

William (Bill) Edward Nash

February 10, 1925 – December 7, 1969

31st/51st Battalion – Australian Military Forces (AMF)

Lance Corporal



They embarked on the USS Sea Snipe, on a six-day journey aboard a crowded boat, anxiously awaiting their arrival to Bougainville after leaving Brisbane on December 6, 1944- these were the men of the 31st/51st Infantry Battalion. Among them was William (Bill) Edward Nash (see Figure 1). Aged at just 19, Nash, along with 800 others watched as the Solomon Islands appeared before them. The region in which they would be faced with unthinkable challenges, fighting a battle that would later be known as “the battle that vanished”.¹

Over the next 2 years, Nash, along with the rest of his battalion would serve alongside New Zealand troops to drive the Japanese from the north of Bougainville. Together they would have to demonstrate great courage to push the Japanese back and fight even harder to make it home alive.

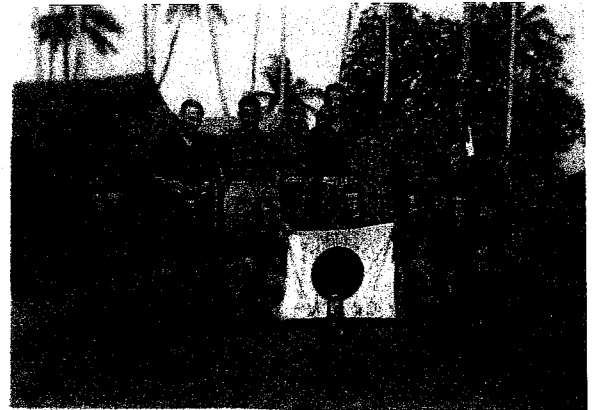


Figure 1: Bill (standing second in from the left) and men from his battalion holding a captured Japanese good luck flag.

Bill Nash was born in Naracoorte SA, on February 10, 1925, to parents Joseph and Rose Ann Nash. Along with his 7 siblings, the family lived in Naracoorte but later moved to a nearby coastal town, Kingston SE in 1942.² Nash received his primary education at a Naracoorte Catholic School.³ His enlistment papers indicated he did not complete his secondary schooling. Nash spent his teenage years working with his father who would trap, and skin rabbits, possibly to be sold to the local skin store.⁴ His father Joseph was known to be a keen fisherman, young Nash spend his leisure time fishing around the Pinks Beach area.

In 1942, Japan had invaded the pacific region, gradually taking over islands located within it where they were setting up air bases. Nash would become part of the 11th Brigade that would prepare to relieve the American Troops stationed on the islands to drive out the Japanese Forces from the Pacific.⁵

¹ Porton: A deadly Trap, Aubrey Davidson 2005

² Life of Joseph Nash, Written by Pat Nash 2011

³ Christine Lloyd (nee Nash), Interview with the author, March 26, 2022

⁴ Kingston National Trust Museum

⁵ Department of Veterans' Affairs. 2022. *Bougainville 1942-1945*. [online] Available at: <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/bougainville-1942-1945>> [Accessed 8 May 2022].

lost.¹⁵ Although the battle only lasted four days, many men were killed, and more were injured. With the incompetence of the leading Generals, mistakes were made, and lives were lost. The battalion's training site was within the Imperial Japanese Army's view, allowing them to monitor and plan the attack about to be launched. The battle began in the early hours of June 8 with barges carrying men and ammunition, stuck on reefs. The ammunition supply was low, men were stranded in shark, crocodile and urchin infested water with snipers shooting at them constantly.¹⁶ To add to the difficulties at Porton, the men were forced to persevere through the contact in waist deep water-filled trenches. The jungle, swamplands and extreme heat only worsened conditions and the battalions' chances of winning the battle.¹⁷

Ammunition had quickly run low, the men being met with heavy fire from the Japanese forces, a decision was made to withdraw. However, this was made difficult again, with the barges stuck out on reefs and the constant fire from the enemy. It would take two days to get the men out, for many this meant carrying the wounded and leaving behind the dead. Nash's records show he was wounded on the June 9 and admitted to the field hospital on the June 11, after having suffered a gunshot wound it would have been his fellow troops that made his survival possible, highlighting the importance of mateship, especially when times are dire. *"Being in that barge was like being in a bloody coffin... when you're in a confined space with wounded blokes you have to look after, it was pretty grim. There were wounded fellas there and we had them in our arms, the moment we let them go they sank in the water so we just couldn't move."*¹⁸

These men showed immense bravery during the Porton Battle. Fighting a fight, they knew in their hearts they could not possibly win. Mateship and perseverance are qualities that these men, along with Nash, showed. They had to work through these hellish conditions to bring themselves and their wounded to safety. It was indeed a battle of survival.

General Sir Thomas Blamey stated: *"The Australian action at Porton Plantation took place over four days and resulted in the Australians killing an estimated 200 Japanese. It was the scene of many individual acts of heroism when barges in the operation grounded on an uncharted reef."*¹⁹

¹⁵ Service and Casualty form, NAA, page 18

¹⁶ Search.informit.org. 2022. *Hell at Porton | Australian Army Journal*. [online] Available at: <<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/IELAPA.200604658>> [Accessed 19 May 2022].

¹⁷ Porton: A deadly trap, 2005, page 77

¹⁸ Felix Grasso, page 109 Porton: a deadly trap

¹⁹ Porton: A deadly trap, page 147

Nash, no longer a teenage boy returned home in 1946. He began earning a living working with his father Joseph, trapping, and skinning rabbits and shearing sheep around the farming district (see Figure 4).

He would later meet Mavis June Randall at the local dance, and they married at the Reedy Creek Church in 1954. Mavis's father gifted them 16 acres of land at Reedy Creek on which they built their family home (see Figure 5). Nash continued to buy surrounding land where they milked cows using machines. For the remainder of his life, he enjoyed fishing, a passion that he inherited from his father Joseph.²⁰ He and Mavis would have two children, Philip, and Christine who they raised on the family farm (see Figure 4).



Figure 5: The Reedy Creek house.

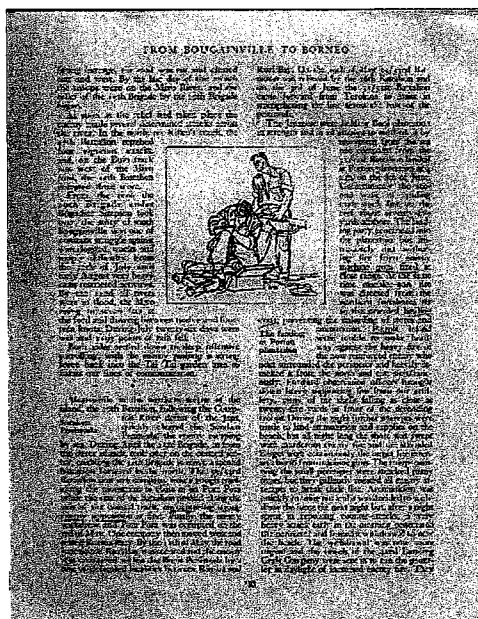


Figure 3. page 133 of "Stand Easy" where Bill has underlined places and jobs that he had partaken in and contributed to.

Although Nash had returned from overseas a war hero, with the allies successful in the pacific, he did not take part in the happenings of the local RSL as the meet ups often included drinking. Nash wanted to move away from "the drink" and focus more on his family. He did not go into detail with his children about his time in the war, however they were gifted photos that he had taken with his personal camera, during his time overseas. Nash also left behind a book called "Stand Easy" that featured a series of underlined pages he said provided an insight to his experiences (see Figure 3).

As told by his son Philip, Nash's experience in the Solomon Islands

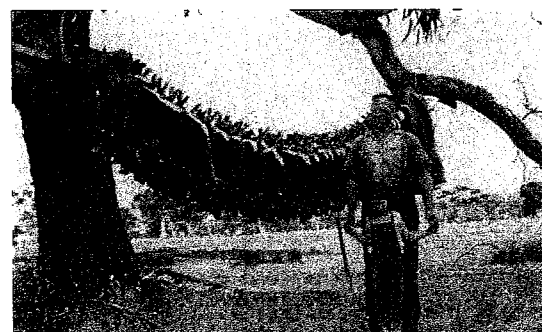


Figure 4. Bill and Christine together with a line of dead rabbits.

was quite raw and difficult for him to overcome. "Gatherings and services dedicated to ANZACs could have possibly brought up feelings that he was not yet prepared to face."²¹

²⁰ Reedy Creek Reflections, Brenda Hensel, page 17
²¹ Phillip Nash, Interview with the author, March 15, 2022

By 1969, Nash had sadly passed away, aged 44. He died at home on the farm. Philip was 13 and Christine 10 years old. It is believed by the family that he never truly healed from the wounds inflicted upon him as a young man during his time at war (see Figure 6).

Not only has Nash passed on, but his memories, stories and experiences have passed with him. Nash's legacy at Porton, as well as the brave men who he fought alongside, will forever remain in the memories of his family. His life and experiences, in not only Kingston but the Solomon Islands, will now too be shared within his family and the next generations to come.

Whilst it seemed the battle that vanished would fade from memory, it has now been found and will continue to be retold. A bloody fight that left Nash with scars but us with only stories and a sense of pride of his bravery, for his battalion, for his mates.

*"May the departed on the beach at Porton rest in peace forever!
No more young lives to be wasted in the jungle, we do pray. Good luck to you All!"²²*



Figure 6. Bill, aged 18

References

Australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au. 2022. *Australians at War Film Archive*. [online] Available at: <<https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/476>> [Accessed 8 May 2022].

Christine Lloyd (nee Nash), Interview with the author, March 26, 2022

CUSTODIANS, A., Memorial, T. and Memorial, T., 2022. *31/51st Australian Infantry Battalion*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56114>> [Accessed 29 April 2022].

Museums Victoria Collections. 2022. *Compulsory Military Service, World War II, 1939-1945*. [online] Available at: <<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2824>> [Accessed 26 April 2022].

Department of Veterans' Affairs. 2022. *Bougainville 1942-1945*. [online] Available at: <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/bougainville-1942-1945>> [Accessed 8 May 2022].

Enlistment documents, NAA, Page 1, 13

Search.informit.org. 2022. *Hell at Porton | Australian Army Journal*. [online] Available at: <<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/IELAPA.200604658>> [Accessed 19 May 2022].

Kingston National Trust Museum

Life of Joseph Nash, Written by Pat Nash, 2011

Museums Victoria Collections. 2022. *Compulsory Military Service, World War II, 1939-1945*. [online] Available at: <<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2824>> [Accessed 26 April 2022].

Phillip Nash, Interview with the author, March 15, 2022

Porton: A deadly Trap, Aubrey Davidson 2005

Porton: A deadly trap by Aubrey Davidson and Battle survivors, 2005, page 77

Porton: a deadly trap, Felix Grasso, page 109

Porton: A Deadly trap, Gemma Katsumata Ex Naval Sub-Lieutenant page 166

Porton: A deadly trap, page 147

Service and Casualty form, Proceedings for discharge documents, NAA, page 2, 17,18

Service and Casualty form, NAA, page 18

Service and Casualty form, NAA, page 18

Stand Easy, AWM Canberra 1945, page 127

Reedy Creek Reflections, Brenda Hensel, page 17

UNSW interview with Colin McKinnon, 2003

William Nash, Record of service book, 1943

PART B: Research.

At the beginning of this task, I had little to no information about Bill's life. Once we had received Bill's records from the NAA, I was able to match dates and locations to the battles he would have been involved in using the War Memorial Websites.

Christine and Philip also contributed lots of their time to help with my research. Christine was able to provide the book "Stand Easy" in which Bill had underlined parts to let the children know what he had experienced. There were also photos that Bill had taken with his own camera, these photos were a great way to connect with Bill and get an idea as to what it would have been like in the Solomon Islands. As Philip was older when Bill passed, he was able to remember his father telling him stories about his life, not necessarily about the war but his teen years and childhood memories. Philip said his father would now and again tell him little things about his experiences.

I purchased a book that helped me a lot with my studies. "Porton: a deadly trap" written by Audrey Davidson is a collection of accounts from men that fought in the battle at the Porton Plantation. This helped me understand the conditions in which these men lived and the horrors they faced during the battle. I also have my mother to thank for all the hours of her time and encouragement throughout this research project, up until now she did not know where or when her grandpa had served, only that he had died young. To help me gain information about the town and what jobs Bill and his father might have done I visited the local museum. There, I learnt about the skin store and the fishing. I also attended my first ANZAC Day dawn service with my mum, and Christine, I thought a lot about Bill and the young men that went away to war.

I had not heard about the ANZACs role in the Pacific during WW2, and it has been interesting to learn about the Porton Battle and how little it has been talked about, even though they lost this battle the men were incredibly brave and suffered for their country.