

# The Borneo Bugle



BORNEO PRISONERS OF WAR RELATIVES ASSOCIATION OF WA INC  
A MUTUAL GROUP TO HELP KEEP THE SPIRIT OF SANDAKAN ALIVE

December 1st 2005 Volume 4, Issue 3

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**OUR NEXT MEETING**  
**CHRISTMAS PARTY**  
**NOOKENBURRAH HOTEL**  
**THURSDAY**  
**DECEMBER 16<sup>TH</sup> 2005**  
**COMMENCING MIDDAY**

## CHRISTMAS 1942

by Keith Jones

Recently Vic Tyrrell kindly loaned me a copy of a very rare book which was published in London in 1958. It is called *Escape From Hell* and it was written by Sergeant Walter Wallace of NSW who escaped from Sandakan in April 1943. (Lynette Silver lists this book in her research references).

In his story Sgt Wallace gives an eyewitness account of the scene in Sandakan camp on Xmas eve 1942. You might like to read this, because the Xmas season is again nearly upon us in 2005.

*"We all felt depressed and sad on Christmas Eve, thinking of our homes and our loved ones, wondering when, if ever, we should see them again. The stars were beautiful that night, I remember, and we sat on the ground, looking at them, singing Christmas carols from time to time. Then, as the moon rose, we had a little surprise from our officers. Draped in sheets, to represent dwellers in Bethlehem at the time of the Nativity, they came over the mound in the north-east section of the camp, singing in unison, Holy Night, Silent Night, and we all stopped our own singing to listen. It was a moving experience, and I think that not many of us were dry-eyed as we listened to those voices. Even the Japanese guards kept still to hear.*

*To this day, the music of that lovely hymn moves me to tears, as it brings back the picture of that night under the stars, making me think of how many of those who heard it then have passed away into the "Silent Night."*

## CONSTITUTION AMMENDMENT

by Allan Cresswell

At our last general meeting a special resolution was passed by our members that our meetings be reduced from six per year to three, and the meetings to be held in future in April, August and December each year.

The April meeting will include discussions and planning for our involvement in Anzac Day. The August meeting will include the Annual General Meeting and finalising arrangements for our Sandakan Day Service. The December meeting will be our Christmas Social/Party meeting.

The Borneo Bugle will continue to be bi-monthly with publishing on February 1<sup>st</sup>, April 1<sup>st</sup>, June 1<sup>st</sup>, August 1<sup>st</sup>, October 1<sup>st</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup>.

## MAITLAND SANDAKAN MEMORIAL

by Keith Jones

The very first Sandakan memorial in Australia was erected by Ted McLaughlin at Boyup Brook in 1991, and it was later re-dedicated with name plaques in 1993. In January of that year the Sandakan Memorial Foundation was established in NSW and this organization went on to erect memorials in Sydney, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Maitland, Bendigo and Brisbane. A photograph of the Sandakan memorial in Maitland NSW is shown below. This memorial bears the name of NX65363 Craftsman D. H. Jones who was the father of Ken Jones, our hard working secretary who did so much to establish our new memorial here in Perth.



**Description:** Brick rectangular platform topped with a granite with a brass relief map of the Sandakan and Ranau areas of Borneo including the route taken on the forced marches. On the lower sections of the east, north and west faces are 3 plaques listing the names of the prisoners.

### Inscriptions:

**(East face - top)**

S A N D A K A N

**(East face - lower)**

names - A to J

**(North face - lower)**

names - K to W

**(West face - lower)**

names - with service number and unit also listing the 2 that escaped and rescued.

**(South face - lower)**

IN MEMORY OF

1800 Australians of the 8th Division A.I.F. and 750 British Troops. They fought gallantly in the defence of Malaya and Singapore during World War II. Following the Fall of Singapore, they became prisoners of the Japanese and were transported to Sandakan in British North Borneo, now Sabah, in 1942 to construct an airfield, where 900 died of ill-treatment.

By the end of 1944, when allied forces were within striking distance of Sandakan, the Japanese command ordered the removal of prisoners inland to Ranau 165 miles (265 kilometres) west. On 29 January 1945, 470 prisoners guarded by 500 Japanese marched towards Ranau. Those unable to carry on were killed.

The second march comprising 532 prisoners left Sandakan on 29 May 1945, 183 arrived at Ranau on 26 June 1945. Only eight survived from the first march.

Of the 288 prisoners left at Sandakan there were no survivors. On 1 August 1945, the surviving 22 prisoners at Ranau were massacred. Six who escaped were rescued by special forces.

This memorial honours those men who enlisted from the Hunter Region of New South Wales.

We Will Remember Them. Sandakan Memorial Foundation. Established: 1994 Dedication: 11 December.1994

**(West face - top)**

This Memorial was dedicated by FATHER JOHN BRENDAN ROGERS OFM Eighth Division A.I.F. Chaplain Sandakan and Kuching and CHAPLIN GARY KENNEY Australian Army

This Memorial was unveiled by the Mayor of the City of Maitland COUNCILLOR JOHN MARTIN

11th December 1994

**(South face - top)**

The sculptured terrain of Sabah illustrates the route of the Death Marches, shown by a bronze ribbon between Sandakan and Ranau which was substantially swamp and dense jungle in 1945.

## President's Corner

by President Allan Cresswell

After a hectic few months leading up to our very special Sandakan Memorial Dedication Service everyone has taken a much needed and deserved breather. Not much activity of late to report on but there are many future projects and articles that are pending for 2006.

The next edition of the *Borneo Bugle* will include an article and photos from Murray Moore relating to his trip to Borneo where he has a very interesting location that he visited. Also some further marvellous drawings by our Treasurer, Colin Prior, and a very special POW Profile contribution by Non Meston. We will also continue in future editions of the *Borneo Bugle* articles relating to other Sandakan Memorials throughout Australia and Overseas. For the last edition it was an article on our own WA Sandakan Memorial and this edition it is on the Maitland Memorial (Keith's article on page 2).

The *Borneo Bugle* continues to be published on the Internet at [www.ozgenealogy.info/borneo](http://www.ozgenealogy.info/borneo) and the colour photos come up really great, especially of our Sandakan Memorial Dedication Service held in August 2005. It is viewable by clicking on the main page at the [Oct 1 2005 Vol 4 Issue 2](#) link. Every edition is posted online approximately two weeks after it is mailed out. Even if you don't have internet, do pass this information onto family or friends who may be able to show you the end result.

The date for our April 2006 General Meeting will be announced in the February and April editions of the *Borneo Bugle*.

On behalf of my wife, Jean, and myself, I wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year. It has been a great year for our Association in 2005 and the Management Committee and many of our members will be working on another well planned Sandakan Day and various other items for 2006.

### Sandakan Memorial Windows Project

15(B) Ada Avenue Wahroonga 2076 NSW Australia

ph/fax: 61 2 9489 3949

lrsilver@hotmail.com [www.lynettesilver.com](http://www.lynettesilver.com)

The long-awaited videos, DVDs and VCDs of the **Dedication** and **Opening Ceremonies** for the Windows of Remembrance at Sandakan are now available.

It has been worth the wait! Using footage shot from four cameras, our most talented film maker has also incorporated wartime archival film and footage of artist Philip Handel at work, thereby creating a wonderful visual record. **Each pack** consists of **two** VHS tapes, **two** DVDs or **two** VCDs, of approximately 1 hr 30 minutes' duration for **each** ceremony.

**THE COST ? JUST \$30 for VHS pack \* \$25 for DVD pack \* \$20 for VCD pack**

Packaging and registered post from Sabah are included. **All proceeds** from sales will be donated to Stage 2 of The Sandakan Memorial Windows (The Friendship Windows, over the north and south doors of the church, see [www.lynettesilver.com](http://www.lynettesilver.com))

To streamline and speed up the ordering process, within **14 days** (if possible) please detach and return the order form below to **15(B) Ada Ave, Wahroonga 2076** with cheque/money order made out to **Sandakan Memorial Windows Project**.

On receipt of your order, it will be immediately transmitted by the Trustees to Sandakan, where the staff at St Michael's Church will dispatch it, direct to your home address.

Lynette Silver

Honorary Co-ordinator, Sandakan Memorial Windows Project

.....  
(DETACH & POST TO: Sandakan Memorial Windows, 15(B) Ada Ave, Wahroonga 2076)

Name: (please print).....

Address: .....

Please send me: ..... VHS pack(s) @ \$30 each (\$.....)

..... DVD pack(s) @ \$25 each (\$.....)

..... VCD pack(s) @ \$20 each (\$.....)

TOTAL: \$.....

ENCLOSED: Cheque/Money order for \$..... (made out to Sandakan Memorial Windows)



## SANDAKAN MARCH

BY VIC TYRRELL

In the Land Beneath the Wind  
 where the Sacred Mountain stands.  
 At a place called Sandakan  
 near Ramua by the aerodrome,  
 filtered sun shines through the trees  
 reflecting the shadows of horror years.


The shadows that now remain,  
 we hope will never be again.  
 They tell of suffering beyond despair.  
 They reflect the pain, and valour, of the men  
 imprisoned there.  
 The anguish of another day, of beatings, torture,  
 and cruel display.

Of grit and courage were these men,  
 the men imprisoned in Sandakan.  
 For three years and more they endured through-out  
 to return to home, old friends, and house.  
 The captors did not share their view,  
 they forced a March to Ranau.  
 A March of Death was to begin  
 veiled in lies of fare and fill.  
 A change of place our soldiers thought,  
 would bring relief and some retort.

One hundred and seventy miles to go,  
 that was all required,  
 to greener fields and a better life style.  
 Seventeen days to complete the track,  
 there was to be not turning back.  
 Flogged and beaten all the way,  
 these men of burden weak and worn,  
 carried their mates through mud and rain,  
 to falter was never to be seen again.

Gallant in mind and bodily strained,  
 a second march was to begin.  
 A similar fate was in store, for  
 another five hundred or more.  
 Stressed with sickness, racked with pain,  
 without boots or hat and loaded with  
 packs of Nippon man, our men were on the  
 march again.

The order was to dispose of them.  
 Stragglers knew their fate, but never forgot  
 goodbye to their mate.  
 And as their life slipped by,  
 their food and possession they did not deny.



To live in hope was all that was left.  
 In faith in God, in his bequest.  
 To weary souls, wrought with pain,  
 into the darkness, never to be seen again.  
 For those remaining, the future grim,  
 sadness and tears for the next of kin.  
 A tragic end at the hands of foe, who  
 murdered to hide their unforgivable sins.  
 In a war they so desperately wanted to win.

In remembrance we all stand.  
 To honour such a courageous band.  
 To shed a tear of deep regret, to pray for tortured  
 souls, still yet.  
 To remember and never to forget,  
 the wasted lives of soldiers strong,  
 whose memory will linger long  
 in the hearts of loved ones when they are gone.  
 And at the Monument in their honour  
 at that place in Sandakan.  
 The immortal souls still roam the grounds  
 in the hope that everlasting peace resounds.

## **Lynette's News Update from Borneo**

### **Windows of Remembrance:**

Our beautiful Remembrance Windows are certainly attracting attention. The church is open for one hour every afternoon for viewing - Monday to Saturday, 2.30pm until 3.30 pm, and all morning on Sunday, as long as you go to church. The Minister reports that many visitors are overcome by the beauty of the windows and what they represent. It is a wonderful way to educate people about the Sandakan story. They are also definitely a showstopper! I was there to witness the bus loads of people stand in the aisle, transfixed, unable to believe how beautiful the windows are. Comments in the visitors book show that people are coming from all over the world - UK and Australia (of course), Holland, Germany USA, France. And it is not just the overseas people who are bowled over. I have it on impeccable authority that at the wedding of a prominent family, presided over by the Archbishop, the entire VIP party walked backwards down the aisle to take their seats, absolutely thunderstruck!

### **Friendship Windows:**

Stage 2 of The Sandakan Memorial Windows Project, to install stained glass windows over the north and south doors of St Michael's, was successfully launched in August - in Burwood Park in Sydney and at the commemorations to mark the end of World War 2, held on the site of Sandakan POW Camp in Sabah. The Friendship Windows, as they will be known, are to celebrate and strengthen the bonds of friendship between Australians and the people of Sabah, originally forged by our prisoners with the local people sixty years ago. Four metres in height, the windows will take Mr Handel, who has agreed to stay out of retirement, 1-2 years to complete. Anyone wishing to participate should send a cheque or money order to Sandakan Memorial Windows, 15(B) Ada Avenue, Wahroonga 2076, along with two stamped, self-addressed envelopes for a receipt and photos of the finished windows. Please include the name of any POW being honoured. All names will be inscribed in the Book of Friendship. Any excess funds will be used to set up a maintenance fund for all the stained glass and to support the Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Scheme (see next item).

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### **Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Scheme - A Living Memorial**

Neil (my husband) and I have established a scheme to enable promising students from remote Kadazandusun villages in Sabah's interior to receive secondary education at St Michael's School, under an arrangement pioneered in 2002. Without this help, even the most gifted village students cannot hope to pass a nation-wide exam to enter advanced colleges and universities - the passport to a better life. Girls, in particular, will benefit from the Scheme. Without a scholarship, their only option is to remain in their villages, their potential unfulfilled. All of the current intake of students sang and danced at the Dedication and Official Opening of the Memorial Windows.

This Scheme does not require vast amounts of money. Our Australian dollar goes a long way in Sabah and, by our standards, the cost of board, lodging, schooling and extra tuition, especially in English, is extremely low. Full board and tuition in Sydney costs between \$10,000 and \$20,000. In Sandakan, all this, plus travel to and from the village twice a year, can be bought with just \$650.

A high percentage of Sabahans are Christian. This includes the Kadazandusun people. It is especially fitting that this Scheme is helping students from this minority ethnic group, as these were the people who helped our POWs on the death marches and at Ranau. All donations, however small, will help. As someone reminded me - a bucket is soon filled by many small drops. For the price of a good cup of coffee, or a beer, a glass of wine or simply your loose change, you can help make a difference. Response from the general public has been wonderful - when I give a talk on one of my books, I leave out a 'wishing bag' for loose change - it is amazing how much I collect! To participate, please send a cheque/money order made out to Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Scheme, to 15(B) Ada Avenue, Wahoonga 2076, along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope for receipt and information letter. There are no overheads at all for this Scheme. Every cent goes directly into the education fund.

### **Sandakan Day Commemoration, Sabah:**

This was held at the POW Park on 15 August and was attended by a large number of people, about 40 of whom were Australian, mainly veterans who had served in Borneo. The following day, 36 people, including 10 Australian soldiers who had come to provide a cataflaque party for the ceremony, our Defence Adviser from Kuala Lumpur and 7 Australian civilians, left the Sandakan Camp at 5 am, bound for Ranau, 250 kilometres away. Although promoted as a Death March Re-enactment, the route followed major and secondary roads and was more of a ten-day general endurance test, with distances up to 39 kilometres being covered in a single day, in 40 degree heat! Neil and I walked the first two or three miles before leaving for Borneo's tip, returning a week later to meet the walkers at overnight stopping places as they neared Ranau. There was no commemorative service, but wreathes were laid by VIPs at the Ranau Memorial at the conclusion of the trek. However, as promised, a few days later Neil and I, with a small group of locals, burned gum leaves on Mt Kinabalu, to commemorate the murder of the last of our prisoners on 27 August. It rained, but the locals said that was good - the mountain also was weeping.

### **Development of the Sandakan-Ranau Death March Track:**

As the organisers of the death march 're-enactment' did not take the opportunity to develop a jungle route, since I returned home I have been working closely with a Borneo trekking specialist (a Kadazandusan) who is keen to cut a track from Boto to Ranau, through the jungle, following as closely as possible the original route, with the aim of improving tourism in Sabah. Using his local expertise and my research and precious original maps given to me by a member of the body recovery team, we have been able, for the first time since 1946, to identify the route, on the ground. As a result, Sabah Tourism, headed by Datuk Irene who worked so hard to ensure our stained glass windows arrived in Sandakan safely, will shortly be promoting a two-day trek at the Ranau end of the route. I have also developed a six-day tour, which includes this trek, for the general public. In time, we hope to be able to cut a track all the way from Boto to Ranau, across the mountains. Anyone who is reasonably fit can do the two-day walk - definitely NO camping involved - but some training will be advisable for the 'hard' option, when it opens!

## BACKGROUND NOTE ON A SURVIVING POW AT BORNEO

by Keith Jones

You would no doubt be interested to know that two surviving Australian POW's who were imprisoned at Kuching are living here in Perth today.

I have been in touch with John Bell, who was originally from NSW. He was bought home after the war in an undernourished state and eventually married Vonda, his army nurse from WA.

Some years ago John wrote a short story about his wartime experiences (as he said, just on the lighter side of it) and he has kindly allowed us to publish it in this edition of our newsletter. As his story will explain John went with 'E' Force bound for Sandakan via Kuching ex Singapore. Through a very fortunate event enroute which he explains in his article John was required to remain at Kuching instead of travelling with all the others of "E" Force to Sandakan. It is an excellent article about his days in Singapore and Borneo and is published in full, "warts and all". See the article commencing on the back page and continuing this page.

### POW Profile - Continued from Page 10

A truck of ammunition arrived at the gates one day and the driver came into the camp complaining that he wasn't feeling the best. Well, a mate and I decided that we would help out as we were off duty at the time. We got in the truck, drove it up to the front line, unloaded it and returned post haste, a distance of approximately 300 miles return. As we did this without permission, we were paraded and, after being subjected to a lecture on leaving our posts, we were told "not to do it again!" I guess we could have been court martialled.

We spent eight weeks in Kuala Lumpur, then were sent back to Singapore. There I drove a brand new 'nightcart', carrying petrol in four gallon drums. As you can imagine, a truck carrying approximately 150 four-gallon cans of petrol had the right of way throughout Singapore. I also drove Lieutenant Colonel Kent Hughes through Singapore during a bombing raid, a trip that you might call 'a bit hairy'. Later I found myself back with the 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion on a ridge overlooking the Causeway with our own artillery behind us and the Japanese shelling us in front, we were copping it from both sides. 'Dropshorts' was the official name for the Japanese, but we called them lots of things!

While at this 'venue', I was ordered to accompany a party to check on some buildings. While inside one of them I sat down and promptly went to sleep. (I hadn't slept for 48 hours.) When I woke I was covered by bricks and rubble, but was not hurt. I made my way back to the ranks to a "where the hell have you been?" interrogation. I had apparently slept for approximately twelve hours through bombardment and they thought I'd 'copped it'.

We moved from this situation to a hilltop where we were sitting ducks for the Japanese bombers. Here my luck held out once more as a bomb landed on one side of a tree and I was on the other. It was a fairly large tree, thank God, but I lost a good mate there as he was on the other side.

After this air raid, I took the injured down to the field hospital in a utility, then back to the hilltop where I discovered that my 'night cart' had been blown up with my personal gear in it, and my unit had moved, according to other soldiers in the area, to the west coast.

So off I went, up and down the west coast looking for them, but 'no can find'. During this search, a padre pulled me up and requested help to bury someone. Besides myself there were two others and the padre all taking turns with the trenching tool and, as the body had been in the open for a least two days (in Singapore's atmosphere), it was not a very pleasant task. Whew!

I eventually found my unit. Everybody surrendered about this time (15 February 1942) and on February 17 we were marched out 25 km to the Selarang Barracks, a large two storey barracks on three sides of a square parade ground in the Changi military encampment. On the march to the barracks we passed a chap dressed as a Malay, chewing betel nut. Our sergeant sang out "Don't spit it out now!" The 'Malay' swallowed and said "I'll wait". He was one of our chaps – I hope he got away with it – although the black army boots kind of spoilt the effect.

Also on the way to the barracks, we came across a body placed about shoulder height on a side of a drain. It had swollen to about three time normal size and orders of "Don't touch, don't touch" went through the ranks, but of course some idiot (we called him other names) poked it with something sharp and it burst, spraying every which way. Not a nice story but mild compared to the traumas experienced by many in the next three and a half years.

The sleeping facilities at the barrack were 'non est.' – cold (bloody hard) concrete. This is where I scrounged material to make the first of the eleven beds I made during the next three and a half years. My prize possession at the this time was

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an air Force issue blanket, one of three I 'found' on the west coast 'excursion'. I gave the others to two mates and I still had mine, albeit a tattered rag, at the end.

I think it was probably a week after arrival at the barracks, at the beginning of March 1942, that work parties were organised and I went with a large number of Aussies (about 1,500) back into Singapore, where we settled into the 'Great World' complex. This had been an amusement park in Singapore's heyday, and had been turned into a morgue during the fighting. On our arrival (a blocked building meant little to the troops) we found sheets, pillows, etc, and in the area I finished up in, a *sharpors*, an Indian bed. This was my home for the next eleven months, before returning to Changi in December 1942.

We went out every morning in parties of fifty, our main area of work being on the wharves unloading trains coming down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore. Rice was the main cargo to be unloaded and stacked in the godowns (warehouses). Handling 200lb bags of rice required some ingenuity. To facilitate matters, we had two men in the rail truck throwing the bags onto the tarmac, then four men would bend down, take a corner each, lift the bag and then a man would walk under it and carry it over to the stack, often having to walk up the stack before dropping it – not easy on a rice diet and every day gradually losing weight.

We handled various other commodities, not the least being, of all things, sewing machines. The spare pack of needles supplied with each machine was worth a fortune to the Chinese women, and a packet kept my two mates and myself in food which lasted a fortnight! Unfortunately, although there was half a godown full of machines, their value became known to many in a very short time and all machines were 'bandicooted' within a week.

The bashings and rough treatment we received from the Japanese were relieved somewhat by incidents which, at the time, broke the monotony. As P.O.W.s we scrounged whenever and whatever we could, and if you couldn't eat it you could sell it and thereby eat.

Our guards were mainly Koreans with a few Japanese officers – about ten 'Kitchies' to every 'Nippon'. One guard lined us up one day behind a table on which he placed two tins of bully beef (or similar). Walking past he picked up one tin, hid it in his shirt and exclaimed "*si tow Australian*" – I know Australians. However as he walked past, one of our chaps followed in his footsteps, picked up the other tin and was back with the group before the guard turned round. On seeing the second tin missing, he let this sink in for a moment, shook his head and said "*si tippa tow Australian*" - I don't know Australians.

We were told once that we had to work after our usual 'knock off' time, without any food and, as we had not had anything to eat since approximately midday, we voiced our disapproval in no uncertain terms. However we solved the problem, - P.O.W. fashion. Our guards were fascinated by photos and, as some of our chaps had managed to keep some photos of family and especially children, the work party gathered round the guards showing photos while one member of our party (Bill Lowcock) literally pulled back a sheet of iron on the godown wall far enough for a small mate to get in and bring out a tin of biscuits (a four gallon size tin) plus a box of condensed milk (24 tins). A whistle brought the troops over and round the corner and everybody was eating biscuits and sharing a tin of milk before the guards knew anything about it. Our job for the next few hours was shifting bags of rice, and as you can imagine not the best of jobs on a meal of biscuits and condensed milk. Not too many of us retained it and, one by one, we crept around the corner and 'lost' it.

As mentioned earlier we scrounged anything and everything. This day sugar came our way. The pockets on gas mask bags were ideal for carrying this commodity, but unfortunately this day we didn't get away with it. A guard found some on one chap and informed the Jap officer. He dealt with it rather well. He told two of our chaps to bring out a bag of sugar, lined us up and then we were told to fill our dixies (cups). We would have been very pleased to take this bonus back to camp, but no, we had to eat it where we were! Well you can only eat so much sugar at one time – what a mess, with sugar all over us by the time the Nips got sick of it.

On this day I had scrounged some tins of tobacco and had them in my trousers where my gaiters kept them from falling out. One of the Nips knew this and tried to draw the officer's attention to it but he was too busy laughing his head off over the sugar fiasco and told the guard to forget it – my lucky day!

A work party to the Tiger brewery was a welcome change from the wharf detail. Two trucks, with 25 men to each plus two of our own officers, set off one day (stone cold sober). Our job was to load the trucks with crates of beer, which when loaded travelled to various Jap camps, were unloaded and returned for more.

Malays ran the brewery and, between filling the bottles and the caps going on, at least six bottles were open. We all took turns to get down behind this area where the Malays would hand us a bottle. Every man managed to get there at least twice during the day. To cap it all the Nips gave us a bottle each for lunch! Even the Nip drivers had their share.

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Consequently our journey back to camp at the end of the day was hectic to say the least. On arrival at the gate to the camp we formed up in threes with our two officers in front and ‘marched’ in, holding one another upright while the officers, holding themselves with their right and left arms saluted the guards – one with the left arm and one with the right – and we got away with it! I could mention names, but won’t.

One day we were taken over the Causeway to a racecourse where many crates, cases, casks, you name it, were scattered. Our job was to sort them out. This was under the evil eye of the *Kempei Tai* (the equivalent to the Gestapo in Germany), who surveyed this scene from high up in the grandstand. However they missed visits made to a cask of over-proof rum, which someone in the party had found. When we lined up to come back to camp the guards found something on one of the chaps. We all received a severe belting but the only chaps that felt anything were those that had not visited the cask during the day, but there were some sore heads the next morning.

About this time, after about after eleven months in this camp, I was sent back to the Selarang Barracks hospital as my back had given up. I had been helped back from work parties for the three months prior, with one mate (6’2”) on one side and the other (5’4”) on the other (however nobody laughed). The doctors at this hospital were performing miracles. However my complaint (a slipped and very worn disc) would require an operation they were not prepared to undertake.

I was told not to go on any more work parties but somehow found myself on 29 March 1943 in the second party of Australians to go to Borneo, the ‘E’ Force with the destination of Sandakan, via Kuching, arriving on April 1. Conditions on the ship, the *de Klerk*, were bloody awful. Accommodation was head to toe, with three layers between decks. One turned over, everybody had to do the same. We were allowed on deck to use the toilet facilities (over the stern, hanging on to a rope).

A day out of Singapore we noticed a large wooden crate on deck (one of our chaps must have been a burglar in civvy life, as he had the lock undone within seconds) and lo and behold, inside were tins of Japanese food (baked beans), etc. Well, no sense in letting everyone in on this so we kept it among six of us. The result was diarrhea, and disembarking was quite a feat, especially with your legs crossed.

We were taken by truck up the river and into the P.O.W. camp at Lintang Barracks in Kuching, where we were paraded in the square and made the acquaintance of Major [Colonel] Suga, the Japanese camp commandant, who informed us we would have three holidays – “yesterday, today and tomorrow and then you shall work”.

However, due to the ‘foraging’ on board the ship, a number of us finished up in the camp hospital. While we were in the hospital, the rest of the party was transferred to Sandakan. The cure for diarrhea was nothing to eat for three days, then one spoonful of rice porridge. If this managed to ‘stay’ with you, you had two spoonfuls on the second day and three on the third. However any bowel movement during this time brought you back to square one and a repeat performance.

After getting over this, I went into the O/R’s camp with other Australians, Scots and English. The camp overall covered a large area and comprised of a women and children’s section, a civilian men’s section, English officers’ section, Dutch officers’ section, Australian officers’ section and a hospital, such as it was. We went out on work parties, where there were occasional beltings and punishments such as sand above the head and lunchtime food being kicked over before we were sent back to work.

After going out on work party for about three months, flattening a hill of sand and filling in a swamp, I and a few other O/R’s were ordered to up to the officers’ camp as cooks and batmen. I didn’t think I would make a very good batman so I became a cook. I finished up in charge, cooking mainly rice and 7 lbs of pork a week between 175 men. We grew *kang kong* and pawpaw.

There were plays and concerts – Gilbert and Sullivan, “H.M.S. Pinafore”, etc, and a choir with Claude Pickford as bandmaster and Johnny Morrison as the main singer.

Then came the great day when Major Suga got us all on parade [to announce the end of the war]: “Hiroshima all gone, Nagasaki all gone, my wife and children all gone”. We didn’t cheer at that point. Then we were told that the war was over, although we already knew (on 15 August 1945) via a wireless in the O/R’s camp, hidden under a stove in the kitchen.

Australian officers were then placed in charge of the whole complex and distributed food that had been dropped (on August 28). It was three weeks to a month before getting out of Kuching on September 10 and sailing down the river to the sea and waiting hospital ships. We went on the H.M.A.H.S. *Wanganella* to Morotai. I was treated for hookworm – a terrible experience, but managed to put on a bit of weight (9 stone 3 lbs, after having weighed only seven and a half on 4 August 1945), before landing back in Sydney on 13 October 1945.



## POW PROFILE



**John Stewart BELL**  
**Private NX43513**  
**2/19 Battalion AIF**

**Article written by John Stewart Bell**

Background notes on this article by Keith Jones on Page 7

I was born in Sydney on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1920. I had a good home life – good but plain food, a loving mother and father, a few belts around the legs for minor misdemeanours – altogether a happy time which stood me in good stead during my Prisoner of War days.

I attended school until age 14, first at Haberfield Demonstration School then at Fort Street Boys' High School in Petersham, then, as times were a bit tough, I went out to work. In 1934, I got a job as first assistant in the Despatch Department, and later in the Motor and Cycle Parts Department of Smith Sons and Rees Ltd, Sydney.

I went into National Training at age 19, came out and went back to work, then, during one lunch hour on 18 August 1941 I joined the A.I.F. (Australian Imperial Force) aged 20, with my father's permission grudgingly given.

I went to Tamworth for training for ten months before being sent to Singapore as 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements for the 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion. We sailed from Sydney in late September 1941 in the Dutch ship, the *Sibajak*, via Fremantle and arrived in Singapore on 5 October 1941.

Our trip around the Great Australian Bight was rather eventful for several reasons. It was the roughest trip the captain had ever made and we were in a convoy with New Zealand troops in the *Johan van Olden Vanderbelt*. When we sailed into Fremantle they asked us where we had been as, although only a short distance behind them, they didn't sight us during the whole journey – we were in the 'troughs' more time than not. The 'inclement' weather affected the roll call at meals as you can well imagine, although I managed to 'control my stomach' and having been delegated a mess orderly for fourteen personnel, my job and that of my partner was easy. (Although the Dutch cooking didn't help – it tasted alright but the smell left a lot to be desired).

We had twelve hours leave in Fremantle and I hoped I could visit my uncle, John Bell, in Kondinin where he had settled and had been farming. However on being told how far the wheat belt town of Kondinin was from Perth, I abandoned that idea and I never did meet him as he died sometime before I returned to Australia.

After arriving in Singapore, we 'embussed' to Bukit Timah over the Causeway. There we were camped in the 'bullring', the training ground for all new recruits. I had my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday here and celebrated it with two mates and twelve bottles of warm Tiger beer. Unfortunately we had to take all the bottles at once and they were all opened as we received them, a terrible business!

I hadn't been there many days when I and eleven others were selected for guard duty in Kuala Lumpur, at 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon. It was a very monotonous existence, 24 hours on and 48 hours off, but left us plenty of time to do our own thing. We went into Kuala Lumpur quite often, returning back to camp in rickshaws. Sometimes we pulled the rickshaw with the owner sitting in the seat, hoping like hell that we didn't rock him out.

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