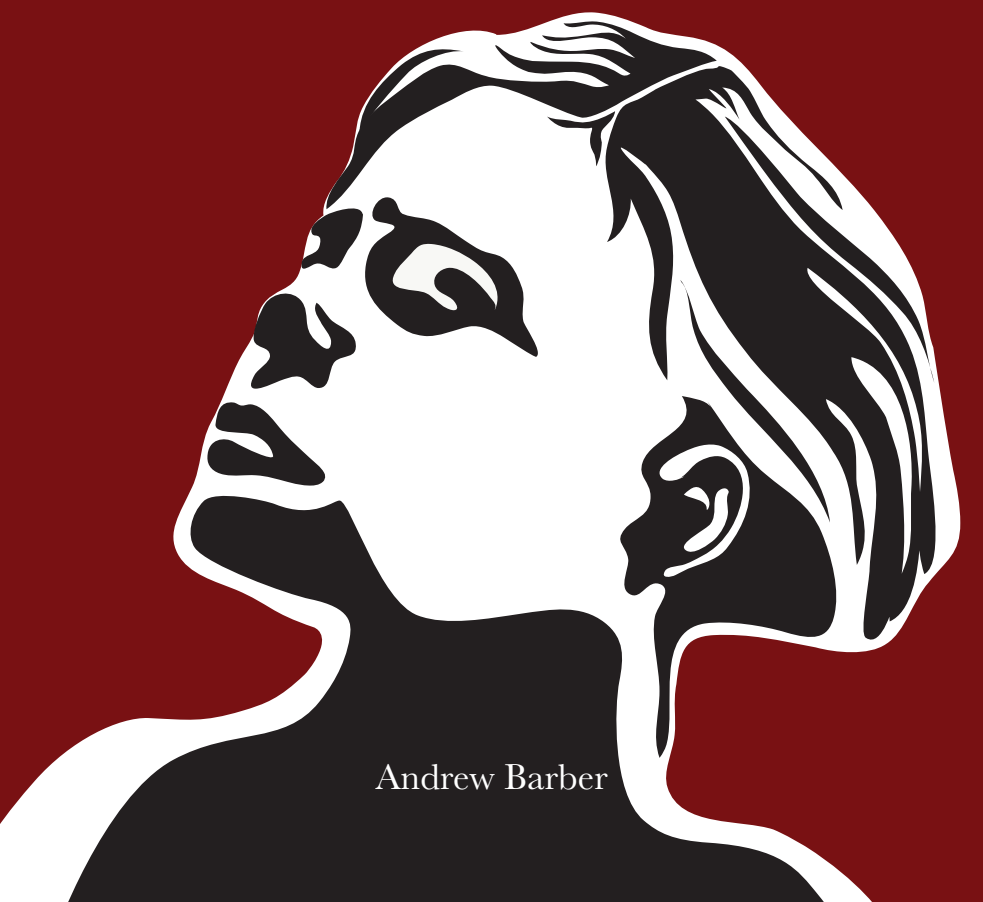
DORIS VAN DER STRATTEN

The Australian Mistress of the Japanese Commander of Kuala Lumpur



Andrew Barber

It was the closing of the day:
She loosed the chain and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away…

At the outset of the Second World War, Doris van der Stratten, an Australian housewife, survived a massacre, endured a five-month trek through the jungles of Malaya, incarceration with POWs and then became the mistress of the Japanese Commander of Kuala Lumpur, before finally and fatally encountering the Japanese military police – the dreaded Kempetei.

In memory of my father
James Peden Barber

1931-2015

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In this revised version, I was helped hugely on the genealogical aspects of Doris' early life by Sue McCarthy in South Australia. She made the breakthrough in finding Doris' Dacca birth certificate and then helped tease out the family connections – not easy given the multitude of names and shifting locations. In the same vein, Major

Kevin Pooley, who is the historian at the Salvation Army, was a great help and went beyond the call of duty in trying to establish any references to Doris and Mare Street. My thanks also to Lawrence van der Stratten's daughter, Barbara Havingh, for taking time to read the book and offer her thoughts.

A special thanks to Paget Natten who, as a young girl with her mother (a van der Stratten) trying to flee Singapore, survived the sinking of the SS Kuala and then saw out the war in brutal conditions in Japanese internment camps in Sumatra. Paget kindly agreed that I might make use of her personal insights to enliven the text, and add much needed colour and texture. She was also the best sort of critic – honest and tough but with a light humorous touch.

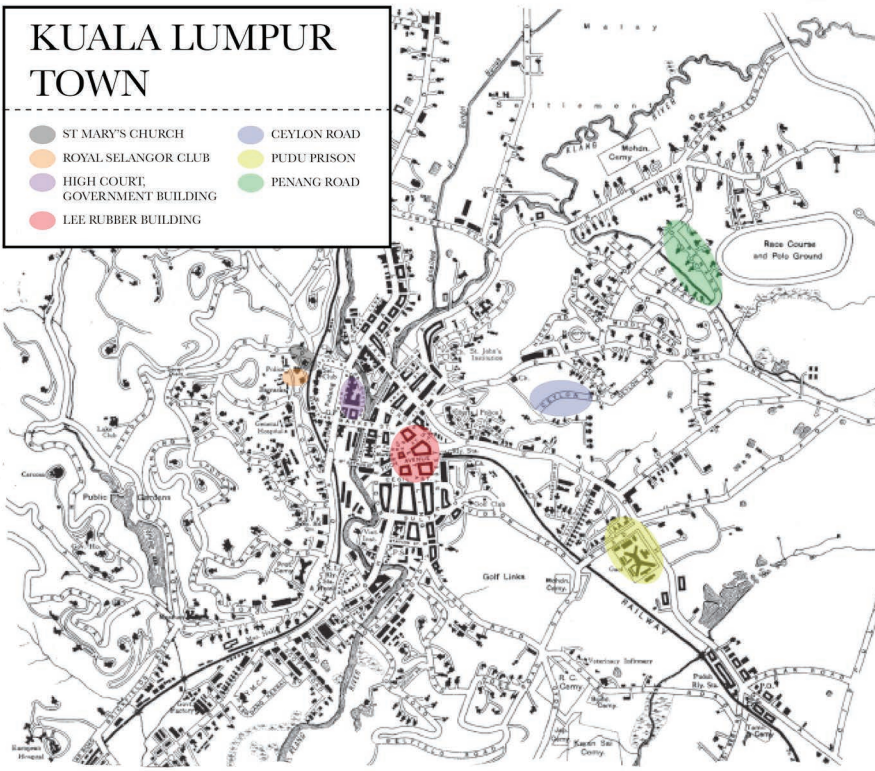
I have tried my best to stay true to the – sometimes conflicting and often partial – historical record, while trying to tell Doris van der Stratten's story with the colour and verve it deserves. Any errors of fact or interpretation are entirely of my own making. Throughout (unless citing a specific text) I have used the spelling 'van der Stratten', although there are variants. I do this on the basis that this is the form used by Paget Natten. It is also that used by other family members in the St Mary's Kuala Lumpur baptism records.

The spectre of Aunt Doris haunted the family.... an undernourished shade... stretched paper thin… forever seeking acceptance and redemption - *Paget Natten*

Preface

Doris van der Stratten died in August 1943, having either jumped or been pushed from an upper-floor window of the Japanese military police – *Kempetei* – headquarters in central Kuala Lumpur following three days of interrogation. She was a 39 year-old Australian housewife and the mistress of a senior ranking Japanese military officer. Before the war she had lived in southern Thailand with her Eurasian husband Philip van der Stratten. In the first days of fighting she survived a massacre of civilians by Japanese soldiers at Kampong *Toh*, and then endured an epic five-month journey through the jungles of enemy-occupied Malaya. Finally, emaciated and diseased, she gave herself up to the Japanese and was interned with POWs and civilians in Taiping Prison. Here she was spotted, isolated and brought to Kuala Lumpur by the garrison commander, Colonel Koda. Under his 'protection' she lived as his mistress in a spacious colonial property, while claiming to be an Italian national. But then she came to the attention of the dreaded *Kempetei*, who decided she was a British spy.

Doris lived most of her life in Adelaide. She came from a broken home and had a rough and ready up-bringing. By the time of her death, she had long lost contact with her father, and was estranged from both her mother and the two daughters from her first marriage. She also thought, wrongly, that her second husband - Philip - had been killed at Kampong *Toh*. During her interrogation by the *Kempetei* she must have felt very alone and that she had nothing to lose: her temper snapped and – uniquely – she fought back.



Some three years later, in July 1946, Doris' interrogator, Lt. Shuzi Murakami, stood smartly to attention in the dock of Kuala Lumpur's High Court. His was one of the first 'Small War Crimes Trials' to be heard in Malaya. With the public baying for justice, if not revenge, and with eyewitnesses attesting that they had seen Murakami throw Doris from the window, he was a clear candidate for the gallows.

This is the story of the life and sad death of an exceptional woman.

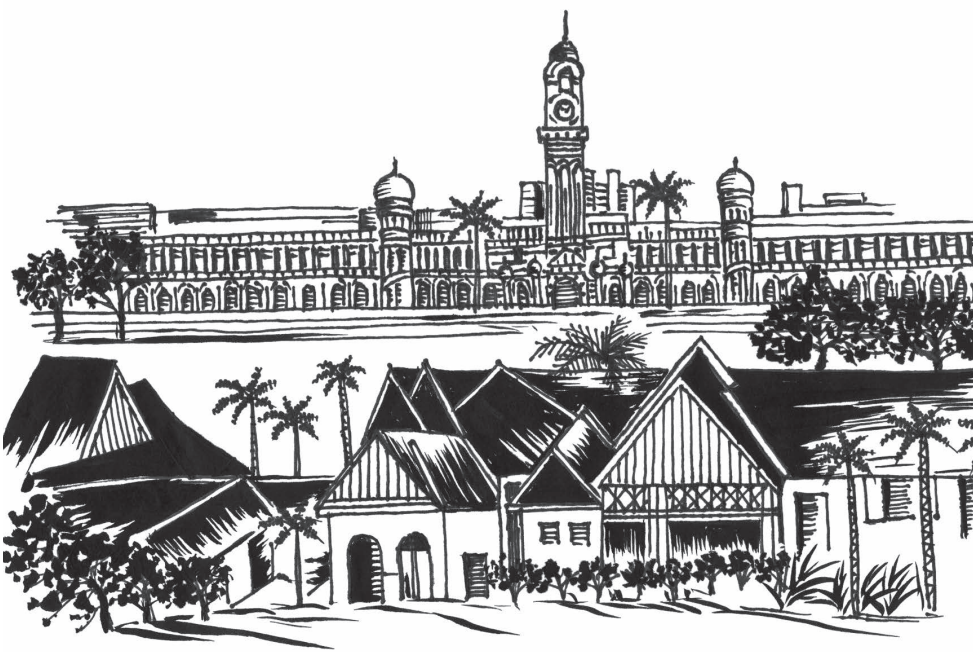
Introduction

In 1946, the High Court of Malaya sat at the eastern end of the long, imposing Government Building (known today as Sultan Abdul Samad Building) in the centre of the city. It was designed by the prominent Victorian architect A.C. Norman in the 'Moorish' style and also housed the Federal Secretariat. It was the centre of British colonial government. Architecturally, Norman bestowed it with marble minarets and lattice flourishes in deference to Malaya's Muslim sultanates, a style later to be adopted by a number of other prominent colonial buildings, notably Kuala Lumpur's decorative railway station. The light, airy verandas and high ceilings were wafted by languorous fans and were designed to moderate the intense heat and humidity. Appropriately, Government Building had been the stage and saluting podium for the victory parade following the Japanese surrender in September 1945. This was the heart of British Malaya.

Government Building backed onto the River Klang, just downstream from its meeting with the River Gombak. Kuala Lumpur took its Malay name from the merging of these rivers – it translates as 'muddy confluence' - an accurate if hardly inspiring nomenclature. On the far side of the deeply embanked river lay the tight grid of streets that comprised the commercial centre of the city; the imposing European banks, trading houses and company headquarters and the more modest Chinese shop-houses, as well as Kuala Lumpur's oldest mosque and venerated Chinese

and Indian temples. The district bore witness to the wealth and diversity of Malaya. Amongst the grander edifices was the Lee Rubber Building, which was built in the early 1930s in art-deco style.

Government Building faced the grassy *padang*,[1] where cricket and rugby were regularly played, cheered by spectators enjoying a Tiger beer or a stengah[2] at the Selangor Club's notorious 'Spotted Dog', which famously boasted the longest bar in Asia, and a line on the floor across which



Selangor Club, Padang and Government Building

women were forbidden to cross. The club's 'black-and-white' architectural style mirrored countless colonial residences built around the turn of the century in Malaya and Singapore – a nostalgic tropical pastiche of 'Tudor' timber-frame buildings from a distant homeland. Less visited, but also revealing distant architectural echoes, was St Mary's Anglican church,[3] with its Gothic arches and modest, apologetic, spire. Like a maiden aunt, it sat discreetly and disapprovingly to the side of the Selangor Club, and faced obliquely across to the High Court. In 1946, St Mary's was without its stained-glass windows which had been looted during the war. Despite desperate appeals for information concerning their whereabouts, the windows had stubbornly refused to emerge.[4] Many of its congregation had also disappeared, scattered or perished during the war against the Japanese. St Mary's was the church where the prominent Eurasian family, the van der Strattens, had prayed, been christened, married and mourned. They too were now largely absent.

Chapter One

Early Years

Doris van der Stratten was born on 19 November 1904 in Dacca, Bengal, on the eastern flank of British India. She was christened 'Dulcima Louise Grace Budd' and was the daughter of Ralph and Pauline Budd. Doris was the product of empire, albeit not from the highly-privileged European colonial elite, but rather from a secondary layer - from those of Anglo-Indian extraction. This mixed-blood Eurasian community assumed an ambiguous position within the imperial construct. They were English-speaking Christians who for the most part worked in intermediary positions between the British governing classes and their subject Indian communities. Theirs was an exposed place – a small diverse community with a foot in each camp but vulnerable to political and social changes and prejudice.

Ralph Budd's father had been 'assistant in the Controllers Officer of the Public Works Department' in Agra in north central India. Just the sort of mid-level clerical position often filled by Anglo-Indians. Prior to this – socially elevating – move into the civil service, the family had been indigo farmers in Bengal. On the maternal side, Doris' mother - née Pauline Alexandrova (it is not clear why she was given this exotic Russian patronymic, but she was to insist upon it throughout her life) Jordan - had been born in 1884 near Lahore in the Punjab. Pauline's father was a 'traffic controller' for the Indus Valley State Railway – the railways being an Anglo-Indian stronghold. Thus, Doris from both sides was born into classic Anglo-Indian stock, though by all accounts in later life presented herself, and indeed appeared to be, of entirely European extraction.

Ralph Budd and Pauline Jordan were married in January 1903 in Karachi, on the western flank of India. At the time,

Ralph was working as a 'clerk in the office of the Chief Commissioner of the North West Frontier Province' in Peshawar. By the time of Doris' birth, however, almost two years later, the Budds had moved to Dacca where Ralph had been appointed an 'assistant in the Foreign Office' of the Bengal government – a prestigious position and suggestive of a good career ahead. Their young baby girl was christened 'Dulcima Louise Grace Budd'. Within the family, however, she was generally known as 'Doris', though 'Dulcima', her latinate baptism name (probably taken from a contemporary heroine whose plucky adventures were serialised each week in the popular 'penny-press'), would return to use many years later, at a time of profound crisis in her life.[5]

Sadly, the marriage of Ralph and Pauline proved to be brief and unhappy and ended in divorce. The reasons for the breakup are unknown, but in 1909 Ralph Budd was to marry one Alice Debenham at the Church of Scotland in the hill station at Simla (chosen, no doubt, because the Church of Scotland, unlike its Anglican counterpart, permits divorcees to marry within its churches) and would proceed to have three children with her. They continued to live and work in Bengal until independence in 1947. The impact of the divorce was more telling on Doris and her mother, as Pauline, sometime around 1908, accompanied by baby Doris, travelled to London – a city and country she did not know - to restart her life. This must have been a time of huge stress and pressure. She was a divorcee, at a time when this status carried a considerable social taboo, with a baby in tow, who had hitherto been part of a well-protected colonial system, blessed with servants and living in a land of heat, colour and diversity. Grey, sooty,

cold, lonely Edwardian London would have been a very different experience. Nevertheless, it was not – we assume - all gloom. Pauline was to meet her second husband in London, as in March 1910 Pauline married one Henry Jacob, an 'electrical and general engineer', at Hampstead Registry office in London. On the wedding certificate Pauline gives her status as 'spinster' and her witness was one Denys Jordan – clearly a family member.

Henry Jacob and Pauline lived in London for two years before deciding, like thousands of contemporaries, to seek a new life in the colonies – in their case to Adelaide in South Australia. This was also an opportunity for some modest name changes, as Henry Jacob chose to adopt a new name – that of Neil Heath. The reasons for this are unknown, though it might have been driven by a common perception that 'Jacob' was a Jewish name. In a time of intolerance and bigotry, Henry Jacob probably chose to relaunch himself with an unambiguously Christian name. As such, in January 1913, Neil Heath departed Britain in steerage class on the emigration ship SS Medina, travelling from London to Melbourne, and from there to Adelaide. Just a month later, in February 1913, Pauline followed Heath to Adelaide on the SS Willochra from Plymouth. She was accompanied by a 19-year old 'nurse' and a baby girl who was a half-sister to Doris. Pauline used the family name Jacob on the passenger list, though once she arrived in Adelaide she adopted the name Heath.[6]

In 1915, and indicative that married life with Pauline was not proving easy, Neil Heath left Adelaide to work in New Zealand, with Pauline failing to accompany him. In 1918, there were brief flickerings of life in the marriage. Heath

moved back to Australia, to Tasmania, where he worked as an electrical engineer at the Electrona Carbide works near Hobart. Pauline followed him but, alas, this experiment in domesticity also failed and in 1919 Pauline left Tasmania and Heath for good. On her return to Adelaide, Pauline set herself up as a shopkeeper and in 1921 took in a lover, George Caine, a trombonist in the orchestra of the nearby Theatre Royal. This relationship, however, proved to be no more durable than her marriage – indeed, as we shall see, it was highly volatile.

While her mother was living a colourful life in Australia, Doris had been left behind in London, aged nine. We know little about the background to this decision, nor her circumstances in London. We do not even know whether she lived with Pauline's family, or with those of her step-father, or possibly neither. The next we hear of Doris is in 1923, when she was a 19 year-old passenger emigrating from London to Adelaide on the SS Hobsons Bay. This was one of a line of vessels plying the UK-Australia route - mostly filled with poor emigrants seeking a new life. Between Pauline's departure from London in 1913, to Doris's voyage ten years later, there had, of course, been the trauma of the Great War of 1914-1918, whose seismic impact had disrupted everything, including shipping and transportation. Thus, the lengthy delay in restoring the family is perhaps not so surprising. But it did mean that young Doris had little in the way of parental support during her formative years – she had no contact with her biological father in India and had a mother who had migrated to the far end of the globe.

On the Hobsons Bay with Doris in 1923 was a contingent

of 'Dreadnought Boys' – poor teenagers from orphanages and broken homes in Britain, being sent to the Dominion of Australia to escape the poverty and the lack of opportunity in post-war Britain; though in practice they were often met by a testing and difficult life in their new home. Doris – who gave the name 'Heath, Dulcima L' on the immigration records - described herself as a 'domestic' and would have sympathized with these young poor boys. In the immigration records, Doris gave her London address as '259 Mare Street Hackney, E'.

Thought not clear from the immigration records, 259 Mare Street was not a simple house address; it was the Salvation Army's 'Home for Destitute Women' in Hackney in the East End of London – a refuge of last resort for poor and broken women and their children. We can only speculate about the circumstances that led Doris there, but images from the time reveal a bleak hostel with large open rooms and serried rows of wooden cots and beds - a shelter little short of the dreaded workhouse. Enquires with the Salvation Army's archives[7] have failed to throw up any references to Doris whilst at Mare Street, though it was reportedly common for women to use adopted names and to hide their identity. How Doris had sunk so low is unclear, but her time with the Salvation Army clearly allowed her to stabilise her life, obtain an émigré ticket to Adelaide and a chance to rejoin her mother and new family. Australia offered Doris an opportunity to relaunch her life and she arrived in Adelaide in 1923, aged 19, with a tough carapace, a rich and colourful vocabulary and the street-wise wit and personality of a cockney survivor from London's East End; but also, no doubt, with the conviction and hope that her life was about to improve under the Australian

sun, and with the excitement that she was about to get to know a mother she had not seen in ten years.

‘Salvation Army Refuge for Women, Hackney, East London’.

Chapter Two

Adelaide

Adelaide Magistrates Court [8] sat in an imposing Doric-columned stone building constructed in the later years of the nineteenth century on an elegant boulevard at the centre of this attractive, gardened city. Unlike the High Court, it handled mostly smaller crimes and infractions, and in the lead-up to Christmas, with the summer temperatures rising, and with miners and farm workers heading into the city, the magistrates dealt with a wearying set of incidents, mostly alcohol-related. 10 December 1924 was such a day. It was hot and dry outside, and the sun harsh, but the thick stone walls of the court building, with its high ceilings, shade and ventilation offered some respite. Behind the magistrate, and adding a touch of majesty to the physical

Adelaide Magistrate's Court

surroundings, if not to the scruffy array of miscreants paraded before him, was a carved and brightly painted Royal Coat of Arms. King George V's arms symbolically extended the majesty and sovereignty of the British Crown, and the process of law, over this distant dominion.

The courtroom that morning was quiet and the public benches largely empty. A bored reporter from the *Adelaide Advertiser* scribbled on his pad – covering the magistrates court was one the lowest rungs in the journalistic hierarchy - yet another day of domestic fights and drunken brawls to fill a required set of column inches. At ten o'clock the magistrate entered the court from behind the raised dais, wearing his black gown and an usher ordered 'all rise'. The magistrate proceeded to the platform at the front of the court, turned to look purposefully around his empire and, with a curt nod of his head, sat down in his high-backed leather chair.

The day's proceedings started with a couple of routine cases – a restraining order on a violent husband and an altercation between two market stallholders, leading to fines for both of them. Around mid-morning the magistrate announced the case of '*Heath vs Cain*', and asked the protagonists to come forward and identify themselves. Indicative of their modest standing, they were both to conduct their own defence and the magistrate wanted to establish some ground rules. Pauline Heath, 'her left arm swathed in bandages,' theatrically made her way to the bench, ostentatiously in pain. Less flamboyantly, George Cain - a small, scruffy man dressed in an ill-fitting suit – also made his way forward. The magistrate advised them to keep it

short and to mind their language – failure to do so and he would find against them.

Pauline was the first to take the stand. Having taken the oath, she told the magistrate that the previous week George Cain had assaulted her; raising her bandaged arm as clear evidence of the viciousness of his attack. The trouble, she said, had begun at a café in Rundle Street, near the Royal Court Theatre where Cain played the trombone in the band. According to Pauline, Cain had – as usual – been drinking 'half the day', and by the time she and her daughter Doris met him after the show, he was drunk. An argument ensued and Cain turned violent, pushing her through a window; the broken glass causing cuts to her arm which then required medical treatment – again a dramatic, pained, raising of the arm to show the physical proof of the assault. The reporter from the *Adelaide Advertiser* slumped further into his seat knowing *Heath vs Cain* would only merit a column inch, at best.

In his response, Cain told the magistrate that the calm, even personality that Pauline had chosen to present to the court that day was very different from her true self, which, he said, was loud, abusive and aggressive. He noted that Pauline's 'gift of vituperation was wonderful'. The incident, he said, had been sparked by Pauline's 22-year old daughter, Doris, whom Cain described as 'one of the most precocious children he had ever met' – and this was not intended as a compliment. She had teased him, swapping around embarrassing photographs and calling him 'a silly _____ fool' and a 'damn goat'. An argument had ensued and Pauline had physically intervened, thus starting the

fight. Cain argued that he had simply tried to defend himself and Pauline had fallen against a window and injured herself. This testimony was corroborated by Frank Locke, a fellow musician and colleague from the Theatre Royal band, who had been present throughout the altercation. He robustly confirmed Caine's version of events while noting that 'Mrs. Heath removed Cain's meal and he did not assault her.'

In offering some background, Pauline told the magistrate that from 192 'Cain had pestered me with his affections'. She also noted that out of kindness she had taken in Cain's daughter from a local children's refuge, to offer her a home. But there were problems. Cain drank, owed her money and she had been forced on two or three occasions to 'turn him out'. In response, Cain questioned her, asking 'You say that I pestered you with my attention when I first met you. Well, did you not encourage me?' Then he plunged in the knife – 'You are a married woman, are you not Mrs. Heath?' With a long pause and a stooping of the head, Pauline admitted that she was, and said that her husband lived in Tasmania. Cain then asked her if her relations with him were 'intimate', to which she replied with a reluctant, monosyllabic, affirmative. Cleverly, Cain had shifted the focus away from his alleged assault on to Pauline's 'moral conduct'. By this stage the journalist had sat up and was making fast, furious verbatim notes. In prim, judgemental Adelaide, this was a story that would resonate beyond his regular summary of court proceedings.

With a weary sigh, the magistrate dismissed the charge of assault against George Cain, noting that Pauline's claim

was 'not sufficiently proved'. He probably had little sympathy with George Cain, who was a known drinker and rabble-rouser, though may have been minded by the 'independent' evidence of Frank Locke - though a 'mate's testimony' was hardly robust evidence. He may also have carried some incipient doubts about Pauline Heath – a woman living a brazen life with a man other than her husband. Most likely, however, the magistrate probably thought that Cain was culpable for the drunken assault on Pauline but that the case was legally weak. Whatever the calculations, Pauline left the court with her arm bandaged and having failed to win her case. The following day the *Adelaide Advertiser* carried the case prominently and salaciously under the title A Piquant Story.[9] In a small city, Pauline had achieved a measure of fame and notoriety, in which the evidence of an assault counted for less than her behaviour as an 'amoral scarlet woman'. Moreover, through witness testimony, her daughter Doris had also come to prominence as a feisty, foul-mouthed troublemaker.

Though no one could have known at the time, in this trial there were extraordinary echoes of events and trials to come. A 'scarlet women' living an adulterous life is physically assaulted in confused circumstances and with conflicting versions of the facts. The spark for the assault appears to have been a 'vituperative' angry flash of temper. In weighing the facts, despite the clear evidence of an assault, the judge came down on the side of the male assailant – clearly doubting the female victim's version of events and almost certainly minded - wittingly or not - by perceptions of appropriate female behaviour. A year later, however, Pauline gained some measure of revenge. On

15 April, George Cain repeatedly telephoned her at her home in Rundle Street, clearly the worse for wear. When she refused to take his call, he turned up on her door step, threatening to break it down. Pauline called the police and a constable arrived and escorted Cain from the property. A few days later he was summoned by the magistrates and made to pay a £100 'bond' and a £100 'surety' to 'keep the peace'.[10]

From her background and from these sad, voyeuristic, newspaper articles we can gain an insight into Doris' early life. Following a tough start in London's East End, she had joined a mother who had abandoned her husband, drank, fought, spoke her mind and maintained a tenuous and contentious relationship with an unstable lover. Doris emerges from this episode, even when the optic is the evidence of a defendant arguing his corner, as a lippy, argumentative and probably sexually 'precocious' young woman; someone happy to spark a fight and make free use of bar-room language. This angular, assertiveness may have been inherited from her mother, but may also have been a natural defence; getting her blow in first. She was the product of her upbringing.

One consequence of this very public airing of Pauline's domestic dirty laundry was that five years later Neil Heath filed for, and was granted, a divorce on the basis of Pauline's adultery. In the divorce court proceedings, which he initiated in Hobart, Tasmania, in March 1929,[11] Heath noted that he had lost contact with Pauline when she left Tasmania in 1919, saying she was going for 'three month's work', but had then 'disappeared' and thereafter failed to

reply to his letters. This was the effective end of their marriage, though he did not file for divorce for another eight years. The next he heard of her was from a newspaper article (presumably the *Adelaide Advertiser's* account of her court proceedings against George Cain) reporting that she was living with another man. Heath noted that as a consequence of this, in 1923 [he was obviously confused, as the newspaper report is dated 1924] he had 'discontinued his support of her'. Citing infidelity, the court granted Neil Heath his divorce and *decree nisi*.

What is also clear from these insights into the domestic life of Pauline Heath is that Doris never received any form of paternal attention or care – either from her biological father Ralph Budd, nor from her step-father Neil Heath, whose name she was to adopt. In short, she entered adulthood without having experienced the settling presence of a father figure. We hear little more of Pauline, who was to continue living in Adelaide until her death aged 56 in 1940; by the end she had become an evangelist (Sister of Joy) within Adelaide's Bible Standard Mission[12].

Pauline never remarried but there were some moments of pride and pleasure. One of these must have been in 1925 when 21-year old Doris – using the name 'Dulcima Louise Grace Heath' - married the 35-year old, Richard Wall.[13] Wall was a divorcee and the ceremony took place in Adelaide Registry Office. In the marriage certificate he was described as a 'billiard saloon proprietor', suggesting Doris had maintained her mother's familiarity with the clubs and bars of Adelaide. He also came with a more damaging reputation – that of a deserter from the military.

Richard Wall emigrated from England to Adelaide in October 1914, just as war was breaking out in Europe, but in May 1915 he volunteered for service and found himself on a troopship heading back to Europe as a private in the Australian Imperial Force's 27th Battalion. Largely raised in South Australia, the battalion initially deployed at Gallipoli in 1915, and from 1916 until the end of the conflict the battalion saw regular and devastating service in various battles on the Western Front. Wall did not fight in Gallipoli, but transferred with his battalion through Alexandria in Egypt before disembarking in Marseilles in March 1916. Thereafter, Wall served with the battalion in France, though his service record was punctuated by regular charges of ill-discipline and absence, the latter largely due to contracting venereal disease which saw him take frequent medical leave and resulted in his pay being docked on a regular basis for what was deemed to be a self-inflicted wound. He also developed a tendency to abscond; on a number of occasions in France he was 'marched into camp' (i.e. found absent and forcibly returned).

Wall's angular military career ends when he faced a Court Martial for deserting for three weeks in August and September 1918 – just two months before the armistice. In late September 1918 he was found guilty of desertion and sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour. He served the first six months at No 7 Military Prison at Calais in France before being transferred in April 1919 to Pentonville Prison in London. Finally, showing some leniency to a man who – with admitted lapses of discipline - had served for over three years on the Western Front, in May

1920 Wall was released and returned to Adelaide on the troop ship *SS Cape Verde*. On return to Australia, the unserved portion of his sentence was 'remitted'. Because of his court martial, Wall's *1914-15 Star*, the *British War Medal* and the *Victory Medal* had been rescinded, but – in a rare display of generosity of spirit - on return to Australia this was reversed and he was able to reclaim his medals.

We now view Wall's experience in France with far greater sympathy and understanding than was the case at the time. He served for over three years on the brutal Western Front through a series of battles that devastated the Australian Imperial Force. Nevertheless, Wall returned to Adelaide in May 1920 with the stigma attached to someone who had been court martialed and found guilty of desertion. The 27th Battalion was largely a South Australia formation, and Wall would have had to contend for the rest of his life with encounters with his fellow volunteers familiar with his history – though they would likely have been more sympathetic than those who had not experienced life in the trenches.[14]

A couple of years after returning to Adelaide, Richard Wall met Doris Heath, another recent arrival from the UK with a chequered history. Wall had married one Constance White in Britain in 1907, before departing for Adelaide in 1914, but on his return from France he divorced Constance and in 1925 married Doris. In 1927, they had their first daughter, Rosemary,[15] followed four years later by Winifred. But, like Wall's first marriage, and like Doris' mother's marriage before her, Doris' marriage to Richard Wall was to end in divorce, nine years later in 1934. Rose-

mary was then just seven and Winifred three years old. In an uncontested claim, Doris accused Wall of 'misconduct' with a married woman, one Esther Burrows. The decree nisi was issued, but not before Justice Piper of the Supreme Court had determined that Doris would 'cover the costs of both defendants', though much of this was in fact borne by a system of financial relief for the poor run by the government of South Australia.[16] It is impossible to know the underlying reasons for this marital breakdown, though both undoubtedly had their demons to contend with. Given their backgrounds, it is perhaps no surprise that these two damaged people failed to make their marriage last.

Doris' two daughters, Rosemary and Winifred, were thereafter to live with their father. This decision in itself is unusual and poses questions, as custody of such young girls would normally have fallen to the mother, particularly if the husband had been deemed the offending party in a divorce petition. There may well have been hidden currents and explanations, now lost, because there is no sign that Doris contested this outcome. With little information to go on, save the bald facts, all that can be said is that, sadly, at the age of thirty, Doris was no longer an active mother to her two daughters and thereafter appears to have little or no contact with them.

Richard Wall later married his lover Esther Burrows and they settled down in the Adelaide suburb of Croydon with the two daughters. A photograph in the *Adelaide Advertiser* in May 1938 shows Rosemary Wall as a pleasantly turned out nine-year old girl, proudly parading her pet dog at a local dog show. She clearly retained a love of dogs, as she is seen

once more in May 1951 in the *Burra Record*, once again presenting a dog. Her younger sister Winifred, however, may have retained more of her mother's hot streak, as an article in the *Adelaide Advertiser* in October 1950 notes that 19-year old Winifred Wall, described as a 'dressmaker', had been admitted into the Royal Adelaide Hospital with a bullet wound in her right thigh after a 'shooting accident'. No more is revealed of this incident, and why and how Winifred ended up with a bullet wound remains unclear, but it does raise questions about her lifestyle.

Chapter Three

The van der Stratten Family

In stark contrast to Doris' complex and fractured family background, the van der Stratten family traced their origins back many generations, with much pride and with the help of a treasured genealogical scroll, to the early Dutch burgher settlers in Ceylon. The emerged a prominent and successful Eurasian family, strongly represented in the law. From this solid foundation, in the late nineteenth century 'Grandfather' Philip Everard van der Stratten, like many other Ceylonese professionals, had travelled to Malaya to try his fortune in one of Britain's most commercially promising colonies. In its fast-developing economy, built on the back of tin mining and rubber, the small British community turned to the linguistic, cultural and technical skills of Eurasians to support their endeavours. They, like their Anglo-Indian counterparts, were the oil in the colonial construct – interfacing with finesse between the stiff British edifice and the local Asian communities.

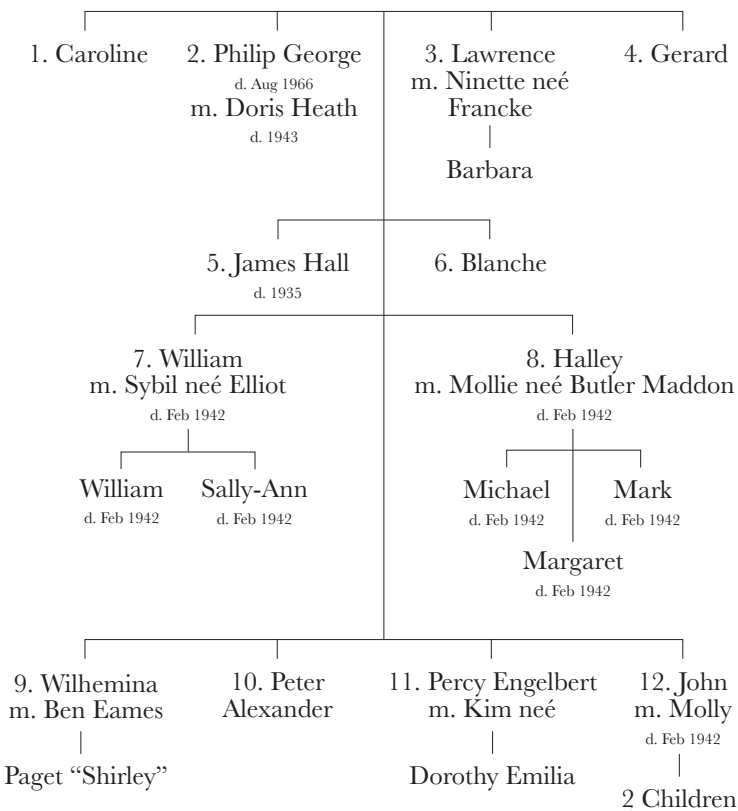
As with the Anglo-Indians, the Eurasian intermediary role in Malaya was a complex place to be, with aspirations and ambitions to be accepted as fully European, but nevertheless judged and placed in the colonial hierarchy according to subtle gradations of colour and lineage. Eurasians were, of course, hugely divergent; some appeared to be pure Caucasian, while others were much more 'Asiatic'. During the war they bemused the occupying Japanese, who initially viewed them with great suspicion and interned many of them amongst the Europeans, but then gradually released most of them. The van der Strattens had cousins and relatives with close Dutch connections, but they were English speaking (they spoke little or no Dutch), staunch Anglicans and proud subjects of the British Crown. The

family name, however, spoke 'Dutch' and in 1942, Philip van der Stratten's daughter Wilhemina Eames had to confront her Japanese captors and demand to be placed in a British, not Dutch, internment camp, where they were intent on placing her.

Philip Everard van der Stratten rose to become Chief Clerk of the Malayan Railways, one of the colony's foremost institutions, and a major employer of immigrant Tamil workers and Ceylonese managers and engineers. He and his wife Maria produced twelve children. They became in two short generations a noisy, exuberant Malaya-based clan, tightly woven from the outside but from within a complex and colourful mix of divergent personalities. They lived at 39 Ceylon Road, a large, rambling family-owned property in central Kuala Lumpur. Malayan Railways itself had a set of official residences in Kenny Hills - one of Kuala Lumpur's more prestigious residential districts. They had arranged their housing in a strictly hierarchical order; the Superintendent had the largest and finest house at the top of the hill and his subordinates lived in ever-declining grandeur and elevation according to their ever-diminishing rank and status. They all had fine views over the city but from where they sat they knew their place in the railway pecking order. It is difficult to know whether Philip van der Stratten chose to opt out of official housing, or was not given the choice, but the family no doubt enjoyed a more relaxed and less hierarchically bound life in their own property in Ceylon Road, in the centre of the city.

Within the family, women played a crucial unifying role,

The van der Stratten Family Tree



with large family meals the basis of boisterous gatherings of aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces. Outsiders married in, and were absorbed into the clan, though a healthy number of male offspring meant the family name remained prominent. They were an active and informal family - local newspapers of the 1930s, *The Straits Times* and *The Malay Mail*, have periodic references to van der Stratten girls playing in inter-state hockey tournaments and the men competing in motor rallies up and down the peninsula.

> *'We stood four-square with Mother England… we were the collective progeny of a distant, yet still glorious realm where we acolytes paid tribute to the mother country like worshippers at the temple of some Olympian matriarch who, when needed, would rise from the waves to save her children from the ignominy of the foreigners, if not the Yellow Peril'* - *Paget Natten*

One daughter, Wilhemina (a classic Dutch burgher name) proved to be a particularly vivacious and lively young woman. 'Mina' had been pursued by a number of suitors before meeting Benn Eames, a British mining engineer. They first met at the wedding of a mutual friend in Singapore and, after a long engagement, in 1936 married at St Mary's Church in Kuala Lumpur. In 1939, a daughter, Shirley [Paget], was born at the European maternity hospital in Bangsar.

Some of the van der Stratten sons branched out into the fast growing motor car business, with motor mechanic and

repair garages in Weld Road, Kuala Lumpur and in Ipoh. Malaya imported many British cars - Wolseley, Austin and Morris - but was also an export market for the larger and more exuberant American makes - Ford, Chrysler and Buick. Stratten Motors was a lively business, and the workshop was always noisy and busy, though generosity of spirit and pocket towards friends, and an equal if not greater interest in chasing girls, meant that it struggled financially.[17] One of the sons, Lawrence, however, took his mechanical skills and passion for cars to join Wearne and Borneo Motors as a mechanic and manager - this was Kuala Lumpur's largest garage and car dealership – and there rose to become a senior manager.

Not all the van der Stratten males were car-mad party animals. One who tended to the bookish was Gerard, who worked as a clerk in the Malayan government mapping and survey department in Kuala Lumpur. Another brother, Phillip George, while a keen and capable tennis player was viewed affectionately as 'studious, lean and pallid'.[18] He was a regular prize winner in Kuala Lumpur's *Malay Mail* daily crossword competition. In 1924, he qualified as a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers both for its Kuala Lumpur chapter and for its Australian counterpart. Later, in the mid-1930s he travelled to Australia for further training as an electrical engineer at the South Australian School of Mines and Industries (also known as the 'Technical College') in Adelaide. It was here that he met the recently divorced Doris Heath. Philip, born in Malaya 1901, was three years older than Doris.

Philip was a gentle, soft-spoken man with a love of clas-

sical music - he idolised the great Australian diva, Dame Nelly Melba. His quiet personality was very different from that of Doris, whose troubled up-bringing had resulted in a personable but feisty nature.[19] It may have been one of those relationships in which opposites coalesce, and maybe it took someone of Philip's understated manner to attract and bring out the best in Doris. He represented stability and the quiet assurance and confidence that comes from a loving and supportive family – everything that Doris lacked. Whatever the chemistry, Philip persuaded Doris to leave Adelaide and all she had known since childhood and join him in Malaya as his wife – a huge personal, geographical and cultural leap of faith.[20] Sadly, in so doing it seems that Doris severed ties to her mother and her two daughters, who were to remain in Adelaide and with no further contact.

There is no evidence from the St Mary's Kuala Lumpur register of 'Births, Marriages and Deaths' that the couple married there. It was the church of preference for van der Stratten baptisms and weddings, but given that Doris was a divorcee, a service would not have been permitted in an Anglican church. They most likely married in a registry office, though most civil records were destroyed during the Japanese occupation. Searches of contemporary Malay and Australian newspapers have also proven barren. Despite the absence of a clear record, it is clear the couple did marry and from the mid/late 1930s lived as Mr Philip and Mrs Doris van der Stratten.

It appears that having left Adelaide the couple spent some time in Sydney - Philip later spoke of the joys of Bondi

Beach - and shipping records indicate a 'Miss D. Heath' sailing from Sydney to Singapore on the *New Holland* in July 1936.[21] Philip appears to have gone ahead and then travelled down from Kuala Lumpur to meet his new wife on arrival at Keppel Harbour; neither knowing that its bustling wharfs and dockside would just a few years later be the scene of a family tragedy. After time spent in Kuala Lumpur - a period long enough for Doris to become known and familiar in the neighbourhood and to her new family - in 1939 they travelled to Pinyok, near Yala in southern Thailand. Philip had been appointed as an electrical engineer for the Thailand Tin Mining Co., which was one of a number of British/Australian- owned tin mines seeking to exploit a newly discovered and rich seam of tin that the mine owners hoped would emulate the riches of the now mature fields of the Kinta and Klang valleys in Malaya.

Chapter Four

The Kampong Toh Massacre

In 1939, the year Philip and Doris moved to southern Thailand, war was declared in Europe and Malaya – as a British colony – found itself 'in a state of war'. Paradoxically, war in Europe and the middle east brought huge immediate economic benefit to Malaya as demand for its natural riches – rubber, tin, bauxite, copra – soared. While most Europeans remained profoundly worried by events at home, it was possible to turn a blind-eye to the news reports and enjoy the benefits of the booming economy. Kuala Lumpur enjoyed a reputation, at least for the Europeans, as a party city – where large houses and servants, and lots of sport and outdoor events, combined to ensure a sociable and gregarious lifestyle; not so cerebral perhaps, but light-hearted and fun. Indeed, the commander of British forces, General Percival, later commented with some disdain that coming from war-torn Britain to Malaya in early 1941 was a shock, and not a comfortable one. While the Blitz was raging over London, in Kuala Lumpur the Europeans partied.

The small, inward colonial stations that dotted British Malaya had been brilliantly and savagely satirised by Somerset Maugham in the 1920s, when he wrote of their petty hierarchies, snobbishness and racism, not least amongst the *mems*,[22] the bored European wives with nothing to do, and plenty of servants to help them do it. Maugham's acid insights were no doubt exaggerated but there was enough truth in them to hurt. The European community in Yala, southern Thailand, however, was in many ways different. Here it comprised mining engineers and rubber planters and just a handful of accompanying wives and very few children. There was no British Resident or District Com-

missioner (nor a Resident's or District Commissioner's wife) to form the apex of a colonial society, nor the layers of administration that accompanied them.

The Europeans working in the Pinyok and Kampong Toh tin mines were an eclectic group, with a high percentage of Australians and New Zealanders, as well as South Africans, Ceylonese, Eurasians and a handful of 'neutral' Europeans from countries such as Poland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. It was a largely male society; practical men – engineers and managers mostly. Most were either genuine bachelors, or 'grass bachelors' – men who had left their wives behind while they worked at these remote and lonely outposts of western capitalism, though many had established liaisons with local women, conducted semi-discreetly. They carried the attitudes of their time, but had much less of the petty snobbishness and prejudices so wickedly excoriated by Somerset Maugham. For Doris, it was a community much less judgemental of a divorcee brought up on the wrong side of the Adelaide tracks than would have been the case in neighbouring Malaya.

By 1940, increasingly bellicose noises from Japan, and the movement of naval and military forces into bases in Indochina, raised the spectre of war in Asia. The first sign of this was an increasingly active 'intelligence war' fought both within Malaya (Japanese sources and intelligence officers were tracked by the British and eventually a number expelled) and in southern Thailand, which was the most likely location for beachheads in any Japanese invasion. Both sides had started to beef up their intelligence activities. The Japanese established a 'diplomatic' consulate in

Singora in south-east Thailand, though its four officials were all military intelligence officers under civilian cover, and it communicated using military, not diplomatic, cyphers.[23]

The British responded in kind and a regular flow of British 'tourists' with a military bearing could be seen motoring in and around Yala, and along the beachheads of southern Thailand. From late 1941, the British sabotage, intelligence and 'stay-behind' organisation, Special Operations Executive (SOE) - its Asian operation was then known as the 'Oriental Mission' and it was later renamed 'Force 136' - initiated an ambitious operation focused on southern Thailand, recruiting assets *in situ* or placing trained British agents covertly into tin mining and rubber plantations in southern Thailand. Here, it was believed, they could clandestinely monitor and report on Japanese intelligence activity and, in the event of an, support the British position by acts of sabotage and 'denial' activities, such as the destruction of the British-owned tin mines in southern Thailand.[24]

Meanwhile, watching this intelligence build-up were Thai police and intelligence officers – some of whom had developed very close relations to the Japanese and were actively hostile to the British. Their counter intelligence units had spent the months leading up to the conflict monitoring the British civilian community in southern Thailand and had a thorough knowledge of their activities – including those who believed they were acting clandestinely.

By early December 1941, SOE had 90 operatives in Asian

theatres. Malaya constituted the vast bulk of the effort, with 43 operatives in Malaya itself and 34 in southern Thailand – 77 in total dedicated to the Malayan theatre of war. In Malaya itself, just two SOE officers were hidden under civilian cover, with 41 in uniform focused on training local cadres -mostly communists - to act as a stay-behind capability. In southern Thailand, however, 29 of SOE's 34 operatives were working covertly under civilian cover (mostly tin mining engineers), with just five trainers and agent runners in uniform, and these were based in nearby Malaya.[25]

Away from the shadowy world of intelligence, the sight of large numbers of British, Australian and Indian Army troops arriving in Malaya reassured a jittery population. Public confidence was also pumped by an insistent propaganda campaign which argued that should the Japanese be foolish enough to attack they would soon be beaten back by a 'first-rate power'. From early 1941, Malaya moved to a war-footing. Alongside regular troops from overseas, there was a drive to expand the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF).

Initially, the government had found from within the European community a reticence to join up, particularly amongst those living in Kuala Lumpur. In 1938, for example, the Commander of the FMSVF, Lt Col Saville, had lamented that 'It is very noticeable that whereas in the country districts the majority of Europeans join their volunteer units as a matter of course, this is far from the case in the larger towns. This is particularly noticeable in Kuala Lumpur...'[26] But things were to change. In January 1940,

Governor Shenton Thomas announced the promulgation of the 'Compulsory Service (Volunteer Force) Ordnance' for able-bodied British males aged 18-55. Those over 50 joined a local Dad's Army (Local Defence Force) while the younger men were conscripted into the Volunteers. Non-British males, and this included Eurasians, were not part of this compulsory conscription but were encouraged to join as volunteers.

Though slow to start, by the time of the Japanese invasion in December 1941, the 2nd Battalion (Selangor) FMSVF stood at a respectable 31 officers and 747 'other ranks'. These comprised not just British conscripts but volunteers from all Malaya's main communities – Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian.[27] From the van der Stratten family, Lawrence had joined the volunteers and, befitting his knowledge of cars, he became a sergeant in a mechanised unit.[28]

In late November 1941, intelligence indicating large movements of Japanese forces in the South China Sea compelled the British military to put its forces on full alert. The government called the volunteers to active stations and air-raid drills were conducted in all the major cities. Like their compatriots across the border in Malaya, the European community in southern Thailand listened with increasing concern each night to the early evening radio broadcasts of the Malayan service of the BBC. The distant, alien threat of militaristic Japan was now inexorably creeping closer.

The majority of the population of southern Thailand

were muslim Malays, and with their *kampongs*[29] and local mosques the Thai border districts appeared and felt very similar to the neighbouring non-federated Malay[30] states of Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan. The bulbous, remote Betong salient was sovereign Thai territory that protruded deep into the central, mountainous jungle of northern Malaya. Most Europeans living in southern Thailand looked instinctively to nearby British Malaya as their natural base – Bangkok was hundreds of miles away by train or boat and seemed a remote, alien capital. The nearest big city, and accessible by train in just a few hours, was Penang, which offered hotels, shops and all the trappings – and vices - of a busy port city. One British engineer noted that 'Once over the border [into Malaya] we breathed a sigh of relief. Everywhere were signs of efficiency and prosperity; clean and tidy streets with friendly folk…'.[31]

Being tin-mining land, the area around Kampong Toh had been stripped of jungle and replaced by a desiccated landscape of mining 'ponds' and 'tailings' - the detritus of processed sand after it had been 'washed' and the tiny granules of tin removed. The smaller Chinese-owned tin-mining operations relied on hard working 'coolie' labour and endless ingenious water-chutes and wooden panning 'trays' to extract the tin, but the larger, more capital intensive British operations -such as at Kampong Toh - had as their centre-piece a floating metal behemoth - the tin dredger - that sat serenely on the mining pond and processed vast amounts of sand through its labyrinthine sets of chutes, trays and drainers. Keeping this beast working was the key to a mine's success and instead of endless Chinese workers toiling in the sun, Kampong Toh needed qualified

engineers like Philip van der Stratten to keep the dredger working. As a consequence of its voracious appetite and destructive tendencies, the land around Kampong Toh was scarred and pockmarked – though vegetation quickly grew and the tailings were masked by thorny shrubs, small trees and grass that grew to the height of a man.

It had become the military orthodoxy, and one that was to prove accurate, that should the Japanese land an invasion force, it would do so on the long, white sloping beaches of south-east Thailand and north-east Malaya – and that it would need to do so before February, when monsoon rains and winds would whip up the South China Sea and make beach landings a hazardous option. To confront the Japanese on the beachheads, in Malaya the British had constructed pill-boxes and concrete defences in and around Kota Baru. They could not, of course, build similar fixed defences in southern Thailand, so here the British defence rested their hopes on Operation Matador - the planned rapid movement of forces across the narrow Kra Isthums along the main railheads and roads from north-west Malaya to the eastern beachheads. To support this there was a major build-up of British forces along the border, with a growing number of British and Indian forces bunkered down at Jitra – the defensive fall-back position on Malaya's western flank.

On 6 December 1941, the BBC announced with some fanfare the arrival in Singapore of the Royal Navy's most modern capital ship, HMS *Prince of Wales*, accompanied by the powerful if elderly HMS *Repulse*. These reinforcements were heralded as proof that Prime Minister Win-

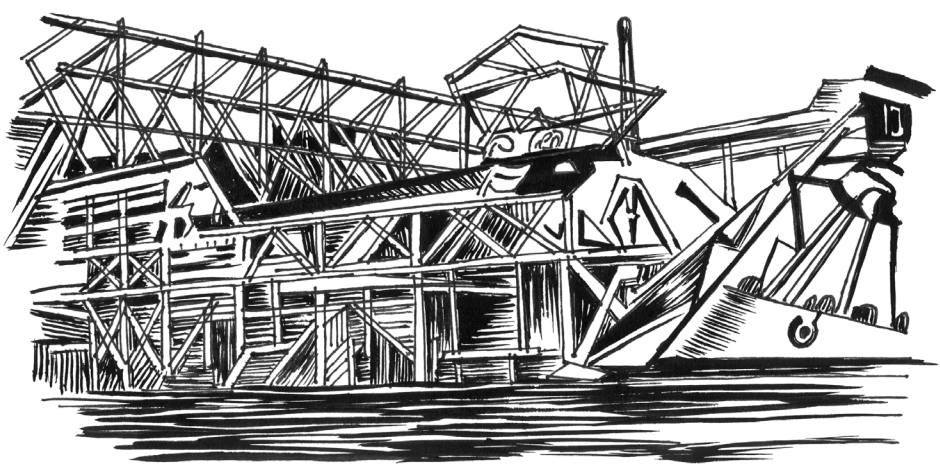
ston Churchill had kept his word and, amongst the huge challenges then facing Britain and its Empire, had sent the necessary forces to deter Japan. The BBC, however, failed to report that an accompanying aircraft carrier - an adapted cruiser with a flight deck laid on top - had been forced to remain in Simonstown naval base in Cape Town for crucial repairs, and that Z Force (as the relief naval fleet was named) therefore had no air cover of its own. Nevertheless, the arrival of this naval force sent a measure of reassurance to Europeans in Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and Thailand, and all hoped that this would be enough to deter the Japanese.

In late 1941, time, weather, politics and geography had combined to place the small European community in southern Thailand at the centre of global events of historic proportions. On 8 December 1941, the gentle, timeless sounds of dawn breaking over the Kra Isthmus were shattered by the loud, insistent drone of aircraft travelling in formation overhead, from east to west. Dogs barked and farmers and villagers gathered in open spaces to watch this unfamiliar procession. After 40 minutes the squadrons had passed over, though shortly afterwards individual planes could be seen retracing their paths. All recognised that this was the sign that war had started, though no one at this stage knew that the Japanese aircraft had launched a devastating shock attack against the RAF, destroying the majority of their fighter planes that had been neatly lined up on the ground at their main aerodrome at Alor Star in north-west Malaya, and at airfields further south. At the same time, Japanese assault troops were landing on beaches at Singora and Patani in Thailand and at Kota Baru in

Malaya.[32]

The Europeans at the Pinyok Tin Mine gathered at the mine offices, where they heard confirmation on the BBC that Japan had launched an attack.[33] Fierce fighting was reported at the beachheads, though the tone of the broadcast was confident and upbeat about British victory. A number of those assembled now regretted not taking earlier cues and evacuating to Malaya, but all agreed that the safest course of action was to remain in and around the mine site, and to await the arrival of the British forces that they knew were stationed on the western side of the peninsula, and must surely – as the BBC had indicated – be moving fast and hard to confront the advancing Japanese.

The British plan, Operation Matador, designed to anticipate the Japanese landing by seizing the Thai beaches and meeting the on-coming Japanese at their most vulnerable



Tin Dredger

failed to materialise. The British were caught flat-footed. In a confused muddle of bureaucratic, military and political indecision they lost the moment and, having done so, chose instead to make the Jitra Line in northern Kedah their first line of defence. This lack of purpose and drive was to cost the British dear and would leave southern Thailand utterly exposed. It also left long-standing plans by the Oriental Mission to destroy and deny key installations in southern Thailand, such as the tin mines, in tatters.

The first the tiny European community at Pinyok Tin Mine saw of the Japanese invasion force was early on 10 December when a group of infantry, dressed in light khaki uniform, flat caps and the distinctive neckcloth of the Japanese military moved stealthily along the road, their rifles fixed with bayonets seemingly as tall as the soldiers themselves. The first group passed by without stopping, but were shortly followed by others in military vehicles. Shocking the Europeans, the locals stood and waved to the advancing Japanese, and then pointed out their presence at the mine site. A small detachment of Japanese troops broke off from the main advance to investigate. They entered the mine site gesticulating, shouting and waving their rifles and bayonets. They forced all the European employees and families from their staff houses to an open area in front of the mine office, where they were told to stand and wait. After a few hours, a separate contingent of military arrived in a truck, accompanied by Thai police. The Europeans were then put into the truck and driven to the mine site at the nearby village of Kampong Toh, where they disembarked. Here they were joined by another group of Europeans who had sought to flee to Malaya but

had been stopped on the road by Thai police and brought to Kampong Toh – which had become a collection and detention centre.

Maureen Magness, the daughter of the Ceylonese mine clerk, later recorded that on 11 December 'a senior Japanese officer accompanied by his staff and an interpreter visited Kampong Toh. After a long speech… he concluded that all in the British party would be executed. Hungry and worn out, this came as a brutal shock. Adding to the alarm, the five 'neutrals' – a Pole, Norwegian and Swede and two Danes – were ordered to move to an annexe and were forbidden to communicate with the rest of the party.'[34]

The Japanese had allocated two wooden bungalows to hold the European detainees – both single story, local Malay wooden houses, elevated off the ground by stout stone pillars and accessible by broad open wooden steps. The 'British' contingent, which included Philip and Doris van der Stratten, were assigned to the 'Mine Manager's bungalow'. They comprised eighteen men and four women and were an eclectic group that included New Zealanders, Australians, a South African and Eurasians.[35] On 12 December, eight 'Hindu troops' from the Dogra Regiment of the British Indian Army, who had been captured near the Malayan border, were also deposited in the 'British' house.[36] Initially the Japanese largely left the detainees alone, visiting periodically. There was little food, but the detainees were not mistreated. The Japanese cooperated closely with the Thai police, who mounted a light guard and even allowed some of the inmates to leave and buy

food and cigarettes.

On 13 December 1941, however, and just after nightfall, without warning a contingent of Japanese troops returned by truck. They dispersed around the site and surrounded the British bungalow. Maureen Magness noted that 'no one dared to stir as all waited in suspense, watching for what would happen next'.[37] Then the Japanese attacked, throwing hand-grenades through the open windows and strafing the raised wooden floor from below with machine-gun fire, before rushing the house and bayoneting survivors. Some of the captives were killed immediately and many were wounded. Within the bungalow pure terror ensued. After less than twenty minutes, believing their job was done, the Japanese troops stood down, mounted their truck and drove off.

Somehow, a good number of the detainees survived the carnage. Doris van der Stratten for one took refuge behind mattresses and cushions 'and shammed dead while the bayoneting was going on.'[38] Meanwhile, one of the mine engineers, Edward Peters, also 'played dead and would not answer'. This tactic saved their lives and once the Japanese had departed, they ran and hid in the large tin-dredger at the centre of the mine's operation, where they bunkered down overnight. Leslie Jones, a New Zealand mining engineer, later wrote that the initial attack had, miraculously, only killed about half the detainees.[39] Another eyewitness, Harold Evans, noted that he and a colleague had escaped the attack by jumping through a window and then hid overnight in the nearby jungle until dawn. But with daylight they heard a further set of gunshots. Some sources

said this follow-on action was the work of Japanese soldiers returning to finish off the injured, though others claimed the shootings were the work of Thai police collaborators. Whoever was responsible, a number of the Indian soldiers and Maureen's parents, who had been wounded but survived the night, were finally dispatched.

The next morning, Doris van der Stratten and Edward Peters, hiding in the mine's mighty dredger, also heard the gunfire and decided there could be no safety in and around Kampong Toh. So they set off for the Malayan border, following a secondary road and light jungle along the eastern side of the Patani River as it made its way deep into the jungle hinterland of the Betong salient. Later they were joined by Leslie Stratford, a burly Australian mine manager and an experienced and resourceful engineer.[40] Tragically, during their hurried departure some local Malay villagers had reported to Peters that they had seen Philip van der Stratten's dead body on the ground alongside the other victims at Kampong Toh, leaving him little choice but to tell Doris that she was now a widow. She thus embarked on her journey into the dense jungles of Malaya with the trauma of having survived a massacre and believing that her husband Philip had perished.

But Phillip had in fact survived the attack. One survivor noted that in the confusion of the night Philip 'just disappeared', though John Hughes of the Peninsular Tin Mine Company later recorded that Philip was one of a 'number of wounded…[who] escaped into the night'. After a period of flight, he handed himself over to the Thai authorities. Maureen Magness, who had also been wounded, later

joined Philip and four other injured survivors who were rounded up by the Thai authorities and escorted by train to Bangkok, initially for medical treatment at the Chulalongkorn Red Cross Hospital before, in March 1942, being transferred to the Prachand civil internment camp in Bangkok, where they were to stay until the end of the war.[41]

While Doris had, erroneously, been advised that Philip had died during the Kampong Toh massacre, in turn Philip spent the war believing that his wife had most likely perished. Dudley Rex - a fellow internee of Philip's at Prachand camp - later noted that 'I was informed by Van Der Straaten that his wife was one of the prisoners confined in the bungalow at the time of the outrage, and although enquiries were made by him he was unable to obtain any information as to whether his wife was dead or alive'. Thus, tragically, both Doris and Philip survived the Kampong Toh Massacre believing that the other had likely died.[42]

The 'neutrals' house had been left alone during the attack but the next day the five engineers, fearing for their lives, also escaped into the jungle and sought to make their way to Malaya. But they struggled in the dense jungle and ended up walking in circles. A few days later, hungry and exhausted, they found themselves back in Thailand, where they came across other escapees from the main house. The two groups joined forces and came across a couple of 'Chinese huts' where they rested. But their respite was short-lived, as they 'were surprised by a party of armed Thai… fifth columnists who proceeded to shoot on sight'.[43] A number of them, including the rubber planter Laub, were killed outright though others survived this second assault and then

headed for 'safety' once more into the jungle. Here they suffered hardship, privation and huge psychological stress - one of the survivors, the South African metallurgist De Boer, 'cracked up' and walked off, never to be seen again.[44]

In their advance down the Malayan peninsula, the High Command of the Japanese army did not as a rule sanction or encourage war crimes. There were some significant exceptions, such as the shooting of Australian troops at Parit Sulong,[45] the massacre of European men, women and children at Long Nawang in Borneo and the slaughter of POWs at Pulau Bintan off Singapore.[46] Kampong Toh was therefore not unique, though the massacre remains a relatively rare example of a premeditated war-crime perpetrated against European civilians. The Japanese 5th Division, whose troops were implicated, were hardened veterans with a reputation for violence from their time in Manchuria; not least their involvement in the Rape of Nanking in Manchuria. They brought the mindset and tactics of that notably brutal war with them,[47] but they were a largely disciplined force. Far from being an act of random violence, there was a deeper and more insidious rationale to the slaughter at Kampong Toh.

When the Japanese officer who had first visited Kampong Toh had accused the British detainees of being 'spies' his allegation could have been challenged by the majority of the terrified group, but not by the six SOE operatives buried clandestinely within this small community.[48] Indeed, the Oriental Mission had a significant number of covert operatives amongst the detainees. The General Manager of the Thailand Mining Company, Frank Butler Jones, his

deputy, TJB Donnelly and the mine manager, Thomas, had all been recruited in situ by SOE and given training in sabotage and denial techniques. These three men died in the initial Japanese assault on the bungalow. Another was George Laub, who was to escape the initial attack but was later murdered by Thai vigilantes. Only two SOE men survived the slaughter. One was Cummins, a rubber planter, and the other was Edward Valentine Peters, Doris van der Stratten's escape partner.[49]

Edward Peters was of classic British imperial stock. He was born in Jubbapore [50] in India in 1890, and trained as a mining engineer in Cornwall, almost certainly at the Camborne School of Mines. In the 1930s he worked in Borneo and thereafter in and around Malaya.[51] Unlike some of the other SOE operatives who were already working as mining engineers in southern Thailand, Peters was not recruited in place but was first identified by the British military and given 'six week's instruction' in sabotage, intelligence gathering and 'stay-behind' skills – including vital training in living and surviving in the jungle. He was then insinuated into the 'Thai Mines Ltd' following a secret arrangement between SOE and the mining group's parent company, Anglo Oriental. The company paid Peters $400 per month, while SOE paid him $200. He was described in a SOE personnel file as 'something of a rolling stone' – which would have been just the sort of adaptable and deployable asset they liked. Under this cover, Peters arrived at Thailand Tin Mining Company in September 1941 – just as intelligence efforts on both sides were picking up pace.[52]

The rationale for the Kampong Toh massacre, therefore, appears to stem from a belief by the Japanese – accurate as it happened – that the British had used their commercial operations in southern Thailand as places to base and hide their intelligence operatives. In the months leading up to the invasion, Japanese and sympathetic Thai intelligence officers had plenty of opportunity to monitor British activity. Alongside British army officers improbably posing as tourists, and sometimes staying in the same hotels as their Japanese counterparts, Japanese counter-intelligence officers would have received reports of 'mining engineers' and planters engaged in reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering on the beachheads, well away from their ostensible places of work. So, the Japanese were aware of the cover being used by the British operatives, and of their tactics and methods, if not the specific identities of their agents.

In the days following the Japanese invasion there was an exceptionally high attrition rate amongst the SOE agents operating in southern Thailand, not just the four that perished at Kampong Toh but agents working elsewhere in and around Yala who were identified and murdered by the Japanese. In many cases the Japanese were supported by local Thai sympathisers. One British survivor later noted 'I can only say that the Siamese were definitely against us at the beginning of the war.'[53] In the case of the Kampong Toh massacre, the decision to separate out the neutrals from the British, and the assertion by the Japanese officer that the latter were all 'spies', therefore makes sense, though it can hardly exonerate their actions. The Japanese rounded up British tin miners and rubber planters and

their families, and killed indiscriminately within this group, in the belief that in so doing they were degrading British intelligence and stay-behind sabotage capabilities. It was a brutal but not ineffective tactic.

In mid-1942, a SOE wartime appraisal of the operation in southern Thailand concluded that 'Owing to the fact that Matador was never put in action as planned, and that instructions to take action were issued some nine hours after, instead of in advance of, the Japanese landings in southern Thailand, it is feared our personnel were rounded up before they could take effective action. Even so, most of the tin mines on the West Coast of Southern Thailand could at least have been partially denied, though full scale denial as planned could not have been carried out…. owing to the lack of time available.'[54]

When this appraisal was written there was still huge uncertainty about the fate of the Oriental Mission's operatives – in fact at least 10 of the 29 SOE agents in southern Thailand had died at the hands of the Japanese, or their Thai sympathisers, within the first few days of the Japanese invasion. The effectiveness of the Japanese counter-intelligence apparatus in monitoring British activity before the war, and their brutal response following the invasion, decimated the Oriental Mission's presence. It is also clear that the operation failed in its prime objective, which was to deny the Japanese the use of British-owned tin mines in southern Thailand.

Chapter five

Survival and Imprisonment

Edward Peters' and Doris van der Stratten's journey through the jungles of northern Malaya was an epic feat of physical endurance and mental strength. Peters was a rugged, veteran tin miner, and had received 'behind-the-lines' survival training from SOE, so perhaps a robust performance could have been expected from him. But nothing in Doris' life, an Australian housewife with a complex family background, could have prepared her for the ordeal she was about to experience. She had just emerged from a massacre, with friends and companions slaughtered before her eyes and believing that her husband had been killed. She had never received any form of survival training and had probably never even ventured into primary jungle. The omens could not have been less propitious.

Having fled the mine, 53 year-old Peters and 38 year-old Doris were accompanied for the early part of their journey by Leslie Stratford, the Kampong Toh Mine Manager. He later told a fellow internee in Changi internment camp that Doris had completed much of the journey without shoes, which makes her endeavour all the more extraordinary. Until a generation before, prior to the first roads being cut across Malaya's densely forested mountain spine, travel from one side of the peninsula to the other had been the long way - by sea. Rivers cutting across the coastal plains offered initial access into the forested hinterland, but once they met the early slopes they soon branched into narrow streams and tumbling waterfalls, and were no means to cross the central mountain range. The jungle was, to all practical purposes, impenetrable.

Their route initially took them through the thickly forested

Betong salient, which was Thai territory digging deep into Malaya. It was crossed by a single unmetalled secondary road heading to Kedah and Perak. Shortly into Malaya the road crossed the 'Ledge', a critical defile where the British had intended, but failed, to halt the Japanese advance.[55] From late 1941, the Japanese commanded this road and sent regular supplies and vehicles towards their advancing front-line further south. While it offered a relatively easy passage, because of Japanese activity the road was too dangerous to use. The encroaching jungle offered all the protection and cover that could be asked for, but it came at a heavy price; the roadside fringes were dense secondary jungle – thorn bushes, razor sharp *lalang* grass and thick new tree growth. Even with a *parang* [machete], traversing secondary jungle was arduous, slow work.

The deeper, primeval jungle was a more hospitable environment; its large enveloping mature tree cover ensured much lighter undergrowth, but the ancient jungle was also a dangerous environment in its own right. During the day it was hot and humid, with a rich, earthy odour created by a mix of rotting vegetation, captured and held in a still, airless environment, where fresh breezes and light rarely penetrated. The high humidity and regular downpours meant travellers were constantly wet and this led quickly to painful and debilitating rashes and fungal infections. Insects were a constant problem, particularly mosquitos and biting ants. The former brought on tropical fevers and malaria, while the latter could raise nasty, painful welts which quickly turned septic in these harsh conditions. 'Jungle typhus' from fleas was a particular problem, though the official advice to 'cover up at night' would have been of little

practical help to Peters and Doris.[56]

The nights were the most frightening – light was always subdued in the jungle but at night there was little or no visibility. Travel was therefore impossible, though not for the many nocturnal animals which could be heard moving and calling out. The fear of attack by tiger, bear or elephant was very real and was compounded when every rustle or movement could be construed as a hostile animal. The psychological damage to vulnerable and tired travellers was immense; and if fear was not enough, it was cold at night in the highland range, and Doris and Peters had little in the way of warm clothing. Not surprisingly, sleep was difficult.

The inability to look into mid-distance at fixed points, and the absence of a horizon, meant it was all too easy to become disorientated and lost in the jungle. The one positive in this harsh environment was the occasional elephant track. These were ancient routes used by traders carrying the wealth of Malaya's hinterland – tin, silver and forest goods – in baskets on the back of elephants down to the coastal plain, from where they could be transported by river boat to distant markets. These elephant tracks were the only sure routes through the deep jungle, but they were difficult to navigate. Elephants preferred to use existing foot marks, so their forest trails were pockmarked with cavernous holes, each expanded and deepened by successive elephants.[57] Attempts to skirt these muddy, cratered channels by walking to the side were thwarted by encroachment from razor-sharp thorn bushes and dense vegetation. Navigating elephant trails was the only option, but progress

was nonetheless brutally harsh and slow.

What saved Doris and Peters during their jungle sojourn was the support and help of the aboriginal o*rang asli*.[58] Malaya's secretive, ancient jungle dwellers are a shy and reticent tribal people. Distinctly different in race and culture from the Malays, with their own languages and animist religious beliefs, they were perfectly adapted to surviving in the harsh, unremitting world of the jungle. They knew its hidden ways; for trespassers into their world they had the disconcerting ability to emerge silently and unannounced from the jungle, and then to withdraw and disappear at will. They lived in small communities in simple huts and moved from time to time to new clearings. Save some modest vegetables, they were not cultivators but were rather hunter-gathers. They ate jungle meat - monkey and deer - using traps or poisoned tipped darts fired from a blowpipe. They also knew which fruits and vegetation of the jungle could provide sustenance, and, equally important, which were to be avoided.

Peters and Doris were taken in and supported by the *orang asli*, and this gave them a lifeline, but it was not much more than that. They struggled to find sufficient food and became severely under-nourished. Both developed fever (malaria was a given for all those in the jungle) and *beri-beri* from the lack of vitamins, and after some weeks they decided that to survive they must drop down from the mountain range to seek help in the populated flat land below. Following elephant paths, and then water courses and small streams, they moved tentatively down the mountainside to the jungle edge where they encountered a new and

unexpected community of transient squatters, frightened people – mostly Chinese – trying to flee the Japanese by disappearing into the jungle.

Following their victory in February 1942, the Japanese had launched a vicious campaign of terror against the Chinese community called the *Sook Chin*.[59] As a consequence, many potential victims – particularly young Chinese men – had fled the towns to the jungle fringes, where feral communities emerged of desperate people eking out a living from the thin soil, anxious to avoid the Japanese and with escape routes mapped out into the deep forest behind. Peters and Doris stumbled into one such distressed community and for many weeks were looked after by a Chinese squatter, who allowed them to live in his hastily constructed bamboo and *attap*[60] hut and supplied them with a basic fare of tapioca, with occasional rice and vegetables as a supplement.

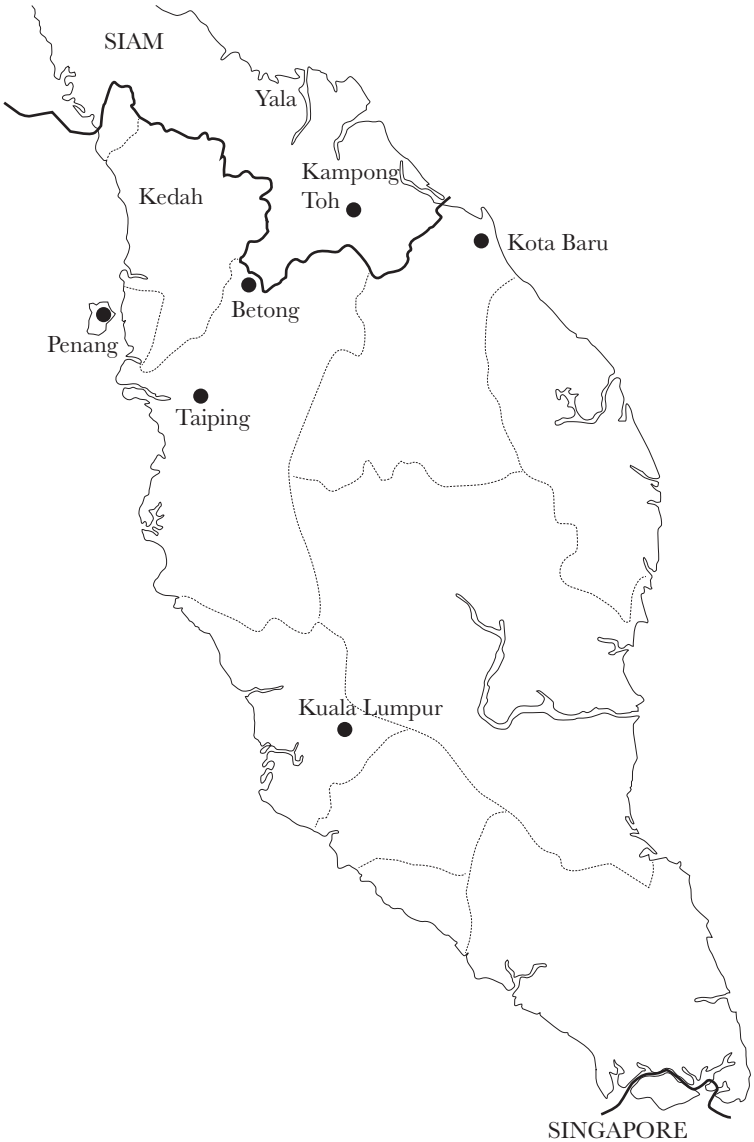
The area where they emerged was close to Tapah and Sungei Siput in Perak. It would later become a stronghold of the anti-Japanese communist resistance. Even in mid-1942 Peters and Doris were not the only Europeans seeking safety and sanctuary there. Two members of the nascent SOE 'stay-behind' force, the British Manager of the nearby Sungei Regala Estate, Robinson, and his counterpart at the neighbouring Kamuning Estate, Chrystal, had remained in the jungle with the communists.[61] While living with the Chinese squatter, Doris and Peters were joined by two British soldiers who had been caught by the speed of the Japanese advance and had found themselves lost behind the lines, the flotsam-and-jetsam of war. These

four then lived for some weeks off the generosity – and bravery – of their Chinese host, but they lived a marginal life, caught on the edge, barely surviving but unwilling to risk moving to nearby towns because of the presence there of Japanese troops and informers.

One day in mid-April 1942, however, their Chinese protector failed to return from a rice buying trip.[62] Along with the two soldiers, Doris and Peters saw this as ominous and decided they had little choice but to turn themselves in. It was possible that their protector might have informed on them, and their chances of surviving a Japanese search party were low. The Japanese were offering a $50 reward for information leading to the capture of British servicemen – so the threat was very real. They were also all desperately ill and emaciated. Given that the British had surrendered in Singapore some three months earlier, their decision is difficult to contest. So, the sick and ragged party of two civilians and two soldiers emerged at Sungei Siput in Perak, and presented themselves to a surprised Japanese military outpost. From there they were sent to join other POWs and European civilian internees being held at nearby Taiping Prison.[63] By the end of their time in the jungle, Peters' weight had dropped from seventeen to ten stone, while Doris weighed just five stone.[64] They must have been skeletal. Doris was also the only women in a camp comprising hundreds of men.

It is worth putting their extraordinary journey into some sort of perspective. As the Japanese offensive rolled down the Malayan peninsula, ending with British defeat and the loss of Singapore in mid-February 1942, it had taken

Malaya 1941


SIAM
Yala
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Betong
Penang
Taiping
Kuala Lumpur
SINGAPORE

less than three months to complete the four hundred or so miles to seize this hugely valuable colony. As the Japanese military juggernaut destroyed all resistance, many British soldiers became lost and sought refuge in the jungle, only to perish or later emerge emaciated and diseased to hand themselves in. The longest known period spent hiding in the jungle was by two Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Private James MacFarland and Thomas Hunter, who in mid-June 1942 after five months gave themselves up at a police station at Salak, south of Kuala Lumpur.[65] Edward Peters and Doris van der Stratten, therefore, survived in the jungle for as long as any regular British soldiers, and for very much longer than most.

It is true that one particularly resilient commando and 'stay-behind' operative was to last longer. Spencer Chapman[66] had been tasked by SOE's Oriental Mission to set up a stay-behind operation in Malaya. He was to survive in the jungle until late-1943, when he escaped and made contact with Force 136, the new name for SOE, then being set up by the British in Ceylon. But he was an explorer and a trained commando, not a regular soldier. In his book, *The Jungle is Neutral*, Chapman argued that 'the length of life of the average British private solider accidentally left behind in the Malayan jungle was only a few months…. [as it] seemed predominantly hostile, being full of man-eating tigers, deadly fevers, venomous snakes and scorpions, natives with poisoned darts, and a host of half-imagined nameless terrors.' Chapman concluded, however, that in fact 'It is the attitude of mind that determines whether you go under or survive. There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. The jungle itself is neutral.' Thus, in seeking to understand how Doris and Peter's survived

their jungle ordeal, it is clear that will-power, strength of character and a desire to live were critical ingredients to explain their reslience .

Peters was a veteran miner, used to a physical life in the outdoors and familiar with Malaya and its climate and ways and had received some specialist survival training with SOE. Doris had endured a tough upbringing in and around the bars and saloons of Adelaide, and no doubt had developed a street-wise instinct for survival, but had little in her background to suggest particular physical resilience. There must also have been a particular chemistry between them, thrown together by circumstance, that allowed them to support and encourage one another during their bleak odyssey. Whatever the explanation, their journey was an extraordinary testament to mental and physical resilience by, on the surface, two very different and very 'ordinary' people. On arrival at Taiping Prison they were supplied with '*aneurin*' - a vitamin-rich medicine - and made a quick

Taiping Prison

recovery from *beri-beri*, from which they were both suffering. They also found basic food and medical help available and were thus able to regain weight and strength.

The prison, the oldest in Malaya, was used by the Japanese to hold prisoners of war from the fighting in northern and central Malaya and also allied civilian internees caught behind the lines. The prisoners were crammed into the three cell blocks, divided between civilians and POWs. The retreating British had destroyed the door locks, but there was little or no effort to lock the prisoners into their cells and there was relatively easy movement within the prison grounds. It was largely self-policing, and different military regiments and civilian groups tended to coalesce and look after each other. One notable group was the Catholic La Salle Brothers, who ran schools in Taiping and Penang.

In March 1942, prior to Peters' and Doris' arrival, the British and allied prisoners were evacuated from one of the cell blocks and temporarily herded together into the remaining two blocks. Thereafter a terrified group of Chinese civilian prisoners – about 150 – were brought into the prison for interrogation. They had been drawn from a trawl of Taiping's Chinese community, who had that day been lined up along the streets of the town. Hooded informants had slowly paced the streets pointing out 'anti-Japanese elements'. They were accompanied by the Japanese military police, or the *Kempetei*, who then corralled these men. Those identified might have been marked out by involvement in pre-war political activity, were gang members, or were simply the victims of petty vendettas. These unfortunate men were then marched to Taiping Prison where a night of terror and violent interrogations was to follow. The next

day about half were released, taking back with them the message that opposition to the Japanese would only result in torture and death. The remainder were marched from the prison, given spades and forced to dig their own grave before being bayoneted, shot and pushed into the ditch. After the war, the mass grave was exhumed and the bodies given formal burials.[67]

In April 1942, when Doris van der Stratten and Peters arrived at Taiping Prison, sick and emaciated from their jungle ordeal, the trauma of this slaughter was still raw; the European prisoners had heard the victims' pitiful cries and wailing carried across the hot tropical night to the neighbouring cell blocks. In contrast to the treatment meted out to the Chinese, the POWs and European civilians were generally not targeted for physical violence, though many carried gruesome stories of acts of barbarity that they had witnessed outside the prison gates. One of the La Salle Brothers had witnessed a Chinese man bound to the rugby posts at St George's School in the centre of Taiping, where he was used for bayonet practice. After the Kampong Toh massacre, Doris and Peters had their own story to tell and would have had few misconceptions about the Japanese and their propensity for violence, and their time in Taiping Prison simply reinforced these perceptions. They also would have been conscious of the casual disregard for human life shown by the Japanese. Of the 1,207 British and Commonwealth POWs who passed through Taiping and Kuala Lumpur prisons, 32 were to be buried in the northeast corner of Taiping Gaol, while 98 were to die in Kuala Lumpur's Pudu Prison – the vast majority from communicable diseases such as dysentery or from those linked to

vitamin deficiency, such as *beri-beri*. In terms of their handling of POWs, at a minimum the Japanese command was complicit in failing to address simple problems of health and sanitation which in turn led to remarkably high mortality rates.[68]

Just prior to Doris' arrival in Taiping, a group of Catholic nuns accompanied by their orphan charges had returned from Seremban, where they had fled ahead of the advancing war front. The Japanese authorities were keen that Doris, as their only female prisoner, should lodge with the Sisters, but she resisted, preferring the company and security of the male prisoners. She was not, however, averse to spiritual support and while in Taiping prison had sought help from the La Salle Brothers. During this time, a very different Doris from the feisty street-wise young woman emerged; she composed a set of poems that she hoped would eventually find their way to her daughters in Australia. At her lowest ebb, the mother who had left her children wanted above all else to reach out to them. She handed the poems to one of the Catholic Fathers and asked that they be delivered to Rosemary and Winifred once the war was over. In so doing, Doris clearly recognised that he had a better chance of surviving the war than she did.

Amongst the La Salle Brothers interned at Taiping, Brother James Dooley kept detailed notes and later wrote a 'Community Diary' of the time spent incarcerated there. This provides an invaluable insight into conditions at the prison, and a time-line of events there and in the town. It mentions particular POWs and civilian internees by name but alas there are no specific references to Doris or to Ed-

ward Peters. There is also no reference to a Colonel Koda, the senior Japanese military commander who had taken a particular interest in Taiping's only female prisoner, Doris van der Stratten. Amongst his responsibilities, Koda oversaw the treatment of prisoners at Taiping Prison and, as such, he had been briefed on the anomalous situation that this male-only prison held a European woman – and one who stubbornly refused to be lodged with the Catholic nuns. His interest was piqued.

In July 1942, the Japanese cleared Taiping Prison of all its POWs and sent them to Kuala Lumpur's Pudu Prison, itself a stepping-stone to camps in Singapore. Before dawn on the day of the transfer, the prisoners were marched out of prison to the nearby railway station where cattle trucks were ready to take them to Kuala Lumpur. The journey was long and hot, and it was only late that night that they arrived at Pudu Prison. Some were almost immediately transferred to Changi Prison in Singapore,[69] while for others Pudu would be their home for some weeks. But Doris was not amongst these tired, dirty POWs and internees. Prior to their departure from Taiping, Colonel Koda had arranged for her to be moved to the civilian hospital for care and rest. Isolated and under medical attention, by the time she had heard that the other prisoners had been transferred it was too late; they had gone and she was alone and under the 'protection' of Colonel Koda.

Chapter Six

A Mistress of the Japanese

It is not known precisely when Doris van der Stratten was moved from Taiping to Kuala Lumpur, though August or September 1942 is the most likely period.[70] Unlike the male prisoners, her journey was not by rail and cattle truck but by a military staff car. From a hospital room run by nuns in Taiping she was moved to an expansive colonial residence at No 12 Penang Road, Kuala Lumpur – close to the city centre and the race course. The property had been commandeered by the Japanese military and was under the control of Colonel Koda, who had left Taiping and was now the Commander of the Western Garrison, one of the most senior-ranking Japanese officers in Kuala Lumpur.

Japanese-occupied Kuala Lumpur was very different from the pre-war city. Virtually all the Europeans had gone – either having fled Malaya, or languishing in internment or POW camps in Singapore. The few that remained – neutrals from countries like Switzerland or Portugal – stood out in the now exclusively Asian city. With the arrival of the Japanese in January 1942, and then the onset of the brutal period of repression of the *Sook Chin*, Kuala Lumpur had lost whatever vestiges of gaiety it once had. Instead of parties, the races, or sipping a *stengah* at the 'Spotted Dog', the city was stalked by fear. Round-ups and disappearances, and gruesome displays of decapitated heads on poles, sent a message of fear, and effectively cowed and subdued the population. Japanese roadblocks in and out of the city, and sentries demanding a subservient bow of the head – failure to do so risked a hard slap - bespoke a city under occupation.

The historic record is not entirely clear, and some sources describe Doris as cohabiting with Colonel Koda, but it seems most likely that he maintained his own official residence 'off Circular Road' while keeping Doris conveniently close to him, in nearby Penang Road. Doris' journey from Kampong Toh had been one of extremes – semi-starved and fighting for survival in the jungle for five long months, to being the only female prisoner in a community of hundreds of POWs and civilian internees at Taiping Prison, to a period in hospital with the nuns, and finally living in a bungalow in one of Kuala Lumpur's most exclusive neighbourhoods, where she was looked after by a retinue of servants. Though she was alone, for a while at least a clean bed and the privacy and luxury of her own bathroom must have felt like heaven.

It was during this period, in late 1942, that Doris became Koda's mistress. We have no records or specific insights into the relationship between them, nor do we know the point at which they became lovers, but his mistress she clearly became. Given that she was an Australian national, there were clear risks for both of them in this relationship so publicly she used the name 'Dulcima' and claimed to be an Italian citizen, and thereby a citizen of one of the Axis powers. The name 'Dulcima' had been with her since baptism, had accompanied her to Adelaide and was on her marriage certificate to Richard Wall. But, until this point, had not been used. Now, its latinate ring was no doubt designed to support the subterfuge, and buttress her claim, to be an Italian.

In the Dutch East Indies, there are records of Dutch wom-

an being coerced into becoming the mistresses of Japanese officers or serving in Comfort Houses. In some cases these women were professional prostitutes who had been plying their trade before the war and, to save others, had agreed to act as sex workers for the Japanese. But there were also cases of regular Dutch women and girls being pressed against their will. Such practices did not occur in British Malaya, however, and the British women in internment camps at Changi and at Sime Road in Singapore were not targeted by the Japanese in the same way. The case of Doris van der Stratten, therefore, is a rare one – and indeed might be unique. There are, to the author, no other known examples where British or Australian women become either Comfort Women in Japanese military brothels or the mistresses of senior officers.

Doris appears, in a calculating and manipulative way, to have been carefully groomed by Koda, controlling and isolating her and then offering her a life hugely better than the alternatives. She also believed that her husband Philip had been massacred at Kampong Toh, so could rationalise that she was no longer married. Whether Doris felt it was acceptable to 'sleep with the enemy' we will never know, though affairs of this nature were a reality in all theatres of war. Doris was certainly not alone; in France many women guilty of collaboration *horizontale* were brutally punished after the war. While there is no evidence that Doris was held against her will or was a hostage, she was clearly under huge psychological pressure in a relationship of huge disadvantage and chose a route that offered safety and protection – albeit at the price of public opprobrium.

Doris' background probably added to her vulnerability.

She came from a broken home and had for long had no contact with her mother and her two daughters. Following her isolation with the nuns in Taiping, and then as Koda's 'guest' in Kuala Lumpur, elements of what in modern parlance we would call Stockholm syndrome – a hostage's positive association with their captor – seems likely to have occured.[71] It is also possible that Doris found in the powerful Koda the father figure she had lacked since a young child. Equally, and less charitably, it was possible that, having honed her feisty personality in the bars and saloons of the East End of London and in Adelaide, that Doris had evolved a street-wise instinct for survival, and the best option available to her was to accept Koda as her lover. In truth we will never know what motived her, though it seems far more likely that Doris was a frightened, confused and lonely victim of a manipulative predator than a scheming and amoral opportunist.

What did Koda get out of this? There were a number of Comfort Houses established in Kuala Lumpur, and senior officers had special rights of access. They could, for example, choose to stay the night with a girl. One of the largest Comfort Houses, known as Ngan Ngan, was close to Koda's residence on Circular Road.[72] Koda was also sufficiently senior that he could have summoned girls to his residence; they were readily available, and possibly he did avail himself of local prostitutes. But Doris was different, and the time, effort and money spent on isolating, then moving her from Taiping and housing her in splendor in Kuala Lumpur suggests a more complex relationship and motivation. Perhaps establishing her as his mistress brought status: a 'trophy' concubine and the ultimate 'conquering' of the Europeans. Perhaps too, and these strands

are not mutually exclusive, Koda was genuinely attracted by the fiery, opinionated Australian; she would have been very different from any other women he knew. This is speculation, but what can be said with confidence is that Koda was taking a considerable risk in establishing 'Dulcima' as his mistress and then presenting her as an Italian national. Perhaps that was also part of the fun, but it left him vulnerable.

It is unlikely that during the year in which she lived in Kuala Lumpur under the 'protection' of Colonel Koda that Doris ventured often or far from her 'gilded cage'. As a Western woman she would have stood out, and it was a small city in which she had lived before the war. Though many of the van der Strattens had scattered or died as a consequence of the war, her parents-in-law and Philip's

Kuala Lumpur Bungalow

brothers Gerard and William continued to live in Kuala Lumpur during the Japanese occupation. In these circumstances Doris' efforts to present herself as an Italian national were optimistic, if not naïve, and it later proved that her true identity was known. The fact that she lived for a year purporting to be the Italian 'Dulcima' was more testimony to Koda's power and authority than to Doris' success at dissembling and subterfuge.

For those van der Strattens still living in Kuala Lumpur, having their Australian daughter-in-law living semi-publicly on their doorstep as the concubine of the hated Japanese must have been hugely humiliating and deeply psychologically conflicting. The family had suffered huge tragedies, with - as we shall see - deaths on the dockside at Singapore and family members perishing on the SS Kuala and the SS Tanjong Pinang. Other family members had been scattered, and news of their fate was unknown, not least that of Doris' husband Philip. To have his Australian wife brazenly living as a 'scarlet woman', the mistress of the despised commander of the Japanese garrison, would have been a particularly hard pill to swallow and would have left them open to public shame and humiliation.

As Commander of the Western Garrison, Colonel Koda's responsibilities extended to oversight of the POWs at Pudu Prison, which he visited on a periodic basis. In mid-1942, Pudu Prison was the only place where, hidden behind high walls, Europeans in any numbers could be found. They were largely invisible to the citizens of Kuala Lumpur, save when occasionally seen marching through the streets under guard – a shameful and humbling sight

for the once all-powerful British. At one stage there were over 650 POWs crammed into Pudu, but from mid-1942 the Japanese moved them to Changi in Singapore. The last group of British prisoners, soldiers from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, left in October 1942, though in their case it was direct to the Thai-Burma railway. At the back of Pudu Prison, in a compound of its own, was Block D. This was where the *Kempetei* kept its civilian prisoners in conditions of utter horror; it was self-contained but no walls could contain the screams and sounds of torture.

In August 1942 a group of POWs escaped. While their initial break-out was successful, they had naively misinterpreted Malaya under the Japanese. Europeans were no longer a common sight and they were soon spotted and captured. They also misunderstood the attitudes of Malayans, of all creeds, who proved reluctant to support and hide them - their loyalty to Britain proved, at best, equivocal, while their fear of the Japanese was very unequivocal. Within two weeks all but one of the escapees had been returned to Pudu, and the remaining officer, Captain Nugent, was found near Taiping two weeks later. The escapees were tortured by the *Kempetei* and were later loaded onto a military truck before being driven from Pudu and executed. Nugent, who was shot in the leg while trying to escape capture, was allowed to recover at a military hospital in Ipoh before being taken out and shot. After the war, only Nugent's body was found; his headstone now stands in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Taiping.

While Koda had administrative control of the prison, he was not involved in the investigation into the prisoner

break-out, nor in their subsequent executions, which was handled by the *Kempetei*. Nevertheless, after the escape and subsequent capture of the POWs, Koda visited Pudu and urged the senior British officers to prevail upon their men to behave. One officer, Major Oliver North, later noted that Koda had reassured the POWs that they need 'have no fears of general reprisals' if they behaved, while stressing to the senior ranks 'to impress upon our troops that other escapes would have serious repercussions'.

Major North's generally benign view of Koda might, however, have been different had he been aware that the Colonel was quietly taking a cut of their – very modest – rations and food budget. In a post-war affidavit a POW and member of the Malayan Volunteers, Kenyon Archer, noted that 'The man who was in charge of the prisoners of war in Kuala Lumpur and who was directly responsible for the conditions there was Colonel Koda.' Archer added that he had been advised by a Japanese officer that Koda had been quietly embezzling the POWs' food and ration budget. Archer's report also highlighted the devastating mortality rate at the prison through disease and hunger – over twelve per cent of the prison population dying during his nine-month stay. As the senior Japanese officer overseeing the administration of Pudu, Koda must bear ultimate responsibility for the appalling conditions in the prison: overcrowded and insanitary, with inadequate food, and diseases such as *beri-beri* and typhus rife.[73] That Koda personally benefited by defrauding funds assigned to POW rations adds corruption and fraud to the charge-list.[74] Archer also noted in his report that Koda had been living with a 'Mrs van Der Stratten…..whose husband had

been murdered [sic] by Siamese at the outset of hostilities'. Archer wrote that having met Doris in Taiping, Koda 'had removed her to his house in Circular Road Kuala Lumpur'.[75] Archer's post-war affidavit concluded, 'I do not know what became of her.'

Word of Koda's corrupt activities, however, had not only reached the ears of Kenyon Archer; more worryingly for Koda they had also reached the ears of the *Kempetei*. Alongside terrifying and cowing potential opponents, the *Kempetei* was responsible for maintaining order and discipline within the Japanese military. It stood independent of the regular command structure, and was feared almost as much by its own as by Malaya's civilian population. Its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur was in the Lee Rubber Building, a fine four-story art-deco building built in 1930 and acquired by the Lee Rubber Company from the Eastern Smelting Company in 1939.[76] Provocatively, the *Kempetei* chose to locate their headquarters in the very heart of Kuala Lumpur's China Town and immediately opposite the venerable Guan Du Taoist Chinese temple. On requisitioning the building, the Japanese immediately constructed ten cells on the top floor to hold prisoners for interrogation.[77] Though the *Kempetei* kept their worst interrogations and torture for Pudu Prison, nevertheless a sorry procession of suspects - many of them Chinese - entered the Lee Rubber Building with dread.

In August 1943, Lt Shuzi Murakami of the Japanese Naval *Kempetei*, who was based at the large Japanese military garrison in Alor Setar in north-west Malaya and was deemed an 'interrogation expert', travelled to Kuala Lumpur to

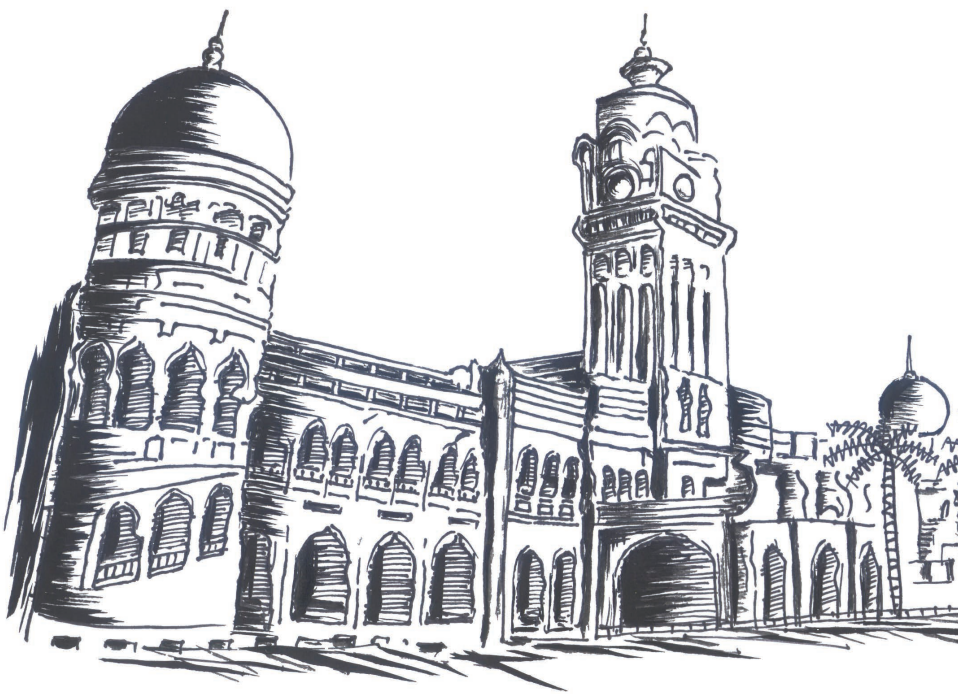
launch an investigation into allegations that Colonel Koda had been corruptly syphoning off official funds for his personal benefit. Lt Murakami was chosen for this sensitive investigation because he was unknown in Kuala Lumpur and would be unlikely to be swayed by personal relationships and connections. The main focus of his investigation was the claim that Koda had embezzled funds allocated for POW rations at Pudu Prison.

As part of his investigations, and while carefully exploring Koda's lifestyle and conduct, Murakami learned that he had an 'Italian mistress' - one 'Dulcima' – living at a residence in Penang Road. This was not only highly unusual but, as Murakami later noted, by July 1943 being an Italian was in itself problematic, as Mussolini's fall from power had left the Italian position within the Axis in an ambiguous position.[78] Moreover, as his investigations gathered pace, Murakami was soon to hear reports that far from being an Italian, Koda's mistress was in fact an Australian and someone who had lived in Kuala Lumpur before the war, having married into a prominent Eurasian family. Accordingly, on 29 August 1943, Murakami instructed Sam Ah Ngah, one of the *Kempetei's* panel of local interpreters, to go to 'Dulcima's' residence at No 12 Penang Road and bring her by car to the *Kempetei* headquarters for questioning. Though neither Murakami nor Doris were to know, this short journey across central Kuala Lumpur would be her last.

Chapter Seven

The Wheels of Justice

When the British returned to Malaya in September 1945, they found a nation divided and traumatised by war. The Malayan economy was on its knees, food was scarce, families were scattered and many had suffered from the terrors of the *Kempetei*. Though all were happy to see the back of the Japanese, the reception for the returning British was ambivalent; they were received with a cagey pragmatism – a desire to live in peace and a return to 'normality' - but not under the old terms. They were no longer the effortless colonial masters and the in-coming British Military Administration (BMA) faced an almost perfect storm of challenges, with little or no experience of civil governance.



Government Building

The desire for justice for the victims of Japanese atrocities, and indeed revenge against the Japanese themselves, was intense and the BMA came under huge pressure to bring to trial those behind the most heinous crimes, though the mechanisms and processes for formal legal process were largely absent.

In a poor echo of the Nuremburg Trials in Germany, the allies brought leading Japanese government and military figures to trial in Tokyo, but elsewhere and for lesser figures the policy was to locate the process of justice close to where the crimes had been committed. Thus a series of widely dispersed 'Small War Crimes Trials' were held across South East Asia. In Malaya, courts were convened in Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lipis, Ipoh, Malacca, Taiping and Penang. Though adapted for circumstance and scale, the allied powers were keen that their system of justice should be seen as distinctly different from the arbitrary law meted out by the Japanese. The trials borrowed from British and American legal process, with contesting defence and prosecution counsels. There were, however, no juries and the adjudicating judge was called the 'Court President', supported and advised by two 'members'. In capital cases there was an appeal route to the Commander of British Forces, though in practice he rarely failed to follow the judgment of the Court President.[79] While carrying military rank, the senior court officers came from the Lord Advocates Department of the War Office and all had previous legal training and experience.

Though it now appears remarkably quick, by January 1946, less than five months after returning to war-dam-

aged Malaya, the BMA was defending itself against accusations that it was proving tardy in serving up justice. A BMA official noted defensively that they held 439 war criminals in camps and promised that trials would begin shortly. This proved to be the case and by late June 1946, war crimes courts in Singapore - which led the way - had resulted in the execution of 41 Japanese prisoners, with a further 28 on death row pending confirmation.[80] The Small War Crimes Trials then began to roll out across Malaya, with Kuala Lumpur and its High Court as the starting point.

To support the process of justice, teams of investigators were assembled to sift the evidence, identify suspects and bring them to court. In Kuala Lumpur, the cases were assessed and prepared by Investigation Unit No 5, which was one of seventeen such units set up across south-east Asia.Unit No 5 was under Lt Col Henderson and had as its base a colonial bungalow off Circular Road, close to where Colonel Koda had once lived.[81] As well as British teams, there were also Australian military investigators seeking evidence for atrocities committed against Australian troops and civilians, and it was an Australian officer, Captain RJ Reynolds, who first raised the case of Doris van der Stratten.[82] In February 1946, Reynolds sent a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Canberra titled the 'Alleged Murder of Doris Heath Nationality Australian Committed by the Japanese at Kuala Lumpur during 1943.' His source was an anonymous lady working for the Kuala Lumpur YWCA, who said that she had known Doris 'Heath' from before the war as they had lived in the same neighbourhood. The informant was aware that Doris had

married into a Eurasian family, though interestingly cited her maiden name, rather than her married name of van der Stratten. The source wrongly claimed that Doris had been residing in Kuala Lumpur since December 1941 [she was then in southern Thailand] but noted that while in the city the 'Japanese were under the impression she was of Italian nationality'. Her testimony continued 'At a later date she took up residence with a Japanese Colonel and, according to rumour, was his mistress… The Japanese Colonel, with whom she had been residing, was removed from the area. Heath was removed to the custody of the Kempei Tai H.Q's, High Street Kuala Lumpur, was subject to torture, as result of which she died.'[83]

Captain Reynolds fed this information to Lt Col Henderson's war crimes investigation unit, and they then started an investigation to unravel the events surrounding Doris' death. The team's first and most important witnesses were the local interpreters who had worked during the war at the Lee Rubber Building. They soon discovered that a number of such *Kempetei* interpreters were familiar with the Doris Heath/van der Stratten case. Indeed, the nature of her demise, the fact that she was an Australian and her position as mistress of the Western Garrison Commander, had lent her death a particular notoriety. There were, however, problems inherent in using such sources as witnesses. Their intimate involvement in the *Kempetei's* work meant they were potentially complicit in crimes committed, and any evidence they offered might well be tailored to deflect criticism from themselves. The investigation unit had to weigh this dilemma and decide whether they were credible witnesses.

The expansive war crimes trial programme underway across south-east Asia was underpinned by a central card system, administered by a secretariat based at the British Military Headquarters in Singapore. It was they who allotted case number No 128 to the Doris van der Stratten murder investigation.[84] Card No 128 had 'Lt Shuzi Murakami' written in red pencil at its head and noted that he was a suspect in the 'ill treatment resulting in death of a civ prisoner at *Kempetei* HQ in Kuala Lumpur on 31 August 1943.' Doris van der Stratten's name was not included though the word 'Dutch' – an understandable error given her husband's family name – was added in brackets. Meanwhile, as part of the process of coordinating and linking cases with suspects, Murakami was allocated a 'P Card', which was filed alphabetically and cross-referenced with the number '128' in the top right-hand corner.[85]

One of the biggest problems facing allied investigators was tracking down suspects. Many who had committed heinous crimes had used the period between the surrender declaration and the arrival of the allies to cover their tracks and disappear into the vast holding camps set up to process Japanese POWs. A further problem was that in many cases suspects were only known to witnesses by nicknames, such as 'Pig-Nose', 'Maggot' or 'The Bull'. Tracking and identifying suspects was a huge task, and the 'P card' system was designed to systemise and centralise that process. In the case of Murakami, however, Investigation Unit No 5 faced few difficulties in tracking him down. His name and rank were known and he had seen out the war at the Japanese army garrison at Alor Star, in Kedah in north-west Malaya. Once he had become the subject of a

legal action he was quickly located and in February 1946 transferred to Taiping Prison. In June 1946, in a journey that echoed the earlier movement of Doris van der Stratten and many British POWs, Murakami was sent from Taiping Prison to Pudu Prison in Kuala Lumpur. There he was held in a self-contained corridor in B Wing alongside other war crimes suspects. Conditions in Pudu were much better than under the Japanese, though they were hardly luxurious; the British Military Police, under whose authority political and war crimes prisoners were held, had an allocation of just twenty cents per day per prisoner for food and rations.[86] Here, in these gloomy circumstances, Murakami was to wait until his trial began.[86]

Chapter Eight

The Trial of Lt Shuzi Murakami

At 8 o'clock on Friday 28 July 1946, Lt Shuzi Murakami was marched from his cell at Pudu Prison to the courtyard behind the main gate; there he was placed in a military truck and escorted by jeep and six British soldiers to the back entrance of Government Building. From there he was led to the basement lock-up of the High Court, where he had a modest breakfast and drank tea. At 10 o'clock, Murakami was escorted along an internal corridor and up a short dark stairwell leading directly into the dock at the centre of the intimate, wood-panelled, courtroom. Immediately facing him, though slightly raised in his high-backed leather chair, sat the Court President, Lt Col Culley, and to either side of him in uniform sat the two advisory 'members'. Above them and prominently positioned was a brightly coloured and embossed Royal Coat of Arms, emphasising the return of British justice and the authority of King George VI. From the high ceiling, fans on long poles sought to offer relief and move the close, warm air. Between and below Murakami and the judge's bench, was the usual bustle of court administrators.

Murakami recognised his British defence counsel from their previous short encounters at Pudu Prison, and also his Japanese assistant, who acted as interpreter. He looked at them both but made no sign of acknowledgment. Behind Murakami and the dock, and just out of reach, sat the ranked and serried wooden forms of the public benches – with prominence given to journalists from the *Malay Mail* and the *Straits Times* and, from further afield, to the international wire services. The noisy chatter from the public benches came to a hesitant but ultimately complete silence

once they realised that the accused had been insinuated, quietly and unobtrusively, into the dock.

Murakami was of modest stature but stood erect in his faded, sun-bleached beige uniform. He presented a compact, efficient impression – brown leather belts and gun-metal buckles tight across his chest, breeches and knee-length brown leather boots. He looked briefly around the assembled court before impassively facing the judges. Murakami was schooled in military discipline and was in command of his emotions; proud of his stoicism and unwavering in his beliefs in Japan and in the *Kempetei's* role in maintaining the faith and providing military and social discipline. A man used to taking orders, but also to giving them.

Once the courtroom had settled into an expectant silence, Lt Col Culley brought his gavel down hard on its wooden block and brought the court to order. Following this, Culley, as Court President, his two advisors, the interpreter and the stenographer were all 'sworn in'. Culley then read the charge – that Lt Shuzi Murakami, a warrant officer within the Japanese Naval *Kempetei*, on or around 31 August 1943, had mistreated Australian national Doris van der Stratten in actions leading to her death 'in violation of the laws and usages of war' and 'amounting to commission of war crimes'. Culley then asked if Murakami understood the charges levelled against him and, assuming so, how he pleaded? Once translated, and following a curt military bow of the head, Lt Murakami responded 'not guilty'.

Neither Murakami nor his counsel could have had held out much hope of success. The odds were stacked against them. The public was baying for revenge, and the uncontested death of an Australian female civilian at the *Kempetei* headquarters can hardly have encouraged expectations of success, let alone leniency. A month before, Culley had sentenced *Kempetei* officer Lt Nishi Yoshinobu to death for the torture and murder of a Eurasian civilian, Dr Netto. Few gave Murakami much chance of escaping the gallows.

> *'Uncle Philip spoke infrequently of his Australian wife. We were told Aunt Doris had leapt to her death during interrogation and torture by the Japs in KL... following capture in Thailand where both she and my uncle had been working. He apparently was reported to have abandoned her, fled the scene and was killed. Rumours were rife about her alleged scandalous behaviour. The truth was the subject of much speculation… was she or was she not the willing mistress of a high-ranking Jap officer...or did she assume that role to ensure her survival?'* - *Paget Natten*

The proceedings started with the prosecution and defence counsels each offering a brief outline of their arguments. The prosecution counsel, Captain S.K. Bannerjee of the British Indian Army – who came with a track record of success as a prosecutor - noted that he would be producing witnesses, including an eyewitness who had been in the same interrogation cell with Murakami that fateful day in late August 1943, who would attest that Murakami had responded to a virulent outburst by Doris van der Stratten by losing his temper and forcing her through an open window,

such that she fell four floors to her death on the road below. In contrast, the defence counsel said that he intended to show that the prosecution witnesses were partial and had tailored their evidence to protect themselves, while in fact Doris had jumped to her death as a suicide, probably in a bid to save her lover, Colonel Koda.

The first witness to be called was Doris' husband, Philip van der Stratten. Having in October 1945 been repatriated from Prachand internment camp in Bangkok, he was by this stage living once more in Kuala Lumpur with the remaining members of his family. His inclusion as a witness was intended by the prosecution to emphasise the personal loss and pain suffered by the family and to assert that they, at least, understood and forgave Doris.

Philip was clearly unable to comment on the circumstances surrounding Doris' death but he was able to offer testimony about the Kampong Toh massacre; explaining that he and Doris had lost one another that fateful night in southern Thailand, both believing the other to have perished. Philip's testimony was intended to confront the commonly held perception of Doris as a 'scarlet woman' and collaborator. By starting the proceedings with the gentle, forgiving Philip, the prosecution hoped that they could sway sentiment and that during the trial Doris would be viewed as a victim, and not a mendacious opportunist. Philip had clearly forgiven his wife, and it was hoped that this sentiment and generosity of spirit would set the tone for the trial. Once Philip had finished his sad account, which was heard in a respectful silence, he stood down from the witness stand and exited the court chamber before quietly

reentering the court from the rear, then to sit in the section of the public benches reserved for family members – a sad, broken man listening to the harrowing details of his wife's last days and hours.

Following Philip's testimony, the prosecution then called their main witness, Sam Ah Ngaw, who was a radio engineer of Chinese origins, and one of the *Kempetei's* panel of local interpreters. In using him and two other local interpreters as their primary witnesses, the prosecution was taking a risk, as they had all been engaged at the sharp-end of *Kempetei* interrogations. The prosecution was vulnerable, therefore, to the defence argument that these witnesses were not offering impartial, disinterested testimony but were rather colouring their evidence to protect their own, exposed, positions.

Having taken his place in the witness stand, and identified himself and explained his position as an interpreter for the *Kempetei*, Sam Ah Ngaw recounted how in late August 1943 he had been sent by Murakami in an official vehicle to collect Doris van der Stratten from her residence in Penang Road. From there he escorted her to the *Kempetei* headquarters for questioning. Sam Ah Ngaw noted that Doris was in the Lee Rubber building for three days, during which time she had some opportunity to move about in public areas. Sam Ah Ngaw said that initially Murakami's questioning had been civil and friendly. He had sought to draw out Doris on her relationship with Colonel Koda, and to tease from her details of Koda's lifestyle and the sources of his wealth. Having exhausted this line of questioning, Murakami then moved to 'Dulcima' and her background. At this point Sam Ah Ngaw said Doris became evasive

and opaque. She claimed to be an Italian national but offered little evidence to back this up. The initial friendly tone turned darker as Murakami continued to probe Doris' background, eventually accusing her of being a 'British spy', sent to infiltrate the Japanese military.

Sam Ah Ngaw said that he was not with Murakami and Doris throughout all her interrogation sessions, but was with them during her last moments. Doris spend two

Lee Rubber Building

nights and much of three days at the Lee Rubber Building, held for the most part in a cell on the top floor. Murakami had grown steadily angrier with Doris' evasive answers, turning increasingly physical in his approach. She in turn responded feistily and confronted her interrogator. On the third afternoon of her detention, Sam Ah Ngah told the court that Murakami 'caught hold of her hair and shook her for about 15 minutes. Later he threw her on the ground and stamped on her body'. Following this she was stripped of her clothes and 'when Mrs Van Der Straaten refused to answer her questions' Murakami 'slapped and kicked her'. Sam Ah Ngaw then told the silent, horrified courtroom that this treatment proved too much for Doris, who shouted 'tyrant, you can't do this to me'. She then slapped Murakami, sending him into a frenzy. He then 'grabbed her by her dress and threw her out the window'.[87]

The newspaper accounts do not address the seeming contradiction in Sam Ah Ngah's testimony, that a 'stripped' Doris van der Stratten was hurled from the window by her dress, but it was reported that his devastating testimony was heard in silence by a rapt court. Sam Ah Ngah concluded his cross-examination by claiming that Murakami later coerced him into covering up Doris' murder as 'suicide'.[88] Under questioning he stated that at the time of her death he had signed a written testimony, in which he had said that Doris had climbed to the window and thrown herself out. But Sam Ah Ngah now said that he had done this under duress and wanted the truth to be told - Murakami had thrown Doris to her death.

Once Sam Ah Ngaw had left the witness stand, with a

confident flourish the prosecution counsel called a second *Kempetei* interpreter, Goh Kwee Tang. Under questioning Goh stated that at the time of Doris' death he had been walking along 'High Street' near the Lee Rubber Building, when he had heard 'something drop. He looked back and saw a European lady lying on the road near the coffee shop…. She was dressed in black'. Goh Kwee Tang then said 'about five or six Japanese took the body in, amongst whom was Murakami'. Goh also noted that a passerby had told him that he had seen the body fall and had looked up to the window from where it came and 'saw a Japanese face' staring out. Though he was a passive observer, and was not present at the interrogation, Goh Kwee Tang's evidence corroborated much of Sam Ah Ngaw's version of events. He had explicitly placed Murakami at the *Kempetei* headquarters at the time Doris died and, by implication, it was his face that the passerby had seen looking out of the window immediately after the body had fallen.

To finish a busy morning session, the prosecution introduced Rajoo, an Indian and the final *Kempetei* interpreter to give evidence. Under questioning, Rajoo said that he had first seen a European lady standing in the lobby of the Lee Rubber Building speaking on a public telephone; he took her to be Doris van der Stratten, whose name had been circulating around the office and whom he knew had been called in for questioning. Having finished her telephone call, Doris exited from the main entrance directly onto 'High Street' and headed down the street and away. Murakami instructed Rajoo to pursue her and to bring her back for further questioning. Rajoo then accompanied some of the early interrogations. Rajoo told the court that

the 'interrogation was confined to her history and lasted two hours. Mrs Van Der Stratten did not seem worried'. She was, nevertheless, detained overnight in a cell and the following day Rajoo noted that she was interrogated once again and at length by Murakami.[89]

According to Rajoo's testimony, it was on the third day of her detention that Murakami's interrogation became violent 'ranging from shouting at the victim, throwing her on the ground and stomping on her and finally stripping her naked.'[90] Rajoo acknowledged that he had been witness to the early part of this interrogation but said that during the afternoon he had taken a break for his 'tiffin' [afternoon tea]. He had therefore left the office and was absent at the time of her death. On his return to the Lee Rubber Building he was 'shocked' to see that Doris lay 'in the courtyard, by the incinerator. The body was lifeless.' Rajoo then said that an ambulance from Kuala Lumpur General Hospital was summoned to take her body away.

Rajoo concluded his testimony by noting that following Doris' death her brother-in-law, William van der Stratten (clear evidence that the Japanese knew all about Doris' family background) was summoned to the *Kempetei* headquarters. He had already suffered grievously, as his wife and three children had perished while trying to flee Singapore, but his suffering was not over. He was kept for two days by the *Kempetei* in the cells for questioning and then shown photographs of Doris' dead body for identification purposes. These he confirmed were his sister-in-law. When he was finally allowed to leave he was given a small bag of Doris' clothes and possessions to take away.[91]

This concluded the testimony of the prosecution witnesses – three *Kempetei* collaborators who had been there, or there about, during the time of Doris' death. The Court President Lt Col Culley drew the morning session to a close and advised that it would resume the hearing at 2 o'clock sharp. He headed to his chambers for a light meal while many of those in the public benches headed across the *padang* for a liquid lunch at the Selangor Club. Murakami was taken to the holding cell in the basement, where he had a simple meal of rice, dal and hot tea. It had been a absorbing morning of witness testimony and the excited crowd streaming out of the courtroom reflected on the horrific behaviour of the *Kempetei*, and the sense that justice was about to be served.

On resuming the afternoon session, Murakami himself was called to the witness stand. Standing erect and to attention, and communicating through a Japanese interpreter, his defence counsel started the questioning by asking Murakami to offer some background on himself and on the investigation he had been called to pursue. Murakami responded that he was a member of the naval *Kempetei* and had been stationed at the Japanese garrison in Alor Star, in north-west Malaya. He was an 'interrogation specialist' and in August 1943 he had been summoned to Kuala Lumpur to investigate allegations of corruption by the garrison commander, Colonel Koda. He noted that the task he faced in Kuala Lumpur was a sensitive one. Colonel Koda was a senior and popular officer, and the decision to bring in an outsider, and not someone within the Kuala Lumpur *Kempetei*, was explained by the need to introduce someone independent and untrammelled by local relation-

ships and loyalties.

Murakami said that during his investigation into Koda's corrupt activities, his 'Italian mistress Dulcima' had come to attention. He had decided to bring her in for questioning, which he claimed had been gentle and correct throughout. He said that he had initially probed for any insights she might have into Koda's shady financial activities, though once he began his questioning, and it became clear that she was not an Italian but rather an Australian national, and he rationalised that she was most likely a 'British spy.' On the third day of her detention, Murakami said that he finished his questioning early 'as she [Doris] was delicate and needed rest she was allowed to rest in a cool room. She was guarded by a Chinese [man].'[92] This individual Murakami identified as the prosecution's main witness, Sam Ah Ngaw. In contrast to Sam Ah Ngaw's testimony, however, Murakami said that while Doris 'rested', he took the opportunity to visit Koda's residence in Circular Road to look for papers. Murakami said that he 'returned around 4pm to be told by [the senior-ranking *Kempetei* officer] Major Kajuma that the lady had committed suicide.' Murakami told the court that 'I was frightened and went to the hospital and saw her body in the surgical room. I felt sorry for her and left after one look at her body'. Murakami then claimed that on his return to the *Kempetei* headquarters he had quizzed Sam Ah Ngah who had told him that 'he saw the lady making for a window and tried to stop her but she picked up a rope and lashed out at him then jumped out'. Murakami concluded his testimony by saying 'I never ill treat the lady in my interrogation of her.'

Murakami's testimony was the last to be heard. By mid-afternoon, after a day of intense cross-examination, it fell to the respective counsels to summarise their positions and expound their arguments. The prosecution counsel, Captain Bannerjee, understandably rested his case on the testimony of the three interpreters whose combined evidence appeared to lead to only once conclusion - that Doris van der Stratten had lost her temper after heavy questioning, had fought back and Murakami had responded in kind – beating her and then forcing her through an upstairs window to fall to her death. They had presented the evidence of an eyewitness to her murder, Sam Ah Ngaw, and corroborative reporting from two other *Kempetei* interpreters who were both in the vicinity of the Lee Rubber Building at the time of her death.

Against this compelling and hard-hitting testimony, Murakami's defence counsel, in a 'stirring address', sought to undermine the prosecution's key eyewitness. He argued that Sam Ah Ngaw had made up his story in order to 'save face and regain the confidence of the outside public'. The defence counsel was understandably attacking the prosecution at its most vulnerable flank – their use of witnesses who might themselves have engaged in torture while employed by the *Kempetei* and whose testimony was founded on self-preservation rather than telling the truth.[93] The defence counsel also claimed - with some conviction - that the three *Kempetei* interpreters had rehearsed their testimonies as well as presenting a version of events that suited their exposed positions. In contradiction to their accounts, the defence counsel noted that at the time of Doris' interrogation Colonel Koda had yet to be arrested and argued that, given his position as Commander of the Western Garrison, it would have been far more likely that a junior

Kempetei officer such as Murakami would have treated Doris 'leniently and kindly' to curry favour.

Flowing from this, the defence counsel then advanced the argument that Doris had committed suicide to protect her lover, noting that 'Mrs van der Straaten [sic] had become separated from her husband, she was alone and friendless. She had no means of support and Colonel Koda had taken her in and given her what she wanted in life. He was therefore everything to her – he was like an oasis in the desert to whom she could look for her livelihood. Suicide was the plan of Mrs Straaten [sic] to save Colonel Koda.' Finally, the defence counsel concluded with the clever legal strategy that while Murakami might have been 'morally responsible for Doris' death he was not legally responsible, and therefore should be acquitted.'[94] It was an optimistic call.

After these arguments were heard, Lt Col Culley rapped his gavel to close the day's work. The court stood while he announced that it would reconvene the following Tuesday at 10 o'clock. After a day of heavy testimony, and with the prospect of a difficult weekend ahead reviewing the arguments, Culley rose, turned wearily and exited through a wooden door that had quietly opened to the side of the bench, followed by his two assistants. The court maintained its silence while Culley was present, but on his departure the tension that had been building all day amongst those on the public benches suddenly broke, with angry calls and jeers directed at Murakami - standing so close in the dock - echoing around the court. His British guards sensing trouble quickly bundled him down the internal

stairwell and into the corridor below. From there he was rushed out of the court building by military truck and back to Pudu Prison before a crowd could assemble and cause problems outside the court.

After a weekend to ponder the evidence and the legal arguments, and a working day on Monday to prepare his papers, Lt Col Culley reconvened the court at 10 o'clock on Tuesday 2 July 1946. *The Straits Times* reported that in the 'hushed silence of a crowded court', the Court President arrived, carrying under one arm his court documents held tight by red ribbon.[95] Murakami stood alert and to attention as Culley brought the proceedings to order. He started by offering his, and the court's sympathy, to Philip van der Stratten, who sat hunched with his head in his hands in one of the boxed rows to the front of the public benches fighting his emotions. The Court President commiserated with Philip over the pain he must have suffered during these court proceedings, hearing of his wife's last hours on earth.

Culley then brought the case to its conclusion. As was common practice in the brisk proceedings of the Small War Crimes Trials, he felt under no obligation to rehearse his calculations in public, simply noting that he had pondered the evidence presented to him, and had given due weight to all arguments. In the small, tight court room all knew a decision was imminent, and that a man's life was held in the balance. All eyes looked at Culley, except those of Murakami who stared blankly ahead into mid-distance. Culley, however, peered owlishly across his glasses and focused his gaze firmly and exclusively on the accused. With

a theatrical flourish, Culley then raised his gavel high; a sign that he was about to pronounce. But in so doing he failed to lean down and pick up a black cloth with which to cover his head – the sign that a death penalty was to be announced. Those familiar with court practice recognised that a most extraordinary outcome could now be expected - but soon all knew it, because in clear, crisp tones Culley pronounced Murakami 'not guilty' of the two charges levelled against him, and brought the case to a close with a loud knock of his gavel.

The Straits Times described the 'surprise and excitement' with which the judgment was met. Murakami, however, showed 'not the slightest trace of emotion' but rather 'bowed stiffly to both the officers of the Court and the European officer assisting his Japanese counsel' before being led back down the tight steps to the holding cell below and then back to his cell in Pudu Prison.[96] Culley meanwhile stood, paused and looked slowly around the court, before assembling his papers and making his way deliberately out through the wooden door to the side of the bench.

We will never know what really happened on that hot, sticky afternoon in late August 1943 in the top floor interrogation cell of the Lee Rubber Building. Given Doris' street-wise, feisty nature it is entirely possible that she snapped and responded to Murakami's violence and provocation by slapping back and shouting at him. Perhaps, as the mistress of the Commander of the Western Garrison, she misjudged her position and felt she was invulnerable. She had earlier shown a remarkable tenacity and will to live during her five-month trek through the jungle, but the

core question - was Doris pushed from the window to her death, or did she jump - will never be known. What is clear is that this final courtroom drama in the sad life of Doris Heath was similar to those earlier court hearings. When Pauline, Doris' mother, had claimed assault by Cain in Adelaide in 1923, the magistrate had dismissed her claim. When Doris had sought a divorce from Richard Wall in 1934, she succeeded though not before Justice Piper punished her by awarding her both sets of costs. Maybe there was an unrecognised and unremarked but underlying bias and prejudice that informed each of these verdicts.

It is certainly difficult to know how, or why, Lt Col Culley reached the decision he did. Sympathy was hardly high with the *Kempetei*, and this trial was one of the earliest to be heard in Kuala Lumpur. The prosecution surely thought that with an eyewitness account of Doris' murder, this was 'one in the bag'. Perhaps Sam Ah Ngah cut an unconvincing figure and the defence raised enough doubts about his testimony to save Murakami. Perhaps too, Culley was unwittingly swayed by the thought of Doris van der Stratten as a collaborator and 'wanton mistress' of the Japanese. Maybe he even bought the argument that she was a *femme fatale*, choosing to leap to her death to protect her lover. The most likely explanation, however, is that Culley was conscious that the British system of justice was also on trial. After the horrors and brutality of the Japanese occupation, and their arbitrary approach to justice and the law, the British were intent on showing that their traditional values and legal practices had returned and were morally and institutionally superior. Against this background, there was probably sufficient ambiguity in the Murakami case

that Culley could accept the defence argument – that he was 'morally culpable' of Doris van der Stratten's death but was not 'legally' guilty. Thus, in coming to the decision he did, Culley was asserting that the Small War Crimes Trials were not kangaroo courts set up to serve up revenge under a veneer of legal process. Whatever the calculations, it was a highly unexpected and controversial outcome.

News of the verdict spread fast. The court proceedings were covered in detail and on the front pages of the main English language Kuala Lumpur newspaper, the *Malay Mail* and in Singapore's *Straits Times*. The wire services also ensured that the story was covered extensively across Australia in most regional newspapers, albeit in a short, summary form. It had been a colourful, tragic story with an unexpected outcome. There was no press criticism at the acquittal of Murakami, save the 'surprise' noted in the Straits Times. The Doris Heath/van der Stratten case had enjoyed the local headlines in Malaya for two days, and a couple of column inches in most Australian newspapers as it was reported over the wire services, a sad and lonely death with a twist at the end. But the newspapers were soon full of more pressing news – independence for, and violence in, India; the birth of the UN; famine in Europe; the Red Army in central Europe; the Nuremburg Trial. Doris van der Stratten soon became barely a footnote in history.

The final note on the Small War Crimes Unit's card for case 'T 128' was a handwritten 'acquitted' – and with that they moved onto the dozens of remaining cases before them.[97]

After his acquittal, Murakami was returned directly to Pudu Prison where he re-joined his *Kempetei* colleagues in their own wing. On 26 September 1946, the British loaded all thirty *Kempetei* officers held in Pudu onto two open military trucks, roped them together and drove them around the *padang* in front of a jeering, hostile crowd. A Public Relations Department van with a loud speaker preceded the trucks, broadcasting in four languages the atrocities these men were said to have committed and seeking witnesses to come forward to identify those guilty of war crimes; one *Kempetei* officer and two interpreters – Hiroto Tadao and Hiroto Siganubo – were picked out.[98] Murakami, however, was not identified and was shortly thereafter released to join other Japanese POWs being repatriated en-masse to Japan. The allies had established a huge holding camp at Rempang in Riau, in the Dutch East Indies. Between May and July 1946, 117,369 POWs were repatriated to Japan. By October 1946 the last stragglers were being corralled there while the British awaited sufficient 'shipping bot-

'Doris was for all her travails, disappointments and circumstances, a warm human being...flesh and blood. There must`ve been times when she was happy. Perhaps being married to my uncle was one of them, however short-lived that time was. And there was something about her that still moves men; a kind of platonic love with honour for a fallen martyr whose sacrifice hasn't been fully appreciated by history, but should be.' - *Paget Natten*

toms' to send them home. There is no firm documentary evidence but it seems likely that Murakami caught the tail end of this exodus.

Key prosecution witness Sam Ah Ngah was less fortunate. It had been alleged in court by the defence counsel that he had framed his evidence against Murakami to buttress his own claims of innocence and had made a 'fictitious story in order to save his face and regain the confidence of the outside public knowing that he had done something which would meet with public disfavour'.[99] If that was his aim, he was unsuccessful because he found himself back in court at the end of July, this time in the dock, accused of 'causing grievous hurt' to one Rajasingham, an Indian whom he had interrogated at the *Kempetei* headquarters in March 1945.[100] It was asserted that Sam Ah Ngah had 'whipped [Rajasingham] with a leather strap and also

Pudu Prison

kicked and punched [him]...'.[101] The outcome of this court session under District Judge EA Burton is unfortunately unknown, but if he did walk out a free man he would then likely have become a target for communist assassination squads who were meting out 'summary justice' to those who had worked with the Japanese during the occupation years. The public record of Sam Ah Ngah's fate, however, is silent.

Colonel Koda, Doris' corrupt and predatory lover, was last noted in August 1943 in detention in Singapore's 'Outram Road Gaol', facing a Japanese military court for embezzlement and 'general misconduct' charges, based on evidence gleaned by Murakami during his investigations in Kuala Lumpur. Kenyon Archer, the POW Malayan Volunteer, was told by a Japanese junior officer and confidante, one Fujibayashi, that 'Koda was a disgrace to the Japanese military and was responsible for our poor treatment at Pudu Gaol'. He also confirmed that Koda had been stealing 'half of the funds' available for feeding the prisoners of war. What happened to Koda after his detention in Outram Road Gaol is unknown though one press account from the trial suggested he was returned to Japan.

Chapter Nine

A Family Decimated

For the Japanese, the Kampong Toh massacre of 13 December 1941 was a barely noticeable ripple in their onward and vigorous assault of British Malaya. Indeed, the rapid advance of their forces down the Malayan peninsula surprised all, including the Japanese who had expected much stiffer resistance. The 'Jitra Line' on the north-west border had been expected by the British to hold for days, allowing reinforcements to arrive and buttress defences, but was breached in two hours by a Japanese *blitzkrieg* led by tanks and consolidated by tough, experienced infantry. Two days after the assault on the beachheads of east Malaya and Thailand, the mighty HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* were sunk by Japanese bombs. British government propaganda sought to maintain morale, but floods of refugees retreating by road and rail told a more honest picture. The Malayan Red Cross set up soup kitchens at Kuala Lumpur railway station to aid travellers heading south to the 'safety' of Singapore, and their stories were given much greater credence.

On 20 December 1941, the British abandoned 'Fortress Penang', their oldest settlement in the region. This decision was based on hard-nosed military considerations, but the nature of the withdrawal led to profound damage to Britain's reputation, particularly amongst its 'Asiatic subject people'. There was incompetence, particularly in failed attempts to deny the Japanese materiel, fuel, food and use of the powerful Penang radio transmitter, but the real damage came from the adoption of a 'European-only' policy for those seeking to join the last trains and boats evacuating the island. A few days later the Japanese happily broadcast this act of segregation as an example of colo-

nial British hypocrisy.[102] For many Malayans, and particularly the Eurasian community who treasured their close links to the British, this cold insight into the underpinnings of colonialism punctured any remaining illusions about British priorities and left them sceptical of British assurances. Cambridge academics Christopher Bayley and Tim Harper later wrote, 'The moral collapse of British rule in Southeast Asia came not in Singapore, but at Penang.'[103]

As confidence collapsed in the British ability to resist, the Malayan peninsula became a funnel, with all roads leading to Singapore, whose 'impregnable' defences would surely hold back the Japanese; and, if not, it was the route to escape by sea. Those with the necessary means, therefore, flooded into the city, which was under regular aerial bombardment by the Japanese. Following Penang, and despite regular assurances to the contrary, all were now acutely conscious that the British might favour their own but were nevertheless intent on escape from the terrifying prospect of life under the Japanese. In practice, following their disastrous own-goal in Penang, the British did not impose a

'Somehow my father managed to get me and Mum on the Kuala, with Sybil and her two children, Molly with Margaret, Michael and an un-named infant. Mum`s last abiding memory of her father was watching him as the Kuala sailed, leaving behind many members of the family who were unable to board the ship, including my father, because the ship was supposed to carry only women and children. She didn`t know this would be the last time she`d see Grandpa. We wouldn`t see my father until the end of the war.' - *Paget Natten*

colour bar on evacuations from Singapore, though it remains arguable that many of the earlier berths had a preponderance of Europeans and later boats had more Asians and Eurasians.

Like thousands of others, the van der Strattens decided to abandon their homes and businesses and join the exodus south, with 'Grandpa' leading the way - clutching his treasured scroll containing the family genealogical tree.[104] Women and children would be found berths or space on vessels leaving Singapore, while the men would take their chances as best they could, either by trying to flee or by facing the Japanese. This decision would decimate the family.

By mid-February competition for spaces on the few remaining vessels at Keppel Harbour was intense. There were controversies. Asserting that it was of vital interest, the - European - management of the Singapore and Penang Port Authority contrived spaces for themselves on their ferry vessels, creating an animosity and anger that would never fade. In the confusion of the dock-side there was bureaucratic muddle, incompetence and possibly racism. The chaos and carnage at the docks was extraordinary, as Japanese planes strafed and bombed the crowded wharves at will. John van der Stratten's Chinese wife, Mollie, was killed by shrapnel – Benn Eames carrying away her dead body. Indicative of the confusion of the time and the 'fog of war', in 1943 the surviving family members placed a classified advertisement in the Japanese controlled Syonan Times newspaper to request information about Mollie's whereabouts, stating that she had last been heard entering 'some hospital'. She was, sadly, long dead by this time.

Meanwhile Benn's wife Wilhemina (Mina) and their three-year old daughter 'Shirley' [Paget] fought their way onto the SS *Kuala*, leaving Benn behind to face the Japanese. Their farewell must have been deeply traumatic, but Mina would have found reassurance that a number of close relatives were also on the *Kuala*. Her brother Halley and his wife Molly and their three children (Margaret, Michael and a young baby) had found refuge on the vessel as it pushed off from the burning dock - just one day before the British capitulation. William's wife Sybil and their two children were also on-board - representatives of the Ipoh branch of the family - while William was to remain behind, seeing out the war in Kuala Lumpur. Nine members of the van der Stratten clan were on the SS *Kuala* as it headed south from Singapore, seeking to escape to safe ports in the Dutch East Indies and beyond.

> *'The bombing was rife. It seemed that the whole world and its wife were there. Mollie, John`s wife, was one of the first casualties. She died on the docks, hit by a shell, and my father wrapped her lifeless corpse in sacking and put her on an Army truck. Mum said the panic was terrible, everyone hustling for a place on a ship that would take them to safety. She recalled a small child on the wharf, crying because it had lost its mother.'*
>
> *- Paget Natten*

On 17 February 1942, the SS *Kuala* was attacked and sunk by Japanese bombers near Bangka off the Rhio archipelago in the Dutch East Indies, to the south of Singapore. The details of that tragic day remain far from clear. Sy-

bil and her two children – the Ipoh contingent – survived the *Kuala's* sinking and landed on nearby Pom Pong island, but there they were attacked and killed on the beach by the Japanese fighters. Meanwhile, Molly's three children drowned as the *Kuala* went down. She survived and was picked up by another vessel – the SS *Tanjong Pinang* – also carrying refugees fleeing Singapore. Tragically, Molly then became a victim when it too was attacked at night and sunk by a Japanese torpedo, fired either from a submarine or torpedo boat. Molly's husband, Halley, somehow had better fortune, surviving the sinking of the SS *Kuala* and being rescued by another vessel. He eventually made his way to Britain where he saw out the war, but thereafter his life must have been haunted by the tragic loss of his family. Six of the nine members of the van der Stratten clan who had sought to escape from Singapore on the SS *Kuala* were to perish in those fateful waters.

As the *Kuala* slipped into the waters, Mina Eames found herself with her three-year old daughter Shirley floating amongst debris in the brown, muddy waters off Pom Pong island. They clung for survival for ten hours to a child's life-vest before being rescued by a Malay fisherman, who brought them to shore. Hundreds perished in 'bomb alley', but for the survivors dragging themselves from the sea, their nightmare had just begun. Their goal was now the port of Padang on the western side of Sumatra, and from there, they hoped, rescue ships and freedom. But to get to Padang they had to cajole their way onto buses and trucks across the mountains. Some 2,000 servicemen and civilians had been successfully evacuated from Padang – so there was hope if they could make it. But for those from

the SS Kuala, such as Mina and Shirley, who begged their way to Padang, they would wait in increasing despair for rescue ships that never came. Finally, on 15 March 1942, a month after the fall of Singapore and to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, Padang was declared an 'open-city' by the Dutch. The Japanese were invited to take control and the first of their troops parachuted in two days later.[105]

Initially, Mina and her daughter Shirley joined a group of about thirty women interned in a small wooden hut in the centre of Padang which became known as 'the British camp'. At the same time, a group of about twenty-five sick and injured British women and children were being treated with wounded men at the Salvation Army Hospital. One ward was full of women from the SS Kuala and several were to die. Michael Pether notes that in these early days 'there was sufficient food and the hospital was adequate and properly resourced'. All this changed, however, when on 25 June all those at the British Camp interned in the hospital – 'wounded and dying patients and all' - were told to collect their possessions and join 2,500 Dutch women and children housed in a much larger internment camp situated in a Roman catholic complex and school, named the 'Fraterhuis'.[106]

Given their Dutch sounding family name, Mina had to fight to avoid being sent to join the larger Dutch contingent in the camp – a battle she won. Paget Natten [Mina's daughter, Shirley Eames] later wrote about the constant petty battles and daily indignities of life in a Japanese internment camp. 'In the beginning of camp life, if you had the money or means you might conceivably barter for per-

haps an egg, or a vegetable such as the exotically-sounding *kankong*. Many of the British had nothing to barter with. The Dutch and Indonesians were in a much better position.' Paget saluted the extraordinary courage and leadership assumed by a female Australian doctor, Majorie Lyon, [107] who had herself been badly injured while escaping the SS *Kuala*. Making the best of a bad situation, Dr Lyon herself later noted 'Whilst … the Fraterhuis was dirty, full of school desks and we were not allowed to bring our beds or bedding or instruments or drugs… it had the advantage of a guard at the gate, a 20-foot fence with barbed wire all around and the presence of 2,000 Dutch women was some protection…'.[108]

In the middle of 1943, and without warning, the female internees at the 'Fraterhuis' were transferred to Padang's 'Native Jail', which had been cleared of all but a small number of men – those that remained were 'political prisoners' and their prospects were particularly bleak. Over 2,400 woman prisoners were crowded into a prison designed to hold 500. During their stay here, their meagre rations were progressively cut, and malnutrition and diseases such as *beri-beri* became commonplace. In addition, the sanitation system was overrun and dysentery and typhoid became rampant. In early December 1943, and once again without warning, the women were told to collect their few belongings and were dispatched in groups of 500 to cover a 350-mile journey – initially on foot, then by train and finally by truck over the mountain range - to Bankinang Internment Camp in northern Sumatra. Miraculously, only one woman died on this journey. Here, in a jungle clearing, five long huts had been built to accommodate the female

and child internees of Padang. This was to be 'home' for Mina and Shirley for the next year and nine months, a time of increasing hardship and suffering.

As the war lengthened, food became increasingly scarce, to the point where some inmates chose to eat rat. Mina Eames, however, took the advice of a British doctor and refused such meat for Shirley and herself, though finding alternatives was almost impossible. All suffered physically and Shirley was to spend much time in hospital from illnesses related to malnutrition. Her mother also suffered hugely, emerging 'a wraith' - greying prematurely and ageing before her daughter's eyes. As well as physical suffering, Shirley was to see in the behaviour of fellow internees the best and the worst of human nature. There were some grand *memsahibs* who took to the camp their pre-war sense of status and snobbery. But, equally, there were others whose small acts of kindness moderated the bleak reality of detention. Dr Marjorie Lyons assumed the status of heroine, as she bravely took on a leadership role for the Malayan detainees. Paget Natten later reflected that during her time in camp she had lost a childhood, something that could never later be recovered. She was three years old when she entered the 'British camp' in Padang, and seven when she and her mother were liberated from Bankinang in September 1945.

> *'Mum always told me my father was in the moon. Each evening after her kitchen duties, she`d tell me to look up at the moon because Daddy was watching over us.'* - *Paget Natten*

'One day the Japs announced they would send the women to dig their own graves; and they did, though thankfully those graves weren`t filled by the prisoners. The Japs seemed to derive much pleasure from the apprehension and fear they caused. They were an emotional and unstable lot, insisting that even the children bow to them with the salute of `Nippon, Banzai`. Failure to do so resulted in a sharp slap across the face. News of a Jap victory resulted in great celebration; bad news could result in cutting our rations, and making us stand for hours in the hot sun, for no other reason than that it suited them to take their feelings out on their captives.' - *Paget Natten*

Having defied death at Kampong Toh, Philip van der Stratten spent the rest of the war years in the Thai civilian internment camp at Prachand, which had been set up in December 1941 at the campus of the University of Moral and Political Sciences opposite Bangkok's Noi railway station. Mrs Streatfield, a fellow internee and British spouse, later noted that 'on the whole the Thai authorities made a tremendous effort to the 350-odd internees' whom she described as a 'mixed bag… British, US, Dutch and Eurasians… missionaries, miners from south Thailand, businessmen, every kind'.[109] A British Foreign Office report dated mid-1943 noted that 'after a period of confusion at the beginning the camp is now reasonably well organized and conditions are not unsatisfactory'.[110] The regime was relatively relaxed. Families were able to live together in their own rooms, though others were divided in male and female blocks. While the internees were forbidden to leave the campus, books and, initially at least, medicines

were available. An entertainments committee was formed to keep the inmates busy and to maintain morale. There were, of course, grumbles – one constant being the absence of toilet paper. The neutral Swiss Consul periodically visited and reported back to allied governments, reassuring them that conditions were generally acceptable. After the war, a British censor officer monitoring mail from the camp noted 'civilian internees write mainly about the comparatively good treatment they have had under the Siamese and the brutal treatment meted out to the POWs by the Japanese'.[111]

For the family members that remained in Malaya, their experience under the Japanese proved generally benign. The Japanese viewed Eurasians with suspicion, and they detained many in Changi and Sime Road internment camps, but many - including Grandpa and Grandma van der Stratten and their sons - were not interned and lived out the war as civilians, sharing all the common hardships and difficulties of the war years but not suffering the violence, disease and depredation of those in camps. Interestingly, those Eurasians who were interned in general adapted rather better to camp conditions than their European counterparts – the typical Eurasian rice diet being more akin to the prison fare and many being more familiar with handling day-to-day domestic tasks than the British memsahibs. By late 1943 the Japanese had found the Eurasians all too confusing and most were released from camps to make their way home, leaving the British '*mat sallehs*' ('white man') behind. These included Mina's husband, Benn Eames, who as a British national spent the remainder of the war as a civilian internee in Changi.

Lawrence was the only van der Stratten to sign up for the Volunteers. He was a sergeant in the '45th Reserve Motor Transport Company' of the Selangor Battalion of the FMSVF. A number of his colleagues were assigned to positions at Belakang Mati [today's Sentosa], which was where the British had placed their mighty naval guns, the wrong weapons facing the wrong way. He became a POW on 15 February 1942, the day Singapore fell, so there is every likelihood his unit was also involved in the defence of Singapore. Lawrence was initially held in Changi POW camp, but in May 1943 he was part of 'F-Force', a large contingent of prisoners sent by cattle truck and rail to work on the notorious Thai-Burma railway. His contingent arrived at a particularly intense – almost fanatical – time for the Japanese, as they sought to force the railway through the unforgiving, harsh terrain of the Thai/Burma jungle. One of the Japanese tactics was 'driving days', when the POWs with little more than hammers and crude tools were forced to work for up to eighteen hours a day under threat of beatings and whips if they slowed.

The conditions endured by the POWS and local Asian labourers were beyond belief – the harshness of the work, the tropical environment, the lack of food, appalling hygiene and the appalling brutality of their guards combined to turn the Thai-Burma railway into a form of hell. Mortality rates were about one third, and those that survived were all thereafter physically or mentally scarred.[112] The remnants of F-Force – all emaciated and sick - returned to Changi in April 1944. Lawrence was amongst those to see out the war there. On 13 September 1945, just days after the formal surrender ceremony, he embarked on the SS

Monawai for Britain, where he arrived in October, initially to spend time in hospital and then to be reunited with his wife, Ninette and daughter Barbara. They had spent the war in Leeds; the file shows that in 1944 young Barbara had found work in Yorkshire; though this came at a price, as Ninette's army spouse's allowance was immediately cut by £3.[113]

After the war, Lawrence and other surviving Eurasian volunteers became embroiled in a bitter dispute with the British authorities over pay and allowances. Prior to the war, the volunteers had been paid a lesser amount that the regular British Army troops but in October 1942, in an attempt to boost morale in POW camps, the BBC had broadcast 'special news of particular interest to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees in Malaya. It has been announced that members of the Malayan Volunteer Force who are now Prisoners of War in Malaya have been placed on the same rates of pay as members of the Regular British Army'. News of this broadcast had filtered through to those in camps and it had helped address a grievance and improve morale. But after the war, the Eurasian volunteers were shocked to discover that the message had in fact been 'directed at the European relatives in UK, Dominions and India and [was] not intended to indicate a decision that all Malayan Volunteers would be placed on UK rates'. This response sparked predictable outrage. A Captain from 'D Company' of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (the sister force to the FMSVF) wrote in May 1946 'These lads were good enough to fight for the EMPIRE, good enough to die for the EMPIRE – BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO DESERVE WELL OF THE EMPIRE AND BE

TREATED AS BRITISHERS.' The returning British colonials appeared not to have changed much from those who instigated the European-only evacuation of Penang in December 1941.[114]

During the war, the scattered members of the van der Stratten family had little or no knowledge of the fate of their loved ones, particularly those that had fled or were in the path of the Japanese war machine. This was a widespread problem and, in an attempt to draw together and communicate the limited information available, the 'Malayan Research Bureau' was set up in Sydney in September 1942 to track and account for the fate of civilians and POWs in camps across south-east Asia, and then to publish its findings. Initial lists were noticeably thin but as the war progressed, and as Japanese Radio and neutral powers such as the Swiss and the Red Cross added to the sum of knowledge, more comprehensive listings emerged.

In September 1942 an early Malayan Research Bureau list contained the sad but incomplete news that 'Mrs Van Der Stratten and 3 children, from the Naval Base, Singapore….. Civilians whose names were reported by the Japanese Radio as having been captured on the SS *Tanjong Pinang*... had been landed on the island [Pom Pong] after their ship had been bombed and sunk coming across from Singapore'. Their ultimate fate, however, was unknown and unstated at the time – they had in fact perished. There was no reference in this list to Mina Eames and her daughter Shirley who by then were in an internment camp in Sumatra. A separate exercise in accounting for prisoners and internees in Sumatra was run by the British Chamber of Commerce for the Netherlands East Indies based in

London. In its report 'British Subjects Interned in Sumatra Camps' of May 1944 there is a listing for 'Eames, Wilhelmina vanderstraaten. [age] 35. Housewife' and a listing for 'Eames, Irene Shirley. [age] 5. [sex] F'.[115]

Philip does not feature on the 1942 Malayan Research Bureau list, but he emerges in February 1943 as an internee at Prachand Camp in Bangkok, where he is described as a British 'Elec. Engineer'.[116] By February 1944, Doris' companion on her epic journey, Edward Peters, is listed in Changi internment camp, though tragically, given the mental and physical strength he demonstrated in the jungles of north-west Malaya, he was not to survive the war, dying there of typhus in July 1944.[117] Wilhemina's husband, Benn Eames, is also recorded as a fellow internee in Changi, though he was to survive. The fog of war was lifting, but only partially and only for those outside Malaya. In all these lists there was one name that did not feature, that of Doris van der Stratten.

In Australia, Doris' first husband, Richard Wall, continued to live in Adelaide with his new wife, Esther Burrows, and Doris' two daughters, Rosemary and Winifred - who by this time were attending secondary school. Wall had been recruited as a trainer for the Australian army - his conviction for desertion in the 1914-18 war having been quietly forgotten. Meanwhile in India, Doris' father, Ralph Budd, served out the war as a civil servant in Bengal, though the promise of post-war independence had led him to decide on retirement in London.

Meanwhile back in Malaya, during the war years 'Grand-

father' Philip Everard van der Stratten and his wife Maria had avoided internment under the Japanese. Following their unsuccessful attempt to escape from Singapore in February 1942, they returned to the family house in Ceylon Road, Kuala Lumpur. With so many members of his family dead or lost and unaccounted for as a consequence of the war, Philip Everard must have been a broken man, and from late 1942 until her death in August 1943, compounding his woes was the humiliation of having his Australian daughter-in-law brazenly living nearby in a Kuala Lumpur bungalow as the mistress of the hated Commander of the Japanese Garrison. 'Grandpa' died in 1944, aged 62 – his early demise possibly brought about by the tragedy enveloping his family.

Chapter Ten

Aftermath

Once the British returned to Malaya in September 1945, the weeks and months following were for the van der Stratten clan, like so many other families, a time of frantically seeking information about loved ones, with some happy endings but also with much sadness. Philip van der Stratten left Prachand internment camp in Bangkok in September 1945 and immediately started the long and painful process of establishing what had happened to his wife and family during the war years. He returned to Kuala Lumpur initially believing that Doris had perished at Kampong Toh, but on his arrival there was advised of her extraordinary saga and her tragic death. Following this, and immediately before the Murakami trial took place - in which he acted as a witness - Philip set about 'tidying up her affairs'.

In July 1946, The *Adelaide News* carried a short article noting that Philip van der Stratten had sent them a letter attempting to locate Pauline Heath so that he could convey to her the sad news of Doris' death.[118] The article concluded, however, that 'Interstate enquiries' by the *Adelaide News*, and an 'anonymous' tip from the General Post Office, had established that Pauline had in fact passed away in Adelaide in December 1940, aged 56, a full year prior to the Japanese attack on Malaya.[119] She spent the last years of her life as an evangelical Christian but this shift to religion was not enough to bridge the divide with her daughter. The fact that Philip did not know of Pauline's death when it had occurred in 1940, a full year before the Kampong Toh massacre, sadly highlights that mother and daughter were estranged to the end.

Adding to a picture of isolation, the last will and testament

of Doris' biological father, Ralph Budd, who passed away in London in 1958, makes reference to his two daughters and son from his second wife, Alice Debenham (who had pre-deceased him), as his beneficiaries but makes no reference to Doris, nor to his two granddaughters, Pauline and Winifred. Ralph Budd had lived in India all his life, though on independence in 1947 he moved to London. He had enjoyed a good if not meteoric career - in 1929, he was awarded the OBE for his services to the Raj. But from all this it is clear that from a very tender age Doris had no contact with her – presumed - biological father. So, sadly, when she died in 1943 Doris was estranged from both her parents, and probably also from her two daughters. A tragic state of affairs.

In October 1945, Benn Eames, Wilhemina and their daughter Shirley, having spent the war in internment camps in Singapore and Sumatra, were evacuated to Liverpool on the SS Antenor. Though Benn and Mina tried to revive their marriage, the stresses of war proved too much and they divorced shortly thereafter. Wilhemina returned with Shirley [Paget] to Kuala Lumpur, where they lived with grandmother Maria in the van der Stratten family home in Ceylon Road. Mina worked in an administrative capacity for the British Military Administration; a job she enjoyed and which allowed her a release from the many ghosts of the war years. Finally, in 1957 and just prior to independence in Malaya, Grandmother, Mina, Paget and Philip left for Britain – a country that held their loyalty but which they hardly knew. They settled in Southampton.

In 1961, Doris' daughters Rosemary and Winifred Wall

visited Philip van der Stratten in Britain. How they tracked each other down, and what transpired between them, remains unknown, though Paget recalls much hugging and affection. Philip was, by all accounts, a gentle and generous man, so the supposition must be that he held no animosity towards Doris but rather viewed her as the victim she most surely was, and he would have communicated that to her daughters. The daughters meanwhile had gone about their lives, had married and had children. Rosemary married one Wallace Dawson in Sydney in 1947, but that ended in divorce, and in 1961 married Ronald Longworth. Winifred stayed in Adelaide and in 1952 married one Barry Day.[120]

Philip van der Stratten died in September 1966, aged 65, of a heart attack while working as a security guard at Southampton Docks. In his will he left his estate of £2,122/- to Wilhemina Eames as his sole beneficiary. Mina died in Norfolk in May 2004. Her daughter Paget Natten, who suffered all the deprivations of a Japanese internment camp while a young girl, became a successful singer and advertising copywriter; she married, had children and now lives in Norfolk – close to the sea but a far cry from those dark murderous waters off Pom Pong Island of February 1942. An iconoclast, she retains the van der Stratten's sense of verve, individualism and fun; her quotes enliven this text.

Philip's brother, Gerard, continued to work in Kuala Lumpur during the Japanese occupation as a clerk in the maps department of the Directorate of Surveys. In December 1945, following the return of the British, his superior

noted that 'he [Gerard] was becoming unduly excitable and also he complained of severe headaches'. In January 1946 he was medically examined and diagnosed as suffering from 'neurosis'. It was explained that 'he had lived in more fear and trembling during the war than most. His brother was sent to Siam and it was his sister-in-law who was killed from a fall from a second storey window of the Jap police HQ in High Street'. Shortly after his medical, Gerard resigned his position and his personnel papers stated that he was then suffering from 'Neurasthenia (nervous breakdown)'. By August 1946, however, he felt better and approached the Directorate of Surveys seeking to return. Given that he was deemed 'such a useful officer', his superiors allowed him to return without loss of pension rights and with his absence termed 'unpaid leave'.[121] The stresses of the war years and the dreadful fate of so many family members had clearly taken a huge toll, though in the case of Gerard time seemed to have helped heal some of the psychological trauma.

Lawrence van der Stratten, after a lengthy battle with the War Office Pay Department (on his return from the Thai-Burma railway he was originally paid his arrears as a corporal, when in fact he was a sergeant, but he could not prove this as his FMSVF pay book had been 'lost with my kit in Burma'…) left the UK in June 1946 with Ninette and Barbara, though not before he had to chase the Pay Department to send an outstanding sum of £50, giving Wearne Brothers in Singapore as his mailing address. The *Malay Mail* of 2 July 1946 announced that the family was 'returning to Malaya in the Mauretania'. Thereafter they lived in Kuala Lumpur for some years, and Lawrence was

awarded the OBE for his war time sacrifice. In the late 1940s, the family emigrated to Perth in Western Australia. Barbara still lives there, though when interviewed could only barely remember 'Aunty Doris', whom she described from her childhood pre-war memories as having a 'kindly face and a large nose' but nothing else. Perhaps more telling, though Barbara had lived in Kuala Lumpur as a teenage girl during the time of the Murakami trial, when interviewed for this book she knew nothing of this element of her family's history – an indication of just how conflicted the wider van der Stratten family were by Doris' behaviour and the events covered by the trial. The veil had been quickly lowered on this piece of family history and thereafter never raised.

Doris' 'gilded-cage' in Kuala Lumpur, No. 12 Penang Road, had a distinctly mixed record. It was owned by a prominent Eurasian lawyer, Basil Joaquim. He and his family had fled Kuala Lumpur, leaving their property abandoned, for it then to be requisitioned by the Japanese. Joaquim had managed to get his wife Hilda Marie on to the SS T*anjong Pinang* and she perished at sea along with a number of van der Strattens. Like Benn Eames, Basil Joaquim spent the war in Changi internment camp, and after the Japanese surrender was evacuated to Liverpool on the SS *Monawai*, alongside Lawrence van der Stratten.[122] After Doris' death, No 12 Penang Road was occupied by a Japanese judge, who appears to have been a careful and good tenant, but on the return of the British in September 1945 it was requisitioned by Force 136. They used it until May 1946 for accommodation for their 'allies', the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) – the

main communist rebel movement that had worked closely with them during the war but rapidly thereafter became embittered enemies of the returning capitalist colonial power. Having spent much time in the jungle, it is perhaps no surprise that the MPAJA proved to be appalling tenants and trashed the place. Once they had vacated the property it was taken over by the Red Cross who used it as a 'Ladies Mess' until in mid-1947 Basil Joaquim sought its return, together with a very substantial compensation claim. A long and acrimonious correspondence was to ensue, with the British administration reluctant to accept responsibility for the sorry state of the property.[123]

'I have very fond memories of Uncle Philip...this slight, quiet, generous man with a penchant for Chaplin, who once stood for hours outside the stage door where a certain Nellie Melba had entranced the masses with her voice. His tenacity and devotion to this diva gained him audience and tea with her. Several times, I`m told. Philip was more of a father to me than my own. I still have the Teddy Bear he bought me from Robinsons when I was 11, and my copy of Wind in the Willows. The bear is old and his fur is tacky. When I look at him I remember the joyous occasion I brought him home. Oddly, he seemed much bigger then.' - *Paget Natten*

British and Australian war crime investigation units investigated the Kampong Toh massacre and testimony was recorded from a number of survivors. Given the fleeting nature of the incident, it proved difficult to identify with any clarity Japanese suspects for trial. Harold Edmonds

had reported that the Japanese guard placed over the mine was commanded by a 'Major Asaeda' and that a 'Lt. Ande Nakao' had visited the bungalow on 11 December and announced through an interpreter that 'we were all spies and we would be exterminated.' But years later, and with little else to go on, the perpetrators of this massacre proved impossible to identify and there was little or nothing the war crimes teams could do to bring them to justice.

In 1948, Lt Colonel Culley resumed his pre-war existence as a solicitor in rural Cambridge, where he swapped life-and-death judgements on crimes of murder, torture and violence for the gentler challenges of conveyancing and probate. By background he was a scholarship student from Norwich Grammar school who read law at Corpus Christie College Cambridge. In the First World War he had distinguished himself with acts of notable bravery while serving in the Royal Flying Corps. In the Second World War he first volunteered for the RAF and was then called to serve in the Lord Advocate's Office (Legal Department) of the War Office, and hence to the small war crimes trials in Malaya. He was no doubt a man of his time, and his views on Doris will have been coloured by contemporaneous views on collaboration, but on balance he emerges as a man of depth and character, and his decision to acquit Murakami almost certainly stemmed from his objective assessment of legal imperatives, rather than from deep-rooted if little recognised personal bias and prejudice.

In August 1973, the La Salle Brother's Catholic Mission in Kuala Lumpur appealed publicly for news of 'Dulcima Streaten's' Australian relatives. Since the war they had

kept in their possession poems written by Doris for her two daughters, reportedly expressing her longing to return to Australia.[124] These poems almost certainly date from her time incarcerated at Taiping Prison, where she was detained alongside the Catholic brothers. One of them seemingly kept her poems safe and many years later sought help through the West Australian State Librarian to find and deliver them to a family member. Following mention of this story in a radio announcement, a member of Doris' family based in Sydney reportedly came forward and contacted the La Salle Brothers. Unfortunately, the Brothers' archives in Kuala Lumpur offer no clues to the recipient - it may have been Doris' elder daughter Rosemary, who had moved to Sydney from Adelaide in the 1950s. Attempts to identify and locate the daughters, or other surviving family members, continues, though so far with limited success.

> *'Doris had two daughters by her first marriage. In the 60s they came to visit their stepfather in the UK, seeking clarification. What he told them was for their ears only. He died in September 1966...and the truth about Doris went with him.'*
> *- Paget Natten*

Epilogue

My interest in Doris van der Stratten stems from research for a book that I wrote in 2010 about the impact of the Second World War on Kuala Lumpur, a city I have lived in for almost twenty years. *Kuala Lumpur at War 1939-1945* was intended to explore the consequences of the conflict on the city and its people rather than tell the story of a military campaign, and in my research I came across various references to Doris Heath/van der Stratten. From this I pieced together the bare bones of her life, sad death and the subsequent war crimes trial. Her story was covered in five pages, at the end of a chapter about Comfort Women. I wasn't entirely comfortable about this, and certainly felt her extraordinary saga deserved better, but in the context of that particular book it was a fair outcome.

After *Kuala Lumpur at War* was published, work and other distractions stopped me pursuing new research projects. This was a great relief to my family, but the tale – and it is an extraordinary one – of Doris van der Stratten kept returning. I recognised that this was a 'human interest story' as much as 'history'. I tried on a couple of occasions to write a play about Doris and her life, but found I was simply not equipped for that sort of writing. Despite these false starts, Doris would not go away and eventually after a gap of some years I returned to the research trail to see if the five pages from my earlier book might be expanded into a short book.

I knew that the Murakami court papers were missing from

the dozens of other Small War Crimes Trials court cases assembled by the British War Office's 'Judge Advocates Office', whose dusty files now lie at the British National Archives at Kew. The records of these many trials held across south-east Asia in 1946 and 1947 offer a treasure trove of information about Japanese behaviour in the war, and about the *Kempetei* and their methods. The Kuala Lumpur trials themselves comprised over twenty cases, with the majority linked to the *Kempetei*. Unfortunately, the file for Case No 128 - that of Lt. Shuzi Murakami of the Japanese Naval *Kempetei* - is missing. This omission is perplexing because the series at Kew is largely intact. One explanation is that, given Doris' nationality, her file was passed to the Australian authorities. Australian war crimes teams and courts were no slouches and worked closely alongside their British counterparts.

By September 1946, for example, the Australians had executed over 60 war criminals, hanging thirty-five and shooting another twenty-five, with a further 350 sentenced to imprisonment.[125] For the most part their focus was on war crimes linked to the fighting in and around the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea and to the maltreatment of POWs in Malaya and on the Thai/Burma railway - the latter accounting for about seventy per cent of their case load. Be that as it may, I could find no evidence that the Murakami file was held in an Australian archive. In its absence I had to turn to other less authoritative and detailed sources to try to piece together the narrative of the trial. Not surprisingly, at the time of Doris' death in August 1943, Kuala Lumpur's Japanese-controlled English language newspaper, *Malai Sinpo*, failed to report the incident.

Post-war, things were different and there was considerable contemporary public interest in the case and the local English language newspapers - *The Malay Mail* and *The Straits Times* – offered substantive coverage of the trial.

In 1998, I was posted to the British High Commission (Embassy) in Kuala Lumpur as the Political Counsellor. The following year I found myself in the public benches of the High Court observing the trial of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who had rather foolishly challenged Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohammed, and found himself a year later charged with sodomy and later corruption. The courts have now moved to a new building away from the centre of the city, hopefully with padded seats, air-conditioning and functioning toilets, but when I attended Anwar's trial it was to the same teak-panelled court room (though I did not know this at the time) used in 1946 for Lt Shuzi Murakami, albeit with the Malaysian coat-of-arms rather than that of King George VI hanging over the judge's bench. It provided an elegant backdrop to the often tacky and partial testimony of Anwar's sodomy trial. Years later, I was able to use my recollections of the court room as I read through voluminous files of war crimes trials. The court room is sadly no longer used or accessible, and is in effective moth-balls.

Doris' early origins in British India had not been known to me when I first wrote this book, so the chapter on her early life has required substantive redrafting. Once new information became available, notably her birth certificate, like pulling a thread from a sweater I slowly but remorselessly teased out her early years and family roots. As an

indication of the challenges posed by multiple names, in 1904, Doris (which the given name she typically used) was baptized 'Dulcima Louise Grace Budd'. On her parent's divorce she took on her mother's maiden name of Jordan. In 1910, the mother married Henry Jacob, but in 1913, on emigrating to Australia and for unknown reasons, he abandoned the name Jacob and assumed the name Neil Heath. This was the surname used by Doris when she travelled to Adelaide in 1923. In 1927, she married Richard Wall, though divorced him in 1935, reverting to Heath. In the mid/late 1930s she became van der Stratten following her marriage to Philip. She ended her days with Koda, where she started, with Dulcima. A complex life not designed to make a biographer's work any easier.

It is all too easy when the bare bones of Doris' early life are laid out to make superficial judgments based on circumstance and family background. She had a difficult childhood and came from a broken home. One of the very few direct comments that we have about Doris confirms the stereotype; in the 1924 court case, George Cain insinuates that twenty-year old Doris was foul-mouthed and sexually promiscuous. This detail, which may be true as far as it goes, feeds in and confirms the impression of a feisty, angry young woman. But is this a fair call and how much does it really tell us about Doris – save that she had developed an early defensive carapace?

In writing this book I became increasingly conscious that I probably did not possess the necessary experience and background to understand, or at least judge, Doris. I was fortunate to be brought up in a settled, happy middle-class

family, went to Cambridge University and spent twenty plus years in the British Diplomatic Service – a privileged life if ever there was. Any challenges or obstacles that came my way were modest and navigable, and there was usually support and guidance if I needed it. How would I have faced life as a young man with an absent father and a single mother who drank and lived with a drinker and general layabout? And how would I have responded to the physical and emotional challenges of surviving a massacre in which I believed my spouse had died, to live semi-starved and sick for five months in the jungle, then to be incarcerated the sole member of my gender amongst hundreds of POWs, finally to be isolated and manipulated into a deeply one-sided and exploitative relationship that brought with it huge social opprobrium? Not well I suspect.

We do not know if Doris' Anglo-Indian background was ever acknowledged, or if it was, whether it was a noteworthy issue. In family recollections, Doris is always described as 'Australian', and by that they mean white European. It would appear, though we have no photographs, that she looked European, and the only reason that we have knowledge of her Anglo-Indian antecedents comes from tracking back her family genealogy. The similarities of her family background are, however, all too close to those of her husband. She was of Eurasian extraction and with a strong family connection to the Indian railway service – so very similar to Grandpa van der Stratten and his links to the Ceylonese and Malay railway services. Nevertheless, Doris does seem to have been viewed and carried herself as pure white European, and in the records of Shuzi Murakami's trial there is little or no allusion to the complicating factor

of a Eurasian background.

In researching this book, I was lucky enough to get to know Paget Natten. Along with her mother (Doris' sister-in-law Mina Eammes), Paget had an extraordinary war and her story is covered briefly in the book. She, in vivid, colourful terms, offered me the family's conflicted view of 'Aunty Doris' and Paget kindly allowed me to cite from her writings. Throughout she was hugely sympathetic to Doris and her fate, seeing her – as she surely was – as a victim and a warm if vulnerable personality. I hope my book does justice to this interpretation of Doris. Nevertheless, one aspect of Doris' life I find difficult to fathom is her decision on being granted her divorce in 1934 to leave her two daughters with her former husband Richard Wall and the 'other woman' cited in the divorce case, Esther Burrows. Thereafter it seems that Doris had little or no contact with her daughters. At the time of the divorce, Rosemary was seven and Winifred just two. Nevertheless, many years later once she had been through horrendous physical and mental suffering during her trek through the jungles of Malaya and was languishing in Taiping Prison as the only female detainee amongst hundreds of POWs, Doris wrote a set of poems to her daughters. At her lowest ebb she sought to put right something that was wrong.

The Lee Rubber Building still stands on its prominent corner site in Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown. In 2017, it was bought by a Singaporean hotel chain who terminated the leases of the existing tenants – a book shop and a popular arts and souvenir gallery – and started the process of renovating the art deco classic, and turning it into a boutique

hotel. During this period, when the building was stripped bare to its bones, one quiet Sunday morning a friend and myself persuaded the guard on duty to allow us to enter. We made our way to the top – to the fourth floor. Having been parsed back to its fundamentals, it was clear that the building had been constructed in a simple, open manner, with just a few internal supporting pillars breaking the clean sweep of each floor. One flank had no windows and contained the stairwell, and a kitchen and toilets for each floor, but the remaining three exterior walls were dominated by large broad metal-framed windows (originals I would guess) allowing for plenty of light, and for fresh air to circulate. The windows pushed out wide on their vertical hinges, and the sills were set low.

To the rear of the Lee Rubber Building is a narrow access road, with rubbish bins and drainage ditches along the sides. The building opposite is close, almost intimately so – though whether it was there in 1943 I do not know. Near the rear windows overlooking this small road I noticed there were a set of rough cement lines, each some two inches wide, imposed into the tiled floor. The original – and otherwise extant - small black-and-white floor tiles had been gouged out, clearly to allow for the construction of set of narrow walls for a set of interior rooms that had long been stripped away. These were surely the interrogation rooms constructed for the *Kempetei*.

We opened wide one of the windows and looked down to the street, four floors below. There was an immediate sense that this was the same sight, and the same danger, presented to Doris during her fateful interrogation. We

were standing where she had fought for, and lost, her life. The veil of time and history had lifted, just a little. It was a sobering moment. But, apart from proving a pensive experience, did the visit reveal anything? Well, it gave away no clues as to whether Doris jumped or was pushed – though I was struck that either outcome would have been easily achieved. The base of the window sills were low and the windows themselves were designed to swing open wide and easily. It was all too easy to picture a body falling to the ground below. We departed in a far more subdued and reflective manner than when we had arrived some few minutes before.

The circumstances of Doris' death amplify the ambiguities of her life. Was she pushed or did she jump – or did she resist and an ensuing struggle go horribly wrong? The truth will now never be known. Come what may, it was extraordinary that Murakami walked free without any form of punishment and his acquittal forms a final insult to Doris van der Stratten's dramatic and ultimately tragic life. Even if she had – after two days of harsh interrogation – chosen to take her own life, to drive someone to take such a desperate measure must surely imply culpability? Murakami should never have been acquitted.

Some might see Doris as a victim of circumstance – a lonely, terrified woman grasping at an offer of comfort and protection from a predatory, corrupt and manipulative figure of authority. Others instead see her as an amoral collaborator who had learned her opportunistic survival tactics from her time in the East End and from her hard-drinking and hard-living mother. Most, however, will view her as a

sad woman, neither an angel nor a devil, whom fate dealt a particularly bad hand. Ultimately, the man who knew her best, and with whom she had spent the happiest years of her life, her husband Philip van der Stratten, had the humanity and generosity of spirit to judge his wife in an entirely forgiving and sympathetic way. That view surely should prevail as the final verdict on the tumultuous life and tragic death of Doris van der Stratten.

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[1] Also known as the '*medan*' – the central flat grassy heart of the city; used forcer-emonies and public events as well as sport

[2] A whisky and water: '*stengah*' means half in Malay

[3] It is now a Cathedral

[4] Arkib Negara *Malay Mail* 10 August 1946

[5] The name 'Dulcima' may have borrowed from the heroine of *Tug of War*, written by Maurice Gerard in the early years of the nineteenth century and serialized and syndicated by 'penny newspapers'. Its plucky, accident prone, but fundamentally well-intentioned heroine, Dulcima, proving a feisty femi-nine role-model.

[6] Shipping records suggest Neil Heath may have travelled on the Orient Line's *Omrah* from London to Adelaide in 1911, and was described as a 'labourer', while there is a reference to a 'Lily Heath' which may have been a familiar name for Pauline travelling on the *Geelong* from London-Adelaide in 1913 and described as a 'domestic'. There was no obvious reference to a Doris Heath.

[7] Major Kevin Pooley – Salvation Army archives

[8] It was often also referred to by an earlier name – the Police Court

[9] *Adelaide Advertiser* 17 December 1924

[10] *Adelaide Advertiser* 24 April 1925

[11] *Tasmanian Advocate* 5 March 1929

[12] Sue McCarthy genealogical research

[13] South Australia Births Marriages and Deaths (Marriage 1925 304/889 and Rosemary's birth 1927 203A/184).

[14] ANA B 2455 Wall Richard

[15] Ibid

[16] Adelaide Advertiser 26 December 1934

[17] Paget Natten

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid

[20] Paget Natten

[21] *Straits Times* 12/7/1936

[22] *Memsahibs*

[23] Louis Allen *Singapore 1942*

[24] UKNA FO 369/3697

[25] In Shanghai, SOE had three agents active under civilian cover, while in Java they had two officers in uniform.

[26] Andrew Barber *Kuala Lumpur at War*

[27] Arkib Negara 1957/00235

[28] Michael Pether - Sergeant Lawrence Van Der Stratten, # 6290, 45 Res. M.T. Coy, FMSVF – born 27.9.02, Mechanist Sgt

[29] villages

[30] The non-federated Malay states had a looser connection to the British colonial authorities than their 'federated' counterparts. The non-federated states of Perlis, Kelantan and Terranganu were in many ways similar in tone and culture to the Malay sultanates of southern Thailand.

[31] HLH Harrison (SOE) in *The Sarong and the Kris* (c/o Jonathon Moffat)

[32] The Japanese attack was launched to coincide with the raid on Pearl Harbour, though because of the international date line, that attack occurred late on 7th December – seemingly, but in reality not, before the attacks on Malaya and Hong Kong.

[33] Harold Joseph Edmonds – Newmarket New Zealand 1945 – states that most of the Europeans, including Philip van der Stratten, were employed by the 'General Mining and Agency Company Ltd', but also notes that the 'Pinyok mine… was controlled by the Thailand Tin Mines Ltd'.

[34] Op cit HLH Harrison citing Maureen Magness

[35] IWM 92/35/1

[36] Mixing of civilians and POWs being against international protocols

[37] Maureen Magness, cited by H.L.H Harrison

[38] Leslie Stratford – mine engineer – cited by Sydney Lion in his deposition made in New Zealand in October 1945.

[39] IWM 01/24/1

[40] Testimony of Sidney George Lyon, Christchurch New Zealand October 1945, Stratford whom he met in Changi internment camp was employed by 'J.B. David, a big Jewish mining contractor and owner in Singapore'

[41] UKNA FO 369/3697. 'The five were MH McFarlane, D Bailey, M.JEdmonds, PG Van Der Stratten and Miss Maureen Magness.'

[42] Ibid

[43] Lloyd Jones – Testimony c/o Michael Pether

[44] Ibid

[45] Gilbert Mant - Massacre at *Parit Sulong*

[46] Michael Pether

[47] Peter Thompson – *The Fall of Singapore 1942*

[48] UKNA HS9 citing HLH Harrison

[49] Noted in the SOE document as 'Cumyn' but in Lloyd Jones' list as 'Cummings'. An Australian tin miner, David Higgins, who was not at Kampong Toh ended up in internment at Prachand and later told investigators into the massacre that 'I had certain instructions and a mission to fulfill which I do not want to disclose'.

[50] Jubblepor – now in the central province of Madhya Pradesh. An old British cantonment town.

[51] Michael Pether

[52] My thanks to Jonathon Moffat for drawing my attention to UKNA references – HS9; HS1/111; HS1/112 and WO325/775 for the SOE position in south Thailand

[53] UKNA FO 369/3697

[54] UKNA HS1/226

[55] Lt. Gen. A.E. Percival – *The War in Malaya*

[56] Arkib Negara 1957/0521467

[57] John Frederick McNair – *Perak and the Malays*

[58] Jones uses the name 'Sakai' in his note, which was commonly used at the time though this has connotations of 'slave' so I use the current name orang asli. The orang asli divide into a number of distinct clans and language groups and it is uncertain which group took Doris and Peters into their protection

[59] It translates as 'purification by cleansing' – one of those terrifying euphemisms for a programme of torture and death.

[60] A simple traditional wooden house with leaf roof

[61] Arkib Negara 1957/00166 and Michael Pether. Robison failed to survive the war though Chrystal lived through and later emigrated to Australia. Both men were helped by the bravery of a local Eurasian, Charlie Laws, who was the 'son of a Britisher' interned in Chang though had the looks of his Indian mother, who was thereby able to avoid the suspicions of the Japanese and take food into the jungle for passing on to these men. Later in the war, Charlie Laws was suspected by the Japanese of collaborating with the resistance and had little choice but to 'join his jungle brothers'.

[62] Lloyd S. Jones

[63] Peters was to die of typhus (his was the first case noted) at the Sime Road Internment Camp in Singapore in July 1944. Thomas Kitching – *Changi Diary* (courtesy of Michael Pether)

[64] Ibid

[65] *The Malay Mail* 10 June 1942. They were both to survive the war

[66] Spencer Chapman - *The Jungle is Neutral*

[67] *St George's Institution Taiping. Community Diary 1941-1949*. La Salle Brother's Archives Kuala Lumpur.

[68] UKNA WO 361/1436 and WO 361/2199

[69] LPM Lewis – *Changi the Lost Years* (courtesy of Michael Pether)

[70] Lloyd Jones states 'late June' but this seems too early as the POWs were moved in July, and they were sent before her.

[71] The syndrome describes how hostages over time associate and empathise with their captors.

[72] Today's Jalan Tun Razak

[73] UKNA WO 325/31

[74] *Kuala Lumpur at War* - Andrew Barber

[75] Other sources cite a property in Penang Road

[76] An additional floor was added after the war

[77] *Malay Mail* 18 May 1946. Once the British returned, the 'Corps of Military Police (India)' moved seamlessly into their Japanese counterpart's accommodation.

[78] With Mussolini's oustering in July 1943, following the Allied invasion of Sicily, being an Italian offered less protection than before amongst its Axis partners.

[79] In one case in Penang a *Kempetei* officer was sentenced to death but the Court President had recommended that the Commander of British Forces consider

leniency, given extenuating circumstances. On appeal he reduced the sentence to a lengthy period of imprisonment. In all other cases, the death sentence was confirmed on appeal.

[80] *Malay Mail* 26 June 1946

[81] Today's Jalan Tun Razak

[82] Malay Mail 26 June 1946. On 25 June 1946, the first 'Australian War Crimes Court' had sentenced to death 'The Maggot'; one Hayashi Eishun, who had worked on the Thai-Burma railway guarding POWs and was convicted of murdering Lance Sgt. Whitfield of the Imperial Australian Army

[83] NAA A1067 IC46/55/2/11

[84] UKNA WO 737/2

[85] UKNA WO375/2, WO375/3, WO375/4, WO375/5

[86] Arkib Negara 1957/0290302-0

[87] The evidence seems conflicted at this point - though not explained in the press coverage - with Doris at one moment stripped, and then thrown through a window by her dress.

[88] Ibid, and NAA A1067 IC46/55/2/11 and family personal record

[89] 31 August 1943

[90] *Straits Times* July 1 1946

[91] Ibid

[92] *Malay Mail* 2 July 1946

[93] Ibid

[94] Op cit

[95] Ibid

[96] *Straits Times* 3 July 1946

[97] Ibid

[98] *Straits Times* 3 October 1946 and Malay Mail 4 October 1946

[99] *Malay Mail* 3 July 1946

[100] *Straits Times* 31 July 1946

[101] *Malay Mail* 13 August 1946

[102] A.J. Barber - *Penang at War*

[103] Bayley and Harper – *Forgotten Armies*

[104] Paget Natten to the author

[105] Michael Pether – *The Woman of Padang and Bankinang Internment Camps* (2014)

[106] Ibid, citing Dr Lyon

[107] Dr Marjorie Lyon came from Perth, Western Australia, and worked for the Malayan Medical Services before and after the war

[108] Ibid – citing Dr Lyon

[109] IWM 2929 87/1/1

[110] UKNA HO 215/78

[111] UKNA WO 203/2374A

[112] John Brown FMSV database - Sergeant Lawrence van ver Stratten, # 6290, 45 Res. M.T. Coy, FMSVF – born 27.9.02, Mechanist Sgt., In Thailand 'F' Force May '43 – April '44. Then back to Changi POW camp with a registration 3 4/6919 and another (10734). Via M. Pether

[113] Arkib Negara – Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam 206/434 Lampiran 22 Siri NOM

[114] UKNA CO 968/142/3

[115] UKNA WO 208/1699

[116] ANA A989 1943/520/2 and Changi the Lost Years – LPM Lewis

[117] ANA 1943/520/2

[118] Adelaide News 11 July 1946

[119] South Australia Births Marriages and Deaths records Pauline's death in 1940 and burial at Dudley Park cemetery Adelaide.

[120] Sue McCarthy genealogical searches

[121] Arkib Negara MU6447/46

[122] Michael Pether

[123] *Arkib Negara* 1963/0005431

[124] *Straits Times* 9 August 1973

[125] *Malay Mail* 10/9/1946