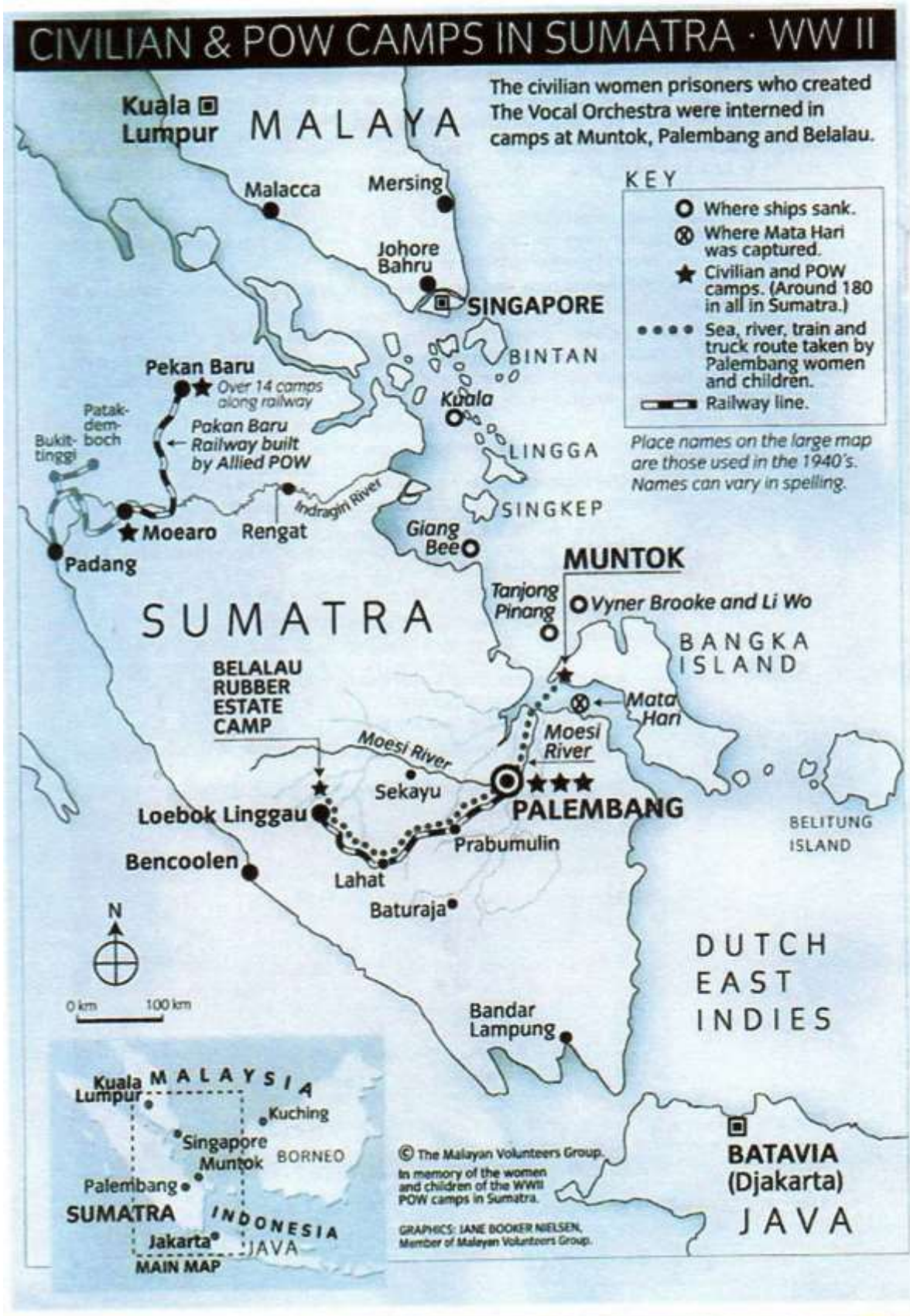


# The Muntok Women's Internment and Prisoner of War Camp



# **The Muntok Women's Prison Camp 1942 to 1945**

## **1. Background**

In December 1941, the Japanese invaded northern Malaya, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Pearl Harbour in USA. Fighting progressed down the Malay peninsula and in February 1942, the Japanese reached the Johore Straits near Singapore.

Many people tried to leave Singapore just before the Fall on February 15. Civilian women and children and elderly men boarded up to 44 boats, together with British and Australian soldiers bound for battle in Java. 65 Australian Army Nurses who had been ordered to leave Singapore were on the SS Vyner Brooke.

Over 40 of these boats were bombed by Japanese planes and warships in and near the Banka Straits. About 4,000 to 5,000 people lost their lives from the bombs and by drowning.

## **2. Radji Beach**

22 of the Australian Army Nurses struggled to shore at Radji Beach on Banka Island. Some civilian women and children, elderly men and soldiers also reached shore in lifeboats and on rafts. Most of the women and children decided to walk to Muntok to seek food and to surrender to the Japanese.

On February 16, a group of 12 Japanese soldiers came to Radji Beach. They shot and bayoneted the men. Only 2 men, Stoker Ernest Lloyd and American Eric Germann survived. They were both injured but lay in the water and pretended to be dead. Later, they reported what had happened.

Next, the Japanese soldiers made the Australian Army Nurses and a civilian woman stand in a line and walk into the water. They

machine-gunned them all in the back. They were all killed except Nurse Vivian Bullwinkel. She was shot but not fatally injured.

Vivian Bullwinkel stayed in the jungle for 12 days and cared for an injured soldier, Private Patrick Kinsley. Local people gave them food but eventually Vivian Bullwinkel and Kinsley surrendered because he needed medical care. They entered the Muntok jail where 1000 shipwrecked victims were held but sadly, Kinsley died.

### **3.Palembang**

After 6 weeks in the Muntok jail, the prisoners were sent to Palembang. The evacuees from Singapore were joined by many Dutch people taken from their homes by the Japanese.

In Palembang, the Women and children were placed into houses surrounded by barbed wire. There were 30 people to each house and 10 people to each garage. The Men were put into the Palembang jail and the soldiers put into military prison camps. The conditions were very hard.

The Men were made to build an atap (bamboo and palm leaf) camp where they lived until they were moved back to the Muntok jail. The Women and children then moved to the Palembang atap camp. They were later moved back to an atap camp in Muntok.

### **4.The Muntok Women's Prison Camp, October 1944 to April 1945**

The Women and children were taken back to Muntok in October 1944. They were very weak from poor food and medical care and began to suffer from Malaria, beri beri, dysentery, typhus, TB and Banka fever. 650 Women and children were in this Camp and 76 people died.



**Muntok Women's Camp, drawn by Margaret Dryburgh**



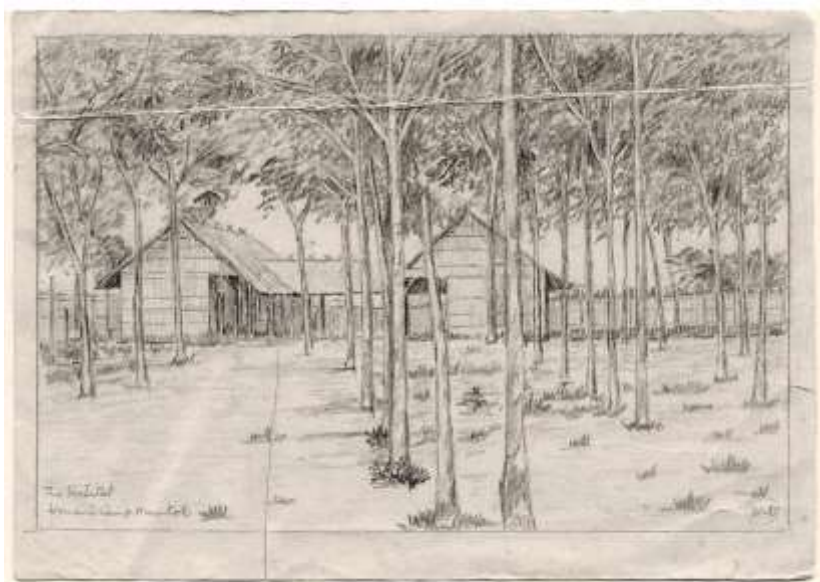
**Kitchen, Muntok Women's Camp (Margaret Dryburgh)**

Margaret Dryburgh was an English internee who drew many pictures of the Prison Camps. She also helped to form the Women's Camp Vocal Orchestra which sang lovely music and inspired the prisoners. She died in the last camp at Belalau.





**Inside Women's Camp hut, (Margaret Dryburgh)**



**Muntok Women's Prison Camp 'Hospital', (Margaret Dryburgh)**

The many Women who died in Camp were buried by their friends under the rubber trees. After the War, their bodies were moved to the Muntok Town Cemetery, which is now houses and the Pertamina Petrol station. In the early 1960's, the Dutch moved all the Dutch remains to Jakarta. Most British and Australian civilian Women are believed to have been moved to a grave in the Catholic Cemetery in Muntok in 1981. Their Men still lie under houses and the petrol station.

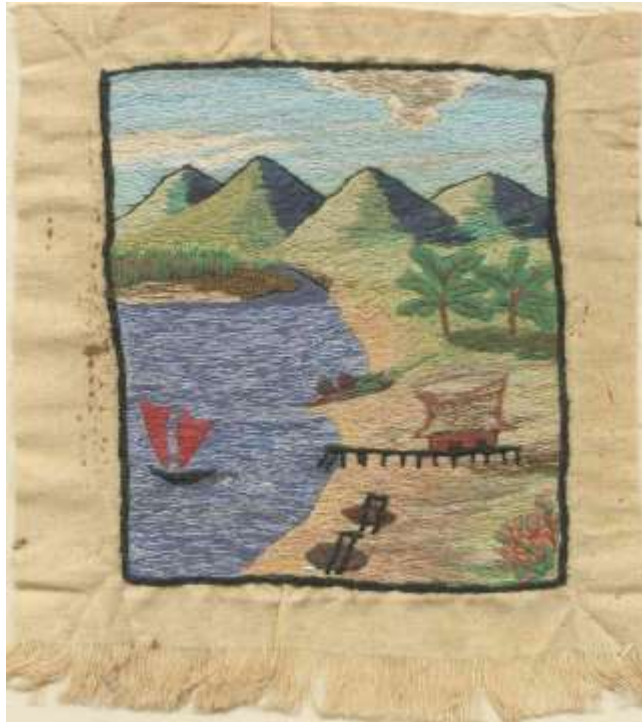
## 5. Daily Life in Muntok Women's Camp



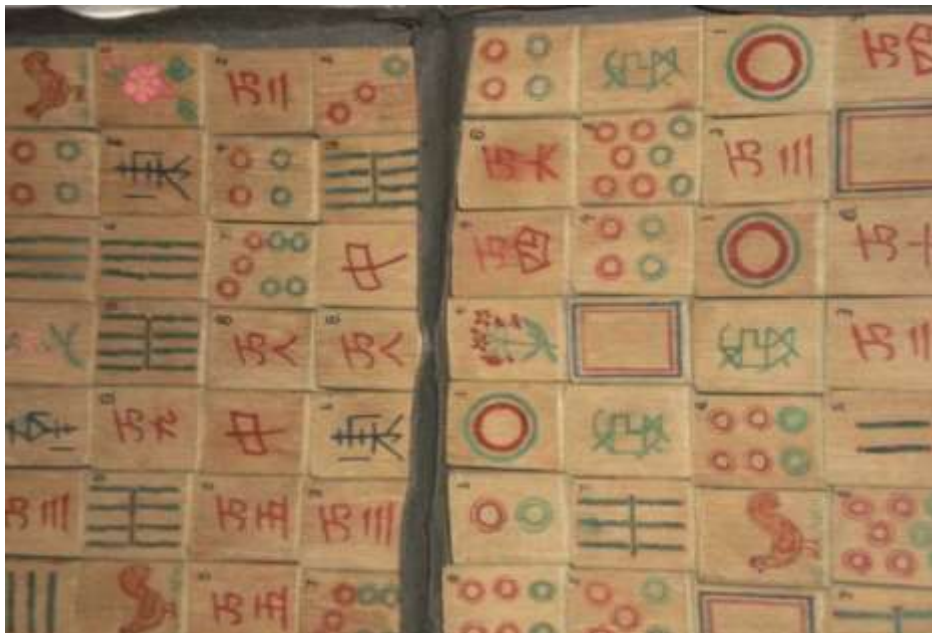
Emptying latrines (toilets), Muntok Women's Camp



Sleeping quarters, Muntok Women's Camp



**Embroidery made by Australian Army Nurse Jean Ashton in Camp. She pulled coloured threads out of her clothes to sew the pattern.**



**Mah Jong set made in Women's Camp from scraps of wood**



**Rag doll made in Camp by Mrs Mary Brown for her granddaughter**



**'Bully', Japanese rag doll made by Australian Army Nurse Betty Jeffrey**





**Internee Mrs Mary Brown**

Mrs Brown and her daughter Shelagh were bombed on the Vyner Brooke. Here we see her dress which she made from the Reverend Vic Wardle's pyjamas, hat made from a broken umbrella and shoes left behind in Muntok jail by English sailor E. Wilson.



**Grave of Mrs Mary Brown and many other internees, reburied in Muntok Town Cemetery, 1948**

## 6. Muntok Town Cemetery



**Grave of Mrs Resie Armstrong and Mrs Bedell with many others, moved from Camp to Muntok Town Cemetery, 1948**



**Derelict Muntok Town Cemetery, Women's Camp Graves, 1968**

"LET US NOT FORGET".  
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"Volunteers to dig a grave". So the word went round. ~~XX~~ has died, her body no longer able to withstand the great demands made upon it, her Spirit ready for her Master. Her last words were "I will pray for you all in Heaven". She had had typhus, and then there was no food to build up her strength. In the so called hospital, there was only enough water to allow one cupful per person per day for washing purposes. This in the tropics in sweltering fever heat and those nursing the sick, themselves in need of rest and care. And now the call for "Volunteers to dig a grave". When will the rough coffin be sent or will the body have to lie in the open for 24 hours and quiet vigil be kept, as on a previous occasion? Out of the barbed wire they go, those able at the time and with the strength for the digging. Peace? Quietness at any rate. No longer the noisy, dusty, dirty squalor behind the barbed wire. Human bodies, skin and bones, struggling for existence, struggling to help each other - orphaned children in a bewildered small world - sad sights - only silent happier memories of a past existence. The task is finished, back they come weary, silent - no water to wash off the dirt, the sweat, but triumph only that a need has been met, a task accomplished. A rough box is brought; will the boards hold? The small procession forms, how heavy the load, how slow the pace. The Camp is silenced, another body laid to rest. The way was steep, the clay heavy, the service simple, the prayers sincere. The Hymn 'O God our Help in Ages Past' never more appropriate, and favourite ~~more~~ more inspiring. One broken body now triumphant - for her Faith was Sure and her life of <sup>Service</sup> Witness Supreme in her Death. Women honoured woman.

Scripture  
and

There is no one now to care for her Grave, no one is responsible for her last resting place. The end came soon for her, but there were many more like her, both men and women. Is she Chinese, is she English, Eurasian or Scotch? Is she Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of England or a Plymouth Brethren? She had loved Malaya, in her work or in her home. It was only the sad fate of War that caused her to die so soon and in such hardship in an Allied Territory, now Indonesia. She was proud to be British in 1943.

No tombstone or cross now marks the spot of her last resting place - no neat sown grass covers the site. No, for all she did, all she was - only the tropical growth of twenty-three years covers the ~~site~~. The birds will be singing, the sunrises and the sunsets will lighten the spot, and the sun give warmth. Will there be buildings erected here in years to come or more battles fought?

She was just one of God's children, but let us not forget.....

Found in Shelagh Lea nee Brown's papers (Mary Brown's daughter)



## **7. The Graves Today**

The Muntok Town Cemetery was built over in the 1960's. The Dutch, the Australian Army Nurses who died in Camp and civilians who wore a uniform during their lives were moved to War Cemeteries in Jakarta.

In 1981, the remains of 25 people were moved to the Muntok Catholic Cemetery by the petrol station owner. It is believed these were the bodies of 25 Women British and Australian civilians.

The Men's graves still lie beneath houses and the Pertamina petrol station.



**Grave with plaques and bougainvillea petals, September 2015**



**Completed grave with Men and Women Internees**



## 8. Some Memorial Plaques, Muntok



**Plaque to Australian Army Nurses, Muntok**



**Plaque in memory of Women and Children, Kampong Menjelang**



**Plaque to all internees and POW's, Timah Tinwinning Building Museum**

## **9. Australian Army Nurses**

21 Australian Army Nurses were killed at Radji Beach at about 10.30am on February 16, 1942.

They were:

Matron Drummond

Sisters Casson, Tait, Neuss, Hudson, Ogilvy, Wight, Bridge, Beard, Keats, Halligan, McGiade, Elmes, Cuthbertson, Willmott, Kerr, Fairweather, Harris, Salmon, Stewart, Farmaner

Sister Vivian Bullwinkel was shot but survived, as did Ernest Lloyd and Eric Germann from the 2 groups of men.

4 Nursing Sisters died in Muntok Women's Camp:

Sisters Raymond, Singleton, Hempstead and Gardam

4 Nursing Sisters died at Belalau camps, Loeboek Linggau, Sumatra

Sisters Davis, Hughes, Freeman and Mittelheuzer



**Nurses Beryl Woodridge, Wilma Oram-Young, Vivian Stratham (Bullwinkel), Betty Jeffrey and Nesta James with pilot Ken Brown, who rescued them from Belalau camp, Loeboek Linggau, Sumatra**

## 10. The Timah Tinwinning Museum

The Timah Tinwinning Museum tells the history of Banka Island and its tin mining. The Vivian Bullwinkel Galeri, tells about the War Years, the killing of the Nurses and others on Radji beach and the Men's and Women's Camps.



**Timah Tinwinning Building Museum**



**The Vivian Bullwinkel Galeri**

## 11. The Muntok Peace Museum

The Muntok Peace Museum was opened in September 2015. It tells about World War 2 and the Camps. We hope that visitors will learn the importance of Peace.



**Muntok Peace Museum opening**



**Inside the Peace Museum**



**1000 peace cranes**

The Muntok Peace Museum has a very good website,

<http://muntokpeacemuseum.org>



## 12. Summary

The events of World War 2 were tragic, for those who died, for the survivors and their families. Lives were changed forever. We remember all these people.

But we are also grateful for the help and kindness of the many people we have met in Muntok and Palembang in helping to preserve their memories. The Malayan Volunteers Group and the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia have also helped us in preparing memorials to the people who suffered and died in the War.

It is very good to know that the many people who suffered during the War are now remembered in Muntok and that their families will be made welcome if they visit in the future.

There is now a wonderful friendship between the prisoners' families and the people of Muntok and with one another. Although our families were taken from us, we now belong to a wider family of friends.

We hope that people who learn about these Camps will see that war is very harmful to men, women and children and will try to prevent it from happening again.

