



# Keepers

OF THE GATE

**New Guinea Volunteer Rifles: 1942**

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Personal Stories by NGVR Soldiers***

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**It is well over seventy years since the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (NGVR) was involved in WWII. 1942 was NGVR's year, the year the unit was mobilised, fought and disbanded after it served its purpose. Although NGVR's role was small, its importance cannot be appreciated without viewing it in a broader strategic way.**

PRIOR TO THE PACIFIC WAR, the Japanese wished to establish its own 'sphere of influence' or colonies in South East Asia; however, the western powers were critical of its aims. Thus Japan was in a situation of stalemate—the US initiated sanctions which Japan could not tolerate for nationalistic pride and economic reasons; it had to either bow to the western powers or aggressively progress its plan.

The US was neutral and Japan thought if it could destroy the US Pacific Fleet and establish its South East Asian Economic Sphere of Co-posterity (SEASEC) swiftly, it would be able to negotiate a peaceable solution with the US, rather than go to war.

The boundaries of the SEASEC were to be the former German Pacific Island Colonies, which the Japanese took over as Mandated Trust Territory after WWI in the east and Papua New Guinea and Indonesia in the south. The Japanese aim was then to move westwards into Burma and India. Japan had already been fighting for nearly a decade occupying Manchuria, Korea and most of China.

Australia had been at war for over two years when the Pacific War commenced. Most of Australia's military resources were in the Middle East helping against the Axis powers. In 1941 with the looming Japanese threat, Australia sent its 8th Division, less one brigade to Malaya. The 23rd Brigade 8th Division formed the 'Bird Forces' and deployed Gull, Sparrow and Lark Forces to Ambon, Timor and Rabaul respectively. Australia was counting on the British forces in Malaya and the British fleet for protection.

The Japanese simultaneously attacked Pearl Harbor, Malaya and other territories and achieved its goals more rapidly than they expected. The Japanese plan seemed to be one of six weeks' consolidation before the next stage of conquest. After 7/8 December 1941 attacks and invasions the next stage was the invasion of Rabaul and NG Islands, Indonesia, etc. Each jump was about 400 to



Lae-Salamaua and Wau-Bulolo (Gold fields)  
 Source: *To Salamaua*, Phillip Bradley, 2010

600 miles to ensure the new ventures were within range of land air support. The targets were airfields with sea port access—Rabaul, Ambon, Lae, Salamaua, Milne Bay and Port Moresby are examples.

This changed when the Japanese realised that their country and supply lines were similarly vulnerable as the Allies to seaborne aerial attacks. For example, there were the 10 March 1942 successful US carrier attack on Lae and Salamaua and the 18 April Doolittle raid on Japan. These attacks delayed Japanese invasion plans so their aircraft carriers could be redeployed to provide stronger air cover to protect the Emperor, their existing gains and shipping. Japan's plan was to entice the US carriers into battle in an endeavour to eliminate them. An invasion fleet would use the screen of the naval forces to occupy Pt Moresby. This became the Battle of the Coral Sea. When the British Malayan force and its fleet were defeated, Australia called on the US and appointed US General MacArthur as Supreme Commander. The only force available in Australia at that time was the Militia which was deployed to Pt Moresby.

## **New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, a militia unit**

NGVR had the distinction of being the only Australian army military unit raised, mobilised, fought and disbanded overseas, in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea between 1939 and 1943. On 4 September 1939, the Australian Government ordered the Administrator of the Territory of New Guinea, Sir Walter McNicoll, to raise the NGVR. A cosmopolitan group of men from Europe, the British Isles, New Zealand, Australia and Asia, whose homes and livelihoods were in New Guinea hastened to join. Bear in mind that in 1940, the expatriate population of the Wau/Bulolo area was about 3000, with Rabaul and surrounding islands just over 1000.

The initial strength of the battalion was limited to twenty officers and 400 other ranks, but this was increased in June 1940 to twenty-three officers and 482 other ranks. The enthusiasm in the early days stemmed mainly from returned soldiers of the 1914–18 War, but by mid-1941 the unit had lost many of its younger members having joined the AIF and other services. While the remoteness of many areas was a disadvantage, a growing realisation of the danger of war in the Pacific led to a revival of interest late 1941.

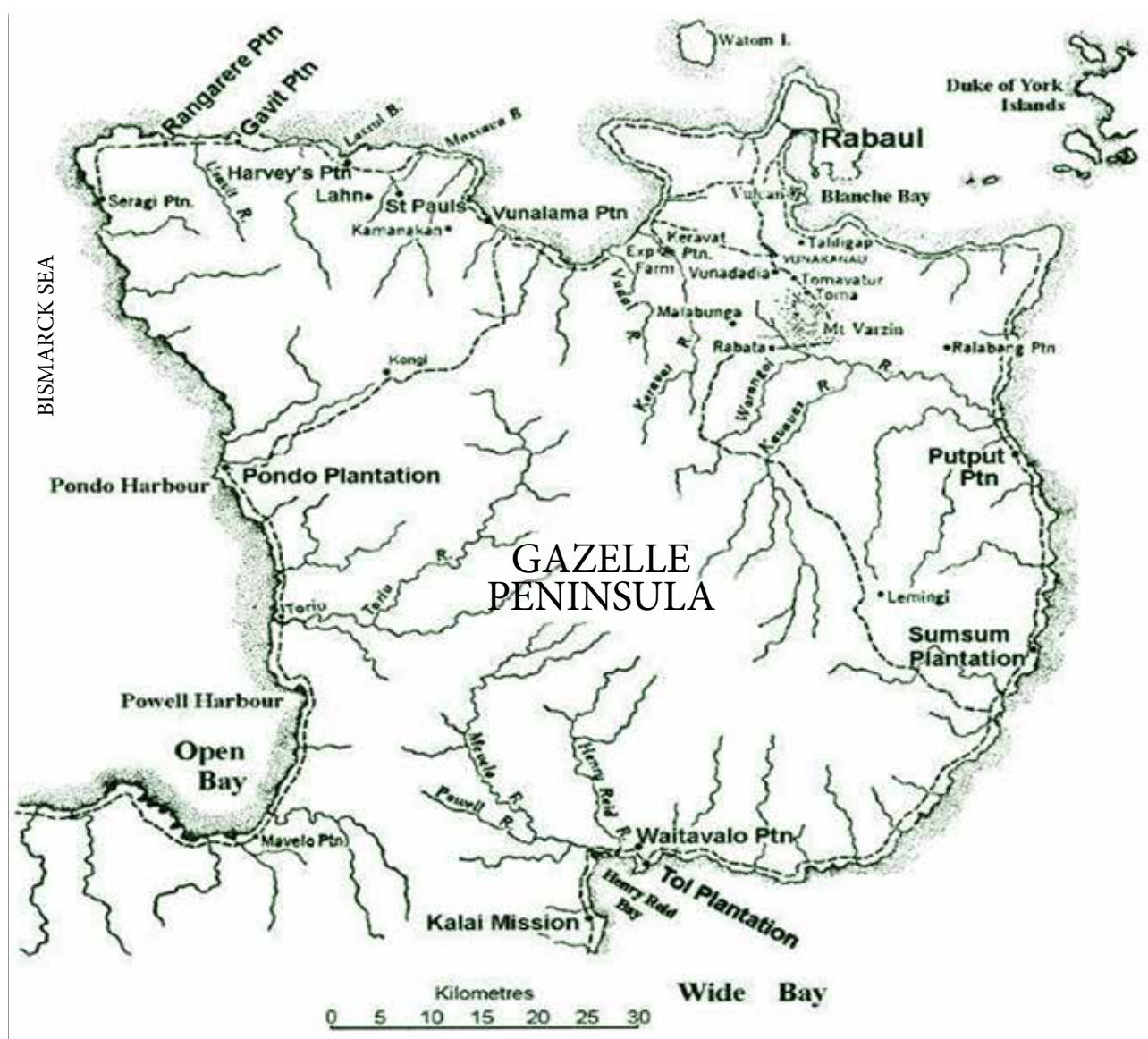
In April 1941, NGVR was deployed in Rabaul, the New Guinea (NG) Goldfields and the New Guinea Coast. Since September 1939 Rabaul was the Battalion HQ and also comprised a rifle company. The NG Goldfields comprised the Bn 2IC located in Wau with a rifle company and a machine gun (MG) Company and in nearby Bulolo there was an Australian Army Medical Corp Detachment. The NG Coast was made up of a rifle company HQ with a MG Platoon in Lae, while Salamaua and Madang each had a rifle platoon. Enlistment was for a two-year period and there was no pay except for an allowance of one pound per year. The uniform consisted of khaki shirts and trousers, made from material sent from Australia. The Army supplied felt hats, bandoliers, leather belts, boots and puttees. Brass NGVR shoulder badgers were worn. Arms consisted of .303 rifles and some Vickers and Lewis machine guns.

Major Bill Edwards NG2000, a WWI veteran, assumed command of NGVR on September 1941. This was when NGVR's HQ was transferred to Bulolo after the deployment of Lark Force to Rabaul lessened the significance of NGVR there. Edwards was also Adjutant and he and his 2IC, Major EW Jenyns, also a WWI veteran, encouraged the detachments in the NG Goldfields and Coast to develop independent units, preparing escape routes, observation points and stores dumps in their own regions. Although most were not mobilised until 21 January 1942, they continued to give their best without pay. This was a very different strategy to that used in Rabaul.

## The NGVR in Rabaul

When the Japanese invaded Rabaul in the early hours of 23 January 1942, the Rabaul company of NGVR was under the command of Lt Col Carr, the CO of 2/22 Battalion. NGVR, being part of A Company 2/22 Battalion under the command of Major Bill Owen (later CO of 39 Battalion who was killed at Kokoda 29 July 1942) was positioned on the extreme northern flank of the defence around the western shore of Simpson Harbour, just south of the 'Big Dipper' Road or, as it is known today, 'Burma' Road. NGVR manned Vickers machine guns, Lewis guns and a mortar. The Vickers were dug in within 100 m of the beach and to the side of the new steep military road 'Big Dipper', while the Lewis guns and mortar were further south near Vulcan. NGVR withdrew when outflanked to the south near Vulcan. Because the Japanese infiltration south of NGVR's position cut the Big Dipper and Kokopo Ridge Roads before NGVR could withdraw through battalion lines, most NGVR soldiers moved west along the north coast. This explains why more were evacuated by MV *Lakatoi* from the north coast of New Britain than MV *Laurabada* from the south coast.

2/22 Battalion's dispositions were widely spread, for instance, A Company (about 100 to



Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain

Source: *NGVR 1939–1943, A History*, Ian Downs, 1999

120 officers and other ranks), to which NGVR was attached, was protecting a three to four km front along Simpson Harbour's western shoreline. Only two companies were tasked to cover the Battalion's harbour frontage of about 15 kms, A Company protecting the Burma Road junction with Malaguna Road in the north and Y Company, a composite of detached troops, at Raluana Point protecting the junction of the Harbour Road and the Kokopo Ridge Road junction in the south. The rest of the battalion was on the escarpment above the harbour. Any assessment of the situation would confirm Lark Force was on a 'mission impossible'. Unfortunately, the commander either did not appreciate this early enough or was too inflexible to develop an alternate strategy should Rabaul be invaded by an overwhelming force, which was expected and was.

There were eighty NGVR soldiers reported to be in Rabaul at the time of the Japanese invasion. Of these, twenty-two escaped (thirteen on MV *Lakatoi*, two on MV *Laurabada*, three on an unnamed vessel, two in the McGowan Group, one in MV *Dulcy* and one who missed the boats and survived in the bush for many months before being rescued), forty-six captured and twelve, the balance, assumedly perished in battle or succumbed to privations suffered during their escape. Forty-three died (seven were massacred at Tol and thirty-six were lost on *Montevideo Maru*), while three officers were taken to Japan and survived the war. Thus fifty-five of eighty perished, a casualty rate of seventy per cent was sustained by NGVR in Rabaul and its aftermath.

Pte Leslie John Stokie NG239 was the man who missed the boats. A planter in the Baining, he was suffering from malaria at the time of the invasion and his movements between January 1942 and when he was rescued was hampered by these malaria attacks. He tried to canoe to the New Guinea mainland in July but was forced to turn back. After hearing of shot down American airmen hiding in the hills at the back of Ulamona, he sent a message to them and they eventually arrived at Stokie's camp in poor health. The three airmen and Stokie were taken out by Catalina flying boat in March 1943. By this time, Stokie had been in the bush for fourteen months. After a holiday, Stokie returned to duty as a member of 'M Special Unit' as a coast watcher and leader of a small guerrilla group on the north coast in New Britain. He was put ashore with fifteen other Australian and twenty-seven native troops on 28 September 1943 at Cape Orford, west of Wide Bay. When he was withdrawn from New Britain in June 1944, his team was credited with killing sixty-three Japanese. He ended the war as an acting captain and was awarded an MC.

## **NGVR in the New Guinea Goldfields & New Guinea Coast**

The only army unit in Salamaua, Wau, Bulolo and Lae and the Markham was NGVR which was called up full time on 8 December 1941, although mobilisation did not take place until 22 January 1942. The Australian military plans were to have troops only in Rabaul and Port Moresby, so the defence in Lae/Wau area was left entirely in the hands of the militia, NGVR.

Lae, Bulolo and Salamaua were bombed midday 21 January. The Administrator declared a state of emergency and handed over civilian administration to Major EW Jenyns, the 2IC of NGVR and from that day until ANGAU was formed in Wau on 15 February 1942, NGVR was both an armed force and an administrative unit. Edwards set up NGVR Headquarters on his plantation west of Lae. The civil population was moved by late afternoon on 21 January to an emergency camp about six kms west of Lae and plans were made for all unfit males to be evacuated; a group east along the coast to Papua by boat, some through Salamaua to Wau and others including the



NGVR soldiers at Kokopo, prewar



NGVR at Lae, 1940



NGVR troops in Rabaul, prewar



Chinese civilians escorted from Nadzab to Bulwa and by truck to Wau. Bill Edwards, whose nicknames were 'Whisky Bill', 'Mud Guts' and 'Kukurai', acted swiftly and intelligently.

As the only administrative representative of law and order, NGVR assumed responsibility for several thousand indentured labourers recruited from many outlying districts, but now without support and unable to return to their homes. The NGVR established depots and fed them, and they became the first of the army of carriers and labourers who proved so vital in their support to the Allies during the fighting that followed.

On 22 January 1941, Salamaua received a warning of a Japanese invasion fleet; however, this proved to be the fleet which invaded Rabaul. Thus the bombing on 21 January was merely a diversionary raid. Meanwhile, in Salamaua the 133 expatriates were evacuated to Butu eight kms inland, and the next day 100 continued overland to Wau. The others took canoes along the coast reaching Gona on 4 February, thence by aircraft to Port Moresby via Kokoda. Six RAAF ground signallers and five to six NGVR men under the command of Sgt Bob Phillips kept the important RAAF staging air field at Salamaua open. The Japanese showed their intentions when their 1 February second bombing raid on Salamaua spared the airfield while the Wau airstrip was bombed.

Administratively, NGVR came under the 8th Military District HQ in Pt Moresby. NGVR comprised 151 at Wau, 85 in Bulolo, 39 at Salamaua and 19 in Madang, a total of about 294. It was not a well trained fighting force having suffered turnover difficulties earlier and was armed with only obsolescent WWI light infantry weapons. NGVR Lae was A Company and the Salamaua/Wau men comprised B Company.

NGVR and Kanga Force faced huge transportation and communication difficulties. For instance, Salamaua is forty kms south across Huon Gulf from Lae and it is the same distance from Lae to Kirklands at the Markham River Crossing lookout. Salamaua is fifty air kms from Wau (a five to eight day walk) while Bulolo and Kirklands were twenty kms and ninety kms from Wau respectively.

By mid-February, B Company assembled at Mubo under Captain Umphelby, a regular army warrant officer who was previously in Rabaul and was transferred to the New Guinea mainland. Following the Japanese occupation of Salamaua, the unit's role was to keep Salamaua under observation and to oppose any Japanese move towards Wau. Prepositioned supply dumps and observation posts in the hinterland facilitated the task. Umphelby's Company was a varied lot, accompanied by seventy carriers to transport equipment including two Vickers MGs. These were set up to cover the narrow approach up the Botoi River valley into Mubo. Clearly the unit contained a number of men with a good appreciation of terrain.

The Wau NGVR detachment joined the Salamaua detachment at Mubo and prepared to fight as guerrillas when the Salamaua invasion occurred. Instructions were received 2 February to keep Wau air strip open with the expectation of the need to destroy it within a few days.

A RAAF aircraft spotted the Lae invasion force on 7 March. On 8 March Japanese Naval troops landed at Lae and at 0155 hours a battalion of 144 Infantry Regiment (the unit responsible for the Tol massacre), part of Horrii's South Seas Detachment (Nankai Shitai), landed on the eastern side of the Salamaua Isthmus unopposed. Captain Allan Cameron of the 2/22 Battalion, who had arrived in Salamaua from New Britain by small boat on the previous day, was the senior officer present and immediately ordered the sole Hudson Bomber to leave and sent Sgt Phillips off to blow up the fuel dump. Cameron and three others waited for the Japanese at the airstrip and after a skirmish, the airstrip was blown and they departed south towards Mubo.



NGVR Lae, 1940



NGVR at Kokopo



NGVR Vickers Platoon, Rabaul

After the Japanese landed in Lae and Salamaua on 8 March, NGVR's dispositions were four officers and seventy other ranks (ORs) in the Salamaua area, five officers and eighty ORs in the Lae/Markham area, two officers and 100 ORs in the Wau/Bulolo/Bulwa area and another thirty ORs in the Madang/Ramu area, a total of 291 of which only 100 were fit and trained. Estimated Japanese numbers in the Lae/Markham were 1800 and 300 in Salamaua. NGVR's role was to keep in touch with the enemy and dominate the patrol areas without threatening the Japanese enough to provoke them to reinforce and attack in overwhelming strength beyond the limit of the road to Nadzab or beyond Mubo from Salamaua. The men of NGVR were the 'Keepers of the Gate'.

Five Hudson aircraft bombed Salamaua on 9 March slightly damaging one transport ship while four B 17 bombers followed up later but they could not locate the target. On 10 March, the US carriers *Yorktown* and *Lexington* launched a successful 104 aircraft raid from seventy kms south of the Papuan coastline, sinking an 8600-ton merchant cruiser at Lae and forcing another to breach at the end of Lae airfield while at Salamaua a 6000-ton transport and a minesweeper were sunk. This was an important raid as it was the first serious loss of ships and men for the Japanese since the start of the war. Most importantly it reinforced the need for increased air cover for Japanese invasion fleets and imposed a delay on the proposed Pt Moresby sea borne invasion until early May.

Following the loss of Lae, Captain Hugh Lyon's A Company was similarly stationed in the Markham Valley west of Lae keeping an eye on Japanese moves in that direction. The radio removed from Salamaua continued to provide valuable information to Pt Moresby. Leigh Vial, a former NG government officer and now in the RAAF, with the assistance of NGVR scouts set up a coast watching position in the hills north of Mubo at 'Nuk Nuk' overlooking Huon Gulf, Salamaua and Lae, observing shipping and air movements. Similarly, another observation post was established about fifteen kms west of Lae just south of the Markham River, 'Chungol' which overlooked Lae airfield and was never discovered by the Japanese. The NGVR scouts, led by Sgt Jim McAdam, worked either in the timber or mining industries before the war and consequently had an intimate knowledge of the area and environment.

A Company was set up at Bob's Camp near Kirklands Crossing on the south bank of Markham River just upstream from the mouth of the Erap River, about forty kms west of Lae, to watch for Japanese crossing and threatening the Bulolo River Valley. Kirklands was in swampland and was hot, humid and mosquito infested. Most men stayed at Bob's Camp, about six kms south in thick rainforest, which was connected by phone to Kirklands. At this stage the Japanese had advanced only to Heath's Plantation, twenty kms west of Lae where a mountain gun was established.

On 8 March, the same day Salamaua was occupied, a major change in command in the Pacific was made; US forces in Australia and areas north and north east, including the Philippines would be called South West Pacific Area (SWPA) under General MacArthur, the rest of the Pacific would be under naval command of Admiral Nimitz. MacArthur arrived in Darwin on 17 March and on the following day the Australian Prime Minister Curtin announced MacArthur would be the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in SWPA. General Thomas Blamey would be the commander of Allied Land Forces and US Lt General Brett the commander of Allied Air Forces. New Guinea Force replaced the 8th Military District and Major General Morris would retain the command of NG Force. Pt Moresby was being bombed and Morris could do little to reinforce NGVR in the NG Goldfields because of more pressing concerns.

Also on 8 March, NGVR was instructed to destroy the Wau Airfield and carry out demolitions



NGVR Salamaua Platoon, 1940



NGVR, Wau, 1942, on rest after the battles of Salamaua and Mubo

of the Bulolo Valley. By 15 March, Major Bill Edwards authorised the destruction of two power stations as well as the main Bulolo/Wau Bridge, even though there was no indication of Japanese movement from Salamaua or Lae—perhaps the result of paucity of communications and commanders not appreciating the terrain/environment in which NGVR was operating, because without air support, resupply was near impossible. Meanwhile, the Commander of New Guinea Force, Major Gen Morris, sent a reinforcement platoon of 1 Independent Company, under the command of Captain Roy Howard, via the Bulldog Track arriving Wau 12 April. Howard immediately sent two sections each to A and B Companies NGVR.

A Company maintained a standing patrol east of Nadzab and had been using a truck for resupply purposes. The truck was captured by the Japanese on 1 May. Meanwhile, there was still no evidence of the Japanese intending to advance from Lae towards Wau and NGVR remained the 'Keepers of the Gate.' Leigh Vial, at Nuk Nuk, estimated there were only 100 Japanese in Salamaua. In Lae the Japanese priority was keeping the airfield open to keep up the pressure on Pt Moresby. Apparently in April, a Japanese pilot estimated there was only a naval garrison of 200 men plus thirty pilots and 100 aircraft maintenance personnel in Lae, a total of about 330. With the Japanese higher command planning a seaborne invasion of Pt Moresby, a diversion of forces and supplies for an offensive towards Wau made little sense.

Squadron Leader Jackson and his squadron of P40s surprised the Japanese at Lae and destroyed 9 fighters and 3 bombers on 22 March.

On 22 April, NG Force HQ instructed NGVR that no operations against Lae or Salamaua were to be undertaken without direct authority from Pt Moresby. On the same day, a sixty-man Japanese patrol moved from Salamaua to Komiatum challenging NGVR's control there. NGVR's small guard saved the radio and shot three Japanese but the Japanese destroyed the village and NGVR's supplies and returned to Salamaua the following day—it seemed just a matter of time before the Japanese made a move into the hinterland towards Wau.

On 23 April 1942 Kanga Force was formed. Reinforcements and supplies would be despatched by air to Kanga Force once the threat to Pt Moresby was removed. Thus Kanga Force would comprise NGVR, 2/5 Independent Company and 1 Platoon of 1 Independent Company. An Independent Company comprised seventeen officers and 256 men, a total of 273, divided into three platoons each with three sections of nineteen men.

Separate signalling, transport, engineering and medical personnel were attached and a higher proportion of automatic weapons were allocated. The Independent Company Commander was Major Paul Kneen, an ex-Solomon Island administrator, while Sgt Mal Bishop (to become a CO of PNGVR after the war) was the Engineering Sergeant.

NGVR was reinforced late May early June 1942 when Major Paul Kneen's larger 2/5 Independent Company was flown into Wau. Although Edwards retained command of NGVR, he handed over to Lt Col Norman Fleay, when Kanga Force was established soon after.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was fought from 4 to 8 May 1942, after which the seaborne threat to Pt Moresby was removed.

On 12 May, Lt Col Norman Fleay, the commander of Kanga Force was instructed to harass the enemy in the Markham Valley and Salamaua area. After five false starts due to bad weather, on 23 and 24 May the 2/5 Independent Company was flown into Wau in seven Dakota aircraft sourced from Australian National Airlines (two), Dutch (one) and USAF (four). By 26 May the unit had assembled at Bulolo. This was the first time a whole Allied unit had been airlifted into a war zone.



Troops from 2/5 Ind Coy and NGVR with Japanese equipment left behind after the attack on Mubo



NGVR troops with a captured Japanese flag after the raid on Mubo

After a seven-day reconnaissance in the Markham area, Lt Col Fleay submitted an appreciation to Pt Moresby. He estimated there were 2000 enemy in Lae and 250 in Salamaua while his force amounted to two companies of NGVR with an effective strength of 100 split between the Markham and Mubo areas, 250 men from the 2/5 and Howard's sixty, a total of 410. Additionally he estimated only thirty men of his HQ personnel were suitable for operations. His conclusion was that his force was only suitable for raids and patrol work defending the Bulolo Valley and the route to Papua.

Kanga Force Commander Fleay set three raiding tasks: Heath's Plantation where the mountain gun was positioned; Lae airfield and its aircraft; and Salamaua. Two targets were selected, Heath's and Salamaua which were to occur simultaneously. On 15 June Capt Winning 2IC of the 2/5 led fifty-one of his men to Mubo via the Buisaval Track and joined up with NGVR for the Salamaua raid. He was accompanied by Umphelby and Ted Jenyns and four others who were to look after the carriers. From 19 to 24 June close reconnaissance was carried out on the target and it was established that about 300 Japanese troops were in Salamaua. On 27 June the raiding group moved to Butu situated eight kms south of Salamaua. The 27 and 28 June were spent in planning, briefings and preparation. It was decided seven raiding parties each of about ten men would be used with each party to be led by an NGVR scout. The objective of the raid was to demolish key infrastructure and cause as much mayhem as possible.

The raid commander was Capt Winning and the coordinated raid commenced before dawn on 29 June. It was successfully carried out with estimated 57 to 113 Japanese killed for the loss of three slightly wounded attackers. All returned to Mubo by 30 June. The impact of the raid was seen in the rapid response of the Japanese Command:

Salamaua was immediately reinforced and troops were pushed into the hinterland to find signs of the Australians. Having to deploy additional men to Lae and Salamaua meant they were not available elsewhere when operations in Papua and Guadalcanal were being planned. It was the first offensive action on land against the Japanese invasion of New Guinea Mainland. The raid justified the Independent Company concept, the value of the NGVR scouts and the importance of detailed reconnaissance for accurate information for planning successful operations.

On the following night, Major Kneen, the 2/5 Independent Company Commander, commanded the raid on Heath's Plantation. The objective was to destroy a bridge and the artillery piece and cause as much chaos as possible. A composite group of 2/5 Independent Company and NGVR was used. Surprise was achieved but when Major Kneen was killed early in the action, Captain Lang assumed command of the group and extracted the party west and across the Markham River. The Japanese reacted and on 2 July they bombed Wau, Bulolo and Skindewai. The bombing killed two 2/5 Independent Company men at Bulolo.

On 10 July Capt Winning and Umphelby, the latter very ill, returned to Wau and told Lt Col Fleay of the poor condition of their troops. A section of the 2/5 was sent forward as reinforcements and another followed on 19 July. The Japanese reinforced Salamaua and Sgt Jim McAdam estimated the number had now swelled to about 500 with strong patrols of up to seventy men scouring the immediate area of Salamaua for signs of Australian activity.

A strong Japanese force of 136 departed Salamaua for Mubo on 21 July, the day the Japanese landed at Gona. The Japanese approached Mubo late in the afternoon with their scouts forward. The Australians fired on the group. The Vickers situated on Mat Mat OP, was ideally sited firing along the valley trapping the Japanese and those who had advanced were caught in the fire of Lewis guns on the Australian's right flank. At least twelve Japanese were accounted for while

the Australians suffered no casualties. This was when it was reported that there had been a European man at Salamaua, a former dredge worker, who appeared in league with the Japanese. ANGAU officer John Murphy was certain he was Joseph Hoffstetter, who was later mentioned for showing the Japanese the 'old German survey line', the route the Japanese used when they attacked Wau in 1943 and providing information which assisted the Japanese in establishing its Gona beach head in the lead up to the Kokoda Trail Campaign. The Japanese later reported Hoffstetter was killed in the Buna area.

On the same day as the Japanese moved on Mubo, they also took action in the Markham Valley. It was the time when the Lae/Salamaua situation receded in importance when the Japanese landed at Gona. This overland threat to Pt Moresby meant the limited resources being sent to Wau would be disrupted and Kanga Force would have to make do with what it had. What was not known at the time was that the Japanese orders for the overland attack on Pt Moresby also included plans to press the Australians at Wau to facilitate its Pt Moresby offensive.

Although NGVR remained in good spirits, the deprivations of continuous operations in hostile terrain without adequate supply and medication took their toll, with many falling sick with fever and other tropical diseases. The number of fit men steadily dwindled. As food was not getting through, the soldiers became increasingly dependent on local food supply. Japanese air raids, their intimidation tactics over the local people, and the sheer physical difficulty of getting rations forward to feed carriers had a cumulative effect and threatened to stop Kanga Force activity.

Later, when the focus shifted to the Milne Bay and Kokoda Track battles, NGVR continued to man its posts overlooking the Japanese. 1942 was NGVR's year; however, NGVR was an exhausted unit by September. Although some troops remained in place until early 1943, there were too few to be effective when NGVR was officially disbanded. Because of their knowledge of the country and its problems, the remaining NGVR soldiers were attached either to the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) or other units which needed their individual talents, and NGVR lost its identity. Many never served again because of the deprivations suffered during their long period in the jungle without medical and other supplies.

The NGVR soldiers came from many walks of life. While some were too old to join the AIF, medically unfit or employed in restricted occupations, they fought well and did what they were asked to do. They also initiated the organising of New Guinean labour which was to become a vital contributory feature to the success of the Allied campaign in the New Guinea archipelago.

After NGVR was disbanded, its Commander, Major Edwards, transferred to ANGAU and was in charge of carriers with the American troops in their drive along the Morobe coast towards Salamaua in 1943. In late 1943, 1 New Guinea Infantry Battalion (NGIB) was formed with Major WM Edwards as its founding commander. In September 1943 he was promoted Lt Colonel. In November 1944, Lt Col Edwards was promoted to Colonel to command the newly formed Pacific Island Regiment, which comprised 1 PIB and 1 NGIB and 2 NGIB, with 3 NGIB to follow in August 1945. On 10 October 1945, at the age of forty-nine years, Col Edwards retired from the command.

**Bob Collins, Vice President of the NGVR & PNGVR Ex-Members Association Inc.,  
collected and edited stories from ex-NGVR men, which form the basis for the complete book,  
*Keepers of the Gate: Personal Stories by the NGVR Soldiers.***

**It is important these memories are preserved so future generations can honour the  
'KEEPERS OF THE GATE'.**