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Editorial – Baros of Sirovi

I have just returned to Perth after a month on board USNS Mercy as part of Pacific Partnership 2015. In Bougainville, near the port of Kieta, a group of Australians from the ship had the opportunity to clean-up and refurbish a World War 2 memorial monument to Baros of Sirovi. So who was Baros and what is the military significance to Australia of the monument?

Prior to the commencement of war in 1939, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) established a coast-watching organisation. With the outbreak of war, this was expanded, with volunteer observers recruited to cover the islands north of the Papua New Guinea mainland, extending from west of Manus island to the eastern edge of the British Solomon Islands. This 1200 miles early warning system was badly impacted by the Japanese invasion in January 1942, including Bougainville, which occupying Japanese forces used as a base to attack Guadalcanal and other Allied territory. As much of the staging and assembly of Japanese naval forces and convoys occurred in the Rabaul, Bougainville and New Ireland area, the Bougainville coastwatchers – firstly Jack Read in northern Bougainville and then Paul Mason in the southern sector – played a critical role in getting this information to the Allied forces, who were then able to anticipate major attacks and vector Allied aircraft to repel Japanese air raids.¹

Paul Mason of Inus Plantation had decided to see the war out on Bougainville and made plans to do this as a coastwatcher. He was a very talented radio repairer, who developed a great aptitude for accurately identifying ships and aircraft.¹ A typical message from Mason on 07 August 1942 to U.S. Forces at Tulagi and Guadalcanal was: “Twenty four torpedo bombers headed yours.” The warning allowed the U.S. ships to be dispersed and prepared, and fighter aircraft to be waiting. Only one Japanese plane returned to its Rabaul base.² After some seventeen months, Mason and Read were both withdrawn by submarine, after the Japanese used over 100 men to conduct a series of inland searches for them, which made their roles untenable. Paul Mason returned to Bougainville to take charge of guerrilla operations in 1944, which harried the Japanese forces and rescued missionaries and others still interned.¹

When war came to Bougainville, various villagers sheltered plantation owners and Allied soldiers. One of these was the Methodist teacher at Amapo, Nason to Manmaduk, who was betrayed to the Japanese

by other villagers, known as the Kieta Black Dogs, who led the Japanese to his mountain village. Nason escaped, although those he was sheltering were captured. The Paramount Chief of the area was Baros, a Christian man, whom the Japanese blamed for allowing Nason to shelter Allied personnel in his village, and they demanded that Baros lead them to the hide-out of Paul Mason, the coastwatcher, who was badly wanted. Baros refused to betray his friend. In January 1943, under the rain trees in Kieta, the Japanese forces assembled all the people from the hills to witness the execution of Baros as a salutary lesson. He was given one more chance to betray the coastwatcher, but he refused. He was then executed by beheading.²

On 8 January 1955, the Captain of HMAS WAGGA, LCDR J. Hume, unveiled a memorial erected by the Bougainville Sub-Branch of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia to honour Baros. A large guard and unarmed party were landed from WAGGA, including 16 Papua New Guinea Division ratings embarked for the cruise. Baros's two wives and two children were present in a position of honour.³ The original plaque read “TO A LOYAL NATIVE BAROS OF SIROUI WHO GAVE HIS LIFE JANUARY 1943. LEST WE FORGET. RSS & AILA BOUGAINVILLE SUB-BRANCH”. On 28 May 1964, the then Australian Governor-General, Viscount De L'Isle, VC, visited the memorial and laid a wreath.⁴

In the late 1970's, Mrs Merle Wall, MBE of the Kieta Lions Club arranged for a new plaque recognising Baros and the work of the Kieta Lions Club in maintaining the memorial park. In the 1980's, a Japanese A6M3 Model 22 Zero aircraft, a Type 89 Chi-Ro medium tank and a Type 3 (1914) 76.2mm Naval Gun were added to the Kieta Memorial Park by the Kieta Lions Club.

The Kieta Memorial Park is near the Kieta Wharf at the junction of the beach road and road to Arawa. The Cenotaph, consisting of an obelisk in front of 3 flag poles, is the centre of the path. Unfortunately, when we visited on 30 June 2015, the Park was badly overgrown, the second plaque had disappeared and the obelisk required repair and repainting. The primarily Australian Defence Force (ADF) health group subsequently cleaned up the grounds, repainted the Cenotaph and replaced the plaque. Pictures of before and after are below. Hopefully, future ADF visits will ensure the Memorial is maintained and enhanced.



Before and after: Kieta Memorial Park

In this issue, we have a range of excellent original articles, including articles on a second opinion mental health clinic, working with veterans, the benefits of blast gauges, an overview of the debt that tropical medicine owes to the military and some noteworthy book reviews. Finally, the third excerpt from the HMAS Sydney medical officers log from 11-18 November 1914 is reproduced, which outlines the health aftermath of this naval battle.

AMMA is gearing up for its Annual Conference in Hobart and we look forward to seeing more papers from colleagues preparing for the Conference. We continue to get a good range of articles, but other military and veterans' health articles are always very welcome and we would encourage all our readers to consider writing on their areas of military or veterans' health interest. The theme of our next issue is mental health (October 2015). If you have papers in these or other areas, we look forward to hearing from you.

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1. Downs IGF. Coastwatching remembered. *Naval Historical Review*; Jan 1972. (<https://www.navyhistory.org.au/coastwatching-remembered/>)
2. Voyce AH. *Peacemakers – David Pausu and the United Church of Bougainville*. New Zealand; Wesley Historical Society: 1979.
3. Naval Intelligence Division. *Australia Station Intelligence Summary, April 1955*. Melbourne: Navy Office: 1955.
4. AAP-Reuters. Tribute to island natives. Melbourne; *The Age*: 29 May 1964: 10.