

Geoffrey Noel POPE

2nd/13th Battalion and 66 Battalion BCOF Japan



Geoff on Enlistment

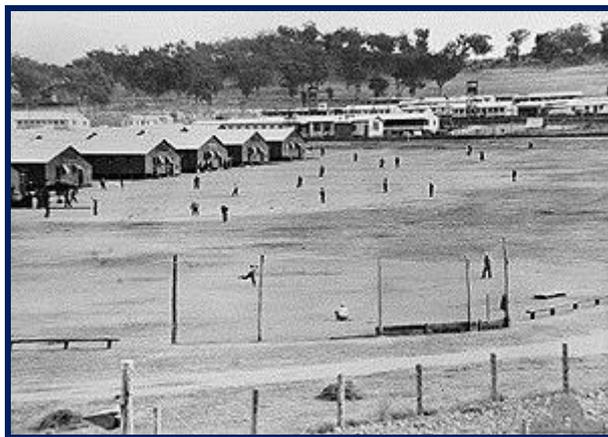


Geoff Shortly After Discharge
Note RSL Badge

Geoffrey Noel Pope VX 94388 was born on 25 December 1925 and was raised in Warrnambool, Victoria. Geoff enlisted on 23 February 1944 at the age of 18. “My motivation for enlisting was that my father served in World War 1 in Gallipoli, my brother was in the R.A.A.F. flying Lancaster Bombers over Germany and my sisters were employed supporting the war effort.”

“I did my initial training in Cowra, my Stretcher Bearer/Medic course at Darley Camp, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, and then returned to Cowra. I was at Cowra when the Japanese Prisoners of War staged the breakout from the Prisoner of War Camp, very close to our base”.

The Cowra Breakout occurred on 5 August 1944, when 1,104 Japanese prisoners of war attempted to escape from a prisoner of war camp near Cowra, in New South Wales, Australia. It was the largest prison escape of World War II, as well as one of the bloodiest. During the escape and ensuing manhunt, 4 Australian soldiers and 231 Japanese soldiers were killed. The remaining escapees were re-captured and imprisoned.



Cowra Prisoner of War Camp Before the Breakout

Geoff presented the North Beach Sub-Branch with a mounted piece of barbed wire from this Camp

From Cowra he relocated to Singleton, NSW, Eagle Farm Queensland, and undertook jungle training at Cunungra in Queensland. He then joined the 2nd 13th Battalion in Morotai. “Morotai was a staging post for the 2nd/13th to join in the invasion of Borneo”, Geoff said.

In June 1945, the 2nd/13th took part in Operation Oboe, the last major Allied campaign in the South West Pacific during the War to liberate Japanese held British and Dutch Borneo. This was a multi force operation planned primarily by General McArthur, with combined forces of the navy, air and army invading from multiple directions, forcing the Japanese to relocate inland. Geoff said, “Before we landed in Borneo on Sunday 10th June 1945 the crew of the ship gave us a chicken breakfast, just to say farewell”.

Geoff was involved with others of the 2nd/13th in undertaking a number of fairly complex reconnaissance missions. He recalled, “I remember one in particular; we went up river in canoes paddled by the natives. There were about six of us in the canoe, one native in the front and one in the back, and there were rocks everywhere that they had to dodge. It amazed me that the one in the back of the canoe knew exactly what the other was thinking. I think the one in the front turned his head in the direction the canoe should go, this sending a message to the native in the back. We got outside the targeted POW camp to find out how many Japanese and our boys were there. We were told that the Air Force were also there, but we didn’t see any. On the way back the natives had a race down the river in the canoes and I tell you what, it was rather hairy at times.”

POW numbers in Borneo were more than 4600 with only 1393 surviving at the War’s end.

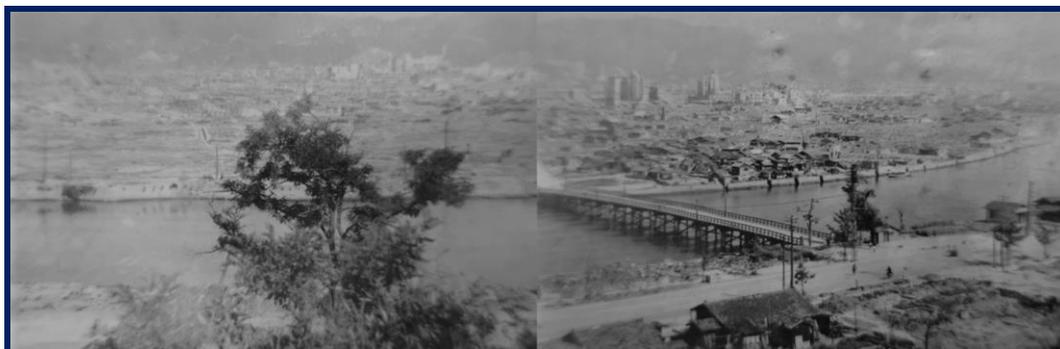
“At one stage we were guarding an R.A.A.F. radar installation, and on the outer perimeter a group of Dayaks came through our lines wanting ammunition for their rifles and Bren Gun, which were all brand new. We let the leader go through to see our Colonel and got talking to the men. They were very short, muscular and really good men. We found out later that an Australian Captain organised these blokes to fight the Japanese. They left late in the evening, and during the night we heard this terrible noise, banging and carrying on, all the rifles and guns were firing. Radio communications later confirmed that the Dayaks we’re going back through the Japanese lines.”

The Dayaks were trained by Special Operations Australia, the Z Special Unit, well prior to the June 1945 invasion of Borneo. The aim was for the Dayaks to operate covertly behind enemy lines. This very much supported the Allied invasion.

“When we were advised that the War was over, we returned to normal duties and digging our fox holes, as the Japanese of course had not heard the news. It was some time before the more remote forces of Japan surrendered to the Allies.

In December 1945 the Army called for interest to go to Japan with the Occupation Force, so I volunteered. I went back to Morotai to wait before going to Japan. Nothing seemed to be happening, so we had a stop work meeting.” The delay was the result of communications between the Allied commanders and time to organise shipping. “In February 1946 we finally arrived in Japan. It was mid-winter and very cold in our billets, especially as only one blanket was allocated to each man”.

The Australian contribution included forces of the 65th, 66th and 67th Battalions. “I was with the 66th and based in Hiro in Southern Japan” Geoff recalled, “I went to Hiroshima to see what that was like. We were astounded at the devastation. Bricks on the side of the road turned to dust on touching them.”



Photos Taken by Geoff at Hiroshima

“I was then sent to a village in the mountains to help organise the disposal of a large number of gas bombs and to use Japanese labour to render them safe. We managed to make use of an old electric train as transport from the village to Hiro and back again. I travelled up and down quite often to replenish the medical supplies. Two engines were needed to get up the mountain. Coming back down the mountain was a different matter, the drivers of the two engines, on the same narrow gauge line were racing and bumping each other having a great time. I was glad to get off that train.”

“From there I went to Tokyo to do guard duty, but our Commanding Medical Officer wouldn’t allow this, as we were Medics and needed to support the medical team. So, I got out of guard duty”.

“While in Tokyo I met up with two Americans, a Scotsman and a New Zealander and we all went on a tour of the city. The locals wondered why the Scotsman was wearing a ‘skirt’ as a uniform. Needless to say, we all had a good time.”

“We were relieved by a New Zealand contingent, but as they were short of medical supplies I had to stay on. Although their supplies arrived the next day, I remained for an additional 10 days. When I returned to Hiro, I reported to the Orderly Room only to be told that there was no record of me being in Tokyo at all. I said, ‘thanks very much, I could’ve stopped there’. My next assignment was the island of Etajima, the BCOF Hospital. The best part of it was that the hospital cook was my brother in law, so I had some quite good meals out of him.” Etajima was used by the Japanese as a Naval Base. The BCOF used the facilities on the island as a hospital for the Occupation Forces.

“In September 1947 I returned home on the ‘Kanimbla’. My brother in law was on the same ship and we were both discharged in Melbourne. After discharge I was walking down the street and a Provost pulled me up and asked for my Leave Pass. I replied that ‘I didn’t have a Leave Pass’. He demanded, ‘why not?’. After showing him my Discharge Papers he wished me good luck and I was on my way” .

“I returned to my home town of Warrnambool but felt a great difference in the place. It was as though I was a stranger. I decided to join the Warrnambool Volunteer Fire Brigade, which I enjoyed very much, made new friends and got to know everybody once again. I then went to Hobart to join their Fire Brigade. On December 27th, 1952, I married, had two sons, Andrew and Mark and was employed in various occupations over the next 30 years before coming to live in Perth.”



Geoff Pope

Geoff is a regular attendee at the North Beach Sub-Branch and is a well-respected Member.

In 2020 he received his 50 Year Membership Certificate, but first joined the RSL shortly following his discharge in 1947.

Geoff has also received a Certificate from the Prime Minister expressing thanks from a grateful nation for contributing to Australia’s efforts in the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan.

Geoff is truly a staunch member of our RSL.