

Riau Islands Trip - Malayan Volunteers Group

Thurs 16 Feb 2012

Liz Moggie, Frans Duiniveld, Edda and Rufus de Silva, Asalina Yunus and Imogen Holmes met at Tanah Merah Ferry terminal. We took the 1820 ferry and arrived at Tanjung Pinang, Bintan Island, Indonesia about 1 ½ hours later. Clocks were put forward 1 hour. Two Customs officers with Labrador dogs sniffed around us. Darwin, Liz's Indonesian son in law met us and our cases were stowed into the back of a car and we walked along dark and dingy streets and alleys, poorly lit, along a walkway between wooden houses over the sea to a seafood restaurant. We enjoyed steamed tilapia, kang kong, mixed vegetables, prawn fritters and Bintang beer. More alleys busy with many motorcycles. It had been raining heavily and there were a few puddles to negotiate. Down some steep steps to board a sampan.

Dark and tricky disembarking and embarking a large dive vessel called Bintan Explorer. We have a crew of 6 with 4 owners and friends. The Captain is dark, rugged and comes from Lembatan Island east of Flores. There are 7 of us, a total on board of 17, 12 men and 5 women. We boarded at the stern an area with bench seats around. Through to the galley and kitchen section which had a bench seat along one side with narrow table. Opposite was a large counter for laying out food. At one end beneath the counter was a sliding cupboard door which led to the engine room full of rather rusty looking engines. Door from the galley down 6 steep steps to an air conditioned dormitory cabin with 6 berths and 3 alcoves with 4 berth cabins. Each berth had 'sun and moon' patterned curtains. Imogen and I had one four berth cabin. Bottom sheet and rock hard pillow, small thermal blanket and soft towel provided. 2 loos with wash hand basins in a small room between the stern and dining area. No seats on loos, salt water constantly flowing into a big plastic tong in the corner with dipper for flushing. Hose for showering. From the stern there were steps of differing heights up to the top deck which had tables, chairs and benches and a higher platform with a small door for access to the prow.



Donned sarong and had a cursory wash upstairs and attempted to climb into my top berth. It was a long way up. With much giggling and pushing from Imogen arrived in my space. Small windows at the head of our berths and along our bulkhead so with head on pillow much to view.

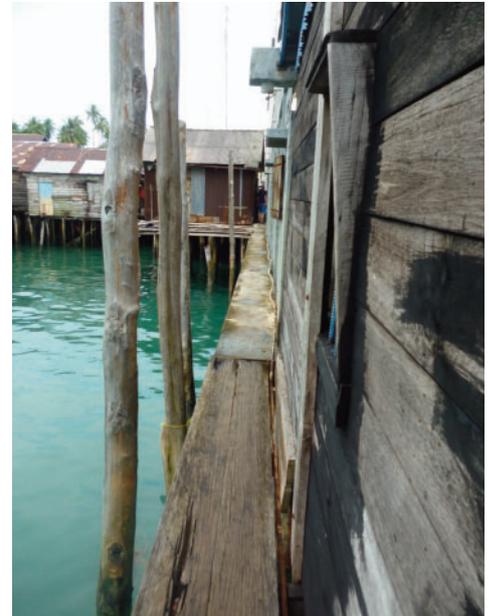


Fri 17 Feb 2012

0340 engines roared into life and we were off on the high tide. 0505 rain lashing on my window woke me. Could not get down the 2 rungged ladder at the end of the berth. It was very high. Tried every which way. Eventually 0530 swung down by holding the ledge between Imogen's bunk and mine and stretching my leg fully down to get my toes on the wooden edge of the lower bunk to descend. Challenging. Dark and cloudy outside but newish moon. One of the crew with a torch was peering out at the stern presumably checking depths. The boat cut under the bridge between Rempang and Galang, across Selat Gombol to Moro on Sungei Bawah.

Breakfast 3 small pesang mas and 2 cups of inky black, very strong coffee.

Tied up at Moro, Sungei Bawah jetty, climbed up steep ladder and walked along a narrow 18 inch plank walkway with wooden hut on one side and water on the other, quite high up from sea level.



Amazing feature were large concrete block houses which had rows of holes for swifts for the collection of their nests. A thriving and lucrative business. There was a constant twittering which was electronic to entice the birds to come and build their nests.

Lots of bicycles some with rattan panniers hanging across them with bigger areas each side for carrying goods and many brightly coloured Japanese Honda and Kawasaki motorcycles. Poor main street quite dirty. Picked up a car and were driven up a rutted coast road through kampongs. Stopped at a large Bhuddist temple on high hill. Moro seemed fairly primitive with rubbish everywhere under the seaside houses hoping for high tide to sweep out the rubbish. Many prison blockhouse/towers for the swifts.

Left 1145 along Selat Durian. 1205 past Durian promontory where on the escape route 2 men were left to assist escaping refugees in Feb 1942.

Lunch: soup with veg and small bird's eggs, steamed ikan, sweet & sour chicken and pesang mas.



Motored awhile and had a siesta. Went ashore at Tanjong Batu and walked the town. Some old Dutch colonial bungalows.

Stopped and talked to schoolchildren in the square practising for a concert. They were chatty and friendly. Boys put their foreheads on my hand after shaking hands. A beautiful gesture. We stopped at a stall for a kopi susu and chat with the locals.

Dinner: fried chicken, sardine curry, veg soup. Fresh sweet pineapple and watermelon.

Happy hour and we sat around on our top deck and recounted our life stories and association with the Malayan Volunteers Group. Liz and I had only met last August and discussed the possibility of this Riau trip and we said 'come on let us do it'.

Sat 18 Feb 2012

Left Tg. Batu around 0130. Fairly rough around 0200 crossing open sea. Alarm at 0600 for us all. Strong black kopi with condensed milk sitting on the stern. Lovely clear sky with a pinky dawn.

0700 storm approaching.

Approached and went right around Pompong Island which is steep and wooded. Coconut grove at one spot. Some fishing traps. Bengku Island in the distance. 0730 storm approaching with a very black sky.



Breakfast: coffee, toast and selai nanas – pineapple jam - and pesang mas.

0800 lots of islands with mist on mountains. Still raining. There are terrific rips and currents between the islands. Ashore at Tanjung Biru, Temiang Island, Lingga. Walked on a winding cement path through kampong. Children were being punished outside a school. A line of boys arms crossed, holding their ears and standing on one leg. 1000 sailed on.



1135 we must be going over the equator about now

1145 lunch: soup with very green leafy veg, carrot, cauliflower, whole fish with belimbings and veg on top – very sour. Egg and veg omelette, fried rice and chicken. Fungus in soup and vermicelli.



Stopped at Senayang Island during the morning where we had to wait while our Captain registered with the Harbourmaster.

We walked through the village and there were lots of chickens, ducks and cats. At one house with colourful tiled steps the owner was proud to show us a cat with a third ear.

This is where Imogen's father Captain Kirkwood of the Royal Indian Medical Service tended Janet Lim.

Going through islands of Bakung and Lingga around eastern side to Buton on coast from Diak town. Entered at 1430 and at 1500 through strait with Pulau Dasi on left and fishing village of Kelit on right. Followed the western coast of Lingga.



1715 making for a large coral bank and in distance on horizon was an enormous bauxite barge. Scraped and bumped over the coral and had to go astern for a bit. 1800 very tricky and slow approach to Buton arriving just before dark. A very fast ferry came in and we had to adjust our mooring to accommodate it. The ferry tied up alongside and left sometime during the night.

Very long covered concrete jetty. Fishing nets cast out at various points along the jetty and fisher folk also using lines to catch tiny fish without bait (to feed their chickens). Steps down at various points for small sampans to unload and load foot passengers. Motorcycles used the jetty too and there were many.

Set off in 2 cars at 0830 after a huge leap up onto the jetty. Lots of planted nipah palms (for attap) on the way. Stopped at Linggam Cahaya a fantastic museum full of old Malay artefacts. Antiques were collected from people on the island. Dutch, Chinese and willow pattern china. Beautiful porcelain. Malay keris and costumes. A fine entrance path lined with old jars and ground orchids. There is a strong association with the Sultanate of Johore.

Crops on the island used to be gambier (for tanning leather) and pepper. Visited site of the old Istana Damnah ruins with a fine squat loo on a pedestal at the back and a plunge pool. Across the road was a modern replica of the old palace with pictures, silk hangings and a throne dais. A reception house at the back with an unusual forked path. This is where the ministers used to interview supplicants. Went on in the car up a rough laterite road and then climbed up a fairly steep and stony hill to the old Bukit Cening Fort with old Dutch cast iron cannons from VOC - Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie – Dutch East India company.



Unusual tall bush with white berries on it and a lovely pitcher plant with several flowers. Onboard at 1130, chugged slowly through channel – made a bish on the coral and bumped around and had to go astern.

Lunch: beehoon, omelette cake with curried veg inside, fish, veg soup and melon.

Arrived Singkep 1345, walked through Dabo town. A few bird towers. A fine new white mansion. Lots of cats and dogs. Durians, dukus and mata kuching for sale. Extremely steep hill so Frans hailed a motorcycle and I went up on the back of it followed by the others. Reached the large Dabo hospital on the top of the hill. We spent quite a long time looking around finding the older part of the hospital at the back. Looking up at one of the tiled corridors at the rear we saw that the tiles were the original ones made in Marseilles. Imogen took an enormous tumble, luckily on to the grass. Thought she was going to end up in the hospital where her father had done such sterling work during the war caring for internees. There was a pleasant garden at the back with a fountain, a lovely place for convalescence. Across the road were bungalows which must have been used by hospital staff and the bigger one used by the Dutch administrator. Azlina found an old Indonesian lady with a beautiful face who had a kopi stall where we enjoyed good coffee. Could not obtain the miracle face cream. Wandering down the steep hill there were old colonial Dutch bungalows with big gardens on each side of the road and now looking a bit neglected.



At the bottom of the hill we came upon a stall selling Apam Baleh, a pancake, cooked in a mould and filled with crushed peanuts and sugar, served piping hot. Strolled on into the town and Frans stopped at the durian stall negotiated for a nice buah and we all had some. Very strong with a lingering taste. We burped our way back to our kapal observed by a very large crowd on the jetty who enjoyed whizzing up and down the jetty on their motorcycles. One cycle had 2 adults and 3 children on board. The town was not going to miss viewing us eating our dinner. Even small babies were brought along for the ride.



Dinner: veg soup – every soup was different – prawns, fried chicken and potato balls. Of course a big thermos of rice with each meal. Discovered a sweet cordial made from passion fruit – Markisa. Late to bed at 2100 and we left the jetty at 2230. Nice to sleep with the diesels thundering away.

Mon 20 Feb 2012

Rained a lot during the night. 0500 woken with flashing lightning and the boat wallowing around in a roughish sea. Big tanker on horizon and land in the distance. At 0710 engines were slowed right down and we gathered at the stern while I strewed heather for all those lost on the Tandjong Pinang especially Alexander Brown father of Valerie and Delphine, grandfather of Ann and Tessa; Penelope Landon, mother of June and grandmother of Jeanie and David. I said a prayer for all those souls lost having read through the passenger list earlier. We took photos. One of the passengers was a Mrs. Howe an Australian cake shop owner of GH cafe, Battery Road who gave cake making lessons at YWCA.

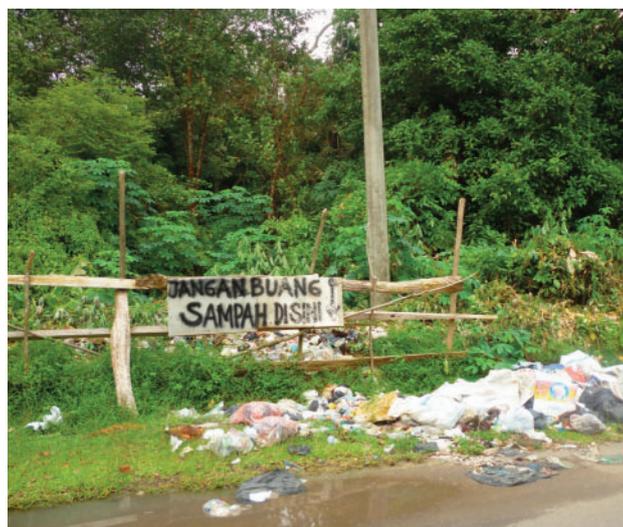


0835 passed Tg. Ular lighthouse.

5 small ships and a car ferry. Sheeting down with rain. Arrived Muntok on Banka Island and tied up alongside 2 Timah tugs at jetty. Immigration at 1025 and the very young and smartly uniformed Health Officer examined all of us, stethoscope on our chests and torch into our eyes.

1045 had an Emping – looks like a prawn cracker but made of a fruit called Melinjau.

1245 lunch: fish curry, varied veg soup, chicken, papaya and melon.



Very difficult getting across the two vessels and up on to the wharf. Walked up a hill but it was not the right one as it lead to the compost area and some official drove up and corrected us. Back down and up another hill and we walked and walked. It felt like 3 miles. Overcast, oppressive and hot. Police cruised by and then some authority who needed our names and nationalities. A gentleman came by and said that Muhd. Rizki was still at a meeting. Whilst waiting on the road we discovered we were in front of the town's murtabak stall. A young Indian fisherman who spoke very good English had a long chat with us. Opposite there were rambutan trees and an avocado tree. A second car came and took us through the large and sprawling town. We passed a sign which said 'Jagan Bwang Sampah Disini' which amused some by being deliberately misunderstood.



On to the waterfront where a lot of the women and children from the shipwrecked Vyner Brooke came ashore. We were shown the buildings they were kept in. One where the English previously kept their horses.

Further inland there was a cinema where prisoners were also kept. We were then driven to the Kalian lighthouse where the memorial in a gated enclosure is dedicated to all the Australian nurses.



I saw Mavis Allgrove's name as E.M. Hannah as she then was. Issued with life jackets we boarded two motorised sampans and banged our way for about 20 minutes to a beautiful beach. Approaching I saw Tg. Ular lighthouse. The beach is Pantai Radji or Telok Ingeris (English Beach) as the locals call it.



We were shown the area where the men were bayoneted. There was a large fresh water stream flowing down to the sea. Further on we came to the place where the nurses were told to walk into the sea to be shot. This is where Vivian Bullwinkle survived her gunshot wound and eventually met up with soldier Kingsley in the jungle. Some big boulders on the beach reminiscent of Penang and Batu Ferringhi. The remains of those bayoneted or shot have never been found which raises the question why?

Liz led us all in the WW1 prayer for the fallen by Laurence Binyon:
They shall not grow old as we that are left
Age shall not wear them nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.
We will remember them.

1720 returned in our sampans, getting wet with spray but the return journey was not so bumpy. Driven to the Catholic cemetery where 25 bodies of internees have been buried in one grave. They had been exhumed from the area where Pertamina petrol station now exists. There are still old Dutch graves at the back. Sadly the local government did not register the names when bodies were reinterred.



Imogen said something ran over her feet on the second night at sea and was able to confirm it when she went downstairs during happy hour and saw ratty scampering across the floor.

Dinner: fried chicken, sweet and sour tofu, veg soup, watermelon.

Apparently we have been extremely lucky with the weather as this area around Banka Island can be very rough. The Captain would not go around the Pangkal Pinang side because of the weather, fortunately we wanted to go only to Muntok.

Tues 21st Feb 2012

Alongside Timah wharf with 3 Timah tugs/barges. No rat during the night. 0600 up a fine clear day.

Breakfast: Ubi (sweet potato), boiled eggs, watermelon, toast.

We all made an effort with clothes for today's presentation and lunch with the Administrator. 0900 Met Muhammad Rizki, Senior Manager Metallurgy of Timah. Driven to Timah's spacious rest house and served Kuih Kuci triangular glutinous rice with slightly sweet chopped chicken in centre, otak otak, Apam Baleh, Kuih Pelita/kapal, a rectangular boat of banana leaf with white coconut jelly inside.

In April 1945 all prisoners moved from Muntok to Berlallau in Sumatra. The internees were released by the Dutch. The Japanese first came to Muntok Feb 14 1942 and bombed the ships Gian Bee, Mata Hari and Vyner Brooke.

1200 went in buses to beautiful palace of Bupati, Regent of Muntok (elected).

Anthony Pratt and Judy Balcombe were garlanded and we were escorted by ceremonial costumed people, the men holding tall umbrellas and the ladies with garlands on cushions. We were led to the steps. Dance of welcome by lovely girls. Very beautiful and graceful.





We were seated at round tables with pretty decorations. Speech of welcome by the Bupati and response by Anthony Pratt. Then Muhd. Rizki spoke in both Indonesian and English and said that all those whose relatives died here are now family.

Buffet lunch: beef curry rib soup – guli kedondong is an acid fruit. Sweet sour prawns, baked fish in a spicy chillie sauce, fish balls, beef satay, gadoh gadoh, fried sotong. Grapes, Lengeng – mata kuching, kway lapis, kway koci with coconut and palm sugar.

After lunch we were driven nearby to the prison which was the site of the men's camp. Anthony Pratt's father died here in 1945. The plaque was presented and placed on the new plinth. We were met by officials and shown a short way into the prison compound. I could see a durian tree in the distance.

On to the shore where some of the escaping boats landed at Kalian lighthouse. Anthony and Judy left their garlands on the memorial to the Australian Nurses.

Then to site of the women's camp with the existing well still in use. A huge crowd of villagers with their children gathered around for the plaque ceremony. A large notice board showed drawings of the women's huts. Margaret Caldicott's grandmother died at Muntok. The Bupati made a speech. He also told the village that the road would be made good. Enthusiastic children sang the Indonesian national anthem. The women's camp covered an area of 5 acres. Only objects still remaining are 2 wells and the kitchen concrete platform. Margaret Caldicott spoke.



Returned to Timah resthouse for tea and watched a documentary film of Vivian Bullwinkle. Margaret Caldicott showed us pictures of her family in the early days in Singapore and her mother's sad letter to her father from the camp at Berlalu telling him of his wife's death at Muntok.

We were each presented with a Timah t-shirt, a Banka tin keychain and a colourful t-shirt depicting local scenes. The Bupati's wife who promotes the island's heritage and batik which is called CUAL, presented the ladies with a beautiful batik silk blouse with a typical Banka pattern.

We had dinner outside around 1900. Gadoh gadoh, prawns, fish and a sweet cakey like pudding made with cheese. Watermelon.

Muhd. Rizki took me to the kedondong tree outside and presented me with a branch with some fruit on it. We had been given a wonderful welcome with delicious food and taken on a most interesting tour of the wartime sites. Everyone wanted to chat. A memorable day indeed.

There were planks ready for us to walk from jetty to the first barge but an enormous jump down and Franz helped us. We left the Timah wharf at 1540.

Wed 22 Feb 2012

0600 we were in the mouth of the Moesi river with muddy water.

Breakfast – fatter bananas, selai nanas (pineapple jam) with toast. One of the crew poured himself a coffee from the thermos and added 4 huge tablespoons of sugar. More sugar than coffee.

0720 – lots of water hyacinth in the water. Trees growing in the water but not mangroves. An occasional padi field. 0810 still chugging up river. Large ship coming up behind us. Several Banka ferries going down river passed us. Increasing small boat traffic. 0930 passed Global Triton registered in Panama. On left bank an oil terminal ? Pladjoe.



1020 approaching more oil storage tanks. Lots of shipping, small boats, houses, both sides. 1050 we chugged under Ampera bridge with stacks of traffic going over it and approached wharf.



Moved off and back under bridge and then 11.15 tied up alongside 2 tongkangs to register with harbour office. 12 cookie came and gave us a scratch lunch of veg and fish.

12.45 very hot and still waiting.

12.45 we left our kapal with fond farewells to our stalwart crew and climbed over a boat and got into 2 taxis. Went over Ampera Bridge and saw our boat tied up alongside.

There are 1 ½ million people in Palembang which is the second largest city after Medan in Sumatra.

1340 still in the traffic looking for the hotel. 1445 arrived at the Hotel Arista (which changed its name from Horison a few weeks ago causing the confusion).

Lots of durians around. We went to the market by the river. Filthy with rubbish everywhere and crowded. Exceedingly hot. We walked around trying to find batiks but all were of poor quality.



Thurs 23 Feb 2012

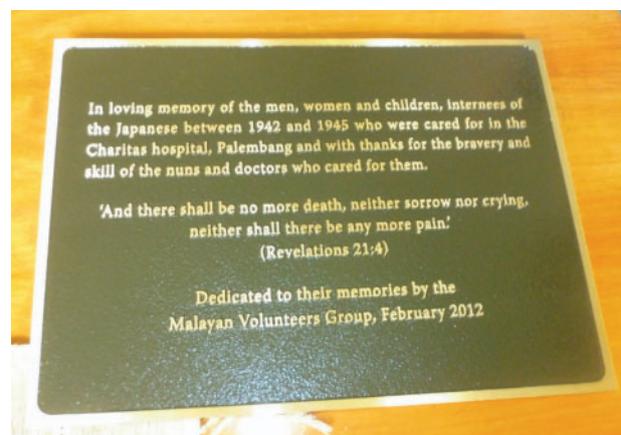
Sumptuous breakfast provided by Arista Hotel. Every type of European food, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese and Thai. Eggs, omelettes, pancakes, waffles, breads, croissants, muffins. Fresh fruit – papaya, pineapple, rambutans, watermelon. Fresh orange and guava juice. A special blender to make thick papaya juice. Very good Indonesian coffee.



We hired a car and our driver Arun Khan (HP 0815 32984394) was most obliging and pleasant. He was smartly dressed in a batik shirt and wore white elongated shoes with squared off toes. I noticed many Indonesian men favoured these long toed shoes.

To Tg. Tumpang textile museum Fikri Koleksi, Jl. Kiranggo Wiro Sentiko No. 500 Rt. 12-30 Ilir Tel: (0711) 315571. We watched several girls making songket. Had fun looking at the batik and songket and purchased several sarongs and small items.

Next stop Charitas Hospital where hanging in the entrance is a plaque from the Army, Navy and Air Force of the United Kingdom in gratitude to the Mother Superior and Sisters of Charitas Convent who gave so much help during the period 1942-1945 to prisoners of war. We met Dr. Yanto and were taken around the hospital, shown old pictures of the hospital and the heavy bronze plaque which Judy Balcombe on behalf of the Malayan Volunteers Group had presented the day before. Mother Pawli, head of Charitas Foundation came to greet us. Sister Melanie is the head of the congregation of Franciscan Sisters. Dr. Yanto and his assistant then took us across the road – where we took our lives into our hands negotiating the traffic – to St. Joseph's Convent. The large and beautiful church was rebuilt in 2011 as the old one had succumbed to termites. A statue of the Virgin had a serene Indonesian face.



Lunch at a local restaurant – kway teow, soto ayam, bihun goreng.

Stopped and visited a zoo Ponto Kayu Park in parkland setting. Small elephant being ridden by his keeper. Several monkeys and the wah wahs were whooping. A crocodile, hamsters and geese. Said farewell to Rufus, Edda and Azlina at the airport and then visited Carrefour Hypermarket for Imogen to buy a case. Noticed they sold Lays crisps, Indonesian style. All enjoyed a Magnum ice cream.

We passed an interesting T-SHIRT shop. Hordes of motorcycles driven by men and women weaving in and around the cars. Dextrous drivers as we never saw an accident.

After dinner we met Frans' friends in the lobby who showed us 2 antique sonket sarongs. We were then driven to the home of the dealer, quite a long journey. The sitting room, ante room and dining room were filled with old chests, Dutch and Chinese furniture, Dutch lamps and cupboards full to the brim with porcelain, metal ware, neilo and baskets. Most of the porcelain and particularly the trade beads, were dug up from the river. We were engrossed and surprised to find it was after midnight when Imogen phoned from the hotel to enquire our whereabouts.

Friday 24 Feb 2012

Same car and driver and 11.45 dropped Imogen at the airport. Stopped at a rattan shop where a great deal is imported from Cheribon on north coast of Java. Good strong furniture. Interesting large woven food covers in pleasing patterns, round and oblong. Some big oval clocks on the wall in a bronze colour and intricately patterned. Mosques crowded for Friday prayers and the Imams were preaching their sermons broadcasted by loudspeakers.



Museum shut for lunch so we walked along to the old Dutch Fort with angled slit apertures for slim muskets. Unusually the high and steeply sloped walls above the angled openings ended in an ordinary high wall on both sides of the fort's gates. Guard in the 'piket' denied us entry as it is a military establishment. One could see the main house inside with 2 large cannons on the front lawn.



The Museum was interesting and full of artefacts, costumes, porcelain and keris but unbearably hot. A wonderful unusually shaped Chinese pottery tong at the back. On to stalls selling antique books. Liz then departed for KL and Frans and I enjoyed a pleasant evening and dinner together.

Sat 25 Feb 2012

Frans and I breakfasted at 0630 and left for the airport where we parted, he for Djakarta and Bandung and me for Singapore.

