While the operation was referred to as an ‘evacuation’, the reality was more sinister. Worried by the Japanese advances through Papua New Guinea, the government was alarmed that the people at Cape Bedford were familiar with the Japanese who had dominated the northern pearling industry. It was also worried by potential connections between German missionaries in Papua New Guinea and the Guugu Yimidhirr at Cape Bedford. Ties between Cape Bedford and the Neuendettelsau Mission Society had not survived World War I, and education at the mission had been conducted in Guugu Yimidhirr and English since the beginning of the century, but that didn’t slow the rumour mill. Effectively the people were interned at Woorabinda behind barbed wire. Muni himself was detained—initially prevented from travelling with the people to Woorabinda, he was interned in Brisbane for four months before being allowed to live with one of his daughters at Eumundi on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast. This lasted until 1944. The Guugu Yimidhirr were not so fortunate; sixty people died at Woorabinda during their seven year exile.

In 1948, community leaders, assisted by then Queensland opposition

It remains one of the most remote of Lutheran parishes in Australia and New Zealand; they don’t call this part of the world ‘Far North’ Queensland for nothing. But Hope Vale’s history is rich and unique.

Sunday, 17 May 1942, was one of the worst days in the history of the interaction between the Guugu Yimidhirr people and European Australia. But the people have chosen to remember a different event instead.

On Sunday, 18 May this year, LCA Bishop Rev John Henderson unveiled a memorial outside St John’s Lutheran Church in Hope Vale. It carries the names of 36 men who ‘returned from Woorabinda to help build Hope Vale’ over a six-month period from April to September 1949. This is what they choose to remember.

In 1942 the Cape Bedford Mission (as it was then known) was a very different place than it is today. Established by missionary Johannes Flierl and lay helper Johann Biar in 1886, the mission was led by Rev Georg Schwarz from 1887. Schwarz was known as Muni (the Guugu Yimidhirr word for ‘black’, as the people couldn’t pronounce his surname). The people of the mission lived in four small settlements: Elim and Hope Valley on Cape Bedford itself, Wayarego on the McIvor River to the north and Spring Hill, closer to Cooktown. On Sunday, 17 May 1942, the people gathered for worship at Spring Hill.

As worship ended, the church was surrounded by armed soldiers, who forced everyone onto American army trucks and took them to Cooktown. The people were held at the wharf for 24 hours before being loaded onto a steamship for the trip down the coast to Cairns. At Cairns they were loaded onto a train for the long journey south. By the time the train reached Townsville, the Lutherans in the north were aware of what was happening. When the train stopped in the station, members from the congregation went there with food and water; this was the first proper meal the people had received since leaving Spring Hill.

The train continued through to Rockhampton in central Queensland and from there the people were trucked again to a mission station at Woorabinda, under the watchful eyes of soldiers with fixed bayonets. They were mostly welcomed by the people there, but were deeply troubled by the cold climate, especially as they had left Spring Hill with virtually nothing beyond the clothes they were wearing.

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A return to hope

by Rosie Schefe

Above: One of the youngest in the advance parties, Herb McLean says he didn’t realise what the return meant until he had a family of his own.

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Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return [Zechariah 10:9]
member Joh Bjelke-Petersen finally negotiated permission for the Cape Bedford people to return home. But it was not to the old outstation way of life. Instead, the people were required to live in the new settlement of Hope Vale, which did not then even exist. And they had to negotiate their own way back.

On 9 April 1949, the first seven men reached the Hope Vale site: Willie Wallace, Jack McIvor, Colin Jack, Jack Jerry, Fred Grogan, Jimmy Hart and Ernie McGreen. In the following six months another 29 men followed, readying the site for their wives and children, transporting army surplus buildings, setting up a sawmill for new construction and beginning a new chapter in the story of Hope Vale.

**In their own words**

Some of the people of Hope Vale shared their family memories of Woorabinda and the return.

**ROY MCIVOR, ARTIST AND ELDER**

If the Lutheran church didn't come to us, where would we be? That is the question. If missionary Muni, if he didn't come. But we are thankful to God and I think that sometimes we can say that we are a chosen race too, you know? God's chosen people too. That is wonderful.

The military took us away and they thought, oh well, we'll break their willpower and take them to a strange land where they'll never come out again … Woorabinda was a great community. There were people there who were good at gardening. They had people help out at the big garden, good soil … There was a big school and we had a few disagreements but I had good friends there. A good teacher too. At that time there was a rule that indigenous kids could only go to Grade 4. But the teacher who came there he was going over, taking us further. There were brainy kids there too, you know.

**HERB MCLEAN, COMMUNITY ELDER**

When we were taken away I was only eight or nine years old. We’d never seen a train, didn’t know how to behave on the train. We were curious too, rowdy. When the train started to move the old ladies saw the houses moving very slowly and they told us to be quiet, that we were making the houses move!

The first people to return in 1949 had this place (Hope Vale) in their heart and soul. They looked at the future and they believed this was a better place for children to grow up. Hope Vale is a lovely town. So we came back; there were 36 of us. I was only 15 or 16 when we came back. I didn’t realise how important it was to come until I got married myself.

We built everything here—the school, the rodeo ground. We built it for our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. There are only three [of the advance party] left now: George [Rosendale], David [Deemal] and me.

**REV DR GEORGE ROSENDALE, PASTOR AND EDUCATOR**

God had a reason for bringing us back to Hope Vale; we need to keep that in mind. It is up to us to share the gospel, not to keep it in our pockets but share it with others. They need it.

Woorabinda was a great place for me; I was happy there. I wanted to go out west, but I didn’t get to do that. Woorabinda had problems; our parents and elders were very concerned. A lot of drunkenness and gambling was going on. They wanted to take our kids home.

It’s great to have David [Spanagel] as our pastor, but I felt sad also knowing that none of our own was able to come up and take on the work of sharing the gospel. When I look at other communities along the cape, there are no white ministers; they are all their own people. I had the privilege to be able to train them to do that.
‘Management is about doing things right. Leadership is about doing the right things.’ With this declaration June Pearson, chairperson of St John’s Hope Vale in Far North Queensland, welcomed David Spanagel to St John’s as its pastor.

David’s history with the community goes back more than 30 years and this ceremony of ordination and installation was a reflection of this changing relationship.

David and Pam Spanagel, with their three young children, moved from South Australia’s Barossa Valley to the far northern community early in 1983. While the former farmer was appointed to the position of manager of Hope Vale Mission, David saw this as a vocation in ministry to the people of these communities. A few years later the Lutheran Church recognised this too, placing him on its roll of lay workers. He remained manager at Hope Vale for four years, then moved south to Cairns and eventually Kuranda. The Spanagel connection with Hope Vale remained strong. For the next 20 years David was the liaison officer for Far North Queensland Lutheran Mission.

During this time David and Pam regularly travelled to Wujal Wujal (a 600-kilometre round trip) and Coen (a 2000-kilometre round trip) to support ministry in those centres.

In 2011, when the community could not find a pastor, David was invited to fill a pastoral carer’s role, having already been well equipped through his experience in lay ministry.

David and Pam moved to Hope Vale semi-permanently, working their way back into community life slowly, carefully. They took their time to listen and to develop trust-filled relationships again.

‘[God] was equipping us for our work over a lifetime and for most of it we weren’t even fully aware’, David said. ‘He had a plan: God knows the future, Hope Vale is complex, and it’s all in his hands. I still say God has saved the best till last.’

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David’s ordination and installation expressed this new situation in a unique way. The elders and congregation, who had, after three years, called David to be their pastor, dressed him in the surplice and stole that symbolise his being ‘set apart’ for ordained ministry, as Christ’s representative within the community. He will serve St John’s, Living Waters Wujal Wujal, and Coen.
Smoke and water
by Rosie Schefe

A small fire of melaleuca bark is set beside the river. Just around the bend are the Bloomfield Falls, still swollen with rain that has been falling since Cyclone Ita flooded the Bloomfield River weeks ago.

The Kuku Yalanji people of Wujal Wujal call the waterfall ‘Living Waters’ and it holds age-old significance. Only the traditional owners and their invited guests approach it.

This smoking ceremony has been arranged to welcome David and Pam Spanagel into closer relationship with the members of Living Waters, Wujal Wujal. In the case of Pastor David it raises him to the cultural status of ‘Father’ or ‘Maja’ of the Kuku Yalanji people living in Wujal Wujal. It is a position of honour and special respect. Now that David is ordained and called as their pastor, they want him to have a special place in their community. Not everyone who is welcomed this way receives such status. This ceremony is also Pam’s acceptance into the Kuku Yalanji family.

Sap from the grasstree and freshly cut bloodwood leaves are added to the fire, rapidly producing clouds of thick white smoke with a sharply clean scent. Traditional owner Francis Walker tells everyone how the fire represents the traditional resources of building materials, shelter, warmth and medicine.

First Pam and then David are encouraged to step forward into the thick of the smoke. Kathleen Walker wafts smoke over them with her hands, ensuring that it completely envelopes them, permeating clothes and hair. As they step back from the fire, the last wisps gently float away on the afternoon breeze.

Everyone moves toward the edge of the river, where a small amount of water is poured onto their heads as a final blessing from the river. Pam and David are then welcomed into the family with long hugs before we return to Living Waters for the formal installation and worship with holy communion.
One bite isn’t enough, is it?

Here’s how to get the whole apple.

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