



P190 Feb 1999



Iaden, fevered, starved

The POWs of Sandakan
North Borneo, 1945





Front cover:

Wooden cross erected by a local Chinese over the grave of an Australian who died on the track leading from Sandakan to Ranau on one of the death marches. This soldier was shot while trying to escape and his body was buried by a local gardener about 12 kilometres from the Sandakan POW Camp. AWM 042578

Inside cover:

Drawing of the Sandakan POW Camp by Corporal Frederick Woodley, 2/10th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers. To the left is the 'big tree', a prominent feature of the camp. In the centre is the small 'cage' in which POWs were confined for punishment, sometimes many men at a time. To the right of the cage is the Japanese guard house. Corporal Woodley died at Sandakan POW Camp on 6 February 1945. Reproduced by permission of Mr Arthur Woodley.



This motif depicts flowers representing people of the three nations who suffered at Sandakan during the Second World War. The design is taken from the stained glass window, created by Robin Seville, located in the pavilion and is repeated on the granite memorial and decorative gates.

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Their Service—Our Heritage A Federal Government Program
Honouring the Sacrifice and Service of Australia's Veterans



Foreword

The events surrounding the Sandakan–Ranau death marches are, regrettably, little known by most Australians. Yet, together they represent what is arguably the worst war time atrocity committed suffered by Australian service personnel.

This booklet is an important step along the way to making this part of our history better known among Australians of all ages.

The 1999 mission by former prisoners of war (POWs), and widows and relatives of POWs who died at Sandakan and during the death marches also will help us remember those who perished in those dark times. It is my privilege to lead this mission, during which the official dedication of improvements to the Sandakan Memorial Park will take place.

I commend this booklet to the reader, trusting that he or she will recognise that the service and sacrifice of those who suffered so cruelly at Sandakan and during the marches are as much a part of our heritage as the more glorious episodes from other times. At the very least, we all should pause for a moment in silent remembrance of them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'B' and 'S'.

Bruce Scott

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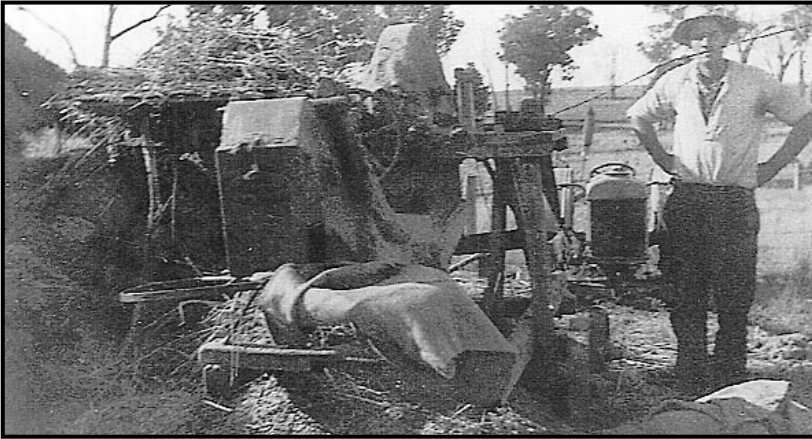


REMEMBERING SANDAKAN

Private E H 'Ted' Ings Binalong, New South Wales

Whenever the parishioners of the Anglican Church, Binalong, New South Wales, attend a service, they are reminded of the tragedy and loss of war. The memorial gateway to the church is dedicated to the memory of Private E H Ings, 2/19th Battalion, 2nd Australian Imperial Force (AIF), who died in 1945 on active service.

Ted Ings was born in 1903 at Binalong and in the 1930s, with his brother Les, he ran a dairy farm near the town. The Ings brothers were well-known for their skill in building the large old-fashioned haystacks. At local dances, Ted's skillful playing of the squeezebox was much in demand and he is remembered in the district as gentle-natured and well-liked. On 17 July 1940, at Goulburn, New South Wales, he enlisted in the 2nd AIF and was assigned to the 2/19th Battalion. In early 1941, Private Ings and the 2/19th Battalion, 8th Australian Division, sailed from Sydney on the *Queen Mary*, bound for Singapore and the defence of Malaya.



'Ted' Horace Ings at work, Binalong, late 1930s. Photograph: Ings Family



The Ings brothers building a haystack, Binalong, New South Wales, c. 1930. Ings family.

As letters in the possession of the family show, throughout that year Ted regularly wrote home from Malaya. But other events were soon to have a telling effect on Ted and the soldiers of the 8th Division. On 15 February 1942, the British defenders of Singapore, which included the 2/19th Battalion, surrendered to the Japanese. Months later, on 19 July 1942, the *Sydney Sunday Telegraph* published the name of Private E H Ings in a list of 430 New South Wales soldiers classed as 'missing in action' in Malaya, Singapore and Java.

After this alarming news, the Ings family in Binalong would have been relieved to hear that Ted was not 'missing' but a prisoner of war. Over a year later, in September 1943, a card from Ted, which said he was a POW in Malaya, reached his sister-in-law May, in Binalong. It had been sent through the International Red Cross. Today the family still has the

telegram May sent to the other members of the family, telling them the good news. A later letter from the Red Cross Bureau for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War, Sydney, sent on 6 November 1944 to Binalong gave the following brief information from the International Red Cross, Geneva:

Tokyo Cables NX 60355, Pte. E.H. Ings Transferred From Malaya to Borneo Camp Since 1/4/44.

Ted Ings never returned from Borneo. The inscription on the memorial gates at the Binalong Anglican Church records that Private E H Ings died on 24 February 1945, aged 41, at somewhere called 'Sandakan-Ranau'.



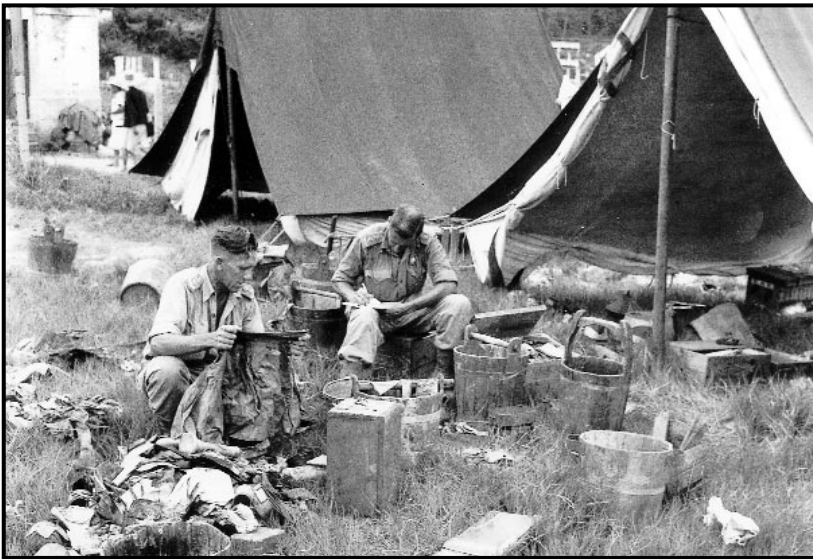
*Paybook photograph taken
on enlistment of NX60355
Pte Ted Ings, 2/19 Battalion.
AWM PO2467.777*



'FOUND OVER SIXTY PAYBOOKS
AND VARIOUS OTHER ARTICLES'

Searching for the Sandakan POWs Borneo, September–October 1945

Sandakan is today a large city on the north-east coast of the island of Borneo. In 1945 Borneo was still occupied by the Japanese, and at the end of the Pacific war in August, Australian units arrived in the Sandakan area to accept the surrender of the Japanese garrison. Just 16 kilometres out of Sandakan, in a north-westerly direction, was the Sandakan POW Camp. Here, between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese had at different times held over 2700 Australian and British prisoners. The POWs were brought from Singapore to Borneo to construct a military airfield close to the camp. By 15 August 1945, however, there were no POWs left at Sandakan Camp.



Captain G M Cocks, 3 POW Contact and Enquiry Unit, at the Sandakan POW Camp reading out the name and regimental number from a pair of shorts belonging to a POW to Lieutenant E K Robinson. All the articles shown here were found in the camp and bore the names and numbers of Australian and British servicemen, most of whom died in the camp. AWM121783

During October and November 1945, the camp site and some of the jungle area to the west was searched by Australian War Graves units and 3 POW Contact and Enquiry Unit. Similar searches were also conducted in the area of a small settlement called Ranau, 260 kilometres west of Sandakan, in the mountains close to north Borneo's largest mountain, Mount Kinabalu. Eventually, searches were also made all along a jungle track, or *rentis*, which ran from near Sandakan, through low-lying river swamps and up into the mountains to Ranau. In these areas at various times between 1945 and 1947 were found the personal relics and bodily remains of over 2163 Australian and British POWs. The remains of a further 265 known to have been at Sandakan in early January 1945 were never found.

Sandakan camp itself was a burnt-out ruin. Careful excavation and searching uncovered hundreds of bodies at different burial locations. One Australian War Graves officer wrote of this work in the unit war diary:

25 September 1945—Was informed that a native who had worked in the PW compound for the Japs was willing to give information...his information was of the greatest importance. He said that in a certain part of the compound there was a place where there were mass burials, on receipt of this information I immediately went to the place and found that what the native said was true. At the daily conference I asked for and obtained 20 Japs [Japanese prisoners held at Sandakan awaiting repatriation to Japan] as a working party for the following day.

26 September 1945—Took out Jap working party to compound. On digging found ample evidence that it was a mass burial place. It is difficult to calculate the number but would say at a guess that it would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 100–150 bodies. Went to No 2 cemetery where 24 graves appear to be too big for single burials. Several graves which were opened were found to contain as many as 5–8 bodies.



Captain R A Houghton, 23 Australian War Graves Unit, inspecting a body in a grave at Sandakan POW Camp. AWM 120432

Some scattered personal items belonging to the POWs were also found at the camp. The war diarist of 23 Australian War Graves unit recorded:

22 September 1945—Spent all day at the PW compound searching for records and other articles that may have a bearing on identifying bodies. Found over sixty paybooks and various other articles bearing numbers and name.

The main items located at different places in the camp were service paybooks, identity disks and army-issue webbing such as haversacks and kit bags. The military badges showed the international origin of the Sandakan POWs—Australian Army hat and collar badges, along with badges from British and Imperial units such as the Gordon Highlanders, the Singapore

Volunteer Force, Royal Army Medical Corps, the 17th Dogras (a British India Army unit), the Suffolk Regiment and many others. Other personal relics found included jackets, hairbrushes, mugs and eating utensils.

Perhaps the most poignant area to be searched was that which appeared to have been used by the POWs as a medical aid station. The final report of 3 POW Contact and Enquiry Unit described what was found there:

On 22 October Lieutenant Robertson located what would appear to have been the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], after the remainder of the camp had been destroyed. A large number of improvised stretchers were found under banana palms. . . The wreckage of a small atap hut was cleared, and items of medical stores found. . . No drugs of any kind were found. Used filthy bandages and dressings were scattered over the whole



The AIF section of the No. 1 Cemetery at Sandakan POW Camp. Thirty-eight of these graves were marked and identifiable. AWM 120491

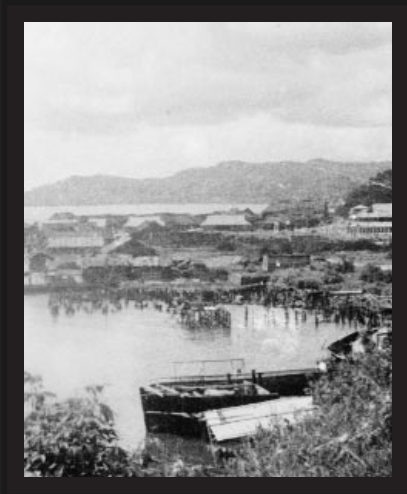
area. It is thought that this area is where the sick were concentrated when the compound was destroyed by fire, after the fit personnel left for Ranau.

More bodies and similar personal items were found along the track to Ranau and at Ranau itself. Reports from the unit listed all items found and stated:

The items themselves have been parcelled and will be sent to Records, Melbourne, for further checking. All Paybooks and most of the other items have been damaged by weather and/or fire, and require very careful handling. Paybooks, and personal effects of PW, in a number of cases, found concentrated in small heaps, and in some cases covered over by blankets or sacking either for concealment or protection from the weather.

Typical of the few recovered remnants of the POWs' presence at Sandakan are some items in the collection of the Australian War Memorial. These include six fire-damaged cigarette cases, two improvised smoking pipes, a shaving brush, a dixie lid used as a cooking utensil, a rosary and crucifix, and false teeth. All of these were found at the camp by 9 Military History Field Team.

Research has indicated that some 2428 Allied servicemen—1787 Australians and 641 British—held in the Sandakan Camp in January 1945 died between January and August 1945 in Japanese captivity. Private Ted Ings of Binalong was one of them. They perished at the Sandakan POW Camp, along the track to Ranau, and at Ranau itself. What brought about the deaths of so many prisoners so close to the Allied victory over Japan in August 1945?



'WE ARE WELL. WE ARE HAPPY.
WE ARE WELL FED'

Sandakan POW Camp, 1942–1944

After the fall of Singapore in February 1942, numbers of Allied POWs—Australian and British—were brought progressively to Sandakan. The first large group of Australians—about 1500 men—to arrive from Singapore was 'B' Force. They steamed along the east coast of Borneo on the *Ubi Maru* and arrived at Sandakan on 17 July 1942. Lieutenant Rod Wells thought the scenery beautiful:

From the sea it's lovely. With the red chalk hills on the side of Berhala Island it really is very impressive. I suppose for a split moment we thought, with a sigh of relief, that here's some beautiful, peaceful land where there may not be any Japanese.

Once ashore, the Japanese marched them to Sandakan POW Camp, which was under the command of Captain Hoshijima Susumi. In April 1943, 'B' Force was joined by 776 British POWs and, between April and June, by another group of 500 Australian prisoners—'E' Force.



Captain Hosijima Susumi (centre), Commandant, Sandakan POW Camp, 1942–1945, talking with his defence counsel outside the courtroom where he is being tried for war crimes at Labuan, January 1946.
AWM 133913

The POWs were brought to Sandakan to build two military airstrips and their service roads and dispersal pens. Each day at 7.30am, work details left the camp for the airfield where they cleared and burnt off scrub, filled in swamps, dug gravel, and pushed trucks along a light railway to where the gravel was dumped for levelling. At 5.30 pm they marched back to camp. In the early days this life was almost bearable. Private Keith Botterill, 2/19th Battalion, remembers:

We had it easy the first twelve months. I reckon only half a dozen died at the top... Sure we had to work on the drome, we used to get flogged, but we had plenty of food and cigarettes... We actually had a canteen in the prison camp. We were getting ten cents a day... I think a coconut was about one cent, and a turtle egg one cent... And a fair sized banana went for a cent... It was a good camp.

Concerts were held and one of the best entertainers was Private Nelson Short, 2/18th Battalion, who composed songs. Short adopted the popular Irish–Australian song *Ireland Over Here* to their situation at Singapore and at Sandakan:

*If the Harbour Bridge was spanned across the causeway
And old Fremantle came to Singapore
If Adelaide bells rang out in Bukit Timah
And Bondi Beach was lined around these shores
If the River Yarra flowed into the harbour
And old Rockhampton on this island did appear
Then we wouldn't want to roam
We would always feel at home
If we only had Australia over here.*

Although prisoners, their position might at that time have been summed up in the words, chosen by the Japanese, on a postcard that Bombardier Dick Braithwaite, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment, recalled they were allowed to send home:

We are well. We are happy. We are well fed. We are working for pay.

This tolerable situation did not last long. One significant change came with the arrival in April 1943 of new Formosan guards. With the advent of the Formosans, who lived in the camp, and the earlier establishment in late 1942 of a system of punishment known as the 'cage', the POWs began a journey into a world of systematic deprivations and violence. Mass beatings during work details began, as recalled by Warrant Officer William Hector 'Bill' Sticpewich, Australian Army Service Corps:

My gang would be working all right and then would be suddenly told to stop... The men would then be stood with their arms outstretched horizontally, shoulder high, facing the sun without hats. The guards would be formed into two sections, one standing back with rifles and the others doing the actual beating. They would walk along the back of us and... smack us underneath the arms, across the ribs and on the back. They would give each man a couple of bashes... if they whimpered or flinched they would get a bit more.

The cage, which was placed near what was known as 'the big tree' facing the guardhouse, was a more prolonged and agonising form of punishment. It was a wooden structure, 130cm by 170cm, with bars on all sides and high enough only



*Gunner D S Folkes, 12 Battery, 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, examining a wallet belonging to a deceased POW which he found in the mud at Sandakan POW Camp, October 1945.
AWM 120438*

to sit in. Prisoners crawled into the cage through a narrow opening. A POW undergoing punishment would have to sit at attention through the heat of the day. At night he had no bedding or mosquito netting. During the first week no food was permitted and the guards twice daily administered beatings. Sentences to the cage for trivial misdemeanours varied from a few days to over a month. Keith Botterill spent some time in the cage:

The time I was in for forty days there were seventeen of us in there. No water for the first three days. On the third night they'd force you to drink till you were sick. For the first seven days you got no food. On the



Looking towards the big tree in the burnt-out remains of the Sandakan POW Camp. To the right of the big tree stood the cage in which prisoners were tortured. The Japanese guard house was to the right of the cage. AWM 120461

seventh day they started feeding you half camp rations. I was just in a 'G' string, never had a wash. We were not allowed to talk, but we used to whisper... Every evening we would get a bashing, which they used to call physical exercise... The [cooks] knew we got out at five so they'd come down then to feed the dogs with swill, the kitchen rubbish. They'd pour it into this trough. We'd all hit together, the dogs and all of us, and we'd fight the dogs for the scraps. If you've ever tried to pull a bone out of a starving dog's mouth you'll know what it was like. The dog would fasten onto your wrist to take the bone off you, and you'd still be putting the bone into your mouth. And you'd finish up the better.

In July 1943 an elaborate local intelligence network, built up at the camp and connecting it with the local civilian internees and guerrilla units even further afield, was betrayed to the Japanese. Captain Lionel Matthews, 8th Division Signals, was the organiser of this network. Matthews was arrested, tortured and eventually shot, along with eight local people who had been part of the organisation.

Following the breaking of the intelligence ring, the Japanese, hoping to take out the source of such resistance from the camp, removed all but eight officers to



Captain L C Matthews GC, MC, 8th Division Signals, 2nd AIF. Captain Matthews was executed by the Japanese on 2 March 1944 for his part in the secret intelligence organisation run between Sandakan POW Camp and Sandakan town during 1942 and 1943. Matthews was posthumously awarded a George Cross for gallant and distinguished service whilst a POW at Sandakan.

AWM059358

Kuching, hundreds of kilometres away on the far side of Borneo. Discipline and security at the camp were tightened.

The rest of 1943 and 1944 were characterised by an increased number of beatings—'almost daily occurrences' is the phrase used in the official history—prolonged work, diminishing rations and sickness. In September 1944 Allied planes began raiding Sandakan and the airfield. December saw a reduction in the daily rice ration to between about 140 and 200 grams per man, despite there being adequate supplies in the camp. By the end of the month further air raids had rendered the airfield inoperable and any real usefulness the POWs had for their captors was at an end. The health of the POWs deteriorated rapidly and the death rate crept up. In January 1945 the Japanese issue of rice ceased altogether and men were given just 85 grams per day from accumulated stores built up by the POWs themselves.



An aerial view from an Allied reconnaissance plane of Sandakan POW Camp (left) and the nearby Japanese military airstrips. The bomb craters from recent Allied air raids are visible both on and close to the airstrips. AWM 044659

January 1945 saw the Japanese on the defensive throughout that vast Pacific and Asian territory they had conquered so swiftly in late 1941 and early 1942. To the Japanese, it must have seemed only a matter of time before the Allies struck at Borneo. Fearing that this invasion might occur in the Sandakan area, they made provision to move the POWs over 260 kilometres westward to Ranau where they might prove useful as supply carriers in the mountains. A track, or *rentis*, was cut by local labour through the low-lying swamps and jungle to the south of the Labuk River and its tributaries—the Dusan, the Kolapsis, the Muanad, the Pandan Pandan, and the Mandorin—up into the dense rainforest of the Maitland Range, past Paginatan village into the Crocker Range (which formed the foothills of Mount Kinabalu) and on to a highland plateau at Ranau. In the swamp lowlands this track was made of logs and proved dangerous to walk on. It was often easier to wade through the swamp itself. Through the mountains the track became narrow, slippery and, in many places, steep.

On 26 January 1945 the POWs were informed that a party consisting of approximately 455 Australians and British were to leave Sandakan for another part of Borneo where there was plenty of food. The prisoners were divided into nine groups which left the camp progressively between 28 January and 6 February. Bill Sticpewich remembers them leaving:

None of them were fit. They were all suffering from beriberi and malnutrition. They were all issued by the Japs with crude rubber boots but nobody could wear them. Some of them had their own boots but more than sixty per cent of them were bootless.

In this state the marchers set off westward into the swamp and the jungle.



'ONCE YOU STOPPED,
YOU STOPPED FOR GOOD'

First death march to Ranau January–March 1945

Approximately 455 POWs left Sandakan on the first march to Ranau. They were issued with enough rations—rice, some dried fish and salt—for just four days, and the men found that they were also to be burdened with extra sacks of rice, ammunition and other pieces of Japanese equipment. Additional supplies supposedly were to be made available at various Japanese food dumps along the way but the marchers were often reduced to scrounging whatever the jungle could provide or by trading their few possessions with the local people. Most were forced to march in bare feet and the track west soon became a barely passable pathway of mud, tree roots and stones. Virtually every night it rained. Over sections of low-lying swamp a bamboo walkway had been erected. With the mud and rain, this proved impossible to walk on, so the POWs were forced to wade through the swamp itself.



Japanese POWs filling in graves at Sandakan POW Camp. The graves have been examined for relics that might have helped to identify the occupants. AWM 120451

Keith Botterill was with the third group to leave Sandakan on 31 January. For their first three days in the swamp country they had a small amount of rice and six cucumbers among 40 POWs. This was, in Botterill's words, just enough to keep them alive. Group 3 took 17 days to make the trip through swamp, jungle and mountain forest. Of the 50 who had started out, only 37 reached Ranau. Some had simply died of exhaustion and disease: others, unable to go on, were shot or sometimes beaten to death. As Botterill later recalled:

I've seen men shot and bayoneted to death because they could not keep up with the party. We climbed this mountain about 30 miles out from Ranau, and we lost five men on that mountain in half a day. They shot five of them because they couldn't continue. But I just kept plodding along. It was dense jungle, I was heartbroken; but I thought there was safety in numbers. I just kept going.

As Botterill went on towards Ranau he realised that others in the earlier parties had suffered a similar fate:

Although I did not see the bodies of any men who had been shot in the parties that had gone before, often I could smell them.

This ruthless disposal of incapacitated POWs seems to have been official, if unwritten, policy on all the POW marches which left Sandakan between January and June. Behind the final group on the first march came Lieutenant Abe Kazuo's killing squad which had been given the task of making sure that no POW survived if he became unable to go on. If they came across POWs who had fallen out from earlier groups, but were clinging to life when Abe's squad came through, they were to dispose of them. A Japanese soldier who was with Abe later testified to war crimes investigators:

Two soldiers ... were the ones who had been detailed to come at the rear and they may have received the orders you refer to directly from Abe ... About two or three hours after leaving Boto one PW became very ill

indeed and Sato [Sergeant Sato Shinichi] without telling me anything about it took him into the jungle and bayoneted him to death. Endo [Private Endo Hirkaki] and Sato told me that 16 had died on the way from Sandakan to Boto but they did not give any details of the deaths.

Groups 1 to 5 all marched through to Ranau, losing 70 out of 265 POWs along the way. Groups 6 to 9 were held at the village of Paginatan, ostensibly because there was no accommodation for them at Ranau. Private William Dick Moxham, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment, was with Group 7 and he recalled their progress over the 200-odd kilometres between Sandakan and Paginatan:

Men from my own party could not go on. Boto was the first place where we actually had to leave anyone. They remained there, at this Jap dump. At the next place, at the bottom of a big hill, we left two more men. Later, we heard shots, and we thought the two men must have been shot... In all of my dealings with the Japanese, I have never seen anyone of our chaps after they had been left with the Japs. Once you stopped—you stopped for good.

Paginatan village is approximately 42 km east of Ranau on the road back towards Sandakan. In 1945 it was a Japanese food dump and POWs were forced to carry rice between the village and Ranau. A number of men died or were beaten to death on these rice-carrying parties. AWM 042511



Groups 6 to 9 remained at Paginatan for about a month. There, many simply wasted away and died. Some, including the sick, suffered the same routine of brutality that they had encountered from the guards at Sandakan. Of the 138 POWs from groups 6 to 9 who had reached Paginatan, there were but 68 left one month later. At the end of March approximately 50 to 60 Paginatan survivors set off for Ranau. Dick Moxham remembers the nightmare journey:



Balabiu, a nine-year old from the Ranau area, who gave food to starving Australian and British POWs during the death marches, listening to a recording made of her story. Also listening is a missionary, Mr Trevor White (left), and Major Harry Jackson (right), the leader of the combined Australian-British Borneo Reward Mission, 1946–1947.

AWM 042565

One man was puffed up with beriberi in the legs and face, and was getting along all right on his own and could have made it; but the Japs would not let him alone, but tried to force him along, and eventually he collapsed. They kicked him on the ground. The Jap turned and saw the man had gone down, and he struck him over the head with his rifle butt. The soldier was left there. The party marched on.

Just 46 of them reached Ranau alive to join the remnants of groups 1 to 5.

Of the approximately 195 POWs who had made it through to Ranau from these first groups, by 1 April another 89 had died at the camp and 21 on rice carrying parties between Ranau and Paginatan. The purpose of

the carrying parties was to take supplies back to Paginatan for subsequent POW and Japanese groups making the trek from Sandakan. Most of those who died on these nine-day trips were either shot or bayoneted to death for their inability to walk any further. As Keith Botterill, who went on all six journeys, recalled:

No effort whatsoever was made to bury the men. They would just pull them five to fifteen yards off the track and bayonet them or shoot them, depending on the condition of the men. If they were conscious, and it was what we thought was a good, kind guard, they'd shoot them. There was nothing we could do.

At Ranau the POWs were herded into insanitary and crowded huts. Dysentery became endemic and eventually three-quarters of the available living space was occupied by the sick and the dying. Dirt and flies covered everything and the weak, but still relatively healthy POWs, could only watch helplessly as their comrades wasted away with dysentery or their bodies became distended with the accumulated fluids of beriberi. Each night, Keith Botterill recalls, was a night of death followed by a morning of burial:

You'd wake up of a morning and you'd look to your right to see if the chap next to you was still alive. If he was dead you'd just roll him over a little bit and see if he had any belongings that would suit you; if not, you'd just leave him there. You'd turn to the other side and check your neighbour; see if he was dead or alive.

There'd be a burial party every morning ... which consisted of two men to each body. We used to wrap their wrists and ankles together and put a bamboo pole through them and carry them like a dead tiger. We had no padre. And no clothes on the bodies, just straight into six inch deep graves. The soil was too hard to dig any deeper. We'd lay the body in and the only mark of respect they got, we'd spit on the body, then cover them up. That was the soldier's way.

By 26 June, just under five months from when the 450-odd Australian and British POWs had set out from Sandakan, there were only six of them left alive at Ranau—five Australians and one British soldier.

Over those months those who had stayed behind at the Sandakan camp fared little better than their comrades at Ranau and Paginatan. Malnutrition caused by the reduction in the rice ration to virtually starvation levels, disease and the failure of the Japanese to issue needed medicines brought inevitable results. From the beginning of February to the end of May, 885 Australian and British POWs died at the camp. One Australian who died in February was Private Ted Ings, 2/19th Battalion, of Binalong, New South Wales. The official cause of his death was given as malaria but certainly he was also suffering at that time from malnutrition and possibly also from one of the other diseases which by that time were endemic at Sandakan.

Ted Ings' death was typical of those hundreds of Australian and British POWs who between January and August 1945 expired at Sandakan camp from ill-treatment in a situation where their captors possessed locally enough medical and food supplies to adequately care for them.

By mid-April the Japanese had decided to move the rest of the POWs away from Sandakan, an area where they expected an Allied landing. However, a final evacuation of the camp came about only after a large sea-air bombardment of Sandakan on 27 May. This attack severely damaged most of the town and convinced the Japanese that the foreshadowed invasion was imminent. They withdrew their defences inland beyond the POW camp that now stood between them and any Allied troops who might be landed at Sandakan. In these circumstances, the camp, which contained approximately 800 malnourished, ill and, in many cases, dying POWs was evacuated and burnt. Dick Braithwaite watched his home of three years go up in flames:

It was a strange, sad sort of feeling to see those huts going up. Knowing also, of course, that any records of our friends that had died, things that we'd made and cherished, the little pieces of wood that had become more or less like the family jewels, they were going up in smoke. It was a great loss. It must have been in the back of our minds all the time that this was it for us.

Some 530 prisoners were gathered together in eleven groups for another march westwards to Ranau. The remainder, all too incapacitated to move, were left behind in the smouldering ruins.



'IT WAS A ONE WAY TRIP'

Second death march to Ranau May–June 1945

The Australian and British POWs on the second march to Ranau left Sandakan camp on 29 May 1945. Of about 530 marchers, only 100 were in any condition to embark on such an ordeal. Many knew themselves they would not get far. Within a day, one of the groups—group 2—which had left with 50 POWs had already lost 12. As with the first march, a Japanese detachment had been assigned to deal with those who fell out. As a Japanese soldier with this death squad later testified:

On the way from Sandakan to Ranau I took my turn in S/M Tsuji's [Sergeant-Major Tsuji] party twice. The first time three were killed I think and on the second four were killed. On the first occasion I killed one, but not on the latter occasion. Captain Takakua [Captain Takakuwa Takuo] ordered me to do it and S/M Tsuji was present when I killed the man. There may have been a few Formosans ... who did not get a turn in the killing parties.

Australian Army
felt hats found at
Sandakan POW
Camp, 1945.
AWM Robertson
Collection, 121/6



Nelson Short was on the second march and he recalled the bravery with which many POWs faced their end:

And if blokes just couldn't go on, we shook hands with them, and said, you know, hope everything's all right. But they knew what was going to happen. There was nothing you could do. You just had to keep yourself going. More or less survival of the fittest.

Dick Braithwaite became quickly aware of the purpose of this forced march:

It was a one-way trip when we started to hear shots, and you felt there was no hope for anyone who fell out.

In short, this second march was simply, if this were possible, a more brutal version of the earlier march. Rations were always totally inadequate and proper medical attention non-existent. They ate whatever they could find in the jungle. Nelson Short recalled eating snails and tree ferns. To urge them on, they were beaten with rifle butts. Men died daily of their illnesses—some with their mates close by, others after wandering away alone into the jungle. Men who could not walk any further were shot, bayoneted or, in some instances, beheaded. One or two were killed so that a guard could take from them some treasured personal possession. About 113 died within the first eight days and a group of about 35 were massacred near Tangkul.

The survivors of the second march reached Ranau on 27 June, 26 days out from Sandakan. By that time there were only 183 of them left—142 Australian and 41 British POWs. This second march had indeed been a death march.



'THEY HAD NOT HAD ANY FOOD
FOR A WEEK'

Last days at Sandakan Camp 29 May–15 August 1945

As the POWs for the second march to Ranau were being mustered at Sandakan on 29 May, the Japanese burnt the POW camp. Approximately 288 prisoners, too sick and weak to go, were left in the open air to fend virtually for themselves. In mid-June the Japanese officer in charge received instructions to take these POWs to Ranau. Those who could not walk would be disposed of in some manner. Consequently, 75 of these emaciated men set off on what was to be a third march westward into the jungles and swamps. Little is known of the fate of these 75 but what is certain is that they did not go far. Most were dead before the party was much more than 60 kilometres away from the camp.



Remains of the burnt-out Sandakan POW Camp looking towards the big tree.
AWM120463

By the end of June there were still some 80 to 90 POWs alive in what remained of the camp. Food now consisted of a small amount of rice, some tapioca, coconut oil and scraps smuggled in to them by some Chinese camp workers. Living quarters were nothing more than lean-tos made from sticks, blankets and whatever else came to hand. Most of the surviving evidence of life and events at Sandakan in July and August 1945 comes from camp guards interrogated after the war and Chinese workers. One of the latter, Ali Asa, a water boy, described the camp at this time:

After the truckload of men [the 75 taken away on the last march towards Ranau] had gone all the PW remaining were left in the open in No 2 Camp site, there were no houses left. These men were sick. About 10 to 12 PW died every day. In August I was ordered by the Japs to take some ubi kayu [yams] to the PWs, at this time there were only five alive. They asked me when I was going to bring some food as they had not had any food for a week.

It was clear that the Japanese now in charge at Sandakan had no intention of allowing any of the POWs to survive the war. On 13 July, 23 men still capable of walking were taken out of the camp towards the now defunct airstrip. A little later, Wong Hiong, a young Chinese camp worker, heard shots and when the guards returned he asked what had happened:

I asked them what they had been shooting and they said 'ducks'. I asked how many they shot and they said 23. One of the Japs told me that the 23 PW were shot because there were not enough trucks left to take them away for the march.

Yashitiro Goto, a Japanese guard, later testified to war crimes investigators about this 'duck' shooting:

It was Takakua's [Captain Takakuwa Takuo] order so we could not disobey. It would be a disgrace to my parents so we carried out the orders. Taking the PWs to the airport near the old house on the drome,

all those who could walk. There were 23 PWs and under Morozumi's [Sergeant Major Hisao Murozumi] order we lined them up and shot them. The firing party kept firing till there were no more signs of life. Then we dragged the bodies into a near-by air-raid shelter and filled it in.



Aerial reconnaissance photograph, taken by the 307th Bombardment Group. The POW sign erected in September 1944 (upside down in the middle of the photograph) can be clearly seen. Sandakan POW Camp.

After the massacre of the 23 most of the remaining 28 prisoners died from disease, starvation and exposure during the three weeks leading up to the Japanese surrender on 15 August. Guard Goto Yashitoro described the condition of the camp in its final days:

All the PWs left were too sick to fend for themselves. We did not cook for the PWs at this stage. Those who were able to crawl about were caring for the others. These PWs either died from lack of care and starvation, being too weak to eat. The last died about 15 August.

Goto failed to describe how the last prisoner, an Australian, actually died. Chinese worker, Wong Hiong, witnessed the final horror of Sandakan:

His [the last POW's] legs were covered with ulcers. He was a tall, thin, dark man with a long face and was naked apart from a loin cloth. One morning at 7 am I saw him taken to a place where there was a trench like a drain. I climbed up a rubber tree and saw what happened. Fifteen Japs with spades were already at the spot. Morjumi [Sergeant Major Hisao Murozumi] made the man kneel down and tied a black cloth over his eyes. He did not say anything or make any protest. He was so weak that his hands were not tied. Morojumi cut his head off with one sword stroke. Morojumi pushed the body into the drain with his feet. The head had dropped into the drain. The other Japs threw in some dirt, covered the remains and returned to the camp.

So died the last POW at Sandakan Camp on the day the Emperor of Japan broadcast to his people that the war was over and that Japan was surrendering.



'THEY KILLED THE LOT OF THEM'

Last days at Ranau, 26 June–27 August 1945

The 183 survivors of the second march—142 Australians and 41 British—began arriving at Ranau on 26 June 1945. They found only six men from the first march still alive. Over the next few weeks, despite their exhaustion, sickness and malnutrition, they were subjected to a harsh and brutal work regime. Parties cut bamboo, collected wood for burning, atap for hut construction, and carried 20-kilogram bags of food to Ranau from a dump three kilometres away. This was light work compared to that of those unfortunates who were assigned to haul an average of 130 buckets of water a day up a steep slope for the Japanese officers' quarters. As Private Keith Botterill later testified, rations for the POWs at this time were barely sufficient for survival, let alone for sick men:

They were given a small cup of rice water a day with about an inch of rice in the bottom. Plenty of rice was available and the Japanese used to get 800 grams a day themselves; they also used to get tapioca, meat, eggs and sweet potatoes and showed no signs of malnutrition.

No accommodation was available for those from the second group and initially they were herded together in an area 50 metres square. There was no place for cooking or basic sanitation, and living quarters were simply the protection of the scrub. Between 30 June and 18 July, as well as working for



POW relics found at Sandakan POW Camp, October 1945. AWM Robertson Collection, 121/8

the Japanese, the POWs built themselves a hut. A measure of their physical condition by this time was the fact that when the hut was finished only 38 were fit enough to occupy its elevated floor space. The remainder were so sick and debilitated by dysentery and other illness that they could only crawl under the hut for shelter.

Keith Botterill estimated that in early July men died at the rate of about seven every day. Moreover, the beatings and the bashings continued. One POW who perished as a result of a severe bashing was Sapper Arthur 'Dickie' Bird, a survivor of the first death march. By 7 July Bird was sick and emaciated with beriberi, malaria and leg ulcers but, despite his condition, a Japanese guard dragged him out for work. When he tried to explain his incapacity Bird was knocked to the ground and continually kicked for over ten minutes. Later that evening he was observed lying virtually where he had fallen and an effort was made to get him back to the hut. Bird was in great agony and he lapsed into a coma. Nothing could be done for him and he died two days later. An Australian doctor, Captain J B Oakeshott, was so appalled by the manner of Sapper Bird's death that he purportedly declared:

If anybody is fortunate enough to escape this camp or live it out, this incident with others should be brought to the notice of the authorities and see that justice is brought about.

From this place of degradation and misery four Australians did manage to escape and their stories are told below. After the last escape—that of Bill Sticpewich and Private Herman 'Algy' Reither on 28 July—there were approximately 40 POWs still alive at the camp. The daily rice ration had been even further reduced and none of them was capable of any prolonged physical work. From the Japanese camp administration's point of view, the time had come for their elimination.

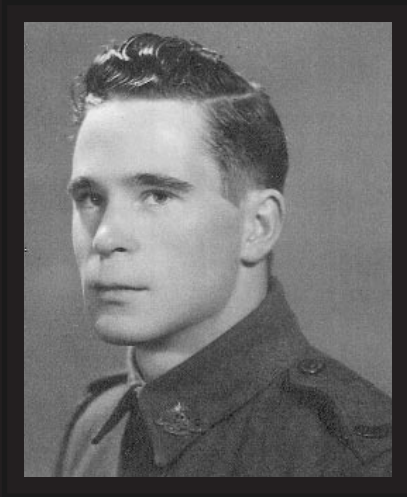
In August 1945, within sight of Japan's surrender, their captors put these sick and helpless men to death. Although there were no POWs left alive to bear witness to these acts, Japanese and Formosan guards later described the final massacres to war crimes investigators. One guard described how the sick were either carried or forced to crawl up a hill to the graveyard where they were each shot through the head. Another guard described the killing of a fitter group of about 10 POWs who were marched a little way from the camp. They were made to sit down after which a Japanese Sergeant-Major told them:

There is no rice so I'm killing the lot of you today. Is there anything you want to say?

Allegedly, the prisoners were also offered tobacco and water. Then they were shot one by one and buried. Sadly, strong evidence suggests that the last POW survivors at Ranau were not killed until 27 August, 12 days after the official Japanese surrender.

At this time, out in the nearby jungle, friendly villagers were taking Private Nelson Short, who had escaped in early July, to an Australian rescue party:

We heard this tat, tat, tat, tat...I said 'Wonder what it is?'...We found out that was the killing of the last of the men in the prison camp at Ranau. They killed the lot of them.



'IF YOU ESCAPE THE SAME THING
WILL HAPPEN TO YOU'

The death of Gunner Albert Cleary 20 March 1945

The tragedy of Sandakan is the tragedy of hundreds of individual Australian and British POWs. So much violence of one kind or another—starvation rations, withholding of medical supplies, lashings and other forms of physical abuse—were visited upon the Sandakan POWs that it seems inappropriate to single out the story of one man. However, what happened to Gunner Albert Cleary, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment, 2nd AIF, of East Geelong, Victoria, at Ranau in March 1945 was of a special horror. Cleary's story can stand as emblematic of the general brutality and complete lack of compassion experienced by each and every prisoner.

Albert Cleary survived the first march to Ranau. In March, Cleary, along with Gunner Wally Crease, escaped from Ranau. After four days on the run Cleary was recaptured and thrown into what was known as the 'Guard House'. This was simply an empty area at the end of one of the huts used by the POWs. Cleary, who had clearly been beaten-up before his return to the camp, had his arms tied high up behind his back, and he was then made to kneel with a log tied behind his knees. In this position he was systematically kicked and punched all over



Gunner Cleary Memorial, Ranau, Sabah, Malaysia.

his body by two guards. At times his head was held while his throat was punched and the guards also terrorised him by charging at him with fixed bayonets stopping only inches from his face. By jumping on the end of the log tied between Cleary's legs, the guards were able to cause further suffering. To add to his pain, Cleary was made to stand on his feet every half-hour, causing the blood to rush back into his lower legs and inducing great pain. Beatings also occurred with rifle butts, sticks and anything else to hand. This treatment went on for three and a half hours and was witnessed by a number of POWs, including Keith Botterill who would eventually survive to tell of what he had seen of the depths of human cruelty in a jungle hut at Ranau.

Next morning Cleary's sufferings began afresh. Botterill, who had been away from the camp on a work party, returned at midday to find that the guards were still beating Cleary. At that point, Crease, who had also been recaptured, was returned to camp. All that afternoon both men were given the same treatment and, although they continually begged the guards to stop, no mercy was shown to them. This time Botterill heard the bashings continuing throughout the night and they were most severe after the guard was changed. Next morning Crease managed to escape again into the jungle but he was subsequently shot.

Botterill was now sent away from Ranau for four days on a work detail but when he returned he found that Cleary was still alive. He had been tied by the neck to a tree, dressed only in a *fundoshi* (a small piece of cloth given to the POWs to cover their private parts). Cleary was filthy and covered in blood blisters and caked blood. Suffering from dysentery, he had also been left to lie in his own excreta. Days were hot at Ranau but, because of the altitude, nights were cold. Cleary's terrible condition seemed to arouse no compassion in his captors who continued to hit him with fists and rifles. He remained for eleven or twelve days in this condition.

When the guards could see that Cleary was dying, he was thrown into the gutter beside the road. Eventually he was allowed to be taken away by his comrades. They carried him to a stream, washed him, and brought him back to be among them in one of the huts. On 20 March 1945, Gunner Albert Cleary, aged 22, died. Repeatedly, throughout the days of Cleary's torture, one of the guards told the other POWs:

If you escape the same thing will happen to you.

Unfortunately, it ultimately made no difference whether a POW tried to escape or not. One way or another, apart from six Australians, they all died.



'SYDNEY WAS A LONG WAY FROM THERE'

Six who survived

Nelson Short went on the second death march in June 1945. He recalled the camp at Ranau:

To think that a man was going to survive. You saw these men every day when you were getting treated for ulcers. The dead were lying there, naked skeletons. They were all ready to be buried. You thought to yourself, well, how could I possibly get out of a place like this? We're in the middle of Borneo, we're in the jungle. How possibly could we ever survive? Sydney was a long way from there.

Nelson Short did make it back to Sydney, one of six POWs—all Australians—who went through Sandakan, the death marches, and Ranau and lived. Four of them escaped towards the end at Ranau. As well as Short from the 2/18th Battalion, the others were:

- Warrant Officer 'Bill' Sticpewich, Australian Army Service Corps;
- Private Keith Botterill, 2/19th Battalion; and
- Lance Bombardier William Moxham, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment.

Two others escaped earlier from the second death march:

- Gunner Owen Campbell, 2/10th Australian Field Regiment; and
- Bombardier Richard 'Dick' Braithwaite, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment.

Escapes from the second death March June 1945

Gunner Owen Campbell, 2/10th Field Regiment

It was accepted by many of those who left Sandakan on the second march at the end of May 1945 that they would die.

The only chance at life was escape, and Owen Campbell and four others—Private Edward Skinner, 2/10th Field Ambulance; Private Keith Costin, Australian Army Medical Corps; Corporal Ted Emmett, 2/10th Field Ambulance; and Private Sidney Webber, Australian Army Service Corps—opted for life. They decided to break from the column at the first opportunity. Out of sight of guards during an air attack, they slid down a 61-metre bank, hid in some bracken and rubbish, and lay quietly until the column had moved on. For four days they fought their way, sometimes on hands and knees, through the jungle in what they assumed was the general direction of the coast.

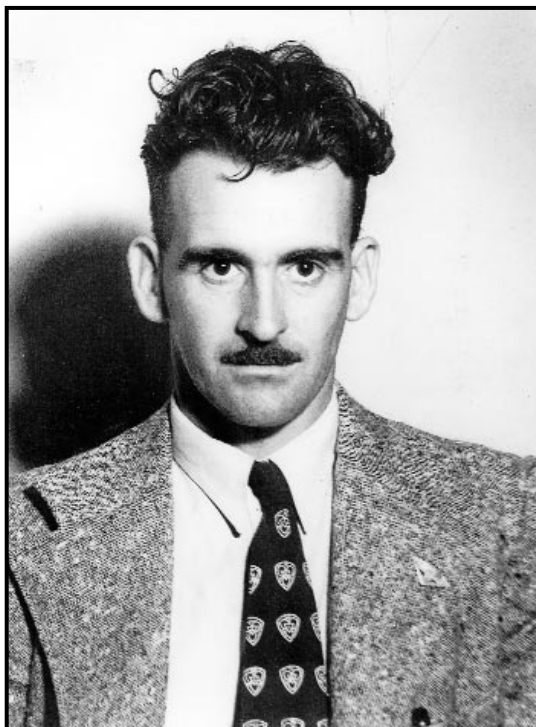
When Ted Skinner got sick, Campbell elected to stay with him while the others pressed on. For three days Campbell, despite suffering himself from beriberi and malaria, tended the sick man. One morning, on his return from food gathering, he found Ted with his throat cut. Skinner, described as a 'brave and gentle man' who always carried his Bible with him, had taken his own life so as not to hold Campbell back any further. Campbell caught up with the others, only to find Costin



*Kulang, the headman of Kampong [village] Muanad, who assisted Gunner Owen Campbell, 2/10th Australian Field Regiment, during Campbell's escape from the second Sandakan-Ranau death march in June 1945.
AWM 042512*

incapacitated with dysentery and malaria. Webber, Emmett and Campbell decided that the only way out of their predicament was to hail a passing native canoe and hope for the best. As they were attempting this, a Japanese soldier appeared from the floor of the canoe and shot Emmett and Webber dead. Three days later Costin also died and Campbell went on alone.

For a number of days Campbell was delirious. He lurched wildly about in the jungle and eventually followed a wild pig, which had tried to attack him, towards a river. Seeing a canoe, he called out 'Abang'—Malay for older brother—and the canoe turned and



Sandakan POW survivor, Owen Campbell, 2/10th Australian Field Regiment. Campbell escaped from the second Sandakan-Ranau death march in June 1945.
AWM 041489

headed for him. The canoeists—Lap and Galunting—took Campbell to Kampong Muanad where Kulang, a local anti-Japanese guerrilla leader, was headman. The people of Muanad hid and cared for the sick POW. Eventually, Kulang took Campbell down river to where an Australian SRD (Service Reconnaissance Department) unit was camped.

From here, Campbell was taken out to sea to be picked up by a seaplane and taken to an aircraft carrier, *USS Pocomoke*, lying off Borneo. Campbell's privations as a POW had seen his weight go from 76 to 44 kilos when examined by the *Pocomoke's* doctor. Moreover, four of those kilos were fluid being in his system as a result of the beriberi from which he was suffering.

Bombardier Richard 'Dick' Braithwaite
2/15th Field Regiment

During the early stages of the second march Dick Braithwaite was so ill with malaria that his mates had to hold him up at roll call. For him it was a question of escape or die. Taking



advantage of a gap in the column, he slipped behind a fallen tree until everyone had gone by. At nightfall he made his way back to a river they had recently crossed, hoping to follow its course to the coast. On his way he encountered a sick

Sydney, Australia, May 1946: Sandakan POW survivor, Richard Braithwaite, 2/10th Australian Field Regiment. Braithwaite escaped from the second Sandakan-Ranau death march in June 1945.
AWM 041488

Japanese guard, whom he killed. Initially, Braithwaite finished up in the middle of a jungle swamp feeling he was a beaten man:

I had nowhere to go because of the gloom, and the surrounding vegetation was all heavy jungle, thorny. I just sat down on a log there and watched those reptiles, insects, crawling past, thinking, well, this is where it happens, mate, you're finished. After about half an hour just sitting, all of a sudden I thought, no, you're not finished. You're not going to die in a place like this. And I became really angry. I just put my head down like a bull and charged that jungle, and, I don't know, it just seemed to part. Maybe someone was looking after me.

Eventually he reached the Lubok River where an elderly local man called Abing helped him. Abing took Braithwaite in his canoe down river to his village, where he was looked after and hidden. The locals wanted to help him as they thought he might be able to get Allied planes to stop strafing their villages and canoes on the hunt for Japanese! Hidden under banana leaves, Braithwaite was paddled for 20 hours



Bariga, from the Ranau district, during an interview conducted by members of the Joint Australian-British Borneo Reward Mission, 1946-1947. Bariga assist in the escape of four POWs from Ranau in July 1945. AWM 042561

down stream to Liberan Island where it was hoped he could be handed over to Allied forces operating in the area. On 15 June 1945—his twenty-eighth birthday—Dick Braithwaite was rescued from north Borneo by an American PT boat and taken to nearby Tawi Tawi Island. A week later, after he had told his story, an Australian colonel came to see him in his hospital bed to tell him they were going in to rescue his friends:

I can remember this so vividly. I just rolled on my side in the bunk, faced the wall, and cried like a baby. And said 'You'll be too late'.

Escapes from Ranau, July 1945

By July 1945 those POWs still alive at Ranau could see that it was only a matter of time before they, too, would die of sickness, malnutrition or following the sort of beatings handed out to Cleary, Crease and Bird. Keith Botterill recalled the moment that he, Nelson Short, William Moxham and Andy Anderson decided to make a run for it:

We picked the moment when we knew that death was a sure thing. There was no option left: die in the camp or die in the jungle.

The four escaped on 7 July and for some days hid in a cave on the slopes of the great mountain—Mount Kinabalu. But they had not gone far from the camp and the ever-present danger of recapture. As they were escaping from an enemy soldier who had found them in a hut, they ran into local man Bariga. They had little option but to trust him with their story. Bariga hid them and although he promised to return the following day with rice and tobacco, the prisoners knew that the Japanese offered rewards for bringing in escapees. Throughout the remainder of July Bariga hid them and brought food. Anderson died of chronic dysentery and they buried him in the jungle.

Despite Bariga's care, the three men remained in dreadful physical shape. Botterill had beriberi, Moxham was virtually



Sandakan POW survivor William 'Dick' Moxham, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment. Moxham escaped from Ranau in July 1945. AWM 041486

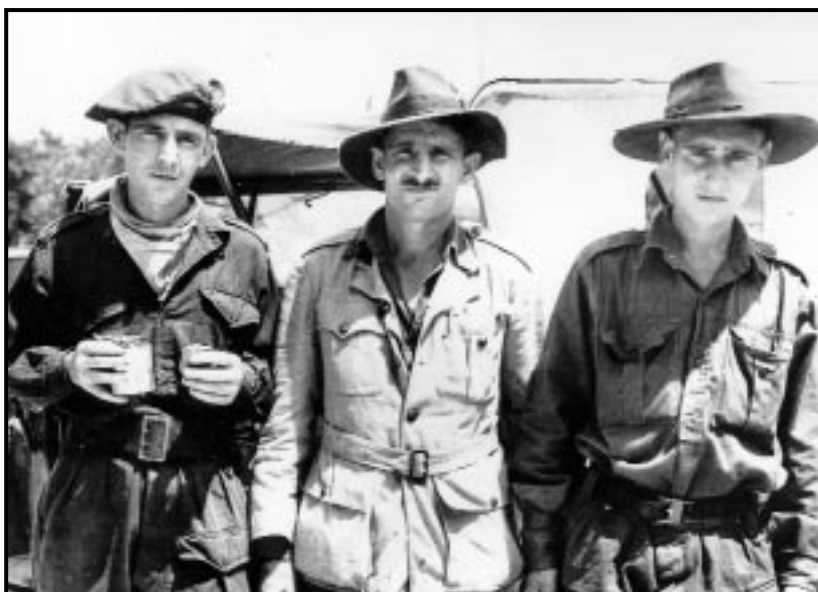
incapable of walking and Short thought that for him it was 'bye-bye, blackbird'. At this point, Bariga learnt that there was an Australian unit operating behind the lines in the area, and after the Japanese surrender on 15 August the three POWs were told to head out of the area and meet up with this unit. The danger was still not over, however, as the local Japanese had yet to acknowledge the surrender and there were still local people who might

turn them in for a reward. Eventually, in late August, they began their last trek, helped by Bariga and others, through the jungle. Still very sick, they could only move slowly and on one afternoon they collapsed for a rest. As they lay there they heard men coming through the jungle towards them. Nelson Short recalled:

We said, 'Hello, what's this? Is this Japs coming to get us? They've taken us to the Japs or what?' But sure enough it was our blokes. We look up and there are these big six footers. Z Force. Boy oh boy. All in greens.

They had these stretchers, and they shot them down. 'Have a cup of tea. Some biscuits.' You could see the state we were in. This is it. Boy oh boy. This is really it. I cried, they all cried. It was wonderful. I'll never forget it. We all sat down and had a cup of tea together.

The final escape from Ranau was that of Sticpewich and Reither. Towards the end of July a friendly Japanese guard warned Sticpewich that all remaining POWs at Ranau would be killed. On the 28th he and Reither managed to slip out of the camp and, moving a short way up the road, they decided to hide in the jungle until the hunt for them died down. They moved on and were eventually taken in by a local Christian, Dihil bin Ambilid. Dihil refused to betray them, and cared for the two POWs despite the presence of Japanese in the area.



*Three Australian POW survivors who escaped from Ranau in July–August 1945: from left to right; Private Nelson Short, 2/18th Battalion; Warrant Officer Hector 'Bill' Sticpewich, Australian Army Service Corps, and Private Keith Botterill, 2/19th Battalion.
AWM OG3553*

Hearing of the presence of Allied soldiers, Dihil took a message to them from Sticpewich. Back came medicines and food but unfortunately Reither had already died from dysentery and malnutrition.

These six Australians—Braithwaite, Campbell, Short, Moxham, Botterill and Sticpewich—were the only survivors of those Allied POWs who had been alive at Sandakan Camp in January 1945. But this small band was enough to bear witness to what had happened to their Australian and British comrades. They were alive to testify in court against their tormentors and to ensure that the world received eyewitness accounts of the crimes and atrocities committed at Sandakan, on the death marches and at Ranau.



REMEMBERING SANDAKAN
1945-1999

Remembering Sandakan 1945–1999

The first information of the fate of individual Sandakan POWs reached Australia between October and December 1945. On 12 December at Grenfell Road, Cowra, New South Wales, the family of Sidney Core received the following telegram from the Minister for the Army:

It is with deep regret that I have to inform you NX48471 Pte Sidney Russell Core previously reported missing believed deceased cause and date not stated is now reported deceased cause not stated on 10 June 1945 whilst a prisoner of war in Borneo.

That phrase—cause not stated—was to bring much anxiety and heartache over the years to the next of kin. How precisely had their son, husband or brother died? Hundreds of similar telegrams reached families throughout Australia and the United Kingdom. Soon the general public witnessed that first sad act of remembrance carried out by the Sandakan families—the insertion in a newspaper of a Roll of Honour ‘In Memoriam’ notice. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of Saturday, 3 November 1945, the Cole family of Parkes, New South Wales, publicly mourned the death of Tom Cole:

COLE—June 7, 1945, died whilst a p.o.w. in Sandakan, Borneo. NX72771, Pte T.W.T. (Tom). ‘A’ Coy., 2/18th Battalion, 8th Division, dearly beloved son of Mr and Mrs Wently Cole, of 4 Metcalfe Street, Parkes, and brother of Colin, Marie, Valerie, and Ethel, and brother in law of Merle. Always remembered.

Many similar notices appeared on that day.

In the immediate post-war years, as the scope of the Sandakan disaster became known, a number of official actions were taken. Japanese officers and camp guards stood trial for war crimes committed against the Sandakan POWs. Much of the

eyewitness evidence given at these trials came from the six Australian survivors. Typical of the charges laid was this against eleven Japanese who had been in charge of the first death march:

Murder—in that they between Sandakan and Ranau, British North Borneo, between 29 January and 28 February murdered numerous unknown prisoners in their charge.

As a result of these trials, eight Japanese, including the Sandakan camp commandant, Captain Hoshijima Susumi, were hanged as war criminals. A further 55 were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Little was reported in Australia of the trials, and the families of the Sandakan dead learnt nothing from newspaper reports about the circumstances of how individual POWs had died. For many next of kin in the



This cemetery contained the graves of most of those POWs whose bodies were recovered from the cemeteries and other burial sites in and around the Sandakan POW Camp. It was formed on the site of the Sandakan military airstrip that had been constructed between 1942 and 1944 by the POWs. As the site was too low lying and prone to flooding, the bodies were eventually removed to Labuan War Cemetery. AWM Robertson Collection 122/1

immediate aftermath of World War II, the fact of a war death in the family was accepted fairly stoically. It was only much later, sometimes in another generation, that the desire to know more arose.

Public honour and remembrance was, however, accorded to those who had perished at Sandakan. During 1946 and early 1947 at Sandakan itself a war cemetery was built. The remains of the POWs from the old camp cemeteries, from along the track to Ranau, and from the Ranau area were interred in the Sandakan War Cemetery, which was dedicated on Anzac Day 1947. Unfortunately, the area where the cemetery stood was low-lying and prone to flooding. The bodies of the Australian and British POWs were removed eventually to Labuan War Cemetery where they still lie in the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Most remain totally unidentified and on the plaque that marks many a POW's grave are these words:

*An Australian Soldier of the 1939–1945 War
Known Unto God*

Or, more sadly, one encounters the following inscription:

*A Soldier of the 1939–1945 War
Known Unto God*

Situated in the Labuan War Cemetery is the Labuan Memorial to the Missing and the names of those Australian POWs whose graves remain unidentified or were never found are recorded there. The names of the unidentified British POW dead from Sandakan are recorded on the Kranji Memorial to the Missing at Singapore.

At the time it was not forgotten, either, that the only real help the Sandakan men had received had come from the local people. Some of the POWs had given hand-written notes to those who had helped them, telling them to hand these notes

over to Allied representatives once the war was over. Mostly the notes told of how the villagers along the track to Ranau and at Ranau had hidden and fed escapees or given food to starving men and asking that they be compensated for these acts of mercy. Eventually these notes led in November 1946 to the Australian and British governments dispatching Major Harry Jackson to investigate these claims. Jackson, with Major R Dyce, representing the British government, travelled extensively in the area between Ranau and Sandakan, interviewing all with claims and rewarding many with money, medical attention and goods.

Also with Jackson were Colin Simpson and Bill MacFarlane from the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Simpson was very moved as he discovered the story of the POWs. Walking the jungle track the prisoners would have taken between Paginatan and Ranau, he wrote a poem in which he attempted to recapture something of their suffering on the death marches. The second verse of Simpson's poem reads:

*From walking in the footsteps of the dead,
Feeling their presence in a rotten boot,
A blaze upon a tree that marks a grave,
A bullet scar still unhealed in the bark,
A scrap of webbing and an earth-stained badge,
A falling bamboo hut, a giant tree
They rested at; this creek,
This climb that runs the sweat into your eyes—
Though you aren't laden, fevered, starved...
You tell yourself you know how they went by.*

[Colin Simpson, from script of *Six from Borneo*, reproduced by kind permission of the ABC.]

Together, Simpson and MacFarlane interviewed and recorded many local people who had helped the POWs. Later they interviewed the six survivors and put together a radio program

about the Sandakan POWs—*Six From Borneo*—which was broadcast throughout Australia on 31 May 1947.

Typical of those rewarded by the Jackson mission was the Widow Burih of Paginatan village. Survivor Hector Sticpewich told Jackson that Burih had been well known to the POWs passing through this village. Jackson took a statement from her that reads in part:

When the war was in progress the Japanese came here with PW. The PW came around the kampong [village] looking for food. I gave them food on different occasions, mainly sweet potatoes, Ubi Kayu [yams] fowls and eggs. As the many parties came through Paginatan I gave them food. They were very thin and a lot had fever. The Japanese did not see me give food, if they had they would have struck me or shot me.

Burih's assistance to the POWs is all the more remarkable when it is realised that her husband in August 1945 had died

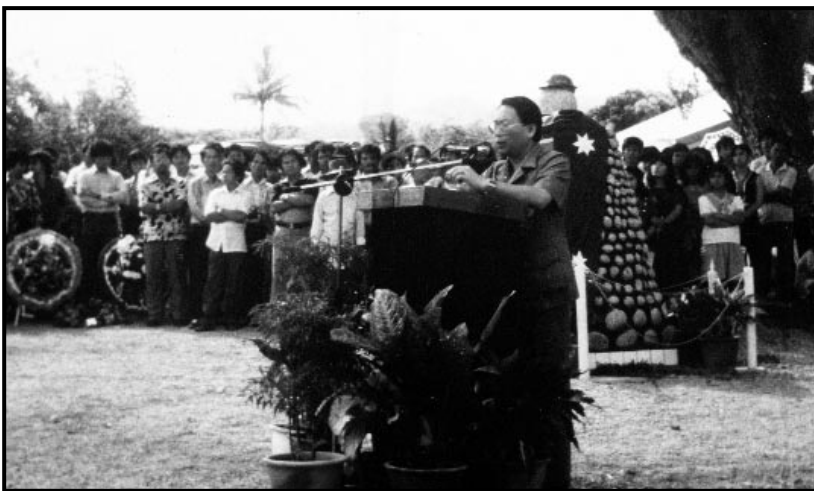


The widow Burih of Paginatan, who gave food to starving Australian and British POWs during the Sandakan-Ranau death marches, having her story recorded by members of the Joint Australian-British Borneo Reward Mission, 1946–1947. AWM 042514

of malnutrition and beriberi from lack of food during the Japanese occupation.

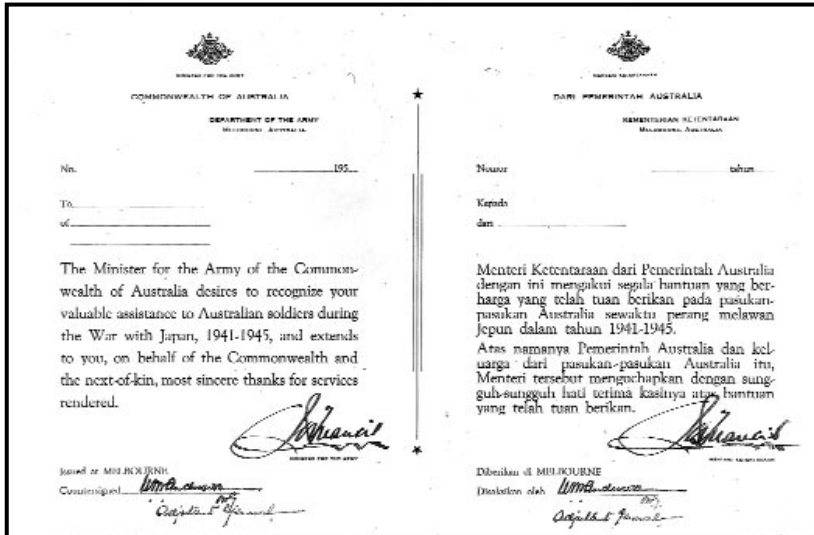
Eventually the war crimes trials came to an end, the recovery of bodies was finished, Labuan War Cemetery built, and local people rewarded for their help to the POWs. After that, for nearly 40 years, by comparison with what had happened to the Australian POWs on the Burma–Thailand railway, little was done to remind the Australian or British public about the terrible fate of the Sandakan prisoners. Partly, this can be put down to the fact that there were only six survivors who would have been unable to do much on their own to make the story known.

One of the first major efforts to commemorate what had happened at Ranau took place in 1985. In July of that year a memorial was dedicated at a Ranau church in the presence of Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, Chief Minister of State of



The Chief Minister of the State of Sabah, Malaysia, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, giving an address at the unveiling of the Gunner Cleary Memorial, Ranau, 5 July 1985. The memorial cairn can be seen behind the Minister. AWM P0495/05/03

Sabah, Malaysia. The memorial was the initiative of the Victorian Branch of the Returned and Services League and, in particular, of its President, Mr Bruce Ruxton. In 1981, Bruce Ruxton had been at Ranau with Sandakan survivor Keith Botterill. Botterill had pointed out to him various locations within the old Ranau POW Camp and especially the place where Gunner Albert Cleary had been tied to a tree, beaten, and left to die. This spot became the site of the Ranau memorial, popularly known as the Gunner Cleary Memorial.



Examples of the commemoration certificates issued to local people in north Borneo by the Australian Government in the early 1950s. AWM EXDOC098

In 1988 there appeared *Sandakan—The Last March*, a book by Don Wall, himself an ex-POW of the Burma–Thailand railway. *The Last March* used the testimony of the six survivors, Japanese guards and local people to reveal the horrific circumstances in which the Sandakan prisoners had died. Wall also produced a list of all those Australians who had died at Sandakan, supple-

mented in 1997 by a list of the British POWs which appeared in his subsequent work—*Kill the Prisoners*.

Also in 1988, historian Hank Nelson and the ABC's Tim Bowden brought Sandakan to an Australia-wide public with a radio documentary series entitled *Prisoners of War*. Their sections on Sandakan were based on the testimony of the six survivors and others who had escaped in earlier years from among those Australians brought to the area. Subsequently Nelson produced a book of the series—*Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon*. By the end of that Australian bicentennial year the events of Sandakan were no longer buried from the Australian public.

Wall and Nelson's work was added to in 1989 with the publication of Athol Moffitt's *Project Kingfisher*. Moffitt, who had been the Australian prosecutor at the trial in 1946 of Sandakan camp commander, Captain Hoshijima Susumi, was able to reveal from his knowledge of the war crimes interrogation documents that the last POWs had been killed at Ranau on 27 August 1945, well after the Japanese surrender. They had undoubtedly died, in Moffitt's view, to stop them being able to testify to the atrocities committed by the guards. Moffitt also revealed, for the first time since the 1940s, that there had been a plan—*Project Kingfisher*—to rescue the prisoners. The reasons why the plan was never put into operation remain contentious. For whatever reasons it was never implemented, it is still sad to think that it might have been possible to rescue some of the POWs and so to have prevented the final catastrophe of Sandakan.

The most recent attempt to come to grips with what happened at Sandakan is Lynette Ramsay Silver's *Sandakan—A Conspiracy of Silence*, published in 1998. Silver draws on an immense amount of hitherto little-used archival material to tell the story of the POWs. Most significantly, using original burial and

exhumation documentation, her work gives hope that some of the unidentified graves at Labuan War Cemetery may be able to be marked with the name of the soldier whose remains lie buried there.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the development of a movement to commemorate the Sandakan dead in the communities from which they had gone to war. On 2 September 1989, in the presence of three of the Sandakan survivors—Owen Campbell, Nelson Short and Keith Botterill—the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, Sydney, unveiled the Sandakan Memorial in the Sandakan Memorial Park, Turramurra. This was a local council initiative and it was clearly deeply appreciated by relatives of deceased Sandakan POWs who attended the ceremony. One lady wrote:

For the first time I felt my boys hadn't been forgotten, dying in that hell before they'd had a chance to become men, that someone cared enough to call them heroes.

In 1991, Ted McLaughlin, an ex-POW of the Japanese and a resident of Boyup Brook, Western Australia, erected a memorial there to three of his friends who had died at Sandakan and to all those who had perished in that place. To Ted's surprise, over 200 people turned up, many from hundreds of kilometres away, for the dedication of the memorial. In September 1993, over 300 came to Boyup Brook for a Sandakan memorial service, a situation which led to the erection and dedication of an even larger memorial on 14 September 1994. This memorial contained the names of all those Western Australian soldiers who had died at Sandakan.

This pressure for local remembrance of Sandakan was reflected in the eastern states by the establishment in 1993 of the Sandakan Memorial Foundation. The Foundation flowed out of a special Sandakan Memorial Service held at the Kirribilli Ex-Services Club on 1 August 1992, organised by the



Sandakan Memorial in the Sandakan Memorial Park, Turrumurra.

The memorial was unveiled on 2 September 1989 in the presence of three Sandakan survivors—Owen Campbell, Keith Botterill and Nelson Short. The memorial was built by Ku-ring-gai Council and dedicated to those who died at Sandakan in 1945.

AWM P1188/04/03

Sandakan Memorial Committee. The importance to the Sandakan families of such occasions was evident:

Whilst it was an extremely sad and moving ceremony, bringing tears, you came away with a feeling that at long last your loved ones had received a form of funeral service. At last, after so many, many years, families and friends had been granted the opportunity to pay their respects.

Between 1993 and 1995 the Sandakan Memorial Foundation was instrumental in the erection of several Sandakan memorials at various locations in the eastern states—Burwood, Sydney; Tamworth, NSW; Wagga Wagga, NSW; Maitland, NSW; Bendigo, Victoria; and New Farm, Queensland. These memorials provided a place of remembrance for the Sandakan families living in

the surrounding districts, as on each memorial were the names of the local men who had died at Sandakan. The ceremonies of dedication at these memorials would all have been moving events but perhaps one of the high points of the Foundation's work would have been the dedication ceremony for the New Farm memorial in September 1995. On that occasion, death

march survivor Owen Campbell read two passages, the first of which, from the Wisdom of Solomon, Chapter 3, contains these words:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no torment will ever touch them.

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.

Of recent years the Sandakan story has also received national recognition. In 1995, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Australian Government conducted a number of official veterans' pilgrimages to former battlefield sites. One of these pilgrimages commemorated the 1945 Australian landings in Borneo as well as the events at Sandakan, on the death marches and at Ranau. Owen Campbell and others associated with Sandakan were able to take part in ceremonies there to dedicate the Sandakan Memorial Park.

In 1995 the Australian War Memorial also produced its own tribute to the memory of Sandakan. Throughout the 1980s, the long-running POW exhibition at the Memorial had made little detailed reference to the Borneo prisoners. By 1995 it seemed appropriate, even overdue, that the Sandakan story be brought to the Memorial's millions of visitors. In a Sandakan section of the new 1945 exhibition, visitors saw the few pitiful relics from the camp in the Memorial's collection. These included false teeth, a rosary-crucifix and a battered drinking mug. Around the walls were placed the small paybook photographs of every Australian who had perished at Sandakan—an attempt to help us visualise the individual tragedy hidden in the grim statistic of over 2400 dead POWs.

Through its *Their Service—Our Heritage* program, in March 1999 the Australian Government and people further honoured those

lost at Sandakan. During a special mission, the Sandakan Memorial Park was re-dedicated. Originally developed by the Returned & Services League of Australia on what is now a Sabah State Forestry Department reserve, the Memorial Park has been substantially upgraded by the Office of Australian War Graves to provide an interpretative facility and commemorative site. Here, visitors can follow on text panels in a commemorative pavilion the story of the Sandakan camp and the death marches. Nearby, a polished stone memorial—the Sandakan Memorial—stands in the centre of a ceremonial space. On it is the simple inscription:

*IN REMEMBRANCE OF ALL THOSE
WHO SUFFERED AND DIED HERE,
ON THE DEATH MARCHES
AND AT RANAU*



Owen Campbell, one of the six survivors of the Sandakan death marches, points out the site of the old boiler house at the Sandakan POW Camp, 1985. AWM P0495/05/02

A walk around the park pathway reveals pieces of old heavy machinery used here between 1942 and 1945—a trenching machine from the airfield, part of the generator used to supply power to the camp and a boiler. Owen Campbell senses there are presences in this place that no memorial, relic or exhibition can reveal. In 1995, fifty years after the Sandakan death marches, Campbell returned to the camp site and to that track where so many of his mates perished. He described the emotions he felt that day:

I did have feelings at Sandakan when I walked up to where the old camp was. You never forget because when you are in the services you create a bond with your fellow man that you don't create in civilian life. You discuss things with him that you won't discuss with anybody else and you create that great bond of friendship and no matter what happens it will endure for ever and you will never forget it—I can't anyway. There are still some buried there somewhere I'm sure because I had that feeling when I was there... that there were spirits waiting to be released from where they were. You get those feelings after a while.

How should we now remember what happened to the Australian and British POWs at Sandakan in 1945? Those who suffered captivity at the hands of the Japanese in World War II carry that memory in their bones. Understandably, many ex-POWs found it—still find it—hard to forgive those who inflicted so much upon them. Those who were not there probably can never fully comprehend the depths of pain and, at times, despair to which the Sandakan POWs were forced to descend by their enemies. Then there is the grief of their families who until recent years knew little of what had happened to their loved ones beyond the fact that they had disappeared in the jungles of Borneo. Owen Campbell was well aware of their agony:

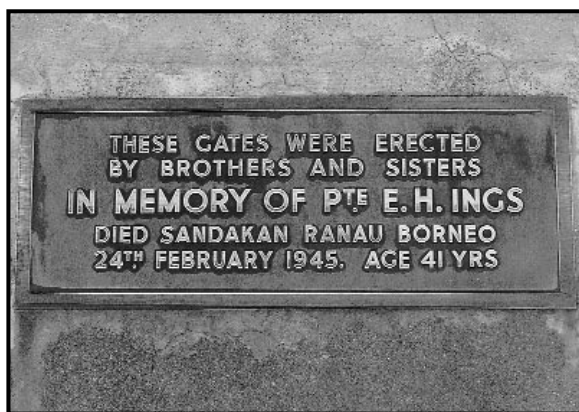
War is painful not only for the soldiers fighting on the front line but for the ones who are left behind. Consider the worry they must go through

and the anxiety they must suffer. You take our wives when they heard we were prisoners of war, what they must have gone through, it's unbelievable. They suffered just as much in their own way as we suffered in our way...the wives and mothers are wondering are we ever going to meet again.

The brothers and sisters of Ted Ings never saw their brother again. They came together as a family and built the memorial gateway at Binalong's Anglican Church to make sure that future generations would know that Ted had died on 24 February 1945 at a place called Sandakan–Ranau. Perhaps what the prisoners of Sandakan deserve of the future is that each generation asks itself the question—what happened at Sandakan? In asking how we should remember Sandakan, we could heed Owen Campbell, who said at the camp site in 1995:

The Sandakan story has got to be brought out into the light. That's what I reckon. Bring it to their [young people's] notice and then they'll start to talk and that will bring it further into the minds of the

younger generation that is coming up. That's the only way I can do it. When you realise it's got to be told then you don't mind the personal anguish, as long as it does some good somewhere along the line and opens people's eyes.



Plaque on the memorial gateway to the Anglican Church of St Thomas, Binalong, New South Wales, erected to Private Ted Ings, 2/19th Battalion, who died on 24 February 1945 at Sandakan POW Camp.

The Australian servicemen who died at Sandakan were a long way from home.

The British POWs who died there were a lot further from their kith and kin. Even now, the fate of that particular group of prisoners is little known in the United Kingdom, except by their families. In 1945, Christopher Elliot visited Borneo in search of information about his missing brother, Corporal Donald Elliot, Royal Air Force, of Beccles, Suffolk, England. Donald, who was on the first death march and whose will was found near Ranau, died on 17 March 1945 in the vicinity of Paginatan. In 1996, Christopher Elliot returned to Sandakan and Ranau with the next generation—his daughter and Donald's niece, Anne Elliot. Anne wrote the following tribute to her uncle's memory. It may be allowed to speak for all the



Captain R A Houghton, 23 War Graves Unit, reading an inscription on a monument erected by Australian and British POWs at the Sandakan No.1 Cemetery. The inscription read: 'To the memory of British and Australian fallen in Malaya'. AWM 120490

Sandakan POWs—Australian and British—and how they might like to be remembered by those who loved them and missed them down the years:

To the spirit of Donald Elliot

*You don't know me.
But I know you
Through my father, he has not forgotten you
And never will.
His life has been greatly affected
By your death.
He always looked up to you, you were his hero.
I will never forget.
Hope that you are at peace here.
And that you didn't suffer too much pain.
And that you can forgive your enemies
For what they did to you.
I thought of you at the VJ Day March
In Pall Mall, London.
I stood and watched the veterans walk
By—the lucky ones.
I was quite choked but proud.
You did it for me and the likes of me.
Thank you.
I think things would have been
Different if you were still around.
But life isn't always fair, is it?*



MATERIAL CONSULTED IN THE
PREPARATION OF THIS PUBLICATION

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Special thanks for their help in the compilation of this booklet are due to the Ings family of Binalong, NSW; Mr Hugh Waring, Canberra; Mrs Enid Maskey, Sandakan Memorial Foundation; Mr Bruce Ruxton, President of the Victorian Branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia; officers of the Office of Australian War Graves; and the staff of the Australian War Memorial.

Chapter head images

Page 1: Anglican Church of St Thomas, Binalong, New South Wales. The gateway into the church grounds is a memorial, raised by the brothers and sisters of Private Ted Ings, 2/19th Battalion, who died at Sandakan POW Camp on 24 February 1945.

Page 7: Improvised cooking utensils and drinking mug found by No 10 Field History Team, Sandakan POW Camp, 3 May 1953. AWM 069806

Page 15: Sandakan, British North Borneo, 1947. AWM 042573

Page 25: Memorial at No 1 Cemetery, Sandakan POW Camp, October 1945. AWM 120490

Page 35: No. 1 Cemetery, Sandakan POW Camp. AWM 120491

Page 39: The 'cage' at Sandakan POW Camp, from a drawing by Corporal Frederick Woodley (detail of inside cover illustration).

Page 45: Rosary beads found at Sandakan POW Camp. AWM Military Heraldry Collection

Page 51: Gunner Albert Cleary, 2/15th Australian Field Regiment, 2nd AIF. Photograph: Reg Young

Page 57: New recruits leaving Sydney, New South Wales. A view of Sydney Harbour Bridge from the troopship. AWM p0527/05/02

Page 69: Artists impression, Sandakan Memorial, Sandakan Memorial Park, Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia.

Page 87: Gunner D S Folkes examining a wallet belonging to a deceased POW which he found in the mud at Sandakan POW Camp, October 1945. AWM 120438