

Percy Alan McDougall

I was brought up on a farm halfway between Katanning and Dumbleyung. At the age of six I went to a little school called Glencoe. We had to travel by horse and sulky four miles and back each day.

I left school at the age of fourteen and worked on the farm until I was called up by the army. When I joined the army I had no experience about it at all. So the first time on parade I thought all the saluting and quick march and stamping their feet was to me quite humorous and I couldn't keep a straight face. The sergeant caught me smiling and told me to take that smile off or he would. I thought, cripes, what have I got into here. The funny bit didn't take long to work off and get down to the serious business of being a soldier.

Did three months training at a camp just out of Fremantle called Melville. Just after that I was called up for full time and was put in the 10th Garrison on Rottnest Island just off shore from Fremantle.

I was on Rottnest Island when the Jap submarine got into Sydney Harbour. We didn't know anything about it at the time. But that night we had to patrol the beach all night in case the Japs decided to land there too.

I hadn't joined the AIF as my mother wouldn't sign for me to go as she reckoned we might be needed in Australia and I was under twenty-one she had to approve.

Well, the 2nd Twenty-eight got smashed up on Ruin Ridge the army called for recruits. As I had just turned twenty-one I didn't need my mother's permission. I joined the AIF and was sent to Northam camp to train to go away.

I was sent on embarkation leave. But when I got back to camp the Japs had just made an effort to come to Australia. We were put into any Battalions that were short of men. I was put into the 11th Battalion of the 13th Brigade. I was sent to Darwin where the Japs were still bombing the place.

After a few months in Darwin we were sent by boat to Queensland. And from there we were sent to Lae in New Guinea. At Lae we were put onto what is called a duck. That is a small boat that can travel on land and sea. We were taken aboard the duck to a cargo ship which had a rope ladder hanging down the side. We had to scale this rope and carry a lot of our gear.

Food and toilets were on the deck and we had to go down a ladder in one corner of one of the cargo holds to the bottom of the hold to sleep. Now I learnt about the Black Hole of Calcutta at school. Believe me that had nothing on this hold. It was so dark in that hold if you switched on a torch it looked like a glow-worm. It was a bit scary on that boat but we arrived safely on a bay in New Britain.

Here we were training to actually fight the Japs and I was raring to get amongst them. Well, a couple of days before we were due to take off and push the Japs further up towards Rabaul, my head officer told me I wouldn't be going with my mates but would be going to Officers School.

Well, I exploded and told him in no uncertain terms I wasn't going. I wasn't going to miss my chance after all the years of training to have a go at the Japs. Ordinary times I surely would have been gaoled. Anyway they got their way and I did have to go to Officers School and caught up with my mates later in Jacino Bay. At that bay we had to patrol no man's land to make sure the Japs were still up around Rabaul.

It was there the biggest bluff in history was carried out. On the opposite side of the Island and within sight of the Japs, our troops got small boats and would go up towards the Japs, get out of their boats, carry them back to land where they had started and do the same again and again hoping to make the Japs think there was a lot more of us than there was.

When the war finished I was on patrol in no man's land. We got it on our little telephone wireless, whatever. We couldn't even yell out Hoorah, had to keep quiet as we had no idea how close we were to the Japs. Anyway we packed up and went up to Rabaul to take over one hundred thousand Japs who we discovered there. They were all in good condition. We had been told they were in very poor health. They had hundreds of miles of tunnels where they lived and had everything stored away ready for their go at Australia.

The poor Indians they had had as prisoners had to work hard and were poorly fed. They had the run of the places as soon as the war ended. My mates and I were walking along one day and one of the Jap's trucks broke down. The driver was out cranking it. The Indians walked up to him and gave him a big kick up the backside. The Jap turned around and bowed to the Indians. Every time he bowed they slapped his face. We said to the Indians, "Kill the B....!" But of course they couldn't.

That action by the Indians stayed with me for years. One day about fifty years later I was walking along Scarborough Beach front and came across this Jap in front of some big town houses showing off to some Jap women. I thought, "We fought them B....s to keep them out of Australia and here they have taken our best beach front land." Well, what happened with the Indians came back and I was going to give him a bloody big kick up the rear end when I had to stop myself. It was very hard though.

Well, after our stay at Rabaul, we got on another cargo boat to come home only this time they had put bunks in the hold and lights. It was quite a change to how we went over there.

It was good to get back home. My brother who had been manpowered during the war to work on the farm had himself a girlfriend. I got introduced to his girlfriends Auntie who was really nice. We ended up living happily married for 53 years.

I found when I got home my family seemed to eat really big meals. My stomach had shrunk over the years. It was quite a while before I got used to the meals.

Petrol rationing was still on.

I share farmed with my father until he passed away. I then took over the farm and paid whatever I had to the rest of the family. I couldn't make ends meet. I had to sell the farm and square up the debts. I bought a farm in Albany during 1968 and a house at Emu Point.

After I lot of buying and selling I eventually retired in Albany and built a new house in Barnesby Drive and still live there. I lost my wife who had been a perfect wife three years ago.

So folks that's my story. I hope I've done alright.