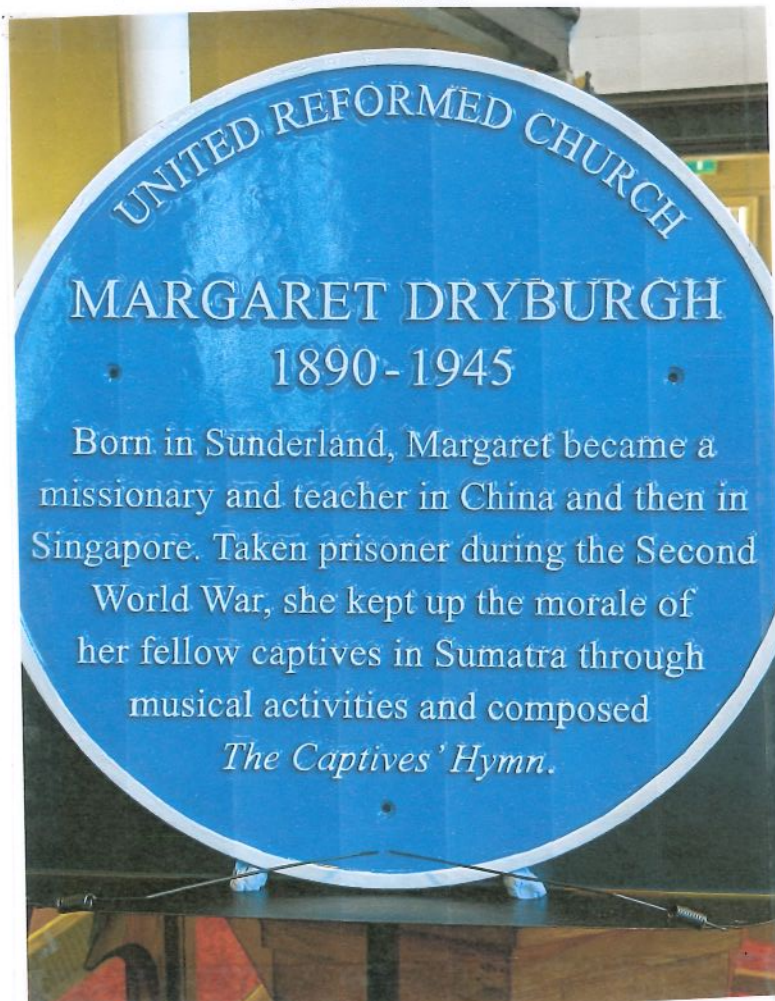


SELAMAT PAGI
THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER
<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>



Singapore Far East Moon Rose

EDITION 6
JUNE 2025



Margaret Dryburgh's Blue Plaque dedicated on Sunday, 8th June 2025.

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

June 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

It must have been a shattering blow for all those still fighting in Burma or suffering in Japanese POW and civilian internment camps to learn that peace had been declared in Europe on 8th May 1945, with the defeat of Hitler and the Third Reich. There would be another three long months of conflict and the loss of many more lives before Japan's unconditional surrender on 15th August 1945, and the real ending of the Second World War. Indeed, the wait for freedom was longer still for those who were interned in camps all over Sumatra before they were released from captivity and repatriated.

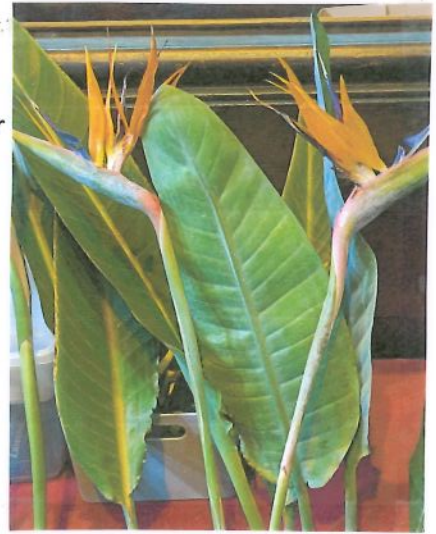
Therefore, for those of us with relatives who had died in captivity or were still imprisoned in the Far East on 8th May 1945, the celebrations in London to mark the 80th anniversary of V-E Day were tinged with sadness. However, it must be said that the week's celebrations were very impressive, starting with a wonderful military parade on Bank Holiday Monday, 5th May 2025, attended by HM King Charles and HM Queen Camilla and other members of the Royal Family, including the Prince and Princess of Wales and their three children. It was interesting to see the Veterans from the European Theatre of WW2 given pride of place between and beside members of the Royal Family. They could be seen happily chatting away to the Royal Family before and during the parade. On Tuesday, 6th May, an open air celebratory concert took place on Horse Guards Parade – attended again by the King and Queen. The Malayan Volunteers Group was offered 2 tickets for the concert, which had been arranged by the Royal British Legion, and these were accepted by **Christine Cavender** whose family members were lost on the *Kuala* and *Tandjong Pinang*. [See **Christine's** report on P.19] On the anniversary of V-E Day itself, Thursday, 8th May 2025, there was a Service of Thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey in the presence of the Royal Family. Street parties were held in all parts of the UK, including Downing Street, either on the day itself or over the following weekend.

In 1992, on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the Relief of Rangoon on 14th May, the purpose-built FEPOW Church in the UK's Norfolk town of Wymondham started holding annual Memorial Services in remembrance of all those who had died in Japanese prisoner-of-war and civilian internment camps in WW2. The Church of Our Lady and St. Thomas of Canterbury is the only purpose-built FEPOW Church in the UK – indeed in the world. The small side chapel with its altar and glass triptych panels holds the Books of Remembrance in which the names of all British FEPOWs are recorded, both those who died in captivity and those who returned home. This year, the service was held on Sunday 11th May. A wreath commemorating the Malayan Volunteer Forces and civilian internees was laid by **Rosemary Fell** on behalf of the Malayan Volunteers Group (MVG), and **Richard Brown** laid a wreath on behalf of the Java Group. Wreaths were laid by other representative bodies and organisations including Norfolk's Deputy Lord Lieutenant, the East Anglian Regiment and Military Attaches from the Australian and Canadian High Commissions. This ecumenical service is always well attended and so it was this year. The wonderful light lunch provided afterwards for the congregation, gives time to catch up with other FEPOW and civilian families. It was good to see ABCIFER's [Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region] banner displayed on the altar rail in the side Chapel although the Association has now been disbanded. At this Service, civilian internees are remembered as well as military personnel.

We were delighted that **Olga Henderson** (Child Internee in Changi and Sime Road camps) was able to attend the Service again this year, together with other MVG members. After the Service, FEPOW Historian, **Sibylla Jane Flower**, presented the Church Parish Priest, **Fr. Denis Gallagher**, with the original Christmas Hymn sheet, dated Christmas 1942, from Wampo POW Camp in Thailand. The sheet of paper, which had been screwed up into a small ball for safe keeping, had been carefully straightened out and restored. The gift was gratefully received by the Church Archivist, **Peter Wiseman**.

On Sunday 8th June, at the United Reformed Church in Sunderland, a Service was held to unveil the Blue Plaque dedicated to the life of **Margaret Dryburgh**, composer of "The Captives' Hymn" and creator of the Women's Vocal Orchestra in the women's Civilian Internee Camp in Palembang. Attended by **Stephen and Margie Caldicott**, **Dr. Judy Balcombe** and **Arlene Bennett**, **Judy** said, *"We are in Edinburgh now after a wonderful day in Sunderland yesterday. The church service to dedicate the plaque to Miss Dryburgh was very beautiful and many people attended from surrounding parishes.*

There were very special readings and prayers and it couldn't have been done in any better way. There were lovely tropical flowers in the church."



We were delighted to learn last year that **Dr. Judy Balcombe** had been invited to give a Presentation about the Muntok Peace Museum at the 2025 Researching FEPOW History Group's Conference in Liverpool in June. But we were requested to keep the information quiet until it was certain that the Conference would go ahead. It was only earlier this year that we were able to make the announcement in the March edition of **Selamat Pagi**.

Judy's Presentation at the Conference can be read on P. 20.

It is good that the plight of the civilian internees – men, women and children – is now being made known to a wider public. The terrible war crimes committed by the Japanese Navy and Air Force on innocent civilians escaping war-torn Malaya and Singapore in small ships is still little known about, and the perpetrators of these crimes were never brought to justice. It's only by telling the story of those unfortunate enough to have been interned by the Japanese after their ships were sunk or captured, that the full extent of their ordeals can be made known. We are very grateful to **Michael Pether** for his invaluable and detailed research into the fate of many of these small ships and the names of those on board, and for his permission to reproduce his research and the passenger lists. It is due to his research that many relatives have finally been able to discover what happened to their loved ones. For many years after the war, their disappearance remained a mystery. The hurried departure of many of these vessels, of all shapes and sizes, leaving Singapore over that last weekend before Capitulation, meant that passenger lists were sketchy or non-existent, and for many years relatives simply did not know what had happened to the ships or their passengers.

Finally, we look forward to the many events which are being arranged by the Royal British Legion at the National Memorial Arboretum here in the UK, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of **V-J Day on 15th August** when WW2 really ended – a date so often forgotten by those with no Far East connections. These events will be reported in the next edition of **"Selamat Pagi."**

Very recently we have heard from **Vilma Howe**, former Muntok and Palembang Child Internee, who has broken her right wrist. In her own indomitable way, she said – *"It would be my right wrist and I am right handed, which makes everything I do very difficult..."* We send **Vilma** our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

“S.S. VYNER BROOKE”

Sunk by Japanese bombers in the Bangka Strait, Sumatra,
on 14th February 1942.

With thanks to Michael Pether for his comprehensive research into the
sinking of this ship and for his permission to reproduce his information

Introduction

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

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

The reader is to be aware that some of the realities presented in the latter part of this introduction may be upsetting. *[Editor: Please note – Michael Pether’s complete document updated July 2024, with this information, is available on the Muntok Peace Museum website. It will not be included in this newsletter.]*

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

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

- Firstly the book “*On Radji Beach*” by **Ian W. Shaw** (published in 2010) is a very well written and most comprehensive account which rightly focuses almost exclusively on the lives and the deaths of the Sisters from the Australian Army Nursing Service who boarded the “S.S. Vyner Brooke.” The book is highly recommended for anyone wishing to understand the living hell encountered by the nurses from the time of the ship being attacked by the Japanese bombers.
- “*White Coolies*” by **Betty Jeffrey** (first published in 1954 and then reprinted many times since) is the story through the eyes of **Sister Betty Jeffrey**, AANS, who survived the sinking of the ship and subsequent inhumane interment by the Japanese. It was first written during the three and a half years she was a prisoner of the Japanese in Sumatra.
- “*Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke*” by **Ralph E. H. Armstrong** (published in 2003) who was a boy in his pre-teens also survived the sinking and then the years of internment in Sumatra.
- “*By Eastern Windows*” written by **William H. McDougall Jr.** (originally published in 1948) gives a valuable insight into the events in his chapter on survivor **Eric Germann** and also notes his later discussions with the child survivor **Isadore ‘Mischa’ Warman**.
- “*Women Beyond the Wire*” written by **Lavinia Warner** and **John Sandilands** which covers the story of the survivors from the “S.S. Vyner Brooke” as part of the overall tapestry of the experiences of women internees of the Japanese 1942-45.

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

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

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

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

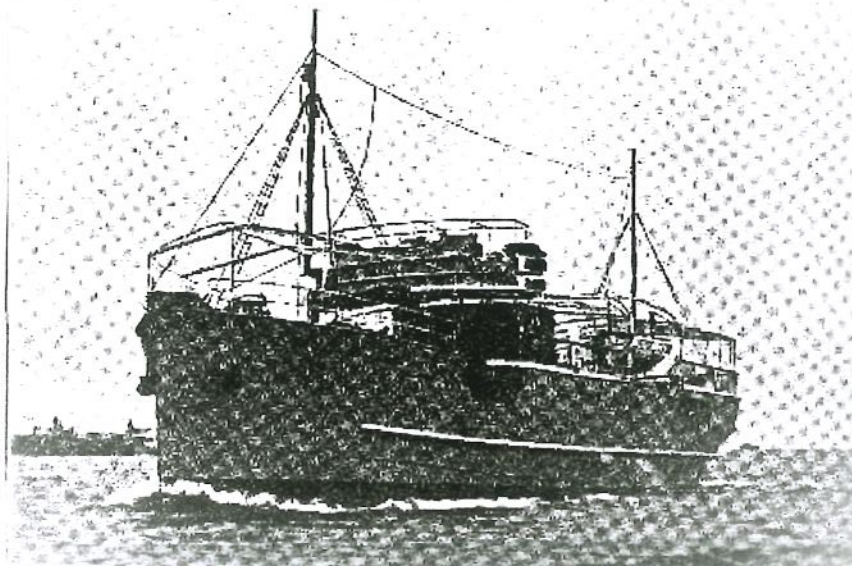
Of the probably more than 100 people killed during and after the sinking of the **"S.S. Vyner Brooke"** only 15 of the deaths are memorialised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, which is partly the motivation for creating a memorial document such as this one.

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

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

The "S.S. Vyner Brooke" in Singapore:

The **"S.S. Vyner Brooke"** was designed by Singapore naval architect, **F.R. Ritchie, OBE**, for the 3rd Rajah of Sarawak (**Sir Charles Vyner Brooke**) and built in 1927 in Leith, Scotland by one of the finest shipyards in the Leith estuary, **Ramage & Ferguson**, specialising in luxury steam yachts. She was 251 feet long, 41 feet wide and had 44 First Class cabins, a 40 foot by 24 foot Saloon forward of the cabins, and all furniture was teak covered with leather.



Accommodation for the 47 peacetime crew and cabin staff was located fore and aft.

The ship was 1650 GRT and powered by a 3-cylinder triple expansion steam engine. It was equipped with lifeboats, rafts and lifebelts for 650 passengers and could carry 200 deck passengers. Launched in 1927 she arrived in Singapore in March 1928.

When requisitioned by the Royal Navy from the Sarawak Steamship Company at the time of the Japanese invasion of Northern Malaya in December 1941, she was quickly painted grey and armed with a four-inch gun forward, two Lewis guns aft and depth charges.

The invasion of Malaya and Singapore, from the time of the first landings in Northern Malaya on 8th December 1941, was swift and brutal. Within eight weeks the Japanese had taken Malaya and landed on the island of Singapore which had become intensely overcrowded by tens of thousands of fleeing civilians of all races from Malaya, plus almost 100,000 servicemen.

During these few weeks, the **“S.S. Vyner Brooke”** was despatched on patrol up the east coast of Malaya, as described in a letter home, dated 28th January 1942, by 2nd Engineer, **Sub. Lt. Jimmy Miller**. Some relevant points from the letter include the fact that most of the local Malay and Chinese crew members had (understandably) deserted and would have to be replaced by Royal Navy ratings prior to the evacuation departure. **[Editor: The letter can be read on the website.]**

By the second week of February 1942, the Japanese army was advancing across Singapore Island and a chaotic evacuation of civilians – mainly Europeans, Eurasians and a small number of influential Chinese – and selected skilled servicemen was underway from the port in front of what is today’s CBD. **[Central Business District – now Singapore’s main financial and commercial hub – often referred to as the Downtown Core.]**

Literally, any ocean-going vessel of any size remaining in Singapore harbour was ultimately enlisted by the authorities to evacuate people under what had become almost constant bombing and machine gunning by Japanese planes. Singapore itself was ablaze, columns of black smoke rose thousands of feet in the air and the streets were littered with the dead and dying.

People desperately clamoured for departure passes from the Colonial Government authorities (men under 40 years of age had been banned from leaving the island for months and women had not been publicly encouraged to leave because it would ‘...adversely affect morale...’) to board any ship leaving the Island. By 11th January 1942 even the rather hidebound men in authority saw the absurdity of their bureaucratic incompetence and more passes were issued for civilian men and women to leave, so finally some real urgency entered the situation.

At least 46 ships of all sizes – ranging from the quite large, refrigerated cargo ship **“S.S. Empire Star”** (525 feet and 12,656 tons) through a range of mid-sized merchant vessels down to some small craft like the **“S.S. Tandjong Pinang”** (which at 97 feet only just qualified in the definition for a ‘ship’) – were assembled to leave as a convoy during the 48-hour period of 11th-13th February 1942. There were also several naval ships of varying sizes identified as evacuation vessels.

The Naval ships, apart from a couple of destroyers, which briefly escorted the bigger merchant ships like the **“S.S. Empire Star”** and **“S.S. Gorgon”** after leaving Singapore, included auxiliary (i.e. merchant ships that had been requisitioned) patrol ships, auxiliary mine sweepers, flat bottomed ex-Yangste River gunboats and ex-Yangste River Passenger ships, HMMLs (fast Royal Navy launches of 112 feet), RAF fast launches and even a large tug like the **“HMS Yin Ping.”** Some of these naval ships had almost exclusively a complement of service personnel on board – but also a few civilians.

Of the 46 or more ships leaving in the last window of opportunity (as many thought) only a dozen would make it to safety. The other 40 ships would be sunk, run aground, or captured at sea by the Japanese navy with many thousands of their passengers and crew killed, or taken prisoner to face three and a half years of extremely harsh, malnourished and medically deprived treatment in internment or POW camps in Sumatra and elsewhere. Many of these women, children and men would die during the remainder of the war in these cruel camps.

To put the research purpose of this document into historical context, the fate of only a small number of the 40 or so ships sunk or captured carrying evacuees from Singapore during these last few days before the Surrender to the Japanese on 15th February have been thoroughly researched and documented. This is one of the attempts to prevent the lives of those several thousand men, women

and children who did die because of their escape attempt being simply consigned, without proper tangible memory, into the dustbin of history.

The officers of the “**S.S. Vyner Brooke**” were all peacetime sailors – very experienced merchant marine officers and engineers and represented a group of mature, very decent men. The ship was under the command of the same captain who had steered her back and forth between Singapore and Sarawak carrying high class passengers and cargo and who had taken her up the coast of Malaya for wartime missions during December with 3rd Engineer **Dennis O’Brien** returning from the tin mines of Thailand in December 1941 and then the last-minute boarding of Extra 2nd Engineer **Robert Trewitt** from his job as an engineer on a rubber plantation in Malacca just prior to departure. The officers at the time of departure were:-

Captain – **Lt. Richard Borton**, RNR, 53 years of age from Yorkshire

Chief/First Officer – **Tpy.* Lt. William Sedgman**, RNR, a 31-year-old Welshman

Second Officer – **Tpy.* Lt. Arthur Mann**, RNVR, a 38-year-old Londoner

Chief Engineer – **Lt.(E) David Reith**, RNVR/RNR, aged 67 years from Aberdeen, Scotland

Second Engineer – **Tpy.* Lt. ‘Jimmy’ Miller**, RNR/Naval Auxiliary Personnel (T.124 Agreement), aged 28 years from Gisborne, New Zealand

Extra 2nd Engineer - **Robert Trewitt**, RNVR, aged 45 years from North Shields in England

Third Engineer – **Dennis O’Brien**, Naval Auxiliary Personnel (T.124 Agreement), aged 54 (or possibly 45) years from NSW, Australia

(*Tpy – Temporary)

-of whom **William Sedgman**, **David Reith**, **Jimmy Miller** and **Robert Trewitt** would die in the massacre on Radji Beach on 16th February and **Dennis O’Brien** would somehow lose his life after clinging to a lifeboat for hours after the sinking. **Captain Borton** would reach shore and become a POW and survive the war and **Lt. Arthur Mann** would make an incredible voyage by raft and small craft all the way to Java and escape from there to Australia to go on to serve again during the War.

How many people were on board?

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

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

Numbers given for those on board the “**S.S. Vyner Brooke**” range between 227 and 330 people, including crew.

Captain ‘Tubby’ Borton in command of the “**S.S. Vyner Brooke**” states in his report that the people on board comprised:

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

A Malay Navy website (webmaster@navy.mil.my) states that there were 20 men from the Malay Section of the Royal Navy/MRNVR on board.

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

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

to Changi POW Camp in Singapore with its information collecting Bureau of Records and Enquiry. **Major William Alston Tebbutt** (NAA B3856, 144/1/346) states that on board were "...Lt. R.E. Borton plus 50 crew, including gun crew..." he also estimated a total of 200 passengers including a number of Eurasian men, women and children – this indicates a complement of 250.

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

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

An interesting statement in this context is that by **Lt. Russell F. Wright** (who had been the Assistant Embarkation Officer when the "**Vyner Brooke**" left Singapore) – he said in his post-war signed affidavit in the War Crimes files that he and the other men in his group were refused permission to board the ship because the captain advised "...that their complement was 250 above lifebelt strength..." He later sailed on another evacuation ship; the "**Mata Hari**" and fate brought him back into captivity - and the surviving AANS nurses including **Vivian Bullwinkel** – at Muntok internment camp.

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

Other authors and survivors have stated:

- **Joseph Kennedy's** book "**When Singapore Fell**" (P.41) – 200 or more passengers; the same figure as used by **Geoffrey Brook** in "**Singapore's Dunkirk**" but fewer than stated in "**The Battle for Singapore**" (P.323) which suggests 300 passengers.
- **Dr. Goldberg-Curth** in her report states there were 280-290 passengers, but it is unclear whether she means to include crew, which would take the total up to 330 people on board.
- On the Angelpyro.com website, **Vivian Bullwinkel** is quoted as stating there were "...265 frightened men, women and children, plus the 65 AANS nurses..." suggesting about 330 people on board.
- **Sister Jessie Simons**, who survived the sinking and internment states (in her book "**While History Passes**" P. 8) upon boarding the "**S.S. Vyner Brooke**" "...I felt sorry for the many children..." already on board.
- **Hal Richardson** in "**Into the Fire**" states there were close to 300 people.

Note: The American passenger, **Eric Germann**, is recorded in the book "**By Eastern Windows**" as observing that (P.140) whilst the Europeans were packed into the dining saloon, the Eurasians were jammed in the after hatch, and the forward hatch held the Chinese crew which had been replaced by some Malays with British Naval Ratings and a few British Army lads.

This Memorial Document is notably deficient in that it has no record of the Chinese or Malay crew or their fate.

Who were the passengers?

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

This is confirmed by passenger **Major Tebbutt** in a post-war conversation with **Miss Ivy Allen**, a friend of 2nd Engineer **Jimmy Miller**, RNR, who lost his life after reaching Bangka Island in the

massacre on Radji Beach, when **Tebbutt** told **Ivy Allen** “...the ship was dreadfully crowded with women, children, nurses etc...”

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

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

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

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

Insofar as considering the actual composition of passengers – as part of the process of determination who has not yet been identified in this researched Memorial Document – one paragraph from the book, ***On Radji Beach***” is key:

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

This is a very important paragraph and indicates what the composition of the people on board the ship may have looked like. [Note: Figures in brackets are the numbers of people in each category who have actually been identified in this document.]

• Males in late middle age, elderly & includes some younger men	20 (18)
• Females – older women classified as over 40 years	20 (21)
• Younger Women – estimated as, say, 30 years	30 (33)
• Children	40 (14)
• Australian Army Nurses	65 (65)
• Crew as recorded by Captain Borton	52 (23)
TOTAL 222 (174)	

These figures are remarkably close to **Captain Borton’s** report and the figure given by **Major Tebbutt**. This guides us to the conclusion that the main gaps in identifying those on board – meaning those people who went missing without trace – are probably as follows:

6-8 elderly men

10-15 younger women

About 35 children

About 31 crew

[To be continued in the next edition of this newsletter.]

**Below is a list of the names of the 64 Australian Army Nurses who were on the Vyner Brooke.
Compiled by Arlene Bennett – with thanks.**

**AUSTRALIAN NURSES KILLED OR
LOST ON SS VYNER BROOKE
OR SHORTLY AFTER**

Matron Olive Paschke – Victoria, aged 37
Kathleen Kinsella – Victoria, aged 37
Louvima Bates – Western Australia, aged 32
Ellenour Calnan – Queensland, aged 29
Mary Clarke – NSW, aged 30
Millicent Dorsch – South Australia, aged 29
Caroline Ennis – Victoria, aged 28
Gladys McDonald – Queensland, aged 32
Lavinia Russell – NSW, aged 32
Marjory Schuman – NSW, aged 31
Merle Trennery – South Australia, aged 32
Mona Wilton – Victoria, aged 28

**AUSTRALIAN NURSES MASSACRED
ON RADJI BEACH, BANGKA ISLAND**

Matron Irene Drummond – South Australia, aged 36
Alma Beard – Western Australia, aged 29
Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy – South Australia, aged 30
Joyce Bridge – NSW, aged 34
Florence Casson – South Australia, aged 38
Mary (Beth) Cuthbertson – Victoria, aged 31
Dorothy (Bud) Elmes – NSW, aged 28
Lorna Fairweather – South Australia, aged 29
Peggy Farmaner – Western Australia, aged 28
Clarice Halligan – Victoria, aged 37
Nancy Harris – NSW, aged 31
Minnie Hodgson – Western Australia, aged 33
Ellen (Nell) Keats – South Australia, aged 26
Janet Kerr – NSW, aged 31
Eleanor McGlade – NSW, aged 38
Kathleen Neuss – NSW, aged 30
Florence Salmon – NSW, aged 26
Esther Jean Stewart – NSW, aged 37
Mona Tait – NSW, aged 27
Rosette Wight – Victoria, aged 33
Bessie Wilmott – Western Australia, aged 28

**AUSTRALIAN NURSES WHO DIED
IN MUNTOK, BANGKA ISLAND**

Wilhelmina Raymont – Tasmania, aged 33
Irene 'Rene' Singleton – Victoria, aged 36
Pauline Blanche Hempstead – Queensland, aged 36
Dora Shirley Gardam – Tasmania, aged 34

**AUSTRALIAN NURSES WHO DIED
IN BELALAU, SUMATRA**

Gladys Hughes – Victoria, aged 36
Winnie May Davis – NSW, aged 30
Pearl Mittleheuser – Queensland, aged 41 (died 18/8/1945)

**NURSES WHO RETURNED
HOME TO AUSTRALIA**

Vivian Bullwinkel
Betty Jeffrey
Nesta James
Carrie (Jean) Ashton
Kathleen (Pat) Blake
Jessie Blanch
Veronica Clancy
Cecilia Delforce
Jess Doyle
Jean (Jenny) Greer
Janet (Pat) Gunther
Ellen (Mavis) Hannah
Iole Harper
Violet McElna
Sylvia Muir
Wilma Young
Christian Oxley
Eileen Short
Jessie Simon
Valerie Smith
Ada Syer
Florence Trotter
Joyce Tweddell
Beryl Woodbridge

**THE LAST DAYS OF FREEDOM
SINGAPORE TO SUMATRA
15th FEBRUARY – 17th MARCH 1942
Extracts from John Hedley's Diary**

*[John Hedley, JVE, together with 9 other JVE members, was invited to join the 1st Mysore Infantry, under their CO **Colonel Preston**, when they were ordered to withdraw from defending the airstrips in the North East of Malaya after the Japanese invaded on 8th December 1941. In mid-January 1942, the Mysorees were transferred to Pengarang Garrison on the south easterly point of Malaya opposite Changi Point on Singapore Island. After Singapore fell, **John**, and his other JVE members decided to follow the escape route set up across Sumatra by **Col. Dillon**. This is his story of their escape].*

Eventually the infamous Sunday of 15th February 1942 came upon us and whilst I have no doubt that **Col. Preston** in the "Battle Box" knew exactly what was taking place, he certainly had not divulged anything to his officers, or if he had, it certainly wasn't to those of us who had recently joined him as Special Service Officers. I was the duty officer on that day and as part of that duty it was my job to listen to the various news bulletins from London. I found myself in the mess at 6 o'clock in the evening with the radio on as usual. When the News bulletin from London came through, I was more than surprised to hear that the bulletin, because of its importance, was going to be read at dictation speed. I had never heard of this before, not have I ever heard of it since, on any BBC bulletin. The bulletin went on to say that the BBC had heard from reliable sources in the Far East that Singapore had surrendered and that **Lieutenant-General Percival G.O.C. Malaya** had surrendered that afternoon. The BBC had the decency to say that this was an unconfirmed report but they thought that in the circumstances it was so important that people should have the opportunity of taking note of the bulletin. I immediately rang through on the field telephone to **Col Preston** to report what I had heard and got the reply back that it was in fact true and that he would be sending down orders to us within the next few hours. I then told the rest of our group from the Johore Volunteer Engineers the news. The almost unanimous reaction was to say that there didn't seem any point in us staying around any longer. Besides we felt it was our duty to escape capture so as to continue the battle against the Japanese so the sooner we could make our way out of the area the better and escape the ignominy of being captured. The nearer we would get to freedom, i.e. Australia or India or wherever, the better. We made some pretty rapid plans and we packed a haversack with a change of clothing. We informed the second in command, **Major Burrows**, of our plans and asked him not to say anything about our plans until after we had left. In the early morning, and before dawn, we moved off, twelve of us, through the minefield to the eastern side of the Pengarang promontory. During our stay in Pengarang we had been joined by 2 other Special Service Officers **Messrs. Martin and Browning**. These two made up our escape party to the round dozen. We felt that if we could get along to a village that we knew from our patrols, we would be able to persuade one of the Chinese boatmen there to take us down through the island to, if possible, Sumatra. We arrived at the village of Tanjong Ramunia as dawn was breaking. We felt it unwise to make too much movement during daylight for fear of being spotted from the air and we lay up and rested that day but did make contact with our Chinese boatman friend who agreed to take us down to an island in the Riouw Archipelago where he knew larger steamers called and where he felt certain we would get a passage to Sumatra. The dusk came and we boarded his junk and made ourselves as comfortable as possible for the journey. We sailed throughout the night and in the morning found ourselves at the small sea port of Tanjong Pinang at the southern end of the Riouw Archipelago. True to his word the owner of the junk linked up with a coastal steamer which was then going to Sumatra. We therefore said farewell and trans-shipped. It turned out that this coastal steamer was going to sail into the Indragiri River on the east coast of Sumatra. This suited our book and so we found what space there was available on the deck and awaited events. We sailed up the river, the mouth of which was fairly wide, with mangrove swamps lining the banks on either side. It was a dull sort of landscape. We arrived at the first town of Tembilahan approximately 30 miles up the river. We stayed one night alongside the small jetty before proceeding up river. The next town which is Rengat, boasted a hospital and a police station. We disembarked here to await events. We were billeted in one of the warehouses alongside the river with only a bare concrete floor to sleep on. None of us had any sleep that night because the mosquitoes in that area appeared to have had no food for years and years. They certainly made a meal of us.

The result of this was that being unable to sleep we sat up, smoked, talked and wondered about the future.

During the course of the day, three other fairly large boats arrived but carried on further up river without disembarking passengers. However, a 'pigi' bus shuttle service also operated between Rengat and the next village, Ayer Molek, up the river. We had been asked by the Dutch Controller (Senior Admin. Officer) if one of the officers could, or would, volunteer to act as liaison officer between the Dutch and British at Rengat. Problems were arising with the 'pigi' buses which were being overloaded, or even hi-jacked. I volunteered for this job and so I stayed behind at Rengat but as I never saw a 'pigi' bus for the rest of that day, it didn't appear to be much of a duty. My other colleagues meanwhile proceeded up the Indragiri and onward to India. I found myself some accommodation quite near to the quay where I thought I'd have a reasonable night's rest on a bed for the first time for days. However, this was not to be. A group of Royal Air Force and Naval Officers came through and they considered that as they had been ordered out of Singapore by their senior officers with instructions to get to India, that they had precedence over everyone else. The result of this was that I, as a 2nd Lieutenant, had a chair rather than a bed that night and it didn't please me at all. During the following day a further contingent came up in three more quite large boats and these had aboard a **Colonel Dillon** and a **Colonel Sydenham**. I met them on the quayside and was fairly curt in my remarks about some officers coming through Rengat without troops or papers and about their attitude in general. Both **Col. Dillon** and **Col. Sydenham** were gentlemen. They said that they would be taking over control of the organisation required for ferrying groups further up the river. Whist on the quayside with the two Colonels, I spotted two of my own rubber planter friends from Malaya, **Tex Poole**, a Canadian, and **John Parsons** who came from Huntingdonshire. We were all more than delighted to meet each other and it wasn't long before we knew exactly what we were going to do. None of us, I suppose, had really been involved in the war and we wondered what our contribution could be. It seemed fruitless to link ourselves to the big groups of soldiers who were being moved further up towards the centre of Sumatra. We felt that there must be more people out on the islands needing help, so we decided that we would look over some of the smaller boats that had arrived from Singapore with the aim of using one of these to return to the islands and ferry any fellow escapees onward to Sumatra.

The small boats had arrived carrying small groups of people all bent on the same objective of escaping from Singapore and by hook or by crook getting to India or Australia. The first stage was to get to Sumatra. Unbeknown to ourselves, the route that was being taken by the bulk of the people was a route that had been planned out in advance as an escape route from Singapore. It was amazing to see the motley collection of vessels that had been used to come out of Singapore. The one we would have liked was an RAF air/sea rescue launch. This was a beautiful stream-lined twin-engine job. We would have loved to have taken this boat – it looked beautiful and seemed perfectly designed. Our only problem was that we were unable to find out how to start the engines. In the end we had to abandon the idea of sailing this boat. We eventually found a Singapore Harbour Board Red Cross Launch. It was broad of beam, approximately 30 feet long, 8 feet wide with a draught of 18 inches. It had an awning to give a certain amount of shade, if one was prepared to lie down on the seats alongside the engine. Its role in peace time was to ferry stretcher cases from the islands in the Singapore Roads for hospitalisation on the main land of Singapore. It had a small Thornycroft engine, petrol driven, and as this started almost first time, we decided that this was probably the boat for us. We then had the problem of fuel and here we found that the tanks of the RAF air/sea rescue launch still contained some. Having collected 20 x 5 gallon drums we proceeded to siphon out the petrol from the launch into the drums. We stowed these in the forward end of our own boat. The fact that the octane content of the RAF launch petrol was 80 didn't worry us unduly. It was for certain that the octane content of the petrol normally used on the small Thornycroft would be only 60 or 65 at the most, however, we didn't worry about small details like this. Having obtained our boat and having fuelled it, we then wondered what was going to be our first assignment. It wasn't long in coming. Our contacts with the Dutch Police bore fruit in that the Officer in Charge came down to the quayside and asked if we would be prepared to take a party of Dutch Policemen down to Tembilahan. This we readily agreed to do and so that afternoon we embarked 17 police, making a total of 20 passengers and crew. We set off down the Indragiri to Tembilahan possibly 40 miles away. With our little engine and the flow of the river, we had little difficulty in maintaining an adequate speed and were into Tembilahan within three hours. Here, the Dutch Police disembarked and we also went ashore for a short spell.

We re-embarked and continued down the river before heading across to the islands where we had heard there were a number of survivors from ships that had been sunk by Japanese aircraft. At this time we were not too well equipped for navigation. We knew that the tide was fairly strong and flowed at approximately 4-5 knots in the Strait. We knew that we could make about the same speed in our boat. So, if we wanted to cross the water between the mainland and the islands, and we headed at 45° into the tidestream, we ought, in the course of time, to hit the islands at the place we had aimed for. Fortunately for us the first night of crossing was a fine night and there were stars to guide us. However, we didn't quite hit land in the morning at the place at which we had hoped, but we were certainly within two miles of it which wasn't bad navigating. What we did see, however, was one of our gun boats which had been bombed and disabled and beached on the west of Singkep Island – the most southern of the islands that make up the Lingga Archipelago. She must have been beached at high tide for its bows were almost in the jungle which at that place came right down to the shoreline. We thought we would go and see if there was anything for us to scrounge from the boat. It was hard to believe that **HMS Grasshopper** could have been beached where she lay because looking back out to sea, there was only the narrowest of gaps in the reef. **HMS Grasshopper** was one of the fleet of the Yangtze River gunboats that operated in the China Station. We climbed up on board only to find that anything that was removable had already been taken. She had obviously been ablaze at some stage as there was a lot of charred paint and wood about. We found nothing of value to us except a small binnacle compass which we were able to take and which was to stand us in good stead on our second trip to the islands.

With nothing else of value on **HMS Grasshopper**, we re-embarked and set off for the north of the island. We made this in reasonable time but went to the small island just north called *Senayang* where there was a small village with a fairly large landing pier. We pulled up alongside the pier, tied up and went exploring. The first thing we looked at was a Japanese fishing trawler which appeared to have been abandoned alongside the jetty. We went on board and though it was quite a short stubby type of vessel, we were amazed at the power of its engines. These were of the Maybach Diesel type and I suppose, when operated, could have moved that boat along at about 30 knots if it had needed to. It really was a powerful little boat. Again we thought of commandeering it, but found ourselves unable to start the engine and probably would have been unable to maintain it should it have broken down.

We moved into the village and met the Head Man and talked with him. He told us that the Japanese were supposed to have landed on the island at the north but that he hadn't seen any as yet. There were always rumours that the Japanese were just north or just south of wherever one was at the time. However, he hadn't seen any more survivors. We bought foodstuffs in the village shop with what little money we had remaining, and we also had use of the communal showers in the village to give ourselves a good wash down in fresh water. We stayed the night tied up alongside in *Senayang* and the following morning set sail for Dabo which is the capital of Singkep Island and situated on the east coast of that island. Dabo had a Dutch Administrator, known as the Controller, with administrative offices, a jetty, hospital and other public offices.

We pulled up alongside the jetty and made our way to the Controller's office and whilst there we learnt that there were a number of British Army and Civilian Nursing Sisters, Civil Servants and others who got so far on their route out of Singapore, and no further. We had known one or two of the nursing sisters who had been in Johore General Hospital prior to the outbreak of hostilities and we renewed acquaintances here. We hadn't been long on shore when we had been asked by a number of people if we would take them across to Sumatra. We made the acquaintance of the Controller and he came down to see what sort of boat we had. When he saw it he said, "Well, I don't mind you taking men in that, but you are certainly not going to take any women." We certainly hadn't thought it looked as unsafe as that. However, he was the man in charge at that particular time and we very soon had twenty people who wanted to come with us.

We therefore arranged that we would set sail at about 3pm in the afternoon and would sail round the south of the island and head to the northwest to the mouth of the Indragiri River. When we were due to embark, the wind got up causing the waves and sea to become very rough. We got our passengers aboard but then found that the wind was catching our boat and though we cast off we found we were unable to make any headway out to sea. This frightened some of our passengers, who thought they would prefer to stay behind and would we let them off please? We considered discretion the better part of valour and so abandoned our idea of getting off that day. We tied our boat up as best we could so that she wouldn't get too much

of a buffeting and made our way back to the Controller's house in the town.

We stayed the night there and in the morning we went down to see if any damage had been done to our boat and, as luck would have it there was none. We therefore made it known that we would be leaving for the mainland soon after mid-day that same day.

We didn't have as many volunteers to join us this time, but finished up with, I think it was, about 14 passengers, so with the three of us it made 17 altogether. We had also acquired, from one of the passengers, a chart of the seas and the islands thereabouts which we thought would be of great help. We also acquired some candles which we could use in the binnacle of our acquired "Grasshopper" compass. When it came to embark the seas were calm and we had no difficulty in getting away.

We moved on a southerly course to go round the southern end of the island.*

*[*After the war I learned that one of the passengers had recorded this journey in his book, "Singapore to Freedom." Oswald Gilmour had joined us at the second attempt to leave Dabo. I feel that his account of the trip back to Sumatra is worth adding as a postscript to my narrative and is included at the end of my diary.]*

The only excitement that occurred on this particular leg of the journey was the passing overhead of several Japanese planes. Now we had not personally experienced aerial bombing, but some of our passengers certainly had. They panicked, and got down alongside the engine under the awning, crammed into quite a small space in the hope we would not be spotted by the Japanese aircraft. In the event we were not, or if we were, we were far too small and insignificant for them to bother about us. The rest of the journey round to the south of the island was uneventful though we did lose our chart, blown overboard by a gust of wind, which left us with only a school atlas map. Having gone round the south east point of Singkep we then dropped anchor. It was felt that to make the crossing from the island to the mainland in daylight, we would be asking for trouble. The shore here is pretty shallow and so we were able to strip off, have a swim and generally smarten ourselves up. We climbed back aboard and pooling what food resources we had prepared an evening meal. Not a very good one, but nevertheless quite tasty.

As it was getting dark, we started the engine and set sail for Sumatra. The evening was not as bright as it had been when we came across, but nevertheless as not too bad and we set course on our old fashioned 45* in the hope that we would hit the right place at the other side. Some of our passengers were certainly very nervous and, whilst we had no major incident on that crossing, we had two minor one which caused a certain amount of consternation. The first was when someone left a towel on the exhaust pipe which soon caught alight. The burning towel was thrown overboard and that was that. The second incident was when our little engine suddenly cut out and refused to restart. We thought we might have run out of petrol, but it certainly wasn't this. We refuelled and still the engine refused to start. I suppose it was an hour before we managed to get the thing going again and I am convinced, to this day, that engines are just like humans – they can take so much and then they need a rest. I am certain that this little engine of ours, which was doing very well indeed, had just had enough and wanted a rest. When we got it going again, it went as sweetly as before and we continued on our journey.

When dawn came we were within sight of the Sumatra coastline, but if you have ever been to sea and looked towards a coastline of mangrove swamp and looked to see if you could find an inlet, you just don't find one. However, we knew that if we got a little closer, we should be able to find an entrance to the Indragiri River. We did, and knowing that the Indragiri River had a delta at its mouth, felt pretty sure that whichever inlet we took we would come into the main stream of the river sooner or later.

During the morning we entered one of the rivers of the delta and we sailed up, joining the mainstream and arrived at Tembilahan just before mid-day. I think all our passengers were very relieved to find themselves at a village where there were other people about and on the mainland of Sumatra at last. Our passengers disembarked and expressed their thanks and amazement that we had the intention of repeating our trip to Singkep to pick up any more survivors should any still be there.

That same afternoon, we started to retrace our steps to the islands. I think our passengers of the previous trip thought we were completely mad, it was certainly the last thing we thought we were.

We reached the open sea just before it got dark but found the sea in a much more difficult mood than it had been on the previous occasion. In fact, we had not been on the open sea more than about an hour when a sudden windy squall hit us and the driving rain lashed down

to soak us. I should mention that we had acquired at Tembilahan a very small dinghy which we towed behind us in the forlorn hope that if anything happened to the launch we would be able to get into the dinghy and use it as a lifeboat. This had seemed a very good idea at the time, but I rather doubt, in retrospect, as to whether it would have worked. Anyway, it was a nice little dinghy and it had at one time been aboard the Sultan of Johore's yacht. Anyway, this dinghy, instead of staying behind us was now shooting alongside and all over the place in the rough seas. I was on the tiller at the time but I left it for a moment to get an old waterproof which was just forward of the engine and before I got back to the tiller, the boat had turned through 180°. I wouldn't have believed this was possible, but the compass that we had acquired from HMS Grasshopper now came into its own. The compass confirmed that instead of going towards the islands, we were heading straight back for Sumatra. This meant we had to do another 180° turn and in the seas that were running, it wasn't a very pleasant experience, though we accomplished it without mishap. We then continued on an uncomfortable but uneventful journey across and again were lucky in hitting the islands at the point we hoped.

This time, we did not go right round to Dabo on the east coast, but cut into a small town in a bay in the north of the island. We knew that this town had a telephone connection with Dabo and were able to make use of this and ascertained from the Controller that there were no further people wishing to be evacuated from Dabo. The last group having left the previous day in a launch called "Florence Nightingale." We asked the Controller if he knew of any other pockets of survivors and he said that he understood that most of the survivors on the islands north of Singkep had already been picked up and taken over to Sumatra, so he considered that it would be in our best interest if we too headed back to Sumatra.

This we decided to do. We took the boat out of the bay and started to set sail back to Sumatra. Again, however, the wind had got up and the sea had become rough. **John Parsons** was not as good a sailor as either **Tex** or myself and was already prostrate on the floor of the boat being very ill. **Tex** and I sat either side of the tiller and really we were hoping for the best. The sky was overcast but it wasn't raining and whilst we were moving away from the shore, we had one remarkably lucky escape. It was dusk, the wind had got up and was whipping up the sea to quite a fervent. We had hoped to be able to move almost due west but there appeared to be a reef just ahead of us. We thought we ought to take evasive action and try to steer round the northern end of the reef. Unfortunately, when we turned in a northerly direction we found we were making no headway whatsoever. **John** was being very sea sick and was lying prone in the boat forward, feeling very sorry for himself. **Tex** and I, sitting side by side on the stern of the boat, decided that the only thing for it would be to run across the reef. We altered course and did just that. It was quite a hair-raising experience, for when we got onto the reef we should, by all accounts, have been holed, however, thanks to the very shallow draught of our launch, together with a great deal of luck, we were able to hoist ourselves, or that's what it appeared, onto a wave which just took us over the reef. We used the boat hook just in case and whilst this would have made very little difference, we did have it ready over the side to push us up or keep us a little higher in the water.

We survived, and leaving the reef behind we had another uneventful crossing back to the mainland of Sumatra. This time we hit the right mouth of the Indragiri River and sailed back to Tembilahan.

The trip from Tembilahan up to Rengat obviously took us a great deal longer than trip coming down with the Dutch Policemen. We had to battle against the current of a now swollen and flooded river. At Rengat we found the place almost deserted. There were no further stragglers trying to move through to the west coast of Sumatra. We sought the Dutch Police and they were able to help us once again and said that we would be able to go in a 'pigi bus' to the next stage of the route through Sumatra. This was to a rubber estate at a place called Ayer Molek. We were sorry to leave the Singapore Harbour Board Red Cross launch; this had stood us in very good stead and we had been aboard for quite some time. We couldn't really say it had become our home but at least we had become quite attached to it and it was certainly a great friend to us in our rescue attempts to bring people from the islands to the mainland of Sumatra.

[To be continued in the September edition of Selamat Pagi.]

N.B. John Hedleys' Diary was also serialised in Editions 29, 30, and 31 of MVG's newsletter Apa Khabar.

These are My War Time Diaries – Sumatra 1942-1945

By Dr. [Miss] Marjorie Lyon

By kind permission of her brother John Lyon

JOURNAL 15. BOOK X111

On Tuesday gate opened – Wednesday evening peace announced – Food and materials arrive – Camp becomes hectic and unpleasant – Visits hospital in Men's Camp -

Extracts from Journal 15 about the lead up to the announcement of peace.

Sunday, August 12th 1945 (1243rd day)

The main concern of the camp is food – and increasing hunger and deficiency diseases. We are comparatively well off on Red Cross rations (which, however, can be equalled by anyone in the camp who does gardening and does a few corries).

But we are hungry and seldom feel satisfied. We have given up breakfast entirely and having nothing but sugarless milkless tea or coffee at 12-1 p.m.; this meal consists of 90gms each of rice and a few spoonfuls (sic) of vegetable. Dinner is at 6-7.30 p.m. and consists of 90gms each of rice and a spoonful or two of vegetable with the addition on alternate nights of rice – topi and sago pancakes and fragments of meat from bones or meat issue – the whole meal seldom more than a tablespoon between us. Vegetables are spinach, kentang (*potato*), praantje leaves (*possibly cranesbill?*), nanka (*jackfruit*) and about once a month praantjes, also green papaya or green pineapple occasionally as a vegetable. With the 110 gm of rice saved daily from our double ration we make topi for pancakes and bread which also uses up our sago meal. The loaf is about 3½” in diameter and 2½ - 3” high and we have half each which we eat now after supper to prevent hunger from keeping us awake. We have had practically no pisang (*bananas*) for 2 weeks and the godown has given me in place of meat a portion of the epiglottis (which cannot be eaten, has no fat and is useless) for the last twice. This is personal malice, as the Sisters get quite edible muscle. **Elsie's (Crowe)** bones, from similar malice, are meat free. In the last 2 weeks we had kepala praantjes - 500gms on 29th July and 8th August and a so-called double portion on the 1st – in place of 500 gms on the 2nd day. Only I get this and we share it with **Keta**.

.....We had a visitation yesterday p.m. of a senior officer looking much more worn and harassed than when he visited in Padang accompanied by the **C.C., Yamada** and **Kukubu** and a few body guards. That's the first time for 2 months that **Kukubu** has visited the camp and of course I could get no speech with him.....

Tuesday, August 14th 1945 (1245th day)

We were issued with 2 small cakes of quite nice clean saka yesterday. I forthwith sat and ate mine as did most people.....

About 50 letters came in today – and many of the British got cards dated up to January 1945. I had one dated Dec.10th 1944 and devoid of news. **Mrs. Mephram** had a letter from Canada dated Aug. 1944 and a good few of the Dutch had cards from POW from Thailand dated Dec.'44 and Jan'45. There were also some for the Men's Camp.....

Keta had colic after taking the rotten sago meal as blubber for lunch. We have put ours in bread which seems to render it less toxic. The camp is too hungry to discard it though it is really not fit for food. **Elsie** pressed me to one of her cakes of saka and I'm ashamed to say I succumbed to temptation and ate it. It beats me how people can refrain from eating sugar. I crave for it nearly all the time. It is a pity one does not get used to hunger.....

[Editor: There is now a 4-day gap in Dr. Marjorie's Diary. But although Peace had been declared on 15th August 1945, in Sumatra they were still under Japanese rule.]

Saturday, August 18th 1945 (1249th day)

We have had quite a busy week preparing for **Juff Brard's (tumour)** operation and doing it. The wooden table arrived from the Men's Camp on Wednesday [15th August] but no answer to my letter – and no anaesthetic. I spent Wednesday afternoon devising a means of tipping it and fixing shoulder straps and Thursday afternoon finishing it and putting out instruments and linen. The orderly brought me an answer to my letter to

Dr. K (*the Japanese doctor*) – 2 x ampoules of 1% novocaine, 6 x ampoules of something in place of morphine and 1½ litres of saline. He said they had no ether or chloroform. The resulting anaesthesia extended to the costal margin but she felt the incision slightly and was feeling everything even to hot packs and was able to move her legs before we sewed her up. I must say she was extremely stoical.

Friday, August 24th 1945 (1255th day) 2nd day after internment

What a week this has been! Rumours as to the early arrival of plenty of food had been rife since last Saturday and on Tuesday morning first **Doughy** said there would be no gardening and then that 300 could go in the morning and more in the afternoon – then about 40 minutes later the gardeners were all brought in and rumours of air raids circulated. However a little later the gate was opened and the people told they could go and get ferns and flowers or wood as they wished – and a couple of hundred did so. I was giving injections – 1st round of T.A.B. at the time and was kept informed by the patients. The camp hummed with excitement.

On Wednesday about 300 went out to gather wood or do what they wished and on Wednesday the whole camp got 3 times the usual rice issue but no meat. The issue was announced about 10 p.m. on Tuesday night and news of meat for the camp was received at the same time. The whole camp wandered about talking excitedly for hours. On Wednesday about 6-7 p.m. the **H.B.** went to Bankinang with the Camp Commandant and on their return with **Bosselaar Kaag** and **Levison**, peace was announced and the camp went crazy with emotions. Several huge Dutch flags were run up on quickly improvised flag poles and everyone wept and the children shouted or wept and there was much hand-shaking and kissing. We seemed to have a house full of people drinking tea and coming to the door to congratulate us most of the evening. The camp had plenty to eat and the meat was issued and all sorts of food promised for the next day. All night long the camp hummed and we got no sleep at all. Fires were going cooking breakfasts from 3.30 a.m. and **Keta** was making up rice pap for breakfast with white sugar which she got – 3 spoonsful (sic) – in exchange for 50 chillies.

On Thursday all the relatives from the Men's Camp came over in batches – and the Camp hummed all day. We received 3 green mugs of rice each and double sago meal on Thursday and lots of vegetables. On Thursday an exchange market began – our old clothes and worn out rags being eagerly exchanged for food such as we had not seen for months – an old uniform too ragged to use except as operation dress brought 2½ K of kachang (sic) ijau and another eggs, gula saka, pisang and piles of praantjes and ubis. The Malays came crowding round and the gate is opened for 1-2 hours at a time and all the Camp rushes out and bargains for food. Every family has chickens and eggs and fruit now. It is shameful that we have been so starved for so long when there is so much food just beyond the Camp. Captain had bought us a chicken and produced it cooked for tiffin – G.O.K. what she gave for it for she bought it in the early morning before the Malays came to make our market. She had a rigor a few minutes later and could not eat any chicken. We enjoyed it very much indeed and had delicious croquettes from it for supper too. In the evening lorries came several times and the tempo of the Camp rose to fever point again. American printed cotton material, shoes, tooth brushes, powder and soap came in. We were regretfully expecting another hectic night when a storm came up and heavy rain.....

Flossie has handed the Camp over to **Dr. Vis** entirely. I heard that she was asked to resign but I don't know yet who did the asking. **Vis** spends the whole day here. I have finished my T.A.B. injections – 1st round today and will only do my own patients for the second round.

The material was distributed today – thin but attractive (to us at least) American prints – 5 metres per person. Soap is being distributed – very highly perfumed soap made locally redolent of Himalaya bouquet – a cake and a guest cake each. Very poor quality hand towels, cheapest Jap variety, were also distributed.

Yesterday the men came over and today lots of women visited the Men's Camp – but also lots of men came over here and they seem to stay here doing various jobs such as guard duty in place of the guerrillas who have gone, wood chopping etc. They sit up talking all night and they are a perfect nuisance.

Monday August 27th 1945. (5th day after Peace). Life has become far more hectic and unpleasant and Elsie and I have had no peace since peace was announced. [To be contd.]

BOOKS.

"Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke." By Ralph E.H. Armstrong. With a foreword by Patricia, Countess Mountbatten of Burma. ISBN 07041 0406 7

It was no pleasure trip...

the **Vyner Brooke** was a small, nineteen hundred ton steamer designed to carry cargo and no more than fifty passengers between Sarawak and the East Indies. But, on St Valentine's Day, February 14th 1942, her decks and cabins were packed with over three hundred women and children – evacuees fleeing from a ferocious and unprovoked Japanese assault upon Singapore, which had left its waterfront blazing. They hoped, somehow, to reach Australia and safety. Instead, the **Vyner Brooke** was attacked by Japanese aircraft, bombed and sunk in the Bangka Strait, and survivors struggled for long hours, even days, battling strong currents to reach shore exhausted, only for some of them to be bloodily slaughtered there by the Japanese troops.

The Author...

not then in his teens, escaped the massacre to pass with his mother, his two sisters and his infant nephew into a long and frequently brutal captivity in which, weakened by starvation rations, internees died like flies. Nevertheless, as the author makes plain, the steadfast caring support of imprisoned Priests and Christian Brothers gave hope to all, education and enlightenment to the living, consolation to the dying and still remains an inspiration to those who greeted Liberation at last.

"Prelude to the Monsoon." By G.F. Jacobs. ISBN 0 7041 0074 6

Five Men against the Might of a Japanese Army. Their Orders Incredibly Simple – and Simply Incredible.

When it came to organising Hell on Earth for their hapless captives, no-one in the Second World War was more adept at it than the Japanese. And a few places anywhere more unspeakably vile than the infamous Japanese death camps of Sumatra.

Here, of the thousands originally herded into captivity, more than half perished in the first two years. In one camp alone, from brutality, overwork and deliberate starvation, the death rate rose to five percent weekly.

It was obvious to the Allies that if any Japanese prisoners at all were to emerge alive from the death camps, action would have to be taken very quickly to safeguard them immediately after the end of hostilities. And that end could come with startling swiftness, for plans were advanced to drop the first atomic bomb...

Yet the difficulties in the way of providing that immediate safeguarding action were truly enormous. When the war officially ended, British forces would be charged with liberating one-and-a-half million square miles of South-East Asia, and for disarming three-quarters of a million Japanese troops, most of which, it was expected, would fight on fanatically and suicidally to the bitter end.

Desperate situations call for desperate remedies. Thus it was that some weeks before the war's end, five men parachuted into the jungle on Japanese held Sumatra. Led by a 23-year-old Royal Marine Commando Major, **[Gideon Francis Jacobs]**, their orders were incredibly simple and simply incredible: **"Whatever the cost, take control of the island's 80,000-strong Japanese army, and get the prisoners out!"**

This is that Royal Marine Major's own tense and true story. How – parachuted into Sumatra to deal with one situation, he soon found himself embroiled in another; plunged into the murderous maelstrom of conflicting emotions, tensions, prejudices and violence which marked the birth of the Indonesian Republic.

It is, on the one hand, a remarkable story of true-life adventure. And, on the other, it is a personal record of a resourceful and brave midwife to history.

"Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra. Faith, Hope and Survival." By Barbara Coombes. ISBN 978 1 52678 775 0

Thousands of women and children were among those who struggled to leave Singapore just before capitulation on 15th February 1942; their hope was to reach safety. For many that hope was never realised; countless numbers drowned as ships were bombed and sunk on their way to 'safety.' The 'lucky' ones who survived the onslaught of the ships would become guests of the Japanese; many of these would not live to see the end of the war.

Two very different women fleeing on those last ships and subsequently interned in camps throughout Sumatra were Margaret Dryburgh, a missionary and teacher, and Shelagh Brown, a secretary at the Singapore Naval Base. Their paths crossed briefly prior to the catastrophic events of 1942 and met again in internment.

"The Captives' Hymn" composed by Margaret Dryburgh was initially sung by herself along with Shelagh Brown and friend Dorothy MacLeod on 5th July 1942; thereafter sung at services throughout internment and continues to be sung at services all over the world. Music and faith were fundamental to both their lives and Margaret's creative talents lifted the spirits of everyone during those dark and difficult days.

In a remarkable partnership, when the women were struggling to find something new that would lift their flagging spirits, Margaret and fellow internee, Norah Chambers produced a 'Vocal Orchestra' using women's voices in place of instruments. The first performance stunned the entire camp; they had never heard anything so beautiful and momentarily made them feel that they were free and floating away with the music.

"May the Day of Freedom Dawn."

**SERVICE OF DEDICATION FOR THE
BLUE PLAQUE COMMEMORATING MARGARET DRYBURGH
With thanks to Neil Sinclair for his report**

On 8th June at a service at Stockton Road United Reformed Church in Sunderland, England, a blue plaque commemorating Margaret Dryburgh, Presbyterian missionary and teacher, was dedicated by the Revd. Kim Plumpton, the Moderator of the Northern Synod of the URC. It is now on the outside of the Church porch.

Margaret was born in Sunderland in 1890. In 1919 she became a missionary in Swatow, China, later moving to Singapore. In both places she was also a teacher.

Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in 1942. The ship Margaret was escaping on was captured off Sumatra and she was taken to the first of four internment camps for women and children. In these camps Margaret's faith shone through as she led services and bible classes, as well as writing plays and editing the camp newsletter. She died of malnutrition and disease in 1945, shortly before liberation.

The moving service, led by the Revd. Jane Powell, had the theme of faith, courage and song. It celebrated Margaret's great musical contribution in the camps. This included the organising of a vocal orchestra and the composition of *The Captives' Hymn*, which is still sung throughout the world today. The hymn formed part of the service, as did the 23rd Psalm which Margaret asked to be read to her as she was dying.

Among the large congregation were the Mayor and Mayoress of the City of Sunderland, and Margaret's great nieces. The Church was also particularly pleased to welcome Margie Caldicott, the daughter and granddaughter of two of Margaret's fellow internees in Sumatra and Judy Balcombe and Arlene Bennett from Australia.

**Margaret Dryburgh's great nieces,
Susan Readman and Janet Kirkup,
with her cake after the dedication of
her Blue Plaque.**



**Margaret Dryburgh
Missionary and Teacher**



**Margaret Dryburgh's apron,
with the words and music of
The Captives' Hymn, on display
at the IWM North in Manchester.**



"Miss Dryburgh walked paths of peace in troubled lands."

VE DAY – 8th MAY 2025

With thanks to Christine Cavender for this report

Wow what a lucky lady I was to be able to attend the VE Day celebration concert in London and a huge thank you to RBL and Colin Hygate for obtaining the tickets for the MVG.

I had heard about this concert and wondered how I would be able to obtain a ticket, so was overjoyed when I was offered a ticket from the RBL via MVG.

The weather had been beautiful and I spent some hours searching through my wardrobe to find suitable attire red, white and blue, something cool if it was hot, and also something warm as the evenings were chilly. Such decisions!!

Fortunately the weather was favourable during the day, but I must admit it did turn chilly in the evening but the atmosphere, the joy and singing warmed us all up.

The gates to Horse Guards Parade opened from 5 p.m. and fortunately as I only live about an hour from London, I arrived in plenty of time to soak in the atmosphere and to find my seat. After going through security we were greeted by a plethora of volunteers who were handing out flags and fluorescent wristbands. I was amazed to see the transformation of Horse Guards Parade from the normally formal venue to an amazing concert venue with an enormous stage, 12,500 seats, a sea of people all dressed in red, white and blue waving their flags and taking pictures of each other. The atmosphere was electric, and everyone was so happy and friendly and there to participate in the VE Day celebrations.

I had a lovely seat with a good view of the stage and had the Royal Box behind me, so I could observe who had arrived. As the concert was being televised, everyone had to be seated by 8.15 p.m. for the concert to commence at 8.30 p.m. and to be seated by the time the Royal Family arrived and also the guests of honour – THE VETERANS!! We weren't seated for long as everyone was joyous and waved their flags, cheered and applauded when the Veterans arrived and took their seats. By this time the sun was starting to set, and we were all taken by surprise when there was a rumbling and everyone looked to the skies as a Lancaster Bomber flew over the concert ground.

The concert started and Zoe Ball took to the stage to act as compere to welcome everyone and introduce the events of the evening. I know this event was to celebrate VE Day and the end of the war (in Europe), but I am pleased to say that she reminded everyone that it wasn't officially the end of the war until VJ Day on 15th August 1945.

Well what a poignant evening, tears, happiness, nostalgia, sadness, memories and fun!! There were two large screens alongside so wherever you were seated you had a view of the stage and could follow the proceedings and the band. There were many funny moments on the stage, including a 'Dad's Army' sketch, a sketch from the show 'Operation Mincemeat' and equally there were very sad and poignant moments with letters from evacuees, love letters from husbands and wives and letters from lovers.

As the sun was setting at about 9.15 p.m. it was getting quite chilly, but the music and stories kept us warm and then, much to our amazement and applause, King Charles appeared on the stage and gave a wonderfully inspiring speech praising our veterans and giving us hope for the future especially in the turbulent times we are experiencing in the world to day.

To be honest, there were a few excellent musical acts, some of which I didn't know but the stars of the concert were the Veterans and their stories and the wonderful nostalgic music. It was spine tingling to hear 12,500 people singing **"Blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover"** **"We'll meet again"** and **"You'll never walk alone."** As the sun set and darkness descended it was magical seeing everyone waving their flags and the twinkling lights of the wrist bands.

The chill of the evening descended, and the last song got everyone up on their feet as we all sang, "Dancing in the Moonlight" a very apt end to the evening.... magical.

The concert finished at 10 p.m. and we were all ready to leave for our journeys home, some to stations, some to coaches and cars, some to various hotels and some to the pubs.

Leaving the venue and sending 12,500 people on their way was extremely well organised and I would like to say a huge thank you to the Royal British Legion for such a wonderful memorable evening.

The Muntok Peace Museum

Thank you for asking me to talk about the Muntok Peace Museum in this year, the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which, as we know, ended on August 15, 1945. The Muntok Peace Museum is a small Museum in the town of Muntok on Bangka Island, Indonesia. World War 2 Prisoners' families built the Muntok Peace Museum in 2015 and we continue to help the Muntok Red Cross and community.

Although small, the Museum holds the enormous history of the many people who suffered in this area during the Second World War – the local population, the 1000's lost at sea in the bombing of ships carrying both evacuees from Singapore and servicemen en route to Java, the 21 Australian Army Nurses, civilians and servicemen killed in the Radji Beach massacre, people killed in other massacres in the area and the many who suffered and died in the harsh prison camps on Bangka Island and in nearby Sumatra.

The Muntok Peace Museum has an excellent website

<http://muntokpeacemuseum.org> maintained by librarian David Man in New York. David's grandfather, like mine, died in the Muntok Jail, in 1944. The website aims to tell the history and to create a biography of as many prisoners as possible.

People find the website and contact us, seeking information about their families, which many have not known until now. We aim to tell the history accurately, to help visitors learn about their families and to deal with their years and often generations of grief. It is important to remember the War victims and to speak their names. They are not forgotten and deserve great respect.

Matron Annie Sage, Chief Australian Army Nurse, flew to Lahat in Sumatra in September 1945 to meet the prisoners who had survived Belalau prison camp. She wrote in the preface to Prisoner of War Australian Army Nurse Betty Jeffrey's book *White Coolies* that *'These prisoners surely fought in the War, just as sailors, soldiers and airmen fought – they fought with courage against inhuman physical treatment and terrible mental anguish and endeavoured to live with bravery, resourcefulness and compassion at the highest imaginable level.'*

I was very glad in the early years of my research to meet Dr Roderick Suddaby, the late Keeper of Documents at the Imperial War Museum. Shortly before his death, he wrote to me thanking us for what he called '*Our Work*'. I consider it **is** our work, a duty to continue to tell the story of the prisoners and to work positively in their memory.

The Muntok Peace Museum aims to show how the War affected so many people. We hope that visitors seeing the exhibits will be encouraged to follow a peaceful path in their own lives, in the community and in the world. In this way, we are following the 3 principles of the Netherlands War Graves Foundation. This cares for 25,000 Dutch war graves in Indonesia and looks after British and Australian war graves in Indonesia, on behalf of its sister organization, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Their principles are to remember the history, to support war victims' families emotionally and to educate people about war in order to strive for Peace.

The world is poised on a very difficult and dangerous precipice again My friend Reni Amelia, a teacher in Muntok, has said to me that *"It is our duty to talk about the past so that the younger generation can understand"*.

Many of us here today have families affected by the Second World War. I would like to think that as people affected by War, we can try to convey a peaceful message for the world now and for future generations. David Man's grandfather Gordon Reis wrote in his prison camp diary that *"Thoughts of our loved ones are our guiding stars"*.

I would like to explain how the War affected my family and the long journey that led me and other friends to build the Muntok Peace Museum and now, to participate in health initiatives on Bangka Island. One of my grandfathers was a rubber chemist and the other was a rubber planter. They never met but the Second World War affected both of them. My mother's father Jack Beed was the chemist. During the War, he had a reserved occupation, not permitted to enlist in the Services but required to remain in his workplace, overseeing the making of tyres for the Australian Airforce.

My father's father Colin Douglas Campbell was the rubber planter, manager of Selaba Estate in Telok Anson, in Perak, Malaya. He died from beriberi and dysentery in the Muntok Jail, aged 53. At the time, my father was at boarding school in Australia. He never spoke of his childhood or his father, except once to say he had loved him more than anyone in the world. The loss of his father affected my Dad very deeply, causing a depression that he never recovered from.

I can hardly imagine how my Dad felt as a young schoolboy – he first believed his father had drowned in 1942 in the bombing of his ship leaving Singapore. Then, a postcard came from Palembang prison camp, so the family thought he was alive. But finally after the War, they learned that my grandfather had died in Muntok camp in 1944.

I think this background is why I feel a responsibility to try to do something positive today, first becoming a doctor and now with our long involvement with Muntok on Bangka Island.

The internet revealed a lot of helpful information. I joined the Malayan Volunteers Group, finding former child internees and people whose families were prisoners in the same camps. Many of these people became close friends and shared their stories.

I found that my grandfather had left Singapore on February 12, 1942 on the *SS Giang Bee*, one of the large flotilla of boats carrying evacuees, many of which were bombed and sunk. Until February 10, men under 50 were not permitted to leave Malaya or Singapore. They were required to form the civil defence, which was run on military grounds with weapons and tanks, to maintain law and order, to continue tin and rubber production for the War in Europe and to preserve local morale.

Authorities insisted that Singapore was impregnable and could not fall. But on February 10, as the Japanese Army advanced, the population was informed they were *'In the hands of God'* and to leave by whatever means possible. People flocked to the Singapore docks and boarded a vast number of vessels commandeered for the

evacuation. The order had been given for code books in Singapore to be destroyed, meaning that Dutch messages warning of Japanese planes and warships in the South China Sea and Bangka Strait en route to fight for the oil fields in Palembang in Sumatra were not detected. The evacuating vessels sailed into the region which became known as 'bomb alley'.

Michael Pether from the Malayan Volunteers Group has estimated that over 100 vessels carrying evacuees were sunk by the Japanese in this area. The names of many of the 1000's lost at sea will never be known. My grandfather's boat was sunk but another prisoner's diary reveals he was pulled from the water into a lifeboat. He was placed in a series of increasingly harsh camps, first in Muntok on Bangka Island, then Palembang in Sumatra and back to Muntok, where he died on August 2, 1944.

In these camps were 1000 men and 600 women and children - shipwreck survivors, Australian and British Army and civilian Nurses, Dutch prisoners who had been taken from their homes and workplaces in Indonesia and Catholic nuns, bishops and priests. During February and March 1942, there were also many British and Australian servicemen from the bombed boats in the Muntok Jail. These men were later transferred to the shocking military camps at the Mulo School, the Chung Wa School and Sungei Geron in Palembang. Some were then moved to Changi in Singapore.

All but the sickest prisoners were moved from Muntok to Belalau Camp at Lubuk Linggau in Sumatra around Easter 1945. After the War, the Japanese concealed the existence of this remote camp in the mountains to hide the skeletal captives but survivors resembling prisoners from Belsen were finally rescued in September and October 1945.

I first visited Bangka Island in 2011 with Anthony Pratt from London whose father had died in Muntok. Anthony Pratt is a film art director. He worked with Stephen Spielberg making *The Pacific* and *Band of Brothers*, series made by Spielberg so his own children could learn about the horrors of war.

In 2011, Anthony and I decided to visit Muntok to look for our relatives' graves. We learnt that although the Dutch had moved **all** their graves, military **and** civilian, to 7 large War cemeteries in Java in the early 1960's, the majority of British, Australian, New Zealand and other allied civilian graves had been left behind in Muntok. The British authorities only moved their military graves and declined to move the civilians.

The Muntok Town Cemetery was abandoned and built over in the 1960's. The male prisoners now lie buried under houses and a petrol station. The women's remains were found during the building of the petrol station in 1981 and moved to a group grave in the Muntok Catholic cemetery.

People who grieved the loss of their families in the Japanese camps were now upset and angry that their relatives' graves had been neglected by their own countries. Former internee Mrs Shelagh Lea, whose Mother died in Muntok, wrote to the British government for decades, asking that the graves be preserved or a memorial

erected but she was finally informed that she could care for the Indonesian cemetery herself ! This of course was not possible and was a source of great distress.

2012, Shelagh's daughter Margie Caldicott and her husband, Anthony Pratt and I returned to Muntok and Palembang with plaques funded by the Malayan Volunteers Group to mark the prison camp areas. The British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia wrote that the story of the Lost Muntok Graves was "*one of the saddest they had heard.*"

In 2013, Margie Caldicott helped to organize the *Singing to Survive* Concert in Chichester, with the music of the Palembang Women's Prison Camp Vocal Orchestra. Many surviving internees and prisoners' families attended. Ticket sales provided computers and repairs for the school at Kampong Menjelang, the former women's prison camp site and plaques with the names of the civilians we believe still remain buried in Muntok.

Our historian friends in Muntok next suggested we may like to build a small museum to tell the story of the war years. By now we had a circle of friends around the world connected to these camps – in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Spain, France, Malaysia, Singapore and America - and began fundraising for the project. The land was donated by Kampong Menjelang and we asked that the building also be used for children without electricity to do their homework and for women's meetings.

People sent donations, we held garage sales, I wrote and sold a cook book with recipes written down by prisoners in camp and held a fundraising afternoon tea at the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne.

This Centre was established in 1950 by former Sumatran Prisoners of War Australian Army Nurses Sisters Vivian Bullwinkel and Betty Jeffrey. Today it holds lectures and events and gives scholarships for nursing education in memory of all Australian Nurses who serve in war and peace-keeping activities.

My friend Arlene Bennett spoke at this conference in 2023 about Vivian Bullwinkel and her colleagues, the 65 Australian Army Nurses from the *SS Vyner Brooke*. 12 died in the bombing of their ship and 21 were massacred with civilians and British and New Zealand Servicemen on Radji Beach near Muntok on February 16, 1942, with Vivian Bullwinkel the sole Nurse survivor. Her uniform, with bullet holes, is in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. A further 8 *Vyner Brooke* Nurses died in the Women's camp.

These 65 Australian Army Nurses had been evacuated from Singapore against their wishes under Army Orders when news came of the rape and murder of Nurses by the Japanese Orita Battalion in Hong Kong on Christmas Day, 1941. By a cruel twist of fate, 22 *Vyner Brooke* Nurses then encountered this same Orita Battalion at Radji Beach.

Shortly before her death, Vivian Bullwinkel revealed that the Nurses had been violated on Radji Beach before they were killed, a fact we believe she had been ordered not to disclose at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.

Vivian Bullwinkel lived her life in memory of her nursing colleagues killed on Radji Beach. She was Director of Nursing at Melbourne's Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital and pioneered university nursing education in Australia. During the Vietnam war, she was involved in Operation Babylift, flying many abandoned sick orphans to Australia in cardboard boxes.

Vivian Bullwinkel and Betty Jeffrey drove around Victoria after the War to raise funds to build the Nurses' Memorial Centre. They were our inspiration to create the Muntok Peace Museum.

The Malayan Volunteers Group and BACSA gave generous donations, as did the family of Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia's Official Representative to Singapore who was executed by 2 guards in Muntok on February 17, 1942 after standing up in defence of a Frank Brewer, a British soldier. Frank Brewer's oral history recording is in the Imperial war museum and can be accessed online.

Today, the Australian Embassy to Indonesia attends the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service in Muntok each February 16 and gives 2 university scholarships on Bangka Island in memory of Mr Vivan Bowden.

The Muntok Peace Museum began as a tribute to our families whose graves were abandoned and lost. As our group of prisoners' families continued to visit Muntok, we learnt more about the history. Muntok town was severely bombed on February 10, 1942. Villagers fled to live in a cave at Batu Balai. Life was very hard for the people of Muntok during the War, with assaults on women by Japanese soldiers and limited food supplies. The Muntok Peace Museum now remembers all of the War victims, telling of their hardships and suffering, their resilience and their care for one another.

Finally the Museum was completed and families, including the family of Mr Vivian Bowden, travelled to Muntok for the opening in October 2015. We carried the plaques with the names of the civilians who remain buried in Muntok to place on the group memorial grave in the Catholic

We called the Museum the Muntok Peace Museum because we wanted not only to tell the story of the prisoners, but to demonstrate the horrors and futility of War. These sentiments and the importance of educating the younger generation have been expressed openly in speeches in Muntok by Indonesian authorities, the Netherlands War Graves Foundation and the Australian Embassy.

Muntok was visited by UNESCO in 2009 and was praised for being a town where people of many races and religions – Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu live together in peace and harmony without conflict. This small town can surely serve as a model for the world.

The Service to remember the end of the Second World War, held at Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore in 2012 involved religious leaders from all faiths joining together in a prayer for Peace.

At the opening of the Muntok Peace Museum, an Indonesian Official sang to us in English, words from John Lennon's song, *Imagine*,

Imagine all the people living life in peace....

A brotherhood of man....

Sharing all the world....

I will describe a few of the many exhibits from the Muntok Peace Museum.

"Horror off Bangka" is a sketch showing victims from one of many bombed ships clinging to a piece of wood, displayed with the artist's son's permission.

We see a Nurses' uniform and red cape. In addition to the Australian Army Nurses, there were many British Nurses in these camps, both military and civilian. British Army Nurse Margot Turner from the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, later Brigadier Dame Margot Turner and Chief British Army Nurse, was bombed on both the *Kuala* and the *Tandjong Pinang*, the only survivor on her raft. She recalled how, one by one, the children with her became dehydrated and died and how she had rolled their bodies into the sea.

A photo wall has pictures of prisoners sent by their families. At the base is a photo of Australian obstetrician Dr Albert Stanley McKern who wrote his will as he was dying in Belalau Camp, leaving his estate of \$12

We see Sister Betty Jeffrey's and missionary Miss Margaret Dryburgh's many drawings of prison camp life. This is the Muntok Women's Camp so-called 'hospital' hut.

There is a picture of the apron made by internee Mrs Mary Brown from scraps cut from the women's dresses as a birthday gift for Miss Dryburgh, co-founder of the Palembang Women's Prison Camp Vocal Orchestra. The apron is now in The Imperial War Museum North, with the words and music of her *Captives' Hymn*, sung in prison camp every Sunday. Last Sunday, we attended the dedication of a blue historical marker to Miss Margaret Dryburgh at the Sunderland United Reformed Church, from which she had set out as a missionary to China in 1919.

Each February 16, the anniversary of the Radji Beach massacre, families of the Australian Army Nurses and civilian internees and the Australian Embassy attend the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service which begins at the Muntok Peace Museum. Further Services take place at the Nurses' Memorial at the Tanjong Kelian lighthouse and at the headland which overlooks the vast graveyard of the Bangka Strait.

The Services end at the water's edge with the Radji Beach Ode of Peace, which states that *violence will not have the last word in this place*. Everyone present holds hands and walks into the water, as Vivian Bullwinkel said the Nurses did before they were shot. This is now known as *The Walk for Humanity* where everyone present vows to do whatever possible to help create a better and more peaceful world.

In 2020, we were joined at the Memorial Services and in *The Walk for Humanity* by Mr Takonai Susumu from the Japanese Embassy to Indonesia. The Australian, New Zealand, British and Japanese Embassies and prisoners' families planted a Tree of

Peace together in the garden of the former Japanese camp commandant. This area is now a Peace Garden.

During Covid, people were dying in Muntok - the friends who had made our commemorations possible. My friend Arlene and I held garage sales and raised funds for the Muntok Red Cross, to buy stethoscopes, pulse oximeters and a Covid transport ambulance.

During Covid, I wrote a book with the royalties donated to the Muntok Red Cross in perpetuity. We now also help the Muntok Girls' Orphanage and are encouraging the World Mosquito Program to help eliminate Dengue Fever on Bangka Island. It is special to be here today at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine with its long history of work combating infectious diseases. The World Mosquito Program exposes mosquito larvae to the otherwise harmless Wolbachia bacteria. The hatched mosquitos and their descendants are then unable to transmit dengue fever, zika and chikungunya viruses. This is an exciting development that can save many lives.

Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop was one of 106 Australian doctors who cared for Prisoners of War in Java, Singapore and on the Thai Burma Railway. In addition to his wartime work, Weary Dunlop continued to help former prisoners after the War. Even after retirement, he kept his Collins St office open and former prisoners were always welcome to drop in for a chat. I had the privilege of meeting him there twice and his secretary brought out the trolley with cheese sandwiches and a teapot.

Weary Dunlop and the Australian Army nurses from the *SS Vyner Brooke* were both remembered on Australian coins in 2017 and both were given a State Funeral.

The Weary Dunlop Foundation which trained Thai Nurses in Australia and assisted medical research is to close this year. The Foundation became aware of the Muntok Peace Museum and our work on Bangka Island. Most of the Foundation's funds will continue to help medical research but I am very touched to say that later this year, donations from the Foundation will be given to the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne for its postgraduate nursing scholarships and to the Muntok Red Cross to help continue its important humanitarian work on Bangka Island.

Last year I visited New York and stood at the John Lennon *Imagine* Memorial in Central Park. We met with a former child internee and talked about our shared history and the state of the world today.

We can't change the past or bring our families back but we can try to work towards a better future, in their memories. Through the Muntok Peace Museum, we have tried to record the wartime history so people can learn about their families. We found our relatives had no graves so we made plaques with their names. When people in Muntok were dying from Covid, we helped to buy an ambulance for the Red Cross to take them to hospital. We will continue to help educate young girls, to support the Muntok Red Cross and to help prevent Dengue fever.

We also want the Museum to help people think about those who suffer in wars today and ways to help create Peace. The Muntok Peace Museum began as a memorial to our families, because our own authorities would not protect or remember their

graves. Its purpose has expanded and today it hopes to spread a message of positive action, improved health care, Peace and Hope for a better and safer future.

Mrs Eveline de Vink, Director of the Netherlands War Graves Foundation in Indonesia wrote these words for the Bangka Island Memorial Service about creating a peaceful world:

“In honour of those who fell, those who lived through the War, those who stood by them and those they left behind, may we remember their stories and may these stories be a call to action to us all.

“What each of us can do to maintain Peace and prevent war will be different from person to person. But let us all try to do our part, so that we can together prevent what the commemorations, monuments and war cemeteries so visibly show.”

Our friend Dery Aryandi from the Muntok Red Cross writes: *“We are all brothers and sisters in this world.”* We are all connected through time and space through our shared history. I hope we can learn from past tragedy to help make a better world today.

Thank you

[Editor: Judy's full Presentation illustrated with photographs is available to view on the Peace Museum's website: <https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>]

MUNTOK PEACE MUSEUM

