

Symposium Abstracts and Bios – Ordered by Programme

Day 1 – Saturday 30 August 2025

Biography: Paul Budde -MC

Paul Budde is Chair of both the Camp Columbia Heritage Association (CCHA) and the Dutch Australian Cultural Centre (DACC). Professionally, Paul is an internationally recognised telecommunications and digital economy analyst. Over his career, he has advised the United Nations and governments including Australia, the USA, the UK, and the Netherlands, contributing to strategies in broadband, digital infrastructure, and smart cities.

Paul has also led ICT trade missions between Australia and the Netherlands, reflecting his lifelong commitment to fostering Dutch–Australian connections in both business and cultural spheres. Now semi-retired, he focuses on Dutch–Australian cultural and heritage preservation, as well as historical storytelling.

Abstract: Master of Ceremonies and the Story of Camp Columbia

As Master of Ceremonies for this symposium, Paul brings both a professional interest in international collaboration and a personal commitment to preserving Dutch–Australian history.

Camp Columbia in Wacol was a pivotal site during World War II. Initially the largest American military camp in Queensland, it hosted the U.S. Sixth Army and elements of the Seventh Fleet. Later, it became the headquarters for the Netherlands East Indies government-in-exile—the only time Australia has hosted a foreign government. After the war, the site served as a refugee and migration camp, playing a key role in Queensland’s postwar immigration story.

The Camp Columbia Heritage Association (CCHA) is a volunteer organisation dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Camp Columbia, sharing the stories of soldiers, evacuees, and migrants, and creating a visible legacy through research, signage, exhibitions, and a future heritage trail. Through this symposium, Paul and the CCHA aim to connect military, cultural, and human stories into a wider narrative of Allied cooperation and enduring international friendship.

Biography: David Horner

David Horner, AM, FASSA, is an emeritus professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University. A graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, he saw active service in Vietnam and later headed the Army’s Land Warfare Studies Centre. He is the author or editor of 38 books on Australian military history, defence and intelligence. As the Official Historian of Australian peacekeeping, he was General Editor of the six-volume series. The first

volume of his Official History of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation was joint winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award for history, and the UK Intelligence Book of the Year.

Abstract:

When War Came to Queensland

More than any other state, the Second World War had a major and lasting impact on Queensland. Professor Horner's keynote address provides an overview of why and how Queensland played an important role during the war. After the outbreak of the Pacific War the state was the most likely to be invaded. Military units were rushed north from southern Australia and defences were strengthened. But as the war turned, Queensland became the base for defensive operations in New Guinea and then for Allied offensives through New Guinea and beyond. Brisbane became the main allied headquarters. Military schools were established, the Atherton Tableland became the main training area for the Australian Army, and amphibious landings were practised along the coast. The legacy is evident. Many present-day Army and Air Force units and military training areas are still located in Queensland. The presence of major military headquarters and units in wartime Brisbane swelled the city's population and set it on a course to become the nation's third largest city. The presence of thousands of United States servicemen also had a lasting social impact, both in Brisbane and beyond. This symposium will provide further depth to this remarkable story.

Biography: David Dufty

David Dufty is a historian and author who lives in Canberra. His book about Australian code-breaking, *The Secret Code Breakers of Central Bureau*, won the 2017 Nib Military History Prize. His other works include *How to Build an Android*, *Radio Girl*, *Nabbing Ned Kelly*, and *Charles Todd's Magnificent Obsession*.

Abstract:

Central Bureau – Australia's version of Bletchley Park

During the second world war, Australia was home to the largest wartime code-breaking operation outside of Bletchley Park. Central Bureau was a joint allied unit comprising mostly Australian and United States Personnel. It was founded in April 1942 in Melbourne, but soon relocated to Brisbane, following the relocation of General Macarthur's headquarters. Central Bureau broke numerous Japanese army and air force codes, and also performed traffic analysis on enemy communication patterns. From its small beginnings, by the end of the war, Central Bureau and its intercept stations around the South West Pacific Area comprised 4,000 personnel. Due to its secretive nature, the contributions of those who served in Central Bureau were not recognised until many years.

Biography: Gerard Benjamin

Gerard Benjamin is a longtime resident in Newstead and has been associated with the New Farm and Districts Historical Society for more than 20 years. He regularly conducts history walks in the area and is the author of three popular books about the history of the locality, the most recent being “New Farm: 50 Stories”. He has assisted many people with the editing and production of their memoirs. Research into his own family history led to the discovery that a great-great-grandfather penned Queensland’s second novel.

Abstract:

Submarine base and the Navy 134 facilities at New Farm

The arrival in Brisbane in April 1942 of the submarine tender USS Griffin along with 15 subs, signalled the establishment of the New Farm submarine base. Initially, the small numbers of USN personnel were accommodated in hotels or boarding houses. By June, the naval facilities had expanded, and Brisbane was designated “USN Base 134”.

Barracks, mess halls and many more facilities were developed in New Farm Park and on riverfront land belonging to the CSR refinery to form the “USN New Farm Receiving Station”. A Naval Officers Club was built nearby at 50 Oxlade Drive.

If the arriving personnel were struck by the quaintness of houses on stilts, the locals of New Farm were in turn fascinated by both the naval installations and the cultural differences. Oral histories collected by the New Farm and Districts Historical Society record many fascinating impressions and stories from that era, and a selection of these will feature in the presentation. Each Anzac Day on 25 April, the Submariners Walk Heritage Trail on Macquarie Street is the venue for commemorating the story of New Farm’s wartime contribution. Meanwhile, the former USN Officers’ Club at Oxlade Drive still stands and has been repurposed as a magnificent dining spot overlooking the river, aptly named the “Officers Mess”.

Biography: Meghan Adams

Meghan Adams is an historian at the Sea Power Centre in Canberra. She has worked for the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Australian War Memorial and is a PhD candidate at the University of New England. Meghan’s research has focused on Australia’s wartime experience, specifically grief and memory during the First World War as well as women’s history and the home front during Second World War. She has published a number of articles with the Australian Dictionary of Biography and was a contributor to the 2024 publication *In the Fight: Australians and the War in Burma 1942-1945*. She is currently writing a chapter for a forthcoming publication on Australia’s links with India during the World Wars which will be published in 2026.

Abstract:

Repair, refit and resupply: Brisbane as a naval base during the Second World War

From the outbreak of the Second World War, Brisbane proved to be an important base for Allied Forces. While this aspect of the city's history has been well recognised, its significance as a hub for industry, ship building, repair and resupply is lesser known. However, it was these functions that allowed Brisbane to play a key role in equipping and supporting allied navies, particularly the Royal Australian Navy, Britain's Royal Navy and the United States Navy, as they fought to win the war in the Pacific. Over the course of the conflict, Brisbane's military and naval importance only continued to increase. By the end of the war, Brisbane was home to two notable dry docks which allowed significant repairs to be made to allied vessels in closer proximity to the front. It had numerous replenishment and stores depots as well as victualling yards and facilities which kept ships and personnel well equipped, and it maintained a shipbuilding industry which was responsible for the construction of new ships as well as the refitting of numerous peacetime and merchant vessels for wartime service. This presentation will explore the development and expansion of these facilities, and the crucial role that they, and Brisbane more broadly, played as part of the allied campaign during the Second World War.

Biography: Roger Marks

Roger Marks, Queensland born, early Primary school Bundaberg (WW2 yrs), Secondary Maryborough Boys State High, graduated Civil Engineering UQ, 26 years 'work experience', 99% centered Brisbane, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Cairns, Rockhampton, retiring Brisbane, now Sunshine Coast. Boyhood exposure to 'planes' saw 'Aeronautical settle to Civil', flying lessons till the money ran out, but an enduring interest in 'those wartime aerodromes', several visited during working career. Early retirement due retinal detachment forced the 'what to do next' review. A lifelong love of woodwork suggested antique aircraft restoration but reality became what the rear cover of QAWW2 says "An attempt to thoroughly address all of the WW2 airstrips of Queensland..show where they were, what they became etc!"

Abstract:

Airfields in Queensland during WWII

'QAWW2', is an acronym for Queensland Airfields WW2 – 50 Years On", my 1994 self-published book, a once only 3000 print run. My wife and I promised ourselves, 'never again'. Persistent requests led to a pdf cover to cover version of the book on CD (2003). This later morphed into the current USB memory stick version. Recent additions to this USB copy are the crux of this presentation. In 2011, a kind customer assisted in making most of the pdf 'word searchable' and in 2021, another customer offered a 'kmz file'. This 'file' introduces a blanket of star markers in your Google Earth (GE) screen to all 60 sites given Illustrated text in QAWW2 and similarly to the 130 odd lesser airfields. Not only does clicking on any of the listed airfields sweep you straight to its location in Queensland on your GE screen, you can then open that airfield's companion pdf, including around a dozen maps and more photos, received apres publication. This is a wealth of information never feasible to include in QAWW2. GE has a great image overlay tool allowing a WW2 aerial to be fitted over the GE site and to vary its transparency from 'then to now'.

Day 2 – Sunday 31 August 2025

Biography: Adrian Vickers

Adrian Vickers is Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Sydney. His many writings on Indonesian history include *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge University Press). He currently leads the OMAA project which examines Australian history through multilingual sources, including Dutch- and Indonesian-language materials on the period 1938–1963.

Abstract:

Indonesians in Brisbane and the Anti-Fascist Struggle

Brisbane was one of the main sites where former Indonesian political prisoners were able to organise in anticipation of the end of World War II. Mohammad Bondan was a key leader amongst the Indonesians. For him, Camp Columbia was an important site because it was “freely open” (bebas terbuka). The conditions of the camp allowed him to connect with other Indonesians inside as well as sympathetic Australians outside, both individuals and members of the Labor Party and the Communist Party of Australia. The freedom that he had in Camp Columbia was the product of an uneasy collaboration between Indonesian political leaders in exile and the Netherlands Indies leadership in Australia.

Biography: Nonja Peters

Nonja Peters, anthropologist, historian, and museum curator she completed her PhD at UWA. Was She is Adjunct Professor at Edith Cowan University and University Associate at Curtin University’s John Curtin Institute of Public Policy. A Dutch Australian, her research focuses on migration, identity, and cultural heritage preservation, with special interest in Dutch maritime and migration history. Nonja has authored 10 books, curated 25 exhibitions, and presented extensively worldwide. She bridges academia and the public through high-impact cultural projects and has been recognized with a Dutch Knighthood and induction into the Western Australian Women’s Hall of Fame.

Abstract:

The Netherlands East Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees rehabilitates Dutch children at Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra 1945-1946.

When Japan invaded and occupied the Dutch East Indies from 1942 to 1945, Dutch nationals, including children, were interned in concentration and POW camps for over three years. This paper explores the wartime experiences of these children, their internment, and the challenges they faced during and after their release in August 1945. Liberation brought its own uncertainties, as civil unrest and political upheaval disrupted efforts to resume normal life. Many families were subsequently evacuated to Western Australia, where some children were

placed at Fairbridge Farm School in Pinjarra to recover before repatriation. Their relocation was facilitated by the Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE), operating under the NEI government's Department of Economic Affairs from Camp Columbia, Wacol. NIWOE branches in major Australian cities coordinated medical care, accommodation, education, and cultural orientation. The first wave of evacuees—primarily women and children—arrived in a fragile state, often suffering from severe malnutrition and illnesses such as beriberi. Some children appeared years younger than their age. The second wave, beginning in October 1945, posed even greater medical needs. This presentation examines the little-known efforts made in Australia to rehabilitate these young evacuees, shedding light on the long-term impacts of war, displacement, and recovery.

Title of presentation: Women's Auxiliary Corps (VK) attached to the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL)

Abstract

This presentation explores how World War II in the Pacific irrevocably shaped the lives—and gave purpose—to three Dutch women: Ineke, a Netherlands East Indies (NEI)-born student in Sydney; Joan, from Western Australia; and Anne, a Dutch émigré from Canada. Each volunteered for the Vrouwenkorps van het Koninkrijk Nederlands(ch)-Indisch Leger (VK-KNIL)—the Women's Auxiliary Corps attached to the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army—stationed at Camp Columbia near Brisbane, Australia.

The VK-KNIL grew out of the (Volunteer) Women's Auxiliary Corps (VVHK), established in London on 20 December 1943 by the Dutch Red Cross, based on a Ministry of War proposal. Initially, 270 women responded to a call in Vrij Nederland, offering unarmed humanitarian assistance in Red Cross uniforms. When the corps was militarised in early 1944, it was renamed the Women's Auxiliary Corps and its members issued khaki uniforms similar to those of Britain's Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Formally created by State Decree No. 1 on 5 March 1944, VK-KNIL was led by Lieutenant-Governor Dr. Hubertus van Mook, head of the NEI government-in-exile in Australia. It became fully operational by April 1944 and took up residence at Camp Columbia that July. VK-KNIL, along with its naval counterpart MARVA, later played a significant role during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1950).

Recruitment drives in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, and Brisbane targeted single and married women, especially those with Dutch or Malay language skills. By June 1944, the first 51 recruits had joined—including NEI refugee women who had fled Java via Broome in early 1942. Eventually, more than 1,000 women from across the Dutch Empire and Allied countries would serve in the VK-KNIL.

Their remarkable service reflects the hidden transnational threads of wartime resistance, survival, and post-colonial transformation led by women.

PS The focus of the presentation is on the women's lives in Camp Columbia and minimally in Java.

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