

BRUCE SCATES

ANZAC JOURNEYS

Returning to the battlefields of World War Two



CAMBRIDGE

ANZAC JOURNEYS

Australians have been making pilgrimages to the battlefields and cemeteries of World War II since the 1940s, from the jungles of New Guinea and South-East Asia to the mountains of Greece and the deserts of North Africa. They travel in search of the stories of lost loved ones, to mourn the dead and to come to grips with the past.

With characteristic empathy, Bruce Scates charts the history of pilgrimages to Crete, Kokoda, Sandakan and Hellfire Pass. He explores the emotional resonance that these sites have for those who served and those who remember. Based on surveys, interviews with pilgrims, extensive fieldwork and archival research, *Anzac Journeys* offers insights into the culture of loss and commemoration and the hunger for meaning so pivotal to the experience of pilgrimage. It shows how the stories of HMAS *Sydney* and Bomber Command, and the historic battles of the 2nd AIF, have loaned new life to the Anzac legend.

Richly illustrated with full-colour maps and photographs of pilgrimages from the 1940s to today, *Anzac Journeys* makes an important and moving contribution to Australian military history.

Bruce Scates holds the Chair of History and Australian Studies in the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University.

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Returning to the battlefields of World War II

BRUCE SCATES

with

Alexandra McCosker, Keir Reeves,
Rebecca Wheatley, Damien Williams



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*This book is in memory of Hank Nelson
who recovered the experience of Australians at war*

*All royalties from the sale of this book are donated
to the Australian Red Cross, supporting its humanitarian work
among the victims of war*

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MONEY, MEASUREMENT AND TERMINOLOGY

To avoid anachronism, this book retains imperial units of measurement.

Money

Australia used pounds, shillings and pence for much of the period covered by this book. In Victoria in 1950 the average yearly wage for a male factory worker was just over £296 while a manager or a clerk was paid around £433 a year. There were 12 pennies (d) in one shilling (s) and 20 shillings in one pound (£). A guinea was £1 1s. When Australia adopted decimal currency in 1966, \$2 was equal to about £1.

Measurement

The relevant metric equivalents to imperial measures are as follows:

- 1 inch = 25.4 mm
- 1 foot = 0.3048 m
- 1 yard = 0.914 m
- 1 mile = 1.61 km
- 1 acre = 0.405 ha
- 1 pound = 0.4536 kg
- 1 stone = 6.35 kg
- 1 ton = 1.016 t

Terminology

The Returned and Services League has a long and complex genealogy. To simplify the narrative, the Returned Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA) and the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) have been referred to throughout the text as the RSL. ANZAC was originally the acronym of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, but it also came to represent a place (the site where Australian and New Zealand troops landed at Gallipoli), a group of servicemen (initially those who served in the campaign) and a mythology or legend. In each case the meaning of Anzac is contextualised by the narrative to follow. Australian and New Zealand troops re-formed as the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in Greece in 1941 and often addressed themselves as Anzacs in other theatres of war. The Australian Office of the Imperial War Graves Commission adopted the title Anzac Agency in the 1940s. Mindful of these historical continuities, this book takes the title *Anzac Journeys*.

INTRODUCTION

'This great sorrow'

In June 1942 the Japanese ship *Montevideo Maru* set sail from Rabaul. Its destination was Hainan, an island Japan had occupied off the southern coast of China. The cargo of 845 prisoners of war (POW) and 200 civilian internees was intended for use as slave labour. After *Montevideo Maru* had been at sea barely a week, a US submarine torpedoed it; there was nothing to mark the freighter as a POW transport, and as such it was a legitimate military target. Almost all the prisoners were sealed in the ship's hull, and there was no chance of escape. The stricken vessel caught fire and sank within 11 minutes.

The sinking of *Montevideo Maru* was one of Australia's greatest wartime disasters. It remains the greatest single loss of Australian lives at sea. The fate of men captured at Rabaul remained a mystery until after the war. Rabaul was one of the first island garrisons to be overwhelmed by the Japanese advance through South-East Asia; its airfields and harbour were captured in January 1942, weeks before the fall of Singapore. It was not until 1946 that Major Harry Williams, an officer seconded to the Australian Prisoner of War Contact and Enquiry Unit in Tokyo, discovered a nominal list of *Montevideo Maru's* ill-fated passengers and forwarded details home to Australia. The original list was lost and the accuracy of Williams' report soon came into question. Long after the war, families still harboured agonising doubts. Had their son or husband died at sea or in battle? Had they perished in a Japanese work camp somewhere in the 'Far East'? Had they been executed? Some even thought they might still be alive. Doreen Beadle believed that her brother Fred escaped the mass killings at Rabaul and hid for a time in the jungle. 'For years we were hoping that he got away', she said, 'and was hiding on the islands, maybe with amnesia.' For Doreen Beadle, the recent acquisition of *Montevideo Maru's* shipping lists, which included Fred's name, ended all such speculation. 'The government hid the story for many years', she insisted, 'and there was this great sorrow that you couldn't talk about.' The release of the list by the National Archives of Australia, and the creation of a website designed to 'gather stories' about men lost on *Montevideo Maru*, loaned a kind of finality to her family's story. The list was acquired only in May 2012, a (somewhat belated) gesture of reconciliation from the Japanese Government. Whatever its provenance, *Montevideo Maru's* records opened a long-overdue forum for descendants of POWs.¹

What function does that forum serve? Memorial notices solicited from relatives situate these men as members of the families they still belong to: he was 'the second son of Arthur and Winifred', 'brother of Eric', 'husband of Jean', 'son of Richard and

Emma', 'fondly remembered by all he left behind'. Families were encouraged to post the few surviving photographs they had. From the day the site was launched, sepia images sealed in ageing albums were uploaded into cyberspace. They show pictures of men in khaki swinging on garden gates, fading photographs of weddings and christenings, a smiling father lifting his daughter on to his shoulders, a young man in a slouch hat posing proudly beside his wife. Some offer personal anecdotes. 'Brave and determined Uncle Bill' was an 'adventurer' and explorer; Kevin's Uncle Charles loved the dogs and the boxing; Bruce Gilchrist fired the first anti-aircraft rounds on Japanese fighters over Australian territory. But the abiding note of most of these messages is absence and the blunt reality of a life cut tragically short. 'Vic was married to my mother, Winifred Scott in May 1941,' one contributor wrote. 'She was 20 at the time. They were together for 4 months before he was shipped out.' 'Wilf' Pearce became a father on 2 January 1942, 'but never got to meet his new daughter'. These men were sorely missed and 'greatly loved' by uncles, siblings, cousins, parents.

Several visitors to the website recorded their last memories of these men or the terrible moment when families learnt of their loss. Lorraine was five when Uncle Bert went overseas: '[H]e came to say goodbye to Mum and Dad, and he carried me on his shoulders.' Jan remembered her mother weeping when she heard her brother was on *Montevideo Maru* when it was torpedoed. '[D]ad is 99', one relative wrote, 'but he still carries a photo of Keith in his Bible.' Many noted the long wait for news after their relative was posted missing: three and half years it took and really only now they knew 'for certain'. Only two contributors reached for the word 'closure', although that was the favoured theme of many a newspaper columnist.²

The word they used instead was 'confirmation'. The publication of *Montevideo Maru*'s shipping list, the digitisation of the original Japanese indent and, finally, the release of passenger photographs, leaves no room for doubt. And in some ways, a visit to the website has come to serve the purpose of a pilgrimage. Here families lay their tributes, pledge 'never to forget', gather (albeit virtually) among a community of mourners, and situate their own family stories within a wider national narrative of loss. Visiting the website may well be as close to an actual pilgrimage as most relatives get. None of the dead were recovered, and the wreck of *Montevideo Maru* lies somewhere in the South China Sea. But that does not discourage everyone. Despite being 94 years of age and confined to a wheelchair, Doreen Beadle attended an Anzac Day service in Rabaul the year the lists were published. She made her way to *Montevideo Maru*'s memorial in Bitia Paka War Cemetery and viewed the names of all the victims, Fred's included, arrayed on 30 columns. 'It was healing to be able to touch his name,' she said. Touching a name etched in stone seemed far more comforting than viewing it in cyberspace.³

This book is a study of those who visit the traumascapes of war: its battlefields and memorials, work camps and prisons, abandoned airfields and carefully tended cemeteries.⁴ Its subjects are those who define themselves as ‘pilgrims’, a self-conscious community (like the descendants of men lost on *Montevideo Maru*) with some deeply felt connection to the site concerned. The use of the word ‘pilgrim’ may seem slightly anachronistic. No one is suggesting for a moment that Chaucer’s pilgrimage to Canterbury is historically the *same* experience as laying a wreath at a Cross of Sacrifice; many of the respondents surveyed here professed no deep religious faith, all being the products of a far more secular age. Nonetheless ‘pilgrimage’ is the word they choose to describe their journey. It captured the sense of a quest, often an ordeal, a journey (as Victor and Edith Turner’s classic formulation put it) ‘out of the normal parameters of life [and] entry into a different, other world’.⁵

This sample includes veterans walking former battlefields, prisoners returning to sites of punishment and incarceration, widows and parents grieving for a young man’s loss, distant relatives seeking to solve a ‘mystery’ of their family’s past. A family connection (as again the *Montevideo Maru* site attests) motivates many of these pilgrims, but certainly not all of them. Amateur historians engrossed in the mythology of Anzac, schoolchildren charged with researching the life and death of a soldier, and those who nursed or befriended men damaged by war also figure in this sample. Of course, the memorials and battlefields of World War II attract other kinds of visitors: in Europe, Asia and Africa alike these places appear as ‘optional extras’ in ever-expansive tour itineraries. Alongside earnest pilgrims walk casual sightseers, backpackers far more interested in beaches than cemeteries, the curious and disinterested, bored and adventurous. Mary’s sentiments, posted defiantly on a website, convey the expectations of this particular cohort: ‘We did not go to Sandakan to relive the past, we went to see the old man of the forest, the orang-outangs.’ It says much about the industry of modern tourism that Mary’s coach cruised seamlessly from a nature reserve to a POW death camp. And no doubt there is much in her testimony and experience that merits the interest of tourism scholars. But this book is not about Mary or other casual visitors.⁶ While pilgrimage and tourism have always travelled together, these are qualitatively different kinds of journeys.⁷

Nor is this the kind of journey undertaken by what Peter Stanley calls the ‘hard-headed military historian’. When professional historians ‘sniff the ground’ (as Stanley puts it) they do so to better understand a battle. Where were the guns sited; what was the range of enemy artillery; ‘where were their flanking units’? These questions may or may not matter to a pilgrim walking the ground where a father, grandfather or uncle was killed. Many would wish to understand a battle’s progress in order to appreciate the circumstances of ‘their’ soldier’s death. But a pilgrim’s journey will

centre on memorials and cemeteries more than it will on what military tacticians call 'killing zones'. Stanley concedes that it is important for people to 'experience' the heat and humidity of South-East Asia or to 'get their knees brown' trekking the desert of North Africa. Confronting the conditions under which men fought pays off in 'historical insight'. A pilgrim by contrast seeks an emotional connection to people, places and events lost in the past. It is telling that Stanley's *Guide to Exploring Australian Battlefields* spends barely a few pages examining cemeteries and pilgrimages. He focuses on the physical landscape of war rather than the emotional aftermath. The kind of book that Stanley has written is most useful and appropriate for this kind of battlefield visitor, but it is a highly selective and gendered testimony (battlefield experts are almost invariably men), and it offers no understanding of the commemorative architecture that frames remembrance or of the emotional investment many pilgrims bring to these places. In short, it is not a history of pilgrimage.⁸

As the differences with Stanley's study suggest, this book fills a significant gap in studies of war and remembrance. There is now a substantial literature on pilgrimages to the battlefields and cemeteries of the Great War. A comparable study of World War II sites is conspicuous by its absence. Yet visits to these sites began even before the war ended and continue to this day. As World War II receives increasing prominence in the way we define Australians' experiences of war, a pilgrimage to Kokoda or Crete or Hellfire Pass may one day come to rival the much-travelled path to Gallipoli.⁹

The geographical scope of these journeys is daunting. The graves of Australian servicemen and women killed in World War II are scattered across the globe. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) sources confirm that some 28 000 *identified* graves are located in more than 40 different countries. Nor is every site of pilgrimage a cemetery. Of some 10 000 airmen killed in World War II, the bodies of more than 3000 were never recovered; Australia's navy (and its merchant marine) lost more than 2000 men – many of these bodies surrendered to the deep. Denied a grave, families seek out derelict airfields in the north of Australia or the south of Britain; they journey to the coast of Western Australia and stand by the memorial raised to HMAS *Sydney* to gaze at the ocean that claimed her.

The choice of pilgrimage site varies with every particular pilgrim: a track in the jungle where prisoners were marched to their deaths; a grove of olives where an uncle may have been buried; a stretch of desert too vast to imagine. Each of these warscapes are what scholars have called 'active sites of memory', open to interrogation and interpretation by different groups and different generations. What do Kokoda, Crete and Tobruk mean to the men who fought there? How do their memories of war differ from those of men who endured long and brutal years of

confinement and forced labour under the Japanese? Why have their families felt a need to return to these places, to walk in the shadow of memory? What do widows, children and grandchildren choose to forget and long to remember?

The 'shadow of memory' is an appropriate phrase. Few of the contributors to the *Montevideo Maru* website had any personal recollection of the men killed 60 years ago. Most spoke of a 'family memory', stories (as one put it) passed 'along the generations', nurtured, treasured and no doubt embellished along the way. In a strict sense, these were not memories at all. A memory is something only an individual can experience, and phrases much in fashion in the academy – 'collective memory', 'national memory', 'cultural memory' – suggest more than they explain. There is a vast literature on memory, and much of it (as one scholar has quipped) is 'not very memorable'. We have drawn a clear and necessary distinction in this project between what veterans (or, for that matter, children or grandchildren) actually remember and what Marianne Hirsch has called the 'postmemory' of others. 'Postmemory' is a form of retrospective remembrance, those family stories that (as the examples from *Montevideo Maru* confirm) have come to assume a life of their own.¹⁰

We have organised this book around particular sites mindful that a sense of place is embodied in every pilgrimage. Part 1, 'Captivity narratives', is the largest section of the book for obvious reasons. It is not just that the scale of loss – more than 8000 Australians died as prisoners of the Japanese; around 30 per cent of fatalities – or the places associated with their deaths – Hellfire Pass, Sandakan and Singapore – loom so large in World War II mythology. 'Captivity narratives' is also the place where we outline many of the debates surrounding the nature of commemoration and examine the architecture of remembrance that frames all World War II cemeteries. Dedicated in June 1953, Labuan Cemetery in North Borneo was the first major World War II cemetery the Anzac Agency completed. It was also one of the first times (in either world wars) that the Australian Government funded a pilgrimage for a civilian representative.

The second part of this book, 'Desert and island', considers Australia's first extended engagements in World War II and the way these campaigns came to be remembered. Throughout 1941–42 the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) fought in Bardia, El Alamein and Tobruk, staving off the German and Italian advance across North Africa. The 6th Division also served in Greece and Crete, an ill-conceived campaign often likened to the doomed assault on Gallipoli 26 years earlier. 'Desert and island' reminds us of the changing pattern of pilgrimage. Tobruk and El Alamein were opened up to regular tours in the early 2000s – the former was effectively closed to travellers as the domestic politics of Libya became more and more unstable. Visits to Crete, by contrast, peaked in the early twenty-first century, its proximity to Gallipoli enabling commemorative cruises across the

Aegean. The current financial plight of Greece may well affect the fortunes of this pilgrimage industry.

Part 3, 'Air and sea', considers pilgrimages to sites associated with Bomber Command and the crew of HMAS *Sydney*. Again, the scale of loss is confronting. Proportionally more men were killed in Bomber Command than in any of the branches of the armed forces; when *Sydney* went down in 1941 all 645 of the ship's company was lost with her. Two key commemorative events frame the discussion in these chapters: the discovery of the wrecks of *Sydney* and *Kormoran* in 2008, and the unveiling of a memorial to Bomber Command in London in 2012.

Part 4 shifts the focus to what is often called 'Australia's front line': the battlefields of Kokoda and the forward supply base in Darwin and the Northern Territory. The former demonstrates again the diverse motivations that lie behind visits to World War II battlefields. Trekking Kokoda is as much a feat of endurance as a solemn act of remembrance. Darwin, by contrast, shows how pilgrimage intersects with urban heritage: commemorative trails leading through the heart of the city take visitors on a journey through its wartime history.

This book deliberately departs from a chronological account of World War II to examine places in which fighting took place at overlapping points in time. Australia declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The words chosen by the Australian Prime Minister – 'Great Britain has declared war upon her and ... as a result Australia is also at war' – signalled from the outset Australia's readiness to defend imperial interests. The first contingent of the Second AIF sailed for the Middle East in January 1940, but the first major action was fought by the Royal Australian Navy: the sinking of an Italian cruiser by HMAS *Sydney* in the Mediterranean in July 1940 (Italy had entered the war as an ally of the Axis in June). Australia's first major success on land was the capture of Bardia from Italian forces in January 1941. The siege of Tobruk began in April, as did the disastrous defence of Greece.

On the other side of the globe in November 1941, *Sydney* was sunk in a brief but savage action off the coast of Western Australia. Later that year, Japanese troops began a steady advance southward through Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. In February 1942 more than 80 000 Allied troops based in the supposedly impregnable fortress at Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. Japan's main aim was not to invade Australia but to secure Dutch oilfields and establish its own empire in the Asia-Pacific region. That was not how it seemed in a country long obsessed with 'yellow hordes' to the north. Alarmed by the swift defeat of British and Australian forces in Malaya and Singapore, and the bombing of Darwin a few days later, Prime Minister Curtin brought home what was left of the 6th and 7th Divisions.

On the other side of the world, the RAAF continued to fight over the skies of Europe until 1945. At the battle of El Alamein in October 1941 British and Australian forces halted Rommel's advance on Alexandria, turning the tide on the North African front. Australia's war effort shifted steadily to the Pacific. By July 1942 Japanese troops had landed on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea and Australia (aided by the Americans) struggled to curb their advance along the Kokoda Trail to Port Moresby. By January 1943 organised Japanese resistance in Papua had ended, but northern Australia, and Queensland in particular, remained the staging post for an Allied advance through the islands of the Pacific. For the remainder of the war, Australian troops fought under the supreme command of US General Douglas MacArthur; again Australia was a junior partner in a new imperial alliance.

Each of the campaigns noted here has been the subject of intense scrutiny by military historians. But remembering a conflict is not the same thing as arguing over how it was fought. This book begins with the experience of men taken prisoner by the Japanese because their families faced one of the longest and most painful ordeals of the war. The way they (and subsequent generations) reckoned with their loss inscribed the politics and structures of commemoration and remembrance. By the same token, this study necessarily privileges some sites of pilgrimage over others. Bardia was an important battle, but very few Australians have made their way there. Names emblazoned across banners carried on Anzac Day – battle honours like Lebanon and Tarakan – do not resonate in the way of Tobruk or Kokoda. Many are aware of the massacre of Australian nurses on Banka Island; few realise that 700 women were held at Muntok camp and that half these women died. Complex and intriguing questions surround the issue of which sites have come to be remembered and why. Clearly, though, it was not just the size of the battle or the number of fatalities. For reasons that range from domestic politics to climate and geography, some sites became places of pilgrimage whereas others did not.

Nor should we underestimate an element of agency among travellers themselves. The RSL pioneered pilgrimages to Borneo. As early as the mid-1980s Bruce Ruxton (president of the Victorian RSL) led family members and others from Sandakan to Ranau, retracing the route of the POW Death March. Initially these tours included extended visits to the 9th Division landing beaches in Brunei, places (Ruxton thought) that had as much potential as pilgrimage sites as the celebrated landing beach at Anzac. But developments soon persuaded him otherwise. In March 1991 an apologetic president of the Empire Service Association of Brunei wrote to his counterpart in the Victorian RSL: 'There have been changes in Brunei recently which may well effect your decision to have an extended stay here ...

Brunei is now DRY.' The Association was able 'to stockpile some refreshments before the import ban came into effect', but apparently not enough to meet the requirements of Bruce Ruxton. The landing beaches concerned soon fell from the tour itineraries, and excursions to Sabah's scenic attractions (and amply stocked hotels) took their place.¹¹

There are many sites of (World War II) memory in Australia, including a monument to *Montevideo Maru* dedicated (by Australia's Governor-General) on the seventieth anniversary of her sinking. These sites range from the 11 'principal war cemeteries', each marked by a Cross of Sacrifice, to a 'Freedom Wall' built in Brisbane to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Allies' victory in the Pacific. They include museums, heritage-listed buildings (such as MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane), even sportsgrounds where American and Australian forces camped. And most were community initiatives. In townships across Australia a new list of names and places was added to most local memorials, fusing the memory of World War II with that of World War I. Not all these sites are places of pilgrimage, and some (like the Freedom Wall) were quickly forgotten. This book chose Adelaide River Cemetery in the Northern Territory as a focus of study, linked as it is with the defence of the north and the memory of the bombing. We have also included sites in Western Australia dedicated to the memory of HMAS *Sydney*.¹²

This selection has therefore been determined by both the volume and frequency of visitation and the salience a particular site has in the popular mythology of World War II. These points are often, though not always, related. Sites have also been chosen to represent a range of experience. A motor tour of airfields in the English Midlands is a very different journey from a trek across the Owen Stanley Range. Walking the Thai-Burma railway beside a father who worked the line is different from imagining the ordeal of a great-uncle killed on the Death March from Sandakan.

This book also considers how these journeys have changed over time. In the immediate post-war period wives and veterans attended the dedication of virtually every significant cemetery, sometimes as guests of the government, often as private individuals. Before this the trail was blazed by the men who gathered in the bodies, the bags of bones exhumed from prisoner-of-war camps, the charred remains sifted from crash sites, bloated corpses tugged by an indifferent tide. How and why the fallen came to be commemorated is part of the story of Australian pilgrimage. And, as with every historical narrative, that story relies on the archives. Again, *Montevideo Maru's* story offers a useful point of reference. Doreen Beadle was certainly not the first person to visit the ill-fated ship's memorial. In July 1955, not long after the monument was erected, the mother of a man lost on *Montevideo Maru* made

her way to Bita Paka Cemetery. Her account was published in another set of documents held by the National Archives of Australia, in the monthly proceedings of the Imperial War Graves Commission. 'Here lies so many of our boys from the 2/22nd Battalion', she began:

When you enter the Cemetery you pass over an immense lawn dotted with Jacaranda trees; then through the gateway of exquisite Crotons and flowers, and up marble steps. Straight in front are ten panels, five on each side containing the names of those men whose graves are known only to God, and those who went down with the 'MONTEVIDEO MARU' [*sic*]. Ahead, between the panels, stands the Cross of Sacrifice. Looking down the list of names on the panels, which included that of my son, I felt they were not dead, but very much alive. Bita Paka must be seen, because its beauty could never be described.¹³

A desire to *see* those places and those names, and a belief that such a journey can help 'heal' the wounds of war, has motivated one generation of Australian pilgrims after another. This woman's experience was certainly not the same as Mrs Beadle's: her loss was more immediate, her grief more profound, her journey more taxing. Like every history, the story of Australian pilgrimage is an analysis of change over time. The differences and the continuities that unite or distinguish successive generations of pilgrims and the way some sites yield different meanings from others is a key focus of this project.

Alongside these actual journeys is a journey of the mind. Both Mrs Beadle and her anonymous predecessor *imagined* this site long before they visited it. In lounge-rooms across Australia, families read and reread the last letters they received from loved ones. They ordered pictures of tombstones and memorials from the Imperial War Graves Commission, sent floral tributes across the ocean, composed epitaphs for graves most grieving families could never hope to see. And today they visit websites offered by a range of public and private agencies.

The *Montevideo Maru* website is something of an innovation for the National Archives. This highlights an important point. The archival record is always a limited one. To access the testimony of today's travellers one must look beyond neatly indexed sets of documents. In addition to the existing historical archive this project has created an archive of its own: interviews, oral histories, written and web-based surveys and a (shared) experience of pilgrimage inform this essentially ethnographic approach.¹⁴ Stories matter to historians – and how, where and why they are told matter as much as what is said. A few of these interviews were conducted in domestic spaces of the subject's own choosing: a lounge-room in Melbourne, a cluttered



'a desire to see those places': the style of grave marker used in Bita Paka cemetery and throughout much of South-East Asia. Pilgrims often liken the neat rows of plaques to soldiers on a parade ground. Naming missing men necessitated a separate memorial.

Source: Courtesy of Mike Goodwin

study in Sydney, a bustling but intimate café in Toowoomba. But the vast majority of these interviews were gathered on what might be called the pilgrimage trail. Informants were questioned beside the graves and memorials of family members, as they trudged along a cutting made for the Thai–Burma railway, climbed the summits of Kokoda or walked an abandoned airfield in the north of England.¹⁵

Care was taken to craft these questions in a polite but challenging way. Asking them in these places, and in the sometimes extended travelling time from one pilgrimage site to another, offered an emotional detail that might not have been possible elsewhere. There is a rich literature surrounding the use of oral history, and it has proved especially useful in capturing the troubled memory of war. The value of these stories does not lie in ‘revealing facts and events’ so much as in a search for their meaning. Almost by definition, an interview is an act of collaboration. This study acknowledges the ‘shared authority’ of witness, informant and historian alike.¹⁶

Gathering such testimony through oral history, surveys and careful ethnographic observations offers a better appreciation of what historians have called ‘historical sensibility’. Such testimony yields new insight into the (changing) popular memories of the war, the culture of loss, bereavement and commemoration, and the hunger for meaning pivotal to any pilgrimage. The stories reproduced in this volume are only a small percentage of this total archive. In making our selection, we chose those testimonies that seemed to illustrate a type of pilgrim or of pilgrimage experience. Our aim has been to represent the spectrum of experience within each pilgrimage site, rather than be statistically representative in our sample.

This book is a contribution to a new field in historical inquiry: the history of the emotions. In the past, historians might well have dismissed Mrs Beadle’s testimony as subjective, sentimental, beyond the proper province of academic inquiry. Today, we understand the insights such testimony can yield into the private world of loss and bereavement, changing practices of mourning and the ‘memory’ and mythology of war. But (again, as the *Montevideo Maru* website suggests) this emotionally charged testimony must be approached with caution. No one doubts the sincerity of Mrs Beadle’s grief for her brother, and clearly there are cases where the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these men sense something of that loss as well. Websites like that hosted by the National Archives are testimony to the licence our age has granted ‘expressive grief’. Once, as Doreen Beadle noted, ‘there was a great sorrow you couldn’t talk about’. Now a less stoic generation courts an emotional engagement with the past. It is not the role of a historian to judge the validity of such feelings, and there is certainly evidence that the trauma of war can echo from one generation to another. It is his or her task to provide a cultural context for these stories and occasionally, respectfully, to intercede. There

is no evidence that the Australian Government deliberately suppressed intelligence surrounding *Montevideo Maru*; in fact, it was in everyone's interest that the dead should be named. But Mrs Beadle was right to suspect secrecy on the part of the authorities. The government did 'hide the stories' of Japanese atrocities against POWs and for reasons many (then and now) would see as justified.¹⁷

The approach of this book is to weave these historical memories, family voices and archival research together with the physical remains and cultural heritage of Anzac World War II sites. In doing so we combine people and place using an historical lens that marshals oral history, the archive, commemoration sites and remnant cultural heritage to provide fresh approaches to understanding war pilgrimage both in the past and present day. While grounded in Australian history this book is also about how historical memories have ongoing legacies that continue in the early twenty-first century. These legacies are often best observed through the examination of war heritage commemoration sites and the historical landscapes of World War II. This book argues that the Anzac landscapes of World War II provide the setting where visitors feel a sense of place and connectivity to broader historical themes associated with the Australian war experience. *Anzac Journeys* is not just a voyage across a physical landscape; it traverses an emotional landscape as well. And it demonstrates that battles do not end when the guns cease firing. As the *Montevideo Maru* website attests, Australians still live in the shadow of war.¹⁸



'grounded in Australian history': a young Australian tends the grave of an Australian airman buried outside Florence. This particular pilgrim was part of a study tour conducted by Monash University. She described her journey as at once a pilgrimage and a learning experience. Studying the architecture of commemoration led to 'deeper understanding' of the relationship between history and memory. It also demonstrated the human cost of war. Note the upright tombstones, a feature of most war cemeteries in Europe.

Source: Bruce Scates

CAPTIVITY NARRATIVES



1

CHAPTER ONE

'IF ONLY I KNEW WHAT HAS BECOME OF HIM'

The loss of Australia's prisoners of war

More than 22 000 Australian servicemen and women were taken prisoner as Japanese forces swept through Asia and the Pacific. They shared their captivity with civilian internees as well as members of other Allied forces. Conditions in each camp were different, and survival rates varied accordingly. The Red Cross map expresses a deep desire to locate a missing loved one but, in truth, the numbers in each camp, even their location, were often a mystery. Members of Australian forces were also taken prisoner by Axis troops in Europe, but their experience has not loomed quite so large in national mythology.



'locating a missing loved one': a Red Cross map identifying prisoner-of-war and internee camps in the Far East.

Source: Red Cross, *Prisoner of War and Internee Camps of the Far East*, Rare Books Collection, Monash University

In January 1946, barely a few months after the fighting in the Pacific had ended, E.V. Britnell, secretary of the Australian Prisoners of War Relatives Association, wrote (yet again) to the Prime Minister: 'We are being asked by members of the Association who have had the misfortune to have their relatives die whilst prisoners of war in territories which were formally occupied by the Japanese, when it will be possible to visit their graves.'¹ Misfortune was an understatement, as Britnell knew full well. Families who lost loved ones in Japanese POW camps suffered a terrible ordeal. Since 1942, and the fall of Singapore, they had lived in a state of chronic anxiety, never knowing whether a son or daughter was alive or dead, fearing but not knowing the worst, unwilling to give up hope, unable to grieve. The phrases 'anxiously awaiting news', 'worry and distress', even 'mental torment' occur time and time again in their correspondence. Having been denied certainty for so long, and emotionally exhausted by war's end, many craved the finality if not the solace a pilgrimage to a grave might bring.²

This was an ordeal that began and ended in silence. In most cases, the fate of other casualties was quickly and reliably conveyed to their families. Not so prisoners taken in the Pacific. As late as October 1943, the Red Cross journal *Prisoner of War* described the Far East as 'a closed book': Japan would not permit the inspection of its camps or confirm the number of prisoners or the location where they were kept. Thousands of families were told that their men were missing, 'presumed taken prisoner', but no one knew for sure. In many cases that status would not change until the war's end, sometimes with the return home of a virtual stranger, often with the news of his death.

The silence of the East was never total. And that in a way made matters even worse. Word from the camps was irregular, unpredictable and always brief. In the course of the war some families received a Red Cross card bearing the signature of a son or husband and that 'trite copy book phrase' 'I am in good health'.³ Most were not. By the time these undated cards arrived in Australia, many of the men who sent them were dead, victims of disease, neglect and abuse. Letters were even rarer. Without notice or explanation, a Japanese plane dropped a 'small bag' of correspondence over Port Moresby in May 1942, and families who had heard nothing for months gazed in disbelief at the handwriting of vanished men. 'He said he was in the best of health', Mrs Evans wrote to the Prime Minister, 'that he was well treated and that I was not on any account to worry about him.' But two years later Mrs Evans had still heard nothing further.⁴ Ellen Evans was not alone. In the course of the war, military censorship and the indifference, hostility or, as one frustrated official put it, 'plain cynicism' of the Japanese prevented all but a trickle of letters. These arrived through the consulates of neutral countries having taken a

staggered route across Russia to Switzerland. Return correspondence was unlikely. In 1944 the AIF Women's Association noted that more than a million uncollected letters were 'banked up' in Tokyo.⁵

To hear the voice of a loved one was what most families craved. A voice (unlike an undated letter) *proved* that a man was still alive. Late in the war Radio Tokyo broadcast a number of prisoner messages. These were principally for the purpose of propaganda – they certainly did not signal any improved attitude towards the treatment of POWs themselves. But families did not know that; right across the world the transmission of POW messages unleashed joy and hope. Praying their man's voice might be next, families and friends gathered around radio sets and strained to decipher words through fading signal and crackling static. Flight Lieutenant Clarence Sturgeon 'had been lost before the fall of Singapore and no details were known'. In 1944 two cards arrived dated the year previous, and that July a message intercepted from Tokyo. 'I am quite well and in good spirits,' a disembodied voice announced. Mrs Sturgeon's faith was restored, and she despatched yet another trail of letters and airmail cards overseas. She was one of the lucky ones. Her son survived the war. Tens of thousands of others, including many of those marched to recording studios, did not.

The absence of reliable information encouraged families of POWs to imagine the worst. Rumours of ill-treatment had filtered back to Australia from the earliest days of the Pacific War. More than a thousand Canadian troops had been taken prisoner when Hong Kong fell in December 1941. News of woefully inadequate conditions travelled home via Red Cross officials who supervised civilian exchanges. It was the beginning of what one British report called 'a growing list of brutal outrages'. Despite official attempts to calm the public, stories of enforced labour, starvation, disease and outright sadism gained steady currency as the war progressed.⁶

The fear that 'our boys' were the victims of these outrages spread like wildfire through the Australian community. It was not just that Australia seemed the next destination in an apparently unstoppable Japanese advance; or that (in the popular imagination at least) a nation woefully ill prepared for war had been abandoned after the unimaginable fall of Singapore. Racial stereotypes, mobilised so effectively to fight the war, encouraged the easy demonisation of an enemy on our doorstep. And, however well intentioned the policies of government, secrecy surrounding the fate of prisoners made matters worse. Since the first month Japan had entered the war, imperial and Dominion governments had gathered shocking details about the ill-treatment of prisoners. Escapees had been interviewed, intelligence filed from diplomatic missions, and secret cables intercepted. 'It is hard to find words with which to describe the conditions and treatment to which these POWs had been

subjected', one weekly intelligence summary began. 'It can be described without exaggeration as slave labour in its vilest form.' As the report progressed, words for what came to be called the Death Railway came readily to hand. 'Living conditions are deplorable, food insufficient and often through breakdowns in supply, lacking entirely. Disease has been rife in nearly every camp ... No accurate assessment can be given about the death rate ... No consideration was given to the sick, who were driven to work until they died ...'⁷ As early as June 1943, the Australian Government had appointed Sir William Webb to lead a commission of inquiry into a string of atrocity stories. The existence of the inquiry was common knowledge in the Australian community; a steadfast refusal to release its findings mystified and angered the families most concerned.⁸

The reasons for this secrecy were complex. The government's thinking was shaped by practical considerations as much as by solicitude for the bereaved. How would the Japanese respond to the publication of atrocity stories? Would they retaliate against other prisoners? Would premature disclosure compromise future war crimes trials? Secrecy was also driven by wartime politics. Britain and to a lesser extent its Dominions favoured the 'wise control' of information and pressure through diplomatic channels. The United States, on the other hand, eventually resolved to mobilise the outrage of its citizens and lifted its temporary press embargo in early 1944.⁹ From that point on the war cabinets of Britain and the Dominions were forced to make one 'grievous and shocking disclosure' after another and attribute these to the 'barbarous nature of the Japanese'. 'Can my honourable friend say anything reassuring?' a disbelieving backbencher asked Sir Anthony Eden in the House of Commons. 'These revelations may cause a very great deal of anxiety.' The honourable friend could not.¹⁰

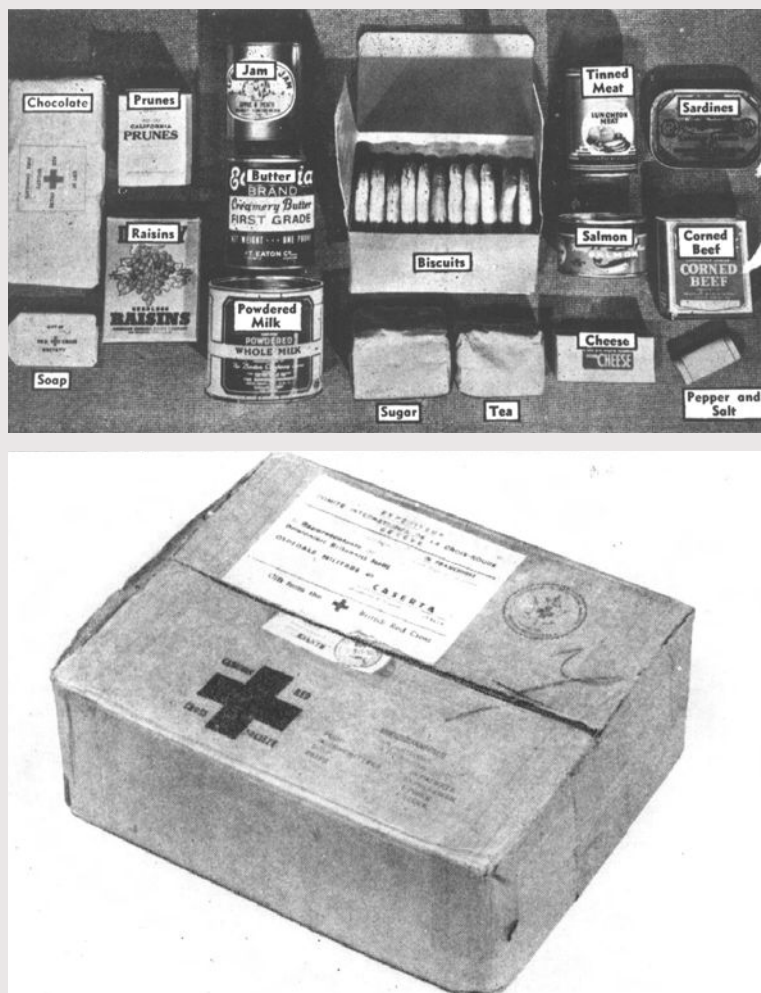
It is a moot point whether knowing the worst could have made things any better for relatives and friends, and the moral complexities of these issues have been surveyed with great sensitivity by Michael McKernan.¹¹ Arguably, though, the information reluctantly released by governments raised at least as many questions as it answered. Not long after the liberation of Labuan, Army Minister Forde issued a statement to the public headed 'Australian Prisoners of War in Borneo'. It was the first official acknowledgement that Allied troops were interned on Labuan and the first (unsatisfactory) attempt to explain their fate. 'Inquiries and interrogation of the natives' suggested that some 300 men had been brought to the island; more than 200 had perished by early 1945. There was a vague reference to forced marches across the mainland, an admission that 'defenceless captives' had 'been shot by their Japanese guards' and disturbing revelations of starvation and 'inhuman brutality'. Equally disturbing was the suggestion that this information was all families were

likely to get. 'It seems that about 200 of the men died and were buried in the island in circumstances that render identification extremely difficult ... While every endeavour will be made to identify as many as possible of the Australians involved in these tragic happenings, it is feared that identification will be inconclusive and incomplete ... Any information which the Army can assess as authentic will be passed to the next of kin with the least possible delay.'

That opened the floodgates of speculation. The next of kin were left wondering whether it was their missing man who had perished on the island. And why had identification proved so problematic? Taunted by lurid speculation in the press, families harboured fears of ritual beheadings, brutal mutilations and indiscriminate burials in mass unmarked graves. Forde's closing admission that he felt 'it best to inform the public in his way rather than obtain the information ... through other channels' only made matters worse. There was a clear implication here that 'other information' existed that the government still chose not to release. As late as November 1945, three months after the end of the Pacific War, the families of more than 200 Sandakan prisoners still had no information as to whether their husbands or sons were dead or alive.¹²

What curt government memos dubbed 'a great distress' was the lot of most POW families. How did those families respond? In the initial stages of the war especially, frenetic activity strove to relieve an overwhelming sense of powerlessness. Millions of letters were despatched to uncertain addresses overseas, with no assurance that prisoners would ever receive them. Fund-raising efforts amassed thousands of tonnes of medical comforts and food, and a 'mercy ship for Malaya' crammed with Bonox, marmalade and sweetened condensed milk set sail for the Far East. Unbeknown to relatives, little of this crucial aid ever reached its destination.¹³

Many POW families sought comfort in the qualified reassurance of church or charity. Throughout the war, the Red Cross journal *Prisoner of War* was distributed free of charge to all next of kin. Its ever-optimistic pages extolled the natural beauty of Thailand, Malaya and 'Golden Burma', praised the nutritional value of seaweed, beancurd and other 'oriental foods', and noted that the Japanese 'had a soft spot for children'. As the war progressed and one 'heart rending story' after another 'shocked' the general public, families must have scanned these columns with increasing disbelief.¹⁴ Others responded as agents rather than victims; their grief was channelled into politics, and they rallied in support of missing loved ones. It was not just that families wrote letters, raised relief funds and mobilised a formidable network among themselves (the Australian Prisoners of War Relatives Association numbered more than 9000 members by 1945). Individual relatives also lobbied government; they challenged the wisdom of the authorities, complained



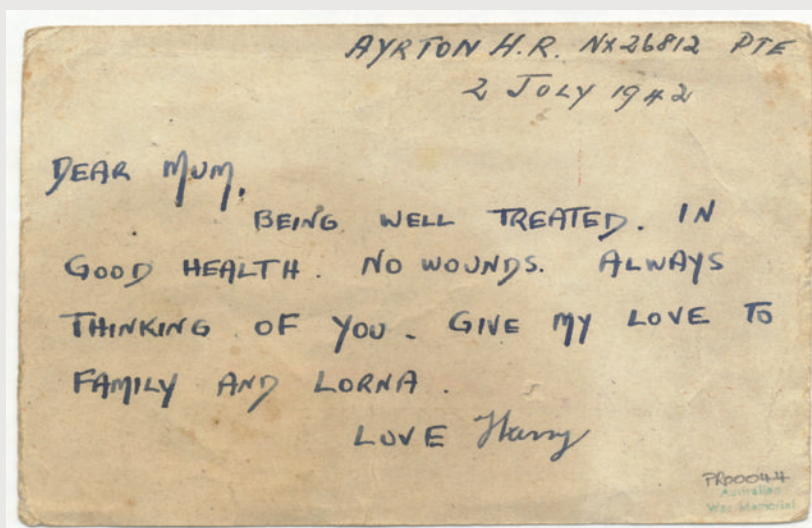
'to relieve a sense of powerlessness': a Red Cross Comfort Parcel intended for distribution to POW camps. Very few such parcels reached the camps in South-East Asia and many were found rotting in warehouses after the war. Fund-raising efforts for the Red Cross were one of the ways families maintained a sense of connection with a prisoner overseas. This 'emotional labour' was later transferred (in many cases) to efforts to find and visit a prisoner's grave.

Source: Courtesy Australian Red Cross Archives

of lack of services, even questioned the prosecution of the war. 'It is possible that our Government could do something – or try to do something', the brother of one prisoner wrote. 'It is now close to two years since our first lot of prisoners were taken.' Fathers protested at the disgraceful incompetence that led to the fall of Singapore, mothers angrily pleaded the interests of their sons. A distraught Mrs Edwards wrote to the Prime Minister in August 1944. Her grandson was posted missing at Kokoda two years earlier, 'and we have not heard another word from him since'. She had just heard that an offer by the Japanese Government to relay messages was declined by the Australian Government for 'security reasons'. 'I was amazed to learn [of this decision]', she protested. 'What security regulations would have been broken by learning from Japan this news and it would have comforted hundreds of wives and mothers to learn about their dear ones.'¹⁵

All these letters convey a clear sense of entitlement. They suggest, as several besieged officials complained, 'a lack of faith in the competency' of government and a troubling willingness to take matters into their own hands. Sydney Smith, the indefatigable secretary of the Australian Prisoners of War Relatives Association, demanded the government's 'urgent attention' on a host of issues, questioned the secrecy surrounding intelligence, pleaded the case of 'overwrought' relatives, and asserted time and again that the Commonwealth had neglected the best interests of men and women imprisoned overseas. If their government was unable to press the prisoners' claims with the Japanese, Australian families were quite prepared to take on the enemy themselves. Just a few months after the fall of Singapore, Grace Hamilton took 'the liberty' of writing to the prime minister. If the government would grant her access to the airwaves, she would speak on behalf of the mothers of Australia and even 'be willing to write the speech myself'. 'I am sure that an appeal of this kind would do no harm if it did no good,' she argued.¹⁶

A 'great worrie' could become an even greater anger. While Grace Hamilton's tone is insistently polite, the relatives of these missing men were far more strident, far more assertive, and far better organised than those who suffered a similar loss during World War I. During the Great War, families mostly approached government through intermediaries; the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Bureau gathered what information it could about the fate of the missing, filtered the rough testimony of soldiers and released what it thought appropriate for the consolation of anxious families. A new generation was far more sceptical of government and far more willing to question it. They acted within and beyond support agencies (such as the Red Cross) and replaced the patient petitioning of the supplicant with the robust politics of entitlement. They would decide what information they were entitled to: Smith and others like him were simply not prepared to wait and weep.¹⁷



'such brutal and inhumane treatment': a postcard from Harry Ayrton to his family. As it turned out, Ayrton was not 'well treated' at all. Nor was he in 'good health'. Private Ayrton died on the railway in July 1943. His family went through the war believing he would one day return to them.

Source: Australian War Memorial PR00044. Courtesy Ayrton family.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the case of the *Rakyo Maru*. Like the ill-fated *Montevideo Maru*, the *Rakyo Maru* was a freighter requisitioned by the Japanese to transport POWs. It too was torpedoed by an American submarine en route to Hainan. In this case, though, there were survivors. And their ordeal was harrowing. The rescue took place a full 60 hours after the ship was abandoned. Those fortunate enough to survive machine-gunning by the *Rakyo Maru*'s Japanese escort 'had neither food nor water for two blistering days and three nights. When rescued, they all looked alike: emaciated, exhausted, and covered with a thick coating of drab green crude oil.' Many 'too filled with salt water to hold fresh water down' lapsed into unconsciousness, 'several were delirious', four eventually died. The dead were buried at sea, three of the four cases unidentified. The government was slow to release the names of men rescued, and reluctant to convey much of the stories they had to tell. Smith despatched another angry telegram to the acting Prime Minister: 'My Association [is] deeply concerned that no public statement has yet to be made giving details of torpedoed Japanese transports and conditions of Jap prisoners of war camps. Rumours are rife and relatives of all prisoners of war are overwrought with anxiety as to the fate of their boys.'¹⁸ And families again took matters into their own hands. Recuperating on a hospital base in Brisbane, a single rescued survivor received more than 300 letters from anxious relatives. Again and again, the question was the same. Did he know anything, anything at all, of the fate of their son?

A partial truth gave comfort to no one. Families insisted on the 'right to know', and that demand for exact news on the fate of a loved one did not cease with the end of the war. 'I have had an inquiry from the parents of one of the soldiers who died whilst a prisoner of war in North Borneo', the secretary of the Victorian RSL wrote to League headquarters in June 1946. 'Naturally they are seeking full information and are surprised so little has been made available.' But the suggestion that Sir William Webb's report be made available to the general public met with a predictable (and well-rehearsed) response: 'It is considered both inadvisable and undesirable that any information contained in the report, other than that which has already appeared in the Press, should be released to the general public. This decision is prompted by a sympathetic consideration for the personal feelings of the next of kin of those unfortunate members of the Australian Military Forces who were subjects of such brutal and inhumane treatment at the hands of their captors.'¹⁹ The RSL colluded in what historian Lynette Silver has dubbed a 'conspiracy of silence'. A chastened official thanked the secretary for the army for the 'comprehensive reply covering the whole sorry story'; it would let the matter drop. There was no such option for the families of POWs. Having been denied all else, families became determined to find and visit a grave.²⁰



'insisting on the right to know': sifting through the rubble of a POW camp in Thailand. Descendants of prisoners lost on the Death Railway hoped to solve the mysteries of these missing men.

Source: Bruce Scates

That was no easy matter. As the following chapters will show, a number of factors militated against a pilgrimage to World War II sites and (in the short term at least) there was nothing like the mass, commercialised battlefield tourism that emerged after World War I.²¹ In the meantime, the first pilgrimages were made not so much by next of kin as by their proxies: former POWs aiding the search for the dead, chaplains sent to grieve for them, journalists determined to let the public 'know'. These narratives are each distinctive as a genre; individually and collectively they evoke the themes of return and retribution, redemption and renewal. And they range from actual journeys across a physical landscape to imagined journeys across a landscape of the mind.

2

CHAPTER 2

WITNESS TO WAR

The first journeys

Following the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japanese forces moved swiftly through South-East Asia. The speed of the Japanese advance saw many thousands of Australian, British, Dutch and Allied servicemen and women taken prisoner. They would soon become part of a vast slave-labour force, along with many more local and indigenous people. Men of the AIF, RAN and RAAF and the women of the Australian Army Nursing Service were captured in Malaya, Singapore, Java, Timor, Ambon and Rabaul in early 1942. Even so, the POW story still centres on Singapore (where the greatest number of prisoners was taken), Thailand and Borneo, where thousands laboured and many died.



'the speed of the Japanese advance': territory occupied by Japan and sites of the POW story.

Source: Allan S. Walker, *The Island Campaigns* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1967), p. 372.

In the wake of any war comes the witness. Witnesses are men and women who testify with the authority of direct experience. They are the survivors of battles and atrocities, whose lives were swept up in tragedy or trauma, who resolve to speak out against the most unspeakable of crimes. Historians have labelled them ‘moral witnesses’. Burdened with ‘a terrible tale to tell’, their whole sense of self is often defined by their stories.

This chapter looks at three different kinds of witness testimony about the prisoner-of-war experience under the Japanese. The first two concern survivors who returned to the sites of imprisonment soon after the end of the war. The third is a documentary made by an Australian journalist who journeyed through Borneo gathering material. All three are among the first recorded impressions of the Sandakan Death March and the building of the Thai–Burma railway, experiences that now loom large in the way we remember World War II. Recovering these stories helps to explain how places become ‘traumascape’, sites that are (as Maria Tumarkin has put it) ‘marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss’. And it helps us to understand why the railway and the route from Sandakan to Ranau are places of pilgrimage today.¹

RECOVERY AND RETRIBUTION: WILLIAM STICPEWICH INVESTIGATES

Warrant Officer William Hector Sticpewich is our first ‘moral witness’. In 1942 he was one of 2700 Australian and British POWs transported to British North Borneo. Three years later only six of these men survived. Men died, an early army intelligence report noted, of malnutrition, starvation, exhaustion, exposure and disease, literally worked to death in a series of work camps across the island. Several hundred perished in the marches from Sandakan to Ranau as Japanese forces fled inland hoping to escape the Allied advance. The last men were murdered in a ‘definite policy’ of systematic extermination. No longer able to carry supplies, they had ceased to serve any useful purpose to their captors. And they posed a serious liability. Survivors were by definition witnesses, and the Japanese had good reason to fear retribution for their crimes.²

The story of every survivor is different. Bill Sticpewich owed his survival to chance, cunning, resourcefulness and grudging collaboration. Something of a Jack-of-all-trades, his skill in maintaining camp machinery made him almost indispensable to the Japanese. His basic command of Malayan and Japanese was equally useful. Sticpewich and his ‘technical team’ were granted better rations, better treatment, even medical supplies. By his own admission he was one of the fortunate few who never really starved at Sandakan. Sticpewich also managed to befriend one of the



'a terrible tale to tell': Warrant Officer William Sticpewich gives evidence to a war crimes trial in Tokyo. Throughout the proceedings, Sticpewich would play the role of the moral witness; bringing the perpetrators of the Borneo atrocities to justice. After the war nearly 900 Japanese and Formosan soldiers were on the Allies' wanted list for Borneo. More than 400 were arrested and charged. Sticpewich remained in uniform after the war, rising to the rank of major. On leaving the army, his papers were donated to the Australian War Memorial, thus ensuring the existence of a permanent record of the evil he had seen. Partially blind, Sticpewich was knocked down by a car in 1977. His death was deemed 'not attributable to war service' and his widow's pension assessed accordingly.

Source: Australian War Memorial, P02289.002

Formosan guards. Warned by this guard that the few survivors of the death march were to be killed – ‘All men very short time *mati, mati*’ – he escaped into the jungle in July 1945.³

Sticpewich evaded recapture and, with the assistance of sympathetic locals, met up with a commando unit spearheading the liberation of Borneo. He returned to Sandakan in November 1945, provided crucial reconnaissance for the 8th Australian War Graves Unit and acted as an ‘investigator’ in efforts to bring war criminals to justice. ‘They [the Japanese] never expected me’, he gloated some months later. ‘Their faces went green when I walked in. *They* thought I was dead in the jungle.’ In that same jungle Sticpewich searched for the victims of the Death March. Throughout 1945–46 and again in 1947, his knowledge of the route, terrain and circumstances of the march helped to recover hundreds of bodies. An officer of the Australian War Graves Unit had described the search for Borneo’s war dead as a ‘colossal task’. Sticpewich’s diary, kept during the second and longest of the searches, helps us to understand why.⁴

First and foremost was the punishing terrain. The Death March from Sandakan to Ranau stretched more than 260 kilometres into the mountainous interior of Borneo. The climb traverses several major river systems, dense jungle, swamps, precipitous mountains and heavily timbered valleys. Sticpewich admitted that he soon ‘felt the strain’ of the journey as he slipped down the same steep and muddy track he had trudged in 1945. Days began ‘with showers’ and ended with ‘heavy rain’. Temperatures climbed higher than 40 degrees Celsius and, in the close humidity of the jungle, bodies ran with sweat.⁵

In 1945 prisoners had lugged loads of rice and equipment across this impossible landscape. In 1945–46, and again in 1947, Sticpewich struggled to retrace the ground. The second of these searches was the most exhaustive. Finding a campsite, or (as he curtly put it) ‘the usual evidence of murder’, a systematic search of the entire area began.⁶ Previous parties had wandered barely 20 metres from what remained of the *rentis*, the Malay term for the narrow and overgrown track. Sticpewich extended the search to 270 metres, examining ‘every square inch’, be it ‘cliff face’ or ‘riverbed’. Each searcher worked along the lines of a grid pattern scouring a two-metre area for clothing, gear and human remains. At some sites, most notably former POW camps, vast tracts of the jungle were felled and the ground dug over by a team of more than a hundred ‘coolies’ time and again.

The search of Jungle Camps 1 and 2 (in the vicinity of Ranau) were typical of many. ‘All the ground scraped clean’, Sticpewich noted in his diary, ‘found portion of skull in old fur felt hat Aust pattern. Show[s] evidence of being murdered by rifle fire. Probably one of the 17 victims who were murdered 1 August 45 ...



'a grim harvest of relics and remains': Australian slouch hats found in the ruins of Sandakan camp. Sticpewich made every attempt to identify the bodies he recovered. Usually he failed.

Source: Australian War Memorial, Robertson Collection, I22/6

searched for an area up to 300 yds from the campsite ... a set of dentures were found.' Over the next few days Sticpewich's party sifted through the soil of an old POW cemetery and, despite the work of previous recovery teams, gathered a grim harvest of relics and remains. Work began early in the morning and ended only as light failed. Sticpewich's attention to detail was unrelenting.⁷

It was not just the 'science' of Sticpewich's search method that secured success, or his frequent assertion that he 'handled the natives' better than most. Unlike previous searchers, he offered payment for every set of remains brought in from the jungle and a bonus for the man who discovered the greatest number of bodies. The incentives worked. 'A bulldozer could not shift as much dirt as this gang has been doing,' he noted.⁸

Sticpewich knew how 'the native's mind worked'. He also knew the ground. It is evident throughout the diary that this survivor of the march saw things others could not. Sticpewich knew which winding path was most likely to have been taken, at which point a stream would have been forded and where men – exhausted by their ordeal – finally fell out of the line.⁹ Such landmarks were not immediately apparent to members of the War Graves detachments, but for Sticpewich these landmarks *were* the journey: they triggered memory, sharpened recollection and prompted a deeply personalised narrative of events.¹⁰

Then there was the matter of Sticpewich's personal investment in the search. At one level his account is careful and forensic; an inventory of every rotting ground sheet, boot (Australian, British or Indian pattern), shoulder badge and tunic button wrested from the mud. At another, even the simplest object is asked to tell a story – a drinking bottle cut out to make a dixie, a compass hidden to aid a planned escape, a 'hobby pipe' fashioned to pass long hours of captivity in Changi, even a christening mug bearing a child's name. Artefacts like these were evidence that these men were determined to survive; they gave (like the case of pipe and christening mug) the scattered remains of the dead, a name, a family, a face.¹¹ Human remains were even more eloquent. Sticpewich's search would not just locate the dead, he would also explain how and why they died: '[R]emains located ... about 15 yds from 5/8 mile peg. Skull only recovered. Skull was fractured on left side above temple. 2¾ inches long. Left side cheek bone and upper jaw broken away apparently been the results of a bullet. Bullet entering though left eye and passing through face in a downward passage through to the mastoid bone right side. A[n] old Australian Army pattern boot found about 15 yds away.'¹²

This was not a matter of disinterested speculation. Sticpewich felt an intense sense of obligation to the relatives of the dead: 'I have endeavoured to do our utmost to lessen their anxiety and sorrow', he told the Army authorities. '[We] must

leave no stone unturned.’ Alongside this sense of duty to the bereaved may well have been the guilt of the survivor. The fact that as a prisoner he enjoyed certain privileges – while those around him perished – would certainly have compounded any sense of guilt. And to survive itself conferred an obligation. Sticpewich’s zeal to recover the remains of former comrades was partly a pursuit of justice. His detailed diary reads like the transcript of a trial. It names the ‘Jap murderers’ and outlines the circumstances of his comrades’ deaths. The entry for 17 May is typical of many:

... a native led us to a location where ... in 1945 ... he was working ... he saw 6 Japs[,] 4 ORs [other ranks] and 2 officer types with swords, with a white man (soldier) they put a rope round his neck and strangled him then dragged him into the jungle about 12 yds where they left him. He later saw where they left the PW, stating he covered the body with the PW’s groundsheet, but said the Japs stripped clothes from the victim.¹³

Such information was invaluable to the war crimes trials, and at several points in the diary Sticpewich rehearses his grim testimony to some imagined future court. But he also faced a dilemma. His principal purpose was to gather intelligence crucial to the recovery of remains; the moral imperative to bring ‘Jap informers’ to justice was quite another matter entirely. Throughout the diary, Sandakan’s survivor rails against ‘disloyal’ natives who turned escaped men in to their captors. And for an obvious reason. These ‘savages’ might well have betrayed him as well. Future generations would walk the route of the Death March in the hope of consolation. Sticpewich trod that path in the hope of revenge.

RECOVERY AND REDEMPTION: A CHAPLAIN’S JOURNEY

Our second witness is Reverend H.C. Babb. Like Sticpewich, Babb was a survivor. He served as a chaplain to the East Surrey Regiment in Malaya, narrowly escaped the regiment’s mauling at the hands of advancing Japanese and retreated to Singapore not long before its fall. Babb was incarcerated for several months in Changi, and in mid-1942 he joined a working party on the Thai–Burma railway. For more than three years Babb conducted services for British and Australian POWs, and tended to the needs of sick and dying men. Although he was based mostly at Chungkai (a hospital camp 129 kilometres north-west of Bangkok), Babb moved with various work parties along the entire section of the line. Babb was liberated in 1945 and, like Sticpewich, volunteered to help locate the bodies of the dead. He worked, as he put it, ‘with a small band of Australians’, and their efforts would succeed

where less 'determined' parties led by 'British officers' had failed. Although Babb was technically a British officer himself, this was an Anzac journey from beginning to end, made in the company of what Babb called his 'Australian friends'.¹⁴

Henry Babb's return to POW memory sites was bound to be very different from Sticpewich's gruelling march through Borneo. Babb, and a party of surveyors from the War Graves Commission, *rode* the Death Railway through Thailand, travelling with comparative ease between one jungle camp and worksite to another. Nor (with some very notable exceptions) was the recovery of the railway's dead quite as difficult. The victims of the Death Marches were scattered across hundreds of miles of track. With the exception of a surviving cemetery plan from the base camp at Sandakan, Sticpewich had no record other than his own memory to guide him. And Ranau's dead were by definition unknown. The Japanese had done all they could to obliterate any trace of them. Perverse as it may seem, men who died building the railway were honoured. The Japanese permitted the construction of well-ordered cemeteries and even memorials to mark this (unwilling) sacrifice for the Emperor. Certainly some of the more isolated graves were difficult to find, and even the shortest journey through the jungle left the party 'wet through with sweat and [steaming] like a suet pudding'.¹⁵ But each of Babb's days ended in a well-established railway camp as the guest of the men who had once been his master.

These two authors offer us qualitatively different kinds of testimony. Sticpewich's diary is essentially utilitarian; it charts the track, records the gravesites, gathers evidence against 'all the Jap murderers' and any who aided them. As with any autobiographical narrative, its author is also a subject. As previously noted, Sticpewich was keen to compare his management of the search and handling of those difficult natives with the incompetence and naïveté of those who went before him. But that is the extent to which the author's voice intrudes on the text. Babb's account by contrast reads like a sermon or (at more intimate moments) a confession. It is a search for redemption and a parable of survival. As such, it bears all the classic elements we associate with a pilgrimage. There is a sense here of a quest, a journey 'out of the normal parameters of life [and] entry into a different other world', a visit to a landscape saturated with meaning, and a return home to an everyday world, exhausted but renewed by the experience.

In the course of this journey, Babb is very conscious of his role as a storyteller. He reflects on his own personal investment in the project at hand and strives to establish a relationship with an imagined audience. Interventions are common throughout the text, framing what scholars have called autobiographical narrative. 'Note by Padre' reads a bracketed entry after an intelligence officer had interrogated a Japanese guard: 'I have had to be a trifle facetious in places. It is a heart-breaking job seeing all these cemeteries and knowing that all the graves contain bones of



'struggling to transcend the horrors': a proposal for a national memorial park at Kinabalu. The nature reserve would transform the jungle into a picturesque landscape, domesticating the wilderness, honouring the dead but also serving the living. This turn to more utilitarian forms of commemoration was one way of dealing with the traumatic memory of war.

Source: G. S. Carter, *A Tragedy of Borneo 1941-45*, (Brunei: G. S. Carter, 1958), Rare Book Collection, Monash University.

young men cut off before they had reached their prime – and many of the lives could have been saved had the Nips been less brutal and had given us even a minimum of medical supplies. If I had been an excitable Frenchman I would have cried my eyes out.’¹⁶

Babb may not have been an excitable Frenchman, but he was certainly enthralled by the journey. He describes his ‘elation’ at rediscovering ‘lost graves’, isolated cemeteries overgrown by the jungle, incorrectly recorded on prisoner maps or badly damaged by Allied bombing. He and his party wander far from the track and search the jungle for clues. In the classic paradigm of pilgrimage the most rewarding sites are those that involve an element of ordeal to reach. Battering one’s way through a tangle of vines was enough to test the determined searcher and heightened the joyous sense of reward:

We hacked our way through walls of steaming jungle ... Bamboo, Tiger Wood, Jungle Grass, Creepers, Prickly bushes, Ants, Bees, were only a few of the obstructions we encountered ... We struck the position of the old cook-house of the Camp. The fireplaces, old tins etc could not have been better clues. On again and a cry from Gordon was the best sound I had heard for three hours – ‘Here’s a tree with a cross on it.’ A voice from the rear ... ‘You little Trimmer! You little bobby dazzler!’ ... There were 5 graves here at least ... I myself felt like Isaac Newton must have felt like when he discovered the law of gravity.¹⁷

Babb’s ‘determined little party’¹⁸ searched the line from August to October 1945. In that time they visit 144 cemeteries and recorded the location of 10 549 burials. As in the case of the Death March, more than a hundred bodies were never recovered. But again there was a difference. Aided by lists of names (sealed in bottles and entombed with the dead) most of these men could be identified. After three years of waiting the missing had at last been found.

The differences between Babb’s and Sticpewich’s accounts don’t end there. The Death March was an unmitigated tragedy with little to redeem the suffering. Babb, by contrast, could admire the products of the prisoners’ labour. The railway was an engineering marvel, a ‘miraculous achievement’. The word ‘miracle’ is notably absent from Sandakan narratives, then as today. By the same token the jungle in Sticpewich’s account is simply an obstacle to be crossed. Babb, by contrast, can also see its beauty. As he journeys up the line, he is transported spiritually as well as physically. Babb chases ‘brightly coloured butterflies flitting about in the sun’, marvels at ‘the most graceful birds I have ever seen’, vows to ‘learn more’ about God’s marvellous creatures of the forest. Sticpewich’s jungle is nothing like this. It is dark, oppressive, empty and silent.¹⁹

Perhaps the most dramatic contrast of all is the cemeteries. Sticpewich's cemeteries were hardly worthy of the name. The dead were covered with barely six inches of earth, few graves were properly marked and those who perished on the march were seldom buried at all. By contrast Babb describes the graveyards of Thailand as something of a flower show. As the diesel rattles down the track it passes one immaculate burial ground after another. 'Coolies', locals and, of course, the Japanese had set to work clearing the jungle, laying paths, fencing the perimeters and decorating Allied graves. An avid gardener himself, the country parson from Oxfordshire was delighted to find 'Hibiscus ... Cannas ... roses and other local flowers riotously [vying] with each other in exhibition [of] their splendour'.²⁰

Unlike Sticpewich's grim encounter with evil, Babb seeks and finds a spiritually uplifting place. There was 'sunshine in his heart as well as in the sky' when he reached Hindato Station: 'It was a delightfully quiet spot and the only sound to be heard is the singing and twittering of birds. I have never been so entranced since the journey began; indeed this is hallowed ground and I felt very close to God here.'²¹ The tilting crosses, 'the names still visible', were always the most moving. The crosses, he noted, 'were rather crude, but one could fully appreciate the last efforts made by sick prisoners for their comrades who had passed on'. Other markers prompted Babb to reflect on the feelings of their makers. He wondered whether a simple stone cairn was the work of a homesick Scotsman. And visiting these graveyards Babb was mindful to record the testimony of the men who made them: '[near] the entrance was an archway, and carved on the wood, "We Will Always Remember Them"'.²²

Even in death, then, these soldiers retain a voice, a presence, a dignity. And they attempt to influence their own destiny in a way that is virtually unimaginable in Sticpewich's account. On the track most men died when all the strength and all the spirit had gone out of them. In Babb's account they can still 'fall' as heroes rather than victims, choosing execution as an escape from the slow death of a prisoner.

[As] we moved up a track ... towards Kanchanaburi, [we came] to the 4 graves of British soldiers who attempted to escape in early 1943 ... This little plot of England in Thailand is looking as it should do. Stones have been placed around the graves, a low fence of bamboo around the area, and the archway of tree trunks surmounted by a white cross completed an attractive picture. Well do I remember hearing the shots which killed these brave lads ...²³

There were no little plots of England in Ranau.



'I felt very close to God there': prisoners bury one of their mates at a makeshift cemetery on the railway. Babb was careful to record the location of these tiny graveyards, and treasured the original crosses raised to the dead.

Source: Australian War Memorial, P00406.031

The irony of all this was that these 'very English' cemeteries were initially tended by the Japanese. The graves of Sandakan, Ranau and the track were also cleared by conscript enemy labour, but those forces were soon evacuated to Japan or hastily despatched to the war crimes trials in Rabaul. Management of Borneo's graveyards quickly fell to the War Graves units and its vast reserves of 'coolie labour'. That was not the case in Thailand. The greater number of troops stationed along the line meant that the process of repatriation was a much more lengthy and difficult business. Moreover the involvement of civilian labour – auxiliary staff managing the railway – lessened the stigma of 'the enemy' tending Allied graves. Finally, and here Babb's faith again shapes the texture of his narrative, some Japanese tended the graves with genuine respect and dedication. At Mezali, Babb found a 'beautiful little cemetery', carefully enclosed by bamboo lattice and with potted flowers adorning every grave. This, he hoped, was a labour of redemption. 'A Nip Lieut.' responsible for preparing this cemetery seemed to seek forgiveness. 'This is the work of my heart,' he told Babb in English. His acknowledgement that the Japanese might have a heart distinguishes Babb's account from many prisoner narratives.²⁴

As he was a man of his time, Babb's diary is not without its racist overtones. Like Sticpewich, he paints an ugly caricature of the worst of his captors, 'the cruel looking fat faced Nip ... typical of our p.o.w. days'. But the most 'evil' of the enemy were officers ultimately responsible for the cruelty and Korean guards all too willing to do their bidding. The enemy and, for that matter, 'the Asiatic' was not one undifferentiated mass. He draws a clear distinction between combatant and non-combatant, 'despicable slave drivers' and the 'Civilian Railway Nips', who 'obeyed our orders implicitly and helped us more than we could have hoped ... in our wildest dreams'. And Babb's narrative is suffused with compassion, a willingness to forgive that is rare in these recollections of war. Sticpewich demands only retribution. On his truly transformative pilgrimage, Babb imagines reconciliation in its stead.

I found my attention drawn to the broken stones on the line which acted as a ballast. I thought of 1943 when things were at their worst as far as we prisoners were concerned. The Nip Railway engineers demanded more bodies, and sick men were carried out on stretchers to crack stones as they lay on bamboo stretchers close to the line! Such memories rouse the bitterest feelings in me, and I can only steady myself with the thought that my MASTER demands that we should love our enemies and do good to those who spitefully use you. It is all very difficult, but I still am convinced that it is brotherly Love which can build up a new world.²⁵

That new world would be a long time coming, but what Babb does encounter on this journey is a world turned upside down. In captivity, the Japanese would starve them. Now they prepare ‘a first class breakfast’, ‘arrange a lunch in pleasant surroundings’ and led Babb and his party to banquets of dancing and wine. ‘The local Nips provided us with a hot bath’, he writes appreciatively, ‘my first one for 2 years!’ And at Reptu, the Nips, not the prisoners, do a ‘speedo’, toiling to clear the overgrown cemeteries on what had been the hardest part of the line. This was what Babb called ‘a complete swing of the pendulum’. The old colonial order had been restored, the white man was master, Babb was a prisoner no more.

RE-ENACTMENTS, REIMAGINING: SIMPSON’S DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

Whatever their differences, Sticpewich’s and Babb’s accounts have one crucial feature in common: they were personal accounts. Neither author sought the publication of his manuscript, and to this day their readership has been confined to a narrow circle of historians. Colin Simpson’s *Six from Borneo* is a very different kind of document. Broadcast by the ABC and BBC, then republished as a six-shilling pamphlet, its audience may well have numbered a million. Like some best-selling autobiographies, Rohan Rivett’s *Behind Bamboo* and Russell Braddon’s *Naked Island* among them, the documentary drama’s success broke that long silence surrounding prisoners of war.²⁶

Six from Borneo styled itself as the ‘authentic story’ of Sandakan, a ‘completely factual documentary’. There was a good deal of truth in that claim. Simpson joined Major Harry Jackson’s trek from Sandakan to Ranau in 1947, a mission sponsored by the Australian Government and intended to reward locals who, at no small danger to themselves, had aided prisoners of war. His notes of that journey included a detailed diary and a series of intimate letters to his wife, searching ‘interrogations’ of the ‘coolies’ and virtual transcripts of conversations with both Jackson and Sticpewich. The last provided the framework of Simpson’s play. Sticpewich ‘was obviously essential to my story’, he confided to his wife; he was ‘articulate’, ‘knew’ everything and ‘in fact without [him] I couldn’t do the job’. The old survivor’s testimony is woven through the narrative, a presence from the beginning of the march to the trials (and executions) that signals the end. Simpson may have needed ‘Stippy’, but it was Jackson whose company he actually enjoyed. Harry is ‘a character & a half’, he told his wife. He roamed the *rentis* as if it was his own and laughed off the hardships of the track: ‘The steamy, green jungles left him with no fears’, an

admiring Simpson related, 'and he is inclined to talk of his mountain climbing as a piece of cake.' Back in camp, the 'friendly little chap' was simply irrepressible.²⁷

Jackson's larger-than-life character kept the Australian War Graves Unit 'a cheerful little outfit' – or so Simpson reassured his wife. The journey changed its tempo as they left the relative comfort of Jesselton to retrace the long trek into the interior. Although in his letters home he still strove to put on a brave face, Simpson admitted Sandakan was 'a terrible story [and one] I have to piece together'. The pieces can still be found in a yellowing file of papers held by the Mitchell Library. In one line a Chinese servant's account of 'a heap of bodies' butchered a few yards from the track; in the next, Simpson's graphic capitalised notation, 'I HAVE SEEN THIS SPOT, FROM WHICH 49 PRISONERS BODIES WERE RECOVERED. TREES STILL BEAR BULLET MARKS.'²⁸

Simpson's first broadcasts home anticipated the later narrative style of *Six from Borneo*. There is the same attempt to situate the listener in place, the same mixing of narrator voices, the same lure of the journey. From 1948 Simpson would develop this genre further in the *Australian Walkabout* series produced for the ABC's Features department, in which he travelled the country recording 'interviews with tobacco farmers, tourists, cane-cutters, pearlshell divers, and cattlemen, as well as a corroboree at Mitchell River'.²⁹ This style of onsite observation served him well in Borneo:

SIMPSON: Our expedition got away at dawn. I call it an 'expedition' because at least, it looked like one. We had a cavalcade of 35 native carriers, each with [30 pounds of gear] including units of Macfarlane's recorder strapped to his back ... We went up a break, cut into the side of the mountains, with a high wall of jungle on one side and a precipice filled with jungle on the other – I can still see the carrier-line winding up it, perspiration shining on their brown skins. Meanwhile our perspiration flowed freely as the sun got higher. It soaked our shirts and dripped off our noses. When, after seven hours climb, we reached the rest hut ... all we could do was to peel off our sodden shirts and lie prone on the bamboo floor ... I think Major Jackson here will bear me out.

JACKSON: Yes, it felt as hard as that the first day ... The mud was knee deep at times.

But *their* hardships were not the focus of the narrative. Having situated his listeners so effectively in place, Simpson beckoned them on to another more exacting journey.

SIMPSON: We left Ranau to walk 26 miles further inland to a place called Paginatan. Now we were on the actual track of the Death Marches. When the sweat ran into our eyes on steep climbs we thought of the prisoners the Japs used as white coolies carrying 40 pound bags of rice between Ranau and Paginatan. I carried only a waterbottle, a service revolver and a camera. We were well fed, they were starved. We were healthy, they had beri-beri, malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers. We stopped at creeks and had a smoke, they were driven on by the guards. At night when the insects shrilled [RECORDING: INSECTS] we slept in a hut, under mosquito nets ... They slept in the open or huddled from the rain under trees ...

Alongside this storytelling technique, the sounds of the jungle and the voices of POWs engender a sense of what Jackson called 'authenticity' to the text. The 'story has never been fully told to the people of Australia and Britain', the narrator announced at the beginning of the broadcast. 'You will hear it in this hour, and you will hear the six survivors tell their stories.'³⁰

And tell them they did. A little after nine o'clock on the evening of 30 May 1947, in lounge-rooms throughout the Empire, families heard, often for the first time, the full extent of the prisoners' ordeal. It was a shocking narrative, gothic in its attention to dark detail.

Recreating the prisoners' path was Simpson's recurrent theme. We join these 'unfortunate souls' as they push their way through the 'green immensity of jungle': 'This is Dick Braithwaite [a voice rises above the crackle of cicada]. I was in the Second March ... We walked all the first night and until 11 o'clock the next day. On the third day we came to the swamps – thick grey mud crawling with little grey crabs. As it sucked down your feet and gripped you to the knees you seemed to be leaving the last of your strength behind you.'³¹ *They* were now the colonised, Nelson Short complained, 'working like coolies' for the Japanese. And for those who defied their masters there was even more degrading punishment.

I am Keith Botterill [a gravelly voice announced], one of the six who survived. Yes, I was in the cage 40 days and nights. For pinching some of the food they wouldn't give us, they put 17 of us in a wooden cage about 12 feet by seven and not high enough to stand up straight. We got no food for a week. We didn't get any water until the third day – and then they stood over us and forced us to drink and drink until we were sick ... There was a Formosan guard called Kitamura, a horrible looking, hairless creature like an animal. He would deliberately spill half our food on the ground in front of us. Or he'd give it to the dogs. When we were being starved he'd walk up and down outside the cage eating a big fish or a pineapple ...³²

Throughout the documentary, the Japanese and their Formosan allies are often presented as animalistic; they are subhuman, evil, ‘calculating’ and ‘ruthless’. They take an ‘oriental’ delight in the sufferings of others. And the greatest degradation they could force upon a white man was forcing him to turn against his own. The guard would ‘line us up in pairs and make us bash each other,’ Botterill continued. ‘If I didn’t hit my mate hard the guard would crack him with a rifle butt, and bash me as well.’³³

Six from Borneo negotiates both a physical terrain and a storied landscape, where traces of men suggest their continued presence. Again the innovative style of Simpson’s documentary sought to involve as well as inform his audience as it moves between character, space and time.

NARRATOR: Elaborately carved walking sticks, razors laboriously ground down from an old table-knife, honour-rolls of dead comrades painstakingly scratched into the backs of mess-tins – many such relics have been found by Australian War Graves units during the recovery of prisoners’ remains for internment in the Sandakan War Cemetery. And under a tree in the camp, a number of hymn-books were found in the grass. Apparently a padre held religious service under this tree.

PADRE (ENGLISH): O God before whose almighty judgment we place the righteousness of our cause in this war, help us to withstand the tribulation of our captivity and the torments of our enemies. Give us of Thy strength O Lord and hasten, we beseech Thee, the day of our liberation.³⁴

The padre’s voice was intended to reassure those shaken listeners, including of course the families of the men who died. Given the paucity of army intelligence and the lack of any sizeable community of Sandakan survivors, it is altogether likely that Simpson’s play was the first extended account of the prisoners’ ordeal these families had heard. It must have been a confronting moment, their private loss broadcast suddenly to the world.

Simpson was acutely conscious of this community of listeners. Like Babb’s diary, the text strives to lend purpose to lives of suffering and confinement. Men ‘murmur derisively’ as the Japs address them; they outwit their captors, crawl beneath the wire and scrounge food for the sick, their survival in itself an act of defiance. And when the time for death does come they invariably face it bravely. ‘Go on. Let me have it,’ an English sergeant spits back at the enemy as he collapses on the track.³⁵

Perhaps most important of all, the men murdered at Sandakan are finally laid to rest. Simpson's play sketches their gravesites with simple poignancy, recovering some dignity for the dead. It relates the work of the War Graves Units with far greater sympathy than Sticpewich's earlier account. Simpson describes them as a company of surrogate mourners and alerts families to a wider community of carers as well.

You go a little way along the track [a narrator points the way for his audience]. You pass a wooden cross propped up askew in an excavated grave. A Chinese gardener found the man who dropped out there, and put the cross up when he made the burial ... You travel on a mile. Five times you leave the track in that one mile ... Here, where tall trees roof away the sky, and hanging vines are barbed with curving thorns, and the undergrowth is flossy-leaved taledos shooting up through the matted, sodden leaves – here were two graves. Your guide has been here before. He is from 31st Australian War Graves unit. He recovered the remains.

WAR GRAVES PRIVATE: It's 150 yards in from the track. It looks as though they tried to get away ... No identification, except we know they were Australians, from the slouch hats and the Rising Sun badges.³⁶

We know they were Australian. Their very anonymity makes them universal: listeners could believe it was their son, their father, recovered from the jungle. It was the best comfort Simpson could offer the bereaved.

Simpson's documentary pledged to remember the men who died on the Death March. 'It should be known', Sticpewich declares at the play's end, '– and never be forgotten ... It's grim and it's terrible ... but it's a lesson that ought to be part of the history we teach in the schools.' Part of it was, but not all. It was not just that the story of Sandakan receded from popular memory. Prisoner narratives of the post-war period came to focus on the railway, perhaps because more men were involved, more survived to tell their story and more (like Babb himself) rescued a heroic narrative from their ordeal. The memory of Sandakan was much harder to live with. And Simpson himself recognised this. 'I have added nothing', he told his audience back in Australia, 'but there are some things I have subtracted and I have done this because there are some things better left unsaid.'³⁷

The unsaid of Sandakan are the notes systematically deleted from Simpson's diary. Starvation was a powerful theme in the broadcast – no need to add that prisoners stole from one another as well as from the Japs. In the play, men who fall out from the march are promptly shot by their captors; the sound of distinct rifle fire punctuates the text. In fact, as the broadcaster's notes confirmed, the sick and



'You pass a wooden cross propped up askew': the local Chinese raised this tribute over the grave of an Australian who perished on the track between Sandakan and Ranau. Simpson's documentary strived to visualise such places and thus lend some dignity to these men's deaths and provide comfort for the bereaved.

Source: Australian War Memorial, 042578

exhausted were usually bludgeoned to death, their skulls bashed in by rifle butts and pick handles. No one could bear the 'sound effects' of that. The play makes no reference at all to cannibalism, a taboo thought too terrible to be mentioned. But several witnesses related incidents where Japanese troops 'cut up, cooked and ate' their victims. Nor was it simply hunger that drove them to do so. A Chinese cook told Simpson that one prisoner was carved to pieces while still alive; his beating heart, liver and intestines wrenched out in an act of ritualistic slaughter.

Of course, the truth of these accounts might well be questioned. Those forced to serve the Japanese had every interest in demonising their former masters. But that was not the point. Simpson decided which truths of Sandakan would prevail and which should be sidelined and forgotten. The play's self-censorship was most apparent in its muted reference to a crucifixion; 'one crime', it tells us, 'beyond description here'. But Simpson had just such a description at hand. His papers include a typescript of Wong Siong's interrogation and a confronting account of a POW's death:

In the early morning [the prisoner] was taken out by a Jap captain. A wooden cross was ready about 7 ft high and with a crosspiece to take the stretch of a man's arms. He was placed against the cross. One nail was driven through his left hand with a hammer; one through the right hand and two through his feet (exactly as Christ was crucified) ... The man cried out as the nail was driven through his left hand. He sagged on the cross and Wong cried as he saw the blood running from his hands and feet. He shouted and groaned ... A Japanese took a piece of cloth and stuffed it in his mouth and stifled his cries. The officer [then] stood on a wooden chair and drove [an 8 inch] nail through the man's head with a hammer.³⁸

The prisoner was naked 'except for a small loincloth', a tiny detail that made the biblical reference complete. But this was a real event, not a parable. Wong Siong remembered a ginger-haired man, taller than any other soldier left in the camp. He described the dark eyes and broad face of a real individual, a man who 'used to wink at Wong when he saw him'. As Simpson noted, some things were better left unsaid.³⁹

In the final analysis, *Six from Borneo* straddled an impossible contradiction. 'The purpose of the documentary', Simpson wrote to one of Sandakan's few survivors, 'is to tell the people of Australia and Britain what happened in North Borneo ... Naturally the story must be told with the greatest accuracy possible.'

'Possible' was the operative word. 'In the telling of the story', he continued, 'I am anxious to avoid undue distress to relatives of men who are dead. For that reason



'new kinds of commemoration': a memorial to Indian troops killed during the Malaya campaign stands beside the Cross of Sacrifice in Singapore's Kranji cemetery. As in World War I, the Imperial War Graves Commission tried to incorporate all the diverse elements of Empire into its commemorative template. Many of the Indian troops killed in these campaigns were cremated rather than buried.

Source: Bruce Scates

we probably should not name [several men].’ And that was the problem. By not naming those who were crucified, bludgeoned to death, ritualistically slaughtered or who slit their own throats to avoid recapture, Simpson made that the possible fate of every Sandakan victim. The conflict between the imperative to remember and a memory we could live with would haunt those relatives well into the future and remains (as we will see) the defining feature of Sandakan pilgrimage today.⁴⁰

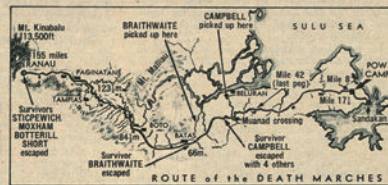
Sticpewich’s journal, Babb’s diary and Simpson’s documentary are three very different kinds of narratives. Between them they span a vast spectrum of emotional response, craving retribution, offering redemption, reliving and remembering a great human ordeal. Towards the end of his play, Simpson likens Sandakan to Belsen, and by 1947, when *Six from Borneo* was first broadcast, the Holocaust was already a familiar cultural reference to his audience. Like the Holocaust, the memory of the Death March and the Death Railway was deeply problematic. How could one make sense of such a story, understand the atrocity, comfort the bereaved and properly honour the memory of the ‘Fallen’? Was ‘Fallen’ really the right word for men who perished on the track or died as captives in any of a thousand squalid camps? Remembering the POW experience called for new kinds of commemoration, a language of loss communities could meaningfully deploy as their own. To mark the Great War, the creators of the War Graves Commission had raised a whole architecture of commemoration. It would struggle to transcend the horrors of this new kind of war. The next chapter examines how the War Graves Commission responded to this momentous challenge.



JACKSON, CENTRE, AND OTHER EX-PRISONERS TOAST JOHNNY FUNK, WHO HELPED SO MANY AUSTRALIAN WAR PRISONERS

HE WALKED WITH GHOSTS

Major Harry Jackson retraced the tragic Sandakan Death Marches to reward the brave



MAJOR HARRY JACKSON of the Australian Regular Army is not a superstitious type, but he has walked with ghosts. It is little wonder that he has felt their presence, for his walks have twice taken him from Sandakan to Ranau, along the route of the Sandakan Death Marches.

Of perhaps 2500 men imprisoned in Sandakan, only six survived the imprisonment and the march that followed. The others fell and died among the living, thrusting growth of the Borneo mountain jungles. Six men lived, all Australians, Short, Botterill, Braithwaite, Moxham, Campbell and Sticpewich. Two and

a half thousand died unbeaten to the last along the track or in the camps.

To conjure up the ghosts of this army was part of Jackson's task—one of the most splendid and self-rewarding peacetime ventures ever carried out by an Australian officer. In some way he had to uncover the story of the death marches in greater detail than it was known to the six tough survivors who had battled through. He had to reward the deserving friends of the marchers, and uncover the evidence that would bring retribution to the authors of their extermination.

His mission was indicated from the time that the 31st Australian War Graves unit, operating in Borneo, was approached many times by natives, each bearing little notes written in English to the effect that they had helped prisoners of war. The prisoners who had written the notes had been too clever to sign their own names—they would have been signing death warrants had the papers fallen into Japanese hands. But with the instinctive Australian flair for doing the right thing, for getting the idea across and using common sense, each had used a name readily recognisable to Australian eyes. They had signed them "Ned Kelly" and "Billy Hughes" and "Darby Munro" and "McSweeney Todd."

With commendable speed, the Australian Government decided to honor the implied promises made in the notes by men who had written them with no other methods of reward to hand. They knew also that many natives of Borneo had done their best for our men without any thought of reward. Some of them had died helping; died atrociously, at the hands of executioners more barbarous than the world had heard of.

The evidence of help had to be accepted or rejected on the spot. Payment, at least initially, had to be made there and then; and the paying officer had to use judgment and imagination. He also had to have the tenacity to force his way into the deep jungles where there were rhinoceroses and elephants and fearsome pythons and powerful orangutans. He had to tackle the leeches and the swamps, the headhunters and the crocodiles.

It says something for the calibre of the man they chose that Jackson now counts headhunters among his friends. The steamy, green jungles left him with no fears, and he is inclined to talk of his mountain climbing as a piece of cake, a pleasure trip that filled in a nice hiatus in the postwar period. But he says himself that here and there, on the sunny bank of a tiny stream, or deep in the green forest, he felt the presence of ghosts.

Jackson, a friendly little chap, is of medium height, unimpressive build and looks like a small businessman from any suburb. In spite of a beaked nose and jutting jaw his face is friendly. His signature is wide, open and scrawling, and he is distinctly an extrovert. He displays a few nervous mannerisms, and one easily-recognised trick of his attracts attention. He is a follower of his own form of Pelmanism, memorising things through their associations. For instance, when asked his initials, he will say "H.W.S. for Harry Walter Samuel, Hot Water Service." Through these means, or just naturally, he has developed an excellent memory for names and dates. But in spite of these minor pedanticisms, he is an Army man through and through.

He was born in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote 35 years ago, in the early days of the first World War. He was the only son of

Continued next page



Jackson and a native who helped rescue Bomhardier Dick Braithwaite, of Newcastle, one of the six who survived at Ranau prison camp.

January 17, 1951

PEOPLE

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'Pledged to remember': Colin Simpson's account of Harry Jackson's journey. The purpose of the search party was 'to conjure up ghosts'. The same might be said of Simpson's documentary drama. Note the article's attempt to salvage something positive from the tragedy of Sandakan: 'the heroism of the natives', the reunion of the six survivors, and especially the larger than life character of Jackson himself.

Source: *People*, 17 January 1951, p.47.

3

CHAPTER 3

BRING UP THE BODIES

Commemorating our war dead

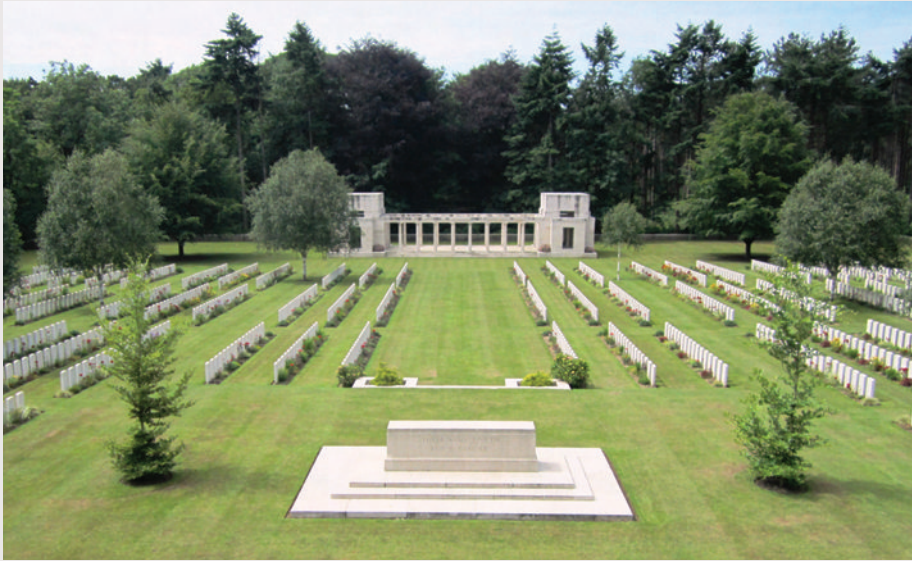
Before the cemeteries of World War II could be established, War Graves units marked graves and recovered bodies. Thousands of men were buried along the course of the Thai–Burma railway, and one of the first tasks of the Imperial War Graves Commission was to concentrate and rationalise these isolated burials. Major cemeteries were established throughout South-East Asia and across the globe, and none were exclusively Australian. The dead were often clustered in plots determined by their nationality.

Sticpewich, Babb and Simpson, whose stories formed the basis of chapter 2, made their respective journeys in the immediate aftermath of the war. The first major pilgrimage to a POW site in South-East Asia did not take place until a decade later, and as late as 1967 a cemetery on Ambon was still incomplete. This is in contrast to the surge of commemorative work that followed the Great War. Throughout the 1920s more than a thousand cemeteries were established across the Western Front alone, a mammoth building task Kipling likened to the pyramids of Egypt. All told, these cities of the dead contained the bodies of more than a million men. The Australian military casualties of World War II were half those of World War I, the fields in which they were buried had not been ravaged by four years of largely static carnage, and there were far fewer 'missing' men.

Nor was it necessary to invent a whole new architecture of commemoration. The dead of World War II would be honoured in much the same way as those of World War I. Reginald Blomfield's Cross of Sacrifice would serve as the centrepiece of the larger cemeteries. Its symbolism spoke throughout the Empire. Some viewed the cross as a symbol of Christian sacrifice, others focused on its bronze inset sword, a symbol of martial valour. Accompanying the cross was Edwin Lutyens' Stone of Remembrance, an abstract architectural form open to any interpretation. Like the Cenotaph in London, which inspired it, the Stone was perfectly proportioned and, to Lutyens' mind, 'intrinsically spiritual'. It served as a tomb for those absent dead, for the missing and as a makeshift altar.¹

The language of the Great War also accommodated what the Imperial War Graves Commission often called 'a new host of dead'. Their names also 'Liveth Forevermore' and collectively they were called the 'Glorious Dead'. Individual graves were marked with an accepted code of regimental particulars and often personal epitaphs chosen by next of kin. Unidentified remains would be marked by Kipling's plaintive tribute – 'Known unto God' – which spared the anonymous complete oblivion.

There were a few departures from the Great War's traditions. In active seismic zones, the commission opted for 'recumbent bronze plaques set in a concrete base' in preference to less stable upright headstones. In the 1920s Australian families were required to pay for epitaphs: threepence halfpenny for every letter and for every space between them. By the 1950s Australia could afford to be more generous, although 'certain parts of the British Commonwealth' still insisted on payment.² Finally, for a time at least, graves were marked with the designation Australian Military Force (AMF) rather than Australian Imperial Force. That caused an outcry. AMF might be mistaken as a reference to the militia and (as one outraged correspondent wrote) 'it is a crime to take away a name like AIF from dead men



'intrinsically spiritual': Lutyens' Stone of Remembrance set at the symbolic centre of Kranji. The stone, and the Cross of Sacrifice that accompanied it, was identical to any one of the hundreds of monoliths scattered across the Western Front. Despite its hefty 10-ton bulk, each stone strived to create an impression of weightlessness, subtle curves in the structure creating an optical illusion called entasis. The same phenomenon is seen in the Cenotaph, a replica of which commemorates Singapore's dead of the Great War. Above: One of the original Stones of Remembrance planted on the killing fields of the Western Front. Note the symmetrical lines of graves aligned behind it and the peaceful setting of Polygon Wood.

Source: (top) Nick Hughes; (bottom) Bruce Scates

who have fought and died under the AIF [and tar them] with the same brush as conscripted men [who served in the militia]'. For all the rhetoric of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) about equality of sacrifice, some deaths counted in the minds of some much more than others.³

With so much lesser a task why did it take so long for those 'new' sites of memory to be completed? And why did families seem disinclined to visit them? In the 1920s pilgrimages to France exceeded 100 000 annually – and probably as many as 10 000 visitors crossed the ocean from Australia. The graves of Singapore were a few days sailing time from Fremantle; rising disposable income had made travel more affordable, and by the early 1950s Qantas offered air services to Asia. But few of the bereaved ever made such a journey.

At first glance the new task seemed, as the official record of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission remarked, 'less onerous'.⁴ But generalisations seldom sit well with history. The dead of the Great War were concentrated in a thin corridor of the Western Front; the fields of Flanders and the Somme seemed to entomb a generation. World War II was much more mobile and, although (combatant) fatalities were fewer, they were dispersed across a much wider area, in sprawling theatres of war that spanned Africa, Asia and Europe. The men and women who died as POWs were buried, if they were buried at all, in thousands of different locations; in the embankment of the railway line they were forced to build, along the ragged path of the Death March, in the burgeoning cemeteries that adjoined every jungle camp. Identifying them was not always an easy matter. Those who mourned dead POWs of the Japanese were confronted with two conditions shared by people whose loved ones had died in the Great War: distance from a grave and the absence of a body.⁵ Moreover, visiting the graves of men killed on the Western Front involved travel to a country that offered a climate, cuisine and culture that most found comfortable, even pleasurable. By contrast, the heat and humidity of South-East Asia was something to be endured rather than enjoyed, while the attractions of tourism in this region were appreciated by only a few Australians at this time. Finally, although new flights to Asia (and beyond) offered the possibility of faster travel, fares were still prohibitively expensive for all but the wealthy until the 1970s.

The category of 'missing' was not confined to POWs. As subsequent chapters will show, the remains of airmen were scattered across the sky; artillery barrages obliterated soldiers' bodies; lost at sea meant just that. But the absolute uncertainty surrounding the fate of these men and women meant that prisoners posed a category all of their own. Missing prisoners were consumed by their limbo.



'to put a body to a name': a soldier sifts through a wallet found in the mud of Sandakan camp. Belongings were often separated from bodies, and personal effects rotted quickly in the tropics. As in the Great War, identifying the dead was a commemorative imperative, the act of naming making the absent present again. No effort was spared.

Source: Australian War Memorial, I20438

Eventually it was possible to put a name to a body. The chances of identifying the dead depended on which camp a prisoner was sent to and in which theatre of war. In Germany the POW fatalities were comparatively few (less than five per cent died in captivity) and the records comprehensive. More than a third of the prisoners taken by the Japanese were dead by the end of the war. In some camps the burial records survived, lists of names sealed in bottles and carefully buried with the dead. In other cases they did not. Often such records were lost to the elements. Babb found Hintock cemetery in 'good order', 44 neatly positioned graves and all with flowers on them. 'A bottle was found in one grave', he reported. Sadly, the white ants had got there first and 'there was nothing but earth in it'.⁶ Other records were deliberately and systematically destroyed. Captain L.G. Darling, POW liaison officer for the 9th Division, scoured the grounds of the old Lobang Compound, as had investigating parties before him. A 'large shallow grave' was evidence enough of what had occurred: this was one of the many mass killings in Borneo. But identifying the dead, 'each of whom was only wearing a single item of Army clothing', proved next to impossible.

Traces were obliterated wherever possible. On PW's departure all personal effects were collected from the PW and the Compound then soaked with petrol and burnt. An idea of the intensity of the fire can be gauged by the amount of molten glass, burnt locks of suitcases and metal remnants of web equipment amongst the ashes. A torn tartan rug and a ground sheet, the latter with ... the name [torn out] ... further testify to the Japanese efforts of concealing the identity of PW.⁷

In many cases it was not even possible to determine the nationality of the dead. 'Impossible to distinguish British [from] Hindu', or an Australian from an Englishman; a field of crosses reading 'Unknown PW of Unidentified Nationality' marked the first concentration cemetery at Sandakan.⁸

Many cases of lost identity were probably avoidable. Towards the end of the Great War, aluminium discs were issued to Australian soldiers, but they were still not standard issue in 1939. Instead the 'dog tags' worn by soldiers were sometimes made of compressed cardboard; exposed to the elements, they rotted almost as quickly as the bodies they were intended to name. And in the most tragic cases soldiers shed their own identity. Keith Botterill recalled exhausted men discarding their last possessions on the Death March. 'I saw men even take off and throw away the little aluminium identity discs from round their necks', desperate somehow to lighten their burden.⁹ It is not surprising that the vast majority of the march's dead were buried as unknowns. They lie in clusters in the cemetery on Labuan; each row signifies the camp they died in, tablets reading 'Known Unto God' still marking their staggered progress on the track.

They were not buried where they ‘fell’, and here again one encounters another important difference between World Wars I and II. In 1919 it was both possible and politically imperative to claim the old front line with the dead. To this day, tiny cemeteries mark Gallipoli’s forward trenches and trace the rolling fields of Western Front offensives. In World War II the speed of battle had changed forever the geography of the dead. The scattered remains of airmen hardly constituted a field of battle; where was the front line in the jungles of Malaya? Men who fought there never knew. And while many of Babb’s generation clung to the imagery of Rupert Brooke, that ‘corner of a foreign field that was forever England’, others were not so sure. Honouring a soldier where he fell in battle was one thing, marking the place where a man dropped on some forlorn stretch of track quite another. In the end practicality outweighed sentiment. Babb had visited 90 cemeteries in the course of his tour; most held fewer than a hundred graves and several as few as five. Noting the difficulties of ‘construction and maintenance’ and that many places were ‘so remote’ that relatives would never visit them, the commission exhumed bodies from small or outlying graveyards and reburied them in three cemeteries at Chungkai and Kanchanaburi in Thailand and Thanbyuzayat in Burma. Hard-won paths and clearings were reclaimed by the jungle and those bamboo arches that pledged ‘We will always remember them’ left to rot.¹⁰

The policy of concentration raised problems of its own. Very little thought had gone into the siting of POW graveyards; most were annexes of primitive hospitals, the graves as far away as the sick could carry their dead. Few were large enough to accommodate new burials. Old Number One Cemetery at Sandakan had to be abandoned and a larger graveyard was established on the abandoned airfield that men had died to build. Sandakan’s dead were relocated there, along with the bags of bones recovery teams brought in from the track and hasty battlefield burials from the Borneo landings at Tarakan and Balikpapan. The airfield was on flat ground and, not surprisingly, prone to flooding. So in 1949 the dead were moved again, this time to their ‘permanent’ resting place at Labuan.

The exhumations were a terrible business, for soldier and civilian alike. Ray Battram (a soldier working with the War Graves units) recorded his horror as a body slipped from a rough wooden coffin. The wet clay had preserved much of the flesh, there was colour in the cheeks, hair and whiskers still suggested a face. Eyelids had perished, but a pair of haunting eyes remained. They stared back at Battram in a kind of glassy emptiness. Many bodies still bore the marks of the injuries that killed them. Some skulls had been severed from the spine, evidence of beheading. Careful notes were made again, and there was some hope that dental records might offer a new chance for identification. But most of the dead remained unknown. Battram packed their remains away in caskets and sealed up the horrors as best he could.¹¹



'a terrible business': bodies gathered from isolated grave sites await final burial at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery. Despite every effort to conduct these proceedings with dignity, the relocation of remains caused immense distress to the bereaved. The Imperial War Graves Commission produced folios of completed memorials and cemeteries in the hope they might console families far away. This was not the kind of photograph they sent.

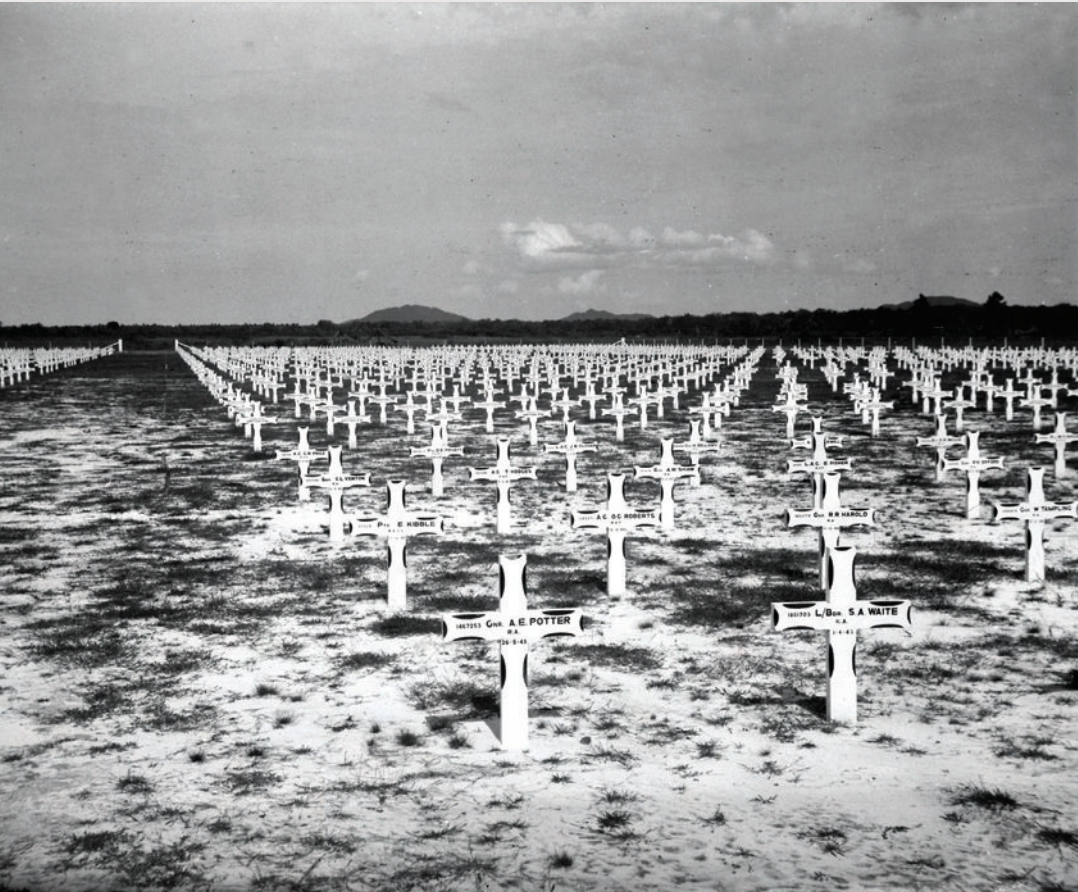
Source: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Stories like these inevitably filtered back to Australian families. Imagining an exhumation was probably as terrible as witnessing one. As late as 1949, an anonymous letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and signed 'Next of Kin' protested at the 'bungling of the war graves service':

My son was killed in action at Balikpapan in July 1945 and was interred with some hundreds of other Australians in the War Cemetery there ... Then, in April 1947, came notification that my son's remains ... had been transferred to Sandakan ... I was given to understand that this would be his final resting place. Recently, however, the Imperial War Graves Commission ... informed me that the graves had been removed to Labuan ... The reason given was that the Sandakan Cemetery had proved subject to severe flooding but it seems strange that two years should elapse before the discovery of this fact.

These 'frequent removals' were deeply 'distressing to the parents and relatives of dead soldiers'. Nor was there 'any assurance that the remains of their loved ones would even now be permitted to rest in peace'. That unknown mother – or was it a father? – gave their address as Haberfield. Their son was almost certainly Lieutenant Charles David Brennan, the only officer from that part of Sydney killed in the Balikpapan landings. But the anonymity was quite intentional. Charles could well have been any parent's son.¹²

The fears expressed by 'Next of Kin' of Haberfield proved well founded. During the next twenty years, the exhumation and reburial of Australian and other Commonwealth war dead continued apace. No fewer than six cemeteries were closed in Burma and the remains of more than a thousand men transported hundreds of miles to Rangoon. All the Commonwealth graves in Sumatra were also relocated. Jakarta cemetery had to be extended to accommodate several hundred dead. 'Next of Kin' had taken comfort from the thought that his or her soldier was buried with comrades; as late as 1961 the ranks of Labuan were reinforced with more than 2000 from Sandakan. In each case, relatives were informed of the relocations, reassured that a chaplain would officiate at the reburial and that all due reverence would be accorded to the dead. But a quarter of a century on removals were still an unsightly business. Bones were washed clean of the mud and remnant skin tissue, hair and the shreds of rotting uniform discarded or 'boxed' with the remains. Families wondered why all these grim procedures were necessary. And why, since the dead were to be moved anyway, could the government not bring them home? The bereaved 'feel they might have been consulted', a Sydney daily declared, 'and given the opportunity of bringing the body back to Australia'.



'not permitted to rest in peace': the second POW cemetery at Sandakan. As it was located on a flood-prone airfield, the bodies buried here would be exhumed once again and shipped to Labuan cemetery. The grave markers (like the site itself) were temporary. As with the Great War, the Imperial War Graves Commission decided against an upright cross, opting instead for a plaque or tombstone. A cross could be inlaid on the same if families so requested. Fields of crosses were thought unsightly and unstable and might possibly cause offence in a largely Muslim region.

Source: Australian War Memorial, Robertson Collection, 122/1

In official reports the public is often represented as being 'grateful', admiring of the care taken of Australia's war graves and appreciative of 'lovely' photos of the same. No doubt for many that was so. But as was the case with the Great War, the Commonwealth's refusal to repatriate bodies angered a significant number of mourners. They, not the state, should have the right to commemorate *their* dead.¹³

And adding insult to injury was the way next of kin were informed of these relocations. 'The letter is of the circular-letter type [addressed to] Dear Sir or Madam', an RSL official reported, 'with another blank for the name of the cemetery. A rubber stamp is put in the corner and a signature is scribbled purporting to be signed for F.R. Sinclair, Secretary for the Army.' Grieving families deserved at least an individual letter, not this 'rather makeshift and rather shoddy communication'. This, the writer concluded, was 'altogether too businesslike a manner in which to deal with a subject [so] sacred'.¹⁴

Politics as much as practicality drove the relocation process. The decline of old colonial powers and the rise of nationalist movements created what the commission called 'unsettled conditions' through much of South-East Asia. There was 'banditry' in Burma and communist insurgency in Indonesia. The War Cemetery at Makassar was situated in the centre of a 'politically unsafe district', and when the locals were not openly hostile their attitude was one of irreverent indifference. A commission inspection of the 'British' graves at Surabaya recommended 'the erection of a stout boundary fence': as it stood the cemetery was too convenient 'a short cut for residents' and too inviting 'a scratching ground for poultry and goats'. Clearly concentration was the only way the IWGC could maintain its exacting standards. And those standards had even been compromised by 'foreign' staff in the commission's employ. 'Many of the graves in the war cemeteries of Java and Sumatra were marked with the wrong crosses', Brigadier Brown informed a committee meeting in London, 'apparently due to the practice of removing the crosses to mow the grass and then replacing them incorrectly.' The commission was about to go to the horrendous expense of replacing temporary crosses with permanent headstones. A horrified committee feared the names that 'Liveth Forevermore' might actually be in the wrong place.¹⁵

It was the Indonesian situation that proved the most difficult, and in that case another complicating factor came into play. Originally, Commonwealth war dead were buried alongside the forces of the Dutch – Holland had lost thousands of men defending its colony against the Japanese. In a post-colonial world (Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1949) the status of Dutch – let alone imperial cemeteries – was deeply problematic. Indonesians had served in Dutch forces during World War II, and at one stage Jakarta suggested their graves be

removed from the Netherlands Fields of Honour and 'defined as Indonesian'. F.C. Sillar, CBE, principal undersecretary to the commission, thought that suggestion 'dangerous'. In 1966 he despatched a series of anxious cables to his superiors in Canberra, all marked 'SECRET' or 'CONFIDENTIAL'. 'The Imperial War Graves Commission has always insisted that the nationality of a war grave stems not from the serviceman's personal nationality but the nationality of the Force with which he had served.' They had been forced to make some exceptions, Americans who served with the RAF being a notable example, but such concessions were regrettable and 'had been hushed up'. Sillar feared that agreeing to 'another basis of nationality ... might start a "run" on the Commonwealth war graves'. Would India or Pakistan, rejoicing in their newfound independence, also reclaim their dead? And there was no telling what havoc those troublesome Irish might wreak.¹⁶

The large number of Commonwealth dead buried in Holland (many an Australian airman among them) further complicated the situation. London and Canberra wanted to avoid the impression that the old colonial powers were 'ganging up' against Indonesia. But they couldn't risk embarrassing or offending The Hague either – not at least until the Netherlands ratified its own agreement. And as a Commonwealth body, the commission was bound to negotiate any agreement on behalf of all the nations it represented. At one stage embassy staff thought it prudent to step back from negotiations altogether. The Indonesians were much more likely to talk to Delhi than they were to Canberra, and one reciprocal agreement might well lead to another.

Mirroring these global politics were the internal politics of the commission. In another reluctant concession, London devolved management of Indonesian graves to the 'Anzac Agency' based in Canberra. Australians had always been proprietorial about their war graves. As the agency's name suggested, the example of Gallipoli (where Australia and New Zealand demanded ownership of the battlefields as the price of peace with Turkey) had set an alarming precedent. True to form, the Anzac Agency balked at any relaxation of the commission's standard agreement. They would be the 'sole authority' managing war graves, their cemeteries would be guaranteed 'protection from risk of disturbance' and even land lying outside their boundaries kept from any use 'which may impair their appearance and tranquillity'. The terms might not have been as generous or as gracious as those offered by the French 50 years earlier, vesting land 'in perpetuity' as 'the free gift of France'. Nor were they as exacting as the concessions forced on Turkey. But it was the best that more than 20 years of tough negotiations could achieve.¹⁷

It was not until 1964 that the agreement with Indonesia was finalised and something like secure title granted to Commonwealth War Graves.¹⁸ It came at a cost. Mindful of persistent anti-Dutch feeling, British, Australian and Indian

governments removed their graves from the Netherlands Fields of Honour. Another relocation might have been troubling to relatives, and it certainly complicated British and Australian relations with the Netherlands, but a close reading of diplomatic despatches reveals that many members of the commission believed foreign cemeteries 'inferior' to their own. Brigadier A.E. Brown, charged with inspecting all Australian War Graves for the Anzac Agency, regretted that the standard of Dutch war cemeteries was 'far below that to which the Commission had been accustomed'. The design was 'inartistic', the workmanship 'shoddy' and the 'small purple flowers' perversely favoured by the Dutch thought a poor substitute for the English rose. In any case, a ban on flying the Dutch flag prevented raising a Union Flag or (for that matter) an Australian ensign. Commonwealth cemeteries were symbols of the British Empire and as such the situation was simply intolerable. 'In view of the large time since the end of the war', an embassy official warned, 'raising this subject [of relocation] now is bound to cause further agitation in the minds of bereaved relatives.' But what was at stake here was not so much 'emotional' considerations as the 'questionable value' of an unfair agreement with the Indonesians. No fewer than four cemeteries were quietly abandoned, and the war dead were concentrated in Jakarta and Ambon.¹⁹

It wasn't just the Australians who begrudged any compromise. As late as 1965 an explosive mix of 'nationalist groups', 'communist supporters' and what a memo from Jakarta called the 'Indonesian authorities' fuelled 'anti-Australian agitation in Ambon'. Partly this was prompted by the Menzies Government's support for Malaysia in the years of Confrontation, but it also confirmed an older view that Australians had always been (as one Indonesian leader put it) the 'Lackeys of the Imperialists'. Commemoration was a casualty of these uncertain times. A note in a diplomatic file observed that because of the international situation 'local authorities have refused to allow work on the cemetery to proceed'. It was another two years before the ban was lifted, and when the Cross of Sacrifice (that defining motif of all the Commonwealth cemeteries) was finally landed on Ambon wharf, the drum was found to be broken, the shaft chipped and one arm of the cross deliberately snapped in two. In 1968 Labuan cemetery was finally completed. It might well have been better to have left Lieutenant Brennan at Balikpapan.²⁰

The delay in completing cemeteries and memorials helps to explain why so few of the prisoners' next of kin made their pilgrimage overseas. A pilgrimage must have a destination; in the case of South-East Asia sites of memory constantly shifted through the 1940s and 1950s. Then there were more general changes in the way the war dead were remembered. Historians of commemoration have noted the utilitarian turn of the 1940s. Communities extended old monuments rather than build new ones, a new (and shorter) column of dead joined those killed at Gallipoli,

the Somme and Flanders. Memorial funds were generally put to a useful and enduring purpose, endowing hospitals, scholarships and even building swimming pools. Only a few suggested that such funds be used to sponsor pilgrimage, a common demand after the Great War. In Borneo itself, a call to develop a national park and transform the surrounding jungle into 'a useful and prosperous agricultural area' was deemed 'a more constructive way' to commemorate than 'War Graves Cemeteries'. A spectacular nature reserve on Mount Kinabalu was intended to honour the dead, serve the living and reward 'the loyal hearted natives'.

Finally, an increasingly secular society developed new cultures of loss and bereavement. A widow of the 1940s might not have felt the same Edwardian imperative to lay a body to rest. And mourning the loss of war was no longer a lifetime's occupation. Psychologists urged the bereaved to move on; changing opportunities for women meant that a widow need not remain widowed for long. This is not to suggest that the loss of World War II was lesser than that of World War I; only that that loss would have been expressed differently. In 1919 nations and communities pledged themselves to perpetual remembrance; confident that the Great War would be the last, they raised memorials to 'outlast eternity'. Somewhere in the mid-twentieth century, *Lest We Forget* lost that moral certainty.²¹

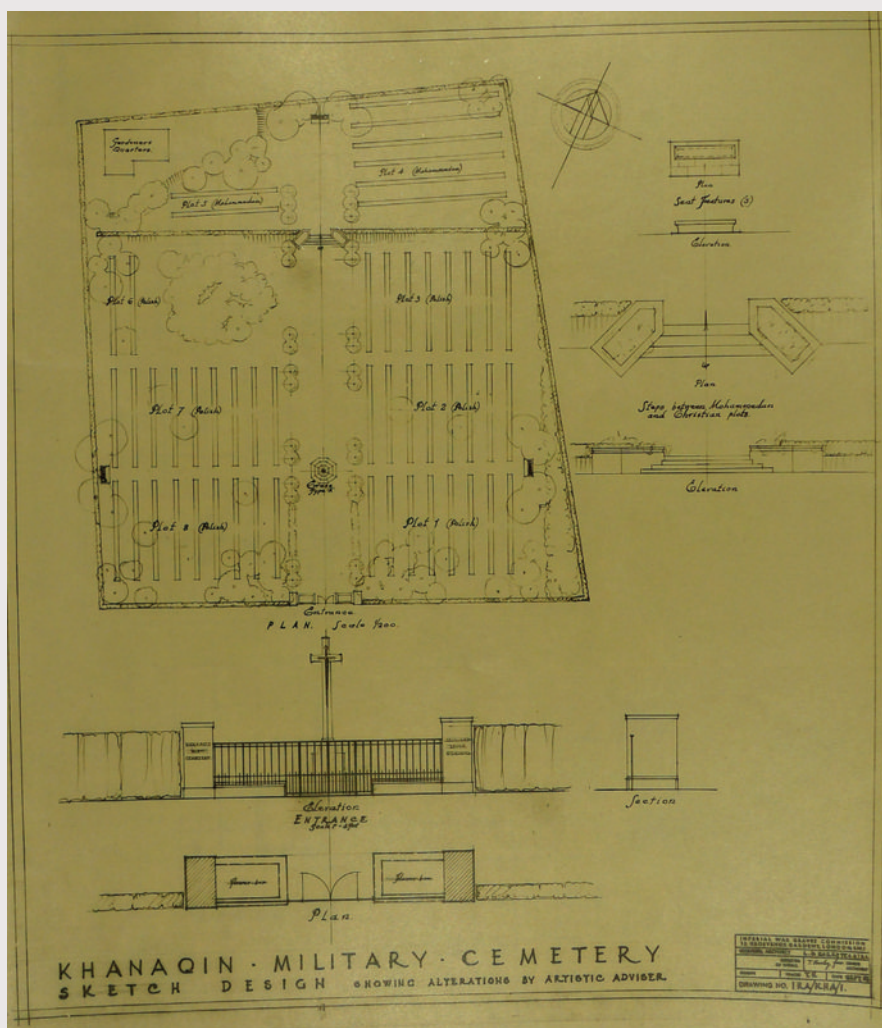
But that was certainly not true of everyone. The next of kin of prisoners of war faced a particularly cruel kind of loss. As we've seen, long years of uncertainty surrounding the fate of their men at once prolonged and deferred the whole grieving process. The patterns of grief were set by a previous generation. In the wake of World War II as in the wake of World War I, families sought details of their son's or husband's death, cherished photographs of his grave and took great solace in the dedication of cemeteries. Captain P.S. Pincombe of the Australian War Graves Service played an important role for these disenfranchised mourners. Returning to Australia after the 'final' burial of Burma's war dead, he assured families that their loved ones were at rest 'in the best cemetery in the Southern hemisphere'. Knowing that few would ever see Thanbyuzayat, he had organised photographs of more than a thousand headstones, allowing families to visualise that grave on the other side of Asia. Pincombe performed a pilgrimage by proxy, tending every mound, laying out the cemetery gardens and assuring that every grave that could be identified was identified. 'All that could be done had now been done', he told mourning families.²²

To secure that finality to loss, standing by a grave still had no equal. For that reason, groups of mourners in Australia and overseas facilitated the process of pilgrimage. Admittedly these networks were not as strong as they had been in the 1920s. They certainly had less funding, but the essential intention was the same. In

1947 Australian residents of Sandakan formed the Australian Association of North Borneo 'with the idea of helping relatives and friends to visit the war cemeteries'. The executive included the social elite of the colony, men and women well placed to liaise with returned servicemen's groups, bereaved families and the Australian Government. The group promised to 'assist with local knowledge concerning accommodation, transport etc'. Such help was certainly needed. Despite the inroads of tourism, colonialism and commerce, much of Asia and the Pacific remained too exotic, too difficult, too out of the way.²³ Back home, the Australian Prisoners of War Relatives Association took that process one step further. Its secretary, E.V. Britnell, wrote to the prime minister and asked the government to organise a pilgrimage. For men like Britnell, World War I had set an enduring precedent. It was time for Australians to cross the oceans again: 'I have been reminded that after the last war the shipping companies ran their own conducted tours to territories in which there were the graves of Australian Servicemen, enabling relatives here to see the graves of their men who would otherwise, on account of the difficulty and cost involved, not have the opportunity of doing so ... we suggest it would be a grand service if your government were to arrange similar tours as soon as possible.'²⁴

In fact, no such 'services' were extended to families who made their ways to the battlefields of World War I. No concessions were made in 1919, and none would be made this time. The cost, the prime minister's secretary noted, would be 'enormous',²⁵ and although he 'appreciated the desire of relatives to visit the graves of their loved ones ... the Government cannot agree to grant this concession'. Nor, in January 1946, was such a pilgrimage a practical possibility: 'It is pointed out that, even if a person wished to go overseas for this purpose, it would be impossible to do so for some considerable time owing to lack of transport facilities.'²⁶

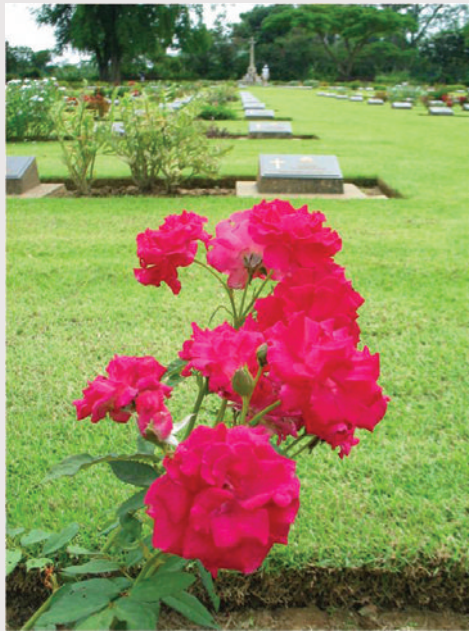
The lack of suitable shipping was probably the least of the government's problems. The same conditions that delayed the completion of memorials in the post-war years – civil unrest, wars of national independence and the undeveloped state of much of Asia – made pilgrimages difficult, dangerous and expensive. Again, that was not true of all theatres of war. As we'll see, a number of sites in Europe hosted sizeable pilgrimages in the post-war period. It was not even true of all POW sites. Singapore remained an outpost of empire, and even after independence the island remained at the crossroads of British and Australian commerce. Arguably a pilgrimage to Kranji cemetery during the 1950s or 1960s was not unlike many tours of the Western Front 30 years earlier. Travellers stayed at Raffles Hotel, took tea at the High Commission and motored with relative ease past the Turf Club to the cemetery. Here, as in France, enterprising travel agents seized on a potential market. Convenient package tours could be arranged from London or Sydney.²⁷



But most other destinations were not so well catered for. The men of Gull Force returned to their old island garrison in 1968. Ambon had been overrun by a vastly superior Japanese force in February 1942. Those who survived the fighting, and the brutal reprisals, were prisoners for the rest of war. Gull Force could return to Ambon only with the help of the RAAF. There were no regular commercial flights and no refuelling facilities on the island. The pilgrimage, coinciding with the long-delayed opening of the memorial, had to carry its own food and its own linen and was warned that accommodation was limited and primitive. Given recent unrest, the former POWs were not permitted in the town, and a cable from the Australian Embassy warned: 'THERE WOULD BE NO POSSIBILITY OF GULL FORCE OR ANY OTHER VISITORS ENGAGING IN SIGHTSEEING EXCURSIONS OR OTHER VISITS OUTSIDE THE CEMETERY.'

The men of Gull Force were not easily discouraged. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s they chartered Cessna aircraft for staggered trips throughout the Pacific, begged a berth for themselves on naval vessels, prevailed on embassy staff to smooth over diplomatic difficulties and corresponded tirelessly with Ambon's governor. Several pilgrimages were undertaken, each carrying a bounty of flags, plaques and 'small gilt kangaroo lapel badges' for distribution among the locals. Ambon's veterans established a scholarship at the school and stocked the pharmacy of the hospital. They also relived some war-time exploits. In 1945 RAAF bombers dropped surrender leaflets over the islands. In the 1960s old AIF men leaned out of their tiny aircraft and littered the skies over Ambon with messages of gratitude and friendship.²⁸

While every journey faced its particular challenges, all helped to heal the hurt of war. Labuan provides the best example. Its war cemetery was finally completed in 1953; not until then was a Cross of Sacrifice raised on British North Borneo along with a stone pylon, surmounted by an urn honouring Indian troops whose bodies were cremated. By that time the graveyard had swollen to include 1788 burials. Although Labuan was originally intended to hold men killed in bitter fighting for the island, it had also taken in remains from Sandakan, Balikpapan and Tarakan. The choice of Labuan as a concentration cemetery was charged with political significance. The island was situated on the aerial trunk route between Australia and Asia. Busy with traffic bound for Hong Kong, Tokyo and Singapore, it symbolised Australia's future engagement with the region. It also offered a kind of continuity between one conflict and another. Labuan was a port of call for sailors and airmen en route to Korea. The 'example of courage and devotion' enshrined in the 'ordered green of [that] jungle clearing' was said to inspire them all. Most important of all, the island had been one of the bloodiest Australian battlefields of the Pacific War.



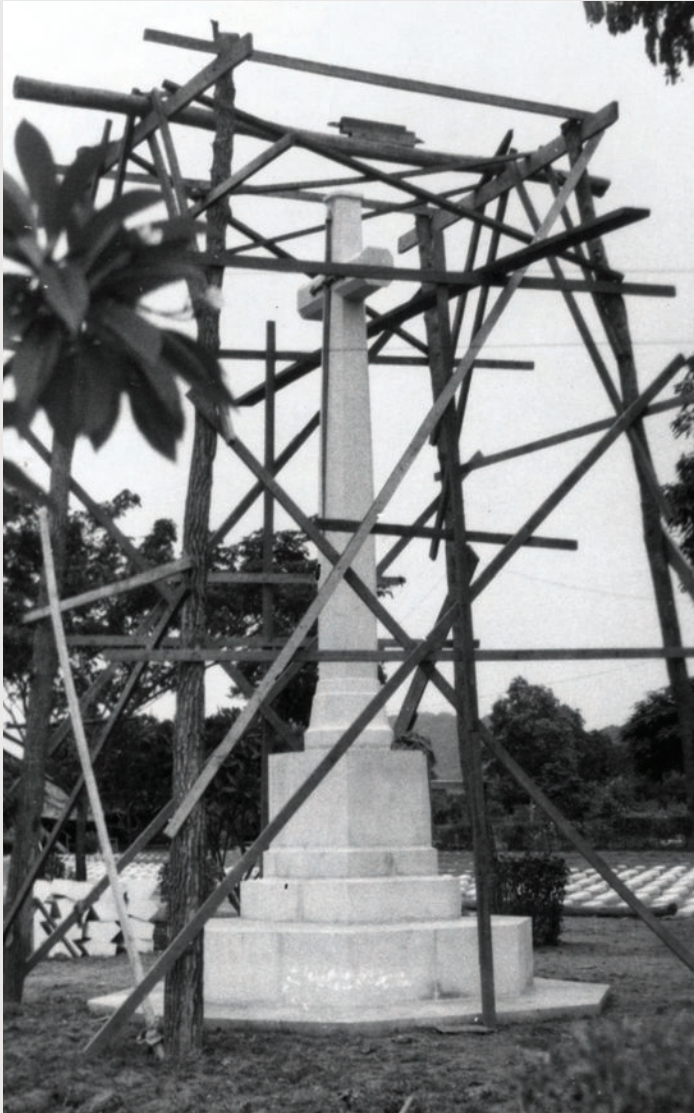
'the healing power of nature': a rose rises from the earth. As with World War I, Australian trees and flowers were transplanted to cemeteries across the world, connecting distant landscapes to home. But the rose remained unrivalled in the horticulture of commemoration.

Source: Bruce Scates

Here the Second AIF had 'struck a decisive blow' and ousted a well-entrenched and determined enemy. The purposeful sacrifice of men who had died taking the beaches, almost all of them identified, was in stark contrast to row after tragic row of Sandakan's unidentified dead.²⁹

The natural beauty of the island cemetery excited the imagination of journalists. Framed by palms and sea, 'a few jewel green acres' had been carved out of the jungle. Labuan, one paper told its readers, boasted 'one of the loveliest cemeteries in all the Pacific Islands', a title already claimed by several other War Graves Commission graveyards. Nature had 'obliterated the scars of war' and the island 'reverted to its peaceful tropical ways'. After the Great War, the commission had laboured to bring colour to the frozen fields of the Somme and the desert sands of Palestine. The plentiful rain and sun of the tropics now offered new opportunities for horticultural display. Exotic blooms delighted pilgrims, as splendid as the floral arrangements that greeted Babb on his trek through Thailand and Burma. Even more comforting were 'saplings of Kurrajong and lemon-scented gum' sent from Australia and 'other trees and flowers dear to the senses of the English, New Zealand and Indian soldiers buried there'. By 1953 the commission had acquired 30 years experience in these nostalgic commemorative plantings; its gardeners were dab hands in transplanting greenery across the globe.³⁰ Australia even developed a new bloom for the occasion, the 'great rosarian Alistair Clark' of Melbourne striking 'a rose of remembrance' for exclusive use in the war cemeteries of World War II. 'It was not born for vain display [an earnest editorial blurted]. It was not bred to satisfy a horticulturalist's whim. It was born for a nobler purpose – to be, in perpetuity, Australia's continuing tribute to her war dead – to rise out of the ground in which they lie.' This was a generation that recognised the healing power of nature well before our own.³¹

Like the most affective garden, the dedication of Labuan cemetery was a careful balance of structure and informality. The official ceremony was presided over by the Governor of the District, General Sir Ralph Horne KCMG, KBE, MC, TD. Flanked by the Australian Minister for the Army, a bevy of consular officials and senior representatives of all three services, Horne stepped out into 'the blazing tropical sun' and unveiled a 'Crusaders' cross' covered with the Union Jack. There were the usual hymns and speeches, a minute's silence, then a rousing 'Reveille' played across the ranks of 'sleeping dead'. But newspaper reports back home focused on the pilgrimage's personal dimensions. Sticpewich was there, returning to mates he had been forced to abandon. A photographer noticed him wandering head down among the gravestones, satisfying himself that at least some of the bags of bones he'd gathered had been dignified with a name.³²



'a Crusader's Cross': the Cross of Sacrifice nearing completion at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery. The memorial posed as a martial as well as a Christian symbol, the bronze sword at its centre an allusion to timeless valour. Often these memorials were carved from Portland stone, ensuring quality, permanence and the assurance that some corner of a foreign field was forever England.

Source: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Even more newsworthy was the presence of women. Myrtle Matthews of Adelaide and Hazel Taylor of Brisbane had lost their husbands in Prison Camp and Landing Beach respectively. Both had their fares paid by the Australian Government. While the Commonwealth was not prepared to subsidise pilgrimage on a mass scale, concerted lobbying by veterans' groups, the War Widows' Guild and like associations had forced it to add civilian 'representation' to the standard diplomatic contingent. That set a dangerous precedent. Throughout the 1950s governments worked to devise rigid and selective funding criteria.³³

The choice of these two particular women was careful and deliberate. It was not just that both widows were well connected with ex-service associations, or that they represented *part* of the spectrum of loss entombed at Labuan (no bereaved from India, New Zealand or even Britain were present). Mrs Matthews was the widow of Captain Lionel Matthews, the heroic leader of the Sandakan resistance tortured and executed by the Japanese. '[I did not] feel sombre or depressed', she told a reporter hungry for a story, 'indeed just the opposite.' The sun 'shone brightly', the hymns 'led by a choir of Malaysian girls' were comforting; 'I laid a wreath of beautiful tropical flowers which seemed to stand out from the others'. Mrs Matthews was impressed by the dignity of the service, and marvelled at the spectacle of officials in white uniforms, an honour guard in khaki, native women in 'gay sarongs' and 'the elaborate head dresses of native chiefs'. Amid the proceedings she was given time alone to visit her husband's grave; 'I felt uplifted and at peace,' she said. That was a claim few of the bereaved of Sandakan could make.³⁴

4

CHAPTER 4

UNSPEAKABLE HISTORIES

From Singapore to Hellfire Pass

Singapore was Britain's most humiliating defeat of World War II and diminished Australia's relationship with the British Empire. A hundred and thirty thousand British and Commonwealth troops were captured, including 15 000 Australians. The siege was brief but bloody. In February 1942 Japanese troops surged across the narrow strait separating Singapore and Malaya. Australian forces were caught in bitter fighting in the north-west of the island, where they were hampered by waterways that bisected their positions, inadequate communications, and poor command and tactical decisions. From Singapore the Japanese raised work contingents for Borneo, Thailand and other parts of their empire. Tens of thousands had been reassigned from the island by 1943; many would never return.



'Britain's most humiliating defeat': Singapore Island

Source: Allan S. Walker, *Middle East and Far East* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962), p. 526

It wasn't the first time Charlie had clambered up onto a rice truck on the Thai–Burma railway. The old man grimaced with the heat of the iron as he pulled himself into position. 'The first time I did this, I was the guest of the Imperial Japanese Army,' he jested, but he had posed for the cameras several times since then. Charlie didn't say how many times he'd returned to Thailand. There had been a string of private and RSL pilgrimages marking regular reunions and significant anniversaries in the wake of World War II. What Charlie called the 'big one' had occurred in 1995. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II was something even the government was bound to notice.¹

By the time Charlie made this particular visit – August 2005 – POW pilgrimages throughout the Pacific had become part of a regular tourist itinerary. Every year thousands of visitors walk the battlefields, cemeteries and work camps of Singapore and Thailand; they pause outside the 'dark towers' of Changi Prison, inspect the reconstructed chapel and museum, view the vast graveyards of Kranji or Kanchanaburi and trudge through the railway cutting to Hellfire Pass. But as Charlie knew all too well, blokes like him hadn't always been celebrities. Public interest in the prisoners' ordeal had waxed and waned throughout the twentieth century and for many reasons.

First, as we've seen, came the enforced silence of the war years. Families were told very little, and when the men did come home parents and wives were advised not to ask. Some men buried what were clearly traumatic memories, others simply sheltered in the silence. Nell was one of several widows who accompanied Charlie's pilgrimage: 'No, no he didn't talk about it ... [oh] he had [such] nightmares and I used to say to him, "Talk about it", and he said, "No, you wouldn't understand", but I said, "I can listen; I can be there as a listener."' Like others on the trip, the old woman said she'd learned more on her journey than in 30 years of marriage. 'All I knew was that he was an ex-POW and I couldn't get anything out of him. I've learned more through other people. He just closed up. Like they all did ... you couldn't find out.'²

You could find out from other sources. There was a flurry of publications in the 1940s and 1950s as Rohan Rivett's *Behind Bamboo* (1946), R.H. Whitecross's *Slaves of the Sons of Heaven* (1951) and Russell Braddon's *Naked Island* (1952) followed one another in rapid succession. The last was a powerful fusion of fiction and autobiography. Styling itself the authentic voice of the POW, it sold more than two million copies. These novels and several others like them addressed the lingering fear that prisoners were not really worthy of the Anzac tradition. Years of confinement in places few had heard of, the degradation of becoming the 'white coolies' of the Japanese, were hardly the same stuff as Tobruk, El Alamein or Crete. The last

might have been a failure, but at least it was a noble one. There was nothing noble about the fall of Singapore; many men had not even fought in Malaya before they were forced to surrender to the Japanese. Publications like these helped restore the prisoner to the heroic lexicon of Anzac. They also broke what Michael McKernan called the 'wall of silence' surrounding the POW experience.³

The wall descended again in the 1960s. The introduction of conscription and active opposition to the war in Vietnam encouraged questioning of the Anzac mythology and lessened any public interest in POW narratives. Silence was also aligned to the life cycle of the former prisoners. Twenty years after the end of the war they had strived (with varying degrees of success) to return to 'normal lives' in their community. Aside from the regular reunions many now saw themselves as fathers and husbands, breadwinners and providers, their social and domestic responsibilities eclipsing an earlier identity fashioned by their war service. They had been urged, in the jargon of the time, to 'put the past behind them'. That was no easy task, as we'll see. The traumatic memory of war returned in a number of guises, not just in the nightmares Nell spoke of.

A revival of interest in Australia's prisoners of war – and with that a sudden increase in what might be called pilgrimage traffic – can be dated to the mid-1980s. Australian historians (professional and amateur) played an important part in this trend. A book and radio series by Hank Nelson and Tim Bowden positioned the prisoner at the very centre of the Anzac mythology, celebrating the qualities of resourcefulness, laconic humour, survival against the odds and mateship. A growing number of personal memoirs, especially those of Stan Arneil and 'Weary' Dunlop, fostered a better appreciation of what it meant to be a prisoner of the Japanese.

But a growing interest in memory and war was also part of a much wider global movement. Historians debate the reasons for the 'memory boom' in Western society, but few would underestimate its influence. It's fuelled in part by a deep nostalgia for the past, a search for traditions in a society without ritual, a longing for something fixed and familiar in a world where change tears old certainties asunder. In Europe, where the Holocaust generated a whole new field of memory studies, the end of the Cold War and collapse of the East/West divide is said to have 'unfrozen' memories formerly suppressed by ideology. New agendas of nation-building came to the fore and with them an interest in founding myths, minority identities and popular mythologies. Pilgrimages to war sites are a manifestation of the memory boom; ageing veterans (like Charlie) long to revisit their wartime past and their families often encourage them to do so. Ironically, this rediscovery of POW stories – and indeed World War II narratives more generally – is taking place during the same period as memory passes into history. In the second decade of the

twenty-first century fewer than a thousand former POWs are still alive. Few could still make the journey that Charlie and his mates made in 2005.⁴

Debate surrounding the memory boom was of very little interest to Charlie; the role that governments could play in 'telling the truth about what happened' was. As Charlie saw it, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II was a turning point. In 1995 an ambitious state-sponsored commemorative program, appropriately dubbed 'Bigger than Gallipoli', took place throughout Australia. Communities restored their war memorials, a 'Commemorations Branch' in the Department of Veterans' Affairs commissioned teaching resources, and the Australian War Memorial spent more than half a million dollars on public commemorations marking VE and VJ days (Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan). History became spectacle; a pageant marketed for the media and steeped in nostalgia. Also in 1995 Charlie made one of his many pilgrimages back to the railway. In a post-Vietnam age that valorised the victim, public attention was focused on the POW. Time and time again, these old men were presented as living links with a renewed Anzac legend.⁵

All this suited the federal Labor Government's agenda. Remembering the fall of Singapore – the 'betrayal' of Australian troops by an incompetent British Empire – advanced Paul Keating's republican aspirations. A focus on the Pacific War (Keating had lost an uncle at Sandakan) was part of his plan to reorient the nation, economically and culturally, towards the Asian region. But what's been called the 'public memory of war' – the memorialising of war in the public and the national domain – cannot be effective if it is simply orchestrated from the top down. 'To be dynamic', Joan Beaumont has noted, 'public memory must resonate with private, or individual memories of war, in a way that is complex and inherently difficult to document.' This study is part of documenting that process. Pilgrimage is one point where the private memory of war and its public commemoration are woven together.⁶

An understanding of pilgrimage is shaped as much by anthropologists as it is by historians. Trained in the objectivity of our discipline, determined to distance ourselves from the witness, suspicious of all the subjective claims of memory, the emotional and indeed the spiritual dimensions of pilgrimage too often elude historical understanding. But arguably the emotional geography of these journeys, charted so carefully in interviews and surveys, exposes the common denominators of all pilgrimages, be they secular or religious. There is (as we've seen in the case of those earliest journeys) a sense of a 'quest', a journey through landscapes saturated with meaning towards a 'sacred centre', an ordeal that lifts its participants 'out of the normal parameters of everyday life'. Pilgrimage, as we will see, is an 'emotion laden process', and one replete with its own narrations, constructions and performances.

At their conclusion, they can offer participants like Charlie a kind of ‘redemptive closure’, a chance to transcend, as Tim Cole observed in another context, ‘horror, dismay and grief’.⁷

There is much that links a study of pilgrimage today to the earlier journeys we’ve considered. But there is also one important difference. As the twentieth century progressed, the cost of travel to World War II sites abroad steadily declined. The figures speak for themselves. In 1945 the cheapest Sydney–London airfare cost the equivalent of 130 weeks of the average wage, in 1965 it cost 21 weeks and by 1995 just 3.5 weeks. The fare to Singapore was around a third of that and (as we’ll see in the chapters to follow) cruises across the Pacific rediscovered sites forgotten and neglected for decades. Once pilgrimage had been the prerogative of a privileged elite. By 2005 it could form part of an affordable travel package for a wide cross section of Australian society.⁸

This chapter is the first of several examining pilgrimage today. It retraces the course taken by Charlie, his old comrades and their families back to Changi and the Thai–Burma railway to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Their journey was meticulously recorded, often in physically and emotionally demanding conditions. Pilgrims were interviewed as they retraced prisoners’ footsteps, and most responded (often with disarming intimacy) to a detailed postal survey on their return home. The most compelling testimony to emerge from this exercise were pilgrims’ actual voices, sometimes strong and assertive, often cautious and reflective, always shaped in the emotion of the journey and the day. Transcribing such charged testimony is a problematic exercise, and it raises issues relevant to all the subsequent chapters in this book. The rendering of oral testimony into written document, the reworking of active voice into static words, ‘flattens out the emotional content of speech’. It also conceals the performative aspect of any interview, privileging what was said over how it was said, bleeding meaning from text. The transcribed text to follow – here and in subsequent chapters – notes pauses, silences and repetitions, mindful that they carry their own world of meaning.⁹

MEMORY TRACES

In many ways the four POWs who travelled with Charlie back to Singapore and Thailand were very much the exception. They had resolved to speak of their experience, to stand witness to a close circle of family and community, indeed, to record their testimony carefully and self-consciously for future generations. With few exceptions, their stories were redemptory, the act of telling them therapeutic.

Their pilgrimages to sites of former captivity serve the purpose of transcendence, and the way these pilgrims told their stories often worked along the themes of 'trauma', 'catharsis' and 'redemption'.¹⁰

These stories merit close examination. But first we should consider how they came to be told in the first place. The last thing these men, or any of the 8th Division, had expected is that they would be taken prisoner. Charlie, John, Les and Mitch were part of more than 15 000 troops the Australian Government sent to Singapore in the early stages of war. They joined a garrison of British, Indian and Malay troops manning what many saw as an impregnable island base. Investing in a deep-water naval base in Singapore had been a cornerstone of both imperial and Australian defence planning. The island's 15-inch guns would block the approach of any hostile fleet sailing on Australia; supported by the mightiest fleet in the world, this 'Gibraltar' of the south could check Japan's expansionist designs.

The Singapore Strategy (as it came to be known) had much to recommend it. For both the Australian and British governments, it was defence on the cheap. Australia could ill afford a sizeable navy of its own, but it could help to garrison a British base in Asia. Singapore protected Australian and British commercial interests in the region, particularly the tin mines and rubber plantations of Malaya. And it cemented an alliance with the mother country; Australia had fought World War I as Britain's junior partner – it would begin World War II that way as well.

But the entire strategy was founded on a fallacy – and a series of false expectations. The island had neither the aircraft nor the ships needed to protect it, and as long as Britain was fighting on another front in Europe very few of either could be spared. The planners of Singapore had expected a naval assault, yet the Japanese approached the island by land, streaming down through the 'back door' of the Malayan peninsula and quickly overwhelming an inadequate and poorly coordinated Allied defence. No one had expected the speed of this advance. Ever-resourceful Japanese troops rode cheap Japanese bicycles down expensive British-built roads. The British had not anticipated that Japanese troops – believed to be short-sighted, ill equipped and poorly led – would prove such effective fighters, particularly in the jungle. By 31 January 1941 the Allied defence of Malaya had collapsed. The last troops were withdrawn from Johore to Singapore, the causeway was (partly) demolished and the island prepared for its final defence.¹¹

That preparation left much to be desired. The defence of Singapore was bedevilled by frequent shifts in command and difficulties in coordinating British, Malay, Australian and Indian troops. There was no air support to protect the island and, although many of the fortress guns could traverse 360 degrees, they were designed to attack ships rather than ground targets. The armour-piercing shells they

fired were of limited use against infantry. And in an echo of the whole Singapore Strategy, British command placed all their eggs in the one basket. Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival believed Japanese forces were most likely to launch their attack from the north-east; the freshest of his troops were deployed there. Two Australian brigades, battered by their losses in Johor, were sent to the north-west sector of Singapore. Again outwitting their opponents, it was there that the Japanese attacked.

British defeat in the Malaya campaign has been the subject of innumerable military histories. For the purposes of this book, it is interesting to see how the fall of Singapore looked to the men who were there. Standing on the edge of the mangroves, looking out towards the old causeway, Jack remembered that his position was virtually indefensible. 'Oh, the infantry got a big hiding. One of the units lost as many as 200 killed easy – might have been more. But I think the front was too big to cover in the first place and conditions weren't good.'

That was an understatement. By fanning troops out all along the coast of Singapore, General Percival opted for weakness everywhere rather than a strong point of defence. Nor did he have any effective forces in reserve. 'Conditions', as John put it, were appalling. It was not just the incessant rain and heat in which men unused to tropical conditions were suddenly expected to fight. Allied positions around the western section of the island were not much more than a few rifle pits screened by barbed wire. They filled with water, John recalled, as exhausted men awaited an enemy attack. Then there was the lament of many a front-line soldier in Singapore: the failure from command to tell men what to do. John remembered waiting for the order to fire: 'everything was ordered from GHQ so it took a couple of hours before permission was given'. The Japanese, on the other hand, moved quickly, decisively and, most importantly of all, they knew where to aim. John strained his eyes as he looked out on the estuary, trying to imagine the swarms of troops that overwhelmed their position in 1942. 'The Malays that were stationed on Singapore Island used to have their clotheslines arranged so that they pointed [like an] arrow to wherever any of our troops were so the Jap planes coming over could pick them up.' Betrayal – real and imagined – made defeat all the more bitter a pill. Although the 8th Division constituted 14 per cent of the island's defence force, it sustained 73 per cent of fatalities in battle.¹²

Singapore came to be remembered as the greatest disaster of the war. In less than three months, British and Allied forces in the Far East suffered 138 000 casualties, of whom 130 000 men were taken prisoner. John was one of them. He had spent a few days as a front-line soldier, and (along with Mitch, Larry and Charlie) he would spend more than three years as a prisoner of war.

For these men the journey back was an attempt to recover something of their wartime memories. Some things looked the same of course. The Long Bar at Raffles was still there, although that was out of bounds to other ranks in 1942. And Serelong Barracks was still standing. All the former POWs had spent time there before being shipped out to work on the railway. There was a tour of the forts that had failed to save the island, an inspection of the Battle Box command centre where moving, speaking manikins relived Britain's defeat. Several hours were set aside for a visit to the northern end of the island; first a tour of the new Changi museum recapturing (a panel claimed) the authentic prisoner experience, then a service at Kranji, where the missing of the railway came to be commemorated and where Britain's empire buried more than 3000 dead.

Familiar as some things seemed, in many ways this was also a frustrating journey. Singapore, the camps, the railway were simply not as these men remembered them. In stark contrast to the powerful recall of memory, this was a landscape irrevocably changed. And of course it was the island, Singapore, that had changed most of all. Charlie grunted into the tape-recorder as the bus jolted its way down busy city streets: 'You see the roads. Havelock Road, I worked there. Thompson Road. Thompson Road I was bashed by the Japs. But it doesn't look the same now. [Pause] It's all gone.'¹³

Modernity had swept aside the landmarks of memory, old arching trees where sweating men sought a moment's shade, laundries, markets, street stalls, even the cemeteries where prisoners pillaged food offered to the dead. The walls of Changi Prison now flanked a housing estate; the battlefields of the estuary were drowned beneath the waters of a dam. 'They've cleaned it all up,' Jack cried out to Charlie. 'The hibiscus hedge has gone. Do you remember that, Charlie? We used to make hibiscus leaf soup.'¹⁴

As the group journeyed through Thailand tracing the course of the railway, the landscape became even harder for memory to negotiate. Larry complained that the overgrown ruins of one camp looked much the same as another. Freightened at night from worksite to worksite, his maintenance crew had little sense of distance, space or even time. 'I couldn't name the towns,' he lamented. 'We wouldn't even have known if a town was nearby.' Rather, all around them, was the jungle, vast, hostile, impenetrable and featureless at one and the same time. This is an extract from an interview with Charlie near the border of Thailand and Burma. Charlie remarked on the claustrophobic nature of work on the line: 'You were in the valley with the mountains on your left and mountains on your right ... There was no way out, no escape, no way out of the gully.'¹⁵



'the course of the railway': an abandoned locomotive rusting in the jungle. Not all these iconic relics are authentic representations of the POW past; the Bridge over the River Kwai (for instance) is not the real bridge at all. But their placement in pilgrimage sites builds the atmosphere of the journey and fosters a sense of connection with the past. The railway was a military imperative for the Japanese. Locomotives like this one supplied troops in Burma, lessening their reliance on vulnerable sea transport via Singapore and the Malacca Straits.

Source: Bruce Scates

But it was more than just a jungle. In the course of their journey, one memory tumbled into another, summoned up by places, sensations, smells. Larry was overcome by emotion as he recognised his old camp at Kami Songeri. The memories, he said, ‘flooded’ back to him: ‘The recollections of the starvation, the disease, the cremation of the bodies on the bamboo fires, the [punishing] work on the railway.’¹⁶

Often those memories seemed like a flashback, and that is frequently a feature of traumatic memories of the past.¹⁷ Disruptive and unsettling, they took interviewer and interviewee by surprise. On a warm August evening at the beginning of our pilgrimage, Mac and his companions shared a meal on the elegant end of Singapore’s waterfront. They sat there, drinking cold beer and watching a silken black river flow by. ‘What a charming scene’, one of the group said, ‘such a pretty place!’ And that took Mac on a tirade into memory: ‘This river used to stink, it used to smell. In 1942, the whole waterfront was burning. There was really just a few miles of Singapore left. So the Japs lobbed everything on it ... The whole [place] was alight ... buildings were burning, there were bodies everywhere.’

Mac’s memory of the siege was one of chaos and carnage, weirdly juxtaposed with the sound of champagne corks popping and bottles of beer exploding. But one particular death, summoned up in the plush surrounds of an open-air restaurant, signalled the cruelty and futility of them all: ‘I found one girl, a little Chinese girl. Her legs were shattered. I took her to St Andrew’s Cathedral. We’d set up a hospital there. Asked the doctor if they could help. They told me to put her over there in the corner. Then I knew there was nothing I could do. [Pause] Yeah, this river used to stink, it used to smell.’¹⁸

It was this stark encounter with death that lingered longest in this survivor’s testimony: a man blown to pieces beside Charlie near the causeway; a group of women and children wired together, machine-gunned by the Japanese, their bodies left bloating in the sun, left for Jack to bury. Often these men remembered the first deaths they witnessed, but not always. It was the memory of cholera victims, the life fluids leaching from every opening in their bodies that was etched in Larry’s mind. ‘We lost 30 men – all died in just a few days. You can be looking like you and me one day and the next just be skin and bone.’¹⁹ Towards the ends of their lives, these men felt a need to tell their stories. Like the testimony of Sticpewich and Babb we examined earlier, the act of witnessing and narration was a way of reckoning with a painful past, building what psychologists have called a ‘bridge’ to life beyond catastrophe. In short this journey was intended to lay the ghosts to rest, and that need was felt, as we’ll see, by both the survivors and their families.²⁰



'there were bodies everywhere': a Chinese woman mourns the death of her child. There were as many civilian as there were military casualties of the campaign. Singapore was defenceless against Japanese aerial attack. Many of the civilian casualties were later buried at Kranji cemetery.

Source: Australian War Memorial, 011529/22

COMPOSING MEMORY

Memories of course are not just about what happened. The narrator not only recalls the past but also asserts his or her interpretation of that past as well. Memory, in this light, 'is not just a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meaning'. Such a process is notoriously selective, subjective, composed and revised to suit the agenda of author and audience alike.²¹

And even before they are spoken these stories draw on certain cultural scripts. Scholars of memory invite us to consider these narratives as carefully crafted performances in which the storyteller casts him- or herself in a certain light. Charlie built an image of himself in the process of these interviews, a complex character positioned around three closely related persona: soldier, captive, custodian of grief. Each of these identities had a strongly performative element. As a soldier, Charlie styled himself a larrikin, a boy from the bush keen for adventure. 'Well, it's stupid going to a bloody war I can tell you ... it wasn't for king and country that you enlisted ... you went to go overseas to see the world, to ... see the pyramids and the sphinx. But I didn't [get] that far ... I went the other way.'

The best part about being in the army was having a quid in your pocket and, of course, the boozy company of your mates. Leave was the best time to muck up, and the way Charlie remembered his leave immediately after the war is interesting. Scholars of repatriation alert us to the loneliness and alcoholism that often descended on men on their return. Charlie's account is one of sociability, exuberance, a passion to live and make up those stolen years.

Used to go down to Coolangatta all the time, used to go down there and spend two or three days ... drinking and dancing, go into the ... hotel and take a bottle of gin or whisky and put it on the bar and ask for a soft drink with it. We weren't popular, I can tell you ... We used to get up in the morning and after breakfast we would go over to Tweed Heads. They shut the bar at 10 o'clock over there so we'd do the beer session there and on the way back from the pub we'd get about a dozen bottles of [pause] Tom Thumb, that was the name of it – Tom Thumb Rum. [We'd] do the beer session at the 'Queensland' and then have dinner and then we'd go up to the room. I was knocking around with one of ... the housemaids there. We'd start on the rum ... Then we would go down to the surf. One or two waves would knock you down.²²

This exuberant, ebullient masculinity was a memory Charlie treasured. It reminds us, as Stephen Garton has noted, that in many ways memories are gendered

constructions. This rowdy, boozy companionship enabling movement, agency, physical and sexual adventure contrasted sharply with the stolen years – the years of emasculating captivity.²³

As a captive that theme of the knockabout Australian expressed itself in very different ways. Charlie spoke often of Australian inventiveness, mateship, humour and sacrifice but, most of all, a determination to ‘see it through’, a stoic refusal to die. No doubt this owed much to actual experience but, in much the same way as Alistair Thomson’s diggers reviewed their lives through the prisms of Anzac stereotypes, Charlie’s story owed much to the Australian nationalism that mythologised Singapore’s fall and modelled POWs as the inheritors of Anzac ideals.²⁴ At several times in the course of our journey he recited the same story almost word for word. Predictably perhaps, it contrasted the qualities of Australian POWs with those of the British. ‘The Poms, they’d say: “I’ll never get home, and I’ll never get home.” They weren’t like us; they didn’t have the will to live. Some of them wouldn’t eat their rice; I’d say, “Aren’t you going to eat that?” They’d say: “I can’t eat that mock [*sic*], chum – here, you have it, Aussie.” I didn’t care how many times you threw up. You still keep something down.’²⁵

Soldier, captive but, most clearly of all, throughout the journey Charlie positioned himself within a community of mourners.²⁶ As an executive member of the RSL, his life’s mission is one of commemoration, what he called a ‘duty’ to keep their memory alive. ‘No one’, he stated repeatedly, ‘ever died alone.’ More than 60 years on, Charlie continued to sit by their side.

There are not enough young people in Australia who realise what happened ... on the railway, they know nothing about that, the atrocities, or anything at all. When I go to the schools to give talks I don’t pull any punches. I say exactly what the Japs did on the railway, what they did in Borneo, set fire to the huts and our chaps were burnt alive ... I reckon the younger generation should know what has happened in the past.²⁷

There is a heady measure of hatred here, but there is also, in one of war’s most unsettling paradoxes, an immense capacity to love. As we looked across the sea of tombstones at Kanchanaburi. Charlie was asked if he recognised the names of any men in particular. ‘Oh yes, here, yes ... I see the name down there and that’s my mate there. Oh, I walk up there and tears stream down my face.’

‘And you remember them?’

‘As they were then. There’s no truer word spoken than the “Ode”: “They shall grow not old as we who are left grow old.” They are still young. They are still 22, 21. They’re the ages they were when they died. I can see them you see, [their faces,

their hair, their eyes] ... I get very emotional when I think of my boys, my mates.' Thinking of his mates, Charlie styled himself as a 'remembrancer': part witness, part historian, one with the moral authority to claim a privileged knowledge of the past.

In the parlance of the time, Charlie was quite a character. He played the part of larrikin, captive and 'remembrancer'.²⁸ But one might well feel uneasy with that phrase much enamoured by cultural theorists: 'performance'. It suggests insincerity, the false drama of the stage. To Charlie this was much more than mere performance. He had lived this life as well as imagined it, and all the stories he told, and even the ways he told them, were an attempt to make some sense of it all: 'I'm not sorry. For myself I'm not sorry ... I'm relatively healthy ... Learned a lot from being a prisoner of war, learnt how high a cove can go and how low a cove can go.'

Jack's testimony differed dramatically from Charlie's, not so much for the raw information that was imparted as the meanings and inference of the script itself. And partly again that was a comment on how that testimony was gathered. Charlie returned alone. Not entirely alone. He travelled always with his memories and the ever-imagined ghosts of his mates.

Jack, by contrast, was almost constantly in the company of his daughter, Nora. Nora carried the same brand of tape-recorder as the group's professional historian and, in the fellowship that becomes compulsive recorders, they shared their batteries and cassettes. But the equality of pilgrimage is often overstated. The purpose of Nora's interviews was to preserve a family memory – and tolerant as she was of the occasional methodological intervention, she knew from the outset the kind of information a dutiful daughter should gather. 'Let me ask the questions,' she stated more than once. As the bus circled Singapore she catalogued battles and worksites, opinions, options and good old-fashioned facts: 'Why were the radios useless, Dad?' 'Were you surrounded by Japanese sympathisers?' 'Why were the British so stupid?'²⁹

As the party followed the railway into Thailand, Nora's interviews developed in skill and technique. Together she and Jack unravelled the minutiae of an ordeal, refashioning the intricate stratagems that kept men alive. It was a shared project in which interviewer and interviewee worked towards common aims.³⁰ With a clarity that belied memory, Jack described burning rice, adding water and brewing something akin to coffee; he sewed together shoes to keep out the hookworm; he supplemented meagre rations through scavenging, recycling and theft. For Nora this was something of a revelation. She'd not heard these stories before, or not bothered to listen, or (and this she thought most often) never really understood.

... before Hellfire Pass ... I start[ed] asking Dad because [I knew] he had worked in the cutting ... And he said, 'It was ... just hammer and tap' ... But having been to Hellfire and having seen what the hammer and tap

was all about, I realised, y'know, and I just cracked. And I said, 'It wasn't just hammer and tap – I mean ... it took a whole day to do one of those.' A whole day ... and these are men who are [so] weak and [so] sick and all the rest of it ... You know, it hit me like a – I don't know what – and I just burst into tears.

One suspects that at times these stories were equally discomfiting for her father. This alerts us again to the way memories are composed and recomposed, how over time a story can be recycled, altered and changed for private peace or public consumption. Nora remembered word for word stories she'd been told as a child, a positive (if selective) memory of how her father and his mates outwitted the Japanese and subverted the relationship of captive and captor. Standing near the site of an old quarry, at first Jack made light of that crippling labour under the Japanese: 'The Japs would make you carry your basket load and dump it up the top ... when you threw it down, the bloke at the top would bash you, and [when you took the basket] back, the bloke at the bottom would bash you. You just couldn't win. [Laughs.]'

NORA: 'I remember you pushed big – what were they, those steel things? – you said you pushed them off, you weren't supposed to push the whole thing off, but it was something you did ...'

JACK: 'I can't remember that.'

NORA: 'I can remember that as a kid, you said you used to push the whole ... [the whole trolley over]. I remember you got the Japanese guard to help you, and then he got ticked off ...'³¹

'Yes, yes,' Jack answered, but there seemed to be very little conviction in his voice. Repetition, in this case, had rendered memory 'safe', 'filtering out', as some scholars have put it, pasts that were unsettling, painful or simply at odds with the accepted narratives of war.³²

Others wondered whether they shouldn't undertake a preliminary sorting of those memories themselves. Elaine's father served as an orderly in hospital camps along the line and scribbled a diary between case notes of the dead. It described in graphic detail a good deal left out of the Anzac and POW mythology, and referred to homosexuality, prostitution and highly salacious descriptions of how he would mark eventual reunion with his wife. The one book Elaine's father had carried with him from Changi was an illustrated marriage guide, and he studied its contents diligently. The accepted wisdom is that men ceased to think about sex – food took its place. 'All the talk, all the time', Larry (another survivor of the railway) insisted, 'was about apple pie and ice cream. That and steak and eggs.' But Elaine's father's



'a shared project': 'Jack' and 'Nora' search the names of the missing at Kranji. Some 24 000 who have no known grave are commemorated here, including Jack's comrades on the railway. Almost all the elderly members of the group travelled with their families. It was a case of pilgrimage transmitting 'memory' from one generation to another.

Source: Bruce Scates

diary suggests otherwise. Its testimony collided with an authorised memory of the past, so much so that she vowed to burn it once at her own journey's end. She didn't. Instead she sought to have it published, evidence perhaps of her own reconciliation with the past.³³

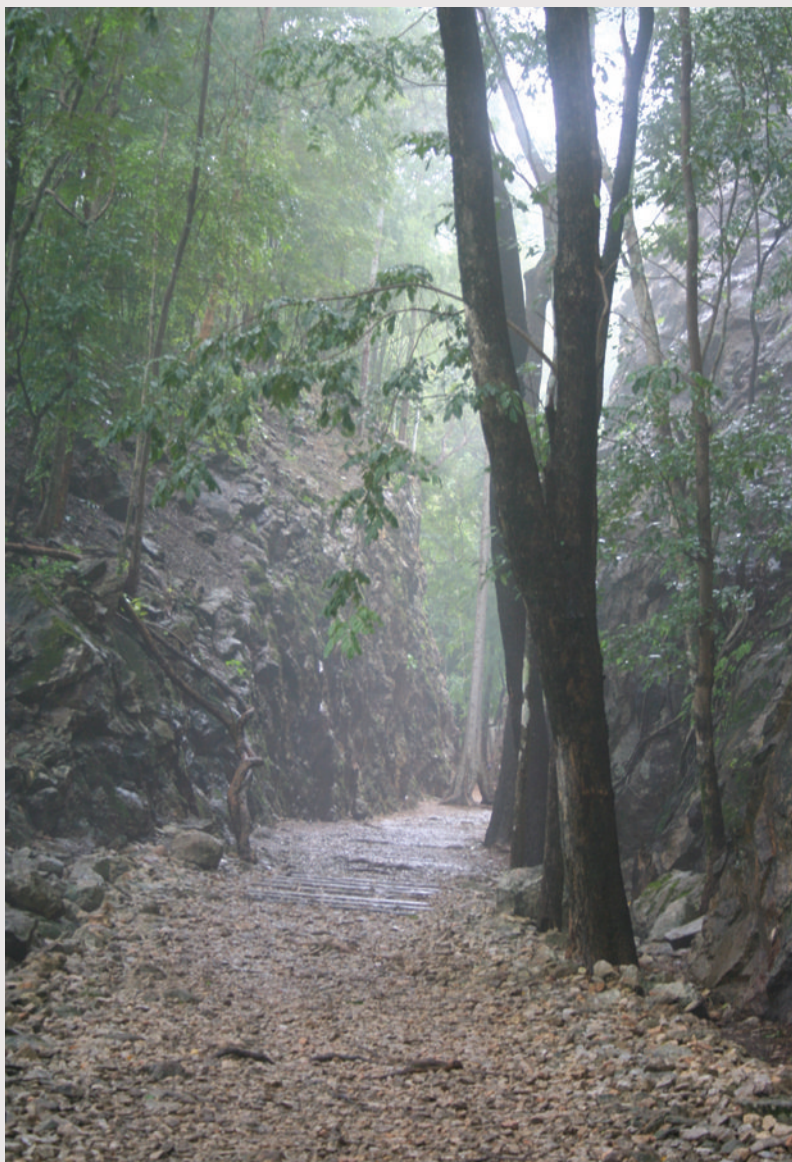
CONTESTED GROUND

In contrast to the prisoner's memory – that fluid, partial and so often volatile thing – are the more ordered, more sanitised and certainly more clichéd scripts of official memory. Memorialising the POW experience began well before the war was over. In recent years the 'commemorative frenzy' (as some have called it) has reached truly extraordinary heights. A forest of memorials has been raised, the old line has been marked with walking trails and interpretative museums, the gates of Changi prison and its nearby prison chapel repositioned and recreated. And this burgeoning memorialisation of war is taking place during the same period as the war itself passes beyond living recall.³⁴

No doubt these memorials serve any number of functions; no doubt visitors respond to them in many different ways. What needs to be noted here is that these official memories often displaced and disrupted memory of a more vernacular kind. And perhaps the most iconic POW site can serve as an example. Hellfire Pass is a railway cutting on the Thai–Burma railway. It was dug and chiselled from the rock in much the way Nora described. Five hundred yards long and 80 feet deep, on this stretch of the railway alone 68 men were beaten to death. And now it is part of a recognised tourist itinerary, as travel agents based in Bangkok and Brisbane ply the pilgrimage trade.

At first, though, the 'marking' of this site was modest and minimal. In 1983 Charlie Company, Royal Australian Regiment, relaid a section of the line. They did so as a tribute to fellow soldiers who toiled and died there. For several days they worked from dawn to sunset, used few mechanical aids, subsisted on little more than rice. These men were not starving, not stricken with tropical disease, not beaten or terrorised. But by recreating the line, they struggled to understand the historical experience of building it. It was a way of situating themselves in a past that they themselves had not lived.³⁵

In the early 1990s Rod Beattie, an Australian expatriate and engineer, embarked on the formidable task of clearing the line. Three miles of it was wrested from the jungle as Rod blazed a rough trail to the deepest of the cuttings. He was motivated by a passionate commitment to the POW story and perhaps a personal interest: Beattie became the curator of a private museum in Kanchanaburi and recovered relics stock its displays.



'dug and chiselled from the rock': Hellfire Pass, the most iconic of all the Death Railway's cuttings. Some historians have questioned whether Australian POWs worked here or on sections of the line nearby. That has done little to diminish the site's significance; prisoners have claimed this place as their own. Note the ghosts of railway sleepers buried beneath the leaf litter.

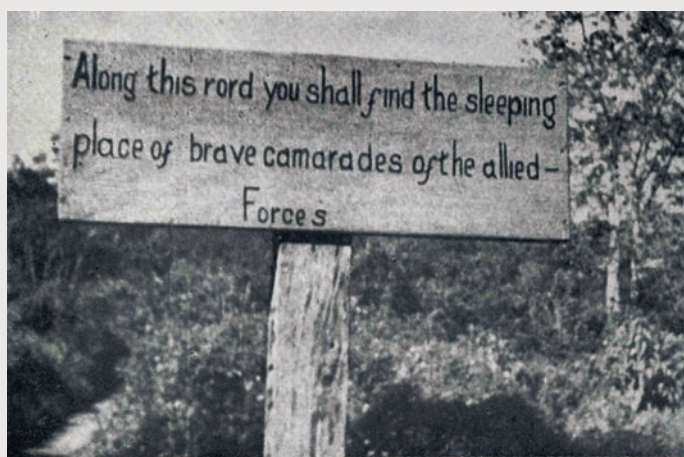
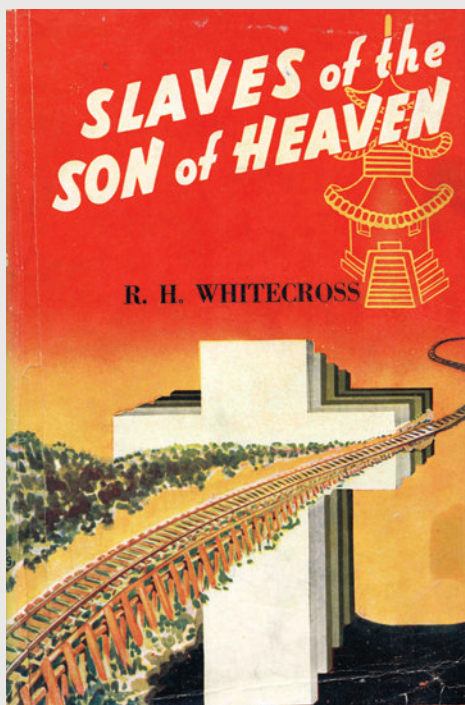
Source: Bruce Scates

Beattie's efforts were also a response to renewed Japanese interest in the Line – and a financial interest at that. In 1989 the Thai press carried news of a development proposal by Chinoda Engineering. The firm was considering restoring 170 kilometres of track, primarily as a tourist attraction, and sought government assistance for a feasibility study. Veterans groups in the Netherlands and Australia were outraged. 'It's as if Auschwitz was to be reopened as an amusement park,' one Dutch POW declared. 'It was inconceivable that a railway which had taken tens of thousands of lives would become a commercial venture.' Bruce Ruxton was more direct. 'They should leave it alone,' he insisted. 'If they are going to open it as a tourist attraction ... they [must] tell people what they did. If they go ahead with building it ... former prisoners of war [should be there] to supervise it.'

Worst of all was the possibility that most of those tourists would be Japanese. C.T. Moodie, Australia's former ambassador to Burma, warned Ruxton of the unseemly proclivities of the Japanese tourist. '[My] wife and I went to the American war memorial in Manila', he wrote, 'and were appalled to see several busloads of Japanese tourists wandering about laughing and giggling and taking photographs ... I do [not] see how the behaviour of Japanese tourists can [ever] be controlled.'³⁶ Faced with the spectre of uncontrollably chuckling Japanese, the Thai Government lost interest in the project. Both private and commercial concerns made way for suitably restrained, state-sponsored commemoration.

In 1994 Prime Minister Paul Keating visited the site intent on appropriating the Pacific War as part of a republican nationalist agenda. The development of what the guidebook discretely terms 'waystations and rest areas' followed, thus domesticating the track in a way acceptable to tourism. Four years later, Keating's successor, John Howard, pursued the memory of war for his own political purposes. Monarchist and republican alike actively co-opted the POW story. Whatever the rhetoric, Canberra's investment in the memory of the railway translated itself readily into bricks and mortar and fuelled the growth of a pilgrimage industry. In April 1998 the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum, an impressive facility unprecedented in that part of Thailand, was unveiled. Lost to the jungle only 20 years ago, the Pass now stages memorial services for around a thousand people every Anzac Day.³⁷

The conflict between the earlier grassroots efforts at commemoration and the 'official' memory sponsored by the state is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the Australian Government's decision to tear up the track purposely created by pilgrims and establish a 'proper' memorial in its place. This was the subject of vexed debate, as the record of the following conversation suggests. As we strode through the cutting the noise of ballast shifting and grating beneath our feet framed every word. Charlie walked up to a slab of black marble and read the inscription out



Japanese Hypocrisy.
Notice erected "after" the war.

'traumatic memories of their past': the cover and inside photographic plate of R.H. Whitecross's *Slaves of the Son of Heaven*. Whitecross's horrific account broke the enforced silence of the war years and elevated the POW ordeal to legendary proportions. Enlisting in the 2nd AIF at 20, he survived the railway, a 'hellship journey' to Japan and enforced labour in the mines. 'The Oriental races', he told his readers, 'are unspeakably cruel and ruthless'. Tributes to men killed on the line (welcomed by Rev. Babb as a sign of genuine remorse) are dismissed here as 'Japanese hypocrisy'. As the caption confirms, Whitecross's war was far from over.

Source: R.H. Whitecross, *Slaves of the Son of Heaven*, (Sydney: Dymocks, 1953), Rare Book Collection, Monash University.

loud. The manager of Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum (and custodian of that new memorial) stood anxiously beside him.

CHARLIE: “‘1942–3’. Wrong dates. 1942–5 we worked on the railway. Not ‘43. The line might have been finished but the work wasn’t finished. The work went on to maintain it. Right through to ‘45.’

WARREN: ‘I think it’s just talking about the construction.’

CHARLIE: ‘If that remains it will have to be altered to ‘42–’45 ... and there were heavy rails here.’

WARREN: ‘You walked past them as you came in.’

CHARLIE: ‘Yeah, I saw them but where were they *here*? They were *here* somewhere.’

WARREN: ‘They were just in front of the flag over there. Now, to be honest with you, Charlie, on Anzac Day people would just trip over them, kick their shins. Now they were put there as a memento, all right, as a symbolic gesture. They ... were a bit of an eyesore, getting a bit dilapidated ... This is a memento. It’s not important to build a whole railway ... but just little sections here and there. Like at Hintock, where we just put them down as a symbolic thing and we keep it beautiful ... What did you think of Hintock station?’

The conversation resumed at that one part of the track still left on the line. It is just near Konyu cutting, the site set aside for Anzac Day observance. In a place many would describe as ‘sacred’, the contest between Charlie and Warren, vernacular memory and official, flared up again.

CHARLIE: ‘What are these here?’

WARREN: ‘The idea of that was to symbolise the railway sleeper – you know, the fragmented path and then the full path and then going on into infinity.’

CHARLIE: ‘It would have been better if you had of had original wood, original sleepers, moving up the railway.’

WARREN: ‘Yeah, I know, but that’s an artist’s planning view, and architects and stuff like that.’

CHARLIE: ‘You should have had the sleepers.’

WARREN: ‘Well, you’ve built houses in the past, haven’t you, Charlie?’

CHARLIE: ‘Nahhh.’

WARREN: ‘Well, let me tell you, speak to someone who has. [They’ll tell you all about the problem with architects.]’³⁸

The problem with architects was nowhere near as big as the problems raised by this ‘remembrancer’. What kind of historical truth did this site articulate, and who exactly did it address: former prisoners, their descendants, earnest pilgrims or a stream of Thai and other visitors pouring from the bus? Charlie asserted special rights of ownership. He was what people in the Canberra bureaucracy liked to call a ‘stakeholder’, and part of the reason for his visit was to report on the new memorial to the RSL. All the POWs in the party, and indeed their extended families, saw themselves as the site’s legitimate custodians. They craved what heritage scholars have called the authenticity of the past, its ugly, unsightly, even offensive fabric. Symbolic gestures, however aesthetic, were frankly not enough.³⁹ Jack declared he ‘wasn’t all that impressed with the memorial’. As he saw it, it ‘took away from the solemnity of the cutting’. ‘All just too commercialised,’ he sighed, wringing his hands as if they were still ached from hammer and tap. Larry proclaimed himself ‘a regular churchgoer’. A temporary cross had been raised for an Anzac Day service some years back, and he believed it should still be there: ‘those men – like Christ – suffered and died’.⁴⁰ The son of a POW killed on the line, Ralph also rallied to their memory. It wasn’t so much the new memorial that bothered him as the desecration of the track itself: ‘The design does nothing for me at all but, you know, I can live with it ... It’s not my idea of what I would have done but ... I can live with it. My emotional disturbance ... is all the track work they’ve disturbed. They have taken away what this was – which is a railway cutting and turned it into a walking path. Now [Warren’s] obviously been instructed to make it as safe as possible. So he is fixated on that.’

‘The rails were in place, weren’t they?’

‘There were some display rails put in place, [yeah] ... and Weary Dunlop’s ashes – a third thereof – was placed in that ballast. You have taken a sacred cow and spread the ashes. Now, that gets a Victorian very upset.’

Ralph believed the memory of one of Victoria’s greatest war heroes had been desecrated. Shifting those ashes was a disturbance of the dead all too common in the history of war graves. He went on to emphasise a rupture between vernacular and official memory, what he saw as a sacred site compromised for tourism, and the irony of a museum that actively denied the past:

There is a hell of a lot of text in there, isn’t there? And irrelevant, irrelevant artefacts as I see it. And just between you and [me] [lowers voice] I don’t think there really is much POW stuff in there. It isn’t intended as a memorial. It should have been called [an] interpretive centre or something like that ... it’s not a [memorial] at all. [Our] blokes who rolled up in ’98,



'vernacular and official memory': the clean-cut marble of a state-sponsored memorial contrasts sharply with a site of memory pilgrims themselves have created. Compare the static quality of the former and the way individuals carry their own meanings into the cutting's shrine.

Source: Bruce Scates

they came with ... books that people had written about their units and all this sort of thing to present to this museum, and they thought they were going to do a wonderful bloody thing and they got told, 'Go away.'⁴¹

Echoes of these conversations can be found in other contexts. The rhetoric of memory can be monopolised and mobilised, and there can be an uneasy transition between personal experience on the one hand and national commemoration on the other. What is clear is that sites like Hellfire Pass have spawned not one site of memory but many and that the official and the vernacular have competed for space. Commemoration, as heritage scholars have noted, 'is always an act of evaluation, judgement and "speaking"'. It is 'neither possible nor desirable to insist on a single, objective and authoritative meaning of any place'.⁴²

Vernacular and official is one fault line that runs through this memory place; the rift between the sacred and the secular is another. For Warren the memorial serves any number of practical functions: education, commemoration, tourism and a way of enhancing Australia's standing in the region. For others, the Pass is a deeply spiritual place, a site where ghosts walk again. Carl, a middle-aged man, shaken by his POW father's trauma, related an earlier visit as we made our way through the cutting:

When I came over three years ago I was travelling with a fellow from Victoria who actually worked at one of the bridges ... actually worked as a pile driver building the wooden bridge ... at Hellfire Pass. We walked down there very early, before the Dawn Service we went through there, and he was saying to me, 'It's my first time back since the war,' he said. 'Oh, I can hear them, I can hear their voices, I can hear them talking, I can still hear them ... It brought the hair up on the back of my neck.'⁴³

The objects carried into the cutting heighten the site's significance: rusting tools and relics carried out of the jungle, paper crosses pinned around them, a trail of red poppies tumbling down a face of rock, occasionally a photograph, sometimes a letter. Pebbles and objects transplanted from one place to another symbolically linking home and destination, building new 'layers of meaning' into the site. Sometimes such items are intended to be durable, such as those fashioned from wood, stone or sheets of paper carefully laminated together. But usually these offerings are intended to blend with the elements, becoming (as it were) a part of that place: 'On a tree near Shimo-Sonkuri, where F Force was, someone had left a WW2 colour badge. It had been there a long time. [There must be] a story behind it.'⁴⁴

GROUNDING MEMORY

Sometimes the story is the landscape itself. The trek to Cholera Hill is probably the best example.⁴⁵ In the monsoon season of 1943, more than 800 Australians died there. At first the bodies were sunk in the waterlogged earth but, as a cholera epidemic gripped the camp, most were cremated on funeral piers. Larry remembered the ‘big bamboo fires’ that charred and consumed rotting flesh, the pathetic effort to sift one set of remains from another, the single day they lost 30 men, their bodies not much more than ‘skin and bones’, the one man who every day, every week, every month stoked the flames. ‘The bloke who looked after the fire he did it all the time ... he was a sergeant major ... [who] didn’t live long after that ... [but he] was made of iron.’⁴⁶

The bodies that were buried at Cholera Hill were exhumed by the War Graves Commission and taken (with those tiny parcels of ashes) to one of the consolidation cemeteries described in chapter 3. But the presence of those bodies was still felt by onlookers. ‘I saw the indentations of the graves,’ Helen wrote on her return home to Australia. ‘To this day I still see them.’⁴⁷

Such a land is in need of healing. In one of those poignant gestures that so becomes a pilgrimage, members of the party, all children of POWs, gathered gum leaves from wayside eucalypts, bundled them together in a small clay pot and set them alight in the wind and rain. It was, as Ron noted, a quintessentially Australian occasion, borrowing an Aboriginal healing ceremony, done for Australians by Australians, burning gum leaves in a foreign land.

Witnesses to the ceremony emphasised different parts of it, and these descriptions fit very neatly into the classic paradigm of pilgrimage. The trek up the hillside slipping like the men themselves had in the mud and the rain – and historically pilgrimages have involved such a journey – ‘a hard path’, as the historian of religion Mircea Eliade calls it, ‘sown with obstacles’, because a shrine easily reached is not truly a shrine at all. The squally, incessant showers indicated, as one pilgrim remarked, ‘that God too was crying’ – and the way that a place can somehow carry the subjective investment of the pilgrim has long fascinated pilgrimage scholars. Even an engineer in the party, a man not much given to poetry, waxed lyrical at the minor miracle of a rainbow blazing brilliant across a storm-filled sky. ‘Now what are the chances of that, eh? A double rainbow with another rainbow above it. It’s beautiful.’⁴⁸

Commemorative services, as we’ve noted, usually gain their power from an oft-rehearsed coherent structure, a ‘codified public ritual’. The real power of this



'their pilgrimage helped them understand': a party of secondary-school students on the Victorian Premier's Spirit of Anzac Tour walk the Death Railway. They have researched the life and death of a soldier killed on the line. Their pilgrimage ended with a commemorative service at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

Source: Bruce Scates

ceremony was its literally volatile unpredictability, its capacity to unhinge, to surprise. At the moment Larry reached forward to place his own gum leaf on the smouldering flames, the clay pot, brittle with heat, cracked to its very centre. Several months later, witnesses remembered that explosion, a clap of thunder, a huge release of tension. The landscape, they all agreed, spoke back to them that day.⁴⁹

This chapter has focused on the journey four POWs took across a 'traumascape' of war. As they made that journey, they reckoned with traumatic memories of their own past, sharing their experiences with a close circle of friends and family, confronting secrets too long left unsaid. But as the ceremony at Cholera Hill suggests, landscapes also spoke back to these men's relatives. Their pilgrimage helped them understand the experience that had made their father or uncle, grandfather or husband such 'deeply damaged men'.⁵⁰

It is to the journeys of the sons and daughters of POWs that we now turn.

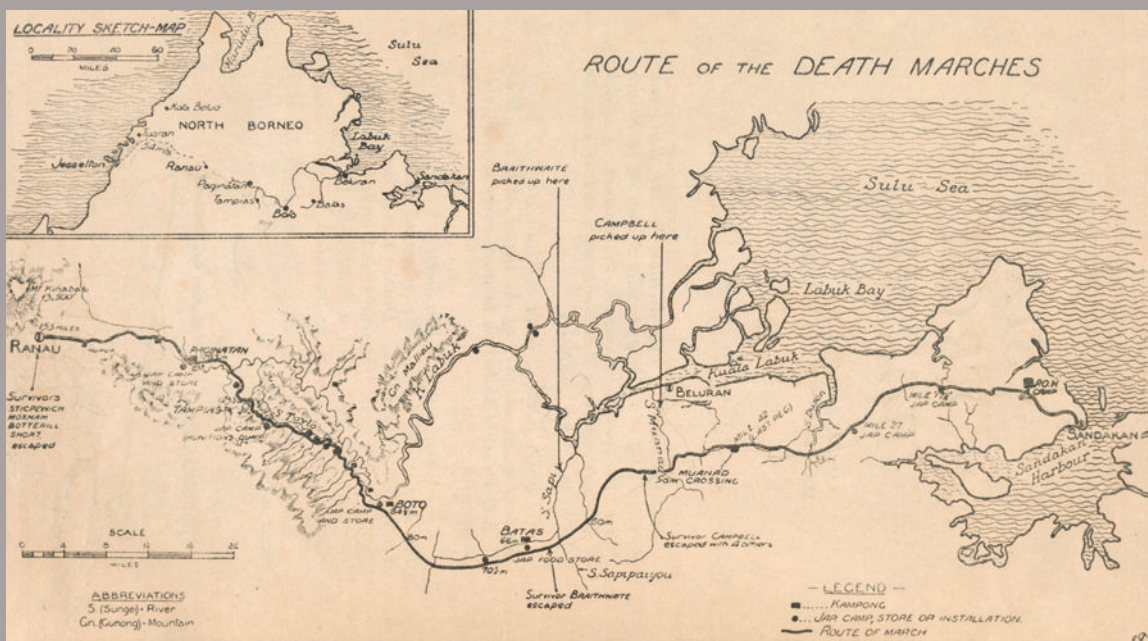
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CHAPTER 5

THE DEATH MARCH

Journeys back to Sandakan

The Sandakan Death March began on the coast of northern Borneo and ended in its mountainous interior. In fact, there was more than one Death March, as the Japanese hurriedly concentrated their forces around Ranau. Japanese soldiers also suffered and died on the march. Resenting enforced relocation and fearing defeat, they subjected Allied prisoners to harsh and degrading punishment. Only six of more than 3000 British and Australian prisoners survived the ordeal on Borneo. For Australia this was surely the greatest tragedy of the war.



[You will feel] their presence in a rotted boot,
A blaze upon a tree that marks a grave,
A bullet scar still unhealed in the bark,
A scrap of webbing and an earth-stained badge,
A falling bamboo hut, a giant tree
They rested at this log, this creek,
This climb that runs the sweat into your eyes –
Though you aren't laden, fevered, driven, starved
You tell yourself you know how they went by.

Colin Simpson, *Six from Borneo*

Charlie, Jack and Larry's journey back along the railway was one of the last of its kind. As the veterans of World War II grow old they become less and less capable of so physically and emotionally taxing a journey. Soon there will be no survivors left to claim custodianship of this story – and that story will pass on to others.

In the case of Sandakan there were very few survivors. Of the six men who escaped the Japanese, only three ever returned there, and of these only Bill Sticpewich made any real attempt to retrace his journey. What we have seen in the case of Hellfire Pass – prisoners returning to the site of their ordeal to explain to families what happened there – was never really possible in Borneo.

Furthermore, the absence of survivors made for a different kind of pilgrimage. Very few family members have any direct memory of the men they sought to honour. Of course, there were exceptions. Although Brian was only seven when he waved his father goodbye, he remembered the times with his father with clarity and intimacy. In a way, the memory of his childhood was divided into three defining phases: the time before his father went away, the moment he heard of his death, and the fragmented family life that followed. For Brian, and a number of other pilgrims like him, that first phase had an idyllic quality. He remembered his father in the warm domestic spaces he had inhabited before leaving for war:

Of course we missed Dad when he left. Up until this time we were a happy, carefree family. I still remember the simple joy of Dad and three kids laying on the lounge-room carpet in front of the open fire, listening to the old wireless, and our excitement on Friday nights when Dad brought home a block of Streets Neapolitan ice cream. I remember our last holiday with Dad; it was at Lake Illawarra catching rabbits with ferrets, fishing, prawning and wandering over the hills ...¹

Brian's father went first to Goulburn for training, then to Malaya. His family wrote letters every other day 'and Mum had us say a little prayer each night'. All connection was severed when 'Private Smith' was reported missing. It was four months after the war that the family learned any details of his death.²

Maureen's story was similar. She was six when her father went to war, and in this case the vulnerability of a young child underscored her memories of her father as a protector: 'I remember my father as a very gentle, very ... tall man ... he was about 5ft 11in ... so he was no giant but he was to me. A gentle, kind, wonderful father ... I can remember ... little things like ... him killing the magpie because it swooped on me, and us going up into the bush and burying it, and it looked like an eagle to me – it was huge.'³

In both Brian's and Maureen's cases, the news that their fathers had died was abrupt and catastrophic. And neither heard the news from their mother. Brian remembered his mum being 'speechless', probably as 'stunned and confused' as he was. His aunt called each of the children into the house one by one, and broke the news to each of them separately. Maureen recalled her mother being 'in pieces': 'I remember ... one of the family just coming and saying, "The war is over. Your father is dead and he's not coming home." And that was it.' It wasn't. Both Brian and Maureen remembered the hardships and uncertainties of growing up without a father, the breadwinner and provider for most people in post-war Australia. Brian received some help from Legacy, and to this day he idealises his mother's complete devotion to her children. But Maureen's childhood from that point on was 'totally disjointed'. First was her mother's marriage to a 'horrible abusive man', a veteran of Changi. Afterwards Maureen was sent to live with her grandmother while her mother went out to work. Maureen used the word 'powerless' to convey the abiding memory of her childhood. It was as if from the day her father died her life began to fall apart around her.⁴

Brian and Maureen are unusual among the sons and daughters of Sandakan's victims in having an immediate memory of their fathers. For others, these men are defined by their absence. They 'were denied the right to know', Peter protested, 'whether Dad was a bad man, a good man ... You know what I mean? Never playing cricket with ... Dad ... Just the things we take for granted ... You know, the 2428 of them that didn't return – it's what they left behind is so tragic.'⁵

At another level, what they left behind is a way of imagining these phantom parents. Respondents spoke with reverence of the relics that remained in their possession: 'the letters Dad wrote home'; the albums of photographs 'black and white, of course, and rice paper sort of in between'; sketches of the places their children had never seen; 'beautiful gifts mainly from Singapore'; all mementoes of a

journey pilgrims longed to follow. Some of the most prized possessions emphasise a man's military service: his medals, service dossiers, and studio portraits of handsome young men in uniform. Others connect eerily with the places that claimed them. Bernie's father died on the first Death March and was buried in a mass grave at Paginatan; his watch, 'which has Dad's name and number on the back', came back to his mother only in 1948. Liz regularly visits the Sandakan Room in the Australian War Memorial just to see her grandfather's mess tin, his name still scratched in the metal, recovered after the war. But perhaps the most poignant mementoes are those that connect these soldiers to the communities they came from. Kevin brought his 'shoebox of memories' with him to Sandakan. Inside was a photograph of a surf boat being launched at Port Macquarie, a boat named in honour of his late uncle. 'You see the oars are crossed,' he said. 'That was a sort of memory thing about his life and losing him in the war.' 'Chid', as Kevin's uncle was known, served as a medical orderly, saving lives as surely as he saved them in the waters off Port Macquarie. He was among the last to die on the Death March.⁶

Whatever their nature, whatever their association, these objects are a way of materialising memory, restoring fathers, uncles and grandfathers to their families: a sepia christening photo fragile with age, fading red ribbons worn by a champion swimmer, prizes that once signified lives of promise and achievement.⁷ Often these familiar associations bridge the generations. Liz said:

My father ... was 14 years old when his father went to war, and I gather he absolutely adored his dad and missed him terribly. I have a picture that my father (aged 14) drew of his father ... It is a tracing of the studio portrait of Sidney in his uniform ... I always thought it was very poignant that my father ... drew this picture of his dad ... It suggests a lot of yearning and great sense of loss. My father died in 1990 and I treasure the drawing as a memento of the boy my father once was.⁸

That yearning and sense of loss didn't die with Liz's father. 'What happened to our stolen generation?' Shirley asked. 'Why was I cheated out of a grandfather?' Stuart, who has travelled to Sabah three times with his father, noted the way these objects prompted a sense of connection to the past:

I grew up knowing my grandfather died as a POW but I was indifferent to the details ... It wasn't until 2000 when I was at my brother's place for a family get-together the photo album was dragged out and I saw the original handwritten card from Pop. 'My darling wife and child I am a prisoner of war' etc. This was a life-changing moment for me; it was like flicking a switch from indifferent mode to totally engrossed. It brought



'a sort of memory thing': artefacts encountered or carried on a pilgrimage.

Source: Bruce Scates

tears to my eyes to the point that I walked away to dry my face. I could never keep a dry eye during the reading of the 'Ode' and the playing of the 'Last Post', but now it sends shivers up my spine.⁹

Stuart sang 'Waltzing Matilda' as a tribute to his grandfather at the furthest point of his pilgrimage. At Kundasang he left a card inscribed: 'I would have called you poppy ... I never met you. Will always miss you.'¹⁰

A very similar response was common among the women we surveyed. Liz expressed her surprise at the strength of feeling she had about her grandfather. There is, as she put it, 'so much emotion even [though] I never met him'.

I really don't know why. It might be something to do with the circumstances of his death, and the tragedy and waste of life. As well as the suffering they experienced. It's hard not to empathise with what they went through ... My uncle Brian, who was only four when his father went to war, has been to Sandakan four times now. He first went in the early 90s (after my dad died) and keeps going back. It's like part of the family is now in Borneo and we have a special connection with the place.¹¹

CONNECTING TO PLACE

Connecting families to place was the purpose of pilgrimage. This was as true of Sandakan as it was of the journeys along the line. That sense of connection was strongest when it involved immediate family. 'I was too young to know my uncle', Bess explained, 'but he knew me.' She can clearly recall the night the war ended: 'My parents and their siblings had gathered together, and I couldn't understand what all the singing and bellringing was about.' She also remembered the homecoming of two of three uncles: 'I was on my father's shoulders – [among a] huge crowd at the Roma railway station ... These two strange men, wearing long baggy army shorts – they had been on the Burma railway and were so thin.' Most of all, she remembered the absence of Uncle Harry: 'I wanted to see where he had been and especially where he died in such terrible circumstances. Nobody in my family had been there, and I felt I had to go to say goodbye – on their behalf as well.' Bess has visited Sandakan three times now, most recently with family from Roma. Walking the places 'where he would have walked' made her feel 'connected every day [and] many times during the day': 'It was an experience I find difficult to describe – disturbing, but I also felt very close to him. Every spot I felt close to my uncle ... I left a small photo of him and a sprig of wattle from my home ... I don't know where these tributes end up, but it doesn't really matter.'¹²



'I left a small photo of him': 'Bess' slips a photo of her uncle beside the panel to the Missing at Labuan. Placing an image by a name was deemed by many to signal the end of this journey.

Source: Bruce Scates

What did matter was to cultivate that sense of connection, and some pilgrims went to considerable lengths to do so. Bernard, the 73-year-old son of a man buried as an 'unknown', has also visited Sabah on three separate occasions. Each time he has walked a 16km section of the Death March track. He's done this in punishing heat and 'finished ahead of the 20-member group'. 'Each time I have felt I was not walking alone', he explained, 'and I will never forget his presence.' Others claim to hear their voices. In all probability, Narelle's grandfather was killed on 24 February 1945. Officially, he was listed as dying of malaria, but more than likely he was one of 124 sick or crippled men 'bayoneted, shot or beheaded' before the first march left the camp at Sandakan. The first time Narelle visited the park, her husband couldn't get her further than the boiler, a relic of captivity rusting away at the entrance. 'She seemed to be stuck there ... I guess for ten minutes or so ... And then she said things to me, like: "They're talking to me; I can hear the voices."' ¹³

Of course, this connection is entirely imagined. Bernard's and Narelle's fathers weren't really there. Nor, ironically, was the Death March track itself. And this leads to another defining difference between pilgrimages to Sandakan and other POW sites we've examined. The railway weaves its way through Thailand on a course set down by Japanese engineers; many of its camps and cemeteries, embankments and cuttings are clearly marked. They have become specified sites on many a pilgrimage itineraries. But there was no single route on the Sandakan Death March, and the way men clambered through swamps and jungle is surely untraceable. Moreover, the landscape itself has changed irrevocably. The physical features of the cuttings at Compressor Pass or Hellfire Pass remain instantly recognisable. The jungles of Borneo, by contrast, and the villages they once supported have given way (in many instances) to vast plantations of palm groves. Any tangible connection that the Death March had with this landscape has been lost. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, successive appeals by the RSL raised modest cairns as memorials to the men who died. It also laboured to retrieve prison camp sites from snake-infested jungles. Relatives contributed what they could to these projects. One war widow donated two weeks of her pension (or, as she put it, her 'widow's mite'), bemoaning the fact that vast tracts of 'prime Australian land' were now 'controlled from Tokyo'. ¹⁴

With no survivors and few landmarks to guide them, guides now mediate a pilgrim's passage through space and time. Olivia and her husband Edward have been conducting tours of Sabah since the 1990s, which are effectively the successors of Ruxton's RSL tours. A former schoolteacher and amateur historian, Olivia is well equipped and well informed. Each man who died on the track has been meticulously researched, the subject of books she has written with precisely this audience in mind. In order to personalise the journey, participants without a

POW relative were encouraged to adopt a POW. The cast was chosen from Olivia's book: memorable characters distinguished by their bravery (Captain Oakeshott), their suffering (Albert Cleary) or survival (Botterill, Nelson or Braithwaite). That man's individual ordeal was a constant frame of reference as the bus made its way up to Ranau and woven into a well-crafted and carefully delivered narrative of the journey. One example will suffice.

On the fifth day of the tour, the group stopped at a nondescript clearing; Olivia announced our arrival at the main Ranau camp. 'Now the hut was roughly here', she explained while pacing the ground. 'It was just an open-sided outhouse hut ... the Jap guards at one end, the so-called fit in the middle and the sick ones at the far end who had dysentery trying to keep out of the muck ... Botterill said to me the smell was just so bad and that ... before he laid down [each night] he had to get a piece of bamboo and scrape the muck off the slats from the dysentery people before he could sleep. In the morning he'd wake up and see if the fellow either side of him was dead or alive. If they were dead he'd take whatever he needed that that bloke might have had that he didn't and ... then later in the day bury the bodies ... Prisoners who were very weak couldn't carry [the bodies] other than getting a bamboo pole and tying them up by their feet and their hands like a tiger, and they would struggle all the way up the side of the hill, and scratch out a grave. [A Japanese officer] would stand here laughing at them ... Botterill says, "I buried every one of them", which was pretty much right ... and that was one of the reasons he was so tormented all his life.'¹⁵

Some descendants found these accounts distressing – a question we will consider shortly. What is certain is that these stories situated pilgrims in a landscape of suffering and – given Olivia's role in recording POW stories – confirmed her position as the custodian of their memory. It also facilitated a slippage between past and present, as in this extract from her commentary: 'It's a palm plantation. It doesn't remotely resemble what it was like in 1945. You can see why we don't bother bringing anyone here. If you look out here you can see where the marchers were. Look out across that clearing in the palm plantation, the space between us and the river. That's where the marchers are. *And we'll catch up with the marchers again* [emphasis added].'¹⁶

As surely befits the Death March, atrocity stories accompanied every phase of the group's journeys; a bend in the river where an exhausted man was executed; a grave site found 40 years ago; a rough track leading through the jungle on which men were marched to their death. But that hardly exhausted the repertoire. Readings, poetry, documents, photographs and artefacts were produced to illustrate various sites. The last three enhanced the authenticity of accounts few were inclined to



'where their forefathers trod' or, in this case, their fathers. 'Brian' makes his way towards a hut overgrown with jungle and looks out on the place where a body was recovered.

Source: Bruce Scates

question. In the early twenty-first century the cross-referencing of the War Graves Unit's maps with global positioning satellites confirms the rough direction of the track; in that sense at least pilgrims could persuade themselves that they had walked where their forebears trod. Finally, at key points of the journey, Olivia conducted her own set of quasi-formal commemorations. All members of the tour played their allocated part, reading the Bible and reciting Binyon's 'For the Fallen', burning gum leaves and laying wreathes, joining hands and observing a minute's silence. Such services were highly ecumenical. At the 'Service of love and remembrance at the Pool of Reflection, Kundasang, Mount Kinabalu', an exhortation from Pericles followed a reading from St John. The British, Australian, Malaysian and Sabah flags were hoisted, then lowered to half mast; two musical tributes, 'Highland Cathedral' and 'An Irish Blessing', reflected the group's diverse Anglo-Celtic heritage.¹⁷

Pilgrims expressed their appreciation of Olivia's services. Her work was described as 'inspired', 'moving', 'a learning experience, a wonderful experience'. 'She knows the history and she personalised it for each person on the tour group', one man wrote. Some admired what they called 'logistical support'; others were moved to tears by music. Lil wandered across the Memorial Park at Kundasang, with Mount Kinabalu towering above and the 'Gloria' surging all around her: 'It's almost a staircase to heaven ... I could feel the spirits being uplifted ... I think that's what music does for me. [We're in] God's Garden, that's God talking to me right now, in the most beautiful way.'¹⁸ And for those whose relatives died on the track Olivia facilitated that quest to 'find' a missing relative. 'If it wasn't for Olivia', Stuart confessed, 'it would just be an empty space.' Instead father, son and grandson held each other tight and stood as close as one could stand to the spot where Private Smith had perished.¹⁹

DISRUPTED JOURNEYS

Pilgrimage is an expression of faith, so it is hardly surprising there were few dissenting voices. But there were some. An emphasis on reconnecting with relatives meant that those without family sometimes felt excluded. Others wondered why 'rival' tour groups were shunned so fiercely and denounced so loudly as imposters. Surely the motivations for their journey were similar. Sometimes there were disagreements in the party, particularly where the Japanese were concerned. Olivia defended the motivations of a businessman from Tokyo raising a memorial 'to their dead and ours' at the end of the track. It was, she believed, a genuine gesture of atonement. Others were not convinced. 'This place belongs to us', a Vietnam veteran insisted, 'and the dogs are just pissing on it.' 'By all means let them have their memorial', another relative suggested, 'but nowhere near ours.' Commemoration is often codified: the



'as close as one could stand': father, son and grandson gaze out on the place where 'Pop' perished. Family groups like this one were an important dynamic on the pilgrimage and secured the transmission of family stories from one generation to another.

Source: Bruce Scates

ceremonies, hymns, flag-raising and speeches provided a necessary 'focus' for the journey and a way to express much that couldn't be said. But at least one participant felt his own feelings 'crowded out' by so 'busy an agenda': 'I needed more time to be alone, more space for silence.'²⁰ These comments tell as much about the varied and sometimes contradictory expectations of pilgrims as they do about the tour leader. Leading so diverse a cohort across what is in effect a traumascapes is no easy task.

Finally, as the attempt to recreate the plight of POWs became more and more elaborate, pilgrims were confronted with a paradox. 'We travelled on an air-conditioned bus on a made road. The prisoners were marched on a track just a metre wide through nearly impenetrable jungle, carrying heavy loads, with little water, food or medicine and execution the certain result of falling behind or attempting escape ... As we travelled along the road, they gave us a vivid description of the dreadful events. I seem to be in two worlds at once.'²¹

At journey's end, the group assembled at Labuan and was invited to commemorate their soldier at his grave or memorial. More often than not, it was the latter. Just as few men survived the Death March, comparatively few of those who were killed were identified. Here again there is something distinctive and disturbing about a pilgrimage to Sandakan. Brian was sure he had narrowed down the search for his father's grave to three possible unknowns; the way the bodies had been recovered from the track and their chronological relocation to Labuan guaranteed at least that. But not all had that reassurance. Brian observed: 'I went away with a guy in 2001. He asked could he put these flowers on his relative's grave] ... and [Olivia] said, "There's 500 in that square there" ... and he was gutted.'²²

Stuart thought his best chance of finding his grandfather was 'one in 44'. 'I visit them all', he added, 'just in case.' And others rely on what they called 'a feeling' to guide them to a certain gravesite. Janet paced the plaques at Labuan carrying a picture of her father. On that occasion, like before, she was 'sort of just drawn to this area'. 'I just assume that he's here,' she said, as she knelt by the plaque of an Australian soldier 'Known unto God'.²³

Janet used the term 'closure' to describe her wreath-laying at Labuan. It is a word that springs easily to the lips of many pilgrims. 'My first pilgrimage', Bernard explained, 'was certainly in search of some sort of closure': 'My aim was to visit where he was held prisoner at Sandakan. Follow the track of his Death March, the place where he died and where he is buried. Other relatives who have passed away can be visited in our local cemeteries at any time. To find the place where my father is buried, after so many years of not knowing, was certainly a part of the way to a closure.'²⁴ To bring about that closure Bernard and his wife left parting messages in the visitors' book: 'Nice to meet you on this sad day', 'Happy to visit you again – your loving family.'²⁵

Pilgrims were comforted by the thought that the bones of fathers, grandfathers, uncles were not 'lying in one of those gutters or one of those swamps'. Their remains had been recovered and laid out with 'dignity', and not just left 'rotting in the jungle'. Whatever controversies attended the repeated relocation of bodies in the immediate post-war period, descendants of these men expressed overwhelming approval for the work of the War Graves Commission: 'that beautiful cemetery' at Labuan healed much of the trauma associated with their journey. Nowhere is that better illustrated than in Maureen's case.

Maureen was six when she lost her father, and from that moment her life changed forever. It was not just the violent stepfather suddenly imposed upon her or the 'higgledy-piggledy years' as she was shuffled from one household to another. Maureen's status as the child of a man killed on the Death March meant that she was subjected to 'one horror story' after another: 'I was told that they [tied] my father up, that they pulled two bamboo trees down ... tied one leg to each tree and let them go [tearing him] apart – that sort of thing, that's the sort of thing I was told when I was a kid.'

'You were told that at school?'

'No, I was told that by adults.'²⁶

The first week of Maureen's pilgrimage only seemed to confirm these stories. There was (as she put it) just one 'abomination' after another: the ordeal of the march, the execution of those who fell behind and finally the resort to cannibalism: 'Slicing the body parts from men still alive ... I don't know how to describe it; words don't describe it.'

But it was Maureen's visit to Sandakan, the camp where her father died, that proved for her the most difficult. 'At Sandakan that day I felt that I was just absolutely full to the brim with grief. That's the best way I can describe it, just absolutely stuffed full with it, and it probably sounds a bit stupid but I felt that – you've seen that, that painting *The Scream*? [by expressionist artist Edvard Munch] ... I was quite conscious of those sort of faces, skeletal. I don't see apparitions, I don't see ghosties and things around the place [but] I just felt like we were moving through a whole sea of that, those sort of skeletal ghosts ... this was just beyond tears, but ... how do you process all this grief?'²⁷

Maureen found a way to do just that at Labuan. It was not that she was led to one particular grave among the unknown, or that she took much comfort from those formalised expressions of grief: the wreaths of flowers, the Cross of Sacrifice, all parts of the elaborate architecture of remembrance. What Maureen found at Labuan was her father's name. 'I don't know that that Sandakan experience will ever leave me, but I do feel better about it now ... to see my father's name up there and have it all polished ... shining brightly – it was ... nice ... I don't have ... anything monumental to say, except that I do feel much relieved ... and freer.'²⁸



'gleaming in gold': 'Kevin' leaves an offering at a memorial bearing his uncle's name. The flowers have been picked from the surrounding jungle, placing his uncle in the landscape that claimed him.

Source: Bruce Scates

Maureen had thought Sandakan would 'haunt' her forever. But the sight of her father's name gleaming in gold had subdued that ugly vision of butchered bodies and ghostly apparitions. Memorials had played their part in healing, leaving her and her father 'in peace'.²⁹

Maureen believed something 'had been cleared away' on her pilgrimage to Sabah. She felt no need to return. But clearly for those who book and rebook a Death March Tour, 'closure' is at best an imperfect concept. And some pilgrims took exception to that word altogether: 'I'm a professional psychologist and don't like that word "closure",' Mabel said. 'I went to Borneo to gain an understanding of what my father went through and to bless him on behalf of my mother, who died in 1993 without having the opportunity to do so herself ... I remember my father through my mother's memories, and his letters, which I read in 2003. [This pilgrimage and an exhibition I'm] putting together [is a way to] personalise the stories of the lost POWs.'³⁰

Parallel to the debate over whether pilgrimage was a quest for closure ran an even more fierce dispute over what exactly gaining 'an understanding' of the POW experience involved. Stuart knew some relatives 'want to be shielded from any of the ugly truth'. He didn't. '[Olivia] provided us with the nitty gritty of what happened here, that happened there. She does not sugar-coat the stories or try to omit the nasty details; she tells it like it happened. In my opinion it is the only way history should be told.'³¹

Some, like Kim, hoped for the truth but without 'all the grisly details'. One could acknowledge the brutality without a 'blow-by-blow description'. Others believed confronting the past was really not the best way to escape it. No one knew what happened to Peter's uncle, Walter. There was just that entry in his file: 'died whilst POW'. Even so Peter was of the opinion that the National Archives of Australia should 'put back' many of its files and 'reclassify' much of the material publically available: 'There's stuff there that ... just torments me sometimes ... You need to know that your father was a hero or whatever. Don't need to know ... some of the descriptions from the war [crimes] trials ... you know, when they start cutting up a man when he's still alive, removing his organs ... If one of these family members found out ... that was their father – God, they don't need to know that ... Maybe governments have a right to protect us.'³²

Governments certainly believed they had a right to protect their citizens in the 1940s and 1950s. The decision to withhold information from relatives, or release information 'with discretion', is evidence enough of that. The role government should play in remembrance was a source of considerable debate among pilgrims. Nowhere is that more apparent than on Anzac Day. The official observance of Anzac Day in Sabah is a very recent phenomenon. The commemorative park and

centre was completed only in 2004. Formal dawn services with official Australian Government representation followed after that. Far from government driving commemoration in Sandakan, it has had to catch up with private initiatives. Several parties claim to have run the first Anzac Day service in Sandakan, and some of these claims reach back to the 1980s. What is beyond dispute is that services began without any kind of official sponsorship. Government recognition, one tour leader reflected, was both reluctant and late.³³

The attempt to codify commemorative practice has sometimes met with resistance. Of course *almost* everyone appreciated the efforts that the Australian Government had gone to; the ceremonies are well organised; the catafalque parties impressive, and the gunfire breakfast at the end of the speeches very much appreciated. 'Each anthem, reading, prayer and blessing added another layer,' Linda recalled. 'I was humbled and honoured to stand on this site.' But one suspects that ultimately the effectiveness of these services had less to do with efforts of the Department of Veterans' Affairs or the Office of Australian War Graves than the setting and occasion itself. Sandakan Memorial Park (an extensive commemorative precinct initiated by the RSL in the 1980s but completed with massive government funding a decade later) is nestled within the confines of the old POW camp. A dawn service there in the midst of what seemed to be a jungle was bound to be 'atmospheric'. Linda recalled 'the lighted pathway threaded through the dark', the day breaking 'with pink, gold and white clouds', the sound of monkeys scrambling in trees above, their chatter at odds with these deeply solemn proceedings. And not everyone, especially not those with the direct family connection to the site, were altogether comfortable with the way Australian officials conducted proceedings. Stuart, the grandson of a man killed on the Death March (and a man who 'liked to use the English language to its full extent'), feared the officials were 'taking over': 'You know, you sit there for five minutes and [they're] saying, "Ohhh, welcome the Honourable blah blah blah and blow it out your bum" ... which I really picked up on this Anzac Day. [There] was one bloke [who] got up and he, he was blowing out his bum: "Welcome dignitary blah blah blah", but then the local Sabah bloke ... [and] said, "Welcome all the relatives of the victims and dignitaries" and I thought, "Good on you, mate! You didn't blow that one out your bum."' ³⁴

The 'personal ceremonies' were what mattered to Stuart, those that centred on relatives rather than protocols dictated by Canberra. And when a structure was set down, there were some who sought to change it. At the end of the Anzac Day service in 2010, the descendants of POWs were invited to the microphone and asked to call out their soldier's name. To begin with, the speakers were compliant. The name and rank of each man was read out, and nothing else said. Shirley was the first to amend this protocol: 'My grandfather,' she added loud and clear, inserting



The 'personal ceremonies' were what mattered: photos of the lost framed by Australian flags. Note the gum leaves burning in the foreground. This incorporation of Indigenous mourning practices was a feature of these journeys and signals the inventiveness of pilgrimage.

Source: Bruce Scates

that family connection that ‘really mattered the most’. Others followed. These men were no longer just dead soldiers: their memory belonged to families as well as to the state. ‘It’s not the politician’s story’, Shirley commented after the service, ‘it’s ours.’ And sometimes what Stuart called ‘personal ceremonies’ jarred against the official template of remembrance: at Sandakan, as on the Death Railway, vernacular and official commemoration competed for space.

Victor was four years old when his father went to war; he still remembered his ‘Dad marching off from Lancer barracks in Parramatta’. The little he knew of his father suggested that he was something of a larrikin, not one to take officialdom too seriously, full of ‘a great sense of fun’. With that in mind, Victor and his own son decided to embark on a private memorial service, waiting discreetly for an end to the official proceedings. At the centrepiece was the old boiler that Narelle could not walk beyond. It was one of the few surviving POW artefacts with a direct connection with Victor’s father:

My son Paul wanted to express further the Australian way of acknowledgement and respect. For this purpose, he had taken some – a lot – of gum leaves with us. We did not have the opportunity to burn them during the [official] service so afterwards he stuffed them into the restored boiler from the remnants of the camp. He lit them and a DVA [Veterans’ Affairs] lady and another official came over and wanted to extinguish the fire ... Paul pointed out that I had waited 68 years to do that. The DVA people pointed out that [the boiler] had just been restored at a cost of \$25 000. We thought that with my father’s sense of humour, he would have found the whole thing amusing.³⁵

‘Amusing’ is not a word often associated with pilgrimage, but it reminds us again of the emotional range of these journeys. Not everyone was as earnest, or as driven, as this particular cohort. Sites like Hellfire Pass or Sandakan Memorial Park are not just visited by the descendants of POWs. They feature now on many tourist itineraries, an optional extra alongside walks through the rainforest, shopping excursions, cultural shows and culinary adventures. Stuart was sickened by the sight of casual day-trippers disembarking from tourist coaches; they wandered aimlessly across what to him was a sacred site and wrote ‘really bizarre shit’ like ‘nice view’ in the visitors’ book. He has a point.

And even within these self-selected groups, styled ‘Anzac Day Tour’ or ‘Borneo POW Pilgrimage’, there are different levels of engagement and different expectations. Pilgrimage has always involved a sense of the elect, and some came to doubt the commitment and motivation of their fellow travellers. Narelle, for example, thought the first two groups she travelled with had come for what she

called the right reasons: 'But this year [on her third Sandakan pilgrimage] I felt most people were there to party, shop, drink and have a holiday.'³⁶

Finally, these stories, however powerful in their own right, were also enmeshed in others. Wandering 'God's Garden' at Kundasang Memorial Park, Lil remembered her 'darling eldest sister' who died of cancer. Maureen's grief for her father reflected the recent loss of her husband, the 'total goneness of him', as she put it. The search for bodies left rotting in the jungle reminded Daniel of the day HMAS *Melbourne* cut the *Voyager* in two. He was serving on minesweepers at the time, and after several hours work they recovered 82 bodies. But not all of them. 'I've never seen water like it, just dead calm ... not a ripple. But a body floated past and it had no head, no arms, no legs ... And they just left it there ... nobody picked it up ... they just said, "Nah, it's not a body. Don't worry about it. It's a carcass of a sheep", which it wasn't. Anybody could see it was a body.'³⁷

Sandakan, as Daniel noted, 'brought all that back'. This is not to diminish the depth or sincerity of the emotional responses we've considered, but it does provide another context for these journeys. Pilgrims respond to these sites, but they also carry certain attitudes, assumptions and expectations with them. And these expectations are not just born of their own life stories but are also socially conditioned. Shirley mourned the loss of 'her stolen generation'. But that powerful phrase functioned to draw a parallel between her experience and that of Aboriginal children removed from their families in accordance with government policy. She felt as much a victim as they were. This language of victimhood and human rights has been explored by a number of historians.³⁸

The traumascapes of World War II provoke diverse responses from a diverse cross-section of visitors. Yet the ongoing appeal of these sites and the intensity of familial (as well as national) memories highlight the capacity of key war heritage sites to speak across generations about the Australian experience of war. Such sites as Sandakan and the Death Railway are the most immediate physical reminders of this war. Pilgrimages to these places provide a powerful sense of place to visitors; their experiences (in turn) reinforce a site's significance for subsequent generations. From the very moment the war ended, South-East Asia became Australia's most important site of pilgrimage. But it was not the only one. The following chapters consider other kinds of journeys through other sites of conflict.



'a powerful sense of place': a stained-glass window set in the pavilion of Sandakan Memorial Park. Note the central motif of prisoners marching to their deaths and the tapestry of Australian wildflowers. A memorial window was a means of sacralising space, and many pilgrims to this place have likened the pavilion to a church. The pavilion is also an instance of the role that the state plays in facilitating pilgrimage. As late as 1990 the site was 'densely overgrown', and there was 'a real risk of jungle growth obliterating it altogether'.

Source: Bruce Scates.



DESERT AND ISLAND

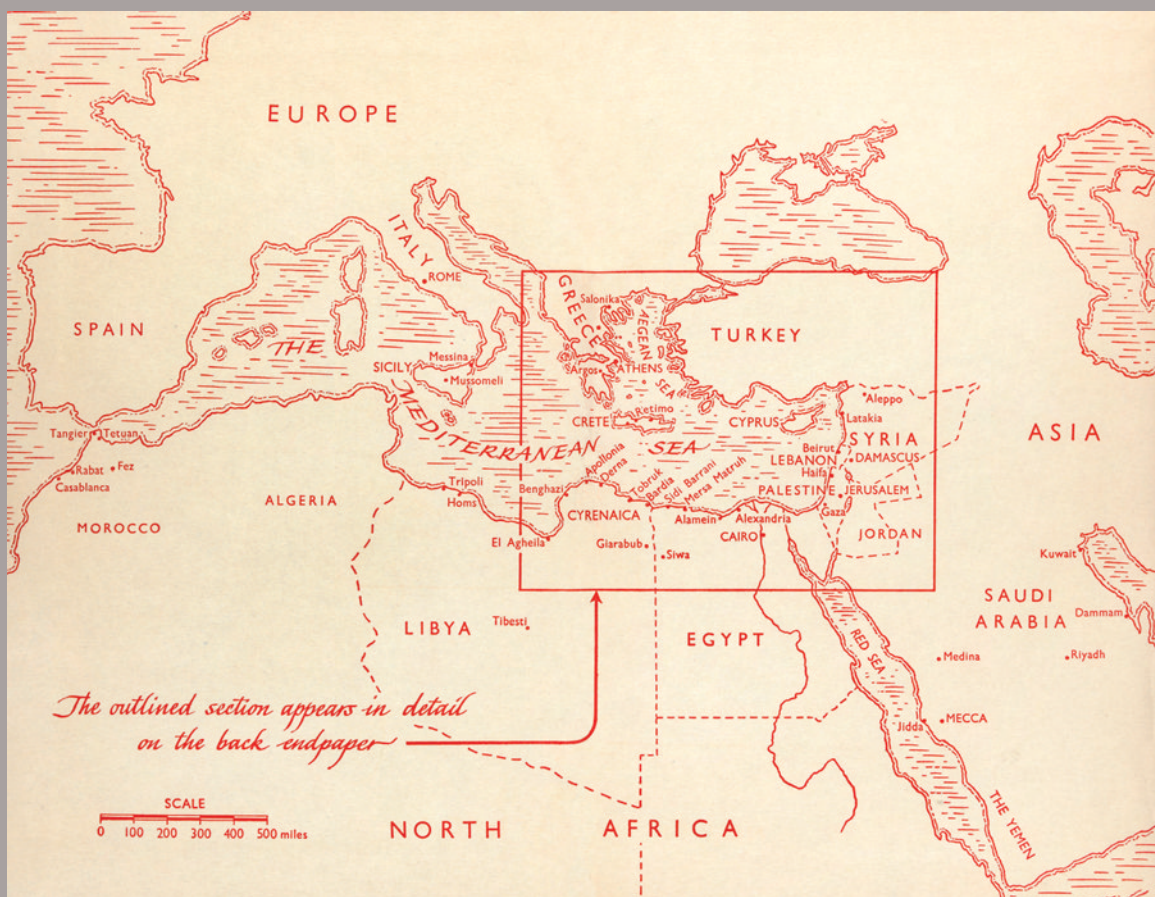
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CHAPTER SIX

DEATH IN THE DESERT

North Africa

The battlefield of North Africa stretched across more than a thousand kilometres of desert from Alamein (near Alexandria) to Benghazi in Cyrenaica. Libya had been an Italian colony since the 1930s, its occupation part of Benito Mussolini's quest to build a new Roman empire. His ally was Germany, in particular General Erwin Rommel and his mechanised Desert Corps. Defending Egypt was important to the Allies in order to maintain control of the Suez Canal. In August 1940, No. 3 Squadron RAAF arrived in North Africa and began operations against Axis forces in the Western Desert in November. The first land combat involving Australian infantry took place during the battle of Bardia in January 1941. Fourteen thousand Australians were besieged at Tobruk between April and August 1941, during which time 559 died. The Western Desert campaign turned decisively in the Allies' favour in November 1942 when the combined German and Italian forces were defeated in the battle of El Alamein.



'more than a thousand kilometres of desert': outline of the North Africa campaign.

Source: John Laffin, *Middle East Journey* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958). Reproduced with kind permission of Bronwen Grey and the Laffin family

Kathleen Gahan's passport is sealed in plastic sheeting in the State Library of Victoria's heritage collection. It slips from its folder onto the table, leaving a trail of dust and memories. The old blue cover is soiled and battered, bent, perhaps, by customs officials impatient to stamp it. This is a British passport, the document declares, issued at a time many Australians saw themselves as subjects and citizens.

The passport is one of many mementoes its owner once treasured. Alongside it rests a souvenir route map. Issued to air travellers on the Qantas route from Sydney to London, its bold red lines girdle the globe, straddling oceans and continents. With scant regard to scale or geography, it features the exotic wonders Australians might encounter on their travels: the Tower Bridge and Big Ben, the Taj Mahal and Colosseum, a sailing vessel plucked from the Aegean, an elephant carrying a canopied maharajah. Behind them looms one of the pyramids at Giza – the only such cultural landmark 'Kitty' Gahan would actually visit.

Kitty Gahan, the war widow of Captain Studley Gahan, left Sydney at 10pm on Saturday, 19 October 1954. She flew all night to Darwin, then travelled via Jakarta to Singapore. Her aircraft touched down briefly in Bangkok, Calcutta and Karachi, and finally arrived in Cairo at 5.30am on Tuesday. What would be a 20-hour flight today took more than three days and nights to complete in the early 1950s. Mrs Gahan's party included representatives from the RSL and the 9th Division: a father who lost three sons in the war; a mother whose sons were first captured in the Middle East, then killed en route to Italy; and two widows (Kitty included). Their purpose was to attend the dedication of the War Graves Commission cemetery at El Alamein. Several of the party would visit the graves of 'their boys'; Mrs Gahan would view only the name of her husband, lost in the battle for Tobruk in 1941. Captain Gahan's only memorial is a line etched in stone on a panel to the missing.

To this day the Gahan collection offers a chronology of her travels: menus, invitations, luggage tags, and the lavish certificates airlines used to offer on crossing the equator. Kitty Gahan pasted yet another Qantas guide on the scrapbook's cover – an image of an attractive hostess offering 'anything you may need to make your journey more enjoyable'. This was a souvenir, of course (literally a way of remembering), but the collection also served as a memorial. Towards the end of its pages, photographs of camel rides and pyramids give way to row after row of tombstones. The final image was the name of her husband carved in cool, white stone in the heat of the desert. Captain Gahan was 27 when he died. His widow never remarried.¹

WAR IN THE DESERT

Captain Gahan was one of more than 3000 Australian casualties at Tobruk. In all, some 14000 men of the 9th Division served there, accounting for a time for more than half the garrison. Tobruk was central to the Allies' North Africa campaign. It was the only deep-water port for hundreds of miles; it also had an airfield. Most important of all, it stood in the path of the German advance to Egypt. So long as it was held, supplies for Rommel's troops and tanks had to be trucked hundreds of miles across the desert.

But Tobruk was a fortress in name only. Australian troops inherited a defensive system developed by the Italians. It involved a perimeter that stretched in a great arc around the port, 48 kilometres of intermittent trenches, occasional strong-points, barbed wire and minefields. The Red Line (as it was called) also involved an anti-tank ditch – although it could be breached in several places. Holding Tobruk necessitated 'defence in depth'. This meant aggressive patrolling, well beyond the Red Line, into any forward area likely to be occupied by the Germans. Australian troops were found to excel in this role. They also adopted new tactics to cope with any German breakthrough. In the event of an armoured force breaching the Red Line, troops were to stay in their pits, allow the tanks to 'wash over' them, then emerge to check advancing German infantry. Mines, British artillery and captured Italian guns (dubbed the bush artillery by Australian batteries) dealt with the advancing tanks.²

These tactics worked. The Second AIF withstood four months of siege, a condition of continuous warfare not seen by an Australian force since Gallipoli. But the policy of 'making the besiegers the besieged' meant costly raids on German positions. Studley Gahan was killed on one of these, a push into the German salient on 17 May 1941. The War Diary records the last sighting of Gahan at 7.30 hours, six of his 12 men wounded, but still pushing on to the next position. His body was never recovered.

Tobruk did fall eventually, Australians withdrew in October and the British, Polish and South African troops who relieved them took a less aggressive stance towards the town's defence. But before it fell, Tobruk had proved that Rommel and his armoured corps were not invincible, and the naval supply of the port through a gauntlet of air attacks was a legend in itself. The German propaganda machine sneered at Tobruk's defenders as 'poor desert rats' – a reference to the tunnels in which Allied troops were forced to shelter. Australians adopted the term with pride, striking their own unofficial medal in the shape of a rat, made from the remains of a German bomber. After the war Allied veterans would form a Rats of Tobruk Association, and two of its members would accompany Kitty Gahan to North Africa.³

As one of the missing, Captain Gahan was commemorated at El Alamein, the largest World War II cemetery in North Africa. Alamein was also the site of a battle, one that changed the course of the war in the desert and finally routed Rommel in 1942. Again Australian troops played a key role. The Eighth Army's casualties numbered 13650, but of these the 9th Division alone accounted for 2694. Although less than 10 per cent of the attacking force, Australians suffered 22 per cent of casualties. Statistics like these ensured that the bitter campaign in North Africa would loom large in the annals of the Second AIF. It also made the desert a place of Anzac pilgrimage.⁴

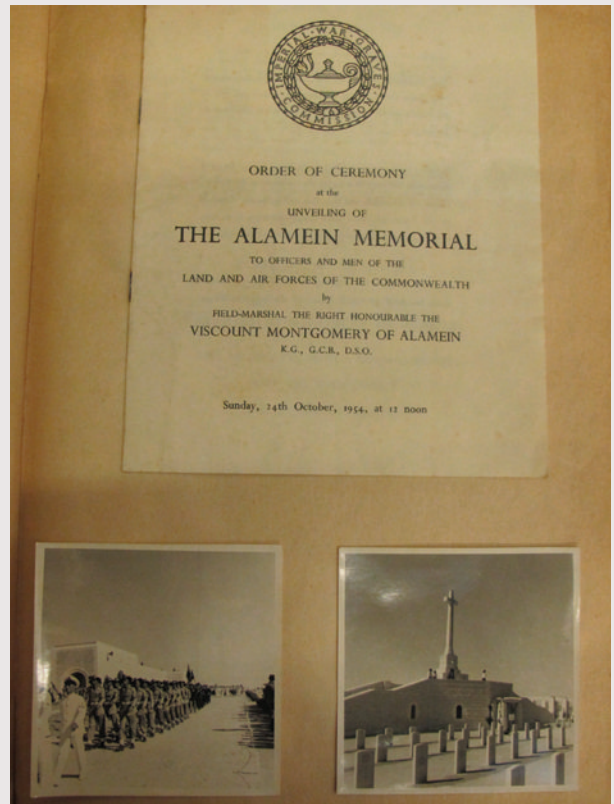
Kitty Gahan published several accounts of her journey. In writing these she carefully considered her audience. For the readership of *Mud and Blood*, the journal of the 2/23rd Australian Infantry Battalion Association, she emphasised the fighting qualities of the Australian soldier. El Alamein is presented as a site of sacrifice, and when Kitty toured the desert it was certainly still a battlefield. The wrecks of Spitfires lined abandoned airfields, and barbed wire marked where trenches had been sunk into the sand. 'The Arabs' were 'scrounging' whatever warring armies had left. 'I noticed a few humpies built out of metal pieces', she added.⁵ One can imagine diggers nodding their heads.

To the War Widows' Guild Mrs Gahan wrote less about minefields and more about cemeteries. An account of her approach to the 'arched colonnades' of El Alamein visualised that 'final resting place':

... we saw the Memorial walls before us ... on the far side a tall cross rises with arches on each side ... The ground had been raked perfectly smooth and the 7000 odd headstones were the only thing to break the surface; there were no mounds as in an ordinary cemetery. There are headstones instead of crosses to combat the corroding influence of the wind. Each one is inscribed with the man's name and unit, a Rising Sun and a verse from the Bible chosen by the next of kin.

Kitty Gahan emphasised the religious elements of the service and its genuinely ecumenical nature. 'Prayers were said by the Anglican Bishop of Cairo, the Presbyterian Moderator and a Muslim Priest, and the Roman Catholics conducted a Mass. After the "Last Post" and "Reveille" the Scottish Pipers played a lament which sounded sadly beautiful in that setting.' The desert afforded space for everyone.

Mrs Gahan's account ended with a list of visiting dignitaries, perhaps to assure families that their loss had been officially acknowledged. A final comment was reserved for the wreath she was charged to lay: 'The Guild's wreath was a bunch of the most beautiful artificial wattle tied with a lacy silver ribbon. As a rule, I can't



'straddling oceans and continents': Kitty Gahan's passport and scrapbook. The collection reminds us of the link between tourism and pilgrimage – travel for pleasure and a journey charged with a much more earnest purpose.

Source: Kathleen Gahan Papers, 1929–82, State Library of Victoria, MS 14565. Images: Bruce Scates

bear artificial flowers but this was really lovely and complete strangers came up to me to say how much they admired it. In the blazing heat real flowers were dead before the ceremony started.' They were sentiments her 'community of mourners' would understand.⁶

A special committee appointed by the Australian Government had selected Mrs Gahan and her companions to go to North Africa. All their airfares were met, their accommodation arranged by various legations and the Commonwealth added a daily stipend of two pounds ten shillings to cover 'out-of-pocket expenses'. 'Every woman who applied had a claim, of course', a note in the War Widows' Guild circular conceded, 'except the astonishing re-married ex-widows.' Even more astonishing was the changed attitude of the government. 'Do you remember our early days', the article continued, 'when we had to *ask* to be invited to even the simplest of ceremonies?'⁷

A number of factors had driven that change. Sadly for the Guild, none involved 'an improved status of the war widow'. First and foremost was the politics of precedent. The Commonwealth first funded a pilgrimage by next of kin in 1953, when the memorial to missing airmen was dedicated at Runnymede in England. Initially the government was reluctant to send anyone at all, but 'representations from influential parties outside the parliament and members of both government and opposition' forced Cabinet to 're-examine' its position. From that point on it was hard to refuse appeals for the opening of subsequent cemeteries, although hard-hearted accountants in the public service certainly sought to do so. 'In cases where 1500 or more Australian dead are commemorated', a memo drafted for the prime minister explained, 'some limited representation ... should be permitted to bereaved relatives. Other than that, no official representation of bereaved relatives will be sponsored by the government.'

That policy soon attracted vocal critics. What made a death in the Battle for Britain any more worthy of recognition than that of an airman who died in Malta, where barely 211 Australians were commemorated? Nor, in a war to defend the British Empire, could distance determine a decision. More than 20 relatives had attended the unveiling ceremony in Papua at government expense – could a case not be made for a similar delegation (honouring a comparable number of dead) to visit North Africa? Others opposed any subsidy altogether, W.S. Kent Hughes, Minister for the Interior, among them. It was not just that the Runnymede decision reversed all the protocols established by World War I, or that the Imperial War Graves Commission (and *not* his department) should really meet the costs associated with the dedication of war graves. Kent Hughes believed that subsidising some and not others introduced a cruel inequality to the bereaved and that the money 'would be far better spent in issuing all next of kin a suitable brochure of photographs'.⁸

That might have satisfied the public in 1919. It seemed paltry compensation in 1954. And among those ‘influential parties’ lobbying government were a host of ex-service associations convinced of their right to represent a powerful constituency of mourners. Finally, once one claim was made on the public purse, it was difficult to deny others – particularly when that claim was a subsidy to the spouse of a senior government official. There was no question that Sir Thomas White (Australia’s High Commissioner in London) should attend the dedication at Commonwealth expense. But were Lady White’s fares and expenses really (some asked) ‘a proper charge on the Treasury’? Concerned that the government would be ‘subject to [more] adverse criticism’, Prime Minister Menzies thought it prudent to make concessions. The cost of some ‘limited representation’ (£4500 to be exact) seemed a small price to pay.⁹

A SELECT FEW

Kitty Gahan was one of a select few in the 1950s, just as she would have been if she were travelling there in the twenty-first century. Not many people (and even fewer Australians) visit the cemeteries and battlefields of North Africa. These journeys began within months of the war ending and long before the task of building the cemeteries was completed. As early as September 1947 the Australian Battlefield Memorials Committee recommended an ‘official presence’ at the unveiling of the new memorial at Tobruk. It replaced an earlier monument hastily raised by Australian engineers during the siege itself. ‘Of simple yet serious dignity’, it would stand at the very entrance to the cemetery, a towering obelisk with the word ‘Australia’ carved on its face. The monument proclaimed Australia’s dominion over a land in which so many Australian lives were lost. Built of stone sourced from El Alamein (the other great battlefield of the Western Desert) and quarried (pointedly) by German prisoners of war, it featured a map of Australia cut into its base.

The Tobruk memorial was comparable to the divisional memorials raised across the Western Front in the aftermath of the Great War, and it was altogether appropriate that servicemen attend its dedication. But which services exactly should be represented? A bitter dispute broke out between the Rats of Tobruk Association and the RSL. Both threatened to boycott any ceremony where they were not represented in their own right. Federal Cabinet’s suggestion that Australia’s High Commissioner in London should lead the delegation was equally unconscionable. ‘We will not have Mr Beasley unveiling *our* memorial’, one old ‘Rat’ declared at a stormy Association meeting in Sydney. ‘*He* was not a returned soldier.’ The Rats demanded their old commander, General Sir Leslie Morshead, as ‘the logical choice’, and they were certainly prepared to ‘shake Canberra up [a bit]’. ‘The Association

should contact every ex-serviceman of the Federal House', a committee member suggested. 'Which two?' a voice asked in reply.¹⁰

The episode highlighted the divisions between those who went to war and those who did not – a recurrent theme (as we've seen) in the history of pilgrimage. Divided the ex-service constituency might well have been, but the Rats remained a formidable force. Canberra conceded to most of their demands, including a side-trip to Gallipoli, the first official pilgrimage there since 1924. F.A. Burrows, one of the five-member delegation, had been awarded the Military Medal at Gallipoli and the DSO and Polish Cross at Tobruk. His was the first Australian battalion to encounter the Germans, and he was the last commanding officer to leave the garrison. Burrows' pilgrimage began in April 1948 with a 'landing' at Anzac Cove on 25 April. It concluded with visits to the major cemeteries of Tobruk and El Alamein, where the graves of his comrades were still marked by crosses in the sand.¹¹

The dedication of monuments and cemeteries was one prompt for pilgrimage; anniversaries another. In 1965 the national executive of the RSL explored the possibility of a Mediterranean battlefield tour to commemorate Australia's role in the Middle East. That year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the RSL and 20 years since the end of World War II. It was estimated that the tour would cost members 'something like £500 each', a hefty amount given that the average annual wage for men was around £1500. It would last 'possibly three to four weeks' and take in Tobruk, El Alamein, Bardia and (perhaps) Israel. The tentative nature of this exploration was altogether appropriate. There were no takers.¹²

However, that year did see a pilgrimage to Gallipoli and, mindful that the RSL represented both the First and Second AIF, a decision was made to visit Tobruk. The Turkish ship *Karadeniz* was chartered for the 21-day cruise, and 311 passengers (mostly Great War veterans) sailed from Athens to Sicily, then Malta, Tobruk, Alexandria, Beirut, Rhodes, Heraklion, Izmir and (finally) Gallipoli. It was a busy agenda, and barely a day was spent in Tobruk. The pilgrims were ferried ashore on RAF 'Z' craft, propped precariously on steel chairs brought in for the occasion. RAF lorries ferried them to British, French and German war cemeteries.¹³ The latter, an IWGC report noted, 'resembles an ancient Turkish fort' built of 'hard local stone' to stand the extremes of the desert. More than 6000 German dead had been brought in from the desert and buried en masse in its courtyard. There is no record of how Australian veterans of World War I responded to a German cemetery built for World War II, but the fact that they made an effort to visit the site is surely of interest. However bitter the campaign in North Africa, there was a genuine respect for Rommel and his men, as German and Allied troops alike endured the hardships

Impressive unveiling in Western Desert

MEMORIAL TO AIF HEROES WHO FELL AT TOBRUK

Tobruk (AAP)

THE new memorial to the 599 Australians who died during the siege of Tobruk in 1941 was unveiled yesterday by Lieut-General Sir Leslie Morshead, who commanded the Ninth Australian Division at the time.

In the fluctuating campaigns of the Western Desert from the beginning of 1941 to the end of 1942, he said, this now historic battlefield was the scene of victories and defeats and then of final victory.

Great Britain as usual bore the lion's share of the sacrifice, with Australian, South African, New Zealand, Indian, and Polish forces doing their part.

Tobruk was held by dauntless courage, unbreakable spirit, high endeavour, the will to fight, and the unity and teamwork of the garrison, he said. It was held with the support of the Royal Navy, who guarded and maintained the garrison regardless of danger and with the gallantry that was traditional in the Navy.

"Let us pay homage to the memory of these stalwarts, our comrades, who fought so nobly and so valiantly, and who died for their homelands and for our King and Empire.

"Let us who are left see that their memory is kept ever fresh and green."

Impressive ceremony

Trumpeters of the Royal Hussars sounded the Last Post, the guards presented arms, and after the sound of the armoured cars' guns, silence fell on the place once filled for so long with the roar of battle.

At first attention on the memorial itself stood four marine commandos, from the British sloop *Peacock*, which had come specially from Malta to represent the Royal Navy.

Grouped around them stood the representatives of Britain and the Dominions, and the present-day men of Tobruk, hushed in memory of those who fell.

The Reveille came clearly upon the echoes of the two-minute gun resting the silence. There was the rattle of rifles as the guards sloped and entered arms and stood at ease with the blessing was given.

The guards came to the present at the words of the National Anthem, then the group around the memorial



—DAYNE

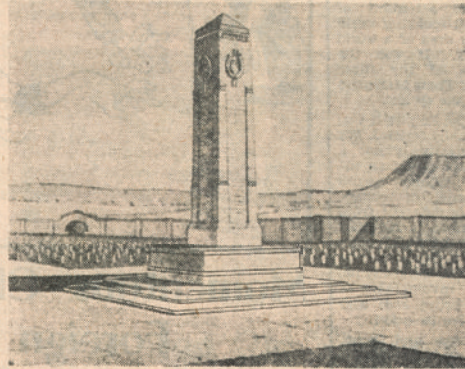
SIR LESLIE MORSHEAD

broke up. The leaders moved to the saluting base and the march past began.

Accompanying General Morshead in the Australian delegation were Brigadiers A. E. Brown, F. A. Burrow, G. Allen, Colonel E. A. Griffin, Captain E. T. C. Line, Mr F. McKechnie, and Chaplain Steele.

The memorial will take the place, and stands almost on the site, of the concrete memorial erected by Australian engineers while Tobruk was first under siege. The design of the old memorial has been closely followed in the new.

Of simple yet serious dignity, it is built in the centre of an elevated stone platform 40 feet square, just inside the entrance to the cemetery.



A SKETCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL in Tobruk Cemetery.

'of simple yet serious dignity': the memorial raised at Tobruk Cemetery in 1948. Although press reports conceded that 'Tommy Rats' from Great Britain 'bore the lion's share of the sacrifice', this was very much an Australian memorial, the single word 'Australia' raised over desert sands. This was the first unveiling of a substantial World War II memorial and (unlike the dedication of cemeteries) attended almost exclusively by service and ex-service personnel. A 'sacred' stone tablet bearing the name 'Tobruk' was salvaged from an earlier wartime memorial and carried home to Australia.

Source: *Argus*, 1 May 1948

of the desert. And in death both sides shared a kind of companionship. Visiting Tobruk after it had been retaken by the Allies, the Australian writer (and Gallipoli veteran) Frank Clune found a poignant tribute by the grave of an unknown German soldier: 'an Aussie had filled a prune tin with water, then picked flowers in Bardia a mile away to place on the grave of his dead enemy'. By contrast, there would be few such gestures for Australia's enemy in the Pacific.¹⁴

After the cemeteries the travellers retired to the township. A makeshift canteen serving beer was a welcome sight to all. The vessel sailed out of Tobruk harbour that same night. No attempt was made to visit El Alamein. Instead, 'a film of the battle was shown'.

Private tours were equally infrequent, and there were few intrepid travellers. In 1956 Frank Murphy flew his Proctor light aircraft from Australia to England, breaking his six-week journey with a visit to the Tobruk cemetery. In 1968 the *Australian Women's Weekly* related another adventure by three 'happy go lucky Australians' who drove a 1952 Volkswagen across the desert. There was no petrol gauge, and the van spluttered to a halt half a mile from El Alamein. The young women found the cemetery 'impressive'; it stood 'alone in the desert, a moving reminder of the lives lost there'. In the time it took to refuel they read many epitaphs. 'They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old' and 'In loving memory of a man who knew how to make a woman happy' were both deemed worthy of recording in their diaries. The party pressed on to Tobruk, where the only hotel was 'ridiculously expensive'. They set up camp at the British army base, only to be escorted from the town 24 hours later. One of the party (dressed in swimming costume and blouse) was 'lectured on the way we should dress. Our garb should be neck to knee at least.' It was not the only case of culture shock these young travellers encountered. 'Our stomachs ... rebelled against the strange foods, and the Arab people constantly crowded around us like bees to a honey pot ... there was always a medley of camels, dogs and donkeys.' Even the youngest and most adventurous found the journey 'hot, dirty and tiring'. It was hardly a place the wives or parents of men lost in the desert could visit with ease. North Africa, John Laffin concluded, was lonely, battle-scarred and dangerous, and Tobruk and El Alamein were towns with 'nowhere to go'.¹⁵

As the twentieth century progressed, this particular corner of the Middle East became less and less welcoming to Westerners. Following the Lockerbie bombing in 1988, Britain and the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Libya, and sanctions followed. For much of this period, Libya was 'very much a closed shop' so far as pilgrimage – or any other kind of travel – was concerned. The Anglo-US invasion of Iraq in 2003 signalled a change of attitude, a desperate Muammar Gaddafi opening up a new dialogue with the West. Made Easy Tours (owned at the time by John and Janice Burt) were quick to seize on the opportunities North

Africa now offered. Their first tour of Tobruk, Bardia and El Alamein was launched in the same year that air strikes targeted Baghdad. Many in the industry noted the irony: a contemporary war had enabled pilgrimage to another generation's battlefields.

Denis has worked with Made Easy since that first tour in 2003. He describes it as a 'magnificent tourist destination', rich with the ruins of the ancient world and in many places phenomenally beautiful. But the tourists took some persuading. A night under canvas in the desert doesn't suit everyone; nor was Libya a place for 'the nervous'. On this first tour, Denis was farewelled at the airport by his two elder brothers; both convinced 'they were never going to see me again'. Until the recent unrest, Made Easy Tours could count on filling one small bus at best – 'usually less than 20'. Then civil war effectively closed the borders.

What motivated this determined cohort? Visiting the battlefields of North Africa is described by most as a pilgrimage. Denis has encountered only one couple on his tours so 'focused on the wonders of the ancient world' that they 'actually tried to negotiate battlefields out of the itinerary', but 'they changed their tune completely by the end'. Denis advertises himself as a 'battlefield guide', and the tours he leads retrace (usually in reverse) the Second AIF's campaign across North Africa. It's what the industry describes as a niche market: 'I've had Rats of Tobruk come with me ... veterans of the Alamein campaign [too] ... but more frequently, of course, the children, the next generation. And these are people in their late sixties, seventies now, of course – do the sums – they were tiny children ... when their father went off to the war [sometimes] never to return. And in some cases [their] mother has remarried ... and they've grown up [with a] foster father, I suppose and ... there's something within them wanting to know more about their own natural father's experience and to visit the grave. Because of its location this has always been difficult but with the [recent] political situation it's been impossible.'¹⁶

Isolation and politics are not the only challenges Denis confronts. The infrastructure in North Africa has not improved much since 1968 when that 1952 VW crossed the desert; and periodic warfare in the region and occasional epidemics have not made the task of Made Easy Tours any easier. Then there is the issue of the site itself. There is no trail or railway to follow, and the desert is not posted and 'marked' in the same way as the well-travelled path to Hellfire Pass. Locating the site of battle is of itself a challenge. Tobruk was encircled by a series of defensive posts, pits and tunnels that once harboured machine guns and artillery. The sands of the desert have buried most. 'They're flat on the ground [Denis explained], so you can't see them coming up, dead easy to miss them. [The posts are generally] 700 metres apart – [but even with GPS you can drive] straight through them and you don't know 'cause you can't see; there's no landmark. You're just in the middle of the desert.'¹⁷



'locating the site of battle': pilgrims explore Tobruk's defences. The Red Line is almost the only physical reminder of the battle, and in many places these earthworks are buried by desert sands. Note the impact of high-explosive shells.

Source: courtesy Denis McCarthy and R.E. Lawrence, Rats of Tobruk Association Inc.

The most obvious landmarks in the desert are the cemeteries: Commonwealth, German, French, Italian. Denis makes a point of visiting them all. In some cases, these sites are not dissimilar to those elsewhere. Denis likened the CWG Cemetery at Tripoli to many of its precursors on the Western Front: 'green grass, pretty flowers, sprinklers running, similar to what you'd expect to see' on the Somme or Flanders. But they weren't all like that. Benghazi on the Mediterranean, located among trees in a quiet corner of the city, is one of his favourites. Its 'barren red earth' is 'not like the red soil of, say, Toowoomba', he explained. 'It's red sand ... Not a stick of green, not a blade of grass ... yet beautiful.' It was a very different kind of beauty from the English gardens raised in France, or tropical extravagances nurtured in the Pacific. At Tobruk, cemetery engineers sank a well 700 feet into the sand, storing just enough water to keep geraniums, acacias and eucalypts alive. At Halfaya-Sollum even the most determined horticulturalist threw away his gardening tools. Situated between the Western Desert and the sea, water was simply 'unobtainable'.¹⁸ These are places, Denis noted, at war with the elements. The Italians and Germans brought in their bodies, storing the coffins (as earlier noted) in huge purpose-built mausoleums. The walls and cloisters of Commonwealth cemeteries offer little such protection. Every year the inscriptions pilgrims come to see have been worn down further by corrosive desert sandstorms.

Interpreting these sites is difficult for even the most accomplished guide, especially when some on the tour have their own version of the story. Denis was the first to admit that travelling with a veteran of the campaign was a privilege – but it did pose challenges. '[One old] Rat of Tobruk ... wanted to argue the toss, particularly up at El Alamein, because he was there, for that as well, and I'm doing the spiel and he was challenging the facts and I thought, yeah, well, fair enough, I respect you and where you're coming from. I said, "Look mate, how about I give the historian's view and then you can give the truth later?" We came to an understanding.'¹⁹

Old diggers found it difficult to recognise and understand the places they revisited. Time and time again, Denis asked one old man what he remembered. Time and time again, a featureless desert yielded none of its stories. There were two exceptions: 'I've had some veterans in [the group], you sort of hang off their every word ... and you get a bit frustrated because they say, "Nah, nah, don't remember this, don't remember that, nope" ... We got to Tobruk harbour, [and] I said, "Well, here we are at last, John ... We're at Tobruk harbour, now do you remember anything?" He said, "Denis, yes I do ... you know what I remember – this" and he pointed to that rocky, hard ground ... They had to dig into that ... "This is what I remember," he said.'²⁰



'at El Alamein, because he was there': a view of the Cross of Sacrifice through the arches of the cloister. Even in the desert the Commonwealth War Graves Commission puts on something of a flower show. Bringing colour to this parched landscape is one of its greatest challenges.

Source: Nathan Wise

Like the prisoners considered in chapter 4, memory had a smell, a taste, a feel to it. It was a tactile thing, the sand 'gritted in your teeth', the heat on your back, the blinding glare of the desert. These were the landmarks of memory. The earth triggered another memory for John, as it does for most other survivors of combat. Denis resumed his story: '... something happened at Tobruk cemetery ... John was standing [by] his mate's grave ... there's six graves in a row ... all the same date ... close to the point where Australians were being withdrawn ... He said, "We knew we were going home that day. [My] group [was to be taken] by boat through the blitz, the dangerous boat ride back to Alexandria. We were in tents down on the harbour ... we heard commotion outside. Someone was running, saying: 'Get down' because the dive bombers are coming. When the bomb hit the tent us four were thrown that way and those three were thrown that way"'.²¹

At that point, Denis remembered, John beckoned to the earth. The old man was the only survivor of the blast. 'And right there he told us stories about each of them. "This one I'd just passed a cigarette to," he said, "and I watched the bottom half of him separate from the top half of him." And I looked at his son and daughter-in-law standing there with their mouths open. They had never heard any of this before.'²² Denis thought there were two things 'remarkable' about this. The first was how John, this 'gentle man', had coped with such an horrific memory. Second, he'd never said a word of this before to his children, but there he was, relating the scene as if it was unfolding before them, a trauma tale retold (as we've seen before) with seemingly perfect clarity.

Families were the second group Denis's tour catered for; most were the sons and daughters of men killed long ago in the campaign. Few knew much at all about their fathers; none had had a chance to visit their graves before. Denis likened their journey to a kind of long-delayed mourning. 'Years in the hoping and the wishing for a lot of those families. [They came] for the wives, the mothers never able [to come here]. And for themselves.'

In a tiny café in Toowoomba, where this particular interview took place, Denis pointed to an image on his laptop, his own memento of one of the very first of these journeys. 'This man came with me first, a New Zealand man. This is Knightsbridge cemetery. His father was a New Zealander who was killed and he was about eight, I think, when his father went off to the war. He now lives near Brisbane. And this was his chance [despite his] two bad knees. On this day, he knew we were going to Knightsbridge cemetery to where his father's body had been moved after being buried in a battlefield grave ... so he was in shirtsleeves and tie ... we found him the grave and gave him this space and peace. And there he was in the distance standing like that for a long time.'²³

How did pilgrims mark such places? As in 1942, the desert favours the resourceful and inventive. Unable to drive their tiny Australian (and New Zealand) flags into

the earth, pilgrims sought out crevices in sand-blasted stone work; mindful that the wind tears everything away, laminated photos are secured to graves with boulders and lanyards with poppies strung securely around headstones. Some carry what Denis called 'dilly bags' of offerings, inviting all to participate in their tribute. In 2003, 'before the age of smart phones and iPods', a Queensland woman 'opened her bag to reveal a cumbersome tape player', all so that she could play the national anthem to 'a family grave at Knightsbridge'.

A veteran of many tours, Denis finds the media-oriented commemorations at Gallipoli 'overdone': 'The feedback I'm getting is that people feel somewhat cold. There's the bright lights from the cameras; it's so theatrical. I understand why such a professional approach has been adopted but maybe we've gone too far. The thing they will say to me is "Our own little ceremony was far more moving."'²⁴

Denis is obliging. Members of the group are invited to read poetry, sing songs and devise ways of remembering that speak to them. One woman carried a photo of herself as a little girl, standing in a garden in Auckland, held by a father who marched off to war and did not come home again. 'Her grandfather lies in a grave on the Somme and her father lies here. [She chooses] a famous poem, "Some corner of foreign field that is forever England"'. She chose that to recite. An Australian resident, [with] a New Zealand father, making a statement I think about the Anzacs' sense of place in the world at that time. There's a story in that.'²⁵

Near the water at Alamein Denis chooses a poem of his own, inviting a member of the group to recite lines from 'Beach Burial', a Kenneth Slessor poem that he committed to memory 50 years ago:

Softly and humbly to the Gulf of Arabs
The convoys of dead sailors come;
At night they sway and wander in the waters far under;
But morning rolls them in the foam.²⁶

And then each of the group throws a poppy into the water. That, Denis thinks, is all that really needs to be said.

Poppies are powerful symbols; as evocative of sacrifice in World War II as they are for World War I. On the eighth anniversary of the Battle at Alamein, Lincoln bombers dropped 'a cloud of 250 000 flaming red poppies' from the sky. They fell between the 7000 white crosses, marking the graves Kitty Gahan and her party would eventually visit. A lifetime later, Denis and his party gathered by another cemetery in the desert, and this time two poppies said as much as a quarter of a million: 'One of the more robust members of the group brought two poppies with him. Before his mother died, decades earlier, she gave him the two poppies and he



has them with him. They're in cellophane. "And when you get the chance, darling, my brother and my cousin ... place them on the graves for me, won't you, darling?" I think she died in the '60s. Here he is in 2009 ... he's done it ... he took it on board and did it knock him around.²⁷ That able, good-humoured, gregarious man was 'reduced to tears and sat quietly with his wife away from others'.²⁸

Denis emphasised that *all* the members of the group were affected by these services. In his journeys through the desert, Denis was assisted by two local guides. Every year they lead him safely through the minefields, find the gun pits half buried in the sand and seek out the circles of stones in the desert marking the place men were buried nearly 70 years before. 'They give us our space, you know ... they respect our space ... See, they're getting stories about evil Westerners and so on and we're getting stories about evil Muslims, but this – this is a classic, they're feeling it, they can see that family means so much to us.'²⁹

In that crowded café in Toowoomba, he summoned up a photograph on his laptop of the Italian cemetery at Tobruk with a statue of the Virgin Mary standing at its centre. 'This is at a time in the 2000s when the war in Iraq is going on ... 11 of September 2001 has happened and in the Western world the anti-Muslim thing is in full flight ... Yet here we are commemorating in the 2000s what happened in the Western Desert in the 1940s at an altar with religious icons that are so familiar to our own faith ... One of my friends says, "Every soldier goes to war believing God is on his side", and that's as true of the 1940s as it is today. There's a lot of hatred against Islam and the Muslim community because of September 11 ... let's just reflect for a moment on who's fighting whom and where was God in this ... in the Western Desert in 1941 and 1942 and [how we see things] now. It's an important and interesting point.'³⁰

Denis was making an important point about the study of pilgrimage as well. Most of his tour had embarked on their journey to honour a family member. Yet 'family' in this context took on a far broader meaning. 'We are all members of one family', he remarked, our common humanity unites us all. By the same token, reconciliation with an old enemy had led him to question whether the new foe was really an 'enemy' at all. 'They're my colleagues', he said, 'even if we don't speak the same language', they take us into their homes, lead us across their country, even care for the graves of our fallen. The enemy wasn't Islam, Denis continued, and reports of the desecration of Western graves were 'totally out of proportion'. The real enemy, he concluded, was the prejudice, fear and misunderstanding that drove men to war. Pilgrimage, it seems, builds many kinds of bridges. Winning the desert war was part of a greater Allied strategy to defend the Mediterranean. The 6th Division, which had fought in North Africa in 1941, went on to fight across the waters in Greece. And it's in Greece that we resume our journey.



'they respect our space': two Libyan guides beside the fig tree at Tobruk. The tree still marks the place of a casualty clearing station; pilgrims seek it out mindful that it might have been the place a relative died.

Source: Denis McCarthy

Africa, here we come!

From page 35

We slept at a hotel and every evening before dinner sat in a sidewalk cafe and ordered a beer, which was served with a medley of dishes of snails, mussels, octopus, "petit" biscuits, almonds, and salads. The night following our arrival we were all taken to a cabaret by two Tunisians staying in the same hotel and their friends, one of whom we later discovered was the Algerian Consul.

They acted as our hosts for the

the Arabs in their market. We soon had money enough to live for the next few days.

Hillie found us again at three in the morning sleeping in another olive grove, and on Sunday we reached Tangiers.

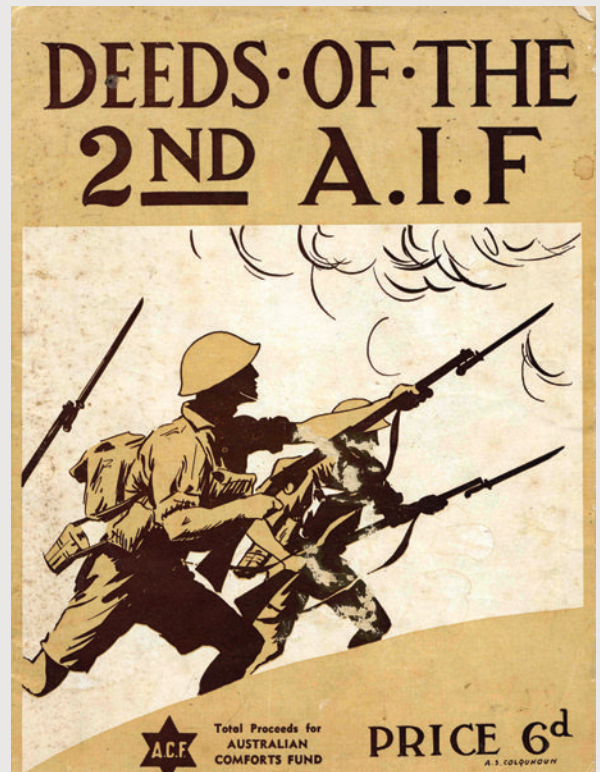
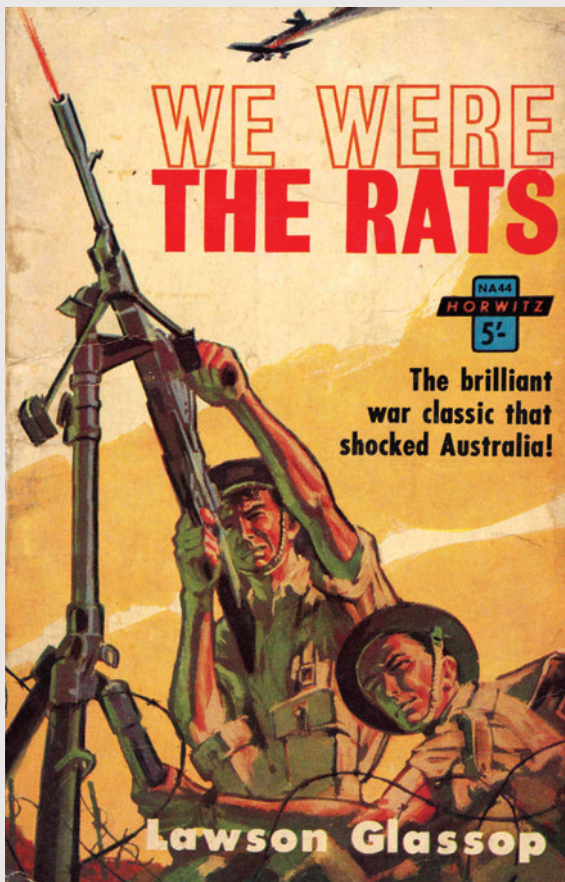
Our trek across Africa was virtually done. As we shopped for gifts in the old city, Medina, we could see the bulk of Gibraltar across the Mediterranean Sea. A boat trip across the water to Algeciras in Spain, and by evening we were there.

**INTRODUCING them-
selves to the first
camel seen on their
journeyings.**



'always a medley of camels': the young Australian women who crossed the desert in 1968. Pilgrims were not generally as adventurous as these intrepid travellers. Then, as today, the cemeteries of North Africa were seldom visited.

Source: *Australian Women's Weekly*, 8 May 1968.



'winning the desert war': *We Were the Rats* (left) and *Deeds of the 2nd AIF* (right). First published in 1944, Lawson Glassop's autobiographical account ran for several editions and achieved a readership of thousands. Norman Lindsay described it as 'a first class war novel', full of 'brilliant sketches of the digger in action'. The book also anticipated later pilgrimages to the desert; an image of a helmet resting on a cross adorns the back cover. *Deeds of the 2nd AIF* was sold to raise funds for Australian soldiers. Here a new generation of diggers inherited the aura of Anzac.

Source: Lawson Glassop, *We Were the Rats* (Sydney: Horwitz, 1962); Australian Comforts Fund, *Deeds of the 2nd AIF*, (np, nd), Rare Book Collection, Monash University.

7

CHAPTER SEVEN

A POST-WAR DREAM

Greece and Crete

In March 1941 British, Australian and New Zealand forces were diverted from North Africa to Greece to defend the country from German and Italian invasion. The German army overran the British, Greek and Anzac forces but not before both sides suffered heavy losses along the Thermopylae Line and the Aliakmon Line further north. More than 50 000 Allied troops were evacuated from mainland Greece, many of them to Crete. The commander of the New Zealand Division, Major-General Bernard Freyberg, was ordered to defend the island and did so without air support. German paratroopers dropped onto the island in May 1941, targeting the airfields at Maleme, Retimo and Heraklion. After a week of fierce fighting, Australian commanders ordered their men to surrender or attempt to escape. In the defence of Crete, 1742 British Commonwealth troops died and a further 11 000 were taken prisoner.



'defending Greece': mainland Greece and the island of Crete.

Source: John Laffin, *Middle East Journey* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958). Courtesy Bronwen Grey and the Laffin family

In April 1951, some ten years after the invasion of Greece, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies wrote a letter to Field Marshal Alex Papagos, Generalissimo of the Greek Armed Forces. 'The Australian government', Menzies declared, 'is deeply appreciative of the great honour which is being paid to our country.' The erection in Athens of a memorial to commemorate 'Australian and other British Commonwealth troops who were killed during the Nazi invasion of Greece' was described as a magnificent gesture, a sculpture of Athena, bearing shield and sword, fusing the valour of the classical world with a modern struggle for democracy. Menzies even allowed himself a rhetorical flourish: 'The gallant defence of Greek soil in the last war by Greek and Commonwealth forces against overwhelming odds will always be remembered in the annals of Australian military history.'¹

Remembering war is an inherently difficult task. The defence of Greece and Crete was one of the greatest military disasters of the war for Australia – 17 125 men of the Australian 6th Division, a staggering 40 per cent of the men committed, were killed, wounded or captured. By any objective appraisal the campaign was unwinnable from the outset. British, Australian and New Zealand forces came to the aid of Greece in April 1941, just as German forces had in turn come to the aid of their Italian allies. The Greek army had turned back Mussolini's advance, but it had little chance against a German blitzkrieg. Mindful that Greece was Britain's sole remaining ally in Europe and heartened by the recent fall of France, Hitler committed a formidable force to the campaign, 10 divisions spearheaded by tanks and supported by dive bombers. Against this, the Allies could muster a force of barely 60 000, with few heavy weapons and 80 aircraft against the Germans' 800. Their Greek allies were valiant fighters but poorly equipped and badly led. Allied forces struggled over poor roads to reach the mountainous northern frontier of Greece and began to retreat almost the moment they arrived there. The Anzac Corps, as it came to be known, dug in on the Thermopylae Line; New Zealanders defending the coastal plain while the 6th Division fought in appalling conditions at Brallos Pass in the mountains.

The fiercest engagements took place around Anzac Day, a point not lost on the soldiers who served there. And that was not the only allusion to the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. Churchill had committed British and Dominion troops to Greece hoping to win Turkey and Yugoslavia to the Allied cause and open up a second front in the Balkans. Rather like the debacle in the Dardanelles some decades earlier, the campaign in Greece was based more on visionary optimism than a sober assessment of military realities. By the end of April, harassed Allied forces were conducting a fighting withdrawal down the peninsula. The last Allied troops were evacuated from Piraeus in May 1941, Australian ships *Stuart* and *Perth*

aiding in the rescue. The fortunate escaped to Egypt; other troops were diverted to Crete and told to prepare for the next German invasion.²

In many ways, the defence of Crete was as ill-fated as the campaign on the mainland. By May 1941 the island's garrison numbered around 40 000 and Churchill dreamed (again) of a new Gibraltar in the Mediterranean. But the force was poorly equipped (many weapons and supplies had been lost in the hurried evacuation), poorly coordinated (Creforce was made up of composite battalions, a loose alliance of Dominion and British troops alongside ill-trained Greek militia) and bedevilled by poor transport and communication across the island. The commander of Crete, a New Zealand officer and Gallipoli veteran Major-General Bernard Freyberg, had one great advantage. By 1941 Allied forces had cracked the ENIGMA code. Freyberg knew the German invasion was imminent and that it would take the form of an amphibious landing and an assault from the air, spearheaded by elite parachute forces, the *Fallschirmjäger*. But the defence of Crete offered as many 'what ifs' as the bungled assault on Gallipoli. Fearing an invasion from the sea, Freyberg failed to commit much-needed reserves to the critical defence of the airfields; New Zealand forces withdrew at the point they should have advanced at Maleme; success in one sector of the island was not taken advantage of in another.

Like the campaign on the mainland, the Battle for Crete ended in evacuation, which involved first a gruelling march over the mountains to the island's southern coast, then a perilous sea voyage to Egypt. The Royal Navy rescued 16 500 men but lost three cruisers and six destroyers in the process. The civilian population often aided those who remained on the island, at terrible risk. This created a lasting legacy of friendship between the people of Greece, Australian veterans and (as we'll see) their descendants.³

The statue of Athena was intended to symbolise that friendship but, as with the campaign itself, much was problematic. The project to commemorate Australian and other Commonwealth dead was led by a Dr Nick Theologos. What little was known about him did not inspire confidence. A confidential memo from Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister warned that Dr Theologos was 'sometimes an embarrassment to the Greek Diplomatic Service', he had no official status from the Greek Government, his methods were 'rather unorthodox' and his 'self-styled Greco-British Societies' (the 'dubious' outfit behind the memorial proposal) something of 'a one-man show'. Menzies chose not to meet an envoy from Greece visiting Australia to raise funds for the memorial.

Even more alarming was what the Greeks were actually proposing. A statue of a sword-bearing Athena was all very well, but the exhumation of three unknown soldiers (one Briton, one Australian and one New Zealander), the procession

of their remains through the streets of Athens (with motorcycle escort) and ceremonial 'installation' at the base of the memorial, flouted the dignified 'restraint' and understated symbolism prized by the Imperial War Graves Commission. The whole idea, another memo remarked, 'was entirely repugnant'. And it would set an alarming precedent. If the Unknown Warrior interred in Westminster Abbey ceased to represent 'the great mass who are buried away from home, overseas', then what was to prevent any other 'foreign city' commandeering its own nameless soldiers? 'Cheapening the whole symbolism behind the original idea' was only one consideration. In 'land-hungry' Greece, it was common practice 'for the bodies of the dead to be dug up after a period ... [the] bones then scraped and buried in small caskets'. Assurances that this might be done under the watchful gaze of 'Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant clergy' satisfied no one. This was not the way the Commonwealth honoured fallen soldiers, nameless or otherwise.⁴

It was three years before the Greek Memorial to Commonwealth War Dead was erected and, to Theologos's mind, the project was never completed. The Greeks followed the instructions from London and Canberra, 'that the tombs in Athens should be accepted as cenotaphs and left empty', and they were reminded that, 'after all, it is their own symbolism'.⁵ But for Dr Theologos and his organisation only that 'precious' thing, the remains of the unknown, could fill them, and lend cold stone 'an exceptionally stately and solemn character'. In the end, high-level delegations from Britain, Australia and New Zealand attended the unveiling ceremony; not to do so would have been a 'diplomatic slight'. And among the crowd chosen to represent 'the Gallant Children of Australia' were pilgrims who served themselves or whose sons and husbands had died in the campaign.⁶

It was the Greek Government who first suggested that veterans and widows of the campaign might attend the unveiling. Ever mindful of cost, Canberra thought that the presence of embassy staff (reinforced by a contingent from the Australian High Commission in London) was more than 'adequate' representation among 'practically every "brass hat" in the Mediterranean'.⁷ But in Australia, as in Britain and New Zealand, veterans' associations and war widows' guilds demanded just such recognition. In the end the RSL, itself a formidable political lobby, invited applications from interested parties and, with the War Widows' Guild, selected suitable delegates. That was no easy task.

In the end, Mrs Margaret Kay was chosen to represent the bereaved 'Australian widows and mothers of Australians who died during the campaign'. She was a popular nomination: Margaret Kay was the widow of Colonel William Kay, an army doctor who had served in the campaign. She was well connected socially and a stalwart of the War Widows' Guild, and her husband had proved an exemplary

serviceman. Moreover, in what could well be seen as an overdue rapprochement to Athens, the RSL had chosen to honour a man well known to the Greek people: 'many Greek soldiers were treated in Colonel Kay's hospital', it was noted, and Mrs Kay had a 'very real bond with the Greek people'.⁸

Margaret had no need for the unknown soldier Athens had planned. Her intention was to visit the grave of her husband. First buried in Kephissia, Colonel Kay's body was exhumed and reinterred with more than 2000 other Commonwealth servicemen in Athens' Phaleron Cemetery. Consolidated cemeteries like Phaleron were a feature of World War II commemoration and, as was the case in the Pacific theatre, the repeated relocation of remains caused relatives no small measure of distress. But Margaret's distress began well before then. In May 1941 she received the first private reports that her husband had been gravely wounded during the hurried and desperate withdrawal from Greece. Details drifted in over the days and weeks to follow. It was not until the end of the month that one of Kay's colleagues sat down to write the letter Margaret had long expected. 'I hardly know how to write this letter to you,' Lieutenant-Colonel Morrow typed, but clearly this was not the first such message he had sent.⁹ Morrow hadn't witnessed William Kay's injuries or his death, but he had read reports of the devastating attack at Piraeus. Colonel Kay had been one of the medical staff coordinating the evacuation. He had taken his place on the vessel *Hellas*, along with what was left of the 2/5th Australian General Hospital. *Hellas* was bombed repeatedly by German aircraft, then it caught fire, rolled over and sank. As many as 700 servicemen and civilians went down with the stricken ship.¹⁰

Kay was one of the few to escape *Hellas* but not without injury. His arm was severed at the elbow, and pieces of shrapnel had pierced his skull. He was taken to the British General Hospital, where he lapsed in and out of consciousness for two days before he died. Lieutenant-Colonel Morrow spared Margaret none of these details. He was determined to rule out any false hope and probably believed that Margaret should know the depth of her husband's sacrifice. But there was some solace he could offer: 'It will be some consolation to you and your family to know that every branch of the Forces in Greece, New Zealand and Australia, have expressed their unstinted admiration and praise for the work of our Unit, and of our Commanding Officer ... Personally I have been most distressed by it all – it is more than a Unit loss, as it has been a great personal loss also.'¹¹ William Kay was killed at the age of 53. He had survived the landing at Gallipoli but died within days of Anzac Day during the evacuation from Greece. For the Second AIF as for the First, the Aegean had hosted a tragedy.



'a glimpse of his grave': this photograph of Colonel Kay's grave was sent to his wife Margaret on the other side of the world. For most families a photograph was their only connection to the final resting place of a loved one. Above: the Colonel is seated at his desk, a photograph of his children looking on.

Source: (top) Australian War Memorial, P03725.005; (bottom) Australian War Memorial, P02689.001

William Kay's death devastated his family. Margaret was left with four children, the two youngest girls barely in their teens. Despite private confirmation of his death, William was still classified as 'Missing' months later. And despite the unequivocal tone of Morrow's letter, Margaret and her family continued 'hoping against hope'.¹² It was not until October, some six months after the evacuation from Piraeus, that Margaret reluctantly accepted her husband's death.¹³

In the years to follow, Margaret devoted herself to charity work for the 2/5th Australian General Hospital and the War Widows' Guild. The former kept her busy; the latter provided a kind of companionship only the bereaved could understand. Mourning rituals, so important to that generation, such as tending a grave or touching a headstone, were denied to her. In 1952, more than a decade following William's death, Margaret confessed she had 'given up hope of ever being able to get there to get a glimpse of his grave'. A journey to Greece would have been long, expensive and complicated. Then the Greek Government's unexpected invitation to host her visit realised what she called a 'post-war dream'.¹⁴

Like the Great War pilgrims who went before her, Margaret based her voyage around the United Kingdom.¹⁵ The home country offered comforting familiarity, a welcome corrective to the culture shock inevitable in visiting Greece. In the UK, Margaret would spend time with her expatriate daughter Pam, incorporating a second family member into her pilgrimage. Although the Greek Government offered financial support, such an extended trip was bound to be costly. Margaret sold her piano and other prized possessions to secure the fare to Britain, but visiting William's grave remained her 'fondest wish'.¹⁶

Margaret was farewelled in Sydney by family, friends and an enthusiastic contingent from the local Greek community. It was her first time flying, and she found it a 'queer and eerie experience roaming through skies at night'.¹⁷ The journey to Greece was exhausting, and its staggered itinerary underscores the distance involved. Margaret's Argonaut 'Astraea' went from Sydney to Darwin, then Jakarta, Singapore, Bangkok, Calcutta, Karachi, Bahrain, Beirut, Rome and finally on to Athens. The tedium of the journey was relieved by glimpses of volcano-studded islands scattered across the sea and by the 'intriguing' presence of her fellow passengers: 'a multimillionaire Indian engineer who was an undergraduate from Oxford', 'a veiled Persian lady and her son ... it was surprising to see how gracefully she ate her meals with her face still veiled', and J.T. Limb, the RSL's soldier representative, 'an exceptionally fine type', a wounded hero of Brallos Pass. There was an inconvenient, and unexpected, delay in Singapore, meaning that the party was in transit for more than six days. The 'mission' arrived in Greece only just in time for the unveiling; their plane touched down at Athens airport on Anzac Day eve.¹⁸

Margaret proved a reflective pilgrim, a blessing for any historian. Every night she sat by her hotel window overlooking the floodlit Parthenon, and diligently recorded the day's thoughts and activities. Her diary was a way of interpreting and making sense of the world around her. 'I sat in wonderment thinking of the table I sat at a week ago – dinner at home – and now amongst this pomp and ceremony.'¹⁹ Margaret's ten-day program in Athens included sightseeing tours, official occasions and several dinner receptions. The most important part of her tour was the memorial's unveiling ceremony on Anzac Day, 1952 – 'our day', Australia's High Commissioner declared, 'of national remembrance'.²⁰ Under the Mediterranean sky and with thousands of locals in attendance, King Paul of Greece unveiled the memorial – or at least tried to. Despite tugging on the rope several times, 'an imp in the wind' caught the cord under Athena's helmet. The Greek and British flag covers remained stubbornly in place, concealing the monument that had long proved so contentious. Despite 'a moment of uncertainty and disappointment', the ceremony continued. Eventually Greek officials deemed the 'gesture of unveiling' enough.²¹ Queen Frederika wondered if a 'shy' Athena didn't 'prefer to remain veiled',²² but the King, Margaret thought, just looked 'very angry'.²³

Margaret travelled as William's widow, but she was also keenly aware of the community of mourners she represented. Before departing she'd sought information about men buried in Greece, pledging to undertake her journey for all those widows left at home in Australia. Margaret reported diligently on all such official and unofficial activities. Her careful descriptions of the site and the ceremony were relayed first to Mrs Vasey, founding president of the War Widows' Guild, then via the Australian media to all who had lost loved ones in the conflict:

The monument is in a recess of Alexandria Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares of Athens ... on either side are park grounds with trees, some of them Australian gums, which give a good background for the white marble which was taken from Mt Penteli, as was the marble for the Parthenon ... The monument has a very long, broad base, and at the centre of the back, up three or four steps, rises a very high column, surmounted by Athenia [*sic*]. She is dressed as a warrior in the classic Greek robes, and with a gold helmet and shield, carrying a gold tipped spear ... At the front of the column, at its base, is a reclining lion, as though watching over and guarding the three [empty] tombs ... Australia on the left, Britain in the centre and New Zealand on the right, and each surmounted with their respective coats of arms carved on top.²⁴



'a monument that had long proved contentious': a tribute by the Greeks to the Anzac and Commonwealth forces. The three vacant tombs lie at the base of the memorial, as does a reclining lion. Margaret Kay stands at the centre of the picture; on the left is Mr Limb, an ex-serviceman from the 6th Division and delegate from the RSL; and Dr Theologos to her right. Dr Theologos was a driving force behind the memorial. Unorthodox to the end, he worked on a mini-Olympics to raise funds for the monument.

Source: (left) Morning Bulletin, 25 April 1953; (right) courtesy the Kay family

Readers in Australia had need of such detail. Margaret's words enabled mourners to embark on their own imagined journey, conjuring up that far-away memorial built in honour of the fallen. Few wives and mothers would ever see their loved one's grave or the landscape of Greece that claimed them. This was a pilgrimage by proxy.

The day following the unveiling was marked with a service at Phaleron cemetery. Margaret paced through the graveyard, reading the names chiselled onto headstones, looking for an epitaph she had travelled half way around the world to see. 'I was rather overcome when I saw Daddy,' she wrote home to her family. Her choice of words here are suggestive. Margaret did not just see a name; she saw William.

The description of the cemetery that followed was intended again to comfort distant families. Margaret summoned up the most idyllic imagery she could muster. Phaleron is 'a quiet, peaceful spot, facing the sea', she wrote, 'and is very well kept, green lawns and flowers blooming on each grave'.²⁵ Here nature heals the pangs of grief and loss, a graveyard likened to a garden. And what more fitting place than Greece for classical allusion? Scribbled among Margaret's notes are jottings from Pericles, ennobling the sacrifice of a generation: 'It is not the epitaph upon monuments set up in their own land that alone commemorates them, but also in lands not their own. There abides in each breast an unwritten memorial of them, planted in the breast rather than graven on the stone.'²⁶

Sixty years after Margaret's journey, these words still resonate with her descendants. Margaret's pilgrimage, they recall, 'meant everything' to her.²⁷ And, as it turns out, similar journeys would mean much to them.

DESCENDANTS' JOURNEYS

Margaret would not be the last of her family to visit William's grave. Her children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren have made this pilgrimage since. Margaret's four children had memories of their father, faint and fragile memories but memories nonetheless. William's grandchildren and great-grandchildren have relied on family repositories of memory; diaries, newspaper clippings, photographs and letters to construct an image of a man they never knew. When William and Margaret's granddaughter Dianne read through their family collection she described the process as 'rewarding'. In creating some sense of William, she explained, she was also able to understand 'Mum's adoration'. But it was more than that. 'I now feel I have a new grandparent', she remarked, someone whom 'I have not known before'. The Kay family has sustained an unbroken dialogue of remembrance and mourning between the generations. The most recent visit by the Kay family was in 2006.²⁸

The experience of this particular family is hardly unique. Greece and Crete, like the other World War II sites considered in this volume, are positioned at the junction between memory and history. Few veterans of the campaign are left and, of these, fewer still are well enough to travel. This seems to strengthen the resolve of their descendants. Visiting the place where a father, grandfather or uncle fought recovers a dimension of a family's history soon, if not already, lost. It also inserts 'their story' within a wider national narrative.

Anniversaries of the campaign add an element of urgency to this project. The fighting in Greece barely featured in the commemorative program launched by the Australian Government to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II – for reasons we'll examine later, the focus was firmly on the Pacific. But in May 2001 the government sponsored an official party of 22 veterans and war widows to attend the unveiling of an Australian memorial at Rethymno. Retimo (as it was known then) and Heraklion were the two airfields the 6th Division had been tasked with defending 60 years earlier. Most pilgrimages, though, were privately funded. A large contingent of Australians and New Zealanders embarked on a commemorative tour of Crete in 2005. That year marked the ninetieth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing and 60 years since the end of World War II. A Greek–Australian company, Sun Tours, flew the group to Athens; they then transhipped to a busy cruise across the Aegean, visiting Rhodes, Mykonos and Santorini as well as Gallipoli and Crete.

There were only five veterans on the tour. One of them, Dan, had made his first pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 1936 as a crew member on HMAS *Sydney*. He'd served on HMAS *Perth* in World War II, witnessed first-hand the bungled campaign in Greece and helped assist the evacuation. Dan's former comrades, veterans of the 6th Division, saw action in the Middle East, Greece and Crete before being taken prisoner. Their recollections of that brief and bloody campaign were hazy; for them World War II was a long, enforced wait in German POW camps. Perhaps it might have been different had they been interviewed earlier. Patrice, who served with the WRANS from 1942 to 1946, had vivid recollections of her pilgrimage to Crete in 1981. She remembered 'the beautiful colour in the flowers growing at the cemetery', 'the peaceful blue of the Mediterranean' and the warm companionship of the men who walked beside her: 'I travelled through Crete with the men who, 40 years before, were pushed off the island to escape to a ship, North Africa, or be killed. Visiting graves with them, one just disappeared into a distant corner and left them with their thoughts as this was their first time back.'²⁹

Another such commemorative landmark occurred in 2011; thousands of people descended on the small island warscape to commemorate the seventieth

anniversary of the campaign. Spanning five days, official ceremonies were held at Suda Bay Cemetery, Rethymnon, Galatas and Maleme. One of the largest organised groups consisted of nearly 150 people; most were New Zealanders, some were Australian, but almost all shared a family connection to the campaign. This self-styled Anzac tour included many children and grandchildren of former servicemen; their journeys reveal the many complex ways successive generations negotiate a family's memory of war. Only one veteran returned to Crete with this particular group, a fragile (if much-lauded) link to history.

For Jim and Sue, a couple from regional Otago, 2011 was their second visit to Crete. It proved markedly different from the carefree adventures they'd enjoyed 30 years earlier. Both their fathers had served on Crete, and that was one of the reasons they had first been attracted to the island. But not, they admitted, the only one. In 1976 Crete was something of a paradise for young travellers: cheap, exotic, blessed with seemingly endless beaches and not far from London. Then their fathers' war seemed like 'such ancient history'.³⁰

Now, as they reflect, they realise that the first visit took place barely 30 years after the war had ended. 'It feels strange,' Sue confessed. 'It was actually a very close history', one well within living memory. Even so, back then the war was not much more than a 'passing interest'; on this journey they felt both 'emotional' and 'intense'.³¹ Jim and Sue wondered whether Crete had become more special as they aged. With maturity came reflection, and the view of pilgrims bussed across the island was very different from that of backpackers joy-riding around the coast. Like most pilgrimages, 2011 was a highly structured journey, a 'learning experience', as Jim put it, not just a tourist jaunt. This time they were being led across the landscape; guided through information and detail they didn't have when they travelled alone. Sue added that parenthood provided a kind of prism through which to read the landscape. Her very first thought at the cemeteries, Commonwealth and German alike, was that these men were the same age as her three sons were now. They were, she said, 'someone's baby'. At the end of their pilgrimage, both Jim and Sue felt that their memories and their fathers' seemed to be 'tying together'.³² The island was no longer just a site of youthful wanderlust; it had proved itself a richly textured, deeply storied place.

Barbara's experience was very different. This was her second visit, too, but, unlike Sue and Jim, she did not feel things 'tying together'. To the contrary. Barbara's experience was unhinging. Her journey across the island threw up difficult memories. Walking across the olive groves in which her father had fought, she remembered a man damaged by war. Growing up, Barbara had watched her father struggling with alcoholism. The happy times Barbara remembered with her father

were overshadowed by what she called his 'distance': he would be 'away with the fairies', she said, and was often 'very quiet and looked sad'. As a child, Barbara felt weak and helpless as she found her father 'lying down ... crying. I was very close to my dad', Barbara said, 'and I am still'.³³

That paradox of being close, but distant, and wearing the trauma of another as if it was one's own, was felt by other members of the party as well. Barbara and her companions could not claim to have experienced war directly, but the intensity of their fathers' memories were 'transmitted to them so deeply as to [almost] constitute memories in their own right'.³⁴

That transmission of memory is not simply a telling and retelling of stories. Nor is it always a matter of words. Ruth's father did not talk about his experiences at Crete. He wanted to, she said, but was *told* to try and forget by her mother. All throughout his life, a 'pain and frustration' simmered beneath the surface. And sometimes it blew up in their face. Ruth remembers her father falling apart at the beginning of the Gulf War when the television screen raised a kind of mirror to his past. 'He appeared to be in a trance', Ruth said 'with arms around his knees and rocking himself back and forward.' Her father muttered over and over again, 'It is the same as Crete, the same as Crete'.³⁵ Ruth's reading of that island was informed by the silences of her father; she journeyed there in the hope of letting the trauma go.

Like Ruth, Greg made this journey seeking an understanding of what his father had been through. It was an experience he believed had shaped his life as well. Greg, who travelled with his teenage son, conceded that his father had never been able to share the details of his service with any of the family. Yet it 'affected [their] lives very much'. Again there were triggers to the trauma. Greg remembered his father's eyes welling up every Anzac Day; 'there'd be tears streaming down his face', he said, then he would go off with his service mates and get drunk.³⁶

Anzac Day loomed large in the memory of pilgrims; sometimes as a rude confrontation with the pain of their fathers, other times as a moment of quiet contemplation. Robert remembered cold Auckland mornings when his father took him to the dawn service. Even then he knew that walking alongside Dad was 'a special thing to do'. Now he describes it as one of the most 'precious' memories of his life. Robert's father had always wanted to return to Crete but, like most of that generation, he never found the means or opportunity to do so. And that gave a singular purpose to his son's pilgrimage.

Although Robert travelled in a large group comprising couples, families and friends, this softly spoken, middle-aged man kept to himself, and was often quite alone. Robert's constant companion was the memory of his father. All throughout

the trip, he carried a handsome framed portrait of Dad as a young serviceman. At Suda Bay cemetery, where many of his father's comrades were buried, Robert drew the frame close to his chest and paced up and down the graves. The picture was raised to the height of the tombstones, a black-and-white image gazing out over the dead. This photograph served a number of purposes for Robert. Without any hint of irony he considered it a medium, a means to 'pay respect to Dad's comrades on his behalf'.³⁷ But it also fulfilled the unrealised hope of his father. With the son who had walked beside him on Anzac Day, Dad had at last returned to Crete.

Photographs are deeply meaningful tokens for pilgrims. Alison's great-uncle was one of the 742 Commonwealth servicemen buried at Suda Bay cemetery. As part of her own private service at his grave, she placed his photograph, his Military Medal citation and an image of the decoration against his headstone. It was a way of bringing that name to life. And a name was all she had. New Zealand families were not permitted a family epitaph, a rule established in the wake of World War I and rigidly applied to commemoration of World War II as well. Such a decision seemed defensible at the time. If one New Zealand family could not afford an epitaph, Prime Minister Massey declared, then no New Zealander would have one.³⁸ But ironically this egalitarian gesture generated inequalities of its own. New Zealand pilgrims viewed the absence of an epitaph with disappointment, even resentment. Why were families from their country alone disenfranchised in their grief?

It is a situation some seek to alter. Alison's offering was one way of personalising a grave but only for the time of her 'service'. With steadfast resolution (and one or two nervous glances behind them) another party of pilgrims glued a medallion portrait of 'their soldier' to his tombstone. He might have been denied an inscription from his family, but now at least he would have a face. Marita Sturken has observed similar behaviour at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Among the tens of thousands of items laid at the base of the commemorative wall, personal photographs more than any other offering 'testify to the previous aliveness of the war dead'.³⁹ In this case, the photograph was an act of defiance. Fixing a personal image to that clean Portland stone breached all the strict protocols of the War Graves Commission; each grave was intended to conform to a uniform pattern, and no 'private memorial' was permissible. By challenging the template of commemoration, this family asserted their right of ownership. The grave of this soldier belonged to them; it was no longer just the property of the state.



'Now at least he would have a face': the image of a Maori warrior is placed beside the fern leaf of New Zealand. The refusal by their government to allow the personalising of graves by family epitaphs led many to install these private memorials.

Source: Bruce Scates

Every pilgrimage has a destination, but honouring the unknown is no easy task. Michael had several connections to the Crete campaign: two men from his father's family fought there, three from his mother's. The body of one uncle was never found. Like all those 'denied a grave by the fortunes of war', Michael's uncle's name is inscribed on the Memorial to the Missing at Phaleron. But a name is not always enough. With his twin brothers and his son beside him, Michael selected a New Zealand soldier 'Known unto God' at Suda Bay, and he adopted that nameless grave for his uncle. And who was to say that he didn't lie there? All of them felt a kind of 'presence' as they walked by that spot, that particular grave among row after row of 'unknowns'. Whatever the occupant's identity, this site became their primary focus of remembrance. Here they said prayers, sang songs and took photographs of the headstone, careful to record the row and plot number, so that future family visits could honour *this* grave again.

Just a few hours later, visiting the German cemetery at Maleme, Michael noticed a headstone engraved with the same date of death. 'The two of them went off in the one day,' he said, both leaving families behind. One day in May, Michael thought, confirmed the common humanity of soldiers, whatever uniform they wore. Of course, Michael might well have been mistaken. Identifying a time of death is difficult in any battle, especially in the case of 'unknowns'. But factual accuracy counts for little in so emotionally charged a journey. Michael and his brothers and his son took solace from these stories. 'I've done my duty to my family,' he explained, '[and] had my tears.'⁴⁰

Appropriating a grave is one way of challenging the anonymity of the unknown, adopting a place another. Jack barely remembered his godfather; his uncle had been killed in May 1941 and the body had never been recovered. But Jack knew from a letter that his uncle had fought in the counter-attack at Galatas; somewhere on the road to the ridges this 'brave soldier fell' to slow the German advance. The letter, written by his uncle's commanding officer, was still in his possession. It contained a description of his uncle's burial in the field, an account crafted to offer comfort to grieving families back home. 'In a lull in the fighting, we buried your son's body beneath an olive tree' – unlikely, given the nature of that engagement, but consoling nonetheless. A few days after Anzac Day 2005, Jack made his way along the road leading to Galatas. He located the rusting water tank described in the letter and scrambled down the slope to a cluster of olive trees nearby. Jack read the letter to the party of pilgrims who followed him; the old man's hands were shaking but his voice was firm and clear. With the same solemn authority, he called for a minute's silence. Then he threaded a string of poppies through the canopy of one particular tree.



'We buried your son's body beneath an olive tree': Jack threads a string of poppies in remembrance of an uncle he barely knew. Pilgrimage gives licence to this kind of ritual and is often far more meaningful for participants than the rigid template of official commemoration. Jack invited fellow pilgrims to participate in his impromptu service. The image to the right shows the great-granddaughter of William Kay, killed in Greece in 1941. Here she tends the grave as have generations of the Kay family before her.

Source: (left) Bruce Scates; (right) courtesy the Kay family

Jack's tribute to his godfather was individualised and inventive. It had none of the pomp and ceremony of official commemorations, none of its lofty rhetoric or carefully codified ritual. Jack had read the same letter his mother had cherished, honoured his uncle in the place that had claimed him, invested the landscape itself with tokens of remembrance. That, he believed, meant more than any memorial to the missing; one name among many, aligned alphabetically in stone.⁴¹

STUDENT PILGRIMAGES

In the first decade of the twenty-first century thousands of young Australians visited Anzac warscapes as part of government-funded awards, RSL-sponsored programs or privately organised school tours. Nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, these education-focused pilgrimages often include the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of veterans. This relationship can be surprisingly strong. As Jay Winter has observed, it is a connection that steps over the 'troublesome generation of parents in the middle'.⁴² It also steps over older and more conventional modes of remembering, offering space for 'fresh imaginative responses from the grandchild generation'.⁴³

We can see such responses in the essays written by these students. They are asked to study the campaign histories in preparation for their journey. And during the tours they are required to write detailed and considered accounts of their travels. In 2011 the Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour selected Greece and Crete as the designated site of study. It was an appropriate choice. That year marked the seventieth anniversary of the campaign, and a large proportion of the men who fought it had enlisted in Perth.

Students were selected on personal attributes and academic merit. A direct family association to the campaign was not a prerequisite, and only one of the ten students chosen had a relative who actually fought in Crete. But all felt a connection to what they called the 'Anzac legacy', including those of non-Anglo-Saxon descent.

What was the basis of that attraction? As the students saw it, they had much in common with that young generation of men and women who marched off to war. Actually they were a good deal younger. The average age of these students was just 16; most of the men who fought in Greece were in their mid-twenties. But that did not lessen the sense of being 'just like them' – young adults on the cusp of their futures. Students warmed to stories of the Second AIF rambling over the ruins of antiquity; the troops' sense of adventure and spirited willingness to see the world mirrored their own. A second factor was a sense of shared community.



'rambling over the ruins of antiquity': soldiers of the Second AIF and students from Western Australia explore the ancient city of Athens. A common remark by such groups is that they are 'walking in the footsteps of the Anzacs'. Although this is not technically correct, it conveys a sense of connectedness with the past.

Source: (top) Australian War Memorial, 006795; (bottom) Department of Veterans' Affairs, Western Australia

Students researched West Australians who died in Greece, gravitating towards men and stories from their own communities. The 6th Division, as already noted, had a strong West Australian contingent. These men had come from schools, sports teams and towns similar to their own. Of course, these similarities are easily overstated. Australia in the late 1930s was a vastly different place from the world these students inhabit. But a connection to place served to transcend such differences.

Current Australian military engagements also informed that 'Anzac legacy'. At the time these students applied for the award, ten Australians had been killed in Afghanistan. That was a loss amplified through the community. Lachlan saw 'ten men with families, with children and with friends. Ten Australian communities that are now one member short.'⁴⁴ And in the time between Lachlan presenting his essay and making his pilgrimage, a further 13 young Australians would die in Afghanistan. The cost of war would become very apparent to young Lachlan.

It was also apparent in Crete. On their first day on the island, the group travelled to Suda Bay Cemetery. They were struck by the number of graves there, and (like many a pilgrim before them) by the number of unknowns. Their first task was to personalise the sacrifice. Each student had researched the life and death of a soldier buried there. Each carried small laminated cards telling the story of that man. This they placed alongside his grave, along with his photograph and a small Australian flag. Mehdi described these commemorations as 'moving and reflective'; reading about each man 'brought home the fact their deaths impacted widely on their family and community'.⁴⁵ Being 'right by their very graves' Hayley felt an unexpected sense of fellowship with Margaret Kay's generation: '... it was a saddening moment to realise that their families never did find out where their bodies lay. We felt the weight of their sacrifice for not just their own lives but also the families who they left.'⁴⁶ And like Margaret Kay before her, Hayley and her classmates mourned on behalf of others, feeling a sense of obligation to those who could never visit these graves, sensing a nation's 'distant grief'.⁴⁷

As those tiny Australian flags suggest, nationalism was also a part of this journey. But not, perhaps, the most important part. For Jade, the Anzac story had 'translated' into a narrative for modern Australia. It speaks to us all, she explained, 'as we continue to grow as a multicultural country'.⁴⁸ One of Jade's fellow travellers was an example of that Anzac evolution. Mehdi, with his family, fled the Taliban a few years earlier. His escape from that repressive regime, his fraught journey as a refugee and resettlement in Australia, fostered a new interpretation of the Anzac story. Like Lachlan, Mehdi drew a strong connection between the First and Second AIF and Australian servicemen and women of today. Mehdi felt that his pilgrimage was a sort of 'thank you', an honouring of sorts, to his adopted country.⁴⁹ Jade's

and Mehdi's understandings are evidence of that wider interpretation of Anzac, a demonstration of how it has drifted from its original historical context. The allure of Anzac is more than just nationalism, 'universal, rather than tribal, a focus for a generalised sense of goodwill rather than something grounded in specific history'.⁵⁰

Of course, there were moments of patriotic pride. 'The ANZAC Spirit', Tyran declared, 'is the legacy that defines this great nation; it is an integral part of our Heritage and the driving force that shapes our future.'⁵¹ But ennobling narratives of nationhood proved harder to sustain as they travelled across that landscape. Outside the tiny village of Askifou, Tyran found a kind of commemoration very different from that sanctioned by the War Graves Commission, a junkyard of rusting weapons accompanied by the injunction 'We want to keep our memories'. Those memories include mass executions, enforced labour, sexual abuse and starvation. Students wandered through the rebuilt town of Kandanos, a place where 180 civilians were shot or hanged, 'all the livestock were destroyed and every house of every street in the town was burned to the ground'. They passed the ruins of Prevali, a monastery destroyed in yet another brutal act of reprisal. They learned of the role civilians played in sheltering Allied servicemen and of the price they paid for doing so. And they realised that total war was fought as much against women and children as it was against men in uniform. At Kandanos, and other memorials to civilian suffering and resistance, the group laid wreaths to 'local people': 'We learned of German reprisals against resisting Cretan peoples and Robyn [the accompanying tour manager] encouraged us to consider the long-term effects of war on the communities in which conflict takes place.' This mature and reflective appreciation of the human cost of war was hardly the stuff of jingoistic nationalism.

These students also acknowledged the suffering of German soldiers, and again sites of memory framed this discussion. The graveyard at Maleme is probably one of the most visited German war cemeteries in the world. Partly this has to do with its location. Maleme is set on the heights overlooking the old airstrip; indeed graveyard and airport share the same name. In 1941 it was the key to control of the island. Just as the Commonwealth War Cemetery looks out to sea – an oblique reference to the evacuation – its German counterpart gazes across the battlefield that won them the campaign. German paratroopers secured the airstrip in bitter fighting around Hill 107. Had they been defeated there, the German invasion would almost certainly have failed. For almost every tour, the heights of Maleme are a point of orientation, a place to explain the vicissitudes of the campaign. It also demonstrates its cost. Allied troops might have lost the island, but they inflicted a terrible toll. More than 4000 German troops are buried there. And their cause is buried with them.



'we want to keep our memories': the preservation of war memory takes many forms. Above are rusting relics assembled in the Pass through the mountains. This was the route taken by Commonwealth forces fleeing to the evacuation from the coast. Below is a Ross Bastiaan interpretive plaque that records the Allied evacuation from the tiny fishing village of Svakia. Rather like Gallipoli, the evacuation is recorded here as the most successful aspect of a doomed campaign. Dr Bastiaan's plaques are a feature of Australian pilgrimage trails; his modelling skills as a dental surgeon being turned to the purpose of commemoration. Like the museum above, the plaques are a private initiative and provide a welcome orientation to heritage sites.

Source: Bruce Scates

One of the most challenging features of Maleme cemetery is the interpretation centre set deliberately at its entrance. Panel after panel outlines the rise of the Nazi regime, explains the global politics of fascism and relates its horrific crimes. Nowhere do these accounts acknowledge the courage or sacrifice of Crete's invaders. Set within this historical context German soldiers are both the victims of the Nazi regime and its willing agents. Maleme offers an unsettling view of war, confronting the atrocity at its core. It should be noted here that the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) was founded as a private charity rather than an agency of the state, and its stated mission is to remember the cost of war and 'despotism'. At Maleme, heroism and the Holocaust cannot be spoken of in the same breath.

Many pilgrims to Maleme find the site disturbing, perhaps these young students most of all. The contrast with Commonwealth war cemeteries is striking. At Suda Bay, each individual grave is honoured with a gleaming upright headstone. Maleme is commemoration en masse, a field of dead broken intermittently by clusters of rough-hewn crosses. Verticality, scholars of commemoration tell us, is the language of hope whereas horizontal lines speak only the language of mourning. Remembrance at Maleme is flat and subdued, Suda Bay (as one pilgrim put it) 'uplifting'. And Maleme is so much darker. Pilgrims likened the Commonwealth cemetery to a well-kept English garden, adorned by flowers, lovingly tended, a comforting statement of colour and light. The plaques at Maleme are black and the crosses a tarnished grey, as dark perhaps as the cause that these men served. Of course, the site could be read differently. The open spaces of Maleme are very different from the fortress of the dead the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge raised at El Alamein and Tobruk. But few visitors to Crete would have that point of comparison. This was commemoration at its most confronting.⁵²

It was the apparent anonymity of the war dead that made Maleme most challenging for the students. There were no epitaphs for German soldiers, no parting messages from grieving families, no single grave to claim as one's own. And like Sue, they realised that each soldier buried here shared a common humanity with 'their boys': they too were a mother's son. 'The message of loss was clear,' Mehdi noted. 'If war teaches us anything it is that peace, love and harmony are worth striving for in our lives.'⁵³

The cemetery at Maleme was tolerated, even respected, by the locals. The Fallschirmjäger Memorial, a monument erected to honour German paratroopers killed in the campaign, was not. Nor is it difficult to explain why. Its symbolism was confronting. Reproducing the imagery on the Fallschirmjäger parachute corps badge, it featured an eagle diving earthward. To many locals who lived through



'the language of mourning': the strong vertical lines and clean white stone of Suda Bay (right) are seen by many as 'uplifting'. Note the gum trees, planted by the Imperial War Graves Commission as a symbol of home. Many pilgrims contrast this site with the mass graves at Maleme (left). Among the crosses lies the grave of General Bruno Bräuer, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army in Greece, 1942–44. Bräuer was executed for war crimes. More than 500 000 Greek civilians starved to death during the occupation of their country.

Source: Bruce Scates

the war, this image bore an unsettling resemblance to the Stuka dive-bombers that spearheaded the invasion. Soldiers and civilians alike still remember these 'evil' warplanes, their sirens howling, spitting death from the sky.

The monument's politics were equally explicit: the eagle clutched a swastika in its talons and a lengthy inscription (written in German) praised the valour of the men who conquered Crete. Removing the memorial was an attempt to oust the painful memory of defeat and occupation. Within months of the war ending, outraged citizens had the swastika rendered over. There were several attempts to knock the eagle from its base before a bolt of lightning destroyed it entirely. All that remains of the Fallschirmjäger Memorial today is a mute pillar of stone. One can barely read the inscription, covered as it is with anti-war and anti-fascist slogans. Every monument is a site of contestation, and the Fallschirmjäger Memorial particularly so. Students were deeply divided over its presence in the landscape. Mehdi felt 'quite uncomfortable' with the vandalism. No stranger to war himself, he did not interpret this site as a tribute to German militarism. To the contrary, the crumbling monument, splashed with angry red and black ink, 'signified the greatest call for peace'. Mehdi read the monument – and indeed all of Crete – as an instance of what Maria Tumarkin has called a *traumascape*, a place 'marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss, [where] the past is never quite over'. Decades after the end of World War II 'the past is still unfinished business'.⁵⁴ Unfinished business is an apt description of the story of HMAS *Sydney*.



AIR AND SEA

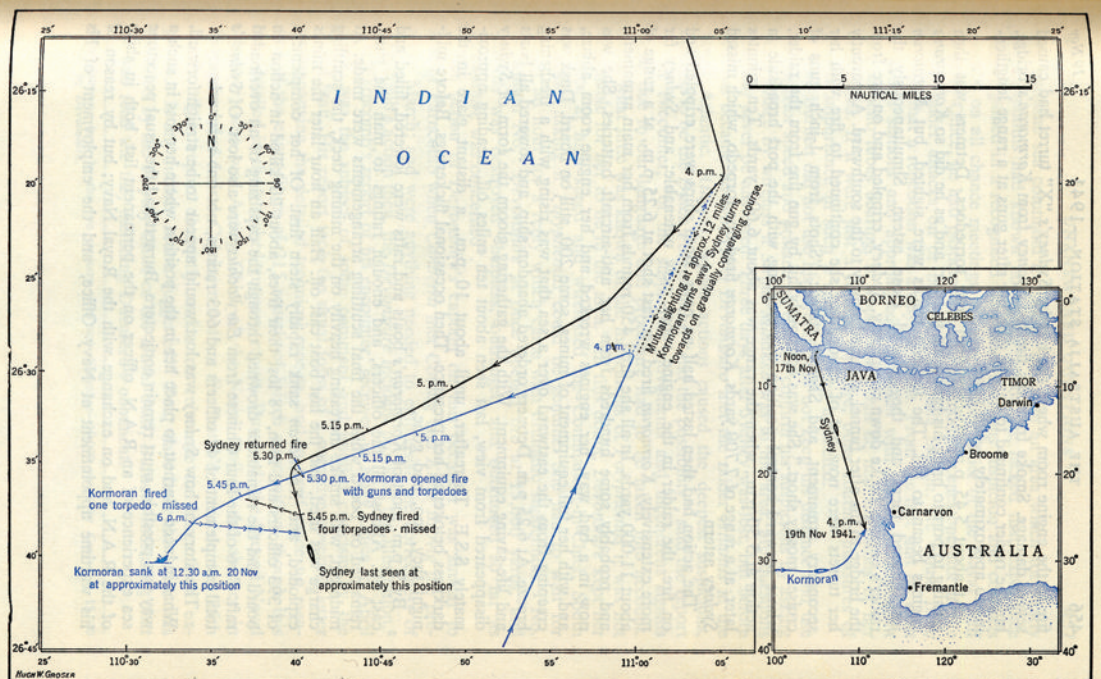
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CHAPTER EIGHT

SEEKING THE UNKNOWN

Remembering *Sydney*

HMAS *Sydney* won fame in July 1940 when she sank the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* off the coast of Crete. The 6380-ton light cruiser returned to Australia in early 1941 to engage in work closer to home. In November 1941 *Sydney* departed Fremantle to escort the troopship *Zealandia*, carrying members of the 8th Division, to Singapore. On her return to Fremantle, *Sydney* encountered the German raider *Kormoran* disguised as a Dutch merchant vessel. *Sydney*'s captain made a fatal error in approaching too close to *Kormoran*. The speed and accuracy of the German gunners mortally wounded *Sydney*. None of *Sydney*'s complement of 645 men survived.



Sydney-Kormoran Action

'a fatal error': retracing the final voyage of HMAS Sydney

Source: G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), p. 455.

The Mitchell and the Jamieson families lived close to one another in Foote Street, Albert Park, only a short distance from Port Phillip Bay. Francis Joseph Mitchell, known as Joe, was born in March 1919. More than six feet tall, with blue eyes and a head of brown hair, Mitchell joined the Royal Australian Navy in May 1940. In March 1941 he was transferred to HMAS *Sydney* as a supply assistant.¹ The Jamiesons' second son, Ernie, also joined the navy. After his training in Victoria and New South Wales, he was posted to HMAS *Arunta*, and would later take part in the battle of Leyte Gulf. The news of *Sydney*'s disappearance became known to the Australian public in late November 1941. From that time on, whenever he was home on shore leave, Ernie Jamieson would pay a visit to the Mitchells. Each occasion Mrs Mitchell would ask: 'Have you seen anything, Ern?' He could only shake his head in reply.

For the Mitchells, like the families of the other 645 officers and men who died on board *Sydney*, it would be 67 years before the location of the ship's wreck was known. For some relatives, particularly the parents of dead sailors, the ship's discovery in March 2008 would come too late for them to know precisely where their family member reached his final resting place. The bronze statue of the 'Waiting Woman', who looks out expectantly over Geraldton towards the Indian Ocean, captures the unknowingness surely felt by those whose son, sibling or lover was listed among the ship's company as missing.²

Individually, the deaths of the 645 made them no different from others killed at sea in war or peace, with no known grave. The movements of the tides and the currents joined the men's remains with those of every other person lost at sea since the moment that humans first took to open water. There was one exception: a badly decomposed body, in a life raft, was washed up on Christmas Island in February 1942, but these remains were not officially acknowledged as those of a *Sydney* crew member until 2000. But the collective loss and disappearance of *Sydney*'s crew was exceptional for two important reasons. First, there were no survivors to give an Australian account of what happened, despite the fact that the battle took place on the nation's doorstep. Second, *Sydney*'s sinking still constitutes the largest single destruction of Australian naval lives at sea.³ To put the number of deaths in perspective, the awful tally of 645 is larger than the total number of Australians killed in the entire Korean War or the Vietnam War. It was also far more than the 113 casualties that the Royal Australian Navy had, until 19 November 1941, suffered since the war began.⁴ Because of the scale of the loss, and the widespread interest in what had been the mystery of *Sydney*'s disappearance, the seascape and the landscape of Western Australia's mid-north and north-west coast became places of war pilgrimage.



'capturing unknowingness': the 'Waiting Woman' and the 'Dome of Souls', Geraldton: each of the seagulls soaring heavenward in the dome symbolises a life lost at sea.

Source: Dave McGowan

With one notable exception, the story of pilgrimage to HMAS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* is a story of Australia emerging from the shadow of the Vietnam War. There are several important strands to this argument. Such was the scale of defeat in Vietnam that any previous reluctance on the part of the media to commemorate wartime loss was abandoned. Between 1945 and 1975, press commemoration of *Sydney* tended to focus on her victories in the Mediterranean (and her predecessor's victory over *Emden*), not on her sinking just off the Western Australian coast. After Vietnam, government and Defence officials slowly came to realise that tending to the needs of family members required some symbolic efforts that went beyond what was normally provided for through the repatriation system.

Part of this change in official outlook was due to the very successful agitation by returned servicemen (or 'veterans' as they had begun to style themselves, after their American counterparts) who had fought in Vietnam and felt that they were owed proper recognition for their war.⁵ Their sentiment is expressed ably in the conclusion to John Murphy's *Harvest of Fear* (1993): 'It was the final, and saddest, irony of the Vietnam intervention that its veterans were denied even the simple dignity and solace of the returning soldier. That they should feel their experience shunned was one wound too many.'⁶

The result was to reinscribe victimhood on the Anzac legend, replacing stoicism with emotional release.⁷ Moreover, during the 1960s growing attention had been given to Australian naval command and operations at sea. In 1964 and 1967 the Australian Government took the unusual action of conducting two royal commissions into the collision between HMAS *Melbourne* and HMAS *Voyager*, in which 82 sailors had died during night exercises off Jervis Bay on 10 February 1964. This set the scene for a proliferation of research into the loss of *Sydney*, which occurred after Commonwealth records relating to World War II were made available for open access from 1969.

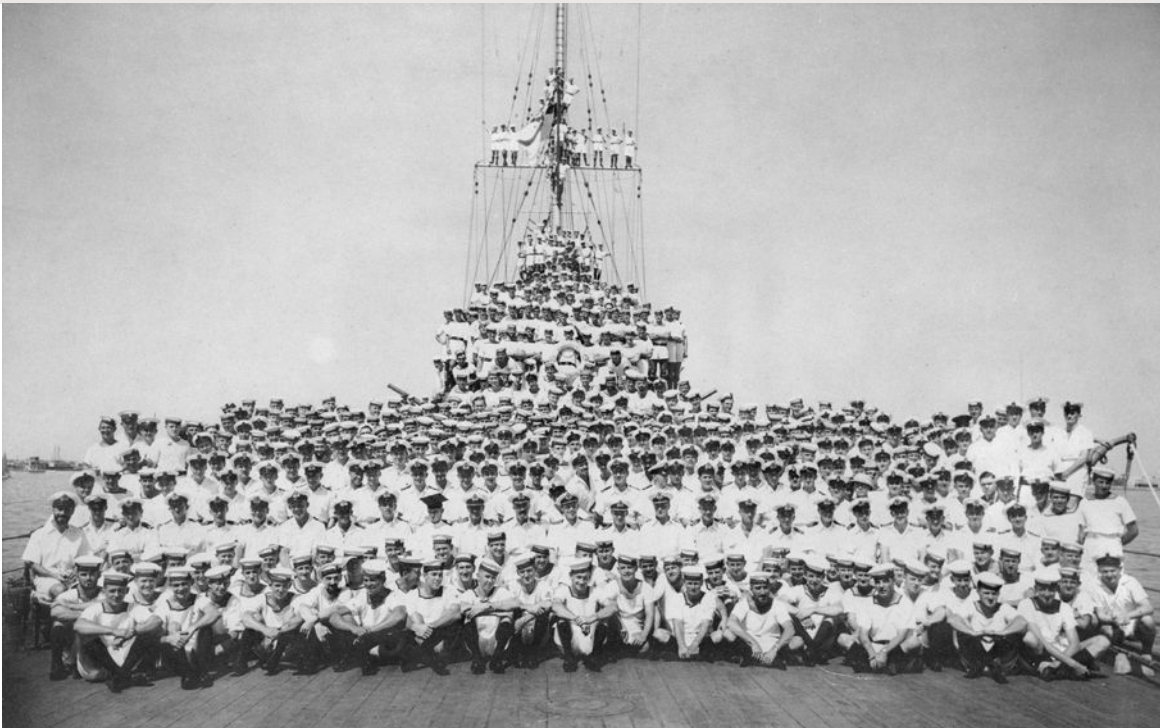
These events helped to create a climate in which conspiracy theorists thrived on the mystery of *Sydney*. It fed the anxieties of those whose trust in government had declined following the *Voyager* royal commissions and the defeat of the United States and its allies in Indochina. In the eyes of some researchers, the Commonwealth records gradually released to the public were alarmingly incomplete. Some accepted that gaps in the archival record were due to mismanagement or loss, but more energetic imaginations interpreted documentary silence and bureaucratic inertia as evidence of a cover-up. In 1981 Michael Montgomery, son of the ship's navigator, published his book *Who Sank the Sydney?* In it he alleged that *Kormoran*

had been flying under a neutral Norwegian flag when she opened fire on *Sydney*, that *Kormoran* had been sighted by the Royal Australian Air Force well before the battle took place, that *Kormoran* had been assisted by a Japanese submarine, that the Germans had machine-gunned *Sydney*'s men in the water and that Australian sailors from the lost ship had been taken prisoner and transferred to Japan.⁸ Like other conspiracy theorists who followed him, Montgomery could not produce a single piece of positive evidence to support these claims.⁹

Occam's razor is at its dullest in the hands of a conspiracy theorist. Such individuals heightened interest in *Sydney*'s loss and her possible whereabouts, but at enormous cost to families who sought real answers and delayed researchers who relied on verifiable evidence.¹⁰ It is a sad fact that alongside the families and friends of *Sydney*'s crew, and a handful of *Kormoran* survivors, some of the most dedicated pilgrims to this theatre of war have been the paranoid, anxious and delusional characters who saw signs of a conspiracy in the midst of Australia's post-Vietnam moment.¹¹ The one notable exception to this pattern of pilgrimage was Jonathan Robotham, a man whose life was lived not in the shadow of Vietnam but in that of the two world wars. Before we come to his story on the Western Australian coast, we must return to the battle that brought him there.

THE SINKING OF SYDNEY

In 1941, HMAS *Sydney* II was the pride of the Australian fleet. During the previous year, under the command of Captain John Collins, she had fought alongside the Royal Navy vessels *Havock*, *Hasty*, *Hero*, *Ilex* and *Hyperion* in the battle of Cape Spada, off the west coast of Crete. On the morning of 19 July 1940 *Sydney* sank the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni*.¹² This battle honour continued *Sydney*'s distinguished tradition of naval service begun by her predecessor. HMAS *Sydney* I was a Town Class light cruiser that forced the German raider *Emden* aground on the Cocos Islands on 10 November 1914. *Sydney* I remained in the service of the Royal Australian Navy until she was decommissioned in 1928. In August 1934 the Australian Government announced that it would purchase a *Leander* Class light cruiser to be called *Sydney* II, 'to perpetuate the glory of the famous Australian cruiser of that name which defeated the *Emden* in the Great War'.¹³ A month later she was launched at Portsmouth by Mrs Bruce, wife of the Australian High Commissioner. In May 1941 the 6380-ton ship came under the command of a recent graduate of the Royal Naval College, Captain Joseph Burnett.¹⁴



'a distinguished tradition': Sydney's officers and crew, 1940. The ship's company was lost when the vessel was sunk the following year.

Source: Australian War Memorial, P00795.001

In November 1941 *Sydney*'s company was made up of 42 officers and 603 men from each of the Australian states. There were also six men on board from England, Scotland and Singapore and six from No. 9 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, who operated and flew the ship's Walrus amphibious aircraft.¹⁵ In February 1941 *Sydney* had returned to Australia for a refit to repair damage sustained during her battles in the Mediterranean. On 11 February the lord mayor of Sydney unveiled a plaque on the ship to commemorate her victory over *Bartolomeo Colleoni*.¹⁶ The *Sydney Morning Herald* estimated that more than 200 000 people turned out that day to watch 400 members of the ship march from Circular Quay to the Town Hall, where *Sydney*'s men were treated to a luncheon surrounded by Union Jacks and Australian flags.¹⁷

As *Sydney*'s company was sitting down to eat, the 9400-ton German auxiliary cruiser HSK *Kormoran* was into her third month plying the waters of the South Atlantic under the command of Theodor Detmers. *Kormoran*'s captain was 'a determined and capable officer who had visited Australia as a lieutenant in the cruiser *Köln* in 1933, and who had war experience in command of a destroyer in the Norwegian campaign'.¹⁸ Between January and May 1941 *Kormoran* sank seven British and Greek tankers and steamers, while an additional British ship, *Canadolite*, was captured and sailed to France as a prize. On the night of 1/2 May 1941, *Kormoran* entered the Indian Ocean where she would soon change her disguise to that of the Japanese *Sakito Maru*, and afterwards sink several more ships, including the Australian merchant vessel *Mareeba*. After another change in appearance – this time to one of 'insignificance' – *Kormoran* refuelled and refitted her engines more than a thousand nautical miles west of Fremantle. In mid-November 1941 Detmers steered his ship east, then north-east to investigate the area around Shark Bay, between Geraldton and Carnarvon.

When *Sydney* and *Kormoran* sighted each other, a few minutes before four o'clock on the afternoon of 19 November, the weather was fine and nightfall was three hours away. As they neared one another, Detmers hoped to avoid a confrontation with a larger vessel approaching from the north (which he soon identified as a cruiser) and turned his ship into the direction of the sun. He ordered his men to action stations, raised a Dutch flag and hoisted the letters PKQI for *Straat Malakka*. By 5.30, *Sydney* had repeatedly attempted to verify *Straat Malakka*'s identity, which she was unable to do. With the ships now less than a mile apart, Detmers ordered the Dutch colours be struck and replaced with German ones. He gave the order to open fire with guns and torpedoes. Within seconds, *Sydney* took hits to her

bridge and director tower. Evidence from the wreck shows that *Kormoran* struck *Sydney* on her port and starboard sides at least 87 times with shells fired from her 15-centimetre guns. A German torpedo struck *Sydney*'s bow, causing her to take on water and slow considerably in speed. In addition, *Sydney* was hit with numerous rounds from *Kormoran*'s 3.7-centimetre gun and 20-millimetre machine guns.¹⁹ In evidence tendered to the 2009 inquiry into *Sydney*'s disappearance, defence experts calculated that up to 70 per cent of the Australian ship's crew became casualties in the first few minutes of the battle, which lasted approximately half an hour and exacted a terrible toll on *Kormoran*.²⁰ The German vessel was so badly damaged that Detmers then ordered the scuttling of the ship. Those who had survived the battle with *Sydney* watched the Australian ship drift away towards the south-east, listing to port with fires visible on her decks. The two vessels eventually settled on the sea floor, 12 nautical miles from one another.

The vast majority of *Kormoran*'s crew survived the battle with *Sydney*. Twenty men were estimated to have died by the time Detmers gave the order to abandon ship. A further 57 died in the water after their raft capsized. Those who survived – 315 Germans and three Chinese laundrymen – were taken as prisoners to Australia.²¹ Most were picked up by ships involved in the search for *Sydney*, but two boats made it to the shore at Quobba Station, 80 kilometres north of Carnarvon. One landed at 17 Mile Well, and the other made it to Red Bluff. To the east was a hot, bright and dry landscape populated mostly by sheep. The limestone cliffs along the coast gave the men shelter until they were discovered by stockmen and taken into military custody.

After their interrogation and voyage to Victoria, *Kormoran*'s surviving officers and men spent the rest of the war in prisoner-of-war camps near Murchison. One of their guards was Jonathan Robotham, a German-speaking Englishman who had migrated to Australia in 1932. Robotham learned from these prisoners the story that the Germans had buried in the caves at Quobba a film canister depicting the battle with *Sydney*. Discharged from the militia in January 1945 after almost a year of treatment for mental illness, he eventually made his way to the north of Western Australia to begin a search for the film canister. He took up work on a geological survey in order to save money to buy a metal detector and arrived at Quobba Station sometime in 1948 or 1949. He took up residence in a water tank-cum-hermitage nearby and spent the next 21 years scouring the caves for evidence of the canister. The cyclonic swells that hit that part of the north-west coast each year beat him to it, just as they frustrated a party of Australian Army engineers sent to search the area during the war. No trace of the film has ever been found.²²



'Sydney was hit': shell damage to a gun turret. Only a physical inspection of the wreck would sink persistent rumours that a Japanese submarine was also involved in the action that claimed Sydney.

Source: Australian War Memorial, P09281.109. Photographer: David Mearns. HMAS Sydney Search Pty Ltd as Trustee for Finding Sydney Foundation

WAYS OF REMEMBERING

Robotham is the sole exception in the pattern of pilgrimage to the *Sydney* and *Kormoran* sites after the war. In the two to three decades that followed *Sydney*'s disappearance and the scuttling of *Kormoran*, there was no activity besides his that bore any resemblance to war pilgrimage in the region off Western Australia where the battle was thought to have taken place. In the decade that followed the end of the war nothing of the sort is reported in the local press in Geraldton or Carnarvon, even in accounts of Anzac Day.²³ War pilgrimages would normally have attracted the attention of local journalists, particularly in papers that regularly carried rather more mundane stories of whaling and wool prices on their front pages.

In 1952 Perth's *Sunday Times* published a very brief report of a former *Sydney* crewman meeting one of his counterparts from *Kormoran* in the Western Australian capital, but few details were provided and there was no hint as to whether the German was heading north or whether he was on his way to the east coast of Australia, where several *Kormoran* men migrated after the war.²⁴ During the late 1940s and 1950s former *Sydney* crew members who had fought in the Mediterranean hosted occasional reunions. At certain times these gatherings were open to friends and family of the ship. On other occasions – such as 19 July (the anniversary of the ship's sinking of *Bartolomeo Colleoni*) – they were, however, exclusively for the crew.²⁵

Immediately after *Sydney*'s disappearance, family and friends of the deceased Australian sailors were accommodated in church services held on both sides of the country, which placed an emphasis on the Christian belief in resurrection. Those who found themselves separated by the enormous distance from where their loved ones lay were reassured that, in death, the men of *Sydney* would rise to new life.²⁶

At the same time, civic memorial services combined solemnity with efforts to raise funds for the replacement of the lost ship. In Victoria on 12 December 1941, the mayor of Brighton organised a civic memorial service held at a local grammar school in memory of the men of *Sydney* and *Parramatta*, attended by representatives of the services, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides.²⁷ A collection for the Lord Mayor's RAN Relief Fund was taken to supplement the £1000 that Brighton City Council had pledged towards *Sydney*'s replacement.²⁸ In Geraldton, £850 was raised in five weeks following the ship's disappearance, but there was no public ceremony marking the first anniversary of the battle.²⁹ In 1941 surf lifesavers in Fremantle began competing in an annual competition for the 'HMAS Sydney II reel trophy', which had been presented to their club by members of the crew in August that year.³⁰

In the absence of a physical memorial, families used the notices pages of newspapers to express their grief and the longing they felt for their loved ones.

In Perth the family of Sid Davies, an electrical artificer on board *Sydney*, wrote of their 'Treasured memories today of our only son and brother Sid and shipmates./ We who loved you, sadly miss you./As it dawns the twelfth year./Inserted by your loving mother, dad, sister Gwen, and Joe.'³¹ Also in the west, Charles Redfearne's sister, Bess, wrote succinctly of the depth of her loss: 'My brother and pal, how I miss you dear.'³² In Brisbane, Able Seaman William Hare's mother recalled the death of her only son: 'My heart aches with sadness,/My eyes shed many a tear/As it dawns the 13th sad year.'³³ The many printed references to the men as 'missing' rather than dead expresses the prolonged agony that friends and family members felt in the absence of a grave over which to mourn, an agony we've already noted in the case of missing POWs. A notice published in the *Courier-Mail* nine years after the battle typifies this sentiment:

HASS – In loving memory of my dear Son, Able Seaman L.W. Hass, aged 20, who is missing on HMAS *Sydney* since 20 November 1941.
As the ivy clings to the oak,
My memory will always cling to you,
To the world he was but one,
To me he was my son,
Memories live forever.
Deeply mourned by his sorrowing Mother.³⁴

Other families made more tangible public gestures towards the memories of their sons. The parents of Able Seaman Ernest Frisch of Rockhampton, in central Queensland, donated a trophy in memory of their son for a 15-mile road race that was first held in 1946. At the presentation of the trophy in 1951, Frisch's brother spoke of Ernie's prowess as a cyclist, before those assembled observed a minute's silence for the dead man.³⁵ As a commemorative act it differed from a pilgrimage in that it recalled a memory of the man's life as it was before he went away to war. In addition to the trophy, Mr and Mrs Frisch had donated £5 towards the Central Queensland HMAS *Sydney* Replacement Fund.³⁶ According to a relative alive in 2012, they never made a trip to Western Australia in search of their son's resting place.³⁷ The cost of such an exercise, the lack of a known wreck site and the fact that they had already made tangible gestures towards commemorating him might well have postponed this pilgrimage, time and again.

Although there was still no dedicated memorial to the ship, HMAS *Sydney* associations were established in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia, and by the 1960s these groups organised annual pilgrimages to mark the anniversary of the ship's loss. In Victoria, the Shrine of Remembrance became the site of

mourning and commemoration; in New South Wales members of the Association gathered at Martin Place, while in Western Australia services were held at King's Park.³⁸ In 1974 a group of *Kormoran* men travelled to Melbourne to lay a wreath at the foot of *Sydney*'s memorial oak at the Shrine, in the presence of members of the HMAS Sydney Association. The Shrine, and its counterparts in other states, also hosted what might be called private memorials. Throughout her youth, Pat visited the monument. On each visit she remembered 'four young boys who grew up in my home town and went down with the *Sydney* – I can still picture them'.³⁹

By the time the fortieth anniversary approached in 1981, moves were afoot to construct a memorial in the region where the battle had actually taken place. Members of the Carnarvon subsection of the Naval Association of Australia had entered into an agreement with the landholder at Quobba Station to build a stone cairn at High Rock, near where *Kormoran*'s boats had arrived with their cargo of tired and hungry men. A team of local volunteers constructed the monument from stones found nearby, and a time capsule was buried with instructions for it to be opened in 2041.⁴⁰ It was dedicated on 6 November 1982.⁴¹ Quobba now hosts tourists as well as sheep, and the cairn at High Rock is advertised as an attraction along with surfing, rock-fishing and whale-watching.

The building of the cairn at Quobba is one of the first indications of the way in which commemorating this aspect of Australian military history started to incorporate collective acts of pilgrimage during the 1980s and 1990s. Several factors contributed to this. Certainly, regional officials had begun to see the tourism potential of war heritage, particularly in areas where primary industries were employing fewer people. Significantly, too, associations of *Sydney* II men were beginning to face serious problems of decline brought on by the deaths and ageing of their members. In their place came officers and men from *Sydney* III, an aircraft carrier that had been converted for use as a troop transporter during the Vietnam War, nicknamed the 'Vung Tau Ferry'. In the late 1970s and early 1980s they had organised themselves into state-based groups, such as the HMAS *Sydney* & VLSVA (Vietnam Logistical Support Veterans Association), incorporated in Victoria. Gradually, these newer *Sydney* associations began to amalgamate with older groups that included men from the Great War and World War II. In 1991, for instance, the three existing *Sydney* associations in Victoria were amalgamated into one, 'with the Vietnam boys taking the lead'.⁴² Those belonging to the older groups were offered life memberships and assistance with their pension claims, shopping and other odd jobs. Concerned that the Shrine commemorations on 19 November had begun to 'fall away' as World War II men aged, the Vietnam veterans in the HMAS *Sydney* & VLSVA revived the annual service in 1993.⁴³ Between 1993 and 2010 a memorial



'where the battle took place': or at least the nearest landfall. Tourists climb the Quobba cairn sometime in the 1980s. The makeshift nature of the memorial contrasts with the costly and elaborate structures that followed.

Source: Carnarvon Heritage Group

service was also held in St Mark's chapel at HMAS *Cerberus* on the Sunday closest to 19 November.⁴⁴

The practice of ex-servicemen from Vietnam taking over responsibility for commemorating a World War II battle helped to establish a tradition of continuity of service aboard ships that bore the same name. Commemorating the fighting and dying of men in 1941 also worked to associate *Sydney*'s name (whether II or III) with sacrifice and official betrayal. After all, those who had served in *Sydney* III and other logistical support vessels had had to fight during the 1980s and 1990s for official recognition of their active service in Vietnam.⁴⁵ So in 1997, when it was reported that naval volunteers who had served aboard logistical support vessels would not enjoy the same rights as other Vietnam veterans, a VLSVA representative from Queensland claimed that *Sydney* III had been a Viet Cong target. 'Again', he said, 'the navy – which is always the case in this country – has been treated differently to the army and the RAAF. Again we've been betrayed.'⁴⁶

Linking *Sydney*'s name with betrayal played to a theme that featured strongly in some published accounts of the ship's disappearance. With a hand on his heart, Michael Montgomery concluded *Who Sank the Sydney?* with the hope that he had 'done enough to demonstrate, to those who were bereaved, that their menfolk's lives were not needlessly sacrificed as they have been led to believe all these years by a conspiracy of silence'.⁴⁷

In the absence of an open and thorough investigation (and as several key players in the *Sydney–Kormoran* drama died, as Detmers did in 1976) a space opened in which conjecture and guess-work masqueraded as fact. In addition, interest in the ship's fate was helped along in the 1990s by the well-publicised activities of the 'End Secrecy on *Sydney*' group and the 'Sydney Research Group' (an organisation of ex-servicemen intent on rescuing Burnett's reputation). End Secrecy on *Sydney* was convened in 1991 by a convinced Western Australian conspiracy theorist and *Sydney* Research Group member, John Doohan, who drew support for his mission from descendants and friends of the ship's crew, many of whom were becoming desperate for an answer to the ship's fate as they aged. One was Betty Schoch, whose husband of five weeks (with whom she had only shared two full days of marriage) disappeared with the ship. She worked as the End Secrecy on *Sydney* co-convenor for several years. In one of the final notices that she placed in the *West Australian* to mark the anniversary of her husband's death, Schoch wrote: 'In loving memory of my Husband and gallant crew lost with HMAS Sydney, Nov 1941. The full story is now breaking at last. Betty.'⁴⁸ Sadly, the full story would come too late for Schoch. She died, aged 88, only 18 months before the wrecks of the two vessels were located on the sea floor.

One of the effects of Vietnam's aftermath and the conspiracy theories that circulated in the 1980s was the marked increase in commemorative practices by the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in 1991. During that period Carnarvon had begun to solidify its claim as the obvious place for pilgrimage to this former theatre of war. Captain Detmers' widow, Ursula, quietly visited the town for three days in 1991 having decided that, before she died, she needed to travel from Hamburg to the place where her husband had washed up on Australian shores all those years ago.⁴⁹ This followed a visit by the officers and crew of HMAS *Sydney* IV to Hamburg in July 1990, in which a group of *Kormoran* survivors and their wives were invited to a cocktail party on board the ship, hosted by her commanding officer.⁵⁰

The low profile given to Mrs Detmers' pilgrimage is unsurprising given that any official commemoration of *Kormoran*'s dead remained a touchy subject around Carnarvon. In 1986, during the International Year of Peace, local councillor and returned serviceman Keith Hasleby had proposed that a joint *Sydney*–*Kormoran* memorial be erected in the region in a spirit of friendship and international reconciliation. The level of opposition to Hasleby's suggestion saw the memorial eventually located just off Carnarvon on Babbage Island, near the site of a former whaling station. It bears no written text.⁵¹ The status of the joint memorial was conspicuous by its absence from services held in November 1991.

The Naval Association of Australia's Carnarvon subsection and RSL subbranch arranged for a wall of pale brick and bronze panelling to be built behind the city's war memorial, which recorded the names of *Sydney*'s 645 dead. At midday on 23 November 1991 it was unveiled with prayers and the national anthem. This ceremony was followed by a dusk service at Quobba, also conducted by the Naval Association. The patrol boat HMAS *Dubbo* was positioned offshore to give a naval salute while members of the Ex-HMAS Sydney Association recited prayers, the 'Last Post' and 'Reveille' were played and 'Advance Australia Fair' was followed by 'God Save the Queen'. At the very place where *Kormoran*'s men had landed, no provision was made for them or their ship in the official proceedings.

Local attitudes towards the surviving German sailors began to change over the following decade, to the point that when official commemorations were held in Carnarvon in 2001 (this time under the aegis of the local shire and the chamber of commerce) it was deemed appropriate to 'involve the Carnarvon community as a whole in this lasting tribute, all family and friends of the heroic HMAS *Sydney* (II) servicemen, as well as surviving HSK *Kormoran* servicemen'.⁵² With HMAS *Sydney* IV now fighting alongside German forces in the NATO-led invasion of Afghanistan, it was hardly the moment to dwell on old animosities.

At the age of 79, Fritz Engelmann, one of *Kormoran*'s youngest crew members, travelled to the town carrying with him funds from the German Naval Federation for Carnarvon's HMAS *Sydney* II Memorial Avenue, which was unveiled on Remembrance Day 2001.⁵³ Here, 645 individual plaques bearing the names of each of *Sydney*'s crew were arranged in alphabetical order, each with a palm tree planted behind them. The concept of this 'living memorial' suffered a setback when it turned out that the palms attracted hungry spur-throated locusts in far greater numbers than they did pilgrims. Nevertheless, the avenue's location between the North West Coastal Highway and the town's southern entrance draws a regular number of visiting schoolchildren and passing motorists, who often leave floral tributes next to the plaques.⁵⁴ Of all the memorials to *Sydney* in the Gascoyne region, the avenue is the most easily accessible and best suited to moments of private reflection. Gail Kemp, niece of Able Seaman Benjamin Barker, thanked the people of Carnarvon, 'for giving us a grave stone we can go to – it is a truly beautiful and very haunting drive and one that you cannot do without a lot of tears falling'. Every Anzac Day, Gail's mother cried as she remembered her brother and his shipmates.⁵⁵

The successive attempts at reinscribing the Gascoyne landscape with memorials to *Sydney* and *Kormoran* between 1981 and 2001 came under growing competition from similar efforts in Geraldton. Carnarvon had been reasonably successful in attracting domestic and international visitors to its memorials, so it stood to reason that Geraldton had something to gain by commemorating *Sydney*'s loss. The very dedicated effort shown by local Rotarians, the RSL, Glenys McDonald and others involved in planning and erecting the memorial that now sits atop Geraldton's Mount Scott is outlined in some detail in the epilogue to McDonald's *Seeking the Sydney*.⁵⁶ Importantly, McDonald argued, it was the town's 'deep emotional attachment to *Sydney* ... rather than any sense of geographical identification with the ship's final Indian Ocean resting place, that brought momentum to the memorial project'. Here McDonald was hedging her bets on the ship being found closer to Carnarvon, as it was in March 2008.

Geraldton's ability to draw on its own emotional heritage was the most spectacular development in changing patterns of pilgrimage to *Sydney* and *Kormoran*. After all, it was done in spite of a recommendation made in 1999 by a joint standing committee of the Australian Parliament that such a memorial be located in Fremantle and dedicated on 19 November 2001.⁵⁷ It might well have been argued that the people of Fremantle, whose citizens had farewelled (and, in some cases, married) the crew of *Sydney* had just as strong an emotional claim on the ship. Yet it was Geraldton that became the principal place of commemoration on 19 November 2001, when the 'Waiting Woman', the stele, the memorial wall and the 'Dome of Souls' were unveiled and dedicated to the memory of *Sydney*.



'a grave stone we can go to': HMAS Sydney II Memorial Avenue, 2010. The memorial mirrors the commemorative culture established after the Great War, avenues of honour marking the entrance of many a town. Living memorials like this one are rich in their symbolism. Planting a tree serves as a surrogate funeral, all the more significant when a body was taken by the sea.

Source: Rebecca Mayo

FINDING THE WRECK

While Carnarvon and Geraldton had been contesting which place was the better site of memory, the question of the wreck's location remained a burning issue. The question gained in intensity as some of the claims put forward by various theorists became wilder and close relatives of *Sydney*'s crew grew older.⁵⁸ For the small group of Western Australians who formed the HMAS Sydney Foundation and, later, the Finding Sydney Foundation, discovering the location of the wrecks was crucial to countering speculation circulating about *Sydney*'s fate. The eventual success of their directors and supporters in raising sufficient funds to mount a search based on rigorous evidence helped to take pilgrimage to *Sydney* and *Kormoran* from the land to the sea.⁵⁹ The funds left over from the search would also allow for a virtual memorial to be created online, as well as an English- and German-language plaque at the Laboe Naval Memorial.⁶⁰

The discoveries of *Kormoran* on 12 March 2008 and *Sydney* four days later were followed by a number of ceremonies on land and sea. On 16 April HMAS *Anzac* carried five relatives of *Sydney*'s crew (including one of Captain Burnett's sons, Rory) over the site of the wreck where wreaths and an engraved commemorative cartridge were placed in the water. The German ambassador to Australia did the same over *Kormoran*. On 24 April the Australian prime minister led a national memorial service in St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, where a larger number of relatives gathered alongside dignitaries, sailors and the directors of the Finding Sydney Foundation.

For some, the occasion was about much more than remembrance. The son and daughter of one *Sydney* sailor, separated at a very early age after the death of their father, learned of each other's existence for the first time following the discovery of the wrecks. They were reunited in St Andrew's.⁶¹

In the proceeding months the navy began planning to take a larger number of relatives over the site of *Sydney*'s wreck in HMAS *Manoora*. It had received more expressions of interest than *Manoora* could hold, so a ballot was conducted to select 280 relatives. They departed Geraldton on 18 November and stayed overnight on the ship in preparation for a ceremony conducted the next day. At first light, HMAS *Sydney* IV was silhouetted by the rising sun, a short distance from *Manoora*. The relatives on board *Manoora* watched as *Sydney*'s crew stood to attention, dressed in white. Seeing the faces of the men and women on board at about the distance that *Sydney* and *Kormoran* were apart when the battle first began was a 'distressing' experience for some.⁶² Betty Schoch's sister-in-law, Merle Campbell, was on board *Manoora* with her niece. She had been 12 years old when her brother died and remembered especially the effect of his death on her parents. Her father, a school



'given up to the sea': committing objects to the deep from HMAS Manoora, 2008. Flowers drifted together on the rocking waters, marking as it were a surrogate grave.

Source: Department of Defence. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia

headmaster, spent the rest of his life searching for answers to his son's death, even writing to contacts in Germany in the vain hope of an explanation. Campbell typed her brother a letter and sealed it in a glass jar, which she placed in the water while on *Manoora*. Other items given up to the sea included framed photographs, a ship's clock, love poetry, a German anti-war poem and floral wreaths.⁶³

For a small group of six or seven people, the trip in *Manoora* afforded the opportunity to connect deceased relatives with the men who lay below. Rebecca Mayo, whose grandfather Lieutenant Eric Mayo had died on *Sydney*, travelled with her father to scatter her grandmother's ashes over the Indian Ocean. Janet Mayo (1915–1995) had been made a CBE and an OBE for her work with the War Widows' Guild of Australia, in which she had served as state president of South Australia and, later, national president.⁶⁴ For Rebecca Mayo, travelling to the site of the wreck was as much about honouring the work and memory of her grandmother as it was about her grandfather, whom neither she nor her father had ever met.

During the time leading up to and following the discovery of *Sydney* and *Kormoran*, the promise of 'closure' became a common refrain. In August 2007 Phil Shepherd, one of three West Australian men who claimed to have found *Sydney* in shallow water, told a reporter: 'This is a sacred site and a war grave – probably our most important war grave. We hope we can give the families some closure knowing where their people are and where they can place some flowers.'⁶⁵ Six months later, on board the survey ship that actually did find the wrecks, Glenys McDonald's excited reaction to the discovery was to say: 'That will give people closure!'⁶⁶ At a press conference announcing that *Sydney's* wreck had been positively located, the Australian Prime Minister used the term twice: 'The Australian Government hopes that the discovery of HMAS SYDNEY brings some closure to the families of the 645 Australian Defence Force personnel who lost their lives bravely in this naval action in World War II.' And then: 'I conclude by saying this, this is a day which begins a process of closure for many families of the crew of the SYDNEY. It's also a time for the nation to reflect on the bravery of all of those who gave their lives in defence of their country, in this particularly bloody and brutal naval engagement.'⁶⁷

That 'process of closure' continued in the virtual memorial raised to *Sydney* not long after the wreck had been located. Heathcote Gardiner had been named after Able Seaman 'Hecky' Gardiner, a handsome young uncle he never met, lost when *Sydney* went down. His mother had never recovered. 'For 67 years [she] diligently researched, enquired and prayed that some time in her life time she would find out the full truth about what actually happened and the location of the *Sydney's* final resting place.'

Heathcote recalled that she used to liken herself to that plaintive figure fronting the memorial at Geraldton: 'the lady staring out to sea waiting for news of a loved one'. His mother 'often said she would never have full closure until the final position of the ship was found'. Nola Gardiner died in January 2008 'only weeks from hearing the news she longed for'. *Sydney's* discovery came too late for her to receive any consolation from knowing its location. 'Knowing my mother', Heathcote concluded, 'she would have received the news and [would] be at rest at long last.'⁶⁸

Garry Baverstock, a nephew of Able Seaman Ernest Baverstock, who died in *Sydney*, believes the same 'unresolved closure [was] suffered by the families of [all] the 645-crew': 'From my experience, not knowing the truth has certainly been a burden unfairly suffered by the siblings, wives and children of the [men] lost.'⁶⁹ It was true of his family at least. Garry's nephew Paul recalls that his grandfather (Ernest's brother) was convinced a Japanese submarine had 'finished off' *Sydney*. 'Why were those Jap bastards [*sic*] in our waters anyway?' Grandpa continued: 'They were going to mine the whole bloody coast!' It was the peddling of such conspiracy theories that delayed the discovery of the wreck too long for such people as Nola Gardiner.⁷⁰ The most ardent believers in a cover-up remained unapologetic after the wrecks were found.⁷¹

Finding *Sydney*, as one contributor after another put it, meant 'we can finally say farewell'. That word couldn't be used by parents convinced their sons might return. As was the case with prisoners or airmen posted missing, the absence of a body (and the want of corroboration by survivors) meant there was always 'a faint hope' their boy had somehow survived. The niece of Stoker James Blackwood remembered that his parents refused the issue of their son's medals. 'Right up until my grandmother died aged 99 she still believed he would come home.' Able Seaman Donald Jones' niece recalled: 'Until the day she died, Donald's mother believed her son would one day return.' She had 'also lost a brother at Gallipoli'. The nephew of Stoker Archibald Thomson was clearly proud of the uncle he'd been named after. 'Archie was a good-looking young sailor and had a close relationship with a young lady who for over 20 years after the loss of the *Sydney*, continued to place memorial notices in the *West Australian* newspaper on the anniversary of the sinking.' Archie's mother was never reconciled to the loss of her son: 'Meg would not accept the fact that she would not see him again and for many years while doing her house work, she would say to other family members "I wonder if today is to be the day that Archie will walk in through the door."' In some cases, the discovery of *Sydney* was said to end a lifetime of wondering. In that sense, closure seemed an appropriate term.⁷²

Yet the experience of those who undertook pilgrimages to *Sydney* reveals far more complex patterns of mourning than the neat rhetoric of 'closure' would suggest. While Merle Campbell disliked the term, being on *Manoora* was 'absolutely closure' for her.⁷³ She was relieved that DNA tests carried out on the body at Christmas Island returned a negative result, yet was upset when a naval medical officer arrived in uniform to take a swab from her. The 'sadness' of the lone grave of the unknown sailor who was reinterred in the Geraldton war cemetery on 19 November 2008 was, for Campbell, less settling than the thought that her brother was with his shipmates.⁷⁴

Others were less sanguine. Former Victorian magistrate Ted McGowan, whose brother died in the battle with *Kormoran*, told the ABC: 'It doesn't bring closure. I've lost a brother and that's that.'⁷⁵ In 2006 Rebecca Mayo's father had told ABC's 'Stateline' in South Australia that 'we all want closure', when asked how he felt about participating in DNA tests that were trying to identify the body on Christmas Island.⁷⁶ After his voyage on *Manoora*, he spoke instead of an 'opening' that would allow him to think properly of the man he never knew as his father.⁷⁷ The former chairman of the Finding Sydney Foundation, Ted Graham, became well aware of how fraught it was to use the term 'closure'. He preferred to speak of a 'measure of peace', closely echoing the words of George VI in the messages of condolence sent to the families of deceased Empire servicemen.⁷⁸

Nor is 'closure' always in evidence in those tributes pasted on the *Sydney* memorial website. To the contrary, nephews and nieces, sons and daughters, grandchildren and cousins strive to keep the memory of these men vivid and alive. They write in the most intimate ways of men they seldom knew as individuals, recording nicknames, anecdotes, stories 'related to me by our mother'. As boys, members of *Sydney*'s crew are described as 'larrikins', 'practical jokers' and 'day dreamers'. Don would climb trees and drop acorns down on his sisters, chase the girls and put frogs down their dresses. Ben, on the other hand, was 'quiet and reserved', tinkered endlessly with his radio, played the guitar and ukulele. Often these 'memories' evoke a physical presence, men who brim with life, vitality, virility. Stoker Robert McConnell 'loved his dog, Flash', and enjoyed running, boxing and cricket. Donald Jones was always 'mucking about in boats', his niece recalled, underscoring his early connection with the sea.⁷⁹ Most describe 'their' sailors as handsome, and almost without exception they are young. The men look out from photographs posted on the website, asserting the 'previous aliveness' of the dead.

And in other ways as well the website serves to 'materialise memory'. Families reproduce artefacts they treasure: a jumbled assortment of medals and photographs; service records and family letters; 'a small, cream, fine woollen, polar bear I named



'I wonder if today will be the day that Archie will walk through the door': a photograph of Stoker Archibald Thomson, posted on the HMAS Sydney II Memorial website. Archie's interests, the family reminds us, included cycling and football; 'a good looking young sailor', he was also popular with the ladies.

Source: courtesy of the Naval Association of Australia

“Poly Bosom Friend”); a ‘favourite toy’, given by a ‘fun loving uncle’ on the last days of his leave. All these objects are intimate, but letters eloquently so. Ordinance Artificer 4th Class Alan Cunnington ‘wrote beautiful letters’, which his wife Yvonne ‘kept lovingly tied with blue ribbon’. Yvonne’s last letters to him ‘were returned to her from the Dead Letter Office and remained unopened until she shared them with her daughter in the summer of 1989’. Inside was the picture of his wife and daughter, ‘which he had asked for, but never got to see’.⁸⁰

A large number of postings scan that ‘dreadful pink telegram’, expressing ‘deep regret’ for the loss of a man ‘missing as a result of enemy action’. Some appear to be in pristine condition, as if hurriedly locked away the moment they were read. And a number of these correspondents recreate the moment families heard news of the sinking, recording, in cyberspace, the terrible unfinality of a loved one’s death:

I was feeding Bruce [Margaret remembered]); he was on my knee at the time, when I heard the knock at the door. We lived in a fairly secluded part of Boronia [Victoria] and had very few visitors so we all followed our mother to the door. Mr and Mrs Dyer, the local postmaster and his wife, had waited till the post office closed for the day and had walked the long distance to personally deliver the telegram. Our mother did not cope with all the uncertainty; she walked the floor night after night. Later naval friends of Dad called to see us, always the talk was that after the war we would know just what happened to the *Sydney* ... I waited till the end of the war always expecting my Dad to return.

Stan remembered with the same dreadful clarity ‘that steamy night in November 1941’: ‘I can still see my Mother standing at the foot of my bed crying and my Father at the side of my bed also crying. All he could say, “READ THIS, IT’S JIMMY” and he handed me the ... telegram ... Both my Mother and Father went to their graves not knowing what had happened to their son.’⁸¹

It seems unlikely that these postings on the *Sydney* website serve the purpose of securing ‘closure’. Rather, as we noted with the case of *Montevideo Maru*, they offer a forum for what Pat Jalland has called ‘expressive grief’. And they were a chance to assemble what one correspondent called a ‘jigsaw of memories’. ‘My story is about a missing part of my childhood,’ Ellen wrote in her ‘Reflections on my father’. ‘I would like to have held his hand.’⁸² A very similar patterning of memory, and reckoning with unresolved loss, can be seen in the way families commemorate Bomber Command.



'unresolved loss': the burial of an unknown serviceman from HMAS Sydney. The body was carried across the Indian Ocean in a Carley float and finally came ashore at Christmas Island. Despite DNA testing, the identity of the man remains a mystery. He was interred beneath a gravestone reading 'Known unto God' in Geraldton War Cemetery, families of Sydney's crew attending the funeral.

Source: Department of Defence. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia

9

CHAPTER NINE

JOURNEYS INTO NIGHT

Bomber Command

RAF Bomber Command squadrons were concentrated in Lincolnshire, in England's East Midlands. The principal targets for Bomber Command crews in 1944–45 ranged from the nearby areas of occupied northern France to the far eastern parts of Germany, including Berlin. In the latter case, a successful operation could take up to nine hours to complete, usually in darkness. More Australians were killed flying with Bomber Command, as a proportion of the overall force, than in any other theatre of World War II in which Australians took part.



'targets for Bomber Command': routes prepared for pilots over occupied Europe and Germany, and the airfields to which some returned.

Source: John Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy, 1939-1943* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1954), pp. 318-19.

Fixing the wings of an Avro Lancaster to its fuselage is never an easy task. In the dining room of an ageing farmhouse near Barham in southern New South Wales, a 'Lanc' lies on its back while Trevor T. fiddles with struts and screws to put the aircraft together. A musician and retired dairy farmer, Trevor indulges this pastime as secretary of the Cohuna Model Flying Club. After nearly 20 years work, this one-sixteenth scale model of Britain's most famous bomber of World War II is nearing completion.

Like his three friends and fellow club members looking on, Trevor's passion for flying machines was ignited half a century ago when Paul Brickhill popularised tales of wartime aerial daring in *The Dam Busters* (1951) and *Reach for the Sky* (1954). Brickhill, born in Melbourne in 1916, brought a very personal experience of war to his literature. Having joined the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during World War II, the fighter pilot and journalist was shot down over Tunisia in 1943. He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Germans, an experience that became the basis of his most famous work, *The Great Escape* (1950).

As Trevor and his friends go about their work, a bachelor farmer sits at the nose of the aircraft. He knows Lancasters better than Brickhill and certainly better than anyone else in the room. Edgar P., who is now aged 91, flew 50 missions in them over Europe between May 1943 and April 1945 as a member of Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command.

The walls around him testify to those years. Back then, Edgar commanded one of the most technologically sophisticated pieces of machinery in the British war effort. Citations for his two Distinguished Flying Crosses sit in a frame by the door. Photographs of his crew hang on an adjacent wall. They show young men in flying suits, dwarfed by the aircraft behind them. Nearby there are the crests of his three RAF squadrons: Nos 100, 625 and 550. A portrait of the young Queen Elizabeth watches from the opposite side of the room. In the adjoining lounge-room, Winston Churchill sits in a frame above the mantelpiece.

Churchill's enthusiasm for Bomber Command's practice of area bombing had faded quickly by the end of March 1945, but the dangers Edgar and his comrades faced remain fresh in his mind. 'The Jerries could sit off with their cannons at 800 yards and just pick you off,' said Edgar, his voice dropping. 'If you were flying straight and level, they could just pick you off. You see, I've seen dozens and dozens go down. You'd just see this little bit of tracer across the sky and the little flame about two-thirds of the way [along the aircraft] ... and the next thing, you'd see it going down in flames.'¹



'If you were flying straight and level': Edgar in the cockpit of a Lancaster. Few pilots survived as many as 50 missions over Europe. The chance of surviving 50 operations was around 30 per cent.

Source: courtesy of Annie Barr

OPS: BOMBER COMMAND'S MISSION

When the first Australians arrived to join aircrew in RAF squadrons in March 1941, the Lancaster had not yet entered active service. They flew in Wellingtons and Whitleys – aircraft with crews of six rather than the seven that flew in Lancasters from 1942. Heavy, four-engined bombers such as these required long, flat airfields for take-off and landing. Lincolnshire, in England's East Midlands, was the perfect place for these squadrons to be based. Still known today as Bomber County and home to such active stations as RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire's low and largely featureless landscape had long been recognised by the RAF and its antecedents as being an ideal location to situate an attacking aerial force within easy reach of continental Europe. From the RAF's earliest days, Lincolnshire was where its future leaders would be schooled in doctrines and theories of aerial bombing. At their most extreme, bombing theorists promised victory from winged armies who would take the fight to the enemy well beyond the range of artillery, leading to the collapse of political regimes from within and the avoidance of the slow, mechanised carnage that had taken place in the previous world war.

The European war that began with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 was the opportunity that the theorists had been waiting for to put their ideas to the test. Too often, however, the results of Bomber Command's wartime operations did not match the rhetoric of its leaders. Much was promised in its ability as a precision force (celebrated, for instance, in the legend of the Dambusters), but its real power lay in laying waste to large areas of industrial and residential zones. To state this in no way diminishes the bravery and skill of those who made up its aircrews, but it does form an important backdrop to thinking about the reluctance with which Bomber Command has been commemorated since the end of the war.²

Like other Dominion nations, the Australian Government decided early in the war to commit members of its own air force to the aerial defence of Britain. Like Britain, Australia had created an air force independent of the army and the navy (in 1921). It was an air force, however, that Australian policy-makers were willing to direct primarily to imperial rather than home defence on the assumption that Singapore would hold off any attack from the north. The failure to plan for a Japanese attack and the allocation of air resources to the British war effort was shown for what it was in the ease with which Darwin and other northern towns were bombed from February 1942. Moreover, the government's decision to commit men and resources to the Empire Air Training Scheme 'had the effect of transforming the RAAF into an organisation devoted to the recruitment and basic training of aircrew destined for operations in Europe'. They called it the 'surrender' of aircrew to Britain. Military historians still disagree over what exactly that phrase meant.³

More than 10 000 Australian men flew with Bomber Command between 1941 and the end of the war. As the official historian of the RAAF notes, service in RAF Bomber Command was the largest demand on Australia's overseas air force during World War II.⁴ Some 4050 of them died on active service in training, on operations and in prisoner-of-war camps. The deaths of those men represented 7.3 per cent of the total number of British and Commonwealth airmen killed in Bomber Command; 55 783 in all. In comparison with other theatres of war in which Australians fought, those in Bomber Command suffered a disproportionately high number of casualties: higher, as a percentage of casualties, than any other branch of the armed forces and second in total only to the 8000 men who died as prisoners of the Japanese.

'FALLEN AIRMEN': THE FIRST COMMEMORATIONS

Official commemoration of Bomber Command lagged well behind other branches of the armed forces in which Australians had fought during World War II for several reasons. Australia's proximity to the Pacific War made combat in Europe seem distant and of lesser importance than the fight against Japan. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Australian political leaders were happy enough to celebrate the nation's martial traditions on the Gallipoli Peninsula and at Kokoda, but few were willing to visit airfields from which Australian airmen had flown, or the cemeteries in which those who were killed are buried. It was a different story during the war itself. The last entry that Flying Officer C.T. O'Riordan (a Sydney barrister-at-law and air gunner) recorded in his diary, before his death over Germany on 29 July 1943, was a visit to his squadron by Dr H.V. Evatt, the Australian Minister for External Affairs. Then the government was all too willing to acknowledge the contribution of Bomber Command – and to urge men on to even greater sacrifice. With the war won, that acknowledgement was no longer needed.⁵

Then there was the difficulty inherent in commemorating airmen. In some cases, the men of Bomber Command were well served by longstanding protocols governing remembrance. In cemeteries like Brookwood in the south of England, Australian airmen of World War II are buried alongside soldiers of World War I, marked by the same regulation tombstone, honoured with insignia and family epitaph. Not that there was always much to bury. One rear gunner entitled his memoirs *They Hosed Them Out*: 'flak' and cannon fire ripped through a human body as easily as they tore apart an aircraft's fuselage.

The missing posed another kind of problem. First there was the inconclusive nature of their deaths. In any given raid, Bomber Command would lose between 2 and 10 per cent of aircraft and crew. 'Lose' was an appropriate term. Unless a bomber was seen exploding in mid-air, no one could rule out absolutely the possibility of survivors. The chance that men had parachuted to safety prompted a desperate flurry of correspondence from their families: 'Is there any chance he has been taken prisoner?' 'The plane came down in the Channel; is there no hope of rescue?' 'He cannot be dead; I do not feel that he can be.' 'Missing Presumed Dead' was the message sent to next of kin – and, like the families of prisoners of war, they waited out the war in a kind of limbo. Nor did war's end always promise certainty. Six of Lurline's brothers served in the forces, three in the RAAF and three in the AIF. The two eldest airmen were killed within ten days of each other in 1942: Kingwell (King), flying Blenheims in the Middle East, and Fred in a bombing raid over Germany. 'I used to have dreams', she said, 'that they hadn't really been killed ... and that they'd lost their memories or something like that and couldn't come home.' Her youngest brother, Bruce, too young to be caught up in the war, confirms that he had similar dreams and that for years he couldn't believe that they were dead. These feelings continued for decades, ending only after Lurline and Bruce made visits to Fred's grave in Germany. She remembers a visitors' book in which she wrote 'Goodbye, Fred', and burst into tears.⁶

After the war, authorities again faced the challenge of commemorating the missing. More than 20 000 men and women lost their lives in operations from bases in Britain and north-east Europe and have no known grave. The scale of that loss (almost half the total fatalities) merited a memorial all of its own. In 1953 the Imperial War Graves Commission raised 'a Shrine' beside a wooded field overlooking Runnymede. As with every memorial examined in this book, the site was carefully chosen. Runnymede was the place Magna Carta was signed, a symbol of liberty (the Queen noted in her speech) not inappropriate for the war against fascism. The peaceful Surrey countryside surrounding it is spotted with World War II airfields. Most of the larger 'dromes' for heavy bombers were located further north, but it mattered that Runnymede was also 'air force country'. The memorial took the form of a cloister, 'guarded' at the entrance by an eagle. On its walls the names of the dead are listed by year, swelling with the casualties of massed bombing raids in 1943–44. The names of 1956 Australians and New Zealanders are carved on the towering panels, watched over by their national emblems.⁷



'she wrote "Goodbye": Lurline visited the grave of her brother in 1985, more than 40 years after he died. Here Fred Keck appears in his RAAF uniform.

Source: Lurline Stuart

To mark the dedication of Runnymede, the IWGC issued an invitation to all the next of kin of those commemorated there. The commission provided a parking voucher to those who motored to the site, and British Railways offered a generous discount on all its services to Surrey. But to many grieving relatives in Australia that was just an ‘added indignity’. They had lost their sons or husbands or fiancées on the other side of the world, and most would never see their memorial. Some Australians were present at Runnymede’s dedication. An official delegation was led by the Australian High Commissioner and included an RAAF contingent serving in Malta. Six pilgrims had their fares and travelling expenses paid by the Commonwealth; as we’ve seen, that set a costly – some would say unfair – precedent.

John McQuitty had three sons who served with the RAAF abroad; two did not return. Bill McQuitty’s plane was severely damaged in a bombing raid in 1941; the engine gave out nine miles from the English coast, and the aircraft crashed into the sea. Robert was killed during the invasion of Europe, his aircraft being ‘blown to pieces’. The remains of both men were ‘irrecoverable’.

The other relatives who attended lost men in similar circumstances – although the Australian media did not quite appreciate the pathos of their story. The *Australian Women’s Weekly* reported Connie Hoffmann’s trip as a shopping tour and social outing as much as a pilgrimage: ‘She is delighted at the prospect of buying English and Parisian clothes’ and ‘the greatest thrill’ of all was ‘the thought of meeting the Queen’. Mrs Hoffmann was the nominee of the War Widows’ Guild. Her husband, Flight Sergeant Owen Hoffmann, went down with a Wellington bomber. He never saw his son Daryl, who was born in April 1943. The *Weekly*’s report says much about the rush to forget in a post-war period marked by rampant consumerism. But it also tells us a great deal about the privileged social backgrounds of those ‘lucky enough’ to be chosen and the way tourism so often intersects with pilgrimage.⁸

And sometimes the ‘lucky’ ones were simply resented. Violet Hancocks lost her only child in a bombing raid over Bremen. She was angered that service organisations chose those to be subsidised – they would always favour their own. Nor did she think anyone had the right to represent her. ‘Suffering cannot be quantified’, she tried to explain to the Australian High Commissioner; it has ‘a strange uniqueness’. Most of all Mrs Hancocks railed against a hierarchy of entitlement that seemed to value a wife’s loss above that of a mother.

When you tell me that other people will be there, including Mrs Vasey [founder of the War Widows’ Guild of Australia], I do not feel at all comforted. Nobody can act as liaison between myself and my dead child. He had his own lonely and desperate end and I have my lonely and desperate grief. I have found from consulting the executive of the mothers’



'the thrill of meeting the Queen': Mrs Hoffmann and her son and niece gaze at a map of 'Royal Britain'. Here the *Women's Weekly* expresses a strong sense of family values and a fervent belief in the British Empire. The children did not join Mrs Hoffmann on her pilgrimage to Britain.

Source: National Library of Australia

organisations that there has been a great deal of uneasiness over the fact of Mrs Vasey's selection as representative to the Coronation. Nobody doubted she had the right to be there, but the question was asked 'Why war widows exclusively, and no accredited representative of a mothers' organisation?'⁹

The wife of an English soldier denied a pension in Australia, Mrs Hancocks nursed a deep sense of injustice. And she asserted a moral economy quite at odds with the consensual language of shared loss and common sacrifice. She believed that a fare to England was scant 'compensation' for all her 'years of pain':

From a monetary point of view alone, the Commonwealth is in our debt. [It] cost £2000 to rear and educate a boy to the age of 21 years, yet when they died in the service of their country we got NOTHING. Now we are to be deprived of the right to accept an invitation to see the unveiling of the war memorial because we haven't the money to travel there. Is this just or honourable, especially when so many of our legislators are going to the Coronation at public expense? We who have known the prolonged anxiety of the message 'missing' have particular claim to the consideration of our country. The memorial is the only tangible thing at which we can pay homage and show our love.¹⁰

Mrs Hancocks never returned to England. Of the 20000 who attended the dedication service at Runnymede, only a few hundred at most had any direct association with the Australian airmen. But unlike many of the sites in Asia we've considered, family ties to the Old Country facilitated a pilgrimage by proxy. Mrs Watts of Toowoomba did not believe her suffering was 'unique' and asked her sister Agnes to represent her: 'She would like me to take notice of the service [Agnes wrote from Chelsea in London] and let her know all the news.' Edith Watts' son Richard was killed when his aircraft 'crashed in flames' near Breuvery-sur-Coole on the night of 3/4 May 1944. The fuselage of the Lancaster was spread over a large area and 'several bits of flesh were found amongst the wreckage': 'These were collected [an Air Ministry official reported] and buried near the crash but are not marked by a cross. I searched in the vicinity and found several odd bits of unidentifiable clothing. I consider it most likely that the bodies of the unaccounted for members of this crew were completely destroyed by the explosion.' The Air Ministry spared Edith Watts the details of the search. But that stark word 'irrecoverable' probably told her more than enough.¹¹

Officers at Australia House and the War Graves Commission were kept busy managing such relationships. They also briefed next of kin on where, when and how to send their floral tributes. A wreath or surrogate mourner ensured some

kind of presence at the service. And the media of the time strived to build that same sense of connection. The ABC broadcast the entire proceedings, not just the address by the Queen. And in the far north of Australia, an article in the Townsville *Bulletin* invited readers to imagine themselves in that quiet corner of England: the Queen stepped forward, it noted, to rest a 'heart shaped wreath of pink carnations' on the cream white stone of remembrance. 'Beside it lay a wreath of English crimson roses', a tribute to Flight Lieutenant John Allsop, the first of many Australian airmen killed in World War II.¹²

Commemorative events like the dedication of the Runnymede memorial focused on the air force as a whole rather than on separate command structures. That is yet another reason why the first pilgrimages to Bomber Command sites were private activities with very little state involvement. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the number of combat veterans of the Great War rapidly decreased (the last, Claude Choules, died in 2011) and attention began to turn to the following generation of old men who epitomised the face of battle. Those who flew with Bomber Command had lived close to the limits of human experience, both in the manner in which they fought and in the odds they had to overcome in order to survive. Furthermore, the members of that elite group who were still alive in the early 2000s were approaching the limits of ordinary human longevity.¹³ There was one final compelling reason why commemorating Bomber Command was never as straightforward as it was for veterans of earlier wars or indeed those who fought in other theatres between 1939 and 1945. A question had long hung over the conduct of the Allies' prosecution of the bombing campaign over Europe: was it justified by military necessity and the existing rules of war? British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had been in no doubt about the necessity for combined RAF and United States Army Air Force raids over residential and industrial areas of Germany during the winter of 1944–45. After the fact, however, he began to display a marked reticence towards area bombing that was summed up in his minute to senior staff officers of 28 March 1945: 'After stating that "the destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing", he insisted there was a need for "more precise concentration on military objectives, such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive".'¹⁴

Dresden was not Bomber Command's most deadly attack, neither in the number of the city's inhabitants who were killed (25 000), nor in the built-up area razed (59 per cent).¹⁵ The symbolism of the destruction that took place there grew out of proportion with that suffered by such cities as Hamburg, which was attacked 17 times between January 1942 and April 1945, resulting in the destruction of 75 per cent of its built-up area and the deaths of many more people. As the German

historian Sönke Neitzel has observed, the ‘destruction of Dresden was a tragedy; but it was one tragedy among many’.¹⁶ With the increasing attention placed on Dresden in particular and area bombing in general, some former members of Bomber Command began to experience feelings that they had managed to avoid for most of their lives. Alan Walker, a South Australian wireless air gunner in No. 467 Squadron RAAF, lived the last decade of his life tormented by nightmares of the ‘wizard fires’

accompanied by the screams of men, women and children. The burnt, the dying and the horribly injured filed past him. Alan, like [his brother] Laurie, joined the RAAF in part to avoid the awful immediacy of death on the battlefield. The war seemed so much cleaner and more clinical in an aeroplane way above the field of battle, but for Alan this had simply postponed the torment and guilt. No amount of reasoning could reach him, not that he asked for help.¹⁷

RECOVERING MEMORY: LOCAL COMMEMORATIONS

It was perhaps in spite of the increasingly vociferous criticisms of the bombing campaign that, from the late 1970s, squadron associations and local community groups began to place memorial stones near the sites of former airfields in and around Lincolnshire. Unlike the larger units of organisation in the army and the navy (such as battalions and ships), the strongest bonds in the air force existed on a much smaller scale, chiefly between men in individual aircrews. To a large extent their survival depended on the strength of that bond. This was evident well before the first mass raids were flown in May 1942: ‘Thus, although it was the pilot alone who must resolve within his heart the fears attendant on pressing the aircraft into deliberate attack against heavy defences, and make all decisions on the basis of reports furnished by his crew, it was becoming more and more apparent that the corporate efficiency of a harmonious crew could exceed that of its ablest member, while the efficiency of an unsettled crew tended to approximate that of the most inattentive member.’¹⁸

The more recent pattern of pilgrimage to Bomber Command sites has therefore centred very strongly on those places in which aircrew spent their time on active service: the towns and airfields of Lincolnshire. Individual men in some cases made journeys of their own in the years that followed the war. Warren B. recalls a story of his father, who flew with No. 460 Squadron RAAF, suddenly pulling over during a drive through the English countryside and running across a field towards a small

airfield. Above the noise of the car's motor (and to the amazement of his wife) he had heard the Rolls Royce Merlin engines of a restored bomber being started nearby.¹⁹

The placement of memorial stones and the creation of squadron associations allowed for more collective commemoration to take place in the 1980s and 1990s. Pilgrimage took on more ritualised forms of commemoration that involved solemn remembrance and church services followed by celebration at reunion dinners. This pattern is all too evident in the tiny Lincolnshire village of North Killingholme, the airtime base of No. 550 Squadron RAF. In 1982 a stone commemorating the squadron was unveiled on the main road next to the former airfield. A squat granite pillar, bearing the insignia of the squadron, it marked the place where aircrews turned off the main road towards the tarmac and yet another mission courting with death. Ten years later the 550 Squadron Association was created and the first of many services held in St Denys' church. The 1990s also saw the installation of a memorial stained-glass window in the church's southern nave. It depicts the view through the cockpit of an aircraft returning home, gold and green in the lower section representing the earth, blue and white above the sky and clouds. An upturned 'V' of yellow lights denotes the runway with a flare path. Images of the church and a windsock beckon an exhausted aircrew down to earth. A northern constellation shines above them. The base of the window pays tribute to all who served at North Killingholme in the period from 1943 to the end of the war – RAF, RAAF, RCAF, RNZAF and WAAF. The St Denys parish tribute is an instance of how memorials address different constituencies. More vernacular in character is the makeshift museum set up in the local town hall. The 550 Association (an active social group in the tiny township of 200) 'commandeered' two rooms and promptly stocked them with more than 500 photographs and mementoes. Here the old men and women of the squadron find a place to remember, fading images of airmen and their Lancs reminding North Killingholme of a fading connection with the past. But the makeshift museum is a place for the township as well. The old women of the village were girls when the squadron was stationed there. Every night they would count the number of Lancs that went off on a mission 'and every morning they knew how many hadn't returned'.²⁰

Voluntary associations like the 550 Association allowed relatives, friends and, most often, the children of Bomber Command personnel an opportunity to participate in rituals and ceremonies that remembered the dead and commemorated their war service. In the following 20 years, the children in particular would play an ever-increasing role in organising and sustaining these activities. As Jack H., one of the few surviving Bomber Command pilots, remarked at the association's twentieth church service, they were 'an extended family' now.²¹



'the view returning home': No. 550 Squadron memorial window, St Denys' church, North Killingholme. Note the RAAF acronym; 550 was a composite squadron made up of airmen from throughout the Empire. Vernacular tributes are often less overtly religious. Note the wreath left at the No. 550 Squadron memorial stone (right).

Source: Bruce Scates

TOWARDS A NATIONAL MEMORIAL

With the increased attention given to commemorating Bomber Command at a local level, moves were soon underway to give it a greater national profile in Britain and beyond. In 1985 the Bomber Command Association was formed as a means of 'perpetuating the Command's history with truth, dignity and pride'.²² The association was open to all former members of Bomber Command, and it quickly began to agitate in the English capital for better recognition of their war service. In little time, the association's members and supporters showed themselves to be effective lobbyists. On 31 May 1992 the Queen Mother unveiled a greater than life-sized bronze statue of Sir Arthur Harris outside the RAF Church of St Clement Danes. It was the fiftieth anniversary of Harris's appointment as commander-in-chief of Bomber Command. He now, quite literally, stood alongside the other great air commander, Air Chief Marshal Hugh 'Stuffey' Dowding, who led Fighter Command against the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain. He stands in uniform with his hands clasped behind his back, facing Australia House. The inscription underneath Harris's statue made clear that it was more than just one man who was being commemorated: 'IN MEMORY OF A GREAT COMMANDER AND OF THE BRAVE CREWS OF BOMBER COMMAND, MORE THAN 55 000 OF WHOM LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. THE NATION OWES THEM ALL AN IMMENSE DEBT.'

Paying further homage to Harris's leadership and his crews' bravery was complicated by the political backdrop of European reunification during the 1990s. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the long Cold War between the Western and Soviet powers came to an end. The new spirit of European unity demanded reconciliation between old foes that had lain on either side of the Iron Curtain. This threw the former East German city of Dresden, which had served as a metonym for Bomber Command's destructive power since the early 1960s, into even greater prominence as it was incorporated into the new Federal Republic of Germany. The city's baroque Frauenkirche was rebuilt with the aid of British fund-raising and craftsmanship, largely through the auspices of the Dresden Trust (created in 1993). Its reconstruction stood 'for a rapprochement between Germany and Britain, Eastern and Western Europe; the Frauenkirche is no longer the stone accusation it stood during its long post-war life as a war memorial'.²³ As that reconstruction was taking place, efforts to further commemorate Bomber Command at a national level in the UK were caught between competing impulses: the first, towards greater European unity and reconciliation, and the second, in which British identity was firmly anchored in the role that the nation played during World War II.

As the final touches were being added to the Frauenkirche in time for its reopening in 2004, a rash of memorials to various aspects of World War II were

being unveiled, or were being prepared for unveiling, in London. A statue of five bronze figures that constitute a monument to the Royal Tank Regiment was unveiled by its colonel-in-chief, the Queen, in June 2000. Two years later, at the top of Constitution Hill, four stone columns that form memorial 'gates' were dedicated to the memory of British servicemen from the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean who had served in the armed forces between 1939 and 1945. In 2004 the sacrifice of animals in war was recognised in a Portland stone monument unveiled by the Princess Royal on Park Lane ('They had no choice' reads part of the inscription). On the sixtieth-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Britain, in 2005, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall unveiled a bronze relief that sits atop a stone structure situated at the Embankment, alongside the Thames. Significantly, the memorial carries the crest of Fighter Command, and fund-raising efforts for the memorial, led by the Battle of Britain Historical Society, were championed in the press by the *Daily Mail*. With this and other memorials in place, it would only be a matter of time before somebody asked when the same would be done for Bomber Command.

When that moment did come, in October 2007, it happened during a lunch at Grosvenor House on Park Lane, hosted by the Heritage Foundation, a philanthropic organisation of British comedians, musicians, actors and sports commentators. For several years, the foundation had been inviting representatives from the Bomber Command Association to its lunches. The foundation had been doing so since it commissioned a blue plaque to commemorate the life of Kenneth Wolstenholme, an English sports commentator who had won fame calling the 1966 World Cup Final between England and West Germany. During the war, Wolstenholme had flown with Bomber Command. When the foundation's chairman, David Graham, mentioned his admiration for the animals in war monument to the Bomber Command Association's secretary and chairman, their reaction was swift and to the point: 'Yeah, and where the bloody hell's ours?'²⁴

In early 2008 musician Robin Gibb became annual president of the Heritage Foundation. A keen amateur history enthusiast, as well as a member of the Bee Gees, Gibb was keen to advocate for Bomber Command once Graham put it to him that the lack of a memorial was a 'national disgrace'.²⁵ The veteran actor Herbert Lom, well known for his portrayal of Inspector Dreyfus in the *Pink Panther* series and other Hollywood baddies, provided an introduction to the editorial team at the *Daily Telegraph*, which was keen to take up the cause. In early March 2008 Lom wrote a feature for the *Telegraph's* Sunday edition, which concluded with the contact details for the Heritage Foundation.²⁶ The following day, and in the weeks that followed, Graham was inundated with telephone calls, letters and emails from people wishing to pledge their support for the Bomber Command Association's

campaign. 'I just had a feeling', he recalled, 'that this was something so emotional, so important, so big, that the British public would take to it and by God they did.'²⁷

Having generated a public profile for the campaign, and secured support from the highest levels of the British Government, the next task for the newly created Bomber Command Memorial Appeal was to nominate a site for their proposed monument. With new war memorials now proliferating throughout the metropolis, officials at the City of Westminster were tending towards the view that any future proponents of monuments should demonstrate a connection between the site on which they wanted to build and the group or individual being remembered. In the case of the Royal Tank Regiment, its monument was situated next to the Ministry of Defence buildings at Whitehall, while the Battle of Britain sculpture sat near other RAF memorials on the Embankment. Furthermore, it was easy for the champions of the latter cause to make a case for its location being directly underneath the skies in which Fighter Command had defended the city from German bombers.

Not so with Bomber Command. Its scenes of battle lay hundreds of kilometres away, and its airfields were well to the north. The closest connection its crews had to sites in London tended to be those featuring ready access to alcohol or women, or both. New British recruits for the bomber force were inducted in buildings next to the Lords cricket ground, but members of the memorial appeal regarded that site as unsuitable. Something closer to the centre of the city was needed, but where? Buckingham Palace had been hit by a bomb during the war, so perhaps this was the necessary connection to an area within the royal parks. That the bomb was dropped by the enemy's air force required a rethink of that proposal. Committees associated with the memorial appeal occasionally met at the RAF Club, situated at the western end of Piccadilly near Hyde Park corner. Across the road lay the casually kept fields of Green Park. On the opposite side of the park sat the Commonwealth Gates on Constitution Hill. Surely a monument of that size and scale, in that location, befitted the memory of 55 000 dead officers and airmen?

The Bomber Command Association was so impressed by the Commonwealth Gates that it engaged the architect of that project, Liam O'Connor. While Graham had originally suggested something along the lines of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC (which names each of the 58 000 US servicemen and women who died in Vietnam), O'Connor designed a monument that made an obvious reference to the style of architecture found in large Commonwealth war graves on the Western Front, such as Tyne Cot, in which columns and unpolished stone are the dominant features.²⁸ Its use of the Greek Doric order also referenced the Corinthian and Ionic orders seen in the Wellington Arch and the nearby Decimus Burton Screen at the entrance to Hyde Park.



'clustered together': airmen trudge across the tarmac after returning from a raid. The figure on the left gazes skyward looking for survivors of the mission. On the far right, a second crew member wears his parachute like a yoke. Above: At their feet, pilgrims have placed tributes. The photographs of airmen individualise a family's loss.

Source: Damien Williams

The Bomber Command Association submitted O'Connor's plans to Westminster City Council in time for the planning committee to consider the design in early May 2010. Measuring just over 84 metres in length and 8.5 metres in height and with an open pavilion in the middle, it was one of the largest proposals for a memorial seen in London for many years. The pavilion was designed to house a sculpture nine feet high by Philip Jackson, depicting a bomber crew of seven cast in bronze, dressed in their flying suits as they would have been on their return from a raid over Europe. Figurative sculpture often leans towards the heroic in war memorials. Not in this case. The men, clustered together at the end of their long flight, wear their exhaustion on their faces.

The political support that the Bomber Command Association had gathered with the help of such prominent supporters as Robin Gibb was aided by a fund-raising campaign in the pages of the *Telegraph*, which raised approximately £1.5 million. In an election year, with British servicemen and women at war in Afghanistan, it became harder and harder for politicians to say no to the Bomber Command Association's proposal. O'Connor's design was approved without significant modification.

'FINDING MY FATHER': PILGRIMAGES WITH BOMBER COMMAND

At one of the first mass reunions of Bomber Command personnel held in London's Albert Hall in 1949, Harris sent the following message: 'My admiration to those, too few, survivors of our devoted air crews who knocked the enemy flat on land and sea and from the air, and whose sons, if need be, will knock him flatter — after the long-haired gentry get through picking him up, dusting him off, and kissing him better! Happy landings, even when the wheels are up!'²⁹

They were fiercely loyal to their plain-speaking wartime leader known variously as 'Bert', 'Butch' and, most famously, 'Bomber'. 'We want "Bert"', the men chanted.³⁰ Today those chants are no longer heard. In the main, the people who make the trip to commemorate Bomber Command and reunite with members of old squadrons are not the ex-servicemen and women themselves, but their children. Age and time have taken their toll on those who have a direct memory of conflict in the air. Their numbers are rapidly thinning. The sense of loyalty at commemorative events such as the Green Park dedication is still as strong as it was in 1949, except today that feeling is directed at members of the air crew who flew rather than at their wartime commanders.

For the children of Bomber Command the act of pilgrimage becomes one of discovery. This was a chance to find out more about a father some had barely known. John A. attended the dedication ceremony at Green Park in late June 2012, while on his way to attending his third reunion of the 550 Squadron Association in North Killingholme. He serves as the 550 Association's Australian convenor, and it was in that role that he made contact with Edgar, commander of his father's B Flight. John's father flew 36 missions with No. 550 Squadron late in the war. He returned to Australia only to die from an aneurism in 1958, two weeks shy of his thirty-sixth birthday.

Like the other cases we've examined, John's memory of his youth is marred by memories of his father's trauma. David Walker's uncle dreamed of firestorms consuming Europe beneath his aircraft; John's uncle (another airman) of falling from the sky. John's own father suffered from similar nightmares. He vividly remembers being carried by his father from his own bed and placed in his parents' bed early in the morning. The sheets on his father's side were often soaked with sweat. 'It was something none of them got over', he said, 'and how could they?' John has many positive memories of his father, who died at an early age. But he now realises that those hurried shifts from one bed to another were his father's desperate attempt to snatch a few hours sleep after a deeply troubled night. He also knows that the war is inseparable from the story of his family. John's mother Lurline lost two brothers in Bomber Command and an uncle in the Boer War. When his father returned from the war, the birth of John's older brother saw a vain attempt to manage an impossible past: 'The Lancaster my father flew in was called "P" for Peter. Just about everybody in that crew who had a son named him Peter.'³¹ There was nothing accidental in the choice of that name: it was intended to somehow normalise an experience beyond human understanding.

It was John who pushed Edgar to get a passport, arrange a companion for the journey and apply to the Australian Government for support towards his trip to the Green Park dedication service. When asked when he became interested in his father's service in Bomber Command, John said that it was when his own son turned eight. At that time, the boy was the same age as he was when his father died. A few days before the dedication ceremony took place at the Green Park memorial, John asked himself, 'But why am I [here]? It's very much searching for your father. Which if I were writing a book I'd call it *Finding My Father*, but that's been written before.'³² He isn't the only child of a Bomber Command man who could write a book with that title.

Warren expressed a similar sentiment on the day the Bomber Command memorial was unveiled. His father had flown with No. 460 Squadron, survived the

war and died two years ago: 'When I heard the Bomber Command memorial was to be dedicated here in Britain, I all of a sudden had this burning desire to come and represent Dad. I know this is going to be very emotional and for the past few weeks in particular I've been choking up thinking about it. With all the discussion about Bomber Command, you know, with Dad passing away not so long ago it's been ever so painful and I just thought if I didn't come here, if I didn't represent his memory for me, you know, I would rue the day.'³³ Warren went on: 'I've struck a hundred Australian veterans here who *are* my father and I've learned exactly what sort of people the aircrew guys were.'³⁴

Warren continued to talk about what it was like to be among ex-servicemen who had gone through the same training and active service as his father. The previous day, he had accompanied a group of them to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, and he spoke of a 'really unusual experience' that took place: 'There was a Lancaster in the museum and they took down the barriers so the veterans could walk around under the Lancaster. [Pause] It was really strange. [Pause] They were just talking like they were 19, and it was bizarre. These old blokes, they were talking about really technical things, you know, when you started the aircraft you needed to start it on this tank and swap it over to this fuel tank and then all these sort of acronyms and mnemonics and things. They were talking this language, which was a World War II aircraft language that [pause] only they could understand. And probably for 70 years they've never been able to have that conversation with anyone else but themselves. It was incredible, and I started talking to some of them this morning, and they had kind of realised it, and it was just astonishing to watch.'³⁵

It was just as astonishing to see those aircraft fly. John remembered the first flyover he attended at Killingholme, a heavy Lancaster lifting only just above the tree tops and roaring though the sky above them. He also remembered the faces of the old men who flew them: 'Tears were just streaming down their eyes. They were back there.' For John, going back also meant walking the old airfield. 'I want to find where my father's barracks must have been. I would like to walk along the fields and see what's there. There are factories and pylons going across, but you can work out what was there.' In a hot afternoon in July, John wandered across a disused tarmac, peered into abandoned buildings, stood in a field of poppies where his father must have stood, found a photograph of him with the men of his squadron. His pilgrimage ended as he laid a wreath at the No. 550 Squadron memorial. 'It was almost like saying goodbye to my father,' he said. The chance to say goodbye has been a recurrent theme in this study of pilgrimage.³⁶

For both John and Warwick, the impulse to unite a family's story with a wider story of the nation at war drew on material sources of the sort that is so important



'a language only they could understand': former aircrew return to a Lancaster at East Kirkby airfield. A crew's survival depended on the skill and teamwork of its members. Flying a Lancaster was something none of them would forget. Here they resume their places in the aircraft.

Source: Bruce Scates

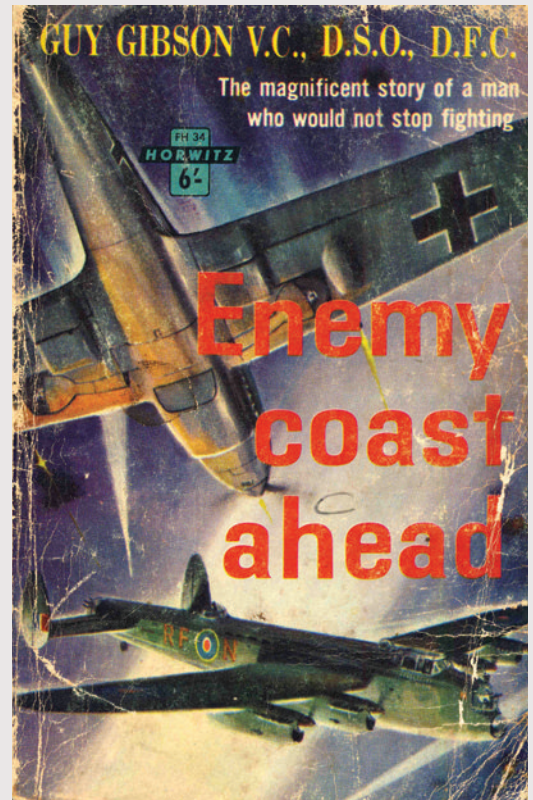


'in a field of poppies where his father must have stood': John walks towards the tarmac at North Killingholme airfield. Throughout the afternoon he sought out places where his father served. Below: he searches for his father in the squadron photograph.

Source: (top) Bruce Scates; (bottom) Damien Williams

to family historians. During the 1990s acquiring the flying logbooks that belonged to each of their fathers was a memorable step towards making their journey back to the UK. They were relics both personal and official that provided a direct link to a period in the lives of their fathers that was highly significant yet, until more recent efforts towards collective commemoration took place, was also deeply personal. And as is so often the case with the archives, it was the lost sources that proved the most tantalising. John's mother had told him often about 'a wonderful diary' kept by his father during the war. So wonderful, in fact, that a wide circle of friends and family borrowed and reborrowed the document. 'This was in the days before you [would] Xerox it off and eventually someone lost it.' John has since collected (and copied) three further diaries from his father's (seven-member) crew but 'of course the diary you've never seen is going to be so much better'. Especially when your father kept that diary.

Diaries are not the only sources that have eluded John: 'When I first became interested in this, when I first found Dad's logbook, some of his crew were still alive. I had met one of them years ago [the rear gunner]. I was going up to Brisbane for a conference and I rang him up and he said, "I would love to see you. Come and have a meal. It would be great to see you, John." Well, I thought, I've only got about half an hour so I foolishly sent him a set of questions, and I probably did mention Essen [Dresden]. And he rang me up and said, "Don't come!" He left three messages in just 15 minutes on my answering machine. "Don't come." Just panicked. So I rang him up and I said, "Did the questions offend you?" He said: "Didn't even read them." I must have triggered a raw nerve. He was so open before that, [when he said] "I would just love to have a beer with you", and so on.'³⁷ John felt the rejection deeply, but he also knew the cause of it. His questions had unsettled a difficult memory about war and the part this man had played in it. Silence was the only defence. There is a different kind of silence in the way Australians commemorate their 'Front Line'.



'a direct link': two autobiographical accounts of Bomber Command. Peter Flynn's *Rear Gunner* (left) was described as an 'on the spot' war story. Flynn joined the RAAF in 1940, flew in fighters and bombers and (being a former journalist) turned his hand to popular fiction. Guy Gibson VC, DSO, DFC was killed on operations with the RAF. His *Enemy Coast Ahead* (right) was avidly read in Australia and a foreword by Sir Arthur Harris accompanied the first Australian edition. 'This is a magnificent story', Harris claimed. 'It is also History.' One of a generation of 'shining youth', Gibson had secured his 'place in Valhalla'. Both books fostered the legend of Bomber Command, deflecting growing anxiety over the morality and military effectiveness of their missions.

Source: Peter Flynn, *Rear Gunner* (Sydney: Calvert Publishing, nd); Guy Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, (1946; Melbourne: Horwitz, 1962); Rare Book Collection, Monash University.



AUSTRALIA'S FRONT LINE

10

CHAPTER TEN

WALKING THE TRAIL

Kokoda

Kokoda has become a byword for the campaign fought between Australian and Japanese forces in the mountains of Papua between July and November 1942. It was fought principally to defend Port Moresby, capital of the Australian territory of Papua and New Guinea. The first Japanese attempts at conquering Port Moresby were severely hindered by significant naval losses in the Battle of the Coral Sea and at Midway in May and June 1942. Undeterred, Japanese ground forces landed at Buna and Gona in July 1942. The Australians were initially forced to withdraw to defensive positions close to Port Moresby but regained ground along the Trail between there and Kokoda. After the war, the dead were reinterred at the Bomana war cemetery, barely 10 kilometres from the capital and considered by many to be the beginning of the Trail.



'fought in the mountains': the route of the Kokoda Trail

Source: Dudley McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area – First Year: Kokoda to Wau* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1959), p. 114.

Running through the centre of Papua like a spine is the towering Owen Stanley Range. On the coast, south of these dark mountains, Port Moresby lies ... through the mountains ... a faint track, a native pad. So it was before the war. Few then passed over this track – only the barefoot natives, now a missionary, now a patrolling officer of the Administration, now one of those lost and wandering white men ... and then come thousands of soldiers climbing, toiling, sweating, panting, trembling, retching, fighting and dying along the track. Now few traces of their long agony remain – and as the track was before they passed, so it is again.¹

Dudley McCarthy wrote these words after walking the Kokoda Trail in the early 1950s.² He also wrote the official history of the Kokoda campaign.³ Little did he know that in years to come, the Kokoda Trail would not be a forgotten war relic. On the contrary, it would become an important and popular site for pilgrimage for generations of Australians.

Despite the inherent dangers in walking the Kokoda Trail, on average, 4000 trekkers (per year) between 2005 and 2010 have attempted the physically and mentally demanding journey along the 96-kilometre Trail.⁴ Dudley McCarthy was wrong. Trekker numbers have generally been increasing since the early 1990s. An exception to this was in 2009. Trekker numbers immediately dropped following a light plane crash in August of that year. Nine Australians were killed when the light plane they were travelling in crashed into the Owen Stanley Range. These nine Australians were flying from Port Moresby to Kokoda to begin walking the Kokoda Trail.⁵ Sadly, these are not the only recent casualties associated with the Trail. The Trail itself is punctuated with memorials honouring not only the soldiers who fought there but also those who died while attempting the walk.⁶

What lures so many to undertake so difficult and dangerous a journey? The historical commentary accompanying a topographical map issued to trekkers suggests an answer. Kokoda assumes legendary proportions in the minds of many. The Kokoda Trail, the commentary tells us, was not just 'a story of courage, mateship, sacrifice and endurance'; it was also (it claims) the first critical phase of the 'battle for Australia'. That phrase has proved contentious. As earlier noted, the Japanese had no immediate intention of invading the Australian mainland; their purpose was the capture of Port Moresby, and the isolation and containment of Allied forces while they pursued other objectives in the Pacific. Having said that, Papua had been an Australian mandated territory since 1906. And it was the key to any advance further south. Holding it was imperative. Japanese forces landed at Gona and Buna in July 1942 and began the 200-kilometre trek over the rugged Owen Stanley Range towards Port Moresby.

If Kokoda was a battle for Australia it was certainly not the only one. Within a month of the landing at Gona, a similar Japanese force attacked Milne Bay on the eastern extreme of New Guinea. Unlike Gona, the landings were repulsed, the first notable land defeat for Japan during the war. It says much for the partial and selective memory of war that Kokoda looms so large in the Australian popular narratives while Milne Bay is often sidelined. And few Australians could place Kokoda in the context of the other Papua New Guinea campaigns, let alone the broader battle for the Pacific.

The elevation of Kokoda in Australia's national imagining of World War II is often dated to Paul Keating's visit to the Trail in April 1992. Three Caribou aircraft carried the Prime Minister's entourage across the Owen Stanley Range, the largest airlift to Kokoda since World War II. As many saw it, Keating's actions that day 'raised that campaign to a new eminence in the pantheon of Australian heroism'. The Prime Minister made his way to a grassy clearing on the old battlefield, sank to his knees and kissed the earth. Previous military campaigns, he declared, were 'mostly imperial conflicts', but this battle was fought 'in defence of Australia'. There could be 'no deeper spiritual basis for the meaning of the Australian nation than the blood that was spilt on this very [place]'.⁷

There is no doubt that Keating's visit raised the profile of Kokoda, yet its emergence as a pilgrimage site began long before his visit and indeed well before the war was actually over. As early as March 1943 newspapers predicted that the Trail would become 'the route of an annual pilgrimage for young men of generations to come'.⁸ Partly that was because so many young men had died there. As the Japanese advanced along the Trail a smaller and far less experienced Australian force fought a series of battles and strategic withdrawals. At Kokoda itself, where the airfield on which Keating landed was one of the key objectives of the campaign, 480 militiamen with barely a few months military training confronted several thousand battle-hardened Japanese. The 39th Battalion fell back to Denaki, then Isurava, where they were finally reinforced. Their new commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Honner, left a frank account of their condition and the physical ordeal men faced on the Kokoda Trail: 'Worn out by strenuous fighting and exhausting movement, and weakened by lack of food and sleep and shelter, many of them had literally come to a standstill. Practically every day torrential rains fell all through the afternoon and night, cascading into the cheerless weapon pits and soaking the clothes they wore ... In these they shivered through the long chill vigil of the lonely nights when they were required to stand awake and alert but still and silent.'⁹

The Japanese, on the other hand, continued to advance. At Isurava, they employed the same tactics that had proved so successful in Malaya, penetrating weak points

in defence and working through seemingly impenetrable jungle to encircle and entrap Australian positions. The Australians left about a hundred dead when they fell back from Isurava, conducting a fighting withdrawal through Eora Creek and Templeton's Crossing. But as the war correspondent Chester Wilmot put it, the Japanese 'paid for every yard' they advanced, and every day they were delayed their meagre supplies dwindled further. The Battle of Brigade Hill in September 1942 was the most ferocious of the campaign – Butcher's Hill, the men of the 2/14th, 2/16th and 2/27th Battalions came to call it. Fighting resumed around Ioribaiwa until the Australians fell back to Imita Ridge.

Here the Japanese advance ground to a halt, hopelessly overextended, short of ammunition, demoralised and exhausted. They were less than 30 kilometres from their objective – Port Moresby – when Japanese commanders ordered them to withdraw. From that point on, the Allies were on the offensive, retracing their steps on the Trail. By November 1942 Australians had retaken Kokoda and the Japanese fought a dogged retreat back to the beaches of Gona and Buna. It took some weeks, and many casualties, for Australian and US forces to secure the northern coast of New Guinea. Reclaiming the Trail had proved a turning point in the war for the Pacific.¹⁰

Each of these locations has a place in the saga of the campaign. Each carries a story. And the Trail now is marked by plaques and memorials relating the exploits of the men who fought and died there. A boulder stands on the place where Private Kingsbury was shot dead, and won his posthumous Victoria Cross, a relief map sculpted by Dr Ross Bastiaan explains the terrain at Brigade Hill and at Isurava four black granite columns are framed by the Owen Stanley Range. Each bears a single word capturing what most trekkers see as the essence of Kokoda: 'Courage', 'Endurance', 'Sacrifice' and 'Mateship'. The first three belonged to the language of Lutyens and Kipling; the last was added at the insistence of the then Prime Minister, John Howard.¹¹

THE PILGRIMS' WAY: EARLY JOURNEYS

As Howard's intervention suggests, these markers for the Trail date from the 1990s and the most recent phase of trekking Kokoda.¹² By contrast, John Laffin walked Kokoda in 1955, barely a decade after the war had ended. Like McCarthy, he found the Trail 'deserted', with 'no hint of the intense activity it knew': 'Any equipment left had long since rotted or been salvaged by the scavengers who followed the war ... The tropics rot everything, except memories.'¹³ But John Laffin was not the only Australian in search of memories at Kokoda. The cemetery at Bomana



'a fighting withdrawal': George Silk's iconic image of a soldier aided by a 'native' on the Trail. The photograph was taken near Buna in 1942 and has come to symbolise the Kokoda campaign. Today's travellers also rely on indigenous 'porters' to carry their packs.

Source: Australian War Memorial, 014028

was completed in 1953, its dedication was attended by virtually all the European population of Port Moresby. As in the past, the government funded a few fares from Australia but not as many as special-interest groups would have wished. Initially the government agreed to fund 38 fares from Australia. The official party was to include three federal ministers, their wives and private secretaries, high-ranking members of the military and diplomatic corps, and two state governors. That left seats on the plane for three widows and six parents, a decision veterans' groups and the bereaved themselves thought 'scandalous'. William Yeo (President of the RSL in New South Wales) claimed that the 'alleged' pilgrimage was just an excuse for 'a holiday' and suggested that politicians' wives 'stand aside'.¹⁴ The War Widows' and Widowed Mothers' Association of Victoria also balked at the inequalities of state-sponsored commemoration. Mrs A.E. McCutchan, Honorary Secretary of the Association, drafted an indignant protest for the group's monthly newsletter:

It is a great disappointment to us that only so few dependants of the men and women buried in Papua and New Guinea were invited to the unveiling of these Memorials by the Federal Government. One would assume the bereaved would have priority over the secretaries of our federal parliamentarians. Why it was necessary for these people to take their secretaries to the unveiling is beyond our comprehension, when over 1000 applications were received by the government from the next of kin of those to whom the Memorial had been erected.¹⁵

The government acted quickly, chartered a second aircraft and increased allocation for service groups and relatives to 23.

Those thousand applications received by the government offer a grim tally of grief. 'Two cousins beheaded', read the remarks on one; '4 sons in services – 3 made the supreme sacrifice', notes another. Mrs Hutchins had seven sons in the Second AIF, '3 died – POW – Ambon 1 other buried at Rabaul' – she was chosen. Mrs A.E. Norbury, a widow who had remarried, was not and was 'regarded as a disqualification'. More than half the applicants were mothers or widows of men killed in action, or as prisoners of war or on the ill-fated *Montevideo Maru*. Some described their sons as 'missing' rather than dead, particularly in the case of vanished aircrew. Mrs Logan from Coburg, Victoria, had both her husband and her son buried at Lae. The government deemed her case 'deserving'. Mrs J.E. Ogilvie from New South Wales was surely just as worthy. All five of her children served in World War II, two as nurses. One son went down with *Sydney*; a second son was lost in the jungles of New Guinea. But Mrs Ogilvie's application was 'regrettably' declined, as were the vast majority of others. Men cited their service in World War I and the number of sons killed, decorated or wounded in World War II. One was a Boer War veteran,

one was partially blind, one limbless. A large number of applications were from families who had lost their 'boys' in Greece, or Africa, or on missions for Bomber Command over Europe. An assisted pilgrimage to New Guinea was one of the few chances they had to truly honour their memory.¹⁶

But most pilgrims to Kokoda were privately funded, then as today. And the closer to Australia, the easier and cheaper the journey. A second party of around 30 people made it to the dedication service, their chartered aircraft flying from Cairns into Port Moresby. This particular pilgrimage was organised by the Cairns subbranch of the Returned Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia and led by the mayor of Cairns himself. Most of its members were the wives or parents of fallen soldiers. The Remembrance Day weekend (as it was called) was structured around the working lives of its participants, something hardly possible for pilgrimages further afield. It began with a ceremonial tree-planting on the new road leading to the gates of the war cemetery; a route the Administrator of Papua renamed the 'Pilgrims' Way'. It continued with a (brief) walk towards the heights of Kokoda, and it ended with a formal service at the Cross of Remembrance. The 'Last Post' was played by 'three native police buglers'; the 'Ode' was recited by Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Barnes, who had served in New Guinea; and relatives were invited to lay their wreaths. After the ceremony, cemetery staff escorted the wives and parents to the graves of their loved ones. By this time, in 1953, all the wooden crosses had been replaced with headstones made of South Australian marble, a touch of home brought to those who could never return to Australia.¹⁷

Accounts of the pilgrimage were circulated widely in the Australian media. They enabled 'imaginary journeys' by families located (by an accident of geography) further south and offered a consoling message to all the bereaved. Standing at the entrance to this 'tropical and picturesque' graveyard, Mr C.H. Lampo, a member of the visiting group, was 'spellbound by the beauty of green trees and flowing trees'. The hills stood around like sentries 'guarding our illustrious dead': 'We felt like trespassers.' Mr Lampo urged parents and friends of Australian war dead to visit Bomana to see 'what words failed to convey'. The mayor agreed. Pilgrimage, he assured his constituency, fosters 'a feeling of personal contact with those who have passed on. It is the kind of feeling you cannot get when you are so far away from the boys who lie at rest up there.'¹⁸

The mayor led a second such pilgrimage in 1954 and a third the year after. Each group grew in size; in 1955 no fewer than 44 Australians travelled to Port Moresby in a specially chartered DC4 aircraft. 'The graves were a glorious site', one woman wrote to the Anzac Agency, 'beautiful yet sad'. 'They are in God's keeping', she concluded. This was the very impression the Imperial War Graves Commission's architects and gardeners had laboured to create.¹⁹



One of the Catalinas which operate from Port Moresby to West

A Qantas Douglas airliner at a New Guinea airport. Qantas operates

NEW GUINEA "BIRD OF PARADISE" SERVICE
INTERNAL SERVICES AND ISLANDS SERVICES



'closer to Australia': Qantas advertises flights to New Guinea. The earlier brochure (above) notes Kokoda on the map and offers a flying-boat service to Lae and Rabaul. Issued not long after the war, it enabled pilgrimage to battlefields and cemeteries 'near' to Australia. The brochure below dates from the late 1960s. The exotic wonders of the region are clearly the focus, anticipating the mixed motivations for trekking Kokoda.

Source: Qantas Airways

For a time it seemed possible that pilgrimages to Papua New Guinea would grow in size and frequency. In 1956 Ansett Airways announced five luxury flying-boat tours of the South Pacific: 12-day tours that took in Port Moresby and Rabaul. Working with returned soldiers' groups and widows' associations, Ansett devised a kind of pilgrimage itinerary, its balanced offering of sightseeing and commemoration working a niche market in the travel industry: 'We expect a lot of women to take an interest in this new venture [a spokeswoman for the Widows' Guild asserted]. Although Remembrance Day will be a sad one, the rest of the trip will make [us] as happy as possible. On Anzac Day we will blaze the Kokoda Trail and pay a visit to the thousands of war graves there.'²⁰

Less adventurous perhaps were the passengers of cruise ships plying the Pacific. Throughout the 1950s regular visits by luxury vessels like the American liner *Coronia* swelled the visitation rates at Bomana. The lack of alternative attractions in Port Moresby left little choice other than a shore excursion to a cemetery. Immaculate expanses of lawn, tropical flowerbeds and a magnificent natural setting made Bomana a sight to see. Not all the passengers were Australians, and not all (as the Anzac Agency conceded) had any direct association with the fallen. But the Trail and the cemetery already had the trappings of historic site and natural wonder. Tour operators recognised Kokoda's potential long before the trekking boom of recent years.²¹

Even so, pilgrimage (and tourism more widely) was slow to develop in Papua New Guinea. 'Annual events' like the Remembrance Day weekend from Cairns soon exhausted the number of parents and wives who 'needed' to go. Returned men were another potential market, and one specifically targeted by Ansett's 'Aerial Tours'. 'Finance stops them all', the tour manager noted, 'swimming, fishing and tennis on Hayman Island' en route a preserve of the well-to-do.²² The expatriate community at Port Moresby put on a 'good show' every Anzac Day, as did the 'planters and patrol officers, missionaries and traders' at Papua's second cemetery at Milne Bay. 'White and brown united in two minutes silence', Colin Simpson remembered, local Papuans proudly wearing their 'Loyal Service' ribbons. But at other times of the year (and outside the cruise season) Bomana had but a trickle of visitors. Laffin came across one of these lonely travellers on his own journey back to New Guinea.

Mr Creighton stopped at the head of a road-wide space, one of two dividing the rows of graves in three sections, and looked slowly over the whole expanse of 4340 graves. He shook his head slowly as if he couldn't believe it. Finally he said, 'I wonder ... how we find a particular grave' ... Unobtrusively I watched Mr Creighton. He was reading the inscription on

the headstone next to that of his son. Then he gave a little helpless gesture, and standing close to the headstone over his son he patted it several times, almost absently, as if he were thinking of something else. I found myself feeling glad that the stone would be warm to his touch. Then without looking at it again Mr Creighton came slowly over the green carpet towards me.²³

We would see that same desire to touch a tombstone generations later.

‘WALKING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS’: EXPERIENCING KOKODA

Undeniably, people's wish to connect somehow with the past is a driving force behind the journey through Papua New Guinea. Ray's father served with the 2/2nd Battalion and fought at Templeton's Crossing on the Trail. Ray's reasons for making the journey to Kokoda were quite straightforward: 'I wished to retrace some of my father's footsteps, experience the challenges of the Track and witness the jungle conditions in which he battled.'²⁴

Recreating an experience is a recurring theme among trekkers, and the usual hardships of walking the Trail are simply not enough for some. Many want to experience the adversity, the danger, as if this could secure some connection with the 'digger experience': 'I wish it would piss down with rain,' one man declared. 'That way, we can really experience what the diggers did.' Committed pilgrims that they are, most trekkers shun the luxuries of the modern world – and Kokoda (more so than any site this book has examined) caters for a narrow range of travellers. 'We were not there to experience five-star accommodation,' Paul explained. 'We were there to follow the route of the diggers.'²⁵

It is the physical act of following the Trail that makes Kokoda different – different from the other sites we've considered and from the earlier tradition of pilgrimages to the Western Front. You don't trek Kokoda in an air-conditioned bus, and even tours that claim to 'recreate' the Death March offer 'modest amenities' en route. This is pilgrimage at its extreme. Much of the trek is spent concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other; that is, literally putting one foot in front of the other. And therein lies an irony. Intent on reflecting on the past, the demands of this journey offer pilgrims little chance to simply stop and think. 'Walking the track is a very personal experience and quite spiritual at times when you have time to reflect instead of gasping for air and simply being buggered.'²⁶

Although it's impossible to 'share' an experience across generations, pilgrims try to appreciate what their relatives might have felt. Being 'there' built what heritage scholars have called a 'sense of attachment', a way 'of intersecting the



'the whole expanse of 4340 graves': Bomana War Cemetery, 2012. Anzac Day has been commemorated here since the cemetery was first established in 1953, the large expatriate community ensuring a good attendance. The ranges in the background mark the beginnings of the Kokoda Trail. At its highest point the path climbs more than 2000 metres above sea level.

Source: Alexandra McCosker

lives of combatants, who in some instances may also be relatives but who can always be empathised with as fellow human beings': 'One can begin to imagine their predicament, from the landscape one sees and the structures one can visit and encounter. Such locations offer a reaffirmation of personal ties, a way of remembering, and of exploring individual and collective identities.'²⁷

In short, the trek was an attempt to 'develop' a kind of ersatz memory, 'trying to put my grandfather into the scene ... laid out before us'.²⁸ This is very different from the postmemory considered elsewhere in this volume. There were no family stories to link this trekker (emotionally if not intellectually) to the Trail. But it reminds us again of how pilgrimage can involve an imaginary as well as an actual journey and how a memory 'not quite one's own'²⁹ (and not properly memory at all) can be created and linked to other narratives of the past.

George's trip to Kokoda served to 'place' his grandfather there – even though his grandfather had not been directly involved in the Kokoda Campaign, and even though the war was a facet of the past his grandfather would clearly have preferred to forget: 'My primary reason for walking the Kokoda Trail was to gain an understanding (albeit, in completely different circumstances) of the country in which my grandfather served. The war, and his time in the Army, was not something he would ever talk about. He did not attend ANZAC Day services, nor did he keep any of his medals [and] never left South Australia one more time in the 60 plus years following his return from PNG.'³⁰ George's 'not knowing' about his grandfather's experiences was significant in that George now sought the information that was missing in his life. Something, as he put it, was 'incomplete':

My grandfather was traumatised by his time in the Army, and in particular in PNG. He never spoke a word of his time in PNG apart from telling us that it was not an experience he wanted to remember or discuss. Having undertaken my own research ... [I know] he became quite ill whilst serving in PNG on his first tour but was required to undertake a second tour 12 months later. It was a long and difficult journey from Adelaide where his unit was based, via multiple trains up to North Queensland before being flown into PNG. He went AWOL twice, both times prior to being deployed, to return to Adelaide to see my grandmother and his two very young children. On both occasions he was court martialled ... He dealt with his bad experiences by shutting them out and not sharing them with others.³¹

George's grandfather sits uneasily within the hero mythology of Kokoda. While one generation wanted to 'shut out' and forget their experiences, subsequent generations are now trying to 'remember' and piece together stories forgotten, lost or suppressed in the past. Like the other pilgrimages this book has examined, many trekkers at Kokoda are opening up rather than closing a dialogue with the past. George specifically rejected that problematic concept, 'closure': 'I did not seek closure from my trip to PNG, it was more about a beginning than an end for me ... I saw this as an opportunity to begin gaining some type of understanding of the environment, seeing the landscape first hand, meeting the local people, smelling the jungle, drinking the water, enduring the heat and humidity, and all the time thinking about what these heroes had done ...'³²

Here we see a quest for an authentic past, the same quest we've encountered elsewhere in this study of pilgrimage. 'Walking in their footsteps' involves something of experiencing 'their soldier's' ordeal and what scholars have called a 'personal physical' element.³³ For that reason most trekkers reject any suggestion that the Trail should be improved (even for safety reasons). Safety wasn't a consideration in 1942, nor should it be one now. And making the Trail an 'easy ride' would diminish it: 'I wanted to see (as close as possible) what the diggers went through – track improvements would definitely detract from the experience ... The Track is an institution in Australia and should be kept. Most go over to challenge themselves and to pay respect to the brave hero's [*sic*] that went before us ... Any improvements by do-gooders and money seekers should be vehemently opposed.'³⁴

This raises the question of who owns Australian heritage outside Australia's borders. Among those do-gooders is the Australian Government, which (under the jointly managed Kokoda Memorial Initiative) has established trekkers' huts along the Trail.³⁵ A place to sleep was one thing, but when it was suggested to one trekker that bridges and railings be installed, he was outraged:

It ain't broke, so for God's sake don't try to fix it! Though I found the trek very taxing ('cause nothing can prepare you for New Guinea but New Guinea) it was an awesome experience and is only becoming more so as I reflect more deeply on it ... perhaps the best part of the trip was how 29 Aussies – young or old, male or female, cane toads or cockroaches, miners or surgeons – when yanked out of their comfort zone (big time!) bonded together to make a great team ... I think it gave us a small glimpse of how those wonderful young blokes in 1942 managed to do what they did.³⁶

JOURNEYS 'HOME'

This reference to 'bonding' reminds us of the many dimensions of the 'Kokoda experience'. Walking the Trail is a team-building exercise for senior management and a practical aid program for one of the poorest communities in Papua New Guinea; Kokoda is the chosen destination of football teams and high school groups, and it has a value quite apart from its connection with Australia's military heritage. Indeed, the Trail's 'stakeholders' are bitterly divided between those who see it as pristine wilderness and those who insist that it's still a battlefield. A large proportion of trekkers are simply not there for the history. It's for the 'adventure', the 'physical challenge', to 'push their boundaries'.

And there can be no doubt that treks across Kokoda also serve as a political and social purpose, particularly in communities riven by religious, cultural and ethnic tension. In the wake of the 2005 Cronulla race riots, Mecca Laalaa (a young Muslim woman from the western suburbs of Sydney) trekked Kokoda in the company of the federal Member from Bankstown, members of a surf life-saving club and a cross-section of the Cronulla community. 'It was all about building relationships,' Mecca explained, 'and sharing ideas and stories.'³⁷

The focus of this study, though, is pilgrimage. Annette's journey was solely about her father.³⁸ Sergeant William (Bill) Guest served with the 39th Battalion in New Guinea. Bill's wartime experiences began when the *Aquitania* set sail from Australia and arrived in Port Moresby in January 1942. He was involved in bitter fighting over the airfield at Kokoda in August 1942. Bill was also responsible for care of the wounded during the long and taxing withdrawal. At one stage, Bill and his party were completely cut off from their battalion and in danger of encirclement. Later in life Bill recalled 'thinking that this would be it for them'.³⁹ Like the prisoners' testimony this book examined earlier, it is clear that Bill 'wore' the trauma of his youthful encounter with the Japanese:

Dad suffered nightmares [Bill's daughter, Annette, explained], he hated the Japanese with a vengeance ... he refused to shake the hand of a Japanese diplomat to PNG, he never slept without a torch under his pillow. For a long time he didn't talk about the war, until ... 1979, [when] he became the Secretary for the 39th Battalion, QLD branch. The battle in New Guinea was beginning to gain some publicity, the 39th were being hailed as heroes and Dad was most insistent that they were not ... stating the heroes were the ones left up there [on the Trail]. Dad had a photo, blown up and on the wall of dead jap soldiers on the beach at Gona, with an inscription underneath: 'What a glorious sight.' Dad was asked to return to PNG with the Prime Minister for the opening of the Isurava memorial. After he came back, he took the photo down. He said, it was time to forget.⁴⁰



'it's about building relationships': Alexandra and Vi at the completion of the Kokoda Trail. Vi was born in Vietnam, Alexandra in Australia. The meanings of walking the Trail spoke across age differences and cultural boundaries.

Source: Alexandra McCosker

Only with the passing of time, and a pilgrimage of his own, was Bill finally able to let his memories rest. This is a common experience, as we've seen, for those still grappling with their past. Bill was part of the Department of Veterans' Affairs mission to Isurava in 2002. Together with other veterans, he attended the dedication of the Isurava memorial and watched the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Michael Somare, unveil the four black pillars earlier described.⁴¹ The memorial marks the site of the Battle of Isurava in August 1942. To visitors this clearing on the mountaintop is tranquil, spectacular, picturesque. For men like Bill, a soldier at the sharp end of the Pacific war, this would always be a traumascap.

Bill returned to Kokoda again in August 2007. Or at least his ashes did. A short walk from the large official Isurava memorial lays a smaller but in some ways more eloquent structure. It reads:

Sergeant W.J. Guest VX103114
39th Infantry Battalion
23/1/1921 – 1/12/2006

This is a shrine that honours all diggers, this is where memories are fostered and triggered, and when you are here, think of this trail where a step was triumph, when victory was veiled.⁴²

Bill's ashes were scattered at Isurava on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the battle. It was not the first such ceremony. In May 1954 the ashes of a widow of Lieutenant A.P. Saunders were scattered over the cemetery where he was buried – those bonded in life were reunited in death. There is scant historical record of that particular occasion.⁴³ Bill's daughter, Annette, on the other hand, has left us a full and compelling account. It was a 'pilgrimage [for] my father and [for] all those who fought and those who died', she explained. 'Dad wanted to go home. I took him home.' This was one of the 'most memorable experiences of my life'.⁴⁴

A memorable experience, but not an easy one. Like those who had preceded her, she drew inspiration from her father's generation:

As we started out from Hoi, we started to climb, and I have never seen anything like it, 15 minutes into the walk, with the heat and the humidity, I was struggling, my back pack was like a dead weight and I was sweating out more than I could ever drink ... I was seriously wondering if Dad wouldn't mind being spread out along the track a bit, to lighten the load! ... My knee was not in good shape by this time, and every step was hurting,

but as strange as it may sound, I felt Dad was with me and just when I felt I could not go on, I seemed to get a second wind. I remembered reading entries in his diary when he had to get the wounded out of Kokoda ... with japes [sic] shooting at you! So whatever pain I was in, was nothing compared to what they had suffered.⁴⁵

Annette looked back on the experience of past generations – she also looked forward. Her third son walked with her: ‘I made him carry his pack, so he knew what his grandfather went through.’⁴⁶ At the time of Annette’s journey her son was 19 and ‘around the same age as Dad was when he first went to New Guinea’.⁴⁷

Pilgrimage is an encounter with another place. It can also be an encounter with an equally foreign culture. Ivan, headman of Isurava village, asked Annette’s permission to take some of Bill’s ashes and bury them where his guesthouse was soon to be built.⁴⁸ The villages along the Trail continue to live with the legacy of the fighting that occurred in their homeland, accommodating (in more ways than one) the trekking groups that cross their country. Annette was determined to engage with the local community. She gave a speech in Tok Pisin, a native language of Papua New Guinea, to the people who would be Bill’s guardians: ‘I gave them my Father to look after.’⁴⁹ She was certain this was what Bill would have wanted:

He didn’t speak very much about the war, or his experiences as I was growing up, in fact, I am very ashamed to admit that it was only in the last 10 years that I really had any idea what Dad’s unit achieved in the War ... I never discussed with Dad what would happen after he died, a few times I felt he wanted to say something, but he couldn’t bring himself to talk about it, as he got sicker, he talked constantly about New Guinea ... [attending] the official opening of the Monument at Isurava remained a high point of his life, I could only think of one thing to do with his ashes and that was to take him home. It ... it meant we would have nowhere to visit, to lay flowers or just to sit quietly and remember, but deep down I knew it was what he wanted.⁵⁰

Like the battles that took place on the Trail, Bill’s ceremony didn’t go exactly to plan. A ‘contingent of diggers’ was supposed to attend but they couldn’t fly in because of the fog.⁵¹ The sense of ceremony among the local people more than made up for that: ‘After the ceremony, some of the elders came up and thanked me for bringing Dad back. “*You no can worry, by me lukoutim pap bilong you stap wantim, by me lukoutim em*” (“Don’t worry, your father is here now, we will look out for him”).’⁵²



'Don't worry, your father is here now': Isurava Memorial, the resting place of Annette's father. Spreading Bill's ashes was a way of interacting with place as well as the local community. In a sense, this landscape has become his memorial. Note the mist gathered in the valley. For pilots, as for soldiers, the war in New Guinea was perilous.

Source: Alexandra McCosker

Annette's journey was about bringing her father 'home', but home of course means different things to different pilgrims. The family of Private Frank Archibald travelled in quite the opposite direction. They would bring his spirit back to Australia.

Frank Archibald was born in the same year as the landings at Gallipoli. He was an Aboriginal man, and a labourer, born in Walcha, New South Wales.⁵³ On an autumn day in May 1940, Frank signed up for the war.⁵⁴ He was 25 years old at the time. Frank survived bitter fighting on the Kokoda Trail, but was killed during the Allied offensive of November 1942.⁵⁵ Frank's body remained in the land that claimed him. For a time it rested in a tiny, temporary graveyard. With war's end it was exhumed and reburied at Bomana War Cemetery. The rigid protocols governing Australian war graves forbade any repatriation of his remains to Australia. That (as we've seen) was a cause of deep regret among white communities. It also breached the mourning practices of Aboriginal people.

Frank's cousin, Richard Archibald, was responsible for bringing his spirit home to Australia: 'Traditionally, when Aboriginal people pass on, they are interred in the country of their ancestors ... when this cannot happen, a ceremony is carried out to ensure the person's spirit can leave the area where they died and can return to its birth place, from where it can be reborn.'⁵⁶

Frank's spirit had waited 70 years to come home. The family found that ceremony well worth waiting for. Richard Campbell, another member of Private Archibald's family, played the didgeridoo at the commencement of Bomana's Dawn Service. Those who gathered there that Anzac Day could hear the humming of the didgeridoo reverberating among the crowd and the headstones. Later that morning, the didgeridoo would be heard again, this time being played at Frank's graveside. This particular 'didge' was unique in appearance. It had been intricately decorated by hand, adorned with pictures of the Archibald family, including a painting of Frank dressed in his army uniform.⁵⁷

Frank's sister Grace (who was a child during the war) came to Bomana War Cemetery to witness the ceremony. Another relative was asked by ABC Radio what it meant for her to be in Papua New Guinea:

It is very hard to put it into words. But my mother, who was the elder sister, always spoke about her brother and one thing they would have liked to have done is to come and see their brother's grave. So, she is not here now. But she is here in spirit with us and so are all of the other family and it means a great deal to us to come over ... it is hard to tell you about the spiritual part of it, but, to send his spirit back home, to his homeland, is a big thing for an Aboriginal Australian because we can't die in foreign lands without coming back home.⁵⁸



'to send his spirit back home': Richard Campbell, Cyril Davis and Martin Ballangarry at Bomana War Cemetery, April 2012, preparing to call the spirits of Frank Archibald and five other Aboriginal diggers back to Country.

Source: Alexandra McCosker

Frank's spirit made the journey home. So did soil from the grave that held him. Brown, wet earth was dug up from his grave and reverently transported back to Australia. Eighteen days after the ceremony at Bomana, the sounds of the didgeridoo rang out again, and the soil was scattered around Frank's parents' grave at Armidale, New South Wales. More than 40 of Frank's family members attended his 'home coming'. Towards the end of the ceremony, a storm drifted across the sky. Just as quickly as the storm appeared it disappeared.⁵⁹ Their boy had returned home to the land of his ancestors.

The incorporation of traditional Aboriginal mourning practices has been (as we've noted), in some cases, a feature of Anzac pilgrimage. All across the globe, from the cutting at Hellfire Pass, to the deserts of North Africa, the burning of gum leaves is said to heal the land and assert a sense of Australianess. At times, some white Australian pilgrims feel a need to borrow such ritual, adopting a practice outside formal Christian beliefs, emulating a spirituality that can never truly belong to them. This could be seen as a comment on how a largely secular society still seeks a meaningful connection with the realm of the spiritual. It is certainly an instance of 'cultural fusion'. In this case, though, Aboriginal people reasserted their enduring ownership of Private Frank Archibald. They brought home the spirit when the body was denied to them. And we too return to Australia's shores for the final chapter in this volume.



'here in spirit with us': Bomana War Cemetery at dawn, 25 April 2012. Anzac Day was not just a time for Aboriginal people to connect to country. A few metres from the cross, a headstone bears the epitaph: 'Loving son/gave life for his country/my all/Mum'. That morning a black-and-white photo of a smartly dressed young man had been propped up beside it, making the absent present again.

Source: Alexandra McCosker



'bitter fighting on Kokoda Trail': *Front Line*, a post-war comic book, offers 'true stories' of Australians in combat. Most of the stories are fanciful but so too is some of the popular mythology that has grown up around Kokoda. The grandchildren of *Front Line*'s original readers now walk the Trail in increasing numbers.

Source: *Front Line* (Melbourne: Southdown Press, nd) Rare Book Collection, Monash University.

11

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A CITY AT WAR

Darwin

In February 1942, following their stunning success in capturing Malaya and Singapore, Japanese forces continued to push south through the Netherlands East Indies and Portuguese and Dutch Timor. The bombing of Darwin on 19 February was designed to hamper any Allied counter-attack on the Japanese invasion of Timor. It was launched from the same aircraft carriers responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor. The destruction of the RAAF base (along with nine out of the ten US Kittyhawk fighters stationed there) ensured that these aims were achieved. Fears that the attack was the prelude to an invasion led to panic among sections of the military and civilians in Darwin, and large numbers of people fled the city to head south. Government control over the region north of Birdum was handed to the military commandant on 23 February and remained that way until the end of the war.



'launched from the same aircraft carriers responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor': the bombing of Darwin, 19 February 1942.

Source: Douglas Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962), p. 432.

Beside the jungle-clad Adelaide River, 80 miles south-east of Darwin, is a beautiful formal garden, with smooth, level lawns overhung by scarlet poinciana blooms and the brilliant yellow of the drooping cascara.

Here are buried the men and women of the last war who died in the Timor Sea and Northern Australia.

As you pass through the big monumental gateway, there is an open green space running up to a semi-circular shrine with a bronze cross. On either side of this space are row upon row of clean white gravestones – nearly 400 of them – with the name and rank of the dead, and a message from the bereaved. Most of these stones are engraved with a cross. Some have the Star of David, a few the Crescent of Islam. Some have no symbol at all ...

But this home of the dead is as quiet as some deserted garden in a fairy tale, a place where no man comes.

Advertiser (Adelaide), 10 December 1955

The Northern Territory bears the marks of World War II more distinctly than any other place in Australia. On 19 February 1942, just four days after the fall of Singapore, two waves of Japanese aircraft took off from land bases and carriers in the Timor Sea to bomb Darwin. The aim of the Japanese war planners was to prevent a counter-attack on Timor, which their forces had just taken. The 250-odd confirmed deaths that resulted from the attack were due to two things: the accuracy of the Japanese airmen, and the woeful response of the RAAF in anticipating and responding to the attack. Only ten US Kittyhawk fighter aircraft were available to defend the city on the day of the attack. The fighters were unable to prevent the destruction of several important sites around the city: the post office, the Administrator's office, the police station and police barracks. Eight ships were sunk in the harbour along with two more near Bathurst Island. In total, Darwin was bombed 64 times between 19 February 1942 and November 1943.¹

Many of those killed in the raids are buried at Adelaide River, the largest war cemetery in the north. Initially, American servicemen were buried there, a reminder that more than 110 000 Allied troops and airmen were stationed in northern Australia by 1943. The bodies of US dead were repatriated; the bodies of Australian soldiers, nurses, seamen and airmen remain alongside civilians, such as the post office employees who died in the first raid. There are seven casualties from the merchant navy, Laundry Man Wong Cheung among them. Adelaide River also contains the bodies of 14 British servicemen and one Canadian. Like Sapper E.C. Ranson from Scottsdale, Tasmania, and Flying Officer E.G.I. Etherington, of Gosford, New South Wales, they are buried a long way from home.²

Not far from Adelaide River are a series of abandoned airstrips. Alarmed by repeated bombings of the north, the Allies moved matériel and personnel inland. An extended heritage trail marks what is called 'Australia's front line'. Only a few kilometres to the north of Adelaide River, at Gould, is an abandoned strip that was once home to No. 1 Squadron RAAF. During 1944 and 1945, the squadron flew twin-engined Bristol Beauforts – light bombers that attacked targets in Timor and Ambon, as well as Japanese shipping. Closer to the Stuart Highway, at Coomalie, No. 31 Squadron flew a deadlier version of the Beaufort – the Beaufighter – dubbed 'whispering death' by its enemies for its ability to fly low, fast and unheard before firing cannons, rockets or torpedoes at its target. Not much is left of the airstrips that were home to Nos 1 and 31 Squadrons, much like the locations of the British, American and Dutch squadrons that were stationed nearby. Successive wet seasons, cyclones and termites have all exacted their toll.

From 1943 the build-up along Australia's front line increased as the war in the Pacific began to turn in the Allies' favour. No longer were US, Australian, Dutch and British forces on the defensive: the Territory became a staging post for offensives further north. Allied aircraft based in the region flew north to attack Japanese forces on land and at sea, and dropped supplies to independent companies and resistance fighters in Timor until Australia abandoned them. The build-up of military infrastructure, particularly in roads and communications, allowed for a huge increase in the number of people living in the Top End during the war years. The European population of the Territory almost doubled between 1939 and 1943 (even with the large numbers of people who evacuated the region following the first raids).³

Darwin, however, was not the only place to be bombed during World War II. A group of Dutch civilians who had been evacuated from the East Indies were killed in raids on Broome in March 1942. Townsville, Katherine, Wyndham, Derby and Port Hedland were also attacked, although some of these attacks were very slight affairs. Townsville's 'attack' was actually a case of a Japanese flying boat jettisoning its bombs. Japanese raids on the Australian mainland also came via the sea. On 31 May 1942 two Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour and attacked HMAS *Kuttabul*, resulting in the deaths of 19 people. Scattered along the east coast are the reminders of Australia's war: concrete pillboxes at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, a former Catalina airbase at Cairns, even a bomb shelter (now a pub) in Berrima. Compared to other Australian cities and towns that bore the brunt of Japanese military aggression, Darwin's position as a site of World War II memory was consolidated for two important reasons: the comparatively higher number of casualties and the fact that it was the first place raided on the mainland. It was hardly comparable to the bombing of European cities but it did, in the language of the time, bring the war home.

Given the scale of this loss, military and civilian, one might have thought it an easy matter to establish the Territory as Australia's pre-eminent site of World War II pilgrimage. Several factors conspired against it. First, there was the isolation of Darwin itself, closer to Asia than to the capital cities in the south. Added to that was the isolation of Adelaide River. Travelling 80 miles from Darwin to visit the cemetery was a long way on an unsealed road and, once the war was over, maintaining that road was no longer a military imperative. Throughout the 1950s Adelaide River consistently returned lower visitation rates than other cemeteries in the Pacific area, Bita Paka and Bomana included. In fact, pilgrimage to this particular site within Australia was probably more costly and more difficult than travelling to Kranji Cemetery in Singapore. As the report in the *Adelaide Advertiser* intimated, few people visited. Every night, 'marauding bands of wild horses and kangaroos invade[d] the cemetery area', feasting on the flowers the caretaker had planted.⁴

The *Advertiser's* correspondent wrote a decade after the end of World War II, as Australia returned to peacetime normalcy. Forty years later, remembering World War II was back in fashion; in 1995, the year of the 'Australia Remembers' campaign, the Australian Government and the RSL hosted separate pilgrimages to Adelaide River. Although the Cenotaph in Darwin remained the centrepiece of Anzac services, the navy, army and air force all took a proprietorial interest in 'their' cemetery. Finally, there was the infrastructure that facilitates any pilgrimage. It was not just that sealing the road extended the effective range of 'grey nomads' in caravans, or that rising disposable incomes made travel more affordable. From the 1990s Adelaide River became a (brief) stop-over for coaches and four-wheel-drives touring Litchfield National Park, situated just to the north. The Territory's war heritage became a marketable commodity, an adjunct to its natural and cultural heritage. In the hurried day-trip itineraries of the north, tour operators face a choice: a half-hour break at the service station (located on the main road, and offering the creature comforts of toilets and café) or negotiating the narrow track (and challenging turning circle) that leads to the war cemetery. The time of day often makes that choice for them. While a stout fence now keeps the kangaroos and wild horses at bay, mosquitoes infest Adelaide River early in the morning and late afternoon. If a tour has come from Litchfield, then that is just the time the buses visit. Perusal of extant visitor books offer little of the rich and deeply personalised testimony encountered elsewhere in this survey.⁵

Adelaide River is not the only site in the Territory marketed as war heritage. Darwin has been marked in this way as well. The Darwin Cenotaph, situated on the Esplanade in the designated government precinct, lists just 52 casualties of the

Great War. In fact the Great War servicemen from the Northern Territory listed on the Cenotaph are outnumbered by the surrounding plaques of the individual units (73 in total) of Australia and Allies who served in the Territory during World War II. New plaques continue to be added with the frequent visits of Australian military units and wartime allies units, particularly from the United States Navy, whose members make the pilgrimage to the Esplanade and the wreck of USS *Peary* when visiting Darwin.

The ways in which pilgrimages and commemoration ceremonies have been conducted at such sites as the Cenotaph and the Adelaide River War Cemetery illustrates the dualism that exists at sites of war heritage. As Australian heritage scholars William Logan and Laurajane Smith have observed, 'Heritage can be used in positive ways to give a sense of community to disparate groups and individuals or to create jobs', but it can also be used by governments 'in less benign ways to reshape public attitudes'.⁶ Infamously, the extent of the bombing was played down by Australian officials in the immediate aftermath of the first raid. Prime Minister John Curtin furthermore sought to allay fears in the Australian community when he said, 'Let it be remembered that Darwin has been bombed, but it has not been conquered.'⁷ Ostentatious displays of commemoration were shunned in the immediate aftermath of the war, even once the true death toll was made public. The *Centralian Advocate's* special correspondent travelled to Darwin on the sixth anniversary of the first raid and observed that 'folk are rather prosaic about it now'. The reporter continued, 'Memorial services held in the churches were fairly well attended, but the general – and probably the best – attitude, seemed to be "let the dead past bury the dead".'⁸

Like other sites examined in this book, attitudes to World War II commemoration changed dramatically during the 1990s as the fiftieth anniversary of the war's end approached. Darwin's prominence as a pilgrimage destination increased as a result. During commemorative events held in 1992, historian Francis Good observed that 'many survivors felt very strongly that there was still after fifty years, much cause to set the record straight about war events in the Territory'.⁹ One person interviewed by Good even went as far as saying, 'I think America has told their story and we've tried to conceal it.'¹⁰ While press coverage of earlier commemorative events factually reported on the extent of destruction that Darwin suffered during the bombing,¹¹ more recent events have placed greater emphasis on the role of Darwin as *the* place where the Pacific War arrived on the nation's doorstep. In commemorating the Japanese attacks on Darwin, two things coalesced during the 1990s: the desire for survivors to testify to their experience, and the need for the state to venerate a place in which Australian and US servicemen had died in the defence of the nation.



'remembering the fallen': Darwin's Cenotaph, built to commemorate World War I, looks out on a battlefield of World War II as well.

Source: Laura James

On the sixtieth anniversary of the first bombing raid, an official Garden of Remembrance was opened on the grounds of Thorak Regional Cemetery, 20 kilometres east of Darwin city. Such gardens were designed to offer an alternative form of memorialisation for the families of deceased servicemen and women, who are able to scatter the ashes of their loved ones, leave a memorial plaque, or both. The opening of the Northern Territory Garden of Remembrance took place well after those of most other Australian cities (which had them from the 1960s) and attracted approximately 300 veterans from around Australia. The choice of the date on which to open the garden, like the interpretative panels that seek to educate visitors on the significance of the Territory at war, further emphasise the centrality of the bombing and the cooperation of Australia and its allies in prosecuting the war against Japan.

Increasingly, commemoration of the bombing of Darwin underscores Australia's alliance with the United States. No longer, however, is Japan seen as a threat. In November 2011, 60 years after the signing of the ANZUS Treaty, Barack Obama became the first US president to visit the Northern Territory. Together with the Australian Prime Minister, he laid a wreath at the USS *Peary* memorial. Afterwards, in a short speech to Australian troops and US marines at RAAF Darwin, Obama described the Northern Territory's capital as the place 'where our alliance was born – during "Australia's Pearl Harbor"'.¹² Historical analogies of this sort work well in reassuring members of the Australian public that US forces are present to protect Australian interests as well as its own. At the same time, there is only a very low risk of rhetoric of this sort offending China, Australia's most important trading partner. The Australian Government's recent decision to allow US marines to be based in Darwin on 'rotation' will undoubtedly drive commemoration along similar lines to Obama's recent visit and, with it, greater official encouragement for people to make pilgrimages to this former site of battle.

Why are some sites and locations regarded as more significant than others? Darwin is a revealing case study of the response to this process of transcendence. In Darwin the memorial is more organic in its genesis. Perhaps this is a consequence of the immediate fear and outrage in the Darwin – indeed Territorian – community following the bombing of Darwin by Japanese aircraft in 1942. In this respect it is an event for national memorialisation (during war) rather than national remembrance. As one respondent observed, 'It is obvious it is a very important reminder to residents of Darwin that previous conflicts will never be forgotten.'¹³ Government approval of the Esplanade as a war commemoration precinct ensured the maintenance of this legacy.

Evaluating the role of memory in determining the significance of heritage sites provides one way of explaining contested interpretations of the past and their

present-day management. The importance of sites is, to a large extent, determined by public memory of them. This is part of a broader 'heritage-isation' process, a practice that in part explains the enduring appeal of Darwin and other World War II destinations discussed in this book. A good example of the heightened emphasis on heritage of the war is the Bombing of Darwin Experience Gallery at East Point. This interactive sensory experience is run by the Darwin Military Museum under the auspices of the Northern Territory Government. The aim of the exhibit is to give visitors a first-hand sense of the experience of the first bombing of the city on 19 February 1942. Visitors with recollections of the bombing can share them through Story Share, an oral history video-recording kiosk that is part of the bombing exhibit. Yet, as is evident at official war heritage sites throughout Darwin, the exchange between community and official commemorative strategies in determining public policy can occur by design rather than default. Gillis has argued that contemporary societies are so accustomed to 'having the past represented to us through museums, historic sites, and public sculpture that we easily lose sight of the recent origins and diverse meanings of these uniquely modern phenomena'.¹⁴

The idea of contested memory provides one way of explaining conflicting interpretations of the past and also the management and commemoration of these sites in the present. A number of factors drive the twenty-first-century desire for remembering the bombing throughout the Northern Territory. There remains a strong grassroots desire among the Darwin community to remember the events of World War II. There is also the recent increase in official funding support and attendance at commemorative events by the Commonwealth and Territory governments and Defence departments. This has occurred as Darwin has become a touchstone for soft diplomacy that emphasises the historical legacy of the city and reinforces the geopolitical significance of the Australian and American relationship (and the ANZUS Treaty) today. There is also the simple fact that Darwin is a military city. Currently military forces and their families are stationed at RAAF Darwin, RAAF Tindal and Larakeyah Barracks, which is the main base of the Australian Defence Force in northern Australia. The impact of the war on the Darwin community has shaped 'official recognition and popular appreciation of these events ever since'.¹⁵

Pilgrimage to Darwin, and other World War II sites throughout the Northern Territory, highlights how public attention increasingly turned to the Pacific War and latter conflicts during the second half of the twentieth century. During 2011 and 2012 emphasis was placed on commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and the sixtieth anniversary of the battle of Kapyong (a key conflict for Australian military forces during the Korean War). This change in



'a pilgrimage destination': Anzac Day crowds surrounding the Cenotaph on the Esplanade, Darwin, 2011. A low wall encircling the memorial commemorates the fallen from the conflicts that followed the 'war to end all wars'.

Source: Laura James

emphasis indicates how war commemoration – and indeed patterns of pilgrimage to war sites – is not static. Instead they change over time. In all likelihood public interest in war heritage sites and commemoration sites situated along the Esplanade will increase in their relevance to the Northern Territorian (and Australian) community rather than dissipate in future. This trend in part explains why the bombing of Darwin is increasingly emphasised in official ceremonies and continues to be widely remembered and commemorated among the Territorian community. It also highlights how the profile of those attending is changing as new generations embrace these memories of Australians at war.

The significance of the bombing of Darwin to those visiting it as a World War II destination is not only the universal theme of remembering the dead but also the isolation in which Australia found itself during 1942. This stage of World War II was a time when Australia's national security must have felt perilous. More subtly, other themes that have emerged emphasise how the passing of time leads to better understandings of the lasting message of peace and the need to present contested viewpoints. Darwin is today, after all, a pilgrimage destination for American and Japanese war heritage pilgrims as well as a destination for Australians. The Japanese visitors follow their own war heritage trails, and their role reminds us that the process of commemoration is equally relevant for the vanquished as it is for the victor. The question of who has the right to commemorate and what we forget when we remember war are taken up again in the conclusion of this book.

CONCLUSION

'A great consolation?'

Twenty veterans are gathering in an airport lounge in Sydney. They are old men now, all of them in their nineties, but as young men they joined the Second AIF and fought in some of its most historic battles, first in North Africa, then in the Pacific. Their journey is a pilgrimage – that is the term each of them prefers to use. They are returning to El Alamein on the seventieth anniversary of the battle, and their visit will conclude with a service in the same cemetery Kitty Gahan visited some 60 years earlier. These old men will lay a wreath by the Memorial to the Missing, not far from where Captain Studley Gahan's name is inscribed. And no doubt they too will remember someone dear to them.

Jean Parry is the only female veteran joining the party. As Elsie Jean Grenda she served with the 2/7th Australian General Hospital in North Africa, and tended the wounded during the Battle of El Alamein. Historically, women have been underrepresented in Anzac pilgrimage, as we've seen. The pilgrimage to El Alamein will again prioritise the experience of men.¹

This pilgrimage is one of the last such journeys to be undertaken. Age has wearied these men and, even with their entourage of medics and carers, few World War II veterans are capable of sustained international travel. The writing of this book is timely. The history of pilgrimage has come to a crossroad as the story of the war itself passes from living memory into history.

El Alamein was not the only destination for Anzac pilgrimage, and (as we've shown) travel to the battlefields and cemeteries of World War II has a long and complex genealogy. This book has considered treks through the jungles of New Guinea as well as that dusty ride through the desert, a search to find an abandoned runway in the north of England and a quest to discover the wreck of HMAS *Sydney*. We have walked the battlefields of mainland Greece and Crete, stood where Singapore and Darwin were bombed, journeyed along the Thai–Burma railway and trudged the Sandakan Death March. All these journeys began in the immediate aftermath of war. Despite the cost, difficulty and sometimes even danger, a small proportion of Australians travelled – even in the 1950s and 1960s – to distant lands that claimed their loved ones. And many others imagined such a journey.

Recapturing the character and extent of these imagined journeys has been one of this book's many challenges, particularly in the first phase of Anzac pilgrimage. Physical journeys often leave a record, an archival trail the historian might follow. An imaginary journey takes place in the landscape of the mind, a private world usually outside the province of history. But in the immediate aftermath of World

War II, these imagined journeys were far more feasible (and far less costly) than actual travel overseas. And they too have left their traces in the archives.

Just before Anzac Day in 1957, a press release from the Australian office of the Imperial War Graves Commission announced a tour by its secretary general to Commonwealth war cemeteries in South-East Asia. Mr Higginson promised 'to examine a grave or a name on a memorial' for 'any person' who wrote to him and to forward them a 'personal report' on his return to Australia. More than 400 letters were received and 'the secretary general wrote personally to each enquirer', often enclosing a photograph of the grave or cemetery concerned. The Anzac Agency played the part of a surrogate mourner, the facilitator of imagined journeys to places loved ones longed to see. 'This kind of service was of great consolation to the bereaved,' a satisfied official noted – it brought the memory of these men and women 'home'.²

Consolation was the promise of this early phase of Anzac pilgrimage. Admittedly the practice of mourning changed during the twentieth century and the way Australians came to commemorate World War II – with a preference for more utilitarian memorials – was very different from the way they remembered World War I. But history, as we've seen, is often a matter of continuity checked by moments of change. The imperative to lay a body to rest, to stand actually (or symbolically) by a grave, remained central to the way this new generation of mourners reckoned with their loss. In that light, it was no accident that the war cemeteries of World War II borrowed so heavily from the neoclassical traditions of World War I: the architecture of remembrance delivered consolation. It fashioned gardens from traumascapes and built beautiful memorials over the battered bodies of the dead. The faultless white stone offered a kind of immortality: these were places the absent, honoured by name and often epitaph, became present again. And here at last the dead found their resting place, ending the gruesome process whereby bodies were buried, exhumed and reburied again. In some cases, bones had been gathered up in 'sugar bags'; in others, 'bodies only partly decomposed' sealed for transportation in 44-gallon drums. The establishment of permanent cemeteries offered solace to the living – and conferred a long overdue dignity on the dead.³

That same search for consolation persuaded governments to send 'representatives of the bereaved' to dedication services for all the major cemeteries in the 1950s and even 1960s, facilitating what's been called a 'pilgrimage by proxy'. This book has retraced these early journeys, ordeals by aviation far more taxing on the pilgrims of the 1940s and 1950s than the jet age travel of today.⁴

For some, though, a pilgrimage by proxy was simply not enough. Alongside consolation in this first phase of Anzac pilgrimage, there was anger, doubt, frustration, disappointment and even despair. This book has revealed the agonised

search by families to find out what became of their loved ones, the suspicion – in many cases quite justified – that they had not been ‘told the truth’ about the fate of men and women killed in war. And it has identified a new turn in the language of loss, one driven by the politics of entitlement.

Violet Hancocks is one such example. Her son, as we saw in chapter 8, lost his life in a Lancaster raid over Bremen. She denied that anyone could take her place at his memorial and believed a free passage to the dedication service at Runnymede would be ‘scant compensation’ for her loss. It was not the only ‘compensation’ Mrs Hancocks demanded. Her ‘voluminous correspondence’ to the Air Ministry spans more than a decade and runs to several hundred pages. First the government refused to make an ‘official inquiry’ into the circumstances leading to her son’s death: Jack had been sent out with a new crew on what she saw as a suicidal mission. Then there was the loss of his diaries: ‘There is absolutely NO excuse for their disappearance’, Mrs Hancocks protested, those precious ‘effects which were all that remained of my son’. Among those effects were the air force wings her son had been so proud of. All that was returned to Mrs Hancocks were ‘a few civilian rags’. And when the last battered case of belongings finally reached her anything of value had been stolen: mothers deserve ‘protection from such vandalism’, she declared. ‘We are deprived of our boys, and then all the little tokens that mean so much to us.’ In the course of the war the authorities offered Mrs Hancocks scant consolation. The government’s later refusal to subsidise her pilgrimage to Runnymede only added ‘salt to the wound’.⁵

Admittedly Mrs Hancocks was an exceptional case. Few mourning mothers took their complaints directly to the prime minister – and not many stepped beyond their private grief to question both the prosecution of the war effort and the point of the war itself. At the height of her correspondence with the Air Ministry, Violet Hancocks wondered whether this so-called ‘war for democracy’ was anything other than a ‘bloodbath’, and ‘our boys ... mere cogs in a merciless military machine’.⁶

But other mothers – and fathers for that matter – also complained of delays and evasion on the part of the authorities, they protested at the exhumation and relocation of loved ones’ remains, suspected ‘concentration’ cemeteries were just a convenience for the War Graves Commission, sometimes even demanded the repatriation of the dead. For all the soothing language of consolation, the loss of war for some was insurmountable. True, 400 families took up the Anzac Agency’s offer of a full report on ‘their memorial’; but what of the thousands who didn’t? What can we read into the space of their silence – indifference, acceptance of loss or an inconsolable pain?

Mrs Hancocks’ generation clearly felt a need to undertake a pilgrimage. But what of travellers today? The state still plays a role in sponsoring travel to Australian war graves. Governments begrudged £100 to Violet Hancocks, yet governments

today are prepared to spend millions of dollars on such trips. It is not just the cost of special airfares for the few surviving veterans, or the entourage of officials that travels in their train. Far from Australia's borders, the state invests heavily in the infrastructure of pilgrimage, the literature that entices people to visit these places, the museums built to explain them, a veritable forest of memorials raised by governments from both sides of politics.

Some historians have argued that the state has engineered the boom in 'war travel' and for its own cynical political purposes. What better way to secure support for Australia's current military engagements than by fostering a reverence for previous (and less controversial) campaigns?⁷ But that is not the whole explanation. The memory boom, as we've seen, is too far-reaching a phenomenon to be put down to a simple act of government intervention. It involves a combination of national history and family stories, an affirmation of collective identity, the recovery of an enduring past in a world apparently addicted to change. Ultimately, as Jay Winter has noted, it must be seen 'as an act of defiance': an attempt 'to keep alive at least the names and the images of the millions whose lives have been truncated or disfigured by war'.⁸ At a much more prosaic level, the surge in pilgrimage in recent years owes much to structural changes in the travel industry and rising disposable incomes; Britain, Greece, Thailand are simply more accessible today. But some sites still pose their challenges. Kitty Gahan found travel to North Africa 'difficult'; it remains difficult today.

The means is there to travel, but why are these war sites chosen above other travel destinations? Sometimes they're not. Pilgrimage is an appendage of a wider travel industry, tours take in shopping centres, natural wonders and war cemeteries in a single day. This book has not focused on the experience of these 'casual' travellers. Its concern has been with those who consciously undertake a pilgrimage. What does that journey mean to them?

In some ways the meanings of a pilgrimage are shaped by the destination and with that the experience of travel itself. An air-conditioned bus speeding across a desert highway is hardly the same kind of journey as a trek across the Owen Stanley Range. This book has spanned a number of very different destinations to convey the varied spectrum of pilgrimage. It has taken us from densely signed heritage landscapes of Singapore and Darwin to makeshift museums run by local farmers in Crete. We have delved to the bottom of the sea in search of HMAS *Sydney* and have gazed skyward for the trace of a missing aircrew. Every site carried its own story: victory at El Alamein and the saga of evacuation from Greece, endurance at Kokoda, tragedy at Hellfire Pass. The wider narrative of a nation at war informed all these journeys, just as they have fashioned the structure of this book.



'few surviving veterans': Jean Parry, who nursed at El Alamein. Jean Parry, then Elsie Jean Grenda, volunteered for service in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) in February 1941. She had been inspired by its work during the Great War and wanted to do her bit as well. At 93, Jean remembers adventures in Egypt as vividly as the heartbreak of war. Her exemplary role in the service community – including founding membership of the Middle East Association – helped ensure her selection for the 2012 contingent for El Alamein. Few early Anzac services represented female service personnel in this way.

Source: courtesy of Jean Parry and Department of Veterans' Affairs

Each chapter revealed a distinctive kind of journey and a different sort of pilgrim. We journeyed along the Thai–Burma railway in the company of the men who built it. The story of the Death March was the story of descendants rather than survivors. In Crete we met schoolchildren rambling over the Anzac battlefields, while on Kokoda we travelled with grandchildren trying to imagine their grandfathers' ordeal. Some of these journeys were highly structured – bound by the codified ritual of an Anzac Day service, for instance, or the vivid, highly personalised narratives whereby tour guides told the story of a place. Sometimes (as scholars have noted) the boundaries between informing and performing were 'porous'.⁹ But this study of pilgrimage has also found space for the private and unpredictable: two friends driving to the airfields of northern England unsure in every sense where their journey might take them; those who carried a letter, a photograph, a gumleaf or a sprig of wattle and devised a graveside service meaningful only to them. And there is an irony in this. When the cemeteries of World War II were raised they were intended to stand in perpetuity, their meanings were frozen in time; they said all that needed to be said. However impressive these structures are the pilgrims studied in this book devised their own memorials, vernacular ways of remembering often at odds with the forms of commemoration codified by the state.

Responses to places varied within and between these particular cohorts of travellers, determined, to a great extent, by the kind of emotional investment each traveller carried to a site. Understandably, the son who remembered a father lost at Sandakan felt more strongly about the journey than a granddaughter who knew only a name. Returned soldiers viewed an old battlefield differently from the families who travelled with them: they saw things in a landscape others could not. Some went in quest of 'closure'; they sought a grave or a place where they could say goodbye. There was a cathartic element to that experience, one that comfortably conforms to the classic paradigm of pilgrimage. But 'closure' is too simple a word to capture the experience of Anzac journeys. Many found it trite and inadequate, while some sought quite the opposite to closure, committing themselves to an ongoing search for truth. Closure hardly explains the experience of those who return time and again to battlefields and cemeteries. Nor does it necessarily accommodate other diverse motivations: pilgrims spoke of their curiosity, their longing for a sense of connectedness with the past, their reverence and their anger. Many were surprised by what they found. And, like most historical study, this project has privileged those who volunteer their testimony. One elderly woman shook her head when she was offered a survey at a Bomber Command reunion in North Killingholme. 'This is all that's left of poor Jock,' she said, and burst into tears. Perhaps that is testimony enough in itself.¹⁰

Remembering generated its own forms of inequality. Much of the literature on pilgrimage emphasises what the Turners first termed ‘communitas’, a sense of shared purpose engendered by a common journey. But that can be overstated. In this study direct descendants of the dead claimed a privileged connection to a place others could not. Among the bereaved themselves, there were subtle and not so subtle gradations of loss: mothers demanded precedence over widows; parents or children of the missing lived in a limbo peculiarly their own. As a study of Anzac pilgrimage this book has focused on Australia’s and New Zealand’s shared narratives of war. But honouring our dead has often served to marginalise the fallen of other nations. And sometimes the politics of pilgrimage was brutally exclusionary. It was not just that modern-day pilgrims responded with indifference or hostility to the commemorative architecture chosen by other nations, or – in the case of pilgrimages in the Asia-Pacific region – that travellers contested the right of former adversaries to honour their dead alongside our own.

A decade after the war had ended, many were outraged when a Japanese mission charged with recovering war dead dared to lay a wreath beside the Cross of Sacrifice in Lae. An official from the Imperial War Graves Commission demanded that they leave the cemetery, and the wreath (‘bearing a card printed in Japanese’) was carried away. There was no single response to this incident, and even branches of the RSL (and the IWGC for that matter) were bitterly divided. Some believed that this enemy presence in ‘our cemetery’ overstepped ‘the bounds of decency’: these ‘same Japanese’ committed ‘barbaric atrocities’ that ‘so many can never forget’. Others, including the President of Tasmania’s RSL, found such attitudes ‘childish and unreasonable’: surely, he pleaded, ‘these hates and prejudices cannot go on for all time’. Hate, it seems, is an emotion easily allied to nationalism. A love for those we have lost animates many a pilgrimage, but then (as today) forgiveness is harder to find.¹¹

These journeys yielded different meanings, but they were also told in different ways. This book has moved from the archival record to spoken testimony; its narrative sometimes turns on a diary or a scrapbook. We have read the transcripts of a radio program broadcast in to Australian lounge-rooms in the 1940s and watched images of the wreck of *Sydney* that flashed across television screens; recorded the testimony of tour guides and battlefield historians as well as pilgrims themselves. Pilgrimage is a place of unbounded diversity, and *Anzac Journeys* has tried to capture its range.

In short, no single story emerges from a study of Anzac pilgrimage, still less a simple nationalist narrative driven by the state. But all these journeys were acts of remembrance – ‘historical remembrance’ as Winter calls it – that bring together the

familiar and the sacred, the present and the past. Every pilgrim walked his or her path with a deep sense of history, hoping to recover a memory that might otherwise be lost.¹²

In some cases these ‘memories’ were not strictly memories at all. The children of POWs had not experienced the brutality of building the Death Railway, and they could never truly imagine it. The terror of battle in the desert, the fear of a cold, lonely death in a bombing raid over Germany, the unspeakable resolution to take another’s life, these are beyond the comprehension of any who have not experienced it. But there is no doubt these pilgrims travelled in the ‘shadow of memory’ (as the opening pages of this book argued). Many lived with the trauma of the men and women who came home damaged by war, and others have come to define their lives in terms of another’s absence. The sway these memories (actual or adopted) have over these people’s lives differs with individuals and no doubt over the course of a person’s life. For some, it is almost a mark of martyrdom, and several historians have noted how individuals and social groups consciously adopt a sense of victimhood to assert a certain kind of identity. But that neat analysis simplifies a diverse and complex experience. What this book has shown is the myriad forms that ‘memory’ takes and the very different reasons that people pursue it.

In examining the experience of the children of the death camps, Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch coined the term ‘postmemory’. The stories of survival were not one’s own but passed down – in what she called the transmission of memory – from one generation to another.¹³ Historians might quibble over the exactness of that term ‘postmemory’, but we have seen evidence of it in every field of this study. Pictures, even artefacts carried to grave sites, diaries read to memorials, the telling and retelling of anecdotes and stories, all cultivated a kind of postmemory; all were attempts to understand (even relive) a life not truly one’s own. Postmemory involves a kind of ‘vicarious witnessing’, a testimony reaffirmed by each successive generation. It is based on ‘sensually as well as intellectually immersed knowledge’, recovering, reimagining the past in an affective, empathetic way. Pilgrimage accommodates the work of postmemory. In the traumascapes of World War II our travellers retraced the steps of those who had been there before.¹⁴ ‘I stood where he stood’; ‘This helped me to understand what she went through’; ‘I feel like I know him now.’ Words like these were spoken in Crete and Sandakan, searching for disused hangars on RAF airfields, running a finger down a chisel mark in Hellfire Pass, trudging to the summit of Kokoda. Of course, no one can actually journey into the past, but perhaps these pilgrimages skirted its borders.

Those pilgrims at El Alamein have taken their place by the memorial. They stand stiff and silent, faces fixed on a blank white wall of stone. These pilgrims are the last of their generation, and it seems unlikely they will come here again. But as the memory of World War II slips into history, others will follow in their footsteps. Some will go in search of a legend, retracing the stories of the Second AIF; some have a sense of the past that is local, intimate, familiar and at odds with the grand narratives that fuel the mythology of war. Many make this journey to bring family and world history together, riding the rising wave of the memory boom. And some go to complete the pilgrimage Violet Hancocks was denied.



'the shadow of memory': the silhouettes of young Australian visitors to Hellfire Pass captured on the wall of the cutting. Pilgrims like these can complete the four-kilometre walk established along the railway. It passes bomb craters made by Allied air raids and chiselled markings in the cutting walls, evidence of the danger and hardship of working the line.

Source: Bruce Scates

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 National Archives of Australia (NAA), *Fact Sheet 266: The Sinking of the 'Montevideo Maru'*, Canberra, 2012; 'Light falls on war mystery', *Weekend West* (Perth), 30 June 2012. The loss of the ship was also a tragedy for Japanese families. Of 88 guards and crew, only 17 survived the sinking and subsequent march through the Philippine jungle.
- 2 See 'Memories' posted on 'Person Details', NAA, Ernest Wilfred Pearce, Bruce Macintosh Gilchrist, Charles Maher, William George Ekblade, Stanley Parker, Albert Carr, Keith Morris Gray, John Stanley Robertson, Victor Ernest Ross Wainwright, available at <www.montevideomaru.naa.gov.au> (accessed 13 September 2012); see, for example, 'Finally, an answer for Uncle Charlie', *Wimmera Mail Times*, 29 June 2012.
- 3 'Light falls on war mystery', *Weekend West*, 30 June 2012.
- 4 With the exception of the discussion of HMAS *Sydney's* virtual memorial, this book has not surveyed websites, although (as the *Montevideo Maru* case suggests) descendants have often embraced this new medium of remembrance. A pilgrimage involves an actual journey and the trials and experiences involved in the same. The book does consider 'imagined journeys', but again these focus on an actual place.
- 5 Ian Reader & Tony Walter, *Pilgrimages in Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Victor & Edith Turner, *Images and Pilgrimages in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). A vast literature has since developed (and in some cases challenged) the Turners' formulation, but it remains foundational work.
- 6 In a sense, Mary became an accidental pilgrim. Although she had no initial intention of visiting the memorial park, she was deeply moved by the experience. The mother of three sons herself, she heard 'the spirits' of those brutally murdered men 'calling' her. Mary Aird Bath, 'Stories of courage in jungle camp', available at <www.borneopow.info/pilgrim.bath1.htm> (accessed 3 August 2011).
- 7 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 16–17. For a review of this literature see the *Annals of Tourism Research* devoted to pilgrimage, vol. 9, no. 1 (1992) and Michael Pearson, 'Travellers, journeys, tourists: The meanings of journeys', *Australian Cultural History*, no. 10 (1991), pp. 127–9; for slippery distinction see Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 38.
- 8 Peter Stanley, *A Stout Pair of Boots: A Guide to Exploring Australia's Battlefields* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008), pp. 21, 104, 114, 212, 217. Stanley is aware of the 'emotional reactions' to these sites and he writes with some sensitivity on the way places 'radiate meaning', but this is not the primary purpose of his book. This is not a one-way journey. Just as tourism and pilgrimage intersect, military historians are sometimes surprised by 'the magnitude of the emotional reaction to a battlefield', *ibid.*, p. 245.
- 9 For a survey of such literature see Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 10 We owe this quip to Jay Winter; Bruce Scates, Rae Frances et al., 'Anzac Day at home and abroad: Towards a history of Australia's national day', *History Compass*, 10 (2012), pp. 523–36, observe: 'Scholars of commemorative cultures have called for a more dynamic conceptualization of remembering and forgetting. They note that memory of war is partial and selective, that it is produced out of complex relations of public culture and private

- experience, and that commemorative rhetoric often conceals as much as it recalls.' See also Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Maria Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jan Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Katherine Hodgkin & Susan Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003); D. Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Andrew Hoskins, 'Ghost in the machine: Television and war memory', in S. Maltby & R. Keeble (eds), *Communicating War: Memory, Media and Military* (Bury St Edmunds: Arima Publishing, 2007); P. Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2009); M. Anico & E. Peralta, *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2009); Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006); Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving images: Holocaust photographs and the work of postmemory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 12; Marianne Hirsch & Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- 11 E.J. Williams to J. Healy, 6 March 1991, Borneo Tour, RSL Papers, Box 983, National Library of Australia (NLA): MS 6609.
 - 12 Imperial War Graves Commission, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report* (London: HMSO, 1949), pp. 12–13; Liz Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli: War, History and Memory in Australia* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2004), pp. 87, 152. For an introduction to a rich literature surrounding sites of memory see Nancy Wood, 'Memory's remains: *Le lieux de memoire*', *History and Memory*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1994).
 - 13 Imperial War Graves Commission, 'Anzac Agency quarterly reports', July 1955, NAA AGS1/6/3 Part 1.
 - 14 Bound by the ethics requirements of Monash University, almost all respondents have been deidentified. As a general rule, a person's real name has been used when it appears in the public domain (as in Mrs Beadle's testimony on the *Montevideo Maru* website). Archival sources (not restricted by ethics requirements) are also addressed in this way. This project is indebted to the generosity of all the informants, and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Field notes, recordings, transcriptions and surveys are currently held at Monash University, and scholars in the field are welcome to view them.
 - 15 Each site visit involved around 20 extended interviews, and some sites were visited several times. In all, more than a hundred interviews were conducted, and they were supplemented with a comparable number of web-based and written surveys. In addition to the surveys conducted for this project, a number of tour operators (including Charlie Lynn of Adventure Kokoda, Greg Osborne of Tempo Holidays and Denis McCarthy of Made Easy Tours) granted supervised access to survey material. This book also drew on research materials generated by a second ARC-funded project (based at Monash University) examining the history of Anzac Day. Unless otherwise indicated, field notes and interviews were recorded at the pilgrimage site they discuss.
 - 16 Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia', *Oral History*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1994), pp. 77–91; Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 63–74; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

- 17 For the concept of ‘expressive grief’ see Pat Jalland, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006), introduction. The task of historicising grief has been taken up by several scholars of World War I but few of World War II. For pioneers in this field see Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 2008); Michael McKernan, *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001) and Damousi’s and Jalland’s studies noted above.
- 18 So too do the combatants of other nations and their descendants. This book is a study of Anzac pilgrimage, it does not attempt to chart the return of Japanese or German veterans to the traumascapes of war; that is the topic of emerging scholarship elsewhere. See, for example, Craig Collie & Hajime Marutani, *The Path of Infinite Sorrow: The Japanese on the Kokoda Track* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009).

CHAPTER 1 THE LOSS OF AUSTRALIA’S PRISONERS OF WAR

- 1 E.V. Britnell to J.F. Chifley, 11 January 1946, NAA A46/380.
- 2 Position of Wireless Message Scheme, 13 September 1944; J. McKernow to H.V. Evatt, 23 August 1944, NAA:A1608,A20/1/1/ Part 3.
- 3 *Prisoner of War*, 10 July 1944; for sample cards, 16 January 1945.
- 4 Memo to the Prime Minister marked G 20/1/1, NAA: A1608, A20/1/1/ Part 3. Ellen Evans to John Curtin, 24 March 1944, NAA:A1608,A20/1/1/ Part 4.
- 5 Cablegram from London, 22 July 1943, NAA:A705,32/6/60. Statement on Correspondence to POWs, NAA:A1608,A20/1/1/ Part 3.
- 6 Official Report – House of Commons, 25 January 1944, Prisoners of War, NAA: A10322 13/1944.
- 7 South East Asia Command, Weekly Intelligence Summary dated 16 June 1944; ‘Reports of treatment’, NAA: A705.
- 8 A summary of Webb’s report was tabled in the House of Representatives on 12 September 1945.
- 9 For an extended discussion of the merits of these strategies see Prisoners of War, NAA: A10322 13/1944; ‘Reports of treatment’, NAA: A795 32/6/60.
- 10 Official Report – House of Commons, 25 January 1944, Prisoners of War, NAA: A10322 13/1944.
- 11 Michael McKernan, *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).
- 12 Ibid. For press response see clippings, NAA A705, 32/6/60; these issues are canvassed by Lynette Ramsay Silver’s pioneering study, *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence* (Bowral: Sally Milner Publishing, 2003), pp. 277–8.
- 13 *Prisoner of War*, October 1943; cablegram dated 20 June 1942, NAA A981; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 1942.
- 14 See for example *Prisoner of War*, 8 May, 9 June, 11 August 1944; February/March, April 1945; ‘Grim story told by survivors shocks Parliament’, NAA, A705, 32/6/60.
- 15 E. Edwards to John Curtin, 29 August 1944, NAA A1608 A20/1/1/ Part 4.
- 16 Grace Hamilton to John Curtin, 4 November 1942, External Affairs Department – Treaties – Red Cross – POWs in Far East, NAA A981 TRE755.
- 17 For a discussions of the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Bureau see Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

- 18 Telegram dated 16 November 1944; F.R. Sinclair, memo to Prime Minister, NAA: A989, 1944/925/1/3/Pt 1.
- 19 Correspondence between F.H. Sinclair and G. Neagle, 28 June, 10 July 1946, NAA: MP742-S1/1/269, MO 742/1.
- 20 Ibid.; Silver, *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence*. Paul Ham's recent book *Sandakan: The Untold Story of the Sandakan Death Marches* also takes up these arguments.
- 21 Scates, *Return to Gallipoli*, ch. 3.

CHAPTER 2 THE FIRST JOURNEYS

- 1 Joan W. Scott, 'The evidence of experience', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 17 (Summer 1991), pp. 78 ff; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between History and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 239; Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998), p. 58; Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 12.
- 2 L.G. Darling, 'Detailed report on Allied PW in the Burnei–Miri area between Mar–Jun 45', Sticpewich Papers, AWM: PR00673, folder 4; Report re: search Ranau–Sandakan track, NAA: MP742/1 132/1/529.
- 3 W.H. Sticpewich, 'Prelude to the Sandakan–Ranau march: War crimes and events', p. 12; also clippings from the *Sabah Times*, Sticpewich Papers, Folder 5; see also Simpson Papers, Mitchell Library: ML 3343 MLK 7150.
- 4 Ibid; also Colin Simpson, *Six from Borneo: Documentary Drama of the Death Marches* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1947), p. 26.
- 5 Sticpewich diary, 29, 30 April, 2 May, 7 June 1947.
- 6 Ibid., 19 May 1947.
- 7 Ibid., 9, 10 May 1947.
- 8 Ibid., 22 May 1947.
- 9 Sticpewich, 'Prelude'.
- 10 War Diary, 23rd AWGU; Sticpewich diary, 17 May 1947.
- 11 See for example 15 April, 12, 13 June 1947. For a detailed inventory of relics from the Sandakan camp, see NAA: B3856–144/4/140.
- 12 Sticpewich diary, 15 April 1947.
- 13 Ibid., 17, 18 May 1947. Sticpewich also generously rewarded 'natives' he considered loyal.
- 14 Diary of Chaplain H.C. Babb, AWM: 3DRL 6012 A, introductory note, p. 23; for an Australian account of Babb's journey see the memoirs of Jack Leemon, 'The bodysnatchers', AWM: MS 0811.
- 15 Babb diary, pp. 1, 9.
- 16 Ibid., p. 17.
- 17 Ibid., p. 37.
- 18 Ibid., p. 23.
- 19 Ibid., p. 51.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 7, 47.
- 21 Ibid., p. 27.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 3, 11, 28.

- 23 Ibid., p. 47.
- 24 Ibid., p. 51. There were also a very high number of fatalities among Japanese forces on Borneo. For a graphic account of their own death march see Ueno Itsuyoshi, *An End to a War: A Japanese Soldier's Experience of the 1945 Death Marches of North Borneo* (Koto Kinabalu: Opus Publications, 2012). Thanks are due to Richard Braithwaite who edited this volume.
- 25 Ibid., p. 30.
- 26 K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983).
- 27 Colin Simpson, correspondence dated 27 November, 2 December 1946; 'He walked with ghosts', pp. 2, 5, 8; Simpson Papers.
- 28 Colin Simpson notes, OK Kulang interrogation, January 1946, Simpson Papers.
- 29 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, p. 164; *Kilmore Free Press* (Kilmore, Vic.), 1 July 1948, p. 2.
- 30 Simpson, *Six from Borneo*, p. 3.
- 31 Ibid., p. 15.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 6–7. On notions of the Japanese as an 'inhuman adversary' in the immediate aftermath of the war, see David Walker, *Not Dark Yet: A Personal History* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2011), pp. 154–6.
- 33 Simpson, *Six from Borneo*, pp. 7–8.
- 34 Ibid., p. 11.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 5, 6, 9.
- 36 Ibid., p. 15.
- 37 Ibid., p. 6.
- 38 Transcription of Wong Siong's interrogation, pp. 5–6, Simpson papers; *Six from Borneo*, p. 27. Wong Siong was 16 when he witnessed the crucifixion and 19 when he gave evidence. The accuracy of such testimony was questioned at the time; see War Crimes Trial Borneo, NAA: MP 375/14 WC 20.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Colin Simpson to Owen Campbell, Simpson papers. The largest cohort of Sandakan survivors were the officers removed to Kuching. Most officers escaped the Death March.

CHAPTER 3 COMMEMORATING OUR WAR DEAD

- 1 Frederick Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 1–7; Clayre Percy & Jane Ridely (eds), *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to His Wife, Lady Emily* (London: Collins, 1985); Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 42.
- 2 Scates, *Return to Gallipoli*, pp. 42–3. For reaffirmation of the same guiding principles of remembrance see Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 29; Anzac Agency, IWGC, minutes, 18 May 1949, NAA: MP 742/1 132/1/705.
- 3 Undated clippings and correspondence, RSL Papers, Circular 1403C, NLA: MS 6609.
- 4 Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 2003), p. 187.
- 5 Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley, WA: UWA Press, 2007).

- 6 Diary of Chaplain H.C. Babb, AWM: 3DRL 6012 A: 32.
- 7 L.G. Darling, 'Detailed report on Allied PW in the Brunei–Miri area between Mar–Jun 45', File marked SECRET, p. 5, in Sticpewich Papers, AWM: PR00673, folder 4.
- 8 Memo from H.C.A. McCann, 23rd Australian War Graves Unit, 28 January 1945, AWM: 52.
- 9 Simpson, *Six from Borneo*, p. 16.
- 10 Babb diary, pp. 16–17; IWGC Minutes of Monthly Meeting, 20 February, 15 May 1958, NAA: A2909, AGS 4/2/2 Part 71.
- 11 'War Graves Recovery', NAA: MP742 255/15/1291; B3856/0 114/1/235; also Jack Leemon, 'The bodysnatchers', p. 129, AWM: MS0811.
- 12 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1949. An obituary to Charles Brennan was first published four years earlier, mourning one 'so dearly loved', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 1945.
- 13 Imperial War Graves in Burma, NAA: 2902, AGS3/4/57; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 1947; *Mercury* (Hobart), 28 June 1949, Anzac Agency IWGC, Monthly report, June 1956, NAA: A2909 AGS1/6/3 Part 6.
- 14 John Chappen to J.C. Neagle, 25 October 1949, RSL Papers, Circular 2258C, NLA: MS 6609.
- 15 Imperial War Graves Commission Minutes, 21 June, 15 December 1955, 20 September 1958.
- 16 Foreign Office Despatch dated 9 October 1952, War Graves Indonesia, NAA: A2909.
- 17 Longworth, *Unending Vigil*, chs 8 & 9; Scates, *Return to Gallipoli*; F.C. Sillar, memo dated 1955; A.E. Brown, memo dated 6 June 1956, War Graves Indonesia, NAA: A2909. Agreement dated 10 September 1962, NAA: 3808; IWGC, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report*, p. 13.
- 18 The Imperial War Graves Commission became the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in the 1960s – a belated recognition of Britain's decline.
- 19 A.E. Brown to Imperial War Graves Commission, 22 June 1953; A.E. Brown, memo dated 6 June 1956, J.M. McMillan, memo from Australian Embassy Djakarta to Canberra, 27 July 1956, War Graves Indonesia, NAA: A2909. Details of war dead are available on the CWGC website.
- 20 Cablegrams from Australian Embassy Djakarta to Canberra, 7, 15 January, 17 February, 13, 14, 16 September 1965, Commonwealth and Indonesian War Grave Agreement, NAA A3808.
- 21 K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), ch. 8. For discussion of the changing nature of mourning see Pat Jalland, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth-Century Australia: War, Medicine and the Funeral Business* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006); Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kinabalu National Memorial Park Project, *A Tragedy of Borneo, 1941–45* (Brunei: G.S. Carter, 1958), program in Sticpewich Papers, AWM: PR00637, folder 6.
- 22 *West Australian* (Perth), 26 February 1947.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 21 October 1947.
- 24 E.V. Britnell to J.F. Chifley, 11 January 1946, Australian POW Relatives Association, Victorian Branch, Visit of Next of Kin to War Graves, NAA: A46/380.
- 25 H. Strachan (PM's secretary) to E.V. Britnell, 8 February 1946, *ibid.* A subsequent report estimated that the cost would exceed £270 000, and that figure involved paying only

half the fare of next of kin to one of some 27 000 identified graves. A means test was suggested, and anxious officials demanded some assurance that pilgrimages not degenerate into ‘battlefield tours’. Despite the British precedent of sponsoring pilgrimage to nearby graves in Holland, labour and conservative governments declined to entertain so costly a scheme; ‘Pilgrimages to War Graves’, NAA MP 742/1.

- 26 H. Strachan (PM’s secretary) to E.V. Britnell, 8 February 1946, Australian POW Relatives Association, Victorian Branch, Visit of Next of Kin to War Graves, NAA: A46/380.
- 27 Kevin Blackburn & Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012); Anzac Agency, Monthly Report for February 1955, February 1957, NAA: A2209 AGS1/6/3 parts 5 & 7.
- 28 Cablegrams from Australian Embassy Djakarta to Canberra, 20, 22, 25, 27 March 1968, Commonwealth and Indonesian War Grave Agreement, NAA: A3808; Gullforce (2/21 Bn) Association Pilgrimage to Ambon, AWM: MS1527.
- 29 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 23 December 1950, 10 June 1953; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1953. Despite its situation, fewer than 40 a month signed the visitors’ books at Labuan, although a resident British community put on a good turn-out for Anzac and Remembrance days, Anzac Agency, Monthly Report for April 1954; July, November 1955, NAA: A2209 AGS1/6/3 part 5.
- 30 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 23 December 1950, 10 June 1953; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1953; Scates, *Return to Gallipoli*.
- 31 *Argus* (Melbourne), 11 November 1952; Imperial War Graves Commission, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 13.
- 32 *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 June 1953; *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 15 June 1953.
- 33 See returned association correspondence with both the Chifley and Menzies governments, ‘Pilgrimages to War Graves’, NAA: MP742/1/0.
- 34 Imperial War Graves Commission, *Unveiling of the Cross of Sacrifice erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission in the Labuan War Cemetery North Borneo at 10.00AM on 10th June, 1953, Order of Service*, program in Sticpewich Papers, AWM: PR00637, folder 6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1953; *West Australian*, 6 June 1953; *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 15, 18 June 1953. The development of these criteria is discussed in chapter 6 below. For the moment it is sufficient to note that the size of the cemetery was the deciding factor. Pilgrimages were subsidised for Singapore (for instance) but not for Ambon, see Anzac Agency, Monthly Report for December 1956, NAA: A2209 AGS1/6/3 part 7.

CHAPTER 4 FROM SINGAPORE TO HELLFIRE PASS

- 1 Field notes, 18 February 2005.
- 2 Interview with Nell, 24 August 2005.
- 3 Robin Gerster, *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987); Nigel Starck, *Proud Australian Boy: A Biography of Russell Braddon* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2011); Michael McKernan, *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return* (St Lucia: UQP, 2001).
- 4 Bruce Scates, ‘Manufacturing Memory at Gallipoli’, in Michael Keren & Holger H. Herwig (eds), *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pp. 57–75; Geoff Eley, ‘Foreword’ to Martin Evans & Ken Lunn (eds), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 23.

- 5 Interview with Charlie, 23 August 2005; Liz Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli: War, History and Memory in Australia* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2004).
- 6 Joan Beaumont, 'War and memory', in Peter Dennis et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995); 'Prisoners of war in Australian national memory', in Bob Moore & Barbara Hatley-Broad (eds), *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War II* (New York: Berg, 2005), pp. 185–94; Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson & Michael Roper, *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge 2006), ch. 1.
- 7 Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 153; Ian Reader & Tony Walter, *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).
- 8 John Richardson, *A History of Australian Travel and Tourism* (Melbourne: Hospitality Press, 1999).
- 9 Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 63–74. See also Ronald J Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (New York: Praeger, 1991) and Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
- 10 Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 3–5, 15–17. See also Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the emergence of memory in historical discourse', *Representations*, no. 69 (Winter 2000), p. 138. Although five POWs joined the 2005 tour, one of these men had been a prisoner of Germany rather than Japan. His experience of captivity was very different but beyond the boundaries of this particular study.
- 11 Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957); Karl Hack & Kevin Blackburn, *Did Singapore have to Fall? Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003); Masonobu Tsuji, *Singapore 1940–42: The Japanese Version of the Malayan Campaign of World War Two* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 12 Ibid.; S. Woodburn-Kirby, *Singapore: The Chain of Disaster* (London: Cassell, 1971); interview with Jack, 12 August 2005.
- 13 Interview with Charlie, 13 August 2005.
- 14 Field notes, 13 August 2005; for a study of Singapore's vanishing war heritage see Kevin Blackburn & Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).
- 15 Interview with Larry and Charlie, 18 August 2005, field notes, 13, 22 August 2005.
- 16 Survey, Larry C (Warwick, Qld). The reference to memories flooding over him comes from his daughter who closely observed her father on this trip; survey, Glenda (Tannymorel, Qld).
- 17 For an introduction to the (vast) literature on traumatic memory see Paul Antze & Michael Lambek (eds), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 18 Field notes, 12 August 2005.
- 19 Field notes, 16 August 2005.
- 20 Dori Laub, 'Truth and testimony: The process and the struggle', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 63.
- 21 Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in *The Death of Luigi Triastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 52.

- 22 Interview with Charlie, 23 August 2005.
- 23 Stephen Garton, “‘Fit only for the scrap heap’: Rebuilding returned soldier manhood in Australia after 1945”, *Gender and History*, vol. 20, no. 1 (April 2008), pp. 48–67.
- 24 Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 25 Interview with Charlie, 13 August 2005.
- 26 Jay Winter uses the term ‘communities of mourning’ in Frans Coetzee & Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (eds), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War* (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1995), pp. 325–56.
- 27 Interview with Charlie, 23 August 2005.
- 28 Peter Burke, ‘History and social memory’, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003). For a rewarding discussion of this concept see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), conclusion.
- 29 Interview with Jack and Nora, 15 August 2005.
- 30 Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different?’, p. 70.
- 31 Interview with Jack and Nora, 15 August 2005.
- 32 Cf. Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia’, in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 305.
- 33 Interview with Elaine and Larry, 15, 19, 20 August 2005.
- 34 Scates, ‘Manufacturing memory’, pp. 57–75.
- 35 Tourism scholars have explored the marking of sites in other places. See, for instance, Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 41; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990); and Alon Gelbman & Dahlen J. Timothy, ‘From hostile boundaries to tourist attractions’, *Current Issues in Tourism*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2010), pp. 239–59.
- 36 Unidentified press clippings; C.T. Moodie to Bruce Ruxton, ‘Restoration of the Burma–Thailand Railway’, RSL Papers, NLA: MS 6609, Box 945.
- 37 Figures provided by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs; see also *Office of Australian War Graves Journal*, 2000–01, pp. 57–8.
- 38 Field notes, 19 August 2005.
- 39 David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 3–6; Lowenthal, ‘Fabricating heritage’, *History and Memory*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 5–24.
- 40 Interviews with Jack and Larry, 20, 23 August 2005.
- 41 Interview with Ralph, 19 August 2005. The rails referred to were installed in 1983. Very few original sections of the line are still in place.
- 42 See the exchange prompted by David Glassberg’s ‘Public history and the study of memory’, *Public Historian*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring 1997); Insa Eschebach, ‘Soil ashes, commemoration’, *History and Memory*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011), p. 132; Paul Gough, ‘Sites in the imagination: The Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial on the Somme’, *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 11 (2004), p. 236.
- 43 Interview with Carl, 24 August 2005.

- 44 Survey, Jack M., Summerland Point, NSW.
- 45 For traumascapes in history see Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005). Note also the notion that ‘violence leaves traces’ in Katharina Schramm, ‘Introduction’, *History and Memory*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011), p. 5.
- 46 Survey, Larry C. (Warwick, Qld); field notes, 22 August 2005.
- 47 Survey, Heather S. (Mount Pleasant, WA); ‘Consolidation cemetery’ was the term used by the War Graves Commission to describe cemeteries created by bringing together the remains of a number of smaller cemeteries or individual graves.
- 48 Field notes, 22 August 2005; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harvest Books/Harcourt, 1959).
- 49 Survey, Nigel (Condell Park, NSW); field notes, 20, 23 August 2005; survey, Herb (Toowoomba, Qld).
- 50 Interview with Carl, 24 August 2010.

CHAPTER 5 JOURNEYS BACK TO SANDAKAN

- 1 Survey, Brian M. (Padstow, NSW).
- 2 In compliance with ethics procedures, all subjects are deidentified, as is any connection with their family.
- 3 Interview with Maureen H., April 2010.
- 4 Interview with Brian M., 28 April 2010; interview with Maureen H., April 2010.
- 5 Interview with Peter A., 25 April 2010.
- 6 Interview with Janet J., 30 April 2010; survey, Bernard R. (Narrogin, WA); survey, Liz G. (Weetangera, ACT); interview with Kevin U., 1 May 2010; survey, Kevin U. (Port Macquarie, NSW).
- 7 Elizabeth Hallem & Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); interview with Peter O., 25 April 2010.
- 8 Survey, Liz G. (Weetangera, ACT).
- 9 Interview with Shirley, 27 April 2012; survey, Stuart M. (Padstow, NSW).
- 10 Survey, Stuart M. (Padstow, NSW).
- 11 Survey, Liz G. (Weetangera, ACT).
- 12 Interview with Bess W. (Pamona, Qld).
- 13 Survey, Bernard R. (Narrogin, WA); interview with Jim and Narelle L. (25 April 2010); survey, Narelle L. (Trinity Beach, Qld).
- 14 Barbara Shaw to Peter Venn, Borneo Tours, RSL Papers, NLA: MS 6609, Box 985.
- 15 Olivia L., notes on bus commentary en route to Ranau, 26 April 2010.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Field notes, Anzac Borneo Tour 2010; ‘A service of love and remembrance at the Pool of Reflection, Kundasang, Mt Kinabalu, [2010]’. See also ‘A service of purification and remembrance at the Sandakan Memorial [2010]’. No (Australian) participants in the tour were of Asian descent, and this particular group’s profile reflected that of an older, white, Australia. There were Asian participants in other tour groups, however, whose lives (and those of their families) had been altered by World War II. We consider the responses of more ethnically diverse groups further below.
- 18 Interview with Graham, 30 April 2010; survey, Michael U. (Gold Coast, Qld); interview with Lil, 28 April 2010.

- 19 Interview with Stuart, 28 April 2010; Ken J., 'Thoughts of a son', <www.borneopow.info/pilgrim/jones.htm> (accessed 30 August 2011).
- 20 Interview with Geoff, 28 April, 2 May 2010; author's notes, Anzac Borneo Tour 2010; interviews with Daniel T., 29 April 2010; Terry C., 29 April 2010; survey, Charles S. (Sydney, NSW).
- 21 John L., Sandakan Pilgrimage, <www.borneopow.info/pilgrim/lewis.htm> (accessed 30 August 2011).
- 22 Interview with Brian M., 28 April 2010; survey, Brian M. (Padstow, NSW).
- 23 Survey, Stuart M. (Padstow, NSW); interview with Jill J., 30 April 2010.
- 24 Survey, Bernard R. (Narrogin, WA).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Interview with Maureen H., 23, 28 April 2010. This is how Maureen recalled her childhood; for her it is an 'emotional truth', and she repeated this account virtually word for word on three separate occasions.
- 27 Interviews with Maureen H., 23, 28, 29, 30 April 2010.
- 28 Ibid., 30 April 2010.
- 29 There is a rich literature of the significance of naming, see (for example) T.W. Lacquer, 'Memory and naming in the Great War', in J.R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Also chapter 3 above.
- 30 Interview with Mabel, 30 April 2010; survey, Natasha M. (Ardross, WA).
- 31 Survey, Stuart M. (Padstow, NSW).
- 32 Interview with Kim L.; Peter A., 25 April 2010.
- 33 The tour leader asked to remain anonymous. He claimed that the first services numbered fewer than 20 people (interview, 25 April 2010). See also Office of Australian War Graves, *Journal of the Office of Australian War Graves*, 1999–2000.
- 34 'Sunday 24 [sic] April 2010', Sandakan; correspondence by Linda; interview with Stuart, 29 April 2010.
- 35 Interviews with Shirley, 28 April 2010; Victor B., 25 April 2010; survey, Victor B. (Northmead, NSW).
- 36 Interview with Stuart, 29 April 2010; survey, Narelle L. (Trinity Beach, Qld).
- 37 Interviews with Lil J., 28 April 2010; Maureen H.; 29 April 2010; Daniel, 27 April 2010.
- 38 Interviews with Daniel and Shirley, 27 April 2010. For the rise of this discourse of victimhood see Charles S. Maier, 'A surfeit of memory? Reflections on history, melancholy and denial', *History and Memory*, 1993, pp. 136–51; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006).

CHAPTER 6 NORTH AFRICA

- 1 Katherine Gahan Papers, State Library of Victoria (SLV): MS F Box 4180/3; NAA: B883, 2002/05064671.
- 2 Henry Gullet, *Not as Duty Only: An Infantryman's War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976); Chester Wilmot, *Tobruk 1941* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944); Peter Cochrane, *Tobruk, 1941* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2005).

- 3 Cochrane, *Tobruk*; John Laffin, *Middle East Journey* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958); 2/23rd Battalion, Unit War Diary, May 1941, AWM: 52.
- 4 Barton Maughan, *Tobruk and El Alamein* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1966).
- 5 *Mud and Blood*, 9 December 1954.
- 6 War Widows' Guild, Circular 31, undated.
- 7 Advice from the Imperial War Graves Commission, 1 October 1954. War Widows' Guild, Circular 30, undated (emphasis added).
- 8 For the status of war widows see Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Memos to Prime Minister's Department and the Secretary of Treasury, 9 August, 5 October 1954; R.G. Menzies to W.S. Kent Hughes, NAA: A462, 827/2/37.
- 9 W.S. Kent Hughes to C.J. Austin (Air Force Association), 29 September 1954. PM's file 827/2/37, Estimates of Expenditure, 21 September 1954, NAA: A462, 827/2/37.
- 10 K.J. Morris to J.B. Chifley, 30 September 1947 (emphasis added); Jack Houlihan to J.C. Neagle, 1 October 1947; undated press clippings, Circular 2790C, RSL Papers, NLA: MS 6609.
- 11 'Report by F.A. Burrows', Circular 2790C, RSL Papers, NLA: MS 6609; *Chronicle* (Adelaide), November 1947. Extending the pilgrimage to Gallipoli prompted the Gallipoli Legion of Anzacs to demand representation. There were also protests from the Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women of 'distasteful discrimination', J. Birnie to J.B. Chifley, 10 December 1947; E.S. Vidal to JB Chifley, 2 October 1947; NAA: A 461 N370/1/15.
- 12 Circulars 1965, RSL Papers, NLA: MS 6609, file 4973c.
- 13 Report by Sir Raymond Huish, RSL and RSA Gallipoli Pilgrimage, Anzac Jubilee, April 1965, *ibid.* See also Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), ch. 5; also Ken Inglis's compelling account, *Canberra Times*, 15, 21 April 1965.
- 14 Anzac Agency, Monthly Report, December 1955, NAA: A2909, AGS1/6/3 Part 6. Frank Clune, *Tobruk to Turkey with the Army of the Nile* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1943), p. 105. See also John Laffin's account of the Tobruk fortress cemetery and his chance encounter with a German pilgrim searching for the grave of her son: John Laffin, *Middle East Journey* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958).
- 15 Anzac Agency, Monthly Report, July 1956, NAA: A2909, AGS1/6/3 Part 6. *Australian Women's Weekly*, 8 May 1968. Laffin, *Middle East Journey*, chs 2 & 5.
- 16 Interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 'War Graves now like living memorials', *Mail* (Adelaide), 15 August 1953. Imperial War Graves Commission, *Thirty-first Annual Report* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. 30.
- 19 Interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Interview with Frank T., 9 March 2011. Frank's company embarked on tours of North Africa after 2005. Discouraged by the domestic situation, the company has since turned to battlefield tours of Kokoda (interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012).
- 22 Interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012.
- 23 *Ibid.*

- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 *Mercury* (Hobart), 23 October 1950; interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012.
- 28 Correspondence with Denis M., 14 May 2012.
- 29 Interview with Denis M., 5 September 2012.
- 30 Ibid.

CHAPTER 7 GREECE AND CRETE

- 1 R.G. Menzies to A. Papagos, undated, c. 1951, NAA: A1838, 31/1/3/3.
- 2 Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria* (Canberra: Australia War Memorial, 1962); Peter Ewer, *The Forgotten Anzacs: The Campaign in Greece* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2008).
- 3 Ibid. I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1954). Maria Hill, *Diggers and Greeks: The Australian Campaigns in Greece and Crete* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).
- 4 Imperial War Graves Commission to Prime Minister's Department, 15 August 1950, NAA: A1838, 31/1/3/3.
- 5 Note from Foreign Office, 3 August 1950, NAA: A2910, 427/6/59, N.Theologos to R.G. Menzies, 28 September 1950, NAA: A1838, 31/1/3/3.
- 6 N.Theologos to R.G. Menzies, 28 September 1950, NAA: A1838, 31/1/3/3.
- 7 Memo from Waller in NAA: A2910, 427/6/59.
- 8 *Argus* (Melbourne), 20 May 1952. Recommendation for the 'Greek Mission' by the Returned and Services League, undated, Kay family papers.
- 9 Lieutenant-Colonel Morrow to Margaret Kay, 29 May 1941, available at Bill Kay, <www.2-5agh.org> (accessed February 2012).
- 10 Gavin Long, 'The embarkation from Greece', *Australia in the War of 1939–1945*, Series 1: Army, Vol. 2: Greece, Crete and Syria (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1953), p. 161.
- 11 Lieutenant-Colonel Morrow to Margaret Kay, 29 May 1941, available at Bill Kay, <www.2-5agh.org> (accessed February 2012).
- 12 *Reveille*, 1 July 1941.
- 13 In October Margaret applied for probate of Colonel Kay's will.
- 14 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 16 April 1952.
- 15 Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 16 *Sunday Telegraph*, Sydney, 13 April 1952.
- 17 Mrs Kay's diary, 19 April 1952, Kay family papers.
- 18 In their nominations held in the private Kay family papers, the RSL describes this pilgrimage as the 'Greek mission'; report from Mrs Kay; list of nominations, Crete; circular 2721C, RSL papers, NLA: MS 6609.
- 19 Mrs Kay's diary, 25 April 1952, Kay family papers; report from Mrs Kay circular 2721C, RSL papers, NLA: MS 6609.
- 20 *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 26 April 1952.
- 21 *Mercury* (Hobart), 26 April 1952.

- 22 High Commissioner Sir Thomas White to Margaret Kay, 8 August 1952, NAA: A2910, 427–6–5–9.
- 23 Mrs Kay's diary, 25 April 1952, Kay family papers.
- 24 *Argus* (Melbourne), 20 May 1952.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 The speeches of Pericles found in Kay family papers.
- 27 Field notes from discussions with Tom Harding, Margaret Kay's son-in-law, 1 February 2012.
- 28 Letter to Bill Kay from his niece Dianne, 9 April 1999, Kay family papers.
- 29 Office of Australian War Graves, *Journal of the Office of Australian War Graves*, 2000–01. Surveys by Ray M. (Narraweena, NSW); Alfred C. (Eastwood, NSW); Patrice D. (Hurstville, NSW).
- 30 Interview with Jim and Sue, 23 May 2011.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Survey, Barbara H. (hometown not supplied, New Zealand).
- 34 Marianne Hirsch, 'The generation of postmemory', *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, issue 1 (Spring 2008), p. 103.
- 35 Survey, Ruth (Bamganie, Victoria).
- 36 Interview with Greg, 19 May 2011.
- 37 Interview with Robert, 23 May 2011.
- 38 Scates, *Return to Gallipoli*, pp. 48–52.
- 39 Marita Sturken, 'The image as memorial: Personal photographs in cultural memory', in Marianne Hirsch (ed.), *The Familial Gaze* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), p. 182.
- 40 Interview with Michael, 25 May 2011. Returning to the car, Michael's taxi driver explained that his great-grandfather had also died on that same date.
- 41 Field notes, April 2005.
- 42 Jay Winter, 'Notes on the memory boom: War, remembrance and the uses of the past', in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 86.
- 43 Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson & Michael Roper, 'Introduction', *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), p. 4.
- 44 Lachlan, Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour essay, 2011 tour, <www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/anzac/detcms/navigation/previous-tours/2011-tour> (accessed January 2012).
- 45 Mehdi, Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour diary, 27 April 2011.
- 46 Hayley, Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour diary, 25 April 2011.
- 47 This phrase comes from Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2007).
- 48 Jade, Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour essay, 2011 tour, <www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/anzac/detcms/navigation/previous-tours/2011-tour> (accessed January 2012).

- 49 Mehdi, Western Australian Premier's ANZAC Student Tour essay, 2011 tour.
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