

The Borneo Bugle



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

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PATRON

WILLIAM GAYNOR OAM RFD

PRESIDENT

ALLAN CRESSWELL
TEL (08)94017574
153 WATERFORD DRIVE
HILLARYS WA 6025
EMAIL:cressie@bigpond.net.au
EDITOR BORNEO BUGLE

SECRETARY

KEN JONES
TEL : (08)94482415
10 CARNWRATH WAY
DUNCRAIG WA 6023
EML:kjo37084@bigpond.net.au

VICE PRESIDENT

BOB BRACKENBURY
TEL : (08)93641310
5 ROOKWOOD ST
MT PLEASANT WA 6153

TREASURER

COLIN PRIOR
TEL : (08)92717663
23 HADDRILL STREET
BAYSWATER WA 6053
EMAIL:cprior@westnet.com.au

LIAISON/RESEARCH

KEITH JONES
TEL : (08)93494220
PO Box 1526
WANGARA WA 6947
EMAIL:keithjones@arach.net.au

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OUR NEXT MEETING

SEE PRESIDENT'S
CORNER PAGE 3

SANDAKAN DAY - 2006

by Ken Jones

This year the service will be held on the **27th August**, which is the day in 1945 that the last of the Prisoners of War were murdered by their captors, 12 days after VJ Day was proclaimed. This will be the first Commemorative Service to be held at the Sandakan Memorial in Marri Walk, Kings Park since it was dedicated in August 2005.

As custodians of the Memorial, the Carine Senior High School staff and students will be participating in and assisting with the Service. The Commemorative Address will be given by the Colonel Commandant RAE Western Region, Colonel Geoffrey Smith and the Student Address will be given by C S H S student Sze Howe whose family comes from Sabah.

The Linties Choir and a school ensemble will provide musical accompaniment at various times throughout the Service. Wreaths will be laid by invited guests and they will be followed by members of the assembly.

The Chaplain will be Captain Andrew Robinson, the Catafalque Party will be provided by 13 Field Squadron RAE and there will be a Bugler from the Australian Army Band Perth to assist with The Act of Remembrance ceremony.

The service will commence at **10.30am** with 'God Save the Queen', irrespective of the weather and conclude about an hour later with 'Advance Australia Fair' and the dismounting of the Catafalque Party. **Please note that there is no access this year from the northern side of Marri Walk (Tennis Club Side) due to a building project blocking entry. All access is by way of May Drive only.**



Head Boy Stuart Hartmann and Head Girl Hollie James of Carine Senior High School at Sandakan Memorial Dedication Service August 2005

Photo courtesy Tony Williamson CSHS

Wanneroo writer Mary Aird Bath is a Scottish born lady who made her first visit to Sabah last year and came across the story of the POW's of Sandakan. She told of her experience up there in an article which appeared in the Community newspaper *Wanneroo Times* on July 5th 2005. This is reprinted below with Mary's kind permission so that we can all share it with her. In our next edition we will run Mary's story of her second trip to Sabah which appeared in the *Sabah Daily Express* in June this year.

Keith Jones

Community Newspapers - *Wanneroo Times*

MARY AIRD BATH, of Wanneroo, was not long back from an emotional visit to Sandakan in Borneo last month when she saw a TV program about the nearly 1800 Australian POW deaths there. Historian Lynette Silver said Sandakan had the "potential to be World War two's Gallipoli". "I think it will have the power to move those same sorts of emotion; that this is hallowed ground, that this is where we did our best, we lost all these people and a place of great emotion," she said. Mary's visit and the TV show compelled her to write this piece for Community.

STORIES OF COURAGE IN JUNGLE CAMP

by Mary Aird Bath



Mary Aird Bath in
Kuala Lumpur

SANDAKAN is on the east coast of Borneo. A place only the hale and healthy should venture to. The climate daily is hot and humid, 35 degrees with very high humidity.

I was truly surprised when watching *60 Minutes* and its very sad and untold story of World War Two. I have travelled for the past 10 years or so and seen many cenotaphs honouring brave young men. The oil slick from the Arizona still comes to the surface in Pearl Harbour. There still stands in Warsaw part of the wall that kept the Jewish race in the ghettos.

We did not go to Sandakan to relive the past; we went to see the 'Man of the forest' – the orang-outangs. We were not disappointed. Sepilok National Park is 23km from Sandakan; a 20-minute ride by taxi. The park is virgin land surrounded by swamps, mangrove forests and flowers that are so exotic yet can be so deadly to man. Trees that block out the sun at times can be quite a blessing to a white traveller like me. Heaven on earth? But it is only heaven to the animals of the forest.

Sabah was our destination with all its mod cons; a winter respite, swim and eat to our hearts' delight. "Oh you must go and see the natives of Borneo," the pamphlets and locals were telling us. We did not know we had to fly over South-East Asia's highest mountain, Mt Kinabalu, to the far east of Borneo. However, this was a holiday that was to be different.

On the plane I picked up some very informative literature about Sandakan and its sad history. Immediately I went deep into thought and our morning trip was to the Memorial Park at Sandakan. Sandakan is quite a small town up and down hills that can really tire even the healthiest of travellers like myself. The memorial park is 37km from the city and port. It is quite a small area, about 2ha. Its lush green manicured verges were once covered in jungle vegetation. Lying serenely at the entrance is a lily-pond. Tony, my husband, was, I suppose, lost in his thoughts too at the tranquility and beauty of the surroundings. Tony's dad was a survivor of the El Alamein conflict in Egypt. Tony will not speak about his own days in Vietnam, but I knew his lack of words towards me was his way of showing respect to the fallen heroes of Sandakan.

The grounds have a few war relics which are just skeletons of 1945. They include a couple of water tanks not much bigger than a child's swimming pool and a rustic old tank that was obviously Japanese. The only physical piece of machinery that was provided for the prisoners was a road digger. Prisoners were brought to Sandakan to build an airstrip that never was accomplished because of the inhuman conditions they had to survive under.

There is a small Museum at the top of the hill, which tells the story of the camp thanks to the six Aussies who took a chance and escaped into the jungle. The allies heard about Sandakan, but it was all too late as the march to Ranau had begun and was to be the last steps many young men would take.

I had such an unearthly feeling in the grounds I was walking through that it makes it quite uneasy to write this story; at the time I wished I had wings on my feet so my shoes would not tread where many felt so much pain. No Saturday night barbie, no beer around the fire or sausage on a roll. These Aussies did not see the Aussie dream, the Holden car. No, for what reason did they suffer so much?

Their souls were beneath my feet but their spirits were calling me; the fair the short the tall, 2700 (including British prisoners) I could hear and I could see faces of youth beckoning me, or was it just a mother's fear as I have three sons? I was really distraught. I collapsed on the steps of a small sanctuary, which tells the story and holds pictures of yesterday's heroes. This small pavilion and its contents are the true stories told by the six men who took great courage and fled into the jungles and survived with the help of the natives of Borneo.

I hope their families will forgive me if my words are not worthy of the fallen. I have been privileged to have had the good health and stamina to pay homage to so many that did not live the life they should. I wrote in the visitor's book "I will never forget".

President's Corner

by President Allan Cresswell

Our Annual Sandakan Day Ceremony at Kings Park is almost upon us. Do mark your calendar for 27th August 2006 to attend our very special day to honour our relatives. The ceremony commences at 10.30am. Remember to allow extra time to arrive at the venue because of the City to Surf Fun Run which may effect some people, especially in the Western Suburbs. This year the Carine Senior High School will be assisting in various ways with the service. It is so pleasing to see their involvement in the preparation and running of Sandakan Day. Toilet facilities will again be provided. After the completion of the ceremony we invite all our members, relations and friends to stay behind for a get together/picnic. Bring your lunch and refreshments. We welcome everyone to stay afterwards.

Our General Meeting/AGM is normally held in August. However the RAE, who usually hold their meetings on the second Sunday of the month, were required to alter their day and came back with a date.....27th August 2006.....our Sandakan Day. So we are unable to hold a meeting until the next RAE meeting at Irwin Barracks. The date will be advised to our members as soon as we receive details. We apologise for the delay as we know just how much everyone looks forward to our AGM!

The Annual Boyup Brook Sandakan Ceremony will be held on Tuesday September 12th 2006, commencing at 11.00am. Bob and Steffoni Brackenbury will be attending and I hope to also attend that day. Our association will be again laying a wreath at this service. The Ex POW Association is providing a 45 seater coach to the ceremony. The departure is at 9.30am on the Monday with an overnight stop at Bridgetown then onto the service at Boyup Brook on Tuesday. I have been told that the package is \$210. Please contact Barbara Harper on 93874950 to obtain final details on this excellent idea.

Mentioned below is information regarding the Annual Membership fees of our association being due for the 2006/2007 financial year. Please do forward your membership renewal so we can continue to provide the *Borneo Bugle* every two months and apply funds towards our new website project.

Our association's website project planning has already commenced and full attention will be directed towards this project after the Sandakan Day Ceremony has been held. Any contributions by way of articles, photographs, family stories will be most welcome for submission to our website. As stated in the last *Borneo Bugle*, the website will be a work in progress with items gradually being added over 2006.

Non Meston has completed a replacement 35 foot mural of her wonderful depiction of the soldiers on the Death Marches. Those who attended the Sandakan Exhibition at Alexander Library will be aware of the fine backdrop that she created with the original mural. Talking of the exhibition.....I have been told that the Sandakan Exhibition is on the way back to Borneo this month (August) with Ryan Rowland and Joe McLaughlin.

This is our twentieth edition of the *Borneo Bugle* and we continue to seek items of interest to be submitted. The newsletter continues to be read worldwide and feedback of appreciation has been received from many Australian, British, Malasian and American family members, of Sandakan POWs. Of particular need is contributions for the back page POW Profile. If you are yet to submit your family members profile please do consider doing so. If required I can visit and assist in compiling the article.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The membership subscriptions 2006/2007 for our association are now due. The Management Committee have set the subscription to remain at \$15.00 annually. The majority of our costs are the printing and sending out of the Borneo Bugle, arrangements for Sandakan Day Ceremony and the purchasing of wreaths.

Payments can be mailed to our Treasurer, Colin Prior, whose contact details are on the front page. Colin will also receive subscriptions at the conclusion of our Sandakan Day Ceremony.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome two new members:

Trevor Brandis, brother of WX16743 Sergeant William Brandis of 'Z' Special Unit, and Trevor's wife Maureen.

Lynette's Update from Borneo

Article and photographs courtesy Lynette Silver

Stained glass windows project:

Philip Handel, our brilliant stained glass artist, completed the right half of the four-metre high Friendship Window for the south transept of St Michael's Church. This window, depicting a dramatic scene of St Paul at sea in a raging storm, promises to be as spectacular as the Windows of Remembrance. Philip hopes to have this window completed by August. He will then begin work on the north transept! For those who missed out on Stage 1 of the Windows Project, there is still time to honour a prisoner of war, or simply be part of this wonderful concept, by contributing to Stage 2. Just send your cheque, plus details of the POW you are remembering, to Sandakan Memorial Windows, 15(B) Ada Avenue Wahroonga 2076, along with two self-addressed, stamped envelopes for your receipt and information letter, and photos of the Friendship Windows, when they are complete.

Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Scheme:

This Scheme, a 'living memorial', is going from strength to strength. We are now supporting the education in Sandakan of thirteen girls from remote villages, whose ages range from 12 to 17 years. All the families are very poor. Only three fathers receive any income- one earns \$50 a month, and the other two, \$150 a month. The girls have asked me to thank everyone who is helping them. They are overwhelmingly grateful.

Our program is currently limited to thirteen students, as this is the maximum capacity for the hostel, but it is hoped to expand the Scheme by converting the 'old rectory' to a hostel for boys. Now that the word has spread, parents are travelling for 13-14 hours, on foot and over rough roads, to beg for a place for their talented child. At the moment, almost all the donations have come from my personal representations to people who come to hear me speak about my books (not necessarily on Sandakan). The generosity of these strangers, who have no connection with Sabah, is amazing. We have also had exceptional support from members of 2/18 Battalion AIF, who lost so many of their mates in Borneo. Also very heart-warming is the response of Barker College, a leading private school on Sydney's north shore. As the result of my being invited to deliver the Remembrance Day Address in the school's War Memorial Chapel last November, Barker's Cadet Unit has undertaken long-term sponsorship for two students, the school community has offered to host two Year Ten students from Sandakan for four weeks each year and, with the Old Boys' Union, has made a very substantial donation to the Friendship Windows, in memory of three ex-students who died in Borneo.

As my ultimate aim is to build a Trust of sufficient size to support the Scheme, once the windows are complete I will devote greater energy to this project. In the meantime, if you want to help change someone's life, **forever**, and by doing so, say 'thank you' to the village people who protected and tried to help our POWs, please send your contribution- large or small - to Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Scheme, 15(B) Ada Avenue, Wahroonga 2076. Remember, EVERY CENT goes direct, to Sandakan!



Canon Moses and Mrs Chin, Lynette and Neil, with ten of the scholarship girls
(all sing in the choir, but three were absent)

POW Chapel:

Inspired by the Sandakan story and the Remembrance Windows, which she saw last year, Sydney artist Antoinette Russell has created a wall hanging for the southern wall of the chapel. Painted on canvas, mainly in shades of dull gold and silver, and backed in a deep, rich green, it symbolises the spirit of the POWs, the colours beautifully complementing the old grey stones of the wall on which the artwork mounted. Antoinette completed the hanging in time for Anzac Day, when it was dedicated at a private ceremony, attended by relatives accompanying me on the Anzac Day tour, church officials and the girls on our scholarship scheme. To the delight of the relatives, the simple service was preceded by a special 'unveiling' of the Windows of Remembrance, complete with music, resulting in as many tears, this year, as last!



Wall Hanging



Wall Hanging Closeup

Death March treks:

Accompanied by my husband, trekking specialist Tham Yau Kong, six serving soldiers of the Australian army, three members of the Royal Australian Air Force, a POW relative and various Australian and international media teams, we successfully opened 120 kilometres of the original death march track in March this year. It was a most amazing and emotional experience, and one which had a profound effect on the military personnel. As one of the RAAF team was a nursing sister, the pair of us were the first women, ever, to follow the path taken by the POWs across the mountains. The vast resources of the Packer organisation helped publicise the walk and coverage was excellent. Besides scores of radio and TV interviews and newspaper articles here and overseas, there was a five-page report published on 25 April in The Bulletin (the only media outlet to ask any questions about Sandakan post-war), and a twenty-minute, very moving documentary (arguably the best yet) screened on 'Sunday' program (Channel 9) on 23 April.

Inspired by the response from the inaugural walkers, I arranged for the Anzac Day tour to follow a three-mile section of the track. Apart from one lady who had undergone a recent hip replacement and sensibly opted out after two miles, everyone completed the sector with the help of Tham and his dedicated Dusun guides and porters. The oldest person was aged 78. A relative of Noel Parker, swollen with beri-beri and beaten to death along this part of the route, held a brief but very personal ceremony at the place of his death.

After three very slothful months, I am back in training, ready to accompany two treks in August. As hoped, those participating have been drawn from a much wider community than our POW circle. And all but two of those undertaking the full, six-day walk have opted to camp out!

As a result of the publicity surrounding the opening of the track I have been invited to escort 180 financiers, attending a conference in Kota Kinabalu in September, to Sandakan, enabling me to reach a much wider, and completely new, audience.

For more details of the treks, including a host of pictures taken on the opening walk, and press coverage in Sabah, take a look at www.sandakan-deathmarch.com For more details on the Windows and Scholarship Scheme, see www.lynettesilver.com

SANDAKAN MEMORIAL PARK – TURRAMURRA

by Allan Cresswell

Part 5 of our ongoing articles re various Borneo Memorials throughout Australia and Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak)

EDITORS NOTE: In the last Borneo Bugle it was reported that the Boyup Brook Memorial was the first one constructed in Australia to honour those who died in Borneo. It has been since pointed out by our friends in NSW that this was not the case and that the memorial in Turramurra NSW was the first. It is appropriate now that we do acknowledge this to be the case in this edition of the Borneo Bugle.



Location:

Off Du Faur Street North Turramurra NSW 2074

Description:

Broken sandstone column on a sandstone base, to which is affixed a dedicatory plaque. The broken column symbolizes lives cut short, a fitting commentary on the fate of 2,538 young Australian and British POWs who perished at the hands of a cruel foe.

Inscription:

SANDAKAN MEMORIAL PARK

This park was dedicated on 2nd September, 1989 to the memory of the 1800 Australian and 738 British members of the armed forces who died whilst prisoners of the Japanese at Sandakan in British North Borneo during World War Two. Only six survived the infamous Sandakan death March.

This plaque was unveiled by
His Worship the Mayor of Ku-Ring-Gai,
Alderman Richard Lennon,

Accompanied by
Mr Owen Campbell, B.E.M.

One of the six survivors of Sandakan, in the presence of Major-General Sir Ivan Dougherty, CBE, DSO, ED, Bec, LLD.

Stuart J Doyle
Hon. Custodian
Municipal War Memorials

Warren Taylor
Town Clerk

“SERVIENDO GUBERNO”

Dedication:

2 September 1989

PHOTOS OF THE 1989 SERVICE ARE ON PAGE 7

SANDAKAN MEMORIAL PARK – TURRAMURRA SERVICE 1989

Photographs courtesy Frank Murray



Beverley Lyn, Keith Botterill, Maureen Devereaux and Owen Campbell at Turramurra Service 1989

Beverley lost her father and uncle at Borneo. Keith escaped (one of the six), Maureen lost her brother and Owen escaped (one of the six)



Mary Wilkins, Nelson Short and Colleen Short at the Service

Mary (wife of Tony in next photo), Nelson escaped (one of the six), with wife Colleen



Tony Wilkins at the Turramurra Memorial

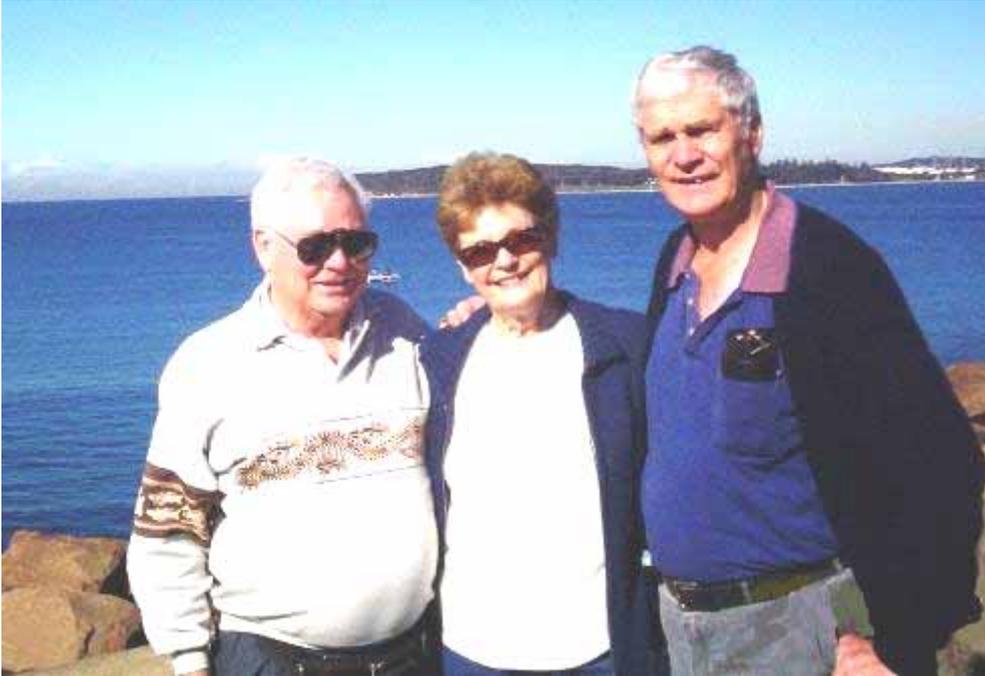
Tony was with the 2/12 Battalion that was part of the liberation forces at Labuan

OUR RECENT TRIP TO SYDNEY

by Steffoni and Bob Brackenbury

All photos courtesy Steffoni Brackenbury

Recently we went to Sydney as houseguests of Bill Young. We were met at the airport by Bill and his neighbour, Frank Murray. Bill is well known to our readers. Frank is the son of Private Richie Murray of 2/19 Battalion who died at Ranau and a close mate of survivor, Keith Botterill. Frank grew up in the area in which he now lives and kindly chauffeured us and Bill to many of the beauty spots of the southern areas of Sydney.



Frank Murray, Steffoni Brackenbury and Bob Brackenbury Sydney 2006

On one train trip he pointed out the large tin hall still standing next to the Kogarah RSL where his father, a well known boxer, used to fight. As well as escorting us around Frank also arranged one of the highlights of our short stay – meeting a few “Sandakan Family” at Bill’s place to swap stories, view photos, etc before adjourning to Bill’s “local” – the Hurstville RSL Club, for lunch.



Gathering at Bill Young’s Residence prior to RSL lunch

Steffoni Brackenbury, Bill Young, Tony Wilkins, Pauline Patterson, Frank Murray and Eva Shepherd

Continued page 9

OUR RECENT TRIP TO SYDNEY – continued from page 8

With us was Pauline Patterson, who was born in Sandakan, just escaping captivity to come to Australia aged seven years, her father spending the war years as a civilian prisoner in Kuching. Another was Eva Shepherd whose brother, Bill Nay, of the 2/10 Field Ambulance, died at Sandakan. The small shelter near the Information Centre of the Sandakan Peace Park was built in his memory. Also present was Tony Wilkins of 2/12 Field Regiment who was in the landings at Labuan at the war's end. Tony is a keen war historian, can speak Japanese and Malay, and has an extensive collection of Sandakan memorabilia. Unfortunately a few more relatives that Frank had arranged for us to meet couldn't make it at the last minute.



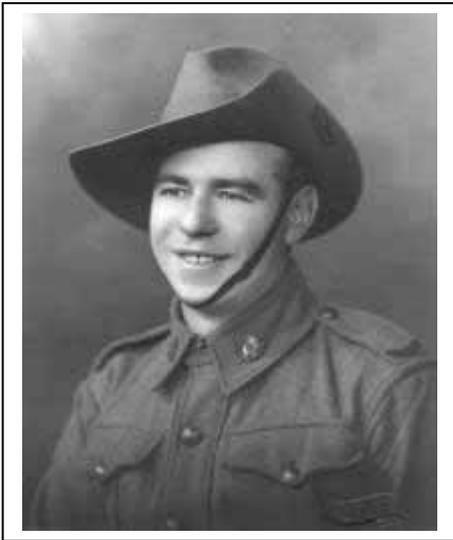
Frank Murray, Steffoni Brackenbury and Bill Young – Sightseeing Sydney

On another day in the centre of Sydney CBD we noticed our little Sandakan lapel badge worn by several of a group in uniform. We took the opportunity to find out that they had just attended their own National Serviceman's Association ceremony at the Sydney Sandakan Memorial in Burwood. We were able to expand on their little knowledge of the significance of the badge they were wearing. It does show the value of the badge as a conversation starter to give further public awareness of the story of Sandakan – a good enough secondary reason for obtaining and wearing one.



Bill Young, Steffoni and Bob Brackenbury enjoying an icecream

POW PROFILE



**Eric James
GARDNER
Sapper WX 6998
2/6th Field Park Company
R.A.E.**

Written by Roy Patrick (Pat) Gardner

My father, Eric James Gardner, was born at Yarloop Western Australia on January 14th 1904. He trained as a Carpenter and Joiner, becoming a skilled Wood Machinist and an excellent Cabinet Maker. At aged 22 years he married Francie Elizabeth Staveley and they raised two sons, Ronald Eric and myself, Roy Patrick (Pat).

Dad was very Australian, a loving family man, loved horse racing and we as a family wanted for nothing. We lived in North Perth, near Dad's parents. Dad visited his parents very regularly and he was also very close to all his siblings. Dad was no gambler but he enjoyed going to the horse races, often with either Mum or my elder brother, Ron.

When World War Two broke out Dad was determined to join the army to serve his country. When he attended at Claremont for voluntary enlistment on July 30th 1940 he understated his age by two years. He gave his year of birth as 1906. At this stage during the early war years enlistment of a 36 year old would have been rejected. He also nominated his occupation as "labourer" rather than a skilled tradesman that he was, to further enhance his prospects of acceptance.

After initial training at Melville and Northam he was transferred to the 2/6 Field Park Company RAE and they were based at Ascot Racecourse. Dad enjoyed being at the racecourse. He was given the nickname of "Sitting Bull" as he would often get up early in the morning, sit in the grandstand, and watch the dawn training of the horses. It was the pose that he assumed whilst intently watching the horse training that resulted in the nickname. Then on January 31st 1941, presumably because of his wood machining background, Dad was allocated to Trade Group III, being classified as a "Sawyer"

I recall being woken one morning at about 6.00am when I was ten years old and bundled in a car with my mother, brother, paternal grandparents and uncle to travel to Fremantle. I remember it as being "hush hush" and sort of a secretive and mysterious journey. An uncle had contact with someone at the West Australian Newspapers and we now suspect that word was received overnight via that source that dad was about to embark overseas. Other members of our family may have also attended Fremantle Harbour as I can recall a few other people being there. The ship, *Zealandia*, was berthed and the soldiers already onboard when we arrived. Access was restricted by way of barricades along the wharf that prevented us coming close to the ship. We moved down the wharf to the stern section of the ship where the barricade returned to the edge of the wharf. All the Western Australian soldiers were down this end and ropes were being thrown between the soldiers and us. These ropes carried written notes and were exchanged backwards and forwards.

We all were waving as the ship departed. With a good view of dad and his mates we remained on the wharf until the ship moved out of sight. My grandmother said to my mother, "Francie, I just want to stay here until Eric comes home". We were then bundled back into the car and travelled up the coast road to Cottesloe watching enroute the troopship heading north. We were never to see Eric James Gardner again. Dad died on the 9th July 1945 at the Ranau Number 2 Jungle Camp after completing the second death march which departed from Sandakan. Dad must have tried so hard to stay alive for so long a time as a POW. He knew all his loving family was waiting patiently back in Australia for him to return.

Mum kept Ron and I protected from the information that must have come back regarding what happened to dad. A telegram came to our home late in 1945. I recall soldiers coming to our home after the war but mum never talked to us about what was discussed. She had fulltime employment at Boans in the city and she worked until not long before her death in 1977. She had dedicated her life to ensure her sons had a good upbringing and education into adulthood. She did it alone as she never married again nor had a partner. Our mother, grandparents and all the family were very supportive towards us boys, and except for the loss of our father and his love, we were never to feel deprived in any way.