

'CHANGTEH'

[also incorrectly referred to as 'Chante', Chiang Tee' and 'Chang Tei'.]

- Bombed and sunk 14 February 1942

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The tug 'Changteh' was built in 1914 by New Engineering & Shipbuilding Works, Shanghai for the China Navigation Company Ltd for use in its fleet of numerous tugs and ships plying trade on the Yangtze River. The 'Changteh' was used to maintain the Hunan, Changsa, Yochow and Hankow services during the low water period between December and May/June each year. It was a shallow draft, but sizeable, steel tug of 244 grt, being 140 feet long x 26 feet wide - with two triple expansion steam engines producing 69 h. p and a speed of 8 knots. The China Navigation Co. Ltd. was an old company founded in 1876 in London to trade up the Yangtze River from their Shanghai base with passengers and cargo.

{Note: this is **not** the 'Chante' a ship of 4324 tons built in 1925 for the Australian Oriental Line and trading between Hong Kong and Australia during the pre-war years.]



Photo of what is very probably 'Changteh' towing barges on the Yangtze.

By 1941 the constant and escalating fighting between the Chinese armies and Japanese invaders, together with the increasing prospect of hostilities between Britain and Japan, had become such a threat that the Royal Navy requisitioned many of the passenger vessels and tugs working on the Yangtze River and relocated them to be fitted out with appropriate equipment and used as 'Auxiliary Minesweepers' in Singapore. Many RNR/RNVR/MRNVR officers were assigned to these vessels.

Invasion of Malaya and Singapore:

The invasion of Malaya and Singapore, from the time of the first landings in Northern Malaya on 8 December 1941, was swift and brutal. Within eight weeks the Japanese had taken Malaya and landed on the island of Singapore which had become intensely overcrowded by tens of thousands of fleeing civilians of all races from Malaya plus almost 100,000 servicemen.

By the second week of February 1942 the Japanese army was advancing across Singapore Island and a chaotic evacuation of mainly Europeans, Eurasians, Indians, and a small number of influential Chinese was underway from the port in front of what is today's CBD.

Literally any ocean-going vessel of any size remaining in Singapore harbour was ultimately enlisted by the authorities to evacuate people, in what had become an environment of almost constant bombing and machine gunning by Japanese planes. Singapore itself was ablaze, columns of black smoke rose thousands of feet in the air and the streets were littered with the dead and dying.

People desperately clamoured for departure passes from the colonial government authorities (men under 40 years of age had been banned from leaving the Island for months and women had not been publicly encouraged to leave because it would '... adversely affect morale ...') – they wished to board any ship leaving the Island. By 11 January 1942 even the rather hidebound men in authority saw the absurdity of their bureaucratic incompetence and more passes were issued for civilian men and women to leave, so finally some real urgency entered the situation.

About 50 ships of all sizes - from the quite large, refrigerated cargo ship "SS. Empire Star" (525 feet and 12,656 tons) through a range of mid-sized merchant vessels down to some small craft like the "SS. Tandjong Pinang" (which at 97 feet only just qualified in the definition for a 'ship') – were assembled to leave as a convoy during the 48-hour period of 11 – 13 February 1942. There were also

several Naval and RAF patrol boats/launches of varying sizes identified as evacuation vessels, plus another 50 or so civilian launches, yachts, junks, and coastal craft.

The naval ships, apart from a couple of destroyers, which briefly escorted the bigger merchant ships like the 'SS Empire Star' and 'SS Gorgon' after leaving Singapore, mainly comprised auxiliary (i.e., merchant ships which had been requisitioned) patrol ships, auxiliary minesweepers, flat bottomed ex-Yangtze River gunboats and ex Yangtze River passenger ships, RAF fast launches and even a large tug like the 'HMT Changteh' as it would have been formally designated.

A large collection of British owned vessels which had been servicing trade and passengers on the Yangtze River in China had escaped, or been requisitioned, south to Singapore in 1940-41 as the Japanese invasion of China became increasingly entrenched and widespread. This 'China Flotilla' comprised a mix of passenger vessels, flat bottomed Royal Navy gunboats designed for operating on the relatively shallow areas of the Yangtze and work tugs (also custom designed for moving barges up and down the shallows of the river) and had been transferred to Singapore and / or requisitioned by the Royal Navy for use as Auxiliary Minesweepers and patrol boats around Singapore and Malaya. Almost all these vessels such as 'HMS Li Wo', 'HMS Grasshopper', 'HMS Scorpion', 'HMS Dragonfly', and 'HMT Ying Ping' would all come to grief under the bombsights and gunsights of Japanese bombers and warships during their evacuation of Singapore.

Of some 100 assorted 'vessels' (from launches, junks, and small yachts upwards) leaving during the 'last window of opportunity' - or as many so thought - only a small number (perhaps fifteen to twenty) would make it to safety on the east coast rivers of Sumatra or to Batavia in Java. The other 80 vessels would be sunk, run aground, or captured at sea by the Japanese Navy with several thousand of their passengers and crew killed, or taken prisoner to face three and a half years of extremely harsh, malnourished and medically deprived treatment in Internment or POW camps in Sumatra and elsewhere. Many of these servicemen and civilian women, children and men would die during the remainder of the War in these cruel camps.

To put the research purpose of this document into historical context, the fates of only a small number of the vessels carrying evacuees from Singapore during these last few days before the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 - the ones that were sunk, scuttled, or captured - have been properly researched and documented since the Second World War. This is one of the attempts to prevent the lives of those several thousand men, women, and children who did die because of their escape attempt being simply consigned, without proper tangible memory, into the dustbin of history.

Departure from Singapore:

The 'Changteh' had been placed under the command of Malayan Royal Navy Reserve (MRNVR) officers – men who had been drawn from a variety of often unrelated peacetime civilian occupations in Malaya and Singapore and only a few of whom had ever experienced war, particularly at sea.

A few contemporary records based on testimonies of survivors, held in the files of the UK Archives, state that the 'Changteh' was under the command of **Sub. Lt (or Lt) James 'Jimmy' Leslie Craig, MRNVR**, a 43-year-old rubber planter from the Jenderak Estate at Kuala Lipis, Pahang. Another naval reserve officer serving on the ship was **Sub. Lt. Sidney John Fisher, MRNVR**, a 31-year-old Composing Room Superintendent in the Government Printing Offices, Kuala Lumpur. Both these men were destined to lose their lives in the bombing attack on the vessel.

It appears that the 'Engineering Officer' on board was **Harold Hansen Holm**, who in peacetime had been the Chief Engineer, Changkai Tin Dredging, Rawang, Selangor – in the November 1942

announcement that Harold Hansen had been awarded the OBE (Military Division) he is ranked as Temporary Lieutenant H. H. Hansen, RNR and he is shown in the 'Gazette' in 1943 as a Temp. Lt. (E). However, whether Harold was a Temp Lt (E) in the RNR at the time he was on 'Changteh' is unclear.

From sparse records in the UK Archives, we can deduce that the passengers on this last voyage were a mix of RAF specialists plus a few British Army personnel – in the final week prior to the Surrender the Allied Military authorities decided to evacuate several thousand skilled and 'key' personnel to the Dutch East Indies and many vessels in the evacuation flotilla had such personnel aboard – sometimes mixed with civilian evacuees.

We are reliant for much of the information on 'Changteh' last voyage upon the reports (under the signature of his First World War and later rank of Pilot Officer- or Flt. Lt. - H.V. Puckridge RAF) made by 'passenger' and survivor on the vessel, one **Hugh Victor 'Robert' Puckridge**, a 45-year-old Lieutenant in the Transport Section of the Selangor Btn., FMSVF at the time of the invasion (his status as an Officer rank veteran of the First World War, was from his time briefly in the Shropshire Light Infantry but then as a Pilot officer in the Royal Flying Corps where he had seen action in the sky and had been shot down behind enemy lines), but in civilian life in Malaya since 1926 Robert Puckridge had been a successful rubber planter and Manager of Damansara Estate at Batu Tiga. His report gains validity as it was written by a man who had seen real action in the First World War and was therefore seen through the experienced eyes of a true veteran (see his personal entry under 'Passengers' below). It is however somewhat surprising, given his occupation as an established rubber planter, that he states in his report whilst in Ceylon in July 1943 that *"... I do not know the name of the Captain of the Chan Tee..."* – since the captain was one James Craig who was also a rubber planter in Selangor, Malaya.

Nevertheless, there were other acquaintances (of similar age) from the Malayan rubber planting industry on board. The only other known full 'civilian' aboard – but who was wounded in the bombing and did not survive the sinking – was **Robert Bertram Greenlaw Forbes**, 44-year-old rubber planter and Manager of Bukit Munchang and Kapar Bahru Estates, also located in the state of Selangor not far from Kuala Lumpur. Forbes seemed to know Puckridge quite well and, from the tone of his post war letter (see below), Harold Holm clearly knew Jimmy Craig.

Another Malayan Volunteer on board, who would also lose his life, was 34-year-old **Flying Officer Thomas George Duncan Ashley-Cooper, MVAF/RAFVR** (in civilian life a Senior Customs Officer with Federated Malay States Customs in Singapore and one of Malaya's outstanding pre-War cricketers starting from his teenage years) - he was wounded and then 'Presumed Lost' in the sinking.



However the bulk of those men on board are stated by 'Robert 'Puckridge (in a report he signed as a Pilot Officer, DFC, No. 258 Squadron, RAC, Colombo) on 27 May 1942 to be "... A mixed party of Army and RAF personnel, 11 Officers and 85 other ranks left Singapore at about 1930 hours on 13th February 1942 on board a China River ship, named Chan Tee, manned by R.N.R..."

These were the skilled technicians and operatives of the men of the Royal Corps of Signals, who had been officially 'attached' for their skills and work in Singapore to the RAF (ref. to CQMS W.A. Shave, letter dated 16.8.43 to OIC, Ceylon Army Signals, re fates of Signalmen Manson, Barker, and Peckham) and a much larger group of RAFVR men from specialist technical units such as 151 Maintenance Unit or 'RIMU' ('Radio Installation Maintenance Unit') at Seletar airfield where there were aircraft maintenance units, radar installations and radio location units – all highly secret! F/L White, a passenger on 'Changteh' with a few of his unit, was the Officer in command of the highly secret 518 A.M.E.S. (Air Ministry Experimental Station), RDF (Radio Direction Finder/ Radar Direction Finder) unit at Kota Tinggi, Johore – just across the very narrow Johore Strait from Singapore. 518 A.M.E.S. was one of a network of radar Stations built across Malaya and Singapore Island during 1941.



In this RAF/RAFVR evacuation group there were also wireless operators and other men from the civilian and marine airbase at Kallang. The 'Filter Room' where these men actually worked was apparently in KATONG, very close to what is now central Singapore [Filter Rooms were central to the Radar system and were where detected aircraft information was gathered and assessed before being passed onto the Squadrons – the Filter room at Katong contained a large table with an outline map of the area painted on it, overlaid with a grid of the area covered by RDF (Radio/Radar Direction Finding) and the RDF units across Malaya and Singapore.], where the principal fighter field of Brewster Buffalo planes were based. This researcher understands that 232 Squadron RAF (which may have flown Hurricanes), plus 243 Squadron RAF and 488 Squadron RNZAF were at Kallang. There is one reference to New Zealanders and Australians being amongst this group who boarded 'Changteh'.

There were also some 50 RAF on board a similar sized vessel, another tug named 'HMS Yin Ping' which left the same night as 'Changteh' – they were all part of a large contingent of 250 highly skilled RAF and RAFVR personnel who had been ordered by Air Vice Marshall Pulford (who was himself to escape on HMML 310 only to die on uninhabited Tjebia Island near Banka Island) to be evacuated at the last minute during the afternoon of 13 February on seven evacuation vessels. Only one of these vessels reached safety and only 45 of these RAF/RAFVR men also reached Colombo. Many were RADAR specialists.

Apart from several men from the '29 Construction Section, Royal Corps of Signals' (who lost their lives in the bombing and sinkings of 'Changteh') very little has been found by this researcher as to which units of the Royal Corps of Signals boarded 'Changteh' – by deduction there might have been anywhere from 10 -30 men from this regiment, but from the few men from Signals listed as 'Missing' by the CWGC for 14 February it seems likely that it was more likely the lesser number of 10 than 30 – and it appears that there were very few, if any, Signals men amongst the survivors. We can therefore reasonably assume that there were specialists from other Army units such as RAOC and RASC among those on board.

Insofar as the number of people on board - there is of course no passenger manifest, none of the evacuation ships had such a list because of the chaos surrounding the evacuation- we also have;

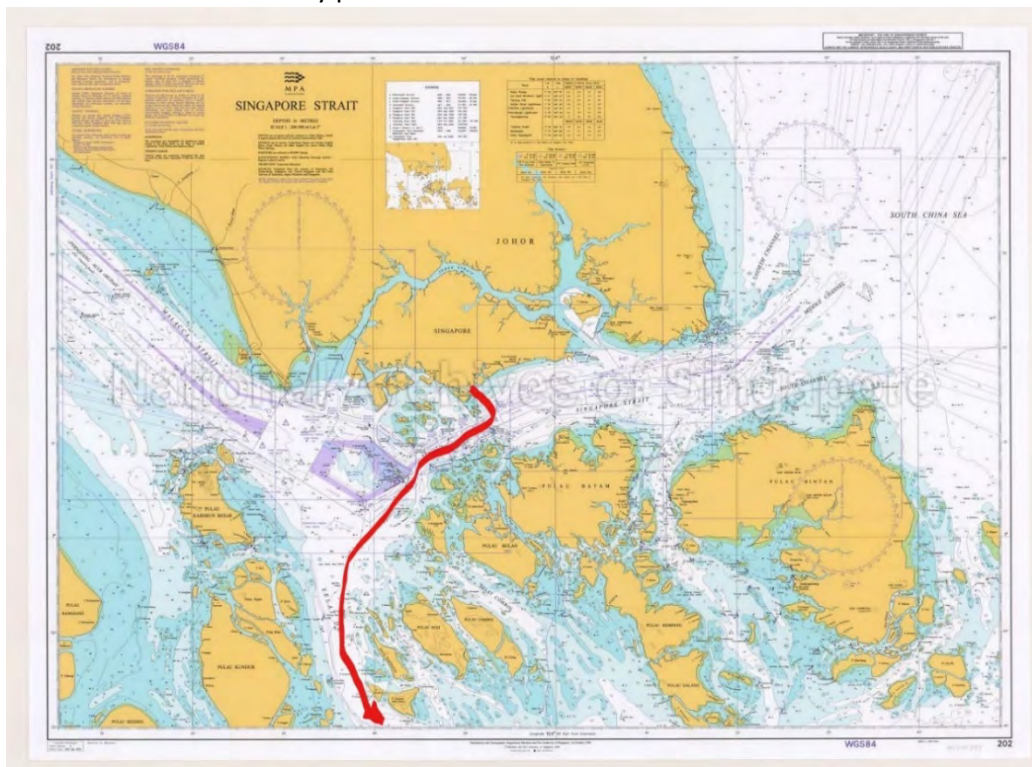
- "... 40 RAF..." – from naval-history.net website
- "70 passengers on board..." from 'The Escape from Singapore' (p.196) by Richard Gough.
- "... 70 Army and RAF, of which approximately 30 reached Padang..." from 'The Story of Changi' by Captain David Nelson.
- We also have a mention by Puckridge that on/in/and hanging on to the lifeboat with other survivors after the sinking were "... about 18 of the ship's crew...".
- along with a couple of civilian men on board as passengers, **this indicates that there were somewhere between 90 and 115 men aboard the 'Changteh' when she left Singapore Harbour.**

Several sources – probably repeating each other say that 'Changteh left with the auxiliary minesweeping vessels 'Rahman', 'Klias' and 'Hua Tong'. Whilst this researcher has not yet researched the voyages of those vessels it seems that these reports may be incorrect because they left variously on 7th and 11th of February. Puckridge in two separate reports states the 'Changteh' left Singapore at approx. 7.00 or 7.30 pm and repeats in a letter to Mrs Forbes after he arrived in Ceylon that departure was on Friday 13th February.

That same night of 13 February also saw the little launch 'Elizabeth', plus the Fairmile patrol launch 'Pahlawan, the Auxiliary patrol boat 'Fanling', the ex-China tug 'Yin Ping', the ex-Yangtze River passenger vessel 'Fuh Wo' and the ex-Yangtze River gunboat 'HMS Dragonfly' use cover of darkness to make the ill-fated run out through the Singapore minefields and along the coast of Sumatra to safety in Batavia -all were doomed because the Japanese Navy and Air Force had swept down from Indochina to invade Sumatra and were in fact lying in wait for the slower vessels of the evacuation fleet.

The 'Changteh' was rated at a speed of 8 knots – which means that, once it had probed its way out of the out of the mine strewn harbour, it would have been travelling at a maximum 7 or 8 knots in the first day or so of its voyage as it tried to leave Singapore behind. A speed of 8 knots means the vessel travels at 8 nautical miles per hour – or 14.8 kilometres per hour.

This means that the vessel had been steaming through the night and early morning for about 15 hours by the time the Japanese bombers attacked, so we could 'guesstimate' that it might have achieved about 12 hours at something close to full speed after, say, three earlier hours at a slower speed of 5 knots getting through the minefields surrounding Singapore Harbour and some of the densely packed little island of the Durian Straits.



Therefore the 'Changteh' could have travelled roughly up to 110 nautical miles, or approximately 190-210 kilometres, during that fifteen-hour period before it was first bombed. This would have taken them towards the sea near mouth of the Indragiri River on the east coast of Sumatra – the Indragiri River was the objective of many of the smaller vessels in the evacuation flotilla because that was a key part of the official 'escape route' which had been secretly established by military groups some weeks previously with food, water, and provisions left at selected base camps. The 'escape route' would take the evacuees along the small towns up the Indragiri River, across the mountainous backbone of Sumatra and then by the Dutch railway down the western slopes and

across the plains to the port town of Padang (the port was named Emmahaven) where Allied naval and merchant ships were already being ordered to call in and pick up the several thousand evacuees from Singapore.

But this was not to be so for the ill- fated men aboard 'Changteh'.

The only reference to where survivors were picked from the sea is in one of Robert Puckridge's statements (see below) which indicates that the ship might have been bombed well north of the entrance to the Indragiri River, somewhere west of Pulau Lingga - which because of that location in turn suggests that the Japanese bombers which attacked 'Changteh' were the same flights of bombers which attacked the 'SS Kuala' (with 700 women and children aboard) and the ' Tien Kwang' (packed with RAF and civilian men) when they were both anchored , desperately trying to hide', at Pom Pong Island in the Lingga Archipelago of islands earlier that same morning of 14 February. These bombers must have killed hundreds of people at sea that day.



Official escape route from Singapore February 1942

Returning to 'Robert' Puckridge's valuable record, he continues in his report of May 1942 that, after the bombs struck" ... *Colonel Burton [Charles Frank Burton, a senior RAMC officer and Army Doctor] and myself set about tending the wounded with tourniquets, available dressings, bandages and morphia. We*

carried three cases of leg wounds near a damaged lifeboat. The boat was lowered empty and found to be useless, as it quickly sank. The wounded were returned under cover, and we continued to give first aid where possible...”

- then he amplified in his sad, personal, letter of condolence written during the war to the widow of **Ronald Forbes** “...As I was going below [after the first bombing attack], your husband came up to me and said, ‘I’ve been hit’. He lifted his shirt and had a bomb splinter wound in the left side of his stomach. It was bruised and black but not bleeding. I looked right around to see if the splinter had gone right through but there was no other wound, he was not in pain and looked and appeared quite normal. I told him the doctor [he is referring to Colonel Burton] was just coming down, as we had done what we could up top. Whilst I was in the bows, there were two more attacks, and on my return your husband was no longer there...”

Puckridge’s formal report continued “... During this time two more bombing attacks were made. One on the starboard side and one on the bows. When it was obvious that the ship would sink shortly, further doses of morphia were given to those wounded who were still conscious. Colonel Burton, who had been working non-stop, doing what was possible for the casualties, thanked me for my help and complained that he was not able to do any more for them. I assured him that he had done a magnificent job and as the ship took a heavy list, he, the Captain (name unknown), pilot officer Ashly [sic Ashley] – Cooper (shattered left elbow), one Army signaller and myself, dived overboard...”



Pilot Officer H.V. Puckridge

Colonel C.F. Burton, M.R.C.S, Military Cross.

(Royal Flying Corps)

[In the context of Charles Burton’s courage during the bombing and his unflinching care for the wounded, it is worth noting that, during the First World War, Lt. Charles Frank Burton, RAMC, had been promoted to Captain in 1915 awarded the Military Cross “... For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in his skilful leading of the stretcher-bearers on all occasions. He has always shown great coolness under the heaviest fire...”.]

The picture this conjures up of living but unconscious men having to be left aboard a sinking vessel because of lack of lifeboats is truly awful.

The bombers attacking 'Changteh' were probably either a flight of Kawasaki Ki- 48, which had been primarily and widely used in the attacks on Singapore since December 1941,



Ki-38 bomber

- or a flight of Mitsubishi G3M bombers (known to the Allies as 'Nells') which were to be used in attacks on Sumatra,



Mitsubishi G3M bombers

Typically, Japanese bombers flew in formations of nine planes at a time in 'V' formation. Many reports of attacks at sea suggest the precision of the aim of Japanese bombers was not particularly good in the case of small, fast naval vessels but amongst the evacuation vessels their targets were often at anchor or relatively slow merchant or auxiliary vessels such as tugs or other work craft – nevertheless, even 'near misses' (as Puckridge comments) flung enough shrapnel to create damage to men and wooden decks or superstructures.



After firstly stating that **AC. Lincoln** had ***“Died of Wounds”*** inflicted during the bombing, Robert Puckridge also reported in another document addressed to ‘RAF, Ceylon’ in 1943, that he and three other survivors had compiled the following list of names of men ***“Wounded & Presumed Lost”*** [i.e., presumably the men who were either unconscious or sedated with administered ‘morphia’, plus other wounded they knew had gone down with the vessel].

- **AC. Tyrrel [sic]**
- **AC. Woods**
- **F/L Glendenning**
- **F/L White**
- **P/O Till**
- **P/O Ashley-Cooper**
- **L/Col. Burton, RAMC.**
- **Mr Ronald Forbes**
- **Captain of Chan Tee (not wounded)**

Puckridge also recalled that before abandoning ship *“... One lifeboat had put off after the first attack, and after the second and third, I threw all available tables and chairs overboard to help those in the water... ”*.

“...I swam 30-40 yards from the ship and turned around to look at it. 3 men whom I took to be the Colonel, the Captain and Ashly [sic] – Cooper, were getting on a small outboard motorboat. The ship then dipped its nose, listed over towards us and threw an odd assortment of goods into the water beside us. Among these was a watertight floating mattress (Kally Float) [he presumably meant a Carley Float, but he calls it a ‘floating mattress’ and Mrs Puckridge, in turn, later referred to it as a ‘Lilo’?] about 6’ x 3’, thrown within 15 yards of me. I got on to this and saw our ship roll over to nosedive and finally sink nose first.

The outboard motor-boat must have capsized, as after the ship had sunk it was nowhere to be seen. Colonel Burton, the Captain and Pilot Officer Ashly[sic] - Cooper must have been drowned after the motor-boat capsized, possibly due to the suction of the sinking ship ...”.

Again, his report to ‘RAF Ceylon’ Puckridge then lists the men they knew had ***“Drowned”***, this appears to include men who had reached the lifeboat which got away, but in the interpretation of the researcher, may have drowned whilst holding onto the raft or lifeboat during the days it took to reach safety in Sumatra

- **AC. Hickey**
- **AC. Rossiter**
- **LAC. Abbott**
- **LAC Stock**
- **Sgt Shears**
- **LAC Ellis**
- **LAC Blow**
- **AC. Owen**
- **AC. Sharman, W/Op Kallang.**

He also recorded that **‘Last Seen on a Raft’ was AC. Gray** – this must have been **AC 1 Fernley William Grey** – presumably this refers to the raft attached to the lifeboat and that he had somehow slipped overboard during the night.

Puckridge's account then resumes,

"... One lifeboat (overloaded) with a raft attached [in his letter to Mrs Forbes, Puckridge said there were initially about fifty people on this lifeboat and raft], was about 150 yards in front of where the ship sank. I could see no-one in the water, and my light float was drifting away at a fair speed. The signaller had got into a torpedo shaped float with a water paddle. I was picked up at 20.00 hrs that night, some three miles away from the lifeboat, the Signaller [in fact this person appears to have been Signaller Douglas 'Colin' Findlay, RNZNVR] at 21.00 hrs by a different ship. We were about 15 miles from an island in the Banka Straits. The life-boat was picked up 4 days later with 26 survivors [confusingly Puckridge said in his letter to Mrs Forbes that there were '56' survivors picked up from the lifeboat -- logic steers us to this being simply a 'typo' -- he also told her that Ronald Forbes was not among them because Puckridge met the large group of survivors whilst still in Sumatra. But he speculated to her that Forbes might have been "... one of four men who, the lifeboat survivors told him, swam for an island the boat could not reach, and they were never seen again] ...".

In the context of reports of survivors of the sinking, Robert Puckridge's separate report to 'RAF, Ceylon' records as *"... Last seen swimming for an Island..."* the following two men – **'LAC Thompson'** (presumably **LAC John Thomson of Glasgow**) and **'AC. Mercer'** (AC1 Shirley Mercer).

Insofar as **survivors who made it to Sumatra**, we have Puckridge's figure of 26 men in the lifeboat (it is not clear if the raft was still attached – probably not because a lifeboat would hold 26 men) plus;

- **'Robert' Puckridge** himself on what he calls his 'Kally Float' ['Carley Float'?). He was picked up at 8.00 pm that same day (after about 8 hours on his flotation device) by the auxiliary patrol vessel 'Hung Jao' (an ex-Yangtze River Customs boat) under Lt. Robin Henman, MRNVR – this small evacuation vessel had, since leaving Singapore, rescued many men from the sea from multiple sunk evacuation vessels (e.g., 'Shu Kwang') and it took Puckridge and others into the Indragiri river mouth by 9.00 am the following morning. Puckridge recorded " ... I was picked up off a floating mattress at 8 p.m. Sat 14 Feb. somewhere north of **Bakung**. We entered the Indragiri River at 9 a.m. 15th..." (p.71 'Singapore's Dunkirk'). By 6.00 pm they reached Tembilahan. **This a very important statement because it is one of only two records indicating where the 'Changteh' might have sunk – 'Pulau Bakung' may be the island 'Pulau Bakung Besar' which is at the northern end of the larger island named Pulau Lingga, which places the sinking at the northern end of the area marked in 'yellow' on the map a couple of pages further on in this document ['Pulau' means 'island']**.



A Carley Float - they came in many sizes - and that on 'Changteh' if Robert Puckridge described it correctly, was about 6' x3'.

- **Signalman Douglas Colin Findlay, RNZNVR**, who was picked up from the sea by 'HMS Malacca' (an ex-Yangtze River customs boat) at 9.00pm that same night and then, the following day, delivered with others to the river town of Tembilahan on the Indragiri River. He was also a survivor and to quote Lt. W.B. Nevis, MRNVR aboard 'HMS Malacca' on 14 February 1942 (page 153 from 'Singapore's Dunkirk') *"...That night we heard shouts to starboard and picked up Signalman Finlay, who had been drifting for hours on an Oropesa float. He was on 'Changtei', sunk by aircraft that afternoon. Hearing by W/T (Finlay [sic] on watch!) that Palembang was under attack, we decided to enter the Indragiri..."*; then also, the Sydney, Australia, based 'Malayan Research Bureau' Report # 45 tells us *"... The 'MALACCA' picked up the wireless operator from this ship [note this is researcher's underlining since this indicates it was not Peckham of the Royal Corps of Signals, but Findlay of RNZNVR] during the night of the 14th/15th February. He was on a float. He said he had seen the captain killed..."*



An Oropesa Float (used by Minesweepers to clear mines during WW2) on which Signalman Colin Findlay, RNZNVR, survived nine hours floating at sea before being picked up by 'HMS Malacca'.

Lt F.O.S 'Frank' Mann, RN on 'HMS Malacca', in his post war memoir, gives another, more complete, perspective on events during this period *"...Soon after darkness had fallen, we were signalled by two ships (that were afterwards identified as "Tenggaroh" and "Hung Sau" [sic – 'Huang Jao'] who told us that they were full of survivors (men and women) from two other ships that had been bombed and sunk that morning. They asked us for a position which we gave and as they had a large number of wounded on board, we advised them to try and make the Indragiri River with us the following morning, to which they agreed. We then carried on at slow speed. At approximately 22.30 a shout was heard in the darkness just off the starboard bow; the Aldis lamp was brought into action and picked out a figure sitting astride an Oropesa float. The ship was brought alongside, and the figure was identified as **Signalman Findlay R.N.Z.V.R.** a survivor of H.M.S. "Changteh". He stated that his ship had been bombed and sunk about 8 hours previously, that casualties were heavy and that he thought there were several more survivors floating nearby. We circled around for about an hour trying to find these survivors but without success, and we eventually gave up hope and carried on. At dawn on February 15th, we found ourselves at the mouth of the Kuala Lajau which is the southernmost arm of the Indragiri Delta. The entrance was very shallow, and we had no charts to help us; however, thanks to Providence, we managed to find our way up to the mouth without mishap. Here also we found a small Examination Station with two Malays in charge. We anchored here and sent a boat ashore to try and contact someone to pilot us up the river. The Malays were*

extremely obliging and helpful and were not at all put out by the motley crowd who had disturbed their peaceful existence. They got hold of the local “Kapala” or head man for us who agreed to pilot us as far as Lapat which was a small village about 15 miles further upstream. From there up to Tembilahan, which was the largest village in the district, we were left to our own devices. We accomplished this journey safely and arrived there at 16.30. “Tenggaroh” and the “Hung Sau” had followed all this time and at Tembilahan they discharged all their wounded, and we did the best we could to help them. Fortunately, there was one R.A.M.C. Doctor in the party who was not wounded, and he did a magnificent job with the very limited medical supplies at his disposal. He carried out twenty-seven [sic] amputations within four hours by candlelight and without the use of anaesthetic. His name was Lieut. Colonel Hurd-Wood, he had been in the Navy in the last war and commanded a Destroyer. On arrival at Tembilahan we discharged all the Military personnel we had brought out of Singapore, and we were very glad to get rid of them as they were a responsibility as well as a millstone round our necks. In this village we also learnt of the fate of various other ships that had left Singapore with us; these included the “Thu Kwang”, the “Kung Wo”, “Changteh” and “Kuala” all of them had been bombed and sunk. We also understood that there was still a vast number of survivors from these ships who had not been picked up but were still floating around in lifeboats or else stranded on small islands, amongst them some 200 women and children...”

- **Signalman Arthur Edward Peckham, Royal Signals** - as confirmed by both his section leader Sgt F.C. Bennett, Royal Corps of Signals who saw him in hospital at ‘Dyombie’ [which was probably the town of Djambi – now Jambi - in southern Sumatra] and by CQMS G. P. Wilson, G.P. By way of geographical perspective, Djambi is 100 km inland up the Djambi – now called Jambi – River and the mouth of the river is probably some 50 – 60 km across the sea from where the “Changteh” was sunk, so how Peckham reached Djambi must involve quite a story. Presumably he was picked up by another passing evacuation vessel [possibly even one of the incredibly slow, ponderous Singapore Harbour ‘water boats’ named ‘Daisy’ and/or ‘Heather’] which passed through the same area as ‘Changteh’ was sunk and successfully reached the Djambi River.
- *And, perhaps [because he states he saw Peckham in hospital in the place called ‘Dyombie / Djambi /or Jambi’, and later reported this fact in May 1943 to his ‘OC No. 2 Company, ‘R’ Ind. L. of C. Signals’], we can reasonably include as a passenger, **Sgt. (and later CQMS) Frederick Charles Bennett**, also 29th Construction Section, Royal Corps of Signals – CQMS Frederick Bennett died in Burma later during the war, on 14 March 1944.*

Puckridge’s list of those in the lifeboat is very incomplete but does record;

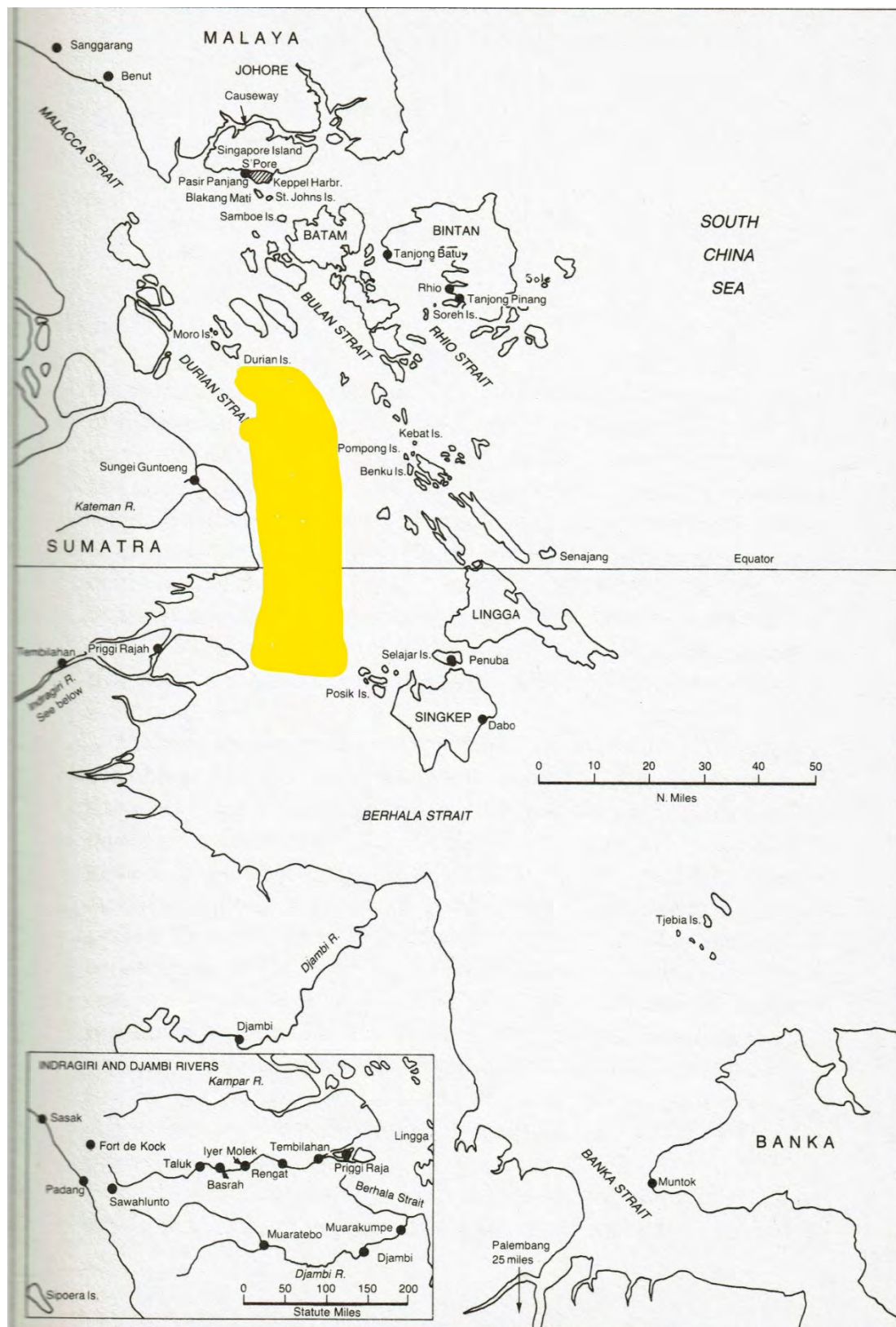
- “... **Chief Engineer of ‘Chan Tee’ (name unknown) ...**” - this probably refers to **Tpy Lt. Harold Hansen Holm, RNR** – who is mentioned in MRB Report #45 together with the fact that the lifeboat occupants were later transported upriver to Rengat (presumably from Tembilahan) by ‘TANGAROH’, this was in fact the ‘**Tenggaroh**’ the personal motor yacht (built by the Singapore Harbour Board in 1929) of the Sultan of Johore.



‘Tenggaroh’

The yacht ‘Tenggaroh’ was under the command of Lt. Peter Whitworth, MRNVR; in civilian life a 31-year-old schoolteacher with the Education Department in Malaya. In an official report it was later noted “... *in the handling of this small vessel, designed as a yacht for sheltered waters, Lt Whitworth displayed, in moments of emergency, cool judgement and resource...*”. This beautiful motor yacht (owned by Sultan Sir Ibrahim Al-Masyhur Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar Al-Khalil Ibrahim Shah (1873 – 1959), the 22nd Sultan of Johor, and who was reputedly, fabulously wealthy) was later scuttled up the Indragiri River because its fuel pump failed. It had on its last voyage, and as recorded by Lt Frank Man, rescued survivors from three other vessels.

The area where the ‘Changteh might have been sunk, estimated from the statement in the official ‘Prescription of Death’ for Sub. Lt Sidney Fisher, MRNVR which started “...**at the southern end of the Durian Straits...**” and the statement by Robert Puckridge that he was picked out of the sea by ‘Tenggaroh’ “... *somewhere north of Bakung...*” (Pulau Bakung is amongst the islands shown north east of Lingga) is marked in ‘yellow’ on the map below - this gives a perspective on where the sinking and the rescues were occurring.



Probable wreck site of 'HMT Changteh' – showing the mouth of Indragiri River to the west and the town of Djambi to south. Note also the bombers had probably attacked and sunk another evacuation ship 'SS Kuala' just to the northeast of the marked area – at Pom Pong Island.

The **survivors in the lifeboat** are recorded as having “...reached the coast in a grossly crowded lifeboat, it appears that many had died along the way. Men took it in turns to be towed behind the lifeboat and some had been 25 hours in the water and were suffering exposure...” (‘Singapore’s Dunkirk’ p.71). According to the records of the ‘Malayan Research Bureau’ in Australia (Report #45) the” ... boat had been so crowded that men had had to hang on to lifelines while they rowed. There were about forty of them all told but they lost a few along the way. The Air Force men [had] rushed it and upset it. [This suggests the lifeboat had then tipped up and spilled its occupants into the sea which might explain the circumstance of many Air Force men having ‘Drowned’ according to Robert Puckridge’s later report] *They were from New Zealand, Australia, and England. Several wounded from this ship were left behind at Rengat...*”. It is said that the lifeboat took four days to reach safety, presumably firstly making landfall and then struggling north or south along the eastern coast of Sumatra attempting to reach the mouth of the Indragiri River (and then upriver to Tembilahan), during which time it would have encountered endless miles of inhospitable, impenetrable mudflats and mangrove swamps. One man on board, the young **Assistant Cook Bruce Gaunson Taylor, RNZN** – who only a couple of weeks later would lose his life aboard an old British destroyer ‘HMS Stronghold’– was awarded the British Empire Medal for his” ... bravery and endurance in the Far East...” – this was a recognition for his service during this horror period in the lifeboat where some 20 men died of wounds, slipped off and drowned or tried to swim to passing islands , but were never seen again. He is said to have been one of those who, amongst what must have been hourly tests of endurance, searched for fresh water and food amongst the hostile environment of the mangroves.



Reality of Mangrove swamps

Puckridge also stated that the lifeboat survivors included “... **about 18 of the ship’s crew...**” these crewmen are unidentified by Puckridge - but are known from other sources to have included the abovementioned 19-year-old **Assistant Cook Bruce Taylor, RNZN**, from Dunedin, New Zealand - and no doubt there were a few Royal Navy ratings – as well as probably an unknown number of local Malay ratings of the MRNVR. In the context of the Malay crew, presumably one ‘**A.B. Kassim**’ who reported to the Navy that Sub. Lt. Craig and others were ‘Missing’ was also a crew member. Sadly, no real records of the movements and fate of these Malay sailors appears to have been compiled, even though they were usually classified as the ‘Malay branch of the Royal Navy’. The Japanese

tended not to imprison these Malay as POWs as a matter of course, so hopefully they made their way safely back to Malaya and Singapore.

Puckridge did however list the following passengers as “Survivors” in his letter to the ‘Malayan Research Bureau’ of 16.7.43 whilst he was with ‘RAF Ceylon’ – it was collated from three survivors by Puckridge,

- **Cpl. Malley**
- **LAC Jones**
- **AC. Suter**
- **LAC Byles**
- **LAC Brown**
- **LAC Walsh**
- **LAC Fanwick**
- **LAC Lander**
- **Sgt. Shave, R. Corps of Signals**

It has been hard to identify these specific men who are listed as on the lifeboat - some names appear to contain spelling errors – but the description that it included New Zealanders (possibly only Bruce Taylor but perhaps RNZAF men?) and Australian air force (RAAF) men is scope for further research.

The men in the lifeboat, with the raft initially trailing behind, spent four days without any/insufficient water or food whilst caring for many dead and dying comrades- it must have been a horrific and traumatic experience for the survivors because only 26 of the original 56 survived to reach Tembilahan. They struggled against the dense, impenetrable mudflats and mangroves that line the largely, at the time, uninhabited eastern shores of Sumatra.



“...Forty men escaped in the only undamaged boat, the proper complement of which was 22. After being nearly swamped in heavy weather, they reached land near the mouth of a river a few days later but found no fresh water. Thirty survivors were picked up next day. Aircraftmen Brown and Welsh never faltered throughout a severe ordeal and set a magnificent example to all the rest...” (RAF Commands.

So, the **casualties** from the bombing attack, and then the challenge of survival in the sea and on the lifeboat and the attached raft, were about **60 – 85 men out of the 90 – 115 men** who originally left Singapore – and **not many more than 25 men of the original complement survived POW camps and the battles of war.**

The Escape Route.

All the survivors - except for Signelman Peckham and possibly Sgt Bennett who appear to have been swept south by sea currents to near the Jambi River - would have made their way slowly across Sumatra, firstly upstream stopping at the small towns of Tembilahan and Rengat on the Indragiri River, then to Sawah Lunto (an old Dutch mining town) across the mountains on the west coast and by train down to the plains on the west coast and Padang.



Rengat on the Indragiri River (old photo)

The Indragiri River is 500 km in length and its origin is in the mountain range of the west coast of Sumatra. On the west coast lies the town of Padang which had become the main departure point for evacuees from Singapore.



Indragiri River



Padang

Once they arrived in the pretty Dutch town of Padang there was good military organisation allocating the thousands of servicemen and civilians from Singapore men onto rescue vessels bound for Java or Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), as they arrived in order of arrival. Boarding the ships entailed a short train ride out to the port of 'Emmahaven'.



'Emmahaven'

Broadly, we are told **Peckham, Malley, Jones, and Suter** were "Left in Sumatra'. **Peckham** was wounded and in a hospital in 'Dyombie/Djambi/Jambi' but ended up a POW in Pekanbaru, possibly after the fall of Padang; **Malley** has not been identified, **Jones could be LAC E.L. Jones** who became part of the 'Sumatra Battalion' after the capture of Padang by the Japanese on 17 March 1942; and **Suter is Aircraftsman 2nd Class Percival Rudolf Suter, RAFVR**, who was also captured by the Japanese in Padang on 17 March 1942 but who then became a POW on the horrendous 'Sumatra Death railway, building and tragically died in a camp hospital at Pekanbaru about ten days before the Japanese surrendered in August 1945.

Some of the survivors of the sinking (one was **19 year old Assistant Cook Bruce Gaunson Taylor, RNZN**) transhipped from Padang in Sumatra to Tjilatjap and Batavia in Java on vessels such as 'HMS Danae', 'SS Dumayer van twist' and 'SS Zaandam' – as did many servicemen and civilian evacuees

from Singapore – some only to lose their life in battles around Java (young **Bruce Taylor, RNZN**, boarded ‘HMS Stronghold’, possibly at Tjilatjap, and lost his life when the ship was attacked by a powerful Japanese naval force of three Cruisers and two Destroyers on 2 March 1942, whilst fleeing from Tjilichap to Australia) or become POWs when Java fell on 8 March 1942. Others like LAC William ‘Biles’ (sic: Byles) reached Java but was captured by the Japanese and endured years of harsh POW camps to return to England.

It appears that **Harold Hansen Holm** achieved this Java leg of the journey but successfully continued to Australia, where he worked for a few months at a naval base in Melbourne before returning to Britain, re-joining the Royal Navy, being promoted to Acting Temporary Lieutenant Commander (E) and serving during the remainder of the War in a training base in Egypt.

Sgt. W. A. Shave, Royal Corps of Signals was one of those who successfully escaped to Ceylon (presumably from Padang?), as did **Robert Puckridge**, who re-joined the RAF and was able to report some details of survivors to headquarters. **Signalman Colin Findlay** also reached Ceylon and underwent intensive training in South Africa, becoming a Signals Officer and serving in a what appears to have been a secret coastal boat operation out of Alexandria, Egypt during 1944-45.

Once safely in either Ceylon, Australia (or one of their next postings) several of the survivors are known to have written to the friends and widows of men who lost their lives during or after the bombing attack on ‘Changteh’ – Lt. Cdr. (E) Harold Hansen Holm wrote from Alexandria to a friend explaining that Jimmy Craig had been “... *badly hit and must be presumed dead...*” and “... *Fisher... had been seen on a small raft... standing up, so he could not have been badly wounded, if wounded at all...all those on rafts and light wreckage drifted away from us ...so we lost touch with them... I feel very sorry for Mrs. Fisher who I believe is now serving in the W.R.N.S....*”, and Robert Puckridge wrote to Mrs Forbes as mentioned above.

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Anyone who has corrections, amendments, clarifications or additional material on the events, the crew, or passengers of ‘Changteh’ is most welcome to contact the researcher and compiler of this document: Michael Pether, 2/23 Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland, 0622, New Zealand. Email is mncpether@gmail.com. Telephone number is New Zealand 09-4865754 or mobile New Zealand 0274543695.

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.

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- **Nzetc.victoria.ac** – History of New Zealand in WW2
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- **Wrecksite.eu**

Crew (researched list):

- **CRAIG – Sub Lieutenant James 'Jimmy' Leslie Craig, MRNVR.** *"... Born 1899. To Malaya 1923. Planter, Reading Estate, Selangor till 1937 then Jenderak Estate near Kuala Lipis, Pahang. Sub – Lt MRNVR Lost at sea 14.2.42 on the Chang Tee. Wife Elsie evacuated to Aberdeenshire..."* (JMM). 'Jimmy' Craig was the Captain of 'Changteh' and one database has him in the Straits Settlement Volunteer Naval Reserve. He appears in the 1901 census of Scotland living (as a toddler) at Canongate, Edinburgh and first travelled from London to Singapore in 1923. With a top speed of only eight knots and width of 26 feet the vessel would have been relatively easy target for Japanese bombers in broad daylight in the open sea. Both a one-line report by AB. Kassim, MRNVR, and a post wartime schedule of Royal Navy Casualties in the UK Archives records him as Captain of 'Changteh' – but it is otherwise difficult to verify this role. His role as captain of 'Changteh' is also recorded by a respected researcher of Malayan Volunteers, the late Mr John Brown. Several books and other records state that the captain of this vessel is unknown, and we are left with the very perplexing statement by Robert Puckridge (himself a rubber planter) recording he did not know that another Selangor rubber planter was in command of the vessel. The official record of his death is **Lieutenant James Leslie Craig, MRNVR** died 14.2.42. Wife Elsie M. Craig of Cults, Aberdeenshire. He is memorialised on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 97, Col. 3 (CWGC). No mention of Jimmy Craig has been found in the archives of Singapore and Malayan pre-war newspapers.
- **FINDLAY -Signalman Douglas Colin Findlay, # A/1487, RNZNVR or RNVR (NZ).** Colin Findlay was born on 1.4.20 in Auckland, the only son of Dougall (who had a hairdresser and tobacconists' business) and Nellie Findlay, and grew up in John Street, Ponsonby, Auckland. He attended Bayswater School and then Seddon Technical College. Colin passed his 'School Certificate' exam in 1936 which was promptly followed by successfully passing Accountancy exams in 1937 and 1938. As a young Accountant from the greater Auckland area in New Zealand he was mobilised into the RNZNVR as an Ordinary Signalman on 25.2.40 and immediately joined other naval ratings in training on the ancient, obsolete New Zealand warship 'HMS Philomel' (at permanent anchorage at the naval base in Auckland harbour) where he was soon promoted to Signalman. During 1940 he gained Radio and (possibly Radar) experience at the RNZN shore station at 'Tiri Tiri' and on several occasions aboard the naval launch 'ML Wirihana'. In June 1941 he was posted overseas to 'HMS Sultan' the shore

base in Singapore, with a seagoing assignment of several months on 'HMS Mauritius' [a Crown Colony-type light cruiser launched in 1941 but located in Singapore to redress a few technical hull and 'magnetism' issues] whilst it was based in Singapore in August 1941. [Interestingly another young RNZN Signalman, Brendan McHugh, was also serving on 'HMS Mauritius' at that time – he tragically lost his life a few months later in February 1942 whilst severely wounded on a raft after the sinking of another evacuation vessel, 'SS Tandjong Pinang', on almost the same date and in similar area as that where the 'Changteh' survivors were struggling to survive in the sea]. After a few weeks back on land with 'HMS Sultan', Douglas was sent to Ceylon and attached to 'HMS Lanka', the shore base in Colombo, and then returned to Singapore, where sometime after the Japanese invasion he would have been hurriedly assigned to 'Changteh' for the evacuation. As with all naval personnel assigned to evacuation vessels during the chaotic week before the evacuation (and the Surrender to the Japanese) no official records remain - it is understandable that RNZN records do not detail the gap between the time Colin Findlay finished at 'HMS Lanka' on 20.1.42, returning to Singapore and him being formally assigned to the RN sloop 'HMS Falmouth' (presumably in Colombo) a year later in 1943. The official 'New Zealand History of the Second World War' gives us a glimpse of his experiences *"... Sub -Lieutenant D.C. Findlay and Assistant Cook B.G. Taylor were on board 'HMS Changteh' when she was sunk after leaving Singapore About forty men got away in a lifeboat ... They were suffering from hunger and exposure when they arrived at Rengat... where they found Findlay and others... The whole party were taken to Padang, where they embarked in 'HMS Danae' for Tjilatjap in Java..."*. The context of his experience during this period is of course in the main narrative of this document. The journey taken by Colin Findlay up the Indragiri River, across Sumatra and then embarking from Padang in Sumatra to Ceylon can only be conjectured, but his official RNZN service record is essentially 'blank' because some Defence Force clerk in Wellington, NZ., has simply made his transition seamless. His next assignment was to the Royal Navy sloop 'HMS Falmouth' had already been serving in the waters around Singapore and the Dutch East Indies for several months during 1941-42 and had then accompanied Convoy SJ1 from Tjilatjap on the last stretch of its voyage into Colombo on 21 February 1942. Douglas was promoted to Acting Leading Signalman once he joined 'HMS Falmouth' in Ceylon- probably about May 1942- and after participating in exercises with other RN ship during July 1942 he was clearly recognised as ready for promotion and left that ship in 1943 to join the 'Central Drafting Pool and Training camp' at the onshore 'HMS Assegai', in Durban, South Africa. Six months later he had been commissioned as Ty. Acting Sub- Lieutenant and was sent for two weeks to 'HMS Good Hope', which was another *"...stone ship..."*, or land-based Naval Officer training base, located at Sea View, a few kilometres outside of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. [It was situated in a newly built luxury hotel, The Seaview Hotel, and had a golf course, a tidal swimming pool and a tennis court. It was started in 1942 by the Royal Navy and was the only facility outside of the UK where men from all over the British Commonwealth could be trained for a commission in the RNVR.]. Then back to 'HMS Assegai' and after a few months shipped to 'HMS Nile' another shore establishment (albeit very rudimentary under tents) at 'Ras el Tin Point' near Alexandria in Egypt. It appears he was being well trained and prepared for the confidential 'Special Operations' unit of the Royal Navy located there - becoming part of the crew of Fairmile 'B' Class launches HMML 862 and 863 on unknown duties. Finally, for his active service, he was assigned for duties at what appears to be another immediately neighbouring shore base in Alexandria, 'HMS Mosquito', which was the repair base and base for coastal forces boats in Mediterranean attack and clean-up operations. This tour of duty finished in April 1945, and he then returned to training depots in New Zealand, firstly 'HMS Cook' in Wellington and finally to where it all started, 'HMS Philomel' in Auckland. The 'Mentioned in Despatches' Douglas was awarded in 1945 was for 'Services in War in Europe'. He was discharged from

the RNZNVR in November 1945 and in 1947 married Natalie Dawson from Rotorua. They went to live in Kawakawa in the Bay of Islands where Colin became the Town Clerk. The family moved to Whangarei in 1951 where Colin became a partner in the successful firm of Chartered Accountants 'Foster, Findlay and Hewitt' – whilst also enjoying his leisure pursuit of golf at Waitangi and his interest in horse racing at the Bay of Islands Racing Club. After Natalie's death in 1982 Colin remarried Helen and moved to Auckland, where he passed away in 2001 and is buried at the Waikumete cemetery in Auckland. (Sources include the much-appreciated background provided by Colin's daughter Trisha Findlay.)

- **FISHER – Sub Lieutenant Sidney John Fisher, MRNVR.** “... Born 1911 Southwark. His father a printer there then in Southend-on-Sea. Arrived in Singapore on P & O steamer ‘Corfu’ in June 1936 (‘Malaya Tribune’ 8.6.36) S.J. Fisher was appointed Composing Room Superintendent, Govt. Printing Offices, FMS, Kuala Lumpur from 7.1936 (‘Straits Times’ 4.7.36). Wife Alma Joyce, a Signalwoman with FMSVF. Sub-Lt MRNVR lost at sea on the tug *Chengteh* 14.2.42 *Durian Straits*. A report of his death in ADM358/584. Alma was evacuated on the ‘*Empress of Japan*’, arriving in Liverpool 3.42. She returned home to Enfield, joined the Wrens, and returned to Singapore as a Secretary 1946 and married E. M. McDonald...” (JMM and Singapore newspaper archives). Sidney Fisher married Alma Overall on 20.4.40 at St Matthews Church, Ponders End, Middlesex on one of his ‘home leaves’ and they returned to live in Kuala Lumpur, until the Japanese invaded in 1941. Sidney joined the FMSVF Light Battery before at some stage switching to the MRNVR. After the invasion in northern Malaya, Alma was evacuated south from Kuala Lumpur, travelling with a friend Jo Ker Cooper to Singapore to board the ‘*Empress of Japan*’ to safety in the UK. The last, heartfelt and loving letter from Sidney to Alma was written on 8.2.42 (the day the Japanese landed on Singapore Island) and he mentions he is aboard a vessel - a ‘coal burning’ vessel which does not sound like the ‘*Changteh*’ – so he presumably was assigned to ‘*Changteh*’ at the last minute before the evacuation on 13.2.42, as alluded to by Harold Holm who said in a letter to a ‘Mr Wilson’ that “... *Fisher had only been with us a few days but we liked him...*”. The full text of Holm’s letter was,

H.M.S. “*Saunders*”,
c/o F.M.O. Alexandria
29th May 1944.

Dear Mr Wilson,

*I have just received your letter of Feb 20th. As you will agree the whole subject is painful to me, especially as Jimmy Craig was a great friend of mine. Fisher had only been with us a few days, but we liked him. I can only give you the information that was in my report to the Admiralty. Jimmy was badly hit and must be presumed dead, **Fisher according to enquiries I made after getting to the one boat afloat an hour after the sinking; had been seen on a small raft, and, according to our man, standing up, so he could not have been badly wounded, if wounded at all.** All those on rafts and light wreckage drifted rapidly away from us, as we were waterlogged and had 40 men in and around the boat, all wounded, so we lost touch with them. We lasted a number of days without food and water before getting ashore in Sumatra, so there is a possibility of anyone not badly hurt, having drifted to an island, being still alive there, for as you know, most islands in that area have cocoanuts and suchlike growing, sufficient to feed people. This is all very unsatisfactory to relations, but optimism or pessimism are matters for the individual. I feel very sorry for Mrs. Fisher who I believe is now serving in the W.R.N.S. in my area.*

Yours sincerely,
Signed: - H/H/Holm
Lt. Cdr. (E) R.N.R.

There are many tiny, uninhabited islands in the Rho and Lingga Archipelagos, probably nothing edible for a city conditioned European and Malaria mosquitoes are rife so the chances of survival of a man by himself would have been slim. The official record confirms Sub Lt Fisher lost his life on 14 February 1942 and, reflecting the post war nature of the record at the CWGC, it says that he was the husband of A. J. (Alma) McDonald (nee Fisher),

also that he is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval memorial, Panel 98, Column 1 (CWGC).

- **HOLM – Temporary Lieutenant Harold Hansen Holm.** “... Born 1903 Tynemouth and to Malaya 1934 where Chief Engineer, Changkai Tin Dredging, Rawang, Selangor. Wife Marjorie evacuated. He left Singapore on Chang the [sunk 14.2.42]. Arrived Rengat on ‘Tengarroh’. Reached Padang and eventually Australia. Worked at Lonsdale Naval depot, port Melbourne then returned to UK. Died 1973 Tynemouth...” (JMM). The first mention of him in Singapore newspapers was in 1934 when he and Marjorie must have been arriving in Malaya for the first time and were reported as on the P. & O. ‘Mantua’ from Europe bound for Penang; then in 1935 it was reported in the ‘Straits Times’ (6.11.35) That “...on October 24 at General Hospital Sandakan, British North Borneo, to Marjorie, wife of H.H. Holm a son...” - this must have been Morris Holm (1935-2001). A few years later there is an advertisement in the ‘Malaya Tribune’ (28.4.38) of an auction of “... household furniture, golf clubs, wine decanters, crockery, an HMV Gramophone – the property of Mr. H.H. Holm of the Straits Steamship Co. Ltd at No.322 TAMAGAWA Gardens on Saturday 30 April...”. Finally, in the ‘Straits Times’ (25.4.39) is the classified “... HOLM – on April 9 at Tynemouth Maternity Hospital to Marjorie, wife of H.H. Holm, a son...”. It is not clear whether Harold joined the RNR/RNVR/MRNVR in the period 1940-42 when volunteering became compulsory for men in Malaya and Singapore who were between the ages of 18 and 40 years and not in ‘war critical’ occupations - but Robert Puckridge’s report written in Ceylon in July 1943 states “... Chief Engineer of Chan Tee (name unknown) ...” and “... The Engineer Officer got through to Sumatra where I saw him. As LAC. Brown (and I hear Walsh also) got a BEM., I presume the Engineer Officer got home to make his recommendation...”. By elimination it appears that Harold Holm was the ‘Engineer Officer’ referred to by Puckridge in his report on ‘Changteh’. As stated above Harold reached Padang and then Australia where his feedback to the ‘Malayan Research Bureau’ (contained in Report No. 45) was “... HOLM, an Engineer, arrived in Australia and worked at the Lonsdale Depot of the Navy before going back to England. He was from the ‘CHANG THE’. HOLM had had a boat [the lifeboat after the sinking] and crew and some RAF and arrived in the ‘TANGAROH’ [sic] at Renggat [sic]. His boat had been so crowded that men had to hang on to lifelines while they rowed. There were about forty of them all told but they lost a few along the way. The Air Force men rushed it and upset it. They were from New Zealand, Australia, and England. Several wounded from this ship were left behind at Renggat...”. After a few months in Australia Harold Holm was sent back to Britain in May 1942 and his journey would have been very similar to that recorded by fellow traveller Lt. F. O. S. ‘Frank’ Man, RN, DSC.” ... It was eventually decided by R.A.N.B. (Royal Australian Naval Board) after about a month of waiting, that all officers and men who had been in the tropics and away from England for a period longer than 3 years should be allowed to return there. The remainder were either shipped straight off to Colombo to carry on their Naval duties there or were incorporated in the Australian Navy. ... I had been in Malaya without a break since October 1936 and therefore qualified to return to England for which I was more than thankful ... We embarked aboard the S.S. “Ceramic” (above) at midday the following day, Saturday May 16th. Our fellow travellers consisted of a Naval draft of 10 officers and 150 ratings also a draft of about 200 ranks of the R.A.A.F., all of us destined for England. There were no women on board. The “Ceramic” was a single-funnelled cabin-class ship of about 18,000 tons, twin screw and capable of a maximum speed of about 14 knots. Her main drawback was that she was a coal-burner. She was built on the Clyde in 1912. ...She was the flag-ship of the Shaw-Savill and Albion Line. ... I shared a cabin on board with two other Naval officers – Lieutenant W. B. Bevis R.N.V.R., whom I have already mentioned, and

Lieutenant (E) H. H. Holm R.N.R. ... Holm was picked up by us [Lt. Man had been on 'HMS Malacca'] off the coast of Sumatra after his ship had been sunk, he was slightly wounded and had literally lost everything he possessed including his clothes. When we picked him up, he had been in the water for nearly two days stark naked. He also was a married man and had two children, all his family were safe in England. We sailed from Sydney at half past one on the afternoon of Saturday May 16th. It was a glorious day and we stood on the foc'sle [sic] and watched the ship make her way down harbour and out through the Heads, it was a wonderful sight. **The cabin I shared with Bevis and Holm was roomy and comfortable, there was also a private bathroom attached so we lived in comparative luxury.** Apart from divisions and P.T. in the mornings we had all day to ourselves, and it was not easy to keep everyone amused although the Australian Comforts Fund had been extremely generous to us and supplied all manner of deck games including several medicine balls which were very popular. They had also supplied everybody with a small canvas bag containing warm clothing, razor blades, soap, and two handkerchiefs; in addition to this they provided each man with a sheepskin waistcoat which was a God-send to all of us during the cold weather. Our destination was unknown to us, and it was not until we had been two days out of Sydney that we were informed that our first port of call would be Lyttleton in the South Island of New Zealand. Early on the morning of Wednesday May 20th we sighted land. ... [after leaving New Zealand] ... **In the evenings after dinner, I used to play Bridge with Bevis, Black and Holm; I had never played before but became quite a fiend towards the end of the journey.** During the day we played deck-games and read books, there was a very good library on board.... [then the ship headed for the Suez Canal] ... The weather was now extremely hot, in fact very much hotter than anything I had experienced in Malaya or the East Indies. At times it was almost unbearable especially below decks, even at night-time it was very seldom cool. The humidity appeared to be even greater than in Singapore. Colon itself is not a very imposing town, at least I can only judge from the little I saw of it; being a large coaling port it is not easy to keep clean and added to this are of course the old-fashioned ideas of sanitary arrangements still used by the local inhabitants.... **I went ashore in the evening with Bevis and Holm, we had dinner at the American Club which seemed to be the only respectable place in town.** We drank Pabst beer out of tins and plenty of it. I found it exceptionally good. We then went on a typical tourists' journey of the local night life, visiting about four different night clubs ... We returned on board at midnight to find the ship practically deserted, a few hours later people began to drift back in various states of intoxication. On the whole none of the draft misbehaved themselves although one member of the R.A.A.F. was stabbed slightly and spent the night in jail. It was impossible to sleep on deck now owing to the ship coaling all night, and there was coal-dust everywhere.... Early on the morning of July 24th we arrived at New York and anchored between Staten Island and Governor's Island, a hot and misty morning. At 6 o'clock in the evening we weighed anchor and proceeded up stream into the harbour. This short trip up New York harbour in the twilight is the most beautiful trip I have ever done.... We tied up at No. 52 pier at half past eight, no shore leave was granted. The following morning everyone was as keen as mustard to get ashore, but there were endless arrangements to be made over passes, money, and customs; these finally arrived at 1 p.m. so we were able to step ashore before the shops closed **I stepped ashore that afternoon with Bevis and Holm, our first object was shopping so we got on the first bus, paid a nickel – for which you can travel anywhere in New York – and proceeded up 8th Avenue to the shopping centre...I made a few purchases but had to spend a great deal of time watching Bevis and Holm buying "Undies" and "Scanties" for their respective wives, I think they did so more in the way of a peace offering than anything else. ... At 1200 on Sunday August 2nd**

we slipped and put to sea on the last leg of our long voyage. The convoy formed up slowly at slow speed as a thick fog had settle down. There were 30 ships all told. By August 4th the fog had cleared, and the weather was fine, the convoy was in good formation and most ships carried out a firing practice. Thick fog came down again the next day, visibility about ½ cable and no other ships could be seen, station was kept on fog buoys streamed astern by all ships. Two ships lost the convoy that afternoon to proceed to St. Johns, Newfoundland, and were torpedoed before they reached their destination, not very heartening news for the rest of us. The fog finally cleared on August 7th and apart from two bad stragglers they were in good position. Various practice manoeuvres were carried out and smoke screens were laid down all very efficiently. The coast of Ireland was finally sighted on the morning of Thursday, August 23 13th. At 2 p.m. on Friday, August 14th we berthed alongside at Liverpool and after a very quick dispersal we caught the London train, and I was home again once more at 12.30 that night....". Harold Holm remained in the Navy during the war and in 1944 was recorded - in the Admiralty Fleet Orders 31.3.44 - as an Acting Temporary Lt. Cmdr. (E) and Engineering Officer, RNR (Temporary) with the Royal Navy Combined Training Centre Middle East (at Little Bitter Lake in Egypt at the entrance to the Suez Canal).

- **KASSIM** – A.B. Kassim, MRNVR, reported to the Navy during the war that “... Sub. Lt Craig, MRNVR. And a Lieutenant and Sub Lt MRNVR. Whose names are not known...” were ‘Missing’. The unknown ‘Sub. Lt’ was presumably Sidney Fisher, but the identity of the ‘Lieutenant’ is unclear (possibly Harold Holm or Puckridge wearing a uniform?).
- **TAYLOR** – **Assistant Cook Bruce Gaunson, # 3093, RNZN** was born on 18.1.23, the son of Frank and Jane Noblet Taylor (nee Proctor) of 11 Torquay Street, Abbotsford, Dunedin, New Zealand. He had several siblings including two older brothers Thomas Edgar Taylor (b.1915) and Walter Renwick Taylor (b.1919). Little is known of his early life apart from him being a competitive athlete in ‘one mile’ races, aged 16 years, at the Caversham Club, Dunedin, in 1939 and him facing charges of ‘Mischief’; in the Dunedin Magistrates Court in March 1941 along with two other young men for breaking streetlamp lightbulbs in Green Island, Dunedin, by throwing stones (no conviction was entered but they had to pay for the lightbulbs). Soon after that (16.5.41), aged 19 years, he enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Navy as an Assistant Cook and began training at Auckland shore base ‘HMS Tamaki’ until August that year when he was shipped to shore base ‘HMS Sultan’ in Singapore. Nothing is known of Bruce Taylor as a young naval rating in Singapore after he arrived there on 12.9.41. Like all non-attached naval personnel in Singapore at that time, he was no doubt hurriedly, and without any official record being made, assigned from ‘HMS Sultan’ to an evacuation vessel – in his case ‘Changteh’ as either a crew member or passenger during the chaotic evacuation of Singapore. So Bruce Taylor, aged 19 years with no wartime experience, endured and survived the bombing and sinking of ‘Changteh’ and was one of those who escaped on the overcrowded lifeboat and raft - it seems that it was his performance during the following four days as one of the men (many of whom were wounded and dying) in the lifeboat that saw him being recommended for recognition – which came in the form of him being awarded the British Empire medal in November 1942 [it was in 1943 that Mr & Mrs F. Taylor met the Governor General of New Zealand, Sir Cyril Newall, at Wains Hotel, Dunedin, where he presented them with their son’s BEM – Bruce Taylor was still at that time classified as ‘Officially Missing’]. Bruce Taylor would have travelled up the Indragiri River and across the mountains of Sumatra to the west coast port town of Padang, - where he was probably amongst the group of ‘Changteh’ survivors who were taken by ship to either the Java port of Tjilatjap on the south coast or Tanjong Priok at Batavia on the north coast.[Some references say they travelled on ‘HMS Danae’ but according to naval-history.net ‘HMS Danae’ left Padang’s post of Emmahaven on 20 February 1942 which would have made it

physically impossible for lifeboat survivors of 'Changteh' to have reached Emmahaven in time.] Nevertheless, Bruce Taylor reached either Tanjong Priok or Tjilatjap in time to connect with the First World War Era Royal Navy destroyer 'HMS Stronghold' and be taken on board either as crew or as a passenger before it left. One source, a Mr. B. Laurenson of RAN Armaments Depot who evacuated on another vessel from Singapore and reached Padang, tells us something that almost certainly applies to Bruce Taylor *"... At Padang the party received 20 guilders each – the Straits dollar was of no value... On the night of the 23rd [of February] the naval party embarked on the Dutch steamer 'VAN TWIST' [sic: 'Dumayer van Twist'] for Java. The next six days were very bad. Half starved – living on boiled rice and herrings – in a ship packed to excess. Eventually the port of Tjilichap was reached on the 1st of March. No passengers were allowed ashore until 1600 when half of the Naval Party including Mr Harrower and myself, were detailed to go on board the 'Stronghold'. Just before she sailed it was decided to transfer the Admiralty Civil Staff to a Dutch liner 'Zaandam'. The 'Stronghold' went alongside, and the transfer was carried out ['HMS Stronghold' was attacked the following morning by Japanese warships and sunk with many lives lost] ...".* (RAN Armament Depots – 'A Singapore Story - 1942' account of Mr B. Laurenson). 'HMS Stronghold' had departed Tanjong Priok in Batavia on 26 February as an escort to the steamer 'Ashridge' through the Sunda Strait, before entering the port at Tjilatjap. Bruce Taylor presumably boarded 'HMS Stronghold' in the transfer reported by Laurenson on 1st March [on board he would have found a small group of Royal New Zealand Navy ratings 19 year old AB Aubrey Kenny and AB Joseph Murphy (both of whom would survive the sinking of 'HMS Stronghold' and endured years of horrendous existence as a POW in Macassar), plus Stokers Joseph Oliver, 20 year old Malcolm Morton, and Ralph Rothwell together with Lt Ronald Gunn, RNZNVR, (all of whom would lose their lives in the sinking of 'HMS Stronghold')]. The old destroyer then left Tjilatjap as the escort to the Dutch 'SS Zaandam' loaded with refugees bound for Fremantle, Australia. Soon after it detached itself (for an unknown reason) from that much more modern (1939), fast merchant ship and 'HMS Stronghold' was sighted by Japanese aircraft." *... On 2 March 1942 a Japanese task group consisting of the heavy cruiser Maya and the destroyers Arashi and Nowaki, belonging to a Japanese carrier force operating S of Java, discovered and sank HMS STRONGHOLD (Lt.Cdr. G.R. Pretor Pinney, R.N.), fleeing from Tjilatjap to Australia. STRONGHOLD sank at 1858 hours at position 12°20'S, 112°00'E. About fifty survivors were picked up by the (captured) small Dutch merchant Bintoehan that later transferred them to Maya..."* (www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?37361). **Bruce Gaunson Taylor, RNZN, aged 19 years of Dunedin** was one of the 82 men who lost their life that day – 37 crew and 13 'evacuees' from Java were later picked up by the 'SS Bintoehan' but it too was then captured by the Japanese cruiser 'Maya' and those men became POWs.

- **UNKNOWN crew members – it is assumed that there were possibly up to 20 other Royal Navy and Malay Division Royal Navy men as crew as well. They would have included some who lost their lives and then about 15 other survivors in the lifeboat/raft which reached Tembilahan. Regrettably it has not been possible to ascertain who the men were – the deaths listed in the online CWGC records do not specify 'Changteh'.**

Passengers (researched list):

- **ABBOTT / ABBOTTS – "... LAC Abbott was Drowned..."** according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This was presumably [because he was the only RAF serviceman with the name Abbott or Abbotts to die in Singapore] **Aircraftsman 1st Class George Abbotts, # 1159570, RAFVR** – although the CWGC records say he died on 16.2.42, so it must have been from the

lifeboat. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 417, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC).

- ASHLEY – COOPER - Flying Officer Thomas George Duncan Ashley- Cooper, #11629, MVAF/RAFVR.** Thomas George Duncan Ashley-Cooper was the son of Thomas and Freda Ashley -Cooper and" ... *born in 1907 in France. Educated Christ's Hospital* [an ancient school initially established in London in 1552 for poor children, and which relocated to Horsham, West Sussex in 1902] *and King's College, London. Travelled from London to Malaya in 1928 to take up an appointment as Customs Probationer FMS. By 1940 HM Customs & Excise Dept: Senior Customs Officer, Tobacco & Revenue Branch, Railway Goods Shed, KL. An outstanding cricketer in Malaya, at one stage being part of what was known as 'TGDA Cooper's XI' at the Singapore Cricket Club. Married Marjorie Elfreda Gale 11.39 Singapore. He was Pilot Officer MVAF. Marjorie, aged 21, evacuated with son Anthony* [born 1939 and died 1944 in the UK] *to India then on the 'Britannic' from Bombay, arriving in Glasgow 23.4.42. To Halsemere. She later took up a government position in the Far East. He was lost at sea 14.2.42 aged 34 years, following sinking of the 'Chang Tee'. (JMM).* T.G.D. Ashley-Cooper first came to prominence as a very talented cricketer in 1932 playing for Perak State and a few years later had also represented the State of Selangor (he was Captain of the Selangor Club XI) and then the 'Federated Malay States'. He had been appointed an Assistant Comptroller of Customs in 1931 at a salary of \$6300 p.a. ('Blue Book' annual government record of Singapore) and in 1936 was with the Seremban Customs Department. At about that time he is increasingly reported being involved in amateur theatrical shows with the 'Singapore Repertory Players' and over the next five years is regularly reported as participating at a new show every few months – just prior to the war the Governor of Singapore and his wife were attending these performances. The year after they married Marjorie is reported giving birth to their son, Anthony, at Singapore Maternity Hospital ('Straits Budget' 17.10.40) although sadly Anthony died in 1944 in the UK. Marjorie Ashley-Cooper (nee Gale) was born in 1920 to Reginald Henry Gale (a British Rubber Planter and later Manager of Anglo- French Trading Co. Ltd in Kuala Lumpur) and Elfreda Florence (nee Suter) from a British family long established in colonial Malaya, and they married at St Andrews Cathedral, Singapore in 1939. T.G.D. Ashley- Cooper as he appears to have been generally referred to. was categorised as "... *wounded, presumed lost...*" in Puckridge's report but his letter to Mrs Forbes in 1943 tells us that ".... *The captain said the ship was going to sink shortly, more morphia was given to those conscious, the other lifeboats were useless as we lowered them and they sank, so as the ship listed the captain, doctor (Colonel Burton), P/O Ashley Cooper (from the FMS Customs) dived down from the bow and a signaller* [this was Colin Findlay, RNZNVR] *and I dived over from amidships. The ship rolled nose first, then towards us, and threw out a lot more stuff, including a 6 x 3 water-tight mattress near me. I got on to this and saw Captain, Doc and A. Cooper getting into a small boat. The ship then sank and took the three in the boat with it....*". The official record is Flying Officer Thomas George Duncan Ashley-Cooper, RAFVR, aged 34 years died on 14.2.42, he was the son of Thomas and Freda Ashley Cooper and husband of Marjorie Elfreda Ashley Cooper of Cowplain, Hampshire. Remembered on Column 412, Singapore Memorial, Kranji War cemetery (CWGC). T.G.D. Ashley -Cooper is also memorialised on the 'Roll of Honour' of his old school, Christ's Hospital, Sussex. After the war Marjorie bore a second son named Christopher Charles Ashley- Cooper (1946 – 2012 buried in St. Mewan, Cornwall), and she married Richard Dennis Lucien Kelly (1916-1990). She died in 1960 aged 40 years.

- **AVIS** – “... Aircraftsman 1st Class Frank Avis, #1074066, RAFVR died 14.2.42 aged 21 years, son of Florence Avis of Brighton, Sussex...” (CWGC) is thought to have been aboard - source Jon Heyworth, RAF Commands.
- **BARKER** – “Signalman Barker was with me, attached to the RAF. On leaving Singapore arrived at the docks, our party was split. Sigm. Manson, **Sigm. Barker**, Sigm. Peckham and myself boarded one boat ... The three men were with me until our boat was sunk. The only one I have heard of is Sigm. Peckham...” (W.A. Shave, CQMS, Ceylon Army signals. 16.8.43). This appears to be [although the date of death seems to be the CWGC practice of using the last report of a sighting as a date of death] **Signalman Alfred Henry Barker, # 2324697, 29 Construction Section, Royal Corps of Signals**, died 13.2.42, son of Alfred and Sarah Ann Barker: husband of Rosamund Winifred Barker of Weybridge, Surrey.
- **BILES / BYLES** – “... **LAC Byles was a survivor**”. This was probably **LAC William Ben Biles, # 701268, R.I.M.U., RAFVR, Singapore** who was born on 12.7.18, had a home address of Godwincroft, Bransgore, Nr. Christchurch, Hants., who enlisted on 18.7.30, was captured in Java on 8.3.42 and who became a POW in several Java camps before being moved to a POW camp in Singapore in May 1945. (MI9 questionnaire on COFEPOW website). Godwincroft is a small hamlet forming part of the Parish of Bransgore, which is a picturesque village on the edge of the New Forest National Park. William Biles married Sheila Ruth Biles who died in Bournemouth in 2015.
- **BLOW** – “...**LAC Blow**” listed as **Drowned...**” according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This is **Aircraftsman 1st Class Donald Edwin Blow, #1259149, RAFVR**, who died on 14.2.42, aged 21 years, son of George Edwin and Jessie Ann Blow of Hertford. Also memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Kranji War cemetery, Singapore, Column 417 (CWGC). The website ‘Stevenage At War’ provides additional information that he was “... part of 518 Air Ministry Experimental Station (Radar), RAF and the son of George & Jessie Blow who ran a bakery in High Street. He joined the RAF in 1940 and was engaged on Radio and Radar work. 518 AMES was set up at Koto Tinggi [in fact it was ‘KOTA Tinggi’ which is in the State of Johor in Malaysia] airfield in October 1941 to help improve the defences in the area in the event of war...”. Donald Blow was one of the men of the highly secret 518 A.M.E.S. (Air Ministry Experimental Station), RDF (Radio Direction Finder/ Radar Direction Finder) unit at Kota Tinggi, Johore. #518 AMES was one of a network of radar Stations built across Malaya and Singapore Island during 1941. “... The building of these sites had been extremely slow because of the extreme slowness of the Directorate of Works. Works services which normally took more than a few weeks in the UK would extend to eight months and even then, not completed. Part of the reason for the slowness was put down to the peacetime financial control the Ministry auditors had over the Chief Engineer. Another reason, probably more likely, was that the RDF was so highly secret that it could not be explained, and this caused the lack of speed. The equipment for 518 AMES .RDF. arrived in Singapore in May 1941 but the station was not completed until 1941 – the Japanese invaded northern Malaya on 8 December 1941. Kota Tinggi was sited in southern Johore, half way between Singapore and the station at Mersing where the station at 550 feet high gave reasonably good coverage over broken country, but was ‘blind’ in the area where there were 2,000 feet mountains...” (Dave Croft , RAF Butterworth and Penang Assn – MVG Newsletter). The officer in command, F/L Thomas White, and the men from his RDF unit would have retreated to Singapore in late January 1942 before the Japanese invaded Singapore on the night of 8 February 1942.
- **BROWN** – “...**LAC Brown was a survivor...**” according to Robert Puckridge and he did record that that ‘LAC Brown’ was awarded a British Empire Medal on the recommendation of the ‘Engineering Officer’ (presumably Harold Hansen Holm) – this allowed the researcher of this

document to establish from the RAF Commands' website that "...1113512 Aircraftman 2nd Class Frank Brown, Royal Air Force. 996631 Aircraftman 2nd Class Thomas Welsh, Royal Air Force. H.M. Minesweeper " Changteh " sailed from Singapore in February, 1942, carrying 40 officers and men of the Royal Air Force, among others, and was sunk the next day by air attack, with heavy loss of life. Forty men escaped in the only undamaged boat, the proper complement of which was 22. After being nearly swamped in heavy weather, they reached land near the mouth of a river a few days later but found no fresh water. Thirty survivors were picked up next day. Aircraftmen Brown and Welsh never faltered throughout a severe ordeal and set a magnificent example to all the rest **London Gazette No. 35837, Dated 1942-12-25** ...". So, the

survivor was **Aircraftman 2nd Class, Frank Brown, # 1113512, RAF**. Since searches of the CWGC and the MI9 Liberation questionnaires on the COFEPOW website revealed nothing, we must presume that Frank Brown safely boarded an evacuation vessel at Padang to either Ceylon or Java and then Australia. [There is a listing of a 'LAC. H.V. Brown, RAF' as a member of the 'Sumatra Battalion' which was formed from Allied servicemen who were captured at Padang, Sumatra on 17.3.42. (book 'The British Sumatra Battalion' by Aphthorp) but it seems this is not the same man].

- **BURTON – Tpy. Colonel Charles Frank Burton, # 8617, RAMC, MC.,** was born in Rangoon, Burma on 16.1.1889 and "... qualified M.R.C.S (Eng) and L.R.C.P. (Lond) in 1913 at the London Hospital Medical College. He was commissioned into the RAMC Special reserve under the rank of Lieutenant on 19th September 1914. He mobilized on 7th October 1914 and entered the war in France on the 22nd. On 7th April 1915 he was promoted to Captain. He was awarded the Military Cross 'For Conspicuous Gallantry and Devotion to duty in his skilful leading of the stretcher-bearers on all occasions. He has always shown great coolness under the heaviest fire'. After the war Charles took a permanent commission as Captain in the RAMC. He was posted to Germany in 1919 and then to Egypt in 1924. On 9th September 1926 he was promoted to Major and became a specialist in Gynaecology in 1927. He then served as Gynae. Specialist at the Medical Field Hospital at Devonport from 1926 to 1928 and in India at the British Military Hospital, Lahore, and Dalhousie from 1928 to 1934. From 1934 to 1937 he was Officer Commanding (& Specialist) of the Military Field Hospital in Woolwich. In 1937, he was posted to China and was at Kowloon up until 1938. He gained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel on 1st May 1938 and became Senior medical Officer at Shanghai & Commanding Officer of the BBMH from 1939 to 1940, when he was posted to Malaya until 1942. During this time, he served as Acting Colonel - from 23rd December 1940, temporary Colonel – from 23rd June 1941 and as Assistant Director Medical Services at HQ Singapore Fortress from 1940 to 1942. He was reported missing in the Journal of 25th April 1942 and presumed to have been killed in action at sea in Malaya on 14th February 1942. He is now commemorated on the Singapore Memorial. Charles was the son of Lt-Col. John Adolphus Burton, L.R.C.S. & P. Edin., I.M.S. and Georgiana Ernstine [nee Middlecoat] Burton; and the husband of Teresa Frances [nee Gelardi] Burton [b.1888, Folkestone] of Folkestone..." ('RAMC in The Great War'). During his time in Singapore Charles Burton gave a talk on the Radio on "... the RAMC contribution in Singapore...". Teresa Frances Burton died in 1967.
- **DUFF – "... A.C. Duff was wounded and presumed lost..."** according to the report by Robert Puckridge.
- **ELLIS – "... LAC Ellis was Drowned..."** according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This appears to be **Leading Aircraftman James William Ellis, #642037, RAF** [who is recorded by the CWGC as having died on 17.2.42 which is three days after the sinking so presumably drowned off the lifeboat or raft] he was 21 years of age and the son of Albert E. and Annie May Ellis of Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, King's Scout. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 416, Kranji War cemetery. (CWGC). Another piece of information is "... James William Ellis died in the sea of injuries sustained 3 days after the sinking of Chang Teh..." (Jon Heyworth, RAF Commands website).

- **FAMWICK** – “... LAC Fanwick was a survivor...” according to Robert Puckridge. This may be a spelling error? Also, no person of that name has appeared on searches of the MI9 Liberation questionnaires on the COFEPOW website nor on the CWGC records.
- **FORBES – Roland Bertram Greenlaw Forbes** was born in India on 3.12.1898, the son of George Forrest Greenlaw Forbes and Lilian Annie Margaret Forbes (nee Kauntze). He joined the Royal Flying Corps (as did Robert Puckridge another passenger on ‘Changteh’) during the First World War and reached the rank of Officer. He travelled from Liverpool to Singapore in 1922 to become a rubber planter in Malaya. He was a well know planter working on the Sengat Estate near Ipoh, Perak (with brief time on the Rosevale Estate) and from about 1935 on the Bukit Munchong and Kapar Bahru Estate north of Kuala Lumpur in Selangor. He married Phyllis Margaret Raworth (b. Wandsworth, London 1893 – 1959). There must be a high probability he boarded ‘Changteh’ with Robert Puckridge - who wrote a lengthy letter to Mrs Forbes on 1 March 1943 “... I am very sorry to say that I can hold out very little hope that your husband survived. Here is what happened. We left Singapore on Friday, 13th on the ‘Chang Tee’ and were bombed at 11 a.m. on Saturday morning, Near misses. All officers on top deck killed or wounded. Many men killed or wounded lower deck. The doctor and I (slightly wounded) set about dressing wounds and giving morphia. As I was going below [after the first bombing attack], your husband came up to me and said, ‘I’ve been hit’. He lifted his shirt and had a bomb splinter wound in the left side of his stomach. It was bruised and black but not bleeding. I looked right around to see if the splinter had gone right through but there was no other wound, he was not in pain and looked and appeared quite normal. I told him the doctor [he is referring to Colonel Burton] was just coming down, as we had done what we could up top. Whilst I was in the bows, there were two more attacks, and on my return your husband was no longer there. One lifeboat had put off after the first attack, and after the second and third, I threw all available tables and chairs overboard to help those in the water. The captain said the ship was going to sink shortly, more morphia was given to those conscious, the other lifeboats were useless as we lowered them and they sank, so as the ship listed the captain, doctor (Colonel Burton), P/O Ashley Cooper (from the FMS Customs) dived down from the bow and a signaller [this was Colin Findlay, RNZNVR] and I dived over from amidships. The ship rolled nose first, then towards us, and threw out a lot more stuff, including a 6 x 3 water-tight mattress near me. I got on to this and saw Captain, Doc and A. Cooper getting into a small boat. The ship then sank and took the three in the boat with it. There now remained one lifeboat overloaded and towing a raft 150 yards ahead. Me on my Lilo, and the signaller [Colin Findlay, RNZNVR] on a canoe- shaped float with paddle. I could see no-one in the water, but about fifty people on the lifeboat and raft The lifeboat was picked up four days later with 56 survivors. Your husband was not among them as they joined my camp in Sumatra. I can only think that during or after the second and third attacks, he swam for the lifeboats and perished during the attack, or having reached the boat, was one of the four men who swam for an island the boat could not reach. Those four men were not seen again but may have reached the island. Names unknown. Information given by a survivor. I cannot think that he died in the lifeboat because his wound seemed to be quite superficial, and apart from it he seemed perfectly fit and well, and had he made the lifeboat he could easily have survived the four days. I am desperately sorry to tell such a story, but I know that it is best to tell the whole story. I have been in touch with Mrs Ashley Cooper and written a report for the War Office about Colonel Burton. The Signaller [Colin Findlay, RNZNVR] and I were indeed lucky to get through and finally from Sumatra here ... Yours very sincerely, H. V. PUCKRIDGE, Flight Lieut. RAF (Planter Damansara Estate) ...”. From Puckridge’s later written comments Mrs

Forbes must have evacuated to Australia although her name does not appear in Inward passenger Lists for 1941-42.

- **GLENDENNING/GLENDINNING** – “... *F/L Glendenning was wounded and presumed lost...*” according to the report by Robert Puckridge. This was presumably **Flight Lieutenant Alexander Glendinning, # 87519, RAFVR**, who died 14.2.42 aged 37 years, the son of the Rev. J.P.C. Glendinning and Caroline Mary Glendinning of Belfast, Ireland. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 412, Kranji War Cemetery...”. (CWGC). Jon Heyworth on ‘RAF Commands’ states “... *Glendinning was seriously wounded in the leg on the first attack and given morphia and was seen to be alive, but unconscious on deck having been placed under cover from strafing as the ship sank with him on board...*”. In 2005 the medals of F/L Glendinning were sold at auction – being his Pacific Star and the War Medal 1939-45.
- **GRAY / GREY** – “... *A.C. Gray was last seen on a raft...*” according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors – indicating that he was probably on the raft being towed by the overcrowded lifeboat. During the four days (and nights) that this raft appears to have been behind the lifeboat as it entered mangrove swamps along the coast of Sumatra it would have been easy for men to slip off in their sleep or because of exhaustion. This was presumably **Aircraftman 1st Class Fernley William Grey, # 977926, RAFVR** who died on 14.2.42 and who is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 418, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC). [This is possibly F. William Grey born 1908 in the village of Graveley, Hertfordshire.]
- **HICKEY** – “... *A.C. Hickey was drowned...*” according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This was **Aircraftman 1st Class Bernard Hickey, # 1112895, RAFVR**, who died on 14.2.42 aged 28 years, son of Thomas and Jeanie Hickey; husband of Joan T. Hickey of Sheffield. He is also memorialised on the Singapore War Memorial, Col. 418, Kranji War cemetery (CWGC).
- **JONES** – “...*LAC Jones was left in Sumatra...*” according to Robert Puckridge and other survivors. The commonality of this surname makes it extremely difficult to identify who this man was. There are several possibilities, but it may have been none of these men,
 - **‘LAC Eric Jones, # 120547, RIMU.**, born 26.8.13, enlisted 17.8.40, captured Java 8.3.42 whose home address was ‘Alsan’? Cottage, Mountnessing, Nr. Brentwood, Essex.’ (MI9 Liberation questionnaire – COFEPOW). Mountnessing is a village near Brentwood.
 - **‘LAC E.L. Jones, RAF** listed in the book ‘The British Sumatra Battalion – possibly the same man as above.
 - **LAC. W. Jones, RAF** died Kanchanaburi (CWGC) – and possibly the same man,
 - **Corporal Wilfred Jones, #974068, 512 AMES, RAFVR** died 18.11.44 son of Edward Jones and Eleanor Jones of Buckley, Flintshire. Remembered on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 437. (CWGC).
- **KNIGHT** – “... *A.C. Knight Drowned...*” recorded in the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors, indicating that he was not killed by bombs nor died from wounds in the lifeboat. This was **Aircraftman 1st Class Harold Edgar Knight, #1179850, RAFVR** died 14.2.42 and who is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 418, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC).
- **LANDER** – “... *LAC Lander was a survivor...*” according to Robert Puckridge. No references could be found in either the CWGC nor the COFEPOW MI9 questionnaire databases, so it is presumed that LAC Lander reached safety in either Ceylon or Australia. There is however a mention of a ‘LAC E. Lander, RAF’ in the ‘Sumatra Battalion’ list compiled by Apthorp in the book “The British Sumatra Battalion”.

- **LINCOLN** – “...*A.C. Lincoln Died of Wounds...*” was reported by Robert Puckridge – presumably this means he was seen to die of his wounds either before the ship sank or in the lifeboat, as opposed to drowning as the ship sank. Also, “... was last seen boarding an unnamed ship in Singapore on 13.2.42 (Glenda Godfrey, RAF Commands). This was **Aircraftman 1st Class Reginald Ernest Lincoln, # 1286535, RAFVR**, who died on 14.2.42 aged 21 years, he was the son of Ernest E. and Doris May Lincoln of Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. Also memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 418, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC).
- **MALLEY** – “... *LAC Malley was left in Sumatra...*” according to Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This may be another case of spelling error in the record. It has not been possible to identify anyone by that specific surname on the MI9 Liberation questionnaire database on the COFEPOW website, nor on the CWGC records – hopefully this mean ‘LAC Malley’ reached safety in Ceylon.
- **MANSON** – “*Signalman Manson was with me, attached to the RAF. On leaving Singapore arrived at the docks, our party was split. Sigm. Manson, Sigm. Barker, Sigm. Peckham and myself boarded one boat ... The three men were with me until our boat was sunk. The only one I have heard of is Sigm. Peckham...*” (W.A. Shave, CQMS, Ceylon Army signals. 16.8.43). This was **Signalman William Jack Andrew Manson, #2327367, 29 Construction Section, Royal Corps of Signals**, died 13.2.42, aged 34 years. Memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 44. (CWGC). From ancestry.com we have William Jack Andrew Manson, born 1907 son of John Manson and Eliza Ruth Curtis. Married to Gertrude Dorothy Whiting (born September 1904 and died 1986 at Eastcote, Middlesex) ?.
- **MERCER** – “... *A.C. Mercer was last seen swimming for an island...*” was reported by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. There were reports that four men were seen swimming towards an island that the lifeboat towing the raft could not reach. It seems likely that – depending on exactly where ‘Changteh’ was sunk – this could have been the small uninhabited islands northwest of Pulau Singkep or (if the vessel was sunk further north of the mouth of the Indragiri River) the islands northwest of Pulau Lingga. This is almost certainly AC. 1st Class Shirley Mercer, #633677, RAF, who died on 18.2.42 [does the CWGC have something on its file as to where or when Shirley Mercer died?]and is memorialised on the Singapore memorial, Col. 418. Kranji War cemetery (CWGC). Mercer was recorded as from a ‘Filer Unit’ at Kallang (at that time Kallang, which is close to the centre of Singapore city, was an airfield/flying boat base adjacent to a huge inland ‘lake’) – however research indicates that the ‘Filter Room’[Filter Rooms were central to the Radar system and were where detected aircraft information was gathered and assessed before being passed onto the Squadrons – the Filter room at Katong contained a large table with an outline map of the area painted on it, overlaid with a grid of the area covered by RDF (Radio/Radar Direction Finding) and the RDF units across Malaya and Singapore. The map for the table was drawn from one in a school atlas, the grids, enlarged, were from a school exercise book. Seated around the table were the plotters receiving information from the RDF stations up country and those in Singapore. The Filter Officer’s analysis of the situation from the RDF Stations was passed on to fighter control –info via Audrey McCormick and Mary Harris of MVG and written by Dave Croft, RAF Butterworth, and Penang Association] WAS based in the Katong district which is adjacent to Kallang district. There is also the record that S. Mercer was last seen boarding and unknown evacuation ship on 13.2.42 (RAF Commands website – via Glenda Godfrey, FEPOW)
- **OWEN** – “...*A.C. Owen was Drowned ...*” in the report by Robert Puckridge of those men that the survivors knew had drowned, as opposed to being killed by bombs or dying of wounds. This was **Aircraftman 1st Class Leslie William Owen, #1054275, RAFVR** died on 14.2.42 aged 25 years, the son of William Henry and Alice Maud Owen of Wellington, Shropshire. He is also memorialised on the Singapore memorial, Col. 418, Kranji War cemetery. (CWGC)

- PECKHAM / PICKHAM** – “... *Signalman Peckham was left in Sumatra. Picked up off a float...*” according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors who we must assume crossed paths at Padang on the west coast of Sumatra before boarding ships to safety in Colombo. Then we have the following report on Peckham in the ‘Changteh’ file held in UK Archives at Kew “... *rescued after about 9 hours immersion in the water, also wounded. I visited him in hospital at DYOMBIE [must be the town of Djambi in southern Sumatra] in Sumatra...*” (report by Sgt. F.C. Bennett, R. Signals, Malaya – who died in Burma on 14.3.442). Also, fellow ‘Changteh’ passenger CQMS (rank had been Sgt. at the time of his escape from Singapore) Shave, Royal Corps of Signals, reported on 16.8.43 in Ceylon that Peckham was on board and “... *in hospital in Sumatra, suffering from wounds, but was progressing satisfactorily...*”, although he seems to have learned this second-hand from CQMS G.P. Wilson, Telecommunications School, ISC, Simla who also reported in January 1945 that “... *whilst proceeding through Sumatra I saw Sigm. Peckham A.F. in hospital ...*” – Wilson says he was not on the ‘Changteh’. This is almost certainly **Signalman Arthur Edward Peckham, #2327363, Royal Corps of Signals**, who it appears had drifted south clinging to a ‘float’ to the area of the mouth of the Jambi River, was taken upriver to hospital in Djambi/Jambi by either a Japanese ,craft or an evacuation vessel, and later transported north to become a POW in the horrendous Pekanbaru Railway POW camps in northern Sumatra – there is a completed form somewhat like an MI9 questionnaire on the COFEPOW website, which means he survived the war.
- PUCKRIDGE** – **Hugh Victor ‘Robert’ Puckridge** – to quote from a well-researched biography written by Howard Barkwell in the Sourton Parish Council newsletter of September 2017, and other sources “...*was born on 3.8.1897 at Sourton, Devon, the son of Rev. Oliver Puckridge and Fannie Hewitt. He moved with the family when his father was appointed as Vicar of Pinhoe in 1902 [he was still Vicar there in 1937 according to the ‘Straits Times’ of that year]. He was at Sherbourne School early in the [First World] war where he captained the cricket 1st XI, opening the batting and keeping wicket. He may have briefly attended university, but more likely entered the army straight from school. He was gazetted Second lieutenant in the Shropshire Light infantry in April 1916 but seems to have joined the Royal Flying Corps almost immediately. By June of that year, he had attended the Military School at Birmingham and had gained the Royal Aero Club Aviator’s certificate as a pilot. He trained on a Maurice Farman biplane. This was a French designed model, which had seen some action early in the war, but was hugely obsolete and had been relegated to training duties by this time.... In February 1917 he was reported wounded in action but was soon back flying again. At some stage he joined the 23 Squadron. It moved to various airfields on the Somme flying first the Spad S. VII and later the Spad. S. XIII. Both were French designed single seat fighters made of wood and fabric and used to patrol the front line and for low level strafing of German troops. In May 1918 the squadron was equipped with the brand new Sopwith Dolphin. This was still a biplane but more robustly constructed. It had a Hispano- Suiza water cooled engine and was armed with two Vickers machine guns with a capability for two extra Lewis guns. Hugh must have taken part in some of the legendary dog fights with German pilots. On one occasion when he was leading a newly arrived American pilot, he opened fire on a German plane only for his guns to jam. The enemy was able to dive into the clouds and escape. On 1st July 1918, after taking off from the airfield at Bretangles, Hugh failed to return and was posted as missing. It transpired he had been forced down but had managed to land safely behind enemy lines and had been captured by German troops. He spent the next five months as a prisoner of war and wasn’t repatriated until just before Christmas. After his return home it was announced that his service in France had been recognised by the award*

of the Distinguished Flying Cross.... In 1920 while on leave at Pinhoe, from the newly formed Royal Air Force Uxbridge, he was fined ten shillings for riding his motorbike through Longbrook Street in Exeter without lights, a sign of a cavalier spirit or youthful irresponsibility? In 1922 he was still at Uxbridge but was declared bankrupt. He left the service soon after... In 1926 he sailed for Singapore to start a new career as a rubber planter.... After eight years training in 'the language and the customs of the local people' he was appointed manager of the Damansara Estate Rubber Company in Selangor. In 1936 he married Effie Molyneux Combe [youngest daughter of Sir Ralph and Lady Combe, of Bunce's Shaw, Farley Hill, Berkshire – Farley Hill is a small village ('Straits Budget' 2.7.36)] at Farley Green. ...the Puckridges seemed to come and go regularly to their home near Henley-on-Thames ... in Malaya Hugh still played cricket... he was remembered as something of a character described as 'a tall gangling fellow with a full prawn moustache and known to everybody as Puck' who insisted on blowing his copper hunting horn on all possible occasions. He drove a bull nosed Morris, but had the tail taken off and another Morris bonnet and radiator put on the back, ostensibly so that the police would not know whether he was coming or going! In the Second World War Mr and Mrs Puckridge were home on leave, but despite the worsening situation in the Far East returned to Damansara.... Soon after the Japanese left Communist Chinese insurgents started attacking plantations and other isolated communities. Special Constables were appointed to try and protect both property and workers. Those at Damansara were paraded soon after dawn each day in front of Hugh's office, the Union Jack was raised, and he did his best to blow reveille on his hunting horn. He is credited with surviving the Emergency in one of the loneliest and most dangerous districts in the country while still planting and producing rubber from the estate. In the 1952 New Year's Honours List he was awarded the Colonial Police Medal. He had been serving as an Inspector in the Auxiliary Police in the Federation of Malaya. It is unclear when they finally returned to this country, but probably in the late fifties. He retired to Henley-on-Thames but was in Devizes Hospital at the time of his death on 31st August 1966...". (sourtonpc.org.uk). Robert Puckridge had achieved the rank of Flying Officer in the RFC and RAF; had initially been Planter/Manager at Damansara Estate, Klang, Selangor; had married Effie Molyneux 'Molly' Combe in 1936, she was later evacuated from Singapore in January 1942 on the 'Westpoint' to Colombo and then on the 'Empress of Japan' to England (JM), and Robert had been commissioned as a Temporary Lieutenant in the Transport Section of the Selangor Battalion, FMSVF in July 1941 ('Morning Tribune 10.7.41). He had successfully traversed the official escape route across Sumatra – whilst acting as ADC to Colonel R.M.L. Rosenberg, Royal Corps of Signals (whom he might have known in Kuala Lumpur) who later boarded and lost his life on the ill-fated 'SS Rooseboom' which was torpedoed and sunk in the middle of the Indian Ocean. He had separated from Rosenberg when they reached Padang, Puckridge linked up with the RAF there. He continued at Damansara after the war and then moved to Jenderak Estate, Pahang which became a focus for Communist terrorists; by 1952 when the Communist Insurgency reached its peak his address was c/o the Rest House, Bentong, Pahang and it was that year he was awarded the Colonial Police Medal for Meritorious Service for "... setting an example to the planting community in Selangor and then taking on planting in an even more difficult area of Pahang... where he set an example for both the Police and the community..." ('Straits Times' 3.1.52). (JMM).

- **ROSSITER – "... A.C. Rossiter was drowned..."** according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors and further information is recorded by Jon Heyworth of the RAF Commands website "... Drowned on 15/2 when a lifeboat overturned following the sinking of the ChangTeh by Japanese bombers ...", which is in line with the comments made by Robert

Puckridge that Air Force men had 'rushed' the lifeboat. This must have been [because no other RAFVR man by the name of Rossiter died in Singapore] **Aircraftsman 2nd Class Walter Rossiter, # 576400, RAFVR** - although according to CWGC he died on 12.2.42 - aged 18 years, the son of Walter James Rossiter and Margaret Rossiter of Cockerton, Darlington, Co. Durham. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 420, Kranji War cemetery. (CWGC) He is also remembered on Newton War Memorial, Co. Durham.

- **SHAVE – Sgt W. A. Shave, Royal Corps of Signals** escaped and reported to OC. Army Signals Ceylon in a report dated 16.8.43 (by then he had been promoted to CQMS) that the following men boarded 'Changteh' with him- Sigm. Manson, Barker and Peckham.
- **SHEARER /'SHARMAN' – "... A.C. Sharman, W/Op Kallang, drowned"** was the record by Robert Puckridge and other survivors – which indicates he was not killed by the bombing not died of wounds but possibly was blown overboard by the explosions or died from the lifeboat/raft. There is no CWGC record of anyone by that name losing their life around the time of the sinking of 'Changteh' but there is the record of **Aircraftsman George Shearer, # 1126378, RAFVR** dying on 14.2.42 aged 19 years, son of John H. and Catherine K. Shearer of Glasgow. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 420, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC). There is also the record *"...AC2 Shearer (based at Kallang, Singapore) was last seen boarding an unknown evacuation ship on 13.2.42 at Keppel Harbour, Singapore..."* (RAF Commands – Glenda Godfrey).
- **SHEARS – "... Sgt Shears was drowned..."** according to the report by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This was **Sgt. Philip Gordon Shears, #956073, RAFVR**, who died on 15.2.42 aged 25 years, son of Edwin Philip shears and Maud Zarita Shears of Teddington, Middlesex. He is memorialised on the Singapore memorial, Col. 415, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC). Philip Shears was born on 9.6.16 and attended Cranleigh School in Surrey, England between 1930 -32.
- **STOCK – "... LAC Stock was drowned..."** according to the report from Robert Puckridge and other survivors. This was **LAC Arthur Stock, #110024, RAFVR** who died on 14.2.42 aged 27 years, son of James Edward and Jessie stock, 61 Lord Duncan Street, Salford and husband of Ethel Stock of Salford, Lancashire. He is memorialised on the Singapore memorial, Col. 417, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC). He was born on 26 January 1914.
- **SUTER – "... LAC Suter was left in Sumatra..."** according to Robert Puckridge. He must have made the trek with other survivors up the Indragiri River and across Sumatra to Padang – but for some reason [was he wounded and hospitalised?] he must have been delayed and did not reach Padang in time to board the last evacuation ship from there in early March 1942. He would have then been stuck there until the Dutch prudently declared it an 'open city' to prevent bloodshed and the Japanese took control on 17 March 1942. This was **Aircraftsman 2nd Class Percival Rudolf Suter, #137524, RAFVR**, aged 36 years [he was born in 1907 according to the UK Census 1911], son of Jacob and Annie Suter of Hove, Essex. (CWGC). Percival Suter appears to have been in 307 AMES. and was captured on 17.3.42 in Sumatra [this would have been at Padang] and died on the Sumatra Railway (Chris Hobson, RAF Commands Forum). He endured a long horrific period as a 'slave labourer' on the 'Sumatra Railway' and died on 3.8.45 at the 'Hospital or Death' Camp 2 at Tangkerang Tengal, Pekanbaru, Sumatra - eleven days before the war ended on 14.8.45 - and was initially buried there in grave 333. Now in grave 2.E.8 at Jakarta War cemetery. The story of the horrific 'Sumatra Railway' is that *"... in 1944, with a dwindling supply of local 'Romushas' [Javanese slave labourers], it was decided to bring in POW's from across the Dutch East Indies and the Pacific. Around 5000 allied prisoners were brought to Sumatra to work. Most of these prisoners were captured in Java two years earlier when Major General R. T. Overakker surrendered the KNIL army and the Dutch colony (around 4000).*

The other nationalities that made up the work force were British (around 1000), Australian, American, and New Zealanders. (300 total). The prisoners were housed in camps along the railway with the first POW's arriving at camp 1 in Pekanbaru on the 19th of May 1944. As the railway progressed, the prisoners built bridges spanning wide rivers, embankments through the jungle and cuttings through hills and around cliffs. They did all of this while risking severe beatings or being killed by the guards, whilst also surviving on the meagre rations that were given to them by their Japanese captors. For example, they were given a cup of peeled rice a day which lacked the vitamin rich skins. If a prisoner was sick, they were put on half rations which was around 800 calories a day. These rations were substituted with rats which were a constant companion in the camps, maggots that could be found in the latrines and anything else that looked edible along the railway. Prisoners who became unwell were transported to camp 2 on the outskirts of Pekanbaru where treatment was based. The few doctors worked in un-sterile environments with limited equipment, medicine and antibiotics. Tropical ulcers often led to amputations, done with no anaesthetic and maggots were used to help clean wounds by eating away dead tissue. The population of camp 2 during its operation was around 800. When the war ended on the 15th of August 1945, around 700 POWs had died with many prisoners dying from malnutrition, beriberi, malaria and dysentery..." (<https://www.pekanbarudeathrailway.com>). At some point after the war ended his remains appear to have been transferred to Medan Dutch War Cemetery (Medan is the northern province in Sumatra where Pekanbaru is located) and reburied in grave 2.B.8; then in 1961 at the request of the Indonesian government many graves of Dutch and Allied of servicemen around Indonesia were disinterred and concentrated at the Jakarta War Cemetery – Percival Rudolf Suter now lies at rest in grave 2.E.8 with a brass plaque in a beautifully kept lawn cemetery maintained by the Dutch government.

- **THOMSON / THOMPSON** – *"... LAC Thompson was last seen swimming for an island..."* was reported by Robert Puckridge and other survivors. There were reports that four men were seen swimming towards an island that the lifeboat towing the raft could not reach. It seems likely that – depending on exactly where 'Changteh' was sunk – this could have been the small uninhabited islands northwest of Pulau Singkep or (if the vessel was sunk further north of the mouth of the Indragiri River) the islands northwest of Pulau Lingga. This was presumably **LAC. John Thomson, #982191, RAFVR**, who died on 14.2.42 aged 24 years, the son of James and Jeannie Thomson of Glasgow. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col.417, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC)
- **TILL** – *"... P/O Till was wounded & presumed lost..."* according to the report by Robert Puckridge. This was **Flying Officer Edward Stracey Till, # 60942, RAFVR**, aged 39 years, son of Herbert Jennings Till and Annie Till (nee Huxtable). Memorialised on Singapore Memorial, Col.413, Kranji War Cemetery (CWGC).
- **TYRROL / TYRRELL** – *"... A.C. Tyrrol was wounded and presumed lost..."* stated the report by Robert Puckridge. This would appear to be **Aircraftsman 1st Class Claude David Tyrrell, # 1206675, RAFVR**, who died on 14.2.42 aged 25 years, son of Josiah and Elizabeth Tyrrell. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 419, Kranji War Cemetery..." (CWGC). He was attached to HQ., RAF Seletar (Jon Heyworth , RAF Commands).
- **WELSH/ 'WALSH'** – *"... LAC Walsh was a survivor..."* according to Robert Puckridge, and he notes in his same report to the Malayan Research Bureau on 16.7.43 whilst he was in Ceylon that *"... As LAC Brown (and I hear Walsh also) got a B.E.M. I presume the Eng. Officer got home to make his recommendation..."*. The following record on 'RAF Commands' website confirms that this was not a man named 'Walsh' but appears to have almost certainly been *"....1113512 Aircraftman 2nd Class Frank Brown, Royal Air Force. 996631 Aircraftman 2nd Class Thomas Welsh, Royal Air Force. H.M. Minesweeper " Changteh " sailed from Singapore*

in February, 1942, carrying 40 officers and men of the Royal Air Force, among others, and was sunk the next day by air attack, with heavy loss of life. Forty men escaped in the only undamaged boat, the proper complement of which was 22. After being nearly swamped in heavy weather, they reached land near the mouth of a river a few days later but found no fresh water. Thirty survivors were picked up next day. Aircraftmen Brown and Welsh never faltered throughout a severe ordeal and set a magnificent example to all the rest London

Gazette No. 35837, Dated 1942-12-25 ...". With no one of that name appearing amongst the MI(Liberation Questionnaires on the COFEPOW website nor on CWGC records we must assume Thomas Welsh reached safety in either Ceylon or Australia via Java after leaving Padang.

- **WHITE** – “... *F/L White was wounded and presumed lost...*” according to the report by Robert Puckridge. **Flight Lieutenant Thomas Roden White, #77510, RAFVR**, died on 14.2.42 aged 35 years, he was the son of Mr. & Mrs. P. H. White; husband of Daisy White of Sompting, Sussex. He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 412, Kranji War Cemetery. F/L White was the Officer in command of the highly secret 518 A.M.E.S. (Air Ministry Experimental Station), RDF (Radio Direction Finder/ Radar Direction Finder) unit at Kota Tinggi, Johore. 518 AMES was one of a network of radar Stations built across Malaya and Singapore Island during 1941. “... *The building of these sites had been extremely slow because of the extreme slowness of the Directorate of Works. Works services which normally took more than a few weeks in the UK would extend to eight months and even then, not completed. Part of the reason for the slowness was put down to the peacetime financial control the Ministry auditors had over the Chief Engineer. Another reason, probably more likely, was that the RDF was so highly secret that it could not be explained, and this caused the lack of speed. The equipment for 518 AMES .RDF. arrived in Singapore in May 1941 but the station was not completed until 1941 – the Japanese invaded northern Malaya on 8 December 1941. Kota Tinggi was sited in southern Johore, half way between Singapore and the station at Mersing where the station at 550 feet high gave reasonably good coverage over broken country, but was ‘blind ‘in the area where there were 2,000 feet mountains...*” (Dave Croft , RAF Butterworth and Penang Assn – MVG Newsletter). F/L Thomas White and the men from his RDF unit would have retreated to Singapore in late January 1942 before the Japanese invaded Singapore on the night of 8 February 1942.
- **WOODS** – “... *A.C. Woods was wounded and presumed lost...*” according to the report of Robert Puckridge. This was presumably **Aircraftman James Wood, # 1106457, RAFVR** who died on 15.2.42 aged 22 years, the son of Thomas and Alice Wood, He is memorialised on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 419, Kranji War cemetery...” (CWGC). Glenda Godfrey has confirmed this view on ‘RAF Commands’.