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PHOTOGRAPHS OF BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND 1945

INTRODUCTION BY PROF. RODDA

I was a medical officer at RNZAF Station Torokina, Bougainville from 17 June 45 until 15 November 45.

At this stage the RNZAF in Bougainville comprised four squadrons of single seater Chance-Vought F4U-1 Corsair aircraft with their servicing units. These aircraft supplied the air cover and ground attack air force for the Australian Army 2 Corps in the Bougainville campaign. In addition there were various attached RNZAF aircraft such as Lockheed Ventura PV-1 reconnaissance bombers operating as photographic reconnaissance aircraft; Lockheed Hudsons operating as communication aircraft and Douglas Dakota C47 transport aircraft. All these aircraft operated from Piva North airstrip. In addition the RNZAF headquarters for all Pacific Islands Operations - Command of the New Zealand Air Task Force COMZEAIRTAF was at Torokina and the RNZAF personnel numbered more than two thousand on Bougainville.

The only RAAF at Bougainville was a small army cooperation and communications unit.

There were five RNZAF medical officers at Torokina - one Senior Medical Officer at COMZEAIRTAF headquarters and four of us responsible for the medical care of the personnel of the operational flying Station. We shared responsibility for sick parades, for care of personnel admitted to our small Station Sick Quarters hospital for airstrip emergency duty and the supervision of hygiene and sanitation. Personnel requiring major surgery or intensive medical care were transferred temporarily to the Australian Army Hospital at Torokina. We were each given responsibility for the specific medical care of the aircrew of one of the fighter squadrons and in the last few weeks before VJ day I was looking after 23 Squadron.

On a previous tour of duty, this squadron had used a code whereby the squadron commander called "Spook one", the flight commanders called "Spook two" and "Spook three" and the other pilots called "Spook four, five etc." when talking on their radio telephones. This code had effectively confused the Japanese radio operators who did not understand what a spook was and had been unable to understand or to give false instructions. The squadron had come to be known as the "Ghost" squadron". The squadron song was written by one of the pilots and was a parody of a hit in a war time American film.

I was on airstrip standby duty the day of what has since been referred to in the Australian press as the "Blamey affair" when an Australian army infantry unit supported merely by the H.M.A.S. Diamantina attempted a landing on a beach held by the Japanese. This operation was planned to occur at the time of a visit to Bougainville by the Australian G.O.C. General Blamey and was to be an entirely Australian affair so no air attacks by the RNZAF were asked for - until about mid-day when the landing parties had been severely mauled and quite a number of Australian soldiers killed and wounded. I was on the airstrip when the request for assistance came and within a very short time 36 fully armed and bombed up Corsairs - each with one or two 1000 lb bombs were roaring into the air. Their attack on the Japanese enabled the Australian infantry to withdraw. I well remember meeting my own squadron commander when he returned after that massive air strike. He was furious "If only those stupid Aussies had asked us this morning we could have flattened the place before they tried to land - not after!"

The day after the Japanese surrender I went in an RAAF Aircraft (Bristol Beaufort) dropping leaflets calling on them to lay down their arms. The copies were made from some leaflets picked up by Australian soldiers.

As medical officers we regularly attended clinical rounds at the Australian Army General Hospital and I also visited frequently the ANGAU hospital which cared for the locals - numbers of whom were continually coming in from Japanese held areas and who were often very sick and usually severely malnourished. It was this contact with Angau which enabled me to arrange the successful trip to climb Balbi after the Japanese surrender.

I was the last RNZAF medical officer at Bougainville and closed the Medical Section and Station Sick Quarters. All our medical supplies were given to ANGAU and the Senior MO of ANGAU Major Dudley Williams AAMC undertook to hand these over to the Methodist Mission which was expected to return to Bougainville not very long after. This is acknowledged in Rev. Voyce's subsequent letter.

The photographs used in making the slides were either official RNZAF or RAAF photos which I was able to obtain. The others taken from the air were taken by one of the aircrew of an RNZAF Hudson (NZ 22031) during a test flight after servicing in which the captain F/L Winefield kindly took me in a reconnaissance flight to both Mt. Bagana and Mt. Balbi. One photo shows the captain and myself discussing the route with the navigator and one of the servicing team.

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Captain J. Heyward, NZDC was a Dental Officer at RNZAF Station, Bougainville. He died of poliomyelitis in N.Z. during the post war epidemic. Major H.A. Johnson, Australian Army Survey Corps was a member of staff at 2 Corps HQ. He is now retired, living in Melbourne.

The police boys who came with us on the Balbi trip were kindly provided as an escort for us by ANGAU. Their uniform was a khaki lap-lap with leather belt and brass buckle inscribed "Gott Mit Uns" a remnant of booty captured in German New Guinea in 1914-18.