

BECOMING THE GREATEST
GENERATION SERIES | BOOK TWO

THE MOONLIGHT CAVALRY



A NOVEL

LYNN ELLEN
DOXON

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A World War II Novel

Lynn Ellen Doxon



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info@artemesiapublishing.com

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Dedicated to
Lieutenant Colonel Kermit Lynn Doxon, U.S. Army Retired
1914 - 1995

CHAPTER 1

OUT OF AUSTRALIA

EVERY OFFICE I CHECKED was locked. I looked around nervously for the right office. I'd arrived at the Southwest Pacific Headquarters in Brisbane two days late because an autumn storm had delayed the ship from Townsville, and now everything seemed to be shut down for the noon hour. I climbed to the next floor, where I heard voices from a room down the hall. That must be it. I rushed in. US Army General Walter Krueger and several other officers glanced up from the papers spread out on a table as I burst in. I stopped dead in my tracks and saluted.

"Lieutenant Sinclair, reporting for duty, sir!"

General Krueger raised his eyebrows slightly, returned my salute, and then turned to a major who stood behind him.

"Hamilton, get this boy where he belongs."

I trotted back downstairs behind the lanky major. As we walked, he asked me. "What were you thinking barging in on the general?"

"All the other offices were empty or locked."

"You had better thank your lucky stars it was Krueger and not MacArthur," he puffed, a little winded from the speed with which he was taking the stairs. "How much field training experience have you had?"

"I've been executive officer of my battery as we trained at Fort Bliss and Townsend for the past year. Before that, I taught school for three years. Physics and chemistry."

The major found a captain in a cafeteria on the first floor of the converted office building.

"This lieutenant will lead that radar platoon to Kiriwina," the major said, then he turned on his heel and left without another word.

"Have you had anything to eat?" the captain asked.

"No, sir."

"Grab some grub and sit down. We'll discuss your orders."

In a few minutes I dropped my tray, heaped with food, on the table.

"You ever been in the field?" the captain asked.

"No, sir. I just completed jungle warfare training."

“How much experience on the SCR-584?” The food made me think of Mom’s Sunday dinner, distracting me slightly from his question. I hadn’t had food this good since leaving home.

Swallowing, I replied, “I operated a prototype unit demonstrated at Bliss.”

“How did you come to be separated from your battery?”

“They sent me to Darwin for malaria officer training. The Japs attacked the city, wounding me. My unit left while I was recovering.”

“A lieutenant as malaria officer?” he mused. “Seems the field officers aren’t taking this as seriously as MacArthur planned. At least you’ve been under fire. You’ll have to do.”

Shoveling some more delicious food into my mouth, I said, impolitely talking with my mouth full, “I would like to get the radar unit set up and run through the operation a few times before we leave for the island.”

“No. You’re leaving this evening.”

Pausing with a forkful of food, I replied, “Yes, sir.”

After I inhaled the rest of my lunch, the captain called for a driver, and we headed for the field where my new platoon waited. On the way, he explained the arrangement.

“This platoon is made up of select recruits fresh from Camp Davis. They came here to train previously deployed troops on the SCR-584 with a Lieutenant as green as they were. One of those Ninety-Day Wonders. Don’t know how they think they can make an officer of a college kid in three months.”

I didn’t mention that I, too, was a Ninety-Day Wonder, graduating with the first class at Camp Davis. But, of course, by now, I had been in the army for nearly two years, which qualified me as an old hand.

“They did fine training the old hands on the new equipment. The lieutenant had been a schoolteacher, so he knew how to do that. Then the plan was to send the platoon out as replacements. The poor boy broke down during the first week of jungle training. That’s what you get for sending a schoolteacher to do a soldier’s job.”

I shuddered and kept my mouth shut.

“Anyway, you’ll take on this platoon, give ‘em some additional training, and prepare ‘em for combat duty while on the island. We’ve kept ‘em in the dark until we knew we could go through with it. You’ll have a very short time to get ‘em packed up and ready.”

“You’re sending a bunch of inexperienced troops who still need training onto an island with no artillery or infantry support?”

“There aren’t any Japs there, but we aren’t telling the troops that. We want ‘em to feel like it’s the real thing. You’re going in with an Aussie Air Corps radar unit. Their captain will be in charge overall, but you’ll be

second in command and train the Aussies on the 584. This is the first time we've tried something like this. We're counting on you to make it work."

"What about my former unit?"

"When your battalion arrives at the island, these boys will become replacements. They'll be assigned wherever the battalion has lost troops."

"If there aren't any Japs on the island, why would we need replacements?" I asked.

"We expect to lose at least a few men from each platoon to disease. After all, it's a jungle out there," he laughed at his joke. I opened my mouth to reply to his cavalier attitude as the driver slammed on the brakes, and the captain jumped out of the jeep. Several soldiers lounged in front of their tents.

"Platoon, fall in," he shouted to the men. The platoon quickly formed ranks.

"This is Lieutenant Sinclair. He's taking command of your platoon." The captain paused, apparently waiting for me to say something.

I stepped forward. "Good afternoon, men. I'm very pleased to be here. We've been temporarily posted to the RAAF," I said. "They're sending us to an island with one of their field radar stations. We'll train the Aussie radarmen on the SCR-584 while we're there and gain a bit of field experience ourselves. Pack up the equipment and your gear. We leave at 1700. Fall out."

The captain drove off and the men turned and began packing their lockers and duffels but didn't seem too eager. A staff sergeant, he looked like a career army man and was about ten years older than me, stepped up and saluted. "Staff Sergeant Bridger, sir."

"Good to meet you, Sergeant."

He looked at me and seemed to take my expression for worry. "We'll be ready by 1700, sir."

"I would expect nothing less, Sergeant." He started to turn away and I asked, "Why are they sending a full platoon and support personnel with one radar unit to train the Australians? A platoon usually has three searchlights and two radar."

He hesitated, then replied formally, "There has been some bad blood between Lieutenant McCarthy, our previous CO, and the men. Things got a little out of hand. I think Cap wants you to calm the men down. They sent McCarthy home. The captain told us you were selected for your strong, even-handed leadership skills."

I didn't set him straight about how I got the assignment. I knew I could lead the platoon, but there had been no selection process.

I had no idea of the lay of the land, but the captain had pointed north when he told me to join the RAAF unit, so when the men and equipment were packed up, I pointed my jeep in that direction. The men followed me in the trucks. Assuming the Aussie radar unit would be somewhere close to the airstrip where I saw RAAF planes taking off, I approached the surrounding encampment. The guard was expecting us and directed us to the command tent.

"Lieutenant Sinclair, US Army reporting, sir," I told the CO, a broad-shouldered, prematurely grey colonel.

"You blokes are a welcome sight," he replied. "How did you come to have one of those fancy new radar?"

"It was sent here for training purposes," I replied. "We're lucky to have it. There aren't enough of them yet for general distribution."

"And when there are, they'll all go to Europe. Can't understand that Europe First policy. We're fighting a war here, too, and against a very aggressive enemy," he growled.

"I hear you," I replied.

"The blokes in the radar station are excited to use that kit, though. I'm assigning your platoon to radar station two. Captain Wilson is in charge. We're sending you in to warn us of any airborne threats as we start this new island-hopping campaign. I'm pleased General Kreuger agreed to let you train our men on the equipment."

"Yes, sir. May I ask what this island-hopping campaign is all about?"

He looked me up and down, obviously considering whether a first lieutenant should be let in on overall war strategy, and just as obviously decided against it.

"Corporal Taylor," he ordered, "take this platoon to join RAAF radar station two."

"Howdy, Mates. You the Yanks who're going in with us?" the unit Captain asked as I hopped out of the jeep.

"We are. I'm Lieutenant Sinclair, CO of this platoon."

"Glad to meet you, Sinclair. Captain Will Wilson. Call me Willy. I head up the Aussies on this trip."

He was about my height and weight with the same sandy hair and ruddy complexion. The two of us headed for his tent.

"Willy, have you found a long-lost brother?" one of his men shouted.

"Maybe distant cousin," he shouted back.

Turning to me, he said, "D-Day for this invasion hasn't been scheduled. We'll be on the island until they get the invasion force together and get 'em there."

"Where is the island?" I asked, hoping to get more details from a captain than the colonel.

"Ah, our lovely holiday spot is called Kiriwina. It's a tiny island off the coast of New Guinea. We have food, tents, and other supplies enough for your platoon. We're planning for a month's stay. Make sure your medic has enough Atabrine, anti-fungal, and other meds. Bring your own arms, ammo, and fuel. Other than that, we're set to go. Be ready to board the transports in three hours."

Rejoining my platoon, I spotted the combat medic. "What's your name. Corporal?" I asked.

He turned to stare at me. "Lance, sir. Corporal Lance,"

"Corporal Lance, get us a month's supply of Atabrine," I said, then called the Quartermaster Corps to request fuel and ammo. The sergeant said he would have the supplies to us in two hours. Lance was soon back with additional medications.

"I got everything but the antimalarials," he said.

"We need that damn Atabrine!" I shouted. Corporal Lance looked frightened. "Don't worry, I'm not blaming you. Let's see what we can do."

I drove back to the medical unit with him.

"You are supposed to have a three-day supply," the pharmacist on duty told me.

I showed him our orders and told him we would be on the island for at least a month before anyone else arrived. He called his superior, who finally showed up and called his superior, who sent me to his superior. Eventually, I stood in front of the mobile hospital commander, explaining my situation.

"Troops are moving into the staging area now. They should be able to get there within a week," he said.

"I doubt it," I replied. "Nobody has mentioned a landing date before late June, and it's not even the middle of May yet. Until D-day, my platoon is on its own. I need a month's supply."

"Not enough to go around," he said as he wrote an order for two weeks of medication.

"Pick this up," I told Lance, handing him the order. I returned to the platoon. The quartermaster's corps had delivered the ammo, fuel, and other necessary supplies. The men and the precious SCR-584 were ready to go, thanks to Sergeant Bridger. As soon as Lance returned with the medication, I drove toward the dock where I had arrived in Brisbane only five hours before, this time with an undertrained platoon and, to the Aussies, an unfamiliar radar unit in tow.

Two British Landing Craft Tank, which we called LCTs, approached the dock. The big, ugly flatboats, thirty feet wide and a hundred fifty feet long, dropped their bow ramps. Captain Willy motioned for us to board first. We backed our vehicles up the ramp and to the rear of LCT, where we tied down the trucks and equipment with navy personnel's help. I ordered my platoon to sit against the big, square engine house at the back of the boat to be out of the way as the Aussies boarded. The two pom-pom guns mounted on either side of the engine house were unlikely to protect us from a full-scale attack, but at least we had some protection.

"Open your C rations, boys," Sergeant Bridger barked. "You never want to miss a meal if you can help it, and it'll probably go down better if you eat before we get out on the water."

The Australians still hadn't started loading their equipment.

"Lieutenant," called the captain of the craft. "Where's the rest of your equipment?"

"This is it," I told him. "The first truck is for troop transport and tows the radar unit with our personal equipment inside, the second truck carries the fuel and pulls the power unit, and the third is for troop transport and additional supplies. Just three trucks, two trailers, and a jeep are all we have."

"What?"

"It's new equipment, smaller, faster to set up. We have everything we need."

"What do you know?" he marveled, signaling the Australian forces to begin boarding.

As we got underway, the Aussies gathered around, asking questions about the SCR-584. We promised to show them how it worked once we set up on the island. I hoped that would give me time to review the manual and get in a bit more practice since I hadn't used this equipment in a while.

The LCT, not set up to transport troops on long trips, offered no hammocks or cots. Several of the Australians strung their own hammocks between the trucks. My men and I sprawled out on the deck, rolling in our blankets as the sea swells rocked the boat. We finally fell asleep as the landing craft moved around the rocky island protecting the bay, then headed north toward the island of Kiriwina.

At sunrise, the Aussie mess team handed out ration packs. I opened mine to find some uncooked oatmeal cereal with nuts and dried fruit. I watched the Aussies. They dumped the cereal into their tin plates, scattered the powdered milk packet over it, and poured water over the whole mess. I demonstrated the process to my men. They thought I knew what I

was doing even though I had never eaten uncooked oatmeal like this. The oatmeal and the cup of coffee the navy provided turned out to be a pretty filling meal.

After breakfast, the men played craps or poker, talked, smoked, and watched the clouds and sea—whatever they could find to while away the time. I pulled out Sarah Gale's most recent letter to read.

April 25, 1943

Dear Gene,

I don't know if you should make your letters to me so mushy. You do know that censors read all of our letters, don't you? I do love you, but I try really hard not to put anything embarrassing in the letters.

I did make it to Des Moines just fine. I looked up your Captain Henderson's mother when I got here. At first, she was a little standoffish, wondering why a WAAC recruit knocked on the base commander's door. But when I explained that I was only in the WAACs for the duration of the war and that the man I intend to marry was her son's executive officer, she was very friendly and helpful. She invited me in, and I met Captain Henderson's wife and son. She is a bit more passive than expected, but maybe Henderson wanted someone who would behave as ordered. Somehow, your descriptions of him make me think that might be true.

Tomorrow we start training. I have already met some very interesting girls in the barracks. I hope I can keep up with them on academic subjects. I can run circles around some of them on the exercise field.

Last night, some of them invited me to go with them to a bar near the base. They were really surprised when I told them I had just turned twenty-one and would love to go to my first bar with them. It turned out that Iowa doesn't allow places to sell alcohol by the drink except for beer, which is less than 5% alcohol. They wanted to get me a martini, but we drank a beer and returned to base. I had fun, but it was not as exciting as some of them expected.

I need to get a good night's sleep tonight so I will be ready for training.

I love you and miss you a whole lot.

Love

Sarah Gale

Willy walked up behind me as I tucked the letter into my pocket.

"You got a Sheila back home?"

"Sure do. The cutest little red-haired, green-eyed beauty you ever saw."

"You have to watch out for those redheads. They've got spirit."

"She sure does. She joined the WAACS as soon as possible and is now in their officers' candidate school."

"My mom was one of those green-eyed, red-headed Scottish girls.

Dad was a much more reserved Englishman. Couldn't hardly keep up with her."

"Really? In my family, my Dad is a Scotsman, and my Mom is English. Dad's family went to America after the battle of Culloden, and my mom's family came on the Mayflower."

"Probably works better for the Sheila to be English and the bloke Scottish. My people got to Australia at about the same time. After Culloden, I believe."

Willy and I spent the rest of the day getting better acquainted. He had chosen a military career while I had been drafted into it. We were both thirty years old, but he was an experienced captain, and I was an inexperienced lieutenant. By our second night on board, we felt like old friends.

CHAPTER 2

LANDING

AFTER SEVERAL ENDLESS DAYS on a boat not meant for sea crossings, we spotted our destination one morning. The long, low island curved around a large natural bay. Coconut palms and a dense jungle backed a narrow strip of beach. Not mountainous like other islands we had seen around New Guinea, with only two real hills. Captain Wilson and I studied the island as we approached.

“There’s a relatively flat spot on that hill to the north. Do you think we could set up there?” I asked.

“If we can get there, it would be an excellent site. It looks like the highest point, although that ridge on the neck there might be higher. But the northern site faces open water on three sides, so we could see what’s coming from New Guinea, the Bismarck Islands, and the Solomons. The plantation overseer will know if we can get up there.”

“It looks like grass on the steepest part. We can probably do it.”

“Hope it isn’t sawgrass.”

As we neared the island, a dark-skinned seaman came forward, climbed on the frame of the landing craft, and began calling out directions. I climbed up on the other side, spotting bright fish darting in and out of the many coral formations in the crystal-clear water.

“Your first view of a coral reef?” he asked. “Ten degrees starboard!” he shouted behind him.

“Yes. Stunning! The water’s so clear, the coral so bright.”

“And it can take out the bottom of the boat in a second if we don’t follow the channel. This is my home island. He turned away and shouted, “Five degrees port.”

“Why does the channel wind so much?”

“It’s a natural channel that we’ve followed for generations. Unfortunately, they will have to blast out a bit more for the troop landing to fit the bigger ships.”

“Too bad they have to destroy any part of this beautiful reef.”

“This reef is only a tiny bit of the destruction this war is causing, both to my people and yours.”

I nodded in agreement.

Slowly, the boat moved toward the island, winding through the narrow channel as the seaman called out directions. On the beach, palm trees waved in the breeze.

“It’s a tropical paradise barely disturbed by man,” I reveled. The seaman gave me a funny look but didn’t say anything. I wondered if he saw something I didn’t.

The LCT dropped its ramp onto the clear, sandy beach. Across the sand, we saw a road that the local seaman said led to the one plantation on the island.

The Australians quickly released the tie-downs and drove their first truck onto the beach. It immediately bogged down in the sand. The Aussies rushed to the jungle and cut palm and tree fern fronds to lay in front of the truck’s wheels, making a path to the road.

“Push,” shouted Willy.

Ten men put their shoulders to the back of a truck and managed to push it onto the path of fronds. Other men stood on the beach with machine guns and bazookas, watching the jungle and cliffs nervously. I wished I could tell them that there were no Japs on the island.

We moved the other trucks, trailers, and jeeps across the sand one by one. Then, as the skipper of the LCT raised the ramp, we waved and headed up the road. We made excellent progress through the palm trees on the well-maintained dirt road for a mile or so. At the plantation house, the British proprietor greeted us and assured us, ironically, that the island was free of Japanese. He introduced himself as The Reverend Mister Reynolds.

“Can we get up to the top of that rise?” Willy asked, pointing northwest.

“It won’t be easy. There’s a ridge that slopes to the southeast from the top. A narrow track at the end of this road will lead you there. Might take a bit of chopping to get the trucks through. Take the track until you see an even narrower track leading to the right. Past that point, making your road along the escarpment’s edge will be easier than following the native trail.”

We moved out on the plantation road.

On the other side of the plantation, the road suddenly gave way to a narrow footpath. The Australians pulled out axes and machetes without an order. A sergeant cut a pole barely longer than the trucks’ width and laid it with its center at the beginning of the track. One man started chop-

ping at one end of the pole and another at the other. Another man began chopping in the center when the first two were six feet in. Two others followed him, clearing the strips that were left. The Australians traded off much more often than we Americans had in jungle training. Workers alternated between Australians and Americans, switching off every two to three minutes to avoid exhaustion in the miserable heat and humidity.

The jungle fought back. Vines, thorns, and sawtooth leaves snagged our uniforms and clawed at our faces. Giant rhododendron bushes filled the spaces where the towering trees let light through. Tree ferns and thick bamboo blocked the path, and vines knit the trees together in a solid mass of vegetation. Colorful orchids bloomed all around us, and overhead, a bright array of birds twittered, seeming to laugh at us for thinking we could drive through the jungle. Insects, rodents, and snakes scampered and slithered out of the leaf litter at our feet, startling more than one man as we moved forward.

We stayed on the high ground, which was all of six feet above the level of the swamps and marshes we detoured around. Soon, a rough, winding road appeared through the jungle along the formerly narrow track. Generally, we avoided chopping down large trees, but occasionally, we had to cut down a tree to make room for the trucks to pass.

"Chop it down!" came the call and two American men moved forward with axes. The men wielding the axes didn't appear to have any experience chopping down trees. I moved forward and called for them to stop. They turned toward me with surprised and somewhat fearful expressions on their faces. I simply took one ax, waved them back, and started chopping.

"First, you chop a wedge out of the side toward which you want the tree fall," I explained. "It has to be low to the ground so the trucks can drive over it. Cut about a quarter of the way through the tree." With the newly sharpened ax, it took me about five minutes. It was one of the smaller jungle trees. "Then move to the other side and chop through to the wedge." I handed the ax back to the watching private. "Stand back, one on either side, and take turns with your swings," I watched until they got it right.

Bridger walked up beside me. "First time I ever saw a Lewie so eager to do grunt work."

"Those two were going to kill each other and take a few others out with them if I didn't teach them the right way," I replied.

The trucks crawled behind the sweating machete and ax wielders, moving forward to drag a fallen log away when necessary.

"This is what he meant by a bit of chopping?" I asked Willy as we inched forward.

"British!" Willy spat as he swung the machete through the trunk of a tree fern.

After five hours of backbreaking work, we reached the point where the narrow trail branched upward to follow the ridge to the hilltop. We stopped for lunch and a rest break.

Here, the ridge was a gently rounded hill. Farther up, a sharp-edged sixty-foot cliff fell from the south side of our proposed route.

"Crickey, it's all sawgrass," Willy exclaimed.

"The alternative is to try to go over those rock outcroppings and chop down dozens of trees," I said. "Here, all we have to do is mash down the grass."

"Right, that's all," Willy nodded.

Four Aussies pulled leather chaps and gloves out of their gear, took the truck-width pole, and stepped up the steep incline, mowing down the sawgrass with their machetes. When they called out "pothole" or "rocks," men scrambled up behind them with shovels or sledgehammers to smooth out the path enough that the trucks could pass. The trail rose gradually to about sixty feet above the swamps and jungle in the first mile. I realized why they called it sawgrass when I wandered too close to the edge of our trail, and a leaf caught my hand, ripping a gash in it as I pulled loose. I wrapped it in a bandage and trudged upward. Then we arrived suddenly at a rough coral outcropping that rose about forty feet, surrounded by different species of jungle plants, but they were just as thick as in the swamps below.

"Hold back!" Willy called. "No trucks will start climbing the hill until the road is cut to the level spot up there. We'll do some scouting for the best path up tomorrow. But, for now, hunker down here."

The sudden dark of the tropics descended. We set up camp between the jungle and the cliff. A cool breeze wafted in from the ocean, drying sweat and lifting the oppressive humidity. However, inside the tents, the temperature remained a balmy eighty degrees all night, the humidity still oppressive. Fortunately, my flashlight didn't reveal mosquitoes or other insects, snakes, rodents, or animals inside my tent as I prepared my bedroll.

We had barely begun widening the track the next morning when a tall man in a British uniform from the Great War came down the narrow trail, followed by a line of natives. One man had a large feather headdress, face painted with black, red, and white designs, a flower lei around his neck, and flowers tucked into grass bands on his upper arms. Other men wore flower crowns and less elaborate face paint.

"G'day," said the man in the uniform. "Welcome to Kiriwina. I'm Kevin Armstrong-Davis, and these fellows are part of my little army of coast

watchers.”

“G’day,” responded Willy. “We’re an advanced radar station, here to watch for aircraft. We plan to set up on the rise over there.”

“Come visit their village,” Armstrong-Davis said, gesturing at his entourage. “After you meet the chief, the natives can show you the best path to the rise.”

“We appreciate that,” Willy said. “This man is not the chief?” he asked, gesturing to the man with the feathered headdress.

“He’s the emissary,” said Armstrong-Davis, “sent in place of the leader. So if you attacked these blokes, the leader would still be alive.”

I didn’t envy this poor guy, sent as a sacrifice if we were hostile.

The natives helped us widen the path through the jungle until we reached a fork in the footpath. We left the trucks and equipment with a few guards and walked to the village. The Aussies and Americans stopped and stared. Women went about their work wearing short, brightly colored grass skirts tied around their hips, coral necklaces, and flower leis draped between their naked breasts. When I could pry my eyes off the women, I looked around the village. Children ran everywhere. Tiny thatched roofed houses, elevated on poles, surrounded a central yard. In the shade beneath the most prominent house, an old man sat on a chair made of a log.

“Come pay your respects to the chief,” Armstrong-Davis invited Willy and me. “Don’t let your head be higher than his. Do you have anything for a gift?”

“No. What would he want?” asked Willy.

“Empty shell casings, tin cans, food.”

Willy turned to his supply chief, Corporal Rankin, while I asked, “Why would they want casings and tin cans?”

“They can make things out of them. Necklaces, little oil lamps, cut tin decorations. Shiny metal is scarce and valuable here.”

Corporal Rankin soon trotted back from the trucks, lugging a case of canned peaches.

Two for one, I thought, food and cans. Clever!

We duck-walked toward the chief and presented him with the peaches, opening the box so he could see the cans. He repeatedly turned a can in his hand, confused about what it was. Finally, I took another can from the box, opened it with my knife, and speared a peach. As I lifted the peach slice from the can, Armstrong-Davis said, “Don’t eat that. Eating in public is taboo here. People eat at their own hearths with their backs turned to each other.”

“What in the world?” exclaimed Corporal Rankin.

“Food is scarce. They talk a lot about food, but they eat privately.”

I pantomimed eating the peach, then dropped it back into the can,

giving the open can to the chief. Willy and I backed away from the chief, and the group that had greeted us led us out of the village. I looked back as we left and saw the chief entering his home with the case of peaches under one arm, the open can held high in the other hand.

With the natives' help, we chopped and cut our way through another half-mile of rocks and jungle. Finally, circling a coral knob, then following a ravine up the last slight rise, we found ourselves on the highest point on the island.

"You set your unit up here," Willy said, choosing a small grassy clearing near the top of the ravine. "We'll go a little farther and see if we can find good spots for our stations."

The men pulled the trucks and trailers into position. Then, as I reviewed the manual, they leveled and stabilized the trailer, unfolded our pre-assembled antennae, connected the generator, and fired it up. Next, I worked with the radar operators to relearn the radar's operation while the other men set up tents and prepared to crawl into them for a break. Then I looked up the ridge, where the Australians still assembled their equipment and would for the next four or five hours.

"Let's give the Aussies a hand, men," I said.

The men groaned but followed me up the road.

"Blimey, you blokes set up already?" asked one of the Aussies. "Where's your equipment?"

"That's the new SCR-584 antenna," I told them, pointing to the round receiver on top of the equipment trailer, visible through the trees. "It folds flat for transport, then we just unfold it and hook it up. Takes about fifteen minutes. All the operational equipment is inside the trailer. We sit in there and monitor everything."

"And we sit out here, rain or shine, watching through these viewers. That is, once we get the bloody things set up." He sounded unhappy!

We laid cables, carried parts, and helped assemble the three Aussie radar units in record time—only three hours and forty-five minutes. The Aussies loudly and somewhat vulgarly expressed their appreciation, slapping their helpers on the back.

I had assigned several men to put up the Aussie tents while the rest helped with the radar. When the Aussies saw the fully erected camp, they cheered and broke out cases of beer to share with my men. I noticed several men were watching to see how I would react. I took a bottle myself and sat down with Willy. We shared a meal of cold C-rations, then returned to our camp in the dark.

I considered how I would deploy the men. Four men on the radar, four sentries, and two manning machine guns would give me six crews, provided I took a shift myself. They had all trained on the radar, but only fifteen were experienced radar operators. I set up a four-hour rotation for the men and took the first shift, feeling slightly slap-happy from fatigue. I had the radar operators give a refresher on the radar's operation to the entire shift, then sent the gunners and sentries out. When the midnight shift arrived, I repeated the process. I plied the replacements, groggy from just four hours' sleep, with leftover coffee brewed during the first shift.

Despite the late hour, I had trouble falling asleep, the air heavy with impending rain, and my mind churning over my first combat assignment. I felt the pressure of my duty, responsible for the lives and welfare of sixty men inexplicably sent to this remote island with one radar unit. Although quiet now, I couldn't help worrying about what would happen when the infantry landed. I finally dozed off and slept through a torrential down-pour, the men later told me, before my alarm woke me. I checked on the new shift, then walked up the road toward the newly erected mess tent. As I approached, I saw case after case of peaches. We would be eating peaches at every meal.