



Captain Gwynne Caleb HARRIS

[1911 – 1944]



Name: Gwynne Caleb **HARRIS**

Rank: Captain

Honours, Awards & Decorations: Mentioned in Dispatches - June 1943 ANGAU
- July 1945 M Special Unit

Service Number: PX98 (P438 - ANGAU)

Unit: M Special Unit

Service: Australian Army

Born: 4 June 1911; Wales

Enlisted: 7 December 1941; New Guinea

Date of Death: 25 March 1944 (aged 32 years)

Place of Death: near Vanimo, New Guinea

Cause of Death: Execution

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Buried/ Commemorated: Lae War Cemetery, PNG [grave H.A.14]
 Australian War Memorial [panel 11]

Next of Kin: Son of John Arthur and Ann Harris of Guildford, W.A.

In Civilian Life:

On enlistment, lived in New Guinea and was employed as a Patrol Officer at Lae. He was described as a “big, fleshy young man with a bald head surrounded by a fringe of fiery red hair ... hard face and a soft lisping voice ... a courteous manner ... a generous good nature ...” - his nickname was “Blue”.

Military Service:

February 1942	Appointed Lieutenant (CMF); allotted special duties seconded to ANGAU
January 1943	to AIF; Captain; remains seconded ANGAU
May 1943	Allotted for duty to “M Special Force” .Operated behind enemy lines for a year on the Rai Coast and New Britain, and reconnoitred Finschhafen before the invasion in September 1943.
July 1943	Awarded MiD “for acts of bravery and distinguished service during 1942 in the South West Pacific Area”
July 1945	Awarded MiD (posthumous) “for distinguished service in the SWPA”

Circumstances of Death:

M Special Unit was part of the Services Reconnaissance Department, in the South West Pacific theatre of World War II. It was a joint (Australian, New Zealand, British and Navy, Army and Air Force) Allied special reconnaissance and military intelligence unit; it saw action in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands between 1943–1945, against the Japanese.

The unit was formed in 1943, as a successor to The Coastwatchers. Hence, M Special Unit's role was focused upon gathering intelligence on Japanese shipping and troop movements. Small teams from the unit were landed behind enemy lines by sea, air or land.

Harris, leading a reconnaissance party, landed by submarine at Tanahmerah Bay, near the Dutch New Guinea Border in the Vanimo region of New Guinea on 24 March 1944. Warned by natives, they were engaged next day by a strong Japanese force. Harris was wounded and instructed one member to escape, which he did successfully. Several others evaded capture. Harris, wounded in three places, and two others (Privates Bunning and Shortis, who were killed) engaged the enemy for four hours. Harris faced the enemy with an empty pistol, and was captured and propped against a tree and interrogated. He was then bayoneted.

Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Sundry web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents