

The Borneo Bugle



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

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OUR NEXT MEETING

IRWIN BARRACKS
SUNDAY AUGUST 10TH
2003
AT 10.00AM
SEE YOU THERE!

Sandakan Exhibition 2003

by Allan Cresswell

Our inaugural Sandakan Exhibition is currently on display at the Alexander State Library in Northbridge. It is open every day of the week until Sunday August 17th 2003. If you are yet to attend I do urge you to do so. It is a great exhibition and has many items of interest ranging from paintings by ex Sandakan POW Bill Young of NSW, a wonderful wall mural by our own Non Meston, a great diorama of Sandakan and the Ranau Death Marches and many other wonderful displays. The replicas of the Ranau Memorial, the Sandakan Tree and the Sandakan Punishment Cage add greatly to the atmosphere. Many personal stories are also displayed. Congratulations to Non and Ryan of the Education Committee. The Exhibition is something they can both be very proud of. The opening ceremony was held on Sunday August 3rd and opened by Federal Member for Cowan, Mr Graham Edward MP. A special guest was Jack Wong Sue who infiltrated Borneo as a member of the clandestine operations of Special 'Z' Unit.

Exhibition Pictures Page 5



Ryan Rowland having a break from the setting up of the Sandakan Exhibition

Photo courtesy Allan Cresswell

Sandakan Day 2003

by Ken Jones

ON SUNDAY 24th AUGUST 2003

Sandakan Day is the day we commemorate our relatives who gave their lives in North Borneo. Our counterparts in Sydney and Adelaide will also be holding similar services on this same day. These Groups chose the Sunday nearest to the 27th August, when the last POW was killed, as the most relevant date.

It is somewhat of a pity that other States and organizations can't hold their services on this day. Services are held in Canberra, Queensland and Victoria but on different days.

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SANDAKAN DAY 2002

Photo courtesy Allan Cresswell

EDITORIAL

A few months ago I received a telephone call from our member, Ryan Rowland, who rang to discuss a great new concept of his. An exhibition on the Sandakan POW's at the State Library! His enthusiasm was instantly evident as he relayed his various thoughts and ideas to me. "It will be a great community education program, promote Sandakan Day and promote our group", he announced excitedly.

His describing of ideas and various thoughts of replica monuments, dioramas, paintings, photographs, family stories, etc and his genuine enthusiasm immediately rubbed off on me and I was instantly hooked. It did really seem such a great idea but would our group have the capacity to prepare and present a professional and informative exhibition? A small band of people yet the challenge was there for us to really put it all together on this once off chance. Could we achieved it? Would it be a success?

Well the answer to this most of us now know is a big yes! It was such a successful opening and it is such a great exhibition. Our thanks go our to Ryan and his family, together with Non Meston who ensured by their hard work and efforts that Ryan's vision did come to fruition. Special thanks also to Non whose magnificent wall mural of the Sandakan Marches is the highlight of the exhibition. The diorama of Sandakan and the Ranau Death Marches by Tom and Lloyd was also highly commended by all at the opening ceremony. Thanks also to the many contributors of photos, stories and various items of interest. It ensured that this Sandakan Exhibition is something really special to see..... AC

SANDAKAN DAY 2003

Continued from page one

Last year, our first Sandakan Day, saw about 250 relatives, friends and invited guests attend even though there was a threat of rain.

This year we have invited the British Consul-General, Mr. Hugh Dunnachie MBE, to give the Commemorative Address and Carmel McLean, who won the Boyup Brook Scholarship, to give the Student Address.

We have invited Sandakan and Outram Road survivor Bill Young to attend and he is on his way via Melbourne, driving, by himself. Talk about tough!

The Australian Army Band Perth under the direction of the Officer Commanding and Music Director, Captain Peter O'Connor will be in attendance. Also there, will be the Linties Choir under the direction of Catherine Ritchie and one of their singers is Group member Margaret Douglas.

The Catafalque Party will come from members of the 13 Field Squadron, with whom we have an excellent liaison and have supplied the Party previously.

The programme and other arrangements are being finalised and if there is any requirement for handicapped persons to gain access to Marri Walk, please contact me on 9448 2415. Special arrangements have been made with the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority.

Normal entry to Marri Walk will be from Fraser Avenue and May Drive where adequate parking is available. Signs will indicate the entrance.

Members are asked to wear their relatives medals and also their Group name badges and to be in attendance by 10.50am.

We look forward to seeing you there.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome three new members since our last 'Borneo Bugle':-

Stephen and Andrea Spiers whose relatives are **Sappers Bertram and William Evans** of the 2/6th Field Park Company, Royal Australian Engineers.

Robert (Bob) Carthew whose relative is **Sergeant John Carthew** of the 2/10 Australian Field Ambulance, Australian Army Medical Corps.

Coming Events

Please mark your calendar

- ❖ **Sunday August 10th 2003 at 10.00am**
Note the date of our next meeting at Irwin Barracks Karrakatta.
- ❖ **From Now until Sunday August 17th 2003**
Our Sandakan display at Alexander State Library held at mezzanine floor. A major project being held by our group. Please do visit.
- ❖ **Sunday August 24th 2003 at 11.00am**
Sandakan Day Ceremony to be held at Kings Park.

President's Corner

by President Bob Brackenbury

Life has been exceptionally busy for quite a few of our Group members of late as telephone bills and fax / e-mail paper missiles will testify.

BORNEO EXHIBITION. Community Education committee members Non Meston and Ryan Rowland plus everyone they can conscript into the workforce are progressing well towards a successful education project. In addition to Ryan's contacts at the Australian War Memorial, DVA and RSL bodies and the like are being cajoled into providing pictures, news items etc., we have had offers of information and help from a variety of sources.

SANDAKAN DAY. Secretary Ken Jones has been working on preparations for the Day for some time now and will report elsewhere. He is still waiting on a decision from the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority regarding our memorial.

GARAGE SALE. A garage sale held recently at Reg Blewett's was moderately successful, raising just over \$600 which wasn't too bad for a first time project. Should we have another one it would need to be in warmer weather, which may result in more "troops" and more of the public venturing out. The timing of this was to provide some extra funds for expenses in relation to the Exhibition. Our thanks to Reg and Coral Blewett for the use of their premises and to the other members who helped out, including the not quite, "naked chef" on the BBQ. Two full sets of encyclopaedia that we couldn't sell have been donated to two local Senior Citizen's Centres.

BILL YOUNG. Bill has advised he is driving over from Sydney, by himself, to spend a few weeks in the west as Steffoni's house guest. He is hoping to arrive here in time for the Exhibition and has forwarded some of his original paintings. These have appeared in several books on Sandakan and he takes them with him on the school lectures he conducts. In between visiting the Boyup Brook Memorial and in participating in our Kings Park service, Bill hopes to catch with as many of our members as possible.

P.O.B.P. BRIGADE. A few our members have recently joined this exclusive band. Keith Jones has retired to take up great grandfather duties full time; Ken Thurston can now spend more time restoring field guns, Val says she only sees him at night times; Reg Blewett who for 19 years was one of the RAC's mobile mechanics found the day after he retired his 4WD had a flat battery and a tractor at his house had a burst tyre! On the other side Allan Cresswell, who had "retired" to spend more time on his research for his forthcoming edition of the 2/6th Field Park history, has now re-entered the workforce.

BI-MONTHLY MEETING. This meeting will be held at our usual venue at 13 Field Squadron on Sunday 10th August commencing at 10.00am and it hoped that Bill Young will have arrived and be in attendance. We will then adjourn to the Ryan Club.

SANDAKAN HISTORY. The most recent offer was from out of the blue by a complete stranger. Robbie Stevens contacted me via the RAE Association with veritable gold mine of papers and plans that were the work of Major T T Lewis (OC 2/6th Field Park). He passed away a year after returning home. Allan has been liaising with Robbie and now has copies of some of Lewis's papers which will become available to members.

REMINDERS

EXHIBITION- 3rd to 17th August at Alexander State library.
 BI-MONTHLY MEETING- 10th August at Irwin Barracks.
 SANDAKAN DAY- 24th August at Marri Walk Kings Park

THE JOURNEY TO SANDAKAN - 2003

By Non Cadwgan Meston.

This has been a most memorable year for me for several reasons. I went in April to Borneo to see where my father suffered and died – at the 19th mile point on the death march to Ranau on June 2nd 1945.

I was fortunate to have my brother's company in doing this pilgrimage and this too was significant as he has not lived in Western Australia since he graduated as an Engineer and left to follow his career overseas. I have seen him only occasionally since his return to Australia, which is a big loss for a family as small as mine – my widowed mother and myself. No other relatives have ventured to Australia.

So Huw was with me to say farewell to our father, at Sandakan, at the place where his body was recovered, and finally at Labuan, where he was buried as one of the three who were found at that location. Huw placed Alwyn's medals on the grave, with a bunch of daffodils and sang for him 'Land of my Fathers' in Welsh. We have never considered ourselves as anything but true Australians, but in our hearts we are still Welsh.



Huw Cadwgan at Labuan War Cemetery honouring and saying goodbye to his father

Photo Courtesy Non Meston

This journey was emotionally at times overwhelming, but has for me achieved some healing, especially as my mother was never able to make the trip – we said goodbye for her too. I am happy that Huw will be with me again to see our Borneo Exhibition in which we pay a tribute to those men whose story has been for so long untold

I would recommend to any of you who might consider going to Sandakan that there is the possibility of great benefit in coming to terms with that tragedy of the men who endured such atrocities for so long, and surely deserved to be returned to us. And in saying a last goodbye.

The Treasurer, Colin Prior, reports that the majority of members have responded to the request to pay their 2003-2004 annual membership fee of \$20.00. For those who have not would you please send your payment to-

The Treasurer, 23 Haddrill Street, Bayswater 6053

MEMORIAL WINDOWS TO HONOUR SANDAKAN POWs

A project has been initiated for the installation of stain glassed windows in the historic church of St. Michael and All Angels in Sandakan, Borneo (Sabah), as a memorial to Australian and British prisoners of war who died there and as a thanksgiving to the local people who risked and gave their lives to help them. Almost 2,500 POWs (almost 1800 of whom were Australians) died at Sandakan or on one of the infamous death marches to Ranau during 1942-45. Only six, who escaped from the marches, survived. Many of the prisoners spent the night in the church before being transferred to the Sandakan compound, 12 kilometres away. Built in the late 1890s from local stone, St. Michael's is one of only two buildings to survive World War II.

Writer and historian Lynette Silver, approached the church in April to discuss the feasibility of a memorial window. As a result, the church authorities have made available the entire, tri-panelled west window. Of cathedral-like proportions, it dominates the main entrance. The estimated cost of replacing the plain lead light of the five-metre-high central panel with stained glass is \$15,000. The three panels would be in the vicinity of \$30,000.

The windows will have to be made in Australia, as there are no local people skilled in this work. A well-known Sydney artisan, who has spent a life-time designing and making stained glass windows for gothic-style churches, is willing to come out of retirement to undertake the work. This is the first time Australians from all states have had the opportunity to participate in such a project or to show their gratitude to the people of Sabah, many who were tortured or imprisoned for trying to help the prisoners. Eight were executed by firing squad.

For more information, please contact the Project Co-ordinator, Lynette Silver on **02 9489 3949** or lrsilver@hotmail.com Anyone wishing to contribute to the stained glass windows should send a cheque or money order (made out to **Sandakan Memorial Windows**) to **The Treasurer, Sandakan Memorial windows, 15B Ada Avenue, Wahroonga 2076**, along with details of the POW being honoured (for the memorial book) and TWO stamped self-addressed envelopes (one for a receipt and information sheet, the other for a photograph of the windows, when installed).

Bill Young, who survived Sandakan and Outram Road Gaol, has dubbed this project, **WINDOWS FROM THE HEART.**



Jean & Allan Cresswell admiring the replica Ranau Memorial and the Ranau Death March Mural during setting up on Sat August 3rd 2003
Photo courtesy Allan Cresswell



Federal Member for Cowan, Mr Graham Edward MP. and Jack Wong Sue at the opening of the Sandakan Exhibition on Sunday August 3rd 2003
Photo courtesy Michael Rowland

VALE - SAPPER CARL EDGAR 'SNOWY' JENSEN WX9682 – 2/6th FIELD PARK COMPANY ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS

A survivor of Sandakan and Outram Road Prison

Article by Clive Rosser and Allan Cresswell

Carl Edgar Jensen was born to Danish parents at Fremantle WA on 25th March 1911. His father was a seaman from the port town of Sonderborg on the island of Als in Denmark, who had jumped ship in Fremantle. After a period of prospecting he sent home a gold nugget requesting his family arrange and pay passage to Australia for a young woman that he and the Jensen family in Denmark knew. She arrived in Western Australia and they wed.

The union produced three sons followed by three daughters and Carl was the youngest of the boys. The family resided in North Fremantle and his father was manager of the German Club in High Street Fremantle. He spoke fluent German. After the outbreak of the 1st World War anti German sentiments were running high. The local police suggested the family leave Fremantle until the war was resolved. The club was later vandalised.

During World War One, Carl, as a schoolboy, spent time in both York and Nannup and he developed a great love of the country life. At school he developed his skills at Aussie Rules Football and played with the North Fremantle ex Scholars. In the early 1930's he played three seasons with East Fremantle League team, resulting in playing for the premierships team in 1933. He then left them to go mining in Kalgoorlie as football players were unpaid and work was hard to find.

Carl ended up in Geraldton where he drove a provisions truck from Geraldton out through to the station country and up to Carnarvon. In between he captained the Fire Brigade 'A' Grade Football Team to an undefeated premierships in 1937. At Geraldton he was living at the Esplanade Hostel and he started courting the owner's daughter, "Elsie".

When Carl returned to Perth, "Elsie" followed him and resided with Carl's mother. Elsie had just turned 21 years and the wedding arrangements were on the agenda when Carl arrived home and advised that he had been successful in his application for a position at the Shell Oil Company depot in North Fremantle. But they only took married men! A wedding between Carl and Elsie was hastily arranged. Then ten months later in 1939 Patricia Maria Jensen was born.

In 1941 Carl signed up to serve for his country and after a few weeks of basic training, left on the troopship *Zealandia* bound for Singapore. Needless to say the "Snowy" nickname came from his mane of blonde hair. He formed a bond with two other West Australians, Ted Keating and Don Marshall, and they were inseparable. Ted, like Carl, was married and had a daughter and a son, whereas Don was still unmarried. It was a true Aussie mateship that had its strength in times of adversity, which they were later to experience. All had spent time on the West Australian Goldfields.

Singapore fell to the Japanese and the trio became POW's, vowing to look after one another and determined to escape and return to their families.

The three mates were sent to an island, Pulau Bukum, on a working party at the damaged refinery of the former Asiatic Petroleum Company. The Japanese wanted the refinery back in working order, especially the blending plant for aviation fuels. Whilst pretending to repair the diesel engines they made sure they would never work again by removing vital parts. Sabotage, yet the Japanese suspected nothing, just such incompetence by Australians!

They also serviced the two motorboats that carried stores from the mainland. Here was an opportunity to escape. They collected food, fishing handlines and fuel over a few days then set off in one of the thirty-foot boats. They soon found the engine running hot, as they had forgotten to open the water-cooling valve. Once open the motor cooled and they were heading for open sea. An approaching sandbar became their obstacle as the boat was steered to starboard instead of port. They became stuck on the sandbar with a tide running out. Their efforts to push the boat off the bar were to no avail. They then arranged the boat so that it appeared that it had drifted from moorings. They then crept back into camp. The Japanese later considered that the boat had drifted off from the jetty and no punishment was necessary. From then on the trio titled themselves, "The Three Musketeers".

They were transferred with "E" Force to British North Borneo in March 1943. Enroute to Sandakan they stayed for a period of time at Kuching. One night they went under the wire and made contact with British civilian internees who were formerly from Sandakan. There they were provided with maps from Harry Keith, the former conservator of Forests, and supplied names of trusted contacts by the former Commissioner of Police, Major Rice-Oxley. A note was supplied by G



Brown recommending that assistance be given by their contacts in Sandakan and he also suggested the best escape routes from there.

At Sandakan "E" Force was placed initially on Berhala Island and the trio went about making their contacts to arrange for an escape. The camp intelligence officer heard of the escape plans and offered to lead the escape and he took possession of all material the group had gathered. The plan was to steal canoes from the nearby leper colony and meet up with Allied Forces by island hopping, hiding in the day and paddling at night.

On the night of the planned escape the intelligence officer advised the group they were not going because of weather conditions and the escape plans would work better if commenced from the mainland, where they were about to be transferred to. Next morning at roll call six soldiers were missing including the intelligence officer and two other lieutenants. The "Three Musketeers" were called to the hut of the senior officer, Captain Richardson, who advised that it was decided that the three lieutenants would go in their place instead. "Snowy" later wrote, "We said nothing, turned on our heels and never spoke to the officer again". This escape group successfully returned back to Australia although the intelligence officer died in the Philippine Islands.

Later at the main Sandakan Camp the three were still making plans for escape using local police and civilian help. In the meanwhile the underground movement collapsed and resulted in many arrests. The Japanese became aware of the "Three Musketeers" contact with civilians and various notes being exchanged between them. They were arrested by the Japanese Military Police, the Kempei Tai. For many months they were severely bashed and tortured at Sandakan before being sent to Kuching to undergo a military trial. Many Australian Soldiers and civilians were discovered to be part of various escape plans and involved in the use of radio receivers and the smuggling of food, medical supplies and money.

At Kuching they were again bashed for months and Ted Keating died as a result of the shocking treatment he received. A Japanese Tribunal found Don and Carl guilty of planning to escape and Don received a four year sentence whilst Carl received two years. They were transported back to Singapore and interned in the infamous Outram Road Gaol. Both were in solitary confinement and later Don died from disease and malnutrition. 'Snowy' demanded that he be allowed to be in Don's cell when he heard that Don was gravely ill but he could not help him any further. A true mate to the end! During the closing months of the war Carl was transferred to Changi where limited medical supplies were available.

The move to Outram Road in a way did save "Snowy's" life, as those who remained behind were to perish at Sandakan, on the shocking Ranau marches or were murdered at Ranau. Only six escaped from the marches to tell the horrors of the events there.

"Snowy" never discussed his POW days with his family or friends, possibly as a way of blocking out the memory of losing two of the best mates a man could have.

Carl returned to Elsie and another two girls; Kerry Ann and Carolyn Joy, were born. They lived in a War Service home he built in Applecross. "Snowy" stayed in the Army for another 15 years and ended his career as a Warrant Officer 1st Class.

In civvy life he became the 'live in' building caretaker of Millar's Timber & Trading, supervising the cleaners and attending to the building tenants requests for him to fix "everything". When Millers closed down their St Georges Terrace office, "Snow" went with them to the new operations in Kewdale and stayed there until he retired.

Elsie passed away three years ago and the tight knit family, his girls, saw that he was looked after. His ability to care for himself after Elsie's passing became a problem, and he was prised by his doctor out of the Applecross house and into Lodge care. Every week 'his girls' and their partners visited him. He was never short on visitors.

Each year a Sandakan Day is held at the Sandakan Tree in Kings Park and at the last service the Governor presented Carl with a certificate acknowledging 'his service to our country' during World War Two.

He passed away on April 9th 2003 with 'his girls' and grandchildren around him.

RIP 'Snowy'

POW PROFILE



**Alvin Cedric
WILLMOTT
Private WX 10178
11th Res Motor Trans Coy
A.A.S.C.**

**Script written and spoken by Anita Willmott
for Anzac Service at Mercy College,
Koondoola in 1995**

WORLD WAR II: LOOKING BACK THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

My experience of the Second World War began on 18 December 1940 on the day that my father enlisted in the Australian Army. I was six years old. You will notice that I refer to this man as “my father”. At the time I only knew him as “Daddy”, and have never had the chance to call him by the older name of “Dad”.

In reply to one of his cousins who asked him why he enlisted, my father wrote:

“As you say, I did honestly see it as my duty. I had much more to fight for than many others, - four responsibilities, etc. as you said. Several misguided people tried to dissuade me from going, but I fear they did not know how pigheaded a Willmott can be”.

The four responsibilities were us, his children, - my two brothers, Peter, seven, and Garnet, four, my cousin, John, who lived with us, who was five, and myself aged six.

I was never really aware that there was a war on, or that my father had enlisted. All I knew was that our family life changed. The boys were sent off to a country boarding school. I was taken to Perth to stay with family friends in West Leederville. My mother stayed in lodgings in Perth while she was waiting for my father to complete his Army training in Northam. In this way, although at the time I was not aware of it, I was the last member of my family to see my father alive – a precious memory.

Five months after enlistment, in April 1941, WX10178, Driver Alvin Cedric Willmott, a private in the Australian Infantry Force (AIF) was sent overseas in a troop ship to Malaya. His letters merely said “ABROAD” with no address. He worked as a dispatch rider taking messages by motorbike from one section of the Army to another. Technology was not so well developed in those days.

At the capture of Singapore on 15 February 1942, my father was taken prisoner by the Japanese. The last letter my mother received from him was dated 26 January 1942. In that letter, he said the bombs were getting closer, the night skies were filled with searchlights, and that it was hard to write “things uncensorable that he could tell us”. They could not disclose their whereabouts. My mother heard nothing more for over five months, during which time my father was reported “missing – whereabouts unknown”.

Subsequently, on 19 June 1942, my mother received a letter card from my father posted from a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, country unknown; then, some time later, another card, with no date, no address, written (or rather the four lines were typed) from a POW Camp, Borneo. These were stamped with Japanese printing.

On 15 August 1945, there was the ceasefire against Japan, and subsequently the Japanese signed their surrender to the Allies. The whole countryside rejoiced and went crazy with joy. By this time, I was in country boarding school, and all the boarders were given a holiday. I really looked forward to seeing my father again, although by this time, I was eleven, and my father’s image had become rather blurred.

After the war was declared over, my mother avidly watched the newspaper lists looking for my father’s name in the troop ship companies returning to Perth. On the 29 October 1945, over two months after the war ended, she received a War Office dispatch saying that Alvin Cedric Willmott had died in Borneo on 29 June 1945, - six weeks before the war ended. The Dominican Sisters at my boarding school called me out of school to tell me that my father had died. I was given the day off school. There was no family around to be with me.

From information that has come to light since then, my father had been in the prisoner-of-war camp based at Sandakan, Borneo. He died from dysentery and malnutrition. Their total food supply for the day was a handful of rice. Apparently he was too weak to go on the first march from Sandakan to Ranau, but all the sick prisoners-of-war who were left behind on the first march were forced to go on the second so-called “death march” which took place during May and June 1945. My father did not survive, but died somewhere before they reached Ranau, Borneo. There is no grave to visit.

All during my childhood, I always expected to see him come around a street corner at any time, and I would recognize him. It was hard to believe that he had gone forever. It always made me sad to sit on a beach and watch the ocean. You see, - my father went overseas and didn’t come back.