

Copy of letter sent by Sub.Lieut. P. Mason R.A.N.V.R. to
Commander Feldt S.I.O. North Eastern Area.

26th March, 1943.

Commander E.A. Feldt R.A.N.,
S.I.O. Naval Office,
TOWNSVILLE.

Dear S.I.O.,

Read sent me word that you were very ill. That is indeed bad news, but I hope you have fully recovered and will be back in harness shortly. Read and myself and all who have associated with you here, would like you to know if we could only convey it, how much your interest and encouragement has been appreciated. I would also like to thank you for my stripe. It meant a great deal to me.

I was just out of Kieta when the first raid was made there. Four large destroyers and a cargo vessel attacked at 3 a.m. 31st March or 1st April. One force was landed on the N.W. side of the Peninsula whilst another went into Kieta Harbour and landed there attempting to cut off all on the Peninsula. There had been four A.I.F. there, but two were out on patrol, and the other two were saved by a warning, circular message received from Macfarlan (V.N.T.G.) which I received and sent to them. They climbed the wireless hill at 3 a.m. to see if their native watchers were on the job and ran into a party of Nips. They raced down the hill to get their packs and finding another party in possession of the town, promptly got into the bush.

The Catholic Mission was visited by the Nips. At the Mission were an old French Father and a young German one, together with three brothers. I had visited the Mission a few days previously and heard that Bishop Wade's orders were that they were all to leave their stations in the event of a raid; but all excepting one brother, a Luxembourger, remained although I sent warning the night before of the impending raid. As soon as the ships left I went into Kieta to see that the A.I.F. were safe, and the missionaries admitted that they had told the Nips where I was, and what I was doing, also when questioned about the A.I.F. Buin party, disclosed there were four men there. I immediately let the boys there (D M K) know that their position was known, but they failed to move out until a landing was made at Buin, and they lost their equipment.

I had a hard time near Kieta after this, due to missionaries advising the natives that the war was over in Bougainville, they had nothing more to fear and the Japanese Government was now in charge. This was not just native talk, as the German priest naively admitted he had told the natives this, as also had the New Zealand brother. The natives here, following Kieta being left in a mess and the looting after Merrilees left, were in a bad way. Mackie (A.I.F.) recalled his four men and I was left alone amongst them unarmed. Then the four A.I.F. from Buin (D M K) and I asked permission from Mackie to take Wigley and Otter to Buin. Our trip there was delayed by unfriendly natives and we arrived there as the enemy ships were leaving for Tulagi and the Coral Sea Battle. I myself went to Kaiserina Augusta Bay to try and find the first stores dropped, and whilst I was away the Nip fleet came back from the Coral Sea Battle (I presume that is where they came from), the set broke down and no one knew how to get it going again until my return. From this time on, except for a food shortage we had an easy time as Read sent police boys and cash and the natives in this district remained friendly. The Mission was also friendly and helpful here, until the Nips grabbed them.

To give you an idea of the natives attitude here, they were ordered to go to work on a 'drome, which they did from all around where we were, as well as from elsewhere. Our cook-boy went with them to work on the 'drome and get information. After this we had more trust in the natives as they told the Nips repeatedly we were not anywhere in the district. We got them to search for dropped supplies. So they worked for the Nips by day and for us by night. The Nips appeared to know we were about although precautions were taken to shield our "ground wave" signals to prevent D.F-ing.

How?

I suspect the Kieta natives told Tashira that I was still in Buin. They sent many patrols and enquiries were made about me; but out of thousands of natives none betrayed us. We had given the stick to some beach natives who told the Nips about us previously, before the Nips actually occupied Buin. These same natives told us to move, as the Japs meant business this time "as they were bringing their beds ashore" just before they occupied Kihili.

When we moved out of Buin about 21st December, some natives from the Korimina district heard where we were from others at a Christmas gathering, and all the Kieta natives with Japs came after us. The Kieta natives called themselves black dogs, raping, killing and looting as they came. Tom Ebery was caught, taken to Kieta and made to accompany the "black dogs". It was thought he knew where we were, but he didn't, he had just recovered from twelve months illness and was forced over gorges and mountains. Beaten with sticks and rifles most of the time, he died near the headwaters of the Mailal River in Buin. The local natives found the body and buried him on the banks of the river, marking the spot so that they could show us when we came back, but we did not return that way.

The reign of terror has spread across the island and along the coast as far as Numa and South to Taimonapu. One white hat was killed because he would not join in the war against us. I have not heard from the Buin area, although I have some natives keeping up propoganda down that way, and I hope I may be sent there again some day.

All the foregoing is sent with the idea you may be interested and the picture I have tried to describe together with Read's information may be helpful. I am convinced our greatest danger lies with natives, as I have a poor opinion of the Nips, except one or two, one of whom is Tashira who, in my opinion, is the organizer behind the natives. His method is to get the native outlawed by us, by committing an offence which we could not forgive, and thereby getting a hold on the native. Their propoganda is the war is over, if you don't believe it you get your throats cut, if you do you share in the spoils of war and loot still available.

I believe it is just as easy to organize the natives to be anti-Nip if funds in the shape of lap laps and axes and rifles for Police Boys were available. They are really bloodthirsty and treacherous at heart. The hill boys behind Numa already want our permission to go and wipe out the Nips at Numa, also beach natives who they believe have been putting it over them for years. They do not propose a frontal attack, but to sit down amongst them friendly like and at a given signal knock them on the head.

Again many thanks for your interest and we all hope you are fully recovered and none the worse for your illness.

Regards.

(Sgd) Paul Mason.