SELAMAT PAGI

THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER

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Singapore Far East Moon Rose

EDITION 7

SEPTEMBER 2025

"21 Hearts"

A stage play about the massacre of the Australian Army Nurses on Radji Beach at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra

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If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.
If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.
When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.
A very old Chinese Proverb

In the U.K. the 80th anniversary of V-J Day, on 15th August 2025, finally arrived after months of careful planning under a cloak of secrecy. The lead-up to this historic and emotional date for so many of the relatives of those who had suffered and died during the 3 ½ years of Japanese incarceration, both as military personnel and as civilian internees, had been a long one. Here in Britain, very little information had emerged in the media about the format that the celebrations would take to honour these brave men, women and children, and what they would be.

Earlier this year, it became clear that the main event would take place - not in London where the week long celebrations for V-E Day had occurred - but in Staffordshire at the National Memorial Arboretum. There was to be an event, organised by the Royal British Legion (RBL), in the open air around the base of the Armed Forces Memorial at the heart of the Arboretum. Would Royalty attend – and if so who else would be there? These were the questions on everyone's tongue – and we were delighted to hear finally that the King and Queen would be there, and the remaining veterans of the Far East conflict, now few and far between. In 2015, 3,000 veterans took part in a parade to mark the 70th anniversary of V-J Day. Their numbers today have dwindled to 33. The dignified manner in which those who were chosen to take part in the event was most humbling and a reproach to those – now long gone – who silenced them on their return from Japanese prison camps, injured and traumatised from their long ordeal.

We were only told about the arrangements in the couple of weeks before the event. Members of the MVG with relatives who were veterans involved in the Malayan Campaign or civilian internees, were offered 10 tickets by the RBL to attend the event, followed by lunch in the grand recently built hospitality suite. **[See Imogen Holmes' report on Ps. 29-31]**

As well as the main RBL event at the Arboretum, Services were held in other parts of Britain – in Norwich a service was held at the Cathedral and this was attended by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester; in Edinburgh, the service was held at the Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle and attended by the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh. A service was also held at Leicester Cathedral, and in churches all over the country.

In London, the only event planned was an Afternoon Tea Garden Party at No. 10 Downing Street, arranged, it seemed, very much at the last minute and hosted by the UK's Prime Minister, for veterans and their families who were unable to travel to the NMA for the Friday event. With no Malayan Volunteer Veterans now alive, five first & second generation children of MVG Veterans were given invitations to attend this event. **[See Christine Cavender's report Ps. 26-28].**

At dawn on the 15th August, military bagpipes played the lament 'Battle O'er' at the Cenotaph in London; in the Far East section of the NMA; and at Edinburgh Castle. A piper also performed at a Japanese Peace Garden to reflect peace and reconciliation between the nations.

Also on Friday morning, 15th August, the King addressed the nation at 7.30 a.m. in a radio broadcast - eighty years after his grandfather, King George VI, announced in his historic message that "war has ended throughout the world." The theme of King Charles' message of peace was a much broader one, reflecting his role as a convenor bringing together peoples of different nations, religions and ideologies. But he vowed that the service and sacrifice of those who fought in the war against Japan "shall never be forgotten." The King also said that 'friendship is a greater weapon than arms,' during his tribute to the wartime heroes of V-J Day.

The Malayan Volunteers Group (MVG) held a Service in the Chapel at the NMA after the main RBL event. This service included two traditional hymns, "Abide with Me" with music arranged for voices in 4 parts by **Lisa Ho** and dedicated to the Volunteers of WWs1 and 11, and "The Captives' Hymn" composed in Palembang prison camp by **Margaret Dryburgh**. Readings were taken from books and diaries about POWs and civilian internees in camps in Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) and one from a book about the atom bomb dropped on Nagasaki. The wreath was then taken down to the Memorial Garden and laid on the Memorial Stone dedicated to the Malayan Volunteer Forces both military and civilian.

It ended a very emotional day on which the few surviving FEPOWs played a major role and their courage and sacrifice was commemorated and recognised.

Saturday, 16th August 2025, brought together over 1,000 relatives and friends of former British Army FEPOWs; local military personnel; standard bearers; wreath layers from various Far East organisations including the MVG; and civic dignitaries, in Lichfield Cathedral at a wonderful service of remembrance and celebration organised by COFEPOW. Those taking part in the readings were children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. **Rosemary Fell** and **Imogen Holmes** attended this service on behalf of the MVG, and **Rosemary** laid a wreath dedicated to the Malayan Volunteer Forces and Civilian Internees. A wreath was also laid on behalf of the Hong Kong Volunteer Forces and Hong Kong Police by a **Dr. Chan**, whose family originally came from Hong Kong and whose grandfather was murdered there by the Japanese in 1942.

It was a weekend of quiet reflection; to give thanks, 80 years on, that World War Two finally ended; to remember those who did not return; and to celebrate the lives of those who did. It was also a time to renew old friendships made through the MVG and other Far East organisations; a time to pay tribute to those remarkable veterans who came in their wheelchairs with their carers; a time to join with them to celebrate and remember their fallen comrades; and a time to feel humbled by their presence. **We will remember them.**

V-J Day in Australia

Judy Balcombe and **Arlene Bennett** attended the VP Service at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne on 15th August. They returned on 17th August for a talk about the CWG cemetery built at Yokohama & planted with Eucalyptus trees for reconciliation, staying for the Last Post Ceremony.

Hansard Report

You may be interested to read the Hansard report on the UK Parliament's debate on 21st July 2025, about the UK's Government's plans to celebrate the 80th anniversary of V-J Day.
https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-07-21/debates/38DE5EA2-8D91-483A-9DE6-524A887D8513/VictoryOverJapan80ThAnniversary?fbclid=IwY2xjawLtyP9leHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHudjmna_u8u77FurusHTlJTUSkPXguAvNZbc0GVDRbPWGnrU9jI3eDjXP5r0_aem_VWLY0sZ_gPPLMn0OwG_pGw&sfnsn=mo

David Man has quoted the following sentence from the debate:

This is very encouraging and moving. I note a few references to the civilians such as: ' It is so important in this debate that we remember all those who served in our forces, ***as well as the civilians who died in the conflicts, many of whom will not have names on war memorials.***" Let's hope this recognition continues to grow. [Ed: We agree, **David].**

On 23rd July, Judy Balcombe wrote:

"We are going to Canberra to see the play "21 Hearts" about the Australian Army Nurses killed on Radji Beach. The play is touring Australia and is now at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. **Arlene (Bennett)** is there now to attend a showing of the play arranged by the Australian College of Nursing tonight, while we are attending on Friday night with some of the Nurses' families. **Arlene** is returning to Melbourne early because, very sadly, **Diane Whitehead** has died and it will be her funeral on Friday. She was 91. Diane was preparing to write the biography of **Norah Chambers**, which she was researching for some decades. I had offered to help her by making recordings and typing for her but she kept saying that she wasn't ready to start! We will try to ask Diane's sister if she might like us to take over the project. It would be extra sad if all her papers were thrown away."

Other letters and articles of interest in newspapers about V-J Day

In the lead up to V-J Day, there was an interesting article in the British newspaper 'The Daily Telegraph' on 6th August, the day 80 years ago when the first of the atomic bombs was dropped on Hiroshima. It was written by **David Blair**, the grandson of a man who was slowly being starved as a civilian internee in Sime Road Camp in Singapore. For all the horrors unleashed on Hiroshima that day, it was a life saver for **Denis Bruce Soul**, whose survival was due to his liberation from 3½ years as a prisoner of the Japanese Empire just over a week later. True, it was also due to a second bomb being dropped on Nagasaki before Japan surrendered, but Hiroshima's bomb was the main reason for **Denis Soul's** survival and consequently for **David Blair's** existence.

A letter from **Sally Cumming**, a civilian child internee in Java, was published on 8th August, the day of the Nagasaki bomb, in which she said that but for the bombs she may not have survived the plan to kill all prisoners. Her mother died of starvation a month before liberation, and she said she was thankful still to be alive.

Royal Marine James Wren – last of the 'Plymouth Argylls' now aged 105 - was rescued when HMS Repulse was bombed and sunk by the Japanese. He was captured in Muntok by the Japanese while attempting to escape from Singapore by boat. He was then taken to Sumatra where he was interned in Palembang in the same camp as **Bob Hall's** father, who survived the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales, escaped from Singapore and was also captured on Bangka Island. **James Wren** was released from captivity in August 1945.

He told The Duchess of Edinburgh, who visited him prior to the 80th anniversary of V-J Day, ***"When we got back, the government didn't want to know and told us not to talk about it."***

A Comment:

It is interesting to read in the pages of **Dr. Marjorie Lyon's** book, **"These are my War Time Diaries"** her comments about the behaviour of camp inmates following the Japanese surrender, resulting in a developing animosity between the Dutch and English in the civilian internment camps. After 3½ years of captivity, during which relations between the two nations had always appeared to be co-operative and cordial, it is sad to read how quickly these relations seem to have broken down after Peace was announced. Yet most escape diaries mention how helpful the Dutch Controllers, in the various islands of the former Dutch East Indies and on Sumatra, were to the escapees before the Japanese occupation.

80th Anniversary Celebrations in Singapore.

We also look forward to the 80th Anniversary Service in Kranji Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery to mark the signing of the Japanese surrender in Singapore on 12th September 1945. The wreath commemorating the Malayan Volunteer Forces will be laid by **Roger Willbourn** on behalf of the MVG, and **Judy Balcombe** will lay a wreath in the private wreath laying part of the ceremony on behalf of Friends of Bangka Island and the Muntok Peace Museum. **Arlene Bennett** is also attending from Australia. Reports on the events in Singapore to mark this anniversary will be given in the December edition.

Birthday Wishes

We send huge Congratulations and many belated Happy Birthday wishes to our wonderful **Vilma Howe**, former child internee in Muntok, Palembang and Sime Road, who was 97 on 11th July. Her delightful story about Tokay Lizards can be read on **P 9.** These lizards are larger than the little geckos, which most of us who lived in Malaya are familiar with and which normally frequent older style pre-war bungalows and houses, and have suction pads on their feet similar to their smaller relatives, so that they can run up and down walls. It must have been unnerving to have seen this large foot long lizard running up the walls of the bungalow as they slept.

Apology for the mis-spelling of Bangka Island in the MVG's newsletter, Apa Khabar.

We offer an apology to for the incorrect spelling of Bangka Island, in the July edition of 'Apa Khabar'. Unfortunately, we had no opportunity to correct the spelling before Apa Khabar was printed and sent out.

BOOKS

"The Forgotten Indian Prisoners of War of WW11." By **Gautam Hazarika.** Published by Pen & Sword Books. ISBN 9781 036 124 380. **Gautam** writes:
My book comes out next month in India and in November in the UK. Am thrilled by the reviews, including one by Jonathan. A book summary is in the P&S listing:
https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/The-Forgotten-Indian-Prisoners-of-World-War-II-Hardback/p/56543
The following 3 reviews are by well known authors, including MVG's historian **Jonathan Moffatt co-author of "Moon Over Malaya. A Tale of Argylls and Marines,"** who writes:
"This timely, very well researched book tells the story of the Indian officers and rank and file of the British Indian Army from the capitulation at Singapore on February 15th 1942 to Japan's unconditional surrender and beyond..... Singapore historian **Gautam Hazarika** tells the complex story of the Japanese duplicity and intrigue within the Indian leadership. It is the story of those who joined the Indian National Army; those who chose captivity and those who joined the INA but very soon had second thoughts and ended up as POWs..... This book is a 'must read' to those interested in that story and the events of WW2 in South East Asia. It will certainly add to our knowledge of POW captivity."
K.S. Nair, author of "December in Dacca and the Forgotten Few," writes:
"**Gautam Hazarika's** book – effectively an Indian history of the INA – is a remarkable work. It is the Indian point of view, yet as far as possible unemotional, one-volume retelling that this episode of India's history demands. It accounts for the "first" INA of **Mohan Singh**, as well as the later INA of **Subhas Chandra Bose**. It is clear eyed about the limits and extent of the INA's battlefield success, as against the extent and limits of its political success. It is densely annotated, and topped off with unusual, faithfully rendered illustrations. Highly recommended."
Kevin Noles, author of "Indian Prisoners of War in Japanese Captivity during World War Two," writes:
"An important book that highlights the suffering and fortitude of the forgotten Indian prisoners of the Japanese. This is a vital contribution on a neglected subject, and it deserves a wide readership."

"The Narrow Road to the Deep North." By **Richard Flanagan.** Published by Chatto & Windus. ISBN 978-0-701-18905-1
Tasmanian-born **Richard Flanagan's** novel, *"The Narrow Road to the Deep North"* which won the Booker Prize in October 2014, was based on his father's experiences as a Japanese prisoner-of – war on the Thailand-Burma 'Death Railway.' The prize was presented to him in London on 14th October 2014 by the then Duchess of Cornwall. **Flanagan** took 12 years and 5 versions to produce the final version of the novel which includes a love story woven into the narrative. He finished writing the novel on the day his father died, aged 98. Much was written about the book and the author at the time, including a full page interview with **Richard Flanagan** by **Gaby Wood** in The Daily Telegraph dated 16th October 2014. In her *'Appreciation'* article the day before, **Wood** ends her piece with these words: ***"It is a big book, the way CinemaScope is a big medium, and it will no doubt be a movie some day soon."***
Those who bought the book may have found the graphic details of cruelty meted out to prisoners by their sadistic guards difficult to read. And it may be for this reason that it has taken over 10 years for **Gaby Wood's** prediction to come true, with the current television drama serialisation of the book by an Australian production now being shown. It is not for the fainthearted.

"The Bells of Nagasaki." By **Takashi Nagai.**
As we celebrate the 80th anniversary of V-J Day this year, it is interesting to note that the book, *"The Bells of Nagasaki"* is being republished. This is the eye-witness account, by Japanese doctor **Takashi Nagai**, of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, written in 1946 and first published in 1949.
Nagai was an interesting man – as a devout Catholic, he appalled many of his countrymen by giving a speech in the ruins of the once majestic Urakami Cathedral in which he cast the dropping of the bomb, not as a monstrous war crime, but as a grace from God. He claimed that due to the sacrifice of the thousands of Japanese Catholics who died in the bombing, God had finally brought the war to an end. His address is re-printed in the book. When he died in 1951, his funeral was attended by 20,000 mourners. Today, we should note the urgent warning he offered in his book nearly 80 years ago, when he said, ***"Men and women of the world never again plan war! Grant that Urakami may be the last atomic wilderness in the history of the world."***

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

*[**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 Mysores 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].*

The next stage of our journey through Sumatra was slow progress. We duly arrived at the Ayer Molek rubber estate now being used as a transit camp. We were billeted in the hospital Coolie Lines, and were greeted by a number of army nursing sisters together with civilian women and a **Colonel Hennessey, R.A.M.C.** who was caring for the sick and wounded. We were pretty tired and found ourselves a space on the boards in one of the Coolie Lines but were unable to get very much sleep that night on account of the mosquitoes. There was one thing about travelling overnight on the sea – there are no mosquitoes, but at Ayer Molek, like Rengat before, things were different, for even with a scrounged mosquito net, we were unable to get much sleep at nights.

The second day we took stock and learnt that most of the troops, who had escaped from Singapore and were passing through Sumatra, had been billeted in the smoke-house area of the factory on this rubber estate. We also understood that there were Japanese prisoners of war being escorted back to India. I suppose it was nice to know that we had taken prisoners of war in Malaya. It must have been rather surprising to a great many people because of the speed of the operation. We made little contact with this group at all during the day but learnt later that transport was being arranged for this group to be moved to the next staging post, which was the town of Taluk.

Some of the army nursing d sisters had been down to the smoke-house area and contacted the officer in charge to enquire as to how they were expected to move up the escape route. They were callously informed (by a **Major Nicholson**) that, as they had left their posts in Singapore, as far as he was concerned they were no longer service personnel, they were civilians and would have to fend for themselves. This didn't please them one little bit. They were smarting under this insult when they came back to the camp. When we heard of this we too thought it high handed and a callous action to take.

It could truthfully be said that none of us was particularly enamoured with some of the people that were in senior positions in our forces at that time. Though we had no direct allegiance to anyone other than our own volunteer units we felt it right to help whoever we could. After getting nowhere fast with the lower level of authority in Ayer Molek we were able to get on the telephone to **Col. Dillon** who, by this time, was at the next stage at Taluk. **Col. Dillon** had been helpful before at Rengat and was again equally as helpful. He accepted all that was being said and in the end promised that three buses would be sent back to us at Ayer Moluk to transport all the people from the hospital area of the rubber estate up to Taluk. **Col. Dillon** was as good as his word and the following day, three buses arrived. These were coaches and the nearest approach to the old fashioned 'char-a-banc' that we had not seen since childhood. These coaches consisted of six or seven forward facing bench seats with a door at the end of each seat for entering. There wasn't much time wasted in embarking on these coaches and the party was evenly distributed – we were the only three fit service people present and were expected to take over the leadership. So that there would be some control in each of the buses, we allocated ourselves accordingly. **John** had the first bus, **Tex** the second and I was in the rear coach. Our next stop was to be Taluk. A drive in these conditions was expected to last about 24 hours. In the event this is almost exactly what it did take.

The only excitement of that particular drive was when one of the buses broke down during the night and refused to move. The driver got out and fiddled with the engine but all to no avail. He then asked if any of his passengers had a torch. One, a **Mrs. Smart**, who was the wife of the chief of the Federated Malay States Railway network, had a torch but was most reluctant to lend it to the driver and insisted that before she did so someone should indemnify her for the use of the battery in the torch. She asked for a written note to the effect that the British Government would replace the battery at the end of the war. This assurance was eventually

given to her and I signed a worthless piece of paper which, no doubt, she probably still has to this day. I am not aware whether she tried to redeem my note or not. The bus came back to life however and we proceeded on our uncomfortable journey.
We arrived in Taluk just after mid-day - possibly the last of the organised parties to arrive before the Japanese. The town is built around a market square and this is where we parked. There were a great number of other troops around who were on their way through Sumatra. They had got as far as Taluk only. This was also as far as anyone could get up the Indragiri River if one had come up all the way by boat. The strict instruction to the people in our three coaches was not to go far away in case we were given permission to proceed further. I set off to look for **Col. Dillon** at the Headquarters of the organisation helping escapees. I found him in an office set up just off the market square and pleaded that as we had three buses, and were ready to move on, that we should be permitted to do so rather than have to wait and take our turn in what could be seen to be pretty chaotic conditions. Without too much cajoling and wheedling, he told us that as we were already in a close-knit group, we would be allowed to proceed straight away in the buses to the next staging post which was the town of Sawahloento (sic).
Sawahloento was at the head of the railway and we would be able to catch a train there to take us down to Padang on the west coast of Sumatra. However, when I went back to our buses in the market square to give the glad news that we were to proceed to Sawahloento, to my annoyance, I found that some people had moved off into the market place and were not ready to go. The opportunity to move forward was not one that could be missed and a decision had to be taken as to whether to leave those people who were not on the coach and hope that they would be able to come up later. Fortunately this decision did not have to be taken – we had given the people a quarter of an hour to get back and all our group did come back within that quarter of an hour, so it wasn't long before we were on the road once again.
By this time we had been able to take stock of the people in our party. We had Army Nursing Sisters of QAIMNS, Civilian Nursing Sisters, Territorial Army Nursing Sisters, nurses from the Indian Medical Service, other civilians, men and women from industry and the Malayan Civil Service and one very sick young soldier who was being cared for by the army nursing sisters and **Col. Hennessey** of the R.A.M.C. There was a father looking after his small son, his wife having been killed on the ***"S.S. Kuala"*** when leaving the docks in Singapore, and he and his son had again escaped when the ***"S.S. Kuala"*** was sunk by enemy action south of Singapore, near Pompong Island. There were children who had lost parents and others separated from family. All would have a tale to tell if they survived. All were full of courage and eager to help.
But always the main objective was to get through to the west coast. On the journey up to Sawahloento the sick soldier, **Corporal Bradbury**, had become gravely ill and required a lot of attention. He was given one of the seats to himself and was nursed during the journey by the Army Nursing Sisters and it is to them that he certainly owes his life. When we left Taluk we had hoped that we would have a fairly trouble-free run to Sawahloento. This, however, did not materialise, for the following day we ran into some very severe floods which held us up at a little village called Peranap.
Most villages on roads in the Far East boast a Rest House of sorts; Peranap was no exception and so we made the small Rest House the headquarters for our party. There was not a lot we could do other than just wait until the floods subsided and, whilst people were most anxious, there wasn't any point in being too impatient. Some of the civilians with money went out looking for transport that they had hoped they could either buy or commandeer to get themselves further up the line that much more quickly. They were not successful.
We had to spend three nights in this temporary accommodation. The Rest House was not big enough to accommodate our numbers and so every available bit of space on the floors was taken up by people at night. The floods had subsided a little after the three days and we decided that we should endeavour to push forward.
The drivers of the buses weren't too happy but I think they too had had enough so we used old sacking to cover up the front of the engines of the buses and we were fortunate to get the three buses through the floods with only a little shoving and pushing. We continued on our journey to arrive at Sawahloento the following evening. On arrival at Sawahloento we were divided up, the ladies going to the hospital and the men being directed to a warehouse down by the railway line.
There was some semblance of order here – the Dutch Military seemed to be taking on the responsibilities for the administration. We were given a meal and a space in which to sleep and told that there would be a train the following morning leaving Sawahloento to go to Padang and that we would be expected to be on that train. Sawahloento in normal times

would have been an attractive town – as it is in the hills. I have no doubt that those who lived in it in peace time did enjoy it as a healthy area and a nice area in which to live and work. We weren't particularly interested in that sort of thing. All we wanted to do was to get to the west coast and once there we had no doubt that we would find ships to take us away to India and beyond.

We embarked on the train the following morning soon after 9 o'clock, and proceeded on our way to Padang. In normal times this journey would be very breathtaking, for it starts off from Sawahloento through jungle and steep sided valleys gradually opening out into the rice fields of the plains and then to the sea. The journey was peaceful with only two stops for the engine to be re-fuelled and re-watered. At both stops we had the opportunity to obtain snacks from the hawkers who appeared to come from nowhere to surround the train. Sugar, rice, sweeties, all sorts of small packets of good things to attract anyone feeling the slightest bit hungry and who had the money to pay for them.

We arrived at Padang during the afternoon and were formed up and marched into the town. There was quite an organisation already set up in Padang and we had not been there very long before we were detailed off to various billets. Our group was now well split up and I suppose it could be said that the first part of the trip, that to the west coast of Sumatra, had been accomplished. If we were to have any further success in escaping to India or Australia the next part would depend entirely on the arrival of boats. Padang itself is not a harbour town – the harbour, Emmerhaven, was about three miles south connected by road and rail services. We hadn't been in Padang very long before we found our way to the harbour. The harbour itself was alright but there never appeared to be any ships in it so it hadn't any useful purpose to serve for us. It became a period of waiting and waiting and hoping and hoping – even in these circumstances extraordinary things happen. I can recall being asked if I would play football at one of the Chinese schools. I accepted. I was told to be there at 4.30 p.m. or thereabouts. I duly arrived to find that the teams had already been picked and it was a match between the army and navy and I was playing for the army. I don't know what it is, but games of any sort seem to bring out the best and sometimes the worst in people. What is certain is that whenever games are played, they are always played hard. There seem to be no half measures. This game was certainly no exception. I don't think I've ever played in a rougher or tougher match. No quarter was asked and no quarter given. The football pitch was hard and the knocks received and given were plentiful. I do not remember the result but I fancy it probably should have been a draw with the score line of two all. I do know that this was one of the hardest games I had ever played and I came away very bruised.

After a few days in Padang it became obvious that we were unlikely to see any ships in the harbour and so this set our minds working on other means of escape. As is inevitable, in circumstances like these, we began to meet friends that were of like mind and it wasn't long before we had a group together of about ten of us who had decided that if no ships were coming into the harbour then we must go and look for a boat that would take us over to India – a small matter of about 1,800 miles, but this didn't daunt us at that particular time. We organised it so that 'Recci' parties went out to see if we would be able to get a boat. Others of us went round shops and villages to buy as much rice and food as we could. We held our 'councils of war' in the evenings and it was at one of these that I had the misfortune to be nearly on the receiving end of a bullet which might have shattered my right hand. We were in the reading room of a school, in a room off one of the school's main buildings. We were looking through the collection of arms that we still had. I had my Colt 45, **Tex** had acquired a small very wobbly '38'. This weapon looked like a small blank cartridge pistol but was very lethal though it was wobbly. **Tex** accidentally let it go off, the bullet that came from its muzzle grazed the back of my hand and buried itself in the skirting boards at the foot of the wall behind me. A nasty shock and accidents do happen. I suppose we were all very fortunate that the shot had not hit anybody at all, nor had the bullet ricocheted. **Tex** apologised and said he wouldn't do it again!

The problem at this time was, of course, the boat and though the expeditions up the coast had seen a number we had not been successful in getting hold of one that we felt would stand the long trip. During this time the rumours were getting stronger and stronger that the Japanese were approaching fairly close to Padang and it could only be a matter of time before we were taken prisoner.

As always in cases like this, the end came sooner than we expected. It was a pretty ignominious end of our freedom and the date **17th March 1942**. All soldiers were told to report to a Chinese School, which we did, and were herded into a small area. We were surrounded by Japanese soldiery who didn't stand on any ceremony. If any of their captives

didn't do what they were told they soon corrected them. It is hard to describe the feelings at a time like this. I know we had endeavoured to obtain some alcohol, I suppose with the idea of drowning our sorrows. Unfortunately, the only alcoholic beverage we could find were two bottles of Advocaat, a sticky, custardy sort of drink. Nevertheless, it was alcoholic and we drank the two bottles between the three of us in the hope that it would enable us to be a little more resigned to what was in store. I don't think it did this. I think it only made us feel probably that much more sickly than we might otherwise have done. The first thing, of course, that we had to do was to hand in our arms and following this we had a very long wait before being marched away from the school into the barracks which were located on the outskirts of Padang. We were unceremoniously marched through the town and through the main gate of the old Dutch barracks.

Thus started my 'time' as a Japanese P.O.W. which lasted 3½ years. After a few months in Padang we were transported by lorry to Medan from where we were to be transhipped to the Burma-Siam Railway's project. However, the ships that were due to collect us were sunk by the allies. We thus remained in a transit camp just outside Medan for eighteen months. During this time we were engaged in various manual work ranging from cultivating land; building a Shinto Temple; to unloading and loading freight wagons; and filling and emptying oil drums etc. etc.

One of the more bizarre jobs was the unloading of a Japanese brothel train – complete with girls and equipment. All presumably for use by the Japanese soldiery.

In Padang we had been lent a wireless set by a fellow Dutch P.O.W. and thus together with my colleague **"Jesse" Matthews**, a planter from Johore who had been attached to another army unit at the time of the capitulation in Singapore but who had also managed to get to Padang, we operated the clandestine radio together.

We were fortunate that in our two major prison camps we were able to plug into mains electricity. The radio was a pre-war set in a bakelite case which fitted neatly into a soldier's back pack. By no means a small thing to hide. We had no headphones so at night had to resort to a doctor's stethoscope to pick up the sound for ourselves, and do this without our near neighbours knowing anything about it. Not always easy.

At Padang we operated the radio in the roof space of the camp's gymnasium. **Matthews** stood guard whilst I climbed up to listen in.

When we moved to Glugor there was no gymnasium so we hid the radio under boxes and scraps of clothing at the head of our 30 centimetre bedspace.

One day we were informed that the Japanese were to perform a detailed search of the camp and that they were looking for a radio. After hurried discussions we decided to hide it in the latrines. Latrines in Dutch native barracks are open drains over which one squats to do one's motions! There was not quite enough room to hide the set completely. Unfortunately for us the Japanese medical officer, whilst others were searching the barracks, inspected the latrines and, of course, found the radio. After much shouting and threats I had to own up to keeping the set to prevent mass punishment of the camp. Needless to say, I feared the worst.

I was called out later that evening to report to the Japanese Commandant in his quarters near the guard room. My heart sank, I thought this would be the end. However, through the Camp Interpreter, I answered several questions and even quoted the Geneva Convention which, in one place, says an officer is allowed to keep personal possessions when taken prisoner. My radio was a personal possession. The Japanese, of course, were not party to the Convention. Eventually I was told to return to my quarters and await events. Our radio was confiscated but I heard nothing more. It was grim waiting. I feel I have to thank a young Japanese officer, **Lt. Takahashi**, who was present at my interrogation for the leniency shown to me.

After eighteen months in Glugor, 200 of us were sent on a working party to build a road in the mountains of Atjeh (sic) in the north of Sumatra. A forced march on the road back was murderous, 85 miles in 84 hours constituted an atrocity. After a spell on 'light work' in a coal mine, we were transferred to the Moera-Pekan Baroe (sic) railway project. We were directed to the rail head of the Pekan Baroe leg. Grim work this, equal to anything on the infamous Burma-Siam railway – the story of which has been well documented. The Sumatran project hardly at all.

The two halves of the railway – one starting at Pekan Baroe and the other at Moera were eventually joined together with a great fanfare of trumpets and ceremony. Unfortunately for the Japs the euphoria didn't last long for the linking of the two parts coincided with the dropping of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs in August 1945. The war, and our incarceration, was soon over.

I survived, I was one of the lucky ones. In due course, after six months leave in the U.K. I returned to my old job of rubber planer in Malaya. ***[Ed: John Hedley joined the MVG and became a much valued FEPOW Veteran supporter & regular attendee at our V-J Day Services at the NMA on 15th August. Post-war he married Naomi Davies a QA Nurse whom he met in Sumatra where she was also interned.]***

NOCTURNAL VISIT OF THE TOKAY LIZARD

With thanks to Vilma Howe for this story about an unwelcome incident during her captivity in Palembang

After the horrors of sleeping on the sloping concrete slabs in Muntok, we were transferred to Irenelaan in Palembang, to be bunked in houses whose tenants had been forcibly removed by their Japanese captors. Now we would be huddled into these homes.

After Muntok... a house! Multiple families would share each bungalow... still... a house!

However, as the previous owners had been forcibly removed, they stripped the homes of as much as they could carry... but we cared little, anything after Muntok and those slabs was welcome. To dampen our enthusiasm, however, our captors ordered several families to share each house, thus crowding allotted living space.

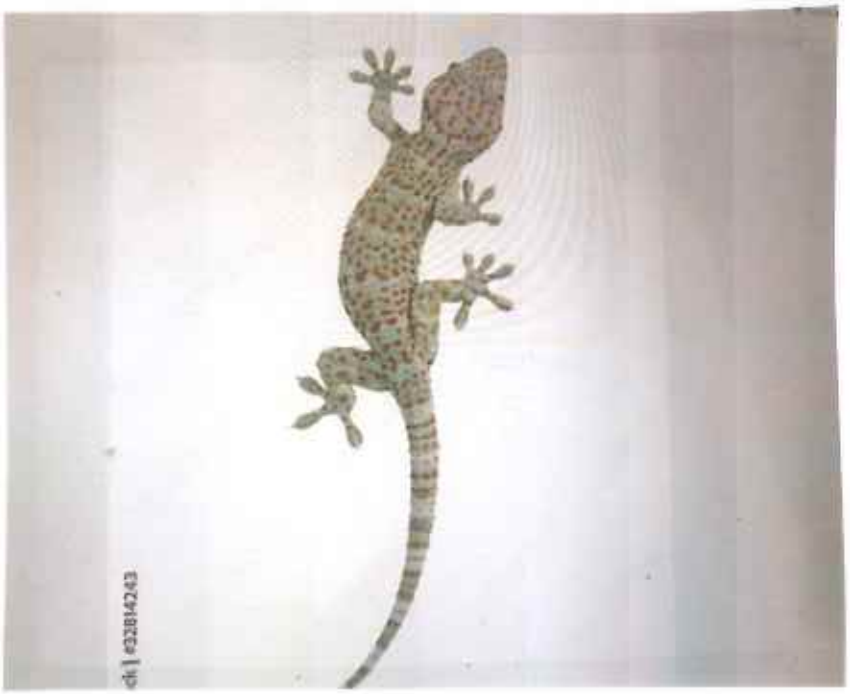
Seven of us shared one 'bedroom' with zero privacy as the rest of the inhabitants had to pass through our room on the way to the bathroom! Fortunately we discovered a dilapidated old cupboard which we dragged into position to partially barricade us from the washroom traffic!

We slept on the cold tile floor using anything we owned as padding. In the shadowed darkness we were grateful for the occasional flash of moonlight.

Rolling over one night, I spotted the huge Sumatran Tokay Lizard lumbering up the wall above our sleeping heads... Terrified, I thought, "do I shoo it away" causing it to emit the loud 'trrrp' sound and run down hurriedly and falling on one of the sleepers?

With much control I decided not to agitate anyone, but steadfastly kept watching the large lizard as it slowly crept towards the ceiling and disappeared... relieved it had not emitted its shrill 't-r-r-r tokay sound!

[**Vilma Howe** and family were captured on the ***Mata Hari*** in the Bangka Strait, and first interned in the 'coolie lines' of Muntok Jail. Internees were later moved to Palembang, Sumatra.]



The Sumatran Tokay (or Towkay) Lizard (Gekko gecko) is a species of lizard native to Sumatra, and other parts of South East Asia. They are large nocturnal geckos which can reach a length of 25-30 cms [10-12 inches including tail] on average, but can grow to 16 ins. It is believed to be the third largest species of gecko – unlike its smaller Malaysian relatives known as 'chi-chaks'. The Tokay Lizard has vertical pupils, a blue-grey soft skin with red or orange spots or speckles and can change colour to blend in with its environment. They have suction pads on their feet which enable them to climb vertical walls. They can be aggressive, territorial and can give a nasty bite.

NEWS JUST IN

We are sad to report, at the time of writing, that **Vilma** is in hospital with a fractured pelvic bone and is currently not mobile. We send her all our best wishes for a speedy recovery and hope she regains her mobility very quickly. We are very pleased to say that her sense of humour has not deserted her!

BANGKA ISLAND COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL

The Queensland Nursing Sub Branch of the Returned Services League [RSL] has designed this beautiful medal in memory of the Australian Army Nurses who were evacuated just before the Fall of Singapore in February 1942, on the ill-fated ***SS Vyner Brooke***. **Ann Martin**, of the Queensland Nursing Service has kindly donated one of these medals to the Peace Museum in Muntok, and another to the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne. She visited Muntok in 2017. The medal comes in a special box with information about the symbolic design inscribed inside the lid:

LAMP
Lamp of knowledge
Dedication and Selfless work
RED CROSS
Humanitarian Service
Medical Red Cross Symbol
BLUE
Waters of the Bangka Strait
BELT
Unity and Strength
SHAPE
Similar to the Albert Medal and awarded for lifesaving valour
SUSPENSION BAR
Balance
RIBBON
Desert Rose
Helping you connect to Mother Earth

A framed document with the medal was presented to the Peace Museum by Judy Balcombe during her visit to Muntok for the commemoration services in February 2025.

EXCERPTS FROM "WOMEN INTERNED IN WORLD WAR TWO SUMATRA"

By Barbara Coombes

By kind permission of her daughter, Sarah Coombes.

Margaret Dryburgh's poem ***"A Prison Camp! A Dwelling Bare!"*** from her Sumatra Diary describes her feelings for their new life as prisoners of the Japanese:

A prison camp! A dwelling bare!
Privations and discomforts sore!
And yet a thing of beauty rare
At our own door
A tree, a wealth of blossoms bore,
Its petals of a pinky hue
With rosier buds.
Each day it more
Entrancing grew
It took the mind, in swift retreat
To apple blossom in the spring,
To lanes, where hawthorn hedges sweet
Their fragrance fling.
Ah! When in future years we think
Of sorrows we in exile knew
We'll also see the sprays of pink
Against the blue.

'Muntok is a pretty little town with attractive buildings, lovely trees and flowers, but the impression it made on us was of horror, apprehension, discomfort and sorrow.'

These words were written by Margaret Dryburgh in February 1942 upon reflection after they found themselves put ashore at Muntok, on Bangka Island, Sumatra. Margaret and her three fellow missionaries were now beginning life as prisoners, but one in which they would all give their utmost in continuing to 'serve' the community. It was here in this ghastly accommodation in the 'Coolie Lines' where Shelagh (Brown) vividly remembered Margaret bringing something familiar to the alien existence that they now found themselves in; prayer and passages from the Bible. Shelagh often reflected how lucky it was that the ***Mata Hari*** had been captured and not sunk as Margaret may have lost her glasses and Bible.

Those early days were intolerable: so many people, poor sanitary conditions and very little food coupled with physical discomfort and constant worry.....

After two weeks in the misery of the old 'Coolie' accommodation they were told to prepare to move to Palembang on mainland Sumatra. As they were to witness many times during those dreadful years, the news of the move was invariably at short notice; they were informed of the move the day before, however, as they would find out later this was a relatively long notice! Another common occurrence when a move was imminent was a very early call and this was no exception being at 3.30 a.m.; Shelagh remarked in her diary that it was bitterly cold and dark and they waited a long time on the pier.....

From the pier, they eventually embarked onto small cargo vessels to travel the fifty miles up the Moesi River to Palembang.....

Their first night in Palembang was spent in a school; however they were pleasantly surprised to find a meal had been prepared by some of the servicemen and despite the fact that they eventually slept on the floor, it boosted morale to get a decent meal!

.....they were divided into groups of about sixteen or seventeen. These groups were then directed to small cottages, previously owned by the Dutch in Bukit Besar, a street on the western side.....

The stay at these cottages was short, just a month; on the morning of 1st April they were told that they had one and a half hours before moving – again.....

The women, to their surprise, went only a short distance to another group of bungalows..... often referred to as the Irenelaan Camp. ..... the only available space left were the garages! It was in such a garage..... (lived) a group of fourteen women and a small boy, Mischa. The women in **Garage Nine** took him in and lovingly cared for him throughout internment.

"HOW SLOWLY TIME DOTH PASS"

(Early in October 1944 the women interned in Garage Nine were returned to Muntok.)

The journey was not only horrendous but graphically drew attention to the fact that it was where it all started two and a half years ago; some had died and others were in an extremely weakened state through malnutrition and disease. With no news on the development of the war this would be, psychologically, an immense blow; knowing when a situation is going to end, or likely to end, is mentally easier to cope with.....

They finally had orders to leave for Muntok on Bangka Island and Margaret describes the horrendous journey:

"We set off in the dark to the boat. Even the Japs said it was not a good vessel, and we must not move about. It proved to be only a small junk. By the time two hundred women and children got aboard, there was no chance of moving at all. Though terribly cramped we had to wait all night alongside the quay. When officers came aboard at 4 a.m. we set off down the river. We passed boats with camouflaged roofs and other signs of war. We had three meals of dry rice. An order 'come quickly' when we reached the pier relieved us, as we dreaded another night on the junk. The old and sick went ashore in a tender, the rest of us climbed down a ladder and were helped off. A walk along the pier in darkness brought us to some cattle trucks and lorries over which a Red Cross flew. In these we were taken to our destination.

The new camp promised well. The air was like wine, and the huts were clean and fresh. We explored with a feeling of freedom and were delighted to find decent kitchen premises. One hundred and fifty instead of fifty to a hut was a tall order..... gradually, with the arrival of luggage we got organised....."

The fact that they were in Muntok was a 'step closer' to home and undoubtedly gave the impression that they might be soon on their way back and this unrelenting nightmare would be over. In the cruellest way possible not only was this far from the truth but their lives were to become 'hell' before any sign of the end was to emerge.

Despite the appearance of such clean, fresh accommodation with an actual kitchen and space with trees where one could walk, it was to turn into a 'death camp'. Margaret's diary entry just two months after arriving illustrates the daunting and overwhelming environment of illness and death:

"The place was fever-ridden, and soon sickness was rampant. There was not room in the wards for all the individuals. Life was still strenuous with water drawing, cooking and sewing and there was no time for diversions. Night watching was a necessary though trying duty. Deaths were frequent, sometimes of a daily occurrence. One funeral arranged for midday had to be delayed as a colonel was expected. Later women had to carry the coffin over 200 metres and had to fill in the grave. Their last resting place was very peaceful and beautiful."

The beauty of the surrounding area amidst the pain, disease and squalor prompted Margaret to write a poem, "The Burial Ground" that manages to epitomise her ability to combine beauty, sadness and spiritual elements.

..... Just a few months after writing the poem Margaret laments that:

"Unfortunately, the epidemic did not abate, and the death toll mounted steadily. Everyone being terribly reduced in weight felt tired and dispirited, and sorely grieved by the loss of dear friends."

The sickness that was so rampant was later believed to be cerebral malaria spread by contaminated water, causing victims to experience raging temperatures, and fall unconscious followed by extreme skin reaction. This sickness became known as 'Banka Fever'. (sic)

..... The war in Europe was gradually creeping towards peace; however, the women had no knowledge of this and now received the worst possible announcement in March 1945:

"News of another move was received with much trepidation. We felt very apprehensive about the new camp of Malay houses, each one of which was to accommodate forty. A wet spell came on, and after 58 funerals, added greatly to our misery." (Margaret's diary entry)

They were going to be moved back to the Sumatran mainland, in what they would find was a jungle and further south than they had been when in Palembang. Their final internment would be at Loebok Linggau. 78 women had died on Bangka Island; it was a miracle that anyone was left standing but one of their toughest trials was about to begin. The most horrendous journey lay ahead of them; it would be the last journey as internees that they would ever undertake, however, some would never arrive.

CIVILIAN & POW CAMPS IN SUMATRA · WW II
The civilian women prisoners who created The Vocal Orchestra were interned in camps at Muntok, Palembang and Belalau.
KEY
Where ships sank.
Where Mata Hari was captured.
Civilian and POW camps. (Around 180 in all in Sumatra.)
Sea, river, train and truck route taken by Palembang women and children.
Railway line.
Place names on the large map are those used in the 1940's. Names can vary in spelling.
Kuala Lumpur
MALAYA
Malacca
Mersing
Johore Bahru
SINGAPORE
BINTAN
Kuala
LINGGA
SINGKEP
Pakan Baru
Over 14 camps along railway
Pakan Baru Railway built by Allied POW
Patak-dem-boch
Bukit-tinggi
Indragiri River
Moearo
Padang
Giang Bee
MUNTOK
Tanjong Pinang
Vyner Brooke and Li Wo
SUMATRA
BANGKA ISLAND
BELALAU RUBBER ESTATE CAMP
Mata Hari
Moesi River
Moesi River
Sekayu
PALEMBANG
Loebok Linggau
Prabumulin
BELITUNG ISLAND
Bencoolen
Lahat
Baturaja
N
0 km
100 km
DUTCH EAST INDIES
Bandar Lampung
Kuala Lumpur
MALAYSIA
Kuching
Singapore
Muntok
BORNEO
Palembang
SUMATRA
INDONESIA
Jakarta
JAVA
MAIN MAP
© The Malayan Volunteers Group.
In memory of the women and children of the WWII POW camps in Sumatra.
GRAPHICS: JANE BOOKER NIELSEN, Member of Malayan Volunteers Group.
BATAVIA (Djakarta)
JAVA

PALEMBANG JAIL MEN'S CAMP

April 1 1942 to 16 January 1943

An extract from "The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra"

By Judy Balcombe – with her kind permission

The civilian male internees, meanwhile, strove to remain alive in Palembang Jail and at Pladjoe. The captives elected British and Dutch camp leaders and formed committees for cooking, washing and sanitation. As in the women's camp, food supplies were limited and lacking in nutrition. The men were issued with a handful of white rice for each meal – this was sometimes supplemented with a stale vegetable and a very occasional flake of meat.

A magazine, *Camp News*, was produced weekly for a number of months while the men's strength and paper lasted. It was edited and typed by American Journalist **William McDougall** and fellow internee **William Probyn Allen**. Four copies of the magazine, two in English and two in Dutch, with coloured illustrations, circulated among the 480 men. The magazines were read quickly and passed on to other readers. Articles about camp activities, details of church services, gossip, recipes and humour were included, aiming to inform, entertain and help while away the long, dreary hours. A few possessions were offered for sale, and a general knowledge quiz offered first prize of a precious fried egg. An advertisement called for old clothes to be used for dysentery rags.

The men tried to fill their days with lectures, foreign language and music lessons, concerts and a badminton match. *Camp News* describes several concerts held in the first months, with clever skits and costumes. These songs, sketches and ditties all helped to distract the internees from their otherwise grim and hungry lives. Coconut shells worn on the chest aided the semblance of women's costumes and raised a needed laugh. **Donald Pratt** was one concert member much appreciated by the audience. In real life, he was the nephew of Hollywood horror actor **Boris Karloff** (who was born as **William Henry Pratt**).

Later, when the men were sent back to Muntok, **William McDougall** buried the pages of his diary and *Camp News* in bottles and cans along the foundations of a camp building. A pipe was laid as a ruse to deceive the Japanese. He retrieved the intact pages from their hiding place at the end of the war.

Words of the poem, "Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth" by **Arthur Hugh Clough**, were published in one edition of *Camp News*. This poem had been popularized in a wartime speech by **Winston Churchill**, and the stanzas must have encouraged the internees to hope for better times. The poem was set to music by Muntok's interned priest, **Father Bakker**. It was his dying wish that the song should be given to Dutch **Queen Wilhelmina** and to **Winston Churchill** after the war, and this indeed took place. The words 'by eastern windows' from this poem formed the title of **William McDougall's** post-war book about the men's camp.

Palembang Jail became more overcrowded as extra prisoners were brought in. The Japanese ordered the men to build themselves a new camp at Poentjak Sekoening ('Yellow Peak' named after the surrounding trees with yellow blooms). This area was half an hour's walk from the jail, in an open field close to the women's Dutch Houses Camp. For several months, a group of fifty men walked from the jail to work on the new site.

Many men asked to join the work party to experience the freedom of being outside the high jail walls. The walk also provided exercise, the opportunity to barter with local people for much-needed food and to pass near the women's camp. The men laboured with local workers to build the new camp huts made from bamboo and atap (thatch made from palm leaf). The finished camp would be surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, with Japanese and Korean guards.

As the working party passed near the women's houses each day, the women climbed on to a high wall and waved and called to the men. They were too far away to speak but at least could recognise one another and know that their loved ones were still alive.

Men's Barracks Camp, Palembang, 16 January 1943 to 19 September 1943. The bamboo and palm leaf camp huts built by the men were completed in January 1943. The men left Palembang Jail to move into their new prison camp, carrying their meagre possessions and anything else they had managed to scrounge. They were no longer confined by stone walls but there were many new problems. They were joined by 200 more Dutch internees, and the camp became extra crowded. Torrential rain fell through the palm leaf roofs. In the downpours, the open drains, used as latrines, flooded the earth floors of the huts, swilling over the men's feet. Rats and lice lived in the roughly hewn roofs and walls, plaguing the prisoners at night. They developed sores and rashes from insect bites and could not sleep.

There was inadequate food and sanitation, and their situation was worsened by a shortage of fresh water. The men dug a deep well for drinking – the water was brown and muddy and needed to be boiled. This meant that extra wood must be chopped for the fire, depleting their energy reserves. Water was rationed and sticky mud was everywhere. Bathing was limited and hygiene compromised, leading to skin infections and frequent dysentery.

The men continued to hope the war would end soon or that they would be repatriated home in exchange for Japanese prisoners. This was not to be.

In September 1943, the men were informed they were about to leave the atap barracks camp but were not told their destination. Believing their captors were going to live in the huts, the prisoners caused what damage they could and flung logs and rubbish into the well.

But the men were returned on barges down the Moesi River to the dreaded Muntok Jail on Bangka Island. The new inhabitants in the Palembang barracks camp were the civilian women prisoners from the nearby Dutch houses. The women's conditions had been cramped before, but they were now dismayed to find their new camp not only primitive and unhealthy but in a state of disrepair.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/leisure/2025/09/01/lim-keng-watt-an-ordinary-man-who-lived-in-extraordinary-times

Lim Keng Watt was a member of "B" Company 4/SSVF (the Malacca Volunteer Corps). When Singapore fell, he was entrenched on Cluny Hill with "B" Coy under the command of Captain D. Todman who told the men to escape and return to their families in Malacca. Lim Keng Watt was interned by the Japanese at the Central Police Station for a month, but was released and returned to his teaching job at the St. Francis Institution in Malacca. He was also an active sportsman, keen musician and drama enthusiast.
In 1946, he was invited to represent the 4th Battalion SSVF Chinese "B" Company in the Victory Parade in London.
The story of his extraordinary life is told by his daughter, Audrey Lim, in her book called, "Memories of a Malaccan. The Life and Times of Lim Keng Watt (1909-96)."

https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2025/08/31/sunken-ships-and-stolen-history

The story of the desecration of the sunken warships, HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse, by Chinese salvage ships which have stripped the wrecks not only of their metal but also human remains and possessions. Much of this is now in Malaysian breakers' yards under Police investigation, including the large anchor from the Prince of Wales. Veterans want to see the return of this anchor to the UK for display in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3324236/japans-defensive-stance-over-wwii-history-upsets-british-pows-son?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article

Japan's 'defensive' stance on WWII history upsets British POW's son | South China Morning Post

Edwyn Smyth who was captured in Java in March 1942, was a forced labourer in Hiroshima and saw many POWs worked to death. He was scarred for life. His son, Terry Smyth, expressed deep disappointment that senior Japanese politicians ignored invitations to a commemorative event on Tuesday 2nd September to mark 80 year since Tokyo's formal surrender on USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, and the liberation of thousands of Allied POWs [and civilian internees]. The event took place in Yokohama Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, which was established for peace and reconciliation.
Terry Smyth said, "We might say it is rather impolite. I am not sure what the Japanese Government would have to lose." He added that the Japanese Government "...had been unnecessarily defensive in its posture towards families of FEPOWs."

"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

Who were the passengers contd.

There are a lot of references to children having been on board, but as with so many first-hand accounts of the sinkings during the evacuation of Singapore, children proved to be only an afterthought when survivors actually set about recording (generally in internment camps well after the 'dust had settled') who was on board and there is no definitive record of their numbers – except for 'ORB'* (P.133) which states *"...with around 40 of the passengers being children..."* If that figure is correct (it presumably is contained in one of the Australian Nurses records) then the death toll amongst children was around a horrendous 75 percent! **Sister Ada 'Mickey' Syer** in her post war oral archive held in the Singapore Archives states that soon after departing *"... a lot of infants required feeding..."* Research for this memorial document has identified only about a dozen or so children, but there were clearly many more. This is one of the worst – and yet unrecorded parts of this terrible event – since it indicates some thirty to thirty five children and babies died during and after the attack on the ship, or in the sea, and will hopefully be clarified by further research in coming years.

It seems clear from analysing the various reports and memoirs that the gap between those identified in this document and those actually on board the **"S.S. Vyner Brooke"** – a group of about 30-40 people – comprises to a large extent those (often elderly men and women, including a few couples) killed during the bombing of the ship in cabins and staterooms – as well as those who climbed down to, slipped, fell into, or were tipped from lifeboats into the sea but who did not manage to reach other groups and floated away or drowned quite quickly. The infants and children would have been most vulnerable at this latter point of the 'abandon ship' and mothers with more than one child would have had little chance of protecting more than one child at a time.

These people may never be identified unless new letters or diaries come forward.

What happened after leaving Singapore?

According to the very brief official typed report by the Captain of the **"S.S. Vyner Brooke"**, the chronology of the last voyage of the ship was:

- Thursday 12 February 1942:
  - 2000 – Left Singapore
  - 2400 – Entered DURIAN STRAIT and carried on till daylight.
- Friday 13 February 1942:
  - 0800 – Anchored in small bay at island off LANKA ISLAND
  - 0900 – Enemy plane circled ship, no attack
  - 1100 – Enemy plane circled ship, no attack
  - 1130 – Hove up and proceeded to LIMA CHANNEL, close to shore (LANKA ISLAND)
  - 1500 – ship circled by three enemy planes – no attack. Planes headed north.
- Saturday 14 February 1942:
  - 0130 – Anchored off TUJING ISLANDS
  - 0600 – A plane signalled but could not understand signal; then plane used machine gun and flew away to south.
  - 0900 – Enemy plane circled ship, but no attack
  - 1000 – Hove up, and proceeded towards BANKA STRAIT
  - 1300 – Attacked by nine enemy planes. Ship at full speed and endeavouring by continuous alteration of course to avoid the bombs. Low level bombing by planes

[* ORB "On Radji Beach" by Ian Shaw explains this period of the sinking in a very well-structured manner and is recommended reading for a fuller understanding of the chronology and detail of the tragedy.]

1320 – Orders to abandon ship. Engines stopped, ship listing to Starboard; Port lifeboats all badly damaged (3); and one in starboard side by splinters; two lifeboats lowered away with women and children superintended by **Sub Lieut. SEDGEMAN** and **Lieut. Commander WHITE**. All Passengers had lifebelts on, and during all previous alerts.

1340 – Ship heeled right over and to Starboard, and remained bottom up for about two minutes, and finally sank. During attack Lewis gun and 4-inch gun in action. Position of ship 8 degrees north of MUNTOK LIGHTHOUSE when sunk.

Hal Richardson in ***"Into the Fire"*** records *"... Dawn [13 Feb] gave them sight of a group of islands and they closed on them along the Lima Straits between the scatterings of those islands of the Lingga Archipelago, an impressive variety offering shade and shelter with the Sinkep Island, the largest in the group, offering contact with the Dutch..."*

[Researcher Note: Richardson then adds something that occurred at dawn on 13 February 1942 in the vicinity of what he has named LANKA ISLAND – after the ship travelled *"... along Lima Straits between the scattering of those islands of the Linga [sic] Archipelago... which is"* the channel between two very large islands, Pulau Singkep and Pulau Lingga, some 115 miles from Singapore. This next piece of information does not appear to have ever been recorded elsewhere in the story of the "S.S. Vyner Brooke" – *"... With daylight came the evidence of sinkings, wreckage on the beach and bumping against the ship's side, confirming that those had been Japanese searchlights at night and explaining the summer lightening that had flashed brighter, briefer, than that usually presented on the skyline by Sumatra's sudden storms. Further evidence of Japanese naval activities in these waters came with the appearance on shore of a party of about 40 people. Men, women, children calling, waving and boats were lowered and brought them aboard where the Australian nurses tended the burns and other wounds. They told of surprise attacks in the darkness and sinkings – so many..."* Given that neither the Captain, nor the 2nd Officer nor Major Tebbutt mention this group of people being picked up it will have to be considered a confusion with something that happened on another vessel and discarded from the voyage of the "S.S. Vyner Brooke"]

Lt. Mann records that just after 0630 hrs. on Friday 13 February *"... we were now clear of the Durian Straits steaming for the Sherbro' group of islands. The instructions had been to steam at night and hide up among the islands during the daylight hours, and the Captain's intention was to get among this group, hoping to get close enough not to be observed by aircraft. A forlorn hope. We reached the islands about 0800 and came to anchor as close under the shore as possible, which was not very close, and we were very much exposed. During the forenoon a flight of nine Japanese aircraft passed right over us but took no action although they must have seen us... We were painted grey and flew the White Ensign so were a legitimate target [so]... the Captain decided we would stand a better chance underway, [which] was obviously true, at least we had a slight chance if able to manoeuvre. The anchor was weighed and away to the south we steamed. To the south was another group of islands which had a strait running through them [this would have been the Lingga Group] and we steamed to these and into the channel between them hoping that we were being given some measure of concealment... We came out of the southern end of the channel between the islands by which time darkness was shutting down, and very welcome it was too. Course was set for a group of islands called the Tujo (meaning seven in Malay) Islands, where we hoped to lay up during the following day, and we steamed thru' the night without incident. It was still dark when we arrived at the Tujo group, so we waited until dawn and then crept in as close as possible and came to anchor..."*

Passenger **Major Tebbutt, AIF,** has also left us a very well written and detailed account of the events which is worth understanding and he makes some statements which clearly question **Captain Barton's** judgement in not remaining anchored close to the land during daylight hours. The objective of this order, which was issued to all the ships leaving Singapore during the last few days prior to the Surrender, is not recorded, but from a commonsense viewpoint was the correct one from the aspect that passengers and crew would have more easily reached land when attacked, as

opposed to being miles offshore and relying on lifeboats and rafts. But on the other hand, made the ships sitting targets and was using up valuable time in the escape journey.

Tebbutt's report correlates with the sparse chronological report of **Captain Barton** insofar as times and places, but when **Barton** decided to leave the 'Tujing Islands' (**Tebbutt** calls them Toejou Islands) at 1000hours on Saturday 14 February – after being buzzed and machine gunned by Japanese planes – essentially to make a run for it, **Tebbutt** records *"... The Captain stated to me that he considered it suicidal to remain anchored close to land, that the ship could easily be picked up from the air and would provide a sitting shot for bombers; from his experience he believed that he might be able to avoid the bombs in an open fairway. Accordingly, he did not obey his orders to anchore[sic] in the daytime..."*

Major Tebbutt also notes the serious risk faced by many on board if the ship was actually sunk because total crew and passenger numbers vastly exceeded the capacity of lifeboats – in fairness to **Captain Barton** this was the case with almost every ship leaving Singapore in the few days prior to the Surrender and most Captains tried their hardest firstly to prevent too many passengers boarding their ships and secondly to warn people of the under capacity of lifeboats:

"... Early in the journey an examination of the boats was made in company with a ship's officer, who stated that of the six boats carried, two would hold 30 passengers each and the remainder 20 passengers each. Each passenger was given a lifebelt, and lifebelts were altered to fit the children. In view of the deficiency of lifeboat accommodation, all who were strong swimmers were told that if the ship was sunk, they must be ready to take to the water. Lectures were given explaining the ship's alarm signals, the method of use of the lifebelts, the method of loading the lifeboats and on general matters should an attack be made..."

Tebbutt's record insofar as contingency planning is borne out by those also recorded by Australian Army nurses on board, and to give the ship's officers and the leaders of the nursing staff their due credit, procedures and training delivered in the 36 hours available were very good for coping with an attack by bombers.

Lt. Mann describes the sense of unreal calm that everyone must have felt at that point *"... It was a lovely day, the blue sea was clam, the sun shone in a clear blue sky, and away to port about ten miles was the green palm covered island of Banka (sic). We could see a white, slender lighthouse ashore and all seemed so peaceful..."*

Major Tebbutt, however, continues with his recollection of the actual attacks which finally sank the **"S.S. Vyner Brooke"**:

"... After the ship left Toejou island there were three or four alerts before about 1300 hrs when a formation of nine planes was observed flying towards the ship. These planes flew over the ship several times and were fired upon by the Lewis gun. They then went about two miles ahead of the ship, and three dived over the ship, dropping their bombs from approximately 3,000 feet. The anti submarine gun and the Lewis gun were fired, and the ship circled at full speed. The bombs all fell into the sea, exploding close enough to shake the ship. The same procedure again took place when a further three planes attacked. Finally, the nine planes attacked together, converging from the centre, half-right and left. This time two bombs hit the ship with a severe jar and rattling; the engines were almost immediately stopped..."

It seems that three bombs hit the ship (p. 151 ORB*):

- One bomb went down the funnel killing all the crew in the engine room – according to the book this included the 'elderly reservist" **Lt. Reith** and at least three of the Malay sailor, but the eyewitness account by 2nd Officer, **Lt. Mann, RNVR,** actually records Chief Engineer **Reith** as alive and able to enter the sea wearing a lifejacket.
- One bomb penetrated the stateroom killing most of the elderly passengers who had sought shelter there (P.165 ORB*) – this would have been up to 15 people.
- A third bomb killed or wounded the gun crew on the forward deck and the "elderly couple" in the radio operator's cabin.

Major Tebbutt tells us that *"... During the attack the European passengers were assembled in the saloon and lay down on the floor...one of the bombs which hit the ship went very close to the saloon, which was filled with the red glare from the bursting bomb. A ship's officer then told the*

passengers to go to their boat stations and he led the way. There was no panic..."

Tebbutt agrees with **Captain Barton** that the ship was attacked at 1310 hrs (**Mann** says 1330 hrs) and sank at 1340 hrs and tells us that *"... at this time the ship was at the entrance to the Banka Straits* (sic), *some 10 or 12 miles from the island. The weather was calm and the visibility good..."* He is referring to Bangka Island which is a large island off the east coast of Sumatra.
Perhaps the final words of the attack on the ship should come from one of the **"Vyner Brooke"** ship's officers, and in the memoirs of 2nd Officer, **Lt. A.R. Mann RNVR** we are told:
"... After the fifth salvo had missed us I began to think we were going to see it through. We had dodged them on so many occasions and now we were doing it again; it seemed just a matter just carrying on with the game until they had no more bombs left. I was soon disillusioned. In they came from Forward for the sixth time, bombs on their way down, hard-a-port. The Captain and I had our heads out of the bridge windows watching the bombs come nearer and nearer, but the ship wasn't swinging fast enough it seemed. She wasn't. Down past our faces, about ten feet away in front of the bridge, through the covers on No.2 hatch, through the covers on No.2 'tween deck hatch to explode in the lower hold, they passed... On going for'ard I saw clouds of smoke coming from No.2 hatch...one of the nurses came to me and asked for First Aid equipment saying there were many people badly injured down below. As we were talking, I heard the aircraft coming in again from for'ard and dragged her into a nearby cabin where we both laid on the deck to avoid flying glass. A stick of bombs fell close to the port side, so close that they blew the bottoms of the port side boats in as they hung from their davits... The ship was already taking a list to starboard.
I then went to the bridge where the Captain was still standing, he called out to the starboard boat-deck to hurry and get the boats away; they were already being lowered. I noticed that nothing was being done to the port boats, so got hold of the Naval rating who had been at the wheel, the ship now being stopped, and we started to lower the for'ard boat. He said, 'But the bottom's stove in Sir?' I said, 'That don't matter, the tanks may keep her afloat, at least people can hang on to her.' We lowered her into the water, and I sent him down the fall to unhook and push her off, which he did. I looked at the other two boats on the port side and their bottoms had been blown in..."
Major Tebbutt tells us from his perspective that *"...of the boats, only two were undamaged by the bombs. These were lowered to the water and the passengers climbed down the rope ladders under the control of the ship's officers. Two other boats were lowered but became water-logged..."*
Survivor **Eric Germann** helped lower the lifeboats as well only to find one immediately filling with sea water. *"... Bomb fragments had holed it, as well as three other lifeboats. Only their sealed air tanks kept them afloat..."* [By Eastern Windows P. 142.]
Understandably, as a passenger, **Dr. Goldberg-Curth** says she observed that only one lifeboat was undamaged and was filled with sick passengers whilst the remainder of the passengers jumped into the sea.
In contrast, **Vivian Bullwinkel** in her testimony to the Australian Board of Enquiry into War Crimes (29.10.45) said that three lifeboats left the ship and reached the coast around 'Radji Beach.'
This is corroborated in the memoirs of **Lt. A.R. Mann RNVR,** the 2nd Officer who states (p.7):
"... The three starboard boats had gone clear of the ship's side and were packed with people, they were trying to get the oars out which was difficult with so little room to move..." and that (p.8):
*"... After **'Vyner Brooke'** had gone I could see, away to what had been the starboard side, the three boats pulling towards Banka Island* (sic) *about eight miles away. They appeared to be going well and should have been ashore in an hour or two..."*
Mann's memoirs continue *"... The list to starboard was then about 45 degrees and as I let go from the combing of the baggage port, I actually slid down the side part of the way before hitting the water. I swam away from the ship to a reasonable distance, and came near to a lot of others, men and women, I didn't see any children about, and assumed they had been taken into the three boats. The bottomless boat I had lowered was floating full of people and water, and there wasn't an inch of space on the lifelines round her rubbing strake, so she was doing some good..."*
[To be continued.]

The Muntok Jail

Judy Balcombe's visit with Neil Hobbs

Our friends took us inside the Jail that had been the Men's and Boys' prison camp. It is still a jail behind a tall wall topped with barbed wire. Once, nearly a thousand men and young boys were crammed into this building that was built to house two hundred and fifty prisoners. We walked in through the heavy door, into a wire passage opening to exercise yards with cell doors around the quadrangle.

The cells were just as described by prisoner William McDougall in *By Eastern Windows*, with a high barred window and concrete sleeping slabs. The title of McDougall's book came from the poem *Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth* by Arthur Hugh Clough, which had been quoted by Winston Churchill in one of his famous wartime speeches.

Muntok's Catholic priest Father Bakker had set the poem to music and it was his dying wish in prison camp that the words and music would be given to Winston Churchill after the War. William McDougall, who became a Catholic priest and Monsignor in the USA after the War, fulfilled Father Bakker's wish, giving the song to Churchill in 1946 on his visit to Florida. I have not been able to locate the document or any copy and still hope it may be able to be found.

"Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth."

By Arthur Hugh Clough

Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke conceal'd,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!

Today the prisoners in the Muntok Jail are well-looked after, with good meals, a library and a clinic. They have a band and go out to play competition sports. My grandfather had died in the Coolie Lines building, the former Public Works Depot, which was used as a makeshift 'hospital' for dying men and was joined to the jail by a barbed wire tunnel. McDougall and other volunteers, including Catholic Brothers had volunteered in the 'hospital' wards, emptying the dysentery bed pans. Eleven of these Brothers had died from dysentery following this work.

Now only the foundations of the Coolie Lines remain, next to the new building of the Muntok Red Cross.

In 2010, I had found and met Neal Hobbs, who had been a prisoner in the Men's Camps with his father. Neal was aged 17 in 1942. They had left Singapore on the *SS Mata Hari,* which was captured and brought into Muntok. Neal visited Muntok with us in 2014, when he was 89, wanting to see where he has been imprisoned so many years before. He confirmed that the structure of the Jail remained largely unchanged. He showed us his cell and where the morgue and the foul open toilet pit had been.

Neal's father was a horse trainer in Malaya. He had been a jockey but had a twisted back after a fall from a horse and was unable to work in camp. As a teenager, Neal joined the burial party in Muntok in order to be given a few extra rations for his father. Young Neal had helped to carry the many men who died from malaria, beri beri, dysentery and starvation to the town cemetery one mile away. McDougall kept lists of the deaths, sometimes up to six men dying in one day.

It was very likely that Neal had buried my grandfather.

FILMS

"Dongji Rescue." On 1st October 1942, the *USS Grouper* – an American submarine on patrol some 100 miles east of Shanghai – torpedoed the *Lisbon Maru*, a Japanese freighter carrying 1,816 British POWs. They were held in the ship's holds in appalling conditions. In breach of Geneva Conventions, the ship carried no markings to indicate that she was carrying POWs. As the ship was sinking, the Japanese battened down the hatches to prevent the men from escaping, but the POWs did manage to break out only for many of them to be shot or drowned. However, local Chinese fishermen from the nearby Zhoushan Islands sailed out and rescued 384 men.

This is the basis of the recent Chinese film, named after one of the islands where the rescue took place. It follows the fictional brothers **Ah Bi** and **Ah Dang** who witnessed the attack on the ship. They harboured a lone British POW but when the Japanese arrived to search for the other POWs, the local fishermen were interrogated and tortured. This spurred them on to rescue the rest of the POWs – which did happen in real life. Although ***"Dongji Rescue"*** is highly dramatised, in reality the fishermen did attempt to hide the rescued POWs in their homes and temples at great risk to themselves and their families.

"The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru." In 2024, ***Fang Li's*** documentary film, detailing the true story of what happened to the *Lisbon Maru,* was released. In 2022, **Denise Wynn**, daughter of **Dennis Morley**, one of the survivors of the *Lisbon Maru*, wrote to Chinese President Xi Jinping asking him to approve of her father's campaign to establish a memorial for the fishermen. Recently, **Denise Wynn** travelled to the site where **Fang Li** had located the wreck, and scattered petals in memory of the victims.

This documentary tells the real story of how the men in the holds felt the torpedo strike and heard the commotion and gunfire above deck, including the Japanese bomber which flew over to attack the *USS Grouper*. Over the next few hours as the holds started to fill with water, the Japanese ordered the men to pump out water using a small hand pump. They continued pumping even after the Japanese had sealed the men in the holds to stop them escaping, and they communicated between the three holds by clanging the metal sides with Morse Code. When it was obvious that they were doomed to die, one officer climbed a ladder and cut through the tarpaulin which had been used to seal them in. As the men poured out of the holds, the Japanese fired on them and then used utility boats to skim through the men in the water firing on them as they tried to swim for their lives. The massacre scene was depicted very powerfully in the ***"Dongji Rescue"*** film, but it really did happen. Sadly many of those who escaped were recaptured rather than risking the lives of the fishermen who had rescued them.

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 contd.

On Tuesday gate opened – Wednesday evening peace announced – Food and materials arrive – Camp becomes hectic and unpleasant – Visits hospital in Men's Camp – Lewis has extreme malnutrition and scurvy – New tablets labelled 'Sulfaquinine' – Embark in ambulance with Lewis on 1 September for Padang – Lewis in Military Hospital – To Yamato (formerly 'Orange') Hotel to meet Japanese doctors and Mitsusawa Military Hospital – He kind and helpful

Monday August 27th 1945. (5th day after peace)

Life has become far more hectic and unpleasant and **Elsie** and I have had no sleep since peace was announced except for Friday night which was wet. These beastly men are all over the Camp day and night and the last 2 nights fresh fish in ice came in about 8 p.m. and the whole Camp was up the whole night cooking it and as they were short of firewood they have been tearing down our wooden huts in which we sleep..... Tonight I propose to sleep out under the clothes lines of the shack and tomorrow **Elsie** will.

Food is plentiful – rice issue 3 green mugs daily – meat or fish daily – plenty of saka, pisang, peanuts, K.I. and chickens to be got in exchange for clothes over the fence. The Camp is filthy – no corrie being done and everyone throwing away food and killing chickens and leaving pools of blood and offal. It is worse than at the Boei, and the lavatories are nearly as bad. We had a green mug of sugar each issued yesterday and 2 packets of cigarettes and some margarine, about 30 gm. There are many with gastro-intestinal upsets and a man is said to have died at the Men's Camp of overeating.....

Dr. Vis runs the Camp now..... **Flossie** does nothing. I look after my patients as before. **Elsie, Charman** and I visited the Men's Camp on Sunday afternoon to see the 3 sick men and were told that **Vis** had given instructions that I was not to be allowed in the hospital. However, the staff seemed more in sympathy with me than him and took me to their bedsides. I paid only a social call but determined to examine them later with a view to transport arrangements. The hospital was as dingy and crowded as ever but the dysentery patients are now housed separately in a new shed and are only 14 in number now. There are only 3 British in hospital – **Lewis** with T.B., extreme malnutrition and scurvy, **O'Hare** with impetigo, and **Giffening** with an infected ulcer of his leg and chronic B.D. [Ed: Bacillary Dysentery] not acknowledged..... I told **Vis** I had paid his hospital a visit and seen 3 British socially and proposed to go and examine them with a view to transport. He was as rude as ever but had to agree..... I went over and took the men limes, white sugar, saka, pisang, eggs and a live chicken. I think we can take him (**Lewis**) along with us and that if he goes to Sawahluntah (sic) with **Vis** he will die of neglect..... The Sisters had been shocked to hear in what poor condition the sick were at the Men's Camp. They all seemed more cheerful on our second visit; poor things, they are broken spirited and starved.....

We don't know how we are to leave yet and are awaiting the arrival of the Army. It is said to be the British who have control of Sumatra and don't the Dutch hate the idea. We are hoping to get to Singapore without delay via Peken Bahru (sic) but all of us, men and women, are one in our strong desire to get away from the Camp. This Camp is a perfect death trap now and will become more dangerous every day the ongoing rubbish lies about. There is talk of our going to P.B. to live in houses of 5-6 whilst awaiting shipping to Singapore, and also talk of going to Padang and being shipped to Colombo – but no one can do more than guess at present. The Army is said to be due today. I hope to get **Lewis** sent to Singapore by plane.

Tuesday August 28th 1945. (6th day after Peace).

Food still abounds and many people have digestive disturbances.....

This a.m. **Dr. Kukubu** (Japanese) was brought to our door by **Mevr Maurer** and we talked to him on our step. He had an interpreter with him who spoke Malay and seemed

to wish to fraternize at this late date. **Elsie** and I were polite but not friendly. He gave us a tin of meat and beans and a box of Vit. E as a present and said he would let us know when he knew that the Army was at Fort de K. Apparently there are no British yet hereabouts.
This afternoon **Mr. Ross** called and talked for a while and asked for some iodine and dressings and said the British were having a poor deal from the Dutch Drs. I suggested that I take them over at once and he thought that would be welcomed..... Later I talked to **Mr. Levison** who will sound the men and let us know tomorrow.
We had very little sleep last night as threatened rain kept me in. It was fairly quiet from midnight to 5 a.m. and then we were awakened by the blasted cookers pulling the attap off our roof for their fires. I asked them to desist and they did so for 5 mins. and then continued to pull off attap..... There is no doubt of the anti-British feeling among many of the men and our own H.B. cannot or will not prevent those annoyances directed towards us. If our Army does not rescue us soon we shall be mere wrecks.
The Camp is full of men day and night ostensibly on duty but actually visiting their women and the loods (sic), bathroom and W.C. position is intolerable! I always said it would be awful if the knowledge of armistice preceded the Allies but I never dreamed how awful.

Wednesday August 29th 1945. (7th day).

Mr. Levison turned up today and said that the men appreciated my offer to assume medical care but in view of the strained relations already between Dutch and English they feared to precipitate an open crisis and so felt bound to decline. They hoped, however, that in view of the fact that we shall be travelling or camping together in the near future, **Vis** would consent to the men coming to me for an overhaul before they left..... but I certainly could not approach **Vis** for permission to 'overhaul' them whilst they were under his professional care, as that would be a most unprofessional thing.....
News was received about 5 p.m. of a party of about 50 men and 20 women to go to Padang tomorrow at 8.30 in passenger cars. I heard that the Dutch insisted that the move start – and later, that the orders are from Tokyo and originate perhaps in Washington or London – and that everyone in the whole area must go to Padang..... If it is authentic, the news is most unwelcome..... we were hoping at the worst to go to P.B. (Pekan Baru) and form a small English Camp. A couple of officers from the P.B. P.O.W. Camp called yesterday with letters for the women. We also learned from the Nip that there is no Allied Army as yet in Sumatra.

Thursday August 30th 1945. (8th day after peace).

This has been quite a hectic day too! At midday one of about a dozen military lorries, each with a Nip and a couple of European P.O.Ws. turned out to be from the British P.O.W. Camp at Pekan Bahru (sic) and to contain an Air Force Officer named **Sim** who was injured on the ***Kuala*** on the foot. He brought me a note and a huge bottle of 4,000 tablets of a preparation new to me labelled **Sulfaquinine**. The note said it was supplied by the Red Cross for Bacillary Dysentery, and asked me to send some to the Men's Camp. I took some to the Dys. Ward .....
Then about 6 p.m. or so, **Mevr Holle** came in to say that 500 more were going to Padang on Sat at 9 a.m. and the British were given the option of going, and the alternative was to wait here with the Riau people with the hope of getting to P.B. of which there was no guarantee.
As **Sims** had said there was no contact with the Allies yet and as **Henessy** wrote that he had been expecting an Allied Army Medical Officer since yesterday, I was not sure what was best – but **Mr. Ross** and a Canadian called **Apatecky** turned up then and we discussed it. They thought it would be best to go on the grounds that P.B. was uncertain, that at Padang we could hope for contact sooner, and ships could call that could not get upriver to P.B. – and also the first comers would fare best at Padang. We put it to the Sisters and to the British Camp and all wished to stick together and go in one group with the men. I pointed out the danger of a terrific outburst of dysentery (8 new cases were admitted today) owing to the filth of the Camp and the free buying of cooked food at the local market. I strongly advised them to take this chance of going before the epidemic broke. We arranged that **Mr. Ross** would go and put it to the men

and let us know whether the majority wished to go or stay. About half an hour later **Ross & Steele** turned up to say **Mr. v. Brakel** had told them the contingent would go at 9 a.m. tomorrow not Saturday. We said we'd be ready if all or most of the men were willing to come. They went to the Men's Camp and found the men about to have their evening meal and before anyone started to eat 100% of the British had declared for Padang tomorrow. I had a note from **Ross** saying all would go and that **v. Brakel** had made a mistake and the convoy would go on Saturday..... It was a very exhausting evening but all of us are relieved at the prospect of getting away from here. We quite regret having to wait till Saturday.....

Friday August 31st 1945. (9th day of peace).

This was a hectic day again. I did the rounds and the ward and went over to the Men's Camp before lunch – while **Elsie** packed frantically – and all the Dutch men from the men's Camp visited this Camp while many of the women and children went over to see the men. It is the Queen of Holland's birthday and sugar and prawns were issued here and tins of cheese at the Men's Camp and coffee etc. The whole Camp was noisy and very dirty all day and our life (already almost unendurable by the cooking, pot mending and wood chopping) was made more miserable by a piano brought in by lorry and dumped outside against our front door and played upon by a vamping pianist from 11 a.m. – 11 p.m. whilst the girls and boys danced in the blazing sun on the sand. There was no corrie done and the stinking, festering patches of corrupting entrails and blood lying all around where chickens had been killed made the atmosphere dreadful.....

..I walked over to the Men's Camp and asked for **Bruna** who turned up and showed me our British patients - poor old **Lewis** looks worse than ever – and told **Bruna** I would try and get an ambulance for him. **Bruna** – unshaven and grubby and being moderately polite with a great effort – said they would be pleased to be rid of all the British. I replied the pleasure would be mutual and **Lewis** will certainly die here within a few days and may well die on the journey, but if he survives and reaches Padang he may perhaps have a chance.....

We walked back to the Camp and had lunch and then set to work helping **Elsie** to pack in the blazing heat and smoky atmosphere..... I sent a typed note off to **Kukubu** as soon as I reached our Camp asking for an ambulance – and a note to **Henessy** via the lorry telling him we were going and had received and distributed his pills. **Kukubu** and his senior orderly arrived about 4 p.m. and we went and talked at the shack re: transport of the British sick. He said that we could perhaps get an ambulance but that it must be used only for British, not Dutch, and said that the other British sick could go in small Morris cars each with 3-4 patients. We went over the list..... All this held me up and then **Dr. K** said he would make sure of the ambulance and then return and let me know. About 8 p.m. he did return and confirmed it and then asked for a typed list of my patients etc. to be sent tonight..... By the time I had typed this out it was dark, and I had to hand over my few Dutch patients. The hospital was in turmoil as news had just been received that 30 patients were to go in the morning..... Finally at about 11 p.m. we went to bed.

Saturday September 1st 1945. (10th day after peace).

I slept for an hour or two..... though I did not actually rise till 5 a.m. We had a couple of hectic hours and were ready by 8 a.m. and waited around saying goodbye to a number of callers till the ambulance and cars arrived about 8.30 a.m. When the ambulance came **Vis** appeared and started to argue with the driver who told him it was nothing to do with him but was for the English Dr. I climbed up and went off to the Men's Camp where we collected **Mr. Lewis** whose condition was much the same. He did not stand the lifting at all well and as soon as we reached the Women's Camp made him comfortable.....

After a bit of a fuss it was arranged that the small cars and the ambulance would go direct to Padang and the others to Payae Kaembo and then by train.

The morning was lovely and it was a glorious feeling to be driving along the road seeing the padi fields and jungle without any interning fences. For the first hour or so we had constant trouble with telegraph or telephone lines which were broken and all over the road catching our wheels or our roof and necessitating frequent stops to disentangle our ambulance. The driver was very patient. **Lewis** settled down to sleep after about ½ hour

but he gradually deteriorated and within about 3 hours was much worse – quite unconscious and with a rapid pulse and stentorous breathing..... and at about 200 km. from Padang I told the driver **Lewis** would die soon. He stopped the ambulance and waited for the Transport Officer. The Nip showed great concern and offered to wait but I told him that nothing would make any difference to the patient now and after waiting till the whole convoy had passed, we went on. I must say the Nip driver was very good and saved jolts etc. as far as possible on that tortuous road. We nearly lost the rest of the convoy of lorries but kept up with the 11 small cars, more or less, and made frequent halts of 10 mins or so probably to let the engines cool. Finally at about 1 p.m. we stopped for lunch and everyone got out and sat about – at a spot with a glorious view of the mountains. The Dutch sick - about 29 all told – had no-one to care for them except **Mevr. Jungst**..... We had only **Mrs Brooks** and **Charman** who were busy keeping **Lewis** comfortable..... The day dragged on slowly.

At every stop almost some Nip Officer came to enquire for **Lewis** and one who spoke good English said we must go to the hospital at Payae Kaembo and see if they had anything we needed. We finally reached P.K. but went on, to my relief, as **Lewis** was beyond aid and there was a long journey yet.

About ½ hour out of Fort de Kok, we had to stop for an accident. **Dr. Vis** of course was not to be found so I stopped the ambulance and went up and got the wailing patients out on the road – found their injuries not extensive and took them with us. At our next stop **Vis** turned up and had come to see our ambulance and I had to explain what had happened and how I had his patients. He was more or less polite but very off hand. The last few hours were a race between **Lewis** and death and **Lewis** won by about ½ hour. We reached the Military Hospital about 10 p.m. and poor old **Lewis** was moribund and we rushed him to a ward. A slim stiff young Nip dressed in a soldier's cap and a white surgeon's coat introduced himself in halting English as **Dr. Marya** in charge of the hospital and asked about **Lewis** and whether my other 9 patients were to be admitted or not. It seemed that no arrangements had been made for them elsewhere and no-one was there to meet us. I persuaded them to stay the night and promised to discharge them tomorrow..... By the time we had unloaded all the patients, I found **Lewis** just the same..... Within ½ hour of admission he was dead.

I had explained to **Dr. Marya** that I wished to keep English patients separate from the Dutch because of their dysentery and we were given a ward with a dividing wall and the 4 women in the far end and 5 men in the end nearest the entrance.

Having settled the patients we asked about accommodation for ourselves and were told we were free to go to a hotel. We tried to ring the Orange – now Yamato Hotel – but were told there was no room empty. I found the Nip doctors and asked **Marya** if we might sleep in the women's ward with our 4 patients and they agreed instantly. We had some milky coffee and were starting on pap when **Dr. Marya** came back and said he had gone to the Yamato Hotel and had told them to prepare 2 rooms for us and to have food cooked. We thanked him and went off in the ambulance.....

At the hotel the Indonesian clerk showed us rooms and told us food would be served almost at once. It was then 20 to midnight. We were excited and delighted to have a whole suite – verandah, bedroom with mosquito proof compartments with 2 beds – bathroom and W.C. It looked clean and spacious after Bangkinang and we rapidly bathed and went over to cold rice and vegetables and meat and hot coffee and then fell into bed at about 1 a.m.

Sunday September 2nd 1945. (11th day after peace).

We slept soundly but were both awake before daylight and got up and dressed as soon as it was light. By daylight the rooms were very indifferently clean – and the linen dubious. However, it was no worse than during our last stay in 1942..... we went across to rice pap and fried egg and coffee with sugar. The B.B contingent who left (for) Padang on the 30th were all there. We heard that a plane with a blue cross had come very low yesterday and dropped 4 long drums per parachute – containing towels, soap, cigarettes, razor blades and leaflets. I saw a leaflet later. It announced that Japan had surrendered unconditionally and that our guards must give us the pamphlets. It advised us to stay in our camp and that help would come as soon as humanely possible – to eat little and

often if we had been starved and not to accept food from natives – to boil water and eat no uncooked food as cholera, dysentery and typhoid were likely.
Bosselaar (German representative for the Japanese for all internment camps in Sumatra) who was at the table took no notice of us..... but many of the Dutch bowed and talked to us. We did not see **Mr. Levison** (British Vice Consul in Sumatra) until later in the day.
After breakfast, our ambulance, driven by the senior orderly (who had been in Padang and who had brought Elsie eggs) took Elsie and me (and others) to the Military Hospital where we found our patients in good condition having slept well and been fed with pap and K.I. and coffee for breakfast. The Jap doctors were very kind and helpful though the language difficulty prevented much contact; they invited us to ask for anything we wanted in the way of food, medicines etc. and sent in a very efficient dressing team and trolley with 4 orderlies who raced round the ward doing dressings. It looks as if the Military Hospital had been empty for some time and is only now re-opening.
The 3 Nips – **Mitsusawa, Nakamuna** and **Marya** asked why the Dutch and the English were separated and looked knowing. I told them of the dysentery and also that until we went to Bankinang I had looked after all the Dutch women and kids.....
We were called to a conference this morning with a very senior Nip Dr. from Fort de Kock – probably Director Medical Services..... He said that within a day or 2 material (for clothes for our patients) would be distributed so that we could make what we wished. He promised that anything he had, was at our disposal and that if we were refused things it was because none was available..... and the conference ended in a friendly manner.
[To be continued].

V-J DAY at DOWNING STREET – 14th August 2025

With thanks for this Report from Christine Cavender

Our Group waiting to enter Downing Street
Back L to R: Tim Stubbs, Mark Hammett and Mike Landon
In the front – Christine Cavender and Becca Kenneison

Well Well, what can I say! I am such a lucky lady to have been able to attend the commemorations for this important event, to remember our families and the 'Forgotten Army'. I had always planned to go to the National Arboretum and meet up with MVG members, but when the RBL contacted me with an invitation to join them and attend the V-J80 celebrations with lunch afterwards, needless to say I jumped at the chance.
Knowing how traffic can be and with the ceremony starting at 11am on the morning of the 15th August, I put all my plans in place. These were to leave home in Kent on Thursday 14th August

around 9am for the expected 3-4 hour drive to Birmingham, booking a nearby hotel in Lichfield, visiting the Cathedral and generally spending a leisurely day enjoying the sights etc. before joining everyone at the NMA on the 15th.
Then I had a confidential e-mail from Colin (Hygate) on the 4th August completely throwing all my plans out of the window. Apparently, he had received a last minute invitation from the Prime Minister for some members to attend a reception in the garden at Downing Street on Thursday 14th August 2025. Colin sent an e-mail to those who were in close proximity to London whom he thought would be able to attend the reception on behalf of the MVG.
As I can be in London within 90 minutes, this for me was a no-brainer, and an opportunity not to be missed, but would put all my previous plans into turmoil, particularly as this was only a tentative enquiry and nothing definite, but Colin would let us know when he received more information.
I actually received the formal invitation on Sunday 10th August from the Prime Minister, to attend a reception in the garden at Downing Street on Thursday 14th August at 3.30pm. From here on, I had to start changing my plans. I decided to get a train to London and meet the other 4 members who had accepted the invitation. We contacted each other and decided to rendezvous at the Red Lion pub in Whitehall and then all go together over to Downing Street. I would then return home, pick up my car and drive directly to Birmingham, hopefully arriving there before 10pm. Bearing in mind I was travelling on my own, I was a bit concerned about the long drive ahead, particularly as it would be dark.
Then some big decisions, importantly WHAT TO WEAR!!!
Well considering how hot it had been and was forecast to be, it had to be smart, cool, practical and definitely comfortable in view of all the travelling I had to do.
Whitehall was very busy, but I got a seat outside the Red Lion and waited for the 4 other MVG members whom I didn't know. After about half-an-hour, a lady got out of a taxi looking around for someone, so I thought, 'Ah! This must be Beccy' so I approached her and introduced myself. She wasn't Beccy but a lady called Jackie who was also going to Downing Street for the Reception. She belonged to another group which had been recently formed and had received an invitation. By this time it was about 1.45 and we were joined by Beccy, Mark, Mike and Tim. We introduced ourselves and considering we didn't know each other, we had a common interest and chatted, discovering all about each other and our connection with the MVG. I felt so sorry for the men who were wearing suits, as it was extremely hot.
At 2.50pm we made our way to Downing Street and checked in with the security at the gate, feeling really important and being watched by the gathering crowds probably wondering who we were and if we were important to enable us to walk down the hallowed street.
Walking down the street, which only a select few are permitted to do, was a great honour, especially when we were photographed at the famous black door, with which we are all familiar. How things change! I remember as a child one was able to walk down without an invitation. We took lots of photos, and I am sure they will be shown around at the Annual Lunch in October. It was then that Tim found he didn't have his phone on him and realised that he had left it somewhere on the journey to London. Fortunately, and to quote Tim, he said that it didn't matter too much as it was only a pay-as-you-go phone, purchased from a local supermarket.
We were invited into the foyer and even met the famous Larry the cat who had been sitting in the window watching our arrival. He jumped down, gave some of us a sniff, left some hairs on us and then decided to leave us to our visit.
At this point for security reasons, we had to hand in our mobile phones and place them in an especially numbered cupboard.
We were guided through the corridors and down the stairs into the Rose Garden where we were met by the staff serving us very welcome cold, delicious drinks. Considering it was almost 30 degrees they were well received. We were serenaded by a military band and served with some beautiful food, various sandwiches, beautiful cakes and hot or cold drinks. The staff were very attentive. It was a 'pinch me' moment to think here we are in the middle of a busy Whitehall having afternoon tea with the Prime Minister in his back garden, where a few hours earlier he had hosted a meeting with the Ukranian President Zelensky. Certainly a moment in history.

Christine outside No.10

After about an hour, Sir Keir Starmer joined us and made a speech acknowledging the horrors of the war with Japan and the sacrifices made by both the military and civilians and their families, and hoping that the world will never experience such horrors in the future. This was particularly poignant considering his meeting with President Zelensky in the morning and the volatile world we are living in at present.
We mingled and chatted to the various other groups who had also been invited to the reception but before I left I had to go to the ladies and see what they were like in No: 10..... they were lovely. It was an honour and humbling experience to have been invited to the Prime Minister's residence in honour of V-J80 commemorations and to be able to represent the MVG, but as I had to travel to Birmingham I left the others at 5pm to catch my train home to pick up my car and start the rest of my journey. We agreed to send our photos to each other and to keep in touch and hopefully meet up at the MVG lunch in October.

Friday, 15th August 2025 – V-J80 Day

I left home at 6.30pm and was very lucky as the Dartford Tunnel was clear and to my surprise there was very light traffic, so I arrived at my hotel by 9.30pm. I used the navigation app. called WAZE and it got me from door to door without getting lost. I would highly recommend using it when travelling to unknown areas. It had been an exciting and memorable day but with all the travelling I was exhausted and was soon in bed.
At breakfast the next morning you could tell that most guests were going to the NMA as there were a lot of military personnel with friends and families. I knew the Arboretum didn't open until 10am so I left about that time to make my way on the short 6 mile journey. Big mistake, the road was really busy and the queue to access the car park was horrendous, not helped by the necessary security which surrounds the King and Queen and Prime Minister.
Fortunately, I arrived on time and after passing through security, and wearing a blue wristband, I was guided by volunteers of the RBL to the memorial and the seating area where I had been allocated to watch the proceedings. I had a lovely seat next to a lady called Celia and her husband whose job it was to look after all the Royal Gates. We had a lovely conversation and they wanted to know why I was at the ceremony and who I was representing. I told her about the death of most of my family and their incarceration by the Japanese and the roll of the MVG to help children and families of the civilian internees and how it has helped us to trace what happened to our relatives. She was most interested and she realised it wasn't just the military who were imprisoned but civilians too.
I think most of you would have watched the proceedings on the television, which looked beautiful, but to be there and look at the memorial with the sun shining on it against a backdrop of blue sky was incredible. A sight to behold. The atmosphere was buzzing but it was dignified, joyous and respectful and exceedingly hot. Unlike me, a lot of people sensibly wore hats, fortunately the RBL had placed bottles of water under our seats.
The proceedings started with the laying of drums, followed by the guard of honour escorting the King and Queen, Prime Minister, dignitaries and veterans, who all laid wreaths. This was followed by a 2 minutes silence and then we were treated to a magnificent fly past by the Red Arrows. I then sat back, relaxed and enjoyed the readings, music, dancing and watched the big screens with stories, readings and memories from the veterans and civilians who were affected by their experiences and their incarceration. It made me feel very humble to witness their stories and experiences and I so wish that my Father could have told me more about what happened to our family when he was alive.
Fortunately the weather was beautiful with clear blue skies and our last treat was a wonderful fly past by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight not once, not twice, but three times.
The ceremony finished and we said our goodbyes and Celia thanked me for telling her my family history as it made her realise how awful the war was. As we know, it has always been the Forgotten Army.
We all left and made our way through the grounds to the marquee where the RBL laid on a beautiful lunch. I kept looking for other MVG members, but didn't see anyone, so at 2pm I made my way to the Chapel, but unfortunately silly me, I had got the time wrong for the MVG Service and I got there just as the service finished. It was a shame, but at least I had found everyone. We then made our way to the MVG Plot where a wreath was laid in memory of our loved ones.
By this time it was 4.30pm and we had had a wonderful, memorable day but we were all very tired and extremely hot so it was time to say goodbye and make our way home in different directions and hopefully meet up at the MVG luncheon in October.
For me, I felt very honoured and proud that I could represent my family on this very important day.

V-J DAY 80

With thanks to Imogen Holmes for this report

On a beautiful, hot morning at the National Memorial Arboretum, Rosemary Fell and I arrived to take our seats at the Royal British Legion event to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day and to pay tribute to all those who fought, died or were Prisoners of War in the Far East. What an honour and privilege it was to be there. We sat five rows from the front, joining other MVG members as well as some friends from The Java Club. We could see the Guard of Honour, consisting of the Royal Navy, Grenadier Guards (splendid in their red tunics and bearskins) and Royal Air Force, lined up to our right and the programme began with the solemn 'Laying of Drums', with the musicians of the Central Band of the Royal Air Force, slowly descending the steps of the Armed Forces Memorial, to lay their drums at the bottom, followed by standard bearers, while the bands of the Household Division played Nimrod.
Very moving.

Imogen & Rosemary at the Event

Shortly after this the Royal Anthem was played as Their Majesties, the King and Queen arrived, accompanied by the Prime Minister, the National President of the RBL and other dignitaries, and made their way to the front of the Memorial so they could lay their wreaths. After the Royal Party walked to the covered dais to our left, where 30 or so veterans were sitting, two veterans arrived on the stage to read the Exhortation and the Kohima Epitaph, before and after the Last Post, two minutes' Silence and Reveille. It was during the silence that the Red Arrows flew overhead, trailing red, white and blue vapour, which was a wonderful sight, causing a little emotional hiccup from me. Following the second reading, the Guard of Honour marched off, accompanied by the Band of the Royal Marines, and Ruby Turner took to the stage, looking splendid in a vibrant red dress, and sang, 'I'll be Seeing You', followed by Celia Imrie, wearing a teal-coloured, long-coated trouser suit (my, she must have been hot!) walking on to the stage to begin the narration. Maybe it was nerves that caused the slip of the tongue as she announced the day marked 80 years since VE Day – a few corrections were muttered around me but, as she's a National Treasure (remember her as Babs in Acorn Antiques?), we all forgave her. Her narration paid tribute to the veterans present and to the sacrifices made by so many, so that we could celebrate 80 years of peace. Two large screens either side of the Memorial showed clips of veterans talking of their experiences and sharing their memories with us, all very poignant. As the National Children's Choir of Great Britain stood in formation on the steps of the Memorial, and sang 'The Captives' Hymn', I felt very emotional. Thinking of the doughty Margaret Dryburgh, who was such a stalwart and inspirational friend to the women in the Sumatran camps, on Bangka Island, in Palembang and, finally, Bellalau, where she died, composing this song so that they could sing it during their services, I wondered what she would have made of its popularity and importance, being sung in front of such an audience, including the King and Queen, and on television, 80+ years later. The children sang it beautifully.

As we sat in our seats under a blazing sun, I'm sure I wasn't the only one to feel grateful that was all we were enduring – we weren't having to toil at impossibly hard manual work on starvation rations, in tropical heat and humidity, or monsoon rainfall and mud, while suffering any one of innumerable tropical diseases. These conditions were brought home to us by more testimonies on the screens, including that of our

own Olga Henderson, who was only nine when taken into civilian camps, and excerpts from veterans' diaries or memoirs, read by actors Nitrin Ghandra, Anton Lesser, Sir Ben Okri and Robert Lindsay. A highlight was when 104-year old Yavar Abbas of the 11th Sikh Regiment, was accompanied onto the stage to read an excerpt from his diary, but first announced he was going off-script to pay tribute to his 'brave King', as he continues with his cancer treatment, something Yavar himself endured and survived 25 years ago.

In between the screened testimonies, by now describing the lead up to the end of the war, we enjoyed performances by Jasdeep Singh Degun on the sitar, The Queen's Pipers playing 'The Flowers of the Forest' and Laura Mann singing 'When they Sound the Last All Clear' – beautifully sung and enough to bring on the tears again. The final performance was Jennifer Pike playing 'Lark Ascending'. It was during this performance that dancers appeared with paper doves, on the end of long, bendy poles that swooped and soared as the music played, depicting peace after nearly 4 long years of fighting in Burma and the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As the last strains of the violin faded away, we could hear the rumbling in the sky as the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight of the Lancaster bomber, flanked by the Hurricane and Spitfire, flew overheard. We could hear them circling before they flew overhead again a second time, and then a third.

This marked the end of the event and we sat respectfully for a little while before taking our leave and heading up to the chapel for the MVG service, which had been scheduled for 1.30 p.m. It was lovely to see so many old friends, including Margie and Stephen Caldicott there. Colin Hygate and Roger Willbourn conducted the service admirably. Richard Brown laid the wreath in front of the altar and readings were taken from books, diaries and personal letters of POWs as they anticipated the end of the war. Bob Hall read the Exhortation, FEPOW Prayer and Kohima Epitaph. Afterwards, we walked up to the MVG plot and gathered while Richard laid the wreath and we said a few prayers before slowly drifting away – some of us went to visit the FEPOW Building.

MVG's Wreath and Logo on the NMA's Chapel Altar

On Saturday, 16th August, Rosemary and I attended the COFEPOW service in Lichfield Cathedral. Rosemary had been invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the MVG. The Cathedral was filled to capacity with the children, families and friends of Far East Prisoners of War. We stood as His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Professor Elizabeth Barnes CBE was escorted to her seat. The service commenced following the procession of clergy and the Standard Bearers of the Royal British Legion, along with the FEPOW Standard.

Throughout the service we enjoyed singing rousing hymns: 'O God our Help in Ages Past', 'O Praise Ye the Lord', 'I Vow to Thee My Country' and 'Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven', which were interspersed with prayers and readings. The FEPOW Prayer was read very clearly by the delightful young Evie Dallinger and we heard from Clare Smith extracts from 'The Happiness Box' with an explanation of how this children's book was written in Changi Prison by Australian Sergeant Sir David Griffin. A moving rendition of 'The Captives' Hymn' was sung by Helen Norgrove. For the sermon, Reverend Richard Brooker read extracts from the Sermon from the Final Thanksgiving Service, following liberation, on 26th August 1945, by Reverend J.N. Lewis Bryan ACG.

When it came to the Act of Remembrance, the standards were lowered as the Last Post sounded and, following the Silence, raised again when Reveille was played, after which young Evie Dallinger read The Kohima Epitaph. Wreaths were then laid and Rosemary went to lay the MVG wreath with her counterpart from the Birmingham FEPOW Group. After the last hymn, the Clergy, Lord Lieutenant and Standard Bearers processed out of the Cathedral to the accompaniment of a recording of Josh Groban singing, 'You Raise Me Up'. The service ended with the Organ Voluntary playing Pomp and Circumstance March No.4 in G. Op.39 by Sir Edward Elgar.

Garage Sale arranged by Judy Balcombe and Arlene Bennett
raised the wonderful total of $Aus 550 for the Muntok Red Cross in May.

Note:

We would be very grateful for any reports, diaries or stories which you would be willing to contribute to this newsletter. Please e-mail or send them to the Editor – details below

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