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Catholic Mission,  
Hanahan,  
Buka Passage,  
Territory of New Guinea,  
29 June, 1947

Dear Mrs. Bailey,

Your letter of the 6th of June arrived a few days ago. I was most pleased to receive that letter for it gives me the occasion to fulfill a long delayed duty. I am the Missionary who last saw your son John in the Navy Prison Camp of Rabaul. I regret deeply that I did not write to you before. Upon my liberation from Rabaul in September 1945, I was forced to go to Sydney for a rest and there got in contact with the families of 42 American Airmen who had been in the camp with me, I did the same for three Australians. There was the case of four other men whose addresses I had lost. All that remained was a scrap of paper with:

J. Bailey  
Geoffry Vincent  
..... Vincent

However I remembered that John Bailey was from Perth, a Catholic and had made his studies with the Brothers. Through them I should have been able to contact you. But poor health, a burden of work and letter-writing forced me to cut down in my activities. I always wanted to write to the Brothers' College at Perth, but before I could manage it the call came for my return to the Mission Field. Tonight I am happy to write the little that I know of the last days of John in Rabaul.

I was captured with an American Brother here in Buka (an American myself) and kept prisoner here for a year.



In August 1943, I was brought to Rabaul with the Brother. We remained there for five months before being brought to the Catholic Mission at Vunapope near Rabaul. It was during those five months that I met so many American and Australian Airmen. However we civilians were not allowed to communicate with the Military prisoners. Our conversations were always short and generally interrupted. So you cannot expect too much to be remembered. John and the other three were in good health when they were brought to the camp; they had not suffered any injury. And I am positive that they did not suffer any torture in the camp. The radio man (one of the two Vincents, I believe) was beaten very badly one day in Rabaul when he refused to reveal the code. After the questioning of the first few days they were not at all molested.

As for sickness, I remember that some of them had slight touches of malaria, but these were easily cured with quinine that we obtained from Indian prisoners. The food of course was very poor and scarce. We were allowed  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb of rice a day. We got more when we managed to steal it, or do some odd job for some officer. Hunger was the greatest suffering at that time. Of course we were subject to very heavy bombing at that time from the American Fifth Air Force from Port Moresby and some Task Fleet operating near Rabaul. Fortunately we never had a bomb inside of our wire enclosure.

In my notes here, written from memory in 1945, I have the name of the ten Americans but not of the two Australians who were taken out together on the 25th of November 1943. However I am positive that the two Australians were of the group of John for they were the only Australians in the camp



at the time. I am also positive of the date for I still have it written in my Breviary for that day.

John did not leave any message. Do not take this as indifference or neglect. The removal of the 12 Airmen was very sudden and most of us were working out of the camp at the time. There were only two or three of the civilians and it was impossible to get near to them. And remember that we all believed that we would all live together or all perish together. It is beyond explanation how I thought of getting the names of the Airmen. Kept them written in my Breviaries.

One day when I had the occasion to speak with John for a couple of minutes he told me that he was from Perth and that he had studied at the Brothers' College. That statement always remained present in my memory.

There is one incident that you will be pleased to know.

In the camp I always did the one possible thing for the Airmen: absolution. It was not possible to hear the confessions, we were too closely guarded. The day after John and his group came into our camp, one of the Catholic Americans told me that John was a Catholic. "Tell him to prepare, make his contrition and I will give him absolution the next time that I walk by his window." Half an hour later I was near the water tank when John came to fill his bottle with fresh water: "What about absolution, Father? I went to confession three days ago but another absolution will not hurt." He received it with all my heart. That's the least that I could do.

From the photograph that you sent me I recognise him very well. I could not say so much of many other Airmen, but



I could recognize practically all the Catholics who passed through the camp.

It is unfortunate that the other civilians did not survive. I took information of the Americans and the twelve Australian civilians took information of the Australians.-- The rest of the story is sad. On the 29th of January 1944, Brother Joseph Redman, S.M. and myself were transferred to the Mission Camp at Vunapope. On the 11th of February, he was killed by an American bomb. The other twelve civilians were not to be found after the surrender in 1945. It seems that they disappeared in February 1944. So I remain the sole civilian survivor of that Prison camp.

I do not know what the Australian Intelligence Service and the War Crime Commission think of the prisoners who were with me, but we in the camp at the time thought that the different groups taken out were taken to ships and brought to the Phillipines or Japan. There was no indication that they were executed. The American Officers that I met in Australia thought that the men had been put on ships and that the ships had been sunk.

I sincerely hope that these small bits of information will prove a consolation to you. I wish I could give you more. In return I ask you to say a few prayers for me and my difficult mission of 2,200 souls. I hope that soon I will be relieved and allowed a much needed rest at home. My heartfelt sympathies to you upon the loss of such a fine man as John. My sympathies also to John's wife and children. Yours very sincerely  
in J.M.J. - Joseph Lamarre. S.M.