

Elaine Lenore Balfour-Ogilvy

11th of January 1912 – 16th of February 1942



Figure 1 Elaine Lenore BALFOUR-OGILVY (2023) [photograph], Virtual War Memorial, accessed 9 May 2023. <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/12371>

PREMIER'S ANZAC SPIRIT SCHOOL PRIZE

Renmark High School

Stephen Files

Elaine Lenore Balfour-Ogilvy was born on the 11th of January 1912 to parents Major Harry Lort Spencer Balfour-Ogilvy and Jane Balfour-Ogilvy. Major Balfour-Ogilvy was a war veteran, serving in the Boer War and in New Guinea during the First World War. Elaine, sometimes called 'Lainie' by her family¹ was one of 3 girls and 2 boys. The family was well known and respected in Renmark and the wider Riverland area and a large part of this was due to their war service. *Elaine attended St Peter's Woodlands Girls' Grammar School, and Renmark High School.*² (figure 3) During her education, Elaine represented her schools in hockey, and was an excellent swimmer and tennis player. She loved to sing was later invited to join the Adelaide Choral Society³. Elaine trained as a nurse and pursued this as her career pathway. After three years of study and training on staff at the Adelaide Children's Hospital, she was awarded the Hospital's Silver Medal⁴.



Figure 2 Denisbin (2017) the original Renmark High School that Balfour-Ogilvy attended in the present day [photograph], Flickr, accessed 9 May 2023.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/82134796@N03/38908429272/in/photostream/>

According to the Virtual War Memorial she enlisted on both the 13th of September 1940 and the 29th of November 1940 at Keswick Army Barracks, a few months after the fall of France. However, upon further investigation she actually enlisted on the 13th of September (Figure 4). In doing so, Elaine *become the district's first army nurse. Her brothers Spencer and Douglas also served in the Second World War, enlisting in the RAAF and AIF respectively.*⁵ It is obvious that the family's commitment to service ran deep.



Figure 3 Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy (front row 3rd from the left) school photo (1920s) [photograph], Renmark High School, accessed 19 May 2023.

*Elaine was soon appointed to the 2/4th Casualty Clearing Station of the Australian Army Nursing Service*⁶, Figure 5. She departed in 1941 on the Queen Mary heading for Singapore and Malaya.

The journey on the Queen Mary, embarking from Sydney in March 1941 was an opportunity to connect with other nurses. Observing a diary entry of Vivian Bullwinkel, a fellow nurse that was also in the 2/4, it was obvious that these nurses were close with each other as they swapped recipes and song lyrics. Elaine even took the opportunity, if reluctantly, to sing as a performance on the Queen Mary.⁷

Upon arrival at the Malay Peninsula, Elaine and her fellow nurses were split into small groups and started connecting with local communities and undertaking their roles. Through

¹ Virtual War Memorial Australia, Elaine Lenore BALFOUR-OGILVY: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/12371>

² ibid

³ Spurling, K (n.d) Lieutenant Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy AANS <https://kathrynsurling.com/blog/lieutenant-elaine-balfour-ogilvy-aans>

⁴ *Opcit* Virtual War Memorial Australia, Elaine Lenore BALFOUR-OGILVY

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ *Opcit* Spurling, K

A.A. Form A.296.
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

ATTESTATION FORM
FOR SPECIAL FORCES RAISED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD.

Army No. SX10596 LFB Miss 10/1955
Surname Balfour Ogilvy Other Names Elaine Lenore
Unit R.B.N.S.
Enlisted for service at Renmark (Place)
South Australia (State) 13 9 40 (Date)

A

Questions to be put to persons called out or presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.*

1. What is your name? 1. Surname Balfour Ogilvy
Other names Elaine Lenore
2. Where were you born? 2. In or near the town of Renmark
in the state or country of South Australia
3. Are you a natural born or a naturalized British Subject? If the latter, papers are to be produced 3. British
4. What is your age and date of birth? 4. Age 30 years & months
Date of Birth 11 January 1912
5. What is your trade or occupation? 5. Trained Nurse
6. Are you married, single or widower? 6. Single
7. Have you previously served on active service? If so, where and in what arm? 7. No
8. Who is your actual next of kin? (Order of relationship—wife, eldest son, eldest daughter, father, mother, eldest brother, eldest sister, eldest half-brother, eldest half-sister) 8. Next of Kin: Miss Balfour Ogilvy
Address: Tanamaddy
Relationship: Sister
9. What is your permanent address? 9. Tanamaddy
Renmark
10. What is your religious denomination? (This question need not be answered if the man has a conscientious objection to doing so) 10. Church of England

I, Elaine Lenore Balfour Ogilvy do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true and that I am willing to serve in the Australian Military Forces within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

Witnessed by: G. H. King (Signature of Attesting or Witnessing Officer) B. Balfour Ogilvy (Signature)

*The person will be warned that should he give false answers to any of these questions he will be liable to heavy penalties under the relevant law.

National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, SX10596

Figure 4 BALFOUR OGILVY ELAINE LENORE: Service Number - SX10596: Date of Birth - 11 Jan 1912: Place of Birth - RENMARK SA: Place of Enlistment - KESWICK SA: Next of Kin - BALFOUR OGILVY HARRY (1940) [document], National Archives of Australia, accessed 9 May <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6397185>



Figure 5 Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy (back row far right) and the 2/4TH CASUALTY CLEARING STATION (1941) [photograph], Virtual War Memorial, accessed 9 May 2023. <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/12371>

this, she worked all over the Malay Peninsula, (Figure 6), as part of the 9th Field Ambulance. Eventually, she was based in Lampai, South Johore with the 4th CCS.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the 4th Casual Clearing Station was withdrawn to a makeshift theatre at the Kluang airfield,⁸ (Figure 7). The Malay Peninsula was now a key position in the defence of Singapore, as Japanese expansionism focused on South-East Asia after the catastrophe at Pearl Harbor.

Kluang Airport was a military operated airport with 2 runways in the city of Kluang (Figure 8). At the time, an area known for their eco farms with an estimated population of 53,671, it would become a vital post in the defence of Singapore.

However, as the emergency worsened in early 1942, the fall of Singapore became inevitable, and the evacuation of the nurses began. Elaine was part of the last group of nurses evacuated on the 12th of February 1942 just 3 days before Singapore would fall. She was evacuated on the final vessel to leave, the SS Vyner Brooke. Sixty-five nurses boarded the SS Vyner Brooke,⁹ (Figure 9).

During the late afternoon of the 13th, just a day after evacuation, the vessel was attacked by multiple Japanese aircraft. Despite evasive action, she was crippled by several bombs and within half an hour rolled over and sunk bow first.¹⁰ Sister Balfour-Ogilvy allegedly volunteered to stay on board until the very last minute to ensure all others were safely evacuated to lifeboats.¹¹ Elaine, known good swimmer, after the sinking was seen holding onto a rope connected to another lifeboat in order to reach Radji Beach. She did this in shark and crocodile infested waters, along with a band of other survivors. This act of bravery intensely reflects the ANZAC spirit in the forms of courage and perseverance. Unfortunately, 12 other nurses downed.

However, an awful fate awaited many of those that landed on Radji beach,¹² (Figure 10) Approximately 150 survivors made it to shore as Elaine and her fellow Australian nurses took to their duties and treated the wounded. It is most likely that Elaine sang to her patients as she usually did to

⁸ ibid

⁹ Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs 80th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore and the Bangka Island massacre: <https://www.dva.gov.au/newsroom/latest-news-veterans/80th-anniversary-fall-singapore-and-bangka-island-massacre#:~:text=In%20the%20days%20prior%20to,February%201942%20with%20other%20evacuees.>

¹⁰ Australian War Memorial, The Sinking of the Vyner Brooke: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84734>

¹¹ Australian College of Nursing, Meet the Bangka Nurses: <https://www.acn.edu.au/nurseclick/meet-the-bangka-island-nurses#south-australia>

¹² Opcit, Australian War Memorial, The Sinking of the Vyner Brooke.

lighten spirits and boost morale, as the fear of the Japanese forces that occupied the island loomed large. The ranking officer went to find the Japanese on the island in order to surrender to them, which was deemed the safest course of action. When he returned with Captain Masura and his Japanese soldiers, the male prisoners were led away, before shots were heard and the Japanese soldiers returned without their prisoners.

*After observing the massacre of the two groups of men, she (Elaine) suggested that the nurses all run in different directions so that at least some of them would survive. This was possibly the most sensible idea that anyone had on Radji Beach.*¹³ Elaine's idea was rejected by Matron Drummond who said it was their duty to their wounded patients to comply with the Japanese. Although her idea was rejected it still reflected the ANZAC spirit characteristic of ingenuity that lived within Elaine.

At this point, Elaine, along with the other nurses were blindfolded and marched into the water. Matron Drummond remarked, *Chin up girls, I'm proud of you and I love you all.*¹⁴ Not long after this comment the nurses were executed. Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy died aged 30 on February 16th, 1942.

*Evidence that has emerged many years since this event suggests it was probable that many of these nurses were raped before they were shot.*¹⁵ Major Bill Tebbutt stated in his Affidavit seeing a body of one of the nurses about 45 meters away from the rest of the line of other nurses. This was most likely Elaine attempting to make a heroic and desperate attempt to survive the massacre, she was persistent until the very end. *This seems completely in character with her positive approach to life and the probable influence of her father's bravery in war; rather than be passively slaughtered by a callous enemy.*¹⁶ There was only one survivor of the massacre, Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel who pretended to be dead, after being struck by a bullet. She would eventually re-surrender to the Japanese and survive POW camps to return to Australia and share much of this story.

Although Elaine died, her story was not finished. Over a year later, on the 23rd of March 1943 she was posthumously promoted to lieutenant, (Figure 11). *By 1945, all military nurses had*



Figure 6 Mikeyashworth MA (2014) Map of the Malay Peninsula showing the Federation of Malaya, 1949 [illustration], Flickr, accessed 12 May 2023. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/36844288@N00/15657073578>

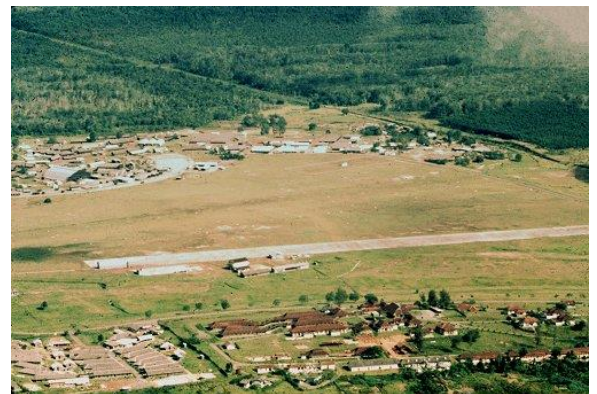


Figure 7 Biggadike PB (1957) KLUANG AIRFIELD [photograph], JANVISION GALLERY, accessed 9 May 2023. <http://www.users.waitrose.com/~q8jan/index.html>

¹³ Opcit, Virtual War Memorial Australia, Elaine Lenore BALFOUR-OGILVY.

¹⁴ Virtual War Memorial, Irene Melville DRUMMOND MID <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/598752>

¹⁵ Australian Dictionary of Biography, Drummond, Iren e Melville: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/drummond-irene-melville-10051>

¹⁶ Opcit, Virtual War Memorial Australia, Elaine Lenore BALFOUR-OGILVY.



Figure 8 Kluang today (2023) [photograph], Wikipedia, accessed 12 May 2023.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kluang>

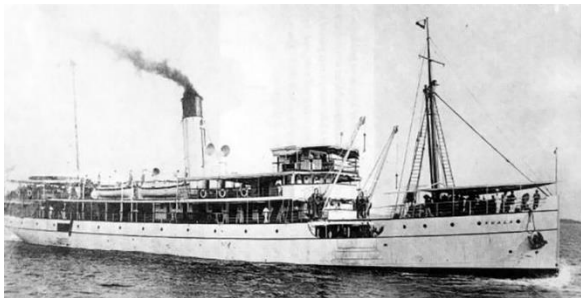


Figure 9 SS Vyner Brooke (2022) [photograph], Australian Nurses Memorial Centre, accessed 9 May 2023.

<https://australiannursesmemorialcentre.org.au/index.php/events/80th-anniversary-of-the-ss-vyner-brooke-sinking-bicton-wa-event/>



Figure 10 Cox AC (2015) Radji Beach today [photograph], Find My Past, accessed 10 May 2023.

<https://www.findmypast.com.au/blog/history/sol-e-survivor-vivian-bullwinkle-and-the-banka-island-massacre>

QUALITY CHECKED	
OFFICER'S RECORD OF SERVICE	
Name: ELAINE BALFOUR-OGILVY	
Rank: NURSE	
Service Number: 123456	
Date of Birth: 1915	
Place of Birth: [illegible]	
Religion: [illegible]	
Education: [illegible]	
Employment: [illegible]	
Remarks: [illegible]	

Figure 11 Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy, Officer's Record of Service (1940s) [document], National Archives of Australia, accessed 10 May 2023.

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNR/Retrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6397185>



Figure 12 Annette Green AG (2021) Sister Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy silo art [photograph], Australian Silo Art Trail, accessed 12 May 2023.

<https://www.australiansiloarttrail.com/paringa>

been appointed as officers, although many still preferred to use their traditional titles of "sister" and "matron".¹⁷

Elaine has a massive impact on the post war Renmark community. "She was a local girl [and] her life finished at 31 or 32 in terrible, terrible circumstances. It highlights the brutality and stupidity of war,"¹⁸ is how President of the Renmark RSL captures this feeling.

In recent years both the Children's Library and library at Renmark High School were named in her honour. She was also commemorated by locals from both the Renmark RSL and Renmark High School in a podcast on the Virtual Australian War Memorial, which I proudly participated in. Further, Elaine is ever present in daily life, her image painted on the silos in Paringa, (Figure 12), a neighbouring town to Renmark. A scholarship at her Woodland's Grammar School was also created in Elaine's honour, to inspire future generations.

It is evident that Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy displayed the ANZAC spirit, especially perseverance, when she stayed on the boat to help survivors get on to the lifeboats and attempts to escape the Japanese even when death looked imminent. She was one of the last nurses evacuated from the Malay Peninsula, committed to her patients. Elaine's strong sense of mateship is also obvious, with her nurse group as they swapped recipes, sang together and paid the ultimate sacrifice together, in service of the country, their patients and their families.

¹⁷ ANZAC Portal, Devotion: Stories of Australia's wartime nurses:

<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/devotion-stories-australias-wartime-nurses>

¹⁸ ABC NEWS, Anzac Day 2017: Nurse executed on Banka remembered: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-21/elaine-balfour-ogilvy-nurse-anzac-day-memorial-renmark/8453488>

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Part B

This competition presented me with the opportunity to research a hero whose name I am around every day.

However, the challenge did not start as well as I had hoped. When my teacher approached me about being part of this competition, I did not hesitate. My mind immediately went to the grandstand at the Berri Football Oval, a place I have played many matches of football and cricket at. The Tom 'Diver' Derrick Grandstand. I had always wondered about Tom Derrick, my family mentioned that he was one of Australia's most decorated soldiers and my interest was further piqued observing a display at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra earlier this year.

I started my research of Tom Derrick, finding The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Dictionary of Biography very useful. However, during the construction of Tom's story, my teacher pointed out that Tom Derrick could not be the focus of my research, as he was researched by a recent winner.

I immediately felt disappointed. However, it would be completely against the spirit of the contest to simply 'give-up.' My mind went to the Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy story, something I have been connected to since Year 8. Apart of this story is Elaine's refusal to leave her patients on the Malay Peninsula or Radji Beach. Elaine didn't 'give-up' and her obstacles were far more significant than mine!

I began my research on Elaine Balfour-Ogilvy at the beginning of term 2. I was a little 'research fatigued' after the Tom Derrick experience, but this quickly faded as I found information about Elaine that was new to me. The most useful sources were a website by historian Kathryn Spurling and the Australian War Memorial. Both sources allowed Elaine's story to come to life with many quotes and a depth of information that allows a reader to somewhat experience what she did. Using the Renmark High School archive was useful in my search of picture resources, as the internet seemed limited. However, when I searched events, places and objects connected to Elaine, instead of Elaine herself, I found more picture resources on the internet.

I used the information provided on the SACE Stage 2 website for Modern History, particularly the section dedicated to the Individual History Essay, to assist me with referencing. I used an organised system in word to keep noting websites, books and articles as I used them, how useful they were and what I used them for.

My teacher also offered the group of students undertaking this challenge the opportunity to meet with locals that served in the Vietnam War. Initially, I was not sure how this would assist me in my research on Elaine, but the experience was fundamental. The veterans and the wife of a veteran were able to make the events of war become more than words on a page as I watched them struggle with their stories and memories and still live the ANZAC spirit as they persevered through their fears and worked together as mates.

Words: 500



Figure 13 Group photo with the Vietnam War Veterans (front row 4th from the left) (2023) [photograph], Renmark High School, accessed 19 May 2023.



Figure 14 Files BF (2023) Putting a poppy in the sister Elaine-Balfour-Ogilvy memorial at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra [photograph], Ben Files, accessed 19 May 2023