F.E.L.O — DUTCH NEW GUINEA

PARTY "O"

PROLOGUE.

The following is a true account of a successful operation carried out behind enemy lines by F.E.L.O., a Special Services unit, of the Australian Military Forces, during World War 2 in the wilds of Dutch New Guinea in the early months of 1944.

The operation was performed by four members of the A.I.F., ably assisted by eight New Guinea native constables. Much has changed about the area since the Indonesian take over of this former Dutch colony of New Guinea. This western half of the Island of New Guinea is now called Irian Jaya and the capital, Hollandia, Jaya Pura, and probably some of the native villages mentioned in the text have also had name changes. But, changes have not altered the story one bit and the men who made up the party are all still with us, albeit considerably older.

First of all I think it necessary to explain about a military unit with such an odd title — Far Eastern Liaison Office — a title that conjures up visions of a unit, located in comfortable offices, situated well away from the areas of hostilities and staffed by clerks immersed in paper work and commanded by elderly, first world war, officers glad to be able to do their bit to aid the war effort!

And this was the impression that was meant to be taken!

Admittedly the main Headquarters, in Melbourne, was well away from the centre of hostilities. But, there were no old timers on this job. Just a nucleus of officers — army, navy and air force — and the two C.O.s; navy Commander J.C.R. Proud and Colonel 'Kassa' Townsend. The others were army clerical staff, there to look after administration, and a bevy of signallers to man a powerful radio transceiver capable of sending and receiving signals from any part of the globe and especially the south-west Pacific area. Then there were the operatives — the front line men — a close-mouthed lot, who would suddenly appear and just as quickly depart a few days later. All very secret and hush hush!

So, Far Eastern Liaison Office was a title meant to mislead and a cover for its real activities. This unit, with the strange name, was originally charged with all combat propaganda in the South West Pacific Area, but as time went on its operations expanded into two main divisions:

(a) Overt propaganda by means of leaflets and front line broadcasting units (F.L.B.U.s).

(b) The penetration of enemy territories by field parties and native agents. In the later stages of the war this latter function was to be directed more to obtaining intelligence than to organising native resistance.

Units such as "Z" Special, "M" Special (Coast Watchers), S.R.D. (Service Reconnaissance Dept.), and S.I.A. (Secret Intelligence Australia) were all controlled by the A.I.B. (Allied Intelligence Bureau). These units were well known and their wartime exploits have been well chronicled in many books and even now books are still being written! But not poor old FELO, unheard of during World War Two except to a very few in authority, and still virtually unknown after the cessation of hostilities, and even to this day!

There were many reasons for this lack of knowledge, the main one being given, by the author and war historian, D.M. Horner, in his authoritative book, "Allied Co-operation in the Pacific Area."

He writes:

'There were problems with FELO which had developed plans to broadcast messages to Japanese held areas as well as to conduct psychological warfare and intelligence operations in battle zones. These broadcasts went beyond the scope of military propaganda and since they involved British and Dutch territory they were political in nature. In September 1942, it was decided that FELO would be separated from the control of GHQ, through AIB, and would be controlled by the Australian Chiefs of Staff, through General Blamey. However, liaison between FELO and the AIB continued throughout the war with the AIB assisting in many FELO field operations.'

CHAPTER 1.

THE BEGINNING. BY CDR. J.C.R. PROUD R.A.N.

It really began in Singapore late in 1941, but because Japan thought and moved too fast for us, the idea was stillborn. Special Operations (or S.O. as they were called by the limited number of initiated) had been carried out in the European theatre since the beginning of hostilities. Their object was to penetrate the enemy controlled areas, sabotage his installations and equipment, obtain intelligence, weaken his morale by undercover propaganda and, by the same methods, strengthen the morale of the subject populations and increase their resistance to his occupation forces.

In Malaya it went off like a damp squib because the groundwork had hardly been done before a fast-moving Nippon army was at the Causeway. Overt propaganda (i.e. propaganda where no attempt is made to disguise its origin) had been successfully carried out by the Far Eastern Bureau of the Ministry of Information since early 1940, but this organisation was not equipped to do what can best be described as combat propaganda. With the fall of Singapore imminent, a number of us who had been trained in various phases of special operations were sent to Java to endeavour to establish organisations there, but again the Japanese were too fast for us, and in March '42 we found ourselves in Australia with orders to persuade the Australian authorities to approve of the conduct of special operations with bases in this country.

The area we had to cover was large enough and potentially fruitful enough to satisfy the most ambitious of us. The Netherland's Indies and Malaya had gone, together with New Britain, the Solomons, and a fair parcel of the New Guinea mainland. In all of these areas there were native populations whose resistance to Japanese occupation might be a major factor in the enemy's final defeat.

One man only saw the possibility of our operations, General Sir Thomas Blamey, the Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces. With his personal backing three organisations were established (Allied Intelligence Bureau was already working under the Director of Naval Intelligence), and one of these, and the only one entirely Australian in direction and control, was the Far Eastern Liaison Office, a title that was intended as a cover for its real activities. FELO, as it came to be known in its shortened form, was charged with all combat propaganda in the South-West Pacific Area. This involved lowering the morale of the enemy forces,

misleading him in regard to our military intentions, and influencing subject populations to weaken the enemy's war effort and assist our own forces.

Our beginnings could hardly have been more modest, a Director (R.A.N.), an Assistant (British Army), and three O.R.s (A.M.F.). The ranks were soon swelled and given greater variety by the addition of a Deputy Director (Wing Commander, R.A.A.F.), a Captain of the Netherland's Indies Army, and a Lieutenant of the Dutch Navy. The varied nature of the organisation was maintained and even increased up to the end of the hostilities, when we had a total strength of over 500, of which 35 were R.A.N., 285 A.M.F., 21 R.A.A.F., 25 Dutch including native troops, 145 New Guinea natives, 8 civilians, and last, by no means least interesting, 5 Japanese prisoners of war.

Two months were spent in getting our organisation together. Our first need was people who knew the areas in which we were to operate, and fortunately the area with the highest priority at that time was New Guinea. We assembled specially selected men from the New Guinea service and ex-planters who knew the natives and the country and were made to order for our purposes.

Cdr. J.C.R. Proud, (R.A.N.) Director, FELO.

CHAPTER 2.

OPERATION HOLLANDIA

The first FELO operation outside Australian New Guinea was codenamed "PARTY O" (we, who were in the party, preferred to call it "Operation Hollandia") and began in March, 1944, when, at the request of GHQ our party was inserted north of the Central Mountains, on the Idenberg River in Dutch New Guinea, with the task of working our way across country to the Hollandia area and, while doing so, obtain information for the U.S. task force for use during their coming landing.

The main objectives of the operation were:-

(a) Denial of local labour to the enemy.
(b) Denial of native foods to the enemy.
(c) To encourage the local native population to give cooperation to our own forces during and after the landing.
(d) Gather intelligence information prior to the landing.

The following is my account of the operation as a member of that party.

Fifty two years have come and gone, almost to the day, since Party "O" and it is only in the last few months I have decided to write of our experiences in this, to my mind, important and exciting operation.

Over the intervening years I have forgotten many of the incidents that occurred during the patrol due to a failing memory; mores the pity, but I can still remember enough to write a story well worth reading.

I do not pretend to be an author of note and am well aware that the following story will have little, if any, literary merit and, furthermore as you will no doubt have, even at this early stage, noticed my syntax and punctuation leave a lot to be desired. But, that's as may be, and although my memory may be a little dim, the contents are all true and did happen in that operation of long ago, named Party "O", or, as we preferred, Operation Hollandia.

The war was in its fourth year and, at long last, the Allies seemed to be getting the upper hand on this large island of New Guinea. The proposed landing, and the final one

on the mainland, at Hollandia, when successful, would mean the elimination of enemy soldiers in this area of the Pacific except for a few small isolated areas in various places such as Wewak, Aitape and the islands to the east, Bougainville, Solomons etc. It was obvious the Americans were not at all interested in cleaning out these odd pockets of resistance and were more than willing to leave the dirty work to the A.I.F. General MacArthur was much more interested in getting to the Philippines and fulfilling his vow of returning.

This, then, is my account of that epic journey of nine weeks in that wild and, even to this day, largely unexplored country of Dutch New Guinea in the early months of 1944.

Firstly, at this phase of the war I was just one month short of age 26, and a relatively uneventful eighteen months in the Middle East and then a particularly rough sojourn in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea saw me ready for this operation. Really, I was awfully lucky to be going at all because, during the Sanananda, Gona, Buna campaign, I had, along with quite a number of others, contracted Scrub Typhus after being bitten by one of the mites from the rats who, in their droves, were feeding off the dead bodies, ours and the enemies, in front of our perimeter.

Flown back to Port Moresby from Poppondetta airstrip I eventually returned to Brisbane by way of the hospital ship "Manunda" and after a lengthy period of convalescence was ready to return to my unit when, of all the bad luck, I was stricken by a severe attack of pneumonia, and the ever present malaria, which meant a further stay in hospital. After being pronounced fit once again, I had to face an army board who were doing their best to kick me out because of my ill health. But, I was determined they weren't going to get rid of me and managed to persuade one particular doctor, who struck me as being a nice fellow, that despite my gaunt appearance my general health was good enough. Really it wasn't so, and looking back now, I realise that they were right in their desire to rid the army of my services because over the years since my health has been very much "so so". I guess they knew from experience that it was unusual for someone who had contracted Scrub Typhus to be willing and able to soldier on as such a lot of those smitten by it had succumbed to the disease.

During my second stay in hospital, and the following convalescence, my 7th. Division unit had been disbanded and on my return I found, along with some of my mates, that I had been transferred to 7th. Div. Signals. Feeling very downcast at this turn of events I was prepared to volunteer for almost anything to get away from my new unit. The prayed for chance came when an officer from my old unit visited and said he was

looking for volunteers for a "hush hush" job in New Guinea. This heaven sent opportunity was too good to miss and I grasped it with both hands, without even bothering to enquire what the job entailed. Within days I found myself in Melbourne, of all places, fronting up to a naval commander who turned out to be my new C.O. — Cdr. J.C.R. Proud. Another week saw me in New Guinea where with three others we covered the attack on Lae and when that was completed, in late 1943, we found ourselves taken to an outpost on the Sepik River, inland from Aitape, where we joined another operation called "Mosstroops" for about 6 weeks. Then, on Christmas Eve, back to Brisbane to get ready for Operation Hollandia.

CHAPTER 3.

PERSONNEL

Lt. R.R.(Bob) Cole was appointed as leader of our party. Bob was the obvious choice as he was a former New Guinea patrol officer and thus a man who had extensive experience of the native population and who would be at home in the type of country that would be encountered during the operation.

The other members of the party were :-

Sgt. A.N. (Neville) Dening.
Sgt. M.G. (Spike) Berrie
Cpl. A.J. (Sam) Lulofs
and eight New Guinea native policemen whose names appear further on in the story.

Here is a little personal history of each of us:-

Bob, our leader, though slightly stand-offish at times and a little abrupt but a good bloke, was born in the year 1914 and was the second oldest. He was about 5ft. eight inches tall and very fit and had enlisted from New Guinea at the start of hostilities, joined the A.I.F. 6th. Division, and his unit had been lucky enough to go to Gt. Britain for a time and then return to the Middle East. Eventually he returned to Australia in the early months of 1942 and from there was seconded to A.N.G.A.U. (Australian & New Guinea Administrative Unit) and eventually joined up with F.E.L.O.

Yours truly, a quarter of an inch over six feet in height and a little on the thin side; the son of a grazier from a property in south-west Queensland, and aged 22 years, enlisted in the A.I.F. 7th. Division, and went to the Middle East in the middle of 1940 and returned home to Australia in March 1942. From there to New Guinea. My unit took a bit of a caning at Sanananda and was disbanded shortly afterwards and later I was lucky enough to be asked to join F.E.L.O.

Neville, always the pink cheeked boy, who came from the small town of Texas not far from the N.S.W. border, was then a little over 19 years of age and about 5ft. 10 in height. He also went to the Middle East with the 2/33rd. Infantry Battalion, and returned in 1942. He transferred to F.E.L.O. at about the same time as I did.

Sam, about the same height as Neville, but much heavier,

was born in 1904 and joined the 2/5th. Independent Company (Commandos) and saw service in New Guinea around the Markham Valley early in the war and from there was seconded to F.E.L.O. He was born in Sumatra of Dutch parents and migrated to Australia before the war and became naturalised. He was fluent in the Dutch and Malay languages and was our resident linguist. He still had quite a trace of Dutch accent but had acquired a good command of the English language even though he had some difficulty in correctly pronouncing w's and r's!

As stated earlier we had all not long returned from an operation named "Mosstroops" on the Sepik River, inland from Wewak. This was an operation run by ANGAU and it had been a difficult mission in particularly rugged country from which we had been hurriedly evacuated on the day before Xmas Eve, 1943. It was here that we met Bob who had been patrolling for FELO in this area.

During our stay with Mosstroops we had offended the Japanese troops in the area by killing a few and they had decided we were a nuisance and had to go, and after a few more minor scuffles, we took the hint and beat a hasty withdrawal, courtesy of a U.S. Catalina aircraft.

So, Bob was the leader; Neville, second in charge and, Sam, the linguist and general dogsbody.

Yours truly, having had considerable radio experience in the M.E. and N.G., was saddled with the radio duties; worse luck! I would have preferred any other job, but, if this was the only means of being part of the operation I was prepared to take the job, although it would be accompanied with a little grumbling from time to time.

(A few words about the problems met by wireless operators, as they were called fifty years ago, would not go amiss at this point. Looking back now, and seeing the great advances radio telephony has made over the intervening years, I think we did remarkably well at our trade considering the drawbacks in design and circuitry of those days. Instead of the present day extremely reliable and rugged solid state miniature transistorised circuits we were cursed with a set full of thermionic valves which were not only cumbersome and very fragile but were prone to give up the ghost at the most inopportune moments! They were delicate and bulky and needed to be treated carefully. Every component was built on a much grander scale, especially the power supplies which, due to the heavier power demand by the valves, were a load on their own and consequently much more difficult to transport.

Communication posed many more problems those days. Not only were the radios less efficient and lacking the

refinements of the modern sets, such as frequency control, small power drain, ease of operation, greater range etc., they required a greater backup of spare parts and a lot more patience to establish and maintain contact.

Being saddled with the radio was a disappointment. I was well aware that this assignment would be a particularly demanding, thankless and onerous job and having already completed a little over three years of radio work in the army I had been looking for a welcome change. My time as a radio operator gunner in a tank in the Middle East had particularly soured me towards more of the same and then having to carry a small radio as an infantry man in the Buna, Sanananda campaign, completely erased what little enthusiasm that remained. I could write a large book about the trials and tribulations of the radio operator, the favourite whipping boy when things go wrong! It would make interesting reading! There are forever problems, no matter how well things are going, and the operator is always working, either sending, encoding or decoding messages when the others are relaxing. A very similar situation exists nowadays when a married couple both go to work. At the end of the working day they arrive home and he gets his feet up and relaxes while she has to keep going and prepare the evening meal! Like the operator her work is never finished as there is always something crying out loudly for attention!)

The rest of the party were native police constables from New Guinea. These policemen were from the top half of the island — New Guinea — which in those days was not to be confused with the bottom half — Papua. New Guinea policemen tended to look down on the Papuans and often referred to them as "allsame Mari" (women) because of one of their habits of bleaching or colouring their hair.

The native policemen were:-

No.2434	YARU	District	MANUS
No.2433	ANIS	"	MADANG
No.2780	ARAM	"	WEWAK
No.3018	KAKI	"	BOUGAINVILLE
No.2790	WUNIAS	"	WEWAK
No.2451	SABI	"	MADANG
No.2788	SABOKINYA	"	WEWAK
No.2446	WONGE	"	MADANG.

They were all good soldiers and experienced policemen and very dependable. Three of them, Anis, Wongi and Sabi had been with us on the Sepik. The other three were well known to Bob and had been with FELO for some time and jumped at the chance for a bit of action. Of course they all spoke pidgin English and some were easy to understand, and some not so easy.

Wongi, who appeared the eldest, had a nasty habit of talking with his pipe in his mouth and, to me, was well nigh unintelligible though the other policemen didn't seem to have any difficulty in understanding him! Anis spoke pretty good English and even kept a diary. He had been to mission school and most of the time was with me and often acted as a welcome interpreter!

Before leaving Brisbane we had been informed that the Dutch administration was most unhappy we intended taking New Guinea native policemen into their territory, but we were determined that they should accompany us as they were very important members of the party. We had believed their reasons for not wanting to accept the policemen had been cleared up before our departure for Merauke. As it turned out we were wrong, as you will read later.

Apparently Commander Proud, had insisted that the policemen go, or nobody would go, and that had settled the matter.

Before leaving Brisbane we were granted a short leave of a few days and then spent several interesting weeks at the Canungra Jungle Training Centre involved in some intensive jungle training. This was an exercise in which we thought we were already fairly competent, but that's the army way of doing things!

Canungra proved to be similar to a lot of New Guinea but lacked the rainfall and consequently it was somewhat easier to get about. Not nearly as much mud or mosquitoes! As "old hands" we had a good time there and found it a much kinder climate than the northern half of New Guinea.

From Canungra we were taken to Fraser Island – the largest sand island in the world – situated off the coast of Maryborough – to the "Z" Special Unit training camp and were given a quick course in small boat work, demolitions, small arms training and the Malay language. Mastering languages, even at school, had always been my weakness and while the others picked up the language quickly – and at that I guess we were taught only the simple stuff – yours truly, never the linguist, failed dismally! Fortunately, there wasn't a test at the completion of the course to reveal my shortcomings and Sam, of course, showed us all up, including the teacher!

CHAPTER 4.

ON THE WAY

Back, once again, to Brisbane and on March 17th, 1944, on an early sunny morning, we left our comfortable headquarters at "Kirkston" (a lovely old three story home at Lutwyche, high on a hill just before what was then, the Grange tramline turn-off) and were taken by a motor launch to a spot just off the mouth of the Brisbane River where we boarded a Royal Dutch Air Force Catalina for our trip to Merauke, Dutch New Guinea. We were accompanied by Capt. John Millar and two radiomen of AIB who were to set up a base camp on the Idenberg River and relay our signal traffic to Merauke and to ALAMO FORCE (U.S.) at Finschafen.

The aircraft was pretty crowded with our twelve, and Millar and his offsiders, but the Dutch crew were very helpful and went out of their way to make us as comfortable as the limited space would allow. We were assured that our extra weight was, not a problem, as the aircraft was not carrying any bombs on this trip, although she still carried a full, most impressive, complement of weapons.

Our experience of Catalinas was limited to the occasion we had been hastily evacuated from a Mosstroops perimeter on the Sepik River just before the Japs arrived in force. During this drawn out operation all supplies had been brought in by the Cats landing on the river; in itself no mean feat, considering the amount of floating debris being carried along by the swift current, not to mention the crocodiles!

We had, during that operation, had the misfortune to be strafed by a friendly (?) U.S. Catalina — I can still remember it was number 34 — and I had been astounded by its fire-power even though in three passes, from a height of about 150 feet, it failed to hit anything but trees! It was a nasty and unforgettable incident!

The Catalina — a very efficient aircraft — is U.S. built and designated as a Flying Boat, or PBY, and is a Patrol Bomber. It has a wingspan of 104ft and a hull length of 65ft and normally carries a crew of eight and 4000 lbs. of bombs and is powered with two Pratt and Whitney radial engines each of 1200 h.p. It is a true amphibian though normally it uses its body for takeoff and landing on water but, if the occasion arises, can use its wheels and make a ground landing.

It is very comfortable and reliable and renowned for the ability to stay in the air for long periods – as much as 20 hours! However, the aircraft is not noted for its speed and cruises around the 100 knot mark so our journey was going to be rather long and tiring and altogether the distance travelled would be in the vicinity of 1800 miles and by the end of the trip we would be happy to reach Merauke, two days later, and stretch our legs.

Our first stop would be at Townsville – about half way to Merauke – for an overnight stay and then the final hop next day of another 900 miles to our destination.

We arrived at Townsville just as darkness was setting in and were rather surprised to see a rather poor attempt at a blackout although the docks area was darkened. Evidently they weren't expecting any air raids. We were taken ashore by launch and provided with bunks and a good hot meal at an army establishment in the docks area and next morning – the 19th. – were taken back to the aircraft, where the crew, having spent the night on board, already had the engines turning over ready for take off on the leg to Merauke.

This was a new experience for our native constables. They had come to Brisbane by ship and flying was a real adventure for them. For the first part of the trip they were very quiet but once settled down became more adventurous and really enjoyed themselves, although it was still a while before they could be induced to look out from the side blisters! There was much talk among them about the wonders of flying and how they would be able to impress their friends and fellow policemen about their journey in the "balus belong guvman" (government bird) when they returned.

Late in the afternoon, the aircraft arrived at Merauke and landed on the river. From the air on the way in we had a good view of the area and it was not an impressive sight. Merauke appeared to be just a small village, built on a series of mud flats, with several European style houses, which we correctly assumed belonged to the Dutch administration, and some native huts. Another mile farther inland, away from the swampy area, we could see a few rows of army tents which turned out to be our destination.

CHAPTER 5.

DUTCH NEW GUINEA

Merauke is situated on the southern coast of the island of New Guinea and is approximately 40 miles due west of the Papuan/Dutch New Guinea border. It lies at the mouth (delta) of the Merauke River which flows into the Arafura Sea and is some 250 miles north west of the tip of Cape York and before the advent of hostilities, it had been a minor Dutch settlement.

The cluster of olive green tents we saw from the air was indeed the Dutch army camp and this was where we were to stay until ready to depart farther a field. The tents were on a square and level strip of red ground covering a couple of acres. On the northern side of the camp, a small creek running along the edge of a series of low hills, was filled with clear water – rather unusual we thought, as all the other small streams were carrying the muddy overflow from the river. This streamlet was apparently fed by a spring from the hill side and provided water which was pumped to an elevated tank in the middle of the camp. The stream eventually made its way to one of the numerous other waterways that made up the delta and to prevent backflow of the muddy water a weir, made of rocks and cement, had been constructed on the western side of the campsite.

Our welcome was rather less than cordial and we were a little disconcerted by the cool reception we got from the Dutch commandant but put it down to the Dutch, well known, arrogant nature. Nevertheless we were given three, eight man, tents close to the high tank and adjacent to, what they were pleased to call, the ablutions area and were then escorted to the camp mess and given a good hot meal which was very much appreciated. After the meal, and feeling much better, we returned to the tents and found them, on closer inspection, to be in a bad state, with the ground underfoot very wet and messy. Apparently though, and we were pleased to see, the former occupants had liked their comfort as the tents were provided with good types of canvas stretchers which would keep us off the damp and muddy ground. We were particularly grateful for this small piece of refinement in these otherwise extremely rough living conditions. Earlier there must have been quite a large concentration of troops in this area, as indicated by the number of tents, but now only a few of them were in use and they were occupied by Malays, who appeared to be policemen of sorts. Along the southern edge of the camp,

next to the main administration buildings, were half a dozen better looking tents being used by a sprinkling of Dutch servicemen, all O.R.s. After introducing ourselves we found them friendly and quite helpful and almost all bilingual with a good grip of English.

Neville, Sam and myself took one of the tents and the policemen had the other two. Capt. Miller and his two signallers were apparently given quarters elsewhere and quite obviously were more acceptable to the Dutch than our lot.

Our trip had been comfortable, but the meals during the flight had naturally been pretty ordinary and we had been ravenous and really appreciated the nice hot meal and were now looking forward to a good sleep. First thing to do was to get some semblance of order in the tent and we were wondering how to protect our belongings and keep them off the muddy ground until Neville — clever lad — came up with the suggestion that we commandeer a couple of stretchers from a vacant tent to pile our gear on.

Without waiting to ask permission we quickly grabbed a couple of the stretchers and piled all the gear on them and were ready to turn in, fully clothed but, minus boots. There weren't any blankets or other bedding materials provided, just the stretchers! Not that their absence was a problem as we had been in the army long enough to become used to this lack of those small refinements usually found in a family bedroom! Indeed, sleeping on a stretcher was an unheard of luxury!

By this time it was rapidly becoming dark and we were in a hurry to turn in before the daylight was completely gone. In this part of the world once the sun dips below the horizon the light is gone, there being very little twilight, and except for our torches we had no other means of illumination.

Unfortunately, to finish a very ordinary day, just as we settled down, a storm that had been promising all afternoon, decided to let the heavens open and we were deluged with water from the leaking roof and the ground beneath us was flooded. We spent a pretty uncomfortable half hour in almost total darkness, broken only by frequent flashes of lightning, huddled on the stretchers, soaked to the skin, waiting for the storm to finish. Like most tropical storms it was of short duration and we were left with a sodden mess of gear although, thanks to our extra precautions, the important stuff escaped most of the deluge. The stretchers we were using as beds, unlike the tent, proved to be waterproof and very efficiently collected and held the water that came through the roof and had to be turned upside down to drain after the storm abated. It was a bad start but, despite the soaking, we were tired enough to get to sleep and have a reasonable night's rest. The

evening was probably an indication of things to come!

CHAPTER 6.

ON THE OUTER

Next day we were left in no doubt that the Dutch were not happy with our native policemen and showed their displeasure by making them change tents and eat and sleep with the Malay coolies. This uncalled for piece of nastiness was not totally unexpected as we well aware of their arrogance and insensitive treatment of native races under their control. Their superior attitude to anyone not possessing a white skin was well known. They were very much the white masters in their colonies!

Earlier, I wrote they were most unhappy we had even considered bringing native police from the Mandated Territory and were at great pains to let Bob know of their displeasure. But, the policemen were here and we weren't about to send them back! Our relations, at this point, were far from cordial and, in the next few days, we were very much on the outer. The only thing that kept us going was the fact that this operation had the blessings of the Americans, and indeed had been requested by them, and that our allies, the Dutch, could not do much about it except to try to be as unco-operative as possible, which was something they proved to be very good at! It was blatantly obvious they did not want us to carry out any operations in their colony and were determined not to help in any way. Even Bob was given the treatment by not being invited to bunk in the officer's quarters or eat his meals in their mess. He overcame that problem by living in the tent with Capt. John Beatty, our base man, who had been here for several weeks.

There was really very little we could do about the Dutch attitude except wait for further developments. Bob, by this time, was feeling pretty offended and said that if the ill feeling and lack of co-operation from the Dutch continued he would have to get in touch with Proud and explain the situation and see if he could patch up our differences. In the meantime it would be best to ignore them and get on with our preparations for the operation.

The next few days we were busy gathering our final supplies which, fortunately for us in view of the Dutch hostility, had been sent ahead earlier. I spent my time checking the radio, which was a new type, and making doubly sure that it was in good working order and, most importantly, that the dry cell battery which powered the set was new and unused. I found another spare battery in the store which I

would have liked to take along but it was far too heavy and the extra weight would be too much to carry and, if and when needed, it could be dropped along with other supplies.

We were counting on the operation lasting about ten weeks and knew it would need a great deal of careful planning, and thought, especially when supply drops of food, a new radio battery, trade goods for the natives, and perhaps more ammunition, were needed.

Luckily, John Beatty, a former associate of Bob's, was a pre-war officer of the New Guinea service and knew all about the problems of patrolling in this type of country and it was comforting to know that we would be able to depend on him to get everything we considered to be necessary in our air drops. I know Bob had plenty of faith in John!

The supply drops were necessary as it was really not possible to live off the land, even though at times, we would be able to supplement our diet with the likes of taro, "sak sak" (sago) and the occasional pigeon etc. We had found, on other operations, that much of inland New Guinea was surprisingly lacking in things fit to eat or, at least, food that would keep one in good health. This lack especially applied to the heavy inland jungle country. Coastal natives with their gardens in the more open forest country, and able to harvest seafood, are always much more healthy looking and have a far better diet than bush natives who seem to live on mainly foods heavy in starch; and look like it with their numerous sores and scaly skins.

Trade goods were going to be a very important item in gaining the confidence and co-operation of any natives we contacted. One of our main aims was to convince the locals to steer clear of the Japanese and to deny them any assistance and we were pretty sure the trade goods would help to do the trick. Trade goods backed up by treatment for their numerous medical problems were both very important and to this end we would be carrying a good supply of first aid items as well. In fact, anything we were able to do to gain their confidence and get in their "good books" would be well worth the trouble and a big plus towards the success of the operation. It would be difficult enough to fight the Japs so it was very important that we keep the locals friendly, as we could not afford to have them both as enemies.

We had found at other times that almost invariably the local population, in Japanese controlled areas, was pro-Jap. And who could blame them? After all they had to live with the enemy and self-preservation is paramount! Why go out of the way to be difficult when the consequences of non-co-operation could be so devastating?

The trade goods were mostly beads, knives, tobacco, salt, cloth and scrub knives. We carried only a few of the latter because of their weight and they were to be given away only, on very special occasions, as a reward for good service. There was a large quantity of the small multi-coloured beads and a quite a few bangles as we knew from past experience they would be greatly prized by the natives as ornamentation. A handful of the small beads was considered a great treasure! All these articles, of course, meant more weight to carry but were very necessary.

The country we intended to traverse on the way to our objective was very rugged and hilly and the maps showed the majority of the area as unexplored with a very large expanse of swamp where we would be put down and the journey would actually commence. We were to be flown by Catalina and land on this swamp as there was no place in this rugged and heavily wooded area to land wheeled aircraft. Besides, the Catalina was the only plane available and large enough to do the job.

We knew before leaving Australia that our Dutch allies from Merauke had intended to provide one or two fairly large patrols to work in parallel, but separately, from our patrol and indeed we had welcomed this as long as we were to be given a free rein. Because of this we assumed we would be assured of the fullest co-operation and sharing of any information available. How wrong we were as you will read a little later!

Our knowledge of Hollandia and the surrounding area was minimal. We knew it was the capital of Dutch New Guinea and was situated on the northern coast, on Humboldt Bay, about 10 to 15 miles east of the border with the Mandated Territory and, from where we were now situated, was almost five hundred miles of largely unexplored country to the north. That was the sum of our information. Our knowledge of the town itself was zero and we knew absolutely nothing about enemy movements or strengths. Not a very good start!

We were going in blind and were not particularly happy with the situation. Of course, as to be expected, operations like this were never supplied with enough information. But, we knew the Americans must have made many reconnaissance flights over the town to aid them in the coming landing and some of that information should have been passed on and would have been very welcome and, in particular, details of how far inland the Japs had penetrated would have been a big help to us!

Lack of this knowledge, and the complete absence of any reliable maps of the country, added up to the fact that this operation was not going to be a picnic. We would need to use

every scrap of expertise gained in previous operations to make it a success and at the same time were going to have to lean rather heavily on Bob's shoulders and use his great store of knowledge. It was certainly not going to be a cakewalk.

We had been supplied with maps covering the area before departing Brisbane but they had proved to be useless and even the Merauke people had no faith in them! The maps we had were:

Netherlands (Dutch) New Guinea, 1/250,000 sheets:-

BIRI RIVER, HOLLANDIA, IDENBERG RIVER, MEERVLAKTEOOST.

These four maps gave scant and, as we proved later, very inaccurate information of the country south-west of the Sermoi River and made our planning very unsatisfactory.

Prior to leaving, Bob had made an effort to obtain the latest information regarding supplies and drop sites and the route over which we proposed to travel. However, the Dutch people, being so decidedly cool in their attitude towards us, did not make any move to pass on any of this information and we were not given the opportunity to study the photographs and maps. It was made painfully clear that we were regarded as trespassers on their land and that they were not going to aid us in any way! To paraphrase a modern saying : "With allies like these who needed enemies?"

Bob, really fed up and cranky at this denial of any help, as a last resort produced our instructions setting out the mission's objectives by Cdr. Proud. But even this at the time, was looked upon as insufficient to release the required information for our perusal!

The whole thing was bordering on the ridiculous. We knew that the Dutch officers, when introduced in Brisbane and told of our part in the mission, had promised to help as much as necessary. Yet, now we were in Merauke, the same officers were decidedly unhelpful. It was clear we were not wanted and it seemed that the instigator of this sorry affair was O.I.C. Merauke.

This unfriendliness became very much more obvious when two days after we arrived at the camp the Dutch flew a party over the proposed patrol route and Bob was not invited, or even advised, of the flight until after it's return!

Needless to say we found this extremely blatant and un-co-operative attitude most disconcerting especially when we were told they held no instructions to use their aircraft for our food drops. This, of course was the last straw, because

if this was withheld we might as well return to Brisbane! To say we were dismayed at their mindless behaviour would be putting it mildly! I, for one, had never had a particularly high regard for the Dutch armed services and this arrogant treatment really got me going!

But, Bob wasn't going to be beaten and in a last desperate throw of the dice he arranged with John Beatty to signal Brisbane of our problems. This brought about a complete reversal of the Dutch attitude and they became much more helpful, but still a little stand-offish.

We, now, were assured of help with our supply problem. A Dutch Air Force B25 (Mitchell) bomber would do the food drops and we were given the series of photos taken when the B25 had overflown the area, from the base camp to our anticipated destination, and photographed a number of native villages, in more or less, a straight line between the two points. From experience we knew the native villages would, almost always, be situated in a clearing on a hilltop and photos of these were taken as they were considered to be the easiest for the supply aircraft to locate. Each print had its own code number for quick and easy identification.

CHAPTER 7.

THE RADIO

The radio, that most important item, was a new type to me and I spent some time learning to use it. It was an RAAF type, designated ATR4a, and I very quickly realised that it was going to be ideal for the job. All up, it's weight was about 30 lbs. and came in three tin boxes; one, the largest, for the transmitter-receiver; one for the battery and plug in Morse key and microphone and a small tin box for the few spares — mainly peanut valves. Why the mike, earphones and Morse key were contained in the battery box was a bit of a puzzle until I found that there was a speaker provided in the radio container. This totally unnecessary component — at least I thought it was unnecessary — took up a considerable amount of room which could easily have provided space for the mike, key, etc. The extra space then provided in the battery box could have been used for the radio spares thus cutting out one container.

The top cover lifted off and revealed the speaker and the meters that gave a visual indication of power output and battery condition plus the plug in points for the crystal oscillators, key and microphone. There was no place provided for message pads and code book and pencils though I had already made up my mind that the message and code books, for security reasons, would not be left in the radio compartment but carried in my own pack. The two containers, radio and battery pack, were normally connected by a cord when in use but, this could be removed for carrying separately.

The whole instrument inside the case had been well and truly waterproofed and was guaranteed not to give trouble in areas of heavy rainfall and humidity.

In those days, before the advent of biros and the difficulty of providing a supply of ink for a pen, indelible pencils were preferred to ordinary lead pencils because of their resistance to accidental erasure, etc. There were six pencils in the pack and they would be more than enough.

The microphone was fitted with an on/off switch, which was called a 'pressle switch', and was connected via a plug and cord of about 4 ft. in length. The Morse key which was normally jacked into the top of the set could be lifted out by its cord connection and placed anywhere convenient such as a stump, pack, or whatever was available. The whole outfit was designed to be carried on the back and was almost a load on

it's own. It was powered by dry cells and had an output of about ten watts. I knew that such a small output meant that care would have to be taken when erecting an aerial, especially in heavy jungle, and had already decided that a half wave Wyndham, or something similar, should do the trick. Even being on the wrong side of a hill, with this low signal strength, would make transmissions difficult, if not well nigh impossible at times.

Having previously used radios, with a thermionic valve oscillator controlling frequencies, I was well aware of their problems. Changing frequencies with this set, unlike my previous radios, would be simple – just a matter of flicking a switch from one crystal to another. No more fiddling tuning. It was most reassuring to see this set was well supplied with these plug-in quartz crystals which meant it would be very stable and not suffer from frequency wander if handled a little roughly. This was indeed a big plus as one of the native policemen would do the carrying. Our working frequencies were:

(1) 6900 m/cs from 0700 hrs to 1930 hrs daily.
(2) 4101 m/cs from 1930 hrs to 0700 hrs daily.
(3) 4315 m/cs for communication with supply plane.

Callsigns were:-

Ours: 8PV
Link: 4LF

The link station, 4LF, was to be situated on the Idenberg River with Capt. Miller and his two signallers. The schedules were to be twice daily at 0730 and 1615 hrs or as near that time as possible. The link station was to keep a full 24 hour watch and if necessary could be called at any time.

Our link was also to be an outstation of the AIB, with the callsign, VIV, at Finschafen, some 700 kilometres away to the east, and all our messages were to be sent to 4LF and then passed from there to Merauke, 500 kms south. Any intelligence gathered had to be passed to ALAMO FORCE at Finschafen, and after the invasion, to the Task Force. Signalling these distances, especially over the high range to Merauke, would be beyond the range of our small set and we could only hope that our link, 4LF, never ceased to function.

It all seemed pretty straight forward and I was sure the radio would be quite satisfactory over the required distance but wasn't particularly in love with the callsigns as they seemed to be too long and cumbersome and I thought we could well do without the numeral preceding the letters. I made a note to talk with our link about dropping the numeral when

calling. Also, both the call signs would have been much better reversed; i.e. 8VP and 4FL as they would have been so much easier to send and recognise, especially if there was any interference, as there was bound to be. All radiomen know that, if one is using low wattage transmitters with consequent low signal strengths, interference and static are the biggest enemies of clear reception. To me it was patently obvious someone ignorant of signalling by Morse code had allocated the callsigns!

The code to be used was called a "BULL" code and was a double transposition type and easy to handle – or should I say – an operator sitting at a comfortable desk in a good light would find it easy to breeze through the encoding of a message using this code? However, as I well knew from many a past experience, I was to find during the next few months that, quite often, encoding the simplest message would be extremely difficult, especially late at night, when my only protection from the rain would be a leaky groundsheet, shakily supported on four sticks, with a feeble light coming from the flickering flame of a stub of candle! It was on these many occasions I envied the link station, sitting back in their canvas chairs in reasonable comfort, with the rain drumming on the tent roof waiting for my transmission and wondering why my message was later than the scheduled time!

Big time Morse operators will always say that the code is just like another language to learn, and so it is, but a lot depends on conditions! In a well lit office equipped with air conditioning and all modern aids one can read Morse at speeds of 20 to 25 words per minute quite comfortably. But trying to do it in the aforementioned jungle conditions with a small transceiver when you are at the mercy, not only of the weather, but atmospheric conditions which cause all sorts of static and, not to mention, other foreign transmissions which insist on intruding on your receiving frequency, it just becomes plain difficult!

I was well aware of all these problems having had considerable experience with wireless in tanks in the Middle East and infantry pack radios with the 7th. Division in New Guinea. To digress a little further – and after all this is a story of my experiences – on my former unit's way home to Australia, in early 1942, from the M.E., we travelled in the Danish motor ship "Sophocles" and they were short one radio operator and on the call for volunteers I was chosen. It was, for once, an easy way to earn five shillings a day! The lighting was good, the chair comfortable, and the receiver an excellent and very powerful model. What more could one want? It was relatively easy to copy 500 groups of incoming messages which ranged from 15, to sometimes 20, words a minute over a period of 30 to 40 minutes. (To the uninitiated, a group of

five letters is counted as a word).

Also, my point about the call sign being easy to recognise among the welter of other signals coming in was borne out by the Merchant Navy call sign of GBMS (Great Britain Merchant Service) that was used on the ship. Bear with me and I will endeavour to show you how an easily recognisable call sign means such a lot to the identification of an incoming signal. The code for GBMS is read as DAH DAH DIT, DAH DIT DIT DIT, DAH DAH, DIT DIT DIT. Try saying this by emphasising the dahs slowly and the dits as quickly as you can and you will see immediately it has a certain swing and rhythm that can be easily recognised even over intruding static and other transmissions. This is an excellent example of the type of easily recognised callsign I wanted and just reversing our proposed callsigns would have made for much the same easy and quick recognition. Once the callsign is recognised and the pitch of the Morse note is fixed in your head you are on your way to successful copying.

The reader may think I am going on about the radio but on these operations it is fair to say that the signalling is most important and lack of communication with base almost certainly means disaster. Strict adherence to scheduled transmission times is also extremely important to the success of any operation and, as information sent concerning enemy movements was the main reason for this operation's existence in the first place, we could not afford to have the radio out of action at any time. And don't forget we also depended on the radio for food, etc as well. Without it we would starve!

CHAPTER 8.

ON THE WAY

And so it was on the 20th March, 1944, when all plans had been finalised and all needs satisfied we were flown with Millar and his team, again by Dutch Catalina, to an in-land camp, north of the central mountains, on the Idenberg River. Here, a Dutch army officer, Capt. Van Eichoud, had already established a base camp for forward operations. The camp was situated on the north bank, where the river by virtue of a bend, formed a sort of a backwater and an ideal place for the Catalina to drop anchor in the relatively still water away from the fast flowing main stream.

Capt. Millar and his two radio operators, Tas Bailey and Jeff Atkins, were also offloaded and wasted no time in setting up the link station. Tas Bailey, as the nickname indicates, hailed from Tasmania and Atkins from South Australia. Bailey was an old N.G. hand and obviously was very competent and used to radio work in the wilds having been engaged as a radio operator with A.I.B. on an operation behind Wewak early in 1943. Their gear was impressive. A large collapsible table, three canvas chairs and folding bunks were erected in a sizable green tent and the radio equipment installed on the table. From what I had seen of the Coast Watchers radios it seemed to be a similar outfit and was quite bulky and made our small radio look insignificant. If the camp was under attack, though this would be highly unlikely, the set would have to be abandoned or wrecked as it was much too large to carry away.

Power for the radio was provided by wet batteries and a charging arrangement in the shape of a small portable petrol Briggs and Stratton motor was supplied to keep them charged. Because of the necessity of keeping a 24 hour watch, the radio had, as one of its components, a separate speaker. A speaker is preferred to earphones in this case as the operator, as long as he remains in earshot, is not tethered to the radio as he would be if using earphones and can easily hear incoming callsigns when engaged in other duties.

When everything was installed, and contact made with Merauke, I suggested to the operators that I would like to do away with the figure in front of the call sign. They agreed it was a nuisance and were happy to omit the numeral but were against reversing the callsigns and I had to be satisfied with the shortened versions and was not overly put out with their refusal to reverse them.

This base camp was ideally situated in very heavy jungle country alongside the river, a large, fast flowing stream very much like the Sepik, but flowing in the opposite direction, to the northwest. It empties into the South Pacific Ocean at Tandjung (Cape) D'Urville and, like the Sepik, is subject to frequent flooding. It is bordered on both banks by very thick jungle growth and for the most part flows through very hilly and rugged country. At this point the river was about 60 yards wide and ideal for landing a Catalina provided the pilot made a preliminary sweep to detect floating objects in the water. After landing it was only necessary to taxi round the bend into comparatively still water.

It certainly was a safe camp, being well concealed from any searching aircraft by the overhanging canopy of tree branches and was much too far inland to be worried by the Japs and was really only accessible by aircraft, such as Catalinas, able to land on water.

Our first task was to gather more of the available information about the type of country and the route we were likely to take on the patrol from maps that Van Eichoud possessed. He was much more obliging and helpful than his mates at Merauke – thank goodness – but the information was sketchy and, more or less, identical with the maps we already had. Most of the area ahead was stamped on the map as – RELIEF DATA INCOMPLETE – which indicated it was largely unexplored. Although it was pleasing to see that included in this unexplored wilderness were several small, named, native villages close to our proposed route.

The actual distance we were being asked to cover appeared to be not much more than seventy or eighty miles as the crow flies but, as the AIF soldiers had found on the Kokoda Track, we weren't crows and therefore lacked the gift of flight! In this type of country, where one row of hills follows another in quick succession, seemingly forever, the actual distance straight across, from one hilltop to the next, is relatively small and appears to be only little more than a stone's throw away. But, when the attempt is made to cover the distance on foot, it quite often turns out to be a day's march, and an extremely difficult one, especially when it is raining and the ground underfoot is muddy! One has to be very fit to travel in this country. Still, it was nothing new and we were well aware of these difficulties and all pretty fit and barring accidents thought we would be able to handle the terrain okay.

The next job was to re-pack the gear. The hills, mostly, would be two to four thousand feet above sea level and every pound weight would count on the days ahead. Only items absolutely essential to success could be carried. On these

operations the temptation to pack small, non-essential, items is strong and this is where self control and previous experience comes in and the decision is made to leave such items behind. We were always warned that unnecessary and valuable articles should not be carried but left behind in a safe place. To this end, and before leaving HQ, it was required to make a list of all personal possessions left behind on a form titled: INVENTORY OF PERSONAL EFFECTS — which gave a list of the articles and followed with the words:

> The following is an inventory of the personal effects of the late — Joseph Blow; QX 11111; Sgt. FELO.

This was done in case of the death of the operative so that the belongings were then returned to the next of kin.

Every serviceman is well aware that arms and ammo become extremely heavy, especially in hilly country. But as they were a necessity, even though we had been advised to avoid contact with the enemy at all times, other items had to be reduced to a bare minimum. On this patrol we would be continually moving and would not, at any time have a permanent camp, so everything would have to be carried on our backs. It only takes a couple of days march, with a too heavy pack, to convince one that some items carried are not really necessary!

Food. Food for the constables would be bully beef and rice and included in their pack was stick tobacco and newspaper for rolling — an important item. They preferred this to our compo rations and I must admit that sometimes their food appealed to me more than ours. The only good thing about our rations was that they provided, as well as food, items like cigarettes, tea, chewing gum, army chocolate and small toilet articles such as razor blades and tooth powder. The razor blades were always handy but I did not have any intention of using them for shaving having made up my mind to grow a beard for the duration.

For cooking we had been supplied with a nest of American billy cans, the biggest one holding about one gallon of water though we did not anticipate having to cook much on this trip except perhaps rice and the occasional native vegetables such as taro. We each carried the issue Australian army mess tins with the folding handle and these could be also used to boil water and cook in, if necessary.

Arms and ammo, first aid kit, tinned wax matches, compass, a U.S. army poncho and hammock each, all to be carried, meant we would be well loaded. Excess baggage such as cameras, extra clothing, toiletries etc, were not even considered. We had to be ruthless and leave such things

behind. And, most importantly, items that could cause identification such as paybooks and diaries had to be left in Brisbane for safekeeping.

We all had a choice of weapons; the main ones being either a .30 calibre U.S. carbine or Owen gun. Someone had suggested a Thompson would be worth taking but that advice was ignored. Sure, the Thompson had a greater hitting power but its lack of reliability, ungainliness and the extra weight of the larger calibre ammunition meant it could not compete with the Owen. I'd had a bit to do with Americans, and their much talked about Thompsons, and the way they used (wasted ?) ammo meant they really needed a mule train following to keep up the supply!

The carbine was a different kettle of fish and looked very attractive and had the additional advantage of being light with a fifteen round magazine, and semi-automatic action. The Owen, with the iron skeleton butt, was around the same weight, and with the magazine fully loaded, just a little heavier but just as easy to carry. Personally I thought the Owen was the more reliable and robust of the two and I chose it because I knew its worth. The carbine had the advantage of a longer range and was also easy to carry but, in the type of country we were anticipating, a weapon with an effective range of, at the most 50 yards, would do the job. Very rarely does one encounter any greater distances of clear view in heavy jungle. Neville and Sam also preferred Owens while Bob decided on the carbine. The native constables were to carry carbines and not their usual .303 rifles. A spare Owen and Carbine and two pump-action 12 bore shotguns – very handy, among other uses, for shooting pigeons etc, for food – were carried by the policemen.

Each of the Owen gunners carried an additional five full magazines as well as the one on the weapon. Actually we were using the double, reversed ended magazines welded together and I always thought the two fully loaded mags on the gun tended to spoil the balance, but at least they gave those extra rounds before reloading. The U.S. carbines also had five additional magazines plus an extra fifty rounds each to compensate for the smaller capacity of their magazines. The ever present problem with machine pistols and semi-automatics is the inclination to discharge more rounds than are really necessary and they can be really very wasteful if not handled correctly – something which is not always possible in the heat of battle. The magazines were carried in the standard army issue pouches and were not one of my favourite pieces of webbing but had to do as they were the only ones available.

The shot guns were to use number two and three shot cartridges as this size shot was considered best for a number

of reasons, but mainly because they were an excellent offensive and defensive cartridge with great hitting power.

We were also carrying short barrelled Lugers, that had been captured in the M.E., and liked them as they used the same 9mm. cartridges as the Owens although they had one disadvantage in that the spent cartridge very occasionally failed to eject. The cartridge case was the cause of the ejection trouble as the pistol was designed to take a parabellum round and this type of cartridge was not available. We considered this to be only a minor disadvantage as the Luger was only a fall back weapon anyway! I carried mine in a shoulder holster – much more comfortable than on a belt. In Brisbane I had been lucky enough to get a skeleton holster from a gunsmith. On an earlier operation we had tried the longer barrel on the Lugers and, with the wooden backed holster, used them as machine pistols but they weren't popular and being semi-automatic weren't in the same class as the Owen anyway.

We were really very lucky in being able to choose our firearms and it was one of the many advantages of serving in this type of unit. In my previous 7th. Division unit one carried in the way of arms what the establishment directed whether you wanted it or not. In my case, being a wireless operator in a tank, I was obliged to carry a .45 revolver – a cumbersome weapon at best –I would have much preferred a smaller .38 calibre revolver. Also, in the infantry, you are given no choice unless you have the good luck to be a Bren Gunner or one of the few in each platoon to carry a machine pistol such as an Owen or Thompson. The rest of the platoon have no option but the .303 rifle; excellent as it may have been. But it doesn't take long to find out that this single shot weapon lags well behind in the confidence stakes when the chips are really down – especially when used in close quarter encounters. Advancing under cover of Owen gun fire is ever so much more easy than the single shot rifle that has to be cocked after every round. You may say it only takes one round to kill an enemy. True enough! But in the heat of the moment who is counting? An Owen for me every time!

Lastly, we were issued with Weldrods; a most, to say the least, peculiar weapon which looked for all the world like a twelve inch piece of one inch waterpipe! It was a silenced (very) .22 calibre single shot pistol and fired a .22 short cartridge with doubtful accuracy, even at short range! The magazine acted as the hand grip and the trigger was without the benefit of a guard and the whole thing was not very impressive and personally I thought, that because of its questionable value and weight it would be the first thing to be dumped! And dump them we did except for one, which was kept just in case it was ever needed for some close quarter

action.

Most of us favoured machetes, or scrub knives, but I found a Malay army cutlass preferable as the hand guard offered much better protection against wait-a-while vines. I carried mine in a scabbard on my belt and, at first, it proved to be most awkward because it was longer than a machete and tended to tangle with my legs, but I soon got used to the extra length and found it just as effective as the machetes.

Everyone carried their favourite knives, usually the commando variety, though I for one didn't intend getting close enough to a Jap to use mine! An Owen gun, I knew, would beat a knife anytime as it certainly has a greater range!

Watches. Bob and I were issued with U.S. army Waltham pocket watches, which looked to be ideal, but turned out to be next to useless in the wet and had to be replaced twice! Then, unlike nowadays, it was apparently pretty difficult to waterproof watches! I had the same problem with a Waltham wrist watch when dumped in the surf off the coast of Borneo on a later operation.

Compasses. Each carried an army issue prismatic compass, which proved to be excellent.

Hand grenades. Something that no soldier should be without, were, because of their weight, limited to one each. A pity, but they do get pretty heavy after a while and they do make a lot of noise when used! We had enough in the ammo pouches as it was and I, for one, being the careful type, had never been keen on the way they were carried, by the Yanks, through the ring on the pin clip!

A valuable piece of equipment was the U.S. army lightweight nylon hammock with waterproof top and mosquito netting complete with Zip fasteners to close the netting. But, we soon found out for safety sake, the Zips were never closed in case of a surprise attack, as they would prove a hindrance when a speedy exit was needed. The hammocks were a quick way to set up somewhere to sleep and keep out of the incessant rain and much better than sleeping on the ground among the leeches. Two trees was all that was needed and they were always in abundance. The constables weren't provided with hammocks but instead each carried a largish waterproof groundsheet and a light wool blanket and always seemed to be able to keep themselves dry no matter what the conditions!

Spare wool socks and half a towel each and the jungle green shirt and trousers we stood up in was considered to be sufficient. No underclothes. The only piece of luxury (?) equipment was a U.S. army nylon windcheater with the woollen

lining removed. The good old army slouch hats were worn though I often look back and think something like the fatigue hats that are worn now would have been much better as the slouch hats proved to be a real menace in thick vine scrub!

The policeboys had khaki shirts and shorts and lap laps. They were barefooted and preferred it that way as their feet were not used to boots, and when one examined the soles of their feet with the hard skin almost a quarter inch thick, we could only agree that, in their case, boots were really not necessary. Their load was not as great as ours as far as personal equipment went but they were expected to carry the radio, extra weapons plus most of the food. After a food drop they would be pretty well loaded for the next few days until we managed to ease their load by eating some of the excess.

All gear was carried in individual U.S. army packs, rather than the regulation Australian army issue, as the U.S. pack was a lot more comfortable on the back, and could hold quite a bit more equipment as well. Though, as we all knew when first put on, all packs feel comfortable but after a while, when fully loaded as ours would be, even the best of them start to chafe and become uncomfortable.

It is often said a soldier marches on his stomach. True enough! But, he also uses his boots! For the Europeans (for Europeans, read whites) in the party, boots were certainly one of the most important items of equipment. We knew there were a lot of steep hills ahead to be climbed, and that there would be plenty of wet weather and mud as well, so we had to choose the type of boot carefully. On an earlier operation the U.S. army, calf length, canvas boots had been tried and found most unsatisfactory, although before testing they seemed to be ideal for the job. The rubber soles which were deeply grooved would put some truck tyres to shame and looked to be the ideal boot but, while they were excellent for climbing hills when the ground was dry, they were hopeless in the mud once the tread filled up! The same applied to the normal U.S. leather boot with rubber sole.

The good old Aussie army boot seemed to fill the bill with one modification. We bought a quantity of brass L-shaped screw on studs from a local bootmaker and screwed them into the soles and they proved to be just the shot when combined with the long lace up U.S. army canvas gaiters. They were hardwearing and very robust and after being given a few coatings of dubbin (grease) were well nigh indestructible.

First aid kits were a personal thing and were complete with most requirements such as bandages, sulpha tablets and atebrin, aspirin etc. Each of the kits contained two syrettes of morphine, in case of severe sickness or wounds and,

privately, I thought they could be used as a lethal dose if needed! Our friends, in a sister unit, "Z" Special, were issued with what was known as "L" pills – cyanide tablets – in case of capture. We thought they were bunging it on a little!

Chapter 9.

HAZARDS

In an operation of this type, where help is hundreds of miles away and evacuation is out of the question, sick or badly wounded members are very much a problem as the patrol is simply not equipped to cope. In the circumstances we do the best we can, but what can you really do, for instance, with someone who is badly wounded, loses a limb, or is shot in the chest or other vital part? He is totally disabled and can't go on and can't be sent back to base or cared for by the rest of the party. A predicament to be avoided! Those days one could not call up a chopper to pick up the seriously wounded!

So what do you do when you are two or three hundred miles from your friends? I leave it to your imagination! All sorts of plans for such emergencies can be made beforehand but I fear that if and when the time came for a decision of this magnitude no one would be eager to abandon a comrade. A very tough decision to make!

Before going on operations, of this type, all personnel were made well aware of what could become of them if this sort of situation arose. Success of the operation comes first, at just about, any price! Fortunately, for us, on all our operations we did not have to make this decision, as we were never placed in this predicament – thank goodness! We came close several times but each time was able to call up a Catalina to land on a river and evacuate the wounded. If the situation arose on this operation there would not be the remotest chance of rescue!

Chapter 10.

READY

Finally, when all the equipment had been doubly checked and made ready for the long and arduous journey, the Cat again arrived from Merauke, and on the 22nd March, 1944, took us for a further 20 minute flight to an uncharted swamp, some seventy miles almost due south of Hollandia.

Viewed from the air, the swamp – for some reason we called it Van Rees lake – looked rather forbidding and appeared to cover an enormous area. It was bounded on three sides by hills of varying heights and on the north side, towards Hollandia, lay the catchment area of creeks and low lying jungle. Ahead of that rose a series of low ranges fading into the northern horizon.

The lake was much bigger than expected and we found out later that it had grown considerably in area since the last recce due to torrential rains! It was most disturbing to see the trees and undergrowth standing deeply in water for a considerable distance to the north, our proposed direction of travel. A most worrying sight!

The pilot circled a couple of times looking for a clear landing space among the small islands that dotted the deeper water and during the landing preparations we sighted the Dutch party, led by Capt. Van der Vien, who had left the base camp the day before. They were sitting in rubber dinghies and appeared to be having difficulty locating the shore. We were soon to find out why!

Eventually the pilot was satisfied that a landing could be made in a clear spot and the aircraft settled with little room to spare and under power circled the swamp for almost an hour in an endeavour to find the shore. Here we encountered the first of a series of setbacks. We had decided, before leaving the river, that we would first land on the lake and then taxi as close as possible to firm ground and wade to the shore carrying our gear. Clearly we could see this was not possible and we were at a loss to decide the next move.

Chapter 11.

THE SWAMP

There was an abundance of islands of all sizes, some only a few yards square and only a few feet apart, and they were mostly covered with grass and small shrubby trees. The water looked to be fairly shallow and we thought we may be able to hop and wade from island to island to the shore and, with that idea in mind, Bob picked one of the larger islands and jumped from the blister of the Cat, fully laden, pack and all, expecting to land on firm ground. But, to his dismay, he met with very little resistance, to his not inconsiderable weight, and quickly sank to his shoulders and was in danger of disappearing altogether but luckily was close enough to be quickly dragged back into the aircraft along with many gallons of water and grass! This, our first setback, was one of many more to come, and certainly something we had not been led to expect!

It soon became apparent that, although the islands looked solid and substantial, appearances were very deceptive for they proved to be nothing but matted grass and small trees growing on top of the water and were light enough to be moved around aimlessly by every little wind shift. The grass had a rather large hollow stem and resembled the papyrus reed that grew in the Nile River in Egypt. The portion above water was quite dried out and it extended below the waterline to the roots for a couple of feet and was particularly buoyant. When pushed below the surface it bobbed up immediately. They were similar to floating islands we had encountered, during the previous operation, in the Sepik River area, though somewhat smaller.

A number of other islands were tried, very carefully this time, but without success, and by doing so we made our next problem. The draft from the Cat's propellers caused many of the smaller islands to close up round the aircraft effectively blocking further movement! Try as he might the pilot couldn't get the aircraft free. His evasive tactics only served to pack the islands in more closely!

Lt. Bruin, not to mention the rest of us, was becoming increasingly worried that the aircraft could be permanently trapped if he continued and as a last resort the engines were shut down in the hope the islands would float away. But of course they didn't! We sat there now completely packed in by trees and grass and before long it became patently obvious

there was only one solution and that was for us to get into the water and push and pull the aircraft until it was free — not an easy task in the deep water — and very exhausting and frustrating as well!

Even when freed, and in clear water, the pilot was not prepared to restart the engines for fear the Cat became trapped once more. He asked us to turn the aircraft around and push it out toward the open water — again not an easy task with a heavy aircraft as the water was now much deeper — but we eventually managed to manoeuvre it into the clear.

We could see the pilot (Lt. Bruin) had had enough, and who could blame him for being worried? He said he was sorry but was unwilling to further risk his aircraft and, as it did not seem possible to get any closer to shore, we would have to use the aircraft's rubber dinghy and get ashore as best we could.

His suggestion appeared to be the only possible solution to our predicament and we surely would manage comfortably with the large dinghy these aircraft carried. With a normal crew of eight one would expect to see a rather large inflatable. But, once more we had another set back! When the crew produced the bulky red pack and tossed it into the water, where it rapidly inflated, we were expecting to see a large rubber boat unfold but were very much dismayed to see only a smallish red dinghy materialise. It certainly was not the regulation-sized dinghy. The pilot was quick to explain that they had, a few weeks before, been forced to use their dinghy in a somewhat similar situation and had been unable to replace it. It was all they had and we would have to do the best we could with what was available.

Not half as sorry as we were; that's for sure! As the dinghy was far too small to carry all the members of the party, plus the gear, we would have to make other plans.

Perhaps, as the islands were already floating, we could use two or three smaller ones to carry the gear and push them ahead of us. We developed this idea a little more by planning to spread the constable's collection of groundsheets over the grass with the gear placed thinly on top. It was certainly worth trying. So we put the idea to the test and tried to move a small island a short distance through the water and failed miserably. It was easy enough work to move the thing without much trouble but it would only move in every direction except the right one. It proved to have a mind of its own and a mulish objection to travelling in the direction we needed.

Back to square one we moved and decided the best and safest plan would be to use the dinghy in stages and ferry as

many of the party as possible, with their packs, to shallow water, leave them there, and then one could bring the dinghy back for the gear and the other members. This appeared to be the safest plan and one calculated to keep the important gear dry. It would be far too risky to try and carry all the party and gear in one load. Some would have to swim alongside and, as the water was deep, this was asking too much of some of the party.

Time was getting on and we wanted to reach firm ground during daylight so the six policemen with their packs were loaded in the dinghy and Neville volunteered to do the rowing by using just a stern oar. He said he would be able to handle it on his own. Off they went, all crowded in a heap with Neville using the oar at the stern, looking anything but safe, and we watched, praying the water would become shallow enough in the next few hundred yards. Every so often we could see Anis checking the water depth with the spare oar until finally the dinghy disappeared from sight. Almost immediately we heard Neville shouting that the water was a little under three feet deep where they were and he was going to disembark the policemen and return. This was good news and we then got busy and readied the rest of the gear to be loaded from the port blister of the Cat. There was still a goodish amount of equipment, arms and ammo, radio and battery, and our packs, for the dinghy to carry.

Shortly, Neville came into view and we were pleased to see him making such a good fist of moving the dinghy, even though a couple of times he became entangled with an island.

Back alongside the Cat, once more, he manoeuvred into position and we quickly loaded the rest of the gear. This time there was enough room for two to ride in the dinghy and row and Bob and I would swim alongside hanging to the rope loops provided while Sam would use the other paddle. I, ever mindful of the radio, suggested, to be on the safe side, that we wrap the radio, battery and spares in a couple of the nylon hammocks in case of accidents.

Our prospects of clearing the swamp were improving with this plan, though we were feeling anything but happy with the situation and were particularly worried that we may be caught in deeper water when night fell. Our careful planning had not foreseen us having this difficulty reaching the shore. The operation, so far, had got off to a very bad start, and we were feeling pretty low but, we had trained long and hard for this occasion and hadn't come all this way for nothing and were certainly not returning to base. Anything but that!

Bob asked the pilot if he would, after take off, fly a little to the north and try to pick the shortest distance to

dry land and to fly in that direction and waggle his wings as an indication. He agreed and we were ready to go. We waved farewell to the crew of the Cat, knowing that in a short while they would be back in their camp and tonight would be sleeping in comfortable beds with never a care! Goodness only knows where we would be, but at a guess we would still be stuck in this cursed swamp!

We watched the take off. The plane turned, taxied, and after a longish run took off. It swung to the north and flew in a half circle, hunting for the best route, then back over us and again set course straight northwards and waggled the wings and Bob took a compass sighting of the direction. The plane turned, this time to the south, flew over us, dipped its wings in farewell and headed for home.

Chapter 12.

GETTING ASHORE

First, we had to get away from the islands, and this turned out to be pretty tricky as they seemed to be alive and had the nasty habit of positioning themselves in our path and even when negotiated wanted to follow in our wake! Neville on the first trip had not had this trouble and we were at a loss as to why they were now acting like this. Finally we came to the conclusion that the extra drag was caused by us hanging to the side rope loops. We tried hanging on to the rear and this improved progress slightly and markedly improved the steering. After half an hour of this frustratingly slow movement we suddenly emerged into clearer and shallower water and there before us were the policemen waiting. A clear channel could be seen ahead and we correctly guessed that, pre-flooding, this must be one of the many creeks flowing into the swamp. In the belief that, if this opening was followed, we would eventually reach dry land or, at least lead us in the right direction, we changed bearings and set out again with the policemen, Bob and myself, wading alongside.

So now we waded and pushed and tugged the dinghy, in what we were almost certain was the right direction to the shore, and found with great relief, that after about half an hour of very slow progress, the going became a great deal easier in the thigh deep water. When the end of the creek was reached we found ourselves among small trees and undergrowth and progress again became very much slower.

The water was warm and very clear but this didn't prevent some of the party suffering from the effects of the long immersion and they were rapidly becoming exhausted and needed help. The water was still thigh deep and wading was becoming very tiring. Looking around one could clearly see fatigue mirrored in their faces and clearly rest was needed. Bob called a halt to the struggle and gratefully we stopped wrestling with the dinghy and sought the support of the many small trees that were now impeding our progress. Ten minutes of this standing around resting sufficed to give us enough energy to renew the struggle and we again fell to the task, though somewhat reluctantly! I say reluctantly, because we had become a pretty disillusioned group by this time and really needed something in the way of good luck to re-kindle our hopes!

Still, and despite this, we determinedly struggled on. I

remember, at the time, marvelling at the amount of punishment the human frame can stand when there is no other possible alternative but to keep going! Here we were, a sorry wet and bedraggled muddy bunch of humanity, in a seemingly hopeless situation, with darkness falling rapidly, trying to find some dry, or if not dry, at least reasonably solid footing, and there was not one complaint to be heard. Plenty of cursing, to be sure, but I think a little cursing always helps in these circumstances! Our only desire was to press on and rid ourselves of this watery and muddy hellhole!

And this determination paid off as, before darkness set in, we finally had made enough headway to be able to stand, to everyone's relief, a little over knee deep in the water. But here, once again, we seemed to be stumbling from problem to problem in this watery wilderness. Having overcome one obstacle, we were now stuck with another. The nearer we got to dry land the deeper the deposit of silt became. We were now sinking deeply in the mud! Boots were filled with the fine silt and causing all sorts of chafing problems with our feet which were already pretty sore from their long immersion in the water. Progress, if anything, was even more difficult as we were slipping and sliding all over the place and were only saved from disaster by the plentiful growth of small trees. Our packs were making us top heavy and clumsy and often someone would only remain upright by making a last desperate clutch at a tree trunk to save from falling into the mud and slush. Those of us unlucky enough to be bringing up the rear were ploughing through a thick muddy slime that covered us from head to toe. I, for one, was wishing for deeper water in an effort to get rid of the stinking muck and hoping the awful conditions wouldn't last much longer. But, unhappily they did last for another quarter of a mile or so. Perhaps the only consolation was that now we were not going to drown in the deeper water. Break a leg or arm perhaps, by falling over, but not drown! Small comfort!

It was now much harder to push the dinghy and battle the bottom and our progress was not helped by the many small trees that had to be negotiated. Some had to be lopped below the waterline to allow further progress and it had become necessary to station a man in front of the boat to make sure that the stumps of the lopped saplings didn't hole the bottom. At this point we decided to abandon the dinghy as clearly it had outlived its usefulness and was rapidly becoming a liability.

So, with some reluctance, as we would now be much more disadvantaged by the additional weight, the gear was unloaded, the radio was given to Anis to look after, and we shouldered packs and waded through the gathering darkness and very soon had our second bit of good luck. There was a moon. Not a full

moon, but plenty bright enough to see by, and then finally, about three hours after sunset with the water level just below knee height, a mud flat above water was reached.

A spot to rest, at last! But what an awful resting place it turned out to be. The bank was barely large enough for us all and there was no chance of lying down for fear of sinking in the slimy mud. A fallen tree trunk bisected the bank and this gave some of us a resting place of sorts. So we rested (?), some sitting on packs and some perched on the log, wet through and covered with mud, and spent a most miserable night besieged by millions of mosquitoes and constantly thinking that a nice hot cup of tea and a bite to eat would be very welcome.

At least we could smoke. That is, we could smoke if we had any dry tobacco and luckily three of the constables had unopened tins! Those days tobacco came in sealed tins and amazingly Anis had somehow kept some thin white paper dry and this enabled us to satisfy our craving and forestall the hunger pangs. The wax matches, thank goodness, ignited without much trouble. You may laugh at the desire for a smoke but I can assure you it was most welcome. We just sat and waited for the dawn, wrapped in our own thoughts, too miserable even for conversation.

Our one consolation was that we were fairly safe from observation as our information indicated the Japanese had not penetrated this far west in this area. Sam stated the obvious when he said that no Jap in his right mind would come near the place anyway! This observation met with general agreement! Only silly 'bloody' Australians and Dutchmen would come here!

Just on daybreak we heard voices in the distance, and of course immediately thought the worst and kept very quiet. When it became light enough we were greatly relieved to see it was not a Jap patrol but Capt. Van der Vien and his party, still with their rubber rafts, which we could see were very much bigger than our small one, some several hundred yards from where we had spent the night. They had not seen us and Bob asked Neville to wade across and let them know we were nearby. Neville approached and when a little closer shouted out to let them know he was coming, much to their surprise, he said.

It was significant that the Dutch party were much better equipped with dinghies and we put that down to their prior knowledge of the difficulties that would be encountered in the swamp. This, we thought, was just another example of their non-co-operation and bloody mindedness!

In view of the treatment we had been shown at Merauke, we

were not overjoyed with their willingness to dump their dinghies and temporarily combine parties until we cleared the swamp. Their party was so much larger than ours and consisted of several Dutch officers and N.C.O.s, who spoke good English, and about a dozen Malay policemen with a good number of coolies who were being used as porters.

Feeling a whole lot better after a meal of tinned 'bully' beef, our first since leaving the aircraft, we donned muddy packs and continued, once more, to plough through the mud flats, all the time wondering if the swamp would ever end. It was extremely difficult to make much headway and I for one was praying for some hard dry ground to give my feet a little rest from the chafing effect of the constant immersion in the muddy water. I could feel what seemed to be a couple of big blisters around my heels and guessed the others would be saddled with the same problem. Even a few square yards above water would be heaven!

We could see by the waist high debris left on the trees that the water level had receded by about three feet and were thankful that the operation had not begun a few weeks earlier.

The Dutch party, after a few hours travel, in their wisdom, reckoned we were going in the wrong direction and decided to go their own way. We, thankfully gave no argument, and were only too glad to see them depart as we had become fed up with the incessant chatter of the coolies and were already regretting the decision to combine parties. The coolies were all criminals and had been collected from the jail at Tanah-merah and were being used as porters as a way of serving their prison sentences. The soldiers and Malay policemen carried only their weapons and radio and the coolies carried the rest of the gear. What an army! We thought this particular party was far too large for their own mobility and, while they were fortunate to have coolies carry their food and gear, we were greatly disadvantaged by their lack of progress.

We spent a second night in the god-forsaken swamp, though this time were greatly bucked to find ourselves among trees large enough to rig hammocks and allow us to get out of the mud and water and have the added protection from the thousands of mosquitoes and leeches. A much better night although the mud from our clothes, boots and bodies certainly gave the hammocks a lived in look! For safety's sake we had previously agreed that when sleeping in the hammocks we should also take on board all our gear. This, as you can imagine, left little room for our bodies!

At first light, after a quick meal, and feeling somewhat stiff and cramped, we continued on our way until about 2pm. when Bob called a much needed halt. We had been walking (?)

the whole time in foot deep slimy mud, slipping and sliding and occasionally falling over in hidden holes or tripping on tree roots, and the going had been very difficult. Strangely the mosquitoes had gone and we were now beset by hordes of leeches. They were everywhere, in the mud, in the trees, and in the water. I do not exaggerate when I say they were in the millions. Even a momentary pause would see them advancing on all sides and try as we might we were unable to keep them at bay. They invaded our bodies from every angle, backs, arms and legs and even through the eyelet holes in our boots, where they gorged themselves unseen on our blood! The policemen were lucky as they were barefoot and could see the invaders and deal with them. I couldn't help wondering how they managed to survive as, except for us, there was no sign of any animals or birds for them to feed on!

There did not seem to be any end to the mud and, to increase our worries, we were now ploughing through heavier undergrowth and larger trees and visibility had decreased to about ten yards. The thought that we might be approaching areas patrolled by the Japs caused us to try and keep our movements as quiet as possible but with very little success.

Finally, in desperation, Bob sent Sabi, a policeboy, to climb one of the taller trees to see if there was a way out of this mess. Up he went to about 30 feet from the ground and from this vantage point called out that he could see a small hill to the northeast. This was the news we were waiting for, and with high hopes and renewed vigour we immediately took off in that direction and found in a few more hundred yards that we were gradually walking up a slight slope on to firm ground.

Chapter 13.

TERRA FIRMA

What a relief! At last we had solid going underfoot and to celebrate we managed, with the wax matches, to light a fire near a small creek and have a very welcome mug of tea and some tinned rations. Next, we attempted to kill two birds with the one stone and to clean ourselves of the mud and leeches by bathing fully clothed in the water but, to our amazement, even the creek was full of leeches and we hastily retreated up the bank! We found most of the pests so engorged with blood that they were the size of a little finger and quite unable to move and could see why the early physicians had used them for blood letting. They were most efficient at the job!

After a rest, and a search and destroy operation on the leeches by applying a burning twig or lighted cigarette to their rear ends, we took off again and soon came upon another small creek. Along the northern bank we found fresh prints, made by bare human feet, and shortly afterwards made contact with two primitive natives who almost died of fright seeing such a gathering of strange people in their bush! They carried bows and arrows but seemed much too terrified to think of using them! They looked and dressed (?) the same as the Sepik natives and our police boys got quite excited.

The locals were badly frightened, and wanted to run, but the policemen quickly headed them off and brought them back and we managed to quieten them, after a while, with presents of trade goods. Surprisingly they seemed to have a smattering of the Malay language and with this, and some sign language, Sam arranged for them to guide us to a small village nearby. They called the village Lereh.

Chapter 14.

A VILLAGE

This was more good news! We were pleased to see that this village was on our map. We had proved the Dutch party wrong and were on the right track, but with still a long way to go. From Lereh we calculated, as the crow flies, it was at least another sixty or seventy miles to Hollandia.

We were surprised to see the village consisted of a couple of native huts in a sad state of repair and only a few males. There were no women or children and we thought they would be in the bush hiding and wouldn't appear until it was safe to do so. Although the natives called the village Lereh we were doubtful as we had expected something a little bigger to warrant a name on the map.

With a lot of talk, and distribution of trade goods in the form of beads and a little cloth, we eventually convinced the natives we meant no harm and gradually a few more emerged from the bush until there were ten males but still no women or children, which was puzzling.

They were very interested in the trade goods, especially the salt and brightly coloured beads and bangles. The salt turned out to be the major attraction, as Bob knew it would be. Before leaving base he had insisted on including a five pound tin of cooking salt with the trade goods and this proved to be a real winner! He knew that salt was almost unknown by inland natives and that it would be much in demand once they had a taste. It was curious to see them, from a distance of some yards, trying to suck the salt from the container!

A couple of the new arrivals, who also spoke a little pidgin Malay, had been in contact with Japanese soldiers. They were able to assure us that while they had been visited, from time to time, there were no Japs in the immediate vicinity at present. We were also told that the real village of Lereh was some ten miles to the northwest with another small village named Hiwagen in between. These men had come from the real Lereh and were in the habit of visiting and staying in the ramshackle huts while looking for food in their garden by the creek.

Our police boys were greatly puzzled there were no 'wun toks' among the natives. 'Wun toks' or 'one talks,' in the Mandated Territory, are local natives who are able to speak

pidgin English. They have usually been to mission school where they learned to speak the language. On returning to their village they become someone of importance because of their ability to converse with visiting "kiaps' (government officers) and native policemen. In their country it was the normal thing, for a policeman, or for that matter, a patrol officer, when entering a new village to ask for a 'wun tok.' But, here, because of the different language, 'one talks' did not exist or to be strictly correct they talked pidgin Malay. It took our policemen some time to realise that pidgin English was not spoken in this country even though the inhabitants looked the same as those over the border.

Later that afternoon Capt. Van der Vien's party straggled into the village. They had found our tracks and followed them to the village and apparently had finally decided that, after all, we had been going in the right direction!

Chapter 15.

A DRY CAMP

The village had suddenly become overcrowded with the two parties so we decided to retire to the safety of the bush for the night. The Dutch party, as usual, was making enough noise to attract any searching Jap patrol and rather than try to tell them their business we got out of there and left them to it.

While it was good to know there weren't any Japs about we were well aware that, in this business, it really didn't pay to place too much faith in the local natives so, to make doubly sure, we took great pains in hiding our camp from them and moved well away from the huts, with two people on guard at all times. A good deal more rest was needed to get over the rigours of the swamp before we continued on the way north and we didn't want to be bothered by the local natives, the Nips, or the Dutch, for that matter!

Perhaps by posting two guards we were being unnecessarily cautious, as it is extremely difficult for unwanted visitors to get about in heavy vine scrub in the dark without making plenty of noise. We had found this out on the last patrol in the Sepik area where night-time noises, whether from natural causes or the enemy, were the bane of our existence and caused many a stand to before the reason for the noise was ascertained. In dark, forest country it is much easier to get about quietly as most of the trees and undergrowth tend to grow in a vertical manner, whereas in thick jungle, while the trees grow upwards to the light, the vines and wait-a-while etc. are much more adventurous and grow in all directions and in doing so create a tangle which cause many more problems for those wishing to move quietly.

Instead of posting two sentries we could have used booby traps. But, again in this type of country, where it is raining more often than not, our only booby traps would be trip wires with a hand grenade attached ready to spring out on the unwary, we were loath to use them because they had the nasty habit of being triggered during the rain by a falling branch and it was always the devil's own job to ensure that it wasn't a Nip sneaking around the camp that set it off. And, there's nothing worse than a grenade detonating close by when one is sleeping. Whether caused accidentally or by an intruder the resultant clamour is guaranteed to scare the daylights out of one and in doing so successfully prevent

sleep for the rest of the night.

After some discussion, we didn't think, in this case, booby traps were necessary, thank goodness! As anyone who has set one knows, it's easy enough to jam a grenade in a bully beef tin with a trip string attached but not quite so easy to delouse it when departing! On the last operation we had seen two accidents with trip wires; neither one fatal. Luckily in both cases the victims were fortunate to be in a situation where they were able to be evacuated.

While we were settling in, Sam was poking around in the bush and, as luck (?) would have it, caught and killed a python about eight ft. long. He said it would make a good meal and promptly started to skin it. He was welcome to my share, and I told him so! Bob and Neville didn't seem to be falling over each other to get at it either!

Like a lot of country people, I had, during my 'teen years', lived in a bark hut in South-west Queensland and due to the remoteness from shops had quite often eaten a fair amount of kangaroo meat and had even tried a small snake and had liked the 'roo meat but not the snake and, at this early stage of the operation, did not feel hungry enough to eat any of the local fauna! Perhaps later on, when food was short, I might be glad to partake.

However, Sam wasn't put off by our reluctance and cut it in pieces and cooked it in the coals. The policemen thought it was good 'kai kai' and hopped in for their share and soon all that was left were the bones!

As a memento, Sam used part of the skin as a band for his hat.

Guard duty having been arranged for the night we turned in early for the first good sleep since leaving base and next morning, instead of moving on, spent the day cleaning and drying our gear and weapons of the considerable amount of moisture and mud they had gathered in the swamp. Most of us had minor injuries and leech bites to attend to as well. I also took the opportunity to look at the radio and give it a quick test and was pleased to see it had emerged from the swamp in good order.

Chapter 16.

IN TOUCH WITH BASE

Now, the next task was to get in touch with base and Bob asked me to set up and send a message advising them we were still in the land of the living. Our normal scheduled time was past but I knew they would be keeping a continuous watch. I sent LF, the callsign, three times, switched to receive and got an instant reply to go ahead. Obviously they had been listening on our frequency and were worried that something nasty may have happened. I was able to assure them of our safety and signed off, promising to keep the afternoon scheduled transmission with an explanation of our absence. The date was the 25th. March. During the later transmission we asked for a food drop for the 27th, two days away, near a small village named Hiwagen (one of the villages in the group of photos) situated about two thirds of the way to Lereh.

All our messages were sent in a code consisting of groups of five letters. This code was changed daily and, of course, both parties were required to have access to identical code books and naturally all messages dealing with the progress of the operation were sent in this code to prevent the enemy from gaining information of our whereabouts and actions. It is not unusual, in well run areas, for the enemy to intercept, or at least be aware that messages, other than their own were being transmitted. Because the code was changed every twenty-four hours a possible decoding of a single message was largely negated. There was also the outside chance of the enemy using direction finders to pinpoint the location of our transmitter, and to minimise this, transmission times were kept as short as possible and care taken that no two messages were sent from the same location. Continual movement, no matter how unnecessary it may have seemed at the time, was easily the best method of hiding our location and preventing a follow up surprise attack.

However, besides coded messages, there also existed a Q code, consisting of collections of three letters, in which information concerning the sending of the actual message could be sent. For example the letters QSA asked what strength the other party was receiving our transmission. QRK meant are you reading me? QSK did you get the message etc? These and many more combinations are normal operating procedural codes and it is possible, and often necessary, to pass a great deal of non-secret information using only this Q code.

Next day, about 3pm, Bob and Yaru visited the native village and found another Dutch patrol, a much smaller one this time, under the command of a Lt. de Bruina, had arrived. This patrol went under the name of "Shark" and had landed in the swamp two days before us and had had even more trouble in getting to dry land and by great good fortune had also picked up our tracks and followed them to the village. They were exhausted and filthy from the swamp mud and we knew just how they were feeling!

Chapter 17.

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

Time was passing. The extra days spent in battling the swamp had put us behind schedule and a move was necessary. A native guide to the next village would help catch up and Bob asked Sam to try and get one of the local natives to lead the way. A little bribery in the shape of stick tobacco did the trick and we were ready to move on. But our delight was soon dashed when, much to our disappointment, the combined Dutch party decided to accompany us!

Of course we were reluctant to travel with such a large party. We were a much smaller party and were mainly there for intelligence gathering and definitely not looking for a show down with the Nips. We could not see the Dutch party, because of it's size, keeping out of trouble and besides that, were far from impressed by their lack of skill, experience and fitness, which had almost immediately become apparent.

Nevertheless, on the morning of the 26th March we moved off, following the local native, on the way to Lereh. For the greater part of that day we walked in a northerly direction over a chain of thickly wooded hills, interspersed every few hundred yards with creeks and small swamps. It was difficult walking as the hills, though low in altitude, were quite steep and in the afternoon the rains came yet again to make a slippery slide of the narrow track. The Dutch party, thank goodness, much quieter now due to exhaustion, tagged along behind like Brown's cows, with many of them suffering severe leg cramps.

Along the way we met three more natives and Sam, with the aid of some trade goods, prevailed upon them to help the Dutch party with their gear. One of the Malay policemen had become very sick with bouts of unconsciousness and needed to be carried on a makeshift stretcher. Our progress, of necessity, had become snail like and we were regretting the decision to combine.

The Dutch, in our opinion, had made a mistake by having such a large party, almost four times as many as ours. Their size had made them unwieldy and robbed both parties of the mobility that is essential in order to maintain secrecy, and at the same time cover distances quickly. Furthermore, as stated earlier, we could see that their European personnel, with one exception, were not sufficiently experienced, and the

Malay members, especially the police, were entirely unsuitable and seemed a particularly sullen and unwilling lot.

That afternoon, we reached Hiwagen, a village consisting of a single hut and a native garden. We camped the night in the adjacent scrub and about 10 o'clock in the morning two Mitchell bombers appeared and dropped a total of ten storepedoes. Nine arrived safely and the tenth 'chute failed to open spilling the contents over a wide area. The broken one contained mainly rice and the four local natives managed to salvage a goodly amount from the wreckage. That it was mixed with a fair amount of soil didn't seem to trouble them!

The food drop was most welcome and we divided it up between the three parties as best we could. The problem was now, how were we going to carry the extra loads? In other areas we had never had any trouble getting native porters to carry the excess stores, but here there were very few natives and those that were on hand were rather disinclined to act as carriers although they were quick enough to come forward and claim the cloth from the parachutes. This left us with the dubious choice of either leaving some stores for the natives, or becoming grossly overloaded by carrying the excess ourselves. Heavy packs are one thing but overloading is dangerous because then one tends to become pre-occupied with the extra weight and trudges along without keeping a proper look-out and in the event of an ambush or surprise attack it is very hard to spring into action when weighed down with the extra baggage.

The reluctance of the natives to act as porters seemed to stem mainly from the mistrust they had of the Malay police in the Dutch party. Sam had questioned one of the natives at length and had been told that, before the war, the natives had suffered much harsh treatment from these policemen. This statement was supported by their willingness to provide, whenever possible, as many porters as we needed when separated from the Dutch parties.

Finally on the 28th, after a long and tiring day, we staggered into the true Lereh village and found a number of scattered hamlets, and the guru's house, all deserted. There were a few native huts and gardens, all in a neglected state, and the inhabitants though small in number, were friendly enough.

We spent the next day interrogating the natives but obtained very little information to become excited about. All they could say was that the Japs visited every now and then but did not stay in any of the houses. It was inhospitable country and the climate and the terrain were particularly unfriendly and we could not blame them for not stopping. To

us the land was a succession of steeply wooded hills, often with clouds at their tops, divided by large areas of swamp and cursed with a seemingly continuous rainfall. Bob, who had plenty of experience, called it filthy country! And we agreed!

On the 30th March at 11am a single Mitchell flew over and dropped one storepedo and left word that there would be another drop on the 3rd April. We had not ordered a drop but were happy enough to get it. I had told HQ we would be at Lereh on this day and they had taken it upon themselves to send us some extra supplies. This storepedo contained stick tobacco for the policemen and, wonder of wonders, some chocolate bars and cigarettes as well as the usual food rations.

It was disappointing that the unasked for drop did not contain the trade goods that had been promised earlier. We needed the goods badly as bribery seemingly was the only way we could get any help from the locals and on my late radio sked we were further disappointed when advised that instead of the 3rd April the next drop would not be possible before the 7th April.

In view of this alteration Bob decided that, for the present, we would make Lereh our base camp and carry out all patrols and reconnaissance from there until the Dutch parties had become better organised and, we hoped, set to go on their own.

Chapter 18.

JAPANESE PATROLS

On the next recce patrol, on 4th April, several natives were contacted about two miles northwest of Lereh at a small village named Fiara on the south bank of a swiftly flowing stream. They told the same story, that occasionally Jap patrols were seen in the vicinity, but had always been evaded. One small Jap patrol, of six soldiers, which had been seen two days before, appeared to be moving in an easterly direction. This seemed to be an excellent opportunity to make our presence felt, especially as their patrol was small in numbers, and from Fiara, with Lt. de Bruina and eight others of the Dutch party, we set off in that direction to see if contact could be made. While not exactly spoiling for a fight we thought that the time had come to show the enemy that they were not alone in this area. But, despite a series of sweeps to the east, we had no luck. The lack of contact was not unexpected as this patch of rock-strewn terrain had made progress particularly rugged and, combined with the heavy rain and very thick undergrowth, good visibility for any distance was minimal. We were rapidly becoming fed up with the never ending rain and were looking forward to returning to a more friendly area.

At this point in time, although only 13 days had passed since we had left the Idenberg River, we seemed to have been here forever and only one of those 13 days had been free from rain. All our belongings were soaked and would remain so as there was no chance of drying anything. We turned into our hammocks at night, fully clothed and in full marching order, with all weapons, boots and packs dripping wet. The hammocks, by this time were liberally coated, inside and out, with mud collected from a hundred swampy gullies and small creeks and the smell from the wet clothes and boots was well nigh over-powering, but at least we had shelter from the elements until, all too soon it seemed, it became our turn for sentry duty. Here I was sometimes lucky because, quite often, my radio duties kept me occupied until late at night and saved me from taking my turn on watch.

Next day, 5th April, Lt. de Bruina, a Malay policeman and two of our police boys came down with malarial attacks. We returned to Fiara very disappointed and frustrated and took possession of a couple of deserted huts, on the Etia River, for protection from the rain. Being in the huts meant we were obliged to keep sentries out to prevent surprise attacks. Our

policemen were quite willing to act as lookouts along with some of the brighter looking Malays.

In the meantime De Bruina had become very ill but there was nothing we could do but dose him with quinine and hope for the best. The rain was still coming down in buckets-full and late in the afternoon to compound our problems the river began to rise very quickly and a quick withdrawal was needed, so we staggered back to higher country, wet through and surprisingly cold, carrying De Bruina on a makeshift stretcher.

Here we met some more natives, with Malay speakers among them, who appeared to be pretty friendly. At least they were friendly with us but were very pointed in avoiding the three Malay police with De Bruina. With Sam's help we questioned them and found they were the first lot of natives we had contacted who actively disliked the Japanese! Whether this was put on for our benefit was not clear though Sam thought they were "fair dinkum".

That night, on my late radio sked, word came that another food drop, with the long awaited trade goods, had been made at Lereh the day before and next day the rest of the Shark party from Lereh arrived carrying the cargo from the drop. Despite them saving us the trouble of picking up the drop from Lereh they were not welcome as we now had many more mouths to feed and worry about. Some of their party were sick and the Malay policeman was still very ill and delirious and looked to be beyond help and later he somehow, while no one was looking, managed to disappear into the bush. We put out a search party but couldn't locate him anywhere and next day some of the coolies continued the search and finally found him down by the river. He had hanged himself!

Much against our better judgement we remained with the Dutch party and continued patrolling the various routes leading toward Hollandia while endeavouring to contact as many natives as possible. But, we were very much hampered by the other party and eventually decided the time had come to move away from them as they were slowing us up a great deal. Their task, of harassment of the Japs, was different to ours and separation would definitely be to our mutual benefit.

Moreover, the Dutch seemed to have an inordinate number of health problems and were ill equipped for the type of work they were supposed to be doing. Some of the Malay soldiers were not fit and appeared insufficiently trained for rough bush patrolling on hard rations. Their officers had difficulty with some who seemed temperamentally unsuited for these conditions. Nobody seemed to care! It was time for us to leave!

The "Shark" patrol had not been supplied with any trade goods and even before leaving had not anticipated using any but while with us they soon realised the benefits that could be gained by gifts of trade goods and made many demands on our meagre supply to use as presents or payment to the natives. As a consequence our stock was very quickly used up in requirements for the forty odd members of the Dutch party and this lack embarrassed us shortly afterwards when we were in need of some native guides.

Later during the operation, after more trade goods had arrived with an airdrop, we were again obliged to share as the goods dropped to the Dutch party were mostly useless. Items such as large axes and spades and shovels were dropped and these were quite unsuitable for a mobile party to carry.

Our smaller and much more experienced party was capable of moving quickly, and making more frequent contacts, to give the impression of a much larger force, whereas the combined Dutch party of over 40 men and bearers had proved to be extremely cumbersome and unwieldy. Clearly their numbers were a hindrance to us, and themselves.

Chapter 19.

VAN DE VIEN DEPARTS

After waiting in vain all day for the promised drop, the Van de Vien party, to our delight, decided at long last, on the 7th of April, to leave and strike out on their own. This was good news indeed though we were still left with the much smaller Shark party. We parted company, trying not to appear too pleased, and went on our way, glad to be rid of Van de Vien's party. I was elated to see them go because, due to their radioman's incompetence, I had been lumbered with quite a lot of their signals, as he seemed most of the time to be unable to gain contact with their base at the Idenberg River and was quite happy for me to relay his messages! Their radio did not appear to be nearly as good as ours which seemed to be part of his problem but I had the feeling, while watching him operating, that most of his difficulties stemmed from his own lack of ability. But, that was his problem from now on. Unfortunately though, I was still saddled with all the radio messages of the Shark party still with us. Amazingly they did not have a radio as part of their equipment and why anyone would venture into this wilderness without some means of communication was beyond comprehension! All told I sent 27 and received 32 messages for them over a period of 2 weeks. It was work that I could have well done without!

Patrolling went on and almost immediately we found evidence that a Japanese patrol had visited a small deserted cluster of huts, which we thought may have been a village named Japsi, but were not sure. There were many of these huts dotted around the countryside but almost all of them appeared to have been unoccupied for a considerable time and we began to wonder where the occupants had got to. A few days later, when we did come across some natives, we were told that the enemy had forbidden them to travel any further south. When we did eventually make contact it was very difficult to gain their confidence and we thought, perhaps, that their lack of friendliness was largely due to the fear of reprisals by the enemy.

After leaving Japsi we experienced a few close shaves with Nip patrols but, although lucky a couple of times, successfully kept out of serious trouble. One of the police boys, Sabokinya, got a slight wound in the forearm late one afternoon when a Nip patrol, who had wandered into our path, began firing blindly in our general direction before beating a hasty retreat. But the wound was not serious and only needed

a bandage and a couple of stitches. Mostly we were successful in keeping out of their way and I think we were doing a good job in tricking them into thinking we were a much larger party and this was probably the reason they did not make any serious attempts to locate us. The enemy's seeming lack of hostile intent was quite puzzling, as we had on numerous occasions, been told by natives of threats coming from their patrols, as to the unmentionable things they would do to us if we were caught! Personally, I thought the threats were mainly made to impress the natives and an attempt to deter them from helping us in any way.

Chapter 20.

DE BRUINA — RECCE DISASTER

Two days later, De Bruina, now recovered, and most of his Shark patrol, left in a quick recce to the north and we followed much more slowly and, late in the afternoon after travelling about 3 miles, came upon another native village. The two natives we found there said it was Kartebi and it was much the same as the others with a number of ramshackle huts and little else. These people were very scared of the Japanese, and the Dutch, and said they weren't supposed to be at the village at all. They were forbidden to travel any farther south than five miles from Genyem, some twenty five miles north of this spot, but had sneaked away to tend their village garden and had found to their dismay that it had been cleaned out. Obviously it had been plundered by an enemy patrol, very probably the one that had fired on us the previous afternoon.

The natives told us the enemy had extensive gardens at Genyem where the soil was good and there was an abundance of water, and grew lots of food, which they took to Hollandia. However, none of the produce from the gardens was available to the natives and this was the reason they were visiting their own village gardens. A good government road — as distinct from a native track — to Lake Sentani was used by many army vehicles and there was also an army brothel at Sentani and the women regularly visited the soldiers at Genyem. From what we could gather the women were not locals and appeared to be all from Japan! We reported all this to HQ on the next radio sked.

On the 10th April, a signal came to say that a further drop had been made at Fiara the day before; it was supposed to have been made on the 7th and this meant a hurried dash back to claim the cargo before the natives pinched it.

Myself and three policemen, Sabi, Anis, and Yaru were left behind as we were all sick with fever and weren't up to the trip. Despite having the shivers it was a very welcome spell away from the mud and slush. The policemen had managed to build a shelter which kept most of the rain out and my only job for the day was to contact HQ and advise them we were picking up the drop. During the transmission a message was received that Bob had been promoted to captain and that there would be a further drop at Fiara this same day and, as luck would have it, they were still at Fiara collecting the first

drop when the plane arrived.

This time the drop was for the Shark party, who had not yet returned from patrol, and we decided that another day here at Kartebi would help me and the policemen to get better and would also give the Shark party a chance to make contact and gather their stores.

Next day we had almost given up hope of contacting Shark and had started to move away when four members of the party; two Dutchmen and two coolies arrived at the camp. They had been at the Nawa River crossing, about one and a half miles away, and on hearing the plane had hurried to the drop site but found our boys had already left for Kartebi. A couple of the local natives pointed them in the direction of our departure and by great good luck they found our camp.

The Dutchmen, Black, whose real name was Swartz – we called him Blackie – and Shellou, had a tale of woe. The party had gone north in the direction of Genyem and made contact with a largish Japanese patrol. Shots were exchanged and a running battle ensued. They managed to kill two Japs before hastily retreating along the track back to their temporary camp at Bondoen. Reuniting with their main party they quickly retreated again and made camp in another village, some distance away, where they were in turn surprised by the Japs and forced to withdraw, luckily without any casualties, but in doing so abandoned most of their gear and the party had been split in halves.

Eventually they got back to the river crossing and Black and Shellou had left two of their party, De Bruina and Sgt. Heck, there as a rearguard in case the Nips followed on further. A Sgt. Djoene and one other N.C.O. with five Malay policemen had been cut off during the skirmish and their whereabouts were unknown.

We were amazed that the Shark party would even contemplate camping in a native village? A village in the middle of a clearing on a hilltop would be very hard to guard with their limited number of people and to hole up in a native hut, of all places! Their lack of common sense was breathtaking in the extreme! We certainly would not be guilty of such a stupid and dangerous mistake and definitely would not stay overnight in any village, as they did! Of necessity we had to make contact with the villages but we always moved away as soon as possible and while doing so made sure the locals remained unaware of our further movements. But, this piece of utter stupidity was typical of the Dutch thinking. The first place a patrol would look would be in a village and we suspected strongly that many of the natives, to curry favour, would not be backward in revealing our whereabouts to

the enemy and thought the Dutch would have enough nous to realise that too. But, they were very careless and a menace to our safety and the sooner we got away from them again the better!

We were well aware that any small party, for its own safety, must always be on the move and never, never stay in one place more than one night. Constant movement being the only certain defence from surprise attacks.

Still, they were in trouble and we were obliged to help. HQ would have to be advised of their plight and a stores drop arranged to re-equip them. In the interim we would have six more mouths to feed when de Bruina and Heck came and this would force us on to short rations until the next drop arrived.

Chapter 21.

SAK SAK

Bob decided we would not move away but retreat a little farther back in the scrub and that we could ease the food shortage by cutting down one of the many sago palms, which grew in abundance in this swampy country, and produce sufficient sago (sak sak) to keep us all going, in a sort of fashion. (Sak sak comes from a tree belonging to the Cycad family and is almost all starch and certainly is not to be recommended as a staple diet. It comes from the pithy centre of the palm and when separated and washed and dried is a whitish powder. It can be cooked, either inside a length of bamboo or spread and baked on a flat stone. The first method, when cooked and removed from the bamboo, emerges as a clear, inedible, sausage shaped tasteless glutinous mass and the latter culinary masterpiece appears as a partly clear flat cake dusted with what seems to be a fine ash but is really some uncooked sago on top. Neither method of cooking appeals to the European palate any more than ashes from the cooking fire would! But it is food and the policeboys didn't seem to mind eating it!) Definitely not recommended as a constant diet, though we did find if the cakes were spread with a layer of Vegemite they were greatly improved. The thicker the layer of vegemite the better the taste! This same sak sak, in most inland areas of this large island, is a main source of food.

While the sago extraction was proceeding Bob sent Sam and two policemen with some food to relieve de Bruina and Heck at the river and then sent Yaru, Aram and Kaki on a recce to Boendroe village about five miles away to see if they could pick up any sign of the Nip patrol.

Next day Bob, obviously feeling the inaction, decided he too would walk to the river and bring Sam and the policemen back as they weren't really needed there. On the way he came across a large deserted European type house, about two miles from the river, which showed signs of recent Japanese occupation. His careful scouting of the surrounding area did not reveal any of the enemy so he proceeded to the river.

Our next move was to return, once again, to the Nawa River to await the recce party. We left Sabokinya to complete making the rest of the sak sak and he was to await the return of the three policemen from their patrol and then join us at river crossing.

Twenty-four hours later Sabokinya and the three recce police arrived and brought news of a Japanese patrol, just north of Boendroe, moving in the direction of Genyem. But they had seen nothing of the missing Dutch party. We then returned to the vicinity of the big house in case the Japs came back and camped in the bush nearby.

For two days we maintained a watch on the river track and sent out scouting parties but had no contacts. Again I remained behind as my fever (?) had returned making my radio work almost impossible. Listening to Morse code when suffering from a splitting headache coupled with the shivers is not much fun and my resolve to demand an offsider on the next operation was considerably strengthened. An extra radioman would not go amiss in times like this. I know "Z" Special always had an extra man to do the coding and radio work, if it became necessary, and surely we could do the same.

Thanks to their stupidity the Dutch had very little gear and needed re-equipping even down to boots. The proposed airdrop was a risky business with the Japs so near and we were unhappy because our original plan had been for a drop in another six days and this additional one would upset the programme. But, nothing could be done about it and we obtained a list of their needs and sent the message back to base asking them to get in touch with the Dutch HQ and arrange for a drop on a nearby village, in four days time. A village which, by a large piece of luck, was one that had been on one of the series of photos.

Chapter 22.

STORES DROPS

An airdrop, at the best of times, was always a very risky business, because, a smoky fire had to be kept alight to attract the aircraft, and the smoke would also catch the attention of any enemy patrol in the vicinity. If the enemy patrol happened to be on a neighbouring hilltop at the time of the drop our smoke and the aircraft would be seen and they would know what was going on. If this situation arose our only hope was that they would be far enough away to prevent them getting to the site while the drop was in progress and the stores were being collected.

The day for the drop, 18th April, came and our fears proved to be groundless. The operation was made successfully by two B25s. In all they dropped ten storepedoes and we hastily gathered the goods and put as much distance between us and the village as possible. Everything had arrived in good order even though one of the parachutes hadn't opened properly and we were more than satisfied although some articles ordered had not arrived and were promised in the next drop.

The parachutes used for the stores drops were sometimes made of silk but were often hessian. The containers, or storepedoes as they were called, were made from plywood and were a cylindrical shape with a diameter of about 15 inches and about 6 ft. long with a conical shaped nose. Each carried a surprising large amount of stores.

Unfortunately, the hessian parachutes often had a nasty habit of not opening fully, which meant they came down on a slant and generally landed wide of the mark! We soon found it was not much fun running through the mist and smoke being chased by a descending, out of control, storepedo! Those not opening fully were like bombs from a divebomber with the fluttering sound of the malfunctioning chute adding to the worry of its eventual impact. They certainly brought back a few memories of earlier days in the Middle East.

The aircraft was forced to make the drop from an altitude of about 2000 to 3000 ft. – a rough estimate on my part – to get any sort of accuracy. Ideally the storepedo should land on the cleared top of the hill, because if it missed and went down the slope, among the trees, it would take too long to recover. The local natives certainly didn't mind if some of the storepedoes went astray and, as we had to collect as much

as possible and quickly get out of there for our own safety, those that were badly off course were given up as lost. The natives had plenty of time to recover the errant stores and the odd silk parachute was a great prize for them, to say nothing of the contents!

Living off the land in this type of country, despite the common belief that all tropical jungles teem with all types of edibles, is particularly difficult especially for white people. Food is always a problem, and very much more of a problem in this godforsaken area, even for the natives, and for us to remain in a reasonable state of health, food drops were a necessity. This unscheduled drop was the first of four during the operation, and they were all carried out without a hitch and delivered to the designated villages; a plan that worked perfectly due to the expertise of the airmen who flew the planes.

Even with the supply drops, our food still had to be supplemented with such items as native bananas – very much a rarity this far from the sea – sak sak, taro root, native nuts and occasionally a grub that Sam said was a witchetty grub! I wasn't convinced it was the dinkum article, though it wasn't so bad when roasted! The taro root is good tucker, much the same as sweet potato, and is a type of yam and usually plentiful, especially where there is a lot of water. The plant has a large leaf, shaped like an elephant's ear, and is easy to identify.

Never at any time were we actually hungry, although on occasion the food was a little on the doubtful side! Sam's choice, of what he called suitable edible local flora, wasn't always a success when cooked! Often, a decent home cooked meal would have been very welcome and, at times, even bully beef and desert wafers (army biscuits), would have been considered a gourmet meal! For a couple of days after a food drop we usually ate pretty well but afterwards some of the food often had to be abandoned because of our inability to carry. To be on the safe side we always made an attempt to hide the leftovers in the unlikely chance of some day having to retrace our steps.

The drop had provided us with a couple of surprises. Bob received some mail from his wife and, we had been sent some chocolate by John Beatty. We thought it rather strange there was only mail for Bob until he told us he had only arranged for his mail to be sent forward! Apparently it had been left to the individual to arrange for his own mail to be forwarded. A peculiar arrangement! We were not impressed!

Chapter 23.

OUR FIRST KILL

Bob, the Dutchman Black, Neville and four of the policeboys, patrolled to Boendroe and surrounding area and saw plenty of evidence of Japanese occupation, but no Japs. The camp where the Dutch had been jumped was visited but nothing was found and they then decided to go towards the Nawa River, in case the missing men had returned, and look around in some of the old huts where they may have been sheltering.

After arriving at the river, a half hearted search was being made when suddenly one of the constables drew their attention to smoke coming from among the trees halfway up a neighbouring hill. A policeboy was quickly sent to recce and, in an old broken down hut, heard what he thought were Japanese voices, but, sensibly rather than attack, returned and told of his discovery. He was unsure of the numbers so Bob decided that a concerted attack would be made on the hut to be on the safe side.

But, perhaps the voices belonged to the missing members of the Dutch patrol? We could not be sure so Neville and the policeman made another recce to see whether they were friend or foe. In less than thirty minutes they returned to report that the voices belonged to two Japanese soldiers and Neville said they were both armed, one had a rifle and the other had something that looked like a machine pistol. He said they were preparing a meal and were quite relaxed and certainly were not expecting any interruptions.

The decision to split up and attack on each flank was quickly taken; Bob and Neville and one policemen to the left, and the others to the right. Quietly the hut was approached. They were ready for anything! Suddenly, Neville, who as usual in these situations was leading, motioned for them to wait and then disappeared round the front of the hut. Next they heard two quick, short bursts of Owen gun fire and then Neville reappeared and beckoned them forward to view his handiwork. He had found the two Japs eating their meal, with their weapons at least 10 feet away leaning against the hut wall, and shot them both before they could make a move. Their astonishment at seeing him suddenly appear around the corner of the hut had been so great that they had not made a move toward their weapons and it had been a simple matter for him to account for them both in a matter of seconds!

From previous experience I had held the opinion, that despite a lot of talk about Japanese fighting qualities, they were at times careless and often failed to keep a proper lookout when on patrol and their lack of precautions left a lot to be desired. In this case their slackness had caused their deaths.

The two Nips seemed to be well supplied with cooked rice and dried fish and were in good condition and well turned out and probably were part of a patrol that was in the area. One of them was an officer as he was carrying a sword and quite a lot of invasion money in a bag. Bob thought he could have been a paymaster; though what a paymaster was doing so far away from his headquarters was puzzling.

A quick look was made for any information in the shape of papers, etc and the bodies were searched but nothing that seemed important was found. They had the usual paybooks, photos and the apparently all important, strip of cotton cloth covered with stitches which appeared to be some sort of good luck charm, but little else. Neville, ever on the lookout to make a profit selling to an American soldier, was disappointed to find the officer wasn't carrying the Jap imitation of a German Luger pistol!

Chapter 24.

RE-UNITED

While poking round the hut they heard someone call from the nearby bush. Sam pricked up his ears and said it sounded like a Dutchman calling. Black, the Dutchman, said it sounded like one of the lost party. He called out in Dutch and told the man to come forward as they were friends and were looking for him. Out he came, rather warily, and when he saw his friend Black, called to the other missing members of his party and they followed.

They were a pretty woeful sight, only partly dressed and two were even without boots. Quite obviously they had been in a very relaxed and unguarded state when jumped by the Japanese patrol and had fled the scene post haste. Four of them had managed to retrieve their rifles before taking to the trees but the other three were unarmed and partly undressed as well. All in all they appeared a sorry and woebegone lot and had almost given up any hope of re-uniting with the rest of their party. Luckily, in the distance, they had heard Neville firing and had decided to investigate. Very carefully they had searched the general area and found the old hut but were still worried that the shots had come from a Japanese patrol. But, after further investigation, had finally seen the native constable standing guard near the hut. Still not totally convinced and rather than reveal their whereabouts they had decided to call out from the cover of the bush and were over-joyed when answered in their own language and to finally know it was safe to venture out.

Because of the suspicion that the two dead Nips had been members of a larger patrol caution dictated they get out of there in a hurry so, in all haste, back they came to the Nawa River base and the Shark patrol was reunited, all thirteen of them. In the meantime, more good news had come when I received word there was to be the promised drop at our present position, the next day, with the rest of the equipment and food for the Dutch party.

On the 20th April, two Mitchell bombers duly arrived and dropped the storepedoes. All eight landed safely in the marked area and were quickly gathered and examined. It was, for once, almost an exact supply of all requirements. Among the stores was a spare radio battery, which I quietly claimed without anyone seeing me. I felt we had gone out of our way to help the Shark party over the last week or so, and had no

qualms in relieving them of the battery when I knew that, being without a radio, they had no use for it.

Chapter 25.

GOOD BYE SHARK

Now that Shark was fully kitted out we decided it was safe to leave them again and make off in the general direction of Hollandia to try to carry out our orders to, wherever possible, contact the natives and try to convince them to keep away from the Japs and deny them any assistance. So far we had been successful without getting into any real trouble but knew that the Dutch party had severely affected our schedule and that, by now, we should have been quite a lot closer to Hollandia.

Most of the patrolling was uneventful except for the one occasion when Neville and Sam, with two constables, had been searching to the west and surprised a small Japanese party having a meal. Actually, they had passed quite close to the Nips and would not have discovered them in the thick scrub but for the enemy's, once again, lack of lookouts and incessant chatter. A few shots were exchanged, with little apparent result, and they then beat a hasty retreat back to our camp. Neville said he thought it was possible they might have got a couple but weren't hanging round to find out!

Just in case they were followed we struck camp immediately, and moved further back into some thick, vine scrub where we stayed the night.

Our patrolling must have been successful because in the next days we were once again receiving threatening messages relayed by the local natives, promising all sorts of unmentionable reprisals! But, despite the threats, we felt safe enough and were fairly confident we would not be taken by surprise as the Dutch party had.

The country now was very heavily timbered with large trees covered in moss and very thick undergrowth with a multitude of trailing vines and wait-a-while to trip the unwary and it was becoming ever so much more difficult to travel. Fatigue was catching up with us as we struggled to make quick headway through the increasingly thick scrub. Often, because of its almost impenetrable nature, scrub knives were needed to cut a track, although we were loath to use the knives because of the noise made in cutting, their use was necessary as without them movement was almost impossible. Much care had to be taken because of the noise and it became necessary to provide a couple of advance scouts doing the

cutting, with the rest of us about fifty yards behind. It was extremely tiring to carry heavy packs and take turns at cutting a track, in the lush growth, and rest periods were frequent. We were at a high enough altitude, in this area, to be near the cloud base and fine misty rain fell ceaselessly, adding to our discomfort.

Many small creeks were crossed on the journey northward over the very hilly country and thankfully there was never any shortage of drinking water and usually it was very pure and drinkable, not like the large areas of swampy and slimy water we had encountered earlier. Most of the creeks were small and easily forded by wading or by using stepping stones and sometimes a friendly log but, one day, our luck ran out and we were finally stopped by a swiftly flowing creek about 10 yards wide. It looked pretty deep and was flowing in a southerly direction and most likely was a tributary of the Idenberg River some 30 miles away.

The first thing we did was to look up and down the creek to see if there was a possible crossing. Bob sent Anis one way, and Sabi the other, to see if we were going to be lucky and about an hour later they returned and the news was bad! There was no easy way across and, indeed, where we were was the narrowest part!

Chapter 26.

A BRIDGE

What do we do now? That was the question! There were lots of possible options though backtracking at this juncture was not considered one of them. Perhaps we could try and waterproof the gear and swim across. Or build a raft. But, one look at the speed of the current made us forget the idea of swimming across. It seemed far too risky and the raft was also ruled out as there was no dry wood in this permanently wet area and even if we did manage to build one it would be far too ungainly and unmanageable in this fast flowing stream. Even if did manage to get across it would be almost impossible to keep the gear and the radio dry. The radio had to be protected from the water at all costs. Clearly it was not worth the risk.

Neville suggested building a flying fox across the creek and, at first, that seemed a good idea. We were in some very thick, lush, vine scrub and there was plenty of "kunda" (liana) vines about and if we could get one across the creek and fasten it at each end we could slide all the gear across. We thought about this for a while and then Bob said that, in his opinion, a flying fox wouldn't work but he thought we could build a bridge from the plentiful supply of vines available in the area. He had done it before during his time as a Patrol Officer in the Mandated Territory, he said. His was the voice of experience! He had done it before! He said, the major problem was getting the first vine across. Neville said, that was easy, he would take it across, but I said I was a better swimmer and would go. Bob wouldn't let either of us go and called upon Yaru, the boss police boy, to do the honours as he was a strong swimmer.

First of all a thin light vine was needed to be taken across and we hunted around for something suitable but had no luck as they were either not strong enough to take the strain, or too short.

It was then I remembered the large ball of very strong cord that was used to string up the radio aerial. Why not use that? There was more than enough to go across the creek and back and it could be payed out from this side and taken across by Yaru.

Bob, being the expert, proceeded to tell us how we should build the bridge. He stressed that, even when the bridge was

finished, it was not going to be easy to cross with all our gear. The idea was to use three vines; a heavy one to walk on and a lighter one on each side and about four feet higher, to use as hand rails.

It was settled. We would build the bridge. No time was to be lost so we tied the cord round Yaru's waist, gave him a scrub knife and our best wishes, and helped him into the water. He certainly proved to be a very strong swimmer, quite unusual for a native as most of them can only dogpaddle. Strong swimmer though he was, he nevertheless was quickly swept down the creek by the current until, swimming furiously, he managed to make enough headway to eventually reach the far bank about 30 yards down with still plenty of cord left on our side.

He scrambled up the bank and came back up stream until level with our position and then disappeared into the bush. In no time he was back dragging three long vines, one thick and two thinner ones, and then picked out a tree close to the bank. Bob called out and told him that it would have to be tied about 10 ft. up the trunk to allow for stretching, when the weight got on it. He did that, and then tied the two thinner vines, one each side of the thicker one, about four feet higher to act as handrails.

He then tied the vines to the end of the cord and we pulled them across. It was here the trouble began when tying the vines to the tree on our side. It was necessary to get maximum tension on the vines and the tighter we could get them the better. We pulled and tugged at the vines, with very little success, until eventually we were forced to make a type of windlass to get added purchase and finally they were secured to our satisfaction.

We ended up with a V shaped contraption that looked anything but safe! Bob now suggested a small refinement. We should cut some thinner vines and use them as ties between the bottom vine and the handrails for stability, he said.

This proved to be easily the most difficult part of the operation and after a few attempts we were happy to leave the job to the policemen. Eventually they had all the ties in place and surprisingly the whole job had taken only a little more than half a day. All we had to do to finish the project was to cut some footholds in the tree on our side and we would be ready to try crossing.

From a distance it looked a pretty flimsy sort of bridge and it looked even worse close up. But, Bob said it would do and he would have the honour and be the first to go across with all his gear. I said, he should let one of the policemen

go first and he reluctantly agreed and Anis said he would go.

First, he climbed the tree to get to the bridge, and then off he went! It looked anything but safe but he kept going until near the middle the bridge started to dip alarmingly, as we knew it would, and ended up only about 4 ft. from the water but, fortunately everything held fast. We had done a good job in securing the ends!

From the middle Anis had to climb the incline up to the other side. It looked far from easy, and was a struggle, but he made it!

My turn next, and I admit I wasn't at all confident, but determined to give it a go. I found the hardest part was keeping upright and I walked at a sideways angle of about 45 degrees when near the middle. The sight of the water rushing past about four feet below was sufficient motivation to keep me moving as quickly as possible. While getting to the middle was difficult enough I found the going was much more demanding and arduous when climbing the upward slope to the other bank but, fortunately, the ties between the bottom vine and the hand rails afforded a bit of a grip with my boots and I made it, and that was good.

The rest of the party then came across, with me flushed with my mastery of the bridge crossing, shouting instructions. The police boys put the rest of us to shame and did not have any trouble and thought it was good fun! A couple of them had to make two trips to carry the excess gear across but they, to their credit, made light of what, to me, had been an extremely difficult task! I nominated Anis to carry the radio across as he seemed to be one of the more confident and agile of the constables and he didn't fail me. Looking back now I realise that in many ways we were extremely lucky to have the constables with us and as time went on so did our appreciation of their skill and bushcraft increase. No wonder Bob had been so insistent on their coming with us! He knew their worth!

I've often thought about that bridge and whether it was still there and had anyone ever found it and wondered who built such a contraption in this wild uninhabited country.

By the time we had everything on the opposite bank it was late in the afternoon and we camped about fifty yards from the creek for the night. It was time for my radio sked anyway, so out it came and Bob's message was quickly encoded and the set switched on ready to go but I was unable to raise HQ, which was not surprising, as it was raining fairly heavily and the signals must have been pretty well shielded by the tall hill behind us. I had hoped that the time spent with the radio would be short and was looking forward to being able to relax

for a while but it was not to be. Obviously more height was needed, so Anis came and we climbed, slipping, sliding and cursing — I did the cursing, Anis being a former mission boy did not — half way up the next hill, picked a suitable tree, rigged a groundsheet for cover, Anis climbed the tree and set up the aerial and all was well although I noticed the battery voltage was down somewhat. Here the reception was excellent and the message was quickly sent and acknowledged, thank goodness! It had been a big day and we were grateful to be able to rejoin the others, have a cold meal in the pitch darkness and hop into our hammocks, wet through, but at least out of the rain.

Chapter 27.

RADIO PROBLEMS

The radio batteries were the original set and had done a marvellous job but were becoming run down and would soon need replacing with the ones I had taken from the Dutch drop.

Next morning we turned out early, had a final look at our engineering feat, the bridge, and were well on the way by eight o'clock. Our destination was getting a little closer every day and we reckoned that it was about 20 miles away, as the crow flies, though taking into account the hilly country the actual walking distance would be almost twice as far! If all went well it would be six or seven, very cautious, walking days away.

Since leaving the Dutch party we had made only two minor contacts with the Japs, though we knew they were about, as often an occasional rifle shot was heard usually some distance away, and as long as they weren't shooting at us we were quite happy.

At the next native village, this time situated on top of an extremely high hill and one, thankfully, that had been photographed, a list of requirements was sent to base and next day, to our great relief, the aircraft arrived and did a good job of landing every storepedo in the cleared area, with all of the chutes opening nicely. At this drop, all six of the chutes were made of silk. We kept one and gave the rest to the villagers who must have thought it was Christmas with all that cloth! Cloth of any sort is greatly prized by the natives and coloured cloth most of all. They do weave their own cloth from a species of tree bark and while it is very durable it lacks the qualities of woven cotton or silk.

(Natives in this area, as well as the natives across the border in Australian New Guinea, do not wear any clothes except for a woven belt with occasionally some fibrous material hanging down the front for the women and for the men a "cok bokis" (cock box), as the policemen called it, secured round the waist with a woven cord. This box was cut from the stalk end of a locally growing gourd hollowed out and fitted over the penis. Usually a dilly bag carried over the shoulder completed the outfit with one or two woven bands round the arms.)

This drop had been our most successful and was completed

in less than fifteen minutes and, in the next half hour, we had gathered all the goods and cleared out of there after leaving about 20 pounds of rice with the natives as a reward for their help in collecting the stores.

The natives were always present when a drop was imminent. Though, when the planes came they always ran for the safety of the bush and from their hiding places they watched the storepedoes floating down and by their actions were greatly astonished at the way the parachutes came from the aircraft and opened and floated down slowly. They would stand there, with mouths open, chattering among themselves, at the way this manna from heaven arrived! Scared they may have been, but when the planes departed their fright was quickly overcome by the sight of all the goodies contained in the storepedoes and we were forced to keep a sharp lookout to prevent them from absconding with some of the stores.

At a suitable distance away as it was now late in the afternoon we camped and Bob soon had a message ready to go, and with help from Anis, I whipped up the aerial, made contact with base and started transmitting. Half way through the message I realised I couldn't hear my own Morse signals in the earphones and that meant either the earphones were faulty or the signal wasn't being transmitted. A quick test proved the earphones okay so obviously something more serious had happened.

What was wrong? I sent a QSA for signal strength to base. No answer! I tried again, but still no answer, and then switched the radio to receive and in a few minutes had a request to repeat all after a certain group. Obviously they had missed some of the message but apparently were receiving my carrier wave but no signal. A quick check seemed to prove the radio okay so I switched back to transmit and requested signal strength but still no reply. By now I was convinced that something serious was amiss with the set and that a look at its innards was justified.

Although the set had been well waterproofed I had always been careful not to allow it to be exposed to the elements and become wet for fear of insulation breakdown in the wiring. For this reason I had been careful not to remove it from its protective container and was not keen on doing so even now. Like a waterproof watch, once the back is removed and the seal broken, its resistance to moisture entering is lost and it would be the same with the radio and, in this climate of high rainfall and humidity, I was particularly reluctant to remove the case though it now seemed necessary.

I wasn't at all confident of finding the fault as we had not brought testing equipment or spares, except for the

aforementioned peanut valves, and this certainly was not the right environment to start looking for faults in such an intricate piece of equipment as a radio. However, the screws were removed and the top cover lifted to have a look, in much the same fashion as a motorist who, in a broken down car, raises the bonnet on the off chance that the fault may be obvious. And it was! I was lucky! There the problem was, right before my eyes. It was the small slave relay that worked in synchronism with the Morse key. It appeared to have something amiss with its armature and a closer examination revealed a broken return spring ,which kept the armature permanently attracted to the relay core, and consequently it could not follow the key movements thus preventing its contacts from repeating the signals from the Morse key.

Disaster! What do we do now? It was an easily repaired fault if a replacement spring had been available, but miniature helical springs like that were only obtainable many hundreds of miles away. There appeared to be only one possible solution to our predicament. Transmission by voice. I knew we could bypass the faulty relay and use voice, but would the signal be strong enough to read? Morse transmission has a greater range for a variety of reasons but it seemed there was no alternative; it was voice or nothing!

I replaced the cover and told Bob that I would try voice transmission and if unsuccessful would try relocating the aerial to a more suitable position. I repeated the base callsign, LF, three times and then hopefully switched the set to receive and waited and in quick time I had an answer. Base must have been puzzled at the switch to voice transmission but sent the letter, K, — go ahead — and amazingly signal strength 4, which I thought was pretty good. I immediately sent our message using the ABLE, BAKER, CHARLIE, phonetic alphabet and their reply, the letter, R, — message received — came back and I signed off.

A short time later we sent another signal telling of the problem and asked for a spare armature spring, or if none was available a new radio. Within ten minutes the reply that I had expected came back. There was neither a spare radio nor armature available and from now on we were to send in voice while they would stick to Morse code. So, that was the last of our Morse transmissions and voice would have to do the job from now on. We could only hope that our transmitted signal strength from now on would remain satisfactory.

I was happy enough to use voice transmission. It had one disadvantage but also an important advantage. The Nips would realise that the English language transmission was being sent from close by and would try to locate us with their direction finders, if they had any. However, I felt this was only a

minor disadvantage as we could easily increase our chances of not being detected by ensuring transmission time was kept to a minimum and being continually on the move.

The advantage, and a big one at that, was if something happened to me, as long as one of the party were capable of encoding the message – and I knew Bob could – anyone would be able to send it and base could reply by voice. None of the others were proficient in Morse code, though Bob professed to be, but I very much doubted if he could send or read a message without a great deal of trouble.

Thankfully, this was another crisis solved. Lady luck had indeed smiled on us once again and I was grateful that the fault on the set had not been really serious. If voice transmission had been unsuccessful and we had lost the means of communication with base the existence of the operation would have been threatened. But, now that voice transmission had proved successful I was fairly confident in maintaining contact as long as the location of the aerial was carefully sited and patience used in passing messages. Transmission from here on, if the maps could be believed, should improve as we were fast approaching less hilly and more open country.

Chapter 28.

THE LANDING

Next morning we moved on and, after the next hill had been negotiated, began hearing sounds of aircraft in the distance and occasionally one would fly almost directly over our position. Were they Japanese or American? Perhaps they were part of the U.S. Task force doing recce flights in preparation for the imminent landing. Whoever they belonged to would have little chance of detecting our presence as there was plenty of top cover in this heavily timbered country and with the thick undergrowth cutting visibility to only a few yards we were also safe from surprise from enemy patrols. Nevertheless, we still kept an extra sharp lookout and to make doubly sure, always had a couple of policemen in advance of the main party. If there were anyone about the policemen would know.

We needn't have worried. There was no sign of the enemy ever having been in this part of the country. The Nips were very fond of cutting tracks to follow on their patrols and seldom wandered away from the track and we had not seen any of these. It's rather strange that, farther out we had seen many Japanese patrols but closer in, where we were now, they were absent! Perhaps we were missing them in the thick undergrowth? Whatever the reason, we were very thankful.

Not only was there a lack of Nips, but this section seemed to be without natives, or again if they were about, we had not seen any. The absence of natives was probably due to this section being a much dryer area and the lack of readily available water in the form of creeks and watercourses would prevent the establishment of native gardens. And, wonder of wonders, there had been a total absence of rain for which we were extremely grateful as it allowed us to partly dry our gear and do some make and mend of equipment that was showing signs of wear.

We had, during the journey from the Idenberg, been puzzled by the lack of animal and bird life and in this area it was almost completely non-existent with only the odd bird and snake in evidence. Native foods such as sago and taro root was also absent and this was probably the reason natives shunned the region and preferred to live closer to the sea where there was more tucker.

On the 21st April, the long awaited message came and we were warned to expect the U.S. landing within the next few

days. We were also told to move in closer and make our presence known to the Japs without attempting any actual contact but to leave them guessing as to our strength! In other words, we were to try and convince the Hollandia garrison that they were also in danger of being attacked from their rear!

So, we put on a spurt, relishing the easier, flatter terrain and the lack of steep hills and finally emerged into more open type forest country where the creeks were plentiful and contained good clear drinking water and the edible flora was again in abundance. (The edible flora was in abundant supply here, but, I stress, this supply would not be apparent to those of us who did not know where to look. The policemen, of course, and Bob, to a lesser extent, were all past masters at living off the land but an outsider would very easily go hungry).

In this more friendly (easier travelling) country we were continually coming in contact with natives, and the Nips, and were taking great pains to avoid actual conflict. The natives were friendly enough but, as they appeared to be in close contact with the enemy, we were not at all sure of their intentions and were not taking any chances. Some of them were wearing pieces of Japanese clothing and had the occasional Nip cigarette and obviously had been working for the enemy. And, really, to be fair, who could blame them? Very likely they didn't find the Japanese any worse than their former Dutch masters!

We had always been cautious when dealing with the native population and now it was time to be doubly careful. Dodging the Japs and keeping the locals at arms length at the same time was going to be difficult. Could we trust the locals? Perhaps they were reporting our movements to the enemy and waiting for us to relax our vigilance before attacking. We really didn't know! It would not be the first time a small party had been attacked and we knew of a few instances where it had happened in the Mandated Territory and felt that we could easily be in the same predicament if we let our guard down.

Nevertheless, despite the doubts, we thought it would be helpful if the remainder of the stock of beads and parachute cloth, etc was handed over. The gifts would, we hoped, support the impression that we wished to be friendly and our generosity won instant acclaim from the assembled locals and much argument followed to see how the gifts were to be divided. Still, despite our friendly overtures, we were determined to keep them at a safe distance and try to prevent them from approaching in any numbers. This became a job for the constables who had shown they were more than capable of

handling almost any situation and had at times demonstrated that they were not averse to using a little force to reinforce their authority.

We also were very careful in not revealing the whereabouts of our camp at night. This was easier said than done and it was only the policemens' rather robust actions that made sure we weren't followed.

It had become much easier now to augment the rations by raiding the numerous native gardens for bananas and taro root and, this close to the coast palm trees were in abundance and we had the added luxury of dining on the growing tops of the palms — sometimes called "millionaires cabbage" as taking the top meant the death of the tree. These extra greens were very much welcomed as a change of diet and also proved a godsend because a food drop was out of the question as we were only a few miles from Hollandia. A drop, at this time and place, would be a dead giveaway and courting disaster.

While reasonably okay for food, we were desperately in need of some new clothing. All this time without a change had left its mark and we were a pretty ragged lot. The left leg of my trousers was missing from the knee down and Neville had a big rip in the back of his shirt, which he had tried, unsuccessfully, to mend with some of my cord. Sam's hat with the snakeskin band was missing and had probably been taken by a hungry village dog and he now wore a grimy piece of parachute cloth round his head as a replacement. The remainder of our clothes were in a similar woeful state.

Surprisingly, our footwear was still in reasonably good state. The good old reliable army boots had stood up well to the almost continual wet and muddy conditions although the leather laces had often been replaced with some of my cord. The U.S. army nylon windcheaters were also in good condition though pretty grimy and badly in need of a good cleaning. They had been well chosen and were just the thing during rainy weather and in the low misty cloud on top of the higher hills. We had selected well in those two items.

Bob, experienced in living in this type of country was, when one considered the circumstances, always neatly dressed and had the best and well cared for beard, but for size and length could not begin to match Sam's wild looking growth which was, by far, the most prolific. I was proud of my effort, as well, but the poor multi-coloured moustache detracted from the overall look, while Neville didn't seem to be able to grow a beard at all. A few downy hairs under his nose, and a bunch of straggly long hairs on his chin, was his best effort! But, then he always looked too young to grow a beard! The police boys were always clean-shaven and put us to

shame. How they managed to shave with the same old blunt safety razor blades was a remarkable feat!

While our clothing had suffered badly we still had almost our full quota of ammunition as there had not been the need to use much and we were well supplied and even had a hand grenade each. The only other ammo we had used were the shotgun cartridges the policemen had used to shoot pigeons. I had a feeling though it wouldn't be long before we were using some more!

We moved on, keeping a good lookout, and always with someone, usually a policeman, leading fifty yards ahead of the main party. Occasionally we would stop and listen intently for a few minutes, as we knew this would pay dividends because, from past experience with Japs, we were aware they were very prone to chattering as they walked on patrol. A bit like our American allies who patrolled like Brown's cows!

Any day now, we expected to hear the sounds of the U.S. landing and sure enough, very early one morning, while I was on a special radio schedule and the others were sitting talking, we heard the shattering sounds of explosions and gunfire north of our position. Suddenly the sky was full of aircraft and the sounds of bombing and strafing were coming over loudly and continuously. Most of the bombing came from the direction we had often heard the sounds of aircraft engines warming up and we guessed the Americans, as their number one priority, were doing their best to put the airstrip out of action.

This was the day we had been waiting for! The Task Force had landed! In a few more days we would be able to join the Americans and relax. It would only be a matter of waiting until all was clear. How wrong we were!

Chapter 29.

STRAGGLERS

It was the 22nd April and we had been on patrol in this wild country for almost five weeks.

The noise of the landing lasted all day with little cessation in the bombing and shelling but, surprisingly, by nightfall only an occasional isolated rifle shot and, now and again, some sporadic machine gun fire could be heard. The landing had apparently met with very little resistance.

We had expected the opposition to be limited as for some days the natives had been saying that a lot of the Japs were already making their way westward along the coast and the information of this exodus had been forwarded to HQ and from there, we hoped, passed to the Task Force. Obviously attacks on Aitape and Wewak, to the east, had been successful and the garrison at Hollandia knew they would be next on the list and were getting out while the going was good!

Now we could relax we thought. The danger was over! A couple of days walking and we would be with the Americans. But, we were mistaken and in a few days we would be fighting for our lives!

Although most of the enemy were fleeing westward, along the coast, for some reason many were coming south in our direction. Why, it was hard to understand, though I guess they were just trying to get away from the U.S. troops.

They were everywhere, though only in small groups of five or six, and we had to be very much on the alert if the operation was to progress to a successful conclusion with no casualties.

So for the next ten days, in spite of this added danger, we decided that it would be best to stay in the area but to keep away from the tracks as much as possible. Being only a small party, contact with large numbers of the enemy was to be avoided at all costs as we had no wish to become casualties at this late date!

In a short while it became apparent that the stragglers, as to be expected, were very short of food and were starting to eat anything that seemed remotely edible. They descended on the native gardens and stripped them of all vegetation and

when nothing remained, must have realised their only chance of survival was to move along the coast with the intention of contacting their own troops further to the west. It had finally dawned on them that there was very little likelihood of help in going south and from then on we were often forced into contact.

The denuding of the native gardens also meant that we were going to be on short rations and more time had to be spent digging for taro roots and collecting and cooking a few other edible plants that the constables knew about which fortunately grew in this area. The plants were okay and, if one liked spinach, could be eaten with little trouble and at least it was filling! It is significant that when food is scarce we tend to put our aversions behind us and are more than willing to give almost anything a try especially if it means the difference between a full stomach and starvation!

Our original instructions were to avoid trouble, but now it was easier said than done, and we found ourselves in the middle of the enemy's escape route. There were signs that many hundreds had already passed along the route because they had beaten a path through the bushes about fifteen yards wide and stripped much of the undergrowth of their leaves in search of anything remotely edible. There were still plenty more to come and we had to be very much on the alert.

Goodness knows where they would end up! We reckoned that most would eventually starve and die, in the rugged and inhospitable country to the west, before they reached the next Jap outpost on the coast at Tandjong Sarmi some seventy miles away.

But there were plenty of them wandering aimlessly in our area and we had our hands full protecting ourselves. They had not all gone to the west!

Fortunately those we did contact were in only small groups, of two or three, and very much a disorganised rabble. The almost complete absence of officers was very apparent and we thought that perhaps they had their own escape route!

Our party, though small in numbers, were experienced soldiers, and backed up by the constables, were far from defenceless. We were more than ready to give a good account of ourselves now that the enemy could not be avoided and in the next few days that's just what we had to do!

During those last days we accounted for some fifty-two of the enemy, without loss to ourselves, though a few times there were close shaves. We were lucky to always meet small parties who were greatly surprised, and that gave us the advantage.

On one memorable day we surprised fourteen, of the sons of Nippon, resting in a ramshackle native hut close by a small creek. It was clear by the absence, once again, of any lookouts and the noise they were making, that they were completely unaware of our party. So unaware that they did not even hear the noise I made when attacked by big black hornets, while creeping up on the hut!

We were uncertain of the enemy's numbers though by the voices there seemed to be at least a dozen. If this was correct we would have to be very careful as we would not be able to commit more than nine of our party to the assault. This would leave three policemen as a guard against a surprise attack from other stragglers and to keep an eye on our packs etc. Our nine would then attack the hut and hope to take the occupants by surprise and to make sure, Bob sent Wunius in a wide arc round to the right to try and get a view of the front of the hut to see if there was a sentry. In the meantime we retired about 50 yards further away to await Wunius' return. He was back in less than fifteen minutes and reported that there was no guard and, though there was a lot of talk going on, he had been unable to see how many were inside the hut. The lack of a sentry was good news and obviously meant they were not expecting any trouble and would be off guard.

So, very cautiously we moved, and despite the hornets, crept to within ten yards of the hut on the side away from the creek with Neville a little in advance. He moved further ahead and crouched behind a rock five yards from the hut and held up a grenade as a warning and waved for us to back away and take cover. We needed no second warning as grenades are multi-directional and will just as easily kill friend as foe if one is not careful! He pulled the pin, counted to three, and threw it through a hole in the side of the hut and ducked back behind the rock. Almost immediately the grenade detonated with a satisfying roar and a couple of seconds later we emerged from cover and were amazed to see the entire side of the hut had been blown out. Apparently the grenade had exploded before hitting the ground and all the Japs looked to be either dead or badly stunned. A few were showing some movement but were not capable of retaliation and a few bursts of Owen fire was all that was needed and then Sam, just to make certain all had been accounted for, ran to the doorway and needlessly let loose half a magazine from his Owen – a waste of ammo!

Chapter 30.

SAM'S STORY

On examination it looked as though the grenade had done most of the damage, before we let loose, and all of them were well and truly dead. This had been a well-armed party and we had been lucky, as you will see in a moment. They certainly weren't like some of their mates as they were well supplied with rice and dried fish plus some vegetables that had obviously come from native gardens in the vicinity. A couple of them appeared to have been sick and were lying in makeshift beds. We made sure they had all gone to wherever good dead Jap soldiers go and just as we were ready to make a search of the bodies we heard Yaru calling that there were three Japs at the creek. Sam took off after Yaru and what occurred then is worth repeating in the following paragraphs.

Before the attack we had been unaware of three Japs down at the creek some seventy-five yards away. Obviously our attack plan hadn't been faultless and we had been more than a little careless in not scouting the area well enough before hand. Apparently, the three had been washing or bathing while our attack was in progress and on hearing the firing had decided to save themselves rather than help their mates. They took off along the creek bank, carrying their rifles, and but for Yaru, who with Anis and Sabokinya had been left to guard our rear, would have got away. He saw them go and called to us and then, closely followed by Sam, took off after them. The rest of us, once alerted, followed more slowly.

About one hundred yards further down the hill we arrived on a scene that will forever stay in my memory.

Sam, in his haste to get at the fugitives, had apparently taken a tumble down the creek bank — I think it was named Broa Creek — and was just getting to his feet as we arrived on the scene. His Owen was lying near a largish rock and had obviously been knocked from his grasp when he fell. While we watched, he quickly retrieved it and ran firing a burst from the hip at the nearest Jap, some 15 yards away. The Jap didn't fall. He had missed! Still running he fired another quick burst. Missed again! He tried a third short burst, this time standing still, and still no luck!

Sam was an excellent shot and wouldn't normally miss at that range.

What was wrong? Why had he missed three times, at close range?

He was almost on top of the Jap when he saw the problem.

The Owen's barrel was bent and even to this day I can still see the amazed look on his face!

But, our Sam had been a commando and a trifle like a bent barrel didn't faze him for long! He quickly tossed the useless gun to one side and whipped his favourite knife from its scabbard – a well-sharpened army issue bayonet. Sam loved that bayonet!

By this time the Jap had recovered from his initial shock, realised that he better defend himself, and swung his rifle up ready to fire, but had delayed too long and was just a fraction late. Sam was on him in a flash, struck the rifle aside, and stabbed him in the chest.

It was all over in a twinkling and we hadn't moved. Just stood there with mouths agape!

But Yaru had moved! He had quickly disposed of the other two Nips, who weren't showing any signs of defending themselves, but were continuing their dash for cover. There was nothing amiss with his Owen!

Initially, Sam seemed to have the Japs mesmerised and for a fraction of time they seemed incapable of movement and made no attempt to protect themselves. Perhaps their inaction was excusable when one took into account his appearance! He looked and acted like a wild man, with his ragged clothes, big black beard and dirty rag round his head. He was a sight to behold!

We left the Japs where they fell and ever careful and aware that the gunfire might have attracted more of their friends we went back to the hut, made a quick but thorough search for any documents – but found none – then gathered up their weapons, removed the bolts, tossed the rifles in the creek and took the grenades and rifle bolts with us to dispose of later. We put about 500 yards between us and the hut and made camp for the night. One of the policemen dug a hole and tossed the grenades and bolts in and covered them, certain they would do no more damage.

Sam had retrieved the Owen gun and we examined it. He said that, while chasing the three Nips, he had fallen down the creek bank and the Owen had been knocked from his grasp. and the muzzle must have hit a rock when he fell. Looking at it we could see it had hit some hard object and the rock, next

to where the gun had been lying, looked the likely culprit.

The barrel was bent upwards and slightly to the right. It was curved rather than sharply bent and that was probably the reason the rounds cleared the muzzle. We estimated the bend to be about 20 degrees, or perhaps a little less, and were mystified why the whole thing hadn't blown up in Sam's face. He was a very lucky man! We hadn't seen anything like it before – at least not one that still worked!

The barrel would have become fairly hot during the attack on the hut and had not had time to cool down and was, no doubt, the reason it bent when it hit the rock.

We weren't about to try to fire it again, though Sam was prepared to try! It looked far too dangerous and would be impossible to straighten properly. It was finished.

Sam tossed it into the scrub where it probably still lies. It was another casualty of the war!

From then on Sam used one of the spare American .30 calibre carbines.

This seems to be a good time to have a word about Sam and his great dislike for the Japanese. As mentioned before, he was born in Sumatra and at about age 25 came to live in Australia and eventually was naturalised. His parents remained in Sumatra and they were badly treated by the Japanese. Sam somehow found out about this and was thereafter determined to do away with every Jap he saw!

(There is a follow up to this story. After, and probably during the war years, there had been a monthly magazine called "Man" magazine – now out of print – which I think was printed in Melbourne. Sometime in 1946 there appeared a double page drawing of this same incident showing Sam stabbing the Japanese soldier, and the Owen gun with the bent barrel lying nearby and Yaru shooting the other two Nips. How it got to be there is not known as Sam swore he had not mentioned it to anyone. Though, as you will read later on, we referred to it in an interview, and subsequent taping of the operation by Damien Parer, the well-known War Correspondent. For years I had a copy of this drawing but somehow misplaced it and now only have a copy of the original done by a badly wounded young soldier from Victoria during his period of convalescence.)

Chapter 31.

CLOSE SHAVES

That night we got to talking about the Japs in the hut. They had plenty of rice, which was puzzling as all the other stragglers had very little. We were also amazed by their carelessness in not keeping a proper lookout. Neville, always the thinker, suggested that they may not have come from Hollandia but from farther a field. Perhaps, he said, they had come from the east, and travelled along the coast from over the border at Vanimo, a little over 30 miles away, and had probably planned to go to Hollandia but had heard the sounds of the landing, had realised what was happening, and made a detour in a southerly direction to bypass the hostilities. When we discovered them they were having a much needed rest before going further westward. We agreed it was a strong possibility.

Fate had caught up with them when they found the old hut and decided to rest awhile before continuing their trek westward. They would have expected the area to be safe from attack this far south and had obviously become careless and because of this carelessness had paid the supreme penalty.

Once we knew they were in the hut their fate had been decided and they never had a chance to withstand our attack. We had shown them no mercy. We may have been feeling guilty about the outright slaughter but, what else could we have done? We could have bypassed the hut and let them go on their way – perhaps to fight and kill some of our own soldiers at a later time – or we could have attempted to disarm them and taken prisoners, but this was a risk we were not prepared, or able, to take. Unnecessary killing? I don't think so, and on reflection, I think we did the right thing.

A few days before we had been told on the radio that the Americans had occupied Genyem – a village 15 miles from Hollandia and only a few miles north of our present position. During our talk Bob said that as we were close to the U.S. troops now seemed to be a good time to make an attempt to contact them and next day we should advise base of our intentions and slowly make our way northwards. Our operation was clearly finished. At least it was ended as far as gathering information was concerned. In this part of the world the war had clearly been won and the enemy routed.

Off we went next morning, a little excited, but still

keeping a good lookout. This area was only lightly timbered but the low shrubby undergrowth reduced visibility to about twenty yards or so. Sam and I were used to taking the lead in the mornings and Bob and Neville in the afternoons and I was walking slowly, just in advance of Sam, and my pack was feeling unduly heavy. We'd had a big day the day before and were pretty tired and some of us were recovering from our latest malarial attack – a disability we had picked up earlier in other places – and consequently did not have our minds completely on the job. My lethargy, however, quickly left me with a rush for on entering a small clearing I saw before me a lone Nip perched on a rock about twenty yards ahead, obviously having a rest. He saw me and reached down for his rifle, which was propped against the rock.

My reflexes have always been quick and my Owen was cocked ready to fire. From the hip I aimed and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened! A misfire! Unheard of in an Owen gun!

I recocked and tried again. Still no luck, and as I was about to dive for cover, there was a blast over my left shoulder and the Jap, just as he was aiming his rifle, fell to the ground. It was good old, dead-eye Sam, come to the rescue with his trusty carbine. Thank goodness, and may God bless you Sam!

I've often thought about that Jap and the misfire. Here I was standing, momentarily frozen – very momentarily I can assure you as fear can give my reflexes that bit of extra speed when needed – to the spot, with a weapon that wouldn't fire, utterly defenceless, or thought I was! In the heat of the moment I had completely forgotten my Luger in the shoulder holster! What would have happened if Sam hadn't been there?

That same morning, after changing the magazine and firing a couple of rounds to see if everything functioned properly, we was again sneaking quietly along, now keeping a good lookout, when suddenly a Jap popped up on my right no more than 6 or 7 yards away. He fired his rifle – I heard the report just before the Owen began to rattle – but he must have been a bad shot as he missed. Fortunately for me, being left-handed, my Owen was under my left arm and it was a natural movement for me to pivot and fire. This time the Owen didn't fail me. More by good luck than good shooting my burst of four rounds caught him in the face and that was another one!

By now I was thinking that this wasn't one of my best days and was hoping for a little less excitement to keep my nerves under control. Two near misses in a couple of hours was enough for me!

In the afternoon Bob and Neville took the lead. A most welcome move, I thought! So Neville went ahead. Sam was a little put out as he loved to lead because it gave him the opportunity to get first crack at any Jap, who might be silly enough, to cross his path. By the end of that day we got six more Nips. Neville, with a very clever manoeuvre, got four in one group and Sam got a couple.

I know this may sound like shooting kangaroos but you can be assured it was much more risky than that! These fellows were armed and could shoot back. It was, them or us!

Why didn't we take them prisoner? A good question! Perhaps we could have, assuming of course, they were prepared to surrender, and they most certainly were not! We, so few in number, were taking enough risks as it was and had been very lucky to have escaped without any serious wounds and the thought of, at this time, having about 40 odd Japs in tow was quite out of the question. We had seen, at other times, the things Japanese prisoners could do to the unwary and were determined it was not going to happen to us. Our complement of twelve men was not nearly large enough to guard them without risking our safety and we couldn't provide them with food as we had barely enough for our own needs.

It was tough on them, but that's the fortunes of war. They would have done the same to us given the opportunity. Keeping them captive was a risk we were most certainly not prepared to take! Bad luck for them!

Looking back, after all these years, I realise that most, if not all, the Japs we killed in those last few days of the operation, probably would have died anyway, of starvation or sickness, in the following weeks. There was no help and precious little food for them in that wild country and taking the long view, perhaps we could have tried to dodge them and saved our ammo!

Chapter 32.

THE AMERICANS

We could hear and see that the Americans were very rapidly taking over. Aircraft were plentiful and all those we saw had U.S. markings. The sounds of fighting had just about ceased except for some sporadic gunfire and what sounded like the odd mortar explosion from about 2 miles ahead.

The last eight hours had not produced any contact with enemy soldiers and it came as a surprise when we found three .303 Lee Enfield rifles lying on the ground to the left of a well-worn track. Examination showed they all had full, or nearly full, magazines and were in pretty good condition. Goodness only knows where they came from and how they got there, as obviously they were rifles belonging to our army. Had they come from Aitape or Wewak or points further east? We would never know! To make sure they would not be used the bolts were removed and thrown into thick undergrowth much to the dismay of the constables who would have dearly loved to own them! Perhaps, in the years ahead, someone would find and wonder where they came from.

We were close enough now to try to make contact with the U.S. forces at Genyem. After a short discussion it was decided that it would be a good idea to send a couple of the police boys ahead to make contact. We reasoned that the, "quick on the trigger", Yanks would be less inclined to shoot up a couple of natives than a couple of white men. Anis, because he spoke reasonable English, with the boss boy, Yaru, as the other one, seemed to be the best pair to go. But, not right away. First they were to reconnoitre in the direction of the firing and to remain under cover and not make contact, and to report back as soon as possible.

It seemed a good idea and we decided the boys would go next morning, all being well. After making camp for the afternoon, Sam and Bob with three policemen, went back to a nearby creek, for a well needed clean up, a couple of hundred yards away. The rest of us were to wait our turn and go when they came back.

Within minutes we heard gunfire from the direction they had gone. Neville, and the rest of the police, went quickly to investigate while I stayed behind to guard the camp. The shooting was of short duration and within ten minutes they were all back at the camp. Sam was waving an officer's sword

and had a bag full of paper money which, of course, turned out to be worthless invasion stuff and we reckoned he must have killed another paymaster! He said he was going to sell the sword to the first Yank he met! Neville also had scored one of the Japanese army imitation Lugers.

Bob said they had surprised a group of four Japanese soldiers having a swim, without a guard of any sort and they had paid the maximum price for their carelessness!

Of course, once again, they were sitting ducks! They had attempted to get to their rifles but only one had succeeded and they were all killed. That brought our tally to 52 without loss to ourselves. Neville, who had been hit with a splinter of rock from a ricochet, and Wunias, who had been nicked the day before, with a graze on the left arm, were our only minor casualties.

That encounter put the finish to the idea of having a clean up and the gear was hurriedly gathered and camp shifted about a quarter of a mile away. You can see that we were always careful and very mindful of doing the right thing for our own protection, which was something the enemy did not appear to practice, to their own undoing! A quarter of a mile doesn't sound very far, but in the patch of densely timbered country we picked, it was a good safe distance. My radio message reporting our daily activities, and what we proposed to do the next day, was quickly sent and the rest of the night was ours. A safe camp it may have been, but we still kept a couple of guards out all night!

Morning came and a bright sunny day looked in the offing and after a quick meal Bob sent the two policemen on their way with instructions to be back early in the afternoon. In the event they met any Japs, Yaru carried an Owen and Anis a carbine. We had no worries; they were two very reliable policemen and would do the job.

About 2pm they returned, all smiles, and reported there was a U.S. forward post, a little over a mile to the north, manned by two soldiers. The post was some 50 yards in the bush ahead of a perimeter defence in a largish village clearing and we reckoned it had to be the one on our map named Genyem. If this was correct, there was still some 10 miles to the coast and from there, about 10 miles east to Hollandia.

The boys said there seemed to be a lot of soldiers and native houses in the perimeter. We thought it could be a company or even a battalion of Americans.

So, early next day, with Yaru and Anis in the lead, we warily approached the forward post and when within one hundred

yards the two boys went up alone. We had decided that they should not carry any weapons and wear just a pair of shorts to try and give the impression that they were local natives. If, and when, they were allowed to approach the forward post they could then, speaking in English, tell the Americans of the rest of our party waiting to make contact. Bob had given Yaru his army slouch hat to show, reasoning that most Americans would instantly recognise it as Australian.

Anis said later that it was touch and go whether they were going to be shot out of hand and it was only his good command of English that finally convinced the lookouts they were friends, and not Japs. He showed them Bob's hat but it didn't help any, and when he revealed that there were more of us in the bush ready to come forward they decided this was a job for an officer and one of them ran back to the perimeter. In quick time, a Major and another officer plus a squad of ten men approached the forward post. Anis said it was plain to see they feared some sort of a trap and were not about to take any chances as they were armed to the teeth.

The sergeant called out to us to come forward and leave our weapons behind. Needing no second bidding we quickly dumped our weapons and packs and moved out in single file, taking good care not to make any moves that may have been construed as unfriendly. We were quickly surrounded by the squad who made a great show of menacing us with their weapons and who appeared very nervous, and trigger-happy.

Speaking for myself, I was terrified and thought this was by far the scariest moment of the whole operation and I could see that the others were feeling the same way. The soldiers, who seemed very young and barely out of their teens, were excited and almost out of control and it took some stern words from the Major, who along with the sergeant was quite a bit older, to calm them enough for us to explain our existence. Until he got his troops under control I was fully expecting we would be gunned down at any moment. A frightening experience indeed!

We had assumed, and rightly so, that any of the forward troops would have been advised to be on the lookout for an Allied patrol. Not a bit of it, they knew nothing at all and as far as they were concerned anything on two legs in this area would be either Japanese, to be shot at, or natives to be treated with caution!

But, once we had convinced them we were on their side and were 'dinkum' Aussies we were greeted with open arms and treated right royally.

After collecting our gear we were escorted back to the

perimeter and once there were immediately surrounded by a mob, all pushing and shoving for position to get a good look at us. The whole thing was becoming rather embarrassing until Bob asked the Major to call his troops off and allow us to settle down and give us a position in the perimeter where we would be able to relax for a while. We were taken to the centre and given a place next to the radio operator and the Major's slit trench and here the major and his officers proceeded to ask questions about the operation. They wanted to know where we had been and how we had got there in the first place; what had we been doing and how long had we been in the area and, of course, a typically American question; how many Japs had we killed? When told we had been there for a couple of months and had been doing intelligence gathering for their task force they were most impressed and full of admiration and not to disappoint them we bunged it on a little.

Just the same, and despite their admiration, we were annoyed that these forward troops had not been warned of our existence. It seemed doubly strange that, although we were inserted into the area at the request of the Americans, this forward company had not been notified. A typical army mess up. Someone had slipped up!

It was apparent that this company of soldiers were not regular army and had only been out from the States for a few weeks and were as green as grass. They seemed to be ill disciplined and pretty much at a loss in these surroundings and would have been sitting ducks for the Japs had there been any about.

Fortunately, they had nothing to fear because we knew most of the enemy, except for a few possible stragglers, had been long gone to the west.

They had been out of contact with their HQ battalion for some days because of the failure of their peddle radio and the Major, seeing our radio, asked Bob whether I could try and get in touch with their HQ.

Why they hadn't sent a runner back before this was beyond me. Though very likely they didn't know the way! I suggested to Bob that perhaps if we sent the message to Miller he could send it on to Finschafen and they could relay it to the task force.

We did much better than that. Base, from the day after the landing, had a daily schedule with a "Z" Special unit attached to the task force at Hollandia and from then on I passed quite a few messages through them. The major was most impressed with our radio and asked if it was made in the U.S. I was happy to tell him it was made in Australia!

That night we settled down, safe and sound, in the centre of the perimeter. The troops had dug slit trenches for us and had even constructed a shelter from groundsheets to protect us from the rain! It felt good to know that we were finally in safe hands and didn't have to worry about the Nips, or post sentries. Our hosts fed us well and we were more than ready for a good night's sleep, at long last!

Wrong again!

We had just settled down for the night after having a yarn with some of the Americans. Most of them came from the state of Georgia and had not been prepared or trained for action in this wild country. They were nice young fellows, though a little too brash and sure of themselves for their own good and had a lot to learn. We hoped, for their sakes, they wouldn't have contact with the enemy before they had a lot more experience!

And then it happened. It had just gone 9pm when, suddenly, there was a burst of firing from the forward post and within a few moments it seemed everyone in the perimeter was up and shooting!

Nobody seemed to know what they were shooting at but that didn't seem to matter! We kept our heads well down, and it was a good move because, incredibly, some of them were even shooting across the perimeter!

Finally, there were shouts to cease fire from the officers and things quietened down and slowly returned to normal. We were told later that the forward post had reported they had seen what they thought were Japanese in the trees and began shooting.

Shooting at shadows probably! Privately we thought they were an ill disciplined mob and the officers appeared to have little control. Next day we were proven correct when just on midday, as we were enjoying a meal of U.S. rations, someone in the forward post called out that they could see a Jap in the trees. About a dozen soldiers (?) immediately rushed helter-skelter from the perimeter and headed for the scrub shouting they were "gonna get me a Jap."

They didn't get one and finally came straggling back to the perimeter like a lot of Brown's cows! We were surprised that they hadn't shot one another!

Next thing, to our amazement, they set up a mortar and started firing indiscriminately into the scrub for about 10 minutes. God only knows what they hoped to hit! We were not

impressed!

Chapter 33.

HOLLANDIA

Next morning, we decided that it would be much safer if we got out of there and continued on to Hollandia under our own steam. It was only another ten miles and in this flatter country we would be able to easily do it in a day. At the radio sked we asked base to alert Hollandia that we expected to arrive either, late that evening, or the next morning.

Much refreshed, after our first good night's sleep for ages, we set off and about midday came to Lake Sentani; a beautiful stretch of lovely clear water backed by low hills on the southern side. The water looked very inviting and we were certainly in the need of a good wash and brush up so we had a very welcome quick dip, boiled the billy and then continued on the way.

Nearing the coast we met a squad of ten soldiers who had been sent to contact us. They were a different kettle of fish and looked to be, well-trained regular army soldiers, which made us wonder why the brass, in their wisdom, had sent such a badly trained company of raw troops to Genyem.

We were going to Dempta, a town situated on Humboldt Bay, some 10 miles east of Hollandia. About two miles from our destination the ten man squad left with the intention of reconnoitring the area directly to the west. We thought it rather funny, after having successfully navigated through the wilds for the last two months, when the sergeant asked whether we would be able to find our way to Dempta! Bob assured him we were more than capable. Nevertheless, the sergeant picked a two striper to act as our guide and we readily accepted the offer thinking we would be able to use him as our contact man when we reached the troops at Dempta. The scare we had when making contact at Genyem had been sufficient excitement and we weren't keen to repeat the experience.

Rendezvous with the forward troops went smoothly, thanks to our guide, and we were escorted to the main camp and there interviewed by the Colonel. Unfortunately, I am unable to recall the battalion number, but I do remember they were regular army and appeared to be well behaved and well trained. The colonel treated us right royally and made sure we got everything we needed. We even had a beer with him, and although it was only low alcohol U.S. canned beer, it was much appreciated and went down well! Instead of a tent we were

given a, not very clean, native hut for our quarters, which suited us and before leaving, the Colonel asked Bob to come and see him later to talk about the operation.

We were told where to go to get a meal and the Quarter master was asked to supply us with anything we needed in the way of clothes, etc. We readily accepted the offer of towels and singlets, underpants, etc, plus a blanket each and such luxuries as toothbrushes and toothpaste. I took the opportunity and asked for a pair of trousers but had to settle for a camouflage suit to replace my torn ones. Those of us who smoked, stocked up on cigarettes and the policemen were supplied with tobacco, though they weren't keen on the American loose leaf style, which wasn't nearly as good as their stick tobacco. At meal times we joined the chow line and were suitably amazed at the goodies arranged on tables. Tobacco, cigarettes, even small cigars, shaving gear and a variety of lollies, plus writing materials were all there for the taking at no charge! What a difference to our army!

Bob thought it would be a good idea for all of us to see one of the army doctors for a check up. Neville and myself, and a couple of the police boys, had suffered a lot from malaria we had contracted the year before in the Mandated Territory. Apart from that our health generally was pretty good, which was remarkable considering we had been living for the last two months under the most trying conditions. We all had a few cuts and scratches, and two had minor wounds that were almost healed but needed a bit of attention. It wouldn't take us long to get really fit again.

What was needed more than anything else was a really good rest. Six or seven days with nothing to do but eat and sleep would be very welcome and then we would have to think about the trip back to Australia and a spot of leave.

The operation had taken close to nine weeks and we were all comparatively well cashed up with a goodly amount of money in our paybooks that we had been unable to spend. It would have been nice to have something to spend at the local U.S. army PX but the paybooks were back in Brisbane.

During operations it was usual for an extra five shillings per day to be added to our pay as 'danger money'. This extra money made our pay look a little more respectable and was very acceptable though it was unfair that the P.B.I. (Poor Bloody Infantry) didn't also get it! But, we had received it on other ops and were not about to refuse it this time!

Bob had gone by light plane to Hollandia several days before to make a report to some of the brass so we decided to

follow him. With the help of a ride in an empty army truck we arrived and were quickly provided with a place to stay by the Americans. We were a little put out that the local 'Z' Special party weren't particularly happy to see us and put it down to professional jealousy!

Obviously nobody had thought about arranging our trip back to Brisbane, which we thought was a pretty poor show. Bob went to the "Z" C.O. and he very decently arranged a lift for us for the following week. In the meantime we could just lie around, rest and look at the sights.

Despite all the sounds of bombing and strafing during the landing we could see very little evidence of damage to the town. A few buildings had been destroyed but a remarkable number were untouched. A number of cargo ships had been sunk in the harbour and the wharves and harbour sheds had taken a heavy battering; U.S. engineers were hard at work restoring the damage. We didn't see the airstrip but guessed it would be badly damaged as well.

The P.O.W. compound was about a mile out of town and it came as a surprise to see how few Japanese it contained. We estimated there was about five hundred, at the most. The majority of the garrison must have gone bush and headed westward up the coast, to God knows where, before the invasion! From our own experience we knew they wouldn't last long in that country as there would be precious little to eat and it was about 80 odd miles to the next Japanese garrison. Most of them would die, but I guess dying would be preferable to being taken prisoner!

The only really decent houses were on the hills at the back of Lake Sentani. According to the Yanks most of the better buildings had originally belonged to the Dutch governor and some of the other high-ranking government officials. It wouldn't be long before some of the American brass were in occupation. The Yanks certainly like their comfort!

We were just putting in time until an aircraft became available and there was nothing to do but wait, laze about and be early for the 'chow' line, as our Allies called mess parade. And we were certainly amazed at the quantity and variety of the chow that was available. And the food; turkey, ice cream, pancakes (hot cakes), bacon rashers, orange juice, fruit, etc had us really astonished at the way the other half lived. Shades of bully beef, rice, sago and army biscuits!

One day, while sitting talking to some Americans, we were approached by a War Correspondent from the ABC who wanted to make a record of our experiences during the operation. We weren't particularly keen but Bob convinced us that it would

be something of interest to our families. The war correspondent turned out to be none other than Damien Parer, of all people!

Bob declined to take part in the interview, which I thought a little strange since he had been so keen for us to do it, but we went ahead and Parer set up his equipment and asked us lots of questions, all the time recording the answers on tape. The whole session took about six hours and he said it would be made into a record of about half an hour's duration and would be broadcast in Australia before the month was out.

When the recording was eventually finished he played it back and it was awful and extremely amateurish, to say the least. But, Parer thought it was excellent and was quite happy with our effort, though I think he was being diplomatic and we came to the conclusion he was not hard to please and told him so but he stuck to his guns, noted our addresses and promised a copy each when we got home.

This had been our third operation in the New Guineas and each one had been tougher than the last. What next lay in store for us, we wondered? More New Guinea perhaps? The way the war was progressing we didn't think so. Farther to the north-east seemed to be the most likely.

The Sixth and Seventh Divisions were doing all the mopping up and the Japanese were finished in New Guinea except for some small pockets here and there. As far as the war here was concerned, the Allies would be moving on and our next job could be somewhere in the islands to the north-east. Perhaps Borneo.

Thus ended a very successful patrol. It had been a great achievement and we could look back with a great deal of pride on our exploits of the past nine weeks. Every man in the party had pulled his weight, especially the eight native policemen, whose bushcraft had been invaluable. They had proved to be 'number one' (one of their favourite expressions) soldiers and had been, collectively, a tower of strength during the operation and deserved a great deal of the credit for its success.

Chapter 34.

MISSION DEBRIEF

On this operation we had walked without a rest, for a total of sixty-two days and though the distance, as the crow flies, was only about seventy miles from swamp to Hollandia, we had travelled almost twice that far. This too may sound unimpressive but, when one considers the type of country it was; almost completely unexplored with most of the natives in a primitive state of civilisation, with countless swamps lousy with mosquitoes and leeches and the most rugged mountainous country imaginable, it was a great achievement even without the added risk of contacting the Japanese.

We were informed that our operation had been the only one that had been successful in the area. Hollandia had long had the name for being a dangerous area for operations and at least two other parties, starting from different locations at the same time as ours, had come to grief.

The main one, an AIB operation, led by Capt. Blue Harris, an original coast watcher, had surfaced in the U.S. submarine 'Dace' at Tanamerah Bay, ten miles to the west of Hollandia.

They had started for the shore in a rubber dinghy but it had overturned in the surf causing them to lose most of their possessions, including both radios. The loss of the radios was enough to make the operation an immediate and complete failure and they had no option but to return to the submarine. Unfortunately, a breakdown in torch signals caused the sub to submerge and leave. They were now on their own with very little gear and only a few weapons. The Dace was due to return in fourteen days and their chances of staying in the vicinity for that length of time was extremely slight, so Harris decided to move inland as they were almost certain to be discovered and either captured or killed if they did not.

Local natives, living in a nearby hut, were warily approached and asked to supply a guide to get them to a safe camp for the night. Harris had previously decided that they should make their way south to the Idenberg River where Capt. Miller had his camp. This was the same Miller who ran our base station at the Idenberg River and Harris' party had intended to use him also as their HQ and base station, and maintain radio contact throughout their operation.

Their lack of communications with base would create a few

problems for AIB, who would assume the worst, but there was nothing Harris could do but try for Miller's camp about 70 or 80 miles south. He knew it was a dangerous and desperate decision but with the enemy strongly entrenched in every other direction they had no option but to head south. So despondently they gathered what was left of their gear and set off on the long journey knowing the chance of finding Miller was an almost impossible task.

All that day, led by the native, they travelled in rugged hilly country and at nightfall made camp in a dry creek bed. The guide left them, saying he would look for a better camp, but did not return.

It was an ominous development and they were now sure they had been betrayed. Later on it was revealed that their presence had been made known to the Japanese as soon as they first approached the natives on the beach!

To cut a long story short, they were attacked by the Japanese and Harris and four others were killed. Three of them escaped and went into hiding until the Japs left the vicinity and then set off in the direction, they calculated, would bring them to the Idenberg and Capt. Miller.

After five days of travelling they realised the chances of getting to Miller were negligible, as they had become very tired and hungry and unable to continue for much longer. By good fortune they found some caves in a hillside and went into hiding for the next fourteen days; their only food being palm tops. On this diet they became very weak and were greatly relieved, in a few more days, to hear the sounds of the U.S. task force landing. With great difficulty they managed to make their way back and contacted the Americans.

Around about the same time, a Dutch/AIB party, walking in from Vanimo in Australian New Guinea, had all been killed the first day out. The two Dutch parties that started with us had also failed to get through.

So much had depended on the F.E.L.O. operation and it had come up trumps!

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For his part, as leader of the patrol, Bob, was awarded the M.C. and promoted to Captain, and I was awarded the M.M. and promoted to S/Sgt. That Neville and Sam didn't get the M.M. as well, instead of just being mentioned in despatches, was a great shame. Neville was promoted to lieutenant and Sam to Sergeant.

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The following is Bob Cole's summing up of the whole operation and it's effectiveness:-

INTELLIGENCE OBTAINED:

Concerning the enemy: From time to time intelligence was obtained by interrogation of natives and this was passed on immediately by signal link to ALAMO FORCE and, after the invasion, also to Task Force. The greater part of this information subsequently proved to be correct but, as the enemy prohibited any native traffic past GENJEM – either way – it was impossible to obtain information of activities on the coast.

The enemy was found to be using the government road from LAKE SENTANI – GENJEM – BROA CREEK to OENEROM and presumably endeavouring to strike the TOARIM RIVER or SARMI. It is estimated that at least 1,000 of the enemy passed over this road immediately after the invasion. They were organised bands up to a few hundred and were armed with mortars and L.M. Guns. However, those passing later were scattered, disorganised, demoralised and in poor health. These scattered small bands had apparently travelled long distances for clothing, footwear and equipment was in a poor state and very few carried rifles – although practically everyone carried grenades in their packs and a number carried revolvers.

Concerning the natives: Comparing the natives met in this area with those previously met to the south-west of AITAPE, very little difference could be detected, physique, dress, bodily decorations, houses, cooking methods, foods and gardening methods were all similar.

All natives carried the bow and arrow and the usual variety of hunting and fighting arrows but no spears were seen.

Areas or villages made up of scattered houses had their own language, which varied as the patrol moved, but interpreters were common for these "talks". Malay was spoken by isolated natives only until the KARTEBI village was reached, and here probably twelve of the inhabitants could converse in that language. KARTEBI village was the nearest to the enemy in which bush natives were found and even these, like all others contacted, were shy and needed much persuasion to walk freely into our camp.

Contacting and establishing goodwill and confidence with the local bush natives was more difficult than previously experienced. Undoubtedly their natural shyness was furthered

with contact with the enemy and their use of forced native labour.

The whole area was trade hungry and showed eagerness in acquiring such articles as knives, tomahawks, beads, cloth, salt and tobacco. They had only limited supplies of native food to offer in exchange but, on several occasions, they were persuaded to act as carriers. Twice, however, for unknown reasons such carriers fled without being paid. Apparently their shyness needs very little encouragement to outweigh their desire for trade articles.

Another method of establishing goodwill was found in treating the natives' sores. The whole area is pitifully in need of medical patrols and there was plenty of scope for using bandages and adhesive plaster carried for the purpose.

TOPOGRAPHY:

The whole area covered was of a most uninviting nature, generally swampy or mountainous with no happy medium.

REES LAKE (the swamp) was a most depressing feature for it is bounded by long grass flats with no firm foundation. Islands float on the water at the will of the wind, making navigation a danger. Merging into a vast sago swamp it extends to the foothills of the mountains, which bound it on three sides.

Native tracks undoubtedly follow the easiest terrain but these lead over strenuously steep mountain ridges, from one to four thousand feet – the valleys being swamps or, at least mud flats.

Undoubtedly the uninviting type of country is the reason for the dearth of native population.

Trouble was not experienced in finding suitable running streams for campsites, but animal and bird life is almost non-existent, as was experienced south-west of AITAPE.

Because of the scarcity of natives gardens were few and native foods rare. Sago grows abundantly in the swamp areas and the usual Limbongs (pith of tree) and native Kabiaks (nuts) are to be found.

PORTERAGE:

Throughout the patrol each member carried his own pack, with the FELO natives in addition carrying radio, medical and surplus rations. This, and because of the difficult nature of the country through which the patrol was travelling, was very

fatiguing. It caused some concern at the end of the patrol when contact was made with the enemy as alertness was undoubtedly affected. On three occasions local natives were used to carry from one base to another but twice these carriers fled into the bush without payment. No satisfactory explanation can be given for this behaviour.

DROPS OF FOOD AND EQUIPMENT:

Some difficulty was experienced in getting goods at the times required and at the sites most convenient. Possible reasons for this will be found in the delay in signals but, with the scarcity of native carriers, it seriously affected movement of the patrol and made planning almost impossible.

In all nine drops were received and generally cargo arrive in good condition — the most serious damage being to rescue kits.

DENIAL OF NATIVE LABOUR & FOODS TO THE ENEMY:

Very few natives were contacted during the patrol and none within six days walk of GENJEM, which was the nearest outpost to where our patrol was operating. Explanation of this is that natives had been forced to work for the Japs so they adopted themselves the action, which we had hoped to achieve, if they were found to be co-operating with the enemy. Undoubtedly this position inconvenienced the enemy — at least during their escape. It is known that, on one occasion, a party of Japanese required a guide from OENEROEM village but found it deserted and could not induce any natives to assist them.

F.E.L.O. NATIVES WITH PARTY:

All members co-operated splendidly and it is certain that the patrol would have experienced greater difficulties if it had to work with a lesser number.

KAKI and ARAM, left with the Dutch party because of sickness, eventually reported at FINSCHAFEN on the 28th May. Lt. de Bruine, O.C. Dutch party, spoke glowingly of their assistance to his party.

HEALTH:

Generally, little trouble was experienced except for a period of one week when one of the N.C.O.s experienced severe headaches accompanied by fits of vomiting. Treatment was given for malaria and chill.

All members were required to give continuous attention to

their feet as boots were never dry. This problem caused the Dutch party considerable trouble.

GENERAL

The area allotted for the operation of this mission did not allow very much scope for FELO activities.

The native population was very scattered and did not live in villages. Making contact was very difficult and natives who did approach the patrol were very reluctant to accompany it in any direction towards the enemy.

Communications with natives was quite satisfactory as usually a Malay speaking native could be found and the FELO's interpreter's experience was invaluable on these occasions.

Stress is made on the importance of adherence to all supply requirements. In country unknown to the patrol requirements cannot be forecast accurately. Therefore, it is necessary to have a full range of supplies available at Base before the patrol commences. Further strict adherence to the requests of the O.C. party must be kept to permit planning and mobility, for there are innumerable difficulties known to the party which cannot be fully made known to Base. Also, full co-operation by Air Force is required to ensure drops being made at the requested sites at the required time. Otherwise, as was experienced by the O.C. of this party on his last two missions, supplies dropped at the wrong site not only delayed the patrol but also exhausted the supplies dropped in an endeavour to bring them forward to the required positions. Further, contact may be lost without any intelligence or propaganda work being undertaken at the same time.