

By MALUMNALU

It was a truly touching and sad moment as three Australian brothers paid tribute to an elder brother they lost 65 years ago on the bloody battlefields of Buna, Oro province, on December 2, 1942.

They cried, hugged each other, and talked about the love they had for William Dennis Blake, who was barely out of his teens when killed by a Japanese sniper in Buna during the dark days of World War II.

All of us there, including me, had tears in our eyes as we watched this truly-moving ceremony.

Private William Dennis Blake was only 20 years of age when he made the supreme sacrifice for peace whilst a member of the 2/6 Independent Company of the Australian Infantry Forces.

He left behind a heart-broken young family who have never let go of their memories.

His three surviving brothers Robert (84), Roger (80), and Maurice 77, together with nephew Bill (53), made the emotional pilgrimage to his graveyard at Bomana War Cemetery last Sunday, December 2, the 65th anniversary of his death.

Earlier, last Saturday, they flew over their brother's battlefields of Buna and Gona.

They said a prayer for peace, read a message from their family members, and then laid a wreath on the grave of their brother.

"It's a very sad and emotional time," Robert said after the poignant ceremony.

"He (William) was born in Waikerie, South Australia.

"We left home when he was 14 and I was 13.

"We went to a boarding

house and attended school."

The winds of war were blowing across the world during those days of the late 1930's and early 1940's and both brothers joined the Australian army - William with the Infantry and Robert with the Navy.

"When we joined the army, he (William) had a horse," Robert recalled.

"He rode the horse 120 miles to join up (with the army).

"That was quite a thing to do, to ride a horse for 120 miles.

"He trained in Victoria and Townsville before being sent to New Guinea.

"He served on the Kokoda Track and then Oro Bay.

"He was shot by a Japanese sniper at Buna."

Robert, meantime, joined the Royal Australian Navy and served on the HMAS Corvette in the waters of New Guinea and Borneo.

He was earlier on the HMAS Adelaide when news came of the death of his beloved elder brother.

"I was in Melbourne on the HMAS Adelaide when the news came," Robert remembers.

"You break down, that's all, it's really, really sad.

"My mother took it very bad, and my father, he didn't show much because he served for four years in the Great War at Gallipoli and in France and was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry."

William was survived by his parents, four brothers and a sister.

Robert last visited the grave of William on what would have been his 50th birthday in 1972, and since then, had been planning a pilgrimage until this year

This was the prayer read last Sunday: "Almighty God, our

Heavenly Father, we remember with thanks William who made the supreme sacrifice for us in time of war.

"We pray that the offering of his life may not have been in vain.

"May your Grace enable us this day to dedicate ourselves to the cause of justice, freedom and peace; and give us the wisdom and strength to build a better world.

"May your strength and peace be ours as we mourn again the loss of William, and may your peace surround us this day of remembrance.

"We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord."

And this, the message from his many nieces and nephews, for their perennially-young uncle: "Although we never had the privilege and honour to have met you, we feel we have come to know you through your letters to the family.

"What a tremendous uncle you would have been to us.

"Today, we feel your spirit would be happy that your three brothers have come to visit your final resting place.

"So we say today:

Remembrance is a golden chain

Death tries to break  
But all in vain.

To have, to love, and then to part

Is the greatest sorrow of one's heart.

The years may wipe out many things

But some they wipe out never.

Like memories of those happy times

When we were all together.

"Uncle Bill, your legacy will never be forgotten.

"Love from your nephews, nieces and our children."