Officer's Investigation Of
Banka Island Massacre
Incredible Escapes Of S.A.
Nurse And British Stoker

From T. L. GOODMAN

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Maj. William Alston Tebbutt, a Sydney solicitor in civil life, who was attached to headquarters of the 8th Division, AIF, at Singapore, was aboard the auxiliary naval vessel Vyner Brooke, some of whose passengers became victims of the Banka Island massacre. He has prepared an official detailed report from his own observations and statements to him by witnesses.

He describes the incredible escape of one person from each of the two groups lined up on the beach and massacred—a South Australian nurse and a stoker from the lost battleship Prince of Wales.

The passengers were now in two groups, one of which was in the ship's boats and the other clinging to the raft and the wreckage. This second group, was carried by the tide and current into Muntok Bay, where they were picked up by an RAP pinnace. That morning the Japanese had occupied Muntok and these passengers were subsequently taken under Japanese control. After some experiences not involving deaths, they were taken to the Tinwinning labor assembly station, where I joined them about two weeks later, when I was captured in the jungle.

On the other group reached shore about ten miles north-west of Muntok on the evening of February 14. They were 31 men, including three nurses who were believed drowned. In addition there were approximately 20 civilians—men, women and children—and twelve ship's officers and naval ratings. These men and before daylight by eight or ten soldiers from another junket ship. A naval officer, Lt-Cdr. J. C. S. White, taking passage on the Vyner Brooke, also made shore At daylight Sengelman, chief officer of the Vyner Brooke went inland to get help.

After he had left some police in authority suggested that the civilians (women and children (about fifteen) should move up a track, as they would be safe and time would be saved. Two slightly wounded ratings from the Vyner Brooke had been on the former ship. They were detailed to escort this party. The nurses apparently were invited to accompany it, but decided to remain. This party, after going a mile, was resting when the party of about 12 men, including one man armed with a tommy gun, and including Sengelman, they came up to them. They saw them but took no notice.

"About an hour later this patrol (not now the Sengelman) returned and again passed the first party after carefully looking at them. It is noted that this party consisted only of exhausted looking women and children and two ratings bailing wounded and blood. Later the group reached a road and eventually were taken into Japanese custody in Muntok.

Victims Lined Up

'THE Japanese patrol referred to reached the party on the beach and, after looking them over, indicated that the service personnel should move along the coast to the south. These, numbering from 15 to 20, walked to a small cape and started along a track leading inland. The Japanese, however, motioned them along the beach and halted them in line with their backs. They were then made to move them up, tuck off strips and bandage their eyes. Some difficulty was experienced in making the men understand what was wanted, and a Japanese officer of sergeant in charge became angry at the hesitation, drew his sword and cut a man standing at one end over the face. At the other end of the line was Sengelman, Lt-Cdr. J. C. S. White, taking passage on the Vyner Brooke, also made shore At daylight Sengelman, chief officer of the Vyner Brooke went inland to get help.

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"During this time the soldier with the tommygun lay down on the beach with his gun aimed. The men turned round and the man next to Lloyd, said, 'Here's where we get it in the back.' Lloyd then said, 'Well, I'm going to give it a go,' and he with the other rating rushed into the sea. The gun then started firing, taking as its target the other end of the line.

"One at a time the victims were shot; by the time the stream of bullets reached the final man standing Lloyd and his companion were some 30 yards in the sea and apparently the companion was here killed and the gun turned on Lloyd. The latter plunged and swam forward, assisted by a strong easterly current. A bullet struck him on the shoulder and he noticed some blood spurt up. He continued struggling, and after a few seconds another bullet struck him on the head, causing momentary unconsciousness.

Again Captured

"With the first flickerings of returning intelligence, Lloyd resumed swimming amid the splashing of further bullets, current, and his efforts, took him out of the danger zone, and after an indeterminate time in the sea he landed further down the coast. After about ten days of freedom, during which he survived by the help of local Chinese, he was again captured and taken to the Muntok labor station.

"Before being recaptured he returned to the scene of the tragedy and saw the bodies of his companions some of which had been floated off by the tide. In the area where he had first landed were were partly in the sea the bodies of nurses and others bearing bullet and bayonet wounds. Some 50 yards from Lloyd, the bodies of Sengelman and a nurse.
yards from the others were the bodies of Sedgeman and a nurse who had apparently tried to flee.

After the killing of Lloyd's companions the Japanese, perhaps more interested in the loot than the prisoners, turned round the little cape, some of them being observed to be without their headgear.

In his introduction, Maj. Tebbutt says:—"As the subject matter of this report are over three and a half years old, and the statements also are very old, there may be omissions and errors in unimportant details. In some cases I took the original statements written, but all of these have been destroyed long ago at times of enemy and under threats of Japanese searches. I took the view that if the matter came to enemy notice, even indirectly, an effort would be made to destroy the evidence by removing the witnesses.

The guards at Palembang were much more cautious and vigilant and frequent patrols were made beyond at Chang, where this report is being compiled.

Maj. Tebbutt says that the Japanese units which landed at Muntok were the identifying insignia of the crews on the boots of their shirts.

Voyage Begins

The following are extracts from Maj. Tebbutt's report on the Vyner Brooke's tragic voyage and the Muntok horror—"On February 11 instructions were received by Capt. Gelgardi, liaison officer, Malaya Command, to confer with the Navy for the evacuation of members of the Australian Nursing Service. Capt. Gelgardi finally arranged that the nurses were to be embarked on HMS Vyner Brooke from HMS Laburnum on February 12. In respect to the arrangements, it is noted that a naval staff officer on February 12 stated that there would be no hurry, and that it was not until Capt. Gelgardi gave his views of the importance of the Japanese attack that the matter was treated as one of urgency.

HMS Vyner Brooke was 1,659 tons gross, commanded by Lt. H. E. Borton, RN, with a crew of about 50, including the Cyan crew. Orders to Lt. Borton were to proceed to Batavia via Durien and Basse Strals and to lay up close to the coast in the daytime.

"Passengers were embarked on the evening of February 12—an estimated total of 200, including a number of Eurasian women and children. The ship left Singapore April 7. On the morning of February 13 the ship anchored off Lingga Island. Japanese planes flew over the ship and there were a few shells. We were then at sea and dived over the ship, dropping their bombs from 3,000 feet. The ship circled at full speed. The bombs fell all into the sea, exploding close enough to shake the ship. A further three planes attacked, and finally a pair of planes attacked together. These two bombs hit the ship, and the engines were almost immediately stopped.

"A ship's officer told the passengers to hide in their boat stations. There was no panic. I went to the rear of the ship and saw that the passengers were moving there to the boat stations, and I then went to the deck of the ship and assisted in the lowering of the boats. Only a few boats were undamaged by the bombs. These were lowered, but became waterlogged.

"The embarkation of the passengers appeared to be proceeding in an orderly manner, and I then went to the rear of the ship, where I found two women with bleeding wounds, one of them seemed a bit hysterical. The boat had a big list, so I got these women to the well deck, explained the position to them, gave them some advice, and threw them overboard. Shortly afterwards I jumped in myself.

Weather Calm

The ship was attacked at 11:40 and sank at 1:40. The ship was in the entrance to Langkawi Strait, some ten of twelve miles from the island. The weather was calm and the sea was clear.

When the ship sank, there were several boats in the area, but they were all in the water. The ship sank quickly, but the crew made it to the lifeboats. The Japanese landed on the island, but the survivors managed to escape to the sea and were picked up by a British destroyer.

About two weeks later he was captured and joined the other prisoners.

"Aircraftman J. E. Barker, No. 3134922, McCann, No. 1069562, stated that: with a wounded companion, he reached Banks Island after the air-sea rescue launch had been sunk on February 18. He was captured and was again bayoneted twice. He lay still, and just as the Japanese were leaving, one of them must have observed the movement and McCann saw him again approaching with his bayonet. McCann pulled out of dirt and pellmell, which he threw into the enemy's face and then struggled. He was still at the face of darkness close to the sea, and remained hidden in a state of semi-consciousness for some days, and was driven by the Japanese.

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"Aircraftman J. E. Barker, No. 1162750, stated that he was a member of the crew of an air-sea rescue launch which left Singapore and put into Muntok Bay on the night of February 14-15, 1942. Just before daylight some people were noticed floating in the bay, supported by wreckage. Barker assisted in getting these ashore. Among them were many Australian nurses.

After finishing this task he was lined up with a number of other Europeans by Japanese troops and moved in single file through a small building.

The two men in front (he was third in the queue) were interviewed briefly by a Japanese officer and then taken out. As soon as he was alone with the soldier he punched him, knocking him down, ran and jumped into the water and swam out to a wreck in the bay. During the day he remained in a submerged part of the wreck, where there was a few inches of space between the water and the ceiling. That night he swam ashore and, proceeding down the coast, joined Maj. Tebbutt, with whom he was captured about two weeks later.

Rammed A Transport

L T. Ronald George Gladstone Station, RNR, stated that he left Singapore as first lieutenant of an armed auxiliary. On the afternoon of February 14 this ship engaged an enemy convoy and after ramming a Japanese transport, was sunk by gunfire from a cruiser. When the ship was ordered to be abandoned, he jumped into the water with a badly wounded RNVR officer. While in the water they were machine-gunned from a transport at a range of about 15 yards. He was hit in the back of the head and the other officer was again hit. As they drifted to the rear of the ship they became targets for bullets of wood hurled by Japanese crowding the rails. His companion died that night and he himself remained in the water for 48 hours, eventually coming ashore on the north coast of Banka Island.

"With some others who had joined him, many being wounded, he was proceeding to Muntok about March 2, to seek medical attention. When about 12 miles from Muntok they found the bodies of four RAF personnel lying in a heap in a ditch. They showed evidence of having been bayoneted."

Betrayed By Malays

Maj Tebbutt lived in the jungle on Banka Island before Malaysians betrayed him and two naval ratings to a Japanese patrol. He saw surviving nurses at Muntok for a couple of days, and then was sent to Palembang in southern Sumatra where he saw them occasionally in hospital conducted by Dutch and Eurasian sisters of the Order of Francisca. In the middle of 1943 the hospital was closed and the nurses were sent away. In May this year all officers of the rank of major and above were transferred to Changi camp in Singapore where Tebbutt is now quartered.