

Program of Events

10am Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre

Morning Tea – Meeting of Families
Unveiling of Plaques

10.30 Buku-Larrnggay Theatrette

The Rescue of USAF Pilot Clarence 'Sandy' Sanford
The Loss of HMAS Patricia Cam

11.30 Rika Park - Welcome Address

Banambi Wunungmurra introduces Traditional Owners
Bakamumu Marika & Djawa Yunupingu

Performance by the

Gumatj & Rirratjingu Dancers

Speeches & Messages

The Hon. Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA
Official Representatives & Descendants

12 Noon Dedication of the Memorial

The Reverend Doctor Noel Kentish

Followed by Community Barbeque

Contributors

NT Government

East Arnhem Regional Council

Rirratjingu Association - Gumatj Association

PastMasters International

Proudly sponsored by the NT Government programs
'The Territory Remembers' & NT History Grants

HMAS PATRICIA CAM & USAF Flt. Lt. 'Sandy' SANFORD MEMORIAL



Monday, 24 APRIL, 2017

**Rika Park
Yirrkala
Northern Territory**

The Rescue of 'Sandy' Sanford



On 14th March 1942, USAF Lt Clarence Sanford was flying a Kittyhawk over New Guinea against the Japanese when he got lost in cloud. He flew south for 150 miles & then west for 300 miles across the Gulf of Carpentaria until out of fuel he parachuted into the sea close to Bremer Island (Dhambaliya).

Wandjuk, Milirrpum & Milirrrma Marika, from Yirrkala mission, were hunting on the island & found Sanford by the waters' edge. Approaching Wandjuk said in English "What are you doing here, are you Japanese?" "NO" Sanford replied & Wandjuk said "Are you English?" "NO" came the reply & up came the spears until Wandjuk saw his crucifix & said "Are you Jesus man?" "YES, YES" came Sanford's earnest reply to his rescuers.

The next day, rested & refreshed, they walked down the island to the canoe - crossed to the mainland & camped. Badly sunburnt & in shock, they bound his feet but after 10 miles, with 5 more to the mission, Milirrrma went on ahead to raise the alarm & by evening Sanford was bathed and put to bed.

After 2 weeks he went by lugger to Millingimbi then on to Darwin & Brisbane before returning to the States. He never flew again in combat but after the war he completed his medical training & practiced as a surgeon for 30 years at Buffalo NY until his death in 1987 at the age of 68.

The Loss of HMAS Patricia Cam



One year later, in January 1943, Yirrkala Missionary & Coastwatcher Harold Thornell expected new code books so sent Djimanbuy & Djnipula Yunupingu; Narritjin Maymuru & Milirrrma Marika to Elcho Is. to check the mail, unknowing that head of the coastwatchers & missions Rev Len Kentish was bringing them on HMAS Patricia Cam. They met at Elcho & the 4 Yolngu plus their canoe went aboard for a lift back home to Yirrkala via Jensen Bay.

On Friday 22nd, the ship was bombed by a Japanese seaplane. Crewman Neil Penglase & Djnipula Yunupingu died at once. Edward Nobes & Djimanbuy Yunupingu were killed by the 2nd bomb. Len Kentish was captured & flown to the Aru Islands. The survivors took turns to paddle the life raft, except William Moffitt & Andrew Johnston who floated away & were lost in the night.

Around 3am the raft reached Gurraka Is. below the Cumberland Strait. The men were barely ashore before Paddy Babawun Wanambi of Milingimbi, had a fire going & had found fresh water. Exhausted, they slept until dawn.

Percy Cameron & Milirrrma Marika died next day & were buried side by side. A signal fire was lit & next afternoon Paddy & Narritjin saw smoke from the south & went for help. They met Dika below the Gulgari Rip & he took them to Elcho whilst his son Militjbi & family went north to greet the survivors late the next morning with the words "We have come to look after you".

Captain Alexander Meldrum, set off with some of the Yolngu to cross Cumberland Strait & walk more than 25 miles up Marchinbar Is. to the coastwatcher at Jensen Bay, arriving late the next evening during a storm.

Coastwatcher Jack Jensen knew a daily flight looking for the Japanese invasion fleet passed over the top of the island, so next morning he was dancing on the beach, waving his arms like a madman to attract the pilot to his message in the sand & the arrow pointing south. At 0930 he radioed Darwin & by mid-morning pilot Len Gairns was over the survivors' beach, he dropped a message and his rations before heading for Horn Island.

Jensen sent 4 Yolngu south to help the survivors & they arrived later that afternoon. An hour before midnight HMAS Kuru left Darwin for the Wessels which she reached on last light of the following day, one week after the sinking of HMAS Patricia Cam. It was dark by the time they were all aboard, leaving Percy and Milirrrma to the wilderness they sailed to Jensen Bay then Darwin which they reached at 10am on Monday 1st February 1943.

In 1946 Mrs Violet Kentish at last learned of her husband's beheading & 2 years later his murderer was hanged in Hong Kong Jail as a war criminal.

In 2013 a group of heritage researchers, The Pastmasters, found a piece of ship's timber that led to the Patricia Cam story, the survivors' island location & Percy Cameron's daughter Jan Braund. It would be a further 3 years before all the Yolngu were identified & the full story could be told to the families gathered in remembrance at Yirrkala on the 24th April 2017.