Paul Victor Smith

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I was educated at Aquinas College, passed my leaving certificate in 1938 and began university studies in 1939 doing first year medicine. I failed that and started working at the Crown Law Dept in1940. When I reached the age of 20, I was called up for military training and served 3 months with the 16 Cameron Highlanders, where I was placed in Intelligence section. At the finish of this training I joined the Australian Imperial Forces as a trooper on 14 Oct 1941. (I received permission from my parents to serve overseas if necessary). I enlisted out of family pride, because my three older brothers were also in the services, and national pride, because Australia was not doing so well in the battle to date and public opinion was that we were certain to lose the war. I joined 2/10 Australian Armoured Regiment. After a brief period of training at Northam the Regiment was taken in two troop ships to Melbourne so that we could train with other armoured regiments in Puckapunyal, Victoria. The Australian cruiser HMAS Sydney shadowed us for protection on the journey from Fremantle to Melbourne. That was its last trip as it returned to WA and sank off Geraldton, losing all hands.

The training at Puckapunyal went on and then at the beginning of Dec 1941 we were given five days pre-embarkation leave in Melbourne; however we never actually went overseas at that point because on the 8th Dec the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and entered the war. Prime Minister Chifley ordered that no further troops would leave Australia and all overseas troops were to be brought back to defend this country. I remained with the Armoured Division training in various states of Australia, mostly New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, until the threat of a Japanese invasion was over. As the fighting now centred on jungles in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands where tanks could not be used, the Armoured Division was disbanded and these troops then joined other infantry units which were serving in the Pacific islands. Mine was the Pacific Islands Regiment which consisted of Battalions from Papua and New Guinea. They were looking for Australian officers and sergeants and I went with others on the TSS Taroona in late January 1945; firstly to Lae, New Guinea, then, learning that the Papuan Infantry Battalion was the best trained and were likely to see action first I flew with others from Lae to Port Moresby and was taken up to Bisiatabu in the hills above to train with Papuan troops. I was given command of 12th platoon in 'D' Company and I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by experienced non-commissioned officers and other troops who had seen service on the Kokoda Trail. The training was important because the troops had to get to know their officers and sergeants. Luckily I took over an excellent platoon of thirty five men who came from a number of different tribes in Papua. Many of them, including my Papuan sergeant George Metacarpo, (known always as Sergeant Meta) and excellent Corporals Biri, Umbetu and Bueba had all had considerable experience and with my Australian sergeant Alex Foster we formed a great team in the training of this platoon. This went on in the hills above Port Moresby for two months.

After that the whole of the Pacific Islands Regiment including a battallion from Papua and three from New Guinea sailed for active service in Bougainville. At that stage there were ten thousand American troops in Torakina being bottled up by two thousand Japanese. The Americans were conscripts and were loathe to go into the jungle where they were in serious danger of being shot, so the Australian Army sent three brigades to Bougainville. Our company joined an Australian

brigade which was pushing the Japanese soldiers further south down the Buin Road. This advance continued for several weeks, and the Australians suffered many casualties as the troops were under constant fire from Japanese mortar and artillery. Finally we reached the Mivo river which happened to be in flood. The wet season had commenced and the most obvious way across the river was a fjord which was 200 yards wide, and led to the Japanese soldiers firmly ensconced on the opposite side. Naturally the Australians could not cross and to even attempt this would have cost many lives. The task was to get behind the Japanese lines; we had suffered the loss of three officers through sickness and mental fatigue and we were down to two remaining officers. Peter Sheekey took over command of the Company, and my platoon was left to perform almost all the reconnaissance behind the enemy's lines.

The Australian soldiers were very anxious to find out the strength of the Japanese forces at that point and also where the enemy camps were located. From aerial surveys it was surmised that there were many large camps between the Mivo River and the Port of Buin where the Japanese were in large numbers. The Papuan soldiers were ideally suited for jungle warfare because of their knowledge of the jungle and their incredible skills at concealing themselves. They only wore a rami around their waist and were bare footed; we each carried a small haversack containing meagre rations of bully beef and biscuits and some ammunition. Initially the Papuans were hesitant about going into Japanese territory but soon realised that they were much more suited to jungle life than the enemy and gradually became more confident. Each week we would do a patrol being careful to go well down the river before crossing. These patrols varied in time from three days to five, and on one occasion, to seven days. The Papuans had keen eyesight and were able to spot Japanese machine gun posts, (which were numerous) within an area of three or four miles behind the lines. Originally we were engaged in marking the position of enemy camps, which we plotted on aerial maps. Then we started setting ambushes on the Buin Road and the information we gathered was of immense value to Australian Intelligence. Once we shot up a small group of Japanese soldiers and I took from the officer a set of documents which I handed to Intelligence. These papers proved to be an accurate account of soldiers and weapons held by the Japanese at their site on the Mivo river. This was a wonderful piece of luck and thereafter any documents we found were handed in immediately, as the Australian Intelligence team had half a dozen Japanese / American interpreters who were able to understand the contents.

One of our first big tests was an encounter with a Japanese machine gun post. The Papuan soldiers with their new found confidence were keen to tackle these posts but I was generally against it because these positions were carefully hidden and generally contained three or four guns with half a dozen soldiers and I believed that we would suffer casualties by taking on such a project. Eventually one day when the troops had been given grenades which they were anxious to use, I was persuaded to permit an attack on a machine gun post. I positioned the three sections of my platoon and made my advance. At this critical position, a Japanese soldier stood up and yawned, and Corporal Birri shot him. The rest of the platoon rushed in, firing and throwing grenades. Luckily several of these grenades were successful, and all six Japanese soldiers were killed. Thereafter the Papuans were very enthusiastic about taking on other machine gun posts. I was still very wary of taking such a risk with my men but a couple of weeks after that, another opportunity arose. We again saw a post which appeared to be vulnerable and I was discussing tactics with Sergeant Meta when Corporal Umbutu came up and said that he and his friend Godara would crawl up there and throw grenades in to the machine gun post. I did not like this

practice but Sergeant Meta said that Umbutu could do it. So the two Papuans set off, crawling up to the Japanese position with only two grenades each, and no rifle. It took over an hour for them to cover the forty metres. They had ferns stuck in their hair and they crawled inch by inch towards the post. When they got within ten yards, they pulled the pins out of the grenades, and threw them into the post, killing the six occupants. In each of these two successful attacks, it was the bravery of Corporals Birri and Umbutu which was responsible for the success of the venture. I wrote them up as heroes in the report which I gave after each reconnaissance. They were both awarded a military medal, which was richly deserved.

I would like to recount another interesting incident: The General in command of Australian Forces in Bougainville received word that the Governor General of Australia, the Duke of Gloucester, was going to visit the troops. He wanted a Japanese officer's sword to present to the duke as evidence that the Australians were winning the war in this area. However, although enquiries were made amongst the troops in Bougainville, no such sword had been captured. The commander of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, Colonel Elliot Smith said to me, "Paul, you are often behind the Japanese lines, couldn't you get a sword for the General?" I told him that the Japanese officers don't usually carry swords in the jungle, and it would mean a raid on a Japanese camp, of which the opportunities were few and far between. However, coincidently a couple of weeks after this, about six miles behind the Japanese lines, we came upon a small camp. My forward scouts reported that this camp seemed quite deserted, the Papuans were very keen, and after careful consideration and several more reports I decided that we would have a quick raid, in and out in five minutes. I headed for a large hut in the middle of the camp and surprised two Japanese officers, whom I shot. I noticed a beautiful samurai sword hanging on the wall; I took possession of this and on my return I sent it up to Colonel Elliot Smith, who in turn gave it to the General, who was then able to carry out his wish to present a sword to the Duke of Gloucester. Later the General sent me a personal note together with his own personal carbine rifle, and a quantity of ammunition. I heard later that the Duke gave the sword to the army museum in Canberra where it was on display for several years.

At about this time we began to notice that the Japanese were hauling large pieces of artillery out of their battleships and locating them in different positions through the jungle, seemingly with a view to guarding any possible invasion of the port city of Buin. One large artillery piece was causing havoc by randomly firing approx 20 shells at midnight each night. Although the Australians became prepared for this by sleeping underground in dug outs, the shells were causing many injuries and even some deaths. The air force was flying over the area constantly but so dense was the jungle that they could not locate this gun. I was asked if I could find it and I told the Intelligence officers that the most certain way of pinpointing the location was for me to take compass bearings from various positions following the direction of the firings at midnight each night. On this occasion we were on patrol for seven days, and eventually I was satisfied that with all the bearings I had narrowed down the possible position of this gun. On the last day, to test that my bearings were correct, we moved through the jungle and sure enough we could see this gun. The position was heavily guarded by Japanese soldiers and we saw at least 200 of them in and around the camp. The gun was cleverly concealed under a dense area of trees with camouflage nets over the gun. From our vantage point we could clearly see the gun under the nets but we decide not to attack because I knew that now the location was made certain the air force could bomb it and destroy it. I am still not able to estimate how big the gun was but it was

certainly the largest artillery piece I ever saw during the war. I had taken six compass bearings in total and we had been out of our own camp for seven days before we were able to get the information to Brigade Intelligence. These details were passed on to the air force and within a few days they had heavily bombed the area and in so doing put the gun out of action. That gun never again fired on the Australians.

Most of our patrols were of five days; some were only of three. I had gathered all the information possible and the only thing stopping the Australians from crossing the Mivo River and advancing down the Buin Rd to capture the port of Buin, was the great volume of water coming down the Mivo River. It was impossible for a large army to cross and we all had to wait until the water subsided which was expected in about another two months. We continued to do our short patrols and in the latter weeks of the war we were able to kill a few more Japanese with ambushes on the Buin Road because of the small but constant numbers of Japanese personnel going up and down this road between the Mivo River and the port of Buin. We carefully kept a record of the number of Japanese killed in these ambushes and we had reached just over 90. Our last patrol was in the middle of August 1945; the next morning Sergeant Jack O'Brien put an aerial up over a tree to gain contact with Brigade Headquarters and he received this message: 'The war is over return to camp avoiding contact'. When I first received the note from Sergeant O'Brien I thought it must have been a hoax. He assured me that it was not because he had been given a new code and there was no way that the enemy could have found the code so quickly. He was firmly convinced that the message was a genuine order from Headquarters. We could not comprehend that the war had finished so quickly until we got back to camp and learnt the news that the Americans had dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagosaki, inflicting tremendous casualties, running into the hundreds of thousands. Apparently the Jap leaders had immediately surrendered. The day after we returned to camp the Brigade issued our instructions as to how we would get this news through to the Japanese soldiers facing us across the Mivo River. We were taught how to say in Japanese 'The war is over come on in'. When asking for volunteers to go across and call out this message there were no takers so it was up to my platoon to cross the river calling out as we had been instructed. Within an hour a detachment of Japanese numbering 109 emerged, including ten officers fully armed with their swords at their belt. The senior officer could speak a little English and he instructed his men to hand over their weapons, but they refused to hand over their swords and a scuffle ensued between Sergeant Meta and a Japanese officer. Meta asked, "Will I kill him Taubada (Sir)?" And I replied, "The war is over, there will be no more killing." We marched this Japanese contingent back to camp, a distance of approximately two kilometres, and they were the first prisoners of war taken on Bougainville. It was obvious that these prisoners were suffering from malnutrition and I arranged for them to be immediately given a good meal of meat and vegetables which was gratefully received. Eventually about 6000 Japanese surrendered on Bougainville, all of which were taken to a nearby island and the Papuan Infantry Battalion was sent to guard them there. I did not stay with the Papuans because the war was over and my mother and father had died within a day of one another, the same day that the war had ended. Also my son was two months old and I was anxious to get home. The Colonel agreed to this and he recommended that I be given an early discharge. This took several weeks to come through Army Headquarters. The entire Battalion had moved to Torakina (the capital city of Bougainville) and the troops were allowed to enjoy themselves with only one parade each morning. On the day I left Torakina I was driven to the airport in a jeep. I wanted to get my platoon on parade so that I could say farewell but not a single one of them could be found, even

though I made a search all around Torakina. Eventually the jeep driver said, "Sir, we must go to the airport or we will miss the plane." Several miles out along the road I cam across my platoon ranged up on the side of the road, all waving and sobbing. They knew, as I did, that they were not just losing their platoon officer, but a very good friend. The jeep driver offered to stop, but I declined, as I myself was quite distraught at having to farewell this magnificent band of men, who had rightly earned the title of being the most efficient platoon on Bougainville. Our plane went first to Port Moresby where those of us returning to Australia were transferred to a seaplane. We landed in Cairns on Oct 4 1945 exactly two years since my marriage. As we were all eager to get home I had some trouble convincing the authorities to put me on one of the earliest planes to Perth - eventually I found myself in Headquarters in Brisbane where I fortunately met a friend of mine, Major Gordon Barrett-Hill who took me into the CO and gave me the necessary priority. Major Barrett-Hill also told me that I had been recommended for the award of the Military Cross but in a disappointing turn of events I was later told that the exploits of our platoon were confirmed by a Papuan Sergeant which was not acceptable to the Australian authorities. So I unfortunately never received the Military Cross that I believe was due to me.

I was finally discharged on the 26 Nov 1945. Although grateful for the military experience I was very content to be at home with my beautiful wife and family. On New Years Eve 1945 I was taken in an army ambulance to Hollywood Hospital suffering from malaria. I remained in hospital for three weeks. I recommenced my civilian employment in the Crown Law Department in February 1946. I believe my army training and experience made me a much better person and it proved to me that in order to get on in this world, one needs to always give of ones best. It was something that I will treasure all my life.