

# The Borneo Bugle



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

April 1st 2006 Volume 4, Issue 4

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#### OUR NEXT MEETING

IRWIN BARRACKS  
KARRAKATTA  
SUNDAY APRIL 9<sup>th</sup> 2006  
AT 10.00AM

## ANZAC DAY 2006

by Allan Cresswell

**Anzac Day March 2006** is rapidly approaching and we look forward to a large turnout from our association members to march under our banner. Last years march was a resounding success with fourteen of our members attending. Please do consider joining us on the day. I marched for the first time last year and it is such a great experience to see and feel the support and warmth from the public. Contact Vice President Bob Brackenbury for any additional information regarding marching under our banner on Anzac Day. Hope to see you there!

This year's **Anzac Day Dawn Service** will again be conducted by the Engineers at their Memorial area, adjacent to where we have our meetings. An open invitation is extended to our Association, their families and friends to attend if they wish. Unlike the larger City service this area does not have the huge crowds, so it makes it a more personal experience. It is professionally run in a dedicated manner and in a beautiful setting. Our Association will be laying a wreath and anyone who wishes to lay one privately is encouraged to do so.

After the main service any Borneo POW Association members present are asked to gather at our plaque on the Honour Wall for a short ceremony to honour our Sandakan POWs. If you plan to attend the Dawn Service please wear your medals, and also your Group name-tags for the benefit of the Gate Security.



Our members starting to form up - prior to the Anzac Day March in 2005

Photo courtesy Allan Cresswell

## BORNEO NEWS

By Lynette Silver  
Received January 2006

### The Windows

Although Philip Handel was not in good health before Christmas, he is now feeling much improved and Stage 2 of the Windows Project (Friendship Windows) is progressing well, with the design for the southern transept, St Paul and the storm at sea, all but complete. Even at this stage - a detailed design on paper - it is dramatic and the finished product will be magnificent. We are aiming for August 2007 completion for both windows.

DVDs and videos of the Dedication Service and Official Opening of the Windows of Remembrance (twin pack) are available. Contact me if you have not received the information and would like to purchase. It is an excellent production. For those who were there, you can relive the emotion of the day. For those who were unable to come, you will be able to experience it for the first time. All proceeds go to the Friendship Windows.

### The Scholarship Scheme - A Living Memorial

Donations towards this Scheme are steady, despite a (deliberately) very low-key campaign, and in the four months since September, I have raised or received from individual donors, almost half of this year's TOTAL budget. The 'wishing' bag never results in less than \$100, and indeed, when we passed it around at our November lunch in Sydney, it came back with well over that amount in it. Below \*\* are very brief profiles on the 13 girls we are currently helping to educate. Although the details are scant, they are sufficient to show just how vital our contribution is and how far it goes. (\$5 pays for food for one student for FIVE days!) For the price of a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, (or more, if you can manage it) you CAN help change someone's life, forever. \*\* **Editor - List omitted due to space constraints**

### The Death March Route

A project I began some time ago has now come to fruition. A series of signs, 'POW ROUTE' and all bearing the silhouetted POWs featured on the front of my current book, at the request of local authorities, have been erected by the Sabah Government at key spots along the Sandakan-Ranau highway. A 'self help' brochure, in various languages, explains to the traveller the significance of the site. If you look at the website, [www.sandakan-deathmarch.com](http://www.sandakan-deathmarch.com) [<http://www.sandakan-deathmarch.com/>](http://www.sandakan-deathmarch.com/), Challenge Walk/ Taviu Hill photo gallery, you will see what the signs look like. This will help those, who cannot or don't wish to walk, have some idea of where the track went and the historical significance of various places.

### The Death March Track

The cutting of the most challenging and scenic section of the track, from Bauto (just before the mountains) to Ranau, following the original POW route, is now complete. In March I will be going to Sabah with Neil to 'open' it, by walking as much of it as I can. We expect to have media interest in this event, as it is the first time since 1946, when the war graves recovery team passed along the track that anyone has followed in the footsteps of the POWs. The terrain includes mountains, valleys, rivers and streams, and the scenery is varied. The big climb, which claimed the lives of five people in Keith Botterill's and Richie Murray's group, passes through primary jungle.

If you look on the website you will see an extensive array of photos, taken by Tham Yau Kong, Sabah's trekking specialist, who cut the track, with the help of the only detailed map in existence, given to me by a member of the recovery team, and tiny pieces of information I extracted from hundreds of pages of reports. Although we listed a walk for February this year, the first scheduled trek will not be until May. For the Lest We Forget Tour in August, we have two members of our Sandakan family - Loraine White and John Eaves - booked on it!

## President's Corner

by President Allan Cresswell

The proposed February 2006 edition of the *Borneo Bugle* did not go ahead due to various reasons and for that I do apologise. This edition has some very interesting articles and I hope it does compensate for this prior omission.

It is very pleasing to see articles compiled for the *Borneo Bugle* now coming from various association members and non members. Special mention goes to Keith Jones for obtaining such a wonderful article from Sandy Young who is now 106 years old (story on pages 6-9). Thanks also to Lt Col Peter Winstanley RFD (retired) JP in allowing us to publish the back page POW Profile on Lieutenant Edwin John Esler. Also Murray Moore for his excellent article and Lynette Silver for her update on Borneo news. Non Meston has compiled an informative report on the latest re the Sandakan Exhibition. On that note I must add how pleasing it is to see the exhibition now housed and on display at the Fremantle Army Museum at Burt Street Fremantle. Although much of the display material could not be presented due to space constraints, it is so important that the Sandakan Story be available to the general public as a permanent reminder of the horrors that our soldiers endured and the sacrifices they made. Hopefully much more of the documents, photographs and stories of the exhibition will be able to be presented when/if additional space becomes available in the future.

Vice President, Bob Brackenbury, has some Sandakan Badges available for purchase. He will have them available at our next General Meeting. They are the same badges as those produced by the Burwood City Council for their Sandakan Day Ceremony in 2005.

The Christmas Meeting 2005 held at the Nookburra Hotel was a great success and was well received by the members. Ken Jones has reported further re this meeting on this page. Unfortunately no photographs were available (or taken?) during this inaugural function.

Please do remember the following dates:

- Sunday April 9 2006**                      Our next meeting to discuss the Anzac Day March and other items of interest  
**10.00am**
- Tuesday April 25 2006**                13 Field Squadron Karrakatta - Anzac Dawn Service 2006  
Service will start at 0550hr but coffee Royal from 0500hr. It is ideal to be early to avoid a queue at the front gate. Seating, Breakfast and Lunch available.
- Tuesday April 25 2006**                Anzac Day March – Information available at our next meeting or from our Association's Vice President, Bob Brackenbury

### CHRISTMAS MEETING 2005

by Ken Jones

A luncheon was held in conjunction with the December General Meeting at the Nookburra Hotel, Innaloo. The function was attended by twenty two members and two prospective members (who have since joined our Association). After a very short meeting we later enjoyed good companionship and good food.

The business of the meeting was quickly completed and President Allan gave a summary of the past year's events, highlighting the dedication of the Sandakan Memorial and the Anzac Day march as well as expectations for the coming year.

A selection of poems (some from Sandakan Day services and some new ones) were well read by various members.

As the majority of those present had not seen the servicemen profiles that Allan had put together on DVD, a computer and screen was set up and the profiles shown and was well received.

A very harmonious gathering with an excellent choice of well presented and well priced meals.

## IN SEARCH OF DOCTOR VAL STOOKES - MEMORIAL AND GRAVE

### Background Research

by Allan Cresswell

Doctor Valentine Stookes was born in Liverpool England. During World War 1 he became a pilot and won the Military Cross. In 1923 he worked as a doctor at Miri and later bought a private medical practice at Sandakan. In 1935 he purchased a farm 100 kilometres up the Kinabatangan River where his family lived. Stookes was an accomplished flyer and conducted a Flying Doctor Service around Sandakan and inland areas using a seaplane.

Stookes assisted to get medical supplies to the POWs at Sandakan and was involved in the Underground Movement with the Funk brothers, Doctor Taylor and others. Doctor Stookes became the Sandakan Gaol Medical Officer and helped where possible those servicemen and civilians with medicines and food, who had been imprisoned by the Japanese for their escape attempts.

In April 1943, the Japanese arrested Doctor Stooke's wife, Dora (a Japanese-Filipino), for allegedly helping to spread news obtained from her husband. After undergoing interrogation and torture, she was released as they could find no evidence against her. During 1943 the Stookes family moved into the interior but later the doctor was arrested and sent to Kuching with other civilians.

In 1945, nine civilian men from Kuching POW camp were brought to Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu), to be tried by a court martial—the consul of China (Cho Huan Lai), Doctor Val Stookes, the Chief Secretary of Sarawak (Le Gros Clark), an estate manager from Sarawak (Donald McDonald), an American engineer (H W Webber), two members of North Borneo Civil Service (S G Hill and R S Abbott) and two Dutchmen from Pontianak (Bunte and Kribbe). The nine were given prison sentences ranging from six months to six years. All died before the end of the war—the first five mentioned above were shot by machine gun at Keningau on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1945 and the other four died from illnesses in Jesselton Gaol. The five men murdered at Keningau were later commemorated by a monument at the place where they were killed.

### Visit to Keningau 1995

by Murray Moore



#### The Memorial at Keningau

My brother, Gerald, and I plus a friend from our 1995 tour of Borneo, broke off from our 1995 tour of Borneo, broke off and took a taxi inland to pay our respects at the request of Mrs Stookes. She gave me \$50 to purchase flowers for this memorial.

So I thought it appropriate to select five roses, one for each of their children and a bunch from her.

As we drove all the way down from Kota Kinabalu – it was wonderful to see this gardener mowing the lawn 50 years later!!!

Photo Courtesy Murray Moore



#### Keningau District Office

We went into the town of Keningau and sought out the District Officer to relate the purpose of our visit.

After presenting him with the remainder of Mrs Stookes \$50 (for the continued maintenance), he assured us that the upkeep was and always has been an honoured part of Keningau policy.

Photo Courtesy Murray Moore

Continued on Page 5

## Visit to Keningau 1995 – Continued from Page 4

by Murray Moore



### The Memorial at Keningau

Some passing school children to whom my brother Gerald and I related the story of these war heroes.

Photo Courtesy Murray Moore



### Mrs Dora Brewer (formerly Stookes)

Mrs Dora Brewer at the Boyup Brook Dedication.

I first met Mrs Stookes around 1990. This quiet, lovely, educated and determined lady was a nurse in the Sandakan Hospital. She was married to Doctor Stookes and evacuated up river with all the children. She was tortured by the Kempi Tai in Sandakan.

Photo Courtesy Murray Moore

## Recent Years

by Allan Cresswell

Mrs Dora Mildred Brewer (formerly Stookes) of Cloverdale Western Australia passed away on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1997 and is memorialised at Karrakatta Cemetery. But what of her husband, Doctor Val Stookes? His name is on the memorial at Keningau but what became of his remains and that of the other murdered civilians? By a strange co-incidence I became aware of the story below by Stanley Chee of Kota Kinabalu the same week that Murray Moore forwarded the story and photographs on Mrs Stookes and Keningau to me. The abridged story from Stanley.....

First, I went to check the exact location of the cemetery with our company's land surveyor, Mr Loh. He also had never heard of Jesselton Cemetery before. However, he knew there was an old cemetery just behind Sri Gaya at Jalan Istana. I wrote down all the names of the nine men on a piece of paper and prepared to go to the cemetery the following day.

Next morning at 10:30 am, I arrived at the cemetery and immediately started my mission. For the first fifteen minutes, most of the gravestones I found were quite new and in Chinese styles. Those weren't the old gravestones that I had in mind (a traditional English style or a simple cross), so I changed my searching strategy. I walked down to the other side of the cemetery, which is just beside Wisma Fook Lu Siew. Surprisingly, on my right-hand side, there were some old gravestones. I ran down and checked the names on each gravestone carefully. In the fifth row, the name on a gravestone looked very close to one of the names on my list. He was Mr Donald McDonald. The list said only Mr McDonald. Immediately, I checked the next gravestone. Bingo!!! The name was Mr H W Webber. His name was on the list. This had to be the place where they were buried. The rest of the gravestones that I discovered later were those of Mr V A Stookes, Mr Le Gros Clark, Mr S G Hill and lastly Mr R S Abbott. But where were the gravestones of Mr Cho Huan Lai, Mr Bunte and Mr Kribbe? On the spot, I called Grace Tsang to check whether any information had been left out. According to Grace, the gravestone of Mr Cho Huan Lai had been moved back to China right after the war. As a result, the number of names on the list was cut down to eight.

To complete my mission, I quickly inspected most of the gravestones around that area. Still, no trace of Mr Bunte's and Mr Kribbe's gravestones. Suddenly, I noticed a fallen gravestone on the right-hand side of Mr Donald McDonald's grave. I didn't know what to do next because it seemed like moving somebody's gravestone wasn't the right thing to do. But my curiosity overcame my fear; and I decided to go for it. While lifting up the gravestone, I kept thinking that I was doing this for Sabah's History, not trying to disturb him. Finally, the lift paid off in a big way. It was Mr Knibbe's gravestone. Referring back to the list, the name given was Kribbe. However, I thought they were the same person. Right, only Mr Bunte's gravestone was missing. Like the case of Mr Cho Huan Lai, there was a possibility that Mr Bunte's gravestone had been moved back to his own country or somewhere else. In conclusion, I was very excited to find those gravestones. In fact, I never thought that the discovery could be that easy. But the feeling of success was awesome. In addition, after I studied the locality plan, I noted that the name of Jesselton Cemetery has already changed to S.P.G. Cemetery

## THE SANDY YOUNG STORY

Prepared by Keith Jones

I recently had the pleasure of meeting 106 year old William "Sandy" Young with his son Alan and Alan's wife, Morwenna. In 1939 Sandy was the manager of a factory in Sandakan which produced tannin by extraction from the bark of mangrove trees. He has an interesting story to tell of his experiences in Borneo as a civilian during the Japanese occupation, and it is reproduced here with his kind permission. It is an extract from an autobiography which he wrote some time ago for his family history.

**A sprightly Sandy Young - as he is today**

Photo courtesy Keith Jones



Around this time war broke out and the Japanese took Singapore and Malaysia. Things started to become very awkward, as we knew they would eventually take the west side of Borneo. We maintained exporting extract for as long as we could until no ships arrived to transport it. Once the Japanese took Jesselton we knew changes were going to occur rapidly. They used to fly their fighter planes daily over Sandakan and the bay, firing a few random bullets into the water. The Governor sent a message advising that the factory be put out of action. We had a large number of belts in the factory, which we burnt and we took the tubes from the evaporators and threw them into the sea beyond the jetty. We hoped we might be able to recover these at the end of the war. We also destroyed any fuel reserves. The company decided it did not want its ship the *Baynain* to fall into the hands of the Japanese so we sent out a general invitation to anyone wishing to leave Sandakan on it. Garcia, the chemist, left for the Philippines at this stage and I didn't see him again as he did not rejoin the company after the war.

The *Baynain* departed shortly after Christmas 1941 and the only people on board were Captain Dooley, Dave Baldwin our engineer, Norma and Clare Parnell, my wife May and our son Alan. The rest of the population decided to risk staying. The *Baynain* was sailing for Tarakan 2-3 days away in Dutch Borneo. I didn't hear anything until I received a telegram from May in early January 1942 saying they had arrived safely in Surabaya. They had left the ship in Tarakan and waited over a week until a Dutch plane was able to fly them out. The *Baynain* had been attacked shortly after by Japanese fighters while attempting to sail from Tarakan. The ship was captured and Captain Dooley and Dave Baldwin interned at Balikpapan.

When the Japanese arrived in Sandakan in early January 1942 they interned all Government employees and those in industry on Berhala Island at the entrance to Sandakan bay. I was not interned at this time, maybe because the Japanese thought I might be useful in getting the factory restarted. The island had two large huts on it and had been used previously as a quarantine post for people suffering infectious diseases. The men occupied one hut, the women and children internees the other.

At this stage those not incarcerated had been left in their bungalows. Some Japanese civilians came in to inspect the factory every day. This continued for some weeks until one day a car was sent for me, McLeod, Matt Allen (Andy Lockhead's replacement) and Hunt. We were driven to the headquarters of the secret police in Sandakan. We were taken in separately and each invited to work with the Japanese to get the factory operating again. They planned on getting new belts and diving for the tubes (which they had discovered) in the harbour. I said I did not think it would be right as my country was at war with them. I was then put in a room and left. McLeod and Matt Allen arrived shortly thereafter, as they had given the same response, Hunt however, had agreed to work for them.

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The three of us were put into a car and assumed we would be returned to our bungalows. Instead we were driven through the town to the local prison, which was manned by Malay policemen at this time. One by one we were put into separate concrete prison cells. Each cell had a window, table, chair and plank bed about four inches off the floor with a blanket. Nothing was said to us. We were kept in solitary confinement with no outside contact or information until one month later we were finally released and taken to join the rest of the internees on Berhala.

Three other civilians were not taken into custody. Jim Taylor a doctor, Gerald Mavor, the manager of the light and power company and Philips, the manager of North Borneo Timber Company. I assumed they were not interned because the doctor could attend to the Japanese garrison and the other two could maintain the supply of power and timber. Later, Mavor and Taylor annoyed the Japanese in some way and were arrested and taken down to Singapore where they were imprisoned. Mavor died but Taylor survived and we met again in Sydney after the war.

Life on the island was very mundane – we had nothing to do. The Japanese Officer in charge addressed us soon after we arrived and advised us not to try to make any attempt at escape or contact people on the mainland otherwise we were likely to be shot. Some of the internees however, had managed to contact the Chinese fishermen on the mainland and establish a secret trade. There was a system of placing items for trade in the huts and several internees would slip out each night and meet the Chinese on the beach to exchange these items for food.


The incarceration on Berhala continued until the end of 1942 when a Japanese ship arrived and took us all down to Kuching where a large civilian POW camp was being established. We were housed in huts of 70-80 persons. Women and children were similarly accommodated about 400 yards away. We all had individual beds that we had to make ourselves out of wood and wire. We also found some of our luggage that had been stored in Sandakan had been returned to us. I found a small case of mine and so had a few clothes. There was a large POW encampment nearby of British soldiers and another of Australian officers who had been captured in Singapore.

Life in the camp became fairly well established. We formed a band with guitars fashioned from wire and timber by George Brown who had worked in the forestry department. I played a mouth organ and we gave regular performances. Plays were also written and performed in the camp. The Japanese would occasionally give us printed postcards to send to our relatives. These would contain phrases such as 'I am well', 'I am working' and 'The Japanese are friendly'. We were not allowed to write anything critical on the cards or they would be confiscated and destroyed.

Our camp was about 2 miles out of the town of Kuching. The Japanese insisted on us providing a quota of men each day to go out and cut down rubber trees. We were given only axes and were expected to carry the trees back into camp for use as firewood. The cleared land was used to plant sweet potato crops. We had to pass a Japanese guard post on the way out of camp each day where we had to stop and salute. If you failed to salute you were slapped across the face. This happened to me on a couple of occasions. I was slapped once in front of the guardhouse and once in the garden (for not working hard enough). If you did not work to their liking you were punished.

After we had been in Kuching for several months we began to get genuine reports on the status of the war. The soldiers in the adjacent camp had manufactured a receiver out of a pair of earphones and so were able to get news from the British headquarters in the Far East, which they would relay on to us. (Previously, our only source of information was a fellow called Fletcher, who, we found later, made up most of the information he gave us. He was the main trader in the camp and claimed to receive information from the mainland. He would give us a reading each week on what was supposedly happening with the war.) A Captain from the camp would send a note across once a week with the genuine news. This continued for several months until it suddenly stopped. Some Japanese guards had overheard the soldiers discussing the war. It didn't take long to find out where the information was coming from and the Captain was subsequently shot to death.

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The wife of a government forester, Agnes Keith, was an author and she began to write a bit about life in the camp, with the knowledge of the Japanese, some of who had read her book about life in Sandakan before the war, "Land Below the Wind". She published "Three Came Home" after the war – the three being herself, husband and son.

We did our best to grow tomatoes and local vegetables to supplement the food we were given and so were better off than the soldiers who were unable to grow anything. We traded food with the soldiers for boots and shoes. Nearly everyone lost weight in the camp – I went from about 8 stone down to 5. The soldiers were kept working by the Japanese. It was very hard going with only the use of limited hand tools to complete the work heaped upon them, mostly clearing jungle or laying air strips and roads and over half of them died in the process. These soldiers were more fortunate than those interned at *Sandakan* (approximately 2,500), who were forced to march to Ranau near the end of the war, a distance of 150 miles further north and away from the advancing allies. Many had no boots or shoes. Only 6 Australians survived that march. It has since been established that an order was issued by the Japanese High Command that all prisoners were to be exterminated, by any means possible, if and when the Allies landed.

Around 1945 the Japanese decided to release letters they had been holding for over two years. I had received news from an Australian officer that May and Alan had arrived safely in Sydney. After three weeks in Surabaya they had managed to get on a seaplane flying to Australia. May had also written to the Bakau Company in Glasgow detailing what had happened in Sandakan.

In 1945 the first allied planes started flying over Kuching. They dropped information leaflets all over the town. The Japanese promised death to anyone who picked up one of these leaflets. After the planes had gone one or two Japanese fighter planes would take off and fly around overhead for a while.

Life continued on as normal in the camp but we were getting less and less rice to eat and no meat at all. When the bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Japanese informed us that the Emperor had decided to bring the war to an end. A few weeks later Australian soldiers landed at Kuching and we were officially told the war was over. Food parcels were dropped by the RAAF flying down from Labuan. A parcel unfortunately killed one prisoner as he stepped out of a hut during one of the drops.

On liberation, we were taken from Kuching to the island of Labuan where we were accommodated in large Australian army tents. Overall, we were there for about two weeks. One day I managed to see an aerial photograph of Sandakan and although the town itself had been burned down, the factory was still standing. I made enquiries about this and was told that the Japanese were still in occupation but a launch carrying a detachment of Australian troops was going over shortly to take command of the town. I asked if I could go with the troops to assess the factory and was given permission. When I arrived I found our residential bungalows had been burned completely although the garage was still intact. I walked inside the factory and found a head lying on the ground – I couldn't tell whether it had belonged to a Japanese or European. The office and laboratory were also no longer there but two other bungalows nearby were still standing. Indonesian guards placed there by the Japanese were occupying these. I couldn't see any great damage to the factory itself although the roof was peppered with bullet holes. I also noticed a large pile of bricks next to the boilers. (I didn't know what they were there for until I went back to the factory to start it up at the end of 1946. The bricks were actually covering an unexploded bomb. Matt Allen picked up the bomb and took it down to the jetty and threw it in the water. Some Australian soldiers later defused it).

After my visit to the factory I got permission from the RAAF to travel down to Sydney. I got a seat on a plane and we flew across Borneo towards northern Australia stopping to refuel on a few islands on the way. We flew on to Townsville and were given some civilian clothes by the Red Cross before heading on to Brisbane. (Previous to this we had some Australian army clothing given to us when we were released from the camp.) We managed to get in contact with May and I arranged to be flown down to Sydney. I landed at Mascot and it was one of the greatest moments of my life to see Alan running across the tarmac to meet me.



## NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome **six** new members.

**Thomas Hack**, nephew of **Private Alexander Hack** of 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion and Thomas' wife, **Helen**.

**Roy (Pat) Gardner**, son of **Sapper Eric Gardner** of 2/6 Field Park Company RAE and Pat's wife, **Eileen**.

**Gordon Marshall**, nephew of **Sapper Donald Marshall** of 2/6 Field Park Company RAE and Gordon's wife, **Rosemary**.

## RANAU MEMORIAL - SABAH MALAYSIA

by Allan Cresswell

Part 3 of our ongoing articles re various Borneo Memorials throughout Australia and Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak)

This is a photograph of the Ranau POW Memorial that commemorates those Australian and British Soldiers who died on the Death Marches from Sandakan to Ranau in 1945 and those prisoners who died at Ranau. It also commemorates the assistance given by the local people of British North Borneo (now Sabah). It is commonly known as the Gunner Cleary Memorial. The memorial is inscribed as follows:



*THIS MEMORIAL MARKS THE SITE OF A PRISON CAMP OF SURVIVORS OF THE FIRST DEATH MARCH FROM SANDAKAN TO RANAU FROM JANUARY TO APRIL 1945.*

*OF THE 2000 AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> A.I.F. AND 750 BRITISH SOLDIERS OF THE BRITISH ARMY WHO LEFT SANDAKAN ONLY 6 AUSTRALIANS SURVIVED.*

*ON THIS ACTUAL SPOT, VX 52128 GUNNER ALBERT NEIL CLEARY, 2/15<sup>TH</sup> FIELD REGIMENT, ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY, WAS CHAINED TO A STAKE AND BEATEN AND STARVED FOR 11 DAYS BEFORE HE FINALLY DIED ON 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 1945, AGED 22 YEARS.*

*THIS MEMORIAL ALSO COMMEMORATES THE COURAGE AND BRAVERY OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE OF SABAH, WHO SO GALLANTLY ASSISTED THE PRISONERS-OF-WAR AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS.*

*LEST WE FORGET*

*OFFICIALLY UNVEILED BY DATUK JOSEPH PAIRIN KITINGAN, CHIEF MINISTER OF SABAH, ON 31 JULY 1985 IN THE PRESENCE OF:*

<i>KEITH BOTTERILL</i>	<i>SURVIVOR OF THE MARCH</i>
<i>OWEN CAMPBELL</i>	<i>SURVIVOR OF THE MARCH</i>
<i>NELSON SHORT</i>	<i>SURVIVOR OF THE MARCH</i>
<i>BRUCE C RUXTON</i>	<i>STATE PRESIDENT RSL, VICTORIA</i>
<i>JUNE M HEALY</i>	<i>DEPUTY NATIONAL SECRETARY, RSL</i>



**Photograph of Gunner Albert Cleary, 2/15<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF, of East Geelong, Victoria**

# POW PROFILE



**Edwin John ESLER**  
**Lieutenant QX 6483**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals**

**Another 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals  
 who became a doctor Post War**

**Article written by Lt Col Peter Winstanley RFD (retired) JP**  
**Email [pgwinstanley@cambraivillage.com.au](mailto:pgwinstanley@cambraivillage.com.au)**  
**Web [www.pows.of.japan.net](http://www.pows.of.japan.net)**

**The assistance of Mrs Joy Esler, Mr Russ Ewin (fellow  
 POW and member of 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals) and an obituary  
 written by Mr Philip Hammond is acknowledged.**

Edwin (Ted) Esler was born in Toowoomba Queensland on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1920. As a schoolboy he had always wanted to be a doctor. This was the time of the depression and was beyond the means of his family and, although a local doctor had offered financial assistance, he joined the public service. He was an outstanding student at Toowoomba Grammar School and he topped the state in marks for French.

He enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) on 24 June 1940 and in June 1941 was sent to Malaya as a first reinforcement. One of his tasks was to provide communications to the Anti Tank Regiment. As with so many others, Ted became a POW on 15 February 1942. In July 1942 Ted was one of 1,500 POWs who were shipped to Sandakan in North Borneo. This party included POWs who were not really fit and 130 Medical personnel volunteered to go with them. This group included a number of Medical Officers; Lt Colonel Sheppard, Majors Maffey, Rayson, Capts, Elliott, Heinz, Jeffrey, Mills, and Picone. There was also one Dental Officer Captain Reid. Later Captain Oakeshott was also in Sandakan. Captains Jeffrey, Picone & Oakeshott were to die on the march of death from Sandakan to Ranau (the Japanese set out to ensure that some 2,500 were not to survive and of that number only 6 did survive, by escaping).

On arrival on Sandakan it became apparent that the men were to build an airfield for the Japs. Ted had some involvement with the establishment of contact with an underground movement. He also decided to learn the Japanese language and was used as an interpreter. He had used an old Japanese dictionary to assist in his studies. As with many allied interpreters, he suffered many bashings when interpreted replies did not suit the Japanese interrogator. The story of the events at Sandakan have been covered in detail by Lynette Silver in her book "Sandakan- A Conspiracy of Silence", the late Don Wall in his book "Kill the Prisoners", the late Peter Firkins in his book "From Hell to Eternity" and Kevin Smith's book "Australia's Proud but Tragic Heritage". I do not propose to go into any of that detail.

Following the discovery of the existence of the underground movement a number of civilians and one POW officer, Captain Lionel Matthews, were executed. Then most of the officers were shifted to Kuching in Sarawak. Lt Esler was amongst this group. At Kuching he took any opportunity to study and to talk with people from many walks in life. including, the doctors. This no doubt also influenced his decision post war to become a doctor. At Kuching he was much liked and respected. Following the end of the war he was discharged from the Army on 22 November 1945.

On return to civilian life he studied medicine at Queensland University and went on to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology gaining admission to the appropriate colleges in Australia and in the United Kingdom. He had many achievements, which included being Honorary Medical Officer at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane and establishing a teaching unit at Queensland University for training budding obstetricians and gynaecologists,

From 1967, when he had his first heart attack, Doctor Ted Esler suffered from poor health. He had several heart attacks and underwent major cardiac surgery. Following his retirement he filled in part time at the Mater Mother's Hospital, conducting antenatal clinics, did computer work and helped would-be parents through his genetic counselling.

Also in retirement, he had intended to translate and write technical medical books covering the advances in obstetrics and gynaecology by Japanese doctors. This project was not finished when he died on 17 April 2003.

A fellow Signals Officer, who was at Sandakan and Kuching, said that Ted Esler was "one of the finest men he had known".

## The Borneo Exhibition at the Army Museum

On Sunday 26th March we had an initial showing of the Borneo Exhibition which was attended by a small group of members. This was not a Formal Opening - that may come later - but just an opportunity for those who could be there to see where we will be and to hear our plans. Thanks to you all who were there, and also to those who contacted me.

The Army Museum is a magnificent venue, and has very much more to offer to those interested in our military history. So the Exhibition is now available to any of you whenever the Museum is open - from 11am to 4pm at weekends and on Wednesdays by arrangement. The Museum is manned by volunteers, so we do not have the pressure of manning it ourselves, but this can be an option at times if you contact me.



**Ken and Val Thurston at the Fremantle Army Museum**



**Panels on Display at the Fremantle Army Museum**

It is anticipated that the Exhibition will be offered space in the main galleries when this becomes available to house the larger display. However the core exhibits are there now, and will be added to as time allows, when Ryan returns from the Anzac Tour to Borneo.



**Side View of Panels on Display at the Fremantle Army Museum**



**Bob Brackenbury, Captain Wayne Gardiner Senior Curator, and Volunteer Guide Len**

Please turn over the page

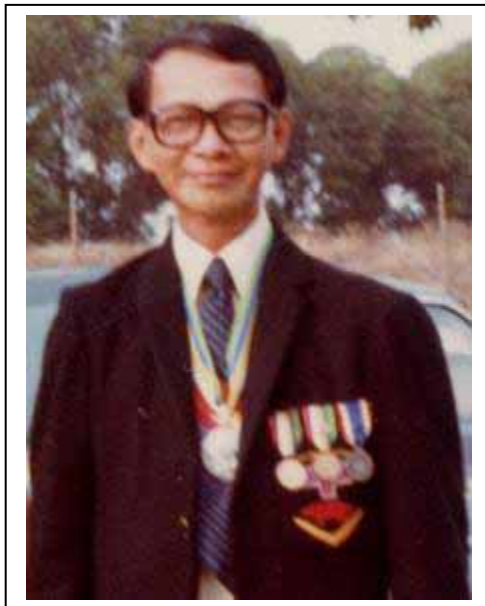
**Continued from over the page**

This year's Anzac Tour will include students, parents and teachers from both Boyup Brook and Bakers Hill as part of their respective Ted McLaughlin and Ben Hart scholarship programs. They will be joined by the three Western Australian Cadets sponsored by the RSL. In addition Ryan has organised a tour for the larger Australia-wide RSL sponsored Cadet group to observe Anzac Day on the Kokoda Trail. Next year all will be going with him to Borneo.

Incidentally other local schools have shown interest in our story. Anthea Matunjan of Sanzac School was invited to address students at John XXIII during her visit in September as Ryan's guest. Ryan and I have been invited to talk to other students at John XXIII in May, to add to their knowledge of these events in World War II, with a view to a possible scholarship or touring program

In the last weeks through our contacts in Sabah we have added to our knowledge of the origins of The Sanzac School in Kota Kinabalu.

A local boy, Francis Loh who made himself indispensable to troops of 2/23 Battalion in their work of reconstruction at war's end, was instrumental in its establishment. He was great at climbing coconut trees and had other great skills. In a tribute to him the departing troops collected funds to enable him to resume his disrupted education so that ultimately he became a news reporter for a local English newspaper, and later a very successful businessman. It was he who negotiated with the Sabah Government to acquire the site and to build the School in recognition of the help given to him by his digger mates. In 1971 he gifted the school - the first Malay medium secondary school in Sabah to the Education Department as a memorial to all those who lost their lives in the liberation of Sabah, 1941 to 1945. The RSL also made a significant contribution of funds.



**The Founder of SANZAC  
Francis Xavier LOH**

Francis Loh, his son, was educated and lives in Perth and now, in recognition of his achievements, there are also some plans for a student to come from Kota Kinabalu to Perth on a scholarship to be named 'The Francis Xavier Loh Memorial Scholarship'.

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Contact Person for the Borneo Exhibition Group

Photos Courtesy Ryan Rowland