

# MEDIA RELEASE

## ONLY BIRDS ABOVE by PORTLAND JONES

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Only Birds Above* is a work of historical fiction, from an author who has spent her life working with horses.

Arthur Watkins is a blacksmith who leaves his beloved young wife Helen to serve with the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Battalion in the Middle East in WWI. He returns without his horse, a man forever changed by what he has seen and suffered.

Years later, Arthur's children, Ruth and Tom, are still feeling the ongoing effects of the first war on their family life, when Tom is sent by his father to work in Sumatra. Trapped there when the Japanese invade in WWII, Tom is taken prisoner and made to work on the Pekanbaru Death Railway. There he is sustained by memories of life on the farm at home and a growing compassion for his father.

*Only Birds Above* is a novel that shows war doesn't happen to just one soldier: its traumas are felt for generations.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

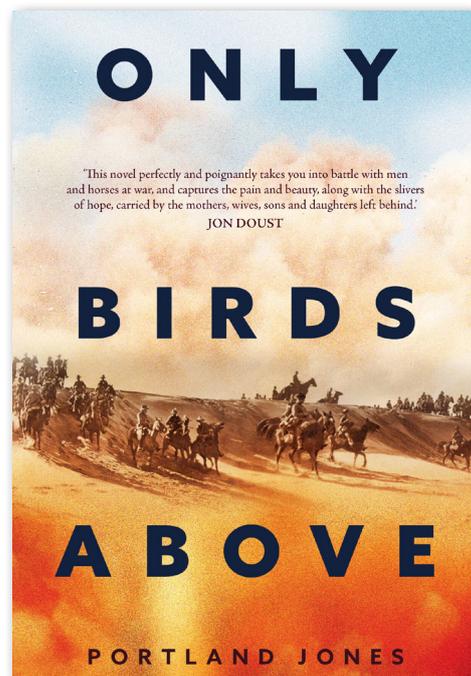
Portland Jones is a writer, lecturer and horse trainer who lives and works in the Swan Valley. She has a PhD in Literature and her first novel, *Seeing the Elephant*, was shortlisted for the City of Fremantle Hungerford Award. *Only Birds Above* is her second novel. She has also co-authored a non-fiction book, *Horses Hate Surprise Parties*.

Portland is currently working on a third novel and another non-fiction book.



### NOTES

- The book was inspired by the author's great-grandfather, Dirk, who was captured by the Japanese in Sumatra. As a prisoner of war he became part of what has come to be known as the Pekanbaru Death Railway – 220 kms of rail through impossibly rugged and mountainous terrain. Dirk, along with thousands of Allied soldiers and civilians and well over 100,000 press-ganged Javanese labourers died while building the railway line, which was completed on the day Japan surrendered and subsequently never used.
- While the author worked on a PhD thesis, she interviewed Vietnam veterans, and a common theme was the inadequacy of the government response to the trauma experienced by veterans and their families. This led Portland to explore how the death of horses might have impacted the WWI soldiers who lived and worked alongside them.
- This is a novel by an author who works with and loves horses. Horses are never far away from the action in this book, with their ability to channel human emotion – and their nobility that sometimes aligns with human courage, but often makes human actions seem more poignant and futile.



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