

AV1379 "TARRA"



AV1379 "TARRA" was one of the last Army vessels to be launched and fitted out before the end of WW2. She was classified as a 125' Wooden Cargo Vessel (WCV) and this class were commonly called '300 Tonners', Tarra was armed with 3 x 20mm Polsten A/A guns. TARRA was allocated to 12 Small Ship Coy. Christmas 1945 TARRA, the last of a line of 300 ton WCV's would become the longest serving and hardest working of all the Army's 125' 300 ton WCV's. They were built at the Commonwealth Govt. Shipyards in Hobart and Fremantle, due to their proximity to large reserves of timber. TARRA was to be the last 125 footer built in Hobart.

Working up trials were completed by March 1946 and her first major task was dumping over-age and obsolete ammunition of Newcastle N.S.W. large stock piles of ammunition and bombs had built up in the Newcastle area during the closing stages of the Pacific war. TARRA was to load the ammunition and dump it at sea beyond continental shelf, 20 miles east of Newcastle. She was to be engaged in ammunition dumping from Cairns, Melbourne and Sydney until 1951 and also loaned to the War Graves Commission for the arduous task of collecting and transferring the remains of Australian Servicemen from various battle locations in New Guinea to the Australian War Cemeteries at Port Moresby and Lae. She was then loaned to the Dept. of Territories, with a civilian crew, and had the task of picking up Copra from small Copra Plantations in New Guinea as there was a considerable backlog due to the shortage of coastal shipping in New Guinea. At the end of WW2 the Defence authorities in Australia had given away many ships and craft to various nations and authorities and/or scuttling them. Now there was a shortage at home - The more things change the more they remain the same.

The Dept. of Army had, in 1947, decided to again raise Reserve Forces (CMF) and began to raise Transportation Squadrons in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. These squadrons were raised with Regular Army personnel and some craft and vessels were allocated. The strength of Regular Army Transportation was now very small approx. 60 all ranks.

Returning from the "Copra Shuttle" in 1952 the TARRA now had a further task in New Guinea. The Army had raised an Infantry Battalion in New Guinea - comprised of Native soldiers with Australian officers and NCO's. The battalion, based in Port Moresby, was to have a Company based at Vanimo, on the North coast of New Guinea, 18 miles from the border with Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya - Indonesia). TARRA was required to insert troops the Pacific Islands Regiment (1 PIR) and would then continue a shuttle service from Australia to Vanimo. It would continue the shuttle for nine years until replaced by the LSM's in 1961. The TARRA was, in effect, a "Tramp Ship"

A VOYAGE FROM SOMEWHERE TO SOMEPLACE - CALLING AT THE PORTS OF MONOTONY, BOREDOM, DRAMA, EXCITEMENT, COMEDY, FRUSTRATION ANDACHIEVEMENT.

In the 1950's the TARRA was likened to the fictional small US Navy cargo ship in the film "Mister Roberts" with some exceptions. The TARRA did not have the assets nor the amenities that the US navy ship had. The TARRA did not have an Amenities/Laundry Officer. As a matter of fact - she did not even have a laundry - just an old battered washing machine lashed down between the aft winches and it may or may not work. The ship was always infested with Copra beetles and Cockroaches. The only result from fumigation was that the next strain of insects were larger, stronger and more inquisitive to the point that they would crawl over one while sleeping.

The command structure of TARRA operations was, to say the least, ambiguous. The TARRA was an Army ship but did not belong to a unit. Operational Command of the ship was difficult to establish. Operational Control was vested in Northern Command (Army-Brisbane) through the Movement Control office but that apparently ceased once the ship left Brisbane. On arrival in Port Moresby there was a form of local Army control ie. "Could you drop some cargo off at "A" port and/or "B" port? The crew rotated every 12 months and they came from the staff at Tn. Centre (School) in Sydney with some coming from the staff of CMF units in Brisbane or Perth. At the time of TARRA doing the "Shuttle Service" there was no thought among the crew as to what unit one belonged to - we belonged to the TARRA. - however, 30 years later confusion reigned and still does as Central Army Records Office (CARO) recognises that such a ship did have a crew assigned because there is documentation showing crews being assigned from Sydney to Brisbane but no records show that they were in New Guinea. The ship was in New Guinea but the crew was still in Brisbane.!

The standard ports 'serviced' by TARRA from Brisbane were Cairns, Port Moresby, Samarai, Lae, Madang, Wewak, Aitape, Vanimo, Manus Island. Irregular ports of call were Kavieng, Rabaul, Kandrian and any other location on the coast of New Guinea and adjacent islands.

In Oct 54 I was sent to Brisbane to join the "TARRA", an Army ship carrying out Logistical Re-supply operations to New Guinea ports, remaining on this ship until Oct 55. Norm Stark was the Master, with Ken Duncan as First Mate, "Taffy" Maggs as Second Mate and Reg Cullen as Third Mate. The Bos'n was "Brick" Bradford. The Chief Engineer was Frank Thorne with Keith Stewart as Second and Ian Craig as Third. "Soapy" Joe Palmer was Wireless Operator. The "rest" consisted of Peter Cheffins, Joe McDowell, Eric Hale, "Junior" Aitken and a few others whose names I forget but not the faces.

The "TARRA" was berthed at Bulimba and in due course we moved to Newfarm for loading. The loading was organised by the Movements Staff of HQ Northern Command and was the result of many years' experience in this field. Last port Cargo was always loaded first and First Port loaded last. In reality, as it arrived it was loaded and on the last day quite a lot of Last

port Cargo arrived and was loaded. My memory of that last day was Brick Bradford kicking a wooden crate down further in the hold so the Hatch beams would fit in position.

When we sailed it was as it was to be for the next 20 years. Everybody was glad to see us leave and nobody was there to see us off. The ship was not Radar equipped at this time and we did a lot of anchoring at night going up the Coast and, as I was on the 12 to 4 watch, it was always mine and Eric Hale's task to flake out the anchor chain in the chain locker as it came down the Hawse Pipe. It never occurred to us that a slip or malfunction of the winch could have one of us go up through the Hawse Pipe.

The voyage to Cairns was uneventful and we were there for a few days and my memories of that stay was Reg Cullen coming aboard one afternoon as us youngsters were going ashore, with his uniform in tatters and bleeding from the chest where some fool had tried to pin Reg's ribbons to his bare chest. He had a smile a mile wide and his only words to us were "I won". We sailed the following day and that particular trip up the coast to Cape York was out of this world and although we didn't realise at the time that coast was never the same again. The only vessels we saw were the sailing Luggers out on the reef after Pearl and Trochus. The Coast North of Port Douglas was void of buildings and people. Even as we passed Cooktown we did not even see the loom of the town lights, which I suppose was no big deal as my family and I settled there 22 years later and it was difficult seeing the lights when living in the heart of town. The coast north of Cooktown left an impression upon me that has lasted to this very day. The emptiness of the Cape York eastern coast, the visible loneliness and the sheer magnitude of the coast made such an impression on me that some eight years later as Master of AB 2996 every "nook and cranny" was looked at. The only other place in Australia that has ever affected me as much as Cape York did was the Northern Territory coast. Today the Cape York coast is like "George St." in Sydney with settlements and boats of all kinds, everywhere.

On our way up the coast we went through the Flinders Group of Islands in Princess Charlotte Bay. The ruggedness and the loneliness of this group of close together islands was rather exhilarating and today it is rather a letdown to see what the years have done to the islands. At Cape York we went through Albany Passage, between Albany Island and mainland Australia. Our Skipper Norm Stark was reported to have taken General MacArthur through this passage

in WW2. As we passed through the passage and looked at the remains of the settlement of Somerset (1863), I began to think of what stories, sorrow, drama and frustration that the remains could tell. It was, for me, the beginning of an interest in the history of Northern Australia that has remained to this day. From Cape York we went east through Torres Straits, anchoring off Coconut island overnight and then passing Bramble Cay (the most Northern extremity of the Great Barrier Reef) and then began the punch into the SE Trades to Port Moresby.



We arrived at Port Moresby about 2200 hrs and immediately we were issued a pint tin of Pineapple juice, to make sure we received our vitamin C, salt tablets and Paludrine tablets. We berthed at the new wharf the following morning and began discharging immediately (for some reason everywhere we went there seemed to be a great desire to unload us, then load, and get us out of port again). Port Moresby in 1954 had not changed much, visibly, since 1945 although there was now a number of stores and above all a Supermarket/Trade store

called "KRIEWALDTS" that sold milkshakes (Powdered milk) that we young fellows went to every afternoon at 1700 hrs, but we never saw any girls. In the Moresby Hotel there was an annex called the "Snakepit" which was a public bar and here everybody that had no desire to drink in the Lounge gathered and here you could get a drink, a fight, a fight or a fight (not necessarily in that order). The atmosphere in the Snakepit was good, early in the day, but did change as the day went by. The place was frequented mainly by Oil Rig workers from Australasian Petroleum Co. who were in town for a break. By 1700 hrs one did not have to look for a fight but had only to cough and there was always somebody who disagreed with you.

In those days Europeans did not carry out menial tasks as there was sufficient Native labour to do this and especially in Port Moresby it was a "no-no". In Moresby, at the end of the day we would rush up to Kriewaldts for our powdered milkshake and we would either be covered in paint and/or grime from the cargo. All Europeans had a standard of dress and a "position" in the town that must be maintained at all times. One could almost read the minds of the local citizenry who saw us in that condition - "how disgusting, but they are Army. That explains it all".

When we sailed from Port Moresby we also carried a Platoon of Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) Troops on board as well as a full cargo. The 30 or so troops lived on the cargo hold deck and on the Stb. side for'wd, outboard of the port cargo winch, was a toilet and on the Port side was a makeshift galley. As well as the troops were Australian Senior NCO's of PIR. Living conditions were not the best for everyone concerned as by this time we had approx. 57 people on board including 4 washboys. That particular trip from Port Moresby to Samarai is well remembered by myself as it was a nightmare. I could stand the rolling of the "TARRA" but not the pitching, and between Moresby and Samarai it pitched! One of my vivid memories of that trip was coming out of the fo'c'sle not feeling very well at all and promptly standing on the stomach of a PIR soldier who was not feeling very well either. He quickly vomited over my feet and I reciprocated. I did not see much of the coast between Moresby and Samarai and when we reached Samarai the District Medical Officer diagnosed Acute Appendicitis and the "TARRA" sailed without me. I was put into the Samarai Hospital and was to be returned to Port Moresby as soon as possible for the operation. (This was Dec 1954 and my appendix was finally removed in Brisbane in May 1955)

After a few days in hospital I was advised that I would not be operated on in Samarai and it would not be possible to remove me to Moresby until 22 Dec 1954 as the Flying Boat (Catalina) was booked out and I could leave on the "BULOLO" on the 22nd. In the meantime my status was a "live in outpatient", as long as I was there in the hospital at 0830 for the usual check and was in bed by 2200 my time was my own. Samarai was a jewel of the Pacific and the 28 Europeans who lived on the island were individual characters and varied in backgrounds and of course varied in their reasons for being in Samarai. During my stay at Samarai I met everybody on the island as well as those from the outlying islands and the mainland. Samarai was the District H.Q. for the Milne Bay District and had been abandoned in the early days of the war. After the war the Administration of TP & NG decided to build it up again. A new wharf was built to take ships up to 15000 tons and as well as being the District HQ it also supported a small but not insignificant Private sector ie. Two Supermarket type stores (Burns Philp & A.H. Bunting), Trade stores, a bank and last but not least the "Samarai Club". The island could be walked around in 25 minutes and its highest point was 53 metres. The streets were lined with Hibiscus, Frangipani and Crotons and everywhere were the very tall Coconut Palms which were, in age, about 60/70 years.



My official/unofficial type of curfew was broken on many occasions as some of the small boat skippers, Govt. and private, would ask the staff at the hospital if I wanted to go on a small trip for a day or so and naturally I would want to go. I thought to myself that I would probably never see the area again so I was "in" anything that was going. We went to every island East of Samarai to Misima island and included Jomard Entrance on

the Southern Barrier where a Liberty Ship was grounded during the war and some Sherman tanks were still aboard. I also went on a trip to E'ssala in the Trobiand Islands. The only place that I did not go was into Milne Bay and it didn't really matter as years later I was to see and go everywhere within the District.

One of my fondest recollections of my stay at Samarai was on one Sunday when the PNGVR Platoon had a "Range Practice". It was held on Sariba Island and everybody that wanted to go went on three vessels, one of which was the Govt. Trawler. This vessel was an ex-Army 66' Trawler of which there were many scattered about the Territory. Wives and children also went (There were no single girls on the island at this time) as well as the barbecue necessities and the beer. We unloaded at the usual "stick" wharf on the Northern side of Sariba and walked to the Southern side and were confronted by an ocean beach that would make Fiji and Bondi look pale in comparison. We also had a large quantity of four gallon drums which we swam out to a point about 100 metres off the beach and for the rest of the day the PNGVR shot at them with Bren Guns. It was a tremendous social/military occasion enjoyed by all, but I thought to myself "what would the Army think!" but as Samarai was a difficult place to get out of I assumed that it would also be a difficult place to get to.

Back at the hospital there were patients coming and going all the time and in the main it was malaria that put them there. There was a Native hospital below the European Hospital on the



Eastern side of Samarai and I would wander down there from time to time and talk to the Medical Assistant who ran the Hospital. These Medical assistants were, in many cases, Ex-Servicemen from WW2 who remained and were not qualified doctors and also Displaced persons from Europe who were qualified doctors but could not practice in Australia. In both cases these Medical Assistants were first class and their

and ability in Tropical medicine was beyond reproach. Medical supplies were not plentiful in those days and all Medical Assistants had non-standard methods of treatment. The one that I remember most and have used ever since is using Foot Powder on Tropical Ulcers. It works!

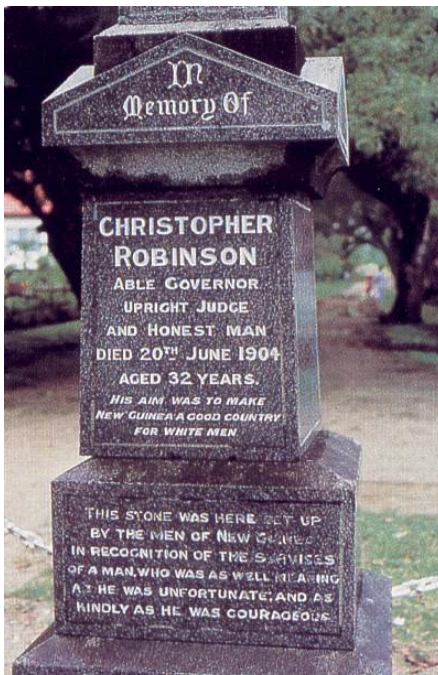
One day at the hospital a European miner was brought in from Misima Island under Police guard. He was in advanced stage of the DT's and also had Malaria. He was a "before" fellow and had been on Misima since the 1920's. He had "married" a local native girl who later died and then he married the younger sister. Apparently he was out at his claim quite a lot and when he returned home he found that his "wife" was carrying on with a fellow from the village. After consuming every bottle of Gin he had he went out and shot both of them. He was charged with murder and was to be sent to Moresby for trial but the DT's and suspected Blackwater Fever sent him to the Samarai Hospital first. (Blackwater Fever is an advanced complication of Malaria and in the Milne Bay district, in isolated areas, the mortality rate was high if not attended to. Although the symptoms of Blackwater are the same as Malaria the onset of Blackwater was noticed by the colour of Urine passed. Blood coloured Urine was the best indication that one had Blackwater Fever.)

His bed was next to mine and about 9 or 10 PM he would become quite rational and his knowledge of the Arts was phenomenal. (I was to find over the next 20 years that these people who were out in the "bush" for whatever reason had nothing but booze and books and while first appearances were disheartening they were very intelligent and well versed in whatever subject their isolation caused them to study.) Harry was his first name and over the years I have forgotten his last name but for an hour or so he would recount his life and experiences and his use of the English language would do credit to many a master of English literature. He would lapse after an hour or so into a babbling mess of futile conversation and then begin to have "living nightmares" in which he would be falling into a volcano which was full of crocodiles or he was about to be beheaded by a sword. The Police Boy who was his guard became agitated by all the ravings but Harry was calmed down after a while by the Hospital Sister. Sometimes he would be handcuffed to the bed but never once did I see him offer or indicate violence to anybody at the Hospital. Harry, after he was "dried" out to an acceptable travel standard and the Malaria attack was brought under control was put on a Catalina and flown to Moresby. He was admitted to the hospital there before he stood trial. After I went to Moresby I went and saw him in the hospital. He neither recognised me or remembered Samarai Hospital. His trial was held after I returned to Australia and he received life imprisonment. He died in prison and in 1963 I traced his grave at the old cemetery between Hanuabada and Idubada near the Shell fuel complex. All the headstone had was his name - nothing else.

One historical landmark that should not be overlooked at Samarai is a monument that stands near the main wharf (built post war). The Monument has an interesting history. In 1901 a Missionary of the London Missionary Society, the Rev. James Chalmers and another Missionary, the Rev. Oliver Tompkins, plus 10 villagers from Kiwai Island were murdered and eaten the same evening on Goaribari Island, North of the Fly River mouth.

When news of the massacre reached Port Moresby an armed party, led by the Governor, Le Hunte, went to Goaribari as a punitive expedition and killed 24 of the villagers and destroyed the whole village. The "Dubus" (men's huts where weapons and war trophies (skulls) were kept) were destroyed in each of the nine villages on the island. There was some concern in Australia when news of the counter-massacre became known. Many people were amazed that Missionaries were still being eaten by savages in the 20th Century. Others felt that the punishment meted out was too severe and others felt that Rev. Chalmers deserved to become a martyr.

Le Hunte returned to Goarabari the following year and reached an "understanding" with the villagers and obtained the skull of Chalmers but not the skull of Tomkins. Le Hunte was the last British Governor as, at Australia's independence from the British in 1901, Australia assumed sovereignty over British New Guinea (Papua) and Le Hunte became Governor of South Australia. An Acting Administrator, C.S. Robinson was appointed and Robinson took to his duties with great enthusiasm. Robinson decided to go to Goaribari and arrest the murderers of the Missionaries, one or more prisoners from the original raid were on board, and at the same time, recover the skull of Tomkins. On arrival at Goaribari the villagers came out to the ship in canoes as they had been told by Le Hunte that no further action would be taken against them. As they came aboard the principal murderers were seized as they were identified. The remaining villagers in the canoes began to fit arrows to bows and a shot was fired, whether a shot or arrow was fired first is not known, and then all aboard the ship with weapons began firing at the villagers. Approximately 50 villagers were killed.



When news of the massacre reached Australia the press had a field day with most comment coming from church dignitaries and missionary groups. Robinson was suspended from his position and the 35 year old became confused and upset at the ferocity of the criticism laid against him from Australia and on the 20th June 1904 shot himself, at the base of the flagpole at Govt. House in Port Moresby. When news of this event reached the Miners in the Milne Bay district a collection was taken up and a monument was erected at Samarai.

It was, however, a cynical gesture by the Miners in placing the monument near the boat landing at Samarai. Across from Samarai is the island of Kwato and the HQ of the London Missionary Society was on Kwato. The Miners figured that every time the missionaries came across to Samarai the first thing they saw as they stepped ashore would be the monument and they did not want the LMS to ever forget what it was there for.

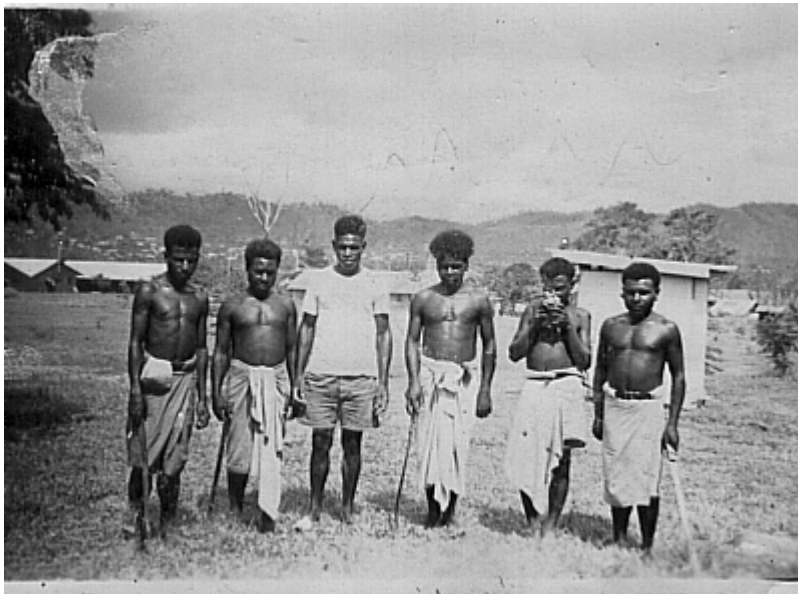
The time came for my departure from Samarai on the 22nd December 1954 and the "BULOLO" was to arrive "about" 1 PM and depart "about" 8 PM. The two words "about" and "maybe" were widely used in the Samarai/Milne Bay area. "about" referred to a time period of 24 hours and "maybe" referred to "What will be - will be!" I awoke very early that morning and had breakfast on the Hospital side veranda which looked out to the South East. There was a mist surrounding the adjacent Islands and as it cleared with the rising sun the deep green of the rain forest emerged and the green crept up the steep mountains and finally merged with the clouds covering the mountain peaks. It was a sight that I was to continually see throughout TP & NG over the next 20 years and one that will never leave my memory.

The "BULOLO" arrived at 3 PM and began loading Copra immediately. There was myself and a family of six leaving on her. A departure is no big deal anywhere else but in TP & NG it is an event that is cherished by most and in Samarai the whole island turned out for it. I went aboard at 5 and was immediately accosted by a young male steward who invited me to a "party" being held in the steward's quarters about 9 PM. and he would come along to my cabin to escort me to the party. What he didn't know was that some of the "TARRA" crew had a "party" with them in Moresby when the "BULOLO" was Northbound and while they would accept the free beer from the stewards, anything else suggested to our people would attract

"mild violence" and it did. I said "no thanks", and settled in my cabin and then went to dinner where I was again invited and they received my previous answer. The "BULOLO" was due to leave at 8 PM but the Master "Wild Bill" Wilding must have had a bad day as we left at 7 PM amid a lot of shouting and screaming coming from the Bridge of the "BULOLO". There were a few Australian tourists aboard and the departure from Samarai was like a ship leaving Italy for Australia and the well-wishers on the wharf convinced that they will never see the departing passengers again. There were streamers from the ship to the wharf and a local native choir of kids singing "ESSLAYEE" with perfect harmony. Considering that I was not a "local" and the family of six were only "going south" for three months it was quite a send off.

I stayed on deck until the "BULOLO" passed Ava Point Light and then retired for the night. About 10:30 PM there was a knock on my cabin door and I did not bother to answer. After a while the knocker went away probably convinced that I was not very broad minded at all. The ship was rolling rather heavily the next morning and not many passengers were at breakfast but to me it was just fine. Although the ship was rolling it was nothing compared to the sea keeping characteristics of the "TARRA".

We arrived in Port Moresby at 1700 and was met by the Orderly Sgt. and taken out to Murray Barracks. I had not been here before yet I had the feeling that had I been here in 1934 then the changes would have been negligible. The Barracks are just over three mile hill on the left and was the Sub Area HQ for TP & NG. The whole of TP & NG was administered, militarily, from HQ Northern Command in Brisbane. The whole staff of Murray Barracks numbered about 20 all ranks including PNGVR. I was quartered with the single men in a little house that had four small bedrooms and a veranda at the back. There were four of us. An Intelligence S/sgt, a Sgt. Armourer, a supply Sgt. and myself.



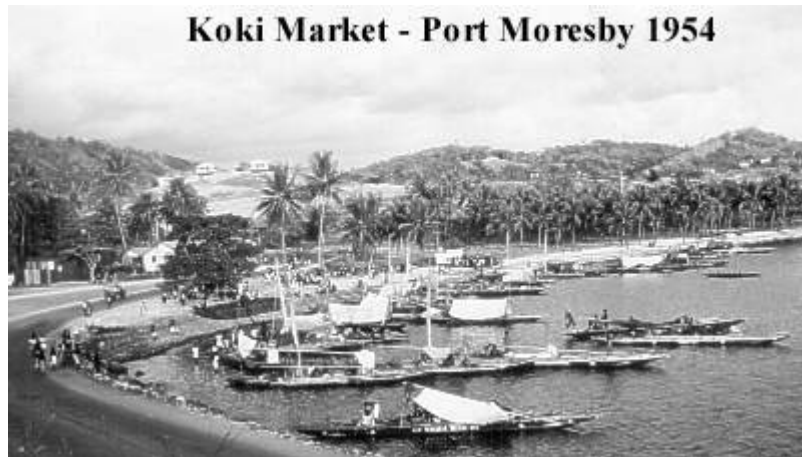
The building in which we were all housed was not ventilated to a tropical degree and consequently mould formed on everything and especially on cigarettes if the pack was left open overnight. They were a limp stained pack the next morning. The "in" thing in TP&NG was to smoke Craven A's in the round tin of 50's, Ardath in 50's or the "yuppie" thing was Benson & Hedges in the 50's flat tin. Snakes were still prevalent in the long grass away from our quarters and

the toilet was the proverbial "out house" about 50 metres from the building. One always gave the "out house" a good going over in the morning. I wandered over to the mess after settling in, there was absolutely nowhere else to go, and found another little house divided into three rooms. The drinking side, the storeroom side and the eating side/kitchen. It was an all ranks mess and normally the lowest rank would be Sgt. and now a Spr. was in. Everybody came to the mess and with guests it was quite busy. The next day I was received in officially at the Orderly room and then a decision had to be made as to what duties could I perform. All regimental duties were carried out by Pacific Islands Regiment troops and other duties were probably considered to be above my station but I eventually became a "Gopher" (Acronym

for "Anybody wants something then I would go and get it"). Another position given to me was that of Labour Supervisor. In 1954 the "White women's Protection Ordinance" was still being used although many of its sections had not been used for some time. The punishment for offences against white women were draconian and included the death penalty (attempted rape and above) and floggings for offenders found guilty of lesser offences. One section of the Ordinance dealt with a curfew on Papuans/New Guineans who were found outside their place of domicile or inside a house which was other than his own were jailed if they could not produce a pass signed by his employer(European). The penalty for this indiscretion was a \$4.00 fine and/or two months jail. The offenders were taken to a compound at Kila Kila and in the mornings Murray Barracks would receive up to 20 labourers from Kila Kila, some, if not most, were these offenders. The Ordinance was repealed some time later but Port Moresby was, in those days, still "TAIM BILONG MASTA"

The two on the right and the fellow second left were in for assault with axes and were awaiting "formal proceedings". The fellow in shorts was the "Boss Boi". The one I had trouble with was "in" for simply being without a pass.

I was given some heavy instruction in dealing with the "Labour Line" and I took heed of everything told to me. All my job entailed was to wander over the Murray Barracks area sighting rubbish or grass to be cut and then gave instructions to the "Boss Boy" and he did the rest. The grass cutting implement was called a "Serif" which was nothing more than a strip off hoop iron about 3 feet long, slightly curved. One day for some never explained reason one of the Labour Line attacked me with his "Serif" and I became rather upset and instinctively grabbed the arm which was holding the "Serif". In the scuffle that followed I put a headlock on the native and the Boss Boy belted the native across the fingers, and hitting my fingers at the same time, with his stave which much to my relief caused the native to drop the "Serif". The native was now enraged and my headlock became much tighter so I virtually dragged him to the Supply Depot about 200 yards away and the OC of the Depot, Capt. Harry Shattock, came out with a couple of PIR soldiers and took over. He then informed me that had I held the headlock on much longer the poor fellow would have died of strangulation. The police were called and took the offender away and then there was a lot of statements taken and then the whole thing was forgotten.



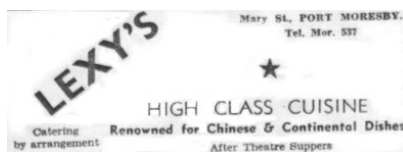
I began to fit in quite well at Murray Barracks but longed for the day the "TARRA" would return Southbound and I thought that I would be able to rejoin, but that thought was dispelled as the "TARRA" did come in and sailed for Brisbane without me. Apparently I was not fit enough to make the journey which confused me somewhat, but then the RQMS explained it to me as being a case of "The establishment of Murray Barracks was way under staffed with no Spr.'s at all so when one comes along we like to keep him as long as we can!". I was taught to drive a jeep and acquired my Army licence. My teacher was a PIR Pte. called Robin Tokaile who was a Tolai from Rabaul.

As soon as I received my licence I was rather pleased with myself, not even realising that all of a sudden my "Gopher" jobs increased dramatically and extended over all hours. I thought that I was pretty smart getting a licence and driving a jeep around town but in retrospect it was apparent that Murray Barracks was a lot smarter than I was.

One of my "Gopher" jobs was to find a suitable gravel pit, other than a commercial one, and one day on the Northern side of Jacksons Airfield I walked to the top of a hill to "see what I could see". On reaching the top I found that the peak had been made level and a smooth concrete floor about 30' x 30' was in place. The concrete was painted and, centred and taking up most of the space, was the insignia of the U.S. Army Airforce and painted underneath was "386 Bomb Group USAAF". There was no indication of any other buildings on that peak and none on the slopes of the hill. The position was about 3 miles from the main runway at Jackson's field. Later a few of the people at Murray Barracks had a look at it but could find no explanation for it. We did find that the "386 Bomb Group" were at Jacksons during the war as late as Dec. 1943 and flew B-26C's (Marauder) light bombers.

The weekend social life was rather hectic and was starting to go beyond my economic means. Girls were in Port Moresby as I did see one or two but I had no chance as for every girl there were dozens of eager males whose economic means were a lot healthier than mine. Sometimes there would be a girl who was home for a while from Australia who would come to the Mess with her parents and being of the same age group (16-18) and me being the youngest in the mess and the age of the next youngest was 26, I did actually get to talk to some very lovely young ladies. Unfortunately these girls had parents who had eyes in the back of their heads and if we as much moved close to the Mess door they would be right there. I was only going to show her the garden plants that I had planted at the front of the Mess. 20 years later when our eldest daughter arrived home from Australia on school holidays my wife and I adopted the same procedure.

The only nasty incident that I experienced in Port Moresby was when another Pte. Soldier arrived for a transit stay. He was an American soldier and he was a member of the crew of a U.S. Army ship that was doing Survey tasks up at Kavieng (New Ireland). He was a Guamese and we got along fine. One night we decided to have dinner in town and went to "Lexy's" restaurant which was in the laneway next to the Papuan theatre.



We ordered our meal and waited. My meal arrived so I decided to wait for my mates meal to arrive. It didn't so I asked the waitress how long would it be and she replied "Oh!-I thought you knew. We will serve you but not your friend" and walked off. I was rather "upset" by this and said a few words. My mate was also upset and then the dragon

Lexy appeared and ordered us both out. We got a taxi back to Murray Barracks hoping to raise a few vigilantes and burn the famous "Lexy's" down but the DAQMG who was in the mess at the time pulled us into line and later told us that an official complaint would be made. What angered me most was that the other patrons at the restaurant carried on as though it was all happening elsewhere. Some twenty years later I was to meet "Lexy" at the Yacht Club in Moresby where she ran a restaurant and I reminded her of the incident. She doubted that such a thing could have happened.

During my stay in Moresby there were occasions when I went aboard many ex-Army craft ranging from the ubiquitous Workboat to the ALC-40's and the "E" and "D" class vessels. Also there were a large number of the RAAF 56' "Boong boats" which were operated by Steamships Trading and were called the "K" class i.e. "Kano", "Kuku", "Kaia" etc.

After WW2 it became the refit base for APC who were involved in full scale oil drilling in the Western Districts of Papua. APC operated many ex-Army vessels and no doubt some of the skippers were ex Water Tpt. although I did not meet any. Still remaining on many of the peaks and headlands surrounding Moresby were concrete gun emplacements and many of them still remain.

A little North of the "MACDUI" wreck was Tatana Island. This island was skirted by the remains of wharves built by the Americans during WW2. They had also built a causeway from the mainland which is still in use.

On the southern side of Fairfax harbour is Napa Napa and this originally was a slipway built before WW1 and owned by a Mr. Stewart. During WW2 it was taken over by the Army and became a Water Craft Workshops. After WW2 it became the refit base for APC who were involved in full scale oil drilling in the Western Districts of Papua. APC operated many ex-Army vessels and no doubt some of the skippers were ex Water Tpt. although I did not meet any. Still remaining on many of the peaks and headlands surrounding Moresby were concrete gun emplacements and many of them still remain. A little North of the "MACDUI" wreck was Tatana Island. This island was skirted by the remains of wharves built by the Americans during WW2. They had also built a causeway from the mainland which is still in use.

Through the Mess I met many people and many years later quite a few of these people were in responsible positions both in the public sector and the private sector and were to assist me greatly in my endeavours, as I was able to assist them. Not least amongst the many friends I made in Port Moresby was one who had quite an arsenal of weapons that he had picked up in his travels since the end of the war. I was given a Thompson Sub-machine gun, Owen Gun, Austen Sub-machine gun, Garand M-1 rifle, .303 rifle, Jap rifle as well as a .45 pistol and an air pistol. I could not take these back to Australia for obvious reasons so they went into storage for the time being. The sequel to these acquisitions took place after I returned to Chowder Bay.

My stay in Moresby finally came to an end in mid-April and my departure by QANTAS DC-4 was no different from the departure from Samarai only this time there were 40 people departing. The shed at Jacksons was overflowing with those departing and hordes of "farewellers" who were ingenious in their designs of "eskies" in which to hold the beer, wine, eats and ice. One group of "farewellers" had a bathtub full of beer which was covered by a kapok quilt. Rather than load it all back onto the truck I assumed that the farewell party went on long after the DC-4 with its passengers left Moresby and all beer was consumed. It would then be easier to load the bathtub on the truck or they may have left it there for future "farewellers".

The trip to Brisbane took 10 hours and from there I went out to 1 Camp Hospital at Yeronga. From there, after a week, I went to RGH at Greenslopes where my appendix was finally removed and after being told earlier in Moresby that it was preferable that it be taken out in Australia because of possible complications the incision became septic and I was on a drain for another week.

After I left Greenslopes I was given 2 weeks "recuperation leave" and after reporting in to the "TARRA" that I would be back shortly I went to Sydney. Here I met another girl and for the next few years began a series of "Dear John" letters. The romance invariably lasted for 2-3 weeks before my departure somewhere and six weeks later I would receive the inevitable "Dear John".

The "TARRA" was at PETERS SLIP under the Story Bridge in Brisbane undergoing partial refit when I rejoined her and soon settled in again. We were to come out of refit and go to the Army wharf at Bulimba before loading at Newfarm for return to the Islands. The only "wacko" incident at Bulimba this time was performed by "Junior" Aitken. He was the duty engineroom watch one night and as we were on shore power, being a 25KVA on the wharf, it was his task, before going to bed, to close the KVA down. His bunk, like mine, was in the Focsle and we watched as he began moving drums out of the way on the Cargo deck, making sure the Office doors (Port and Stb.) were open (On the 300 tonners the Wheelhouse was where the office on the "TARRA" is situated.) and a clear path was made from the KVA to the ship. When asked what he was doing he replied "I'm sick and tired of bumping into things after I close the KVA down. Tonight I'm going to close the KVA down and get into bed before the lights go out!" He only tried it that one time.

The ship had been fumigated to eradicate Cockroaches and Copra beetles, which meant that instead of thousands there would be now only hundreds of the things left.

We finally loaded a full cargo and departed Brisbane once more. The trip up the coast to Cairns was much the same as before except that on this trip we had an overnight stop at Hayman Island. Apart from the duty watch we all went ashore and for a few hours revelled in luxury at the Resort main bar. Some of us younger ones could not keep up with our elders and returned to the ship (mainly because we had no money left). "Junior" Aitken was the duty watch in the Engine Room and we told him all about the fine comfortable time we had ashore. The Skipper, Norm Stark, was already aboard and entertaining one of the female resort guests in his cabin. Junior went to the Skippers cabin, knocked on the door, opened it and asked the Skipper if he got somebody to replace him for an hour or so could he go ashore. Any one of the remainder of the crew would not have gone to the Skippers cabin in the first place, and if we did, then we would have waited until the Skipper came to the door. After making his request Junior should have left the cabin but he waited for an answer. The Skipper who was otherwise engaged was not very long in giving Junior an answer. Although Junior did not go ashore at Hayman Island and his evening was ruined I am pretty sure that Norm Starks' evening was also ruined from that moment on. It was some time before Junior came face to face with the Skipper. (Junior left the army years later and in 1975 was electrocuted in Darwin while helping to clean up after "Cyclone Tracy" had devastated the city.)

We called in at Cairns once again for three days and departed for Moresby via the inside passage. On arrival at Port Moresby I picked up my small weapons collection and hid them aboard. The stay at Moresby was a repeat of the previous stay - Kriewaldts for a powdered milkshake, the Snakepit for beer, the movies and of course a trip out to Murray Barracks to see old friends. To break the routine Ken Duncan and I went and had Dinner on the "SHANSI", a Swire & Yule ship that was on the Sydney - Islands run. There were also the Bank line vessels which started from Singapore and tramped to every and any port which had Copra to load and meandered across the Pacific towards the UK.

Leaving Moresby the "TARRA" fought its way down to Samarai against the SE Trades and continued on up to Kiriwina and then made for Lae. We ended up at Dreger Harbour. Our stay was overnight and a few of us took a stroll around the place. One of the interesting historical facts about Dreger was that at the end of WW2 the U.S. had offered to the Australians the base at Manus as a going concern but our reply was "thank you- no! The RAN is going to use Dreger Harbour". The Americans then disposed of most of the equipment at Manus to Chiang Kai Chek and departed. A few years later the RAN decided to use Manus as a base and moved there. About 1/2 mile from the wharf at Dreger and towards the entrance was a Quonset hut that was in a state of disrepair but on a notice board was a torn poster which was partially

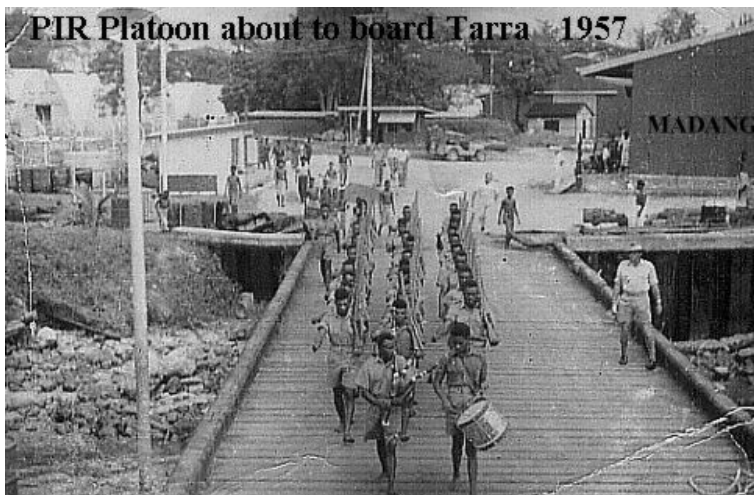
readable and declared that Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, Frances Langford and Patti Page would be appearing that evening. The whole area was virtually untouched and years later I was to traverse this area from Finschafen to Dreger Harbour with a friend who was living at Finschafen and saw and found items that were out of this world.

We arrived in Lae on a Sunday afternoon and anchored off Voco Point. The place was dead but apart from the duty watch everybody was ashore at the RSL. There were no units stationed in Lae but there was a platoon of PNGVR. A small amount of cargo was discharged and we departed for Madang. We passed Finschafen and as we approached Fortification Point the weather began to come in from the NE with a vengeance and as we passed Sio Mission the weather and wind dropped to a gentle breeze and we headed toward Madang.

Madang is (or was) the most beautiful and best placed town in the Territory. The entrance to the harbour is bounded by the mainland on the west and by a long, narrow island on the East. In the inner harbour the wharves and the anchorage are protected from the SE Trades by a continuous chain of small islands running up to Alexishafen. The "TARRA" berthed at the Copra wharf and we now prepared to carry out maintenance under the ever watchful eye of Brick Bradford. Norm Stark regarded Madang as the home port of AV1379 "TARRA" and the crew undoubtedly agreed with him. At "knock off" time there were only two of us left on board. There were two main watering holes in town. - The Madang Club or the Madang Hotel. There was no "this one is better than that one" equal time was given to both.

The Native troops were all quartered on the cargo hatch and we had a large purpose designed tarpaulin to provide shelter from the elements. The NCO's bedded down where space could be found, Wardroom, Aft quarters or Foc'sle.

We departed Madang and went North to Cape Croiselles, passing Kar Kar and Bagabag Island to starboard. Then a leisurely run up to Manam Island, which was an active volcano, keeping it to starboard and then passing the Ramu and Sepik Rivers to Port. We came up on Cape Moem at about 0700 and anchored off Wewak town.



As I was to discover from this moment on, it did not matter what time one arrived at Wewak as there is always a moderate swell running and surf on the beach. There were no wharves and the method of unloading was the same for the "TARRA" as it was for the much larger ships - by "surfboat" and you hoped that as the winch lowered the cargo onto the "Surfboat", the "surfboat" was still there and not five feet away as the swells passed. Some of the crew went ashore for a few hours before we

departed for Aitape. We arrived at Aitape early the next morning and as we only had parcel cargo the skipper took it ashore and he also was going to see his "cousin". Norm Stark had a "cousin" at every port we went to!

We then departed for Vanimo and if Madang was the most "everything" town then Vanimo was the most "everything" outpost. The only incident prior to arriving in Vanimo was that we overshot in the darkness and sailed into Humboldt Bay (Hollandia). Although there would have been no International incident with the Dutch authorities but it would have been very embarrassing for the "TARRA". Vanimo was similar to the physical geography of Wewak. A prominent headland completely covered by a Copra plantation, concaving in on the eastern and western sides to form a surf beach on the East and a well protected bay on the West. The wharf was of local manufacture and we very carefully moored alongside. PIR had a Company of troops based here on a six monthly rotation. The purpose of the "TARRA" was to do that six monthly resupply and rotate the troops. We began unloading immediately and had the PIR troops to assist. The only mechanical handling equipment were the winches and once landed on the wharf it was all by hand. The deck crew of "TARRA" worked in the holds with the PIR and after a few hours it was difficult to tell which was PIR and which was "TARRA" crew.

The climate here is typical New Guinea and we would be a lather of sweat in minutes and filthy dirty in 10. We would simply fall overboard, swim around for a minute or so and then go back to whatever it was that we were doing. There was a Catholic Mission on the Western side of the bay and the Priest was Father "Ray" (Raymond Quirk). This man was a "Con



Vanimo village from Tarra 1955

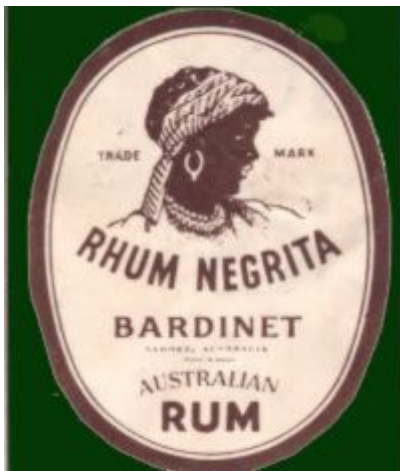
man", drinker, gambler and anything else that could gain something for the Mission. He was also the most sincere and caring person that I was to meet and a friendship was formed that continued on until my final departure from PNG in 1975. (Father "Ray" passed away some years ago at a retirement home for Catholic Priests East of Perth) He would come over to the ship "just to say hello and have a cup of Tea" and leave with the teapot, tea, milk and sugar. Before the

arrival of PIR his was one of complete isolation and his survival and sanity was maintained by his dedication to the Mission and the villagers he cared for. His sphere of "operations" went to the border with Dutch New Guinea, South into the mountains to a non-defined point and East towards Aitape. When we departed Vanimo he was a passenger, "some serious business in Madang". As we left Vanimo a few of us were having a cup of tea near the Galley down Aft and he made a short speech to us, "If you are of the Catholic faith then I'm available to you at any time and if you are not of the Catholic faith then I'm available to you at any time". He then asked for a cup of tea.

We completed several trips between Madang and Vanimo carrying PIR Troops and cargo thus changing over the Infantry Co. at Vanimo. On the last trip from Vanimo to Madang we stopped at Aitape and because of the swell we anchored in the lee of Tumleo and Seleo Islands. There were no indications that Aitape had been the scene of a major campaign during WW2. It was only as you walked around Tadjji airstrip that the bomb craters became quite evident, otherwise the jungle had reclaimed everything. Natives were still bringing in weapons of every description including small Jap Howitzers, machine guns and rifles as well as many American weapons. Tadjji was an area which was heavily bombed during WW2 and

there were many UXB's still around the area and UXB's were still being found four miles from four miles from Tadjji A/field. On Tumleo Island there was quite a lot of WW2 evidence. An ALC-20 was quietly rusting away on the fringing reef and many buildings remain, although in a deteriorated condition. Father Ray came ashore with a few of us and the villagers on Tumleo greeted him like a long lost brother. He did tell us that there were executions carried out on Tumleo either just before or just after the end of WW2 but I cannot remember the story.

We arrived in Madang and loaded for Manus Island where a Company of PIR were to be stationed at Nutt Point, near Lombdrum. After loading which was a Saturday most of the crew went ashore to the Madang Hotel. Ken Duncan and I went and had dinner at the Madang hotel and there was a noisy fellow a couple of tables away and it was Chips Rafferty with a group of friends who were in the Territory making a movie. I made a mental note to have a look at the movie when it was released but of course forgot the name and never did see it. About



2230 there was a commotion on the wharf and Peter Cheffins was bought aboard in a mess. Joe Palmer had crowned him with a bottle after an argument over Australian Rules football in the Madang Hotel. The police were involved and charges lay. Maybe society was different in the 50's as drinking beer was not on the list of priorities of 17/18 year old's and drinking Rhum Negrita was for those who had more money than we did. It seems incredulous that, in the 80/90's that we have Alcoholics at age 13 and 14. Witnesses were required for the court case and we sailed for Manus with a crew of 11 instead of the usual 15. Shortly after leaving Madang and between Kar Kar Island and

Bagabag Island, Frank Thorne stuck his finger in water pump in the engine room, and we returned to Madang to get him to hospital.

We finally sailed for Manus with less crew than we had on arrival and finally reached Manus. On the way we were to see one of nature's wonders in the form of an island beginning its existence. It was to the SW of Alim island, about 20 miles from Los Negros and the disturbance had been going on for a few days before we passed it. The surface was heavy with steam and the hardened Lava was about a foot above the surface. When we returned it was about two feet high. We arrived at the RAN base, HMAS "Lorengau", with a bang. There was a Lt. Cmdr of the RAN on the wharf standing by a little stand that said "Bridge Here". Norm Stark overshot by about 60 feet and slammed into the wharf. The RAN presence at Manus is interesting in that at the end of WW2 the Americans had offered the base, which they had built and was probably the greatest asset in the Territory, to the Australian Government but the offer was declined as the RAN was to base at Dreger Harbour. Dreger Harbour only lasted a few years and then the RAN moved to Manus. By that time the base assets had been stripped completely by the Nationalist Chinese for their war against the Communists. Ah! Australia-- you have done it again! Seadler Harbour is without doubt a very fine harbour and there was much to see. We walked around the base and inspected the detention camp where the Japanese were held prior to Trial and Execution. We went out to Momote where the RAAF were rebuilding the Airfield and on out to Mokerang which was an American Airbase also. There was a mass of "goodies" here but as the Skipper had told me I was bringing too much junk aboard, I did not pick any of it up.

After unloading we left for Madang and thence to Kavieng where we met up with the US

Army Survey ship which was working in the area. from Kavieng we went to Rabaul and here

we unloaded some cargo for the local PNGVR. 80% of the Coastal shipping based here was mainly ex-Army. There was 300 tonners, "E" and "D" Class, 45' Tugs, many 40' W/Boats and even one of the 84' Hospital Launches. I photographed just about the lot but only have a few of the photographs left. We stayed here for three days and then departed for Kandrian which is on the South Eastern Coast of New Britain just above Gasmata. This was real "Jungle" country and it was a small but deep harbour protected by three islands in front of it. We were surprised to see a Yacht anchored in the Harbour. It belonged to the District Officer, Des Ashton, who was rather keen on Ocean Yachting. A short walk from the ship was the local swimming hole complete with waterfall. Apart from being cold it was the clearest water to be seen in New Guinea. There was quite an amount of beer drunk ashore that night and I was duty watch. One of the Cadet Patrol Officers had tried to out-drink Taffy Maggs, Keith Stewart and Reg Cullen. When they came back to the ship the Cadet jumped aboard and rushed into the wardroom and forgetting to stop went through to the Stb. side and straight into the harbour. After pulling him out Reg Cullen remarked "He has to learn sometime".

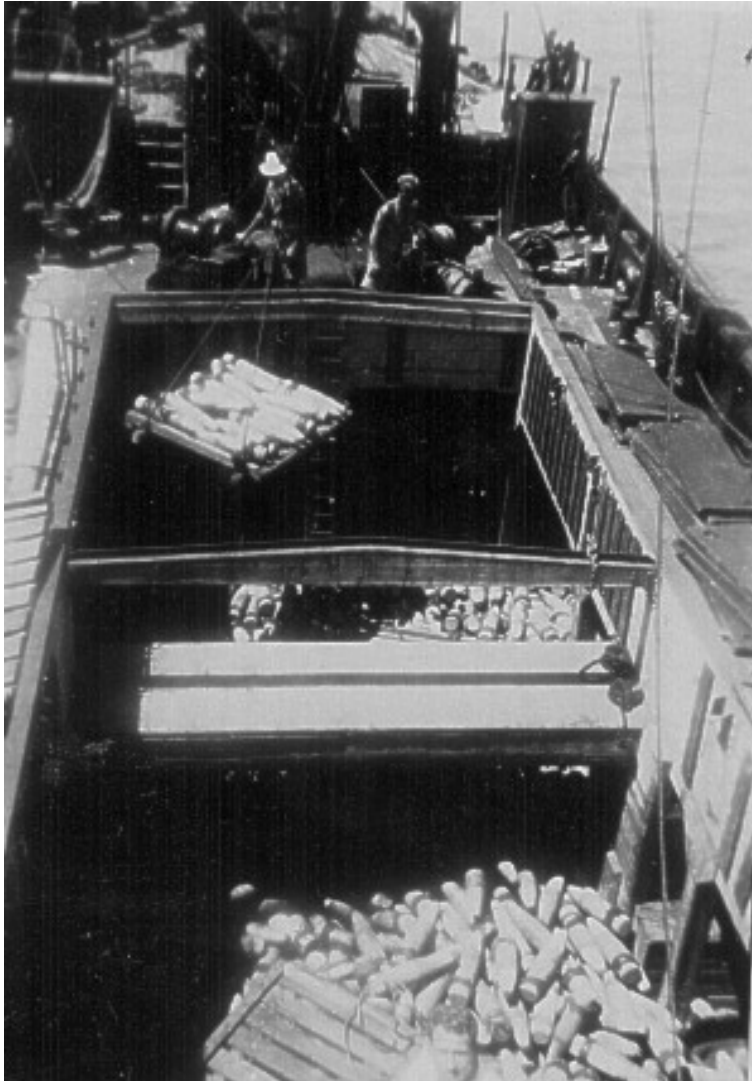
We departed Kandrian for Samarai and then to Moresby where we loaded retrograde cargo for Brisbane and departed for Cairns and Brisbane. On the way to Brisbane I tried out my small "cache" of weapons that I had picked up along the way, first by tying them to the foremast and pulling the trigger by remote control (a piece of string) and after no barrels exploded, concluded that they were OK. What I was going to do with them, I had no idea. At Brisbane we unloaded and then were required to stand by to assist the loading of the Troopship "GEORGIC". The 2nd Battalion RAR was leaving for Malaya to take part in offensive operations against the Communist uprising. Our task was to take the luggage and "War" dogs out to the "GEORGIC" which was anchored near the mouth of Brisbane river.

After that task was carried out we then proceeded on ammunition dumping tasks for three weeks. We dumped bombs, ammunition and weapons off Cape Moreton, beyond the 100 fathom line. Loading was done at Pinkenba. The crew loaded the bombs and ammunition and also did the dumping. On a few days the sea was like a millpond and the dumping was completed very quickly but on other days there would be a swell running and it would become difficult. Everybody in the crew was involved in the actual dumping and we would rotate from loading the Bombs etc. into cargo nets in the hold, winch operators, helmsman, "Peggy", "Slipman" and Lookout. Bombs and Ammunition would be placed in the cargo net which had four steel rings. Two of the rings would be connected to a "Senhouse" Slip. When the load of bombs were brought up and out over the side by the Derricks, the "Slipman" would pull his line and the two rings would come free and the bombs fell into the sea. Sometimes the Slip would not release and the "Slipman" would pull again and forget to keep his eye on the roll of the Ship and on numerous occasions the Slip would come free at the worst possible time resulting in Bombs coming very close to the side of the ship. On many occasions when we were dumping cases of Artillery shells and cases of weapons they actually fell on or crashed into the side of the ship during a roll. The other problem was bringing the load up from the hold. Sometimes the load would foul under the hatch combing and the load contents would fall back into the hold. Those who were in the Hold working always laughed about it later but when this happened we would get behind a Pillar for protection just in case there was an explosion. With up to 300 tons of munitions aboard, slipping behind a 12" square Pillar 10 feet away from a load of dropping shells was of no value at all, but it helped morale.

At the completion of that task we then went to "Peters Slip" for refit and fumigation.

Once on the Slipway all of those who held rank always had "Business" to attend to ashore. Norm Stark always had to see a "Cousin", Taffy Maggs, who as Second Mate had the responsibility of all matters pertaining to Navigation, found that the Story

Bridge hotel had just the right atmosphere in which he could carry out his duties to a successful conclusion without hindrance, "Soapy" Joe was



always running off to Victoria Barracks on "Communication matters". We never saw much of Reg Cullen and I don't think anybody was game to ask him what he was up to as they would probably get a "Karate chop" in answer. Ken Duncan used to do a lot of "Cultural" trips into downtown Brisbane but since Brisbane in 1955 did not have any culture we assumed that girls were in some way connected with his trips. Everybody had some reason to go ashore and it was the young ones who were left under the watchful eye of "Brick" Bradford who, on learning that we could use the air powered Chipping Hammers had us working all day chipping, always said to us "Job and finish" and we would work very hard but always completed the task between 1600 and 1630. I think he worked everything out on a slide rule before he gave us the task. The only enjoyment we had while on the Slipway was shooting rats with the Air Pistol.

Going back to Chowder Bay, I was only there long enough for leave before going to Japan but

I was back aboard the "Tarra" in 1957 as Wireless Operator.