

## **GOOD AFTERNOON LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.**

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO COMMEMORATE THE 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF THE NEW GUINEA VOLUNTEER RIFLES, (THE NGVR), ONE OF THE LEAST KNOWN AND UNDERSTOOD UNITS OF WW2.

IN THIS ADDRESS I WILL COVER A NUMBER OF POINTS RELATIVE TO THE NGVR.

- I) WHY WAS THE NGVR FORMED?**
- II) JUST WHO WERE THE NEW GUINEA VOLUNTEER RIFLES (NGVR) ?**
- III) WHAT DID THEY ACHIEVE?**

TO UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WERE FORMED IT IS NECESSARY TO KNOW THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE PACIFIC IN THE LATE 1930'S.

PRIOR TO THE PACIFIC WAR JAPAN WISHED TO FORM ITS OWN "SPHERE OF INFLUENCE" IN SOUTH EAST ASIA BUT THE WESTERN POWERS WERE CRITICAL OF ITS AIMS. WHEN THE USA IMPOSED SANCTIONS WHICH JAPAN COULD NOT ECONOMICALLY TOLERATE IT HAD EITHER TO BOW TO THE WESTERN POWERS OR AGGRESSIVELY PURSUE ITS PLANS.

THIS IT DID IN LATE 1941 BY ATTACKING PEARL HARBOUR, MANILA, HONG KONG, VIETNAM AND MALAYA.

### **WHY WAS NGVR FORMED?**

WHEN WW2 COMMENCED IN 1939 AND UNTIL LATE 1941 IT WAS A EUROPEAN WAR.

AUSTRALIA HAD JOINED BRITAIN AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF WW1 AND DESPACHED THREE DIVISIONS TO ASSIST. THEY WERE DEPLOYED TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

WITH THE LOOMING JAPANESE THREAT IN THE PACIFIC IN 1941, AUSTRALIA DESPACHED THE 8<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION LESS ONE BRIGADE TO MALAYA. THE 23<sup>RD</sup> BRIGADE FORMED "BIRD FORCE" AND DEPLOYED "GULL", "SPARROW" AND "LARK" FORCES TO AMBON, TIMOR AND RABAUL.

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT, WITH 3 DIVISIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ONE IN THE PACIFIC, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS COUNTING ON THE BRITISH FORCES IN MALAYA AND THE BRITISH FAR EASTERN FLEET TO CONTAIN ANY JAPANESE THREAT.

### **WHAT WAS THE NGVR?**

IT WAS THE FIRST MILITARY UNIT RAISED OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA AFTER WW1 AND IT WAS RAISED IN THE MANDATED TERRITORY OF NEW GUINEA. WHICH, BY AGREEMENT WITH THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS WAS PROHIBITED FROM ESTABLISHING MILITARY BASES BUT WAS CHARGED WITH PROTECTING NEW GUINEA FROM EXTERNAL ATTACK.

BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIAL THREAT POSED BY JAPAN TO NEW GUINEA THE ADMINISTRATION IN SEPT 1939 TASKED Lt Col JOHN WALSTAB WHO WAS THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE NEW GUINEA POLICE FORCE TO RAISE THE NGVR, WITH A STRENGTH NOT TO EXCEED 21 OFFICERS AND 450 OTHER RANKS.

IT WAS A MILITIA UNIT, WHAT IN OUR DAY WAS A CMF UNIT, OR TODAY IS A RESERVE UNIT.

ENLISTMENT WAS FOR A 2 YEAR PERIOD AND THERE WAS NO PAY EXCEPT FOR AN ALLOWANCE OF ONE POUND PER YEAR. UNIFORMS WERE KHAKI SHIRTS AND TROUSERS MADE LOCALLY FROM

MATERIAL SENT FROM AUSTRALIA. FELT HATS, BANDOLIERS, LEATHER BELTS, BOOTS AND PUTEES WERE SUPPLIED.

ARMS CONSISTED OF .303 RIFLES, SOME VICKERS AND LEWIS MACHINE GUNS.

THE NGVR HAD A VERY LOW PRIORITY AND MOST OF THE EQUIPMENT WAS EX WW1.

### LOCATIONS AND PERSONNEL

DEPOTS WERE ESTABLISHED IN RABAU, LAE, SALAMAUA, WAU, BULOLO AND MADANG.

INDIGENOUS NEW GUINEANS AND CHINESE WERE PROHIBITED FROM JOINING THE NGVR BUT IN RABAU A CHINESE AUXILIARY AMBULANCE DETACHMENT WAS FORMED

RESIDENTS OF NEW GUINEA WERE OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH THE THREAT POSED BY JAPAN SO ENLISTMENT INTO THE NGVR WAS WELL SUPPORTED. ALTHOUGH IN 1940/41 MANY MEN LEFT NGVR TO JOIN THE AIF (AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE)

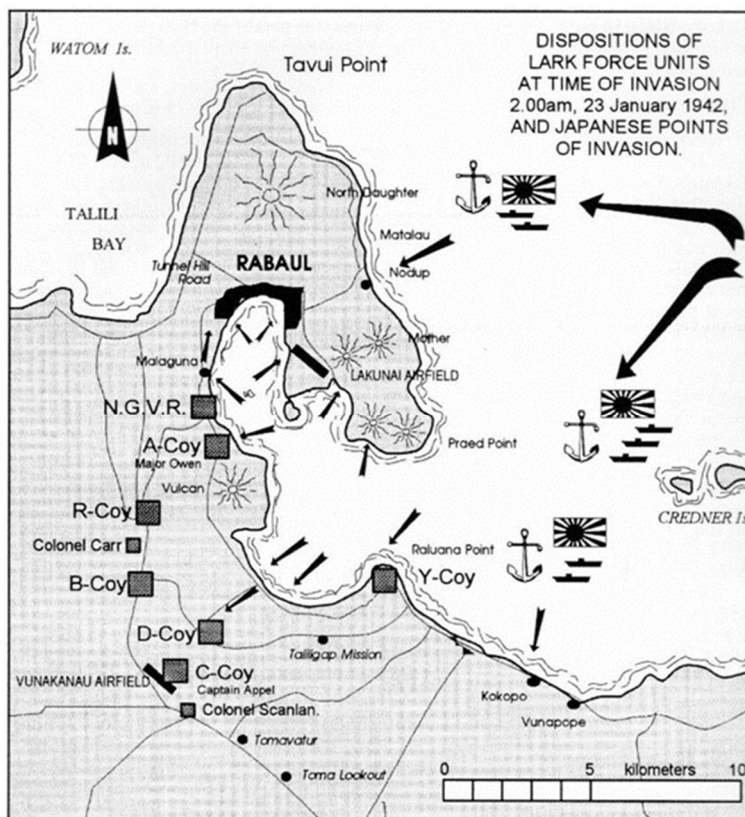
### TRAINING

TRAINING WAS LEFT IN THE HANDS OF LOCAL COMMANDERS AND LIVE FIRING WITH THE VARIOUS WEAPONS WAS CARRIED OUT IN ALL AREAS.

HOWEVER IT MUST BE ACCEPTED THAT TRAINING WAS FAIRLY BASIC.

### NGVR IN ACTION.

AT THE LANDING OF THE JAPANESE IN RABUL ON THE MORNING OF 23 JAN 1942 NGVR WAS WITH 'A' COY 2/22<sup>ND</sup> BN BETWEEN VULCAN AND MALAGUNA – ONE OF THE MOST EXPOSED POSITIONS IN RABAU HARBOUR.



THERE WERE 80 NGVR SOLDIERS REPORTED TO BE IN RABAU AT THE TIME OF THE INVASION. OF THESE, 22 ESCAPED, 46 WERE CAPTURED, AND 12 PERISHED IN THE BATTLE OR SUCCUMBED DURING THEIR ESCAPE. OF THE 46 CAPTURED 7 WERE MASSACRED AT TOLL, 36 WERE LOST ON THE "MONTEVIDEO MARU" AND 3 OFFICERS WERE TAKEN TO JAPAN AND SURVIVED THE WAR.

THUS 55 OF 80 PERISHED, A CASUALTY RATE OF 70% FOR THE NGVR AT RABAU.

WE NEED NOW TO LOOK AT THE OVERALL POSITION IN NEW GUINEA FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POINT OF VIEW IN LATE FEBRUARY.

**THIS SECTION DOES NOT RELATE DIRECTLY TO THE NGVR BUT IT EMPHASISES THEIR COMING ROLE.**

THE JAPANESE AT THIS STAGE HAD BEEN UNBEATABLE. THEY HAD DESTROYED THE MAJORITY OF THE US PACIFIC FLEET AT PEARL HARBOUR, THEY HAD TAKEN HONG KONG AND SAIGON, SINGAPORE HAD FALLEN, AMBON AND TIMOR WERE OCCUPIED, AND RABAUH HAD FALLEN.

AT THE TIME IT WAS A REASONABLE ASSUMPTION THAT THE JAPANESE WOULD CONTINUE SOUTH AND INVADE AUSTRALIA. AFTER THE WAR IT BECAME KNOWN THAT THE JAPANESE NAVY WANTED TO DO THAT BUT THEIR ARMY THOUGHT IT WAS TOO BIG A PROJECT AT THE TIME AND WAS AGAINST IT. BOTH THE NAVY AND THE ARMY AGREED THAT PORT MORESBY SHOULD BE TAKEN TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEVER LINES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, THE PACIFIC ISLANDS AND THE USA AND ISOLATE AUSTRALIA.

THERE ARE FOUR WAYS TO APPROACH PORT MORESBY FROM RABAUH.

1. **BY SEA** – AND THE JAPANESE TRIED THIS IN MAY AND, WHILE THE CORAL SEA BATTLE WAS PROBABLY A SMALL VICTORY TO THE JAPANESE THEIR FLEET TURNED BACK TO RABAUH AND IT HALTED THEIR PLANS OF A SEA INVASION.
2. **VIA THE KOKODA TRACK.** THE JAPANESE COMMENCED THIS ATTACK IN JULY AND THE BATTLE WENT ON UNTIL SEPTEMBER. AGAIN ANOTHER DEFEAT FOR THE JAPANESE, ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE DEFEAT CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE JAPANESE NEED FOR TROOPS AT GUADALCANAL.
3. **VIA MILNE BAY.** WHOEVER CONTROLLED MILNE BAY HAD AIR SUPERIORITY OVER THE SEA LANES FROM RABAUH TO PORT MORESBY. THE ALLIES ESTABLISHED AIRFIELDS FIRST HOWEVER AND THESE BECAME INVALUABLE WHEN THE JAPANESE ATTACKED. THE JAPANESE ATTACKED IN LATE AUGUST AND WITHDREW IN EARLY SEPTEMBER.

**DO NOT BELIEVE US MILITARY HISTORY BOOKS WHICH CLAIM GUADALCANAL TO BE THE FIRST JAPANESE DEFEAT ON LAND. MILNE BAY WAS THE FIRST TIME THE JAPANESE ARMY HAD BEEN DEFEATED ON LAND IN WW11.**

4. **VIA LAE AND SALAMAUA.** THROUGH WAU AND THE BULLDOG TRACK, DOWN THE LAKEKAMU RIVER AND THENCE TO PORT MORESBY. **A LONG WAY AROUND? YES! BUT DOABLE.**

THIS HAD BEEN PROVEN BY NGVR AS THEY HAD ALREADY USED THIS METHOD TO EVACUATE CIVILIANS AND MALES UNFIT FOR MILITARY SERVICE.

THE JAPANESE ACTUALLY TRIED THIS IN JANUARY 1943 IN THEIR ATTACK ON WAU, BUT AGAIN FAILED.

**THAT IS THE BIG PICTURE BUT WE NOW NEED TO GO BACK TO LOOKING AT WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FALL OF RABAUH IN JANUARY 1942.**

**NGVR ON THE MAINLAND.**

THE FALL OF RABAU IN JANUARY 1942 LEFT THE MEN OF THE NGVR AS THE ONLY ARMED MILITARY FORCE IN THE PATH BETWEEN THE JAPANESE FORCES AT RABAU AND PORT MORESBY UNTIL THE ARRIVAL OF KANGA FORCE IN WAU IN JUNE 1942.

SINCE THE INVASION OF RABAU NGVR LAE HAD BEEN BUSY EVACUATING UNFIT CIVILIANS AND CREATING CAMPS AND FOOD DUMPS ALONG THE MARKHAM RIVER.

NGVR WAU AND BULOLO WERE INVOLVED IN THE EVACUATION OF CIVILIANS AS MANY HAD TO PASS THROUGH THEIR AREAS ON THE WAY TO THE BULLDOG TRACK.

AIRPORT RUNAWAYS AT LAE, SALAMAUA, MADANG, WAU AND BULOLO HAD BEEN PREPARED FOR DEMOLITION AND BARRIERS READY TO ERECT TO PREVENT ANY JAPANESE AIRCRAFT LANDING. DETACHMENTS AT WAU, BULOLO, SALAMAUA, LAE AND MADANG WERE ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP AS INDEPENDENT UNITS PREPARING ESCAPE ROUTES, OBSERVATION POINTS AND STORES DUMPS IN THEIR OWN REGIONS.

ONE OF THE FIRST ACTIONS CARRIED OUT BY NGVR ON THE MAINLAND WAS TO ASSEMBLE A FLOTILLA OF 4 SMALL SHIPS WEIGHING FROM 16 TONS TO 45 TONS TO RESCUE SURVIVORS OF THE RABAU DEBACLE. THREE OTHER VESSELS WERE HELD ON THE MAINLAND IN RESERVE AND WERE NOT NEEDED. THIS LITTLE FLOTILLA HAS BEEN DESCRIBED VARIOUSLY AS "THE NGVR NAVY" "THE HARRIS NAVY" AND "THE LITTLE DUNKIRK OF NEW BRITAIN".

THIS OPERATION RESULTED IN 214 SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS EMBARKING ON THE "LAKATOI" FROM THE WITU ISLANDS OFF THE NORTH WEST COAST OF NEW BRITAIN AND ARRIVING SAFELY AT CAIRNS.

IN MADANG THE NGVR WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE POLICE OFFICER (NGVR WAS USING PRISONERS AS CARRIERS AND LABOURERS), BUILT A LINE OF CAMPS AND STORES DUMPS AT WALKING DAY INTERVALS ALL THE WAY TO KAINANTU EACH UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE NGVR AND SET UP WIRELESS REPORTING STATIONS AT SEVERAL LOCATIONS FOR REPORTING OF JAPANESE AIR AND SHIPPING MOVEMENTS TO PORT MORESBY.

### **INVASION OF THE MAINLAND.**

LAE AND SALAMAUA WERE INVADDED ON 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH AND THE NGVR WITHDREW FROM LAE UP THE MARKHAM VALLEY AND FROM SALAMAUA TO MUBO AND WAU.

IN JUNE NGVR WAS REINFORCED BY A PLATOON OF THE 2/1<sup>ST</sup> INDEPENDENT COY AND THEN BY THE 2/5<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENT COY - THUS 'KANGA FORCE' WAS FORMED – NGVR WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF 'KANGA FORCE'

### **OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS BY KANGA FORCE**

TWO MAJOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS WERE THEN CONDUCTED BY KANGA FORCE.

1. BEFORE DAWN ON 29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 7 SEPARATE PARTIES TOOK PART IN AN ATTACK ON SALAMAUA. THE PARTIES WERE A MIXTURE OF NGVR AND INDEPENDENT COY MEN. HOWEVER ALL THE SCOUTING AND RECONNAISSANCE HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT BY NGVR SCOUTS. THE ATTACK WAS SUCCESSFUL WITH ABOUT 112 JAPANESE KILLED FOR THE LOSS OF 3 WALKING WOUNDED.

#### **THIS WAS THE FIRST MAJOR OFFENSIVE OPERATION BY ALLIED FORCES IN NEW GUINEA**

2. ON 1<sup>ST</sup> JULY A MIXED NGVR AND INDEPENDENT COY ATTACK WAS CARRIED OUT ON HEATH'S PLANTATION IN THE MARKHAM VALLEY. THIS WAS PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL IN THAT A NUMBER OF JAPANESE WERE KILLED BUT DOGS HAD ALERTED THE JAPANESE AND THE

COMMANDER OF THE ATTACKING FORCE MAJ. KNEEN WAS KILLED. IN THE CONFUSION RESULTING FROM HIS DEATH THE ATTACK WAS CALLED OFF AND THE ATTACKERS WITHDREW.

### **WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THESE ATTACKS?**

THE JAPANESE ATTACKED MUBO AND WERE REPULSED WITH A LOSS OF A NUMBER OF MEN. NGVR HAD SITED THEIR VICKERS MACHINE GUNS TO COVER THE APPROACHES AND HAD ALSO SET OUT DISTANCE MARKERS ON THE AIRSTRIP OVER WHICH THE JAPANESE HAD TO CROSS AND THEY WERE CAUGHT IN A HAIL OF CROSS FIRE AND FORCED TO WITHDRAW.

THE JAPANESE ALSO INCREASED THEIR PATROLS INTO THE MARKHAM AND AREAS BEHIND SALAMAUA WITH PATROLS OF UP TO 100 MEN – TOO BIG FOR NGVR TO AMBUSH OR TAKE ON.

### **NGVR REACTION TO THIS**

WAS TO WITHDRAW TO THEIR PREPARED WATCHING POSTS, CONTINUE REPORTING WHAT INFORMATION THEY COULD TO PORT MORESBY, AND CONTINUE SMALL HARRASSING INCIDENTS MAKING SURE THE JAPANESE KNEW THEY WERE IN THE AREA, BUT HOPING TO CONVINCING THEM THAT THEY WERE IN MUCH GREATER FORCE THAN THEY ACTUALLY WERE.

### **THE REST OF 1942 WAS SPENT QUIETLY DOING JUST THAT –**

#### **1942 WAS NGVR'S YEAR.**

TOWARDS THE END OF 1942 NGVR SOLDIERS WERE EXHAUSTED. OVERALL NGVR REMAINED IN GOOD SPIRITS, BUT THE DEPRIVATION OF CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS IN HOSTILE TERRAIN WITHOUT ADEQUATE SUPPLIES AND MEDICATION WAS TAKING ITS TOLL, WITH MANY FALLING SICK WITH FEVER AND OTHER TROPICAL DISEASES.

THE NUMBER OF MEN FIT FOR OPERATIONS WAS RAPIDLY DWINDLING . NGVR WAS RELIANT ON LOCAL FOOD SUPPLIES AND COULD NOT MOUNT OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS – THEY JUST KEPT ON LETTING THE JAPANESE KNOW THEY WERE IN THE AREA AND ACTIVE.

IN MANY CASES THEIR LIVES WERE LONELY ONES – SGT CARLO CAVALIERI (NGVR) WAS CARRYING OUT SURVEILLANCE DUTIES NEAR ONGA VILLAGE IN THE UPPER MARKHAM AREA WITH ONLY AN AUSTRALIAN SGT SIGNALLER AND SOME NATIVE POLICE BOIS WHEN HE RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM A LOCAL VILLAGER THAT “THE JAPANESE KNEW WHERE HE WAS AND WOULD COME UP AND KILL HIM WHEN THEY WERE READY”.

AS IT HAPPENED WO2 HARRY LUMB (NGVR) WAS KILLED NEAR THERE SOME MONTHS LATER. WO2 AUGUST FREUND (ALSO NGVR) WHO PASSED THROUGH THE CAMP WROTE IN HIS BOOK “THE CAMPING CONDITIONS OF CAVALIERI AND HIS MATE WERE EXCEEDINGLY ROUGH. THE HUTS WERE SKIMPY AND POORLY ENCLOSED. THERE WERE NO TABLES AND CHAIRS, AND EVEN SHELVES ON WHICH COOKING AND EATING UTENSILS AND FOOD COULD BE PUT WHEN EATING WERE MINIMAL.”

SGT JIM HUXLEY SPENT HIS 21<sup>ST</sup> BIRTHDAY AT BAROLA NATIVE HOSPITAL, NEAR KAINANTU, WHERE HE WAS THE ONLY EUROPEAN AND HAD 6 ‘DOCTA BOIS’ WITH HIM. HE HAD A WARM BOTTLE OF BEER WITH HIS DINNER – HAVING CAREFULLY HOARDED THE BEER FOR THAT OCCASION.

### **DISBANDMENT OF NGVR**

BY 1943 THERE WERE TOO FEW FIT MEN TO BE AN EFFECTIVE FORCE SO NGVR WAS OFFICIALLY DISBANDED – ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF MEN'S SERVICE RECORDS SHOW THEY WERE OFFICIALLY IN NGVR WHEN DISCHARGED IN 1945/46.

MANY NGVR MEN WERE DISCHARGED UNFIT FOR DUTY AFTER SPENDING MONTHS IN HOSPITAL IN AUSTRALIA, AND THOSE STILL FIT WERE TRANSFERRED INTO A VARIETY OF OTHER UNITS AND DUTIES – MOST WENT INTO ANGAU (AUSTRALIAN NEW GUINEA ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT) WITH A VARIETY OF DUTIES SUITED TO THEIR PARTICULAR SKILLS:-

- EITHER IN CHARGE OF CARRIER LINES TAKING FORWARD SUPPLIES AND AMMUNITION AND BRINGING WOUNDED BACK. (SGT TOM KEENAN) OR UNLOADING SHIPPING ETC. (SGT HENRY McCAULEY)

-A NUMBER WERE ATTACHED TO AMERICAN UNITS TO PROVIDE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN DEALING WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION. (SGT) NEVILLE SWANSON ATTACHED TO THE US MARINES.

-ACCOMPANYING AMERICAN BISCUIT BOMBER AIRCRAFT DROPPING SUPPLIES (SGT HAROLD OSBORNE).

-OTHERS WITH DIFFERENT SKILLS WENT INTO SIGNALS (SGT ALAN DUNWOODIE) ,

MEDICAL UNITS (SGT JIM HUXLEY)

OR WORKED IN AUSTRALIA WHERE THEIR ENGINEERING AND MECHANICAL SKILLS WERE USED IN BASE UNITS (SGTS BILL PETERS AND ABE SHEATH).

-A FEW WERE IN DEMAND ON UNIT HEADQUARTERS WHEN MAJOR ADVANCES OR ATTACKS WERE BEING PLANNED SO THAT THEY COULD PROVIDE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE AREA (SGT STAN BURTON)

-OTHERS WERE GIVEN MORE AGGRESSIVE ROLES CARRYING OUT PATROLS INTO JAPANESE TERRITORY (LT TOM LEGA, MM. AND LT JIM BIRRELL, MC.)

**VERY FEW PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA HAD EVER HEARD OF NGVR OR WHAT IT MEMBERS HAD ACHIEVED IN ITS SHORT BUT HIGHLY EFFECTIVE HISTORY, BUT ITS MEMBERS WERE STRONG INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD GONE TO NEW GUINEA TO WORK BUT WHEN FACED WITH THE JAPANESE THREAT DID NOT SHRINK FROM THE TASK AHEAD OF THEM.**

**IN CONCLUSION NGVR WAS A UNIQUE AUSTRALIAN UNIT COMPOSED OF MEN WHO DID A REMARKABLE JOB UNDER EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND ARDUOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.**