

‘SS Rantau and SS Relau’

- Captured in the Banka Straits on 14 and 16 February 1942 respectively.

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There appears to be little in the way of officially recorded history on the escape voyage from Singapore, just prior to the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942, that details the voyages of these two modest sized vessels – in fact we are heavily reliant on the account (written March 1995) left by Captain Fred Chamberlin and two books by authors,

- **‘From The Fall of Singapore to freedom in Japan’ by Captain Frederick William Chamberlin**
- **Richard Gough, ‘The Escape from Singapore’**
- **‘Out In the Midday Sun’ by Margaret Shennan**

to provide any sort of base for an historical understanding. This paucity of archival material (particularly official) was possibly caused by the fact that no servicemen boarded the ships in Singapore (to the knowledge of this researcher) and a also that quite a high proportion of the relatively small group of men who originally escaped Singapore on these two vessels later died in the harsh, deprived and disease-ridden internment camps of Muntok, Palembang and Belalau in southern Sumatra - leaving few to write the story post War.

Gough’s book refers to the vessels as ‘sister ships’, along with mentioning that they were owned by the Straits Steamship Company Ltd - and both the book and a contemporary wartime statement (No. 204, ‘Malayan Research Bureau’, **Mrs K. P. Price** wife of passenger W. G. Price) describe the deadweight of ‘Rantau’ as 75 tonnes (which would probably have been an estimate) - together with the information that they were both ‘palm oil tankers’.

Other sources fill out the specifications of the ships,

- **‘SS Rantau’** – built at Sungei Nyok (presumably the Straits Steamship Company dockyard on the Prai River, Province Wellesley, Malaya, where many S. S. Co ships of around this size were built) in 1933, registered 1933, length 118 feet, width 23 feet, net tons 66/gross 197 tons. Owner Straits Steamship Co.
- **‘SS Relau’** – the ‘Straits Times’ newspaper of 24.4.38 mentions the “... *small tanker Relau should be in commission shortly...*” and a month later reported that the Straits Steamship Co., tanker ‘Relau’ was berthed at the west waterfront in Singapore. The following year the ‘ST’ of 3.4.36 notes that in the S. S. Co. Annual report “*the small tanker Relau was delivered and placed in commission in July [1938] ...*”.

So, at the time of the outbreak of war in 1941 these two vessels were employed in the business of freighting Palm Oil from the Plantations of northern Malaya down to Singapore for export to the West.

These two vessels were part of the much more diverse fleet of small/medium sized ships owned by the Straits Steamship company - and in turn by Mansfield & Co. Ltd. ‘Mansfields’ was a Shipping Agency established in 1852 by George Mansfield and which in 1892 took over ownership of the Straits Steamship Co. Ltd., which was a ‘feeder’ shipping network from the smaller ports of Malaya to Singapore where it could connect to the big deep sea ships of the Blue Funnel line.

After the Japanese Army invaded northern Malaya on 8 December 1941 the sources of Palm Oil from the plantations of Malaya quickly ceased, and the ships were relocated to the Naval Base in Singapore and "... had been used by the Navy for some time for bunkering the fleet out at the Base..." (CHAM).

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 breakwater protected 'port' in front of Clifford Pier in today's CBD.

Literally any remaining 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 plus assorted 'vessels' (from launches, junks, and small yachts upwards to the bigger merchant ships mentioned above) 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 'lost' whilst carrying evacuees from Singapore during these last few days before the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 – i.e. 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 at sea or were later imprisoned by the Japanese in internment or POW camps following their escape attempt, from being simply consigned without proper tangible memory 'into the dustbin of history'.

Escape from Singapore:

One book reference '**The Escape from Singapore**' explains the escape of the two ships in this document,

- **'SS Relau'** – *"... a 75-ton palm oil tanker and a Straits Steamship Company vessel used by the R.N. to bunker their ships at the Naval Base [at Sembawang]. When the Base was abandoned on 28th [January 1942] her captain, was ordered by the naval authorities to leave his loaded vessel at anchor and evacuate [across the Island] to Singapore. The Company was not amused by this, and Marine Superintendent F.W. Chamberlain found a new crew and personally went across and brought the vessel around to the Inner Roads. She spent the next ten days bunkering ships and later ferrying evacuees around the harbour. On the 13th [February] she embarked **sixty passengers** and left that evening under the command of Captain Chamberlain, with the Company's assistant Chief Engineer looking after the engines. In the next 24 hours she stopped twice to pick up shipwrecked survivors including 13 Ratings from the 'Scorpion' [the ex - Yangtze River gunboat 'HMS Scorpion' sunk in the Berhala Straits on the night of 13 February] found clinging to a life raft at about 3 pm.*
- **'SS Rantau' [or 'Rantau' the book says]** – *"... A sister ship to the 'Relau', the 75-ton palm oil tanker sailed on 12th [February] under the command of S. Baddeley, company employee, and a scratch crew. This included Mansfield's Chief Engineer Superintendent Froggatt, who acted as ship's engineer and Captain McAllister, Singapore Chief Pilot.*

Margaret Shennan in her book '**Out in the Midday Sun**' (p.345) says that" ... A group of Mansfield's staff were told to take out two of the Company's remaining 75-tonners, 'Rantau' and 'Relau' with Chief Marine Superintendent Baddeley and his assistant Captain Chamberlain, in command. Joining Captain Baddeley on the 'Rantau' were Singapore's Chief Pilot, Captain McAllister, the Superintendent Les Froggatt and Bill Price who had supervised both boats' construction..."

Naturally, the best account is from **Captain Chamberlin** himself in his 1995 memoirs, who records starting on 1st February 1942 “...Things had been pretty sticky before then and Baddeley and I had been sleeping at the offices so as to be handy for any emergency.... About 9.30 am Mohamed Bin Lam, Master of M.V. Relau, came into the office in a great state and told us his tale of woe. His ship, he said, was out at the navae l(sic) base, and he didn’t know what to do for the whole navy had “run away” from the base and he couldn’t get any orders at all. Also, most of his crew had cleared out... Baddeley tried to get in touch with the Naval Base. All to no avail so we were compelled to believe there was some truth in the story ... It was therefore decided that I should go out to the Naval Base and try to bring her round to Singapore. Tomms (Chairman Straits Steamship Company) drove me out in the office car, and I had much difficulty in locating the Relau. She was tied up at the wharf just inside the big floating dock which had been sunk. I tried hunting all round the base trying to find somebody, but the place was deserted. I went into the Admiral’s office and found a chaotic scene – electric lights all burning, fans running and drawers pulled out of desks and papers scattered everywhere... Wasn’t much use in looking any further , so I took the ship away and made a more or less uneventful passage round to Singapore except that I was held up outside the minefield s waiting for permission to enter the port. Finally anchored in the Roads about 9.30 pm. During the next twelve days the Relau proved to have been well worth saving for she supplied bunkers to several ships, thus enabling them to get away. It is possible that they would not have been able to obtain bunkers otherwise.... On the night of Saturday 8th, the Japs put a terrific all night barrage and on Sunday we learned that they had landed on the island. Desertions had increased and things were in a very bad way. However, by Thursday [12th February] we had got all our ships away except for MVs Relau and Rantau and two smaller vessels... so it was decided that Baddeley should take the Rantau away whilst I took the Relau, both ships being manned by volunteer crews of civilians who wanted to get away from Singapore...”.

Who was aboard ‘Rantau’ and Relau’.

These accounts indicate that there could have been as many as 90 crew and passengers aboard the ‘SS Relau’ by the time it had rescued the additional groups of men from sunken ships, and possibly 10 aboard ‘SS Rantau’.

The researcher of this document has found that the likely distribution – where apparent - of Mansfields employees between the two ships was,

- **‘SS Relau,**
 - Officers,
 - Fred Chamberlin/Chamberlain (Captain)
 - George Jones (Engineer)
 - Signalman John Flood, RN.
 - Passengers,
 - Joe Penrice
 - Cecil Starkey
- **‘SS Rantau’,**
 - Officers
 - Sidney Baddeley (Captain)
 - Leslie Froggatt
 - Thornton Draggett (Engineer)
 - Captain Donald McAllister
 - Passengers,

- Thomas Burns
- William Gladstone 'Bill' Price.

It appears from a later report written by Air Commodore Modin, RAF, in Palembang POW Camp, that there was at least one woman (unidentified, but for the record this researcher speculates that it could have been a family member of Donald McAlister who was a passenger, by the name of **Miss J. McAlister** who is noted in the list of women in Palembang Internment Camp as 'Left to nurse in Palembang with Dr. Hollweg, 9/10/42') on board as part of the evacuation group from Singapore.

Chamberlin does recollect that there was pressure from servicemen to board the 'Relau' in an 'unauthorised manner' just as the little ship was about to leave Singapore Harbour – *"... When I boarded my ship a crowd of Australian soldiers in a nearby junk threatened to shoot me if I picked up anchor without taking them on board. However, I had a man named Hallam, ex-Hong Kong policeman who had been in Singapore on Secret Service work. He was badly wanted by the Japs who had a price on his head, and we had been asked to get him away if at all possible. Hallam had a rifle with him, and he retaliated by saying he would shoot the first one who showed his head above the bulwark. He kept me covered the whole time I was getting the anchor up and there wasn't a head to be seen. I think Hallam was about one of the toughest looking individuals I have ever come across. I should mention here that apart from the two engineers I was literally the only seaman on the 'Relau'..."*

Escape from Singapore.

Clearly, the management of the Straits Steamship Co. had retained or resumed firm control of these two vessels from their fleet after the invasion of Singapore Island and from our small (researched) list of crew and passengers they became a focus of the escape plans of Straits Steamship Co. and Mansfield & Co., for many of their remaining employees.

Captain Chamberlin sets the scene *"...The idea was to take the ship to Batavia for they were both very valuable craft. Friday 13th was a crowded day, rumours were rife, one even said the Americans had landed at Malacca, and that relief was only a matter of hours. Shelling and air raids were continuous. In the afternoon the two smaller ships were scuttled in the Inner Roads [see old photo below, the Inner Roads are where 'Marina Bay' now exists]. Then at about 6.30pm we received the final orders to go..."*



The Inner Roads of Singapore Harbour in 1941-42 were inside the 'breakwater' (known as the 'Detached Mole') that can be seen towards the top right of this old photo.

... At about 7.30 pm [this was 13.2.42] both ships finally got underway. Just previous to this I had taken 'Relau' alongside the ill-fated 'Vyner Brooke' to give her bunkers and she sailed a couple of hours before we did. It did not take long to realise that not one of my crew had the vaguest notion of how to steer, so it was obvious that I should have to do everything myself...".

Mrs K.P. Price's abovementioned statement to the Malayan Research Bureau (MRB) tells us "... her husband, William Gladstone Price, Naval Architect to the Straits Steamship Co. left Singapore at 6 pm on Friday 13th, on the 75 tonner 'Rantau'. At the same time there left the 'Relau', on board of which were included W. Penrice, L. Froggatt, Captain Baddeley and Mr Withers Payne [Mrs Price's information was incorrect insofar as Mr Withers Payne who remained in Singapore and became a POW]".

Another contemporary wartime source is contained in an MRB statement by one 'Ass: Sup: Engineer- Straits S.S. Coy' **A. Bannatyne** who had left Singapore on the launch 'Sylvia' after the Surrender [on 17th February!] and reached Sumatra, then boarded ships to Java and finally to safety in Australia. He reported that 14 employees from 'S.S.S.' had boarded the 'Relau' and the 'Rimau' [sic] and left on "... 13th February ..." but also reported "... of whom there is no news...".

Chamberlin continues his account the next day (14.4.42) "... At about 3.30 in the afternoon while passing some small islands, I spotted what appeared to be a small canoe with a couple of white men in it so after signalling to 'Rantau', I went to investigate. It turned out to be [a] small boat and when I anchored its occupants came aboard. They turned out to be two RAF men on the staff of **Air Commodore Modin** who had left Singapore [with] a party of thirteen in a fast RAF launch [researcher note; this was 'Air Sea rescue launch H.S.L 105 - also aboard were **Group Captain E.B. Rice, RAF, plus New Zealander Sqdn. Ldr. 'Wilf' Clouston, RAF and Sqdn. Ldr. Frank Howell, DFC Bar, RAF]** bound for Batavia. Their launch had been attacked and sunk by Japanese aircraft and one member had been killed [researcher note; this was **Wing Commander R.A. Chignell, RAF and former O.C. Kallang** – his body had been put over the side of the HSL]. *The party had taken refuge on one of the Islands [researcher – possibly near the Berhala Strait] while two of them set to try and get help. We sent a lifeboat to get Modin and the rest and split the party between the two ships*

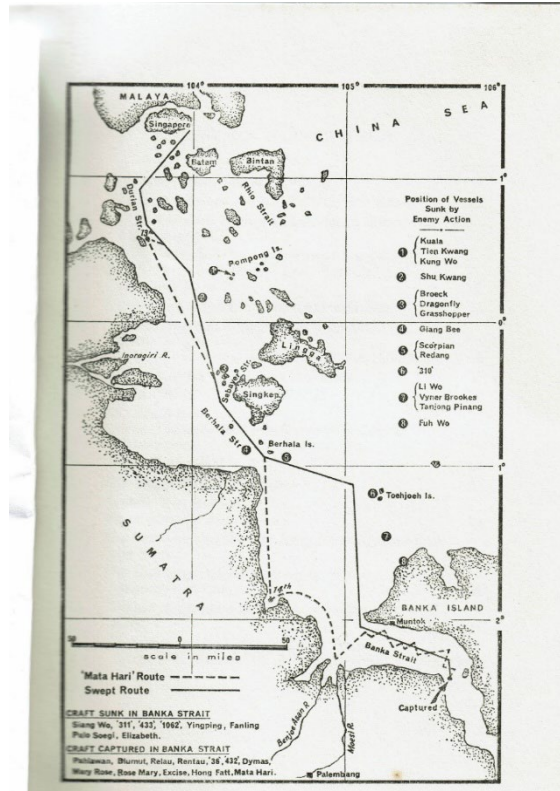
[Modin must have been placed aboard 'Rantau'] and then proceeded. It was decided to anchor late that night as close inshore as possible to one of the numerous islands to keep hidden from Jap planes during daylight hours. We found a suitable island and went ashore to hide. However, a Jap plane spotted the ships in the afternoon, and dropped a couple of bombs, fortunately doing no damage... At dusk we boarded the ships again and set off just as darkness fell. All went well until about 2.30 am on Monday [note, 16.2.42] and then I heard a faint cry for help coming out of the darkness. I stopped to investigate, but it was so dark that it took some time to locate it. At length discovered a small craft with a crowd of people clinging to it. Managed to get them, on board and found I had picked up thirteen Malay and three English ratings, survivors from 'HMS Scorpion' which had been shelled and sunk 36 hours previously... Continued once more but had now become separated from 'Rantau'

Note: Modin later (in Palembang POW Camp) wrote a report in which he recorded the following were also on H.S.L. 105 – therefore also picked up by 'Relau' and 'Rantau'.

- *Crew- **Sgt Kinnaird (Coxswain), RAF; LAC Caldwell, LAC Morgan, AC1 Tinworth, AC1 Davies, Sgt Reeves, LAC Hall, LAC Bunton/Bunten and AC1 Garrett.***
- *Passengers – **Group Captain Brownsden – Rice (died later in war), Air Commodore C.O.F. Modin, Wing Commander Chignell, Wing Commander Wills – Sanford, Flying Officer Finlay, RAAF***

So 'SS Relau' stopped to pick up shipwrecked survivors including 16 ratings from the 'Scorpion' which raises the possibility that 'Relau' in fact was the same vessel, reported in other archival records, which picked up men from the 'HMS Scorpion' who were clinging to a 'raft' or 'Carley Float' somewhere south of the Berhala Strait (see centre of map shown below) under the command of **Lt. Harold George Fabian, MRNVR** – but there is no record of who was on it (apart from an unidentified Malay seaman named 'Zulkarri or Sulkarri', and of course Harold Fabian) or where it was captured . Fabian became a POW, as would all the naval ratings (except probably the Malay ratings who were more often freed by the Japanese on Banka Island).

This confirms that both ships made it safely all the way south through the islands of the Rhio Archipelago, and through the Berhala Straits, and before reaching the vicinity of what was to be the trap for most vessels –the Banka Straits (separating Banka Island from Sumatra) and the waiting warships of the Japanese invasion fleet landing troops in southern Sumatra with the objective of securing control of the strategically valuable oilfields of Palembang.



Map showing escape route of many of the evacuation vessels - the 'Rantau' and 'Relau' would have travelled the same course and been captured in approach to the Banka Strait at the bottom of the map.

First to arrive was 'Rantau' and **Richard Gough** tells us in his book "... When they reached Banka Strait during darkness on 14th [February], they found it crowded with vessels, which daylight revealed as the Japanese fleet. Those on board witnessed the capture of their sister ship and later watched the 'Tapah' sail into Muntok where it too was seized..."

The account Gough gives us for 'Relau' is "... On 16th [February] she crept through the Banka Strait, when, as daylight came, her lookouts reported a black shadow ahead. As morning came this revealed itself as an enemy cruiser then an enemy destroyer was reported astern and closing fast. She came alongside and the 'Relau' was boarded by armed enemy sailors..."

[There is a slight possibility this date of 14th February for the 'Rantau' being captured is incorrect because a conflicting record by Lt. K.G. Stein, MRNVR aboard another vessel (patrol launch HMML 1062) which was soon to be sunk by the Japanese states "...15.2.42. 1000. Anchored Behala Light House: 'TAPAH', 'RELAU', 'RANTAU' in vicinity. Seaplane dropped one bomb at approximately 1600 amongst 'TAPAH', 'RELAU', 'RANTAU'. No damage. Army personnel ashore...." and the Berhala Strait is some 150km /81 nautical miles from the Banka Strait.]

Air Commodore Modin wrote in his POW Camp report "... Fine on the starboard bow we saw a line of what looked like minesweepers in line ahead steering towards what could be the Palembang River [the Musi River]; but again, the nationality could not be ascertained. Right ahead of us lay a large destroyer or small light cruiser, bows on, hiding her ensign and making it difficult to guess her nationality or type. As she stopped and tended to swing gradually off the bows on position, she gave a kick of her propellers to straighten herself to the bows on position. She was obviously waiting for us. In view of the fact that the 'Rantau' [sic] and her consort the 'Relau' astern of us were both purely unarmed civilian vessels **and a woman** [researcher note, this is the only mention found during research that a woman was aboard 'Rantau'] and only having Service personal on board by virtue of collecting them from

Malang Tigah island [researcher note, it has not been possible to identify this island but it is presumably south of the Berhala Strait] (and in the case of 'Relau' having picked up shipwrecked persons from the water during the night) I suggested to Captain Baddeley that 'Rantau' should Code Signal 'I wish to speak with you'. This was when the ship ahead hoisted the International 'K – Stop Immediately'. As already stated, we had already stopped engines and the ship ahead now moved towards us, and as she came alongside bows astern, we saw that she flew the Japanese war naval ensign and was packed with Japanese seamen..."

It also seems likely that the '**Rantau**' and '**Relau**' had come up against the powerful Japanese warships (the cruisers 'Yura', 'Sendai', and destroyers 'Asagiri' and 'Fubuki') providing protection for the huge invasion fleet carrying the Japanese Army heading for Palembang in southern Sumatra - and specifically the cruiser they encountered was the huge First World War Japanese cruiser 'Sendai' 418 feet in length, 5200 tons, with a speed of 35 knots and carrying seven turrets of 5.5-inch guns.



Japanese Cruiser 'Sendai'

*'Out in the Midday Sun' continues (p.350) with Captain Chamberlin recalling that on Monday 16th ... as daylight came, we saw a large cruiser which signalled us to stop immediately, and as the light got better, we found ourselves in the midst of a large convoy of Japanese vessels... bound for the occupation of Palembang [in southern Sumatra]. We were off the northern tip of Banka Island. We considered the scuttling of '**Relau**' but we had so many sick and wounded on board it was decided against...". The book explains that after a Japanese naval boarding party boarded '**Relau**' and the vessel was taken into Muntok Harbour the crew were disembarked on Muntok's long finger of a jetty, where they met up with their comrades from '**Rantau**' - '... which had been captured two days earlier...".*

The book then quotes 'Bill' Price from '**Rantau**' "... We got as far as Banka. I remember we woke up in the morning to find ourselves under the guns of a Japanese cruiser... They'd have blown us out of the water but were too close. So, they sent a boarding party instead. There was nothing to be done but take it on the chin..."



Muntok town and 'port'

Captivity on Banka Island:

It appears both vessels were assessed as having value to the Japanese and some of the officers and crew were ordered by the Japanese Navy at Muntok to form a skeleton crew and return the ships to Singapore. This eventuality is confirmed by Captain David Nelson [an officer in the SSVF, and the person in charge of the wartime 'Bureau of Research & Enquiry' in Changi POW camp] who recorded after the war in his very reliable book 'The Story of Changi Singapore' that the POWs knew that these ships had returned to Singapore and he had recorded during the war whilst in Changi that, insofar as the **'Rantau'**, *"... Ship at Naval base 13.8.42..."* and also insofar as the **'Relau'** *"... Ship at Naval Base..."*.

Amongst those on board these vessels captured at Muntok, Banka Island - without doubt the 'lucky' ones were those forced by the Japanese to crew the vessels back to Singapore as the ships became Japanese property for the duration - those men whilst enduring food scarcity and the frustration and humiliation of working for the Japanese for three and a half years all survived until release. This group included Thornton Draggett, George Jones, Bill Price and Bobby Moffett.

However, Fred Chamberlin and others faced a land-based future of incarceration. Chamberlin on **'Relau'** continues" ... *At 4.00 pm [16.2.42] we were taken ashore and landed on Muntok jetty, a long narrow affair about 15 feet wide and a quarter of a mile long. Here we found about two hundred women and children from other ships. No sleep at night what with the poor kids howling and other things. In the morning [17.2.42] we were herded into Muntok cinema where the men were separated and sent to work unloading army stores etc. Had a small meal of rice that day.*



Muntok's very long Pier.

*... Next day we were taken and billeted in the coolie lines, men on one side, women and children on the other, sixty people to a room designed to accommodate twenty Chinese coolies. Here **we learned of the massacre of the Australian and Polish nurses and civilians from the 'Vyner Brooke', details of which I need not go into here...***

We stayed in this place exactly one month, going out on working parties during the day and living on two meals of plain white rice a day... At the end of the month the women were sent across to Palembang, and the men followed a few days later. Two hundred and fifty of us made the journey on a very small Jap fishing vessel. We had to stand up all the way for the simple reason it was impossible to sit down.

The civilian men were separated from the services men and began three years of hard labour, starvation and death in southern Sumatra.

Captain 'Fred' Chamberlin was transported to work as a slave labourer in the Mitsubishi factory in Japan and Marine Superintendent/ Captain Sidney Baddeley was transported to work in the major Japanese Navy bases at Sasebo and Fukuoka in Japan and in late 1942 sent to a 'secret interrogation 'camp because they thought he was a covert Royal Naval Officer. Chamberlin's experiences also in some of the harshest labour Camps in Japan make for appalling reading – as he recorded insofar as one disgraceful so-called Japanese POW 'hospital' he endured (he says it was a 'disgrace to humanity' and 'alive with bugs, fleas, rats and every type of vermin. Starvation the order of the day') when he was very sick with Beri Beri and malnutrition in 1944, and said that "... when the Yanks entered the place, they took one look – lined up the Japs and shot the lot..."



Capt. 'Fred' Chamberlin (back row far right) as a POW in Japan with fellow POWs

- **The others are crew from the captured ship 'MV Hauraki'.**

Other horrors of deprivation, disease and lack of medicines were to be faced by those left in Sumatra. The Mansfields men were generally fit, mature men between 35 and around 55 years of age (men were required to retire in Malaya once they reached 55 years of age) and many had been keen sportsmen during their pre-war lives. After a month or so held in Muntok after capture the civilian internees were shipped across the Banka Strait and up the long Musi River (Moesi River) to the city of Palembang where several POW and Internment Camps had been established. From that point the diet of prisoners deteriorated, being substantially very poor-quality boiled rice, and the effects of starvation and Vitamin B deficiencies as animal products, fruit and vegetables became scarce – Beri Beri became a common serious sickness.

First to die (from Beri Beri and Infectious Dysentery) at Palembang out of the men we know were on these ships was **Donald McAllister**, aged 58 years and originally from the Isle of Arran, on 11.5.42.

After almost 18 months at Palembang the civilian prisoners were transported back across the Banka Strait to Muntok on Banka Island, a known area for Malaria. The confident and authoritative **Walter 'Joe' Penrice** was the next to succumb (probably Beri Beri and Malaria), aged 47 years, on 20.7.44 and a few months later **Thomas Burns** passed away aged 50 years. During this period up to six men a day were dying in Muntok Jail Camp and on 2.11.44 **'Tambie' Messenger**, aged 45 years died from Beri Beri and Malaria as well. Early in 1945, just prior to the last and traumatic move of the prisoners across the Banka Strait, up the Musi River and by land across Sumatra to Belalau, **Freddie Adam** aged only 38 years died on 28.1.45.

The move of internees (men and women) to Belalau at Loeboek Linggau occurred in early 1945 and their arrival in this 'camp' consisting of old, dirty and rat-infested huts in a jungle setting – that had previously 'housed' the estate workers – was a descent into hell. Black Water Fever, Cerebral Malaria and Amoebic Dysentery were rife and the death toll by the time of release later in the year was 99 men and 89 women – this was equivalent to 25 % of all the internees and 55 % of the British

internees. Two more of the Mansfields/Straits Steamship Co. team who 'escaped' on the 'SS Rantau' and 'SS Relau' died here – **Dennis Peterkin**, aged 42 years, on 15.4.45 and then **George Andrews** aged only 38 years, on 27.5.45. After the war many of the graves of internees were relocated by the Dutch to formal cemeteries that they have maintained impeccably – sadly it is not known what happened to the remains of George Andrews, but Dennis Peterkin's remains were reinterred in Grave IV 62 at 'Pandu Memorial Cemetery in Bandung, West Java (source Muntok Peace Museum website).



Belalau Internment Camp at time of Liberation 1945

(photo from muntokpeacemuseum.org)



Belalau Camp, Sumatra, jungle location in 1981

(photo by Internee Eric German – source Iz Warman, USA, also a child internee in Belalau)

Both vessels 'SS Rantau' and 'SS Relau' survived the war and were taken back by the Straits Steamship Co. for trading around Malaya post war.

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Anyone who has corrections, amendments, clarifications or additional material on the events, the crew, or passengers of 'SS. Rantau' or 'SS Relau' is most welcome to contact the researcher and compiler of this document: Michael Pether, 2/23 Sanders Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland, 0622, New Zealand. Email is mncpether@gmail.com. Telephone number is mobile New Zealand +64274543695.

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.

Sources:

- **BEW** - 'book 'By Eastern Windows' by William H. McDougall Jnr – possibly the best record of life in the Men's Internment Camps in southern Sumatra
- **CHAM** – 'From the Fall of Singapore to Freedom in Japan' – account by Captain Frederick William Chamberlin (2nd March 1995), courtesy of Jonathan Moffatt.
- **JEYES List** – this is a remarkable, microscopically handwritten, document (understood to be held in British Archives) on 13 pages of the old style shiny 'Jeyes' toilet paper, compiled in Changi Prison Internment Camp during 1942/43 that lists thousands of names, and abbreviated details of employer and the wartime fate, of European men who had been still resident in Singapore and Malaya just prior to the invasion of Malaya and Singapore. The researcher holds a set of A3 sized photocopies of each sheet of this 'Jeyes' record.
- **JMM** - Jonathan Moffatt's 'Malayans' database
- **SNA** – Singapore National Library online newspaper archives
- **TEFS** - Book 'The Escape from Singapore' by Richard Gough – a valuable record of both the story of the evacuation of Singapore and containing one of the bests lists (and the records of their fates) of vessels involved in the evacuation.
- **TROVE** – the 'Trove' online archives of Australian newspapers.

Passengers and crew:

[Those who survived the war are shown in green font]

- **ADAM - Frederick Marshall 'Fred/Freddie' Adam**, arrived in Singapore 1930 from Britain. Assistant, Mansfield & Co., Singapore then Penang since early 1930s. From the time of his arrival Freddie was actively and successfully playing cricket, football and tennis for the Singapore Cricket Club until his move to Penang in about 1933 when he also played Rugby. By 1936 he appears to have moved back to Singapore (still actively playing sports) and that

In **F. M. Adam** the S.C.C. have a brilliant goalkeeper for the 1936 season. Last year he played for Penang in the Malaya Cup.



—Straits Times Photograph.

year was the Best Man at the wedding of fellow passenger on the evacuation vessel, Bobby Moffett. The following year he took up Polo and in 1938 returned to the UK to marry Miss Joan Scott in Cheshire before they both returned to Singapore. He must have been transferred by Mansfields to Sarawak because in May 1940 there is a newspaper report of the birth of a daughter at Kuching hospital, Sarawak. When war arrived, he is said to have become an Air Raid Precaution (ARP) warden. One of those in the Relau/Rantau Mansfields escape party from Singapore 13.2.42. A Palembang, Sumatra internee, then also moved to Muntok Internment Camp. Wife Joan (nee Scott) evacuated to Australia on the 'MV Gorgon' with daughters Judy Joan & Judy arriving Fremantle, WA., on 20 February 1942 Perth WA. **Freddie Adam that fit , active sportsman died in captivity at Muntok on 25.1.45, aged 38 years.** Joan remarried postwar and had 2 sons. She died Singapore in the 1980s. (JMM and SNA)

- **ANDERSON S.A. [Stewart Alexander] OBE 1964.** Partner, Ritchie & Bissett Hull [Naval Architects], Union Building, Singapore. Aged 32 in 1942. Escaped Singapore 13.2.42 in the Relau/Rantau SSC group. Intercepted 16.2.42. Palembang, **Sumatra internee.** Wife Rene; children Carole b.1947 & Alan. With Ritche & Bissett, Singapore postwar. Retired to West Linton, Peeblesshire. Died 28.10.66 Edinburgh. (JMM).
- **ANDREWS G.V. [George Vincent] FCA.** Born 1907 West Derby, Lancs. To Singapore 1938. Accountant Mansfield & Co., / Straits Steamship Company, Ocean Building, Singapore. Pte Scottish Company, 1st SSVF. In April 1937 he married Miss Dylis Beatrice Croft, daughter of Mr & Mrs Harry Croft of Singapore and Redhill, Surrey.



Mr G.V. Andrews and Miss D.B. Croft at their wedding at St Andrews Cathedral (Straits Times photo).

Wife Dylis Beatrice evacuated with daughters Jill & 'Tricia' Patricia Dylis (10.9.38 – 2.11.2024, Hobart) on 'Ulysses' on 21.12.42 with 250 women and child evacuees on board, arriving in Fremantle WA on 31.12.41. George was in the 'Relau/Rantau' Mansfields escape party from Singapore 13.2.42. The 'Jeyes' toilet paper list compiled in Changi Prison Internment Camp records "... ANDREWS G.V. MANSFIELDS NEI?". George is also listed on the record for the Men's Internment Camp in Palembang. As a **Sumatra** internee he clearly was later transported firstly back to Muntok Camp on Banka Island and then to the horrific conditions of the Belalau Camp in the jungles of south Sumatra. **Died in captivity 27.5.45 aged 38 years at Belalau, Sumatra.** JMM and SNA)

- **BADDELEY – Sidney Baddeley**, born 1896 Silvertown, London. Merchant Navy medal WW1. Received Master Certificate 6.3.22 Liverpool. Captain: Assistant Marine Superintendent, then Marine Superintendent SSC/ Mansfields, Ocean Building, Singapore. 1936 married Bridget Hogan in London. Commanded 'Rantau' on departure 12 February 1942 (source TEFS) also recorded that he escaped Singapore 13th on 'Rantau' (sources MRB reports – A. Bannatyne and Mrs Price). Briefly a Sumatra internee, firstly Muntok then Palembang until 26.8.42 (list of men in Palembang Internment Camp) when he was transported to work at Sasebo (a Japanese Naval base) and then the major naval base and port at Fukuoka, Japan. On his MI9 Liberation questionnaire Sidney recorded his home address as 'Newlands', Sandiway, Northwich, Cheshire. Wife Ruby [Margaret?] evacuated on the 'Narkunda' arriving Fremantle WA 24.1.42 then to SA. Wife c/o Mrs. Leather, Hodge Lane, Hartford, Cheshire, England. He resumed duties at Singapore 1946. Retired 1950 to South Africa and died 1960 Natal. Son Philip [aged 86 in 2006 – lived in Cumbria]. Daughter Winifred Margaret. (JMM and MI9 questionnaire on COFEPOW website)

- **BURNS – Thomas Burns**, arrived in Singapore in 1924 from Birkenhead, England. 2nd Officer, Fire Brigade, Motor, Water & Oil Services, Singapore Harbour Board. Evacuated on *Rantau* Palembang, Sumatra internee. **He died in captivity on 22.10.44, aged 50 years.**

- **CHAMBERLIN/ CHAMBERLAIN – Fred William Chamberlin (also spelt ‘Chamberlain’ in newspapers)** was in the employ of Mansfield & Co., and therefore the SSS Co as 2nd Officer aboard the ‘Kedah’ in 1938. His 25-year-old wife, Mrs Jean Edna Chamberlain, died in September 1941 (SFPMA 15.9.41) leaving an infant son – notably what was an undoubtedly tight knit group of officers from the SSS Co. and allied nautical professions, Messrs A.A. Anderson, G.V. Andrews, G.F. Ritchie, L. Froggatt, and S.W. West were all present at this funeral, as they were again five months later aboard ‘Relau’ and ‘Rantau’. After capture of the two vessels at Banka Island (Muntok) the location and movements of Fred becomes blurred - initially we have the ‘Jeyes List’ compiled in Changi internment camp noting “... CHAMBERLAIN FRED W MANSFIELDS NEI...” and the Palembang Men Internee list has “*F.M. Chamberlain , father F.W. Chamberlain , 4 Townshend Rd., Richmond, Surrey, England...*”, and then we have the record that Fred had been sent (with the interned crew of the M.V. Hauraki’) from Changi to Japan to work as POW in the Mitsubishi Works factory (see photo). In 1945 Fred was repatriated on a hospital ship from Yokohama and then onwards by plane via Okinawa. He returned to work in Singapore during the 1950s-60s and was later appointed to the Singapore ‘Seaman’s Register Board’. (JMM and SNA)

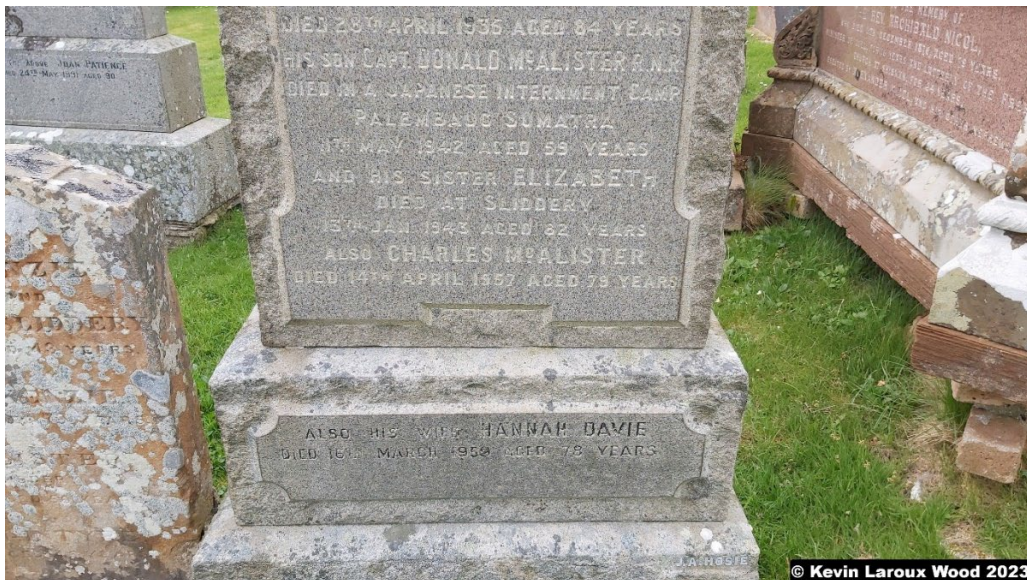
- **DRAGGETT – Thornton Ernest Draggett**, one internet source states he was born in 1910 in Western Australia to North Overy Draggett and Elsie Hobbs – but this is not recorded in the official birth Australian records. Living in WA during 1928-28 and owned motorbikes. Joined SSC early 1930s. Assistant Superintendent, Engineer, Straits Steamship Company. In the ‘Mansfields - SSC’ escape party 13.2.42 as Engineer. Intercepted 16.2.42. Palembang, Sumatra internee. ‘Jeyes list’ shows him aboard ‘Rantau’, also recorded in Palembang Men Internees list so he survived Palembang, Muntok and Belalau Internment camps. Wife E.C. evacuated on ‘Gorgon’, arriving Fremantle WA 20.2.42. Australian newspapers (‘The Western Australian’ 6.10.45) reported in October 1945 “... *Mr Thornton Draggett, who was Superintendent Engineer of Mansfield & Co, Singapore until his internment by the Japanese arrived in Australia by A.N.A. airliner last night. Mrs Draggett who spent some time in Australia during which she was a social worker at the Perth Hospital in now in England...*”. In ‘Nothing Lasts for Ever’, pp. 18- 19. “... *His party who returned to Singapore included Bill Price, Deputy Manager of Sungei Nyok dockyard, and his assistant, G.R. Jones, Thornton Draggett and Bobby Moffatt, Assistant Superintendent Engineers, Jurgen Thomson and Freddie Harper. The only survivor of Mansfield’s Sumatra group was Cecil Starkey. ‘Joe’ Penrice, Dennis Peterkin, Freddie Adams, George Andrews and ‘Tamby’ Messenger all died as prisoners...*”. He returned to SSC postwar then to Melbourne. Remarried Sandra postwar. In late 1950s left SSC for Lloyds Surveyors on east coast of UK. Recorded as a Ships Surveyor for Lloyds in 1960 and 1963. Thornton Draggett died in July 1994 in Surrey. (JMM, SNA and Trove newspaper archives Australia).

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- **FLOOD – Signalman John Flood**, P/JX 218135, RN. Born 19.8.21 and enlisted 3.9.40. Captured aboard ‘SS Relau’ on 16.2.42 in Banka Strait and POW in Muntok then Palembang POW Camps. Home address 13 Kepler Street, Seaforth, Liverpool (MI9 Liberation Questionnaire on COFEPOW website). Whether John Flood was one of the crew leaving

Singapore or one of the surviving crew of 'HMS Scorpion' picked up south of the Berhala Strait is unclear.

- **FROGGATT – Leslie Froggatt**, born, 1899 in Lincoln, England. Marine Engineer who became Superintendent Engineer Straits Steamship Company 1934-48. Escaped Singapore 13.2.42 as Engineer on 'Rantau' but it was intercepted by Japanese warships in the Banka Strait on 16.2.42. He was briefly a Muntok internee, the Palembang Internment Camp list of men internees recorded "...Left Muntok on 21.2.42...". The 'Jeyes toilet paper' list compiled in Changi Internment camp also records "...FROGGATT LESLIE STRAITS SS CO LEFT RANTAU NOW BVD. NAVAL BASE...", so it appears that Leslie Froggatt was one of those required by the Japanese to crew the vessels back to Singapore and was then held as a POW near the Naval Base and perhaps later in Changi. Wife Mary 'May' Helena Froggatt (b.1899) is stated to have evacuated in December 1941. Post war the family (minus son who had joined Shell Oil and later became Sir Leslie Froggatt) migrated to Australia in January (Mrs and Eric on the 'Charon') - March (Leslie senior on the 'Gorgon')1948 and Leslie (senior) worked as an engineer in Australia. Leslie Froggatt died on 2.7.75 and Mary 'May' Helena Froggatt died in September 1986 in Victoria, Australia. Sons were Eric Froggatt (b.1932) and Sir Leslie Trevor Froggatt (1920-2010).
- **HALLAM – Inspector Henry George Hallam** of Police Headquarters, Hollywood Road, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Police (HK Directory and Chronicle 1940). Escaped 13.2.42 on 'MV Relau', on which Captain Fred Chamberlin noted him as "... an ex-Hong Kong policeman who had been in Singapore on Secret Service work. He was badly wanted by the Japs who had a price on his head, and we had been asked to get him away if at all possible..." and praised by Chamberlin for defending the vessel in Singapore Harbour with his rifle from "... a crowd of Australian soldiers in a nearby junk threatened to shoot me if I picked up anchor without taking them on board... Hallam had a rifle and he retaliated by saying he would shoot the first one who showed his head above the bulwark. He kept me covered the whole time I was getting the anchor up and there wasn't a head to be seen. I think Hallam was about one of the toughest looking individuals I have ever come across..." but became an internee when the ship was intercepted by the Japanese 16.2.42 in the Banka Strait. He appears in the list of men in Palembang Internment Camp as "H.O. Hallam". Henry Hallam died on 18.07.44 at Muntok Internment Camp, Sumatra, which was two days before the death of Walter Penrice – this was the period during which Beri Beri and Malaria were rife at Muntok and causing many deaths. Probate administration was in Manchester and his effects went to Dora Eleanor Maud Howe, married woman, and Alfred Howe, Captain, British Army. He was originally buried in Grave E2 at Muntok Cemetery, Indonesia. His body was removed after the 1960s. He is also commemorated on the Sai Wan Memorial, Hong Kong (militaryimages .net., ref Royal Hong Kong Police memorial WW2 deaths) .
- **JONES – George Richard Jones**. The MRB statement by A. Bannatyne recorded that "... - Jones, Engineer..." was on either the 'Rantau or the 'Relau' when they left Singapore. The 'Jeyes Toilet paper' lists compiled in Changi Internment Camp recorded "JONES GEO RICHD ENG SSCO LEFT RELAU...". Froggatt, 'Nothing Lasts for Ever', pp. 18- 19. "... His party who returned to Singapore included Bill Price, Deputy Manager of Sungei Nyok dockyard, and his assistant, G.R. Jones, Thornton Draggett and Bobby Moffatt, Assistant Superintendent Engineers, Jurgen Thomson and Freddie Harper. The only survivor of Mansfield's Sumatra group was Cecil Starkey. 'Joe' Penrice, Dennis Peterkin, Freddie Adams, George Andrews and 'Tamby' Messenger all died as prisoners...".

- **MCALISTER/McALLISTER – Donald McAlister** (often also spelt in Singapore newspapers as McAllister with a double 'll') was born in 1883, the son of Charles McAlister and Jane Brown of the little village of Sliderry, on the Isle of Arran, North Ayrshire, Scotland. After serving his apprenticeship with the shipbuilding yard of Ferguson Bros., Port Glasgow, he spent four years at sea with the coastal and river shipping line of Walford Lines Ltd., gaining a 1st Class BOT. Certificate. In 1924 he was the pilot in the port of Bangkok, Siam and then appears to have moved to Singapore as a Pilot for Singapore Harbour Singapore - eventually becoming Chief Pilot - and over the next few years became involved in investments in local firms including the new stockbrokers Rose, McPhail and Penman of which he was a director. In 1929 he was a passenger on the 'SS Patroclus' leaving Singapore and returned in 1939 on the 'Akshar' at which time he discovered that one of the partners of that stockbroking firm had run the company into bankruptcy. His investments extended to Thornycrofts the shipbuilders and Straits Trading. He was also a Ships Surveyor and elected a Member of the Ship Surveyors Institute in 1935. In 1937 he was elected to be a member of the Pilot Board, Singapore. By then he had become a member of the Singapore 'establishment' and travelled widely. Capt./Lt MRNVR/RNR. It was natural that at the time of the invasion of Singapore he escaped Singapore with Mansfield & Co. and S.S. Co in the 'Relau' and 'Rantau' group on 13.2.42. Captured near Banka Island he became a Muntok and then a Palembang, Sumatra internee. **Died, of Beri Beri and Dysentery, soon after captivity on 11.5.42 aged 58 - 59 years in Palembang Internment Camp. Reinterred after the war and now lies at rest in Grave 6.A.1 at Jakarta cemetery. His CWGC record is as "Lieutenant Donald McAllister [note spelling], Royal Naval Reserve, 'HMS Terror II' (this was in fact an old 'Minesweeper in Reserve' at the Singapore Naval Base titled the 'Guardship' during prewar peacetime years).** He is also remembered on the family gravestone at Kilmory Churchyard, isle of Arran and the War memorial at Sliderry, isle of Arran. (JMM and SNA).





McAlister Family headstone and War Memorial on Arran.

- **MESSENGER - Jack Stephenson Messenger**, known as 'Tamby' or 'Jackie' from Hove, Sussex. was born in 1900 in Kingston on Thames, Surrey, England the son of Walter James Messenger and Helen Priscilla (nee Stephenson). Jack appears to have arrived in Singapore by 1920 and immediately became very active playing tennis as well as billiards at the Singapore Cricket Club – which he continued all through the 1920s. He must have returned for his first 'home leave' in 1923 when he sailed for Singapore again on 12 May 1923 on board the 'Troilus', with the occupation of Assistant and giving his address as Netherglen, London Road, Redhill in Surrey. Presumably on his next 'home leave' he married Georgina Isobel Cole in 1926 in Fylde, Lancashire, England, they then sailed 1st class in November 1926 on board the ship 'Agapenor' bound for Singapore. Jack was recorded as a clerk and they gave their address as 85 London Road, Redhill in Surrey. In 1928 they had a son (Peter James Messenger) and that year they again returned for 'home leave' with baby Peter, to London in November 1929 on board the ship 'Hector' from Singapore, returning in March 1930 on board the ship 'Patroclus' bound for Singapore, Jack was still recorded as a clerk but after the next 'home leave' was a Shipping Assistant. By then Jack had taken up playing golf and in 1932 he is noted as in the SSVF where he held the rank of private in the Support Company. He had worked for Mansfield & Co. from 1920s. Wife Georgina evacuated. Escaped Singapore in SSC escape group 13.2.42 on Relau/Rantau but intercepted 16.2.42. On list in Men's Camp Palembang, Sumatra, internee. Also, on 'Jeyes' toilet paper list compiled in Changi Prison Internment camp records "... MESSENGER J.C.? 'RELAU' NEI ...". **Jack Messenger died in captivity 2.11.44, a time of widespread Beri Beri and Malaria, aged 45 years at Muntok.** His estate was probated on 21 May 1947 in London Administration, papers to his widow Georgina Messenger. Georgina died, aged 92 years, in 1990 in Chiltern, Buckinghamshire.

- **MOFFETT - Robert Nixon 'Bobby' Moffett** from North Shields, Northumberland, born 1903. To Singapore 1928 as Engineer Officer on the delivery voyage of the Governor's yacht, 'Seabelle 11'. Joined S.S. Co 1928. i/c Malayan Water Transport, Bernam River. Straits Steamship Engineer, Butterworth. Stores Superintendent SSC 1934. Deputy Manager, Sungei Nyok Dockyard.

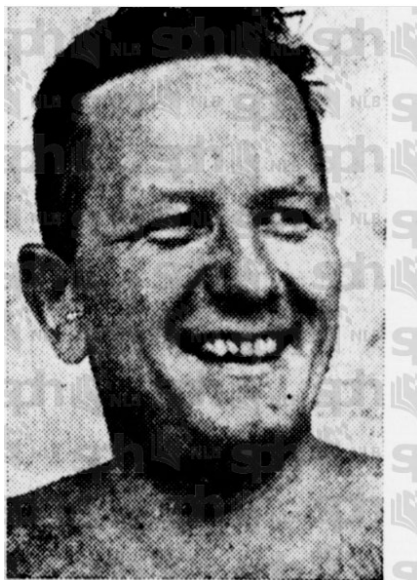


In 1936 he married Miss Betty Holden, daughter of Mr & Mrs H.B. Massey of Monkseaton, Northumberland. Wife Betty evacuated with daughter C. on 'Gorgon', arriving Fremantle WA 20.2.42. Bobby was captured by the Japanese and compelled to serve afloat on the 'Rantau'. He was briefly a Muntok, Sumatra internee then "...Left Muntok on 21.2.42..." (List of Men in Palembang Internment Camp). 'Jeyes' toilet paper list compiled in Changi records "...MOFFETT R.N. S.S.CO -RELAU – IN SINGAPORE X NEI? ...". Presumably ordered by Japanese to crew one of the vessels back to Singapore. Later a Changi internee. Froggatt, 'Nothing Lasts for Ever', pp. 18- 19. "... His party who returned to Singapore included Bill Price, Deputy Manager of Sungei Nyok dockyard, and his assistant, G.R. Jones, Thornton Draggett and Bobby Moffatt, Assistant Superintendent Engineers, Jurgen Thomson and Freddie Harper. The only survivor of Mansfield's Sumatra group was Cecil Starkey.

'Joe' Penrice, Dennis Peterkin, Freddie Adams, George Andrews and 'Tamby' Messenger all died as prisoners...". Returned to S.S. Co 1946 as Stores Superintendent, Telok Ayer till 1961. He died 24.1.62 aged 59 years, at Kilsby near Rugby. (JMM, SNA).

[Photo of R.N. 'Bobby' Moffett at his wedding to Miss Betty Holden at St Andrews Cathedral.]

- **PENRICE - Walter 'Joe' Penrice**, b.1897 Birkenhead, the son of Oscar and Ella Penrice (who were later of Higher Bebington, Cheshire). Attended the private school 'Birkenhead institute' in the 'Wirral' near Liverpool and was House Captain of the school House named 'Tate' in 1914. With the outbreak of war, he enlisted and became 2nd Lieutenant, Kings Liverpool Rifles, WW1, wounded 1916. To Singapore 1920 and became noted in playing cricket for Singapore Cricket Club, swimming at the Singapore Swimming Club and rugby for Singapore. Commissioned as 2nd Lt (Eurasian Coy) SVC Penang in 1928 when he was working for Mansfield & Co. Ltd – promoted Manager, Penang from 1933 then Director, Mansfields and 'No.2' for Straits Steamship Company. Promoted from Lt. to Captain SSVR 1928 then Acting Major of 2SSVF in 1937. Appears to have been a bachelor and clearly accepted as a member of the Singapore 'establishment' by 1941 when he was appointed to the Singapore Licensing Board and the Board of the Singapore Harbour Board.



W. PENRICE, winner of the 50 metres Veterans' Race for the Bagnall Cup at the Singapore Swimming Club.—Straits Times picture.

On the *Relau* 13.2.42 then an Internee in Muntok and Palembang **Internment Camps**. During his internment 'Joe' Penrice, possibly reflecting his peacetime commercial seniority, became head of the 'British Committee' in Palembang and Muntok Internment Camps – it was a somewhat controversial period with other nationalities not in support of his authoritarian approach to such matters as publishing any material concerning the 'British community' and friction came to a head over the factions of opinion within the camp over the 'keeping of dogs', which saw him lose the role of head man ('BEW'). **'Walter 'Joe' Penrice died in captivity 20.7.44, aged 47 years in Muntok Internment Camp, Banka Island at a time when Beri Beri and Malaria were rife and taking the lives of many.**

- **PETERKIN - William Dennis Peterkin**, born 1903 at Toxteth Park, Lancs. Worked for Alfred



Mr. and Mrs. **W. D. Peterkin** and party.

Holt & Co., Liverpool then from 1928 Assistant, Mansfield & Co. Ltd, Ocean Building, Singapore. Sub-Lt SSRNVR in 1934 and Medical Auxiliary Service, Singapore. **Photo below of William and Greta Peterkin at the 'Coronation Ball' at the Tanglin Club, Singapore in May 1937.** Left Singapore on Rantau in SSC escape group 13.2.42 but intercepted 16.2.42. Wife Greta Mary [nee Morgenstern] evacuated from Singapore very late before the Surrender on the 'Gorgon' on 13.2.42 arriving in Fremantle WA on 20.2.42. She worked with Dalgety's, Perth WA till 1944 then to UK on 'Nestor'. He a

Palembang, Sumatra internee and **died in captivity 15.4.45, aged only 42 years, in Sumatra.** Greta remarried in 1956 to Harold Smyth.(JMM and SNA)

- **PRICE - William Gladstone 'Bill' Price**, born in 1884. Arrived in Malaya 1926 and joined the Straits Steamship Co group with Eastern Shipping. Later Assistant Manager Sungei Nyok Dockyard, Province Wellesley. Left Singapore on 'Rantau' which had been built in that dockyard. Captured at Muntok. Left Muntok 21.2.42. Palembang, **Sumatra internee**. The 'Jeyes' toilet paper list compiled in Changi prison Internment Camp records "... PRICE W.E. S.S. Co LEFT RANTAU RTD.S'PORE...". Froggatt wrote in 'Nothing Lasts for Ever', pp. 18- 19. "... His party who returned to Singapore included Bill Price, Deputy Manager of Sungei Nyok

dockyard, and his assistant, G.R. Jones, Thornton Draggett and Bobby Moffatt, Assistant Superintendent Engineers, Jurgen Thomson and Freddie Harper. The only survivor of Mansfield's Sumatra group was Cecil Starkey. 'Joe' Penrice, Dennis Peterkin, Freddie Adams, George Andrews and 'Tamby' Messenger all died as prisoners...". Returned to Malaya post war, retiring in 1953. Wife Kathleen b.1900 and daughter Margaret [Shennan]. Lived in Butterworth. Bill died 1961. (JMM and SNA).

➤ **RITCHIE - Frederick George Ritchie**, OBE b.1886 Dundee. Educated Morgan Academy and



Technical College, Dundee. Surveyor of Ships and Inspector of Machinery Straits Settlements 1913 and 1914. Then he joined the ships surveying firm named 'Fittock and Adams' and when David Bisset joined it became the well-known firm of 'Ritchie & Bisset'. In March 1916 Frederick married Bella Simpson, only daughter of the late David Simpson of Dundee. He jointly led Ritchie & Bisset Naval Architects [Consulting Engineers & Marine Surveyors] with Bisset during 1916-42 from the Union Building, Singapore and held various directorships. Reputedly became one of the richest men in Malaya. Wife evacuated to India then Victoria, Australia (a Mrs Ritchie and child arrived in Fremantle on the 'HMT Orion' as First Class "Admiralty Civilians" on 6.1.42). He escaped Singapore, aged 56 years, on 13.2.42 in the 'Straits Steamship Co' escape party on either 'Relau' or 'Rantau' but the vessel was intercepted in the Banka Strait, and he became an internee in the Muntok,

Palembang and Belalau Internment Camps. Returning to Singapore after the war he eventually spent a total of 43 years in Malaya, became a notable senior figure in Singapore commerce. Frederick Ritchie died at his home in Anderson Road, Singapore on 8 August 1952 and was buried in Bidadari Cemetery. (JMM and SNA)

➤ **STARKEY - Cecil Quentin Starkey**, born 2.9.03 in Gartcosh, Lanarkshire, son of William Starkey. He qualified as a Chartered Accountant and became Accountant, Mansfield & Co. Ltd from c.1930. Pte in the Scottish Company 1SSVF early 1930s. Married Edna Florence Farahar in April 1935 at St Barnabas Church, Gillingham, Kent, England. To Singapore in 1935 on 'SS Patroclus'. The 'Jeyes' toilet paper list compiled in Changi Prison Internment Camp records "... STARKEY CECIL Q MANSFIELDS LEFT 'RELAU'...". So, Cecil Starkey escaped Singapore on 13.2.42 in the S.S. Co/Mansfields party on 'Relau' but was intercepted by Japanese warships on 16.2.42. He became a Muntok, Palembang and Belalau internee in Sumatra. Wife Edna Florence and son James Roderick evacuated on 'Ulysses' on 21.12.41, arriving Fremantle W.A. on 31.12.41. Cecil survived these harsh and deprived internment camps returned to Mansfields postwar as Secretary. Retired 1955 to East Sussex. Died 22.11.70, aged 67 years, in Bearsted, Kent. (JMM and SNA)

➤ **WARREN G.S. [Gilbert Stanley]** b.1903 UK. To Malaya 1928 as Station Superintendent & Traffic Inspector, FMS Railways. By 1940 Assistant Traffic Supervisor, FMS Railways KL. L/Cpl IFMSVF [1937] to Lt SRE attached to HQ Malaya Command HQ POW Singapore to Taiwan 16.8.42 to Tokyo 1943.

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- WEST - Stanley William West, born 1904 South Stoneham, Hants. To Singapore 1926. Paints Company Manager/ Representative: Red Hand Composition Paint. Aged 38 in 1942. Escaped Singapore with the Mansfields Group 13.2.42. "Jeyes" list has "...WEST STANLEY W. RED HAND P SISSONS [SYMONS??] P' BANG..." Palembang Sumatra internee. Wife Mabel Doris evacuated, aged 35, on 'Aorangi', arriving Fremantle WA 23.1.42. He was repatriated to the UK on 'Dominion Monarch', arriving Southampton 15.11.45. Died 7.3.1958, aged 53 years, Edgeware Hospital, London. Daughter Patricia. (JMM).

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