



# AUSTRALIAN ARMY

## ARMY HEADQUARTERS

Unrecovered War Casualties – Army, R1-4-A113A, Russell Offices, CANBERRA ACT 2600

UWC-A/WW2/2015/15-05

### See distribution

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R1-4-A113D

### FINAL REPORT – INVESTIGATION REPORT INTO EXECUTION AND BURIAL LOCATION OF NX143314SERGEANT LEONARND GORDON SIFFLEET

#### References:

- A. Defence Casualty and Bereavement Support Manual (DCBSM), Chapter 8
- B. DI(G) PERS 20-4 – *Recovery of human remains of Australian Defence Force Members previously unaccounted for*
- C. Army Standing Instruction (Personnel), Part 9, Chapter 3
- D. Operation Aussies Home submission dated 7 March 2017
- E. Operation Aussies Home Addendum to Initial Submission dated 5 February 2018
- F. (National Australian Archives Record) Series Number – AWM 54, Control Number - 135/2/8, Barcode – 457368, Title - [Burials - Graves Registration:] Burial Returns, Army Form W3314, Members of the 2/11 Infantry Battalion, Rabaul, Aitape, Wewak Campaigns, interned Wewak War Cemetery, 1945
- G. (National Australian Archives Record) Series - MP742/1, Control Number - 336/1/1210, Barcode - 1068459, Title – Execution of Sergeant Siffleet and two natives at Aitape, New Guinea [file consists of main file in two parts and two attachments – the titles are: Part I; Part II; Photographs – execution by Yunome; Duplicates][Part I includes 18 photographs; first attachment includes 3 photographs]
- H. (National Australian Archives Record) Series Number - A471, Control Number - 81210, Title – [War Crimes – Military Tribunal – NOTO Kiyohisa (Captain) AWC 2964 – Unit - 27<sup>th</sup> Special Naval Base Force WATANABE Tenuo (Chief Petty Officer) AWC 2967 - Unit - Naval Garrison Troop Guard Company : Date and Place of Tribunal – Rabaul, 9-10 July 1947], Barcode - 739450

#### Context

Reference A, details the Australian Defence Force (ADF) responsibility with regards to the 'Recovery of Human Remains of ADF Members: Missing in Action Believed Dead' – currently issued as Reference B (to be incorporated into the DCBSM at next amendment).

Reference C, stipulates the Army remains committed to the identification and recovery of human remains of Army members who have died during a conflict or on operations. It also advises of responsibility for fact-finding investigations of such cases.

Unrecovered War Casualties – Army (UWC-A), is tasked by Army with the responsibility of conducting investigations with regards to unaccounted persons and for unrecovered war casualties.

## Executive Summary

1. Operation Aussies Home (OAH) forwarded a submission to UWC-A, in relation to NX143314 Sergeant (SGT) L.G. Siffleet who was executed on along with his two Ambonese companions on the beach at Aitape on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1943; their bodies have never been recovered.

2. This report has reviewed that submission and all known available evidence.

3. Operation Aussies Home has put forward the hypothesis based on the *Balance of Probability*<sup>1</sup>, that the Unidentified Australian Soldier (UAS) that washed up east of the mouth of the Nigia River, Aitape, on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1945 and who is now interred in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Lae, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7, is in fact Siffleet.

4. Siffleet and his two Ambonese companions, Privates Pattiwal and Reharing, had been captured while operating behind enemy lines whilst on Operation Whiting, held for a period and tortured. On the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1943, taken to Aitape beach and publicly executed by beheading and buried where they were executed.



Siffleet, Pattiwal and Reharing being lead to their execution

5. Their executions were photographed on the orders of the executioners, the photograph negatives were later found on the belongings of a dead Japanese body at Hollandia depicting the last moments of Siffleet, Pattiwal and Reharing lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond Reasonable Doubt <http://www.findlaw.com.au/faqs/3670/what-is-meant-by-beyond-reasonable-doubt-in-crimin.aspx>

6. The time lapse period between Siffleet, Pattiwal and Reharing execution/death/burial in 1943 and the washing up/locating of the remains at the mouth of the Nigia River, Aitape on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1945 is one year, three months and one day or 65 weeks and four days or 459 days.

Calculate Duration

From and including: **Sunday, 24 October 1943**  
To and including: **Wednesday, 24 January 1945**

**Result: 459 days**

It is 459 days from the start date to the end date, end date included  
Or 1 year, 3 months, 1 day including the end date

**Alternative time units**

459 days can be converted to one of these units:

- 39,657,600 seconds
- 660,960 minutes
- 11,016 hours
- 459 days
- 65 weeks and 4 days
- 125.75% of a [common year](#) (365 days)

◀ Make adjustment and calculate again      Start Again ▶

**October 1943**  
8 days included

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

**November 1943**  
30 days included

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

**December 1943  
–December 1944**  
December 1943: 31 days included  
Year 1944: 366 days included

**January 1945**  
24 days included

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

■ = First day included (24 Oct 1943)    ■ = Last day included (24 Jan 1945)

Advertising

<https://www.timeanddate.com/date/durationresult.html?d1=24&m1=10&y1=1943&d2=24&m2=01&y2=1945&ti=on>

7. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is opposed to exhumation of remains from war graves within its care. It will normally only undertake exhumation when a grave is threat of being loss or in the case of over-riding public necessity. This extends to opening of graves for DNA testing. A copy of this policy is attached at Annex A.

8. Siffleet beheading is the only known photograph beheading execution of a European during World War Two. His death and the whereabouts of his remains at the time and to date still have massive immeasurable public interest. This public interest may meet the s47E(d), requirements to warrant the opening of the Lae grave and take a sample for DNA testing.



Moments before his execution

9. In 2015 and 2016 the Case Officer interviewed the <sup>s47F</sup>  
<sup>s47F</sup>

### Historical Background

10. The *Field Service Regulations Volume 1, 1930* <sup>2</sup> contains the policy used by Australian units during World War Two for burying deceased service personnel in the field; an extract of these Regulations pertaining to Grave Services.

11. The Grave Registration Units (GRU) then brought the remains of deceased service personnel into temporary war cemeteries from the field. These temporary cemeteries were consolidated into larger war cemeteries. Aitape itself was such a temporary war cemetery, which operated from 1944 to 1945.

12. In regards to the three permanent Commonwealth War Cemeteries now located in New Papua Guinea at, Bomana (Port Moresby), Bita Paka (Rabaul), and Lae, this decision being made post the end of the war.

13. The remains in the Lae Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7 was initially interred in Australian War Cemetery Aitape, Plot A, Row B, Grave 2, these were exhumed, transported and re-interred into the Australian War Cemetery at Wewak Plot F, Row A, Grave 7 before being again exhumed, transported and finally re-interred at Lae Commonwealth War Cemetery.

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<sup>2</sup> Reprinted with amendments in 1940



interred the Australian War Cemetery at Aitape or Siffleet two companions executed with him at the same time.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT – SERGEANT SIFFLEET / HIS COMPANIONS / OPERATION WHITING**

16. An in depth historical ‘Context Brief’ in relation to Siffleet, his two Ambonese companions and Operation Whiting is contained at Annex B.



Studio portrait of Len Siffleet in civilian clothes. AWM photo ID number P02547.001

## **REVIEW OF OPERATION AUSSIE HOME HYPOTHESIS**

17. OAH submission at Reference D contends that:
- a. Siffleet was buried near the place of execution in a grave some four to six feet in depth.

No Japanese that were interrogated at the end of the war in regard to Siffleet’s

execution quote the depth of the grave. Siffleet was buried first with his two companions being buried on top of him.

- b. That tropical monsoon pattern of heavy rain over the period of November to April, strongest over the Christmas period to March for Aitape would have assisted in the uncovering Siffleet remains.

From the date of their execution to the date of the discovery of the body, at the mouth of the river there had been two monsoon periods; 1943/44 and 1944/45.

No theory has been provided why the 1943/44 monsoon should be discounted.

Either monsoon period could have also assisted in uncovering all three sets of remains, not just Siffleet's. Additionally, Pattiwal or Reharing would have been uncover first as Siffleet's body was the first body placed into grave, Pattiwal or Reharing were placed in afterwards.

OAH provided no theory why Pattiwal or Reharing remains should be discounted.

- c. Coupled with (b) this the combination of disturbance by military landing craft, tracked vehicles, wave action and diurnal tidal action would have also assisted in uncovering the remains.

It would have also assisted in uncovering all three sets of the remains, not just Siffleet's.

Additionally, the recapture of Aitape, which was a part of Operation Reckless, occurred over 22-24 April 1944, this is when the beach at Aitape saw the most disturbance from landing craft and tracked vehicles.

The Australian 6<sup>th</sup> Division began progressively relieving the Americans in place from early October 1944. Landing craft and tracked vehicle traffic over the Aitape beach during the latter part of January 1945 was minimal.

- d. No other Australian Servicemen were reported being killed in or near that location and their bodies not recovered.

**Incorrect**, there are two other Australian Servicemen recorded as missing in the area, during that period and their bodies not recovered. s47F

s47F

Additionally, the Australian War Cemetery at Aitape, had three UAS interred in confines, two soldiers and possible one airman. All of which were later exhumed transported to Wewak again exhumed and finally interred and laid to rest in Lae.

- 18. OAH Addendum Reference E further contends that:

- a. 14. *'There were six possibilities as to the identity of the Unknown Australian Soldier (UAS) whose body was found on the beach, above the low water line near the mouth of the Nigia River at Aitape on the 25 Jan 45. They were:*

- (1). *SGT Siffleet, Caucasian – beheaded and buried 24 Oct 43 near mouth Nigia River, last seen wearing Australian army issue shorts and shirt, UAS recovered near place of beheading, head was missing from the UAS, burial would have slowed rate of decomposition.*

Incorrect, executed on the Aitape beach, buried in wet sand, s47F  
s47F with Pattiwal and Reharing also being executed s47F  
and placed on top of him.

- (2). *'PTE Reharin, Mongoloid – beheaded and buried 24 Oct 43 near mouth Nigia River, wearing native issue shorts.'*

Incorrect, executed on the Aitape beach, buried in wet sand, s47F  
s47F buried with Siffleet below him.

- (3). *'PTE Pattiwahl, Mongoloid – beheaded and buried 24 Oct 43 near mouth Nigia River, wearing native issue shorts.'*

Incorrect, executed on the Aitape beach, buried in wet sand, s47F  
s47F buried with Siffleet below him.

- (4). s47F  
s47F, off Aitape beach, s47F

Records do not state what s47F was wearing at the time he went missing. To add anything, is only conjecture.

Not correct - within a few days of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami the Thai's were checking pubic hair colour to quickly screen foreigners (Europeans). This anecdote demonstrates that even after a few days in the tropics, it is impossible to determine ancestry (race) using skin colour, soft tissues etc. Additionally, taking into consideration there was no skull.

- (5). s47F  
s47F at mouth of Nigia River, s47F  
s47F

Records do not state what s47F was wearing at the time he went missing. To add anything, is only conjecture.

Not correct - within a few days of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami the Thai's were checking pubic hair colour to quickly screen foreigners (Europeans). This anecdote demonstrate that even after a few days in the tropics, it is impossible to determine ancestry (race) using skin colour, soft tissues etc. Additionally, taking into consideration there was no skull.

- (6). s47F

s47F is discounted has his disappearance occurred after the date in question.

*'15. Those excluded from the information provided by this report and the initial OAH report:'*

- a. *'b and c – due to their general racial classification being Mongoloid.'*

Not correct - within a few days of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami the Thai's were checking pubic hair colour to quickly screen foreigners (Europeans). This anecdote demonstrate that even after a few days in the tropics, it is impossible to determine ancestry (race) using skin colour, soft tissues etc. Additionally, taking into consideration there was no skull.

- b. *'d and e – due to their exposure to the hydraulics of the open sea environment, the prolific number of sea predators in that area and rate of decomposition in warm tropical waters ...'*

Siffleet, Pattiwal and Reharing were buried together in one grave. This grave was either close to or below the high water mark, therefore the warm tropical waters would have helped in accelerating decomposition, even beneath the sand.

- c. *'if due to his drowning about 3 weeks after the UAS in question was recovered.'*

s47F has been discounted as a possible suspect.

*'16. The end result being that, on the balance of probabilities, it is highly probable that the UAS recovered near the mouth of the Nigia River on the 25 Jan 45 is SGT SIFFLEET.'*

Incorrect, Pattiwal and Reharing are still possible candidates based upon OAH submission. Additionally, so are s47F

This leaves a total of five possible candidates.

### THREE UNIDENTIED AUSTRALIAN SERVICEMEN – AUSTRALIAN WAR CEMETERY AITAPE

19. When the Australian War Cemetery at Aitape closed towards the end of 1945 there were 118 servicemen buried within it confines. Three were UAS; all buried in Plot A, the first was being in Row A, Grave 4, the second in Row B, Grave 2, the last in Row D, Grave 10. The details from the Grave Registration Cards for these individuals are as follows:

- a. **Plot A, Row A, Grave 4** <sup>3</sup>, Date of burial 29 December 1944 (originally buried in the UASF Cemetery (Aitape) Number 1, Grave 3, on 4 November 1944). 42/8B/1415, Killed in plane crash, non-combat, Aitape area on 2 December 1944, body too badly mutilated as result of plane crash to determine

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<sup>3</sup> A8234 – 36 – pp 251-252

marks or scars or colour of eyes.

- b. **Plot A, Row B, Grave 2** <sup>4</sup>, Date of burial 24 January 1945, Remains found just above sea level approx. 20 yards (18 metres) east of mouth of the Nigia River. Body had been washed up during a storm on the previous day. Body too decomposed through action of water and sea lice to note any deformities etc.

*also*

**War Dairy** <sup>5</sup>, 'An Officer from 17 Bde junior Leaders' School, situated near the mouth of the Nigia River reported that the remains of an Unidentified Australian Soldier had been washed up above sea level, approx 20 yds (18 metres) east of the mouth of the Nigia River. Capt Kerr and Party investigated and recovered the remains (Head and feet missing). Records held by his Unit indicate that the remains could be that of a <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED] <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED] in the mouth of the Nigia River some <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED] But due to lack of any means of confirming identification, the remains were buried in Aitape Aust War Cemetery as Unidentified Australian Soldier.'

OAH contends this individual, is Siffleet.

- c. **Plot A, Row D, Grave 10** <sup>6</sup>, Date of burial 22 February 1945, Report of discovery of remain received 12 March 1945, 42/8B/1518, Found floating in shallow water opposite 17 Bde HQ. Body recovered by 17 Bde personnel. Body has been mauled by sharks. Right foot missing. Portion of abdomen, back and right arm missing. Body appears to be immersed in water for at least one week. Head swollen up and features badly disfigured. This individual is discounted as his disappearance occurred after the date in question.

<sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED]  
<sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED] and his body had not been recovered. <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED] is discounted as his disappearance occurred after the date in question.

## MISSING SOLDIERS IN AITAPE AREA – NOT RECOVERED – PERSONAL RECORDS

20. A review of the three individual's personal Army records that went missing from around Aitape over the same period has been undertaken. The review was done to locate information in relation to their disappearance, the searches undertaken by their respective units and any other relative information:

- a. <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED]

<sup>4</sup> A8234 – 36 – pp 205-206

<sup>5</sup> 7 Australian War Graves Unit, War Diary, 24 January 1945

<sup>6</sup> A8234 – 36 – pp 301-302

<sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED]

s47F

Time lapse from disappearance on s47F to unidentified body recovered at the mouth of the river on s47F – 84 days (12 weeks); within the date range.

b.

s47F

Time lapse from disappearance on s47F **discounted**, not within date range, disappeared after remains in question were found.

c.

s47F

Time lapse from disappearance on s47F to unidentified body recovered at the mouth of the river on s47F – 52 days (7 weeks, 3 days); within date range.

#### **NATIONAL ACHIEVES OF AUSTRALIA DOCUMENTS – (CONSIDERING SIFFLEET’S EXECUTION)**

24. The following documents held by the National Achieves of Australia (NAA) in relation to Siffleet’s Execution have been reviewed in detail and the following information is found:

25. Reference G:

a. Page 62, paragraph 2:

‘... (b). *The prisoners were later moved from Malol to Aitape.*

...

(d). *WATANABE then allowed three civilians YUNOME, YASUNO and MITSUHASHI Masayo to execute the prisoners. ...*’

b. Page 71, paragraph 3:

‘... (e). *It was decided to move the prisoners from Malol to Aitape. ...*’

c. Page 91, Statement by KATSUMI, Kanichi, no paragraph numbering:

s47F

*'... the senior staff officer, Commander NOTO gave verbal orders for detachment leader, Warrant Officer WATANABE, "to kill all PsW on AITAPE at present". ... Arriving at AITPAE, I transmitted Commanders NOTO's orders to Warrant Officer WATANABE. That day or the day after -the date is not clear-, three PsW ( said to be on AUSTRALIAN and two INDONESIONS) were blind-folded and forced to kneel on the beach at AITAPE then, each was decapitated from behind at with a samurai sword by three civilians attached to the military ...'*

- d. Page 113, Report on Interrogation of MORO, Yoshiji:

*'...  
7. He first saw the Australian PW and the 2 native PW when they first arrived ate AITAPE form MALOL, and on another occasion when out of curiosity he went to the front of the house in AITAPE where they were accommodated. They were then very thin.  
...  
11. MORO recalls that YASUNO fails to kill SIFFLEET at the first stoke, and that when SIFFLEET feel forward into the open grave he was still alive. He thereupon stabbed to death in the chest by one of the civilians with a sword.'*

- e. Page 152, Translation of Affidavit by WATANABE, Teruo, no paragraph numbering:

*'... However, since no orders came and there was no reason to keep the prisoners in MARORU indefinitely, they were sent to AITAPE. I don't quite remember the date, but it was about two week after their capture. ... The prisoners were incarcerated in a building on top of a mountain in AITAPE and one seaman was place on guard to look after their food and other needs. ...*

- f. Page 153, Translation of Affidavit by WATANABE, Teruo, no paragraph numbering:

*'... I cannot remember the date nor the time, but the following day, about 1200 hours, I ordered the men to make preparations for the execution on the North beach of AITAPE. ... They dug the hole in which the three prisoners were to be buried. About 1400 hours, ... I personally conducted the three prisoners from the building in which they were imprisoned to the north beach. Bringing them to a halt approximately 50 metres from the site of the execution ground. I called them one by one to the spot on the beach where the preparation for the execution had been made. First I turned the Australian over to YASUNO. After he had finished decapitating, I turned one of the native soldiers over to YUNOME. After YUNOME finisher the decapitating, I handed the other native to MITTSUBASHI. All three fitted well into the hole. ...'*

- g. Page 185, Interrogation report of YUNOME, Kunio, no paragraph numbering:

*'Q. Did he say where it would take place?  
A. Yes, he told me that the execution would take place on the beach near the camp.  
...'*

- h. Page 191, Paragraph 1:

*'...  
(v) It was then decided to move the prisoners from MALOL to AITAPE.  
...'*

- (viii) ... the prisoners were then to the beach where a hole had been prepared. SIFFLEET was blindfolded, made to kneel alongside the hole and YASUNO carried out the execution. YASUNO ordered YUNOME to behead REHARIN and MITSUBASHI to ...'
- i. Page 198, Paragraph 1:  
'1. At AITAPE, NEW GUINEA, on 24 Oct 1943 NX14311 Sgt L.G. SIFFLEET, M Special Unit; REHARIN, a native; and PATE WAIL, a native were executed by Japanese. ...'
- j. Page 201,  
'...  
(iii) ... I went to instruct the local inhabitants and chiefs in the area to capture and bring in 3 enemy prisoners of war to our outpost at Malol. ... 5 or 6 days later, chiefs of the Ainbai area bringing with them 3 enemy soldiers they had captured – one Australian ...
- k. Page 210, Statement by VX102798 Captain Victor Alexander Robinson Chapple, paragraph 2:  
'...  
(d) At about 0930 hours on 24 October 1943 these three men were executed on the beach neat Aitape as ...'
- l. Page 212, Statement by VX102798 Captain Victor Alexander Robinson Chapple, no paragraph numbering:  
'...  
Q. How many did they bring in?  
A. Three – 1 Australian soldier and 2 Ambon natives.  
  
Q. Where were they confined?  
A. They were put in goal in Malol Village.  
  
Q. What kind of goal was it?  
A. A former missionary's home.  
...'
- m. Page 214, Statement by VX102798 Captain Victor Alexander Robinson Chapple, no paragraph numbering:  
'...  
Q. Explain to me in detail just how this execution took place?  
A. We received order from Wewak HQ on the 23 Oct 43 by wireless. Yasuno and Sgt Maj Watanabe, garrison troop leader of the guard company, talked over this execution that night. Next morning Yasuno called us all out and told us to come down to the beach where holes had been prepared previously by natives. The prisoners were brought down by members of the guard company garrison troops. Then the prisoners were given a cigarette. They were blindfolded. Yasuno made the Australian sit down by the hole, then he cut his head off.'  
  
Q. Look at photograph No. 2 Is that a picture of the Australian and the two natives standing on the beach before they were beheaded?

- A. Yes.  
...
- n. Page 216, Statement by VX102798 Captain Victor Alexander Robinson Chapple, no paragraph numbering:  
‘...  
*Q. Would you mark on the map with the pen the approximate position where this execution took place?*  
*A. Yes. (Marks with cross and signs his name approximate place of execution) (Map marked “Exhibit No.6” and attached hereto).*  
...’
- o. Page 299, no paragraph numbering:  
*’24 October – the affair of the prisoner of Malol Outpost. This afternoon was for me an occasion to be remembered for a lifetime. I myself, with my own Japanese sword beheaded an enemy soldier prisoner. This was a new experience for me. But I screwed myself to it. Anything can be done if one resolves to do it to the very best of one’s ability. And I am convince that given complete confidence I can carry out any task successfully. I really believe I was magnificent. Amongst the Japanese onlookers there were many who declared their admiration for my skill in making such an excellent stroke.’*
- p. Page 318, paragraph 3.  
‘...  
*d. ...Another policy said the executions took place at Aitape, but the basis of his knowledge of that fact could not be determined.’*
- q. Page 324, Translation of statement by KATSUMI, Kanichi, no paragraph numbering:  
*‘... the senior staff officer, Commander NOTO gave verbal orders for detachment leader, Warrant Officer WATANABE, “to kill all PsW on AITAPE at present”. ... Arriving at AITPAE, I transmitted Commanders NOTO’s orders to Warrant Officer WATANABE. That day or the day after -the date is not clear-, three PsW ( said to be on AUSTRALIAN and two INDONESIONS) were blind-folded and forced to kneel on the beach at AITAPE then, each was decapitated from behind at with a samurai sword by three civilians attached to the military ...’*
26. Reference H:
- a. Page 38, paragraph 2:  
(c) *‘In October 1943 near Aitape one Australian Sergeant and two Ambonese natives were captured by New Guinea natives and handed over the Japanese and he (Yunomo) interrogated these men. The Australian was dressed in a green shirt and shorts. One of his name was “George”, was aged twenty-five or twenty-six years, was formerly a grocer’s shop assistant in Sydney, was unmarried, and a wireless operator in the Australian Army.*  
(d). *At a about 0930 hours 24 October 1943 these three men were executed on the beach near Aitape as the result of an order for their execution sent by wireless from Japanese HQ at Wewak by a Naval Staff Captain Tadano.*  
(e). *YASUNO, who was a Japanese civilian attached to the Japanese Navy executed*

*the Australian Sergeant, he (Yunomo) then executed one of the Ambonese natives, and MITSUBASHI another Japanese civilian attached to the Japanese Navy executed the other Ambonese native. The execution was supervised by a Japanese Navy Warrant Officer named WATANABE. He (Yunomo) at the place of execution was ordered by WATANABE and YASUNO, to execute on of the Ambonese natives.. ...'*

- b. Page 42, no paragraph numbering:  
*'... Q. How many did they bring in?*  
*A. Three – 1 Australian soldier and 2 Ambon natives.*  
*Q. Where were they confined?*  
*A. There were put in the gaol in Malol Village.*  
*Q. What kind of goal was it?*  
*A. A former missionary's home.'*
- c. Page 46, no paragraph numbering:  
*'... Q. Explain to me in detail just how this execution took place?*  
*A. We received an order from Wewak HQ on the 23 Oct 43 by wireless. Yasuno and Sgt Maj Watannbe, garrison troop leader of the guard company, talked over this execution that night. Next morning Yasuno called us all out and told us to come down to the beach where holes had been prepared previously by natives. The prisoners were brought down by member of the guard company garrison troops. Then the prisoners were given a cigarette. They were blindfolded. Yasuno made the Australian sit down by the hole, then he cut his head off. ...'*
- d. Page 50, no paragraph numbering:  
*'...Q. Would you mark on the map with the pen the approximate position where this execution took place?*  
*A. Yes. (Marks with cross and signs his name approximate place of execution).*  
*(Map marked "Exhibit No. 6" and attached hereto). ...'*
- e. Page 50, no paragraph numbering:  
*'Q. How far was the place of execution from the point?*  
*A. Two or three minutes walk. With high tide in it would be covered with water. No mark was made over the grave. ...'*
- f. Page 70, no paragraph numbering:  
*'...On 24 October, 1943, Sgt Maj WATANABE ordered the native to dig a hole in the sand along the sea coast. Then Sgt Maj WATANABE, Sgt YASUNO, myself, MITSUBASHI, ADCHI, six men of the Takasa Unit and about 25 or 26 men of the Navy garrison unit went to the place of execution. There were natives also present at the execution. The first execution was done by YASUNO, who beheaded the Australian sgt with a sword. By the order of YASUNO, I then beheaded on of the Ambon natives with a sword. MITSUBASHI executed the other native in the same manner. I believe ADASHI, a civilian employee, was the one who took the picture of the execution. After the execution we buried them and covered the hole with sand. I was told by YASUNO that the reason for the execution was that they were guilty of reconnoitring the area and giving secret information through wireless, the natives acting as a spy. ...'*

- g. Page 78, no paragraph numbering:  
*'... Civil Administration Officer YASUNO, W.O. WATANABE, I and some guards went to MALOL, brought the three spies back to AITAPE and confined them to the prison. ...'*  
*'... On the morning 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. the enemy spies were taken to the sea-shore. ...'*  
*'The place of execution had been ready with a hole dug on the sea-shore. W.O. WATANABE and his marines were guarding the place of the execution and the other gathered themselves around it. ...'*
- h. Page 139, sub-paragraph (c):  
*'That about the middle of October 1943 the Accused WATANABE moved the prisoners to AITAPE. ...'*
- i. Page 207, (WATANABE Affidavit), no paragraph numbering:  
*'... Around the latter part of September or the beginning of October 1943, about 10 natives ... captured one Australian and two native soldiers ...'*  
*'... The prisoners were incarcerated in a building on top of a mountain in AITAPE and one seaman was placed on guard to look after their food and other needs. ...'*
- j. Page 209, (WATANABE Affidavit), no paragraph numbering:  
*'... The location decided upon was in a building occupied by the HAKKEN civilian employees of the Navy located in the middle of the AITAPE Mountain. ...'*  
*'They dug the hole in while the three prisoners were to be buried. About 1400 hours, (I'm not certain about the time nor the day of the execution) I personally conducted the three prisoners from the building in which they were imprisoned to the north beach. Bringing them to a halt approximately 50 metres from the site of the execution ground, I called them one by one to the spot on the beach where the preparation for the execution had been made. First I turned the Australian over to YASUNO. After he had finished decapitating, I turned one of the native soldier over to YUNOME. After YUNOME finished, the decapitating, I handed the other native to MITTSUBASHI. All fitted well into the hole. ...'*

## **TIMELINE – EXECUTION TO DISCOVERY OF BODY**

25. To assist in placing things in context from the date of the execution of Siffleet and his companions (24 October 1943), the missing Australian soldiers and the date of discovery of the body at the mouth of the Niga River (25 January 1945); a period of one year, three months and one day (*or 65 weeks and four days or 459 days*) had lapsed.

26. To assist in advancing their theory Operation Aussie Home have put forward the opinion of SQNLDR Dr Malcolm Dodd, which states in full the following:

*“from my extensive experience in the Solomon Islands with similar bodies, (about 25+ trips now) it is fair to say that a deep burial of 4-6 ft. in sand tends to protect full skeletisation quite well over months to a year”*

27. It is a scientific proven fact that no two bodies will decompose at the same rate. Many factors must be taken to consideration when determining decomposition such as

environmental, insects, etc. As such, the professional opinion from CAPT D. MacGregor. Further the email from Dr Dodds refers to protection for up “to a year” and the body in question was found some 15 months after the known execution date.

## CONCLUSION

28. Based on the OAH submission and the evidence available there are five possible candidates who could be the person has been laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Lae, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7. These candidates are:

a. NX143314 Sergeant L.G. Siffleet;

b. Private Pattiwal;

c. Private Reharing;

d. s47F

e.

29. The submission by OAH does not establish, on the balance of probabilities that, SGT Siffleet is the soldier buried in the specified grave.

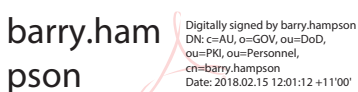


## RECOMMENDATION

30. **Recommendations.** The following recommendations are made:

a. That the headstone at Lae War Cemetery, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7 remains unchanged.

b. The ID Board may wish to consider requesting that CWGC open the grave in question and obtain a DNA based on “over-riding public necessity’. This would however be an extraordinary request, likely to be resisted by DVA and CWGC.

- c. If recommendation b. is accepted the DNA sample is tested against the s47F s47F

	<b>Support/Not Supported</b>	<b>Agree/Not Agreed</b>
 <b>barry.hampson</b> <b>MAJ</b> Case Officer Tel: 0262 66 7600  15February 2018	 <b>B. EBERT</b> Mr Case Manager – Pacific Tel: 02 6266 7600  15 February 2018	 <b>A.C. BERNIE</b> Mr Manager UWC-A Tel: 02 6265 5319  15February 2018

Distribution:

Annexes:

- A s47E(d), s47G
- B. Historical Context – Sergeant Siffleet / His companions / Operation Whiting
- C. Specialist Report – CAPT Donna MacGregor
- D. Specialist Report – Felicity Gilbert PhD

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-----Original Message-----

From: CWGC Enquiry Support Team [mailto:enquiries@cwgc.org]

Sent: Wednesday, 20 December 2017 1:41 AM

To: s22

Subject: s47E(d), s47G

Dear Mr. Hampson,

Thank you for your email.

Please find attached s47E(d), s47G


Yours sincerely

s47F


CWGC Records Data Manager

Could you please provide me a copy of s47E(d), s47G  
s47E(d), s47G

s47E(d), s47G



s47E(d), s47G



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT – SERGEANT SIFFLEET / HIS COMPANIONS / OPERATION WHITING



Sergeant Len Siffleet, bound and blindfolded, moments before his execution on the beach at Aitape. The executioner, Yasuno Chikao, was killed before the war's end. (AWM 101099)

### Len Siffleet and the Whiting Mission

by Garth Pratten

*Len Siffleet's story will be one of those told in the Australian War Memorial's new Second World War exhibition.*

*A display will honour his life and highlight the extraordinary details of the mission upon which he died.*

Just after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of 24 October 1943, three haggard prisoners, an Australian and two Ambonese, were escorted onto Aitape beach by a party of Japanese marines. The prisoners were stopped by a large hole. Here they were met by a group of Japanese civilians from the 8th Naval Construction Group. One of them, Yasuno Chikao, read a short statement from a flimsy piece of paper. Yunome Kunio, another civilian, related what happened next to an Australian interrogator in February 1946:

*Then the prisoners were given a cigarette. They were blindfolded. Yasuno made the Australian sit down by the hole, then he cut his head off.*

A photograph of this scene taken by another Japanese was among twenty-two photographs found by American troops at Hollandia, the capital of Dutch New Guinea, in April 1944. It shows the Australian just seconds before he

died. The photograph has become one of the most well-known of the Pacific war as perhaps the only image depicting the execution of a western prisoner of war.

Remembered for how he died, not for who he was, the unfortunate Australian in the photo has in the past been incorrectly identified

*The photograph has become one of the most well-known of the Pacific war as perhaps the only image depicting the execution of a western prisoner of war.*

variously as an American airman and as an Australian Victoria Cross recipient, William Newton. His true identity has remained obscure.

The Australian soldier was in fact Sergeant Leonard George Siffleet. He was a caring, decent man who deserves to be

remembered for more than just his gruesome and untimely end. Siffleet's story will be told in the Australian War Memorial's new Second World War exhibition in a display that will honour his life and highlight the extraordinary details of the mission upon which he died.

Len Siffleet was born in Gunnedah, New South Wales, on 14 January 1916. The third child in a family of seven, Len was an active and industrious boy. He enjoyed sports and became quite a good swimmer, splashing down the Namoi River with "Boy" Charlton. While Charlton went on to Olympic glory, Len Siffleet won two gold medals at the NSW North-West championships in Tamworth.

As a young man, Len was renowned for his knitting skills and outfitted the whole of the Gunnedah pipe band with highland hose.

In the late 1930s, Siffleet followed his sister Pearl to Sydney in search of work. After their mother died in 1941, the two took on the responsibility for bringing up their two youngest brothers to accommodate the itinerant nature of their father's work. The boys lived with Pearl and her husband while Len supported them financially.

In the meantime, the world had tumbled into war. Siffleet hesitated to join the army because of his responsibility to his brothers. He tried to join the police but was rejected because of poor eyesight. The army was not quite so selective. Siffleet was called up in August 1940 and served with a searchlight unit at Richmond air force base. After three months he was released and resumed life as a civilian. The war had yet to threaten Australia directly and the militia was still functioning on a part-time basis. But in September 1941, as the situation worsened, he joined the AIF and was posted to the 1st Division Signals Section at Ingleburn.

Being so close to home was too much of a temptation for Len; on two occasions he was absent without leave from Ingleburn. He had good reason to go walkabout. Back in Sydney was his fiancée, Clarice Lane. Len and Clarice's engagement was an open-ended affair. Like so many young people at the time, the uncertainty of the war played on their thoughts and Siffleet was still mindful of his obligations to his brothers, so they decided to delay their wedding, even if Len were sent overseas.

Siffleet was eventually sent to Victoria to complete a specialist signals course at the Melbourne Technical College. In September 1942 he volunteered for special duties and joined the ranks of Z Special Unit. No one will probably

ever know why he chose special duties. His letters from Melbourne give nothing away. Perhaps he was fed-up with being stuck in Australia, or he could have been seeking adventure, or maybe he just wanted to do his bit to get the war over so he could return to the family he missed and the fiancée he loved.

Z Special Unit has acquired a special mystique built up by forty years of Australian television and popular history. The reality was much less exciting. The unit had as many clerks

*Someone who missed the spotlight of history came up with the melodramatic "Z Special Unit", perhaps the worst cover name ever.*

and storemen on its books as it had field operatives. Z Special was simply a holding unit which administered the Australian personnel serving with a much more secret organisation, the Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD), a cover name for Special Operations Australia (SOA).

A cover name was needed to disguise the true nature of the work these Australians were involved in. Someone who missed the spotlight of history came up with the melodramatic "Z Special Unit", perhaps the worst cover name ever.

In October 1942, Len proceeded to the "Z Experimental Station" in Cairns, another botched attempt at trying to provide an inconspicuous cover name for the camp where SOA trained its operatives. It was here that the famous "Operation Jaywick" team had completed their training. While



Sergeant Len Siffleet with his fiancée, Clarice Lane, in Sydney in 1941 (AWM P02547.003)

Len Siffleet was training in Cairns, the Dutch section of ISD was planning a mission to establish a coast-watching station in the mountains above Hollandia, which had recently been occupied by the Japanese. The mission was codenamed "Whiting".

When it came time to choose the Whiting team, 19-year-old Sergeant H.N. Staverman of the Royal Netherlands Navy was selected as the team leader. His second-in-command was Corporal D.J. Topman from the Dutch army. Siffleet was the party's radio operator. Two Ambonese privates from the Dutch colonial forces, M. Reharin and H. Pattiwael, completed the team.

Christmas Day 1942 found Siffleet, now an acting sergeant, in Port Moresby. He was making the best of things, but like most young Australians overseas that Christmas, would rather have been somewhere

New Guinea highlanders crowd around the Dakota transport at Bena Bena after the Whiting and Locust parties had disembarked. (AWM P1708.002)



else. As the New Year rolled around Siffleet wrote his last letter home:

*I hope you and the boys are well. I would like to see them, probably by the time I get back they will have grown to manhood. There's no doubt they would have brightened up the place at Xmas. It would be grand if we could only bring back one of those Xmas's we used to have at home. Perhaps as the years go on we may have the pleasure again.*

*Have you seen Clarice lately? When I have work to do, time flies, but when I am idle well time seems to be the same. Patience seems to be the only consolation. It's wonderful just what a person can adapt himself to. I have had quite a few experiences since leaving Australia, and when I return I shall have many funny stories to tell. There may be a celebration first.*

On 20 January 1943, all the waiting and training was over and the Whiting party found itself on a Dakota bound for Bena Bena in central New Guinea. This would be as far as the lumbering Dakota could take them because to travel any further would have made it easy prey for any lurking Japanese fighters. Also on board was the "Locust" mission; it was heading for Vanimo, to the west of Aitape, and the two parties would travel together for their mutual protection. With several hundred New Guinea carriers in tow, the combined parties left Bena Bena on 21 January, heading for Mount Hagen. In the coming months they would trek over 1,100 kilometres, approximately the same distance from Melbourne to Newcastle, across the mountainous spine of

central New Guinea.

By February they had reached Wahag, but here they were forced to wait until a supply flight into the airstrip there could be arranged. The mission thus far had been plagued by a running quarrel between Staverman and Topman; Topman returned to Moresby on the plane that eventually brought in the supplies. The parties travelled down

*In the coming months they would trek over 1,100 kilometres, approximately the same distance from Melbourne to Newcastle, across the mountainous spine of central New Guinea.*

the swampy valley of the Sepik river and on 10 June, five months after leaving Moresby, they arrived at Lumi, the intended base camp for the Locust party. A few days later the Whiting party set out for Hollandia.

Back in Australia, the power struggle between the Americans and the Australians for control of the Allied intelligence and special operations effort had resulted in a reorganisation. SOA received a new cover name, the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), and was controlled directly from

Australian Land Headquarters. It was just one of several organisations under the umbrella of the US-controlled Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB).

The reorganisation resulted in the creation of another Australian special unit, "M". Like Z, it was an administrative unit responsible for all the Australian personnel serving with the AIB. Henceforth, only those Australians serving with SRD would be administered by Z. Len Siffleet, traipsing through the jungle somewhere between Maimai and Lumi, was oblivious to all these administrative machinations and on 5 May he was transferred to M Special Unit, the same day his promotion to sergeant was confirmed.

In 1942, the Japanese garrison at Aitape was small. It consisted of five Japanese civilians from the Minseibu (a civilian administrative organisation attached to the navy), a platoon of Japanese marines and a smaller detachment of Formosan volunteers, recruited primarily as a labour force. In mid-September 1943 the garrison received word from friendly locals that Allied spies had slipped into the mountains around Aitape. A patrol was dispatched to track them down but returned empty handed. A reward

was offered to any local who could catch the Allied soldiers.

Despite a warning from a local that the mission had been compromised, Staverman opted to press on towards Hollandia. Together with Pattiwael he scouted ahead while Siffleet and Reharin remained at Woma with the radio. These are the last definite details that remain of the Whiting party's movements. Through August and September little was heard, Siffleet probably trying to minimise use of his radio to avoid detection. What follows has been pieced together from interrogations of Japanese prisoners and translations of Japanese documents.

Sometime in mid-September Pattiwael and Staverman were ambushed near the village of Nemo, south of Hollandia. Staverman was killed but Pattiwael managed to escape to warn Siffleet and Reharin at Woma. Siffleet sent one last message that Staverman had been killed and that he would destroy his codes and radio and head south towards Wamala Creek, the base camp of another AIB party.

Siffleet and his party never made it. At Wantipi, a group of about 100 local supporters of the Japanese surrounded them when they stopped for a meal. Siffleet

fired on the attackers, wounding one, and managed to break free but was quickly caught. He and his companions were beaten and abused by their captors as they were led to the Japanese outpost at Malol, where they were exchanged on 24 September for some Japanese occupation money and a roll of fabric.

At Malol the prisoners were interrogated by Yunome and Hiroe, the Japanese civilian administrator. Siffleet at first said nothing. He was slapped and beaten, and then Hiroe beat him again using both a long stick and a club. Siffleet in the end apparently said quite a lot, as revealed in Yunome's report, perhaps another indicator of the brutality of his ordeal. Not much of what he said would have been any use to the Japanese, however.

He gave away many basic details, but the story he told of his own mission and that of his mates in the Locust party was a fabrication. With great courage, he was buying them time. The interrogation lasted for three days and the prisoners spent two weeks at Malol before being taken to Aitape.

Admiral Kamada, the Japanese commander in Wewak, was informed of the capture of the prisoners. He did not regard them as being of much importance and

they languished, first at Malol and then at Aitape, while their captors waited for word on what should be done. On 22 or 23 October, Captain Noto, Kamada's chief staff officer, reported to him that a barge was about to leave for Aitape.

Almost as a second thought, Kamada told Noto to instruct the barge's captain to pass on to Warrant Officer Watanabe, the commander of the Japanese marines at Aitape, orders to kill the prisoners. Noto later claimed the decision had been reached after a "military punishment tribunal" had been convened by Kamada. In the light of the contradictory statements of all involved, it would seem that this tribunal never took place.

Following the receipt of his orders on 23 October, Watanabe intended to shoot the prisoners the next day. As a matter of procedure he consulted Yasuno, the civilian administrator and his notional superior. Yasuno was indignant. Minseibu personnel had captured the prisoners, so they would have the honour of executing them in accordance with Japanese tradition.

Thus on 24 October 1943, before a crowd of jeering locals, Siffleet, Reharin and Pattiwael were beheaded by three Japanese civilians: Yasuno Chikao, an administrator, Yunome Kunio, an interpreter, and Mitsuashi Masuyo, a clerk. Siffleet went quietly to his death. They were buried where they died, below the tide line. Later that afternoon the three executioners returned to place flowers on the grave. The next day, there would be little trace of the horrible events that had taken place but they would live on in the mind of Yunome Kunio.





Members of M Special Unit with indigenous guerrilla troops at Lumi, about 50 km south of Aitape, shortly before the Whiting and Locust parties separated to undertake their respective missions. Sgt Staverman is at the extreme left (obscured); next to him is Sgt Siffleet. Pte Pattiweel is standing fourth from left. (AWM P1708.004)

That night he wrote in his diary:

*This afternoon for me was an occasion to be remembered for a lifetime. I myself, with my own Japanese sword beheaded an enemy soldier prisoner. This was a new experience for me. But I screwed myself to it. Anything can be done if one resolves to do it to the best of one's ability. And I am convinced that given complete confidence I can carry out any task successfully. I really believe I was magnificent. Amongst the Japanese onlookers there were many who declared their admiration for my skill in making such an excellent stroke.*

In December 1943 the Army posted Sergeant Len Siffleet missing in action, believed to be a prisoner of war. This was the last his family heard until he was officially declared dead in 1946; at that point the army tried to reclaim all the money that had been paid into his bank account during the previous three years. His grave was never found.

The last Clarice Lane heard of her fiancé was a telegram received from the AIF on 15 September 1943, a week before Siffleet was captured. Not listed as his official next of kin, Clarice received no official notification that Len was missing, nor that he was dead. After the war she drifted out of touch with the Siffleet family and married

another man. Clarice only learned of Siffleet's fate on Anzac Day 1989, when the infamous photo was shown on *A Current Affair*.

In 1946 the Japanese responsible for the deaths of Len Siffleet and his companions stood trial for war crimes. Noto, Watanabe and Yunome were all found guilty. Noto was

*Clarice only learned of Siffleet's fate on Anzac Day 1989, when the infamous photo was shown on A Current Affair.*

sentenced to twenty-seven years' imprisonment, Watanabe to seven and Yunome was sentenced to hang; his execution warrant was signed by Lieutenant General Sturdee on 15 September 1946.

Yunome made several appeals for leniency, arguing that he was only carrying out orders that he regarded as lawful. His first appeal was quashed. The second made reference to the dubious evidence, given by Noto, that a court hearing of sorts had been convened before the prisoners were executed. In light of the findings and sentences of the other trials, Yunome's death sentence was commuted to ten years' imprisonment.

Kamada and Mitsuashi were captured and tried by the Dutch.

Kamada was subsequently executed for the murder of other prisoners at Balikpapan, while the fate of Mitsuashi, removed from a repatriation ship just hours before it sailed for Japan, is unknown. Yasuno and Hiroe were killed while trying to escape from the Americans at Hollandia.

Len Siffleet was an ordinary Australian sent to do an extraordinary job, no different from thousands of others in the AIF. In 1943 he was sent on a reconnaissance mission to New Guinea. He was betrayed, beaten and then executed. Len Siffleet was a soldier acting only as ordered, but his executioners did not see this as a reason for clemency. While he waited in Port Moresby to leave on that fateful mission, Len wrote to his sister Pearl:

*Times have certainly tossed me around. Twelve months ago I imagined I would be an old married man by now, although one has a long time to live and there is still plenty of time.*

## The author

Garth Pratten is a historian at the Australian War Memorial. The author would like to thank Mr Raymond "Boyd" Gordon (Siffleet), Mr Ronald Siffleet and Mrs Clarice Mills for their kind assistance during the course of his research.

R3338960633389606(DRMS  
ID)

SENSITIVE

For action by: 1300h 20 Feb 18

## DECISION BRIEF FOR DSSIM-A, CHAIR OF UWC-A ID BOARD 01/18

1. **Purpose.** To seek a decision on Operation Aussies Home's (OAH) submission that the Unknown Australian Soldier (UAS) buried in the Commonwealth War Cemetery Lae PNG Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7 (PP.A.7) is or is not that of NX143314 SGT Leonard Gordon Siffleet who was killed by the Japanese on 24 Oct 1943.

2. **Recommendation.** It is recommended that the board decide:

a. That on the balance of probabilities, the Unknown Australian Soldier buried in PP.A.7, Commonwealth War Cemetery Lae PNG IS ~~(IS NOT)~~ NX143314 Sergeant Leonard Gordon Siffleet.

Identified as SGT Siffleet / ~~Not Identified as~~ SGT Siffleet (Please circle)

3. **Background.** Operation Aussies Home (OAH) made a submission to Unrecovered War Casualties – Army (UWC-A), 'Request for a Headstone Change and addendum' in relation to that of NX143314 Sergeant (SGT) L.G. Siffleet who was executed along with his two Ambonese companions on the beach near Aitape on 24th October 1943.

4. Operation Aussies Home has put forward the hypothesis based on the *Balance of Probability*, that the Unidentified Australian Soldier (UAS) that was recorded as washed up east of the mouth of the Nigia River, Aitape, on the 24 Jan 1945 and who is now interred in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Lae, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7, is in fact Siffleet. The board has been presented with all of OAH's submissions and annexes for consideration in advance of the meeting.

5. Having reviewed the OAH submissions, UWC-A does not support OAH's hypothesis, for the following reasons:

- a. Forensic opinions from Ms Felicity Gilbert and Captain Donna MacGregor both consider it highly unlikely that a body buried in the tropics for around 15 months would survive to be recognised as a "body" as described in the records.
- b. That two other Australian soldiers were lost drowned in the vicinity of the recovered bodies in the preceding weeks to the recovered body. Aquatic taphonomy is a developing science and these individuals cannot be excluded as the soldier washed up on 24 Jan 1945. Ms Gilbert's report considers these drowned soldiers more likely candidates than SGT Siffleet for the body recovered.
- c. The OAH submission relies on shifting sands to explain how the body could be misinterpreted as "washed up" when it may have been "uncovered." OAH provided no theory as to why the 1943/44 and 1944/45 monsoon season be discounted in the exposing of the body,
- d. OAH provided no theory as to why the two Ambonese executed at the same time as Siffleet be discounted,

SENSITIVE

**SENSITIVE**

2

- e. The OAH submission suggests that SGT Siffleet was in fact executed at the NIGIA river. They hypothesise that a Japanese barge base may have existed there a potential site for interrogations. No evidence regarding a barge base has been presented, and extensive war crimes evidence suggesting SGT Siffleet was executed at Aitape beach, 17km away from the Nigia River has been discounted or not presented.
  - f. UWC-A has review the OAH submission, addendums and all known evidence available and the end result being, we are not satisfied on the balance of probabilities, that the UAS recovered near the mouth Nigia river on 25 Jan 1945 is SGT Siffleet.
6. **Issue.** OAH's submission is not supported by UWC-A, however should be considered independently by the board, and stand on its merits. Mr <sup>s47F</sup> may be contacted by telephone if any matters of confirmation are required. Regardless of the board's decision, this matter is likely to be subject to public scrutiny.
7. **Way ahead.** Upon reaching a board decision, appropriate notifications will be sent to the Operation Aussies Home. Regardless of the decision made, OAH should be commended for their research and contribution to the attempts to locate SGT Siffleet. If the board chooses to identify the body as SGT Siffleet, additional work will commence in notifying family, Ministers and the Office of Australian War Graves for subsequent headstone changes.
8. If the board decides not to identify the body as SGT Siffleet, ongoing work will attempt to identify the body and locate SGT Siffleet in the field.
9. **Conclusion.** This brings to a close a significant body of work from MAJ Hampson and OAH who should both be acknowledged for their detailed work on this case.

**Drafted by:** Mr Brad Ebert                      ICM-AP UWC-A    Tel: 67600    19 Feb 18  
**Cleared by:** COL A. Collingburn              DSSIM-A            Tel: 54377    20 Feb 18  
**Consultation:** Board members: COL A. Collingburn (Chair), COL P. Saultry , LCDR J. Duke

Agree/Disagree  
s22

Supported/Not Supported

Supported/Not Supported

**A.R. Collingburn**  
COL  
(Chair 1/18 ID Board)  
DSSIM-A  
Tel: 02 6265 4377  
R1-4-B028

**P. Saultry**  
COL  
(1/18 ID Board Member)  
CLO-A  
Tel: 02 6265 3868  
R1-4-A99

**J. Duke**  
LCDR  
(1/18 ID Board Member)  
HQ ADFIS  
Tel: 02 6127 2590  
BP:33-02-089

20 Feb 18

20 Feb 18

20 Feb 18

**SENSITIVE**

**REPORT ON REMAINS OF UNIDENTIFIED AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER BURIED AT  
LAE COMMONWEALTH WAR CEMETRY PLOT P.P.A.7  
(PROPOSED TO BE LEONARD SIFFLEET)**

**1. Statement of Qualifications and Experience**

I, Donna Marie MacGREGOR, state that I am a Senior Forensic Officer within the Brisbane Scientific Section of Forensic Services Group at the rank of Sergeant. I have over 14 years' experience in this role. Of these 8 years' experiences was full time and involved the examination of all types of major crime scenes including skeletal recovery scenes, but more recently this role has been part-time where I have been focused on training in human anatomy, pathology and skeletal recovery, and assisted in the examination of major crime scenes pertaining to skeletal remains. In this role I have assisted with the examination of 5 large-scale forensic search operations related to the various long-term cold case investigations. I also act in the capacity of forensic anthropologist for the Queensland Police Service. I have over 14 years' experience in this role.

I am also a lecturer in human anatomy and forensic anthropology within the School of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Health at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. In this role I teach human anatomy and forensic anthropology to undergraduate students in Biomedical sciences, Medical Imaging, and Radiation therapy, and supervise research by postgraduate Masters students in the field of forensic crime scene and forensic anthropology related topics. I have over 7 years' experience in this role.

I also serve as a Captain (Reserve member) within the Australian Army in the role of Forensic Anthropologist posted to the specialist unit, Unrecovered War Casualties-Army (UWC-A). In this role I am part of multidisciplinary field teams tasked with the location, recovery and identification of remains of Australian Soldiers from WWI and WWII and have undertaken this work in Belgium, France, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea including the area around Aitape. I have completed 14 international activities in the 8 years I have served in this role.

I am the holder of a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours from the University of Queensland; a Masters of Science in Forensic Science from Griffith University; and a Diploma in Fire Investigation from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. I am currently undertaking a Diploma in Forensic Human Identification through the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine, Royal College of Physicians, London.

## 2. Background

This report outlines the probability of Unidentified remains of an Unknown Australian Soldier (UAS) recovered at GR 059463 (Map: Aitape East 1") at the mouth of the Nigia River, Aitape on the 25 January 1945, now buried in Lae Commonwealth War Cemetery in plot P.P.A.7, as those belonging to NX 143314 Sergeant (SGT) Leonard George SIFFLEET.

NX 143314 Sergeant (SGT) Leonard George SIFFLEET served in the AIF in WW2. It is believed that he was beheaded by a member of the Japanese forces near Aitape in Dutch New Guinea on the 24 October 1943. This identification was based on a photograph taken from a deceased Japanese officer in April 1944 at Hollandia, that depicts a blindfolded kneeling Australian soldier whose head was forward being towered over by a Japanese soldier with a sword above his head. This photograph has received wide publicity. The body of SIFFLEET has not been recovered.

This report is provided based on an understanding of soft tissue decomposition and the processes that can affect decomposition rather than any other supporting documentation except for the excerpts nominated in the report below. The opinion provided in this report is formed on:

- professional experience with decomposed and skeletal remains through contemporary and cold case forensic casework,
- practical experience and observations with the recovery of military remains from various theatres including the area around Aitape, and
- a review of the available academic literature around this topic.

## 3. Factors that affect the Decomposition of Human Remains

Decomposition is a natural process whereby organic matter is broken down into smaller elements and returned to the environment. The normal process of decomposition, or decay as it is also called, of a body passes through various identifiable stages of decay. Depending on the publication, this process has five (5) main stages. These stages include fresh, bloat, decay, remains (or dry stage) and skeletisation. The time taken for a body to pass through these stages is dependent on a number of variables. These include primarily temperature, moisture and depositional environment after death i.e. the environment surrounding the body (Janaway et al 2009).

### *(i) Temperature and Moisture*

With regards to temperature, the higher the temperatures the faster the rate of decay. Therefore, bodies will decompose faster in summer than in winter. The amounts of moisture (i.e. from ground water, precipitation etc) in the environment around the body

will also, though to a smaller extent, have an effect with watery environments promoting continual breakdown of the remains.

*(ii) Depositional Environment*

The depositional environment also has a significant effect on the rate of decomposition. This depositional environment depends on the position of the body relative to the ground surface (i.e. depth of burial), and if the scenario is a burial then the presence of any coverings (i.e. clothing and/or coffin) and the soil particle size has a significant influence.

A body on the surface will decompose more rapidly than a body submerged in water or buried beneath the ground surface. Further a body buried in a shallow grave will decompose more quickly than a body buried at a depth greater than 50cm, as the shallow burial is subject to daily fluctuations in temperature that effect the soil surface and penetrate partial into the soil profile. This is especially true of clay soils. Deeper burials experience a more constant temperature thus slowing decomposition effects.

The presence of coverings surrounding the buried body is also important. If the body is disposed of within some form of covering or a coffin, decomposition will proceed at a slower rate as the soil environment is prevented from contact with the body, and air borne vectors such as insects are excluded from the body. However, without some covering around the buried body, the soil microorganisms and/or possible insect vectors can more easily access the body and accelerate decomposition. This is especially true of shallower burials.

The type of soil, or rather the soil particle size is as important as the depth of burial, when considering the decay rate of a body. The particle size affects water permeability and air exchange (Bethell and Carver 1987). For example, clay soils due to their hold water as they are more permeable and thus accelerate decomposition. A damp porous soil promotes accelerated rates of decomposition. In a tropical environment water passes through the sand both due to precipitation events (i.e. rainfall), and in coastal areas from tides and high-water tables.

The size of the body will have an effect on the rate of decay. A thin or emaciated body will decompose at a more rapid rate than a larger body (Mant 1987). The report by Thurgar & Latimer dated 3 Mar 2017, provides evidence via the photograph of an emaciated Sgt SIFFLETT at the time of his death. In addition, trauma, such as that caused by torture to the body will also promote the rate of decomposition.

*(iii) Report by Thurgar and Laitmer dated 3 Mar 2017*

The report nominated above presents various references to the possible burial site of SIFFLETT, and also to the physical condition of SIFFLLEET. These are presented below.

In the report by Thurgar & Latimer dated 3 Mar 2017, it states on page 12, paragraph 65:

*“It is reported in Japanese annals and native ‘stories’, that on or about 3.00 pm on the 24 October 1943, SGT Siffleet and two fellow Ambonese prisoners (PTE Pattiwahl and PTE Reharin, who were members of the Netherlands East Indies Forces) were marched to the beach nearby to the Barge Base. They were forced to the ground and made to kneel before a crowd of Japanese and New Guinean onlookers. Wearing blindfolds, the three prisoners were beheaded **and buried**”.*

Page 11, paragraph 63 states:

*“It is contended that the ‘**beach**’ (mud flats) near the location of the Japanese barge transportation unit (2 Spl Sea Transport Unit) is the logical place where the beheading of SGT Siffleet.”*

Page 14, paragraph 67 states:

*“As reported earlier in this document, and consistent with Japanese military practices after carrying out a beheading in the SWPA, **the remains were buried at or nearby the place of execution.**”*

Page 14, paragraph 70 states:

*“Multiple reports ranging from native accounts through to the Court Martial records of Yasuno Chikao, who was found guilty of his beheading, indicate that SGT Siffleet **was buried on the beach at or near Aitape.**”*

Page 14, paragraph 73 states:

*“**The beach near Lemieng village (hamlet) where SGT Siffleet was buried,** faces out to sea and does not have the impediment of off-shore coral reefs or islands.”*

Page 17, paragraph 85 states:

*“(a) there is evidence to indicate the remains of SGT Siffleet were **buried at depth in sand/mud on the 24 October 1943** at Grid Reference 060463, Map Aitape East, 1:63360 (1 inch/mile).”*

Therefore, from these statements it is deduced that SIFFLEET was buried at an unknown depth in sandy/muddy soil, on or near a beach, without any coverings except for at least the clothing they were wearing at the time of death which included a shirt and a pair of shorts.

*(iv) Observations of the Aitape soil*

In addition to the known information above, the author of this report has had experience with burials in the Aitape area. The coastal areas along the beaches have sandy silt soil and the presence of a high-water table. The daily temperature in this near equatorial area is over 30 degrees Celsius. High humidity is experienced all year and the area receives high annual rainfall (i.e. 100+ ml). The wet season occurs from December to March. These conditions are conducive to accelerated decomposition due to the moist warm porous nature of the soil.

#### 4. Possibility of UAS being SIFFLEET

Sgt SIFFLEET was killed on 24 October 1943. UAS was located on 25 January 1945. This presents a post-mortem, or time since death, interval of 15 months.

A review of the literature, located no studies that considered for the conditions that have been described for the possible SIFFLEET burial. Similar studies in temperate climates have been conducted. Any studies in tropical environments have examined clothing and coffin effects. Though these studies are still not a direct comparison they do provide some assistance with post-mortem intervals.

Studies in Croatia determined that bodies buried in their clay soils in summer had all soft tissue sodden and bones becoming exposed (Morovic-Budak 1965). In Coral atolls in the Pacific bodies buried in plywood coffins were partially skeletonised between 3.5 - 4.5 years post-mortem (Spennemann and Franke 1995).

Though these studies are no direct comparisons, they do provide some guidance towards decay rates. The conditions in Aitape are warmer with higher rainfall and humidity, and the body of SIFFLEET was buried and assumed to not be protected from the environment. Also, at the time of death SIFFLEET was emaciated and wounded due to the torture he had sustained. The soil in Aitape is sandy and porous and not clay. These additional variables will substantially accelerate the rate of decomposition of remains.

It is therefore highly probable that the remains of SIFFLEET would have been in a more advanced state of decomposition if not skeletonised in the 15 months interval between his death and the discovery of the UAS remains. In my opinion It is unlikely that the body reported as UAS on the grave registration card on page 20, paragraph 86 of the report by Thurgar & Latimer dated 3 Mar 2017, is that of SGT SIFFLEET based on the state of decomposition of the UAS still recognisable as a "body".

#### 5. Conclusion

**In my opinion it is highly unlikely that the body reported as UAS, now buried at Lae plot number PPA7, is that of SGT SIFFLEET.** This opinion is based on the expected state of decomposition of the body of SIFFLEET given the proposed burial environment and their reported state of the body of UAS from the grave registration card. Given the 15-month interval between the death of SIFFLEET on 24 October 1943 and the discovery of the remains of UAS on 25 January 1945, the body of SIFFLEET would be expected to be in an advanced state of decomposition and most likely to be in a partial or near skeletonised state, not a recognisable "body".

**Donna MacGREGOR**  
**B.Sc., M.Sc. (For.Sci), Dip. Policing**  
**CAPT, UWC-A**  
**16 FEB 2018**

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# **Report on two bodies recovered from Aitape on 24/01/1945 and 21/02/1945.**

**13 February  
2018**

**Felicity Gilbert**

My name is Felicity Gilbert I am a Bioanthropologist and PHD Candidate at the Australian National University, specialising in decomposition and more specifically decomposition in aquatic environments.

My qualifications are:

- Bachelor of Arts
- Post Graduate Diploma of Forensic Anthropology
- Master of Applied Anthropology

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report covers details pertaining to two bodies recovered from the Aitape area on 24/01/1945 and 21/02/1945. It details the probability of any of these two recovered bodies belonging to fourteen individuals (twelve Australian Soldiers and two Indonesians) that were either executed (EP1-3), lost in the flooding of the Danmap river (DMP 1-8), or went missing, presumed drowned (MP1 -3), between 24/10/1943 and 19/02/1945.

I, Felicity Gilbert, as an expert in human decomposition and more specifically human decomposition in aquatic environments was requested to give my professional opinion by Professor Marc Oxenham, School of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian national University, based on the information provided in Appendix 1.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Recovered body one.**

Based on the information received and factors discussed, in my professional opinion it is possible that Body one could belong to one of the five individuals (excluding MP2 and DMP1-8) that died in the area between 1943 and 1945.

DMP1-8 are excluded as they were lost three days after the recovery of body one.

MP2 is excluded as they went missing 26 days after the recovery of body one.

In my professional opinion, out of the five individuals, Missing Persons number 1 and number 3 are the most likely candidates.

### **Recovered body two.**

Based on the information received and factors discussed, in my professional opinion it is possible that recovered body two could belong to one of the fourteen individuals that died in the area between 1943 and 1945.

In my professional opinion, out of the fourteen individuals, Missing Person number 2 would be the most likely candidate.

## **LOCATION INFORMATION (Bernie, 2018)**

B1: Remains found just above sea level approximately 18 metres east of mouth of the Nigia River.

B2: Found floating in shallow water opposite 17 Bde HQ. Close proximity to B1 recovery location.

EP1-3: All documentary references to EP1-3 indicate that they were executed and buried in the vicinity of a beach at AITAPE on 24 October 1943. However, one theory is that they may have been executed in the immediate vicinity of the recovery of B1, as hypothesised by the public submission (Bernie, 2018).

MP 1: last seen at the beach at Aitape. There are several long beaches to which this could refer, and the precise location is not known. Reported to have drowned while of unsound mind.

MP2: was last seen swimming approximately 8km to the NW of the location of B1 and B2 recoveries.

MP3: was last seen drowned in the Nigia River, the same river at the mouth of which B1 was recovered from. According to one source, he was last seen in an unconscious state in the mouth of the river some 6 weeks earlier.

DMP1-8: lost in a flood at the Danmap River, approximately 50km to the East of B1 and B2.

## **BODY ONE (B1): RECOVERED 24/01/1945**

EP1 – 3: executed 24/10/1943 or 458 days prior to B1 recovery.

MP1: Missing, presumed drowned 27/11/1944 or 58 days prior to B1 recovery

MP2: Missing, presumed drowned 19/02/1945 or 26 days post B1 recovery

MP3: Missing, presumed drowned 04/12/1944 or 51 days prior to B1 recovery

DMP 1-8: lost in the Danmap River flooding 27/01/1945 or 3 days post B1 recovery

MP2 and DMP 1-8 immediately ruled out due to timeframe.

## **Decomposition:**

From the brief description provided, the body appears to be in an advanced state of decomposition but presenting with some degree of adhering soft tissues. The mention of sea lice damage also implies that some soft tissue was still present. The water temperature in this location averages between 27 and 30 degrees Celsius (COSPPac 2017 & NOAA 2017), which would promote fairly rapid decomposition.

Both wave action and sea lice can significantly accelerate the breakdown of a body in a water environment. Sea lice scavenging is extremely variable. They have been known to decimate a

human body in a matter of days but may also cause minimal disturbance, leaving only bore holes on areas of soft tissue (Tsokos, 2005).

While the body was missing its head and feet, this could be a result of various extrinsic factors such as scavenging, movement in the water and general decomposition. The head (starting with the mandible), followed by the hands and feet are generally the first parts of the body to detach in a water environment (Haglund, 1993). While I would expect to see the hands following a similar sequence, the position of the body in the water as well as possible scavenging may have contributed to the feet disarticulating first.

The description does not imply that the head and feet were removed through human intervention, but this may have been impossible to determine given the level of decomposition and lack of appropriate expertise. Without further information it is not possible to determine if the head was removed by natural processes or through human intervention (e.g. sharp force trauma).

EP 1-3:

In general, decomposition occurs relatively rapidly in tropical conditions (Hayman and Oxenham 2017), although the rate of decomposition will be affected by a range of factors. As the depth of burial(s) is unknown, determination of the possible rate of decomposition is difficult to estimate. However, in a sandy, warm and moist environment I would expect decomposition to progress fairly quickly (Spennemann et al. 1995. Rysavy and Goff 2014). If the three individuals were buried in the same grave, this could also create a higher bacterial load. The open decapitation wounds, even if the bodies were buried immediately, also has the potential to attract insects and accelerate the decomposition process (Anderson, 1997). While decomposition within multiple-body graves (i.e. mass grave) may vary significantly by any given body's position and depth within a mass grave (e.g. Troutman et al. 2014), there is no information on the structure of the grave (e.g. single grave with bodies buried side by side, overlapping, on top of each other etc.) or graves in this instance and no inferences regarding differential decomposition among these three individuals can be made.

It is possible that some level of preservation may have occurred to EP1-3 whilst interred, in the form of Adipocere (Spennemann et al. 1995). Had this occurred, the body(ies) may have preserved (a form of mummification) some of the underlying tissue and given the appearance of advanced decomposition but with some tissue intact. The likelihood of this kind of preservation is highly dependent on the depth of the grave, moisture content and consistency of the sand (see Hayman and Oxenham 2016:93-4 for a discussion of decomposition rates with respect moisture level). As this information is not available, it is not possible to speculate as to whether this has occurred, but it is an outlying possibility.

However, had the bodies been dislodged from their grave(s) on the beach and spent some time in the water, I would expect a fairly rapid breakdown through water movement and wave action regardless of their level of preservation. The description states that this body was found on land 'washed up during a storm on the previous day' implying it had been subject to some level of turbulence within the water.

The time frame of 458 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described, makes it highly unlikely that B1 is any of the three executed

persons.

MP1: Given the time frame of 58 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described, it is possible that B1 could be MP1.

MP3: Given the time frame of 51 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described, it is possible that B1 could be MP3.

# at an advanced state of decomposition and without further information the 7 days difference between MP1 and MP3 is negligible.

**Summary: Recovered body one**

As explained above, without further information regarding the state of decomposition on the body it is very difficult to determine if MP1 was presenting just an advanced state of decomposition, or displayed a level of preservation which has implications in establishing a timeframe. In my professional opinion, it is highly unlikely that recovered body number one belongs to any of the executed persons (EP1 -3).

Based on the information received and factors discussed above, in my professional opinion it is possible that Body one could belong to one of the five individuals (excluding MP2 and DMP1-8) that died in the area between 1943 and 1945.

In my professional opinion, out of the five individuals, Missing Persons number 1 and number 3 are the most likely candidates.

## **BODY TWO: RECOVERED 21/02/1945**

EP1 – 3: executed 24/10/1943 486 days prior to B2 recovery.

MP1: Missing, presumed drowned 27/11/1944 86 days prior to B2 recovery

MP2: Missing, presumed drowned 19/02/1945 3 days prior to B2 recovery

MP3: Missing, presumed drowned 04/12/1944 79 days prior to B2 recovery

DMP1-8: Lost in Danmap River Flooding 27/01/1945 25 days prior to B2 recovery

### **Decomposition**

From the descriptions provided, this body, while fairly decomposed had not been in the water for an extensive period of time. This is evident from the descriptions of bloat around the facial area.

The water temperature in this location averages between 27 and 30 degrees Celsius (COSPPac 2017 & NOAA 2017). At these temperatures, bloat in the facial area could present in a matter of days. The statement also mentions that the body was found floating in shallow water. This reinforces the description of bloat observed. The temperature of the water is conducive to both bloat and subsequent floatation within a short timeframe (Heaton et al 2010).

The statement that the body had been mauled by sharks with the right arm, right foot and a portion of the abdomen missing would have contributed to the state of the body (Allaire et al 2012).

The statement that the body had been in the water for at least one week is plausible, but in my opinion this timeframe would not be significantly longer than one week and could have been shorter due to the factors described above.

EP 1-3: From the description provided, the head was present and presumably attached. It would be highly unlikely to find the head even in close proximity to the body had it been actually detached, particularly if the body had been in the water for any significant amount of time.

Given the time frame of 486 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity, as well as the preservation of an attached head, described for B2 does not indicate it could plausibly be identified as any of the three executed persons.

MP1: Given the time frame of 86 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described, B2 is highly unlikely to be MP1.

MP2: the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described for B2 is plausible within a timeframe of 3 days.

MP3: Given the time frame of 79 days between disappearance and recovery, the level of decomposition and scavenging activity described, B2 is highly unlikely to be MP3.

DMP1-8: While surface current data is not available for this timeframe, current speeds for the area range between 0.05 and 0.30 metres per second (COSPPac 2017) and one of DMP1-8 could have drifted to the recovery location within the timeframe. Considering the level of

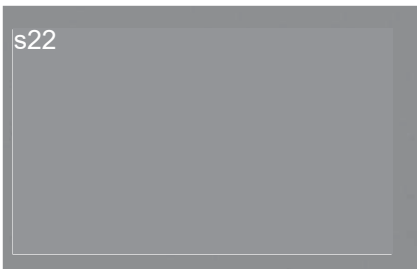
decomposition, and scavenging activity described for B2, I would expect a more advanced level of decomposition and damage to the body if it had drifted 50km's. While there is an outside possibility within the timeframe of 25 days that one of DMP1-8 could be MP2, my professional opinion is that t/his is highly unlikely.

**Summary: Recovered body two.**

Based on the information received and factors discussed above, in my professional opinion it is possible that Body two could belong to one of the fourteen individuals that died in the area between 1943 and 1945.

In my professional opinion, out of the fourteen individuals, Missing Person number 2 would be the most likely candidate.

Signed



Felicity Gilbert 19/02/2018.

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## Appendix 1

### (1) Soldiers Known to have died or gone missing in the Area of interest

#### **Executed Person One** executed on 24 October 1943

Australian male - late 20s, beheaded on beach. Buried on beach. Depth of grave unknown.

#### **Executed Person Two**- executed on 24 October 1943

Ambonese male -mid 20s, beheaded on beach. Buried on beach. Depth of grave unknown.

#### **Executed Person Three** - executed on 24 October 1943

Ambonese male -mid 20s, beheaded on beach. Buried on beach. Depth of grave unknown.

It is possible that all three were buried in the same grave on the beach, as they were executed one after another in the same location. Their place of execution, and burial is on the beach in the Aitape region.

#### **Missing Soldier One**- missing on 27 November 1944

His (brief) records indicate: drowned accidentally while of unsound mind. Was last seen in the sea at Aitape at about 0520 hours, when he disappeared 100 yards (91 metres) from shore. A search failed to recover the body.

#### **Missing Soldier Two**- missing on 19 February 1945

His personal Army records indicate his disappearance as: drowned accidentally while attending an authorised swimming parade. Body not recovered. Court of Inquiry held on 14 March 1945.

#### **Missing Soldier Three**- missing on 4 December 1944

His personal Army records indicate his disappearance as: accidentally drowned -on duty at the time, attending an organised swimming parade; body not recovered.

## **(2) Bodies recovered from the area, and during the time, of interest**

Note, only two bodies were recovered, at different times, but both apparently in the general area of the Aitape Township.

### **Body One**- found 24 January 1945

Remains found just above sea level approximately 20 yards (18 metres) east of mouth of the Nigia River. Body had been washed up during a storm on the previous day (23 January). Body too decomposed through action of water and sea lice to note any deformities etc.

*'An Officer from Junior Leaders' School, situated near the mouth of the Nigia River reported that the remains of an Unidentified Australian Soldier had been washed up above sea level, approx 20 yds (18 metres) east of the mouth of the Nigia River. Capt Kerr and Party investigated and recovered the remains (Head and feet missing). Records held by his Unit indicate that the remains could be that of a Private xxx who was last seen in an unconscious condition in the mouth of the Nigia River some six weeks previously. But due to lack of any means of confirming identification, the remains were buried in Aitape Aust War Cemetery as Unidentified Australian Soldier.'*

### **Body Two**- found 21 February 1945

Date of official burial 22 February 1945. Report of discovery of remains received 12 March 1945, 42/8B/1518. Found floating in shallow water opposite 17 Bde HQ. Body recovered by 17 Bde personnel. Body has been mauled by sharks. Right foot missing. Portion of abdomen, back and right arm missing. Body appears to have been immersed in water for at least one week. Head swollen up and features badly disfigured.

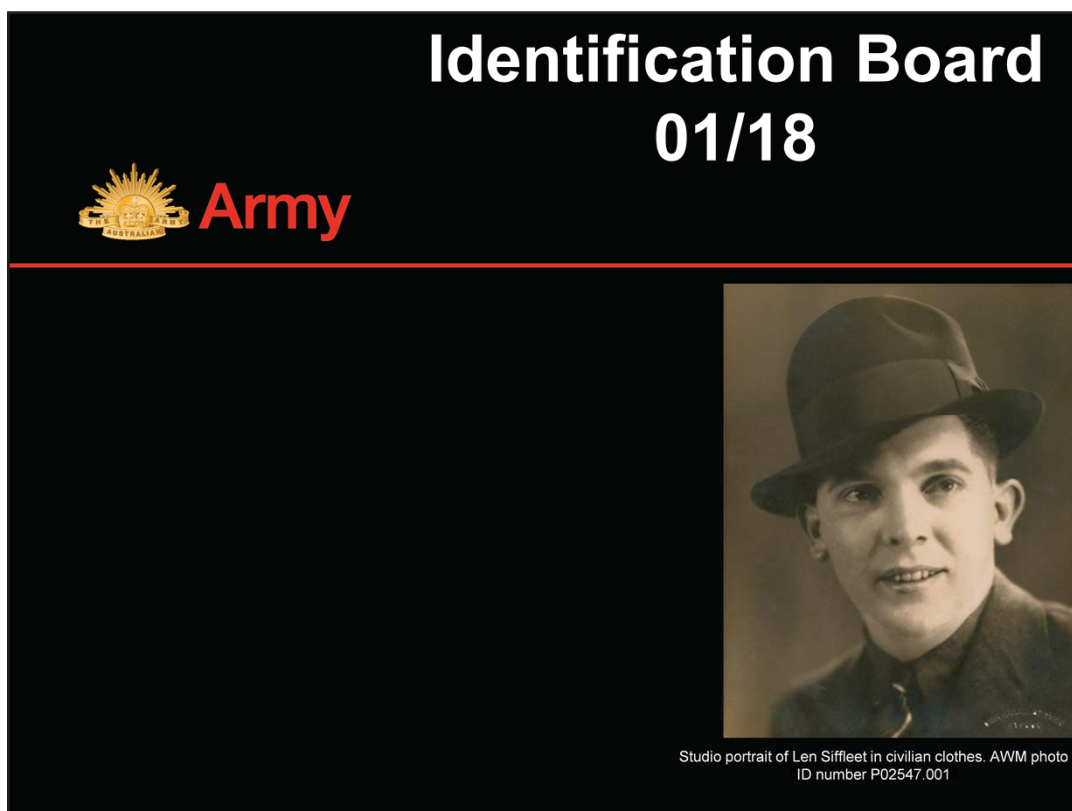
## **(3) Task**

Six individuals (4 Australian Soldiers and two Indonesians) were either executed or went missing, presumed drowned, between the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1943 and 19<sup>th</sup> February 1945. Three of these individuals were known to have been decapitated and buried immediately after execution (on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1943).

Two individuals were recovered in the general area of all six deaths (or instances of missing, presumed dead), one on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1945 and one on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1945.

Based on the facts (as listed above) and your professional opinion, as an expert in human decomposition (particularly decomposition in aquatic environments), what is the probability of these two recovered sets of remains belong to any of the six individuals that died or went missing in this area between 1943 and 1945.

Further, in your professional opinion, who are the two most likely candidates for the recovered, but otherwise unidentified, bodies.



Welcome Gentlemen/Ladies, (as appropriate)

Introduce everyone

We are here today to undertake an Identification Board in relation to NX14331 Sergeant Leonard Gordon SIFFLEET who was executed by the Japanese on the 24 October 1943 on the beach at AITAPE, NEW GUINEA during World War Two. SGT Siffleet was executed by beheading along with two Ambonese companions after they had been captured operating behind enemy lines. Their bodies have never been recovered.

- This board:
  - IAW Draft Chapter 8 DBCSM - board
  - IAW DIG Pers 20-4 - current
  - IAW ASI Part 9 Chapter 3 – balance of probabilities
- Process based on Fromelles ID board
- Authority under *Section 81* of the Defence Regulations 2016
- Process and delegations

As you can see this Board is required to make its decision on the Balance of Probabilities.

It draws its Authority, process and delegations from the references mentioned on this slide.



# Standard of proof

- Balance of probabilities\*
  - “standard of proof required in civil law cases, i.e. **it is more probable than not** that what the person says happened is true.”
  - 51%
  - The board is “reasonably satisfied”
  - Sliding scale due to seriousness – Briginshaw
  - Inquiry Officer standard
- Will advise the family IAW ASI 9-3

(\*<http://www.findlaw.com.au/faqs/3670/what-is-meant-by-beyond-reasonable-doubt-in-crimin.aspx>)

The Balance of Probabilities, is the standard of proof that is required in civil law cases.

The family of SGT Siffleet will be advised IAW with the policy.

Sergeant Siffleet and his two Ambonese companions, Privates Pattiwal and Reharing, were captured while operating behind enemy lines whilst on Operation Whiting.

They were held for a period at Malol and tortured then moved to Aitape. Where they were incarcerated in a building on top a mountain in Aitape.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1943, taken to north beach at Aitape beach and publicly executed by beheading and buried in one grave below the high tide mark.



A brief outline of the circumstances of SGT Siffleet, PTEs Pattiwal and Reharing.

- They were captured while operating behind enemy lines on Operation Whiting.
- Held for a period at Malol, questioned and tortured.
- Moved to Aitape and held in a building on a hilltop.
- Sometime on the 24 Oct 1943, they were taken to north beach at Aitape and public executed by beheading, their execution was photographed, and below the high tide mark in one grave.
- The timing of the execution varies from statement to statement.



**Army**

# Outline



**Aerial view of Aitape – please note hill location**

The yellow circle show the hill at Aitape, the Japanese interrogation reports refer to it as a mountain.

Siffleet beheading is the only known photograph beheading execution of a European during World War Two.

His death and the whereabouts of his remains at the time and to date still has massive immeasurable public interest.



Siffleet beheading is the only known photographed beheading of a European during World War Two.

His death and the whereabouts of his remains at the time and to date still have immeasurable public interest.

Initially, the photograph was reported as an American airman, then as Australian VC winner before being correctly identified.

His family was not told, they found by seeing it displayed at the local pictures after the war.

All three were buried in one grave, on beach, Siffleet executed first, other were then executed other at a time and placed on top of Siffleet – confirmed by Japanese statements.

An Unknown Australian Soldier (UAS) body washes up near Nigia River, 24 Jan 1945. 459 days / 1 year, 3 months and 1 day post the executions.



The interrogation report of the senior guard in charge, WO Watanabe, confirms that only one grave was dug, that Siffleet was executed first, then an Ambonese soldiers one after another.

From the date of execution to the date of UAS body being discovered was 1 year, 3 months and 1 day, or 65 weeks and 4 days, or 459 days.



# Location of Siffleet's Execution

The hill  
at Aitape



The marking made on the map by WO Watanabe



# Body washed up

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE-SUMMARY. Army Form 1118 (Adapted)

(A.T.P. (Grave heading not required))

Unit 7 Aust War Graves Unit Date and Time.—From 0001. 18.1.45 To 2359 hrs 24 Jan '45

Place.	Date.	Hour.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices, Diaries, &c.
AITAPE EG.	18 Jan '45		A communication was received from Capt Kerr advising particulars of location trip and progress made:- "Left Aitape 8 Jan for river camp, 9 Jan, River camp to Nilo; 10 Jan, Nilo to Tong; 11 Jan, exhumed three bodies at Tong; 12 Jan, sent bodies back to Aitape; 13 Jan, left Tong for Pambes.	
do	19 Jan '45		Unit members at Camp engaged on domestic duties; enquiries were made regarding 60 caskets consigned to this area for use in direct burials; no word has been received of their arrival.	Report No.7/38
do	20 Jan.			
do	21 Jan		Capt Kerr returned from trip to Tong-Kusem-gilem-Torricelli Mts area and reported on nature of the journey.	
do.	22/23 Jan		Unit tents in vicinity of Cemetery site were removed; Capt Kerr made enquiries reference a bulldozer and one has been promised for Cemetery work. Application was made for the increase in allotment of Native Labour but, owing to the acute shortage in the area, the request was not granted.	
do.	24 Jan.		An Officer from 17 Bde. Junior Leaders' School, situated near the mouth of the Nigia River reported that the remains of an Unidentified Australian Soldier had been washed up above sea-level, approx. 20 Yds east of the mouth of the Nigia River. Capt Kerr and Party investigated and recovered the remains (Head and feet missing). Records held by this Unit indicate that the remains could be that of a s47F who was last seen in an unconscious condition in the mouth of the Nigia River some six weeks previously. But, due to lack of any means of confirming identification, the remains were buried in Aitape Aust War Cemetery as Unidentified Australian Soldier.	s22

64541 11.45 54.4500 A. H. PROSSER, ACTING COMD. BATTALION.

7 Australian War Graves Unit diary entry for the body washed up on 24 Jan 1945

This show the entry by 7 Aust War Graves Unit, for 24 Jan 1945,

'An Office from 17 Bde Junior Leader' School, situated near the mouth of the Nigia River report that the remains of an Unidentified Australian Soldier had been washed up above sea level, approx 20 Yds east of the mouth of the Nigia River. Capt Kerr and Party investigated and recovered the remains (Head and feet missing). Records held by the unit indicate the remains could be that of a s47F who was last seen in an unconscious condition in the mouth of the Nigia River some weeks previously. But, due to lack of any means of confirming identification, the remains were buried in Aitape Aust War Cemetery as Unidentified Australian Soldier.'



Army

## Body washed up

An Officer from 17 Ade. Junior Leaders' School, situated near the mouth of the Nigla River reported that the remains of an Unidentified Australian Soldier had been washed up above sea-level, approx. 20 yds east of the mouth of the Nigla River. Capt Kern and Party investigated and recovered the remains. (Head and feet missing). Records held by this Unit indicate that the remains could be that of a s47F who was last seen in an unconscious condition in the mouth of the Nigla River some six weeks previously. But, due to lack of any means of confirming identification, the remains were buried in Aitape Aust War Cemetery as Unidentified Australian Soldier.



Army

# Body washed up

BRONZE PLAQUE - LAWN R16/8/267.  
GRAVES REGISTRATION UNIDENTIFIED AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER. DUTCH NEW GUINEA. X

Date of Death	Surname	LOCATION REPORT 7/39.1.1.
Place of Death	Other Names	
Date of Burial 25.1.45	Rank	No.
Place of Burial Aitape War Cem. A.P.2.	Unit	
Map Ref. Aitape East 1", 059463	Age	Religion
Date of Reburial 22.10.45	Next of Kin	
Place of Reburial Wewak War Cem F.A.7		
FURTHER REE: 20.11.46		
LAKE WAR CEM. P.P.A.7	Relationship of N-O-K	

9/10/1355  
43/185/14/19  
M. Bur  
11-12-1945  
W. 22-10-45  
W. 22-10-45

s2  
2  
s22

The Grave Card registration – Front - for the body washed up on 24 Jan 1945

Front of Grave Registration card showing Aitape initial burial, Wewak burial then Lae burial.



**Army**

## Body washed up

52/52/1449:- Remains were found just above sea level approx 20 yds east of the mouth of the NIGRA River. Body had been washed up during a storm on the previous day.

Body too decomposed through action of water and sea lice's to note any deformities etc.

Report on Discovery of Remains received - 9.2.45.

**The Grave Card registration – Rear - for the body washed up on 24 Jan 1945**

Back of Grave Registration Card, showing notations.

'Body too decomposed through action of water and sea lice's to note any deformities etc. ..'

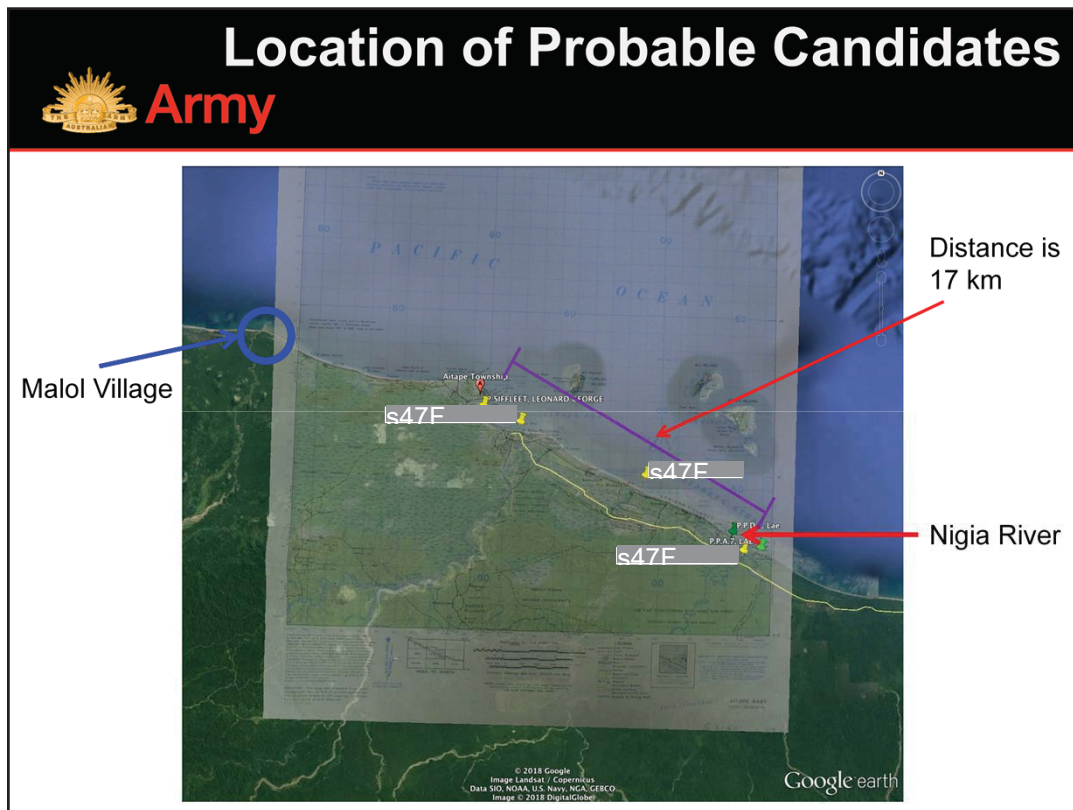


**Army**

## Probable Candidates

- It is believed there are five probable candidates:
  1. SGT Siffleet – date of death 24 Oct 1943;
  2. PTE Pattiwal – date of death 24 Oct 1943;
  3. PTE Reharing – date of death 24 Oct 1943  
(all above three - 1 year, 3 months, 1 day);
  4. s47F – date of death 27 Nov 1944  
(12 weeks); and
  5. s47F – date of death 4 Dec 1944  
(7 weeks, 3 days).

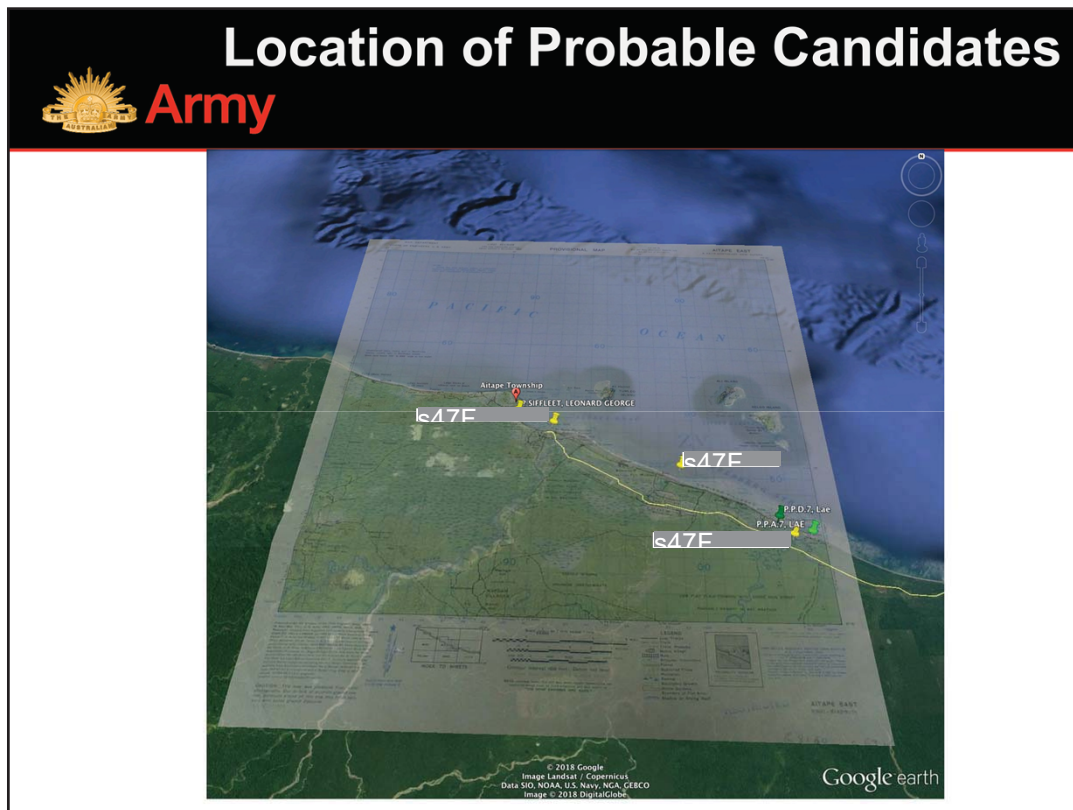
List of all 5 probable candidates who could be considered.



Location markers on the map

Note – Loats marker is also showing

As is PPA7 marker



Second view of markers



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- Operation Aussie Home their hypothesis *Balance of Probability* that:
  - (85.a.) there is evidence to indicate the remains of SGT Siffleet were buried at depth in sand/mud on the 24 October 1943 at Grid Reference 060463, Map Aitape East, 1:63360 (1 inch/mile); - **the only evidence that could be found was that the three were executed on the north Aitape beach and buried in the same grave, no depth of the grave was given in any interrogation statement.**

OAH Hypothesis – each laid out

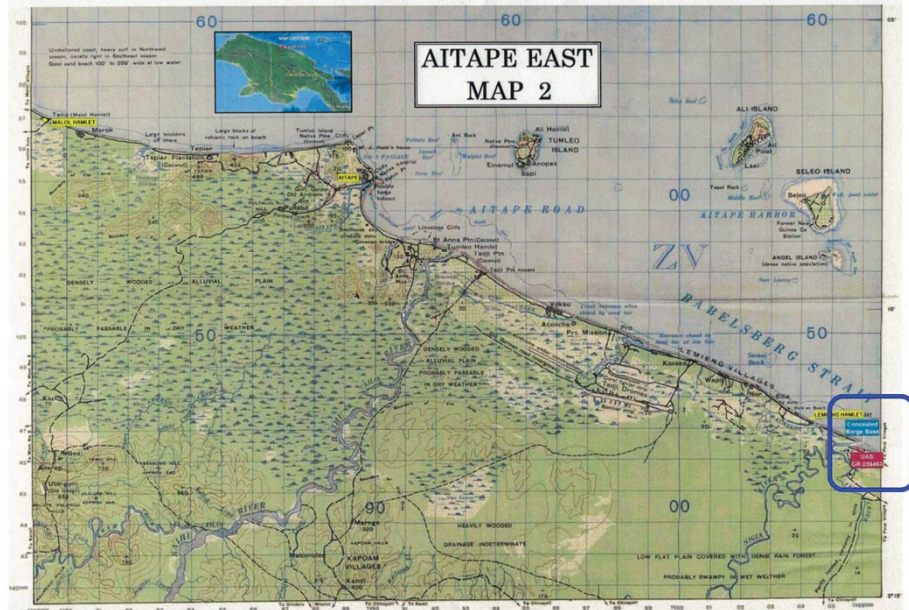
Japanese interrogation statements do not state the depth of the grave.

The senior guard, WO Watanabe, statement clearly states that during his interrogation there was only one grave.



Army

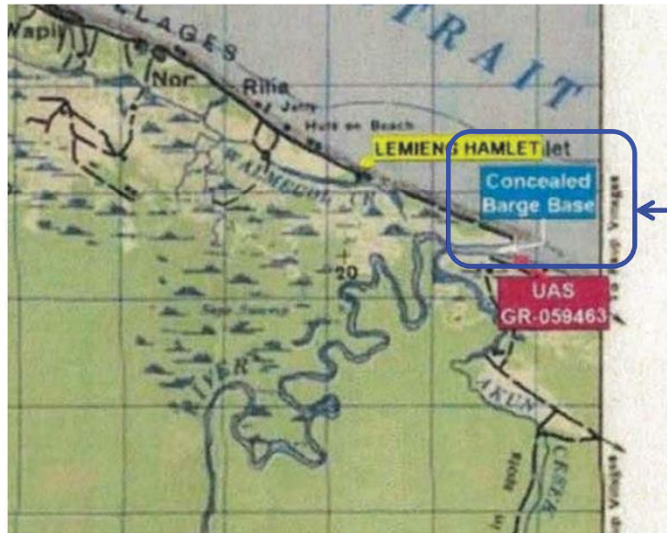
# Operation Aussie Home hypothesis



# Operation Aussie Home hypothesis



Army



This was actually  
a barge hide,  
not a base



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85.b.) M Special Unit operatives wore Australian Army uniform but did NOT carry any form of identification into the field.
  - **This fact is not in contention.**
- The UAS must have been wearing Australian Army uniform items to be identified as such at the time of recovery by the Australian Graves unit personnel.
  - **The identity of the UAS as an Australian is not in contention.**



Uniform not in contention

UAS – as an Australian not in contention



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85.c.) Sqn Ldr Dr Malcolm Dodd (Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine and Forensic Pathologist serving with the RAAF Special Reserve) indicated:

*“from my extensive experience in the Solomon Islands with similar bodies, ( about 25 + trips now ) it is fair to say that a deep burial of 4-6 ft. in sand tends to protect from full skeletonisation quite well over months to a year”*

***- The depth at which these bodies where actually buried is not known and the time period is 15 months not 12 months.***

Depth of grave is not known.

Period is actually 15 months not 12 months.



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85.d.) No other Australian soldiers were reported as being killed in or near that location and their bodies not recovered (there was no fighting in that location); - **Incorrect – other Australians during that period, in that location are reported as missing and not recovered.**

s47F

Additionally, within a few days of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami the Thai's were checking pubic hair colour to quickly screen foreigners (Europeans). This anecdote demonstrates that even after a few days in the tropics, it is impossible to determine ancestry (race) using skin colour, soft tissues etc. Additionally, taking into consideration there was no skull.

Incorrect.

Two other Australians soldiers reported missing and never recovered during that period and fit the decomposition

s47F

- 12 weeks
- 7 week, 3 days



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85. e) an UAS's remains were recovered approximately 100 yards away at GR 059463 on 25 January 1945;
  - **Incorrect, the remains were recovered the day prior and buried on the 25 Jan 1945, refer 7 Australian War Graves Unit diary entry (slide 10).**



Incorrect – refer to slide 10



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85.f). it appears that the corpse remained buried for about a year and was gradually uncovered over a short period of time by a combination of disturbances by military landing craft/tracked vehicles, erosion from tropical rainfall, wave action and diurnal tidal action;
  - **Operation Aussie Home provide no theory for erosion from wet session 1943/44, the wave action and diurnal tidal action up to 1945. Additional, Siffleet remains were the first in the grave, therefore they would be the last out by such tidal action. Once starting to becoming uncovered they would have been discovered by locals or animals.**

There are actually two wet seasons that need be to taken into consideration 1943/44 and 1944/45 not just 1944/45.

Operation Aussie Home only consider 1944/45

Also, if bodies may have uncovered slowly, if this was the case, they may have well be discovered by individual(s) before being washed out to sea then washed up – no theory to has been put forward. Additionally, animals such as pigs may have found them before they been washed out sea.



**Army**

## Operation Aussie Home hypothesis

- (85.g). it is contended that the human remains were uncovered and discovered a short time after full exposure to the elements after being exposed during the 'wet season' of 1944/45 and at that time remnant portions of Australian Army uniform were attached to those remains.
  - **Operation Aussie Home provide no theory to discount the 1943/44 wet season. Once starting to becoming uncovered they would have been discovered by locals or animals.**

Same as previous slide

- Three bodies confirmed in grave will increase the rate of decomposition.
- After 15 months in a grave, whilst the body may not be skeletonised it would not be articulated as a body.



**Army**

## US Landing at Aitape



The Americans landing would have cause far more sand disturbance then Australian relief in place.



A map of the Americans landing.



**Army**

## Australian Aitape Cemetery

### Key points:

- 118 Australians were buried within the temporary cemetery.
- Three Unidentified Australian Soldiers (UAS) are within this number, all were in Plot A of the cemetery.
- The remains from Aitape temporary cemetery were exhumed and moved to Wewak, they were then moved again to Lae at the end of the war; once the location of the permanent Commonwealth War Cemeteries had been decided.



- The Aitape Aust War Cemetery contained 118 Australian servicemen at the time of its closure.
- In that number there were 3 UAS, all were in Plot A.
- The UAS in question was in Row B, Grave 2.
- The remains of these Australians were exhumed and moved to Wewak, where they were again exhumed moved to Lae at the war; one the location of the permanent Commonwealth War Cemeteries had been decided.



## Conclusion

- Based on the OAH submission and the evidence available there are five probable candidates who could be the person that has been laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Lae, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7.

These candidates are:

- **NX143314 Sergeant L.G. Siffleet;**
- **Private Pattiwal;**
- **Private Reharing;**

s47F

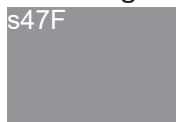


or



The conclusion drawn from the evidence reviewed is there are five probable candidates:

1. Siffleet
2. Pattiwal
3. Reharing
4. s47F
- 5.



The body washed up had no head or feet, was badly decomposed through action of water and sea lice's to note any deformities.

Additionally, within a few days of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami the Thai's were checking pubic hair colour to quickly screen foreigners (Europeans). This anecdote demonstrates that even after a few days in the tropics, it is impossible to determine ancestry (race) using skin colour, soft tissues etc. Additionally, taking into consideration there was no skull.

It must be remember the member of GRU were not expert in identifying remains especially one without a skull and who had been it the water for an extended period.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- a. That the headstone at Lae War Cemetery, Plot PP, Row A, Grave 7 remains unchanged.
- b. The ID Board may wish to consider requesting that CWGC open the grave in question and obtain a DNA based on “over-riding public necessity’. This would however be an extraordinary request, likely to be resisted by DVA and CWGC.
- c. If recommendation b. is accepted the DNA sample is tested against the <sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED]

<sup>s47F</sup> [REDACTED]

Discuss if required



**Army**

# Questions



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

083419