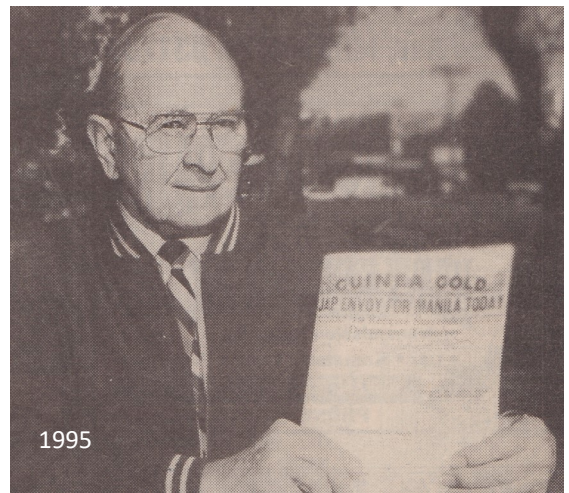


Intense relief at war's end: Gilbert Powell remembers the feeling

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The end of the war against Japan brought a feeling of intense relief for Mildura veteran, Gilbert Powell, 78.

Gilbert was serving on Bougainville at the time. He had been involved in mopping up operations and heard of the Japanese surrender on radio broadcasts.

"It meant you didn't have to look over your shoulder any more and that you were going to get home" he said yesterday.

Gilbert came as a lad of 18 from Boinka to Mildura in 1934 after the wheat farm operated by his parents, Charles and Harriet Powell, went under because of drought conditions. With the family were his two sisters, Phyllis and Dorothy.

One of his enduring memories is the sadness he felt when his mother died in 1943. At the time he was based at Mataranka in the Northern Territory. He received a telegram saying his mother was ill.



Mrs Powell died suddenly from a kidney disease before Gilbert, who was given compassionate leave, arrived home. He was met at the bus in Mildura by his family members who were crying. They told him sadly they had buried his mother the day before.

According to Gilbert his mother had a premonition that she would not see him again when he left for northern Australia. She proved to be right, Gilbert recalled. He still remembers his feelings at not seeing his mother before she died and also of being as "sick as a dog" on the plane flight down from the Northern Territory to Adelaide.

In Mildura before the war, Gilbert worked mainly on the land as contract tractor driver, cultivating blocks after irrigation. He worked 12 hour shifts, seven days a week for one shilling and six pence an hour (15 cents). The hire rate for the tractor was 10 shillings (one dollar) an hour.

He was conscripted into the Australian Military Forces (AMF) in 1939 and trained at Balcombe on Mornington Peninsula. "I got mumps here and was left behind but I eventually got home and I was recalled and went into camp with the 7th Battalion of the 23rd Brigade of the 4th Division at Nagambie.

I was a machine gunner in E Company, in infantry. I went to New Guinea and at the end of the war I was on Bougainville".

During his army years, he rose to the rank of Sergeant.

While on Bougainville, he experienced two eruptions of the volcanic Mt Bagana. Another volcano, Mt Balbi, was about 10 miles away. Once an earthquake tossed Gilbert completely out of his bed when he was on Bougainville.

At the end of the war Gilbert was with his unit on Berry's Hill in the central highlands of Bougainville where Australians faced a large force of Japanese troops. Among the Japanese troops who surrendered to the Australian forces was General Kanda, the officer commanding troops present at the infamous Rape of Nanking in China in the 1930's. According to Gilbert, General Kanda was later tried as a war criminal but Gilbert cannot recall his fate.

After hostilities ended, the army introduced a points system for discharging soldiers. "But it was a long time before my number came up. I was discharged on January 30, 1946. They (the men at the discharge centre) worked out a few details and gave me a new suit. They said 'On your way sport, we don't need you anymore'".

After the war Gilbert got a job at the Voullaires' property at Monak where he worked until 1965, when he accepted a position at the Mildura Co-operative as machine operator packing dried fruit, until he retired on February 12 1982.

Mr Powell says that despite some heart problems and major heart surgery at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne in 1993, he is still in good health, as is his wife Kathleen. The couple have two daughters, Maureen and Dianne, and two grand-daughters, Rebecca and Kendall.



7th Battalion Association Note:

After the war, Masatane Kanda was tried and convicted of [war crimes](#) by the Allies, sentenced to 14 years imprisonment, and began his sentence in 1948. He served four years in prison, and was released in 1952. He died in 1983.

Source: Wikipedia (go to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masatane_Kanda)