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BURMA THAILAND RAILWAY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (Inc)

OBJECTIVE: To perpetuate the memory of the privations and sacrifices of Allied Prisoners of War and the selfless dedication of the medical personnel during the construction of the Burma Thailand Railway by informing current and future generations through all forms of education and particularly with Quiet Lion Tours to the Burma Thai Railway; The River Kwai; The Three Pagoda Pass; ANZAC Day at Hellfire Pass and Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

NEWSLETTER FOURTY FOUR DECEMBER 2016



For those on Facebook, we have recently created a public **Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association Inc.** Page to share interesting news and articles relating to BTRMA.

Page: www.facebook.com/BTRMAinc

Please feel free to invite your friends, relatives and colleagues to like our Page to promote the work of the Association and memory of the privations and sacrifices of POWs and medical personnel during the construction of the Thai Burma Railway line in WWII.

We also have a **Quiet Lion Tour** Facebook Group for past tour participants to connect and share stories.

Group: www.facebook.com/groups/877471688958808



VALE Milton (Snow) Fairclough OAM WX2629

2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion

Milton (Snow) Thomas Fairclough OAM 28.08.1920 – 01.10.2016, died aged 96 years at Murdoch Hospital. His funeral service was held at Karrakatta on 10.10.2016.

Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association Inc.
Published by Elizabeth Brennan [?] · Yesterday at 11:18 · 🌐

It is with a heavy heart that we convey that our dear Milton 'Snow' Fairclough has died peacefully at St John of God Hospital Murdoch on 1st October, with his sons Colin and Chris with him at his passing. On behalf of the BTRMA, we extend our deepest sympathies to the Fairclough family and to all who's lives Snow had an undeniable impact upon. May he rest in eternal peace.



1,295 people reached [Boost post](#)

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👤 Peter Luberda, Janine Doney and 26 others Chronological

1 share 10 comments

 **Chelsea Dawn** RIP Snow 🙏🙏
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 11:25

 **Linda J Franklin** I had the pleasure of knowing this incredible man on the 2013 tour. The courage and strength of Snow is so so moving and I hold the time I spent with Snow in my heart for ever. Rest in peace beautiful Man.
Unlike · Reply · Message · 2 · Yesterday at 11:33

 **Nueng Sakulwarit** RIP beautiful man Snow
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 11:58

 **Rachael Doney** Sad loss of a wonderful man and a lot of history. Snow had amazing recall and has shared so many stories that would otherwise have been lost forever
Unlike · Reply · Message · 2 · Yesterday at 12:06

 **Ron Wilson** One thing you can guarantee is that there will never be another 'Snow'. I was fortunate enough to spend many a time chatting and having a laugh with him. Heartfelt condolences to his family.
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 12:35

 **Joe Steenson** RIP Snow, my boys loved you on Quiet Lion Tour.
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 13:29

 **GregandDee Poultney** RIP Snow
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 14:12

 **Reelene Warby** Take a good rest old mate
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · Yesterday at 14:47

 **Christine Chittenden** My deepest sympathy to Snow's family on the recent loss of a wonderful man.
On the 09Tour Snow spent time with me reliving the antics that he, Bill H and my father Paddy Fox got up to on the line. It was a magical experience. Rest in peace old soldier and have a beer with Paddy for me.
Snow, you will be missed. 🇬🇧
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · 23 hrs

 **Carrie Zaretsky** Meg Clark 🙏
Unlike · Reply · Message · 2 · 19 hrs

👤 2 Replies

 Write a comment...
Press Enter to post.

Snow was born at Perth on 28 August 1920, grew up on a farm in Moora and he was a "jack of all trades" working in rural areas of Western Australia prior to World War Two. He was with a group of country boys who were members of the Militia in the 10th Light Horse and enlisted in the AIF on June 19, 1940, joining the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion which was mainly raised in Western Australian.

In 1940 the battalion sailed from Fremantle on the Isle de France in a convoy with the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth 11, Aquitania, Mauritania, Isle de France and the Andes. The convoy called at Colombo and the battalion disembarked at Port Tewfik on the Suez Canal and later trained at Palestine and in Tel Aviv. The battalion saw action in Syria and later at Mrouj, near Beirut in Lebanon.

In February 1942 the battalion traveled on the troop ship RMS Orcades via Durban, South Africa, to Oosthaven in South Sumatra. They disembarked at Batavia (Jakarta) before traveling by road to Bandung.

On 9th March 1942 the Dutch surrendered, which inevitably included the Australians.

After nearly a year in Bandung, the battalion went to Makasura before being shipped to Changi Prison on Singapore with Dunlop Force under Lt Colonel Edward Dunlop.

In January 1943 Dunlop Force went by train on a five-day journey in cramped steal rice wagons from Singapore to Non Pladuk in Thailand and then to the Konyu River Camp, the Hintok River Camp and the Hintok Road Camp.

Dunlop Force worked on the section of the Burma Thailand Railway between Konyu (Hellfire Pass) and Compressor Cuttings.

Members of Dunlop Force suffered similarly to all prisoners on the Burma Thailand Railway with diseases, inhumane and brutal treatment, starvation, overwork, lack of basic needs and terrible conditions.

By the completion of the railway Milton Fairclough's health was bad and when his group went to Tamuang where men were selected for virtual "slave" work in Japan he was unfit and was admitted to the Nakon Pathom Hospital. He was then on maintenance work and remained in Thailand until the Victory in the Pacific.

Snow Fairclough returned to Thailand on twelve occasions as a mentor to students sourced from High Schools and sponsored by the Burma Thailand Burma Railway Memorial Association, the Extremely Disabled War Veterans Association, various Community Service Clubs and the Retired Prisoners of War Association of Western Australia on Quiet Lion Tours.

Snow was the focus of the outstanding documentary titled “War, Hate and The Lizard” produced by the Town of Victoria Park to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Pacific Day in 1945. The ‘Lizard’ was the name given to the most brutal of all the prison-guards who received a 20-year gaol sentence by the War Crimes Tribunal that ironically was ultimately reduced to five years.

A significant occasion for Snow was being invested with the Order of Australia Medal (OAM). The presentation took place in April this year recognising his service to veterans and the community. This was a proud moment for Snow, his family and the Battalion.

Another very significant event in Snow’s life was his visit to Japan with his son, Dennis, in October 2014. Snow and three other POWs participated in the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Program aimed to: “deepen mutual understanding between the peoples of Japan and Australia by inviting former Australian POWs to Japan to foster reconciliation”.

Snow’s memoir written in 2002, “My Soldiering Days 13.11.39 – 14.1.46” shows classic Aussie defiance encompassing views of British and Dutch military attitudes. The Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association reveres the memory of “Snow” Fairclough.



VALE Eric Herman Rosenberg Roediger WX10710, 24.04.1910 – 25.09.2016

At 106 when he died, Eric was one of the oldest soldiers surviving from World War 2.

Eric was born in South Australia and the family moved to WA in 1924 taking up a farm near Northam-Goomalling. After his father set up a butchering business in 1933, Eric decided to start his own milk round in Northam with a horse and cart. He later tried goldmining before going into share farming in Dowerin.

In 1941 Eric joined the Army and was shipped to the Middle East. His brother Claude followed later and they were allocated to the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion. After service in the Middle East the Battalion were transported on the RMS Orcades, ostensibly to return to defend Australia after the Japanese entered the war. However, orders were changed and they disembarked in Java without their machine guns and equipment. They were given old Dutch rifles and only a few rounds of ammunition and it was not long before they were forced to surrender to the Japanese when the Dutch capitulated.

Eric and his brother Claude were POWs in Java and Thailand together. Eric cared for his brother when he became gravely ill and under the care of Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop. After completing the railway, the Japanese shipped the fittest POW's on the "Hell-ship" ship Byoki Maru to Japan where Eric and Claude worked in coal mine at Ohama.

On returning from the war Eric bought a farm south of Cunderdin with another brother, Keith, and they ran a wheat and sheep property with Eric retiring at age 70.

Faith was a major part of Eric's life from an early age and he believed it to be a major factor in his survival as a POW. Both Eric and his brother Claude were Church of Christ elders for many years.

Eric always attended the memorial services to represent his battalion. He did not find his war experience as a defining part of life. To him his family came first, he was a devout Christian, and his great love was farming. These three segments of his life kept him mentally strong and tough as a POW.

A very large group attended the funeral at Fremantle Cemetery on 7th October 2016.

The Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association reveres the memory of Eric Roediger and our condolence and thoughts are with the family.

VALE Sergeant John Roy (Jack) Thorpe WX10477

105 Australian Transport Company and British Commonwealth Occupation Force

Enlisted 20/12/1940 and Discharged 17/9/1947

Jack Thorpe was born at Claremont WA on 9/11/1921 and died at Ellenvale, Busselton on 30/8/2016. Jack's funeral took place at Busselton Funeral Centre on 7/9/2016.

Jack was the eldest of four children and due to circumstances he played a large part in watching out for his younger siblings. He left school at fourteen years of age to work as an apprentice mechanic in his father's bus service. After two years the apprenticeship was interrupted and he obtained a job as a "bowser boy" at a garage in North Fremantle. His father later arranged for him to recommence his apprenticeship as the bus service was sold to the Metro Bus Company and they needed an apprentice.

After the outbreak of World War Two, Jack wanted to enlist immediately with his mates Ron Gwynne and Gordon Page. There was a complication because of age and he put his age up by three years. He finally enlisted on 20th December 1940 and joined the Second Recruit Training Depot at Northam. He then volunteered for Mechanical Support Unit and after training at Puckapunyal in Victoria he left for the Middle East on 18th September 1941.

His unit travelled via Port Tufic to the Suez Canal and El-Kantara and then across the Sinai and on to Barbera. He then joined the 1st Australian Troop Carrying Column attached to the 7th Australian Division as part of the 105 General Transport Company. At Port Tufic, Jack joined the troopship Orcades which sailed on the 29th January 1942 en route to the Dutch East Indies where he became a Prisoner of War.

After several months in Batavia he joined other Australians on a ship for Singapore and Changi Prisoner of War Camp and later on, a ship heading for Burma. He was part of A Force. Jack's group commenced work on the Railway at the third camp, Kunknitway (the 25 Kilo Camp). He was later at the 105 Kilo, 75 Kilo and 55 kilo camps on the Burma end of the Burma Thailand Railway.

A feature of Jack's POW experience occurred whilst in the 55 Camp. Jack met Basil Clark of the 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion from Cadoux who he had known previously. Basil had a bad ulcer on his leg. The bottom half of the leg below the knee was 75% eaten away with gangrene. Jack was talking to Basil when the Medical Officer (Lieutenant Colonel Albert Coates later Sir Albert Coates) said, "That leg will have to come off, Clark. If we leave it on you have got no chance, let me take it off and you have got better than 50% of getting home". Basil said, "I'll have it off".

The operation was done next morning when two orderlies arrived with the stretcher consisting of bamboo poles with two rice bags stretched over the two long poles. The operating theatre was nothing more than a lean to at the end of the hut, with a dirt floor. There was a 44-gallon drum outside with a fire blazing to burn the amputated limb. The Colonel explained that the anaesthetic would only last a few minutes and proceeded with the operation, Jack Thorpe holding the patient. One of Colonel Albert Coates' students was Weary Dunlop. (Note: Basil Clark survived on returning to Three Springs and built a successful farming venture).

When the two ends of the Railway joined on the Thailand side of the border at Konkoita, Jack's unit travelled by train to Tamarkan. Later the group went to Saigon and later still back to Singapore. On Christmas Eve 1944, Jack left Singapore on the Awa Maru to go to Japan where he was lodged at Camp 22 Iisuka and working in underground coal mines. In August 1945 he was freed after the Japanese capitulation. Jack travelled home to Australia via Manila, the last leg in the HMS Speaker, an aircraft carrier, which called at Guam and New Guinea en route to Sydney. He finally reached Perth.

Jack went on to transfer to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. When he returned to Australia on an annual leave period he decided to take over his father's hotel at Three Springs and was given a discharge from the BCOF. Post war, Jack was the President of the Three Springs Arrino RSL in WA for about 40 years and was awarded the OAM in 2002. Over a period of 15 years he raised over \$50,000 to assist with sending many young people (aged 14-16 years) from his District to the Burma Thailand Railway on Quiet Lion Tours.

Jack Thorpe was a bloody lucky man by his own statement. Surviving life as a POW on the Burma-Thai Railway, Jack lived a full life as a community leader in Three Springs. In 2006 he wrote a book on his life story called 'Bloody Lucky'.

2017 Quiet Lion Tour

Bookings have been strong for the QUIET LION TOUR 2017 which departs Perth on 17th April 2017 and returns on 28th April 2017. If you are considering taking part in this most interesting and informative tour you are advised to make your booking now.

The political situation has stabilised in Thailand and a new King installed. The Military have maintained control and there have been no demonstrations for some time nor are any expected. It is also of note that there are currently no health threats and this is likely to remain over the period of the tour.

The Quiet Lion Tours have always featured High School students from around Australia who are sponsored by various charitable and service organisations. The focus on students is to celebrate the work done by the Doctors on the railway and to perpetuate the message that “we may forgive but we will never forget” the horrific story of the Burma Thailand Railway. The tour normally includes survivors of the railway construction, but this is subject to the health of the POWs and is not guaranteed.

The Tour is for 12 days (11 nights) and the focus is on the story of the Australia POWs, their camps and the Australian doctors culminating in the ANZAC Day Dawn Service in Hellfire Pass and the Memorial Service in the Cemetery at Kanchanaburi. Many sites of Prisoner of War camps, the Bridge on the River Kwai, hospitals sites and other areas of interest are visited as part of the tour.

Descendants of exPOWs who have become authorities on the Thai Burma Railway travel on the tour and provide commentaries in addition to English speaking Thai Guides.

The Quiet Lion Tours commenced in 1985 and travels to Thailand to honour Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop, all other Doctors who tended the sick and all the Prisoners of War who were on the Burma Thailand Railway. The tours are operated by the Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association, a non-profit group dedicated to preserving the memory of those who toiled on the Death Railway as Prisoners of War of the Japanese.

Several days are spent in Bangkok for tourist, shopping opportunities and to acclimatise to the local weather conditions. Accommodation comprises of 4 nights at a top hotel in Bangkok, 2 nights at a riverside resort in Kanchanaburi and 5 nights at the Home Phu Toey Resort (on the River Kwai near Hellfire Pass) which includes the Weary Dunlop Peace Park.

Arrangements can be made for travel from any State in Australia.

Interested people should contact:

Tour Organiser	Ian Holding	0418 832 281	iholding@sinosteel.com.au
Tour Leader	David Piesse	(08) 9447 7505	djpiesse@gmail.com

See Booking Conditions on the BTRMA website.

Proposed 2017 Quiet Lion Tour itinerary

DAY 1 MONDAY	17th APRIL 2017
1.40 PM	Assemble Perth International Airport (Perth Travellers)
4.40 PM	Depart Perth International Airport TG482
3:15 PM	Melbourne International TG466
4.00 PM	Sydney International TG472
2.00 PM	Brisbane International TG474
9pm to 10pm	Arrive Suvarnabhumi Airport Bangkok. Overnight accommodation at Royal Benja Hotel Bangkok
DAY 2 TUESDAY	18th APRIL 2017
7.30 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
8.00 AM	Teachers and Carers to be briefed by Committee
9.00 AM	Visit the Royal Summer Palaces at Bang Pa-in & the ancient capital Ayutthaya. Lunch cruising down the Chayo Phraya River. Free time to shop after cruise. (Students under supervision) Overnight accommodation at Royal Benja Hotel. (Welcome and arrival dinner)
DAY 3 WEDNESDAY	19th APRIL 2017
6.30 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
7.30 AM	To Nakom Pathom, Nong Pladuck, Ban Pong, Tamuang and Kanchanaburi, visit Burma Thailand Railway Centre (TBRC). Lunch at Tida Loa Restaurant by the bridge over the river Kwi Noi, Welcome Dinner and Karaoke. Overnight accommodation at Pung Waan Resort
DAY 4 THURSDAY	20th APRIL 2017
6.45 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
7.45 AM	Group Photo
8.00 AM	Visit Chungkai Cemetery and Cutting and then to TBRC
10.40 AM	Train to Wampo Viaduct with lunch at Jungle Training Centre. Visit Tarsao hospital and camp sites (Pung Waan Kwai Noi Resort) and Tarsao. Sai Yok Noi Falls (Tonchan South Camp) Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey
DAY 5 FRIDAY	21st APRIL 2017
6.45 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
8.00 AM	Buddhist Ceremony. Kun Kanit, Oonjai and POW Remembrance. Visit scene of Hintok Road Camp, Kinsayok Camp area, Sai Yok Yai Waterfalls, Houseboat trip and lunch on River Kwai terminating at the Hintok River POW Camp. Konnyu River Camp Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey.
DAY 6 SATURDAY	22th APRIL 2017
7.00 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
9.00 AM	Visit Hellfire Pass Museum.
11.30 AM	Juniors practice drill for wreath laying ceremony (at Cemetery).
1.00 PM	Australian Rules Football Match – Thailand Tigers vs TBA Lunch at Football ground. Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey
DAY 7 SUNDAY	23th APRIL 2017
6.30 AM	Wake up call. Breakfast.
8.00 AM	Takanun Camps and Khao Lam Dam (lunch at Dam staff club). Pass Brankassi and Hindato camps. Walk the Burma Railway Heritage Trail from Hintok Road through Hintok Cutting to Hellfire Pass Museum. Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey. Concert to celebrate the Christmas of 1943 Concert at Hintok Mountain Camp. Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey

DAY 8 MONDAY**24th APRIL 2017**

Free Day. Visit Weary Dunlop Museum and Jack Chalker Gallery.
 8.00AM Optional Three Pagoda Pass Tour.
 5.00 PM Media interviews for exPOWs and families
 5.30 PM Welcome reception Weary Dunlop Museum
 7.00 PM Light and sound show.
 8.00 PM Dinner with Australian and New Zealand Ambassadors and Quiet Lion Group
 Pack bags before retiring
 Overnight accommodation at Home Phu Toey

DAY 9 TUESDAY**25th APRIL 2017**

2.30 AM Early wake-up.
 3.00 AM Bags at reception and leave for Dawn Service in Hellfire Pass
 7.15 AM Breakfast at Home Phu Toey front entrance
 8.00 AM Group Photograph and leave for Kanchanaburi for juniors wreath laying practice and 11AM ANZAC Day Ceremony at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery
 1.00 PM Lunch at Baan Rao Restaurant
 2.20 PM Dinner and overnight accommodation at Pung Waan Resort

DAY 10 WEDNESDAY**26th APRIL 2017**

6.30 AM Wake up call. Breakfast.
 8.00 AM Return to Bangkok.
 Lunch and Cultural Show at Rose Garden Resort
 Final Dinner. Overnight accommodation at Royal Benja Hotel

DAY 11 THURSDAY**27th APRIL 2017**

Free day for shopping. Juniors under supervision
 2.00 PM Late Check out with arrangements for access to some rooms for shower, toilet, change of clothes and luggage access. Travellers can arrange access to rooms until 6.00 PM at their own cost.
 3.30PM **Sydney travellers** leave city for airport
 7.20 PM Depart Bangkok for Sydney TG475 Arrive 7.20 AM Friday 28th APRIL
 7.00 PM Dinner for remaining travellers
 8.00 PM **Brisbane and Melbourne travellers** leave city for airport
 11:55 PM Depart Bangkok for Melbourne TG465 Arrive 12.05 PM Friday 28th APRIL
 11:55 PM Depart Bangkok for Brisbane TG473 Arrive 11.50 AM Friday 28th APRIL

DAY 12 FRIDAY**28th APRIL 2017**

4:30 AM **Perth travellers** leave city for airport
 7:20 AM Depart Bangkok for Perth TG481 Arrive 3:15 PM

Itinerary current 20th October 2016

Subject to alteration without notice



**APPLICATION TO TRAVEL
THE QUIET LION TOUR 2017
17th APRIL to 28th APRIL 2017**

**ORGANISED BY
BURMA THAILAND RAILWAY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (Inc)**

I apply to join ***The Quiet Lion Tour 2017 (Tour)***. I have read and agree to be bound by the TERMS AND CONDITIONS of the Tour published on the Association's website. I have freely and willingly signed the **WAIVER FORM; RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK** and agree to be bound by its terms.

Adult tariff is \$2,900 ex-Perth or \$3,000 ex-eastern states and juniors (under 18 or full-time high school students) \$2,550, all on a twin share basis. Single supplement \$750.

A precondition of travel is personal travel insurance. This can be organised through travel agents, banks and private Health Insurance at the traveller's own expense.

I enclose a deposit of \$250, which is non-refundable. (See conditions).

Any travel outside of group flights will incur a \$50 charge. Other fees may be imposed by Thai Airlines on any change of air tickets. As a group booking, only a limited number of flights outside the Tours normal travel times are allowed. Please inform BTRMA if you wish to travel separately to the group before or after the Tour. (See conditions).

"Land content only" arrangements are rarely accepted but where that occurs there will be a different tariff.

First Name _____ Surname _____ (as per passport)

Passport Number _____ Expiry Date ____/____/____ Nationality _____

Preferred first name _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Address _____

Suburb / City _____

Post Code _____ Telephone _____

Email _____

Room preference: Double/Twin/Single Sup. Share with _____

Special meal or medical requirements _____

Signature (parent or guardian for juniors) _____ Date ____/____/____

Details of relatives who were POW _____ (attached)

Polo shirt size: chest measurement in centimetres _____ cm

Must be in this format as shirts are made in Thailand and their shirt sizes are different.

THIS SIGNED APPLICATION MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE FOLLOWING:

1. Photocopy of current passport photograph page.
2. Photocopy of travel insurance policy for the period of travel including full conditions.
3. Deposit \$250 per person.

RETURN TO:

BURMA THAILAND RAILWAY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (Inc)
22A Alexandra Road
East Fremantle WA 6158

OR email to iholding@sinosteel.com.au

Further details on Tour content is available via:

Website www.btrma.org.au

Tour Organiser	Ian Holding,	iholding@sinosteel.com.au	0418 832 281
Tour Leader	David Piesse	djpiesse@gmail.com	(08) 9447 7505

Payment can be made by direct deposit

Name: Flightworld Trust account No: 2
Bank: Bankwest
BSB: 302-162
Account: 0733348

The sinking of the Vyner Brooke

Built in 1928, the SS Vyner Brooke was a British-registered cargo vessel of 1,670 tons. She was named after the Third Rajah of Sarawak - Sir Charles Vyner Brooke. Up until the outbreak of war with the Japanese, Vyner Brooke plied the waters between Singapore and Kuching, under the flag of the Sarawak Steamship Company.

She was then requisitioned by Britain's Royal Navy as an armed trader.

On the evening of 12 February 1942, Vyner Brooke was one the last ships carrying evacuees to leave Singapore. Although she usually only carried 12 passengers, in addition to her 47 crew, Vyner Brooke sailed south with 181 passengers embarked, most of them women and children. Among the passengers were the last 65 Australian nurses in Singapore. Throughout the daylight hours of 13 February Vyner Brooke laid up in the lee of a small jungle-covered island, but she was attacked late in the afternoon by a Japanese aircraft, fortunately with no serious casualties. At sunset she made a run for the Banka Strait, heading for Palembang in Sumatra. Prowling Japanese warships, however, impeded her progress and daylight the next day found her dangerously exposed on a flat sea just inside the strait.

Not long after 2:00pm, Vyner Brooke was attacked by several Japanese aircraft. Despite evasive action, she was crippled by several bombs and within half an hour rolled over and sunk bow first. Approximately 150 survivors eventually made it ashore at Banka Island, after periods of between eight and 65 hours in the water. The island had already been occupied by the Japanese and most of the survivors were taken captive.

However, an awful fate awaited many of those that landed on Radji beach.

There, survivors from the Vyner Brooke joined up with another party of civilians and up to 60 Commonwealth servicemen and merchant sailors, who had made it ashore after their own vessels were sunk. After an unsuccessful effort to gain food and assistance from local villagers, a deputation was sent to contact the Japanese, with the aim of having the group taken prisoner. Anticipating this, all but one of the civilian women followed behind. A party of Japanese troops arrived at Radji Beach a few hours later. They shot and bayoneted the males and then forced the 22 Australian nurses and the one British civilian woman who had remained to wade into the sea, then shot them from behind. There were only two survivors - Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, and Private Cecil Kinsley, a British soldier. After hiding in the jungle for several days the pair eventually gave themselves up to the Japanese. Kinsley died a few days later from his wounds, and Bullwinkel spent the rest of the war as an internee.

Of the 65 Australian nurses embarked upon the Vyner Brooke, 12 were killed during the air attack or drowned following the sinking, 21 were murdered on Radji Beach, and 32 became internees, 8 of whom subsequently died before the end of the war.

The stories of the Vyner Brooke and Vivian Bullwinkel are completely inter-connected.

Lieutenant-Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel (Mrs Statham) AO MBE ARRC ED FNM, 18.12.1915 – 3.7.2000, the sole survivor of the Bangka Island Massacre

Vivian Bullwinkel was born on 18 December 1915 in Kapunda, South Australia, to George Francis and Eva Bullwinkel (née Shegog). She had a brother, John. She trained as a nurse and midwife at Broken Hill, New South Wales, and began her nursing career in Hamilton, Victoria, before moving to the Jessie McPherson Hospital in Melbourne. In 1941, wanting to enlist, Bullwinkel volunteered as a nurse with the Royal Australian Air Force but was rejected for having flat feet. She was, however, able to join the Australian Army Nursing Service; assigned to the 2/13th Australian General Hospital (2/13th AGH), in September 1941 she sailed for Singapore. After a few weeks with the 2/10th AGH, Bullwinkel re-joined the 13th AGH in Johor Baharu. Japanese troops invaded Malaya in December 1941 and began to advance southwards, winning a series of victories. By late January 1942 they were advancing through Johore and the 13th AGH was to evacuate to Singapore. A short-lived defence of the island ended in defeat, and, on 12 February, Bullwinkel and 65 other nurses boarded the SS Vyner Brooke to escape.

Two days later, the ship was sunk by Japanese aircraft. Bullwinkel, 21 other nurses and a large group of men, women, and children made it ashore at Radji Beach on Banka Island. Others on board either went down with the ship or were swept away and never seen again.

The group were joined the next day by others making a total of about 100 including about twenty English soldiers from another ship sunk earlier. They elected to surrender to the Japanese.

An officer from the Vyner Brooke walked to Muntok, a town on the north-west of the island, to contact the Japanese. While he was away Matron Irene Drummond, the most senior of the Australian nurses, suggested that the civilian women and children should start off walking towards Muntok.

In an action that later became known as the Banka Island Massacre, Japanese soldiers came and killed the men, then motioned the nurses to wade into the sea.

They then machine-gunned the nurses from behind. Bullwinkel was struck by a bullet which passed completely through her body, missing her internal organs, and feigned death until the Japanese soldiers left. She hid with British Army Private Cecil George Kingsley of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps for 12 days, tending to his severe wounds, only then realising the extent of her own wound, before being captured. They were taken into captivity, but Private Kingsley died soon after due to his having sustained such serious wounds, including a gunshot wound in his abdomen.

Bullwinkel was reunited with survivors of the Vyner Brooke. She told them of the massacre, but none spoke of it again until after the war lest it put Bullwinkel, as witness to the massacre, in danger. Bullwinkel spent three and half years in captivity. Another surviving nurse, Pat Darling died in 2007.

Vivian retired from the army in 1947 and became Director of Nursing at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. Also in 1947 she gave evidence of the massacre at a war crimes trial in Tokyo. She devoted herself to the nursing profession and to honouring those killed on Banka Island, raising funds for a nurses' memorial and serving on numerous committees, including a period as a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial, and later President of the Australian College of Nursing.

Bullwinkel married Colonel Francis West Statham in September 1977, changing her name to Vivian Statham. She returned to Banka Island in 1992 to unveil a shrine to the nurses who had not survived the war. She died of a heart attack on 3 July 2000, aged 84, in Perth, Western Australia.

Australian ExPOWs return to Japan

Over the years, the memories of the Burma Thailand Railway fade away with the passing of the survivors of the Railway. As part of the experience of coming to terms with the horrors of the Railway experience, a number of survivors returned over the years. The following is a description of one such visit.

Five Australian exPOWs and their family members (a total of ten people) visited Japan from 1st to 9th March 2011 at the invitation of the Japanese Government as part of the project "The Japanese/POW Friendship Programme".

Few young Japanese know that Japan fought against Australia during the Second World War and fewer still knew of the atrocities which occurred.

About 22,000 Australians became prisoners of war (POWs) under the Japanese army after the invasion of the Far East. Most of the POWs were sent to Japan and Southeast Asia and the latter included Thailand, particularly the Thai-Burma railway, so called the "Death Railway". About 8,000 of them died of the harsh labour, starvation and diseases. The death rate was as high as 36 per cent. The total number of Australian deaths in WW2 was about 19,000. The fact that 40 per cent of them died as POWs under the Japanese army has put a dark shadow on Australian national history. Many survivors suffered from the scars on their bodies and hearts, and anti-Japanese feelings arose from time to time.

With this historical background, the Japanese government invited personnel related to the Australian army to return to Japan.

During a one-week stay by the ex-POWs, a sincere apology by the then Foreign minister, Maehara, was a highlight. There were assemblies in Kyoto and Tokyo and escorted trips to internment camp sites. All ex POWs were warmly welcomed in each region. Two days after the group left Japan (saying "It was a very fruitful trip"), an earthquake hit Japan.

Visiting members of the party were:

Mr. Harold Ramsey, born 1921 (89 years old at the time) of Victoria. Joined the Australian army at the age of 18. Involved in the action in the Middle East. Before being sent to Java, captured by the Japanese army and was interned in Changi. Forced to work at the Burma-Thai Railway. On his way to Japan on the "Hell Ship" Rakuyo Maru, his ship was torpedoed by a US submarine and sunk in the South China Sea on 12 September, 1944. Rescued by a Japanese ship, he was interned in the Tokyo No.11 dispatched camp (later No.14 Branch camp, in Tsurumi ward, Yokohama city). Forced to work at Toshiba Tsurumi factory. After the camp was destroyed by American air bombing on 15 April, 1945, he was transferred to the Tokyo No.15 Branch camp in Niigata and worked at Niigata iron factory. Accompanied on the trip by Mr. Stephen Ramsey (son).

Mr. Norman E. Anderton, born 1921 (89 years old at the time) of Queensland. Signaller of 8th Battalion. Injured before the fall of Singapore on 13 February 1942 and became a POW at the hospital. Was forced to work at the Thai-Burma railway. The war came to the end while he was in Tambaya hospital camp in Burma (Myanmar). Accompanied by Ms Nichole (Nikki) Wood (niece).

Mr. Alfred John Simmonds (Jack), born 1922 (88 years old at the time) of Queensland. Became a POW in Singapore, interned in Changi POW camp and transferred from Singapore to Moji, Japan, on the Kyokko Maru in May 1943. Interned in the Osaka No.10 Branch camp (Taisho Branch in Shinchitose-machi, Taisho ward, Osaka city) and forced to work at the Osaka iron factory. Transferred to the Osaka No.7 Branch camp (2 Kitago, Takefu city, Fukui) in May 1945 and forced to work for Shin-Etsu Chemical in Takefu. He had earlier visited Japan in 2004 with Australian ex-POWs, Mr. Neil MacPherson and Mr. Jack Boon courtesy of the Japan-Australia Society of Nara and visited the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama. Accompanied by Ms. Dawn June Steindl (partner).

Dr. Charles Rowland Bromley Richards, born in 1916 (94 years old at the time) of New South Wales. Became a POW in Singapore, was sent to the Thai-Burma railway and instrumental in saving the lives of fellow POWs as a medical officer. Sent in Saigon and on the way to Japan on the Rakuyo Maru the ship was torpedoed by a US submarine and sunk. He was rescued by a Japanese naval frigate, interned in the Sendai No.9 Branch camp (Sakata city, Yamagata) forced to work at Sakata branch of Nippon Express. Accompanied by Dr. David Alexander Bromley Richards (the eldest son), Ms. Patricia Margaret Reed (partner), Ms. Maria Clare Richards (the wife of the eldest son), Ms. Lois Yvonne Richards (the wife of the second son). Published "A Doctor's War". Previously visited Japan in 1959 and had a reunion with two civilians who were kind to him in Sakata. Rowley had made a speech at a seminar held at the Australian National University in Canberra under the auspices of the University in 2006.

Mr. GF (Fred) Brett, born in 1925 (85 years old at the time) of Tasmania. Captured in Timor in 1942, interned in Changi POW camp and forced to work on the Thai-Burma railway. He was later transferred to Fukuoka No.13 camp (in Saganoseki, Oita) in September 1944, after a two-month journey on the Rashin Maru, the so called Byoki Maru (sick ship). He was forced to work at the Saganoseki refinery at Nihon Kogyo and later at the No.8 camp (later called No.5 Branch camp) in Kawasaki, Fukuoka. He was forced to work in the coal pit of Omine mine of Furukawa Kogyo. Accompanied by Mr. Robert Bennett (registered nurse).