



# A pictorial narrative of 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment troops involved in the major mopping-up operations after the Battle of Bougainville.

Images from New Zealand National Film Unit "Weekly review # 140" -  
"Easter action on Bougainville, 1944", (filmed by Stan Wemyss).



**When the offensive resumed, therefore, so did the demanding, draining, and deadly task of assaulting hidden Japanese positions one by one. Because the enemy was virtually invisible, and rarely fired indiscriminately, reconnaissance squads and platoons frequently could not determine the extent of Japanese defenses: details of Japanese positions often remained unknown until after the attack.**

### **The Battle of Bougainville \***

The attack broke on the morning of the 8th of March, 1944, and continued for several weeks. Despite strenuous efforts and numerous casualties, the Japanese were unable to penetrate more than several hundred yards and each time were driven back until at length the back of the attack was broken.

On the 23rd of March just after midnight, the enemy attacked again by infiltration at first, and then just before dawn a heavy en-masse banzai attack effected a penetration of 300 yards on a narrow front. This wedge almost broke through, but savage fighting, often hand to hand and with bayonets drove the Japanese back, and by afternoon the lines were intact once again.

Numerous snipers were still inside the perimeter and caused a number of casualties.

### **Mopping-up operations \***

On the 23rd, immediately action died away, the Battalion was ordered to make a sweep along the outside of the perimeter in front of the 129th Regiment's lines.

This was no easy task and cost the unit a number of killed and wounded, although the Japanese casualties inflicted was extremely large in comparison.

Further to that the force was to seek out enemy security forces and destroy personnel, communications and supply dumps.

1st Battalion began active patrolling outside the perimeter, usually moving with about 200 men from two companies extended on a 500 yard front, combing the jungle, brushing aside any small opposing groups, or indicating enemy positions for attention for artillery or aircraft.

It was the kind of fighting requiring initiative and dash, for which the battalion was noted.

Once through the perimeter, the Battalion moved eastwards in the "bush formation" previously practised during training at Lami in 1942. This method was to have two companies forward on a screen frontage of 500 yards, with one company in reserve, with lines of communication between flanks into an advanced Battalion HQ in the

centre. From here the direction could be changed, or halts ordered, when one portion of the frontage met opposition. The unit met isolated opposition frequently until shortly 1300 hours, when it was engaged on a 150 yard front with machine-gun fire, rifles and grenades.

A sharp fight ensued in which three Japs were killed for certain and a number of probables, for the loss of one Fijian corporal.

The unit was then ordered to return to the perimeter for the night, but on the way in ran into an enemy force.

Two platoons were sent up with orders to clear the block at all costs.

These got to work and after a brief fire fight and a bayonet charge, the area was cleared and the Battalion entered the perimeter.

### **Private E. Kete \***

A Fijian soldier reported missing and killed three days previously was found still alive in a deserted Japanese dugout. He was Private Eaivoresi Kete, a member of 'A' Company, whose remarkable powers of endurance kept him alive. During an attack on an enemy strongpost he was shot through the head, the bullet entering behind the right ear and coming out below the left eye. When the Japanese found him they took his clothing and rations, bayoneted him twice in the chest and once through an arm and believed him dead. The area in which he lay was thrice shelled by American artillery after the patrol to which he belonged retired. But he still lived, and in a period of semi-consciousness he crawled into the dugout in which he was found. Kete completely recovered.

These 1st Battalion activities over the next few days were all one day jobs, as it was impossible to get far from the perimeter against the determined enemy opposition. On the 25th the 1st Battalion left the perimeter to make a reconnaissance in force in front of the 2nd Battalion, 129th Regiment.

The information given by the Battalion enabled the enemy bivouac area to be located, and on the following day two heavy artillery concentrations and a dive bombing attack was made on it. Later, patrols by the 1st Battalion over the same area, revealed that the scene was littered with Japanese dead, and it can be justly be claimed that as a result of the sweep on the 23rd, the unit had made a definite contribution to the defeat of the Japanese that they were to suffer in their large-scale attack on Torokina.

## 2nd Lt. Bruce Dent Killed in Action \*\*

The leading scouts had hardly got through the perimeter when they were fired on from a low hill.

'A' Company was sent forward to deal with the enemy who were well dug in, and had three machine-gun posts. On one side of the hill was a swamp, and on the other a minefield. As it was impossible to outflank it a frontal attack was made. This was repulsed with several casualties to the Fijians.

After several attempts to dislodge the enemy, a withdrawal was made and artillery support called for. A heavy barrage was laid down and the feature attacked again, and eventually secured. Three Japanese prisoners were taken after the machine-gun posts were silenced, while a 75 mm gun was captured.

The action which lasted all day cost the Battalion one officer, 2nd Lieut. Bruce Dent killed, and 14 other ranks wounded.

2nd Lt. Bruce Ingham Dent.

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1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment.

Platoon Commander 'A' Company. 2nd Coy.

Killed in action. Machine-gun. 1200 hours, March 25th, 1944.

Age: 22.

Awarded Military Cross (posthumous) leading combat and reconnaissance patrols between 31st January and 2nd February, 1944, deep in Japanese held territory in the vicinity of Pipipaia, Bougainville.



2nd Lt. Bruce Dent and his platoon of Fijian commandos just before leaving the Ibu outpost for Pipipaia.

Photograph: David D. Duncan.

On the 26th the 1st Battalion set out on a sweep in force along the Numa Numa trail when they came under machine-gun fire and rifle fire from snipers. As the enemy positions were on a rising feature and well dug in, a withdrawal was made and an artillery barrage put down. This done, a platoon from Support Company searched the area and found it cleared, so two Companies pushed forward, but met with machine-gun fire from a strong force.

Again a withdrawal was made and a barrage put down. Time did not permit an investigation of the second area and the Battalion withdrew to the perimeter. The day's actions cost the Battalion three killed and six wounded. An artillery barrage worked the position over during the night.

On the 28th the Patrols were out again over the same area. Patrols were made over the area on which the artillery had been called by the Battalion. It was found to be an enemy bivouac large enough to hold a Regiment, and the artillery fire had covered the sector with devastating results. Dead littered the whole area, and it was impossible to even make an estimate of the number.

Next day 'A' Company, reinforced, passed through the perimeter at Numa Numa trail, and after clearing it for approximately 300 yards, swept west in screen formation. About 200 yards from the trail Japs were observed and the right flank opened fire and shot one. By 0900 hours the company was engaged in a fire fight which soon spread along the whole front to the edge of the minefield. The unit withdrew and called for artillery and the 'C' Company moved out to support 'A' Company.

A further artillery concentration was placed on the area, and after it lifted the two companies moved up. This time the enemy positions were reached without contact, but then a running fire fight commenced, the enemy was dug in under roots of trees and in fox-holes, prepared to fight fanatically.

Eventually the area was cleared at a cost of four killed, and nine wounded, but the Japs lost 27 killed.

On the 30th another reconnaissance in force was made, still in front of the 129th Regiment, but along the Logging Trail and to the east. Sniper fire was encountered almost immediately causing three casualties. Another platoon was brought up to bring machine-gun fire on the snipers' positions at the foot of a large banyan tree, and the Fiji fire was answered by machine-guns and mortars. The area was too well defended to take without numerous casualties, so in the afternoon a medium tank was brought up, and engaged the Banyan tree target.

\*\* Excerpts from; "The History of the Fiji Military Forces, 1939 - 45"



Troops relax at the perimeter while awaiting the order to move out on patrol.



Fiji Infantry start moving through the perimeter defences to continue the major mopping-up operation.



Fiji Infantry Regiment troops man a Vickers heavy machine gun, only 100 yards away from a Japanese outpost.  
(Same Vickers crew, front cover image).



Troops in another sector carrying mortar rounds, move towards a battle zone.



Risking Japanese sniper fire, a platoon officer, and his men run into the combat sector.



Before moving forward, Fiji Infantry troops try to pinpoint exactly where the Japanese are, how many, and what their fire power is.



A Fijian opens fire with his Owens machine-gun.



A wounded soldier is made-ready for movement to a medical station.



Fiji Infantry troops observing enemy positions from afar.



Encountering heavier opposition than expected, troops are under attack by Japanese mortar, grenades, and machine-gun fire - they desperately need to find better cover - a soldier has already been shot twice by rifle fire. Meanwhile, a Support patrol is urgently making it's way to reinforce and re-supply them with ammunition.



↑  
A Fijian stands his ground  
as a heavy bombardment falls close by.



The Advanced Headquarters in the centre of action is receiving  
continuous reports from platoons fighting multiple skirmishing actions  
in different areas; HQ then co-ordinate and issue orders.



An officer knows the general location of the Japanese, but can't pinpoint  
their exact hidden hideout.



A Fijian throws grenades at a hidden Japanese hideout.





Fiji troops hurriedly stretcher-carry a wounded soldier from the combat zone to a medical station for urgent attention.

**In the recent major battle, Japanese infantrymen had proven to be fanatically determined in advance, but they were even more so in defeat, and as all the allied armies discovered to their cost: the Japanese fought, and died for every yard of ground.**

Fijian troops attempted to outflank, and move behind a Japanese machine-gun post, but met fierce resistance - they have been forced to retreat, and hold a defensive position - mortar crew lay down a heavy barrage.







Fijian troops attack a Japanese stronghold; a soldier opens fire with his Bren machine-gun.



Risking his life, a medic attends to a badly wounded soldier.



Captain Eric Chivers, 'A' Company Commander.



Two officers and their troops walk back to the perimeter after combat.



Aerial view of the Laruma river.



1st Battalion officer (unknown) and 1st Battalion Commanding Officer:  
Lt. Colonel G.Upton right).



Still only one mile from combat zone, a critically wounded officer is attended to by an American doctor before being driven to an underground hospital for urgent surgery. His platoon, and allied servicemen (New Zealanders?) look on.



Photographer unknown.

Group photograph of Fijian troops during the major “mopping-up” operation.

NARRATIVES	EVENT /YEAR	CREATED
“Mopping-up operation”	- 26.3.1944 - 10.4.1944	Oct 2016
“Soldiers in the air”	- 29.12.1943 - 15.2.1944	Nov 2016