David’s Navy

Part 5 Jan 46 to Mar 27 HMAS *Ararat*

Date 26-1-46

Arrive on *Ararat*

 Well, I have now unpacked my gear on the “Ararat” – which means I have arrived safely on board! I am sure I should have a good time here – even if it is busy. Apparently there is not much spare time with the 20th M/S – but it is much better that way than the other.

 I have been made Gunnery Officer (something I hadn’t expected), Divisional Officer for seamen & Mess-deck Officer; so say good-bye to any newsy letters until I’m well settled in.

 As Gordon probably told you I was lucky enough for a sleeper + services - & what services! A cup of tea & paper in the morning & also the best wishes of the Vict. Railways printed on a cellophane (?) wrapper!

 Arrived in Melbourne on time into a sweltering day. I rang up “Lonsdale”, went down to see them & got another three days leave as she, “Ararat” was not in. So out I went to Cowden’s where I stayed until I reported at 9 am. Monday morning. Of course I was able to bring up-to-the minute news of Bill, & everyone was thrilled. I stayed at home Frid. & Sat. & went down to see Alan Fealy (who I met at Macdonald’s) on Sunday afternoon.

 Had reported to the ship by 10 am. Monday & what should be happening but an inspection of the 20th by the Gov.-General of Vict. So out we went & fell in, where I almost wrenched the Gov’s hand off; expect he had just about had it by the time he reached us.

 After lunch started unpacking but was taken off to visit some of the other corvettes. There are 9 corvettes & a sloop in the flotilla. We will not be going around to S. Aus. as I expected until a month or more – believe we are going down to Hobart in the meantime; so not too bad!

 On the Monday night there was a party on board for the C.O. – who had got his extra half stripe. He seems a very nice chap, but apparently very strict. Once again it is better that way.

 Today I have been pretty busy taking over & tomorrow we will be leaving again for 10 days.

 Thanks for your letter Mum, which I received tonight. It was O.K. about the jumper – I haven’t needed it at all. Trust Bill had a good weekend. Yes, that compact must be very nice, from what I hear of it this end. No Mum, I still haven’t got a cabin, but I use the ‘jimmy’s’ & sleep in the wardroom – so that’s not too bad.

 Thanks for sending on Mrs. Mac’s letter, Mum. Well I think that’s about it for now so cheerio – hope Gordon likes his new boarding house.

Date 5-2-46

My new jobs & routine

 I don’t think I’ve ever felt so tired before so this is going to be as you suggested Mum – only a few lines.

 Since last letter we finished off the field down off Cape Otway in three days instead of the expected ten. So imagine we were steaming. Of course half the ten days was allowed for bad weather which we were lucky enough to miss. Never-the-less I was going for 16, sometimes more, hours a day, & after a month’s leave it is a little tiring. Being new on board, the skipper had me doing everything; I would come off watch at 8 am & maybe get 10 mins. for breakfast & back to the bridge or where ever he wanted me. He has got the right idea – to learn quickly is by experience – so I did! Still I actually enjoyed myself, even though tired, because I hadn’t been to sea for 3 months & this work (dan-laying – will explain it all in a later letter) is all new to me.

 On the top of it, he (the ‘old man’) has got me to keep a Midshipman’s Journal (a record of all you do & experience etc) – I have been sitting up tonight getting it up to date as it has to be examined tomorrow.

 Also I have been taking over this Gunnery Dep’t with its thousands of ledgers & forms I have never ever heard of, so I have just forgotten about time.

 We arrived back in Melbourne Sunday night – you couldn’t guess what I did – just crashed heavily & died until next morning! Monday I was over on the next ship, “Cowra”, with the Gunnery type trying to track up some system in the game. Unfortunately there has been no-one on here to hand over to me, as the last bloke went to hospital a few weeks back & I been digging up books & forms all over the ship. He certainly must have had system – what a . . . . . system! What a sad letter this must be – but I’m not as bad as I sound – you see work seem so strange to me!

 Back to the ship – actually it has been quite a good time & when things settle down it should be O.K. As you probably know there are 10 ships in the flotilla & we operate together – something again which is different to what I was used to.

 Well, today I have been duty-bloke & as here that means on deck the whole time; up with the hands & pacing around all day. These ships are really “pusser” to the “Strahan”. Always in correct rig – which seems to be ‘blues’ most of the time. I am certainly glad I brought some warm gear – I needed it even last trip. Got the jumper thanks Mum – nothing else yet except readdressed letter from Sydney. Also got a nice letter from Mrs. Mac.

 Tomorrow we leave again – this time for Hobart. Get there by the weekend and stay till Monday & then out; back again following weekend & then not too definite, except we are going on to Adelaide within a couple of months – probably see you both on your holidays – I wonder!

 We had some photos taken before we left for Otway & are now on board – quite good, will send them on. One of the ship, ship’s company & officers!

 Sorry to hear you weren’t too good Dad, last week, trust O.K. again now.

 Excuse scribble etc but it’s after 12 now & am still a little tired. What with the sea air & work it should make me fit anyway.

 Expect you are well settled in new boarding house Gordon – how do you like it without the animal kingdom below you?

 Here’s the best to you all, really must crash, cheerio for now

Date 24-2-46

Hobart & S.A.

 I hope you are having some wonderful weather & a good rest down at Victor. Very glad to hear Marg was on the mend & should be able to leave for her holidays. I must try & drop her a line while she’s away.

 There must be something wrong with the Whiteman family at present, as I have just had a couple of days in bed: a touch of flu! To make things difficult in the middle of it, I got 3 injections at once, which were quite a while overdue. Anyway I feel a little better today & the cold has now dropped to my chest, which is a good thing. Last night the ship’s company had a dance in the local R.S.L. rooms, so I had to put in an appearance. I got back to the ship about 10.30 after thoroughly enjoying the dance & forgetting all my woes.

 The latest buzz is as follows: we leave Hobart tomorrow morning & finish off the S-E coast, field, returning to Hobart on Monday to fuel, & on-to S.A. waters to sweep. Whether we will first call into the Port I don’t know, but rather doubt it. The main field over there is not far from Lincoln, at the bottom of the Bight. Guess you have a laugh at the way these buzzes change every letter – but that’s just what happens, actually it is not wise to bank on anything.

 Had a bit of bad luck this time. With a week in, I thought we could make a trip of two days somewhere. But no chance. We have had all the business, such as training a guard division from each ship. Whaler races – both sailing & rowing. This is O.K. for a couple of days, but a programme was drawn up for the whole week, & as the Skipper & John Lewis went away for three days at the end of the week it meant we were stuck for the weekend which was relatively free. The Jimmy, Tom & I were going up to the Lake District which I believe is very pretty.

 This morning John Lewis & I went to church at the Cathedral here, at 11 o’clock. It is one of the most beautiful churches I have seen – only small, but well worth seeing.

 Our other Sub arrived on board this week & has taken over Gunnery from me: I am now A/S C.O. i.e. Anti-Sub Control Officer. It’s a big name for quite a small job at present. The only thing big about it is the value of the gear which I’ve signed for!

 Yes Mum, the journal has been quite O.K. so far, shouldn’t have it much longer – I hope. All being well, should be able to put my stripe up on arrival in Adelaide.

 Do hope all parties have a very good holiday & rest & are now all feeling 100%

Date 13-3-46

In Tassie

 We have just anchored in a bay (North West Bay) near the entrance of the Derwent Estuary. We have been here for two days sheltering from the weather & I have returned after completing a small field (7 x 7 miles) today.

 Tomorrow we get under-way at 0615 & are off to sweep another field down near the S-E corner, this time 24 x 18 miles, so should take a bit longer, especially if we don’t get a run of good weather. On the completion of this we are returning to Hobart to have a boiler-clean which will mean about 7 days there. We were going to have this in Adelaide but not quite so lucky. After that we’ve got two more fields to do here in Tassie before going to S. Aus., so it doesn’t appear as if we will make it while you are on holidays. I also thought we would be in Vic. While Marg. D. was there, but that’s no longer the case.

 It was about a two-day trip from Melbourne to Hobart & this time we came down the East Coast of Tas. We had good weather almost all the way & arrived Friday afternoon. I didn’t get off till after supper, & went ashore with Tom E. We had a look around & then went to a dance at a place called Wrest Point, but it’s far from a resting place. I was very surprised at the sight of Hobart – I was expecting a much bigger place: I doubt whether it’s as big as Ballarat – never-the-less it is very pretty round about; farms within two miles of the city.

 Sat. I was duty & on Sunday morning after Divisions (prayers) Tom, John Lewis (a S. Aussie) & I changed into civvies & caught a ferry across the river to the Royal Hobart Golf Course & spent a very pleasant day: we didn’t get past the 5th hole because it rained & we had to dash back to an old “convict-built” barn (as we were explained by a ‘local’). We lost a ball each, before getting to the first green – but we had tons of fun. Were back on board for supper & after a shower went to bed early.

 When we woke on Monday morning it was really cold & starting to rain & by the time we slipped at 1100 it was really blowing. We were still in the harbour at 1130 & Mt Wellington was covered with snow about 1/3 of the way down. We didn’t get any snow at all in the bay – but it’s the first time I’ve seen any snow fall: be blown, I should say. As I said before, we didn’t go far; got inti a sheltered bay & stayed there for two days.

 On the Tuesday afternoon, four of us with three officers from the “Cowra” went ashore & had a chop picnic. There is some beautiful country there – just about have to cut your way through the fern & bush. Naturally it rained & I got wet through & as I had a pair of large sea boots on – I got blisters on my feet, & then on the return trip got my trousers & sox ripped to bits in the shaft of the motor boat. But even so we had an extra time! Grilled chops & steaks on toast – beautiful!

 Well today is Gordon’s birthday – I expected to be back in Hobart & send him a telegram – now I realise I haven’t his address, let alone being back in civilisation to send it & I don’t know when we will be back. So please forward my best wishes to him Mum & I’m sorry it’s not on time.

 By the time this arrives, expect you will be on your holidays Dad, do hope you & Mum have a great time. Latest information seems to suggest we will be much longer down here than anticipated – still one never knows quite what’s going to happen with this Flotilla, next.

 Well there’s no letters to answer as haven’t had any mail since in Melbourne – maybe next time in. Hope everyone is well – I’m feeling fine but still tired.

Date 5-5-46

In Sydney

 Well, still haven’t had any more definite time for leave; the first batch have gone but when they get back depends entirely on troop trains. Still I am pretty sure to be home for some time – even if only for a few days.

 I have certainly got my hands full these days: I am the only executive officer left on board – the jimmy & the other two subs went on the first leave, leaving the C.O., Engineer & myself. So I have had to arrange all leave, pay, storing, etc - & take over all jobs for the period – anyway it is good experience.

 Last Wed we shifted from the buoy to No 2, Woolongong which is very handy as we are close to Garden Is. & the city. We were tied up astern of the “Implacable” & so witnessed the big send-off. It certainly was worth seeing: streamers, bands playing, etc.

 I went out to see the Macs last week & they seemed very pleased to see me – Neal was also home – 21 days leave. The Skipper looked out for me that night; so I have had a couple of evenings off. Even so I haven’t had a night aboard on my own. Chief (the Engineer) or the Skipper had brought someone down. If everything goes O.K. it now looks as if I should be leaving Sydney about 14th & to return by 25th ; we are sailing on the 27th for the Islands – ‘a winter cruise through the South Sea Islands’ – sounds pretty good doesn’t it?

 So Eric has got onto the “Bataan” – much better than a training corvette – should go places if he stays on it for any time.

 On Sunday afternoon the Skipper & I went out to some of his friends & played tennis (Chief looked after the ship – hardly correct, but a good idea). We stayed for supper & had quite a happy time.

 Hope you are not finding life too strenuous on your return to the office, Marg – I guess A.K.P. welcomed you back with open arms – full of work! Have had quite a bit of trouble with laundry here. Still haven’t got it & am wearing the Skipper’s shirts, & chief’s cap covers, hanks etc!

 Am afraid this is just the few lines, Mum, but hope to see you all in the very near future,

Date 27-5-46

Back from Leave

 Well, I arrived here safely after a good trip from Adelaide to Melbourne, then only 3 hours there & on by trooper at midday. Fixed up for those shoulder straps to be sent on Mum – any time after a fortnight. Couldn’t get in touch with the Cowden family, tried quite a few times.

 Expect by now ‘everything’ is official & general knowledge, Marg – I would certainly have liked to have been there. I hope the announcement reached the “Age” in time.

 The trip in the troop train was much better than usual, except we had 123 Jap war criminals aboard. Since arrival in Sydney have been very busy – Navy always leaves everything to the last minute. We have shifted ship twice since Sat. & have been delayed by breakages during storing. The rest of the 20th left this afternoon. We may go tomorrow or even later but I will be glad to get to sea again for a while.

 I am duty at present & have just found out that Ron Nelson is still on the “Aussie”, which is astern of us, so have asked him to come and see me.

 This is only the 6 lines Mum, but at least they are on the way. Don’t expect the family has settled down properly yet, anyway, cheerio for now to all,

Date 2-6-46

Sub/Lt D.A. Whiteman!

To Townsville

 I am writing this sitting out on the quarterdeck. It is Sunday afternoon & a perfect a day as you could wish for. We have been in shorts & sandals for the last two days & the sun is getting hotter each day (the pen is not working too well). At present we are going through Whitsunday Passage & the Islands are only 500 yards away on both sides. This is what a chap joins up for!

 Well we are due in Townsville tomorrow morning at 0600 & will probably leave on Tuesday morning & I think may be going to Port Moresby first.

 Latest information is that we will be coming back to Sydney to refit on November 12th , not Sept. as I told you. Anyway that will be 2 months there, at least, so probably be home for Xmas unless unlucky & have to spend it on board like last year. Also you should be able to arrange that wedding to suit me now Marg – but don’t put it off on my account!! Well expect you are quite used to that ring by now & also all the congratulating, or whatever you like to call it, that goes with it.

 We didn’t leave Sydney as expected on the Monday because of loading & then when the ‘dockies’ broke a dozen batteries we were delayed until Wed. Still we have been able to come up on our own which is much better than with the flotilla.

 I received your letter on the Tues. Mum. Unfortunately I was duty most of the time on return to Sydney so didn’t get away at all. On the Sat. night we had a Chanlayer’s(?) farewell so I didn’t go to “Momo’s” party. By the way Marg will you get that film for me & send it on please. Marg D. is also getting some so I told her to give any films to you to send on – I knew you wouldn’t mind (127).

 I haven’t forgotten the coupons Mum, you will find them in this letter, I hope. I have been told by the Skipper, who went to Navy office while in Melbourne, that I won’t be out until Dec. - 12 months! That is such a long time I don’t know whether to believe him or not. I’ll probably be about the only “rocky” officer in at the time if it is correct.

 I will have to do my own dhobying now, unfortunately, & must get on with that this afternoon. Will be able to post this in Townsville but don’t know when the next lot of letters will arrive Mum, anyway I think I’ve started off a little better this time, so will continue.

Date 13-06-1946

 Well, we arrived here yesterday & I received two letters from you Mum. We had an excellent trip up all the way from Sydney; the only patch we rolled about in was the Coral Sea, which took about 3 days.

 After leaving Townsville we crossed the Coral Sea & the first island we sighted off N.G. was Brumer Is. We anchored there for 1 night & the following day, to rest the two small ships which travelled with us. As we weren’t allowed ashore, five of us spent the afternoon in the motorboat investigating right along the coastline & native villages, & at the same time trying to fish. Needless to say, the only one we ‘caught’ was from a native who came alongside us – for a couple of cigarettes & the old meat we were using for bait!

 Brumer Is. is right at the southern tip N.G. & from here we went through China Straits (which divides the mainland from the islands & is quite narrow) but was very interesting. From here we went Eastward to clear the reefs & islands, & so straight up north to New Britain & into Rabaul.

 The first job was to oil & so we finally anchored about 1700. Tom & I went ashore that night to the pictures. This is a mobile unit & everyone brings their own chairs, so, as we arrived late we had to stand at the back with the natives. Anyway we finished up sitting on a heap of old car springs we found & thoroughly enjoyed the programme.

 This morning the Skipper, Chief & I went ashore about 1000 to have a general survey of the place. It is a very pretty place – a big harbour with the mountains coming almost to the water’s edge. It is circular except for the volcano which rose out of the sea & erupted in 1936. This is a terrific size & is now joined to the mainland, the whole thing now being covered with thick undergrowth. There is another volcano on the other side of the harbour which is still active, sending sulphur fumes & smoke over the harbour. When I say smoking, I mean a few puffs now & then. The harbour is literally filled with wrecked shipping – 234 is the official no. & I should say there is all of that. Almost every part of the beach around the whole harbour has some wrecks on it, merchant ships, naval & even subs.

 To carry on with this morning – after walking along a road for a short distance we were picked up by an Army Lt. in a jeep. He proved to be very interesting & helpful & drove us all around one half of the town – or I should say, remains. – The town consists of Army rents, depots etc with the remains of native villages & Chinese & Malay quarters. There is wreckage every, a lot now almost overgrown with undergrowth.

 Thus type proved to be a Water Transport Officer & he arranged a boat for us to use during the afternoon. We brought him on board for lunch & left at 1330 on our trip. We explored a number of wrecks including a Jap destroyer on which we had a hell of a lot of fun. We then went ashore & investigated a lot of caves dug by the Japanese for their landing craft & themselves to live in. Then we had a swim – it was beautiful - & carried on, only to go aground on a coral reef. We couldn’t move the boat & tried everything, until with all of us pushing in the water except the driver we got her free. It was a 20 minute job though. So eventually we returned on board after quite a great day. I took quite a few snaps which I hope were successful. Have you been able to get any yet Marg? – I hope so.

 The remainder of the flotilla are going out tomorrow to carry on the sweeping. Most of this area was cleared by 2 corvettes & 2 M.L.’s over the last couple of months, & so far have got 25 mines. After this is finished we go on to Bougainville. As we are an L.L. sweeper (magnetic mines) we are staying in here till the rest return on Monday.

 Am glad Mrs. Gillen appreciated those few things Mum, & trust your eyes are feeling better. This is about the issue for now, so ‘goodnight’ folks,

Date 23-06-46

At Rabaul

 We are now well into our second week here & are still a wonderful time. Although the rest of the flotilla has been out sweeping most of the time, we have only had two days out, as mine-destruction vessel. These have only been check sweeps around Rabaul.

 Tomorrow we are going on to Kavieng for a week, & return via Rabaul to Dreger Hbr. (N.G.). It should be very pleasant.

 I think I’ve learnt more about Rabaul in one week than most would in four. We have met quite a few Army types & each has taken us for drives & trips. Last Tuesday I must have covered 100 miles during the day – & in a staff car. Had lunch out at an army mess, waited on by natives. In the afternoon we visited the local mission, the new site for the capital of New Britain (Kokopo). & a huge Jap store depot, with tremendous amounts of gear & heavy machinery just lying around to rust.

 On the Wed. night, Tom & I went to a dance out at the AMWAS. mess & it was an excellent turn & a beautiful super. Thursday we were at sea returning Friday afternoon, after “Arventa” with Commander Collins had arrives. Went to the pictures ashore at night.

 Sat. afternoon was a big event here – a native ‘sing-sing’. Natives came from all directions &, in the headgear & with weapons, performed many dances. There was also a march past by the native police with their own band. It sounds as if I was there, but this is all second hand, as I unfortunately was on duty. Never-the-less the skipper took quite a few photos for me. (I will enclose an extract from Guinea Gold about the event).

 We had an interesting event here the other night – the closest thing to a mutiny I have seen. It was on the “Swan” but luckily all differences were settled the same night.

 Thanks very much for the photo Mum – I think it’s very good – about the best I’ve got of you. So trust your eyes are much better. I have received two letters from you Mum since being here. Apparently it was quite a hectic day for the holiday & spoilt by the weather. We were at sea for the great celebration. So you are having another few days in Adelaide – guess it certainly won’t hurt you Mum. Expect you had quite a full time Marg.

 So you got the only goal of the match, son – just a bit good I’d say! I played a game on Wed. afternoon & during the 2nd quarter it poured raining. We played on & finished the last quarter in at least 3” of water. It was the funniest game I’ve ever played.

 Well it is only short Mum, but it is on the way, so cheerio for now, am feeling great & certainly enjoying myself.

Date 3-07-46

Acting Sub/Lt. D.A. Whiteman

 Once again am writing this on deck – we are now on our way to Finschafen (NG) where we will be for 10 days, doing a boiler clean & taking on stores. We will be arriving tomorrow morning.

 Since the last letter we left Rabaul – on our own again as we stayed behind to collect the mail - & took 1 ½ days to Kavieng. This is at the northern tip of New Ireland. The first afternoon Tom, Graham (the other sub) & I went ashore. We landed in the Chinese quarter & then wandered into the Malay quarter, not knowing where we were going. There was nothing there except a dozen or so huts, & after walking what seemed miles finished up at the airstrip, & nothing there either except 30 odd wrecks. On returning we found the main part of Kavieng – a dozen huts where the 2 whites live; (out of ink again) these are Civil Administration people who have taken over. We were told this was the Jap’s main Naval base, south of the Equator – it didn’t look like it as we could see only 6 wrecks in the harbour!

 After making use of one of the Civil type’s huts to get a drink of water – we were waited on by his servants – of course we didn’t realise this until he came in and asked us quite ‘politely’ “if we were comfortable” – we wandered down through the native quarter & so returned, having seen all there was of Kavieng. The following afternoon I took the whaler out with 4 sailors & went for a sail right around three of the nearby islands. Had a wonderful time except in true tropical style the wind dropped around 4.30pm and we rowed half the way home, finishing up towed behind a motor boat.

 Sunday (the next day) we had a day off from work (??) so took the motor boat this time with a dozen or more ship’s co. & landed on a beautiful beach at the nearest island. It was perfect there – in a sheltered lagoon with a sandy bottom. We spent the morning swimming and fooling on the beach – heaving the caber (a thick bamboo), heaving the shot-put (a big coconut) and such things as long jumps etc. After each event we had a swim & then split a coconut, drank the milk, had a chew & carried on. How’s that for an enjoyable morning.

 On Monday morning the C.O. detailed the M.L. (motor launch) under our charge, to destroy a Jap mine sighted on one of the beaches. So I went with them to try my hand at demolition. The sub. off the M.L. and I went ashore & found it, & after a couple of charges, exploded it. It certainly made a mess of the area, but believe me, we made sure of getting a 10 minute fuse.

 We then came on to Rabaul, picked up mail for the flotilla & are now on the way to Kavieng.

 By the way Mum, have those shoulder straps for my great coat ever arrived. I paid for them & was told they would arrive in a couple of weeks. So let me know please & if not, I’ll write them a note.

 I received a letter from you on the way through Rabaul Mum, - can’t imagine all that cold & rain. I brought a nice coconut back on board, will try & post it on.

 Well, you can see life is naught but one big holiday - & I can take plenty of it – well, why not? I’ll now have to look over Finsch. From there we go back to Rabaul (what for, I don’t know) & on to Bougainville.

 I guess that’s it for now (have written to Cowdens & sent on some cig. papers) so cheerio, hope you all are tops,

Date 7-07-46

Sub/Lt. D.A. Whiteman

 It is certainly not very often I address my letter to you Dad; that only happens on special occasions. Well, this is a full 10 days before your birthday & so I want to wish you all the best & many happy returns, for the 17th . Hope you have a happy day & trust that this will reach home on time.

 The last letter from home was telling me that Sunday the 1st was a wet, wintery day. Well for the past two days here, it literally hasn’t stopped. I went to the pictures last night (Sat.) & wore and Army hat, shorts, & sandals; I certainly was drenched but that is much better that wearing an oilskin & complaining of the heat.

 This afternoon I went ashore for the first time at Finsch. It is a very big area & couldn’t hope to cover it on foot. As there are only a few Yanks left & we were the last ship in here, we haven’t got a jeep to our ship. Apparently it was a big Yank dump & camp. There are dozens of enormous sized sheds & of course the camp & living area is still left standing – everything in good nick, but just walked out of. They know how to make a camp into a small town – everything is laid out to perfection. Also, once again, there are great quantities of stores & material lying about. If a chap deserted & lived at one of these places, he would probably make a fortune. Naturally the Australians have checked everything over; there is no doubt the Aussies have got a name for being “rabbit” merchants (souveniring to the point of wrecking everything else). Still it might as well be done that way, as left to rot.

 We expect to finish our boiler-clean on Wed., when we will return to Rabaul to oil & carry on to Bougainville. There is a funny thing about oiling in Rabaul. There is a Jap tanker with her stern blown off, which was beached with her stern on the sand, how I don’t know. Instead of our tankers staying at anchor, they come in & pump their oil into the old Jap ship & then off they go again. Thus, we can then take our fuel from the beached Nip ship. I don’t think it will last much longer though, it has a big list now & it is rusted through to some of the fuel tanks.

 We are in a sad state on board at present; we have about 30 below usual compliment. We have one Petty Officer (cox’n), no Leading Seamen, one A.B. & the rest are Ordinary Smn. As a result we have a very young ship’s company, & with the Officers (excluding Chief!) – still we manage.

 I believe we have quite a bit of work to do at Bougainville (for a change!); 13 fields there. After that we only have Pt. Moresby to do & then down to the Barrier Reef.

 Yesterday we got a signal saying the flotilla will have 8 weeks in Sydney beginning the first week in Dec., & 21 days leave to each watch – I will certainly have had my issue of leave this year.

 Guess you have been very busy with the end of the year Dad, also expect the change of mayor takes place then, doesn’t it? That will be a good thing:

 Hope you & the family are well Dad, & once again best wishes for the 17th July!

Date 16-07-46

At Bougainville

 We are now down at Bougainville & will stay for about 10 days when we return to Rabaul & fuel. This will go until the end of Sept. as we have got tons of work to do – there are 13 fields spread right around the coast with three different nationalities & types of mines. We will only complete one field this time before returning, so it looks like one field a week.

 There is no civilisation down here at all i.e. other than natives & of course no contact with mail planes, so all mail has to wait until our return to Rabaul.

 The weather has altered up here from sun to rain. We have only had a couple of good days since leaving Kavieng. It has simply poured with rain the whole time. I believe this ends in August & I certainly hope so.

 One of those perfect days was just after we got here & the mob of us went ashore for the day. After finding an opening through the reef (they almost completely surround the majority of islands) we entered a beautiful lagoon & ran straight up onto the sandy beach. We roamed around the island, had a few coconuts, a swim & a sun-bake. It certainly is a good way of spending your time up here.

 I saw an amazing thing before I left Rabaul. I have told you how the Japanese went underground with their workshops, stores etc. Well a new cave had just been discovered & we were given an authority to see through it. It was ¾ mile long with other tunnels running off at right-angles, & it was stacked with torpedoes, warheads, 250, 500, & 2000 lb bombs. They were 3 & 4 deep as far as you can see down the side tunnels. The army officials said if the dump had gone off, it would blow a channel from the main harbour to the sea, - a distance of 1 ½ miles and a range over 1000 ft. high. It makes you think, doesn’t it?

 The other day Tom & I went canoeing - we got one issued to the ship – we got through the reef & landed on the beach, to find there was an outlet to a mountain stream there. So we carried the canoe over the sand bar & paddled about a mile up the stream till we came to the rapids. It was rather a peculiar feeling – thick jungle & raining & yet not a sound.

 You can see it is definitely not all work up here. Well, I hope you are all well, that you have lost your cold Dad, so cheerio for the time,

P.S. Trust you had a good birthday Dad.

Date 2-08-46

At Bougainville

 After receiving two letters from you in Rabaul last Mum, which incidentally were 21 days apart, we are now back at Shortland Is., a few miles south of Boug. Is. This last anchorage of ours – Shortland – is an ideal spot. Plenty of islands with all fruit “laid” on & beaut. lagoons & swimming beaches. Also fishing is excellent & we have fish of some sort almost every day.

 There is a mission ashore conducted by an American, & French Father. I have only met the latter, as they always seem to be away chasing their flock. It is nothing for them to take a 40 mile trip around the East Coast in a native canoe. As a result the natives are very well educated & really quite interesting to talk to. And their village is laid out as the latest architect would have advised. All homes set off in a street, equally spaced & beautifully made, with verandahs back & front, windows & doors & religious pictures over the latter. They are made of bamboo, coconut & palms. Behind each of the houses, at equal distances, are their respective cooking houses & then again two communal eating huts – with knives, forks, cups & saucers & even teaspoons. At either end are the wash places with showers, hand-basins & soap. They have quite an elementary water system. All rain water is collected off the roofs by guttering effect of the palm matting. Further back are their vegetable & even flower gardens. It is certainly an eye-opener.

 Apart from being interesting we eat like kings down here. The natives bring out fresh fruit, fish, & fowls & ducks. Have had some beaut. roast duck. It was quite amusing to see 6 roosters & 3 ducks wandering around the quarterdeck quite at home until they were gradually killed off.

 As a matter of fact Tom & I are taking a few sailors away this afternoon as the natives have told us where to get wild duck & at the same time, crocs. So should have quite a bit of fun.

 Yesterday was the completion of 3 days evaluations i.e. general drills, training, etc. In the morning for instance we were rushing around putting out fires in the tiller flat, rigging makeshift booms, weighing anchor by hand – a continual rush. Each had his own class & worked on competition lines.

 At the end of this, at 1500 there was a ‘go as you please’ race – there were eight entries & such rare looking craft you never saw. They had to be made out of anything except pieces of real boats, & any means of propulsion you like & of course, Rafferty’s rules. My word it was funny to see these craft being assembled on deck & then various bets as to the buoyancy of such & such & whether this other would make 50 yds in one piece. The one we (officers) made tipped over as soon as someone stepped on it, as we had to re-rig it & add two outriggers. A supply assistant trod in one of the other craft & both ends came up to meet. And so they collapsed right & left. Another half-hour was added so alterations could be made & then the great race. There were sails of all shapes & paddles of every variety & when lined up for the start, it looked like a floating junk shop. At the word go almost everyone caught in part of someone else’s & for 50 yds it was an open battle to all craft, so when they did, about 50% of each vessel was either missing or trailing in the water. It was the funniest race I have seen in years & we finished up second – not too bad except I lost 10/- which I put on ours, at 5 – 1.

 We have done sonic sweeping this time & now have done 3 fields in this area. The hold-up of course, is fuel & supplies, for which we have to return to Rabaul, the whole trip taking 4 to 5 days. But we still manage a good time in Rabaul – last time I visited the latest & largest combination of caves & tunnels found there & the entire honeycomb stacked with rope-docs, 500 to 2000 lb. bombs & even dozens of complete aero engines. All this is being taken down to the shore put in landing barges & dumped out to sea. Japanese are doing all this work. Also the two AMWAS Tom & I know are now transferred to Civic Admin; so there is another diversion which is quite pleasant!

While down here at Boug. we have discovered beached mines of every description – Jap contact, Yankee contact, acoustic & magnetic, so we have had plenty of mine-disposal to do. ‘Ararat’ has now got 2.6, so blowing up mines is just part of the day’s work now.

 The flotilla has dwindled from 13 corvettes to 5 & 3 ML’s so I am not thinking of months now – but years (?)

 I hope all at home, are well & you Dad have completely recovered. I am still enjoying life & having a great time – not mad, they call it ‘troppo’ up here.

 So for the time – cheerio &

P.S. Have forwarded on 16 cig. papers by letter, Dave

Date 11-08-46

At Rabaul

 Since last writing, which I’m sure is more than a week, we have not done much at all. On returning from Boug. we spent two days in here storing, which included big supplies of fresh veg., & fruit & meat. It was certainly great to have complete roasts & plenty of fruit. This only lasted about eight days, when the majority of it all went bad (except the meat) & had to ditch it.

 After storing we (Ararat) went down to Dreger Hbr (just south of Fincsh in N.G.) to collect 50 drums of special mineral oil. We arrived about midday & left at 6 am next morning. Still, I met some very interesting types there. Chief (Engineer) has two cousins working there & invited them down with 4 oppos. Well, they have all spent their lives in the tropics & my word, I learnt quite a bit from them, & very interesting. I have never heard of money spoken of so lightly. These two brothers have bought up all the machinery, running stock, equipment in the area & expect to make $200,000 each in the next few years. Already they’ve got 40,000 & they say they can’t notice the difference in the stocks. They make it & lose it just as quickly on some other venture. We were offered two jeeps to take back, but of course it is not worth the trouble carting them, let alone space.

 One thing we have got on board now is a speed-boat given us by an Army Lieut. here. We are renovating it at present & should have quite an amount of fun out of it when it’s going. It can do 15 – 20 knots. Just the shot!

 We arrived back here in just under five days & are now doing a boiler clean; i.e. the Japanese are. We have a working party out on board every day – about 20 of them & we have them working in the boiler, engine room & also on deck, chipping & painting. Definitely a great asset with our present lack of hands.

 The rest of the flotilla went down to Boug. Wed. morning & we will follow about next Wed. Another report says we will not be going to the reef but to Moresby, when finished here. Personally I hope so, I believe Moresby is a very nice place at present. But when we finish here is still very indefinite.

 The AMWAS we knew here, have now transferred to Civil Admin, so we still have a few pleasant evenings in their mess; we are off to a party tonight, it is one of the lass’s birthday.

 When we returned from Dreger we got our first parcel mail. I received all your Mails, Arguses, magazines & the parcel containing cake & two films. Thanks very much the whole issue was very welcome. Also your letter Marg. – it’s a great ‘novelty’. I certainly hope you can get a house shortly & of course that I can get down; I would probably do much better in applying for ‘passionate’ leave! I hope Bena does get over to see you – you write like her.

 Yes Mum, I received that English letter – it was from the sub. I met in Sydney & H.K. Had a bit of bad luck over the last four days – have has a slight attack of dysentery – am getting back onto my food again now & feel quite OK. It wasn’t enough to lay me up, so I was quite lucky. Don’t keep worrying about my sleeping quarters Mum – I do OK – sleep wherever it’s coolest & that is not in a cabin. Your idea of clothing is still a bit exaggerated – at sea, shorts only are worn; in harbour it is the same but every 4th day (duty bloke) have to be in full tropical rig.

 Well folks, must get this off, sorry it is so late. Up here days & weeks seem to have no meaning, time is registered only between the period of dawn & dusk & the relationship of one period from another . . . . .

 Cheerio for now, trust you are all 100%

Date 25-08-46

At Buka

 We have just left Buka (Nth of Bougainville) after sweeping till 2p.m. & will be back at Rabaul tomorrow midday.

 Actually we have only been down here two days this time as we were left behind in Rabaul to pump out the “Narutu” – a Jap tanker which is going to be salvage. She had a list of 16° when we went alongside her & after pumping out her tanks she went back to 9°. It was that trip to Dreger that put us behind in everything; we had to do a boiler-clean on return & then trapped the other job. Never-the-less in Rabaul, except that Tom was transferred to Katoomba as one of their subs was sick.

 Last Sunday we went for a trip in a Navy Fairmile about thirty miles down the coast to a plantation called Put-Put. I slept most of the way down – that’s the way to enjoy a sea-trip in someone else’s ship. We sailed into an estuary formed by two rivers. We rowed over to the mangroves looking for oysters & we disturbed by a croc sliding into the water. So we returned for some rifles. But this time couldn’t find any, although plenty of tracks. In the afternoon went for a swim & a ramble along the coast – in all quite an enjoyable day, also as the sun shone most of the day.

 While at Rabaul we had a jeep for the ship – so I made good use of it & drove round everywhere. I had never really driven anything on my own in the way of cars, so one night Graham (the other sub on board) & I went out to the civvy (old AMWAS) mess & as he couldn’t drive I decided this was the time to try my skill (?). Everything went well & I felt quite confident after that.

 There are some Chinese tailors there & I have got 2 pair of white shorts & 2 shirts made up – all for a few pounds of rice, a tin of tobacco & a few odd presents such as a cigar, chewy, etc. I took our S.B.A. (sick berth attendant), really an amazing type, if anyone has got something he wants, he always finishes up getting it, & always above board – sometimes only just. Doc. wanted some shorts made so I took him along & in a few minutes we were ‘No 1 boys’ & the old chink will do almost anything for us.

 Since our stay here I have accumulated quite a lot of gear – some Yankie shirts, trousers, u/pants etc – quite an amount of army gear from hat to the boots. That sought of gear is very handy up here.

 I think we will only be making one more trip to Boug. & then to Moresby – or so it appears at present. There is a possibility “Cowra” & ourselves will be sent back to sweep two magnetic fields, not done, as we are both “LL” sweepers i.e. we carry all necessary gear for magnetic & acoustic sweeping. But at present the skipper refuses to do it, as we have not got any trained ratings to operate it. He is quite justified to do this.

 During the next month we will probably lose both the skipper & the ‘jimmy’ (1st Lt) as we are expecting reliefs for them any time. I’ve seen the new skipper & he is a sad old type – he’ll soon have to change his views on here.

 Guess what Mum, I’ve started to do my own dhobying & quite an amount of satisfaction out of the result – also I know it’s done properly. But I will add the primary cause was, all the dhobying firms packing up on board.

 Had quite an interesting morning yesterday – we arranged for some natives to come out at 6 am. & took four away with us to show us where all the fish hid. We used 3 charges & collected about 300 fish – all quite a good size. The natives did the diving & spearing for us – we were able to send a bucketful around to each ship in the flotilla.

 Those two lads apparently had a good time – they must like Sth. Aussie to come from N.S.W. – still it’s certainly a good way to see the country before going before going back to work.

 How is the house-finding programme going Marg any luck. Remember me to Bena when she arrives - tell her to be at home next time I go to Box Hill.

 That’s about it, hope you are all tops, cheerio &

Date 4-09-46

At Boug

 This is quite a time lag from the last letter – we have gone cruising all round the island.

 After leaving Rabaul last we went first to Buka again & swept a field at the western side of Buka Strs., in the evenings going to a beautiful anchorage down about 10 miles at Boug. Then we came further down the west coast to Torikina – it was the big Army base here – where we anchored for three nights & completed a field nearby. So onto the Boug Straits where we are now. We have now circumnavigated this island & anchored in about a dozen different spots, & in each one there was a mission, if not there within a couple of miles. The place is literally riddled with them. I have lost faith in them from the ones I have seen – they appear to be a business run on sympathetic lines, but definitely making money. I guess there is some good – there are always a few natives that can speak English to enable trade!

 On completion of this field the Flotilla will have finished down here & we all return Rabaul, store, & with the exception of “Cowra” & ourselves, go onto to Moresby. We are both “LL” sweepers & while in Rabaul we are picking up trained ratings & are coming back here to do the magnetic & acoustic sweeping. How long that will take I have got no idea – imagine will be quite some time. If we complete same before Nov. we are going up to the Sepik River – north east coast of NG)- & if not when we return after Dec. These are latest signals of future operations, but I’ve learnt not to believe them until we are actually on the way. The magnetic business is pretty authentic though.

 When we next arrive in Rabaul there will be some drastic changes on board. Firstly Tom has got his demob. & will be leaving, leaving only two subs to do everything (there will not be a relief for him). Secondly the 1st Lieut. Robbie, is being demobbed & his relief will be waiting there to take over; & thirdly the captain is going down to be married & demobbed. His English bride arrives Melb. on 24 Sept. on Stirling Castle. Which means new skipper will take over also, at the same time. So it will be almost a new be a new ship. One thing I will now have a cabin, but as I am now I’m quite O.K. – sharing the Jimmy’s cabin.

 Well, our fresh vegs are all gone now so back into tins – anyway not worrying me much, as I don’t eat as much nowadays – but don’t worry Mum, it’s about time I used up some of the food stowed away over the past few years!

 We have had a spell from exploding mines of late, been doing more dan laying for the sweepers.

 The other morning at Torikina experienced rather a remarkable sight. There is a volcano just inland over 8,000 feet & tapers straight to a peak. This is usually enveloped in cloud, but in the early morning the whole sky was clear & you could see the fumes & gases gushing upward in an even stream. This contrasts with the small volcano at Rabaul from which the smoke puffs out. I took a photo of it, but I think the distance was too great to get the effect.

 While at Buka Straits the other afternoon one of the lads caught a good size shark – about 9 feet. The skipper took more interest in it than anyone & had his photo taken with the shark hanging up behind him.

 This present field a new type of sweep is being used – i.e. a different method, & today 4 sweep wires were broken while doing one lap. For compensation they cut one mine.

 No Mum, I’ve only received one lot of mags & papers so far, hope I get them soon, are running short of mags onboard. Glad to hear Bena had such a good time – expected she would. That wild duck shoot you wrote of Mum – well we didn’t see any wild ducks, we have only the tracks of the crocs, so we went after wild pigs but didn’t even hear one of them; so we shot down some coconuts & ate them!

 Apparently the coal position at home is getting serious now – I think it is better out of Aust. for a while.

 What about that sister of mine giving me some more news of the approaching seal of the bonds of holy matrimony, or if the preparations for such embody too much time, then convince my little brother to write to me once in a while. You can’t realise how hard it is to win this peace!

Date 17-09-46

Contracted Malaria

 This is definitely overdue, but I’ve had a bit of bad luck since last writing – I went down with a bout of malaria – only fairly mild thank goodness, probably because I’ve been taking my atabrine regularly. Unfortunately we were at sea the whole time, which didn’t improve things. Still I had a good rest – over a week without any watch keeping or work. Now I feel 100% again & what is most important, am eating up to my old standard.

 I took tis turn down at Boug last. Since then we returned to Rabaul for 1 ½ days lost the Skipper, Jimmy & Tom & took on new Skipper & Jimmy. They seem to be two good chaps – the C.O. is quite elderly – well, over 40.

 Since then we have been back to Boug, spent two days at Lori kina & are now on the way back. We are all ‘on the rocks’ as far as food & stores go, but expect “Wilcanill” (store ship) in when we arrive. I hope so – tinned beans for breakfast, bully-beef for dinner & pilchards for supper. The Flotilla will split up as soon as we have stored.

 Now Tom has gone I have trapped most of his jobs including Capt’s sec. & correspondence! Good revisory training I suppose. Have also changed my watch, am doing the afternoon & middle (12 – 4 am) It is not as bad as it sounds, I rather like it. Another thing too, I have now got a cabin – at last after 12 months! First thing I did was to chuck everything out & have a good clean out & it is really looking tiddly – for how long I wonder?

 Thanks very much – I got another stack of mags & papers last time in – that’s the second. So Eric & Ron are demobbed – I should have remined a sailor. It is the same up here; lads that joined up after me have been demobbed & we have no senior hands at all.

 My dhobying petered out slowly already Mum – I pity any wife who had to rely on me. Hope your feet are getting better Dad – they must be very painful.

 Well Mum & Dad & you two family aspirants, I have just about done my tether, hope you are all well, I am on tsp line again, must off to my cabin.

Date 25-09-46

At Rabaul

 Thanks for all your letters & birthday wishes which I received two days ago – in plenty of time thanks. A letter from everyone one in the family – there must be an important occasion somewhere (?). It looks as if we will be down at Boug on the 2nd . We are leaving again in 3 days’ time for east Boug as our Senior Officer down south was not satisfied with one of fields there – so we all have to make a two day trip there & back to do another check sweep.

 This time in I have only been shore once – yes, really doing some work. I played cricket one afternoon against an Army Officers team. It was a beautiful day & I thoroughly enjoyed myself & very surprised when I got one wicket & made 2, (repeat two) runs, which I must add was pretty good considering our score. I haven’t played cricket since I left school (yes, one game in O.T.S.) & I had a wonderful time – full of beans. My word, I’m stiff today though.

 The next afternoon I shot through about 3 & went sailing with the boys off “Cowra”. It was a perfect day for sailing – a stiff S-E easterly & we certainly moved. On returning I stayed over there for supper & afterwards we got out 2 clarinets they had bought from Army Amenities & kicked up a wonderful row. Each finger has to control about 3 stops, so unfortunately, there was very little tune. At the end we could manage two lines of “Memphis Blues” together.

 Today “Wilcannia” arrived & we began storing. All we got was two weeks supply of fresh provisions & no dry stores at all. So we have just about had it, as we consumed nearly all dry stocks over the past 3 weeks. “Wilcannia” is only making one more trip before Xmas, so we will have to start growing wheat, sugar & tea on the foc’sle. Definitely the “forgotten flotilla”.

 Well, the new skipper & jimmy are settled in now & they are two good chaps; both opposite. The skipper is quiet, efficient but far from sad & the jimmy, a young chap has tons of “go”, is a bit wild & cheers the place up. He’s certainly re-organised the ship. You apparently had a busy day when the Duke arrives – quite important too – “Mr & Mrs A Whiteman seen this afternoon chatting with the Chief of Staff & his wife under the pines. Mrs. Whiteman wore . . . . . Next week we will have another celebrity --------Suzie’s Social Column”! Thanks for the cuttings Mum, they all came out well.

 Rex’s party apparently went with a swing – all were merry & bright – trust Rex remembered where he put the ‘key’ next day. Tell that bloke next time you see him to put down his plough, for a few minutes & take up his pen & write me a few lines!

 Well, my young brother, it was good of you to write. You seem to be doing O.K. at work & it sounds as if you like it. Keep going up one week each term & you’ll be right. I’ll see if I can get a few cig papers.

 It’s time for me to go though, so once again thanks for each of your letters, will be thinking of you on the 2nd

Excuse pencil but the old pen had definitely had it this time.

Date 25-09-46

At Rabaul

 Thanks for all your letters & birthday wishes which I received two days ago – in plenty of time thanks. A letter from everyone one in the family – there must be an important occasion somewhere (?). It looks as if we will be down at Boug on the 2nd . We are leaving again in 3 days’ time for east Boug as our Senior Officer down south was not satisfied with one of fields there – so we all have to make a two day trip there & back to do another check sweep.

 This time in I have only been shore once – yes, really doing some work. I played cricket one afternoon against an Army Officers team. It was a beautiful day & I thoroughly enjoyed myself & very surprised when I got one wicket & made 2, (repeat two) runs, which I must add was pretty good considering our score. I haven’t played cricket since I left school (yes, one game in O.T.S.) & I had a wonderful time – full of beans. My word, I’m stiff today though.

 The next afternoon I shot through about 3 & went sailing with the boys off “Cowra”. It was a perfect day for sailing – a stiff S-E easterly & we certainly moved. On returning I stayed over there for supper & afterwards we got out 2 clarinets they had bought from Army Amenities & kicked up a wonderful row. Each finger has to control about 3 stops, so unfortunately, there was very little tune. At the end we could manage two lines of “Memphis Blues” together.

 Today “Wilcannia” arrived & we began storing. All we got was two weeks supply of fresh provisions & no dry stores at all. So we have just about had it, as we consumed nearly all dry stocks over the past 3 weeks. “Wilcannia” is only making one more trip before Xmas, so we will have to start growing wheat, sugar & tea on the foc’sle. Definitely the “forgotten flotilla”.

 Well, the new skipper & jimmy are settled in now & they are two good chaps; both opposite. The skipper is quiet, efficient but far from sad & the jimmy, a young chap has tons of “go”, is a bit wild & cheers the place up. He’s certainly re-organised the ship.

You apparently had a busy day when the Duke arrives – quite important too – “Mr & Mrs A Whiteman seen this afternoon chatting with the Chief of Staff & his wife under the pines. Mrs. Whiteman wore . . . . . Next week we will have another celebrity --------Suzie’s Social Column”! Thanks for the cuttings Mum, they all came out well.

 Rex’s party apparently went with a swing – all were merry & bright – trust Rex remembered where he put the ‘key’ next day. Tell that bloke next time you see him to put down his plough, for a few minutes & take up his pen & write me a few lines!

 Well, my young brother, it was good of you to write. You seem to be doing O.K. at work & it sounds as if you like it. Keep going up one week each term & you’ll be right. I’ll see if I can get a few cig papers.

 It’s time for me to go though, so once again thanks for each of your letters, will be thinking of you on the 2nd

Excuse pencil but the old pen had definitely had it this time.

Date 2-10-46

Birthday at Boug.

 This is the third birthday away from home; Melbourne, Hong Kong & now Bougainville – quite a good variety!

 Today we have been out sweeping operation “Kiltor” – which is on the east coast. Luckily we arrived (i.e. only “Ararat”) back at anchorage early so I took a party ashore in the whaler this afternoon. It was a perfect day & beautiful in swimming. Half the party went inland with rifles & the rest of us stayed on the beach, went for a long walk (i.e. for me Marg!) & found a beaut stretch of surf. There was no canal in the vicinity & the sea came in even breakers – not very long but easy to shoot. As per usual we split a few coconuts & then wandered back.

 I had one misfortune though, we had to land the whaler in a bit of surf & no sooner had the bow touched the sand, than a beaut wave hit us on the side of the stern, almost tipped the whaler over, sent me flying into the drink with Army hat, sun glasses, towel, cigs, etc & my camera, with new film in it. By the time I recovered all these articles & got ashore everything was soaked through. I couldn’t strip the camera in the sand so left it open & am going to clean it out tonight. I’ve already opened it & the film of course is useless, the bellows are all buckled & every part seems to be rusted – just my luck. Still I think with a stripping & good oiling throughout, it should be O.K. A few weeks ago I made a tidy little canvas case for it, complete with strap – just think of all the work I will have wasted if the camera is no good!

 When we left Rabaul last we had some heavy weather on the way down – the Jimmy & Skipper missed a couple of meals & sea-sick sailors were 2d a doz. ; it is not the correct thing for this part of the world – ‘it’s just not necessary’ (one of the last c.o.’s favourite sayings).

 I heard yesterday that labour was put back with a big majority & the referendum was a forgone conclusion for “Yes” in the three clauses – ‘Joe for King – up with the red banner’!

 Just before leaving Rabaul I got some more mail – two from you Mum & one each from the ‘house-hunters’. Yes you are presumptuous William, & now that I’m a big boy please refrain from calling me ‘Brother’ in one line & then dashing my pride in the next line with ‘my son’! – you venerable old fellow. Anyway thanks for the good wishes Bill & yours Marg; it was your two letters I really appreciated!!

 Thanks for yours Mum, but don’t trouble about Khaki sox, I only wear them if ordered to. You have the wrong idea about Tom – he went through O.T.S with me but had done two years at sea prior to it. Yes Boug. is quite large, for up here that is, about 180 by 40 miles. Sometimes all the islands look beautiful & then again they all look the same.

 I am sorry to hear about Gwen Weller Mum – afraid I don’t remember very well.

 Thanks again for your letter Dad, just been reading it through again, & of course for the wishes. Guess you are pretty well snowed under with work still, but trust you are feeling completely OK & no more of these tired turns. Yes Xmas is not so far off & I certainly hope to make it this year.

That snap is excellent Mum, in fact better that that even – thanks! Must crash, getting under way at 6.30 tomorrow, so goodnight all,

Date 20-10-46

Degaussing etc at Boug. Sts.

 It is certainly a long time since last writing, but we have been down here for over a week & it is not much good writing in this locality.

 Well we still haven’t actually started sweeping this magnetic field - have had one setback after another. We wasted a few days in Rabaul for important stores which did not arrive, so had to leave without them. On arrival we had to be degaussed, & this took a day each. Then we went out to stream our sweeps while Cowra repaired one of her diesels. Our operation went O.K. except we can’t locate two important connections (electrical) & therefore cannot pulse. So the following day we (Ararat) went over to the field to lay 10 datum buoys. These are to mark the outer perimeter of the field & also points from which we can fix the ship’s position. This is rather a tedious job as they all have to be plotted very accurately. We went O.K. until having laid the 6th buoy, we finished up with the mooring wire around our port screw. We spent the rest of the afternoon trying to remove it without success & finally returned to anchorage on the starboard engine & spent the next day diving to remove it. Meanwhile Cowra has been running around plotting the area to be swept.

 After all this delay we have had today Sunday, off & ready to start tomorrow. We will have to finish off our datum dans while Cowra begins the sweep. If we cannot make these connections I spoke of, we will not be able to sweep until we receive some spares from south.

 This field is on the southern coast of Boug. at Boug. Strs. & is a very wide bay with 25 miles of beach & 6 miles at the deepest part. It is where the Japanese landed & the minefield was laid by Yank aircraft. We are at present anchored at a small island opposite this bay & while ashore the other afternoon we found a Jap observation post (I presume). It is well camouflaged right on the beach – as the jungle growth comes right to the water’s edge - & it looks as if the Nips just walked out of it. Remains of two huts, cooking drums still full of water, rows of water buckets covered with palms, stacks of small bombs, 4” (I should say) cartridges, Jap helmet & a lot of ‘Saki’ bottles etc. As we didn’t have any shoes we didn’t investigate further.

 While in Rabaul last, there was an earth tremor. ‘Vulcan’, the volcano that went up in 1936 now has a big split down one of the sides; one of the ‘beehives’ (two small islands which came up during ’36 eruption) toppled in half, and there were quite a few landslides blocking the roads.

 Last time in I got a letter from Tom & he stressed the good points of his present holiday at Port Macquarie, north coast of N.S.W. He wants me to go up for a weekend when in Sydney, I hope I can make it.

 You seem to be doing a lot of worrying whether the new officers are ‘good men’, or not, Mum. What if I tell you they are really ‘bad men’, do you want to book a passage, or do you think you can untie these strings for a few months Mum!! You don’t pick your friends in this racket, you make them. Anyway these two must be out of the ordinary Mum, because, as I said before, they are two good chaps.

 That is one good thing I don’t have to bother about Mum – the colour of my singlets – as I haven’t looked at one since leaving Sydney. It is only shorts, with shirts for meals, thanks goodness. I haven’t received my parcel yet, am looking forward to it next time in – I hope.

 That wedding certainly must be getting near when you are buying frocks for it – hold those two apart for a little while longer.

 (Continued 24th) Have had continued strokes of bad luck this trip. Cowra broke down again & we borrowed the spare parts necessary off her & began pulsing. But only for 25 minutes, when our diesel broke a piston & finished us for a couple of weeks. So we are both on our way to Rabaul now where we will be meeting “Swan”, who has just come up from south.

 Expect there will be a few letters on arrival – also parcel. That’s about the issue for now, so cheerio & hope you are all 100%,

Date 5-11-46

At Pt. Moresby

 Just a hurried note to let you in on some fairly important news. As you see we are now at Pt. Moresby & on our way down to Sydney.

 The big decision was made when “Swan” arrived in Rabaul & on checking all those defects I spoke of, decided we could do no more sweeping until after a refit. So we are on route to Sydney where we will be paying off & recommissioning “Echuca” to bring back to these parts. Between these times we get 21 days leave.

 We arrived here yesterday & are leaving today with a tow. Have to take an Army 300-ton vessel to Sydney. That will slow us down considerably, but expect to arrive about 16th Nov.

 Had a good look around this town yesterday & it’s a good spot – 100% on Rabaul. There are approximately 900 Europeans here at present & still more arriving. The natives are a much better than New Britain & of course much more to do. Last night a planter & executive type took four of us out to his home for supper. It is about 4 miles from the town & just over-looking the sea: a beautiful spot. There was one big spacious living room with the table in one corner & everywhere else were low couches, divans, deck chairs & anything that would support in a reclining position. I couldn’t stop yawning as soon as I’d stepped into the place.

Supper, or dinner, was served about 10 o’clock by the light of two small lanterns. And it was a super meal, everything fresh. In the 4-course menu was wallaby tail & tomato soup (what a delectable drop!) & also roast wallaby.

After the meal you retire to a semi-lying position, sip coffee & then the host wondered why 3 of us dozed off!

Got your parcel before leaving Rabaul Mum – thanks very much the cake was in perfect condition & fresh as the day it was baked.

Glad to hear you got the cable O.K. Marg. & on the 16th , & also the explanatory letter. Your letter of the ‘near future’ has not, repeat not, been received on board. Request copy be forwarded forthwith, as, in the interests of the atomic age, science & the Labour Gov’t., further delay will have disastrous effects to the ‘Cause’.

I remain Madam, your disobedient brother. Congrats on the effort in the show; my camera still works, trust family is enjoying all benefits of good health, must get on my way to Sydney,

Date 17-11-46

At Sea almost Sydney

 Tuesday morning we should arrive in Sydney. From then on panic will again reign as it did in the Strahan. This ship has to be paid off into “F” class reserve, i.e. completely, & then we have to recommission Echuca. In between everyone has to have 3 weeks leave & be ready to sail the end of January.

I have received my appointment to Echuca, so if I can’t get my demob before January I will be in this racket for another 12 months at least, which means I might as well go beach-combing when I eventually do get out. I have applied for my demob, but what will become of it, I have no idea.

It is still not decided how the officers will take their leave. The sailors are going in two batches of three weeks each, beginning when we arrive. But as each of us have our own particular jobs to straighten out, it will depend entirely on the completion of these. Anyway I will be getting 3 weeks leave, so that’s the main thing

 Since leaving Moresby we have had perfect weather, until last Friday, & also at Townsville – were there two days. Friday morning we got an anti-cyclone warning & about 1800 we got the outside of it. It only lasted 10 mins., but everything certainly went wild. There was a 60-knot wind & you couldn’t see for rain & spray. We didn’t expect to see the tow but it was still tied on after everything cleared up. Since then we have had wind & sea, & cold with it. We have now got everything on the beam & she is rolling like a son of a - - .

 Thank goodness I have only got two more middle watches to keep – that has been from Rabaul at the beginning of the month. It has been a beautiful trip through the Reef – you would certainly enjoy a trip up there.

 Glad to hear you & Dad are taking a holiday. Will seem like old times going down to Victor about Xmas-time, except no kids to bother you now.

 Yes Bill, it will give me great pleasure to accompany you down the aisle, & bear the burden of the ring – provided I can wear a pair of grey bags & an open-neck shirt – I’ll have nothing else. And, of course, the bridesmaid will have to meet with my approval!

 I hope you did O.K. in your exams Gordon – when do you get your holidays? Trust Aunt Min is improving Mum.

 Expect will get mail & parcel in Sydney. Well, six pages of this size is a big strain so must relax for that middle tonight,

Date 28-12-46

Signal I am demobbed

 Xmas is now over & soon it will be 1947, which means very shortly I will be a civvy. Yes about 4 days after my return I received a signal saying I would be demobbed when Ararat is accepted into reserve. There is no saying just when that will be, but expect about the end of January.

 As you have no doubt guessed, I did not fly back – it was the two day train trip. I went to the Uni, but gathered from 2 ex-servicemen I was talking to – that no good could be gained from a visit, & to wait until demob papers go through. Also went to the bank & the accountant very kindly gave me first hand information that a branch was being opened at Clare. They agree to give me necessary time off to do Uni course – within reason of course. My salary is now £235. But my impression of the work there was far from good, but guess I’ll have to get back to the rut.

 I arrived back on board about midday Thursday & during the afternoon all the other officers ‘shot through’ leaving me with the baby. Since then have had to run everything myself – but believe I have worked my own leave well. Have only been duty 3 nights since return. Have ‘lived’ at Mac’s. Went out to Mac’s Xmas Eve & of course Xmas Day. They had a few friends in but I spent a very pleasant day. The turkey was cooked on Xmas Eve & had it cold – same as you did & it was very nice. But you know how I like hot roast poultry! – never satisfied am I? Boxing Day Neal & I hired a car & went for a swim in the morning, back for lunch & to another beach in the afternoon. At night went to a party at a friend of the Mac’s place. So it was a full day.

 Since then have been on board, quite a lot of office work to catch up on. Tonight have typed 5 letters – it’s the only time I can do them, too many interruptions during the day – I can understand your work Dad.

 How’s the holidays going Gordon – wish I was still home. And thanks for all the Xmas Day notes, folks, but how about young brother – where did he spend his time?

 Sorry to hear about Miss Jane – more than expected it though.

 Well folks it seems as if you spent a very happy Xmas Day & may the new year bring every happiness & all good health to you all.

P.S. Hope you got my telegram & I received yours Xmas morning, it was rung through to Mac’s. Thanks!

Date 10-01-47

Start decommissioning

 At the moment there is tons of work & little news. I still have a full ship’s company – 65 – to play with & as a result have got a lot of work done in the last couple of weeks. This ship has been shuffled around like a pack of cards. When I got back from leave our messdecks & galley had been closed down; as a result have had to find ships for everyone to eat & live on. Just to be helpful we have been moved all over Garden Island & so we have been in & out of ships trying to find a meal here & somewhere to sleep there. At the moment I have got everyone on living out allowance & this is rather awkward with so many left on board.

Wed. 15th – I was interrupted & it lasted 5 days

 I received those snaps thanks Mum – quite good too, when will that sister of mine learn to lower her nose while snaps are being taken! Bought the white shoes Dad – size 8 – they had no duck skin so got canvas – will forward them on.

 Went out to see Bruce again, found his mother had been in hospital for about three weeks, will be out shortly though. Am going to the pictures with him tonight.

 Last took Mrs Mac to the pictures – Blithe Spirit. That’s the first time I’ve been since in Sydney this time. I am once again living out at the Mac’s – no food on board so I go out there every night, not that you can buy anything outside; Sydney is a sorry place at the moment.

 Mr. Mac’s sister, who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, & is an invalid, has been staying there since Xmas, so I have been quite a help out there moving her around. It takes two of us to get her out of bed etc.

 Mr. Mac left last week & is working at the Smelters, Port Pirie for 12 months. He is going to ring you up when he gets over. Expect I will see him a few times on home grounds this year.

 Still no news of finalisation of paying off. My work is almost finished, the engine room dep. will hold us up. Have not been able to go up & see Tom yet, of course he’s back at work now, still might get a weekend off shortly. On Friday have arranged a trip to Katoomba with another sub - off “Cowra”. Like to see “them there hills” before I go.

 Have to been down to the beaches a few times so am not working over hard.

 Yesterday afternoon at 1630 the old Flotilla sailed out to carry on the job of clearing our sea lanes. I was quite content to watch them go too.

 Yesterday I did a silly thing. Fell down on the iron deck & hurt my left wrist. It gave me a bit of trouble so saw the Doc. He strapped it up & was to go back this morning for X-ray, but the pain has gone & can move it a bit today so guess everything is okay.

 Well Mum sorry for the big delay but my intentions have been good. Had better carry on with my work. The pen is excellent thanks – have just run out of ink. Am feeling tops again now, hope the same applies at home, cheerio

Date 28-1-47

Still decommissioning

 Time is drawing on & I still can’t see this ship getting paid off till near end of Feb. The engine room branch is holding me up; as far as my work is concerned I could finish up in a matter of days but have to extend work till E-R is O.K. That is harder to do than ‘digging out’ on a big job. I’ve had a signal hurrying me up for demob but just can’t go until we have been accepted finally into reserve.

 Never-the-less life is quite pleasant in that I go home every night & can do just as I like – in effect, a second home. Last week I have stayed at home with Mrs. Mac. The second son, Graham, (cont. once again on the 29th)! Was expected home last Sta. week & of course Mrs. Mac has been waiting around since then for some communication. Graham has been away 18 months with the Dutch ships in N.E.I. He is 6’3” in height & now weighs 8st. 12 lbs. – good testimony of conditions!

 Well I didn’t get to Katoomba on that Friday. It turned out a day when everything went wrong. I was taking a lass by the name of Judy Morgan-Jones (not plain ‘Jones’ mark you) whom I met at the Macs, & at the last minute she couldn’t come. Then it rained & we arrived an hour late to pick up the other chap’s girlfriend. By this time she had ‘shot thru’, thinking it was off, & so finally we drove out to Bobbin Hd., about 15 miles away & that was the day’s outing – to Katoomba

 I went swimming down at Balmoral Beach on Sat. & Sunday went on another car trip with some chaps off the “Warrnambool”. We got a good trip in & went to Mitta Jong & back (south of Sydney). It was perfect weather & we covered about 180 miles. I did a lot of driving so am feeling quite confident now. No Mum – I am a slow driver & am always very careful!!

 Two afternoons during the last week the skipper & I went for a short sail. It was beautiful sailing weather with a stiff nor-easter blowing & certainly an excellent way of spending a working afternoon.

 Graham arrived home late last Sat. night & so now Mrs. Mac is a very relieved woman. He has got 77 days leave. Sunday & Monday afternoons we again enlivened Balmoral by our presence, for a short swim.

 On Thursday night Mrs Mac, Graham & myself are going to see “Follow the Girls” at Theatre Royale, where the afore-mentioned Judy is in the ballet.

 What is the latest bulletin re ‘the marriage’ – still going to wait for a home? Received sea bag; thanks very much. So for a while must say fare-well, I am now eating like the proverbial horse – thank goodness

Date 11-02-47

On board

Dear Folks,

 Once again I’m writing with no definite news. There will come a time in the next few weeks when I will start to do something about it. I’m sure if I complained I would be sent down for demob straight away. But until the 20th I will be silent – after all, a holiday in Sydney is worth taking, especially on Navie’s pay.

 Life is very monotonous during the week; coming into the ship each day with next to nothing to do. But we always seem to cram quite a bit into the weekends.

 Last Sunday week I took our whaler away with a party of eight, including Mrs. Mac, who hadn’t been out sailing for years. We spent a very pleasant day although it drizzled on & off. Took our lunch & after a run out the Heads we went round to a little beach inside North Head. After we had dropped the ‘ladies’ at Cremorne the wind dropped & we had to row back to Garden Island. Pity we hadn’t kept the passengers to do a bit of work.

 During last week Graham, who has now put on a stone in weight, bought a car – a Ford 8 – so we have been doing a bit of work on that. I will get my licence very shortly it will always be handy. On Sat. afternoon went for a short run & in the night Graham & I took two lasses to the pictures & came home afterwards & had a bit of a dance. The girls stayed there for the night in preparation for a day at the beach on Sunday, but it rained all day so we were ‘grounded’ inside. We tried to start the car to drive them home in the morning but couldn’t get it going & were stranded at the bottom of a hill until 1 pm. Never the less the car provides quite a bit of amusement.

 I was to have taken Judy M-Jones to a night club last night, with Graham & his partner, but I developed rather a savage headache in the afternoon & so got Ian (the eldest son) to take Judy. Apparently they had quite a good time, but it was no good me going. It is the result I think of the cold I developed when I first came down & can’t shake off properly.

 Received the Argus & extract from ‘Mail’ thanks Dad. Post man is waiting to go off so will say farewell again for the time.

Hope everyone is well & Gordon, you’ve settled back to work again.

Date 25-02-47

On board

 I am still here even after last Friday’s inspection – it didn’t go off as well as I expected & apparently it will take anything up to 6 weeks to complete. If I am kept here for that time it will wreck all my plans, as Uni begins second week in March. As soon as an opportunity arises I will take advantage of it to “shoot thru” to Melbourne.

 As I told you I had to go back to the ship on Thursday night – I left just after ringing you @ spent a pleasant night sleeping with – not one, but one hundred and one very friendly cockroaches. That is not so bad but when I got on board Monday morning I found that some rats had taken over my bunk, made quite a mess & didn’t even have the decency to make the bed. It is time to leave before the dockyard cats take over.

 Mr. Mac has been home for the last 10 days & left again yesterday morning for Melbourne & probably back to Pirie.

 Spent a very pleasant weekend – Sat. morning ran into town in the car & in the afternoon went for a run finishing up at Queenscliff for a surf. On Sunday left early & went out through the west & to place called Frenches Forest. Had lunch in the latter on a hill overlooking the coastline for miles. The sea was about 15 minutes away & it was a wonderful view. Carried on to Newport for a swim – that’s about 20 miles up the north coast & as the seaweed was a bit thick drove onto the next beach Bilgola – a perfect spot. It certainly was a wonderful way to spend a weekend.

 On Tuesday last I took a day off from work & the ‘family’ motored down to Pt. Kembla. We went down through the country and back the coast road. We went through the famous Bulli Pass on both routes & it is a worthwhile sight. Mr. Mac had to visit the works Superintendent’s wife – he is in Pirie - & we had lunch there; very acceptable being cold chicken! You can see I am making the most of my day in Sydney!

 I got a letter from Bill last week & you can tell him I have got his order – as much as I can get anyway.

 Have just got your letter Mum – glad you had a good birthday. I will try to make 4 Knapp St. Mum – won’t promise as I don’t know how fast things move at Lonsdale.

 Until next time I will draw to a close – trusting everyone is well, & Gordon can still eat –

Date 21-03-47

Demobbing

 Just a note, but must let you know what’s happening.

 I arrived down Tuesday midday after a very good trip – a sleeper & a seat in the Spirit - & came out here Tues. night. Wed. went down to “Lonsdale” & began demob. In the afternoon went out to an Army camp & had X-rays after which I went to the Knapp’s. Stayed for supper & left about 2130 – both well. Thursday morning carried on with demob routines & in the afternoon did 3 hours of tests – the vocational guidance scheme. I didn’t finish any of the test & was interested to find their conclusions. I went for the interview this afternoon & find that the summary of all the tests show that I have the ability for either civil engineering or architecture! He showed the how they work it out & concluded that I should do one of those two courses as they both include planning, constructing & design & definite tendencies toward administration. All very interesting but it needs tons of thought. This morning I spent over an hour in the dentist’s chair & came out feeling quite shaky. He did one small in the front & a very big one on the back. It was the latter one that caused the trouble. Still not bad considering I haven’t been to a dentist for over 2 years.

 Unfortunately I can’t finish medical until Tuesday when X-ray results come in so I won’t be able to leave until Tues. night at earliest – will send a telegram anyway.

 Guess there is tons of work going on at home so won’t take up any more of your time by having to read a long letter! Trust everything is working out. Also that your finger is O.K. Gordon.

P.S. Got your letter here thanks Mum.

P.P.S. “Cowdens” got invitation this afternoon – can’t see that anyone will be able to make it, yet.

P.P.P.S. Have been well, am well, & hope to be well. Present particulars – wt.: 10 st. 8 ½ ., ht.: 5 ft. 8, complexion: fair to middling, eyes: assorted. Last seen wearing Naval uniform, but expect will change into civvies as soon as possible. Dangerous – is a heavy eater!