

The abandoned British graves of Muntok 1943-45

by Margaret Caldicott.

My Mother, Mrs Shelagh Lea née Brown (internee Sumatra 1942-45) apologized before she died in 2005 that she was leaving the problem of her Mother's grave in Muntok, Bangka Island, unresolved. I was wondering how to proceed.

On November 25th 2011, I received an email from Ralph Armstrong (a, teensger internee 1942-45 and author of *Short Cruise on the Vyner Brooke*):

"I have only recently been told that only the Military graves at Muntok were moved to Jakarta, not the civilian ones. The civilian graves were abandoned apparently. Is this true?"

Unfortunately, I had to reply that as far as I knew from my Mother's years of correspondence with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), it was completely true. These British Civilian graves had been lost, due to the CWGC policy of having nothing to do with civilian war graves. I could tell he was very upset by the news concerning the graves of his Mother (Mrs Theresia Armstrong – known as Resie) and one of his Sisters (Miss Dixie Armstrong) in Muntok. His other sister (Mrs Grace Watters-Pryce) had died at Belalau, Sumatra (the 6th and final camp) and her grave together with all the other civilian graves there had been moved to Jakarta.

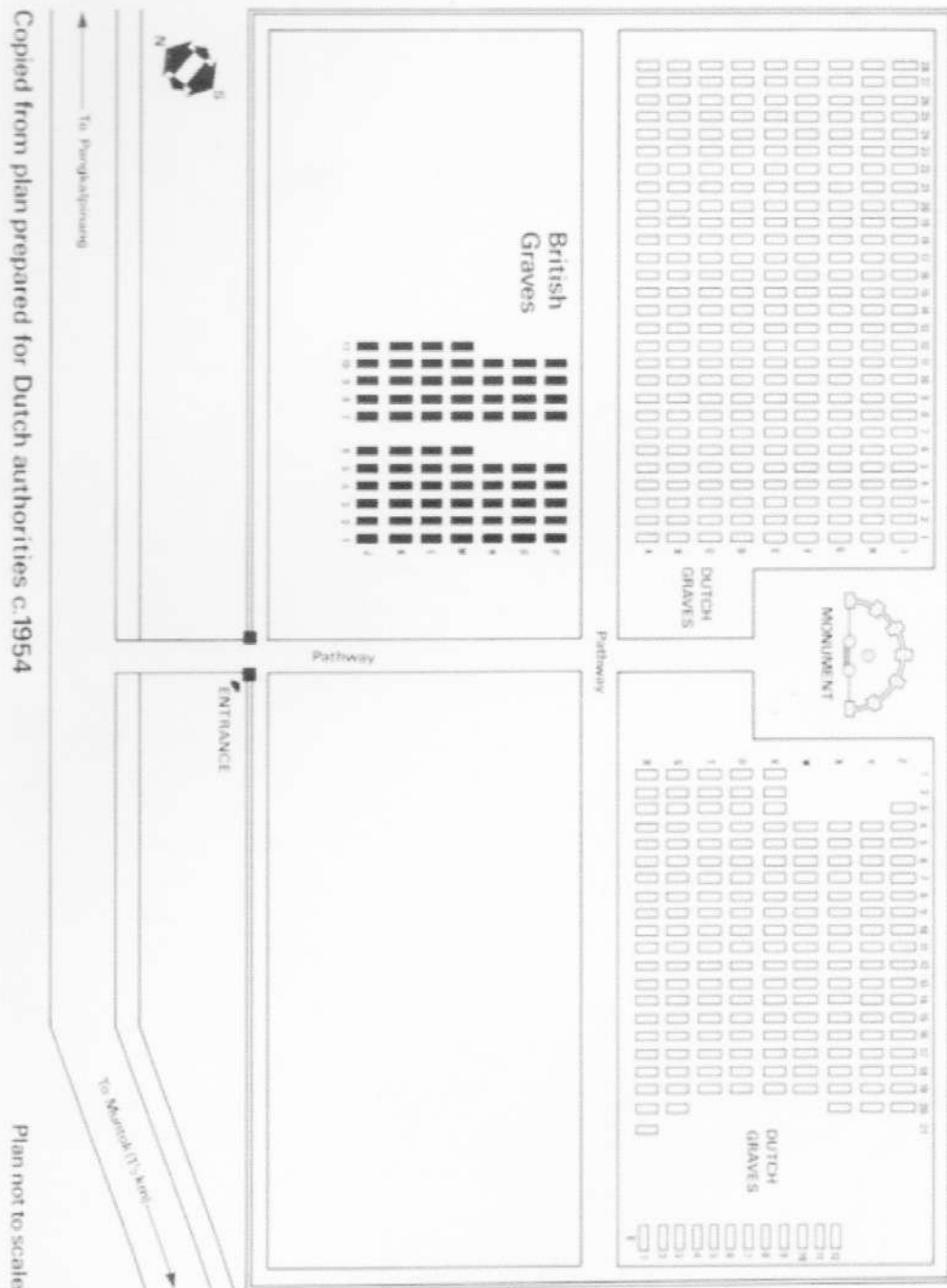
I discovered that Judy Balcombe (her Grandfather died and was buried in Muntok) had visited Muntok in 2011 with Anthony Pratt (his Father died and was buried in Muntok). Judy had written an article about their trip, and so I immediately started to correspond with her. Anthony's solicitor, Oswald de Sybel, had discovered my Mother's letters, written over many years to the CWGC, in the Archives at Kew. They knew about my mother's efforts to get some form of memorial for the Muntok graves and had picked up the trail. My Grandmother, Mrs Mary E Brown of Singapore had died on 17th January 1945 and was buried at Muntok.

When my Mother had received no help from the CWGC in the 1990s she then met Alan Harfield, and he agreed to write a Memorial Booklet for the Muntok graves, which would give families some memorial to treasure. The years went by and Alan became ill and died about 2 years after my mother died, without being able to finish the booklet.

Judy and Anthony were planning to visit Muntok again in February 2012 and so Stephen (my husband) and I joined the party. Alan Harfield's widow, June, returned all the information about the graves that my Mother and Alan had collected. We then set off with the plan and photographs to discover the fate of the graves!

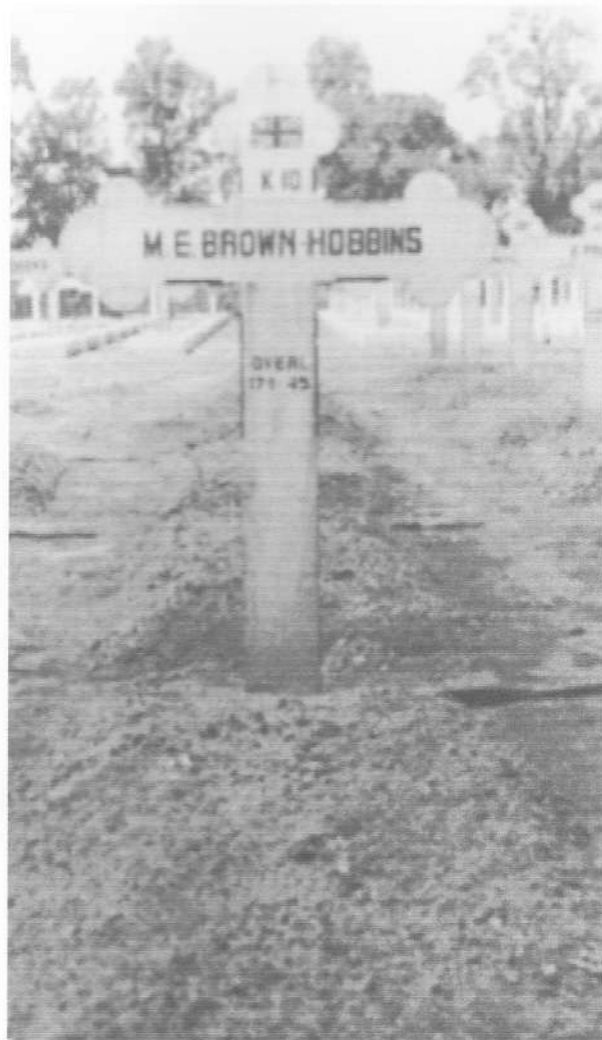
Cemetery plan with lettered rows and numbered graves referred to later .

Cemetery, Banca Island, Sumatra



After the War, the Dutch moved all of the Women's graves to this Cemetery from the shallow graves at the back of their camp. The Men had been buried in this cemetery when they died. Families were able

to request photographs of their relations' graves.



The Men's graves with a different design of cross can be seen behind the Women's graves.



Grave of the the Muntok RC priest, Father Bekker.

Later on, the Dutch moved all their war graves, but the British only moved their military graves, leaving the British civilian graves of 30/31 Women and 54 Men.

By the 1960s the remains of this cemetery looked a mess. The remaining crosses were falling down, grass growing etc. Various reports were given, stating the deteriorating condition of these graves, and yet nothing was done, and the graves were eventually lost.





"Let us not forget" was discovered amongst my parents' papers, dating from the 1960s.

"LET US NOT FORGET".

"Volunteers to dig a grave". So the word went round. ~~XX~~ has died, her body no longer able to withstand the great demands made upon it, her Spirit ready for her Master. Her last words were "I will pray for you all in Heaven". She had had typhus, and then there was no food to build up her strength. In the so called hospital, there was only enough water to allow one cupful per person per day for washing purposes. This in the tropics in sweltering fever heat and those nursing the sick, themselves in need of rest and care. And now the call for "Volunteers to dig a grave". When will the rough coffin be sent or will the body have to lie in the open for 24 hours and quiet vigil be kept, as on a previous occasion? Out of the barbed wire they go, those able at the time and with the strength for the digging. Peace? Quietness at any rate. No longer the noisy, dusty, dirty squalor behind the barbed wire. Human bodies, skin and bones, struggling for existence, struggling to help each other - orphaned children in a bewildered small world - sad sights - only silent happier memories of a past existence. The task is finished, back they come weary, silent - no water to wash off the dirt, the sweat, but triumph only that a need has been met, a task accomplished. A rough box is brought; will the boards hold? The small procession forms, how heavy the load, how slow the pace. The Camp is silenced, another body laid to rest. The way was steep, the clay heavy, the service simple, the prayers sincere. The Hymn 'O God our Help in Ages Past' never more appropriate, and favourite ~~was~~ more inspiring. One broken body now triumphant - for her Faith was Sure and her life of ~~Service~~ Witness Supreme in her Death. Women honoured woman.

Scripture
and

There is no one now to care for her Grave, no one is responsible for her last resting place. The end came soon for her, but there were many more like her, both men and women. Is she Chinese, is she English, Eurasian or Scotch? Is she Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of England or a Plymouth Brethren? She had loved Malaya, in her work or in her home. It was only the sad fate of War that caused her to die so soon and in such hardship in an Allied Territory, now Indonesia. She was proud to be British in 1943.

No tombstone or cross now marks the spot of her last resting place - no neat mown grass covers the site. No, for all she did, all she was - only the tropical growth of twenty-three years covers the ~~spot~~. The birds will be singing, the sunrises and the sunsets will lighten the spot, and the sun give warmth. Will there be buildings erected here in years to come or more battles fought?

She was just one of God's children, but let us not forget.....

Local people tell us that houses started to be built in the cemetery area from the end of the 1960s, and then the Pertamina Petrol Station was built on the land between 1979 and 1981. (The red and white bollards show the original cemetery entrance- see the plan on Page 2).



25 Bodies were discovered during the building of the garage, and the Catholic priest was asked if these could be reburied in the Catholic Cemetery.

In the RC Cemetery there is a grave with the inscription (translated by Mr Muhammad Rizki) "***Here rest 25 British Allied army/military. The victims of WW2 (1942-1945). Died in Muntok. Reburied at Muntok Catholic Cemetery on 19 March 1981***".



Surely these are not the graves of army/military but of 25 of the 30 British civilian Women? Their graves are on the plan where the garage now stands at the front of the cemetery.

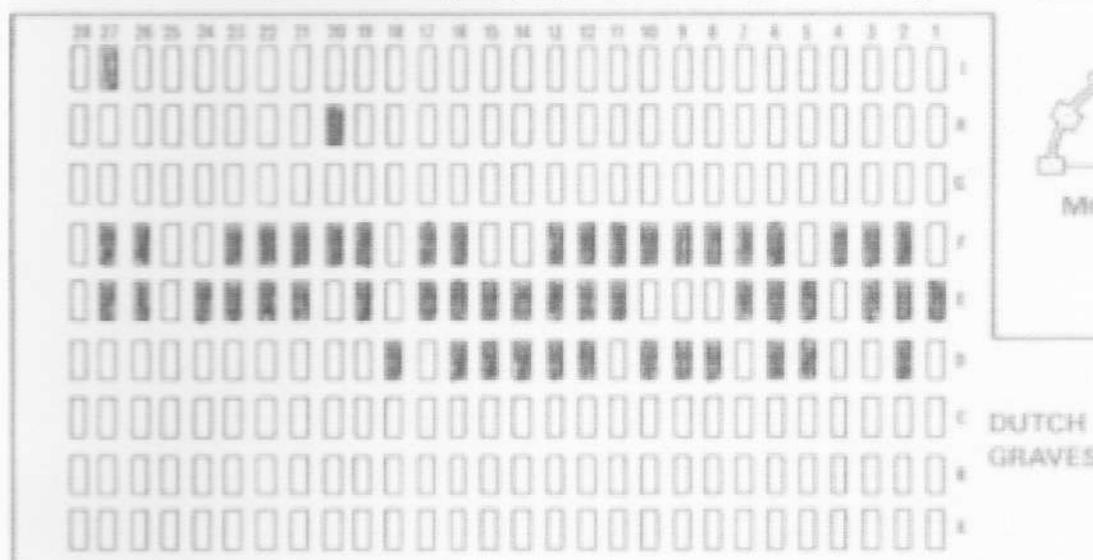
We have lists of the remaining British civilian graves with letters and numbers. There are one or two discrepancies, which we now have to investigate, but 2 of these lists relate to the cemetery plan (above).

My grandmother Mrs ME Brown Hobbins (the Dutch liked to put the maiden name after the surname) is in **Plot 3 Row K No 10**.

Anthony Pratt's father, Mr Donald Frederick Pratt is in **Plot 1 Row E No 15**.

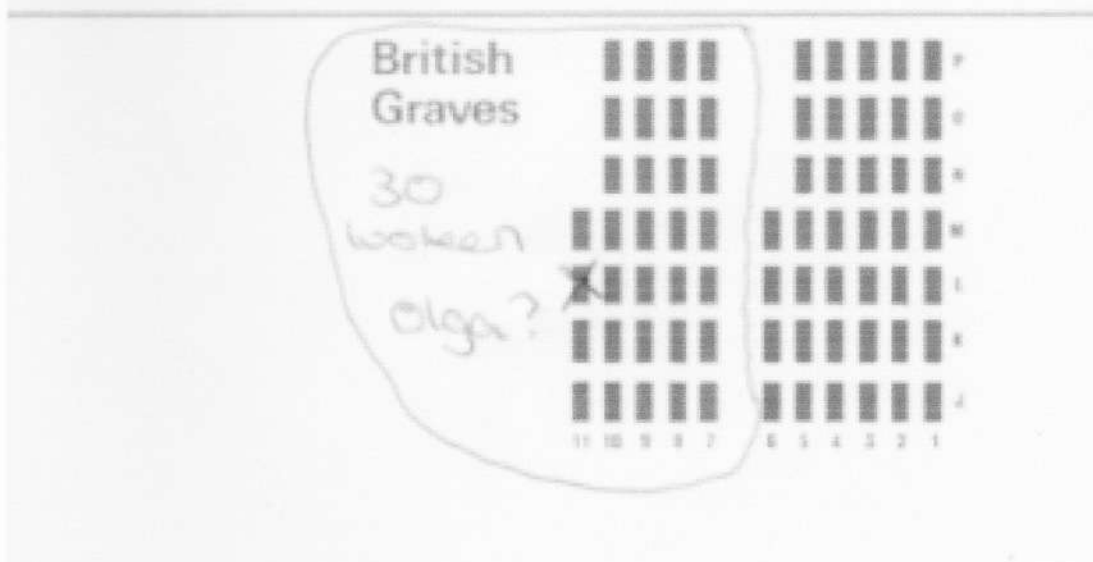
Judy's grandfather, Mr Colin Douglas Campbell is in **Plot 1 Row E No 7**.

PLOT 1 of Dutch plan c.1954(see page 2) showing remaining men's graves



x=1 grave is empty in the women's plot3

PLOT 3 of Dutch plan c.1954 (see page2) remaining womens graves J-P7-11



Below is **LIST NO. 1** of 3 lists in my possession. Studying the lists leads me to believe that 54 British Men's graves and 29 or 30 British Women's graves were abandoned in Muntok Cemetery.

Dutch War Cemetery, Muntok, Bangka Island

The list is in order of plot numbering as shown on the plan on page 12

<u>Location of Grave</u>	<u>Name and Forenames or Initials</u>	<u>Date of death</u>
Plot 1, Row D, No 2	Mr Algernon Neville Laybourne Aged 54. ¹	28 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row D, No 5	Mr Michael Francis Enright ² of Bankstown, New South Wales, Australia.	30 June 1945
Plot 1, Row D, No 6	Sir John Bruce Stuart Campbell, DSO & Bar, Croix de Guerre, St John's Ambulance Brigade, Perlis, Malaya. Aged 66	14 October 1943
Plot 1, Row D, No 8	Mr G C Spandaw ³	30 May 1944
Plot 1, Row D, No 9	Mr L G. Jeffrey ⁴	2 May 1944
Plot 1, Row D, No 10	Mr George Basil Warburton Gray ⁵	12 February 1944
Plot 1, Row D, No 12	Mr Hubert Victor Miles Woods of 23 Leigh Street, Ghant, Penang. Aged 43.	21 November 1943.
Plot 1, Row D, No 13	Mr G. Holderness, of Batu Anam Estate, North Johore.	28 May 1944.
Plot 1, Row D, No 14	Mr Robert Wallace Morris, of East Molesey, Surrey. Aged 42.	8 June 1944.
Plot 1, Row D, No 15	Mr Frederick Fletcher, of Walton-on-Naze, Essex. Aged 70.	9 June 1944.
Plot 1, Row D, No 16	Mr Frederick Langhorne Llewellyn BSc, AMIEE. Aged 48. ⁶	13 May 1944.
Plot 1, Row D, No 18	Mr Charles John Arnold, of Norwich. Aged 70.	3 January 1944
Plot 1, Row E, No 1	Mr F.V. Boswell ⁷ Aged 51.	10 July 1944.

- Notes:
1. Husband of Gladys Irene Laybourne who died Palembang October 1944.
 2. IWC.C publication Civilian War Dead 1939-1945, Vol VII, London, 1957, shows date of death as being 24 January 1942 which is a date prior to the setting up of the Civilian POW camps at Muntok. The Australian and Dutch cemetery lists give the date as '30 June 1945'.
 3. G.C. Spandaw is not included on the Dutch Cemetery List.
 4. Shown as 'L.C. Jeffrey' in the Dutch cemetery list.
 5. The Dutch Cemetery List gives the date of death as being '12 February 1945'. Husband of Major Gray who died at Muntok on 13 January 1945.
 6. The Dutch Cemetery List gives the date of death as being '13 May 1944'.
 7. The Dutch Cemetery List gives the date of death as being '10 July 1944'.

<u>Location of Grave</u>	<u>Name and Initials</u>	<u>Date of death</u>
Plot 1, Row E, No 2	Mr George Henry Hallam	18 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 3	Mr John Samuel Evans, of Austral Malay Tin Ltd, Puchong, Federal Malay States. Aged 37.	17 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 5	Mr Walter Penrice, of Singapore. Aged 47.	20 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 6	Mr David Richard Evans, of Baulkham Hills, New South Wales, Australia. Aged 60	30 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 7	Mr Colin Douglas Campbell Aged 53.	2 August 1944
Plot 1, Row E, No 11	Mr Francis Grainger Brown ⁸	5 November 1944
Plot 1, Row E, No 12	Mr Vincent Bristow Pybus Aged 57.	11 November 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 13	Mr Robert Stephenson. MM ⁹	8 April 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 14	Mr W. Vorlauf ¹⁰	5 February 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 15	Mr Donald Frederick Pratt Aged 37.	1 May 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 16	Mr James Henry Stanners, of Grangemouth, Stirlingshire.	22 January 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 17	Mr John C.H. Aitken, of West Cults, Aberdeen. Aged 54.	25 November 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 19	Mr Riley Lewellyn Morgan, of Devonport, Devonshire. Aged 28.	24 March 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 21	Mr John McGuffin, of Mosman Park, Western Australia. Aged 52.	8 March 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 22	Mr Gordon Burt, OBE, of Dunedin, New Zealand. Aged 46.	28 January 1945.
Plot 1, Row E, No 23	Mr C.H. Adam	5 October 1944.
Plot 1, Row E, No 24	Mr L.R. Blake, of Hove, Sussex. Aged 47.	23 February 1945

Notes: 8. IWGC publication Civilian War Dead 1939-1945, Vol Vii, London, 1957 gives the date of death as being '15 November 1944'.
9. The Dutch Cemetery List gives the surname as 'Stevenson'.
10. The Dutch Cemetery List gives the date of death as being '9 February 1945'.

These men's graves are listed in LIST NO. 2 of my lists.

Plot 1 Row F :-

No 2 Rev AV Wardle d. 4.1.1945	No 3 Mr R Meldrum d. 13.12.1944
No 4 Mr F Thompson d. 27.11.1944	No 6 Mr GS Reis d. 2.11.1944
No 7 Mr HS Tisshaw d. 24.11.1944	No 8 Mr T Efford d. 24.11.1944
No 9 Mr WP Douglas d. 23.11.1944	No 10 Mr RJP Clarke d. 19.11.1944
No 11 Mr TK Wilson d. 22.11.1944	No 12 Mr HL Watson d. 2?.11.1944
No 13 Mr CM Jenkin d. 17.11.1944	No 16 Mr CG Rebel d. 10.11.1944
No 17 Mr L Burn d. 8.11.1944	No 19 Mr JS Messenger d. 1?.11.1944
No 20 Mr CF Grixoni d. 28.10.1944	No 21 Mr GA Dohoo d. 25.10.1944

No 22 Mr T Burns d. 22.10.1944 No 23 Mr VS Conolly d. 17.10.1944
 No 26 Mr JG Dominguez d. 11.09.1944 No 27 Mr RH Prior d. 15.8.1944

<u>Location of Grave</u>	<u>Name and Forename or Initials</u>	<u>Date of death</u>
Plot 1, Row E, No 26	Mr Alfred Herbert Wright, AMIMechE, AMIEE, FRSA, of Grifnock, Glasgow. Aged 44	9 February 1945
Plot 1, Row E, No 27	Mr Herbert Zimmerman	11 June 1944.
Plot 1, Row H, No 20	Mr E.H.M. Manden	23 July 1944.
Plot 1, Row I, No 27	Mr E.A.G.A. Dumas	1 December 1944.
Plot 2	There is no record of British or Australian burials in this plot.	
Plot 3, Row J, No 7	Mrs Mary Louise Day Aged 53. ¹¹	16 December 1944
Plot 3, Row J, No 8	Mrs Marjory Gray ¹²	13 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row J, No 9	Mrs Rena Rosie Haynes Aged 49.	10 January 1945
Plot 3, Row J, No 10	Mrs Resie Armstrong	7 February 1945.
Plot 3, Row J, No 11	Mrs Louise Sinnatt wife of Lieutenant J.A.H. Sinnatt, Royal Artillery. Aged about 32	23 February 1945
Plot 3, Row K, No 7	Mrs Esme Barbara Skinner, of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Aged 38	22 March 1945
Plot 3, Row K, No 8	Mrs Amy Alexandra Mary Simmons Aged 30.	26 February 1945
Plot 3, Row K, No 9	Mrs Edith Florence Bedell, ¹³ Nurse, of Batang-kali Estate, Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S. Aged 65	19 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row K, No 10	Mrs Mary Elizabeth Brown, ¹⁴ of Grove Court, Katong, Singapore. Aged 67	17 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row K, No 11	Mrs Helen Dixey ¹⁵ Aged 48.	28 February 1945.

Notes: 11. The date of death recorded in a 'Camp List' is given as '17 December 1944'.
 12. Wife of George Basil Warburton Gray who died in the Male Internment Camp, Muntok on 12 February 1944. [Plot 1, Row D, Grave No 10 – see page 12].
 13. Wife of Doctor A.E. Bedell.
 14. Wife of Edwin A. Brown, CBE, VD, JP. [Her daughter Miss Shelagh Brown, later Mrs Shelagh Lea, was also interned in the Womens POW Camp at Muntok].
 15. The wife of A.C.N. Dixey. The date of death is shown as '27 February 1945' in the Dutch and Australian lists of burials and as '26 February 1945' in the 'Camp List'.

Note: Ralph Armstrong's mother, **Plot 3 Row J No 10** and sister **Plot 3 Row M No 10**

<u>Location of Grave</u>	<u>Name & Forenames or Initials</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Plot 3, Row L, No 7	Mrs Lillian Rodrigues	1 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row L, No 8	Mrs Agnes G. Dominguez ¹⁶	9 November 1944.
Plot 3, Row L, No 9	Mrs Marion Galloway Langdon Williams. ¹⁷ Aged 46.	7 February 1945.
Plot 3, Row L, No 10	Mrs Dorothy MacLeod ¹⁸ Aged 59.	1 April 1945.
Plot 3, Row M, No 7	Mrs Evelyn Mary Parr. ¹⁹ Red Cross Nurse, of Singapore. Aged 38.	11 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row M, No 8	Mrs Edith Evangeline Castle, ²⁰ of Doncaster, Yorkshire. Aged 50.	19 November 1944.
Plot 3, Row M, No 9	Miss Eva Prouse, of Bukit Bintang Road, Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S. and Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia. Aged 49.	2 February 1945
Plot 3, Row M, No 10	Miss Dixie Resie Armstrong. Aged 32.	5 April 1945.
Plot 3, Row M, No 11	Mrs Kathleen Mary Hutchings ²¹ of 12 Balmoral Road, Singapore. Aged 46.	12 April 1945.
Plot 3, Row N, No 7	Mrs Olga Mary Neubronner, CMB., SRN, Senior Superintendent, St John's Ambulance Brigade, Singapore. ²² Aged 39.	2 March 1945.
Plot 3, Row N, No 8	Mrs Mary Awmack Battersby ²³ (known as Mona) of Tapah Rubber Estate Ltd., Tapa Road, Perak. F.M.S. Aged 51.	11 February 1945.

- Notes:
16. Wife of J.G. Domingues who died at Muntok on 11 September 1944.
 17. Widow of L. Langdon Williams of Singapore. Shown in the Imperial War Graves Commission publication *Civilian War Dead 1939-1945*, Vol VII, under the surname of 'Williams'. She was, however, always known as 'Mrs Langdon Williams' in the POW Camp at Muntok.
 18. Wife of Lieutenant Colonel D.G. MacLeod.
 19. Widow of the late Reverend A.C. Parr, of St Andrews School, Singapore.
 20. Mrs E.E. Castle is shown on the 'Camp List' as having died on '18 November 1944'.
 21. Wife of Major Philip Townsend Hutchings of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Reserve who also died in captivity.
 22. Wife of Captain Guy Vivian Neubronner of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. It has been reported that Mrs Neubronner was exhumed and moved probably to a Dutch Cemetery when the Dutch nationals were exhumed and reburied in a war cemetery at Jakarta, Java.
 23. Wife of Eric William Battersby.

See Note 22 above. Mrs. Olga Neubronner (**Plot 3 Row N No 7**), on another list "Is not registered at the Netherland Field of Honour at Menteng Pulo". We are unsure about Olga's grave? She was a close friend of the Brown family, who wrote beautiful poetry in the camps, despite not only having had a miscarriage on Muntok pier after shipwreck but also later having been imprisoned with 3 other British nurses in Palembang Jail for 6 months. (The nurses never discovered the reason for their imprisonment).

<u>Location of Grave</u>	<u>Name & Forenames or Initials</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Plot 3, Row N, No 9	Mrs Isobel Veronica Pennefather, ²⁴ of Sebrong Estate, Layang Layang, Johore, Malaya. Aged 48.	15 March 1945.
Plot 3, Row N, No 10	Mrs Emily Elizabeth Smith, of 13 Simon Lane, Singapore.	9 November 1944.
Plot 3, Row O, No 7	Miss Lottie Regina Reginald Wales, of 86 Cairnhill Road, Singapore.	3 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row O, No 8	Mrs Joan May Maddams, BA ²⁵ Aged 36.	19 December 1944.
Plot 3, Row O, No 9	Mrs Ruth Russell-Roberts ²⁶ Aged 36.	20 January 1945.
Plot 3, Row O, No 10	Mrs Muriel Gregory, MA (Wales), B.Litt (Oxon). ²⁷ Aged 43.	15 November 1944.
Plot 3, Row P, No 7	Miss Sabine Elizabeth Mackintosh, of Alton, Hampshire. Aged 57.	27 December 1944.
Plot 3, Row P, No 8	Mrs Blanche Lucy Jones, ²⁸ of 88 Circular Road, Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S. Aged 58.	8 December 1944.
Plot 3, Row P, No 9	Mrs Nellie Ellen Tay, ²⁹ of 61 Rockshore Road, Singapore. Aged 40.	21 November 1944.
Plot 3, Row P, No 10	Mrs Sylvia Plummer, ³⁰ Aged 42.	19 November 1944.

- Notes:
24. Wife of Edward Matthew Pennefather.
 25. Wife of Arthur Samuel Taylor Maddams. Incorrectly listed in the Australian casualty list as 'Mrs J. M. Taylor'. It has been confirmed that there was no 'Mrs Taylor' in the Women's POW Camp at Muntok.
 26. Wife of Lieutenant Colonel D. Russell-Roberts.
 27. Wife of Charles Pressley Gregory.
 28. Wife of Frederick Leonard Jones.
 29. Wife of Dr Tay of Singapore.
 30. Wife of A.H. Plummer.

Details of additional Prisoners of War who died and were buried
at Muntok

The following is a list of prisoners of war who were known to have died during their captivity at Muntok, and who were buried in the cemetery, but for whom there are no known grave markers or grave details.

<u>Name & Forenames or Initials</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Mrs Claire Sammy Aged 52.	18 November 1944.
Mr Frederick Marshall Adam of Singapore. Aged 38. Husband of Joan Adam.	25 January 1945.
Mrs Marjorie Hindnaugh Cocke Nurse. St John's Ambulance Brigade. Aged 53. Wife of Morris Hayward Cocke.	5 March 1945.

Note: Mrs C Sammy is mentioned elsewhere as being buried in the von Salehn Netherlands field of honour Leuwigayah/Cimahi.

Judy and I wonder whether we are able to honour these abandoned graves of members of our families, 70 years on, by having some form of internet Roll of Honour and, hopefully, a monument in Muntok with the names of these, our British civilian men and women?

The people of Muntok have been very helpful and respectful of our plight, and not only gave us a very warm welcome but also looked after us during our stay. We now have new friends and we hope to return to Muntok when their Tinwinning Museum is open, with a space devoted to these 2 camps.

I am indebted to Anthony Pratt's solicitor friend Oswald de Sybel for all his hard work, unearthing my mother's letters at Kew about the interned civilian graves of Muntok 1942-1945. I am also indebted to Judy Balcombe for her research and for sharing her extensive knowledge, and for the wording and planning of the 4 plaques, which made our trip very poignant. Without the www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk website (please visit it), we would never have known about Judy's article in 2011. Thank you also to the MVG members for enabling the plaques to be made for the Men's and Women's camps in Muntok.

Further reading about some of these civilians:
Women Beyond the Wire by Lavinia Warner & John Sandilands
By Eastern Windows by William H McDougall, Jr