

SELAMAT PAGI
THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER
<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>



Singapore Far East Moon Rose

EDITION 5
MARCH 2025



**Centre: Gita Kamath, Australian Deputy Ambassador to Indonesia, with
L and R: the Australian Naval and Military Defence Attaches, laying flowers
in the sea on Radji Beach after the 'Walk for Humanity' 16/02/2025.**

SELAMAT PAGI
THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER
<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>

March 2025

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

As we look forward to celebrating the 80th anniversary of V-J Day on 15th August 2025, we do so in memory of those who, in March 1945, were in a very precarious situation, hanging on to life in their civilian internment camps, hoping and praying that the end of the war would come soon. For many it was not possible to overcome the lack of food, medicines and basic needs to survive. How sad that they were not to know the end of their ordeal was only a few months away.

It was, therefore, with great sadness that we heard of the death of **Jane Elgey (nee Reid)** on 15th December 2024. Evacuated from Singapore on the ill-fated **Mata Hari**, Jane and her family were interned initially in Muntok on Bangka Island and then moved backwards and forwards from there to other camps in Sumatra, including Palembang, ending up in Belalau Camp in the heart of the jungle near the town of Loeboek Linggau.

Jane's funeral service was held on 15th January 2025, and attended by her children, **Glynis**, **Jacqueline** and **Vincent**, grandsons and great grandsons, and her many friends. We thank **Stephen** and **Margie Caldicott** for representing the MVG.

Glynis's moving eulogy to her mother can be found on Ps. 2-4. As well as **Glynis's** eulogy, there was also a heartfelt Tribute from **Vilma Howe**, **Jane's** friend in the Palembang Camp, which was read out during the funeral service. Both were captured as children with their families on the **Mata Hari**. **Vilma's** Tribute follows the eulogy on P. 4.

On 16th February 2025, the 83rd Anniversary of the Radji Beach massacre, Remembrance Services were held on the beach and in other locations in Muntok. Attended by **Judy Balcombe**, **Arlene Bennett** and **David Man**, together with representatives from the Australian and New Zealand Embassies in Jakarta, the beach service ended with the now familiar "Walk for Humanity," during which all present hold hands and wade into the sea, as the Australian Army Nurses were ordered to do all those years ago, before being shot. Today, flowers are strewn in the sea in memory of those who were massacred on that beach in 1942. See **Judy's** report on Ps. 20-27.

In a letter to The Sunday Telegraph newspaper in the U.K. on 19th January 2025, **Admiral Lord West** referred to the aircraft carriers **HMS Indomitable**, **Illustrious**, **Indefatigable** and **Victorious** which, in January 1945 en route to Sydney to become the hub of the new British Pacific Fleet, attacked the Japanese forces in Indonesia. These attacks, known as the "Palembang Raids" were aimed to destroy the oil refineries on the Moesi River at **Pladjoe** and **Soengei Gerong** near Palembang – thus denying the Japanese the aviation fuel they desperately needed for their war effort. These attacks were successful. However, during the raids several British planes were shot down, and at least nine of the captured Fleet Air Arm aircrew were executed by the Japanese. **Admiral West** rightly says that we should remember the strategic significance of these raids and the men who died, or were injured and murdered as a result of this operation.

In response to **Admiral West's** letter on 26th January, it was pointed out that in addition to remembering the murdered Fleet Air Arm personnel, we should also remember the military FEPOWs and civilian men, women and children who were incarcerated in prison camps in Palembang and in other parts of Sumatra.

We will remember them on 15th August 2025 – V-J Day's 80th anniversary.

If you have any articles for future editions - please contact Rosemary Fell rosemaryfell@gmail.com

The Life of Jane Elgey

With thanks to her daughter Glynis Elgey

Jane Winifred Young Elgey (nee Reid)

Born 9th June 1929, Johore Bahru, Malaya.

Jane was 1 of 5 children having an elder sister and 3 brothers. Only her younger brother **Dirk Reid** and his wife **Lucy** are still with us, but could not attend today, due to their ill health.

Our mother, **Jane**, attended a Catholic Convent School for all nationalities, and she also went to school with the Princess of Johore.

Jane and her family had a lovely home and lifestyle, and often swam in the Sultan of Johore's private pool, as both her parents were friends of the Sultan.

My mum's mother, **Oma Reid**, cooked local food for the family which I am sure helped them to survive the POW Camps and was a good grounding for things to come.

13th February 1942.

Our mother, **Jane**, and her family escaped Singapore on the **Mata Hari** as the bombs were being dropped.

Whilst on the ship, the children were given sweets and one got stuck in mum's braces, and she often wondered how her teeth would have ended up if she still had braces on.

Their ship did get some damage from the bombs but did not sink and they limped into Sumatra where they were captured by the Japanese. Our mother **Jane** and her family were put amongst the Eurasians in the various camps as the Australians and English kept to themselves.

Mum and her family spent 4 years in Sumatra in various camps as they were moved around. Mum once said banana skins don't taste nice as they used to fry or boil them before eating them. I recall her telling us they ate anything and everything they could get their hands on. My mother's grandmother, **Oma Kobus**, died in Camp and mum was very close to her.

15th August 1945

The Japanese surrendered and soon after our mother and her family flew to Singapore on a Dakota from Lahat Aerodrome, it being mum's first trip on a plane – it had square portholes. They stayed in the Raffles Hotel until passages were allocated for them on the **M.V. Antenor** where they docked in Liverpool where their father was waiting for them. No grand reception or brass bands welcomed them.

On arriving in Paisley mum was enrolled in the Paisley Grammar School. Although she was 16 at the time, she was put in with a class of 12 year olds as she had lost so much schooling.

1946-1949 Paisley Grammar School

On leaving Paisley Grammar School in 1949 she worked at Coates Thread Mills Science Department testing the strength of the thread made there. She didn't stay there long as she secured a job at Paisley Co-operative Manufacturing Society Ltd, working in the Bespoke Tailoring Department making bespoke jackets from start to finish. She worked there until 1952 when she was 23. She then went to work for Fulton's Dye Works near Barrhead as a Control Clerk, pinpointing the position of each dyed material.

Jane then went to work as a Nursery Nurse at a Children's Home in Rhu Helensburgh with one of her friends. She also worked with the old type of computer sending information to the Mills in Manchester and to a NAAFI in Winchester.

Mum gets married

Mum had a boyfriend, **Duncan**, who was serving in the Army. When they split up his friend, **Harold**, who was stationed in Hong Kong asked if he could write to mum and they became pen pals. When he was on leave in Hull, they met for the first time in Gretna Green where mum was staying with her sister **Erica**. They then travelled up to Paisley, and on the train **Harold** gave her a box of chocolates but replaced one of the chocolates with an engagement ring. They travelled up to Paisley to stay with her mother, **Marie**, who took to Harold and said yes.

Harold only had a few days leave but could not get a special licence to get married in Scotland, so that travelled down to Hull and were married on 12th November 1955 at Hull Registry Office. It certainly was a whirlwind romance. Soon after, **Harold** was posted to Gibraltar. Whilst in Hull, **Jane** stayed with **Harold's** parents and I recall her telling us that she worked at the Metal Box.



Mum joined **Harold** in Gibraltar in the summer of 1956 where **Glynis** was born. They lodged with a local family until they could secure Army Quarters. **Harold** had a shilling leftover from his pay which he used to save and he asked mum if there was anything she needed before he saved up for a car. She said a sewing machine so that she could make all her own clothes and baby clothes for **Glynis**.

1959 -1963

In 1959, mum and **Harold** were back in Hull, staying with his parents, and **Jacqueline** was born in the January.

In 1961 they moved to Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, where mum took on a few part time jobs: Chalet Maid Summer Season at Totland Bay IOW and Cafeteria Assistant, Norland Chalet Hotel, near Yarmouth IOW.

Around 1963, **Harold** bought his first house in Carrs, near Haslingden in Lancashire where we lived for a couple of years. Whilst there, mum worked at a Fishmongers until **Harold** was posted to Singapore.

1964 - 1970

Mum, **Glynis** and **Jacky** joined **Harold** in Singapore where mum met up with her childhood friends, also her father who was still working out in Singapore, and her younger brother **Dirk**. In 1966 we were back in East Hull where **Harold** bought a house and where **Vincent** was born in May just before the World Cup of '66. Whilst in Hull, mum had a few part-time jobs, working round our school hours and was always home when we finished school. Later that year we moved to Portsmouth into Army Quarters, but by 1967 we were back in Singapore for another 3 years.

We returned to Hull in 1970, and eventually moved to Market Weighton on Christmas Eve just as it started snowing. **Harold** only had a week's leave before being posted abroad again.

1971 onwards

Mum had a variety of jobs in and around Market Weighton over the next few years. She met several celebrities during her life, including the late **Dame Ann Neagle** in Gibraltar and in 1984 she met **Jon Pertwee** at the Liverpool Garden Festival. She was invited and attended a Garden Party at Holyrood House in 1995.

She also went to London to join the campaign for Prisoners of Japan to receive long overdue compensation.

Mum's POW Camps were immortalised in the TV Series **TENKO**, although she told us that life was much harsher than the TV series portrayed. She later met the producer, **Lavinia Warner**, in person in Chichester where she also met some of the cast of **TENKO** and other internees whom she had not seen since she was liberated from the Camps. She was also interviewed by **Pam Rhodes** for a special programme of Songs of Praise for V-J Day which you can still watch on YouTube.

In January 1999 our mother lost her soul mate **Harold** and she often spoke about him in the present tense. She missed him greatly as he was her one and true love. They had a truly wonderful marriage and I remember them renewing their vows at this very church because they had married in a Registry Office.

On 15th August 2015, mum and I attended one of the V-J Day memorial services where we met **Dicky Bird** and other internees who were captured by the Japanese and mum met up with other internees whom she had not seen since the end of the war, and had a good catch up. Mum was also invited to attend the 75th anniversary of V-J Day on 15th August 2020 at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire. We met **Sophie Raworth** journalist and newsreader, and **Dan Snow** MBE historian and TV presenter. We also met and had a lovely conversation with the then **Prince Charles** and **Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall**, as well as **Boris Johnson PM**, which was the highlight of the weekend for her. It was an emotional day for her remembering all those who never came back and died in the camps. The BBC televised the VJ75 Commemoration.

Mum loved her artwork and painting and went on various painting holidays. She met **Ashley Jackson** whose father was also interned in one of the POW camps in Sumatra but sadly did not return. **Ashley Jackson** invited mum to the opening of his Gallery in Holmfirth where 'Last of the Summer Wine' was filmed.

She was also a member of various art groups in Pocklington and Hook and raised monies for the Royal British Legion selling poppies door to door as well as visiting the local factories. She also collected thousands of bras for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance to help raise funds for them. Another pastime of mum's was dressmaking and knitting as she made the majority of her own clothes and ours when we were growing up, and in her later years she enjoyed crochet and knitting squares to make blankets for another charity.

She supported various charities over the years including the Gurkha Welfare Trust and was also a member of the Royal British Legion.

She enjoyed swimming and going on coach trips with friends. She travelled in Europe and stayed in Youth Hostels. She would help anyone out, and never saw bad, only good in a person. I now know where I get my love of taking photos as mum has numerous photos, not only from her younger days but also from her trips abroad with the Church to Italy and her painting holidays in the UK.

More recently, mum was awarded the Freedom of Market Weighton in December 2020. And only this Christmas **Jacky** took her to switch on the Christmas Tree lights in the town for the second time.

Jane was a loving wife to our late father, **Harold**, and a fantastic mother to the three of us, making sure we never went without. She hated to see food wasted and on one occasion when we took her out for a meal in York, we had left a bit of cauliflower. She looked at us and said, "You can tell who was interned in a POW camp" looking at our unfinished plates and her clean plate. She had a wicked sense of humour sometimes.

One thing which she used to say sticks in my mind, and that is, "**Glynis** you are my Rock, my Rock of Gibraltar."

Mum leaves behind her 3 children **Glynis**, **Jacky** and **Vincent**; her grandsons and great grandsons as well as her brother **Dirk** and his wife **Lucy**; numerous nieces and nephews who live as far apart as Paisley, Hull, London, Oxford and Australia; and her long-term friends from the Camps with whom she kept in touch.

There is so much more I could say about her life but trying to get 95 years into this Eulogy would take too long. I am sure you all have your own stories and memories of our mother. I will end by saying: **"THINGWAY" "SO"**

A Tribute to the everlasting friendship between Jane (nee Reid) Elgey and Vilma (nee Stubbs) Howe

In 1942, as the enemy bombs rained down on Singapore, the families of Jane (Reid) Elgey and Vilma (Stubbs) Howe hastily evacuated on the "Mata Hari" ship. Bombed at sea, but fortunately not sunk, all aboard were captured and sent to the horrors of Muntok and Palembang Sumatran internment camps.

It was during their time in Palembang that Jane and Vilma befriended each other – and over the years they shared the horrors of captivity... malnutrition and health setbacks and tolerated their bad skin sores each day. The one day, amidst the restlessness among the young, a lady decided to let the children do a play. Jane and I were selected to play gypsy girls (no we didn't have costumes, but waved our worn camp clothing around...and sang a "gypsy" song composed by one of the camp ladies) ... and felt happy for a brief moment of our lives.

Suddenly in mid-1942, the Japanese decided to relocate some families, Vilma's among them ...not to freedom. We were shipped to Singapore's Changi Prison and Sime Road Jail to remain there till war ended. Jane thought I had gone free..... meanwhile she was moved around Sumatran horror camps until war ended and lost family members in death. In August 1945 Peace came eventually. Vilma moved to Canada and Jane was back in the UK...unaware of each other's whereabouts...but then Margie Caldicott of the Malayan Volunteers Group found and linked us and Jane and I had a memorable reunion in Chichester. To the delight of all there Jane and I ...in recollecting our camp days, had remembered EVERY WORD OF OUR CAMP GYPSY SONG.

Over the years, Vilma, now living in Canada and Jane in the U.K. kept in touch. I wish to thank Glynis Elgey, whenever she visited Jane she would "connect" us electronically and we could chat briefly and sing our song together...we remembered every word of the song and we'd remember our malnutrition camp diets and how we coped with them.

I have unforgettable memories and sounds with Jane to sustain me forever...I am sooo going to miss my dear friend...rest in peace, Jane...as we say goodbye in our song... lye-lye-lye-lye-lye..... **Vilma.**

THE FALL OF SINGAPORE AND THE FATE OF THE LAST 65 AUSTRALIAN NURSES IN 1942

Talk given by Arlene Bennett at the Liverpool RFH Conference in June 2023

By kind permission of Arlene Bennett

The 8th Division Australian Army Nurses of the 2/10 AHG, 2/13 AGH and 2/4th Casualty Clearing Station were stationed in Malaya. As the Japanese proceeded with great speed down the Malayan Peninsula the nurses were ordered to transfer to Singapore. They were working at St. Patrick's School and the ACS Oldham School until they were to be evacuated.

On the 10th February, 6 members of the AANS were sent on the *WAH SUI* with wounded soldiers bound for Australia. It was decided that all the nurses should be evacuated from Singapore because of what had happened in Hong Kong. The nurses were asked for volunteers to leave on the first ship available. No one volunteered to leave so **Matron Paschke** and **Matron Drummond** decided who would leave Singapore first. Fifty-nine nurses were selected to leave first on the *EMPIRE STAR* and later on the 12th February, 65 on the *SS VYNER BROOKE*. The Vyner Brooke would be one of the last ships to leave Singapore. Those on the Empire Star were bombed but they made it back to Australia even though fourteen people on the ship were killed. The nurses flung themselves over the passengers to shield them from the bombing. These nurses received the George Cross for bravery. The *SS VYNER BROOKE* had a very different story filled with tragedy. For the 65 nurses on *SS VYNER BROOKE* there was still much work to be done on the way home. They helped with the food that was on board as most people didn't think to carry food with them. **Sister Clarice Halligan** had written home to her sister in Melbourne at the end of 1941, *"Thank you very much for the parcel. I was glad to get it. We are carefully packing all tinned foods in the bottom of our kit bags in case we are in for a siege, which is quite likely, however, we are ready what may come, we can make it and a bit more, as long as we keep the Japs out of Australia anything that may happen here is worthwhile."* Clarice would be one of the twenty-one nurses massacred on Bangka Island.

The ship travelled during the night and kept close to the shoreline hoping not to be detected. This worked for a while but on the 14th February their luck would run out. The ship was bombed and machine guns strafed those who were in the water or in lifeboats. The nurses assisted the passengers to abandon the ship prior to leaving the ship themselves with some emergency supplies of medicine and bandages in their pockets. Twelve nurses were lost either at the time of bombing, in the water, or floating off and away from land.

Up to 100 boats were lost in the bombing of the ships in the Bangka Strait and up to 5,000 people lost their lives.

A group of 22 Australian Nurses washed up on Radji Beach near Muntok in Indonesia. **Matron Drummond** suggested that a bonfire should be lit to act as a beacon for those who were still at sea. About 60 men also washed up on the beach. The nurses cared for those who were injured with what little they had. Eventually it was decided that a party of men should walk into the town and alert the Japanese that there were women and injured remaining on the beach. **Matron Drummond** also suggested that the uninjured civilian women and children should begin the long walk into town. This single act saved so many lives. The women and children passed the Japanese who would ultimately go to Radji Beach.

When the Japanese soldiers arrived at Radji Beach they ordered the men around the bluff in two groups where they were shot and bayoneted to death. Two men survived - **Stoker Lloyd** and **Eric German**. Once they had finished dealing with the men, the Japanese soldiers returned to the women wiping their bloodied bayonets. What happened next was shocking.

The nurses were raped and tortured by these soldiers of the notorious **Orita Battalion** – the same battalion which had been in Nanking and later in Hong Kong where they raped and murdered nurses at the St. Stephens Hospital on Christmas day 1941.

This information was published on an ABC website on 2nd June 2023. The research came to light after **Lynette Silver** and **Georgina Banks** had researched the incident. **Georgina** has written a book called, *"Back to Bangka"* and she is the great niece of **Gwendolene Dorothy Elmes (Bud)** who was murdered on Radji Beach.

The nurses were lined up and ordered to walk into the sea. A machine gun began to fire upon them. **Matron Drummond** said to her nurses, "*Chin up girls..... I am proud of you..... I love you all.*" She was brutally shot as were all the nurses. All but one of the nurses died. **Vivian Bullwinkel**, who was taller than average, was shot just above the hip but no vital organs were hit. She feigned death in the water and was gradually washed back to the shore. She could not see any sign of life in any of the nurses who were washed up on the beach. The Japanese had left the beach. **Vivian** crept into the jungle behind the beach and hid. She slept for about 24 hours. A voice from within the jungle called to her. It was **Private Kinsley**, a British soldier who had been badly injured. **Vivian**, who had been shot, managed to look after him. She walked to a nearby village to ask for assistance but the men of the village offered none because they were afraid of reprisals from the Japanese. As she began to return to the jungle, the women called to her and they left her some food. She and **Private Kinsley** lived in the jungle for 12 days. **Vivian** decided that they should give themselves up. **Private Kinsley** begged for one day more of freedom. When asked why he told **Vivian** that it was his birthday and that he wanted to be free one last time. They waited.

The next day they set off into Muntok and were met by a passing car of a Japanese officer. They were treated kindly and were taken into camp.

Meanwhile 31 more of the Australian Army Nurses had come ashore all along Bangka Island. They were initially held in the Customs House and moved a few doors up to the picture theatre. After a few days they were moved to the Coolie Lines and the men went to the Muntok Gaol next door.

Betty Jeffrey and **Iole Harper** would take three days to reach land having swum into the mangrove swamps. Eventually all the nurses would be together. Thirty-two of the sixty-five had survived.

Vivian retold her story but the nurses agreed never to speak of it again until they were home.

Private Kinsley died a few days after he was imprisoned.

Most of the nurses had discarded their shoes as they left the ship so they bound their feet in rags or found shoes and used them, and some made trompers - wooden scuffs.

The nurses would soon be moved to Palembang in Sumatra. They would be taken in a dirty coal carrying ship out to sea and then up the Musi River to Palembang. The nurses would briefly be settled into a camp at Bukit Besar which was inhabited by various soldiers as well as civilian men and women.

The nurses were then sent to a camp which was referred to as Irenelaan. The men's camp was the Palembang Gaol. Behind the women's camp the men were building a new camp in which to be housed. The women's houses were hopelessly cramped with little space within for the women housed there. The women had few items and two of the nurses found a toothbrush which they shared throughout the war. There was little firewood to burn to do the cooking. There were no medications to use if the women became ill. A used tin would become a valuable item for the women. Life was monotonous for them but they soon developed ways of improving their lot.

Margaret Dryburgh, a missionary from England, and **Norah Chambers** would start the vocal orchestra. There were lectures given to the women on a variety of subjects. The food was cooked by groups of women. The amount of food was limited. The rice was dirty, the vegetables were left by the Japanese in the sun to rot and there were small amounts of meat left for the women. The women had to clean the latrines with coconut shells or similar. During the rainy season this task was made even worse.

As Christmas Eve 1942 approached, the women saw the men passing by to go to work. The women began to sing *Silent Night* and *Oh Come All Ye Faithful* to them as they passed by. The following day the men would return their favour. It was the closest that they would get to be with each other. The women lost condition as each day passed. During their time in Palembang they could go to the Charitas Hospital for some extra treatment. During these visits to the hospital some of the women could meet with the men from the men's camp to discover how the men were doing. **Sister Mavis Hannah** was caught by the Japanese with messages in a sanitary pad to be relayed to wives in the women's camp. She was left to stand in the sun for hours as punishment. The nuns from Charitas were also imprisoned by the Japanese because they seemed to be on the side of the prisoners. They hid medicines in their robes which would give some hope to those who were ill. They too joined the camp.

The women moved once again, this time to the men's camp, Palembang. The men had left the camp but before they left they had trashed much of the camp. They didn't know that the women would be taken there. Some of the women would die in Palembang, but none of the nurses. Eventually the women's camp was moved back to Muntok. They were taken there by boat. The camp was very primitive. The women were deteriorating and so many died. Disease was rampant in Muntok. There was malaria, Dengue fever, Banka fever alongside malnutrition, beri-beri and dysentery. The nurses took care of the sick as well as doing their other tasks but gradually they were becoming sick too. Four nurses would die in the camp in Muntok during 1945. This was terrible for the nurses to endure but they needed to carry on as best they could. They had very little access to medication. The amounts that were left would have been almost useless.

By April 1945 the internees were to be moved again. This time they were taken in two groups back to Sumatra. Women were dying and so many did not make it to their final destination. They were taken on a ship to Palembang. Conditions were appalling. They arrived late at night and were loaded into the cattle carriages of a train. The airless carriages were cramped and the women spent the night in them. The following day they travelled the many hours to Loebok Linggau. So many people did not live to reach their destination. **Sister Betty Jeffrey** described their journey as dreadful. Everyone was weakened.

The camp was in an abandoned rubber plantation, high on a hill. There was a creek running through the two halves of the women's camp. The accommodation was in a dirty rat-infested state. The creek soon became contaminated. The health of the inhabitants deteriorated significantly due to the small amount of food and illness leading to high death rates.

The nurses were weakened due to lack of food and the constant threat of disease. Despite this they managed to offer some succour to those in the camp. They could bathe the patients and give them a drink or perhaps assist them to eat a small amount of rice. They had nothing but care and compassion to offer and some words of encouragement.

It is thought that approximately 89 women died in the camp at Belalau. Another four nurses would also die in this camp. One died after the war had ended.

The end of the war came but the nurses did not know that it had ended. They wouldn't know until **Captain Seki Kazuo** addressed the women. On the 24th August he climbed onto a table and announced that the war was over and that we could now be friends. He never said who the victors of the war were.

The Japanese would throw open the doors of the store room which held Red Cross packages with food and medicine in them. The nurses had suffered the deprivation of these items as had everyone in the camp. Undoubtedly the death rate could have been less significant.

Because the camp was well hidden amongst the trees, the allies hadn't been able to find the nurses. Finally, **Major Gideon Jacob** discovered them. He had flown over the camp and saw fabric moving amongst the trees. **Major Tebbutt** who had been on the *SS VYNER BROOKE* with the nurses had insisted that they must be somewhere in Sumatra. Indeed they were.

Food was parachuted into the camps. The nurses enjoyed Vegemite on bread!

On 24th September, **Matron Annie Sage**, **Sister Floyd**, one of the nurses belonging to the 2/10th who had been evacuated on the *EMPIRE STAR*, and **Sister Chandler** arrived by plane to collect the nurses. **Matron Sage** had taken sixty-five lipsticks for the nurses. When she arrived, she saw the small number of nurses and asked one of the nurses, "*Where are you all?*" She realised that this was all that was left of the 65 nurses. She declared that she was the mother of them all. A profound moment! Only 24 nurses had survived the war.

They left for Singapore by plane with **Sister Chandler**. The nurses arrived and were taken to St. Patrick's Hospital – the place where so many of them had been before they left Singapore. They gradually gained weight but the soft beds were too much for some of them, and they slept on the hard floor. They were befriended by **Lady Edwina Mountbatten** who had taken a keen interest in their story and wellbeing. She would visit the Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne when she visited the nurses in Australia.

The nurses travelled home on the *AHS MANUNDA* and arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia on 23rd October 1945. The *MANUNDA* had on board the first nurse known to be killed in Darwin on

19th February 1942. They would finally be home on Australian soil. There as a great fanfare in Fremantle and the nurses were showered with flowers.

The nurses had a special bond. They would talk to each other and meet up often. They would speak to each other about what had happened to them and how they had survived, but they didn't talk of their ordeal to others. Many returned to nursing and others married. Some were never well enough to go back to nursing. **Vivian Bullwinkel** went to the War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo in 1946. Her testimony was tame to say the least. She was most likely gagged by the Australian, British and United States Governments who wanted post war Japan not to be as affected as it might have been had her story become public knowledge.

She was a notable nurse who returned home. She had a full career. She worked at the Repatriation Hospital in Melbourne but she resigned her post as Lieutenant in 1947. Later she became the matron of Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. She was the President of the Victoria College of Nursing (precursor of the Australian College of Nursing). She was a decorated nurse who was awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal 2nd class; the Florence Nightingale Medal, an MBE & an AO. She contacted and kept in touch with all of the families of the nurses who were massacred on Bangka Island, writing to them all at Christmas and on special occasions when she knew that it would have been tough for them.

She was a most revered nurse who had a statue unveiled at the Australian War Memorial in not only her honour but for all the nurses who were lost on Bangka Island.

As **Michael Pether**, a NZ historian wrote:

"All credit for this revelation to a small group of highly intelligent, lovingly motivated women researchers and authors, who persevered to know the truth of the final, horrendous experiences of their relatives and nursing forebears on Bangka Island at the hands of the Japanese after the sinking of the SS VYNER BROOKE."

He also wrote:

"To read of the no less than devastating ongoing experiences suffered by Vivian (Bullwinkel) in the immediate months after the atrocity is really heartbreaking. It is almost beyond belief that she retained her sanity with both the memories of Radji Beach and the physical pain and debilitation. She was very high in my respect previously – now she in my view was a truly remarkable human being."

This is an Australian story; a story of women; a story of war; it is a story we must never forget.

Lest we forget.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"White Coolies" by Betty Jeffrey

J.P.L. Kickhefer – White Coolies' illustrator

The Australian Nurses Memorial Centre, Melbourne -- admin@nmc.org.au

Australian War Memorial -- www.awm.gov.au

Jim Claven Historian

National Archives of Australia -- www.naa.gov.au

Georgina Banks



L-R Shirley Gardam (died in camp);
Mavis Hannah (survived);
Matron Irene Drummond
(massacred on Radji Beach).

V-J DAY 80
CHICHESTER VOCAL ORCHESTRA CONCERTS

Report by Margie Caldicott

Margie Caldicott has made contact with **Stephen Walton** at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London about putting on Vocal Orchestra Concerts to celebrate V-J Day in 2025 – and to mark its 80th anniversary. Her suggestion is to perform the iconic classical music, arranged in 4 parts in wartime Sumatra by English Missionary **Margaret Dryburgh** and musician **Norah Chambers**, in concerts held in IWM museums in London, Manchester and Duxford. The idea has been passed to the IWM Events Team, but it remains to be seen whether the concerts will come to fruition.

If anyone is interested in organising a concert for the Chichester Vocal Orchestra, please contact Margie Caldicott [margiecaldicott@yahoo.co.uk] or Rosemary Fell [rosemaryfell11@gmail.com]. The music is held at the IWM but it is very faint and frail and in Margie Caldicott's mother's archives. It can only be viewed.

The Chichester Vocal Orchestra performs well known instrumental or orchestra pieces arranged for female voices. The pieces were first performed in a WW2 Women's Prison Camp in Palembang, Sumatra, on 27th December 1943.

This is a unique chance to hear the inspirational story of the survival of some remarkable women through music.

The idea of a Vocal Orchestra was conceived by **Norah Chambers** (who had studied violin at the Royal Academy of Music in London before moving to Malaya to teach music) and **Margaret Dryburgh** (a Missionary who had been the headmistress of the Presbyterian Girls School in Singapore prior to the Fall of Singapore in February 1942). **Norah** said of **Margaret**: *"You could go to her, hum a tune and straight away she could write it down and harmonise it."*

They arranged the music for 4-part women's voices, on tiny scraps of paper, to give the flavour and colour of the original using vowel and consonant sounds sparingly, as well as degrees of softness and strength. No words, no instruments, just pure 4-part singing. A Capella.

"The idea of making ourselves into a vocal orchestra came to us when songs were difficult to remember, and we longed to hear again some of the wonderful melodies and harmonies that uplifted our souls in days gone by."

The repertoire consists of 22 Vocal Orchestra pieces including the Largo from Dvorak's New World Symphony; Chopin's the Raindrop Prelude and Prelude op 28 no. 20; Beethoven's Minuet in G; Tchaikovsky's Andante Cantabile; Ravel's Bolero; and Handel's Pastoral from The Messiah.

Margaret Dryburgh also wrote the words and the music for The Captives' Hymn in Palembang, first performed as a trio on Sunday 5th July 1942. It became the Camp Hymn sung every Sunday until their release in September 1945. It is now sung at Remembrance Services around the World on V-J Day.

The Chichester Vocal Orchestra comprises 25-30 women already experienced as choral musicians. The Singing to Survive Concert is performed in an hour (without interval) with 2 narrators telling the story of the Camp interspersed with music.

The basic cost of putting on a concert in the UK would be:

£200 fee for the conductor/Fees for 2 narrators?

Programme printing/Publicity

Tea for the VO between rehearsal and concert

Hire of venue etc.

Cost of travel to venue from Chichester – by coach or train.

Costs could be reimbursed by selling tickets or having a retiring collection.

The printed music can be purchased from Music Shops or online @ www.presser.com

Song of Survival Vols 1-6 arr. Dryburgh and Chambers. Treble Chorus; a capella – 312-41771-6; Captives' Hymn – 312-41787 (Keyboard SABT)

Previous concerts have raised funds for a Refugee Charity; BEATS Charity; Memorials on civilian graves in Muntok, Bangka Island; & computers for a Primary School in Muntok.

"S.S. KUALA" – contd.

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].

A small number of the nurses on the ship who lost their lives are specifically remembered on the 'Malayan Nurses' Roll of Honour in Westminster Abbey (ST. 13/11/50) and these include **Matron** (retd.) **Cherry**, **Sister Olive MacFarlane**, **Matron Fanny Holgate**, **Sister Grace Logan**, **Matron Waugh** (who later died, from injuries inflicted during the bombing of the ship in Padang soon after the Japanese arrived in that port town) and **Sister N.S. MacMillan** who died in internment.

When the ship caught fire from the bombing, most of the women and children literally had to jump into the sea and a great many were swept quickly away from the ships and Pom Pong Island to their deaths. There are also many stories from survivors who spent days floating at sea before being picked up by local Chinese and Malay villagers and fishermen. These stories bring into focus that unavoidable reality of racial division that existed at the time, regrettably driven by the attitude of some Europeans and their racially superior view of other races, even in the survival situation in tiny rafts; also the reluctance of some local fishermen to rescue Europeans – preferring instead firstly to save Chinese survivors floating at sea – and even a few of the local Malay rescuers robbing both Chinese and European survivors.

On board the ship racial differences became quickly apparent (whereas society had actually operated much more respectfully in pre-war business and sporting circles) viz *"...onboard the Kuala... he had been a member of the Singapore Rotary Club ... he knew me, but there on an evacuee ship, he knew me not [also other passengers] ... very few European acquaintances spoke to us. It seemed that the presence of Chinese on board was only tolerated but not welcomed ..."* (CSL – Dr. Chen Su Lan).

This contrasts with the heroics of **Tay Ah Soey** who rescued dozens of floating survivors and **Tan Ah Ngoh** – both received awards for bravery after the war – **Tan Ah Ngoh** a British Empire medal in 1949 and **Tan Ah Soey** an award in 1952 (ST. 10/12/52). **Tay Ah Soey** became a well known hero in Singapore history. He picked up about 36 people in his sampan including **Lim Chong Pang** and also arranged for much food to be brought to Pom Pong Island from his village.

Further, in the chaos and death occurring during the bombing of the ship and the situation where scores of women, children and men were being swept to their deaths by the powerful currents around the island, and tragically between moments of incredible bravery and self sacrifice, there occurred some awful moments of racism, again recorded by **Dr. Chen Su Lan** (who wrote much of his account of the sinking and its aftermath – when it was fresh in his mind – during the many weeks he hid from the Japanese on Pulau Temiang). Sadly he recorded several instances when race appeared to come before humanity *"...a little Chinese girl carried on the back of a Chinese swimming towards Pom Pong was not allowed to be put in the [life] boat ..."* and also the situation of *"...two brothers [Chinese] threatened with a revolver for clinging to a life buoy ..."* and finally *"...[a] taxi-dancer was not allowed into a [life] boat..."* (CSL).

There is no question that the nurses on Pom Pong Island were very brave, demonstrably unselfish and totally dedicated to their patients. It is notable that several of the QAs who lost their lives have been awarded "Mention in Despatches" which is a high honour – if awarded posthumously this MID is amongst the highest honours.

The toll of lives lost from these events was often highly concentrated on individual families and had a shattering effect. Amongst the women there were three sisters from New Zealand – all had graduated from University (two as medical doctors) in that country and had gone to work in Malaya in the 1930s. All three women lost their lives in the events which followed the bombing – the eldest **Agnes "Nessie" Craig** and her sister **Dr. Teresa "Tessie" Thompson** (nee Craig) boarded

the "*S.S. Tandjong Pinang*" from Pom Pong Island several days after the bombing, and died in the sinking of that ship on 17th February 1942; and **Dr. Florence Craig** died the same day as her sisters but on Senejang Island from bomb blast wounds received in the bombing on Pom Pong Island. Their father, **Dr. George Craig, CMG, ISO**, a former Comptroller of Customs in New Zealand, who had retired to Sydney, Australia in 1935 never recovered from the shock of losing his three daughters and passed away in July 1947 (archives "Sydney Morning Herald" 2/7/47). In the **Sleigh** family from Singapore were three of the five daughters of that family, all little girls in the care of a family friend, **Miss Jessie Lee**, but who disappeared and were never heard of again. Then family hoped against reality for decades that the girls had survived and were living somewhere unknown in the world.

Crewing the ship after its local Malay and Chinese crew had been sensibly dismissed of their duties in Singapore (since the ship was not returning) and had been replaced by Royal Navy personnel (EFSGR), including some from the "*HMS Prince of Wales*" and possibly the "*HMS Repulse*", were at least eight officers and some fifteen or more crew.

It appears that amongst the men on board was one of the most senior British Army Officers in Malaya – **Brigadier General Walter Lindley Fawcett** (Brigadier General Staff, 3rd Indian Corps under General Heath) who died in the later sinking of the "*S.S. Tandjong Pinang*." Also on board, probably because of this high ranking passenger, were the wives of **Brigadier Curtiss** and **Brigadier Wildy** plus those of the highest ranking RAMC officers including the wife of **Col. Stringer** and a mystery woman who boarded and was described by other passengers as "**Mrs. Seaver**" the 'wife' of **Brigadier Seaver** (but his legal wife spent the duration of the war in Ireland) – both these women lost their lives in the later escape from Pom Pong Island on the "*S.S. Tandjong Pinang*."

Also amongst the people on board there was a very large group of men from the Public Works Department of the Straits Settlement and Federated Malay States governments – one PWD survivor, **Jim Hutton**, puts the numbers at 68 men. They were instrumental in the survival of the shipwrecked on Pom Pong Island through taking control of organisation and their efforts in finding fresh water by digging into the ground at "Spring Cove." Many of these men were also serving Malayan Volunteers. There was another group of 20 men from '250 AMES', which was an RAF Radar unit from Singapore, who had been ordered to go to Java.

On the other hand, a question of historical fact remains as to whether a group of eight or nine men from the Straits Trading Co. Ltd., who appeared to have been designated to board the "*Kuala*" actually go on board that ship or at the last minute switched to the "*Tien Kwang*" – some in fact appear to have been amongst those who were killed crossing the docks to get on board launches. The men who were shipwrecked on Pom Pong were often stalwart, sometime heroic, but there appears to have been widespread despair and depression amongst many men. The conditions on the Island were desperate – the position appeared hopeless, everyone was rationed to half a cigarette tin of water twice a day, there was almost no food, and they faced a very steep, stony, inhospitable terrain and jungle, plus there was the constant need to hide in the trees all day as Japanese bombers flew over searching for targets. Many had lost their shoes and most of their clothing. There were many wounded people; some obviously dying and these exhausted and dispirited men were faced for many days with the awful task of burying or disposing of the dozens of bodies on and around the Island as the climate of the tropics took hold.

Amongst the men on Pom Pong Island there was, regrettably, one recorded instance of absolutely dishonourable behaviour when at least some of a small group of Australian Army deserters from the ship "*Tien Kwang*" (which had also been sunk at the Island), stole precious water supplies from the only real source at "Spring Cove" in "Water Bay." Side arms were distributed to PWD men who mounted guard to counter this appalling conduct.

A sad truth is that, of the several hundred people who lost their lives in the sinking of the "*SS Kuala*" and the abandonment of the "*Tien Kwang*" (before it was also bombed and scuttled at Pom Pong Island), very few of the bodies were able to be buried on Pom Pong Island – it seems possibly less than a dozen. The lack of digging implements, the very rocky foreshore and the loss of energy amongst the survivors because of the lack of food or water in the end precluded the normal burial of

remains. Most of the (possibly up to two hundred) bodies of those who died on the Island or were washed up on the shore were taken out to deep water by the ship's lifeboats.

Whilst many people were killed on board during the bombing and more in the water between the ship and Pom Pong Island, as mentioned above, there were a large number of children, women and men swept away by strong currents whilst clinging to rafts, articles thrown from the ships or just frantically trying to swim to save themselves. There are very few recorded accounts of the people swept away since most died at sea, however **Dr. Chen Su Lan** was one of these and also one who survived this ordeal so his personal account is important to an understanding of the reality experienced by many people in this part of the tragedy. He recorded:

"... The spot south of Pompong is the meeting place of several currents. With the tides they change their courses which are both irregular and erratic and with which only the fishermen in the neighbourhood are conversant. While I was drifting in the south-westerly direction in one current, others floated in the south-easterly direction in another ... I was now some distance away from the southern end of the island and to the west of it. The sea to the south of the island and to my east was strewn with heads. 'Help! Help!' from every throat as one, two and three lifeboats passed around the southern end to the eastern side to deposit survivors from the ships or picked up on the way. Some lucky ones were picked up. Others were left to drift like me ... I was still confident that they would somehow return to pick me up. I had as an extra precaution clung to a rattan basket. Discarding this bulky and unwieldy thing I caught hold of a wooden bath grating in the hope I could sit on it and could see things and be seen. But every time I tried to go on top I went under ... I was now right at the spot where the cross currents met, and the hitherto calm sea gave place to big waves which buffeted and submerged me again and again, one moment I sank in the trough of a swell and in another moment I rose to the top with only my chin above water ... at about 2 p.m. I gave up the remains of the bath grating and seized a packing case floating near me ... [after being ignored by a lifeboat or sampan nearby when he called for help] ... I reasoned that if I was not rescued in broad daylight with a boat so close, by what chance would I have when the sun went down ... with my last hope shattered a shudder went through me and I began to feel helpless and cold. In the meantime a mattress with two white women lying on it came near. One of them, perhaps the younger, was vomiting violently and groaning while the other tried to soothe her with kind words. Hearing my shouts they too cried 'Help!' ... a sense of being alone and abandoned chilled and overwhelmed me..." (CSL)

In the compilation of this record it emerged that only an estimated 300 (this includes those women and men who ended up as internee or POWs in Sumatra, Java and Singapore) of the original 750 or so people who boarded the "**S.S. Kuala**" in Singapore ever made it to relative safety via the port of Padang in Western Sumatra. This indicates that at least 350 women, children and men who boarded the "**Kuala**" lost their lives – at least 150 people being killed as a result of the bombing and swift currents at Pom Pong island and a further almost 200 losing their lives at sea when the little rescue ship **S.S. Tandjong Pinang**", which had picked them up from the beach at Pom Pong Island, was sunk by the Japanese on 17th February 1942 as it raced towards Batavia.

Such was the confusion on what happened during the War it was still officially believed even in 1946 that the **S.S. Tandjong Pinang** had been captured by the Japanese (STA 29/5/46) and this might have been caused by the incorrect report (which seems to have emanated from British official sources in India in 1942) that there had been a Japanese radio broadcast stating the names of many of those who lost their lives on the "**S.S. Tandjong Pinang**" as having actually been captured.

Whoever was responsible for either this error, or possibly an inept attempt at propaganda, caused much unfounded hope for survivors during and after the war.

Of the survivors who left Pom Pong Island in rescue craft, some 40-50 would later lose their lives in evacuation ships from Padang, in particular the "**S.S. Rooseboom**" which was sunk in the Indian Ocean on 1st March 1942 with almost total loss of life including some nurses, wives and children of PWD men and several men from the "**S.S. Kuala**" (see **Rooseboom** document on the Malayan Volunteers Group website) or during their brutal experience as internees and POWs of the Japanese. In many cases there appears to be no record of the deaths at the CWGC – it could be surmised that in some cases there were no family members left to follow up the whereabouts of the missing

person – in several instances it can be seen that where wives are listed as possibly lost in one of the sinkings there is the sad fact that their husband also lost his life as a POW.

No single authority (commonwealth War Graves Commission or Changi Museum etc.) seems to have assembled anything like the list of, incredibly, over 700 people who crammed onto the quite small “*S.S. Kuala*” when it left Singapore under bombing at 6.15 p.m. (WNSF) on the night of 13th February 1942. In 1943 an informal style of enquiry started and continued until 1946 in the UK to ascertain who was on the “*S.S. Kuala*” and also who later transhipped to the “*S.S. Tandjong Pinang*” – the various records of this enquiry have been included in this research.

Several survivors compiled partial lists of passengers and survivors, regrettably probably the best lists which were the records compiled by **Mr. K. Brundle** of the PWD on Pom Pong Island, were taken by the informal leader on the Island, **Major Nunn**, when he later boarded the ill-fated “*S.S. Rooseboom*” in Padang and the lists were lost with him when it sank in the Indian Ocean.

There were many Chinese women and children of Chinese on board. The story of the **Low** family is an important example in this context (see NIL) because it illustrates how the Chinese faced a dangerous and ambiguous position after escaping and then having to live under the rule of the Japanese – theoretically accepted as part of the new order, but in fact more often they were cruelly persecuted. **Mrs. Low** and her children were, with some other Chinese people (and also she records, a ‘**Captain Ross**’ plus some other Europeans and Eurasians) taken by a *tongkang* from Pom Pong Island to a fishing village called Ek Chai. “Ek Chai” was the Chinese transliteration of the village called “Redjaj” which was en-route to Senejang, where the Dutch had a small administration centre. The Chinese were left there in the care of the villagers and the Europeans and Eurasians continued to “...a place where there was a hospital...”

A large number of the Pom Pong Island survivors were rescued by **Captain Bill Reynolds** in the ex-Japanese fishing boat (later to become the famous “*Krait*” which was used by Allied Commandos to mine ships in Singapore harbour) he had commandeered in Singapore – 76 people on his first trip on 18/2/42 and a further 96 on his second rescue on about 20/2/42. Others left on Chinese junks including the “*Hung Jao*”, the 66 ton coastal launch “*Numbing*”, the 30 foot long, log burning steam launch “*Plover*” (according to **Richard Gough** in his book “*Escape from Singapore*”) and the SHB barge “*Heather*” – either sent to collect them or which had been just passing by on the way to Sumatra.

Thanks are recorded to survivors, the late **Mrs Brenda MacDuff**, **Shirley Eames**, **Mr. Stanley Jewkes** and **Mr. Ken Hartley** for their first hand memories, comments and access to their records about the voyage and sinking of the “*S.S. Kuala*”; and also to **Jonathan Moffatt**, and the late **John Brown** for their invaluable assistance with significant sources of information for this research. The researcher particularly would like to record sincere thanks to **Ms Hao Chen** for her truly invaluable assistance in clarifying the identities of Chinese passengers on board and providing major amplification to the detail of the events and people involved. The book written by her grandfather, **Dr. Chen Su Lan**, has proven to be a invaluable insight into the events and behaviours during those days of pain and chaos – it is recommended that anyone seeking an honest understanding should read the book in the National Library of Singapore.

Information has been recorded in its original form wherever possible in the interests of not distorting what is known – *it therefore includes some historical inaccuracies or uncertainties which are shown in italics where relevant*

Another excellent book covering this event at Pom Pong Island, from a different perspective, is that written by **Geoffrey Brooke** entitled “*Singapore’s Dunkirk*”, published in 1989 by **Leo Cooper**, ISBN 0-85052-05107. **Geoffrey Brooke** was a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and was on the ship the “*Kung Wo*” which had left Singapore with about 200 men (including at least 100 from the Singapore Naval Base) and after being attacked from the air anchored several miles from Pom Pong Island some hours before the “*S.S. Kuala*” was sunk after all aboard (except for a Chinese stoker who had been killed) escaped in the lifeboats to a nearby island.

For those who wish to understand the geographical position of Pom Pong Island and the “*S.S. Kuala*” I quote from the Public Works Department of Malaya for 14th February 1942.

- a) “Dawn on February 14th found two of these ships anchored a quarter of a mile to the SW of Pompong Island in the Lingga Archipelago. The ‘*Kuala*’ was 300 yards west of the

'Tien Kwang' and another refugee ship the "Kwang Wu" which had been bombed and abandoned the previous day, lay some 2 miles to the SW.

- b) *Pulau Pompong is about 1 mile long and half a mile wide just north of the equator and in Longitude 104 degrees 20 degrees E. It has a small sandy beach on the N.E. side and a mangrove strip to the west. The rest of the island is rocky and semi-precipitous. It rises sharply to a central back which runs N.W./S.E. 400ft. high and is covered with jungle but no fruit trees. Pig was seen but there are no mosquitoes."*

Not surprisingly, since this was recorded by highly skilled engineers, this is a very accurate description. Using Google Maps (both the Map and the Satellite options) the reader can find Pom Pong Island at the co-ordinates of 0.369/104.259; lying directly west of Pulau (means island) Pinta and North West of Pulau Senayang (which is itself west of Pulau Temiang).

By way of background on the ship prior to all these events Dr. Chen Su Lan recorded that based on an account given to him by one of the ship's 'boys' amongst the crew "... the ship was in Penang when it fell ... she was bombed more than once whilst rescuing survivors from other ships and was brought to Singapore in safety. He was sure that owing to her clever skipper, she was a difficult target whilst in motion ..." (CSL).

The list [of names which can be viewed on the Peace Museum website:

(<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>)] positively identifies or recognizes the presence on board of almost all (about 700) of the passengers and crew on the "S.S. Kuala" but there appears to be about 40-50 more people yet to be identified. If anyone has additions, deletions or corrections to this material it would be gratefully received in the interests of achieving a high degree of accuracy.

Please would you e-mail Michael Pether at mncpether@gmail.com who will copy all the organizations and individuals using this document on websites etc. with the updates.

Or telephone New Zealand at + 64274543695 or write to:

Michael Pether, 2/23, Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland 0622, New Zealand.

MARGARET DRYBURGH'S PLAQUE

In June this year, the Stockton Road United Reformed Church is planning to commemorate Margaret Dryburgh's life by erecting a Blue Plaque in her honour. An application for Listed Building Consent to attach the Plaque to the United Reformed Church was submitted in early November last year (having obtained the agreement of the local authority). However, it was only in the first week of February 2025 that approval was given by all the relevant Church Committees. The Plaque now has to be manufactured and then fixed to the stonework of the Church Porch. Once this has been done, a photo of the Plaque will be included in a subsequent newsletter.

Teacher and Missionary – 1890 – 1945.

Margaret Dryburgh was one of Sunderland's most notable daughters.

She was born in 1890 when her father was minister of St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Monkwearmouth. He moved to the Church in Swalwell the same year but returned with his family to Sunderland in 1906 following retirement.

After gaining a BA and her teacher's diploma, Margaret taught at Ryhope School for six years from 1911.

In 1919, Margaret became a Presbyterian Church of England Missionary in Swatow in south-east China, where she was a teacher at the girls' school. The Women's Missionary Association of this Church (then St. George's) supported the WMA House in Swatow where Margaret lived. St. George's felt she was 'our missionary'. This was especially as she came from Sunderland.



Margaret's graduation from Durham University in 1911
(The Dryburgh family)

Margaret wrote to Sunday School members about her work. A further link was through her family being members of the Church.

In 1927 **Margaret** moved to Singapore where many people, or their parents, had come from Swatow and, as well as being the Principal of the girls' school, was much involved with the work of the Church, especially using her musical talents in training choirs, congregations and schools.

In Captivity.

Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in 1942. The ship **Margaret** was escaping on (*The Mata Hari*) was captured and she was taken to a prison camp for women and children in Sumatra. Here she organised Bible classes and services and kept up morale by forming a 'vocal orchestra' for concerts.

In the camp, **Margaret** wrote 'The Captives' Hymn' which was sung every Sunday. It is still sung today throughout the world. The story of the years of deprivation in captivity has been told in a variety of ways over the years, such as through the television series *Tenko* and the Hollywood film *Paradise Road*. **Margaret's** life is also well described in the book, *Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra: Faith, Hope and Survival*, by **Barbara Coombes**. Sadly, **Margaret**, weakened by hunger and disease, died in April 1945, only five months before liberation.

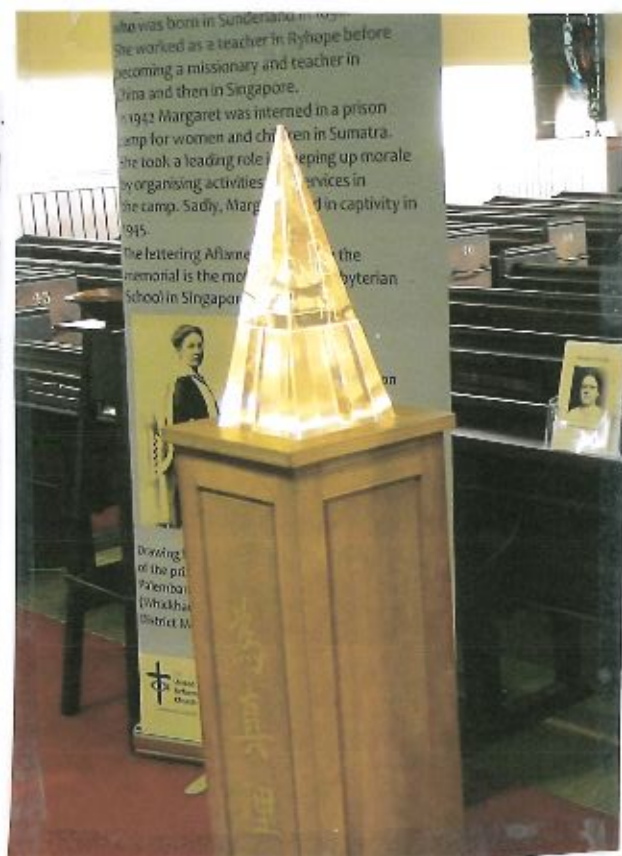
The lettering on the glass pyramid memorial to **Margaret Dryburgh** by **Manny Ling** is 'Aflame for Truth.' This is the motto of the Kuo Chuan Presbyterian School in Singapore, the successor to the school in which **Margaret** taught.



The accommodation block of the prison camp at Palembang drawn by **Margaret** (*Whickham & District Memories*)



Musical arrangement for The Captives Hymn written and composed by **Margaret Dryburgh** at the Palembang Internment Camp. (*The Brown/Lea/Caldicott family archives*)



Oral History Interviews

COCKBURN, Marie (nee de Souza). See Archives on Line – <https://www.nas.gov.sg>

Interview with Dr. Jason Lim. 8hrs 12 mins POW Accession Number 002176

17 reels of interviews with Sumatran internee Marie de Souza, including details about the Giang Bee, Jebus and Belalau Camp.

THE FRANK BREWER ORAL HISTORY TAPES

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

Tape 7

BROTHEL GIRLS AND A BIRTHDAY PARTY

Behind the pool was a little lane with houses on stilts where the brothel girls were housed. The girls were very friendly when they could laugh and joke in safety, send us greetings and throw bread and things over. All this was done behind the galley where there was a bit of space, bicycle sheds beneath the fence. They gave quite a bit of cheer, at a distance, to some of the troops. Some of the Japanese guards used to visit the girls and they, if the friendly type guards, would often come in at night having had a lot to drink with the girls, and come back to the camp and pick up a few of the prisoners that they'd had contact with, and give them a bit of food and offer them drinks too, and on one occasion offered to take them across the lane!

Then we had a birthday party for someone in my room in the Chinese Chamber of Commerce Building which held the Officers and senior NCOs. I was in a small room with about 8 others. One of them had a birthday party and acquired a couple of tins of bully beef and a bottle of Japanese rice wine (saki). They were all out on working parties that day, and they told me to prepare as best I could, and could I find a cloth to put over a box for the table? I even acquired a candle and a bit of oil for heating the little wick lamp. Would I prepare a meal? We did the best we could and had a really splendid party that night but later in the night two things happened: first of all, one of the room mates in the room lying on the floor let out a scream and rose to the erect position on one movement. A huge rat had landed on his chest and that woke him up. A few minutes later after that, when we'd laughed him back to sanity, **Colonel Roberts** wanted to go quickly out of the place down to the *benjos* in the playground, with the most ghastly stomach upset. Obviously one of the tins of bully beef had blown.

Odd incidents of that kind cheered people up and each room did its best to find ways of entertaining themselves. A sad but rather amusing thing was that one of the British Officers, who came in late from South Sumatra, was from a ship, a Naval Auxiliary, that had grounded off South Sumatra. It was weeks before they (the crew) were rounded up and brought to us. He couldn't believe the War had gone the way it had gone. He would not unpack his belongings and for a night or two he wouldn't even take off his boots. *"Oh, no, no, no! It is all going to be over in a day or two. I've heard the stories. The British are coming back. We shall all be out in a few days. I'm not unpacking."* He maintained this optimistic view right to the end of the War but he did eventually take his boots off.

A bit of a problem, by contrast, was a party of Dutch from the Dutch warship, a destroyer or something, who came in with the Dutch ship's treasury, so they had a lot of money. We gather that even once a week they paid out the wages or salary to the Officers and men. Once the Japanese found out that you had money to spend....

They tended to live extremely well but we didn't benefit from that at all.

RUMOURS

Another worry was these rumours of the war. On the working parties local people would find an opportunity for a quick, quiet conversation in either broken English or some Malay. They were always coming back with great, exciting news: landings in Penang; landings in Java, and it is all going to be over soon. Troop morale going up all the time but for the rest of us, who probably understood the situation better, this was not good and it was damaging. Once morale goes up like that and weeks go by, it goes down again.

CHINESE & MALAY RN POWs

In with us we had some Malay Seamen and a Chinese who had been on the galley staff of a British auxiliary warship. He was very, very helpful. He understood the cooking of rice and was quickly put to work in the galley. A great asset to us. The Malays didn't want to get away from us either. From time to time the Japanese would send in a message or talk to the Malays and the Chinese chap saying that, *"You shouldn't be here. You should be out, free. We're not at war with you. It is the Co-Prosperity Sphere."* (They replied) *"No. We are in the British Navy."* They refused to go. I think they were able to stay with us in this period. Later on they were taken out to live in Palembang. Were any of the Guards bribeable? Not really. We had nothing with which to bribe them. A very few

of them took part in buying and selling. Occasionally a guard would take a liking to your watch if he hadn't already pinched one, or a pen and offer money for it, but that's not a bribe, and sometimes they would offer to sell something for you to other guards. This was very rare.

One of the Japanese officers in charge had been a monk: he had a little bit of English, very broken, wasn't much use, so one couldn't have a conversation with him, not the sort of man to talk with, he was too staccato and only rude to us. The interpreter spoke very good English: one could talk to him but one had to be careful not to talk about the war. The guards from privates to sergeants spoke no English. They would learn a few words of other people's languages as all troops do, such as Malay, and we picked up a few words of Japanese. There was this extraordinary mix of nonsense language going on. *Yasume* (rest/sit down), *Benjo* etc. Other words that were very commonly in use by the Japs became a sort of Lingua Franca and everyone got by in some way. You couldn't have conversations with the guards. They were very impatient people.

THE DUTCH POWs

The Dutch were treated exactly the same as the British. The majority of the prisoners in the Palembang area were British. The administration was largely British. There was one Dutch Officer who shared the work with me at some of the camps, a very nice chap. He later elected to go on a work party which was never seen again, up country or somewhere. He disappeared. The Dutch tended to be very punctilious about accepting the discipline of bowing etc. They also had a Naval Officer, who had been an Attache in Tokyo before the War, who spoke very learned Japanese which the Japanese would smile about because they didn't understand it.

They didn't get into as much trouble with the Japanese as we did. They certainly did on working parties and the general mooching about in camp, but other than that they didn't have as much to do with the Japanese administration and didn't take so much of the heavy kicking we had to take. Their living conditions were the same as ours but they, having been caught in situ, most of them, or on a ship with everything they had, or in a battle with their equipment with them, were not flotsam and jetsam like us, they were much better equipped and in a way better able to provide for themselves.

In Java some of the Dutch captured there were put into big camps, sometimes in houses and we heard stories from those who came over to us from Java that they lived very well there. Messing proper, waiters, bands playing, going out visiting families for a few months at the beginning, but then things toughened up.

The relations between British Officers and their guards were totally different from that in German camps. *[Brewer had discussed these with his brother who was a POW in a German camp].* There was no twitting [taking the mickey] of the guards. Words being used would not have been understood. If the guards had the impression you were making fun of them in any way, the reprisal would have been so instant and brutal one wouldn't think of trying it on for your own good health. Beri beri took quite a time to come. There was no sign of it up to May 1942.

INTERROGATION

The formal interrogation, or debriefing that Officers had, took place in the 1st school in Palembang, **Hang Chow [Chung Hwa?] School**, in March 1942. After we'd been there about a fortnight, we were told we would have a formal interrogation. The Japanese office was used for this purpose, with three or four Japanese officers, including an interpreter, and a table and chair for the interviewee. They took in the officers according to rank and asked for details of military service and weren't given any replies, just name and number and rank which was evident.

My own interrogation was a bit farcical. I had in the back of my mind always the problem of speaking the language of the region and having been mixed up in behind the lines operations and being on the General List, no regiment.

The interrogators didn't have any particular points to ask me but they knew I spoke some Malay and asked how this came about. I explained that I was a very new soldier indeed having been in local government in Malaya and we had to speak local languages; a lot of us were pulled in to help the military through the use of languages. Then they wanted to know where I'd started my military service. *"I was just a Private in the Volunteers. Then I was taken out and became a Corporal in the Defence Corps, then back again as a Private."* *"Oh, how did you become an Officer?"* *"Oh, that was very late."* At this stage they all became rather amused and clearly saying rude things to one

another about the British Army and its way of choosing people. They quite rudely told me to go away. They weren't interested in me anymore.

Colonel Hill was dealt with more ferociously but he stuck to his guns, saying he was only in a position to give his name and number. They seemed to know something about his HQ position at Singapore and tried hard to get answers out of him. He was thumped and rather badly treated then taken away for several days. We wondered whether he would ever be returned to us. He did come back to us in a pretty poor shape.

The rest of the officers had nothing much done. It was quite evident that as far as the Japanese were concerned the war in this theatre was over and we were pretty useless people. We'd surrendered and everyone was out of the way. There was no operational information to be gained from us. They rather despised us and closed up pretty quickly on the interrogations. We couldn't tell if our interrogators were ordinary Army Officers or Kempeitai. Some were reasonably informed about our services. I think regular Army Officers.

THE NEXT MOVE

On April 22nd 1942, there was an exchange of fit men from A Camp [Mulo] with sick men from our camp and we were told that our Camp, Chung Hwa [B Camp], was to be regarded as a work/working camp and most of the work would be at the aerodrome.

Early in May, **Colonel Hill**, our SBO [Senior British Officer] was taken to the aerodrome to see the proposed quarters for our working party which was to move out there. He came back and said it was an extraordinary thing but there were proper military quarters, huts with all the natural conveniences you would expect. If that was where we were going we should be quite satisfied although it was quite wrong for us to be taken to do military work on the aerodrome.

Three weeks later, **Colonel Hill** was taken out again to see the quarters and prepare the depositions for the actual move, and came back extremely depressed. The quarters he had seen first were quarters for Japanese Air Force personnel. Nothing to do with us!

Our quarters were 2 miles away from the aerodrome in a clearing. Bamboo huts with attap roofs had been constructed. That was where we were going. The whole thing was enclosed in a heavy wire fence. So the move began on May 25th; some 500 men, 16 Officers, 2 of those being Dutch. A small administrative organisation: Senior Officer, **Colonel Hill**; an officer for the galley; a rations officer to go with the Japanese into town to collect the rations; an RAMC Cpl. **[Felton]**; one clerk Cpl **[Warburton]** to assist me as a sort of Adjutant. We were the staff. The other officers went out on working parties and we had to fill in for them when they were ill or needed a rest.

The accommodation consisted of three very long huts constructed of bamboo slats and sleeping places two feet six inches off the ground, a narrow corridor between the bed slats. One end of one hut was partitioned for the officers.

We were told we had to dig a well. A party was assigned to that. Meantime water was brought out to us in a water cart from the town. Well digging was not particularly successful. At most we were able to find about six feet of water.

The arrival parade was interesting. A Japanese captain addressed the assembled 500 men or so and emphasised that we were under military discipline. He pointed to the wire and showed us the machine guns posted around the wire. Anyone crossing the wire without permission would be fired on without any hesitation. This was a working camp and everyone had to work extremely hard. One free day a week was allowed for washing clothes and cleaning the camp: cutting the grass and cleaning the latrines. This Japanese Captain then departed and we didn't see him again for some time. The control of us was left to a Sergeant Major. He proved to be particularly ruthless and brutal. His only interest was in getting the maximum number of men out to work.

There was a Japanese quartermaster who looked after the rations and the galley. The galley had been well constructed especially for us. He was not too bad a chap and he was very quickly nicknamed 'Soupo'. Then there was the Japanese interpreter, a tiny man, who was known as 'Honolulu Joe'. He had come from Honolulu at some time and boasted a great knowledge of the United States. He pretended to be sympathetic to us all and sorry for us in our condition. He wasn't too bad but, of course, there were moments when he carried out Japanese instructions. One of the most humorous things was to see him shouting at our galley officer who stood about 6ft 6 ins tall. The little man used to pick up a box and stand on it, and shout into the Officer's face and slap it when necessary.

We had breakfast at 7.00 in the morning. A very slim breakfast. A bugle at 7.45 calling us on parade. Then there was the two mile march. At 11.00 was a 30 minute rest period. From 1.00 to 3.00 p.m. a meal and rest. A meal was brought from camp. At about 5.30 everyone was marched back to camp for the evening meal, wash and bed. Some candles were issued and that was the only light we had. The work itself consisted of clearing a hill in order to extend the aerodrome. The men were issued with spades and chunkals. There were rails laid for the trucks which had to be filled. The work was absolutely non-stop in the working period. The Japanese, local folk from the aerodrome as well as our guards, standing with each group urging us on. It was extremely hot and the work extremely fatiguing. Problems arose with sickness straight away. In the morning the parade became agonising. There were so many sick. The Sergeant Major and his men would go round the huts and scream at any man lying on his bed saying *"You stand to attention when any Japanese present."* They stood up and were immediately told they were fit to work, and beaten until they got out on parade. Working parties were mustered in one area, and behind them the small administrative staff and standing sick were counted. They were treated viciously in order to persuade them that they must get out to work.

The Researching FEPOW History Conference in Liverpool.

We are delighted to announce that **Dr. Judy Balcombe** has been invited to give a presentation at the Researching FEPOW History Group's Conference in Liverpool, U.K. in June (13th - 15th). We all know about her incredible work in Muntok; the building of the Peace Museum; the discovery of the forgotten civilian graves; her support for the Muntok Red Cross; raising funds to buy an Ambulance for the town; and her annual visits in February to attend Remembrance Services in Muntok and on Radji Beach. Her profile given to the Conference Organisers is as follows:

"Judy Balcombe (Dr. Judy Campbell) is a family doctor in Melbourne, Australia. Her family lived in Malaya from 1884, when her great grandfather worked as a railway engineer for the Sultan of Johore. Her grandfather was a rubber planter in Perak and was one of the many thousands of evacuees leaving Singapore just before the Fall whose boat was bombed and sunk in the Bangka Strait off Bangka Island, Indonesia. Colin Douglas Campbell died in the Muntok men's prison camp on Bangka Island on 2nd August 1944.

Judy began visiting Bangka Island in 2011 with an elderly friend from England, both looking for their relatives' graves. They discovered the sad fact that most of the graves of British and Australian civilians who died in Muntok men's and women's prison camps had been left behind after the war and the cemetery built over by houses and a petrol station in 1981. By contrast, the Dutch had moved both their military and civilian graves to well-maintained War Cemeteries in Java.

Helped by the Malayan Volunteers Group, Judy brought plaques to mark the prison camp locations. In 2015, the Muntok Peace Museum was built and plaques with the names of all deceased believed to remain buried in Muntok were placed on a Memorial Grave.

The Muntok Peace Museum has many exhibits detailing the War years on Bangka Island and in Sumatra. The Museum remembers all who suffered and died in the area during the Second World War – the local population; the many thousands lost in the bombing of the ships after leaving Singapore; the 21 Australian Army Nurses, civilians and 60 British and New Zealand Servicemen massacred on Radji Beach, Bangka Island; the victims of other massacres along the shoreline; Mr. Vivian Bowden, Australia's Official Representative to Singapore who was murdered by 2 guards in Muntok on 17th February 1942; and all who suffered and perished in the harsh camps that followed.

The annual Bangka Island Memorial Service held each 16th February, on the anniversary of the Radji Beach massacre with members of staff from the Australian, New Zealand and British Embassies, now begins in the Muntok Peace Museum. The Service ends with the Walk for Humanity on the beach, where all present hold hands and walk into the water, vowing to work for a more peaceful world.

Judy visits Bangka Island each February. She and the people connected to Bangka Island now help the Muntok Red Cross in memory of the prisoners.

Bangka Island Memorial Services, Muntok, February 15 and 16 2025

The annual Bangka Island Memorial Services took place over 2 days in Muntok recently. The first Service was held at the Muntok Peace Museum on February 15, the 83rd anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. The Muntok Peace Museum was built in 2015 by families as a tribute to the many British, Australian and New Zealand civilians who died in Muntok prison camp during the Second World War. Their graves were left behind after the War and now lie under houses and a petrol station (men) and in a group grave in the Muntok Catholic cemetery (women). By contrast, all Dutch military and civilian graves were moved to war cemeteries in Jakarta in the 1960's.

The Muntok Peace Museum now remembers all people who suffered in the area during the War - the local population, the many lost at sea in the bombing of over 100 ships carrying evacuees from Singapore and servicemen en route to fight in Java, the Australian Army Nurses from the *SS Vyner Brooke*, 12 of whom died at sea, 21 who died with civilians and servicemen on Radji Beach, Muntok on February 16, 1942 and 8 who died in prison camp, the many servicemen killed in other massacres, Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia's Official Representative to Singapore, murdered by 2 guards in Muntok on February 17, 1942 and the many British, Australian, Chinese, Eurasian and Dutch internees in the harsh prison camps of Muntok, Bangka Island and in Palembang, Belalau, Padang and Bangkinang in Sumatra.



In memory of all who suffered on and around Bangka Island and in Sumatra

Present at this year's Memorial Services were David Man and Judy Balcombe, representing civilian internees, the families of 5 Australian Army Nurses killed on Radji Beach, the family of Sergeant Robert Henry

Seddon who witnessed the Radji Beach massacre from the sea, Arlene Bennett, Past President of the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre, 14 members of the Australian Embassy to Indonesia including the Deputy Australian Ambassador, the Australian Consul and Australian Military and Naval Defence Attaches, Australian friends, Indonesian authorities, the Muntok Red Cross and National Indonesian Nurses' Association and many Indonesian friends.



***Muntok Peace Museum, with
Muntok Red Cross and
Indonesian Nurses
Association***

The Service at the Muntok Peace Museum began with a recording of former child internees Jane Elgey nee Reid describing her capture on the *SS Mata Hari* and internment in the prison camps, emphasizing the lack of food leading to starvation, her brother's illness and his hearing the sounds of the Palembang Women's Prison Camp Choir rehearsing, which he has thought was Angels singing. The recording also played *The Captives Hymn* sung by St Paul's Church, Chichester, written and composed by internee Presbyterian missionary Margaret Dryburgh, which was sung in camp the women's prison camps every Sunday.

Judy Balcombe gave an address telling the history of the War on Bangka Island. The names of the civilians who remain buried in Muntok were read and Staff Sergeant Julie Mayor read the ***Prayer for All Affected By Wars.***

We commend to the Mercy of God all who suffer as the result of war, especially the maimed, the blind, and those who are afflicted in mind. Have pity on the homeless and friendless and upon those who do not have a country of their own.

Comfort those who mourn; be with them when they mourn, be with them in their sorrow, support them in their loneliness.

Prosper all who seek to minister to their needs and give us all the faith to look beyond the troubles of this present time to know that neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God.

A presentation of the Bangka Island commemorative medal created by the Nursing Sub-branch of the Queensland Returned Services League and donated by them was made to Muntok historian Mr Fakhrizal, to be placed in the Muntok Peace Museum, in recognition of his work in uncovering and preserving the wartime history, operating the Muntok Peace Museum and coordinating the recent renovations of the Muntok Peace Museum.



Bangka Island Commemorative Medal

An announcement was made of a bequest to the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre to assist with its postgraduate nursing scholarships. This Centre was established after the War by Radji Beach massacre survivor Australian Army Nurse Sister Vivian Bullwinkel and her fellow Prisoner of War colleague Sister Betty Jeffrey, in memory of all nurses who serve in war and peacekeeping activities.

A further bequest has been made to the Muntok Red Cross to help continue its valuable humanitarian work in West Bangka Province. The Muntok Red Cross helps in all aspects of health education and disease prevention and attendance at emergencies. The Red Cross collects blood for transfusions for use in surgery and also for use in renal dialysis and for treatment of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever. Our group hopes to become involved in the Wolbachia Bacteria Dengue Fever Elimination Program which has recently been approved by the Indonesian government. This successful lifesaving program will be discussed more fully in a further edition of Selamat Pagi.

A Welcome Dinner for all participants was held at the Café D'Orange. The Australian Embassy presented owner Yanni Sloodweg with a plaque in memory of her late husband Marc. Yanni and Marc Sloodweg have cared for the Nurses' Memorial at the Tanjong Kelian lighthouse for some years. The Memorial is maintained by the Australian Government Department of War Graves. Marc Sloodweg also designed the new Memorial to Mr Vivian Bowden which stands next to the Nurses' Memorial.

The next morning, February 16, we drove in a convoy to the Tanjong Kelian lighthouse. Here a Service was held in memory of Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia's only diplomat to have died in war. The Deputy Australian Ambassador gave an address. The poem *Home*, written by Vivian Bowden as a schoolboy on leaving his home in Yokohama for boarding school in Australia was read. Wreaths and wildflowers were laid. Mr Bowden was made to gather flowers before he was shot.



***Deputy Australian Ambassador to
Indonesia, at Service for Diplomat Mr
Vivian Bowden***

The Memorial Service to the 12 Australian Army Nurses killed in the bombing of the *SS Vyner Brooke*, 21 killed on Radji Beach and 8 who died in prison camp was then held, with addresses by Michael Noyce and Arlene Bennett, Prayer were spoken, followed by the Last Post, a minute's silence and wreath laying.



***Service for Australian Army
Nurses of the SS Vyner Brooke***

The group then proceeded by jeep along the dirt road to the headland. Here, all victims of the Radji Beach massacre were remembered and the names of the 21 Nurses read by family members. The Australian Military Defence attaché gave an address on the British and New Zealand military casualties on Radji Beach and in other massacres in this area in February 1942.

David Seddon from Scotland, whose father Sergeant Robert Henry Seddon witnessed the Radji Beach massacre, read the poem *The Heroes*, a tribute to the many ships of the Merchant Navy which were lost at sea in wartime work.

HEROES

by David Partridge, Botany Bay, Australia.

*Don't speak to me of heroes until you've heard the tale
Of Britain's merchant seamen who sailed through storm and
gale*

*To keep those lifelines open in our hour of need
When a tyrant cast a shadow across our Island breed
Captains, greasers, cabin boys mates and engineers
Heard the call to duty cast aside their fears
They stoked those hungry boilers and stood behind the wheel
While cooks and stewards manned the guns on coffins made
of steel*

*They moved in icy convoys from Scapa to Murmansk
And crossed the western ocean, never seeking thanks.
They sailed the South Atlantic where raiders lay in wait
And kept the food lines open from Malta to the Cape.
Tracked by silent U-boats which hunted from below,
Shelled by mighty cannons and fighter's flying low,
They clung to burning lifeboats when the sea had turned to
flame*

*And watched their ship mates disappear to everlasting fame.
I speak not of a handful but 30.000 plus,
Some whose names we'll never know in whom we placed our
trust.*

*They never knew the honour of medals on their chests
Or marching bands and victory and glory and the rest.
The ocean is their resting place, their tombstone is the wind,
The seabird's cry their last goodbye to family and friend.*

***Freighters, troopships, liners and tankers by the score,
Fishing boats and coasters, 2,000 ships and more
They flew the Red Duster as they sank beneath the waves
And took those countless heroes to lonely ocean graves.
Their legacy is freedom to those who hold it dear
To walk with clear horizons and never hide in fear
So when you speak of heroes remember those at sea
From Britain's Merchant Navy who died to keep us free.***

The plaque to Captain Thomas Wilkison from the Li Wo, who received a posthumous Victoria Cross after his small Yangtze River steamer took on the Japanese fleet in the Bangka Strait to help protect the evacuating ships, was saluted and a wreath was laid.



***Plaque to Captain Thomas Wilkinson
and crew from the Li Wo***

The Deputy Ambassador gave the Radji Beach Oration. The Last Post was played followed by a minute's silence. The National anthems of Indonesia, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia were played. Wreaths were laid.



***Memorial Service at
Beach***

We then proceeded down the steps to the beach. Shoes were removed and people held hands and walked into the water for *The Walk For Humanity*. This represents the last actions of the Australian Army Nurses before they were shot, as reported to the Tokyo War Crimes

Tribunal by survivor Sister Vivian Bullwinkel. The Radji Beach Ode created in 2017 included the Nurses' creed, *Pro Humanitate, For Life* and states that violence will not have the last word on Radji Beach. All present promise to work towards a more peaceful world. Flowers and petals were cast into the water.



The Walk for Humanity

The group then drove to Menumbing Hill for lunch. Some visitors proceeded to the Sukarno Museum while several of us retraced our steps and rejoined the jeeps to drive to the area the local historians believe is the actual site of the Radji Beach massacre. This is a stretch of open beach, with a rocky headland which is believed to be where the 2 groups of men were taken to be killed. It is a beautiful and quiet place, ideal for personal reflection. A group of swallows circled and sang overhead.

A Thank You dinner was held by Friends of Bangka Island at the Yasmin Star Hotel, for local authorities including the local government, the Muntok Red Cross and Nurses' Association. Embassy staff and some visitors left the following morning while those remaining joined in the pilgrimage through old Muntok, visiting the Customs House, the Chinese Mayor's House, the Muntok Red Cross Offices, the Muntok Jail (the former Men's prison camp), the Junior Secondary School for a dancing display and tour, the Vivian Bullwinkel Galleri at the Timah Tinwinning Museum and the former residence of camp commandant Captain Seiki Kazue where the Tree for Peace was planted by the Australian New Zealand, British and Japanese Embassies in 2020.

Our final stop was to visit the area of the former Town (Old Dutch or Civil) cemetery behind the Pertamina petrol station to pay tribute to the remains of the male civilian prisoners who still lie buried there.

This year we were joined for the Memorial Services by an Australian screenwriter who is preparing a 6-part television series about Radji

Beach survivor Sister Vivian Bullwinkel. It is expected this series will be screened worldwide.

Vivian Bullwinkel used her knowledge gained in prison camp to become Director of Nursing at Melbourne's former Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital after the War. She pioneered university nursing education in Australia. During the Vietnam War, she organized the air transport of abandoned orphans from Vietnam to Australia in cardboard boxes.

Vivian Bullwinkel is known as an heroic and iconic Australian, a woman of great courage, integrity and humanity. Her statue was placed in the forecourt of the Australian War Memorial in the country's capital Canberra in 2023, near that of Australian surgeon on the Thain Burma Railway, Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. Vivian Bullwinkel is the only woman to have been so honoured. We are proud to help to remember her history.

At the end of the Services and local visits, our group concluded that the 3 days had been very moving and well carried out. Several newcomers said they would be returning in 2026. News has been received of many others planning to attend next year, which hopefully will include the British Embassy to Indonesia.

Report by Dr. Judy Balcombe



***Rosebuds blooming on Tree for Peace
planted in Muntok by Australian, New
Zealand, British
and Japanese Embassies in 2020
(2025)***