

RON TRENGROVE "MY EARLY DAYS ON TIMOR"

1.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.21 no. 200 May 1967: 7-11.
2.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.22 no. 201 July 1967: 7-12.
3.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.22 no. 202 August 1967: 5-7.
4.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.22 no. 203 September 1967: 3-7.
5.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.22 no. 204 October 1967: 15-16.
6.	"My early days on Timor" by NX42322, R. Trengrove, 75 L.A.D., later 2/2nd Ind. Coy. 2/2 <i>Commando Courier</i> v.22 no. 205 November 1967: 6-10.

Ron Trengrove has sent to me a couple of exercise books full of his early experiences in Timor. These are far from complete but they do tell a story and I think a story well worth repeating so the time has arrived to include these in our old feature "Historically, Yours!" I hope the readers will have as much enjoyment reading them as I did.

HOME LEAVE CANCELLED

I am going to try and write down as much as I can remember of my 12 months on Timor as accurately as I can remember it and dates and months as near as I can remember. If I say weeks where it was only days it is only because at times we lost track of days and weeks as Sunday was a patrol day as was Monday and every other day. And when things got hot, and we were on the run, every day was like a week, and nights twice as long.

As everyone knows the Japs struck Pearl Harbour on the 7th December 1941 and we of the 75 L.A.D. who were expecting to go on leave from Darwin were attached to the 2/40th Btn. who were also all packed up ready to go to Tasmania on leave.

The ship which was to take them was in Darwin. It was the old *Zealandia* which was sunk in Port Darwin in February, 1942, the day of Darwin's first raid Sunday night, 7th December, 1941. We had gone to bed about nine o'clock and for some reason, I had been lying awake for an hour or more. Everyone had seemed to be expecting something that day. All were kind of excited. It may seem as if I am, or have, imagined it, but I thought of it after the first excitement had subsided that night and often since.

Our tents were nearest the "C" Company huts and my tent closer than the other two belonging to our outfit. It was a hot night with the moon well up. It had been like that for a few weeks as we were in the middle of the wet season. All was quiet when I saw lights switched on in "C" Company's orderly room and about five minutes later uproar and confusion was on in "C" Company's lines.

Those of us who were not awake in the L.A.D. soon were awake and wondering. I got out of bed and put my boots on (incidentally all that I did put on or had on) and, ran over to the first hut which was No. 13 Platoon's, and enquired as to what all the row was about, to be informed that they were ordered to get out of bed and have everything ready for a move immediately.

The boys were convinced it was leave, but I reckoned not as the Japs had everyone guessing for the past few months and we all knew that the Jap Minister was going to see Roosevelt. However, that's all they knew so I went back to our tent and was told that our W.O.2· Willersdorf had gone over to Battalion Headquarters to find the reason for the commotion and would be back in a few minutes.

I immediately set to and lit a fire and started to boil the water in the dixie for tea. By the time we had had tea and a biscuit we were waiting on the return of Willersdorf. He seemed to have been away hours and most of us were considering going back to bed when he turned up and called us all together in the tent and told us that the Japs were in the war and that we were to start packing up the L.A.D. immediately.

The time then was still before midnight and we knew we would not get any sleep that night. Luckily we had had all our crates for the gear made months before so all we had to do was pack the tools and spare parts which doesn't sound much but when one considers we had two store vans of three ton capacity full of these necessary parts and they had to be packed securely and in their correct crates, and then all the tools of the trailer and the tool kits of our fitters. We had an all-night job in front of us.

We worked right through until four, in the morning by which time everything but our own personal gear had been packed. I had made some hot Bourn Vita about this time so we all had time off for a smoke and the drink and something to eat, after which we packed our own gear and then went down to breakfast and were sitting waiting for the order to move by five o'clock.

After a lot of palaver from Ordnance heads and signing various papers, Willersdorf gave us the order to get out on the road and take our place at the end of "C" Company, who had already moved out. Sufficient to say that after one of the slowest rides I have ever had in a truck we arrived at the wharf in Darwin. We had come 27 miles already and some of us were wondering if we would ever see that road again.

TO KOEPANG, DUTCH TIMOR, ON THE *WESTRALIA*

We were lucky in the fact that all attached units to the 2/40th Btn. were to travel on the merchant cruiser *Westralia*. About 300 of us were put aboard her. She was laying out in the stream and us chaps were among the first half a dozen boat loads to get aboard and so we had a good chance of picking a good spot for ourselves.

Everyone thought that we would be pulling out that night but we were mistaken as we did not pull out until Wednesday, 10th December. I am not too sure now whether the sloop *Koala* went first and the *Zealandia* then *Westralia*, or vice versa, however sufficient to say we were on the move at daylight and we were just clearing the boom when the sun began to rise in front of us and it was one of those usual glorious sunrises that one so often sees at Darwin, like the sunsets which were always worth watching and which I very seldom missed seeing when I was stationed at Larrakeyah Barracks.

We had to go very slowly to keep up with the *Zealandia* who was at her top speed of about eight or nine knots. The sloop was nearly always well to the fore and for our protection well in the fore and round on all sides was the pride, and I think, the full strength of the Royal Australian Air Force consisting of three Lockheed Hudsons. By the full strength I mean the strength of the Darwin Squadron and no doubt they did a good job then and later.

We didn't have much to do other than look over the rails of the ship, and it was in doing this that I saw my first sea snake, a yellow, black spotted one - about three feet long, floating on top of the water.

After we had been at sea and out of sight of Darwin, or I should say Vesteys and Larrakeyah, we had our first idea of how the Navy worked. A ship was seen on the horizon and on getting nearer to us she made off a little to the east and on our first signal refused to stop but on the second order which was given in typical Navy style: "Heave to or we fire," which she did promptly, and our commander, a big bearded giant, by the way not so much in height but in width, went over to the ship he had ordered to heave to in a naval cutter or pinnace.

She turned out to be a Dutch ship and her skipper thought that we were Japs. We continued on our way and on Friday morning of the 12th December, we sighted land and in no time we seemed to be between two islands, one on our left was named Lemoa and the one on the right was Timor - Dutch Timor.

ARRIVAL AT KOEPANG

Well, we pulled up past a town which we were told was Koepang, and then on to the bay where huge boats, bigger than life boats, came out to us and in no time now it seemed we were piling down the gangway with our gear around us, each man looking like a moving mountain and piled into these cumbersome looking boats. If I remember correctly we were towed about four in line by a motor launch.

We couldn't get right up to the jetty as the tide was out, so they took us in as far as they could. We were told to have nothing to do with the natives, but not me. I gave my kit bag to one and my pack, and then clambered on to the shoulders of another who took me to the jetty. A lot of the boys carried out the officers' orders and waded in, but Eric, Cam and I and numerous others, did the same as I mentioned above and even some of the officers lowered themselves for once and took a ride.

It was so stupid not to have done it as the Dutch officials had specially mobilised this large force of natives to do just that, and the natives were quite put out about those who, refused to be helped. The order about having nothing to do with natives was so ridiculous as we proved later

on and had we been freer with them than we were we might have had a much better understanding with them and they with us later on when we needed it.

Well, we got ashore O.K. and then we had to stand about and wait for trucks, but not for very long, as everything was fairly well organised, thanks to the Dutch, I imagine. Australian trucks had been there waiting for us for six months, but the Dutch would not allow us to come over until the Japs came into the war.

We were taken to the barracks that had been made for us alongside of, Penfoei Aerodrome, which in peace time was a civilian drome, but now the R.A.A.F. was in charge with the Royal Netherlands Air, Force and the N.E.I. Army. The Dutch had gone to a lot of trouble for us and on their advice we had been supplied with beds which were very heavy and well-made and comfortable.

We were debussed at the entrance to the camp and it was here that we met the Javanese soldiers who later on proved such gallant and game fighters, who lost so much by the enemy in Java. A Javanese soldier, a Sergeant, who was in charge of the guard was very friendly and wanted all of us to come and see him and his wife and child in Koepang. His name was Van Nuisenberg who later on up in the Portuguese Timor was such an able and competent spy for Capt. Van Sweetman, a Dutch Captain who I met a month or so later.

After a lot of preliminary chopping and changing we were eventually settled in a small hut made of bamboo and grass thatched roof with a concrete floor. They were exceedingly well made and all done by native labour. A number of natives were under the command of a senior native who had had training in carpentry. We had a lot of amusing hours asking the Malayan name for the tools they were using and although I can't remember them now. I still recall "pencil" was pronounced "penceel".

All the heavy carting was done by native women who carried the coral rock and concrete in small baskets either on their heads or shoulders. Each basket would not hold as much as the average household bucket. They worked in gangs of 20 to 30, and either had a native man over them or a woman chief who seemed to favour some and harangue others severely for apparently nothing at all. They all either chewed tobacco or sang, laughed and chattered in some way and occasional fights broke the monotony. When this latter happened a stick or some smart kicks were brought into play by the chief of the respective gang.

SETTLING IN – DOWN TO WORK

Things began to straighten out after a few days and we of the L.A.D. started work on the trucks in earnest. Our meals, of course, came out of tins, and after a week or so bread was issued which, although very sour was a change from dog biscuits.

Troops were not allowed leave to Koepang for at least a week, but me being the driver of our ute. I was in after a few days of landing having driven Willersdorf who wasn't such a bad egg if he had only known his job and could have seen his lack of knowledge and let well enough done.

Well, things began to settle down to the same lazy, dassie, humdrum life ,we had been living in Darwin and was now in the office cataloguing all our spare parts which were beginning to arrive. Laurie Ross, who was one of the nicest chaps I had the pleasure to meet in the army and

who smoothed over a lot of upsets in the L.A.D., was then a L/Corporal but was very soon made a Staff Sgt. which I for one was very pleased to see him get as he managed everything and would have been an ideal officer which he became on his return to Australia in August, 1943.

Eric Herd, my pal, who was the second recent addition to our small Unit, had a terrific row with W.O. Willersdorf and in my opinion was justified in his argument and it was the first time that Willersdorf had been spoken to in such a manner. However Laurie smoothed that over but only because he said that he never heard what Eric said and I can't write here what he said as the words are not exactly the words one uses in terms of endearment.

Harry Leviston, who was also a champion chap, heard everything that went on and he gave us a running (and running it was) description of what happened and Harry being never any other way but laughing, gave a very vivid description which proved most amusing. Willersdorf was struck dumb and then came to life running after Eric shouting out: "Halt. Stop. Halt that man." Eric turned round and repeated what he had said inside, which inflamed Willersdorf to fresh hues in the face and temper, but to no avail. Harry was asked had he heard what had been said but denied same although as he said he was almost in agony refraining from laughing. However, after a lot of palaver the whole thing was forgotten, and Christmas was on us.

CHRISTMAS AND INTO THE NEW YEAR - 1942

We were to have had pork for Christmas dinner but finished up with tinned salmon, tinned fruit and dog biscuits and raspberry jam. Pigs were abundant on the island and although they belonged to the natives and a large number were bought for Christmas. The C.O. Lt-Colonel Leggett, who was an excellent soldier and was taken prisoner, said that he didn't think they would be fit to eat, which also was later, proved to be wrong as I had in the 12 months hence, than I had ever seen before.

Christmas passed and we were getting well into January 1942 when I got a dose of dysentery which was followed by a bout of dengue fever followed by malaria, but all were not very serious and only kept me inactive for about a fortnight. By this time we were well organised and were going to move to Baboe, half way between Penfoei and Champlong, the latter being headquarters and hospital situated on a mountain top.

We had lots of leave and plenty of laughs.

I mentioned before that we were not allowed in Koepang for a week but it was notable on each occasion that I was in there in that week that a large proportion of officers and senior N.C.O's., W.O's. and Sergeants, were to be seen in the shops and consequently got the pick of everything before the old private had a chance to get any of the good things. I suppose that is known as good old Australian Army fellowship between officers and men that, we hear so much about, but very seldom see.

At the time we left Darwin our C.O., Capt. R.,C. Neave, was on leave, also one of our fitters, Col Mackenzie, and they arrived back with a lot of 40th Btn. chaps who had gone on leave and some odds and sods of reos in the beginning of February.

Penfoei by this time was protected by one company of 2/40th Btn., "C" Company, the other Companies being spread over about a 30 mile front from Baboe to Tenaure, pronounced, if I

remember correctly, "ten hour". The latter was where all equipment and heavy loads of any description were unshipped and it was situated a few miles south or should I say south west of Koepang. Between Penfoei and Baboe was our Coastal Artillery, the 2/1st Heavy Battery, consisting of two six-inch naval guns standing out plain on top of the coral rocks overlooking the entrance to the bay and to the west or south Koepang. Singapore style I imagine. Good for practice shooting at nothing or if the enemy were silly enough, at them if they came in that way, which they did not.

JAPANESE AIR RAIDS BEGIN

I am not sure now whether they the Japs, started their first raids in January or in February. Sufficient to say one afternoon a plane was spotted very high up in the sky almost invisible so high was it up, and circled for a few minutes and then made off. It was the same procedure they had used everywhere. Spotter today, Zeros or bombers tomorrow. In this case if memory again serves me right, no planes came the next day, but they came with a vengeance the next three.

Beautiful Zeros, but from photos I had seen of Messerschmitts they were more like German planes than Zeros. However I guess they were Japs. Everyone was that excited afterwards that they didn't appear to know exactly what they were.

They scored reasonably well that day. One Dutchman being hit in the knee and one Kittyhawk in for repairs made unrepairable. Needless to say no Japs lost, and could those sons of Tojo fly? They were no mugs. They came in over Champlong in a long powerful glide down on to Penfoei drome.

The alarm had been given in Baboe but apparently not at Penfoei as the Dutchman who was shot saw the planes coming and started to shout that the Americans had arrived, and was jumping up and down with excitement at the prospect of Yank fighter planes coming. His jubilant outburst was cut down very smartly when the plane got close and a burst of machine gun fire raced away from the first plane and chopped the ground up near him. He broke into a smart gallop but was brought down much faster than he could have done voluntarily.

A good pal of mine, Tom Thick, of the 2/ 11th Engineers, also was whacked on the rump in this raid, and I only wish Tom was here to give the details more clearly than I can remember them. However I will try and write them down as best I can and as Tom told me afterward.

It appears that Tom was in the hangar at the time, what for I don't know. Sufficient to say he was there with a couple of Javanese boys who were then looking after the petrol. The nose of the Kittyhawk was there just outside the door of the hangar, and on the first burst from that fast flying Jap Tom and the Javanese tried to drag the Kitty inside, but the next Jap had spotted the Kitty and started firing at it and needless to say Tom and his boys didn't waste time diving for cover under a huge log of wood. For some reason Tom was a bit slow and his rudder was still out in the open when a piece of shrapnel from the Jap's cannon zipped across his stern and sure made him move. He decided that was a bit too hot in there and got up and made for the back door which, to Tom's consternation, was jammed full of Javanese and one or two Aussies all trying to go through in a body like a serum. Just as he got there they broke through with Tom a split second later. He had also been nipped on the arm with some hot lead and some

other portion of his anatomy but nothing serious enough to impede his speed. He made a bee-line for a trench and when he jumped in there was another chap there, Aussie or Javanese I don't know which. Tom said he hadn't been there more than a few seconds when he noticed a peculiar smell and he looked at the other chap and decided. that he had either got into the wrong slit trench or the chap had forgotten where he was, and as Tom said, Zeros or no Zeros his nose couldn't put up with the aroma, and he immediately made for another trench where he waited until the Zeros had finished their exhibition and he then noticed that the Javanese Shell Petrol boy was going up on the roof of the hangar to put a fire out which had been started by incendiaries, so Tom went over and up after him and was helping to beat the fire out when back came the Zeros again. The Javanese boy had the best idea, he just sat down and slid off the roof. Tom went down the ladder and was on the ground a matter of seconds after the Java boy, and he again went for his trench.

When Tom got excited he stuttered a bit and in the telling he got excited and it sounded much more amusing than I have been able to tell it here. But it was not amusing for Tom, believe you' me.

There was also one of the Anti-Tank trucks on the drome and another ute and the driver of the truck made for the ute for some reason and dived underneath same. His truck was riddled with bullets and had he stopped in the seat he would have been killed. The Japs must have decided to give the ute the go by. Things now had brightened up. We were evidently going to see a lot more of these raids. Singapore had gone, of course, and we realised that we would have a very poor show as we numbered only about 1,500 strong with the addition in the last week before the Japs visited us in earnest, by an Ac Ac Battery of Tommies from Java, all veterans of Dunkirk and London, Coventry, Liverpool blitzes, and although I had the pleasure of only meeting one of them the 40th boys who later got through, said: "Let us hear anyone say the Tommies haven't got what it takes and God help them if we are around."

The Tommies only had Bofors and when the Japs did come they nearly cried because the Japs would not come low enough – but more about that when I come to it.

AT CHAMPLONG

I, at this time of the first raid, was having a good time driving the ute between Champlong and Koepang and Tenaure and Penfoei, and very seldom saw B'aboe except late in the evenings and mornings, either driving Laurie or Capt. Neave about.

We had moved half our outfit up to Champlong, consisting of the trailer and one ute and Cpl. Norm Hullick, Ron Mears, and Col McKenzie. They were stationed up in the scrub about a mile and a half above Champlong. Laurie Ross, Capt. Neave, Harry Leriston and myself at Champlong in the shop and house Capt. Neave had commandeered for our use as a store room for our tyres and spare parts. We lived on the verandah.

I suppose I was one of the first Privates, if not the first on the island, to have a personal servant. By first I mean Australians to have a batman who used to clean and wash the mud off my boots before I got up and take my clothes down to be washed every day and do my ironing for which he received the colossal sum of one Gulden or Guilder Dutch paper money. He was so good that Capt. Neave wanted him but, I said no as he had no idea how to treat his own batman, but

I put forward a scheme whereby we four could have him but at the same time I retained full control and they were to pay him one guilder each pay.

I don't remember his name and now as I write I re- member that I was not the first to have a personal boy, but mine seemed more likely to stick than the others had done for their other masters. I felt mighty important having someone working for me and giving the orders, but I had to check on all my things now and again. He wouldn't steal but seemed to believe that what was good for me was just as useful to him and he had a habit of always using my comb and soap and towel but after several threats he stopped all that and I took him wherever I could in the ute.

On Feb. 14, Capt. Neave told me that we would probably be going on a salvage expedition with the Air Force up near Atamboea to salvage some eight Kitty Hawks that had overshot the drome in a rainstorm and had force landed near the coast some 26-odd miles from Atamboea.

I will go back a bit here. Raids, after the first, were, becoming quite common although no bombers had yet put in an appearance and there had been a huge naval battle in the Macassar Straits or so the wireless said, and the Japs had taken Ambon where the 2/21st Bn. had put up such a magnificent show against terrific odds. The Dutch forces also made a good show there.

Kittyhawk's and Douglas Dive Bombers also were landing at Penfoei and going on to Java and all ports north as the saying goes, but none were left for us. We only had Lockheed Hudson bombers that were so helpless against a pack of Zeroes, but we lost more by accidents than we did by enemy fire. They needed replacements bad but were unprocurable.

I was driving a lot between Baboe and Champlong and it was one evening not dark yet, when I got a surprise. I had taken Col down from Champlong to Baboe for the night and was racing back. I always raced on that trip as it was good fun and imagined I was some crack race driver. I was cracked alright, but no track driver. I had a couple of, natives acting as lookouts and was tearing, along about 45 or so when they thumped heavily on the roof of the cabin and pointed up and yelling. I immediately shot of under the trees and jammed my brakes on and got out to see in the sky some 20 odd planes and thought, "Well, Ron me boy, she's on," but after waiting some 10 minutes concluded they were more Kittys or Yanks in some planes making for ports north and so it was. I continued merrily on my way.

Eric, who was driving the breakdown with Joe Dean as his partner, was being worked night and day as the A.S.C. and trucks belonging to the Battalion were carting stores and bombs day and night and not a few were having accidents and breakdowns. Things were definitely getting more and more hectic.

CONCEALING THE TRUCK

I remember one time Capt. Neave and I were just rolling out of Penfoei over the new concrete bridge when some Aussies were running towards us and pointing upwards. I jammed the brake on but did not throw the clutch in as I reckoned this would stall the engine. It did and acted as a brake. Reggie piled out his side and I tumbled out mine and jumped over the side of the low concrete parapet into the mud of the creek. Luckily I jumped where it was hard. Not so our Reggie Neave - mud up over his ankles. He swore. I laughed.

Unfortunately there was no cover for the truck and at the time we had had no inclination where or how close the planes were and in any case we didn't stop to think of the truck. I thought of Mrs. Trengrove's youngest son first.

At this moment up came the Battalion Provost Sgt. who didn't like our ute because we were always exceeding the speed limit, exceedingly so may I add, and he had never been able to catch us red handed. He said: "Who's the driver of this truck?" I said: "I am." He said: "Well take it away under cover." I said: "If you think so much of the so and so truck, you shift it." He said: "Get it out of here!" "Not me," I said, although I thought the planes were rather long in appearing. Anyway after an argument with Capt. Neave our gallant Sgt. Provost succeeded in getting me to shift it, which I did about 50 yards away underneath a solitary tree that was about as thick as my arm and all its branches on top at about 15 feet.

I came back and laughed but by then we had decided it was a false alarm so I raced back, got the ute and picked Reggie up and we scooted along the road that ran around the edge of the drome at about 70 mile per hour because a truck on that road stood out like a mountain on a mole hill. Reggie was acting spotter, a job which we took in turns.

I could go on telling about such things and lots of other times we had some scares and laughs but that is not my purpose in writing this diary.

To get back to Feb. 14. We packed our gear, Norm, Capt Neave and I, and in the morning, Sunday, 15th, we set off with the Air Force 30 cwt. truck, the ute belonging to the Fortress Sigs, with a Lt. and two Sigs.

THE QANTAS FLYING BOAT

I'm afraid I must go back again to tell about the time Capt. Neave and I went to the Pashen Grande (hotel) in Koepang for lunch and while having lunch which in those places consists of rice and more rice with a large flat dish some two feet in diameter with small dishes which fit inside the large dish like small squares, and in these small dishes there are delicacies of all descriptions.

Little fish about the size of sardines very highly flavoured and salty, and other dishes containing things that I know nothing about. Some looked good and some didn't. However I tried most of them including the chicken, goat, and deer meat, then we had coffee such as one never has had before in Australia. Thick, strong and one makes it very sweet.

While there three chaps came to lunch who belonged or were employed by the Qantas or Imperial Airways. They were Co-Pilot, Engineer I think, and one passenger off the flying boat that was shot down off the south coast of Timor by seven Jap Zeroes. It appears that they were flying along at a reasonable altitude when they sighted these seven Japs who were diving or about to dive on the Qantas plane, the pilot of which immediately put the big ship into a dive but of course he was not in the hunt getting her to water level before they got close enough to shoot. Well, the Japs opened up on them wounding and probably killing some of the passengers. The pilot of the Qantas boat managed to get the big ship onto the water where she fell in halves cut by machine gun bullets. The co-pilot was thrown clean through the glass above him out into the water. One of the passengers who had been hit in the knee was lucky

enough to grab a mail bag which kept him afloat for a long time and enabled him to eventually get to shore. He incidentally could not swim. The co-pilot had never swum more than 200 yards in his life and the other passenger who was a manager of a plantation in Borneo had not been much further than a quarter of a mile in his life, and a rough estimate was that they were not more than a mile and a half from land, in shark infested waters. Also when they got closer to land there was a good chance of them meeting up with crocodiles or alligators. Personally the difference between the two latter animals are not worth worrying about. I think they both have a taste for human beings. Well they reached shore by devious means, and now I am not too certain whether four or three men escaped from the ship.

Unfortunately they landed on a strip of land that was divided from the mainland by a river and although the plantation manager who was English, by the way, could speak Malay, he could not entice the natives to come over with food because of the crocs that were in the river, so he had to swim over himself and get it. He sent a note by natives to Koepang and after about two days a launch came round and picked them up. The Dutch doctor who attended the chap with a wound in the knee, said that the immersion in salt water had saved his leg from infection and amputation.

The reason, I guess, why the Japs shot the flying boat down was because they had evidently found out that small arms and other supplies were being flown to Singapore in Imperial Airways ships. Unfortunately the one they attacked had only passengers aboard, all plantation managers from Borneo and a few other British possessions up that way, who had been on a visit to Sydney for a conference. I forget the name of the flying boat.

A SPECIAL JOB

Now I will try and continue on with the trip to salvage the planes. We went through Soe some two hours after setting out from Headquarters. By the by I had my breakfast that morning in the Officers' Mess - some contrast to our meals and mess - hotel fashion A La De Luxe - waited on too. Must be marvellous to be one of the chosen few.

Soe was a beautiful town situated on a high mountain. The scenery we had already viewed was comparable to any I have seen in Australia. The view from Soe was a superb panoramic sight. One could see part of the Mena River which we had crossed at the base of the mountain by means of a long bridge some three quarters of a mile in length and known as the Mena River Bridge.

Also we could see some lovely valleys and away out to sea and part of the coast. We didn't stop long there. This was my second time there. I was to see it twice more but I didn't know about the second time then.

We passed on through various small native villages one not far from Soe the name of it I can't recall was later to become a prison camp for our boys.

After we had gone down the mountain the other side of Soe, if I remember correctly, some 50 miles of descent, we came to a new concrete bridge over a gorge with sheer rock sides and from one side to the other about 100 feet across. This bridge was also later blown up and stopped the Japs for a month.

We stopped after we had crossed and the Air Force chappies took some snaps of this fine bridge which had only been completed some two months or so.

We moved off again with us taking the lead and racing ahead to arrange for lunch for 11 at Kefamenanoe, about 50 mile from Soe. Capt. Neave was at the wheel and when he was at the wheel one needed all one's nerves together and under control to stand the strain. He nearly put us over an embankment. In fact the front wheels had dropped over but that's, all. We managed to get her back on the road between the three of us. Norm got into a very bad temper and said some things about some drivers and their habits and where they should be.

However, we arrived at Kefamenanoe in good time and had lunch ready by the time the others arrived. We had a nice meal and it was here that. I had my second glass of stout, or it was like stout. It was called Anker Denker. I first had some in Koepang with a Dutch Captain of an oil tanker who was very soon after blown up by Jap bombers up near Singapore. This Anker Denker was an excellent drink, and I liked it.

After lunch we had a walk around the town. It was a pretty town in a valley. The Chinese owned all the shops and there were some very nice Dutch houses there. It was only a small population with a Dutch Administrator in charge, but the town houses and other buildings were spread well out. There were nice gardens on most properties with flowers as one sees in Australia.

We left there and went on our way to Atamboe which we reached about seven that night. We had a clean-up at the Dutch Army Barracks and walked back up to the Pashea Grande for dinner which also was another excellent meal.

CAPTAIN NEAVE AND THE TIMOR PONY

We met Capt. Van Sweetman and he said that everything was ready for us in the morning. Norm and I slept together in one of the Dutch Sgts. rooms and we arose early in the morning with another meal at the Pashea Grande we set out with 11 saddle ponies and some pack horses with our tools and other gear aboard them and some 60 odd native porters who seemed to carry almost as much as the horses.

Capt Van Sweetman led the party on a beautiful pure white Timor pony which he had named Pooti. We had two Javanese soldiers with us, -one bringing up the rear of us who were riding and the other one who took charge of the bearers. It was raining and we followed the road for a few miles then branched off into the bush. We didn't actually get on to the horses till we reached this point as we were taken to this point by truck where we each selected a horse. Mine proved to be a very spirited blighter. I succeeded in losing my hat going down the first mountain from the road and had the devil's own job turning him round to get it. However I did manage and we eventually all got down to the foot of the mountain and across a creek and then we - were going along some boggy and flat country.

I have seen some funny things happen on horseback but I have never seen anything so funny as Capt. Neave. He had a tin hat on and was hunched up on the saddle like some crack jockey, but he didn't ride like one. Tom Thick at some future date gave the exact description. Unfortunately this has to be kept clean.

His horse was very stubborn and I guess objected to the rider. He tried to belt it along with a stick and then with heels which from my position in the rear, one of the Air Force chappies poked the horse in the rump with his rifle and away went the pony. Reggie's arms, head, legs and body went to work. I was absolutely convulsed with laughter. The tin hat bobbed up and down like a cork in rough water. His arms flapped up and down as if he was about to take off and his legs were flying out and back like as if he was trying to go sideways and forwards at the same time. His body was see-sawing like as if he was doing some violent exercise. Altogether a very amusing sight. Then the horse stopped and refused to go any further except when led by one of the Javanese boys, and an occasional crack on its rear from behind by another Javanese boy.

The country we were now passing through was very jungly and wet now but after riding for some three hours we eventually arrived at a native village for lunch but not before one of the Air Force boys had gone over his horse's head when it went down to its belly in a bog. It was very funny and I wish that I had kept a diary of that trip.

I might add that when we stopped for lunch Ronald Claude was very sore and had the skin worn away from his seat (the latter being me) and some ointment was applied to the sore spot.

We made good time and arrived at Batapoeti before dark where we were to make camp and work from there. The natives immediately were put to work to make lean-tos for all, themselves included. These rough shelters were composed of sticks in the sand with cross bars and palm boughs laid and tied down and appeared like a gable roof with one side taken away. We were camped some 200 yards from the beach amongst the coconut plantation.

SALVAGING THE KITTYHAWKS

One plane was here on its nose with the tail up in a tree with the cockpit facing the ground. The pilot had made a perfect landing in the bad light on this strip and had only hit or seen the only tree in the strip too late to miss it. He was unhurt other than a gash on the nose.

The other seven planes were some two or three miles further on and a bit inland in a big swamp. I went to them next day on my own.

We had tea out of tins and then had a smoke. We got very little sleep that night as the mosquitoes had no trouble in getting inside the nets we had and swatting, cursing and groaning were heard all night.

We arose early and after breakfast started work on the plane. This was Tuesday by the way. We were stripping the Kitty pretty fast. We of the L.A.D. were after parts to fit up our Caterpillar Diesel Motor that Col Mackenzie and I had set up on concrete blocks at Champlong to supply electricity for the hospital there and electric power for our own use.

The Fortress Sigs were after the wireless sets in the Kittyhawk's and the R.A.A.F. were after spare parts to fix up the Kitty the Japs had shot up and future planes (if any). They needn't have bothered and likewise us and the Sigs but as one can't see into the future ahead we went.

It was while stripping the guns that Capt Van Sweetman had a narrow escape from being shot and having his head blown completely off. He showed less agitation about it than anyone. I was sitting under the wing on a piece of engine cowling. A mechanic was standing up with his

head and shoulders in the cockpit stripping the instrument panel and the stick with the gun controls on it. Capt. Neave and Flying Officer Cole were sitting on the bottom side of the wing which of course was facing the deep blue sky taking out the hydraulic gadget that worked the guns. Capt. Van Sweetman was standing watching a fitter working on the motor a little in front of the two officers on the upturned wing and in direct line of the 3.5 machine guns.

The chappie in the cockpit sung out to the pseudo mechanics on the wing not to touch anything as he was taking the firing mechanism out. Whether our would be mechanics caused the gun to go off I don't know and neither do I, but I do know that they were fiddling about when it went pop. Of course it made a noise much louder than that. Anyway I know that I cleared the ground by at least four feet and was in danger of hitting my head on the wing of the plane which the tallest man in the outfit could walk under without stooping.

The mechanic on the engine nearly dived into the engine booster and our two bright lads on the wing looked as if they had been struck by lightning. The bullet from the gun could not have missed parting Capt. Van Sweetman's hair by more than the thickness of a cigarette paper. He calmly turned round and made some casual remark about it being close and then smiled. Oh, boy, what nerves. He never even changed colour. There were a lot of words thought but not spoken. Our two potential engineers both disclaimed responsibility.

It was here that I had my first drink of *tuaca*, pronounced *too ark uh*. It's a sap from a sort of a large palm tree and is gathered over night by cutting a limb off the tree and a bamboo bottle being hung underneath to catch the drips of sap. It tastes like strong ginger ale when fresh, but when allowed to ferment, boy, has it some kick, as Arch MacRury can tell.

Tuesday afternoon I made my way out to the other planes and I come to a shameful part of my career. I salvaged the clocks out of four of the Kittyhawk's. I also got a sheath knife out of a parachute.

The three other planes were some distance up in the hills from the swamp. I did not bother to go up to them. The planes in the swamp had been landed various ways but none successfully. They were all piled up. Some with under carriage down, some up.

Two pilots had parachuted down. One landed in a tree and had his neck broken. The other one landed O.K. One of these planes that came to earth on its own caught fire. I did not see any of these three planes.

I returned to camp and we had, tea and then went to bed, not before I had given Capt. Neave, Norm Hulick and one of the Air Force chappies one each of these clocks.

Next day we all went out to the wrecks at the swamp and it was here that F.O. Cole made the tragic discovery that all the luminous clocks had disappeared. Of course I knew entirely nothing about it and after the officers going into a huddle the matter was left until we returned to camp that evening.

The Sigs officer was walking round one of the planes when he let out a yell and brought his leg out of the mud and slush which by the way was knee deep in most places, to find that his foot was badly cut and streaming blood. It had been opened up by a piece of metal that had sunk

down in the mud from the plane. It was then the Sigs last day as they were already overdue back at Klupalima, the fort.

Well, we worked here on the instrument panels and guns and got the ammo and trays holding the ammo out. We didn't get all the guns and it was Capt. Neave's brilliant idea to set these guns up at Penfoei to be used as Ac-Ac. How they were going to be set up was as yet a vague idea in Reggy's mind.

I'm not certain now whether it was Wednesday or Tuesday that we saw a large formation of Jap bombers coming back from Koepang but we sure did see them and we had seen some two or three times on Monday going to and returning from Koepang. We afterwards learnt that they had unsuccessfully bombed some ships between Tenaure and the island of Semoa, and also the guns at Klupalima.

We returned to camp that night and Capt. Neave said to me after tea that some of the clocks had to be returned. He didn't want to part with his and I didn't with mine, and I had no intention of doing so unless he did, so the upshot was he handed his over to me, likewise Norm and the Air Force chappie. I returned them all after a lot of deliberation and put them amongst the panels underneath the lean-to hut where we had put everything that we had stripped from the planes.

RETURN TO BASE AT CHAMPLONG

The Sigs Officer and his two men returned in the small boat that arrived early next morning to Atapoepoe, some 15 miles up the coast, and just after they left a note arrived by a Javanese soldier. It contained an order for the Air force personnel to return immediately and be back not later than midnight Thursday.

Capt. Neave immediately decided he would go and take Norm with him and leave me to pack up the gear. The Air Force chaps had to pack so they and I left some two hours after Capt. Neave arrived. F.O. Cole took the clocks with him.

We arrived back on the road at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Again I was left to see that all the gear turned up as there was a large portion of the gear being brought out by the native porters.

Capt. Neave came back in the ute about an hour later and he said that I should have taken no notice of Cole and come up to Atamboea, but now he had decided to go to Atapoepoe and pick up some of the Kitty's guns and ammunition that had been sent there in the boat.

We got there about 5 o'clock where I had my first meal since about 6 a.m. that day, some rice and small salted fish with hot chilli sauce and I mean hot and some good hot coffee, but no sugar. It was here I met Sgt. Slickter, a young Dutch Sergeant who was also later taken prisoner. We left there after getting a phone message from Staff Capt. Arnold to return to Champlong immediately.

We stopped at Kefamenanoe for some coffee and a bite to eat and while sitting in the lounge waiting for it Norm was bitten by a scorpion which didn't improve his temper.

We raced away again to Soe but not before we smacked a buffalo in the rear. We had to get out and lift and prise the mudguard off the back wheel. It was of course pitch dark and as Capt. Neave was always a speed merchant I had secretly scraped some black paint off the headlamps before we left Atamboea while he was getting something. He said I had better scrape some off when he came back so Norm and I winked and scraped more off.

We had coffee at Soe and something else to eat and got back to Champlong at 3 o'clock Friday morning. We, Norm and I, went to bed but were up again at 6.30. Capt. Neave and I were supposed to go down to Baboe in the ute with spare parts and pick up two fitters and go on to Klapalima or Koepang and operate as an L.A.D. wherever the trucks were or where we were needed, but when Capt. Neave went to see the Brigadier to get permission to go down to Baboe to carry out the aforementioned plan Brigadier Veale said no. I had to sit in the ute for two hours while Reggie did his best to make the Brigadier see his point of view, but to no avail.

THE JAPANESE ASSAULT

We had had an early breakfast, we being all personnel at Champlong which included a section of Engineers, A.S.C., L.A.D. and other odds and ends who were there. This was before 7 o'clock Jap planes had been over in large numbers and were still over dropping those things that don't care who they hit. Anti personal I believe they call them, also a lot of other names but as they say in Hoyts, unsuitable for general exhibition. High explosives were also being dropped in large lumps as well.

It was just on seven when some terrific explosions were felt and heard. Everyone looked at everyone and said, there goes the drome at Penfoei which had been mined for the past six weeks with more dynamite than Whelan the Wrecker could have got rid of in his busiest wrecking mood. Enough to have delighted Lawrence of Arabia for years to come could he have but seen it.

Also a bomb dump was blown to blazes and various petrol and oil dumps in the vicinity of Koepang and Penfoei. I was ordered back to my precious ute. If I drove it ten yards I had to fill it up with petrol. Capt. Neave was not going to be caught with a light tank of petrol.

At about a quarter to eight Jap bombers came from everywhere. They didn't touch Champlong. Whether they knew the hospital was there we don't know but we guessed that they saw the A.S.C. stores were there and a huge ammo dump and petrol was about a mile further up from Champ. The island was rotten with spies and fifth columnists.

Things started to get a bit hectic here and so much went on that I have difficulty in remembering what followed, what with it being such a long time ago and so many events following one another in, quick succession.

But I will try and set it out as it happened. I may have to go back on myself occasionally but that can't be helped as one thing brings to mind other events which have already happened and I temporarily forgot.

JAPANESE PARATROOPS LAND

At 8 o'clock I was sitting in the ute still waiting for Capt. Neave to get permission from the Brig. for us to go down, when someone shouted paratroops are being landed. I went to get out of

the truck to go and see them but Reggie appeared and told me to stay put. While everyone else rushed down behind the hospital to see the spectacle of some 600 paratroops dropping from the sky.

They dropped from some 25 or 30 transport planes preceded by a severe ground strafing of Zeroes and other Jap fighter planes. They dropped onto an open and clear piece of ground about 130 yards from B'aboe on the Champlong side and about the same distance from our L.A.D. store van and breakdown wagon which were opposite the house we had commandeered.

From here I will tell it as Eric Herd, my pal, experienced it and saw it personally. He had been out nearly all night dragging trucks in and his last job on the breakdown truck was to bring a disabled Bren Carrier from Klapalima. When the raids started on Baboe he was in the house and the rest of the boys were there also.

Naturally they all went for their slit trenches that we had dug outside. I had dug one when I had been stationed there and unfortunately it used to leak in the bottom and was at this time rather slushy on the bottom. It was also the rainy season over there.

Joe Dean, who was Eric's offsider on the breakdown, had only a few minutes previous changed into a clean outfit of clothes. When the first alarm went Joe, who didn't like aeroplanes, especially unfriendly ones, bolted for the first trench which happened to be mine. He dived into it and low and behold was smothered in sticky, watery mud. Joe, from all accounts did not appreciate this at all and after the first wave went over and the all clear was given Joe went and changed into another clean outfit. He did look nice and away went the alarm again and so did Joe to repeat his first performance. Sort of act 2, scene 1, sort of style or maybe it was just practice. Anyway Joe once more got into a clean change or put his original clothes back on, I'm not too sure which.

Eric who had been on the ground in one of these raids with a handkerchief rolled up in a pad fashion between his teeth and slightly raised up from the ground on his hands, was getting a good shaking up from the explosions that, were going off round him and he was biting so hard on the old handkerchief that a gold filling he had in his teeth popped out never to be found, alas; alack, and alaska. The loss of this made him very annoyed and determined to get a Jap one day for it. Personally I think the gold was worth half a dozen of the yellow men, but who am I to quibble.

Don Company of the 2/40th Btn were the roving company at Baboe. That is wherever the Japs struck Don Company was to go. Well some 20 minutes or so before the paratroops dropped Don Company got a message supposedly from an ally in the shape of the Timorese native Rajah of Koepang, that Japs had landed at some place on the south coast, the name of which I cannot remember. Anyway it meant that Don Company had to go and go they did. The distance would be some 20 miles or more.

No sooner had they left than the raids started in earnest and the Zeros and dive bombers gave everything a pasting. This was when Eric lost his gold filling. He said every time the dive bomber started their dives he was sure it as coming straight for him. They however were bombing the kitchens which were all under one roof and the food was sent out in trucks which

to my mind had been a mistake from the first as if the Japs found out it would be one of the first places to go, and evidently they had found out because that was their target. It was machine gunned, dive bombed and severely knocked about.

The babbling brooks (cooks) were sheltering in holes near the cook house, except Ace who was in a sort of a washaway in the bank at the back of the cook house and he reckoned that one of the dive bomber pilots had seen him and I guess Ace was correct because as that worthy lad said after: I said to myself, Ace, that bloke has taken a definite dislike to you and is out to get you so move boy, and move he did into the nearest slit trench which he had no sooner reached than a bomb landed in the exact place where he had been crouching.

In the meantime bombing was going on around Baboe and by this time there were only about 12 or 15 men left in this little town and it was nearly 8 o'clock when Eric sung out to the boys that some more bombers were on their way. They were strung out in a long line and imagine everyone's surprise when instead of bombs bodies began to fall with great white billowing parachutes opening up behind them. What could they do, those few men in Baboe against 600 paratroops with Zeroes circling and strafing every blade of grass that moved, so they decided to beat a retreat for the rocks up the back of their sleeping quarters, but not before W.O. Willersdorf had set fire to the store van. They never had time to burn or put out of action the breakdown. That was done later by Don Company men, I think.

Capt. Neave's batman would not go with the rest of our L.A.D. boys. He went across the road into a slit trench with one of the Sigs and the last we heard of him some days later was that the last some of the 40th had seen of him was in Baboe with a bullet wound high upon his left shoulder.

We at Champlong, after two days of waiting to hear from the L.A.D. boys, gathered that they were either killed or taken prisoner.

THE FIGHTING CONTINUES

Now to continue my side of the story of the next two days and Friday. The first Japs, which were paratroops landed at about 8 o'clock on the Friday, 20th February, 1942, just two months and eight days after we landed.

We at Champlong waited all day for news of how the fighting was going. Planes roared overhead all day but none of them had that colour patch we longed to see. The bombing was terrific and it now sounded as if naval guns had been added to the din and we knew that they were not ours.

The few Dutch troops comprising Dutchmen and Javanese, came through on their trucks and by all accounts had a bad time. They later in the day tried to go through the Jap lines but were stopped by a road block. A concrete block which a Bren Gun Carrier tried to tow off the road but without success. The block was later blown to pieces by our engineers.

About 9 o'clock in the morning Capt. Neave came to me and said that we of the L.A.D. and two Tommy Gunners making five men in all, were to go out past Champlong on the road to Soe to look for a paratrooper who was supposed to have landed behind us. We searched the road either side for some miles and questioned one or two natives but saw no sign of the suspect.

Expectancy and nervousness was reaching a high pitch as we could get no information from below as to what was going on. Everything was set to blow our ammo dump, petrol and ordnance stores sky high, likewise the house we slept in with all our tyres and spare parts. This was later abandoned because the hospital would have been flattened, so the Japanese got all these supplies which were to have lasted us for six months, including food supplies. No one seems to know why the hospital was so close to all these stores, but there it is, it was and what's the use of saying or blaming anyone then or now.

Night came and a very nervous night it was. There was roughly 200 men at Champlong including hospital staff and sick and a few wounded. The Major of the Fortress guns and one corporal had been brought by ambulance from Klapalima seriously wounded. Both died after a few hours, wounded by bombs. The driver of the ambulance was driving along near B'aboe when what he thought were Dutchmen fired on him. He stopped to abuse them heartily, wanting to know who and what the so and so blazes they thought he was and when these supposedly green clad Dutchmen arrived closer he amazedly stared, then in double time jumped back into the cab and drove away. These green clad men were Jap marines.

Another attempt was made to bring wounded to Champlong but the Japanese refused to let any more go through to hospital. All our natives of Champlong had said goodbye and taken to the hills. All the natives when we came to the island and up to when the Japs landed thought that one Australian was as good as, 100 Japs. Their disappointment must have been terrific when after three hard days of battling against odds of nearly a thousand to one Col. Leggett had no alternative but to surrender.

Saturday morning brought more paratroops and supplies by air; for those already established. A rough guess of how many were or had been landed in this fashion between us and Baboe was 1,200 Japs, and now we had good reason to believe that some 18,000 seaborne troops had been landed somewhere near Koepang but nowhere near where our boys had expected and prepared for them. The two six inch fortress guns had already been blown up without firing a shot as no crews could have withstood the bombing they received. Although the Japs never actually hit the guns our own men blew them to pieces.

TO SOE

I don't know whether our anti guns ever went into action but someday I hope we will know much more than anyone knows now. We got orders to evacuate Champlong to Soe which we did sometime on Saturday. I can't for the life of me remember whether it was daytime or night time. I think it was early in the morning on Saturday in darkness, but that is open to contradiction.

I, for one, could not but help feel badly about Eric and the other boys of our outfit at Baboe. It seemed like desertion. We had all been together so long and now when we were in trouble and meeting the enemy, here we were split up, one half not knowing what had happened to the other half.

We arrived at Soe, the L.A.D. ute with Reggie driving, took up last position as an L.A.D. should. We took everything we might need in the way of spare parts and personal gear, the latter being, cut down to a minimum, one complete change of shorts and shirt and a couple of

changes of socks. I took five new tooth brushes I bought in the canteen a week or so before and about three tubes of toothpaste, and three or four cakes of soap. My shaving outfit that I had given to me in 1941 and my writing case that my sister gave me and some photos of Mum and Dad.

We did nothing at Soe but walk round and later in the morning we, that is Laurie Ross, and Col and Harry, Norm and myself, went for a swim in the lovely concrete and tiled pool that was fed by a stream from up in the mountain.

During the day we saw some Jap planes going towards Koepang but not as many as on Friday. I don't remember that we did anything special on Saturday other than go around the various trucks and check them over and walk around passing and listening to various opinions from everyone who knew as much as the .heads themselves knew.

A guard had been placed on the road some few miles out of Soe and this was maintained up to the last minute that we evacuated Soe. Sunday morning arrived bright and clear when it was decided that the L.A.D. personnel would return to Champlong for more spare parts and information. We left Soe early and when we got to the guard Capt. Arnold pulled us up and told us that a phone message had come through to say that some of the L.A.D. and some cooks had turned up at Champlong. I was so pleased that tears came to my eyes and for once Capt. Neave could not drive fast enough to please me.

UNCERTAIN TIME

When we arrived at Champlong those of us in the back of the ute nearly broke our necks getting out to greet our mates. I saw Eric and Roy and Cam before the truck stopped. I dived on to them and felt like kissing and hugging them and for the life of me I couldn't stop sniffing and laughing. More like crying, I guess.

W.O. Willersdorf in charge of the party of L.A.D. and cooks had walked all the way inland to Champlong which had taken them 2 1/2 days with little or nothing to eat, dodging the planes and Japs who at times were very close to them. The Japs had a series of bird calls such as owl hoots and other types of birds, as signals to let one another know where they were and quite a number of times the small party had had Japs on either side.

There is a lizard on Timor which because of its queer noise, we named Choco and made a call which sounded just like the word Choco only dragged out much more than that and repeated about five times. Whilst they were settling down for the first night, using banana leaves for blankets, Eric said as one of these lizards started its croaking cry: "If he goes five or more we will know the Japs are not near." It was only said in a joke, but as the boys said after everyone unconsciously counted every lizard they heard and heaved sighs of relief when it reached five. They cursed Eric heartily for ever saying it.

We got the things that we came back for and waited until evening before we moved out. I forgot to tell about what happened before we left Champ the first time. We destroyed three new Chevrolet motors which were still in their crates, by giving them some gentle taps with a 14 lb. hammer and ditto the diesel motor Col and I had lost so much sweat over. As we left all other things intact we may just as well have left these intact.

We had, we being our fitters, fixed a motor bike up during the day also a couple of heavy trucks. I was to ride the bike back to Soe and as it was getting towards evening and the light on the bike was nearly useless I was told by Reggie to leave immediately the time then being about 5 o'clock Sunday evening.

I was kicking the bike over when a dumb cluck of a driver batman came up the road on a push bike and said the Japs were at the bottom of Champlong hill and that the Yanks had landed at Koepang.

Well it caused a stir believe you me and I was further ordered to move away with the news to Soe, for what it was worth. It wasn't worth anything as the Japs did not arrive up there for another couple of days at least.

I reported to Capt. Arnold after reaching Soe and told him who had given the information and he said he didn't believe it especially the Yank part of the message. This chappie who gave the alarm was later severely tongue lashed for his stupidity in not verifying the fact about the Japs and for starting a false rumour about the Yanks. The Japs he supposedly heard were some of "C" Company men who had battled their way through the Jap lines and got to the bridge near Champlong and it was these chaps being challenged by the guard down there that this brilliant specimen of manhood had heard and taken for granted that they were Japs. Where he got the rumour about the Yanks no one, not even himself, seemed clear on. But he started a panic at Champ.

JAPS DIDN'T HAVE IT ALL THEIR OWN WAY

All trucks were ordered to leave with or without their load and Eric was to drive our ute out and some of our lads were a bit slow getting something and a certain Captain who I have mentioned quite often wanted to leave them behind but Laurie said to Eric, don't move off until I tell you, and this made the Captain very wild, threatening nothing short of a firing squad for Staff-Sgt, Ross and Eric, but wait they did and it was all later forgotten when it was found that certain officers had allowed the panic to spread.

As the last truck raced away from Champlong the chaps from "C" Company, about 13 in all, saw the last one race away and shouted out to it but it never stopped. However they caught us later at Atamboea.

On Monday word came through that Col. Leggett had surrendered to the enemy as he could hold out no longer. The men were tired having practically no sleep for three days, and before that nights on guard and false alarms, then fighting against such terrific odds with no meals except tins of bully beef and a packet of dog biscuits, and bayonet charges and bombs, shelling, strafing. Just a general hell without hope of reinforcements who had been turned back eight hours from landing. The 2/4th Pioneers and 600 Yankee Artillery men and various other reinforcements numbering somewhere near 2,000 men.

What wouldn't we have given to have seen them two weeks ago, and the promised fighter squadron that secret runways had been built for, that never' arrived. It was useless to fight, but they did and Don Company paid the account for the trick that was played on them by wiping out most of the paratroops on their return to Baboe. They threw grenades in the huts and set

fire to them when the Japs refused to come out. They riddled the huts with tommy gun slugs and rifle and machine gun fire. It was sweet revenge.

The disabled carrier the L.A.D. left behind that wouldn't go into any gear but first, the Japs got that on the road and was causing us casualties when //Leo// came along in the only other good carrier out of the ten (something else attributed to two officers and a W.O. that was in working order. The Japs stopped in the middle of the road and jumped behind it to shoot at Leo and his crew, one of whom jumped out and fired his tommy gun at the legs he could see behind the Jap controlled carrier, then jumped back into the carrier and Leo let her go flat out past the Japs and as they sailed past one of the crew dropped a grenade into the Japs carrier which must have went and made an awful mess as our grenades have a habit of doing when released for duty.

//Possibly referring to Cpl Leonard Jack Bell, TX 2945 - 4 PI Carriers
<http://www.sparrowforce.com/2-40th%20posting-unit.pdf> – see also Henning, *Doomed Battalion*: 141.//

Just after this Leo was winged in the ear by a Jap sniper. Unfortunately for that worthy fellow he was spotted up in his tree and because they could, not get enough elevation on the Lewis mounted in the back of the carrier. Leo backed her over the edge of the road and the gunner poured 240 rounds into the tree before the Jap fell out. He had been tied to the tree. A habit they had. Then they came on to Champlong later to come on to Soe and thence Atamboea.

THE ENGLISH ACK-ACK CROWD

Leo told a good story about the English ack-ack crowd who were the cause of him and his carrier crew being at Atamboea to tell the tale. But as the details are not fresh enough in my memory I cannot set it out clear enough, but suffice to say that Tommies are tops with Leo and his crowd. He told us about how the Tommies couldn't get the Japs to come within range of the Bofors guns which have a ceiling of some 3,000 feet. So while a couple of Tommies stood out in the road and waved towels and anything else to make the enemy dive at them, the others would stand by at the guns and when the Zeroes or dive bombers came low enough to spray lead at the men in the road, the gunners would sight them up and in this fashion got nine Jap planes the first day and at least seven the next day which wasn't a bad piece of work.

They wished that they had had their 3.7 that they knew so well in Dunkirk, London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and from a host of other towns in England and France. Veterans of air raids every one of them. Every man of them who was not killed was taken prisoner with our boys because after they were within two miles of Champlong their Major stopped one of the 40th Don Rs to be told that the Battalion was surrounded. Upon hearing this the Tommy Major turned around and went and gave assistance. We believe he broke through the Japs but could not break out again. I guess they were in much the same condition as our boys. When they hadn't been on the guns they were doing infantry work where and when they were needed. Whilst doing the latter they had made it possible for Leo with his carrier and crew to get out.

Some of the Japs in Baboe had found our canteen stores and made the mistake of drinking our beer and getting slightly pickled. Leo and his gang, all Tassies by the way, peeped in the door and then let a tommy gun peep and for good measure a grenade. Exit from this world Japs.

TO SURRENDER OR NOT

Up at Soe after the message arrived about the surrender, with advice for us to do the same from the Jap commander. Brigadier Veale said "No", but his staff advised him to throw in the sponge.

We were given, we being all ranks under officers, a sales talk about surrendering according to the military code. But Yours Truly had other ideas. While one was free one had a chance of getting back to Australia. Once a prisoner one may not even have had the chance of life, let alone escape. I told Laurie that I had no intention of giving myself up as I reckoned I could live in the hills and make, for the coast to see what the chances were of getting a boat of sorts to get to Australia as we had compasses and well knew where Darwin was, but any part of the coast was good enough for me.

Laurie, a married man, was all for it and we were stripping our packs of things we didn't want or could do without and putting food in tins in their place. Capt. Neave did his best to dissuade us from going bush, but I had made my mind up and was going even if I went alone. As Eric and the others in the L.A.D. were not at all keen on it remembering the recent experience, later changed their minds, and by that time it had been decided that we would retreat still further to Atamboea. This was decided in the afternoon and then everyone seemed to be racing around putting gear back in trucks and taking unwanted gear out.

TRUCK CONVOY TO ATAMBOEA

We in our truck left a good portable sigs wireless behind on orders, of course. I won't tell you on whose orders because you will think him a bigger dope than he was and if you think that you're right, he was. A brilliant officer of the C.M.F. who wouldn't join the A.I.F. unless he could join as an officer. Those last few words I heard that man say in Darwin. Needless to say he was an absolute panicky, nervous, dithering, fool whose money got for him anything he wanted. There was not one officer who I knew who had any time for him and would go the other way rather than see him or have to speak to him. He was later mentioned in despatches or commended, which will only show that not all medals are won by the right men, but in this case no one should have got anything. We all did a job and it was all for the one reason, safety first, and by first I mean every man for himself, but later on I will tell more of this brilliant piece of work.

We were all ready to go late in the afternoon. Every truck, ute, and man loaded with as much as they could carry. The truck I was in was a three ton Chev loaded with petrol. We were about in the middle of the convoy of some 25 vehicles. It seemed strange at this time of the afternoon, for a few minutes before the first truck pulled out a fog started to come in one end of Soe while we were going out the other. Just as if it had been sent to cover our withdrawal. I wonder if it was?

We got to Atamboea some 100 odd miles early after midnight, not without mishap. My truck bogged going around the sharp turn off at Kefamenanoe, but was soon pulled out by another. A Dutch Sgts motorbike would not take the grade up one mountain so it was sent over the side to hurtle down the valley. A ute was overturned but no casualties sustained. It was righted and continued on its way. It was a nightmare drive as I seemed to have had very little sleep for a

week and I hadn't really had much during the days. Had been doing something all day long. I don't know how the driver kept awake but I was nodding every few miles. That was the reason why I never drove and because he had had more experience in the three tonners than I. The three ton trucks we had over there seemed to have a nasty habit of turning over for no reason at all as Eric well knows because he had had many a sleepless night on the road to Tenaure salvaging them.

AT ATAMBOEA

At Atamboea we were eventually organised into small parties with an officer or Sgt. in charge and given various buildings around the town to sleep in. Guards, of course, had to be maintained and various other duties performed.

The heads, Brig. Veale, Capt. Arnold, Brigade Major, Capt. Neave and a couple of other Majors and Captains, stopped at Capt. Van Sweetman's house and the Pashun Grande. Sweetman's house was in the centre of the town overlooking the park and most of the town. Situated in a lovely garden and lawns the house was very pretty and sprawling like one would imagine a big sheep station house out west to be.

We had a big wireless set with us which was very heavy and took eight men to lift off the truck. It was set up a mile or so Dili side of Atamboea. We waited for what seemed years but was only two or three days for news that someone would hear our calls, and as time wore on men's spirits became lower and lower.

Then a ray of hope. Bandoeng in Java was raised. They said. they would tell Australia. They never got the chance, I guess, because it was not so very long after this bright news that we heard over the radio that Bandoeng had been taken and the Japs were invading Java. All hope vanished with this news and I had never had a feeling like I had then and I know everyone else did.

What was the use? We couldn't speak to the outside world. We could expect nothing from them. It was with a bitter laugh that we received the news over the B.B.C. and A.B.C. that Australians and Dutch were still fighting valiantly in Timor. This news after about five days of wondering whether we were going to share the same fate as all of our pals had received some days before. Soon to be written down or written off should I say as dead loss prisoners of war. Some missing believed killed. Some missing believed prisoners of war. Great comfort those few words to our relations.

Well by the end of the week it was decided that we get out of Atamboea. I mentioned before that we were all split up into small parties in different buildings about the town. Some of us out of each section, myself included, were shown how to get to the rendezvous from our various places around the town, the Sgt. and myself being the two selected to know our route out to the rendezvous. All this in case of a moonlight flit and the O.C. of some of the sections did not happen to be in the vicinity of his particular section, well, then another man who had been shown the route could lead them out.

The day after this had been done, Sunday, I think it was, sections were told they would be moving out. I knew where they were being sent. To the swamps at Batapoetie where the

Kittyhawks were. What a place to send men ill equipped for such a place. One of the worst places on the island. Rotten with flies in the day and millions of mossies in the night. Very few mosquito nets amongst the boys, and the water down in the area was scarce and not of the best quality. Not quite rotten and not far from it.

WITH BRIGADIER VEALE'S PARTY

I wondered at the time why we were being sent in that direction. I wasn't left long wondering. My section was all loaded up with packs, rifles and ammunition, ready to move out when Ron Mears who had been Don R at Capt. Van. Sweetman's house since arriving at Atamboea, came up and told me I was wanted at the house immediately with my gear.

There I was interviewed by Capt. Neave and asked would I be prepared to go with the Brig. and party and if necessary fight to the death for him if we ran into Japs? Whichever crowd I went with It didn't matter much, so I said I would be in it.

I owed all this to Laurie Ross who had spoken to Capt. Neave about it and he in turn had spoken to Capt. Arnold who had given his consent which made the party as follows: Brig. Veale, Capt. Arnold, Capt. Neave, Staff Sgt. Laurie Ross, Sapper Tom Thick, Sapper Les Moule, Pte. Joe Young Arnold's batman, Pte Jim Clout Brig's batman, Lance Cpl. Cam Robertson, Pte. Col Mackenzie, Pte. Ron Mears, and Pte. Ron Trengrove - 12 of us altogether.

It was nearly sunset when the last section moved out past the house and Brig. Veale waved them goodbye. We just walked around until it was time to get some sleep and be waked up for our turn on guard in front of the house.

We all arose very soon after midnight and had breakfast and coffee. Then we proceeded to do the trucks over, by over I mean letting the oil out of the sump and water from the radiators then starting the motors up and letting them seize up. You can't imagine the din that was caused unless you have heard a motor seize up. If you have imagine 25 or 30 trucks with throttles half out racing engines until the pistons seized.

I must go back a couple of days to tell you about Loss, one of our sigs. from Champlong who had been left behind. He walked from the latter to Soe, some 40 odd miles, and got there too late to catch us again, and was driven from Soe to the bridge our engineers had blown up where he was let down by a rope to the bottom of the gorge and then hauled up the other side where some of our chaps had been sent back from Atamboea to pick him up. It took 21/2 hours to get down and up this place so will give you some idea of the trouble it must have caused the Japs.

On Loss's arrival at Atamboea he had to go and tell the Brig. And company all that he knew, and when he came out I was sitting in the ute outside, and he said to me: "What happened to that wireless set that was put in your ute at Champlong?" I told him it was left at Soe. Loss walked away singing "I lost my hopes on Blueberry Hill", a song which will always bring to my mind Loss and that wireless set. Loss had got Australia on that set which was supposed to only reach about 30 miles in its wave length.

ON FOOT TOWARDS PORTUGUESE TIMOR

We moved out from Atamboea at 4 o'clock in the morning in a truck up the old Dili road. Stopped to disable the wireless set, then turned off and went as far as we could in the truck, and then transferred our gear to a couple of horses we had managed to get. We went as far as the road went and then two of us were sent on ahead to scout and when we reported all O.K. we moved on, each man of us loaded down under more than we could carry.

The lower ranks were not allowed to throw anything away. I eventually got rid of a spare bayonet. Capt. Arnold threw his rifle away as soon as we got out of the truck, hence the spare bayonet. I had to carry that but as I have no love for a bayonet I got rid of it at the first opportunity.

The Brig. was going to throw his rifle away, thinking the same as Arnold, that a revolver was enough hardware for him, but Capt. Arnold said: No, he had better keep it, which we all were very amused at: The Brig. kept it.

After a bit it was decided that I should stay hidden with all the gear while the rest of them moved on and found a place to camp for the night. They were away about five hours in which a couple of times I got the jitters and thought I saw Japs but they turned out to be Aussies and the next lot were Javanese going bush.

Capt. Neave, Laurie and Cam came back just when I was quite convinced I had been ditched. I'll never forget that first night or day. When I got to the camp they had selected my legs were jelly. We had walked up a dry river bed with great stones that one finds in the Nepean River in New South Wales and what with stumbling along up this river leading a stubborn horse and a great pack that seemed to be stuffed, with lead, I was in no condition to fight a snail that evening.

It was dark when we got to the camp where tea had been prepared for us. We had taken as much tin food as we could put on the horses and we could carry in our packs. We went to bed that night very tired. Capt. Arnold took one of the guards that night and very pleased everyone was because that meant a few minutes less for each one of us.

260 ODD MEN BEING SACRIFICED FOR THE SAKE OF ONE MAN

We arose early next morning and after breakfast and we had packed everything together on horses and ourselves we set off once more. It was easy to see now why the others had been sent to the north coast and us making for the south coast. 260 odd men being sacrificed for the sake of one man. The reasoning was this that if the Japs got into Atamboea very soon they would find out from the natives which way the men had gone and would go after the big party rather than the small one. It's nice when you think of it. One man was supposedly worth roughly 260 men, because he was a Brigadier. A similar story to Malaya.

They didn't think to get Lt-Col. Anderson out. The man who really knew what the Japs were like and who hadn't sat at a table to visualise how they fought. Likewise Lt. Sharman, of the 2/40th Btn. who knew by practical experience how they fought. Why wasn't he taken instead of Capt. Neave or Arnold or even the Brig.? None of these three had any idea what a Jap was like even to look at except in all probability that they were supposed to wear glasses and had buck teeth.

Sixty of those men or thereabouts were later caught by the Japs and every one of those who had fought their way through the Jap lines at Koepang, Baboe and Penfoei were caught. Good battle experienced men. People wonder why I am so bitter against untried officers who didn't get the commissions in the battle field. In my opinion that's enough reason and I will give you some more reasons if I finish my story.

THE TIMOR PONIES

We had been walking on the flat all the previous day but were now about to go mountaineering and the tracks the natives used were made by mountain goats and our first climb was up about 4,000 feet. Climb, climb, climb, and here we were. We had been riding in trucks for 12 months and the walking we had done in 12 months was harmless.

We climbed all that day with frequent rests, and dinner. After lunch Cam and I went on ahead. When I say went on ahead I mean we staggered on with our packs on our back and rifle, looking for horses to buy or, if possible, catch, but none could we buy, borrow, beg, or steal. Had we known what we knew some months later we would have taken what we wanted from the natives. Cam and I walked many a weary mile of the track that day, climbing and crawling up to native huts and villages without success.

Later on the rest of the party caught us up and Les Moule and Tom Thick went ahead and had all the luck. We stopped by a fast mountain stream, had a bath and tea and by then it was dark. Tom and Les came back after dark with the good news that they had struck some

Javanese soldiers in a native village who had persuaded the native chief to lend them as many horses as we wanted which was 11. Capt. Neave, Les, Cam, Col, Joe and myself went on up in the dark to this village for the rest of the night.

When we awoke in the morning I for one got a surprise to find what a natural fort we were in. Two huge boulders were facing out towards Atamboea and overlooking the track and behind us was clear open space also sloping away and in the village plenty of big rocks to get out of the way of rifle fire and return same. I would have been quite willing to have stopped there with the Javanese boys.

The rest of the party arrived early and we had something to eat. A boiled egg and some bully beef. We then put all the gear on the Timor ponies and it was here that I really saw how good these horses really were. Up and down the narrow mountain tracks with these great loads and never a stumble or a falter in their steady gait. Nose to tail plodding along with a native to each horse.

We descended from our home of the night before. It reminded me of a Zane Grey story and still does. It was grassy and tree dotted this side of the mountain and away in front of us stretched more mountains and valleys. The mountains immediately in front of us were barren and seemed like old volcanoes, but red clay was their main composition, studded with small tufts of grass. Down the bottom of the mountain we had just come down there was a creek and on all sides were signs of soil erosion. The track wound up this creek for a little way; then crossed over and straight up the aforesaid volcanic looking mountain and I mean straight up. It

was a goat track. The horses went up it though. We went up at a smart clip at first and were exhausted when we reached the top and the old Brig. sure felt the pull.

We went on after a spell up and down until we thought we would never get to our set destination which was a Chinese trading post for the natives. The Chinese had built a big bamboo hut, two in fact, which he called the Pashen Grande. We arrived there at dusk, tired and fed up, but after a great feed of rice, a boiled egg and some tinned herrings we got off the Chow we went to bed and slept well.

JOURNEY'S END – LEBOS, PORTUGUESE TIMOR

The natives call the Chinese on the island Sheena, meaning, of course, China. Next morning we again set off and we had a great climb up, and what a climb up and up until I thought we would never reach the top. We did however, and after a rest while we drank some coconut milk and the boys ate some bananas which natives brought out, we moved on again still going up. We stopped frequently and had some coconut milk and bought eggs from natives who offered them when we passed through their villages, also chickens.

I don't remember now whether we reached the first Portuguese fort this day or the next but I know we got our first view of Portuguese territory this day. We walked along the ridge of a clear mountain and it was a lovely view. We had valleys and mountains on all sides and across to our left was the Fort Lebos but we had to go around another mountain and over a ridge upon which we got our view of the sea that stretched away to Darwin and then the sea behind us where the Japs had full command of Java, Sumatra, Bali and all those other islands.

We wondered what was going on. Whether Darwin had yet been attacked and invaded. We sat below this ridge for a fair while looking and a great crowd of natives gathered around us.

We got to Lebos after Capt. Neave had gone up with Jim Clout and had a look see. There was no one there except the old native telephone operator. We took up residence in this place which was built like a fort such as one sees in the Foreign Legion pictures. It had walls about three feet thick with great sloping sides outside and a path or concrete ridge inside for the guard to walk around and the wall was loopholed like around the parapets or ramparts of an old English castle. The entire structure was built up high with steps on one side and a ramp some 75 yards long to the front.

These great structures had been built because of the native uprisings in the early settlement of the island. It was at this point our party joined up with the lads of the 2nd Ind. Coy., and from there on my experiences were their experiences.

TRENGOVE RONALD CLAUDE : Service Number - N107496 : Date of birth - 24 Mar 1920 : Place of birth - PLYMOUTH ENGLAND : Place of enlistment - PADDINGTON NSW : Next of Kin – TRENGOVE HAROLD - NAA: B884, N107496 - <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=5688051&isAv=N>

TRENGOVE RONALD CLAUDE : Service Number - NX42322 : Date of birth - 24 Mar 1920 : Place of birth - PLYMOUTH ENGLAND : Place of enlistment - DARWIN NT : Next of Kin – TRENGOVE

HAROLD - NAA: B883, NX42322 -

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=4894731&isAv=N>

Ronald Claude Trengove [Men of the 2/2] - <https://doublereds.org.au/history/men-of-the-22/nx/ronald-claude-trengove-r686/>

Transcribed by Edward Willis

Revised 29 December 2024