

## HMS Yin Ping

Sunk in the Banka Straits on 15 February 1942.

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The 'HMS Yin Ping' was a modest sized tug built in 1914 and had a gross tonnage of 191 grt. – it was probably designed for berthing or towing barges and apparently owned by the Chinese Dredger Co., before being requisitioned by the Royal Navy in 1941. The Chinese Dredger Company Ltd was a private company in China established in 1917 to carry on business as dredger, tug-boat, barge and shipowners with the Kailan Mining Administration. The Kailan Mining Administration was a significant mining company based in Tientsin, Northern China managing large coal mines – its assets became subject to attacks by Japanese organised rebels as early as 1939 and no doubt the 'Yin Ping' was sent to safety in Singapore or requisitioned by the Royal Navy soon after as the direct threat from the Japanese in China became an unacceptable risk.

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 over crowded by tens of thousands of fleeing civilians of all races from Malaya plus almost 100,000 servicemen.

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

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

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

About 46 ships of all sizes - from the quite large refrigerated cargo ship "SS. Empire Star" (525 feet and 12,656 tons) through a range of mid-sized merchant vessels down to some small craft like the "SS. Tandjong Pinang" (which at 97 feet only just qualified in the definition for a 'ship') – were assembled to leave as a convoy during the 48-hour period of 11 – 13 February 1942. There were also several Naval ships of varying sizes identified as evacuation vessels.

The naval ships, apart from a couple of destroyers, which briefly escorted the bigger merchant ships like the 'SS Empire Star' and 'SS Gorgon' after leaving Singapore, included auxiliary (i.e. merchant ships which had been requisitioned) patrol ships, auxiliary minesweepers, flat bottomed ex-Yangste River gunboats and ex Yangste river passenger ships, RAF fast launches and even a large tug like the 'HMS Yin Ping'. Some of these Naval ships had almost exclusively a complement of service personnel on board – but also a few civilians. This was the situation for the 'HMS Ying Ping' which had on board the Commanding Officer's wife and a civil engineer from the Singapore Naval Base.

Of the 46 or so ships leaving in the last window of opportunity, as many thought, only 6 would make it to safety. The other 40 ships would be sunk, run aground, or captured at sea by the Japanese navy with many hundreds 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 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 fate of only a small number of the forty or so ships sunk carrying evacuees from Singapore during these last few days before the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 have been properly researched and documented. This is one of the attempts to prevent the lives of those several thousand men, women, and children who did die as a result of their escape attempt being simply consigned, without proper tangible memory, into the dustbin of history.

### **What happened to the 'HMS Yin Ping'?**

Aboard the unarmed 'HMS Yin Ping' as it left Singapore were, according to author Colin Smith in his book "Singapore Burning" (p.529), a total of 78 people - including officers, crew, service personnel passengers plus the wife of the CO of the ship.

After the sinking of the ship two days later there were, according to Colin Smith, only 32 survivors.

Because it was evacuating service personnel, there were on board two other very senior naval officers – the Captain Superintendent of the huge Naval Base in Singapore and a Lieutenant Commander also from the Base - on the ship as it left a burning and bomb shocked Singapore. These were men each with twenty or more years' serious, ocean going experience aboard British warships and Atkinson had been the executive officer commanding the largest battleships.

Despite his junior rank and lack of experience, the role of Commanding Officer of the 'HMS Yin Ping' on its last voyage was allocated to Lt. Patrick O.H. Wilkinson, MRNVR (he had in fact only been appointed an Actg. Sub-Lt in the Straits Settlement Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve 'SSRNVR' in November 1940, but for some reason most records refer to him being in the MRNVR which, was not the same organisation).

In trying to substantiate exactly how many persons were on the ship, the composition of the total number never appears to have been stated precisely (because the original crew number are not stated) but the following calculation provides an estimate;

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| - Lt Wilkinson, plus Mrs Wilkinson plus say ten crew                            | 14 persons        |
| - Captain Atkinson boarded with 11 persons from the Naval Base (Chapman report) | 12 persons        |
| - 50 RAF and 20 Army boarded (20 Army later disembarked to 'HMS Malacca')       | <u>50 persons</u> |
|   | 76 persons        |
- which is very close to that quoted by author Colin Smith.

Patrick Wilkinson was a 30-year-old Australian who was an Assistant Planter from a rubber plantation in nearby Johore, and a volunteer in the SSRNVR (Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve) with just 18 months experience who was about to undergo the ultimate test at sea during wartime. Post-War he compiled a detailed report on these last few days;

*"... FRIDAY 13<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY. During the afternoon I was anchored off Clifford Pier awaiting instructions from Capt. Atkinson, R.N., At 1815 Engineer Captain R.N., Commander Douglas R.N., and Mr Lee-Hunt were embarked. Owing to Japanese shells landing in the near vicinity of Yin Ping I gave the order to heave away at 2350, with the intention of waiting for Capt. Atkinson near H.M.S. Laburnum. At 2355 Capt. Atkinson embarked from Eureka O and we proceeded to Peak island with Eureka in tow.*

*SATURDAY 14<sup>th</sup> 0015. On passing Cooper Channel we were called up by H.M.S. Trang which was ashore on a reef. I proceeded past Peak Island, turned the ship, and returned to Cooper Channel where I anchored. The Eureka was sent off to Trang and approximately 50 R.A.F. and Army personnel were embarked. At this time the S.S. Hong Tat went aground near Trang, but no further assistance could be rendered owing to lack of space aboard Yin Ping. In addition, a quantity of coal was on deck, and, if any more personnel had been embarked the ship's stability would have been impaired. 0220. Hove away and proceeded to the westward. Visibility was particularly bad owing to heavy smoke and it was decided to anchor at 0330., at which time Fairmile 310 signalled that she was aground. Assistance was offered but was declined. 0400. Let go anchor in 10 fathoms. 0615 Capt. Atkinson proceeded in Eureka towards 310, which had managed to get into deep water and was proceeding, whereupon Eureka returned to Yin Ping. 0630. Commenced heaving away. When one shackle was on deck the windlass sheared a pin, and was found to be unrepairable. it was therefore decided to cut the cable, which operation was completed by 0650, when we proceeded into Durian Straits. During the passage of these straits the following vessels were seen – Tingarro [sic – this is 'Tengarroh'], Pinang [ sic -this is 'SS Tandjong Pinang'], and either Tien Kwang or Shu Kwang. Despite large numbers of enemy aircraft passing overhead, we were unmolested. It had been decided to await water boat 'Daisy' at False Durian Is. and at 1030 Eureka was ordered to contact Daisy, which was on our port quarter distant about 5 miles. 1245. On approaching False Durian Is. H.M.S. Malacca was sighted anchored close inshore and Capt. Atkinson Instructed me to make fast astern. A protest was made by the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. Malacca, but Capt. Atkinson informed him that our windlass was out of order, then we made fast. At 1310, 9 enemy bombers were observed, who after passing overhead, wheeled to Starboard and returned to reconnoitre. At this time Daisy and Eureka were seen approaching and were ordered to keep clear of us, as it was obvious we were about to be bombed. At 1315 three bombs were dropped, one falling between us and Malacca, and two very close on the port side. These bombs were probably Semi armour piercing as they did not burst until they were under water. The only damage sustained by Yin Ping was the blowing in of the wheelhouse windows. The ship developed a heavy list to port, and, as it was then unknown what damage had been sustained, boats were lowered, and personnel embarked in the boats and Eureka. The latter, when proceeding towards the beach ran on some rocks and remained fast owing to a rapidly falling tide and was eventually abandoned and stores were removed. I cast off from Malacca and anchored in two fathoms, and it was discovered that the effect of the bursting bombs was to fill the port side of the ship with water, which accounted for the list. Examination proved that no damage had been done to the hull, and all hands were recalled.*

*It was then discovered that Daisy was ashore, so assistance was rendered, and she was towed off. At this stage it was decided to transfer the Army personnel to Malacca. This completed, we were about*

to proceed, when Malacca informed us that her condenser was cracked and asked us to stand by. This request was complied with until 1720, when all three ships proceeded. Owing to our superior speed we soon left Daisy and Malacca astern.

SUNDAY 15<sup>TH</sup>. Berhala was passed at approx. 1000 and no further ships were sighted. At 1745 Banka Is. was sighted and I went below, the watch being kept by Capt. Atkinson. At 1920 I returned to the bridge to find a cruiser and destroyer on our port quarter distant about 2 miles. Identification was impossible until the cruiser turned to port presenting her beam to us. At this moment she made some short signal to us, presumably an identification signal, and opened up one searchlight on us. Our position was approx. Muntok Light bearing 124 degrees, 20 miles. Orders were given for all personnel to get out of sight, but, at 1925 she opened fire on us at about 3000 yards. The first hit the bridge, killing or seriously wounding all up there except Captain Atkinson, myself and my wife, who was aboard with Capt. Atkinson's permission. We three were badly cut by shell splinters. Fire immediately broke out and we were compelled to leave the bridge by climbing over the fore end. The second hit the fore deck killing a large number of men, while the third damaged the boiler and killed a number of men on deck by the engine room. I am unable to remember clearly all the subsequent events owing to a severe hit on the head. From information received from Engine Room staff, the ship still had way on her. At approx. 1930 it became impossible to remain on the foredeck and, as the whole midship section of the ship was on fire, the order to abandon ship was given. At this time Capt. Atkinson was on the foredeck and appeared to be in a rather dazed condition. After all hands forward had left the ship I informed Capt. Atkinson that I was also going. As mentioned above the ship still had a little way on her, and, as she came past I noted that the two small boats were still intact, although the paint was beginning to blister from the heat. I managed to haul myself aboard again and found some sixteen Naval and R.A.F. personnel on the after deck. It appeared to me that it would be wise to launch the port boat first, as the fire was not so close to this boat as the starboard one. A party was made up, and after some effort, this boat was successfully launched. Before anything further could be done, two men from the deck jumped into it and capsized it. Steps were immediately taken to right it. In the meantime, I found that Commander Douglas had been brought aft. He was very badly wounded, having amongst other things two broken arms and both legs broken, and it appeared to me that he was mortally wounded. By this time the starboard boat was in flames and could not be launched. At about 1940 YIN PING listed quickly to starboard and sunk by the head in less than a minute. I ordered all hands to jump clear and keep the boat clear as well. I decided that all wounded should be kept in the boat while the unwounded should remain in the water. two lines were rigged from bow to stern and those in the water were supported by these lines. At this a stage it was discovered that one oar was missing, and it was impossible to row towards those people who had already left the ship from the foredeck. A moderate sea was running, and the boat was kept head to sea. These conditions prevailed till morning were [sic – when] the Japanese cruiser which had sunk us was sighted heading towards us. When about 1500 yards from us she stopped and after an interval of five minutes proceeded again. At this time, we were about four miles from the coasts of Banka Is, near Muntok Lighthouse. We had been making a certain amount of progress by using the floorboards as paddles, but, the tide having turned, it was obvious we were no more than holding our own. At about midday two R.A.F. launches were sighted, and, in view of the fact that the wounded required attention and we had no water, I signalled them for assistance and was picked up about ten minutes later by R.A.F. launch 56. We were taken to Muntok pier after having made a search for survivors and were made prisoners of war....” (document source: Patrick Wilkinson's niece Lorraine Murphy, copied from a report held in the UK National Archives).

The story is also recorded, through different eyes, in an earlier written statement made by Engineer Captain R.P. Chapman dated 8 March 1942, only three weeks after the events, whilst he was in "Prisoner of War Camp, Mulo School, Palembang, Sumatra".

He states that the 'Yin Ping' was "...250 tons approx., Shanghai Tug 1914 ..." and then narrates;

*"... The Yin Ping sailed from Singapore at 23.45 on the night of 13/14 Feb.42, under the command of Lt Wilkinson, R.N.R., and having on board Capt. Atkinson, R.N. (Captain Superintendent), Commander DOUGLAS (Commander of the Dockyard), Mr LEIGH HUNT (Superintending Civil Engineer) and personnel of Naval Staff consisting of Yeoman of Signals, a Petty Officer and about 8 ratings. A EUREKA Motor Boat with crew of 1 Petty officer and 2 men was towed astern.*

*Off PEAK ISLAND the SS. TRANG signalled that she was aground and required assistance. YIN PING anchored and the EUREKA M.B. in charge of Commander Douglas endeavoured to transfer personnel from TRANG to Yin PING. The tide was falling and the M.B. could only make two trips, but further transfer amount to 60 men all told was made in the TRANG's own boats. Personnel transferred consisted of about 40 R.A.F. Ground Staff and 20 Army Other Ranks. This occurred between 0100 and 0200 hrs. 14<sup>th</sup> Feb.*

*YIN PING then proceeded via DURIAN STRAITS, and anchored before dawn with the object of contacting the "Daisy" and "Heather, two water boats which YIN Ping intended to convoy; contact was not made until later on the 14 Feb., with DAISY alone. HEATHER was not seen.*

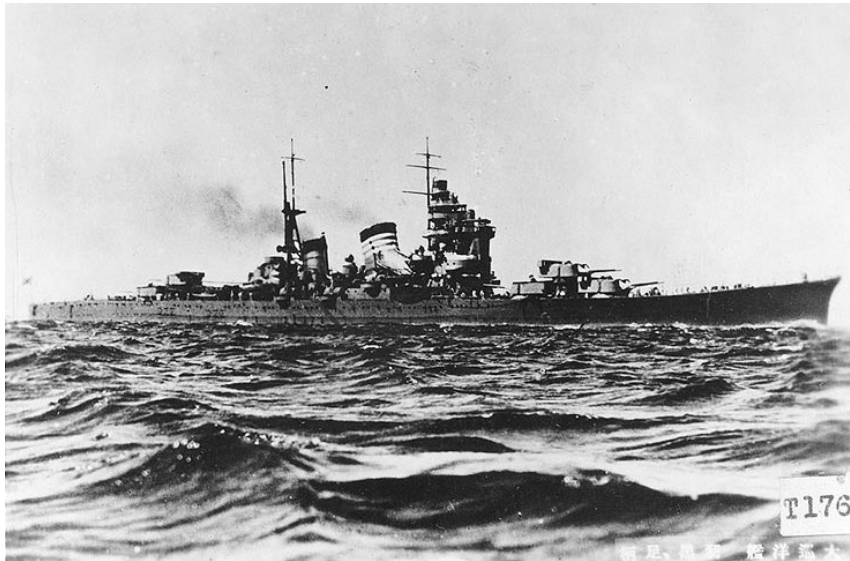
*On the afternoon of 14 Feb., H.M.S. MALACCA was sighted anchored close inshore to an island, and YIN PING who had had trouble with her cable winch, made fast to MALACCA's starboard quarter, and our Army passengers were transferred to her. Shortly after, a large flight of aircraft passed overhead, circled and then bombed. One bomb fell between the two ships, but beyond making YIN PING very wet and causing slight damage to MALACCA's main machinery, no damage was done. While in this berth troops were landed for exercise, but while landing them the Eureka M.B. ran ashore on a reef and had to be abandoned.*

*The intention was to lie up inshore during the day, but as we had been bombed whilst doing so, it was decided to get underway, and make as much progress as was possible, by day as well as by night. During the night 14/15 Feb., Yin Ping lost contact with MALACCA and DAISY, neither of whom were seen again by YIN PING.*

*At about 19.30 on 15 Feb. when approaching the BANKOR [sic] STRAIT, YIN PING who was burning navigation lights, was fired at without warning. The first shell destroyed and either killed or wounded all personnel on the BRIDGE. The second shell killed or wounded a large number of passengers, made a big hole in the upper deck, and damaged the ship below the waterline., forward of the BRODGE. A third shell did damage to the engine room steam pipes. The bridge structure and doch-houses caught fire immediately, and burnt with great rapidity. A good deal of small arm ammunition was stowed on the bridge, and it exploded like machine gun fire, adding considerably to the difficulty of launching ship's boats. Only one was got away, and this was entirely due to Lt. Wilkinson who had been well peppered with shrapnel in the first explosion. Captain Atkinson and Commander Douglas were both seriously wounded, and they probably died. Mr Leigh Hunt was not seen after the first shell hit the bridge, and it is thought that he was blown overboard.*

*The majority of survivors totalling almost 20 were picked up the following morning, 16 Feb. by two R.A.F. launches, which had been captured by the Japanese, and were landed at BANKA....”*

*They landed at Muntok on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1942 (report by Chapman).*



Japanese Cruiser 'Haguro'. (Source: Wikipedia)

The attacking Japanese warships could have been cruisers or destroyers. The destroyers 'Fubuki' and 'Asagiri' were known to have been sinking ships near the location of the 'HMS Yin Ping'. It was an unequal contest in the extreme and the unarmed 'HMS Yin Ping' was easy prey for the sophisticated and very heavily armed Japanese warships, which were world class insofar as speed and armaments and in fact superior to Allied warships in the region at that stage of the War.



Japanese destroyer 'Asagiri' (Source: Wikipedia)

Why the 'HMS Yin Ping' was reportedly showing navigation lights we will never know. It was 1930 hrs and so would have been dusk by then in the tropics. The attacking warships would not have been able to pick up the position of the tug by radar because it had not yet been developed for use on ships by the Japanese, but it seems that the various destroyers and cruisers of the Japanese Navy that were strung across the Banka Strait as a net for ships escaping Singapore and were literally sitting, waiting and physically listening because they similarly picked up the passage of other civilian evacuation ships - such as the 'HMS Giang Bee' and the 'SS Tandjong Pinang' – then shone searchlights at them and promptly sank both those ships at very close range, at around the same time in the evening on days before and after the 'HMS Yin Ping' was sunk.

The chaos and confusion which must have ensued on the 'HMS Yin Ping' when the six shells consecutively struck would have been compounded by the fact that it was already twilight, about to quickly become dark and the deck of the ship would have been lit only by the glare of fires that had broken out on the sinking ship. It would have been a significant challenge to organise the large number of non-crew and non-sailors on board into an 'Abandon Ship' procedure with any semblance of order during daylight, let alone at twilight as occurred - twilight occurs at 1930 hrs on that day of the year in the region of the tropics where the attack took place – and the survivors then had to cope with a rapid transition to the full darkness of night by 2000 hrs when they were swimming towards and struggling to climb into the only 'boat' launched.

This was also a ship which the 'fickle finger of fate' had ordained should be carrying two of the most senior Royal Navy officers in Singapore – Captain Atkinson and Engineering Captain Chapman – and the loss of Captain Atkinson as one of the Navy's most liked and respected senior officers would have, in particular, shocked the upper ranks of the RN around the world (see his biographical entry later in this document) - theory would say they should have had the best chance of survival.

But perhaps the weight of huge naval experience and emphasis on adhering to orders for as long as they did on the 'HMS Yin Ping' may have worked against the survival of the escapees on this occasion.

With the benefit of hindsight and knowing now the realities faced by all the evacuation ships leaving Singapore during the 11-13 February 1942 (there were none to speak of leaving after that date) this tragedy was the result of 'HMS Yin Ping' ;

- delaying its journey to stop and help other ships and launches which had run aground or had mechanical issues – this was the time when the Japanese Navy were trying to close the net across Banka Straits.
- following orders and sheltering amongst the islands of the Rhio Archipelago each day – this proved futile because of Japanese air reconnaissance planes, and sometimes fatal as in the cases of the 'SS Kuala' and the 'Tien Kwang' at Pom Pong island.
- along with all other evacuation ships during those last few days before the Surrender, was unable to learn of the existence of the Japanese cruiser and three destroyers lying in wait in the vicinity of the Banka Straits – because the British officer responsible for radio/ Morse codes in Singapore had jumped the gun and destroyed his code books prematurely in the face of the threat from the Japanese troops advancing across Singapore island. Messages being received and warning of the Japanese naval threat near Banka Island were simply unable to be decoded. For this reason, all the ships which met an awful fate at the hands of the powerful destroyers – such as the 'SS Redang', the 'HMS Giang Bee' and the 'SS. Tandjong Pinang' had no idea that a deadly naval force was lying in wait for them

- by a cruel coincidence of history reaching Banka Island at the same time as the Japanese invasion fleet and two companies of soldiers from one of the most brutal regiments ( the 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment) in the Japanese Army were about to land on Banka Island.

The reports of Chapman and Wilkinson point to a top speed for the 'HMS Yin Ping' of 17 knots which, if the ship had simply left Singapore and headed straight for Batavia (now Jakarta) - particularly if it had held to the coast of Sumatra would have made a lot of difference. It would have possibly arrived safely by late early 15 February as did the small, slow, coal burning auxiliary minesweeper 'HMS Scott Harley' which left early on the morning of 12 February, but whose captain disobeyed orders to hide up at islands during the day and simply kept steaming at the plodding 6 knots or so his ship could achieve.

### **Who were the survivors?**

One document (of two by Engineer Captain Chapman) in the UK Archives records that the group of men who were in the only 'boat' to be lowered, or hanging onto ropes trailing from it, and then taken by launch to Muntok during the night of 15/16 February, were;

- *Captain (E) R.P. Chapman, RN*
- *Lt P.H. Wilkinson, RNR.*
- *P.O.'s Simpson and McFarling*
- *AB's Anderson and Nicholls*
- *E.R.A Jones*
- *Sto's. Hodgson, McCarthy and Hughes*
- *Also 1 seaman, 2 marines and 13 Army or Airforce other ranks*

This means that there were at least 26 survivors – maybe more since author Colin Smith had a count of 32 survivors.

It depends whether Chapman was including Corporal Seddon and Marine Bentley (below) and any others in his report of 'men taken by launch to Muntok' ,since these two men independently made their way to Banka Island by swimming or floating with debris.

Lt Wilkinson also paid tribute to two of these survivors in his post War report;

*"... I wish to commend W.H. Anderson A.B. on the manner in which he bore himself after leaving Yin ping. His leg was broken and he had received a large number of shrapnel wounds. During the period that he was in the boat and after we had been rescued by R.A.F. launch 56 he did not once complain despite the fact he was obviously in great pain....:*

*-and also,*

*"... I should like to also bring to the attention of the Air Ministry the excellent behaviour of Corporal John Stanley Swingstone (sic - this is in fact John Stanley LIVINGSTONE, see entry below, and appears to be the result of handwriting or typographical error) R.A.F., without whose assistance I should never have been able to launch the boat, and who was directly responsible for the righting of the boat after it had been capsized..."*

Coincidentally some of the 'Yin Ping' survivors, who drifted or swam to shore away from the main group, became witnesses to the awful atrocity carried out by sadistic Japanese soldiers from the 229<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Imperial Japanese Army - the so called 'Tanaka Butai' who had carried out the rape and murder of British and Chinese nurses in Hong Kong on Xmas Eve 1941. Such a record is left by



Corporal Robert Henry Seddon, PLYX1717, Royal Navy, who, post War, stated in an affidavit to war crimes investigators into the execution on 16 February 1942 of up to 83 civilian women, men and teenagers, Australian Army nurses and servicemen (being survivors of the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' who had reached Radji Beach, Banka Island) the day after the 'Yin Ping' was sunk - that;

*"... I was manning a Lewis gun on the Yin Ping when it was sunk in the evening by a Japanese cruiser and destroyers. The date was about 14 Feb 42 off Banka Island... I swam alone towards the shore and about 24 hours later (about 5 pm the next day) I was about a hundred yards from the shore, I was in a delirious condition but was fit enough to swim without a life raft. I saw a number of people on the beach including Jap soldiers, English soldiers, some civilian women and some nurses. I did not see any children. ... The Japs appeared to be rounding them up and were pushing them with rifles with fixed bayonets. They sorted them into three rows on separate parts of the beach but close together. The party on the right mostly civilian women and some civilian men (apparently old men) were marched about a mile along the beach and disappeared. The other two groups turned to face the sea it looked as though they were ordered to by the Japs. The center group were all women mostly nurses. The left hand group were all men. After they turned I waved and shouted. One of the nurses saw me and waved to me, I thought she meant me to keep down and out of sight. Two or three men and women made a break for it into the water. One was shot but kept on swimming away from the beach to sea. Of the other two one was bayoneted on his waist..... The remaining men and women were trying to escape they were bayoneted and shot.... I was washed on to the beach and collapsed on the beach about two hundred yards along from the Japs... I was trying to see what was going on but was too weak to move. The japs had seen me, two of them (one of them the man with the sword) ... the Jap with the rifle and sword kicked me ... the one with the sword flicked me under both arms. I was too exhausted to move at all. ... I think they considered I was dead. They moved off along the beach. A few hours later I crawled up the beach to some fresh water and drank enough to get into the jungle [Seddon later that day came across L./Seaman Wilding from the 'HMS Li Wo' which had also been sunk and also a Malay sailor from that ship] ...and next morning all three of us returned to the beach and saw the bodies left as they had been killed ...[he also came across stoker Lloyd from the 'SS Vyner Brooke' who had been amongst those shot on the beach but who had swum out to sea and survived the massacre] ..."( source: file in Australian National Archives , Melbourne on War Crime at Radji Beach).*

There remains lack of clarity on how many men swam or floated independently to Banka Island and once there either hid in local villages with survivors from other ships, or were executed when captured by Japanese patrols or even specifically those who became POWs. It is the opinion of this researcher that some survivors from the 'HMS Ying Ping' would have been killed by two Japanese patrols which operating along the beaches of the north-western coast of Banka Island from 15 February 1942, with orders to kill all these landing on the Island. This was the fate met by men from other sunken ships such as the 'SS Tandjong Pinang', the 'SS Vyner Brooke', the 'SS Siang Wo' and the 'HMS Li Wo'.

Amongst the POWs in Muntok there were at least " ... 13 RAF AND Army... " men who had been on the 'HMS Yin Ping' since this is the number given by Engineer Captain Chapman – in fact 41 RAF POWs in Palembang and Muntok had a date of capture of 16 February and there were also another 16 naval ratings also with the same date of capture. These men will only ever be linked to the 'HMS Yin Ping' if their complete MI9 Liberation questionnaire is accessed.

## Who lost their lives?

Given that there were 76-758 people on board and about 26-32 known survivors, this tells us that some 45-50 people lost their lives in the attack by the Japanese warships, the sinking, struggling in the sea to reach land, or perhaps at the hands of Japanese patrols once they reached Banka Island.

It appears that the majority of these men will have been RAF plus several naval ratings—their identities remain unclear and they will be officially recorded as “Missing Presumed Killed”.

The answer may be revealed in the future as memoirs, letters, official documents etc are read in the context of better knowledge of events at Banka island.

Among those killed in the attack by the Japanese cruiser was “... the popular and energetic Captain Kenneth Atkinson, the ‘Captain of the Dockyard’ at the [Singapore] naval base, who had so yearned for his wife to join him. After leaving the base he became in effect Admiral Spooner’s chief of staff and left Singapore at the same time as him. On a slow moving tug called the ‘Ying Ping’ [sic]. They were sunk by a cruiser in the Bangka straits. Out of the seventy-eight on board, there were thirty-two survivors. One of them, who was with Atkinson on the bridge, remembered his last words as they watched the cruiser:” ...This may be our last moment”. And immediately after, ‘They’ve fired’.” (“Singapore Burning “by Colin Smith, p. 529).

In his official post War report Lt Wilkinson makes the statement;

*“... Only two members of the crew are unaccounted for i.e. A.B. Ellis and A.B. Walker. It is my opinion that these two ratings must be dead and I would request that their death be presumed.*

*In addition, one of the members of Capt. Atkinson’s staff, Yeoman of Signals Mogger [sic- in fact MOGFORD] was standing where the first salvo burst and was never seen again.*

*Capt. Atkinson was last seen by me in a dazed condition on the foredeck and after the ship sunk shortly afterwards no trace of him could be found.*

*Commander Douglas was very badly wounded and in actual fact, I believe he expired in my arms when I endeavoured to place him in a more comfortable position. I was in no position to ascertain the fact with any degree of certainty, but if he was not actually dead at this time, it was a physical impossibility for him to have survived after the ship sank a few minutes later...”.*

Engineer Captain Chapman’s report says” ... Lt Wilkinson informed me later that Commander Douglas was very severely wounded by the first shell, which exploded on the bridge and probably accounted for the remainder of Captain Atkinson’s staff who have not been seen since...”.

### **What happened after the survivors reached land?**

Most survivors were promptly taken prisoner once they reached Muntok – those in the launches captured by the Japanese were of course already prisoners.

Some other survivors from the 'SS Yin Ping' and other ships sunk around Banka Island had to swim to shore or paddle supported by debris from the sunken vessels.

Some of these were summarily executed by two Japanese patrols on the coast but some made it into the jungle where they held out for a few days, others hid in the village of Rambat (on the north coast) for up to three weeks.

Once they had all been picked up by Japanese troops the men were held at Muntok (in the Coolie Lines at Tinwinning 's business premises) before most were shipped to Palembang.

The largest group of POWs in Palembang were Royal navy and Merchant navy, but there were also large numbers of Army ( both British and Australian), Royal Marines and Royal Air Force.

If anyone has additions, deletions or corrections to this material it would be gratefully received in the interests of achieving a high degree of accuracy - would you please email Michael Pether at [mncpether@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mncpether@xtra.co.nz) who will copy all the organizations and individuals using this document in websites etc, with the updates. Alternatively, the telephone number is - New Zealand 09 - 4865754; or postal address of;

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**Thank you.**

### Sources:

- CWGC – Commonwealth war Graves commission website
- JM MM – the Malayans database list of Jonathan Moffatt.
- JM POW – the POW lists compiled for Muntok and Palembang by Jonathan Moffatt.

### Recreated Passenger and Crew list:

To date research has only identified 28 people who were on the 'HMS Yin Ping' – 12 survivors and 16 of those who lost their lives.

One reason is that many of those who lost their lives will be identified in official records as of the previous ship they were on (such as the 'HMS Prince of Wales' or 'HMS Repulse' ) or even just the Singapore shore base named 'HMS Sultan'. This is the same for POW and MI9 liberation questionnaire records where men often did not note the last ship they were aboard prior to capture.

Some of the other men who lost their lives may be just in the large group of servicemen whom the CWGC and British authorities simply do not know where they were at the time of death – and will have the coincidental 'Date of Death/ Missing Presumed Killed' as 15 February 1942 – the frequently used benchmark date being the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese.

Those identified so far (in green font are those who survived the sinking and in black those who lost their lives) are;

- **ANDERSON** – Able Seaman William Holm Anderson, C/JX201212, captured 14.2.42 (JM POW); it is a tribute to the fortitude of William Anderson that, in his post war report, the Commanding Officer of the ship, Lt Wilkinson, made the following statement *"... I wish to commend W.H. Anderson, A.B. on the manner in which he bore himself after leaving Yin Ping. His leg was broken and he had received a large number of shrapnel wounds. During the period that he was in the boat and after we*

*had been rescued by R.A.F. launch 56 he did not once complain despite the fact he was obviously in great pain..."* (report By Lt P.O.H Wilkinson, UK national Archives)

- **ATKINSON – Captain Thomas Kenneth Whitmore Atkinson**, was one of the brightest, most amenable high-achievers of the Royal Navy during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born on 26.1.02 in the Wakefield district, Yorkshire, the son of Corkett Wadsley Atkinson and Constance Mary Atkinson. As a teenager he attended Royal Naval colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth during 1915-18 and was appointed a Midshipman in 1919. He spent the post War years on a series of warships including 'HMS Warspite', 'HMS Versatile', and the battlecruiser 'HMS Repulse'. Appointed a Lieutenant in 1923 he joined the 'HMS Hood' until 1925 and then during 1926-35 attended navigation courses, was promoted to Lt. Commander in 1931, before becoming Navigation Officer on ships operating from Devonport and Portsmouth – including the aircraft carrier 'HMS Eagle' on the China Station and the Mediterranean. He was made a full Commander in 1934. Participation in further staff courses occurred in 1936 and by 1938 he was Navigating Officer aboard the cruiser 'HMS London'. During 1938-40 he was Executive Officer (Commander) of the battleship 'HMS Nelson' and during this time achieved the rank of captain. On 1 February 1941 he was appointed Captain of Dockyard, Deputy Superintendent and King's Harbourmaster of the mighty H.M. Dockyard, Singapore. He essentially was required to stay too long in Singapore before receiving orders to evacuate to Java and thereby joined the ill-fated 'HMS Yin Ping' on its last voyage with members of his immediate staff from the Naval base. Captain Atkinson was married to Winifred Mary Atkinson (nee Carothers) of Esthworth, Hampshire and had two sons and one daughter. (unithistories.com)
- **BENTLEY – Marine William Arthur Bentley**, PLY/X100010, Royal Navy was captured on 18 February so must have made his way to shore independently by swimming to Banka island in the same manner as Corporal Seddon. William Bentley was born in 1919 and had served on the 'HMS Repulse'. (JM POW Lists)
- **BONAR - BONAR H.J.T.** [Horatius John Thomson] BSc b.1900. Educated Merchiston Castle School and Edinburgh University. To Malaya 1924 as Assistant Conservator of Forests FMS. By 1940 Senior Assistant Conservator of Forests. Pte FMSVF. Lost at sea 15.2.42 on the bridge of the Ying Ping. Wife Mary and daughters Elizabeth, Patricia & Veronica evacuated on the Narkunda, arriving Fremantle WA, on 24.1.42 then to Victoria. (JM MM);
- **CHAPMAN – Engineer Captain Roland Paul Chapman**, Royal Navy, was born on 20.7.1897 in the Hereford district, Herefordshire. He entered the Royal Navy aged 15 years during 1912 and two years later 9 19140 was appointed a midshipman on 'HMS Hannibal' – serving throughout the war years on 'HMS Benbow', 'HMS Mignonette' (a sloop), and the destroyer 'HMS Christopher'. Appointed a Lieutenant post war he served on the torpedo boat destroyer 'HMS valentine' a before entering the Engineering College Greenwich in 1920 and after that the college at Kayham. He joined the battleship 'HMS Warspite' in 1921 and then the cruiser 'HMS Calcutta' in 1924 during which time he was promoted to Lt. commander. 1926 saw him back in the engineering field working at the Engineering Department at H.M. Dockyard at Chatham. In 1929 he was appointed Commander on the battleship 'HMS Rodney' , and then in 1930 back to the engineering department, Chatham before joining the cruiser 'HMS Diomedé' in 1933. He was appointed Engineering Inspector, Engineer – In – Chiefs Department, Admiralty in 1936 during which time he was made Captain

and five years later sent out to Singapore where, in December 1941 with the Japanese invading northern Malaya he took on the role Engineer Captain , H.M. Dockyard , just as the famous dockyard was becoming under attack from Japanese bombers and the pride of the Royal Navy, in the form of 'HMS Prince of Wales' and 'HMS Repulse' were about to join the annals of history.(unithistories.com). After the sinking of the 'HMS Yin Ping' he was captured on 16.2.42 and made a POW in Muntok. Presumably after moving as a POW to Palembang he was later in the 'Japan Party' which left from Palembang in 1942 (JM POW). Surviving this, his second war, Roland Chapman was then appointed Captain and Commanding Officer of the Royal Navy Training establishment in Cornwall and finally spent two years as ADC to the King of England during 1947-48. He retired in 1948 deep into the countryside in central Wales - far away from the sea upon which he had spent his life - and died at Evancoyd, Radnorshire on 4.1.59. (unit histories.com)

- **DOUGLAS** – we know from the records of Lt Wilkinson and Engineer Captain Chapman that Commander Douglas was very badly injured at the time of the attack and had no use of his arms or legs, so either died whilst being supported by Lt. Wilkinson or soon after when the ship sank. In any event he would not have survived the sinking and struggle to the boat in the sea. The official records of the Admiralty have him as 'Missing presumed Died' and the public record is Commander Berwick Maitland Douglas, Royal Navy, died 15.2.42, 'HMS Sultan'. (CWGC). Berwick Maitland Douglas was born on 2.5.1900 and as a boy attended the merchant navy training school on the 'HMS. Conway' (a 19<sup>th</sup> century wooden 'ship of the line' moored on the Mersey near Liverpool) between 1911- 13. Soon after graduating from the 'Conway' he was commissioned in 1918 as a Sub-Lt in the Royal Navy (Navy List 18.12.18), then a Lieutenant in 1921, after which he perhaps returned to the merchant navy world during peacetime. it is not until 1939 that he again appears, being appointed an Acting Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and then in 1942 being described as Lieut. Commander, R.N. (ret.). He appeared in Singapore at the Naval Base in 1939 as 'Passive Defence Officer, H.M. Naval Base, Singapore ' and during 1939-40 he was giving talks across the Malayan Broadcasting Service on topics such as 'The Naval Situation' apparently " ... the purpose of the talk will be to amplify, as far as possible, the somewhat bare admiralty statements concerning British naval activities ..." ( ST. 27.10.39). During 1940 he is in a group photo ( ST. 20.6.40) attending the 'Conway – Worcester' Old Boys Association dinner at the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore with some twenty other naval officers - poignantly amongst that group enjoying dinner and camaraderie was another fellow 'Conway' old boy by the name of Lt Basil Shaw, who would also lose his life escaping Singapore ; in his case whilst in command of another evacuation ship , the 'SS Tandjong Pinang' which had rescued 180 shipwrecked woman, children and babies from uninhabited Pom Pong island. Basil Shaw would actually make it to Banka Island after the cruel sinking of his ship by a Japanese warship and spending three days in the sea – only to be summarily executed along with one of his crew by Japanese soldiers a day after they crawled up the beach on Banka Island. It is not known whether Berwick Maitland Douglas was married or had children.
- **ELLIS** – Able Seaman Ellis; *"... Only two members of the crew are unaccounted for i.e. A.B. Ellis and A.B. Walker. It is my opinion that these two ratings must be dead and I would request that their death be presumed..."*. The only person with the surname Ellis who died around that time according to CWGC records is **Able Seaman Jack**

**Ellis, D/JX 201768, RN.** Who died on 15.2.42 and in official records is shown as being on the complement of the Singapore shore base 'HMS Sultan'. He was the son of Thomas and Maud Ellis, and the husband of Edna Ellis of Heckmondwike, Yorkshire (CWGC). Whether his family ever knew that Jack Ellis lost his life whilst serving on the 'HMS Yin Ping' is unknown.

- **HODGSON** – Stoker R. Hodgson, C/KX111674, captured 15.2.42, (JM POW); it was confirmed that he landed on Banka island with Chapman, Wilkinson etc. and he is listed as a POW at Muntok and then Palembang. It does not appear that he was one of the sailors from the 'HMS Prince of Wales' or 'HMS Repulse' (Force Z website).
- **HUGHES** – Stoker C Hughes, D/KX121359, captured 16.2.42 (JM POW); it was confirmed that he landed at Muntok, Banka Island with Chapman, Wilkinson etc. and he is listed as a POW at Muntok and then Palembang. It does not appear that he was one of the sailors from the 'HMS Prince of Wales' or 'HMS Repulse' (Force Z website).
- **HUNT – John Leigh Hunt**, civilian, died on 15.2.42 on 'HMS Yin Ping' (CWGC); in May 1946 the 'Straits Times' newspaper carried an article titled "Tracing of the Missing Continues' and that included "... Mr. J. Leigh Hunt , Works Department , Singapore reported still missing by C. – in C. Eastern Fleet on Apr.7 ,1942..." ( ST 29.5.46); there is of course the record left by Lt Partridge above which refers to Leigh Hunt being on the bridge of the 'Yin Ping' when the first shell struck and probably being blown overboard by that shell. Little is known about the life of John Leigh Hunt and the only reference to him in pre-war Singapore newspapers is that he was a Polo player and is recorded as riding 'Sweet Diana' in the Singapore polo Gymkhana in 1941 (ST. 28.9.41).
- **JONES** – 'E.R.A Jones' is recorded as landed at Muntok on Banka Island by launch with Chapman, Wilkinson etc. **E.R.A. 5 C John James Jones**, D/JX 73313, had been in the crew of 'HMS Repulse' and was captured on 16.2.42. He is listed as a POW in Muntok and Palembang (Force Z website and POW lists)
- **LIVINGSTONE/ 'SWINGSTONE'** – Although incorrectly recorded by name as 'Corporal John Stanley Swingstone, R.A.F' it is a tribute to the courage and resilience of **Corporal John Livingstone**, 952369, RAF, that, in his post War report , the Commanding Officer of the ship, Lt Wilkinson stated " ... I should also like to bring to the attention of the Air Ministry the excellent behaviour of Corporal John Stanley Swingstone, R.A.F. , without whose assistance I should never have been able to launch the boat, and who was directly responsible for the righting of the boat after it had been capsized ...". He was captured on 16.2.42 and became a POW in Muntok and Palembang (JM POW lists). No MI9 Liberation questionnaire is evident for John Livingstone.
- **McCARTHY** – 'Stoker McCarthy' is recorded as having landed by launch at Muntok, on Banka island on 16.2.42 with Chapman, Wilkinson etc. **Probably** the same person is **Able Seaman Denis McCarthy**, C/JX208187 ('C' represents him enlisting at Chatham naval base), born 1916 and captured on 18.2.42 (POW lists)
- **McFARLING** – 'Petty Officer McFarling' was originally the sailor on board the launch 'Eureka' referred to as being towed behind the 'HMS Yin Ping' and after the sinking he was landed by launch at Muntok on Banka island with Chapman, Wilkinson etc.; this is **Petty Officer Frederick Thomas McFarling**, D/J100627, RN, born on 8.4.04 and who enlisted in January 1921. His MI9 Liberation questionnaire adds that his address

was 54 Linthorpe Road, North Gosforth, Newcastle – on Tyne and that he was captured on 16.2.42. His POW experience saw him imprisoned at Muntok (Feb. 1942), Palembang (April 1942), Changi, Singapore (June 1945), and Kranji [No.2] on Singapore island (June 1945). Nothing else is known of the life of this very experienced Royal Navy Petty Officer except that, in 1947 he appears in 'The London Gazette' as having changed his name by Deed Poll to **Frederick Thomas McFarlane** and giving his occupation as 'Fish Fryer' and his address as 86 Great North Road, Gosforth, Northumberland.

- **MOGFORD/ 'MOGGER'** – 'Yeoman of Signals Mogger' is mentioned by Engineer Captain Chapman " ... *In addition, one of the members of Capt. Atkinson's staff, Yeoman of Signals Mogger was standing where the first salvo burst and was never seen again...*"; this was in fact **Yeoman of Signals James Winsor Mockford**, DJ50177 who died on 15.2.42 aged 41 years, and is recorded by the authorities as attached to Singapore shore base 'HMS Sultan', RN, he was the son of Joseph Thomas Mockford and Emma Eileen Mockford of Plymouth (CWGC) . James Mockford was born on 6.8.1900 at Stonehaven, Kincardine and had been on the 'HMS Repulse' (Force Z website). It is not known whether his family ever knew he had lost his life on the 'HMS Yin Ping' as a result of the spelling error on post war records.
- **NICHOLLS** – we know that '**Able Seaman Nicholls**' landed by launch at Muntok on Banka Island with Chapman, Wilkinson etc, but he does not appear on POW lists for the Muntok or Palembang camps. There is a record of an Able Seaman Thomas Nicholls, DJX 185563 having served on 'HMS Repulse' but there is no specific link between the two names
- **RITCHIE** – according to the record by Engineer Captain Chapman, 'Petty Officer Ritchie' was a member of the staff of Captain Atkinson, boarded the Yin Ping and was presumably with Capt. Atkinson when the first shell hit the bridge and killed all except Atkinson, Lt Wilkinson and Mrs Wilkinson. This is in fact **Petty Officer Leonard David Ritchie**, C/J 109940, aged 33 years and who died on H.M. Tug Yin ping, he was the son of David and Louisa Ritchie and the husband of Helena Elsie Ritchie of Rainham, Kent (CWGC)
- **SCOTT** – Signalman Arthur D Scott, A1521(NZD) from Auckland, New Zealand, MPK on 15.2.42 on the 'HMS Yin Ping' ([www.naval-history.net](http://www.naval-history.net)); also, **Signalman Arthur Donald Scott**, A/1521, age 26 years, Royal New Zealand Navy, son of Frederick and Claire (nee Freeman) Scott (CWGC and NZ War Graves project); the records of the Auckland War Memorial Museum record Arthur as being a Signalman in the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer reserve.
- **SEDDON** – **Corporal Robert Henry Seddon, PLYX1717**, Royal Marines [who swam all the way to shore on Banka island and became a witness to the murder of nurses, civilians and servicemen on Radji Beach] was born on 28.8.18. He recorded that there were 60 -70 personnel on board this tug when it was sunk by shellfire from a Japanese cruiser at 1700hrs the previous day – and he believed at that time that he was the only survivor. Whilst swimming in a life jacket to shore on 16 February 1942 he witnessed the atrocities taking place on Radji Beach and recorded in his affidavit (Australian National Archives, Melbourne) that he saw men and women being shot down and bayoneted " ...*a few did attempt to rush into the water but they were shot and killed before they were able to swim out of range ...*". He continues that he was washed ashore soon after and posed for dead – the same Japanese patrol who carried out the killings on Radji Beach searched and kicked him a few times but must



have believed he was dead and left him there. After spending the night in the jungle by the beach, the next morning he walked along the beach and says “... I searched around and found the bodies of 15 New Zealand and Australian Nursing Sisters, 15 British service personnel and 5 merchant seamen (presumably members of the crew). I walked further along the beach and found 2 more lifeboats grounded and nearby the bodies of 7 R.N. personnel. The latter included two officers and the whole party appeared to have been shot and bayoneted ...”. Robert Seddon was captured on 19 February and became a POW in Muntok, then as a POW in Palembang and survived to return to the UK. He was the husband of Mavis Seddon and they had three children. He died on 16 June 2003 and is buried at St Nicholas Churchyard, Haxey, Lincolnshire.

- **SILCOCK – Mechanic Second Class Robert Silcock**, D/KX83208, RN., age 27 years, died on 15.2.42 on H.M. Tug Yin Ping, the son of Peter and Emily Silcock of Oakworth, Yorkshire and husband of Irene Lilian Silcock of Peverell, Plymouth (CWGC and Force Z website). Robert Silcock had served on the ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ (Force Z website) and he was the mechanic referred to as being on the launch ‘Eureka’ being towed behind the ‘HMS Yin Ping’. He is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, panel 69, column 1.
- **SIMPSON – Petty Officer Charles Simpson**, is recorded as reaching Muntok, on Banka island by launch (Chapman record) and also being captured on 16.2.42 before becoming a POW in Muntok and Palembang (JM POW Lists). He does not appear on records for men who served on either the ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ or ‘HMS Repulse’ (Force Z website).
- **WALKER – Able Seaman Walker** “... Only two members of the crew are unaccounted for i.e. A.B. Ellis and A.B. Walker. It is my opinion that these two ratings must be dead and I would request that their death be presumed.” (Lt Wilkinson report). This is **Ordinary Seaman James Walker**, C/JX 262336, RN., aged 28 years, died on H.M. Tug Yin Ping, son of William and Margaret Jenkins walker, husband of Margaret walker of Balornock, Glasgow (CWGC)
- **WILKINSON – Alice Gwendoline Wilkinson** (nee Bradgate), wife of Lt Patrick Wilkinson, Commanding Officer of the “HMS Yin Ping”.
- **WILKINSON – (Commanding Officer of the ‘Yin Ping’) Lt. Patrick Ormond Howard Wilkinson**, MRNVR, was born on 11.9.12 at Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. He was educated at Melbourne Church of England Grammar School. Initially a tea planter in Ceylon he then became an Assistant Planter, Baradin Rubber Estate, Paloh, Johore [1940]. In July 1940 he enlisted in the SSRNVR and in November of that year, aged 28 years, he both was appointed Actg. Sub-Lt in the SSRNVR and married Alice Gwendolyn Bradgate at St Andrew’s Cathedral, Singapore. They held their wedding reception aboard the ship he was at that time serving on, in Singapore Harbour. After the having to endure the shock and horror the death of his wife Alice during the attack on the ship and then cope with the sinking of the ‘HMS Yin Ping’, Patrick firstly swam in the sea with a large group of other survivors before being picked up by a Japanese captured RAF launch and, wounded from shrapnel and no doubt in severe shock at losing his wife, being taken to the town of Muntok. After his capture on 16.2.42, Patrick was firstly a POW at Coolie Lines, Tinwinning, Muntok, Banka Island until March 1942; he was then moved to Chung Wha School, Palembang until September 1942 when he was moved again to another camp known as ‘O’ camp; in October 1943 he was taken to the camp at Mulo School,

Palembang and then in February 1944 to Sungei Ron; in May 1945 he was transferred with many others to the big Changi POW camp in Singapore until the Surrender by the Japanese in September 1945 .His Liberation questionnaire for an unknown reason gives his 'address' as " ...Casa Nara, Western Avenue, Branksome Park, Bournemouth ..." whereas it appears that his mother was still alive in Australia. He remarried and returned to Singapore in 1946. Patrick died 1976 at Esk, Queensland, Australia. (sources: drawn from multiple records supplied by Jonathan Moffatt, Patrick's niece Lorraine Hughes and including Patrick's MI 9 Liberation questionnaire).