

SELAMAT PAGI
THE BANGKA ISLAND NEWSLETTER

<https://muntokpeacemuseum.org>



Singapore Far East Moon Rose

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**RAANC Vyner Brooke nurses Vivian Statham (nee Bullwinkel)
and Wilma Young (nee Oram) at the Nurses' Memorial Service,
at Point Walter Reserve, Bicton, Perth WA, in 1999**

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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

Important Dates

There are some dates which are seared into everyone's memory – never to be forgotten. The most obvious dates to remember are family birthdays, but for those with loved ones who were prisoners of the Japanese, there are other very important, personal dates which one always remembers. The first of those dates is probably the 15th February 1942, when Singapore capitulated to the Japanese, with its far reaching and catastrophic consequences for millions of families, not just in the Far East but around the world. It was indeed a catastrophe.

There are several other dates around the Fall of Singapore which many will also remember so clearly. These dates may cover the loss of the small ships which carried evacuees away from Singapore in the last few days before the Fall. One such date remembered annually on the 16th February 1942 was the day on which traumatised, shipwrecked souls landed on Radji Beach, Bangka Island, and were mercilessly murdered by the same battle-hardened Japanese soldiers who had so cruelly raped and killed working nurses in Hong Kong.

We also remember, among many other dates, the 13th February when the **SS. Redang** was sunk by Japanese gunfire with the loss of 58 lives, (See Michael Pether's document on Ps. 3-5) and the **Giang Bee** was lost with the loss of 223 lives. (See extract from Judy Balcombe's book, "*The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra*," Ps. 12-14).

We are grateful to **Anne Read** for sending us **important information** about the correct date of the capture of the island of Labuan by the Japanese on **1st January 1942**. Recorded by **Anne's** father, **A.H.P. Humphrey**, the British Resident on Labuan in his official papers, it differs from the date mistakenly recorded in documents written by historians. [See **Anne's report on Ps. 22 & 23.**]

We all have other personal dates to remember about our loved ones and their ordeals as prisoners of the Japanese from 15th February 1942 to 15th August 1945 and longer.

In Memory of Sir Edward ('Weary') Dunlop

We are grateful to **Judy Balcombe** for letting us know that **'Weary' Dunlop's** Medical Research Foundation has now closed after 40 years of helping to fund medical research.

We received this message from **Judy Balcombe** on **Friday 2nd January**:

"We went to the morning tea for the winding up of the 'Weary' Dunlop Foundation. I know it was started by 'Weary' Dunlop 40 years ago and has donated around 3 million Australian dollars to medical research. 'Weary' Dunlop was remembered on an Australian coin, the 50 cent piece, in 2017. The 20 cent coin had a picture of the SS Vyner Brooke to remember the Australian Army Nurses." [See P. 7 for information about the Foundation]

Judy continued:- *"The Foundation has very kindly donated funds to the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre for their nursing scholarships and to the Muntok Red Cross. Arlene and I have been asked to oversee the spending of the Muntok Red Cross funds. The Australian Embassy is donating 2 portable external defibrillators to Muntok and I plan to use some of the 'Weary' Dunlop funds to buy 2 more defibrillators.*

It is a bit difficult to find models that give commands in Bahasa Indonesia and are not extremely expensive. They cost much less in Australia, about a third of the price in Indonesia. I am writing to the chief nurse in Muntok and hopefully they can help to choose a suitable make and model."

The 'Weary' Dunlop Rose

Judy also added the following:

"I wrote to the rose breeder who developed the yellow Peace Rose, Singapore Far East Moon, and he has given this rose to be named after 'Weary' Dunlop. [Editor: The yellow Peace Rose was planted in the Sudirman guesthouse garden (formerly Captain Seki Kazue's wartime house) on 16th February 2020].

The 'Weary' Dunlop Foundation approved the rose and it will be available in mid 2027. The rose is pinky mauve, which symbolises gratitude and admiration.



'Weary' Dunlop Rose

Batamen. Those of us who remember wearing Bata shoes and sandals will be interested to read that several Batamen were evacuated on the **SS. Redang** which left Singapore on 13th February 1942. They are thought to include **Eugen Straussler**, father of playwright **Tom Stoppard**. The history of the Batamen in Singapore has been meticulously researched by **Jan Beranek** in his book about his granduncle entitled, *"In Search of Sylvestr."* [See P.6].

UPDATE from Muntok and request for Donations for the Centrifuge Project.*

It was good news to hear in advance that the arrangements for the Memorial Services in Muntok were falling into place. We understood that in addition to the Australian Embassy officials, the UK and NZ Embassies in Jakarta were sending their Defence Attachees to attend the Service on 16th February, at the Nurses' Memorial at the Tanjong Kelian Lighthouse. However, sadly the UK contingent had to pull out at the last minute due to a death at the Embassy. With 23 Friends of Bangka Island attending as well, this made a very good attendance.

The Radji Beach Oration was given by **Arlene Bennett** and the Opening Address, written by **Lynette Ramsay Silver**, was delivered by **Georgina Banks** – author of *"Back to Bangka"*.

We are grateful to **Judy Balcombe** for her detailed report on the Memorial Services and Walk for Humanity over 15th and 16th February. [See **Judy Balcombe's report Ps. 26 - 33**]

While **Judy** and **Arlene** were in Muntok they visited the Red Cross to hear a presentation on their current needs. She is able to report that the 5 portable external defibrillators have arrived – 2 from the **Australian Embassy**; 2 from the **'Weary Dunlop Foundation** and 1 from the **Friends of Bangka Island** (bought with money raised by **Judy** and **Arlene** at their garage sales).

At the presentation, **Judy** learned that the Muntok Red Cross also needs a centrifuge for spinning bags of blood. Currently blood has to be taken to government hospitals to be centrifuged and then returned to the Red Cross. This is not efficient and causes delay in delivering the blood where needed. However, the cost of a centrifuge is more than the funds left over and more fundraising is needed to reach the target of \$75, 000 Rupiah. *[Editor: Funds are urgently needed to purchase this Centrifuge. Fundraising has been started by the 'Theatre 180 Co.' currently staging *"21 Hearts"*. Please contact the MVG or Judy Balcombe if you wish to donate or buy Judy's book for £20. Copies can be obtained from Judy or the Editor. See P.10]

Diane Whitehead

It was with great sadness we heard of **Diane's** death last July. We hope her research into the life of **Norah Chambers** will be saved for publication. With **Margaret Dryburgh**, **Norah** helped to create the women's Vocal Orchestra in Palembang. Thanks to **Arlene Bennett** for **Diane's** obit. [P. 20] [Editor: I was privileged to meet **Diane** a couple of times – in Chichester at the Vocal Orchestra Concert in 2013 and in Singapore in 2015 before her visit to Muntok. Her warmth and interest in the Australian Army wartime Nurses was very apparent on both occasions.

I recently had a long 'conversation' with her by e-mail not long before she died, about the story of **Vivian Bullwinkel**. She gave me permission to use the information from a Nursing magazine about **Vivian** and gave me some more information about the Military Nurses' uniforms. She also kindly sent me a book about **Vivian Bullwinkel** by **Grantlee Kieza** entitled, *"Sister Viv"*].

'S.S. REDANG'
Sunk by Japanese destroyers, on 13 February 1942
By kind permission of Michael Pether

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The invasion of Malaya and Singapore, from the time of the first landings in Northern Malaya on 8 December 1941, was swift and brutal. Within eight weeks the Japanese had taken Malaya and landed on the island of Singapore which had become intensely over crowded by tens of thousands of fleeing civilians of all races from Malaya plus almost 100,000 servicemen. By the second week of February 1942 the Japanese army was advancing across Singapore Island and a chaotic evacuation of mainly Europeans, Eurasians and a small number of influential Chinese was underway from the port in front of what is today's CBD.

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

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

About 44 ships of all sizes – from the quite large refrigerated cargo ship **"SS. Empire Star"** (525 feet and 12,656 tons) through a range of mid-sized merchant vessels down to some small craft like the **"SS. Tandjong Pinang"** (which at 97 feet only just qualified in the definition for a 'ship') – were assembled to leave as a convoy during the 48-hour period of 11-13 February 1942.

Amongst these was a nondescript little cargo ship by the name of **"SS. Redang"**.

The **"SS. Redang"** was quite an outdated, oil burning, steel screw steamer built in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1901 by Kjobenhavens Flydedock of Skibsverft (MS)*.

It was only a modest sized ship of 500 gross tons and 165 feet in length which could travel at 8.5 – 9 knots (but one passenger says it only made 5 – 6 knots on its last voyage) and prior to the invasion of Malaya by the Japanese it had been owned by Siam Steam Navigation Co. Bangkok, for some 34 years providing cargo services on the coast of Siam and Malaya.

It became a 'Prize of War' by the British Government when it was seized on 9 December 1941 upon its arrival in Singapore.

This vessel with its dark grey hull lined with a white band and topped with cream coloured masts was then handed to the Singapore Straits Steamship Co. for operation on behalf of the Ministry of War Transport (MS)*. Straits Shipping managed to operate her with a skeleton crew consisting of about three Officers, five crew in the engine room, plus five (including at least four Royal Navy and RNVR ratings) Naval Ratings on deck, and under the command of **Captain S. Rasmussen**, a Dane. [www.merchantnavyofficers.com]. **Mr. D. Robertson** (DR) of **Marconi Intl.** who was also on board says the ship was managed by **Mansfield & Co.** Survivor **Douglas Banks** also recorded "... There was a small upper deck on which there were some cabins on either side with the engine room housing in the centre and a narrow alleyway separating this from the cabins on either side...".

The story of its sinking after escaping from Singapore as part of that final, loose, spread-eagled 'Convoy' which left between 11-13 February 1942 is not well known, and appears in very few books or public records, so this account is an attempt to clarify the story of the ship's fate and, more importantly, provide a memorial to the large number of those on board who lost their lives.

[The official file on the "SS. Redang is held by the UK National Archives at Kew under Reference Number TS 13/2042, date 1946-47, (its former reference in its original department in P.3011) – any one who would like to assist the compiler of this memorial document by photographing the pages of the file and forwarding them to me in New Zealand or by e-mail would be giving very much appreciated help.]

*MS = Margaret Sypniewska's website www.angelfire.com

Douglas Banks recorded that the *Cable and Wireless Ltd.* evacuation group (he calls them the 'Rickwood Party') – as did the group of Czech men who worked for the Bata Shoe Co.* – boarded the ship on the morning of 11th February 1942 but for some reason the "**SS. Redang**" did not sail from Singapore harbour until daybreak on Thursday 12th February. In fact, it left from Singapore harbour at 7.00 a.m. on the 12th February 1942 carrying 108 souls including crew, naval and Eurasian armed guards, and civilians (NIRC**).

* See "In Search of Silvestr" by Jan Beranek – about his great uncle and the Bata Shoe Co.

** Netherlands East Indies Red Cross in Palembang Internment Camp – report compiled and dated 9.2.43 with all names of survivors and deaths witnessed and signed by passengers on the ship.

The few sources available show differing numbers of people on board:

- **Captain David Nelson**, who led the Bureau of Records & Enquiry in Changi POW Camp, states in his book "The Story of Changi" that there were "...passengers civilian men 61, women 6, children 3 [giving a total of 70 passengers] ...".
- **Margaret Sypniewska** in her webpage states "...ninety-nine passengers, including its crew... tally was reported as a crew of ten and 89 passengers (including 6 women and 3 children)..." [giving a total of 89 passengers].
- The website www.merchantofficers.com states "... She set sail for Batavia carrying seventy-one evacuees..." [giving a total of 71 passengers]
- **Billie McGee** on the merchantedmaritime.org website has 19 skeleton crew and 70 refugees [giving a total of 70 passengers].
- **Mrs. E. Cross**, an internee in Palembang Camp and someone who compiled many lists regarding internees in Sumatra, records the ship had about 100 people on board – 28 saved.
- But possibly the most accurate record is that of **Duncan Robertson** of Marconi International Marine Communication Ltd., who recorded in his report to his employers at the end of the war "... After we left [Singapore], two launches containing deserting troops, mostly Australians, came alongside and boarded the ship after threatening the Captain with rifles if he refused to allow them aboard. This brought the number aboard up to about 110, including 6 women..." (DR).

DR = **Mr. Duncan Robertson**, Singapore Depot Manager, Marconi International Marine Communication Company Ltd. letter to MIMC Ltd. October 1945. Marconi Veterans Association website.

So, for the purposes of this document we will work with 'up to 100 passengers and 10 crew including Officers.

It is worth noting that, amongst the passengers, there were 24 men – many from Australia – who were employees with *Cable & Wireless Ltd.* on board (DR*) and this was the largest single group of people with a common link on the ship. To date, this research document has identified only 22 men from the C & W. Only **Messrs Robertson** and **Banks** survived the War – with most C & W men dying in the shelling, burning and sinking of the ship but tragically eight of the ten who made it to land died during internment in the living hell of the Muntok, Palembang and Belalau Internment Camps.

This loss of life amongst the C & W men was one of the most awful rates of attrition experienced during the War in any large group escaping Singapore. It compares with the horrendous loss of life amongst the nurses on board the "**SS. Vyner Brooke**" and the "**SS. Kuala**".

It is no wonder that **Captain Rasmussen** did not want to take on board the twenty, mostly Australian, soldiers – he would have known that he already had on board as many people as could be saved in three lifeboats he had on board. Logically, at least twenty people were already doomed, because of lack of lifeboat capacity, from the time of leaving Singapore if the ship was sunk.

The story of the soldiers – it is not clear if they were deserters or soldiers with permission to leave Singapore prior to the Surrender – is also described in the NIRC report in Palembang Camp in 1943 "... one hour later [after leaving Singapore] a motor launch containing eight or nine British and Australian soldiers and a Chinese girl came along side. The occupants climbed on board and the launch was abandoned. About noon the same day [this would have been the 12th February] another launch containing about a dozen Australian soldiers overtook the ship and they also came on board. The launch was abandoned..." (NIRC)

From the list compiled by "**HMS Tapah**" after picking up survivors from the "**SS. Redang**" a few days later this group of soldier included six men from:

- Royal Artillery (**Bdr. Arthur Hansen, Bdr. 'Broderick'** in fact **Roderick Munro**, and **Sgt. Sam Johnson**)
- 2/15 Field Regiment (**AIF Pte. Jack Russell**)
- 2/4 Field Workshop (**AIF Pte. Anthony Alick Hayes**)

These men are further listed in the individual entries (*at the end of this document, which can be viewed on the website*). It is not known whether any of these men, after the War, advised their respective War Office of the names of the other 12 or so soldiers who died in the sinking of the "**SS. Redang**".

So, of the estimated twenty soldiers boarding the ship, only six would survive the voyage and one of those would die as a POW in Sumatra – this leaves the identity of some 14 Australian and British soldiers from Singapore who lost their lives in this sinking a complete, sad, mystery. During this research another group of people with a common interest emerged as passengers boarding the ship in Singapore – they were employees of the Bata Shoe Company Ltd., the Czechoslovakian owned global shoe company, which by 1940 had grown to 800 employees in Malaya (ST* 21.1.40). The Bata Company head office had been established in the Capitol Building in Singapore in 1930 and a manufacturing facility at Klang in 1935. It is not known precisely how many men from this organisation (possibly with other Czech people from Singapore) boarded the ship but to date five have been positively identified – Messrs.

Cervinka, Plhon, Smrzak, Strangfeld and **Zelnicek**. It seems highly probable that **Dr. Eugen Straussler** and **Bedrich Heim** may have been on board but no direct link to the "**SS. Redang**", apart from them being part of the Bata employee escape group and the use of the same 'perished at sea' phrase for their fate by a colleague, has yet been established.

[**Editor:** See pages 252 – 266 in **Jan Beranek's** book, *'In Search of Silvestr'*].

Apart from the NIRC report, one of the most complete accounts of the tragic escape attempt on the "**SS. Redang**" located to date is by **Mr. Duncan Roberson** of the Marconi Company in his letter to his employer at the end of the war. We will let him tell the story first hand:

*"... Although we were rushed aboard on the evening of the 11th, (February 1942) the ship was held back for some Air Force personnel (who did not arrive) and did not sail until early on the morning of the 12th. The Captain, a Danish subject named **Rasmussen**, aged apparently between 60 and 70, said the naval authorities had given him a course to the entrance of the Banka (sic) Straits, which took us right out to sea. Previously, so far as I know, small vessels, especially those with speeds of only a few knots, had been hugging the coastline. ... About 10 a.m. the next day a Japanese seaplane flew over us and dropped one stick of bombs which near missed. I guessed that the plane would communicate with other forces, either planes or ships, and interviewed the captain about provisioning lifeboats and also making up some sort of boat station list. Up to then nothing had been done except swing out a lifeboat which was lying chocked up on the foredeck – this at the speed we were making could easily have been towed astern. When I went up to the bridge I found the captain with signal flags all over the place; I don't believe he was very conversant with international flag signals and was trying to sort them out. We got as far as a rough distribution of the people amongst the 3 lifeboats: C & W people with a few others in the first one; soldiers in another; and the rest of the people and crew in the third – the 3 ship's officers to be one in each boat. To this the captain agreed and I was on my way down from the bridge when several Japanese destroyers appeared on the port bow and after turning to starboard, they opened fire – the captain neither putting up a white flag nor stopping the ship..." (DR).*

It is stated by one researcher that the ship was attacked by the Japanese destroyer '**Asagiri**' north of Batavia (50 miles from the Berhala Strait) and 58 people were killed (BM*)

Bata employee **Zelnicek** later told **Viktor Kos** (the Chief Accountant of Bata) whilst in internment camp at Muntok on Banka (sic) Island "... spotted a distant ship on 13th February, and soon started to be shelled. A great chaos broke out on board, as the splinters were flying around and hitting the ship..."

Margaret Sypniewska (whose uncle **Alexander Malcolm** was on board) states that the ship was attacked by two Japanese destroyers, hit, set on fire and sunk within 50 miles of Berhala Strait. She states that only thirty passengers, including four women and three children got away by boat. (MS).

Mr. Robertson, who had 20 years' experience at sea including the First World War, Dardanelles landings and two instances of torpedoing, continues "... I credited the captain with more efficiency than he proved to possess (I might add that he was one of the first in the only boat which got away and saved his life) ..." (DR)

ST* = The 'Straits Times' newspaper archives at the Singapore National Library.

BM* = Billy McGee on website mercantile marine.org **[To be continued in June]**

THE BATA SHOE COMPANY IN SINGAPORE
Information taken from, "In Search of Sylvestr"
With thanks to Jan Beranek for his kind permission

The history of the BATA Shoe Company, from its establishment by **Antonin Bata** in 1894 in the regional capital city of Zlin in an eastern province of the Czech Republic, has been well documented by **Jan Beranek** in his book about his great uncle, called, "*In Search of Sylvestr. Unravelling my granduncle's fate, Bata, Czechoslovaks and World War II in Singapore.*"

Tomas Bata, one of **Antonin's** children, succeeded in establishing the Bata brand as a leading global shoe company in the 1930s. But the first mention of Bata shoes in Singapore appeared in a small advertisement in *The Straits Times* newspaper announcing a shipment of their shoes arriving in August 1926. However, it wasn't until the middle of February, 1931, that Bata opened its own shop at Capitol Theatre on North Bridge Road. By the end of the end of the 1930s there were over 100 Czechs living and working in Singapore – about two-thirds employed by the Bata Shoe Company. Some were accompanied by their wives and children.

In 1940, some of the Batamen living and working in Singapore returned to Europe to fight Hitler. Many of those who remained joined the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force [SSVF] or the Local Defence Force [LDC].

When the Japanese invaded Malaya, those with wives and children were able to evacuate their families to India on 1st February 1942, where they were accommodated in Nainital at several locations including Petersfield School. Five named Batamen were evacuated on the *SS. Redang* on 13th February 1942, as mentioned in Michael Pether's document, and it's thought that two others may have been on board.

Heim, Bedrich.

In August 1929, **Heim** started work for Bata as a shop controller. After spending time in New Zealand, he joined the LDC in Singapore in 1940. He died when his ship – probably the *SS. Rendang* – was sunk as he tried to escape from Singapore. His wife had already been evacuated to India with the Bata wives and children. His name is engraved on the Kranji War Memorial.

Cervinka, Hynek.

He joined Bata in Singapore with his wife and 2 children in August 1938, as a chief shop assistant. The family was evacuated to India on 1 February, and **Cervinka** escaped on the *SS. Redang*. He survived the sinking but was captured and interned initially in Palembang, but was soon released and stayed in Medan for the rest of the war together with **Kos** and **Zelnicek**.

Plhon, Klement.

Trained as a shoe maker, **Plhon** joined Bata in Singapore in August 1939 where he worked as a production organiser. He was married with 1 son. They were evacuated with other Bata families to India. **Plhon** died when the *SS. Redang* was sunk. His name is on the Kranji War Memorial and in Zlin.

Smrzak, Oldrich.

Smrzak joined Bata in Singapore in August 1938 as head of shoe production. His wife and daughter escaped to India with other Bata wives. **Smrzak** died on the *SS. Redang* and is named on the Kranji War Memorial and in Zlin.

Strangfeld, Josef.

He trained as a cabinet maker and joined Bata in 1927 before being sent to Singapore in 1937 as a sales organiser. His wife joined the other Bata families evacuated to India. **Strangfeld** was drowned when the *SS. Redang* was sunk, and together with the other Batamen, his name is engraved on the War Memorials in Kranji and in Zlin.

Straussler, Eugen.

After working as a doctor at the Bata Hospital in Zlin, he was transferred to Singapore with his wife and 2 sons, the younger being **Tomas** who later became playwright and screenwriter **Tom Stoppard**. The family was evacuated to India with other Bata wives, but sadly **Eugen** died while being evacuated himself, probably on the *SS. Redang*.

Zelnicek, Vladimir.

In January 1939, he was sent to Singapore as a purchaser and served with the Penang Volunteers, but attempted to evacuate on the *SS. Redang* which was sunk. He survived but was captured and interned in Sumatra. There he met **Victor Kos** and **Hynek Cervinka**. They were released and travelled to Medan where they spent the rest of the war.

SIR EDWARD "WEARY" DUNLOP

Medical Research Foundation

[Perpetuating the selfless and steadfast spirit of Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop]

<http://www.wearydunlopfoundation.com.au>

As a prisoner of war himself, Sir Edward Dunlop was very well aware of the impact of war service on veterans and their families. He strongly believed that this warranted greater attention and, typically, resolved to do something about it.

In 1985, his drive led to the creation of the Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation, to encourage emerging medical researchers to study the health conditions of Veterans, serving personnel and their families. The health and well being of those who have served and sacrificed remains vitally important today, following the vision inherited from this truly great Australian.

However, after 40 years of support for medial researchers, the Weary Dunlop Foundation decided to close at the beginning of 2026, but the work and memory of Weary Dunlop will continue in many ways.

The final Weary Dunlop Service was held at 2 p.m. on Saturday 12th July 2025 at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, Victoria.

Each year during the Foundation's work, grants were awarded to doctors for their research into medical problems which would benefit those Veterans who had fought for their country as well as the population in general.

On 20th May 2025 the last of these Grants were awarded to 8 recipients for their research work.

The first of these Grants was awarded to:

Dr. James Grant – Senior Lecturer at the Department of Microbiology, Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology at La Trobe University – for his work on irregular heart rhythms. The project he worked on aimed to develop new treatment for atrial fibrillation – a common heart ailment that leads to strokes, heart failure and death. Aging, diabetes and obesity are strong factors for atrial fibrillation and are especially prevalent in Australian Veterans.

Other awards were given to doctors researching a variety of medical treatments for age-related conditions common to Veterans such as blood disorders, diabetes, osteoporosis, prostate cancer, mental health (Functional Neurological Disorder [FND]) caused by trauma and chronic kidney disease.

As mentioned in the editorial, **Dr. Judy Balcombe** is planning to buy some defibrillators for the Muntok Red Cross with money left to them by the Foundation, after its work was wound up.

A Short Biography of

Sir (Ernest) Edward "Weary" Dunlop.

He was born on 12th July 1907 at Wangaratta, in Victoria, the second of two sons. In 1910, the family moved from their home on Major's Plain, Victoria to a farm near Stewarton, and in 1922 to Benalla. Edward attended schools in both places. His upbringing imbued him with a strong work ethic and a pride in his Scottish heritage, the British Empire and British governance and institutions.

In 1924, he started a pharmacy apprenticeship in Benalla and then moved to a pharmacy college in Melbourne in 1927. He won a scholarship to Melbourne University in 1930 to study medicine, and it was there that he acquired his nickname of "Weary" (derived from Dunlop tyres). He excelled academically and in sport, representing Australia in Rugby Union in 1932. He joined the Royal Melbourne Hospital as a Junior Resident Doctor in 1935 and became a Senior Resident in 1936. In 1937 he joined the Children's Hospital, and graduated as Master of Surgery from Melbourne University the same year.

As a school cadet, he continued his part time army service until 1929, but then ceased this military commitment due to pressure of work. But in 1935, he re-enlisted and was commissioned into the Australian Army Medical Corps with the rank of Captain.

In 1938, he left Australia for London on the "**SS. Ormonde**" as the ship's Medical

Officer. While in London he attended St. Bartholomew's Medical School and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS).

When World War Two broke out in 1939 he was working as a surgeon at St. Mary's Hospital in Paddington. He enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps (6th Division) on 13th November 1939 with the rank of Captain. In December 1939 he was posted as Medical Officer to the Australian Overseas Base in Jerusalem and there he was appointed as Acting Assistant Director of Medical Services.

In May 1940 he was promoted to Major and went on to serve in Greece and Crete as the AIF Medical Liaison Officer. Then in July 1941 he was appointed to command 2/2 Casualty Clearing Station (2/2 CCS) but declined this command preferring instead to stay as second in command and as senior surgeon. He was serving in Tobruk when the 6th & 7th Australian Divisions withdrew from the Middle East and 2/2 CCS was transferred to Java. Here, he was promoted as temporary Lt. Col on 2nd February 1942 and was in charge of No:1 Allied Central Hospital, Bandoeng (Bandung) when Java fell to the Japanese and he became a Prisoner of War.

Later in 1942, the Australian POWs on Java under Dunlop's command were transferred to Singapore, where "Weary" clashed with Lt. Col Galleghan (C/O of the 8th Australian Division in Changi) over his ('Weary's) authority as a non-combatant officer.

On 20th January 1943, he was sent to Thailand in charge of 'Dunlop' Force to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway. His work with wounded, sick and malnourished men has become well known, and he stayed until war ended caring for these men – standing up for them in the face of Japanese brutality at the risk of his own life.

He became a legend among Australian POWs and an inspiration for their own survival. He recorded his experiences in diaries at great personal danger and these were published post-war. When war ended, he was appointed Lieutenant Colonel on 27th September and returned to Australia in October that year and getting married to his fiancée, Helen, in November.

After demob in February 1946, he resumed his medical practice at the Royal Melbourne Hospital retiring as Senior Consultant in 1967. Throughout this time he worked with ex-FEPOWs helping them medically and with pension claims. He was Chairman of the POW Trust Fund from 1969 until 1977 and remained active in ex-POW affairs and in Veterans' Associations. He received many awards and was named Australian of the year in 1976. His wife, Helen, died in 1988 and 'Weary' died on 2nd July 1993. A State Funeral was held for him on 12th July at St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, witnessed by over 10,000 people. He was a great man.

His papers are held in the Private Records Collection at the Australian War Memorial Research Centre. These record his life from 1922 to 1993. Records of his earlier life were destroyed in London during wartime bombings.

Books

"The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop. Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945."

By E.E. Dunlop. CMG; OBE; KStJ; MS; FRCS; FRACS; FACS; D.Sc. PUNJABI (Hon)

With foreword by Sir Laurens van der Post. Edited by Sue Ebury.

Lennard Publishing 1987. ISBN 1-85291-021-6

At the start of his imprisonment by the Japanese in Java, and later on the Thailand-Burma Railway, Sir Edward Dunlop (then a Lieutenant-Colonel) began these diaries. His meticulous observations of prison camp life were concealed throughout the war – and if discovered by the Japanese would have meant certain death by beheading. He managed to recover his records when war ended in 1945, and they remained 'undiscovered' until 1986 when they were published in Australia by Nelson Publishers. In 1987 they were published in Great Britain.

As a commanding officer and surgeon, 'Weary' became a hero and a legend to thousands of allied prisoners whose lives were saved by meagre medical supplies and instruments carried by the medical officers as they marched through Java and the jungles of Thailand.

Sir Edward describes how the camps were organised; he records deaths, cholera epidemics; operations and torture; his despair; the movement of prisoners up and down the line; and his constant struggles to prevent the sick from being drafted into Japanese work parties.

“Weary. The life of Sir Edward Dunlop of the Burma-Thailand Railway.” By Sue Ebury.

Published by Viking. Penguin Books Australia. 1994. ISBN 0-670-847607

Sue Ebury met Sir Edward Dunlop in 1984 when she was publisher at Thomas Nelson, and when she edited his war diaries. He agreed that she may publish his war diaries and they became a best seller overnight when they appeared in 1986. When a biographer was sought to write about his life, Sir Edward suggested that Lady Ebury should be the person to do it. Sadly, Sir Edward died before this biography was published, although it had been written with his total co-operation. The book is meticulously researched and it gives a rare view of a reticent man who lived by old fashioned values, yet retained a wild streak which gave fire to his character and lifted him above his fellow human beings.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE.

In 1978, the Australian Broadcasting Company ran a “This Is Your Life” programme about Sir Edward Dunlop. One of his guests was the Roman Catholic Redemptorist Priest, Father Gerard Bourke, who had been a particular friend of ‘Weary’ on the Railway, despite their differences about faith, humanity and religion. Sir Edward had enormous respect for Father Bourke, and in 1987 he was asked to write the Foreword to a privately published book about the padre, entitled, **“A Great Redemptorist. A Great Padre. Father Gerard Bourke.”**

They met in 1943 at Konyu, one of the many camps where Father Bourke administered to his Catholic flock. Offering to run a Redemptorist Mission for his Catholic soldiers, ‘Weary’ was concerned that the padre’s complete disregard for Japanese reaction to his Mission would get him into trouble. So he offered to attend as well, and was deeply impressed by the intensity of his preaching. For Father Bourke *“... offered no honeyed sympathy to his hard pressed flock, but a stern and critical disapproval of neglect of Christian duties and of their many sinful deviations.”* ‘Weary’ went on to say that he was stunned by this message and thought that it was superb psychology. The Padre himself, however, was not prepared to be frustrated by Japanese orders which prevented him from carrying out his priestly duties. ‘Weary’ told the following story in his Foreword of the privately published book about the life of Father Gerard Bourke and how he managed to escape certain death with Weary’s help:

“I attended a stormy interview between him and a drunken, angry Japanese officer (Usuki) flourishing a samurai sword.

Officer: Why do you disobey the orders of the Imperial Japanese Army?

Chaplain: I take my orders from a much higher authority than the Japanese Army!

Officer: (incredulous) Higher authority? Where?

Chaplain: (pointing upwards) I take my authority from up there!

Officer: (perplexed, looking up) “Nunda. Nunda?” Then, in explosive anger raising his sword, “Bugero, I will kill you!”

I hurriedly stepped between the erect, rapt frame of the priest happy to embrace martyrdom, and the blotched faced, angry executioner. Tapping my head, I said, “Kristian churches very eccentric men!”

This simplification was accepted as evidence of excusable madness. I was never sure whether my crude intervention was approved by Gerard; but I seemed to be forgiven.

‘Weary’ ended his Foreword with the following sentences which summed up the huge respect he had for this Roman Catholic priest, who had offered his services to ‘Weary’ whose own workforce had no serving chaplains:-

“I only hope that the inspiring biography of this remarkable man whose life was intertwined between New Zealand, Australia and Asia, will be widely read..... It should appeal to all.... a supremely Christian life of self-denial, courage, humility, distinction, and invariable usefulness.”

[Editor: I’m sure we would all agree that these words also applied to Sir Edward himself – a wonderful human being, surgeon and an example to us all.

Father Gerard Bourke was Lt. Eric Reeve’s ‘buddy’ in Changi and on the Railway. Eric Reeve was the Editor’s father].

“The Will to Live. The Story of Dame Margot Turner D.B.E., R.R.C.” By Sir John Smyth.

Printed by Cassell and Company Ltd. ISBN 0-304-936-111

On the bosom of the Java Sea a small raft drifted helplessly, swept this way and that by strong currents, an infinitesimal speck on the lonely emptiness of the ocean. On the raft lay a woman in the last stages of physical and mental exhaustion and burnt black by the sun. Death was not far away. But she was determined to cling on to life, determined that fate, which had placed her in this grim position, should not beat her into submission. So she prayed and thought of happier times, and the spark of life remained alight.

Margot Turner, whose story this is, joined the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service in 1937. The first years of the war found her on inactive service in India, until, in 1941, she was posted to Singapore. Then, in February 1942, the dreadful news was broadcast that Singapore had surrendered to the Japanese. All women and children were to be evacuated immediately. Thousands took flight, among them **Margot Turner**, and thousands died as they tried to escape. **Margot** was one of the lucky ones. She survived her ordeal on the raft and survived three and a half years in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp, three years of hard labour on a starvation diet, with no medical supplies, no decent clothing and filthy living conditions. But her will to live pulled her through those terrible years. After the war she returned to work and went from strength to strength, eventually reaching the very peak of her profession as Matron-in-Chief and Director, Army Nursing Service.

“... and we thought the war was over.” By **David Lee**. Published by Thomas Harmsworth Publishing Company. ISBN 0-948807-132-X

This is the story of an unusual and interesting episode which took place after the conclusion of World War II. **David Lee** was then a Group Captain who took command of an RAF Fighter Wing in South East Asia immediately after the war in Europe came to an end. When Japan capitulated three months later, his men fully expected to be able to go home to those peacetime jobs which they so richly deserved.

It was not to be. The Wing was ordered to Java where tens of thousands of Allied prisoner of war and internees had been incarcerated in appalling conditions since the fall of Singapore. They had to be rescued with all possible speed. This book tells in graphic detail how it was done, against a background of fierce Indonesian opposition using weapons handed over by the defeated Japanese forces.

It is a grim story of danger and discomfort, lasting for more than a year, during which many British soldiers and airmen lost their lives, at a time when they had every right to feel that their war was over and they had won it.

The Indonesian opposition was so intense that the Allied forces could not penetrate far into the interior of the island and could not reach, or even know the exact whereabouts of some of the internment camps. It was only after long and patient negotiations with the new Government that two Dakotas a day were allowed to fly into the interior and bring out internee who had suffered grievously. Eventually some 120,000 were released from camps all over Java.

The humanitarian task lasted until the latter part of 1946 when the RAF Wing was finally disbanded and the war for its airmen really was over.

Very few reports of this operation, more than 8,000 miles away, were published at home. There, understandably, the euphoria occasioned by the end of the war still predominated...”

Air Chief Marshall **Sir David Lee, GBE, CB**, served for more than 40 years in the Royal Air Force. As a junior officer he was stationed in bomber squadrons on the North West Frontier of India, became flying instructor at home, served in Bomber Command on the outbreak of war, and went to the Far East to Command a Fighter Wing. He finished his career as Air Member of Personnel and then as the UK Military Representative in Brussels. He retired in 1972.

Subsequently he became an official historian to the Ministry of Defence and, in that capacity, published several post-war histories of the RAF Commands overseas.

“The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra.” By Judy Balcombe. Pen & Sword Publication ISBN 978-1-39906-715-7

The bombing and sinking of over 100 boats carrying evacuees from Singapore, the massacre of 21 Australian Army Nurses, civilians and 60 British & New Zealand Servicemen on Radji Beach, Bangka Island & the murder of the Australian Ambassador to Singapore –

***PLEASE NOTE: The proceeds from the sales of all Judy's book will be donated to the Muntok Red Cross for the “Centrifuge Project”. Contact Judy or the Editor for copies.**

Cost: Discounted price £20

EVACUATION FROM SINGAPORE AND BATAVIA

An Extract from "Iversen. Architect of Ipoh and Modern Malaya."

By his daughter Ruth Iversen Rollitt

With her kind permission

[Editor: Ruth's father, *Berthel Michael Iversen*, was Danish, born in Copenhagen. Her mother *Cornelia 'Cory' Bertha (nee Tissen)* was Dutch. They were married in 1937 in Penang.]

One day, *Cory* met the Dutch Consul, and he scolded her for still being in Singapore with her small children. When she told him she could not leave her husband, he replied that *Iversen* could also join them on a Dutch ship for Batavia (Jakarta). And here followed a bit of fantastic luck. When *Iversen* went to the authorities again to volunteer to do anything at all, they told him to go to Batavia to build a hospital and quarters for the British Army and Air Force there! And so the family managed to stay together. They were given passage to sail on 8th February 1942 on a KPM steamer the *SS. Plancius* bound for Batavia. It would be the last Dutch ship to leave Singapore with evacuees. Fierce fighting broke out on the day they left. The 'Impregnable' Fortress's collapsed one week later, and the British surrendered Singapore on 15 February 1942.

The evacuees were instructed to be at Collyer Quay at noon on the day of departure. They sat in a small launch on the water for several hours with Japanese planes flying overhead, dropping bombs non-stop. It was terrifying! When the *Iversens* got to their cabin, they were amazed. They had been given two beautiful, commodious rooms, each with a bathroom. The ship was only half full. They could not help feeling sad for the many people still left behind in Singapore waiting for a ship to take them to England. They were going to Java, and from there they hoped to be able to go on to Australia. They had arranged to send £2,400 (4 x £600) as a guarantee to the Chartered Bank in Perth, which would enable them to get visas to Australia.

Even though the evacuees were told they had to leave all valuables behind, most women kept their diamond rings. *Corry* left some gold chains and brooches behind in the bank in Singapore. She never saw them again. It seems that the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank was the only bank that was not looted – lucky for those who had their possessions deposited there.

The *SS. Plancius* was part of a convoy of seven ships that left Singapore at the same time. It carried civilian passengers, while the other six had mainly staff and material from the Royal Air Force on board. But although the Captain of the *Plancius* was told to stay with the convoy and sail straight and fast to Batavia, he decided to break away from the rest. An old expert on those seas, he hid the ship between many small islands during the day and only sailed at night. In normal times it would have only taken slightly more than a day to reach Java, but they did not arrive at Tanjong Priok until 11th February. The other six ships of the convoy were never seen or heard of again. The Japanese had sunk them all.

No sooner had they arrived in Batavia than they experienced their first bombardment. They felt they might as well have stayed on in Singapore. Batavia was full of refugees, and there was not a hotel room to be had. The passengers and crew of the *SS. Plancius* were received in the hall of Batavia's Art Circle, and the Dutch women who lived there gave them tea and sandwiches. They were very kind, but made the *Iversens* feel like poor refugees. *Corry* remembered *Els Nisson's* suggestion (*Els* was a Dutch neighbour in Singapore) and rang her parents even though it was already 11 o'clock at night. *Els'* father answered the phone and told the *Iversens* to stay where they were; he would send his car and driver. Their luggage consisted of only two suitcases and a kit bag. When they arrived at the house of Mr. and Mrs. *Burg*, the dining table was laid and food was ready, but the *Iversens* were too tired and too tense to eat a thing. The *Burgs* asked their other daughter and her family, the *van Regensburgs*, to stay with them so that the *Iversens* could have their house until they

knew what to do next. There, the Iversens stayed for eleven days, grateful for the hospitality of this Dutch family.

The Iversens were given passage on a Dutch ship, *SS. Jagersfontein*, sailing from Tjilatjap to Australia on 20th February and followed by submarines. This was thanks to an old friend of Corry, the manager of the Nederland Steamship Company in Batavia, who had managed to find cabins for them. Once again the accommodation was splendid, and the food reminded them of pre-war days, with many courses for lunch and dinner. Young Per, [Editor: Ruth's brother] who had been experimenting with electricity, caused the lamp above the bath to crash. Per was terrified when the Captain threatened to put him in a small rowing boat to be dragged along behind the ship! But the Captain was only joking and told the Iversens that their son was a budding electrician.

Iversen and Corry had only about £50 sterling to cash, but Iversen insisted on having drinks with his meals as always. He reasoned that the money would be wasted if they were torpedoed. After sailing from Tjilatjap, the *SS. Jagersfontein* was followed by Japanese ships, but they soon disappeared. The rest of the voyage was, thankfully, smooth and uneventful.

On the morning of 5th March, they saw land. At first they thought it was Perth, but one passenger said: 'If that is Perth, I'll eat my hat. That is Melbourne!' And so it was. There were many well-dressed people waiting on the quay to receive the evacuees and to take them wherever they wanted to go.

In Australia, 1942-1944

The first and second hotels the Iversens tried turned them away because they would not take children. So they drove to St. Kilda, and stopped at the Majestic after first having phoned them to ask if they would take the family. 'Certainly', came the reply. The owner Mr. Daly stood waiting for them and showed them to a huge family room with a bathroom. It was quite cold and the Iversens had no warm clothes. There was not much left of the £50 to buy anything suitable and all the money they had been able to transfer to Australia was still in Perth! Mr. Daly told them not to worry; they could take a loan of £100 from the hotel and repay him when the money arrived. The room cost £3 as week per person. Although far from expensive, four times £3 was quite a lot and they had to be very careful with their money.

Iversen had to go to hospital with very bad tonsillitis on 19 March and was operated on immediately.....

The very next day, Corry and the children moved into a lovely flat next to the hotel, which also belonged to Mr. Daly. It was a brand new flat, very well built and equipped. There were three rooms, a beautiful bathroom and a kitchen with a dining corner. They borrowed some furniture from a cousin of Muriel (Iversen's sister-in-law) who was married to an Australian and lived in Melbourne. Iversen came back from hospital on 27 March, and they celebrated his and Per's birthdays by going to town to buy a dinner set and some furniture. Iversen made a desk, the children's bunk beds, a bookcase and a coffee table, while Cory made the curtains. They had a simple but cosy home again. The children were put in a dusty but happy kindergarten, and later sent to a Dutch school in Melbourne. With no cook or amah, Corry now had to do everything herself including the laundry!

A CATASTROPHE BEYOND MEASURE

An extract from "The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra" By kind permission of Judy Balcombe

[Please note: Judy is donating the proceeds from the sales her book to the Red Cross in Muntok. We thank her for her generosity. See P.10 for details]

In mid-February 1942, only a month after my grandfather had driven my grandmother to board the ship in Singapore, he made the flurried and hazardous car journey back through Malaya to Singapore Harbour. In the seventy days since Japanese soldiers had landed in Northern Malaya,

they had fought the British and Australian armies down the Peninsula and were approaching Singapore. There was violence, destruction and chaos. It was believed the Japanese would cut off Singapore's water supply and residents were urged to fill baths and receptacles with water.

Duncan Robertson, manager at Marconi radio depot in Singapore, reported after the war that: *'Until about February 9, male Europeans up to 66 years of age were not permitted to leave Singapore without permission from Mr. Justice Aitken's Committee.'*

The British government under **Winston Churchill** still believed that Singapore could not fall to the Japanese and could withstand a siege, but it was becoming evident the situation was critical. By 10 February, European civilians still in Singapore were suddenly told they were 'In the hands of God' and were urged to leave the country by whatever means possible.

Large and small vessels, steamers, gunboats from the Yangtze River, yachts and junks – all seaworthy boats – were commandeered for the evacuation and lay waiting in the congested harbour. The air over Singapore was thick with smoke from the burning oil refineries and storehouses. Some had been bombed by the Japanese and others set alight by the British and Australian armies so contents could not be used by the enemy. In the dark night, the sky was bright as day, with burning flames 200 metres high. Loud bombing continued day and night – in the words of eyewitness **Jock Brodie**, 'the end of Singapore was in progress.'

Women, children and babies, families, older men, government personnel, planters, tin miners, sailors from the bombed British warships, *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*, and soldiers en route to fight in Batavia clamoured on the crowded dock to embark. Bombs fell on the crowd and dead and wounded lay on the ground. Passengers were hurriedly transported out to waiting boats in launches. There were tearful and frantic farewells as some husbands and fathers still chose to stay on shore.

My grandfather and many others pushed their cars off the edge of the wharf into the sea to prevent them being used by the Japanese. They also hoped the obstruction might stop enemy ships from berthing.

My grandfather left Singapore on the SS. *Giang Bee* with nearly 300 others. The *Giang Bee* was a former cargo ship requisitioned into military service. There were no passenger cabins and little deck space. Passengers rushed to board from the launches, hauling their bags up swaying ladders. Suitcases fell open, strewing possessions on the ground – there was no time to retrieve them.

More than 100 large and small boats carrying evacuees left Singapore between 12 and 15 February 1942, just before the island fell to the Japanese on the 15th. Of these vessels, all but twenty were bombed and sunk by Japanese planes and warships as they passed down the South China Sea and the Bangka Strait along the coast of Sumatra. Accurate records were not able to be kept in the chaos. It is not known exactly how many people were on board, but it is thought that between 4,000 and 5,000 passengers and crew lost their lives as these ships went down.

The British code books had been destroyed, and the decoding apparatus had been dismantled and thrown into Singapore Harbour so the Japanese would not know that earlier messages had been intercepted. It was thus not possible for Singapore to receive urgent Dutch messages that Japanese squadrons were flying in their hundreds towards the oilfields of Palembang in Sumatra, above the paths of the evacuating boats. The fleet of enemy warships in the area was similarly unreported. The evacuees were entering Bomb Alley.

The *Giang Bee* left Singapore in a convoy with two other boats, the *Vyner Brooke* and the *Mata Hari*. Local crew had been dismissed or had fled to their homes, so passengers worked shifts in the engine room. The ship's log indicates that my grandfather, although aged 51 and with recent abdominal surgery, volunteered to stoke the *Giang Bee's* furnace. Amid the flames, the heat and noise, the sweat-drenched men shovelled coal faster than humanly possible, striving for their one chance of escape.

The Russian artist **Vladimir Tretchikoff**, later known for his famous paintings of the green-faced Chinese woman, had worked as a journalist in Singapore and was on board the *Giang Bee*. In his autobiography, *Pigeon's Luck*, **Tretchikoff** describes entering the engine room as a 'descent into hell.'

The boats left Singapore harbour, manoeuvring through the many sunken mines. They surged on, trying to travel in the cover of night and camouflage under overhanging trees on small islands during the day. Despite these efforts, the telltale hum of small planes was heard and wings bearing the red circle of the enemy Japanese were seen overhead. Bombs fell, killing several people and damaging the engine room of the *Giang Bee*.

At night, Japanese warships approached. **Captain Lancaster** ordered a white flag to be raised and all women and children to stand on deck, so the Japanese could see that civilians were on board. The attempt at surrender failed when a Dutch plane fired on the Japanese ships. Spotlights from the warships illuminated the *Giang Bee*, and Japanese loudhailers ordered the ship to be abandoned.

Women and children entered the lifeboats, but two of the four boats had been riddled with bullets, their suspending ropes shattered. This damage was not seen in the dark. These lifeboats collapsed into the sea, killing many of the women and children on board.

The warships next signalled their intention to sink the *Giang Bee* and fired shells into her stern. The many helpless passengers still on deck perished as the boat burnt and sank while others jumped into the water to their deaths. **Captain Lancaster** was among the many killed.

The Japanese warships then turned and departed, leaving hundreds in the dark water, dead and drowning. Internee **Gordon Reis**, who later died in Muntok Men's Camp, wrote in his diary: "*When I got into our lifeboat, the screams for help from around were appalling – mostly women's and children's voices now struggling in the sea...*"

Only seventy people from the *Giang Bee* managed to reach Bangka Island. The other 223 were missing, presumed dead. For two long days and nights, survivors struggled in the water against the strong tides, aiming for Muntok's two winking lighthouses and a fire lit by Australian Army Nurses who had reached the shore from the bombed *SS Vyner Brooke*.

Passengers in one of the two lifeboats reached Djebus (Jebus) on the west of Bangka Island. My grandfather was in this group. Here, these people were hidden and cared for by Chinese villagers for some days until the Japanese military came in trucks and took them to Muntok Jail.

The second lifeboat, bearing **Gordon Reis** and others, landed on the Sumatran coast. A number of these passengers were picked up by the minesweeper *Tapah* while others, including the artist **Tretchikoff**, wished to continue in the lifeboats to Java. **Tretchikoff** was imprisoned in Java but released, as Japan and Russia were not then at war. The *Tapah* was soon captured by the Japanese and all on board taken to Muntok.

The *SS Vyner Brooke*, also in the convoy, was carrying civilian passengers, military personnel en route to Java and sixty-five Australian Army Nurses. These nurses had been evacuated for their protection by Army orders as the Japanese advanced and the rape and murder of British hospital nurses in Hong Kong became known. The *Vyner Brooke* was also bombed and sunk by Japanese planes. It is thought that 135 of her passengers and crew, including twelve of the nurses, perished in the bombing or were swept out to sea.

In his book, "*Singapore to Freedom*", **Oswald W. Gilmour** describes the bombing of the many ships, including the *SS Kuala* and *SS Tanjung Pinang* near Pompong Island. He writes: "*Between the islands on the phosphorescent sea floated boats and rafts laden with people, and here and there, upheld by his lifebelt, the lone swimmer was striving to make land. All around the rafts and swimmers were dismembered limbs, dead fish and wreckage drifting with the currents; below, in all probability, were sharks and above, at intervals, the winged machines of death. Among those who had escaped death from bombs or the sea there was not one who did not suffer from mutilations, wounds, sickness, hunger, cold, dirt, fear or loss and none knew what the morrow would bring forth. It was a ghastly tragedy, a catastrophe beyond measure.*" Parched, sunburnt and exhausted, some from the many bombed boats reached land after hours or days, either in lifeboats, on rafts, swimming or holding onto pieces of flotsam. Weakened, they tried to look for fresh water or split open coconuts to sip the cooling milk through swollen, blistered lips. However, they had not reached safety. Some, including twenty-one Australian Army Nurses, civilians and sixty Allied servicemen were massacred on reaching shore, and for others, many years of unbelievable hardship in prison camps had just begun.

These are My War Time Diaries – Sumatra 1942-1945

By Dr. [Miss] Marjorie Lyon

By kind permission of her brother John Lyon

Journal 16. Loose pages in Folder – contd.

Mrs. Wybro shows her a blurb about her services - she and Elsie fly to Singapore on Dakota – Raffles Hotel – Lady Mountbatten visits – Vomiting and nausea – Dick Walkingshaw

Saturday September 15th 1945. (24th day after peace).

This morning I had not done more than half the ward when the Army arrived i.e. **Dr. Edwards** and **Pt. Little** with an armful of Penguins which they had got from the Nips. I had already spoken to (**Dr.**) **Marya** about the 7 more Indians to be admitted and when I mentioned to **Edwards** that it was arranged, he replied that he now had 14 for admission but that 8 could come first and the others later. He got an ambulance and in no time they were there..... The Indians did not bring their cups and plates and **Marya** said he could not supply them..... however **Harley** got them from the steward. I spoke to **Marya** about food after **Edwards** had discussed it with them and interpreted their wishes to me – they cannot eat meat of any sort because of the taboos in varying castes..... However, rice, vegs, fruit, eggs, milk, fish chicken and lots of curry powder and chilli are all available..... **Marya** promised to see to all arrangements re: their food and said 2 men from the Boei would come and either cook or supervise their cooking daily and so be sure that no religious taboos were offended. I went round the British Indians with **Edwards** who confessed that he could find nothing wrong with about half of them..... They did not look too bad and there are many far worse in the Dutch and British Camps either untreated in the Dutch or treated as O.Ps with success by me. They are presumably the worst of the 154 (Indians) at the Boei and their condition is very much better than that of 50% of the British or Dutch internees men and women.

Edwards invited us all to a party at the Yamato Hotel casually in the ward saying some from the Tangsi and as many of our houses as could were expected. I said I would be on duty..... He said he was inviting **Bosselaar** at which I exclaimed that in that case I certainly could not come.

Lt. Sims said he had come down from Bangkinang with **Major Langley** to arrange about bringing down the 1300 people from internee camps who remain at Bangkinang. I only hope proper accommodation will be ready for them and that the water supply will be improved. Local gossip says they feel out of things and neglected and their moral has gone though they have a Recovery Party and have had Red Cross parcels, medicines and food dropped by parachute. The camp is said to be clean now and no dysentery cases are cropping up at all.

We have had no further Red Cross parcels at all – and the Indian Red Cross bag is the only one we have received – i.e. the Staff..... One of the Sisters brought home a neat little oblong tin, labelled one day's jungle rations which was given by one of the parachutists. It contained 2 pkts. of compressed oatmeal porridge, a tube of milk, about 6 lumps sugar, powdered tea, 3 bars chocolate, 10 biscuits, a small tin of jam, and one of cheese, a handful of boiled sweets and a few fizz tablets for drinking water and also salt and pepper. The whole was in a tin 8" x 4" x 2"..... I had seen these tins lying about opened at the Tangsi and Hospital on the Dutch side and at the Hotel but had no idea what was in them. There is much discussion and disgust among the British at the manner in which Red Cross parcels are reaching the Dutch and not the British.....

The Sisters reported the dinner party preceded by 2 hours *pahets* rather boring on the whole..... The girls got home about 1.30 a.m. and were the first to leave.

We hear **Lady Mountbatten** either has arrived at P.K. or will arrive tomorrow.

Monday September 17th 1945. (26th day after peace news).

This morning I spent at the Hospital first getting my own round done, then showing them to **Edwards** and then at my suggestion going round the Dutch Sisters asking what they needed for food..... I was shocked this a.m. to be consulted by **Mevr Storm** for what

looks like Vit C deficiency and to hear from her that neither they nor the patients get limes – very little milk – one egg most days - and the same old stewed veges and tough meat twice daily.....

After we had handed out lots of medicines to the Dutch, **Edwards** suggested that he and **Little** come home with me and go through the drums to extract the vitamins which we were now short of. Whilst on the way, we saw a plane fly over low and they in some excitement said it was a Dakota which could carry 20-25 passengers and probably meant something. From the house **Edwards** rang up **Hill** who told him we would all be evacuated by air by Dakotas to Singapore starting within 6 days – the British and the B.Is. This caused great rejoicing here and at the hospital..... I heard that **Dr. Thomson** had received M.B.E. for gallantry in rescuing people from the **Kuala** – that 9 more internees (British) were expected at the camp from G.O.K., that all were to be issued with shirts and slacks for the air journey and that we would start moving on Sat.....

The Sisters at the hospital say they heard over the radio today that there were 21 Sisters from Singapore General who were put on a beach and machine gunned. That shocked us and worried us as to what we will hear in Singapore of our people who would not come on the **Kuala**.....

Tuesday September 18th 1945. (27th day after peace news).

This morning whilst I was in the ward with **Edwards** a bouncing young woman entered in a khaki uniform with her arms full of magazines. She introduced herself as **Nancy Russell** from W. Australia and said she was a welfare worker of the Y.W.C.A. and had come to see us and cheer us and tell us we'd soon be called for.

.....**Mrs. Wybro** showed me a blurb about my services which was typed and already corrected. She said it was to go to the King and that she had no right to show it to me as it was **Edward's** composition. The facts were distorted and inaccurate and I corrected them as far as possible. She refused to withdraw it! Said I could not tackle **Edwards** as she had violated his orders. I thought it very unlikely to go any further than Padang and so let it slide.

..... I stopped at the hospital to borrow the lab instruments and was told by **Jenks** that **Major Hill** had been ringing me to find out how many stretcher cases I had as the patients were to be flown off tomorrow. I was told by **Hill**..... that the patients would not be going until the day after tomorrow i.e. Thursday..... I was telephoned by **Edwards** at about 7 p.m. and told all the patients were to be moved at 10 a.m. and asking me to come round.....

About 9 p.m. I had a message to say British staff and women and children were to go tomorrow at 10 a.m. too, leaving only the British men to follow. I had to go to the Tangsi to pick up the belongings of the patients left there and found them all in a great state of excited preparation. When I got back I found the **Cheah** family being entertained by **Mrs. W.** I was rather fed up and I could not get on with packing. About 10 p.m. we had a call from a very drunken young man who introduced himself as one of our pilots for tomorrow and who was incensed at my remarks that I like my pilots sober..... Finally we got rid of them and began to pack. At about 2 a.m. we were more or less ready and **Elsie** and I went to bed. At 4.30 a.m. I was awakened by **Mrs. W** who was washing dishes!!

After which I stayed awake till I got up soon after 6. By 8 a.m. we were ready.

Wednesday September 19th 1945. (28th day after peace news).

I went round at 8 a.m. to see that the patients were all ready and then came back to the house..... A little before 9 a.m. I returned to find **Hill** and **Edwards**. **Hill** had not arranged transport to the flying field 10 k.m. away except by his own car and a Red Cross bus. I sent for **Marya** and got him to give us 3 ambulances and then our fun began. It took over an hour to get the walking patients' luggage brought round by the lazy 'boys' and then the walking patients lost some of their numbers en route and had to be chased. Then the Nip soldiers were called in and managed to transport 6 stretcher cases in about 20 minutes. Having packed them in (to the aircraft) and dispatched the first 2 ambulances we found the 3rd had developed engine trouble and the patients had to be put into a lorry whilst I went round to the house where a Jap guard had already arrived thanks to my request to **Marya** made 1 hour previously. The Indian guard

promised by **Hill** had not turned up and I feared to leave the *obats* unattended. Finally by 11.10 a.m. we had all reached the plane, got packed in – seen off by 4 Dutch Sisters, and the Recovery Team.

The journey was quite pleasant – 2 Dakotas being our means of transport, and took a little under 2 hours. **Shirley** was the only one sick and she managed very neatly into a paper bag. The ‘steward’ was a Melbourne man probably an officer though I never saw his coat and he was most solicitous and attentive providing blankets when it got cold, bottles for the patients to urinate into, which our stretcher casers used every half hour. He also plied us with chewing gum, barley drops, cream cracker biscuits, powdered Horlicks, lemon barley water, cigarettes etc. When we reached Singapore – the second plane, having kept cheek by jowl with us all the way came down, while we circled the city and then made a very gentle landing ourselves and we stepped out of the plane to free soil for the first time for 3 and 7/12 years. Our patients were taken in hand by an Army Officer who seemed harassed and in no mood to answer my questions as to their destination or take notice of anything I said. We others were taken over to the Air Port Offices and invited to register while FANY girls urged up to go and have tea etc. at the canteen. It took quite a long time as we were 61 all told and some of the walking patients escaped the harassed R.A.M.C. Officer and had to be taken back to him. Whilst we walked a R.A.M.C. Major who said his name was **Mitchell** chatted to us and told us of the horrible condition of the 24 Australian Nursing Military Sisters who had just flown back from Banka (sic) or Palembang, Their story is that their ship was sunk and 65 survivors and 50 A.I.F. swam ashore where Jap parachutists killed the men with bayonets, then ordered the Sisters to line up facing the sea and deliberately machine gunned them. The 31 survivors were then marched off to a camp where they were starved so that 6 more died. It made us realise all over again how lucky we have been and how justified were all our fears in the beginning. **[Editor: We now know more about what really happened on Radji Beach].**

After registering and being allocated to the Rex Hotel we went into the canteen where tea, coffee with plenty of milk and sugar were available, and plates of cream crackers spread with butter and jam or marmite and also sweet biscuits. Opposite us were 2 men who opened a conversation and told us that they had just flown **Lady Louis Mountbatten** back to Singapore from Palembang. Finally we were collected, taken to collect luggage which was carried for us to an Army truck which took us all the Raffles, not the Rex. We were handed a packet of cigarettes, matches and a tin of sweets as we left. The FANY girls were most solicitous and attentive. At the Raffles we sat and gossiped while rooms were allocated again by FANY girls and when we went up they said they had heard of **Dr. Lyon** and **Dr. Crowe** and were very glad to see us. Several people we met during the day made similar remarks and so there must have been a paragraph in the Singapore papers or over the radio about us. By the way, Elsie and I were photographed on alighting from the plane for the Australian press. The senior FANY **Miss Begg** gave us a delightful room..... It is far better than anything else yet and at lunch we were served with a delicious well cooked meal – soup, fish, meat, banana fritter and coffee - small portions but adequate. We then saw a RAPWI man (**Major Perry**) who had his table in the hall and gave details. He told us we would be sent off at any time – maybe 1-2 days or even tomorrow....

Elsie went to tea with the **Gatis** but I was so tired I excused myself..... I unpacked and had the room in rather a mess when suddenly there was a tap at the door and **Miss Begg** introduced **Lady Mountbatten** accompanied by a **General Thompson D.M.S.** of the Burma Campaign and a sergeant with a note book. They all sat down and chatted in a very friendly way for about an hour and I liked **Lady Louis** very much – slim and forthright with pleasant easy manners and **Miss Begg** introduced some of the Sisters and the Indians & they all talked. Finally just as she was going, **Elsie** turned up & met her. After that it was time for bath and dinner..... I met **Dr. Smith** who had just come from Palembang by air..... who said **Dr. Thomson** would arrive tomorrow..... also **Dr. Jean McDonnell**, all three of whom were camp doctors. They had moved camp many times and suffered like us from lack of food and more than us from sickness losing 65 out of 225 women and children. She introduced me to **Miss Margot Turner** a Military Sister

who had gone off on the **Tanjong Pinang** and who told us it had been shelled and sunk at 9.30 p.m. on the 16th (February 1942) and had gone down within 5 minutes. She jumped overboard and saw **Dr. Thomson** throw over some little raft things. 16 people had climbed into her raft and had been picked up but they had all slipped off one by one in spite of her efforts and she was alone when picked up the morning of the 5th day by a Jap cruiser which had treated her with kindness and taken her to Palembang. From the camp, she had been taken and imprisoned by the M.P. (*Kempeitai*) for 6/12 (6 months) on some suspicion together with several others. She thought that there were only about 10 survivors from the **T.P.** and all the other Europeans had since died. She thought it very unlikely that anyone else had survived as no news had been heard. However, I later heard that **Fay Hoops** and others had sent letters from Japan and so there must be other survivors.

The whole atmosphere of the place is rather emotional everyone claiming their old friend often so changed as not to be recognisable. Here in Singapore I gather the camp conditions have been much better than with us and the food fairly good until recently – but 14 people were taken away by the Gestapo and tortured so that they died within 24 hours of their return to the camp. Others have recovered..... **(Dr.) Cecily Williams** was imprisoned by the Gestapo for 6/12 but survived and has just gone home.

Just as we were getting into bed about 10 p.m. there was a knock at the door and who was there but **Dick Walkingshaw*** in a Colonel's uniform saying he was acting **D.M.S.**** He returned as soon as the capitulation was signed from India where he had been for some months preparing for the invasion of Malaya via Port Dickson and Port Swettenham..... he had been c-opted by the Army for the offensive in Malaya. It was grand to see him and we talked till midnight.

***WALKINGSHAW Dr R. [Richard] 'Dick'** MC MB ChB b.1898 Educated Airdrie Academy. Medical Officer, Straits Settlements 1927. Lt SVC 1927. Various appointments. Medical Officer, District Hospital, Taiping & Acting Surgeon, Perak 1937; Seremban to General Hospital, Johore Bahru 12.39. Returned to Malaya 1945 as a Colonel with BMA. His wife Elma also a doctor. He married Barbara Walker 10.51 Penang.

****DMS** - Director of Medical Services.

Thursday September 20th 1945. (29th day of peace).

I had a wretched night vomiting and nausea for the whole time and felt quite seedy this a.m. However, I got up and ate a fragment of bread for breakfast and did various jobs before **Dick** arrived with a car about 10 a.m. Just then we were called to a clothes distribution..... issued by a most solicitous FANY lass. Then we had tea and biscuits and sweets in the lounge and sent off official text cables from the desk and went off with **Dick** to the RAPWI headquarters at the Goodwood Park Hotel to ask that we be allowed 3 days grace before sailing. There I disgraced myself by a momentary syncope (faint) and had to sit down while **Dick** did the work and then allow myself to be brought home where I have rested and starved all day. I am sure it is only reaction, lack of sleep and over eating and expect to be all right tomorrow.

We saw **Dr. Smallwood** and her husband who has just rejoined her from Burma where the P.O.W. casualties have been 48% altogether.....

Friday September 21st 1945. (30th day after peace).

This morning after an excellent night's sleep I awoke feeling quite well and have greatly enjoyed the day, for the first time appreciating the full comfort and peace of this place and the security of being, as the standard text of the cable says, "Safe and well and in British hands." I went through the menu at breakfast, lunch and supper..... I expect the authorities have carefully considered the needs of such people as we are, and provided high protein and vitamin meals.

Last night the 6 British Indians went off at midnight, but I hear this a.m. the ship had not sailed and **Capt. Perry** came round at breakfast asking if anyone wanted to go to India. We spent this morning talking to new arrivals of yesterday – **Dr. Smith, Dr. Thomson**, both very untidy, pale, unkempt and rather grubby - and others. I hear the press story of the Australian Sisters is not accurate but it is a fact that 21 were machine gunned on the beach and only Sister **Bulwinkel** (sic) of Sydney survived and escaped later to the jungle where she met an R.A.A.F. man and travelled through the jungle till caught by a

Nip and taken to the Camp. However, the incident started with one of the R.A.A.F. men killing a Nip and the Nips then marched off the men and killed them and then came back and despatched the Sisters.....

Dick told me tonight that he had realized his war time ambitions – (1) of being placed in charge medically of the recaptured Singapore (2) of being here when we were freed and being in a position to supply our needs. He had heard of us from the men we met in Taluk and knew we had survived so far and seems really happy to find both **Elsie** and me alive and more or less normal.

Saturday September 22nd 1945. (31st day after peace news).

This has not been so good a day. It began badly by **Mr. Henderson** offering to fix me up for money without going to the bank..... then said he could give me a little on account as a personal favour – which I declined..... I told old **Henderson** I'd manage without any favours and later **Dick** told us he could advance us a couple of hundred or more if he took us on as nominal appointments for the present.

At 9.30 a.m. we went with **MacDuff** to see the local Chinese Dentist **Mr. Huly Wong** and after waiting an hour he examined **Elsie's** teeth decided the aching ones could be dressed but after exposing the nerve under local thought they would be better out. He whipped both out rapidly, cleanly and painlessly under local with no ill effects and I was relieved not to have to give her a general.

..... at 2 p.m. a Staff Officer was coming to allocate passages to the U.K. and Australia.

Elsie was put on the list for the **Antenor** sailing on the 25th and when I finally got interviewed by the Australian, I found myself in a brawl. He was officious and hasty and tried first to suggest I had no right to go to Australia and then tried to push me off this ship – the cargo freighter "**Highland Chieftain**" with 50 cabins, taking 21 days to Brisbane where we must disembark. It was finally left that I 'ought' to ring up tomorrow morning to find out about a passage and all the other women had been told the same.

Dick advised me not to do anything about the ship and said there must be lots more Australians to go and that he could easily put me up at the K.K. if accommodation here was not available. After dinner we went to bed and the desk rang late to say all people for Australia must be ready at 9.30 a.m. – which we took to be a general message only.

Sunday September 23rd 1945. (32nd day after peace news).

This morning I was horrified to be greeted by **Miss Begg** with the cheerful, "Are you all ready to leave" when I went down to breakfast. I explained that I didn't want to go on the ship and, though put out, she cheerfully began to rout round for someone to go in place of me and found a mother and child pleased to go.....

Miss Begg gave us 2 tickets for the Thanksgiving Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral at 10.30 a.m. today. We were very pleased to have them. We wore our berets and found a packed church mostly troops and P.O.Ws and members of the Administration. The Bishop of Singapore took the Service. **Dick** had to go to represent the D.M.S. We had an early night knowing tomorrow night would be occupied with getting **Elsie** ready to go off.

Monday September 24th 1945. (33rd day).

After breakfast, I went out and got a taxi to Mercantile House where I found **Mr. Ross** looking pretty well and quite cheerful as he had already been told to embark on the hospital ship **Antenor** tomorrow morning. I stayed about 15-20 minutes... and told him the story of the **Tanjong Pinang** that I had heard from **Margot Turner**.* **Mrs. Ross** was on the **T.P.** and I can see **Mr. Ross** thinks she is unlikely to have survived. I went back to the Raffles Hotel where I picked up **Elsie**....and went to see **Dick**. We found our way to his office and waited our turn. We each drew \$200, went shopping in High Street and then walked home to lunch. In the afternoon we had a bit of a rest – and later we packed **Elsie's** things. We went to bed soon after dinner in preparation for an early rise in the morning.

***Brigadier Dame Margot Turner D.B.E., R.R.C., Q.H.N.S., Matron-in-Chief and Director, Army Nursing Service, 1964-68. Evacuated from Singapore on the 'Kuala'.**

Tuesday September 25th 1945. (34th day of peace).

We got up about 6 a.m. finished **Elsie's** packing – had breakfast and then waited around for transport in the hall. Lots of our people – all for U.K. practically – as well as other internees from elsewhere were also going. Finally about 8 a.m. we got packed into

covered lorries - very hot – and I went with **Elsie** to the wharf. There we all got off and hung round for ½ hour or so. The Sisters were there..... We talked for a while and then **Capt Terry** came and told me if I did not want to walk back the 2-3 miles to Raffles I must go now with the army lorries. I bade **Elsie** goodbye and promised to come down later if I could, as the ship is not due to sail until tomorrow. I felt very lonely back at the Raffles tidying up alone after 3 years & 9 months of constant companionship with **Elsie**. Later **Dick** arrived and took me down in his car to the '**ANTENOR**'* and we managed to get on board owing to his influence. Then we met **Elsie** who was dismayed at her accommodation – a top bunk in a dormitory of 16..... However, **Dick** interviewed the Adjutant who found a cabin for **Elsie** but when we went to see it, it was full of a Eurasian family with umpteen kids. **Dick** visited the Adjutant again and he said he'd fix something as soon as he could..... We helped **Elsie** write out the formal application required and then we had to leave. **Elsie** looked rather forlorn. She said that she would be all right and in any case we simply had to go. **Dick** took me back to Raffles and then had to rush off after arranging to come for lunch tomorrow. This afternoon I visited the Airport with **Mrs. Whalen** and also the RAPWI Headquarters at the Goodwood Park Hotel trying to get an air passage to Australia. **[To be continued]**.

* '**ANTENOR**' is one of the 22 ships which docked in Liverpool in late 1945 and which brought back over 20,000 Far East prisoners of war and civilian internees to England. The ship is listed on the bronze repatriation memorial which was unveiled in 2024.

OBITUARIES

Vale Diane Whitehead 26/2/1933 – 10/7/2025

Diane was a very special friend to all who knew her. She was a very calm but very passionate nurse. She loved the history especially of all the nurses who served in the AAN and in particular the nurses who left Singapore on the **SS Vyner Brooke**.

She trained as a nurse at the Melbourne School of Nursing in the first group to be trained at the School. Following her training she became a Tutor Sister at the School. She followed her time at the MSN as a Tutor Sister at PANCH. She gained a Diploma of Education and Arts Degree and became a Fellow of the Australian College of Nursing.

She lived most of her life in Black Rock and never lived far from the family home in Bluff Road. She and her sister **Jacquie** owned a small yacht in which they spent a lot of time sailing. **Diane** was always very close to her sister. She also had a group of special friends who liked to lunch at the golf club where they always enjoyed a glass of 'bubbles'.

Diane travelled to many places around the world. She went to Iran to visit her good friend **Ann Richards** twice. She went to Scandinavia, England, Muntok, Indonesia and Singapore as well as so many more countries.

She loved the history especially of all the nurses who served in the AANS and in particular the nurses who left Singapore on the **SS Vyner Brooke**. She was interested in the lives of the nurses, both British and Australian, in the camps of Sumatra. She was also very interested in the Vocal Orchestra in the POW Camp.

This interest in the Vocal Orchestra led her to the concert which was held in Chichester, England, in 2013. She travelled to Jersey to meet with **Norah Chamber's** relatives. **Norah** was in the same camp as the AAN nurses and along with **Margaret Dryburgh** she helped to lead the Vocal Orchestra. She was in the throes of writing a book on **Norah Chambers** which, sadly, she never finished.

Diane spent sometime in the Army Reserve. She donated one of her Army uniforms to the Muntok Peace Museum in 2015 on her second visit there. She had a huge interest in the nurses who were POWs and she helped to set up the Peace Museum.

Her faith was a huge part of her life. She was a keen member of St. Agnes Anglican Church in Black Rock. She was involved in the Evensong Services held at the Church. She was a keen gardener and always played a big part in the plant and book stalls at the Church Fete. She also helped to develop the Remembrance Garden.

Her other interests included music, reading and politics.

She was always a very independent woman who was always thinking of and caring for others. Her health had deteriorated over the past couple of years.

Diane will be sadly missed by all who knew her. **[With thanks to Arlene Bennett for this obituary.]**

Jim Wren. 22/4/1920 – 1/2/2026

It is sad to report that **Jim Wren** has died aged 105. He was one of the last surviving Royal Marines of WWII and one of the last survivors of the sinking of the battlecruiser **HMS Repulse** on 10th December 1941. Unable to attend the 80th anniversary service of V-J Day at the NMA on 15th August 2025, instead he was visited by **HRH the Duchess of Edinburgh** at his care home. As part of Z Force, **Repulse** and **Prince of Wales** and their destroyer escorts sailed out from Singapore on 10th December into the South China Sea without air cover. They were attacked by a flotilla of Japanese high-level bombers and torpedo bombers. **Wren** said that he was enjoying a cup of tea when the first bomb struck **Repulse**. Then she was hit by 4 or 5 torpedoes and sank with the loss of 513 lives. Luckily for **Wren**, he was rescued by one of the destroyer escorts and taken to Singapore, but just before the fall of Singapore he escaped on the **Mata Hari** one of the small boats which left carrying mostly civilian evacuees. The ship was captured by the Japanese in the Bangka Strait and taken to Muntok on Bangka Island. He was then interned in several camps in Palembang, China School, Chung Wha, Airport Camp and finally Songi Geron which was a jungle camp just outside of Palembang built from scratch by the POWs. Jim was in the same camps as Royal Marine **DHS Hall** (HMS Prince of Wales) – father of MVG member **Bob Hall**, who recalled that he last saw **Jim** a few years ago at another fellow Royal Marine's funeral, **Jack Hatherall**. All three were interned in the same camps in Palembang. [See **Bob's report below**].

Later in life, **Jim Wren** became Patron of the Force Z Survivors' Association and was concerned about the wreck of the **Repulse** – a designated war grave – being illegally plundered for scrap metal. [N.B. See Marine Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) Report in A.K. Edition 84 October 2025]

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE at the NMA

Report by Bob Hall – with thanks

On 10th December 2025 at the National Memorial Arboretum, a small group of us gathered around the Memorial Stone dedicated to the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse. Both these capital ships were attacked and sunk by several squadrons of Japanese aircraft while patrolling the South China Sea. Over 800 men were lost from both ships and many of those who survived were later killed in the defence of Singapore or became prisoners of war in the Far East.

The memorial service was conducted by Chaplain **Vic Van de Burg** who opened with prayers and The Exhortation. After a short address, a lone bugler played The Last Post followed by two minutes silence. The Reveille was sounded followed by the laying of wreaths and the service concluded with prayers.

This year, we were honoured by the presence of **Major General Patrick Cordingley** who is undertaking to have the anchor of HMS Prince of Wales salvaged and returned to the NMA. Before making our way back to the refreshments area, we all indulged ourselves with the customary tradition of a 'tot of rum'. It was a privilege to honour all who served aboard both ships and to remember those who were lost at sea and never returned home.

Bob Hall at the Memorial Stone



Congregation attending the Service



THE JAPANESE INVASION OF LABUAN, 1st January 1942
NOTES FROM THE PAPERS OF A.H.P. HUMPHREY
Written by Anne Read, daughter of AHPH, February 2026, Version 2
(Verbatim quotes from AHPH's papers are in italics)

1. Introduction

My father, Arthur Hugh Peters Humphrey (1911-2001) (I will refer to him as AHPH), was in the Malayan Civil Service from 1934 to 1959. His first posting was to Kuala Lipis and Kuantan in east Malaya. From 1936 to 1938 he was Private Secretary to The Governor of Singapore (Sir Shenton Thomas). He was then posted to Telok Anson in the north-west of Malaya. From December 1940 (he was 29) to 1st January 1942, he was working on the island of Labuan. His title was Resident, Labuan, and he was in charge of the administration of the Settlement.

A brief outline of the administration of Labuan, from AHPH's papers:-

Labuan had been a separate Crown Colony until 1906 when it was declared part of the Settlement of Singapore even though it is about 725 miles from Singapore. In 1912 it was constituted as a separate Settlement, from then until the Japanese occupation in 1942. There were four Straits Settlements – Penang, Malacca, Singapore and Labuan. Labuan was administered by an officer of the Malayan Civil Service, designated the Resident, who was responsible, through the Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements at Singapore, to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, whose headquarters were in Singapore.

The four Bornean territories of Labuan, Brunei, North Borneo and Sarawak (as opposed to the four Straits Settlements) were individualistic and entirely separate constitutionally from each other. Their laws and legal systems were quite different. Their racial composition and languages differed. The civil administrations had no common authority to which they were responsible. Importantly, there was a cable station on Labuan (cables to Singapore, Hong Kong, and North Borneo).

During 1941, AHPH made plans for probable invasion by the Japanese.

Spare equipment, sufficient to enable the cables to be operated manually, was concealed in premises on the east coast of the island, together with spare radio equipment. The Japanese discovered it half-way through the occupation which resulted in the interrogation etc. of AHPH, by now held in Batu Lintang Camp, Kuching, by the Kempeitai.

For example, in the months and weeks leading up to the invasion, there was encouragement for self-sufficiency of food and land was made available to the local population to grow more food. Rice (much of which had to be imported) was heavily stockpiled and then distributed to the local population shortly before the Japanese invaded. Other food supplies such as sugar and salt, and non-perishable items like cement, nails and matches were also stockpiled. There were large stocks of fuel oil for the public utilities – electricity generators, water pumping, shipping, lighthouse, etc. The stocks of aviation fuel were destroyed before the Japanese invaded. All these measures were undertaken to deny access of commodities to the Japanese. These actions resulted in maltreatment and interrogations of AHPH by the Kempeitai.

AHPH also started destroying confidential and secret files in the Government office and codes and ciphers for the cable system so that the Japanese would not have access to them.

Of interest, regarding the warships, "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse", AHPH notes that at the beginning of December 1941, the ships were sent to Singapore. On 4th December Admiral Sir Tom Philips and some of his staff flew from Singapore to Labuan and spent the night at AHPH's residence, Government House, before refuelling and departing next morning for Manila for discussions with the American Admiral Hart. AHPH says, *"I asked Admiral Philips that evening whether he thought war with Japan was imminent. He said he thought not but he may have not wished to appear concerned to a young officer in an isolated and exposed post. Six days later he was dead. He went down with his flagship off the east coast of Malaya and the Japanese had complete mastery of the South China Sea."*

On 1st January 1942 the Japanese invaded Labuan and thereafter AHPH and two of his colleagues were interned. As per the plans drawn up for when the Japanese invaded, three others managed to escape off the island, after the Japanese had landed, in a small launch that had been hidden on the north-west coast of Labuan. They took the stock of Treasury reserve banknotes that had been hidden and sunk the currency at sea, again to deny any currency to the Japanese. These three were later captured in north-west Borneo and interned.

AHPH spent 3¾ years in Japanese camps, most of the time being incarcerated in Batu Lintang camp, Kuching. He was aged 30 to 34.

The Japanese occupied Labuan from 1st January 1942 to 10th June 1945.

On 11th September 1945 Batu Lintang camp was eventually liberated by Australian Forces. From there, AHPH was hospitalised in Labuan (where hundreds of the local population visited him). His elation at being liberated was severely tempered on hearing news of the atrocities and murders that had been committed by the Japanese on Labuan. He wrote to his parents *"The Japs murdered many who were loyal to me and I have had the heartbreaking job of seeing their widows who came to visit me in hospital. Everyone welcomed me with embarrassing shows of affection. Over 300 came to see me the first two or three days and the hospital sisters had people lining up in queues. The mental reaction of freedom and all these emotional demonstrations have quite upset me I had no idea such horrors were going on outside as well as inside prison of war camps. I shall make no attempt to tell you the story of all that has happened since **darkness fell on January 1st 1942, when I was captured by Japanese troops on this island.** I can only be thankful that I have come through alive after these past years of imprisonment, public humiliation, starvation, blows and what not. Friends galore have perished – by execution, by illness, malnutrition and every conceivable means of horror and brutality. I look forward more than I can say to seeing you all again. But don't expect me to be too unchanged after 6½ years absence, especially as the last 3½ can be counted as twice that. The grey hairs are all too numerous, but I am lucky enough to be alive. On at least three separate occasions I would not have given an even bet on being alive for another hour."*

He was 34 years old.

On 27th September 1945, AHPH left Labuan for Singapore on the Hospital Ship "Manunda". Hospitalised for a few more days in Singapore, he then got a plane to Colombo. He eventually returned home to England from Colombo aboard "The Highland Monarch" a repatriation ship, arriving in Southampton on 9th November 1945.

He resumed his career in the Malayan Civil Service in Kuala Lumpur. In 1959 he returned to England and was in The Civil Service, in the Foreign Office.

He rarely spoke of his time in captivity and of all the horrors. In spite of all the harsh treatment, he lived until he was 90.

Second Supplement to The London Gazette of Friday, the 20th of February, 1948, to Thursday, 26th February, 1948

Titled "Operations of Malaya Command, from 8th December, 1941 to 15th February, 1942."

"226, Labuan – On the 3rd January, 1942, a small Japanese force took possession of the Island of Labuan, which was not defended."

That date of Japanese invasion was incorrect. In spite of AHPH's Reports to The Under-Secretary of State, Eastern Department, Colonial Office, (See 3 below), which had been submitted on 8th February 1946 and 15th February 1946, more than 2 years prior to the London Gazette report.

[**Anne writes:** I have been unable to find correspondence relating to that error, though I do remember AHPH saying he had tried and tried to correct, to 1st January 1942, the records and official histories that had been written with the wrong date]. **[To be continued].**

VYNER BROOKE TRAGEDY COMMEMORATION SERVICE 15 FEBRUARY 2026

Report by Robert Grey – with thanks

Master of Ceremony: Margaret Herley

On Sunday 15 February 2026, a beautifully mild summer day, the Applecross Sub-Branch of the Returned & Services League of Western Australia (RSLWA) held its annual commemoration service in honour of the Australian Army Nurses, other Allied service personnel and civilians who lost their lives as a result of the SS Vyner Brooke Tragedy. Twelve nurses were lost at sea, twenty-one massacred at Radji Beach on Bangka Island, and eight died as prisoners of war. The service is held at the Army Nurses' Memorial erected in Point Walter Reserve, Bicton, Perth, Western Australia. MVG members Ian Johnston, Allan & Janet Zanetti and Robert & Glenice Gray attended.

At the start of the outdoor service, the swirling pipes of the Presbyterian Ladies College band led groups of families and friends of the fallen nurses, as well as students from six of Perth's major secondary colleges and 703 Sqn Air Force Cadets, in a very moving procession up to the memorial. Each participant in the procession carried a staff flying the national flag of Australia, one flag for each of the 41 nurses who died. The flagstaffs were then displayed around the memorial and the name of each of the nurses was read out by a student to the solemn beat of the bass drum.

The acting President of the Applecross Sub-Branch of the RSLWA then welcomed distinguished guests from national, state and local government organisations, including the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corp (RAANC) and the State President of RSLWA and a large congregation of attendees.

The community choir One Accord then led the congregation in singing the National Anthem, followed by the RSLWA's Lest We Forget hymn. This was followed by an address by the Guest Speaker Lt. Col. Jo Briggs of the RAANC.

The choir then sang The Captives' Hymn, which was sung in the women's internment/PoW camps at every Sunday service gathering and at the frequent burials. Much loved and revered internee Margaret Dryburgh wrote the words and music in 1942 whilst interned. She herself sadly succumbed to disease and deprivation in Sumatra camp in 1945, just five months before the camp's liberation in September 1945.

The Vyner Brooke Commemoration service then moved on to Wreath Laying, the Ode of Remembrance and the bugler played the Last Post and, after One Minutes Silence, the Rouse.

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE TRAGEDY

With the fall of Singapore imminent, 65 Australian Army Nurses, 110 civilian evacuees (including mothers and 40 children) and 52 crew boarded the very small coastal trading vessel **SS Vyner Brooke** and departed Singapore on 12 February 1942. Two days later, the ship was discovered by Japanese planes, bombed and sunk as it approached the Bangka Strait.

Sadly, 12 nurses were lost in the sinking or adrift at sea and, according to Ian Shaw's 2010 book *On Radji Beach*, about 40 to 50 passengers and crew died in the sinking or at sea. The actual number will never be known because no passenger list survived the sinking.

Twenty-one nurses, along with a number of civilians, officers and crew of the Vyner Brooke, many of whom had serious wounds that needed attention, made it ashore on lifeboats or rafts to isolated Radji Beach on Bangka Island. A further 32 nurses made it to shore elsewhere on the island, surrendered to the Japanese occupying army and were placed in POW/Internment camps with captured civilians.

Whilst the nurses needed to stay on Radji Beach with the wounded civilians and servicemen, the civilian women felt strongly that the children urgently needed food and shelter. As a result they made a group decision to walk with the children and an older civilian man and two walking wounded sailors into the town of Muntok a few kilometres away to surrender to the Japanese occupying force. Fortunately they did not experience the tragedy that was soon to unfold on Radji Beach.

Bill Sedgeman, First Officer of the Vyner Brooke, had earlier walked into Muntok to organise the surrender of those on Radji Beach to Japanese authorities and to get their assistance to return with him to collect the wounded. He then returned to Radji Beach accompanied by a Japanese officer and a company of soldiers. Sadly, as it was later learned, this officer and his war hardened group of commandos had already committed atrocities in the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong.

When the Japanese commandos reached Radji Beach, all of the servicemen able to walk, including some officers and men from the Vyner Brooke, were marched beyond a nearby headland where they were shot and bayoneted. The soldiers then returned to the nurses and the severely wounded who had been left under guard at Radji Beach.

There the 21 army nurses and one civilian woman (who had remained at the beach with her wounded husband) were ordered to form a line and walk into the sea, where they were shot with machine gun and rifle fire. The wounded men who had remained on Radji Beach were bayoneted at the same time.

After the war, these events were described and reported to the War Crimes Commission by one of the nurses, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel. Although wounded, she feigned death in the water. After the soldiers departed the beach, she hid in the jungle backing onto the beach and then made her way into Muntok where she surrendered and spent the remainder of the war in captivity.

It has been described by historians as one of the darkest days in the history of WW2 for Australia and it is understandable that the commemoration focusses on the heroic Australian Army nurses.

However, the all-embracing title of the service as the “Commemoration Service for the 84th Anniversary of The Vyner Brooke Tragedy”, indicates that it also commemorates the civilian men and women evacuees and the brave officers and crew of the SS Vyner Brooke.

Of particular relevance to the Malayan Volunteers Group, Michael Pether estimated (p.10 of his research document) that there were 33 younger women passengers and 40 children on the Vyner Brooke. Ian Shaw noted (p.133 of his book) that, “Overwhelmingly, they were the wives and children of servicemen who had stayed behind in Singapore with their units”.

Since the first commemoration service at Point Walter in 1999, at which surviving Vyner Brooke Australian army nursing sisters Vivian Bullwinkel and Wilma Oram were guests of honour, the annual service has continued to grow in attendances. It has also remained extremely important and inspiring to the Returned & Services League of W.A., to family and friends of the nurses, to currently serving nurses in the Australian Army Nursing Service and to the wider nursing profession in Australia.

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Presbyterian Ladies College Pipe Band



Students from Perth's Secondary Colleges



Bangka Island Memorial Service, February 15 and 16, 2026

On February 12, Arlene Bennett, past president of the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre, retired Australian Nurses Meg Ryan and Marion Kilvert and I flew to Jakarta en route to the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service. We met with our friend Mrs Eveline de Vink, Director of the Netherlands War Graves Foundation in Indonesia, which maintains 25,000 Dutch war graves and also cares for the Commonwealth War Graves on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

After lunch in the beautiful Garden Osteria restaurant, we braved a tropical rain storm to visit the Dutch Menteng Pulo war cemetery and adjoining Commonwealth War Graves cemetery. The NWGF kindly has permitted us to place a memorial bench and plaque in Menteng Pulo cemetery, remembering the Australian Army Nurses from the *SS Vynner Brooke*, those who lost their lives in the evacuation of Singapore and the many who suffered in Muntok, Palembang and Belalau camps. The NWGF remembers all Dutch military and civilians who lost their lives in WW2, hence our bench was placed in their cemetery overlooking the CWGC cemetery, which commemorates military personnel and not civilians.



We proceeded to the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and paid tribute to the 8 Australian Army Nurses who died in Muntok and Belalau camps and who, being military personnel, were reburied here after the War. Interestingly, I found the grave of Andrew Carrutthews from the Malayan Broadcasting Commission who died in Belalau after Peace was declared – a civilian buried in this military cemetery.

The following day, February 13, we flew to Pangkalpinang, the capital of Bangka Island and drove the now-familiar 3 hours to Muntok. The next morning we visited the Muntok Peace Museum to prepare for the Memorial Service which begins here on February 15, the anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. The Museum Director Mr Fakhrizal and his wife and granddaughter had spent the preceding day in the Museum with the Muntok Red Cross team tidying the Museum so we found it in pristine condition. There was nothing else needed to do other than add a few more exhibits and take photos while the Museum was relatively empty.



In the afternoon, we visited the Muntok Red Cross, who kindly administered physiotherapy treatment for Arlene's back pain. The Muntok Red Cross today stands on the site of the former rudimentary Men's Camp Hospital where dying men were brought from the Muntok Jail through a barbed wire tunnel into the 'Coolie Lines' building. There were named wards for the malaria, cholera, beri beri and dysentery patients although naming was superfluous as there was no treatment available other than teaspoons of thin rice gruel and bathing by the patients' friends. The Catholic Brothers volunteered to work in the Dysentery Ward and 11 Brothers then died from dysentery here.

The Muntok Red Cross meeting room has a wall-sized display describing its origins on this site and ends with the very moving words "In this very place, humanity was tested – and here it is restored."

We have been helping the Red Cross since its inception on Bangka Island in 2020, at the start of Covid. Through our regular garage sales, afternoon teas and seeking donations from individuals, groups and through a GoFundMe page, we have raised funds to provide medical equipment for the Muntok Red Cross and in 2022, helped to purchase a Covid Transport Ambulance. Before this, patients needed to travel 3 hours to the Covid hospital in Pangkalpinang on the back of a motor bike.

This year, our group helped to arrange the provision of 5 portable external defibrillators for the Muntok Red Cross. Previously the only defibrillators were in the hospitals. 2 defibrillators were donated by the Australian Embassy, 2 defibrillators, metal boxes and spare pads were bought with a donation from the Weary Dunlop Foundation and 1 defibrillator was from our Friends of Bangka Island fundraising. Of great interest is that the portable defibrillator was invented by cardiologist Dr Frank Pantridge, a Prisoner of War on the Burma Railway, like Weary Dunlop. We have remaining funds from the Weary Dunlop Foundation donation, which was for \$1000 for each Australian Army Nurse killed on Radji Beach. This year, we plan to add to this to help the Muntok Red Cross purchase a centrifuge for them to spin bags of collected blood so they can be distributed in a timely manner to where needed for use in surgery, dialysis and treatment of seriously ill children with Dengue Fever.



On the morning of February 15, we visited the government hospital and toured the facilities and the wards. It is a modern hospital, very clean and well-run but with some facilities we hope we may contribute to help improve in the future.

The first part of the Bangka Island Memorial Service took place at the Muntok Peace Museum in the late afternoon of February 15, the anniversary of the Fall of Singapore in 1942. The Muntok Peace Museum stands on the site of the former Women's and Children's prison camp site at Kampong Menjelang, next to a school, a mosque, village and a playing field. Representatives of the Australian and New Zealand Embassies were present together with family members of the Australian Army Nurses from the SS Vyner Brooke, families of civilian internees, members of the Muntok Red Cross, National Nurses' Association and many Indonesian friends.

The Service began with the words of Presbyterian missionary Miss Margaret Dryburgh's Captive's Hymn, written in Palembang prison camp in 1942 and sung at all women's church services in camp during the War. I spoke, welcoming the attendees and explaining that the Muntok Peace Museum was built by civilian internees' families and the family of Mr Vivian Bowden to remember our families who lie in Muntok with no known graves and now buried under houses, a petrol station and in a group grave at the Catholic cemetery after their remains - in marked graves - were not repatriated after the War.

This was the original purpose of the Muntok Peace Museum but the Museum now remembers all who suffered in the area during the War - the local people who suffered severely, the 1000's who lost their lives in the bombing of over 100 ships carrying servicemen and evacuees from Singapore, those killed in the Radji Beach and other massacres and the many who suffered in the harsh prison camps of Muntok, Palembang, Belalau, Padang and Bankinang in Sumatra.

Researcher Kevin Snowden in the UK has prepared a researched document naming over 500 British soldiers who died in and around Bangka Island and this list was presented at the Memorial Service.

The Muntok Peace Museum conveys a very important message, that wars are harmful to ordinary people and that we should learn from the past to help create a more peaceful world today.



The Roll of Honour of The Muntok Lost Graves was read and people were invited to look at the exhibits while hearing the words of *Abide With Me*, the Hymn played at all funerals in the men's prison camp.

In the evening, we were invited to a Welcome Dinner at the House of the Regent of West Bangka. There was traditional dancing, an Indonesian buffet and we were asked to join in group dancing. During the Speeches, the Regent and the Embassies all emphasized the importance of the younger generation learning about wartime history to help prevent wars.

The massacre of the 21 Australian Army Nurses, civilians and servicemen on Radji Beach near Muntok occurred on February 16, 1942. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, Stoker Ernest Lloyd from the Prince of Wales and American Eric Germann were all injured but survived the massacre. On February 17, 1942, Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia's Official Representative to Singapore (Ambassador) was shot and killed outside the Muntok cinema after speaking out in Japanese in defence of Frank Brewer, a British soldier.

On the morning of February 16, we gathered at the Tanjong Kelian lighthouse near the Muntok harbour. The lighthouse was seen by struggling in the sea in February 1942 and this site was chosen by Vivian Bullwinkel for the dedication of a memorial to the Australian Army Nurses in 1993.

A service was held to remember Mr Vivian Bowden and his poem written on leaving his childhood home in Japan to attend school in Australia was read. Wreaths were laid and I sprinkled bougainvillea petals on his grave.

Home

There is a land that I call home, far off in old Japan:

The land of lotus blossoms, the maple and the fan;

The land of cryptomeria pines, beneath whose fragrant shade

The old red lacquer temples doze, while generations fade.

A land of lakes and rippling streams, where rainbow colours blend.

Where snow-clad Fuji sits and waits until the world shall end.

*Would that I might return once more, ere my life's sands are run:
Land of the gold Chrysanthemum ! Land of the Rising Sun !
To hear the old familiar sounds – the ceaseless temple drum,
The clatter, clatter of the clogs as people go and come.
To wander once again about the temple's sacred grounds,
And hear once more the old bronze bell, as fleeted hours it sounds.
But 'tis too late, my day is past; Japan I'll see no more;
I can but dream of what I called my home in days of yore.
The mind must now replace the eyes, their visions it must see,
For though I am now far from home, my thoughts lie o'er the sea*

The service to remember the Australian Army Nurses from the *SS Vyner Brooke* began with an explanation in English and Bahasa Indonesia, describing our visits to Muntok each year and thanking the local people for their help and support.

Each February, we return to Muntok to remember men, women and children from Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand who passed through this place in February 1942 while fleeing the Japanese invasion of Singapore. Lots were injured, exhausted, and frightened. For some, Muntok was a place of brief refuge. For others, it was the last place they saw freedom and life.

We also remember people of numerous nationalities who left Singapore in the evacuating ships, including Chinese, Eurasian, Russian, Armenian and Middle Eastern people; all had long made their homes in Singapore and Malaya. Many others also died in prison camps and over a half of whom were Dutch.

We come here not to reopen old wounds, but to honour human lives and shared history. The events that unfolded here during the Second World War affected people from many nations, and they remain deeply significant to families who live far away, as well as to the people of Bangka Island who witnessed them.

Remembrance is about respect. It is about acknowledging suffering, courage, and loss, and ensuring that these stories are not forgotten as time passes. It is also about friendship and understanding between nations. By remembering together, we affirm the value of peace, compassion, and humanity.

We are grateful to the people of Muntok for welcoming us each year, for caring for these memorials, and for allowing us to honour the past with dignity. We know that Muntok was bombed and its people suffered greatly and many died. Your kindness ensures that those who suffered here are remembered, not only as victims of war, but as people whose lives mattered and are remembered and respected today.

Prayers and tributes followed by the Australian and New Zealand Embassies and family members of the Nurses followed and wreaths were laid.



We then drove to the meeting point off the main road and transferred to a convoy of 4-wheel drive vehicles for the half-hour bumpy ride to the beach for a further Service. The journey is rough but we arrived safely, thanks to the skills of our experienced local drivers from the 4-wheel drive club.

The service continued on the headland overlooking the Banka Strait, where over 100 large and small vessels were bombed and sunk in February 1942, with many 1000's of people losing their lives. The names of many of these people will never be known.

We placed flowers at the plaque to Captain Thomas Wilkinson from the Li Wo, whose small Yangtze River steamer took on the Japanese fleet as it was surrounded, sinking one warship and damaging another. All but 8 crew were killed in this action. Captain Wilkinson was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.



Prayers and readings were held, including the poem, *Heroes*, a tribute to the heroes of the Merchant Navy, which was read by the Australian Naval Defence Attache (with thanks to author Australian David Partridge).

*Don't speak to me of heroes until you've heard the tale
of all those merchant seamen who sailed through storm and gale
to keep the lifelines open in freedom's hour of need
when a tyrant cast a shadow over every nation's creed.
Captains, greasers, cabin boys, mates and engineers
heard the call to duty and cast aside their fears.
They stoked those hungry boilers and stood behind the wheel
whilst cooks and stewards manned the guns on coffins made of steel.
They moved in icy convoys from Scapa to Murmansk
and crossed the widest oceans, never seeking thanks.
They sailed the South Atlantic where raiders lay in wait
and kept the food lines open to Malta and the Cape.
Tracked by silent U-boats which hunted from below,
shelled by mighty cannons and fighters flying low,
they clung to burning lifeboats where the sea had turned to flame
and watched their shipmates disappear to everlasting fame.
I speak not of a handful but forty thousand plus,
some whose names we'll never know in whom we placed our trust.
They never knew the honour of medals on their chests
or marching bands and victory and glory and the rest.
The ocean is their resting place, their tombstone is the wind,
the seabirds' cry their last goodbye to family and friend.
Freighters, troopships, liners and tankers by the score,
fishing boats and coasters, four thousand ships and more
flew their country's ensign as they sank beneath the waves
and took those countless heroes to lonely ocean graves.
Their legacy is freedom to those who hold it dear,
to walk with clear horizons and never hide in fear.
So when you speak of heroes, remember those at sea,
and thank those merchant seamen who died to keep us free.*

Following the Service, we clambered down steps and rocks to the beach for the Wak For Humanity. Here, everyone holds hands and walks into the water together, as Vivian Bullwinkel reported the Australian Army Nurses did before they were shot. The Radji Beach Ode is read in English and Bahasa Indonesia, where we pledge to work together for a better and more peaceful world.



The Walk For Humanity concluded the formal Bangka Memorial Service. Following a picnic lunch, some of us ventured in the 4-wheel drives to the area Mr Fakhrizal Abubakar and his team of dedicated historical researchers believe to be the actual Radji Beach, in particular with the two streams described by Vivian Bullwinkel. A family member of a Nurse killed on the beach travelled with a film crew from the Australian Broadcasting Commission to the beach by the police motor boat so they could view the approach the beach and land from the sea.



As we stood on the shore under the tall palm trees which possibly witnessed the massacre of the Nurses, civilians and servicemen on February 16, 1942 and watched the quiet silver sea, we remember that a Nurse wondered on that fateful day before she was killed, how such a terrible thing could happen in this tranquil place. The Nurses were afraid their families would never know their fate but we do know and we remember them and all the victims of the Second World War in this area.



With thanks to Judy Balcombe for this report.

True Valour – by Judy Balcombe

All prisoners in the camps were stretched beyond the normal expectations of human endurance. Mothers were afraid for their children's lives and husbands and wives feared for one another. Marcel Junod from the International Red Cross wrote of the prison camps in the Far East, explaining the very poor treatment of prisoners: "*In Japanese eyes, Prisoners of War were not only losers but also objects of contempt because they had surrendered. Prisoners of War were no longer regarded as human and so were treated terribly. This low status was also given to civilians, including women and children. Of about 300,000 people captured in the Far East, only about 200,000 saw the day of liberation.*

"Exhausted from hunger and disease, they staggered out from countless prison camps scattered all over Asia. They had been hermetically isolated in a vicinity totally foreign to them, not only physical imprisonment but also total isolation from local people by language and art of living. Mail from home took over a year to reach these prison camps and was often never distributed."

All the prisoners were heroic in their attempts to survive and must be remembered for their courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice. Some were officially recognized and awarded for their work during the War. One exceptional woman received an MBE for bravery, while still missing. This was Dr Margaret Henderson Hunter Thomson. I learnt that the Young Historians from the Mary Erskine School in Edinburgh were researching the experiences of past pupils during the Second World War, including Dr Thomson. Before the Researching Far East Prisoners of War History Conference, we went to the school to visit the staff and students.

It is important that the students know more about this former pupil's heroic actions. Dr Margaret Thompson showed such courage and fortitude in her care for others after the bombing of the *Kuala* and throughout the dreadful months and years that followed. Margaret was born in Leith in Scotland, graduating in Medicine from Edinburgh University in 1925. She worked as a general practitioner and in 1929, married Daniel Stewart Thomson, a scientist and rubber planter in Malaya in 1929. She is recorded as having worked as an anaesthetist in the Singapore General Hospital until February 1942. Here, she would have treated seriously wounded Allied soldiers.

In February 1942, British and Australian female medical staff were ordered away from Singapore for their safety as authorities learnt of rapes and murder of nurses by Japanese soldiers in Hong Kong. Dr Margaret Thomson was a passenger on the *SS Kuala* which was bombed and sunk off Pom Pong Island on February 14, 1942. In *These are My Wartime Diaries*, Australian Dr Marjorie Lyon writes that she and Dr Thomson travelled to the Singapore docks to board the *Kuala* in Dr Thomson's car. Dr Thomson was wounded by shelling in Singapore and sustained a 6-inch buttock wound. Dr Lyon describes how she bandaged Dr Thomson's long buttock wound while bombs fell on the *Kuala*, covering the wound with a tin hat and telling her she would suture it later. Dr Thomson refused analgesia in order to be alert if there were more bomb alarms.

The tragic and horrific fate of those on the *Kuala*, where at least 350 of the 750 men, women and children on board lost their lives, is documented in detail in historian Michael Pether's dedicated researched *Kuala* document which can be read online.

Raymond Frazer of the Royal Air Force pulled Dr Thomson from the sea into a lifeboat and rowed alongside her. He wrote that despite her own injury, Dr Thomson rowed 40 women while caring for their injuries. This heroic action was reported to authorities and Dr Thomson was awarded an MBE while she was still missing.

Evening Telegraph and Post, July 3, 1943

Wounded by a bomb splinter just before leaving Singapore, dive-bombed during the evacuation, picked up by a lifeboat and finally marooned on a foodless island, such was the experience of Dr Margaret Henderson Thomson of the Malaya Medical Service who has been awarded the MBE. In the lifeboat, Dr Thomson rendered invaluable aid among the wounded. She took an oar herself and despite her own wound, pulled hard for four hours and did much to encourage and to keep up

the morale of the boat's company. For three days, while marooned on Kebat Island, with no food and little water, she continued to attend to wounded women and children. Later, on Senajang Island, she took charge of over 50 wounded cases and tended them day and night in spite of a serious shortage of medical supplies and with the crudest of surgical appliances. She also assisted in the evacuation of the most urgent cases to Singkep hospital. But for her resolution and disregard of self, many of these people would have died and it was due to such sacrifice on her part that her wound turned septic and she followed her own patients to hospital. Later she displayed admirable courage in the difficult journey across Sumatra.

Many seriously wounded had been brought from Pom Pong Island to Daboh Hospital on Singkep Island. Dr Thomson remained caring for patients at Daboh rather than leaving with others for Padang to escape Sumatra. On leaving Daboh, Dr Thomson travelled to Djambi. Here she was taken prisoner and placed into the Women's prison camp, the European Primary School with 30 other women. In *Women Beyond the Wire*, Lavinia Warner writes that Dr Thomson had a 'very bad time' in Djambi camp, that 'her clothes were down to her bra and pants.'

In April 1943, some of the Djambi prisoners were brought to Palembang. Child internee Ralph Armstrong records that Dr Thomson lived in House 4 in Irenelaan camp. When a prisoner in Palembang, Dr Thomson worked caring for military and civilian prisoners at the Charitas Hospital, with Drs Goldberg and McDowell. We visit this hospital and have placed a memorial plaque to hospital staff. The hospital was forcibly closed by the Japanese in 1943, male doctors were killed and nuns and female doctors put into prison camp.

Also on the *Kuala* was Sister Margot Turner, a British Nurse from the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Medical Service. Many of the QA Nurses evacuated from Singapore lost their lives on the *Kuala*. After the *Kuala* was bombed, Margot Turner boarded the *Tandjong Pinang* but this was also bombed and sunk, with huge loss of life. Margot Turner was the sole survivor on a raft. She was picked up by a Japanese boat, brought to Muntok and entered prison camp.

In April 1943, Margot Turner, QA Sister Mary Cooper, Olga Neubronner from the Singapore St John's Ambulance Corps, Sister Janet (Jenny) MacAlister and the wife of Dutch doctor Holweg were placed into the Palembang Jail for six months on no known charge. Mary Cooper and Olga Neubronner were weakened by their imprisonment and did not survive the War. Sister Margot Turner later became Brigadier Dame Margot Turner, Chief British Army Nurse.

As a young journalist, author and filmmaker Lavinia Warner worked on the preparation of an episode of *This is Your Life* featuring Dame Margot. Lavinia interviewed many camp survivors for the production, including Dr Margaret Thomson. In the late 1970's, Lavinia Warner accompanied Dame Margot Turner and her fellow prisoner Australian Army Nurse Betty Jeffrey to Sumatra to visit the former prison camp sites in Palembang and Lubuk Linggau. A documentary film, *Women in Captivity* was made detailing this journey. Lavinia Warner later wrote *Women Beyond the Wire* and made the TV series *Tenko* which is based on these camps.

Dr Margaret Thomson and her husband, a Prisoner of War on the Burma Railway, both survived the War. They returned to Malaya to establish health facilities for rubber workers. Dr Thomson died in Scotland in 1982. Her dedicated work in the face of difficulty is a great inspiration and we were glad to give information about her to the school students.

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