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## Cheshunt Memorial Trees



Ches 1.jpg



Ches 2.jpg



Ches 4.jpg



Ches 5.jpg

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### Location

Outside Cheshunt Hall CHESHUNT, WANGARATTA RURAL CITY

### Municipality

WANGARATTA RURAL CITY

### Level of significance

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### Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Property Number

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## Veterans Description for Public

In 1959, two memorial trees were planted in Cheshunt in memory of Sister Caroline Ennis and Sister Dorothy Gwendolyn Howard Elmes. Both nurses were evacuated from Singapore on the *Vyner Brooke*, which was bombed by the Japanese on February 14th 1942 near Banka Island, Indonesia. Sister Ennis was killed in the bombing while Sister Elmes was one of twenty-one nurses massacred on the Banka Island beach.

On the evening of 12 February 1942, the *Vyner Brooke* was one of the last ships carrying evacuees to leave Singapore. Among the passengers were the last sixty-five Australian nurses in Singapore. Throughout the daylight hours of 13 February, *Vyner Brooke* laid up in the lee of a small jungle-covered island, but she was attacked late in the afternoon by Japanese aircraft, with no serious casualties. At sunset, she made a run for the Banka Strait, heading for Palembang in Sumatra.

Not long after 2pm, *Vyner Brooke* was attacked by several Japanese aircraft. Despite evasive action, she was crippled by several bombs and sank. One hundred and fifty survivors eventually made it ashore at Banka Island, after periods of between eight and sixty-five hours in the water. The island had already been occupied by the Japanese and most of the survivors were taken captive.

A terrible fate awaited many of those who landed on Radji beach. There, survivors from the *Vyner Brooke* joined up with another party of civilians and up to sixty Commonwealth servicemen and merchant sailors, who had made it ashore after their own vessels were sunk. After an unsuccessful effort to gain food and assistance from local villagers, a deputation was sent to contact the Japanese, with the aim of having the group taken prisoner. Anticipating this, all but one of the civilian women followed behind.

A party of Japanese troops arrived at Radji Beach a few hours later. They shot and bayoneted the males and then forced the twenty-two Australian nurses and the one British civilian woman who had remained to wade into the sea, then shot them from behind.

There were only two survivors - Sister Vivian Bullwinkel and Private Cecil Kinsley, a British soldier. After hiding in the jungle for several days, the pair eventually gave themselves up to the Japanese. Kinsley died a few days later from his wounds, and Bullwinkel spent the rest of the war as an internee.

Of the sixty-five Australian nurses who embarked upon the *Vyner Brooke*, twelve were killed during the air attack or drowned following the sinking, twenty-one were murdered on Radji Beach, and thirty-two became internees, eight of whom subsequently died before the end of the war.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*