

CHAPTER 5

SANANANDA - POPONDETTA - DOBODURA

(10th January to 23rd February 1943)

Whilst the battle for Buna was in progress some troops from the 14th Brigade (36th and 53/55th Battalions) and the 30th Brigade (39th and 49th Battalions and the Cavalry) were containing the Japanese along the Sanananda track and these were serviced by the 14th Field Ambulance who had an M.D.S. at Soputa. This M.D.S. was first established by the 2/4th Field Ambulance in November 1942. It handled all the casualties from the fighting to recapture Gona, the evacuation route being through forward A.D.S.'s to Mutton's Post at Jumbora where a surgical team under Major Gatenby were working, to the M.D.S. at Soputa where Major Ackland and Capt. Wakefield, surgeons, worked and from there to Popondetta for evacuation to the 2/9th A.G.H. at Port Moresby. The M.D.S. was located in a clearing on the bank of the Girua River.

The 7th Division had their headquarters nearby and also an American Casualty Clearing Station. On the 27th of November 1942 Japanese planes, ignoring the Red Cross markings, bombed and strafed the area killing twenty two personnel, including two Medical Officers. There were fifty wounded. The M.D.S. immediately moved back along the track and relocated in an area giving plenty of cover. After this attack the Red Cross markings were no longer displayed and every effort was made to hide our presence from the air. The new site however was very swampy in wet weather. After this attack and knowing of the Japanese sinking of the hospital ship *Centaur*, ambulance personnel no longer wore their Red Cross arm bands.

The M.D.S. was to be the focal point for medical services during the campaign to dislodge the Japanese from Sanananda. The 10th Field Ambulance were involved with the M.D.S. from the beginning of the campaign, firstly assisting the 14th Field Ambulance and then later in the campaign taking over from the 14th. Dick Holmes describes it as " the worst location we experienced." He goes on to say , " *It was in a tree covered marshland and the soil was saturated with water when we arrived. Within hours, in the theatre the ground became ankle deep mud. There was nothing we could do about it. The cookhouse was the same, so were the wards and tracks. Diarrhoea, dysentery, rats, bandicoots, mosquitoes, prickly heat, stifling humidity, poor rations, wet socks and boots all the time, no washing facilities, a minimum temperature at night of 26 degrees Centigrade plus 95% humidity every night were just a few of the things that made life so difficult, yet every man did his best to get us through this awful campaign.*"

The number of patients and staff with severe diarrhoea and dysentery placed a strain on the primitive outdoor, water logged toilets. Compounding the problem was the twin requirement to site them as far away as possible from the cooking and living quarters and yet the need to use these facilities day and night. With strict blackout conditions at night, negotiating one's way to the latrines and back, especially for sick patients, was a major navigational problem alleviated to some extent by the use of white bandages to mark the track ! For these reasons fast evacuation of patients to Popondetta for air evacuation to Port Moresby was critical.

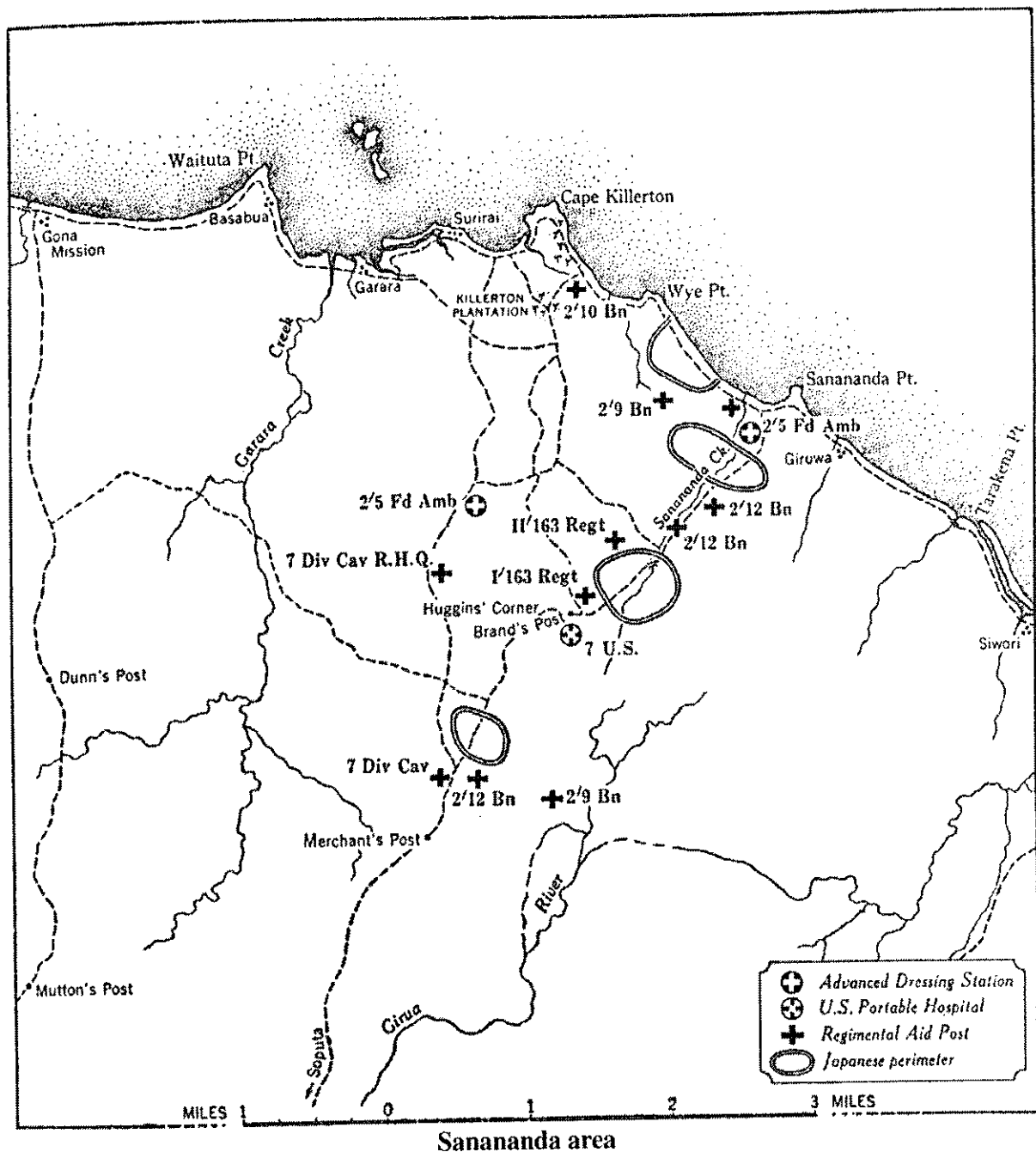
It was planned to commence the attack on the Sanananda section on 12th January using the 18th Brigade, 7th Division Cavalry Regiment and the 163rd U.S. Regiment. The 2/9th and 2/12th Battalions were to attack heavily guarded enemy positions near the Sanananda - Cape Killerton road junction. The medical arrangements for the area were that each of 2/9th, 2/10th and 2/12th Battalions would have squads of stretcher bearers from the 2/5th and 10th Field Ambulances attached to their R.A.P.'s.

The 10th Field Ambulance took over an aid post on the Sanananda track known as Merchant's Post from Capt. Merchant of the 14th Field Ambulance. A surgical team under Major Huntley was doing forward surgery at this post. Further forward Capt. Bill Brand set up an aid post known as Brand's Post. Major Lavarack set up an aid post in a coconut grove near 18th Brigade headquarters. Between the R.A.P.'s and the Aid Posts operated by the 10th, there were three staging posts set up so that stretcher teams could operate in relays.

From all of the aid posts evacuation was by jeep to the M.D.S. at Soputa. The surgical teams worked here day and night and again our officers and orderlies including Capt Emmett Spring as surgeon were involved. From the M.D.S. evacuation was by jeep to the strip hospital at Popondetta and from thence by air to Port Moresby.

A captured Japanese staff car was converted into an ambulance and was also used for evacuation of patients. Drivers of jeeps carrying stretcher patients were highly commended for their care, in some cases proceeding so carefully that walking wounded would pass the jeep.

On 10th January a section of the 10th Field Ambulance comprising 6 Officers 70 Other Ranks under Major Johnson took over the strip hospital at Popondetta. The 14th Field Ambulance had been operating these facilities with a small team. They had been undermanned and unable to cope with the number of patients requiring evacuation with sometimes up to 500 patients being held when there were delays in providing planes for evacuation to Moresby.



Map.

Keith Davey recalls an incident with his mate Ted Donovan on the march to Popondetta as follows :-

" Our trek from Buna to Popondetta, footsore caused by uneven terrain, swampy, intermittent corduroy tracks to avoid bogging will long be remembered. Both of us with dysentery, very homesick with sore bottoms, would have thrown in the towel had the then Sgt. Jack McGill not urged us along. On reaching the R.A.P. we were given medication which tasted like Epsom Salts. If we thought we were crook before, it was nothing to what was to come from this purgative. Some of the boys perhaps remember the motor bike lying beside the track, but like us thought it was pretty useless. A team of horses would not have pulled Ted Donovan past it, so eventually 'good old Sarge ' let us try it. One kick,



The Operating Tent, Soputa - At that time being operated by 14th Fd. Amb. with assistance from 10th Fd. Amb. members. (AWM Neg. No 013927)

maybe two and we were away. We thought we had won Tatts. I never thought one bike could carry so many packs, rifles etc. and two blokes with their behinds on fire. We followed the track until we reached our destination and collapsed under a coconut tree and waited for the rest to arrive. The bike was later retrieved by it's rightful owners. As a result of the awesome noises from the battered exhaust it was rumoured that TOKYO ROSE mentioned there was a secret fast firing weapon manned by two diggers, along the Buna track !"
(Actually Jack McGill was a Lieutenant at the time of this incident).

The attack on Sanananda commenced as planned on the 12th January and by the 19th January the 2/9th Battalion had taken Sanananda Point. The Japanese not wanting to give up their last stronghold in the area and still entertaining hopes of another attempt to capture Port Moresby from overland, resisted fiercely from fortified dug in positions. Casualties were accordingly heavy on both sides. The medical evacuation worked as planned but heavy rain during this period made conditions for both stretcher bearers, surgical teams and nursing staff in the wards extremely difficult. The operating teams would sometimes be working in water up to their knees.

The 2/12th Battalion were still held up by pockets of resistance along the track. As the action pushed forward the stretcher carries became longer with some being up to 4,000 yards. Sgt Jack Urquhart's report which is printed in full at

the end of this chapter estimates that one particular case was carried five miles by two stretcher squads of four, one from the 2/5th Field Ambulance and one from the 10th Field Ambulance including Bert Kenny, Ron Handley, Harold Grundy and Bruce Young. Some of the hazards encountered were mud all the way often up to the knees with pot holes beneath caused by shelling, broken corduroy track submerged beneath water and not the least, parties of encircled Japanese trying to filter through the perimeter to reach one of their pockets. It was found that stretcher squads of six men instead of the usual four were needed. The use of staging posts where stretcher teams could be relieved while another team took over worked well. Two of the staging posts were located at the R.A.P.'s of 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the U.S. 163rd Regiment where the American medical officers were able to give valuable assistance.

By the 17th January the main body of the 10th Field Ambulance had arrived at Soputa from Oro Bay and the transport section had arrived from Milne Bay. The Transport Officer Lieut. Lloyd Stuart and 10 drivers were detached to 7th Division A.S.C. at the request of G.O.C. 7th Division, and were engaged as drivers transporting rations and supplies to the forward areas and bringing back wounded. Our own transport was still at Milne Bay, having been commandeered by the 11th Division.

With our full complement of men now in the area arrangements were made for the 10th to take over from the 14th Field Ambulance who were due for relief. Accordingly Capt. Ian Wilson with 6 O/R's took over the aid post known as Dunn's Post on the Gona road at Jumbora.

While at Dunn's Post, Capt. Wilson recalled the following incident which he puts in his own words.

"In New Guinea I was running a small forward out-post and was soon joined by a small detachment of Salvos with tea making equipment- condensed milk tins with wire handles as usual. What a good job the Salvos did in these situations.

A native "boy" made the tea and demonstrated his ability to count correctly. One morning he came up to me and said, "Tappeta, five Jap-man be stop along bush". There was rifle fire a few minutes later. When the patrol returned they told me, "There were five of thes out there. We got three but the other two got away".

I asked the "boy" how he knew about the Japs and how he could say "five?" He smiled, tapped his head and said "Me know Tappeta me know." Creepy isn't it?"

Capt. Adrian Paul with a light section comprising Sgt. Jack Pigram and 5 O/R's took over Mutton's Post. Evacuation from Dunn's Post was to Mutton's



Capt. Colin Copland attending wounded soldier from 2/9th Bn.(AWM Neg. No. 014246)

Post and from thence to the M.D.S. at Soputa. These aid posts were servicing troops still operating in the Gona area and while organized resistance had ceased when the 10th took over there were hundreds of Japanese, both armed and unarmed fleeing from Sanananda and trying to escape towards the Kumisi river.

By the 17th January the 2/10th Battalion had reached the beach and captured Wye Point. This still left two strong pockets of enemy astride the Sanananda track. Casualties from these operations were constantly being received at the M.D.S.. The operating teams worked double shifts. The surgical work was supervised by Colonel C.W.Littlejohn and his work was invaluable in sorting out the cases for priority surgery. It was a strange sight to see this elderly man with iron grey hair moving around the wards and amongst the patients and staff, most of whom were youths. Ron Woff, working in the surgical tent one night with Noel Smith remembers Colonel Littlejohn watching an operation for a gun shot wound involving the femur being performed by Capt. Emmett Spring. He recalls Colonel Littlejohn counselling him in this fashion saying, "cut it away Spring, cut it away, the only mistake you can make is not cutting enough away." Experience with the Kokoda casualties had proved that because of the danger of infection, the patients of the younger surgeons who practised more radical surgery progressed better than those whose wounds had

not been excised so drastically. Later in the war during the Borneo campaign, with the advent of penicillin to control infection, less drastic surgery was required. Quite a revolution, not only in the treatment of casualties but also in the provision of medical equipment and facilities, had occurred between the Buna and the Borneo campaigns.

BRAND'S POST

Heavy rain over the whole coastal area added to the task of both the fighting troops and the medical staff. Stretcher bearers, aid posts and the M.D.S. at Soputa all suffered inconvenience and difficulty from the continual swampy conditions. Ten inches of rain fell in one night, the 20th of January. This was the night when a message was received that the 2/12th Battalion had suffered twenty four casualties during an attack in the afternoon and that the two teams of stretcher bearers stationed at their R.A.P. could not handle the evacuation of the wounded. Sgt. Jack Urquhart led a train of approximately 150 native bearers back to the 2/12th R.A.P. trying to beat the onset of darkness. "Stand to" on the track occurred at 1900 hours so Sgt. Urquhart alerted every American he met on the way through that he would be returning after "Stand to". Over twenty of our stretcher bearers, who had been carrying out the wounded all day nevertheless returned to the R.A.P. to help. Also to guard the train on its return an escort of thirty four 7th Division Cavalry personnel arrived. The report of twenty four casualties had been overstated and there were eight serious cases needing immediate evacuation and another two who had started out walking who were met on the way and required carrying. So the train set off at 1930 hours and by 1945 hours the rain started and continued for at least two hours. The natives did a good job keeping to the track in the pitch dark and kept up a good pace despite the heavy rain and mud. The noise of the rain blanketed out any noise the train made as they slithered their way along the track. Only once a tommy gun opened up but the fire was not on the party and so they got through and arrived at Brand's Post by 2130 hours. The bearers and escort were soaked and conditions at the Aid Post were not much better than on the track. The Aid Post was soon overrun with water coming through the tents from the swamp.

As much treatment as possible was carried out at the Aid Post but it was obvious immediate evacuation was essential for the growing number of casualties. Men were posted along the Sanananda track and all jeeps on the track were commandeered for the task of evacuating the casualties to the M.D.S. at Soputa. Because of the time and the weather few jeeps were available but by 2200 hours the most serious cases had been evacuated. Because the capacity of the Aid Post became overtaxed as regards shelter, a minimum number of cases were transferred to the 7th U.S. Portable Hospital, situated at Huggins Corner about 300 yards from Brand's Post. Here no surgical interference was allowed

and these cases were evacuated early. By 2330 hours all casualties - thirty four in all - had been transferred to Soputa M.D.S. A fuller account of this incident is given in Sgt. Jack Urquhart's report at the end of this chapter.

While the highest of the ground giving good cover would be chosen for a site, downpours such as the above would turn the whole area into a quagmire. Latrines were a special problem in these conditions but again the innovative abilities of various members came to the fore especially S/Sgt. Bob James who earned the title of "Nightman of Sanananda" with his ingenious high water level latrines.

The 10th Field Ambulance took over the running of the M.D.S. at Soputa from the 14th Field Ambulance on the 17th January. On the 22nd January Lieut. Merv Featonby with 24 stretcher bearers and a train of native bearers was sent to Brand's Post to relieve Sgt Jack Urquhart and his team.

Dr. Bill Brand in a letter just four months before his death was reminiscing on old times, and as is usual after the passage of years, one's recollections seem to dwell more on the lighter incidents which occurred rather than the serious. His letter which is reproduced here however does give a good summary of the work done by himself and his staff of orderlies and stretcher bearers at Brand's Post.

"After a period of more than fifty years, all of us will have some difficulty with accurate recall, but hopefully the episode I am about to describe may stimulate the memory of others, and so provide a rounder and more complete picture.

The detachment was of "A" Company and we walked over from Oro Bay to Soputa to the M.D.S. The site had been attacked by Zeros some time earlier, leaving seven dead and fifty wounded. We proceeded next day along a corduroy track over the swamp to an area in front of Huggins' Corner - just behind a pocket of continuing resistance - which eventually led on to Sanananda beach. We were assigned a place in front of Huggins on a dry mound, which very quickly fell off into swamp.*

Some 300 meters behind us and on the right of the track was the 7th U.S. Mobile Field Hospital, and about 100 meters behind us was a battery of American mortars, that is, in front of the American hospital and behind the Australian A.D.S.

At 0800 hours and at 1300 hours every day this mortar battery fired into the pocket with what we later learned was a very destructive effect.

Our duties included the provision of teams of six stretcher bearers to carry litter patients from the Sanananda beach action through the swamp, around

the pocket, back to the Aid Post, and subsequently manage the return to Soputa M.D.S. for air evacuation at Popondetta to Port Moresby.

The carry from the beach to the Aid Station was approximately two miles through the swamp, a difficult and exposed carry which was not confined by any means to daylight hours only. Sgt. Urquhart and his stretcher bearer colleagues will attest to the 10 inches of rain in four hours during one deluge at night, when they brought their casualties back to the Aid Post to find the water knee deep, rushing through the casualty holding area.

The following morning the A.D.M.S. came by and enquired as to where was our collection of reserve firewood.

Now I have to say to you that firewood of any description that morning was a fair distance from the thoughts of any of us, and I said to the Brigadier that "we had no such reserve sir". He replied, "When I come back I want to see that collection of firewood". I talked to Bob James about this particular problem, and as usual he had a complete and practical answer. We collected a very substantial heap of the wettest wood you could imagine, most of it dragged from the swamp. When the Brigadier returned he saw our heap, nodded his satisfaction, and passed on by the unit.

I have often wondered on the merit of the siting of our Aid Post almost on the perimeter of the Japanese pocket. My conclusion has been, that it was there because it put us very close to the junction of the Sanananda track and the Killerton track going left towards Gona, so that we could be of assistance to casualties coming from either position. What I could never understand was that we were in front of the combat battery of U.S. mortars (not that you can always expect a good fusion of two battle plans provided by two Forces with separate commanders), but it often did occur to me that at some time one of those mortars could have had a ' faulty' charge and could fall short- just in front of Huggins' corner".

** (The official casualty list for the Japanese air raid on the M.D.S. at Soputa was 22 dead, including two medical officers and more than 50 wounded.)*

Dr Bill Brand in giving the toast to the unit at the 43rd Annual reunion stated, "We had an experience none of us would have looked for and we never want again, but we dealt with it in a magnificent way".

Captain Brand was Mentioned in Despatches (M.I.D.) in recognition of services rendered in South West Pacific area during the period 1.4.1943 to 30.9.1943.

The work of clearing out the two pockets of Japanese resistance mentioned previously now commenced and casualties continued to arrive. On the 23rd

January a system of evacuation by natives returning from taking rations up to the front was organized and our staff were mainly supervising and organizing the native trains. By the 25th of January all organized resistance had been overcome and the area was entirely in our hands and jeep transport possible right through to Sanananda Point.

On 27th January Dunn's Post was taken over by a U.S. Portable Hospital and Capt. Ian Wilson returned to the Soputa M.D.S. His party had treated 70 to 80 sick, mostly with malaria. The less severe cases were treated in their lines with quinine and returned to duty. The more severe cases were evacuated by stretcher using native bearers, a difficult two hour march along a poor muddy track. Twenty sick and wounded Japanese P.O.W.'s were also treated, two of whom died. The P.O.W.'s were in very poor condition, starving and suffering with beri beri and oedema.

Capt. Adrian Paul closed Mutton's Post on the 29th January having treated 67 patients, mostly malaria and one Scrub Typhus. The Scrub Typhus patient died later in hospital at Port Moresby. While operating Mutton's Post the detachment improved the camp by repitching the tents 2 feet higher and replacing blanket litters with stretcher racks. A number of Japanese P.O.W.'s were also treated.

POPONDETTA AIR EVACUATION POST

The strip hospital at Popondetta was not exempt from the tribulations that resulted from the heavy rains. When the airstrip was too wet for planes to land it became necessary to hold and treat and feed up to 500 patients for perhaps several days. Food was short and emergency rations were resorted to.

The daily ration was one tin of bully beef between two men per day. Allan Williams remembers having to share his with Jack Walsh and reckoned he didn't fare too well in the carve up! Good quality drinking water was also scarce at this camp which seems strange in a land of torrential downpours and Capt. Adrian Paul had to mark a container, "do not drink - Alkaline" to protect the patients' drinking supply. Allan also recollects the numerous rats at this location big and hungry, so hungry that one gnawed the cap of his fountain pen. Some food drops were made by the "biscuit bombers", mainly large tins of biscuits and bully beef. A consignment of bread in bags was dropped but ended up as either crumbs or crusts. However, as we had not tasted bread since we left Australia those crusts tasted good.

On 13th January 450 patients were being held at Popondetta. Water had flooded many of the wards, blankets and food were scarce and it was estimated that the hospital could carry on for one more day without any evacuations before a

decision would have to be made to move patients by road to Dobodura. The next day conditions improved and 436 patients were evacuated to Moresby by air. For some they had already been receiving treatment for up to 12 days including time in U.S. hospitals and the M.D.S. at Soputa. Tents were re-erected to make them more waterproof and ANGAU natives commenced building a hut for a surgical ward.

Doug Potter remembers Sgt. Harry Cowan trying to persuade pilots to take some patients to relieve our overcrowded situation. *"I remember when at last a plane landed Harry Cowan rushed up to the pilot and asked how many patients he would take. He said, 'I'm not taking off in this.' - a second likewise - a third plane and Harry was overjoyed because the pilot said, 'Fill her up'. This was too much for the other two so they followed suit and so the evacuation got under way and it wasn't long before hundreds of patients had been air lifted."*

Lack of co-ordination between the Air Force and the air strip control resulted in inaccurate information regarding arrival times of planes and exactly where they were expected to land. As there were several strips and it was not known in which direction the planes would land it was a case of having patients ready at either end of the strip or at another strip up to 5 miles away. On one occasion patients were waiting at one strip and when expected planes did not arrive, were accommodated at the strip overnight. All of this did not help the patients in their recovery.

SHIFT TO ORO BAY

The 18th Brigade having finished its task at Sanananda were to be moved out of the area after mopping up was completed. It was planned that the 10th Field Ambulance would move to Oro Bay and establish a 300 bed hospital for the Australian troops in that area. Oro Bay was becoming a base for moving further up the coast towards Salamaua and Lae. Up to this stage the Australian troops in the area numbering approximately 1,300 had been serviced by the U.S. 1st Portable Hospital.

On 4th February a party of 4 Officers and 32 O/R's left Soputa under Major Gavin Johnson to proceed to Oro Bay as an advance party to choose a site and establish a camp hospital. The party left Sanananda Point and travelled by schooner to Oro Bay as the road between Dobodura and Oro Bay was closed on account of the heavy rains.

The M.D.S. site at Soputa had been occupied for a considerable time and it was thought advisable from a health point of view to move to fresh uncontaminated ground. However, it was ascertained that the M.D.S. would be closed within



Loading stretcher patients on to plane Popondetta.

a fortnight so it was decided to move the kitchen to a new site and to dig new latrines.

The strip hospital at Popondetta was closed on 7th February with all future evacuations to Port Moresby being via Dobodura. The Popondetta party moved to Soputa and on the 10th of February a further party of 42 left for Oro Bay. Another party left for Oro Bay on the 14th February but returned as heavy rain had made the road impassable. They eventually were able to complete the journey on February 22nd.

The M.D.S. ceased to admit patients on 20th February and on the 20th and 21st parties of fit men marched to Embogo Crossing and then by launch to Embogo village and were picked up from there by jeep and taken to Oro Bay. This just left a rear party at Soputa to close the camp and they arrived at Oro Bay on 23rd February.

DON LUDLAM'S LETTER HOME

Shortly after arriving at Oro Bay Don Ludlam wrote a letter to his brother telling of his experiences since arriving in New Guinea and this unique letter written in 1943 recording impressions at the time, instead of fifty years on, is reproduced here.

" Our present camp site is an ideal spot though it is not a very big place, it has

much in common with the good old Aussie scenery. Our humpy is pitched on top of many green hills. Looking down to the calm blue tropical sea which sends a beautiful cool breeze to fan us during the hottest of days.

Actually it doesn't get so terribly hot as most people imagine - not on this side of the island anyway. When we first landed on New Guinea soil the sun seemed to be slowly sizzling us but we gradually hardened to it, even though we were working out in it like a mob of navvies. This was at the big central hospital.

From there we had to live in the low lying mudlands and the overcrowded jungles. It was here that the excitement began.

First of all, I will go back to the time we were taken to the 'drome where we were to take off for the scene of activity. It was a hot day and we waited about four hours getting smothered in dust stirred up by the planes that came and went in continuous streams - and wondering when our turn would come.

Then we piled in! There was a wheezy sound and one of the props came to life with a roar, then the second joined in and the great form seemed to be quivering with excitement - straining to get going - all "roaring" to go.

I was a bit shaky on it. She taxied onto the runway waiting it's turn with several others for the take off. Then she faced up and seemed to study the long stretch before her. Then with a terrific roar of defiance moved off. We skipped over mountain peaks in great style - then came down low over the thick green jungle. Heading down for what looked like a grass cricket pitch rushing up to meet us.

The worthy old bus brought us to earth very smoothly and we landed to be welcomed by distant rattles of machine gun fire and the dull booms of the bigger boys. NICE RECEPTION!! The trip took us forty minutes as compared to the forty days hike that many of the troops had to do before us. Incidentally we did not feel too comfortable when we learned that the plane due to take off after us was suddenly ordered to stay put because of the presence of enemy planes in the vicinity. Just as well we did not know this at the time or our little joy ride would have been somewhat spoiled.

Anyway I did enjoy it and got quite a thrill from my first plane ride but I was soon to realize that this was just a penny h'penny show compared to the next part of the journey. It was in the very remarkable little jeep or peep, whatever the Yanks called it.

I might tell you that just about everyone on this island will tell you that the jeep is the invention of this war. If it were not for the jeep (and Boongs as the

natives are commonly called) then recent campaigns would have been a hundred times more difficult.

I've seen it do wonders, from tenderly carrying wounded stretcher cases back from the front line to lugging great loads of ammunition right up to the firing lines. It climbs steep hills that any other vehicle would shy away from and to see it plunge through great mud holes you would think it could swim.

But one does not get to know half about the jeep until he has ridden in one along the snake like treks where we went. The Big Dipper or any other hurdy-gurdy whizzer at Luna Park have nothing on the thrill we got scooting along the rough and muddy ocean wave tracks, hanging on with our big toe and two little finger nails round slippery curves. It was great fun!

The Yanks who drove us were most anxious to push the little buzzers along at top speed because they had to get back to their troop before night fall, and also because the sooner they got away from the area they were taking us the better they liked it.

We joined our forward party who had set up an A.D.S.- incidentally this party was the first to take our unit's name into the Real McCoy. We spent the night at the A.D.S.- next morning I was among the party to go forward as stretcher bearers.

I would need to be an author and write a book if I wanted to tell you all the experiences and incidents of the next fortnight of stretcher bearing. It was here that I saw the Aussie soldier - so much glorified by writers - men nigh on exhaustion who had to lie "doggo" in trenches not two feet deep. In the melting sun all day, they advanced under cover of night through a barrage of stuttering lead, then dig in again and hope to endure the next day of endless heat.

They advanced! - every inch a mile, and every inch - a Victory! Men who worked endlessly, day and night, carrying ammunition and food right into hell and bringing back the wounded to the R.A.P. Men who would have to dare a clear patch, knowing that a Jap sniper had it covered - he had to "get through". Men with bullets in their bellies or a leg or an arm missing, whose main concern was for their cobbles still out there mixing in the exchange of metal.

Then there were the unforgettable sleepless nights spent in a slit trench, soaked to the bone with endless rain flooding down on us. There we wait to relieve a squad of their patients and take them some quarter to half a mile through the blind night - where the next squad would take over. So the relay would go on throughout the night.

Care, Courage & Camaraderie

I remember well my first view of the Jap Zero. He came down low over our heads in a very cheeky dive. We all looked up and Hell - there's two big red bulls eyes on the wings but nothing happened. He just had a look-see and buzzed off. He must have been pleased with what he saw, because the next day he brought a lot of his mates. They had great plans of merry-making! Until they discovered there was a small reception party waiting for them to see that there was no "fowl" play.

Our planes, though outnumbered tore in and broke up the party, making a very good account of themselves keeping the Nips at bay except for a couple that got through and dropped their "eggs" in the Japs own lines.

Our common thought was "there's no place like home", but believe me I had a great liking for my slit trench at that time. The friendly spirit with the Yanks and our boys was very high. They were full of admiration for the Aussies and we were full of appreciation for all the little things they seemed most anxious to do for us. Simple little deeds that can easily be overlooked but mean so much in time of need. We were all glad when the show was over.

Our next job was to set up an evacuation hospital, we had marched about 30 miles in two days to get there - laden down with full packs along muddy jeep tracks. My duties at this spot were nursing duties of which I believe you have heard.

Evacuations were done by air. It was both interesting and lively to have planes buzzing round most of the day - weather permitting. Here we were able to do some trading with the native boys. They brought great bunches of bananas and beautiful paw-paws. We paid for them with "mit", as they called it (in other words "bully beef").

When this whole business was cleared up with no more patients coming in, we packed up again to "hit the road". This time we had jeeps to take us (more thrills and near spills). This brings me to my present situation. I received one of my long awaited parcels soon after arriving here. They had been through the bombs and suffered rather heavily. Of those that did survive, many were mildewed or had rotted with age.

Yours was among the survivors. The P.K.'s had to be thrown out but the saline powder and the socks were very useful."

THE FUZZY WUZZY ANGELS

Don mentions two factors which had a great bearing on the successful outcome of the campaign in New Guinea, that is the American Jeep and secondly the New Guinea natives or the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" as they became known.

Again we are indebted to Don for the following description of just one incident whilst stretcher bearing which so perfectly illustrates the qualities of these cheerful, willing and helpful "native boys".

The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.

"The New Guinea native quickly earned this title by helping the Armed Forces carrying stores and equipment through most difficult terrain and atrocious weather conditions. Sure footed, strong and dependable they were most worthy of the name.

My story begins as one of four stretcher bearers - shoulder carrying a badly wounded soldier from the fighting zone back to our hospital unit consisting of canvas tents in the jungle. We were tired but glad to reach our site safely.

Because of sudden heavy rain, a large pool of muddy water about a foot deep had formed in front of the admitting tent. Some planks of wood about 20 feet long had been placed on the quagmire. Two of our bearers had gone to report or to do something - I don't remember.

Nor can I remember how or why I was placed in the position of having to carry the rear end of the stretcher. I always had to be wary of two man carriage because of my weak left hand. As there was no one else handy I must have thought I could manage the short distance.

Half way across, my left hand was losing its grip. I was horrified with the thought that our patient was certain to be dumped in the mud - when - out of nowhere silently and in an instant a strong hand grasped the left shaft of the stretcher and I saw a mop of curly hair by my side - A Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel.

A true Guardian Angel had come to save our patient from a terrible fate. And now over fifty years, I have cherished the memory of how I too was saved from an everlasting nightmare of what might have been. So I'm glad to be able to relate this happy story - forever grateful that the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel also had his eye on me."

The author of the following poem is not known but it gives a good picture of the invaluable work done by the New Guinea natives in carrying and caring for the sick and wounded.

FUZZY WUZZY ANGELS IN NEW GUINEA

Many a mother in Australia,
When the busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty,
For the keeping of her son.

Asking that an angel guide him,
And bring him safely back,
Now we see those prayers are answered
On the Owen Stanley Track.

For they haven't any halos,
Only holes slashed in their ears,
And their faces worked by tattoos,
With scratch pins in their hair.

Bringing back the badly wounded,
Just as steady as a horse,
Using leaves to keep the rain off,
And as gentle as a nurse.

And so ended the Buna - Sanananda campaign. During this campaign the unit was split into many sections each fulfilling different functions where ever there was a need. Firstly there were the stretcher bearers right up where the action was and then the various aid posts where the attention might vary from just adjusting dressings and dispensing hot drinks to a post complete with operating tent, surgeons, anaesthetists and orderlies, post operative wards and facilities for holding patients needing only short term treatment. Then there was the main dressing station with surgical and hospital facilities and finally the strip evacuation posts which at times had to have elastic sides and be prepared to give hospital treatment when air evacuation was delayed.

The Commanding Officer's Report on the campaign is given in full in Appendix One but his final paragraph is included here.

" The standard of training to which the unit had obtained on embarkation was good and this applied to ex 4th and 22nd Field Ambulance personnel received as reinforcements. Particularly was this so in specialist jobs - nursing orderlies, clerks, pack store, water and hygiene duties. The short time spent at the 2/9th A.G.H. was very good training for all ranks. Morale had been adversely affected by the long period the unit was on notice followed by the four weeks voyage. It improved immediately the unit was given a job and particularly when the unit went into action and in the great majority of time remained high throughout. Transport personnel who were given stretcher bearing and gen-

eral duties did them willingly and well. The work and morale of the conscientious objectors, practically without exception was most satisfactory."

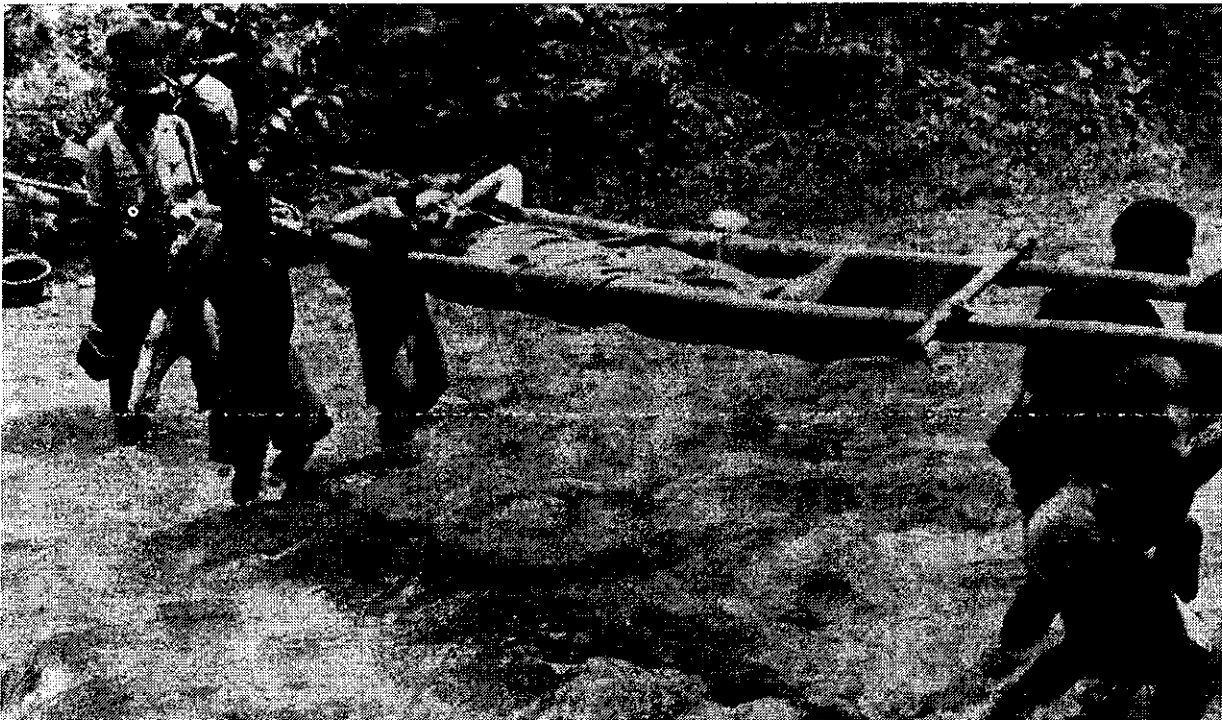
INCIDENT OF THE SANANANDA CAMPAIGN - JANUARY 20TH 1943

By Sgt. Jack Urquhart , 10th Aust. Field Ambulance

The local situation from our point of view was this. Capt. Brand had set up an Aid Post adjacent to the American Portable Hospital at Huggins Corner. This became known after the usual custom as Brand's Post, and from it the Ambulance stretcher bearers worked forward to clear casualties from the 2/9th and 2/12th Battalion's R.A.P's.

At this date we were out of contact with the 2/9th R.A.P. who were on the beach at Sanananda Point with one Jap pocket on the beach on their west flank and another on their south side. Their position had become somewhat remote as their line of communication lay between these two pockets and was subject to considerable menace by the many stray Japs who were for a while loose in the bush and seeking to link up with one or the other of these pockets. This pocket on their south straddled the Sanananda road and separated them from the 2/12th Battalion who by the road would have been I should say two miles distant from the 2/9th Battalion. The 2/12th were attacking this pocket on their southern side with the aim of wiping them out and getting through to the point to link up with the 2/9th Battalion.

There was another pocket again south of the 2/12th Battalion also straddling the road, and held by a perimeter formed by the American 1st, 2nd and 3rd



Native bearers carrying stretcher patient over stream using their long pole improvised blanket stretcher. (Dept. of Information Photo)

Battalions of the 163rd U.S. Infantry Regiment. This pocket lay between Brand's Post and the 2/12th Battalion R.A.P. necessitating a detour for the ambulance personnel of about a mile and three quarters around the perimeter formed of the West side of the American 1st and 2nd Battalions. The distance between the 2/12th Battalion and Brand's Post by road was about a mile and a half.

Two stretcher squads of four - a squad from 2/5th Aust. Field Ambulance and Ptes. Bert Kenny, Ron Handley, Harold Grundy and Bruce Young - made the trip with a stretcher case from the 2/9th Battalion R.A.P. on the beach, detouring round the above mentioned two pockets by narrow muddy tracks, in four hours. To do this in the time was a good effort, the carry being probably over five miles and every inch of the way was over the worst of tracks.

As to the condition of the track,- Brand's Post was three hundred yards from the turn-off round the mile and three quarters detour. The detour was mud every inch of the way - in places up to the knees. The Americans had difficulty finding patches of dry ground to doss on. There were many corpses at the top end of it and beside the track near a small Jap hospital which the Americans had done over a week or so previously having no option on account of armed enemy troops who had mixed themselves with patients. It was also pot-holed under the mud which caused many stumbles. I saw one chap shied off the stretcher into the mud when one of the bearers stumbled. There were numerous Japs shot at various points along the track as they attempted to filter out of the pocket. This frequent infiltration as well as the proximity of the Jap positions to the track in places made the detour comparatively dangerous and necessitated quiet movement.

When the Sanananda road was reached there lay a stretch of three quarters of a mile to the 2/12th Battalion R.A.P. This had been a corduroy track but as a result of shelling and floods had become broken and submerged under water. The shell holes and broken corduroy made paddling difficult. This stretch also was menaced by Japs who were constantly trying to filter by ones and twos through the American perimeter and along the east of the road with the idea of linking up with the pocket which the 2/12th Battalion were dealing with. Also I counted eighteen corpses on this stretch. The detour between the 2/12th Battalion and the 2/9th Battalion was similar to the other. Fortunately for the stretcher bearers this became too unsafe to use and the four hour carry was not repeated.

The following incident happened on the eve of Wednesday January 20:- We had been evacuating wounded from the 2/12th Battalion all day using stretcher bearer relay posts. Two squads of six were attached to the R.A.P. and they carried over the first lap to the next relay post. Capt. Samson who was R.M.O. to the 2/12th Battalion was notified that the relay posts would be with-

drawn at six o'clock enabling the stretcher bearers to return to Capt. Brand's Post before the Americans closed down the track at 'stand to' at seven o'clock, and very urgent cases after that could be evacuated at a pinch by the squads attached to the R.A.P. escorted by 2/12th Battalion troops. At 5 o'clock I was at Brand's Post when an ANGAU corporal turned up at the gate with nearly two hundred natives. ANGAU, he said had received an urgent message from A.D.M.S. that there were twenty four wounded waiting for evacuation at the 2/12th R.A.P. They were to pick up stretchers at Brand's Post where an armed party from 7th Division Cavalry would also meet them and escort them to and from the R.A.P.

Brand's Post could only supply a dozen stretchers at the time so we grabbed blankets in the hope that the natives could make stretchers in a hurry when we got there. The armed guard had not turned up so a quick decision was made that I should lead the party to the R.A.P., neither the ANGAU corporal nor the natives knowing the way, and risk the trip without a guard. We had two hours to get there, collect the wounded, improvise stretchers, and get back before dark and 'stand to'. It was obviously next to impossible to do it if the report about the twenty four casualties was true, but I knew that the Americans would co-operate, having received excellent assistance from them during the day, and if I made it known that we would be back that they would let us through, and we could probably make the trip safely up to about 8 o'clock which would mean that we had perhaps an hour up our sleeve. On the way round the detour therefore I told every Yank within earshot, "We'll be coming through about 8 o'clock with wounded". I think my frantic manner of speech and high speed, and following of the long train of natives must have impressed them to the exclusion of any objections !

I had doubts about these twenty four casualties, knowing that everything was serene at the R.A.P. at four o'clock. This was confirmed by our stretcher bearers whom we met withdrawing from the relay posts, and carrying four stretcher cases. So I detached native squads of eight each from our mob to each of our squads as we met them, partly to reduce our large number and partly to relieve our own stretcher bearers who were making heavy weather of it. Two hundred yards from the R.A.P. I set the natives making stretchers as hard as they could go under the supervision of some Americans who were stationed on the track until the arrival of the ANGAU corporal who had got left behind while detaching the native squads. I then went forward to the R.A.P. to find that the report had been of doubtful origin, but that the R.A.P. did have eight casualties. Two of these were about to be evacuated by the two squads attached to the R.A.P., being urgent cases. The other six they were preparing to hold overnight. We decided to take the lot. It took a little time to get them onto stretchers and over the watery track as far as the natives. Meanwhile the armed escort of thirty four from 7th Division Cavalry arrived, as well as twenty odd of our own bearers

whom Capt. Brand had sent forward again with stretchers which he had scraped up somewhere or other, and some medical supplies for the R.A.P.

These must have been about half an hour behind us, and we met them at the point where the natives had been left. The picture now is as follows. It is half past seven and getting dark early on account of a heavy storm coming over from the south, so surplus stretchers and medical supplies had to be left in the care of the Americans where I had left the natives. Our train numbers over two hundred - at least 150 natives, 34 of an escort, and about thirty ambulance personnel. We have our eight stretcher cases, which number grew to ten when we picked up two more who had started out as walking wounded during the afternoon, had conked out, and been cared for by the American 2nd Battalion R.A.P. We have a track to traverse which even in daytime is a nightmare for stretcher bearers. We have the Yanks to get through - will some trigger happy guy open up on us in the dark? We must move quietly in spite of the two hundred odd train. Incidentally on the detour track you had to keep your eye on the phone wires, especially the red one to avoid side tracking. The red one wasn't too easy to follow as it frequently disappeared into the mud. I missed the track myself once or twice in the daytime. So much for the bright picture !

The train set off at half past seven. By the time we had reached the start of the detour at quarter to eight it was just light enough to see and then the rain started. It lasted for two hours at least, perhaps more, I don't quite remember, and was as heavy as I have seen on the island. The water was streaming down the trunks of the trees, and you could fill a mug from them just like putting it under a tap. We were drenched - strangely! Fortunately the rain solved the noise problem as the din of it on the trees drowned any noise we made. The negotiating of the detour took about an hour and a quarter as we arrived at Brand's Post shortly after nine. Very good time.

I don't know who led the train but how he kept following the wire in the pitch dark and did not get side tracked remains a mystery to me. The natives were marvellous in the way they kept up the pace under the conditions, carrying the Ambulance stretchers which they find awkward compared with their long poled improvised ones, and they didn't drop anybody.

Once a Tommy gun opened up and my heart was in my mouth. It appeared that this must have been one Yank I missed on my way through! Maybe it was one of our escort who fired. At any rate the fire wasn't on us. Another Yank guard we met on the path peered closely into the faces of each one of us. He was making sure that we had not been joined by a Jap on the way through.

They arrived back at Brand's Post to find the A.D.S. with about one foot of water swirling through the reception and wards.