

DIARY BY CAPT. W. G. BOTHAM, D.C.M.

O/C. RABAUŁ FORTRESS COY. R.A.E.

COVERING PERIOD JANUARY 19TH. -- FEBRUARY 27TH. 1942

- Jan. 19, 20, 21. ----- Preparing Lakunai drome for demolition. Personnel - S/Sgt. Elton, Cpl. Edwards, Sprs. Edwards, Rawlings, James. Completed destruction of Air Force material on drome at 21000 hrs. on Jan. 21.
- Jan. 22. ----- Praed Point bombed at 0630 hrs. Battery demolished. R/A.E. - R.A.A. casualties about 12 o/ranks. R.A.E. killed - Cpl. D. Sandison. S15407, Spr. F. B. Clissold. V50844, Spr. J. Bennet. Q89335. Ordered evacuation of Praed Pt. and sent all personnel to Rabaul. With Spr. Vale, lorry driver I demolished Praed Pt. magazine, water supply, stores and huts. Joined "A" Coy. 2/22 Bn. near lower drome, commenced to collect men from Nordup who had walked around South Daughter. At 1630 hrs. "A" Coy evacuated to Vulcan. I took lorry to Raluana Pt. and joined "Y" Coy. Required at 2/22 Bn. headquarters for demolition. Took personnel, collected explosives, and sent parties with same to demolition points.
- Jan. 23. ----- Attack commenced approx. 0230 hrs. at Vulcan, later at Raluana. Mortars and M.G.'s did good work when landing parties were caught on barbed wire. Bn. H.Q. evacuated to Malabonga Junction. I took sigs. and material to there. Placed R.A.E. working party en route at bad point of road to repair same. Left Sigs. at Junction and went to Toma to report to N.G.A.H.Q. Saw Col. Scanlon. Ordered to evacuate about 1100 hrs. to Malabonga with H.Q. personnel. Journeyed to Malabonga, destroyed grader, and repaired bridges en route. Road bad, many vehicles bogged. Left vehicle at Malabonga and journeyed on foot on the road to Bainings. Trucks bombed by Japs. Walked until about 2000 hrs. Slept in bush - heavy rain, troubled by insects. I carried axe and kit bag of rations. Personnel:-- Capt. Botham, S/Sgt. Elton, Sgt. Potter, Sprs. James and Perry.
- Jan. 24. ----- Walked all day and camped in rain at night at Bainings. No fire.
- Jan. 25. ----- Walked all day and reached Lamingi Mission (R.C. Mission on mountain in Bainings) about 1600 hrs. Bainings - huge mountains and gorges; swift rivers and red clay soil.
- Jan. 26. ----- Left Lamingi at 0800 hrs. Perry lost boots at river after one hours journey. I sent him back to Lamingi. We walked all day - heavy going. Camped in small Baining village with Fred Kornorgan and Ron. Brown, 2/22 Bn.
- Jan. 27. ----- Walked all day - steep mountains and deep rivers. Camped beside river (Mamus boy assisted us to cross over) rain at night.
- Jan. 28. ----- Heavy climbing over new track cut by Mamus boy and Lieut. Best, arrived near coast about 1700 hrs. Camped in old shelter. Encountered snake. Heard shelling off coast.
- Jan. 29. ----- Arrived at Saw Mill, Adler Bay about 1000 hrs. White flag showing. Schooner sunk near beach. Japanese pamphlets dropped. Some men awaiting capture. Collected fowls and rice and pushed on from Mill. Slept in shelter near stream.
- Jan. 30. ----- Moved on and experienced some heavy going and rain. Camped beside stream. Made a shelter. Very wet and had difficulty in cooking night meal.
- Jan. 31. ----- Marched on - occasionally route along pebbly beach. Camped on beach in native shelters (Very pebbly) food was scarce along this portion of the route.

Feb. 1. ----- Arrived at Tol (wide bay) early in the afternoon. Stayed at Green House on the hill with Capt. Nicholls, Lieut. Best, and Lieut. Lyons. A party of my troops stayed on the waterfront. A Jap. float plane made a reconnaissance in the afternoon. McGowan and party left in small pinnace.

Feb. 2 ----- Reveille at 0300 hrs. and we left for river crossing at 0500 there were no dinghies available. Sent S/Sgt. Elton, R.A.E. and R.A.A. and 2/22 Bn. man to procure one. Eventually the whole party crossed three rivers at Wide Bay and arrived at "Luis" the Filipino's House near Kalai Mission. We stayed in a copra shed for the night. The Filipino provided roast duck fruit and vegetables. Lieut. Best and S/Sgt. Elton went to look for diesel launch "Bomba". They found it had been burnt and sunk. Tried to get further pinnace in order without success. Met Austrain Father from Kalai R.C. Mission also Mr. Gregory D.O. Rabaul. He was suffering from infected legs and going back by canoe to Rabaul to give himself up as a prisoner.

Feb. 3. ----- About 0745 hrs. I noticed 5 craft proceeding towards Tol. The craft opened fire by cannon on the beach. We immediately left from the other side of the bay and marched all day. We arrived Kiep plantation house after dark. Food was scarce.

Feb. 4. ----- Walked half the day first crossing the river and going through Matpar plantation. Found a large canoe in the village and took to sea - self, Elton, Potter and James. The canoe leaked badly and we beached it near Guma. We stayed in empty mission Father's house at night. We found a little flour and had a good meal of fowls etc.

Feb. 5. ----- We marched onto village on beach. We had a heavy day over the mountains near C. Orford. Capt. Nicholls, Lieut. Best and party moved on. We stayed in a hut and bought a pig.

Feb. 6. ----- We left early and climbed a high mountain, after crossing river. We traversed Wide Plateau - red soil. It was hot and there was no water, so we obtained some sugar cane to chew. A native boy gave us a large bunch of bananas in a village surrounded by a stockade. We descended from the plateau in the dark and found Capt. Nicholls' party in a village. They gave us a little pork.

Feb. 7. ----- (Sat.) We marched on to Matong. Killed a pig there. Matong is a coral strewn village E. of Waterfall Bay.

Feb. 8. ----- We left Matong and had difficulty in crossing the rivers. We passed a saw mill (Mrs. Boles) and met "A" Coy contingent awaiting canoe on river infested with crocodiles. Finally we crossed by a canoe worked by a Tul-Tul and walked to house at Kolai plantation which had been wrecked by natives.

Feb. 9. ----- 18th. Day - Monday. We left Kolai plantation at approx. 0700 hrs., crossed innumerable rivers, and reached Pomio village.

Feb. 10. ----- 19th. day - Tuesday. We left Pomio about 0630. Had trouble getting boats. We reached Wunung plantation. Met Mrs. Yankee - a Malayan woman whose German husband is interned. We had tea and scones. ----- came over from ----- mission and took us back to his station where we had splendid treatment.

Feb. 11. ----- 20th. day. We left ----- at Malmal by canoe about 0700 hrs. to go up river. We climbed up a hill and walked for some hours. We crossed a river and reached Lau about 1700 hrs. Slept in House Kiap. We had to wear boots all the time as the natives had elephantiasis in this village. Saw catechists wife suffering with probably pneumonic flu and gave her aspirin.

- Feb. 12. ----- 21st. day. Thursday. Left Lau at 0800 hrs. Marched ahead with Potter and a Cpl. of the 2/22 Bn. Hard going in places but easy wide track in others. Passed Tu village after 5 hours. We had carriers to here. Pushed on from here and crossed rivers to Rano plantation which had been ransacked. "A" Coy detachment were then in occupation. I obtained a fowl and pushed on. Found police boys with some loot and disposed them. I made them carry kit bags to No. 1 Luluai village at Massau which was reached at 1845 hrs.
- Feb. 13. ----- 22nd. day. Journeyed alone from Massau to ----- about 1 1/2 hours. Saw ----- and Sgt/ Smith, 2/22 Bn. ----- informed me that Lieut. Best had left in pinnace on Tuesday night. Some civilians went through on Sunday - Knight, Fisher & Co. Gasmata had been occupied by Japanese on Feb. 10th. I ordered only the sick men to come to the mission, 18 o/ranks of "A" Coy to village beyond -----, and the remainder to stay at Massau or Rano (Chinese plantation store). I sent for R.A.E. personnel from Massau to work on pinnace "Maria" at mission and make it seaworthy for straight out journey South to Trobriand Islands.
- Feb. 14. ----- S/Sgt. Elton, R.A.E. arrived and worked on pinnace. Capt. Nicholls also arrived at Mission. Many sick men now at Mission.
- Feb. 15. ----- Working on vessel. Sent for ships compass at Rano. Pts. O'Niell and Frazer arrived from Rano with compass. Pte. O'Niell developed Malaria.
- Feb. 16. ----- Completed arrangements for voyage, including installation of compass and camouflage of vessel. Left at 1800 hrs. after difficulty with broken pipe to atomiser on engine. Engine stopped again outside reef. Had to use oars to keep vessel off reef. Restarted engine and commenced journey at 1930. Rough seas compelled a course of S.E. during night.
- Feb. 17. ----- New Britain still in sight at daybreak. Estimated about 40 miles away. Course varied S. to S.S.E. Many personnel sick. Slipping clutch caused stoppage at night. I worked on it with S/Sgt. Elton and was violently sick. Restarted engine after about 1 1/2 hrs., but had to adjust clutch twice later during night.
- Feb. 18. ----- Weather better. Course S/S.W. to S. by W. Blew hot bulb and replaced it with large type - O.K. Rough seas made refuelling difficult. Saw driftwood and birds and considered we were nearing land. Maintained watch for land all night.
- Feb. 19. ----- Sighted Island at daybreak - later identified as Trobriand. Reached Kiriwina Island and was guided by natives to Mission at Losuia. Arrived at Mission at 1300 hrs. and rested at Mission house.
- Feb. 20. ----- Refitted "Maria" for continuation of journey. Met civilian party - Fisher Knight & Co. also N. Duncan (Planter) and K. Chamber (W.T. on Emirau Island). Mission girls sang hymns in evening. Received letters for Mr. Gordon, a Missionary.
- Feb. 21. ----- Left Losuia on "Maria" at 0715 hrs. with 7 personnel and 2 natives as steersmen. Capt. Nicholls and 3 o/ranks and also 2 civilians and natives on launch "Ulele". Rough seas and rainstorm from West. Passed into ('entrecasteau group at 1800 hrs.)
- Feb. 22. ----- Sunday. Arrived at Salamo at 0400 hrs. Boarded "Poseidon" and found some tucker. Walked to Mission and obtained some medicine and stores. Visited hospital and obtained treatment for personnel, stores and food. Met Tongan Missionary, David, and teacher, Peter. Worked on boat all day and 2 other boats. Left Solamo at 2145 hrs. in "Maria" and "Ulele" Anchored off Ferguson Island at 2330 hours, as rainstorm approaching.

Feb. 23. ----- (Monday). Left temporary anchorage at Ferguson Island at 0130 hrs. Arrived East Cape on "Maria" at 1130 hrs. Met Sigs. Holme and Leeson. Saw Cpl. Arnold of Fort. Sigs. at 1245 hrs. Stayed at East Cape for night. Capt. Nicholls left for Giri Giri as the wireless set at East Cape out of action.

Feb. 24. ----- Left East Cape at 0700 hrs. in launch "Mascot" after transferring effects from launch "Maria" and handing some over to Trobrian boys to take back to Salamo. Arrived at Kiuaro - west of Samarai at 1200 hrs. R.M. Mr. A. Temperly, also B. Lee and L. Ross, W.O'S and Mr. Campbell. Crossed to Samarai Island and installed personnel in B.P. Manager's house and obtained bedding and mosquito netting from other houses and hospital. Sent signal to Port Moresby for air or sea transport to Port Moresby. "From Capt. Botham. ----- To H.Q. Moresby.

Two officers 9 o/ranks Rabaul force, 2 civilians arrived at Kiuaro by small pinnace from New Britain. Request air or sea transport if possible as some personnel require urgent medical attention.

W. G. Botham. ---- Capt.

Capt. Nicholls later arrived at Samarai in another pinnace. He and I went to Kiuaro to stay for the night and he sent further signal.

Feb. 25. ----- Wednesday. Wireless station reported out of action. Crossed to Samarai and commenced demolition work. Found store of sugar etc. Burnt oil stores, hotel, bank, church, rectory, and other houses. Returned to Kiuaro to 1400 hrs. Fisher and McGowan & Co. arrived from Trobriands at 1700 hrs. travelling by whale boat to Salamo and from there by launch. They journeyed after receiving refreshments and fuel to Samarai to spend night in houses there. At 1830 hrs. experienced heavy guba (rainstorm) at 2200 hrs. Cpl. Arnold arrived and stated that the signals of Cap. Nicholls and self had been despatched at 1700 hrs. to Moresby.

Feb. 26. ----- Thursday. Heard plane at 0200 hrs. Civilian party came from Samarai about 1000 hrs. and left for Moresby at 1100 hrs. Saw McGowan and gave him clothes. Received signal from Moresby at 1200 hrs - "Catalina" will pick us up". Brought personnel over from Samarai and they stayed with civilians at Kiuaro. Received further signal saying "Catalina would pick us up at daylight on Friday Feb. 27th.)

Feb. 27. ----- Friday. Catalian arrived at 0600 hrs. and moored at Samarai. Party. went across and all army personnel and civilians taken aboard - total 21 in all. Catalian No. A24-14, Crew 8, Pilot Officer - Bolitho i/c. Arrived at Port Moresby 0930 hrs. Landed in R.A.A.F. launch and journeyed to 12 mile. Made report and had lunch. Met G.O.C. Maj. Gen. Morris after lunch - made further report. Slept at Admin. H.Q.

W G Botham

To Wish You

The Season's Greetings

From - "Bill".

W. E. Batham Capt.

Xmas 1941

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R. A. E.

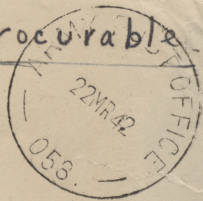


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