

Manning River Times, Taree 19 September 1945

PEACE COMES TO CAMP

Letter from Air Force Man

Mr and Mrs A R Payne, of Upper Lansdowne have received the following letter relating to the surrender of Japan from their son Leading Aircraftsman D. A. E. Payne who is amongst the forces in the Pacific area:

"Today we and the free nations of the world celebrated victory and peace – peace in our lives, our children's lives and forever, we hope.

This morning I was going to write to you, but felt incapable of putting my feelings into words. I walked down on to the beach, listening to the victory bells pealing over the loud speakers and watched the tide running and thought of those little waves rolling round the oceans of the earth and so on to each shore echoing the pealing bells of peace from all the freed peoples of this earth. Freedom from worry and heartaches for loved ones. I couldn't help feeling sad for those to whom the end of the war has no meaning – who will wait in vain for their loved ones to return.

Personally, my feelings were almost naught; only a deep feeling of satisfaction, shall I say satisfaction that I was overseas in a strange land when final peace was declared, although I must now admit a certain amount of envy for those who can celebrate to a fanfare of noise, music and unrestrained excitement. But I'm afraid that is for others tonight. Instead we received the news quietly and then were granted two days' leave. My celebration came in a different form.

Tonight the first Catholic chapel in Balikpapan was opened, and for the first time since the Japanese invasion High Mass was celebrated. What a moving ceremony for such a momentous occasion. I felt privileged to be present tonight – a great feast night – and join with the rest of the boys on such a solemn occasion. I cannot express my feelings when listening to the ceremony. The Seventh Division chaplain (Fr. Cunningham) spoke the sermon in such simple, yet understanding words, blessing us and our future life which lies ahead of us and wishing us a speedy return to our loved ones. He then gave general absolution and I went to Holy Communion. I can say now that this will live in my memory, the scene in the roughly made but pretty little chapel, with real flowers decorating the alter and the three priests in their vestments moving round in the soft electric lights.

Funnily enough, this morning we had to hand in three empty beer bottles to enable us to draw our issue tomorrow, and as I hadn't drunk one of mine it was necessary to empty it. Word had come over just previously with the peace announcement; so I came back into the tent and Tommy Spence and I shared it in a toast to victory – appropriate, eh!

There is no indication at present as to when we may head south so will just have to be patient and wait to see what the future holds in store for us in that direction. However, I'm confident that I will be sitting round the Christmas table with you all. The camp is very quiet tonight. I suppose most of the boys are feeling much the same as myself tonight. I can now say 'Good night' in peace and it won't be long before I'll home with you all for keeps."