

Ex 1707

IN THE MATTER of War Crimes

and

IN THE MATTER of the killing of
R.A.F. and R.F. personnel at SOEBING,
West Java, on or about 11 or 12
March 1942, by the Japanese.

United Nations War Crimes Commission
Reference.....

I, Pieter Gerhard De VRIES, at present of King Edward Hotel, Pier Street, PERTH, being duly sworn, make oath and say as follows:

1. Prior to the outbreak of war with Japan I was Manager of the rice-mills of the PALMNOEKAN and TJLSAN LANDS COMPANY of J.A.V., hereinafter called "the Company". This Company was a subsidiary company of the Anglo-Dutch Plantations of Java Ltd., and as such Manager I was stationed at PEGADAN-BAROE, west Java.

In May 1940 I joined the Dutch Voluntary Training Corps of Java. Later this Corps became merged in the Dutch Home Guard and I became a Sgt-Major in it in January 1942. I was at SOEBING, North of BANDONG, west Java, when the Japanese first landed in Java.

Just shortly before the fall of Singapore, a party of about 200 R.A.F. and R.F. Ground Staff arrived in West Java from Singapore and this party was billeted in quarters on the estates of my Company at SOEBING and nearby places and members of this party helped to defend the military air-port at KLIDJATI. A number of these R.A.F. and R.F. personnel were placed in the Private Hospital of the Company at SOEBING as sick and wounded from attacks on the aerodrome by the Japanese, at KLIDJATI. Some were already suffering from malaria when they arrived from Singapore. I myself saw these persons in the hospital on or about 28 February 1942. There were approximately about 25 R.A.F. and R.F. patients in the hospital.

2. On the 1 March 1942 the first Japanese who landed in Java landed at ERRATAN, a fish harbour in West Java about 15 miles East of PALMNOEKAN. They went via PALMNOEKAN and PEGADAN-BAROE to SOEBING and arrived at my Company's Head Office at SOEBING about 0730 hrs on 1 March 1942. I was not present at SOEBING when the Japanese arrived as it was part of the task of the HOME GUARD to which I was attached to attack the supply lines of the Japanese after they had passed through and I was engaged on this work when the Japanese arrived at SOEBING. I left SOEBING with my unit about one hour before the Japanese arrived. On the 7 March 1942 the Dutch Army surrendered and the Home Guard was disbanded.

3. On the 23 April 1942 I went back to SOEBING to start the rice-mills again for the benefit of the civilian population. The representative of my Company's Directors asked me to do this and the Japanese ordered it. Before the Japanese arrived at SOEBING all the Europeans and some of the R.A.F. and R.F. were evacuated but there was no time to evacuate the patients who were in the private hospital of the company. They were left in the charge of a Dutch nurse, Sister JANSSEN, and an Indonesian Doctor, whose name I do not know, but he, however, fled before the Japanese arrived. The nurse remained.

When I returned to SOEBING on the 23 April 1942 there were no R.A.F. or R.F. personnel at the hospital. I was told by numerous Indonesians that on or about 11 or 12 March 1942 some Japanese soldiers entered the hospital and Sister JANSSEN, fearing that her patients were about to be attacked, took up a revolver to defend them. All the personnel were then taken from the hospital and eye-witnesses told me that the total, including the R.A.F. and R.F. personnel, the nurse, the chemist's assistant and his wife, and 2 other Europeans, was approximately 25. Eye-witnesses told me that this number, plus some women and children, were taken on 11 or 12 March 1942, to an air-raid shelter in the rubber garden at SOKLAT and when at the air-raid shelter they were all killed by shooting or bayoneting by the Japanese soldiers who had removed them from the hospital.

4. In or about the month of May 1942, when the Japanese guard was temporarily absent, I examined an air-raid shelter under a tree known as the 'Sacred Tree' in front of the Technical Department in SOEBANG. I went down the air-raid shelter and there found the skulls and bones of seven human bodies. I attempted to dis-inter the remains but could not do this owing to the return of the Japanese Guard.

On one of the remains I found an identity disc bearing the words "White - R.A.F.". There were initials in front of the word "white" but I cannot remember what they were. One of the skeletons was that of a woman. I could tell this from the long hair on the skull and the dress around the skeleton.

5. I do not know the name of the Japanese Unit of which the Japanese soldiers who entered the hospital were members. I have heard the name of the Japanese who commanded these men but I have forgotten it. The Japanese concerned, however, were members of the first body of Japanese troops to land at ERRETAN in West Java on the 1 March 1942. They were the first Japanese to land in Java. The main body of Japanese left SOEBANG and fought their way to BANDONG between the 1 and 7 March 1942. They left one battalion or unit in SOEBANG. This unit was still there on the 11 or 12 March 1942. It would have been members of this Unit who were responsible for the death of the R.A.F and R.F personnel referred to. The Japanese General in Command of these troops would be the same General who accepted the surrender of the Dutch Forces at the KALIDJATI Air Port on 7 March 1942 from the Dutch Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief.

6. I never saw again any of the R.A.F or R.F personnel alive whom I had seen in the Company's hospital at SOEBANG on or about the 28 February 1942.

SWORN by the said Pieter Gerhard
De VRIES at Perth, in the State
of Western Australia this 7th
day of June 1946.

/s/ P. G. de Vries

Before me (name illegible)

A Commissioner of the Supreme Court of
Western Australia for taking affidavits.