Why Balmain are in the box seat

How Japan took an Australian

By ALAN GILL

Mrs Violet Kentish has a story to tell which will startle Australia’s military historians: in 1943, a Japanese airman landed in Australian waters and captured her husband.

It happened virtually within wading distance of the Northern Territory coastline, almost certainly the only case of an Australian being taken prisoner in Australian sovereign territory. He was later executed.

Even now, only a few people know what happened. The capture has never been made public. Mrs Kentish herself spent several years ascertaining the facts which have finally emerged.

There have been other reports that Japanese military units — in addition to bombing Broome and Darwin — landed in remote regions of the Northern Territory and Western Australia during World War II.

Most of these reports are dismissed as fanciful. But this one is true.

It involves the Rev Leon Kentish, head of the North Australian Department of the Methodists Overseas Missions. On January 22, 1943, Mr Kentish and five Aborigines took a lift in a naval supply boat Patricia C which was plying between Elcho Island off Arnhem Land, Wessel Islands, and Yirrkala Nosy on the mainland.

The boat, which had two officers and several seamen on board, was attacked near Elcho by a Japanese seaplane. It sank craft, and then made repeated passes, shooting at the survivor they struggled in the sea a couple of hundred metres from shore.

The Japanese warplane landed on the water. Mr Kent who was wounded, swam towards it, ignoring or not hearing the partially deaf) warning shots from his companions. After a conversation, the pilot pulled into the co-pilot’s seat and plane took off.

Despite accounts by witnesses, the report of the cap