

THE NEWS Adelaide Monday September 17th 1945

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/130231800>

Adelaide NEWS article about the nurses being found and now in Singapore. Outlines what happened.

Average Daily Net Sales Exceed 75,000

Peram Wheels Retired
No Pains
No Pains
No Pains
SAMPSON'S
158 Rundle St., Adelaide

TODAY'S FORECAST:
CITY—
Fine, Cold
Southerly Winds,
(clouds as they go)

Vol. 45—No. 8,004

TELEPHONE
6251, 1945

ADELAIDE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1945

THE NEWS

24 A.I.F. NURSES FREED FROM SUMATRA CAMP

S.A. Girl Survived Machine-Gun Horror By Japs

Australian Associated Press


SINGAPORE, Today.—Twenty-four Australian nurses, including four South Australians, have reached here from Sumatra.

They are the only survivors of a party of 65 who left Singapore just before the surrender. Their ship was dive-bombed, and 12 are believed to have been drowned.

The others reached Banka Island, off Sumatra, where the Japs captured them. Twenty-two were lined up on the beach facing the sea and machine-gunned.

Twenty-one were killed. The other, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, of Blyth street, Fullarton, was wounded and escaped. Others wounded were bayoneted to death by the Japs.

Sister Bullwinkel was shot in a thigh and washed out some distance. The Japs left her for dead. She staggered ashore amid the bodies of her comrades and wandered in the jungle for a fortnight before she



Australian Associated Press, 1945, *24 A.I.F. Nurses Freed from Sumatra Camp*, The News Adelaide, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/130231800>

Article text:

24 A.I.F. NURSES FREED FROM SUMATRA CAMP. S.A. Girl Survived Machine-Gun Horror by Japs

Australian Associated Press

SINGAPORE, Today.—Twenty-four Australian nurses, including four South Australians, have reached here from Sumatra.

They are the only survivors of a party of 65 who left Singapore just before the surrender. Their ship was dive-bombed, and 12 are believed to have been drowned.

The others reached Banka Island, off Sumatra, where the Japs captured them. Twenty-two were lined up on the beach facing the sea and machine-gunned.

Twenty-one were killed. The other, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, of Blyth Street, Fullarton, was wounded and escaped. Others wounded were bayoneted to death by the Japs.

Sister Bullwinkel was shot in a thigh and washed out some distance. The Japs left her for dead. She staggered ashore amid the bodies of her comrades and wandered in the jungle for a fortnight before she surrendered through hunger and exhaustion.

"We all knew we were going to die and stood there waiting," she said today. "There were no protests. They died bravely, and their marvellous courage prevented me from calling out when I was hit. I couldn't let them down."

When she was interviewed Sister Bullwinkel was still wearing the uniform in which she was shot.

The other South Australians are:

Sister Carrie Jean Ashton, of Mary Street, Unley.

Sister Veronica Clancy, of Stanley Street, North Adelaide.

Sister Ellen Mavis Hannah, of Essex Street, Goodwood Park.

The nurses were found about 100 miles west of

Palembang in eastern Sumatra, and were flown to Singapore in an R.A.A.F. Dakota.

Thin But Cheerful

SOME of the girls are painfully thin after three and a half years of privation. Some look reasonably fit, and all are very cheerful.

They were met at Kallang airport by ambulances, and rushed to St. Patrick's College, which is now the Second 14th Australian General Hospital.

There they were given a great reception by doctors and nursing staff.

A bright ward had been decorated with bowls of flowers. Lights shone throughout the hospital, warm baths and delicacies were awaiting them, and gentle and willing hands were ready to put the tired and bewildered girls to bed. All of them have lost much weight, but none of them is on the serious list.

Their tale is yet another one of Japanese callousness and neglect piled on the horror of Banka Island, which still remains indelibly in their memories.

Their lot has been one of drudgery and semi-starvation, cuffs and indignities, and the humiliation of being herded in crowded camps with all races, creeds, and colors.

But their spirit is unbroken, and they are still able to laugh and joke.

Twenty-one of the party of 65 which left Singapore, were murdered on Banka Island. Twelve are believed to have been drowned and eight died in prison.

Bayoneted by Japs

SISTER Bullwinkel said that the ship on which they left Singapore—the Vyner Brooke was shadowed by Japanese planes.

After it had been sunk, the survivors hung on to rafts or swam all night, and finally reached Banka Island.

The passengers were widely scattered and parties landed at various places along the beach.

Fifty men in the party with which she was were ordered to walk down the beach away from the women. As they did so, they were mown down by the Japs.

Those that were not killed outright were bayoneted by the Japs.

The nursing sisters were then ordered to face the sea and the Japs opened fire.

Sister Bullwinkel said that she was half unconscious when she was in the water, and a little later a wave washed her on to the beach again.

She staggered into the jungle, where she wandered for a fortnight before surrendering.

Brutish Behaviour

OTHER survivors stated that the nurses who eventually got to Sumatra were put into a camp where they were housed in native huts.

They had no facilities and were short of water. They were given neither clothes nor firewood, and they gradually used up the wood of the huts.

They were also subjected to grossly brutish behaviour by Japanese non-commissioned officers and senior privates.

Some nuns who were also internees later assisted the nurses, who were finally allowed to work with the nuns in a hospital.

It was thought before the rescue that the nurses were still at Palembang, where they were known to have been late in 1942.

They were actually found in the hills about 100 miles from Lahat, west of Palembang.

Interstate nurses rescued were:

J. J. Blanch (Qld.), K. C. Blake (N.S.W.), C. M. Delforce (Qld.), J. G. Doyle (N.S.W.), J. K. Green (N.S.W.), J. P. Gunther (N.S.W.), J Harper (W.A.), N. G. James (Vic.), A. B. Jeffrey (Vic.), V. L. McElnea (Qld.), S. J. M. Muir (Qld.), W. E. F. Oram (Vic.), C. S. M. Oxley (Qld.), E. M. Short (Qld.), J. E. Simons (Tas.), V. E. Smith (Qld.), A. C. Syer (Vic.), F. E. Trotter (Qld.), J. Tweddell (Qld.), B. Woodbridge (Vic.)

(Nurses' mothers hear of rescues. —Page 3.)

Tales of Horror

From Allan Dawes, "News" War Correspondent

THE first Australian prisoners flown out of Sumatra told me that many of their comrades—British, Dutch, and Australian—were slowly tortured to death by starvation.

The men I saw were bad enough, but they assured me they were in the best shape of all. The worst cases were still awaiting transport.

Their story was largely the same old tale of neglect, lashings, collective punishment, filthy food, and unending labor with brutal guards standing over men starved, half-naked, and driven to the point of death.

Private P. Harrington, of Bathurst, who was sparkling with vitality, but was just skin and bones physically, told me he could walk, but could not climb stairs except on his hands and knees.

He recounted the horrors of Pakan Baroe camp, naming as a war criminal Lieutenant Mura, now a captain, and held in Singapore. He said Mura was a typical Jap basher, whose methods the Australians must never forget or forgive.

Mura said he hated the British and the Dutch, and was determined to humiliate them. Above all, he hated Australians and their White Australia policy, said Harrington.

When he enlisted he was 13 st. Now he is 9 st. 5 lb.

"Had the war lasted three months longer, not 5 per cent. Of the British and Australians would have survived," he declared.

Harrington, who fell into Jap hands on March 17, 1942, said that since then he had not had one square meal. He ate the filthiest leavings, including fish left lying in the dirt.

Mothers Hear After Silence

(Continued from Page 1)

"I was very thrilled at the news after a terribly worrying time," said Mrs. E. K. Bullwinkel, of Blyth Street, Fullarton, mother of Sister Vivian Bullwinkel.

Sister Bullwinkel is one of the four South Australian nurses in a band of 24 rescued from Jap hands in Sumatra. All the nurses are now in Sumatra.

Mrs. Bullwinkel said she had received no word from her daughter for two and a half years. The last message, written on a postcard from a women's internment camp, suggested that she and the other Australians were quite cheerful.

Sister Bullwinkel, who is 28, received her nursing training at Broken Hill, and then went to Melbourne, where she was nursing until she enlisted. She left Australia in September, 1941.

The ship on which she and other Australian nurses were going to Batavia in February 1942, was dive-bombed and sunk.

LAST NEWS IN 1943

Sister Carrie Jean Ashton, another of the nurses, of Mary Street, Unley did private nursing at Jamestown, and in Tasmania, before she enlisted.

Mrs. W. J Ashton, her mother, said today that her daughter had trained at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. The last news of her since the fall of Singapore had come on a card written in March,

1943. Mrs Ashton had received it in December, 1943.

Mrs. C E. Hannah, of Essex street, Goodwood, said today that her eldest daughter, Sister Ellen Mavis Hannah, had received her training in Adelaide and was in dispensaries at Unley and Norwood before enlisting in January 1941.

The last card received from her was in December 1943.

Mrs E. J. Clancy, of Stanley Street, North Adelaide, was sick in bed this morning when she heard the news that her daughter, Staff Nurse Veronica Clancy, was safe in Singapore.

She was so relieved and excited that she got up and started work round the house.

Mrs Clancy has had only one letter-card from her daughter in that she asked for clothing and vitamin B tablets, which were despatched.



VIRTUAL
WAR MEMORIAL
AUSTRALIA