

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0362

Bullwinkel, Vivian

(1915 - 2000)

Born 19151218, Kapunda South Australia Australia

Died 20000703, Perth Western Australia Australia

Occupation Health administrator, Nurse, Servicewoman

Summary

Vivian Bullwinkel was the sole survivor of the 1942 Banka Island massacre. Post-war, she was Matron of Melbourne's Fairfield Hospital.

Details

Vivian Bullwinkel grew up in Broken Hill, New South Wales, and Adelaide, South Australia. Her father had migrated to Australia from Essex in 1912 and worked as a jackaroo on a station near Broken Hill before he married and took on a clerical post with Broken Hill South Pty Ltd. Vivian's grandfather was William John Shegog, a member of the South Australian Police Force. At the age of nine, she moved to Adelaide to live with her grandparents but returned to attend Broken Hill High School when she was thirteen. In 1934 she began nursing and midwife training at the Broken Hill and District Hospital. From February 1939 she was working at the Kia-Ora Hospital in Hamilton, Victoria, but moved to Melbourne to enlist at the outbreak of war and worked for a time at the Jessie MacPherson Hospital.

In May 1941, Bullwinkel volunteered for the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) and sailed for Singapore, assigned to the 2/13th Australian General Hospital. In February 1942, she boarded the *SS Vyner Brooke* with 65 other nurses to flee Singapore following an invasion by Japanese troops, but the ship was sunk by Japanese aircraft two days later. A large number of passengers, including 22 nurses, made it ashore to Radji Beach on Banka Island and decided to surrender to the Japanese. They were joined the following day by about 100 British soldiers. Upon being discovered by Japanese soldiers, however, the men were killed and the nurses ordered to wade into the sea where they were machine-gunned from behind. Bullwinkel was struck by a bullet but feigned death until her persecutors had left. The sole survivor of the massacre, she hid for twelve days before surrendering and spent a further three and a half years in captivity.

Bullwinkel served in Japan in 1946 and 1947 before resigning from the Army as Captain, but she rejoined the Citizen Military Forces in 1955 and served until 1970, when she retired as Lieutenant Colonel. Post-war, Bullwinkel spent 16 years as Matron of Melbourne's Fairfield Hospital and continued as Director of Nursing there until 1977. In that year, she married Colonel F.W. Statham and moved to Perth. She was a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial, and president of the Australian College of Nursing. In 1992, she returned to Banka Island to unveil a shrine to the nurses who died there.

Vivian Bullwinkel was appointed to the Order of Australia (AO) on 26 January 1993, appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) on 1 January 1973 and awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal on 6 March 1947 for service to the veteran and ex-prisoner of war communities, to nursing, to the Red Cross Society and to the community. She was also the winner of the Florence Nightingale Medal.

Photographs, newspaper articles and memorabilia relating to Vivian Bullwinkel were exhibited at the RSL in Argent Street, Broken Hill, in 2000 and the foyer of the Broken Hill Health Service has been named in her honour.

Events

1956 - 1960

Assistant Matron of the Repatriation General Hospital, Victoria

1964 - 1973

Deputy Principal of the Commandant Australia Red Cross Society

1992 - 1992

Honourary Life Member of the Australia Red Cross Society

2001 - 2001

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

1977 - 1977

Married Col. F W Statham OBE, ED

1961 - 1977

Matron of the Fairfield Hospital, Victoria

1973 - 1977

Member of the Council College of Nursing Australia

1973 - 1978

Member of the Council of Directors of the Royal Humane Society

1973 - 1973

Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)

1993 - 1993

Order of Australia (AO)

1973 - 1974

President of the College of Nursing Australia

1972 - 1974

President of the Soroptimist Clubs, Victoria

1947 - 1947

Royal Red Cross Medal

1942 - 1942

Sole survivor of Banka Island, where 21 Australian army nurses were massacred by Japanese soldiers

1941 - 1941

Staff member of the 13th Australian General Hospital, Australian Infantry Forces

1939 - 1940

Staff member of the Hamilton Private Hospital, Victoria

1940 - 1941

Staff member of the Jessie McPherson Hospital, Melbourne

1963 - 1977

Trustee of the National War Memorial, Canberra

1988 - 1989

Warden of Western Australian State War Memorial (first woman to be appointed)

Published resources

Resource Section

BULLWINKEL, VIVIAN, Department of Veterans' Affairs, 2002,
<http://www.wv2roll.gov.au/script/veteran.asp?ServiceID=A&VeteranID=790630>

TRANSCRIPT OF THE EULOGY GIVEN BY THE HON BRUCE SCOTT, THE MINISTER FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS AND MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE ON BEHALF OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA AT THE STATE FUNERAL FOR THE LATE VIVIAN STATHAM nee BULLWINKEL, 2000,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20011221170503/https://minister.dva.gov.au/media/speeches/2000/july/bullwinkel.htm>

Vivian Bullwinkel AO; MBE;ARRC; ED; FNM; FRCNA 18.12.1915 - 3.7.2000 Survivor of the Bangka Island Massacre, Angell, Dorothy,
<http://www.angellpro.com.au/Bullwinkel.htm>

Nurse survivors of the Vyner Brooke,
http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/nurse_survivors/bullwinkel.htm

List of Electoral Divisions Named After Women, Australian Electoral Commission,
<https://www.aec.gov.au/redistributions/division-names/women.html>

Book

Uncommon Australians: Towards an Australian Portrait Gallery, Faigan, Julian, 1992

Twentieth-Century Women of Courage, Escott, Beryl E, 1999

Australian nurses since Nightingale 1860-1990, Burchill, Elizabeth, 1992

Just wanted to be there : Australian Service Nurses 1899-1999, Reid, Richard, 1999

A Woman's war : the exceptional life of Wilma Oram Young, AM, Angell, Barbara, 2003

Portraits in Australian Health, Best, John, 1988

Our War Nurses: The History of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps 1902-1988, Goodman, R.D., 1988

Some Outstanding Women of Broken Hill and District, Camilleri, Jenny, 2002

Broken Hill, Kearns, Richard Hugh Bell, 1974

Sister Bullwinkel : the untold uncensored story, Silver, Lynette Ramsay, 2024

Edited Book

Who's Who in Australia 1998, Neto, Maryanne (researcher), 1997

Resource

RSL Returned Sisters' Sub-branch Thanksgiving Service, 100 Years of Australian Army Nursing, 2002,
<http://www.perthcathedral.org/>

Brave Women, Angell, Barb,
<http://www.angellpro.com.au/women.htm>

Where are the Women in Australian science?, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, 2003,
<http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/wisa/wisa.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Newspaper Article

Nurses revisit war hell (Bangka Island, Singapore), Warnock, Steve and Chapman, Barry (Photographer), 1993

Tributes pour in for the hero of Paradise Road, 2000

WWII nursing heroine dies, 2000

Heroic wartime nurse Vivian Bullwinkel dies in hospital, aged 84, 2000

Butchery on Bangka, 1977

Lasting testimony to local war hero, Murray-Wilson, Brad, 2002

Bullwinkel honored as World War Two hero, 2001

Exhibition highlights wartime survivor, 2000

Nurse's bravery example to others, 2000

State funeral farewell for Sister Bullwinkel, Mayes, Andrea, 2000

Third Anzac arrives home, 1997

She looked for a warm place to die, 1972

Nurses Four Years' Ordeal, 1962

Article

Service nurses honoured with long awaited memorial, 1999

Journal Article

Vivian Statham, nee Bullwinkel: Eulogy for State Funeral, St Georges Cathedral, Perth, Monday 10 July 2000, Scott, Bruce, 2000

Lecture

Speech on the occasion of the dedication of the site of the Australian Service Nurses' National Memorial Canberra, Scott, the Hon. Bruce MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, 1997,
<http://www.dva.gov.au/media/speeches>

Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html>

Archival resources

Australian War Memorial, Research Centre

[\[War Crimes and Trials - Affidavits and Sworn Statements:\]](#)

[List of Awards for Services rendered whilst Prisoners-of-War](#)

[\[War Crimes and Trials - Affidavits and Sworn Statements:\]](#)

[\[Campaign in Malaya and Singapore - Escape before and after capitulation and evacuation of civilians:\]](#)

[Official Historian 1939-1945 War, biographical files](#)

[Group portrait of Australian Army Nursing Service \(AANS\) nurses, who were former prisoners of war \(POWs\), on board the hospital ship Manunda on its arrival in Australia](#)

National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office

[Bullwinkel, V Sister - International Military Tribunal](#)

[Bullwinkel, Vivian](#)

National Archives of Australia, Sydney Office

[\[Radio talk presented by ABC war correspondent Haydon Lennard\] Release of nurses & civilian internees Sumatra \(Including Sister Vivian Bullwinkel\) \[18 pages: box 7\]](#)

Outback Archives, Broken Hill City Library

[Bullwinkel, Vivian](#)

Author Details

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