

THE ADMIRAL CHESTER W. NIMITZ MUSEUM

PRESENTS

AN ORAL HISTORY BY

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BUNA RECOLLECTIONS TAPED JUNE, 1974

TAPE #197

IN BUNA, IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY, IS ONE OF THE HOTTEST, WETTEST PLACES IN NEW GUINEA. MALARIA AND SCRUB TYPHUS ARE RASH. SKIN COMPLAINTS RANGING FROM HEAT RASH TO RINGWORM AND DOBIE ITCH WOULD MAKE LIFE UNPLEASANT EVEN UNDER PEACE TIME CONDITIONS.

IMAGINE THEN, WHAT THE FRONT LINE SOLDIER HAD TO ENDURE IN THE PRIMITIVE CONDITIONS INSEPARABLE FROM JUNGLE FIGHTING. IT WAS IN THIS PLACE AND TIME THAT MANY AMERICAN SOLDIERS WERE BLOODED IN THE FIGHTING AGAINST THE JAPANESE.

MY REGIMENT OF ARTILLERY, THE 2<sup>ND</sup> FIELD REGIMENT. AUSTRALIA IMPERIAL FORCES, HAD ONE BATTERY AT BUNA, EQUIPPED WITH 25 POUNDERS TO SUPPORT THE JOINT AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN ATTACK ON ABOUT 1,000 STRONGLY ENTRENCHED, BATTLE-WISE JAPANESE.

THEY OCCUPIED A COCONUT PLANTATION AND ADJACENT DENSE JUNGLE ON THE COAST, AT THE END OF AN AIRSTRIP COVERED WITH THICK KUNAI GRASS ABOUT 4 FEET HIGH.

THE AIRSTRIP HAD BEEN USED BY JAP BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS. BREAST HIGH REVETMENTS HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED ON THERE FOR THEIR PLANES. A PALM THATCHED CONTROL ROOM AND WIRELESS STATION MADE OF LOCAL TIMBER OCCUPIED A POSITION ABOUT HALF WAY UP THE 1400 YARD STRIP.

ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STRIP WAS A FORTIFIED POSITION, HOUSING A NAVAL ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN OF 75MM CALIBER, PLUS SUNDRY FIELD PIECES AND MACHINE GUNS.

NEAR THIS POSITION WAS A 70 FOOT BANYON TREE THE JAPS USED AS AN OBSERVATION POST.

WHEN THE POSITION WAS CAPTURED BY THE ALLIES, THIS TREE BECAME OUR OBSERVATION POST, CONNECTED BY FIELD TELEPHONE TO THE COMMANDER OF CARSON'S GUN, SGT. BING CARSON. IT WAS AN IDEAL OP. THE BASE OF THE TRUNK WAS

ABOUT 8 FEET IN DIAMETER AND QUITE HOLLOW. AN APETURE HAD THOUGHTFULLY BEEN CUT IN THE TRUNK BY THE JAPS AND THIS BECAME THE SLEEPING QUARTERS OF MY OP STAFF.

IT WAS THE ONLY DRY SPOT ON THE BATTLEFIELD. THE FIRST FORK IN THE TREE, ABOUT 12 FET UP, WAS OCCUPIED BY 2 AMERICAN MACHINE GUNNERS. THEY WERE GENIAL, IF SOMEHWAT NOISY, NEIGHBORS WHO CHEERFULLY SHARED THEIR CIGARETTES AND RATIONS WITH MY OP PARTY.

ABOUT 40 FEET UP THE TREE, AND CONNECTED BY 2 LADDERS, WAS THE JUNCTION OF 3 LARGE BRANCHES. THE JAPS HAD CONSTRUCTED A WOODEN PLATFORM HERE, AND USED A FEW SADDLE BAGS AS PROTECTION.

ABOUT 30 YARDS FROM THE TREE, WAS THE COMMAND POST OF THE 112<sup>TH</sup> AMERICAN INFANTRY REGIMENT. IT WAS FORMALY THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE JAPANES NAVAL GUN CREW. AN AUSTRALIAN BATTALION SHARED THIS FLANK OF THE ADVANCE AND OUR FORWARD TROOPS WERE EXTENDED RIGHT ACROSS THE STRIP; AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN UNITS ALTERNATIING.

IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT OP COMMANDING A CLEAR VIEW OF ALL THE JAPANESE DEFENSES WITH THE NEAREST ABOUT 300 YARDS AWAY.

OF COURSE, IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN TOLERATED BY THE JAPS. IT COULD HAVE BEEN NEUTRALIZED BY A CONCNTRATION OF SMALL ARMS FIRE EVERY DAY UNTIL WE WERE FORCED TO ABANDON IT.

I RESTORED MYSELF AND MY OP ASSISSTANT AND MY SIGNALER ON THE PLATFORM AND SET TO WORK TO DESTROY THE MAIN JAP DEFENSE COMPLEX WHICH WAS HOLDING UP OUR ADVANCE. MY JOB FROM A GUNNERS POINT OF VIEW WAS TRULY AN ENVIALBLE ONE AND I RELISHED MY GOOD FORTUNE. ALTHOUGH THE JUNIOR OFFICER IN THE BATTERY, I WAS THE ONLY ONE AVAILABLE, AS WE HAD HAD 5 OBSERVATION POST OFFICERS WOUNDED IN THE PRECEEDING FEW DAYS.

OBSERVATION POSTS, IN THE VERY NATURE OF THINGS SHOULD BE CONCEALED FROM THE ENEMY, AND IT'S OCCUPATION SHOULD BE INCONSPICUOUS AS POSSIBLE. AFTER MY BATTERY COMMANDER, MAJ. BILL HALL, DSO, HAD INSTALLED ME AND SHOT IN CARSON'S GUN, WITH AN INSPIRED PIECE OF GUNNERY, I SETTLED DOWN TO REGISTERING THE LINE AND RANGE OF EVERY JAP POSITION I COULD SEE THROUGH MY BINOCULARS.

BECAUSE OF THE CLOSE PROXIMITY OF OUR INFANTRY, I HAD TO RANGE ON THE CLOSEST TARGETS WITH ARMOR PIERCING SHOT, OBSERVING THE FLIGHT AND POINT OF IMPACT BY THE BRIGHT TRACER IN EACH ROUND OF SHOT. WHEN THE RANGE WAS CONFIRMED, I'D CHANGE TO HIGH EXPLOSIVE SHELLS AND THE MAGNIFICENT GUN LAYING MADE MY TASK AN EASY ONE.

BUT, AFTER THE FIRST DAY, MY OP BECAME A GRANDSTAND FOR A CHOICE ASSORTMENT OF AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS AND NEWSREEL PHOTOGRAPHERS.

THEY WOULD STAND UNDER THE TREE AND YELL UP TO ME, "CAN I COME UP?" I WOULD CALL DOWN, "GO TO BLAZES. THIS IS AN OP, NOT A GRANDSTAND." THEY WOULD MAKE PLAINTIFF NOISES AND GO AWAY, BUT SOON THEY WOULD BE ON THE PHONE FROM CARSON'S GUN. "MAJOR HILL SAYS IT WOULD BE OK IF I DON'T SHOW MYSELF OR GET IN YOUR WAY." I'D RELUCTANTLY INVITE THEM UP BUT WITH SOME RUDE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THEIR PROFESSIONS.

ALTHOUGH WE EXPECTED THE JAPS TO FIRE ON US ALL THE TIME, THEY ONLY FIRED A FEW BURSTS FROM THE "PONG-PONG" (?) INTO THE TREE. THIS DISCOURAGED SOME OF MY GUESTS BUT AFTER A FEW DAYS, WE BECAME CARELESS AND SOMETIMES AS MANY AS 3 JOURNALISTS WERE CROWDED INTO MY OP AT ONE TIME.

I ALSO HAD VISITS FROM THE CO'S OF VARIOUS AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN UNITS ENGAGED. ONE GUNNER CAPTAIN FROM A FAMOUS AUSTRALIAN 6<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION REGIMENT, WHO CONSUMED WITH PROFESSIONAL ENVY, BEGGED ME TO LET HIM

SHOOT A FEW ROUNDS FROM CARSON'S GUN/ "COME ON TOM", HE WOULD WHEEDLE.  
"JUST A COUPLE OF ROUNDS. AFTER ALL, I AM SENIOR TO YOU."

THE TREE OP BECAME THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION OF MY OWN UNIT. WHEN THE  
ATTACKS WENT ON, AND THE GUN COULD NO LONGER BE USED, I GAVE A RUNNING  
COMMENTARY ON THE PHONE TO BING CARSON FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL THE MEMBERS  
OF OUR UNIT.

ONE NIGHT, WHEN I WAS SLEEPING AT THE BASE OF THE TREE, THE JAPS MOUNTED A  
NIGHT ATTACK. THE MOST EERIE SOUND IN THAT PLACE OF A JAP BUGLE CALL WAS THE  
SIGNAL FOR THEIR SUICIDE CHARGE.

IMMEDIATELY, FLARES AND VERY LIGHTS WERE SENT UP BY THE INFANTRY AND IN  
THE BRILLIANT LIGHT, THE JAPS WERE CUT TO PIECES.

MY AMERICAN NEIGHBORS IN THE FIRST FORK OF THE TREE RIPPED OFF BELT AFTER  
BELT OF MACHINE GUN ROUNDS AND ENJOYED THEMSELVES IMMENSLY.

WE WERE ON STAND-TO FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT, BUT THE JAP COUNTERATTACK  
PETERED OUT. I SAW SOME SAD SIGHTS FROM MY TREE. DEAD AMERICANS SOLDIERS  
WERE BROUGHT IN FROM THE FRONT LINE AND BURIED NEAR THE CP. WOUNDED MEN,  
BOTH AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN WERE TREATED IN A DRESSING STATION UNDER  
TREE. I SHALL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE STOICISM OF THESE MEN, AND THE  
TENDERNESS OF THE AMERICAN MEDICS WHO ATTENDED THEM.

DURING THE CARSON'S GUN PERIOD, THAT GREAT AMERICAN INSTITUTION, THE  
DONUT, MADE IT'S APPEARANCE UNDER MY TREE. A COFFEE AND DONUT STORE WAS  
SET UP AND MY WHOLE PIT PARTY AND I ENJOYED THIS CHANGE FROM OUR  
TRADITIONAL CUP OF TEA AND BISQUITS. AT THIS TIME TOO, WE LIVED ON GI RATIONS  
AND SHAMELESSLY ACCEPTED GIFTS OF CARTONS OF CIGARETTES FROM OUR  
GENEROUS HOSTS. LATER, IN THE FIGHT FOR TERAKIA (?) A WHOLLY AMERICAN EFFORT,  
I WAS ATTACHED TO THEIR FORWARD ELEMENTS FOR ARTILLERY SUPPORT.

HERE, I MAINTAINED CLOSE LIASON WITH LT. McCAMBELL OF THE 126<sup>TH</sup> OR 127<sup>TH</sup> REGIMENT, I THINK, AND CONCENTRATED THE FIRE OF MY GUNS ON THE JAP POSITIONS ON SUWARI (?) CREEK. UNTIL THEY WERE CAPTURED. AT THIS STAGE, MY OP WAS A HOLE IN THE SAND ON AN EXPOSED SAND SPIT ABOUT 150 YARDS FROM THE NEAREST JAP.

McCAMBELL DECIDED THAT I WAS TOO VALUABLE T BE SHOT AT, SO HE ATTACHED A RIFLEMAN TO MY OP TO ACT AS MY BODYGUARD. THIS IS HOW I MADE THE ACQUANTANCE OF PFC JOHN CARTER FROM KENTUCKY. JOHN CARTER WAS A COOL, TACITURN KENTUCKY WOODSMAN. A VERY FINE SOLDEIR AND AN AMIABLE COMPANION. WE SPENT MANY UNCOMFORTABLE HOURS IN A WET HOLE IN THE SAND AND WITH RIFLES, TOOK ON, AT RANGES UP TO 600 YARDS, JAP SOLDIERS WHO RUSHED INTO THE SURF TO PICK UP FISH STUNNED BY SHELL BURSTS FROM MY GUNS.

ABOUT A YEAR LATER, WHILE ON CONVELESENT LEAVE IN SYDNEY, I MET JOHN CARTER IN A NIGHT CLUB. AND REMEMBERING WHAT WE HAD SHARED, I NEARLY DISGRACED MYSELF BY CRYING WITH RELIEF TO KNOW HE HAD SURVIVED.

THE JAPS MUST HAVE HATED CARSON'S GUN AND PERSISTANTLY SHELLED THE AREA WHERE THEY THOUGHT IT WAS LOCATED. BUT, THE GUN WAS VERY EFFECTIVELY CAMOUFLAGED AND WAS INVISIBLE WHEN NOT FIRING. WE WERE ALWAYS CAREFUL TO CEASE FIRING AT DUSK BECAUSE IN THE DARK, THE FLASH FROM THE GUN'S MUZZLE COULD EASILY BE PIN POINTED. THE JAPS FINALLY CALLED IN AIR SUPPORT TO NEUTRALIZE CARSON'S GUN.

ONE DAY, DURING THE FIRST WEEK IN JANUARY, THREE ZERO FIGHTERS CAME OVER THE BATTLEFIELD AND FLEW UP AND DOWN THE AIRSTRIP AT TREETOP LEVEL, OBVIOUSLY SEARCHING FOR CARSON'S GUN.

I IMMEDIATELY GAVE THE ORDER TO LAY LOW AND WARNED BING CARSON NOT TO FIRE HIS LIGHT MACHINE GUN AT THE ZEROS. I WAS ENJOYING THE CLOSEST LOOK I EVER HAD AT THE FAMOUS ZERO FIGHTER. WHEN ONE OF THEM ACTUALLY FEW UNDER

MY OP, ABOUT 4 YARDS AWAY, THE SCENE LOST IT'S ENCHANTMENT FOR ME. I HASTILY DESCENDED.

I AM VERY HAPPY TO COOPERATE AT THE ADM. NIMITZ CENTER AND TO MAKE AN HUMBLE CONTRIBUTION TO IT'S SUCCESS.

FIRST, BECAUSE IT WILL COMMEMORATE A JOINT AMERICAN-AUSTALIAN BATTLE SUCCESS AT WHAT YOU WOULD CALL THE GI LEVEL. AND ALSO, BECAUSE MY GUNNER COMRADES AND I HAVE GODD REASON TO BE GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS HOSPITALITY (OF AMERICAN) TROOPS DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

I WILL GIVE YOU TWO INSTANCES. BEFORE THE CARSON'S GUN EPISODE, 2 BARGES CONTAINING GUNS AND TROOPS FROM MY BATTERY WERE BEING TOWED ALONG THE COAST TOWARDS THE BATTLEFIELD WHEN THEY WERE SHOT BY ZERO FIGHTERS. MANY GUNNERS WERE WOUNDED AND SOME KILLED, BUT THE SURVIVORS MANAGED TO SWIM ASHORE. ABOUT ¾ OF A MILE, AND LANDED IN AN AREA CONTROLLED BY AMERICAN TROOPS. THEY CAME ASHORE NAKED, HAVING SHED THEIR CLOTHES AND BOOKS TO FACILITATE SWIMMING. THE AMERICANS OUTFITTED THEM COMPLETELY WITHOUT ANY FUSS OR DELAY. AS ONE OF OUR GRATEFUL GUNNERS SAID, "NOT EVEN A BLOOMIN SINGNATURE ON A FORM IN TRIPLICATE."

THE OTHER INSTANCE WAS THE READY RSPONSE OPF THE COL OF THE U.S. 126<sup>TH</sup> REGIMENT WHEN I ASKED HIM FOR A FEW CARTONS OF CIGARETTES FOR MY GUNNERS, WHEN OUR SUPPLY SITUATION BROKE DOWN. "HELL, HE SAID, A FEW CARTONS WON'T GO ANYWHERE WITH YOUR BOYS. HERE, TAKE A CASE OF CARTONS AND LET ME KNOW WHEN THEY RUN OUT." THAT WAS THE FORM OF THE U.S. TROOPS WE SUPPORTED WITH OUR GUNS ON BUNA.

AS A FINAL SAD COMMENT ON THE BUNA BATTLE, I NOTE THAT OUR AUSTALIAN 18<sup>TH</sup> BRIGADE CASUALTIES FOR THE PERIOD OF 18 DECEMBER TO 2 JANUARY INCLUSIVE WERE 22 OFFICERS AND 245 OTHER RANKS KILLED AND 33 OFFICERS AND 524 OTHER RANKS WOUNDED IN ACTION.

I DO NOT HAVE ANY STATISTICS ABOUT AMERICAN CASUALTIES, BUT THEY WERE VERY HEAVY AND MANY YOUNG AMERICANS LOST THEIR LIVES IN THIS BATTLE.

SHOULD THE OCCASION EVER ARISE AGAIN, AND I HOPE IT WILL NOT, WHEN AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN TROOPS ARE JOINTLY ENGAGED, I CAN SAY WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN, THE AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY WILL SUPPORT AMERICAN INFANTRY TO THE FULLEST EXTENT.

TRANSCRIBED BY FOREST J. REES

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