
Alan Wellsley Griffin

Extra Shifts & Eggs

EXTRA SHIFTS & EGGS

In order to make and save more money while in Broome, I cut fellow serviceman's hair, did washing and worked extra shifts – at a price I worked shifts for Jack Scrivener who ran a gambling school at night. When that clashed with his WT shift I would do his shift for £1 a night and sometimes I would sub lease it out for ten shillings. That is how I ended up with a bank balance far in excess of the total of my earnings in the RAAF over the 3 years and 8 months of service. This additional savings enabled me to purchase a third share in the family business – Norman Griffin & Sons Jewellers, Footscray Victoria.

Food wasn't that crash hot – our diet particularly lacked fresh food, and I can remember on one occasion fresh fried eggs were on the menu for breakfast – one only per person. Needless to say I filed through the breakfast queue twice! I can see it vividly in my mind now, toasting the bread at the wood fired coppers that stood in a row beside the mess. The fires had burnt down to red hot coals with white powder ash on top - ideal for making toast. The resultant eggs on toast were simply fantastic.

When Darwin was getting pounded, planes were arriving to be refuelled at such a rate it was difficult to keep up the supplies. The petrol was stored in 44 gallon drums in a dump about half way along the strip and off to the north about 400 yards – it was all hands to the pump rolling the drums to the edge of the strip – loading them onto the truck which then drove to each aircraft and carried out the refuelling. It was two or three men to each drum and the Salvation Army Captain was there handing out chewing gum as we worked on.

PROCRASTINATION

For quite a while in the early 1940's we lived in residential houses in the township of Broome, with operations set up in the deserted orphanage.

Later our sleeping quarters were shifted to tents at the town end of the air strip. These tents were furnished with the highest quality bare earth floor. Conversely, the houses in town were constructed with wooden floors and these floors were supported by concrete stumps in order to prevent termite infestation. Termites were a very big problem in Broome.

On this particular occasion, there was one spare stretcher in our tent and Max Meallin arrived back from leave to take up the spot. He walked in said "Hi" and after a short conversation dumped his canvas kit bag on the ground beside the stretcher.

I was lying on my bed relaxing and said to Max – "If I were you Max I would get an old crate from the mess and keep your gear off the ground." Max on this occasion was prepared to procrastinate and said I'll do something about it tomorrow. Tomorrow came and Max got out of bed and lifted his kit bag from the ground – all the contents fell everywhere; the bottom of his kit bag had been completely eaten away by termites overnight. Good one Max, it does pay to take good advice!

Advice costs nothing and can save a lot of trouble. It has also been well noted as a fact of life that it pays to never do tomorrow what one can do today. How true it was in this situation.

THE OFFICIAL REPORT OR THE TRUTH

In Antonio Cafarella's book "My Broome" he mentions a Catalina Flying Boat from Coomalie Creek near Darwin which flew down to pick up beer supplies and in landing on the strip (because of the haze), ran off the end of the runway and into soft earth.

I have a different story and I feel the version Antonio tells was the official explanation with no blame attached to anyone.

My story is as follows; The "Cat" landed incident free; even if there was some difficulty with haze. The cargo of beer was loaded – or should I say "over loaded" and in trying to take off, the "Cat" ran out of runway and ploughed into the soft earth at the end. The beer was still in the "Cat" when I arrived at the accident scene. Not a bottle broken!

Therefore, I believe the incident occurred on take-off rather than landing. The fact that the cargo of beer was already on board is testimony to this fact.



The Catalina Flying boat comes into land at Broome Airstrip to take on cargo. Catalinas were able to land on the ground as well as water and were frequently used as transporters and in search and rescue missions



The Catalina's resting spot after the accident on take off.
Its precious cargo of beer was spared!

THE CYCLONE, OLD FAITHFUL AND LEAVE

Early in 1944 we were camped in tents at the town end of the airstrip. The MET people concluded that a cyclone was approaching Broome and would strike us about midnight. We were given the option of being evacuated (looking back I wonder where that would have been to) or staying with our gear. As far as I know, everyone stayed and the tents were pulled down and staked flat on the ground over our personal gear. We then just had to stand and wait. We encountered a very heavy blow just before midnight, but the cyclone turned south, followed the coast down and came inland at Exmouth Gulf where the resultant tidal wave washed full 44 gallon drums five miles inland and the RAAF personnel there were left with only the clothes they wore.

At the rear of the tent we added an annex of camouflage cover as did some of the other tents. We acquired a shed door from one of the town houses, added four legs to make a sturdy table for the annex and to top off this comfort area, we borrowed some deck chairs (on a permanent basis!) from the Sun Theatre. Even though the front of the theatre was locked up I knew how to get in via the back fence. Local knowledge was very handy!

I was on watch one day when we had an emergency with a Mosquito ("Old Faithful") returning from a reconnaissance mission over enemy held territory. They had engine problems and one engine failed. The last radio contact we had from the plane was "low on gas, repeat low on gas". Fortunately the Mosquito made the distance on one engine but had to crash land on the strip at Broome.

It is worthy to note that from the photograph of "Old Faithful" the number of missions can be calculated and this mission would have been its 39th.

In March of 1945 Hugh Whitford and I were posted to 5 PD, Perth WA to go on leave and then a further posting to God knows where and I don't think God had much idea either! The transport to 1 PD Melbourne was by troop train and the procedure each day was (after morning parade) to form a queue and file past a table where you were issued with travel warrants etc.



As civilian residents returned to Broome and the physical size of the 40 ZFC unit grew, tents were erected to house the RAAF personnel

L to R:
Elsborough,
Daws, Meallin
and Griffin
outside tent
accommodation
between shifts



Above L to R:
Alan Griffin (self) and
Wal Weir



The tents at the southern
end of Broome Airstrip
grew to be a significant
sized RAAF unit (40 ZFC)



Broome Airstrip where the Mosquito (Old Faithful) crash landed.
Mosquitoes such as this were Australian-built



MOSQUITO'S STING. LONG OPERATIONAL TOUR.

First Made in Australia.

MELBOURNE, March 1.—The first Australian-built Mosquito aircraft to go into action against the enemy has been sent south for overhaul.

The veteran Mosquito left its North-West Australian base after eight months' flying on photographic reconnaissance over Japanese-held territory. In that time it completed about 40 missions and covered nearly 100,000 miles.

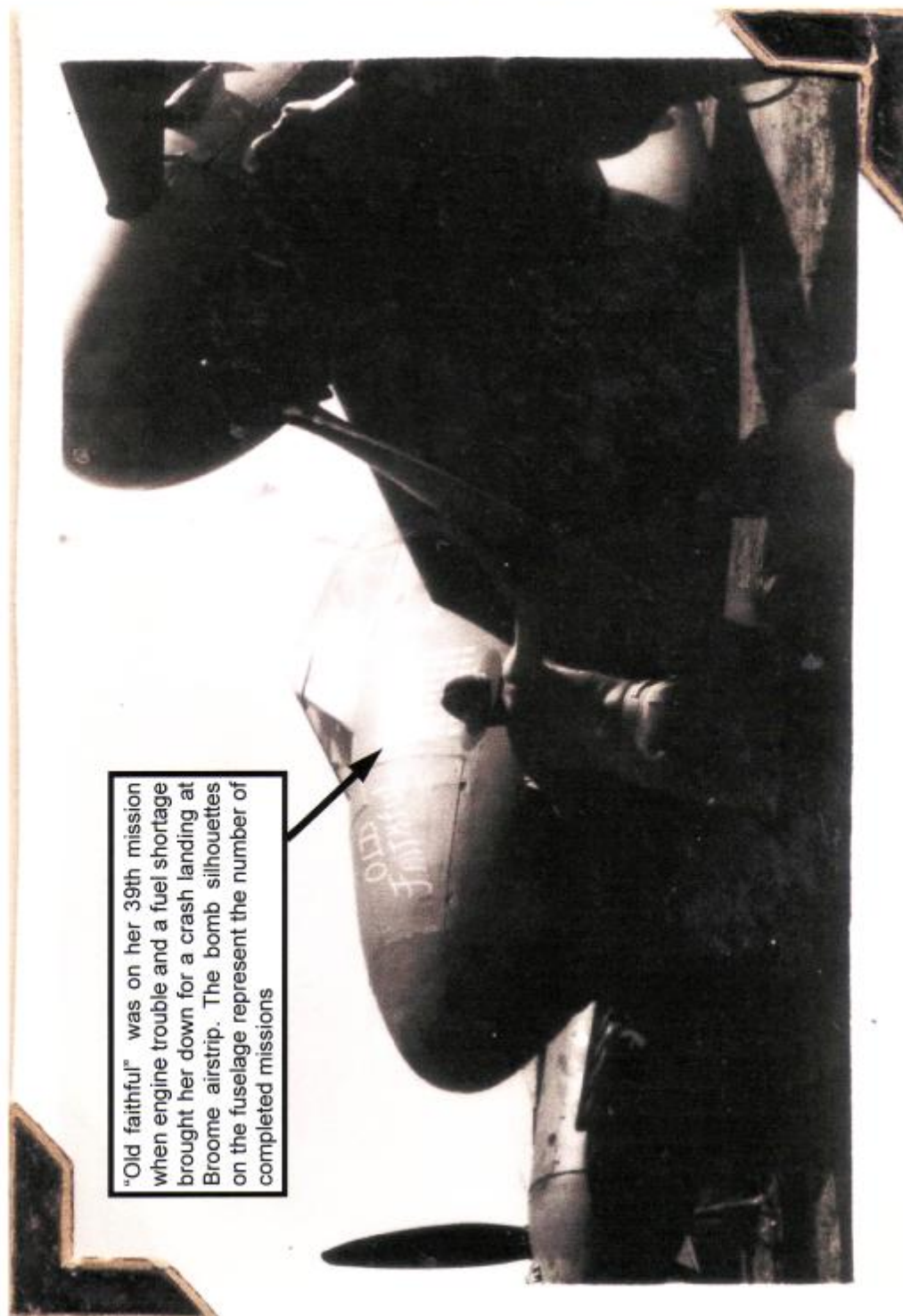
After a complete overhaul at Richmond (NSW) it will probably be used for training crews for operations. The Mosquito completed its first operational tour virtually undamaged by enemy action.

On one mission the Mosquito was half-way back to its base when one of the two engines failed. However, the other engine brought it safely home over hundreds of miles of open sea.

In one five-day period the Mosquito did two trips to Balikpapan (Borneo), covering more than 2,000 miles on each sortie, and a reconnaissance over Ambon.

The commanding officer of the squadron, Squadron-Leader H. A. Gamble, of Victoria, who has flown both British and Australian-built Mosquitos, considers that the local aircraft compares favourably with his British counterpart.

The last radio contact we received from the aircraft was ... "Low on Gas !!"



By the time the queue was nearly completed there would be a loud announcement, "train full, no more until tomorrow". If you missed out, you simply had to do it all over again the next day.

Hugh had met a girl in Perth that he was keen on and he was in no hurry to get back to Melbourne. In order to prolong his stay in Perth, when his place in the queue was getting close to the table, he would slip out and go back to the end of the line. Hugh and I had travelled together on leave and postings since April 1943 and because of his desire to stay longer in Perth we unfortunately split up. I eventually went on to Morotai and Hugh onto Tarakan. We did not meet up again until after the war.

I was keen to get home on leave and it took about four days in the queue to secure a position on the troop train from Perth to Melbourne. After the third day, they wanted four volunteers; the usual story.... "you, you, you, and you" to clean windows of WA HQ in Hay Street. We were dropped off at WA HQ, given our buckets and cleaning materials and left to do the job of cleaning the windows. The HQ was a multi storey building. We checked the job out and didn't like it and didn't do it! We found it was much more pleasurable talking to the female WT in the signal department!

The next day we finally caught the troop train and I believe there was a great commotion looking for the four men who were supposed to have cleaned the windows of WA HQ.

On leaving 5 PD by troop train my paperwork gave me 30 days leave, plus travelling time, after which I was to report to 1 PD Melbourne. This I did and handed in my paperwork at 1 PD. I was given a leave pass for 36 days and food coupons etc, with instructions to report back to 1 PD on completion of the leave.

One day passed and on the morning of the second day the phone rang (I still don't know where they got my parent's phone number from). The chap from orderly room at 1 PD was in great panic and said I had to report back right away and hand in all the food coupons etc. My reply was "that's fair enough", but from 5 PD they were only giving me 30 days leave whilst from 1 PD Melbourne it was 36 days, so how about I take the extra 6 days and then report in. His reply was yes and I feel he was so pleased to clear up his mistake, he didn't mind the concession.

IN TRANSIT TO MOROTAI

After reporting to 1 PD on completion of my leave, the next move was to 2 PD Sydney. We travelled by troop train and spent several days in Sydney.

After parade one morning they wanted a group of volunteers, the usual "you, you and you" to do some work at the wharf. The job was loading rocket motors from shed to ship. The procedure was as follows; two men would load a four wheel trolley with rocket motors – wheel it out of the shed to a sling from the ship, load the sling and bring back the empty trolley and sit down whilst the other two men who had been sitting down would get up, load the trolley and repeat the process, all the time complaining that they weren't getting any danger money for handling rocket motors.

Here I was about to be redeployed to the Dutch East Indies (Morotai) and it did not go down very well to hear their complaints whilst they were on safe soil in Sydney. So I found myself a spot in the sun up the end of the wharf and left the under worked and over paid wharfies to their unfounded claim to danger money.

Morotai is part of the Halmahera Island group in the Pacific Ocean and situated North West of New Guinea. At the time of the Second World War it was serviced by two airstrips; one for Bomber aircraft and one for Fighters. Morotai was strategically significant in the war and was used as an "Island Hop" for further landings in the Pacific region such as Borneo and the oil rich areas of Balikpapan and Tarakan.

The next destination en route to Morotai was to Brisbane by troop train and after a couple of days we were assembled late at night and boarded the troop ship "Stingray" (Liberty Ship). The first port of call was Finchaven N.G. and then onto Morotai. The ship was packed with troops and the hold was set up with long rows of bunks about three feet apart. Each row was a tier of bunks five high! It was beds as far as the eye could see.

There were eight different meal sittings and cards were allotted to each person designating which sitting you belonged to. My sitting number was #4, and the order of the sittings was rotated daily, so on the fourth day out my sitting was first to go to the mess (#1).

The cooks were cunning in reducing their work load by dishing up powdered egg with fatty pieces of pork for breakfast the first morning out. The meal queues went down several flights of stairs to the lower decks where the mess hall was situated. By the time you reached the area more than half the men had dropped out of the queue sea sick. Just the smell of the powdered eggs was enough to put you off. Fortunately it did not put me off my breakfast and it did seem strange sitting in the mess hall with two thirds of the place vacant.

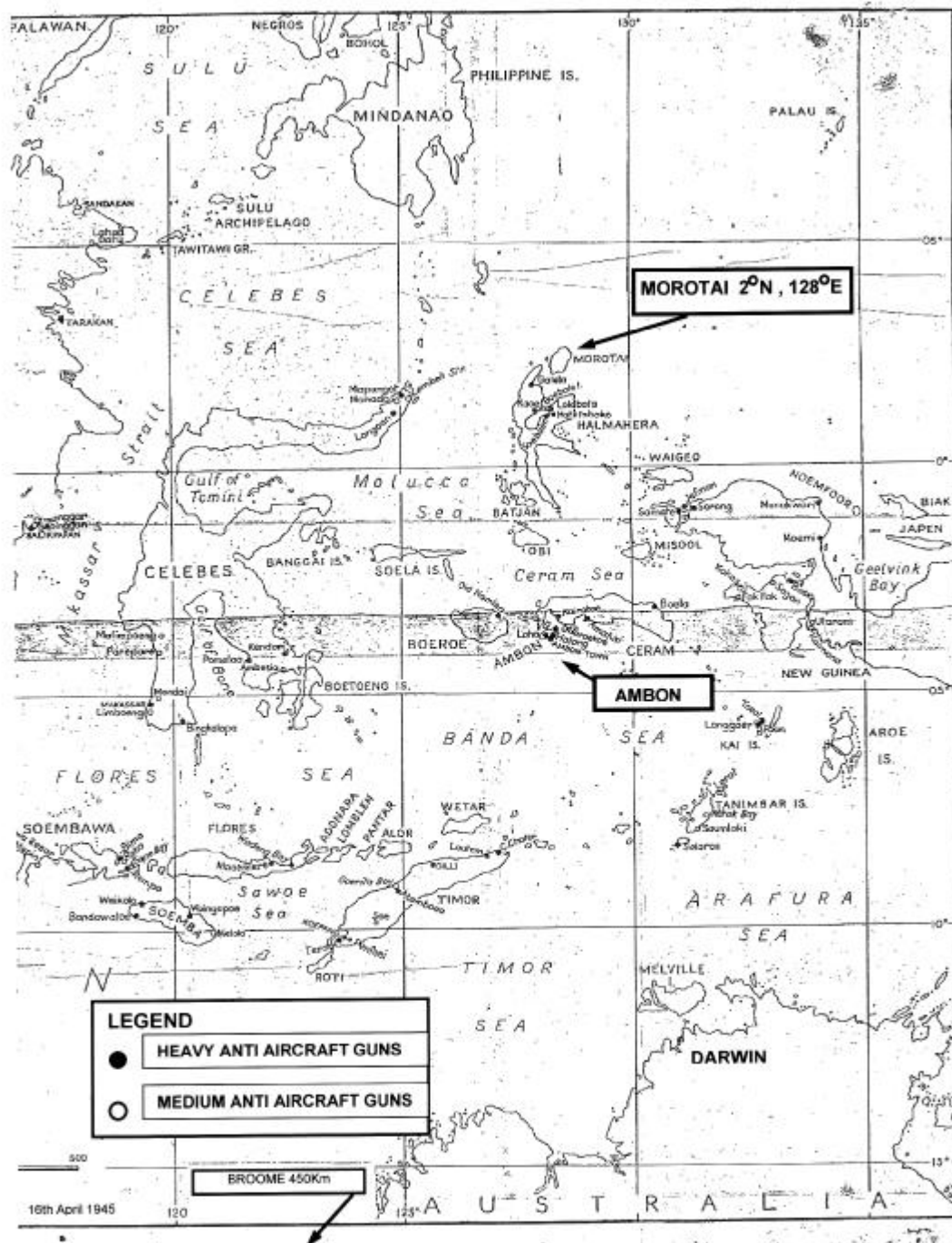
You can imagine from my description of the sleeping quarters aboard ship that it was very claustrophobic and come about 5pm, I and many others would reserve a place on deck with our blankets and sleep in the open on top. Certainly if any thing had happened to the ship you would not have had a chance to get out of the hold.

Arrival at Morotai eventually came and we disembarked at night and were transported by truck to various locations in the area. I can remember vividly the truck travelling in the darkness and every few hundred yards seeing a tree at the side of the road completely covered in fire flies – for all the world just like a white Christmas tree.

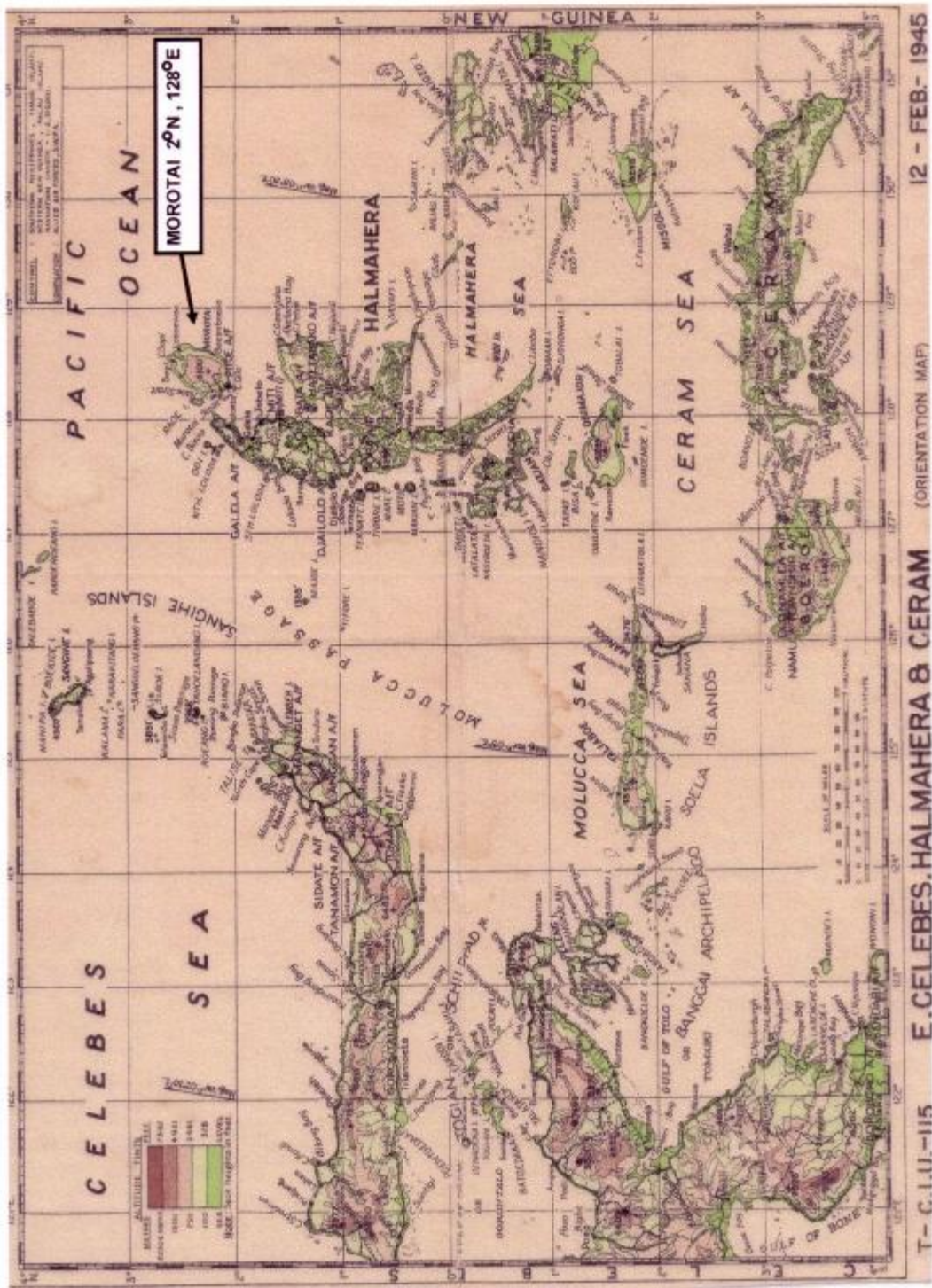
Our truck and several others arrived at a small clearing in the jungle where there were about twelve tents erected ready for our arrival. All the comforts of the jungle, grass floors and only the two blankets we each brought with us as bedding.

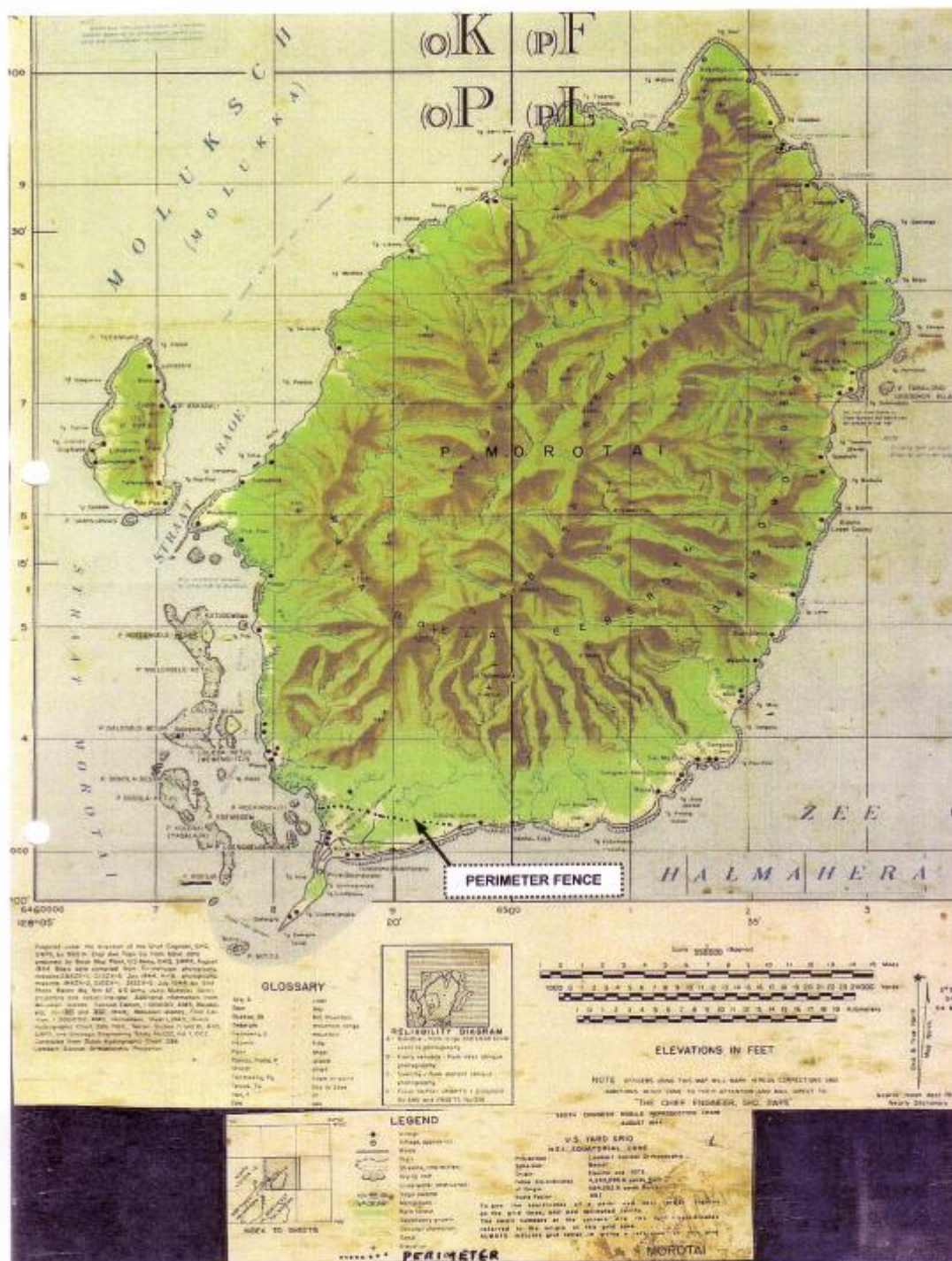
Morning came and we were told that we would not be shifted to our respective units until the next day or so.

In Transit To Morotai



FLAK POSTION MAP FOR JAPANESE ARTILLERY— SEAS NORTH OF DARWIN





2ND / 5TH A.G.H. MOROTAI

I knew I had an uncle, Bert Sharp (my Mother's Brother), in the X-ray department of 2nd / 5th A.G.H. on Morotai, so I decided that having the day free I would look him up.

After enquiries and several thumbed rides I arrived at the 2nd / 5th A.G.H. (thumbed rides were a common mode of transport – willingly provided and thankfully received). Bert was both pleased and amazed to see me and I was introduced to Laurie, who was later to become his wife. Laurie was in charge of the hospital stores and on hearing that I was sleeping on the ground in a clearing in the jungle, gave me a folding stretcher to take back with me.

I remember I had a little difficulty thumbing a ride back to camp. A truck eventually came along, pulled up and I threw the stretcher on and I was about to jump on myself when the truck started to move off. There were several chaps on the truck and one of them close to the back of the cabin hit the cab roof with his hand to let the driver know I still hadn't boarded. He pulled up, I jump on board and we were away.

Whilst living in the clearing in the jungle for a few days I knocked around with a chap (unfortunately I can't recall his name) and we did a little bit of exploring on the island. The island of Morotai was in the Dutch East Indies part of the Halmahera group about 2° north of the equator. The island was about 40 miles long by about 25 miles wide, very mountainous and the only flat area was a small peninsular on the southern tip about 10 miles long.

We only held the peninsular, the rest of the island was under 'Jap' control and separating us was a barbed wire perimeter fence. The area we held contained two airstrips, Wama and Pitoe; one for Bomber and the other for Fighter aircraft. There was a radar station on a small island (Kokoja Island) about four miles off the coast and each day a water tanker would go across to the island on a barge to replenish their water supply. There was no trouble to get a lift across on the barge and apart from the radar station; there was only a native village with plenty of "Beetle Nut" chewing natives to be seen. The nut acts as central nervous system stimulant and prolonged use stains mouth, teeth and gums deep red. To look at them, you would think they had just had their teeth knocked out.



Kokoja Island -
Although not visible,
a very important radar
station was housed on
the Island

Native huts on the
beach at Kokoja Island



Local natives greet
the water tanker on
Kokoja Island shortly
after driving off the
barge from Morotai.
This water run was a
daily event and
served the radar
station, RAAF
personnel and natives
living on the Island



Left - Natives at Morotai boiling green bananas

Below - Natives pose with RAAF personnel outside the tents that served as accommodation and messing for the Allied Troops



Above - Alan Griffin (myself) outside his tent amongst the banana palms on Morotai in 1945



Right - A used kerosene tin filled with water and placed over a wood fire was used by the natives to boil the bananas



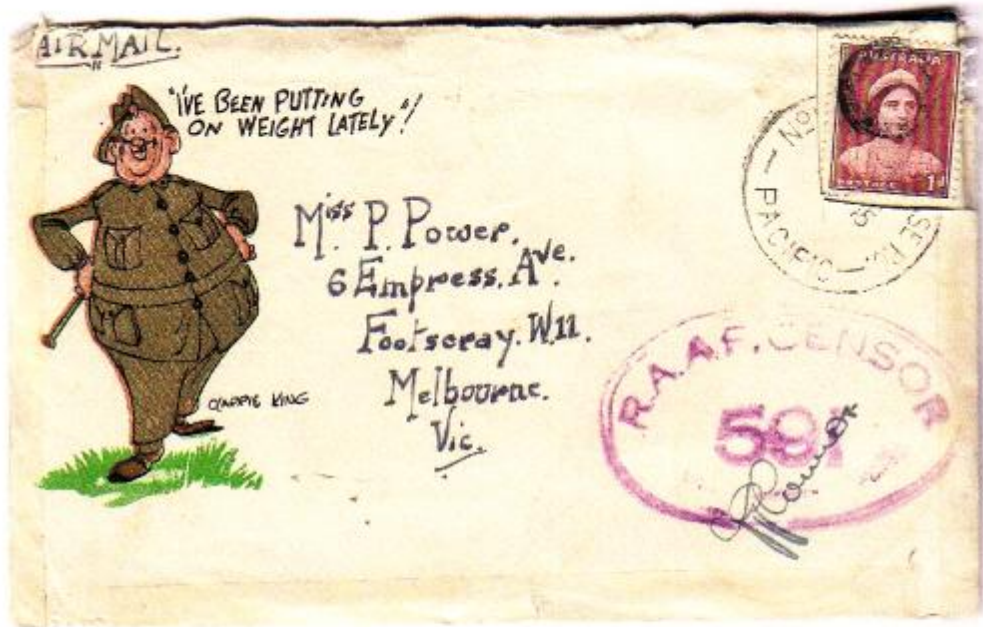


Banana plantation
and 110 MFCU camp
at Morotai

Japanese POW's
at Morotai holding
compound






US Military Guards on
duty outside the POW
compound



The envelope containing the letter I sent from Morotai to Phyllis Power on 12th July 1945. Phyllis was later to become my wife.

The complete letter can be found on the following five pages.

All written communications during the war were censored. An official RAAF censored stamp (# 591) is visible below the postage stamp. The envelope is also signed by Censor Officer - J. P. Connor. His signature also appears on the last page of the letter.

AUSTRALIAN COMFORTS FUND
 (Use Official Address Only)

Date 12 July '45
 From No. 59697

Name LAC Griffin A.W. Unit or Group 603 RAAF Pacific

My Darling Phil
 At last I received two more letters from you in answer to those I wrote when I first arrived here. Oh that they had started coming I think they should turn up pretty regularly anywhere. I hope so. The big mail nights are Wednesday's & Saturday's but sometimes it turns up on other nights as well.

My Darling I'm completely settled down & as happy as I can be expected while I'm away from you. I like it here or I should say I like it better than most of the other places up here & I'll be quite content to spend the rest of my time up here now this

Mail Your Letters A.F.O. Do Not Mention Military Activities.



Date.....

From No.

(Use Official Address Only)

Name Unit or Group

camp! The meals are quite good which helps a lot, then there's the picture theatre now at hand with something on five times a week & at the canteen we can get practically anything to meet our needs (within reason of course). So life isn't so bad here if you look on the right side of it. Last night I went to the Pictures Daring & saw "The National Barn Dance" remember we saw it at the hospital when I was home. I didn't mind sitting it through again because it was quite a good picture. The other feature with it was "Hotel Berlin" really nothing to rave about.

So you have started at Expos

Mail Your Letters A.Z.O.

Do Not Mention Military Activities.



Date.....

From No.

(Use Official Address Only)

Name 3 Unit or Group.....

Phyl Dear, one thing it will
be nice & handy for me want
it. I don't say it would be
a little different to the Plymouth
& grumble for Dickie - he's just
an old house here. & you'll
probably be better off where you
are now.

I'm sorry if I forgot to tell
you that I had received your
letters Darling. I'm afraid that
you'll just have to make
allowances for that memory of
mine. You know what it is.
Phyl but I'll try to remember
such things in the future.

Lee Phyl we are coming on
winning few shillings for
May's on Sunday night -
how much do our total

Mail Your Letters A.P.O.

Do Not Mention Military Activities.



Date.....

From No.

(Use Official Address Only)

Name _____ Unit or Group _____




swinnings come to now. By the
time I get home you should
have enough to pay for any-
thing when we go out on my
next leave. (Date unknown)
It's a good idea don't you think
Dear - or do you disagree.

You want me back Darling I
want to be back with you there's
nothing I could wish for more
than that but all we can do is
wait & go Phyl Dear don't get
tired of waiting when I miss
you so much & I know you are
feeling it just as I. But one day
I will be coming back to you &
that's what I'm living for.

Had a fair bit of rain
tonight & when I was coming
to work tonight at ten thirty

Mail Your Letters A.P.O.

Do Not Mention Military Activities.

(Use Official Address Only)

Date.....


From No.

Name..... Unit or Group.....

it was pitch black & I didn't have
 a torch so what a picnic I had
 getting lost through the
 mud & slipping every blue over,
 the moon in ground - it wasn't
 any joke to me tell you this
 Well Descent I'll have to
 finish up here so cheerio & lots of
 Love

Yours Ever
 Alan W Griffin

P.S. I don't know if I told
 you before but you need
 a 3 stamp on
 my letters.



Mail Your Letters A.P.O. Do Not Mention Military Activities.