

## Australian Women's Weekly November 3, 1945

The following article from the Australian Women's Weekly supports the assertion in the podcast (Pt 2) that the women covered up what had happened to them. It also has an interesting insight into how women were perceived and portrayed during the 1940's. It provides more information about how the Japanese treated POWs.



Marshall Win, 1945, Australian Women's Weekly, p 19. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55465571>

### Text of article:

Emotional welcome as gallant women return. They wept and smiled at sight of home.

By WIN MARSHALL

**When the hospital ship Manunda moved into its berth at Fremantle, cheering crowds on the wharf were suddenly hushed.**

**They stared, quiet with emotion, at the boat-deck. There stood 24 women in grey Army tunics and slacks. It was a tense moment, and somehow cheering did not seem enough to express admiration for these nurses who survived the years in Sumatra.**

As each girl put her foot on Australian soil she turned and waved to the crowd, with tears suspiciously near the edge, but a huge smile of thankfulness and joy on her face.

There never was such a display of flowers and fruit as greeted them. "We did not expect anything like this," they said. "We feel as we did when we were taken by the Japs...It cannot be true."

I picked out Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, only nurse to survive that brutal massacre at Banka.

**Hair cropped short, she stood laughing now and holding a piece of red gum-blossom in her hand.**

"She's fine now." said the others.

But when the conversation turned to atrocities their eyelids flickered slightly and the subject was changed.

**So excited**

Instead they talked eagerly of the latest fashions, the latest hair-do and how heavily made-up the Australian girl seemed after their three and a half years of seeing no make-up.

Sister J. Tweddell, of Brisbane, was *so excited that she had fallen down* the companion way, and walked round with her arm, slightly injured, in a sling. Sister Sylvia Muir, also of Brisbane, just stood nursing her sheaf of gladioli.

Sister Veronica Clancy, of Adelaide, could not keep her eyes off a beautiful basket of fruit until someone reminded her of the three stone in weight that she had gained.

Western Australian Iole Harper put her arm through her mother's and would not let go.

Sister J. K. Greer, of Sydney, had already seen one member of her family in Singapore, when her released P.O.W. brother paid her a visit in hospital.

One little group-Sisters W. Oram, C J. Ashton, V. I. McElnea, and Florence Trotter-discussed their reactions now that it was all over.

They agreed that they did not feel bitter. They had volunteered for the job and had to take what came, but they felt very strongly that the Japan would have to be crushed.

**The girls told how they had earned money for food by doing washing and cooking for wealthy Dutch internees in the camp.**

For most of the time they had worn suntops made out of odd scraps of material.

The Japs issued them with Army shirts and trousers, but they bartered these for food.

Then the Jap commander would order a parade with "strictly correct dress," and there was a great scramble to find enough shirts and trousers.

"The Japs suffered from a great none inferiority complex," said Sister

C. M. Delforce, and Sisters Betty Jeffrey, J. E. Simons, and E. M. Hannah nodded agreement.

"When one stood up to them and refused to do as they demanded, they would crumple up under one's eyes. But at first we did not realise this, and then they were unpleasant."

Once more the strained look appeared in Sister Delforce's eyes, once more the eyelids quivered and the subject was changed.

But not for long, and Sister E. M. Short had her listeners laughing again with her tale of the whole 24 of them marching off to water the gardens, with the hoses at the "ready" over their shoulders.

The Japs insisted on this regimentation and were very angry when the girls treated it as a joke.

### **Heavy work**

The nurses said that they could never fathom the Japanese mentality.

They told a story of a P.O.W. who was found with two bottles of beer. The Japs put him in solitary confinement for three months, and beat him at regular intervals.

**Then he was allowed to return to camp, and his Jap guards handed him back the two bottles of beer.**

They told of planting potatoes, working in the fields, cutting and carrying wood, all between frequent face slappings and standing in the searing sun, as the whim seized their guards.

Occasionally they obtained a small quantity of native tobacco, shredded it, and made it up into cigarettes with any stray piece of paper round the camp.

They also played bridge with a pack of cards made from Japanese postcards and other scraps, but soon it was easy to know what cards had been dealt, by peculiarities on the backs.

Sister Bullwinkel paid high tribute to her comrade nurses whom the Japs butchered on Banka Beach, She said: "We knew we would certainly be killed. We just mutely waited.

**"There were no cries for mercy. We knew no appeal would touch the Japs' hearts. So my comrades died, their only prayer being a silent one to their Maker."**

When the nurses spent the night at Hollywood Military Hospital, in Perth, the reception-rooms were banked with flowers.

For each nurse was a special gift of a posy from the garden of the late Sister P. Farmaner, one of those who died on Banka Beach.

Her mother brought the flowers to her daughter's comrades.