

A few recollections 1942/46 by Kelvin Smibert, Telegraphist PM 4510

Navy Beach Commando

January 2012



Only 2 of us left to march...April 2012...Melbourne



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A few recollections...1942 -46. Kelvin Smibert .Telegraphist PM 4510. NBC

Previously I have avoided this kind of thing despite requests, because, while I have clear personal memories of those times, I cannot put dates to most events.

However, A/B Ted Cherry of HMAS Assault Association has left us with his diary of dates from a lead up to the landings in Borneo to return home. So that makes it easy for me to tie most personal recollections to a place and date over that later period in the war.

So I am motivated to fill in some earlier events.

Living in Melbourne, I started work after matriculating , with an Industrial Chemical Company (ICI)and studied chemistry at night commencing January 1940. Signed up for the Navy early 1942 (17YO) and was mobilised 17th June 1942.

Travelled by train to HMAS Cerberus (Flinders naval Depot) for basic training, in a compartment with John (Jack) Cleary, and Kevin Seeney. (Father of present Deputy Premier of Qld ?)

I finished up spending more time in the company of my good friend Jack than any other person.

Drafted to Port Stephens NSW (HMAS Assault, for commando training etc) later 1942. joined Manoora in Sydney December 1942. and eventually to Cairns.

At this time the idea of combined ops and Beach Groups were in the experimental stage. A small number of us set up a camp in bushland on the west side of the Cairns Pt Douglas road.(Inland from the final site of NBC camp on the beach) At this camp Lt Commander Rogers was in charge and much in evidence. And we practiced landings etc.

There was a certain holiday time when all leave for Australian personnel to Cairns was banned....But, except for the few who were physically restrained by officers, (Lt Com Rogers was not in camp) we all went AWOL and struggled back early next morning.. The Junior Officers were livid and we were paraded in front of Buck Rogers, who walked severely up and down in front of the lines of sheepish young lads all dutifully at attention. Finally. "Well men. Did you all have a good time?"

(Chorus of Yessirs) "Well that's good. Just never do a thing like that again. Dismissed"



2/2 Pioneers camp. Next to ours



Our short term camp



We were close by the 9 Div 2/2 Pioneers (Ex Libya) for whom we had the greatest respect and also admiration for how they were able to just drive up in trucks and seemingly an hour later Tents/Cookhouse/ latrines/QM stores all laid out and operating. We got boots, clothing and some other things from these chaps....Maybe even weapons. I cannot recall. But we got weapon training from them.

Soon after this we found ourselves on the LSIs. Myself on Manoora travelling north from Sydney. Manoora had loaded with frozen beef and weevil infested flour transferred from the 'Australia' in Sydney....This food was probably already damned old when we got it....

So for what was probably about 3 months we had roast beef which had rainbow colouring when cooked, and bread which had to be sliced, held up to the light to identify the little animals, and hook them out with a fork. I had an electric toaster which helped the flavour a bit. The diet was rounded off with de-hydrated potatoes. Maybe the worst spell of food of all my time in the navy.

Headed off across the Coral sea. A few days in Milne bay (it was not that long before that that our wonderfully brave teenagers had stopped the Japs there and relics of tanks and barges littered the waters edge) See the book "A Bastard of a place" by Peter Brune.

Then on to Goodenough Island where we anchored and hung about for some time as a convoy came together. (The Japs lived on the other side of the Island).

Every morning there was a long line of sailors waiting at the sickbay as most of us had crops of skin sores. Mostly on arms. The treatment was Sulphonilamide. (No antibiotics then).

One day, wonder of wonders, we swapped a heap of the frozen beef with the US navy in exchange for big cans of pineapple juice !!! Such nectar !

A few days later NOBODY had any skin lesions !! In retrospect of course we had scurvy. Fancy that happening in a modern navy....Captain Cook would not have allowed it in the 1700s . !

Finally a big convoy was mustered. We took on American troops (not long enlisted) and departed for a landing in Dutch New Guinea at Hollandia. A couple of notable amazing events on this voyage which are too long to tell at this point (Maybe see Appendix)

The pre landing bombardment was moderately intense...But one event stands out. The USS Nashville, 6" cruiser, gave one almighty broadside directed at a point of land or

small island. No result, so a second broadside, and swoosh, a huge explosion and sheet of flame rose from the island...Intelligence must have pin pointed a fuel and ammo dump there.



I went ashore in the second wave but have no clear recollections except that I suffered a certain degree of trepidation, not having been in that position before.



But I do have a mental picture of standing off Wakde Island later....But it wasn't my turn to make a landing and did not.

Finally returned to Australia and home leave.

I think on this occasion, returning from leave, we travelled from Brisbane to Cairns (rather than on the old train), by sea in the SS Taroona, which for a generation had been a main sea connection between Melbourne and Launceston.

Leaving Brisbane, and while standing at the 'sharp end', I was hailed from the bridge by an elderly cousin, Bob Smibert. An old Scottish salt, retired sea Captain who was doing war service as a Brisbane River pilot.. The broad Scottish accent and huge voice tuned by shouting at sailors on square rigged sailing ships had everyone's attention. Much to my embarrassment.Bob had gained some fame for arresting, unarmed, and by bluff, a Japanese ship when he was harbour Master at Thursday Island .



Designed to go up the Tamar River, and drawing only 6 feet, the 'Taroona' rocked like a baby's cradle. We were passengers with a large number of US servicemen and in the tropical morning would all get on the port (shady) side which caused the ship to list about 15 degrees, creating shouts from the bridge "Can't some of you chaps get on the other side of the ship?" Then the reverse in the afternoons.

We went to the 'New' NBC camp on the beach north of Cairns. The blokes already there regarded us as green newcomers to the business. So that peeved us. Also that in my case listed as NBC 'B'. 'B' indeed !!

What a wow of a camp that was. Out of bed early and plunge straight into the blue sea. All fit as fiddles. Extra fruit and ice cream from the itinerant trader on top of the Navy 'scran'. Double beer ration as they had cooked the books to double our numbers.

Even if it was only Cairns beer still hot from the vat, I finished up a stone in weight higher than I have ever been before or since that time.

Ken Boys, Jack Cleary & Herb Kabat NBC beach camp



Apart from continued weapons training we made a number of landing exercises at this time with 9 Div soldiers....A few of our communications branch set up a signal station in one of the only 3 beach shacks on Trinity Beach. (Look at it now on Google maps)



On Trinity Beach....L-R. Sig Alf Withers (died wounds), PO Sigs, Tel Jack Cleary

While myself and few others joined a pommy ship, HMS Glenearn, which arrived off the shore. This was a brand new cargo vessel completed as the war in Europe drew to a close. Turbine driven with a 25 knot speed, it's smooth vibration-free take off was a revelation to me after the vibration and rumble of the Manoora's diesels .

The troop accommodation was in the cargo holds and pretty basic. .Yet the wireless office held a lovely array of the latest radios....(I still havent forgiven the poms for saying when we checked in "Oh. You dont have rum in your navy...So. 'Not entitled'....The rotters). Then one night I was asleep on the upper deck to keep cool. I happened to be asleep at the business end of a 4" gun when they decided to start firing the thing...The upshot of this is that the DVA now give me a small disability pension for my hearing... We went to Townsville on this ship anyway, and had a bit of leave.

Back at the camp, we entrained for Atherton Table-lands. (February?. 1945)



At Atherton

Never been so cold at night in my life. Accustomed as we were to the tropics now, the Table-land had actual frosts at night, a sheet of 3 ply wood for a bed, and one blanket. This engendered screaming complaints.

One day (at Atherton) we turned out dressed up smartly and paraded in front of the King's Brother.....Governor General, Duke of Gloucester. !!

Note: The very small man in centre of left row was Flyweight boxing champion of RAN. Maybe punch drunk



Approx 12th March 1945 (Now Ted Cherry's diary starts)

Moved back to Cairns and stuck into Redlynch Staging Camp. From the dry of Atherton to the mud and slush of the wet season in that transit camp.

Friday 16th March (Ted's notes in Italics) *Came aboard the USS Seabarb. Then laid off Cairns because of bad weather.....* Maybe also waiting for the convoy to muster.

We had been stuffed below decks with a couple or three thousand 9 Div troops. So crowded that, apart from meals in shifts, time on upper-deck was severely limited.

The ship was one of 'Kaisers' welded-up Liberty Ships. Despite that, they played 'Anchors Aweigh' in very formal manner as we pulled away from the wharf.

Had we been hit with even the smallest torpedo on this trip we just could not have got off.

Sunday 18th March *left Australia for Lord knows where (Midday)*

Tuesday 20th March *Arrived Milne Bay (early Morning)*

Wednesday 24th *Arrived Finchafen (early morning) Left at 3pm.*

Friday 23rd March *Arrived Biak 2-30 pm*

Sunday 25th March *Left Biak 3-50 pm... I scarcely recall those 2 places. BUT certainly remember Morotai.*

Wednesday 28th March *Arrived MOROTAI in afternoon,*

Well we didn't waste time when going ashore and the 'Boss' contacted the Senior naval Officer, Morotai, who was supposed to have had a camp set up all ready for our arrival !!!!? But had never heard of us and didn't want to either.

We grabbed the ear of an Afro-American driving a DUKW. (These fellows were always ready to be helpful). Said he would be back in a moment and take us and gear to a site which would be OK to camp in.....Finally selected a banana plantation where we put together our 2-man tents, supplemented by many broad banana leaves to keep out the

inevitable rain, but which kept us awake dribbling in and around us.

When we got real tents and organisation with MUCH help from the Yanks, we finished up staying at or near this site for some time...Long enough to go hunting with Owen Guns for wild-fowl to supplement whatever 'scran' we had. And swimming deep underwater at edge of coral reef, or exploring weird life forms in the mangroves.

One rating told off to get a jeep and water, filled a few empty 22 gallon petrol drums without cleaning them out....That didnt go down too well in a teapot !

.....Ted doesn't mention any detail for the next month and my memory of other camp sites and embarkation preparation are too vague to tell about much. One though. Camped at the end of an airstrip from which the USAF took off before dawn with over-laden bombers. Almost every morning at least one would fail to take off and would explode in a mass of bombs. Just SO sad and wasteful of young lives.

The last camp we had there was really good. Alongside a bubbling stream by the seaside. Only trouble was it was close to the 'perimeter' and just maybe subject to Japanese raids. Some evidence of footprints in the mornings.

Side note:

Morotai was elected by Gen Macarthur as the major base for re-taking Mindinao

And was taken on Sept 15 1944

The landing was scheduled to take place on September 15, 1944, the same day as the 1st Marine Division's landing at Peleliu. This schedule allowed the main body of the United States Pacific Fleet to simultaneously protect both operations from potential Japanese counter-attacks.

As little opposition was expected, Allied planners decided to land the invasion force close to the airfield sites on the Doroeba Plain. Two beaches in the south-west coast of the island were selected as suitable landing sites, and were designated Red Beach and White Beach. The Allied plan called for all three infantry regiments of the 31st Division to be landed across these beaches on September 15 and swiftly drive inland to secure the plain. As Morotai's interior had no military value, the Allies did not intend to advance beyond a perimeter needed to defend the airfields.[9] Planning for the construction of airfields and other base installations was also conducted prior to the landing, and tentative locations for these facilities had been selected by September 15.



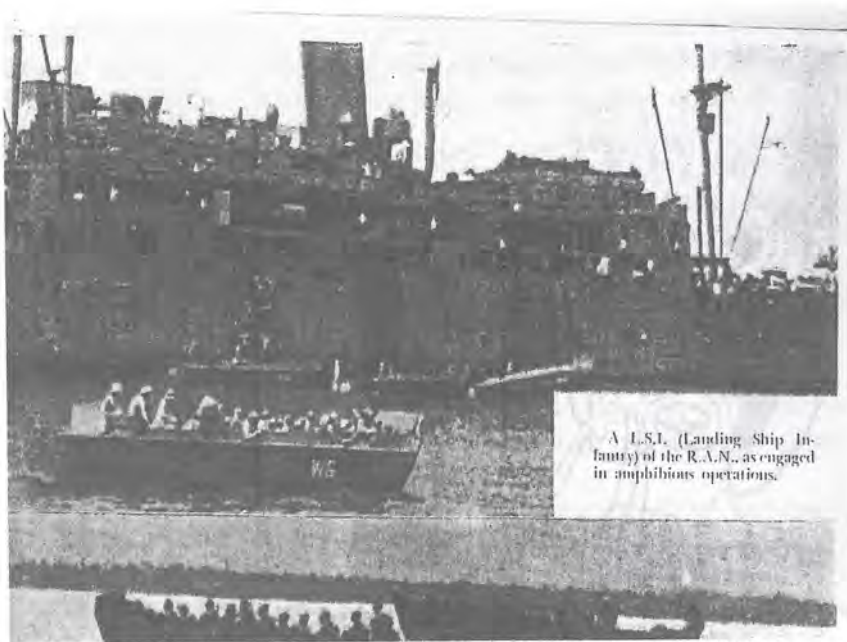
Shropshire supporting the landing at Morotai Sept 1944

Monday 23rd April 45. *Met Ivan.. Came aboard LST 697. Laying off. Attached to 9 Div.*

It appears that Ivan was Ted Cherry's new brother in law whom he had never heard of till we got mail at Morotai !!

I believe it was about this occasion that I visited the 'Wang Poo' knowing that 'Ray' the elder brother of Kevin Donovan, (my best school friend. Very junior cadet paymaster. Killed on "Canberra"...Coral sea battle.) was in "Wang Poo" (Chinese river gunboat... Along with "Ping Wo" both became part of our navy...Coal fired !! My cousin Gordon Russell as Lieutenant on Ping Wo ...Used as supply ship)

Tuesday 1st May 1945 "P" Day. *Landed on Tarakan at 8-30 am. Shelled with 75mm Mountain Gun midnight. 2 sigs killed. 1 injured..... (another died of wounds later)*



A L.S.I. (Landing Ship Infantry) of the R.A.N., as engaged in amphibious operations.

9 Div troops unloading into LCIs off HMAS Westralia. Tarakan May 1st 1945

Ted was certainly brief

The softening-up bombardment was said to be the biggest in the Pacific campaign. Shells, aerial bombs, rocket launching craft. It went on for seemingly hours. (The more the merrier if we had to go ashore.) Ted said 8-30 am so I guess it was, when an LCI came from the Manoora to (*to our LST..landing ship tank...Barge) take a boatload ashore in the second wave....They say the 2nd wave is the most dangerous as the bombardment stopped at the time the 1st lot gets there and the enemy have recovered somewhat....Point of fact there was Zero opposition.



9 Div troops

Approached a long oil loading pier there was a terrified man, stark naked, running seawards not knowing what to do....A certain officer who we had a lot of respect for, said "One rifleman. Forward" The formality of this has us stunned. "What ? Eh? " a few said. One sailor with a rifle edged forward and was told "Shoot that man "...The reponse "Arrh! Fair go. Fair crack of the whip! " Etc. The officer went even redder in the face than usual and nothing more was said.

We stepped ashore with dry feet and all our gear on backs, and stood around looking silly because we were supposed to be about 400M towards Red Beach at neat little hillock which was ideal as signal point.....So. While the soldiers ("Swotties" we called them and it

has taken me all these years to find out that that is at least a 400 year old term that sailors used in Britain referring to soldiers) . Well they were laying down trying to disappear into the ground. But we had no choice but to stand up, gear on backs and amble serenely along a road to the right position....

...It is the funny bits that one remembers best I guess...For as we walked along my mate Doug Armstrong who was behind me said "Hey Kel ! Do you think I ought to cock my rifle" I replied rudely "Of course you silly bugger there is a war on". Doug fumbled with the rifle. Bang !!Straight between my legs.
The swotties squeezed closer to the dirt and called us for everything.

At the hill we found a twin 20mm cannon pointing out of a concrete bunker, covering the whole of the road we came along !!...But the Japs had put a demolition charge into it before retreating, which had failed to go off....
The group then set about getting comfortable on the hillock and making contact by wireless & visual with ships and beachmasters.



Below us on the beach an American LST had beached & tried hard to get a good position for unloading & failed. Eventually darkness fell and in retrospect it is unbelievable that the skipper of the LST left on all navigation lights and unloading floodlights....So, as Ted Cheery said "*shelled with 75mm mountain gun at midnight. 2 Sigs killed. One injured*" The ships lights being the target. They went out pronto.
My tentmate Sig Alf Withers was apparently effected by concussion and although he lasted to do the Balikpapan event he looked very sick...Went back to Sydney and died in the Balmoral hospital.

Plainly the shells were falling a bit short of the LST onto the actual beach ,missing the ship, and a shade long by 60 metres from hitting us. I'm glad they were accurate. The sound of incoming shells like tearing paper. A new sound for me.

During this, one mate of mine was sitting on the downward slope with legs apart, when he felt a burning sensation in his crutch. Investigating, he found a jagged piece of hot shrapnel embedding in the soil..

I for one was too excited to get to sleep that night, frightened I might miss something . Hardly having slept on the upper deck of the LST on the way over...we looked and felt a bedraggled next day. Actually didn't care if there was a war on or not

Night of May 1st: Soldiers on perimeter,dug in and on the alert for Japanese infiltration... Behind them comes a rustle ...There appears a bloke dragging an urn full of hot tea and a voice saying "Cup of tea, Chaps ?" The irrepressible Captain Radford Salvation Army. That bloke was 'something else'

Wed 2nd may 1945 *Snipers operating from hill behind us and causing a bit of a concern. Machine gun opened up over wharf. Three snipers killed plus the machine-gunner*

Later this day I was sent out to an American ship for expert repairs to a radio...While they

did this I tucked into turkey, fruit salad and ice-cream etc. Wow ! Best 'scrان' for months. Still no sleep. A bit groggy. Refused offer to sleep on bunk. Thought I wouldn't wake up.

Thursday 3 May to 13th May (*Too busy to record anything as next item shows*)

Mon 14th May .Day "P + 13". Red beach only. In 11 days 14 hrs we unloaded 3,605 tons of stores, 3712 tons of vehicles, plus 5000 personnel.

Well our beach didn't prove as busy as Ted's beach. The beach (actually a slimey crude oily mess) was not so suitable as unloading point, despite pontoon jetty being set up.

Being on watch at signal station proved to be pretty boring most days. So when not on watch some of us would go exploring.

May 6th 1945 ...Not far away we came across a Japanese Shinto Temple. Built as the Japanese do in beautiful raw timber (no paint). With paths of smoothly swept sand.

Along this unmarked sand was a trail where a wounded (Japanese) man had dragged himself towards the altar, leaving a trail of blood. While alongside a nearby house was a body which had had petrol poured over it etc. Doubtless the same Japanese soldier.



Japanese Shinto Temple. Tarakan

MAY 6th...Having left the area of the Japanese Shinto shrine we proceeded about 1 km to 'front line'. Came upon patrol of 9 Div soldiers with one of their number just shot by sniper. Great shock to me. The rest of the patrol had shredded the tree that the sniper was in....The dead soldier then laid respectfully in a kind of native hut....Only in past weeks I have learned that the casualty was

Don McKinnon from Mt Gambier and today I had the pleasure of meeting his nephew Robert James and I could tell him about that sad day

We took pleasure in joining up with 9 Div infantry to go on patrol. Now I am surprised that they welcomed a bunch of 5 or 6 mad 'matelots'. But perhaps it seemed a bit of extra fire-power would not go amiss.

One excursion took us up a jungle trail where a machine gun had the troops unable to proceed over a rise in the track. They called in a fighter plane with huge bomb slung under, to come in at tree-top level and slip the bomb into the pillbox.

In came the bomb at a flat angle. Caught the top of a tree. Dropped down to the ground and proceeded to roll and bounce down the side slope straight at us. All ducked and it bounced over us into the valley below. No explosion.

So a patrol was sent out through the bush to encircle the enemy. We of course (being only kids) joined in....The jungle proved impenetrable after a half kilometre so we gave up.

I don't know if it was the Japs or us who were lucky that it was....The things that one will do when 21 years old and childish still.

Another day, a group of 6 of us which included Jack Cleary and Johnny Byrne seemed to get ahead of the troops when walking up a narrow vehicle track, with thick bush on the left and grassy flat on the right. Someone saw what could be a sniper up a tree so Jack Cleary, being the crack shot, was put to shooting at it. Proved not to be a man, but the shot brought on mumbled voices in the bush which we took to be Australian so went on till we came to an oilfield workshop in which was a treasure trove of gauges and tools (great souvenirs). So after selecting what we wanted we proceeded onwards out the far door.

No sooner had the last man cleared the doorway that a burst of automatic fire churned up the dirt between our feet..

Well, there was a very smart double back. Nobody hit. The enemy probably too nervous to shoot straight....Then a debate as to what we did next. The decision taken that we were clumsy sailors and shouldn't start our own battle, so took off a sheet of iron and crawled out the back into long grass and wriggled until it seemed safe to get up and walk home.



At Tarakan, Borneo 1945

Communication team

Well three weeks of this sort of thing and we packed up as Ted notes, and shipped back to Morotai.

Sat 18th May 1945. Came aboard L.S.T. 1035. Laying off

Sat 19th May 1945.. Weighed anchor 0800 hrs. destination Morotai

Tues 22 May 1945 Arrived Morotai 3 pm

(Note:- from 22 May to Tue 19th June was our rest period between landings.)

Morotai pre Balikpapan

To be honest I havent many recollections of this period, though we did have a more comfortable camp/s than before. A few more exercises and more weapon training.

This was the time we had the pretty camp site where a bubbling mountain stream met the sea.

The skipper had souvenired a ship's bell from Tarakan and the time was rung every half hour as at sea. Real 'pusser' style. It gave most of us the s...s until some bright spark took the bell and chucked it into the creek.....The 'seniors' were most upset, threatening all sorts of dire things. Eventually offering peace and no more ringing bells if it turned up again... ...it did !

The camp WAS on the perimeter of Jap country....But we had no incursions. Just evidence of movement.

(ie: The 'allies' occupied the south side and the Japanese the north side of the island....Why cause a lot of strife if both lots were happy)

In Moratai harbour, I did manage to visit Ray Donovan, a writer on the old China-gunboat and coalburner, the "Wang Poo" (not the Ping Wo which was sister ship). Ray was an elder Brother of my best school mate Kevin Donovan, cadet paymaster, killed on the 'Canberra' aged 16.

Tuesday 19th June 1945. Spent night in staging camp

17th June was anniversary of my entry into RAN...3 years...due for GC badge !!?

A red chevron would look silly on a jungle-green shirt even if we could find a badge.

Wed 20th June. Came aboard LST 666, laying off. Attached to 7th Division AIF.

99 ships in convoy

Friday 22nd June 1945 to Monday 25th June.

This is definitely the worst ship I have ever been in ---its a hell ship. 520 men camped on the open deck, and it keeps on raining. All our gear is wet and dirty and we feel pretty miserable.. The Captain and crew are making everything as tough as possible. The food is shocking. Left Moratai yesterday and this morning did a dummy-run on a small island---what a farce. Still laying off



On deck of LST. Rained all the time.

Not much more I can add to this comment by Ted...he said it all. The crew were specially unhelpful and would not allow us to use their toilets...so it was 'over the side' at the 'back-end' of the ship.

Tuesday 26th June 1945. Sailed today at 2pm, destination Balikpapan (Borneo)

Sunday 1st July 1945. "F" day. Landed Balikpapan ---only very light opposition.

Arunta, Hobart, and Shropshire in bombardment. Manoora, Kanimbla and Westralia there also.

And, I think, a Dutch warship there as well....was it 'La Trompe', But that sounds like a French name.

Our group went ashore in the second wave as usual. Landed at Red beach.

From this point on, my yarns tell of many near misses, which are funny in retrospect but could have been serious.....No man was injured in any of these.

Quite interesting this. First wave were unloading their soldiers and we were approaching the beach. (me with my curiosity head up) and coming from the left was a barrage of heavy machine-gun fire which churned up the sea between the 2 waves. Behind wave 1 and in front of wave 2. Missing us all.



Then the firing stopped, and we stepped ashore dry footed.

I admired the Army bomb disposal or de-lousing specialists. There were a number of shells and naval depth charges arranged about., with trip-wires for the unwary.

They would go ahead and make them safe !!!!



However one such depth charge which had been made 'safe' was sitting end-up above the high tide mark....A couple of soldiers decided the top of the cylinder looked a good place to light a fire and boil a billy.!!!?....No bodies found but 2 did not answer roll call.

Decades later, one of the army team there became my farming neighbour. And swapping yarns we realised we were both about 50 metres from this event.

Monday 2nd July 1945. Small amount of erratic mortar fire, and machine-gun fire today.

Now at Green Beach. (Closed Red beach yesterday Sunday)

I wasn't aware of this...I must have still been at red beach till night time.

(More later if I get around to it.... Kelvin Smibert)

That night.....On Green beach.

Sometime during the night I was on sentry duty, armed with my Owen Gun.

A radio message came through that unidentified aircraft was picked up by Radar at about 10 miles distant. Well that seemed no worry to us, that far away.

However the interesting thing was that the Radar was 10 miles from us !! Which meant that the aircraft was about to come over us.....

It appeared to me by sound that it was a fairly light aircraft and I did in fact pick it up by sight in the moonlight...The least I could have done was emptied a magazine at it....

If I had been a 'Yank' I would have done...But in our navy one felt that a request in triplicate should be posted to get permission to fire at anything....so I didn't.....The plane proceeded to drop some bombs on an Army Ordnance Stores marquee a few metres away. In retrospect a bit like the US Navy with lights on at Tarakan attracting enemy fire, this huge tent was in WHITE canvas and stood out like a beacon.....This is what Ted Cherry said about it:

"Shells landing, and it's most uncomfortably close at times. Air raid at 5am. A few army casualties"



4th July 1945. Ted observed : *"Still under fire from mortars but most landing in the water. Two or three craft have been damaged plus a few casualties aboard them."*

My recollections are : One of the seamen keeping watch at the end of the floating pontoon/jetty gazing idly into the water, when a shell landed just where he was looking.

He rolled over backwards in shock...Jack ...? from Gawler. S.A. grabbed him and both evacuated the pontoon pronto. Something similar with some other of the boats....with shells landing behind them and tracking them as they zig-zagged like mad.

July 5 1945 *" Shell fire almost non-existent now, which seems a great relief "*

Actually on this day there were a group of 5 or 6 Australian Army tanks deployed in a clearing behind the beach. The blokes had apparently got out to get a bit of lunch when the Japs neatly picked off all the tanks with shellfire... They must have had some good spotters close by.

Friday 6th July *" Moved to airstrip to control beach unloading of R.A.A.F stores (Sep-pingar)*

I was not in that lot...Communications were our thing of course.

Saturday 7th July...*"Small party of Japs infiltrated tonight. They cleared off when sighted by army patrol"*

Sun 8th July. *" The ocean paid our tent a visit at 5am...very wet and uncomfortable "*

Glad I wasn't in that tent

Tues. 10th July... *" Infiltrations reported almost every night, so we are still posting sentries"*

The airforce had some very flash rainproof hammocks to sleep in...My recollection is that these were 100% dangerous as infiltrating Japs only had to stick a knife or bayonet up through the bottom....Some RAAF personnel lost their lives.

Friday 13th July 1945 *"A lone Jap infiltrated to our water point but he was quickly despatched by a few bursts"*

Saturday 14th *"Another Jap infiltrated and poisoned our water point before he was shot. But it was rectified later. If it hadn't been tested many would have been poisoned."*

Sun 15th July:

"Airstrip completed and first plane (a Catalina) landed today, followed by 11 Spitfires. It was a great sight and showed something for our labour. We move again tomorrow"

My activities were quite different to these but I cannot recall just what. I know a few of us had a small camp north of there somewhere....I had a beard which to Asian people is a sign of Seniority...I enjoyed that the locals addressed me as senior person, and disregarded the Officers. There were some fresh water wells there and a great feeling to wash and shower.

We did tend to empty them, so the locals had to wait with their buckets for the wells to re-fill.

Monday July 16th 1945 *"Moved to Mangaar airstrip to land supplies for the new drome. We are entirely isolated at present so the need for sentries is much greater"*

Tuesday 17th July *"Still on our own. Army had by-passed all this area so Japs can come and go at will. Very pleasant I don't think. Army arrives here tomorrow so we feel relieved. I don't think 10 of us would last long against a Jap infiltration, so we hope they will keep away for one more night"*

Thurs 19th July *"Nothing to worry about now as I doubt the Japs could break through us now"*

Friday 20th *"Japs infiltrated last night but they were sighted before any damage done. Shots fired but no casualties amongst our men though it is certain Japs were wounded as bloody rags were found in the scrub"*

Monday 23rd July *"Closed white beach and moved to main camp in the township..Quite a good camp"*

It certainly was that...Bitumen road and a group of three or four Dutch Colonial homes on the brow of a cool hill. Of course we silly sailors didn't get to live in these. They were for officers, administration, but dining room for us. Surrounded by tropical trees fairly 'dripping' with Orang-utangs. We lived in rows of tents of course.

Tuesday 24th July *"Air raid at 2-55am. 10 planes. Bombs dropped in bay and on airstrip but we were lucky here. 2 planes shot down by "Spits" Alarm again at 8pm."*

Thursday 26th July to Friday 27th July;

"Air raid again this morning at 4-30am. One bomb landed only 50 yards away but no-one was hurt. Planes again at 11pm. 28 bombs dropped on airstrip. Alarms on and off till 1am"

this morning Friday....Am feeling horribly tired. Alert again at approx 1500 hours. One plane contacted but no bombs dropped"

Well that 4-30am stunt !...Our tent was on fringe of the tent group (Ted was a long way away) at head of a gully.

First I knew was a mate Herb Kabat shaking me in bed and shouting "Hey! Kel! She's on..."

My reflexes must have been better than Herb's because I rolled out of bed and hit the deck so quickly that Herb fell on top of ME....I could hear the 'Betty' bomber coming . Then a stick of bombs falling up the gully 1-2-3-4. 5 seemed almost right alongside !
Whew...number six didnt come !!

Someone about this time found a Japanese footprint (Their specialty being shoes with separate big toe) on a track only a few metres from our tent

It was alright about Ted Cherry. He was on the other side of the camp

Sat 28th July 1945 *"Very heavy rain from about midnight on until dinnertime today. No air raids or alerts."*

Mon 30th July *"Another damned air raid last night at 2-50am. All clear 15 mins later
(No planes sighted by us)*

Friday 10th August *"First news of peace moves by Japan at 9-30PM"*

Saturday 11th Aug *" Waiting for news of end of war "*

Sunday 12th *" Still waiting very anxiously"*

Monday *"Still no news dammit"*

Tuesday 14th August *"At last ! Peace declared today. No excitement caused by news."*

In the next few days when news came about all the wild excitement and dancing in the streets of the Australian cities, we were, putting it mildly, less than impressed. What had **they** got to dance about ?

The Atom Bomb We thought this the best thing that had ever happened...and serves the Japanese right !

I guess we didn't quite know what the destruction and aftermath were all about., and so much has been written and debated since that I needn't say more.

A few observations: Even before hostilities ceased we did a lot of exploration and fun things in our time off.

a / Even while still camped at the beach we would roam around , like the silly sailors we were, looking for anything interesting. One jaunt where about 6 of us on such a trip found ourselves, unknowingly, ahead of the army's perimeter. Walking up a gully, a hand suddenly waved from a dugout cut into the side of the hill with a slit for firing...Once again we were lucky that nobody was in that with a machine-gun. Yet we got a shock and jumped for cover.

Eventually investigating close up I emptied a magazine into the slit from my Owen Gun.

This brought forth shrieks from inside....Then calling for the person inside to come out using Malay, which the Jap inside probably didn't understand, but maybe my tone and repeated words sunk in and he crawled out. We made him strip in case of a hidden grenade. Then signalled to the soldiers who appeared at the brow of a hill about a Km away, using semaphore (had to wait till they found a signaller).....They then came and took the prisoner away....Prisoner number 3 for the operation..... We carried on !!

b/ "Johnny" Byrne & I had a great interest in wireless parts and making sets, so spent a lot of time sorting in dugouts and such for parts... Actually we found a lot of bits including huge transmitter valves...Got to ship them back home with us...(Hoped to use them to make Microwave ovens...Note..1945)But never did make use of them. Had games with Japanese explosives to clear the entrance to blocked tunnels. Mostly merely covered them deeper. Explored many concrete tunnels. Didn't know if these were Jap or Dutch built...Hoped the army had cleared them but just to be sure we would empty a magazine around every corner before going on.

After hostilities.

Of course boredom set in, so many childish games were played....'Kordie Kars' for example where we had billie-cart races with electric timer...and big bets.

Me and my super special Kart (Heavens ! I had hair then !)



* The army had built a classy rifle range...So this came in for a lot of use

BALIKPAPAN:

Remember the home-made rifle range we made there?

Complete with telephone and all, as I recall.

Photo below shows Jack Cleary (Tel) on the left and Alf Withers (Sig) on the right.....

**Alf Withers has suffered concussion and some kind of head damage on the occasion of the shelling at Tarakan....
In retrospect he should have been invalided home then.
He died not long afterwards in the Balmoral Naval Base Hospital in Sydney and that is why I generally insist that he be remembered as a casualty of that operation.**

In fact he looks pretty crook in the photograph.



- Another favourite was to get some lengths of steel pipe from the refinery. Either 6" or 3". Stick one end into a 3 foot hole in the ground with the pipe sticking up at an angle.

Then we stuffed the cordite from two 75mm cannon shells into the pipe. Followed by broken bricks or anything handy. An electric detonator on a wire...get back a bit and fire.

.....A noise like a great grunt. Then a giant whoosh and across the valley can be seen all the rubbish screaming into the distance. Perhaps the 3" one was more satisfying to us overgrown kids....Old 3" dry batteries form telephones fitted quite snugly in the 3" pipe and the sound effect then were a sharp crack discharge and away.... etc.....

This didn't do anyone harm except a poor young lad sent up as re-enforcement. A latent mental problem set off by the bangs had him en-route to Australia in short order..

....The powers-that-be perhaps missed the point about who were the mad ones.

*Always short of washing and bathing water, someone noticed a wet point in the side of the gully....A pipe driven into this point produced a few drips/ minute. Three pipes multiplied this by three. Then a drain to a 44 gallon petrol drum, which by tomorrow overflowed into another...then another. And so on.... Behold ! Clean water for all.

For the following story I don't have to rely on memory. Out of the blue I have just been given a letter from my late Brother's papers, which I had written to him after hostilities.

Before that, because of censorship, all we could write was "Dear Mum, How are you? I am well but it is very hot here...etc"

Letter to my late younger Brother, Don.

Written on Salvation Army writing paper and I gave my address as:

NBC (B) RAN Beach Unit c/- Aust.Army.P.O.

(Relevant extracts follow): Dear Don,We're still carrying on here as we have for the past month. Nothing to do except eat, sleep and keep the camp in a clean condition...a constant succession of 'Buzzes" (rumours) but none seem to be based on fact. The current one is that our next move might be to Morotai. And from there south, when and how I don't know.

Yesterday the first Liberator (U.S.bomber) landed on the strip. One of the chaps went out to see it come in. So now that they have the large strip operating, we may even fly out....However, Don, I am not letting the situation worry me in the least. We'll go when we go.

Meanwhile, as far as the other chaps are concerned, Kordie Kars are out of vogue and they have a few horses, and have rigged up a couple of little Jinkers, and are having a great time...I am continuing to interest myself in the yachting line.

There are dozens of home made sailing boats here now of all types and one army unit has turned out two excellently built and rigged 16ft skiffs. They have 7 more being built (*A member of the army unit was an ex boat-builder*) for the near future.

(The army got shifted before these boats could be built)

Jack (Cleary) and Murray Leach, The chap who is going to the Uni too) a few days ago bought a 14ft dugout canoe from a local native. I helped them put a couple of outriggers on it and used the spare sail from our boat. Today we tried it out and it behaves excellently. So we are going to go away on a trip or two, the both boats.

While on the subject I must tell you about the trip Harry Dry and I did on Sunday. We set out early in the morning. Sailed across the bay, up an estuary and then three miles up the Rica River. Lunchtime we pulled in to the side where a small jetty marked the track leading to a village. Incidentally, a number of young ladies bathing at this spot continued blithely to do so. We tied up and got our lunch out, and as etiquette demands in this part of the world, we sat down to wait for an invitation to come up to the village.

Sure enough, down came the 'Kapala' (head man) (*incidentally the word comes from the Latin Capo...the head*) who with much ceremony conducted us through a horrible swamp to a collection of about 8 houses. Duly invited us into his own house, by chance a brand new and spotlessly clean one. We squatted on the floor and began handing out bread and butter to the swarm of kids and babies who were brought to us to inspect.. They think a lot of their children and the best way to make an impression is to show a bit of interest in them.

We expected to be able to barter for a bit of fruit, but, but apparently we had picked a very poor village, and dipped out-----So after making a great ceremony of our thanks and leave taking, we pushed off for home.

I won't bore you with the details of the return trip except to say that everything that could go wrong did so. At one place we stopped to collect oysters, I happened to look up to see the 'Janice' about a hundred yards out to sea and going great guns. Well, I don't think I have swum so hard, I didn't want to be stranded 15 miles from home and no way of walking back. (*At this point I remember telling Harry that I was famished hungry and he noted "Well it was you who gave all our food away"*) After that, apart from the fact that our jib sail split up the middle & the bow sprit carried away, lucky enough to get a tow home, everything went well. Except of course there was no supper kept for us at 9 o'clock at night. But we did consider it a great lot of fun. We've now got the boat in excellent condition all set for another trip on Friday with Jack Cleary coming with us in his boat. We'll take more food with us this time.



Jack Cleary sails my yacht 'Janice' in Balikpapan Bay

LATER: Sorry Don that I left this letter. But since then quite a bit has happened. Yesterday us four 'boaters' set out very early in the morning on a trip. Jack and I sailed the canoe

there, and brought the Janice back. And the others vice versa. We were almost becalmed until about half way across and then a thunderstorm came up. Boy! We moved then and ran into the beach just as the others, who'd been on another tack, came up.

Having just finished making a tent with our sails, the rain poured down. So we made a brew and had lunch -----You know, you'd think we would have had enough of picnic lunches and cooking little meals for ourselves by now. There must be something in doing it without being told to.

Today we had a visit from the Naval Officer Commanding this area of the Pacific (Known officially as N.O.I.C Maluccas) . Apparently someone told him that we existed and he came to view the strange assortment of specimens. However as soon as he left they piped that the first 30 to reach the regulating office would leave tonight for Morotai.

I could have gone...You'll think that funny of me? But it would have meant leaving all the old mob.....It was all the 'new' mob who rushed like mad to get away. So there are about 40 of us here now, nearly all the old Assault veterans and a good crowd. It's almost like old times....

Anyway the rest of us are due to leave here in about a week and will probably catch up with the other crowd anyway. (Better to wait here than Morotai). Then there is the chance that any ship we are able to catch will go straight to Aussie.....*(Letter goes back to family matters)*

Some time after this..(No date) Some of us boarded, from the beach, HMS LST 303. And headed to Morotai. We were signed on as crew and that made a mess full of telegraphists... so no more 2 or 3 watches. We were on about a 10 watch routine.

This ship was just arrived from Britain and the Atlantic where fighting the cold was a priority, and our mess was below alongside the engine-room. Quite untenable. So more living on the upper-deck....such lovely fresh air though, after months of tropics ashore.

There were three LSTs in convoy. All British. Nobody was in a hurry so all stopped a few times to drop depth charges for fresh fish. I guess this was in an area of huge depths and likely few fish....Anyway none were caught.

(Note: Our experience from 'fishing' with hand grenades in shallow water was that a on-ly few fish came to the top...while the bottom was covered with fish. So no good result from depth charges either)

Arriving at Morotai my vague memory seems to suggest that we kept a very low profile and tried to make ourselves invisible so as the SNO Morotai was not aware of us being there (we were supposed to go ashore there)...Probably got help from our Boss and the skipper of the LST. Anyway we stayed on the ship and headed for Brisbane at a very stately rate of knots.

As much as anything (apart from the LSTs natural speed) was that our ship (the 303) had engine problems and one diesel was down as often as going. The other two got tired of this and left us. When the engine was eventually fixed, we were sworn to radio silence as the Skipper wanted to put on full revs and surprise the others. We telegraphists were supposed to gauge the distance from the others by listening to the strength of their radio signals (pretty near impossible thing to do) anyway the thing broke down permanently and we limped on.... A good speed for fishing though, as we found.

We Aussie telegraphists were invaluable on board, because by then all ships were using 'voice' (r/t) and to talk to passing ships the Poms couldn't understand the Australian accents per radio and vice versa....So we had to interpret !!!

Arrival in Brisbane: Quietly entered the river. Pulled into a sandy bank and off drove a luxurious limousine (I think a Legrande?). Dutch origin I guess, loaded with all sorts of gear.....No customs duty !!!! Shhhh !!

We disembarked, reported to the Navy and requested that they accept our weapons.

They wouldn't do that and said to take them to Sydney....Sydney refused as well.

So when we arrived at Melbourne we decided they had had their chance...So we took home a bunch of Owen guns and 303 rifles..Leave followed.....

I thought my Navy service had ended ! Not at all. Soon back at Balmoral, Sydney, and swift draft to corvette HMAS Ipswich. Seasick within half an hour for the second time in my life, as we cleared the Sydney heads and back to the tropics for a number of months to see out my 4 years navy....

But that episode is all another story



Yanks at Balikpapan. Trust them to make it look dramatic.



Sappers from RAR 2/13th Fld Coy rest exhausted after failing at first attempt before going back and blowing underwater defences.....LINGKAS. Tarakan campaign