

RESEARCH MISSING PERSONNEL - NEW BRITAIN

1. This report covers the period as from 19th June, 1950, date of arrival at Rabaul, to 21st July, 1950, date of departure for Australia, during which time searches for missing personnel were carried out in the Matupi area and Rabaul district, in conjunction with the R.A.A.F. Searcher Party.

2. The area first searched and finalized was Kokopo where the original Indian burial ground was located. An area covering 100 yds. by 20 yds. was intensively searched, and a further eleven bodies were found making a total of twelve recovered from this area. Individual identification of bodies recovered was not possible. The remains found in this locality were reburied in the Rabaul (Bita Paka) War Cemetery.

Plot P.D.2. to P.D.13.

3. Search operations in the Matupi area resulted in the recovery of the remains of fifteen (15) R.A.A.F. personnel, twelve (12) United States personnel, and one (1) or more civilians. Of the remains recovered, thirteen (13) R.A.A.F. and three (3) United States personnel have been individually identified as follows :-

R.A.A.F.

(1) -	407006.	F/O.	NORMAN, A.L.
(2) -	407708.	F/O.	DIERCKS, F.A.D.
(3) -	403118.	F/O.	ANDERSON, F.O'C.
(4) -	6853.	Cpl.	LANAGAN, A.H.
(5) -	118005.	Cpl.	HOCKING, A.R.
(6) -	19574.	LAC.	BURNS, J.J.
(7) -	17635.	"	HARDWICK, V.H.
(8) -	20343.	"	PARKER, W.M.
(9) -	10253.	"	MCDONALD, E.J.
(10) -	4240.	W/O.	BAILEY, J.P.
(11) -	400866.	F/L.	VINCENT, G.H.
(12) -	400662.	F/O.	O'LOUGHLIN, R.B.
(13) -	401489.	Sgt.	BROWN, D.S.

UNITED STATES.

(1) -	Phillip L. BEK.	U.S.A.A.F.
(2) -	Paul Monroe MANNON.	U.S.N.R. T5/42 660-32-07.
(3) -	Philip K. PHILLIS.	U.S.N.R. T.42 251356.

The remainder, two (2) R.A.A.F., nine (9) United States personnel, and one (1) or more civilians have not as yet been individually identified.

4. Search operations resulting in the recovery of these twenty-eight (28) or more remains have conclusively proved in every instance that death was due to decapitation.

5. The only reliable information with regard to these executions emanated from Japanese sources as recently as September, 1949. Two natives, Toninuea and Toman, who subsequently were employed by the Searcher Party during the search operations, did actually witness an execution unbeknown to the Japanese. These two natives were responsible for the finding of twenty-four (24) bodies by the Australian Army War Graves Service in 1946.

6. The area searched covered approximately twelve (12) acres at the foot of the Matupi crater, map reference Praed Point Series S411-E 15210/5. The area was very heavily covered by tall Kunai grass.



7. Prison labour was obtained for clearing and burning off the Kunai. The area, when cleared, did not show any signs that executions had taken place. It was subsequently learnt however, that the Japanese had levelled the area, presumably to cover all traces of executions or burials.

8. As the area was so large, the only method which could be adopted for searching was to cut it up into sections and thoroughly work each one. Each section was carefully probed by thin iron rods, and excavations were made wherever the iron rods sank easily into the sub-soil. Many hundreds of holes were sunk, and wherever the ground showed signs of having been disturbed, the ground was excavated to a depth of seven feet and in many instances deeper. The whole area was investigated by this method, which although slow, was the only possible way of obtaining results.

9. The following are the particulars of each location where remains were found. In each and every case dental status has been chartered by Squadron Leader Rundle and remitted to R.A.A.F. Headquarters. These of course include dental charting of all United States personnel.

(a)

LOCATION NO.1.

A trench 17 feet long, 6 feet wide and 7 feet deep was dug at this site, resulting in the recovery of four(4) complete remains. These four remains refer to:-

W/O J.P. BAILEY (RAAF)  
PHILIP L.BEK (USAAF)  
and  
two (2) unidentified American airmen.

In the case of Bailey and Bek, identity was established by means of identity discs found amongst the remains. The dental status of W/O Bailey was checked and confirmed against dental records. The remaining two American airmen have not, as yet, been individually identified. However, clothing found in the grave indicated beyond doubt that they were in fact members of the USAAF.

The cause of death in respect of these four members was by decapitation, and it is obvious that prior to their execution each member's legs and arms had been tied with wire and were so tied when recovered. It has not been possible to estimate the date of death, but from the general state of clothing, and footwear it would appear that they were executed shortly after capture, possibly early 1944.

(b)

LOCATION NO.2.

At this scene a trench 30 feet long 7 feet wide and 6 feet deep was dug from which the complete remains of eleven(11) RAAF members were recovered. These remains include the complete crew of RAAF Catalina A24-18, shot down in the Coral Sea battle on 9th May, 1942, the pilot of RAAF Kittyhawk A29-38, shot down at Salamaua on 11th April, 1942, and one(1) as yet unidentified RAAF member. These personnel are listed as follows :-

F/O A.L. NORMAN.  
F/O F.A.D. DIERCKS.  
F/O F.O'C. ANDERSON.  
CPL. A.H. LANAGAN.  
CPL. A.R. HOCKING.  
LAC. J.J. BURNS.  
LAC. W.M. PARKER.  
LAC. V.H. HARDWICK.  
LAC. E.J. McDONALD.  
SGT. D.S. BROWN.

and  
One(1) Unidentified RAAF.



In the case of Norman, Anderson, Hocking, Lanagan, Burns and Parker, identity was established by identity discs found amongst the remains. Identity of Brown Diercks, Hardwick and McDonald was established by comparing the dental status of the remains against individual dental records.

The cause of death in respect of these eleven (11) deceased members was by decapitation. As in Location No.1. these members had been tied with wire and showed evidence of having been blindfolded. At least two had been severely wounded, as thickly padded leg bandages were recovered. Some showed signs of severe bashings as indicated by broken costae. The presence of eating utensils, water bottles and other personal items such as tooth brushes found amongst the remains indicated that this atrocity was premeditated. It has not been possible to estimate the date of this execution, but taking into consideration the general condition of the articles found in the grave, it would appear that they had, in fact, been captives for at least six to nine months. It is assumed, therefore, that the date of death would possibly be during early 1943.

(c)

LOCATION NO.3.

At this location a trench 27 feet long, 8 feet wide and 7 feet deep was dug, revealing evidence of sordid and brutal execution of eleven(11) RAAF and American personnel. The eleven complete remains recovered refer to :

F/Lt. G.H.	VINCENT.
F/O. R.B.	O'LOGHLEN.
Ensign Paul Monroe	MANNON.
Philip K.	PHILLIS.
One (1) Unidentified RAAF	
Five(5) Unidentified Americans	
and	
One(1) American USNR- Believed.	
John S.	RYDER.

In the case of Vincent, Mannon and Phillis identity was established by identity discs found amongst the remains. The identity of O'Loughlen was established by comparing the dental status of the remains recovered against dental records held. Of the remaining seven(7), the presence of one badly corroded identity disc, thought to be that of John S. Ryder tentatively established the identity of that member. Clothing, together with an RAAF service type belt buckle indicated the presence of one further RAAF member, and other personal items recovered, together with further clothing, indicated that the five remaining members were, in fact Americans.

The cause of death in respect of these eleven(11) members was decapitation and bayonetting. Despite every effort to obtain individual skeletal remains, the atrocity was such that the greatest difficulty was experienced in associating any particular head with the correct body. It appeared evident that these members, after being executed were either rolled or thrown into this mass grave. Three heads were found together on one side of the grave and their bodies were stacked on the other side. It is not proposed to elaborate in this regard, but it is now felt that individual reconstruction in respect of these three members has been achieved. Due to the absence of American records, it has not been at this stage practicable to establish individual identities of the unidentified members. American type clothing, partial remains of tropical type flying suits (jungle green) and American service type belt buckles would indicate that these members were Americans, with the exception of the one whose remains were associated with the RAAF service type belt buckle. This latter member appears to be a member of the RAAF.



(d)

LOCATION NO.4.

At this site a grave seven feet deep was dug revealing the complete skeletal remains of :-

One (1) Unidentified American airman.

Identity was not established with regard to this member, as identity discs were not recovered, despite intense searches.

The cause of death was by bayonetting through the back. This was a lone execution, as the area in the vicinity of this grave was probed with negative results. In this particular instance, the only possible remains of identification was by the existence of partial remains of a jungle green zippered flying suit.

(e)

LOCATION NO.5.

A grave eight feet long, seven feet deep and eight feet wide was dug at this site, revealing the remains of :-

One (1) Unidentified person believed civilian.

Identification was not obtained but clothing etc., found in the grave indicated that the remains were those of a civilian.

The cause of death of this unknown person was by shooting through the head. This person's hair was of a sandy reddish colour. The remains were those of a person of approximately 14-15 stone and possibly six feet tall. General enquiries from civilians in Rabaul who were residents pre war give rise to the opinion that this person may be identical with Mr. J. Beaumont, a civilian who, it is understood, was captured and kept in Rabaul by the Japanese.

(f)

LOCATION NO.6.

The site of this location was a bomb crater approximately forty feet from Location No.1. From this site the partial remains of one or more persons, probably civilians, were recovered. The identity of these one or more is unknown.

The cause of death of these one or more unknown persons is unknown. The site of Location No.6 is a bomb crater seventeen feet in diameter and was, no doubt, the site of a former mass grave. The mass grave had, unfortunately been destroyed and the remains disseminated by a bomb. Although the whole area was excavated, only partial remains were recovered. These partial remains, together with personal items recovered would tend to indicate the mass grave of civilians. This assumption is based on the fact that spectacle lens and shoes found were of non service type.

10. Matupi area has now been completely searched and it is considered unlikely that any further remains of service or civilian personnel will be recovered. These searches have proved that apart from being a burial ground for Japanese dead, Matupi was the area selected by the Japanese to carry out mass execution of Allied personnel. These and other searches have proved that at least six mass executions were carried out there involving at least fifty (50) Allied personnel.



11. It is desired to record for official purposes that during the entire searches at Matupi, no information was disclosed that could in any way be associated with the sinking of the "MONTE VIDEO MARU". This statement is made to allay any possible anxiety of the next-of-kin of members who were reported to have lost their lives as the result of the sinking of that ship.

12. In addition to those found at Matupi, the bodies of two(2) RAAF personnel were found buried just inside the old civil cemetery at Rabaul. These two members were BROMLEY and WALSH who were shot down about a week prior to the Japanese landing in 1942, and whose graves in spite of intensive search and investigation, could not be found by the Australian War Graves Service during the period 1945-46.

13. Information given by a half-caste, Rudolph Buckley, to the effect that, between January, 1942, and February, 1943, about thirty(30) service personnel were executed in the new portion of the Rabaul cemetery and buried in individual shallow graves, was, of such a positive character that excavations in this area were undertaken. Although numerous holes were dug, some of which were six feet deep, nothing was found. Information received from other sources led to areas which had already been investigated and cleared by the A.W.G.S. during the period 1945-6.

14. It now seems that any further investigations and searches for Army personnel would be a long and costly matter, and would yield very little results if any. The main places where fighting took place in 1942, viz., at Vulcan, and at the place behind Vulcan where the land forces made their last stand, were thoroughly searched by the A.W.G.S. during 1945-6. Thence the trail of the retreating forces was followed until it ended abruptly in the massacre at Tol from which place one hundred and fifty-five(155) bodies were recovered. There are approximately one hundred and eighty(180) bodies still to be found, but these are scattered in such a large area and information about them even in 1945-6 was of such a vague nature, that, as above, it would be impracticable to make any further searches. Sgt. Henderson is being left in the area for a further month or six weeks to deal with any further information.

15. In conclusion I would like to place on record the appreciation of the Searcher Party for the co-operation and valuable assistance given by the District Officer, Mr. J.K. McCarthy, Senior Inspector, C. Normoyle, the Returned Soldiers' League and civilians in general, without whose help the investigations would not have been possible.

(Sgd) R.A. HOUGHTON, Lt-Col.,  
Imperial War Graves Commission.