

CHAPTER 6

ORO BAY AND DOBODURA

(5th February to 27th September 1943)

THE CAMP HOSPITAL AT ORO BAY

Major Johnson with his advance party contacted Col. C. Myers of the U.S. army, the Sub-Base Commander at Oro Bay and selected a site for the unit's hospital about three miles inland and west of Oro Bay on rising ground about 400 feet above sea level. The swampy coastal plain at Oro Bay is relatively narrow, the ground then giving way to a row of foothills varying in height from 200 to 450 feet above sea level. In the hilly area the temperature is cooler with a persisting sea breeze. It is better drained and has fewer mosquitoes. The principal pests consist of rodents that abound in the kunai grass and are carriers of the typhus mite. Units landing at Oro Bay originally camped near the beach but most later relocated to higher ground inland. The Americans were developing the area as a depot from which to supply forward troops now planning to push up the coast from Buna to Salamaua and Lae. Dick Holmes recalls a road sign at Oro Bay which read, "There are many roads to Tokyo. We will neglect none of them".

When Major Johnson and his party arrived on 5th February 1943 there were some 1,300 Australian troops in the area comprising an anti-aircraft battery, a machine gun battalion and engineers. The only Australian doctor in the area was Capt. L. Atkins from the 2/2nd Tank Attack Regiment. He organized sick parades for all the Australian units and even set up a small hospital unit at regimental headquarters, but anything major or even malaria requiring protracted treatment had to be sent to the U.S. hospital. The only hospital in the area was the U.S. 1st Portable which in addition to servicing the American troops had to carry the additional burden of admitting any Australians requiring hospitalization. On 2nd February there were 83 Australians in the U.S. hospital. Major Johnson was under extreme pressure from the beginning both from Col. Myers, U.S. Sub-Base Commander and also from Col. Miller, U.S. Port Surgeon, to get his hospital established to relieve the small U.S. hospital.

A dispensary was erected on 6th February, engineers started working on obtaining a water supply and native labour was supplied. Tents were erected on the 8th, and on the 9th fourteen patients were admitted. The Popondetta detachment arrived on the 10th and greater progress was made with establishing the camp and the hospital. Whilst the hilly ground was good from a health and comfort point of view it did make camp construction far more difficult. How-

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ever, by the 13th February a water system had been installed and showers erected and the hospital organization had been established and was working reasonably well.

The water was obtained from a spring in a nearby valley and after construction of a dam, water was piped from the dam to the camp. There were even tall eucalypt trees on the site to give the camp a homely Australian look.

Some statistics supplied by the Rev. R.L. Newman for the district are interesting:-

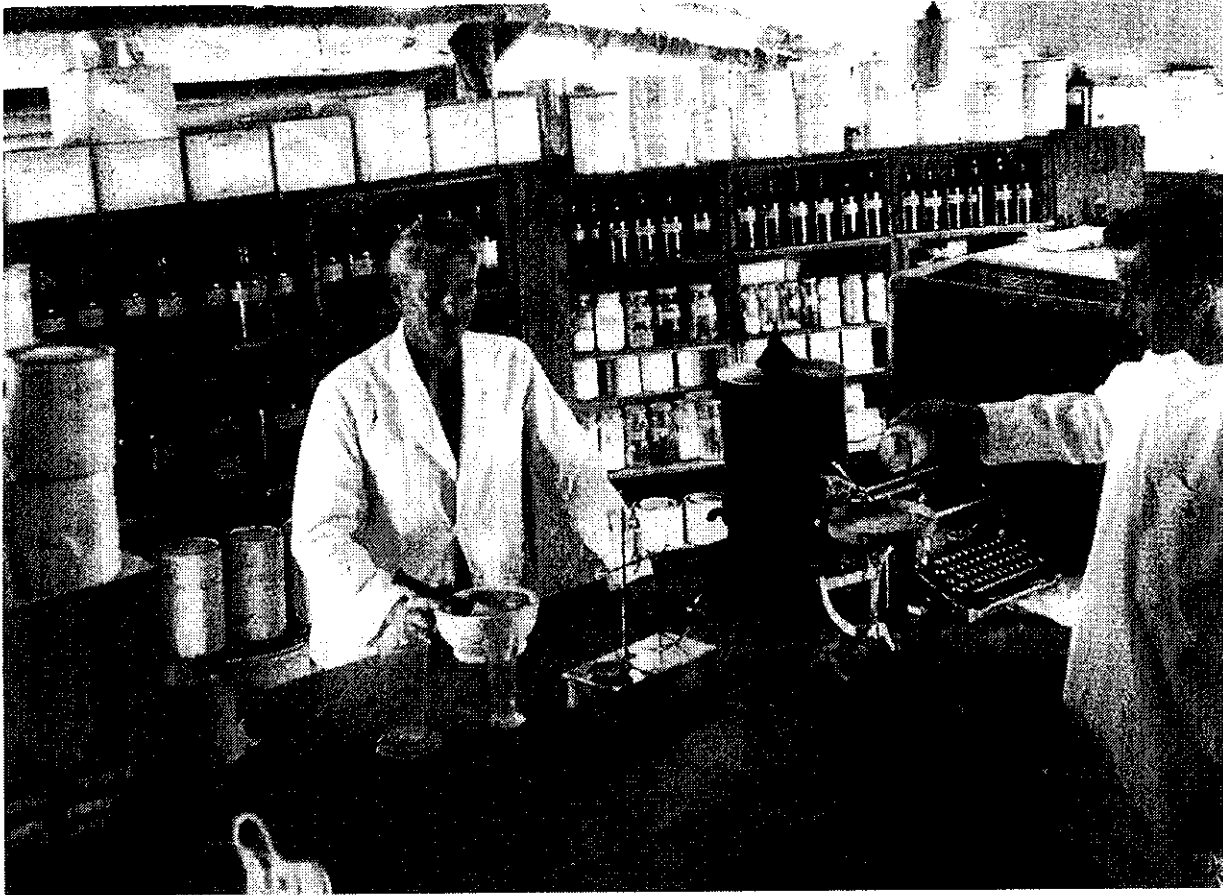
Annual rainfall	- between 90 and 120 inches
Wettest months	- January to April
Driest months	- June, July, August
Hottest months	- November, March, April
Coollest months	- July, August
Temperature	- Max.(shade) 84 to 90 Fht
	- Min. 68 to 72 "
Humidity	- 70 to 75%
Prevailing wind	- Nth West (Monsoonal) Dec to Apr
	- Sth East (Trades) May to Nov

Despite the favourableness of the site and the improved conditions under which we worked there was a lot of sickness in our own unit. Some of this was put down to the change during February from quinine to atebryn as a malarial suppressive. With the cessation of quinine and the slow rise in Atebrin threshold, the suppressive factor was too low.

Major Harry Francis and Lieut. Merv Featonby were appointed Hygiene Officers for the whole area. They inspected unit camps and recommended improvements in buildings, kitchen hygiene, disposal of refuse etc. The 9th Aust Anti -Malaria Control Unit arrived in the area on the 11th February and immediately set about draining, spraying, oiling, filling in ruts and generally working to



Road Sign at Oro Bay.



S/Sgt. Norm Douglas in Dispensary Tent, Oro Bay. (AWM Neg. No. 079699).

reduce the places where mosquitoes could breed.

The dental unit had been set up and was busy from the outset. An operating theatre tent was erected on the 17th February. A Pathological Laboratory under Major Ian Wilson was also established by the 18th February and was invaluable in diagnosing the various types of malaria and other tropical diseases. Ten hospital wards with their annexes were erected and all the ancillary services such as the Quarter Master's store, cookhouses, R.A.P., orderly room etc. were fully set up and operating within a fortnight of the first advance party arriving. By 28th February there were 222 patients held including 44 from our own unit. By now there were approximately 1,900 Australian troops in the area. Enemy bombers were active both by day and night but often just flying over to some other destination.

There was no convalescent depot or reception camp in the area at that time and disposal of patients was a difficulty. To start with, patients were discharged to their units to convalesce but instructions came from the D.D.M.S. New Guinea Force that they were to be held until fit for duty. As there was no airstrip at Oro Bay evacuation of patients to Base Hospital was also a difficulty. The road from Oro Bay to Dobodura was not suitable for jeep travel for stretcher cases. Sea evacuation was arranged to Port Moresby when vessels were available. Apart from the discomfort of the voyage and uncertainty of sailings, this method

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had latterly become unsafe. However, on 1st March 47 patients including Major Gavin Johnson were safely evacuated by sea accompanied by two orderlies.

On the 8th March a formation of nine Japanese bombers with fighter escort flew over the camp. We later learned that these aircraft had just bombed and sunk the *Jacob*, a vessel bringing stores and personnel to Oro Bay from Port Moresby via Milne Bay. On board were twelve 10th Field Ambulance personnel returning to the unit after having been evacuated sick to the 2/9th A.G.H. in Moresby. The sinking took place only about 20 miles from Oro Bay. The *Jacob* was accompanied by a corvette, HMAS *Bendigo*, which picked up the survivors who had spent about 30 minutes in the water. There were three casualties including Bruce Pascoe from our unit who was trapped by large refrigerators on deck moving when the ship listed. This was our first death in action.

A first-hand account of the sinking of the *Jacob* is given by Ken Stanley: -

"In February 1943, (52 years ago) 12 of us, namely Cpl Doug Clemens, Claude Capstick, John Lawrence, Harry Mead, Ted Monot, Wally Page, Noel Norton, Bruce Pascoe, Bill Shepherd, George Williamson, Dick Jones and myself, who had stayed at Pt Moresby due to illness or other reasons, were together at Murray Barracks waiting to join you at Oro Bay.

We flew to Milne Bay and waited there a few days. On Sunday the 7th March 1943, we prepared to embark on a boat for Oro Bay. When we arrived at the wharf in the early afternoon the S S Jacob was already proceeding out of Milne Bay with a corvette escort. Some small ship came alongside the wharf and on instructions we boarded it and headed for the Jacob, a 2,500 ton cargo boat. When we reached it a rope ladder - really Jacob's ladder - was thrown to us, so we clambered up on to the deck. There were about 15 other Aussies and a couple of Yanks on the deck, so we found a shady spot under a tarpaulin awning.

The Jacob had at least six refrigerated units approximately six ft by six ft by six ft. on deck for food, headed for Oro Bay, along with cargo on deck and below. I can still remember chatting with Bruce Pascoe - who the next day was to be our first fatal casualty - as we admired another beautiful New Guinea sunset. About midday on Monday the 8th March we received a great shock as the Jacob was struck by some bombs without any warning. We then saw some Japanese bombers heading your way after welcoming us in this unusual manner. I, and I expect the others were dressed only in shorts, sox and boots. I grabbed a life jacket and a tin hat and waited instructions from the ship's Captain, a Dutchman. Such instructions never came.



Entrance to Camp Hospital, Oro Bay.

At least one or two bombs went down the funnel and started a fire in the engine room. Nobody on deck appeared to be injured. The ship's gun crew took up a position at the rear gun in case the planes returned. I cannot recall much of the next few minutes while we waited. Then the Jacob started to list and with that some of the Lascar crew thought it was time to abandon ship - so we followed. I remember jumping overboard and losing my tin hat as I hit the water. Being able to swim, I struck out to get away from the suction of the sinking ship. I think John Lawrence experienced that. As the ship disappeared the refrigerators floated, as did some life rafts and many cases of tinned fruit. I used one of these cases to assist me.

You've heard it said that a Captain always stays with his ship - this captain did and was in the only lifeboat that was afloat. The 100-plus Lascar crew clung to any wreckage they could use. The corvette, HMAS Bendigo came to our rescue about 45 minutes later in case the planes returned during that time. After all had been brought aboard the Bendigo, we realized that Bruce Pascoe was missing.

The Bendigo crew told us that the Jacob started to list 13 minutes after the bombs hit her and completely disappeared within two to three minutes. One of the other Aussies who was picked up was severely wounded and I could only try to comfort him before he died. He was buried at sea at about sunset that night in a very simple but moving and impressive ceremony conducted by the Bendigo's captain.

The Navy really looked after us that night and next morning as they took us back to Milne Bay. When we were put ashore at Milne Bay I was still only in shorts and boots and was roundly dressed down for losing my pay-book. I got a new one nine months later with a much improved bank balance.

We caught up with you at Oro Bay some days later. Let me conclude with a

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cutting from the Melbourne "Argus" dated 9th March 1943.

K. Stanley.

An appropriate and touching memorial service for Bruce Pascoe was held by Colonel Palmer.

Japanese dive bombers repeated their raid on the wharf at Oro Bay on the 28th March and set fire to the "Bantam". All available ambulances reported to the wharf but there was only one casualty, a naval rating on the escorting corvette. With the burning "Bantam" acting as a beacon the Japanese returned at night and dropped further bombs but there were no casualties and no further damage. Between the 8th March and the 31st there were forty six air raid alerts. There were some spectacular dog fights over Oro Bay which could be observed from our camp. One day a Kittyhawk and a Zero crashed into each other. The U.S. pilot of the Kittyhawk parachuted into the sea and was picked up and brought safely to land.

In early March some of the motor vehicles which had been left at Milne Bay arrived at Oro Bay and the remainder followed in about a fortnight. Before the arrival of our motor ambulances a medical officer from the unit would go daily to the 2/4th and 21st Field Companies and hold a sick parade. Captain Atkins held his own sick parade at the 2/2nd Tank Attack Regiment. After the arrival of our transport an ambulance from our unit would do a "milk round", visiting all Australian units daily, bringing sick patients to our R.A.P. to see a doctor.

Being in a settled camp most troops set about making themselves as comfortable as possible. Beds were improvised using ground sheets with two poles through the sides and supported at the ends on four forked branches driven into the ground. The seam on the edge of the ground sheet limited the size of pole which could be used. The timber available was green and as soon as it dried out it had a tendency to crack and break. This would occur for the heavier members of the unit first, and of course usually at night, giving other members a warning to replace their poles. The Australians' natural ability of "scrounging" and improvising was put to full effect in making camp life as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

Pictures were shown in the area of an evening and members of the all star USO Variety Vaudeville Show gave a concert. The unit had it's own artists, a choral trio, in Pay Sergeant Neil Gerrard, Base, his brother in law Ray Meadows, Baritone and Don Ludlam, Tenor. They would sometimes put on a concert and entertain the troops.

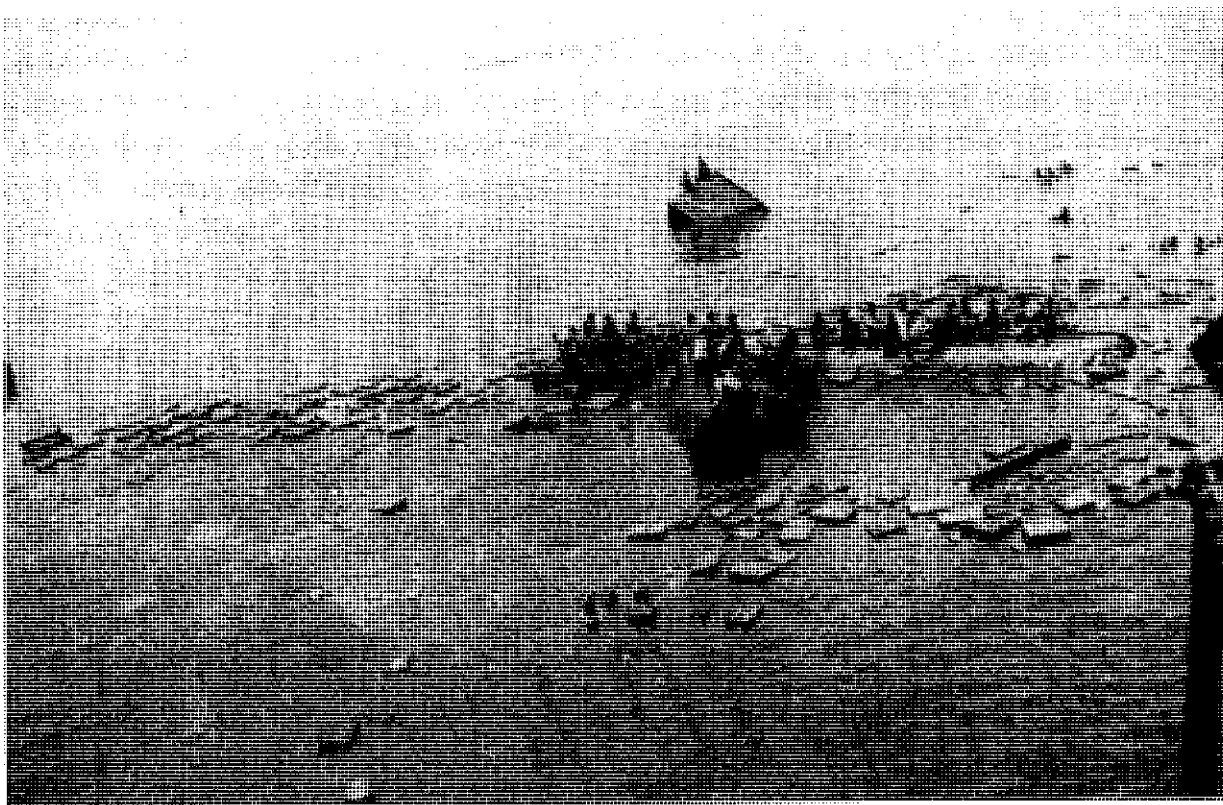
After the war they combined with Eric Garland as Pianist. Under the name of the **Metronomes**, they performed at concerts in the Melbourne Town Hall and

on "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons", a popular weekly broadcast from Wesley Church in Melbourne. Radio was a very popular entertainment before television and they gave radio performances on 3KZ's P & A Parade and 3 DB's Amateur Hour. Later they had engagements on 3LO and 3AR. Easter and Christmas were special times as soloists on Oratorios - The Crucifixion and Messiah. Don brought the Metronomes to an end in 1952 by going to Hobart as Fletcher Jones' opening Manager until 1973.

The conditions at Oro Bay were a huge contrast to the conditions which existed for our first two months in New Guinea. The contrast could hardly have been greater, from oppressive humidity, constant rain, mud, swamp, camps hidden in the jungle, the unit scattered over many sites during the Buna - Sanananda campaigns, to Oro Bay with its more open undulating country, coming into the drier months, with a constant breeze to temper the tropical heat, a settled camp with the majority of the unit at the one site and the opportunity to add a few comforts. Another contrast was that the roads at Oro Bay dried out rapidly after rain and dust from the roads became a problem !

SCRUB TYPHUS

This is not to say that the personnel were not busy. The unit was still understrength by reason of those hospitalized or evacuated sick and despite some reinforcements having been received. The care of an average of 200



Survivors from sinking of the "Jacob" in water and clinging to debris, waiting to be picked up by escorting Corvette, H.M.A.S. Bendigo. (AWM Neg. No.305605)

patients was sufficient to keep all staff fully occupied. A special Scrub Typhus ward was set up and this would be somewhat comparable to present day intensive care wards with individual nursing required on a 24 hour basis. Some Scrub Typhus patients reached a temperature of 106 degrees and recovered. The Scrub Typhus ward was under the care of Sgt. Laurie Malkin, an accountant by profession, who learnt his nursing skills in the army. Captain Adrian Paul in his report on Scrub Typhus states that successful treatment of this disease depends on :

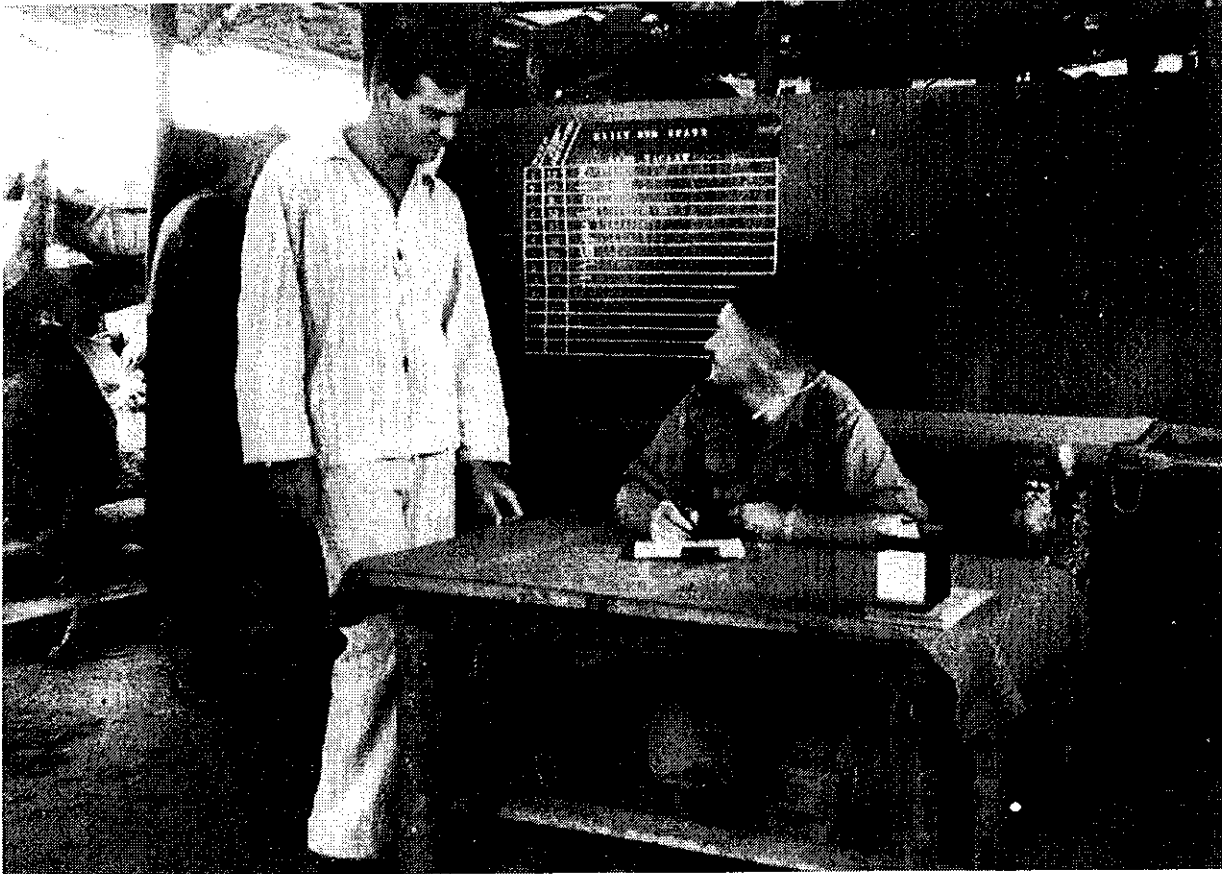
1. Early diagnosis and husbanding of strength.
2. Complete rest.
3. Careful nursing.
4. Typhoid regime - Free fluids and balance chart, Small frequent easily digested foods of high calorific content.
5. Allaying fears.
6. Treating symptoms.
7. Ensuring sleep. (He then details the drugs used to ensure sleep)

An article in the Medical Journal of Australia dated the 18th of November 1944 comments on the nursing of Scrub Typhus patients as follows:-

“Early medical evacuation and confinement to bed of suspect patients in the first five to six days are of importance. The patient must be evacuated as a ‘sick lying case’ where possible to a General Hospital with expert nursing facilities. Patients who are seriously ill tolerate ground transport badly, and are best evacuated by air. If the patient is already seriously ill by the sixth day, or if the days of fever are more than six already, it is often wiser to treat him on the spot at a main dressing station or field ambulance, rather than risk further movement during the phase of circulatory upset and continuous fever. Expert nursing is the single measure of supreme importance. Seriously ill patients require the attention of one nurse practically all the time. The patient should be nursed in the Fowler’s position unless he cannot rest in this position.

Absolute rest during fever is essential. If the patient is restless, adequate repeated sedatives should be freely used. Attention to this should be so stressed that such a statement as “patient restless and got out of bed” should not be found on a night report. Bed rest is necessary till the patient has been apyrexial at least ten days. A fluid intake of 140 ounces daily should be aimed at and more if possible. Any nourishing solids that can be taken should be used. Eggs, when available may be used as ‘egg flips’. Milk drinks provide a good source of protein and calcium. The administration of fluids to querulous or apathetic patients calls for considerable patience on the part of the nurse.”

From February until August 1943 we were the only hospital on the north side of

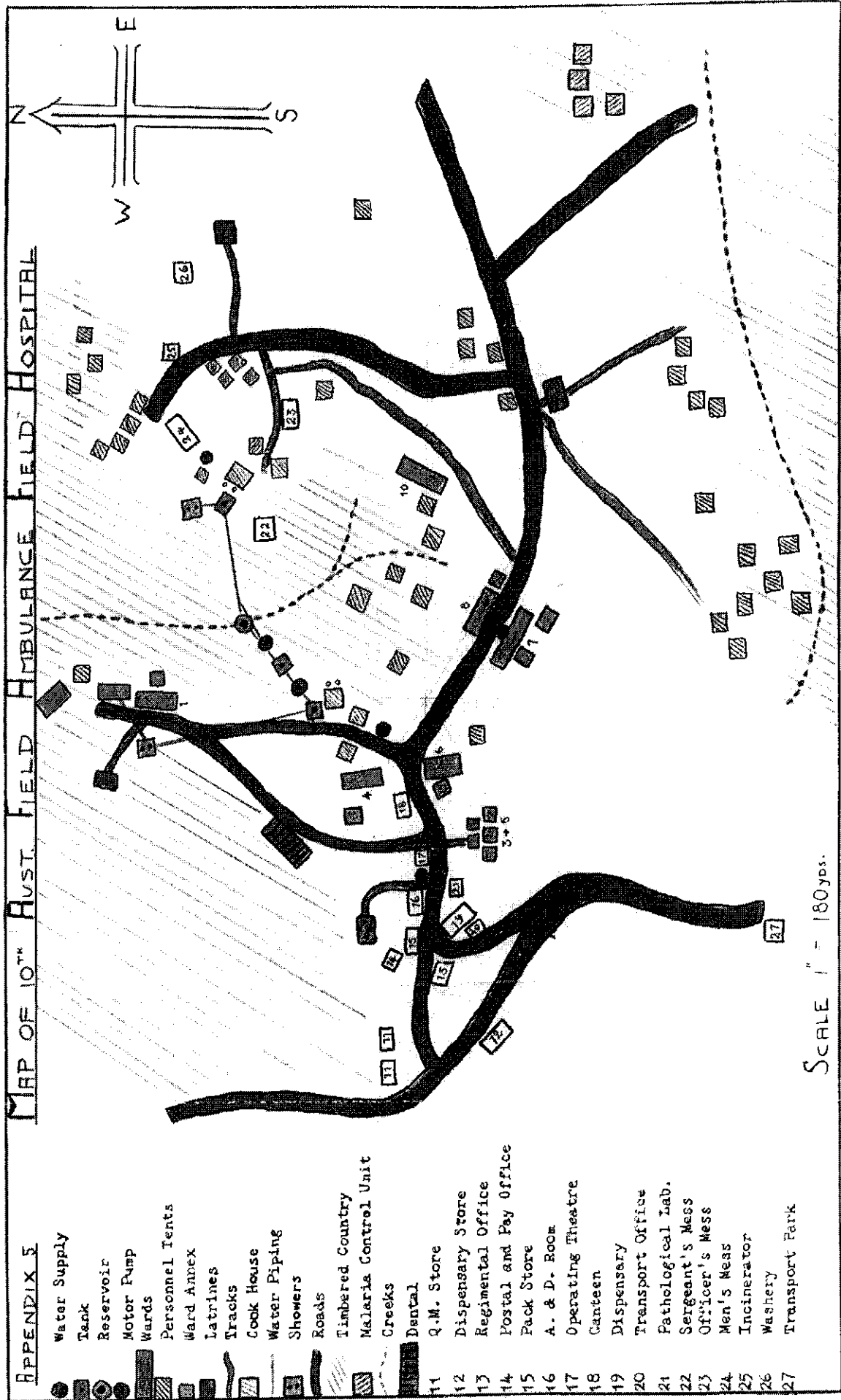


Major Ian Wilson interviewing patient at Camp Hospital, Oro Bay.(AWM Neg.No.079545)

the Owen Stanley range and a special Scrub Typhus ward was quickly established to deal with the cases which were arriving from the Buna area and from our Morobe A.D.S. During the operation of the hospital at Oro Bay our unit treated over 100 cases of Scrub Typhus and there were two deaths, both in August 1943. The mortality rate among all cases reported in New Guinea which were the subject of the above mentioned report in the Australian Medical Journal was between six and seven percent.

Major Ian Wilson developed the disease in September 1943 and was admitted to and treated in our hospital. He gave the 1992 "toast to the unit" at our annual Anzac Day reunion and said he lost seven stone in weight in three weeks. He also said that Laurie Malkin told him later that he was "away with the fairies" on occasions. He praised the treatment he received, reminding us that the 10th had the best record of any unit for the nursing of Scrub Typhus patients. He concluded with emotion that his life had been saved by the boys he had helped to train.

Alan Sharp was one of the Scrub Typhus ward nursing orderlies and he has recorded his recollections of his work at Oro Bay and mentions one particular patient whom he helped nurse back to health.



Map of Camp Hospital, Oro Bay.



Hospital Wards, Oro Bay from the air. (AWM Neg. No. 079682)

The 10th Australian Field Ambulance set up a hospital at Oro Bay in February 1943 where the unit was stationed for some time.

It was here that the unit became leaders in the diagnosis and treatment of scrub typhus. This illness was caused by a tiny tick which lived on rats and infected human beings, attacking primarily the heart. Of more than one hundred patients cared for, the loss of life was minimal, thus emphasising the expertise and care rendered by all members assigned to the scrub typhus ward. The work of the unit was the subject of an article in the British Medical Journal at the time.

Experience in the treatment of this illness under the leadership of Captain Emmett Spring, Captain Adrian Paul and Sergeant Laurie Malkin emphasised the essential need for complete rest of every patient to avoid, as much as possible, strain on the heart in particular. This of course involved dedicated nursing and the unit was indeed fortunate to have the personnel to provide this care.

This quality of nursing could not have been more evident as in the case of a patient, Les Pampa, aged 21 years. Les was admitted to the 10th on the 16th of July with a temperature of 100 degrees. Apart from an occasional day, Les's temperature reached 100 degrees and over for the entire time he was cared for, at times reaching 105. Records show that he was a patient for 60 days and was expected to die at any time during that period. But he survived.

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Alan told me of what he considered the turning point in Les's illness when on being asked by Alan if there was anything he would like, he replied in a barely audible whisper, "hot black tea". This was promptly supplied and received and from then on he seemed to have "turned the corner".

It was always a matter of great satisfaction to the orderlies to see a patient like this recover.

To try to prevent this disease, orders were issued that all troops must wear long trousers with gaiters. Other protective measures taken were the destruction of kunai grass and undergrowth near camps to eradicate rats and other possible carriers of the mite which causes the infection. Beds were raised up off the ground to minimize the possibility of being bitten. Towards the end of our stay in New Guinea the anti-mite repellent Di-Butyl Phthalate was issued to all troops and a decline in the incidence of the disease followed.

CAMP ROUTINE

On one occasion the U.S. Quartermaster had a pleasant surprise for us and made a supply of bananas available. The Red Cross supplied a refrigerator and other stores. Fumigation of all the blankets belonging to Australian troops was arranged.

Enemy air activity increased as the Oro Bay base became more extensive. Slit trenches were dug for patients and personnel. Some spectacular dog fights between our fighters and Zero's escorting bombers were seen over the bay. Night raids were also becoming more frequent. You would first hear the distinctive whine of Japanese motors then the clicks as the bomb doors opened, then the first explosion, then the second - closer, then the third lot of clicks and the explosion beyond you. Heave a sigh of relief and climb back into bed. The bombing was mainly concentrated on the wharf area. There were some casualties admitted to hospital mainly with shrapnel wounds.



*Interior of one of the Wards with Lloyd Champion
Nursing orderly. (AWM Neg. No. 079577)*



Group in front of Chapel, Oro Bay.

Route marches were reinstated to keep the troops fit. On one such exercise in the vicinity of Eroro Creek Lieut. Jack McGill received a gunshot graze to the top of the scalp from a company of U.S. machine gunners who were also out practising.

During April the ration position improved considerably. The Australian Field Bakery was set up and fresh bread was issued every second day. By the middle of April they were in full production and we received a daily ration. We also received supplies of fresh meat, eggs, fruit and vegetables, the first we had tasted since leaving Australia six months earlier.

When the unit left Australia a number of personnel were left behind being under age. Four of these now rejoined us at Oro Bay. On the 11th April another bombing raid on the harbour was carried out and there were three Australian casualties admitted to hospital. One had to have his hand amputated. Two of our officers, Major Ian Wilson and Capt. Emmett Spring visited the native hospital at Warisoto plantation and gave assistance to the Warrant Officer in charge.

SANGARA MISSION

Roy McKim recalls driving two of our medical officers to Sangara Mission to treat those requiring medical attention and also to leave supplies. They were shown the graves of the two mission sisters who had been betrayed by some of the natives and handed over to the Japanese and bayoneted. The missionary who showed them was an albino, "snow white" and over 6 feet tall, a sight Roy McKim never forgot.

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When the Japanese landed unopposed at Gona on the 21st of July 1942 the Mission staff consisting of Father Benson and a nurse and teacher, Mavis Parkinson and May Hayman fled into the jungle intending to make towards Sangara where there was an Anglican Mission and a rubber plantation. The Japanese fanned out quickly after landing and the fleeing party heard patrols moving in the same direction as them. They hid and took refuge in a mission outstation on the Kumisi river. They were joined here by a party of five Australians who had been manning a wireless station at Ambasi and five Americans, pilots and crew of planes that had been shot down and some members of the Papuan Infantry Battalion. The plan was to make a wide circuit of the invasion area and escape across the mountains. They camped in the open just outside the village of Dobodura one night. That evening some of the villagers went to the Japanese at Popondetta and informed them of the presence of the white people. One of the Americans was wounded and they asked for some native carriers and a litter. The natives were reluctant and the party moved off in the morning. The Japanese arrived soon after and were led by some natives along the track they had taken. The party was fired on by the Japanese and the fallen bodies bayoneted. Father Benson and the two girls escaped only to be betrayed once again. This time the two girls were bayoneted to death. Father Benson, who had gone to Sanananda to obtain safe conduct for the girls, was captured and became a prisoner of war.



New Guinea mother with children.

The priests and sisters from the Sangara and Isivita Missions, with the increasing Japanese presence, decided to take a circle route beyond the Japanese infiltration and try to make their way over the mountains to the south coast. They met up with the Sangara plantation manager and his staff, who were trying to get through to Oro Bay a little south of Sanananda. Captain Austen in charge of this party persuaded the mission staffs to join him in his attempt to get through to the coast, as the walking would be easier for the two girls. At one village they met up with some of the "Cargo Cult" natives who were decidedly unfriendly. Other villagers were friendly but afraid of the Japanese who had threatened to punish any who helped Europeans. News of their arrival reached the ears of a dissident ringleader who allowed them to continue for a time be-

fore handing them over to another village where they were virtually taken prisoner. Their route was altered and eventually they were handed over to the Japanese near Buna. They were taken to Buna, interrogated, and after two days taken to the beach and executed by sword by a Japanese soldier whom it is believed volunteered for the job. It is thought that their bodies were thrown into the sea. The six and a half year old son of a lay mission worker was executed last. After the war those responsible for the betrayal were brought to justice and hanged.



Jeep negotiating muddy track through Kunai. (AWM Neg. No. 079661)

INNOVATIONS

It was whilst at Oro Bay that the ingenuity of various members was put to use in improvising and inventing aids to assist their patients. A new operating theatre tent was set up which had a unique overhead lamp which did not cast shadows, partly made from biscuit tins. The light operated from car batteries. The theatre was set up also with running hot and cold water and taps which were operated by the elbow. An incinerator for disposing of food scraps, medical waste and general rubbish, even burning wet garbage was made from 44 gallon drums. A hot water system for the wards was devised, again using the very versatile 44 gallon drum. The transport workshop manufactured and set up a testing board for testing various engine components of their fleet. A patient back rest, a "donkey" to elevate the bed clothes and a bed table were improvised from ARC steel mesh.

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Another useful innovation, allowing the large number of patients to be provided with piping hot meals, was the "flying fox", the cage again being made of ARC steel mesh, which was rigged up between the patients' kitchen and the wards which were on a much lower level.

In April a patient died, on the night he was admitted, from a heavy M.T. malaria infection, our first death in the camp hospital. During April there were 226 patients admitted including 11 with scrub typhus, 109 were evacuated and the remainder returned to their units.

In May Major Gavin Johnson was posted to the 2/2nd Aust C.C.S. and Capt. Peter Hardcastle came in his place. Gavin was mentioned in despatches for his services in New Guinea, the official citation being, "Having rendered gallant and distinguished service in the South West Pacific area."

An electric generator was received from the mainland and set up providing electric light for the operating theatre, A & D Room, Pack Store, Pay and Postal tent, Orderly Room, Dispensary and Pathology Laboratory. First Aid schools were instituted with Capt. Bill Brand and Lieut. Merv Featonby lecturing. Three of these schools were held during May, 1943.

Bill Potter and a team of natives began an extensive building program in June building timber and sisalcraft huts and progressively replacing tents for the hospital wards and other functions. Twelve personnel from 2/2nd Heavy A.A. Unit assisted in this project. Cpl. John Grant was transferred to the 21st Aust. Field Company as R.A.P. orderly.

Major Ian Wilson organized a trial for a new slide agglutination diagnostic test for Scrub Typhus and found the results very satisfactory, being borne out in the main by clinical findings. The character of malaria in the area again underwent a change with the frequency of B.T. malaria decreasing.

UNIT BECOMES FRAGMENTED AGAIN

The next objective of the military forces was to capture Salamaua and Lae and already combined Australian and American forces were engaged in this task. Casualties were being received from these forward areas and from June onwards the unit again began to be split into detachments. Firstly on the 15th of June Lieut. Featonby and 8 other ranks left for Dobodura to establish a strip air evacuation post. This detachment eventually reached almost company strength with facilities for holding patients and treating them, as well as solely evacuation.

Another detachment leaving on the 23rd of June under Capt. Brand were sent



*Improvised Hot Water System with Alan Patrick drawing off hot water for the wards.
(AWM Neg. No. 079675)*

to Morobe, approximately seventy miles further up the coast from Buna towards Salamaua. They travelled by sea on the M.V. "Tung Song". Their task was to establish an A.D.S. and a sea evacuation post. A detailed description of this section's activities is given in the next chapter.

The personnel forming the Morobe detachment were :-

Capt. Bill Brand	Pte. Ross Hayter
S/Sgt. Bob James	" Don Hiddleston
Sgt. Ken Phillips	" Dick Holmes
Cpl. Clem Winchester	" Doug Johns
Cpl. Andy McHattie	" George Johnston
Cpl. A.S. Smith	" Dick Jones
Cpl. Jack Walsh	" Vern Laidlaw
Pte. J.H. Hollonds	" Don Ludlam
" Bill Kennedy	" Fred Marles
" A.G. Hilditch	" Harry Mead
" Phil Scanlon	" C. J. Morrow
" Harry Tozer	" Eddie Mott



*Our C.O., Lt. Col. E.C. (Ted) Palmer outside Orderly Room, Oro Bay.
(AWM Neg. No. 079542)*

Pte.	Don Braine	Pte.	Noel Norton
"	George Brown	"	John Osborne
"	Claude Capstick	"	Allan Patrick
"	W.A. Cook	"	Jock Roe
"	Lou Courtney	"	George Sangster
"	John Cox	"	Martin Smith
"	C.F. Cudby	"	Stuart Smith
"	Cyril Evans	"	Jack Standerwick
"	Geoff Flower	"	Ken Stanley
"	John Garlepp	"	Neville Stephens
"	B.A.K. Graves	"	John Stretton
"	F.W. Haberman	"	Kel White
"	Horrie Hamer	"	Harry Williams
"	Ted Young		

Captain Hardcastle was posted to the 2/6th Heavy A.A. Regt. and Capt. Alec Reith joined the unit in his place. By the 5th July the Camp Hospital at Oro Bay was receiving battle casualties from Morobe. This was our first experience with sea ambulance transport, a form of evacuation which the unit pioneered and became expert in before the formation of a special Sea Ambulance

Transport unit (SEAT) which eventually took over this task up in the Finschhafen area. Some of the vessels used to evacuate patients were the M.V.'s "Blackfin", "Bantam", "Tung Song", "Coorabee", "Wombat" and "Cooramil".

The Dobodura evacuation post was now acting in a dual role - (1). Receiving patients from Dobodura, Buna and Soputa area and evacuation to Camp Hospital at Oro Bay and, (2) Evacuation of patients from Oro Bay by air to Port Moresby.

Improvements were continually being made to the camp at Oro Bay with electricity being connected to the Y.M.C.A. recreation hut and a new kitchen built and a separate mess tent erected to serve the hospital patients. A medical officer from the 7th Field Ambulance together with a microscope and an orderly were attached to assist Major Ian Wilson in the Pathology Section.

The 11th Aust Division arrived at Dobodura towards the end of July, 1943. Consequently the 10th Field Ambulance came under their control. This meant a big influx of Australian troops into the area including the 2/11th A.G.H. Our officers and men gave assistance to the 2/11th in setting up their hospital and when their Scrub Typhus ward was operating some of our orderlies were sent to help instruct the A.G.H. nurses and orderlies in the special requirements of caring for Scrub Typhus patients. Medical arrangements would soon be altered with the arrival of a General Hospital in the area.

Our Scrub Typhus ward was kept particularly busy with 21 cases admitted in July including Major Ian Wilson and two others from our unit - Pte. Bob Staples and Cpl. J.L. Kirley. Battle casualties from the fighting at Nassau Bay and Tambu Bay just south of Salamaua continued to arrive regularly. There was an outbreak of meningitis at the ANGAU native camp at Eroro Creek. Our officers inspected the camp and assisted those in charge of the native hospital at Warisota.

The A.D.S. at Dobodura was expanded and was instructed to receive patients from the Dobodura area and to :-

1. Evacuate to Port Moresby if treatment expected to exceed 14 days.
2. Evacuate to Camp Hospital Oro Bay if treatment expected to be less than 14 days, and
3. Hold and treat those requiring treatment period of less than 4 days.

To speed up diagnosis a supply of slides was left at the A.D.S. at Dobodura for blood samples to be taken there and sent with the patient to Oro Bay. Scrub Typhus continued to be a concern and in August there were 12 patients on the Seriously Ill list and two on the Dangerously Ill list.

When patients were evacuated their medical history card was attached to them giving a brief description of their condition on the outside of the envelope; for example, GSW Rt Femur (Gun shot wound right femur). From time to time the letters NYDN were shown, which stood for Not yet diagnosed, nervous. Some of the causes of this could be shell shock, battle fatigue or merely an attempt to be repatriated. These patients were sometimes referred to as "troppo" cases. Allan Williams recalls two such cases whilst he was at Dobodura. He gives the story thus :-

"1. An ambulance brought in a Major from a Field Regiment on a stretcher- he was in the top berth and when we went into the ambulance he was thrashing around and we found he was strapped down. He was a huge man, all of 20 stone. There were only two of us available to lift his stretcher down so he could be examined and I felt the strain of that lift for days. The Major was what we called "Troppo" and required a lot of attention until we were able to get the U.S. Air Force to take him back to Moresby. Jim Lyall, one of our big orderlies went with him to take care of him in the plane.

2. One night quite late we were just finishing up and getting ready for bed about 2200 hours when all of a sudden a naked and armed man entered the tent where we worked and slept. He ordered us all out and told us to do what he said or he would shoot us. There were three or four of us in the tent, one already in bed and he was prodded out with the end of the rifle. We were told to go outside and stand to attention. One of us was able to slip under the side of the tent and go for help, which soon arrived and the man was tackled from behind and brought down. He was an ANGAU officer who had also gone "troppo" and he thought we were his natives. We had great difficulty getting him to Port Moresby and in the meantime he had to be watched with a 24 hour armed guard. Jim Lyall eventually took him to Port Moresby on a plane with a pistol at his head. This was the only way the Americans would accept him."

Jim's claim to fame was that pre-war he had competed in the annual three mile Yarra swimming race. This race, from the Hawthorn Tea Gardens to Princes Bridge and later from Loy's Corner, near where the Loys Soft Drink factory was situated, to Princes Bridge, attracted a lot of publicity and interest. It was held annually for fifty years from 1913 until 1963. John McDonald in his book "Century of Swimming in Victoria" writes of one competitor in 1934 who was prepared to go to any lengths to win. He writes, " At one stage of the race he decided a short period on dry land - using his feet but no arm action - might hasten his trip to the finishing line.

Did he, as some witnesses suggested, ride a bicycle? Or did he simply run along the bank? Whatever his method, it was effective, at least in the short term. He returned to the water and finished ahead of his rivals, who were amazed to find that the swimmer in question had beaten them.

But the glory was short lived. It was always unlikely that a competitor would be able to cheat so blatantly without being noticed and officials were quickly made aware of the swimmer's unusual route to the finish line. He was disqualified for life".

Pte. Phil ("Doc") Aylwin was detached as medical orderly to a unit of U.S. engineers at Warisota who were operating a sawmill milling the local timber for construction purposes. Pte. George Johnstone was detached as R.A.P. orderly to 11 Aust. Div. Reception Camp. Two other orderlies were detached to operate the R.A.P. for N.G.L of C Signals. Some of our personnel extinguished a small bushfire which started near the Radio Direction Finder hill.

Captain John Sands joined the unit on 9th August 1943. Sgt. Harry Cowan embarked for Morobe to take six Sea Ambulance Transport orderlies to Tambu Bay to evacuate patients from 7th Field Ambulance Light Section. Tambu Bay was further north than Nassau Bay and as the net tightened around Salamaua, Tambu Bay became the evacuation point for clearing patients from the battle zone.

Admissions to the Camp Hospital, Oro Bay from the Morobe A.D.S. increased significantly as the tempo of the battle for Salamaua increased. The procedure adopted now was for a medical officer to examine the patients as they arrived at the wharf and those requiring evacuation were sent straight to Dobodura for evacuation to Port Moresby and the remainder were admitted to the Camp Hospital. Total admissions to the Camp Hospital for August were 742. The Scrub Typhus ward became inadequate for the 30 odd patients and another ward was opened. During this month two Scrub Typhus patients died. By this time we had treated over 100 Scrub Typhus patients. Battle casualties and sick from the Salamaua area were increasing and nursing orderlies were doing 12 hour shifts.

Regular air raids were still being carried out by the Japanese and one man died when he was accidentally run down by a vehicle during an air raid alert.

At Dobodura a Pathologist from the 2/11th A.G.H. was attached to take and examine blood slides and obviate the need to send these to Oro Bay. Battle casualties from fighting in the Salamaua area began to arrive direct to Dobodura via Buna and the number of patients requiring evacuation to Port Moresby was increasing. If bad weather or operational requirements prevented planes arriving, arrangements had to be made to hold patients indefinitely. Such situations occurred late in August and early September. On 22nd August 106 patients were being held, treated and fed.

Early in September it was necessary to divert all transport planes to the Wau

Care, Courage & Camaraderie

area to supply the 7th Division with equipment and food. Supplies to our area and back loading of patients ceased for some days. The A.D.S. used every means available for evacuation of seriously ill or wounded, utilizing a Press plane, a courier plane and a plane carrying staff officers. The remainder were treated and accommodated until the emergency passed and regular supply planes arrived again.

The U.S. Army released 300 U.S. army cots for use in the hospital at Oro Bay to allow us to send 300 stretchers to forward areas.

PREPARATIONS TO MOVE UP THE COAST

When the 2/11th A.G.H. became established early in September (the first General Hospital north of the Owen Stanleys) our role changed and the unit's personnel at Oro Bay and Dobodura began to prepare to move further up the coast towards Lae. The A.D.S. at Dobodura began to evacuate patients to the 2/11th A.G.H. and the Camp Hospital was left to care for Scrub Typhus patients, those with severe malaria infection and sick from the immediate Oro Bay area. Major Watson from the 2/7th A.G.H. arrived to replace Major Wilson who was in hospital with Scrub Typhus and later Lieut. Wignall replaced Major Watson.

By the middle of September it was arranged for the 106 C.C.S. to take over the Camp Hospital and the 6th Field Ambulance to take over the A.D.S. at Dobodura. Oro Bay personnel were to proceed to Dobodura and await movement up the coast to Lae.

Captain J.P. Lyttle was taken on strength to replace Major Harry Francis who was appointed D.A.D.M.S. 11th Division.

On the 18th September the 106 C.C.S. took over the Camp Hospital at Oro Bay and by the 20th the unit headquarters had moved to Dobodura. The weather became hotter and a number of personnel were suffering from itch and other skin complaints. On the 26th September, 1943 the A.D.S. at Dobodura was handed over to the 6th Field Ambulance.

Stores were loaded on a U.S. L.S.T. No 468 on the 27th and at 0700hours on the 28th the unit embarked and sailed north up the coast arriving at Lae beach at 2100 hours.