

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



Singapore Far East Moon Rose

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**Mural of Vivian Bullwinkel at the Australian Army Nurses' Memorial
in the Remembrance Garden, at the Repatriation Hospital**

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June 2026

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

Pilgrimages

One of the many definitions of a Pilgrimage in the New Shorter Oxford Dictionary states that it is: "a journey made for respectful, nostalgic, or sentimental reasons", and a Pilgrim, similarly, is "one who travels for respectful or sentimental reasons."

Those of us who have made Pilgrimages to visit our loved one's graves must surely agree with these sentiments and also feel a profound sense of sadness at the loss of so many young lives. While we are rightly shocked at the sight of the graves of so many young men in the military cemeteries of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in various countries in the Far East, we should also remember the thousands of civilian men, women and children whose remains lie under the waves, or have no known grave, or lie in the corner of a graveyard somewhere in a far-off land.

Judy Balcombe's report in the March edition of this newsletter told us about the Annual Pilgrimage of relatives to Muntok on Bangka Island, to attend Memorial Services on 15th and 16th February in memory of all those who were killed on Radji Beach, and those who died in captivity in prison camps in Sumatra. We must never forget the awful tragedy which unfolded as the little ships, evacuating people from Singapore before the Fall, were sunk and thousands died in such truly horrifying circumstances.

We also remember special dates each year such as Armistice Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Sunday, which we attend, making long or short journeys to remember those who died in battle; in military and civilian prison camps; in the air and at sea. We journey to attend special Services, such as those held in Kranji CWG Cemetery in Singapore, to commemorate and remember those who suffered after 15th February 1942, the date on which Singapore fell – and the world changed for so many people. Or, on a happier note, we journey as Pilgrims to celebrate V-J Day on the 15th August each year, the date on which peace finally came to the Far East and the world. But whichever way we remember these dates - they are all special Pilgrimages and we travel as Pilgrims to take part.

But as the definition tells us, Pilgrimages need not only be made on special dates, they can take place at any time and at any place to visit a grave or follow in loved one's footsteps.

[See "A Pilgrimage to Thailand" Ps. 23 & 24]

Centrifuge Project fundraising.

Book Sales.

We are pleased to announce that the sales of Judy's book, "The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra," are going well. Please order a book from **Judy Balcombe** in Australia, or from **Roger Willbourn** or **Rosemary Fell** in the UK if you would like a copy to help with the Centrifuge Project.

To date £650 has been raised in the U.K. and sent to **Judy** for the Centrifuge project - £450 from book sales and donations, plus a donation of £250 from MVG funds. We still have books to sell in the UK at a cost of £20 each, but they are going fast!

So far, the total raised by **Judy** and **Arlene** from donations in the U.K. and Australia is **AUS \$36,000**. This includes money left over from the 'Weary' Dunlop Medical Research Foundation money after the purchase of 2 portable defibrillators, & from the following events:-

“21 Hearts Donations

Adding daily to this total are donations from the audiences after each performance of the play, “21 Hearts”.

“41 Club Talk

On 21st May, Judy gave a talk to the “41 Club”, a philanthropic Men’s Club in Melbourne. The Club has voted to donate AUS \$2,000 to the Centrifuge Project, and will run raffles throughout this year to raise money. They bought 12 copies of **Judy’s** book to give as door prizes on the day of her talk, and want to buy 20 more copies to sell. [See P.30]

RSL Film Show

In July, the RSL in Wangaratta is selling tickets for the showing of the film, “The Finding of the Montevideo Maru” and holding a Raffle. The proceeds for both are being donated to the Muntok Red Cross.

“Hats for Humanity”

Judy is selling tickets for her “Hats for Humanity” show on 25th July. So far about 50 people have expressed an interest in attending the event, and it is hoped that the final figure will reach 100+. The event will take place at The Duckboard Function Centre at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Melbourne on Saturday 25th July 2026 at 2 p.m.

Weather permitting, the plans are to meet at the Australian Army Nurses’ Memorial in the Remembrance Garden near the large mural of Vivian Bullwinkel, and then move to the Duckboard Function Centre for a presentation about Bangka Island and the work of the Muntok Red Cross, followed by afternoon tea and the showing of **Arlene Bennett’s** wonderful vintage Christian Dior hats. For those unable to attend, but would like to make a contribution towards the purchase of the Centrifuge, an important piece of equipment for the Muntok Red Cross, there is a ‘Supporter’s Ticket’ available using the QR Code. [See the Flyer on P.4]

The Centrifuge Project

Judy has given more information about the Centrifuge Project on P.5.

Message from Arlene Bennett on 29th March

Judy and **David Balcombe** and I went to Wangaratta on Saturday 29th March for the unveiling of the busts of two local wartime nurses, **Caroline Ennis** and **Dorothy (‘Bud’) Elmes**, who were evacuated from Singapore on the SS Vynner Brooke. It was a great event and so many people came, including the very elderly younger sister of **Caroline Ennis** who lost her life on a life raft with **Matron Pashke**, other nurses and children who floated away from land. **Dorothy Elmes** was massacred on Radji Beach on Bangka Island.

Address and Oration given on Radji Beach on 16th February 2026-05-21

The “Call to Commemoration” Address at the Radji Beach Service this year was written by prominent Australian author and historian **Lynette Ramsay Silver**. It was read by **Georgina Banks**, great niece of **Dorothy ‘Bud’ Elmes** who was massacred on Bangka Island.

We also thank **Arlene Bennett** who wrote and gave the Oration at the Service. [See Ps. 18-20]

The Adam Park Project in Singapore

Those of you who will remember visiting the Adam Park Project (and Sime Road Camp) with **Jon Cooper**, during **MVG’s** visit to Singapore several years ago now, will be pleased to learn that the Singapore Government has decided to declare the Estate as a ‘Site of Heritage’ and placed a preservation order on all 19 houses. As this was **Jon’s** project while he was in Singapore, he has been asked by various development agencies to help tender bids to the government to run the estate. **Jon** hopes that in addition to protecting the archaeological inheritance, they will establish virtual museums, tours and a virtual archive in some way.

Since returning home **Jon** has completed his PhD thesis entitled, “The Tartan Tenko: life and death of the Scottish soldier in Singapore 1937-1942” and now works as the Heritage Officer for a group of independent schools in Edinburgh. His thesis can be read online at:-

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/83013/1/2021CooperJonathanPhD.pdf>

Armed Forces' life saving dogs of was immortalised in memorial

The stories of 4 dogs who have served in the Armed Forces were printed in an article in the Sunday Telegraph on 15th March 2026. These dogs have each been heroes to their keepers and carried out heroic wartime deeds. The National Military Working Dogs Memorial Charity (NMWDM) has now completed a monument in Holywell, North Wales to honour these dogs. The monument features 4 plinths set around a domed cenotaph. Each plinth is topped by a bronze statue of one of the 4 dogs chosen for their bravery and camaraderie.

The south plinth is occupied by **Judy**, representing the Royal Navy. She was a liver-and-white English Pointer and received the Dickin Medal for her wartime bravery, and is the only dog to have been registered as **a Prisoner of War in a prison camp in Sumatra.**

Her heart warming and amazing story is told in several books about military dogs, but there are two books which tell only Judy's story. The first, published in 2014, is called "**Judy, A Dog in a Million**" by **Damien Lewis**, & the second, in 2025, is by **Robert Weintraub** & entitled, "**No Better Friend.**" Both worth reading.



A FAMILY HEIRLOOM

H.E. Jo Tyndall was New Zealand's High Commissioner in Singapore from February 2019 – 2023. The story of finding the diary of her great uncle Gordon Burt has been recorded by the Asia Media Centre, and can be read on: <https://www.asiamediacentre.org.nz>

Born in Dunedin in New Zealand, **Gordon Burt** fled from Singapore just before the Fall. He studied engineering at the University of Liverpool in the U.K. and in 1925 joined the British Arctic Expedition to Svalbard as the Chief Engineer. By 1937 he was working in Singapore as Assistant Lubrication Engineer for the Asiatic Petroleum Co. in Collyers Quay. He joined the Singapore Volunteers Armoured Cars Company and married in June 1938.

In 1939 he worked with the British Navy, Army and Air Force as an expert in fuel and lubricants. In his diary in 1941, he recorded that, "...a great deal of my time was spent at the 4 aerodromes Seletar, Kallang, Sembawang and Tengah. I was present during an air raid on Kallang... By the end of January 1942 things were becoming pretty grim in Singapore. The greatest tragedy was the Naval Base...

My work was virtually finished and I took the opportunity of asking Singapore Management for a transfer to Sumatra or Java where specialist knowledge and experience could be of further assistance to the War Effort.

I suggested also that I might be permitted to join the RAF, as a technical officer was required in Sumatra, particularly an officer with a knowledge of fuels, lubricants and refuelling equipment....

On 10th February (1942) we left Singapore. Within a few minutes of our casting off there was an air raid on the docks and the noise of the bombs bursting on the wharves, in the water and among the go-downs was terrible... a city at that moment being raped with bombs, guns and fire and all for some stupid object called 'Co-prosperity.'"

Burt's escape from Singapore was successful and he eventually ended up in Sumatra, unfortunately as a civilian internee. He was initially imprisoned at Palembang before being transferred to Muntok internment camp. He died from malnutrition and beriberi on 28th January 1945 and is buried in Muntok's now derelict graveyard.

Hats for Humanity

Saturday 25 July 2026, 2pm

A gala afternoon of fabulous vintage
Christian Dior hats, food and bubbles

A fundraiser to support the purchase of vital blood processing equipment by the Muntok Red Cross on Bangka island, Indonesia. This project commemorates the close ties forged with the people of Bangka Island and is in memory of the 21 Australian Army Nurses killed on Radji Beach, Bangka Island during WW2 nearly 85 years ago, those lost at sea and in prison camp.

Venue, The Duckboard Function Centre
Repatriation Hospital, Heidelberg, Victoria

Book via TryBooking Hats for Humanity or with QR

<https://www.trybooking.com/DKXGY>



Please join us for this wonderful afternoon



Muntok Red Cross Bangka Island Centrifuge Project

Friends of Bangka Island has been helping the Muntok Red Cross on Bangka Island, Indonesia since the onset of Covid in 2020, fundraising to provide a Covid transport ambulance and other medical equipment and this year, arranging the purchase of 5 portable external defibrillators, the first in Muntok town.

Our project this year is to help purchase a Thermo 8 6 bag floor centrifuge for the Muntok Red Cross to enable spinning bags of collected blood donations. The blood is used for surgery, dialysis and treatment of Dengue Fever in seriously ill children. Bangka Island is an endemic Dengue Fever area and 2 children, aged 8 and 10, died in Muntok in January and February this year.

Currently, blood collected by the Muntok Red Cross needs to be driven to the hospital to be centrifuged then returned to the Muntok Red Cross for distribution across the large rural West Bangka District. This leads to delays in delivery and treatment, which will be improved by the Muntok Red Cross having its own centrifuge.

Friends of Bangka Island is a small group who help to arrange the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service in Muntok each February 15 and 16 in memory of World War 2 victims in this area. Our group comprises 5 family members of the 21 Australian Army Nurses killed on Radji Beach near Muntok on February 16, 1942, 2 family members of civilian internees who died in Muntok in 1944 and the past president of the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre (ANMC).

Friends of Bangka Island is conducting garage sales, talking to groups and holding Hats for Humanity at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Melbourne on July 25 to help raise \$75,000 to purchase the Centrifuge. Your support would be very much appreciated, thank you.



OUR DOCTORS
A POEM BY EDWINA SMITH

Cannons, bombs and bullets,
mark battles won or lost.
Shattered lives, torn and scarred
are left to count the cost.
No matter what the cause may be
or where the fault is found,
tears are shed on either side;
a haunting, mournful sound.

For those behind the trenches,
brave soldiers just the same.
Our Doctors didn't hold a gun,
nor did they seek to blame.
They battled hard against the foe
with scalpel, skill and care
and always made us very proud
no matter when or where.

There was one, a country lad
of sporting strength and size
With a sense of purpose,
compassionate and wise.
In Nineteen Thirty-Nine
our country was at war.
A surgeon he became
and joined the Army Corps.

He served on distant lands
where war was far away,
but this was soon to change
when Tojo joined the fray.
Curtin saw the peril
and called them home by sea.
With danger ever closer,
the worst was yet to be.

'Weary' and Our Doctors
now prisoners of war,
held captive by a foe
they'd never seen before.
Through jungle, swamp and rock
a railway line was built.
Their captives showed no mercy
without a shred of guilt.

Pushed beyond exhaustion.
Torment laid on so thick.
Worn down to skin and bone
and forced to work when sick.
Death, disease and torture
loomed over night and day.
What those men endured
no words could ever say.

Our Doctors gathered round,
perfecting all they knew,
with dwindling supplies
but plenty of bamboo!
They did their level best
to stem the soaring rate
of weak and dying men
Succumbing to their fate.

We'll not forget Our Doctors
who faced a dreadful time.
So many lives were lost
along that wretched line.
They rose above the madness,
attending to their men.
We honour all who suffered
through brutal days back then.

10th March 2026.



Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop

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)- contd.

2. 14th January 1946 – Letter to The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies

This letter was concerning the 100th anniversary, on 24th December, of Labuan being in the possession of Great Britain. AHPH gave a summary of important dates in the history of Labuan from 24th December 1848 including:-

“1.1.1942 Captured and occupied by Japanese forces.”

3. 8th February 1946 – Report submitted to The Under-Secretary of State, Eastern Department, Colonial Office, London

The report detailed the months before the Japanese invaded Labuan on 1st January 1942, details of the invasion and notes on the Japanese occupation.

Below are extracts from his report:-

“Sir,

1. *I have the honour to forward herewith in duplicate a report on affairs in Labuan.*
2. *The report is divided into two sections:-*
 - (i) *Introduction, setting out brief particulars of the island of Labuan and certain measures taken before the outbreak of war with Japan.*
 - (ii) *A record of events from the 8th December, 1941, to the 1st of January, 1942, (the date when the Japanese captured Labuan) with brief notes on the Japanese occupation.”*

-
7. *I apologise for submitting this report to the Colonial Office. In present circumstances, however, I cannot communicate officially with officers in the Far East, nor do I know whether Labuan is any longer one of the Straits Settlements.*

I have the honour to be, Sir, Your obedient servant

(signed)

*A H P Humphrey
Malayan Civil Servant
formerly Resident, Labuan.*

.....

“January 1st 1942 (New Year's Day, Thursday)

Mr. Johnson was at Daat Island en route to North Borneo. I was informed that wireless communications with Limbang via Lawas had ceased the previous evening and that no contact could be established.

M.V. Subok was due to leave Labuan for Limbang with rice. I postponed her departure. She was loaded and alongside the wharf at Labuan. Instructions for immobilising the vessel were repeated. I suspected that the Japanese had returned to Brunei and proceeded thence to Limbang and I telegraphed accordingly to North Borneo and Singapore. This surmise was later known to be correct.

At 7.30 p.m. coastal watch from the harbour reported to me that Pappan Island lighthouse had signalled “unidentified vessel approaching”. It was raining hard and pitch dark.

The revised emergency scheme was operated immediately. I went to my quarters in the town, collected the Government Telegraph Code and other papers and drove in my car to the Cable Station. The signal from Pappan Island lighthouse was repeated to Singapore and North Borneo.

A Police constable arrived at the cable station (sent by the Chief of Police) reporting that Japanese troops were disembarking at the Government jetty and at Messrs Harrisons and Crosfield's wharves from motor vessels belonging to private companies in Brunei.

Mr. Henderson did not appear. Messrs Wicksteed, Meredith and Taylor left, as arranged, by car en route to Lubok Temiang.

Further police messengers brought information that the Japanese troops were seizing Government buildings in the town. I telegraphed estimates of the strength and equipment of the enemy to Singapore en clair and destroyed the code book.

Mr. Lawrie destroyed the transmitter. A police constable reported that Japanese troops were only a few hundred yards away from the station. I telegraphed to Singapore that our wireless had been destroyed and that we were about to destroy the cable.

Mr Lawrie told his Asiatic operator (who had remained calmly at his work) to leave by a back window, so as to avoid the road. Mr. Lawrie and myself were then alone at the station. We fused the wiring system and wrecked some of the equipment of the cables.

About 8.10 p.m. noises outside indicated the arrival of troops. They burst in the doors and captured us.

It transpired later that Mr. Henderson was captured near the harbour while trying to bring me information about the landing. The Chief of Police was captured at the police station whence he had organised messengers to report developments to me at the cable station. Dr. Ou Kok Boo was captured the same evening at the Government Hospital. Messrs Wicksteed, Meredith and Taylor escaped to North Borneo, but were captured in that territory a few weeks later.

The numbers of the Straits Settlements currency notes destroyed were as follows:-

.....”

There is also a section at the end of the report entitled:-

“THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION January 1st 1942 to June 10th, 1945”

(AHPH would have obtained some of this information straight after his release from Batu Lintang. He spent about 2 weeks in a military hospital on Labuan and was visited there by hundreds of local people).

“Reprisals were taken by the enemy against myself, Mr. Henderson, Mr Lawrie and Inspector Yeo Kok Hoe. The three Europeans were exhibited crammed into a cage on the Court House veranda from 11 p.m. on January 1st, to 4.30 p.m. on January 2nd. I was hit several times for “burning oil.” Inspector Yeo Kok Hoe was beaten severely.

Japanese troops looted European bungalows and some shop-houses.

The Europeans were taken to Brunei on January 4th and put in gaol there.

During the occupation the Japanese constructed air-strips on the island, using local labour, British and other prisoners of war, labourers from Java. Hundreds of these labour forces died. Some 300 white prisoners died at this work between October, 1944, and March, 1945. Only 650 survivors of a Javanese labour force, thought to have numbered 3,000, were alive when the Allies recaptured the island.

Many local labourers died of overwork and malnutrition.

Inspector Yeo Kok Hoe was tortured and murdered by the Japanese Kempeitai at the end of May or the beginning of June 1945.

A Chinese merchant, Loon Ghee, of Labuan, was tortured for four days before he died in Jesselton gaol. He is thought to have been connected with the anti-Japanese uprising in Jesselton in October 1943, when guerrillas from the interior killed many Japanese and almost recaptured the town.

The President of the Labuan Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Mr Teo How Tack, who was in 1941 chairman of the pro-Chiang Kai Shek China Relief Fund, was murdered by the Japanese in 1945 (I think) with his relative Mr Too Kok Meng.

Father Untenberger with other Roman Catholic priests were murdered by the Japanese in North Borneo.

The most reliable persons to be consulted regarding affairs during the Japanese occupation would be Dr Ou Kok Boo and Mr Ong Teng Chong (formerly Clerk-in-Charge at the Labuan Post Office). Both were at Labuan throughout the occupation and are reliable reporters.

Many persons surreptitiously assisted prisoners of war at Labuan notably Mr Fu Tong Chye (a Hailem merchant).

Many Labuan people, Chinese and Malays, took very grave risks to assist myself and other Europeans, who had lived at Labuan, while we were in captivity in Brunei, North Borneo and Sarawak. Gifts of cash and food came at every opportunity often in dangerous circumstances. I was in the hands of the Japanese secret police (Kempeitai) at various times for about six months in all, owing to my activities immediately prior to the Japanese occupation.

Labuan Island was heavily bombarded from sea and air in June, 1945, by Allied Forces. The whole town was obliterated and not a single shop-house left standing. All other permanent and semi-permanent buildings were utterly destroyed. The devastation could not have been more complete. All Government buildings and records (including land titles and registers) have been destroyed. Thanks to messages dropped by aircraft the local people evacuated certain areas and it was reported to me in September, 1945, (when I returned to the Island for a few days after being released from a camp in Kuching, Sarawak) not more than 50 local people were killed in the five days campaign that terminated with the reoccupation of the Island by the 9th Australian Division under Major-General Wooton.

When I left Labuan at the end of September, 1945, there were said to be 25,000 Australian troops there, units of the American Navy, and 900 planes. I was told that there were more mechanical vehicles there than had even been on Singapore Island.

The large forces massed in preparation for the recapture of Borneo and Singapore were relieved of further fighting by the capitulation of Japan on August 15th, 1945.

Signed

AHP Humphrey

6th February, 1946”

(The date of the covering letter sent to the Colonial Office was 8th February, 1946. The report itself was dated 6th February, 1946).

4. 15th February 1946 – Report submitted to The Under-Secretary of State, Eastern Department, Colonial Office, London

On 15th February, 1946, AHPH sent another report to the Under-Secretary of State, Eastern Department, Colonial Office in London, entitled:-

“The Japanese Military Operations in Borneo in 1941 and 1942”

The report was 16 pages of typed foolscap paper. (The report itself was dated 12th February, 1946).

“15th February 1946

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith a report on the Japanese military operations in Borneo in 1941 and 1942.

The report covers operations throughout the Island of Borneo in the territories of British North Borneo, Labuan, Brunei, Sarawak and Dutch Borneo, and was compiled by myself during internment by interrogation of British and Dutch officials and others who were with me. The facts recorded were carefully checked and are, I think, accurate.”

(On Page 8)

“On New Year’s Day, 1942, a force of some 200 or more Japanese troops left Brunei in motor launches captured at Limbang and Brunei and proceeded across Brunei Bay to the Island of Labuan, arriving there about 7.30 p.m. The Resident, Labuan, was forewarned by prearranged signals from the lighthouse at Pappan Island and was able to cable details to Singapore and North Borneo before he destroyed the cable and wireless equipment on the island. The Japanese captured the town of Victoria and seized the Resident, the Settlement Engineer (Mr. J.A. Henderson) and the Manager of the Cable Company (Mr. J.G. Lawrie) the same evening.

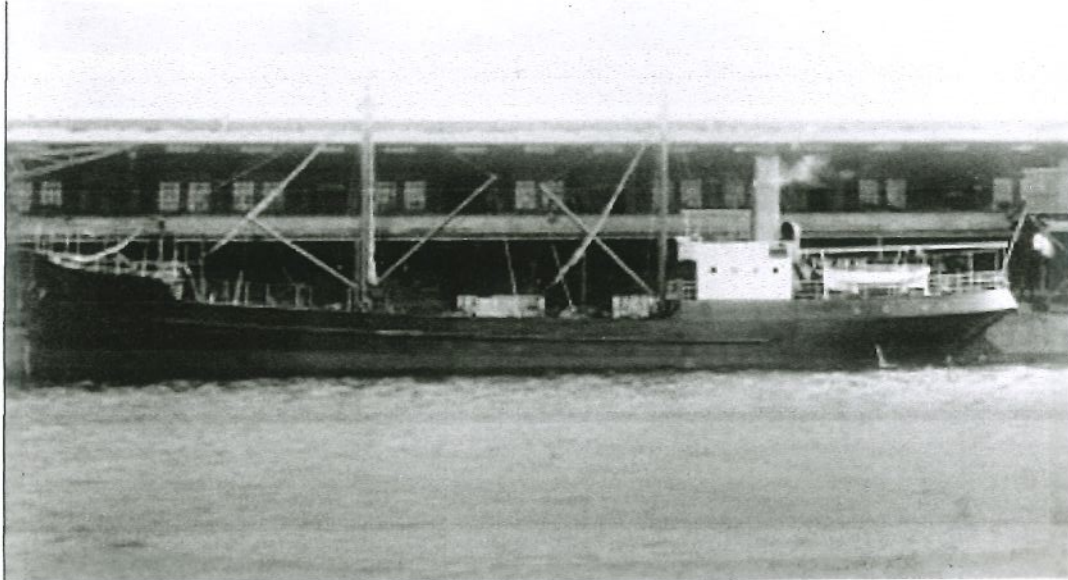
.....”

[To be continued].

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

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S.S. REDANG



It was clearly chaos on board the **"S.S. Redang"** according to **Mr. Robertson;**
"... After firing a few salvos and within 5 minutes of opening fire the ship was ablaze. Most of the people were forward where the third salvo landed. I was aft (the bridge ladder was on the after side) when the firing commenced and at once, with the assistance of several people on the after deck, commenced to get the starboard quarter lifeboat (built to carry 17 passengers) into the water. I think most of the people on the deck who were left alive got into this boat [which was the only lifeboat to get away from the ship]; the rest of the people either jumping overboard from the forward end of the ship, or being killed by shell fire..." (DR)*

Douglas Bank's view of the events was "... There were no incidents during the day's run except for three or four alerts and the following night was uninterrupted. At approximately 11.00 hours on Friday the 13th February, a reconnaissance plane appeared and circled over the ship and was leaving us unmolested. When she returned and circled us again, losing height, she released two bombs, which, however, fell well clear doing no damage and left us. At about 11.40 hours three destroyers appeared on the horizon steaming towards our course at right angles, until they were dead ahead when they turned sharply and steamed towards us. Beyond keeping a wary eye on these, we proceeded with lunch. It was then seen that two of the destroyers had approached to within about 1500 yards on our port bow, the third destroyer was standing off. One of the two destroyers fired two shots across our bows, whereupon shouts were made to the bridge to hoist the white flag, but this was not done. The volunteer 2nd engineer told me later that the 'Stop' was rung down from the bridge, and that he and the Chief Engineer (also a volunteer) were standing by for the order 'Go Astern', but as this had not been received when shells commenced hitting the ship, they decided to come up. The Chief Engineer was killed as he appeared above the engine room companion which was situated about the middle of the port alley-way. When the warning shots were fired the passengers on the upper deck took cover in these two alley-ways, the majority of the party being on the port side. I was on the starboard side, where protection was possibly a little better, but I was concussed by blast and, on coming to, found myself drenched with blood. On turning I found that **Pain**, who had been standing behind me, was no longer there. Shortly after this I was again concussed, and my only recollection was of following some other men into a lifeboat, still very dazed. By this time the ship was burning furiously and enveloped in smoke, and I think it can be taken that the casualties on the starboard side must have been

*DR= Mr. Duncan Robertson

very heavy, and those on the port side almost 100%. I was told that twenty seven shells were put into the ship, but this I cannot vouch for. I do think, however, that none hit her below the waterline because she was still visible and burning at nightfall. The Japs did not lower any boats.

A large lifeboat had been slung outboard on the lower deck. and this was later seen to have capsized, and there were many men in the water, presumably from those on the lower deck, none of whom were Cable & Wireless to my knowledge. The port side lifeboat was smashed by gun-fire and never lowered. The starboard lifeboat was cast adrift with about her normal complement of passengers which was seventeen. We drifted around picking up other survivors until we had thirty-three or thirty-four in the boat, and could not possibly take any more, as the boat was leaking badly, and only had three to four inches of freeboard..." **(Banks)**

A pre-war photo (above) shows the bridge ladder at the rear of the bridge and cabin structure as well as the portside lifeboats on davits towards the stern of the ship (the port quarter) and presumably there was another on the starboard side on davits towards the stern as well. The lifeboat "...chocked up on the foredeck..." referred to by **Mr. Robertson** (in his report included in the March edition) was probably an additional lifeboat taken aboard to cater for additional passengers during the evacuation. This foredeck lifeboat would have been damaged by shellfire since people "... were jumping overboard from the forward end of the ship...". The portside stern quarter lifeboat would have received the direct shellfire hits from the destroyers since they initially appeared on the port side of the '**S.S. Redang**'.

All this is pretty much confirmed in the **NIRC*** report "... the port lifeboat was broken by shellfire and was not used and the spare lifeboat carried on the foredeck was later seen capsized close alongside the ship. The starboard lifeboat got clear with 33 occupants including two badly wounded who died and some rescued from the sea..." **(NIRC*)**

It is also corroborated in the explanation of another Bata employee, **Cervinka**, to **Kos** in Muntok's internment camp whereby he explained that "... as their lifeboat was leaving the ship, **Cervinka** noticed that an officer was trying to lower another lifeboat, but the ropes were entangled and it was impossible. **Phlon** and **Smrzak** [two casualties in the sinking] were seen heading to that other lifeboat. The third lifeboat available was made useless as it was damaged by shelling..."

The log of the IJN destroyer '**Asagiri**' shows that, from the 13th to the 15th February 1942 it assisted the destroyers '**Yuri**' and '**Fubuki**' in attacking Allied shipping fleeing from Singapore and they sank four vessels (including, research has revealed, the auxiliary merchant ship **HMS Giang Bee**' on the evening of 13th February and the Chinese River Steamer '**Li Wo**' on 14th February after both ships had escaped from Singapore) with great loss of civilian life. This was a cruel mismatch in the extreme – these destroyers of the '**Fubuki**' class in the Imperial Japanese Navy were, at the time, amongst the biggest, fastest, and most advanced destroyers in the world at 2090 tons, capable of 38 knots and armed with six five inch guns, plus over thirty AA guns plus six powerful torpedo tubes. (www.combinedfleet.com)

Imperial Japanese Navy Destroyer "Asagiri"



*NIRC = Netherlands East Indies Red Cross - Palembang Internment Camp report 9/2/43

The unarmed little "**Redang**" did not stand a chance against two or three extremely powerful destroyers, each of four times its size and eight times its speed.

Mr. Robertson explains what happened in the case of the only lifeboat (the starboard quarter lifeboat) to get away from the ship:

"... I estimate that about 20 people were in the boat when we pulled away from the ship's side and, apart from a few burns here and there I managed to escape injury. We picked up another 13 people from the water until the boat was dangerously overloaded – amongst these were **Mr Thompson** [**Henry Thompson** was First Radio Officer on the ship] who was pulled over the stern of the boat by one of the Danish members of the crew [probably either **Jorgensen** or **Andersen**] and myself ... [there is then a detailed explanation of the injuries which resulted in the death of **Mr. H. Thompson**]"

The account of there being about 30 passengers who survived in a lifeboat (including four women and children) is restated widely (angelfire.com – archives of **John D. Stevenson AMI, Mar. E.** "Escape from Singapore" and "Sea Breeze").

Captain Rasmussen recorded "... I estimate 62 lives were lost in the attack, either killed by splinters, burned to death or drowned ... two young ladies said to be from Mansfield Co.'s Singapore Office were instantaneously killed by a direct hit while typing out the passenger list in the Chief Engineer's cabin. The Chief Officer, **Mr Riemise** (a Dane), the Chief Engineer, **Mr Dean** (of Straits Steamship Company) were also killed instantaneously, and most of the passengers who rushed below in the 'tween deck when the attack began, were killed either by splinters or burnt to death..." (www.merchantnavyofficers.com).

The identity of the two young women from Mansfield Co.'s Singapore office, mentioned by **Captain Rasmussen** would appear to have been two telephonists from Mansfield's who were travelling with their mother, **Mrs. George**.

Given that **Captain David Nelson** recorded that there were six children on board and the only record of children surviving are the two children of **Mr & Mrs Chong Kiat**, then we must assume that four children lost their lives in the attack on the ship and/or during the sinking.

One or two of these children would have been a daughter or two daughters of **Mrs George**. Elsewhere the number of people killed is stated to be 58 (**BM***) but, simple arithmetic based on **Mr. D. Robertson's** report of the some twenty 'deserters' making a late boarding suggests that up to 75 – 80 people lost their lives in the shelling and sinking. Of these the two largest groups would have been about twenty Australian (and Empire) soldiers plus some twenty men employed by Cable & Wireless Ltd.

Of the crew, the Danish Chief Officer and a British Lt (E), plus the five known Royal Navy/RNVR Ratings were killed. Interestingly, four out of five of the Able Seamen and Ordinary Seamen all came from Glasgow and Dundee and presumably stuck together as a group when they were assigned as crew from "**HMS Sultan**" (the shore base in Singapore) onto the undermanned merchant ships which were attempting to hurriedly evacuate people from Singapore prior to the Surrender.

The survivors from the ship amounted to less than a third of those on board. The NIRC report clearly states "... Concerning the 33 persons who were in the lifeboat, the following details are known:

- 2 died in the lifeboat (see above)
- 12 are in the male internment camp
- 3 Danes see above, released
- 2 Czechs, named, see above (this refers to **Plohn** and **Smrzak**)
- 4 released [researcher note: must be **Cervinka**, **Zelnicek** and two others?]
- 3 ladies in the female internment camp Palembang (Mrs. A. Laybourne, Mrs. N.W. Nailer & Mrs. E.M.C. Pugh)
- 1 Petty Officer [indecipherable word] Navy
- 3 Australian soldiers in the service camp Palembang [names known to **Lt. Cdr. J.N. Hancock**, RNVR (Malaya)]
- 3 British soldiers, as mentioned above

[Not mentioned in the above list – although they may be two of those in the 'released' list are '**Chong Kiat, wife and two children**' recorded as also being in the lifeboat personnel picked up by '**HMS Tapah**'.]

***BM** = **Billy McGee** on website mercantilemarine.org

It would seem that of those on board it was the people at the stern (rear) of the ship who survived whilst those in the engine room and those below decks and those at the front of the ship lost their lives from shells hitting the ship and being trapped by the burning of the ship. **Mr. Robertson** again:

*"...**Mr. Thompson** lost consciousness about 6 or 7 p.m.; before that he told me that he had been hit whilst running aft and that a lot of people were killed on the foredeck including **Mr. Rickwood** of C & W..." (DR*)*

As stated above, two lifeboats, one dedicated to the Australian soldiers and the other one for the Cable & Wireless employees, were damaged by shell fire or the burning of the ship and were never launched or immediately sank. Therefore, the deaths in these two groups were very high.

*"... It was only possible to lower one of the lifeboats and thirty-two survivors from the attack abandoned **Redang**. It took all that remained of the day and all of the next to reach Sumatra whereupon the unfortunate survivors were captured by the Japanese..." (BM* [See previous page] possibly quoting **Captain Rasmussen**).*

In Muntok Internment Camp **Messrs Cervinka** and **Zelnicek** told **Mr. Kos** *"... The only surviving lifeboat carried 33 people. The crew was rowing to as far as possible from the ship which caught a big fire in the meantime. None of them saw the other lifeboat around so it probably never successfully left the sinking ship. They were taking turns in rowing. **Strangfeld** was sitting with his head down and had his briefcase by his legs. His neighbour was, however, complaining about it, and after a while he threw it into the water. **Strangfeld** died in the afternoon of 13th February, and it took a while before the others realised it as he was sitting motionless with his head down. The captain, who was present in that boat, decided to throw the body overboard. Before they did it **Cervinka** cut off a small pouch that **Strangfeld** had around his neck and kept it. They did not search **Strangfeld's** pockets, though. While they were rowing another man and a child died. They rowed all day and night, before they reached a beach on 14th February..."*

The mention by the Batamen of a child dying in the lifeboat is the only record of that death of a child. It is unknown whose family lost a loved one at this point.

Douglas Banks fills in this part of the events *"... The Cable & Wireless personnel in this boat were **La Nauxe** (sic), **Tisshaw**, **Banks Hunter**, **Gardiner**, **Furneaux**, **Worster**, **A.N. & Mrs A.N. Laybourne**, **E.B. Laybourne**, **Hoy** and **Mrs Nailer**. The Captain instructed us to row in a westerly direction, saying we should make land in four to five hours, running as we were with a strong current. After four hours, we enquired where we were as no land was in sight, to which he replied there were trees ahead, and we carried on. Shortly after this a passenger died from wounds and he was buried over the side. He was the Manager of Bata's Shoe Company in Singapore. (**Mr. Thompson** of the Marconi International Marine Company of Singapore died the following morning at approximately 11.00 hours and was buried in a similar manner). After an hour or so the 'trees' resolved themselves into four Japanese destroyers and two cruisers. As we approached, three of the destroyers weighed anchor and left to intercept another ship which we could see following up on the '**Redang's**' course. Although they passed us at about one and a half cables, they ignored us. At this time six Hurricanes were seen coming in to land, presumably at Palembang, and upon this the two cruisers and the fourth destroyer left hurriedly, also without paying us any attention. We continued rowing through the night, eventually making landfall at about 14.00 hours on Saturday – very exhausted and hungry. In spite of this, the only food we could spare was two tablespoons of brackish water from a small keg from the lifeboat and one Marie biscuit per head. We could find no water or food, and it was necessary to cut down palm trees in order to get the nuts for the water, and the tree hearts for food. The water in the beaker was sufficient for about three days at about two tablespoons per head per day. The mouldy ships biscuits were sufficient for about two small handfuls each per day for the same time. The nights were made hideous by sandflies and mosquitoes and sleep was impossible. [To be continued].*

***DR= Mr. Duncan Robertson, Singapore Deputy Manager, Marconi International Marine Communication Co. Ltd.**

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.

Boards plane for Australia – To Labuan where overnight – To Merauke for 45 minutes – On to Townsville where overnight – On to Brisbane where overnight – On again to Sydney where met and taken home to “Joylen”, Louisa Road, Long Nose Point.

Wednesday September 26th 1945. (35th day after peace).

I woke up in misery and was quite ill long before daylight with D & V & Colic.

..... However, I got up and dressed and went down to breakfast and drank a cup of tea and after returned to the bedroom and lay down.

During the morning a knock came to the door and one of the boys carried in luggage followed by a European woman internee who apparently was allocated to **Elsie's** bed. She had been in hospital and was quite inoffensive though, of course, I wished I could have been left in peace.

Dick duly arrived and came up and found me prostrated. However, I put on my dress and went down to lunch..... I did not eat anything but even so was overcome with colic and had to retire. After lunch **Dick** came up and ordered me to hospital and suggested I came to the Mess at K.K. where the nurses could look after me and I could have the comfort of a room to myself..... I gratefully accepted and **Dick** returned to his office and promised to call for me on his way home.....

Finally about 5 p.m. **Dick** arrived and I went off in his car to K.K. where a room was ready with bathroom attached and sitting room next door. **Dick** brought me yards of sulphaguaridine tablets and I started to eat them at the rate of 15 – 4 hourly..... There were 2 amahs both very kind. I felt rotten but I was very glad to be at peace instead of in a ward.

Thursday September 27th 1945. (36th day after peace).

I had a fairly good night but felt very ill indeed this morning..... **Dick** called to see me and sent someone up to take a blood film and leucocyte count..... I was content to lie in bed and drink barley water and had difficulty in swallowing my sulphaguaridine. The Matron came up several times and brought me flowers and books and a piece of material for a dress and sewing cotton etc. She stayed and told me her difficulties as Acting Matron during the Japanese occupation when a Jap Matron had been put in charge. She is a nice little thing – **S.N. Dawson** – and very kind. An Australian Red Cross Visitor – one **Miss Taylor** – also called and brought me a tin of boiled sweets. **Dick** was in at lunch time and again in the evening and so I had no time to be lonely. I felt better as the day progressed and certainly the diarrhoea was checked.

Friday September 28th 1945. (37th day after peace).

Today I felt a good deal better though surprisingly washed out. However, I had an egg and a little toast with no ill effects. I had a visit from **Dugdale** today – the old blighter – and he lent me some journals, the first I've seen for 4 years. **Dick** was in and out several times and told me of the arrival of a **Col Vickers** who is to take over the D.M.S. from **Dick**..... I began to walk about my end of the verandah to get my feet going. **Col. Vickers** is to occupy the room next to mine.

Saturday September 29th 1945. (38th day after peace).

I am much better today and am enjoying my meals – fish, eggs etc. Spent an hour sitting up in a chair. Had usual visits from **Dick**. **Dugdale** called to ask if I wished to join the Mess – silly I thought as I hope to get a plane on Monday. However I agreed. **Miss Taylor** and the Matron called and also **Cathy Boudville** who was to have joined the staff here to morrow but is crying off – together with **Mrs. Syddall** with some flowers and **Mrs. Whalen** was in too for a short time.

Sunday September 30th 1945. (39th day after peace).

I had hoped to go with **Dick** to Johore today, but **Mrs. Whalen** had not arrived with my dressing gown by midday when **Dick** was ready to go. **Mrs. Whalen** duly arrived in the afternoon and took me out in her taxi to the Goodwood and to the Airport to arrange an air passage.

In the late afternoon **Dick** took me to see **Miss McKinnen** at the Alexandra Hospital. We just missed **Gracie Fields** who had been visiting there. We must have spent an hour talking to **Miss McKinnen** who was very thin, but who did not seem to me to be abnormal mentally as I had heard.

She told us all about her adventures of the past 3½ years, and said she had been pretty well till a few months ago when she got malaria and then typhoid bowled her over..... We went back to K.K. and I had supper with the Mess and met **Col. Vickers**, an ugly but probably efficient man who seemed a bit shy but quite kind.....

I went to bed soon after supper and **Dick** came in to say "Goodnight." He and **Father Moran** are trying to get me an air passage now.

Monday October 1st 1945. (40th day after peace).

I visited "Raffles" today in a car borrowed by the Matron for me..... I waited ages to see **Capt. Walker** the officious red headed RAPWI officer with whom I had already had words. In the meantime I visited **Mal** and **MacDuff** and found the former convalescent from her dengue. Indeed she trimmed my hair whilst I waited. Finally RAPWI officer turned up out of "conference" and he was now quite polite. I had apparently been spoken of by **Lady Louise** and between her efforts and **Dick's** and **Father Moran's** the air passage was arranged. I was to go to the 2nd 14th A.G.H. at St. Patrick's to spend the night and to go off by R.A.A.F. tomorrow morning. This was most exciting news and I bade farewell and rushed back to K.K. **Dick** was told when he came in to lunch and said he would take me out to the A.G.H. after office. **Mrs. Whalen** arrived but would not come in so I excused myself and went out to see her..... She promised to come to the A.G.H. this evening or to the Air Port in the a.m. to receive my Malayan money and to bring the dressing gown, and she dashed off in her taxi.

I spent the rest of the afternoon ringing the A.G.H. to confirm, packing and having tea..... Then **Dick** and I drove off to the 2nd 14th at St. Patrick's. **Dick** went in with me and carried my luggage up to the ward where I was given a bed and then kissed his cheek as he kissed mine for the first and probably last time of our acquaintance. He then drove off and I ascended to the ward. It was full of the **Australian Military Sisters from Sumatra and Mrs. L.S.**

Again I had just missed **Gracie Fields** who had left a basket of flowers in the ward. The Sister on duty got me a tray of supper as I was too late for the ward meal and I spent the evening listening to **Mrs L.S.** and the radio..... Finally we composed ourselves to sleep about 11 p.m. but the Night Sister walked round all night with torches and kept me from sleeping. In any case I was too excited to sleep – with the prospect of home before me. Just before we had settled down the O.C. – **Sammy Langford** – appeared to see me..... It appeared that no one was going in tomorrow's plane from the hospital and that it was a gesture of hospitality – my spending the night there. It was very kind of them and I expressed my thanks, I hope, cordially but I could not help thinking how much nicer it would have been to have stayed at the K.K. and gone down to the Air Port in a taxi in the morning.

Tuesday October 2nd 1945. (41st day after peace).

I was called early and rose and dressed and was given a beautiful breakfast on a tray and then a car came for me driven by a soldier. We got to the Airport about 7 a.m. and after a wait they told me where the plane was and my driver took me there and deposited me beside it and went off. After another long wait during which time a number of men in uniform and a couple of R.A.A.F. Sisters in slacks and jackets – a different uniform from those in the 2nd 14th – arrived. Finally we got loaded in and took off about 9.30 a.m. – about 15 in all..... We flew till about 2.30 p.m. and came down then at Labuan..... At Labuan it was dazzlingly hot and we crawled out and were loaded into jeeps and

ambulances and driven to the hospital compound. There we had a bit of a wait in a very hot tent and a roll call and were then moved to our quarters. Mine was the Sisters' Ward and I was the only one sent there. The Sister on duty was not pleased to see me and rang up the Administration who probably told her I was a doctor for she was quite amicable thereafter and indeed friendly. I had a shower and washed out my clothes and had a cool drink and a bit of a rest, and then a young priest was brought in and introduced by **Sister Clarke**. He was quite a nice young man and we discussed the war and his experiences with P.O.W.s and the behaviour of the Nips etc. In the midst of our talk the other sister appeared with my evening meal – at about 5 p.m.! However, I was hungry and enjoyed it. The priest refused food but sat on the next bed and continued to talk whilst I ate salmon and asparagus and stewed fruit and bread and butter. After he went **Sister Clarke** came and suggested that I might find it fun to run around in a jeep before sundown. She told me **Lady Louise** and her A.D.C. were here on a visit. **Lady Louise** was to address a meeting at 6 p.m. and had said she'd like to see me if she had time, as she remembered me at Singapore. We thought we'd be back before she came, if indeed she did come and I did not feel I should go over to call on her. Thus **Sister C** and I went off in our jeep and had a pleasant drive round the island seeing the landing beach where the Australians attacked, and the old memorials etc. The driver joined in our conversation in an Australian manner. His name was **Eric Pouson** and he gave me a telephone number to ring up his father when I got to Sydney. When we got back to the ward, 2 Red Cross workers appeared and gave me a bundle of magazines for the journey and **Sister Clarke** gave me a knitted blanket as I had lost my pullover. There were only 2 other patients in the whole 20-40 bed tent. I went to bed early and slept very well.

Wednesday October 3rd 1945. (42nd day after peace).

Was called in the dark and got dressed and had tea and toast Then I was collected by jeep and rejoined the rest of our passengers at the plane. We took off as soon as dawn broke. The Sisters came on with us as far as Morotai. The journey was uneventful and we came down at Morotai about noon. We walked up to the Red Cross Hut and had a cup of tea..... The orderly at the hut said laconically that he hoped we'd be alright as they had lost 6 "kites" lately. We took off again about 12.40 p.m. and did not reach our next stop BIAK till about 5 – 5.30 p.m. There I was collected by a young R.A.A.F. Officer and taken to the hut nearby which was the Officer's Mess where it was proposed that I spend the night as the hospital was 6 miles away. I was willing to spend the night anywhere! I was introduced to the others who seemed rather stiff and my young Officer showed me the bath and lav room and apologized for the lack of mattress and sheets. There was a canvas bunk with a net and 2 Army blankets. He then drove me to the canteen and lent me his cutlery and plate to have a meal – camp pie, tinned veges and dried apricots which was very welcome. It was now dark and we went back to the Mess where I joined the men who were playing bridge. I felt my presence was a bit of a burden and so I went to bed though it was barely 7.30 p.m. The bunk as comfortable but I was restless. I could have gone to a cinema show but felt too tired to sit up in a chair.

Thursday October 4th 1945. (43rd day after peace).

My nice young Officer – **Brackwell** I think his name was – called me about 5 a.m. and I quickly dressed and he took me by jeep to the canteen for breakfast (scrambled eggs and bread and marmalade and tea) and then to the plane. The rest of the passengers were at the canteen and we took off about dawn. I was the only woman and had been since Morotai but **Calette** and **Darge** were both civilians from Singapore Sime Road Camp and young **Lieut. Tooke** was very good about luggage etc. and **Capt. Ward** solicitous. The journey was very good – not a bit rough and we came down at Merauke about noon. There we had Peters Ice Cream Cup and sandwiches and tea at the Red Cross and there was even a "Ladies" along a conspicuous track. We took off again in about 45 minutes and made Townsville about 4.30 p.m.

Back in Australia at last! A very senior R.A.A.F. Officer met us there and took us across the strip to the Red Cross Hut where about 4-5 women had a grand welcome for the 13 of us! There was a table decorated with flowers and a welcome home card at each

place. We were served with a lovely meal – tomato soup, fried fish and vegetables and fruit salad and ice cream and fruit and tea. A **Mrs. Heatley** was serving us and she was very friendly and kind. The men all received cigarettes and I was offered sweets. After a while we were taken to the telegraph office and the soldiers sent telegrams. I was being entertained by the senior R.A.A.F. Officer and he offered to send a telegram for me and I accepted with pleasure. We chatted about the war and he shocked me by saying that it was a pity the Japs did not drop more bombs on Australia – to waken the people up to their danger. He also asked the same question the men had asked at each stop, “Had the Japs ‘interfered’ with the women in the Camp?” After a while we were taken back to the Red Cross Hut where **Mrs Heatley** insisted on my taking several summer dresses to try on and a Red Cross bag with soap, tooth brush, talcum, towel, pyjamas, vest and pants in it and a reddish cardigan to wear. I was not anxious to accept anything but she insisted. We then piled into ambulances and were driven to the R.A.A.F. Hospital where again I was put into the W.A.A.F’s Ward which was empty. I had a beautiful hot bath in the clean bathroom attached – my first for 3½ years or more. I decided that my last such bath had been in **Elsie’s** flat in Singapore in February 1942. I then put on my pyjamas and sat in bed and talked to the Sisters and Matron who came and perched on it. They brought me a jug of grape fruit cordial and wished me goodnight and I went to sleep and slept well.

Friday October 5th 1945. (44th day after peace).

We were due to take off about 9.30 a.m., and so I go up and bathed and dressed and was ready at 8 a.m. We had a long wait and then were taken to the Red Cross Hut where we had a lovely breakfast and then were brought back to the Hospital for another long wait. We finally went back to the plane about 11 a.m. and took off soon after. The journey was again quite pleasant and we landed at Brisbane about 2 p.m. We had hoped to go on to Sydney but were disappointed at hearing we were to spend the night at Brisbane. A civilian committee of a man and 2 women was awaiting the 3 civilians, and here Army and civil were strictly segregated. **Capt. Ward** came and bade us farewell after we had had a cup of tea and sandwiches at the Hut. The man of our welcome committee went off in a huddle with the Transport Officer at the Airport, and finally came back to say we 3 were to go to Sydney by courier plane at 9 o’clock in the morning. The Army was to travel by train. We then piled into the car and were driven to the Lady Wilson Convalescent Home where we were to spend the night....

Saturday October 6th 1945. (45th day after peace).

We were called early and had another excellent meal and then were driven to the Airport. After a bit of a wait spent by us there in a corner of the luggage shed, we were assembled at the plane and loaded in. It was a load this time – about 30 passengers and piles and piles of luggage in the centre so that the opposite passengers were hidden from view. The trip was pretty good and we reached Mascot about noon. There they announced that those leaving the plane must be responsible for their own luggage and everyone else piled out to the Red Cross Hut for tea, leaving **Mr. Calette** and me scrambling among the mountains of roped luggage. A woman boarded the plane whom I took for a Red Cross Visitor but it was **Janet** and when I came out I saw **Elsie** and **Miriam** waiting.

Home at last. I had a bit of trouble arranging transport as no taxis were available but eventually we got a lift in a sort of bus (R.A.A.F.) as did **Mr. Calette** and his three children who met him. This bus could only take us to the Quay but there **Miriam** scrounged a taxi whose driver was inveigled into taking a P.O.W. We all crowded in together with the baggage – 2 baskets and the case – and then the driver turned round and demanded “where is the P.O.W?” and was disappointed to find it was only me. However he drove off and listened in and joined in our conversation which was naturally about my experiences and when we reached home asked only for 5/- for fare!! **Miriam** insisted on fixing it and she gave him a 10/- note and told him to keep the change.

Christina and **Bessie** and **Uncle Bert** all came out to greet me on the pavement and **Mac** came and licked my legs as if he remembered me. The house was full of the most lovely flowers and the hall was decorated with flags and gold and silver stars and paper ribbons – **Bessie’s** doing.

Here indeed was I home again – and after 4 years and six months.

ORATION GIVEN ON THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY 2026 ON THE BEACH, MUNTOK, BANGKA ISLAND, INDONESIA. With thanks to Arlene Bennett.

I would like you all to cast your minds back to just a little over eighty-four years ago, in the panic that was Singapore in its final days before the Japanese occupation. Bombs were being dropped, roads were being blocked by abandoned cars and other debris. Usual routes to the wharves were unable to be used.

The last sixty-five remaining AANS nurses were trying to leave Singapore. They eventually found their way on board the SS VYNER BROOKE. They had to abandon sick and wounded soldiers in their care and leave them to fend for themselves in Singapore when they were finally ordered to leave. For those of us who are nurses the choice to leave would be difficult and for those nurses who left on the 12th of February it was no different.

Once on board the ship, at the direction of Matron Olive Paschke and Matron Irene Drummond, the nurses set about organising themselves to care for those who needed it most. The nurses were told that they were under no circumstances to leave the ship before everyone else had been evacuated should anything happen to it.

The ship kept as much cover as it could but that was not always possible. Finally, on the 14th of February, they were spotted by Japanese aircraft. They were bombed and soon after the ship would sink on the Bangka Strait. For those onboard it was unimaginable. Many managed to get into life rafts, some got into life rafts which had been strafed and did not float, some swam away, others caught bits of debris to stay afloat.

Twelve of the nurses died at the time of the bombing or shortly thereafter and a small group of the nurses would float away only to die sometime later from thirst and exposure in the ensuing days. Twenty-two of the nurses washed up on Bangka Island. Many other civilians and servicemen would make landfall on that beach. The nurses cared for the sick and injured as best they could with what little medical supplies they had. Matron Drummond suggested that a fire be lit on the beach to act as a beacon to those still at sea. With so many people now on the beach and so little food and water available it was decided that a group of men should walk into the town and advise the Japanese of those present on the beach to surrender themselves to the Japanese.

Matron Drummond decided that the women and children should also walk into the town. As the group of women and children walked into Muntok they saw the Japanese soldiers along with the party of men walking towards the nurses and the men left behind on the beach.

The Japanese soldiers from the Orita Battalion ordered the men to walk around the bluff. This was done in two groups. The first of the men, who were made up of mostly British and a few New Zealanders were then lined up and were shot or bayoneted. The second group were similarly treated although there were some exceptions. Stoker Ernest Lloyd, a British sailor who had been on The Prince of Wales when it was sunk off Singapore, whispered to those who had lined up next to him that they should make an escape and swim out to sea in order to save their lives. He remarked that he didn't die when the Prince of Wales sank and he wasn't going to die today! Eric Germann was an American who swam away from the beach and survived. A third person died as he tried to escape. Mr Ernest Charles Watson, an Australian judge from Malaya died on the beach at the hands of the Japanese. Corporal Robert Seddon was also a British soldier who had tried to land on the beach but the nurses signalled for him to stay out at sea which he did thus avoiding the massacre. The Japanese returned back around from the bluff wiping their bloodied bayonets and walking towards the nurses. What happened next was too difficult to comprehend then just as it is now. The nurses were violated. Twenty-two Australian women and one British civilian woman, Mrs Carrie Betteridge, were ordered into the sea by the Japanese who opened fire on them. Matron Drummond's last words to her nurses were, "Chin up girls...I am proud of you... I love you all" What a comfort these words must have been for the nurses. Mrs Kathleen, another British woman had been on the beach. Too ill to walk in to the sea she was killed by the Japanese. At the end of the massacre there was only Vivian Bullwinkel left alive. Twenty-one of our Australian Army Nurses had died that day.

Vivian Bullwinkel survived the POW camps and she brought home with her the story of what had happened to her friends. She gave comfort to their devastated families and she gave evidence, if somewhat subdued, to the War Crimes Tribunal at the end of the War in Tokyo. About one hundred ships were sunk in the Bangka Strait on the 14th of February 1942 with possibly thousands of people being killed on them. For many this expanse of sea was their last resting place. For many, Muntok became the first place where they would lose their freedom. Thirty-one of the Australian nurses who left Singapore on the SS Vyner Brooke would be joined by Dame Margot Turner who became the Matron of the QAIMNS nurses after the war. Sister Mary Cooper and other British nurses and civilians also became POWs. Some survived the war, Sister Mary Cooper died in Belalau – the last camp that they were in. Another eight Australian nurses died over the next three and a half years in Muntok and Belalau. Twenty-four of the original sixty-five nurses survived the war. Today we pause to remember all who were involved in this catastrophe. These war crimes occurred on Monday the 16th of February. Eighty-four years to the day. For some eighty-four years ago was to be the end of their lives. May the story of our brave nurses never be forgotten by us, and may people around the world learn of their stories so that they are remembered.

It is now up to us to remember what happened during World War II to our nurses and countless others and to promote peace and not war.
LEST WE FORGET.

**ARLENE BENNETT GIVING HER ORATION
With Michael Noyce standing beside her –
Nephew of Australian Army Nurse Kathleen Neuss
Murdered on Radji Beach**



Call to Commemoration

Bangka Island Commemorative Service, 16 February 2026.

Read on behalf of Lynette Silver, AM, MBE, historian

Welcome everyone, to this special service of commemoration.

It is now 84 years since *Vyner Brooke*, with 65 Australian nurses on board, sank in the waters off Bangka Island, sparking a train of tragic events that have no parallel in our nation's wartime history.

It is hard to imagine, in the year 2026, that in these peaceful, calm, tropical waters, twelve Australian nurses abandoned ship, never to be seen again, while another 21 reached the beach to meet a terrible fate at the hands of the Japanese. Of the remaining 32 survivors, who endured appalling conditions for the next three and a half years as prisoners of a brutal regime, eight did not survive the war.

None of the nurses who returned home, vowing to keep alive the memories of those who perished, are left now, and it is we, Australians of younger generations, who have been entrusted to carry the torch, to ensure that the sacrifice and suffering of these extraordinary heroines is not forgotten.

For some of you, this service may be the first chance you have had to express your grief – the memorial service you never held; the funeral you never attended. Those who especially mourn the loss of a family member may have come here today with heavy hearts, weighed down by the enormity of what happened here and in the Sumatra prison camps. However, I urge you, and all those present today, to remember that, when the going got tough, our nurses never gave up. They may have been forced to surrender their physical bodies to the enemy, but never their will, never their minds and never their souls. Indomitable in spirit, they remained unyielding.

You have gathered here at this memorial today to remember, to mourn the lives lost and to admire and acknowledge the tenacity, strength and determination of those who survived. We refer to it as a memorial, and it certainly serves its purpose – to perpetuate the memory and provide a focus for services such as this. However, as Pericles, the Greek statesman, observed in an oration delivered 2000 years ago, we do not need a shrine or memorial to remind us of our nation's loss or to pay tribute our nurses' heroism.

Monuments may rise and tablets be set up to them in their own land, but on the far-off shores there is an abiding memorial that no pen or chisel has traced.

It is graven, not on stone or brass, but on the living heart of humanity.

Honour all our nurses with pride.

They deserve no less.

MY 3½ YEARS EXPERIENCE AS A WWII P.O.W. CIVILIAN INTERNEE WITH THE JAPANESE.

By Pamela Thane.

With thanks to Lynette Ramsay Silver for this diary.

I was a boarder at S.C.E.G.G.S (Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School) Darlington, Sydney, Australia from 1930-1939. Upon completion of my education, I returned to Malaya with my parents who were both Australian (my father was born in Yass and my mother was born in Goulburn). They left Australia shortly after they were married. My father was a Rubber Plantation Estate Manager up until the war started with the Japanese.

When I returned to Malaya little did I realise how the next 3½ years of my life was about to undergo such a sad turmoil for a young girl aged 17, which was to leave me with scars mentally and physically for the remainder of my life. The war started with the Japanese, and my mother and I were evacuated to Singapore. My father, who was in the local Volunteers (Seremban, *[in the]* State of Negri Sembilan) followed later.

My mother and I completed 2 years of training in St. John's Ambulance Service, V.A.D. and Women's Medical Auxiliary Service, Seremban Hospital *[in the]* State of Negri Sembilan. Upon completion and before the Fall of Singapore on 15th February, 1942, we were stationed at First Aid posts in Singapore including nursing at St. Andrew's Hospital. Nursing staff were desperately needed to nurse the wounded members of armed forces coming from north of Malaya to St. Andrew's Hospital.

Police and the army arrived and gave orders that all nursing staff had to leave quickly the best way we could (Government made no attempt to instigate evacuation for Women and Children). This turned out to be leaving on a cargo boat called the "***Mata Hari***" in the early hours of the morning on 13th February, 1942, departing from the jetty at Singapore. The Captain's name was **Captain Carson**.

And my horrific nightmare was to begin on the "***Mata Hari***". My father, being a local Volunteer was not permitted to join us. Hundreds and hundreds of bewildered women and children left on this ship, which was vastly overcrowded, everyone was in total confusion not knowing where we were being taken to, everyone feared for their safety.

After 2 days at sea, the Japanese finally found us. A destroyer came alongside, the Japanese came aboard and we were at their mercy, there was no where to escape, we were like trapped animals.

Their guns were pointing at us, it was the most terrifying experience and the first time we had seen them in real life. We were all captured at night. If it had not been for **Captain Carson** who raised a white flag (signalling that there were women and children aboard) we would have all been killed. They ran the Japanese flag up the mast.

The Captain opened up the store room and we all had food, but not for long – this was to be the last time we would see any **real** food for the next 3½ years. After abandoning the "***Mata Hari***" they took us to Muntok, Banka (*sic*) Island. We all had to spend the night on Muntok Pier with no food or water and the Japanese robbing us of any jewellery we possessed also sneering at us through the night whilst we suffered trying to sleep on hard wooden boards. Their minds were filled with total hatred and evil towards us.

After two weeks in Muntok Camp they moved us up the Moesi River to Palembang, Sumatra on barges to a camp which had 1,000 inmates.

Our camps were all overcrowded, there were no Doctors or Nurses, except for a few nursing nuns. As soon as the Red Cross parcels, including medicine and food, arrived the Japanese immediately took hold of these so we never received any of them. They wanted to see us suffer. They revelled in seeing us in pain. It was their pleasure, they were sadists feeding off our pain.

We scrounged all sorts of things to eat, what they gave us was nowhere near sufficient enough to sustain us. We ate grass, weeds, boiled banana skins and rice which included shrapnel. And to this day I have had a distinct dislike for bananas, the memories will never escape me.

We had to unload sacks of rice from trucks. We had to dig clay grounds, clean out drains and open sewers and carry all our water in buckets from a hydrant 800 metres away. This may not sound too difficult for a normal healthy person to endure but for women who are severely undernourished, suffering from malnutrition and disease in 100°F heat, it was a pitiful sight to see young women, the elderly and infirm having to struggle with tortuous tasks. It was heavy manual labour that accounted for deaths and further starvation. Our hair was infested with bugs, this being so bad our hair had to be cut, cropped short or shaved. We had no soap or personal hygiene items.

Then came a terrible blow – we were moved to Muntok and returned back on triple deck barges like cattle

down the river to the sea to Muntok on Banka (*sic*) Island. This resulted in an epidemic of Banka (*sic*) Fever, 200 prisoners were down with no medicine. There were many deaths, and victims had to be buried in a small Chinese cemetery in the jungle.

My mother became seriously ill with Beri Beri, Dengue Fever and Dysentery. She was critically ill and they tried to make her dig roads. We had to sleep on concrete slabs. Her sickness would never have been so bad if she had had access to proper food and medical treatment. She died just before war ended in April, 1945. She was just fifty years of age. I had to dig her grave. Roman Catholic nurses placed her body in a box and I had to carry her on support of bamboo rods with help from the other prisoners. She died in our last camp when orders were given to move and return to Palembang and then "Belalau", an abandoned rubber plantation estate.

Deaths mounted rapidly. I was extremely ill with large ulcers on my legs and arms, these being the size of saucers.

I was also suffering with dysentery and dengue fever. We were finally released after 3½ years of tormented suffering, the date 16th September, 1945, the date of my birthday.

I was first to be flown out to Singapore and admitted to St. Andrew's Hospital where I was given vitamin injections, proper food for several weeks and clothes, as we had none. My weight was 4½ stones.

My father met me, as he was in Changi Jail. We both returned to Sydney, Australia. He also had been very ill. He was not aware that his wife, **Phyllis**, had died in the camp which was a terrible shock to him. All our letters never reached him, the Japanese confiscated them. Needless to say we had much to catch up on, we had been robbed of 3½ years of our lives and for what?

Whilst in the camp I was severely punished. On one occasion I did not bow to one of the Japanese guards after being told they could only remove my tooth without a sedative injection. The guard called out at Tenko and pointed to me. My punishment was to stand outside in the blazing sun for 2 days without food or water in front of the guards' quarters.

My memories of my 3½ years as a P.O.W. with the Japanese have left me very bitter towards the Japanese people and I will never forgive them for causing the death of my mother and the mental and physical tortuous pain to myself and my father. My parents worked so hard to make a lovely home in Malaya, but sadly they were not allowed to continue their lives together and to enjoy 'the fruits of their labour' into retirement.

We have not been compensated or recognised by the government for the torture. *The civilian women are never mentioned.* It is only ever the Australian nurses. For the last 4 years I have contributed to the A.B.C.I.F.E.R. (Association of British Civilian Internees – Far East Region) an organisation set up for ex-(civilian) P.O.Ws and whose responsibility it is to try to get compensation. In late 1998, ABCIFER informed me that they had been unsuccessful between the Japanese government and solicitors but it is hoped they will make another attempt for the internees. I live in hope.

Signed:

Pamela de Neumann (nee Thane)

July 1999

[Editor: A wreath is always laid at the annual FEPOW Service at Wymondham Church in Norfolk, on behalf of ABCIFER which was disbanded several years ago after the death of its Founder Ron Bridge – a former civilian internee himself. ABCIFER's banner is always laid on the cabinet containing the Books of Remembrance in the small side Chapel during the Service. Wreaths are laid at the foot of the cabinet.

For more information about the Thane family, please see the Muntok Peace Museum's website: http://muntokpeacemuseum.org/?page_id=1831]

THE CAPTIVE'S HYMN

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

First verse of the hymn composed by Margaret Dryburgh and sung at every Sunday Service in camp.

A PILGRIMAGE TO THAILAND

Rosemary Fell

On 7th February 2026, **Imogen Holmes** and I departed a soaking wet British Isles for Kanchanaburi in Thailand; to visit the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum; to travel on the Railway built by the POWs along the River Kwai Noi; and to visit my parents' grave in Chungkai Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. It was a long overdue visit as I had not travelled to Thailand since before the Covid-epidemic. And so it was with some trepidation that I met **Imogen** at the Thai Airways check-in desk at Heathrow's Terminal two for our overnight flight to Bangkok.

On arrival at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport we were met by our taxi driver and a huge tropical storm which turned the roads into rivers in a trice, but stopped as quickly as it arrived. It was quite late by the time we arrived at our delightful Guest House, "The Nine", in Kanchanaburi, within walking distance of the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum. We each had a comfortable en-suite room in a separate single story accommodation block in a secluded corner of the hotel's pretty garden, each room with its own verandah with table and chairs.

On our first day we met **Rod Beattie**, **Terry Manttan** and **Andrew Snow** at the TBRC before driving to Kanchanaburi station to catch the train and travel on the railway built by the Allied POWs at such a devastating cost to lives. We were accompanied by our lovely guide, **Aui**, who leapt onto the train as soon as it came in, and found seats for us before the rest of the many tourists, who were also waiting on the platform, could get in.

After a few minutes we arrived at the river where the train slowly crossed the famous iron bridge built over the river traditionally called the Mae Klong, but now re-named the River Kwai Yai. There were tourists still walking over the bridge, and they moved into side alcoves as the train passed them. No health and safety concerns to take note of here!

As we travelled through open countryside following the course of the River Kwai Noi, we crossed numerous bridges and embankments built by the POWs until we reached the famous Wang Pho viaduct. Here the railway crosses a wooden trestle bridge built up against a cliff high above the river. Everyone on the train was hanging out of the windows trying to take photos of the curved bridge as we slowly crossed it. We got off the train after crossing the viaduct and walked back along part of the wooden bridge. It was quite a daunting walk with only metal plates across the central gaps between the rails and sleepers, but no other safety features whatsoever! Then we were met by our comfortable minibus and driver, **Nim**, and had lunch in a restaurant looking down on the river.

Then it was on to Hellfire Pass and a visit to the interpretative HFP Museum built by the Australians. As we looked round the Museum and read the information on the boards, we were very much aware that the British POWs were only mentioned briefly. But the Museum had been built – at great expense – by the Australians, so we felt it was fair enough! Ironically, though, it was mainly British POWs who had worked at Hell Fire Pass, cutting through the solid rock, using the 'Hammer and Tap' method, 24 hours a day and by the light of fires at night – a truly hellish scene.

The newly constructed wooden steps and walkways down into Hellfire Pass made it very easy to descend into the cutting – in sharp contrast to the very first time I had visited the area in 1996, before the Museum was built. Then there were only concrete steps down the almost vertical rock face. Sadly, but understandably, in view of the huge numbers of visitors, the whole area has been sanitised and is no longer the place of eerie, uncomfortable, humid solitude that it had been in 1996. But we did walk up the concrete steps at the far end of Hell Fire Pass. This was quite a climb, and so it must have been for those POWs working night and day to cut through the solid rock, on starvation rations and severely debilitated by various tropical diseases and ill treatment by the Japanese or Korean guards. At the end of the cutting, we saw the Plaque to commemorate 'Weary' Dunlop, the famous Australian surgeon who had been the medical officer in that area, and the impressive granite memorial built by the Australians at the end of the pass. The pass looks very different today from its atmospheric eerie feeling at the early morning 'Dawn Service' on Anzac Day which I attended when the Museum was first opened by the then Australian Prime Minister **John Howard**. At that time it was almost unaltered from its wartime state, apart from a few small lights strung along the pass so that we could see where to go in the dark.

On our return to Kanchanaburi we went back to the Bridge and walked across it, carefully negotiating the hazardous metal strips between the rails. The area around the bridge is also very different from that of 30 years ago, now built up with numerous gift stall operating on either side of the railway track. It had been an interesting and informative day.

On the second day, **Rod** took us to various places where the POWs, who had been sent up to Thailand by train from Singapore in late 1942, had camped during their long marches to link up with the sections of the railway under construction. In particular, we followed the route of my father's "U" Letter Party from Kanchanaburi to the north. One of these camps was in the grounds of a Thai Temple in a small village and another in what is now open agricultural land. Of course there is nothing to see of the camps any more - only the places where the POWs had built the camps. At Kinsaiyok, we saw the remains of a large coal tip where a station had been constructed. **Rod** explained that although the engines on the railway were fuelled by wood, they needed coal to provide extra power in this area to climb the gradient over a higher part of the railway. All that remained of the station were a few wooden sleepers and the coal tip. The surrounding area was wooded once again, with large trees growing where the station had once been.

We then visited the Saiyok National Park and saw the well documented waterfall where it enters the river. It's not very high but the stream provided the water for the camps in that area. The viewing area by the river has now been developed with walkways and a visitor centre where we had lunch, but is still fairly unspoilt. Sadly we were unable to visit the Kanyu and Hintok River Camps as the road there has now been closed. But we did drive down to the river where there is a crossing.

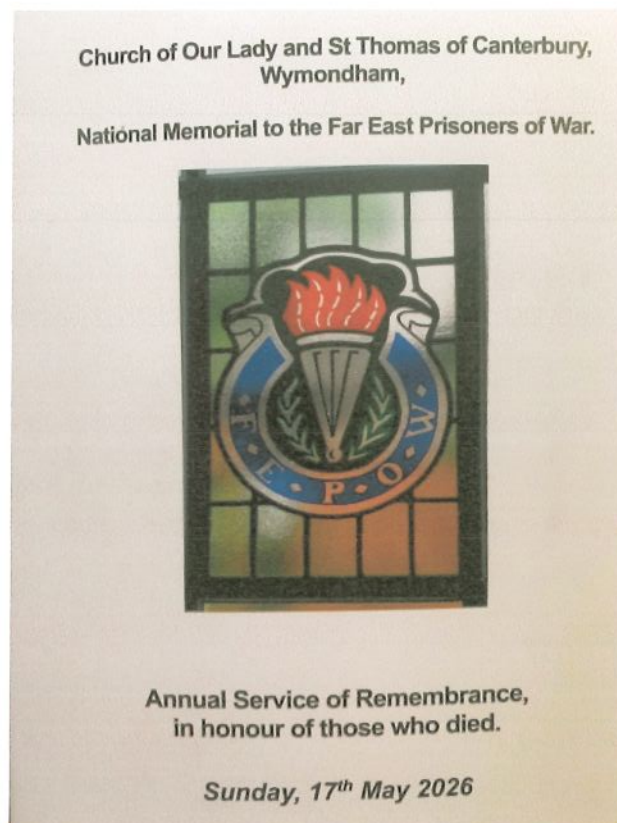
We returned to Kanchanaburi on different roads which followed the railway more closely and led back to Chungkai Cemetery where we stopped for a visit to my parent's grave. It's such a beautiful cemetery - quiet and peaceful in a tranquil area beside the Kwai Noi. I feel very fortunate that my parents' grave is here and not in the main CWG cemetery in Kanchanaburi, which is surrounded by busy roads, and is always full of tourists. Chungkai Camp is where my father died, in Chungkai Hospital, from amoebic dysentery and other vitamin deficiency diseases following his leg amputation above the knee. **Rod** later explained more about this and showed me the records of my father's hospital treatment and subsequent death. The surgeon who operated on him was the well known Canadian Surgeon **Captain Markowitz**, assisted by a **Cpl. G.W. Vaughan**.

Wednesday was a 'free' day and we spent the morning looking round the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum. Although I've visited the TBRC several times, there's still so much to see and so much information to take in. **Rod** came and joined us and explained the details of how 'Hammer and Tap' worked, showing us the long-handled small metal spoons for removing the dust produced in the drilled hole in the rock, and the large bamboo sections which acted as water jugs to wash out the dust. We spent a long time reading through the information and looking at the exhibits. After a delicious lunch in the Museum's coffee shop, we went out to Chungkai in the afternoon to visit my parents' grave for the last time and take some orchids. Sadly, it is no longer possible to walk down to the River from the Cemetery, because the former right-of-way is now part of the CWG Manager's garden. We debated but decided not to challenge the 'friendly-looking' dog guarding the path to the river and disobey the 'Private Property' notice! But it used to be a good way to get to Chungkai from Kanchanaburi - by long-tailed boat from the town to the landing stage by the Cemetery.

As it was our last night, we had dinner with **Rod**, **Terry** and **Andrew** at the '*Keree Tara*', a magical floating restaurant on the river near the beautifully lit up bridge. We sat at a table beside the river and watched a floodlit train crossing the bridge and several colourful tourist boats sail under the bridge. The Thai food was delicious and it was a lovely evening to end our visit to Kanchanaburi.

Our Pilgrimage, however, was not quite at an end because our return journey to Suvarnabhumi Airport was also an interesting experience. **Mr. Wut**, our taxi driver, who had met us at the airport on our arrival, decided that we should return to Bangkok via the scenic route. Firstly he took us to Nong Pladuk. This is where the first trainload of POWs had to march after arriving at Ban Pong from Singapore, and it was from here that they started to build the Thailand section of the Railway. We saw the old station building and the Memorial Stone marking the starting point of the railway. This was alongside the new station, with its exceptionally long platform, where we waited for the train to arrive from upcountry, eating delicious deep fried bananas as we sat on the platform. We then drove on to Nakhon Pathom where we visited the huge golden Chedi (and numerous photo shoots courtesy of **Mr. Wut** who had obviously sussed out all the best areas to photograph) before arriving at the airport. It was a fitting farewell to a busy but very interesting and fulfilling few days. And I am very grateful to, and thank, **Terry Manttan** and his staff at the TBRC for arranging this Pilgrimage for **Imogen** and me.

**REPORT OF THE ANNUAL FEPOW SERVICE IN WYMONDHAM, NORFOLK
on Sunday 17th May 2026 for Selamat Pagi by Richard Brown**



The annual FEPOW Service of Remembrance in honour of FEPOWS and civilian internees who suffered and died both during World War 11 and since was very well attended by relatives and friends. It took place, as always, at the Church of Our Lady & St. Thomas of Canterbury, in Wymondham, Norfolk, the church which is a National memorial to the Far East Prisoners of War. It was built by Father Malcolm Cowin, a padre FEPOW in Thailand, who vowed in 1952 to build a permanent memorial to those who suffered as prisoners of war and internees of the Japanese during World War II, and it is the only church of its kind in the world. The church acts as a 'Living Memorial', and as a Roman Catholic Parish church. It is unique in being the only church in the world dedicated to the memory of FEPOW and Civilian Internees of all faiths and nationalities who died in Japanese POW and Internment Camps during World War II.

These annual services started in 1992. This year's ecumenical service was conducted by the Parish Priest, Father Denis Gallagher, Deacon Peter Ho, and Pauline Simpson BEM, the Chaplain to all FEPOWs, their families and to all FEPOW Clubs and Associations.

During the Service the original Books of Remembrance (details of FEPOWs and civilian internees) were carried in procession to the front of the church and laid them in front of the altar whilst the composer, parishioner John Glynn, sang a song he had written especially for FEPOWs, "Courage to Endure"



The Books of Remembrance

The Address was given by MVG member Colonel Rob Lucas, whose father, Captain Bob Lucas, became a FEPOW in Singapore, along with Major Alan Clark and Captain Stanley Pavillard. Colonel Lucas has kindly agreed for his Address to be published in full:-

It is a great privilege and an honour to be invited to talk to you today as we remember our Far East Prisoners of War.

I would like to thank my supporters club, that is my wife, my children and the granddaughter of Alan Clark for being here today. I am going to talk briefly about my father, Capt. Bob Lucas, Major Alan Clark and Capt. Stanley Pavillard. All of them were captured and imprisoned in Singapore.

My father was a regular soldier in the Royal Artillery and was posted to Penang in Malaya in March 1939. My mother and I followed soon after, I was 6 months old at the time. My father was promoted to Warrant Officer and then commissioned in Sept 1940. My brother Tommy was born in July 1941, and life was idyllic and carefree.

Also in Penang was Alan Clark with his wife, Daphne and son Jeremy. Alan Clark worked as an Accountant for the Municipal Government and was a Major in the Strait Settlements Volunteer Force.

Our lives dramatically changed on 8th Dec 1941 when Japanese forces invaded Malaya. The Japanese forces advanced quickly down Malaya and Penang was heavily bombed in mid-December, leading to the European population being rapidly evacuated by boat and train to Singapore. My father was sent to 9 Coast Artillery Regiment in Singapore to continue the fight.

My mother, Tommy and I, along with many other families, arrived in Singapore in a dishevelled and bewildered state. We were then evacuated from the Island on 29th January 1942, on the Liner Duchess of Bedford, the last ship to successfully reach England. Very sadly my brother, Tommy, caught sepsis and died and he is buried at sea off Sri Lanka. My mother and I arrived in Liverpool and stayed there with my grandparents.

Meanwhile, Daphne Clark, who was a trained nurse, was determined to stay in Malaya to help care for the wounded, much against her husband's wishes. Also on the train from Penang was Daphne's sister-in-law, Dorothy Clark and her son John. Daphne persuaded the authorities that she could stay, and Jeremy could become part of Dorothy's family and be evacuated with them. Dorothy, and her enlarged family, were safely evacuated to Australia. Daphne Clark stayed behind in Singapore and at the last minute was evacuated, along with many Australian nurses, on a ship leaving for Australia. Unfortunately, that ship was bombed by the Japanese and Daphne, along with many others, was killed.

At the same time, both husbands were fighting the Japanese and were captured ending up in Changi. After a few months, they were both at Havelock Road camp in Singapore. Working parties were then selected to go to Thailand to work on the Thai-Burma railway. D Battalion was formed and unusually, was a mixed unit, consisting of one company of Gordon Highlanders, one battery of Royal Artillery soldiers and 2 companies of Malayan Volunteers. The battalion was commanded by Major Clark, my father was appointed Adjutant, and the Regimental Medical Officer was Capt. Stanley Pavillard. I can't think of a more diverse unit to try and command, but it worked as most of the soldiers had been in Malaya and Singapore before the war, so were acclimatised and in reasonable shape to combat the brutal conditions which lay ahead.

The battalion went by train to Bang Pong on 12th October 1942 and from there marched 60 miles to Tarsao, the Japanese Railway Group Headquarters. After a few days they went by barge to Wampo Camp and started to construct the Wampo viaduct, along with other units. It was a huge engineering project, which can still be seen today.

This was the start of a dreadful and degrading time for the POW's. D Battalion came through this awful time better than most other units. Dr Stanley Pavillard put this down to having experienced Malayan Reservists, who were used to the tropics, good administration and discipline regarding health and hygiene and support for each other. The latter was desperately needed as the Battalion endured a large cholera outbreak at their next camp, Tonchan South.

Fortunately, the three officers all survived and came home to very different circumstances. Capt. Pavillard went to his family home in the Canary Islands, Major Clark to be reunited with a young son and no wife, and my father to be welcomed home by a wife and one son. What an awful shock that must have been for both men.

I can remember going to collect my father from the train at Edgehill Station, in Liverpool with all the family, recognising him immediately and running along the platform to greet him.

My father, after some leave, was straight back into military life and I strongly believe this helped him to lead a normal married life, without, as far as I could detect, any post-traumatic stress. What I did notice was the continuing close association and bond between the three friends. They would attend FEPOW association reunions in London and meet up with old colleagues. Alan Clark and my father, as they got older, would stay at the Charing Cross Hotel, so that they could walk over the bridge at Embankment to attend the reunions at the Festival Hall. Later on, Jeremy, and I would escort our fathers to the reunion, mainly, of course, to make sure that they returned safely back to their hotel after a few drinks!

My father never spoke to me about his time as a POW, but I learnt a lot about his experiences through Dr Pavillard's book, The "Bamboo Doctor" and after retiring from the Army I became more interested in that period.

Indeed, I am indebted to 4 organisations that improved my knowledge and helped me in my research and understanding. They are COFEPOW, The Researching FEPOW History Group, the Malayan Volunteer Group and lastly, the Thai-Burma Railway Centre. The Centre helped me to decide to take my whole family, all 10 of us, to Thailand, to show them my father's journey along the railway. I timed it for my 80th birthday, which also coincided with school half term, so that my grandchildren could go. The venture was an enormous success and the staff at the Centre were incredibly helpful and their knowledge and information on my father and D Battalion, vividly brought to life what happened to the POWs and enabled me to show my family what their grandfather, and other POW's had been through and to give more meaning to our annual 'Act of Remembrance'.

I hope my talk in this wonderful Church of Our Lady and St Thomas of Canterbury, which is dedicated to the memory of Far East Prisoners of War, goes some small way to keeping that memory and those of all FEPOW's alive today and far into the future.

After the Address, and Intercessions, the Hymn *The day thou gavest, Lord is ended*, by John Ellerton, was sung, followed by the Act of Remembrance.

Wreaths were then laid in the Memorial side chapel, announced by Gavin Wallace. It has often been said that in any conflict the civilians are often the last to be remembered. For that reason, in advance of the Service, the former standard of the Association of British Civilian Internees, Far East Region, had been laid on the altar rail of the memorial side chapel.

Wreaths were then laid. The first was the Sovereign's, laid by Colonel Ian Lonsdale TD, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, on behalf of His Majesty the King. The wreath on behalf of Wymondham Parish was laid by a Ranger Guide.

Wreaths were then laid for the Cambridgeshire Regiment, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Australian Armed Forces, the Royal Anglian Regiment (successor to the East Anglian wartime regiments), SOE FE (Special Operations Executive Far East), NFFWRA (National FEPOW Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association), the Java FEPOW Club 1942, the MVG (Malayan Volunteers Group), COFEPOW (Children and Families of Far East Prisoners of War), the Taiwan Prisoner of War Memorial Association, Birmingham Association of FEPOW, the CWL (Catholic Women's League Services Committee), the Royal British Legion on behalf of those with no known grave, and the Seafarers' Anchor wreath, laid by scouts, on the blue cloth "sea" in front of the wreaths on behalf of all seafarers, especially those on the Hellships.

The FEPOW Prayer was recited, by Peter Wiseman, the Last Post was sounded by a bugle, followed by two minutes silence, Reveille and the Kohima Epitaph.

Peter Wiseman thanked everyone for attending and invited all to view the names of those FEPOWs, including civilian internees, they wished to remember in the Books of Remembrance. The books now contain the names of around 37,750 FEPOWs who either died in captivity or subsequently in freedom.



**Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk,
Lieutenant Colonel Ian Lonsdale TD &
FEPOW Chaplain Pauline Simpson BEM**



Rosemary Fell laid the MVG wreath



Parishioner Scouts and Rangers



The Memorial side Chapel

Sadly, but understandably, no FEPOWs were present at the Service but FEPOW widow Pearl Fowler attended.

For details of how to add a name of a FEPOW or Civilian Internee, or of how to view the books, please email fepow@wymondhamrcchurch.org.uk or telephone 01953 604144.

Before and after the Service light refreshments were kindly provided in the Church Hall.

A recording of the Service is available on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUfeJGjla4M>

The 2027 annual FEPOW Service will be held on Sunday 16th May 2027 at 12.30. All are welcome. Please let fepow@wymondhamrcchurch.org.uk know that you are attending

Richard Brown

28th May 2026



Judy giving her talk to the 41 Club members about the Centrifuge Project for the Muntok Red Cross.

THE XLI CLUB

“We Stand For: Support and Philanthropy in the Service of Law Enforcement, Defence Services and Emergency Services”

The traditional global “41 Club” (Association of Ex-Round Tablers) serves to continue friendship for retired members of the Round Table. They explore international branches or affiliate with other overseas chapters of the organisation.

In Australia, the organisation serves members and veterans of military regiments.

Judy was introduced to the club by member **Fred Humphries**, the Development Officer at St. Vincent’s Hospital. The photo shows **Judy** with **Fred** and the Club President **Ms. Barbara Poland**.



CONTACTS

Judy Balcombe: Muntok Peace Museum, Donations and Friends of Bangka Island.

e-mail: jdbalcombe@gmail.com

Arlene Bennett: Former President of the Australian Nurses Memorial Centre.

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David Man: Muntok Peace Museum Website.

e-mail: davidgordonman@gmail.com

Rosemary Fell: Editor of Selamat Pagi – the Bangka Island newsletter. e-mail:

rosmaryfell11@gmail.com

HATS FOR HUMANITY

Saturday 25 July 2026, 2pm

A gala afternoon of fabulous vintage Christian Dior hats, food and bubbles

A fundraiser by Friends of Bangka Island to support the purchase of vital blood processing equipment by the Muntok Red Cross on Bangka island, Indonesia. This project commemorates the close ties forged with the people of Bangka Island and is in memory of the 21 Australian Army Nurses killed on Radji Beach, Bangka Island during WW2 nearly 85 years ago, those lost at sea and in prison camp.

Venue, The Duckboard Function Centre Repatriation Hospital, Heidelberg, Victoria

Book via TryBooking Hats for Humanity

<https://www.trybooking.com/DKXGY>

Please join us for this wonderful afternoon

Free parking in the hospital

Supporters' Tickets available for non-attendees who would like to donate, Thank you



Palang Merah Indonesia

Hari Palang Merah dan Bulan Sabit Merah Sedunia 2024

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54, Neal, Judy and the Mother.jpg

