

## TRIP to AMBON

August - September 2015



In July 2015 I drove up to Darwin tracing my Uncle footsteps when he as a member of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF "Gull Force" left Bonegilla Victoria March 1941 by train for Adelaide and then by the Ghan train to Alice Springs where they travelled by road to Birdum then they were loaded onto a cattle train for Darwin they set up camp in the bush 10 Km south of Darwin at Winnellie which is a suburb of Darwin now, after being in Darwin for 8 months, on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 1941 six days after Pearl Harbour was bombed they embarked on three Dutch inter-island trading vessels escorted by the cruiser Adelaide and the corvette Ballarat for Ambon.

In Darwin I met up with my cousin Joan Tucker "nee Miles" and her husband Walter from Glass Mountains, at the end of August we flew to Bali where we were to meet with 33 other members of "Gull Force 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn. Association" they were from Victoria, NSW, SA, and New Zealand we were the only Queenslanders, we all met up at the Ramayana Resort Kuta.

On the 3rd of September we flew from Bali to Ambon Island via Jakarta arriving at Pattimura airport Laha on Ambon at 1-30 PM, it was my first trip to Ambon and I didn't know what to expect. We were met by an excited group of Ambonese all decedents of the Ambonese who helped the Australians during World War 2 it was an emotional greeting of tears and laughter from both sides. Some of the Australians make an annual pilgrimage and have built up a strong bond with the Ambonese. The Ambonese placed Lays of Cloves around our necks,

Alex, Joan and Walter on arrival at Laha, after we collected our luggage we and our Ambonese friends made our way by bus to our first appointment wreath laying at a Australian War Memorials at Tawiri village not far from the Pattimura airport, this memorial was the sight of mass graves of executed Australian found after the war.



Joan Tucker and her cousin Alex Miles.

We also visited a local Kindergarten to official open a toilet funded by Gull Force 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn. Association, then we travelled by bus to the other side of the bay and booked into the Mutiara Hotel in the centre of Ambon City.



The Mutiara Hotel Ambon city.

The Hotel had a banner draped over the front entrance, “Welcome Back Gull Force 2/21 Bn” also there were Australian flags throughout the Hotel.

Ambon is a small Island of about 775 sq km, 51 Kilometre long it is a mountainous jungle clad island, the highest mountain is 1038 metres high. Ambon is the capital city of the Malukas, was better known as the “Spice Islands” it is situated 400 Km west of Irianjaya “West Papua” and 1,000 Km North of Darwin, Ambon Island has a population of about 500,000 about 300,000 living in Ambon City, the people are of Malay-Papuan origin.

“Gull Force 2/21 Bn. Association” was formed in 1965 “Twenty years after the end of the World War 2.” by surviving members of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion who in October 1967 made their first pilgrimage to Ambon. At that time the Ambon War Cemetery had not been completed or dedicated. The Association in conjunction with the RSL of Australia, presented the Governor of the Maluku, “for the people of Ambon” a bronze plaque and a bronze replica of the RSL Badge.

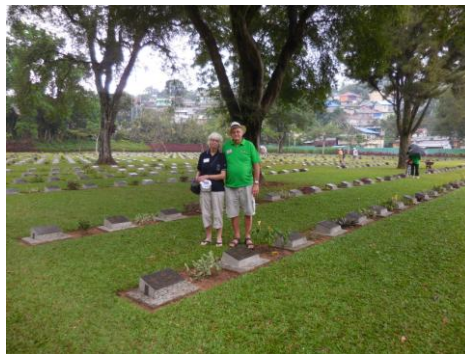


Six months after the first pilgrimage, the Ambon War Cemetery was consecrated and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1968, immediately following the consecration of the Ambon War Ceremony the then Governor of the Maluku, Colonel Latumahina, took the “Gull Force Ass” contingent of nine to the village of Kudamati on the outskirts of Ambon city for the unveiling of Memorial created by the people of Ambon, “the land for the memorial was donated by the people of the Village”.



The Honour Wall with the names of all the veterans who served on Ambon and returned to Australia. The Memorial was refurbished in 2010 and the addition of an honour wall dedicated to the Gull Force veterans who served on Ambon and returned to Australia was unveiled in 2013.

Next morning 4<sup>th</sup> Sep after breakfast we boarded the bus for Galala War Cemetery where Joan and I laid a wreath on our Uncle's grave.



VX 44323 Private A. M. Miles  
2/21 Battalion Infantry Battalion  
25<sup>th</sup> May 1945 age 26

Sleep on beloved and rest forever with the Lord

Albert was made Prisoner of War on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1942 he died 3years and 3months later of Beri-Beri caused by starvation.

Later we got onto the bus and travelled east to Natsepa Beach to be entertained by the Shell Orchestra making beautiful music with sea shells of all shapes and sizes.

We had lunch here and spent the afternoon swimming and resting on the beach, then back to the Hotel.



The Shell Orchestra.

Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup> September I spent several hours watching young men and women in groups of 20 wearing colourful uniforms march past the Hotel.



That night I dined at a nearby restaurant with fellow Gull Force members and some young Ambonese friends we had made, one of the girls was in the marching team above.

Sunday morning I went for a walk down to the wharf, then in the afternoon we were all put into a fleet of black 4 wheel drives, flying Australian Flags and driven in convey south into the mountains along narrow roads to Nona Village on top of a mountain, the trip was spectacular with houses built on the side of mountain surrounded by jungle, we had to leave the vehicles and walked the last 500 metres down steps into the village where we were made welcome and entertained by the villagers.



The steps down into the Nuku Village.



The appeared whole village came out to entertain us.

Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> Ambon Day. Today We “Gull Force” have an invitation from Mayor of Ambon to be his guests for Ambon Day where Ambon celebrates 440 years of colonization and 70 years of freedom, it is 70 years on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September since four Australian Corvettes sailed into Ambon Harbour and expelled the Japanese.

Gull Force in green shirts watching the entertainment at Merdeka Field in front of the Governor’s office.



Gull Force Ass member’s photo taken with two Indonesian radio broadcasters on Ambon Day. . Then we went back to the Hotel for lunch, this afternoon we got onto the buses for a trip to a temporary displaced persons village where about seventy families mostly women and children were housed in one roomed shacks, most lost their houses and husband’s in the Muslim-Christian revolution that started in 1998 and went for several years.

One old blind man there sang to us, war time songs in English he learnt as a child by listening to the Australian Prisoners singing at night in the prison camp. We gave each family a food and clothing parcel.

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup>. Today we boarded two Buses for a two hour drive to the top of Ambon Bay near Paso then follow the coast south to the villages of Rutong and Leahari where we visited a school and the children entertained us with singing and dancing, Gull Force Ass gave the school gifts. After lunch we were taken deep into the jungle where we were given a demonstration as to how Sago was harvested. The group was shown how sago is harvested.



September the 9<sup>th</sup> Today we are taken to the wharf where the four Corvettes tied up after they arrived seventy years ago to take home the 123 survivors of Gull Force 2/21 bn left on Ambon.



This is also the wharf where Gull Force Prisoners had to work, Alex Gabriel told us a story about his father, R C Gabriel who worked on the wharf as a prisoner, when loading torpedoes he managed to bend some of the fins on the torpedoes.

On the way back to the Hotel from the Wharf we walked via the Markets.



One of the colourful stall in the Markets.



That afternoon we rested, followed by a sunset trip to Martha Christina Tiahahu Monument on a hill overlooking Ambon City, then onto the Paramount Restaurant for dinner.

The Martha Christena Tiahahu Monument.



View of Ambon City & Bay from the Monument.

Next morning the 10<sup>th</sup> of September after an early breakfast we were on the bus at 7-30am for the Tantai War Memorial for our commemorative services

This day marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the evacuation from Ambon of the surviving members of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> infantry Battalion following the end of the Second World War. Our uncle Albert Martin Miles VX 44323 served in this Battalion and died a POW on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 after being a prisoner for three years and three months.

Joan her husband Wal Tucker and I along with 33 other members of Gull Force Association arrived at the Ambon War Cemetery at 8am for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Freedom Commemorative Service. The first thing Joan and I did was to lay a floral tribute on our uncle's grave.



Joan & Alex at Alberts Grave 10-9-2015.

Prior to the Gull Force ceremony, we attended a Funeral Service for an Australian soldier killed in West Timor during World War 2, his remains were uncovered during routine building excavation. A two year investigation failed to establish his identity, so he was buried today as an Unknown Soldier, alongside the graves of other unknown soldiers whose executed bodies were discovered in mass graves at Laha after the war.



Sparrow Force Soldier about to be reburied as an Unknown Soldier a two year investigation failed to establish his identity, it was an emotional service conducted by the Australian Army, it is hoped with DNA and time he can be identified, and some family will have closure.

At 10am we attended the Gull Force Commemoration. The “Gull Force Ass” committee had arranged an area of flowers on stems with the names of all the 2/21 Bn “Gull Force” soldiers. Red poppies for the ones that died. White lilies for the ones that returned and since died and blue lilies for the five men still living. Sadly the red poppies (nearly 800) were a far bigger display than the lilies.



Red poppies, white & blue lilies with names of all 1131 soldiers of 2/21 Bn “Gull Force”.



Albert's Poppy



Joan Tucker “nee Miles” and Alex Miles who is wearing Albert’s Medals at the Ambon War Cemetery on the tenth of September 2015.



The ceremony included several speakers the Australian Ambassador, the Mayor of Darwin, and a number of military personal. The President of the Gull Force Association Des O’Brien spoke emotionally of the hardship our soldiers endured over the three years and seven months of captivity. He has over many years spent time with the survivors, who gave detailed accounts of the horrendous acts of cruelty, starvation and medical neglect inflicted by their captives. The service continued with the Ode, Prayers, The Last Post, National Anthem and Benediction. The Commemoration concluded with an Ambonese Choir, in beautiful costumes singing two songs in their language, followed by a very emotional rendition of “Danny Boy” and “Amazing Grace” in English.

After the service we took the bus to the western side of Ambon City to the Kudamati Memorial and Honour Wall. After the service I was given the honour of raising the Australian Flag then Wreath Laying, One Minute Silence, poppies.



Kudamati Memorial and Honour Wall Ambon.

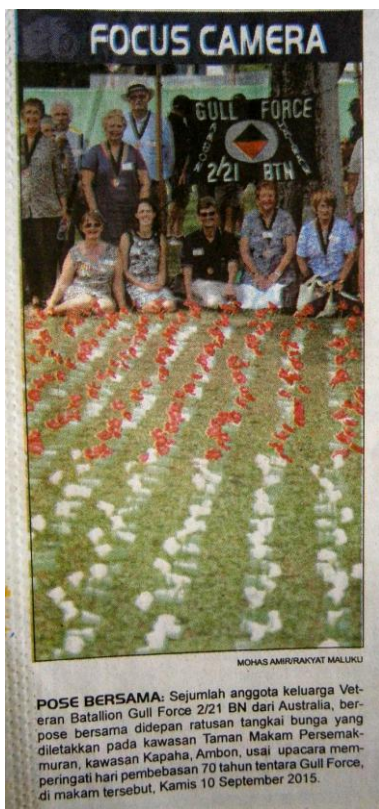
LEST WE FORGET.

That night the Hotel gave us a farewell dinner. We left early next morning for Jakarta and Bali, after a couple more days in Bali Joan, Walter and I flew back to Darwin and our motor homes for the trip back to Gympie & Glasshouse Mountains.

The story of the Sparrow Force Soldier Funeral and the Gull Force Commemorative Service, made the front page of at least four Indonesian newspapers.



I would like congratulate the Gull Force Associate Members who did all the work in putting the trip together.



POSE BERSAMA: Sejumlah anggota keluarga Veteran Battalion Gull Force 2/21 BN dari Australia, berpose bersama didepan ratusan tangkai bunga yang diletakkan pada kawasan Taman Makam Persema-muran, kawasan Kapaha, Ambon, usai upacara mem-peringati hari pembebasan 70 tahun tentara Gull Force, di makam tersebut, Kamis 10 September 2015.



HARIAN Rakyat Maluku  
Jumat  
BERSAMA PEMERINTAH PROVINSI MALUKU  
MARI KITA SUKSESKAN PESPRAWI NASIONAL XI  
OKTOBER 2 & 12  
OKTOBER 2015

**Gainau-Hamu Kalahkan KPU Di Panwaslu**  
Himpunan Pemuda Gainau-Hamu (GPH) Maluku berhasil mengalahkan Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) Maluku dalam pemilihan Panitia Pemilihan Kecamatan (PPK) di Panwaslu Kabupaten Tanimbar, Sabtu (12/9/2015). GPH berhasil meraih 50 persen suara, sementara KPU hanya meraih 49 persen suara.

**KPU Aru Harus Eksekusi Putusan Panwaslu**  
Pengadilan Obrol-Ekta Sisa Wendeber Aru

**SBT Dipimpin Pelaksana Harian**

**Tentara Tak Dikenal Asal Australia Akhirnya Dimaklumkan Setelah 70 Tahun**

**MARI BASUDARA SAMUA KATONG BAYAR LINTIK TEPAT WAKTU**  
INGKAT, JANGAN MELALUI CALO!!

**Subsidi Pesparawi Nasional XI**  
Berguna membangun kebersamaan dan memperkaya keragaman antar Umat Beragama

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MARI KITA SUKSESKAN PESPRAWI NASIONAL XI  
Oktober 2 dan 12 Oktober 2015

**Putusan Sengketa Pilkada Aru Cacat Yuridis**  
KPU Aru akan PTUN-kan Panwaslu

**Golkar Ancol Desak DKPP Pecat Komisiner Panwaslu**

**Pangdam Kembalikan 47 Satwa Langka ke Habitat**

**Gubernur Pasihkan Bakal Adla Pelaksana Tugas Bupati Ambon, Indonesia**

**Paripurna Walikota 'Diserang' Intrusi Dewan**

**Perahu Sementara SBT Nakh Otaota Akademisi Desak Panwaslu Evaluasi**

**70 Tahun Jadi Master Prajurit Australia Akhirnya Dimaklumkan di Ambon**

**Kasus SPKPK Filial BLK Maluku MA Ganjar 5 Tahun Penjara, Direktur CV Aneka DPO**





HELP US TO SHARE THE STORIES AND PHOTOS THAT MATTER TO YOU

# Pilgrimage of honour

Gympie's Alex Miles tells of his recent trip to the Spice Islands to honour his uncle who was one of more than 400 soldiers to die in a Japanese POW camp on Ambon Island.

**I**N JULY 2015 I drove up to Darwin tracing my uncle's footsteps when he, as a member of the 2/21st Battalion AIF Gull Force, left Bonegilla, Victoria in March 1941.

After being in Darwin for eight months, on December 13, 1941 – six days after Pearl Harbour was bombed – they embarked on three Dutch inter-island trading vessels for Ambon escorted by the cruiser Adelaide and the corvette Ballarat.

At the end of August, I flew to Bali with my cousin Joan Tucker (nee Miles) and her husband Walter from Glass House Mountains and met up at the Ramayana Resort, Kuta with 33 other members of the Gull Force 2/21st Bn. Association from Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and New Zealand. We were the only Queenslanders.

On September 3, we flew from Bali to Ambon Island via Jakarta arriving at Pattimura airport Laha on Ambon.

We were met by an excited group of Ambonese all descendants of the Ambonese who helped the Australians during World War 2. It was an emotional greeting of tears and laughter on both sides.

Some of the Australians make an annual pilgrimage and have built up a strong bond with the Ambonese. The Ambonese placed lots of clove around our necks and we then made our way by bus to our first appointment – a wreath laying at an Australian war memorial at Tawiri village not far from the Pattimura airport.

This memorial was the site of mass graves of executed Australian found after the war.



**FAMILY PRIDE:** Gympie's Alex Miles and his cousin Joan Tucker, of Glass House Mountains, at the Australian war memorial in Ambon. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Alex and Joan's uncle Albert Miles who died in Ambon Island POW camp after more than three years a prisoner of the Japanese. PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

We also visited a local kindergarten to officially open a toilet funded by Gull Force 2/21st Bn. Association, then we travelled by bus to the other side of the bay and booked into the Mutiara Hotel in the centre of Ambon City. The hotel had a banner draped over the front entrance, "Welcome Back Gull Force 2/21 Bn" and there were Australian flags throughout the hotel.

Ambon is a small island of about 775 sq km and 51km long, a mountainous jungle-clad island whose highest mountain is 1038 metres.

The capital city of the Malukas, better known as the Spice Islands, Ambon is situated 400km west of Irianjaya "West Papua" and 1000km north of Darwin.

Ambon Island has a population of about 500,000, with about 300,000 living in Ambon City. The people are of Malay-Papuan origin.

Gull Force 2/21 Bn. Association was formed in 1965, 20 years after the end of the World War 2 by surviving members of the 2/21st Battalion who, in October 1967, made their first pilgrimage to Ambon.

At that time the Ambon War Cemetery had not been completed or dedicated. The association, in conjunction with the RSL of Australia,

presented the governor of the Maluku a bronze plaque and a bronze replica of the RSL badge.

Six months after the first pilgrimage, the Ambon War Cemetery was consecrated and on April 2, 1968, immediately following the consecration of the Ambon War Cemetery, the then governor of the Maluku, Colonel Latumahina, took the Gull Force Association contingent of nine to the village of Kudamati on the outskirts of Ambon city for the unveiling of memorial created by the people of Ambon.

The land for the memorial was donated by the people of the village.

Next morning (September 4), we boarded the bus for Galatia War Cemetery where Joan and I laid a wreath on our uncle's grave.

**A**LBERT Martin Miles VX 44323 was made prisoner of war on February 3, 1942 and died on May 25, 1945, three years and three months later of beri-beri caused by starvation.

On Saturday night, September 5, I dined at a nearby restaurant with fellow Gull Force members and some young Ambonese friends we had made.

On Sunday afternoon we were all put into a fleet of

black four-wheel drives flying Australian flags and driven in conveyer south into the mountains along narrow roads to a village on top of a mountain where we were made welcome and entertained by the villagers.

Monday, September 7, Gull Force members were guests of the mayor of Ambon for the Ambon Day celebrations marking 440 years of colonisation and 70 years of freedom.

On Tuesday, September 9, we boarded two buses for a two-hour drive to the top of Ambon Bay near Paso then followed the coast south to the villages of Rutong and Leahari where we visited a school and the children entertained us with singing and dancing.

After lunch we were taken to the wharf where four Australian Corvettes tied up after they arrived on September 10, 70 years ago to expell the Japanese and take home the 123 survivors of Gull Force 2/21 Bn left on Ambon.

Next morning (September 10) after an early breakfast we were on the bus at 7:30am for the Tantui War Memorial for the commemorative services.

This day marks the 70th anniversary of the evacuation from Ambon of the surviving members of the 2/21st

Infantry Battalion following the end of the Second World War.

Joan, her husband Wal and I along with 33 other members of Gull Force Association arrived at the Ambon War Cemetery at 8am for the 70th anniversary of Freedom Commemorative Service.

The first thing Joan and I did was to lay a floral tribute on our uncle's grave.

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Red poppies for the ones that died, white lilies for the ones that returned and since died and blue lilies for the five men still living. Sadly the red poppies (nearly 800) were a far bigger display than

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After the service we took the bus to the western side of Ambon City to the Kudamati Memorial and Honour Wall. After the service I was given the honour of raising the Australian flag before the wreath laying.

That night the hotel gave us a farewell dinner. We left early next morning for Jakarta and Bali and, after a couple more days in Bali, Joan, Walter and I flew back to Darwin and our motor homes for the trip back to Gympie and Glass House Mountains.

I would like congratulate the Gull Force Associate members who did all the work in putting the trip together.



The red poppy laid in honour of Albert Miles.

## Remembrance Day across region honours the dead of all wars

REMEMBRANCE Day came into being largely because the war that was supposed to end all wars failed to do so.

It started out as Armistice Day, to mark the occasion, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, on which the First World War came to an end.

A look at Gympie's Memorial Gates in Mary St tells a story of death on a scale unequalled by any conflict since, but it also shows how wars have become a part of our experience.

Vietnam veteran Ivan Friske and believes the lower death toll in the Second World War may have been due to improved medical technologies, including antibiotics and blood transfusions.

Gympie RSL sub branch president Frank Bontoft said the occasion we will mark at 11am today grew out of the original commemoration of Armistice Day, at the end of the First World War.

Today's commemorations throughout the Gympie region still mark the 97th anniversary of the

end of the Great War, out the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Mr Bontoft said that although the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing was the big commemoration this year, the war still had more than three years to run after Gallipoli.

"Some of the most fierce battles of this war still had not occurred.

"By the 11th November 1918 between nine and thirteen million soldiers had died, many with no known grave.

"This year marks the 97th Anniversary of the Armistice which ended World War One.

"On the anniversary to the Armistice in 1919 two minutes silence was instituted in London with King George V. After World War Two the Australian and British Governments changed the name to Remembrance Day.

"In 1897 Governor General Sir William Deane issued a proclamation declaring November 11 to be Remembrance Day and to be observed at 11am with one minute's sil-

lence to remember all those who died or suffered for Australia's cause in all wars and armed conflicts," Mr Bontoft said yesterday.

Remembrance Day will be commemorated at the Gympie Cenotaph and Kenilworth Memorial from 10:30am and at War Memorial Triangle, Tewantin, Imbil Memorial Park, Kilkivan Memorial Park, Tharo Memorial Gardens, Tin Can Bay Memorial Park and Rainbow Beach cenotaph from 10:45am.

Wednesday, November 11, 2015