

A NURSE'S STORY



Service No.: SX13419
Name: Annie Merle TRENERRY
Nick Name: Merle



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star
Pacific Star
Defence Medal
War Medal 1939 - 45
Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Lieutenant
Service: Army
Enlisted: 7 Feb 41
KIA: 14 Feb 42

Annie Merle (sometimes spelt Myrle) Trenerry was born in the Moonta Mines district on 30 Mar 1909 to Edward Joseph Trenerry and Annie Vincent Trenerry (nee Osbourne). She was the eldest of 5 children, 2 boys and 3 girls. Her father worked in the Moonta Mines.

She went to school in the Moonta Mines district. After completing her schooling she went to Adelaide and started her general nursing training at Hutt Street Hospital; in those days it was a four year course. At the completion of this training she moved to Northfield and gained her certification in infectious diseases before moving to Queens Home and gaining her certificate in midwifery. As a triple certificated sister she was a very highly qualified nurse for her time.

Merle returned to Moonta and became the matron of the Moonta Jubilee Hospital in 1935. She remained in this employ for approximately 18 months and then moved to Eyre Peninsula as a Bush District Nurse, being based out of Tumby Bay.

On 7 Feb 41 she enlisted in the Army and traveled to Wayville (SA) for processing: not unexpectedly she was allocated to the Australian Army Nursing Corps. She was then posted to 13th Australian General Hospital and within 6 weeks was on her way to Singapore, arriving in Apr 41.

Just prior to the fall of Singapore a number of Australian Army Nurses and wounded servicemen were evacuated from the island in two groups aboard hospital ships. The first ship, "*The Empire Star*" left on 11 Feb 42; it was constantly attacked by Japanese

aircraft and severely damaged, but finally made it to Batavia (Indonesia) and then to Australia. The second ship, “*The Vyner Brooke*” left on 12 Feb 42; it also was constantly attacked by Japanese aircraft and finally sank on 14 Feb 42. Along with the wounded there were 65 Army Nurses aboard this ship: some survived the sinking and made it ashore to Banka Island, of these 21 were murdered by Japanese soldiers on the island. The sole survivor of this massacre was Sister Vivien Bullwinkel.

This was a particularly despicable act in a nasty war.

It has not been confirmed how Merle died. Whether it was during the sinking, or as a result of the massacre, is unknown. A letter from the Army to Merle’s family simply states that she was “one of a number of whom no further report has been received, and still remains posted as missing”.

Nurses were not at war as combatants; they were there to tend the sick, the helpless and the suffering. A brave lady gave her life to honour her commitment to these ideals.

Merle’s name is included on both the Moonta and Tumby Bay Honour Rolls and a photograph of her is held in the Tumby Bay RSL. Moonta and the RSL have ensured that her memory is refreshed each year with the awarding of the Annie Merle Trenerry Memorial Trophy.



Singapore Memorial