

CHAPTER 8

**LAE, DREGER HARBOUR AND THE HUON
PENINSULA CAMPAIGN**

(28th September 1943 to 27th April 1944)

LAE

When Lae was recaptured on the 16th September, it had been ruined by bombing and fouled by dead bodies and rubbish. The task was to transform this shattered insanitary town into a safe major base.

Planning had already been done to drive the Japanese from the Huon Peninsula, including Finschhafen and again the 7th and 9th Divisions were to be the spearhead of these operations with the 9th Division driving along the coast and making amphibious landings and the 7th Division operating parallel inland. The 9th Division had the problem of river crossings and the 7th the mountainous country of the Finisterre ranges rising to a height of 13,000 feet.

Only five days after the fall of Lae the 20th Brigade of the 9th Division had been assigned the task of capturing Langemak Bay and Finschhafen. They embarked at Red Beach and were bound for Scarlet Beach near Katika north of Finschhafen where they were to make another amphibious landing, with a view to cutting off the Japanese troops in the Finschhafen area.

Within a week of the fall of Lae casualties were being evacuated from the Lae airstrip direct to Port Moresby. The main body of the 10th Field Ambulance arrived at the Lae landing beach on the 28th September under cover of night and marched up the Butibum River to a camp at Kamkummum. The track was dotted with bomb craters and in the dark it was easy to "lose" a member temporarily ! The unit's task was to set up a 200 bed hospital equivalent to a C.C.S. and to take over a beach evacuation post from the 2/3rd Field Ambulance. Daylight saving was introduced in keeping with the mainland as from the 1st of October. Captain Murray Verso joined the unit and was attached for sea ambulance transport duties.

Advice was received from Corps headquarters that the Morobe A.D.S. was to operate as a sea ambulance transport staging post only and Captain Bill Brand and 12 O/R's were to close the A.D.S. and return to headquarters.

By the 2nd October the first ward was erected at Lae and equipped to accommodate fifty and by the 3rd we were holding thirty two patients. On the 7th of October heavy rain fell in the evening and a new ward which had been com-

pleted and filled that afternoon was completely flooded. Time had not allowed for erection of stretcher racks and patients were bedded down on stretchers on the ground. These had to be hurriedly moved to other accommodation and the flooded ward not used again until stretcher racks had been erected. The road between the C.C.S. and the beach post was often impassable after heavy rain and motor vehicles had to use the river bed as an alternative road.

As new wards were built one of the older ones was closed down and converted to an operating theatre. With the Japanese counter attack on Scarlet Beach about this time there was an increase in casualties and the hospital was fully occupied with up to 300 patients on average being held.

Merv Blow was an officer's batman. In civilian life he was an hotelier. Putting his considerable knowledge of spirits and alcohol to use and using local ingredients such as coconut juice, methylated spirits from the dispensary, boot polish from the canteen and raisins kindly sent from home he concocted his own brand of "jungle juice". One night the mixture was too strong for the bottle and there was a terrific explosion. The authorities not knowing the cause and playing safe ordered an Air Raid Alert ! Whether fighter planes were scrambled or not, is not known.

On the 22nd of October, 1943 the 106 C.C.S. were available to take over the Lae hospital and our personnel were engaged in building additional wards, road building, staffing a ward for 10th Field Ambulance sick, doing the cooking and attending to hygiene duties as well as assisting 106 C.C.S. personnel with nursing duties. The transfer allowed an additional two Officers and 38 O/R's to be sent to reinforce the evacuation post at Finschaffen and additional men to help at the Lae beach post. Driver Keith Flintoff was attached to the Beachmaster at Lae to be responsible for the receipt of all medical and Red Cross supplies, including whole blood, and for forwarding these to the front as and when required. Arrangements were made with the Lae ice-works to store the blood until required. The Lae ice works was one of the few buildings not completely destroyed by allied bombing. The engineers did a good job in getting the building repaired and the ice-works running so quickly. Our patients benefited from the ice supplied to medical units to provide cool drinks and food.

Captain Brand and his team of twelve orderlies established an evacuation post on the beach near Chinatown to handle casualties arriving by sea from Finschhafen. As casualties increased Captain John Sands joined Captain Brand at the Chinatown evacuation post. Capt. Sands earned the reputation of being able to talk almost any Captain of a vessel in Lae Harbour into taking patients south, using everything from barges to Liberty ships.. His organizing ability contributed greatly to the efficient running of the post and also to the well being of the patients in speeding their arrival at a base hospital. As well as the bulk of

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the patients being evacuated by sea some were evacuated by air to either Dobodura or Moresby with our men being responsible for both means of evacuation.

A regular daily evacuation of patients from Lae by air was now arranged with patients to be at the airport by 0900 hours. The following plane loading table was to be adhered to with a maximum of twelve stretcher cases for any one plane :-

Lying	Walking	Total
Nil	20	20
1	19	20
2	18	20
3	17	20
4	16	20
5	15	20
6	14	20
7	13	20
8	12	20
9	11	20
10	8	18
11	4	15
12	Nil	12



Group at Lae - Wally Claringbold, Ray Meadows, Alan Sharp, Ron Sincock, Ray Frith, Neil Gerrand, Claude Capstick.

The American Air Force using mainly DC3 transport planes did a herculean job in New Guinea transporting troops, equipment, rations and supplies to small remote landing strips all over northern New Guinea. The pilots objected to being caught on the ground and so loading had to always be done in a hurry. Also there was always the danger of cloud closing "the gap" over the Owen Stanleys and the pilots not having enough fuel to return to Moresby via Milne Bay. They insisted on loading a plane so that the weight was up the front of the plane and not down at the tail. Life would have been a lot harder without the "Dougies", and their young pilots who so capably landed and took off, often on hastily prepared small strips in those remarkably reliable work horses the DC3. In some areas where there was a coral base, a good strip could be prepared by scraping an area with a bulldozer blade. In swampy areas this was not possible. When the fighting was concentrated around Wau and Nadzab a further hazard was the difficulty of finding enough flat ground for a strip and the proximity of steep mountains to their approach and take off.

After being relieved from running the Lae C.C.S. on the 21st of October we were allotted a new site for our headquarters at Yalu near where the 2nd Aust. Corps were setting up their headquarters. However, as most of our personnel were away with the various detachments and others were still helping at the 106th C.C.S. the move never eventuated and finally Headquarters moved to the Lae Beach Evacuation Post for a short time before moving to Launch Jetty.

Lieut. Lloyd Stuart, our transport officer was transferred to the 2/2nd C.C.S. as Adjutant and Lieut. D. Forbes marched in from A.A.S.C. on the 11th of October 1943 to take his place.

On the 22nd of October 1943, Capt. Alec Reith and 44 O/R's together with medical stores and equipment arrived from Morobe, having closed the Beach Evacuation Post there. The return of these men allowed further reinforcements to be sent to the various detachments at Fischhafen, Nadzab and the Lae evacuation post.

SCARLET BEACH

Lieut. Merv Featonby's detachment at Red Beach moved with the 2/3rd C.C.S. to Kedam Beach where they landed at 0340 hours on the 7th of October and moved inland. From there the next day they were instructed to proceed to Scarlet Beach with a light section of the 2/3rd C.C.S. Patients began arriving immediately and by 2300 hours the first evacuation of patients took place accompanied by some of our orderlies. The situation at Scarlet Beach was very fluid at this time and the detachment was ordered to move once again to Salankua Beach and establish an evacuation post. The Japanese subjected the whole area to constant heavy bombing dropping between 70 and 80 bombs in one raid

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and dive bombing and strafing the area. L.C.M's, L.S.T's and L.C.V's returning from bringing up troops, vehicles and stores were used to evacuate patients in the early stages.

On the night of the 17th October four Japanese craft containing troops eluded our naval patrols and actually effected a landing near Scarlet Beach during a heavy rainstorm. Many Japanese were killed when they met our soldiers but a few managed to occupy and defend a portion of the beach. Two of the barges were disabled and remained on the beach. One barge was observed moving north again and it is not known whether it landed its troops or not. The battle raged on the beach for an hour in the darkness with the Japanese suffering heavy casualties and only a few managing to escape in the jungle across the Song River.

The next day the Japanese from Satelberg made a determined counter attack on the Australian position around Scarlet Beach in a serious attempt to recapture Finschhafen. After breaking through the Australian defences they were menacing the area where the medical services were operating.

Fighting was taking place near the M.D.S. of the 2/8th Field Ambulance and the light section of the 2/3rd C.C.S. to which our men were attached. Members of the units armed themselves and formed a thin defensive line around the wards to protect patients while arrangements were being made to evacuate them. Eventually all patients were successfully evacuated to the beach. The evacuation was carried out interrupted by bursts of machine gun fire through the lines and mortar shells which ripped the sides of the operating tent. From the beach the patients were taken off by barge and sent to the main body of the 2/3rd C.C.S. at Simbang on Langemak Bay arriving just before dusk. This sudden unexpected influx of patients strained the resources of the C.C.S. which was holding 285 patients. The surgical team attached to the light section of the 2/3rd C.C.S. moved with the evacuated patients and continued their work at the main C.C.S.

By the 19th October the 2/28th Battalion had recovered the high ground around Katika and reinforced by the 2/32nd Battalion they repulsed all Japanese attacks and rounded up the few who had landed



Loading patients on to plane, Lae, Bert Wise, Allan Hilditch, Horrie Hamer.

on the beach. The Japanese then withdrew from Siki Cove and retreated up the coast.

These enemy actions were supported by heavy bombing and strafing from which there were some casualties. Continuous night bombing also placed a great strain on medical services trying to operate throughout the night. Preparing meals for staff and patients also was a problem as it was dangerous to light open fires. Personal gear and medical supplies were left behind in the hurried evacuation from Scarlet Beach but were recovered later.

By the 22nd October the 10th Field Ambulance detachment under Lieut. Merv Featonby was moved to the 2/3rd C.C.S. headquarters at Simbang where they were to be responsible for sea evacuations to base. All battle casualties were to be evacuated direct to Buna by whatever sea transport was available. Two of our nursing orderlies were sent to assist the 2/3rd C.C.S. who at that stage were holding over four hundred patients. By the end of October the detachment was reinforced by an additional ten orderlies from Lae.

The Japanese resisted strongly all the way up the coast throughout the month of October. On the 19th the 26th Brigade moved to Langemak Bay. An American Engineer unit moved in with them and immediately commenced work on constructing an airfield in the Dreger area. The amount of heavy mechanised equipment which the Americans moved into the area was an eye opener to the Australians. The Americans finished the Dreger air strip in record time and then presumably moved on to the next place where they would repeat the performance.

NADZAB

On the 15th October 1943 Captain Adrian Paul and twelve orderlies left by air for Nadzab to take over an air evacuation post at Nadzab airstrip from a section of the 9th Field Ambulance. The change-over was on a "walk in - walk out basis". The "equipment" taken over was listed as :-

- 1 Leaky Grass Hut
- 1 12' x 14' worn out tent fly
- 13 Stretchers, 3 Dixies, 1 Spade, 1 Axe,
- 1 Transfusion Pannier
- Some expendable R.A.P. supplies.

They were to come under control of the 111th C.C.S. who quickly helped out with extra tentage and supplies. The first two days were spent setting up camp and establishing liaison with the U.S. Air Force, the Air Force Evacuation unit, ANGAU for native bearers, 153 Aust. Gen. Tpt. Coy. for jeeps and the various medical authorities in the area. The function of the unit was to handle 5th, 7th



Air Raid at Kedam Beach

and 9th Division battle casualties and sick and evacuate them as follows :-

Those fit to return to their units within two to three weeks to 111th C.C.S. at Nadzab. Battle casualties adequately treated, Scrub Typhus fit to travel, interim surgery, the debilitated and chronic skin conditions to Base hospital at either Dobodura or Moresby.

The previous policy had been for the 2/4th Field Ambulance to stage patients for evacuation overnight but as this meant unnecessary movement of sick men it was decided to hold as many as possible at the air strip. On the 20th of October 1943 the 53rd Aust. Field Park moved out and two more leaky grass huts were inherited in which stretcher racks were

built bringing the holding capacity of the detachment to forty five.

Troops staging in the area were a problem as somehow they had discovered that our detachment had tea prepared at all times for patients. The area was fenced off but this failed to deter the staging troops. Reinforcements were received in dribs and drabs until the detachment stabilized at one Officer and twenty two O/R's with two dilapidated jeeps and two Ambulance wagons. Four reinforcements experienced in nursing Scrub Typhus patients were also sent from Lae to assist the 111th C.C.S. in their Scrub Typhus ward. They were Ron Woff, Roy Simpson, Albert De Lantye and Ralph Hallum. The detachment was also to be responsible for blood supplies arriving by air and for forwarding these to the forward surgical teams.

Captain J.P. Lyttle arrived on the 29th of October and this enabled Captain Adrian Paul to be relieved of medical duties to assist the carpenter in building a 70' x 20' Sisalkraft mess hut and kitchen which was divided, unequally, according to Capt. Paul, with the U.S. Evacuation unit, who managed to get the lions share ! An oven constructed by unit personnel out of 44 gallon drums was also installed.

On the 13th of November American nurses arrived on planes to escort patients to base; Result - standing room only on the strip !

During November the 111th C.C.S. at Nadzab was holding 550 patients and

called for further assistance from our unit. A party of twelve were sent including eight nursing orderlies.

Captains Paul and Lyttle flew over the various evacuation routes to Dumpu, Dobodura and Moresby to report on altitudes and best times to avoid bumpy conditions so as to be able to choose the most suitable time and destination of evacuation according to the condition of the patient. Air raids and strafing of gun positions of units adjacent to our detachment were experienced in November. On the 22nd of November a clinical afternoon was held at the C.C.S. on Scrub Typhus which was very prevalent in the Markham - Ramu valley. Captain Adrian Paul covered the clinical side. Brigadier Norris attended together with about twenty American doctors and the Medical Officers from the 111th C.C.S.

On the 21st of December the detachment was relieved by a similar detachment from the 9th Field Ambulance. Excellent co-operation had been obtained from the 111th C.C.S., ANGAU, the Y.M.C.A., the U.S. Air Force and most importantly the crew and pilots of the various Troop Carrier Squadrons.

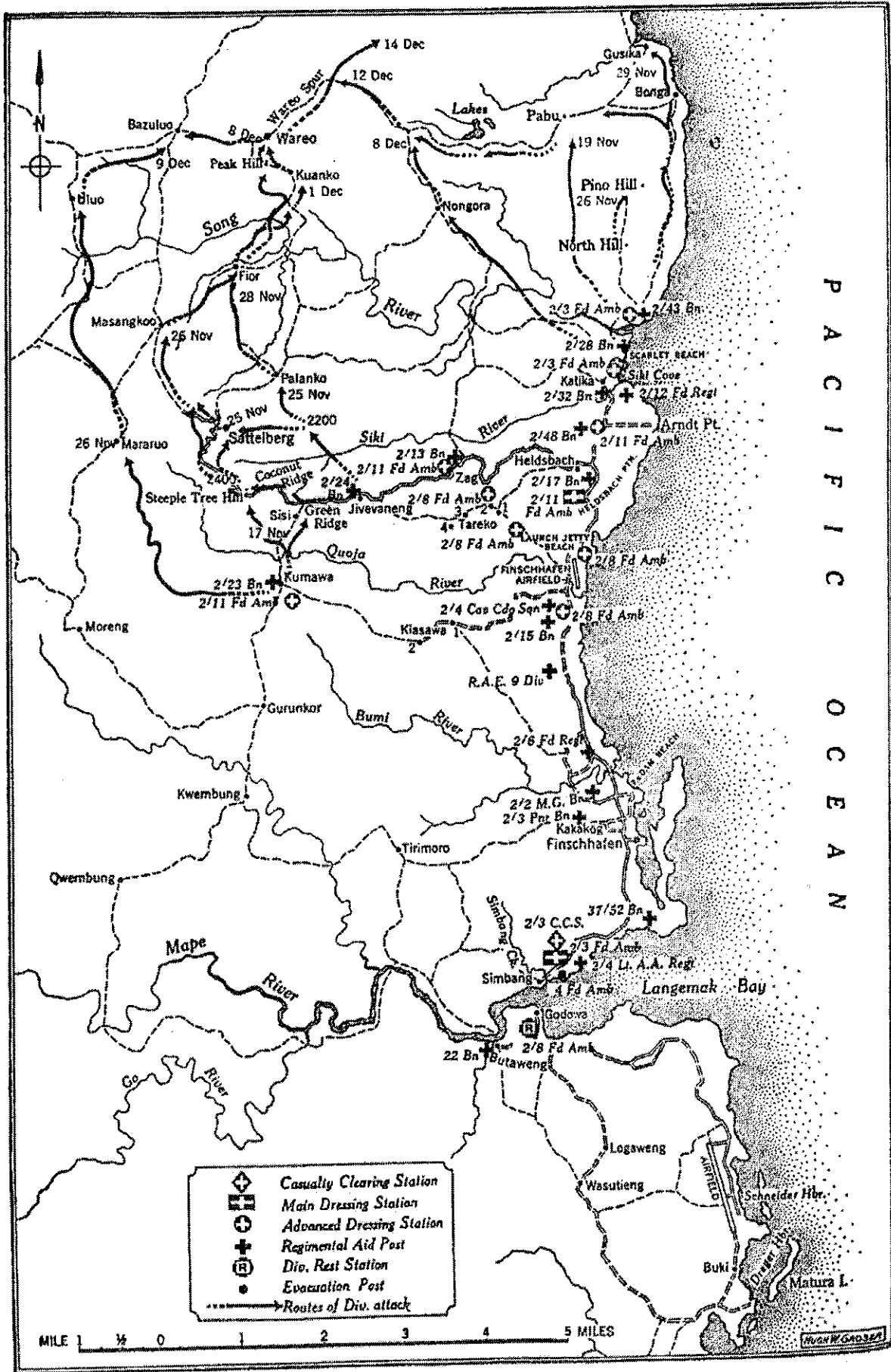
SATELBERG

After the failure of the Japanese counter attack on Scarlet Beach their troops were concentrated at Satelberg, an eminence some 3,000 feet high overlooking Finschhafen. The task now was to dislodge them from this fortress. Nine Matilda tanks had been secretly brought into the area, the first use of this type of tank in New Guinea. The Japanese had the advantage of height with our troops attacking from the lower ground. The task was not easy and casualties were heavy. However, by the 25th November Satelberg was completely occupied by the 26th Brigade. This left the final Japanese stronghold in the area at Wareo. After severe fighting the 2/24th Battalion outflanked the enemy and took Wareo on the 8th December with the Japanese retreating up the coast being vigorously pursued by our troops.

SEA AMBULANCE TRANSPORT

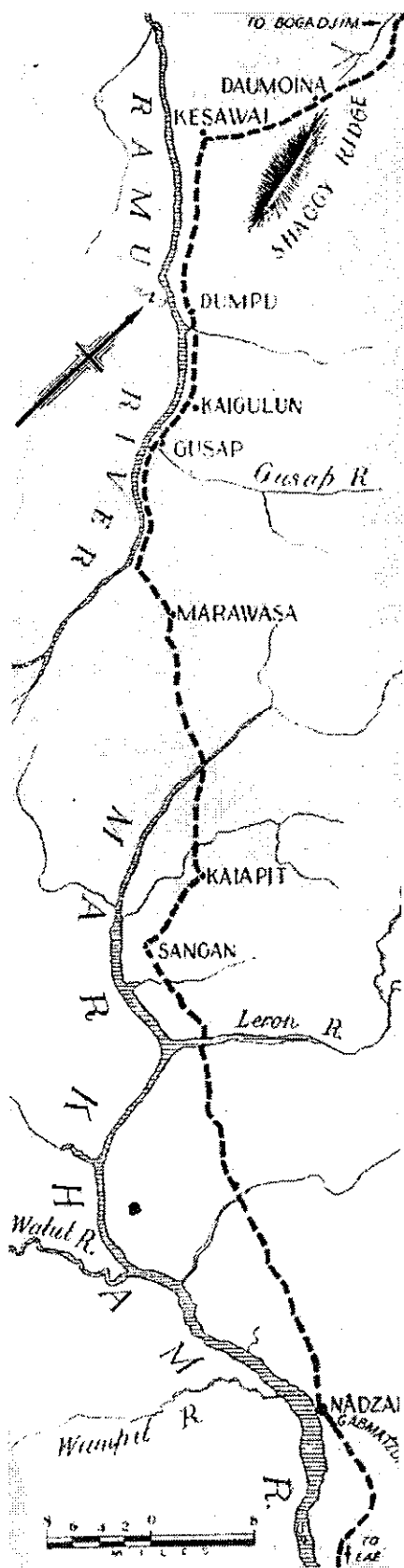
About this time it was decided to establish a New Guinea Sea Ambulance Transport Unit and a detachment of thirty seven medical orderlies under a corporal arrived at Lae for this purpose. Captain Alf Barnett and Captain Murray Verso, who had been with our unit for about a month, were to be in charge of this new unit. They were to take over the work of accompanying patients on their sea evacuation route which in the past our orderlies had been doing.

The new orderlies were given lectures in nursing duties and practical training with the 106th C.C.S. The actual takeover of all sea ambulance transport



Medical dispositions, Finschhafen, 5th November

Map.



Map - Nadzab and Dumpu.

duties was not achieved until early December and our orderlies were still heavily involved in this work until then.

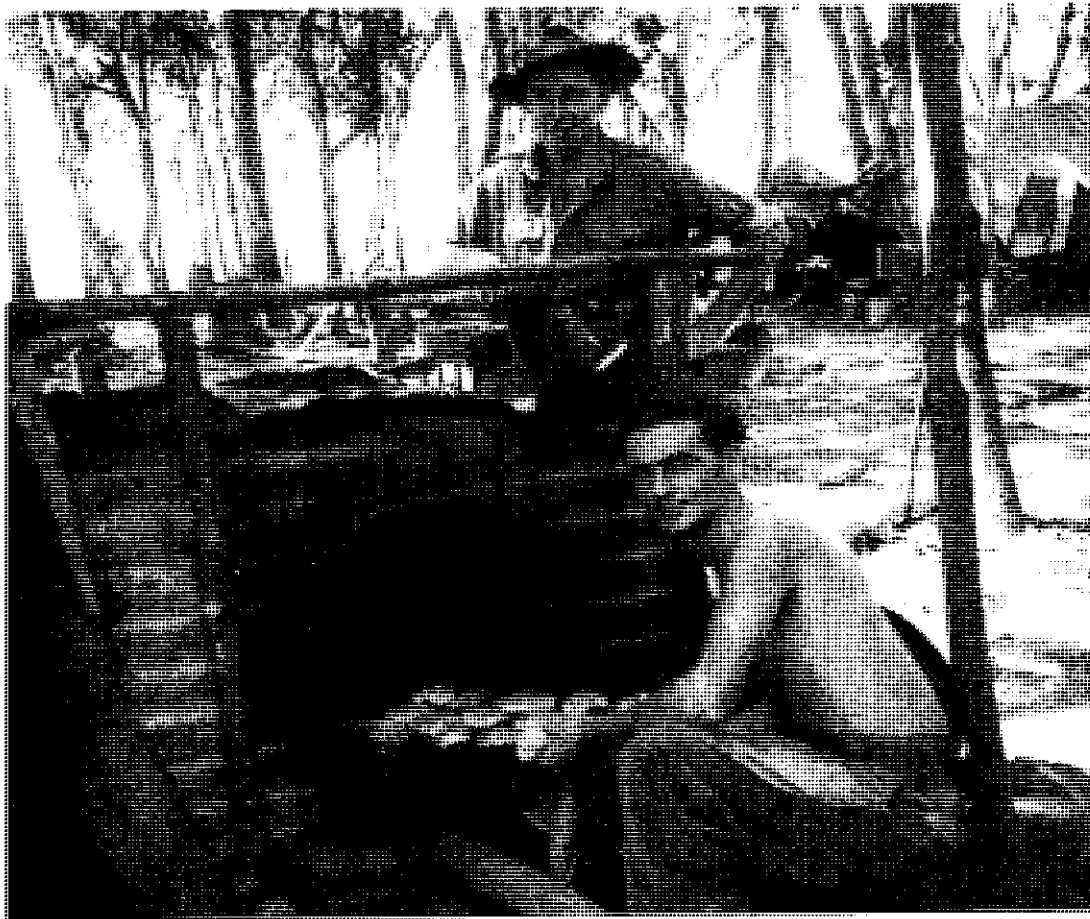
Towards the end of October the Hospital launch, "Stradbroke" was being used on a regular run from Finschhafen to Lae doing one return journey each 48 hours. This was eventually shortened to one every 24 hours. The *Stradbroke*, formerly a luxury yacht, had been converted into a coastal hospital vessel with bunks provided below for twenty eight lying patients and thirty sitting. The bunks were not entirely satisfactory as they did not take a standard Australian stretcher. This made loading and unloading patients a much lengthier process. Later in November the U.S. hospital vessel *Norab* staffed by U.S. medical personnel arrived in the area and alternated runs with the *Stradbroke*.

Lieut. Merv Featonby's report on Evacuations by Sea from Langemak Bay is reproduced here :-

In my opinion the C.C.S. should not handle the evacuation of the patients. It was found that the C.C.S. personnel could not cope with the work while there was a large number of patients in hospital. Rations were unsatisfactory: here again caused by the lack of time on the part of the C.C.S. cooks and staff.

Nominal rolls were inaccurate and generally arrived after the first patients had commenced loading. This caused quite some dissatisfaction on the two S.A.T's, the Stradbroke and Norab. Stradbroke particularly found it necessary to have the list of patients with injuries shown, so that the casualties could be placed in suitable bunks on board. The arrangements for transporting the patients from the C.C.S. to the beach were unsat-

isfactory and sometimes precarious, due to the bad road which was completely neglected and to an inadequate bridge across a creek. Barges to take patients to the S.A.T's were uncertain and after the M.L.O. moved from Langemak Bay, were difficult to obtain, causing delay in placing patients on the ships.



The new oven at Nadzab. Russell Behrens and Eddie Sullivan. (AWM Neg. No. 79487)

M. FEATONBY'S SUGGESTIONS FOR EVACUATION

- 1. The whole evacuation system should be the responsibility of a light section of a Field Ambulance or a Sea Ambulance Transport Company with a Medical Officer or Bearer Officer, 16 stretcher bearers, 2 nursing orderlies, 1 clerk and 1 cook. Patients could be transported to the section post, which should be convenient to point of loading, and kept at the post until S.A.T.'s arrived. Nominal rolls could be prepared the night before the evacuation.*
- 2. Suitable rations and water cans should be supplied from the post for patients travelling on L.C.V.'s or L.C.M.'s.*
- 3. Specially prepared L.C.M.'s fitted with awnings, water facilities, primus stove and rations would be ideal for regular work.*
- 4. Roads should be kept in a reasonably good condition.*
- 5. Regular barge service, both for evacuations and for loading and running to a set schedule, should be provided by arrangement with the nearest M.L.O. in charge of barges.*

The sea-air evacuation of casualties from the Finschhafen fighting to the 2/11th A.G.H. in Dobodura theoretically took just nineteen hours, and required the transfer of patients successively to barge, sea ambulance transport, D.U.K.W., ambulance, plane and ambulance. Sometimes at Lae the D.U.K.W.'s would

take the patients straight from the boat or barge to the plane thus saving one handling.

The following ideal schedule had been hammered out by the various authorities. It was often disrupted by rough weather delaying the vessel from Finschhafen or air alerts at Lae or bad weather delaying the arrival of planes. By and large the schedule worked well with the average time from C.C.S. to A.G.H being twenty to twenty four hours.

1600 hrs	Patients loaded on S.A.T. Finschhafen
1900 hrs	E.T.D. of S.A.T. Finschhafen
0600 hrs	E.T.A. Lae
0800 hrs	Patients arrive at air strip
0830 hrs	Patients emplaned
1000 hrs	Patients arrive at strip A.D.S. Dobodura
1100 hrs	Patients arrive at A.G.H.

The 2/2nd C.C.S. had moved up from Morobe and established their hospital at Heldsbach and were receiving patients by the 30th of November. Their arrival was welcomed as the 2/3rd C.C.S. and the 2/11th Field Ambulance M.D.S. had both been particularly busy with the battles for Satelberg and Wareo.

The Sea Ambulance Transport Unit had vacancies for four Corporals which were filled by transferring four from our unit. They were Corporals:-

Neil McKay	Paul Mathews
Alan S. Smith	J. L. Kirley

LAE - CHINATOWN BEACH EVACUATION POST

Meanwhile the beach evacuation post under Captains Bill Brand and John Sands were busy with patients arriving from the fighting north of Finschhafen and another twelve orderlies from Morobe were sent to assist. Sometimes the casualties would arrive by barge two or three o'clock at night and they would have to be given necessary medical attention, fed, bedded down and prepared for onward evacuation in the morning. During the day the unit would be arranging evacuation of patients from the 106th C.C.S. hospital at Lae as well as handling the patients arriving from the two hospital ships.

The site suffered flooding during heavy rain until eventually a series of drains were dug which could cope with the tropical downpours. During the month of October this post handled 1,406 patients and 942 for November. An earth tremor was recorded at 1815 hours on the 12th of November which was sufficient to shake the utensils on the mess tables and to rock an unbraked jeep gently back and forth.

Orderlies accompanying patients on vessels to Buna or Oro Bay sometimes had difficulty in finding transport to return to Lae and this often left the evacuation

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post short of nursing staff. Of the casualties evacuated 23% were battle casualties, 26% had malaria, another 10% had Pyrexia of unknown origin (P.U.O.) and the remainder were spread over many categories. This was typical right throughout the New Guinea campaign with sickness outnumbering battle casualties.

A request had been made for the erection of a hut at the Lae airstrip to accommodate patients awaiting evacuation. Permission was granted and erection of this amenity commenced in mid December.

LANGEMAK BAY

When Lieut. Merv Featonby's detachment moved to Simbang, Langemak Bay, the 2/3rd C.C.S. was holding 400 patients and his detachment was responsible for evacuating those requiring base hospital attention, to Lae and thence to one of the General Hospitals at either Dobodura or Port Moresby. At first with the state of the road between the C.C.S. and the beach and the lack of control over barges to load the hospital vessel, the evacuation process was not a smooth one either for the patients or for the men handling them. Some examples of the difficulties early in November give a glimpse of the conditions under which they worked.

On the 3rd of November 15 stretcher cases and 23 walking patients were taken to the landing beach by three ton truck. No barges were available and heavy rain began to fall as the day waned. Tents were erected in the darkness to protect the patients and eventually an L.C.V. was obtained to take the patients out to the *Stradbroke*. There they were transferred to the ship and the night journey to Lae or Buna began. If vessels other than the *Stradbroke* or *Norab* were used, then arrangements had to be made for rations to be sent, as no cooking facilities existed on board.

On the 5th of November the bridge over a creek between the C.C.S. and the beach was washed away. Stretcher patients had to be hand carried to the landing beach, a matter of 350 yards wading through waist high water for 30 yards and the track a quagmire. The walking patients had to negotiate the same difficulties. Eventually a boat was obtained to ferry patients across the flooded stream. If ambulance transport was attempted sometimes the vehicle became bogged and again the stretcher bearers had to take over.

By this time the C.C.S. was holding 600 patients and on the 26th of November it was decided to evacuate 192 walking patients on two L.C.T's. The patients were loaded at 0100 hours. Rations, water, Red Cross supplies, medical supplies and orderlies were hastily prepared for the voyage and the bed situation at the C.C.S. was relieved.

In time the evacuation situation, with the co-operation of the various authorities, began to operate more efficiently. The 4th Field Ambulance took over responsibility of delivering the patients to the beach. A captured Japanese barge was brought into service and placed at our disposal to ferry patients to the hospital ships. By the 12th of December the New Guinea Sea Ambulance Transport took over evacuation duties from the 10th Field Ambulance and Lieut. Merv Featonby returned to Lae headquarters. The orderlies who were with him remained with the 2/3rd C.C.S.

HOME LEAVE

On 12th November permission was granted by 2 Aust. Corps to send twenty four personnel from our unit on 24 days home leave. Preference was given to married men who had been with the unit since it's arrival in New Guinea. Some were recalled from the Lae and Nadzab evacuation posts and they were transferred out the following day to 5 Aust Div. Reception Camp for movement to Buna and thence to Australia. Capt. Bill Brand was selected for leave and the 23 O/R's selected were :-

S/Sgt. Douglas N.G.	Sgt. Saunders A.W.
Cpl. Frith R.T.	Cpl. Meadows R.W.
L/Cpl. Potter W.J.	Pte. Bishop D.A.
Pte. Donovan E.P.	Pte. Hay H.J.
Pte. Hollonds J.H.	Pte. Johnston D.J.
Pte. Reid W.C.	Pte. Strevens E.B.
Pte. Holland P.H.	Pte. Atkins E.J.
Pte. Williamson G.H.	Pte. Williams E.A.
Pte. Chapman W.	Pte. Hadfield L.E.
Pte. Lovett W.E.	Pte. Perry G.H.
Pte. Sutherland A.M.	Pte. Sturge W.J.
Pte. Williams H.L.	

LAUNCH JETTY AND SCARLET BEACH

Capt. Lyttle and six nursing orderlies left Lae for Finschhafen on the *Norab* on the 25th November to assist evacuate sick and wounded from the 9th Division to Lae. The 9th Division were pushing the Japanese north towards Sio and Madang. On the following day Captain Alec Reith with a party of seventeen left on a similar mission. One party was to take over an A.D.S. at Scarlet Beach from the 2/3rd Field Ambulance who had advanced across the Song River. Captain Lyttle took charge of this party which were to receive casualties from the 2/3rd A.D.S. and evacuate them to either the A.D.S. at Launch Jetty or to the 2/3rd C.C.S. at Langemak Bay.

The other party under Capt. Alec Reith were to take over an A.D.S. and evacu-



Dr John Sands and Dr Emmett Spring.

ation post at Launch Jetty and forward patients by ambulance to either the 2/2nd C.C.S. or the M.D.S. of the 2/11th Field Ambulance, both at Heldsbach. An ambulance and driver from the 2/8th Field Ambulance was attached for this purpose.

Actually a fresh site was chosen for the A.D.S. at Scarlet beach as Capt. Lyttle considered the site vacated by the 2/3rd Field Ambulance was not suitable. By 1500 hours on the 28th November the A.D.S. was operational and the first patients arrived. By midnight twenty two patients had been admitted including three battle casualties with eleven being held overnight. The battle casualties were the result of an attack on our forward positions by Japanese dive bombers. Our artillery, from positions behind the A.D.S. were continually shelling the Japanese positions.

While at the 2/3rd C.C.S. making evacuation arrangements Captain Lyttle was called on to give anaesthetic for twenty one battle casualties who had just arrived from the 2/32nd Infantry Battalion.

The other detachment under Captain Alec Reith took over the A.D.S. at Launch Jetty from the 2/8th Field Ambulance. It was a two way evacuation post, receiving wounded and sick from the A.D.S. at Scarlet Beach and evacuating them by road to either the 2/11th Field Ambulance M.D.S. or the 2/2nd C.C.S.

for immediate treatment and evacuating from these two units, post operative patients and others well enough to travel requiring base hospital treatment. Some evacuations were made by barge to the 2/3rd C.C.S. at Langemak Bay. By the middle of December the *Norab* was calling regularly to evacuate patients to either Dreger Harbour or to Lae.

The A.D.S. at Launch Jetty also had facilities for holding a limited number of patients overnight if the necessity arose. At the peak of activity around the 1st of January 1944 this post was handling about 600 patients per day with most being evacuated to the 2/2nd C.C.S.

With excessive perspiration it was always a problem to keep clothes clean and fresh. Cold water washing was hopeless and the boys devised various means of "stoking the copper" to give a hot wash. One such method invented by Harry Mead was called the "Spit and Dribble". Basically this consisted of a container of oil and a container of water delivering a mixture which was set alight under a tin of water containing the clothes. The clothes were soon bubbling and came out not exactly "Persil Kahki" but at least fresh and clean.

Early in December the *Stradbroke* was found to have a cracked cylinder head and was laid up leaving the *Norab* to handle sea evacuations from the Finschhafen area. However, early in January another vessel, the AK95 was fitted out and allocated for this work. Another U.S. vessel the *Swan* assisted with the sea evacuations for a time but mysteriously blew up and sank in Dreger Harbour on the 29th of December.

The A.D.S. at Scarlet Beach continued busy throughout the first half of December with a hut ward having been built giving the ability to hold some patients. This became necessary when the 2/11th Field Ambulance could not admit sick but could take only battle casualties. However by the middle of the month the action had passed further north and evacuations were being made from the 4th Brigade by barge from Coconut Grove direct to Launch Jetty thus obviating the need for the post at Scarlet Beach. Accordingly the A.D.S. was closed on the 15th of December and the detachment moved by barge and road to Dreger Harbour where they were to open an air evacuation post at the airstrip.

With the fall of Wareo on the 8th December the number of battle casualties decreased as the Japanese forces were pursued northwards towards Saidor and Madang. The coastal areas through which our troops operated however were highly populated by mosquitoes, and malaria and dengue were rife. Captain Mick Dunn remembers catching dengue shortly after arriving in New Guinea and being miserably ill with what he called "Breakbone" fever.

THE DETACHMENTS

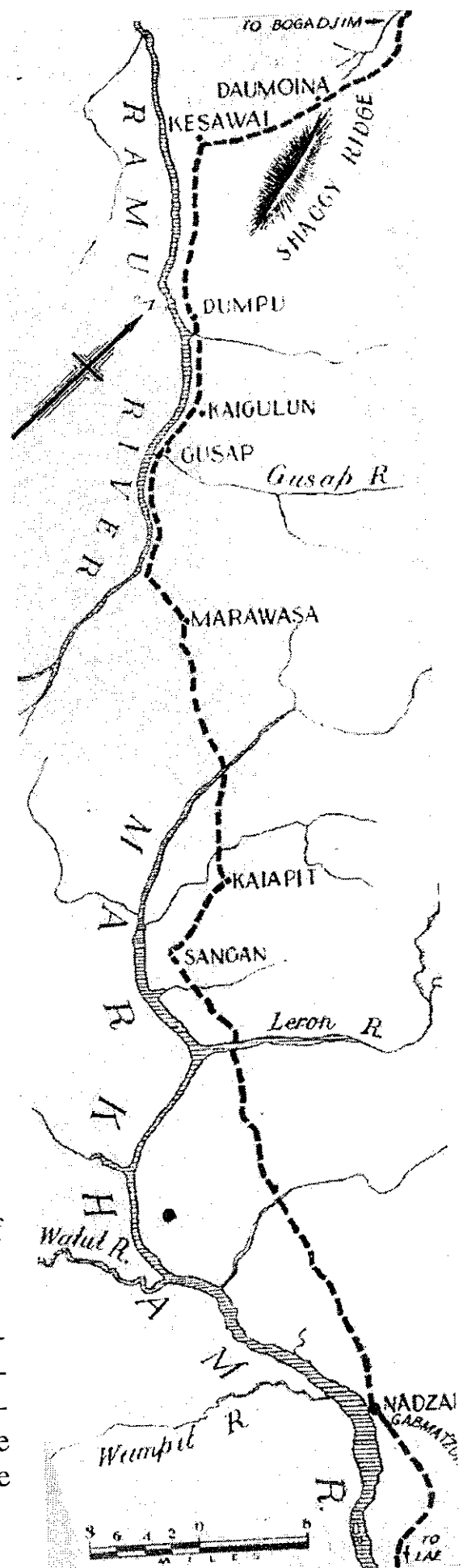
HEADQUARTERS

The headquarters at Lae relinquished their duties at 106th C.C.S. and the Orderly Room moved to the beach evacuation post on the 21st of December. They remained there for almost a month and on the 18th of January, 1944 moved to the A.D.S. at Launch Jetty. Headquarters nursing orderlies were dispersed around the other detachments.

Captain Emmett Spring was transferred to the 2/9th A.G.H. at Port Moresby and Captain Mick Dunn arrived in his place. Captain Dunn was immediately sent to the A.D.S. at Launch Jetty. Early in January 1944 Lieut. Merv Featonby again took a detachment of twelve orderlies forward and they were attached to the 2/2nd C.C.S. at Heldsbach. Lieut. Featonby acted as Adjutant whilst the orderlies were engaged on nursing duties. The evacuation posts at Launch Jetty and Dreger Harbour were reinforced and by the middle of January the approximate disposition of troops was, Lae one hundred, Dreger fifty, Launch Jetty forty five and attached to 2/2nd C.C.S. thirteen.

The C.O., Lieut. Col. Palmer went on home leave on the 16th January and Capt. Lyttle was appointed to administer command of the unit during his absence.

The first draft of leave personnel having returned another 24 were selected and embarked on the *Katoomba* on the 19th of February. Lieut. Jack McGill and twenty three other ranks were in this second batch. The list was :-





Unloading patient from jeep ambulance Launch Jetty.(AWM Neg. No. 079506)

Lieut. McGill J.J.	Sgt. Gerrand N.F.
W.O.11 Gaudion H.A.	Sgt. Stroud E.R.
Pte. Blow M.	Pte. Lawrence H.
Pte. Drysdale J.H.	Pte. Fox A.W.
Pte. Jenkins G.A.	Pte. Jones R.C.
Pte. Jones W.W.	Pte. Handley R.E.J.
Pte. Paull L.J.	Pte. Sullivan R.B.
Pte. Lawrence J.	Pte. Lovell H.A.
Pte. Loveridge J.E.	Pte. Nicholas E.C.
Pte. Lyall L.J.	Pte. Utting E.E.
Pte. Brown G.F.	Pte. Hallum R.H.
Pte. De Lantye A.	Pte. Goslett D.K.

The action had now moved further north and our unit at its various locations settled into a routine of receiving and evacuating patients on their journey to base hospitals. There were many rumours abroad regarding leave for the whole unit and these were followed by official advice that the unit was to be relieved in March. As it was we did not leave New Guinea until May !

The loss of the majority of the 2/12th Field Ambulance on the hospital ship

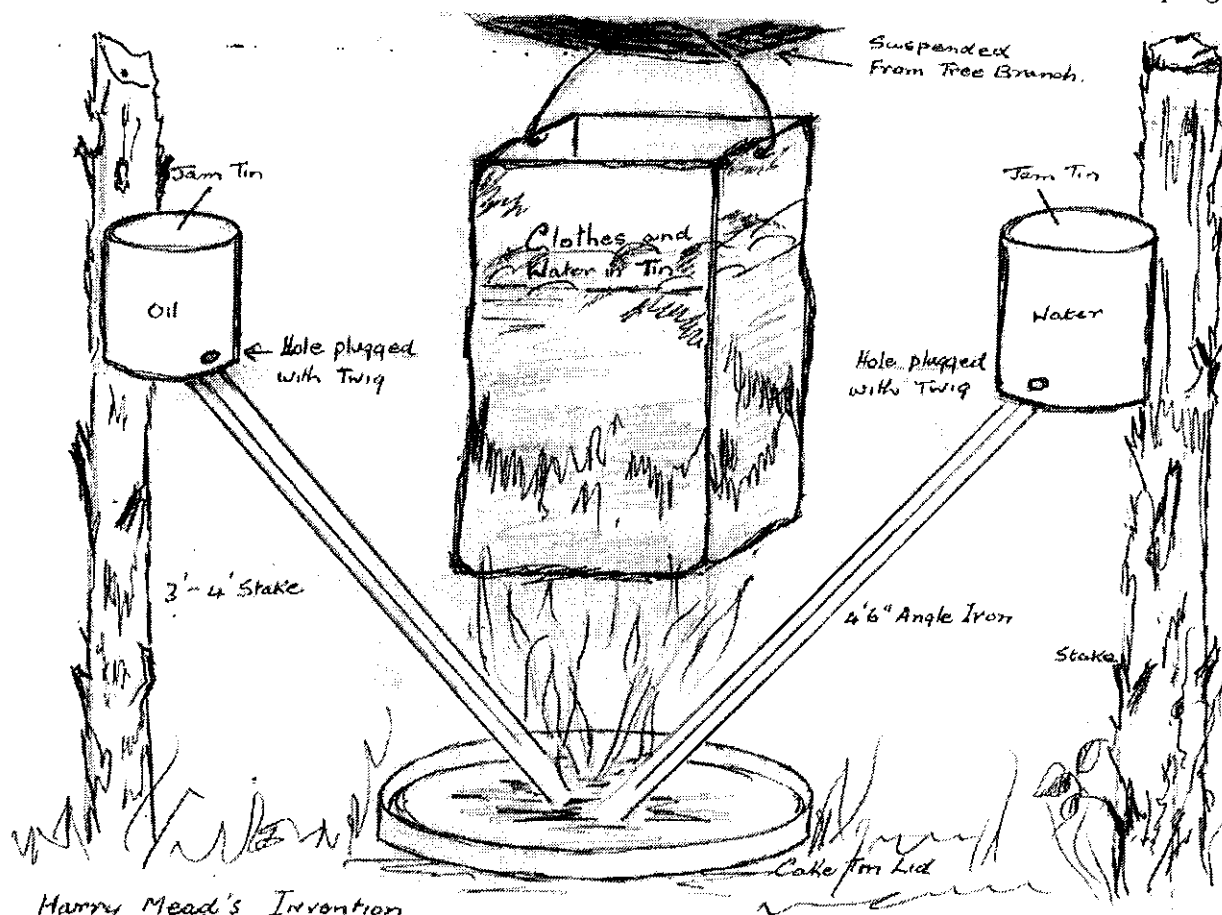


Breakfast at Launch Jetty for walking patients awaiting evacuation. (AWM Neg. No. 079504)

Centaur although occurring in May 1943 left the New Guinea area short on Field Ambulances. The *Centaur* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off Stradbroke Island near Brisbane at night despite being fully lit, with prominent Red Cross markings and without an escort. They carried only medical personnel, including twelve nurses and medical stores. Only one nurse survived together with sixty three male crew and medical personnel. Lieut.Col. Manson, in charge of the Hospital ship was drowned. The ship sank within minutes of being struck.

The Lae evacuation post was still fulfilling a useful task, receiving patients who came by sea from the Finschhafen area and evacuating them either to the local C.C.S. or by air to either Moresby or Dobodura. On the 4th of February the Lae evacuation post was handed over to the 7th Field Ambulance and twenty six of our personnel moved to Siki Cove to take over a Rest Camp operated by the 2/15th Field Ambulance. The remainder remained at Lae under Captain John Sands and were attached to the 7th Field Ambulance for duty.

Japanese air activity continued right throughout the Finschhafen campaign with constant raids on all the areas where we were operating, Lae, Launch Jetty, Siki Cove and Dreger Harbour with some casualties amongst the surrounding troops but fortunately none in our unit.



Harry Mead's Invention

"SPIT & DRIBBLE" at LAUNCH JETTY, PNG.

"Spit & Dribble" Clothes washing method, Launch Jetty.

DREGER HARBOUR

Captain Lyttle moved from Scarlet Beach to Dreger Harbour on the 15th of December to set up the air evacuation post on the airfield. His detachment was swamped with patients before they had time to erect any facilities. 300 patients arrived at 0730 hours on the 16th and 235 of these were evacuated during the day. D.A.D.M.S. 9th Division advised that 100 patients were arriving by sea that afternoon. There was no kitchen, no rations, no latrines and accommodation for only sixty. This was not an unusual situation, being swamped with patients before having time to properly set up camp. S/ Sgt. Len Martin was sent to the beach to prevent the 100 patients arriving and he arranged for the 2/3rd C.C.S. to take them back and send them back early next morning. Five of our small detachment were suffering from Dengue fever but had to keep working. Evacuation was to either the A.G.H. at Port Moresby or that at Dobodura. Patients whose condition would suffer by the altitude reached in crossing the range to Port Moresby were sent to Dobodura.

Temporary relief was obtained from the 2/3rd C.C.S. and on the 25th of December Sgt. Jack Caldwell arrived with 12 O/R's from Nadzab. An American

Care, Courage & Camaraderie

Medical Evacuation Unit took over the airstrip evacuation of both Australian and American casualties and U.S. Army nurses were sent to accompany stretcher cases. On the 19th of December a new camp site was chosen and by the end of the month the post had facilities for accommodating 100 patients. This was necessary because of delays in either sea or air transport. These delays did occur regularly, caused either by monsoonal weather disrupting sea transport or either cloud over the gap in the Owen Stanley's or operational requirements for planes in other areas, interrupting air transport.

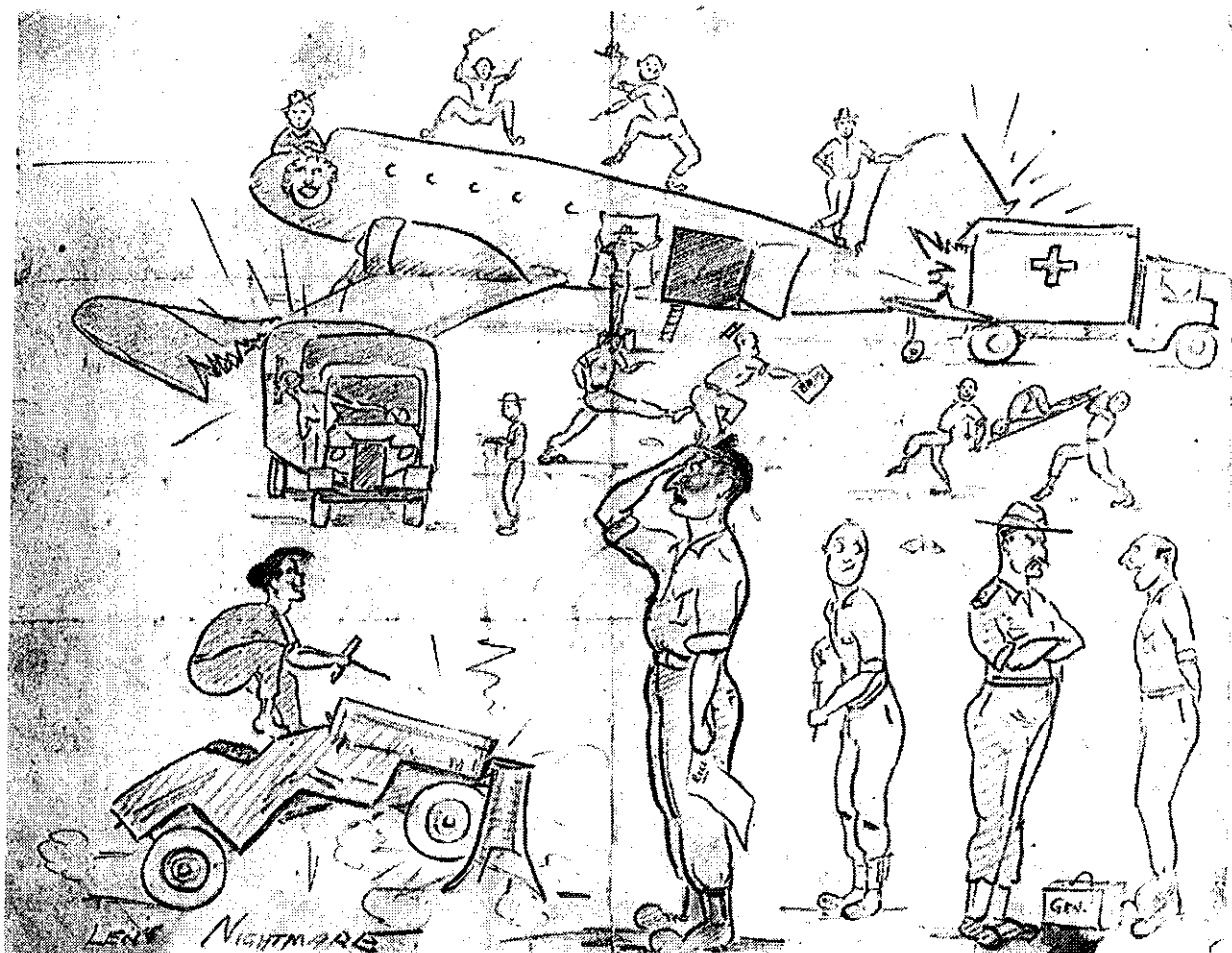
A small beach post was established to receive patients arriving by sea and transport them to our hospital and also to arrange sea evacuation of patients not evacuated by air. Lieut. Jack McGill arrived on the 3rd of January, 1944 and took over this post. By this stage the hospital accommodation had expanded with additional wards. On the 5th of January, 280 patients were held overnight. Some of these had to be accommodated in the mess hut.

It was at Dreger where Geoff Flower shot a pig. On learning that the pig belonged to the local missionary, furious activity took place. Ross Hayter claims, "No pig was ever scrubbed, gutted, cooked and eaten so quickly. All evidence of this dastardly act had to be destroyed!"

Dreger had developed into a major air base. The strip, unlike many in swampy areas, was scraped out of coral and overlaid with steel decking. The noise of a squadron of Thunderbolts taking off in quick succession was deafening for staff of the evacuation post and for the patients. The return to the airstrip of a squadron was just as spectacular and noisy with one plane following almost on the tail of the previous one. One pilot either forgot or couldn't put his wheels down and landed on the steel decking on his belly tank. Fortunately the tank was empty but the sparks of metal against metal created a real fireworks. Again fortunately the plane did not catch fire.

On the 23rd January 1944 at about 2000 hours Japanese night fighters came in followed by bombers dropping bombs on the Dreger wharf area. In this raid there were four killed and seventy seven wounded.

Captain Adrian Paul accompanied by Sgt. Jack Caldwell and Ptes. Kel White, Phil Aylwin and David James attended the scene with ambulances and drivers. There were a number of casualties on a Liberty ship which had been at the wharf and our men attended the wounded on the ship. By the time the wounded had received attention the ship had drifted away from the wharf and the casualties had to be lowered over the side in a lifeboat (under blackout conditions). The U.S. medics who had been attending a lecture at the time arrived as the last ambulance was leaving!



Len's Nightmare. Sketch by Alf Phillips. Our ever popular R.S.M., Len Martin's ability to handle situations such as these (or even worse) was legendary.

The Dreger post experienced difficulties early on with insufficient transport to take patients from the barges to the airstrip but this was largely overcome when Movement Control obtained for us the use of a three tonner. Not exactly the most comfortable means of transport for sick and wounded patients but nevertheless it relieved the situation by handling the less serious cases.

A surprise issue of fresh eggs, meat and butter made a welcome relief from our usual tinned fare. For the month of January 1944 this detachment evacuated 2,122 patients by air and a further 658 by sea to Buna.

For recreation at Dreger there was nearby a stream with a waterfall falling into a large pool which was deep enough for diving and swimming. The nearby beach also afforded good swimming. Kel White, who was a piano tuner by trade before the war, filled eight beer bottles with varying amounts of water and fixed these to a horizontal limb of a tree and had an excellent zylophone. He was also a good diver and had a lot of fun on that diving board.

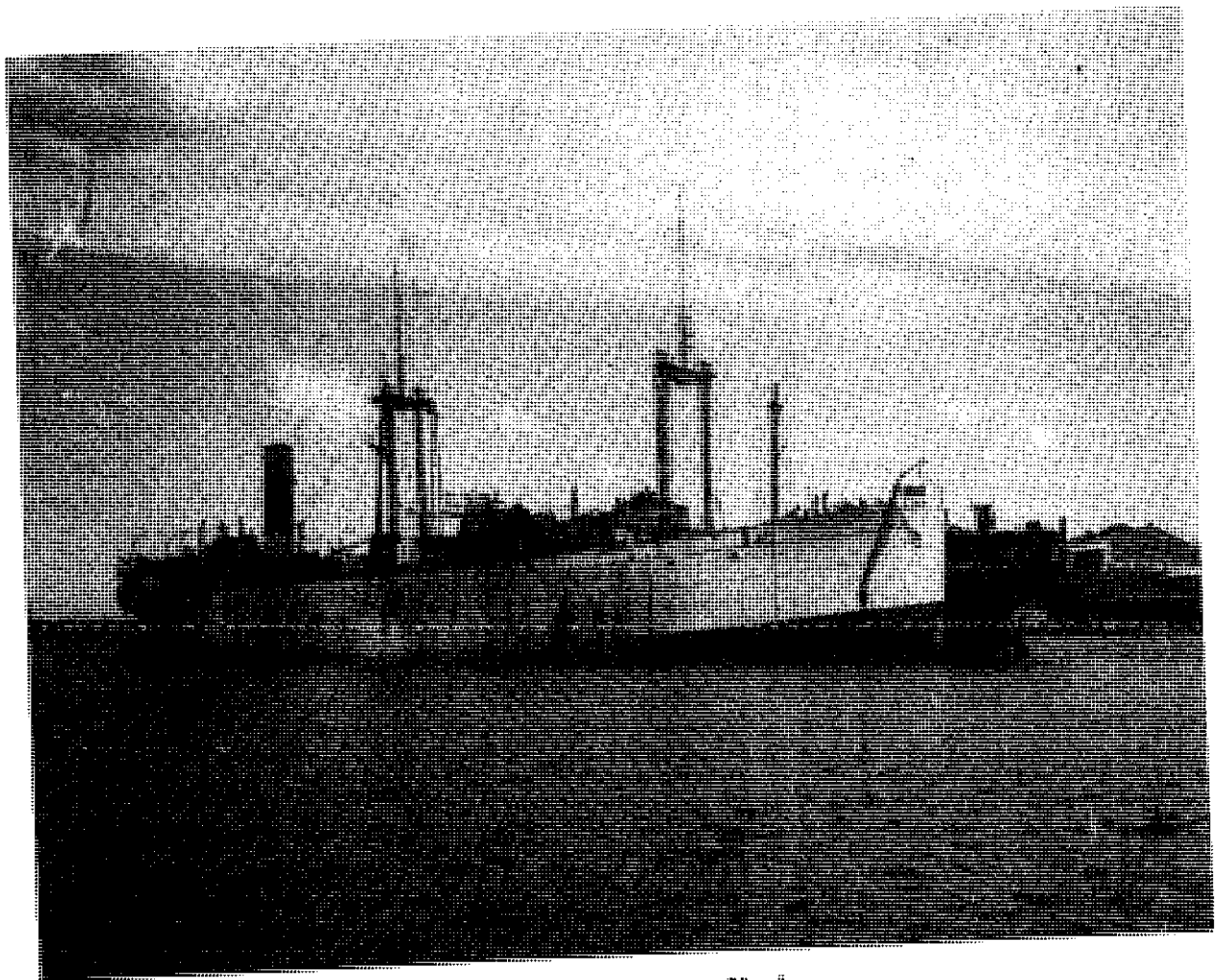
The Americans had made Dreger and its airstrip and harbour into a major base and they had regular entertainments for the troops. After we left, the Ameri-

Care, Courage & Camaraderie

cans turned Finschhafen into a huge base with up to one million men preparing for a push on Japan. They had a four lane highway between Dreger and Heldsbach and twenty six cinemas in the area. Our own unit trio of three very talented singers would sometimes give a concert.

At Dreger when a new Liberty ship would arrive from the States there would be a great trade done between the Australian troops and the Negro seamen with an Australian at almost every porthole handing in a bottle of Australian beer in exchange for a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes.

The road from Launch Jetty to Dreger Harbour was now in good enough condition for patients to be transported by road ambulance thus eliminating the need for sea transport between these two points.
On the 23rd February, 1944 Capt. Adrian Paul was transferred to the School of Hygiene and Sanitation at Port Moresby.



Liberty Ship at Dreger Harbour.



Strip Evacuation Post Dreger. (AWM Neg. No. 079491)



Walking wounded and sick being evacuated by plane, Dreger. (AWM Neg. No. 079496)

THE MAIL MUST GO THROUGH

Our Postal Orderly, Cpl. Cliff Watkins was always popular when the mails were coming through regularly but when delays occurred perhaps not so popular. Nor was the task always "humdrum". His trip to take the mail to Dreger proves that. He writes :-

"When at Lae (N.G.) I was given permission to take the mail to Dregerhafen to our evacuation post. Three of us (not all 10th F.A. boys) waited for two hours at the unmanned air strip at Lae until a D.C.3 arrived. "Yes" said the U.S. pilot, "I'll take you" making his load of 26 personnel (most pilots wouldn't take more than 21 or 22). Gaining speed on the runway, suddenly the pilot jammed on his brakes and fortunately we stopped before the deep creek. "Too many on board, I couldn't lift the plane", the pilot said. So the three of us had to deplane ! It left a nasty feeling of possible consequences. An hour later we got going. But arriving at Dreger the pilot announced an air alert (Japs in the area). For half an hour we circled, we could see the U.S. fighters leaving the strip about one every minute. As soon as one fighter rose into the air another was ready to start it's run. At last we were permitted to land. A second nasty feeling in the same afternoon. What if a Jap fighter had got through to us. The slow D.C.3 would have been an easy target". However, the mail got through.

Ron Woff remembers receiving tins of fruit cake from home that were "peppered" with shrapnel.

During February the Japanese, becoming worried about the build up of the Dreger- Finschhafen base, subjected the area to continuous air attacks and the Dreger detachment tried not to hold patients overnight because of the danger from bombing.

SIKI COVE

A party from the Launch Jetty headquarters under Capt Lytle plus some from the Lae evacuation post took over a Rest Camp at Siki Cove from the 2/15th Field Ambulance. This worked alright for a time until the 106th C.C.S. which had moved to Heldsbach became overloaded and the rest camp detachment functioned thereafter more as a hospital for the overflow of less serious patients from the C.C.S. This was logical as the 5th Division was already operating a Reception Camp in the area.

The 106th C.C.S. were now established at Heldsbach and some of our orderlies were attached to them. Roads in the area were improving and more reliance was placed on ambulance transport by road and less on sea transport. The Siki Cove Rest Camp continued it's function of treating less serious cases from the C.C.S. and when they were considered fit enough transferring them to the Divisional Reception Camp until fit for duty again.



Stretcher patients being evacuated, Dreger. (AWM Neg. No. 079494)



Ready for take off. (AWM Neg. No. 079537)



Swimming Pool, Dreger.

FINAL DAYS IN NEW GUINEA

Once we were listed for home leave our function became very much that of "helping out", including supplying thirty men each day to do gardening work at the 106th C.C.S. at Heldsbach. With the unit not overworked in any of their detachments many turned to making "foreigners" or mementoes out of coconut shells, brass shell cases, beach shells etc which could either be sent home or traded with the Americans.

In March Captain Lytle was promoted temporary Major and on the 11th of that month our C.O. returned from leave. Lieut. Merv Featonby returned from the 2/2nd C.C.S. where he had been acting as Adjutant since the 1st of January.

Capt. Bill Brand and eleven more orderlies were sent to the 106th C.C.S to assist there. On the 4th of April Capt. Cliff Barrett rejoined the unit from the 2/9th A.G.H. for a short time before being transferred again to H.M.A.T. No.3 *Katoomba*. At the end of March "B" Coy. of the 18th Field Ambulance arrived at Siki Cove to take over the operation of the Rest Camp. Our staff continued to assist the 18th for a time.

In April nine of our personnel were sent to 5th Division Reception Camp to act

as tally clerks on Liberty ships coming into the harbour.

The Lae detachment was to travel to Australia independently of the rest of the unit and they embarked from Lae on the *Ormiston* on the 27th April and disembarked at Townsville on the 3rd of May.

The Dreger detachment was still working but evacuations were not heavy. By the end of April all evacuation to Port Moresby ceased and patients were evacuated by air to Lae with the stipulation that it must be a full plane load except in the case of emergencies. By this time the fighting had moved north to Saidor and patients were being received from there.



Ted Young and Stan Murphy at Dreger.

Early in May both parties who had been home on leave had returned and took over from our orderlies working at the 106th C.C.S. The Dreger detachment were advised on 11th May that the 18th Field Ambulance would be taking over their post. The 18th Field Ambulance arrived on the 12th and we were given one hour to prepare to depart. As this meant home leave was imminent it was no problem to be ready. The Dreger evacuation post had handled 6,231 patients since the 16th of December, 1943.

The Dreger detachment joined the main body of the unit at Launch Jetty. The unit was now under two hours notice to embark and all members were given embarkation numbers. On 23rd May at 0800 hours trucks arrived to take us to our embarkation point. Heavy rain had washed out the road from Launch Jetty to Finschhafen and this necessitated a barge trip from Launch Jetty to the "Klipfontein" which was standing at a wharf in Finschhafen. We were all on board by 1300 hours and we sailed direct for Brisbane.

The unit had been in New Guinea from the middle of November 1942 until the end of May 1944, or over 18 months.

The "Klipfontein" was a Dutch boat of 10,544 tons, built in 1939 with twin screw and a speed of 17 1/2 knots. She was owned by United Netherlands



Harold Mollison with native children.

Navigation Co. a company subsequently merged into the present day Nedlloyd Group. The *Klipfontein* got through the war unscathed but met its end in January 1953 when it struck submerged rocks off the coast of Mozambique and sank. The 114 passengers and 117 crew were all saved and were

picked up by the British liner *Blomfontein Castle*.

The messing arrangements on board required our own cooks to do the cooking and allowed for only two meals per day. This minor inconvenience was overlooked in the general euphoria surrounding the early prospect of Australia and home leave. The Lae detachment had disembarked at Townsville and they were transported by rail to Brisbane.

The *Klipfontein* arrived at Brisbane on the 29th May and we disembarked and were taken to a camp at Kalinga where we met up with the Lae detachment, were given local leave, issued with clothing, paid up to date and the main body given leave passes from the 4th June until the 25th July, 1944. We were soon on the train heading south for Melbourne with interstate members going to their various destinations.