

CHAPTER 5

Action At Last

By 3 May, 1945, the battalion had commenced to move to an area previously occupied by 47 Aust Inf Bn, on the outskirts of Torokina. At the time, a list of senior appointments within the unit showed:

CO — Lt Col H. Dunkley	Coy Ocs
2 i/c — Maj C. Jones	HQ Coy — Capt F. Barlee
Adj — Capt G. Davidson	A Coy — Capt K. Blaby
IO — Lt D. Edwards	B Coy — Capt W. McInnes
SO — Lt K. Deller	C Coy — Capt W. Cameron
	D Coy — Capt R. Roberts

It was becoming obvious that 7 Battalion was now on Bougainville for a purpose other than its normal garrison duties. Colonel Dunkley had done a reconnaissance by plane, over Berry's Hill area and on returning to base had discussed the situation with Brigadier Potts. Arrangements were then made for the CO to visit 27 Battalion on Pearl Ridge. The next day a party led by Lt Leith Donald, moved out to observe the operations as well.

On 7 May, Capt Davidson also visited the 27th Battalion area and a HQ Coy cable laying party were busy laying cable up to the Numa Numa Trail.

Sports were still being organised to keep the men fit and active. Company exercises were also being organised. One two-day exercise through swamps described as "too thin to walk on and too thick to swim in", was carried out by each company in turn.

On the lighter side, a football match between 7 Bn and 84 Wing RAAF was played. Even though it was the first game the team had played in nine months, and with many of the former players having departed the unit, much talent was still available. 7 Bn won 12 goals 10 behinds to 3 goals 8 behinds. Rankin, Reid, Hubble, Rogers and Sitch were the best players for the battalion.

Many other sports were also organised, with volleyball and basketball being most popular. B Coy defeated D Coy, 63 to 38 at basketball, D Coy had a win over A Coy 36 to 28 and in a return match, D Coy defeated B Coy, 28 to 18. The Signals platoon also had a victory over the Band, 21 to 12.

In volleyball, A Coy defeated D Coy 21 to 2, the Officer's team defeated an Officer's team from Brigade, 4 games to nil, but the tables were turned in a return match, when the Brigade officers won 2 games to 1.

It was noted at this time that as a result of a friendly game of football, the Adjutant was seen hobbling around the unit area, due he said, to some tough tactics during a game.

The 11th of May saw a further party leave the unit area for the 27th Battalion area, to observe operations, and on 15 May the CO

summoned all NCOs to a lecture on tactics on Pearl Ridge. This lecture was preceded by a discussion by the IO, utilising a sand-table model of the area concerned.

On 18 May, tabloid sports were introduced in the afternoon, after church and a battalion parade. A, B, C and D Coys each supplied nine teams. The team to gain the highest points would be declared the winner and receive a prize of £6. HQ Coy and BHQ were also to field teams, but would compete the next day. No. 5 team of A Coy was eventually declared the winner with a very good score of 61 points.

On Tuesday, 20 May, forty personnel, including Capts Cameron, McInnes and Norman and Lt Deller, returned from leave in Australia, and the Pioneer Platoon left for the Numa Numa Trail at Roadhead, to assist in the construction of a funicular railway up Barge's Hill.

Eight officers and twelve Other Ranks attended a demonstration of flame throwers at the 8th Battalion. At Bosley Field, Pte Wilson was successful in winning his bout in an area Boxing Tournament, but Pte Basil Carl, in his bout, was defeated on points. (Not a very popular decision either). Then on 25 May a Battalion Operational Instruction No. 27 was released, stating that 7 Bn would relieve 27 Bn on Pearl Ridge by 4 June.

All the exercising and sporting activities came to an abrupt halt as men busied themselves with the final preparations for movement to the so called "sharp end".

On 2 June, 15 Pl of C Coy, left Torokina for the Pearl Ridge area, in order to receive final instructions for the takeover role of the PIB Patrol at Mapia. During the same day, the Adj and IO visited 27 Bn to discuss the proposed takeover of 27 Bn's B and D Coy patrols. Capt Blaby also made a reconnaissance flight over Pearl Ridge and the enemy positions along the Numa Numa Trail.

At this time, it is worthy to note, a notice appeared in Unit Routine Orders Part 1, to the effect that a letter had been received from the Secretary of the 7th Battalion AIF Association, offering assistance in any matter that would benefit the 7th Aust Inf Bn (AIF). In reply to this letter the CO had requested that a number of Unit Flags be forwarded. This resulted in the following reproduced letter being received from Mr J Guthridge:

"To CO
7th Aust Inf Bn (AIF)
Dear Sir,

4 May, 1945

I have just posted five flags addressed to you today. I trust they reach you safely. We are proud to have the privilege of presenting these flags to your battalion. We know that the colours, we thought so much of, are in safe hands. I can only add that with these flags go all the good wishes and regards of the "old" Seventh.

kindest Regards,
Yours Sincerely,
J. Guthridge."

It was proposed that D Coy would not be involved in the takeover from the 27th, but would be eventually transported by corvette to make a landing on the east coast of Bougainville, to establish a firm base in the vicinity of Asitavi Point.

B Coy was to march out to an area close to the Wakunai River, establish a firm base, to patrol along the river towards the east coast and finally to meet up with D Coy, after they had made their landing. To this end, 11 Pl, B Coy moved out of their area at Torokina for Pearl Ridge.

The main body of the battalion, consisting of the IO, Assistant Adjutant, 2 i/c's of companies, with 6, 7, 9 and 14 Platoons, also moved out for Pearl Ridge. This move entailed a rough trip by road along the Laruma River, for a distance of approximately 22 kilometres. The road, such as it was, crossed the river on 25 occasions before finishing at Roadhead, at the foot of Barge's Hill.

Barge's Hill, which rose almost perpendicular for about 460 metres, had been named in honour of Pte E. Barge, a stretcher bearer (of Yass, NSW), who had been killed in action as a member of a platoon which attacked Little George Hill on the 29th of November, 1944.

It was most difficult but necessary to carry everything up this hill in a zig zag fashion, on a single walking track, but the climb was a pipeopener to what lay ahead across the treacherous Numa Numa Trail. On reaching the top of Barge's Hill, there was a suitable jeep track, leading along the ridges through Piaterapaia, Little George Hill, Artillery Hill and on to Pearl Ridge.

Initially, BHQ was established on Artillery Hill, as was a detachment of 23 Bde Sigs. Rear BHQ was set up at Roadhead, with ancillary units such as 10 Bty, 4 Fd Regt, Det 23 Aust Fd Coy, Det 243 Aust Sup Dep Pl, 8 Fd Amb and a detachment of 14 Aust Independent Provost Platoon.

HQ Coy was located on Martin's Knoll, a feature about 1000 metres along the track from the top of Barge's Hill. A Coy established its HQ on Smith's Hill, but was minus its 7 and 9 Pls, which were located along the Choko Ridge Track leading to Sisivie. 7 Pl was at Keenan's Ridge about a mile south of Sisivie, and 9 Pl was located about two kilometres distance back along the track from 7 Pl.

B Coy moved on to Berry's Hill, a feature named after Major H.J. Berry of 11 Bty, 4 Fd Regt, and was accompanied by 3 Pl, 101 Aust Hvy Mortar Coy.

C Coy, less its 15 Pl, was in position on a spur known as Tiernan's Spur, named in honour of Lt J.A. Tiernan of the 27 Aust Inf Bn (AIF), about 1000 metres north-east of Berry's Hill. 15 Pl was covering a position known as Mapia, some 1500 metres further north-east of its company headquarters.

Under command of 7 Bn was B Coy, PIB, which at this stage was located adjacent to BHQ on Artillery Hill.

On 4 June, 11 Pl, B Coy (less a patrol led by Lt Bonde, which was to find a suitable site to establish a firm base for B Coy on the Wakunai River), took over the standing patrol duties of the 27th Battalion, where the enemy were in positions a few hundred metres in front on the next knoll.

On the next day, 15 Pl, C Coy, led by Lt Max Elliott, made first contact with the enemy, when Pte H.R. "Noisy" McEwan and Pte J.S. "Darkie" Atkinson killed two Japanese from ambush. A patrol of six men from 13 Pl, C Coy, led by Lt Norm Baskerville, accompanied by Lt Morgan and one other soldier from the Artillery Unit acting as FOO, encountered enemy positions along Tiernan's Spur, where an estimated ten enemy were engaged in combat. Two Japanese were killed and an LMG captured.

During 6 June, a patrol of nine men from 7 Pl, A Coy, led by Lt Leith Donald, moved on enemy positions at Sisivi and engaged with E Y rifle and LMG fire. One Japanese was killed.

In the meantime, Lt Bonde had reported that his patrol had located a suitable area for the establishment of a company perimeter, together with a DZ. He also reported the presence of pro-Japanese Kanaka along the Wakunai River to the coast.

D Coy, at this time, were still waiting at Torokina for their intended landing to occur. And so it was that 7th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF) assumed operational control of the Central Sector of Bougainville.

On 7 June, Lt Peter Rush and five ORs of 12 Pl, B Coy, accompanied by a Native Scout, Sgt Keopili, left their standing patrol area to reconnoitre enemy positions to the north-east. These positions were found to be unoccupied and the enemy had left some equipment and several rifles. Two freshly dug graves were also found. This feature, from then on, was called Rush's Knoll.

Up forward, with C Coy, Lt Norm Baskerville and four men of 14 Pl, made a reconnaissance to endeavour to find a track between two features, but were thwarted by the steepness of the terrain down to the creek.

By late afternoon of 7 June, another patrol from 7 Pl, A Coy, again led by Lt Donald, had arrived at Sisivi to observe the movements of the enemy. During the execution of this task, the patrol was fired upon by HMG and LMG. Fortunately there were no casualties.

In the meantime, C Coy, less 15 Pl, had completed the takeover from 27 Bn on Tiernan's Spur. They had a patrol, led by Lt Baskerville, with Sgt Carl Armstrong and nine ORs, accompanied again by Lt Morgan and one OR from the Artillery, move along the spur to contact the enemy, who were in bunkers and fox-holes astride the track, approximately 300 metres forward. Contact was

made and one Japanese killed. Unfortunately Lt Morgan was also killed.

At about this time a Flt Lt N.C. Sandford of the AIB, a former plantation manager on Bougainville, who was operating along the east coast of Bougainville, trying to find a suitable landing place for D Coy, reported striking the enemy in force at Kevisia, north of the only suitable place for a landing. HQ 23 Bde had considered the matter and had advised 7 Bn that the landing operation would be deferred.

During the night 8/9 June, artillery harassed the enemy on Tiernan's Spur, just forward of C Coy. During the day an air drop of supplies was successfully carried out on Martin's Knoll, the location of HQ Coy. 7Pl, B Coy, PIB, had relieved 15 Pl at the patrol base of Mapia. During the same day, Capt Wal Cameron, OC C Coy, with five ORs and the scout Sgt Keopili, made a reconnaissance of an area known as New Vivie, seeking the most suitable approach route for an attack on the enemy positions.

Three-inch Mortar were now in position at Berry's Hill and able to range on the enemy positions forward of C Coy during the morning. In the afternoon, 13 Pl moved forward by about 100 metres along Tiernan's Spur, but were fired upon by two LMGs. Pte M.E. Newburn was slightly wounded. His mates told him he would never have to part his hair again as he had one permanently now.

Artillery, Mortars and MMGs continued to harass the enemy. During the night shots were exchanged between 13 Pl and the enemy, resulting in one Japanese being killed. During the afternoon of the 10th, a patrol of 14 Pl, killed one Japanese collecting food. Later in the day a message was received from BHQ ordering C Coy to launch an all out attack on the enemy the next morning, however, at 0600 hours on 11 June, 14 Pl themselves, were attacked by the enemy, resulting in one Private being killed. Then at 1000 hours, following Artillery, Mortar and MMG fire, 13 Pl, led by Sgt Arthur A. Bennett, attacked. They were assisted in the attack by the use of flame throwers, being used for the first time. The attack came via the left flank and cleared a feature 200 metres forward of 14 Pl. Forward elements continued the advance for a further 100 metres clearing the bunkers they encountered with grenades. Nine of the enemy were killed, with some equipment and documents being taken. The equipment included a sword, considerable medical gear, six rifles and one Owen sub-machine gun. In this action, four of 13 Pl were killed. Sgt Bennett showing outstanding courage. Those killed were:

VX89415 — Sgt A.A. Bennett

VX134795 — L/cpl M.I. Dougherty

WX37426 — Pte A.B. Watson

VX89386 — Sgt C.H. Schurr (Died the next day of wounds received.)

Wounded was:

VX67252 — Pte J.P. Brannelly.

At 1000 hours on the 12th, Colonel Dunkley decided to move his headquarters closer to the action, so BHQ was closed at its original location and reopened at a position known as Little Hunt Hill, quite close to Berry's Hill. He was now about 1000 metres from his forward troops.

At about this time, Lt Elliott and six ORs, patrolled the New Vivie area where they encountered approximately eight enemy, killing two.

Next day, 13 June, Lt Elliott and his 15 Pl attacked and captured the positions around New Vivie, killing another five of the enemy. Another Japanese was killed by a patrol led by Sgt "Mick" Walsh and five men, during the reconnaissance of the Wearnes Hill area, observing enemy held bunkers. A dum dum bullet was found in the dead man's haversack.

Meanwhile, Major Keith Blaby, (recently promoted), led a patrol from A Coy to Sisivi and found the area unoccupied. The enemy had apparently abandoned their positions during the night of 11/12 June. Some equipment had been left behind and nine freshly dug graves were discovered. 9 Pl moved from their original position at Keenan's Hill to occupy these former enemy positions at Sisivi, but after remaining for only a few hours, decided that they could stand the stench no longer and dug fresh positions about 100 metres further north.

On 14 June, a patrol of nine ORs from 7 Pl, led by Lt Donald, left their base at Keenan's Ridge, to reconnoitre enemy positions at Tokua. The patrol was accompanied by scout Avarau and was for a period of two days. During that time six to ten enemy were encountered in four dugouts astride the track. When fired upon the patrol immediately returned the fire and killed two Japanese.

By midday on this same day word had been received at BHQ that the proposed landing by D Coy had been cancelled. The company then moved up to a location on Pearl Ridge.

B Coy had, after two and a half days of hard march over kilometres of rugged terrain, arrived at their patrol base on the Wakunai River.

The battle for Wearne's Hill was now hotting up. On the night of 15/16 June, Artillery and Mortars had harassed the enemy. Twelve Corsairs bombed and strafed the feature. Then, with Artillery support, 15 Pl moved in. After a heavy fire-fight, the enemy was forced to withdraw from two features, allowing an advance of some 500 metres, with more documents and equipment being captured. Later, the advance continued to the third feature, but heavy LMG and rifle fire from the enemy in bunkers drew a halt to the advance. Only one enemy body was found, but 15 Pl had suffered two men killed and three more being wounded. Those killed were:

VX134511 — Pte C.W.K. Scott

WX34085 — Pte M.K. Gurney.

Those wounded were:

VX66642 — Pte P. Berthon

VX65968 — Pte D. McGregor

N385432 — Pte M.E. Newburn.

The next morning, following accurate Artillery and Mortar fire, 14 Pl moved forward to engage the enemy on the third feature, but also met heavy opposition. The Platoon Commander, Lt Baskerville, and four ORs were wounded, but the action had accounted for two enemy being killed, two more probably killed and an LMG knocked out. Later, a patrol to the left flank, reported seeing eight to ten enemy reinforcements moving into positions at the rear. Artillery and Mortar fire was called down on these positions and continued throughout the night of 17/18 June.

Out with B Coy on the Wakunai, patrols were gathering much topographical information, whilst their first air supply drop was not a great success. Many of the stores missed the DZ and landed in the river and surrounding jungle, however most of the stores were recovered. The pilots who flew the aircraft later reported that the DZ was less than favourable.

It was now time for D Coy to start the relief of C Coy. 18 Pl moved up to relieve 14 Pl.

Meanwhile, in the A Coy area at Sisivi, a patrol of fifteen ORs, led by Lt Ian McKenzie of 9 Pl, had returned to base after observing eight to ten enemy at Tokua. The patrol had engaged and killed three. The natives in the area had stated that the enemy at Buritsiorara had extensive gardens and that vegetables were taken from there to Pipipaia in hand carts, along the main Kiap Road. The next day, another patrol, led by Lt Donald, ambushed a party of eight enemy on the Ibu track, north of Tokua. The enemy were equipped with short rifles and were carrying cooking gear. Four were killed. Documents taken gave information of an 81 Infantry Regiment flag-raising ceremony set for 14 July.

Back at Wearne's Hill, the relief of C Coy was still in progress. D Coy HQ and 17 Pl had relieved C Coy HQ and 15 Pl. By 1700 hours D Coy was on the job when WO2 "Digger" Shiele and nine ORS made a reconnaissance of the enemy positions on Wearne's Hill, seeking a suitable approach route from the flank. The following day, 18 Pl attacked the extensive enemy positions and after a fierce fire-fight the position was taken, losing two men in the process. Another man was wounded. 17 Pl moved through 18 Pl and encountered accurate enemy sniper fire, losing yet another man killed and two others wounded. Those killed were:

VX117297 — Lt F.R. Longmore

VX68026 — Cpl R. Archer

QX136621 — L/Cpl K.F. Schmidt

VX115945 — Pte H.W. Stevens (Later died of wounds received.)

Wounded were:

VX115935 — L/Sgt L.A. Reid

N464373 — Pte G.N. Bushell.

B Coy had by this time, settled into their base at the Wakunai River and had commenced patrolling activities to the Buritsiotorara area. One patrol, led by Lt Peter Rush, had made contact with the enemy, killing one, but was immediately fired upon by two LMGs and rifles. Another patrol, led by Lt Bonde, whilst seeking a suitable ambush post along the Asiuepaia — Buritsiotorara Track, encountered fifteen enemy. The patrol killed two before the remainder quickly dispersed, firing indiscriminately as they went.

Throughout the entire area now under control of 7 Bn, patrolling continued daily. One patrol from 16 Pl D Coy of ten ORs and led by Lt Murphy, in the Wearne's Hill area, killed one Japanese. A PIB patrol in the Mapia area contacted five enemy digging in and killed two and wounding two more. Another patrol, led by Sgt Midgley, located the enemy on a spur running west of the main ridge at Wearne's Hill. Bunkers were observed, but no movement was apparent. Another PIB patrol, returning to their base at Mapia, encountered three enemy and killed one. A 16 Pl patrol in front of their own positions, killed another Japanese.

On 22 June, two stretcher cases, being carried out from the Wakunai River area by natives, while climbing Berry's Hill, were fired upon by PIB on an adjacent hill. Fortunately no one was injured, but it did cause a bit of a stir at the time. It appears that the PIB on Rush's Knoll, upon seeing the torches of the carrying party (it was dark at the time), thought an attack was being launched by the enemy on Berry's Hill. One of the stretcher cases apparently slipped off his stretcher in the confusion and tumbled down the steep slope on the side of the track, and could not be found. This information was relayed back to BHQ, whereup, the CO instructed Lt Ben Cattell to take out a patrol to see what could be done.

"I remember it was as black as the inside of a cow's stomach, and raining. The track was muddy and slippery, so when I arrived at the place where the stretcher case was last seen, rather than flounder around in the dark and perhaps lose someone else, I decided to settle down on the narrow track for the night and resume the search at first light. In the meantime I sent the original stretcher party, now nearly exhausted, on to Berry's Hill.

After things settled down, voices could be heard and after ascertaining that they were speaking English and not Japanese, my men located the wounded man. He was accompanied by one of the escort party and I think it was Normie Hedt who had stayed with him during the ordeal. I immediately sent a runner back to BHQ to have the original bearer party come out and collect the wounded man.

The poor native carriers were absolutely exhausted when they arrived and were being verbally harangued by their WO2 from ANGAU. This Warrant Officer was about knee high to a grasshopper, but had the vocabulary of a bullocky. The air was purple when Padre Pilkington arrived on the scene. He could not help but hear the foul language and prevailed upon me, as senior bloke present, to have the ANGAU bloke moderate his language. I'm afraid I had to inform the Padre that had I intervened, there would have been no

further movement for any of us that night and suggested that the matter be taken up in the morning in the comfort of Berry's Hill.

Strangely enough, that WO2 and I were to meet many years later after we had both been discharged. It turned out that he was our local garbage collector, and I'm sure that night in question, became our common link."

The next day, 23 June, 8 Pl, A Coy departed their area on Smith's Hill to establish a patrol base south of Tokua, from where they would commence operations against the enemy towards Tokua.

Late on the following day, after an Artillery program had been brought down on the feature forward of 16 Pl D Coy, that platoon moved forward and occupied previously held enemy positions. Four Japanese bodies were found. C Coy then moved through to dig in on these positions. D Coy patrols continued to operate forward of these new C Coy positions and located an abandoned Japanese HQ. Some documents and equipment had been left behind. Probing patrols later contacted the enemy located in extensive positions on Centre Hill. It was not considered that Wearne's Hill was clear of the enemy.

On 25 June, another move was completed in the Tokua area. 8 Pl, A Coy had relieved 9 Pl, which had then returned to Smith's Hill.

The next day, a fighting patrol of 16 Pl, D Coy, met heavy opposition from the enemy while digging in on Centre Hill. This resulted in N452780 Pte W.J. Lord and VX69654 Pte K. Gunter being killed, and the following men wounded:

QX50617 — Pte W.O. O'Rielly
VX68730 — Pte H.J. Nelson
VX68130 — Pte J. Macintosh
VX148988 — Pte F. Sporn
V64795 — Pte J.P. Sporn
QX40269 — Pte W.B. Ross
VX68830 — Cpl C.C. Smith.

The day after this disaster, following an air strike by twelve Corsairs, in which bombs fell very close to our own three-inch mortar, 18 Pl, D Coy, moved forward to encounter further heavy fire from Juki and LMGs. This resulted in WX26519 Cpl A. Nash being killed. Also wounded were:

VX88574 — Cpl G.R. Midgley
QX57097 — Pte G. Neden
VX63619 — L/cpl W.J. Evans (Later died of wounds received.)

A withdrawal was organised to allow further Artillery and Mortar fire to be brought down on the position. Later, patrols probed both flanks, but the enemy had not been dislodged. On the 30th, a further air strike was called for. Then, 16 Pl, supported by Artillery and Mortars, attacked and drove the enemy from the forward slopes. Two Japanese were killed. Patrols continued to harass the enemy, but in doing so came under heavy HMG and LMG fire from the

bunkers of the main positions. Another man was lost and three others wounded. Killed was:

VX89360 — WO2 V.G. Shiele

and those wounded were:

VX118511 — Pte T.D. Dellar

VX66124 — Pte G.F. Harrison

NX71972 — Pte D.R. Hill.

It was soon after this action, that while moving out to relieve their patrol at the Mapia area, a PIB patrol, against the advice of Capt Ray Roberts, OC D Coy, moved up the trail towards Centre Hill. They made a hasty retreat when fired upon. One PIB soldier received a bullet on the buckle of his webbing equipment.

In the meantime, 7 Pl, A Coy had moved from their patrol base at Keenan's Ridge, to join Company HQ and 9 Pl on Smith's Hill.

At Wakunai, a patrol, led by Lt Rush had ambushed a food-carrying party on the track north of Buritsiotorara, and killed three of the enemy. Another patrol had what might be called an exciting experience. Led by Sgt Leo Clohesy, it set out on 27 June to examine and set up an ambush on the coastal track. On the 28th, with ten others, including a native scout, Sgt Clohesy set up a patrol base about 2000 metres from the coast. Leaving the stretcher bearer, the two signallers with the wireless set, a man on the bren gun and the native scout, the rest of the patrol moved out on their allotted task. That evening the signallers reported to company that the patrol had not returned. The next morning, the patrol base was attacked by an estimated fifteen Japanese. The five occupants fired back, but withdrew, leaving their packs, the wireless set and the bren gun, behind. The native scout had been killed in the first onslaught.

As the four men were making their way back to company, Sgt Clohesy had returned to base with the rest of the patrol, only to find about ten Japanese in occupation. The patrol attacked and drove off the Japanese, killing one and probably two others. All the gear was recovered.

Another patrol, consisting of ten ORs and Lt Bonde, whilst seeking a suitable ambush site along the Asiuepaia — Buritsiotorara Track, encountered fifteen to twenty Japanese. The patrol killed two, but the remainder quickly dispersed, firing as they went. One other patrol, led by Capt F.H. Barlee, returning from ambushing in the Ibu-Asiuepara Track, killed four Japanese out of a party of six, carrying food.

8 Pl, A Coy was still patrolling from their base south of Tokua.

During the month of June, 1945, the battalion had been in constant contact with the enemy throughout its entire area of responsibility. Much work had been done on improving and repairing the jeep track from the top of Barge's Hill to Berry's Hill. Road extensions from the foot of Berry's Hill to the summit had been

completed, due mainly to the efforts of Sgt Bob Hudson and the men under his control. The track down Berry's Hill to Tiernan's Spur had also been greatly improved and the two hundred and eighty metre rise of Berry's Hill had had 1000 steps cut into it.

A funicular (cable operated) railway up Barge's Hill was under construction and would be completed possibly by the middle of July. Supplies being still hauled up the hill by manpower and cable. A magnificent job was being done by all concerned.

Native scouts and guides had become very popular with members of the battalion who came in contact with them, as they were giving excellent service and assistance. The work of Supili, Keopili, Alumwheeler, Willisilli, Atula and Avaru would be remembered for years to come.

The following is a report compiled by Lt Col Dunkley on 2 July, 1945, and forwarded to 23rd Brigade:

FUTURE OPERATIONS

In the Wearne's Hill area, two known defensive positions remain, the second being 200 yards from the present objective. From captured documents, this position seems likely to be that of Advance Headquarters, 2 Bn, 81 Regt.

Deductions — From general observations and reports just to hand from native scouts, it appears that the enemy is delaying our advance at all costs, while reinforcements move into Base Point 2 and Tokopenapaia area. Fresh troops are reported in these areas — at least 50 at Tokopenapaia.

He has apparently shortened his L of C in the Tokua-Sisivi area and reinforced Buritsiorara. The speed with which he located and attacked our patrol base at Saddle Mountain area, suggests co-operation with local pro-Japanese Kanakas.

Although enemy dead in the vicinity of Wearne's Hill are not in first class physical condition, they are far from emancipated or ill clothed.

All enemy killed in the Buritsiorara area are well fed and in excellent condition, and clothing, although worn, is neatly repaired.

A wide variety of fruit and vegetables were carried by these men. The enemy is particularly aggressive and quick to retaliate in this area.

Enemy morale is generally good, one noticeable exception being after the air attack of 16 June, when a very strong position was vacated, weapons being left in pits and bunkers.

Despite the reinforcing of reserve L of C positions, it is felt, when he is finally evicted from Wearne's Hill area, he will not try to regain lost ground, but will continue to man delaying positions along the Numa Numa Trail.

No difficulties exist in the extension of the jeep road to post 14 and thence to the coast, if required.

The co-operation by B Coy, PIB, has been satisfactory. Better results are obtained when working in close support of our troops than when given an independent role.

2 Aust Mtn Bty took over from 10 Bty, 4 Aust Fd Regt on 29 June, 1945 and have proved both effective and co-operative. No difficulty would be experienced in moving the Bty as far forward as a jeep track went.

3 Pl, 101 Hvy Mortar have one mortar forward and have given useful support.

The Tank Att Pl has provided men to man two flame throwers. Training is now complete and men move forward tomorrow to Wearne's Hill. One flame

thrower, used in action by C Coy, failed to move defenders from a very deep bunker — thin fuel was used at fairly long range. Thickened fuel will be used in future, although vegetation was cleared successfully from approaches to the bunker by thin fuel. A combination of two flame throwers, one with thick and the other with thin fuel is to be tried.

Supply is good, the "Q" side giving very little trouble. The funicular railway will be finished some time next week and has already eased the carrier situation.

Road Maintenance — Owing to continual rain, this is a problem, but not an insurmountable one.

L/T is established with Post 14 (Wakunai) and Tokua should be on line within a few days. The Sigs now look after more than 70 miles of line and are doing an excellent job.

G2 (Air) has been very helpful in arranging air co-operation and air photos. Unfortunately the latter were obliques and did not reveal the expected results.

Casualties — the total number of "kills" recorded are verified up to 1800 hours on 4th July, 1945 and now stand at 72. There are also 6 probables and 10 wounded.

Our losses are 15 killed and 29 wounded. Most of the wounded will return to duty in the near future, many are back already. Fortunately, the Japanese grenades have not been very effective.

Enemy casualties are conservative, the low proportion of "wounded" to "killed" being due to the fact that the body not being left on the ground, two or more witnesses are usually required before a claim is admitted."

To start off the new month of July, Sgt Keopili, led a D Coy patrol on to Centre Hill, around the left flank, to cut the enemy's L of C at the rear. Later North of Centre Hill, he and Capt Roberts were watching and waiting to capture a Japanese Sergeant-Major, but the bren gunner thwarted their plans by shooting the Japanese.

On 2 July, Sgt John Freeman and sixteen ORs ambushed to the rear of the enemy positions and killed one Japanese. Documents were taken from the body. The next day when again active at the rear of the enemy positions, Sgt Freeman and men of 17 Pl were held up by a bunkered LMG, but they managed to kill another Japanese.

On this same day, but out at the Wakunai River, Capt Barlee with fifteen ORs departed their patrol base to recover the body of the native guide who had been killed when on patrol with Sgt Clohesy a week previous. The patrol came across one Japanese sunbaking. He was promptly shot.

At this time the CO decided to rest D Coy from the Wearne's Hill action and replace them with C Coy. This change over was completed by 6 July.

8 Pl, A Coy were still active from the patrol base in the Tokua area and were conducting patrols north of Ibu.

On the night of 5/6 July, Artillery continued to harass the enemy on Centre Hill and at approximately 1600 hours on the 6th, Sgt Keopili, Capt Cameron and 15 Pl, stalked up the hill from their positions on the north side of Centre Hill, only to find that the enemy had withdrawn. The positions were found to be well sighted and very extensive. A Juki had been used from one of the bunkers.

14 Pl were called forward to consolidate and it was later that investigations revealed five bodies, six rifles and one Owen sub-

machine gun had been left behind. Examination by the RMO of one of the bodies further revealed that flesh had been cut from each leg.

Another Japanese was killed by a patrol led by Sgt Roy Sitch, with members of 15 Pl, accompanied by Sgt Keopili, when moving north towards North Hill for about 300 metres, made contact with a Japanese listening post.

The next day, WO2 Horrie Hubble, with a section of 14 Pl, made contact with the enemy at approximately the same spot. The section was fired upon resulting in VX134973 Pte Len B. Hateley being killed and VX66771 Pte Trevor Fimister wounded. The patrol accounted for one Japanese killed and one other probably killed.

Meanwhile, B Coy on the Wakunai, were still patrolling extensively, but found no enemy between their firm base and the river junction 450 metres downstream.

8 Pl, A Coy, were also still active. Lt Neil McPhee, accompanied by Lt Donald, led a patrol of ten ORs, which ambushed eight Japanese in gardens at Nasisipok. Five of the enemy were killed and one other probably killed. This patrol also reported that Ruravo was clear of the enemy and that the local Kanakas were assisting our troops.

Back on North Hill, on 10 July, 14 Pl, C Coy, with a new Platoon Commander, Lt Horrie Bell, moved forward along the ridge towards North Hill where they encountered heavy opposition from twelve to fifteen Japanese. The platoon members killed one Japanese, but lost VX132944 Pte Alf T. Clarke. VX89418 Pte Ron A. Keogh was wounded. 13 Pl with one MMG, moved up to a spur on the left flank to harass the enemy, but later, all patrols were withdrawn to enable the positions to be engaged by Artillery and Mortar fire. One other Japanese was killed as a result of this action and another probably killed.

Further patrolling by a section of PIB found the positions very extensive and were the main enemy positions on North Hill. Further patrolling by members of C Coy was carried out during the day, with one from 13 Pl being fired upon by about six rifles.

15 Pl and sections of PIB continued patrolling to the rear of the enemy, but received heavy opposition. Total casualties inflicted by these patrols amounted to three enemy killed and two probably killed.

The 13th of July could have been said to have been living up to its "devil's number". C Coy were continuing their patrol activities prior to an air strike, when the Corsairs appeared over the target area three hours earlier than expected, forcing one patrol at least, to beat a hasty retreat.

A later patrol reported that the enemy positions had been vacated. Five bodies were found. Then at 1000 hours, 13 Pl moved onto these recently vacated positions to give support to 15 Pl, which was to attack the main enemy positions from the flank.

At 1100 hours the attack began, with 15 Pl driving out the enemy after a heavy fire fight. Two 15 Pl members were slightly wounded, but seven Japanese were dead. A patrol was organised to move along the track and after proceeding for about 200 metres encountered the enemy. Two more Japanese were killed.

C Coy now paused to consolidate. The next day patrols reported that the ridge was clear of the enemy. The enemy had relocated on the next feature, about 150 metres along the track. This feature was later to be known as Cameron's Hill.

Observation posts were established and the enemy harassed from the end of the ridge. Unfortunately, it was in this vicinity that Sgt Keopili, the native scout, who had given such invaluable service, was killed. He was participating on a reconnaissance with 7 Pl, PIB, endeavouring to locate positions from which grenade dischargers could be used.

Changes were again about to occur in the disposition of the battalion. It was ordered that A Coy would relieve B Coy on the Wakunai. D Coy would take over in the Tokua area from 8 Pl, A Coy and B Coy would proceed to the Numa Numa Trail area to ultimately take over from C Coy. However, before these changes took place, Lt Ian McKenzie, with 9 Pl, A Coy, proceeded on a three-day patrol to reconnoitre and harass the enemy in the Ruravo area. At 0605 hours on 14 July, the patrol engaged six enemy holding a spur with LMG. Two Japanese were killed. At the conclusion of the patrol, the platoon moved back to join the rest of the company on Smith's Hill.

On 18 July, with B Coy on the Wakunai River, Lt Bonde with fifteen men of 11 Pl, departed their base for a two-day reconnaissance and ambushing patrol to the Kukuwabi area. They were accompanied by scout Aratura and after setting up an ambush site, made contact with four Japanese visiting the gardens. One of the Japanese was killed.

The relief of B Coy by A Coy on the Wakunai River commenced with 7 Pl, A Coy, relieving 12 Pl, B Coy. By the 21st of July, the operation was completed when 8 Pl, A Coy replaced 11 Pl, B Coy. 8 Pl had been relieved by 17 Pl D Coy at Tokua.

In the meantime, it had been reported to BHQ through natives in the area, that the enemy was believed to be moving from Ibu to Buritsiotorara to gather food. It was also reported that the natives had killed one Japanese.

Back on Cameron's Hill, Artillery and Mortars continued to harass the enemy positions, from where sniper fire was becoming more prevalent. Notwithstanding, C Coy kept up their patrol activities. One patrol, led by Sgt Armstrong, moved forward to an observation post at the end of North Hill and encountered an enemy ambush party of three, all of whom were killed. It was found that the dead Japanese were in possession of Australian rifles and four hand grenades.

By this time, a suitable approach had been found to the enemy positions, by way of the left flank. On 18 July, at 1200 hours, 13 Pl, led by Lt K.C Neville, ably supported by 15 Pl, with artillery and mortar fire, successfully attacked. After a heavy fire fight, the enemy finally abandoned their positions, leaving seven dead. Cpl Roger Stirrat claimed the sword of a Japanese Lieutenant, who was also carrying an American watch and a pistol. Among the equipment captured was a Juki HMG, which had been giving quite a lot of trouble previously, new clothing, including American type gaiter and a small lighting set.

15 Pl moved into these positions to consolidate. Later in the afternoon, a patrol observed five enemy north of Cameron's Hill, but a further patrol to the same area, reported that they had found two vacant positions 350 metres forward.

On 20 July, a patrol occupied positions further along the track after receiving light opposition. Further patrols along the creek running through these new positions had named that creek Charlie Creek.

Artillery and Mortars continued to pound the area ahead of C Coy's positions until on 23 July, 14 Pl moved forward unopposed to occupy positions consisting of five fox-holes and many lean-tos. A patrol pressed forward for a further 180 metres before being fired upon, resulting in SX39934 Pte John L. Burgess being wounded.

During the night of 23/24 July, sentries on Berry's Hill, reported having heard the sounds of an aeroplane engine in the direction of the Numa Numa Plantation. When this fact was relayed to HQ 2 Aust Corps, it was learned that it was quite a routine matter for enemy aircraft to visit Bougainville from adjacent Islands, during the full moon .

A change over of the companies in the forward area was carried out during the day of 24 July. C Coy being relieved by B Coy. 12 Pl, B Coy took over from 14 Pl, but before departing the area, C Coy patrols located and engaged an enemy extensive area, some 250 metres up the track. There were no casualties.

On this same day, a patrol from 9 Pl, A Coy, led by Lt McKenzie, departed their base on the Wakunai River, to reconnoitre for five days in the area along the east coast of Bougainville, where the Wakunai River flows into the sea. By this time too, members of the Mortar Pl and MMG Pl had arrived in the area to give support to A Coy as there was now a large force of ANGAU natives operating in the vicinity and the role of A Coy had been extended to include the protection of these natives.

At Tokua with D Coy, a patrol led by Sgt Freeman had returned to base after having not seen any enemy movement, but yet another patrol of 8 Pl, PIB with members of 16 Pl, reported having encountered a strong enemy force on a ridge, 250 metres from the firm base at Nasisipok. This patrol had attacked and killed eight of the enemy

and probably killed five more. Lt Edgar, the Platoon Commander was wounded when the enemy returned fire with an LMG.

Another patrol of PIB engaged the enemy at the same spot on the day after, killing one more. Another patrol from 16 Pl contacted a force of probably thirty Japanese in a defensive position at Nasisipok area. One Japanese was killed, but when returning to base, the patrol was fired upon by an LMG. VX134830 Sgt H.K. Midgley was killed. Q131657 Pte C.E. Stanley and VX38168 Pte A.T. Goulay were wounded. A native scout was also wounded.

With the relief of C Coy completed, 12 Pl, B Coy, commenced patrolling to reconnoitre the enemy positions on Cameron's Hill. Then on 27 July, with Artillery and Mortar support advanced on the enemy, only to find that the positions had been abandoned. These positions were indeed very extensive, consisting of twelve well-made bunkers having crawl trenches connecting.

With further patrolling the company was soon in contact with the enemy, which was now located about 350 metres further along the track.

The next day B Coy and 7Pl, PIB patrols engaged the enemy and on the following day further contact was made. This activity had increased the body count by three. The enemy were now situated on a V shape spur and armed with automatic weapons. Then on 31 July, again with Artillery and Mortar support, 10 Pl advanced and occupied the forward enemy positions. Heavy opposition was later encountered from more very extensive positions on the spur. Two of the enemy were killed, with one other being probably killed. One other was wounded. B Coy sustained three fatal casualties in VX135262 Pte S.G. Lowe, NX173614 Pte D.W. McTaggart and QX50616 Pte R. Phipps. This feature was named McInnes Hill after the OC B Coy.

On the Wakunai River, a patrol led by Lt Leith Donald left A Coy to investigate a native report that the enemy was moving into the area known as Evian, located approximately 1500 metres south-south-west of Buritsiotorara and using it as a staging camp.

Another patrol, this time led by Lt Neil McPhee, ambushed six enemy moving in the direction of Buritsiotorara. Four were killed. One of those killed was a Captain, and all were well dressed and carrying packs.

Lt Ian McKenzie's patrol to the east coast returned to base to report it had observed enemy in strength at the village of Teikon. Lt Donald's patrol had also returned to report that it had ambushed ten Japanese at first light on 27 July, at Evian. It had killed seven.

At Tokua with D Coy, Lt Ken Deller led a patrol to Ibu and Nasisipok, but saw nothing of the enemy. On 3 August, 18 Pl relieved 16 Pl at the base just south of Nasisipok. Lt Lindsay McKinnon took another patrol of twelve ORs to Ibu, where it observed two huts and bunkers, facing south along a track to

Tokua. Outside these huts three Japanese were digging a garden. The patrol engaged, which resulted in all three Japanese being killed. On their way back to base, they were fired upon, but no casualties were incurred.

Maj Stevensen, OC 2 Aust Mtn Bty, was in the area at this time, and accompanied by Capt Ray Roberts, OC D Coy with a patrol from that company, moved out of their base for Nasisipok, for the purpose of registering a mortar strike on the area. Unfortunately, the range was in excess of the capabilities of the mortars. The Mountain Battery as a result of this, moved from their location on Pearl Ridge to Berry's Hill enabling the strike to be carried out.

On the same day, Lt Donald and eighteen ORs left Wakunai Base area to reconnoitre the Japanese headquarters at Resiopaia in the Numa Numa area, where they observed the enemy's activities. During the patrol, Supili the native scout, while receiving information from the bush Kanakas, was followed by a Japanese party led by pro-Japanese Kanakas. Realising he was being followed, Supili stalked the Japanese and killed three, whereupon the Kanakas took to the bush and fled. As the patrol was withdrawing about an hour later, heavy firing was heard from the direction of the action.

Back at the Wakunai River base area, scouts on reconnaissance to the north bank of the river, just north of the base area, were fired upon. A later patrol, seeing the tracks of the enemy in the area, made it apparent that there was increased interest by the enemy in the Wakunai River base.

Another patrol again led by Lt McKenzie, ambushed a party of Japanese moving along the Kiap Road to Ibu, accounting for five of them; they were dressed in new clothing and were armed with short rifles. Yet another patrol, led by Lt McPhee went out to seek the enemy in the Pipipaia area, but observed that the area was used by the enemy for staging purposes only. Movement was heard on the Asitavi Track and one Japanese killed.

A further patrol of ten other ranks, with Lt Donald in charge, set up an ambush in the Ibu area, but after waiting six hours without any sign of the enemy, returned to base.

The situation on McInnes Hill was still producing extensive patrolling in order to gain knowledge of the local topography, and to reconnoitre the enemy positions. 12 Pl had moved to a location in the vicinity of Charlie Creek to establish a base to ambush along the enemy's lines of communication. Ambushes were set up daily, during daylight hours, and booby traps set during the night.

Extracts of a further report by the CO to Bde, dated 2 August, 1945 reads:

"From determined efforts to defend Nasisipok and promptly reinforcing of his positions there, following casualties, it is apparent that the enemy places a high value on the rich gardens in the area.

On the Numa Numa Trail, he continues to fight a stubborn rear-guard action, but was caught napping twice, by the deviation of our usual procedure of attack. He seems determined to hold his last defensive position west of

Charlie Creek, in strength. An air strike, arranged for Aug 6, may change his mind. If he still remains in position, further harassing by mortars etc. will take place, as this position appears stronger than usual in fire power and siting.

The value of varying the procedure for attack of defensive position, was illustrated by the ease with which strong positions were over-run on 22 July and 27 July. Both these attacks followed a dawn artillery programme. Past procedure was a night of harassing stepped up by 0930 hrs, with infantry advance at about 1000 hrs. The enemy, apparently in both cases, moved to reserve positions 100 to 150 yards in the rear during the hours of darkness to avoid harassing fire.

Future Operations: The GOC 2 Aust Corps visited this area on 2 Aug, and appeared satisfied with the operations generally. He gave permission for the unit to continue present tactics along the Numa Numa Trail.

It is intended to maintain a company forward on this trail. A Coy will be given their chance to take over this role in approximately a fortnight. All companies will then be blooded in this type of operation.

In Tokua area, one gun of 2 Mtn Bty will be installed, and fighting patrols will be accompanied by a FOO. It is anticipated that this will enliven the war for all enemy in Ibu-Nasisipok sector. Present tactics of lightly equipped fast-moving patrols in Wakunai area will continue.

PIB — Valuable assistance has been given by this coy. Confidence and enthusiasm now being shown by the Pl Commanders.

2 Pl, Hvy Mortar — have commenced operation, maintaining one mortar forward on the Numa Numa Trail.

2 Mtn Bty continue to give maximum support.

Admin — Progress is being made in preparation for takeover of Roadhead by S & T Branch, 2 Aust Corps.

Amenities — First showing of pictures at Berry's Hill on 2 Aug 45, was attended by approximately 50% of troops available. A further showing to-night, will accommodate those who missed out the previous night. This service is greatly appreciated by all ranks.

War Graves — Personnel of this unit recovered all bodies from the local cemetery at Post 12, for transport to Torokina.

Med 8 Fd Amb continues to give sterling service. It is proposed to relieve the RMO at Post 13 for a short rest, by a relieving MO from this unit.

Engrs — a platoon of 23 Fd Coy are now moving into Post 5. Track improvement to Tokua, recce of possible jeep track to Tiernan's Spur and track improvement to Wakunai are under way.

Rations continue to be of high quality.

Morale Very high. Troops have never appeared fitter, mentally and physically."

Artillery and mortars continued to harass enemy positions during the night, until 1100 hrs on 3 August. 12 Pl supported again by artillery and mortar fire, occupied McInnes Hill. The positions were found to be rather extensive, consisting of nine bunkers. Some documents and one LMG were captured. 11 Pl moved up to consolidate. Later in the day a patrol from 12 Pl, forward of Charlie Creek, observed movement over the creek. Pte Arthur Rose ended the Japanese soldier's career. The Japanese was carrying white gloves and US Navy cutlery.

B Coy now consolidated on McInnes Hill and established a strong base for future operations along the Numa Numa Trail. This feature dropped about 75 metres to Charlie Creek, which at this point was about nine metres wide, and normally fast-flowing at a depth of one

to one and a half metres. A standing patrol was set up on the west bank and accounted for one Japanese killed later in the day.

Sgt Clohesy, in charge of a patrol along Charlie Creek, was looking for a suitable crossing place. High cliffs on both sides made it most difficult. A suitable crossing was located and later patrols crossed over to reconnoitre enemy positions.

At about this time it was decided that further changes in the disposition of the battalion be made. C Coy was to relieve D Coy at Tokua by 12 August. D Coy was to replace A Coy at the Wakunai by the 19th, and A Coy was to relieve B Coy on McInnes Hill by the 25th.

Things were hotting up in the B Coy area, as 12 Pl crossed Charlie Creek under cover of artillery, mortar and small arms fire, and occupied the positions which the enemy had abandoned during the fire plan. It was apparent that they had left in quite a hurry, for they had left fresh food in dixies, and had left much valuable equipment and documents. Only one Japanese body was found.

11 Pl consolidated the area and later a patrol from 12 Pl moved further east along the trail, located and killed a Japanese sentry. When returning to base in the B Coy area, a patrol from the PIB located a party of Japanese bathing in the creek. Ten of the enemy were killed.

On 9 August, enemy snipers fired upon 11 Pl, but fortunately nobody was injured. During the night of 9/10th, artillery harassed the enemy positions forward of 11 Pl and the following morning after a short firefight, the enemy withdrew to more defensive positions, upon which further artillery fire was brought down.

Information was now received by telephone from 2 Aust Corps, that the Japanese were considering surrender, and that no further casualties were to be suffered, no more than is necessary to sustain the present situation. Col Dunkley advised his troops to suspend all operations against the enemy, unless attacked. He further advised that leaflets were to be dropped in the Japanese areas.

Unfortunately, the enemy had not yet received word of the impending surrender, and on 13 August, 11 Pl was fired upon by LMG and rifle fire, resulting in V220096 Pte E.J. Bahr being killed. 10 Pl immediately attacked the enemy and drove them from their positions. Wounded in this action were VX63216 Sgt L.J.B. Clohesy, VX137110 Pte B.G. Dougherty, and VX66711 Cpl M.B. Thorn. 12 Pl consolidated on the feature and forty five metres further forward an enemy LMG was knocked out. Artillery was called down on the enemy positions, but a Vickers machine gun, which had been established in the B Coy area, drew fire. A bunker from which the LMG had been silenced, was destroyed by PITA.

From the Australian edition of "Guinea Gold" dated Wednesday, 29 August, 1945 came a report headed, "Rest Period for Island Troops."

It read: "The period of calm that has been called, 'the rest period,' continues on Bougainville as both sides await the activity that will follow the surrender signing in Tokyo, when plans for the reception and concentration of Japanese troops can be implemented.

Bad weather during the last two days has prevented pilots of the RNZAF Corsairs from observing the Japanese trek to assembly points, but infantrymen of the 7th Battalion reported that the enemy has vacated a forward position on the Numa Numa Trail."

On 15 August, the Prime Minister of Australia announced that the surrender term offered to the Japanese by the Allies had been accepted, but enemy snipers were still rather active in the 12 Pl area. VX67404 Pte H.G. "Bluey" Riley was wounded.

10 Pl relieved 12 Pl on the 17th, and a single Japanese was observed in the enemy positions. Movement was again seen when 12 Pl relieved 10 Pl on the 18th. The Japanese could be heard chopping, but no movement was seen.

10 and 12 Platoons continued to alternate in observing the enemy until 27 August when they were withdrawn to McInnes Hill. On the 29th, Lt Peter Rush and ten other ranks began the move of B Coy back to Roadhead, and ultimately Torokina.

Preparations were now underway for the whole battalion (less one company to remain in the forward area) to re-group with 23 Brigade at Torokina. D Coy was allotted the task of acting as guard and staging detachment for the Japanese, who would move overland from the Numa Numa Plantation area on the east coast of Bougainville, to compounds established on the west coast at Torokina. D Coy was to establish bases at both McInnes and Berry's Hill, and at Roadhead. No movement of Japanese was expected before 16 September.

This was the situation when the statistics of battle casualties were released. 7 Bn had lost 23 personnel killed in action, with a further 52 being wounded. They had accounted for 181 Japanese killed, and had probably killed another 17, with at least 11 more being wounded.

On 8 September, Lt Gen Kanda signed the surrender terms at 2 Corps and by the 16th, 7 Bn, less its D Coy, moved back to Torokina. On 13 September, 17 Pl moved out from Pearl Ridge to McInnes Hill in preparation for the first draft of Japanese. On the 17th they received their first batch of five, including an officer and interpreter. This was the first of 1200 Japanese to pass through this check point emphasising the fact that the war was really over.

The campaign on Bougainville had led to much adverse publicity in the Australian press. It had been implied, on some occasions, that the troops were generally opposed to the operations and in some cases, reluctant to carry out instructions. If this was the case, it certainly was not apparent with the 7th Battalion. As a matter of fact, in the book "The Final Campaigns" by Gavin Long, it is stated

that 7 Aust Inf Bn (AIF) entered the fray with enthusiasm. This had been the men's chance of showing their worth, and had done it well.

The following are two more anecdotes, recalled by men who were there.

From Lt Ben Cattell: "When not with the forward mortar crew, the remaining members of the platoon were dug in on Berry's Hill, from where they carried supplies of bombs to whichever crew was in action. One day, a 25-pound round from 10 Bty 4 Fd Regt dropped short on Berry's Hill, just as Sgt Mick Cudmore was sitting on an upturned drum constituted as a latrine.

Mick's blokes vow that he was back in their dugout, properly dressed, before the last echoes of the explosion had drifted away. Remembering that trousers did not have zips in those days, only a row of buttons, Mick must have created some sort of record, which these days would get his name in the Guinness Book of Records. Not all hazards of war were inflicted on us by the enemy. Our own people had a go every now and then."

From Bill Wells: "Two days before 'Digger' Schiele was killed in action, he and a member of the Bn 'I' Section arrived at Base Point 3, and asked for four volunteers to form a patrol. For the first time in my Army life, I broke my resolution never to volunteer for anything. So together with 'Nipper' Williams, Jack Petty, Geoff Wilson, 'Digger' and the 'I' bloke we set off on our mission, which was to find and check out a Japanese trench and bunker system.

It was estimated that the job would take about three hours. Some time later the patrol made its way along a creek bed with Williams and Wells out in front. The going was rough and progress slow, and for my part the tension high as we approached the area in which our objective lay. All of a sudden, 'Nipper,' who was out in front at the time, suddenly crouched down on the track and started to make vigorous pointing motions towards a large tree, which had fallen across the track and creek. I swear the hairs on the back of my neck stood up like quills, expecting to see the enemy at any moment. Unfortunately I couldn't see a damned thing. 'Nipper's' strange signals puzzled me, but under the circumstances I couldn't call out, so 'Digger' indicated that I should go forward to see what was going on.

Very carefully, I made my way up to where 'Nipper' was and he pointed to the biggest, fattest, blackest death adder, perched on top of the log, over or under which we had to go. Talk about nerve-racking. Fortunately the snake slithered off into the jungle and we proceeded until about 200 yards further on, we came to an area which obviously was our objective, for we could see that the undergrowth had at one time been cut down, but was now starting to grow again. This extended for about 100 feet up the slope, where we could also see, just faintly, where some earth works had been done.

'Digger' signalled that we, 'Nipper' and myself, were to work our way up the slope, with the rest of the patrol giving covering fire if necessary. Our moment of truth had come for it seemed almost suicidal to move up that slope. However, I remember us both nodding to each other, knowing only too well that it was up to us.

After what seemed an eternity, expecting to see a Japanese head appear over the side of the earthworks, or have a grenade roll down on us, we finally slithered over the edge of a trench.

As it turned out, the bunker system we were in had long been abandoned, but the experience will remain in my memory for ever."