

# SURVIVORS AND MURDERS AT POW CAMP SANDAKAN



(Source of some information from Lynette Silver)

## GRIM STORY OF DEATH MARCH

# SIX AUSTRALIANS OF 1800 SURVIVE BORNEO HORROR

## RAAF Rescues Last Four of Sandakan Tragedy

From GRAHAM JENKINS

LABUAN, BORNEO

**A BRAVE STRUGGLE TO RESCUE THE LAST KNOWN SURVIVORS OF THE SANDAKAN DEATH MARCH AND THE ATROCITIES WHICH PRECEDED IT, ENDED SUCCESSFULLY YESTERDAY, WHEN FOUR 8TH DIVISION POW'S WERE FLOWN FROM THE HINTERLAND OF NW BORNEO TO SAFETY IN FOUR TINY RAAF AUSTER OBSERVATION PLANES.**

The pilots first had to overpower and disarm some Japanese who were not aware of the end of the war.

The rescued men make a total of six survivors of 2,500 POW's taken by the Japanese to Sandakan, including 1,800 Australians.

The four men brought in yesterday were WO1 William Stricpewich, Newcastle, former international speedway rider; Bdr L. D. Moxham, Parramatta (NSW); Pte Nelson Short, Woollahra (NSW); and Pte

Woollahra (NSW); and Pte Keith Botterill, Katoomba (NSW). All are well on the way toward complete recovery from their grim experience.

The four men were in Australian hands in the Ranau dis-

lian hands in the Ranau district on August 12, but their weak condition prevented their movement through the jungle. A 170-yard airstrip was carved from the jungle to enable the rescue by Austers late in August, but, despite repeated effort, the Austers failed to land. When the Japanese capitulated the men marched to a small bomb-cratered airstrip near Ranau, from which the rescue was made yesterday in thrilling circumstances.

The Austers were led in by Group-Captain J. R. Fleming, and all landed safely. After taking swords and rifles from the Japanese and convincing them forcibly of the Japanese surrender, pilots of the five Austers took off with the four POW's and Major Foster, medical officer, who parachuted into the jungle to render medical aid when the POW's were first discovered.

### ONE PLANE CRASHES

One Auster crashed, so Flight-Lieut Peter Muggleton, Brighton (SA), who carried Major Foster, turned back and picked up the POW, who suffered superficial injuries. Major Foster had to be left in the jungle.

From August, 1942, until May, 1944, Australian and British POW's at Sandakan died from floggings, stonings, and other unspeakable acts at an ever-increasing rate, WO Stricpewich said yesterday. In April, 1944, deaths for the month had reached 242, and only 450 Australians and sundry British could be raised up at bayonet

point from their beds in Sandakan compound for the evacuation death march to Ranau. The march began at dusk on May 29. They set out in parties of 50, one of which he commanded.

### SIX DEATHS A DAY

After two days' struggle on the difficult trail he took count of his men and found that six already had been lost. After that they died at the rate of six each day in his party. Only 142 Australians reached Ranau on June 26. Each morning on the march those too weak to continue were told to remain behind.

"They knew then it was all up, and would say, 'So long, mate,'" said WO Stricpewich. When the others had got under way the Japanese would machinegun their victims.

WO Stricpewich escaped with a mate through the help of a friendly Formosan guard, and he evaded his pursuers by hiding in hedges. With the aid of Dyads and Dusugs, chiefs from whom he learnt that Labuan had been occupied, he contacted the Australians on August 9, but he was without his comrade who died of exposure in the hands of friendly Dyads. He was able to tell the Australians of another party of 8th Division men who escaped on July 7, and within three days Moxham, Short, and Botterill were discovered.

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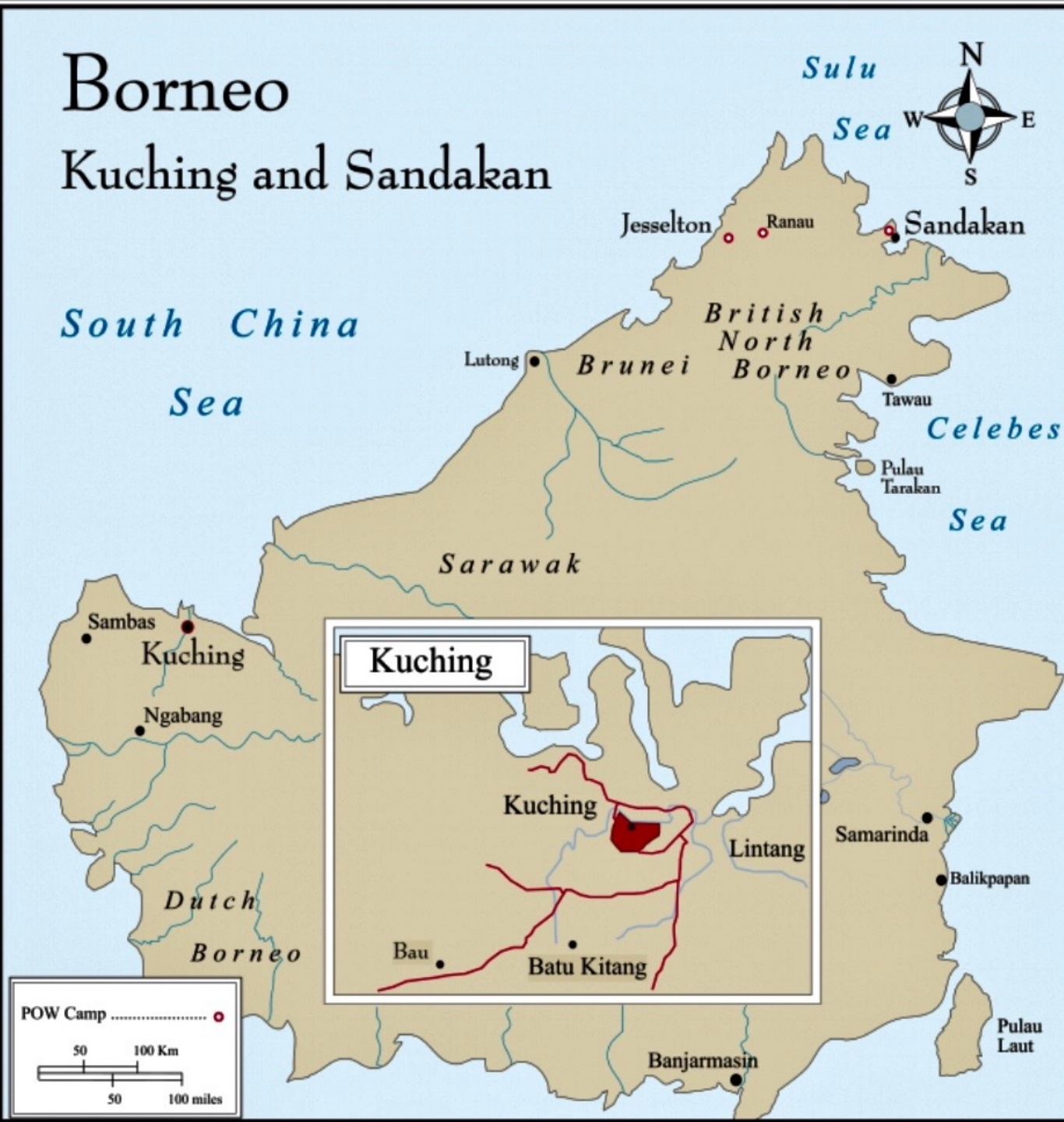
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# Borneo

## Kuching and Sandakan



# Murder of P.O.W. Before Surrender

SINGAPORE, Thursday (AAP).—At Paritsulong just before the surrender of Singapore, the Japanese murdered 110 Australians and between 30 and 40 Indians. The bloodbath lasted 24 hours, and there were only three survivors, one of whom died after 24 hours.

This story, one of the most repulsive of all Japanese atrocities, was revealed in an account released by British Headquarters of cruelties inflicted on Australian and British prisoners of war in the Singapore war theatre.

The Japanese shot, clubbed and bayoneted the men into unconsciousness. They tied the survivors, drenched them with petrol, set fire to them and burned them to death.

The two living are Lieutenant B.

C. Hackney, from Bathurst, N.S.W., and Sergeant G. A. Croft. Both are safe.

Appalling conditions in Sumatra prisoner of war camps are reported by a South African who parachuted into the area on September 2.

He said deaths from malnutrition within three months totalled 240 out of 1000 in one camp, while natives were dying in thousands from starvation.

# BEHEADED P.O.W. WITH ONE STROKE

LOS NEGROS, October 23.—An allegation that he had beheaded an Australian prisoner of war with one stroke of his sword after a drunken Japanese officer had failed to behead another prisoner with one stroke was denied by Shinjiro Senno to-day.

A former warrant officer in the Imperial Japanese Navy, Senno was giving evidence at the war crimes trial in which he and eight other Japanese are charged with having murdered Australian and Allied prisoners of war at the airport near Koepang, Dutch Timor, in February, 1942.

Senno is alleged by a Japanese eye-witness to have joked when an officer had failed to kill outright an Australian prisoner, who fell into a grave and had to be bayoneted to death.

The eye-witness, Miyoshi Moriyama, said in a statement that Senno boasted that he could behead a prisoner with one stroke and then did so.

# Richard Murray

By May 1945 only about thirty prisoners remained alive at Ranau. Two men, **Privates Richard Murray and Keith Botterill**, stole rice from the Japanese to build up food stocks for an escape. When the theft was discovered, Murray stepped forward to take responsibility, knowing that he would be killed. He was bayoneted and his body thrown into a bomb crater at Ranau on 20 May 1945. He is buried in Labuan war cemetery. Murray sacrificed his life to save his mate, Keith Botterill, who became one of the six survivors of the Sandakan death march.



**MURRAY'S  
ENLISTMENT  
PHOTO**

**Studio portrait of NX33361 Private Richard Murray, 22nd Brigade Headquarters. He was one of over 2000 Allied prisoners of war (POW) held in the Sandakan POW camp in north Borneo, having been transferred there from Singapore as a part of B Force. The 1494 POWs that made up B Force, were transported from Changi on 7 July 1942 on board the tramp ship Ubi Maru, arriving in Sandakan Harbour on 18 July 1942. In May 1945 Private Murray was one of only 30 POWs still alive at Ranau.**





**He and Pte (Private) Keith Botterill stole rice from the Japanese to build up food stocks as they intended to escape. When the theft was discovered Pte Murray stepped forward to take responsibility, knowing he would be killed. He was bayoneted and his body thrown into a bomb crater at Ranau on 20 May 1945. Pte Murray sacrificed his life to save his friend. Pte Botterill did escape, he was one of only six survivors of the Sandakan death marches. Pte Murray was the son of Frank and Catherine Murray and the husband of Margaret Murray, of Hurstville, NSW. His body was recovered from Ranau and is now buried in the Labuan Cemetery Section 21, Row E, Plot 7. (Personal information from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database.)**



**VX52128 Gunner (Gnr) **Albert Neil Cleary**, 2/15th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, was one of over 2000 Allied prisoners of war (POW) held in the Sandakan POW camp in north Borneo, having been transferred there from Singapore as a part of B Force. The 1494 POW's that made up B Force, were transported from Changi on 7 July 1942 on board the tramp ship Ubi Maru, arriving in Sandakan Harbour on 18 July 1942. By March 1945 the first of the POWs forced to march through the jungle had reached Ranau. Gnr Cleary, aged 22, escaped from Ranau with NX38584 **Gnr Wally Crease** on 1 March 1945.**

# VX52128 Gunner (Gnr) Albert Neil Cleary



**CLEARY'S ENLISTMENT  
PHOTO**



**They were recaptured by some natives who handed them over to the Japanese for a reward. Both were tortured and beaten, and **Gnr Crease** was shot by Japanese guards on 14 March 1945 after he stumbled into a gully and tried to escape again. The Japanese guards made an example of Gnr Cleary; he was beaten and tied to a log. For eleven days guards beat him, spat and urinated on him.**

**Finally when close to death he was released into the care of the other POWs who took him to a creek, washed him and placed him in a hut, where he died. A memorial now stands on the spot where **Gnr Cleary** died. He was the son of James Ross Cleary and Iris Teck Cleary, of East Geelong, Vic. He has no known grave; he is commemorated on the Labuan Memorial Panel 4.**

Paybook photograph, taken on enlistment, of **NX38584 Gunner (Gnr) Wally Crease**, 2/15th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery. He was one of over 2000 Allied prisoners of war (POW) held in the Sandakan POW camp in north Borneo, having been transferred there from Singapore as a part of B Force. The 1494 POWs that made up B Force, were transported from Changi on 7 July 1942 on board the tramp ship Ubi Maru, arriving in Sandakan Harbour on 18 July 1942. Gnr Crease, aged 24, escaped from the camp with **Gnr Albert Cleary** on 1 March 1945 and were recaptured by some natives who handed them over to the Japanese for a reward. Both were tortured and beaten, and Gnr Crease was shot by the Japanese guards on 14 March 1945 after he stumbled into a gully and tried to escape again. **Gnr Cleary** was tied up and beaten again for many days before he was finally released and died on 20 March 1945.



**Why Wally used two different names to enlist is explained**  
**by the Military Editor of the Australian War Memorial:**

**Walter Gardner** was born on 17 September 1919 in Cairns, Queensland, to Cyril Charles Tower Gardner and Winifred Ivy Wells Gardner. His father was a cane farmer, and he had three brothers: Allan Cyril, Leslie William, and Charles. Known as “Wally”, Gardner was working as a labourer when he enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force on 20 January 1941. Several months later he was discharged as medically unfit, with lumbar pain, so he travelled to Sydney, where he enlisted again, this time under the name “**Wally Crease**”, on 12 July. He gave his birthplace as “Victoria”, and declined to give the names of family or friends to act as next of kin.



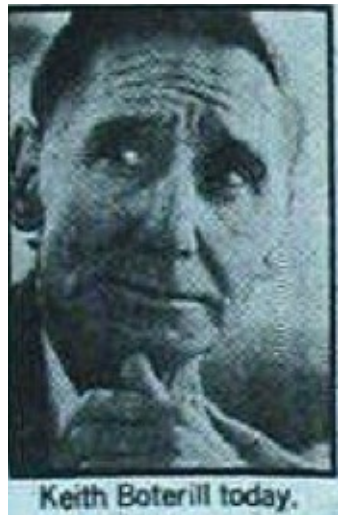


# KEITH BOTTERILL

**BORN: MARCH 1, 1922, NYNGAN,  
NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA**

**SERVICE NUMBER: NX 42191**

**ONE OF THE SIX POWs WHO ESCAPED.**



**SYDNEY, NSW. 1947-05. PORTRAIT OF GUNNER OWEN CAMPBELL OF TOOWONG, BRISBANE, QLD. GUNNER CAMPBELL SERVED WITH THE 2/10TH AUSTRALIAN FIELD REGIMENT AND WAS TAKEN PRISONER OF WAR IN MALAYA SUBSEQUENTLY BEING IMPRISONED AT SANDAKAN, NORTH BORNEO. HE WAS ONE OF ONLY SIX SURVIVORS OF 1100 PRISONERS FORCED TO UNDERTAKE THE INFAMOUS DEATH MARCHES FROM SANDAKAN TO RANAU WHICH BEGAN ON 1945-01-28. THE TOTAL DISTANCE WAS 155 MILES BUT GUNNER CAMPBELL AND FOUR OTHER PRISONERS ESCAPED JUST BEYOND MAUNAD CROSSING. THE OTHER FOUR ESCAPEES EITHER DIED OF ILLNESS OR WERE KILLED BY THE JAPANESE.**



**In 1945, the Japanese high command ordered that no prisoners survive the war. With Allied forces nearing Sandakan, on Borneo island, the Japanese ordered prisoners to march 265 kilometres to Ranau. Of 2,434 Australian and British prisoners in Sandakan, only six survived – 1,787 Australians and 641 British perished in the camp, along the track or at Ranau. The last were executed on August 27, 12 days after World War II ended.**



‘We’d fight dogs for scraps – if you’ve tried to pull a bone out of a starving dog’s mouth you’ll know what it was like’

NEXT month, at the small town of Ranau in Sabah, formerly North Borneo, a group of about 40 Australians will attend a memorial ceremony. A monument will be unveiled, a few quiet tears will be shed.

The occasion will mark the 40th anniversary of the Sandakan-Ranau death march, one of the most appalling yet least publicised episodes of the war in the Pacific.

Accounts of the march vary. So do accounts of the events leading up to the march. What is certain is that of about 2500 prisoners of war – 2000 Australians and 500 British – only six survived to tell the tale.

One of them, Keith Botterill, will be at Ranau for the anniversary. There he will be reunited with a local man named Bariga, now aged 83, who risked his own life to save Botterill's all those years ago.

The six survivors of the march were all Australians. Two of them, Bill Sticpewich and Bill Moxham, have since died. The four who are left are Keith Botterill and Nelson Short, both of whom live in Sydney, Dick Braithwaite, of Brisbane, and Owen Campbell, of Beachmere in Queensland.

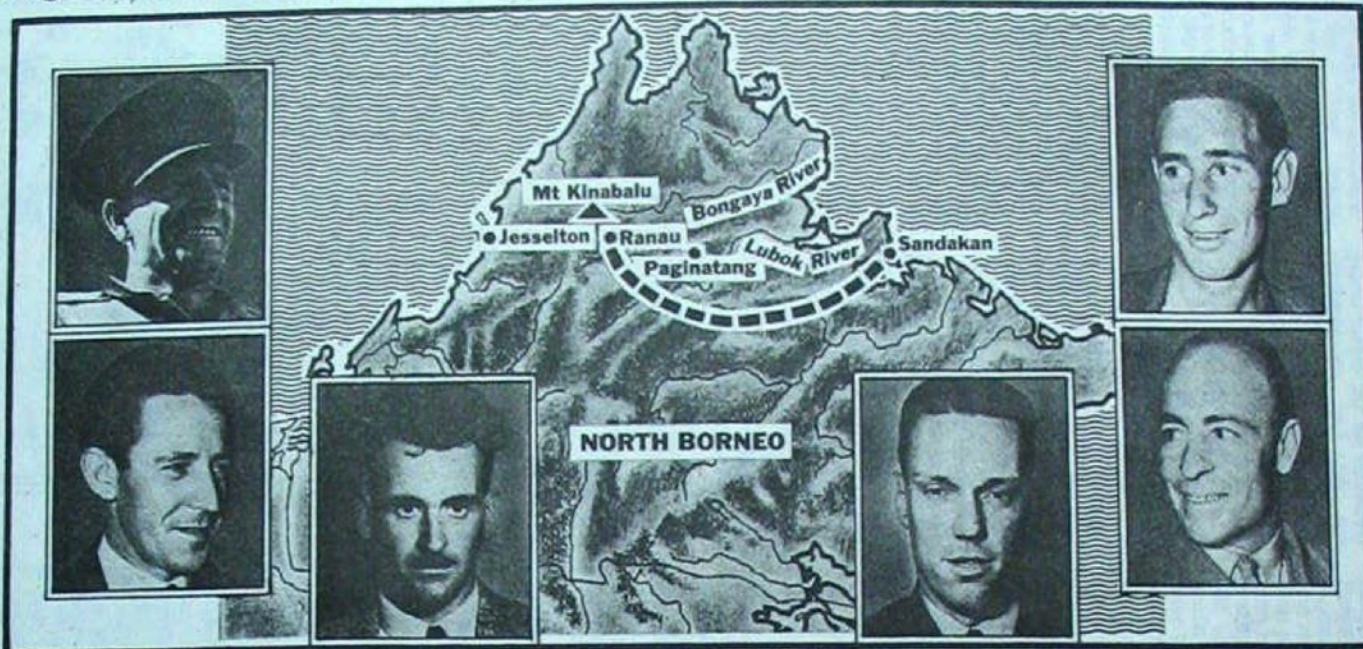
The men are now retired and in their 60s. For most of the last 40 years they have lived lives of quiet anonymity, but gradually interest in their story is growing.

In his new book, *Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon*, Australian National University historian Dr Hank Nelson makes it clear that the Sandakan-Ranau incident was one of the most horrific in which Australian POWs were involved.

More Australians – about 2500 – died during the building of the Thailand to Burma railway, but the survival rate on the railway was more than two out of three, whereas at Sandakan-Ranau it was less than one in 400.

“It was a terrible bloody incident,” Dr Nelson said this week. “And what is particularly distressing about Borneo, in retrospect, is the apparent irrationality of it.” The Japanese wanted the Thai-Burma railway built for strategic reasons; there was a certain twisted logic to the exercise. The Sandakan-Ranau deaths seem to have been utterly pointless.

Nelson's book is based on an award-winning ABC radio series produced by Tim Bowden in which the survivors of the march were interviewed and extensively quoted. (The episode in which they discuss



The death march survivors in 1947 (clockwise from top right): Keith Botterill, William Moxham, Richard Braithwaite, Owen Campbell, Nelson Short and Hector Sticpewich.

Photos courtesy of the ABC.

## Jungle march to infamy

The death march from Sandakan in north-east Borneo to Ranau, an isolated village 250km away over the mountains and through jungle, has been called one of the worst atrocities of the war. Certainly it was the most horrific incident involving Australian POWs. Of about 2500 Australian and British prisoners, only six came out of the jungle alive. Forty years later, this extraordinary event is being re-examined. JANE CADZOW reports.



Keith Botterill today.

other prisoners who were still coming through.

There were several of these rice-carrying trips, and on each of them the death toll mounted.

Botterill: "We'd get through the flats of Ranau and start up the mountains, and then men would start to get sick and sit down. The Japanese would shoot them and divide the rice up among the fit men. The killing would start about five miles out of Ranau, and the second day there'd be more killing of a morning."

"We'd arrive at Paginatang on the third afternoon, rest up there, and head back on the fourth day. There'd be more killing on the way back, and on the fifth day, within sight of the compound, they'd still be killing us."

Eventually the prisoners rebelled. They said they would make no more rice-carrying

trips. "Where were we going from here? Maybe nowhere..."

"I became aware that it was a one-way trip when we started to hear shots, and you felt that there was no hope for anyone that fell out."

Braithwaite remembers being beaten by a guard as he tried to make his way up a slippery slope. He lay in the mud, heaving for breath. "A group came past me and Bob Sykes, who was a WO in my unit, said 'Come on son, you can make it.' And I said 'Yes Bob, I'll be there.'"

"Anyway after they'd gone past I struggled up on my knees, and then up on my feet, and staggered on."

Owen Campbell, who became a Baptist minister after the war, made his dash for freedom in June 1945. With three others, he waited till the guards were out of sight, then

slid down the dirt slope at the

edge of the jungle. One of the men became ill and cut his own throat to avoid holding the party up. The other two were killed by a Japanese soldier hiding on a Malay fishing boat which they had thought would take them to safety.

Campbell had the good fortune to meet a Malay guerrilla leader who smuggled him in a canoe down the Bongaya River and into the hands of the Z Special Unit, which arranged for him to be carried out by seaplane.

Dick Braithwaite, who was a photo-engraver at The Courier-Mail in Brisbane until his retirement, realised on the sixth day of the march that to make a break was his only chance. His strength was failing fast, and the killing-off party was breathing down his neck.

There were times, after his

strength failed, when he remembers sitting on a log, sick and exhausted, and thinking: "Well, this is where it happens, mate, you're finished. After about half an hour of 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 put my head down like a bull and charged that jungle."

Like Campbell, Braithwaite was found by local people, smuggled down-river in a canoe and handed on to Allied troops. In late June, about a week after his rescue, an Australian colonel told him "We're going in now, to look for your friends."

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

Keith Botterill, Nelson Short, Bill Moxham and a

were among those who completed the march. By early July it was obvious that at Ranau there was no hope of survival.

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

Others attempting to escape from Ranau had been recaptured, tortured and killed. Botterill's group was luckier. Anderson died of dysentery, but the others were saved by Bariga, the man Botterill will meet again at the memorial ceremony next month, who built them a shelter in the jungle and supplied them with food.

### Moods of depression

Tipped off by a friendly guard that the prisoners remaining at Ranau were to be massacred, Bill Sticpewich and Aigy Reither escaped. They were taken in by the people of a nearby village, but Reither died before help arrived.

The six survivors found it hard to readjust to civilian life. People in Australia could not comprehend the enormity of their experience, and on the whole the best idea seemed to be not to talk about it.

Dick Braithwaite, who used to wake in the night and strip all the sheets off the bed because he was convinced it was crawling with bugs, said this week he has no idea how his wife put up with his moods of black depression.

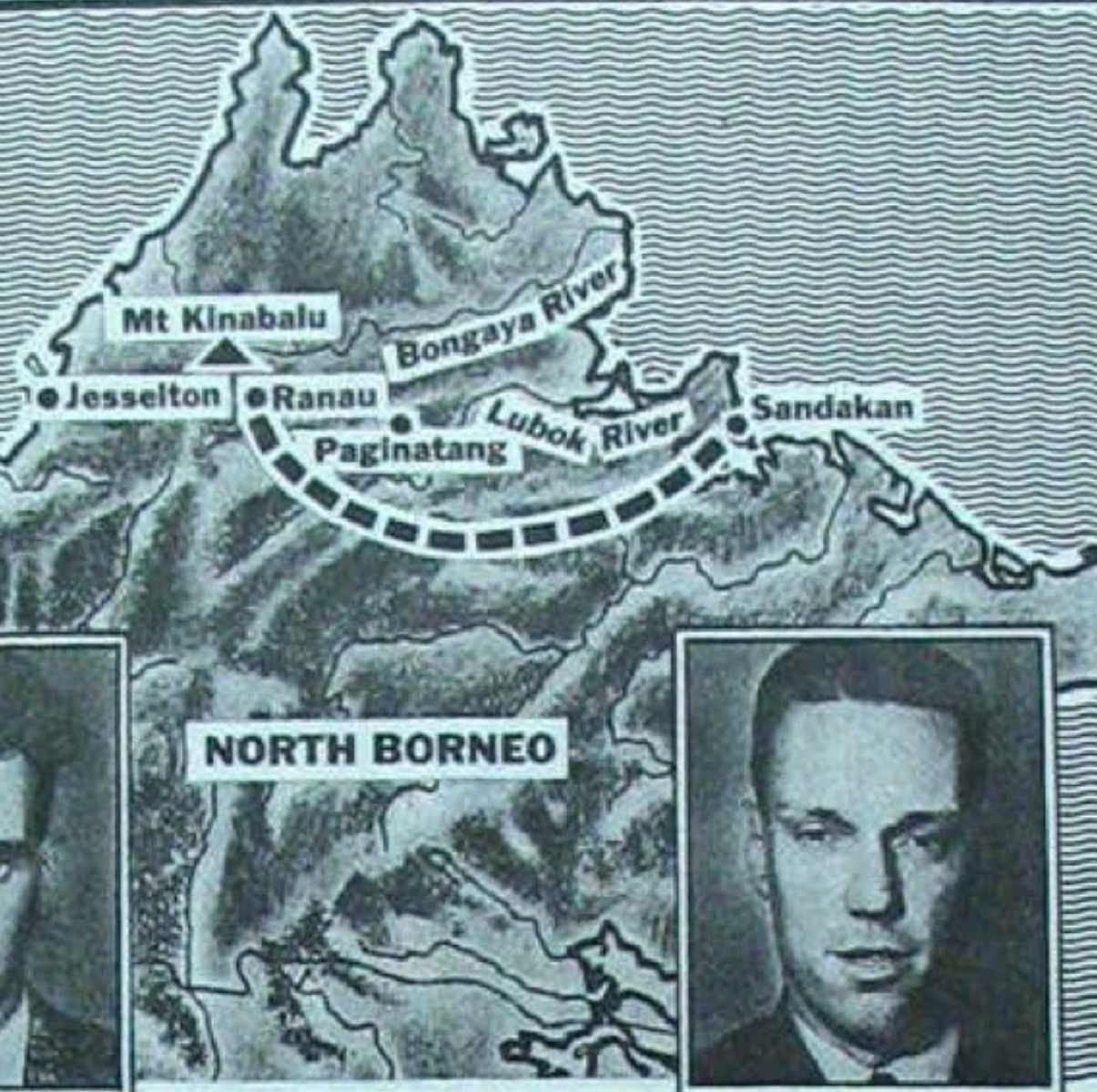
"Why she stayed with me I'll never know," he said. "She's a wonderful lady."

The rehabilitation process was slow, and for some it was not yet over. Keith Botterill, who found work after the war as a plant operator on construction sites, still dreams about the events in Borneo.

Nelson Short worked in a sawmill, as a lift-driver and at various other jobs. For his last 17 years of employment he was a maintenance man with the NSW Water Board.

Short was unable to put much money towards a retirement fund. He said this week he would like to go to the memorial ceremony at Ranau, but could not afford it.

*Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon* by Hank Nelson (ABC Enterprises, \$12.95) is available in bookshops. Tapes of the ABC radio series of the same name are available from ABC Books in



The death march survivors in 1947 (clockwise from top right) : Keith Botterill, William Moxham, Richard Braithwaite, Owen Campbell, Nelson Short and Hector Sticpewich.

Photos courtesy of the ABC

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Meanwhile, two men with a personal interest in the subject are working on a book about the march. Don Harlem of Hobart, and Jack Sue, of Perth, were both members of the Z Special Unit, a band of seven highly trained commandos who landed behind enemy lines in northern Borneo in early 1945.

While the death march was taking place, Harlem and Sue were nearby in the jungle, secretly training a local guerilla force and mounting occasional surprise attacks on Japanese installations. They knew about the march, and having found piles of corpses along the track were aware of its consequences, but to their immense frustration they were powerless to stop it.

In mid-1942 about 1500 Australian prisoners were shipped from Singapore to a Japanese POW camp near Sandakan. In early 1943 another 500 Australian and about 500 British prisoners were shipped across.

Till mid-1943, conditions at the camp were tolerable. The prisoners received little food and worked extremely hard — under the supervision of guards they were building an airfield — but spirits were reasonably high.

Then the Japanese discovered the existence of an underground communications network through which the prisoners had been in contact with the world outside the barbed wire fences. There were harsh reprisals.

The prisoners directly involved were taken away to be interrogated and tortured. At the same time there was a severe crackdown at the camp. Rations were cut and brutal punishment was meted out.

Apparently intent on breaking the prisoners' solidarity, the Japanese moved their of-

icers to another camp. Keith Botterill said this week that the loss of the officers, about 200 men, was a severe blow to group morale.

In Dr Hank Nelson's book, the survivors describe the changed circumstances at the camp:

Nelson Short: "They were watching you all the time. They were walking around with sticks like swords, and if you weren't working hard enough you'd be getting whacked."

Dick Braithwaite: "One fellow that was stood outside the guard house for an unknown misdemeanor had his eye knocked clean out of his socket . . . There were numerous incidents of that nature."

## Crowded cages

Keith Botterill says the events at Sandakan are etched deep into his memory: "I can remember it as if it happened yesterday. All these little incidents."

Botterill was one of the prisoners placed in a cage of slatted wood about a metre off the ground. The roof was too low to stand, and the cages were too crowded to allow all the prisoners to lie down.

Botterill: "The time I was in for 40 days there were 17 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 . . . I was just in a G-string, never had a wash, and covered in lice and scabies. We were not allowed to talk, but we used to whisper."

At the same time each evening the prisoners were taken out of the cage and forced to

fight each other while the guards watched. During this "exercise" period, the cooks would pour the kitchen swill into a trough, ostensibly to feed the dogs.

Botterill: "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."

Major-General C.H. Finlay, who now lives in Canberra, was the commander of the Z Special Unit in which Don Harlem and Jack Sue served. Before the unit left for North Borneo, a plan was conceived to storm the Sandakan camp and rescue the prisoners. "The plan provided for a smash and grab raid on Sandakan," General Finlay said this week.

If this had happened, the death march might never have taken place. But the plan was ruled out "at the highest level" because the air and naval support which would have been required was needed more urgently elsewhere. At this stage, of course, the Allied authorities had no idea of the horror that lay ahead for the prisoners at Sandakan.

"Personally, I think it was one of the worst atrocities of the war," General Finlay said.

All ideas of raiding the camp called off, the seven members of the Z Special Unit did not land in North Borneo till February 1945. By then the death march had started.

As the survivors relate in Nelson's book, the first group of about 500 left the camp in January 1945. They were split into parties of 50 and their destination was the isolated camp of Ranau, 250km away over mountains and through jungle. Most of those who set out were already desperately weak from sickness and starvation.

Botterill: "For the first five days we were going through mangrove and jungle swamps . . . You'd lie down of a night and you'd say 'this is it'. You lay up against a tree in the driest spot you could find, and you were that weary with aches, and leeches as big as pencils were crawling all over you."

"Big baboons were screaming, wild pigs were making a noise, and crocodiles. I was 20. I said: 'This is it. I'm going to die.' You could feel yourself dying. You'd sort of give up, and then you'd say 'Oh no'. You'd just automatically get up and away you'd go, you know."

Guards brought up the rear, and men who fell behind the main party were dragged a few metres off the track and shot or bayoneted. "I just kept plodding along," Botterill said. "It was dense jungle. I was heartbroken. But I thought there was safety in numbers. I just kept going."

When Botterill's group arrived at Ranau the prisoners were ordered to turn around and march 40km back towards Sandakan, carrying bags of rice to feed the Japanese and

Botterill: "This Captain Nagai, the Japanese commander, came out. He said if you don't carry the rice I will march you back to Sandakan. Well, we knew that 95 per cent of the men could never get back to Sandakan, so 20 of us decided to carry the rice for them."

"And only five returned from that trip. We lost 15. So that was the last rice-carrying trip."

At Ranau the deaths continued. The first thing Botterill did each morning was to check whether the men lying on the ground either side of him were dead or alive.

At Sandakan a system had developed by which most of the men had one or two special friends with whom they shared their food and their dreams of escape. "They took my mate and they killed him with a bayonet," Botterill said. "Because we stole some rice and they found out about it."

"That just busted me. I thought, well, there goes my life. That was the chap that brought food to me when I was sick, and vice versa. He was the bloke I was going to escape with."

From then on Botterill was a bit of a loner. Ranau was no place to start making new friends; no one knew who was going to be alive in the morning.

Meanwhile, at Sandakan, conditions had continued to worsen and the death rate had risen alarmingly. On May 29 the guards ordered the prisoners to assemble outside the camp. The second march was about to begin.

## Huts went up in flames

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Nelson Short, who was in this group, says there was a strong rumour among the men that the war was over and they were being marched to the coast to board a boat that would take them home. Everyone who could struggle to their feet to join the march did so, but about 300 stretcher cases were left behind.

Don Harlem says the sick were taken to the airstrip they had helped build and machine-gunned. The camp was burned down. Harlem believes the Japanese acted in such haste because they were expecting an Allied landing.

Dick Braithwaite: "It was a strange, sad sort of feeling to see those huts going up in flames. Knowing also, of course, that any records of our friends that had died, things that we'd made and cherished, the little bits of wood that had become more or less like the family jewels, they were going up in smoke. It was a feeling of great loss.

"Although we wouldn't allow ourselves to give up hope of ever being rescued, it must have been in the back of our minds that this was it for us.

Qld. c. 1941. Studio portrait of QX9538 **Warrant Officer William Hector Sticpewich**, 8th Division Australian Army Service Corps (AASC). Sticpewich was captured at Singapore on 1942-02-17 and later escaped from the Sandakan to Ranau (British North Borneo) death march in 1945-07. He supplied eyewitness accounts of Japanese mistreatment and torture and was instrumental in the conviction of several Japanese guards at the Tokyo war crimes trials; BUT HE ALSO MADE FRIENDS WITH TWO OF THEM, AND DID NOT TESTIFY AGAINST THEM. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THEM AFTER THE WAR, HAS BEEN DISCOVERED WHICH RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS COLLABORATION.

**IT WAS LATER PROVED THAT HE HAD, NOT ONLY COLLABORATED WITH THE JAPANESE GUARDS, BUT THAT HE HAD ALSO MURDERED A FELLOW POW. HE LATER DIED UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES; RUN OVER IN THE STREET BY TWO CARS.**





British North Borneo. c 1947-04.  
QX9538 Lieutenant William Hector **Sticpewich**, 8th Division Australian Army Service Corps (AASC) and 1st Australian Search Party, 31 Australian War Graves Unit (**fourth from left**) with a group of local police and native Dyaks, standing in front of a raised native house. Sticpewich was captured at Singapore on 1942-02-17 and later escaped from the Sandakan to Ranau (British North Borneo) death march in 1945-07. In 1946, he supplied eyewitness accounts of Japanese mistreatment and torture and was instrumental in the conviction of several Japanese guards at the Tokyo war crimes trials. In 1947 he returned to British North Borneo and assisted in the location, identification, and recovery of Australian war dead.



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**IT WAS LATER DISCOVERED THAT HE HAD NOT ONLY COLLABORATED WITH JAPANESE GUARDS, BUT, BY NOT TESTIFYING AGAINST ONE JAP IN PARTICULAR, ALLOWED HIM TO ESCAPE JUSTICE.**



# WILLIAM HECTOR STICPEWICH

## A POW WITH A 'CHECKERED PAST'

**COURT-MARTIALLED IN MARCH 1941, BUT NOT SENTENCED TO PRISON, BY BEING CAREFUL NOT TO INCRIMINATE HIMSELF.**

**He was found guilty of one of the two charges, and curiously, did not testify on his own behalf. As seen in the next photo (photostat) of the proceedings, he arranged for three of the prosecution witnesses to come forward and retract their previous testimony. (One of these later died in the same POW camp as Sticpewich).**

Fraser's Paddock.  
BRISBANE.  
14.1.41.

O.C.,  
8 D.A.C.,

I the undersigned wish to be paraded with the three witnesses Murray, Prescott, and Nott, before you or your Court of Inquiry, with the object of retraction of statement and venting the whole case for completion.

(Sgd) W.H. Sticpewich

(sgd). W.I.F. Nott

(sgd). L.W.Murray

(sgd). G.G.Prescott.

**Sticpewich got 3 of the 11 witnesses to retract their statements, previously made on behalf of the prosecution: Pte. Nott, Murraray, and Prescott.**

## **RESULTS OF THE COURT MARTIAL:**

- Sticpewich was found guilty on one count and fined 5 pounds, Australian money.**
- Pte Nott was, curiously, punished due to his testimony for the prosecution against Sticpewich. He later ended up in the same POW camp as Sticpewich, and died under mysterious circumstances.**

- **'STIPPY' WAS CONSIDERED A 'WHITE JAP' BY FELLOW POWs FOR HIS COLLABORATION WITH THE ENEMY (WHO KNEW HIM BY NAME).**
- **OTHER POWs THOUGHT OF HIM AS A 'SMOOTH OPERATOR' WHO FOUND WAYS TO AVOID THE DEPRIVATION ENDURED BY FELLOW POWs.**
- **His hut was outside the camp near the Jap barracks; always had more food than the other POWs.**

## **STICPEWICH: THE COLLABORATOR**

- **DESCRIBED BY OTHER POWS: “A SMART OPERATOR, GOOD AT LOOKING OUT FOR THEMSELVES.”**
- **“SOMETHING OF A BULLY WHO PICKED WRESTLING FIGHTS WITH YOUNG BLOKES WHO WERE RECEIVING MUCH LESS FOOD THAN HE.”**
- **“NOT A POPULAR PERSON. HE WAS KNOWN NOT TO HAVE ANY FRIENDS; CLOSE FRIENDS. HE WAS A LOANER. HE WAS ONLY INTERESTED IN ANYONE THAT HE COULD BENEFIT FROM. HE WAS A BIT OF A DEALER.”**

**AS TOM GILLING WRITES IN HIS BOOK, THE WITNESS:**

**“BEING A LONER IN A JAPANESE POW CAMP WAS UNUSUAL: EVERY PRISONER NEEDED A MATE HE COULD DEPEND ON WHEN HE WAS SICK. IF STICPEWICH DID NOT HAVE A MATE IT COULD ONLY BE BECAUSE HE WAS ABLE TO MANAGE WITHOUT ONE.”**

**‘STIPPY’ CREATED A JOB FOR HIMSELF THAT ALLOWED HIM SOME INDEPENDENCE AND PROTECTION FROM THE VIOLENT GUARDS AND THE DEMANDS AND PRIVATIONS EXPERIENCED BY THE OTHER PRISONERS...A JOB THAT ALLOWED HIM TO GET MORE TO EAT AND NOT HAVE TO WORK AS HARD.**

**HE WAS MADE HEAD OF THE SO-CALLED ‘TECHNICAL PARTY’ WHICH HE LATER DENIED BELONGING TO, OR BEING IT’S LEADER. A LIE. STIPPY WAS ALWAYS CAREFUL NOT TO INCRIMINATE HIMSELF, LIKE HE DID AT HIS COURT MARTIAL, WHERE HE REMAINED QUIET.**



**'STIPPY' DID WELL, AND IN BARTERING WITH THE JAP GUARDS, WAS ABLE TO SUPPLEMENT HIS RATIONS TO SUCH AN EXTENT, THAT HE HAD AN EXTRA MEAL A DAY OF AS MUCH AS HE COULD EAT; AND AT TIMES, MEAT AND FISH.**

**HE WAS, LIKE THE OFFICERS, THE ONLY POW TO HAVE A MOSQUITO NET TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FROM MALARIA.**

**WHILE STIPPY WAS DOING ODD JOBS, HUNDREDS OF OTHER POW'S WORKED WITH SHOVELS, WEARING THREADBARE CLOTHING; MANY WORE NOTHING BUT LOINCLOTHS; OFTEN GOING BAREFOOT.**

**Sticpewich lived in special quarters outside the compound, not far from the Japanese barracks, and received rations far in excess of other prisoners. Evidently this preferential treatment, which included supplies of anti-malarial tablets, continued throughout his captivity. When he arrived at the last camp, having completed the gruelling four-week trek over steep mountain ranges and through swampland, he was far from a shuffling, hollow-eyed skeleton. Botterill, who failed to recognise his closest mates, recognised Sticpewich at once. Why? ‘Because he was in fantastic condition’.**

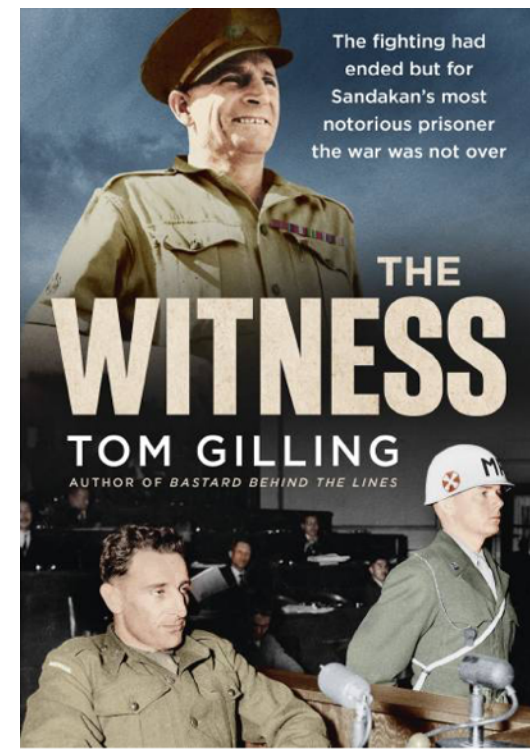
**There is evidence in Sticpewich's private papers that show that he had formed a highly irregular liaison with Lieutenant Nagai, whom Sticpewich had described as "one of the worst criminals".**

**When Botterill discovered in 1946 that Nagai had been repatriated to Japan, he prepared a denunciation listing Nagai's many crimes, which he gave to Sticpewich to present to the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. Although Botterill thought Sticpewich's sarcastic remark at the time, "What do you want to do? Hang every Jap in Japan" was odd, he had no idea that Sticpewich, who had met Nagai face to face while in detention at Labuan, had formed some kind of last-minute mutual alliance with him, allowing Nagai to return home.**

*The pair met in Tokyo, cementing an alliance that was so strong that the pair contemplated writing a book together. On his return to Australia, Sticpewich maintained a correspondence with his "always best friend, Peter Nagai".*

**STIPPY HAD A 'SELECTIVE MEMORY' WHEN GIVING EVIDENCE AT THE WAR CRIMES TRIALS: HE WOULD STATE ONE THING IN A HEARING, THEN RE-STATE IT AS SOMETHING ELSE. (SEE THE BOOK "THE WITNESS" FOR FURTHER DETAILS OF STIPPY'S FAULTY MEMORY). HE HAD A CLOSE 'WORKING RELATIONSHIP' WITH ANOTHER 'WHITE JAP' A CAPTAIN GEORGE COOK, WHO ALSO COLLABORATED WITH THE JAP CAMP COMMANDANT.**

Although an interesting book, author Gilling has stated elsewhere that Sticpewich did not 'collaborate' with the enemy, but only 'cooperated with the enemy.' Hmmm. What's the difference?



Sticpewich stayed on in the army after WW2, attaining the rank of major. **He claimed that he had received his lieutenant's commission 'in the field' from no lesser personage than Lord Louis Mountbatten.** Although he had met Mountbatten, Sticpewich was not promoted to lieutenant until 17 March 1947, by which time Lord Louis was definitely out of the field as he had been appointed Vice Roy of India the previous month.

It was the Australian army, which, although it regarded Sticpewich as an upstart, had very reluctantly promoted him, **when he refused to undertake a further search for bodies in Borneo unless he received his commission.** As he was the only survivor fit enough to travel and undertake an arduous trek along the death march route, the army acceded to his demands.

# THE MURDERED POW

## World War Two Service

**DRIVER**  
**HERMAN REITHER**  
**VX48478**



<b>SERVICE</b>	AUSTRALIAN ARMY
<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	9 OCTOBER 1906
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>	ST ARNUD, VIC
<b>DATE OF ENLISTMENT</b>	26 JULY 1940
<b>LOCALITY ON ENLISTMENT</b>	BALLIANG, VIC
<b>PLACE OF ENLISTMENT</b>	CAULFIELD, VIC
<b>NEXT OF KIN</b>	REITHER, E
<b>DATE OF DEATH</b>	8 AUGUST 1945
<b>POSTING ON DEATH</b>	4 RESERVE MOTOR TRANSPORT COMPANY
<b>PRISONER OF WAR</b>	YES



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

**Reither's family certainly believed something was amiss. In 1951, six years after the war had ended, they finally managed to contact the somewhat elusive Sticpewich, who told them that Reither had died of illness. The family later managed to force a face-to-face meeting so that Sticpewich could hand over Reither's bible and a letter written by his mother. After speaking to Sticpewich, they were certain that he was not telling the whole truth about Reither's death.**

*In 1995, fifty years after the end of the war, Sandakan survivors, their spouses and widows and other guests interested in the Sandakan story were invited to a dinner in Sydney. Among the guests was Mrs Chris Sticpewich. Nelson Short approached her table and, during one of those rare lulls in a room full of chattering people, silenced the room completely when he said 'And your husband, madam, was nothing but a collaborator'.*

**Former POW, Eric Davis, who had been at Sandakan for some months before being transferred to Kuching Camp, stated that a member of the war graves team had confided that Sticpewich had killed Reither.**



**KUCHING, SARAWAK. 1945-09-12. OFFICERS AND MEN OF 8TH DIVISION, EX-POWS OF THE JAPANESE, AT THE KUCHING POW AND INTERNEES CAMP WAITING THEIR TURN TO MAKE A RECORDING OF A MESSAGE TO BE BROADCAST TO THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS BACK HOME IN AUSTRALIA. LEFT TO RIGHT: LIEUTENANT (LT) W. PECK; UNIDENTIFIED; LT G. SLEEMAN; LT J. MILLER; LT V. NICHOLSON; LT R. MCIVOR; LT J. MORRISON; CHAPLAIN A. O'DONOVAN (ROMAN CATHOLIC); CAPTAIN J. MILLNER (ARMS FOLDED); REMAINDER ARE UNIDENTIFIED.**



**Captain George Robin Cook:** another collaborator with the Japanese. He identified fellow POWs to the Japanese for punishment. He asked the commandant for additional POW cages be built to accommodate other POWs for punishment. He asked for several to be imprisoned in a cage for the duration of the war. He was good friends and a fishing companion with **Captain Hoshijima Susumu**, the commandant of the Sandakan POW camp.



**COOK**

**Hoshijima**



# **ARTHUR EDWARD BIRD**

**BORN: 13 APRIL 1910, NORMAN VALE,  
NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA.**

**Series number: B883**

**Service number: NX46905**

**POW WHO DIED UNDER MYSTERIOUS  
CIRCUMSTANCES.**



# **NELSON ALFRED ERNEST SHORT**

**BORN: AUGUST 30, 1917, ENFIELD,  
NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA.**

**ONE OF THE SIX POWs WHO ESCAPED.**



## Portrait of NX58617 **Private (Pte)**

**Nelson A. E. Short**, 2/18 Battalion, of Woollahra, NSW. He was taken prisoner of war in Malaya and subsequently imprisoned in Sandakan, North Borneo. He was one of only six survivors from 1100 prisoners forced to undertake the infamous death marches from Sandakan to Ranau which began on 28 January 1945. Pte Short escaped from Ranau with NX19750 Lance Bombardier William D. Moxham of Toongabbie, NSW; NX42191 Pte Keith Botterill of Katoomba, NSW and QX6866 Pte F. D. Anderson, who died on 29 July 1945, in the jungle.



# Portrait of NX45378 Bombardier

**James Richard Braithwaite**, 2/15 Field Regiment. Bombardier Braithwaite was one of only six survivors from 1100 prisoners who were forced to march from Sandakan to Ranau in Borneo. He escaped along the track near Batas, was rescued and looked after by natives, and finally reached safety aboard an American PT boat.

**ONE OF THE SIX POWs WHO SURVIVED.**



Informal outdoor portrait of NX45378 **Bombardier James Richard (Dick) Braithwaite**, 2/15 Field Regiment, taken at the Three Sisters prior to embarkation. Bombardier Braithwaite was one of only six survivors from 1100 prisoners who were forced to march from Sandakan to Ranau in Borneo. He escaped along the track near Batas, was rescued and looked after by natives, and finally reached safety aboard an American PT boat.





**One of the six POWs who had escaped, Dick Braithwaite, died in 1986.** In 1995, his widow Joyce travelled to Sandakan with Sticpewich's widow Chris and others to attend a memorial service. Joyce and Chris shared a room. Joyce later told Don Wall that Chris Sticpewich confided to her that after the war she and her husband had lived well on the proceeds of the hidden treasure Sticpewich had recovered from Sandakan and smuggled home to Australia. (Many if not most of the POWs who had stayed at Sandakan had secreted personal money and other valuables in a hollow of a large tree that stood in the compound area). Wall repeated the story in his tape-recorded conversation with Tim Bowden but made Bowden promise not to publish the material until after his death (he died in 2004). He also asked Bowden to deposit a copy of the recording with the Australia War Memorial which Bowden did. Was this recovered treasure the reason why after returning to Australia, Sticpewich was able to afford a nice house in a nice area and to keep sending money to Adihil, the man who had kept him hidden from the Japanese?

(Source: Tom Gilling's book, "The Witness")

**QX6866 Gunner Francis (Frank) Douglas 'Andy' Anderson,**  
2/10th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery was one of  
over 2000 Allied prisoners of war (POW) held in the Sandakan  
POW camp in north Borneo, having been transferred there  
from Singapore as a part of E Force. The 500 Australian and 500  
British POW's who made up E Force, left Changi on 28 March  
1943, on board the S.S. DeKlerk arriving at Berhala Island  
(adjacent to Sandakan Harbour) on 15 April 1943. The POW's  
were held there until 5 June, when they were taken by barge to  
Sandakan.

**The next day they were transferred to the 8 Mile Camp, which was about half a mile from the B Force compound.**

**Gunner Anderson**, aged 25, escaped with **Nelson Short, Bill Moxham and Keith Botterill** on 7 July 1945, hiding in a cave for over a week before being found and looked after by Baragh Katus, headman of Batu Lima village, who supplied them with food. Gnr Anderson was dying of dysentery on 29 July 1945, but was killed and **buried by Moxham, Botterill and Short** the next day. (Detail in next photo). He was the son of William and Daisy Louisa Anderson, of Kelvin Grove, Qld. He is buried in the Labuan Cemetery Section 16, Row E, Plot 12.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P02467.956

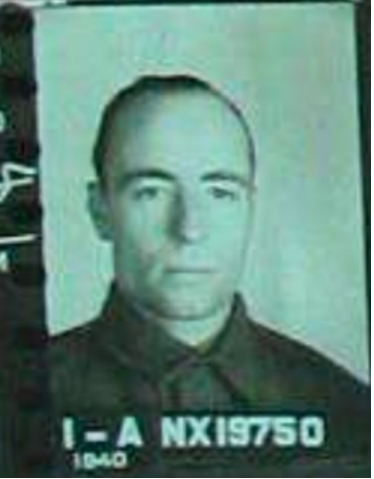
## FRANCIS DOUGLAS 'ANDY' ANDERSON

At the urging of Nelson Short, Keith Botterill and Bill Moxham agreed to kill 'Andy' Anderson who was suffering from severe dysentery and was calling out in his delirium. At the time of the murder, on 28 July 1945, they were in hiding, in a deep gully to the west of the main Ranau-Kota Belud track. Terrified his cries would be heard, they picked up a lump of wood and hit him over the head. They buried the body but pigs found it, necessitating a reburial using stones. With the remains savaged by pigs, any damage to Andy's skull went unremarked by the recovery team. For years, Botterill was haunted by nightmares, crying out in his sleep 'We had to kill him', and studiously avoided answering any questions about Anderson.

**However, disturbing though these deaths are, all were spur of the moment killings. The murder of Reither, however, was ruthless, premeditated and very cunningly planned.**

**Portrait of NX19750 Lance Bombardier William D. Moxham** of 2/15 Field Regiment and Toongabbie, NSW. Lance Bombardier Moxham was taken prisoner of war in Malaya, subsequently being imprisoned at Sandakan, North Borneo. He was one of only six survivors from 1100 prisoners forced to undertake the infamous death marches from Sandakan to Ranau which began on 28 January 1945. Lance Bombardier Moxham escaped from Ranau with NX42191 Private Keith Botterill, 2/19 Battalion, of Katoomba, NSW; NX58617 Private Nelson A. E. Short, 2/18 Battalion, of Woolahra, NSW and QX6866 Private F. D. Anderson, of Kelvin Grove, Qld, who died on 29 July 1945 in the jungle.





**WILLIAM DICK  
MOXHAM**

**ONE OF THE SIX  
SURVIVORS OF  
SANDAKAN DEATH  
CAMP.**



Portrait of NX19750 Lance Bombardier William D. Moxham of 2/15 Field Regiment and Toongabbie, NSW. Lance Bombardier Moxham was taken prisoner of war in Malaya, subsequently being imprisoned at Sandakan, North Borneo. **He was one of only six survivors from 1100 prisoners forced to undertake the infamous death marches from Sandakan to Ranau** which began on 28 January 1945. Lance Bombardier Moxham escaped from Ranau with NX42191 Private Keith Botterill, 2/19 Battalion, of Katoomba, NSW; NX58617 Private Nelson A. E. Short, 2/18 Battalion, of Woolahra, NSW and QX6866 Private F. D. Anderson, of Kelvin Grove, Qld, who died on 29 July 1945 in the jungle.