SELAMAT PAGI

THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER

https://muntokpeacemuseum.org

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DECEMBER 2024

Vilma Howe lays her wreath in Bolton Cemetery, Ontario, Canada, on Remembrance Sunday, 10th November 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.
A very old Chinese Proverb

WISHING YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR

As Christmas approaches, our expectations of an enjoyable festive season, with all the comforts of modern day life, are in stark contrast to the bleak outlook faced by those in civilian prison camps in Palembang in 1942. **William H. McDougall, Jr.** in his book, *"By Eastern Windows"* describes how the women internees defied their Japanese guards to celebrate Christmas by singing carols as the men's working party walked past their camp:

"The day before Christmas, I marched out with the working party. As usual we began to wave and shout when in sight of the Women's Camp. But the women were silent, standing motionless in the open space. The ***Colijn*** *girls on the roof were quiet too. Their stillness silenced us. We slowed to a halt and asked each other, in whispers, what was wrong.*

The answer came in song. Across the no-man's land which separated us sounded the melody of ***"Come All Ye Faithful."*** *Our guards were as astonished as we were and let us stand there listening. The music softened on the second song,* ***"Silent Night, Holy Night,"*** *and grew stronger on the third, a Dutch carol. Leading the singers was a woman in the habit of a nun. Her arm rose and fell, as though waving a baton.*

The guards finally asked us to move on.

"Please walk," *they said in Malay.* ***"Japanese may come."***

We walked, moving quietly and slowly in order to hear those voices as long as possible."

McDougall went on to describe the men's reaction to this unexpected but uplifting event:

"As we hiked back to jail that Christmas eve of 1942, we discussed how best to reciprocate the women's carols. We were still debating when we reached the front gates and were counted through....

On the day after Christmas we reciprocated the women's serenade. ***Father Bakker*** *(A Dutch Priest) led his choir out as members of the working party. When within earshot of the Women's Camp the choir began to sing, first a verse in Dutch then a verse in English,* ***"Come All Ye Faithful."*** *The women were waiting, standing silently in the open space between their houses and the fence.*

The choir walked as slowly as the men could move. The guards did not hurry them, but also did not let them halt.

"Come All Ye Faithful" *was followed by* ***"Silent Night, Holy Night."*** *The Women's Camp was no longer in sight when the song ended but the choir swung into another melody, for singers knew the women could hear them still and would be listening even after the last note died."*

William H. McDougall, Jr. was a newspaper man with the *Salt Lake City Telegram.* He went to the Far East in 1939 and worked as a journalist in Shanghai until 1941 when he escaped. He described his subsequent adventures and capture by the Japanese in his book, *"Six Bells off Java."*

Remembrance Sunday – 10th November 2024

We were delighted to learn that **Vilma Howe**, one of our few former child internees who was captured with her mother and brother on the *'Mata Hari'* and interned in Muntok and Palembang before being taken back to Singapore, was given special permission by the Royal Canadian Legion to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph in the Laurel Hill Cemetery in her local town of Bolton, Ontario, on Remembrance Sunday. Earlier, the Royal Canadian Legion had decided that it would not be arranging its usual Service of Remembrance in Bolton, deciding instead to hold it in the nearby town of Caledon, some 45 minutes drive away from Bolton.

However, **Vilma** was not keen to travel to Caledon and, together with **Sallie Hammond**, MVG's secretary in Canada and the USA, they decided not to take "NO" for an answer, and they managed to persuade the Royal Canadian Legion to organise, at very short notice, a Service of Remembrance in Bolton attended by a parade of Boy Scouts, Sea Scouts and Local Veterans from Bolton's Firehall to the Cenotaph.

This is an edited report in the Caledon newspaper of **Vilma's** story:

*At the Bolton ceremony, a wreath was laid by 96-year-old former child prisoner-of-war, **Vilma Howe.***

***Vilma** was 12 and living in Singapore during World War 11. At the same time of the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Japanese invaded Malaya, and Singapore. Amid intense bombing, **Howe** and her family attempted to evacuate by boat but their ship was hit in Sumatran waters.*

*She and others on board were taken captive and brought to internment camps at Muntok and Palembang in Sumatra – many other evacuating ships were sunk along with all on board. Later in the war, the **Howe** family was transferred by sea to Singapore and (eventually) sent to Changi Jail. She spent time as a captive there and at Sime Road Camp until the camps were finally liberated in August 1945.*

Vilma's wreath in Bolton Cemtery

"There are not many survivors left alive and not very many talk about it," she said. "All you had were the clothes on your back when you got captured... I had an 88-year-old grandmother. I don't know how she made it, she was tough."

***Howe** said conditions in the camps were very bad, with Changi Jail being an especially horrible place. She believes strongly in the importance of Remembrance Day and participates in ceremonies and lays a wreath each year. Previously, she's laid wreaths at Queens Park in Toronto and in Singapore.*

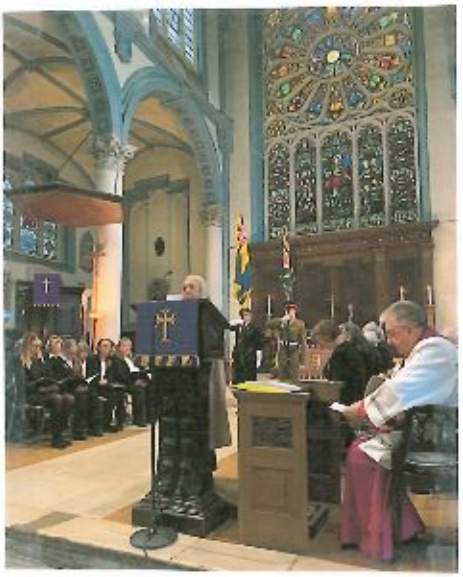
The official Royal Canadian Legion Service took place in Queens Park, Toronto, Ontario, on Armistice Day itself – Monday, 11th November 2024 – and the MVG wreath commemorating the Malayan Volunteer Forces and Civilian internees was laid by MVG member **Kathy Halliday**.

The FEPOW Plot – Field of Remembrance

In the U.K. the build up to the Remembrance weekend started on Thursday 7th November, at the Cross Planting Ceremony, which took place in the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey. This year as usual, two 8" crosses were planted in the FEPOW Plot, one with the MVG logo and the other with the Singapore Volunteers' crest and attached board commemorating the other Malayan Volunteer Forces. We thank **Richard** and **Susan Brown** for attending this ceremony and representing both the military FEPOWs and civilian internees.

On Friday, 8th November, **Richard** and **Susan** also represented the FEPOW community at a Remembrance event which takes place annually at Lloyds of London in front of the Lutine Bell in their building in Lime Street in the City of London, followed by a service in the wonderful Church of St. Katherine Cree. At the service, **June Elkington-Housego** said the FEPOW Prayer and **Dee Larcombe** (a six-year-old child civilian internee in Singapore) read the Kohima Epitaph.
The Lutine Bell hangs within the rostrum of the underwriting room at Lloyds. It was recovered from ***HMS Lutine*** a cargo vessel which sank off the Dutch coast carrying gold and silver bullion in 1799. Only the bell was recovered and returned to Lloyds who had underwritten the ship's cargo. The bell used to be tolled when a ship floundered, but today it is only rung on special occasions, such as on Armistice Day.
The Guild Church of St. Katherine Cree was first constructed in 1280 for workers in the City of London. The present building was built in 1628 and designed by the famous architect Inigo Jones. It is one of the oldest Churches in London.

June Elkington-Housego reading the FEPOW Prayer



The Lutine Bell at Lloyds of London's Building

The Cenotaph Parade in London's Whitehall took place on Remembrance Sunday, 10th November, attended by King Charles and other members of the Royal Family. 13 marchers represented the Malayan Volunteer Forces and Civilian Internees.
The 2 minute silence was also observed on Armistice Day itself, Monday, 11th November, at a service held at the Cenotaph in London by the Western Front Association, attended by **The Duchess of Edinburgh.**
In Malaysia, **Richard Parry** laid a wreath at the Tugu Negara War Memorial in Kuala Lumpur on 10th November and at the Cenotaph in Penang on 17th November.
Martin Foakes attended the Ceremony in Singapore at Kranji Cemetery, and laid a wreath.

Janet Leeson.
It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of **Janet Leeson**. We send her brother and sisters and their families our very sincere sympathy.
Janet's mother, **Drina Leeson (nee Boswell)**, and other members of the **Boswell** family were all shipwrecked on the ***"Giang Bee"*** or captured on the ***"Mata Hari."*** Those who survived were subsequently interned in various camps in Sumatra, and returned to Singapore when the war ended, where **Janet** and her siblings were born. Their father was in the Army, both during and after the war.

BANGKA ISLAND
"A BROAD PERSPECTIVE" continued

Researched and written by Michael Pether
Updated in February 2023 and printed by kind permission of the author

Vessels sunk or captured around Bangka Island and in the Bangka Strait

No passenger lists exist for the ships sunk around Bangka Island – or any other vessels sunk in the evacuation of Singapore – so knowledge of who was on board and, more precisely, where they were sunk is only as a result of painstaking research. Detailed Memorial documents have been completed for those vessels marked with an asterisk [*] and are available without cost if requested of the researcher of this document - **Michael Pether, Auckland, New Zealand**. Probably less than a quarter of the vessels listed below have been the subject of serious research – so the details of the picture will become clearer as further memorial documents are completed in future months and years.

Where known, those ships with Australian, New Zealand or Canadian naval personnel on board – or Australian Army, Australian or New Zealand civilians – are noted with an AU, NZ or CN. For practical recording purposes almost all other Europeans – either crew or passengers – can be regarded as British. There were also a few Eurasian or Chinese families on some of the vessels.

The chronology of the sinking or capture of the ships from which surviving crew or passengers reached Bangka Island is as follows **(with lives lost where known)**:

- **5 February 1942**
  - # **'Katong'** – sunk in Bangka Strait(?)

- **13 February 1942**
  - # **'RAF Auxiliary Aquarius'** – bombed and sunk west of Pualau Tjebia which is northwest of Bangka Island **(approx. 100) *AU, NZ.**
  - # **'HMS Giang Bee'** – a merchant vessel sunk by gunfire from Japanese warships northwest of Bangka, some survivors reached Bangka Island in a lifeboat and some in another lifeboat were taken to Muntok after being rescued by **'HMS Tapah' (170 est) *NZ, AU.**
  - # **'SS Hua Tong'** – captured near Muntok (nil)
  - # **'Klias'** – scuttled near mouth of Moesi River (nil)
  - # **'SS Redang'** – sunk by gunfire from Japanese warship northwest of Bangka, some survivors in a lifeboat were rescued by **'HMS Tapah'** and later taken, after that vessel was captured by the Japanese, to Muntok **(80 est) *NZ, AU.**
  - # **'SS Siang Wo'** – bombed and beached at Tanjong Kelian near Muntok. **(1)***
  - # **'Rompin'** – broke down near Muntok and was captured (?)

- **14 February 1942**
  - # **'HMS Li Wo'** – sunk just off the northwest coast beaches of Bangka in battle **(100 plus est) *NZ.**
  - # **'Jarak'** – scuttled near 'Pulau Sayer(?)
  - # **'RAF Launch ~105** – sunk at a place called 'Malon Tiga Island' **(1 or more, yet to be researched)**
  - # **'SS Vyner Brooke'** – sunk by Japanese bombers 10 miles west of Bangka Island, a large group of passengers and crew reached 'Radji Beach' and were then murdered by Japanese troops on 16 February 1942. Other survivors swam ashore or were picked up by a captured RAF Launch elsewhere near Bangka Island, a few made the voyage in passing lifeboats to Java and internment, others died after being swept out to sea **(185 plus est) *AU, NZ.**

- **15 February 1942**
  - # **'HMS Fuh Wo'** – a patrol vessel beached on Bangka Island (nil)
  - # **'HMS Yin Ping'** – a Royal Navy tug sunk by shellfire west of Bangka Island **(50 est) *AU.**
  - # **HMML 310** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch beached at Pulau Tjebia/Tujuh etc. **(18) *NZ, AU.**
  - # **HMML 311** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch sunk in the Bangka Strait near Bangka Island **(60 est) *NZ, AU.**

- # **HMML 433** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch sunk in the Bangka Strait near Bangka Island **(65 est) *AU, NZ.**
- # **'HMS Pahlawan'** – captured well north of Muntok **(2)**
- # **'HMS Pulo Soegi'** – an Auxiliary Patrol Vessel sunk by shellfire west of Bangka Island **(80 est) *NZ.**
- # **'SS Mata Hari'** – captured and taken to Muntok (nil)

- **16 February 1942**
  - # **'Elizabeth' -** a small launch/tug sunk by shellfire or bombs in the Bangka Strait **(18) *AU.**
  - # **'HDML 1062'** – a Fairmile Harbour Defence Launch sunk by shellfire in the Bangka Strait **(40 est) *NZ.**
  - # **'Fanling'** – an Auxiliary Patrol Vessel sunk by shellfire in the Bangka Strait **(43) *NZ.**
  - # **'Rantau' or 'Rentau'** – captured at Muntok (nil)
  - # **'Relau'** – captured at Muntok (nil)
  - # **'Rosemary II' -** a launch like 'Elizabeth' captured near Muntok (nil)

- **17 February 1942**
  - # **'Blumut'** – captured near Bangka (nil)
  - # **'Excise' –** a launch captured near Bangka (nil)
  - # **HMML 432** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch captured near Muntok (nil) NZ
  - # **'HMS Tapah'** – an Auxiliary Patrol Vessel captured near mouth of the Moesi River (nil)
  - # **'Mary Rose'** – a launch captured near Muntok (nil)
  - # **'SS Hong Tat'** – a merchant vessel captained and crewed by men from 2/15 Field Regt. AIF and other AIF and British soldiers, captured in Sunda Strait and taken back to Bangka **(1) *AU**
  - # **'SS Tandjong Pinang'** – a small coastal merchant vessel which had safely evacuated people from Singapore to the Indragiri River in Sumatra before being told about the hundreds of shipwrecked women and children on uninhabited Pom Pong Island after the sinking of the **'SS Kuala'** and **'HMS Tien Kwang'.** The Captain took his ship to Pom Pong Island, collected more than 180 women, children, babies and a few walking wounded and headed for Batavia. He was stopped by a Japanese warship on the evening of the 17 February 30 miles northwest of Tanjong Ular/Oelar and the ship was sunk at point blank range by gunfire. Of some 60 people who did not die in the sinking and were left swimming in the sea or on rafts, only 12 made it to Bangka Island – but the captain and a crew member were then summarily executed by Japanese troops near Muntok lighthouse within a day of reaching land **(200 est) *NZ, AU**

- **Unknown Date – still to be researched**
  - # **'Dymas'** – captured near Bangka (nil)
  - # **'Jarantut' –** scuttled near mouth of Moesi River (?)
  - # **Pinnace # 54** – (a pinnace is a large launch, up to 60 feet) sunk near Muntok (?)
  - # **Pinnace # 56** – captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **Pinnace # 503 –** captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **RAF Launch # 36** – captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **RAF Maintenance Unit # 151/RAF Supply Tender** – (?)
  - # **RAF Seaplane tender # ???** – captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **RAF Seaplane tender # 257** – captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **RAF Seaplane tender # 258 –** captured near Muntok (?)
  - # **RAF Seaplane Tender # 328** – damaged and scuttled near the Moesi River (?)
  - # **Refueller # 1186** – captured at Muntok (?)

The awful death toll from the sinking of **just the above mentioned vessels** around Bangka Island is well over **1,000 servicemen and civilian men, women and children – in fact at least 1133 by researched estimates.**

As mentioned earlier, there were many other vessels sunk further north between Singapore and Singkep

Island and they would have incurred a similar death toll. **[Current estimates put the overall death toll at between 4,000 and 5,000.]**

Then the scene moved on land to events on the beaches, jungles and towns of Bangka Island where the Japanese troops were waiting – with specific orders from their Commander on the Island to kill any shipwrecked survivors they came across.

Killings and Deaths on Bangka Island:

Many survivors from the above mentioned vessels reached the shores of Bangka Island – or when the vessel was captured were taken to Muntok Pier – and marched into temporary prisons and internment camps including the Cinema, Customs House, the Police Station, the Muntok Prison and rudimentary quarters previously used for indentured workers, and referred to as the Tinwinning Buildings.

However, in addition to those identified survivors known to have been murdered by the Japanese at 'Radji Beach', there were many others whose deaths went unrecorded during the chaos of the Japanese invasion as they were killed in small groups or individually as a result of an order given by the Japanese Officer in charge of the invasion force (which landed on Bangka Island on 15 February 1942) to kill survivors from sunken ships and those arriving on the coast of the island.

Recent research is revealing just how many other people lost their lives at the hands of the Japanese during those early weeks on Bangka Island – most will never be identified or their individual stories known – but here are some situations to recognise and remember in the context of honouring their memory:

- The massacre on 'Radji Beach' – about 80 people were murdered, including 21 Australian Army Sisters, plus civilian women and men, officers and crew from the *'Vyner Brooke'*, and servicemen from that ship and other vessels such as the *'Pulo Soegi'*. A little-known aspect of this massacre, which is revealed in a rare monograph by Australian journalist/POW **Hal Richardson** entitled, ***"Into the Fire"*** and now held in the AWM tells us that there were initially other survivors of this atrocity apart from **Bullwinkel, Kinsey, Lloyd** and **German. Leading Seaman Wilding,** shipwrecked from the *'HMS Li Wo'* and a **Corporal Seddon**, coming across the atrocity the day it occurred found at least three men from 'Radji Beach' – still alive and able to say that had happened but with terrible bayonet wounds in their stomachs – amongst the grass above the beach, at the fisherman's hut and one even a long way inland on the jungle trail. These three unidentified English-speaking men must have expired because there was nothing that **Wilding** and **Seddon** could do for them, and the local people were terrified of Japanese retribution.
- Shipwrecked survivors who expired after reaching the shore such as **Mrs. Helen Parfitt,** who was found on the western coast breach and cared for by **Major Tebbutt** before she passed away. He buried her on that beach where she still lies today.
- **Lt. Cdr. Vickers,** commanding officer of the MRNVR, who was summarily executed on a beach near Muntok in February 1942 – his body was identified by Malay ratings from the MRNVR in Malaya who had served under him prior to the invasion of that country. His mutilated body, with his ears cut off, was found near the airfield on 29th February 1942 but he had been dead for five days. Allied witnesses to his remains described a tall (6'2") man wearing a wristwatch with **'JD'** or **'JP'** engraved on it and a signet ring plus cigarette case with **'M'** engraved.
- Shipwrecked survivors from the *'SS Tandjong Pinang'* – **Sister Charlotte Florence Black, QAIMNS,** who survived five days on a raft with no food or water, reached Bangka Island with a couple of crewmen only to be robbed and beaten by bandits and then succumbed to infection from a poisoned leg. She was ***"... buried on a beach five miles to the northwest of the village of Rambut [Rambat] ..."*** – where she lies to this day. Also, **Lt. Basil Shaw, RNZNVR, Captain** of the *'SS Tandjong Pinang'* and one of his **Able Seaman** (probably **A/S Oswald Littlewood Young, RN**), who were both executed within a day of reaching land three miles south of Tanjong Ular lighthouse.
- Men and women who died soon after reaching shore, or soon after in internment camps or POW camps - from wounds incurred as their ships were attacked or from exposure or from sea water inhalation during their time in the sea. e.g. **Mrs Warman** from the *'SS Vyner Brooke'*. Some of the servicemen who appear to have suffered wounds in this situation were buried on Bangka Island with the notation in archived records of *"... Buried – Muntok 25 yards N.E. of Cinema near pier..."* but it appears that their remains have never been retrieved and their only memorial is on the Columns at Kranji or the Plymouth Naval Memorial. In this category are **Leading Seaman Bakar bin Hassan, Malay Navy** and **Marine O.T.D. Locke, Royal Marines.**
- Many unidentified men from the ships sunk around Bangka Island and in the Bangka Strait who

were without question young and fit enough to have reached Bangka Island but were never heard from again – whilst some would have succumbed to the sea and sharks, there will have been many who made it to shore only to be murdered by the Japanese troops or Chinese bandits. **Staff Sergeant Lockett** and **Staff Sergeant Ginn, Royal Engineers**, from HMML 310 departed Pulau Tjebia (north west of Bangka) in a 'prahu' for Bangka Island in April 1942 to try to contact a Dutch Controller on Bangka Island, but were never heard from again *"... probably they were murdered for the money they carried. In any case they were never heard of again..."* [***"Course for Disaster"***, P.144]. This includes men in the next paragraph.

- Men mentioned (**Hal Richardson** book ***"Into the Fire"***) as having been summarily killed after reaching Bangka Island such as **Victor Spencer** and those **unidentified servicemen and sailors described as "... other able bodied men..." from the 'SS Vyner Brooke'** (this is the only record of these men) who after coming ashore at Radji Beach, gathered firewood for the bonfire and began cooking for the other survivors – then they *"... Struck out for the lighthouse a mile or so along the beach..."* and from the coast struck inland towards Muntok. **Spencer's** group came across a Japanese squad, and he was jabbed with a bayonet and knocked unconscious, but when he came to saw *"... I was the only one left alive and the others were lying around, shot and bayoneted..."*. **Spencer** then came across **Leading Stoker James Hadley , RN,** also from *'HMS Li Wo'* who was badly wounded – it is unclear if **Hadley** had received these injuries in the sinking of *'Li Wo'* or at Radji Beach but he could not move and they were soon captured with **Hadley** dying from his injuries on 26th April 1942.
- **Australian Trade Commissioner Vivian Gordon Bowden**, and experienced and astute diplomat who had been representing Australia on the Far Eastern War Council, was captured near Muntok on the large launch *'Mary Rose'* and protested diplomatic immunity when Japanese troops at the Cinema POW camp demanded his watch – their response was to take him outside and make him dig his own grave. Other survivors heard shots and then the guards returned cleaning their bayonets.
- RAAF and RAF airmen who crashed near Bangka Island whilst attacking the Japanese shipping heading for the Moesi River around the Palembang invasion – including **Pilot Officer 'Tom' McInerney, RAAF,** on 13th February, and later on 21st February, **Pilot Officer David Stewart, RAAF; Sgt. John Burrage, RAAF and Sgt. Malcolm McDonald, RAAF** – none of whose bodies was recovered. On 14th February 1942, RAF bomber 'V9233' was shot down at sea 30 miles north of Bangka Island – the crew reached shore on Bangka with the pilot and one other becoming POWs on 25th February, but two other crew members **Sgt. Allan Tearnan** and **Sgt. Joe Mercer, 62 Sqdn, RAF,** were murdered by local bandits on 24th February.
- Muntok POW escapees – RN, RNZNVR etc. – **Lt. Anthony Ruthven Clark, RNZNVR** and **Cdr. Fenton Livingstone, RN, Lieut. K.J.H. Lester, 2/15 Field Regt, AIF** and **Pte. S.J.O. Hoy, 2/26 Inf Bttn, AIF,** plus several others (the subject of Muntok escape history is yet to be researched) who escaped from Muntok (probably either from the Cinema or an early temporary camp) during the second half of February 1942 and were never seen again – presumably they still lie on Bangka Island. **[Ed: See Edition 2, P.17 Brewer Oral Tape 2, for details of Col. Dalley's escape].**
- The numerous internee deaths from disease and malnutrition in the internment camps at Muntok during the periods they were in use over the next three years (See Muntok Peace Museum).
- The deaths from malnutrition, physical abuse and disease of POWs at Muntok.

Another little-known aspect of these sinkings is that, following the slaughter on the sea of mid-February 1942, local people and POWs during the weeks and months that followed saw literally **hundreds of bodies** washed ashore from the ships listed here (and others sunk slightly further away amongst the islands near Singkep) which had been swept south by the strong sea currents onto the north-western beaches of Bangka Island. One survivor walking southward for many miles along the northwest coast from Tanjong Oelar towards Muntok recounted that he saw a body *"...every 10 feet..."* – perhaps, or perhaps not, an overestimation but certainly an indication of how many bodies had come ashore. For many years those beaches remained covered with the bones of those hundreds and hundreds of men, women and children who lost their lives – remembering that the Japanese Army rarely buried their victims during the war – before the sand finally covered them over. The bones were still clearly evident to the post war Allied War Graves Parties of late 1945 and 1946. So, these remains of civilian women, children, men, nurses, sailors and servicemen of all branches of the Allied Armed Forces from Singapore and Malaya still lie there today.

"That stretch of coastline will forever by hallowed ground."

If anyone wishes to share or obtain more information on any of the ships listed with an asterisk, or those aboard these ships, please contact the researcher Michael Pether on:
mncpether@gmail.com
or at 2/23 Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland 0622, New Zealand. Tel: +64274 543 695

These are My War Time Diaries – Sumatra 1942-1945
By Dr. [Miss] Marjorie Lyon
By kind permission of her brother John Lyon

JOURNAL 5. BOOK 111

Possible move inland to Bangkinang – Move to Boei (jail) - Camp to be moved again - Preparations for move – Boards train to Paya Kumbah – Transferred to lorries – Initially enjoyable journey becomes horrific – Arrives Bangkinang Camp

Extracts from Journal 5 about the Women's move from Fraterhuis, Padang to the Boei [Jail] and finally to Bangkinang

Tuesday, October 12th 1943 (574th day)

Last night we heard that the men were likely to be moved to a place 250 kilometres away inland – a tuppenny ha'penny place for size – and that we were likely to be moved too and should be getting ready. The men are said to be likely to be there between 13th and 15th of this month. This caused quite a stir in the camp, as may be imagined. I think it is not likely that our 2300 odd will be lightly moved as it is so great an undertaking – but in view of the frequent visits to the camp and to this building of people with plans it seems that they want this building and maybe this camp. However, until we know where and how to move, I don't see that we can do much in preparation.....

Wednesday, October 13th 1943 (575th day)

This morning camp gossip says that the men between 30-40 have been seen going off to Bangkinang. Later tonight it was said that all were to go there and were already packed up and waiting departure and that the boys under 16 could either come here if they had relatives here or else go to the Boys' Orphanage. We had a couple of visitations today. We dashed from the polyclinic to attend a bunch of 4 Nips speaking a little Malay – officers – and one soldier and one policeman who were interested in the building. They asked if there were any infectious diseases here and I said yes – lots - I mentioned tuberculosis, diphtheria and dysentery. They seemed rather taken aback and held a discussion in Japanese which from the accompanying pantomime seemed to be ways and means of sterilization. I showed them the children, all of whom howled, and looked pitiful as well they might, emaciated little blighters with dysentery.

... the bell rang and I dashed down to find 2 Jap soldiers who spoke no known language measuring the corridors. They had a sketch book and had drawn a rough sketch of the whole camp and were putting in the measurements in feet and inches.

Friday, October 15th 1943 (577th day)

The Camp seethes with rumours of our impending removal and since a couple of visitations today I feel that the Nips are certainly taking this building and probably the whole camp. This a.m. there came about 6-8 Nips including the one with the doggy face who had told **Mrs. M. [Mepham]** the other day he was the Dr. from the West Sumatra Apotheek and who now had 3 gold stripes on his left sleeve? Major? They asked via a young man who spoke Malay how many rooms and looked at the offices. I asked the young man in Malay, *"Do they want this building?"* but he only grunted. Then this afternoon the stiff young man and an older man returned. They had plans and a map ... I felt in my bones we were going.

Sunday, October 17th 1943 (579th day)

Still nothing definite and the men had not left the Boei yesterday as **Dr. Bruna** was seen visiting... I don't know what we shall do about packing if we must get out.

It is one year and seven months today since we were interned and it felt like a century. It is one year and 8 months since we left Singapore on the 13th (February 1942). How much longer?
It is said that a lot of men, thought to be European from their gait and stature came past marching from the direction of the Boei (Jail) early this a.m. – 2 a.m. or so – and that small groups in lorries or on foot have been passing all day... All sorts of rumours abound.

Tuesday, October 19th 1943 (581st day)

Whilst taking back my lunch tray I was told by **Lottie** that she had heard the Camp was moving at 4 p.m. This was 1.45 p.m. Sent **Mrs. M.** over to **Pastorie** and she came back saying it was true and asking me to go to speak to **Ibuashi** and another Nip who were there about the sick. They were going when I got there but stopped to say the sick would be transported. They had told the Fr. the whole camp were to be ready to move at 4 p.m. and were to carry what they could but to prepare for a long journey and that their *barang* would be sent after. The first and second night would be spent in Padang but they would not say where... about 4 p.m. the police came round shouting and driving people out and making them line up carrying bags and baskets and trundling baby carriages, pushing beds, hauling trunks etc. Then the gates were opened and the people sent off on foot to walk the mile to the Jail which had been vacated only during the day by the men.

Wednesday, October 20th 1943 [582nd day]

A dreadful day – trying to get things clean and shipshape with none of the necessities. The W.Cs were overflowing and blocked. We asked at once to have the W.Cs cleaned but nothing was done. We brought 2359 persons and together with 8 sick men left behind plus **Levisen** (the Vice Consul) and his wife – making 10 extra = 2369. The Jail was considered full with 500 men and recently when numbers rose to 1000 the men complained bitterly of overcrowding. We were nearly 2½ times as many. The day was spent in trying to find everyone a place to sleep – cells meant for 1 person housed 10 women and children. 100 had to sleep in open sheds with no walls... Tonight at about 9 p.m. **Nakano** visited the camp. It was said that he had gone with the men to Bangkinang and had just returned. **Nakano** came straight to me accompanied by a policeman and asked where the sick were. I showed him in what squalor they were lying. He seemed quite distressed. I took him into the Camp and showed him how people and children were forced to lie on hard cement or boards as there were no mattresses or blankets.... **Nakano** promised to have the luggage sent in the morning and the W.Cs fixed...
November arrived with its usual daily rounds of Camp gossip about moving – either back to the old Camp or to Fort de Kok – or that more were coming. Nothing at all happened, however.

Friday, November 5th 1943 [597th day]

The main excitement of today was the letters from Bangkinang which said that they – the men – had had a dreadful journey from 8pm-6am either waiting at the station or in the train to Payar Kembo and then from 4 p.m. in open lorries to Bangkinang with no food and no water on the way. Their *barang* was not taken and some who started off with mattresses abandoned them on the way. It is said to be very hot in the daytime and very cold at night.

Sunday, November 28th 1943 [620th day]

A fine night – no rain – rather hot. No sign of a move in spite of all the rumours. The Malay buyer says he was given a week's notice before the men moved and he is sure he will get that or more before we move.

Tuesday, November 30th 1943 (622nd day)

This has been a very busy day.... Just at lunch time, the new Camp Commander and **Noersidin** came to the office and said the whole camp was to be moved – by motor and train – within 3 days and all the luggage must be brought to the front. They went away *"To think"* they said and came back about 4.30 p.m. to say we were going to Bangkinang and the journey would take 1 day (actually in the dry season it takes 8 hours by train and then 8 hours in a car) - that 12 persons could go ahead with all the heavy stuff, making 5 sections in all. They would not say when we were starting but always – in 2-3 days. About 9 p.m. **Noerisdin** appeared at our door apparently drunk and said he came to give me the 2 days notice he had promised. I questioned him and learnt we were to go to

Bangkinang, that the sick must go, and if they had to die on the way, they could die – that beds etc. could be taken, that cars or lorries would take us to the nearest station – Pulau Ayer about 1 mile away. He could not say when we were going – just 2-3 days .... He took himself off then, as drunk as ever.

Wednesday, December 1st 1943 (623rd day)

This has been a busy day getting things ready for departure. **Elsie** has worked very hard packing the whole day ... I did the routine work and helped dismantle the iron bedsteads with canvas tops ... (which) were simply crawling with bugs – thick nests of bugs - a sickening sight...

Thursday, December 2nd 1943 (624th day)

It rained cats and dogs in the night..... **Noersidin** was in the Camp today ... he is said to have told the office that our Camp at Bangkinang has a high fence with barbed wire and has a river flowing through it. The beds are in 2 tiers – and the lavatories made.
We still don't know when we go but expect the heavy baggage to go tomorrow p.m.

Friday, December 3rd 1943 (625th day)

We were expecting the heavy luggage to go off today but nothing has happened... In the hospital, it is horrible trying to carry on with practically everything packed away.

Saturday, December 4th 1943 (626th day)

As soon as it was light we had our heavy stuff moved out to the front (from the hospital). During the day the Camp bought its heavy stuff and it was arranged on either side of the trees. The Camp Commandant came at noon when the *barang* was on its way out and said they were coming for it between 8 a.m. & 8.30 a.m. tomorrow morning and to leave it out... Asked what they were to do if it rained, he laughed and said, *"put it under cover"*...

Sunday, December 5th 1943 (627th day)

Soon after dark, rain came on and poured all night saturating the mattresses and bedding. It is really dreadful the mess things are in before they start off...
At about 10 a.m. the Camp Commandant (**HOMA** and other Nips) came. They brought an empty lorry but after a while they sent it out while they called for the whole camp to line itself up in groups of 5 for counting. After 3 counts with a different result each time, the Nip tore his hair, and then the heavy rain came on and they went.
Practically the whole camp spent the rest of the morning until about 4 p.m. lugging luggage [to the station]. After about 3 p.m. the train was packed full and only luggage from Groups 1 and 2 and some of Group 3's was in the train. All the rest had now to be lugged back to the Camp.
.... A speech from **Homa** and from another Nip – translated into Malay – they said we must remember that there was a war on.... 13 people were to accompany the luggage and were to be ready at 10 p.m. tonight. Group 1 of 500 approx. to go on the 7th; Group 2 on 9th; 3 on 11th; 4 on 13th; and 5 on 15th and all remaining heavy luggage would go with the last group on the15th. People could take with them only what they could carry.
Travelling would be by train overnight and then by auto.

Saturday, December 11th 1943 (633rd day)

I don't think anyone slept very much and all were up and at it by 5 a.m...working all day. We had our supper and the patients were all excited and standing talking and would not sit or rest because by 7 p.m. the camp began to assemble for the journey. By 8 p.m. the whole of Group 3 was lined up by numbers in order of coaches.... Then my Sisters – 8 of us in all – set off without any luggage to carry, for a walk in the broad moonlight to the station and we were all very cheerful and enjoyed the walk.
When we reached the station, accompanied by 2 Nip soldiers, the train had not arrived and the people were all standing in groups according to the Wagon No. on the train. In a few minutes the train came in and a Nip soldier came and indicated that we must load the patients into the last coach. It was a very tight fit being in 2 divisions with doors between and seating spaces for 20 in each. In between the foremost and middle section was a stinkingly dirty W.C. with no water but a wash hand basin covered in grime. We all set to and loaded in the walking patients and the *barang* and then came the problem of the stretchers. There was no space for them except lengthwise in the space for walking and we had to lie them there.

By the time we had all on board, but before we had things settled, the train started and to our annoyance the Pastor threw in 3 long baskets that did not belong to us at the last minute. After the train had started, I spent a hectic half hour climbing along over the seats to the end of our wagon and seeing the patients comfortably settled. After that, we gave the patients coffee or tea and *pisangs* and let those who could go to sleep.
After I had them all settled, I quite enjoyed the peace sitting looking out at the scenery which was fine – huge mountains with white cloud caps and white mist swirling round the peaks and later little waterfalls and some quite large waterfalls. As the night passed and the train climbed it got quite cold and we had to get out blankets for all. None of the staff slept much for it was very uncomfortable sitting bolt upright on the hard wooden seats. When it began to get cold the police came in and sat on **Mrs. Levison's** lilo. After a while a Nip officer came in and made a nuisance of himself, asking questions and pawing at the arms of the Sisters – ostensibly to look at Red Crosses. I accompanied him along the carriage and refused to be shaken off – finally he took himself out at the other end.

Sunday, December 12th 1943 (634th day)

The train reached Paya Kumbah at about 6 a.m. and we saw numbers of lorries awaiting us. The Nip soldiers came and motioned us out and we had to set to and unload our patients, our *barang*, our stretchers, and ourselves... Having got all out including the water *tong* and the teapots and kettles all full of tea, coffee or boiled water and settled them on the platform, we were ordered to take them out to the roadside about 20 yards away. We did this, then we had the usual fuss of the soldiers trying to count us and they could not make us the 39 we were. Finally I counted for them and demonstrated that we were, indeed, 39. After another 10 minutes or so we were told to load up the lorry. Before we could see properly who of the staff was to accompany it and whether they had food and drink for the journey, we were hurried off to load a 2nd lorry and the first one drove off. I then dashed off to load the 3rd but the Nips were hurrying us and would not let us have time to distribute staff or food. I just managed to get off the 3rd lorry and catch the 2nd which had the sickest patients. We drove off in the dark, except for the bright moon, and for an hour or so it was quite cold. It was beautiful then – a good road and lovely scenery and the dawn coming. We had been interned for so long and in such sordid surroundings that we revelled in the fresh air and scenery and said we could not understand why the men had written that the journey was terrible. For about 1½ -2 hours we enjoyed the ride. Then we had our first taste of the terrific heights and acute hairpin bends we had to manage. Our lorry developed some sort of engine trouble and backfired like a machine gun and refused to climb. Then we would roll backwards towards a precipitous drop while one of the Nip soldiers jumped down and picked up stones to put under the wheels to check our backward progress. After a while they stopped and took off the bonnet and tinkered with the engine and then it climbed more easily. After about 3 hours we stopped for a short rest. I should say 23 – 30 lorries made up our convoy – a good number had only *barang* and luggage. Some lorries had broken down and their passengers were redistributed amongst the others. After about 15 minutes the convoy started off again. The patients complained of hunger so we gave them tea and biscuits - the Nips warning them not to eat much as the worst part of the journey was coming
Sure enough, within a few minutes more hair pin bends, very rough roads and alternate ascents and descents made us all feel rather queer, and people started to vomit. We had a horrible time for the next 3-4 hours. Our drivers were quite regardless of comfort and dashed round bends over bouncing stones. At one time it rained and later the sun came out and we frizzled and I had to try to keep the sick covered against sunburn. **Jenks** and I were the only survivors in our lorry and I felt sick tho' I did not vomit. We had no actual accidents tho' at one stage we had to butt the lorry ahead of us out of a ditch. At several places numbers of empty lorries, some laden with new bicycles, passed us.
At last about 2.15 p.m. we came to a high wooden fence with barbed wire on top and a long row of lorries stopped ahead and I knew we had arrived. It was said to be an 8 hour journey and we must have taken 7½ hours or so.

THE WOMEN OF PADANG AND BANGKINANG INTERNMENT CAMPS – contd.

Prepared by Michael Pether for the Malayan Volunteers Group Newsletter, July 2014

[Sources: Dr. Marjorie Lyon, Sister Marjorie de Malmanche, Mrs. Mavis Lampen-Smith & Shirley Eames]

The new camp at Bangkinang was a clearing in the middle of the jungle and had 5 long huts built of thick green rubber tree wood. **Marjorie de Malmanche** describes their new quarters, *"... A platform 6 feet wide ran down each side and a 12 foot platform was in the middle. An upper story the same was reached by crude ladders placed at frequent intervals. The floor was earth and the roof atap. One weatherboard had been left out upstairs and downstairs for light and ventilation, and there were 6 doorways – two at each end and one each side in the middle. These huts – there were 5 of them – each accommodated 500 people. A bath-house and row of lavatories – cubicles with a concrete floor with holes – was at one end of the camp... Six watchtowers with armed guards perched above the fence, and there was an outer ring of barbed wire. At night the Japanese patrolled between the two fences..."*

Dr. Lyon fills out the picture. *"... There was not a blade of grass or a tree in the camp, and the water supply was piped in bamboo pipes from a ditch leading from a river about a mile away... Food began to be very short here, and smuggling began over the 20 ft. fence surmounted by 4 rows of barbed wire. For a time, one could buy almost anything if one had money, but in June 1944 this was stopped entirely by the Japanese. Thereafter we were all hungry and sugar, meat, eggs, vegetable oil and peanuts became unobtainable, until we were living on 175 grams of rice and 100 grams of sago meal daily, with twice a week a handful or so of the leaves of ubi, previously regarded as poor food for cows..."*

Another internee, a survivor of the sinking of the ***"HMS Grasshopper"***, a New Zealander by the name of **Mrs. Mavis Lampen-Smith** recollected that each internee slept on wooden slats occupying 75 centimetres of space.

The consequences of open water drains from a river and open toilets soon took its toll: this from **Marjorie de Malmanche:**

"... Soon after our arrival, the Japanese had a small ward built into the side of the main one with a single platform ... this was to be the dysentery ward and the beds were a God-send, as later on when the cases became so heavy to nurse, we could not have done it kneeling on the floor. Occasionally, we got cases of Shiga dysentery. This was always fatal and very quick, the patient lapsing into unconsciousness soon after infection ... Our medical supplies were now all used up. W had only the spinal anaesthetic and, for the next two years, we did not receive any more, except morphia, for the two operations later on. Malaria was rampant. There was never less than 400 suffering Malaria every day..."

Dr. Lyon recorded *"... Dysentery had come with us from the jail and we had a big epidemic soon after we reached Bangkinang, and lost 15 patients out of 150 cases out of 2,400 internees..."*

"... Soon after we settled into the camp, the Japanese burnt off the surrounding jungle and told us that volunteers could go out and clear the ground for cultivation of manioca. The leaves and roots that closely resembled lupins could be eaten. Nearly everybody volunteered if only to get outside the fence and away from the noise for a bit. Hoes were issued to the work parties. Certain numbers of women went daily doing 4 hour shifts. The work, at first, was very heavy as the huge stumps had to be dug out and rolled away... for our work we were given a small piece of manioca root... our daily ration at this time was one cup of rice, a third of a cup of sago flour, a few vegetables, either bracken, water hyacinth, manioca leaves, banana flowers or loofah. The rice we received was very often full of little white caterpillars, which had eaten the inside of the grains which were held together by a cobwebby substance. If washed, it all disintegrated, so we ate everything. The sago flour was so dirty we put water on it. The dirt sank to the bottom and when dry could be cut off ... everybody was hungry and rats and snakes were being eaten – a rat costing 1 guilder on the black market." **de Malmanche.**

Mrs. Lampen-Smith recalled, *"... It was terrible to see the little children cutting wood and carrying it from the jungle. Women and children had to clear 5 acres of virgin jungle to make a vegetable garden, but what they grew they were not allowed to touch. Working parties were allowed a little more rations, but I could never work and therefore never got any extra food..."*

Mrs. Lampen-Smith sold her engagement ring through underground channels for about 60 pounds but had only spent one pound when she was 'relieved' of the rest. Later in internment she had to sell her only blanket to obtain money for food – the nights were cold. She was about ten stone when captured but went down to 4 stone 3 pounds.

A death occurred about 6 times a month, at which time the men's camp were informed and made a rough coffin which was delivered to the women's camp, nails already in the top boards... the women placed the body in the coffin and a squad of women carried it out and down the road for some distance to a bridge, where they put it down. When they were back at the camp, men from the men's camp – an old rubber factory about 2 miles away, picked it up and took it to a special burial place.
For a while the widow, relative or close friend of a male internee was allowed to attend his funeral and it was on such a mission to mourn the death of a family friend in December 1944 that **Mrs. Lampen-Smith** saw her husband (who had been an engineer with Cable and Wireless Ltd.) for the first time since internment in Padang in March 1942. Her husband had been only a mile away in the Pakenbaru camp all through that time.
1944 does not get mentioned much in the diaries of survivors except to record numerous rumours about the progress of the war and the fact that rats were becoming unbearable and eating everything they could get hold of, but it seems that morale remained high, lectures were well attended and church services were held every evening. Cooking utensils were by then just about worn out and even chamber pots were being used to cook rice – although most people used old tins. The children were showing signs of malnutrition, being skinny and pot-bellied and crying with hunger.
1945 was marked by the effects of malnutrition and lack of medicine – at both the women's camp and the nearby men's camp at Pakenbaru.
Dr. Lyon recorded "*... meanwhile the Dutch men had had a dysentery epidemic and lost 80 men out of a camp of 800 internees. The Dutch doctors I met were ignorant and obstinate and dealt in brews of local herbs rather than drugs. The last 6 months [of internment] were very bad for us with lack of food, lack of clothes, droughts and jungle fires threatening the camp. Many of us developed beri beri and starvation oedema, and everyone was pretty well at the end of their endurance...*"
Marjorie de Malmanche adds at around this time, "*...we now began to get a lot of TB patients. The disease progressed very rapidly , as conditions were so bad and most of the afflicted died in about 3 months ... 1945 dragged on. The whole place was looking very shabby. Many of the weatherboards had been ripped off huts and lavatory doors used for firewood, as the women firewood gatherers were becoming too exhausted to go into the jungle to cut wood, drag it into the camp and distribute it fairly...*"
The internees' first intimation that the war might be over came on 19th August, when the Japanese told them that they were to get 3 times the rice ration in the morning and that they would also be given meat! On 22nd August, **Dr. Lyon** recorded that the Camp Committee women were taken over to the Japanese Headquarters in a staff car and told that, ***"America has asked for terms and the War is over."*** She poignantly recalled that when the Committee returned and told the camp the news there was dead silence broken only by the sound of weeping.
About 3 weeks after the war ended, all the surviving British women (and men from the nearby Pekanbaru camp) were taken to Fort de Kok by truck and then Padang by train. Japanese soldiers were still armed with machine guns with approval from the Allied Command because local Indonesians had already declared independence and begun their war with the Dutch. Many Dutch internees were murdered around Sumatra and Java at this time when they tried to leave their internment camps.
Whilst waiting at Padang, (**Dr. Lyon** records) the awful treatment that had been meted out by the Japanese to the men at Pakenbaru camp showed its effects, with a further 2 men dying in her makeshift hospital in Padang. Of the 65 British men internees, 15 died in the camp – they had had a much worse time than the women.

Marjorie de Malmanche completes the story of these years from hell, "*... After 3 weeks, the airstrip was ready to take the DC3 planes – Dakotas – and the time came for us to leave. We went in 2 aircraft and all the Dutch women and children who had reached Padang came to see us off. The plane crews were lovely, healthy looking Australians and, as the planes flew side by side over Sumatra and the Straits of Malacca, we could wave to each other through the windows. Then we were over Malaya and saw the red laterite soil of Singapore showing through the palm trees, and knew we were home...*"

Tape 4.

We had no more military type working parties, loading ships with ammunition etc. but were taken out in groups to assist with provision movements at the docks and running supplies around the countryside to Japanese units in their lorries. They began to pick our drivers out for this or just as workers on the backs of lorries. There were umpteen kinds of town/docks working parties. Later, they took about 50 of our men away up country building roads or repairing roads. They were away for a month or more. This reduction of numbers in the camp didn't improve matters as we had a party of 250 brought over to us from Bangka Island including my friend **Ronald Stanton**, and many others. We were very quickly up to near the 500 mark at the school, which was pretty bad. It was never a welcomed thing to go out on working parties because of the lack of clothing and many chaps had insufficient footwear. We tried to scrounge, to pinch. We shared out what we got. The Japs organised working parties. They paraded them in the morning; they counted them up. If not enough men, they went round the rooms and if chaps said they couldn't go, they would have them on their feet. Unless they fell down and couldn't move, they were out working.

Some people enjoyed going out because there were opportunities to acquire bits of food and bits of clothing and other pleasant things that could be obtained from the local people who still remained friendly through most of the POW experience. But they were eventually prevented from being so openly friendly with us by the Japanese themselves who would beat up the civilians if they were seen to be passing something or waving, and gradually the civilian population became very cowed.

One of the rules was that prisoners, whatever their rank, had to stop before a sentry or before an officer and bow according to the Japanese custom. This was very difficult to follow as a rule. It was embarrassing and humiliating. It simply had to be done. If you didn't do it you were beaten, beaten, beaten till you did, across the face with the flat of the hand or on the body with a rifle butt. If you were out on working parties it was stop and bow if a Jap officer passed. For the ordinary populace the same rules applied. It was sometimes amusing but also humiliating to see people walking down the road and a Jap would stop somewhere. The people would go on walking down the road minding their own business. Then there would be this awful screech of fury, and the Japanese really know how to scream and screech and work themselves up into a fury. The whites of the eyes turned red, faces flushed. They would stop these civilians and go over and beat them silly. ***'You are insulting the Emperor. You must bow!'*** With this treatment going on all over the place the population was very soon cowed. The Co-Prosperity Sphere idea receded pretty rapidly.

Some like to go on working parties to get goodies and add to their stocks a bit and also, as long as it was possible, [maintain] friendly contacts with local people. Never more than the briefest contact and this became increasingly difficult after a few months.

SICKNESS

We also had growing sickness in the camp. It was this that made people want to go out on working parties simply because they couldn't bear the stench. The latrine system and running water supply broke down. The school was never built for borders, or permanent occupation of this kind, or for such numbers. So the flushing didn't work; and the taps in the shower places gradually packed up. It was very difficult to keep them going. After about 10 days of this, the Japanese ordered us to go into the piece of ground at the back of the school and dig trenches for latrines. They gave us tools and we set about digging trenches. You couldn't dig down very far. If you got down 18 inches you were doing pretty well. If you got down 2 feet you were doing exceptionally well because the water table was there. Palembang and its surrounding area was very swampy with many rivers flowing into the Moesi from further inland which was tropical, jungly country. The water table was very high.

We'd dig one trench than a couple of days later we would have to dig another one. When it rained all the tidal water went into the original trench and it was washed out again. Every day the situation got worse and worse. It became very difficult to find a patch to dig in. They threw in lots of planks to stand on/walk on. We had no medical officer of our own with us at all, and the Japs provided no-one to come and see us. The only medical person we had was a medical orderly Corporal RAMC, **Cpl. Feltham**. He was a great help in explaining things and doing a few things, but he had practically nothing – only torn up shirts and bandages and a bit of Usol to put on cuts. He may have had one or

two other things he had scrounged somewhere along the line. I think he may have come out of the Tinwinning place. He did a little bit in his sick bay but [we had] no medical officer.
We had lots of people going down with diarrhoea and it became obvious that there was some dysentery there. The Japs refused to believe anyone was really sick and when we had our parades there were frightful moments of beatings of chaps who were very, very sick being kicked and beaten to stand up and go out to work. Eventually the Japs would let them fall back again. We became very apprehensive about this as it was spreading so quickly.
I thought there was something we might do. I had trained as a Malayan Civil Servant in Hokkien Chinese. I was very anxious not to let the Japanese know I could speak this language, being in the Army, because they were looking for people who had been associated with the Chinese guerrillas. It seemed a very dangerous thing to do. There was anther colleague of mine, a Malayan Civil Servant, who was in the RNVR temporarily, and he was a Cantonese speaker. I said to him one day, ***"Look, how about it if we can try to get these guards."*** You see, the difficulty was if you went to the Guardroom and tried to speak to them in mumbo-jumbo, sign language, bits of Malay, they would either laugh in your face or beat your face. ***"Suppose you come up to the Guardroom with me and we both say we want to make a point. Ask to see the Officer. You could write down in Chinese characters DYSENTERY, EPIDEMIC, SPREAD, things like this."*** The Japanese written language is based on the Chinese. All nouns in Japanese can be represented in the form of Chinese characters. He said, ***"That seems a good idea. I won't use my Chinese but will use mumbo-jumbo Malay."*** Lots of these Japs had a few words of Malay. He, being a Chinese speaker, but being in the Navy, wouldn't be under any suspicion at all, and I was right. So the two of us, quite the most junior officers in the place, went to the Guardroom. We succeeded in catching their attention and we borrowed a piece of paper and pen. They were interested in this 'writing down thing.' I'd learnt this once before when I was on the coast of China, learning Chinese, and the Japanese had come and occupied the place. I was asked to do some work and find out whether they were cheating and hiding themselves in the international settlements. We did exactly the same thing, a colleague and I. We came upon these Japanese inside a Chinese house where they shouldn't have been at all, all armed to the teeth. We drew their attention doing exactly the same thing: writing down Chinese characters about this nice ancestral building. They were so fascinated that any Westerner should have any culture at all they dropped any suspicions. And this is what happened with the guards. They began to get the message. All the sickness, this nasty beastly dysentery, and they were in a room next to the sick bay and they would catch this thing. So they told us to go away and about half an hour later in came a Japanese Officer with an English speaking interpreter and asked us a bit more. So we said, ***"It's very serious. It is in your interest to get this under control,"*** and surprise, surprise, away they went and very soon they were back and called on me and said, ***"Come with us."*** We went to a big, empty warehouse or godown. ***"You can put your sick in there."***

THE GODOWN

I said, ***"Well, someone's got to carry them in and somebody should look after them. Well, where's the water supply?"*** There was a big wooden platform. [They said] ***"That's for the bed."*** By the door was a cubicle which had a basin and a tap and that was the only water in this godown. [They said] ***"You get them in there. You can pick three men to carry them in. You can't stay with them, nobody can but you may go in at approved times with a guard to visit them and take food."*** I said, ***Could they have different food?" "No!"*** Well, at least we'd made a start. So we shifted half a dozen of the worst cases in and put them on the platform. We put in empty kerosene tins for them to use.
The numbers grew day by day. The conditions were appalling but there was no way they could be cleaned up. They were so sick themselves, they couldn't do anything for themselves. Only when we took in so-called food were we able to do anything for them in a few minutes.
We were losing the battle now. We were getting too many people ill. One day, I was taking some more into the godown, I wasn't now going on working parties. A lorry arrived with a sick man on a stretcher. He was British, a civilian. A man, who had been on the *Mary Rose*, in the Singapore Police, seconded from the Indian Army because he was a Japanese speaker who had done intelligence work. One of the special personnel to be got away. He was taken off the lorry and put on the pavement. It seemed to me that he was dying. He was in a very bad way but conscious. He looked at me and said, ***"What on earth have they brought me here for?"*** [I said] ***"Nothing you will enjoy. When you***

get in there you can smell everything and realise what you're in for. There's only one possible thing we could try now. If you're prepared to use your Japanese, and I know what it means to you, we might be able to get some real hospital attention in town." He pondered this for a few minutes while the Japs were shouting at one another on the pavement, and said, ***"I can hardly care less now. I think I'll give it a go."*** So he beckoned to a Jap, and whispered in almost fluent Japanese. It was a great surprise to the Japanese there. So he was put in the godown and very shortly afterwards a car arrived with a Dutch Eurasian Medical Officer and he took a quick look round the godown and had a look round the camp sick rooms. He said, ***"Oh, my goodness, this is desperate sitting in the most populous area of Palembang. This is really serious. We've got to do something."*** He was a very strong character. He persuaded the Japanese authorities that something really serious was happening. Within a day these men were taken to a local hospital where they were treated and, I think, all survived, including the police officer, **Morgan**. This was the beginning of medical attention. We were awfully pleased. It was also the beginning of contact with us as Officers to see if they could get any benefit by using us for internal matters. We got that done. Some sort of achievement there.

Then on the 28th March I was called to the guardroom and told to find another Officer. We were to go and examine another building. I went back to the senior Army Officer. We always kept in touch on whatever was going on. I became a sort of Adjutant to this camp internally, with no recognition of this by the Japanese at that stage but everyone, whatever their service, regarded me as a Liaison Officer. I told him what's what and he said, ***"We'd better find somebody else."*** So we went to the senior Naval Officer. He chose **Commander Bernard Scott**, an RNVR Malayan who'd been a pilot in Penang. A very cheerful, able, very good chap. He was asked to join me in this. We were taken down to another school further in the town towards the river.

CHUNG HUA [Chinese Overseas] SCHOOL

This was off the main road, down a little alley with native houses on ether side of it but within its own fenced area. It had an asphalt front entrance. It had an asphalt internal open quadrangle with enough room on the quadrangle to parade all our people and enough room in front where the gate was to parade working parties in and out and we were in our own fenced area.

Another [Japanese] Officer we hadn't seen before joined us there. He seemed reasonably pleasant with his boots and sword. Very nice, good looking chap. Youngish. We were told to go and look over the school building and assess it and see how we would arrange to put all 500 people and any extras in there. A quick look round told us we couldn't really get them in at all. The actual school was bigger than the one we were in and it had inside the school an assembly hall and around it the classrooms, two storeys, and unless we crammed people in the assembly hall there didn't seem any way we could get them all into the school.

In the same compound was another building with Chinese signs on it which I knew to mean Chinese Chamber of Commerce. I called this Office to explain the situation. It was physically impossible for any reasonable accommodation in the school but if we could get into the Chamber of Commerce building? He said, ***"Alright. Go in and look in the Chamber of Commerce Building. It isn't fully vacated yet. There are still some Chinese packing up in there but go in and take a look round."*** He was quite reasonable. And we did this.

There was a curious little incident in there. I was wandering about through some rooms on my own and saw this poor Malay Chinese businessman looking very miserable indeed so I took a chance and spoke to him in his language. His eyes lit up and we had a brief chat almost in whispers. He kept looking round, saying, ***"shush!"*** As we parted, he said, ***"Perhaps in the future we may be able to make contact and be helpful to on another,"*** sort of thing, which I was hoping for. I moved on. Got back in the playground and met **Bernard Scott**. We said to the Japanese Officer that with that we could get them all in, including the working party of 50 up country.

While we were talking in the playground the Chinese businessman suddenly emerged running towards me shouting, ***Tai gin, Tai gin! [Great man!] Help. Help. Help!"*** Tai gin was an honorific term which they always used for officials. He just came rushing up. What he was saying was, ***"I've just been given an order by another Japanese to get out at once which I can't do. Too much to do."*** So I didn't bat an eyelid. The Japanese shushed him, pushed him away. Looked at me. I just shrugged my shoulders. There was nothing I could do for him and it would have been a disaster to have attempted to do anything. Another Japanese came up and he was taken away protesting violently.

We went back to the old school and were told to draw up plans to put all the troops in the school and all the officers, senior NCOs, petty officers etc. in the top floor of the Chamber of Commerce. One of the ground floor rooms was to be the office. One of the school classrooms was to be the Japanese guardroom.
We were taken back to the school to mark each room with who was to go in. Back to our camp and when the working parties came back, we went to each room to explain this to them. It seemed we were going to be in reasonably good condition with that amount of space and the troops were quite cheerful.
[To be continued.]

MUSIC FOR WORSHIP IN THE PALEMBANG WOMEN'S CAMPS

With thanks to Margie Caldicott

My mother **Shelagh Lea (nee Brown)** and her mother escaped Singapore on the ***Vyner Brooke***, followed by 16 hours in the sea, and so started life in the Sumatran camps with no belongings. When she was released in September 1945 her belongings included all her copies of handwritten music in 2 notebooks and on many small pieces of paper. This huge archive of music, with her diary and other items, is now in the IWM, who kindly gave us copies of everything.
The list of around 120 pieces includes at least three dozen hymns, some psalms, two dozen Christmas carols, and over a dozen anthems, mostly well-known settings rearranged in 3 parts. Four of the hymns are composed by **Margaret Dryburgh** to words by **Margery Jennings** (3) and **Gladys Cullen** (1). The list continues with **22 Vocal Orchestra** pieces (written in 4 parts) and is completed with secular songs for entertainments.
I know of only 4 sets of music that have survived around the globe (in Jersey, California, England and, I believe, Australia) all having slightly different pieces. It would be fascinating to know of any other collection, maybe in Holland?
Margaret Dryburgh was a Presbyterian Missionary, and an organist with perfect pitch. She was able to harmonise, arrange and compose music. In the final years before internment, she had been Headmistress of the prestigious Presbyterian Girl's School in Singapore. **Barbara Coombes** wrote: ***"Her love of music was passed on to congregations, schools and choirs within the biggest Swatow speaking congregation, where her church was known as the 'singing' church."*** She survived the Fall of Singapore on 15th February 1942, but her ship, the ***Mata Hari***, surrendered to the Japanese.
On the first night after their arrival in Muntok, when they were so traumatised, **Margaret Dryburgh** was lying opposite **Shelagh** and her mother on the Coolie lines. **Margaret** said she would say Evening Prayer, and invited women to join her. From that moment, faith was at the centre of their survival. **Vic Wardle**, the Missions to Seamen Chaplain, is also mentioned as leading prayers on the Coolie lines; this was before the women and men were separated for the reminder of the war.
Once 'settled' in Garage No: 9 in Irenelaan, the Bungalow Camp in Palembang, **Margaret Dryburgh** with the other missionaries led Sunday services outside the garage. Women and children came to sit on stools or on the ground. A church choir formed, usually conducted by **Margaret Dryburgh**, but occasionally by **Margery Jennings** or **Norah Chambers**. From this grew a choral society, and later about 30 singers became the Vocal Orchestra. **Mother Laurentia** conducted the Dutch choir for their own services.
I know of some of the other talented musicians besides **Norah Chambers** (a professional musician who had studied violin at the Royal Academy of Music before teaching in Malaya), and **Margaret Dryburgh** in this camp. There was **Margery Jennings** and **Dorothy MacLeod** who was a well-known soloist in Singapore, singing solos in Oratorios as well as Gilbert and Sullivan operas and a recitalist. There were also 5 members of

St. Andrew's Cathedral Choir: **Ena Murray** (**Norah's** sister), **Olga Neubronner, Mabel** and **Ruthie Roberts** and **Shelagh Lea. Ena** and **Shelagh** had sung in G & S operas and **Shelagh** was a talented viola player, who lost her viola in the last moments of the escape from Singapore on the ***Vyner Brooke***.

At least 4 people including **Shelagh** wrote out the various manuscripts of **Shelagh's** collection of Church music. (**Norah Chamber's** writing is very neat and recognisable. My mother always said her own music writing was big black blobs going nowhere!). There was a policy always to write out all the parts as full scores, and the person receiving the music would first have to draw the staves on which the music was then written

Shelagh Brown's s diary mentioned the first time 'The Captives' Hymn' was sung on Sunday 5th July 1942: ***"Miss Dryburgh, Dorothy MacLeod and I sing Anthem as a trio in service. Miss Prowse takes service and gives nice address on Hope."*** **Shelagh**, when interviewed, said that one day **Margaret Dryburgh** thrust a piece of paper into her hand saying that she was to sing it the next day as an anthem with **Dorothy MacLeod** and herself as a trio. The women at the service were so moved by the words that it became known as 'The Captives' Hymn' and was sung every Sunday until the surviving captives were released in mid-September 1945. (Some women who were moved back to Singapore must have taken it with them because I have heard that it was sung in camps there as well).

Shelagh told me that the most uplifting words of this hymn were in the final verse: **"Cleansed by suffering, know rebirth." Helen Colijn** said the hymn was 'an instrument of peace.' **"O'er the world may brothers be."**

Margaret Dryburgh gave the will to survive to the women and children through her drawings, poems and music as well as her faith. She died in the 5th Camp in Sumatra in April 1945. Her life and ministry are told in:

"Women Interned in WW2 Sumatra. Faith, Hope and Survival" by **Barbara Coombes.** Published by Pen and Sword. ISBN 978 1 52678 775 0

More information about **Margaret Dryburgh** and information about the Vocal Orchestra music can be found in: www.singingtosurvive.com

"Women Beyond the Wire" by Lavinia Warner and **John Sandilands.**

"Song of Survival. Women Interned" by Helen Colijn.

For the sheet music scores for the Vocal Orchestra see:

Song of Survival for Treble Chorus, a capella Volumes 1-6

312-41771 to 6, Theodore Presser Company. www.presser.com

The Captives' Hymn

Composed and written by Margaret Dryburgh in Palembang Internment Camp, 5th July 1942.

1. Father in captivity
We would lift our prayers to Thee,
Keep us ever in Thy Love.
Grant that daily we may prove
Those who place their trust in Thee
More than conquerors may be.

2. Give us patience to endure,
Keep our hearts serene and pure,
Grant us courage, charity,
Greater faith, humility,
Readiness to own Thy Will,
Be we free or captive still.

3. For our country we would pray,
In this hour be Thou her stay.
Pride and selfishness forgive,
Teach her, by Thy Laws, to live,
By Thy Grace may all men see,
That true greatness comes from Thee.

4. For our loved ones we would pray,
Be their guardians, night and day,
From all dangers, keep them free,
Banish all anxiety.
May they trust us to Thy care,
Know that Thou our pains dost share.

5. May the day of freedom dawn
Peace and justice be reborn,
Grant that nations loving Thee
O'er the world may brothers be,
Cleansed by suffering, know rebirth,
See Thy Kingdom come on earth.

"S.S. KUALA"

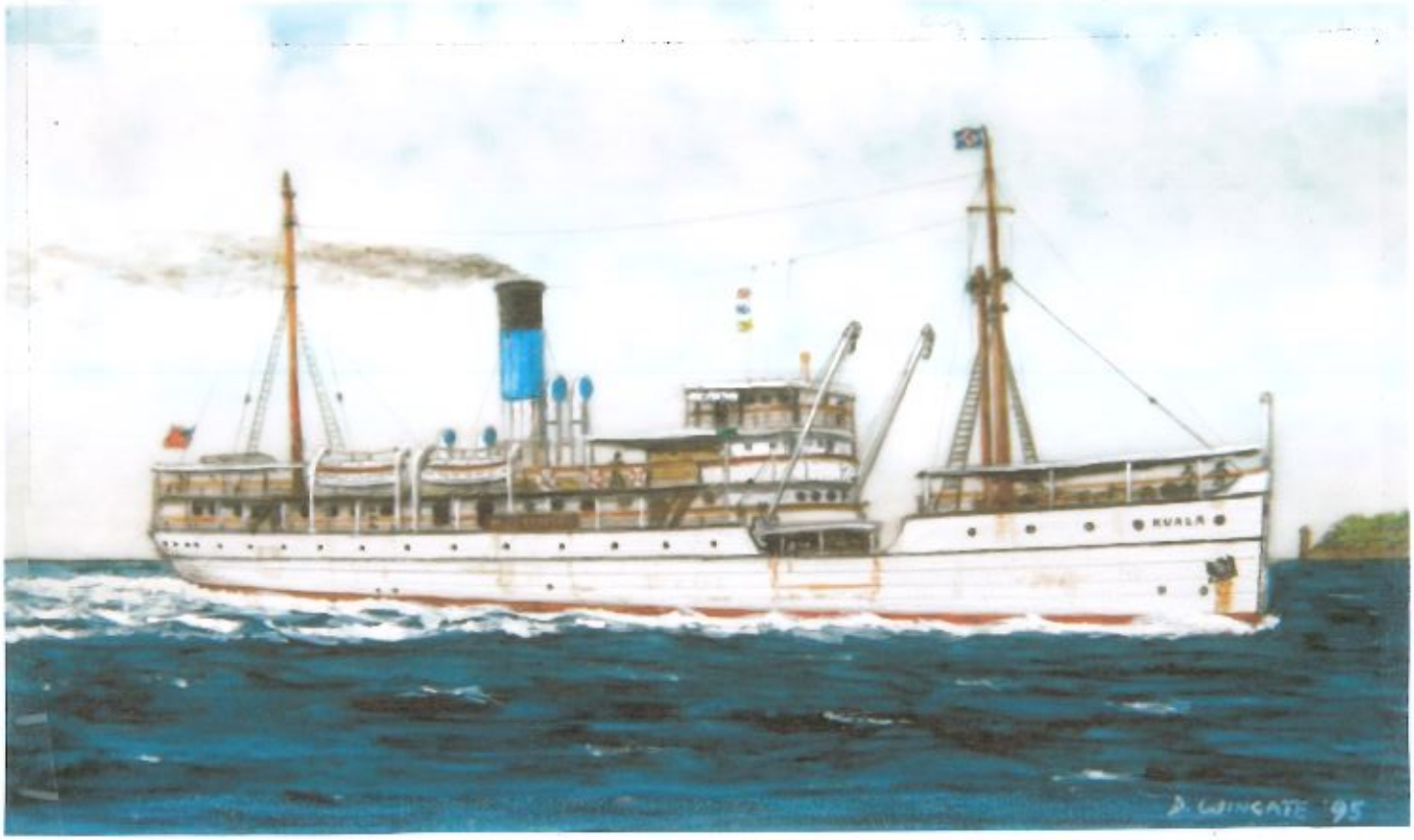
Sunk at Pom Pong Island 14th February 1942.

With thanks to **Michael Pether** for his detailed research and for his permission to reproduce parts of his information about the sinking of the **"Kuala."**

[Editor: Please note that some of the narrative in this document is very harrowing. The Imperial Japanese Forces have never been indicted for numerous war crimes committed by the sinkings of so many small ships carrying mainly civilian women and children. Their plight has never been fully reported. We thank Michael for his research in bringing their ordeal to light].

This document has been compiled as a memorial and out of empathy and respect to the women, children and men who lost their lives in that cruel attack by the Japanese bombers on the small coastal ship, converted into an auxiliary vessel, ***"S.S. Kuala"*** on 14th February 1942, twelve hours after it escaped from Singapore.
This was the day before Singapore surrendered to the Japanese.
Many of the women and children were killed on the ship itself, but even more by continued direct bombing and machine gunning of the sea by Japanese bombers whilst they were desperately trying to swim the few hundred yards to safety on the shores of Pom Pong Island. Many others were swept away by the strong currents which are a feature around Pom Pong Island and, despite surviving for several days, only a handful made it to safety.

Painting of the "S.S. Kuala" by David Wingate
By kind permission



The Captain of the ***"Kuala"*** **, Lieutenant Caithness**, recorded of the moment *"...thirty men and women floated past on rafts and drifted east and then south-west, however only three survivors were picked up off a raft on the Indragiri River, a man and his wife and an army officer..."* The bombing continued even onto the island itself as the survivors scrambled across slippery rocks and up the steep slope of the jungle tangled hills of this small, uninhabited island in the Indonesian Archipelago – once again, **Caithness** recorded *"...but when the struggling women were between the ships and the rocks the Jap had turned and deliberately bombed the women in the sea and those struggling on the rocks..."*

Several survivors recorded that the Japanese planes machine gunned the survivors trying to reach shore, including **Able Seaman Gunner John Sarney, RNZN,** (who recorded it in a letter to his wife); **Able Seaman Jim McCall, RN,** who in a 2012 interview (archive.northernvisions.org) recalled the Japanese bombers machine gunning the lifeboats and women and children swimming in the sea as they attempted to reach Pom Pong Island, and they also machine gunned them on the beaches of the Island; **Dr. Chen Su Lan** who wrote *"...every time the bombs dropped and the rattling of machine guns was heard..."*; and also friends of **Mr. Tay Lian Teck** who reported to his family that they saw him *"...being machine gunned by Japanese planes..."* – this is disputed by other survivors who say there was no machine gunning. However, from reading many documents this researcher is quite sure that the Japanese aircraft did machine gun survivors in the sea.
Once people reached Pom Pong Island, **Caithness** records, *"...the lady doctors and nurses, most of whom were Australian and British nurses from various hospitals in Malaya, carried the wounded to a clearing in the jungle about a hundred feet above sea level..."* He adds, *"...the scene was one never to be forgotten and too awful to mention..."*
Only the day before this totally unwarranted carnage, inflicted on civilians, occurred at Pom Pong Island, the once vibrant city of Singapore had been in its death throes as the Japanese shelled and bombed it into submission on the night of the 13th February 1942. Total chaos had reigned as several thousand civilians milled in fear on the wharves on Singapore harbour whilst bombs and shells were falling amongst them and killing many. They struggled and pushed on to the ships in the harbour with no thought of Passenger Lists, so exactly who was on board that day has been a very confused picture ever since.
This document is an attempt to set the record straight.
Author and survivor **Janet Lim** says that more than half the passengers were women and children. Reality is that the vast majority were women, teenagers, children and babes-in-arms.
Probably the most distressing aspect of this incredibly callous act by the Japanese air force was the high death toll of children and babies that resulted – many in cruel circumstances that saw children floating out to sea with no hope of survival. There must have been 50-70 children and babies on board, but very few, if any, survived to escape to safety in India or the UK. At the extreme, there is the quite incredible story of **Patsy Li**, aged six years, who was swept away from the ***"Kuala"*** on some wreckage and who, some newspapers reportedly claimed, was found several years later, thousands of kilometres away on Guadalcanal as the US troops were fighting the Japanese. Another poignant story is that of **James Cairns** from Penang and his infant son, **Jimmy**, who floated at sea for eight hours before being rescued and reaching Sumatra only to spend the rest of the war together in the Bangkinang men's internment camp.
In the same context, there was the truly horrible reality that when the bombing started and the ship was on fire, many women had to jump, with their children or babies, into the sea and the powerful tidal currents sweeping past Pom Pong Island and try to swim alone through the sea – whilst being blasted with high explosive bombs.
A medical doctor from Singapore, and a ***"Kuala"*** survivor, **Dr. Chen Su Lan**, wrote notes to record his memories of the day whilst stranded on an island during the weeks after the sinking. These formed part of his published book, *"Remember Pom Pong Island and Oxley Rise"* which is now in the Singapore National Library (CSL). This book contains some of the best descriptions of the events of 13th-14th February 1942 as they impacted the people on the ***"Kuala."*** He wrote most passionately of the scale and awfulness of these events:
"...I saw soldiers throwing into the sea anything that could float – bath gratings, chairs, tables, rattan baskets, empty packing cases, kapok mattresses and so on... Around the funnel the fire was leaping and extending. Beyond its devouring and grasping tongues women and children were lining the ship's railings wailing for help which did not come. The majority of them could not swim a stroke and had no life-belts, while the life-boats were used to carry the Europeans particularly the sick and wounded. In my practice I had seen mothers clutching dead babies to their breasts and heard them cry as if their hearts would break. I had heard and seen young wives wailing over their dying husbands so pathetically that even a doctor having seen numerous deaths could not help shedding a tear or two. But I have never heard such mass wailing of hundreds of helpless fellow

creatures as they were told to choose between the burning ship and the yawning depth of an unknown sea. I shall never as long as I live I forget those tormented screams. They broke my heart. They tormented my soul whenever I recalled them... " (CSL).

One of the other survivors of these events, **Mr. Stanley Jewkes**, also powerfully describes in the final chapter of his book, *"Humankind?"* [ISBN 0-7596-8787-0] the true heartbreak and horror faced by individual mothers in this situation and his writing on the whole event in this book is exceptional. Being one of the last people to leave the ship, he describes one single event that in many ways sums up the human tragedy borne by women in the sinking of the ***"SS Kuala"*** and then the false hope of safety a few days later in the boarding of the perceived 'rescue ship' named ***"SS Tandjong Pinang"*** and its even more awful sinking.

"... the young mother had probably been in the water for an hour or so, hanging on to the rope in her right hand. Cradled inn her left arm, with its head barely above the water, was a baby girl about a year old. A little boy of three years clung to his mother with his arms clasped tightly around her neck. They were not more than five feet from the red-hot starboard bow of the minesweeper. The tide-race, which was now running fast, was dragging the rope out at an angle. We found them as we rowed the lifeboat around the bow of the ship looking for any remaining survivors before returning to the shelter of the trees on Pom Pong Island. Japanese planes were still circling overhead, dropping more bombs. Flames had spread through most of the ship, and were playing around the mid-ship depth charges. Ammunition in the ship's magazines were exploding like Chinese crackers, as it had been for the past hour. We expected a violent explosion to occur at any moment.

Carefully and with difficulty we lifted the mother and her two children over the lifeboat's high gunwale. At least they were to have four more days to live before they were sent to a watery grave deep in the South China Sea, at the hands of a ruthless enemy. As we picked them out of the water, I looked at the young mother, who showed no signs of fear or panic, and I thought of my own wife, about the same age, and my year old daughter."

The **"Kuala"** passengers largely comprised a cross section of the Europeans living in Malaya at that time, plus quite a number of Chinese and Eurasian families. Insofar as the Europeans, they represented families split asunder by the Japanese invasion – one record has it that 27 men who were soon to be interned in Changi had wives and some family who had left on the **"Kuala"** (TKD). Many men lost their entire families either in this attack or in the later sinking of the **"S.S. Tandjong Pinang"** (appreviated to **"TP"** in the remainder of this document) which arrived at Pom Pong Island after a few days to rescue the women and children survivors.

In the years spent researching this document it became apparent that, whilst the boarding of the **"Kuala"** in Singapore was chaotic with little organisation and no apparent passenger list, there were strong group dynamics at work amongst the people who boarded. They were in many cases those with strong links and had known each other for years through family ties, sporting associates (particularly golf at the Singapore Golf Club and tennis) in Singapore or through business links. Many of the people on board represented both Europeans and Chinese in the top echelons of the Singapore business world and the Singapore Municipality; and also some of Northern Malaya's oldest European families who persisted with staying in Singapore in the belief it would never fall. Group dynamics were also important in the escape of a group of some of the most influential and wealthy Chinese in Singapore who would have faced serious persecution upon the Japanese taking control of Singapore *[**Noel Barber** in his book states that 125 permits were given by **Brigadier Simson** to the Evacuation Committee on the13th February specifically for the Europeans and Asians who were on the Evacuation Committee's list]* – with most of the Chinese males boarding the **"S.S. Tien Kwang"** (which left Singapore in convoy with the **Kuala**) and a few men with all the women and children boarding the **"Kuala"**. Amongst the group of Chinese there were also strong social and family ties as can be seen from previous attendances at funerals (STA 3/5/39 funeral of **Miss Emma Lu** daughter of the Assistant Manager of the Bank of China in Singapore at that time). This group included **'Johnny' Lim** of the Ho Hong Company and his family; **Tay Lian Teck; Chen Su Lan** and his son; and **Lim Chong Pang** and his brother **Lim Chong Ming** together with their families. There was a terrible death toll in these families during the bombing of

the **"Kuala"** and then as a result of women and children boarding the **"TP"**. Other notable Singaporeans in the group escaping Singapore included a young **Mr Lee Seng Tee** and the "chief of staff" of his father (who was **Lee Kong Chian** of the Lee Rubber Company) by the name of **Tan Sim Boh** who both boarded the **"Tien Kwang"**. **Lee Seng Tee** eventually made it back to Singapore but **Tan Sim Boh** lost his life in the bombing at Pom Pong Island.

Dr. Chen Su Lan recalled the scene at the time of boarding in Singapore, *"... The Staff of the Bank of China was seen carrying bags of important documents on their shoulders, while Europeans, mostly civilians and outnumbering the Chinese, monopolized the space before the gates..." (CSL)*

One of the largest family related groups comprised the Eurasian family made up of the **Eames,** the **van der Straatens**, the **Hartleys** and the **Newmans** from Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. There were several sisters-in-law and many children on board. Similarly, there was another big Eurasian family Group from Singapore – the cousins **Sybil Zehnder**, **'Lili' Plenckers** and **'Flossie' Smith** (possibly also **'Maggie Schook** but this has not been verified as yet) and their children.

We learn once again from **Dr. Chen Su Lan** that many did not know what ship they were on, *"... We had not been told the name of the ship nor of her destination ... The ship appeared to be filled with men in uniform ... as we looked around ... we stumbled upon the name of the ship **"SS Kuala"** on an iron rack on which were hung the depth charges. Her name on the ship's side had been painted over..."*

The reality of being on board the **"Kuala"** during its short journey has not been recorded in detail by many survivors but there are several insights from **Wilhelmina Eames** via her three year old daughter at the time, **Shirley**, which provide some feel for the circumstances. [See under the passenger list for more of their account].

*"... the **Kuala** was so suffocated with frightened talking flesh one could hardly move without having to step over someone..."* and later during this short voyage with food being a priority (because there wasn't any) **Wilhelmina** set off looking for something for the large family to eat, and **Shirley** recounts *"... somehow, even in the midst of despair there are acts from fellow human beings that remain hot-wired into your psyche. A Chinese woman, Straits Chinese, Mum thought, crouched on the floor with a container of boiled rice, preparing to feed her large family. She looked up at Mum, and then at me, and quietly filled a bowl with rice and gave it to Mum. We did not eat much that night, but we did eat.*

Early next morning the ship was bombed. There was, said Mum, unbelievable pandemonium..."

The question of overcrowding [which was unavoidable] is graphically illustrated by the lifebelt situation. *"... The ship was intended to accommodate only 222 passengers but she had about five or six hundred. Most of the Chinese passengers had no lifebelts, all 350 having been taken by the Europeans..."* (CSL)

One book stated that there were 50 nurses from both civilian and military hospitals of which, it states, at least eight nurses were killed on the **"Kuala"** and two died on Pom Pong Island from wounds. **Nurse Garvin** recorded that at least half the batch of QAs who left Singapore were killed. **Molly Watts-Carter** also stated *"... quite 60 women were killed by bomb splinters and blast, the rest of us jumped overboard..."*

The harsh truth revealed by this research is much worse – there were at least 170 nurses and another five VADs who boarded the **"Kuala"** of whom at least 139 died. Amongst those who lost their lives either in the bombing at Pom Pong Island, the sinking of the **"TP"** or later internment in Japanese camps were about 105 nurses from the Malayan Medical Service, the Medical Auxiliary Service, or the Territorial Army Nursing Service, and a further 26 from the QAIMNS.

One of the first bombs to hit the ship at Pom Pong Island was said to have killed a group of senior nurses conferring in a cabin on the handling of wounded already on board, but in fact there were survivors from that cabin - this group was reported to be **Matron Jones** (QAIMNS and Principal Matron of Alexandra Hospital and the person who ordered the nurses to leave Singapore); **Mrs. Cherry** (Superintendent MAS, Singapore); **Miss Spedding** (injured but survived and interned in Padang); **Miss Russell** (survived but killed whilst swimming in the sea towards Pom Pong Island as the Japanese continued to bomb survivors in the water); and **Miss West** (QAIMNS and Matron No.1 Malayan General Hospital Group).

[To be continued].

American Connections to the Muntok Peace Museum

The Muntok Peace Museum on Bangka Island opened in 2015, attended by civilian internees' families and members of the Malayan Volunteers Group and friends and the Muntok community. The Vice-Regent of West Bangka province opened the Museum and sang in English, some words from John Lennon's '*Imagine*', which encourage people to live together in peace and to imagine that this is possible.

At the same time, plaques bearing the names of the internees we believe to remain buried in Muntok in unnamed graves were place on the Catholic cemetery in Muntok. In 1981, the remains of 25 people, believed to be many of the women who died in camp during the War were placed into this grave. The words on the grave contain words from Yeats' poem and read:

" *Tread softly, for you tread on my dreams.*"

David Man, the grandson of internee Gordon Reis who died in Muntok, helped to build the Peace Museum and attended the opening. David is a librarian in the USA. He created the Muntok Peace Museum website http://muntokpeacemusuem.org and continues to maintain and add to the site. The website aims to tell the history of the War years in Muntok, Bangka Island and in the prison camps of Palembang, Belalau, Padang and Bangkinang in Sumatra. David's goal is to create a brief biography of each internee and the military nurses from Australia and the United Kingdom who were taken prisoner.

David is a member with me of Friends of Bangka Island, which helps to plan the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service in Muntok each February 16 with the Australian, New Zealand and British Embassies. He has made several trips to Muntok and helps to fundraise to support the Muntok Red Cross and Girls' Orphanage.

In November, my husband (also David) and I visited New York and met with David Man. It was a happy reunion, with a lot to talk about. A special highlight was visiting the John Lennon *Imagine* memorial at Strawberry Fields in Central Park. We were in the USA during the recent election and were reminded of the great importance of striving for a safe and peaceful world.

John Lennon Imagine Memorial, Central Park, New York

During our stay, my husband, David Man and I visited former child internee Isidore Warman at his retirement village. Iz was 2 years old in 1942 when his ship the *SS Vyner Brooke*, carrying evacuees from Singapore, was bombed and sunk in the Bangka Strait. His father drowned. Fellow passenger American brewer Eric Germann jumped from the sinking ship carrying Iz and they reached shore in a lifeboat.

Eric Germann was one of the 3 survivors of the massacre of 21 Australian Army Nurses, civilians and British and New Zealand servicemen on Radji Beach, Bangka Island near Muntok. Australian Army Nurse Matron Irene Drummond had directed the women and children to walk on ahead to Muntok town to surrender, accompanied by an elderly Australian and 2 wounded soldiers. This advance walking group had thus escaped the massacre.

Iz's mother died in camp from pneumonia. He was raised by the 15 women in Garage 9 in Irenelaan camp, Palembang, Sumatra. Presbyterian missionary Miss Margaret Dryburgh, author and composer of *The Captives Hymn,* which was sung in prison camp each Sunday and co-founder of the Palembang Women's Prison Camp vocal orchestra and MVG member Margie Caldicott's mother Shelagh Brown and grandmother Mrs Mary Brown, who later died in Muntok, lived in Garage 9.

Garage 9, Jalan Cipto, Palembang, former Irenelaan Dutch houses camp

Eric Germann was interned in the Men's camps and became friendly with fellow American internee, journalist William McDougall. McDougall's prison camp experiences lead him to become a Catholic priest after the War. He wrote 2 books about his years in camp, *Six Bells Off Java* and *By Eastern Windows* and his camp diary, *If I Get Out Alive*, was later published by his biographer.

After the War, the Red Cross located Iz's relations. He sailed to Shanghai to meet them and the extended family moved to the USA, which became his new home.

I had written to Iz for some years and we had met on a Zoom Bangka Island service during Covid but this was the first time we had met in person. Iz asked me to speak about my book, *The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra*, to members of his retirement village, which is situated in the grounds of a tertiary college. A large audience attended. Iz spoke about his life in camp and then introduced me to the group.

One of the audience members was American filmmaker Nancy Tong who has made a prize-winning documentary, *In the Name of the Emperor*, interviewing Japanese soldiers who were involved in the World War 2 atrocities in Nanking. Some members of this Orita Battalion were then involved in the Radji Beach massacre. It was a coincidence and an honour to meet Nancy, who gave me copies of her film.

We left New York and travelled back across the country by train. Another very special meeting involved a side trip to New Mexico to stay with the granddaughter of the leader of the English-speaking women and children in prison camp, Mrs Gertrude Bean Hinch. There were a similar number of Dutch women in camp, who were led by Dutch nun, Mother Laurentia.

Mrs Gertrude Bean Hinch

Mrs Hinch had been head of the Singapore YWCA before the War. She made repeated requests to the Japanese for better conditions and medicines for the women and children, although these did not eventuate. The Japanese called Mrs Hinch '*Inchi*' and regarded her fearlessness with a grudging respect. It was a great pleasure to meet her family again, who had travelled with us to Indonesia and to the camp sites in 2019.

One further American connection to Muntok is interesting to mention. I received a phone call while on the train in the USA from a friend of a child internee from the Bull family who had recently died. The family's mother Mrs Bull was American, married to Judge Bull in Singapore. She and her 3 children were on the *Vyner Brooke*. Mrs Bull became separated from the 2 older children in the water and believed they had drowned. She and her youngest child reached shore and were placed into prison camp.

Mrs Bull was very despondent and was placed into Charitas Hospital in Palembang. She called over to the men's latrines repeatedly, asking if anyone had seen her missing children. One day, Australian Army Nurse Mavis Hannah gave Mrs Bull a hand-written note from a soldier prisoner at the hospital who had heard her, telling her that he had seen her 2 older children alive and well on another island. The children had been picked up in a lifeboat and eventually reached Java where they were interned, cared for by 2 women from the YWCA.

After the War, the Bull family was reunited in Singapore. Judge Bull was freed from Sime Road camp and the 2 older children brought back to Singapore by Lady Mountbatten. This was a happy ending. unlike that for many families, after one third of women, one half of male prisoners and a number of children had died in prison camp.

The threads that bind us truly link the many camp families together in an unbreakable bond that reaches around the world.

Memorial Bench to civilians and Australian Army Nurses, Menteng Pulo War Cemetery, next to CWGC Cemetery, Jakarta

New York – November 2024
Left to right:
Iz Warman, Judy Balcombe, David Man
Judy meets Iz Warman, former child Internee in Palembang, and David Man, Webmaster for the Muntok Peace Museum.

Muntok Peace Museum

We thank Judy for her tireless work to keep alive the memory of the civilians interned in Muntok and Palembang in WW2, and for her fund raising sales to help the Muntok Red Cross. In a recent talk at the Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne, she sold copies of her book and other items raising $1,400 for the Muntok Red Cross and Orphanage.

In reply, she received the following message from **Dery Aryandi**, from the Muntok Red Cross. He said:

"Mam Judy and Mam Arlene and friends there, we Muntok Red Cross will clean and maintain the Radjie Beach monument for activities February 16 2025, hopefully we can meet again and convey the message of peace to the whole world, we are all brothers."

DATES FOR 2025

MUNTOK – 16th February 2025
Services in Muntok and on Radji Beach to commemorate the 83rd anniversary of the massacre of Australian Army Nurses, Soldiers and Civilians.

Articles for Future Editions.

We would be very grateful to receive articles for this newsletter. Please send to:
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