New Britain *1941–1945*

Australians in the Pacific War

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Front cover
Australian sailors fire on suspected Japanese positions in Wide Bay in early November 1944, just days after escorting troopships and freighters to Jacquinot Bay.
For full caption see page 32. Australian War Memorial (AWM) image 076808

Back cover
Troops of the 37th/52nd Battalion cross the Mavelu River during a trek from Rile to Mavelu, at Open Bay, in mid-May 1945. *For full caption see page 53. (AWM 092342)*

Inside cover
Sailors serve in the engine room of the frigate HMAS *Barcoo*, one of the warships that escorted the first troop convoy carrying the 5th Division to Jacquinot Bay.
For full caption see page 34. (AWM 076817)

Title page
At Jacquinot Bay, a Jeep is unloaded from an ALC (Australian Landing Craft) of the 41st Landing Craft Company, Royal Australian Engineers, which had just completed an epic crossing of the Coral Sea. *For full caption see page 54 (AWM 018175)*

Metric conversions of imperial measurements quoted in this text are approximate.

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Message from the Minister

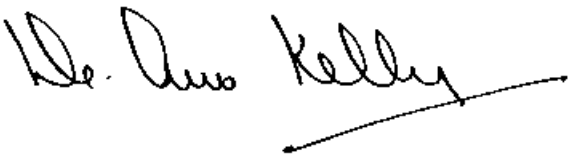
New Britain was one of the most fought-over islands during the war in the Pacific. From January 1942, when Japanese forces invaded and captured Rabaul, through until the war's end when the Japanese garrison surrendered, there was scarcely a time when land, sea or air battles were not waged.

In all theatres of war, there are terrible stories of suffering and tragedy. In New Britain, there is a story that describes one of the darkest times for Australian forces in World War II—that of the fate of Lark Force.

This Australian force was sent to the island, and to nearby New Ireland, in the face of an anticipated Japanese invasion. The men and women of Lark Force faced nearly impossible odds. We must never forget that in the attempt to escape from New Britain, more than 150 Australian servicemen and civilians died or were massacred at Tol and Waitavalo plantations. More than 1000 others lost their lives as prisoners of war or civilian internees when the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk on 1 July 1942.

In telling the story of the long war in New Britain, this book goes beyond the first days of battle and captivity. The air war waged over the island, with bombing by Australian, American and New Zealand aircrews, adds another chapter of courage and loss to our military history. The landings on the island in late 1943 and the 5th Australian Division's campaign to push the Japanese back into the Gazelle Peninsula were fine examples of dedication and endurance.

We respect and remember all those who served in and around New Britain and pay tribute especially to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their service.



The Honourable De-Anne Kelly MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence


NEW HANOVER
Kavieng
0
100 kilometres
0
50 miles
NEW IRELAND
Namatanai
BISMARCK SEA
Aitape
Wewak
NEW GUINEA
Madang
Lae
PAPUA
Gulf of Papua
Port Moresby
AUSTRALIA
Bismarck Sea
Kavieng
NEW IRELAND
Rabaul
NEW BRITAIN
BOUGAINVILLE
Buin
Solomon Sea
0
300 kilometres
0
150 miles
Rabaul
Ramandu R
GAZELLE PENINSULA
Marambu R
Open Bay
Ea Ea
Waitavalo
Toi Plantation
Wide Bay
Lake Dakataua
Talasea
Cape Gloucester
Cape Hoskins
Pandi R
Balima R
Isau R
Toiru R
Beg R
Jacquinot Bay
Kulu R
Sul R
Ana R
Via R
Dagi R
Kapiura R
Torlu R
Melkoi R
Eil R
Pulie R
Ari R
Awul
Arawe
Gasmata
SOLOMON SEA

New Britain is a crescent-shaped island, approximately 610 kilometres long and 80 kilometres wide, lying to the north-east of the mainland of New Guinea. It is typical of the tropical islands in this region: jungle-clad, mountainous, hot, wet, humid and with myriad tropical diseases. Once a German colony, New Britain was seized in September 1914, in one of the first actions of World War I, by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force. After the war, control of the island was handed to Australia under a League of Nations mandate and it essentially became an Australian colony.

In addition to New Britain's indigenous peoples, by 1939 more than 1200 Europeans, mostly Australian, and a few hundred Asians, mostly Chinese, lived on the island. These non-islanders had settled at Rabaul, the administrative capital of New Guinea, along with hundreds of Papuans and New Guineans brought from the New Guinea mainland as contract labourers. Villages dotted the island's coastline and, to a lesser extent, interior, along with mission stations and plantations. Life on New Britain was, in the words of one European resident, idyllic.

Lark Force

In February 1941 a British–Dutch–Australian defence conference, with American observers in attendance, agreed to bolster defences across what Australians commonly called the 'island barrier'. Australia undertook to defend Rabaul, specifically Simpson Harbour, and make it available to Allied forces in the event of war against Japan.

During March and April 1941, Lark Force, a garrison force comprising members of the Australian Imperial Force and Citizen Military Force, or militia, sailed for New Britain. The main unit was the 2/22nd Battalion, a Victorian-raised infantry battalion. The force also boasted coastal, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery batteries, each equipped with two antiquated guns, and sundry other troops. In addition, the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, a locally raised militia, had a company at Rabaul.

By December 1941 Colonel John Scanlan, commander of Lark Force, had about 1400 troops, including six nursing sisters. On the nearby island of New Ireland, a couple of hundred more men of the 1st Independent Company were based at Kavieng. Lark Force was also in the process of acquiring air support, as 24 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), was ordered to Rabaul with four Hudson bombers and ten Wirraway general-purpose aircraft.

Early on 8 December 1941, an unfamiliar aircraft circled over Rabaul and Kavieng. Soon the troops were alerted to a major Japanese offensive having started, with attacks at several points across the Pacific. News filtered through of a raid on the United States Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and an invasion of the British colony of Malaya.

The troops believed they had almost no hope of fending off an invasion. The Japanese had a base just north of the equator at Truk, in the Caroline Islands. There was no Allied air or naval covering force to oppose a fleet sailing south. War Cabinet discussed evacuating Lark Force but left it in place to 'maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at first threat'.

War Cabinet did order the removal of all European women and children, other than nurses and missionaries, from the island territories. Chinese women and children, aware of atrocities by the Japanese in China and fearful of invasion, were not included in the official evacuation. Some Chinese took the precaution of sending family members south anyway. Corporal Norman Furness, 2/22nd Battalion, recalled:

> *I think they deserved better than what they got ... [as] the Chinese had been very loyal up there. And I thought if they were going to take the [European] women and children off, they should have taken the Chinese women and children off as well. Because some of them suffered, pretty badly, later.*

People at Rabaul and Kavieng heard or watched Japanese aircraft circling, ominously, on several occasions. The anti-aircraft gunners watched too, frustrated as their two antiquated guns could not fire high enough. They held their fire so as not to give away gun positions in a futile show of defiance.

The arrival of Wirraway aircraft boosted hopes of fighting back. These Australian-built, single-engine aircraft were touted as 'fighters'. In fact they were based on an American

trainer, carrying a pilot and observer, with the addition of two forward-firing machine-guns and a Vickers machine-gun in the rear cockpit. Pre-war propaganda had painted the Japanese air forces as primitive, but news from Malaya and other fronts revealed they were not. The airmen of 24 Squadron were prepared to put up a fight but figured they had little chance of shooting down an aircraft.

Meanwhile, Australian men living on remote islands were recruited to observe and report on enemy movements. Commissioned into the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve, these 'coastwatchers' now began playing a vital intelligence role. In the middle of the morning on 4 January 1942, warning was received from a coastwatcher on an outlying island of bombers headed for Rabaul.

Lieutenant David Selby, commanding the anti-aircraft battery at Rabaul, spotted the aircraft out to sea:

> *... in perfect arrowhead formation, eighteen heavy long range bombers flashing silver in the bright sunlight. It seemed impossible to believe that they were bent on destruction, so serene and beautiful did they look. The excitement of the men was intense ... many faces were white and tense as the bombers flew straight towards the gun position and deflections and fuze were ordered for the command post. 'Fire!'*

The battery unleashed the first shots in defence of an Australian territory and the first in anger by a militia unit. But their 'flak' burst harmlessly below the bombers. More than fifty bombs were dropped, of which three hit a runway and one a workers' compound, killing fifteen New Guineans.

These men were the first deaths to enemy action in New Guinea. Two days later, bombers again targeted the airfields at Rabaul. On standby were Flying Officer Bruce Anderson and his observer, Pilot Officer Colin Butterworth, 24 Squadron. Butterworth remembered the take-off:

> *... I watched as a pattern of bombs fell on our camp at the northern end of the strip and then followed us about a third of the way down the strip as we gathered speed to take off ... The Direction Finding Station was in flames, a Wirraway had collected a direct hit and a Hudson was badly damaged. Everything else was hidden beneath a pall of smoke, dust and flying debris.*

Anderson and Butterworth climbed steadily and exchanged fire with the enemy flying boats but the Wirraway's machine-guns jammed and its engine overheated. Trailing white smoke, they touched down to be 'greeted' with a rebuke from Squadron Leader John Lerew for damaging the engine. They had achieved nothing except to demonstrate the worthlessness of Wirraway 'fighters'.

In early January, to ascertain Japanese intentions, a Hudson bomber with long-range fuel tanks was sent from Richmond, New South Wales, to conduct a reconnaissance of Truk, 1100 kilometres north of Rabaul. On 9 January, Flight Lieutenant Robert Yeowart, 6 Squadron, and his crew took off from Kavieng. Over Truk, they observed and photographed assembled warships, merchant ships and aircraft. When enemy fighters appeared, Yeowart dived the Hudson into a rainsquall and escaped with minor damage.

Just after midday on 20 January, Sub-Lieutenant Cornelius Page, a coastwatcher on Tabar Island, east of New Ireland, spotted twenty aircraft heading for Rabaul. A few minutes later, a report of another fifty was received. A third, undetected formation also was closing in. Shortly afterwards the crew of a Catalina flying boat of 20 Squadron, based at Port Moresby but operating out of a small forward anchorage, spotted four cruisers sailing towards Kavieng. The invasion was under way.

Two Wirraways were on patrol over Rabaul and six others took off, but one suffered engine failure and crashed. The ensuing dogfight against 'Zero' fighters was disastrous. Three Wirraways were shot down and two were badly damaged. Of the sixteen Australian airmen who took part, six were killed and five wounded or injured. After the action, Lerew requested that fighters be sent from Australia but there were none. Over the next couple of days he made plans to evacuate his airmen. When ordered to stay and fight, Lerew responded with a signal ending *Nos morituni te sautamus*—loosely translated, the Roman gladiators' salutation, 'We who are about to die, salute you'. He was recalled to Port Moresby.

Shortly after midnight on 23 January a Japanese force landed at Kavieng. The commanding officer of the 1st Independent Company had elected to evacuate the 'death trap' some hours earlier. The men endeavoured to get away in a boat but were intercepted and taken into captivity.

At Rabaul, troops were deployed around the shoreline and town. More than 200 civilian

men were also there, as the last chance to evacuate them had been lost when a merchant ship was bombed. Fires burning on the wharves acted as beacons for the invasion force. Shortly after 2.00 am on 23 January, an aircraft started dropping flares around the harbour. The Australians did not hear landing barges approaching but suddenly flares lit up the area around one of the main defensive positions, Vulcan Beach. Sergeant Ken Hale, 2/22nd Battalion, recalled:

> *We could see dimly the shapes of boats, and men getting out. As they landed the Japanese were laughing, talking and striking matches ... one of them even shone a torch ... We allowed most of them to get out of the boats and then fired everything we had.*

The troops at Vulcan Beach, under the command of Major William 'Bill' Owen, fought on for several hours until almost out of ammunition. They believed the Japanese lost hundreds, perhaps thousands of men; in fact, no more than a couple of dozen were killed.

The half-light before dawn revealed the situation was hopeless: more than fifty ships, including an aircraft carrier, had entered Simpson Harbour. The men at Vulcan Beach withdrew before they could be encircled. In the township, troops and civilians already were 'going bush' when, sometime after 10.00 am, Scanlan issued the order: 'Every man for himself'. Sporadic fighting continued into the afternoon before the last men got clear.

Escape or die

Although most of Lark Force had thought it obvious they would be over-run, Colonel Scanlan and his staff had not planned escape routes. The men of Lark Force faced an epic struggle for survival.

RAAF personnel were more fortunate because their escape had been planned. They also had a headstart, leaving in trucks just after the invasion started. After picking up a few civilians and soldiers along the way, the airmen drove as fast and far as possible, then trekked over jungle tracks to a pre-arranged rendezvous point, which they reached on 23 January. Over the next two nights, more than 100 men were flown out. Only four airmen were left behind, in hospital or on special duties.

At Rabaul, about 100 wounded and sick servicemen, merchant seamen and civilians

were left in the care of the six nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service; the nurses were not offered the option of attempting to get away. The women feared sexual assault or death at the hands of the Japanese but, after some anxious moments, were spared. Separated from their patients, some of whom they believed were executed, the sisters were held with female missionaries and civilian nurses. Sister 'Tootie' McPherson, 10th Australian General Hospital, recalled:

> *They [the Japanese] were very suggestive and dreadful in many ways. Many's the time they have chased us, trying to urinate on us whilst the rest of them stayed back and screamed with laughter. It was nothing for them to take their trousers off and things like that. We just had to put up with it.*

The women were not assaulted. Chinese women and girls were not so fortunate.

In the Baining Range south of Rabaul, men hoped they might eventually find a means of getting off New Britain. Few possessed much in the way of rations, medicines or equipment to aid survival in the jungle. The first to reach the single supply dump, probably believing they were the only men to escape, sabotaged what remained. Those who came later found little or nothing to eat.

The condition of the men attempting to escape deteriorated rapidly. Most discarded their weapons and much of their gear before coming out at Adler Bay, while the harsh terrain further hindered survival. Gunner David Bloomfield recalled:

> *The only thing that was intact was my underpants. My shorts were torn, [as was] my coat, my shirt collar had come off, rotted. My boots were soft from being wet all the time. My socks were sodden.*

Bloomfield wanted to rest but spotted a pole holding up a makeshift white flag. The Japanese had landed two days before and left a note stating they would be returning. Dozens of men were preparing to surrender. Some were in poor shape, suffering malaria or painful feet; others assessed that their chances of getting off the island were slim anyway. Some moved on. A Japanese vessel later took those who had given up back to Rabaul.

The men who pressed on struggled against tough terrain, starvation and diseases.

Dozens stopped on the shores of Wide Bay to recuperate. Some planned to stay a few hours, while others needed longer. The Japanese had been there also, having left a notice stating they would return. Suddenly, on 3 March men began shouting that Japanese troops were closing in. Some took the opportunity to surrender, while others tried fleeing, jumping across streams or hiding in the undergrowth. More than 170 men were caught and assembled at Tol or Waitavolo plantations. Next day, about twenty men were selected to go back to Rabaul.

The prisoners left behind had their hands tied behind their backs, with rope passed between every three or four men, and were marched to the nearby plantations. Most guessed they were to be killed. One group, on reaching a clearing, was ordered, by hand signals, to sit down and not look around. One man who disobeyed had his jaw broken with a rifle butt. Private William 'Bill' Cook, 2/10th Field Ambulance, remembered the first man ordered to his feet:

> *He looked down at us and I could see his face was very white and the muscles at the side of his mouth were quivering. But he just said, 'See you in hell, fellers' ...*

Some prayed, some swore, others attempted small talk, and a few just sat silently until they heard 'Next!' As more men were taken away, friends spoke or nodded their goodbyes. Cook, tied to two strangers, was among the last to go:

> *Three of us were tied together and we stood up. It's funny to walk down to your death with two fellows whose names you don't know and never will know. We walked three abreast down the hill and I could see three Japs waiting for us at the bottom. The man on my right was praying quietly and the chap on my left was saying over and over to himself, 'God, what a way to die! What a way to die!' ... The Japs were coming up to meet us and as they got in behind us I knew suddenly we weren't going to be shot. My stomach shrivelled and muscles went stiff, waiting for something to happen. Then it hit me, a stabbing burning pain in the middle of my back, and I fell forward on my face, dragging the other two on top of me. The Japs stood over us, lunging at us, and I felt the blade another five times in my back. I felt like screaming but my mouth was buried in the dirt, my head pressed down by the weight of the man on top of me, and no sound came.*

Cook feigned death but one of his companions groaned and the Japanese returned. Cook,

unable to hold his breath any longer, gasped for air and was bayoneted five times in the neck and jaw. He lost consciousness. When he came to, hours later, he was able to break free and walk. He was one of only five or six survivors of the Tol massacre, in which more than 150 men, including civilians, were murdered.

For weeks, men still on the run headed west, evading enemy patrols and searching, desperately, for food. They wrote down the names of those who died from disease or other causes; at least one man was taken by a crocodile. An officer's notebook recorded more than fifty deaths. Finally, after weeks of trekking, they assembled at camps around Palmalmal, unable to move further west as the Japanese had landed at Gasmata.

The first escapees had reached Port Moresby on 27 February, after getting away in a small craft. With official approval, but limited assistance, the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit organised a rescue mission. During April, men were brought off in a couple of vessels, including the *Laurabada*. About 400 members of Lark Force got away.

Those taken into captivity from New Britain and New Ireland ended up at Rabaul in a prisoner of war camp. Some weeks later, during a raid on Port Moresby, the Japanese dropped a bundle of hand-written messages from some of the military prisoners of war and civilian internees. The men were allowed only a few words. Some letters were pitifully short.

> *Dearest this is just a line to let you know that I am a prisoner of war in the Japanese [censored] at Rabaul. I am well and uninjured and am very well treated. Love to my little one.*

It was enough to give families, friends and comrades hope that the men and women at Rabaul were safe. Nothing more would be heard of their fate until after the war.

Air campaign

Rabaul was subjected to one of the longest Allied air campaigns of the Pacific war. The first bombing raids were flown by Catalinas of 11 and 20 Squadrons RAAF shortly after the town fell. Australian, American and later New Zealand aircraft continued to raid the township and harbour, and other targets in New Britain, until the war's end.

The Japanese ringed Simpson Harbour with anti-aircraft guns, with fighters patrolling by

day and night. In one of many epic actions, on 3 February 1942 Flight Lieutenant Godfrey Hemsworth, 20 Squadron, and his crew were attacked by a night-fighter. One of his gunners, on his first sortie, probably shot down the attacker. Hemsworth flew the damaged Catalina for five hours on one engine before making a forced landing in darkness off Salamaua, New Guinea. The crew effected temporary repairs and made it back to Port Moresby. They had been away more than twenty-five hours and ground staff counted more than 100 bullet holes in the hull and wings.

Three days later, Flight Lieutenant David Campbell, 32 Squadron, flying a Hudson in daylight, was attacked by two fighters. In Campbell's words, his aircraft became a 'butcher's shop'. Three of the four crew, including Campbell, were wounded. Cockpit instruments were shot away and everything and everyone was covered in silver dust from an aluminium powder sea marker that exploded. Working together, fighting pain and loss of blood, they made it across the sea and over the Owen Stanley Range to Port Moresby, just as fuel was running out. Campbell refused medical treatment until he reported to the intelligence officer. In his logbook, he wrote simply: 'Attacked by 2 Zeros. 268 holes in aircraft'.

The first American raid was on 23 February 1942 when six B-17 heavy bombers were sent out. Several Australians were loaned as guides for the 'green' crews. Two crews turned back after running into a tropical storm while the others pressed on and bombed through cloud, unable to observe results.

Over the next three and a half years, Rabaul was raided hundreds of times. Enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire proved deadly. For many airmen, the flak over Simpson Harbour was worst. Lieutenant Robert Martindale of the 90th Bomb Group, United States Army Air Force, recalled:

> *It was like being the duck in a shooting gallery ... the sky was ablaze with shell fire. Although we could not see the Liberator ahead of us, we followed its course by the cone of tracers and ack-ack bursts as the plane made its way across the harbor. The idea of flying through that storm of shell fire was not pleasing, but we had to do it ...*

Warrant Officer Fred Smith, 8 Squadron RAAF, echoed the thoughts of many when he scrawled in his diary on 3 December 1943: 'When will it stop?' In two months, his squadron lost one-third of its original aircrews.

During 1943–44, most Australian raids on New Britain and New Ireland were conducted from bases on Goodenough and Kiriwina Islands. Beauforts carrying torpedoes or conventional bombs attacked shipping and other targets. Beaufighters swept over the islands attacking barges and targets of opportunity. Kittyhawks and Spitfires escorted bombers and attacked ground targets.

Flying over this area, prone to storms, and with fighters and flak to contend with, was daunting. Smith wrote of a night raid in which he encountered thick cloud and, after three attempts to get through, was attacked by a night-fighter. It took thirty-five minutes to shake off the attacker:

> *To escape I climbed for some thin not too turbulent cloud cover and then the Rear Gunner (F/Sgt Thornton) passed out through lack of oxygen. W/T Op [Wireless/ Transmitter Operator] detailed to get him from turret and at great risk I put the nose down through a funnel [in the cloud] hoping for the best but it was necessary to save Laurie's life. Our speed reached 300 Kts and owing to the terrific condensation which occurred all instruments, ourselves & equipment clouded over & became full of moisture.*

The navigator had to work doubly hard to plot their course back to Kiriwina. In darkness they could not spot the small island and were preparing to ditch into the sea when a searchlight was turned on to show the airfield's location not far away. It was a close call.

Landings

During 1943, General Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander of Allied forces in the South-West Pacific Area, ordered forces to land in western New Britain and build airstrips. These would be used to support Allied advances along the northern coastline of New Guinea.

Most of the coastwatchers who stayed behind in 1942 had been killed, captured or evacuated. The Allied Intelligence Bureau arranged to land new parties to gather intelligence, warn of air raids and counter-attacks, and procure local support. In March 1943, three Australians of 'M' Special Unit landed and for one of this party, Captain Peter Figgis, it was a return to an island he had last seen a year before, as a member of Lark Force. In September, another sixteen Australians and twenty-seven Papuans and New Guineans

landed. One objective was to convince New Britain islanders it was safe to side with the Allies again. All parties were inserted successfully but one then ran into an enemy patrol, with two Australians killed and one captured.

On the night of 29 November, five warships, including the destroyers HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, arrived off Gasmata. The plan was to make the Japanese believe a landing would take place there, but the ships' crews wondered what they achieved. According to Commander Walker:

> *Although assigned target areas were thoroughly covered ... no large fires were observed. No retaliatory gunfire, searchlights or other evidence of enemy activity was noted. The entire area had a deserted look.*

Two weeks later, a landing of American troops took place further west at Arawe. Taking part was the Landing Ship, Infantry (LSI) HMAS *Westralia*. Despite tough resistance, by day's end the Americans had enough troops ashore to start pushing inland and secure a perimeter.

The Japanese responded with frequent air raids. American fighters were assisted by reports from coastwatchers and plotting by 335 Radar Station RAAF. The Australians had enjoyed a grandstand view of the landings before setting up on a small island off Arawe, where they experienced sixty raids. Flying Officer Les Bell recalled:

> *Bomb craters, with little space between, pockmarked the island. Dive bombing and strafing interrupted proceedings during daylight hours. Nuisance bombing by float planes kept the troops awake all night. We named a Kawanishi flying boat 'Washing Machine Charlie'. It arrived early in the night, dropped its bombs and departed out of earshot for an hour or so, only to return and drop another string of daisycutters and disappear again for a while. He kept it up all night*.

No Australians were wounded, but patience was tested by having to sit out two or three raids in slit trenches every night.

The next objective was Cape Gloucester, on the western tip of the island. Planners looked for former residents to advise on terrain and conditions. Usually, men with experience of any area in the islands could be found in the forces, but not this time. The Reverend William Wiedemann, a former missionary, was attending to his parish at Kilmore in Victoria when American officers turned up requesting his assistance in producing a terrain study. Within

weeks, Wiedemann was sworn into the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve to participate in the landing.

No up-to-date navigation charts existed. The corvette HMAS *Shepparton* was tasked with surveying Dampier Strait, through which the task force would have to pass. The strait was about 20 kilometres wide and 50 kilometres long and the crew would have to work in daylight marking out channels through reefs and sandbars. *Shepparton* was 'armed to the teeth' with its 4-inch gun and two Oerlikon heavy machine-guns supplemented by a Bofors anti-aircraft gun and two 0.5-inch machine-guns 'bought' from American units with bottles of whisky and beer. Realising they could still be outgunned, the Australians hoped to trick the Japanese into believing *Shepparton* was a Japanese vessel. The corvette was stripped of Australian markings, its battle ensign lowered and stored (to be raised if attacked) and gun crews instructed to fire only if attacked and ordered. Lieutenant Ean McDonald recalled:

> *At dawn, the survey crews steadily set to work, exploring, marking, echo-sounding for depths and plotting onto their base sheets. The launch crews firstly erected cheekily prominent bright calico markers on all the sand cays, then laid marker buoys, and went on to run their sounding lines as fast as they dared. They fed back their results to our main plot room for chart assembly. All day they worked on a beautiful calm sea. The bright sky gave perfect visibility for our work, but also for our enemy ...*
>
> *The guns' crews lounged around in studied nonchalance. They were never more than a few inches from their triggers and close to their shell racks ... During the day a curious Jap pilot flew by, probably quite puzzled but accepting us as friendly. Our guns' crews kept their eyes on him but waved in their best Japanese.*

Task completed, the *Shepparton* returned to Buna, where charts were produced. Vice Admiral Thomas Kincaid, commander of the American 7th Fleet, pronounced the mission 'a most daring achievement'.

The task force, including the cruisers HMA Ships *Australia* and *Shropshire* and destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, sailed on Christmas Eve 1943. The ships were spotted but the Japanese believed they were carrying reinforcements to Arawe and launched an air raid against that beachhead. Lieutenant Commander John Alliston of the *Shropshire* recalled:

> *At first light [26 December] Cape Gloucester could be seen to starboard as a dark line, and beyond, the mass of Mount Talawe's 6000 feet gradually took shape. No lights*

ashore, no reaction from the enemy, not a bogey on the radar screen.

At 6.00 am, the bombardment started. Sub Lieutenant Wiedemann landed with the second wave of marines from the 1st Division, United States Marine Corps. He reported that the warships 'did a wonderful job ... practically everything in the way of timber was mown to the ground for the distance of 400 yards inland'. That afternoon, Japanese aircraft got through the Allied fighter screen, sinking an American destroyer and damaging others.
A second wave of attackers was annihilated.

Soon American aircraft were operating from airfields at Cape Gloucester. During March, Kittyhawk fighters of 80, 78 and then 75 Squadrons RAAF arrived. For the next month, they conducted fighter sweeps and bombed and strafed barges and enemy-occupied villages before they moved on to operations elsewhere. They had been joined by 'B' Flight of 4 Squadron RAAF whose pilots, flying Boomerangs, conducted low-level reconnaissance sorties, plotting enemy positions and lines of retreat, as well as 'leading-in' fighter-bombers attacking Japanese positions.

Final campaign

By August 1944, the areas around Cape Gloucester, Arawe and Cape Hoskins were relatively quiet. Japanese outposts had been withdrawn to areas not patrolled by American troops. Outside of the forward lines, guerrilla warfare was conducted by villagers, coordinated by the Allied Intelligence Bureau.

The Allies had now almost completely isolated the Japanese on New Britain. Warships and aircraft blockaded Rabaul. Sometimes submarines were able to sneak through carrying staff officers and stores but it was not enough to assure subsistence. Many of the 100,000 Japanese naval and army troops were employed gardening and fishing. However, the Allies remained concerned because General Hitoshi Imamura still had enough troops to mount a counter-offensive and, were this to occur, casualties would be heavy. It was even vaguely possible the Allies could lose one or more footholds on the island.

Arrangements were in hand for the 5th Australian Division to take over. Whereas the Americans were content to establish defensive perimeters, the Australians were to go on

the offensive. The objective was to advance eastward to the edge of the Gazelle Peninsula, on which Rabaul sits, and cordon off the Japanese garrison. They would not try to take Rabaul because the Japanese could be expected to resist fiercely, almost certainly to the death, a possibility far too costly in Australian lives to contemplate.

The advance began by stepping up guerrilla warfare. Major Basil Fairfax-Ross, a former plantation owner, experienced in operating behind enemy lines, was instructed to push the Japanese on the south coast back to Henry Reid Bay on the edge of the Gazelle Peninsula. With the assistance of air attacks, his guerrillas made good progress. On the north coast, other guerrilla groups also made ground but were counter-attacked.

In mid-September 1944, the 6th Brigade started the main advance. Raised as a militia formation, it had been in New Guinea since July 1943, though not in battle. One of its battalions the 36th had fought at Sanananda eighteen months earlier, but the other two battalions remained untested. Veterans and reinforcements alike were well trained, but the brigade's commanding officer believed nine-tenths of his men were becoming anxious lest the war ended before they could take part in active combat.

On 8 October, the 36th Battalion landed at Cape Hoskins, an American forward base on the north coast. It spent several weeks preparing for the push. On the south coast, coastwatchers and guerrillas continued harassing Japanese outposts and then, on 4 November, the destroyer HMAS *Vendetta*, frigate HMAS *Barcoo* and sloop HMAS *Swan* entered Jacquinot Bay with two merchant ships, carrying the 14th/32nd Battalion and part of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion. The troops landed and later the warships bombarded Japanese positions in Wide Bay.

With the aid of further landings, the Australians advanced along both coasts. The objectives were Open Bay in the north and Wide Bay in the south. These were opposite each other and created the 'neck' across the Gazelle Peninsula where the Australians were to form their cordon. On the north coast, no contact with the enemy was made until 27 January 1945, when a platoon of New Guinean soldiers fired on a Japanese patrol. Two days later, a 36th Battalion outpost was attacked and its troops pushed out. A series of clashes on the edge of Open Bay ensued. The Japanese sent out strong patrols and the

36th Battalion responded likewise. By early February the Australians were pushing forward again.

Across at Wide Bay, Allied Intelligence Bureau patrols reported that the Japanese were preparing defences. The 14th/32nd Battalion, supported by New Guinean soldiers and gunners of the 2/14th Field Regiment, took up the fight. For the gunners, action was long overdue, as the 2/14th Field Regiment had been raised as part of the ill-fated 8th Division, escaping the fate of most of their comrades only because they were stationed at Darwin. The regiment had been in New Guinea more than a year but had fired only twenty-five rounds in anger. According to Major Arthur Rylah:

> *One of the factors that has sustained the pride and esprit de corps of the regiment is the remembrance of the fate of the rest of 8 Div and the desire to do the utmost to revenge and release them has ever been present.*

The first significant contact in Wide Bay was on 15 February, when New Guinean troops ambushed a patrol, killing about twenty Japanese. With artillery and air support, the 14th/32nd and 19th Battalions advanced. By the end of February, with the Australians occupying positions within Wide and Open Bays, only about thirty kilometres separated the two fronts. The cordon could be formed.

The Australians established defensive lines while patrols went forward to gather intelligence. They reported that the Japanese were preparing strong defensive positions, and soon they mounted counter-attacks. On 8 March about 100 Japanese, supported by a field gun, attacked the 36th Battalion's leading platoon in Open Bay but were repulsed.

At Wide Bay, the push was renewed by the 19th Battalion. The first attempt to cross the Wulwut River, which flowed into Henry Reid Bay, on the northern side of Wide Bay, was repulsed by heavy fire. The Australians tried again and one company under Major Adam Armstrong, who would receive the Military Cross, made it across and established positions. With support from the 2/14th Field Regiment, the 19th and 14th/32nd Battalions pushed into the heights above the Wulwut River, losing several dozen men killed or wounded in sharp clashes.

The Australians had also discovered the sites of the Tol massacre of 1942. Bones were

found littered around the area. Some troops swore they would not, under any circumstance, take a prisoner.

By the end of March the Australians had achieved their objective forming a cordon across the neck of the Gazelle Peninsula. The cost had been about forty men killed and 130 wounded. The other ever-present threat was tropical diseases, in particular malaria, but strict discipline kept malaria casualties to a remarkably low forty-one men evacuated.

During April and May, the 13th Brigade took over on both fronts. Months of patrolling began. Private Bill Towers of the 4th Field Ambulance, who moved up from Jacquinot Bay to Wide Bay, recalled:

> *I was attached to an engineer unit ... well protected, as we had a special platoon to guard us. It was rather bad on the nerves at night, and it was while I was there that we had an earth tremor. It lasted so long that some of the chaps got scared, but I was too busy trying to steady my medicine table to think of anything else. It was funny to see a 3-ton truck shivering like a jelly with malaria.*

While the campaign was now static, sharp clashes occurred. On the night of 12 April a platoon of the 16th Battalion was ambushed, fighting its way clear but with three men killed, one mortally wounded, one missing and thirteen lightly wounded. It was their first time in action but their training stood them in good stead. The official historian, Gavin Long, paid them the compliment of observing they 'behaved calmly, and handled their weapons skilfully, and a dangerous situation was saved'.

Patrolling continued up until the war's end. Early on 15 August, after days of conjecture that Japan might surrender, news came through that the fighting was over. There was celebration in some camps while in others there was just relief expressed. There was also still tension: would the Japanese garrison surrender? Lance Corporal Kevin O'Farrell, 37th/52nd Battalion recalled:

> *A Boomerang fighter plane came over and buzzed us. We couldn't see its markings at first, and thinking it was a Jap plane, we dived for cover. The bloody thing frightened hell out of us, but on its last run it dropped a small parachute with a container which held the message everyone was waiting to hear—WHITE FLAGS AT RABAUL.*

Liberating Rabaul

The opposing forces maintained positions while waiting for the formal surrender of the Rabaul garrison. This occurred on 6 September 1945 on board HMS *Glory*, an aircraft carrier of the British Pacific Fleet.

The Australians demanded the immediate handover of prisoners of war. Some hoped to find hundreds of Australians and Americans—members of Lark Force and others captured in and around New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland. But the Japanese advised the number held was far less. When Captain Frank Morris and Lieutenant Ken Hancock of HMAS *Vendetta* landed to evacuate European prisoners of war, only one Australian, one New Zealander, seven Americans and eighteen Britons greeted them. The British soldiers were survivors of 600 men sent from Singapore; some had died at Rabaul and 518 were moved to Ballalae Island, in the Solomons, where the last men living were massacred.

The 4th Brigade landed from HMA Ships *Manoora* and *Katoomba* on 10 September. The 13th Brigade arrived five days later. One of the first jobs was to liberate Asian prisoners of war. The Japanese had obfuscated on releasing them, claiming that technically they were not prisoners of war as they were on parole and working as a service corps. The Australians liberated 5589 Indian, 1397 Chinese, 688 Malayan and 607 Indonesian troops. All nationalities had suffered terribly. The Australians observed a marked difference between the former captives and their captors who were drawing rations from farms and gardens. Captain Tom Arnold, 2nd Field Ambulance, treated Indians:

> *It was heartbreaking. I've seen the driver of my jeep carrying out virtually the skeleton on his two hands and loading him in the jeep and then another one and they didn't take up any space.*

Also discovered were internees, mostly pre-war inhabitants of New Britain. On 13 September, troops and Red Cross officials liberated the camp holding Chinese residents. Jubilant men, women and children flocked around their rescuers. They had endured three and a half years of captivity, forced labour and cruelties. Three days later, troops found other civilians, mostly missionaries, at Ramale. Sister Berenice Twohill recalled:

We knew something must have been happening because the planes weren't going out at all ... [the war] must have been coming to an end. They didn't tell us. Then all of a sudden, one morning we heard this 'Cooee' on the top of the mountain ... So we Cooeed back.

It would take a few months to get all of the former prisoners of war and internees back home to various countries.

There was virtually no trace of the Lark Force prisoners of war and more than 200 civilians interned at the same time. Four civilian men kept at Rabaul to work for the Japanese confirmed that the prisoners of war and most of the civilians had been taken away in the middle of 1942. Hopes were raised that they would turn up elsewhere but within a month it was apparent that only the officers and nurses were alive. The Japanese advised that the rest were lost in the sinking of their transport ship. An Australian officer in Japan turned up a manifest of 845 prisoners of war and 208 internees, including Norwegian merchant seamen, who boarded the *Montevideo Maru* in Simpson Harbour
on 22 June 1942. The list was possibly incomplete.

The Japanese advised that the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk on 1 July 1942 off the Philippines. Twenty of the crew and guards were rescued but not one prisoner of war or internee survived. A report from the American submarine USS *Sturgeon* confirmed it had sunk a merchant ship in the same area and time as stated by the Japanese. Australian authorities concluded that the *Montevideo Maru* had gone down with the loss of all Australian and Allied lives.

The officers and nurses had been transported on a different ship to Japan. They confirmed that the prisoners of war and internees had been treated harshly at Rabaul. Men were used as forced labourers, subjected to bashings and issued poor rations. Most were in poor condition to begin with, having attempted to escape from the island, and some died at Rabaul.

The officers and nurses, including civilians, had endured poor conditions in the hold of the *Naruto Maru* but reached Japan safely on 11 July 1942. The women went to Yokahama, spending most of the war confined to small, uncomfortable quarters where they worked and lived, with little medical attention, poor rations and virtually no contact with the outside world. The sixty male officers went to Ofuna for further interrogation, after which they were

sent to different camps such as Zentsuji, on the Inland Sea, and Hokkaido. After liberation they returned home, shocked to realise they were the only survivors of captured Lark Force members.

The other group of prisoners of war was made up of Allied airmen and a few soldiers, captured later. Allied servicemen believed that capture by the Japanese was a virtual death sentence. The number of men who ended up at Rabaul is unknown but was at least 100. Some did not survive long after capture and brutal interrogations, dying of wounds or being executed. Others were held for months, even years, subjected to shocking privations. At least four men died after being used as medical guinea pigs. Malnourished, beaten, denied medical aid, men stood little chance of survival. In early 1944, forty men were taken away, ostensibly to be accommodated at Watom Island in Simpson Harbour with the British prisoners of war; all were killed, the Japanese claiming they were caught in an air raid and the surviving prisoners suspecting they were murdered. A few men were fortunate to be selected for transportation to Japan but even this was no guarantee of safety, as some were lost en route. The few rescued at Rabaul in September 1945 survived against terrible odds.

Following the arrival of Australian forces at Rabaul, Major General Ken Eather, commander of the 5th Division, ordered the Japanese to build thirteen compounds to hold 10,000 Japanese each. They were to continue cultivating gardens to provide for themselves as far as possible. There were tense moments and instances of retribution as Australians came to terms with the suffering and deaths of Allied prisoners of war and internees.

During 1946 most of the Japanese were shipped back to Japan. Those accused or suspected of war crimes were held back to be tried as war criminals. As the number of former enemy troops dwindled, the Australian garrison was wound down and civil administration of the territories was restored under one administration of Papua New Guinea.

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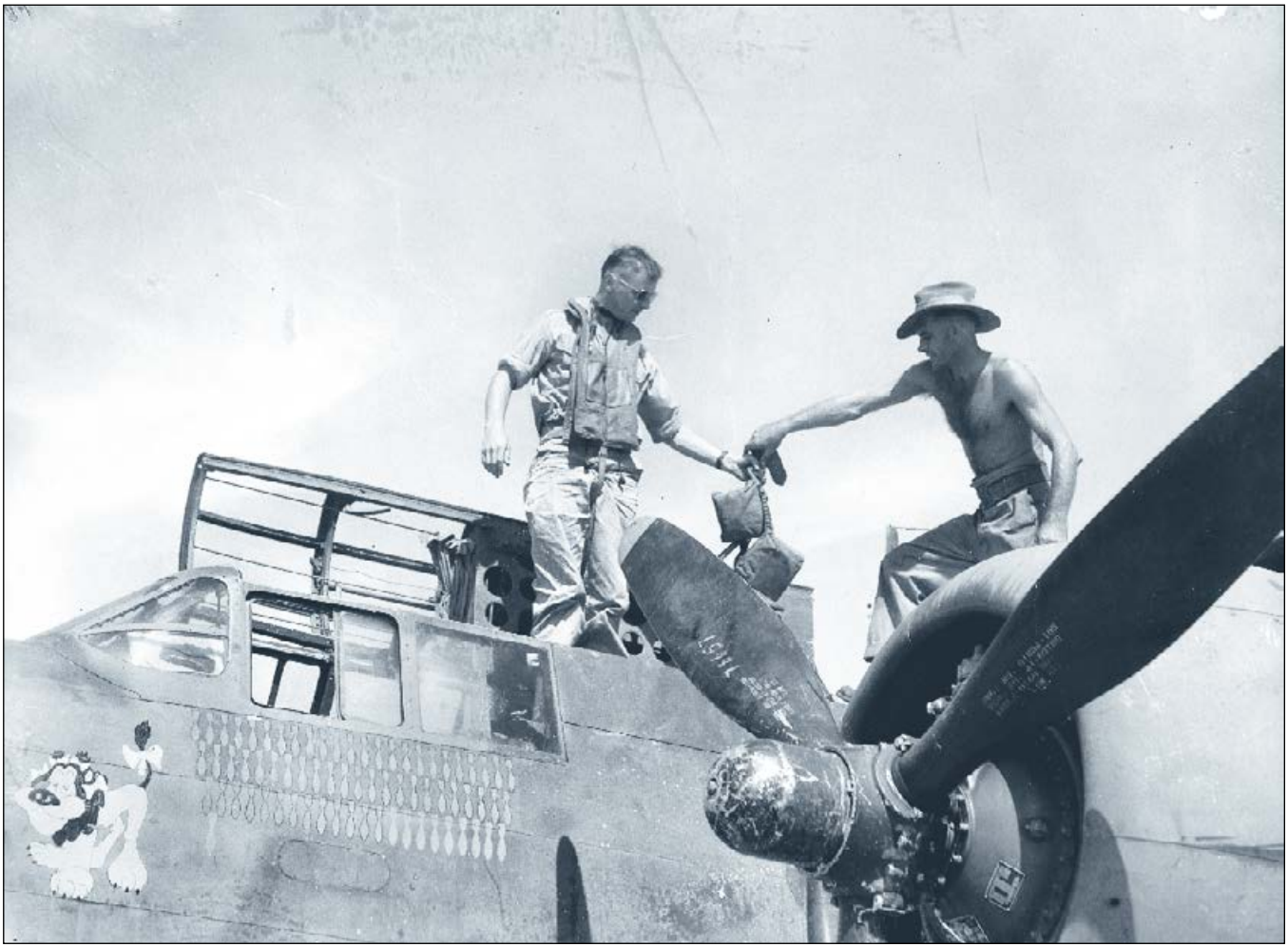
The Australians at War Film Archive, set up by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, is the source of quotes from Tom Arnold, David Bloomfield, Norman Furness and Berenice Twohill. Transcripts are available on the internet at www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au.

The band of the 2/22nd Infantry Battalion, the main component of Lark Force, assemble on Anzac Day 1941, at Rabaul. Of its twenty-five bandsmen who embarked together, twenty-three were members of the Salvation Army. Just one member made it back to Australia, the rest dying in the attempt or in captivity, most when the transport ship *Montevideo Maru* was sunk off the Philippines on 1 July 1942. *(AWM P02328.004)*

Soldiers and civilian men unload the body of a woman who died as they prepared to leave New Britain in the face of the Japanese invasion, Rabaul, January 1942. Most European women and children had been evacuated before the invasion of New Britain and New Ireland, but several hundred planters, businessmen, government officials and missionaries remained. Along with Chinese residents, most were interned, though others endeavoured to escape. *(AWM P00226.001)*

Members of Lark Force spent many weeks or months on the run. About one-third eventually got away in small craft, while the rest were made prisoners of war, were murdered after capture, or died of tropical diseases. Five who sailed from Palmalmal Mission to Port Moresby were (from right) Signalmen Les Futcher, George 'Shorty' Barwick, Dan Thomson, William 'Bill' Lord and Sergeant IH 'Les' Robbins, seen here at Drina Plantation in April 1942. *(AWM P02395.019)*

An American B-25 Mitchell bomber begins to pull out of a low-level run over Simpson Harbour, having bombed a Japanese vessel, November 1943. The bombing campaign against the Japanese base at Rabaul was the longest and costliest of the war in New Guinea. From January 1942 until war's end, Australian, American and New Zealand aircraft flew thousands of missions. Some Australians flew in American squadrons. *(AWM P00240.006)*



Wing Commander JG Emerton, 22 Squadron RAAF, climbs out of the cockpit of his Boston bomber after a sweep over New Britain in late 1943. This particular Boston, nicknamed 'She's Apples', completed 186 missions, more than any other RAAF bomber in the war. *(AWM OG0377)*

Two ground crew members of 79 Squadron RAAF ride on the wings of a Spitfire fighter, giving directions to the pilot as he taxis through the dispersal area at Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands, November 1943. Fighter pilots escorted Allied bombers and sometimes also engaged in low-level strafing and bombing of enemy positions. *(AWM P02874.042)*

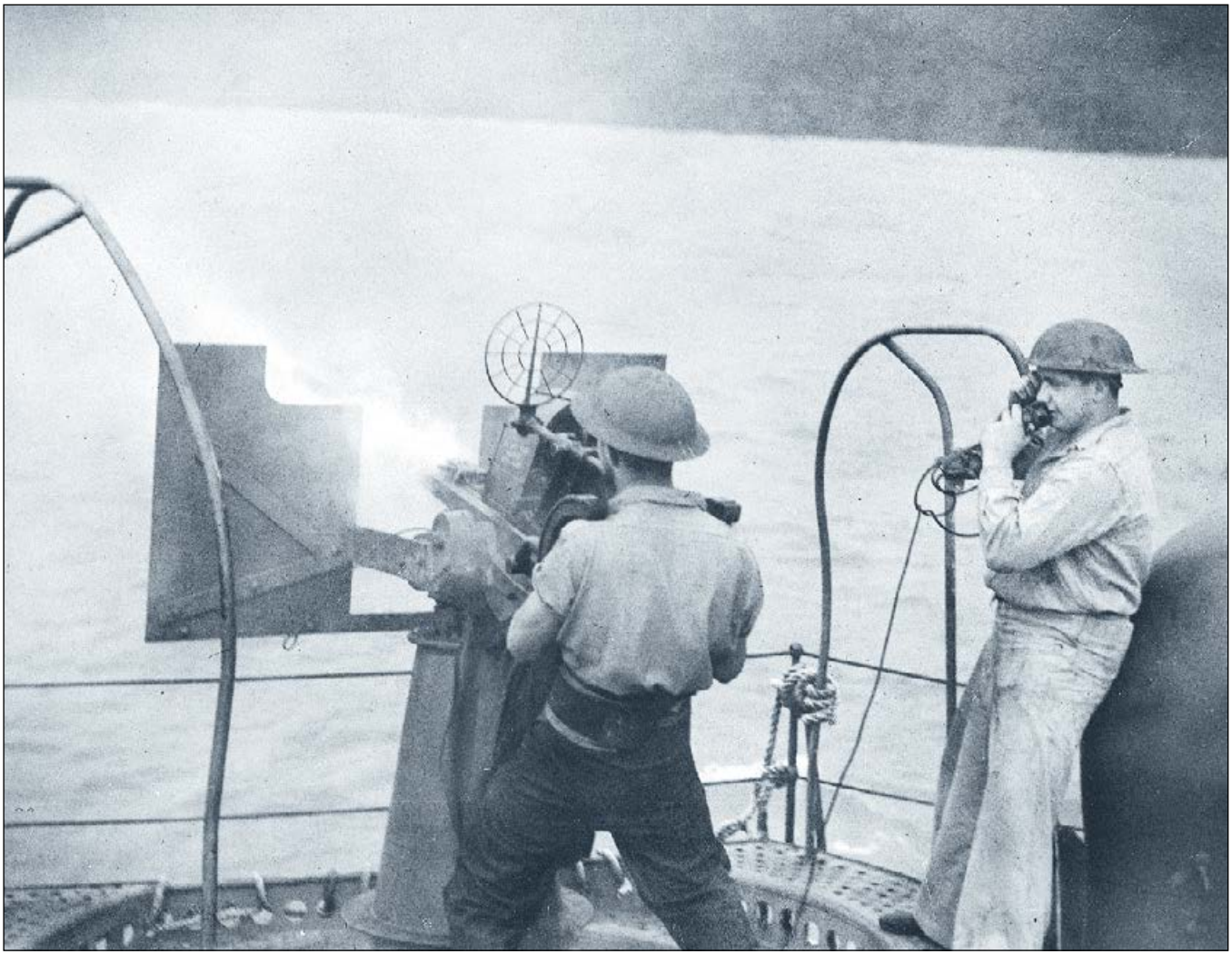
Australian warships supporting the American landing at Cape Gloucester in December 1943 participate in the bombardment of enemy shore positions. The heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia* and destroyer HMAS *Arunta* were photographed from the heavy cruiser HMAS *Shropshire*. This was the first of several American landings for which the RAN warships 'softened up' the opposition. *(AWM 106687)*

Aircrews of 100 Squadron RAAF, based at Vivigani on Goodenough Island, return from their Beauforts after a daylight raid on a Japanese forward base and supply dump on the Amgen River near Lindehafen, New Britain, in January 1944. From late 1942, the aircrews of Australian-built Beaufort bombers flew many bombing raids and sweeps seeking out targets of opportunity. *(AWM OG0472)*

The deployment of the 5th Division in November 1944 boosted the Australian presence on New Britain and marked a switch to more offensive operations, as the Australians were to advance towards Rabaul. At Lae, on the mainland of New Guinea, the 36th Battalion was taken by landing craft to the Dutch troopship *Swartenhondt* for passage to Jacquinot Bay, New Britain. *(AWM 076529)*

Men of the 36th Battalion relax on the afterdeck of the troopship *Swartenhondt* during the voyage to Jacquinot Bay. Some of the men in this veteran unit had survived hard and costly fighting at Sanananda, Papua, in late 1942 and early 1943, while for others New Britain would be their first campaign. *(AWM 076535)*

Troops of the 14th/32nd Battalion watch the destroyer HMAS *Vendetta* as their convoy slips into Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, in November 1944. An important duty for the RAN was to escort troopships and freighters in the war zone, where there remained a potential, albeit much diminished, threat of enemy submarines and aircraft. The warships were also available to fire on shore positions. *(AWM 076655)*



Australian sailors fire on suspected Japanese positions in Wide Bay in early November 1944, just days after escorting troopships and freighters to Jacquinot Bay. The destroyer HMAS *Vendetta*, sloop HMAS *Swan* and frigate HMAS *Barcoo* all participated in this action. The Fairmile launches *ML802* and *ML827* also were available to provide fire support for troops onshore. *(AWM 076808)*

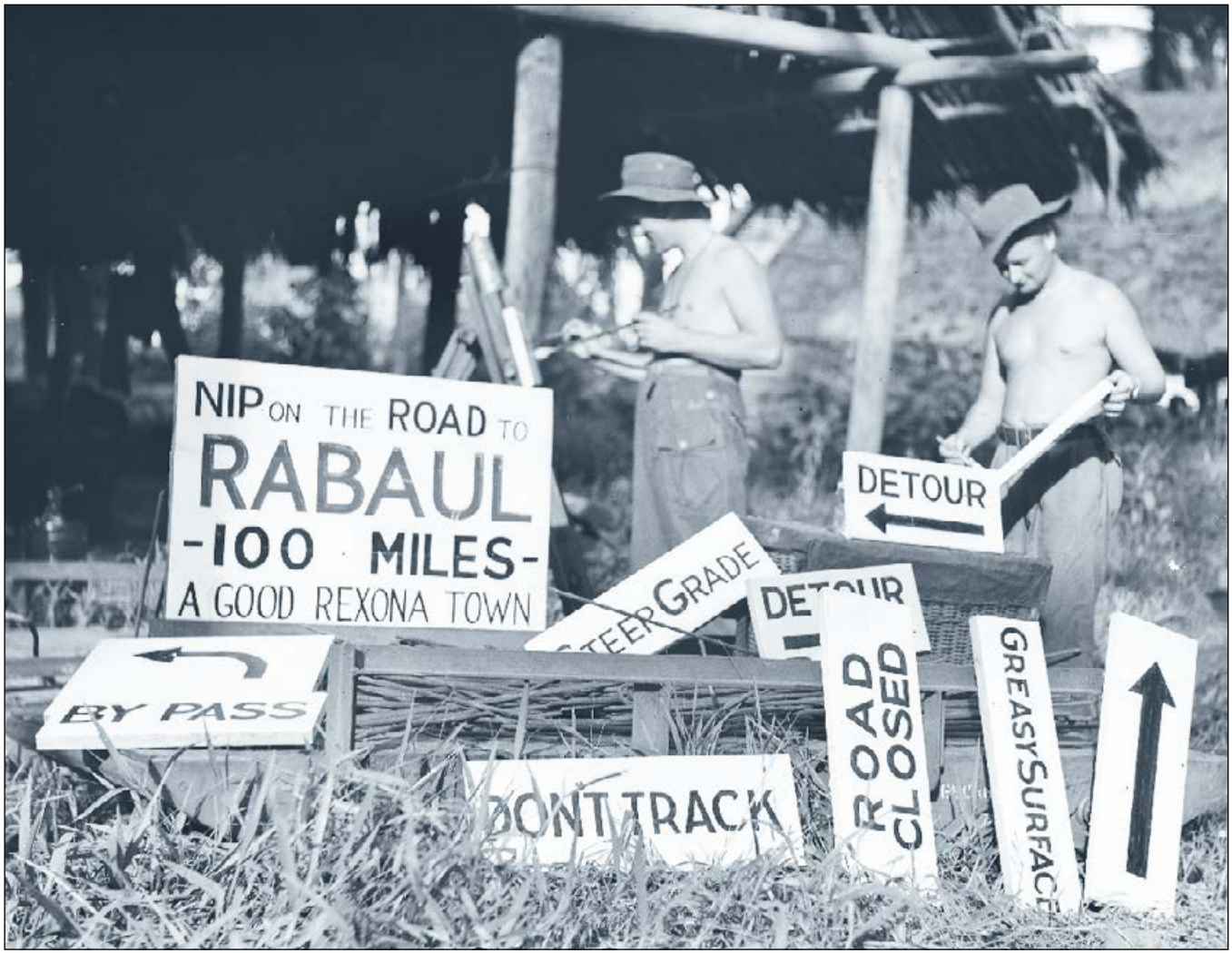
Major AG Lowndes (right), the Brigade Major of the 6th Infantry Brigade, talks with Gulpiak, a lululai, or chief, of the Pomio district of New Britain, November 1944. A loyal, brave and resourceful leader, Gulpiak was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for earlier rescuing an Australian and an American whose aircraft had crashed in Japanese-held territory on New Britain. *(AWM 076710)*

Sailors serve in the engine room of the frigate HMAS *Barcoo*, one of the warships that escorted the first troop convoy carrying the 5th Division to Jacquinot Bay and then took part in the shelling of enemy coastal positions at Wide Bay and patrols of the coastline, November 1944. Situated below deck in often stifling conditions, these men would have felt, rather than observed, the firing of the *Barcoo*'s guns in action. *(AWM 076817)*

Lance Corporal CF Harvey, 2/3rd Railway Construction Company, Royal Australian Engineers, uses a heavy tractor to haul a roller along a section of new road between an airstrip and camp area at Palmalmal Plantation, New Britain. Development of the 5th Division's base and infrastructure to support the planned land campaign began as soon as engineers and equipment were landed during November 1944. *(AWM 077405)*

Sapper William Tester (left) and Sapper D'Arcy of the 13th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, connect up a compressed air sump pump used for pile driving, during the building of a new bridge across a creek in the Jacquinot Bay area in December 1944. Dozens of bridges were needed to traverse the many creeks and streams in the area. *(AWM 077662)*

RAAF personnel from the base post office at Jacquinot Bay unload Christmas mail delivered from Australia in a Martin Mariner flying boat of either 40 or 41 Squadrons RAAF, both of which flew regular courier and transport flights to the war zone from their bases in Townsville and Cairns, Queensland. *(AWM 077651)*



The way forward was marked by road signs that were usually practical—'Detour', 'Road Closed'—but often also humorous, as with the larger sign painted by these members of the 12th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, Sapper LK Self (left) and Lance Corporal KR Baker, at Sampun, New Britain, January 1945. *(AWM 078372)*

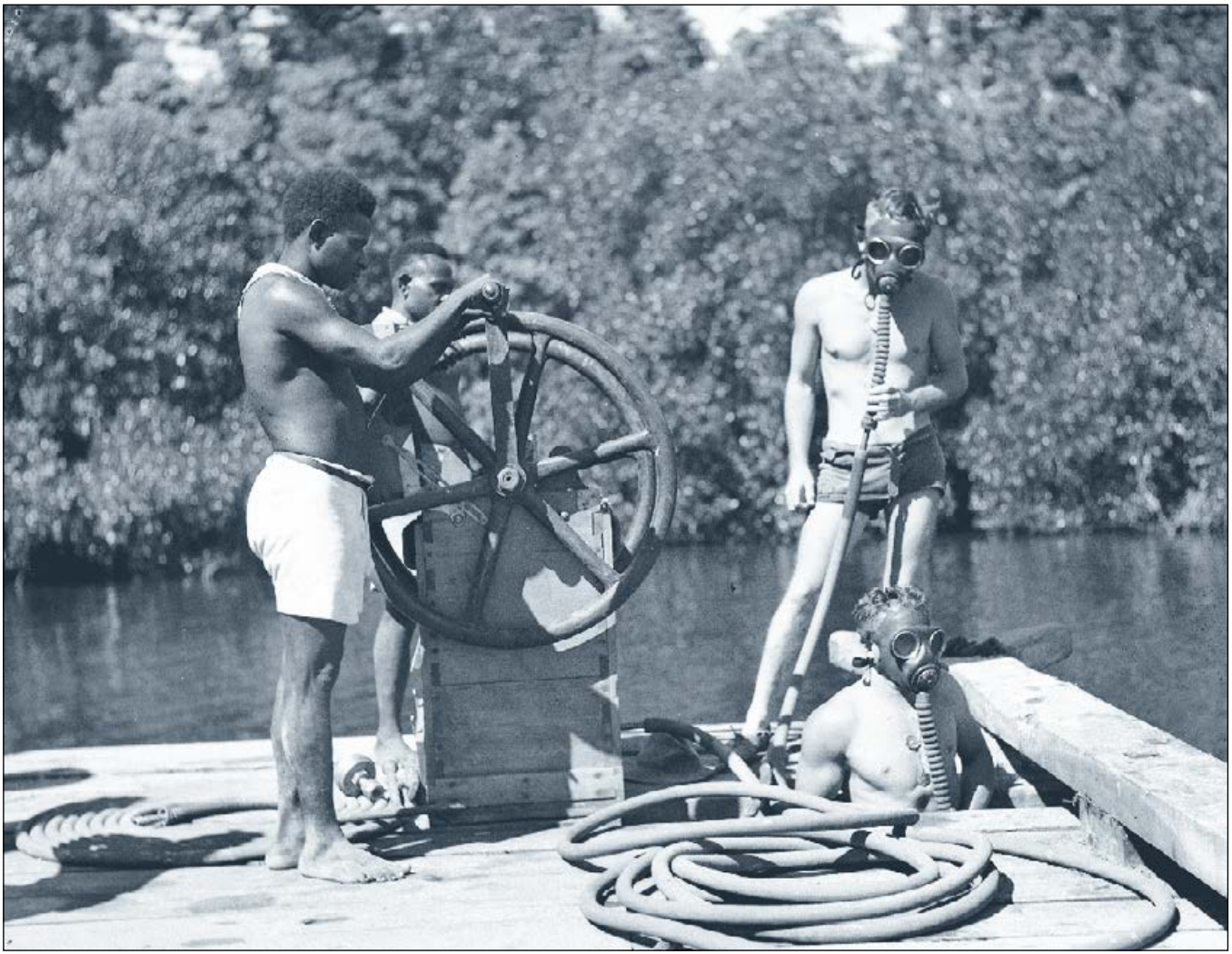
Troops of the 14th/32nd Battalion enter the village of Kalampun after marching from Sampun during the advance towards the expected concentration of enemy forces closer to Rabaul, January 1945. (From left) Private LG Morgan, Private WT Johnson, an unidentified member of the unit, and Sergeant AT White. *(AWM 078376)*

A sergeant from an Australian patrol dries off during a rest period on patrol in the forward area, January 1945. Patrolling and the advance from Jacquinot Bay were arduous. Although relatively little opposition was encountered in the first days of operations, the terrain was often jungle-clad, with many rivers and streams to cross. *(AWM 017959)*

Reminders of those who had served with Lark Force in 1941-42 were found during the advance towards Rabaul in January 1945. At Pul Pul, Sergeant AN Taylor, 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion, places flowers on the grave of Private Donald McLennan, 2/22nd Battalion, who died of illness in February 1942 while attempting to escape from New Britain. *(AWM 078389)*

At Jacquinot Bay in February 1945, men of the three services enjoy some singing during the official opening of the Services Club established jointly by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Australian Comforts Fund. These philanthropic organisations, along with the Salvation Army, supported servicemen and servicewomen until after the war ended. *(AWM 078932)*

On patrol in the Oiva River area in February 1945, Lance Corporal Ero, 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion, moves along a stream-bed, peering into the enveloping jungle, with his Owen sub-machine-gun at the ready. The indigenous troops of this unit were widely respected for their patrolling and fighting skills. *(AWM 078949)*



Near the mouth of the Kalumalagi River, Sappers Edward Nichols and Reginald Skidmore, 17th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, with locally recruited assistants, prepare to enter the water wearing breathing apparatus during the building of a barge slipway, February 1945. Barges supplied forward troops. *(AWM 079005)*

At Wunung Plantation, near Jacquinot Bay, doctors of the 105th Casualty Clearing Station prepare for a surgical operation in the unit's tented theatre, March 1945. As the Australian forces came into closer contact with the Japanese, the number of combat casualties began to rise. Medical teams also dealt with victims of accidents and disease. *(AWM 079402)*

Members of an artillery unit, most likely the 2/14th Field Regiment, float a 25-pounder gun, using wood and empty oil drums, across a stream to reach the forward area, March 1945. The 2/14th originally was in the ill-fated 8th Division, spending many months on garrison duties at Darwin, before finally seeing action in the New Britain campaign. *(AWM 018226)*

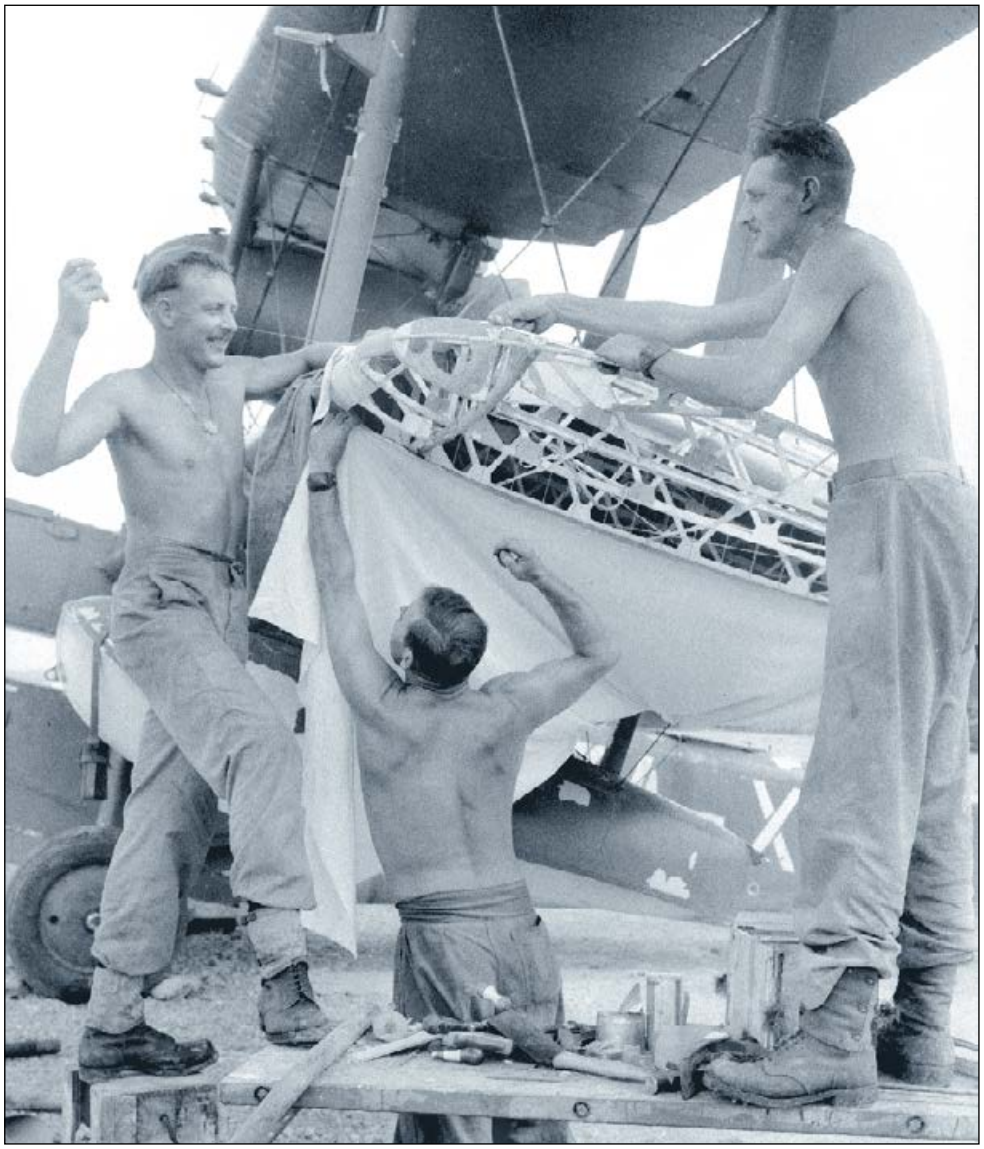
A Jeep is used to evacuate wounded men of the 14th/32nd Battalion from a dressing station maintained by the 6th Field Ambulance in the Waitavalo area of Wide Bay in March 1945. Jungle roads frequently became too boggy, requiring constant road maintenance and skilful driving for Jeeps to continue carrying supplies and men. *(AWM 079862)*

Private HJ Adams (left) and Lieutenant AG Mawson of the 14th/32nd Battalion await evacuation from Waitavalo by LCM (Landing Craft, Mechanised) after being brought in from the forward area, March 1945. Water transport was used widely during the campaign to get casualties back to the base area in relative comfort and speed. *(AWM 079861)*

A wounded soldier evacuated from the forward area to Waitavolo pacifies a comrade suffering from 'shell shock' after some tough fighting in the Henry Reid Bay area in March 1945. The 19th and 14th/32nd Battalions had encountered stiff resistance, including strong mortar fire, after crossing the Wulwut River, on Henry Reid Bay. *(AWM 079881)*

At Henry Reid Bay, Lance Corporal Jim Kinnane (left) and Sergeant Des Payne of 269 Light Aid Detachment, Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, repair weapons handed in for overhaul during the advance through the area in March 1945. *(AWM 018266)*

Privates Leon Ravet (left) and Bernard Kentwell of the 19th Battalion, each armed with Owen guns, pause during a patrol while advancing beyond Henry Reid Bay in early April 1945. The advance in this area was gruelling, with the battalions 'leap frogging' each other every few days, allowing each some rest before again taking up the vanguard. *(AWM 018320)*

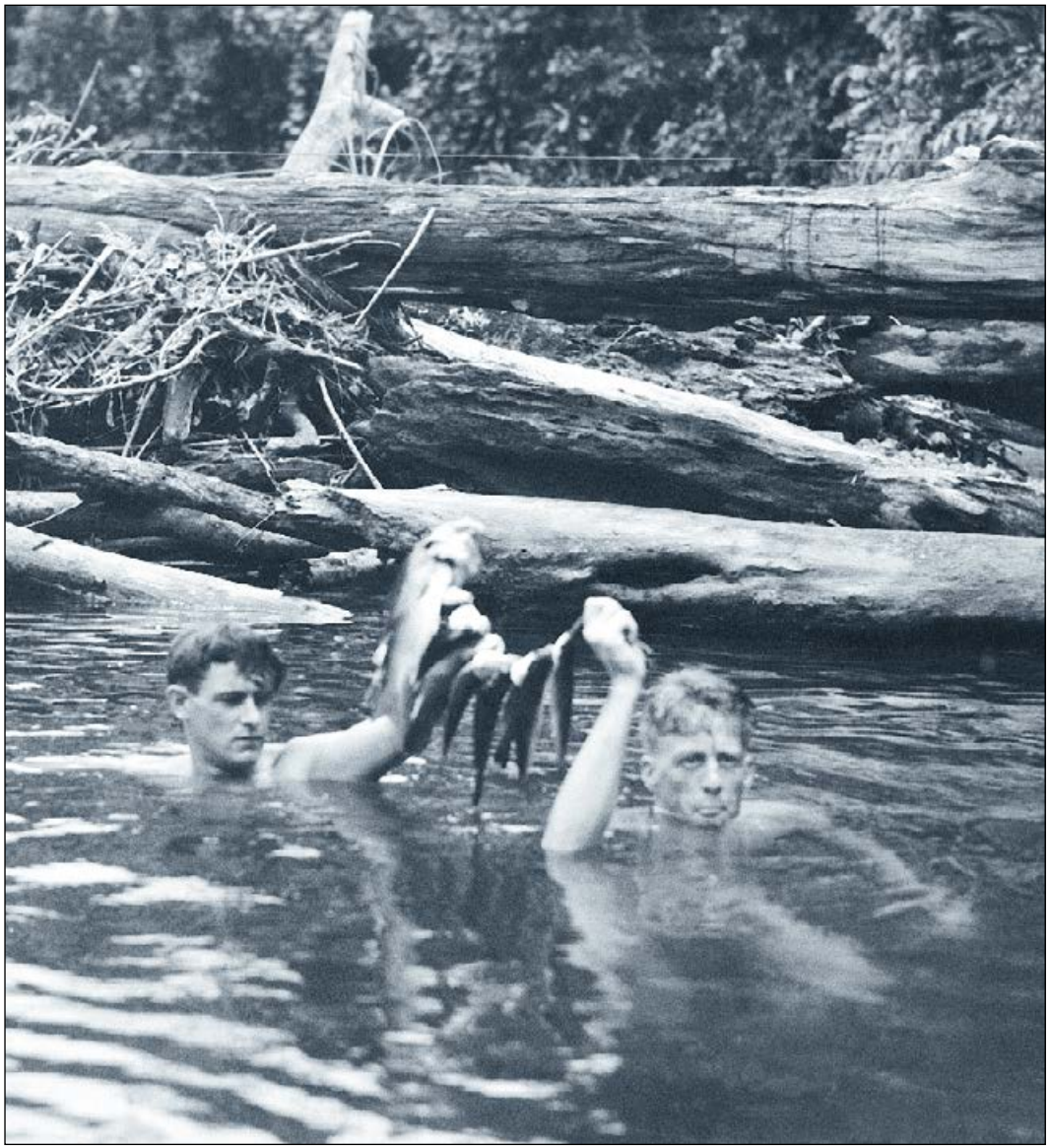


At Jacquinot Bay, where RAAF and Royal New Zealand Air Force units were located, members of 10 Communications Unit RAAF repair the wing fabric of a Walrus biplane amphibian aircraft used for a variety of tasks including transport and air-sea rescue operations, April 1945. From left, Corporal L Riddell, Leading Aircraftsman AH Roberts and Corporal N Bliss. *(AWM OG2441)*

Troops of the 37th/52nd Battalion cross the Mavelu River during a trek from Rile to Mavelu, at Open Bay, in mid-May 1945. After reaching Mavelu, the unit was embarked for transportation to Watu Plantation, on the Gazelle Peninsula, to relieve another battalion on the north coast that was holding the line near Rabaul. *(AWM 092342)*

At Jacquinot Bay, a Jeep is unloaded from an ALC (Australian Landing Craft) of the 41st Landing Craft Company, Royal Australian Engineers, which had just completed an epic crossing of the Coral Sea, sailing from Cairns, Queensland, to the southern coast of New Britain to support operations, May 1945. *(AWM 018175)*

Private A Anderson of the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS), serving with the 2/8th Australian General Hospital, operates the unit's switchboard at Palmalmal Plantation, Jacquinot Bay, in July 1945. Members of the Australian Army Nursing Service and AAMWS were the only Australian servicewomen in the campaign. *(AWM 094243)*



Two men of the 2/2nd Cavalry Commando Squadron carry fish caught by throwing a grenade into the Yara River during a patrol in July 1945. Fish supplemented standard Army rations that in forward areas often still consisted of the unvarying staples of bully beef, 'goldfish' (tinned herring in sauce), rice and biscuits. *(AWM 094621)*

Troops of the 2/2nd Cavalry Commando Squadron cross the Yara River on patrol in late July 1945. The men in the foreground prepare to give covering fire with Owen guns should enemy troops open fire on the men crossing the stream. The men were rightly wary, as units suffered casualties even at this late stage of the campaign. *(AWM 094619)*

Following the end of hostilities and the formal surrender of Japan, the surrender of Japanese forces on New Britain and New Ireland was organised. General Hitoshi Imamura presents his sword to Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee, commander of the First Australian Army, on the British aircraft carrier HMS *Glory*, 6 September 1945. *(AWM 044269)*

Only a handful of the captured members of Lark Force survived the war, as most were killed when the *Montevideo Maru* was sunk in 1942. Among those to return were the Army nurses captured at Rabaul. Four are pictured on their arrival at Sydney on 13 September 1945: from left, Captain Kay Parker and Lieutenants Lorna Whyte, Daisy 'Tootie' Keast and Mavis Cullen. *(AWM 115953)*

Others to endure and survive captivity included missionaries, some members of neutral countries and Chinese residents interned in camps in and around the Ramale Valley, near Rabaul. Here, a group of sisters waves to their rescuers after their prison camp was liberated by Australian troops and representatives of the Australian Red Cross, September 1945. *(AWM 096867)*

The crew of the motor launch *AM5* of the 16th Small Ships Company, Royal Australian Engineers, relaxes at Vunapope, having assisted in the evacuation of internees of the Ramale prison camp, September 1945. After the war's end, Australian forces spent many months in Rabaul area, garrisoning the township, beginning its rebuilding, and guarding the many Japanese who had surrendered. *(AWM 096879)*

An Australian soldier escorts a handcuffed suspected war criminal and an interpreter into the Chinese POW camp at Rabaul in November 1945. One of the last acts of the war was the identification and bringing to justice of war criminals. They were identified by the few surviving Allied prisoners of war—some Indians, Britons, Chinese and Javanese, six Americans, a New Zealander and an Australian—and other internees. *(AWM 099178)*

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