
J Kerferd

Background to a Naval Beach Party
Sept 20-21 1943.

A SAILORS EXPERIENCE OF OPPOSED LANDING

"FAIRFAX" was the original name for party of beach commando.

A course of small arms at Flinders NAVAL DEPOT followed by an army training course at "CUNUNGRA" jungle school. After training, back to Brisbane where the party name was changed to Port Control and scattered along the New Guinea Coast.

The C.O. Leut Commander Band organised to land with the 20th Brigade A.I.F. near Finnhafen as a Beach Party.

I am not certain if this was carried out with NAVY BOARD APPROVAL.

It was certainly known by General Blamey and Rear Admiral Barbey as the planning meeting was held at Lt Com Bands office in Buna!

At dusk on the 19th Sept 1943 we were lined up near the signal Lookout at "Buna" Beach Port Control. The officers sleeping were dug in below.

Seven Ratings and a Sub Leut and addressed by the C.O., Kit and weapons issued and given a hand drawn sketch to be committed to memory and returned. The signalman, my opposite number Signalman North and myself with service pistols and 6 inch Box Lamps and instructed to proceed to the ends of the occupied beach and set up the lamps, mine green – his red and to mark the landing area.

The C.O., his writer and steward to join the advance group to go in the first wave LCV's with the balance to go in the L.C.I. group approximately 800 yards behind.

At dark we were taken out and loaded into LCI 71 Flotilla leader and put to sea.

Daylight showed us 14 landing craft in two neat rows heading North.

Dusk brought us off Red Beach Lae greeted with an air raid.

Troops were loaded and we backed off the beach and headed out to sea to round the Huon Peninsula. With the troops on board, men talking quietly – a long night when someone appeared with coffee well loaded with some very raw whiskey and we then headed for the coast.

Five American destroyers opened up on a flat trajectory with odd shells flying high in ricochets and we speeded up to follow the advance units.

About 500 metres from shore machine guns opened from the beach and we ground to a halt. Troops near the bow started taking casualties. We followed the army down the ramp and landed off the ramp in about 3-4 feet of water fortunately the webbing belt unclipped. Ashore in the coral holes in the dark, moving along the edge of the water having parted in the confusion with my rifleman over Curley Barker contacted Jim Nutting of the advance group who was attending a seriously wounded soldier. He advised the C.O. had been hit and thought he had been put back on a barge.

Moved down the beach to where the occupied area finished. It stays in my mind that the troops lying quietly on the beach, at a given moment the front line stood up and hosed the bush with small arms fire as they walked into the bush. The second row waited a couple of minutes then followed presumably in a leapfrog movement.

At the end of the occupied beach I was fortunate to find a part buried Jap barge and snuggle in alongside, set the lantern on the Gunwail and set to work in 3 second flashes. With firing from

LCI's ships and on air raid The Cone of tracer was something to behold. After daylight we reassembled to find we were orphans.

Someone, I know not who, arranged with a Bofors A/A Battery that they would feed us if we would do night watches in the gun pits they were digging on the beach. It worked well.

The main small arms dumps was bombed during the day and few got any sleep. To relieve the ammunition shortage several biscuit bombers dropped supplies during the night. A horrible feeling as the boxes were crashing through the trees quite close. Air Raid warning was three Bofors shots. This meant the first gun into action fired the three and then continued to fire away.

We had no other casualties than Curly Barker got caught swimming when a stick of bombs aimed at the Bofors. The rest of the party having made rapid tracks ashore.

An interesting activity with Sub Leut was to set off about six miles at night to guide in barges which never seemed to come. A grandstand view of American PT Boats one night attacking Jap barges a mile or so away with us hoping neither side would notice us.

Eventually the missing LST's arrived and offloaded the Australian 43rd Battalion who moved straight inland to attack Sattleberg. Early October we were finally picked up by a P.T. Boat before daylight and returned to Buna. Our only casualty the C.O. who died of wounds.