

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

From T. L. GOODMAN

SINGAPORE, September 16.

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.

which I reached some time before light.

"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 RAF 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.

"The other group reached shore about ten miles north-west of Muntok on the evening of February 14. Included were 31 sisters (three nurses were believed drowned). In addition there were approximately 20 civilians (men, women and children) and twelve ship's officers and naval ratings. They were joined before daylight by eight or ten soldiers from another sunken ship. A naval officer, Lt-Comdr. J. C. S. White, taking passage on the Vyner Brooke, also came ashore. At daylight Sedgeman, chief officer of the Vyner Brooke, went inland to get help.

"After he had left some person in authority suggested that the civilian women and children (about fifteen) should move up a track, as they would be slow and time would be saved. Two slightly wounded ratings from the Vyner Brooke (both had been on the Prince of Wales) 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 a Japanese patrol of about 12 men, including one man armed

when a Japanese patrol of about 12 men, including one man armed with a tommy gun and including Sedgeman, passed them. The patrol saw them but took no notice.

"About an hour later this patrol (not now including Sedgeman) returned and again passed this party after carefully looking at them. It is noted that this party consisted only of exhausted looking women and children and two ratings exhibiting wounds 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 to the sea. Signs were then made that the men should remove their shirts, tear off strips, and bandage their eyes. Some difficulty was experienced in making the men understand what was wanted, and a Japanese officer or 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 Stoker Ernest Lloyd, C/KX86448, from the Prince of Wales, and a rating from the Vyner Brooke. The Japanese still had difficulty in getting compliance with their orders so they motioned the men to turn round and face the sea.

"During this time the soldier with the tommygun lay down on the beach with his gun aimed. The men turned round and the man

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 men left 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 a 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. Finally the 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 strewn partly in the sea the bodies of nurses and others bearing bullet and bayonet wounds. Some 50 yards from the others were the bodies of Sedgeman 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 patrols turned round the little cape, some of them being observed to be wiping their noses."

In his introduction, Maj. Tebbutt says:—"As the subject matters 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 in writing, but all of these have been destroyed long ago at times of, or under threat 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 suspicious, brutal, vigilant and close than at Changi, where this report is being compiled."

Maj. Tebbutt says that the Japanese units which landed at Muntok wore the identifying insignia of three red balls on the breasts 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. Geigard, liaison officer, Malaya Command, to confer with the Navy for the evacuation of members of the Australian Nursing Service. Capt. Geigard 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 11 stated that there need not be any hurry, and it was not until Capt. Geigard gave his views of the imminence of the Japanese attack that the matter was treated as one of urgency."

"HMS Vyner Brooke was 1,669 tons gross, commanded by Lt. R. E. Borton, RNR, with a crew of about 50, including the gun crew. Orders to Lt. Borton were to proceed to Batavia via Durien and Bassee Straits 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 at about 8 p.m. On the morning of February 13 the ship anchored off Lingga Island. Japanese planes flew over about 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. At 11.30 the ship proceeded on her way. During the afternoon further Japanese planes were identified."

"On the morning of the fourteenth the ship anchored off Tojout Island and planes flew within sight several times before the ship proceeded at 10 a.m. towards Banka Straits."

times before the ship proceeded at 10 a.m. towards Banka Straits.

"The captain stated to me that he considered it suicidal to remain anchored close to land, that the ship could easily be picked up from the air, and would provide a sitting shot for bombers. From his experience he believed that he might be able to avoid bombs in the open fairway. Accordingly he did not obey his orders to anchor in the daytime."

Boat Accommodation

"EARLY in the journey an examination of the boats was made in company with a ship's officer, who stated that of six boats carried, two would hold 30 passengers each and the remainder 20 each. Each passenger was given a lifebelt, and lifebelts were altered to fit the children. In view of the deficiency of lifeboat accommodation, all who were strong swimmers were told that, if the ship were sunk, they must be ready to take to the water."

"After the ship left Tojout Island there were three or four alerts before about 1 p.m. when a formation of nine Japanese planes flew over the ship several times and were fired upon by the Lewis gun. They then went about two miles ahead of the ship and three dived over the ship, dropping their bombs from 3,000 feet. The ship circled at full speed. The bombs all fell into the sea, exploding close enough to shake the ship. A further three planes attacked, and finally the nine planes attacked together. This time two bombs hit the ship, and the engines were almost immediately stopped."

"A ship's officer told the passengers to go to their boat stations. There was no panic. I went to the rear of the ship to see that the passengers there were moving to the boat stations, and I then went to the boat deck and assisted in the lowering of the boats. Only two 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 lifebelts, one of whom 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 1.10 and sank at 1.40. The ship was in the entrance to Banka Straits, some ten or twelve miles from the island. The weather was calm and the visibility good. In the water there were collections of people and flotsam scattered over about half a square mile of water. The ship's boats were seen several hundred yards away, but came no closer."

"Swimmers, individually or in

closer

"Swimmers, individually or in groups, were clinging to the wreckage or floating about. There were some rafts on the ship, but I saw only one in the water. I swam about generally in the afternoon, and nearing darkness was close to this raft to which were clinging large numbers of nurses and some civilians. There was no room to clutch a hand for support, and, after being carried away by currents many times and swimming back, I found myself retching and vomiting and decided that I would drown under these conditions. I decided to make for the shore, using their bayonets. They then lined up the remainder facing the sea, motioning them to walk towards the water. The soldier with the tommygun received his orders, and the ruthless shooting down of these nurses, civilians and merchant sailors was carried out."

"As I have said, Sedgeman and one sister tried to escape and failed. After the shooting the Japanese bayoneted any bodies of whose death they were uncertain. The incredible escape of Lloyd was repeated on this side of the small cape. Staff Nurse Bullwinkel was shot through the body and fell into the water. She recovered consciousness after the Japanese had left, and with the help of natives and a phenomenal constitution, remained at large for some weeks before being gathered into the labor assembly station."

"A civilian, E. H. German, an American national, escaped being hit by bullets, but was bayoneted. This thrust went through his chest, leaving scars of entrance and exit. Several doctors who have examined the wounds reported to me that they would not have believed it possible for anyone to survive such a bayonet penetration of the lungs. About a week later this victim also was shepherded into the prisoners' compound."

Aircraftman's Experiences

"AIRCRAFTMAN M. V. McCann, No. 1059202, stated that with a wounded companion he reached Banka Island after his air-sea rescue launch had been sunk on February 15. They encountered a Japanese patrol who bayoneted them, killing his companion. McCann, after regaining consciousness, struggled towards his companion. His movements were noticed, and he was again bayoneted twice. He lay still, and just as the Japanese were leaving, one of them must have observed movement, and McCann saw him again approaching with his bayonet poised. McCann seized a handful of dirt and pebbles, which he threw into the enemy's face and then struggled into the jungle. He remained hidden in a state of semi-consciousness for some days, and was later helped by the natives."

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

"Aircraftman J. E. Barker, No.

SOLDIERS

"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 Stanton, 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 billets 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

M AJ 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 Franciscans. In the middle of 1943 the hospital was closed, and

also Eurasian sisters of the Order of Franciscans. 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.