

# "Mad" Pose Fooled Japs

By feigning madness when he encountered Japanese infantry, after his plane crashed, Flying-Officer Ray Graetz, of Strathfield, was able to spend eight days behind the Japanese lines before escaping.

SUN 23/11/44

Graetz, who was awarded the first Military Cross to be won by an RAAF officer in the South-West Pacific, crashed when his Beaufort was hit by ground fire while he was strafing But Mission.

He landed in the sea and the pilot and observer were killed.

Suffering from an ear wound Graetz swam ashore unnoticed by the Japanese, but lost so much blood that he fainted.

While searching for material with which he built a raft he came upon an unattended coastal gun which he put out of action by cramming sand and gravel

into the breach block and muzzle.

The raft capsized in the water and he returned to the shore. Next day he stole a Japanese uniform, bandages, water bottle and medicine, and when later he passed a Japanese he was unrecognised.

Later when he came upon more Japanese he feigned insanity by poking out his tongue, rolling his eyes and waving his hands. He spent the night with in a few yards of Japanese troops, and next day encountered several hundred.

When he waked right into a

camp he found himself surrounded by Japanese, but a Kittyhawk attack aided his escape.

On the sixth day he found some enemy trucks and disabled them by disconnecting the distributor wires.

On the seventh day he saw four Aitacobras and waved to them with a flare parachute. Late that night he was picked up by US patrol boats.

(The full story of Graetz's adventures is told for the first time in the current issue of the RAAF magazine "Wings").

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**F**LYING Officer Ray Graetz must have had one of the most amazing adventures of World War II after his Beaufort bomber was shot down near Wewak, in New Guinea.

Japanese machinegunners managed to kill two of his fellow survivors as they tried to escape from the downed aircraft off a surf beach.

The Japanese shot off Graetz's right ear lobe, but he was otherwise unscathed.

He was then to spend a remarkable eight days wandering about Japanese-held territory, at times sabotaging trucks and even a cannon, only to be ignored by Japanese soldiers he encountered.

His extraordinary experience began on May 20, 1944, when his 100 Squadron, RAAF, Beaufort was hit by groundfire during a strafing run over Japanese-held positions at But Mission.

With the aircraft's port motor on fire the pilot, Flying Officer L.M. McLaren, turned it towards the open sea, but with the cockpit filling rapidly with smoke it ditched only 20 metres off the beach at But plantation.

The bomber's dinghy was released, and McLaren, Graetz — who was a wireless operator-air gunner — navigator Flying Officer S.L. Anderson and air gunner Flight Sergeant F. Maloney clambered into it.

As they paddled away from the seaward shelter of the wrecked aircraft they were targeted by several Japanese machinegunners behind the beach.

The first burst of fire killed Anderson, and the second riddled the rubber dinghy, causing it to fill with water.

The three remaining airmen jumped from the dinghy and swam seawards, trying to tow it after them.

A third machinegun burst killed McLaren, shredded the dinghy, and took off Graetz's ear lobe.

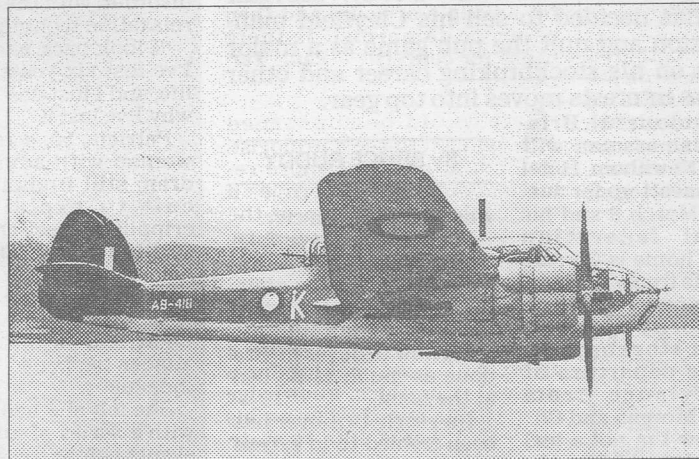
Graetz began swimming westward, and last saw Maloney swimming out to sea.

As Graetz swam, the Japanese on the beach still took spasmodic shots at him, but eventually he was carried far enough out to be hidden by waves.

When he eventually came ashore near But jetty, a Japanese soldier was sitting on the beach about 100 metres away, but seemed to take no notice of him.

Weak from loss of blood from

# The invisible man of PNG campaign



An Australian Beaufort in the skies over New Guinea during World War II

his wounded ear, Graetz crawled under a bush and lay there watching Japanese guards being posted along the beach before dusk.

He fell asleep, but woke again about 10pm to hear motor vehicles passing along a road behind the beach.

He spent the morning of May 21 watching friendly fighters set his Beaufort alight by strafing before collapsing for the rest of the day through loss of blood.

On the third day he decided to try to reach But airstrip and on the way found two bomb craters filled with clean water.

Having had nothing to drink for two days, he lay in one of the craters for several hours drinking large amounts of water.

He reached But strip in the afternoon and inspected it, finding it pitted with large bomb craters, without seeing any Japanese.

He decided to try to travel westward by night, but almost walked into an enemy sentry

sitting looking seawards at the mouth of Manib Creek.

"I sat down near him. He didn't challenge, so I crawled off the beach," Graetz said later in his *Escape and Evasion* Report.

Graetz woke on May 23 to try to build a raft from empty drums and coconut logs, but it collapsed when he tried to launch it.

Walking along the beach, the airman came upon a camouflaged 3 inch (7.62cm) wheeled gun pointing seaward from an open-backed emplacement.

"Put several handfuls of sand down the muzzle and in the breech mechanism," he reported later.

Wandering around But strip that afternoon, Graetz found a waterproof sheet and a silk parachute in which to wrap himself at night.

While bathing in a bomb crater he saw 30 armed Japanese troops moving around the base of a hill, but again went undetected.

On May 24 he found a truck that seemed serviceable, so he pulled the electrical wiring out of it.

That night the airman slept under a large tree, sharing it with two Japanese who retired for the night on the other side of its trunk.

Next morning he awoke to find his "companions" had already departed.

Graetz began walking again, and saw an elderly Japanese coming towards him who did nothing as they passed on a creek crossing.

At another creek clearing he walked past six enemy soldiers who merely looked at him and said nothing.

"Several more (Japanese) were met, all walking eastward along the track," Graetz reported.

He saw another 20 soldiers resting with arms piled in a clearing, but they did nothing but sit up as he walked past.

Next day 20 Japanese working on a bridge called out to him, but when he ignored them they resumed their work.

About 100 Japanese were bathing and washing clothes in the Anumb River, and while crossing it at a narrow point he almost ran into a group working on a road.

That night he slept under a large log in heavy rain.

May 27 was uneventful, but on May 28 he met odd Japanese soldiers on the track who seemed too tired to be interested in him.

While he was trying to cross the Danmap River, two American Airacobra fighters swooped over him, and then returned, wagging their wings.

He waved his parachute in return, and waited there thinking they might send a Catalina flying boat to rescue him.

But two American PT boats appeared and took him on board.

Flying Officer Graetz was later awarded the Military Cross for his outstanding courage, initiative and complete disregard for his own safety.