayer sheath (both of which I still have among my souvenirs) some rice, bullets and money, real and invasion money, all tied in condoms to keep dry.

It was inevitable that Japs were shot as some of them stepped out of the jungle without warning. The immediate reaction was to shoot. Our guard corporal seemed to enjoy killing and with a couple of his men would go looking for stray Japs. He felt it was his duty as guard commander to protect our unit. He was older than us and there was no doubting his bravery but he relished recounting the details of his daily encounters with the enemy. I particularly remember him describing how he surprised two Japs holed up in a rocky area. They were about sixty or so feet from him and his fellow guards. He fired at the rocks behind the Japs and ordered his men to do the same. The bullets ricocheting from the rocks killed the Japs. He brought back a captured Luger pistol as evidence that the enemy was armed.

From this time on there were no more food-gathering walkabouts. Off-duty hours were now spent searching for Jap survivors. I carried my newly acquired Luger pistol and an Owen gun as the ammo was interchangeable, as well as my machete (from Normanby Island) for hacking a way through the jungle. Eddie and I were accompanied by Kasiki and an older native who was expert in sensing any movement or strange odour. The Japs had a distinctive odour and it was not long before we were also able to pick up the scent. They also wore split-toed rubber boots which left a unique footprint wherever they walked on any clear ground. These boots as well as being ideal for jungle use enabled them to climb trees and position themselves as snipers. We were lucky to have a native scout as he could go forward and spot a sniper. The Jap would not fire on him as this would disclose the position where he was waiting to fire on armed targets such as us. I was fortunate not to be a sniper's target but others encountered them and, thanks to the natives, were able to kill them. Among my souvenirs is some ammo from a dropped sniper.

Japs were not expected to surrender so whenever one lumped out of the jungle without arms raised the only safe action was to shoot. There was one notable exception. Two of our fellows were on the track leading to the native village when an unarmed but fully clothed Jap calmly stepped out. of the jungle with his arms above his head and shouted in English "I surrender, I surrender". When satisfied he was not carrying a grenade or any other dangerous weapon they brought him back to camp. Prior to the war he had been a wool buyer in Australia and he said he liked Australians and had not wanted to fight us. He proved to be a valuable source of information and told us of his experiences in the convoy destroyed in the Bismarck Sea Battle and how he survived. He also confirmed that the morale of his comrades was very high when they left Rabaul as they believed their ultimate destination was the invasion of Australia at Port Stephens.

When his ship was sunk he had a life jacket and was lucky enough to be pulled on board a lifeboat. There were three others on the lifeboat but unlike him they were not fully clothed. Under the fierce tropical sun they were burnt raw and one suicided into the sea. They had water bottles and eventually drifted to our island. He took us to the lifeboat but it was too late and we saw two horribly burnt bodies and a sword. I could think of no more dreadful way to die than to be adrift for days without protection from that merciless sun.

Over the next week or two many life rafts drifted past our island. On some were dead bodies and on others sunburnt, emaciated and dehydrated survivors. With the help of natives and their lakatois we brought them ashore and gave them whatever succour we could from our limited supplies of food and medical items. Knowing they liked fish we mainly fed them on our unpopular pregnant goldfish but, having learnt from earlier experience of their penchant for suicide, without the lids on the cans.

Other stray survivors had got ashore and were raiding native gardens. The jungle provided them with excellent cover. Aware of this we were even more frightened moving at night along the track to the doover.

Mopping up continued and the official report was eighty-five killed and twenty-five taken prisoner. These operations were shared by us, the Army and natives. One native was later awarded a Loyalty Medal by Captain 'Mac' Rich of ANGAU. Mac became a good friend and he and I were to become even closer when we were neighbours at Manly Vale until he died.

During the emergency period we continued radar surveillance and were commended by signal from Milne Bay for our performance under pressure which had enabled Fighter Control to make many successful interceptions of Japanese aircraft.

Life was returning to more normal duties but we needed and requested a new Radmin code, having destroyed all classified documents during the emergency. Our request was answered and a new code book was dropped very accurately in our campsite by the crew of a RAAF B25 (Mitchell Bomber). We now had details of the Bismarck Sea Battle which explained why we had so many Jap visitors.

In spite of our best efforts to keep prisoners alive there had been unavoidable deaths and the bodies were buried in roughly marked graves with identity where it was available. Before the end of March 1943 a padre and a member of the War Graves Commission arrived. The padre complained that we had not put crosses on the graves and this raised the ire of Bernard Katz. In very heated terms he said to the padre "Do you think we have been enjoying a Sunday School picnic up here?" He added "We did our best in the circumstances and they are not bloody christians so why would they want crosses?"

The native people, who had experienced horrific cruelty at the hands of the Japanese, were delighted that we had spared their men, women and children from further atrocities. They came in numbers to our camp to give us a Sing Sing to thank us and celebrate the defeat of the Japs. They brought fruit and yams for us and in return Tom our cook boiled up a feast of bully beef and rice for them. In their song and dance they re-enacted the attacks on the Japanese using sticks to represent guns and expressing vengeful jubilation. It was 12 March 1943; a day of great relief, a happy day all round and a day I well remember.

The next day, to our surprise, another three Japs were killed and buried on the track to Vivigani. On 14 March we discovered more life rafts on our beach and we took twenty prisoners. Two of these escaped but their liberty was short-lived as in their weakened state they were soon recaptured with native help.

We gathered many souvenirs from the rafts - swords, pistols, bayonets and bamboo tubes with their contents. Most were thrown into the sea but we each kept some which would later, to our disgust, be confiscated by military police on arrival at Townsville air strip when returning to Australia in August 1944. From me they took a samurai sword, a Luger pistol and a ‘belt of a thousand stitches’. They let me keep other Japanese items including a helmet, a bayonet, prayer holder and pay stick, propaganda leaflets, bullets and invasion money. We subsequently learnt that these MPs were corrupt and had a lucrative trade selling Jap souvenirs to the Americans.

18 March 1943 was my twentieth birthday and it was also marked by the arrival of P/0 Bruce Aldrich to take over command of our station from Bernard Katz. Bruce came on the MV *Ooomoobah* which the RAAF had acquired. It was based in Milne Bay as a vessel to supply outlying radar stations in the Solomon Sea such as ours. It had been owned by a member of the Arnott biscuit family in Sydney until requisitioned for war use. Bernard returned to Milne Bay aboard it on 19 March.

It also brought F/Lt O.K. Griffith to us on 28 March to brief us on a plan to move us even closer to the Japanese base at Gasmata. From this base and on this very day we detected a massive flight of bombers, fighters and dive bombers headed our way. As we plotted their flight path it became evident they were bound for the torpedo-boat base at Oro Bay and we alerted fighter control and confirmed their target as they passed over us. Allied fighters awaited them and shot down many. Needless to say we were not thrilled at the prospect of moving our station even closer to the enemy base.

Japanese air activity increased over the next couple of weeks and I subsequently learnt that Admiral Yamamoto had flown into Rabaul from Truk on 3 April to take personal command of a new Japanese air blitz, ‘Operation IGO’. Huge air raids were launched commencing 7 April. The first was on Guadalcanal followed by Oro Bay 11th April, Port Moresby 12 April and Milne Bay 14 April. This enemy activity kept us very busy and we gave early warning which enabled our fighters to be up and ready in each case. The Japs sank a destroyer, a corvette, a fleet oiler, two merchant ships and shot down 20 of our aircraft. However, thanks to early warning, they lost more than 60 of their planes. Yamamoto was given exaggerated reports of victories by his commanders and he called off IGO on 16 April believing his blitz had worked.

So confident was he that he embarked on an inspection of Japanese air bases in the area. On 18 April, after code breakers had monitored his moves, his plane was intercepted over Bougainville and shot down by P38 fighters. The death of their naval hero was a sad blow to the Japanese who farewelled him with solemn ceremony in Tokyo.