

RESIDENTS SUPPORT CAMBRAI LIBRARY

Cambrai's Library is probably the most serviced facility in the village.

Named after its founder-resident, Mavis Nicholson, the many and varied work activities required to maintain the high standards which have been set, is all undertaken by volunteers – a Committee of nine and more than 40 unpaid helpers. The extent to which this free service is appreciated was evident when a recent estimate indicated it was being used by 60% of Cambrai residents.

Another survey earlier this year recorded that up to 1,100 books were handled over a 21 day period – a month of least activity due to the absence of many residents who were away on holidays.

The Library currently holds more than 5,000 items – books, books-on-cassettes, cassettes, compact discs, DVD's, games, jigsaws, large-print books, reference books and videos. Operational costs are kept to a minimum by recycling much of the stationary, book tags etc., as well as judicious bargaining for both new and second-hand books.

Books given to some residents as gifts – including fairly recent publications – are often donated to the library after they have been read by the recipient and passed around to family and friends.

Items surplus to the Library's needs are packed and offered to various charities, schools or held over for sale at the Annual Cambrai Fete.

Considerable time is taken with the selection of new stock which involves visits to the Library Board of Western Australia, trawling through discards as well as avoiding 'doubling-up' on titles and series prior to negotiating prices.

Cambrai is fortunate to have the services of a dedicated professional in Mavis Nicholson. Her knowledge of the work requirement included 23 years continuous employment as Librarian Technician with

the City of Stirling Library Service.

In summary, residents agree it's a pleasure to visit the Library to meet some of the volunteers who give their time regularly as well as taking advantage of the excellent range and choices available to them.



Mavis Nicholson. Photography - Peter Burchett



Vietnam Veterans v Cambrai Lawn Bowlers

Sixteen men and women from the Cambrai Bowling Group enjoyed their social game against 15 visiting Vietnam Veterans on December 23. A big disappointment for all participants was that the friendly get-together had to be abandoned due to a downpour after only 10 of the planned 16 ends had been played.

While lawn bowls was something new for the Vets., in their weekly physical fitness programme, it also provided an opportunity for them and for Cambrai residents to inter-relate and to enjoy each other's company.

Cambrai resident, Geoff Tanner, himself a Vietnam Veteran, had proposed the visit as part of his group's varied physical fitness programme. Because it proved so successful, he suggested it be repeated again next year – an idea which has been endorsed by Cambrai's lawn bowls President, Bill Clues.

Although the game came to an abrupt end due to heavy rain, some visitors stayed on to enjoy the hospitality of a sausage-sizzle at Geoff and June's Cambrai unit.

The Vietnam Veterans Health Fitness Programme is funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and administered by Damian Pavlinovich of "Wellness by Design." Damian will be remembered by some long-term Cambrai residents when he was associated with a wellness and fitness programme in the Village some time ago.

Derrick Flynn

First Australian POW of Japanese – Malayan Campaign 1941-45

Flight Lieutenant Donald Alexander Dowie 649 Born Adelaide 1917.

Don Dowie (service no, 4323) joined RAAF in 1938. He trained as an aircraft metal rigger with the rank of AC 1. He was dux of his course. In due course, he re-enlisted as a Air Cadet (service no, now 649) at Point Cook in 1939 and trained as a pilot. As a member of 1 Squadron he was sent to Malaya during 1941.

On 8 December 1941 Flight Lieutenant Donald Dowie was one of four crew on a Lockheed Hudson (No 1 Squadron RAAF) operating out of Kota Bahru. For a couple of days aircraft from No 1 Squadron had been shadowing the Japanese invasion fleet as it headed for southern Thailand north-east Malaya. It was decided to attack a Japanese cruiser. Their aircraft approached at Mast height and skip bombed the cruiser. Unfortunately, their aircraft was hit and crashed into the sea. Two of the crew (F/Sgt Coldrey – wireless operator and Sgt Gareth White – rear gunner) perished. The Captain Ft/Lt John Ramshaw and Don were thrown through the Perspex roof. Subsequently Don was the only survivor, although with a fractured spine. Two nights later he was picked up by the Japanese Navy and taken to Singora (Thailand) and then to Saigon where he was handed over to the Kempei Tai. Still later he was sent to Singapore. On arrival in Singapore he was blind folded and moved out to the Changi area on a truck. He was pushed off the back of the truck and some time later he raised his blind fold and was confronted by the sight of a British Officer, complete with Sam Browne Belt, Monocle, Swagger Stick and wearing a Gurkha Regiment hat. This officer said to Don "...I'm Morrison of the Leicesters. Would you care to join our Mess?" That was the start of an association with the British.

Don became part of "H" Force, which was sent to the southern end of the Burma Thailand Railway in May 1943. "H" Force was employed in the Konyu/Hintok area and worked on two huge cuttings and the Three Tier Bridge. There were two Australian Medical Officers (Majors Ernie Mardsen and Kevin Fagan)

and one Dental Officer (Captain Mac Winchester) in the force. Also part of "H" Force were John Diver (British) and Austin Best (British – pre war Resident Medical Officer on Christmas Island) and WO Briganza "Assistant Surgeon" (Indian Medical Services).

Initially Don was located at Tonchan South (north of Tarsau). It was here that he witnessed a brutal bashing of Dr John Diver. Diver had secretly given Medical assistance to a Japanese soldier who had fallen out of the line-of-march as his group was marching towards Burma. The soldier was totally exhausted and was lying in the jungle near death (subsequently died). Don says Diver was a devoted doctor and a man of great courage. It was in this vicinity that Don was used as a donor to transfuse a desperately ill fellow POW who was grossly anaemic. Several methods of delivery were tried, but they were unable to prevent the blood clotting the donee died.

Work in the Konyu/Hintok area was completed by August 1943 and the Japanese demanded a further party of 100 to be sent up north to join with "F" Force and bolster the effort up there. Major Kevin Fagan (Medical Officer) had to select the 100 fittest to go north. He had this to say, "The worst experience I had was the job of choosing 100 of the survivors of the holocaust to go further up into Thailand to a place called Konkoita to help with a cutting which was behind schedule. There were about 300 of us left out of about 600 (Australians)...I had to choose 100 men to march another 100 miles into the unknown, certainly to worse and not to better. I never saw any of those men again." (When Kevin Fagan made this statement in an interview he probably did not realize that he had operated on Don Dowie at the Sime Road Camp, Singapore later in 1944). "I felt that I had come to the end at that stage because these were the fellows whom I had nursed through difficult times and there was a bond of affection between us. I would have understood if they'd cursed me, turned on their heels and walked away. Instead of that they came and shook hands with me and wished me good luck. And I found it necessary

to walk into the jungle and weep for a while ... Later on that day the Japanese medical officer came by, a pompous fellow who could speak quite good English. I said to him, "Unless you change your treatment of these prisoners they will all die." He said, "That would be a very good thing; it would save the Japanese army much rice."

Whilst Don was in the Konkoita area, he was in charge of a work party of around 20 men. The group was involved in building a short two-tiered bridge. This was being supervised by a Japanese engineer Lietenant Shimizu. Don says that Shimizu was not a bad Jap, unlike most, and was a gentleman. The POWs had substantially finished the timber bridge and a team of Tamils was working on an adjacent cutting. When the Tamils broke through, the floor of the cutting was one metre below the bridge platform. There was much panic and loss of face for the engineer. The Jap engineer obtained differential pulleys and stays and as the workers supported the bridge platform others were required to cut down the vertical uprights. Don could see the pulleys were not strong enough and they eventually broke and the upper structure collapsed. Fortunately, there was no loss of life. There followed much face slapping to appease the Jap engineer's frustration.

Upon completion of the Railway in October 1943, Don, as part of what survived of "H" Force, was returned to Singapore, where Major Fagan had to do an operation on his back. Following the War, Don studied medicine and, in due course, became the Director, Medical Services, Department of Social Services South Australia. He and his wife Cynthia reside in Willunga in South Australia. In 2003 they visited the Australian War Memorial and viewed the engines of the aircraft that he was in on 8 December 1941. The engines were recovered in 1976 are now on display at the AWM.

Notes prepared by Lt Col Peter Winstanley RFD (Retired) following discussion with Doctor Dowie. (E-mail pgwinstanley@cambraivillage.com.au) August 2004.