



HUMANS OF THE ROYAL

Joyce Tweddell (1916-1995)



Joyce Tweddell went to school at Petrie Terrace State School and Brisbane State High School. She attended Nunns and Trivetts Secretarial School before training as a nurse.

After graduating from general nurse training on 4 April 1939, Joyce joined the staff of Brisbane General Hospital. She then completed a Therapy Radiography course, a rare achievement for a female of her era.

On 17 January 1941, Joyce enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service and was ordered to active service in the 2/10th Australian General Hospital. She embarked for Singapore on 14 February 1941.

After Singapore fell, Joyce was aboard the *Vyner Brooke*, the last of three ships that left for Australia. The ship was bombed in the Bangka Strait on 14 February 1942 and sank.

Many who survived the blast were shot in the water or drowned. With no land in sight, the remaining survivors sang "We're off to see the Wizard" to keep their spirits up as they floated in the water for at least a day.

They were captured and held as prisoners of war in Sumatra for over three years. During captivity Joyce and the other prisoners lived in a series of prison camps and worked in the jungle. Of the 32 nurses captured, 8 died whilst prisoners of war.

World War II ended on 15 August 1945, however the prison camps were not informed until 24 August. The whereabouts of the final camp that held Joyce was not immediately known.

Joyce was finally recovered at 5am on 5 September 1945 and evacuated to a Singapore hospital. During her internment as a POW she had contracted Malaria, Beriberi and Chronic Amoebic Dysentery. She returned to Australia on a hospital ship arriving on 27 October 1945 and was admitted to the Margate Convalescent Home.

Joyce was discharged from the Australian Army on 27 June 1946. She was employed by the Brisbane Hospital as second in charge of the Radiography Unit and remained in that role until her retirement as Queensland's Chief Radiographer in 1979.

On 2 March 1993 Joyce and six of the surviving POW nurses dedicated a memorial on Radji Beach, Bangka Island. Many years earlier, she had refused to accept the honour of an MBE as she believed all surviving prisoners of war should have been awarded this honour.

The Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital named a building in honour of this remarkable woman and staff member. Today, the Joyce Tweddell Building houses the Infectious Diseases Unit, Cancer Care Unit, Radiation Oncology Unit and the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.