

## Milne Bay – The Battle

On Monday, 25th May, 1942 a gunner's diary records:

*"When the lunch truck came around they told us that we are under 24 hours notice to move. All interstate leave had been cancelled. No indication as to where we are going, but measurements and weights of trucks are required. Port Moresby is mentioned in discussions amongst the troops. Predictor theory class today."*

On 1st June there was a rumor that the Battery was destined for India, but that story was soon discounted, as the next evening the troops were told that the move was to be the following morning, but to Port Moresby. So on the 3rd June the men of the Battery moved to Cluden Racecourse, while the guns, trucks and equipment were loaded on the Dutch vessel "Karsik" belonging to the K.P.M. Line. The ship was of about 5000 tons, with a top speed of not more than 12 knots.

The "Karsik" did not move out for a few days, but then had an uneventful voyage to Port Moresby. The men on board assisted the officers to deplete their liquor stocks, despite the fact that they had to cope with raw bacon sandwiches and red hot curry (Malay style) in the process. The Dutch skipper weighed about twenty stone and drank Bols gin in a huge glass. There was a Dutch engineer, an Australian radio officer, and a deck crew who from the bosun down were Malay.

It was not until Friday night on 12th June that the majority of the troops boarded, in alphabetical order, the Burns Philp ship M.V. "Macdhui". The remainder of the Battery were to follow in the "Swartenhundert". The men were in cabins which had bunks with sheets and pillowslips. There was a wet bar, use of the dining saloon, crisp white tablecloths and silver, and a menu to delight any tourist. There were even stewards to wait on the tables.

The next morning the ship was under way, escorted by two corvettes. Breakfast was of cereal, fish, sausages and egg, toast and coffee, which was a change from the monotony of bully beef, bully beef and bully beef.

The ship followed the Queensland coast, and on the afternoon of the 14th June a Lockheed Hudson flew over the ship on patrol duty.

On 15th June the land of New Guinea was sighted in the afternoon, and the ship pulled into the one and only jetty at Port Moresby after the "Karsik", which was unloading there, pulled out. Before disembarking, dinner was provided in the dining saloon.

On disembarking, the troops were taken in trucks to the 3 Mile 'drome, where there was no proper accommodation, but the men had their nets to ward off the massive attacks by the mosquitoes.

Meanwhile the B.C. was at a conference at H.Q. N.G.F., at which were present Colonel Fraser, U.S.A.F.I.A., Lieutenant-Colonel Pitt G.I. N.G.F., and Lieutenant-Colonel Serisier A.Q. N.G.F. Major Margetts received instructions regarding plans for Milne Bay. These instructions were mainly contained in Appendix D to N.G.F. Operational Instruction No.17 of 15th June 1942 which read, in part, as follows:

*"An aerodrome is to be constructed at Gili Gili at Milne Bay. A party is being despatched from Port Moresby at an early date to construct and defend the aerodrome. The code name for this operation is "FALL RIVER". The following is the composition of the party: Major Margetts, O.C.; 9th Battery; one company 46 U.S. Engineer Regiment; det. N.G.F. sigs; one company 14th Inf. Bde; one M.G. pl 14 Inf. Bde; det A.A.S.C.; special hospital U.S.A.F.I.A.; det A.A.O.C. 14 Bde will be prepared to send a second rifle company at a later date, at 48 hours notice, should additional defensive troops be required."*

*"The role of the garrison will be:*

- (a) to construct the aerodrome*
- (b) A.A. defence of aerodrome*
- (c) ground defence of the area against paratroops or small raiding parties by land or sea*
- (d) provision of such guards as may be required for the protection of equipment, supplies, etc.*
- (e) in the event of an overwhelming force being brought to bear against the garrison, it will inflict maximum loss on the enemy before withdrawal.*

*"Secrecy in regard to this operation including measures for camouflage and concealment of the site, is to be of the greatest importance. Every effort must be made to deny the knowledge that an aerodrome is being constructed. During construction the firing of weapons must be controlled rigidly, so that fire will not be opened prematurely on reconnaissance aircraft when there is still a possibility that our operations have not been observed.*

*"A plan for evacuation will be prepared including denial to the enemy of all weapons, supplies and material of value, which cannot be withdrawn. O.C. Garrison will ensure that all ranks act properly in their dealings with the natives. All dealings with natives will be conducted by arrangement with the local District Officer or his assistants. O.C. Garrison will seek the advice of these officials in any case in which native interests are involved.*

*"Owing to the recent outbreaks of measles in this area (P.M.), suspected cases must be isolated immediately in order to prevent an outbreak in the Fall River Garrison. Any suspected cases must not have contact with natives – they have absolutely no resistance to this disease.*

*"C.S.O. will arrange for sufficient personnel and equipment to be sent to the site to*

*(a) establish regular W/T communications with this H.Q. and*

*(b) establish lines of communications between units and other points at the aerodrome site.*

*"180 days reserve of supplies, ammunition and other necessary items will be despatched with the garrison under arrangements made by A.A.Q.M.G. Reserves of all natures for 9 L.A.A. Battery will accompany it"*

The guns and equipment of "A" and "C" Troops were loaded on the "Karsik" on 16th June, with "C" Troop manning its guns on the deck.

Seventeen enemy planes flew over that day with the heavy anti-aircraft guns engaging

At 0945 the following day 18 bombers escorted by fighters flew over Moresby and dropped several bombs around the "Karsik" and the "Macdhui", the "Macdhui" being hit amidships, causing some casualties. Loading of equipment had to be suspended.

On this day, the B.C. received a message that he was to proceed on a reconnaissance to Milne Bay, and on the 18th he left Port Moresby in a Catalina flying boat with Brigadier General Scanlon U.S.A.A.C., Commander Hunt R.A.N., Lieutenant-Colonel Yoder U.S. Engineers, two U.S. engineer officers, one medical officer, one infantry officer, and six other ranks. A reconnaissance of the proposed drome and unloading areas was carried out. The junior officers and other ranks were left as an advance party, and the main group arrived back at Port Moresby at 1700 hours.

On the same day, 18 enemy bombers escorted by Zeros bombed Port Moresby harbor. The 36th Australian Infantry Battalion history records the event:

*"The "Macdhui", a beautiful Australian ship, was one (of four) of those in the path of the bombs, which straddled her making what appeared to be some direct hits. The explosions raised a huge curtain of water which temporarily obscured her from view. As the spray subsided the watchers saw smoke rising from the ship. In an instant she was on fire; first in the middle; then at one end; then at the other; she was doomed. She had suffered four direct hits. Members of the "Macdhui's" crew and some troops who were aboard dived over the side. Launches sped to their rescue. . . . The watchers saw the ship list over and sink in the*

middle of the harbor.

*"The sinking of the "Macdhui" . . . . occasioned quite a number of casualties, including some officers and other ranks of the 39th Battalion, who had been included in working parties unloading cargo from the holds of the ship."*

Meanwhile the men who had arrived from Townsville on the "Karsik" were still on her and had come through the bombing unscathed. As one gunner reports:

*"On board the "Karsik" there was a funny side to the two bomber raids on Port Moresby harbor. The Malay Bosun had a pet pigeon. Immediately the air raid warning sounded the Bosun, with pigeon on shoulder, would move to the open fo'castle where he would carefully lay out his praying mat and begin bowing up and down in earnest prayer. This he continued to do for the duration of both raids and there were two 9th Battery characters close by exhorting the Bosun to 'put in a word for me, mate'. Perhaps this was the secret of the survival of the "Karsik" which, as far as known, saw the campaign through."*

Not so funny was the fact that the "Karsik" had been partially loaded with aviation fuel and ammunition.

The loading of equipment having been delayed, three truck loads of troops were taken, on 19th June, for a tour of the area culminating in a visit to the Rouna Falls through wild and rugged country, near the commencement of the Kokoda Track. A bottle of beer per man was awaiting the "Tourists" when they arrived back in camp.

On 21st June the remainder of the Battery, who had left Townsville three days previously, arrived per S.S. "Swartenhuidt" glad to be on land again after an uncomfortable voyage.

The next day each man was issued with a rifle, a bayonet and ammunition pouches; the first time that each man was in possession of an issue rifle.

The B.C. detailed "B" Troop to remain at Port Moresby under command 3rd L.A.A. Battery, to add to the A.A. defence in that area. In a letter to his C.O., John Rhoden, Margetts said that after his reconnaissance of the area, the third troop of 9th Battery was left behind in Moresby in favor of taking some heavy guns, mainly due to the fact that the coconut palms, both at the wharf unloading area and at the 'drome site, restricted the traverse of the Bofors gun.

Eventually the loading was completed by 2100 hours on 23rd June, and the "Karsik" pulled out from Port Moresby very early the next morning. The remainder of the Battery, less "B" Troop, followed close behind in the Dutch ship S.S. "Bontekoe", escorted by the sloop "Warrego" and the corvette "Ballarat". A Beaufort bomber flew over the convoy from time to time.

From a gunner's diary dated Thursday 25th June, 1942 aboard the "Karsik":

*"Awoke at 0630 to see land on the port side. About 1000 passed through a strait with islands on one side and the mainland on the other. Very pretty with luxuriant vegetation. See a coconut plantation from time to time. We have now left the islands and now passing alongside the mainland. Raining all the morning. 1230 dropped anchor in a bay – our destination. After a delay of 2 hours we have pulled up our anchor and come alongside a makeshift wharf. We are only about 30 feet off-shore and our ship draws about 20 feet. The natives are being very helpful here. 1600 had tea and scones. A pontoon which was to fill the space between the ship and the wharf will not be ready until tomorrow so unloading will be delayed."*

However unloading commenced at Gili Gili during the night, and the guns were got off and deployed around the wharf area. The "Karsik" was unloaded by 28th June and she left the Bay. "Warrego" had remained close at hand camouflaged with shrubbery. "Bon-tekoe" had disembarked her 800 troops into local schooners, and sailed with "Ballarat" early on the morning of 26th June.

*"South-West Pacific Area – First Year". Dudley McCarthy records:*

*"On 25th June a small force from Port Moresby had disembarked at Milne Bay to protect the new airfield site, and on the 29th a company of American engineers had landed. These troops consisted principally of two companies and one machine gun platoon of the 55th Battalion, the 9th L.A.A. Battery (less one troop) with eight Bofors guns, one platoon of the 101st United States Coast Artillery Battalion (A.A.) with eight .5 inch anti-aircraft guns, and one company of the 46th United States Engineer Battalion. Their task was to construct and defend at Gili Gili an airstrip from which heavy bombers could operate and, the day after they landed, they were told that the work must be completed at the earliest possible moment, the target date being set at the 20th July."*

Other troops included were one section of 23rd Heavy A.A. Battery (two 3" guns), a detachment of R.A.A.F. signallers and 37th Radio Station R.A.A.F.

Again quoting from the Official War History (McCarthy):

*"Milne Bay was shaped like a semi-ellipse. From China Strait on the east the sea flowed – through an entrance approximately seven miles wide – westward for some 20 miles. Gili Gili was near the head of the bay. Heavily wooded mountains pressed in from three sides, leaving only a narrow coastal strip, soggy with sago and mangrove swamps; bush covered except where a few coconut plantations stood in orderly rows. On the north shore the*

mountains came down almost to the sea leaving only a ledge which was rarely more than a mile wide and in places narrowed to a few hundred yards. Along the coast, never more than a hundred yards from the sea, a 12-foot track, crossing many streams, ran for nine or ten miles from Ahima, through K.B. Mission to Rabi, whence it rounded the north-west corner of the bay and travelled to Gili Gili. In the vicinity of Gili Gili, and at the head of the bay, the coastal plain was at its broadest, but even there densely bush-covered spurs ran down from the main 5000 feet summits only a few miles away. On the southern shore the mountains rose steeply and again there was a narrow strip of flat land edging the sea, with mangrove swamps and native coconut plantations, and traversed by a track which ran west then north to Gili Gili. Almost the entire coastline offered suitable landing places, though the mangroves of the low-lying south-west corner of the bay would make landing operations more difficult than elsewhere. The place was notorious for torrential rains during the months just beginning and was a malarial pest-hole."

Major A. G. Margetts, O/C 9th Light A.A. Battery, being the senior officer in the area, was in command until the arrival, on 11th July, of Brigadier John Field.

It was fortunate for some of the men that the Americans had come, as they had loaded camp beds for their own use. However, as much of the unloading of the two vessels was done by 9th Battery, and as the only transport was 9th Battery's, some of the stretchers went astray. They had to be quickly concealed when it was thought the rightful owners were searching for them. In the end, they had to be returned and stretchers were then constructed from the local bamboo, as it was essential to be clear of the damp ground.

A gunner refers to the unloading: "I was carting a load of steel matting for No.1 Strip one morning at 4 a.m., when I had to pass on the Burma Road another truck with its lights ablaze. I made a few rude remarks as I passed and got the reply – "Alright Griff, keep your hat on, I can't find the dipper switch". It was the Battery Commander doing his bit!"

Early in July, the first cases of malaria were reported; 11th July 5 men to hospital, 12th July 10 men to hospital records one diary.

The British ship the "Cochow" came in on the 5th, and "C" Troop was assigned to the unloading of steel matting for the airfield. One good thing about being on an unloading party was that the workers had first choice (unauthorised) of anything in the way of different foodstuffs. A case would be broached and the goods taken.

On the 7th, a parade was held at which the troops were instructed that they would be organised as infantry in the event of a landing by the Japs. Not good news!

The first Catalina flying-boat landed in the harbor on the 8th, bringing welcome mail.

A party from 9th Battery had been instructed to proceed to Dogura Mission. Jim Paton tells the story:

*"The commander of Fall River Force – the name by which the troops first assembled at Milne Bay were known – needed to have knowledge of the track from Dogura Mission to Milne Bay. He needed to know what sort of terrain it traversed and what could be moved along it from the point of view of troops and equipment. The approximate distance from the Mission to Milne Bay along this track was 45 miles. Bruce Paton, Scottie Quin and Jim Paton of 9th Battery were chosen to undertake this task and left Milne Bay by ketch on 8th July 1942, arriving in the late afternoon to be met by Father Bodger who was in charge at Dogura. Dogura was a very impressive mission station, with first rate church and school buildings plus extensive playing fields to cater for the large number of Papua New Guinea children who attended there. Despite the fact that the Japanese were expected to land close by at any time, all of the mission staff (both male and female) were still in residence, although they were aware that they might need to evacuate at short notice. Father Bodger and his colleagues were very kind to the three visitors who were treated to a fine meal before bedding down in preparation for an early start back over the unknown track.*

*"With a trusted native guide, provided by Father Bodger, the three set off at 0600 the next morning to keep a pre-arranged appointment for breakfast with a Miss Carmichael who ran a mission school a short distance along the track. After enjoying an excellent breakfast, they left the residence of Miss Carmichael to a surprise greeting by all her school children – approximately 50 in number. The girls in ascending order of height were on one side of the path, with the boys in the same order on the other side, and as Bruce, Scottie and Jim made their way between them the children sang "Auld Lang Syne" in three parts – a wonderful experience never to be forgotten.*

*"For the record, the mission had to be evacuated within a matter of days after this.*

*"With the help of the trusted guide, it took three days to cover the distance from Dogura back to Milne Bay over some of the most tortuous country imaginable. Deep ravines alternating with high razor-back ridges were the norm as the track, which was suitable for foot traffic only, wound its way through thick jungle for the entire distance. The two overnight stops were spent in native villages high up on the ridges, where the staple diet was sweet potato. With the trek completed on 12th July, the three walkers were more than pleased to be "home" with their mates, prior to the*

*Japanese landing at Milne Bay."*

On the 9th some "C" Troop men under Sergeant Degney went on a patrol east along the north shore of the bay to an infantry patrol post, then on to K.B. Mission, and returned to the wharf area, a distance of about 12-14 miles. An Australian Comforts Fund issue awaited the troops on arrival back at camp: 9oz. tobacco, a packet of cigarettes, soap, writing paper, handkerchief, washer, socks, shaving cream and toothpaste. Something sweet to eat would have been more appreciated.

It was about this time that "Gerry" Chambers, the popular commander of "C" Troop was given a similar task: *"I was sent on a reconnaissance, with a Lieutenant from the Infantry Battalion along with Father Baldwin of the Catholic Mission, to report on an escape route to Mullins Harbor if things got too bad. (There certainly wasn't much feeling of victory in the air.) The trek of three days was through jungle and up the ridges. We brought back a sick planter on a stretcher. Wonderful native carriers."* (Mullins Harbor is south-west from the top of Milne Bay.)

About 0900 the following morning, an air raid warning was received that six planes were approaching, then reduced to one plane, then increased to ten. At 1000 a Short Sunderland flying boat hove in sight, then disappeared in a southerly direction. So much for the ten plane raid.

In the afternoon the men were put on to road-making from the Pontoon Wharf to Gili Gili jetty.

Back on to road making the next day. At 0930 on 11th July, the aircraft spotter gave the alarm. A twin-engined single-tailed bomber flew over at about 1500 feet. It was not until it changed course that the big red roundel of Japan was clearly seen. According to instructions no guns were fired. The aircraft left the area in a north-easterly direction without incident.

At 1100 a Lockheed Hudson flew over.

At 1230 the Dutch ship "Tasman" came alongside the Pontoon Wharf, with the naval escort anchoring near the island.

At 1300 a warning was received that twelve enemy planes were 70 miles away headed in the direction of Milne Bay. They did not arrive. Information of this kind was passed by radio by coast watchers, usually New Guinea residents or patrol officers who had been enrolled in the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) or Papuan Infantry Battalion.

Late in the afternoon, parties were assigned to road-making, and at midnight parties were given the task of unloading the ship just berthed.

The 7th Brigade (9th, 25th and 61st Battalions) under Brigadier J. Field arrived direct from Australia on the "Tasman". Brigadier Field took over command of Milne Bay Force from Major A. G.

Margetts, to operate directly under Blamey's headquarters. He would not be subject to control by New Guinea Force, and was to exercise "operational control" over all land, sea and air forces in his area.

L.H.Q. Operation Instruction No.27 of 18th July 1942 set out the terms:

*"(a) To prepare and defend an aerodrome at the upper end of Milne Bay for the operation of all types of aircraft.*

*(b) To preserve the integrity of south east New Guinea by*

*(i) Preventing hostile penetration in the area*

*(ii) Denying, by air attack Japanese use of the sea and land areas comprising the D'Entrecasteaux, Trobriand and Louisiade Islands Groups.*

*(c) To maintain active air reconnaissance of the above areas in conjunction with the Allied Air Forces."*

On 12th and 14th July, Flying Fortresses had flown over Milne Bay probably on their way to Rabaul. On the 15th, the "Bontekoe" arrived laden with troops and escorted by two warships. A ketch also arrived laden with fresh fruit and vegetables. Unfortunately the members of 9th Battery were not assigned to the unloading of this vessel.

The next day an Empire flying boat arrived with U.S. Army officers and some R.A.A.F. personnel.

On 18th the "Swartenhundi" arrived with troops and petrol. The troops included the 6th Battery of the 2/2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which comprised eight 3.7 A.A. guns.

On 20th, one of the "C" Troop guns was moved to Lau Lau Island on a large raft, with the crew and gear following by launch.

The four-wheeled gun tractors were put to good use over this period pulling vehicles out of bogs, for the roads were incapable of carrying heavy traffic. Some of the 9th Battery vehicles managed to get bogged just near the gun sites. The gun crews lived well on the rations that "fell" off the trucks.

Also at this time fresh meat was obtained by the slaughter of Zebu cattle which had been introduced by plantation owners to keep down the undergrowth around the palm trees.

On 21st another Dutch ship, with her engines and funnel aft, came into the wharf.

So the area was full of activity in preparation for what might eventuate.

On 21st and 22nd July, there were large concentrations of Japanese warships at Gona and Buna, where landings were made on 22nd July.

Preparations were made by N.G.F. on 22nd July to defend Kokoda, although at that time it was not thought likely that the Japanese would attempt to move overland against Port Moresby.

It was at this time that Milne Bay received a report that Japanese warships were 160 miles away, headed in this direction. They were probably the warships which accompanied the landing at Buna, as they did not progress to Milne Bay. However, beach defences were manned and emergency evacuation kits prepared.

Meanwhile, at Milne Bay two Empire Flying Boats had landed on the morning of 22nd July, and at 1640 the first aircraft to land on the new aerodrome appeared in the sky. They were three Kittyhawks of the Royal Australian Air Force; in fact, the advance party for the balance of 75 and 76 Squadrons, and two Lockheed Hudsons which arrived on 25th July. The squadrons were commanded by Squadron Leader I. D. Jackson and Squadron Leader P. St. G. B. Turnbull respectively.

In the latter period of July, there was a fair amount of activity in the Bay, with the arrival of two flying boats and several ships with freight and troops.

On 1st August a "red alert" was given, as there were Japanese aircraft reported some miles away. Eleven Kittyhawks took off and circled the area, but there was no action.

The Official War History "S.W.P.A. First Year" Dudley McCarthy records:

*"On 4th August Milne Bay had its first air raid. Four Zeros swept along the strip strafing the aircraft of Nos. 75 and 76 Squadrons, R.A.A.F., which had arrived eleven days before, the original allotment of one squadron having been increased to two. A number of "alerts" followed on succeeding days culminating in a second actual raid on 11th August when six Zeros were engaged first by the anti-aircraft defences and then by Squadron Leaders Jackson and Turnbull with their R.A.A.F. fighters."*

A "C" Troop gunner records the raid of 11th August:

*"11th August. Cloud over mountains but clear at lower levels. All cameras had to be handed in today or a signed statement given. Work done on .50 gun pit and on "jetty latrine" over the sea. About noon there was a yellow warning. At 1205, we received a red warning and stood to on the gun. Just when we were thinking it was another false alarm we saw at 1230 about seven Zeros coming around the Island from a S.E. direction. Bruce shouted "Enemy planes" and we got on to them firing a few rounds before they got out of range." (Another gunner's diary gives Sergeant Degney's gun credit for shooting down one Zero.) "12th August. The "Bontekoe" arrived with some A.I.F. troops on board. The ketch "Elavala" came in so we went over for the news. Ramsden was not there, but there were two spotters (coast watchers) on board. We heard the news we made yesterday. "Communique S.E. New Guinea. 7 Zeros north of Samarai. In an engagement 2 Zeros were destroyed and 3 damaged or hit. Our*

losses 1 destroyed, 1 damaged." (A member of Battery H.Q. recorded the losses as 3 Zeros and 3 Kittyhawks.)

The Official History, Dudley McCarthy records:

"On the 12th (August) Brigadier Wootten and advance parties of the veteran 18th Brigade arrived and units of the brigade group followed, including the 9th Battery of the 2/5th Field Regiment, but it was 21st August before the whole brigade had arrived . . . . .

"On the same day as Wootten arrived control of Milne Force passed to New Guinea Force as part of the re-organisation which had brought General Rowell to New Guinea to take over from General Morris and which envisaged the employment in New Guinea of the whole of the 7th Division. As part of this re-organisation Major-General Clowes was to command the augmented Milne Force. On the 13th he arrived at Milne Bay with some of his chief staff officers, after a hazardous flight with an inexperienced American pilot who got lost in rain and clouds and finally landed with his petrol almost exhausted. But most of his staff was still to come and it was not until the 22nd that he was able formally to assume command of ground forces which, by the 28th, numbered 8,824 (Australian Army 7,459; United States Army 1,365); the infantry, however, numbered only about 4,500."

The War Diary of 9th Battery records the disposition of anti-aircraft defences on 11th August 1942 as follows:

"Gurneyfield Strip –

- M.1 3" 2 guns 23rd Aust. H.A.A. Battery
- M.2 3.7" 4 guns "A" Troop 2/6th Aust. H.A.A. Battery
- M.3 3.7" 4 guns "C" Troop 2/6th Aust. H.A.A. Battery
- M.31 40mm 4 guns "A" Troop 2/9th Aust. L.A.A. Battery
- M.101 .50 6 guns 101 Battery, U.S. Army
- M.104 40mm 4 guns 104 Battery, U.S. Army

Pontoon Wharf

- M.32 40mm 4 guns "C" Troop 2/9th Aust. L.A.A. Battery."

Red warnings were received on 15th, 17th and 20th August, but no aircraft were sighted. Also during this period, heavy rains and high tides were experienced, making conditions very unpleasant.

A gunner's diary records some events during the period.

"22nd August. Rained heavily all night. British Airways flying boat came in early. Mr. Ramsden of the ketch "Elavala" sent over gifts of fruit and vegetables, also a hen and a rooster to be eaten when we wished. He left another hen and rooster with us to mind for him as he has to do a trip up the coast. It feels quite homely with the roosters crowing and the hens scratching about. Yellow warning just before tea but 'All clear' soon after. Another very high tide – high water at about 1820. Red warning 2000 to 2025.

*"23rd August. Fine weather. Red warning lasting 1¼ hours just before lunch. During this time we heard cannon fire very high up and the drone of planes. At 2 o'clock we received another red warning which only lasted ten minutes."*

**(Note:** Another diary records 16 Jap bombers and 4 Zeros circled over Milne Bay – No bombs dropped as there was heavy cloud cover. One Kittyhawk returned shot up.) The War Diary of 9th Battery on this day records: "Command Milne Force passed to Major General Clowes".

*"24th August. Showery. Cleaning ammunition but interrupted by a red warning – all clear soon after. 1455 Another red warning, about 10 Zeros flew in attempting to strafe the 'drome. Engaged by Bofors and Heavy A.A. then by Kittyhawks. Two Zeros brought down. Catalina flying boat arrived 1650 left 1745. 1820 A ship berthed at the wharf."*

Returning to the Official War History:

*"After a reconnaissance of the area Clowes began to re-adjust the dispositions of his force and by the 25th (Aug.), the 7th Brigade was responsible substantially for the eastern sector, with Lieutenant-Colonel Meldrum's 61st Battalion in position round No.3 Strip, Lieutenant-Colonel Miles 25th Battalion about 3 miles west of that area with one troop of the 2/5th Field Regiment near by, and the 9th Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Morgan) some two miles to the south, on the western shores of Milne Bay. The 2/10th Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Dobbs) was inserted into the Gili Gili area between the 61st and 25th. To the west, on the road to Waigani, was the remainder of the 18th Brigade, with the 2/9th Battalion round Hagita House and the 2/12th near Waigani itself and Milne Force Headquarters on the Waigani Road between the two. A beach defence area stretched round the coast for about a mile on both sides of the Gili Gili wharf with medium machine-guns from the 7th Brigade, Bofors, and one troop of 25-pounders sited there, and American maintenance units allotted beach defence roles. . . .*

*"Meanwhile, on the 25th, more reports of Japanese shipping movements came in. At 10.10 a.m. Clowes was told that aircraft had sighted a Japanese force of 3 cruisers, 2 transports of about 8000 tons each, 2 tankers and vessels resembling tankers, each about 6000 tons, and 2 mine-sweepers. Soon it was clear that this force was headed for Milne Bay. Clowes, deciding that invasion was imminent, assumed active command of all Allied land and air forces in the Milne Bay area, in accordance with his directive. He also placed all unbrigaded units, including American and R.A.A.F. ground troops, under command of the brigadier in whose area they were situated and placed one of the 2/10th companies under Field. . . .*

*"At 1.15 a.m. on the 26th, the crew of the R.A.A.F. tender, which Clowes had sent to patrol the bay and give early warning of the entrance of any hostile ships, reported that, at 11.40 p.m. they had sighted four ships in the bay about eleven miles east of Gili Gili wharf. Less than an hour later heavy and continuous gunfire was heard from the sea.*

*"For Clowes the night was thus clouded with uncertainty; he had no naval forces, coastal guns or searchlights with which to dispute the entrance of Japanese ships; they could roam his waters and effect landings where they wished, and darkness curtailed them from Allied air attack. Soon, however, some definite news began to come through from the 61st Battalion. Captain Bicks' company was reported to be engaging Japanese at K.B. Mission."*

K.B. Mission was about three to four miles from No.3 Strip.

The events for the period 25th to 29th August are taken from a diary kept by a gunner on Lau Lau Island, commencing on 25th August:

*"An Empire flying boat brought in mail early in the morning, but left again soon afterwards. Two red warnings were received during the morning, but no aircraft were seen. About midday a ship, although not finished unloading, left the wharf and several small vessels left the area. (It was later learned that the luggers "Bronzewing" and "Elavala" had been lost assisting the infantry battalion attacking the Japanese). At about 1800, Kittyhawks and Hudsons flew out towards the entrance to the Bay. Three hours later the guns were informed that two Japanese transports, escorted by two destroyers and two cruisers were heading towards Milne Bay.*

*"At 0130 on the morning of 26th August, a red warning was received, but it was for ships, not aircraft! The gun crew on Lau Lau Island had packed their gear and a launch was standing by ready for evacuation.*

*"Later in the night, flashes lit up the eastern sky, followed by explosions, the gun fire continuing for three quarters of an hour.*

*"At day-break three ships could be seen from the eastern side of the island, but they had gone an hour later.*

*"Eight B17 bombers flew over to bomb the invasion area - one was destroyed by enemy A.A. fire. Soon after that, the P40 Kittyhawks strafed the enemy positions (about six miles away) and fired an ammunition dump.*

*"About 0900, the 25-pounders fired several rounds, followed by a barrage in the afternoon. Bombing by B25's, B17's and strafing by P40's continued during the day.*

*"At 2130, the Japanese commenced shelling the Lau Lau*

Island and the Gili Gili wharf area. The shelling lasted ten minutes, with the C4 gunsite receiving a shell at the outside base of the built-up gun pit.

"At 0145 on 27th August, shelling re-commenced for a short time. At 0800, three Zeros and several naval aircraft were engaged by the Bofors gunners. One enemy aircraft was observed with smoke pouring from its tail after attacking a B26. Smoke was seen coming from Gurney airfield.

"On 28th August at 0600, the guns were informed that Japanese tanks had broken through the infantry lines. Bofors were loaded with armour-piercing ammunition, but shortly afterwards were re-loaded with high explosive shells as an air raid was expected.

"During the morning and afternoon, P40s continued strafing the enemy. The 9th Battery Field artillery fired several salvos. It was reported that the enemy naval forces had left the area, leaving at least one ship sunk. It was also reported that there was a possibility of the enemy using collapsible boats, in order to create a diversion.

"The morning of 29th August commenced with a barrage from the 25-pounders. P40s continued their strafing at palm tree level. Early in the afternoon there was a report that the Japanese had broken through at the factory, but this was later learned to be incorrect. However, in the excitement the canteen had been blown up by the person in charge.

"In the late afternoon the P40s were still strafing, and the artillery laid down a barrage. Word then came that Lau Lau Island was to be evacuated. The breech block was removed from the gun, and the fourteen members of the crew left the island in a rowing boat for the mainland. Here they took up infantry positions as beach defence in the Gili Gili area. A Japanese cruiser and eight destroyers were reported headed for Milne Bay! At midnight there were flashes on the horizon, and the troops waited for the shells to land. None came." (Note: The troops on the beach defences were gunners, cooks, batmen, drivers, workshop personnel and so on, with the regular infantry behind; in other words caught between two fires if the Japs landed).

It is now interesting to turn to the Official War History:

"The Japanese landed a total of 1900 to 2000 troops, thinking that 20 or 30 aircraft were based at Milne Bay and that the ground forces numbered two or three companies deployed for the defence of the airfield. They had planned to use both soldiers and marines in the attack. After the Kawaguchi units were diverted to Guadalcanal they intended to use troops of the 4th Infantry Regiment (Aoba Force) against Milne Bay. But they could not get

*Aoba Force down from the Philippines in time so determined to rely on naval forces only. When Milne Bay had been occupied they proposed to capture Port Moresby 'with one blow', in a combined land, sea and air attack in full strength. Their convoy left Rabaul on 24th August and, on the morning of the 26th, landed Commander Hayashi's 5th Kure Naval Landing Force, about 600 strong, 10th Naval Labor Corps numbering some 360, and possibly about 200 of Commander Tsukioka's 5th Sasebo Naval Landing Force.*

*"Although initially the landings were unopposed the Japanese plans miscarried from the very beginning. The balance of the 5th Sasebo approximately 350 strong who had embarked at Buna, were to disembark at Taupota and co-operate with the main landings, by moving across the mountains to Milne Bay, but became marooned at Goodenough Island through the destruction of their barges by Allied air attacks on 25th August. Then the main invasion forces landed at the wrong place. They had intended to land closer to the airfield, and, indeed, could have done so with very little opposition. The well directed R.A.A.F. attacks on the 26th caused disorder and casualties amongst them. Their own lack of air support hindered them. . . ."*

The following Order of the Day for 29th August, 1942 was issued by General Clowes D.S.O., M.C., G.O.C. Milne Force:

*"The Commander Milne Forces desires to convey to all ranks his appreciation of the operations in the last few days.*

*"It is probable that tonight 29 Aug. we will be subject to naval shelling.*

*"Having experience of the previous similar shelling all troops will regard the new attempt with the contempt it deserves.*

*"Stand firm to your posts. Do not panic – it is mostly noise. Above all do not spread rumors.*

*"The Commander is confident that by standing firm and by strict discipline and immediate obedience of all ranks we will win through."*

The day of 29th August was a very tense one. When someone fired on Zebu cattle which had strayed through wire surrounding a mine field and reported "*The bloody cows are through the wire!*", a chain reaction was set up. The report was interpreted as the Japanese breaking through, with the result that there was much excited firing of rifles. The person in charge of the Canteen could not bear to think that his important rations of beer and spirits should fall into enemy hands, so took the precaution of blowing it up.

Fortunately the Japanese did not arrive. Just after midnight

there were explosions heard near the entrance to the Bay. There was a red warning at 1330 but the all clear came soon afterwards. The artillery sent over some shells now and again, but the afternoon was very quiet.

Before dawn on 31st August, the infantry had engaged a Japanese force on the east side of No.3 Strip and inflicted heavy casualties, so that by about 0800 the engagement was at an end except for some sniping.

About midday two Zeros were engaged by the heavy A.A. There is an unconfirmed diary entry recording that "*fighter 'drome and 3.7 A.A. position shelled*".

In the afternoon C.1 Detachment gun and crew were moved by ketch and pontoon from Lau Lau Island to the Pontoon Wharf and then by truck to Ladava Mission where the gun was put into action at the end of a mole.

Around 2200 on 1st September the guns received a message that an enemy convoy was at the entrance to the Bay. Crews stood to their guns. Flares could be seen in the vicinity of K.B. Mission. On the morning of the following day a transport escorted by a destroyer came in, but left hurriedly in the afternoon. There was an unconfirmed report that two Japanese cruisers were at the entrance to the Bay.

On 4th September the War Diary entry is as follows:

*"M2 site (6th Battery Heavy A.A.) in conjunction with 9th Battery 2/5 Field Regiment after testing placed under command 18 Aust. Infantry Brigade for ground shooting. Several shots were fired at ranges up to 18,500 yards and (25 pdrs. 13,500 yds.) were reported quite effective."*

On Friday 4th September a gunner's diary records:

*"0005 When going on guard found the M.G.s (machine gunners) standing to (Jap warship in Bay). Rang T.H.Q., but no instructions for us to stand to. Off guard at 0100 and had a bit of sleep until awakened by naval shell fire. Stood to the gun till 0355 when told to stand down by T.H.Q. Went to sleep again till 0700. Beautiful sunny morning. 1515 Warning that bombers might be over. Stood by. Pit almost finished. Went to bed early. The M.G.s are busy strengthening their defences. About 2000 received report that there is an enemy ship in or approaching the Bay. It is very frustrating the way these Japs can come and go as they please."*

Continuing:

*"5th September. On guard from midnight until 0200 - very peaceful in Bay - no flares or firing. No rain during the night, but overcast this morning, visibility fair down the Bay. 2 Lockheeds went out at 0930. Kept fine all day. Our gun went to Workshops and we got Degney's gun. Reports that there are 2 destroyers and*

one cruiser (enemy) in the area. We all had one bottle of beer tonight"

On the same day the Official War Historian writes:

"General Clowes' worries were not over. At 9 p.m. he received a signal from Blamey which told of expectations that the Japanese would land more troops in Milne Bay that night and that more Japanese reinforcements would arrive on the 12th. Little more than an hour later he was told that the remnants of the Japanese forces would be withdrawn in the darkness and that he could expect a fresh landing by two hostile battalions on the 10th. As the night went on Japanese ships came again to Milne Bay and the busy sound of boats hurrying between ship and shore was heard by the forward troops."

Returning to the gun crew:

"6th September. On guard from 0200 to 0400. Inclined to showers – very quiet. Raining hard this morning. The freighter "Anshun" and the "Arunta" came in and 2 E.F.B.s landed so we should get some mail this time. Just before lunch three Beaufighters and six Beauforts came up the Bay and landed. We feel extra safe now against naval attack. Received mail. Teemed raining till 1600. After tea the hospital ship "Manunda" came in with all lights on. We are permitted lights tonight provided they are shaded. Had a bottle of beer and retired to bed early.

"2200 Woken out of a sound sleep by naval shelling, sounded very close. About half an hour later one ship flashed its searchlight on the "Manunda", still all lit up, and then quietly around the Bay finally settling on the ship at the wharf. Another enemy ship opened up with shellfire. We observed the shells landing around Lau Lau Island and the ship. Enemy ships about 3 miles out. Some of the shells hit the "Anshun". The shelling ceased. "Manunda" unmolested. About midnight sighted a large object between us and the Island. Manned the gun. The object turned out to be one of our launches, Mr. Munny on board. It tied up at our wharf.

"7th September. Just before 0100 everything was quiet and we were considering going back to sleep, when the searchlight suddenly shattered the darkness, rested on our area for breathless seconds, and then slowly moved round to the wharf. The shelling recommenced. A fairly short salvo this time. Darkness and quiet once more. 0200 came and we decided it was safe to return to bed, which we did. Awakened at 0600 to go on guard. Can see the ship over on her side and just out from the wharf. Many sight-seers came out to gun and had a look through our binoculars. The ship's crew are at the Mission. About 0900 the Beauforts and Beaufighters left on patrol – a little bit late we think. Working on Bren gun pit all day. 1405 Spotter alert. "Manunda" taking on

"casualties all day (including malaria cases). Much damage to personal property at T.H.Q. Geoff Mills wounded by shell fire, went on "Manunda". No other casualties amongst our men. C.3 gun pit received direct hit on outside of bags - no damage to gun or crew. 1650 Warning that 2 heavy cruisers headed this way. Beauforts went out. Infantry to stand to all night 2000-2200 on guard. At 2200 saw dark shape on horizon, at first thought it was warship, but as it came closer distinguished craft as ketch, which disappeared in W. direction.

"8th September. 0005 Woken out of sound sleep by naval shelling. Looked through door of hut and saw searchlight in Bay. Two star shells went off in close proximity to us. Shelling ceased. Expecting a fresh salvo any moment "Manunda" is out in the Bay lit up like a show boat. Stood to the gun till 0315 but all quiet. Stood down. A beautiful sunny morning, but felt very tired. Yellow warning at 1000. About lunch time another yellow warning, then red, heard sound of planes and bombs dropped near drome. No A.A. fire. All clear 1330. The C.O. of the infantry in this area came here and discussed our position. We are liable to be mown down by M.G. fire. We will probably have to shift. On guard 2200 till midnight. All quiet."

Reg Goldfinch recalls the shelling:

"A mate, a provost and I were camped in a native hut near the wharf. When the shelling started my mate and I made it to the slit trench, but the provost, who had brought a dozen beer for us, couldn't find the door of the hut in the dark and was running round swearing a treat. When the shelling stopped we crawled out of the slit trench and looked into the hut. The mosquito nets were riddled with shrapnel holes. The provost was very lucky indeed. The beer was safe."

Another incident on the night of the 6th is remembered by Lieutenant Chambers:

"The only communication to Battery H.Q. and on to Brigade H.Q. was from "C" Troop H.Q. on the beach.

"We moved the phone from the hut to a slit trench 4 feet deep and with 3 feet of water in it. A Japanese cruiser was shelling the "Anshun" at the wharf and we were 200 yards beyond in direct line. Most of the shells hit the coconut palms above our heads. Gar. Margetts was on the phone. I was passing him information on bearings to the cruiser and the hospital ship "Manunda" and whether the Japs were shelling her.

"Then a shell hit our hut and I submerged taking the phone with me. Soon 'Bluey the Sig.' turned up out of the darkness to restore communications and assure Battery H.Q. we were still there. Geoff Mills was wounded.

"Now, who was 'Bluey the Sig'? He did a great job keeping the

*lines open. For several days he had no rest. Red hair, shorts and tattered shirt"*

Bunny Cheong was caught in the shelling with his gun tractor at the wharf beside the "Anshun". He remained under the tractor until the shelling ceased, but when he attempted to drive off, the searchlights came on again, blinding him. The tractor and Bunny ended up in the water.

During the days of 9th to 12th September, the foreshore was cleared for 100 yards inland and wired by the infantry and by members of the gun crews situated there. Troop Headquarters was moved back to the Factory. These precautions were made in preparation for an expected further landing by the Japanese.

On 13th September a census of the health of the men of "C" Troop was taken. The healthiest gun detachment had five men who had not contracted malaria. There were at that time 17 members of the Troop in hospital. "A" Troop's health at that time was worse than "C" Troop.

The War Diary of 9th Battery records:

*"6th September. "Anshun" sank. "C" Troop H.Q. hut and C.2 Det. gun-pit received direct hits with 4" to 6" shells. 2 "C" Troop personnel slightly wounded."*

On the night of 6th September some guns of 2/6th Heavy A.A. Battery had the Japanese cruiser in their sights and requested permission to fire. Permission was refused. The retaliation from the cruiser's 8" guns would have been horrific. It was Major Margetts who gave the instruction not to fire.

There is an unconfirmed report that at some late stage permission was sought by the Heavy A.A. to fire on an enemy submarine. "Submarine sunk by A.A. fire!!" Permission was not given.

The Official War History states:

*"Clowes then busied himself with preparations for the new attacks he had been told to expect but never materialised. Thus far the defence of Milne Bay had cost the Australians 373 battle casualties. Of these 24 were officers; 12 officers and 149 men were either killed or missing. Of the Americans; one soldier of the 43rd Engineers was killed and two were wounded in the ground actions; several more were killed or wounded in air raids. Of the Japanese casualties, Clowes reported: 'It is conservatively and reliably estimated . . . . that enemy killed amount to at least 700. . . . This number does not include any of the enemy who may have been lost with the merchantship "Nankai Maru", sunk in the bay by our aircraft. One P.O.W. stated that 300 men had been lost with the ship."*

One of the casualties was Squadron-Leader Turnbull of 76 Squadron R.A.A.F., who crashed while strafing Japanese positions at palm tree level. The efforts of 75 and 76 Squadrons in con-

tinually strafing the enemy gave a great boost to the morale of all troops in the Gili Gili area. Squadron-Leader K. W. Truscott took command of 76 Squadron.

Conversely, a heavy blow to morale was received when both squadrons were ordered back to Port Moresby for one night when the situation looked very bad. However the authorities thought better of it than to repeat that exercise.

The following extracts are from Milne Force Anti-Aircraft Weekly Intelligence Summary No.4:

"1. Forces at our disposal:

Land Defence: *For the night of 28th/29th Aug. one 40mm gun C.2 of M 32 was moved from site on waterfront to a position near the junction of Routes 1 and 2 to act in an anti-tank role covering the break through of any tanks from direction of No.3 Strip. This gun was moved back at dawn.*

2. Alerts. Note: *In view of the number of warnings, Yellow warnings have not been included. Night of 25th/26th Aug. at 0136 hours a Japanese landing in force, covered by naval shelling, was made on the North shore of Milne Bay about 2 miles East from the nearest A.A. gun site. Gun sites remained "Standing To" all night, but there was no A.A. action.*

"3. Alerts 26 Aug. *During the night 26th/27th Aug. while naval shelling from the bay was in progress, gun sites again "Stood To", but there was no A.A. action.*

"4. Action 24th Aug. *Raid No.3 At 1446 Porlock Harbor reported a large number of aircraft flying N.E. to S.W. All available P.40s were sent up and gunsites "Stood To" at 1500 hours. At 1523, 8 enemy fighters approached Strip No.1 apparently with the intention of a strafing attack. All gunsites heavy and light engaged the aircraft until our P.40s intercepted. Several hits were registered, and 3 aircraft were probably brought down by L.A.A. fire. Some of the aircraft were not Mitsubishi type "O", as 2 were definitely observed to have square-cut wing tips.*

*"All our P.40s returned safely after the action. There was no damage caused. A.A. fire effectively prevented the enemy from attacking any ground targets. Later reports advised that Jap forces were landing at Tufi while the raid was in progress.*

"27th Aug. *Raid No.4 Gun sites were "Stood To" at 0744 hours, acting on information received from Porlock Harbor, that aircraft were approaching in this direction. B17s and B26s reached this area . . . these were the aircraft previously picked up. Gun sites "Stood Down".*

*At 0813 Site M.3 reported enemy aircraft approaching from the East along Bay. These consisted of 8 bombers escorted by 12 fighters. A.A. sites engaged at 0814 and effectively broke up the*

formation. The fighters came in towards the Strip, but were turned away by A.A. fire. The bombers continued up the Bay in the direction of the Mission where the fighting is going on.

Fighters and bombers were engaged all over the sky by A.A. fire, which had an open go as the 6 P.40s were absent on patrol. The first serious attempt to strafe the Strip was made at 0830 by 5 fighters, and during this attack one B24 on the ground was set on fire. In this and subsequent strafing attacks on the Strip L.A.A. fire claimed many hits, with almost certain destruction of 6 enemy aircraft including one bomber.

Bombs were dropped near the Strip (4), the A.A. site M.3 (2) and the area where 61 and 9 Inf. Bn. are engaging enemy land forces. No damage has been reported.

M.3 shot down one bomber over the sea. At 0845, 6 B26 Allied bombers flew in from the East and in an engagement with enemy fighters, one type "O" fighter was shot down over the sea.

Later reports from the R.A.A.F. state that P.40s shot down 2 fighters, 1 dive bomber, and 1 dive bomber probable.

The A.A. fire was sustained and accurate and in addition to shooting down planes, had the effect of preventing the enemy aircraft from carrying out any effective bombing.

"31st Aug. Raid No.5 .... and at 1141 hours gun sites identified the aircraft as type "O" Mitsubishi, seven in number.

At 1145 M.3 engaged at a height of 15,000 feet followed by M.2 - no hits were observed.

7. General. As well as the air raids during the period A.A. sites have been very interested in the operations by land and by sea. Naval shells have burst and landed very close to M.3 and M.32, and all sites have maintained patrols and "Stood To" when attack has appeared imminent.

All sites particularly M.3 and M.32 on the coast have been passing valuable information re lights, flares, shipping and operations. M.3 was used in a coastal defence role.

Morale of A.A. personnel has been very high throughout, the one complaint being 'that Tojo is using too much naval and not enough air support for his ground forces.'

Extracts from Infantry Intelligence Report 2nd September:

"A" Company 9 Bn. between Game River and K.B. "C" Company at Rabi with role protection tracks from N. and N.W. 2 Companies 2/12 Bn K.B. and 2 at Rabi. Enemy force estimated 300 attacked Rabi after dusk. First attack lasted 2 hours. Rush attack supported by mortars. Grenades used extensively by Japs. Attacked first from North then from Gama River then from West - 50 enemy killed. Our casualties "A" and "C" Companies, 2 killed 8 wounded.

"Pilot crashed Zero found Kane Kope by Private Farrer Force

*Sigs. Farrer sole survivor R.A.A.F. crash launch sunk by enemy warship Milne Bay. Escorted prisoner to 7th Brigade. P.O.W. gave name as Koshimoto carried 1/3000000 of N.E.A. from Rabaul to Brisbane showing air routes.*

*Captured equipment sent to Force included respirator, battalion flag taken by 61 Bn east of Strip 3, one M.M.G., 2 field guns and ops. map Milne Bay. Flags captured have 2 zig zag lines with anchor in centre indicating 2 Bn. of Marine Regt. Captured ops. map shows Milne Bay area with Jap objectives and date proposed attainment."*

\* \* \* \*

A very important service in the Milne Bay area was the formation of an anti-aircraft gun operations room (G.O.R.) in conjunction with the R.A.A.F.

During the battle of Milne Bay, as the A.A. defences covered the whole of the defended area and had the only workable communication system, practically all the reports from the forward areas to H.Q. passed through the Gun Operations Room.

The G.O.R. was the operational command post of the A.A.D.C. (Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander), Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Margetts.

Originally the G.O.R. operated from a house near the bulk canteen, and had a liaison officer (gunner) detached to Fighter Sector (R.A.A.F.) H.Q. across the paddock. It was quite common for the liaison officer to deputise, for brief periods, for the Fighter Controller.

The theory was that all gun sites were connected by telephone to the G.O.R. and reported all observations (in the air, on the land, and on the water).

The guns of 9th Battery did not wait to be told by G.O.R. to engage the enemy when there was any surprise attack by low-flying aircraft.

During the period of the fighting, the cookhouse at T.H.Q. "C" Troop provided mugs of tea and a meal to those infantrymen coming back from the forward positions.

In improvised ovens made from petrol drums covered with clay, the Futchter brothers, who were bakers by trade, baked loaves of bread, which was a welcome change from the biscuits on issue.

The latter days of September saw seven ships come into the Bay with troops and supplies.

On 20th September, promotions and changes within the Battery were promulgated. Amongst them were Major Margetts to Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander Milne Bay Area, Captain Staughton to Battery Commander and Lieutenant Chambers to Battery Captain.

On 25th September the gun on Ladava Mission, C.1 was moved back to Lau Lau Island which was now defended by about 80 men from the 25th Battalion. The personal gear had preceded the gun on to the barge tied to the pontoon wharf, when General Blamey came along and enquired what was moving. He was told "An ack ack gun, sir", but he must have been puzzled as there was no gun to be seen, only a good array of cane furniture souvenired from the Mission and some kit bags.

More troops arrived in the Bay during October, including 235th Australian L.A.A. Battery on 21st October, and "B" Troop comprising two officers and 71 other ranks, equipment and four Bofors guns on S.S. "Barabala" from Port Moresby on 29th October.

The 29th October also saw the arrival of Lightning fighters, Beaufighters and Beaufort bombers.

On the arrival of 235th Battery, some personnel transferred from 9th Battery to provide N.C.O.s

The Battery took over the A.A. defence of No.3 Strip where only a few weeks before the Japanese had suffered severe casualties. The Strip was now open to aircraft; the first plane to land, on 18th October, was a Flying Fortress.



Milne Bay coastline with anchored trading ketches.  
(Photo courtesy F. Crees)



In memory of the Officers, N.C.O.s and men of the 7th and 18th Aust. Infantry Brigades who gave their lives, defending Turnbull Field (no.3 Strip). This marks the westernmost point in the Japanese advance, Aug - Sept 1942. 65 unknown Japanese Marines lie buried here.



Captured Japanese landing craft and Milne Bay.