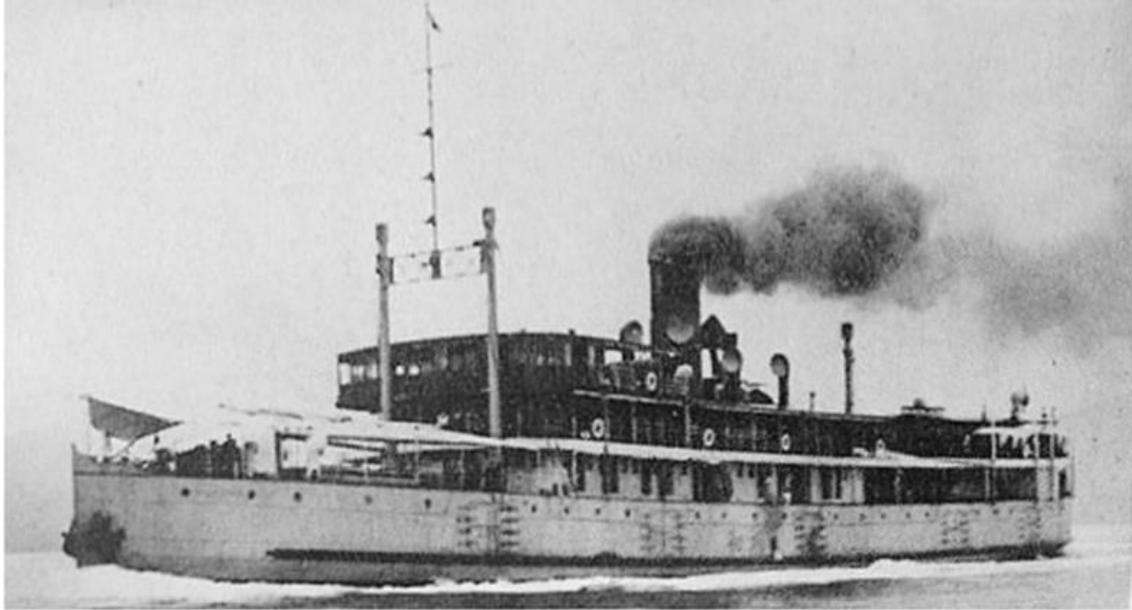


## 'SS. SIANG WO'

- Bombed and beached on 13 February 1942 at Muntok on Banka Island  
[Version 1.5.0; September 2023]



SIANGWO on trials. Emphasis on cargo and 'tween-deck capacities but no split superstructure. HK&WDC advertising in *OSK Guide* 1929

### The 'Siang Wo':

'Siang Wo' was built by Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co. Ltd, Hong Kong (#625) for the Indo China Steam Navigation Company Ltd. [ISNCL] and used in their 'Middle River' passenger service on the Yangtze River – the stretch of the Yangtze River near the city Europeans used to call 'Hankow' (now Hankou) which is some 900 km upriver from Shanghai.

Launched in 1926 it was a sizeable 2595-ton vessel, 275 feet long and 46 feet wide.

Most of the ships such as 'Siang Wo' carried names that Romanised two Chinese characters, the second being 'Sang' or 'Shing' for coastal vessels, or 'Wo' for river steamers. Chinese observe no spacing between the characters and it appears that the ultimate owner of the ICSNCL, Jardine Matheson & Co., were never consistent as to whether to Romanise them as one or two words and whether to hyphenate.

On 15<sup>th</sup> September 1931 the vessel was reported as being ashore at 'Hankow' as the British referred to that town (in Chinese 'Hankou', which today is called Wuhan),



SIANGWO with LUEN HO at Jardine wharves, Hankow.

http://www.maritime-heritage.com.au/2006/04/02/20060402-00010001.html

In July 1939 it was recorded at Tientsin in China.



SIANGWO in unfamiliar waters at Tientsin, July 1939 (Warren Swire /UoB sw08-150).

By 1940, with the deteriorating security situation caused by Japanese aggression in China (the invasion of China by Japan had occurred many years previously), the 'Siang Wo' was requisitioned by the Royal Navy as an auxiliary anti-submarine vessel and by 10<sup>th</sup> December 1940 it had arrived at Hong Kong, then steamed onwards to Singapore arriving 16<sup>th</sup> December 1940.

The Royal Navy requisitioned many such passenger vessels and tugs which had been working on the Yangtze River and relocated them to be fitted out with appropriate equipment and used as 'Auxiliary Patrol Ships and Minesweepers' in the waters around Singapore and Malaya. Many RNR/ RNVR / MRNVR / SSRNVR / NZRNVR and some RANVR 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 during December 1941 to February 1942 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 many 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 Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy and MRNVR 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, included a huge variety of vessels 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, and RAF fast launches.

A large collection of British owned vessels which had been servicing trade and passengers on the Yangtze River in China had escaped 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, plus passenger vessels and work tugs (also custom designed for moving barges up and down the shallows of the river) which had been transferred to Singapore and / or requisitioned by the Royal Navy for use as Auxiliary Minesweepers and patrol boats around Singapore and Malaya. Vessels such as 'HMS Li Wo', 'HMS Grasshopper', 'HMS Scorpion', 'HMS Dragonfly', and 'HMT Ying Ping' would eventually all come to grief under the bombsights and gunsights of Japanese bombers and warships during their evacuation voyage from Singapore.

Of the 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 twenty) would make it to safety on the east coast rivers of Sumatra or to the port of Tanjung Priok at 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. This is one of the attempts to memorialise those on board and 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'.

We are fortunate to have access to some good sources of information on the last voyage of the 'SS. Siang Wo' including.

- The book 'Behind Bamboo' by **Rohan Rivett**
- A report by **Sub. Lieut. T.C. Marr, RNR.** (UK Archives)
- Malayan Research Bureau (MRB) report (#21) by **Miss E. Tasker**
- **TEFS** - The book '**The Escape from Singapore**' (**TEFS**) by Richard Gough.
- A letter written by passenger **Mrs Margaret Robinson**

The desperate situation of beleaguered Singapore which required the immediate evacuation of those on the 'Siang Wo' is best portrayed by **Rohan Rivett**, War Correspondent for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation [and originally from Australia] in his excellent book 'Behind Bamboo' which he wrote in 1945. He paints the picture as,

*"... The day was darkened by the dense pall of smoke from huge conflagrations all over the island; the night was made bright by soaring pillars of flame leaping hundreds of feet into the air. The whole unforgettable scene stood out against an orchestral accompaniment of heavy guns, bomb explosions and mortar and machine gun fire.*





*By the Tuesday [10<sup>th</sup> February 1942] morning most of us in close touch with the situation knew beyond all hope that the end was a matter of days. That afternoon a fellow correspondent told me that General Bennett had told Ian Fitchett, official Australian War Correspondent, to get out and that the last of the correspondents were already down at the docks or were leaving immediately. The end must come in three or four days and those who didn't get away were doomed to rot in Jap concentration camps, probably for years.... We were determined in the MBC [Malayan Broadcasting Corporation] that we would stay on the air to the bitter end, but events on the Tuesday night moved so rapidly that, at dawn on Wednesday, the Thompson Road studios were under Japanese machine-gun and mortar fire, and it seemed likely that the enemy would be in physical possession of the building by nightfall. I was sitting at my desk in the newsroom at half past eight on the morning of Wednesday the eleventh when the phone rang and I heard Mr Davis's voice, hoarse with emotion, saying that he had been told by the military that we must close down by 11 o'clock since the transmitting plant had become untenable... In the next hour the last of us received orders that we were to be evacuated to Java immediately to carry on from there..."*

## Who boarded 'Siang Wo'?

[As with all the evacuation vessels there were no passenger lists compiled – or which survived.]

It appears that 231 people boarded 'Siang Wo' before she left Singapore – of whom 19 were women according to **Sub. Lieut. Marr, RNR** in his report - although Richard Gough in his book states that there were "... *two senior RNR Lieutenant – Commanders, newspaper correspondents* [he is probably referring to Rohan Rivett and Norman Carter], *and some seventeen women...*", other comments seem to confirm the number as 17. The two Lieut. Cmdrs. mentioned were **Lieut. Cmdr. Horace Vickers, MRNVR** (Commanding Officer of the SSRNVR/MRNVR section of the Royal Navy in Malaya based at the Singapore Naval Base – whose fate is described in detail in his individual entry later in the document) and **Lieut Cmdr. Spilman, RN.**, of the MRNVR training shore base 'HMS Pelandok' which was also at the Royal Navy base Singapore and apparently the 'number Two in the MRNVR. The land-based training establishment 'HMS Pelandok' was bombed a week or so prior to the Surrender on 15 February 1942, killing or injuring an unknown number of Malay ratings, triggering the departure of the ratings from 'HMS Pelandok' (it was located on the Johor Strait facing Malaya and the oncoming Japanese) and then relocating to the old vessel 'HMS Laburnum' anchored in Telok Ayer Basin at Singapore Harbour. There they were accommodated along with Royal Navy ratings, but 'HMS Laburnum' was then also bombed, killing more men. On about the evening of 10 February 1942 Lieut. Cmdr. Vickers, MRNVR, met with about 60 MRNVR personnel and gave them the choice of whether they wanted to stay in Singapore or leave as crew on an evacuation vessel – almost half chose to stay and the remainder, say 35-40 men, chose to leave on a ship and it appears most went on 'SS Siang Wo'. Amongst those who chose to remain in Singapore many ended up in 'labour gangs' martialled by the Japanese later in the year and sent to places like Borneo and New Britain.



'HMS Pelandok' MRNVR Training base (photo from UK Archives)

One passenger, **Rohan Rivett (shown in the photo below)**, with his professional journalistic skills left us with the following vivid picture,

*" ... Norman [Carter] and I arrived at the wharves about noon. The Japs gave us a warm welcome by dropping a packet all around the wharf and on the square leading to it. There was a bit of a blast as we dived with more haste than dignity behind some piled sandbags, but no member of the party was injured... Ten minutes later a number of us put off in a motorboat tender and set out across the harbour toward the medley of shipping anchored at intervals all over Keppel Harbour [ now reclaimed land and the area where 'Gardens At the Bay' and the 'Marina Bay Sands' Hotel now stand]. Eighteen Jap bombers chose this moment to sprinkle their cargo over the harbour, but no ship was hit... Our motorboat drew up alongside a squat, ugly looking vessel of about 2500 tons, which we afterwards learned was the 'Siang Wo'... married men were called for, so Norman and I threw in our lot with the 'Siang Wo'...*



*at this late hour the chances of getting through were slim indeed, I thought the odds against us about three to one. But this was too optimistic... twenty minutes after boarding the ships' alarm bells clanged hysterically and most of the two hundred odd naval officers, soldiers and civilians aboard were herded below... the rest of us crowded around as close to protecting sandbags as we could get... we heard the shrill scream of a bomb. Norman and I dived flat on our faces amidst a tangle of head and boots and a second later with a terrific bang a bomb went off close to the ship's waterline... two minutes later the crew discovered that a large hole had been blown in the port side , about thirty feet from where we had been standing ... [we all] ... shovelled sand and mixed concrete , passed down bags to block the hole... there were three more raids in the next two hours and more shrapnel came aboard..."*

**Miss E. Tasker**, an Obstetric nurse who had been evacuated from war torn and bomb damaged Shanghai down to Singapore in 1939 later told the Malayan Research Bureau that she left Singapore city with a group of sixteen people, mainly MBC employees, for Clifford Pier on 11 February 1942 – this included the Chairman of the MBC, Eric 'Davis', but he and a couple of others [Miss Tasker mentions 'Aubrey Herbert' and Frederick Chinnery] separated from the main party on the docks.[There had been a high level decision in Singapore - by order of the Colonial Secretary's Office to evacuate a large group of 'sensitive' workers from the MBC, Press Censorship, Intelligence Sections, the 'British Information Far East Bureau', DIP. Malaya and they were broken up into parties to board 'Siang Wo', Giang Bee', 'Ping Wo'- all disastrously flying the White Ensign, because it made them 'ships of war'- plus, this researcher believes, the 'SS. Kung Wo'. 'Davis' (sic Davies) and Chinnery boarded respectively the 'Ping Wo', which made it safely to Batavia, and the 'SS. Giang Bee' on which Frederick Chinnery lost his life when that vessel was sunk a couple of days later]. One group including most of the original MBC party were then taken out by a Police launch and placed on 'Siang Wo'.

She wrote that the MBC evacuation party comprised,

- **Rohan Rivett**
- **Norman Carter** – “...Batavia Broadcast...”.
- **Andrew Carruthers** – an MBC Announcer

- His wife **Mrs Carruthers**
- An unidentified Chinese couple employed by the MBC [ this appears to have been a **Mr. and Mrs. Leong**, Rohan Rivett's typist and wife who remained at Muntok]
- **Miss Betty Lee** – a Chinese Announcer at MBC, about 20 years of age.
- **Miss Joan Lee** – a Chinese Announcer at MBC, about 20 years of age (not related).
- **Mrs Leyland** – the “... *MBC- Restaurant Mgr...*”.
- **Mrs Mary Austin** – a Clerk with MBC [ some records have her name spelt **Austen**. Her story is explained in detail in her individual entry later in this document]
- **Mrs Margaret Marsden** – Secretary [her story is explained in detail in her individual entry later in this document]
- **Miss Clark** – Secretary [ maybe should have been spelt **Clarke?**]
- **Mrs Margaret Robinson** – Secretary.
- **Mrs Woosey** “... *separated from her husband, but was for last week as caterer for teas...*”
- “... *2 Middle aged women (Clerks – wives of MOI. Officials) not MBC...*”
- **Miss E. Tasker**.

**Miss Tasker** then records “... *on board ‘Siang Wo’ were about 250 Royal Navy ratings including men from the ‘Repulse’ and ‘Prince of Wales’ and crew ... no other Civilians or women and children...*” – this is contrary to a post war oral archive recollection by one of the Malay ratings in the crew who says there were “... *women and children...*”, but Miss Tasker is probably more likely to be correct on the absence of children since she was among the passengers and her account is a contemporary of the events.

A more descriptive personal account is contained in a letter by the passenger listed above, **Mrs (or Miss) Margaret Robinson**, wrote several months later in April 1942 after she had reached safety in New Delhi” ... *I expect you’ve heard of my journey – it was fairly exciting ... I left the flat (Cathay) on the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> February – Aunt Sandy and Uncle Archie Robinson moved in as I moved out ( they had been evacuated by the fighting from their own house during the night)* [Tragically Archie Robinson , an Actuary remained in Singapore and was interned in Changi Prison and then Sime Road Camp whilst his wife Mrs Hilda ‘Sandy’ Robinson, who had been working with the Medical Auxiliaries boarded the ‘SS Kuala’ along with 700 other women and children on 13 Feb. and it was sunk on 14 Feb. at Pom Pong island, she then boarded the rescue vessel ‘SS Tandjong Pinang’ there on 17 Feb. and, along with almost all the other 200 women and children on board, was killed when that vessel was shelled and sunk the same day]. *I just had to leave everything Monty, and only took one kit bag and a small despatch case, I lost the kitbag on Collyer Quay, and it went to Batavia on another boat, but turned up eventually. I actually left, then, the despatch case containing an automatic, a comb, passport, knife and fork and bottle opener, a flask of whisky and nine lipsticks.... “.*



**Collyer Quay (showing Clifford Pier) prior to the War.**



**Collyer Quay (showing Johnston's Pier) prior to the War.**

So, it is estimated that there were about 150 - 200 passengers, including 100 plus naval personnel on board 'Siang Wo' [ that included its officers and crew] - the figure of 500 passengers mentioned by another passenger (Mrs. Robinson) does not seem likely on such a small vessel. Most passengers have not been identified and most became POWs or Internees in Muntok and then Palembang, and even later at Belalau, on the Sumatran mainland.

The naval personnel identified from research as being on board were,

- **Lt. Cdr. Horace Vickers, (RN retd.), MRNVR.**
- **Lt. Cdr. F. Spilman, RN., 'HMS Pelandok'**
- **Lt. A. Woodley, RNR., Captain of 'Siang Wo'.**
- **Lt. T.A. Crossley, MRNVR, an Engineer from Penang.**
- **Lt. (E) W.R. Grant, RNR/MRNVR.**
- **Lt. A. A. Hare, MRNVR, an officer on 'Siang Wo' and Company Secretary, Asia Life Insurance, Singapore**
- **Lt. W. Leggatt, MRNVR, a rubber planter in Malaya.**
- **Lt. C. W. Lyle, MRNVR., a Police Magistrate in Malaya.**
- **Lt. V.N. Wade, RNR/MRNVR., a tin miner in Malaya.**
- **Lt. (SP) C.W. Winter, MRNVR., a Sanitary Inspector in Singapore**
- **Tpy. Lt. (E) W. Dykes, RNR.**
- **Sub. Lt. D.G.R. Kinnear, RNR, "Chief Officer on 'Siang Wo'?"**
- **Sub. Lt. R.C.R. Land, MRNVR, with Stafford & Co., Singapore.**
- **Sub. Lt. T.C. Marr, RNR, "2<sup>nd</sup> Officer on 'Siang Wo' "**

- Sub. Lt. (E) C. Moore, RNR., an officer on ‘Siang Wo’
  - Sub. Lt. J.B. Sharples, SSRNVR, an Electrical Engineer in Malaya.
  - Sub. Lt. S. G. Willimott, MRNVR., a government chemist in Kuala Lumpur.
  - ERA J.J. Dunsmore, RN
  - AB. J.P. Carr, RN., crew of ‘Siang Wo’
  - AB. K. Todd., crew of ‘Siang Wo’
  - Ordinary Seaman R. McGee, RN., crew of ‘Siang Wo’
  - “...Signalman Kirton...” – said to have been killed by bomb splinters on 13 February (Sub. Lt T. Marr.)
  - Ordinary Signalman H.F. Davies, RN.
  - (Rank Unknown) Dahim bin Noordin AHMAD, Malay Section RN
  - Stoker S. McCreery, RN., crew of ‘Siang Wo.’
  - Cook J. Henderson, RN, crew of ‘Siang Wo’.
  - Stores Assistant J.S. Butler, RN., crew of ‘Siang Wo’.
  - Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class J. Neville, RN., crew of ‘Siang Wo’.
- There were a very large number of passengers and crew aboard ‘SS Siang Wo’ and it became apparent during research that there were some very interesting, often poignant, human stories involved – for that reason it is suggested that readers have a glance at the ‘individual entries’ listed at the end of the document.

[**Researcher Note:** given Miss Tasker’s record that “... on board ‘Siang Wo’ were about 250 Royal Navy ratings including men from the ‘Repulse’ and ‘Prince of Wales’ and crew...” and also Rohan Rivett’s “...two hundred odd naval officers, soldiers and civilians aboard ...” there were clearly many more RNVR/RNR/SSRNVR and MRNVR officers and Malay ratings on board than have been identified in this memorial document – so to preserve the possible connection of some men to this voyage a number of names have been included ( *in italics*) in the individual entries at the end of the document. In fact there were probably up to another 50 naval ratings and 10 naval officers in Palembang POW camp who had been passengers and crew on ‘SS Siang Wo’ - specifically those who recorded their date of capture as 15.2.42 but no vessel – who left no record of being on board on board ‘SS Siang Wo’.]

### Evacuation voyage of Siang Wo’:

We also know that after it had been requisitioned by the Royal Navy for coastal patrol and minesweeping duties, ‘Siang Wo’ had been fitted with the standard” ... *4-inch gun mounted on the bow and a stern mounted Lewis Gun. The 4-inch gun could not be elevated more than 45 degrees and was useless against aircraft. Her company colours had been painted over to Royal navy camouflage in grey green with black stripes...*” (TEFS).

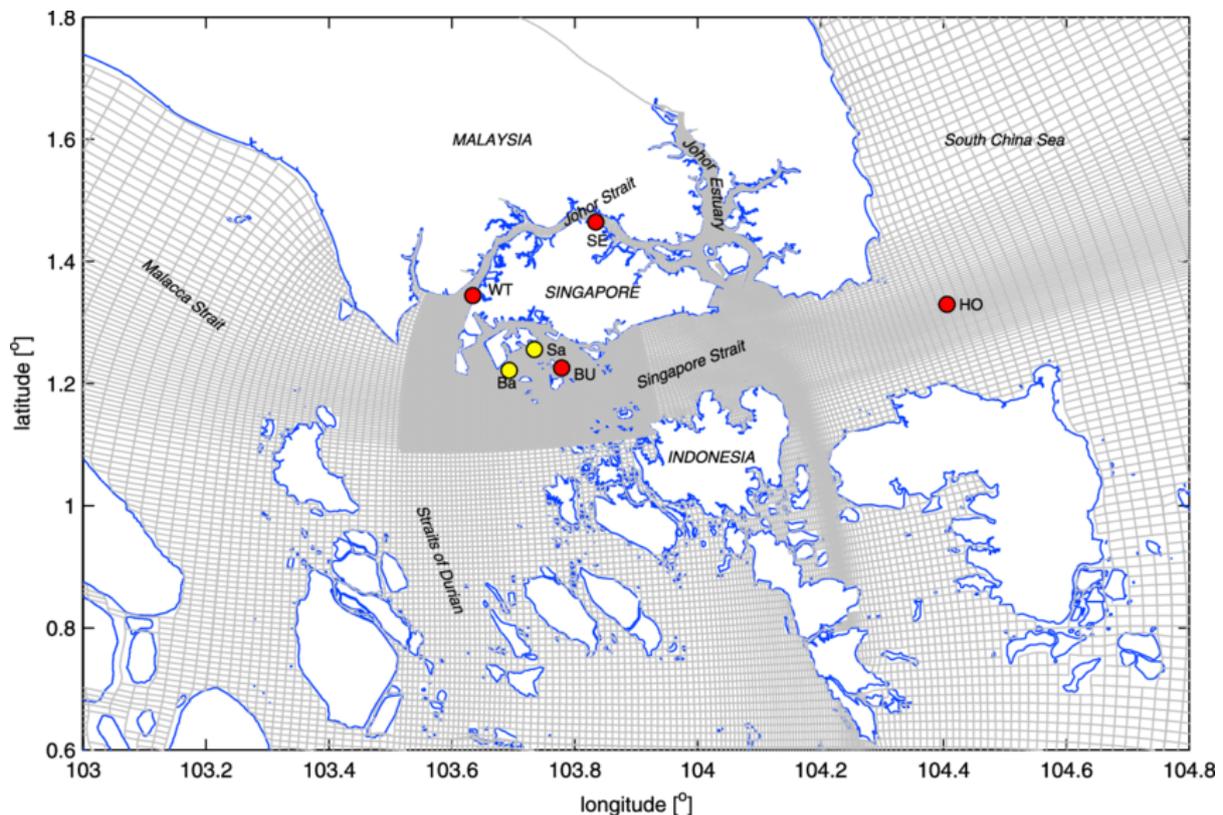
According to **Miss E. Tasker** the passengers boarded the ‘Siang Wo’ on 11 February 1942 but “... they lay in Harbour on the 11<sup>th</sup> until next morning sailed 5.30 am. 12<sup>th</sup>...”.

Richard Gough in ‘TEFS’ had this to say” ... *Under the command of Lt. A. Woodley, RNR, she cast off about 6pm but unable to find the buoy marking the entrance to the minefield she anchored for the night. At daybreak she became 15<sup>th</sup> in line through the swept channel and by 11am was clear of the shipping jam...*”.

**Mrs Margaret Robinson** continues in the very descriptive letter she wrote from New Delhi “... We were bombed most of the morning in the harbour and the wireless and lifeboats and fresh water supply were all destroyed, but we eventually got away in the evening, and I think it was the saddest thing I’ve ever seen just roaring flames from end to end of the island and all the oil installations blazing like fun. The next morning, we left the convoy we were in and hid among the islands just

south of Singapore, hoping that the Jap planes that were around might think we were just another island. They didn't so we moved on. We were all awfully tired, we'd tried to sleep the night before but even a teacup of neat Plymouth Gin didn't make up for the hardness of the bare deck – and we had a terrific thirst which nothing could be done about as the freshwater was non – existent... I suppose there were about 500 of us altogether. We played poker quite a bit and I won some money, but it was difficult to concentrate...”.

**Rohan Rivett** expands on the situation “...Our vessel had a maximum speed of eleven knots at the best of times. Now, with an emergency fire crew and with the hole in her side, she nearly shook herself to pieces when asked to do more than eight. Soon she proved to be the lame duck of the seventeen [vessels in the departing flotilla] and by eleven o'clock that morning, when we lay up in deep water within a few yards of two tiny, thickly vegetated atolls, all the others had disappeared over the horizon...We had several alerts while hiding up between these islands, and then early in the afternoon we set off again. Planes, unquestionably hostile, were sighted once or twice, but they had other fish to fry. So, darkness came down once more as we were labouring along, not yet half-way to the entrance to the Banka Strait and not a quarter of the way to Batavia... It was Margaret Robinson...the last of the Cathay female staff to be evacuated who said suddenly, just as we were settling down for the night: “Do you realize what tomorrow is? It's Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>...””.



**Sub. Lieut. Marr, RNR** simply recorded “... Vessel passed through the Durian Straits at dawn on 12<sup>th</sup> February and was attacked intermittently by Japanese aircraft during the day. Vessel was anchored between two small islands from 1100hrs to 1600hrs in company with ‘HMS Ping Wo’.

**Miss Tasker** recorded “... Bombed on the 11<sup>th</sup> and had near miss with injured (steam pipes damaged and hold) ... 12<sup>th</sup> sailed until midday and then anchored in islands in hiding. Saw ‘Ping Wo’ some way off at anchor. Captain Woodley said it was her.

At 2.30 set off again on account of Japanese reconnaissance planes: went on steadily all night.

So, the 'SS Siang Wo' raised its anchor in Singapore Harbour at 1800 hrs on 11<sup>th</sup> February but then anchored near the 'swept channel' exit from the Harbour until daybreak on 12<sup>th</sup> February when it took its turn to reach open sea and steam towards the Straits of Durian. It passed through the Straits about dawn on 12<sup>th</sup> February and was attacked intermittently by Japanese aircraft during that morning. It anchored between two small islands, with 'HMS Ping Wo' later in the afternoon then steamed south towards Banka Island.

### **Attack on the 'Siang Wo':**

On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February 1942 **Sub. Lieut. Marr, RNR next recorded** "...From 0800 hrs on the 13<sup>th</sup> was attacked continuously by high level bombing and at 1315 hrs received a very near miss which damaged rudder and propeller shafts beyond repair and Lt. Woodley decided to beach ship at Muntok on Banka Island, where vessel was abandoned...".



**Banka/Bangka Island – Muntok town marked by red 'dot'.**

**Rohan Rivett evocatively wrote** "... Banka Island is rather like a shrimp lying alongside the great fish which is Sumatra from which it is separated by the Banka Strait, the strait varying in width from ten to twenty-five miles. Banka itself is 138 miles long and 62 wide and is covered with various series of granite covered hills and ridges from which many rivers run in deep valleys to the sea...". The guidebooks remark that 'in their upper courses they form extensive marshes'. We [after the Japanese invasion] made a personal study of this feature, involuntary, but thorough...".

The book, **TEFS** records (p.224) "... About noon on 13<sup>th</sup> near the northern tip of the Banka Strait, and in sight of Muntok lighthouse, she was attacked by enemy aircraft for some two hours. Shuddering from near misses and a direct hit near the stern, Woodley managed to take her into Muntok. When he later checked the damage no trace of the stern Lewis Gun or its gunners was found. Further examination convinced him that she would never last out to Java, so the captain ran her aground on Muntok beach, close to three other ships near the lighthouse....". This 'damage near the stern' must have been the event which caused the deaths of an **unidentified Malay naval Quartermaster** [in 'Behind Bamboo' Rivett states p.21 "... The Lewis Gun and the Malay operating it had been the only major casualties caused by the explosion at the stern of the ship] and possibly that of **Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class J. Neville, RN**.

Somewhat inexplicably **Sub. Lieut. T.C. Marr, RNR** wrote, in a later report (typed in a Java POW camp) on the events of 13 February, that "... Sgm. Kerton R.N. was killed by bomb splinters..." – this person has never been identified.



**Muntok lighthouse at Tanjong Kelian (1930s - 40s)**

[Tanjung is the Malay word for 'headland']

**Miss Tasker** added "... 13<sup>th</sup> morning – 7 am. Japanese passed over, dropped bombs; near misses with holes etc. each time. Three or four alarms and each time injuries sustained by men at guns. At 2 pm. A depth charge on board was hit and blew up back hatch – broke steering etc. all rushed on deck. After a while found ship not sinking. This was off Muntok, Banka Straits.

Back with the letter written by **Mrs Robinson** "... The next morning Friday 13<sup>th</sup>, about 15 planes bombed and machine gunned us, and this went on from 8 am till 12.30 on and off. It was a bit exhausting and how we weren't just sunk half a dozen times is something I'll never know. The last lot of bombs got the old ship in the stern and wrecked the steering gear, so after floating round and round in circles for a bit they eventually managed to hand steer her into a little bay, which was full of wrecks of other ships and looked absolutely deserted.

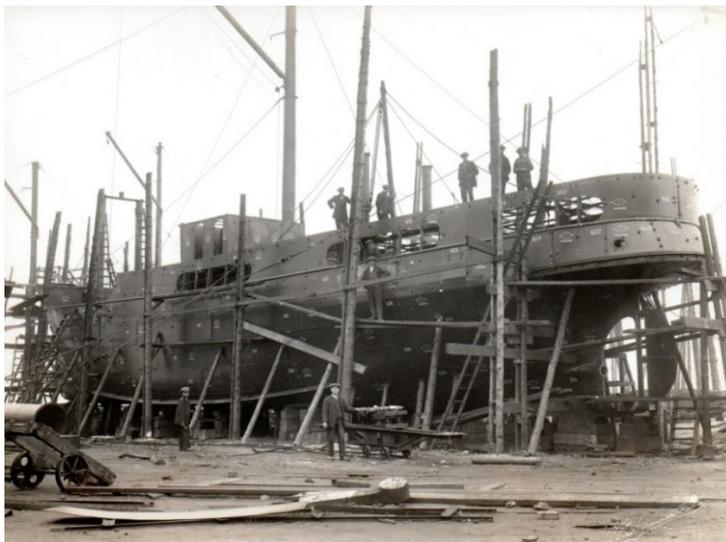
Then in the words of **Rohan Rivett** "... The captain of the 'Siang Wo' ... therefore resolved to beach her on the Banka coast. Already two or three smaller ships lay high and dry, not far from the lighthouse, where they had been beached, as a result of earlier attacks. We therefore ran inshore until the keel grated on the bottom as we came to rest a few hundred yards from the Muntok jetty. The captain having gone ashore and conferred with the Dutch resident, who was practically the sole remaining Dutchman in Muntok, reported that the Japanese had been expected hourly for the past week and that there had been a general exodus towards Java. As a result of this, and of sabotage by

*the local natives, there was not a single navigable boat to be had at Muntok for love, money or murder...”.*

**Landing on Banka Island:**

At Muntok, Lt. Woodley had run the ship aground a few hundred yards from Muntok Pier – the water is very shallow a long way from land in that area – near two or three smaller vessels which had been victims and by then were also high and dry.

The bomb damaged and stranded ‘Siang Wo’ was hailed by a small vessel named ‘Rompin’ (referred to by some passengers as a ‘tug’, but in fact a 78 ton coastal trading vessel which had been operating between Singapore and the Malayan peninsula since 1920 and requisitioned when war broke out to be a RN auxiliary patrol vessel) towing three other boats, including the beautiful diesel engine cruising yacht, a schooner, ‘White Swan’ ( owned by Merton Brown of Thornycrofts the ship builders) and the 30 foot yawl ‘Carimon’ ( owned by J.A.D. Anderson an Engineer with the Public Works department in Johore Bahru and an experienced blue water yachtsman) ‘SS Siang Wo’ signalled these smaller craft that it had been bombed as was grounded.



**‘Rompin’ under construction around 1920**



**‘White Swan’**

**Mrs Margaret Robinson** appears not to have realised that her ship had been run aground and continues describing the scene” *...Everyone on the ship was pretty marvellous and the Skipper was grand. When we anchored in the bay, we took a look around and saw a little coastal boat - minute thing – flying the RAF flag about a mile and a half from us. Nothing happened for ages and then a launch came across to us ... there were about six men in it mostly RAF officers, who had escaped from Singapore on this little boat which had been given up as lost by the Straits Steamship people years ago, and they none of them knew a thing about it. So, a good time was had by all until just before they from Singapore they collected GORDON BURT as Chief Engineer [Gordon Burt was an skilled, highly qualified and experienced engineer from Dunedin, New Zealand working for the Asiatic petroleum Company ‘Shell Oil’ – he was captured a few days later on the launch up the Musi River in Sumatra and became an internee – sadly he died in captivity in Muntok internment camp in January 1945. His story is well worth reading, see [http://muntokpeacemuseum.org/?page\\_id=3195](http://muntokpeacemuseum.org/?page_id=3195)].*

*The skipper of this little thing (‘Rompin’) said that he would take off all the women from our old tub and we could take a chance on whether or not we made it to Batavia. So off we all trooped (with the exception of M. Carruthers, who refused to leave her Andrew and one other woman who just didn’t want to come) and boarded the ‘Rompin’. There must have been twenty or thirty RAF lads on board plus lots of equipment and things – including a very beautiful motor car – and they seemed quite pleased to see us...”.*

**Miss E. Tasker** recorded her view “... Saw and talked to the Captain: then Captain gathered women together; these RAF offered to take women on board, and he advised them to accept because Japanese had left the yachts alone thinking them too small to trouble about. Captain said he was going to try to go to Batavia on hand-steering, but someone else on board said that she would have to be beached.

About 12 went to the yachts – the following stayed on board.

- **Mrs Austin** – who died in horrible circumstances as an internee in 1945.
- **Mr & Mrs Carruthers** (bizarrely, Mrs Carruthers was reported in a post war newspaper interview to have also sailed to Batavia on Anderson’s yacht ‘Carimon’, whereas the reality was she spent the war as an internee in Sumatra)
- **R. Rivett**
- **N. Carter**

Merton Brown’s yacht took-

- **Miss Clarke**
- **Mrs Woosey (who reached Batavia and later Britain)**
- **Miss Tasker (who reached Batavia and Fremantle)**
- **Miss Lee**

Anderson’s yacht took-

- **Mrs Robinson** – “...Now in India...”
- **Mrs Marsden** – “...Now in Melbourne...”

Rest went to tug ‘Rompin’ - Miss Lee stayed. Sudden explosion of engine on ‘Rompin’ meant the abandonment of that ship.... The yachts had petrol and sail and set off for Batavia – 300 miles away. Andersons arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 5 pm. Merton Brown arrived at 7 pm., Tanjong Priok, Port of Batavia...”.

A report #79 to the Malayan Research Bureau by Mr Merton Brown of the 'White Swan' tells us that "... Four women remained on 'Rompin'..." :-

- **Mrs Leyland**
- **Miss Lee (Chinese)**
- **Two middle aged women (wives or clerks of MOI officials)**

...Mr Merton Brown is sure that no one from the 'Rompin', either officers or men, of whom there were 23 or 24, ever turned up in Batavia...".

There is also a reference that mentions a '**Lily**' Lee staying on board at Banka and remaining at Muntok.

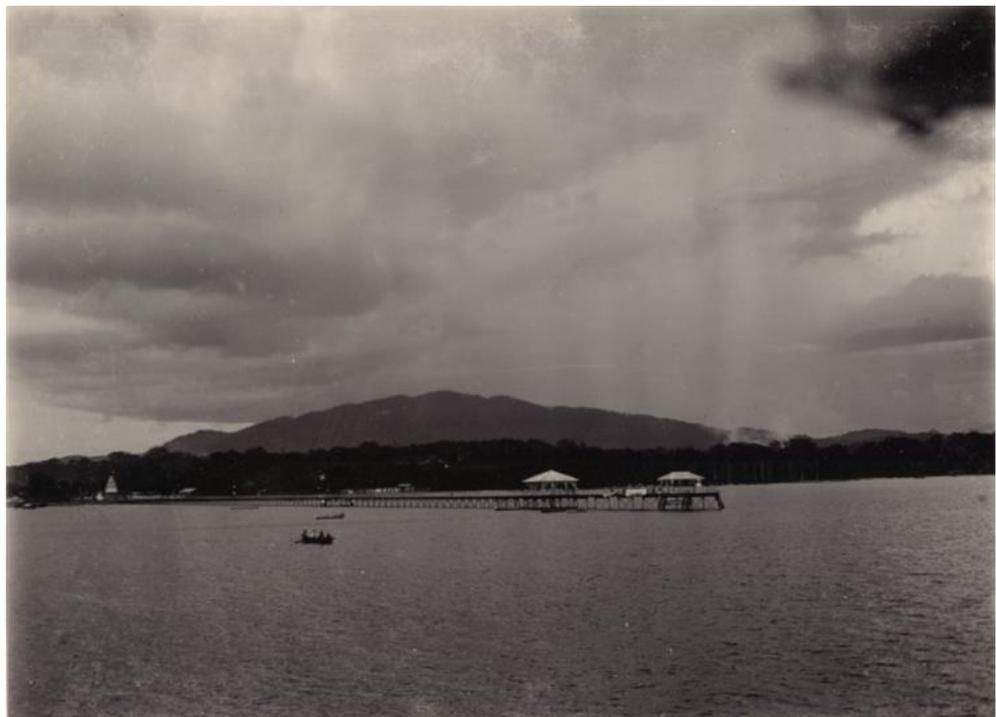
The book **TEFS** summarises this as "... An attempt was made to transfer the fifteen women on board to the 'Rompin', a seaplane tender. She was towing three other boats including the yacht, the 'White Swam'. As the 'Rompin' was also having engine trouble the women rejoined the ship apart from the two who were taken on board the 'White Swan'. The last the passengers saw of the yacht, before they were [later] taken into captivity, was her canvas being unfurled as she slowly sailed away through the cliff and tree lined Strait. She had with her **Mrs Robinson** and **Mrs Marsden**...".

After the departure of the two yachts **Rohan Rivett** tells us "... We ransacked what remained of the ship's stores, but even then, did not get a square meal. Finally, after dark, by the light of a couple of hurricane lamps, carefully shielded, we trooped down the gangway into two large barges which had been brought out from the shore. The less said about the evacuation of the ship the better. The Naval reserve officer in charge was exceedingly drunk and particularly rude during the evacuation. At the end he kept us waiting at the ship's side while he detailed a rating to search for his gear which had been mislaid. When we got to the jetty, he capped an ignominious performance by kicking the baggage belonging to some of the women into the water in a fit of rage. None of his luggage was recovered...".



**Muntok Pier – Customs House on left**

The MRNVR Malay ratings are said taken off their uniforms at this point and gone ashore with all other personnel. A Malaysian based website ( [webmaster@navy.mil.my](mailto:webmaster@navy.mil.my)) offers the insight that the members of the 'Malay Navy Team' had "... *relatively good fortune...*" although "... **Able Seaman Idris bin Mohd Yunus** and his friends were arrested and made into slave labour... after two days in captivity Able Seaman Idris and his friends were released by the Japanese Army and they wandered to a nearby village and continued to live there. While in the village he was told by the residents that Lieutenant Commander Vickers had been seen dead in the bushes there...". Another Malay rating was Ahmad Dahim bin Noordin, originally from Indonesia, who confirms that the ratings went to 'HMS Laburnum' on 8 Feb. and then, on the orders of Lt. Cdr. Vickers, those who did not wish to remain with family in Singapore, boarded the ship 'Siang Wo' which was anchored near Kuzu Island and left Singapore. They sailed at dawn on the morning of 11 Feb.(?), but bombing by the Japanese damaged the stern of the vessel and it lost steering. Ahmad Dahim bin Noordin states that 40 Malay naval ratings landed at Muntok and the next day the Japanese landed.



Muntok's very long – 600 metre - Pier (referred to as a 'jetty' above)



Contemporary photo of Muntok showing the Pier, the town and the shallow mudflats

[The 'Siang Wo' would have beached towards the top right-hand corner of this photo]

**Rivett** continues "...After some delay ashore, all officers and civilians, together with the fifteen women who had not got away to Batavia, proceeded to the Muntok Hotel, while the ratings and troops on board went to the YWMCA Hall in another part of the town.... beds were found for all the women, while fourteen of us shared one bedroom, four in the double bed....".



The Government Hotel Muntok.



**The Muntok 'Guesthouse' which, alternatively, may have been the 'hotel' mentioned by Rivett.**

**Rohan Rivett** "... The next day, Saturday the fourteenth, was enlivened by a series of attacks by Jap fighter and bombers on the Muntok area. Discovering that Muntok boasted only one gun of any kind, they conducted some of these at tree-top level, which, in the state of nerves to which some of the party had been reduced, was scarcely helpful. Norman [Carter] and I spent most of the morning and afternoon first in the slit trench behind the hotel and then out in the jungle.... they apparently failed to spot the hotel which was partially hidden by tall trees.... Towards evening Norman and I walked across the square, or public gardens, in the middle of the town to the resident's house. He was out on his veranda burning the last of his official papers, and gloomily informed us that there was not a boat left along the whole of the Banka coast and that the Japanese were arriving before midnight.... He offered no solution to our problem about getting the women away but asked us what we thought the Japanese would do to him. As he was such a Cheer-up Society and as I thought the whole business of him remaining very fishy, I expressed the opinion that they would certainly shoot him..."



**Dutch Resident's House at Muntok (Source: KITLV Collection, n. 3447, Leiden)**

## Japanese invasion of Banka Island:

**Rohan Rivett** has left us a rare Allied account [i.e. known to this researcher] of the Japanese landing on Banka Island on 14 February 1942" ... *Norman and I went back to our bedroom where a conference was proceeding among certain members of the party who were getting restless at the attitude of the Naval reserve Commander [this could only have been Lt. Cmdr. Horace Vickers, MRNVR], who seemed incapable of action of any kind. We got a few hours sleep and then I woke to find somebody whispering feverishly, out in the main hall, and the first words I could distinguish were, 'They're pulling in towards the jetty now. They'll be here in the next two hours – thousands of 'em!'. One had no doubt who 'they' were. It was now about 3 am. I pulled on some clothes and joined the conference in the hallway. The sentries who had been posted down at the jetty said that a large number of ships had entered the Banka Strait from the north-east just before midnight. Cruisers and destroyers were recognizable amongst them. After much shouting and signalling, both from the shore and from the ships, many boats were lowered, and when the last sentry left the wharf some hundreds of soldiers were already only a few hundred yards from the shore.*

*Commander Vickers, who had now taken charge, decided that all the women should be sent forthwith to the Dutch Hospital, where they would be with the nursing sisters and under the Red Cross... The commander then issued orders to all officers to jettison their revolvers and prepare to surrender at the hotel. So, arms and ammunition were thrown into the jungle and the forty-odd officers stood by to surrender. Nothing happened during one of the least cheerful hours I ever remember....".*

[What those in Muntok were observing was the arrival of a large force of Japanese soldiers who had been ordered to detach from the main strategic invasion flotilla and army heading to southern Sumatra – specifically targeted at Palembang and nearby oilfields – with orders to take and occupy Banka Island. Back 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), which included the Division 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 the Sumatra invasion.

The specifically allocated 'Bangka invasion unit' of the larger 38<sup>th</sup> Division invasion force – being two 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.

The Japanese plan was that;

*"... 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..."*

*Upon arrival the Japanese encountered no resistance, although a few Lockheed bombers from No. 1 RAAF Squadron Palembang gave them a reminder soon after the landing with a 'hit and run' attack on the Japanese flotilla anchored off Muntok in the Banka Strait.*

One company of the 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment remained to occupy Banka Island while the other company, on the 17 February, began movement across the sea to the Palembang area to join the main body of the invasion force attacking southern Sumatra.

As detailed in the memorial document for the 'SS Vyner Brooke' these Japanese soldiers were then sent out on patrols on the west and north coast of Banka Island with orders to kill any shipwrecked survivors - which they did in great numbers.]



### Escape Attempts:

Where the story of the 'Siang Wo' differs from other evacuation vessels sunk and captured around Banka Island is the immediate escape attempts made by some passengers and crew of the 'Siang Wo'. Firstly, any escapees had to travel down the very difficult hilly jungle clad terrain of Banka Island to some point along that island's western coast before ; trying to find ( steal)some sort of boat in which they might cross the Banka Strait to reach Sumatra; and then also sail/ row the hundreds of miles of extremely inhospitable, mangrove swamp covered coastline to the Sunda Straits which separate Sumatra from Java.

One escape attempt according to a report (in the UK Archives) by Sub. Lt Tommy Marr, RNR., was made by several of the ship's officers,

- **Lt. Woodley, RNR.**
- **Lt (E) W.R. Grant, RNR/MRNVR.**
- **Sub. Lt (E) C. Moore, RNR.**
- **Lt. A.A. Hare, MRNVR.**

- but Marr believed they had been unable to leave Banka Island.

There was, however, another escape party which achieved almost impossible feats of endurance over the next few weeks. The primary chronicler of that saga was Rohan Rivett in his book "Behind Bamboo".

**Rivett** explains how, on 15 February 1942, the day after the 'Siang Wo' was grounded at Muntok, he escaped in another group "... Just as day was breaking several of us told Commander Vickers that we thought it our duty to attempt to escape and asked for permission to make a break for it. The commander said hastily that we were mad since we knew nothing of the swamps and mountains of the island and would certainly get picked up by a Japanese patrol and shot out of hand. If we stayed and surrendered formally in the hotel, we might be taken prisoner. However further representations were made, the commander changed his mind, and said we could do as we liked, although in his opinion it was sheer suicide..."

As we will learn shortly in this memorial document, the advice of Lt. Cmdr. Horace Vickers would prove to be horribly reversed by events with an awful, tragic and twisted outcome!

**Sub-Lt. John Sharples** gave this account in his MI9 questionnaire [ it is occasionally very hard to decipher] *“... On 13/2/42 ‘HMS Siang Wo’ was beached at Muntok, Banka Island following bombing air attack. I was billeted in the Muntok Hotel with other officers. On night of 14/15 Feb 1942 the Japanese landed on Banka. When the Japs approached the hotel the SNO, Lt. Cdr. Spilman, RN. warned us to prepare to become P.O.W. I sought and obtained permission to escape and with six others entered the jungle behind the hotel. After 6 days in the jungle, we found a sampan and made our way to Java, collecting 6 other shipwrecked persons en route. Arrived near Merak, Java on night of 6/8 March 1942 but found Japs in occupation and party broke up to filter through to British lines in small groups. Lt. V.N Wade, RNVN and myself were caught by Japanese troops at Tjilegon...”.*

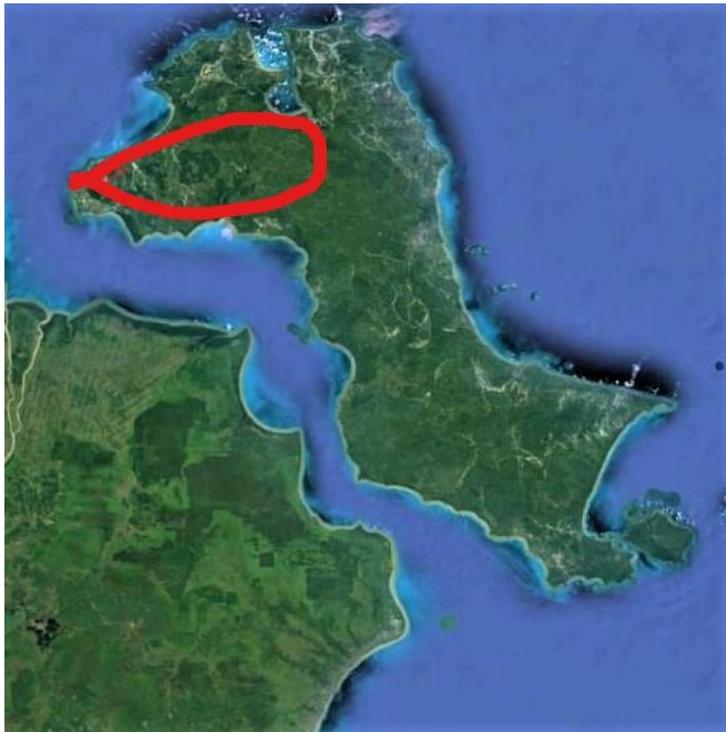
**Rivett** gave a much more detailed account,

*“... Without more ado, we went out the back of the hotel and plunged straight into the tangled mass of banana and date palms and mango trees. Before we had gone 200 yards we were hailed from the rear and joined by the chief officer and second officer of the ‘Siang Wo’ – Kinnear and Marr. So final, there were seven of us – **three officers of the Malaya Naval Reserve** [one was Welshman, Lt. Vernon Wade, MRNVN, but Rivett never identifies in his book who the other two of these men were – probably because he has some derogatory remarks to make on these two – but a later report by Sub. Lt Tommy Marr, RNR. enabled this researcher to confirm that they were electrical engineer **Sub. Lt. John Sharples, MRNVN** and rubber chemist **Sub. Lt. Stanley Willimott, MRNVN.**], **Kinnear, Marr, Norman Carter and myself....** It was about half past six on the morning of Sunday, 15 February.*

*After going for a little over an hour we stopped to take stock of our assets. We found that between us we had thirteen small tins – mostly sample size- of foodstuffs, one pound tin of cocoa and roughly 800 cigarettes. Thanks to the unfortunate order regarding revolvers, we had nothing more lethal than a jack knife between the seven of us. We stripped ourselves of everything except one change of clothing and a few personal possessions and set off again, climbing up the shoulder of the first of a series of steep, thickly wooded ridges. It was weary work clambering over the rocky spurs and ridges, some of which were masked with heavy undergrowth. But we had worked out a plan of campaign from the old [ it was a pre–Great War vintage map that had been hanging as a decoration in the hotel lounge] map which we had brought with us, and we were determined to get over a road which ran across the island some twenty miles from the hotel, before darkness fell...”.*

The next six days were a blur of physical torment amongst the very difficult jungle scrub, streams, treacherous soft mud swamps, ridges of the countryside which typifies Banka Island – encountering abandoned tin mines which litter the island, lonely native huts and families, avoiding numerous Japanese patrols and groups of armed ‘natives’ [ it is not clear here whether Rivett is talking of Chinese or Indonesian people] who would have almost certainly shot them on the spot and suffering the daily torrential downpours early each afternoon.

To cap it off they found that on the sixth day they appear to have walked in a huge circle (see next diagram) and had returned somewhere in the vicinity of Muntok! However, good fortune had not abandoned them because the local people in that area were very helpful , passing them on from kampong to kampong until finally they were taken to a large swirling stream and *“... Fifty yards farther on , among a clump of high rushes , our guide suddenly discovered for us three small but strongly built native prahus, carefully moored on the edge of a channel leading to the main stream... having selected the two best boats we embarked without more ado, four in one boat and three in the other. This was the end of the Odyssey – by – land and the beginning of the Odyssey – by – water...”*



So, on 21 February 1942 the escape group paddled down a stream - which locals had told them was about ten miles from the coast – with Rivett noting that insofar as” ... *both sides of the channel as far as the eye could penetrate into palms and swamp trees, there was nothing but an unending expanse of liquid, bubbling grey mud. The very trees and plants sprouting from this ooze seemed to have a dead and flaccid air...*”. But” ... *gradually the channel broadened and as the day began to dim we were swept out onto the bosom of a wide river perhaps three hundred yards across...*”.

That night they swapped the small ‘prahus’ for a seventeen-foot, and somewhat cumbersome, boat on which they rigged a mast with a sail as a blanket and headed off in a south westerly direction towards what they figured was Sumatra. Landing in a mangrove swamp the next day then rowed along that piece of coast until they found a sandy beach – only to be told they had landed again on Banka Island. The explanation was that their compass had been affected by metal in the boat and they had completed a complete ‘horseshoe’ course and were again only a few miles from Muntok!

They spent the next four days battling the north running sea current in the Banka Straits, but were finally given a patch of cloth more suitable to be used as a sail and began to progress along the coast of Sumatra in a state of semi-starvation [a couple of coconuts, a bottle of whisky and the occasional bowl of ‘gulah’ - rice and sweet treacle being their only diet] and battling the storms known as ‘Sumatras’. On one occasion during a massive storm, they collided with a huge fishing junk and were pulled aboard by charitable crew of Chinese, Malays and Indonesians who” ... *were kindness itself. And within half an hour we had thawed out around the grandest fire I ever remember. Then we sat down to heaped plates of steaming rice and grilled steaks from big schnapper – like fish straight from the nets...*”.

By 5 March 1942 they learned from a passing native prahu that ‘Orang Nippon’ were everywhere and that Batavia was ‘habis’ or ‘finished.’

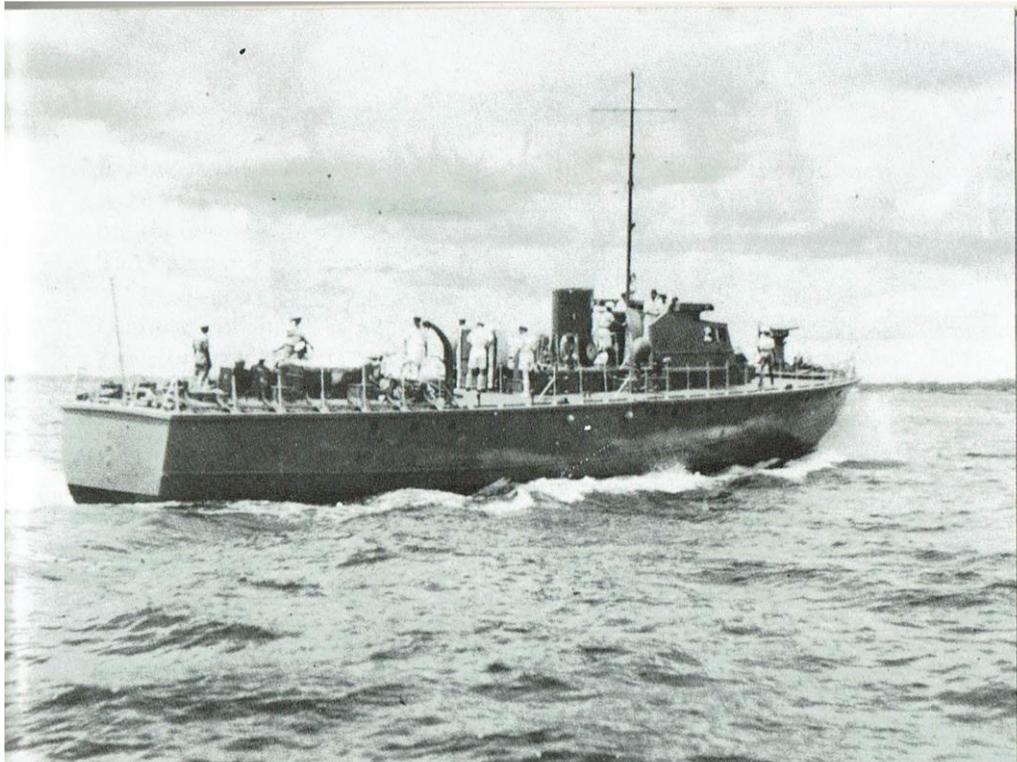
They were by then rowing their craft day and night. The following morning (6 March 1942) - when they must have been close to the Sunda Strait- they caught sight of what appeared to be a white man at the edge of the shore, they rowed in and found to their surprise “... six men were all in a bad way. They had no food, their feet were badly cut and swollen, and they were without boots and socks. ... They had left Singapore on Friday the thirteenth in a motor torpedo boat. Two New Zealanders, an officer and a rating belonging to the crew of the MTB, were among our six. The others a Colonel of Engineers, who was being sent to join Wavell’s staff in Java, two survivors of ‘Repulse’ and a private soldier were among the two hundred evacuees crowded onto the MTB....”.

Research had established that these men were survivors from the sinking of HMML311, in Banka Strait, and their identities are now able to be confirmed - primarily from the handwritten notes on the MI9 Liberation questionnaire of **Lt. T.C.W. Marr**, which came to light during the research for this memorial document - as ;

- “...New Zealanders, an officer...” (**Lt. Edward ‘Ted’ Staples, RNZNVR**).
- “...New Zealanders, ... and a rating...” (researcher’s opinion is that this is probably **AB. Trevor Neville Hill, RNZNVR**)
- “...a Colonel of Engineers who could speak Malay...” (Lt Marr recorded him as Lt. Col. Scott, RAOC., but research has revealed this was **Lt. Col. E.K. Scott, REME**)
- “...two survivors of ‘Repulse’...” (Lt. Marr named **Stoker James Robson, RN.**, ex ‘HMS Repulse’ and another man, whom he did not identify, who was probably the RNZNVR rating mentioned above).
- “... and a private soldier ...” (in contrast to Rivett’s record Lt. Marr names two soldiers - ‘Sgt. Bone’ who would have been **Sgt. W. A. Bone, RASC** and ‘Sgt Snooks’ who appears to have been **Sgt. Harold Snook, RASC.**)

The rescued men explained that during the voyage from Singapore they had encountered a Japanese destroyer in the Banka Straits which opened fire and destroyed their “... little wooden vessel...”, which sank in a few minutes. These surviving six were amongst **fourteen** who had reached shore on Sumatra. They had then set off towards Java in an abandoned lifeboat but encountered Japanese soldiers in an armed junk, from whom they fled, sailing their lifeboat into a mangrove swamp and dense jungle – losing two of their party as captives to the Japanese and a further six amongst the mud and vegetation.

[ Previous research has enabled this researcher to conclude that these men were the survivors of the sinking of the Royal Navy Fairmile patrol launch HMML311 under the command of Lt. E.J.H. Christmas, RANVR carrying military evacuees from Singapore. That vessel had been sunk on 15 February 1942 carrying 15 crew and 55-60 passengers. It appears that only about 20 men survived the shelling and sinking of HMML311 – the group that Rivett’s party had come across, almost three weeks after these men had been sunk, constituted the main group of survivors.]



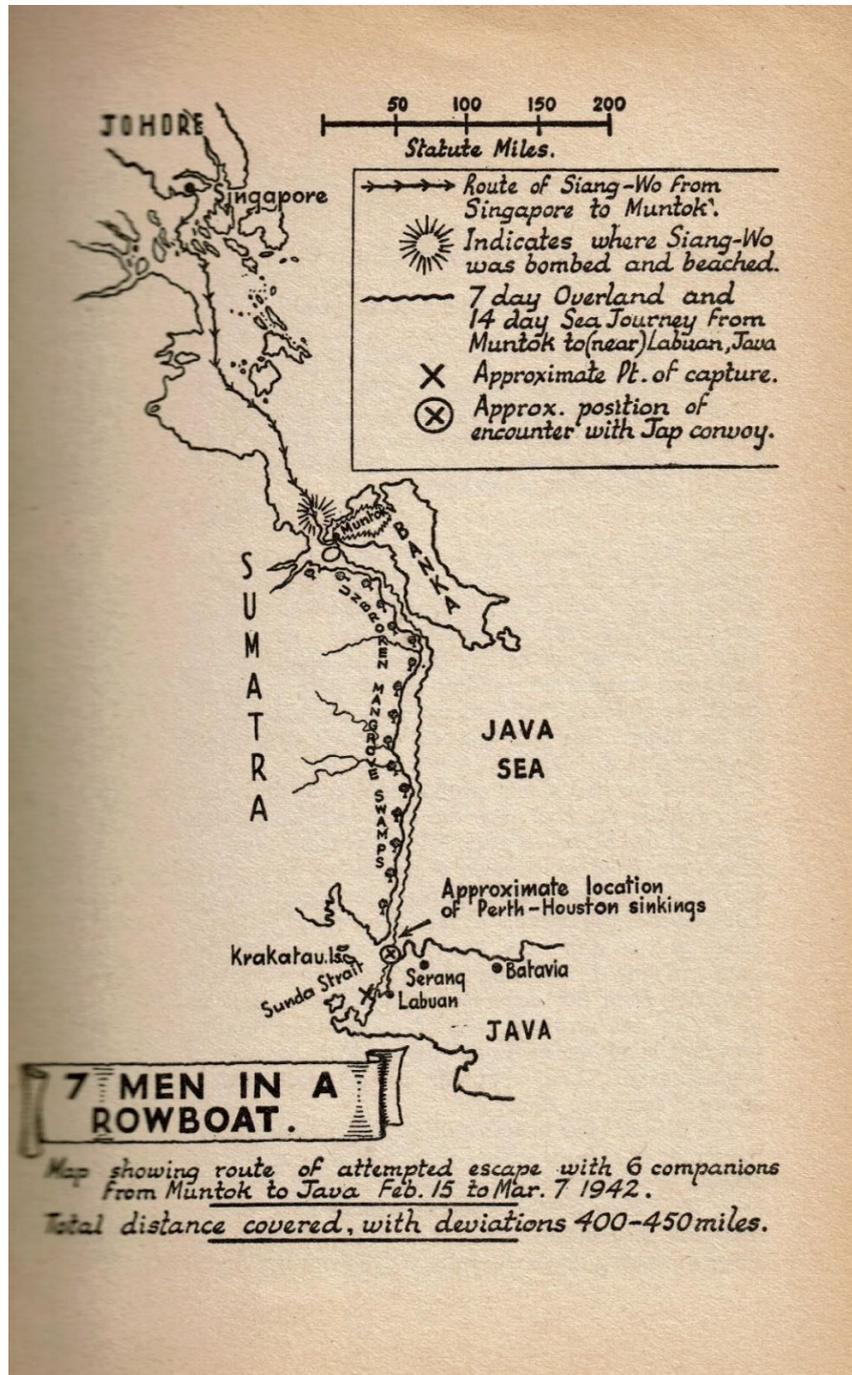
The locally built MML 311 shortly after she was taken over by the Royal Navy

The newly combined group of twelve men (Rivett's escape party and the HMML 311 survivors) set sail again for Java, soon reaching the Sunda Straits and then amazingly one night sailing through the wreckage of the major (but disastrous for the Allies) naval encounter known as the 'Battle of the Sunda Straits', following which they also sailed remarkably unscathed through a flotilla of Japanese warships the following day – without a shot or even a challenge – before landing on the tip of the northwest coast of Java.

They had in fact reached the small port town of Merak in western Java and there they were unfortunately “... surrounded by a horde of yelling Javanese, brandishing Parangs and long wicked looking knives, and waving Japanese flags...”, bound with lengths of boat rope and their twenty-one days struggle was over; it had ended with defeat on Saturday 7 March 1942.

All twelve men were then handed over to the Japanese and faced the next three and a half harsh and deprived years as POWs in camps all over Southeast Asia. They had survived an extraordinary escape and trek through mangrove swamps, seas and enemy territory.

The following diagram from Rohan Rivett's book 'Behind Bamboo' encapsulates the scale and distance - through an incredibly hostile environment of mangrove swamps, open seas, scarce food and patrolling enemy Japanese soldiers - of the amazing escape and sea voyage of Rivett's party,



### **Murder by the Japanese:**

Back in the small town of Muntok on Banka Island, the men and women from 'SS Siang Wo' who had surrendered to the Japanese had been immediately imprisoned in buildings such as the local Cinema in the centre of the small town and across the road from the Dutch Customs House, adjacent to the (original) pier. Soon they would be joined by hundreds of survivors and captives from other evacuation vessels – in total 25 evacuation vessels were sunk, scuttled, beached or captured around Banka Island. The conditions for the men, women and children in the large, concrete and as one would expect windowless, building that housed the Cinema were awful, but during the week after the Japanese landed a less well-known but even more horrific story was unfolding outside those buildings.



**Muntok Cinema 2019**

**[Now used as a roost for Swiftlets making their "birds' nests" for soup of that name]**

The fate of many evacuees arriving at Banka island was sealed the moment the Japanese forces landing at Muntok when an order had been issued by someone in command – presumably the officer in charge of the specifically allocated 'Bangka invasion unit' [This 'Bangka' unit comprised two Companies of 229<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, plus shipping engineer elements also known as the 'Orita Butai'] in turn a section of the much larger Japanese Army 38<sup>th</sup> Division invasion force heading towards Sumatra – that the Japanese troops were to summarily kill any shipwrecked survivors who may be encountered by Japanese soldiers on Banka island.

In contrast to this criminal order, it is however also understood that the Japanese Naval Commander whose warship on 15 February 1942 captured another evacuation ship near Banka island (the 'SS Mata Hari' which laden with civilian men, women and children) must have been aware of this psychopathic order and would not allow the 'Mata Hari' to berth at Muntok pier until the on-shore Army Commander at Muntok gave his assurance that they would not be killed.

Despite that assurance for the passengers on 'Mata Hari' who disembarked on 16 February 1942 the 'die had been cast' for other shipwrecked survivors on Banka Island for a repeat of the brutality and murder in Hong Kong by these men of the 'Orita Butai'. This was a period of chaos, shock and brutality by Japanese soldiers of a murderous form usually reserved for front line action.

On **16 February 1942**, on a beach not too far to the north of Muntok, Japanese troops would commit the horrendous atrocity of the 'Radji Beach Massacre' involving Australian Army Nursing Sisters, plus

civilian passengers from the 'SS Vyner Brooke', ships officers and ratings and soldiers from the British Army ROAC who had survived the sinking of the vessel 'Pulo Soegi'.

By **17 February** there was another mystery disappearance amongst the 'SS Siang Wo' personnel in the form of the fate of **Supply Assistant James Scott Butler, R.N.** – the CWGC record him as on 'SS Siang Wo' and have his death recorded as on 13.2.42, which may simply be the CWGC practice of recording the date of death of missing personnel as the last date they were seen alive in Singapore, or was he wounded in the bombing of the ship and died in Muntok ; but other records state "...*last seen Banka Island 17/2...*". Nothing else is known, but it also raises the possibility that James Butler might have been one of those who annoyed the Japanese or escaped and was taken out and shot at Muntok?

Then there is the fate of **Lieutenant Commander Horace Vickers, MRNVR (RN retd.), Commander of the Malay section of the MRNVR / Royal Navy** who surrendered with the others at the 'Muntok Hotel' on 15 February 1942 – he was another to succumb to the brutality of these Japanese soldiers. Earlier in this memorial document account, we had left him at the hotel with some 30 other Royal Navy and Naval Reserve officers and male passengers of the ship waiting for the Japanese to arrive. What then happened to Horace Vickers from the morning of 15 February onwards, after people were removed from the hotel, has not been the subject of any archived record that this researcher has been able to find, and it appears that in fact British authorities may have never been able to determine his final movements. The CWGC records his death on 13 February 1942, the day 'Siang Wo' left Singapore - which is possibly in line with CWGC policy of dates of death being aligned to 'last verified sighting', but which is also a bit inexplicable given the number of Allied servicemen and civilians in Muntok during the days after the Japanese landed who could have clarified what occurred.

The earliest official record relating to Horace Vickers fate appears on a Royal Navy file (SS/330/141/269) in the UK Archives - this document is a long list of men classified as 'Missing in Action' or 'Dead' Casualties and specifically on page six is an 'Appendix 1' being a statement signed by Cpl. G. Mills, #6142808, 2<sup>nd</sup> Btn., East Surrey Regiment on his discovery of an unidentified naval officer on Banka Island, "... *On about 28 February 1942 while collecting firewood, I was with two naval ratings and another Soldier in a coconut plantation off the aerodrome road about 200 yards from the Cinema, when the other soldier discovered the body of a Naval Officer of Lieut. Commander's rank in tropical uniform. He was well built, about 6'2" in height, had thick black hair and a pointed black beard. There was a ring on a finger of the left hand with the letter 'M' on it, and a wristwatch with the initials "J.P" or "J.D."*. It appeared that he was in the habit of wearing pince nez glasses [ sic: pince-nez, which were glasses without earpieces and stayed on by pinching the nose]. He had a cap with gold braid on the peak and in addition to his white shirt and shorts he wore brown socks and brown shoes and had a kid glove on the right hand.



**Pince-nez Glasses**

*There were a wicker basket and leather case both opened.*

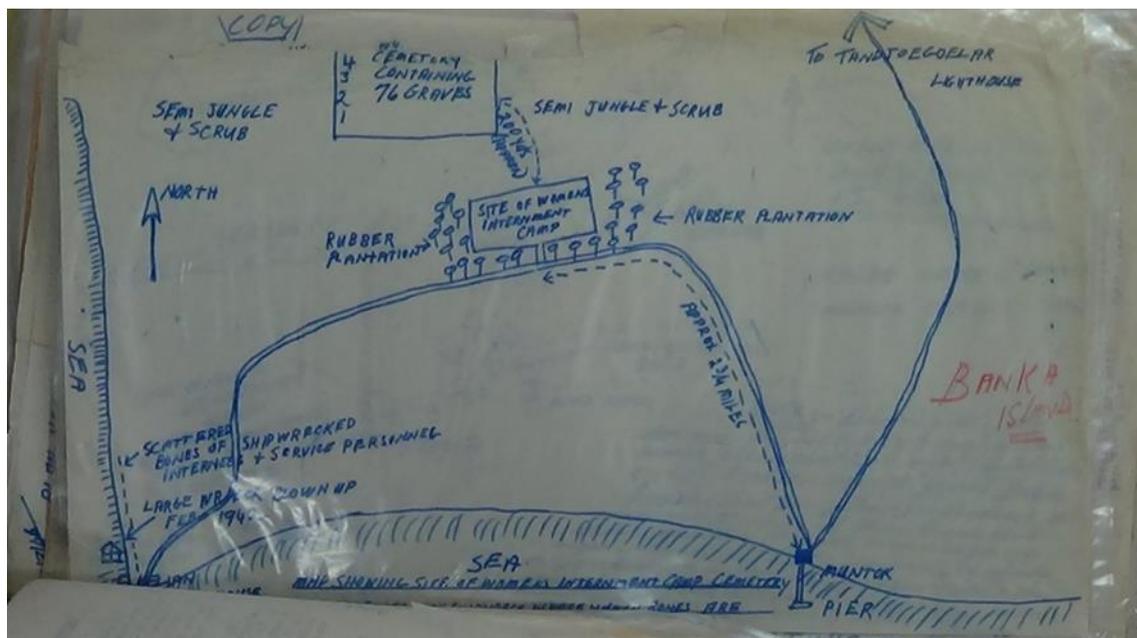
*In the wicker basket were a battered cigarette case (same initial as watch) and some handkerchiefs: in the leather case one civilian overcoat, one pair of socks, small hand towel and razor, but no other means of identification. There were wounds on the body and both ears were missing. The Officer appeared to have been dead four or five days. The discovery was reported to a Naval Officer of the Prison Camp. After about 1 hr. I was taken back to the spot by two Japanese Officers, the Japanese NCO in charge of the Prison and a Japanese in plain clothes. When we arrived at the spot photographs were taken and the area around was searched.*

*The next day I had to go to the place again with two Japanese guards and four coolies who buried the body in grave No. 7A, in the cemetery behind the Prison. A plain cross bearing an inscription in Japanese to the effect that the body was believed to be that of a British Officer of unknown identity was planted. Sometime after I was called upon by the Japanese to identify the photographs taken...”.*

There is also an ‘Appendix II to Casualty List, Royal Navy’ which recorded,

*“...On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Abu Bakar (MN 783) or HASSIM BIN OMAR MM1192 or 1129, MN, stated that he had definitely seen Lieut. Comdr. Horace VICKERS, RNR, dead on the beach at Muntok in February. The Officer was covered with a blanket and the Malay stated that there was no doubt as to his identity. Lieut Comdr. VICKERS was previously this man’s commanding officer and would be well known to them. Signed D. Fiennes, Lieut., RNR. 26<sup>th</sup> May 1942...”.*

We have the testimony of Abu Bakar and Hassim bin Omar as very reliable evidence that Vickers had been murdered - and mutilated – and if combined with the cigarette case and the wristwatch with initials deciphered as ‘JB’ or ‘JD’ (in the view of this researcher this was very likely to have been ‘SB’ which would stand for the initials of Horace Vickers’ wife ‘Santa Beryl ‘), and even perhaps the initial on the ring might have been an ‘H’ not an ‘M’ - makes it reasonably likely the body was that of Horace Vickers.



**Map drawn by Allied Search parties in late 1945 looking for evidence of war crimes committed at Radji Beach – the body of Lt. Cdr. Horace Vickers, MRNVR appears to have been found between the plantations and the beach area marked on the map. (Australian Archives file on Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, AANS).**

It appears that Horace Vickers had either been immediately separated from the other officers – as the most senior Royal Navy officer present - for interrogation and then executed, or perhaps he had escaped and was summarily executed upon re capture since there were several escapes from the Muntok POW camp prior to the end of February 1942. POW camp records of this period are scarce to say the least.

It is also clear from Rohan Rivett's account of his escape on Banka that there were Japanese platoons searching widely on the coast of Banka Island for survivors and, in this context, it is worth remembering at this point that there were several hundred survivors from other evacuation ships who were struggling ashore along the coast of Banka Island and many of these people were also summarily executed by the Japanese on the beaches.

Apart from the killing of Lt. – Cdr. Horace Vickers, amongst others specifically known to have been executed by the 'Orita Butai' Company of the Japanese 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment on Banka Island during the week after their landing on Banka Island were,

- the **eighty people – including the 21 Australian Army Nursing Service Sisters** - from the 'SS Vyner Brooke' murdered on Radji Beach on 16 February 1942,
- **Mr Vivian Bowden, Official Australian Representative in Singapore** (previously Trade Commissioner in Japan) who arrived on the launch 'Mary Rose', was captured, taken to the Cinema and after resisting Japanese soldiers stealing his watch, was summarily executed on 17 February 1942 outside the Cinema.
- in the post war graves party of Captain Yemm, AIF., a note to the effect that **"... Japs also killed 5 BORs [i.e., five British Other Ranks] from a sunken gunboat [possibly the 'Li Wo'?] – they were bayoneted one survivor told E.A. DOMENEY, RAOC '2' AON..."**. The date – possibly around 17-19 February 1942.
- the captain of the 'SS. Tandjong Pinang' (**Lt Basil Shaw, RNZNVR**, from New Zealand) and a crew member (**Able Seaman Oswald Young**, ex 'HMS Repulse'), who had been sunk on that small vessel with 200 women and children aboard (almost all of whom had died in the sinking) northwest of Banka island and who landed in a small dinghy north of the lighthouse near Muntok were executed, on the spot, when found by Japanese troops on 21 February 1942.
- There were also several men - who escaped almost immediately from Muntok POW camp and were never seen again. Amongst these were another New Zealander by the name of **Lt. Anthony Ruthven Clarke, RNZNVR** who along with **Actg. Commander Robert George Fenton – Livingstone, RN.**, escape from the 'Gymnasium' camp in Muntok on the night of 21 February 1942, a few hours after the escape of Lt. David Eustace Martindale Fiennes/ Fiennes - Wykenham, MRNVR and another man who were captured a few days later. Clarke and Fenton – Livingstone were never seen again but it is notable that they both have the official (CWGC) date of death of 28 February 1942 - whether there is information on their deaths available only to the CWGC, or that this is an error is unknown.

### Prisoners of the Japanese:

Rohan Rivett and his companions eventually became POWs of the Japanese - in Java – but some were later moved on to POW camps in Japan where they were used as slave labour.

Those on 'White Swan' reached Java and eventually safely reached Australia.

AB. Bartholomew, R.N., ex 'HMS Repulse' and Fireman William Tidy, Merchant navy both crew from 'SS. Siang Wo', were part of a small group of Royal Navy ratings and MRNVR officers selected at Muntok to man small, captured patrol vessels such as 'HMS Pahlawan' and 'HMS Tapah' on their return to Singapore where those men were POWs aboard these vessels – some anchored at Seletar in the Johore Straits and others used as crews for trade between Singapore and Sumatra.

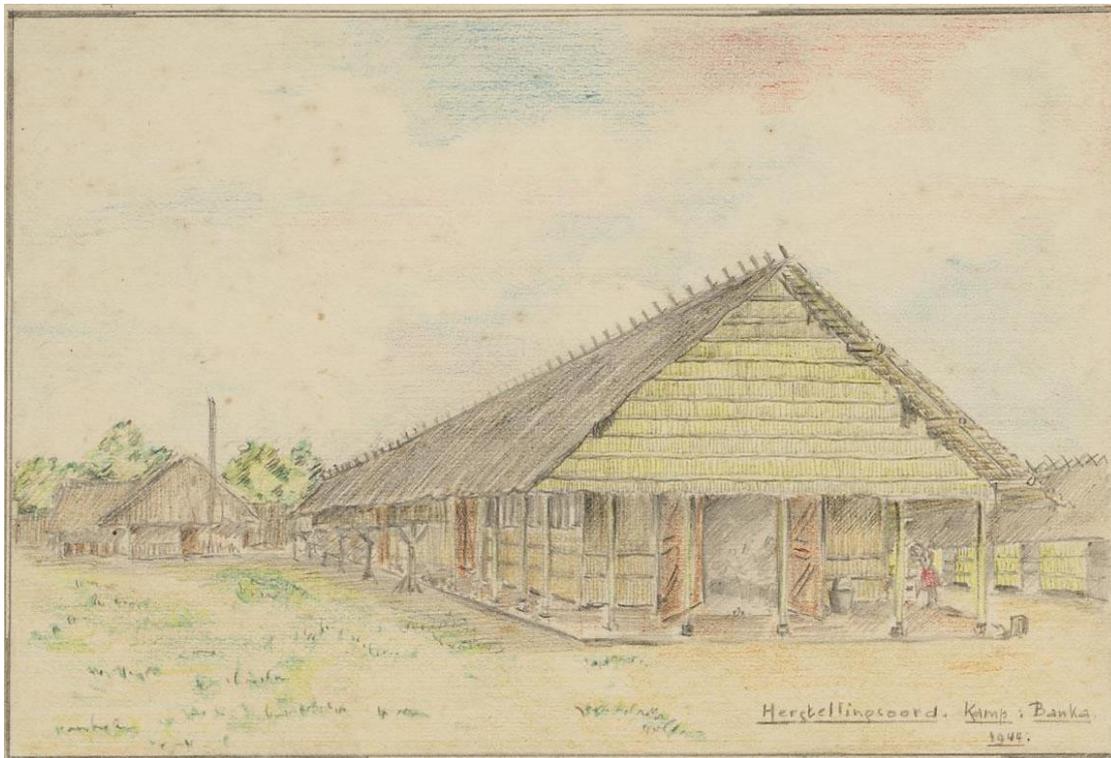
After being held in the Muntok Cinema for several days the servicemen were dispersed with the naval officers and ratings who had been passengers on 'Siang Wo' and taken prisoner in Muntok to firstly become POWS there, working at the site of the airfield clearing trees and filling trenches which had been dug to prevent Japanese planes landing – they initially slept on the ground where they worked. When work was completed at the airfield, they were taken to the Muntok Gaol and held there again for several weeks until they were shipped across the Banka Strait, up the Moesi/Musi River and entered the POW camps at the river city of Palembang in southern Sumatra.

The Japanese appear to have initially made the MRNVR Malay ratings POWS but after a month or two most of these men were released and some returned to Malaya and Singapore.

The civilian men were also taken to Muntok Gaol where they became internees there, and later in Palembang. These were harsh and deprived environments for the men to survive.

The civilian women, children and nursing Sisters were taken to what would be the Women's Internment camp in Muntok (see drawings below). The war years for these people would be spent trying to survive starvation, lack of medicines and brutality firstly in Muntok, then Palembang, then Muntok again and finally to a horrifically deprived camp at Belalau in southern Sumatra.

**Many men and women died as internees due to malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, and disease.**



Women's Hospital – Muntok Internment camp (<https://geheugen.delpher.nl>)

**Muntok Today:**

Muntok town is today remarkably - after the passage of 80 years - unchanged from the place the evacuees encountered in February 1942. The dilapidated Dutch era Customs house still stands at the entrance to the long-demolished pier, the main street still contains many 1930s buildings, and the notorious Cinema has been repurposed as a roost for Swiftlet birds making their nests.

Buried in the sand near the lighthouse at Tanjung Kelian – about four kilometres along the beach from the town – are a few rusting wrecks of the hulls of old vessels.



**Tanjung Kelian as it is today.**

[Note rusty wrecks in water – locals vaguely think they are from the 1950s, but these may be wartime remains]





**Photo of what is possibly - given the similarity of the stern section of this wreck to the pre-war photos of the stern of 'SS Siang Wo' – the rusting remains of the 'SS Siang Wo' (photo by M Ifran Nurdin) which are located just north of the lighthouse at Tanjung Kelian.**

In the Australian Archives lies a file being the report by the Lt. H.L. Langley, RNVR, Senior Officer, 34<sup>th</sup> Motor Launch Flotilla scouting the area of Banka Island in December 1945. Appendix IV of the report records two 'Stranded Wrecks' were observed near Muntok – one by the name 'Van Der Parra' (an old 1899 vessel scuttled in 1935 by the Dutch) lying west/southwest (02 05 21S: 105 07 E) west/southwest of Tanjung Kelian and the other the 'SS Siang Wo' lying around 500-1000 metres due south (02 04 55S: 105 09 48E) in the shallow waters of Muntok Harbour. It is this researcher's assumption that sometime in the 1950s the Dutch or Indonesian authorities of the time organised these wrecks to be refloated and/or dragged to Tanjung Kelian (just in front of the present lighthouse) to function as breakwaters to prevent sand erosion and clear the approaches to Muntok Harbour.

## Sources:

- **'Behind Bamboo'** – author Rohan D. Rivett, book 'Behind Bamboo' published Angus and Robertson, Sydney. First published 1946, 1952 edition. Rohan Rivett was an Australian journalist and war correspondent, Prisoner of War on the Burma-Siam Railway.
- **COFEPOW website** – the MI9 Liberation questionnaire database on the excellent COFEPOW website is key in identifying servicemen for the memorial documents on evacuation vessels.
- **<https://geheugen.delpher.nl>** - old photos of Muntok, Banak islands, Dutch East Indies
- Jardine, Matheson & Company (1852) owner of the China Coast Steam Navigation Company (1873-81), the Yangtse Steam Navigation Company Ltd (1879-81) and the Indo China Steam Navigation Company Ltd (1881) – an Illustrated Fleet List (1852-1976) By Howard Dick & Stephen Kentwell All Rights Reserved 1988, 2019, 2021 h.dick@unimelb.edu.au skentwell@hotmail.com \*\*\*May be cited with acknowledgement to [www.oldchinaships.com](http://www.oldchinaships.com). Jardine, Matheson & Co. themselves have no surviving consolidated pictorial archive of their pre-1945 fleet and in many cases, it has been a matter of deducing from unidentified material. Identifications that Dick & Kentwell regard as unconfirmed are indicated by a question mark but it is possible that some 'confirmed' identifications will need to be corrected in light of further information. Apart from some of the China Coast S.N. Co. ships and the post-war 'Easterns', most ships carried names that Romanised two Chinese characters, the second being 'Sang' or 'Shing' for coasters or 'Wo' for river steamers. Chinese observe no spacing between the characters and Jardines were never consistent, even as late as the 1950s, as to whether to Romanise them as one or two words and whether to hyphenate. Our material is made available in the public domain as a research resource. We trust that anyone making use of this information will make appropriate citation. The authors would welcome any advice on errors, omissions or missing images. Howard Dick & Stephen
- **JMM** – researcher Jonathan Moffatt's databases, particularly his 'Royal Navy/Australian Navy POWs Palembang & Muntok'. And his 'Malayans list M -Z'.
- **Muntok Peace Museum** – link <https://muntokpeacemuseum.org/>
- **TEFS** - Book 'The Escape from Singapore' by Richard Gough.

Anyone who has corrections, amendments, clarifications or additional material on the events, the crew, or passengers of 'SS. Siang Wo' 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](mailto:mncpether@gmail.com). Telephone number is New Zealand 09-4865754 or mobile New Zealand 0274543695.

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.

## Passengers:

Margaret Robertson recalled there were "... *about twenty women...*" on board; the Satchell report (MRB Report #108) stated that there were "... *married women and children...*" but Miss E. Tasker, an Obstetric nurse, stated there were no children aboard 'SS Siang Wo'; other sources for this list that follows were 'Mrs. E Cross' and a Palembang British Women list signed by a person named '?.W. Chivers'.

- **ANDERSON – Mrs Frances Mary Arkcoll Anderson (nee Hodder)**, born 1898, was one of the women who chose to remain in Muntok after the beaching of 'SS Siang Wo'. Prior to her marriage Frances Hodder worked for Anglo Siam Corp., in Singapore and had also been a keen and skilful golfer in Keppel Club competitions during the late 1920s. Her father, Henry George Hodder, one of the early employees of Cold Storage in Singapore, had died in 1924 and it seems that her mother passed away soon after. Frances also was active in the Women's Section of the 'Ex-Services Assn of Malaya (Singapore Branch)'. After becoming engaged – relatively late in life compared to her contemporaries - in 1928 she became the wife of William Anderson (born 1902 in Musselburgh, Midlothian) from Penang, they married at St Andrews Cathedral, Singapore in February 1929 and their reception was held at the home of Mr & Mrs H.L. Manchester (the Treasurer of Singapore Municipality) at 55 Chatsworth Road. They left Singapore on the British India Steam Navigation Co. vessel 'T.S.S. Ekma' for their honeymoon in Europe. William worked for Messrs. Boustead & Co., Penang – when Singapore fell, he became a POW in Changi Prison Internment Camp and later Sime Road Internment Camp. "... *When in March 1944 women were no longer taken to the local hospital and Mary became ill, she was cared for by Phyllis Briggs's (diary record) '...She was desperately thin, and no one would have recognised her. I had known her in Penang. She had been a large woman with a booming voice and a very keen golfer. Now she was frail and pathetically grateful for anything one did for her. She died on the 4th of March ... Before she died Mary made a will leaving her belongings to various friends. She left me a linen dress and a piece of mosquito netting...*". (Muntok Peace Museum). The CWGC record confirms that Frances Anderson died on 5.3.44, aged 46 years, in Palembang Internment Camp – **there appears to be no record of where her grave is located**. William Anderson returned to work in Singapore after the war and in 1951 a bed at St. Andrews Mission hospital in Singapore was endowed by Boustead & Co., to those employees and wives who had died during the war – the name of 'Mrs. W. Anderson' was on the list above the bed. In 1954 William Anderson retired as a Director of Boustead & Co. and set sail for Britain after 30 years in Malaya and Singapore.
- **AUSTIN (AUSTEN?)– Mrs. Mary Melvene Austin (nee Sellar)**, was born on 31.7.1901 at 'Lawarra', Cooma, NSW, Australia to Charles Craig Sellar (a grazier) and Maud Sellar. She married Scotsman Kenneth Austin, presumably before 1927 because in that year she was recorded as 'Mrs. K. Austin' on the 'Kashmir' from Singapore to Europe. Whilst they lived in Singapore prior to the war the only mention of her in local papers was playing golf several times during 1940-41 at the Royal Singapore Golf Club. When the 'SS Siang Wo' beached at Muntok she was one of the group of women passengers who did not wish to transfer to either of the yachts and attempt to reach Batavia. She would therefore have been captured, aged 41 years, by the Japanese at Muntok on 15.2.42 and later moved to Palembang Internment camp. Her death came about in 1945 after years of malnutrition, disease and lack of medicines, and occurred after the internees had been returned to Muntok from

Palembang and were then again on the move to a new location of an internment camp, Belalau, in the jungles of southwestern Sumatra. For an insight into the last days of Mary Austion the researcher offers this quote from the website of the 'Muntok Peace Museum' *"... When it seemed that life could become no worse, the Japanese moved the captives back across the Bangka Straits through Palembang to their final camp at Loeboek Linggau, near Lahat. The men were moved at the end of February / beginning of March 1945 and the women in April 1945... The journey to Palembang was dreadful, lasting a day and two nights in cramped and stifling conditions. Next the women were moved. The journey was described later by some of the AANS nurses. As usual they travelled in the remnants of their uniforms and Red Cross armbands in case anyone perchance saw them. The Japanese insisted that the second of the three contingents to leave the Muntok camp should be the hospital staff and patients, some of whom were gravely ill and had only a few hours to live. Those nurses who could, carried the stretcher cases onto the waiting boat, despite the presences of dozens of Japanese soldiers who watched with "horrified" faces but made no move to assist. Nursing Sister James described the journey: "It was the same frightful boat on which we had come over previously. The hospital staff and the patients were put on the deck without any covering from the sun at all. The remainder of the people were put in the hold, which was even worse. The crowding on the ship was completely disgraceful. There were no sanitary arrangements at all. At the time people were suffering severely from diarrhoea — practically everybody that had been in camp." Dutch woman died woman on the pier and an Englishwoman was buried at sea [ Australian Army Nursing Sister Betty Jeffrey] Jeffrey wrote, 'That burial was a nightmare.'..."*. The official (CWGC) record states that Mary Austin, wife of Kenneth Austin, died on 12.4.45 'off Banka Island' – other records confirm that Mary was 'buried at sea'. **Mary Melvne Austin**, the 44-year-old woman who had grown up as a girl in rural NSW and enjoyed a good life in Singapore playing golf with friends at the Royal Singapore Golf Club, died in sickness and squalor in a hot, suffocating darkness packed into the hold of a small ship in the Banka Strait.

- CARRUTHERS - Andrew Henry Carruthers**, was born on 31.1.18, the sixth son of Lt. Col. Francis John Carruthers and Olive Christian Carruthers (nee Johnstone -Douglas) of Dormont, Dumfrieshire, Scotland. He attended Wellington College in Crowthorne, Berkshire, and the school record states *"... ANDREW HENRY CARRUTHERS, 'Lynedoch' [one of the 'Houses' at Wellington College] 1931 to 1935, a personality of great charm, belonging to a family well-known in Malaya, displayed his originality and ingenuity while he was at Wellington, where he took over a form spontaneously during an examination when the invigilating master had failed to appear. When he left, he joined Boustead's (East India Merchants) in Malaya and was up country when the war began. He showed his sense of devotion and duty to those he was fond of, sometimes at great sacrifice to himself. Taken on by the British Broadcasting Corporation at Singapore, he was announcing up till the very last moment and on the eve of the fall of Singapore saved his wife from their home, which was being shelled. One of the last six Europeans to stand by at the broadcasting station, Carruthers was evacuated on February 11th, but the ship was bombed and ran aground on Banka Island, where he fell into Japanese hands. He died from cerebral malaria and beriberi in a civilian internment camp at Palembang (Sumatra) on September 1st, 1945..."* (Muntok Peace Museum and Wellington College Roll of Honour). Andrew Carruthers appears in Singapore newspapers in 1939 enjoying life in a manner reflecting the young, creatively minded, sporty lifestyle of a British bachelor in the Far East. He is reported as heavily involved in cricket at the prestigious Singapore Cricket Club (SCC), competing in 'hill climbing' motor sports at Pasir Panjang (and

later in court, but acquitted, on a dangerous driving charge along Orchard Road), tennis at the SCC, rugby for the SCC, receiving a 'silver badge' award for efficiency as an Auxiliary Fireman with the ARP in Singapore and arranging and performing in a charity 'cabaret evening' at the Seaview Hotel in aid of the St. Nicholas Home for blind children – all whilst holding down his job as a 21 year old Assistant at Boustead & Co.! It must have been sometime during 1940-41 that he met and married Marguerite Edwards, the eldest daughter of the late Charles Edward's family in Singapore. Given the 'mores' of British Malaya and Singapore society and the 'diktats' of British enterprises in Singapore and Malaya at the time Andrew, aged about 22 years, was far too young for a British employee of only an 'Assistant' level to become married and likewise it was unusual that there was no report of the wedding or marriage in Singapore newspapers. It was only after the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941 that Andrew appeared in Singapore newspapers as devising and presenting evening radio programs for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation – perhaps events had resulted in him departing from the employment of Bousteads? Nevertheless, Andrew and Marguerite boarded the 'Siang Wo' together and at Muntok Marguerite was adamant that she would not leave her husband to join the yachts offering the chance of an onward (albeit dangerous) passage to Batavia. So, both were captured, separated by the Japanese and became internees firstly in Muntok, then Palembang and finally the degrading and unhealthy hell hole that was Belalau camp. All that is known of Andrew's experiences in internment are from the book 'By Eastern Windows', by Wiliam H. McDougall, Jnr., (pp. 123 – 124) when in reference to 1943 he wrote "... *When Pratt ran out of jokes his place as master of ceremonies was taken by a young radio announcer from Singapore named Andrew Carruthers who organised a production team .... they staged most of our shows until illness halted them...*" and when later in August 1945 McDougall describes the truly awful impact of disease and malnutrition were having on internees (pp. 320-321) who by then knew that Japan had surrendered and were desperately awaiting the arrival of Allied troops in the Belalau camp "... *I rose and walked the length of camp to the hospital to see how patients were taking the news. They were far more emotional than their healthier fellow prisoners. Three beri-beri patients were 'dancing' in the aisle – strutting grotesquely up and down, performing stiff gyrations on their swollen limbs. Those who could not walk lay in their beds, some laughing, some crying, a few singing. Andrew Carruthers, 27, radio announcer for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation, who had been a prime organizer of our pre- Muntok shows, was crying. Tears streamed down his beri-beri swollen face. He said he was crying both from happiness and pain. 'Now I will get well' he said 'Soon the Allied soldiers will be here with medicine to save me. They surely will. I'm so happy'. When I first saw Carruthers, standing in line on my first roll call in Palembang Jail, he had been a slender, gracefully formed chap. Now, the last roll call had sounded, and, except for his eyes and voice and shining hope, he was nearly unrecognizable.... But one day flowed another and no Allies came. We were too far from anywhere. Carruthers' wife came from the Women's Camp to find her husband. She shuddered, halted and closed her eyes when she entered our thatched-roofed hospital. Quickly, however she recovered herself and walked down the aisle toward her husband's bed on the other end of the ward. She passed the patients who had both beri-beri and dysentery, each one of them a sodden, living stench. Their eyes were slits in swollen, putty coloured faces. Seum oozed through rag bandages, soaked blankets of rice sacking, and dripped through bamboo bed slats to the earthen floor. ... Since February 1942, Mrs*

*Carruthers had waited for this moment. Through three years and a half of misery she had anticipated their reunion when the war was over. And her husband too. ...Attendants had to prop him up a little bit, so he was not lying flat. She reached his bed and smiled and kissed him. 'Don't worry now' he told her 'I'm going to be all right. Vitamin injections are all I need, and the Allies will have those when they come'. Four paratroopers ... dropped to locate prison camps, found us on September 6<sup>th</sup>. They said hostilities had ceased three weeks before on August 15<sup>th</sup>. They radioed our location to their headquarters across the Indian Ocean in Colombo, Ceylon. Planes flew up from the Cocos Islands about eight hundred miles away, in the Indian Ocean, and dropped food and medicine. But it was too late to save six men, including Carruthers. He died September 9<sup>th</sup>, still bright with hope with his wife beside him...".*

- CARRUTHERS - Mrs Emily Marguerite/Marguerita Carruthers (nee Edwards)**, was born in 1908 [the date has been solely deduced from the passenger manifestos of various ships on which she travelled during her lifetime], the daughter and oldest child of Charles Walter Edwards and Annie Beatrice Edwards (nee Allen) of the Paya Mas Estate in Johore. Charles was an engineer turned planter and died in 1916 leaving his widow with six children. Little is known of the early life of Marguerite, the first occasion she appears in Singapore newspapers is in 1933 when, clearly working for Sime Darby & Co., she is reported as active in the Sime Darby Sports Club. In 1935 she is mentioned as attending a funeral and then in 1938 she committed the terrible 'crime' of "... allowing her car to be washed in Raffles Place..." and was fined \$2! Aged 34 years in 1942 she boarded the 'Siang Wo', was captured by the Japanese in Muntok with her husband and then endured three and a half awful years of malnutrition, deprivation and no doubt sickness and disease in the Muntok, Palembang and Belau Internment camps. She only saw her husband Andrew again in August 1945 when he lay desperately sick from beri-beri in the squalid shack that was the camp hospital in Belau – tragically only to be with him when he died on 9 September 1945. She was taken back to Singapore by plane with other British Internees and repatriated from Singapore on the Cilicia, arriving in Liverpool 27.11.45, then to Glasgow to presumably tell the Carruthers family of Andrew's death. She is recorded travelling from Southampton to Fremantle in 1946, and then must have returned to Singapore and in 1950 married former Changi internee Boris Veniamin Konstantinoff (born 1912) of United Engineers. He changed his surname to Stanton. They left Singapore in 1954 to live in Kensington. She died 1989 in London. (JMM and Muntok Peace Museum).
- CARTER** – Norman Carter, British, was working for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation in Singapore and boarded the 'SS Siang Wo' with Rohan Rivett. From 'Behind Bamboo' we learn that Norman Carter had started his working life as a 'boy' serving on "Worcester" – which presumably refers to the 'SS Worcestershire' a 7175grt steamer launched in 1904 and later sunk by German mines in 1917. Insofar as Norman's service in WW1 Rivett says that he understood he served in 'Mesop' (presumably means Mesopotamia) and then with 'Dunsterforce' [Dunsterforce was an Allied military force, established in December 1917 and named after its commander, Major-General Lionel Dunsterville. The force comprised fewer than 350 Australian, New Zealand, British and Canadian officers and NCOs who were drawn from the Western and Mesopotamian fronts. The force was intended to organise local units in northern Persia and South Caucasus, to replace the Tsarist armies that had fought the Ottoman armies in Armenia. In July 1918, Captain Stanly Sauvage, five officers and fifteen NCOs of Dunsterforce, set out towards Urmia and were caught up in an exodus of Assyrians, after the town had been captured by the Ottoman army. About 80,000 people fled and the Dunsterforce party helped hold off the Ottoman pursuit and attempts by local Kurds to get revenge on the Assyrians for their earlier plundering.] After that war Norman apparently managed a pantomime company travelling through Britain;

then went farming in Australia; then, in the early 1930s he worked in radio stations in Toowoomba and Melbourne (post WW2 he was referred to as “... *a former eastern states Radio Announcer...*” ‘The Argus’ 12.9.45). In the late 1930s Norman is said to have made a 1200-mile overland journey through Queensland and NSW on packhorses – which explains why Rohan Rivett considered him to have excellent ‘bushman’s skills’ in their escape and trek across Banka Island, and then along the coast of Sumatra, in February 1942. The scape party’s attempt was - in the eyes of this researcher - an admirable and staunch action requiring huge perseverance, although some of their fellow passengers remaining at Muntok to become internees as conveyed in this record “... *Mr Carter, address Malayan Broadcasting House, ran away at Muntok 13.2.42...*” (Palembang internees list of those on ‘Siang Wo’ in UK Archives). Norman appears to have endured several POW camps in Java and then Siam during the war – why he was not considered a civilian and simply placed in internment is a mystery. During these years he is recorded by other POWs as having ‘produced and directed’ entertainment shows in the Burma/Siam death railway camps. After the war, he was repatriated to Australia with Rohan Rivett and lived in Melbourne – he ‘dramatised’ Rohan Rivett’s book ‘Behind Bamboo’ and narrated the story on local radio as a series in 1946. In 1948, described as “... *well known theatrical; and radio producer...*” by local papers he married Miss Nancy Buchanan of Richmond, Melbourne at Wesley Church.

- **CLARKE/CLARK** – Miss M. Clarke was a Secretary with the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation. The first mention of Miss Clarke/ is from the ‘Straits Times’ of 4.11.36 when she is reported as being “... *from the BBC and now Secretary to Mr. Dumeresque the General Manager of Malayan Broadcasting Corporation...*”. During 1937-41 she is reported several times playing tennis in Singapore for the YWCA and SCRC teams. Apart from that, all we know of her after reaching Muntok on the ‘SS Siang Wo’ is that “...*Miss M. Clarke, address Malayan Broadcasting House, transferred to Mr. Merton Brown’s yacht 13.2.42...*” (Palembang internees list of those on ‘Siang Wo’ in UK Archives). Being (apparently) British she is most likely, having reached Batavia on the ‘White Swan’, to have boarded one of the ships leaving Tanjong Priok making directly for Colombo, Ceylon – we know she did not board the ‘SS. Klang’ with Miss Tasker and Mrs Marsden for Fremantle – which arrived safely on 2 March 1942.
- **FIRTH** – Mrs. S.E.J. Firth, became and internee in Muntok, Palembang and Belalau (she is also recorded in another internee list as “Mrs. I.L.J. Firth). It is possible that this is Mrs. Dorothy Ethel Jane Firth, the wife of George William Firth, of Ipoh who was a POW during the war.
- **FINN/FEIN?** – Mrs. D.L. Finn died 15.5.45 (interestingly she is not on Chivers’ list of women in Palembang) - it is possible this is a misspelling and was the wife of the Dutch Consul in Singapore, Mr. H. M. J. Fein.
- **INGLIS/INGLES** - *George Sutherland Inglis, born c.1895 from Lauder, Berwickshire. Sumatra internee. Died in captivity 13.3.45 [50] Belalau. In the letter from G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC and an internee survivor in Palembang dated 24.9.45 he listed ‘G. Ingles’ as one of those Palembang internees who were on the ‘SS Siang Wo’ and then noted “... G. Ingles – Mr Ingles was engaged by Mr Eric Davis [ the General Manager of the MBC] on his arrival in Java. Mr. Ingles was afterwards interned in Palembang and died earlier this year. I hope to obtain further details of his death and also a notice of his death...”.* **The reality is**

*that George Inglis was not on the 'SS Siang Wo' – it appears that Mr. Tarry was confused by the fact that George (a British man who had been a tea planter in Sumatra) and had made his way to Java -presumably Batavia – soon after Singapore looked threatened and was taken on the staff of the MBC there, probably amongst a large group of MBC employees from Singapore. See Muntok Peace Museum website for further information.*

- **JONES** – After listing 'Mrs. Jones' as having been on 'SS Siang Wo', George Tarry, the Transmitter engineer of the MBC. who had been in Palembang Men's Internment Camp notes "... Mrs. Jones, interned Palembang. Died in Muntok 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1944..." (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation). The 'Chivers' list of British Women and Children in Palembang lists a 'Mrs. H.L. Jones' but makes no mention of her death; however 'Mrs. E. Cross' list of 'Internees in Palembang 1942' records "... Mrs. J.L. Jones, 9, died on 8.12.44..." which indicates by the use of digit '9' that this person arrived in Muntok on 'HMS Tapah' – however the 'captain's log' ( now in the UK Archives) written in report form by the captain of 'HMS Tapah' does not record anyone by the name 'Mrs. Jones' and given that W. Tarry was in fact aboard 'HMS Tapah' he is most likely to be correct. The official record of the CWGC states that **Mrs. Blanche Lucy Jones**, aged 58 years died on Banka Island on 8.12.44, wife of Frederick Leonard Jones, of 88 Circular Road, Kuala Lumpur. Daughter of Harry and Elizabeth Hayhoe Burrows, of Buxton Road, Norwich, Norfolk (CWGC). Blanche Jones was buried in Plot 3, Row P, Grave No. 8 in the little rudimentary cemetery at the Women's Internment Camp in Muntok. November/December 1944, just after the movement of internees from Palembang, was a time when recurring 'Banka Fever' and Malaria were rife in Muntok Internment camp, many people were sick and the death toll was high amongst young and old – with one or two funerals in the women's camp every day. It is not known whether Mrs. Jones used the name of 'Blanche' or 'Lucy' so, simply for the purpose of this document we will stick with her first name. Blanche's life is also, because of the way records were kept at the time with a focus on husbands, perhaps best followed through the movements of her husband - Frederick Leonard Jones - who was born in Spalding, Lincolnshire in 1889 and, after education at Spalding Grammar School, became a journalist and moved abroad. In 1912, he became editor of the 'Malay Mail' in Kuala Lumpur. On 11 October 1915 at St Georges's Church, Penang, Frederick married Blanche Lucy Burrows, originally from Norfolk. Their first child, Margaret Elizabeth known as 'Muffett', was born in in the Malaya during 1917 and their second child, Anthony in 1920. On 3 May 1921, the 32-year-old Blanche – together with Margaret aged 3 years and Anthony at 7 months – sailed from London on the 'SS Glenluce' to return to Port Swettenham, Malaysia. The ship's manifest noted that her last address in the UK had been 8 Buxton Road, Norwich – perhaps her parents' address. With Frederick and Blanche living and working in Kuala Lumpur, and in common with the practice of expats at the time, Anthony was at some stage sent back to the UK for schooling and put in the care of his uncle Esmond who had married an Elsie J Burrows (maybe Blanche's sister?). By 1936 it appears that Blanche and daughter Margaret were living alone back in England at 74 Alexandra Road, Epsom - Blanche, by then aged 51 years, is listed with the conventional "Unpaid Domestic Duties" and 22-year-old Margaret as a "Model". In September 1939, Frederick is recorded setting sail alone to return to Kuala Lumpur, where the family's address was 88 Circular Road. The ship's manifest notes that he had been staying at 74 Alexandra Road. Blanche also returned to Kuala Lumpur, perhaps after Margaret had become engaged to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Dennis Brent Panting, Middlesex Regiment – Margaret and Dennis were later married, in April 1940, in Britain. In 1939, son Anthony was commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer. He was posted to 10 Squadron (flying Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers), RAF Bomber Command and stationed at RAF Leeming In Yorkshire. On the night of 5/6 November 1940, Anthony was piloting a Whitley on an operation to Milan, they reported that the operation had been completed at 23.59 hours, but the aircraft was last heard from transmitting distress signals. It crashed into the sea about 10 miles east of Kent's North Foreland, killing all on board. The bodies of 20-year-old Anthony and his four crewmates (the youngest of whom was only 18) were never recovered. The following year Frederick and Blanche were both back in Kuala Lumpur when, on 8 December 1941, the Japanese invaded Malaya and like other civilians made their

way to Singapore. Frederick found passage on the 'HMS Giang Bee' which left Singapore several days after the 'SS Siang Wo' on 13 February 1942 but was also bombed and suffered damage during the day of 13 February, and which that evening, after a long stand-off in the Banka Strait with a Japanese destroyer, was shelled, caught fire and quickly sank; 52-year-old Frederick was later recalled by 'Giang Bee' survivors helping the Dutch red Cross compile records in Palembang camp as having been seen 'on board' and the conclusion was that he died in the sinking. Blanche is said to have thought he was still safe back in Singapore and hopefully - for her peace of mind - that was the situation because she had already experienced the pain of the news of her son's death in action during 1940, but in the isolation of the internment camps of southern Sumatra she would not have known that her son in law Dennis Parting had transferred as a Flight Lieutenant into the RAFVR and had also been killed in Tunisia in April 1943. Intriguingly, from the UK Archives we are also able to learn that Margaret Elizabeth Panting (nee Jones) had been recruited into the 'Special Operations Executive' – perhaps as early as 1939 – but her SOE personnel file has not been digitised so nothing is known of her wartime career. She was the only member of her family who survived the war. **POSTSCRIPT: Sadly the Women's Cemetery for the Internees in Muntok on Banka Island fell into disrepair after the war, particularly, during the period of conflict between the Dutch and Indonesians and when the time came to move the remains of those buried to the formal cemetery in Jakarta, the British Government refused to disinter and reinter the remains of British civilians in Muntok and many graves like that of Blanche Jones were ignored and some years later were built over by houses and a service station. The builders removed some of the bones from these graves and a common grave was created that now lies in the Catholic cemetery with a formal marble headstone listing the names of the women internees.**

- **LAYLAND/LEYLAND** – Mrs. Kathleen Minnes Layland, Canadian from Vancouver married to Charles Lancelot Layland, Kuala Lumpur who had worked for Yukon Gold Co., at Ampang near Kuala Lumpur during the early 1930s, he was a member of Lodge Tullibardine and Chairman of Toc H in Kuala Lumpur. Kathleen was a Registered Nurse, holding the 'Public Health' qualification and the daughter of Andrew Kerr Hasting MacFarlane and Annie Minnes MacFarlane. She died, aged 49 years, on 12.5.43 in Palembang Hospital. **Mrs. Kathleen Minnes Layland** died in the 'Catholic Hospital' (presumably Charitas Hospital) on 12.5.43. It appears that Charles Layland escaped Singapore to India because a letter from an MBC engineer, G.W. Tarry dated 24.9.45 states "...Next of Kin husband K.L. Layland Esq., *Champion Reefs, K.G. Fields, South India...*". [Champion Reefs is one of the main mining areas in the Kolar Gold Fields in India.]
- **LEE** – "... Miss Lee, address Malayan Broadcasting House (Chinese), transferred to Mr Merton Brown's yacht 13.2.42..." (Palembang internees list of those on 'Siang Wo' in UK Archives). This must be **Miss Joan Lee** – a Chinese Announcer at MBC, about 20 years of age (not related). "... Joan Lee left Banka in small craft (believed safe) and Barbara Lee interned. No further news..." (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation).
- **LEE** – "... Miss Betty Lee – a Chinese Announcer at MBC, about 20 years of age.". Then also, "... Lily Lee, address Malayan Broadcasting House, remained at Muntok..." (Palembang internees list of those on 'Siang Wo' in UK Archives); and finally, "... Joan Lee left Banka in small craft (believed safe) and Barbara Lee interned. No further news..." (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation).
- **LEONG** – "... Mr. & Mrs. Leong, address Malayan Broadcasting House, released by Japanese and remained at Muntok ..." (Palembang internees list of those on 'Siang Wo' in UK

Archives). “... Released by the Japanese from Banka Island...” (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation).

- **MARSDEN** – ‘Mrs. A. T. H. Marsden was the wife of Dr. A.T.H. Marsden’. This is in fact **Mrs. Margaret A. Marsden**, aged 40 years in 1942 (i.e., born 1908) who worked for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation when she evacuated with the group of women on the ‘SS Siang Wo’. Most information on Mrs. Marsden must – as was the custom of the times – be deduced via the movements of her husband Dr. Marsden. Again, by deduction, they had a son, Richard Thomas H. Marsden in 1934, but it was not until Dr. Marsden’s appointment to Health Officer, Malayan Medical Services in 1939 that the family appears in newspapers. In July of that year the family travelled on ‘SS Kedah’ from Singapore to Penang and Dr. Marsden was seconded to the State of Kedah as health Officer. In October 1940 they were on the move again, this time to Singapore [during these years in Malaya Dr Marsden had also enlisted in the RAMC and by 1938 had been promoted from Captain to Major]. Sometime in early February 1942 Margaret and her husband had the foresight to evacuate their six-year-old son Richard from Singapore in the care of a friend. As the fall of Singapore became increasingly evident, with Japanese troops well advanced across Singapore Island, the staff of the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation were assembled, the transmission stations shut down and the entire staff approved for evacuation. Mrs. Marsden recalled to ‘The West Australian’ Perth newspaper on 6 March 1942 after she reached Australia “... *On the Wednesday I received a call at the office to say: ‘If you are ready to go immediately, you can leave Singapore’ – I went. First, I telephoned my husband – that is the last I have heard of him...*” [Dr A.T.H. was by then serving as a Major in the RAMC in Singapore - he was captured, become a POW of the Japanese in Singapore, Siam and Burma for three years and during which time he and other doctors learned a lot about diseases, vitamin deficiencies etc on which they wrote useful medical papers after the war]. Mrs. Margaret Marsden continued with her account to the Perth newspaper “... *My luggage, packed in readiness, was left on the wharf; I had nothing except the clothes in which I stood and my handbag. Some kind men on board [‘SS. Siang Wo’] provided me with a skeleton wardrobe – shorts, a shirt, pyjamas. Food was scarce and we were delayed in harbour for hours while temporary repairs were done to the bomb damage on board. Intermittent attacks occurred all next day. On Friday Morning we were bombed incessantly for four hours and finally a bomb hit the engine room... Fortunately three craft were sighted. Two were yachts and the third, I think, a motor launch. The women were taken off, most onto the larger of the two yachts. The skipper of the other [this was the yacht ‘Carimon’] said he could take two women, but only if they were willing to work. Another girl, Margaret Robinson, and myself volunteered to go. There was only the skipper, a regular hard-bitten English sailor – and another man [Mrs. Marsden later told the MRB that the name of the other man was either Bill Jackson or Bill Harrison, a tin miner attached to the landing ground, RAF Singapore. MRB report No.176] on board. We took turns on watch and did the cooking. The skipper was the only one who knew anything about navigation, and he never left the deck. We struck terrible weather and the strain of trying to keep the yacht on course was awful. My previous experience of yachting had been confined to cruising through the Norfolk Broads! However, we all pulled well together, even if we occasionally pulled the wrong ropes. Next day, while sailing past an island we heard cries for help. Through the glasses we could see figures on the beach, so we pulled in closer and the second yacht, which was following us up, sent a rowboat ashore to investigate. They found two RAF boys whose planes had been shot down and took them on board [this was Pilot Officer Chalmers and Sgt. G.M. Kendrick, the Air Gunner, from a Blenheim bomber of 211 Sqdn., RAF which had been shot down near Banka Island and who had reached a small island in the Banka Strait] *Finally, on the Monday,**

*blistered from wind, salt water and the sun, and completely lacking any of the 'soignee' [sic: soignee] appearance, we reached Batavia. Here a surprise was awaiting me - my luggage had been sent down in another boat and was sitting in the company's office waiting to be claimed!".* The reason Margaret Marsden could not remember the name of J. A. Anderson's 30-foot yawl 'Carimon' on which she reached Batavia is apparently because she was 'very ill all the way to Batavia'. Margaret Anderson later told the MRB that "... *the yacht ['Carimon'] was put on board the 'City of Manchester' in Batavia Harbour and Anderson went on board too. The 'City of Manchester' was sunk outside Tjilitchap on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February [1942] and Anderson was wounded, but he was rescued. She heard however, that he died later in hospital in Perth...*" (MRB Report No. 176). Margaret then boarded the 'SS Klang' bound for Fremantle and in company with sixteen other MBC employees (and wives) including Miss E. Tasker who had also been on the 'SS Siang Wo' (who had joined the women boarding 'White Swan') they reached Fremantle on 2 March 1942. Arriving in Australia Margaret apparently then tried to frantically trace the whereabouts of her six-year-old son Richard - the same worry was repeated for her husband when he was released from being a POW, he had no idea where his wife and child were. However, the family reunited and returned to Malaya after the war, firstly to Ipoh and then by 1952 Dr. A.T.H Marsden was working for the institute of Medical Research in Kula Lumpur. By 1959 he was Director of that organisation and retired in 1960. Son Richard had been sent to Geelong Grammar School, south of Melbourne, and remained in Australia for the rest of his life.

- **RIVETT – Rohan Rivett** (the author of the book 'Behind Bamboo' which is an integral part of the understanding of the last voyage of 'SS. Siang Wo') was born on 16.1.17, the son of Sir David Rivett and Stella (nee Deakin), his grandfather was a Prime Minister of Australia, Alfred Deakin. A person who would develop into a man of intellect and words, he attended the prestigious Wesley College, Melbourne for his schooling and then Melbourne University where he graduated with first class honours in history and political science. Following that he went on to study at Balliol College, Oxford but because of the outbreak of the war in Europe he never completed his studies there, returning to Australia to join 'The Argus' newspaper as a cadet reporter, but with a couple of months enlisted in the AIF in 1940. He appears to have been briefly married at this time to Gwyneth Terry, but that marriage failed quite promptly. The Army must have realised his potential as a media professional because, after only a few months, he was 'released' to the Australian Department of Information to prepare overseas news bulletins. With the Japanese invasion of northern Malaya, he transferred to the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation – essentially part of the 'Ministry of Information in Malaya – and presumably discharged from the Australian Army. As an MBC war correspondent, he was a broadcaster and, at 8.28 a.m. on Monday 9 February 1942, he raced up the stairs of the Cathay Building in Singapore – interrupted the woman conducting the 'Tiny Tots' session, grasped her microphone and announced to the civilian population of Singapore that Japanese troops had landed on the Island the previous night! This was relayed onwards to the world by an immediate BBC broadcast from London. Most MBC staff were evacuated to Java almost immediately leaving the Chairman, Eric Davis, and a skeleton staff including Rivett and Norman Carter. By the Wednesday (10 February) Eric Davis and his remaining staff comprehended that "... *the end was a matter of days...*" and they were all transported to Collyer Quay, under severe bombing, to be taken out by tender to board the "... *squat, ugly looking vessel of about 2500 tons which we afterwards learned was the 'Siang Wo'...*". After facing the next few days of bombing at sea and then escaping across Banka Island [his fellow passengers who became internees in Sumatra recorded his disappearance as. "... *Mr R. Rivett, address Malayan Broadcasting House, ran away at Muntok on 13.2.42...*"] Rohan and Norman Carter

made the amazing escape journey down the coast of Sumatra to the Sunda Strait and Java – only to be captured by hostile Javanese on that island. He then endured the malnutrition, lack of medical care and harsh treatment of Japanese POW camps [presumably his enlistment in the AIF in 1940 caused him to be classified as a serviceman rather than a news broadcaster under the ‘Department of Information’ because that might have singled him out for Kempetai attention?] for the next three or so years in Java and on the Burma/ Siam Railway. After repatriation in 1945, in company with Norman Carter, Rohan rejoined ‘The Argus’ but in January 1946 was persuaded by Sir Keith Murdoch to the ‘Melbourne Herald’. The following year he married actress Nancy Ethel Summers and over the next decade they had three children - Rhyll, David and Keith. Rohan had an illustrious journalism career – Murdoch sent him to China and then London before he became Editor – in – Chief of ‘The News’ in 1951. Then followed a brilliant but occasionally controversial career because Rohan Rivett was a man who had a conscience and spoke his mind – this was a factor in his departure from the newspaper scene and during the early 1960s he was Director of the International Press Institute in Switzerland. He returned to Australia and became a freelance journalist, author and broadcaster. In 1977 Rohan Rivett passed away at home after suffering a coronary occlusion. A life fully lived.

- **ROBINSON** – “... Mrs Margaret Robinson, MBC “, Cathay Staff: Personal Secretary to Eric Davis and actress. On the ‘*Siang Wo*’ then ‘RAF yacht’, or “... *went on Anderon’s yacht, now in India...*” (Miss E. Tasker); “... *Mrs M. Robinson, address Malayan Broadcasting House, transferred to Mr Merton Brown’s yacht 13.2.42...*” which was the ‘White Swan’ (Palembang internees list of those on ‘Siang Wo’ in UK Archives). It is unclear whether this woman was married or not and could well have been **Miss Constance Margaret Robinson**, to Singapore 1939, who had previously worked for the BBC prior to the MBC. Evacuated on the ‘Siang Wo’ then on the yacht ‘Carimon’, owned by J.A.D. Anderson, to Java. Evacuated from there to India. Joined US Army Air Force. Returned to Singapore 1946. Married W. Nigel Carruthers 1947(JMM).
- **TASKER** - Ms E. Tasker, travelled from Sydney to Hong Kong in 1929 on the ‘Taiping’; Obstetric Nurse [left Shanghai 1939] MBC Commission. On the *Siang Wo* 12.2.42. Arrived Fremantle WA on ‘Klang’ 2.3.42;” ...*Miss Tarsker [sic], address Malayan Broadcasting House, transferred to RAF launch...*” (Palembang internees list of those on ‘Siang Wo’ in UK Archives).
- **WARD** – ‘Mrs. M. Ward’ is listed in Palembang camp as having been on the ‘SS Siang Wo’ (Mrs. E Cross list); this is a reference to Mrs **Myrtle Ward**, aged 37 in 1942, wife of Leonard George William Ward – but (on the clear evidence of her own post war letters) Myrtle Ward was a survivor of the sinking of the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ at Banka Island.
- **WOO** – **Mr. Woo** – on ‘SS Siang Wo’. “... *Released by the Japanese from Banka Island...*” (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malya Broadcasting Corporation)
- **WOO** – **Mrs. Woo** – on ‘SS Siang Wo’. “... *Released by the Japanese from Banka Island...*” (letter 24.9.45 by G.W. Tarry, Transmitter Engineer, MBC to the Malya Broadcasting Corporation)

- **WOOSEY** – “... *Mrs Woosey, address Malayan Broadcasting House, transferred to RAF launch 13.2.42...*” (Palembang internees list of those on ‘Siang Wo’ in UK Archives), although another source says she went on Merton Brown’s yacht ‘White Swan’. There was also the observation by a passenger on the ‘SS Siang Wo’, who was interned in Palembang, that Mrs. Woosey “... *had separated from her husband but was for the last week as caterer for teas...*”. This indicates that this was **Mrs. Edith Lillian Woosey**, the wife of Sydney Arthur Joseph Woosey, who separated from her husband (who was a Police Inspector in Singapore) and filed several claims in court against him in 1938 for maintenance. They both arrived back in Britain by ship in March 1942. Another alternative is that it was **Mrs. Joan Woosey** who appears in Singapore newspapers a few times – arranging a Balinese entertainment function (‘Morning Tribune’ 5.6.41) and performing at the Malacca Club for Poppy Day in 1941 (‘Malaya Tribune’ 1.12.41).

### Crew (including Naval Officers aboard).

- **AHMAD** – **Ahmad Dahim bin Noordin**, born in Indonesia and joined ‘Malay Navy’ in his words. He says he went to ‘Laburnum’ and was there on 8.2.42 but was ordered by Lt.Cdr. Vickers on 10.2.42 that, unless he wanted to stay with his family, he should leave Singapore on a transport ship named ‘Siang Wo’ anchored near Kuzu island. They left at dawn in a convoy of six ships bound for Batavia. On morning of 11.2.42 the ship was bombed by Japanese planes and the stern of the vessel damaged so that it lost its steering. Aboard were some European women and children plus some British officers. Some 40 Malay naval ratings landed at Muntok on Banka Island. the next day (12.2.42) the Japanese landed. (Singapore Oral Archives, national Library).
- **ALLEN** – **Temporary Acting Commissioned Boatswain Jesse Arthur Allen, CJ 37199, RN.,** was captured on 15.2.42 on Banka Island on 15.2.42 and became a POW at Muntok then Palembang. It is not known whether he was on ‘SS Siang Wo’, but his date of capture is the same as this ship.
- **BARTHOLEMEW** – **Stoker Arthur William Bartholemew, # D/KX466???,** Royal Navy ex ‘HMS Repulse’ born 10 March 1916, enlisted Oct. 1940, address 8 Sackville Road, Hampden Park, Eastbourne. Captured 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942, Banka Island. POW camps Banka Island 15.2.42, Seleta [sic] 30.2.42, Loyang dec 1942, Changi 1 7 .44. (MI9 Liberation questionnaire on COFEPOW website). Arthur Bartholomew also recorded his memories during 1984 in the oral archives held in Singapore – he recalls being on a lorry to Keppel Harbor where he was to crew on ‘Firefly’ [this may have been ‘HMS Dragonfly’] and prepare it for evacuation. He was then told to leave that vessel and return to Raffles. He was then reassigned to ‘SS Siang Wo’ anchored out from Clifford Pier – where he had to plug holes with wood because the ship had been bombed. The ship set sail at 1200 on the morning of Friday 13 February and he was down in the engine room- later that day he had some sleep then returned to the engine room and when the ship was bombed, he found the first bomb hit the same saloon where he had been sleeping with others. About then the skipper ordered that if they were hit by any more bombs then everyone would have to move above deck – another bomb hit forward and injured Bartholomew as a rush of ‘women and children’ (?? his words) carried

him up the stairs to the deck. He and Stoker Tidy [ this was Fireman William James Tidy, Merchant Navy) were then ordered to man the boilers and the pumps, and they then returned down to the engine room. The ship was being evacuated during this time and when they were next told to leave the engine room, they found that everyone had left the ship, so they jumped overboard to swim to shore - but the shore was not far off. The 'SS Siang Wo' sank up to its decks. Once on shore the naval ratings took over the 'old gaol place' because it was empty and made a stew before they slept. When the Japanese arrived, they selected Bartolomew along with others to an 'unfinished MTB/MGB' for engine room and upper deck duties where along with a prize crew from the Japanese destroyer 'Asagiri' which had been sinking various ships around Banka Island. Previous research indicates that Bartolomew was almost certainly one of the RN ratings assigned to the SSRNVR patrol launch 'HMS Pahlawan' – which was the 'MTB/MGB' he recalled – to return that vessel to Singapore. He noted on his MI9 that his first POW camp was at Seletar – this was in fact aboard a vessel under Sub. Lt. Innokenty Andre Sibiriakoff, MRNVR who had been the Engineering Officer on the patrol launch. (Singapore Archives, Oral history recording, Accession # 000400, Reel 4 of 8).

- **BOLITHO – PO/Writer William Symonds Bolitho, D/MX63503, RN., 'HMS Sultan', was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42 and held in Muntok POW camp before being moved across the Banka Strait to Palembang POW camp. It is not known whether he was on 'SS Siang Wo' but his date of capture is the same as this ship.**
- **BUTLER – Supply Assistant James Scott Butler, P/MX 70241, RN., 'HMS Siang Wo' died 13.2.42 aged 28 years, son of John Mathew and Edith Mary Butler. Royal Navy Casualty file in UK Archives records "... last seen Banka Island 17.2.42...". Since this was two days after personnel at Muntok were captured, it is possible that James Butler offended Japanese soldiers or attempted to escape and lost his life in those circumstances.**
- **CARR – AB. John Patrick Carr, D/JX204210, RN., was captured on 15.2.42, (born in 1918 and 'HMS Siang Wo' - source JMM) and appears on the Palembang POW camp register with the NOK address as "... (Mother, Mrs. Carr. Curra Street, Duncanfield, Cheshire...". No MI9 questionnaire on COFEPOW database.**
- **CORCORAN – Surgeon Lt. John Patrick Corcoran, RN, (Kranji W/T Singapore, (1911-1965) was captured in Muntok on 15.2.42 and became a POW in 'Muntok Original Camp before being moved to Palembang. It is not known whether he was on 'SS Siang Wo' but his date of capture is the same as this ship.**
- **CROSS – AB Dennis Herbert Cross, D/JX173809, RN., 'Royal Navy Fleet Shore Accommodation Singapore 'was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42 and held in Muntok then Palembang. It is not known whether he was on 'SS Siang Wo', but his date of capture is the same as this ship.**
- **CROSSLEY – Lt. Tom Anderson Crossley, MRNVR, was born 4.1.1882 in Georgetown, British Guiana and was an engineer in Penang when he enlisted on 11.2.1941 so, at 60 years of age, was the oldest man aboard 'SS Siang Wo'. He appears to have arrived in Malaya on the NYK steamer 'Atsuta Maru' in 1915 and is recorded as a member of Lodge Krain at Parit Bunsar in 1920 ( 'ST' 23.8.20)and a few years later in Penang at Scotia Royal Arch masonic lodge ( 'ST' 16.10.23.In 1927 he travelled to Singapore on the 'Kashmir' and in 1935 is reported to be a member of the Penang Wireless Society( that Society was very close to British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation). In 1941 he was commissioned as a Sub Lt in the SSRNVR, and he states on his MI9 questionnaire that he enlisted on 11.2.41. It is not clear whether he was a member of the crew on 'SS Sinag Wo' - his engineering experience may have been relevant - but was captured with most others in Muntok on 15.2.42 and his MI9 questionnaire records he was soon sent to Palembang, but by May 1942 had been part of the 'Japan Draft' from**

Palembang and the remainder of his war was spent in POW camps in Formosa and Japan. He does not appear to have returned to Malaya after the war – which is understandable since he would have been in his late sixties.

- **DAVIES -Ordinary Signalman Herbert F. Davies, D/JX 232369, Port War Signal Station (PWSS), Changi Singapore, RN.,** was captured on 15 February on Banka Island. On 'SS Siang Wo' (JMM). Born 4 December 1910 and enlisted in December 1940. He was a POW on Banka Island, then Palembang (his NOK on the Palembang camp register was 'Wife, Mrs. Davies, 21 Station Terrace, Dowlais Top, South Wales') before becoming part of the 'Japan Draft' on 17.7.42 and spending the remainder of the war in POW camps in Taiwan, Yokohama, and 'Kosaka'. The address on his MI9 questionnaire at the end of the war was No.2 Park Mansions, Ithon Road, Llandrindod Wells, (a village in Powys, Radnorshire, Wales).
- **DUNSMORE - E.R.A. John James Dunsmore, M/DX2758, 'HMS Prince of Wales', RN.,** born 15.7.11 and enlisted in the RNVR on 28.3.20. On 'SS> Siang Wo' (JMM). Captured at Muntok 15.2.42 and a POW there until 1.3.42, following which he was moved to Palembang (there his NOK was noted as 'Wife, Mrs Dunsmore, 16 Port Glasgow, Greenock, Scotland) until being part of the 'Japan Draft' on 17.7.42 when he was taken to Formosa via Changi. This was followed by POW camps in Yokohama and 'Ashio (Japan)'. On repatriation at war's end his address on his MI9 questionnaire was noted as 4 Tasker Street, Greenock, Renfrewshire, Scotland.
- **DYKES – Tpy. Lt. (E) W. Dykes, RNR, 'Missing Believed dead'** (UK Archives) must have been one of the three men reportedly killed by the bombing of 'SS Siang Wo'. The CWGC record adds no further information to the background or family of William Dykes and research has failed to find out anything more about this man.
- **ELLIS – Sub.LT. Ivor Ellis, MRNVR ('HMS Laburnum')** was captured in Muntok on 15.2.42 and held in Muntok POW camp (Airfield) before being moved to Palembang. It is not known whether he was on 'SS Siang Wo' but his date of capture is the same as this ship.
- **GRANT – Lt. (E) Walter Ramsay Grant, RNR** was born on 27.3.04. He married Elizabeth Blair Grant (1911-2008). Walter Grant died, aged 89 years, on 12.4.93. There is a mention of a 'Mr. & Mrs. Grant 'as passengers on the 'Comorin' from Singapore to London in 1938, but it is not certain that these were the same people as this entry. On 'SS Siang Wo' (JMM and the fact that in naval records in the UK Archives Lt. (E) Grant, RNR, reported the death on the Mala Quartermaster ion the ship). Captured at Muntok and became a POW in Palembang before forming part of the 'Japan Draft' in 1942 to Formosa then Japan. Whilst a POW in Palembang his NOK was recorded as 'Wife, Mrs. Grant, c/o Union Bank of Australasia, Perth, W. Australia'. Both Walter Ramsay Grant (27.03.04) and Elizabeth Blair Grant (8.5.11 – 2.9.2008) are buried in the same grave – along with a 'Ross Fraser Rhoderick Flanagan' (Billion Graves) in Morningside Cemetery, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- **HARE – Lt. Alexis 'Lex' Alfred Hare, MRNVR.** His MI9 questionnaire recorded that he was born on 2.10.1906 and he gave his address as Sizewell, Leiston, Suffolk, England or c/o Asia Life Insurance Co. Inc., Singapore. He was captured on 15.2.42 at Muntok. The Palembang POW camp register showed his 'NOK' as Mrs. E. Hare (Grandmother), Sizewell, Leiston, Suffolk. Correspondence with Alexis' daughter in 2020 clarified that her father was born ten years earlier (in 1916) in Leiston, Suffolk, the second son of Marmaduke Edward Hare and his Russian wife Kathleen (nee Gossieveki). Sometime after Alexis' birth his parents separated, and his mother travelled to the 'Far East' where there was a large community of 'White Russians' who had fled Russia at the time of the Revolution. Alexis completed his apprenticeship as a printer then travelled to Singapore in May 1937 on the 'Haruna Maru'.

He was employed by his uncle Mr. A.A. Gossevsy, the Manager of Asian Life Insurance Ltd and someone who had become naturalised British and part of the affluent upper social set in Singapore. Volunteer records on Alexis Hare state his job was 'Resident Secretary' for Asia Life Insurance. Alexis recorded on his MI9 questionnaire that he enlisted in August 1939, and this is confirmed by the 'Penang Gazette and Straits Chronicle' of 12 .12.39 when he was commissioned as an Acting Sub- Lt. in the SSRNVR. Alexis was captured in Muntok on 15 February 1942 and within a few weeks was transported with most other POWs to Palembang POW camp, where he remained until 1.6.45 when many men were transported to Changi POW camp in Singapore. He married in 1946 back in England but that marriage failed after seven years – it appears, like many men, his years as a POW had not helped his stability in relationships. (Sources: Nina Wilson and newspaper archives in Singapore National Library).

- **HENDERSON – Cook Charles Henderson, D/MX65207, 'SS. Siang Wo', RN.,** was born on 14.9.19 and enlisted on 28.3.1940. He was moved to Palembang on 4.3.42 and spent the remainder of the war in that POW camp. Whilst in Palembang his NOK was noted as 'Mother, Mrs. Henderson, 43 Plantation St., Glasgow' and this same address was used on his MI9 questionnaire.
- **HODGSON – Cook Charles J. Hodgson, P/MX64903, RN** was captured on 15.2.42. It is not known whether he was on 'SS Siang Wo' but his date of capture is the same as this ship.
- **KERTON???** – *"...Sgm. Kerton, RN., was killed by a bomb splinters ..."* (Sub. Lieut. T.C. Marr, RNR report in UK Archives). It has not been possible to identify this man.
- **KINNEAR – Lt. Duncan George Robertson Kinnear, RNR,** was Chief Officer on 'SS Siang Wo' when it left Singapore, so it seems likely that he had worthwhile sea faring experience in prewar years. He was born on 30.5.11 and enlisted in February 1911, by July 1941 he had been commissioned as a Temp. Sub Lt in the RNR. He was one of the men in the same escape party described by Rohan Rivett in his book 'Behind Bamboo' and with them made the extraordinary journey to Java where he and the others were captured on 8 March 1942. Rivett describes Kinnear in his book as *"... a thin, lithe, suntanned fellow with a wide experience of ships, ports and men in the waters east of Suez..."* (p.322 'Behind Bamboo')- and Kinnear was unanimously elected skipper in the small boat epic journey to Java. He apparently impressed Rivett with his 'coolness' on the journey during storms and adversity. Imprisoned initially for a couple of weeks in Merak and the Serang Cinema building, he was then held in Serang Gaol for a month, followed by another month in the 'Batavia Cycle Camp' and five months in 'Batavia T9 Priok' camp - before being transported as a POW to camps in Japan until the end of the war (MI9 questionnaire). On his MI9 questionnaire he gave his address as 36 Orchard Grove, Wicor, Fareham, Hampshire (Wicor is a pretty harbour front suburb in Portsmouth). After the war he returned to the sea as a Captain on ships of the Indo-China Steam Navigation Co. Ltd in Hong Kong – skippering 'Choy Sang', 'We Sang', and 'Eastern Muse' (source annual publications during 1950s of UK Meteorological Bureau and ICSN Co. Ltd history).
- **LAND – Sub. Lt Reginald 'Nobby' Charles Rex Land, MRNVR.** Born Croydon, England 18.10.07 one of three children of Arthur Raymond Land (1883-1955) and Harriet May Land (nee Reece, 1881 – 1953). The first mention of him in Singapore newspapers is in 1931 playing rugby for the 'Merchants' and during the 1930s (and through to the post war 1950s insofar as golf) he is reported playing rugby for the SSVF, golf, and at weddings. He returned 'home' in 1939 on the 'Sarpedon'. He worked for Stafford & Co, Singapore. He was married to Evelyn Maud Land, but Nobby won his divorce case, in London, against her in 1938 (SFPMA 14.10.38) [with the co-defendant being Albert Stephen Gispert. Gispert was of Spanish parentage

and a Chartered Accountant in Kuala Lumpur prewar who started the 'Hash House Harriers' movement. As a Captain in the FMSVF he was attached to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and was killed on the night of 11 February 1942 when Japanese troops overran their position at the Dairy Farm Road intersection with Bukit Timah Road. Albert Gispert's remains were never located. The legend of the infidelity and divorce of Nobby Land's wife – it seems she became pregnant to Gispert – now forms part of global 'Hash House Harriers' lore.]. After evacuation of 'SS Siang Wo' and those aboard and the surrender of Singapore, the secret record kept by the internees in Changi prison (on sheets of 'Jeyes' toilet paper) recorded "... LAND R C R (indecipherable nickname possibly 'Nobby') STAFFORD & CO RNVR POW P'BANG...". No MI9 questionnaire has been located for 'Nobby' Land but from the Palembang POW camp register we know he was held there and gave his NOK as "Mr. A.R. Land, Barclays Bank Chambers, Croydon, Surrey".

- **LEGGATT – Lt. (Sp) William W. Leggatt, MRNVR**, was born on 29.4.1884 and spent decades as a rubber planter in Malaya. He became one of Malaya's leading planters during the prewar period and was for six years (1933-39) the President of Incorporated Society of Planters in Malaya – representing the interests of rubber planters employed by the companies across Malaya. He had married Mildred Heywood Haslam in Britain in 1913 but tragically she died in 1916 – two weeks after giving birth to their son David William Leggatt who then lived with and was raised by his uncle in Scotland. William lived and worked on Bukit Kepong and Bolton Estates he became Manager of Bukit Kepong Rubber Estates Ltd., also, the Commodore of the Port Dickson Yacht Club. In May 1941 local newspapers briefly recorded the loss of their 24-year-old son (Lt. David William Leggatt, RN.) in the sinking of HM Submarine 'Usk' in the Mediterranean. William and his (unidentified) second wife are mentioned in the diary of fellow planter Charles Robert Samuel, who has a poignant note in his diary for Christmas 1941 that, as the Japanese were advancing down Malaya, Charles Samuel and his wife spent that Christmas Day with William Leggatt and his wife on their rubber estate (presumably Bolton Estate which is south of KL) "... *about seven miles outside Kuala Lumpur ...*" enjoying "... *Turkey, sausages and Plum pudding...*". William must have then promptly retreated with his wife and all other European civilians around Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, because the State of Selangor was abandoned to the advancing Japanese on 7 January 1942 and Mrs. Leggatt evacuated safely to Britain on the liner (26,000 tons) 'SS Empress of Japan' (renamed the 'SS Empress of Scotland' after Japan invaded Malaya) which vessel left Singapore on 30 January 1942 for Colombo. Two weeks later William, with many other unattached officers of the MRNVR, was on 'SS Siang Wo' when it was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42. He was moved to Palembang a few weeks later and the Naval casualties' files in the UK Archives recorded "... died at Charitas Hospital, Palembang, 23.9.42. Grave No. E/II.51 in New European Cemetery, Palembang. William died of Dysentery - his death is not recorded on the CWGC online register – nor was it recorded by post war newspapers in Malaya. Sadly, prewar life and the existence of the 'movers and shakers' of the prewar decades was so often overlooked during the late 1940s and early 1950s – essentially swept into the dustbin of history.
- **LYLE – Sub.-Lt. Claude Wormand Lyle, MRNVR** was born in Chaing Mai, Siam, on 2.1.1913 to Mr. (later Sir) Thomas Harold Lyle [1873-1927] and (Lady) Rose Hilda Sawyer Lyle [1885-1969] when his father was a British Consul in North Siam and a respected naturalist studying local fauna in the region. Claude is mentioned as passing the Colonial Service Exam in 1934 ('ST' 29.11.34) and arrived in Singapore in August 1935 to join the Malayan Civil Service as a Cadet. He soon was playing rugby (as a 'Stand Off Half' – today's 'First Five Eighth'), hockey and cricket and became well known as a rugby player in Singapore and Penang during prewar years - playing for 'Malaya' in 1939. In 1936 he was sent to Canton on the 'Naldera'

to spend two years studying Chinese and in July 1938 was appointed Asst. Protector of Chinese in Penang. He also became a Police Magistrate in the Malayan Civil Service. Captured in Muntok on 15 February 1942 he was transported to Palembang in April 1942 and spent the remainder of the war there until relocated with others in February 1945 to Changi POW camp in Singapore. His NOK whilst a POW was 'Mrs T.F. Carlisle (mother- she must have remarried), 'Heather Mount', North Maultway, Camberley, Surrey. After the war he returned to Malaya and the Civil Service becoming Asst Commissioner for Labour in Muar, rising to Commissioner for Labour in 1951, then Secretary for Chinese Affairs in 1952, Acting Deputy Chief Secretary in 1955 and finally 'Secretary to Governor and Clerk to the Council of Ministers in 1956 - the 'Indian Daily Mail' ( 19.5.56) reported that Claude Lyle died on 16.5.56 after a short illness while on vacation leave in the UK and he was survived by his widow ( Priscilla Garnett 1924-1984) and three children who had all been born in Singapore during the 1950s. For some reason his death was not mentioned in the 'Straits Times'? Claude had passed away at the relatively young age of 43 years, his address given at the time of Probate was that recorded for his mother during the war and his previous address was "... 156 Mount Pleasant, Singapore...". ('ST' 15.3.57).

- **MARR – Sub. Lt Thomas Charles Wills 'Tommy' Marr, RNR.**, the 2nd officer on 'SS Siang Wo' was born on 14.10.11 in the small town of Anstruther-Wester, known for its fishing, trade and smuggling, in the district of St Andrew, county of Fife, on the east coast of Scotland - north of Edinburgh. Serving in the merchant navy he was commissioned as a Sub. Lt. in the RNR. on 21.2.41. In 'Behind Bamboo' Rohan Rivett - when recounting the challenges of the escape party out of Muntok and across Banka island - describes him as a "*Little Tommy Marr... a Glaswegian, who delighted us ...with a spirited rendition of 'Dear Old Glasgie Toon'...*". In this context his address on his MI9 questionnaire was '17 Bolivar Terrace, Mount Florida, Langside 3324, Glasgow.S2.'. Tommy Marr is said to have been 'ill' most of the time during the weeks of the escape attempt and so was given the task of steering their little boat, rather than rowing. Tommy was captured with the rest of the escape group on 8 .3.42 – on his MI9 questionnaire he recorded that it was at 'Tjligon' [presumably what is now named Cilegon – which is half way between Merak on the western coast of Java and the town of Serang which is further inland] and after one day there he was taken to Serang Gaol for five weeks [where fellow escapee Lt. Col. E.K. Scott, RAOC was 'camp leader']; then the Cycle Camp Batavia; Tanjung Priok; Cycle Camp; Macassar; Cycle camp; Bandoeng Depot camp and finally back to the 'Cycle Camp in 1945. Tommy wrote a brief report on the loss of the 'SS Siang Wo' – interestingly in it he made specific mention of the ownership of 'SS. Siang Wo' being that of, Indo China Steam Navigation Co. Ltd and Jardine Matheson & Co., perhaps indicating that he had worked for ICSN Co before the war? He also made the only reference by any escapees to the unsuccessful escape attempt on Banka Island of fellow officers Lts. Woodley, Grant, Moore and Hare. Post War Tommy was employed by the ICSN Co. Ltd in Hong Kong and during the 1950s served on 'SS Canton', later on the ship 'Eastern Moon' when in August 1967 it was captured by Communist 'Red Guards' in Shanghai( no doubt provoked by the Second officer using a photo of Mao Tse Tung which had been pinned up in the bridge as a dart board) – this was the same day as the Red Guards attacked the British Embassy in Peking. About that point he and his wife Vera left Hong Kong and moved to Australia. Their son Peter died in 1985, Vera in 1992 and Tommy passed away in Alexandra Hills (near Brisbane) in 1994.
- **MC GEE – Able Seaman Robert McGee, C/JX262331, RN.**, "HMS Siang Wo (RN)", was born on 22.6.13 and enlisted on 5.3.41. He was captured in Muntok on 15.2.42 and became a POW in Muntok Gaol until 2.3.42 following which he was moved to Palembang and spent the remainder of the war moving between six POW camps in that city. His MI9 questionnaire

shows at the end of the war his address was 9 South Woodside Road, Glasgow, S4. And this was the address of his wife, Mrs. McGee, recorded in the Palembang camp register during the war.

- **MCCREERY – Stoker Sydney McCreery, D/KX96813, RN. (Devonport)**, ‘Siang Woo’[sic] and ex ‘HMS Repulse’ was born on 17.3.17 and enlisted on 2.5.39. His MI9 questionnaire records that he was captured in the ‘Banker Straits’[sic] on 15.2.42 and as a Palembang POW became part of the ‘Japan Draft’ on 17.7.42 being transported (via Singapore) to Formosa, then Yokohama and finally ‘Sendia’ on 13.5.45. His address at the end on the war was 36 Sydney Road, Kittgreen, Wigan, Lancs.
- **MENDELSON (also alias TODD post war?) – Able Seaman Kimball ‘Kim’ Oscar Tali Mendelsohn (post war using name TODD), PM 3791, RANR.**, was born on 7.3.1922 in East Malvern, Victoria, Australia, the son of Oscar Adolph Mendelsohn and Merle Winifred Mendelsohn – who later became **Mrs. Todd**, then Mrs St. Clair, then Mrs. Sinclair. He enlisted on 8.8.41. It appears that during 1941/42 he was attached to the ‘Singapore Pool’ of the Royal Australian Navy, and he recorded his story as “... I left Singapore just before it fell, as a crew member of the ‘Siang Wo’, one of the ‘Wo’ boats which helped police the Yangste River in China. It boasted a four-inch low trajectory gun forward and a Vickers machine gun aft. It also carried a few depth charges on the stern and was a coal burner. On the second day out, after there had been a number of bombing attacks, the native stokers mutinied and volunteers were called for, to go below. I volunteered and when I reached the engine room, I was promptly handed a long-handled shovel and told to get cracking. I had never held a long-handled shovel before and in fact I don’t think I had ever shovelled anything. Still, I got busy with my work and shortly afterwards I was approached by an engine room artificer – a chief artificer, I think. He asked me my name and I gave it to him. Then he asked my rank, and I told him ‘Ordinary seaman’. I was beginning to wonder whether I had been so brave that a recommendation was to be forthcoming, but instead he told me in a firm voice, but without great heat – “Well, get back on deck. YOU’RE BLOODY USELESS!”. (Source: ‘Palembang Memories’ Max Jagger and Kim Todd, 1995) He would have been captured at Muntok (with other crew members of ‘SS Siang Wo’) on Banka Island and became a POW in Palembang. In 1950 he (as Kimball Todd, son of Mrs. Todd of 2 Montgomery Street, East Brighton, Melbourne) married Daphne Joyce Brady. In 1953, as a ‘bank officer’ he was living at Valkstone Street, Melbourne and noted as executor of his mother’s will. ‘Kimball Todd’ died on 6.9.2004 and is buried at Buderim, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia – his cremation plaque shows no family, but is proudly emblazoned with ‘Royal Australian Naval Reserve’..
- **MOORE – Sub. Lt. (E) Charles Moore, RNR** escaped Singapore on the ‘SS Siang Wo’ and was captured in Muntok on 15.2.42. Very little information has been found on his life, but we can calculate that he was born in 1903, the youngest son of John and Helen Moore of Logie, Dundee. On the family memorial in Cupar Cemetery, Fife, Scotland it records he had three brothers named William, Ronald and Alexander and his sister (according to the Palembang camp register) was Miss H. Moore, 8 Sycamore Place, Logie, Dundee, Scotland. Charles died in Palembang camp on 20.6.45 aged 42 years, and was initially buried in Grave 87, No.2 Camp Cemetery and after the war reinterred in Grave 4.B.5 in Jakarta War Cemetery (CWGC).
- **NEVILLE – Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Jack Neville, D/JX 171020, RN.**, ‘HMS Sultan’, died 14.2.42 at Muntok, son of Joseph and Clara Neville of Dundas, Ontario, Canada. (CWGC); “Died of wounds”; previously ‘HMS Prince of Wales’, memorialised on Plymouth Naval Memorial Col. 3. In the UK Archives the record of ‘Died from Wounds’ on ‘SS Siang Wo’ includes “... J.

NEVILLE, Boy (Ex 'HMS Prince of Wales', 14.2.42 at Muntok- rptd. Lt. Comdr. Spilman, RNR and Lt. A.A. Woodley, RNR).

- **SHARPLES** – Sub. Lt John Sharples, MRNVR, was born on 4 May 1912 in Shanghai. Educated at Bedford School, City & Guilds Engineering College and Imperial College, University of London he graduated B. Sc, and gained admission as MIEE. After arriving in Malaya, in 1937, he is noted as moving from Ipoh to Taiping as Acting Electrical Engineer. He enlisted very late, on 24 January 1942, as a Sub. Lt (Sp) in the MRNVR. (MI9 and JMM). His wife evacuated to Australia to Australia then UK (JMM). Escaping from Singapore on the 'SS Siang Wo' John Sharples was part of the escape party of Kinnear, Wade, Willimott, Marr, Carter and Rivett – he reported in his MI9 questionnaire “... On 13/2/42 'HMS Siang Wo' was beached at Muntok, Banka Island following bombing air attack. I was billeted in the Muntok Hotel with other officers. On night of 14/15 Feb 1942 the Japanese landed on Banka. When the Japs approached the hotel the SNO, Lt. Cdr. Spilman, RN. warned us to prepare to become P.O.W. I sought and obtained permission to escape and with six others entered the jungle behind the hotel. After 6 days in the jungle, we found a sampan and made our way to Java, collecting 6 other shipwrecked persons en route. Arrived near Merak, Java on night of 6/8 March 1942 but found Japs in occupation and party broke up to filter through to British lines in small groups. Lt. V.N Wade, RNVR and myself were caught by Japanese troops at Tjilegon...”. Rohan Rivett's book 'Behind Bamboo' says little about John Sharples – confining his comments to similar derogatory statements to those he made on Stanley Willimott “...unfortunately, to prove themselves quite unfit for such a desperate venture ... the less said about him the better...” and is very critical of John Sharples covertly smoking over two thirds of the groups cigarettes that they had brought along...” On reaching Java, John Sharples and Vernon Wade split from the others to try and reach British lines as a smaller group but was betrayed 'unfriendly' locals and handed to the Japanese. He and Wade noted that they were captured at 'Tjilegon' in western Java and then followed a series of POW camps around Java for the duration of the war – Serang Gaol, Cycle Camp Batavia, Tanjong Priok, Cycle Camp, Gludok Gaol, Batavia, Cycle Camp, 15<sup>th</sup> (?) Depot Camp Bandoeng, Lost (?) Camp Bandoeng, and finally back to Cycle Camp. In his MI9 questionnaire John gave his address as c/o 5 Bishopric Court, Horsham, Surrey. He returned to Malaya postwar as a senior Electrical Engineer and in 1953 is reported as Acting General Manager, Central Electricity Board, Kuala Lumpur. By 1955 he was also Deputy Chairman of the C.E.B and in 1960 he was awarded the CBE (along the announcement of awards to men whose names are familiar during the evacuation of Singapore so this might have been a last gesture of Colonialism in Malaya) when he had become General Manager of the South Johore Electricity Centre.
- **SHEPHERD** – Sub. Lt Basil Lawrence Howard Shepherd, MRNVR, 'HMS Laburnum, (1893-1955) was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42 and became a POW in Muntok and then Palembang. It is not known whether or not he was aboard 'SS Siang Wo' but the date of capture coincides with that of officers from that ship.
- **SMITH** – Pay Lt. Frederick Charles Henry Smith, RNVR (1904-1986) was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42 and moved across the Banka Strait to Palembang on 3.3.42. It is not known whether or not he was aboard 'SS Siang Wo' but the date of capture coincides with that of officers from that ship.
- **SPILMAN** – Lt. Cdr. Frank Spilman, RN., was born on 7.10.1898 (at Sculcoates, Yorkshire ref. JMM) and enlisted in the Royal Navy in December 1916. He was made a Midshipman on 15.6.18 on a battleship 'HMS Thunder' and by 1919 had been promoted to the rank of Sub. Lt. By 1925 he had moved to Malaya and in that year, he became Hon. Secy. Of the Penang

branch of the ex-Services Assn. of Malaya ('ST' 27.2.25) – he was later Chairman of that organisation - and was reported the following year as working for Messrs. Harrisons, Barker & Co., Penang (SFPMA 22.2.26) – eventually as a Planter/Manager (JMM). Reports in following years show him playing golf (from 1927 until 1941), involved in a car crash (1929) and as best man at a wedding (1930). In 1930 he became engaged to Dulcie Kathleen Griffiths of Sepoy Lines, Penang ('Straits Budget' 28.8.30) and they were married on 17.11.31 ("ST" 4.11.31) at St Georges Church, Penang. In 1932 they were both on the 'Ranpura' to Europe. Clearly Frank Spilman was part of the establishment of society because he became a member of the Assn. of British Malaya and in 1940-41 was playing golf at the Royal Singapore Golf Club. He was commander of the Malayan Training Establishment 'HMS Pelandok' at the Singapore Naval Base and according to other civilian records was also second in command of the MRNVR. It was in that capacity that he would have boarded 'SS Siang Wo' in company with Lt. Cdr. Horace Vickers, RN who was the commander of the MRNVR at that time. The secret record of 'Malayans' kept on sheets of Jeyes toilet paper in Changi Internment camp by internees states "... SPILMAN FRANK 2<sup>ND</sup> IN CMD MALAY NAVY LT CMDR LEFT LATE..." Captured at Muntok on 15 February he was first held at the 'Labour Assembly Station' (presumably working on the airfield) POW camp at Muntok, before being moved to Palembang where his MI9 questionnaire shows him being moved to seven POW camps during the war before being transferred with others to Changi. His MI9 shows his UK address as 'Admiralty, London' and his Palembang camp register entry shows his NOK as 'Mr. M. Spilman, Ceylonese House, Hanover Square, London'. Frank Spilman does not appear to have returned to Malay after the war and died in 1973 in Surrey.

- **TIDY – Fireman William James Tidy, Merchant Navy.** Born 4.2.1898 who had served in the British merchant Marine from 1915 until 1918, and enlisted 20.11.40 from 29 Oak Crescent, Canning Town, London, E16. He was captured in the Banka Straits on 15.2.42 and his MI9 records he was in Seletar from February to June 1942; then Loyang from June 1942 until March 1943 and finally Changi POW camp from March 1943 until release in 1945. It seems likely that he was one of the sailors required by the Japanese navy to man vessels (perhaps even 'Pahlawan' with Arthur Bartholomew) back to Singapore and almost certainly in the same floating POW camp vessel at Seletar under the command of Sub Lt Sibiriakoff.
- **TODD (SEE MENDELSON)**
- **VENTERS – Lt. (S) John Mackie Venters, MRNVR,** 'HMS Sultan' was captured at Muntok on 15.2.42 and held in Muntok POW camp until his move to Palembang. It is not known whether he was aboard 'SS Siang Wo', but the date of capture coincides with that of officers from that ship.
- **VICKERS – Lieutenant Commander Horace William Vickers, J25204, MRNVR** was the Commanding Officer of the 'Malay Navy/MRNVR' during the years immediately before the invasion by Japan. He was born in Winterton, Lincolnshire on 15 December 1896 (Navy List), the son of Albert Edward Vickers and Anne Vickers. In 1925 he married Santa Beryl Hardicker Bailey (1899-1990) at Brentford, Middlesex and they appear to have had one child, Ann Beryl Candon Thomson (nee Vickers) born Malta 1929 /died 2012. Horace started his naval career as a Midshipman (#3498) who later served on 'HMS Pembroke' and 'HMS Abercrombie' and by June 1933 was promoted the rank of Lt. Cdr. (Navy List). In 1935 he is recorded as Captain of 'HMS Tempest'. During the 1930s he relocated to Singapore, being mentioned in the 'Straits Budget' on 12.1.37 as representing the Royal Navy at the ASGM of the Singapore Amateur Football Association and then attached to 'HMS Terror' in 1938 whilst it was refitting in Singapore. Early 1939 saw him as a judge for the finals of the Singapore Army Boxing Championships ('ST' 24.1.39) and at a dinner for the Malayan Rugby union at Raffles

Hotel in the company of GOC, Malaya. (SB 16.3.39. Just before the outbreak of the war in Europe it was reported that he had commissioned 'HMS Bramble' and would be attached to the 1<sup>st</sup>. Minesweeping Flotilla, Portland, England ('Straits Budget' 27.7.39). After the first bombing attacks on Singapore in December 1941, along with the CO of the training establishment he moved the Malay ratings from the shore-based training establishment 'HMS Pelandok' at the Royal Navy base to the floating base for the MRNVR in Singapore Harbour. At some point during the week prior to the Surrender of Singapore also must have ordered the unattached officers of the MRNVR and those Malaya ratings who did not feel bound to stay with their families in Singapore to evacuate on 'SS Siang Wo'. Upon arrival at 14.2.42 he was billeted at the Muntok Hotel with some 30 other officers and civilian men from the ship. He surrendered with the others at the 'Muntok Hotel' on 15 February 1942 – but he was to be another who would succumb to the brutality of the invading Japanese soldiers. What then happened to Horace Vickers from the morning of 15 February onwards, after people were removed from the hotel, has not been the subject of any archived record that this researcher has been able to find, and it appears that in fact British authorities may have never been able to determine his final movements. The CWGC unhelpfully records his death as being on 13 February 1942, the day 'SS. Siang Wo' left Singapore - which is possibly in line with CWGC policy of dates of death being aligned to 'last verified sighting', but which is also a bit inexplicable given the number of Allied servicemen and civilians in Muntok during the days after the Japanese landed who survived the war and could have clarified what occurred. The CWGC record gives the post war address of Horace's wife, Santa Beryl Vickers as 'Lee – on – the Solent'. A Mrs. S.B. Vickers travelled by ship to Singapore in 1948.

The earliest official record which appears to relate to Horace Vickers' fate appears on a Royal Navy file (SS/330/141/269) in the UK Archives - this document is a long list of men classified as 'Missing in Action' or 'Dead' Casualties and specifically on page six is an 'Appendix 1' being a statement signed by **Cpl. G. Mills, #6142808, 2<sup>nd</sup> Btn., East Surrey Regiment** on his discovery of an unidentified naval officer on Banka Island, *"... On about 28 February 1942 while collecting firewood, I was with two naval ratings and another Soldier in a coconut plantation off the aerodrome road about 200 yards from the Cinema, when the other soldier discovered the body of a Naval Officer of Lieut. Commander's rank in tropical uniform. He was well built, about 6'2" in height, had thick black hair and a pointed black beard.*

*There was a ring on a finger of the left hand with the letter 'M' on it, and a wristwatch with the initials "J.P" or "J.D.". It appeared that he was in the habit of wearing pince nes glasses [sic: pince-nez, which were glasses without earpieces and stayed on by pinching the nose]. He had a cap with gold braid on the peak and in addition to his white shirt and shorts he wore brown socks and brown shoes and had a kid glove on the right hand.*



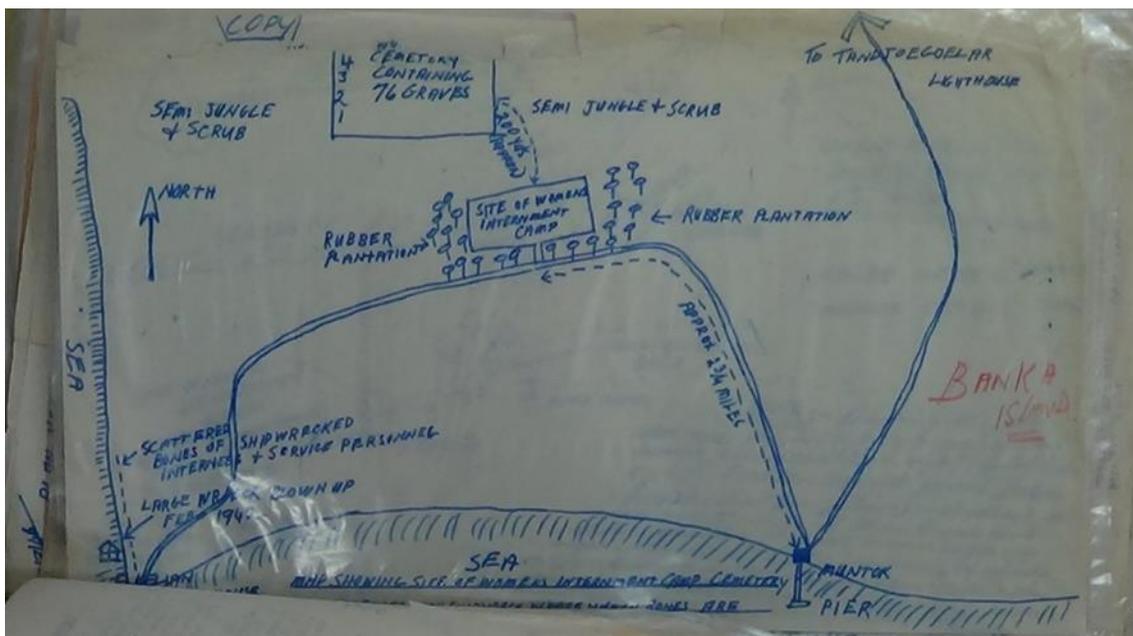
## Pince-nez Glasses

There were a wicker basket and leather case both opened. In the wicker basket were a battered cigarette case (same initial as watch) and some handkerchiefs: in the leather case one civilian overcoat, one pair of socks, small hand towel and razor, but no other means of identification. There were wounds on the body and both ears were missing. The Officer appeared to have been dead four or five days. The discovery was reported to a Naval Officer of the Prison Camp. After about 1 hr. I was taken back to the spot by two Japanese Officers, the Japanese NCO in charge of the Prison and a Japanese in plain clothes. When we arrived at the spot photographs were taken and the area around was searched. The next day I had to go to the place again with two Japanese guards and four coolies who buried the body in grave No. 7A, in the cemetery behind the Prison. A plain cross bearing an inscription in Japanese to the effect that the body was believed to be that of a British Officer of unknown identity was planted. Sometime after I was called upon by the Japanese to identify the photographs taken...".

There is also an 'Appendix II to Casualty List, Royal Navy' which recorded,

"...On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Abu Bakar (MN 783) or HASSIM BIN OMAR MM1192 or 1129, MN, stated that he had definitely seen Lieut. Comdr. Horace VICKERS, RNR, dead on the beach at Muntok in February. The Officer was covered with a blanket and the Malay stated that there was no doubt as to his identity. Lieut Comdr. VICKERS was previously this man's commanding officer and would be well known to them. Signed D. Fiennes, Lieut., RNR. 26<sup>th</sup> May 1942...".

We have the testimony of Abu Bakar and Hassim bin Omar as very reliable evidence that Vickers had been murdered - and mutilated - and if combined with the cigarette case and the wristwatch with initials deciphered as 'JB' or 'JD' (in the view of this researcher this was very likely to have been 'SB' which would stand for the initials of Horace Vickers' wife 'Santa Beryl '), and even perhaps the initial on the ring might have been an 'H' not an 'M' - makes it reasonably likely the body was that of Horace Vickers.



**Map drawn by Allied Search parties in late 1945 looking for evidence of war crimes committed at Radji Beach – the body of Lt. Cdr. Horace Vickers, MRNVR appears to have been found between the plantations and the beach area marked on the map. (Australian Archives file on Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, AANS).**

It appears the most likely scenario that Horace Vickers had been immediately separated from the other officers – as the most senior Royal Navy officer present - for interrogation, torture and then executed; or perhaps he had escaped and was summarily executed upon recapture, a reasonable option since there were several escapes from the Muntok POW camp prior to the end of February 1942. POW camp records of this period are scarce to say the least.

The body of the person found on the beach at Muntok is said to have been buried in grave # 7A in the cemetery behind the 'Prison' (the Muntok Gaol?). The UK Archives file (SS/330/141/269/p.62) under 'Missing Believed Dead' records "... *Commander Horace Vickers, RN., MRNVR., 'Dead on beach at Muntok- B.P. not stated, probably there...'*"

Mrs. Santa Beryl Hardicker Bailey Vickers passed away in Portsmouth, Hampshire in 1990 and was cremated on 3.12.90 – her plaque is No. 114 at Titchfield n St. Peter.

- **WADE - Lt. Vernon Nicholas Wade, MRNVR**, was born in 1904 in Wales, a local paper in 1910 reported (with a photo of him aged 6 years on his rocking horse) that as the son of Mr. & Mrs Wade of 'Underhill House' Llanstephan, he had been dangerously bitten by an adder snake and survived due to the skills of a local nurse who sucked the venom out of the wound. He is first mentioned in Singapore newspapers in 1932 playing rugby for the Government Monopolies Sports Club and his prewar career was with the Govt Monopolies Dept, Singapore where he received steady promotion including the role of Asst. Superintendent of Rubber Control in Penang [JMM and 1935 Directory] He was commissioned initially as a Tempy. Lt. in 1939 when he enlisted and in 1941, he was promoted to Actg. Lieutenant, MRNVR. He was an active and useful member of the escape party recorded by Rohan Rivett in 'Behind Bamboo' – he is described by Rivett as "... *a robust, freckled, tin miner from somewhere up in the Malayan peninsula...*" a description that is totally wrong on Wade's occupation and which starts to cast doubt over some of the other information in Rivett's book POW Palembang. Vernon Wade's prewar efforts with Malay language exams for the Malayan Civil Service and his fluency in Malay paid off during the escape as became the primary link in communicating with local Sumatrans. When the larger group first reached land on Java, Vernon Wade and another unnamed member of the party announced they would go overland to Batavia, since they decided the boat was doomed – in the end it made no difference all the escape party were captured on 7 March 1942. Nicholas Wade then endured a similar chain of POW camps – Serang, Bicycle Camp Batavia, Tanjong Priok Batavia and Singapore – for some reason he was then sent to Kuching POW camp in Sarawak on Borneo. In his MI9 questionnaire he recorded his private address as '*8 Bute St, Treherbert, Rhondda, South Wales*' [Treherbert is a village and community situated at the head of the Rhondda Fawr valley]. Post war Vernon resumed employment in the Malayan Civil Service – noted in 1947 as Asst. Registrar of Imports and Exports and the last record is of him attending a funeral in Singapore in 1952.
- **WILLIMOTT** – Lt. Stanley Gordon, MRNVR, Willimott, BSc PhD., was born in 1899. Educated Liverpool Collegiate School; University of Liverpool; St Catharine's College, Cambridge. He served during WW1 1917-1919. He worked in Cyprus as a Govt Analyst to 1929 then moved

to Malaya 1936 where he was appointed as Government Chemist, Institute of Medical Research Kuala Lumpur. Following his commission as a Sub-Lt in the SSRNVR in 1939 he served at the Signals Station from April 1941 to February 1942. (JMM). After the 'SS Siang Wo' was beached at Muntok and the Japanese landed he was one of the escape party of six men who left Muntok Hotel and headed south (but, in a circle) on Banka Island. Rohan Rivett, in his book 'Behind Bamboo' has little that is complementary to say about Stanley Willimott – his assessment is "... undoubtedly meant well, but he was completely out of his depth in such an emergency and as the days went by he became increasingly a sore trial and a handicap..." and named him 'the Professor' describing Stanley as "...our white man's burden..." .After the capture of the entire group at Merak, Stanley endured being a POW in Serang, 'Bicycle Camp Batavia', Tandjong Priok POW camp. Then the Hospital in Batavia (presumably for the Malaria which Rohan Rivett noted Stanley had contracted at Serang) for three months before being moved to a series of POW camps in Japan via Singapore Batavia, Sumatra (Willimott MI9 Liberation questionnaire – in which Stanley Willimott perhaps showing his reciprocal lack of respect for Rohan Rivett and Norman Carter did not even record their names in the escape party – simply noting 'Australian Civilians'). Stanley's wife E.M. and sons M.D. & Richard John (born 1940) had been evacuated on 16.1.42 on the 'Aorangi', arriving Fremantle, W.A. 23.1.42 (JMM). During his career Stanley Willimott authored many scientific research papers on Vitamins, Cholesterol, Orange Juice and Cod Liver oil.

- WINTER – Lt. (Sp.) Charles William Winter, SSRNVR/MRNVR** was born in Sheerness [near the mouth of the river Thames] on 27.6.1884 and was a Sanitary Inspector with the Singapore Harbour Board. His wife was Eva Dora Winter, nee Howell, (1895-1950) according to the genealogy website 'myheritage.com'. The first mention of Charles Winter in Singapore newspapers is in 1917 when the birth of a daughter at the 'Clinic', Devonshire Rd [a road near Orchard Road in Singapore] was announced for "...Mr & Mrs C.W. Winter of Puloe Balang..." this must have been Barbara Phyllis Winter. The genealogy website 'myheritage.com' also shows two sons being, born one in 1923 who died as a baby and then John William Winter (1928-2007). In 1928 there is a record of Mr. & Mrs. Winter on the 'Malwa' to Europe and during the 1930's Charles is mentioned in Singapore newspapers playing tennis and golf. In 1936 his daughter Barbara Phyllis was married at St Andrews Cathedral to Albert James 'Jim' Barcock a Prison Warder who had been born on a rubber plantation in Malaya. In 1939 Charles Winter was commissioned as Lieutenant in the SSRNVR. After his capture at Muntok Charles was moved across the Banka Straits to the Palembang ( Sungei Rasa) POW camp and died on 14.5.45 of "... Debility and throat trouble..." buried firstly in grave # 54 (#53 was erased) just outside the Sungei Rasa POW camp boundary and post war reinterred in Jakarta War Cemetery grave 4.A.7 [ again some confusion as to where his remains originated since the Jakarta War Cemetery records state POW camp grave # 52!!].The CWGC records have no mention of wife or family. Addendum: Research has been unable to determine the life of Mrs Eva Winter prior to her death in 1950, but it seems that daughter Barbara returned to England (possibly with a granddaughter daughter Evelyn) sometime in 1941-42; sadly, according to a genealogy website it appears 'Jim' Barcock was killed [ he is not recorded as a Malayan Volunteer or on CWGC records] sometime around the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Once again from myheritage.com it appears that by then Jim and Barbara had three children – one son and two daughters. In what may be a sad record of a little known aspect of the fate of the families of some European men from Malaya and Singapore killed during the war with Japan and leaving families destitute, there appeared in Singapore newspapers in 1947 9'ST' 10.5.470) an article on 'Melrose House', the Children's Aid Society home in Tomlinson Road,

Singapore, a photo of two small girls left destitute and taken into care – their names were Angel Barcock and Evelyn Barcock. Further research and the 'myheritage.com' website indicate that both daughters eventually married, one at least in Australia. Barbara died in Western Australia in 1995.

- **WOODLEY – Lt. Archie Woodley, RNR** was captain of the 'SS Siang Wo' on its last voyage. Not much information has been found on the life of Archie Woodley, but he did survive the war. His MI9 questionnaire notes that he was born on 31.12 1888 and during the First World War, received the decorations of the 1914-15 Star/ Victory Medal and the General Service medal, so it is possible that his naval experience came from time in the merchant marine. He enlisted on 1.3.1941 and the 'British Military Lists' of 1942 and 1943 record that he received a 'Temporary' Commission as an RNR Officer of the rank of Lieutenant Commander with effect from 21 February 1941 - so he was somewhat equal in rank to both Horace Vickers and Frank Spilman on board the 'SS Siang Wo'. His MI9 questionnaire and the Palembang POW camp register both record his home address and NOK as (wife) Mrs. A. Woodley, 'Red Beech', 9 River Way, Christchurch, Hants (now Dorset).
- **Unidentified – "... Malay Quartermaster, Missing believed killed or drowned... "(UK Archives)**