



SUEZ MARU FAMILIES & RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER



Kranji CWGC Singapore, © David and Janet Bailes

WELCOME TO THE SPRING 2026 SUEZ MARU FAMILIES & RESEARCH ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Along with updates from *Finding the Families*, *The Apology Campaign*, *The SMRFA Website*, and *Notes From a Chair*; this issue includes a welcome contribution from David and Janet Bailes, previously resident in Singapore before returning to the United Kingdom. David and Janet have worked tirelessly to photograph and record every single *Suez Maru* man's name on the CWGC Kranji War Memorial in Singapore. This issue's cover photograph shows Janet hard at work. Also included is Part 2 of my trip to Jakarta, Ambon, Liang and Surabaya from September 2025. I hope you enjoy this latest newsletter. Please email me (contacts on the last page) with any news or information you would like to see or share in your SMFRA newsletter. Thank you,

Simon Newsletter Editor

INTRODUCTION FROM THE SECRETARY

As incoming SMFRA Secretary, I would very much like to reiterate the committee's thanks to Penny for all her hard work prior to stepping down from SMFRA and wish her well with her publishing company. When I was asked to take up the role of Secretary of the SMFRA, I had no hesitation in agreeing for two important reasons. Firstly, to contribute towards keeping alive the memory of the victims of the *Suez Maru*. Secondly, as the title of Alan Jones's excellent work "*The Suez Maru Atrocity. Justice Denied*" suggests, some unfinished business remains. In 1947 The British Government failed to pursue the prosecution of the perpetrators of the *Suez Maru* atrocity when the truth was revealed. They also denied the relatives of the victims the full truth as to how their loved ones perished. An acknowledgement of these two wrongdoings by the present-day government would be very much welcomed by the members of the SMFRA. If, by taking up the position of Secretary, I can contribute towards both these goals I'd consider it a job well done.

It was almost twenty years ago that a conversation with my uncle first brought to my attention the loss of my second cousin, William Dixon, whilst a Prisoner of War of the Japanese. The full story of how he lost his life was shrouded in mystery and uncertainty, and there was no mention of the *Suez Maru*. Like many of you now reading this newsletter, I undertook my own research, not knowing where this would take me. As the full story of "Little Will" unfolded, I was both shocked and saddened at what had taken place. The turning point in my investigations was an enquiry I sent to Lesley, Chairman of the *Java FEPOW Club 1942*. I wrote asking if she knew anything about the *Suez Maru* and the circumstances in which it was lost. Her reply was very much along the lines of a long-lost relative welcoming me into a very close family. I will never forget that reply, so thank you, Lesley, for welcoming me with such open arms.

After joining the *Java FEPOW Club 1942*, my knowledge of the men of Liang POW camp and the *Suez Maru* grew enormously. The *Suez Maru* 80th Anniversary Remembrance Service at the NMA was a memorable occasion and also provided me with the opportunity to meet other relatives, along with Lesley and Jacquelyn. I have always harboured a desire to visit Ambon and the site of Liang POW Camp and airfield, so I contacted Lesley in 2024 to ask her advice. Along with various suggestions, she put me in touch with Jacquelyn regarding the position of the POW Camp and Liang airfield. The rest, as they say, is history. Those of you who know Jacq will know that her knowledge, commitment, and enthusiasm for the *Suez Maru* men, and the many other areas of life as a POW of the Japanese are extensive. I can quite categorically state that my 2025 trip to Jakarta, Ambon, and Surabaya, featured in the Newsletter, would not have been the success it was without her invaluable help, so thank you. I am very much looking forward to the 2027 trip, (for details see page four), which I have no doubt will be a memorable one.

Simon SMFRA Secretary

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SMFRA - ASSOCIATION NEWS

FIRST SMFRA AGM - SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2026

Our first AGM as an association will be on 29 November 2026, after the gathering at the Suez Maru Memorial, National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire. This, our first year, we would like to reach and gather as many SMFRA members together as possible. We would like to hear your thoughts, ideas and also votes. We will gather in person at the NMA on 29 November for 12 noon, to remember the *Suez Maru* men. afterwards we will meet to hold our AGM. More details will be in the next newsletter and on our Facebook and IG pages, and you can email us for information, too. We will soon make an 'event' on the Suez Maru Facebook page, so please click *attending/interested/not attending* so we can gauge numbers. Thank you

NEW PLAQUE, NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

We built and dedicated the Suez Maru Memorial in 2013, and some of you may have noticed that the plaque text is not as clearly readable as it once was. Also, since it was dedicated, we have researched the Suez Maru men and nationalities in detail, and understand there is no specific Suez Maru memorial to the Dutch in Holland, so they are remembered at the NMA Suez Maru Memorial - as announced at the 80th anniversary gathering in 2023. Therefore, we have begun discussions with the NMA to replace the plaque at the Suez Maru Memorial. It would have almost the same text but include nationalities, and would be re-dedicated on the closest 29 November to its installation. We will launch the inevitable fund-raising appeal once we have a clearer idea of the cost, and will share design options with you all for consultation. Please email any questions or thoughts on this, and as ever, keep an eye on the SMFRA Facebook page and issues of this newsletter too.

THE SUEZ MARU (SMFRA) WEBSITE

You may remember that we moved over to a new website, managed by Marcus, which includes a membership page. Most of the migration of data and information has now happened, and Nicki has been adding information from the (now closed) Suez Maru Facebook *group* (not the Facebook *page*!), which was the forerunner of the *Finding the Families Project*. There are now over one hundred photos of the Suez Maru men, and you can search by service, create a gallery by selecting a photo, and see some of the background information. It's an ongoing project, and we hope to add an update on the various projects there, as well as past information, such as photos of each NMA gathering. The first newsletter is now online, and we will add this one to the page soon. See page 6 for the full website update from Marcus, or click for [Website Update](#) and see Nicki's update in [Finding the Families](#).

SMFRA - ASSOCIATION NEWS CONTINUED...



LIANG BEACH AUGUST 2025 © SIMON FARRELLY

AMBON 2027 TRIP - SUEZ MARU FAMILIES

We are in the early stages of planning a Suez Maru Families trip to Ambon, Indonesia, in October 2027. It is hoped that this will be a 'Walking in their Footsteps' journey for all Suez Maru families and friends who would like to join us. After my trip in 2012 with the wonderful Java FEPoW Club 1942, my PhD thesis on the Liang area, and Simon's amazing journey in 2025, we began discussing options for Suez Maru families to experience Ambon and the places we visited and researched.

A full itinerary is in the planning, but would include options for different levels of energy and fitness. For example, one day might start with a visit to the site of Liang camp, and a short service there, then, after lunch, an optional walk of some of the route of the Liang Marchers. Of the Suez Maru men, 367 were Liang prisoners, and 183 were transported from a prisoner camp on the next island of Haruku. We are looking at all the options to visit the site of the Haruku camp as well. We hope that the trip will include visiting these two camp sites, the Liang airstrip, Ambon harbour, as well as the CWGC at Ambon Town. We would all be staying at the same hotel together, with plenty of time to also relax and take things at a pace. We are putting the itinerary and costs together and will share more information as soon as it's ready. The trip will require long-haul travel to Indonesia, probably via Singapore, we will stay on Ambon, and we expect it will be about 10-14 days. The cost would be flights (we would share details so people can choose to travel together), hotels (we will book a group rate for you to join), any additional meals away from the hotel, and normal travel expenses, but there would be, obviously, no cost for planning and organising the trip and organising/touring etc while there, aside from any transport costs.

For most of us, this would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the island, the sites of the PoW camps, to 'walk in their footsteps', and yes, it will be emotional and thought-provoking for all who travel, but also a unique and reflective experience. We are putting this together in the coming months, so please email us with your 'expressions of interest'.

SMFRA - ASSOCIATION NEWS CONTINUED...

-
STOP
PRESS!
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REMEMBRANCE MARCH, 8 NOVEMBER 2026 CENOTAPH, LONDON

Just as we completed this newsletter, ready to send out, we received the decision from the *Cenotaph Parade Committee* regarding our SMFRA application to walk, as an association, in the annual march past the Cenotaph on Whitehall in London on Remembrance Sunday this year. We are so pleased to say that *we have been invited!* The SMFRA Committee are so proud and excited to share this with Suez Maru families and humbled by this wonderful opportunity to offer a SMFRA wreath to be laid at the national remembrance memorial and to walk together as one to remember and honour the Suez Maru men.

- THE DETAILS -

Remembrance Sunday this year is **8th November**, and we are required to send information and confirm the number of tickets we would require quite soon, so we ask that if you would like to march, **please click the link to join us by Tuesday, 7 April**. We will email you to confirm we have added you to the SMFRA list.

You will need to be a SMFRA member, and of course, you can march with family; however, please bear in mind we may not be allocated *all* the spaces we might like, so please request only the number needed and no 'spares'. At this stage, we only need you to request to be added to the SMFRA attendance list (by clicking the link for a ticket - please do this quickly. Later on, we will email with more information and once we have everything confirmed, will send instructions, including times, meeting point, what to wear, medals and SMFRA pins, etc. You do not have to do any organising (aside from being in London on the day!), and of course, there is no cost; we will arrange a meeting point for SMFRA members and go to Horse Guards together as an association. Having marched in 2023, it will be an early start, about 8am near Horse Guards.

If you would like a space and are a member, please use the link below as soon as possible, and if you are not a member (!) feel free to join and then use the link. See links below - both are obviously free!

LINK FOR MEMBERS TO REQUEST SMFRA SPACE: <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/GFOK>

LINK TO JOIN SMFRA: <https://suezmaru.org.uk/join/>

- WE HOPE AS MANY SMFRA MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE WILL ATTEND! -

APOLOGY CAMPAIGN

COMMEMORATING THE SINKING OF THE SUEZ MARU AND HONOURING ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR

The campaign goes on within all parliaments of the United Kingdom. We regularly remind parliamentarians of the Suez Maru men, and another email has been delivered recently – every nudge is worth it. We need to keep the name of “Suez Maru” in the minds of all ahead of any future developments.

Thirty MPs have now signed the Early Day Motion of Westminster Dr Scott Arthur MP (for Edinburgh Southwest). This amounts to three more since Issue 1 of this Newsletter. Every signatory is worth fighting for. Now could be a suitable time to ask Dr Arthur to push for a question in Westminster parliament once again on the Suez Maru atrocity. Just recently, his priority has been to successfully secure a Rare Cancer Act, a piece of work which won him the award of "Parliamentarian of the Year". He has applied for a Suez Maru question previously, but because of the enormous number of MPs at Westminster, “getting heard” is a lottery. Dr Arthur may be in a better position to ask again now.

✓ [READ the SUEZ MARU EDM HERE](#)

Stephanie Callaghan's Scottish Parliament Motion's signatories remains at 41. The First Minister replied very positively to Stephanie's contact but a potential meeting would be after the May Scottish Parliament elections and without Stephanie, as she is not standing for re-election. We will look for a new advocate and there are a few in mind - if they are re-elected, so we are hopeful of progress in Scotland.

✓ [READ the SUEZ MARU MOTION HERE](#)

There is more positive news from Wales. Following on from the Statement of Opinion submitted by Julie Morgan MS (for Mid and West Wales) to the Welsh Senedd, she was allowed to ask a question on 24 February 2026. The Senedd chamber has just had a £4 million upgrade, and Julie was the first to speak in it. The Senedd is televised, and Julie can be seen here:

✓ [WATCH the SUEZ MARU QUESTION HERE \(BBC iPlayer\)](#)

The question was: “*What is being done to recognise Welsh military personnel and victims of war?*” and Julie stands (around 1430hrs) to document how her constituent, Bethan Chedzey (relative of Suez Maru man Neville Lawes), had brought the issue of the Suez Maru to her attention. Julie gave details of the atrocity and asked the Welsh First Minister, Eluned Morgan, to have a conversation with the British Government on the subject. There are three more signatories since Newsletter 1, making eighteen in total.

✓ [READ THE SUEZ MARU STATEMENT OF OPINION HERE](#)

We are still working *on* the Northern Ireland Assembly, where politics tend to be a little more complex. Fingers crossed, we can report some success in the next newsletter.

You can see if your member has signed by clicking the relevant link. If they have not, and you feel you can help the campaign, we can provide help with an email template if you wish, and adding your own relative's story to this will make all the difference. Every contact is important. Members' workloads are extremely high, so please bear in mind it can take some time for our emails to reach the top of their piles!

Contact us (see the last page for info) to discuss any of the above,

Thanks,

Heather (SMFRA Suez Maru Apology Campaign Lead)

FINDING THE FAMILIES PROJECT UPDATE

We currently have a small team of volunteers working hard to find more family members of our Suez Maru chaps. In the last couple of months, we have made three more precious bonds with the families of: -

Thomas John Argust - Henry George Ernest Chandler - John Affleck.

The Facebook research group is now closed. All photos and stories have been moved to our new website, see contact page. Please take a look and find your brave family member. If we don't already have a story, we would like to hear from you, no matter how small it may be, and we can help with the writing if you wish.

Researching is one of the four purposes of the *Suez Maru Families and Research Association*, and is included in its Charter. I began researching in early 2024, and by August, I had found ten families from the King's Own Hussars chaps. Below is a photo of some of these families at the memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. What an honour it was to meet more Suez Maru families, as well as Meredith Bell, niece of Captain J Sylvester, the lead investigator in the 1949 Suez Maru war crime investigation, who travelled from Australia to visit the Suez Maru Memorial and families.



FINDING THE FAMILIES - THE SUEZ MARU APPEAL

Do you have any spare time to help? We are looking to increase our research team. Using *Ancestry* or *Find My Past*, we can provide any information we already have to enable you to start a family tree. This can be built up to the present day to then trace ancestors. The team are always available by WhatsApp to offer advice and assistance. If you feel you can help, and want to chat about what's involved, please email (see contacts page).

Thanks

Nicki SMFRA Finding the Families Lead

SMFRA WEBSITE UPDATE

Over the past several months, I have been working on building a new website for the Suez Maru Families and Research Association. The aim has been to create a more permanent and accessible home for the growing body of research about the men who died aboard the *Suez Maru*.

The previous website served the Association well, but as our research has expanded, it became increasingly difficult to organise and present the information in a clear way. The new site has been designed as an online archive, allowing each man to have an individual memorial page bringing together everything we currently know about him.

A feature of the new website is an interactive gallery and searchable index of the men who were aboard the *Suez Maru*. Visitors can browse visually or use filters and search tools to find individual records more easily. This makes the archive far easier to explore and will also help family history researchers discover connections between men, units and locations.

These pages include military details, historical research from archives and public records, and in many cases, photographs or personal accounts generously shared by families. Nicki has done an enormous amount of work gathering and uploading the research material, photographs and documents that now populate the archive. One of the most rewarding aspects of working on the site has been seeing these individual stories come together in one place. It is also quite moving to see many of the men's photographs gathered together in the gallery, each representing a life and a story behind the records.

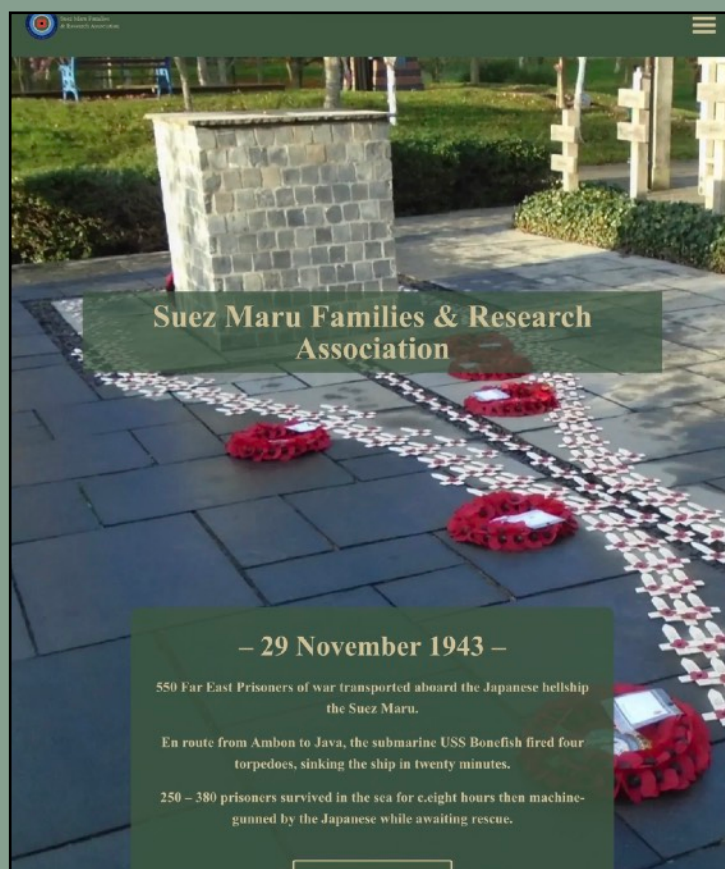
As new information comes to light, the archive can be updated so the research continues to grow over time. Building the website has been a labour of care, and I hope it will help ensure that the stories of the men are preserved and accessible to families, researchers, and future generations.

As always, the project relies on the generosity of families who share photographs, documents, and memories. If you have anything you would like to contribute, we would be very pleased to hear from you (see the contacts page below).

The new website can now be explored, and we hope it will become a useful resource for families and researchers alike, as well as a fitting memorial through which the men's stories can continue to be shared.

Marcus Alexander

– Great Nephew of Gunner Kenneth Smith



DAVID AND JANET BAILES - NOTES FROM KRANJI

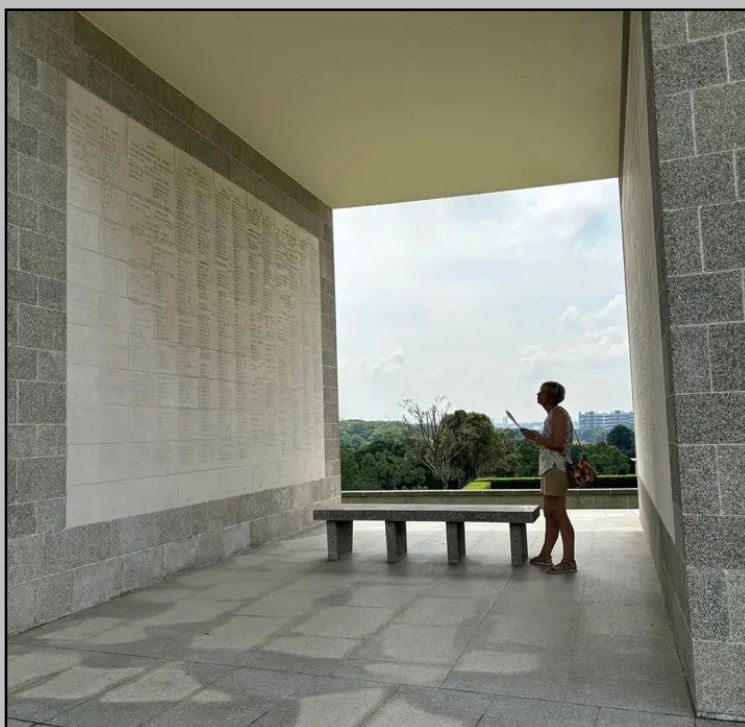
Their project to record the names of all the Suez Maru men at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Kranji, Singapore



Having worked and lived in Singapore for over 20 years, my wife, Janet and I would often visit Kranji War Cemetery/Memorial. It is such an interesting and peaceful place, and it gives everyone who visits time to reflect. One of the reasons we would visit Kranji was due to my Uncle, my father's brother's best friend, Jimmy (James) Permain, who served in the RAF, and to say "hello" especially on Remembrance Day.

A few months ago, I posted a photo on Facebook after visiting Jimmy's stone, which led to Jacquelyn contacting me. She explained that she was doing research into the Suez Maru men, and when she heard that we lived in Singapore, she asked if we would be interested in helping the group with photos.

Jacquelyn sent an email with the regiment, rank and name of each of the men who had sadly lost their lives. Every Sunday morning for a few weeks, Janet and I would go to Kranji, select a regiment, search for the men and take a photo of each stone showing the name. We would then forward the photos to Jacquelyn, and if we had any queries on the names, she would look into our request, ready for our next visit. As the weeks went on, we felt an infinity to all the men and their families, knowing that seeing a family name on a stone would bring great comfort.



Sometimes, when we were doing our research, visitors to the Crematorium would ask what we were doing, and many times we were able to help visitors in locating a stone or gravestone of a family member, as we had come to know the cemetery so well.

We know that not everyone is able to visit Singapore and Kranji, but we hope that our photos have helped many families. It has been an honour and a privilege to help the *Suez Maru* men, their families and the (SMFRA) association's dedication and commitment.

David and Janet Bailes

Just a note to add, on behalf of the Suez Maru families, if we may, that on seeing the information David posted about Mr Permain (whom we now affectionately call Jimmy too), it was an immediate thought to ask if they would consider taking more photos of the Suez Maru men's names at Kranji. What we didn't expect was the huge dedication and time they would immediately put in to find every man and record every name. It was very easy to simply receive their photos and share them on the Suez Maru Facebook page! So all credit to them for all those weekends at Kranji and the thoughtful dedication. (They also arranged to have flowers placed at the name of a chap, who was not a Suez Maru man, but whose family were searching for information - it means the world to them). They also came to the National Memorial Arboretum in November 2025, to stand with us as we remembered our chaps on the 82nd anniversary of the Suez Maru sinking and atrocity (see photo later on).

Thank you are not big enough words, for the kindness shown, but we thank you nonetheless.

SMFRA Committee

The album of images from Kranji is available on the Suez Maru Facebook page.

Here is a link: [Suez Maru Photo Albums](#)

SIMON'S JAKARTA, AMBON, AND SURABAYA JOURNEY 2025 - PART II

Continued from Part I, Issue 1 Autumn 2025

.....After taking photographs of the Muslim Boys School, and a final friendly farewell from both pupils and staff at the gates, I continued my walk towards the site of Liang Airfield. Little did I know that I had yet to discover the site of the camp and that I would, in fact, walk straight past it a little further down the road.....

Photo Right: A friendly farewell
Photo below: The steep uphill route
back to camp



The road down to the airfield was winding with a steep downhill drop to the coast. The prisoners would have made this walk daily, many in very poor physical condition. The steep uphill return journey at the end of the day would have been exhausting in the heat of the dry season, or the heavy monsoon rains of the wet season. Every step of the way I was greeted with friendly curiosity and countless requests for selfies. Very few foreigners frequent this part of Indonesia, and the locals were curious to know what a “Bule” was doing walking down the road to Liang.

(Editor’s note: “Bule”. Indonesian slang for a Westerner used by locals to indicate a foreign person without intending malice)



A friendly smile

Although English is not widely spoken, the use of sign language and photographs of my relative, William Dixon, in his RAF uniform soon got the message across. The reaction was always positive and in many cases, accompanied by stories passed on by an elderly relative. After walking around 3 kilometres, I arrived at the site of Liang aerodrome. Up to this time, only a single photograph was known to exist of the aerodrome, taken by a US Air Force reconnaissance flight in 1944.

(Editor's note: recent research by SMFRA has since uncovered more aerial reconnaissance pictures taken in 1948, four years after both the airfield and POW camp had been abandoned)



Image: © AWM

US Air Force aerial reconnaissance photograph of Liang Airfield and POW Camp 1945



Image © Google Earth

Present day satellite image site of Liang Airfield and POW camp

Arriving at the position of the airfield my initial impression was that there was very little evidence remaining of its presence. Having explored the site on mapping websites and charts, and using the single photograph that was known to exist, I headed towards a pre-planned position about three quarters of the way down the airfield. This was now a football pitch and had been part of the runway built by the men of Liang Camp. As I stood in the middle of the playing field I was mindful of the many lives that had been lost as a result of this patch of land. The pitch consisted of grassy areas, interspersed with rock, and levelled coral, representing clear evidence of the runway.



The football pitch, part of the original runway, and a perfect place to launch the drone

The aerodrome was originally built by the occupying Dutch before World War II. At this time, the runway was very short and could only accommodate the smallest of aircraft. After occupying the island, the Japanese required the prisoners to extend the runway to accommodate their larger fighter-bombers. Working with the most rudimentary of hand tools, the POWs toiled each day for nearly three years, felling and removing trees, and levelling the huge piles of rock and coral. Launching the drone from the football pitch would provide more evidence that this was the site of Liang Aerodrome. The direction of the runway was 330°/150°M, here (pictured left), the drone is on a magnetic heading of 330° overhead the football pitch, with the camera pointing in the same direction.



From overhead, the football pitch on the runway heading 330° (Northwesterly)

At a height of 360 ft, the drone is heading 070°M, looking out towards the Banda Sea (pictured right). The island in the distance is Ceram, and the POWs would have had a clear view of it from ground level as they laboured on the runway.

My trip took place in early September, with the rainy season coming to an end. The weather was warm and humid with the occasional heavy shower, as can be seen over Ceram.



Looking out towards the island of Ceram

Heading 120°M, this drone photograph (right) shows a ferry from Ceram heading into the small port of Pelabuhan situated just off the southwest corner of the airfield. The port existed in 1942, and ships carrying cargo, such as barrels of fuel, would regularly arrive offshore. They were too large to dock at the small pier, and the POWs were then ordered to swim out and unload each barrel by hand. After heaving them into the sea, they would then swim back to shore whilst struggling to manhandle them by whatever means they could manage. The process would be repeated until the ship had been unloaded. (This would often take many hours)...



Ferry from Ceram arriving At Pelabuhan off the southwest corner of Liang Airfield



The outline of the runway with the drone pointing back towards camp 3km away

As the drone returned to the football pitch to land, this photograph (right) shows the patches of rubble and crushed coral interspersed with grassy areas. The narrow road to the left indicates what would have been the edge of the runway. The path off to the left behind the small, flat-topped tree runs approximately 50 metres down to Liang beach and some breathtakingly beautiful views across the Banda Sea to Ceram and Haruku.

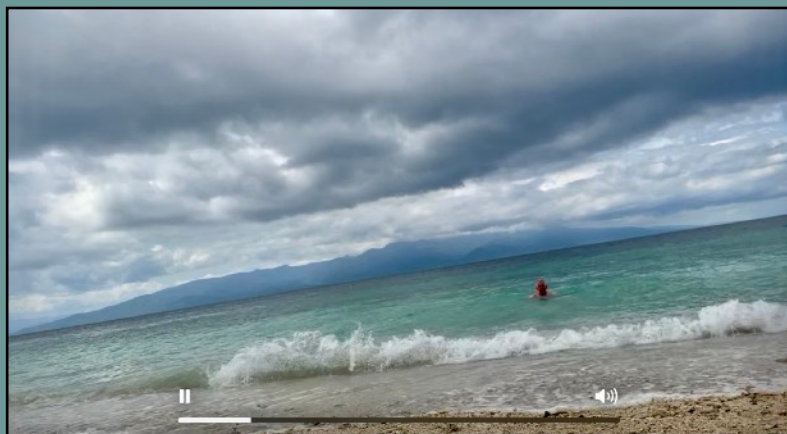
In the photograph to the left, the drone is heading 180°M (south) whilst the runway points 30° to the left on a heading of 150°, parallel to the coastline towards the ferry terminal. The outline of the runway can be clearly seen, now reclaimed by the lower level foliage. The road back to camp climbs about halfway up the hill in the distance before turning left and continuing to climb more gradually for a total distance of 3 kilometres. At the end of each day the men of Liang Camp walked along this road. I walked the same route daily whilst visiting the airfield and the camp site. I found the going extremely tough and could only imagine what the daily experience was like for the weakened, malnourished men of Liang POW camp.



Runway heading 150° M.
The drone landing back at the football pitch



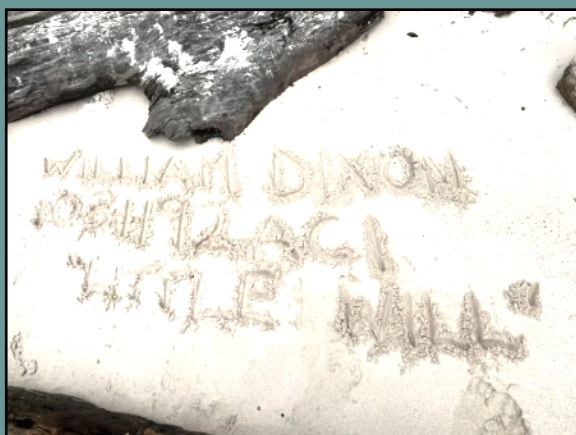
White sands gently sloping into crystal clear waters



With the camera set to record, a fifteen-minute swim in the same spot where the prisoners were sometimes allowed to bathe

Arriving at the beach, the white sands sloped gently down to the crystal clear water, and plenty of shade was provided by the surrounding trees. At the end of a working day, the POWs were sometimes allowed fifteen minutes to bathe in the sea. The soothing salt water would no doubt have come as a welcome relief, particularly to those suffering from coral lacerations, tropical ulcers and suchlike.

No doubt those fifteen peaceful, relaxing minutes were over all too quickly.



William Dixon 1031192 AC1. "Little Will"



In memory of the men of the Suez Maru and all those who did not return

Prior to my trip, Jacquelyn (Frith-Crofts) had mentioned how, during her visit to Liang in 2012, she had written her Great Uncle Jack Frith's name in the sand, leaving it to be washed away by the waves. This seemed to be the perfect way to remember and honour my relative "Little Will", as he was known to his family, along with his fellow prisoners. I traced his name in the sand and laid a wooden cross in memory of the men of Liang POW camp and the Suez Maru.

After my swim, I set off on foot back towards the camp. There are plenty of public buses on Ambon, so I waved down the next one heading towards my base at the Natsepa Hotel, around 15 kilometres away. As mentioned in Part I, the buses are small vans usually crammed full of passengers, goods and even the occasional livestock. They are cheap to use, and the more people on board, the less you pay (what a great idea). As I boarded the bus, I was met with a chorus of "Bule! Sit here!" "Where you from?" "Where you going?" I took my seat next to a family with a small child laid-out asleep, they smiled and nodded. Sign language soon broke the ice, and my family photographs on my iPhone were passed around the bus for all to see and were greeted with much approval.



A bag of hot, sweet potatoes was brought out to be shared by all on board and tasted delicious. The driver turned up the radio, and we rattled along the road to the sound of *Guns N' Roses* - "*Sweet Child of Mine*" blasting out. This was one of the more surreal but memorable moments of my entire trip. These friendly and generous people were, of course, descendants of the same locals who, at great risk to themselves, had left food for the POWs hidden in the undergrowth as they marched back to camp. As I alighted from the bus outside Natsepa, I paid the driver the equivalent of 20 pence for my 15km journey. "Bye, Mistah!" "See you again!", You like Indonesia"? Yes, I most certainly did, and it's wonderful people!

"Guns N' Roses" and hot sweet potato

Having previously abandoned my attempts to cover the first half of the "Liang March" due to torrential rain (See Part I). The next day would see me head back to the port of Ambon by bus to walk the 15km from there back to the Natsepa. The weather was now dry and warm. This was also the perfect opportunity to visit the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery situated on the outskirts of Ambon City.

On 2nd May 1943, the "Liang Marchers" disembarked from the holds of two hellships, the *Mayahashi Maru* and the *Nishi Maru*, at the dock in Ambon port. They then began the long and arduous walk to Liang POW Camp. Now, 82 years later, I set off from the same place to complete the postponed first half of my walk. The first stopping off point was only around 3km away at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery on the outskirts of the city. In 1942, this was the site of Tan Touy (Tan Toei) POW Camp, which housed mainly Dutch and Australian prisoners. The head of the column of around 1000 men slowed, thinking they had arrived at their destination. There are reports they waved to the Australians until the screams and rifle butts of their captors encouraged them to continue on with another 26km to go in torrential rain!



Ambon Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. The site of Tan Touy POW Camp



Beautifully kept and cared for, the cemetery contains the graves of over 2000 men



357 graves are unidentified

Being a Preston man, born and bred, there was one particular grave I had researched before travelling to Indonesia.

Aircraftman Joseph Holden was from my home town, and had been laid to rest after succumbing to dysentery in June 1943, whilst a POW at Haruku. (*Thank you, Jacquelyn for your research*) It is unlikely that his family had been able to visit Joseph, so I made it my business to seek him out and pay my respects.

Us Prestonians look out for each other!

Upon entering the cemetery the first thing that struck me was how beautifully kept it was. The grass was neatly mowed and every single headstone was in perfect condition.

At the entrance to the cemetery there is a book containing the name and location of each grave. I decided to walk up and down each row and pay my respects to every soldier, sailor and airman. It was reassuring to know that those who lost their lives so far from home, were remembered and cared for by the people of Ambon.



Rest in peace, Lad!



Teacher and pupils paying their respects.

As I prepared to leave and continue my walk, I met a local teacher with two of her pupils visiting the cemetery. The teacher spoke good English, so we sat together in a cool shaded area and chatted. They were very interested in where I came from, why I was in Ambon, and, in particular, the story of the Suez Maru. They explained that the pupils and teachers from their school regularly visited the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery to remember and pay their respects to the men buried there. I left knowing that the casualties of war buried in Ambon were in very good hands.



THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE



Latuhalat Beach, where the POWs camped overnight

I continued my walk along the road from Ambon to the Natsepa. Crossing the narrow strip of land that joined the two parts of the island and came to the stretch of sand on the Northern Laitimor peninsula called Latuhalat Beach. This was the spot where the “Liang Marchers” had camped out in the rain overnight. A fortunate few managed to find a space in one of the thirteen tents available, but for the majority of the 1000 men, there was nothing they could do but bed themselves down on the beach in the pouring rain and wait for the march to recommence in the morning.

From Latuhalat Beach, I continued around the bay to the Natsepa Hotel, where the following day would be a rest day. Throughout my stay, I had been in contact with Jacquelyn, who was casting her expert archaeologist’s eye over the photographs I was sending back. Jacquelyn was not convinced the Muslim Boys school I had visited (see Autumn 2025 Issue 1 Newsletter) was the actual site of Liang POW camp, and her meticulous research would prove to be correct.

The final Part III of my trip to Jakarta, Ambon and Surabaya will be published in the next SMFRA Newsletter, and will include my trip on the state-owned *Pelni Ferry Company* from Ambon to Surabaya. This memorable trip lasted four days and followed the same route as the Suez Maru, passing within ten nautical miles of the spot where the ship and the men were lost.

For the time being, however, it was time to enjoy the excellent facilities at the Natsepa hotel.

Images and text © Simon Farrelly 2025-6



The Natsepa Hotel

NOTES FROM A CHAIR

Hello everyone,

Our second, and even bigger, newsletter is here — and wow, what a lot of updates and big news!

Firstly, can I say thanks to everyone who attended the informal gathering at the Suez Maru Memorial at the NMA on 29 November 2025. It was great to catch up with ‘old’ friends and meet new ones, and an extra special thank you to David and Janet Bailes - see their report on page seven, *Notes from Kranji* - we were so pleased to chat with you after all your efforts recording the Suez Maru chaps’ names at the Singapore CWGC. See photo below (on the back row, some of your committee, from the right; me (Jacquelyn, Nicki and Heather).

Next, thanks from me as always to the SMFRA Committee, and a note of change, too. We’re sad to say that Penny has stepped down from the SMFRA Secretary role (and newsletter editor role), but we completely understand, as she also runs her own successful publishing company, and we wish her continued success (I am still working with Penny on a publication, so we are still all in touch, and haven’t fallen out!) Thank you, Penny, for all your hard work, especially working with Heather on finding all the Dutch Suez Maru men’s records and everything else.

Following on, as you may have noticed on page one (!), we have a new newsletter editor - Simon Farrelly. You will remember he is the nephew of SM man William Dixon, and Simon undertook that amazing journey to Ambon last August (part two is above). Simon has also stepped in as SMFRA Secretary, and is on the Finding the Families project, as well as on the team putting together the Ambon 2027 trip - so very busy - please join me in welcoming him, and you can drop him an email, see last page for contacts. Thanks and Welcome Simon!



I also want to say a big thank you to Marcus for taking over the website and building from scratch a whole new proper page. It does everything the old page couldn’t manage. We really wanted to have a page for every one of the 550 men, and also for people to be able to join SMFRA online, and share the Suez Maru story as well as individual Suez Maru men’s stories. A huge thank you to Nicki, too, for the mammoth task of retrieving all the information from the previous project group, the information in the folders and elsewhere, to bring it all together and input it into the new website. It is a combined massive and impressive feat, and I absolutely love the new website. The old one will close and redirect to the new one. See the links on the last page and have a good look - it’s brilliant!

Lastly, but not leastly, a huge thank you to Heather and the apology campaign team. I think they must have sent a billion emails and kept track of and thanked every MP who responded personally. There can hardly be an MP in the UK who hasn’t heard of the Suez Maru story, and in the last few months we have had two ‘firsts’ - the first mention of the Suez Maru Atrocity in the Westminster parliament (by Dr Arthur, early on during the Lisbon Maru debate) and in the Welsh Senedd, where for the first time a question was raised specifically on the Suez Maru Atrocity. I know Heather will thank Bethan, too, for perseverance on this front. Please see page 4 for all the details. Amazing work team!

Continued over...

NOTES FROM A CHAIR (CONTINUED...)

Question: What do I hope for in 2026?

I've lots of thoughts and ideas for this year, and realise that re-reading our founding Charter, specifically our four common purposes, I find they are aligned. The Suez Maru Families and Research Association's purposes are below. First, I hope we move towards a formal apology from the UK Government for the failure to secure justice for our Suez Maru men, when the opportunity was so clearly presented in the open and shut case prepared by Captain J Sylvester in 1949, and for concealing the case from the families. This is requested in tandem with an acknowledgement and recognition of the bravery of the Suez Maru men, and all those taken captive in the Far East. I hope that a constructive dialogue can be opened.

I really am so pleased we have the opportunity to march together in the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph in November 2026, and that as many of us as possible can stand together on that day for our Suez Maru relatives.

I hope our very first AGM on 29 November will be attended by as many Suez Maru families as possible, and that as many will stand at the Suez Maru Memorial at the NMA and remember the 550 men of the Suez Maru.

To that end, I hope for continued success in the Finding the Families Project, and that more families join the appeal to search for *even one more* Suez Maru man's family, and that they, and all the current 100+ Suez Maru families we are in contact with, join us as members of SMFRA to make our voices even louder in the future. See the next page.

I hope the 100+ current Suez Maru families send us their stories, even a line or two that may be known about him, so we can add something personal to the website page for each man, their online remembrance page, in perpetuity.

I also hope all these plans and new projects move forward well, especially the new plaque for the Suez Maru Memorial and planning for the Ambon 2027 trip.

We have been working for just over six months as an association, but look how far we have come, and look where we want to go! Please join us at the Cenotaph and at the NMA, and maybe ask yourself;

Question: What do you hope, from and for SMFRA in 2026?



A reminder (left photo) of why we volunteer to do what we do and a reminder of SMFRA Common Purposes:

- (1) To ensure remembrance of the *Suez Maru* men in perpetuity at the Suez Maru Memorial, and elsewhere, formally and informally, each 29 November
- (2) To endeavour to find families of each Suez Maru man
- (3) To pursue recognition and an apology for the lack of justice in 1949
- (4) To share the Suez Maru story through all means at our disposal.

Do get in touch to get involved with any of the projects, or with any ideas and thoughts. We would love to hear from you. See the last page for contacts.

Meanwhile, thank you for being part of the SMFRA association, and I look forward to catching up in the next newsletter, via email or at one of the above gatherings

Thanks

Jacquelyn SMFRA Chair

SUEZ MARU FAMILIES & RESEARCH ASSOCIATION - MEMBERSHIP

We invite all *Suez Maru* families and, of course, friends, to join us. Membership is free, and we welcome everyone who is part of a *Suez Maru* family or part of the wider *Suez Maru* community who has supported us over the years or recently. We would be so pleased to see *everyone*.

Membership is free, and we will post your membership card at cost P&P, if you'd like us to.

If you would like to join the Suez Maru Families & Research Association,
Click the link below or visit our new website - <https://suezmaru.org.uk>

- JOIN SMFRA -

SUEZ MARU FAMILIES & RESEARCH ASSOCIATION - ENAMEL PIN

We also have a new *Suez Maru Families and Research Association* enamel pin (the image of the association is the new pin). This has been based largely on a pin created by the family of *Suez Maru* man Charles Dron, and incorporates the colours of the three services (dark blue for Navy, green for Army and light blue for Air Force) also using the colours of the *Pacific Star* medal that the *Suez Maru* men were entitled to (the above three colours plus the red of the poppy and the yellow of the sand). The centre poppy has been created by the family of *Suez Maru* man William Brodie, and is a design given to SMFRA as the 'Suez Maru Poppy' design. We are incredibly grateful to both these families.

Please click the above Join link or visit - <https://suezmaru.org.uk/join>

If you would like one of the Suez Maru Association enamel pins, we can post this with your membership card, which would save us extra admin. They are £5 +P&P.

Tick the relevant number on your membership form, and this will be added to your basket.

You will then receive your Membership Card and SMFRA enamel pin at the same time.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US AND STANDING WITH THE SUEZ MARU MEN



SMFRA pin photo



CONTACT US

- WEBSITE -

<https://suezmaru.org.uk/>

- MEMBERSHIP & SMFRA PINS -

<https://suezmaru.org.uk/join>

- SOCIAL MEDIA -

FACEBOOK PAGE

www.facebook.com/suezmaru

INSTAGRAM (NEW)

<https://www.instagram.com/suezmaru>

- EMAIL -

SuezMaru@outlook.com

Please add detail or for the attention of whomever, in the email subject line:

Your SMFRA Team:

Heather - SMFRA Apology Campaign Lead

Nicki - SMFRA Treasurer & Finding the Families Lead

Simon - SMFRA Secretary & Newsletter Editor

Marcus - SMFRA Website Manager

Jacquelyn - SMFRA Chair & anything else!