

Peace at Last

Towards the end of July came the news that men who had five years service would become eligible for discharge on a points system. A party of six men from 6th Heavy A.A. Battery, with the required number of points, moved out early in August.

A report was received through G.O.R., on 9th August, that Russia had declared war on Japan. The first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima on 6th August.

An entry in a gunner's diary for 10th August reads:

"There is a rumor floating around that peace has been declared with Japan. The only thing concrete from the radio is that it tells us to stand by for an important announcement"

"15th August G.O.R. rang us this morning to tell us Peace has been declared. After waiting for several days for the news to come through it is hard to realise it is all over."

"A Thanksgiving Service was held in the afternoon. At night Scottie and I went to the pictures at the R.A.A.F. The searchlight display and rocket-firing display (all impromptu) was better than the picture. Some of the boys managed to get merry on J.J."

The War Diary records:

"Jap unconditional surrender announced by major powers, but the news was not received with the wild enthusiasm one would expect. This perhaps could be attributed to the delay in the official announcement, which robbed the event of any surprise or spontaneity."

Leaflets had been dropped by Allied aircraft in the areas occupied by the enemy on 7th August, telling them that they were losing the war; then on 15th August leaflets were dropped informing the enemy troops that the Japanese High Command had unconditionally surrendered.

It was all over. There was of course, a great feeling of relief, but there was still the problem of getting home to Australia.

Jim Nolen, Harry Anderson and Norm Bridges were some of the five-year men to be marched out to the Transit Camp on 27th August, for eventual embarkation. However, it was not until 20th September that they boarded the "H.B. Hammond" with about 1100 others. That was not the end of their troubles. They disembarked at Morotai on 25th September, embarked on the "Westralia" on 8th October, and eventually arrived in Melbourne on 20th October.

On the same day the first men went into the Transit Camp, a concert was given by Gracie Fields. This was to commence at 8 p.m.,

but by 5.30 p.m. a fair crowd had assembled. By 8 p.m. there were thousands. After being fine every night for the past week, it rained and rained, but this did not spoil the enjoyment of the concert.

On 10th September the Japanese envoys, who were to sign the surrender documents for the Brunei area, arrived by plane. The envoys were headed by Major-General Karada, Chief of Staff, 37th Japanese Army. The red markings on the planes of the Japanese Air Force were painted over with a white cross and a red wind-sock was trailed behind for identification.

The surrender was duly signed, and "B" Troop 6th Heavy A.A. Battery fired a salute of 101 rounds at 1607 hours. The salute coincided with the actual signing of the surrender by Lieutenant General Baba. As previously recorded, "B" Troop 9th Light A.A. Battery fired a similar salute at Kuala Belait.

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Soon Allied prisoners of war were arriving on Labuan Island from Singapore and elsewhere. They were accommodated in huge marquees, to be cared for by 2/4th A.G.H. These men were to be flown back to Australia. Volunteers were called for to accompany them and the response was overwhelming. Offers to drop rank were common, as only private soldiers were asked for.

The unit War Diary records that in the period 23rd/26th September, seven other ranks were marched out for movement to Singapore for duty on ships returning Allied P.O.W.s to Australia; and in the period 13th/15th October: "*N.E. Borneo force leaves on L.S.T.s to evacuate Jap civilians and army personnel from Tawau and Sandakan. Regiment provides 3 officers and 150 O.R.s for the forst. Lt.-Col. England is detached for duty as comdr N.E. Borneo Force.*"

"Pancho" McDonald's diary recalls the 'collection' of Japanese troops who had surrendered:

"On 15th October the men selected for N.E. Borneo Force embarked on two L.S.T.s and left Labuan on 17th October. Two days later Sandakan was reached, where one ship stopped, while L.S.T. 324 R.N. proceeded to Tawau. At Tawau the Japanese troops and some Japanese women were gathered together with the aid of an English-speaking Japanese warrant officer.

"Intelligence officers interrogated the Japanese on the whereabouts of Allied aircraft which had crashed in the area.

"As the L.S.T. was crowded, a barge was towed containing the remainder of the Japanese. The barge broke loose during the night and was not located again.

"At Sandakan the other L.S.T. joined the Tawau L.S.T., and the two ships reached Jesselton on 24th October, where the Japanese

disembarked, except for the provosts who were searched and sent to Labuan Island."

Ted Guinness also recalls:

"After the ceasefire, with a lieutenant, another sergeant and eighteen other ranks, I was detailed for escort duty on an English mercantile ship collecting Japs. Firstly, about 400 in very poor physical shape were brought on board, many dying before they reached Jesselton. The next batch were just the opposite, being a detachment of the military police "Kempei-tai", fit and arrogant and immaculately dressed with silk shirts etc."

On 30th October, N.E.B.F. returned to Labuan and rejoined the unit.

About this time the War Diary records that:

"The sporting activities of the Regt. have been greatly increased. All types of football, swimming, volley ball, soft ball and table tennis are being played by a daily increasing number of personnel"

Although that description of the troops' activities sounded good, they were, in fact, bored and frustrated with their prospects of getting home. However, some men joined the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan.

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Routine Orders of 3rd December 1945 by Major R. J. Thompson as administering command of 2/3rd A.A. Regiment, included No.223 Demobilisation – Movement to Australia, and on 10th December the Victory ship "Percharg" left for Australia with troops, guns and equipment, arriving at Brisbane on 19th December.

The final Daily Order Part II was issued on 15th January 1946.