

The Dutch Contribution
To the defence of Australia
during
The War in the Pacific
1941-1945

The Governor-General of the
Commonwealth of Australia

**His Excellency Major General
Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC**

In his speech at a luncheon hosted by the Prime
Minister of the Netherlands on 26/9/2006 His
Excellency said:

Quote

*In particular Australians will never forget your
commitment and sacrifice as our “Fourth Ally”
in defence of our nation during World War Two. I
still retain childhood memories growing up in
Western Australia during the war years when our
northern coastal towns and cities were being
bombed, watching Dutch submarines slip out of
Fremantle harbour on their dangerous missions
to engage enemy ships in the South China and
Timor Sea.*Unquote.

(From: Governor General of Australia, see
<http://www.gg.au/governor-general/speech.php?id=157>)

**ROYAL COAT OF ARMS
JE MAINTIENDRAI**

Dedicated to the Dutch Servicemen and Women
who joined the Australian forces in defending
Australia 1942-1945

We remember them
Royal Netherlands Army, Navy, Air Force, KNIL
And the Merchant Navy.

Donated by the Dutch Community of South Australia 2007.

With many thanks to Doug Hurst MBE,
Retired Group Captain RAAF for permission to
use his information.

This booklet is distributed on the occasion of the
unveiling of a commemorative plaque on the
Pathway of Honour in Adelaide.

The Netherlands Ambassador to Australia
H. Hon. Niek van Zutphen
November 2007 in Adelaide.

Sponsored by:

Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women Association Adelaide

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Compiled by Ben van Essen and Jan Vel
August 2007

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Preface

This booklet is dedicated to the Dutch service men and women and the Merchant Marine sailors, who gave or risked their lives alongside their Australian brethren to halt the advance of the Japanese in defence of our freedom.

It explains what it meant to be the Fourth Ally in “defence of our nation in World War Two.”

Their considerable contribution to the defence of Australia in the Pacific during WW2 is explained in the following pages.

In 1940 the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans after a five-day campaign and the bombardment of Rotterdam by the Luftwaffe. The Queen and the Dutch Government were evacuated to England. The result was that the connection between the Netherlands and overseas colonies East Indies (now Indonesia) was interrupted.

Such was the scale of the battle to defend Australia that many contributions have been absorbed into the broad sweep of greater events, or simply lost in the mist of time. So it is with the Dutch. They too fought alongside Australians against the Japanese during the dark days of 1942-43 and continued to fight until the Pacific War was over.

The most important Dutch contribution was in the supply of sea-going vessels from the Royal Netherlands Navy and more significantly from the Dutch merchant fleet. The Dutch had more merchant ships in Australia than the other Allies (USA, Australia, New Zealand and England) together.

The distance of Australia from Japan and the United States made merchant ships a critical factor for both sides. The Japanese had to re-supply forces spread over a vast area, extending thousands of kilometres from Japan.

Some Allied supply lines were even longer as much of the military hardware came from the USA. The Allies were using an island continent (Australia) as a base from which to fight a war in islands and countries spread throughout a vast ocean.

To win the war, the Allies needed many ships of all kinds, particularly freighters capable of carrying the more than one million tons of cargo and over 100,000 Allied troops required for the Pacific war effort.

This booklet attempts to detail the various contributions made by the Dutch towards defending Australia from the Japanese during WW2.

The Merchant Fleet

The Dutch operated more than 150 ships in the Dutch East Indies. The KPM Company (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij or Royal Parceltrade Company) was the biggest Dutch shipping line in the East.

During WW2 the VNS (United Netherlands Shipping line) also sent freighters from England to Australia via South Africa.

KPM lost 79 ships during the Japanese invasion of the East Indies, leaving 71 to continue operating from Australian ports.

Initially concentrated in Sydney where the company already had a base, KPM ships operated from most east coast ports, carrying some 100,000 Allied troops and over a million tons of cargo to the Pacific War during 1942-43. They remained a vital part of the Allied war effort until the end of the war.

Of the 27 freighters used to carry American General McArthur and his troops 19 were Dutch

Without Dutch assistance to carry the Allied Armies into the Pacific it would have taken General McArthur much more time to ship troops to the islands of the Pacific and to return to the Philippines.

Even to-day, aircraft would only be able to carry a fraction of the materials and troops needed in such a vast Pacific war. This was even more so sixty years ago with the tiny transport aircraft of the times. Merchant ships carried virtually everything.

Passenger liners were pressed into service as troop ships; their speed and capacity becoming a key part of the Allied capability. Some liners became hospital ships. The *Oranje*, a Royal Netherlands Line ship, is one of the best remembered, having carried 32,461 sick and wounded Allied troops completing 41 war

voyages, covering 382,000 nautical miles and operating out of a number of Australian ports.

Indeed almost everything that went to and from the Pacific War went by ship. In 1942, that most critical year, most ships that sailed to and from Australia were Dutch.

One of those ships was the ‘*MS Abbekerk*.’ (with thanks to Peter Kik for his permission to use the manuscript of his father). On May 10th 1940 , the day the Germans invaded the Netherlands, she was in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Soon afterwards she sailed to Belfast. She was stationed in London during the Blitz. The *Abbekerk* was hit by a German bomb. After the repair it was sent to Clyde in Scotland and loaded with all kind of weapons, munition, explosives, canons, army vehicles, locomotives and even Spitfire fighters all destined for Singapore. The fully laden ship joined a small convoy of troop ships and destroyers leaving Gourock on 12th November 1941. It was the fast new ship in the convoy with

a maximum speed of 17 knots but had to adapt to the convoy speed of only 13 knots, which led to polluted engines. The result of the polluted engines was black smoke. The problem was solved by having the ship running at maximum speed around the convoy once a day.

It made the trip to Freetown and unloaded there goods for South Africa. The unloading of the cargo allowed for the fitting of an extra Bofors anti-aircraft gun on the deck.

The convoy continued on to Singapore. The ship was escorted through the Sunda Strait by the Dutch cruiser *H.M Tromp* on January 10th 1942. In Singapore unloading was a problem as the Chinese crew refused to work in a ship carrying so many bombs. Finally the ship's crew began unloading the '*Abbekerk*'. Much of its cargo was no longer required in Singapore. An order was given to load all the ammunition onto barges which were then deliberately sunk. The ship sailed on to a small harbour in the south of Sumatra after sinking the barges.

The *Abbekerk* berthed for safety next to a small Royal Netherlands Navy ship named ‘*Soenda*’.

On February 17th 1942 the ‘*Abbekerk*’ sailed to Tjilitjap (now Cilicap) on Java’s south coast. Only ten days later, an order came for all ships to leave for either Ceylon or Australia with as many evacuees as they could carry.

As a lot of ammunition was still on board, the evacuees (air-force officers, soldiers, mariners, some higher officers and a number of civilians) had to find a place on top of the ammunition. 24 ships left on the same day including the larger “*Zaandam*” and “*Jagersfontein*”.

The evacuees were brought to Fremantle. Of the 24 ships that left Cilitap only 13 arrived. The fate of the other eleven ships is unclear.

The m.s. *Abbekerk* was eventually torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U 604 some 500 miles southwest of England

So desperate were the Allies for Naval transport that unarmed KPM ships were pressed into

service almost immediately upon arrival in Sydney. On 6 April 1942, only six weeks after leaving the Netherlands East Indies, the *Cremer*, van *Heutz*, *Tasman* and *Maetsuyker* ferried American troops, who had just arrived in Sydney on the Queen Elizabeth to New Guinea.

Eventually KPM ships were armed albeit rudimentarily. Ships were often undermanned and routinely included Australian merchant and naval personnel and men from other allied countries – in one case the crew was almost entirely Filipino.

One of the best known of the Dutch Merchant ships was the '*Janssens*'. She became famous for her daring operations.

She was commanded by the tall, thin, unflappable Captain G.N.Prass. She sailed under charter of the Dutch Navy as a supply ship for Dutch submarines, but always with a civilian crew. Prass once took his ship, with a scratch crew and without a pilot, through a mine field in pitch

darkness and heavy rain, only to be attacked by Japanese zeros next day, taking many casualties and sustaining considerable damage, but still making it to a safe port. For most of the war, the '*Janssens*' only armament was two twin machine guns scrounged from a wrecked Catalina Flying boat.

In January 1942 she returned to Surabaya with two hundred survivors from the British battleships '*Repulse*' and the '*Prince of Wales*'. In February the '*Janssens*' became one of the ships in the evacuation fleet from Tjilitap. Her 450 people fleeing Indie included, among others, Dutch naval personnel with wives and children and some wounded from the '*USS Marblehead*'. Ironically Captain Prass had left his family in Indie when asked to command the *Janssens*.

Many Dutch ships became well known to Allied fighting men. The '*Balikpapan*' which served throughout the war, ferrying troops was perhaps the best known.

Royal Netherlands Navy (RNN now RNLN).

During the invasion of the Netherlands by Germany all Navy and Merchant ships escaped to England. Destroyers under construction were towed away to keep them out of enemy hands.

Three such navy ships the destroyers *Jacob van Heemskerck*, *Van Galen* and *Tjerk Hiddes* joined the *Tromp* in Fremantle.

In December 1941 the Royal Netherlands Navy contributed 3 cruisers, 4 destroyers, several minesweepers, 15 submarines, 13 motor torpedo boats and 64 flying boats to the Allied fleet in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

The Royal Netherlands Navy became part of the Allied effort in the Pacific. The aforementioned

Dutch merchant ships were also placed under its command.

The command of the Indian Ocean was split into two sections; the western part under the command of the British Admiralty (SEAC) South East Asia Command, the eastern part under command of the American Navy (SWPA) South West Pacific directed by Vice Admiral C.A. Lockwood. In 1946 Admiral Lockwood praised the Dutch fleet for its contribution to the war effort.

The RNN provided protection for merchant ships, oil tankers and troop ships crossing the Indian Ocean or heading into the Pacific.

It controlled large areas of the Indian Ocean and carried out offensive operations against land targets.

During the battle of the Java Sea most Allied ships were Dutch and the heavy losses inflicted on them were similar to those inflicted on the

British Navy around Singapore. The main part of the Dutch fleet including the cruisers “*Java*” and “*de Ruyter*” and the Australian cruiser “*Perth*” under command of admiral Karel Doorman were sunk on 27th February 1941. The damage to the Japanese fleet remains unclear but several eye-witnesses reported big fires on Japanese ships.

The surviving ships 1 cruiser, 3 destroyers, 7 submarines, 13 motor-torpedo boats and the surviving flying boats escaped to Fremantle where they joined the Allied fleet for the remainder of the war. The surviving cruiser was the “*H.M. Tromp*” known by its crew as ‘the lucky ship’.

The most remarkable escape by the “*Tromp*” was during the attack on the harbour of Sabang Island, just north of Sumatra on July 25th, 1944.

The “*Tromp*” entered the harbour with orders to destroy port installations and oil tanks. The battle was fierce with the “*Tromp*” taking three hits from enemy shells. Remarkably, none exploded

and the crew wrapped two of the still hot shells in blankets and dumped them overboard.

Her prolonged survival against such odds seems to have got under the skin of the Japanese who claimed (via Tokyo Rose)* to have sunk her a number of times, but they never did.

On March 3rd 1942 fifteen of the flying boats having just flown evacuees, mostly women and children, from Java were in Roebuck Bay near Broome when Japanese Zeros from Timor attacked. Over a hundred people were killed and all aircraft destroyed. The Dutch were buried in a special section of the local cemetery.

During the Japanese attack one of the Dutch flying officers Gus Winckel was able to use a machine gun with which he managed to bring down a Japanese fighter plane.

The remaining flying boats from the battle around Java made it to Australia, some going into the RAAF service and others going to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to fly Indian Ocean sorties to

protect oil convoys and Allied shipping in general.

*Tokyo Rose was a Japanese radio program in English

On the 18th May 1942 a convoy of the Dutch ships *Banten*, *Bontekoe*, *van Heemskerk* and *van Heutz* under escort of the *H.M.TROMP* brought the 14th Australian Brigade to Papua New Guinea.

After the battle of Midway on 25th July 1942 the *Kersek* and the *Bontekoe* brought reinforcements to the 14th Australian brigade.

They served throughout the war on escort duties and offensive operations against the Japanese. Many merchant ships joined them but very few survived the war. Of the seven submarines surviving the onslaught around Java 4 went to Fremantle and 3 to Ceylon. In Ceylon there were already three Dutch submarines from the Netherlands which arrived too late for service in the East Indies. These submarines were used for escort duties in the Indian Ocean.

Unfortunately the submarine mother ship the “*Colombia*” was torpedoed by a German submarine and this made it very difficult to keep the submarines operational as spare parts were no longer available.

On 8th December 1941 the KPM ship “*Janssens*” was requisitioned by the Dutch Navy to replace the *Colombia* and used as submarine supply and depot ship. It sailed to Australia on 3rd March 1942 and was returned to KPM.

According to a story given in the “Navy League of Australia Victoria Division” named: “Battle of Java Sea and Sunda Strait” (researched by Doug Hurst MBE) quote:

In early 1943 Dutch ships based in Fremantle helped escort the Australian 9th Division back from the Middle East.

A Dutch submarine rescued thirteen crew from HMAS Yarra when she was sunk in March 1943. An early version of what became the US 7th Fleet

*was a multinational force of US Australian and Dutch ships. Two thirds of the fleet's cruisers were Dutch as were two destroyers, two submarines and a minesweeper.*Unquote.

The story of Dutch Submarine O 20 about a sub that was under command of the British Navy in Singapore in December 1941 is published on the internet under 'Submarines of the Royal Netherlands Navy'. (see page 34 References).

This site also tells the story of the towing of the submarine KIX by minesweeper "*H.M Abraham Crijnsen*" from Sydney to Merauke in New Guinea in 1945

Civil Aviation: KLM and the KNILM

Civil airline companies KLM (Royal Netherlands Airlines) and the KNILM (Royal Netherlands East Indies Airlines) had their headquarters moved to Australia. On 22nd February 1942 eight planes arrived with the complete crews and ground personal. The USAAF bought all KNILM planes but the KLM remained operating independently and started flying to the USA and the West Indies.

One of the aircraft has an interesting story to tell. It's name is '*Wielewaal*' (a Dutch name for a bird which looks like an Australian bowerbird). It was a DC-3 manufactured by Douglas in 1937. Registered as PH-ALW, it flew the Amsterdam to Batavia (now Jakarta) route. After the German

occupation of the Netherlands it was reregistered as a KNILM plane PK-ALW making flights from the Middle-East to Batavia via Singapore.

On the 8th of February 1942 before departure from the Middle East the captain E.van Dijk was advised that landing in Singapore was no longer possible. On 14th February 1942 Captain van Dijk was given clearance to fly to Medan. After landing there he found 36 women and children who wanted evacuation to Batavia. The “*Wielewaal*” delivered the evacuees to Batavia on 15/2/42.

On 3rd March 1942 it was flown to Buabatu Rd which is on the outskirts of Bandung for another evacuation flight.

Another interesting evacuation task which occurred on the 7th of March 1942 was to bring His Excellency Lieutenant Governor General Dr H van Mook from the Indies to Australia.

“*Wielewaal*” landed in Port Hedland and was re-registered on arrival as VH-ALN. It was then

flown by the KNILM crew on charter to the USAAF. The Americans were not happy with this arrangement and General McArthur decided that it should become part of the USAAF. The KNILM signed a contract to hand over the aircraft together with 10 others. On 14/5/42 test flights to prove airworthiness before delivery were done. All aircraft flew under the Sydney harbour bridge once in each direction! As the "*Wielewaal*" was not camouflaged it was given the very Australian nickname of the 'Shiny Sheila' by the Americans. General MacArthur seems to have used it for flights to the Philippines. After the war it was bought by Australian National Airways and registered VH-ANR 22/5/1946. Finally in 1994 it went to the Queensland Air Museum in Caloundra. It had flown more than 8000 hours.

Royal Netherlands Indies Air Force

From “the Netherlands and Australia”, a publication of the Netherlands Government the following quote:

The military Air Force (ML-KNIL) of the KNIL was of considerable help to the Allies after the outbreak of war against Japan. In strength the ML was comparable to the RAF in Malaya and the US Air Force in the Philippines, whereas the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was much smaller. However in the long war of attrition in the air, the Division had to accept defeat against superior enemy forces. Its losses were enormous: the MT lost 60 out of 70 bombers, 70 of its 100 fighters, 10 out of 36 reconnaissance aircraft and 7 out of 19 transport planes. In addition, dozens

of aircraft were so seriously damaged as to be out of commission for long periods. Unquote

The Government of the East Indies had bought and paid for new aircraft to be made in the USA (being 162 B-25 Mitchell bombers to replace the old Glen Martins). The new planes began arriving in Australia by ship and had to be flown over to the East Indies. Therefore 24 bomber crews were sent to Australia in order to fly over the Mitchell bombers. Unforseen was the rapid occupation of Java by the Japanese. The bomber crews were stranded in Australia. As NEI ground personnel in Australia were only few in number, it was not possible to operate as a Dutch squadron at that time.

All the crews could do was reluctantly transfer most of their aircraft to their US and Australian Allies. Most crews were absorbed into the RAAF.

On the 9th April 1942 a separate Dutch Squadron was established as the 18th NEI in Canberra under

the command of Lieutenant Colonel B.J.Fiedeldij.

The Dutch officers were under operational control of the RAAF. In due course the 18th NEI Squadron increased from its initial size of five aircraft to 24 aircraft. During most of the war it operated from the Northern Territory, mainly out of Batchelor airfield just south of Darwin, attacking Japanese ground targets in and around Timor and specialising in anti-shipping operations. The Japanese air force bombed Darwin on February 19th 1942 with 188 aircraft and further raids were on Broome, Wyndham, Derby, Katharine, Exmouth, Port Hedland Noonamah, Millingimbi, Horn, Townsville and Mossman.

Again from “the Netherlands and Australia” quote: *The establishment of the Dutch squadron came at a difficult time for Australia. The north coast was threatened with a Japanese invasion from Timor and New Guinea. The fear which gripped the entire continent was aggravated by*

the activity of Japanese miniature submarines. These little one-man boats regularly evaded Sydney Harbour's anti-submarine net by following close behind Allied merchant ships, spreading panic and enormous damage. When a number of Allied merchant ships had been the target of Japanese submarine action, the RAAF asked the recently established 18th squadron, which was not yet operational, to assist in the detection and destruction of enemy submarines. Shortly afterwards, a Dutch b-25 flown by 2nd lieutenant W.F.A. Winckel managed to sink a Japanese submarine with depth charges. The squadron could not have asked for a better start. On landing, Winckel was summoned by John Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, to tell his story to the assembled Houses of Parliament.

Unquote

As already indicated the 18th squadron was later moved to Batchelor in the Northern Territory

which made it easier and shorter to fly missions over Japanese occupied areas.

Another Dutch squadron was no. 120 flying P-40N Kittyhawks fighters under RAAF operational control. It was formed in Canberra on 10 December 1943. In March 1944 there was a rumour that the Japanese planned a naval attack on Fremantle. The 120 Squadron together with the 18th Squadron and the RAAF 31 Squadron were moved to Potshot on the Exmouth Gulf Western Australia. They flew through Adelaide and Ceduna across the Nullarbor via Kalgoorlie to Potshot. As the attack never happened all Squadrons were ordered back to their normal bases. During this operation two Kittyhawks lost their way. The pilots parachuted and the planes crashed near Mildura.

In April 1944 the 120 Squadron was moved to Merauke in New Guinea. The ground crew sailed by sea and the Kittyhawks flew in two flights.

In mid-1945 they moved to Biak. In 1945 all units on Morotai came under a new command known as No 11 Group.

The last squadron to come to Australia no. 19 was the transport arm flying Dakotas (former KLM planes). They saw service throughout Australia. One of the Dakotas C47 crashed in North Queensland. A memorial was erected there in 1989.

KNIL (Royal Netherlands Indies Army)

During secret planning sessions the Dutch Army agreed to work with the stronger British, using the impregnable Singapore as a hub of operations. The Dutch KNIL forces fought the Japanese from Malaysia to Timor, but they did not have a withdrawal plan. Australia also moved more forces into the region. This also placed most Dutch air and naval forces under British operational control. This effectively negated an earlier defence in-depth plan for the Netherlands East Indies made by the chiefs of the combined Army, Navy and Air Force. The result was that

most of the Dutch troops (total force was about 90,000) suffered the same fate as their Australian brothers and became prisoners of war initially in Singapore's Changi prison. A number of them were sent to Burma by the Japanese and worked on the Burma railway line.

Resistance and fighting occurred on most islands and some lasted until mid-March.

During 1942 a total of 1074 KNIL officers and soldiers evaded capture by the Japanese and reached Australia from Java, New Guinea and other islands.

From "Alliance during World War II": quote

Timor was also of great strategic importance to Australia. To protect the air force units stationed on the Australian north coast, the "Sparrow Force", commanded by Brigadier W.C.D. Veale , landed on Timor on 12 February 1942. The plan was for this force - which consisted of a coast artillery battery, a battalion of infantry (2/40)

and an Independent Company – to be gradually increased until it reached brigade strength. However the Australians were not allowed enough time to put this plan into effect. No more than a week later, the 228th Japanese infantry regiment landed on Timor and captured most of the Dutch garrison (which was already stationed on Timor) and the Australian infantry battalion. A number of Australians were summarily executed by a Japanese naval unit. Under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Nic van Straten , a Dutch detachment, which had arrived in Timor shortly before the Japanese landing, managed to escape to the centre of the island, as did the Australian Independent Company. The two commanders, Veale and Van Straten, rejected Japanese attempts to negotiate, and resolved to wage a guerrilla war. The KNIL troops in Timor were a mixed bunch belonging to many different units. (The KNIL troops were not trained for a guerrilla war and the troops in Timor came from different islands and different army regiments).

The Independent Company was a very different matter. (The Company was specially trained in guerrilla war.)

In May 1942 the Company carried out a night attack on Dilly (Dili) the largest port on the north coast, where some 1500 Japanese were based. A week later in the same area, the Australians succeeded in killing 30 Japanese, one of whom was a notorious major known as the 'Singapore Tiger', who had been sent to Timor specially to stamp out resistance.

Early in September 1942 the arrival of the experienced 48th Japanese division on Timor was followed by numerous enemy troop movements along the north coast and in the interior.

(Even the specially trained Australians were not able to keep up the fight against the specially trained Japanese Army)

In December the First Australian Independent Company (2/2) was evacuated to Australia by the Dutch destroyer Tjerk Hiddes. Unquote

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JAP. SUBMARINES SUNK OFF AUSTRALIAN COAST

ATTACKED by squadrons of Australian and Netherlands East Indies bombers off the east coast of Australia yesterday, two enemy submarines were destroyed, and a third was probably sunk.

The submarines, believed to be Japanese, were taken by surprise while they were cruising on the surface recharging their batteries. A communique issued by G.H.Q., South-West Pacific Area, at 6 p.m. yesterday, stated:—

"Allied aircraft from one Netherlands East Indies and two Australian squadrons, reconnoitering off the east coast, located three enemy submarines on the surface in widely separated localities.

"In the ensuing attacks two submarines were certainly destroyed, and a third probably sunk. Allied aircraft and naval forces during the past five days have destroyed six, and possibly seven, enemy submarines."

A G.H.Q. spokesman said that

ALLIED AIRCRAFT SINK ENEMY SUBS OFF COAST

SUBMARINE HIT WITH 6 BOMBS

NEI Plane Crew's Exploit

By Our Special Reporter

Pilot of an NEI plane which accounted for one of the enemy submarines off the east coast yesterday was Flt-Lt W. Winckel, who told the story of the exploit on return to his base.

An unassuming, big, blue-slowly. We knew then for cer-
eyed blonde, 5ft 4in tall, quiet talker that we had had success.
in speech. Flt-Lt Winckel was The submarine rose slowly to
not anxious to tell of his en- the surface, turned turtle, and



List of booklets presented:

Mr Rann (BvE)

Mr Willem Ouwens (BvE)

Mr David James (JV)

Mrs Jeuken (JV)

Mr Kik (JV)

Mr Grothauzen (JV)

Mr Pot via Mr Grothauzen (JV) 23 stuks

Ms Gerda Vel
Mr Evert Vel
Mr Doug Hurst
Ms Ellie Merritt