

CHAPTER 6

The Beginning of the End

It was not long before things settled down to normal routine at Torokina. On 18 September the Australian Rules Football team again swung into action on the playing field, defeating a team from Corps Signals. It apparently took them a while to get their act together though, for at half time they were eight goals down.

Final scores were: 7 Bn — 10 goals 12 behinds 72 points, to Corps Sigs 10 goals 5 behinds 65 points. Best players were: WO2 Hubble, Sgt McEniry, Cpl Rankin and Pte Wickham.

On 20 September, Col Dunkley moved up to Berry's Hill to supervise the surrender of the Japanese. Capt Roberts and Lt Edwards went to McInnes Hill and brought back to Berry's Hill, two Japanese officers, after which the first main body of 151 Japanese arrived at McInnes Hill during the morning. The following day, the 21st, they were moved to Berry's Hill where Lt Col Yamamoto, Chief of Staff Officers, 38 Brigade, formerly surrendered all Japanese in the Numa Numa area to Lt Col Dunkley.

In the meantime, a further party of 146 Japanese had arrived at McInnes Hill on the 21st. The next day a further 150 arrived, with the last party of Japanese coming through on the 30th, by which time D Coy had fostered 1291 Japanese in 12 days.

Information was received that 7 Bn would move to Fauro Islands, which was a group to the south of Bougainville; some 18,000 Japanese would be concentrated here prior to their repatriation to Japan.

During the 1st and 2nd of October, D Coy completed their move to Torokina to join the remainder of the battalion which had been involved in the sports carnival in the Base area. Some of the results were recorded as:

Cricket: 7 Bn — 99, lost to 8 Bn 7 for 191.

7 Bn — 7 for 79, lost to 17 Feb Amb 2 for 131.

Football: 7 Bn — 14-8-92 points, defeated 8 Bn 11-12-78 points.

Basketball: 7 Bn defeated Brigade Group A 73 to 35.

7 Bn defeated 7 Bn B team 50 to 27.

Softball: 7 Bn A defeated Brigade Group A 13 to 6.

7 Bn defeated Laundry 15 to 3.

Volleyball: 7 Bn A lost to Brigade Group 1 — 7 to 21, 21 to 11, 11 to 21.

7 Bn B lost to 8 Bn A — 11 to 21, 12 to 21.

7 Bn A defeated 7 Bn B — 21 to 7, 21 to 11.

At first it was thought that only one company would be needed at Fauro, but by 25 October, news had been received that the complete battalion would be required.

Lt Gen Kanda was informed of this intention, and he re-affirmed that he would obey implicitly all orders given to him.

A conference was then called by the CO to discuss with his officers the finer points in relation to administration and control of the Japanese on Fauro Island. The battalion was to move as soon as accommodation became available. When it was revealed that 7 Bn had been promised electric lighting, refrigeration, a mobile cinema, a field bakery, and probably some hospital beds with sheets, it was generally agreed that obviously a mistake had been made somewhere higher up.

In the evening of 8 October, a memorial service was conducted in the Patterson Chapel at Torokina. The Brigade Commander and representatives from all units under command, and in support during the operations conducted by the 7th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF), were in attendance.

The following day, Brig A.W. Potts DSO., MC., Comd 23 Bde, visited the unit and addressed a parade of all ranks. He indicated that it would be the last opportunity he would have of talking to members of the battalion, and expressed the hope that he would meet many of them again in civilian life.

It had been established by this time, that now the war was over, not everyone would be discharged at once. To cover this exigency, a points system was devised whereby each individual would have a certain number of points. The exact method of obtaining this final figure has been long in obscurity, but on 10 October, thirty NCOs and men, with 200 points and over, were marched out to the 7th Brigade holding camp for on-movement to Australia for discharge. It was with very mixed feelings that these men left their comrades, for some had been together for more than four years, and this would be the last time some would see each other for many years. Some have not yet been sighted at the time of writing, but the search still goes on.

To augment the numbers depleted by the departure of this draft, 234 personnel with low points, from the 7th Brigade, were marched in, with a further batch of 40 from 2/8 Commando Squadron arriving a few days later.

By the 11th, advance parties from all companies had departed for the Fauro Islands accompanied by Maj Ces Jones, 2 i/c of the battalion.

Lt M. Elliott, with 120 other ranks who had 175 points or more, departed the unit for discharge. Information was received that officers and men of the 15th Brigade, with low priority points, would be transferred to 7th Battalion, which was now fast becoming a cosmopolitan group and not resembling that which had been in existence since 1942.

Volunteers were now called for the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, and many members of the battalion joined this force.

They were to concentrate in Morotai before movement to Japan.

Volunteers had also been called for the formation of an Interim Army. Four members left 7 Bn to join 55/53 Aust Inf Bn which was headed for Rabaul, and these were Ptes A.L. Pedder, K.A. Lawn, L.G.C. Wilson and H.J. Wakeford. Of these, Pedder and Wakeford later joined the Occupation Force. Other members to join BCOF were:

Cpl M.B. Thorn
Pte H. Smith
Pte K. Goodall
Pte E.J. Sullivan (Cadman)
Pte R.H. Burrows
Cpl D. McGregor
Cpl T.A. Taylor
Pte B.R. Lowers
Pte A.G. Watson
S/Sgt R.W. McClelland
Sgt L.A. Maudouit
Pte M.J. Deacon.

It was a very slow process moving the battalion to Fauro. On 15 October, fifteen personnel from BHQ, and eighty from HQ Coy were first to move, and because it was taking so long for movement to occur, it was decided on the 21st that the Japanese would assist to move some of the battalion by barge. The CO, Adjt, IO, Asst Adjt and the Orderly Room Sergeant travelled by launch, with the rest of the party embarking by barge. The party left Torokina at 0230 hrs with the launch arriving 0830 hrs, but it wasn't until 1630 hrs that the barge tied up at the pier.

Other units which were included in this move to make up the group were Det 23 Fd Coy, Det 17 Fd Amb, Det 2 Corps Sigs, 42 Aust Int Corps, 243 Aust Sup Dep Pl, 82 Dental Unit. All were to be situated at a place called Kariki, with BHQ and HQ Coy. The rifle companies were to be located at Poyana Bay.

Personnel continued to leave the battalion as their points came up, and were replaced by those with lower points. The Japanese were also beginning to arrive.

Eventually the saw mill was completed and timber became available. The jetty at Poyana Bay was completed and movies were screened throughout the area. The first film was "Don Juan Quilligan" and not more than 50% of the men had seen it twice previously.

On 4 November a further 600 Japanese arrived from Torokina compound, and one of the Japanese officers was summoned to appear before the Atrocities Commission. He thought better of the outcome and committed harakiri by using a penknife.

It was about this time that a number of graves were discovered on the neighbouring island of Ballale. This discovery led to a widespread search for the Japanese members of a naval construction

unit responsible directly, or indirectly, for the death of an estimated 500 European prisoners of war. It was believed at the time, that the 432 bodies which had been exhumed, were those of British artillerymen from Singapore, who had been brought to the island for construction work on the airfield. Those who had not been killed by malnutrition and Japanese brutality, had perished in air-raids by Allied planes, which pounded the island during 1943.

To make the search for those responsible for this outrage more difficult, the Japanese unit had been transferred to Rabaul during August, 1943 and had later been broken up to reinforce other construction units.

A little excitement occurred on 19 November when, in the middle of the night, all personnel were required to stand by their beds while a spot check was made throughout unit lines. Nobody was saying why this was necessary, but it became quite obvious, when a Maj Pullen arrived with his staff to investigate the loss of £1900 from the payroll.

Another little episode brought the Escort Platoon into its own when it repelled a midnight attempt by an unarmed hungry Japanese; he was trying to get some rations from the distribution point, and when discovered headed for the sea with such momentum, that it seemed likely he would reach home without having to swim! Unfortunately for him, he ran too close to an Australian wielding a mean paddle. When apprehended, he became remarkably amenable, and remained a naked "guest" of C Coy for the remainder of the night. C Coy had now increased its tally of prisoners to two, the first being on Mono Island almost a year before.

It was now the 1st of December, and many of the personnel had changed. The old timers who read this will not recall any of the names which appeared on the list of officers.

These were:

CO — Lt Col Webster

2 i/c — Capt G.C. Maconachie

Adjt — Capt W.G. Foster

Island Adjt — Lt W.A. Kuhne

Sig O — Lt C.F. Cameron

OC HQ Coy — Capt E.M. Griff

OC A Coy — Lt J.B. Boyle

OC B Coy — Lt R.W. Kitney

OC C Coy — Capt W.H. Scott

OC D Coy — Capt A.H. Brown.

Only two of these were from the original list of officers with the battalion at the conclusion of the war.

On 9 December, 286 personnel from the 8th and 27th Battalions joined the unit to replace 253 men who had not had leave for eighteen months or more, and were marched out to the 8th and 27th Battalions which were now returning to Australia. The next day an additional 186 personnel from the 8th and 27th joined the 7th.

Christmas Day, 1945 was celebrated quietly. Church Services were conducted in the forenoon, followed by a lunch consisting of soup, turkey and ham, pudding and preserved fruits. The only thing to mar this feast that was enjoyed by all, was a heavy downpour.

It could be said that the New Year arrived with a bang, as one pound of TNT exploded in close proximity to the Officers' Mess. Nobody claimed responsibility, and nobody was injured.

On 5 January, 1946 a Japanese Major, who had been reduced to the ranks for stealing a watch last November, escaped from the Japanese prison compound and gave himself up to the authorities on Central Bay. He had considerable evidence to impart regarding the war atrocities, and would give his evidence to the Commission later on. Also at about this time, three Japanese found guilty of murdering their officer, were executed by a Japanese firing squad.

The time had also arrived for 800 Japanese naval personnel to depart for their homeland. The aircraft carrier "Hosho" arrived at Central Bay from Wewak. It departed the following day with the first of the Japanese to be repatriated from the island. Four days later, another aircraft carrier, the "Kutsururi" arrived to repatriate a further 5000 Japanese servicemen to Japan. They were to travel via Torokina, departing Central Bay on the 27th. Two more ships arrived and departed for Japan on 17 February. The number of Japanese now being held on Fauro Island was approximately 4000, and these were to depart on the 25th. The battalion was now out of a job.

It was on 7 March that the American troopship "Winchester Victory" arrived at Central Bay to load stores and low point personnel for Rabaul. It sailed on the 11th with 13 officers and 136 men of the 7th Battalion on board.

The last entry in the War Diary stated that on 20 March, 1946 a further 7 officers and 5 other ranks marched out to Rabaul. As the result of further research, it was found that when S/Sgt R.L. Nicholas marched out for discharge on 18 January, Lt Dave M.W. Edwards had the dubious honour of being the last remaining member of the 7 Bn personnel who had come into camp on 13 April, 1941.

Records show that the 7th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF) was officially taken off the War Establishment of the Australian Army from 11 May, 1946 having been there from 9 November, 1936. For its efforts during the Bougainville Campaign, it was granted the Battle Honour of "Liberation of Australian New Guinea."

In most cases the happy and amusing incidents which are ever the accompaniments of a soldier's life, as well as others not so amusing, indeed some sad, some tragic and some depressing, have all become memories, memories which it would be hard to eradicate — if only one wished to.

From the many enquiries about the compilation of this record, it is plain, more than forty years later, that most who shared these experiences do not wish to forget. Rather do they wish for all and sundry to know, that the war of so many years ago, will be etched on their memory for the remainder of their lives.

If this record serves to refresh that memory in the minds of those who served, then the effort will have achieved its purpose.