

# Sandakan Families Newsletter

Patron Sandakan POW Families: The Hon. Tom Uren AO

National Sandakan POW Families Coordinator, Eric McDonald, National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association of Australia, mobile 0428 494644

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## Editor's Note

Hello again to you all. The year is already whizzing past and it is time again to let you know about the preparations for the Sandakan Commemorative Service on **27 May**.

In this edition we will let you know about some of the details for the Sandakan Commemorative service as well as the annual dinner and lecture, as well as other articles which I hope will be of interest to you.

This newsletter, we introduce two new segments - '**Memorable Quotes**' and '**Keeping Connected**'. 'Memorable Quotes' is a segment where you can send me any quotes relating to Sandakan, from survivors or from family members or other sources that you would like published. In 'Keeping Connected', you can send me any information that you think other Sandakan POW Families and friends would like to know about. For example, details of another Sandakan newsletter, organisation or event.

We like hearing your feedback, or to hear from you with any suggestions, so please drop us a line to let us know what you think.

I look forward to seeing you once more at this year's service and dinner on 27 May.

## National Sandakan Wreath-Laying Service Australian War Memorial, Canberra Friday May 27 2011

The National Sandakan Wreath-Laying Service will be held at **11am on Friday 27 May 2011** at the Sandakan Memorial in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial.

The ceremony will commemorate the courage and sacrifice of the Australian soldiers during the Second World War who lost their lives in Sandakan POW camp in North Borneo and in the death marches to Ranau, and will remember the six Australians who managed to escape.

The Wreath-Laying Service will be attended by many Sandakan families, veterans who have survived Sandakan, diplomatic representatives and

ADF representatives. The wonderful Canberra Men's Choir will provide their voices to the service again this year, and we are also lucky to have a piper from the Canberra City Pipes and Drums.

A free tour of the War Memorial will be offered after these events for those who are interested.

Further details of the service will follow in the next newsletter.

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## **Sandakan POW Families annual dinner and oration: Officer's Mess Duntroon Military Academy 27 May 2011**

This year, we are fortunate to be holding our annual Sandakan POW Families dinner in the Officers Mess at Duntroon on the evening of Friday 27 May. Prior to dinner we will also have our third Canberra Sandakan Oration, *'Billy Young and the dead end kids'*, with guest speaker author Anthony (*please see next page for a short bio of Anthony Hill*).

This year Duntroon is celebrating its centenary – *100 years of Duntroon*. Duntroon Military Academy is responsible for training cadets for service as officers in the Australian Army and Duntroon graduates have led Australian soldiers in every major military campaign in which Australia has been engaged. Recognised as one of the world's leading military colleges, it proudly upholds a famous tradition of training and developing some of the country's most accomplished leaders.

**Further details of the dinner, including times and costs, will follow in the next newsletter.** (If you are coming to Canberra and staying overnight, can we suggest you book accommodation early, as this week is a Parliamentary Sitting Week and the hotels get very busy).



The Changi Chapel, Duntroon Military College: The chapel was originally constructed by prisoners of war in Changi Camp, Singapore Island, in 1944. After the war, it was returned to Australia, erected in the grounds of the Royal Military College and dedicated as a national memorial to all Australian prisoners of war.

## A short Bio.....author Anthony Hill



Anthony Hill is an award winning Australian author. His best-selling books include *Soldier Boy*, *Young Digger*, *Animal Heroes*, *The Burnt Stick*, *Captain Cook's Apprentice*, *Lucy's Cat and the Rainbow Birds*, *Harriet*, *Forbidden*, *River Boy* and *The Shadow Dog*.

Anthony spent five years as a political journalist at Parliament House, and worked as a television journalist, and press officer with the Australian Public Service, the Australian National University and the National Museum.

In 1989 he was appointed speech-writer to the Governor-General Bill Hayden and his successor Sir William Deane. Working for the Governor-General inspired his best-selling novel *Soldier Boy*, about 14-year-old Jim Martin, the youngest known Anzac. It led directly two more military books – *Young Digger* and *Animal Heroes*. For more info go to his website at: <http://www.anthonhillbooks.com/home.html>

Anthony Hill can be heard at the third annual Sandakan oration (prior to the dinner) on Friday 27 May at the Officers Mess, Duntroon, Canberra, where he will be giving a speech titled *'Billy Young and the dead end kids'*.

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### Report on Victorian Sandakan Memorial Service

Sandakan Memorial, Strathdale Park, Bendigo, 13 March 2011.

As usual our service was well organised by Bendigo RSL with support from The Greater Bendigo Council, Bendigo City Band, Navy Cadets, Scouts, RSL Ladies Aux. and others with Alan Holmes compeering the proceedings.

Floral Tributes were laid by many organisations including local Members of Parliament, and also families and friends of the POW'S. It has become a tradition for many to lay a single rose in place of a large floral tribute and donate instead to the Sandakan Scholarship Fund. Letters of thanks from some of the Scholarship girls were read during the service.

Jane Grant was the guest speaker and covered her late father Captain David Dooley's involvement as Prosecuting Officer for the re-trial, relating to the first Death March. This trial took place in Rabaul in May 1946. Jane was thanked for her contribution to the day by Cr. Rod Fyffe, Mayor, City of Greater Bendigo.

A barbeque lunch followed where many took the opportunity to catch up with other Sandakan relatives and friends. *(Report from Frances Newbound)*

## Stories from Sandakan – 2/18th Bn. By Kevin Smith

The book *Stories from Sandakan - 2/18th Bn*, written by Dr Kevin Smith OAM, was launched by Major General Raymond Sharp AO, RFD, ED, Ret'd, former Commander of the 2nd Infantry Division in February 2011.

This book is an account of the 2/18th's experiences during training and during action in Malaya and on Singapore Island. It then focuses on 174 men of the battalion who were sent as prisoners of war from Changi to Sandakan in Borneo, and of whom only seventeen came home. This is Dr Smith's third book about Australian POWs in Borneo. A foreword is written by Mr Merv Blyth, President of the 2/18th Battalion Association. (Source RSL NSW Press Release)

**If you would like to purchase the book:** This new book can be obtained direct from the self-publishing author at a cost of \$45, which includes postage. Contact the author, Kevin Smith P.O. Box 440, Armidale NSW 2350. Two copies can be obtained for \$80.



### Keeping Connected

#### **Notice of Bendigo gathering: 14 August 2011**

*Sandakan Relatives and friends have a Gathering planned at Bendigo RSL Club in Bendigo on Sunday August 14th from 11am. Lunch will be available. This will be a very informal day where we display photos, share stories and publicise any other events which may interest attendees. Further info from Frances Newbound on phone 0358299243 or email [fnewbound@bigpond.com](mailto:fnewbound@bigpond.com) or Lil Constable on phone 0354439005 or email [oldmip@tadaust.org.au](mailto:oldmip@tadaust.org.au))*

**The Sandakan POW's Family & Friends Queensland Inc.** sent out its first newsletter in February 2011. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please email [Jeff.hufer@optusnet.com.au](mailto:Jeff.hufer@optusnet.com.au)

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## Borneo Burlesque: A Portal to the Past

(Details below have been taken directly from the Office of Australian War Graves flyer)

Borneo Burlesque was published as a souvenir of happy moments spent in the midst of barbaric and soul-destroying conditions. It tells of the entertainments produced by and for prisoners of war at Sandakan and Kuching POW camps during the Second World War.

A Portal to the Past, a publication of the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG), tries to capture the essence of the original. It reproduces elements of Borneo Burlesque, with a new foreword and an introduction by Professor Richard Braithwaite, son of Dick Braithwaite, one of the six survivors of Sandakan.

**To request a copy of Borneo Burlesque: A Portal to the Past, please contact the OAWG on:**

**Phone: +61 2 6289 6009**

**E-mail: [wargraves@dva.gov.au](mailto:wargraves@dva.gov.au)**

**or write to**

**Office of Australian War Graves**

**GPO Box 9998, CANBERRA ACT 2601**

A limited number have been printed and priority will be given to relatives of POWs and OAWG will be taking names for these copies which will be posted after Anzac Day.

*(This publication will be reviewed by the National Sandakan POW Families Coordinator, Eric McDonald, in the next newsletter).*

## Sandakan Memorial Park – Online audio guide available

The Office of Australian War Graves and Narrowcasters Pty Ltd have provided an audio guide for the Sandakan Memorial Park.

Developed in consultation with ex-prisoners of war, Sandakan family members and historians, it incorporates first-hand accounts of the camp. The guide takes visitors on a tour of the Park, bringing the story of Sandakan to life.

The audio guide is expected to be available as a podcast online at the Departmental website prior to Anzac Day, 25 April 2011. A transcript of the audio, maps of the Park and audio files are provided for download. This online guide follows the very successful guide for the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. **Both are available at:**

<http://www.dva.gov.au/audioguides.htm>

## Breaking News.....

### Return to Borneo Tour 2011

The 2011 Borneo Tour will cost approximately \$3,900 per person twin share. If you are interested, please contact Dally Sullivan at [rona@bushmansbakery.com.au](mailto:rona@bushmansbakery.com.au)

### Recordings of Sandakan Conversations available

If you would like a copy of the recordings of the Sandakan Conversations session, one of last year's major Sandakan Commemoration activities, please contact Eric McDonald at [blades@ta.netspeed.com.au](mailto:blades@ta.netspeed.com.au).

#### Please note:

Eric moved house recently and in the process unfortunately lost the names of some of the people who had requested the recording at the end of last year. Please e-mail him again for priority in getting a copy.

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## Memorable Quotes.....

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*This is something I never will be able to forget*

*I cannot get to sleep now - I cannot sleep until 3 or more in the morning. It's all buried somewhere inside me.*

*- Australian soldier, Australian War Memorial, Sandakan.*

This week, our featured quote (above) and moving poem (see next page) was sent in by one of our readers, Dr Hazel Hall, who visited the Sandakan Memorial in Borneo last year with her family, and who writes:

*"..... We were at the Sandakan reunion last year and revisited the Australian War Memorial in December, this time with our grandchildren. I'm enclosing a short poem that came from that visit, which might interest the Sandakan POW families".*

(This poem follows over the page. Thank you, Hazel.)

### **SANDAKAN MEMORIAL**

We are the heart of what was Sandakan.  
where pert birds burst the silence with their song  
and captivated couples walk along  
neat pathways where dark marches once began.

There are ornamental plants here now:  
red rows of uniforms stand on parade  
by little resting places giving shade  
near rusty relics where the jungle towered  
as blood and sweat were washed away. The thud  
of boots transformed the swamp into this pond  
of mute pink budding tongues protruding from  
green lily-faces, rising through the mud.

In the pavilion you will see us gaze  
framed neatly in the past, safe in the mist  
of the unspeakable, that still persists  
exploding peace and purpose as it preys,  
while nightly, the mosquitoes' piercing whines  
are far off spitfires from the other times.

**H. Hall**

**29.12.2010.**



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## **How to get in touch with us!**

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If you would like to promote Sandakan activities in your city or town in the newsletter, please contact the editor, Karin, or Eric McDonald.

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcomed. Please email the Editor, Karin O'Shannessy, at [outdaredesign@grapevine.com.au](mailto:outdaredesign@grapevine.com.au), or post to:

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