

# **BANKA ISLAND**

**February 1942**

**“A Broad Perspective”**

**[Version 1.1.0: February 2023]**

The reason that the many terrible events which occurred on Banka Island (east of Sumatra) and in the seas around that island in February 1942 have not been forgotten is almost entirely due to the untiring efforts and huge perseverance of a small group of the relatives of both the 21 Australian Army Nursing Service Sisters (who had been shipwrecked after the sinking of the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ and landed on ‘Radji Beach’ only to be murdered by Japanese troops on 16 February 1942) and of several civilian internees who died in Muntok internment camp.

The world’s historical memory, of the more than a thousand civilians and servicemen who lost their lives on and in the seas around Banka Island during the month of February 1942 after evacuating Singapore, would otherwise have faded and the actual names and the atrocities they endured would by now be simply notes on yellowing files in the National Archives of Australia, the UK National Archives and their related War Museums.

Most of the men, women and some children who died were British and Australian, with smaller of New Zealanders, Malay naval ratings and Chinese.

## **The Evacuation of 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 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, under what had become 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 hundreds of 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 ...’!) 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 quickly issued for civilian men and women to leave, so finally some real urgency entered the situation. Military commands also finally faced up to the seriousness of the situation and large groups of the more skilled servicemen were identified to be evacuated at the last minute so their skills could be used in the ongoing war effort.



Of the 100 or so vessels which left Singapore between 11 -14 February 1942 carrying evacuees, only about 20 made it to safety. Even after the capitulation of Singapore on 16 February, vessels were still managing to leave the island, possibly raising the total to between 140 to 150. The vessels included: tugboats, praus, sampans, junks, merchant vessels, naval vessels etc. Most of the casualties resulted from Japanese aerial bombardment and strafing and shelling from Japanese naval vessels which was inflicted on the motley flotilla of vessels as it sailed down the Bangka Straits towards Java. Accurate shipping departure and passenger records were not kept in the chaos of boarding, and no one knows with certainty how many passengers there were, but it is thought that between 4 to 5 thousand people lost their lives on the eighty or so ships that were bombed and sank or captured.

The naval vessels, apart from a couple of destroyers, which briefly escorted the bigger merchant ships like the 'SS Empire Star' and 'SS Gorgon' to safety after leaving Singapore, included Auxiliary (i.e. merchant ships which had been requisitioned) Patrol ships, Auxiliary Minesweepers, flat bottomed ex-Yangste River gunboats and ex Yangste river passenger ships, Royal Navy 'Fairmile ' design Patrol boats, RAF fast launches and even a large tug like the 'HMS Yin Ping'. Some of these Naval ships had almost exclusively a complement of service personnel on board – but also a few civilians.

#### **Banka Island:**

The history of Banka Island, a large island situated off the south east coast of Sumatra, during the 100 years prior to the Second World War was one that evidences typically efficient Dutch administration in the Netherland's East Indies - with a primary focus on Dutch and Chinese owned open cast tin mining using imported Chinese labour to supplement the local labour force.

By 1942 Muntok , the main town on the south coast and on the edge of the Banka Strait, had developed into a typically tidy, well administered Dutch outpost which at that time featured an extraordinarily long ( 600 metres) pier stretching out to sea because of the shallow waters , a solid Customs house still standing on the foreshore, several streets of Chinese shops, a sizeable Cinema (that sometimes appears to have been referred to as the 'Chinese Club', and which basic structure still exists), a prison and a well-known large 186 foot stone lighthouse, built in 1862 but still standing about 3.5 kms (as the crow flies, but twice that by road) to the west of Muntok at Tanjong Kelian to guide shipping into the northern channels of the Banka Strait.

Apart from the other town of note, the capital named Pangkal Pinang on the northeast coast, the island to all intents and purposes comprised – and still comprises - undulating hills with jungle like vegetation, scarred by the tin mines and with small kampongs evident at distances.

#### **Wartime significance of Banka Island and the Banka Strait:**

Misguided orders given to departing Captains of evacuation ships in Singapore, the loss of naval access in Singapore to coded radio messages from earlier evacuation ships, and the specific location (being on the path of the evacuation flotilla from Singapore and the simultaneous Japanese invasion fleet heading to Sumatra ) and the Japanese Naval order that "There will not be another Dunkirk", were all the keys to Banka island becoming the scene of so much horror in February 1942.

The reasons in more detail were;



- Firstly, almost all (say 50 out of the 60 vessels) the evacuation ships from Singapore which left during the week prior to Singapore being surrendered headed towards and through the Banka Strait as the shortest route to Batavia in Java, because Java was still clearly in Allied hands. A few (say 6 to 8) smaller vessels travelled a shorter distance to the Indragiri River, on the east coast of Sumatra, which was the start of the 'official escape route' across Sumatra to the port of Padang. This escape route had been planned and provisioned by the British Military as early as January 1942. Another couple of smaller vessels headed a little further south and up the Batang Hari River to the town of Djambi.
- The outcome would be that, of the 50 – 60 vessels which left Singapore during 11 – 14 February 1942 about 40 or more would be sunk or captured by the Japanese Navy and Airforce. Research is slowly defining these numbers.
- Also putting late pressure on Singapore authorities in early February 1942 to clear as many women from that city, was a new fear that had spread through the City for the safety of all remaining women and the nurses stationed across the hospitals and aid posts on the Island - news of the atrocities inflicted by the 229th Infantry Division of the Japanese army on the European and Chinese nurses at St Stephens Hospital in Hong Kong on Xmas Eve 1941 had finally reached Singapore. An urgent order was given to evacuate all remaining nurses, key army personnel and where possible civilian women and children and to clear Singapore Harbour of all remaining ships.
- Contributing to the impending chaos of sunk ships and several thousand deaths that would result was the awful fact that Royal Navy radio code books - which would have allowed decoding of the warning messages from earlier evacuation ships as to the arrival of Japanese warships in the evacuation route - had been either destroyed or removed prematurely from Singapore by the time these last ships were leaving.
- At the same time someone in command ordered the evacuation ships to travel only by night, and during daylight try and 'hide' amongst the myriad of islands of the Rhio Archipelago - the harsh reality of hindsight is that those Captains who simply ignored those orders and steamed without stopping were the ones whose ships survived because they reached the Banka Straits before the Japanese Navy. Almost every ship which took shelter was delaying its journey, with the result that they fell into the range of advancing Japanese Navy warships and Japanese bombers.
- Even so, ships leaving Singapore as early as 10/11 February firstly had to contend with aerial bombing and strafing attacks from Japanese bombers as they passed through the islands just south of Singapore, and then through the thousand or more islands of the Rhio Archipelago which extends down the east coast of Sumatra. Many overloaded evacuation vessels such as the 'SS Kuala', the 'HMS Tien Kwang', 'Kung Wo', 'HMS Dragonfly', 'HMS Scorpion', 'HMS Grasshopper' and others were sunk by these bombers with a terrible loss of lives. The range of the Japanese bombers extended over the following week and by 15 February had reached the southern end of the Banka Strait. The Banka Strait is the body of water which varies in width from a few miles to ten miles, between Sumatra (particularly the mouth of the Musi/Moesi river) and Banka Island.
- Then, critically for the events which followed, the Japanese Navy arrived in the more northern waters between Singkep island and Banka Island on 13 February as the advance guard of the Japanese invasion army headed for Sumatra.



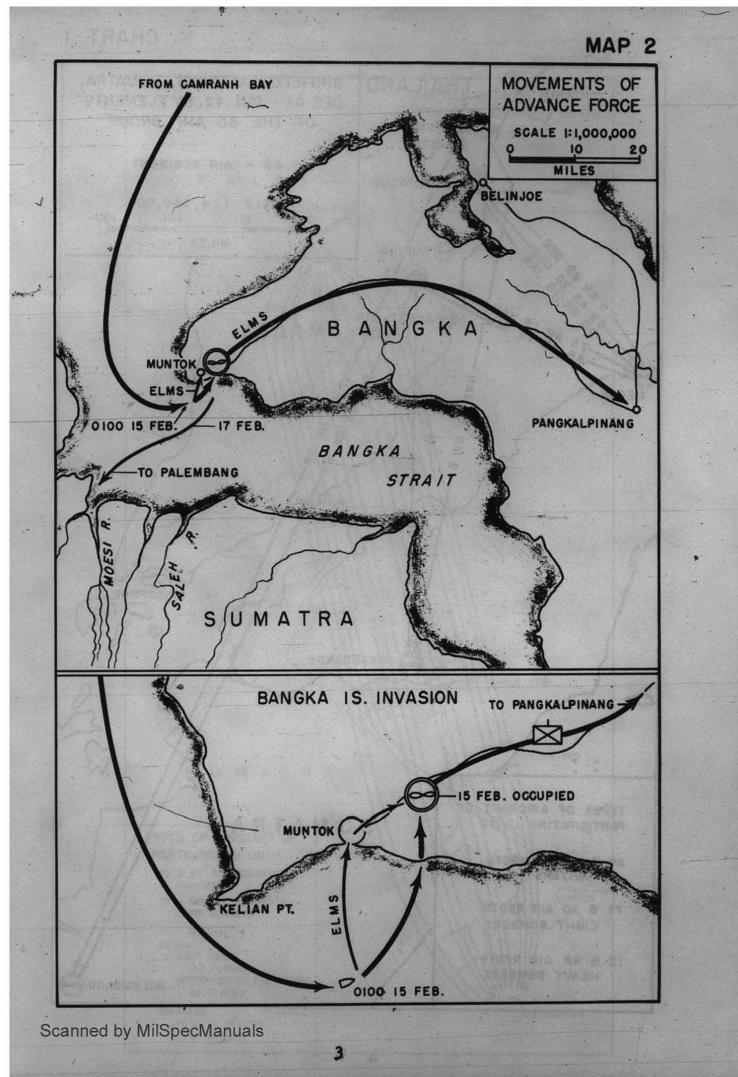
- In the context of understanding why the ensuing awful events on Banka Island occurred as they did, it is necessary to understand that almost a month earlier, in fact on 20 January 1942, the 38th Division of the Japanese Army (at that point still stationed in Hong Kong after invading that city in December 1941), and including the men of the same Divisional Headquarters Companies of the 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment who had committed terrible atrocities around Xmas Eve 1941 at many places in Hong Kong, moved to Camranh Bay in French Indochina (Vietnam) to prepare for invading southern Sumatra and particularly Palembang. The specifically allocated 'Bangka invasion unit' of the larger 38<sup>th</sup> Division invasion force – being the same two murderous companies of 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment plus shipping engineer elements - left Camranh Bay on 12 February 1942 and arrived at Muntok anchorage at 0100 hrs on 15 February. Their plan was;

*"... one platoon was to land in the vicinity of Muntok pier, with the main body, composed of one company and two platoons, landing 2,000 metres southeast of Muntok (See map 2) .... After securing the airfield and its surrounding area, one company which was to remain for occupation was to capture Pangkalpinang. The remaining troops were to rejoin, as rapidly as possible, the main body of the advance force in Sumatra..."*

As planned one company of the 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment remained to occupy Banka Island while the other company, on the 17 February, moved across the sea and up the Moesi/Musi River to the Palembang area to join the main body of the invasion force attacking southern Sumatra.



The following map created by the Japanese after the War shows the advance.



So just after midnight on 14 February 1942 - the Banka Island invasion force - in addition to the powerful fleet of Japanese Navy cruisers, destroyers, frigates and smaller landing craft had assembled on the west and south coasts of Banka Island. They had cut off access to the Banka Strait escape route.

It was into this deadly flotilla that the evacuation ships were headed.

### **Vessels Sunk or captured around Banka Island and in the Banka Strait.**

No passenger lists existed for the ships sunk around Banka Island - or any other vessels sunk in the evacuation of Singapore – so knowledge of who was on board and more precisely where they were sunk is only a result of painstaking research. Detailed Memorial documents have been completed for those vessels below marked with an asterisk [\*] and are available without cost if requested of the researcher of this document – Michael Pether, Auckland, New Zealand. Probably less than a quarter



of the vessels listed below have been the subject of serious research – so the details of the picture will become clearer as further memorial documents are completed in future months and years.

Where known those ships with Australian, New Zealand or Canadian naval personnel on board - or Australian Army, Australian or New Zealand civilians – are noted with an AU, NZ, or CN. For practical recording purposes almost other Europeans – either crew or passengers - can be regarded as British. There were also a few Eurasian and Chinese families on some of the vessels.

The chronology of the sinking or capture of the ships from which surviving crew or passengers reached Banka Island is (with lives lost where known);

- **5 February 1942,**
  - **'Katong'** – sunk in Banka Strait (?)
  
- **13 February 1942,**
  - **'RAF Auxiliary Aquarius'** – bombed and sunk west of Pulau Tjebia which is itself northwest of Banka Island (**approx. 100**) \*AU NZ
  - **'HMS Giang Bee'** - a merchant vessel sunk by gunfire from Japanese warships northwest of Banka, some survivors reached Banka Island in a lifeboat and some in another lifeboat were taken to Muntok after being rescued by 'HMS Tapah' (**170 est.**) \*NZ AU
  - **'SS Hua Tong'** – captured near Muntok (nil)
  - **'Klias'** – scuttled near mouth of Moesi River (nil)
  - **'SS Redang'** – sunk by gunfire from Japanese warship northwest of Banka, some survivors in a lifeboat were rescued by 'HMS Tapah' and later taken, after that vessel was captured by the Japanese, to Muntok (**80 est.**) \*NZ AU
  - **'SS Siang Wo'** – bombed and beached at Tanjong Kelian near Muntok, currently being researched (**1?**) \*
  - **'Rompin'** – broke down near Muntok and was captured (?).
  
- **14 February 1942,**
  - **'HMS Li Wo'** – sunk just off the northwest coast beaches of Banka in battle (**100 plus est.**) NZ
  - **'Jarak'** – scuttled near somewhere named 'Pulau Sayer' (?)
  - **RAF launch # 105** - sunk at a place called 'Malon Tiga Island' (**1 or more, yet to be researched**)
  - **'SS Vyner Brooke'** - sunk by Japanese bombers 10 miles west of Banka Island, a large group of passengers and crew reached 'Radji Beach' and were then murdered by Japanese troops on 16 February 1942. Other survivors swam ashore or were picked up by captured RAF launch elsewhere on Banka Island, a few made a voyage in passing lifeboats to Java and internment, others died after being swept out to sea (**185 plus est.**) \*AU NZ
  
- **15 February 1942,**
  - **'HMS Fuh Wo'** - a patrol vessel beached on Banka Island (Nil) \*



- **'HMS Yin Ping'** - a Royal Navy tug sunk by shellfire not far west of Banka Island (**50 est.**) \*AU
- **HMML 310** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch beached at Pulau Tjebia/Tujuh etc (**18**) NZ AU
- **HMML311** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch sunk in the Banka Straits near Banka Island (**60 est.**) \*NZ AU
- **HMML 433** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch sunk in the Banka Straits near Banka Island (**65 est.**) \*AU NZ
- **'HMS Pahlawan'** – captured well north of Muntok (**2**)
- **'HMS Pulo Soegi'** - an Auxiliary Patrol vessel sunk by shellfire west of Banka Island (**80 est.**) \*NZ
- **'SS Mata Hari'** - captured and taken to Muntok (Nil)
  
- **16 February 1942,**
  - **'Elizabeth'** - a small launch/tug sunk by shellfire or bombs in the Banka Straits (**18**) \*AU
  - **'HDML1062'** - a Fairmile Harbour Defence Launch sunk by shellfire in the Banka Straits (**40 est.**) \*NZ
  - **'Fanling'** – an Auxiliary Patrol vessel sunk by shellfire in the Banka Straits (**43**) \*NZ
  - **'Rantau' or 'Rentau'** – captured at Muntok (Nil)
  - **'Relau'** – captured at Muntok (Nil)
  - **'Rosemary II'** – a launch like 'Elizabeth' captured at Muntok (Nil)
  
- **17 February 1942,**
  - **'Blumut'** – captured near Banka (nil)
  - **'Excise'** – a launch captured near Banka (nil)
  - **HMML 432** – a Fairmile Patrol Launch captured near Muntok (nil) NZ
  - **'HMS Tapah'** – an Auxiliary Patrol vessel captured near mouth of Moesi River (Nil)
  - **'Mary Rose'** – a launch captured near Muntok (Nil)
  - **'SS Hong Tat'** – a merchant vessel Captained and crewed by men from 2/15 Field Regt, AIF and other AIF and British soldiers, captured in Sunda Straits and taken back to Banka (**1**) \*AU
  - **'SS Tandjong Pinang'** - a small coastal merchant vessel which had safely evacuated people from Singapore to the Indragiri River in Sumatra before being told about the hundreds of shipwrecked women, children, and men on uninhabited Pom Pong Island after the sinking of 'SS Kuala' and 'HMS Tien Kwang'. The captain took his ship to Pom Pong Island, collected more than 180 women, children, babies, and a few walking wounded and headed for Batavia. He was stopped by a Japanese warship on the evening of the 17 February 30 miles northwest of Tanjong Ular/Oelar and the ship sunk at point blank range by gunfire. Of some 60 people who did not die in the sinking and were left swimming in the sea or on rafts, only 12 made it to Banka Island – but the captain and a crew member were then summarily executed by Japanese troops near Muntok lighthouse within a day of reaching land (**200 est.**) \*NZ AU



- **Unknown Date – still to be researched,**

- **'Dymas'** – captured near Banka (nil)
- **'Jarantut' or 'Jarantut'** – scuttled near mouth of Moesi River(?)
- **Pinnacle # 54** – (a pinnacle is a large launch, up to 60 feet) sunk near Muntok (?)
- **Pinnacle # 56** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **Pinnacle # 503** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **RAF Launch # 36** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **RAF Maintenance Unit #151 /RAF Supply tender** – (?)
- **RAF Seaplane tender #???** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **RAF Seaplane tender # 257** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **RAF Seaplane tender # 258** – captured near Muntok (?)
- **RAF Seaplane Tender # 328** - damaged and scuttled near the Musi/ Moesi river (?)
- **Refueller # 1186** – captured at Muntok (?)

The awful death toll from the sinking of just the abovementioned vessels around Banka island is well over **1,000 servicemen and civilian men, women, and children – in fact at least 1133 by researched estimates.**

As mentioned earlier there were many other vessels sunk further north between Singapore and Singkep Island and they would have incurred a similar death toll.

Then the scene moved on land to events on the beaches, jungles, and towns of Banka Island where the Japanese troops were waiting – with specific orders from their Commander on the Island to kill any shipwrecked survivors they came across.

### **Killings and Deaths on Banka Island:**

Many survivors from the abovementioned vessels reached the shores of Banka Island – or when the vessel was captured were taken to Muntok Pier - and marched into temporary prisons and internment camps including the Cinema, Customs House, the Police Station, the Muntok Prison, and the rudimentary quarters previously use for indentured workers referred to as the Tinwinning Buildings.

However , in addition to those identified survivors known to have been murdered by the Japanese at 'Radji Beach' , there were many, many others whose deaths went unrecorded during the chaos of the Japanese invasion as they were killed in small groups or individually as a result of an order given by the Japanese officer in charge of the invasion force (which landed on Banka Island on 15 February 1942) to kill survivors from sunken ships and then arriving on the coast of the island.



Recent research has started to reveal just many other people lost their lives at the hands of the Japanese during those early weeks on Banka Island – most will never be known – but here are some situations to recognise and remember in the context of honouring their memory,

- the massacre on 'Radji Beach' – about 80 people were murdered, including 21 Australian Army Sisters, plus civilian women and men, officers, and crew from the 'Vyner Brooke', and servicemen from that ship and vessels such as the 'Pulo Soegi'. A little-known aspect of this massacre, which is revealed in a rare monograph by Australian journalist/POW Hal Richardson titled "Into the Fire' and now held in the AWM tells us that there were initially other survivors of this atrocity apart from Bullwinkle, Kinsley, Lloyd, and German. Leading Seaman Wilding, shipwrecked from the 'HMS Li Wo' and a Corporal Seddon, coming across the atrocity the day it occurred found at least three men from 'Radji Beach' - still alive and able to say what happened but with terrible bayonet wounds in their stomachs - amongst the grass above the beach, at the fisherman's hut and one even a long way inland on the jungle trail. These three unidentified English-speaking men must have soon expired because there was nothing that Wilding and Seddon could do for them, and local people were terrified of Japanese retribution.
- Shipwrecked survivors who expired after reaching shore such as **Mrs Helen Parfitt**, who was found on the western coast beach and cared for by Major Tebbutt before she passed away and he buried her on that beach – where she still lies today.
- **Lt Cmdr. Vickers**, commanding officer of the MRNVR, who was summarily executed on a beach near Muntok in February 1942 – his body was identified by Malay ratings from the MRNVR in Malaya who had served under him prior to the invasion of that country.
- Shipwrecked survivors from the 'SS Tandjong Pinang' - **Sister Charlotte Florence Black, QAIMNS**, who survived five days on a raft with no food or water, reached Banka with a couple of crewmen only to be robbed and beaten by bandits and then succumbed to infection from a poisoned leg. She was " ... buried on a beach five miles to the northeast of the village of Rambut [Rambat]..." - where she lies to this day. Also, **Lt Basil Shaw, RNZNVR**, captain of the 'SS Tandjong Pinang' and one of his **Able Seaman (probably A/S Oswald Littlewood Young, RN)**, who were both executed within a day of reaching land three miles south of Tanjong Ular lighthouse.
- An **unidentified Lt Cmdr., Navy**, (either British or Dutch) whose mutilated body, with his ears cut off, was found near the airfield on 29 February 1942 but had been dead for five days. It is not clear whether this tall (6'2") man wearing a wristwatch with 'JD' or 'JP' engraved on it and a signet ring plus cigarette case with 'M' engraved, on it was a Dutch or British officer. In this instance bandits would not have left his valuables.
- Men and women who died soon after reaching shore in internment or POW camps - from wounds incurred as their ships were attacked or exposure or sea water inhalation during their time in the sea e.g., **Mrs Warman** from the 'SS Vyner Brooke'. Some of servicemen who appear to have suffered wounds in this situation were buried on Banka with the notation in archived



records of “... *Buried – Muntok 25 yards N.E. of Cinema near pier...*” but it appears that their remains may have never been retrieved, or were unidentifiable, since their only memorial is on the Columns at Kranji or the Plymouth Naval memorial – in this category are **Sgt. E. Chatt, RAF** and **Sgt W. Bullock, RAF** who died on 16 February 1942. Similarly, with no formal cemetery burial or reinternment **Leading Seaman Bakar Bin Hassan, Malay Navy** and **Marine O.T.D. Locke, Royal Marines**.

- Many unidentified men from the ships sunk around Banka Island and in the Banka Straits who were without question young and fit enough to have reached Banka Island but were never heard from again – whilst some would have succumbed to the sea and sharks there will have been many who made it to shore only to be murdered by the Japanese troops or Chinese bandits. **Staff Sergeant Lockett and Staff Sergeant Ginn, Royal Engineers, from HMML 310** departed Pulau Tjebia (north west of Banka) in a ‘prahu’ for Banka Island in April 1942 to try and contact a Dutch Controller on Banka Island, but were never heard from again “... *probably they were murdered for the money they carried. In any case they were never heard of again ...*” (“Course for Disaster”, p. 144). This includes men in the next paragraph,
- Men mentioned (Hal Richardson book ‘Into The Fire’) as having been summarily killed after reaching Banka Island such as Victor Spencer and those **unidentified servicemen and sailors described as “...other able bodied men...” from the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’** ( this is the only record of these men) who after coming ashore at Radji Beach, gathering firewood for the bonfire and began cooking for the other survivors – then “... struck out for the lighthouse a mile or so along the beach...” and from the coast struck inland towards Muntok. Spencer’s group came across a Japanese squad and he was jabbed with a bayonet and knocked unconscious, but when he came to saw “... *I was the only one left alive and others were lying around, shot and bayoneted...*”. Spencer then came across ‘Leading Stoker’ James Hadley, RN., also from ‘HMS Li Wo’ who was badly wounded – it is unclear if Hadley had received these injuries in the sinking of ‘Li Wo’ or at ‘Radji Beach’ but he could not move and they were soon captured with Hadley dying from his injuries on 26 April 1942.
- **Australian Trade Commissioner Vivian Gordon Bowden** an experienced and astute diplomat who had been representing Australia on the Far Eastern War Council was captured near Muntok on the large launch ‘Mary Rose’ and protested diplomatic immunity when Japanese troops at the Cinema POW camp demanded his watch – their response was to take him outside, made to dig his own grave and other survivors heard shots and then the guards return cleaning bayonets.
- RAAF and RAF airmen who crashed near Banka Island whilst attacking the Japanese shipping heading for the Moesi river around the Palembang invasion - including **Pilot Officer ‘Tom’ McInerney, RAAF**, on 13 February and later (on 21 February) **Pilot Officer David Stewart, RAAF; Sgt. John Burrage, RAAF and Sgt Malcolm McDonald, RAAF** – none of whose bodies were recovered. On 14 February 1942 RAF bomber ‘V9233’ was shot down at sea 30 miles north of Banka Island - the crew reached shore on Banka with the pilot and one other becoming POWs on 25 February, but two other



crew members, **Sgt Allan Tearnan and Sgt Joe Mercer, 62 Sqdn., RAF**, were murdered by local bandits on 24 February.

- Muntok POW escapees – RN, RNZNVR etc - **Lt Anthony Ruthven Clark, RNZNVR and Cmdr. Fenton Livingstone, RN; Lieut. K.J.H. Lester, 2/15 Field Regt, AIF and Pte. S.J.O. Hoy, 2/26 inf Btn, AIF**, plus several others (this subject of Muntok escape history is yet to be researched) who escaped from Muntok (probably either the Cinema or an early temporary camp) during the second half of February 1942 and were never seen again - presumably they still lie on Banka Island
- The numerous Internee deaths from disease and malnutrition in the internment camps at Muntok during the periods they were in use over the next three years (Muntok Peace Museum)
- The deaths from malnutrition, physical abuse, and disease of POWs at Muntok.

Another little-known aspect of these sinkings is that, following the slaughter on the sea of mid – February 1942, local people and POWs during the weeks and months that followed saw literally **hundreds** of bodies washed ashore from the ships listed here (and the others sunk slightly further amongst the islands near Singkep) which had been swept south by the strong sea currents onto the north-western beaches of Banka Island. One survivor walking southward for many miles along the northwest coast from Tanjong Oelar towards Muntok recounted that he saw a body “...every 10 feet...” – perhaps, or perhaps not, an overestimation but certainly an indication of how many bodies had come shore. For many years those beaches remained covered with the bones of those hundreds and hundreds of men and women who lost their lives - remembering that the Japanese Army rarely buried their victims during the War - before the sand finally covered them over. The bones were still evident to the post war Allied War Graves Parties of late 1945 and 1946. So, these remains of civilian women, children, men, Nurses, sailors, and servicemen of all branches of the Allied armed forces from Singapore and Malaya still lie there today.

**“That stretch of coastline will forever be hallowed ground.”**

If anyone wishes to share or obtain more information on any of the ships listed with an asterisk, or those aboard these ships, please contact the researcher Michael Pether on [mncpether@gmail.com](mailto:mncpether@gmail.com) or at 2/23 Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland 0622, New Zealand. The phone contact is +64274543695 (within New Zealand 0274543695 or the landline 09-5865754).

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