

PILCHER Sally (nee Cook)

Name: Sally Cook

Born: 22 July 1940

Civilian Internee: Fukushima Internment Camp, Japan

Died: 2017



Sally was born 22 July 1940 in Shanghai. She was the eldest child of Murray and Audrey Cook (nee Parker).

The following information was noted down by Sally's husband and is in Sally's own words:-

Pre-War:

I was born 22 July 1940 in the Shanghai Country Hospital at seven o'clock in the morning. Soon after my birth my father nearly died from a burst duodenal ulcer. The practice of the Chartered Bank (for whom he worked) was to send those members of the European staff who had been very ill back to the UK on six months sick leave. However, this was not possible due to the outbreak of the 2nd World War in Europe so we (my father, pregnant mother and I) were sent to Australia instead.

Right: Murray and Audrey Cook with Sally and David on their release in 1945



Wartime experience:

During our stay there the Japanese entered the war and so on my father's recovery he was instructed by the Bank to go to Java, leaving my mother and I and new baby David behind. In Java he was given various jobs to do visiting different branches of the Bank and while he was doing this the Japanese invaded Java. He managed to board a very old ship, one of the last to leave and very overcrowded. It was so slow that the Japanese pilots thought it was a coaster and did not bomb it. After three days sailing they were spotted by the Japanese and they thought that their end had come, but a fog came down which covered them and so they made it back to Australia.



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He tried to join the Australian Air Force but the Bank insisted he went to India.

We all therefore got onto a ship in Freemantle bound for India.

Sometime during the passage we came in contact with a German Raider. This ship had been up and down the east coast of Africa sinking Allied shipping of many nations and taking the occupants prisoner. The German fired on us and we took to the lifeboats. The Captain of the German ship had been told to take no more prisoners and his aircraft came to machine gun us. However, when he saw women and children in the lifeboats he signalled his captain who disobeyed orders and took us on board, and allowed us the contents of our cabins. We found out after the War that he had put a skeleton crew on our ship and had it taken back to Yokohama.

The Raider's original intention was to take us to Germany via the Suez Canal, but they were unable to do this because the Canal remained in Allied hands. The change of plan was therefore to hand us over to the Japanese and we were taken to Yokohama and taken by train in July 1942 to a convent in Fukushima where the nuns had been turned out except for Reverend Mother and two nuns who lived in the basement.

The convent was divided into two sections, the men and boys over the age of 12 being accommodated in one and women and younger children in the other.

There were many nationalities on the men's side which caused tension from time to time. My father and other more mature men decided that the way to occupy the men was to run educational classes of all kinds which helped to reduce friction. My father had his bible with him and ran a course to promote Christianity and he also helped to inaugurate a choir.

My brother David was 8 months old and I was a year and 9 months when we were captured. David was still being breast fed. Initially, we were given good quality food and the first Camp Commandant was a kindly man. Sadly, he was replaced by someone of a less kindly disposition and the quality and quantity of our food declined. From then on my mother was decreasingly unable to satisfy my brother David. This Commandant in his turn was replaced by a very unpleasant man and conditions deteriorated further. David's first teeth came through with holes already in them.

In September 1945 Sally, her brother and Parents were taken by Australian Aircraft Carrier HMAS Ruler to Australia for rehabilitation before return to the UK. Her parents received a letter sent by King George VI to her parents (and no doubt to many others as well), please see above.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I bid you a very warm welcome home.

Through all the great trials and sufferings which you have undergone at the hands of the Japanese, you and your comrades have been constantly in our thoughts. We know from the accounts we have already received how heavy those sufferings have been. We know also that these have been endured by you with the highest courage.

We mourn with you the deaths of so many of your gallant comrades.

With all our hearts, we hope that your return from captivity will bring you and your families a full measure of happiness, which you may long enjoy together.

September 1945.

Above: Letter to Murray and Audrey Cook
from King George VI



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PILCHER Sally (nee Cook) (cont . .)

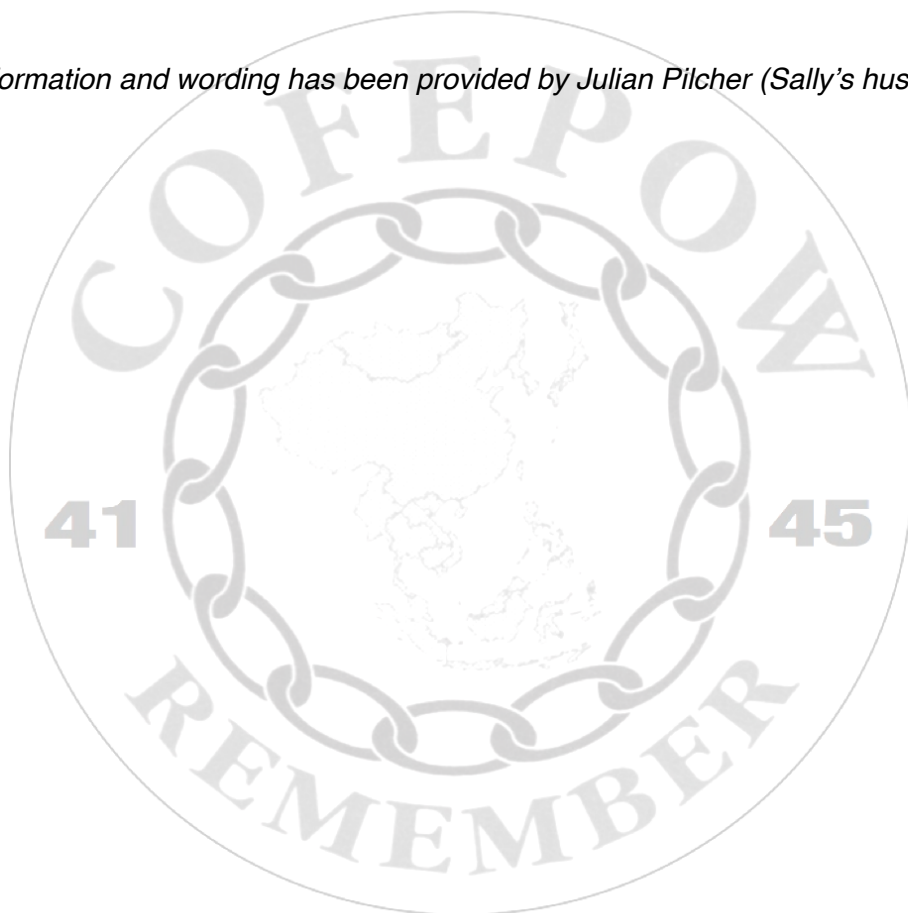
Note from Julian Pilcher, Sally's husband:-

I thought it might be of interest to record some notes written by my late wife Sally (nee Cook) who was captured with her younger brother David and their parents Murray and Audrey Cook in 1942 and imprisoned for 3 years near Fukushima Japan until freed by the Americans in 1945.

More details on the Fukushima Internment Camp, the civilian inmates and conditions are available on the Fukushima Internment Camp website. This has been recorded by others including a detailed article by COFEPOW Member, Chris Best, daughter of Inmate Malcolm Ingleby Scott.

Sadly, Sally died in 2017 of Alzheimers and I was only able to take down the attached brief details.

The above information and wording has been provided by Julian Pilcher (Sally's husband)



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