

AUSTRALIAN WAR CRIMESBOARD OF INQUIRY

X/

SISTER VIVIAN BULLWINKEL, sworn:

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: What is your name, Sister?---Vivian Bullwinkel.

What is your rank?---Lieutenant.

And I understand your number is VFX.61330?---Yes.

And your unit 2/13 A.G.H.?---Yes.

When did you leave Australia?---2nd September 1941.

Where did you go from here?---To Singapore.

How long were you at Singapore?---I was at Singapore about a month.

Where did you go from there?---I then went up to Jahore Bahru and was there from November until about 25th January 1942, then back to Singapore Island.

How long were you there?---From 25th January till 12th February.

And what happened?---On the 12th February we were sent down to the wharf to embark on the Viner Brook.

Have you any knowledge of any war crimes or atrocities committed during your stay in Singapore?---No.

What happened on the 12th February?---On the 12th February we boarded the Viner Brook at about 5 o'clock and sailed down the harbour.

You knew where you were going?---No, we were told that we might be going to Batavia.

Were you long at sea?---We sailed all day Friday and on Saturday morning at about a quarter past two pm three planes appeared over us.

On the 14th February was that?---Yes, and they machine gunned and bombed the boat and she commenced to sink.

Where were you then?---In the Banka Straits about 10 miles from land. We had been told that all civilians were to go over first and we were to await orders. The civilians were to go first and Patron Drummond told us to go over. There were about 12 Sisters on this part of the boat at the time. We went over and there was a submerged lifeboat beside the ship. We got into it.

Were there any injured Sisters there at the time?---Yes, there were three injured Sisters, Sister Neuss, Sister Wight and Sister Salmon.

About how many would there have been in the boat?---There would be about 12 Sisters, and these other three, and a ship's officer.

Who were the other three?---There were two civilian women and the husband of one of them, one was Miss Beaston of the

Education Department, Singapore.

You had 12 Sisters, two civilian women and one man, plus the officer?---Yes.

What followed?---We reached land about half past ten and about two miles further down the coast there was a fire that had been lit by a previous boat that had come in. We went down there to get help and to bring the Sisters down to the fire, and we all eventually got to the fire about midnight. Whilst there a third boat from the Viner Brook arrived bringing civilian women and about four or five Sisters.

BY HIS HONOUR: Do you know the names of those Sisters?---Yes, Farmaner, Fairweather, Malligan, Stewart and Neats.

What did you do then?---We spent the night by the fire and it was decided next morning to try and get help, so one party of men went to one light house; and, there was a second party who went to a second lighthouse; and, a third party consisting of about four civilian women and six Sisters and a ship's officer went inland to a village to try to get information and help.

Were you with that party that went inland?---Yes, I went inland.

Can you tell us the names of the members of that party?---I can tell you most of the. There was Mr. Sedgeman, the ship's officer; Nurse Malligan; Nurse Bridge, Nurse Kerr, Nurse Tate, Nurse Harris, myself, Miss Rossi, Mrs. Hutchins, Mrs. Langdon Williams. So the native women gave us drink whilst there but the men would not let them give us anything to bring away in the way of food or clothing. We returned to the beach and one party from the lighthouse returned but the other party we learned later had been taken prisoner.

Do you know the name of the village to which you went?---No, but it was about four miles inland from the beach. The position was put to the entire party on the beach.

Who put the position to the party?---The ship's officer, Mr. Sedgeman; he explained the position that the Japanese were on the island and that there was no way of getting away, that there was no food on the island and that the only thing to do was to give ourselves up. Everybody was agreeable to that. That night there was shelling out to sea and two hours later a lifeboat arrived with about 20 Englishmen from the English Ordnance Corps.

Did you make contact with the party?---Yes.

Do you know any of the party's name?---I know the name of one of them - Kingsley. They were told the position and what had happened on the island and they agreed that it was best to give ourselves up the next morning.

BY MR. CUFIAIDGE: How many were in that boatload?---About 20 to 25.

about how many people altogether were on the beach?---By this time there would be about 100 men, women and children.

What happened the next morning?---The next morning Mr. Sedgeman went over to Lantok to get the Japanese to come and collect the party and take us over. While he was away Patron Drummond who had taken charge of the women suggested that the civilian women and children should commence on the way so that there would not be so many walking off to the jungle path. They had a Chinese doctor named Tey but the Japs were on his track and he committed suicide later on.

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About 10 o'clock in the morning Mr. Sedgeman arrived back with a Japanese party consisting of about 20. They separated the men from the women in two bunches and the ship's officer tried to tell them we were giving ourselves up as prisoners of war. They just ignored him.

BY HIS HONOUR: How were those Japanese dressed?---They all had khaki shirts and trousers after the style of Jollipurs and little caps with a star in front of them and they all carried rifles with bayonets on them. I did not see any small arms on them. The one in charge was only a small fellow and was dressed very nattily and much tidier than the others. The suit he had on seemed to have been tailored.

Did he have any insignia?---He carried a sword. Afterwards we found out that those who carried swords were supposed to be officers.

You did not know the names of any of them?---No.

You have no idea what Japanese Unit it was?---No, only that they belonged to the first lot that ever arrived at Bangka. They arrived only the morning before, because the remainder of our girls who came in on rafts actually arrived before the Japanese landed.

The Japanese, you say, ignored Sedgeman?---Yes.

In what way?---They just brushed him aside.

X Then what happened?---They took half the men down the beach about 100 yards behind the headland. There would be about 25 of them. Then they came back and took the remainder of the men down the same direction. I suppose they were away five or ten minutes. Then they came back and sat down in front of us and cleaned their rifles and bayonets. Two men escaped Mr. Eric German an American and a naval rating Lloyd (Eng).

X Did you hear any firing while they were away?---We heard some shots from that direction.

Did you notice the condition of their bayonets when they returned?---No; they were wiping them on a piece of rag or a handkerchief.

X How far away were the men taken?---100 yards.

Did you hear any screaming?---No.

X How many shots were there?---Just a quick succession of them; we did not count them. Then they came back and sat in front of us and when they had finished cleaning their rifles and bayonets they stood up and the one in charge suggested that we should go towards the sea and he sent a couple of Japs to push us along. We went towards the sea and kept walking in and when we got up to our waists they starting firing up and down the line with a machine gun.

Did the firing come from those two Japanese or from others?---From others, who were up underneath the trees a matter of 20 or 30 yards away.

X How many of them?---There was only the one machine gun. They just swept up and down the line and the girls fell one after the other. I was towards the end of the

line and a bullet got me in the left loin and went straight through and came out towards the front. The force of it knocked me over into the water and there I lay. I did not lose consciousness.

Can you swim?---No.

You say the water was up to your waist?---Yes, but the waves swept me back. It was rather rough.

About how many women were in your party?---There were 23 including myself - 22 nurses and one civilian.

What did they do with the other women and children?---They passed them on the way and told them to wait until they returned; but the women got tired of waiting and went on and reached Kuntok before the Japanese party overtook them.

You did not lose consciousness - then what happened?---The waves brought me back on to the edge of the water. I lay there 10 minutes and everything seemed quiet. I sat up and looked around and there was no sign of anybody. Then I got up and went up in the jungle and lay down and either slept or was unconscious for a couple of days. I slept mostly because I remember waking up at odd times.

Was you wound paining?---It was at times, but not so badly that I could not move around. This was about the Wednesday. On the Wednesday I came down to get a drink of water and while I was on my way an Englishman sang out to me.

You say there was water there?---Yes, two fresh water springs near the beach about a dozen yards from where I was shot. The English soldier, whose name was Kingsley came along and I joined him. He had been bayoneted in the middle part of the chest and he also had a number of shrapnel wounds and the upper part of his arm blown away, which occurred during the shelling of the ship on the Sunday night. He mentioned that he was lying on the stretcher the men had made for him and they just bayoneted him as he lay there.

He was not in the party that was taken away from yours?---No, he was not marched off; they left him behind.

And they bayoneted him on the stretcher?---Yes, I did what I could for him. He was not able to walk around at all; so I decided to go back into the village again where I had been previously. I went back there and the women gave me some rice, fish and pineapple, which I rationed out with the Englishman.

You do not know what day that was?---Kingsley told me it was a Wednesday when I asked him what day it was. The shooting happened on the Monday and this was Wednesday. After getting the food Kingsley having also rested was beginning to pick up a bit. Then we decided that the best thing to do was to give ourselves up or else die of starvation. We got as far as the village and they gave us some more rice and we decided to go the next day to Kuntok. This village was three or four miles inland from the beach and Kuntok was another village four miles in. When we were on the road to Kuntok a car containing a Jap Naval Officer and a Jap soldier picked us up and searched us, pointing a revolver at us, and ordered us into the car and took us to Headquarters. The Captain there asked questions such as how long I had been in

Singapore, when we left Singapore and what had happened to the boat, how long we had been on Banka Island and who advised us to come into Muntok.

Did he have an interpreter?---Only through the Japanese soldier, who spoke very little English.

Did you tell him what had happened to the party?---No. I just answered his questions. When I found out there were Europeans in a camp I decided not to say where I had been. I told him we had been wandering about the jungle and that the natives advised us to come in. I did not mention the murder on the beach or being there at the time.

After questioning, we were given something to eat and we were taken separately round to the coolie lines where they had other servicemen that they had captured together with civilian men and women.

Did they give any attention to your wounds?---No; the wound was practically healed by then and did not need much attention at all. We were advised there by Mr. Wootton not to mention the story to anybody or talk about it openly; so we did not.

What was the accommodation in these coolie lines?---I was only there two days and it was very overcrowded from what I saw.

What do you call the coolie lines?---It was a place where the coolies when they were being sent to the mines were stationed as a staging depot. They had not given us any covering and what we did receive was given by the British women who still had some of their luggage with them. The food was plain rice twice a day, about 11 A.M. and 4.30 p.m. and a hot cup of tea about 6 at night.

How much rice?---Quite a good handful.

Were you hungry?---Yes.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: Did you do any work there at all?---No, the women did not. The men went out in working parties, but the women did not do any work at all.

Do you know what those working parties were for?---Mostly cleaning up the damage that had been done by the bombing.

You saw the men doing that?---We did not actually see them; they told us that.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: What was the discipline like at that place?---They did not do anything very much to the women; it was mostly the men who got it. They were knocked about, kicked, slapped and punched.

You saw that?---Yes; several men whose names I do not know were taken out and never came back to camp again and we just heard stories of what happened to them.

How long did you remain there?---Until 2nd March; then we went to Palembang.

Who went there?---Only the women and 9 men who were husbands of some of those women. There were about 200 including children.

Do you remember any of the names of any of those who survived?
---I have been with them all the time ever since.
There were some Australians, a Mrs. Conates, of
Adelaide, a Mrs. Parkes, of Sydney, a Mrs. Lowell
a New Zealander and Mrs. Owen, another New Zealander.

A number of them died - can you say from what cause?---Only
through lack of food, starvation and the results of
beri beri and malaria - malnutrition.

Were you at Palembang until the surrender of the Japs?---No,
we had several camps. We were in Palembang first
of all in houses - 20 to 30 people to each house and
we did our own cooking.

BY MR. CUPPAIDGE: Did you have any furniture or bedding in
those houses?---No, they had all been looted before we
went into them.

What food did you receive?---Just rice and vegetables.

Was any clothing issued to you?---Only what was given to us by
some of the Dutch residents.

Was any medical attention provided?---No.

Were you required to work?---No, we did not have any working
parties.

Was your property respected or not?---No, they took fountain
pens and watches if they saw any.

BY HIS HONOUR: They did not offer to buy them?---No.

BY MR. CUPPAIDGE: Were canteens provided?---No.

Were you allowed to write and receive letters?---No.

Were you required to salute Japanese?---No.

How was discipline enforced?---Mainly by threats.

Any blows?---A fair amount of face slapping of the women.

Was it hard slapping?---Yes, quite hard, on both sides.

Were any injuries inflicted?---A couple of women lost one or
two teeth and got black eyes.

What was the sanitation?---Ordinary septic tanks to the houses
but owing to the overcrowding they could not cope with
it.

What about a water supply?---It was rather poor. The camp was
built on a hill and the houses on the hill did not get
any water at all. We had to go down the hill to
carry water up. It was while in that camp that
the "Club" came up. A number of officers commenced a
club and told us we were expected to go along and we
all refused.

BY HIS HONOUR: Who told you that you were expected to go along
there?---It was a Japanese officer whose name I do not
know.

Could you recognize him?---No.

About how many of you were told to go?---They wanted seven or
eight. We refused to go at first and then they

threatened. We decided that if anyone went the whole lot would go. When they opened the club they sent for us to go and 23 altogether went along and when we got there there were about 6 Japanese officers and they offered us drink and cigarettes, which we refused. They talked amongst themselves and we talked amongst ourselves and then, half an hour afterwards, excused ourselves. In the meantime a man in charge, Mr. Iyachi, a Jap on the civilian side, when we were going out asked us to stop because he wanted to say a few words to us and he told us he thought it would be for our own good if four or five of the girls stayed behind as the Japs wanted them to. He said it was through them that we would get food. He said that the Army was in full control of the food supply on the island and he could not do anything about it. He told us it would be for our own good if the girls stayed behind and talked with them. Finally four of the girls volunteered to stay behind to talk it over. We left and then they came back and told us that there was a doctor who could speak English. He said if we did not go to the club there would be no food. The girls said they did not care and that they would sooner die of starvation. The talk went on the same way all the time. At the same time a Mrs. Chan, who was acting as hostess to the Japanese, and who was married to a Chinese talked to us. She was an English woman with a bit of French in her. She married a Chinese in Singapore. Katron Drummond had been good to her and this woman took us under her eye and held the attention of the Japs, meantime telling the girls to leave and get back to their houses. She talked to the Japanese for the rest of the evening and the next day, knowing ^{of} some Eurasian women, told the Japs that they would go to the club. Then we were left alone after that.

We sent word down through a German woman married to an English man to Air Commodore Modin, who reported the matter to the Japanese General who was there, who made his apologies and removed all the officers from the camp. We did not see any more of them.

Is that all that happened in that camp?---I think that is all there.

What happened in September, 1943 when you moved?---We moved into the civilian camp.

You say someone had had teeth knocked out; do you know the names of any so treated?---Mrs. Venning, a Dutch woman; she also had a black eye. I was in the civilians mens camp and Yamasaki was the Camp Commandant.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE:

What was your accommodation there?---We lived in long bamboo huts holding about 50 or 60 people.

Was it sufficient?---It was overcrowded, but not very much so.

Was it in a filthy condition?---No, fairly clean.

What about the sanitation?---Just over open pits and rather short of water. We had three wells, but being a dry season they soon dried up and we had to go down a quarter of a mile along the road to a hydrant and carry buckets of water for the entire camps cooking and to fill the Japanese baths and tongs for them. Then at the same

garden. Most of the water carrying that was done for the garden made us short otherwise and we scarcely had enough for cooking and water to drink. We were allowed about 1 1/2 pints of water for bath and washing of clothes each day.

What hours did you work?---In the first period we used to come out at 5 in the morning till 7 and then from 9 till 11, again from 4 till 5 in the afternoon. That was the period for digging the gardens and between two and 4 o'clock we used to carry the water for the camp.

Did they pay you?---No.

Did they give you any of the produce of the gardens?---Half the camp got produce from it. We were moved to Senka Island and the first party did not have any; but those who remained behind actually got some produce of the garden.

It was in this Camp in April, 1944, that the Military took us over under Captain Suki.

Was he a Marine?---He was in the Army.

Did you know any other officers there?---In that camp there was Mishimoto and Ishimara.

How did they behave?---Ishimara was very fond of face slapping and pushing and it was then they told us we had to commence bowing to every rank.

B. HIS HONOUR: I suppose you would know these men again?---Yes, I would know them.

Were they there when you were released?---No.

You do not know the unit to which they belonged?---No.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: Can you give a specific instance regarding either of these two?---One day Sister Cram and myself were coming back from a gardening period and we did not notice Mishimoto there and did not bow; so we were called up and he spoke to us severely in Malay. Then he stood us in the sun for about an hour without our hats and after an hour he called us in and asked us why we had not bowed. He asked us this through an interpreter, a Dutch woman. After we explained we had not seen him and that we were sorry, he let us go with a warning. On another occasion four of them were left standing in the sun - two nurses, Sister Raymond, Sister Smith, Mrs. Dixie and Mrs. Jennings and they were knocked about.

How were they knocked about?---They had their faces slapped and punched by Ishimara.

Did they lose any teeth?---No.

Did they get black eyes?---No.

Were they scarred?---Their faces were rather swollen for a day or two, with nasty red marks.

BY MR. CULLEN: What followed?---At about that time we had the first air raid in 1944 and their attitude changed immediately. All face slapping stopped and we were left by them alone comparatively.

Did they expose you to the air raids particularly?---No, but they did not do anything to protect us. They had their own anti aircraft guns, they had several around the camp. But there was no protection for us whatsoever.

There was no sign made visible that you were P.O.W.?---No.

Did you ask for one?---Yes, we asked for the camp to be illuminated and a Red Cross put on the hospital but they did not do anything about it.

Who made that request?---The British Commandant.

Who was he?---It was a Mrs. Hinch.

What happened in October 1944?---They decided to take us to Banka Island.

BY HIS HONOUR: Were there any I.O.W. injured in the bombing?---No, not in that raid. They took us across to Banka Island where we found the camp very clean and rather nice and quite roomy, but, there was no light or water. There were eight or nine wells but they were all dry.

Were there any medical supplies?---There were no medical supplies there at all. It was there that malaria got hold of everybody and beri-beri and the deaths commenced. Up till then we had had very decent health.

How was the food supply?---The food had been cut down considerably - to 150 grains of rice and very little vegetables and quite often for weeks we were without any vegetables whatever.

Was there anything supplied in substitution for rice when that was out down?---No. They allowed fruit to come in if we had money.

Had you any money?---Some of us managed to earn a little by working for the Dutchpeople.

Did they allow to work for Dutch civilians?---Yes, but I do not think they knew anything about it; we did it on our own accord. It was here that we had to commence digging our own graves and making coffins.

Were there many deaths?---There were two or three every day.

Can you recollect the names of the dead?---I can recollect some of them.

Were there any Australians?---There was Miss Frowse. All the rest were British. I remember a Mrs. Russell Robins.

Did you have any doctors there?---There were four doctors.

Who were they?---There was a German jewess, Dr. Colberg. She seemed to have charge of the hospital and all supplies.

She seemed to do anything that would bring her anything from the Japs. There was Dr. McDowell, an Scotch and Dr. Thompson, Scotch, and Dr. Smith, English.

What killed these women?---Malaria principally, through lack of quinine.

Was there no medicine?---They brought us some quinine bark but not sufficient.

Would malnutrition be a contributing feature?---Yes.

Were there many deaths from that?---Yes.

And from malaria?---Yes.

Were there any ulcers?---There were no deaths from ulcers; there were ulcers but not many, yet a few were very bad.

How bad?---They were very large and deep.

Were they exposing the bone?---Yes.

But you are not stressing this?---No, Nobody lost their lives and there were no amputations. At this camp we went into hospital, 14 of us; the Dutch Sisters could not cope with the work. We did not get any pay for this.

Did your conditions improve when you went there?---No.

Did you get any more food?---No.

How would your weight be affected?---Our weight was affected; they weighed us every month.

With what result?---Everybody seemed to lose next to half a stone and down to about perhaps four or five pounds.

What was your normal weight?---Ten stone.

And what did you weigh under these conditions?---My lowest weight was eight stone.

You worked in the hospital during what hours?---To begin with we worked about four or five hours every day.

You were not paid for your work?---No, not until the military took us over and then they paid the entire camp 4 guilders 50 cents. That commenced 1st April 1944.

Did they provide a canteen?---No, but they allowed fruit to come into the camp to buy.

What amount of fruit would they provide?---Not very much.

What class of fruit?---It would be principally banana, one between two would be the daily average; usually small green bananas.

You spent the whole of your money in fruit?---Yes, it would be about the only food worth buying.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: Where did you go from that camp?---We went to Loeboklin gau in April 1945. The trip across was the worst we had ever had. It was by boat. We were 36 hours on the boat but the boat could not come into the pier. We went over into the hospital - we had to load all our patients from the pier to a launch and from the launch to the boat. It was a small boat and there were about 400 sick people, stretcher cases included, on the deck without any shelter at all. There were stretcher cases on the deck without shelter and altogether there were 400 people sick aboard.

How much water was provided?---There was a small bottle for each person for the entire trip; there was a fair amount of rice, but there was no shelter nor room nor sanitary arrangements.

Were there any women on board?---Yes, and the crew.

How did they behave?---Quite decently. We lost about 12 women through death on that ship.

12 out of how many?---Out of 400.

What cause their deaths?---Exposure to the sun. They were all sick women and being exposed on the deck and without medical supplies or water, and a tropical sun was just too much for them.

BY HIS HONOUR: They died from sunstroke evidently?---Yes.

And it was evidently through their emacipated conditions?---Yes. We buried one at sea and the others were buried when we got back to Palembang.

Did the Japanese on board pay the women any attention?---No.

The Dutch Sisters did not help them at all?---Yes. They were two nights and a day in train. I had to leave and go 15 miles to a plantation where the camp was.

BY MR. CUFFAIDGE: Who was in charge of this camp?---Capt. Suki. Sergeant Shigemura had most to do with us.

How did he behave?---He was quite objectionable in a way, he hit people with a stick he carried around with him. I saw him beat a woman one day and there was a lot of face slapping.

Were any of the other guards or officers objectionable?---Mano was objectionable in the same sense - face slapping, and making people stand about in the sun.

BY HIS HONOUR: For long periods?---Anything up to an hour.

Would it be women all the time?---Yes.

Would there be any men?---Yes, the Malayan guards -

How did the guards behave?---They never did any face slapping, they used to shout and scream at people but they did not slap them.

What was the accommodation there?---Bamboo huts. There was more crowding than the previous camps, frightfully muddy and filthy.

What vegetation?---Very poor.

What was the food like?---There was rice and vegetable with very little rice or vegetables. Actually on the shore there was a banana plantation and ferns and grass which the natives told us we could eat.

Were they edible?---Yes, we used to cook them.

Were there any clothes?---Not until after peace was declared.

What about medical supplies?---No, not until after peace was declared.

Would these provisions be there before peace was declared?---The clothing and medical supplies, yes. It was the very day after they told us peace had been declared that they gave us tins and tins of butter per person and bottles and bottles of quinine, yards and yards of material. It was the very next day and there was so much of it they must have had it there all the time. They only previously issued us with Army clothes and boots after peace.

During the last stage, do you remember any guards who behaved badly?---No, Captain Suki was in charge then.

Did anything happen after that?---No.

MR. GILLARD: What work were you required to do?---Chopping down trees and carrying wood into the camp, grave digging, and the women cut down the trees.

MR. HIS HONOUR: Were they big trees?---Yes.

Would the timber be tough?---No, not terribly tough, it could have been a lot tougher.

What hours did you work on them?---Very short hours, because the women simply could not do it; after two hours' work they just had to lie down. They could not stand up.

Were you beaten for lying down?---No.

This is the 13th and last sheet of the evidence of VIVIAN BULLMINKEL taken and sworn before me at Melbourne in the State of Victoria this 20th day of October 1945.

VIVIAN BULLMINKEL
Deponent.

H. WEBB
Chairman
Australian Board of
Inquiry into War Crimes