

## 'HMS Fanling' (or 'HMS Fan Lin')

Sunk by gunfire in the Banka Straits on 16.2.42.

[Version 1.1.0; July 2019]

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

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

Literally any ocean-going vessel of any size remaining in Singapore harbour was ultimately enlisted by the authorities to evacuate people, under what had become almost constant bombing and machine gunning by Japanese planes. Singapore itself was ablaze, columns of black smoke rose thousands of feet in the air and the streets were littered with the 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 50 vessels 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 ships 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.

The military had also raised their efforts to evacuate skilled servicemen to Batavia in Java, to prepare for another stand against the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies, and amongst this group were some 100 highly skilled men of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. and REME (Royal Corps. Of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) and several contingents of RAF officers and other ranks.

At Collier Quay at the Singapore wharves (now part of the Fullerton Hotel) a small flotilla of modest sized vessels had been gathered to transport these RAOC specialists, other key army personnel and another group of very senior Navy and Airforce Officers to Java.

Amongst the smaller patrol vessels (and their Captains) were;

- 'Elizabeth' a modest sized launch - sometimes described as a 'tug' (Lt R.C. Beckwith, RN)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 310 (Lt. H. J. Bull, RNZNVR)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 311 (Lt. E. J. H. Christmas, RANVR)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 432 (Lt. L.H. Herd, RNZNVR)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 433 (Lt. Cdr. H. Campey, RANVR)
- **'Fanling' a modest sized customs launch converted for war use (Lt. John Pierce Upton, RNZNVR, and Lt. Ralph Crossley Ripley, RCNVR)**
- 'Pulo Soegi', a small coastal merchant vessel (Lt. A. J. Martin, RNZNVR)

Of the 50 or more vessels leaving in the 'last window of opportunity' (as many believed) only 10 would make it to safety. The other 40 ships would be sunk, run aground, or captured at sea ( in fact 25 ships solely around Banka Island off the east coast of Sumatra) 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 fifty 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.

### **'HMS Fanling':**

The story of the last voyage of the small patrol vessel known as 'HMS Fanling' - presumably named after the area of Hong Kong by the same name - suffers from the fact that there were few survivors of its sinking and even fewer records on the event and the crew and passengers on board.

The nature and size of the vessel is not mentioned in either contemporary Singapore or Malayan newspapers or, to the researcher's knowledge, recorded in the files of the UK Archives - it is only ever referred to as a launch or patrol vessel and the post war letter (below) from Sir Shenton Thomas to the wife of the officer in command of 'Fanling' describes it as an "... *ex Customs launch...*". No photos have been located. However, the fact that the two naval officers in command of the vessel were RNVR and only 28 years of age and 26 years of age, suggests that this was a modest sized vessel. To give a perspective, research shows that in 1936 the boat builder Thornycroft's in Singapore were building two launches for the Customs Department - one of 50 feet and another of 60 feet.

Given that we are told later in this narrative that 'Fanling' was carrying a 4 pound gun on its foredeck, it seems most likely that it was about 60 feet in length - since a smaller vessel would not have been sufficiently robust to carry a gun of that size and handle the recoil. It seems more likely however that the gun was in fact smaller than stated - perhaps a 3 pounder?

The earliest reference found of 'Fanling' is in the personal papers of Lt. D.E. M. Fiennes, RNVR, (ref. Imperial War Museum files) where he mentions in his memoirs that he was on the patrol vessel

'HMS Fanling' during June – October 1941. It is then mentioned again on the website [www.naval-history](http://www.naval-history) that on 6.12.41 "... Patrol launches 'Hung Jao' and Fanling' commenced patrol of east coast rivers...". Then later that month – after the Japanese invasion of Malaya – it is stated that on 25.12.41 'Fanling', 'Hung Jao', ML310, ML311, 'Kudat' and two 72 foot MLs [researcher note: probably HDML 1062 and HDML 1063] were part of patrols on the west coast of Malaya for defences against enemy landings.

### **'Fanling' escape from Singapore:**

It is also mentioned in Report No.148 in the 'Malayan Research Bureau' records, being a list prepared by one 'Lt Milne, RNVR,' wherein he states under the section "Motor and Diesel launches", that one of the vessels which escaped Singapore was "...Fanling, Captain Upton, New Zealand, RNVR. Fitted up for use for RNVR in Singapore...".

The very knowledgeable Captain David Nelson of the Bureau of Record and Enquiry, Changi POW camp, Singapore recorded in his book 'The Story of Changi' that 'Fan Lin' "...Left Singapore 13.2.42. Sunk by gunfire Bangka Straits 16.2.42. passengers estimated 47 of which only 3 known survivors, including Lt-Col. A.H. Long, 2<sup>nd</sup> (?) Rajputs. Stoker D. Kerr ex 'Fan Lin' reports 3 survivors his dinghy – himself, Andrews, A.B. and Basham, A.B., picked up by Lt. Col Scott, RAOC., in junk. Japanese in a junk opened fire so all jumped overboard and swam ashore, getting separated in jungle. Kerr sailed for Java in Javanese fishing boat. Intercepted by Japanese M.L. and taken prisoner. Landed Bantong Parek, 90 miles from Batavia, 6 weeks later taken to Batavia. See 'Elizabeth'...".

[Researcher Note: This story of the surviving naval ratings bears an uncannily close resemblance to the account given by author Rohan Rivett in his book 'Behind Bamboo' – wherein he talks of escaping from Banka Island after the beaching there of the 'SS Siang Wo' and later coming across a group of men down the coast towards the south end of Sumatra whose 'MTB' had been sunk. They included a New Zealand Officer, a Colonel of Engineers and two naval ratings from the 'HMS Repulse'. Previous research has suggested that these men came from the HMML 311 and the New Zealand officer was Lt Ted Staples, RNZNVR.]

In another record ( source : National Archives of New Zealand Auckland Office: BBAE series 1570, box 715, record 460/1946 – being Probate Archives), the following letter was<sup>1</sup> sent to Lt John Pierce Upton's wife, Mrs M. H. Upton by the Naval Secretary, Naval Office, Wellington, New Zealand on 25 March 1946;

*" ... **Death of Lieutenant Upton.** In command of ex Customs launch 'FANLING' left Singapore with a party under Brigadier Aird-Smith, comprising 6 other officers and a few British NCOs and Indian other ranks (all being ex-members of Lt. Gen. Heath's staff) who had been instructed to get away from Singapore if possible.*

*Left night of Feb. 15<sup>th</sup> [ sic] 1942. At 6.30 a.m. on 16<sup>th</sup> found they had steamed into a Jap. Fleet of 1 cruiser, 2 destroyers and other smaller craft. Upton decided to go straight on in the hopes that his boat would not be noticed. Japs fired shot across their bows whereupon Upton stopped and brought his solitary gun, a 4-pounder, into action. 'FANLING' was sunk by H.E. and incendiaries about 15 miles from land.*

*These facts are taken from a letter dated July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1942 to Lt. Gen. Heath from Lt Col. R.H. Long who made Banka Island just before dawn on Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> after being nearly 48 hours in the water, swimming with a lifebelt. He is believed to be the only survivor.*

*The enemy made no attempt to pick up any who survived the shelling. Upton's very gallant action in going down fighting against impossible odds deserves to be placed on record.*

*(sgd) Sir Shenton Thomas, Governor of Straits Settlements and High Commissioner Malay States.*

Since it left Singapore on 13 February and was sunk three days later we can assume that it had followed general instructions for evacuation vessels and spent the daylight hours of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February sheltering amongst the myriad of islands of the Rhio Archipelago between Singapore and its final resting place in the Banka Straits off the eastern coast of Sumatra.

In this context, the [www.naval-history](http://www.naval-history) website again tells us that 'Rosemary' and 'Fanling' were sighted near the Durian Strait on 14 February by a Lt Bevis on 'HMS Malacca'. It is relevant, in the context building up a picture of the size and shape of 'Fanling'; that 'Rosemary' was a Straits Settlements Customs launch of 48 feet in length built by Thornycroft (Singapore) and one of eleven Customs' launches of a similar size in Singapore by 1939.

#### **Who was on board the 'HMS Fanling':**

Given that Captain Nelson recorded the vessel was carrying some 47 'passengers' we can speculate that it was a craft of at least 60 – 70 feet in length, and this in turn allows us to guess that it would have carried a complement of Officers and crew totalling about 12 or more. So, a total complement of at least 47 men and - depending on how Captain Nelson's record is interpreted - up to 60 persons on board for its last voyage.

We know the names of (probably) the only two naval officers on board – 28-year-old Lt John Pierce Upton, RNZNVR, who was in command and 26-year-old Tpy. Lt. Ralph Crossley Ripley, RCNVR. They were both university graduates – Upton in Law and Ripley in Commerce – in civilian life.



**Sub-Lieutenant J. P. Upton**, of Auckland, missing on active service.



Tpy. Lt. R.C. Ripley. RCNVR. Of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

- together with crew members, Royal Navy Able Seamen Stanley Andrew, Walter Basham, and Gilbert Pearce (the latter transferred from the launch 'Elizabeth' to 'Fanling whilst in passage between Singapore and the Banka Straits). Stoker David Kerr, RN was also on board. All these men – except Upton – had previously been on either 'HMS Repulse' or 'HMS Prince of Wales' so were not long-term crew of 'HMS Fanling' suggesting that they had taken the place of some local Malay seamen from the MRNVR. No doubt however there would have been other Malay sailors of the MRNVR also on board.

This leaves something like ten men from the crew unidentified – perhaps other ratings drafted in from the complements of 'Repulse' and 'Prince of Wales' and several Malay crew from MRNVR – both groups comprise a large number of men who lost their lives during the evacuation and tend to be simply listed as having been attached to Royal Navy shore base 'HMS Sultan'.

From a letter written in March 1946 by the Governor of Singapore, Sir Shenton Thomas, to the Naval Secretary, Wellington, New Zealand (and forwarded to the mother of Lt John Pierce Upton, RNZNVR) we learn that the passengers on board the 'HMS Fanling' comprised "... a party under Brigadier Aird-Smith, comprising 6 other officers and a few British NCOs and Indian other ranks (all being members of Lt. Gen. Heath's staff) who had been instructed to get away from Singapore if possible...". Lt Gen. Lewis Heath had been Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Corps in Malaya.

This means either 47 passengers of this Army composition were on board or, perhaps more likely, they totalled 35 passengers if the 'total' on board was 47. Interestingly in the book 'Spotlight on Singapore' by Denis Russell – Roberts he shows the statistics as "... 3 survivors and 44 missing". In fact, here were 4 survivors – the view of this researcher is, therefore, that there was more likely to have been 43 other men to be accounted for; 9 or 10 more crew and 33-34 officers, NCOs and Indian other ranks.

Whilst this researcher believes that any remaining - yet to be located - personal papers left by Lt. Col. Robert Herbert Long, 7/6th Rajputs, who was one of the "other officers" mentioned by Sir Shenton Thomas, probably contains the names of the other unidentified five Army officers (and possibly one or more NCOs), all we know at this point is that Lt. Gen. Brigadier Aird – Smith, Major S.K. Ghose and Lt. Col. Long and were on board – the first two lost their lives as a result of the sinking and the latter survived to spend the remainder of the war as a Japanese POW.

#### **Where was 'HMS Fanling' sunk:**

"Fanling' appears to have left Singapore on the night of 13 February giving it some 60 hours before it was attacked in the Banka Straits.

In his book 'The Story of Changi' David Nelson leaves a key piece of information under the entry for the launch 'Elizabeth' "... Survivors from 'Fan Lin' report 'Elizabeth just behind: saw her ordered alongside destroyer, 20 minutes later destroyer hauled off and sank her by gunfire Fate of crew unknown...". The import of this is that it tells us that 'the Fanling' was sunk after 'Elizabeth' and we know from survivors of the latter vessel that 'Elizabeth' was sunk "...south of Banka island in the Banka Straits ..." at about 7.00 am.

Then we have Sir Shenton Thomas' account (above)" ... At 6.30 a.m. on 16<sup>th</sup> found they had steamed into a Jap. Fleet of 1 cruiser, 2 destroyers and other smaller craft. Upton decided to go straight on in the hopes that his boat would not be noticed. Japs fired shot across their bows whereupon Upton stopped and brought his solitary gun, a 4-pounder, into action. 'FANLING' was sunk by H.E. and incendiaries about 15 miles from land...".

Sadly, against a Japanese cruiser and two destroyers the little vessel and its '4 pounder' would have inflicted little or no damage and as described the high explosive shells and incendiary tracer bullets from the Japanese warships would have destroyed the wooden hull of 'Fanling' within a couple of minutes.

Based on previously researched accounts of other similar sized wooden patrol boats, the first shells from the Japanese cruiser would have probably killed most men in the engine room and many of the Army personnel standing on the open deck of 'Fanling'.

So, from the position of 'Elizabeth' when it sank, together with the record by Sir Shenton Thomas, we can determine that "Fanling" was sunk south in the Banka Straits and after the cruiser and destroyers left the scene of the sinking of 'Elizabeth' - making the time of the sinking of 'Fanling' at about 0800 hrs on 16 February 1942.

A post war newspaper article about the search for a casualty, Major Sushil Ghose, also states that the 'Fanling' was sunk "...ten miles south of Tanjong Kelian...".

The letter from Sir Shenton Thomas via the Naval Office in New Zealand states that it was 15 miles from land – but whether that was from Banka Island or the Sumatran mainland is unknown. The Banka Straits varies in width between these two pieces of land from as little as ten miles up to as much as 50 miles.

### **Casualties and Survivors:**

As with other small patrol vessels such as 'Elizabeth' which were also sunk on 16 February 1942 and those sunk the previous day (15 February) - such as 'Pulo Soegi', HMML 433 and HMML 311 in the Banka Straits - it would have been very feasible for many survivors with lifejackets from 'Fanling' to make land on either the shores of Banka Island or on the shores of Sumatra around the Moesi (now Musi) River.

In reality the only 'known' survivors were Lt Col Robert Long who was captured three days after the sinking and the three naval ratings - Kerr, Basham and Andrew – who were captured several weeks later, hundreds of kilometres away either off the coast of Sumatra and not far from Java (as recorded by Able Seaman Stanley Andrew), which they had managed to reach by early March 1942.

We are also told by Captain David Nelson that Stoker David Kerr survived the sinking with another two crewmen in his dinghy, suggesting some time to order the 'abandon ship' - it seems very likely that there were multiple more survivors!

The probability that all 43 unaccounted for men from 'Fanling' were killed by gunfire from the Japanese destroyers is low – research into similar sinkings in the area has shown that at least a third of those on board (say 15 men) would have survived the shelling and made it into the sea – some of these would have been wounded, but others were probably not and they were generally fit men. We know of the deaths of two passengers – Lt Gen Brigadier Aird-Smith, aged 49 years and Major Sushil Ghose, aged 37 years – and three officers and crew Lt Upton aged 28 years and Lt Ripley aged 26 years and Able Seaman Andrew.

So, we are left with something like ten unexplained casualties – mainly relatively fit younger men who appear to have been wearing lifejackets in warm seas. Strong sea currents were a real challenge for all survivors of ships sunk around Banka island, but many women and men made it to the Island's shores from other vessels which were just as far from land as the 'Fanling'.

As with the other small vessels mentioned the 'unexplained casualties' from the crew and passengers are those who probably made it to the shores of Banka island and were summarily murdered on the beaches - as we now know occurred with Lt Arthur Martin, RNZNVR, and Lt Stephen Day, SSRNVR, of the patrol vessel 'Pulo Soegi' when they reached the western coast of Banka Island at a place referred to as 'Radji Beach' and were amongst the 80 men and women (including 21 Australian nurses) who were executed by the Japanese on 16 February 1942 as a conscious military order and action.

Insofar as Major Sushil Ghose, a newspaper article – presumably post war - quoted on [www.unithistories.com](http://www.unithistories.com) published the following poignant plea “... *The only reported survivor of the vessel was Lt. Col. R.H. Long, who last saw Major Ghose swimming in the sea. A search for Major S.K. GHOSE should be made in the Island of Banka and also in the S.E. coast of Sumatra, entrance to the Straits of Banks[sic] .... If he drifted east from the entrance to the Banka Straits he would reach some place on the east coast of Sumatra, about 50 miles east of the mouth of the Sungei Lalang river and 70 miles north of Palembang and 60 miles north-east of Sekayil towns: search should be made there ....He may have been disabled by wounds, and if still alive may be living with the native villagers and fishermen, out of touch with Allied Government authorities, or may have lost his memory. Major S.K. GHOSE was then 9 in February 1942) aged 37 ears, six feet tall, of athletic medium build and the brown Hindu complexion, using spectacles two full plates of false teeth...Information about him will be received and the expenses of inquiry will be paid by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Kt., C.I.E., P.255 Lake Terrace, Calcutta...*”.

The key point is that Major Ghose – described as “...*aged 37 years, six feet tall, of athletic medium build...*” was last seen swimming in the sea – and no mention of him being injured.

A 1946 ‘Straits Times’ newspaper article on the same missing Major Ghose (see entry below for Major Ghose) adds weight to this view since it was thought during the war that he was “...*originally to be somewhere on the Banka coast...*”.

We know that the murder by Japanese troops of survivors of other vessels sunk in and around Banka Island was ongoing from the time of the Japanese landing on the island on 15 February until at least a week later – such as Lt Basil Shaw, RNZNVR, Captain of the ‘SS Tandjong Pinang’ who together with one of his crew members was executed south of Tanjong Ular ( Oelar) as late as 20 February 1942.

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

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.



**Sources:**

- CWGC
- Hamiltonnaval.ca
- <http://archive.org/stream/easteractaridle1946>
- 'Papers Past', New Zealand
- Singapore National library online archive
- 'The Story of Changi' by Captain David Nelson.
- [www.naval-history](http://www.naval-history)
- [www.untihistories.com](http://www.untihistories.com)

## Reconstructed Passenger and Crew Lists:

### Crew:

- **ANDREW – Able Seaman Stanley Andrew**, D/SSX 25316, Royal Navy, ex ‘HMS Prince of Wales’. His MI9 questionnaire and the camp records of Palembang POW camp tell us that he was born on 31.8.20 And enlisted on 12.4.37 with his wife’s address given as 133 King Street, South Elmsall, Nr. Pontefract, Yorks., England. He was serving on “... HMS Fanling Gunboat” and was captured “...off coast of Sumatra 38 miles from Batavia,2.3.42...”. He was a POW in Palembang camps from 1.4.42 until 24.9.45 with his Camp leaders being Comd. Reid, RN: Col. Hill I.A. OBE; and Capt. Corry, Malayan Civil Service.
- **BASHAM – Able Seaman Walter James Basham**, P/JX 276497, Royal Navy. The MI9 questionnaire (kindly supplied via Keith Andrews of COFEPOW) states that he was born on 3.12.1905 and enlisted in 1941. His address was 61 Layard Road, Bermondsey, London. SE16. He misspells the name of the vessel he was on as ‘Van Ling HMS’ and recorded that he was captured 1.3.42 Singapore (at sea). Before being imprisoned in Palembang Sumatra from March 1942 until September 1945 with Cdr. Reid, RN., as camp Leader. In the records of Palembang Camp, he gives his home address as 9 Mussington Road, Bermondsey. SE16.
- **KERR – Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class David Kerr**, D/KX 90605, Royal Navy, ex ‘HMS Repulse’, Java POW. MI9 Liberation Questionnaire not yet found.
- **PEARCE – Able Seaman Gilbert Frank Pearce**, DJX 206321, Royal Navy, ex ‘HMS Repulse’. Gilbert Pearce transferred from the launch Elizabeth en route from Singapore to the ‘Fanling’. Also “... *Able Seaman Gilbert Frank Pearce, DJX 206321, Royal Navy, died 16.2.42 aged 26 years, ‘HMS Sultan’, son of Frank and Kate Pearce of Winterslow, Wiltshire. Also commemorated on the Plymouth naval memorial, panel 66, Col. 2...*”. (CWGC).
- **RIPLEY – Tpy. Lt. Ralph Crossley Ripley RCNVR**, ex ‘HMS Prince of Wales’. His old school wrote the following during the War – remarkably affectionate and inspiring words “... *On January 14<sup>th</sup> of this year, final word was announced in Ottawa that Lieut. R. C. Ripley, RCNVR., must be presumed to have died on February 16, 1942, in the sinking of ‘HMS Fanling’ by Japanese warships in Bangka Strait, which lies between Sumatra and Bangka Island. Ralph was known and loved by a very wide circle of Old Boys and friends of Ridley and of graduates of the University of Toronto. We know that all will feel a deep sense of personal loss at the definite nature of this information. He enlisted in the spring of 1940 and left Toronto in August that year. After having trained in Canada and England, he received a commission and in May 1942, was attached to ‘HMS Prince of Wales’. He was in the latter on the occasion of the Atlantic meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt and continued to be in her company until she was sunk in the following*

December. He was rescued and taken to Singapore, where he was attached to the auxiliary vessel 'HMS Fanling'. She was engaged in putting troops in the inlets in the West Coast of Malaya and far north as Penang. This work was completed in early February and Ralph's father received word of his having been safe three days before the fall of Singapore. Since then there has been no further word of him. Ralph was at Ridley, in the Upper School. From 1929 to 1933. In his last year, he was a prefect and winner of the Mason Gold Manliness Medal. He was a member of the football team for two years, the hockey team for three, and one year captain, the cricket team for three, and one year captain, and the basketball team for one year. At the University of Toronto, he graduated fourth in the C. & F. course with the degree of B. Com. He played Junior, Intermediate and Senior rugby for the University and Junior and Senior hockey. In 1936 he toured England with the Hon. W.D. Matthews' Canadian cricket team. In 1937 he entered the Canada Life Assurance Company in Toronto. He who lived so full a life died in his 26<sup>th</sup> year. The outline of his life bespeaks the man. Rarely, if ever, have Ridley, and Canada experienced a greater loss than the death of Ralph Ripley...". We know from [www.unithistories](http://www.unithistories) that Ralph Ripley was commissioned as Temporary Sub Lieutenant on 31.12.40 and Temporary Lieutenant some time late 1941. The official record is "... Lt. Ralph Crossley Ripley, RCNVR, died 16.2.42 aged 26 years, 'HMS Fanling', son of Ralph Crossley Ripley and Janet Lamont Ripley of Hamilton, Ontario. Also commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 8...". (CWGC).

- UPTON – Lieutenant John Pierce Upton, RNZNVR.** John Pierce Upton was born on 14 April 1913 at Remuera, Auckland, New Zealand, the only son of Mr. Percy Henry Upton and Mrs. Florence Sarah Nihil Upton of 67 Remuera Road, Remuera, Auckland. He was an old boy of King's College, Auckland and a member of the Auckland Operatic Society. In 1937 he graduated in law from Auckland University and immediately travelled to England before joining the firm of Russell McVeagh as a solicitor. He was also a member of the Royal, New Zealand Yacht Squadron and an experienced sailor, being a member of the 'A' Class keeler "Waitangi" on Auckland Harbour ('New Zealand Herald' 18 4.42). In October 1940 he married Marion Henderson Frater (1921 – 2006) at St Mark's Church, Remuera. They had no children. John Upton volunteered for naval service and left for Singapore the following month (November 1940) to serve in Coastal defence craft. The official record is "... Lt John Upton Pierce, RNZNVR, died on 16.2.42 aged 28 years, 'HMS Fanling', son of Percy Henry and Sarah Henderson Nihill Upton; husband of Marion Henderson Upton of Remuera..." (CWGC).

#### Passengers:

- AIRD-SMITH – "...Lt. Gen. Brigadier William Aird-Smith, 6<sup>th</sup> Rajputana Rifles and Commands and Staff, General Staff. Twice Mentioned in Despatches. Died 17.2.42 aged 49 years, son of Thomas and Janet Aird-Smith; husband of Dorothy Edith Aird-Smith of Longport Somerset. Also commemorated on the Singapore memorial Col.144..."** (CWGC). William Aird-Smith was born in 1893 and mobilised into the Indian Army Reserve of Officers during the 1914-18 War and by 1918 had become a Lieutenant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Rajputana Rifles, Indian Army. He was steadily promoted to Staff Captain in India in 1924; Staff captain 3<sup>rd</sup> Jhelum Infantry Brigade in 1930; Brigade Major, 3<sup>rd</sup> Jhelum Infantry Brigade in 1931; Deputy Assistant Quarter Master General in India in 1936; General Staff Officer, Lucknow District in 1937 and

Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (India) in 1940. He married Dorothy Edith Bruche, daughter of Major General and Mrs J.H. Bruche of Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, Australia. In 1935 Dorothy Aird – Smith was in India but gave her home address as ‘Waimea’, Davidson Street, South Yarra, Melbourne. By 1941 he was deputy Assistant Adjutant general, 11th Indian Division, Malaya and it is in this role that he was selected with the other members of Lt. Gen. Heath’s Staff to escape Singapore. It is notable, in the context of the circumstances of his death after the sinking, that the date of death of William Aird-Smith is one day after the sinking of the ‘HMS Fanling’ suggesting he was known by another survivor to have died at sea or on land – possibly Banka Island if Lt. Col. Long was the witness... .

- GHOSE – Major Sushil Kumar Ghose**, IA/422, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Regiment, Indian Army. Sushil Ghose was clearly an exceptional man and soldier. Born on 4.1.1906 he passed out of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst on 4.2.1926 ( *“...the first citizen of the then much larger Bengal to get the King’s Commission...”* quote from “The Story of the INA” by Col. Niranjan Singh Gill) and immediately became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on the Unattached List of the Indian Army. He was commissioned on 28.4.1927 into the Indian Army and by 1928 was a full Lieutenant. He was made captain in 1935, A/Major on 5.5.1941 and T/Major on 5.8.1941. He was based in Singapore from at least the beginning of 1940 because his name appears in the ‘Straits Times’ (18.1.40) along with others as a guest at a dinner hosted by Mr & Mrs S.C. Goho in honour of Lt. Col. D. Stuart of the Indian Army. In May 1941 he is recorded in the ‘Morning Tribune’ (5.8.41) winning the doubles competition of the ‘All Malaya Indian Tennis Tournament’ in partnership with a Captain J.K. Ghousle. During the invasion of Malaya and Singapore Major Ghose was one of the HQ staff of General Lewis Heath, 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Brigade, and we are told by the Governor of Singapore in a post war letter from Sir Shenton Thomas that it was a group of officers and NCOs from that staff who boarded the ‘Fanling’. In July 1944 Mrs Sudha Ghose, wife of Major Ghose (and daughter of historian Jadunath Sarkar), and of the address 1 Circular Road, Debra Dun, sent a radio message on the ‘All India Radio Message Service’ at Simla under the system broadcasts to Prisoners of War in Malaya *“... All is well here with us and at Mymensingh. Wireless your health...”* – no reply was forthcoming. After the war a newspaper article, now quoted on [www.unithistories.com](http://www.unithistories.com), published the following poignant plea *“... A MISSING BRITISH INDIAN ARMY OFFICER – MAJOR S.K. GHOSE, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Regiment (5<sup>th</sup> Battalion), last employed as Deputy Assistant Adjutant general in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Corps in Malaya ( Under General Lewis M. Heath), embarked at Singapore at 2 pm, the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1942 on board the Motor Launch Peeling[sic] and sailed for Java. About 7 o’clock in the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> February, this launch ran into a Japanese convoy at the entrance to the Banka Straits and was shelled by a Japanese cruiser and sunk. The only reported survivor of the vessel was Lt. Col. R.H. Long, who last saw Major Ghose swimming in the sea. A search for Major S.K. GHOSE should be made in the Island of Banka and also in the S.E. coast of Sumatra, entrance to the Straits of Banks[sic] .... If he drifted east from the entrance to the Banka Straits he would reach some place on the east coast of Sumatra, about 50 miles east of the mouth of the Sungei Lalang river and 70 miles north of Palembang and 60 miles north-east of Sekayil towns: search should be made there ....He may have been disabled by wounds, and if still alive may be living with the native villagers and fishermen, out of touch with Allied Government authorities, or may have lost his memory. Major S.K. GHOSE was then 9 in February 1942) aged 37 years, six feet tall, of athletic medium build and the brown Hindu complexion, using spectacles two full plates of false teeth...Information about him will be received and the expenses of inquiry will be paid by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Kt., C.I.E., P.255 Lake*

*Terrace, Calcutta...". A 1946 'Straits Times' newspaper article on the missing Major Ghose (see entry below for Major Ghose) adds weight to this view since it was thought during the war that he was "...originally to be somewhere on the Banka coast...". Post war the 'Malaya Tribune' 5.9.46 carried the following article "... A British Indian Army officer, now on the missing list and for who a strenuous search is being made at present throughout China after an unsuccessful search in Java. – Major S.K. Ghose, 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Regiment – left Singapore aboard the motor launch 'Fanling' which was sunk off the Straits of Banka, about seven miles south of Tanjong Kelian on Feb.16 1942. He was believed originally to be somewhere on the Banka coast. Major Ghose is 40 years of age and the son – in -law of Sir Jadunath Sarkar...". The official record is "...Major Sushil Kumar Ghose, IA/422, 5<sup>th</sup> Btn. 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab regiment, died 13 February 1942 [researcher: this is the date the 'Fanling' left Singapore and there would have been a record by someone who last saw Major Ghose on that date] Son of Rai Bohadur Saroda Charan Ghose of Mymensingh, Pakistan; husband of S. Ghose of Calcutta, India. Also remembered on the Singapore Memorial, Col.181..." (CWGC).*

- **LONG – Lt. Col. Robert Herbert Long**, 7/6<sup>th</sup> Rajputana Rifles and Corps HQ, captured 19.2.42 when as a POW he gave his NOK details as Mrs. R. Long, c/- Lloyds Bank, Calcutta. His MI9 Liberation questionnaire (supplied by Keith Andrews, COFEPOW) stated that he was born on 20 July 1905, that he served in "... 2 Rajput then AQMG, 3 Ind Corps..." and also that he was in "Malaya Command". He gave his address as 15 Eltham Park Gardens, London. SE19. He stated that he was captured at "... Pangkal Pinang Banka NEI...". He was awarded the OBE in 1951 as 'Special List ex Indian Army'. In recent years his grandson ('Oakvillian' on 17.8.10) on [www.talkmorgan.com](http://www.talkmorgan.com) said that Robert Long was 'deeply troubled' by what he had been through during the war and had died in 1970 as the result of a car accident ( or perhaps not an accident). **For future research** it is noted that Robert Herbert Long recorded, in a four-page article in the 'Rajputana magazine', his account of the life and death of Lt Gen Aird-Smith.
  - **SINGH** – for the purposes of completeness and retaining a link for future research it is noted that amongst the group of senior Indian officers selected for the escape party just prior to the Surrender was **Major K. Bahadur Singh, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Kumaon Regiment** – we know he escaped at the same time and his vessel was sunk and he became a POW and was returned to Singapore. Whether he was on the 'Fanling' is unknown (source is book "The Story of the INA" by Col. Naranjan Singh Gill).
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