

1942 - Timor (19 Feb 42 - 16 Dec 42)

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I was at CHAMPLONG, Dutch Timor, when the Japs invaded Dutch Timor. I did about 24 hours OP work about 2 or 3 miles towards Babau armed with .303 rifle and water bottle - no rations. I had a good view of paratroops being dropped. There was a field phone, hooked up to the party line, but obviously the Japs had cut the line, so was of no use.

I had a conference with myself and decided that I was of no use to anybody so hoofed it back to Champlong, arriving just in time to get on the back of the last utility leaving for SOE. One of the passengers was a Pommy by the name of Fred Berry and his first words to me were "Have a woodbine chum."

Re Fred Berry: for 40 odd years I used to wake up at night and say to my wife "I wonder what happened to Fred Berry?" It was solved when SGT Woolley's story appeared in Col Doig's history of 2/2. He had spent 3½ years as a POW after being caught by a Jap Submarine. BRIG Veale was in charge and running the show so was moved to Soe, a Dutch Garrison town. It was here we were herded together and told every man for himself by CAPT Francis, a ASC man.

I was determined not to hand myself in under the circumstances and at the Dutch Army Barracks procured a Luger pistol, Green uniform and Canvas top boots, and a few tins of rations. Later the order was counted manned and we were told to replace our booty - this we did.

At Soe I had an outbreak of Singapore ear and was treated by a Dutch doctor who stuffed 6 or 8 yards of gauze into my ear, I can't remember which ear but I think it was the left one. He also gave me an Anti Bacil Dysentery needle, which appeared in my pay book.

We left Soe I think 23 Feb 42 and it was night time travel for ATAMBOA. I recall the convoy was stopped because of bright lights, someone (I don't know who) was sent forward to investigate. It turned out to be fire flies covering a tree, it was very bright, and a new experience. We arrived at Atamboia at daybreak 24 Feb 42 and sort of settled in for approx a week. There seemed to be conferences regularly and finally an order from the Brigadier, it was announced every man for himself.

It appeared organized, the Brigadier and Bodyguard headed east for Portuguese Timor and the rest headed to an area west of Ataputi where some rations had been stored.

In the meantime, all trucks were put out of order. I remember a large radio transmitter, about 6 ft. tall by 3 ft., was also put out of action, and consequently no chance of making contact with anybody.

At that stage MAJ Tim Cape, the Brig Major who was not happy with the Brig's actions, was not in favour of this destruction. He asked would I be a volunteer to sail to the Island of Alor where it was reported by the Dutch to have a cable station capable of contacting Australia. The others in the party were LT R. Atkins, the Force Pay Master and PTE Geo Smith, the Major's Batman.

A trip to Ataputi to purchase a vessel, which turned out to be a dug out log with bamboo outriggers a mast and sail. I think the purchase price was 180 Guilders = £30 = \$60 our money.

We were ill prepared for such a trip, estimated to be about 24 hours, all being well. I remember my lot was a loaf of Mildew bread and a bottle of Brandy, a .303 rifle and 50 rounds of ammo. I also had a .32 in a shoulder holster not issued.

The first day we had a trial run along the coast to get acquainted with this rig. To change tact the sail had to be dropped and the boom reversed from either side of the mast, then up went the sail.

The second day we left approx 0900 hr (9AM) and made good progress until approx 2100 hr (9PM) when a rain storm was present and, before we could drop sail, went arse over head. Somehow Geo Smith got caught in the sail and I think it was LT Atkins who eventually extracted him, but for a moment or two we thought he was our 1st casualty.

Of course we lost all our gear, including 2 rifles, and I don't remember any panic, but I guess inwardly we thought it was the end.

Decisions had to be made - all gear gone and boat upside down.

We took turns to dive in an effort to release the mast, probably fixed with a wooden peg. Eventually the mast was disconnected and the boat came up a foot or two. We were cold and wet and treading water, the seas rough.

When daylight came we decided to cut the outriggers from the boat so we could get the boat upright. This we did but the old log was water logged. We eventually cut the 4 pieces of bamboo from the outrig and each of us had a piece.

The currents in the Alor Sea were a mixture and we were probably wondering why we could not make much head way. From memory I guess we discarded the bamboo ½ mile from shore and made a swim through the surf, buggered of course when we hit shore.

I remember Syd Jones was on the beach when we came ashore, we looked like pickled pork. We survived an ordeal of some 13 hours in the sea. Major Cape declared that, should we survive, the dinner and drinks were to be on him. We were lucky because we had sharks and sea snakes insight most of the time, but they did not attack us.

It was 25 years after the War. I was a Tasmanian soldier but left Tasmania Oct 45 and came to Albury. I was a Branch Merchandise Supervisor for Dalgety's and one Monday morning my phone rang. I said "Dennis speaking" and the voice at the other end said "CAPT Gleeson here". He said "Are you the SGT Dennis who was on Timor 1942" - I said yes - he said "General Cape will be in the area tomorrow and would like to see you."

At that time GEN Cape was Master General of Ordinance and conducting a Seminar on Mobilization of civilian activities, such as the Heads of Ford, General Motors, Telecom and the like. I was introduced simply, Denny and I learned to swim during the War. The other two members had, by that time, passed on.

Back to Timor: We were at Bataputi with iron rations which had been dumped there, but when these ran out local food was very scarce. We survived here for approx 3 weeks and it was my lot to clean up after all had left. Some Dutch Officers and wives were camped here.

At the end of March, we decided to move back to Atamboa, four of us; PTE Frank Rose - LT Atkins' Batman, Geo Smith - MAJ Cape's Batman, CPL Ralph Taylor - Pay and Ord Room CPL of A Coy 2/40 Bn and myself.

I approached the Dutch and asked for 1 or 2 rifles but this request was refused, the reason given was they were sure we would be caught by the Japs, and with Dutch arms, they would get the blame.

We arrived at Atamboa 1 Apr 42 and some natives threw stones at us, but no damage done. At the Atamboa barracks was a Jarvanese soldier with wife and 2 kids, they cooked some rice and fed us. Whilst having a spell we washed some clothes and hung them on the fence, gathered what gear we could find and carried this across the river at the back of the barracks. The stores were soap, matches and a small quantity of .303 ammo.

We had to leave the clothes, as at that time 2 small Jap tanks came into the barracks Square with a Jap and machine gun at the ready. I remember at least one burst from about 50 yards, but of course we did not know whether we were the target, but no casualties.

It was organised panic down through the elephant grass, across the river and to our gear. As it was the Wet season a terrific rain storm stopped progress. We sheltered under some palm leaves.

Next day we had 5 porters to carry our gear and it came to a point when they would not go any further, so I paid them off with a cake of soap and a box of matches each. They seemed to be happy with the pay. At that time SGT Major Bowmans of Koepang came along, heading back toward Atambo. I never ever saw him again. He asked did I pay these porters. When I told him what I had given them he immediately slapped their faces, took the soap and matches from them and split up 1 box of matches between them. Those Dutch were tough on the natives. SGT Major Bowmans organised more porters for us and we headed for Laharoes, a Dutch mission post.

We arrived and were asked to keep moving without any help. They said the Japs were chasing us. We could not employ any further porters so dumped what we could not carry ourselves.

Memo was our next stop and here we received a feed of rice and eggs and were allowed to sleep in a shed. A priest here gave us directions to where a gathering of Australians were, a couple of hills away. It was about 4 Apr 42 when we arrived and MAJ J. Chisholm said "Hell, we heard you people had been shot in Atambo" I said "Well, we survived".

I was directed to Beco via Lolotoi and Lebos. At one of these places the Porto CPL saw that I was in trouble with Dysentery, pants down more than up. He brought me a jug of brew and made me drink 2 glasses of this mix. He called it 'Yougan', it was a tea made from the leaves of the Guava tree. Anyway it worked wonders.

Arriving at Beco, there was about a dozen Aussies. The Chefe de Post here fed us poultry, rice etc., our first good feed in weeks. His name was Sénor Morrice and told us he was sent to Timor for throwing a 'bomba' in Lisbon. The Posto had a concrete floor and large table. He sat at the head of the table, obviously enjoying watching us making pigs of ourselves. He regurgitated a large 'Oyster' and let it fly on the floor, and this took the shine off the meal.

His offsider looked to be of Chinese extraction, was educated at Macau University, spoke English plus other languages. He was our interpreter on many occasions. He said to me one morning "SGT Dennis, we

Europeans must stick together". He was loaded with Syphilis and one day he said "SGT Dennis, my balls are as hard as cricket balls" I guess that's life.

I was at Beco for some weeks. I had to send out daily patrols, but some of these people were old and non combatants and not fair dinkum. They found a Wineo Joint and used to come back worse for wear. These people were eventually sent back to Australia.

One fellow, a mate of mine, SGT J.B. Sansom was the transport SGT of the 2/40 BN. He was too old to be on Timor, he had served 3 years plus in the 1st AIF. One night he was brought in to Beco being held on to a pony, I said to my self 'Jack you will not see the night out', he was definitely crook. I immediately sent a runner up to the Posto to get the Infirmacea. He came running with bucket and BooGee. We cleaned old Jack out and I was able to feed him eggs and a chocolate drink.

On 24 May 42 it was organised for a Catalina to take our wounded back to Australia. I guess you could say they stayed at Denny's Guest House at Beco for a night, quite a party. CAPT Dunkley looking after the wounded Gerry Maley, Alan Hollow, PTE Craghill, old Jack Sansom. I think Alan Luby was part of the party, and of course stretcher bearers. I was part of the organising party , organising rations - rice, pumpkins, coffee. I recall that a river to be crossed was in flood and impassable for some hours. I was on the Betano side of the river, I think Fred Bryant was with me. We had clay pots with rice, pumpkins and coffee ready when Dr Dunkley and party were able to cross. I thought the Doctor was going to kiss me for the provisions supplied. I remember he was hard on the natives and would give them a slap for not speaking English. BRIG Veale and a Dutch officer also took off on this Catalina.

Now, re the chocolate drink: One would say where did the choc come from? Well, back in the early 70s whilst I was branch supervising for Dalgety's, one of the towns I was responsible for was Echuca, Vic on the Murray River. It was here I had an X Tas 2/40 mate by the name of Robert Gofton Whitehead (Bob). He was a telephone technician and I used to say good day - Bob used to like a drop made from hops. I called into the Vic pub opposite the P.M.G. about 11AM. There were no customers and the barman said "Looking for somebody mate" I said "Yes, Bob Whitehead", he said "Gawd, you're not a mate of his are you?", I said we were in Timor together. He said "I was in the Airforce and flew in Lockheeds over Timor dropping stuff. I dropped a couple of blocks of chocolate, I wonder if anybody picked it up?". When I declared I had picked it up and what good it had done I thought he was going to have a heart attack. His name was Robertson, known as Robby.

Back to Timor, April 42.

CAPT Arnold of Force HQ instructed us to keep an eye watch for allied planes and to send up 3 smoke signals should we recognise any. We had the 3 fires going down on the Beco rice fields, a couple of miles

from the village, and the Timorese had a heap of green rice storks on hand. Because of the mossie problem we came back to our quarters in Beco at dark.

It was about 3 days before we heard a plane of recognition other than the Japs who used to fly by about 9AM each day. It was almost dark when we heard the plane and was on our way back to camp. Without looking I said "A f---n Lockheed" and ran back to the fires. I guess it was the natives who threw the green rice on the fires and the plane circled around and dropped what ever was ordered. I remember a few small parachutes and these had boxes of Tommy gun Ammo loaded magazines - these were too heavy for these small chutes and these were write offs.

We had a few more drops in this area. I think about the end of June I was moved to Mape and CPL Joe Garland took over QM at Beco. Whilst at Mape I was given various jobs to do. On one occasion I was told to take the safe hand Mail down to the "Kuru" and that time I was the owner of a white pony with orthodox saddle. We camped inside the house and the Creados on the Verandah outside. My Creado "Monpoonie" and the others were making quite a din with their chatter and I yelled out "Monpoonie, bar torber" (go to sleep). He called out "shut up you black bastards and go to sleep".

On another occasion I was delivering a couple of bags of coins to one of the Companys. My Creado, only a boy of 9 or 10 years, was with me. A very old Timor man came toward us and, because the old bloke did not bow to me, the lad did give him a fair tongue lashing and told him I was tuan bort because I had money. I got the bow.

Then there was the time I was going to Bobanara from Mape and on the track were 2 Aussies asleep on the side, they were heading for Mape. I woke them and told them of the risk, it appears the night before they had been celebrating something. Who was it? Kevin Curran and Joe Poynton.

Years later I called on Kev at the Fleece Inn, Bendigo Vic, and told him of the story. Yes Denny, I remember that, I gave some of that stuff to Dr Dunkley for analysis and he said it was Metho and Red ink.

Sometime in July 42 it was decided for the troops to draw some pay. I think the limit was £4 but not sure, the trip took 33 days and most areas were visited.

Hato Bulico was probably the coldest place I remember. Turascai was quite a climb and we eventually reached Remexio. I remember the Inter-nation Brigade fellows here. CAPT Laidlaw (the bull) organised an exercise and I was one of the party. Towards Dili he had a bridge blown and many trees blown. I remember a bandolier loaded with charge was tied around the tree and we had to run for 30 sec and hit the dirt.

We made the saddle and had to rest. The Japs in Dili started firing artillery, CAPT Laidlaw, as cool as a cucumber, said we are safe they don't know we are here. We made the OP on the hill overlooking the drome, and after a look, did not linger.

At Maubessi CAPT Boylands and his troops were in some sort of channel west of the town. The Japs were in Maubessi and was probably the start of the August push. Naturally we gave Maubessi a wide berth.

The 9th Weeding anniversary of S enor Sousa Santos and his wife at Bobanaro was celebrated in top style, I can't recall everybody present. I remember SGT Frank Press and CAPT Baldwin, who got the giggles because the moths were getting inebriated in the Bols Gin.

Another occasion I was sent to organise 2 or 3 hundred ponies and natives to meet a boat at Suai, my contact was S enor Lopes a retired army officer living at Cumnassa. I visited him approx 7AM and by 8.30 I was seeing double. He was a great entertainer, he had a Still down in the barn and produced some beautiful Mandarin and Banana Gin and served in the right type of glass. Yes, I got the ponies and natives, he did the organising.

The August Push - Yes, I survived like most, I can't remember just what places we went through but saw the vary light, then the Japs withdrew. I was travelling with LT Atkins and he said to me "Wait here, I have to report over here". I waited and waited but he did not report back to me, and to this day I never saw or heard of him. He was evacuated with all the surplus officers.

Daylight came and I met up with Dr Dunkley. He took me in tow, checked me out, syringed me ears out, and I soldiered on.

Sep 24th I was part of the onlookers to see the HMAS Voyager come ashore and remain there. The Japs were quite active with the bombing, and on one occasion I was at Alas when this Jap plane spotted us. They flew around in circles throwing bombs, these were probably hand grenades. The only damage was Jack Le Strange of 2/11 Fd Coy was covered in horse manure, and of course when the Japs departed we had something to laugh about.

The last month I was feeling poorly and Dr Dunkley could not pin point my trouble, so I was one of the sick and lousy to come off. I was jaundiced from the many Malaria attacks.

For 11 days we survived on a handful of rice a day, not knowing what the hold-up was. We have since read that the HMAS Armidale had been sunk and embarkation delayed from Betano to Qualan River. We came off by the English built Dutch Destroyer Tjerk Hides. We were ferried out to the Destroyer and clambered

up the nets, a very big Dutch 'sailor lifted me over the rail and on to the deck. At Darwin the sick were taken by Ambulance to Adelaide River Military Hospital. Because our clothes were lousy they were taken and burnt.

I was discharged from Hospital after about a week and, because I had no clothes, was told to take a blanket from the bed for our train trip to Laramah. The blanket was branded Ballarat Woolen Mills 1942. I still have possession of this memento.

The officers and men of N°2 Ind Coy were top quality and, without the help of the East Timorese, we certainly would not have survived. The Portuguese I met were also on our side and a great help.

Of course, the name of the game was survival.