

SELAMAT PAGI

THE BANGKA ISLAND & SUMATRA NEWSLETTER

<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>

EDITION 2

JUNE 2024



Dawn Service – ANZAC Day 25th April 2024



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*If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.
If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.
When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.*

We are delighted that the first edition of "Salamat Pagi" the Bangka Island newsletter has been well received. It is very encouraging to receive positive feedback. We hope the information and research will be of help to those whose relatives were tragically killed during enemy action or died in captivity in Japanese hands.

On ANZAC Day, 25th April, for the first time, a traditional dawn service was held at the Nurses' Memorial at the Tanjong Kelian Lighthouse in Muntok, to commemorate those who lost their lives in and around Bangka Island. The idea of holding this service was proposed by **Gaby Kiwarkis**, a retired soldier from the 5/7 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. It was attended by a group of retired servicemen from this Regiment with their families as well as **Mr. Tim Stapleton** from the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and local officials from Muntok. Also at the Service were **Arlene Bennett** from Melbourne and **Carol Rowe** from the U.K. A full report by **Judy Balcombe**, who arranged the service but sadly was unable to attend due to illness, is given on P. 3. We thank her for all her work in organising both services this year.

We also thank **Gareth Owen** for the information on his website – gtowentranslations.com – about the Bangkinang Camp on the mainland of Sumatra, about which very little is known. **Gareth's** late father was one of about 50 British men in this camp which contained mainly Dutch civilians. As with so many prisoners of the Japanese, he was never able to talk about his experiences, but **Gareth** found an account in Dutch by one of the internees. He was able to translate the book into English, using his knowledge of Dutch and Afrikaans, and with the help of **Professor Ernst Kotze** of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Formerly the University of Port Elizabeth) and a **Mr. and Mrs. Kindermans**. This can now be read on his website (above). Entitled, "**Prisoner on the Equator**" by **Arie Kuijl** ('Opgeborgen bij de Evenaar') it details the prison camp conditions. [See P.9 for extracts from the book].

We are grateful to **Diane Whitehead**, who is a retired Fellow of the College of Nursing, Australia, for sending us an article from *The Hive* magazine about **Vivian Bullwinkel**, the unveiling of her statue and The Bullwinkel Project.

Diane also says – "*The sculpture shows Vivian in the war-time uniform of a nursing sister in the Australian Army Nursing Service, but shows her cape adorned with her decorations and awards received during her service. Joining her collar is the Australian Army's 'rising sun' badge. On the left breast, her MBE, the ARRC (Associate Royal Red Cross) and 3 Campaign Service Medals:- Pacific Star, War medal and Australia Service Medal. The uniform buttons of dark metal are patterned with a map of Australia. On the right breast is featured the Florence Nightingale Medal. This is a non-military award so is worn separately. It is awarded by the International F.N. Foundation for distinguished service to nursing.*

The official portrait of Vivian hangs in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. For this she is wearing the post-WW2 uniform of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC) where she held the rank of Lt. Colonel. The nursing service became incorporated into the Australian Army as a special Corps several years after WW2. The RAANC badge is worn on her uniform collar. The silver-coloured buttons feature a crown over a stylised lamp (symbolizing the original 'Lady with a Lamp' – Florence Nightingale – of Crimea fame and founder of modern nursing).

Diane added – *“The photograph of Vivian Bullwinkel’s official portrait hangs in the 2nd WW gallery of the Australian War Memorial. A postcard of it was sent out as part of the publicity to raise funds for the proposed sculpture.*

Vivian’s career was extraordinary. After ALL her experiences as a member of 2/13 AGH during the war and all that that entailed, she then joined the staff of the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and continued on in the Army as Nursing Reserve. Later she became Matron, or Director of Nursing, at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, where she did so much to improve nursing education and patient care. The air-lift rescue of Vietnamese orphans was another great venture with Vivian and her nurses landing in Saigon during the Vietnamese War. They brought dozens of these babies and children to Fairfield for urgent medical care. It hit the news headlines in Melbourne! There was a ‘happy ending’ as these children grew up and integrated into the community as worthwhile Australian citizens.

*During Vivian’s time at Fairfield, she also became President of the then Royal College of Nursing, Australia, and continued as Lt. Col. in the RAANC Reserve. She also met **Col. Frank Statham** whom she later married, living in Perth WA as **Mrs. Statham**. Vivian continued to shine her light in various pursuits. A new biography of **Vivian Bullwinkel** has recently been published – **Sister Viv** by **Grantlee Kieza** – shedding more light on her remarkable life.*

*When Vivian, now Mrs. Statham, moved to Perth, she was invited to join the Ionian Club by **Cara Kelson**. Through this friendship, other links developed ... Vivian’s tape of the Vocal Orchestra music and **Norah Chambers**. **Cara**, a retired concert pianist, had studied at the Royal Academy of Music as did **Norah**, so a wondrous friendship ensued. Vivian and **Cara** later spear-headed the **Song of Survival** concert in Perth, WA in 1990, which commemorated the 45th Anniversary of the release of the AANS nurses from prison camp in Sumatra. It is through the Vocal Orchestra music that many of us have been drawn together and precious friendships enjoyed.”*

Diane has kindly donated some of her old army uniforms to the displays in Muntok – her grey uniform dress to the Vivian Bullwinkel Gallery in the Tinwinning Museum and her red cape to the Muntok Peace Museum.

We thank **Jane Roy** – publications manager at *The Hive* magazine – for giving us permission to use **Julijana Trifunovic’s** article about the unveiling and The Bullwinkel Project. The article is on P. 18. **Please note** on P.2 of the first edition of ***Salamat Pagi*** it was incorrectly stated that Vivian Bullwinkel’s statue was outside the Australian College of Nursing. It is, in fact, in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, ACT.

We also thank MVG’s secretary in Australia, **Elizabeth Adamson**, for putting us in touch with **John Lyon**, **Dr. Marjorie Lyon’s** brother, and we now have his permission to include extracts from her comprehensive War Time Diaries. See P. 20.

On Sunday 12th May, 2024, in Wymondham, Norfolk, U.K. the annual ecumenical service for FEPOW and Civilian Internees was held at the Church of Our Lady and St. Thomas of Canterbury. The Church was built by **Fr. M.L. Cowin**, a former FEPOW in Thailand, as a ‘Living Memorial’ to all those who died in Japanese Prisoner-of- War and Internment Camps during World War 11. The services were started in 1992 on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the Relief of Rangoon on 14th May 1945. Wreath laying by representatives from various Far East Groups takes place in the side Chapel dedicated to all FEPOWs. Included in the ceremony is the laying of the ABCIFER Standard on the chapel rails. Now disbanded, ABCIFER was the Association of former British Civilian Internees Far East Region. Their members had all been interned by the Japanese. The Epilogue was given by **Peter Wiseman**, Archivist and Historian for the Church, in which he said, *“This ‘Living Memorial’ Church was built to cherish the memory of all FEPOWs and Civilian Internees of WW11. It embodies those things they never knew in their last days: peace, quiet and cleanliness amidst the cool, soft air of Prayer.”*

After the service, the 80 strong congregation was invited to tea in the Parish Hall where old acquaintances were renewed and new ones made.

Since 2017, a Memorial Service has been held every February 16 to remember the Australian Army Nurses from the SS Vyner Brooke – 12 who died in the bombing, 21 killed on Radji Beach, 8 who died in prison camp and the 24 who were imprisoned but returned home. Also remembered are the civilians and 60 British and New Zealand servicemen killed on Radji Beach, the many now known to have been killed in other massacres along the shore of Bangka Island and the 1000's who died in the bombing of over 100 vessels leaving Singapore. The Memorial Service remembers the local population who suffered during War, the 100's of civilians of many nationalities in the prison camps, British Army Nurses and Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia's Official Representative to Singapore who was executed in Muntok on February 17, 1942.

This year for the first time, an ANZAC Day Service was held in Muntok on April 25. ANZAC Day is an important national day in Australia, a public holiday to remember servicemen and women who serve in wars and conflict, past and present.

This year's inaugural ANZAC Day Service was initiated by Mr Gaby Kiwarkis, a retired soldier from DELTA Coy 5/7 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. It was attended by a group of retired servicemen from the Regiment and their families, Mr Tim Stapleton, Minister-Counsellor (Economic, Infrastructure and Investment) at the Australian Embassy, Jakarta and his assistant Dwi Christiani, Arlene Bennett, former president of the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne, FEPOW Family member Carol Rowe from the UK, Muntok historian Mr Fakhrizal Abubakar, Mr Dery Aryandi from the Muntok Red Cross, Mrs Sugia Kam from Jebus and other local officials.

The previous day, April 24, the group had joined in a tour of WW2 historical sites in Muntok, visiting the harbour area, the former Customs House where some prisoners had been held on reaching shore, the old cinema building where 1000 prisoners had been gathered for processing and where Mr Vivian Bowden had been murdered in the grounds after speaking out in Japanese to defend

British soldier Frank Brewer. MVG historian Michael Pether has located a document which names British servicemen believed to have been buried in this location and whose remains were not disinterred after the War.

The group then visited the headquarters of the Muntok Red Cross and saw the ambulance which was provided during Covid by donations from Friends of Bangka Island, the Malayan Volunteers Group and others. This ambulance played a vital role in transporting Covid patients 3 hours to the government Covid hospital in Pangkalpinang and is in daily use now assisting the sick. The ambulance has also travelled by car ferry to take patients to the major hospital in Palembang in Sumatra.

The Muntok Red Cross assists in all aspects of health care and prevention. It also helps in emergencies such as fire and regular town flooding. A major role of the Muntok Red Cross is blood collection, with blood used to treat renal dialysis patients and life-threatening haemolytic anaemia from Dengue fever.

Following this, the group moved to see the foundations of the former Coolie Lines and then visited the Muntok Jail. In the first few weeks of internment, prisoners were held in the Coolie Lines and Muntok Jail before being moved to prison camp in Palembang. In September 1943, the Muntok Jail became the Men's Prison Camp. At this time, it was connected to the Coolie Lines by a barbed wire run. Dying men were placed in the Coolie Lines 'hospital' where they were given rice gruel and tended by their friends and Dutch Catholic Brothers.

From the Jail, the group walked to the Timah Museum and viewed the Vivian Bullwinkel Galleri, temporarily moved to the rear of the Museum while it is closed for repairs. Here they saw displays relating to the early days of the War in Muntok, including a video about Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, the sole Australian Army Nurse survivor of the Radji Beach massacre.

Later in the afternoon, a visit was paid to the Sudirman guesthouse opposite the Timah Museum. This lovely old Dutch home was the

house and office of Japanese camp commandant Captain Seiki Kazue during the War. The group viewed the Peace Rose planted by the Australian, New Zealand, British and Japanese Embassies in February 2020, where a plaque now marks this Peace Garden.

In the evening, a Welcome Dinner was held at the Yasmin Hotel, attended by the group, historians, the Muntok Red Cross and other guests. Arlene Bennet gave an illustrated talk on the Vyner Brooke Nurses, which she had given to the FEPOW Medical History Conference in Liverpool in 2023.

The following morning, ANZAC Day, April 25, the group gathered in the dark at 5.30am at the memorial to the Australian Army Nurses at the Tanjong Kelian lighthouse. This is not Radji beach but is the site chosen by Vivian Bullwinkel in 1992 as being more accessible than the remote beach. This lighthouse was a beacon for shipwreck victims trying to reach the shore from the many bombed boats. The wrecks of several boats litter the shoreline here, one of which is likely to be the Siang Wo.

A formal ANZAC Service was held, with an oration, prayers, wreath laying, The Last Post, Ode to the Fallen, a minute's silence, followed by singing of the Indonesian and Australian National Anthems. The sun rose during this memorable Service.

After breakfast at the hotel, the group drove to the Muntok Peace Museum at Kampong Menjelang, the site of the former Women's Prison Camp. Many schoolchildren came to greet the visitors. The Muntok Peace Museum tells the story of the war years in Muntok through items and pictures and hopes to convey the importance of striving for Peace. The Museum has website

<http://muntokpeacemuseum.org> We are always happy to receive material to add to the Museum history.

From here, the group drove to a site to begin the 4-wheel drive bumpy ride though steep and pot-holed roads to Radji Beach. This area was identified by Muntok historians after examining reports by prisoners

of landmarks including 2 streams entering the sea and proximity to a now-abandoned village where they had sought food.

A second formal ANZAC Service was held here on the beach, again with prayers, The Last Post and Ode.

Arlene Bennett read on my behalf Henry Van Dyke's poem, '*Gone From My Sight*', sometimes known as 'The Parable of Immortality', chosen for its references to ships, to dying, to strength and the fact that those killed on Radji Beach, although gone are never forgotten.

What is dying?

I am standing on the seashore.

A ship sails in the morning breeze and starts for the ocean.

She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon and someone at my side says: "She is gone."

Gone!

Where?

Gone from my sight, that is all.

She is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination.

The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her, and just at the moment when someone at my side says,

"She is gone",

There are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout:

"There she comes!"

And that is dying.

The Radji Beach Service concluded with The Radji Beach Ode and Walk for Humanity, where all present hold hands and walk into the

water, as the Australian Army Nurses were said to have done before being shot. Flowers were placed in the water and everyone vowed to help work towards a more Peaceful world.

The Radji Beach Ode:

“On the 16 February 2017, when people from many countries gathered on the beach to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Radji Beach tragedy, 22 modern day Australian Army Nurses joined hands and spontaneously walked into the water in a moving re-enactment of the Australian Nurses walking to their deaths all those years ago.

“This act, as well as the generosity of local Indonesian doctors and nurses who came to conduct their own memorial service, inspired the relatives of those who died, to enshrine the Walk for Humanity as part of every Commemorative event on the beach.

“The Walk for Humanity stands ‘for life’, just as the motto of the modern-day Australian Army Nurses, “pro humanitate”, declares. It stands for unity, our common humanity binding us beyond race, religion, country or culture. The Walk breaks down barriers and builds goodwill and understanding between people.

“The Walk for Humanity also honours the many wonderful people from around Muntok and Bangka Island who experienced great suffering during World War II, and the thousands of military personnel and civilians from many countries who died on and around Muntok and Bangka Island while escaping from Singapore in 1942. It is said that the beaches around Muntok and the Bangka Straits were just one big grave.

*“Above all, the walk is an act of **positive defiance**.*

“Brutality will not have the last word on Radji Beach.”

“Let us now all come to the beach, join hands and walk to the water; remembering all those who suffered so terribly around these waters and on Bangka Island in 1942.”

The Bangka Island ANZAC Services were recorded and can be viewed on YouTube. It is hoped that this inaugural ANZAC Day gathering in Muntok may become a regular event.

TIM STAPLETON FROM THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, JAKARTA, LAYS THE WREATH



ARLENE BENNETT READS THE ADDRESS ON RADJI BEACH



PRISONER ON THE EQUATOR

(Opgeborgen bij de Evenaar)

By Arie Kuijl

With acknowledgement from Gareth Owen to Mr. and Mrs. Kindermans for their help in explaining certain colloquial expressions and to Professor Ernst Kotze for help with translating the Dutch text.

By kind permission of the publishers, Jumbo-Offset, Goes, Netherlands. Slightly abridged and translated from the Dutch.

Introduction

These memoirs were for the most part written directly after liberation. By providing various factual descriptions the book may be used for reference purposes when the occasion arises. It was written with memories of our ordeal fresh in mind and thus the enemy came in for severe criticism and even our own people were not exempt. But now, almost 40 years after liberation, feelings have cooled. However, it would give a false impression if the measure of leniency acquired in the meantime were to be applied and so I have been sparing in my revision of the text. What is remarkable is that former enemies can now work together and visit each other in peace again. It seems to be an unchanging lesson of world history – yesterday's enemy is today's friend. This is fortunate; after all, we all inhabit the same planet.*

[**We draaien toch ook allen op dezelfde bol* – literally, we all pull on the same rope.]

Foreword

I am delighted that now, almost 40 years after liberation from the hands of the Japanese (1942-45), we survivors of the men's camps at Padang Panjang, Padang and Bangkinang are able to recall our former experiences there in book form. Each one of us had to cope with the physical and mental ordeals of camp life in his own way under the heel of the Sons of Dai Nippon – and many still do. Many did not survive internment and now lie buried in one of the graveyards in the Sumatran jungle. And there are many who narrowly escaped but are now no longer with us. In my opinion, the author has given an accurate picture of what happened in the camps and it deserves a wide readership among ex-internees and others.

Dr. J.J.C.H. Waardenburg (Former Internee and Camp Leader.)

SYNOPSIS OF LIFE AS A CIVILIAN INTERNEE

1. Our First Camp: Padangpandjang.

Flight from the jungle. We are interned. Financial arrangements. Catering, purchasing and sports. We learn to adapt. Our numbers increase. Token guards. Study and recreation. Introduction of Camp Money. Optimism about the duration of internment. Dogfights. Meeting outsiders. The Japanese General who didn't arrive. The dining room and eating arrangements. Going for walks. Toilet facilities. Japanese treatment of prisoners. An outing for the boys. We and the women are moved.

2. To the Military Gaol in Padang.

We leave cool Padangpandjang for Padang by way of the Anai Kloof. We arrive at the gaol where we are put into groups. Temporary supplies from the Women's Camp. Problems in the kitchen. Eating according to Dr. Do Little. Typical Dutch complaints. Various free time activities. Compulsory Toilet Fatigue duties. Rank and position are no longer of importance. Money pooled for the benefit of all. Selfishness. Sport, drama and music. Bodies on display. Private purchases instituted. Beds on prescription. The daily price of food. Drink smuggling. The Camp entrance attracts everybody. Our Great Feast in 1942. Four priests but no minister. Armed squads formed after false rumours. The women show us how. The Japanese raid the women's camp. Our secret radio is discovered. Noise and bedtime. Father Christmas in the camp. The Japanese confiscate our money.

3. To Padang Prison.

We join a larger community. Getting used to crowds. Exchange of experiences. Fewer possessions and less and less space and money. Getting used to our new surroundings. Taking care of each other. Courses with primitive aids. Bucket latrines, foul stench and fresh air. Airing our grievances at the weekly meetings. The Japanese find counting difficult. Activities in multi-functional sheds. A group of Britons join us. A glimpse of the sea. Food problems. Shopkeepers of various sorts. The demands of adaptability. The Japanese loot and plunder. We become rice pickers. A plague of bedbugs. A severe earthquake. Translators in demand. Food gets even scarcer. Contact with the Women's Camp.

4. To the Jungle Camp in Bangkinang.

We go deep into the jungle. What a shambles! Inconvenience caused by poor accommodation. Camp police and a camp judge appointed. Minor but unpleasant incidents. Macho-types with the right of veto. The Tiger who could not go into the pot. Anything for a bit of protein! The women arrive in Bangkinang. We are deprived of our view. Medical aid under appalling conditions. Division into four health categories. Achieving the golden mean when doling out food. Rumours concerning reunited families. Amazing the things you can do with iron hoops. Removal of rubber supplies. Introduction of a work schedule. Night visits to the women's camp. Even less food caused by a broken bridge. Dysentery epidemics. Heroic resistance by the women. Much to do for little food. 100 kilos for the Japanese is only 75 for us. Scouting. We make our own clogs. A work creation scheme. Chance contacts with the women's camp. Disposal of the dead. Gardening by turns. Eating with obstructions. Our wretched diet causes much pain and anguish. Booming black markets. Our Buying Committee. Marie, our hot water mobile steam engine. In emergencies your possessions are vulnerable. Idle chatter about vitamins, calories etc. After lice, ants, rats! POWs pass by our camp. Our resident camp leader shows no fear of the Japanese. Wood vegetables prepared by Marie. Setting up the N.O.E.L. Club. We are ordered to go padi stamping. Our two leaders are summoned by the Japanese. Ingenuity is called for. Schooling carried on. Illegal night meals. Making something solid from sago pudding. Occasional parades of the Skeleton Gang. The exceptional status accorded to the British. Meat from the Emperor on the Princess's birthday. We are ordered to pick Cotton. News items obtained from the Japanese.

5. The Sudden End.

The atom bomb saves us. We go to the women's camp. Various necessary measures are taken. Lice and mud to the bitter end. Recreation for the youngsters. Allied aircraft fly over our camp. Liberation celebrations. Behaviour of the Indians towards the population. Trench-digging just before liberation. Lady Mountbatten visits our camp. Our internment as a lesson for life. The Indonesian red and white flag is hoisted with us too. The Chinese too must be aware. Alcohol reappears. We fly to Medan. We get back to normality in Medan. Our shady camp proves to be a safe refuge. Fierce National Movements. More and more military personnel and plenty of food. The KDP and RAPWI also look after the post. The Repatriation Office is set up. Repatriation for almost everybody. The British refuse native food. Permanent waves for ladies becomes a problem. Only for members! The Red Cross renders first class service. Youngsters are well looked after. Terrible violence is evident. The last Japanese luxury. First reports from the Netherlands. Departure and a new beginning.

[Editor: There follows an extract from Chapter 4.]

Chapter 4. To the Jungle Camp in Bangkinang.

We go deep into the jungle.

There were so many different opinions about the date of our eventual liberation that we used to make bets with each other and because we all had so little money we used to say, "Make a note and pay me after the war."

On several occasions rumours had reached our ears that we were going to be moved yet again, but when our guards told us that a transfer to a new place, Bangkinang, was in the offing, then it seemed that the rumours were true. At first, nobody believed it.

Bangkinang? A little place in the wilds of Sumatra – what was going on? But we could get no sense from the Japanese. They would have to transport everything there despite a severe lack of petrol. Besides, where would they accommodate us? However, after more information was forthcoming, we were informed that “almost certainly” we would be moved to Bangkinang.

The Japanese kept silent. But at midday, a few days after the official announcement, a Japanese arrived and told us that vegetables would be brought in during the evening in two day’s time and that we should eat as much as possible. Then more “Sons of Nippon” arrived and “borrowed” our kitchen equipment because they said they had to cater for a number of pilots at the aerodromes but they would return it in a few days. We knew that this meant we would have to prepare ourselves for the journey and indeed, on the following morning, 17th November 1943*, we were ordered to parade and told that some of us would be leaving immediately. We weren’t told where we were going, only that it would take place in two stages.

That day saw a bustle of activity. Everybody started packing up and food had to be prepared in the kitchen for those leaving as all the essentials had to be taken with them. We could be pretty sure that no food would be provided during the next few days so we had to hold out somehow. A few eggs, bananas and other fruits were brought in with which we could make some emergency rations. However, many of us were so pleased to see an egg at last that these “emergency rations” were gobbled up in five minutes. We had almost forgotten what an egg tasted like, even what it looked like!

“What will happen, will happen” many said and indeed they were right. We all tended to worry too much, often about things which later turned out well. We had often nothing to fear except fear itself.

We had to walk to the station a couple of kilometres or so away and everybody planned to take as much as possible with him, carrying it or dragging it with bamboo sticks, ropes and hooks which had somehow been cobbled together. Evening came and the first group was packed up and ready to depart. Some Japanese officers and a number of soldiers had already entered the prison but seemed in no hurry. We were sure that our journey would take place at night and that they were waiting until darkness fell and indeed, as soon as it got dark, we had to parade with all our stuff. However, this was easier said than done because some had a lot of stuff, others little. The soldiers quickly became impatient and started hitting and kicking us and the whole parade descended into chaos. Marching orders were then given and we staggered out of the front gate. Now we discovered that we had vastly underestimated the weight of our belongings. Bamboo sticks fractured, ropes parted and cases burst open. Everything which fell by the wayside was left behind because the soldiers herded us onwards like cattle. It was impossible to bend down and retrieve something and anything you dropped you had to leave behind. But about half an hour after we had left the prison, a truck drove up with all our stuff. Amazingly, the Japanese had picked it all up – this was something we had certainly not expected.

The first group had had a rough time, but the second group was more fortunate because the Japanese realised that they had bungled the operation and so next morning they ordered us to leave all our stuff in the prison and said that would bring it themselves to the station in trucks. Bulk items had to be stored in one of the big rooms and we were assured that they would all be forwarded to us. Nobody expected to see them ever again. 24 hours later it was our turn to leave the prison for the station.

Although we didn’t have so much stuff to carry, the walk to the station was still an ordeal. Nobody was used to lengthy walks and by the time we got to the station we were

*Archive sources give various dates for the move to Bangkinang. Some 500 men, including the British were apparently moved on 20th October 1943 and the transfer took place in many stages over a period of nearly two months, the last arriving in December. The camp itself was a disused latex processing plant. The women’s camp in Bangkinang was a few kilometres away from the men’s camp and held some 2320 women and children. A modern Dutch guidebook says it is still possible to visit the camp provided you have written permission from the mayor of Pekanbaru as it adjoins a military barracks. There is now little left to see, just a few squat loos, the kitchen and a large bathing pool fed by an adjacent river.

soaked in sweat. As it seemed we would have to wait before we could get on the train, the Japanese indicated that we could sit down but nobody did – we weren't natives! But we noted that we were still weak and hardly any of us had worn shoes so we all developed blisters which caused us no end of trouble. After we had waited a while, the order was given to parade in front of the station and later to enter it where a long train was standing ready for us.

We left Padang on our night journey. As we climbed, the cold got to us and those who had coats put them on. Towards morning we arrived in Pajacombo where we got out and waited. Later in the day, lorries arrived and took us through the jungle to Bangkinang. We were packed in like sardines in a tin together with all the stuff we had been able to bring. Those who knew what the road was like between Pajacombo and Pekanbaru can imagine what soon happened to us. The lorries lurched into an endless series of bends and all of us became road sick, emptying the contents of our stomachs over the sides of the lorries. It also got warmer and warmer so that we were soon baking in the heat. It was not exactly a pleasant journey. Fortunately, the lorries paused from time to time because the Japanese guards were also affected. One of them broke down, sat next to one of us and was promptly sick over the side. Later he fell asleep and we could easily have done him in! Friends and foes sitting next to each other on the back of a jolting lorry vomiting their way through the Sumatran jungle – for anyone still fit enough to appreciate it, a droll sight!

Exhausted, hungry and thirsty we arrived at our destination, a disused rubber factory surrounded by a fence. We were received by our people who had arrived the day before and had already installed themselves in the large sheds. A meal was being prepared for us in the kitchen but we first had to wait a few hours until all the lorries had arrived and we could begin to unload them. Then we had to parade to be counted by the soldiers but this turned out to be a shambles because first we were ordered to parade in fours and then later in fives. Eventually an officer appeared and the matter was quickly concluded but not before we had to listen to a boring speech, after which we were allocated to our sheds. The camp consisted of several small sheds and three large ones, about 12 metres high, previously used to hang rolls of latex. The Japanese had installed scaffolding to make two storeys, and this slightly improved matters.

What a Shambles!

Our camp was nothing more than a neglected pig sty. The open air bathrooms were mired in filth and mud and the toilets were deep holes in the ground. Every time you went you ran the risk of slipping on the mud and falling in, especially at night when there was no light so a visit to the loo was suicidal.*

We quickly had to set about improving our situation. At first we thought the Japanese had put us in this filthy place temporarily while a better camp was being prepared for us. Fortunately we were not to know that we were destined to spend two years here.

Each of us had a space about 63 centimetres wide and two metres long, jammed up against the next person. At night you couldn't possibly turn over without waking your neighbour – and it was always pitch dark. Each shed housed about 200 men. The Japanese had tried to give us even less space but fortunately a few other, smaller, sheds were made available to accommodate us. We had to hang our clothes and cases on the many beams above our heads and fortunately we could cover the bed planks with sheets of rubber latex which were available in large quantities.

Many were relieved that after such a long journey they could now stretch out their limbs and crack jokes, such as "there lies the rich uncle from the East Indies on his rubber mat" or "shouldn't you put the chamber pot under the bed?" or "shut the door there's a draught." After a few weeks, however, the rubber mats weren't as comfortable as they had been in the beginning. It wasn't because they weren't soft but rather that they attracted no end of bedbugs. We, therefore, started to burn the rubber or throw it away.

*Compare the account by **John Robins**, one of the British POWs. Bangkinang was the "worst we have ever experienced, terribly congested, hopelessly inadequate bathing arrangements, lavatory hygienic but surrounded by oozy clay soil, all gimcrack, dirty, squalid, dusty or boggy depending on weather." (Diary, Imperial War Museum, London).

It burned very easily but unfortunately gave off a thick black smoke so burning soon had to be forbidden.

It was appalling, bedbugs crawled absolutely everywhere. We didn't have any sleeping bags so we had to lie on the bare planks which caused many of us at first sleepless nights. In the end we fixed the problem because the situation was totally unbearable. At night dozens of us took blankets and pillows and searched feverishly for the bugs to kill them. At first we tended to blame our neighbours for not being clean enough but we soon realised that we all suffered from this vermin and nobody was to blame. Even the planks, often cracked and broken, teemed with them. We quickly realised that we had to break everything open, a hell of a task because we needed large nails to do so, but it had to be done. We instituted so-called "clear-out" days when everything had to be carried outside. It's worth describing these days. At dawn we dragged all our belongings outside and tried to find a good spot. Space was at a premium and good places were hard to find. After a meagre breakfast of potato (*ubi* in Malay) and a plate of sago, we set to work. Tasks had been allocated the day before so everybody knew what to do but many tried to shirk and dodge their duties but they were soon found out and dealt with. First of all the planks were broken open with jemmies we had had to make ourselves. Hundreds of bugs emerged. The planks were then taken outside and boiling water poured over them while others swept the interior of the "pig sties" clean of all dirt. The planks were then dried in the sun and were now theoretically free of bugs. They were then put back in place. The Europeans were now, it seemed, free of bedbugs for a few hours but the process had to be done regularly because the planks tended to split and crack, providing splendid breeding grounds for the bugs.

Inconvenience caused by poor accommodation.

Those lying in bunks below their neighbours above had problems because dirt and dust from above would fall on them through the wide gaps in the planks, especially during cleaning. We always tried to walk barefoot but this dirt couldn't be avoided. When the neighbour above started to clean up, he gave a warning, "Watch out" and the person beneath then took steps to avoid getting a load of rubbish on his head. Sometimes the rubbish arrived before the warning followed by a friendly "sorry" while the man beneath cursed loudly.

Accommodation and conditions in Bangkinang can be summed up in one phrase: bloody awful (*allerberoerdst* – literally, extremely rotten). There was just one narrow passage between the beds and whenever you wanted to pass somebody, one of you would have to squeeze flat against the wooden wall of the shed. The small number of shutters in the sides of the sheds had to be opened to let in a small amount of light because there was no other way light could enter. When it rained, the wind blew the rain inside but then we could quickly close the shutters, but at night it was impossible so that everybody, especially those on the upper bunks soon got soaked to the skin. We tried to roll all our belongings up in a mat but they still got wet. Those who slept below at least had the satisfaction of seeing their upper neighbour get wet first before the rain seeped down on to them. We often sat up watching and waiting for the rain to stop, dozing until we could sleep again.

Fire was always a hazard so we organised a fire watch roster every night. Four men per night took it in turns to stay awake and each individual had to do fire duty about once every three weeks for about two hours. There were dozens of mosquito nets in the sheds which could easily have caught fire and so those on duty had to see that nobody was caught smoking in their bunks. But still people continued to smoke so it was decided to give those on fire duty authority to report all offenders to the camp magistrate.

Camp police and a camp magistrate appointed.

After about 18 months without a camp magistrate or police, the camp leader suddenly thought it necessary to appoint them and all sorts of childish matters were brought before them. For example, you were only allowed to urinate in the proper place and you were supposed to clean the area around the gutter and many other examples of nitpicking. It was hardly likely to improve the morale of the camp. The "trials" were farcical. The magistrate, looking stern and serious, sat behind a pile of precious paper and handed down judgement on a series of minor infractions of no import whatsoever.

[To be continued].

THE FRANK BREWER ORAL HISTORY TAPES

With thanks to the Imperial War Museum for permission to use these tapes

Continued from Tape 1

We didn't sail very far when **Captain Muloch** anchored. We said, "Why?" "I haven't any charts and I can't simply pick my way through these minefields so we have to stay here." This was at PULAU BUKUM. Enormous great flames. We seemed to be in the full view of everyone. There we stayed till just about dawn and we could see that we had drifted just about back into Singapore jetty land. Then we set off.

Then we found ourselves sailing through what seemed to us to be hundreds of tiny boats, 2 men in each – Japanese. They were clearly going to another corner of the island to land there in readiness for the surrender, presumably. As the light cleared, they looked at us and we looked at them and nobody took the slightest bit of notice. There was no point in having a tiny action. We weren't armed so we sailed through them.

We sailed the rest of the day seeing en route a few wrecks and bits and pieces on the shores of small islands. The Captain anchored again that night. Some of us weren't too pleased about that. Sailed again in the morning. In the meantime **Colonel Dalley** had been trying to persuade him that if he could go straight across to Sumatra to the mouth of the INDRAGHRI RIVER, drop us there, we'd make our way ashore and do what we had to do to cross North Sumatra and find **Colonel Warren**. He wouldn't have this. He said his responsibilities were to get all these other people down to Java and he couldn't deviate though it wasn't a great distance. He refused to do it so we sailed on.

We did sail through the next night and just before dawn we noticed a whole lot of dark, huge shapes around us. Some people excitedly said, "Ha, the Dutch Navy. We're alright." Those who knew a bit more said, "There's no Dutch Navy round here at all." And as the light cleared, we were looking up into a Japanese ship and on the end of it a gun pointing straight at us and a Japanese officer with his sword raised and a naval person being ready to fire the thing. And he had some English and shouted at us, "Hoist the white flag for surrender!" There seemed to be no option. We looked around and there were destroyers, cruisers, transports, all sorts of things all round us and so we found a piece of white material and surrendered. The Japanese officers boarded us, took a formal surrender from **Captain Muloch**, taking his sword and then we were told to follow another of their small boats into the harbour. We were, in fact, very close in to the little port of Muntok on the northwest side of Banka(sic) Island on the East Coast of Sumatra. We moved in and there was a very long, narrow jetty with fairly deep sea. We got off onto the jetty and were marched into the shore. There was a small township there. Marched into a cinema building where we began our prisoner of war days.

Of course, we were handed over to the Army by the Navy. Treatment then, it immediately became obvious, became very different from that the Navy had been showing us. It was fairly well believed that the Japanese Navy, patterned on the British Navy, would be much more understanding in taking prisoners and they showed they were prepared for all the formalities when they took us over.

The Japanese Army had a different image largely because of what they had done in China. Most of us who lived out in the Far East, and I had been in China and knew something of the atrocities up there, we were not at all hopeful of any reasonable treatment and I don't think we had any cause to change our minds in the next month.

We were taken into a building which we found was a cinema. It was on the seafront virtually ... just a building with a flat floor, no raked floor as you get in a modern cinema, and benches. The Japs had put in a lot more benches, and already inside this building were civilians, British & Dutch: men, women and children who'd been captured in Muntok or in ships that had got into Muntok ... A large number of small ships and larger had left Singapore in the week before the Fall and many more on Friday the 13th ... memorable day ... and some 60 of them, I understand, had been sunk going down through Banka (sic) Strait. Some had been captured as they happened to be in Banka or Muntok when the Japs arrived and others were sunk and were caught as they came ashore – flotsam and jetsam – or rowed ashore, were picked up and there were already quite a few in this cinema and some somewhere else that we didn't know about.

An incident happened straight away. As we went in with our bags, such as we had, we were told to unload, tip them all out onto the benches. I had a kit bag which didn't belong to me. My own equipment had been lost and when we got off the **MARY ROSE** I had no bag and someone shouted,

“Well, here’s a kit bag nobody claims.” It was a large one that was heavy. I had no idea what was in it. When we opened it, it happened to belong to a man whom I had known when in the Volunteers in Penang. How it got on our launch I have no idea. So not knowing what was in the bag, I just tipped it out hoping there was nothing nasty in it, and out rolled a little metal oil bottle that goes in the butt of a .303 Lee Enfield rifle. A Jap grabbed it and glowered at me. Standing next to me was a civilian, an Australian, a **Mr. Bowden** who had been the Trade Commissioner in Singapore. He spoke some Japanese. So he said to me, “That’s only a rifle butt oil bottle,” so he explained to the Japanese soldier who immediately beat him across the face. **Mr. Bowden** said, “I don’t think you should do that to me. I claim Diplomatic Privilege,” something to that effect. He was telling me what he was saying. He was beaten again. There was a lot more argument and they took him outside and he didn’t return. We heard from others who’d come in later from outside that he had to dig his own grave with the help of some natives and they shot him straight away. So this was a quick introduction to POW existence. We were then told to sit down at the benches and not to talk to anybody. There was such a shocked silence anyway. A shock of emotion, I suppose, throughout and all the others looked very depressed and shocked. Some of them were injured people. There was a great air of depression everywhere. We did literally sit there in silence pondering our fate. Later in the day they announced that people who wished to go to the toilet should come forward and ask. The toilet consisted of a slit trench on one side of the cinema building. A piece of rough ground. Simply that. It had no screens, no nothing. Men, women and children had to use the same thing and it was in pretty poor condition by the time we got round to using it. A little bit of initiative was now shown. Quietly people began to make contact without being observed. Bits of cloth were found and a few sticks brought from outside and a screen put across half of this slit trench to give women and children some privacy.

Just before dark, a number of Japanese came in and went up to the gallery facing the stage and set up a machine gun. An announcement was made: there was to be no talking and no movement and we could see what would happen if there was talk or movement.

Still no sign of food. I should say that on the launch there was very little food. There was nothing in the galley. We had to go round and persuade people to hand over such as they’d got. Nothing came into the cinema. It was rather a distressing kind of night. There was nowhere to lie down. Nothing one could do. The occasional expedition to the toilet – *the Benjo*.

Very early in the morning a sack of rice thrown in. Raw. And we were told to help ourselves. No way of cooking it so people took a handful and began to chew or put it in a pocket to chew. Then early in the morning the prisoner soldiers, so to speak, mustered outside in two parties ... I somehow got separated from my four colleagues and found myself in a different group as we all marched down to the jetty to begin the day’s work.

[Editor: The cinema building is now derelict and a ‘Hotel’ for swiftlets, whose nests are harvested to make Bird’s Nest Soup – a delicacy in the Far East. Vivian Bowden’s original memorial is next to this building, where he was murdered.]



Brewer Oral Tape 2

Now, we marched down to the dock, these two parties, and it was evident that we were to help the Japanese load transports, and the goods to be loaded in the main were ammunition boxes. So they weren't paying any attention at all to the Geneva Convention in the treatment of POWs.

The ammunition boxes were extremely heavy. They insisted on us having one on each shoulder and walk the length of the jetty, the longest I've ever seen, then hoist them up for the Japanese to catch and take into their transport. We did this all day. Now, quite a number of the prisoners were elderly, in my party particularly – they were in their late 40s and early 50s. There was a very unhappy and embarrassing incident. **Captain Hawkins**, a very old friend of mine who stood about 6ft. 3 ins tall ... looked like a Viking, like **Aubrey Smith**, the actor, awfully nice, charming character, Malayan Civil Service ... he found that after about six trips down the jetty he couldn't get down and lift the ammunition onto his shoulders. Some tiny little Jap, most of these fellows were very small, shoved him down on his knees, picked up the ammunition boxes and plonked them on his shoulders, rifle butt up his backside to get on with it and chased him at the double down the jetty. One has to admit that these Japanese were very tough and strong chaps.

I don't know what we had for food at midday ... a bit more rice to chew or something. I can't remember.

Sometime during the morning, there was quite an amusing incident and we were told to stop and stand against the railings of the jetty ... down the middle came a party, a Japanese naval rating in front and behind him **Captain Muloch** and a naval officer carrying **M's** sword, and behind these two Japanese Naval ratings carrying **Captain Muloch's** baggage. They were marched down the jetty between us. As they came alongside me, I happened to be with **Dalley** at the time, **Captain Muloch** looked at us in fury and said, "It's all your fault; it's all your fault!" implying that if we hadn't been aboard and argued about going to Indragiri he would have got away with it. It was so funny it was unbelievable. He was taken back to Singapore. I believe they regarded him as rather a prize prisoner.

In the evening, at the end of work, we went back to the cinema. We were told to go in and get our baggage and reassemble in the same group that we'd been in for the working party. The party with my friends in was then marched away, then later my party was marched away. We were obviously going to two different camps. We were taken up a road through town to the outskirts to what had evidently been police barracks – Indonesian local police barracks. It was a long wooden hut with a bit of wire around, literally in a kampong – one long wooden hut broken down into rooms. The officers were put into 2 rooms and the men into the remaining rooms 3, 4 or 5. Concrete floors. Behind there was a wash place with a shower or dipper bucket arrangement for sluicing the body and, I think, one or two urinal latrines, squat type things which Orientals use. There was also a sort of kitchen place. South East Asian type kitchen ... wood, charcoal with a large open bowl called a *kuali* – you put your rice in, water and cook it like that ... we had to try to find pots and pans. They did bring in another sack of rice and, I think, some vegetables. We were left to our own devices, how we prepared the meal and shared it out. While we were rummaging about in this hut we found a chamber pot which we used for our food utensils and our mess, very handy. Somehow we got our meal that night and did get a wash and thought things were improving enormously...

Early next morning we were all paraded again and taken by truck down to the jetty for more of this work, and this went on every day we were in this camp. The work was very hard, the food was totally inadequate, and those who were not used to such physical labour were beginning to feel it. It was very hot indeed, and we were getting some trouble. Quite a number of the POWs had no footwear at all – remember, they had come out of the sea. We were very short of clothes and footwear. On the whole people were reasonably cheerful and a good deal of initiative was shown.

There was a **Ptc. Parfitt** – a cockney, an extremely jolly chap in his 40s. He'd come out in one of the latest arrivals of troops in Singapore ... he was very bright. Outside the perimeter wire, not an official perimeter wire, there were native houses on stilts with attap thatched roofs which all the people had evacuated but they had left a lot of their chickens behind. It was very amusing to watch our chaps, including **Parfitt**, inviting the chickens in, tempting them in. The meal was ready in half an hour. And eggs were found by people who managed to get beyond the wire.

My friends had gone to a larger building closer in to the town, not far from the dock – the **Tinwinning Company Quarantine Depot**. This was a modernish building, I think only one storey, but it may have had two. The rooms went round a quadrangle nearly completely covered by a roof. It was light

and airy and packed with people: civilians, men, women and children plus a lot of service people. Only the service people were taken out to work. They had real problems of organisation inside that mixed camp. Supplies were difficult, but some of the civilians had got supplies from the ships that had been anchored at Muntok, which they had been able to bring ashore.

A British civilian from Singapore was named as the representative the Japs dealt with. There was a British Naval Surgeon Lt. there, and a MRNVR Malayan doctor, a Surgeon Lt., who'd been the planting doctor for Malaya, and yet another doctor who was in the Army, also in civil life a Malayan doctor. They had some medicine and bandages and they did quite a bit to look after us as quite a few people had been injured. There was a Malay sailor with a shell wound and his leg became gangrenous. They did, in fact, operate on him and take part of his leg off with no anaesthetic – successfully.

The advantage that Tinwinning had over us was that it was in town. And the Japanese had an office in it and the Japanese officer assigned to look after the prisoners made daily visits there and argued out who was to do what. The Senior British man named as camp representative was able to bargain with this man and get some things done, more supplies in etc. They had that advantage. We had no contacts other than the guards who came to look after us, control us and move us about for working parties.

When we set out on working parties one morning one of the chaps said he couldn't go – his feet were too sore. He was pretty roughly handled, feet kicked and legs beaten with rifle butts and shoved out to work. The British officers had no control over the situation at all ... if you tried to protect you got beaten and nothing was achieved in the end. Many protests were made but it was just the same – you weren't an officer, you were a prisoner and shouldn't be there anyway. Get out and get on working. So we had that disadvantage but could organise ourselves a bit better as we were used to service discipline. We found that there were other service personnel going out on Working Parties. There were NCOs and other ranks, both British and Dutch, who had been shoved into the civil Gaol. They were in a far worse condition than any of us. They didn't have any officers with them to lean on or talk to. They had to fend for themselves. The conditions in the Gaol were pretty dreadful. All the real prisoners had been released. Nobody bothered to clean the place out. It was pretty indescribable. They were beginning to get dysentery and other problems. Contacts were made with the NCOs at the Gaol who explained what the situation was. Back in the Tinwinning Camp, British Officers and the civilian camp representative took this up with the Japanese commandant and said they understood there were these POWs in the Civil Gaol – could they send somebody up to see them and see what could be done for them. Oddly enough, the Japanese agreed to this. Something was done for them and they were able to come down to the Tinwinning for a bit of simple medical treatment.

And that roughly was the camp situation as we knew it in Muntok on Bangka Island.

Now, I used to meet my friends from Dalforce on the working parties, and one day **Colonel Dalley** said to me, *"We've got a scheme and if you want to get in on it you may. We're going to escape."* They apparently had some money amongst them: I had none. They had somehow or other made contact with Chinese – the boat people outside the camp. *"We have arranged for a boat which will be at a certain position on the coast at a certain time of night."* He and **Eno** were going to go out and the Chinese would meet them somewhere outside the camp in the dark and lead them to this boat.

"If you can find your way from wherever you are to the boat we'd be happy for you to come with us."

This was totally out of the question because I had no idea that they had somehow reconnoitred the area they were going and we were further inland. How on earth I could get out of my camp to find their boat? There was no possible arrangement for the guide to come up to our camp and get me out. I actually went down to see him before he went off by arranging to go sick with a small wound in the hand and managed to get dropped off at Tinwinning and explain a bit more why it was out of the question. However, they did go that night. There was a problem in covering up in the morning roll call, but that was done. They got out and I never saw them again 'till after the War. They succeeded in sailing this boat down to Java but by then Java was already in Japanese hands so they were picked up there and taken back to Singapore, then, I think, Taiwan. The odd thing is that in Singapore the Japanese had been rounding up large numbers of Chinese, those who'd been assisting in the battle and particularly those of Communist persuasion, looking for people connected with Dalforce. They didn't connect **John Dalley** with anything, so he was very fortunate indeed and he survived the war as did **Eno**. [To be continued.]

THE BULLWINKEL PROJECT

By Julijana Trifunovic - ACN Director of Philanthropy

By kind permission of "The Hive" - publication of the Australian College of Nursing
And thanks to the Australian College of Nursing Foundation

The sculpture of Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel AO, MBE, ARRC, ED, FNM, FRCNA was unveiled in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) on Wednesday, 2nd August 2023. The statue is the first of an individual nurse or woman. The Dedication Ceremony included speeches from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd); Chair of Council AWM, The Honourable Kim Beazley AC; ACN former President Emeritus Professor Christine Duffield FACN (DLF); ACN CEO Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN and John Bullwinkel, nephew of Vivian Bullwinkel.

This sculpture will stand as a constant reminder of Lieutenant Colonel Bullwinkel's exceptional military service and importance to the story of Australian nursing.

A collaborative project with ACN and the Australian War Memorial, the sculpture recognises not only Lieutenant Colonel Bullwinkel, but all Australian nurses who have lost their lives, survived atrocities, or made sacrifices while serving their country.

"I'm inspired by the thought that generations of children to come will see a figure in bronze of a nurse and midwife at the Australian War Memorial," Australian College of Nursing CEO, Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward, FACN, said.

"The sculpture will be a powerful and long-lasting symbol of nurses' selfless service to Australia and its citizens whether in war or in peace.

Dr. Charles Robb, a Brisbane-based artist, was chosen to create the work through an invitation design submission. Robb's work tells more than just Bullwinkel's personal story but has captured the challenges and accomplishments of all Australian nurses.

"I've had the joy of spending the last few years spending time with and obviously working on the sculpture but also researching Vivian's awe-inspiring life," Dr. Robb said.

"The key thing that I wanted to achieve was to capture a likeness and a sense of the way she carried herself in the world. This quiet, strong, and self-contained individual while reflecting the perseverance that drove her."

The sculpture includes 22 inlaid stainless steel discs reflecting the 22 victims of the Bangka Island Massacre. The discs are arranged at the base of the sculpture as a reflection of the stars that would have been visible in the night sky on 16th February 1942.

Australian War Memorial Director, Matt Anderson said, "We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to commemorate Vivian Bullwinkel.

Vivian's name should be renowned in every Australian household, as should the story of her inspirational life as a courageous leader, a proud nurse and the first woman to serve on the Council of the Australian War Memorial."

Thank you to the Founding Partners of The Bullwinkel Project - Aspen Medical, Boeing, Bupa, Leidos Australia, Serco and to the many donors for their generous support of The Bullwinkel Project and the ACN Foundation. The ACN Foundation would also like to thank the families of the nurses who openly shared their stories and memories of them. Without their support, this project would not have been possible.

Together with the unveiling, the announcement of 22 new scholarships was made. The applications for these scholarships will open in September 2023.

The scholarships will be in the names of the 21 nurses who were massacred beside Vivian on that grave day on Radji beach in 1942, with another dedicated to Vivian, the sole survivor.

Vivian dedicated her life to ensuring the nurses would not be forgotten, and the ACN Foundation intends to carry on her work and legacy.

We must remember their courage and selflessness.

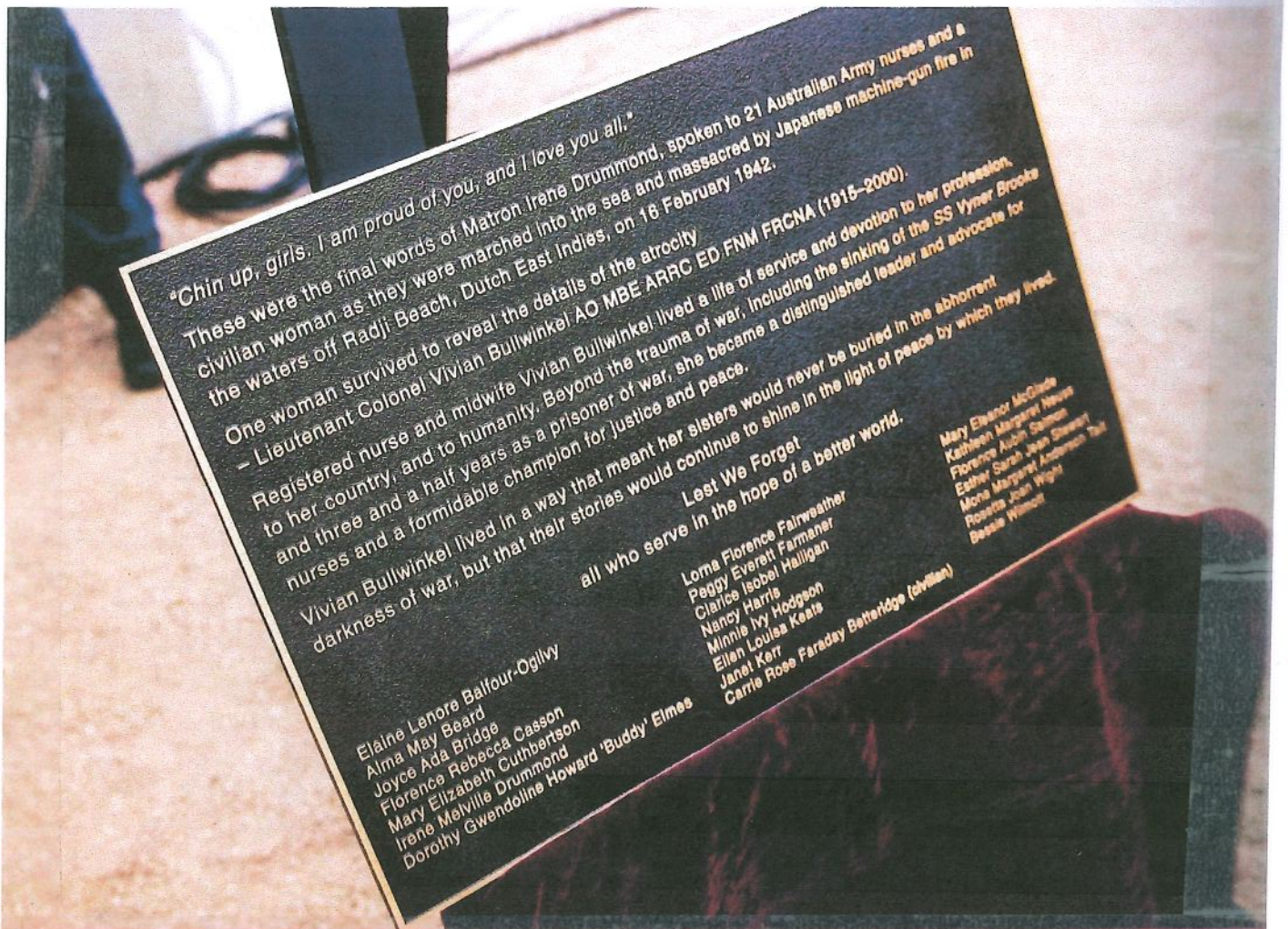
It is important we link the past, present and future for us to remember their sacrifice, service and leadership.

These new scholarships, funded by The Bullwinkel Project, will provide future generations of nurses with the opportunity to lead their own contemporary journey in providing exceptional skilled healthcare for all Australians.





Australian Defence Force nurses in front of the statue of Vivian Bullwinkel



Plaque commemorating Vivian Bullwinkel and her fallen colleagues

These are My War Time Diaries –Sumatra 1942-1945

By Dr. [Miss] Marjorie Lyon

By kind permission of her brother John Lyon

Extract from Journal 1

Singapore General Hospital shock ward – Dr. Elsie Crowe – Directions to leave Singapore – Boards S.S. Kuala with Elsie – Kuala bombed in port – Kuala sails – Kuala moors near Pom Pong Island – Bombed – Swims to island, saving an injured Elsie – Tien Kuang sinks – Treatment of wounded – Behaviour of ship's crew and military and medical personnel – Rescue by fishing boat (Krait) – Indragiri River – Prigi Radja - Tembilahan

Friday Feb. 13th 1942

Got up at about 8 a.m. after 3½ hours in bed, sleepless naturally because of the noise of raids and guns. Yesterday's casualties were terrific and I was hardly out of the shock ward from before noon until 4.30 a.m. today when I went to bed leaving **Dr. Benjamin Chew** in charge of the few patients left in the ward.

Had some breakfast. **Elsie** and I went down to the ward about 9 a.m. to find it was not yet cleared. A few minor wounds had come back from the theatre or were awaiting it. One other, an English soldier lad of about 20, whom I had given plasma and saline to in the early hours, was still there – shattered thigh. I thought he could be saved so started him on saline and plasma whilst I went over to the School of Medicine to persuade them to give me some whole blood. I ran into **Dr. Gray** there and he startled me by greeting me with the words, "Thank god you are still safe." On the way back with the blood I ran into **Patterson**, the Matron of Johore, who told me the women were to leave by ship at 3 p.m. **Elsie** came down to the ward whilst I was still transfusing the soldier lad and told me **Bowyer** had come to the flat and told her we were to leave at 3 p.m. and asked her to tell me. The orders were to the effect that all the women of the service i.e. Sisters and Doctors, were to be at the wharf at 3 p.m. to take a ship for ?? We were to take only what we could carry as luggage. I finished my transfusion and the lad's condition improved. It being now about 2.15 p.m. I dashed up to the flat meeting the departing sisters on the way. I snatched a bite of lunch, slung a few clothes into a suitcase and went off with **Elsie** to the hall where I ran into **Mr. Tyrell** and his wife. The former said he would send his wife if I was going too. We went in **Dr. Thomson's** car, leaving mine outside the hospital. The city looked doomed – a heavy pall of black smoke hung over it and there were more or less constant air raids. We were rather late at the wharf and had to leave the car and carry our suitcases along the wharf about ¼ - ½ mile. I did not see who was directing the proceedings as there were so many of us but word was passed along. Finally we reached the waterside and after a short wait got into a launch which acted as tender to the vessel. Next to me was a woman with a 5 day old baby and behind me a man to whom I remarked, "I wonder what our chances of a torpedo are." He retorted, "Much smaller than our chances of a bomb if we stay in Singapore." **Elsie** was busy talking to friends **Brigadier Stringer's** wife and her sister and a man from the Naval Base. The latter was insisting that we should not go into the "*Kuala*" to which the launch was headed, but to another ship he could arrange for. He was nearly weeping at our refusal to leave the rest of our service (personnel). The "*Kuala*" was one of the Straits Steamships Company's boats that ply between Singapore and Penang and was only a small coaster with perhaps a dozen cabins. I suppose the Naval Base man knew what we did not – that she was loaded with some radio location apparatus and was to carry soldiers too.

We, poor fools, were relieved to see that she was flying the Red Ensign and was armed aft with one small gun! We reached her side and climbed up to find hundreds of women and some children and quite a lot of soldiers in uniform on board. The Army Sisters who had not left during the week were there and lots of strange women whom I did not know. The decks, cabins and holds were already crowded. We went round to the other side of the deck from where we embarked and I was talking to **Jean Milne** who was nervous and **Elsie** was talking, I think, to the **Stringers** when a soldier shouted, "Take cover! The bombers are coming over." There was nowhere to take cover but we left the rails and crouched near the cabin walls and I crouched over **Milne** who was piteously terrified.

There were explosions all round and very close and bits of shrapnel and almost at once the cry went up for a Doctor. I got up and went over and found **Elsie** already in a cabin with **Dr. Thomson** who was wounded in the buttock – a superficial slash about 6” long not involving muscle but bleeding freely. We slapped a dressing on her and told her she was alright and we’d stitch it later and reminded her of my advice weeks ago that the best place for a tin hat was on the buttocks! **Elsie** went next to a **Mrs. Binney** who had been hit with a piece of shrapnel – she had wounds of entry and exit, not large, and a fracture of the femur in the middle third. We splinted her with a mop stick or two, put on a dressing someone had and I opened my handbag into which I had put a couple of syringes and a bottle of morphine at the last minute. I gave them doses and found the ship’s engineer at my elbow asking me to come round to a couple of casualties **Dr. Morris** has seen and had said needed me. I went round and found a body – a blanket over it which **Mr. Marshall**, the engineer, said was practically decapitated and quite dead. The Sisters round said it was one of the M.M.S. Sisters – **MacFarlane**, and that she was killed instantly. I did not delay to examine her but went to a young Chinese woman who was living but with a large laceration of the skull with loss of brain and being quite unconscious. From her I was taken to the hold to a man with a head wound of entry and no exit, also unconscious. I conferred with the engineer and suggested we get this man and **Mrs. Binney** back to hospital as he said we were to be 5 days at sea and as our medical stores were practically nil. However, he pointed to the chaos on the wharves where the bombs had also fallen and he thought they’d be safer on board. **Mrs. Binney** said she would not go back in any case. By this time the Sisters and **Elsie** had got the casualties we had seen into cabins belonging to the crew. We arranged for the Sisters to tend them whilst I went to see other casualties that were clamouring for a doctor. There were five other women doctors on board besides **Elsie** and me – **Dr. Thomson**, who was now hors de combat; **Dr. Craig**, whom I did not see at all after we sailed, and her sister **Mrs. (Dr.?) Thomson** (both being in Army uniform); **Dr. Morris**, who saw a few cases but did nothing except send for me; and **Dr. McMurell** of Johore who did nothing at all. There was also, I found later, a Chinese man on board who said he was a Doctor in private practice but had no drugs or instruments. He did say he would help if we needed help but he looked very frightened and useless. Certainly I was used to dealing with casualties in my shock ward and they all knew it and **Elsie** and I were in the same surgical team. At any rate by a sort of tacit consent we took over the care of the wounded and others sat back. We got Sisters **Service** and **Milne** and Sister **McKirren** to go round the Sisters of both Civil and Army asking for volunteers to look after the wounded and got enough. I was shocked at the horrible Sister from the Singapore General who said she’d help after she’d had a few nights’ rest! And some others who said they needed rest. All the Civil Sisters I knew were eager to help and many of the Army Nurses. At any rate, I left **Elsie** arranging shifts whilst I went with one of the ship’s officers to see their medical stores which were pitiful – a small 1 oz. bottle of iodine, a few bandages and arm splints. However, there were two glass ampoules containing catgut sutures already threaded and from various Sisters we got some flavine and forceps or two and some Dettol. It was a pity we had not brought some first aid medicine and instruments but our departure was in such haste that we did not think of it and, indeed, had we stopped to think we should have assumed that the ship we were to travel in would have medical stores. At any rate with these things we were able to suture **Dr. Thomson’s** buttock!

By this time, it was beginning to get dark and we had left Singapore. I was too busy to notice when we sailed but heard it was at about 5 p.m. I left **Elsie** keeping an eye on the cabin patients whilst I went all round the ship with one of the Sisters and the engineer seeing all casualties. In the passengers’ cabins were a European girl with a laceration of the sternum and a compound fracture and a few other women with minor shrapnel wounds. In the holds, which were crammed with people, sitting for the most part because there was no room to lie unless you were wounded, were several wounded men, including the head wound who had the signs of a middle meningeal haemorrhage; a man of 30-40 with an entry and exit wound of his right arm and a median nerve palsy; an Army lad with a compound fracture of the os calcis, several flesh wounds of the calf; and

others with lesser lesions that I can't remember. I remember one woman with her leg in plaster for ? an old fracture of the femur. The hold was very hot and the lanterns were very poor and I was constantly being overcome with nausea and having to go to the scuppers to vomit. By the time we had seen all the wounded and done what we could for them it was quite late. **Mr. Marshall**, the engineer, very kindly offered **Elsie** and me his cabin saying he could see we were to be kept busy and we took our suitcases there. Some stew had been handed round by the crew but it was not nearly enough to go round and in any case neither **Elsie** nor I wanted any. We were very thirsty and quickly emptied the water bottle in the cabin. We went round our seriously wounded again and found the Chinese girl dying. Her husband and child were on board and had been brought to her but were frightened to stay and had gone off. She succumbed about 10 p.m. – and **Mrs. Cairns**, wife of a British ? Eurasian. **Mrs. Thomson** was bleeding through her sutures and we had to reopen part of the wound and tie off a bleeder and resuture it. **Mrs. Binney** had recovered from her shock and was resting peacefully. The middle meningeal was in a coma and the others much the same. By this time it was after midnight and we thought of a rest. As the cabin was extremely hot and very small we took our blankets out on the deck and with some difficulty found enough space to lie down or half recline outside **Dr. Thomson's** cabin. She had refused any sedative for fear of further bombs and kept her tin hat beside her. Later they buried **Miss MacFarlane** and **Mrs. Cairns** over the side without stopping the ship and as they flushed the space where the bodies had been lying we got wet from the scuppers and had to move. It was a calm night and I was less frequently seasick. We passed an island in flames – most spectacular – which was said to be Tanjong Pinang. In spite of our extreme fatigue we were happy in the thought that we were away from the war and steaming to safety. I don't think either of us slept at all but we did lie down for a few hours until the ship stopped before daylight.

In reference to the orders for an evacuation none of us of the M.M.S. saw the orders but all were told by responsible people. Someone, it may have been **Miss MacMillan**, or one of the Sisters who were there, did see the orders and told me what they were. I remember distinctly the phrase that the Government disclaimed all responsibility for us if we declined to go.

Saturday Feb. 14th 1942.

Before daylight **Elsie** and I rose and went to the cabin. We investigated the bathrooms which were indescribably filthy and without water except for a few dregs in the bottom of the tong. **Elsie** changed into a cotton seersucker dress but I kept my navy and white. We tidied ourselves as best we could and when a cup of tea arrived we divided it and drank it with pleasure. There was no water to drink anywhere that we could find. As soon as it was light we went to see how our seriously wounded were and found them not too bad except the middle meningeal who was in a coma. **Mr. Marshall** came and asked what I needed and he got the ship's carpenter up and I drew for him the splints I needed for **Mrs. Binney**, a sort of long Lister's and some box splints for back and sides. He went off to make them and I went over the ship with **Elsie** and an officer and detachment detailed to help us to choose and prepare a sick bay. We chose part of the hold forward and got all the people moved and the place cleaned and roped off and the patients already in the hold moved over to it with mattresses and blankets from the cabins. By this time, it was about 10 a.m. and a meal of stewed sausages and tomatoes (tinned) was being served. **Elsie** ate a little tomato but I could not yet face food. As we passed about the ship one of the crew offered me a life belt which I refused as there were obviously not anything like enough to go round, saying I could swim. We were anchored off a small island and there were two other ships there. One was deserted though I never knew why or where the occupants had gone. The other had a Chinese name, "*Tien Kuang*" or something like that and carried 200 airmen under **Squadron Leader Farwell** as well as a lot of other Army and Airforce and also had a large consignment of T.N.T. on board, though it was many a long day before I heard this. **Charman** (Sister) heard it with **Farwell** this same day. I heard from **Farwell** later (with **Charman**) that this spot was a rendez-vous for 10 ships from Singapore. Apparently the

idea was to camouflage the ships in the day with branches of trees and all the ship's boats had gone off to the island to collect trees, by the time I was free to look around. No trees had yet arrived and goodness knows we'd have needed a forest to camouflage these ships. The island looked quite close – perhaps half a mile away.

The Matrons on board, **Miss Jones** and **Miss West** of the Army, and **Mrs Brebner** of the Singapore General Hospital were useless, but our Sisters had prepared a list of volunteer Sisters and we arranged for duty lists and a 4 hourly shift. By this time, the carpenter brought me his splints and with the help of **Sister Charman** and two of the crew to lift, one being **Sears**, we got ready to fix her. On a small table outside her cabin we arranged our poor stock of dressings and the Dettol, flavine etc. and the syringes and my bottle of morphine (had seized 2cc and 10cc syringes and stuck them in my bag from my own medical kit before I left the flat). **Sears** (member of the crew) provided a stretcher from somewhere and we lifted **Mrs. Binney**, after I had given her $\frac{1}{4}$ morphine, to it and out on to the deck as we could not manage the job in the short bunk of the cabin. We had cleared the deck on this side, which was quite a small space perhaps 25 ft. long. I had changed the dressings and straightened the leg when a shout went up, "Take cover, enemy planes coming over." I had not noticed the planes until the shout came. I hastily fixed on a splint and we lifted **Mrs. Binney** on her stretcher and took her into the cabin. The door would not shut until we tilted the stretcher to about 30 degrees from the horizontal. I supported the leg and protected her with my body. **Charman** was on the other side doing likewise and the seaman was holding the stretcher to prevent it from shifting. **Sears** was holding a mattress over the slotted cabin door. We waited thus for what seemed a very long time. There were deafening crashes and explosions and dust and smoke everywhere. Pandemonium broke out outside and **Sears** went out to investigate whilst I fixed the splints over the dressing as best I could with the stretcher so tilted. I went outside for more bandages and found that our table was missing – only bits of broken glass about the deck remaining. By great good fortune, however, the 10cc syringe and bottle of morphine I had brought into the cabin. Shouts rose from the panic-stricken mob on the deck (mostly men and Eurasians) that the ship was sinking and get off quick. I called to the mob of soldiers for 4 strong swimmers to take **Mrs. Binney** on a raft but got no response. They seemed beside themselves and nearly knocked me off my feet in stampeding for the island side of the deck. **Elsie** appeared at my elbow asking if we were all right. She had taken cover in the cabin next door with **Mrs. de Malmanche**. **Mal** had been trying to shut the door when she saw the planes approaching and drop a lot of bombs on the deserted ship opposite. A huge fountain of spray rose and as it settled the ship was gone. She hastily shut the door and said, "Look out we're going to be bombed," and she and the others got down on their hands and knees. The crashes came and they looked up to see the roof of the cabin gone. During this time our gun aft went off once apparently with no effect. **Elsie** and I went with **Sears** and another seaman with **Mrs. Binney** on her stretcher towards the gangway where a lifeboat was. There was an awful crowd at this part of the deck but no panic. **Sears** said to us, "Get off at once, the ship will sink very soon. If you can swim go down the Jacob's ladder. I'll see this woman into the boat." The roof of the deck was blazing and bits constantly fell in. We saw him get **Mrs. Binney** down the gangway but not actually onto the boat. Then clutching the 10cc syringe and bottle of morphine I had seized after the bombing to give **Mrs. B** another $\frac{1}{4}$ gm., I went down the rope ladder and jumped into the water just as I stood, without getting my shoes off. **Elsie** climbed down after me and jumped in too. We did not think of going back to our cabin to salvage any belongings as the ship had quite a list and we expected her to sink at once. Also we knew there was nothing left to save of medical stores except the morphine and syringe which were now in my brassiere. We had noticed **Mrs. Thomson's** cabin empty as we passed and **Sears** had said the hold was empty of patients. The water was warm and I never gave sharks a moment's thought, though at any other time I should have been terrified. Knowing **Elsie** was not a strong swimmer, I swam on my back and told her to put her hands on my shoulders in the second life saving position and to kick with her legs. I was quite confident of my ability to get to the shore even if I had to take her without any help from her. Our shoes soon felt heavy and we regretted keeping them on but did not feel like trying to get them off as we feared suction from the sinking ship. **[To be continued].**

POSTSCRIPT.

We are sad to announce the death of **Barbara Coombes**, author of the book, *“Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra. Faith, Hope and Survival.”* Published by Pen & Sword. ISBN 978 1 52678 775 0.

Barbara’s book was launched in July 2022 at the second Vocal Orchestra concert, performed in St. Paul’s Church, Chichester. It tells the story of two women who fled from Singapore during the last days before the Fall – **Shelagh Brown** who boarded the *Vyner Brooke* with her mother **Mary Brown**, and **Margaret Dryburgh** an English missionary who was evacuated on the *Mata Hari*. Their paths were to meet in internment.

Barbara died peacefully on Friday 31st May after a short illness, leaving her husband, 3 children and 4 grandchildren. She had retired as a Lecturer of adults at the Chichester College of Further Education, and was researching civilian internee of the Japanese and missionary **Margaret Dryburgh** and the women of Garage 9 in the Palembang internment camp, Sumatra. Her research was the basis for her Masters in Modern British Women’s History at the London Metropolitan University which she completed in 2011. With the help of **Shelagh Lea’s (nee Brown)** camp archives, she was able to do further research resulting in the publication of her book in 2022 with a foreword by the TV producer of ‘Tenko’, **Lavinia Warner**.

In 2012, **Barbara** joined other MVG members for their visit to Singapore, where she met staff at the Kyo Chan Presbyterian School where **Margaret Dryburgh** had been headmistress, and visited the Presbyterian Churches in Orchard Street and Princep Street. This enabled her to do more research into **Margaret Dryburgh’s** life.

In 2013, she undertook the job as secretary for the first Vocal Orchestra Concert to be held in the U.K. at St. Paul’s Church. Simply called, “Singing to Survive”, it told the story of **Norah Chambers** and **Margaret Dryburgh’s** collaboration to write a 4-part choral work without words. This enabled women of all nationalities to take part in the choir, and the music raised the morale of the internees.

Following the concert **Barbara** gave talks illustrated with the music; wrote articles for magazines and came to know people in **Margaret Dryburgh’s** home town of Sunderland. Her book gives a keen insight into the deep faith held by **Margaret Dryburgh**, based on her own personal faith.

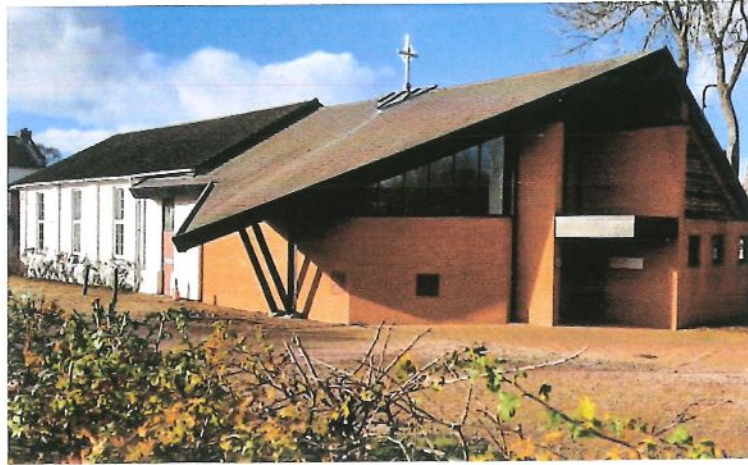
Barbara’s book launch – July 2022



ANNUAL SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE – SUNDAY 12th MAY 2024

**Church of Our Lady and St Thomas of Canterbury,
Wymondham**

National Memorial to the Far East Prisoners of War



"...They died in misery, often in agony, upon no bed with nothing but a sack to cover them in squalor unbelievable. Here is the symbol of things they never knew in their last days-peace, quiet, cleanliness and the cool, soft air of prayer - a living memorial - God's house built in their memory..."

Fr. M. L. Cowin

**Annual Service of Remembrance
in honour of those who died**

Sunday, 12th May 2024

