

## “HMS Vyner Brooke”

Sunk by Japanese bombers in the Banka Straits, Sumatra,

- On 14 February 1942.

[Version 3.6.2; September 2020]

### PART ONE - THE RESEARCH

#### Introduction:

The purpose of researching this tragic event and compiling a memorial document on the sinking of the “SS. Vyner Brooke” is to attempt to expand the knowledge of and facilitate a wider historical awareness of the sinking. Also, in the interests of creating a memorial to those currently unidentified victims, an effort has been made to identify as many as possible of the passengers and crew on the ship at the time of its sinking and decipher the fate of these individuals.

In carrying out this research it has also brought to light that the events on Radji Beach were more awful than the general story portrayed in the mainstream media over the past 70 years. Therefore, this document has a blunt outcome in that it presents something closer to the truth insofar as the crimes of the Japanese troops involved at Radji Beach.

The reader is to be aware that some of the realities presented in the latter part of this Introduction may be upsetting.

To put the document into historical context, the fate of only a small number of the forty or so ships sunk carrying evacuees from Singapore during the last few days before the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 have been properly researched and documented. This is one of the attempts to prevent the lives of those several thousand women, children and men who did die in their escape attempt being simply consigned without proper memory, into the dustbin of history.

The general story of the “SS. Vyner Brooke” and in particular the fate of the twenty-one nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) so horrendously massacred on Radji Beach, has become relatively well known in Australia and is well told in the following books in the possession of the researcher;

- Firstly, the book “**On Radji Beach**” by Ian W. Shaw (published in 2010) is a very well written and most comprehensive account which rightly focuses almost exclusively on the lives and the deaths of the Sisters from the Australian Army Nursing Service who boarded the “SS. Vyner Brooke”. The book is highly recommended for anyone wishing to understand the living hell encountered by the nurses from the time of the ship being attacked by Japanese bombers.
- “**White Coolies**” by Betty Jeffrey (first published in 1954 and then reprinted many times since) is the story through the eyes of Sister Betty Jeffrey, AANS, who survived the sinking of the ship and subsequent inhumane internment by the Japanese. It was first written during the three and a half years she was a prisoner of the Japanese in Sumatra.
- “**Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke**” by Ralph E. H. Armstrong (published in 2003) who as a boy in his pre-teens also survived the sinking and then the years of internment in Sumatra

- **“By Eastern Windows”** written by William H. McDougall Jr. (originally published in 1948) gives a valuable insight into the events in his chapter on survivor Eric Germann - he also notes his later discussions with child survivor Isidore ‘Mischa’ Warman.
- **“Women Beyond the wire”** written by Lavinia Warner and John Sandilands which covers the story of the survivors from the “SS. Vyner Brooke” as part of the overall tapestry of the experiences of women internees of the Japanese 1942-54.

As a result, this document does not attempt to purport to be anything like the full story of the events and experiences of the passengers, because they have already been admirably recorded in the books mentioned above and the biographies of Sister Vivian Bullwinkel.

**It focuses on identifying as many people involved and perhaps revealing some previously unanalysed and publicly unrecorded aspects of the sinking and its aftermath.**

One of the noticeable gaps in general knowledge of the last voyage of the “SS. Vyner Brooke” is the identity of most of the approximately 105 civilian women, men and children - together with the few service personnel on board and the 52 crew – who, in addition to the 65 Australian Nurses were aboard the ship on its last voyage. This memorial document will attempt to identify the passengers and crew, then record their lives and passing in a respectful manner with the objective of showing them as people living full and positive lives, many of whom were cut short in a totally unnecessary fashion by a brutal enemy.

As already stated, the identities of the 65 AANS personnel are clearly recorded and the noble lives of many of those who were murdered on Banka Island are memorialised in literature and records in Australia, Singapore, and the UK and also on the memorial that was placed on Radji beach in Sumatra on 16 February 2017.

Of the probably more than 100 people killed during and after the sinking of the “SS. Vyner Brooke” only 15 of the deaths are memorialised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, which is partly the motivation for creating a memorial document such as this one.

**One of the more chilling aspects of the historical events surrounding the last voyage of the ‘SS. Vyner Brooke’ was the fatal consequence of the Australian Army nurses - along with their nursing counterparts from the QAINMS and the General Hospitals in Singapore - being sternly ordered out of Singapore at the last minute before the impending defeat and Surrender. This was primarily because news was starting to filter through from China of the terrible atrocities and rapes committed against British and Chinese nurses by the soldiers of the 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment (the ‘Tanaka Butai’) of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division of the Japanese Imperial Army on Christmas Day 1941, at St Stephens College Hospital, when they attacked and took Hong Kong. One of the first insights into the events on Radji Beach and Banks Island is that, in some sort of cruel synchronicity of history, it was two Companies of these very same bestial men from the very same 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Hong Kong were landing as the invasion army on Banka Island just as the survivors of the ‘SS. Vyner Brooke’ were struggling through the sea to reach land. Unbelievably, the specific Japanese troops that had been the cause of the urgent evacuation of all Nurses from Singapore had been transported hundreds of miles in the intervening few weeks from Hong Kong and were now waiting for them on Banka Island with a homicidal Officer in Charge in the form of one Major Orita Masaru. How cruel can be the twists of fate in times of war!**

But first let us recap to try and clear up any questions on the sinking and atrocities.

### How many people were on board?

The significant variance in the records and memories of number of passengers on board reflects the chaos on the Singapore docks on those last few days before the surrender to the Japanese. The reality was that by the 12-13 February 1942 thousands of women and children, babies, civilian men and servicemen were pushing, shoving, coercing and threatening their way onto any of the last ships leaving the city before the terror of the Japanese Army arrived from their frontline - which was by then on Bukit Timah Road and in Pasir Panjang.

On consequence of this chaotic situation is that there were no passenger lists for any of the 40 plus ships sunk during the week following their departure from Singapore harbour.

Numbers given for those on board the 'SS Vyner Brooke' range between 227 and 330 people, including the crew.

Captain 'Tubby' Borton in command of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' states in his report that the people on board comprised;

- Crew: 7 Officers and 45 ratings
  - Passengers: 1 R.N.; 1 Army; approx. 180 civilians, mainly women and children.
  - Survivors: RN 7; Army 1; Prisoners of War or civilians about 100; internees at Palembang.
- Indicating **227 people** on board, but also that perhaps there had not been an accurate headcount whilst at sea.

The website Naval-History.net says of 47 crew and 181 passengers, 125 were missing – this indicates 228 people.

The records compiled in the Changi POW camp 'Bureau of Record and Enquiry' under Captain David Nelson, SSVF, show – '*Passengers, RN 1, Army 1, Civilians (mainly women) 180 plus or minus.*' Then he records '*Survivors RN1, Army 1 Civilians 100 plus or minus*'. This record seems to reflect the view of Captain Borton which may well have been the case since Captain Borton became a POW and his views would have passed through the POW network to Changi POW camp in Singapore with its information collecting Bureau of Record and Enquiry.

Major William Alston Tebbutt (NAA B3856, 144/1/346) states that on board were "... Lt. R. E. Borton plus 50 crew, including gun crew ..." he also estimated a total of 200 passengers including a number of Eurasian men, women and children - this indicates a complement of 250 people.

In "By Eastern Windows" (p.140) the author quotes passenger Eric Germann as there being "250 passengers", but this presumably includes the nurses and the crew; this is also the number on board quoted in the book "Women beyond the Wire". This is the same number quoted by 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, Lt Mann, in his memoirs as the number of passengers.

Author Ian W. Shaw in his book "On Radji Beach" (p.126) states there were 65 Australian Army nurses (certain), about 150 civilian and military personnel and a crew of 40 – giving a total of around 255 persons.

An interesting statement in this context is that by Lt. Russell F. Wright (who had been the Assistant Embarkation Officer when the 'Vyner Brooke' left Singapore) – he said in his post war signed affidavit in the War Crimes files that he and the other men in his group were refused permission to

board the ship because the captain advised “... *that their complement was 250 above lifebelt strength ...* “. He later sailed on another evacuation ship; the ‘Mata Hari’ and fate brought him back into captivity – and the surviving AANS nurses including Vivian Bullwinkel – at Muntok internment camp.

AANS Ada ‘Mickey’ Syer believed there to have been **300 people** on board “... *assorted races and creeds and conditions. Some well dressed and some in rags ...*” (Syer).

Other authors and survivors have stated ;

- Joseph Kennedy’s book “When Singapore Fell” (p.41) – 200 or more passengers; the same figure as used by Geoffrey Brook in “Singapore’s Dunkirk”; but less than stated in “The Battle for Singapore “ ( p.323) which suggests **300 passengers**.
- Dr. Goldberg – Curth in her report states there were 280-290 passengers, but it is unclear whether she means to include crew, which would take the total up to **330 people** on board.
- On the Angelpro.com website, Vivian Bullwinkel is quoted as stating there were “... *265 frightened men, women and children, plus the 65 AANS nurses ...*”, suggesting about **330 people** on board.

Hal Richardson in ‘Into the Fire’ states there were close to 300 people.

Note: The American passenger, Eric German, is recorded in the book “By Eastern Windows” as observing that (p.140) whilst the Europeans were packed into the dining saloon, the Eurasians were jammed in the after hatch, and the forward hatch held the Chinese crew which had been replaced by some Malays with British naval ratings and a few British army lads. This memorial document is notably deficient in that it has no record of the Chinese crew or their fate.

### Who were the passengers?

From the memoirs of 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, Lt A.R. Mann, RNVR, we learn that on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February “... *During the afternoon a large power-driven water-lighter came alongside crowded with women, children and a few elderly men. These embarked and spread out all over the ship, the cabin accommodation was very limited so that had to be accommodated in the ‘tween’ decks. Among them were about ninety Australian Army Nursing Sisters....*”. He continues later in his record that the ship weighed anchor during the afternoon and began to leave but “... *a ‘Eureka’ launch came tearing up and by megaphone told us to return to anchor until further orders, We turned back and anchored near the breakwater in the outer harbour. Darkness came about 1800. At 1900 another water-lighter came alongside and this too, was crowded with people, men, women and children...*”.

The women were a mix of ‘Establishment Singapore’ British wives, British evacuees from Malaya, Eurasians, White Russians, British servicemen’s wives and two Siamese women – a mix of people who only a few days before would have probably not even acknowledged each other if they passed in the street in the stratified and racially separated Singapore society.

However, some of the ‘establishment wives’ such as Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Waddle, and Mrs. Macleod would have known each other very well from years of church going, socialising and perhaps sports such as golf in their younger years.

In considering what other group dynamics took people aboard we can surmise that the schoolteachers/school principals on board who included Kathleen Waddle, Dorothy Moreton, and Dorothy Macleod etc. were probably motivated to leave on this ship because of the networking of their jobs and their husbands. There were also at least three Anglican Missionaries on board – schoolteacher Miss Olga Sprenger and nursing Sister Miss Dorothy Simmonds who both lost their lives, either during or after the sinking, and also Miss Louise Beeston who ended up in internment but survived the War to return to work in Singapore in 1946.

To date, only one family of Chinese passengers (the Chans) and one woman with a Chinese surname (Mrs Nellie Ellen Thay who was an Englishwoman married to a Chinese) have been identified and recorded as specifically on this ship – but one statement referred to ‘Asiatics’ plural so it seems that there may have been a several other Chinese couples or families on board who are as yet unidentified.

Insofar as the considering the actual composition of passengers - as part of the process of determining who has not yet been identified in this researched memorial document - one paragraph from the book ‘ORB’ is key.

*“... About 20 of the passengers were adult males, mostly in their late middle age plus some who were elderly. The majority of this group were retired colonial officials and rubber planters.... All of them were accompanied by their wife or, more rarely, by a daughter. There were a similar number of older women, some were married to the men, but others were widowed or the spouses of senior managers from commercial enterprises or the Colonial service. The majority, however, were younger women and children, with around 40 of the passengers being children. Overwhelmingly, they were the wives and children of servicemen who had stayed behind in Singapore with their units. Some of the nurses were concerned about the number of children aboard the ‘Vyner Brooke’ ...” (ORB.p.133)*

This is a very important paragraph and indicates that the composition of the people on board the ship may have looked like (figures in brackets are the number of people in this category who have actually been identified in this document);

➤ Males in late middle age and elderly (includes some younger men)	20 (18)
➤ Females - older women (classified as over 40 years)	20 (21)
➤ Younger women (estimated at say 30)	30 (32)
➤ Children	40 (11)
➤ Australian Army nurses	65 (65)
➤ Crew as recorded by Captain Borton	<u>52 (23)</u>
	TOTAL 222 (170)

- Which is remarkably close to Captain Borton’s report and the figure given by Major Tebbutt (figures in brackets are the numbers of people fitting into these categories identified from the research for this memorial document). This guides us to the conclusion that the main gaps in identifying those on board – meaning those people who went missing without trace - are probably some 6 -8 elderly men, another 10 - 15 younger women, about 30 children and a similar number (31) of crew.

There are a lot of references to children having been on board, but as with so many first-hand accounts of the sinkings during the evacuation of Singapore, children are only an afterthought when survivors actually set about recording (generally in internment camps well after the ‘dust had

settled') who was on board and there is no definitive record of their numbers – except for “ORB’ (p.133) which states “... with around 40 of the passengers being children...”. If that figure is correct (it presumably is contained in one of the Australian Nurses records) then the death toll amongst children was around 75 percent! Sister Ada ‘Mickey’ Syer in her post war oral archive held in the Singapore Archives states that soon after departing “... a lot of infants required feeding ...”. Research for this memorial document has identified only about a dozen or so children, but there were clearly many more. This is one of the worst – and as yet unrecorded parts of this terrible event – since it indicates some twenty to thirty children and babies died during and after the attack on the ship, or in the sea, and will hopefully be clarified by further research in coming years.

It seems clear from analysing the various reports and memoirs that the gap between those identified in this document and those actually on board the “SS. Vyner Brooke” - a group of about 30 – 40 people - comprises to a large extent those (often elderly men and women, including a few couples) killed during the bombing on the ship in cabins and staterooms - as well as those who climbed down to, slipped, fell into, or were tipped from lifeboats into the sea but who did not manage to reach other groups and floated away or drowned quite quickly. The infants and children would have been most vulnerable at this latter point of the ‘abandon ship’ and mothers with more than one child would have had little chance of protecting more than one child at a time.

These people may never be identified unless new letters or diaries come forward.

### **What Happened after leaving Singapore?**

According to the very brief official typed report by the Captain of the “SS. Vyner Brooke”, the chronology of the last voyage of the ship was;

- Thursday 12 February 1942:
  - 2000 – Left Singapore
  - 2400 – Entered DURIAN STRAIT and carried on till daylight.
  
- Friday 13 February 1942:
  - 0800 – Anchored in small bay at island off LANKA ISLAND
  - 0900 – Enemy plane circled ship, no attack
  - 1110 – Enemy plane circled ship, no attack
  - 1130 – Hove up and proceeded to LIMA CHANNEL, close to shore (LANKA ISLAND)
  - 1500 - Ship circled by three enemy planes – no attack. Planes headed north.
  
- Saturday 14 February 1942:
  - 0130 – Anchored off TUJING ISLANDS
  - 0600 – A plane signalled but could not understand signal; then plane used machine gun and flew away to the south.
  - 0900 – Enemy plane circled ship, but no attack.
  - 1000 – Hove, up, and proceeded towards BANKA STRAIT
  - 1300 – Attacked by nine enemy planes. Ship at full speed and endeavouring by continuous alteration of course to avoid the bombs. Low level bombing by planes.
  - 1320 – Orders to abandon ship. Engines stopped, ship listing to Starboard; Port lifeboats all badly damaged (3); and one in starboard side by splinters; two lifeboats

lowered away with women and children superintended by Sub. Lieut. SEDGEMAN and Lieut. Commandeer WHITE. All passengers had lifebelts on, and during all previous alerts.

1340 – Ship heeled right over and to Starboard, and remained bottom up for about two minutes, and finally sank. During attack Lewis gun and 4-inch gun in action. Position of ship 8 degrees north of MUNTOK LIGHTHOUSE when sunk.

Hal Richardson in 'Into the Fire' records "... Dawn [13 Feb] gave them sight of a group of islands and they closed on them along the Lima Straits between the scattering of those islands of the Linga Archipelago, an impressive variety offering shade and shelter with the Singkep Island, the largest in the group, offering contact with the Dutch...".

[Researcher Note: Richardson then adds something that occurred at dawn on 13 February 1942 in the vicinity of what he has named LANKA ISLAND - after the ship travelled "... along Lima Straits between the scattering of those islands of the Linga [sic] Archipelago... which is "the channel between two very large islands, Pulau Singkep and Pulau Lingga, some 115 miles from Singapore . This next piece of information does not appear to have ever been recorded elsewhere in the story of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' – "... With daylight came the evidence of sinkings, wreckage on the beach and bumping against the ship's side, confirming that those had been Japanese searchlights at night and explaining the summer lightning that had flashed brighter, briefer, than that usually presented on the skyline by Sumatra's sudden storms. Further evidence of Japanese naval activities in these waters came with the appearance on shore of a party of about 40 people, men, women, children calling, waving and boats were lowered and brought them aboard where the Australian nurses tended the burns and other wounds. They told of surprise attacks in the darkness and sinkings – so many..." Given that neither the Captain, or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer or Major Tebbutt mention this group of people being picked up it will have to be considered a confusion with something that happened on another vessel and discarded from the voyage of the 'SS Vyner Brooke'].

Lt Mann records that just after 0630 hrs on Friday 13 February "... we were now clear of the Durian Straits steaming for the Sherbro' group of islands. The instructions had been to steam at night and hide up among the islands during the daylight hours, and the Captain's intention was to get among this group, hoping to get close enough not to be observed by aircraft. A forlorn hope.. We reached the islands about 0800 and came to anchor as close under the shore as possible, which was not very close, and we were very much exposed. During the forenoon a flight of nine Japanese aircraft passed right over us, but took no action although they must have seen... We were painted grey and flew the White Ensign so were a legitimate target[so]... the Captain decided we would stand a better chance underway, was obviously true, at least we had a slight chance if able to manoeuvre. The anchor was weighed and away to the south we steamed. To the south was another group of islands which had a strait running through them [ this would have been the Lingga group] and we steamed to these and into the channel between them hoping that we were being given some measure of concealment... We came out of the southern end of the channel between the islands by which time, darkness was shutting down, and very welcome it was too. Course was set for a group of islands called the Tujo, meaning seven in Malay, islands where we hoped to lay up during the following day, and we steamed thru' the night without incident. It was still dark when we arrived at the Tujo group, so we waited until dawn and then crept in as close as possible and came to anchor..."

Passenger Major Tebbutt, AIF, has also left us a very well written and detailed account of the events which is worth understanding and he makes some statements which clearly question Captain Barton's judgement in not remaining anchored close to land during daylight hours. The objective of this order, which was issued to all the ships leaving Singapore during the last few days prior to the surrender, is not recorded but from a commonsense viewpoint was the correct one from the aspect that passengers and crew would have more easily reached land when attacked, as opposed to being miles offshore and relying on lifeboats and rafts. But on the other hand, made the ships sitting targets and was using up valuable time in the escape journey.

Tebbutt's report correlates with the sparse chronological report of Captain Barton insofar as times and places, but when Barton decided to leave the 'Tujing islands' (Tebbutt calls them Toejou Island)

at 1000 hours on Saturday 14 February - after being buzzed and machine gunned by Japanese planes - essentially to make a run for it, Tebbutt records “... *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 the bombs in an open fairway. Accordingly, he did not obey his orders to anchor [sic] in the daytime....*”.

Major Tebbutt also notes the serious risk faced by many on board if the ship was actually sunk because total crew and passenger numbers vastly exceeded the capacity of lifeboats – in fairness to Captain Borton this was the case with almost every ship leaving Singapore in the few days prior to the Surrender and most Captains tried their hardest to firstly prevent too many passengers boarding their ships and secondly to warn people of the under capacity of lifeboats;

*“... Early in the journey an examination of the boats was made in company with a ship’s officer, who stated that of the six boats carried, two would hold 30 passengers each and the remainder 20 passengers 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 was sunk, they must be ready to take to the water. Lectures were given explaining the ship’s alarm signals, the method of use of the lifebelts, the method of loading the lifeboats and on general matters should an attack be made...”*

Tebbutt’s record insofar as contingency planning is borne out by those also recorded by Australian Army nurses on board and to give the ship’s officers and the leaders of the nursing staff their due credit, procedures and training delivered in the 36 hours available were very good for coping with any attack by bombers.

Lt Mann describes the sense of unreal calm that everyone must have felt at that point “... *It was a lovely day, the blue sea was calm, the sun shone in a clear blue sky, and away to port about ten miles was the green palm covered island of Banka. We could see a white, slender lighthouse ashore and all seemed so peaceful...*”.

Major Tebbutt however, continues with his recollection of the actual attacks which finally sank the “SS. Vyner Brooke”;

*“... After the ship left Toejou island there were three or four alerts before about 1300 hrs when a formation of nine planes were observed flying towards the ship. These 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 approximately 3,000 feet. The anti submarine gun and the Lewis gun were fired, and the ship circled at full speed. The bombs all fell into the sea, exploding close enough to shake the ship. The same procedure again took place when a further three planes attacked. Finally, the nine planes attacked together, converging from the centre, half-right and left. This time two bombs hit the ship with a severe jar and rattling; the engines were almost immediately stopped...”*

It seems that three bombs hit the ship (p. 151 ORB);

- One bomb which went down the funnel killing all the crew in the engine room - according to the book this included the “elderly reservist” Lt Reith and at least three of the Malay sailors, but the eyewitness account by 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, Lt Mann, RNVR actually records Chief Engineer Reith as alive and able to enter the sea wearing a lifejacket.

- One bomb penetrated the staterooms killing most of the elderly passengers who had sought shelter there (P.165 ORB) – this would have been up to 15 people
- A third bomb killed or wounded the gun crew on the forward deck and the “elderly couple” in the radio operator’s cabin.

Major Tebbutt tells us that “... *During the attack the European passengers were assembled in the saloon and lay down on the floor...one of the bombs which hit the ship went very close to the saloon, which was filled with the red glare from the bursting bomb. A ship’s officer then told the passengers to go to their boat stations and he led the way. There was no panic...*”.

[‘On Radji Beach’ explains this period of the sinking in a very well-structured manner and is recommended reading for a fuller understanding of the chronology and detail of the tragedy]

Tebbutt agrees with Captain Borton that the ship was attacked at 1310 hrs ( Mann says 1330 hrs) and sank at 1340 hrs and tells us that “... *at this time the ship was at the entrance to the Banka Straits, some 10 or 12 miles from the island. The weather was calm and the visibility good...*”. He is referring to Banka Island which is a large island off the east coast of Sumatra.

Perhaps the final words of the attack on the ship should come from one of the ‘Vyner Brooke’ ships officers and in the memoirs of 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, Lt. A.R. Mann, RNVR we are told;

*“... After the fifth salvo had missed us I began to think we were going to see it through. We had dodged them on so many occasions and now we were doing it again; it seemed just a matter just carrying on with the game until they had no more bombs left. I was soon disillusioned. In they came from Forward for the sixth time, bombs on their way down, hard-a-port. The Captain and I had our heads out of the bridge windows watching the bombs come nearer and nearer, but the ship wasn’t swinging fast enough it seemed. She wasn’t. Down past our faces, about ten feet away in front of the bridge, through the covers on No.2 hatch, through the covers on No2 ‘tween deck hatch to explode in the lower hold, they passed. .... On going for’ard I saw clouds of smoke coming from No.2 hatch...one of the nurses came to me and asked for First Aid equipment saying there were many people badly injured down below. As we were talking, I heard the aircraft coming in again from for’ard and dragged her into a nearby cabin where we both laid on the deck to avoid flying glass. A stick of bombs fell close to the port side, so close that they blew the bottoms of the port side boats in as they hung from their davits...The ship was already taking a list to starboard.*

*I then went to the bridge where the Captain was still standing, he called out to the starboard boat-deck to hurry and get the boats away; they were already being lowered. I noticed that nothing was being done to the port boats, so got hold of the Naval rating who had been at the wheel, the ship now being stopped, and we started to lower the for’ard boat. He said’ But the bottom’s stove in Sir?’ and on looking I found that this was so. I said, ‘That don’t matter, the tanks may keep her afloat, at least people can hang on to her’. We lowered her into the water, and I sent him down the fall to unhook and push her off, which he did. I looked at the other two boats on the port side and their bottoms had been blown in..”.*

Major Tebbutt tells us from his perspective that “...*of the boats, only two were undamaged by the bombs. These were lowered to the water and the passengers climbed down the rope ladders under the control of the ship’s officers. Two other boats were lowered but became water-logged...*”. Survivor Eric German helped lower the lifeboats as well only to find one immediately filling with sea water “... *Bomb fragments had holed it, as well as three other lifeboats. Only their sealed air tanks kept them afloat ...*” (BYE p 142).

Understandably, as a passenger, Dr Goldberg – Curth says she observed that only one lifeboat was undamaged and was filled with sick passengers whilst the remainder of the passengers jumped into the sea.

**In contrast** Vivian Bullwinkel in her testimony to the Australian Board of Enquiry into War Crimes (29.10.45) said that three lifeboats left the ship and reached the coast around 'Radji Beach'. This is corroborated in the memoirs of Lt A. R. Mann, RNVR the 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer who states (p.7) " ... *The three starboard boats had got clear of the ships side and were packed with people , they were trying to get the oars out which was difficult with so little room to move...*" and the (p.8) "... *After 'Vyner Brooke' had gone I could see , away to what had been the starboard side , the three boats pulling towards Banka Island about eight miles away. They appeared to be going well and should have been ashore in an hour or two...*"

Mann's memoirs continue "... *The list to starboard was then about 45 degrees and as I let go from the combing of the baggage port I actually slid down the side part of the way before hitting the water. I swam away from the ship to a reasonable distance, and came near to a lot of others, men and women, I didn't see any children about, and assumed they had been taken into the three boats. The bottomless boat I had lowered was floating full of people and water, and there wasn't an inch of space on the lifelines round her rubbing strake, so she was doing some good...*"

#### **After the 'SS Vyner Brooke' sank:**

Despite the lack of panic evident en masse, the book "On Radji Beach" puts the death toll during the sinking at somewhere between 40 and 50 people, with about 6 people dying as a result of jumping into the sea with ill-fitting life jackets. It appears that apart from those killed in the engine room, in the staterooms and on the deck by bombs and machine gunning; people also lost their lives because they could not swim, because they had been injured badly during the attack on the ship, or were struck by falling rafts, debris or parts of the ship whilst it listed.

There were a few 'elderly' men and woman on board who were killed during the bombing of the ship and/or drifting in the sea afterwards – but who individually have not been able to be identified during this research. Along with the gap in identified children and the estimates of the number of children who boarded the ship, it would seem that it was the very old and the very young that made up the bulk of those victims of the attack on the ship and the subsequent struggle in the sea - who even today remain nameless.

Various reports exist on the fate of nurses killed on board the ship during the bombing, others who died escaping the ship and those who drowned or perished on rafts at sea. These are included in the entries for individual nurses who lost their lives during the period of the attack and the sinking.

Lt. Arthur J. Mann, RNVR, the ship's 2nd Officer was interviewed by the Australian press on his successful escape back to Australia ("Western Mail", Perth, WA, 26.3.42) and described the rafts as "... *Board of Trade, five feet by three feet ...*" [ probably meaning five feet square and three feet deep] which makes the reality that they were tiny. Nurse 'Mickey' Syer recalled that the rafts of the ship were little square things made of canvas (Syer) they are also referred to as being made of 'gimrack' (which means something made of substandard materials) - it seems that such life rafts were made of what we would have regarded today as two wooden pallets joined together and covered with canvas, possibly with some cork material inside. They became lethal projectiles when sliding off a ship which was listing or 'turning turtle'.

Major Tebbutt describes the scene that remained after the sinking “...In the water there was a collection 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. The swimmers were individually or in groups clinging to wreckage, or floating about ...”. Lt. Mann describes the situation as “... In the water were about a hundred people as far as I can estimate, heads dotted all over the place, some calling to others, and one couple who were obviously a man and wife were floating side by side hand in hand...It was by now about 1430. As the afternoon wore on the people became scattered, some died and their bodies continued floating in their lifejacket, and I had to push them away with a stick to stop them brushing into me...”.

Many women and children would have also died when the ship listed (or turned turtle) to starboard and fell on the second lifeboat which got away full of women and children – this is where Wilma Young and Jean Ashton managed to struggle away from the ship coming down on them, but it tragically took Mona Wilton down.

Others were swept away by the powerful sea currents around Banka Island. As related by Dr Neil McGregor (son of Sister Sylvia Muir) the bodies of Sister McDonald and two other unidentified nurses were found on a raft in the Indian Ocean two or three weeks later (the raft having floated in that time down to and through the Sunda Straits to the Indian Ocean which is the direction of ocean currents around Banka Island and Sumatra at that time of the year) – this was also confirmed by Sister Wilma Oram to ex – nurse Dorothy Angell who knew Wilma after the War. Both AANS nurses were told this outcome after being repatriated to Singapore at the end of the War, by a sailor aboard a ship which found the raft. This of course leaves the fate of at least three of the nurses (including perhaps Matron Paschke) and the two children (one being a three-year-old Chinese girl according to Iole Harper – see her entry) on the raft with them all, unresolved. The last time this raft was sighted being swept southwards down the Banka Straits two of the nurses - Sister Dorsch and Sister Trenerry - were in the sea holding onto trailing ropes from the raft.

One piece of information which suggests that one or more of the nurses made an effort to swim for Banka Island further south along the coast (perhaps when they realised that there was no more land in front of them beyond Banka Island) is that contained in the book ‘Soldier Surgeon in Malaya’ by T. Hamilton published in 1957 (source: Barbara Angell on the ‘Angellpro’ website). In this book it is stated that Colonel/ Matron A. ‘Annie’ M. Sage of the AANS - who greeted the surviving AANS nurses after release from internment in 1945 - was told that the identity disc of Sister Dorsch had been found by a “... Mrs Armstrong (now dead) ...” on a beach on Banka Island. The only Mrs Armstrong interned in Muntok and Palembang was Mrs. Resie Armstrong, mother of Ralph Armstrong who wrote ‘A Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke’. Mrs Armstrong, Ralph and several other members of the family were on a raft after the sinking that was also swept south down the Banka Straits and landed initially on the Sumatran coast before being taken by fishermen to a beach on the south coast of Banka Island (P.48-49 ‘SCOTVB’) and then to the town of “Koba” on the north – eastern side of the island. Mrs Resie Armstrong died in internment – the conclusion is that this was the person who found the disc and that it is possible that Matron Paschke, Sister Dorsch and Sister Trenerry made it to a beach on the Banka Strait but were killed by the Japanese.. So it is possible – as the three women hanging onto the raft drifting south along the Banka Strait, Matron Paschke, Sister Dorsch and Sister Trenerry did make it to a beach south east of Muntok but it therefore also opens up the awful possibility that they would have crossed paths with the second landing force of the invading Japanese Army on Banka Island – the one making for the airfield and Pangkalpinang (see the later section on ‘Who Carried Out This Atrocity’ and the related Map 2 of Japanese Army plans). To have met up with soldiers with the record of war crimes in Hong Kong may have almost certainly meant the same fate for these two Sisters and their comrades on Radji Beach.

## Where did the 'SS Vyner Brooke' in fact sink?

It has become apparent to the researcher that, historically, little interest has been paid to exactly where the 'SS Vyner Brooke' sank and that, to reach an understanding of where this may have occurred, it is necessary to know from which direction the ship was approaching Banka Straits.

It is again surmised that the paradigm in the minds of many writers and readers on the incident may be that the ship was at the entrance to the Banka Strait – which appears not to have been the case.

Once the location of the sinking is determined (as best as is possible) that will then also be helpful in clarifying the location of the beach that Vivian Bullwinkel, and Australian newspapers and media since the War, plus numerous authors have called 'Radji Beach'. We can attempt to do this by factoring in an estimate of what sea currents were influencing the path taken by the survivors in the two lifeboats which reached the coast of Banka Island. We know already that the currents around Banka Island and in fact through the entire Archipelago south of Singapore to Banka island - are more powerful than in many other parts of the world.

Once these two factors are determined any conclusion of the location of the sinking will then give a base to later in this document consider the feasible location of Radji Beach.

(1) Firstly, from which direction did the 'SS Vyner Brooke' approach Banka Island?

**Captain Borton** recorded that after leaving Singapore at 2000 hrs (10.00pm) on **Thurs. 12 Feb.** he later reached, at midnight (after 4hrs steaming) the entrance to the DURIAN STRAITS - about 60 km south west of Singapore and even today a main shipping channel – this indicates that since he only covered about 32 nautical miles he was averaging only 8 knots, probably because of potential minefields and the darkness. Then on,

**Friday. 13 Feb.** @ 0800 hrs (8.00am) after a further 8 hours steaming he anchored at '**LANKA ISLAND**' (ORB, p.129 states it was called LINGGO ISLAND – it was probably PULAU LINGGA the long narrow and large island west of Singkep) indicating he had covered about 65 nautical miles at a speed of still only about 8 knots, once again as a result of darkness and then the narrow channels around LINGGA; then later that morning @ 1130 hrs (11.30 am) he says he "... Hove Up..." , meaning raising the anchor, because planes were spotted some distance off, and steamed through what he called the LIMA CHANNEL ( this is also referred to on p.166 of the book 'Spotlight on Singapore' as 'Straat Lima' and is today the 'Selat Lima' body of water or Strait between Singkep island and Lingga island) possibly to gain the eastern side of Singkep island. Then still on Frid. 13 Feb., ORB, p.139, has him as either still at the place called 'LANKA /LINGGO / LINGGA', presumably he was just south of Pulau Lingga, or stationary again at an unknown place, but raising the anchor again @ 2000 hrs (8.00pm) "... and steering his vessel into the **open sea** ... headed for a nearby island large enough to shield the 'Vyner Brooke'..." .

Then, on **Sat. 14 Feb** @ 0130 hrs (1.30 am in the morning) he anchored at what he calls "TUJING ISLAND" (Major Tebbutt states it was called "**TOEJOU ISLAND**" and p. 166 of 'Spotlight On Singapore' refers to it as 'TOCHLOCH ISLANDS', but not surprisingly 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer Lt Mann is most accurate when he records that it was the "...**Tujo group ... meaning seven in Malay...**") – it is almost certainly **PULAU TUJUH** or '**Kepulauan Tujuh**' in Indonesian, known in pre-war maps as 'TOEDJOE Eilanden', which lies directly to the north of TG. ULAR and TG. BETUMPAH. Then at 1000 hrs (10.00am) on that same day Captain Borton states he again "... Hove Up ..." and headed for the Banka Straits, Mann explains that this action was taken at that time because "... at 1100, with a deafening roar of engines, a plane swooped from over the island to starboard and over us. It looked to me like a

*Lockheed-Hudson and had red triangular markings of the Dutch under the wings and RAF roundel on the fuselage..*". There was serious confusion in the signals with the plane as to its identity, which was enough for Captain Borton to decide to get on the move again.

[Author **Ian Shaw** (ORB, p.141-142) still has the ship at anchor @ 1100hrs on the morning of Sat.14 Feb (presumably at TUJING ISLAND /TOEJOU ISLAND/ TOEDJOE EILANDEN) at the time of the first aerial attack and machine gunning and soon after that Ian Shaw has him raising the anchor and heading "... for a small cluster of islands on the horizon, near where the entrance to the Banka Strait narrowed between Sumatra and Bank island ..." (which is confusing since there are no more islands between there and the entrance to the Banka Strait), then records that after about 90 minutes (making it @ 1230 hrs midday) being "... in the lee of another small island, one a lot smaller in fact than Borton had hoped it would be ...". It is problematical as to which island this was, and it may be that the initial short voyage that day was within the TOEDJOE EILANDEN group now known as PUALU TUJUH.ORB, p.143 then records that "... those aboard realised it was now 1330 hrs, well past lunchtime ...".]

**Borton records that the bombers struck at about 1300 hrs – Lt Mann records that "... At 1330 in the afternoon watch, from the north came a group of six twin-engined aircraft... as we watched they swung round towards us, and came purposefully on. As they passed the port side, the Red Japanese ball was only too clearly seen on their wings..." and Borton records the ship sank at 1340 hrs.**

[In contrast, ORB, p.147 has Borton again raising the anchor at 1400 hrs and making for "... a much larger island about 20 kilometres away...", but the bombers struck about ten minutes into the dash for this large island (presumably Banka Island) and, although not specified by 'ORB' it would seem that the book is suggesting that ship must have sunk a little later than Captain Borton recorded, about 1440hrs (2.40 pm in the afternoon of 14 Feb.).]

**The key point here is that, primarily because of the '8 degrees north of Muntok Light' record but also from other less clear information, the 'SS Vyner Brooke' "appears to have approached the west coast of Banka Island and the western entrance to the Bank Strait from DUE NORTH – not from the West as might have been assumed.**

(2) Secondly, at what location did the 'SS Vyner Brooke' sink and where was it when the two lifeboats struck out for Banka Island?

The ship had a normal speed of 12 knots and was presumably steaming at around that rate of knots (in what appears to have been a comparatively eastern route to the east of Lingga and Singkep") between the "LIMA CHANNEL" and the "TUJING USLANDS/TOEJOU" or TOEDJOE EILANDEN – 12 knots equates to the same number of nautical miles an hour and also equates to about 22 kph. However as recorded by ORB, (p.148) on the day of the sinking Borton had ordered full speed ahead for the dash to Banka Island (15 knots equate to 28 kph) so we will use a range around this speed for this last part of the journey.

If we firstly work from **Captain Borton's record** and assume that he had left PULAU TUJUH @ 1000 hrs he would have had some 3 hrs 20 minutes to get to the location where he was bombed, and the ship sank – and he was presumably pointing his vessel directly towards the northern entrance of Banka Strait, which is almost exactly due South. Over the next 3 hours to 3 hrs 20 minutes, at 15 knots he would have travelled about 83 to 92 kilometres; at 14 knots average (i.e. starting to make allowance for his evasive zig-zag course towards the latter stage of his journey) he would have travelled about 78-85 kilometres; and at an average of 13 knots he would have travelled 72 – 79 kilometres. The distance from PULAU TUJUH (TOEDJOE EILANDEN) to TG. BETUMPAH/BETUMPAK is about 80 kms - so he would have sunk close to that headland and possibly at least 5 kilometres off the coast since the water becomes shallow near the headlands.

If we then use the times and interim anchoring of the ship at a small island **as stated by Ian Shaw** in 'ORB', which are rather confusing when looking at a map of the area, then Captain Borton would

have spent a total of approximately 2hrs 30 minutes steaming - including the last run of about 1 hour from what could have been PULAU LALANG. After PULAU LALANG travelling at 15 knots he would then have travelled almost one hour which equates to 28 – 30 kms, which would leave him 35 kms north of TG. ULAR/OELAR (the distance between TG. LALANG and TG. ULAR/OELAR is about 65kms).

The 'SS Vyner Brooke' sank (according to Captain Borton) "*...eight degrees north of Muntok light...*" - one interpretation for this statement (but not the normal one in modern nautical terminology) is that if a line is drawn directly vertically North above 'Muntok Light' (i.e. Tg. Kelian lighthouse), then moved about 8 degrees (on a 360-degree compass) to the right or East then the ship sank well to the north.

Survivors also talked about being approximately 10 -12 miles / 16-19 kms from the western coast of Banka island; ORB, P.165 states that the ship sank about "... 15 miles north of Banka island ..." which is about 24 kms.

The result of all these assumptions and calculations indicates two alternative locations for the sinking - and the starting point for the two undamaged lifeboats;

- Firstly, probably 5 to 10 kilometres north of TG. BETUMPAH/BETUMPAK and say 5 or 6 kilometres out to sea from the coast directly East.
- Secondly, using the ORB information, and starting with PULAU TUJUH as the base - which is another 5 to 10 kilometres further North – and then a simple journey of one hour from LALANG the starting point for the lifeboats would be north of TG. ULAR.

As the second lifeboat with Vivian Bullwinkel and Second Officer Miller plus passenger Eric German clinging on, began their long drift to shore it is recorded (BEW, p.144) "*... after sundown they saw flashings from two lighthouses about five miles apart on the coast. Midway between them burned a large bonfire. They pulled for the fire ...*". These two lighthouses would appear to have been TG. KELIAN to the south and Tg. ULAR/OELAR to the north, on the west coast of Banka island. These two lighthouses are 12 kilometres apart (about seven miles) which, given that the distance was estimated by men in a sinking lifeboat probably seven to ten miles offshore, is a reasonable estimate. **Halfway between these lighthouses is TG. BETUMPAH**

**Note: Vivian Bullwinkel said that one lifeboat had "... civilian women and four or five sisters ..." (testimony to Australian Board of Enquiry into War Crimes 29.10.45) which she later expanded when she said the other two lifeboats had 30 -40 women aboard including 10 nurses and 30 men of the ship's crew ; and a third lifeboat ( the one she was aboard) had 12 nursing sisters, 3 civilians (a Miss 'Beaston', and a woman and her husband) plus one ships officer.**

### **What happened on Radji Beach?**

On the morning of 16 February quite a sizeable group of some 80 -100 people had gathered on the beach (that was later to be called 'Radji Beach') from the two (or three) 'Vyner Brooke' lifeboats, and the steel hulled lifeboat apparently carrying "*... about 20 Englishmen from the English Ordnance Corps ...*"( Bullwinkel testimony to the 'Australian Board of Enquiry into War Crimes' on 29.10.45) which she expanded to 20 -25 RAOE soldiers (Bullwinkel testimony to War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo in 1946) which landed early that Monday morning – this was the lifeboat on which CFN/Pte Kinsley

reached 'Radji Beach'. Other sources say the latter lifeboat was carrying a soldier who died quite quickly and was also buried on the beach from the ship (now known to have been the 'Pulo Soegi') which had also been sunk around the same time in the waters north west of Banka Island.

The identities of these 20 plus British servicemen and ship's crew arriving in the lifeboat on the morning of the atrocity have been somewhat of a mystery since the War – apart, of course, from that of CFN /Private Cecil Gordon Kinsley, RAOC, who survived the massacre and was cared for by Vivian Bullwinkel for several weeks in the jungle bordering the beach before entering a POW camp where he died on 24 March 1942.

Kinsley had been on a small 150-foot Batavian vessel by the name of the 'Pulo Soegi' which was attacked by Japanese warships and sunk during the previous evening of 15 February. The personnel on board did as ordered and most jumped overboard, it seems with life jackets, as soon as the vessel was struck by shells, but many men were later drowned – however according to the RAOC officer in command, T/Maj. Marsh, some good swimmers swam back to the vessel and launched a lifeboat and rafts before it sank. So, Kinsley and a few of the ship's crew plus Officers and men of the 'ZAOW', 14 Section, RAOC must have managed to climb into the lifeboat and make it to shore on Banka island early the following morning.

Other men from the ship drifted on life rafts and those who abandoned those rafts at some stage and swam to shore seem to be the only other survivors to have reached land.

Recent (June 2018) research of the UK Archives in Kew (WO361/316) has raised the probability that perhaps the people in the War Office in Liverpool in late 1945 - investigating the fate of the 'Missing' from the 68 RAOC men (many in the Section 14, 'Z Advance Ordnance Workshop') who originally evacuated Singapore on the 'Pulo Soegi' on 13 February - may not in fact have appreciated at that early stage of post war analysis any significance in a man quoting 'C. G. Kinsley' as his source for information on some missing 'ZAOW' RAOC men killed Banka Island. It is also highly probable that at that, point in history, the investigators were not aware of the massacre on 'Radji Beach' and would not have been looking for massacre victims.

Starting with the more directly linked (somewhat 'first hand'?) evidence of the identities of RAOC men and others in the lifeboat arriving on the morning of 16 February, it is possible to reasonably suggest that at least two and up to eight of these men who were murdered on Radji Beach from the 'Pulo Soegi' can be identified with varying degrees of confidence.

In simple numerical terms the total of RAOC men murdered on 'Radji Beach' appears to have been some 15 men.

Firstly, an archived document completed by one 'C. H. Cotterrell', REME, for the War Office and received on 7 December 1945 records he had been told by 'C. G. Kinsley' the names of two men bayoneted to death on Banka Island on '18 February 1942' and he tells us that the two men were;

- CFN. A. Atkins, # 7646745, Z.A.O.W.
- Sgt. R. G. Hurrell, # 5768950, Z.A.O.W.

CFN/Pte. A. Atkins fate is also recorded as having "... *Died on Banka Island ...*" by another soldier with the name of 'R.W. Thomas, REME' on another official form provided to the War Office after his release as a POW – his source is stated as "... *Members of ZAOW ...*".

The use of the date '18 February 1942' may at first glance seem at variance with the now understood precise timing of events of Radji Beach, but (at least for this researcher) in thinking through the practicality of the sequence of events it is unlikely that Cpl Kinsley saw anyone killed on the 18 February 1942 - since he was severely wounded from both the attack on the 'Pulo Soegi' and then the Japanese bayonets at 'Radji Beach' - and on that particular when date was lying hidden in the jungle adjacent to the beach where the massacre took place. Kinsley could only have relayed this information to Cotterell in Muntok POW camp at least two weeks after the massacre, he might also have been delirious from his wounds (he died from his wounds only three weeks later) and it seems impractical to expect that he would lucidly recall the precise dates of events. The fact that C. H. Cotterell actually managed to retain this information through a variety of POW camps until his release from "... Sendai No 2 Japan..." camp three and a half years later is truly admirable! It is also worth understanding that CFN. Kinsley would also have known only some of the RAOC officers and men in the lifeboat, since it is recorded by the officer in charge (T/Maj. Marsh) that the 68 men on the 'Pulo Soegi' had been suddenly assembled from disparate units of the RAOC from all over Singapore on the night of departure on 13 February. He probably knew only a few men in the ill-fated lifeboat.

If Kinsley saw anyone bayoneted in February 1942 it would have been his comrades on Radji Beach.

Secondly, in addition to the 'Cotterell/Kinsley' record the UK Archives also contain another record by one 'W. A. Stroud, RAOC 14 Sec' who reported on another form to the War Office on 30 November 1945 which lists two other men as being "...Bayoneted in Sumatra between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 ...";

- S/Sgt. T. Hodgson, # 7610705, RAOC, 14 Sec
- Cpl. W.G.J. Sherrington, # 7624357, RAOC 14 Sec.

The source is stated to be "... a party of survivors ..." who were "... brought back to Singapore in July or August 1942 ...", which included 'Capt/ Major [actually T/Maj.] Marsh' who led the contingent of 14 Section, ZAOW, RAOC onto the 'Pulo Soegi' on the night of 13 February and would have also been a POW in Muntok camp after the sinking. This is not quite as directly applicable as the 'Cotterell /Kinsley' information but it offers a reasonable base to suppose that S/Sgt Hodgson and Cpl. Sherrington may have been on 'Radji Beach' - if not on that location then almost certainly bayoneted to death some where adjacent on the North West coasts of Banka Island.

Sherrington's death at the hands of the Japanese is also corroborated to the War Office by one 'James T. Thompson, RAOC' of Dunfermline on another official form dated 27 November 1945 where he records Sherrington was "... Believed reported killed by Japs ..." on "...either Banka Is. Or Southern Sumatra ..." and states the source as "...Survivors of Regt. who were later returned to Changi S'pore. Is. Believed reported in RAOC records there. Men belonged mainly to 'Z' AOW, Malaya ...". Thompson also then records another man killed by the Japanese and in the place as Sherrington;

- A/P/Sjt. A Skimming, #7634180, 14<sup>th</sup> Sect. RAOC.

At the final, 'third hand' level of identification it is worth noting that T/Maj. Marsh also says in his December 1945 report, that he was told in Palembang POW camp that Kinsley had arrived at Muntok camp after he, Marsh, had been moved to Palembang and that Kinsley is reported to have said that he "... reached shore in the ship's boat containing twenty men ***including officers*** ..." [Underline by researcher]. Marsh continues in his report that the officers referred to [ i.e.as those having been in the lifeboat] "... were possibly 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Radford, RAOC, three ship's officers, Lt. Martin, NZRNVR,

*another NZRNVR officer name unknown, a R.N.V.R. Eng. Officer and a Lt Day RN or V. unknown (in talking to him on board he said he was attached to Malaya Command) ...”.*

In this context it is worth noting, but not conclusive since CWGC dates of death often refer to the date on which the deceased was last seen, that the dates of death recorded by the CWGC for Lt. Martin and Lt. Day are 16 February 1942 – which is not the date of the sinking of the ‘Pulo Soegi’ – but on the other hand also worth noting that Marsh’s speculation on the fate of Lt Radford is contradicted by one ‘Craftsman Hope T. Cairns, 14<sup>th</sup> Section ,RAOC ‘ recording on a signed form that he was an eyewitness to the fact that Lt Radford had ‘Drowned’ and this appears to be also the view of the CWGC who have Lt Radford’s date of death as 15 February.

The newspaper ‘New Zealand Herald’ of 20 April 1942, when listing Lt., RNZNVR, as ‘Missing on Active Service’ noted that “... *He was in command of a small naval vessel which left Singapore on February 13, with **two other New Zealand officers** and a crew of 30 ...” [Underline by researcher].*

After taking this information into consideration we are left with possibly the following additional men being victims of the massacre on ‘Radji Beach’;

- Lt. Arthur John Martin, RNZNVR
- Lt. Leonard Stephen Day, SSRNVR
- Plus, at least one other ‘unidentified’ New Zealand Officer of the RNZNVR who - following investigation into NZ records - could very possibly have been Lt. Henry Alan Moray-Smith, RNZNVR, whom the CWGC and NZ Navy records have as based with ‘HMS Sultan’ in Singapore and dying on 16 February 1942, but with no known place or cause of death, except a reference to ‘HMS Sylvia’ which ship did not exist. He may have been attached to the launch ‘Sylvia’ prior to the fall of Singapore, but that launch had been damaged and then repaired by Army soldiers and local Volunteers and made its way from Singapore on 15 February to reach Sumatra unscathed.

This leaves a remaining eight or nine RAOC men and crew of the ‘Pulo Soegi’ as still unidentified victims of the ‘Radji Beach’ massacre.

During the morning of 16 February , one of the senior Australian Army nurses, in consultation with either engineering officer Sub-Lt. Jimmy Miller or Sub – Lt. Sedgeman, appears to have instructed the civilian women and children, plus passenger Mr Dominguez and A/S Cake and A/S Noble (who had been wounded by shrapnel in a manner that prevented them being helpful carrying the many wounded on stretchers later that morning, as appeared to have been the plan) to start the trek into Muntok- with the idea that the others would move off after them, at perhaps a faster pace. A/S Wallace Cake, RN, in his post war affidavit recalled being “... *instructed to go with a party of about 8 women and three children (I think all civilians) up a path from the beach ...”.*

Others describe the group as anything up to 20 people. Vivian Bullwinkel’s later testimony allows us to work out that the group which left Radji beach to walk to Muntok consisted of at least;

- Miss Louise Beeston
- Able Seaman Wally Cake, RN.
- Mr Dominguez
- Mrs Dominguez
- Mrs Kathleen Hutching
- Mrs Langdon – Williams
- Leading Seaman George Noble, RN.

- Miss Alice Rossie
- *Mrs Civah Warman* and her infant son Isidore 'Mischa' Warman.
- Dr Tay (*presumably Dr Tay Soo Won*)
- *Possibly Mrs Nellie Ellen Tay (and children?)*
- Mrs Myrtle Ward

In the book 'ORB' author Ian Shaw has written (p.209) that after the civilian women and children set off for Muntok "... *there were considerably fewer than 100 people left on Radji Beach ...*".

- 22 Australian nurses
  - About 25 uninjured men (we know from Vivian Bullwinkel that these were mainly Royal Artillery Ordinance Corps soldiers including Private Kinsley who survived the massacre and spent several weeks in the jungle with her) and sailors but also civilians and including the Chinese doctor, the engineering officer from the 'Vyner Brooke' and a number of NCOs from both the Royal Navy and the British Army)
  - About 25 wounded (he puts it as "...*the numbers of uninjured men was matched by the number of wounded, most of who were incapable of walking and would have to be carried on stretchers ...*") which would have comprised 2 or 3 civilian women, a couple of civilian men, plus wounded sailors and soldiers.
  - One elderly European woman
- These numbers, totalling 73 people can be used as a general guide.

Page 225 of 'ORB' tells us that the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal accepted the conclusion that the number of people murdered on Radji Beach amounted to 83 people;

- 50 men
- 22 women
- 10 stretcher cases [ we assume that this included women and men]

The official records point to the sequence being that the Japanese split the 50 - 80 people left on the Beach into three groups – the Officers and senior civilian men; the naval ratings and Army ORs from the RAOC and other civilian men; and finally, the 22 AANS personnel and the one civilian woman – leaving a small number of wounded women and servicemen on stretchers and in a fisherman's hut. They then took the groups who were able to walk, one at a time, along the beach and murdered them.

Ian Shaw's book states that the Chinese doctor mentioned as being on the beach earlier in the day was murdered by the Japanese – research strongly indicates that this Chinese doctor may have in fact been Dr Tay Soon Woon of Singapore (see entry for Thay/Tay below) whose wife, Mrs Nellie Ellen Tay of 61 Rochor Road, Singapore, died in internment in Sumatra in 1944. In conflict with Ian Shaw's record is the statement by Vivian Bullwinkel that in this group which left Radji beach "...*they had a Chinese doctor named Tay, but the Japs were on his track and he committed suicide later on ...*".

The records state clearly and consistently that there were 22 Australian Army nurses on Radji Beach and their identities are well recorded.

There is one discordant note insofar as identity of these nurses given that they were either wearing remnants of their Australian uniform, remnants of civilian clothing or possibly garments donated by

servicemen once they had reached the beach. The unexplained fact is that one Corporal Robert Henry Seddon, Royal Marines, who had been sunk on 16 February on the “HMS Yin Ping”, had floated at sea in a lifebelt for 24 hours and as he drifted in towards Radji Beach witnessed the massacre of Naval Officers, servicemen, merchant seamen and the 21 nurses and one civilian woman. In his post war signed affidavit he makes a couple of very relevant observations he recalled from his position a short distance out in the sea - he saw three groups formed on the beach; then “... 2 or 3 men and women made a break for it to get into the water ... one was shot but kept swimming away from the beach to the sea...” [Presumably Stoker Lloyd]; also “.... Some of the remaining men and women were trying to escape. They were bayoneted and shot ...” and finally “... the Japs started from my right to bayonet the women one by one from behind their backs ...”. After floating ashore and playing dead when inspected by the Japanese patrol that were still at the Beach, he left the water after a few more hours and spent the night in the jungle. The next day he went back down the beach and says in his post war report “... I searched around and found the bodies of fifteen New Zealand and Australian Nursing sisters, 15 British service personnel and 5 merchant seamen ... nearby I saw the bodies of 7 R.N. personnel...the latter included 2 officers”. Given that there were not supposed to be any nurses in New Zealand uniforms this remains a strange statement by Seddon – although there was one nurse from New Zealand, but she would have been wearing an AANS uniform. Perhaps the explanation is that a wallet with “New Zealand’ was found at the scene – this could also have been a possession of Lt Miller, RNR, or Lt ‘Peter’ Martin or Lt Moray-Smith , RNZNVR from the ‘Pulo Soegi’.

The ‘... 7 RN personnel... the latter included 2 officers ...’ statement of Corporal Seddon is also an important record. We know that Stoker Lloyd and Able Seaman McLurg made a run into the sea, so their bodies would not have been on the beach therefore the bodies seen would have included Sub-Lt Sedgeman, Sub-Lt Miller and five others – we are told they were all naval ratings. Because of their ranking it is possible that these bodies included those of Royal Navy Servicemen Able Seaman Brooks, Clements and Keenan. There is also the probability that the person identified as the mysterious and so called ‘Extra Second Engineer’ from the ‘Vyner Brooke’ by the name of Trewhitt (see entry below) was also in this group. In addition, there is the probability that there were at least two ship’s Officers from the ‘Pulo Soegi’ - Lt Andrew Martin, RNZNVR, and Lt. Leonard Stephen Day, SSRNVR.

The overall total also correlates with there having been at least 50 people massacred on the Beach – with a few having floated away at the time they were killed and about six more further up the beach and, in a hut, (which Seddon does not appear to have found, no doubt because at that time a Japanese patrol appeared, and he ran into the jungle). This must have left some 45 -50 bodies scattered around the Radji Beach area.

Major Tebbutt, AIF, who had been a passenger on the ship but who made it on his own to Banka Island that same afternoon by swimming (because there was no room to hold onto on the rafts being used by the nurses and civilians) collected a lot of information on the atrocity during his time as POW and significantly records “...that Sedgeman and one nurse tried to escape and failed ...”, he also confirms that “... after the shooting the Japanese bayoneted any bodies of whose death they were uncertain...”. Corporal Seddon also recorded “... A few did attempt to rush into the water but they were shot and killed before they were able to swim out of range ...”

The remaining women, who may have included one or two of the most seriously wounded nurses together with several civilian women wounded also in the attack on the ship, were lying on stretchers and there were up to half a dozen servicemen (perhaps a civilian man as well) in a fisherman’s hut or shelter further up the beach.

There remains the mystery of the identity of the “... *English boy...*” or “... *English lad...*” mentioned by Eric German as having been in the same submerged lifeboat and the same seat as they rowed to shore – in the second lifeboat to arrive. It was this teenager who, that night, was the only person to go with Eric and help the wounded nurses - probably Sisters Casson/Wight/Halligan plus one other - move another of these nursing sisters along the beach to the bonfire. This researcher conjectures that the ‘English boy’ was presumably somewhere between 12 – 18 years of age so as to be described as such. This unidentified boy/young man described as “... *The young Englishman ...*” on p. 148 was shot and then bayoneted in the first group of eight men on Radji Beach. Was he a son of Mrs Stevens?

After shooting and bayoneting the officers, civilian men, ship’s crew and servicemen further along the beach; and then committing the atrocity against the nurses and civilian woman, the Japanese walked - presumably still laughing amongst themselves as they are recorded to have done when they came back to collect the nurses - back to where they had started and bayoneted the remaining wounded men and women on their stretchers in the fishermen’s hut.

The awful aftermath of the atrocity is described by three eyewitnesses;

- Leading Seaman William / Richard ‘Dick’ Wilding who had been on the ‘HMS. Li Wo’ (also sunk in the vicinity of Banka Island) and reached the shore in a damaged lifeboat on 16 February after the massacre also made a signed affidavit which is held in the War Crimes file in NAA in Melbourne. He tells us that he was with a ‘Malay boy’ named Abdulla (a Telegraphist in the Malay Navy – or more likely the MRNVR) and they went to a kampong on Banka Island - later meeting Corporal Seddon. On 17 February, they all went to Radji Beach and “... *we found a lifeboat and a dozen bodies, all women except two. Some were scantily dressed .... possibly as civilians, some in nurse’s uniforms and some naked. Flying on sticks on the beach alongside was the Red Cross of a nurse’s uniform. We found one Englishman still alive (possibly either Mr Watson or Mr Betteridge) sitting further along the beach. He was an Englishman badly wounded, and I think he could not have lived .... Of the only two women I examined one had been shot and one had been killed by a sword ... we then moved further along the beach and found roughly 20 (??) bodies (mostly servicemen) also shot and bayoneted ... we were joined on the beach by an American [this would have been Eric German]. He told us that he was a member of a party of nurses, civilians and servicemen who had been killed on the beach ...*”.
- Another perspective on the horror – this time seen by Richard Wilding, and related to fellow POW Hal Richardson, 8 Division, AIF, is contained in a newspaper article in 1946 (“The Japanese Leopard with unchanging Spots”, ‘The Sun’, Sydney, 8 .9.46 held by Trove website) when Richardson recalls Wilding telling him that when he returned to the beach with Corporal Seddon, “...*I saw the Australian nurses. One was nearly naked. Another had three bayonet wounds in the back. Foot prints showed where the women ran up the beach. At the end of the footsteps they lay – heads cleaved – I counted twelve nurses and two civilian women. They were too gruesome to go around and accurately count. There had been no attempt to bury them. They lay mostly face downwards. I did not see any bullet wounds – they appear to have been bayoneted....*”. The two men explored the little hut at the top of the beach where the nurses had been tending two naval ratings. The ratings were dead – shot through the head. Round the headland was another shocking sight – the bodies of Lloyd’s companions strewn in death. “... *there were fifteen to twenty men dead there. And it seemed as though they had been shot ... I did not stay there but, full of fear, went up into the jungle to hide ...*”.
- The same ‘The Sun’ newspaper article interviewing Hal Richardson tells what he seems to have heard from Stoker Lloyd “...*He said that, after crawling from the beach into the jungle,*

*he collapsed for three days. Then he went down to the beach again and came to the spot where he had originally landed 'There I saw the Australian nurses ... All were dead. I recognised two or three. I counted 12 or 15 nurses and about 25 men dead... Two or three of the women had practically all their clothes torn from them. They were in the most horrible positions – some kneeling – some doubled up. Some had bayonet wounds as well as bullet holes. I saw the chief officer dead and his clothes covered in blood. The nurses were scattered. Some had fifty yards between them. I reckoned they had been dealt with individually...".*

- Eric German then tells us what he found the day after he had been part of the massacre and when he walked back (with the above-mentioned three survivors of another ship he met on the way) and found “... *The stretchers also were where they had been left and in them the patients lay staring sightlessly at the sky. Two stretchers were empty. One had been the wounded soldier Kingsley’s [sic – Kinsley]. What had become of Kingsley? Buridge [it appears this was Betteridge, and this may be Eric German’s or William MacDougall’s admitted effort to hide the identity of people he talks so openly of on the beach] and the three women had been bayoneted in the chest. ...”* (p. 152-153 BYE)

Another witness to the scene, but after the killings occurred, was Lance Sergeant Brice Clement Halls, NX53123, 2/15 Field Artillery regiment, AIF. Brice Halls made a written statement which is held in the war crimes file on the Radji Beach murders in the National Archives Melbourne, and he says that he heard shots as he was in the water swimming towards Banka island and later came across the scene of the atrocity (Note: the official statement is incorrectly typed to record his initials as ‘R.C. Halls’).

We now know from wartime notes secretly taken and hidden in POW camps by Private Hal Richardson, an Australian journalist serving in the AIF and also a POW in Muntok and Palembang, that some of those people present on ‘Radji Beach on the morning of 16 February who lost their lives at the hands of the Japanese that day did not all die at the time of the massacre either on that beach, or in the adjacent cove or in the sea.

A group of British servicemen had left ‘Radji Beach’ independently and headed for Muntok lighthouse just before the arrival of the Japanese on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> February. The reality is also that as the massacres began men and women ran for their lives along the beach and up into the jungle cover as the Japanese started bludgeoning, bayonetting and shooting the victims.

Firstly, insofar as those actually attacked during the massacre, we know from Leading Seaman Wilding, RN from ‘HMS Li Wo’ who swam ashore at Radji Beach several hours after the massacre that he “... *staggered up onto the beach, into one of those empty, peaceful coves and he was ready to collapse when he heard a moaning from the fringe of timber above. He forced himself up the slope and on the grass found a man lying on his belly, groaning as a cloud of flies buzzed hysterically around him. Wilding rolled him onto his side and saw the man had been lying on spilled intestines. He didn’t open his eyes, managing to gasp, “Japs”.* Obviously this man was dying...”. Wilding then looked into the neighbouring cove and saw the scattered dead – he saw many of them were in Australian Army nursing uniform and their belongings scattered around the beach because their bodies had been searched. He then moved on to the next cove where he found survivor Eric German, the American brewer, who had also been severely bayoneted. Wilding then met up with Cpl. Seddon, Royal Marines, from the sunken tug ‘HMS Yin Ping’ and then Wilding told Hal Richardson, “... *We went along the beach, northwards, over rocks and dunes and we sighted an attap hut. A beach lean-to. Fisherman’s hut, we reckoned. We went to it, carefully, and saw inside a white man doubled over. We said ‘hello’ and the man fell forward, right onto his face. We sat him up and asked him ‘Japs been here?’ He mumbled, dribbling and managed to point back along the beach.*

*Dead nurses and all that. Wilding asked him to come back with us and he said gasping 'I'm not going to last too long'. I said, 'Don't be silly' and he sat right yep and showed us his guts spilled out of a gash in his belly. He must've been in shocking pain. He gave a long groan and said, 'In the hut'. Inside, past where he lay, we saw three men, R.N. ratings they were, laid out on a pile of fishing nets. Fly blown they were, stinking...". The two men then walked inland" ... following a faint trail in the deepening woods. Then they saw a European lying with his back to the broad base of a kapok tree. He was folded like a deflated sack, slumped in a pool of blood vibrating with flies, a shimmering, noisily avaricious sheen. He barely muttered but was able to inform them he had been on the beach and had feigned death, waited for the Japanese to go; but now he could go no further...". There will have likely been a number of other people who died away from the Beach after the massacre.*

Secondly, insofar as the group of servicemen who were present on Radji Beach, but left just before the Japanese arrived, Pte. Hal Richardson, AIF, continues in his monograph in the Australian War Memorial Museum that he learned during his interviews in POW camps from one 'Victor Spencer' (this was Leading Seaman Victor Spencer, DSSX 23078 aged 25 years from Hull who was ex 'HMS Prince of Wales' and then 'HMS Li Wo' – and who died later as a POW on 24.7.45) who had come ashore at Radji Beach, and with others had "...gathered wood for the fires that warmed and cooked for survivors..." and had then with "... other able bodied men..." had "...struck out for the lighthouse a mile or so along the beach...". This unknown number of men then turned inland, but encountered a squad of Japanese soldiers when they "... reached a tar road..." and Spencer says he was bayoneted and struck unconscious, when he came around he found that all the others "... were lying around, shot and bayoneted...". Spencer then walked off, but soon encountered another badly wounded sailor "... Leading Stoker Hadley who had served in REPULSE then LI WO..." whom "... was in pain from his wounds and could not move without assistance..." – it seems that Hadley might also have been on Radji Beach - this was Leading Seaman James Bruce Douglas Hadley, DJX 142890, RN aged 23 years from Coventry who died soon after in POW camp from his wounds.

The 'Radji Beach' massacre victims died in a chaotic and dispersed situation that extended along the coast and inland – the harsh fact is that their unburied remains still lie on Banka Island along with the remains of many hundreds of bodies of British civilians and servicemen which washed ashore on the beaches of Banka Island during the weeks of mid-February 1942. .

### **Are the victims buried at Radji Beach?**

One of the more disconcerting aspects, in the context of honouring the deaths and perhaps the remains in a mass murder such as the war crimes on 'Radji Beach', is the question of what happened to the remains of many of the victims given that so many people were killed in the area.

Much of official history and modern comment seems to be based on the broad and simple assumption that the sea had washed away the remains of all those nurses, civilian women, civilian men, soldiers and sailors killed at Radji Beach.

This view appears to be largely the result of Vivian Bullwinkle's testimony to the post war investigation and subsequent War Crimes trial in Tokyo where she stated that she returned to the beach each day during her couple of weeks of freedom but that one day ( seems to be 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942) when she went to the beach "... she was surprised to find a beach empty of all bodies : a particularly high tide appeared to have scoured the beach clean of all traces of the killings, including the bodies of the Australian nurses ..." (ORB p.226).

Without demeaning in any way the integrity of Vivian Bullwinkel's statement to the War Crimes Tribunal it is valid to note that an officer who met her and listened to her when she was first brought into internment states in an official affidavit that (most understandably given her wounds and starvation) she *"...was in a semi – delirious condition at the time I saw her ..."* (Lt Russell F. Wright testimony in the War Crimes file in NAA Melbourne – he had been the Assistant Embarkation Officer for the departure of the 'Vyner Brooke' from Singapore).

Given the very strong sea currents around Banka Island there is no doubt that some of the bodies of the nurses and the Ordinary Ranks soldiers and Naval Ratings ( the two groups who were actually killed in or at the edge of the sea ) would have been washed away by incoming and ebbing tides ; but this is not the full story and on closer inspection there are some records by survivors which indicate that certainly for a period after the killings there would have been quite a number of bodies well beyond the reach of the sea.

To be specific the records show;

- A Malay sailor (who had been badly burned in the attack on the "SS. Vyner Brooke") died upon reaching shore in one of the first lifeboats and was promptly *"... buried in the sand ..."* on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> February (BYE, p.146)
- A mortally wounded soldier who drifted ashore in a metal lifeboat with other soldiers on the morning of 16th February died and was immediately buried that morning next to the Malay sailor (BYE. P.146) – obviously before about 9.00am
- Depending on whether we follow the sequence recorded in ORB ( Officers first then the ORs and ratings in the second group or BYE ( Ratings and ORs first ); the first group (eight men according to Eric German, BYE p.147, and six according to the book ORB, p. 212) of victims to be executed – this may have been the ratings and ORs and appears to have included the young English boy ( identity ?) who had helped Eric German bring the wounded nurses to the main group on the first night on Radji Beach- may have had *"... their bodies thrown into the jungle at the edge of the beach..."* (ORB, p.212), leaving seven bodies presumably in or close to the jungle. Stoker Lloyd, who in his post war affidavit states that he was in the first group to go, had of course escaped. Stoker Lloyd's account is contradicted in Eric German's account which mentions seeing when his group arrived at the execution site *"... at the water's edge, lying face down, sprawled the bodies of those who had gone before them ..."* (BYE, p.148)
- The next group - Eric German and the Officers (Sedgeman and Miller) and the senior civilians such as Mr. Watson and perhaps Mr. Betteridge and *"... several other British servicemen ..."* (ORB, p.212) – were ordered to stand in line facing the sea and from his account they (apart from Mr Watson who had been left sitting against a log before the final spot where the killings took place) were on the edge of the sea.
- Suggesting that there was some post massacre handling of the bodies is also raised in a statement by Stoker Lloyd ("Singapore's Dunkirk", p.146) where he recounts that after laying in the jungle **for a few days** *"... all the male bodies had been piled on top one another in a big heap. Then I went along and found the bodies of the Australian nurses and other women [ we should note this is a plural description of the number of women] ..."*. This seems to contradict Vivian Bullwinkel's statements.
- This particular account also gives further credence to the record in the book ' A Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke' by Ralph Armstrong who writes (pp.53-54) *"... A little known ending to this horror is described by another survivor, who said a group of Australian soldiers were rounded up by the Japanese and ordered to carry the bodies of the massacred men and nurses from the beach to be burned. They had to collect all the wood and debris that they could find, build a large funeral pyre and then place all the bodies one by one on this pyre"*

*until only the ashes remained ...*". This, of course, suggests that the remains of the people massacred are not actually on Radji Beach but somewhere close by. A telephone conversation with Ralph Armstrong in June 2017 confirmed his memory of this and he made the comment that the bodies were buried after being burned.

- The Australian Army nurses, as is well known, were ordered to walk in a line into the sea and presumably did so – but there are several exceptions. Eric German the day after the killings found "... a 'red-haired nurse' was lying higher on the beach than the others ..."
- (BYE, p.152); Corporal Seddon (who was swimming to the beach at the time the killings took place, having survived the sinking of the 'HMS Yin Ping') saw some men and women trying to escape but they were bayoneted and shot. So not all would have been at the water's edge.
- Finally, there were, depending upon the source record, between three and ten men and women who were "stretcher cases" (probably two or three women and around six men) who had been bayoneted and left dead either in the fisherman's hut or in the shade under the trees at the edge of the jungle bordering the beach i.e. well above the high tide line. Vivian Bullwinkel's evidence to the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal stated that there were "... about ten to twelve stretcher cases..." (Knights of Bushido" by Lord Russell of Liverpool, p.103) whilst Eric German said there were five stretcher cases – Mr Buridge /Betteridge, the elderly magistrate Mr Stevens, and "... the nurse with the ripped breast and two civilian women with shrapnel wounds ..."
- (BYE, p.146)
- Apart from those inevitably washed away by the tides and currents , these 'above the high tide' victims may of course have been buried later by local people in which case, when added to the graves of the Malay sailor from the 'SS. Vyner Brooke' and the soldier from either the 'HMS Li Wo' or the 'HMS Yin Ping' who were definitely buried by the large group of "SS. Vyner Brooke" survivors assembled on the beach on 15 February 1942 indicates that there were/ are probably at least eight people buried in the area of the Beach – but maybe many more.
- One such record of local people burying the bodies comes from a niece of Sister Jean Ashton who along with siblings visited 'Radji Beach' in 2012 after which she has recorded the following to this researcher (email Sue Akeroyd 16.11.16) "...Our aunt was a POW and so two of my sisters and a brother went to Muntok to visit the site as you probably learned from the blog. While we were there we visited all of the significant spots and one day, were lucky enough to be taken to Radji Beach. We walked along the beach and watched the water ebb and flow. There was a fisherman on the beach and we chatted to him and told him what we were there for. It was this man who said that he was very familiar with the story of the massacre because his grandfather helped to **bury** the dead bodies of the nurses. I do not know his name or anything more than that, but he probably still fishes on that section of beach...".
- Finally, in the context of the idea that perhaps the bodies of the AANS nurses were not swept away by the sea as promptly as recalled by Vivian Bullwinkel is an item contained in an Australia War Graves investigation report dated April 1946 held in the Australian national Archives , Melbourne "... here I might mention during our trip to Pangkal Pinang, Captain FODEN making further enquiries around Muntok was given by his Malay rating, who had received it from a native of Muntok, an identification card inscribed and belonging to Sister M.E. McGlade, AANS. The man said it was taken from the body of a white woman in the area previously mentioned as being the place of the shooting of the nurses ..."

It is also worth recording that, according to Sister Ada Syer, whilst the Australian nurses were initially being held in the Muntok cinema building a Japanese soldier asked Sister Hannah what uniform she was wearing – when it was explained he said "... we have just buried 25 women wearing that uniform ..."

(Sister Ada 'Mickey' Syer oral history record, end of Tape 2, held in Australian War Memorial, ID # SO 4057). [Researcher Note: author Lynette Silver has corrected the researcher's

understanding here so that it was apparently a Royal Navy serviceman and POW who made this statement to Mavis Hannah]. Apart from the obvious implication that the bodies of the nurses (and others?) may have been buried at Radji Beach there is the fact that the number of nurses referred to is more than the 21 nurses executed by machine gun. Given that at least three civilian women were also killed in the massacre (probably Mrs Betteridge, Kathleen Waddle and at least one other) this number of 25 women may have more importance than previously attributed to it; because if tasked with burying that many people, this researcher doubts that a Japanese soldier [ or a Royal Navy POW] would have later made a differentiation about a few women in civilian clothing. The possible flaw in this piece of information is that it seems highly unlikely that this Royal Navy POW would have kept such information after the War – and if he had died during POW years, he would have almost certainly told other POWs of his experience.

The awful and almost overwhelming question of the remains of men and women , and children, from the “SS. Vyner Brooke” and other ships sunk between 13 – 16 February 1942 in the seas around Banka Island and being washed ashore on its beaches, is one that is underscored by the following excerpt from the report by Captain Yemm of the ‘ Mission to Bangka island, Bintan island and Pom Pong island’ during March 1946 as part of the War Graves investigation “ ... *many human bones were discovered along the coastline stretching from Muntok harbour to Tanjong Kalian and north to Tanjong Oelar. These remains are those of shipwrecked soldiers and civilians. It is estimated from interrogation of the natives that they amounted to several hundreds. There are no means whatsoever of identifying the remains, a few bones were however collected, as proof and for examination upon our return to Singapore ...*”. He does record that they found 347 graves around Muntok (the majority Dutch internees) and talks of 76 AANS graves, but it would appear that he may have been classifying all the womens graves as AANS.

Apart from the bodies of perhaps 50 – 100 people who lost their lives in the attack on the ‘SS. Vyner Brooke’ or whilst adrift at sea after the ship sank, many of the bodies which were noted as having washed up on the beaches of Banka Island would have been from the at least 900 women, children, civilian men and servicemen who lost their lives in the attacks and sinkings of a large group of evacuation ships around the islands just north, north west and east of Banka Island during 13- 17 February 1942. These ships included;

- **‘SS. Redang’** (sunk on 13 February in the Berhala straits between Banka and Singkep islands with up to 110 passengers and crew)
- **‘HMS Siang Wo’** (attacked and run aground on 13 February NW of Banka Island - near the lighthouse - with about 200 passengers and crew)
- **‘HMS Hwang Ho’** (sunk off Lingga Island and the survivors taken to Banka as POWs – including Lt Cmdr. H. Vickers)
- **‘HMS Dragonfly’** (sunk on 14 February)
- **‘HMS Giang Bee’** (sunk on 14 February in the Banka Straits with around 300 passengers and crew)
- **‘SS. Kuala’** (sunk on 14 February at Pom Pong island north of Banka Island with 750 passengers)
- **‘HMS Li Wo’** (sunk on 14 February by the Japanese invasion fleet just north of Banka island)
- **‘HMS Grasshopper’** (run aground at Sempang island, near Singkep, on 14 February)
- **‘HMS Scorpion’** (sunk near Sempang island on 14 February)
- **‘HMS Yin Ping’** (A tug sunk by shellfire from Japanese warships near Muntok lighthouse on 15 February with about 75 on board – 50 of whom were killed)
- **‘SS Pulo Soegi’** (sunk on the evening of 15 February carrying about 80 people including 68 from the ‘ZAOW’ of RAOC.)

- **ML 311** – (sunk in Banka Straits on 15 February with about 75 people on board)
- **‘Elizabeth’** (a launch sunk in Banka straits on 16 February with 26 people on board)
- **‘SS. Tandjong Pinang’** (sunk 30 miles north of Banka on 17 February) – with a large group of 180 or so nurses, women and children on board who had been rescued from Pom Pong island after the sinking of the ‘SS Kuala’.

A Lt. Russell F. Wright, who had assisted in the embarkation of evacuees onto the ‘SS. Vyner Brooke’ in Singapore and retained a continuing interest in their welfare (he actually boarded the ‘Mata Hari’ and coincidentally arrived at Muntok just prior to the first survivors from the ‘SS. Vyner Brooke’) had an experience as late as 28 February 1942 which reinforced just how many bodies of victims of the shipwrecks were being washed ashore on Banka Island “... About a day prior to Sister Bullwinkle’s[sic] [arrival?], while in a working party I arranged with the Jap guards to proceed to the foreshore in an endeavour to identify bodies washed ashore (also to view some lifeboats ex ‘Hong Tat’). I covered one and a half to two miles of foreshore adjacent to the Cinema Camp, there were about 15 bodies on the beach and in shallow water - some were recognisable as nurses. So far as I knew the scene of the tragedy [he is referring to Radji beach] was some distance from Muntok, possibly 20 miles away. An identification party under Air Comdr. MODIN made an official inspection of the beaches in the immediate vicinity of Muntok. I am not sure of the date, but this was just after Sister Bullwinkle’s [sic] arrival...”.

### **Who carried out this Atrocity and what occurred in truth at Radji Beach?**

After the War the Japanese Government, during the demobilisations phase of its forces, was instructed (Instruction #126, dated 12 October 1945) to compile accounts to record the plans and actions of its military arms prior to and during the War. One such document (Japanese Monograph #67 ‘Palembang and Bangka Operations Record, January – February 1942’ was produced and copied into English in 1953 – copy supplied by Dr Neil McGregor April 2017) gives the identities of the military units involved on Banka Island at the time of the sinking of the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ together with a lot of detail as to the dates and places of their deployment.

Essentially this report, compiled by senior Japanese officers including the Chief of Staff of the 38th Division, tells us that on 20 January the 38th division of the Japanese Army (at that point still stationed in Hong Kong after invading that city in December 1941), which included the Division Headquarters Companies of the 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment who had committed terrible atrocities around Xmas Eve 1941 at many places in Hong Kong, moved to Camranh Bay in French Indochina (Vietnam) prior to invading southern Sumatra and particularly Palembang .

The specifically allocated ‘Bangka invasion unit’ of the larger 38<sup>th</sup> Division invasion force – being two companies of 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment plus shipping engineer elements - left Camranh Bay on 12 February 1942 and arrived at Muntok anchorage at 0100 hrs on 15 February.

The plan had been;

*“... one platoon was to land in the vicinity of Muntok pier, with the main body, composed of one company and two platoons, landing 2,000 metres south east of Muntok (See map 2) .... After securing the airfield and its surrounding area, one company which was to remain for occupation was to capture Pangkalpinang. The remaining troops were to rejoin, as rapidly as possible, the main body of the advance force in Sumatra...”.*

As planned one company of the 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment remained to occupy Banka Island while the other company, on the 17 February, began movement across the sea to the Palembang area to join the main body of the invasion force attacking southern Sumatra.

[Researchers Note: The following definitions of the typical makeup of Japanese Army units may clarify the descriptions used in this memorial document;

- Company – up to 150 men comprising 3 platoons and commanded by a Captain
- Platoon – up to 50 men comprising 3 sections commanded by a Lieutenant
- Section – up to 15 men consisting of three teams commanded by a Corporal
- Team – about 4 men led by a Senior private

These definitions give us a close approximation of the number of Japanese around Muntok and on Banka Island when the survivors of many ships began to land.]

So as the survivors of the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ and other ships began to struggle ashore on Banka Island they were not to know that they were arriving at exactly the same time as two Companies of the infamous and ruthless 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from Hong Kong which had been involved in the war crimes during Xmas 1941- the very reason for their original evacuation from Singapore!

As a result, the ‘die was cast’ for a repeat of the brutality and murder experienced in Hong Kong.

Soon after the War, as Allied forces began to land on Banka Island in late 1945 and early 1946 they started to officially investigate the atrocities being reported by the Australian nurses, men and women internees and POWs who were finally being discovered in the atrociously deprived and neglected Belalau internment camp in south western Sumatra.

A Captain Yemm was the first to complete a comprehensive investigation into the events at Radji Beach and (from his report in the War Crimes file held in the NAA in Melbourne) he was told by a Japanese soldier that it was “... *the ‘Orita Butai’ - No. 1 and No. 2 Companies, the MG Company and the HQ Company...*” - who had carried out the massacre (a ‘Butai’ is a general term for a Japanese Army unit – it seems to be applied to units the size of regiments down to units the size of platoons and is usually accompanied by the family name of the officer in charge of that unit). Specifically, his report notes that the soldier told him it was the No. 3 platoon of ‘Tamaka Butai’ (sic) of 229 Infantry Regiment who had killed the nurses.

The ‘Tamaka Butai’ or more correctly the ‘Tanaka Butai’ were, of course, the 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division of the Japanese Army under Major-General Tanaka (also spelt as ‘Tamaka’ or ‘Takaka’ in some records) Ryosaburo who had invaded Hong Kong, and these were specifically the troops who had raped and murdered European and Chinese nurses at St Stephens Hospital, Hong Kong.

In the file compiled by Captain Yemm there is also an isolated handwritten note recording a statement that appears to have been made by a Japanese soldier (he appears to have been one TANEMURA KIYOSHI) to the effect that it some men named “... *SHIMIZI KINICHI and TANEMUKA [sic?] KIYOSHI, [were in?] a platoon of 2 Company under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. KOHIYAMO FUMO who made a patrol to the coast where they met many foreigners who were shot. These included women ....*”. This suggests that apart from the identified war criminals Captain (later Major) Orita Masaru and Sergeant – Major Taro Kato there was another officer in the killing squad at Radji Beach named 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Kohiyamo Fumo?

There also follows in Yemm’s file a note to the effect that “... *Japs also killed 5 BORs [i.e. five British Other Ranks] from a sunken gunboat [possibly the ‘Li Wo’?] – they were bayoneted one survivor told E.A. DOMENEY, RAOC ‘2’ AON...*” this looks to be a reference to the same unit that massacred the Australian Army nurses and continued their killing spree around the coast of Banka Island.

It is worth remembering at this point that there were a number of survivors from other evacuation ships – including the ‘SS Tandjong Pinang’ which had rescued 180 women, children and nurses from Pom Pong island after the sinking of the ‘SS Kuala’ there but only to be sunk itself within a day of rescuing these women and children – who were struggling ashore on Banka Island and some of these people were also summarily executed by the Japanese on the beaches. Notably amongst these were the Captain of the ‘SS. Tandjong Pinang’ (Lt Basil Shaw, RNZNVR, from New Zealand) and a crew member (Able Seaman Oswald Young, ex ‘HMS Repulse’) who landed near the lighthouse near Muntok and were executed on the spot, on 21 February. Also, Lt Commander Horace Vickers, Commander of the Malay section of the MRNVR / Royal Navy was also executed upon landing on Banka – his remains without his head, were found in a plantation behind Muntok by a post war search party.

The book ‘ORB’ (p.211) - drawing on what Vivian Bullwinkel included in her post – war affidavit to the War Crimes Tribunal - suggests that the size of the Japanese force of troops arriving at Radji Beach was likely to be around 18 soldiers led by a Sergeant-Major and a Captain. This is of course approximately the size of a ‘platoon’.

The Melbourne domiciled War Crimes file in the Australian National Archives has nothing further to offer on the subject of pursuing those responsible for the Radji Beach atrocity (the files for this phase of the investigation must be in another war crimes prosecution file perhaps linked with the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal), but it is clear that by August 1946 the Allies had absolutely not given up their hunt for the criminals responsible for the murders on Radji Beach and in ‘The Canberra Times’ ( 30.8.46) there appeared a report that “ ... *The whereabouts of the Japanese responsible for the massacre of 21 Australian army nurses on Banka Island .... are slowly being uncovered. Lt. Masayuki Takeuchi, commander of one of the companies on the island was recently identified in a POW stockade and is now in Taiping gaol, northern Malaya. A second suspect, Sergeant – Major Taro Kato, was captured in New Guinea...*”.

So, it seems that the Japanese invasion force on Banka Island - comprising two Companies was led by Captain Orita Masaru with #1 Company led by Lt. Masayuki Takeuchi and #2 Company led by Lt. Kohiyamo Fumo. It seems that the officers of this relatively small invasion force were being given command authority a little above that usually accruing to their rank. In the same manner, we seem to have Sgt. Major Taro Kato in command of a platoon – although on the day in question Masaru and Kato look like being the ones ordering the murders on Radji Beach.

Some sources state that the commander of Japanese forces on Banka Island (presumably Captain Masaru Orita) had from the beginning given orders that all survivors of sunken ships landing on the Island were to be killed. In this context, it is also reported that the Japanese Naval Commander who captured another ship – the ‘SS Mata Hari’ laden with men, women and children – would not allow the ship to berth at Muntok pier until the Army Commander gave his assurance that they would not be killed.

It seems that there was also another Japanese platoon searching elsewhere on the coast of Banka Island for survivors.

Later in the post war investigation process “The West Australian” (26.10.46) carried this item in a similar story but added that the two men (Takeuchi and Taro) mentioned above;

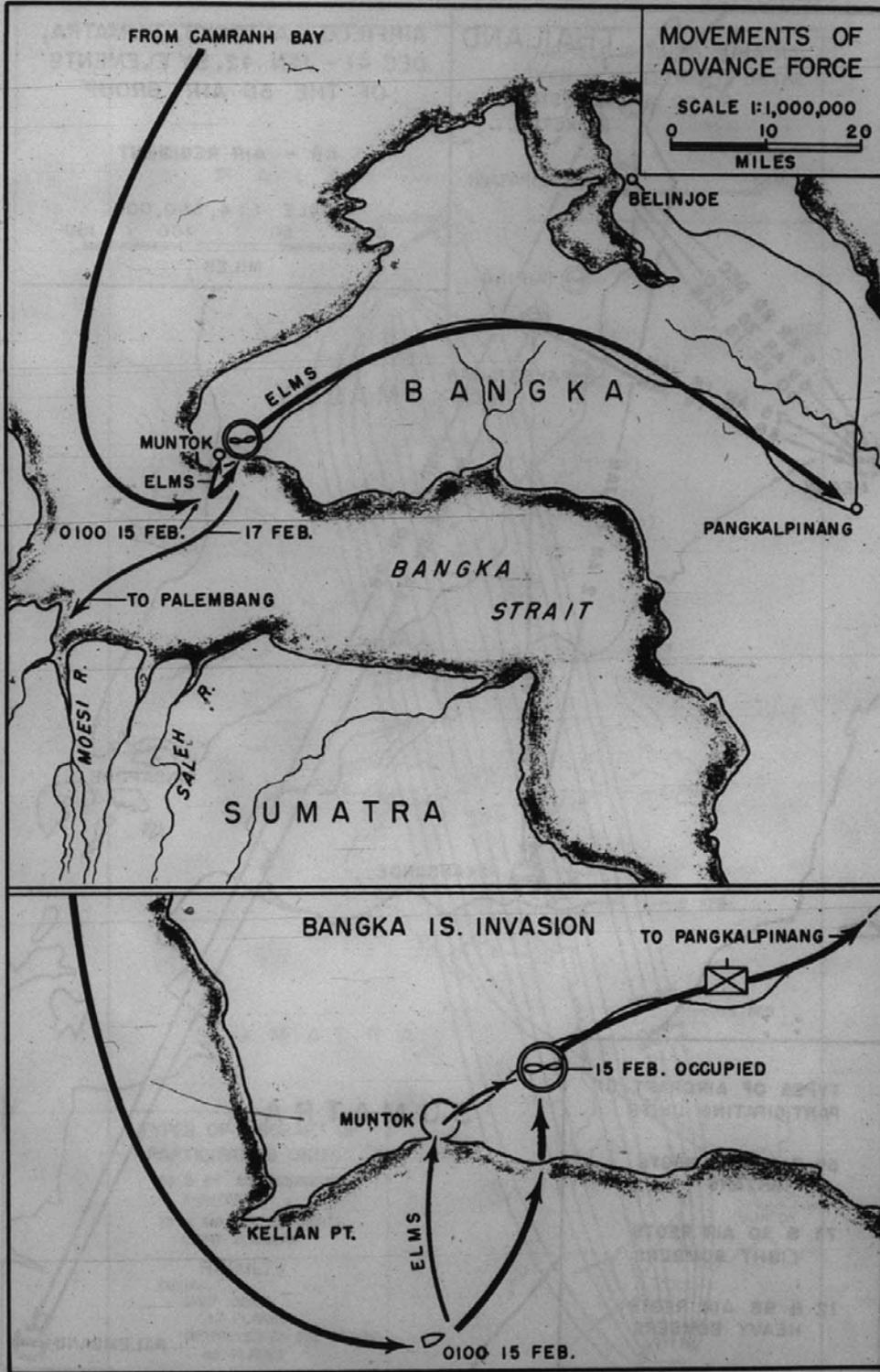
*“...were regular army veterans who fought against China, participated in the storming of Hong Kong, and followed the Japanese troops into Palembang in early 1942. The companies were detached from*

*the main force for the capture of Banka Island. The entire division later fought in the eastern area and met retribution almost to the last man at the hands of Australians and Americans. In 1942 a battalion of the regiment sailed for Guadalcanal in 14 ships, 11 of which were sunk with 1,000 men. Most of the 500 survivors died in the fighting around Henderson Airfield (Guadalcanal) Another battalion was almost wiped out by the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, AIF, at Buna, only 11 escaping – a third battalion endeavoured to land in the New Admiralty Islands in June 1944. Half landed and was subsequently reported missing. The other half failed to land and returned to Rabaul. Twenty six survivors are still being interrogated there, including Major-General Tanaka who commanded operations in Sumatra. Captain (later Major) Masaru Orita, who commanded the two companies at the time of the massacre, fought on in the Manchurian front against the Russians in 1945. The Soviet section of the Allied Council for Japan has just informed Australia that this badly wanted man has not so far been found in the Soviet's POW compound ...”.*

The book 'ORB' (p. 319) also holds the historical view that it was the same soldiers of the 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Banka Island who had been the killers and rapists at St Stephens college, Hong Kong six weeks earlier and says “ ... *It seems likely that Orita had been directly in charge of the soldiers who had raped and murdered their way through St Stephen's College ... and it was certainly Orita who issued the orders for all the killings on Radji Beach ...*”, then later that book ( p.320) closes the story of the sadistic, psychopathic individual who orchestrated and perpetrated the massacre “... *What happened at Radji beach was the result of a premeditated decision by Orita Masaru, who took what he saw as an easy option.... His [own] surrender at the end of the war does not seem to have weighed too heavily on his heart. Orita was a POW in the Soviet Union for almost 3 years before his extradition to Tokyo ... on the eve of his being tried as a war criminal ... he committed suicide”.*

After the war Major – General Tanaka Ryosaburo, 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment, received 20 years imprisonment for the mass murders by troops in his command whilst in Hong Kong.

MAP 2



Scanned by MilSpecManuals

Now moving to the nature of the atrocity against the Australian nurses, civilian women, civilian men and servicemen on Radji Beach the question is 'Did it happen in the manner stated by Vivian Bullwinkel at the War Crimes Tribunal?' which has become the accepted explanation over the past 70 years?

There have been various murmurings and conjectures which need to be addressed to ascertain the full culpability for their crimes of the Japanese Army personnel on Banka Island and the level of total shame these men carry into history – particularly against a backdrop of admitted 'secrets' amongst the AANS nursing survivors.

Firstly, it may be worth contemplating that in Western countries the social paradigm of the 'stigma' of rape against women has materially altered in the 70 years since 1945, as social 'mores' have changed insofar as any women victims of rape having some sort of ongoing 'damaged honour' and reflecting the growth in the authority, role and independence of women - which has escalated beyond anything that could have been imagined prior to the Second World War or even 1945. This researcher proposes the view that, in considering the information in the next few paragraphs, the reader contemplates whether the paradigm in which we live at any point in history can alter the perceived interpretation and impact of information – particularly when it is a case of reputation, honour, morals and gender role.

The name TANEMURA KIYOSHI also comes up as a witness to the events on Radji Beach in an alleged report by War Crimes Investigating Officer (Captain James Gowing Godwin) "File 152 Bangka Island Atrocities, 17 February 1942" in the book "Betrayal in High Places" by James McKay. Described in the book as "... Former Ldg Private Tanemura Kiyoshi of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Company, Orita Butai" he had ostensibly been recalled by Godwin for reinterrogation concerning the fate of Mr. V.G. Bowden (Australian Trade Commissioner, Malaya) on Bangka island on 17 February 1942. To quote from the File mentioned in the book "...Kiyoshi admits that his platoon took part in the successful assault on the lightly defended island and that some Europeans (amended to all) were captured, including a number of Australian nurses. Kiyoshi displayed a most worried attitude that was not lost on this investigating officer. His answers to questions were evasive and devious, similar in context to an earlier interrogation conducted by Sergeant A. H. Weston.... He strongly denied being one of the guards... and had sought permission from his immediate superior NCO Sergeant Furukawa (FNU) to rest in the shade of some trees...". Without going into detail described in the book and the supposed File 152, the relevance of Kiyoshi's statement is that he claimed that the nurses had been raped before being returned to the beach, the nurses in fact being "... forced to bathe (ostensibly) whereupon a machine gun had opened fire and disposed (executed) them. Kiyoshi strongly denied participating of the male prisoners by reason of feeling unwell, and because of his disposition, he had not felt inclined to join in the raping incidents during the night with the rest of the platoon....".

Frustratingly for anyone attempting to get to the truth of the Radji Beach atrocity, the researcher of this memorial document has found that the relevant content of the book 'Betrayal In High Places' is not backed up by the content of Godwin's files from 2 AWCS held in the National Archives of Australia – it has been found from the original files that the report by Captain J.G. Godwin actually starts exactly as McKay states, but the second sentence of Godwin's actual Weekly Investigation Report 152 (dated 13 January 1950) in the NAA Melbourne then states "...Results of this reinterrogation will be reported in the Weekly Investigation Report of Sgt. A.H. Weston ...". **On obtaining and reading the original files compiled by Sgt Weston this researcher determined that there is no evidential foundation for the supposed account by Tanemura Kiyoshi account recorded in "Betrayal in High Places"!**

It seems James McKay, despite knowing that there was no recorded admission by Tanemura Kiyoshi for the rape and murder, was going to see history recorded in the way he (and probably many others at the time) genuinely believed it to have occurred. So, we must put aside the McKay book as a credible source – even although he may have heard rumours to that effect.

Despite the lack of any evidence produced for James McKay's view that the AANS nurses and others had been violated on Radji Beach, there are two other important pieces of information on the matter of whether the nurses were raped and then murdered we which this researcher believes we should consider before again reverting to eyewitness statements around the time of the atrocity;

- A journalist with 'Independent Australia', Ms Tess Lawrence, on 19 March 2017 published an article which stated that during two meetings she had personally with Vivian Bullwinkel at a Club in Melbourne, she was told by Vivian that most of the nurses including Vivian had been violated before being shot at Radji Beach. Tess Lawrence also claims that she was told by Vivian that she had been instructed not to divulge this to the war Crimes Tribunal in Sydney.
- This conclusion is also supported by author Barbara Angell on the website Angell Productions, who with questions in mind as to whether there was something behind the obvious secrets being kept by the surviving AANS nurses who returned to Australia, and also the inconsistencies in the statements over the years by the surviving nurses set out firstly to check the veracity of Vivian Bullwinkel's story against the only tangible evidence left from the murders i.e. the bullet holes in the nurses uniform Vivian was wearing on the day at Radji Beach and then apply logic to the evidence left in the affidavits made by the men who survived the massacre or arrived on Radji Beach within a day or so from other sunken ships. Angell's very thorough investigation concludes that the AANS nurses, including Vivian were raped and there may have been other nurses also killed elsewhere around the cost of Bank Island.

In summary, research has also brought forward several pieces of information which drive the logic of what occurred at Radji Beach to a strong conclusion that some of the AANS nursing Sisters who landed on Radji Beach were almost certainly violated before they were murdered.

- Firstly, the fact that the exact same Japanese troops who raped and murdered the nurses in St Stephen's Hospital, Hong Kong were the troops who had invaded Banka island and were present at Radji Beach – a situation which left them after the killing of the two groups of men with a large group of defenceless women.
- Secondly, Japanese troops had a practice during their invasion of South East Asia, when coming across a group of men and women, of firstly separating and then killing the men before assaulting and later killing the women.
- Then there is the evidence of men who survived the massacre or survivors of other sunken ships who were present at Radji Beach after the killings which states very clearly that some of the clothing on the bodies of the nurses was in disarray or had been removed and some nurses were actually naked – there is no suggestion in any survivor's records that the nurses were naked before the Japanese arrived.

- Also, the researcher of this memorial document, whilst in the Singapore National Archives in January 2018 came across the following statement in an Oral History Recording (Accession No. 000232) by Tan Kok Kheng (the adult son of a wealthy and highly influential Singaporean resident in pre-War Singapore by the name of Tan Kah Kee). Tan Kok Kheng - who was highly credible in the history of commerce, administration and politics in Singapore - is talking about an account related to him by an acquaintance by the name of Toh Soo Tong who had survived the sinking of a ship near Banka Island “...but was then taken prisoner and forced to cook for the Japs on Banka Island ...”, he records that Tok Soo Tong said “... 50 young Australian nurses ... confined to two long wooden houses, stripped completely naked and chained hands and legs to the floor. Half naked Jap soldiers lined up outside the buildings and took turns to rape them. In the kitchen where he worked, he heard them scream for help at the top of their voice. Nobody could help them. It was pitiful. Many of them died from the sexual assault...”. This is a credible piece of historical information but this researcher agrees with
- Barbara Angell’s empathetic analysis of the location of the bullet holes in Vivian Bullwinkel’s uniform gives real weight to the possibility that Vivian was in a state of undress at the time she was shot.
- Next, but not least, is the article by journalist Tess Lawrence in the ‘Independent Australia’ of February 2017 which states bluntly that Vivian Bullwinkel confirmed that some of the nurse had been raped by the Japanese on Radji Beach.

The compelling **conclusion**, arrived at through the lengthy research conducted in compiling this memorial document, is that the events at Radji Beach were even more complex, cruel, and barbaric than mainstream reports have to date led us to believe. The empathy of those honouring the memory of those women murdered at Radji Beach may need to also consider the torture experienced during their last hours - perhaps even more so than has been the case to date.

Nothing detracts from the exemplary behaviour and everlasting honour of these brave and noble women.

The shame, detraction from honour and a further immense stain on the reputation of the Japanese Army can likewise never be removed.

### **What happened to the Sisters on the raft swept along the Banka Strait?**

**There is also another similarly painful interpretation to the information assembled more recently on events on Banka Island and that is the possible fate of Sister Dorsch, Sister Trenerry and perhaps Matron Paschke from the raft last seen drifting along the Banka Strait towards the Sunda Straits between Sumatra and Java.**

We learned that this raft was last seen being swept away by the powerful sea currents around Banka Island. As related by Dr Neil McGregor (son of Sister Sylvia Muir) the bodies of Sister McDonald and two other unidentified nurses were found on a raft in the Indian Ocean two or three weeks later (the raft having floated in that time down to and through the Sunda Straits to the Indian Ocean which is the direction of ocean currents around bank island and Sumatra at that time of the year) – this was also confirmed by Sister Wilma Oram to ex – nurse Dorothy Angell who knew Wilma after the War. Both AANS nurses were told this outcome after being repatriated to Singapore at the end of the

War, by a sailor aboard a ship which found the raft. This of course leaves the fate of at least three of the nurses (including perhaps Matron Paschke) and the two children (one being a three-year-old Chinese girl according to Iole Harper – see her entry) on the raft with them all, unresolved. The last time this raft was sighted being swept southwards down the Bank Straits two of the nurses - Sister Dorsch and Sister Trenerry - were in the sea holding onto trailing ropes from the raft.

Then there is a piece of highly credible information which supports the scenario that one or more of the nurses made a successful effort to swim for Banka Island further south along the coast (perhaps when they realised that they were entering more open ocean beyond Banka Island) contained in the book "Soldier Surgeon in Malaya" by T. Hamilton published in 1957, which states that Colonel/Matron A. 'Annie' M. Sage of the AANS - who greeted the surviving AANS nurses after release from internment in 1945 - was told that the identity disc of Sister Dorsch had been found by a "... Mrs Armstrong (now dead) ..." on a beach on Banka Island. Now the only 'Mrs Armstrong' interned in Muntok and Palembang was Mrs. Resie Armstrong - mother of Ralph Armstrong who wrote an account of the family's experiences in 'A Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke'. Mrs Armstrong, Ralph and several other members of the family had been on a raft that, after the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke', was also swept south down the Banka Straits and landed initially on the Sumatran coast before being taken by fishermen back across the Strait, to a beach on the south coast of Banka Island (P.48-49 "SCOTVB") and then to the town of "Koba" on the north – eastern side of the island. Mrs Resie Armstrong and her two adult daughters all died in internment leaving a small boy who was her grandson as the only family survivor in the women's internment camps of Muntok, Palembang and Belalau (Ralph having been moved to the men's camp) – the conclusion is that she was almost certainly the person who found the disc.

This therefore also opens up the awful possibility that at least Sister Dorsch would have crossed paths with either the perpetrators of the Radji Beach massacre or the **second** landing force of the invading Japanese Army on Banka island – the one making for the airfield and Pankilpinang (see the later section on 'Who Carried Out This Atrocity' and the related Map 2 of Japanese Army plans). To have met up with soldiers with the record of war crimes in Hong Kong may have almost certainly meant the same fate for these two Sisters and their comrades on Radji Beach.

The logic for this having occurred starts with;

- The finding of Sister Dorsch's identity disc and here we quote from the excellent website [angellpro.com](http://angellpro.com) by Barbara Angell "... *The only way for anyone's identity disc to be found is for it to have been forcibly ripped or cut off...* [ it is noted that Matron Sage gained the knowledge of the identity disc from women internees , rather than nursing sisters, which makes it even more credible ] and Matron Sage is also reported as having said that "... *Miss Paschke, Matron of the 10<sup>th</sup> Hospital was seen on a raft after the ship sank. She gave up her place to a younger nurse, then tried to swim to the beach...*". Despite Miss Paschke being known to have been a non-swimmer, this is a very strong piece of evidence that the fate of Sister Dorsch, and perhaps the others, being a tragedy that occurred on Banka Island. Sister Dorsch's identity tag would not have floated off her body and all the way to a beach on Banka Island by itself – whether Mrs Armstrong found the tag by itself on a beach or on the body of Sister Dorsch is not known.
- Then we have the reports ( albeit controversial and from 'Betrayal in High Places' ) that one Private Tanemura Kiyoshi claims to have heard , again quoting Barbara Angell "... *screams coming from nearby houses situated between groves of paw paw and mango trees , and was told that some NCOs and officers were pleasuring themselves (raping) some Australian nurses...*" – and then being taken away to be

killed. It is important to note the reference to 'houses' as opposed to being on Radji Beach.

- And thirdly the statement by Tok Soo Tong ( p.33 above) that whilst working for the Japanese as a cook on Banka Island he heard from the kitchen he was working in, a group of nurses being raped in "...two long wooden houses..." on Banka Island, presumably in Muntok since he was cooking for the Japanese troops at their base, and some dying as a result.
  - There were a number of atrocities and executions along the coast of Banka island during the period of 15 – 20 February 1942 and it may be that Sister Dorsch , and others were simply executed along with any servicemen being found in the same circumstances. .
- The essential point here is that we have two reports referring to nurses being raped and killed in buildings. This steers logic away from these atrocity reports being part of being the accepted account of events at Radji Beach and point instead to either a village or buildings in or around Muntok itself. It seems unlikely that the Japanese would have put in too much effort into marching the nurses all the way from Radji Beach to Muntok and then all the way back to that specific location to be killed.

There looks to have occurred a second atrocity involving some of the nurse, probably in the vicinity of Muntok, and this may be the explanation of the fate of Sister Dorsch, and possibly Sister Trenerry and Matron Paschke.

Finally, whether at Muntok or later in the Palembang internment camp it has become clear that apart from the nurses at Radji Beach the Japanese troops raped some of the Australian nursing sisters during internment - as noted by renowned author Lynette Silver who records in her book 'Angels of Mercy', quoting Australian Army doctor, Charles Stewart Johnstone's diary. This diary tells us that when the POW nurses were released and came aboard the hospital ship; the 'Manunda', Matron Sage was weeping because *'they were in a shocking state physically and mentally. All had VD (venereal or sexually transmitted disease).* # his words.

### **Banka Coast as a Graveyard:**

Finally, one piece of information – a hand drawn map (c. 1946) from the War Crime investigation file (located in NAA Melbourne) on the events at Radji Beach - gives some idea of what was found by the investigation party soon after the war;



and a rowing speed of 1 knot - by probably only four already exhausted men rowers in an overloaded life boat (which might even have had people hanging onto ropes alongside) – then it would have taken about two to five hours with these two propulsions aids giving it a maximum speed of 5km. At a more likely speed of 3-4 km per hour it would have taken three to six hours to have reached land in a south easterly direction. Tg. Betumpah seems be a likely headland it would have reached in that time and is in line with the sea current. If the current in the area is stronger then it would have reached land faster or could have travelled further.

The second lifeboat, half submerged, and it appears with no rowing capability left an hour or so later would have been entirely at the mercy of the tidal current and therefore moving at about 3 km per hour. It would have taken that lifeboat four to six hours and reach a spot said to be a mile of several kilometres away from the bonfire (it is assumed north of the bonfire which may have reduced time at sea by almost an hour).

Looking at the map it is possible, but seems less likely, that the current would have naturally swept the lifeboats around the headland TG. BETUMPAH to TG. BESAJAP, but this is a question only local knowledge would be able to answer.

Secondly, the location and description of ‘Radji Beach’ and ‘camp site’ by survivors;

When the second lifeboat with the wounded nurses was washed ashore - the ‘bonfire’ lit by the first lifeboat was several kilometres away (ORB p.177 and this appears to be confirmed by the fact that it took Second Officer Miller and Eric German’s rescue party “... *over two hours* ...” to walk back to the location where the wounded nurses were located and bring them back (ORB. , p.200) ). In BEW (p.145) German recalled that the lifeboat was ‘*a mile away*’. This tells us that either there was a very long beach or relatively uninterrupted piece of coastline. We assume that the second lifeboat landed north of the bonfire, but this is an important fact to clarify, if possible.

*We are told, “...daylight revealed that they were on a sandy beach that stretched into the distance in the north and was about 20m wide at high tide. To the south there was a rocky outcrop that extended into the water and separated that beach from another, smaller but equally sandy beach... the second lifeboat was not visible...”. (ORB, p.202).*

The bonfire appears to have been lit some 50-100m from the headland which is described as being to the south (ORB).

Then we have some descriptions of the geography beyond the ‘Headland’ and to its south.

One is that First Officer Sedgeman nominated four sailors to explore the beach beyond the headland (ORB p.203). This exploration party had found a freshwater spring bubbling out of rocks behind the headland. The spring formed a small stream that flowed inland to a swampy area back from the beach.... They also found a fisherman’s hut in this vicinity. (ORB, P.205). This is an interesting piece of evidence – firstly springs generally come from water running of a higher piece of land, they tend to be very old and resilient and this one came out of rocks and flowed inland. It makes sense that fishermen, who possibly lived further inland at Kg Menjelang, would build a coastal hut near clean fresh water to save them constantly returning inland to their kampong for supplies of fresh water. On Mapcarta today the only real evidence of fishermen’s huts is at the northern end of the beach between Tg. BETUMPAH and Tg. BESAJAP – although there is a small structure south of Tg SABAJU.

Then there are the descriptions of where the two groups of men were killed. The first group of men were led around the rocks at the end and onto a small beach beyond (ORB, p. 212) - the soldiers and

their eight prisoners climbed over a small promontory of rocks and driftwood about two hundred feet away and disappeared (BEW, p. 147). It is worth noting that these were not rocks one could walk through but needed to be climbed over. Others described this as “...they took half the men down the beach about 100 yards behind the headland ...”. Insofar as the second group of men, the Japanese officer and two soldiers are said to have “...reappeared, climbing over the rocks ...” (ORB, p.147) – this second group of men taken in the same direction as the first (ORB, p.213) and “... were in a small cove ...” (BEW, p.148). An idea of the distance they had been taken is given by survivor Vivian Bullwinkel “...I suppose they [the Japanese soldiers] were away five or ten minutes ...” (Vivian Bullwinkel War Crimes evidence signed statement, Melbourne 29.10.45) and then again, “...How far away were the men taken? ... 100 yards ...” (Vivian Bullwinkel War Crimes signed statement, Melbourne 29.10.45). So, this tells us that the men were taken no more than 100 yards, across a small promontory of rocks to such a distance that the Japanese could get the dozen or so men to that location, kill them individually by bayonetting and shooting, and return to the ‘camp site’ within - let us say 15 minutes to allow for memory error under stress by Vivian Bullwinkel. That suggests it would be no more than 200 meters from the original ‘campsite’.

Finally, there are descriptions of the geography to the south of the place the two groups of men were killed. Eric German (after briefly running into the jungle once he was sure the Japanese had left) ran “... for about a mile ...” [south] along the beach until he came to a stream flowing into the sea. (BEW, p.151). Next morning, he ventured across the stream and headed south... he met some other survivors [of other ships] walking north ... Eric led them back, across the stream, to the fatal cove. (BEW, p.152). This indicates that about a mile south of the site of the men being killed there is a stream - Sungei Menjelang?

So, the descriptive statements used in the book “On Radji Beach” (Bullwinkel and other survivors) and “By Eastern Windows” (survivor Eric German) and Vivian Bullwinkel’s war crimes statement in Melbourne, provide the following criteria that a ‘Radji Beach’ location should satisfy;

- The ‘camp beach’ should be sufficiently long to “... stretch into the distance ...” suggesting perhaps more than a kilometre.
- The ‘camp site’ should, about 200 feet to the south, have
- a rocky outcrop extending into the water, or an “outcrop of rocks” or “small promontory of rocks” and,
- On the other side of the small promontory, there should be a smaller but equally sandy beach to the south, also described as a “small cove”,
- On the “south side of the headland” (this headland could conceivably comprise both the ‘coves’ of Tg. Betumpah as observed on Google Maps and Mapcarta) there should be a ‘spring forming a small stream that flows inland to the jungle’.
- and further south again, on the south side of the ‘smaller beach/small cove’ there should be a,
- Stretch of beach at least a mile before which there is a,
- Small stream running into the sea and a,
- Beach that continues beyond the ‘small stream’

In the view of this researcher the AANS nurses, civilian women and servicemen on stretchers were killed on the beach 100-200 feet north of Tg. BETUMPAH.

There are three possibilities for the location of where the two groups of men were killed,

- In the most northern of the two ‘coves’ forming Tg. BETUMPAH – this one appears to be approximately only 30m across (therefore meeting the definition of a ‘cove’) and appears to be the most likely location, since it seems unlikely that the Japanese would have bothered to

climb over a further two sets of rocky outcrops to reach the second option and Vivian Bullwinkle stated that the Japanese managed to walk the men to the site, kill them individually and return within ten minutes,

- The beach between Tg. BETUMPAH and Tg. BESAJAP/BESAYA – this beach appears on Mapcarta to be some 600 metres long and does not meet the definition of either a ‘small beach’ or a ‘small cove’.
- On Teluk Menggeris between Tg. BESAJAP and Tg. SABAJU – this seems just too far away from the ‘camp site’ location and is over a kilometre long so does not meet the definition of a ‘small beach’ or cove’.

NOTE: The March 1946 Graves investigation Unit report held in the Melbourne Archives throws us a contrary scenario insofar as location since it states that, a man named YAS SIN took them due west 4 km from ‘KAMPOENG MENDJELONG’ to a beach just south of Cape SABAJAU where there was a fisherman’s hut opposite a fish trap in the water (Note: today there is one small structure -is it a building?- evident on Mapcarta at that site but no sign of fishing boats) – and this is where YAS SIN said he “ ... found many bodies of white men and woman mostly in a decomposed state ...” two (?) days after the shooting. AS SIN then took the GRAVES Investigation Unit to the place he said there were many bones “... *This was at Cape BESAJAP about a mile further north and as he said there were many bones amongst the rocks and the ‘half earth half sand on the edge of the water ...’*”

It is perhaps worth noting that today the main collection of fishermen’s huts along that stretch of coast is on the immediate south of TG. BETUMPAH, which is even further north again. Whether the Graves Investigation Unit’s final written reconciliation and report - based on YAS SIM’s guidance and descriptions and whatever maps they were using - was geographically accurate may be an issue. On the other hand, Teluk MENGGERRIS can be verified on Mapcarta as being due east of Kampung MEJELANG, YAS SIN was a local and seems unlikely he would have wrongly described two key features in his natural environment, and the use of the estimate by the Graves Investigation Unit of ‘... *about a mile further north ...’* between SABAJAU and BESAJAP is supported by the look of the distance on Mapcarta.

**Researchers conclusions;** Care must be taken with the assumptions by YAS SIN in this record because so many bodies (men and women including nurses) would have been washed up on this part of the coast from the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’, the ‘SS Tandjong Pinang’ and the ‘HMS Yin Ping’ and other vessels that it would have been hard for YAS SIN to distinguish the massacre victims from those coming from sinking ships, and the number of days after the event he visited the site in 1942 is questioned in the Grave Investigation Unit report.

It is also possible – actually highly likely - that other isolated small groups of survivors of the ships were also being summarily executed along this stretch of the coast, quite apart from the Australian Army nurses’ group, civilians and servicemen with them. Reality is that with no known survivors from these possible killings we would have no record of those war crimes.

Having said that some records suggest that the males could have been killed at Cape BESAJAP at the northern end of Teluk MENGGERRIS. This location is quite some distance from where it appears the survivors first made camp and does not equate with the apparent time taken for the Japanese soldiers to return on two occasions to the Nurses camp after killing the males. However, it does fit quite well with the memory of Eric German who said that, after he survived the killings he ran for “... about a mile...” (south) until he came to a stream flowing into the sea – this distance coincides with the location of Sungei MENJELANG, as shown on the 1940 map copied to us by Judy Balcombe.

Given the estimated location of the ship when it sank and the 'evidence' from survivor accounts the conclusion of this researcher is that – on balance but not conclusively – the evidence points in greater probability to the campsite and location of the massacre of the women and stretcher wounded being just north of TG. BETUMPAH and the site of the massacre of the two groups of men probably in either of the two 'coves' on TG. Betumpah.

Sources:

- **Barton** – the official report held in the UK national Archives by Lt R.E. Barton, captain of the “SS. Vyner Brooke”
- **BPPL** = List of people from Singapore and Malaya with their last known situation prepared in Changi prison camp during 1942 by Mr. Jack Bennett (aged about 45 years and described as a merchant with the General Import/Export Borneo Co., internee # 386 in Changi) from internees in Changi Civilian internment camp and POWs and Internees passing through that camp in Singapore during 1942. The list is recorded in tiny “Pinpoint” writing on eighteen sheets of ‘Jeyes’ toilet paper that is unreadable to the naked eye. It is held in the National Archives of the United Kingdom and is a unique and invaluable record of the last known sightings of many missing men.
- **BYE** –the book “By Eastern Windows” by William H. McDougall Jr.
- **Coolies** – the book “White Coolies” by Betty Jeffrey.
- **CORD** – Colonial Office Register of Deaths
- **Cross** – list prepared by Mrs. E Cross, a Swiss internee in Palembang married to a British immigration officer in Malaya, of ‘British Internees in Palembang 1942’ with a cipher for each ship on which the internees had travelled from Singapore
- **CWGC** – the records on the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
- **Goldberg** – the report by Dr Anne Marie Goldberg – Curth held in National Archives of Australia, ‘472 WO 30744, pp 104-06, listing the names of survivors she knew of on her raft and in internment camps, plus those who died in ‘Mundok’ and ‘Luebok Lingoe’ camps
- **JMM** – The ‘Malayans’ database compiled by Jonathan Moffatt, author and researcher.
- **MMPM** – The Muntok Memorial Peace Museum website
- **ORB** – the book “On Radji Beach” by Ian W. Shaw.
- **SD** – the book “Singapore’s Dunkirk” by Geoffrey Brooke published in 1989.
- **SOS** – the book “Song of Survival” by Helen Colijn published 1997.
- **SUM** – database of Sumatra internees on the Malayan Volunteer Group website
- **SCOTVB** – the book “A Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke” by Ralph Armstrong
- **SFPMA** – the newspaper archives at the website of the Singapore National Library containing past copies of the “Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser”.
- **ST** – the newspaper archives at the website of the Singapore National Library containing the past copies of the “Straits Times”.
- **SYER** – Nurse Ada Syers (later married name Corbitt), Oral History recording, AWM, ID # SO 4057
- **Tebbutt** – official report comprising five pages compiled by Major William Alston Tebbutt, Intelligence Officer, AIF, whilst in Changi POW camp later in the War and held in the National Archives of Australia (NAA. B3856, 144/1/346).
- **WBTW** – the book “Women Beyond The wire” by Lavinia Warner and John Sandilands published in 1982

- Importantly amongst the sources used is the list on the next page which appears to have been compiled in Palembang camp by internees of people who were on the ship; but believed by the internees to have been killed, or considered "Missing" (source is the UK National Archives),

"VYNER BROOKE."

NAME	ADDRESS	REMARKS.
WADDLE	MRS RAFFLES GIRLS SCHOOL S'PORE	LAST SEEN IN LIPBOGAT. WOUNDED. HEAD T HAND. 30
WATSON	MRS. KUALA LUMPUR.	
SIMMONS	MRS MATAN - ST ANDREWS HOSP. S'PORE.	
STANLEY	WILLIAM. VICTORIA HOUSE. VICTORIA ST. LONDON.	SEEN IN WATER.
GOODING	MR SAM. STRAITS TRADING Co. Penang.	DEAD BODY SEEN IN SEA.
PARFITT	MRS. KLANG	
FRATT	MR J. SEREMBAN.	SEEN ON SHIP. BOTH LEGS SHOT OFF.
MADDEN	MR JB. TAIPING	WOUNDED IN BACK & ILL.
WATSON	E.C. JUDGE. IPOH.	LEFT ON BEACH - DEAD.
SPRENGER	MISS OLGA. POPU ENGLISH SCHOOL. K.F.	BELIEVED DROWNED.
WALKER	MR & MRS. P. & J. RAFF. S'PORE.	
GLENCROSS	MRS	of COMMERCIAL UNION S'PORE
BETTERIDGE	MR & MRS. HALLAM. & Co. K.F.	SEEN ON BOARD.
CARR	MISS. 40 TRENGROVE & Co. K.F.	" " "
ANGUS.	MRS. MISS & 2 BOYS. SINGAPORE.	
PEARSON	MRS (SIAMSE).	
RITCHIE	MRS. BOARDING HOUSE - OXLEY RD. S'PORE.	
CHAN	DENYS SON OF MRS CHAN JOO KIM S'PORE.	
MUSTELL	SISTER MALAYAN NURSING SERVICE.	
STRANGE	DAPHNE .. .. .	LAST SEEN IN WATER

at any rate supply, so far as you can, the information about each individual, or would be greatly appreciated. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,  
M. R. N. V. R.,  
Lavinia  
Springhill Road,  
Wakool

Large Encl  
Subscribed  
A. H. ...

Anyone who has corrections, amendments, clarifications or additional material on the passengers of the 'SS. Vyner Brooke' is most welcome to contact the researcher and compiler of this document: Michael Pether, 2/23 Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland, 0622, New Zealand. Email [mncpether@gmail.com](mailto:mncpether@gmail.com). Telephone number is New Zealand 09-4865754 or mobile New Zealand 0274543695.

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The above is Part One of a two-part document designed to be accessible on the Internet. Part Two consists of the Vyner Brooke's passenger list and can be accessed [HERE](#).