Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00381

Tweddell, Joyce

(1916 - 1995)

Born	19160703, Spring Hill, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Died	19951114, Caloundra Queensland Australia
Occupation	Army Nurse, Nurse

Summary

During World War II, Joyce Tweddell became a prisoner of war (POW) when she was captured, together with many other nurses, by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. She was interned in Sumatra for three and a half years before her recovery from the camp at the cessation of the war.

She refused to accept the honour of an MBE in the early 1970s as she believed all surviving prisoners of war should have been awarded this honour.

Details

Joyce went to school at Petrie Terrace State School and Brisbane State High School. After school she worked and completed courses at Nunns & Trivetts Secretarial School before turning 18, and thus became eligible to enter nursing. She loved to go bushwalking and made the three day trip on horseback to O'Reilly's Guest Lodge many times.

Joyce trained as a nurse in Brisbane, graduated from general training on 4 April 1939 and joined the staff of Brisbane General Hospital (now Royal Brisbane Hospital). She also completed a Therapy Radiography course, which was unusual at the time because it was necessary to have studied physics and chemistry at school, and although this was a rare achievement for a female at the time, Joyce had done so. She received her results for this course after she returned from the war. Her mother received her qualifications while Joyce was interned.

Joyce Tweddell enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) on 17 January 1941 and was ordered to active service in the 2/10th Australian General Hospital. She embarked on the *Queen Mary* for Singapore on 14 February 1941. She was aboard the *Vyner Brooke*, the last of three ships that left for Australia after the fall of Singapore on 12 February 1942. The *Vyner Brooke* was bombed in the Bangka Strait on 14 February 1942, and sank in approximately 15 minutes (a direct hit down a funnel exploded the bottom of the ship). The Japanese then returned and began firing machine guns at the survivors in the water. She and the surviving nurses and patients made for shore, and spent at least a day in the water. Many of their number were killed in the blast, shot in the water or drowned. To keep up their spirits, with no land in sight, they sang "We're Off to see the Wizard" over and over again as they floated and kicked while holding a piece of board. They landed on Bangka Island. Joyce was captured, together with many other nurses, by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore in February 1942 and held as a prisoner of war in Sumatra for three years. She was promoted to Lieutenant in December 1943.

During captivity Joyce and the other prisoners lived in a series of prison camps starting at Muntok, then on to Palembang in Sumatra, to a camp in the jungle and finally to Loebok Linggau where they remained until found a month after the Japanese surrender. Of the 32 nurses that were captured, 8 died whilst prisoners of war. Those left suffered from lack of food, fought and recovered from the many diseases such as malaria, beriberi, Bangka fever and scurvy and they survived the way they were treated by the Japanese. Though the Second World War ended on15 August 1945, the prison camps were not informed of this until 24 August. The whereabouts of their final camp was unknown until locals mentioned seeing women working in the jungle, and led them to the camp.

Joyce was recovered from the Japanese camp at 5am on 5 September 1945 and evacuated to a Singapore hospital. She returned to Australia on the hospital ship *Manunda* arriving in Australia on 27 October 1945. She was admitted to the Margate Convalescent Home on her return to Brisbane. From her internment she had contracted Malaria, Beri Beri, Chronic Amoebic Dysentery and Residual Debility.

Joyce was discharged from the Army on 27 June 1946. She was employed by the Royal Brisbane Hospital as second in charge of the Radiography Unit and remained in that unit until her retirement as Queensland's Chief Radiographer.

Joyce retired from nursing in 1979 and took to travelling in earnest, usually with Flo Syer (nee Trotter) who had been interned also. Joyce never married. In 1993 Joyce and six of the surviving POW nurses returned to dedicate a memorial on Radji Beach, Bangka Island. Present on 2 March 1993 were Janet P. 'Pat' Gunther, Florence 'Flo' Syer, Jean 'Jennie' Ashton, Mavis Allgrove, Vivian Bullwinkel, Wilma Oram and Joyce Tweddell, as well as a group of Red Cross Nurses, relatives of some of the nurses who perished and supporting personnel.

The Royal Brisbane Hospital honoured Joyce by naming one of their new buildings after her. The Joyce Tweddell Building houses the Infectious Diseases Unit, Cancer Care Unit, Radiation Oncology Unit and the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.

Published resources

Book
Heroic Australian women in war: astonishing tales of bravery from Gallipoli to Kokoda, De Vries, Susanna, 2004

Resource Section
Tweddell, Joyce : Service Record, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Australian Government, 2002, http://www.ww2roll.gov.au/script/veteran.asp?ServiceID=A&VeteranID=18321#summary1

Sister Sylvia Muir and Joyce Tweddell (1941), De Vries, Susanna, 2009, http://www.women.qld.gov.au/q150/1940/index.html#item-sylvia-muir-joyce-tweddell

Resource
The Australian Ex-prisoners of War Memorial, City of Ballarat, 2008, http://www.ballarat.com/memorial.htm

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, Queensland Office
TWEDDELL, Joyce - members folder, Second World War Queensland army personnel (QFX)

Australian War Memorial, Research Centre
Group portrait in the hospital grounds of original Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) Staff and three physiotherapists who sailed from Sydney in January 1941 to staff the 2/10th Australian General Hospital (AGH)

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

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
TWEDDELL JOYCE : Service Number - QX19070 : Date of birth - 03 Jul 1916 : Place of birth - BRISBANE QLD : Place of enlistment - BRISBANE QLD : Next of Kin - TWEDDELL ROSE

Author Details
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