

RAF Auxiliary 'Aquarius'

Sunk near Pulau Tjebia/PulauTujuh near Banka Island

On 15 February 1942.

[Version 1.1.10: July 2019]

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

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

Literally any ocean-going vessel of any size remaining in Singapore harbour was at this point enlisted by the authorities to evacuate as many people as possible, under what by then 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 craft like the "SS. Tandjong Pinang" (which at 97 feet only just qualified in the definition for a 'ship') and Royal Navy patrol launches of 70 feet and upwards in length – were assembled to leave as a convoy during the 48-hour period of 11 – 13 February 1942.

The naval ships, apart from a couple of RN and RAN 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.

Of the 50 or so ships leaving 'in the last window of opportunity' - as many anticipated - only 10 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 memorial document on one of the vessels 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.

RAF Auxiliary vessel 'Aquarius':

Captain David Nelson (who compiled a huge amount of research on missing personnel whilst working with the 'Bureau of Record and Enquiry' in Changi POW camp, Singapore during the war) in his book 'The Story of Changi' recorded "... *Aquarius* – left Singapore 10.2.42. Bombed and sunk. Only 3 known survivors picked up by M.L. 310 and died later Pulau Jeddia (Pulau Tujoh group) ...".



Photo: Royal Air Force Auxiliary 'Aquarius'

The disappearance of the 'Aquarius' has always been accompanied by an element of mystery, and confusion – firstly because there are only three known survivors of its sinking and they all perished on an isolated island a few weeks after reaching land; and also because there appears to have been an American merchant ship in Singapore by the same name which may have departed during the same week of February 1942 and which reached safety.

What was the 'Aquarius'?

The 'Aquarius' was a unique vessel and its early story is summarised in the 'Easter 2014' magazine of the 'RAF Butterworth and Penang Association' magazine "... RAFA Aquarius. Aircraftman Shaw, more popularly known as 'Lawrence of Arabia', was sent to Northwich in Cheshire in early 1934 to take a leading role in acceptance trials of a small cargo vessel purchased by the RAF. Intended for use as a flying boat support vessel in the Far East, RAFA Aquarius sailed for Plymouth with Shaw on board before proceeding to sail to Seletar, arriving on the 28th May 1934. A/C Shaw didn't travel to Singapore on the Aquarius as Lord Trenchard had put a ban on him leaving the country while serving with the RAF. RAFA Aquarius was sunk in the Banka Strait in February 1942 by Japanese aircraft ...".

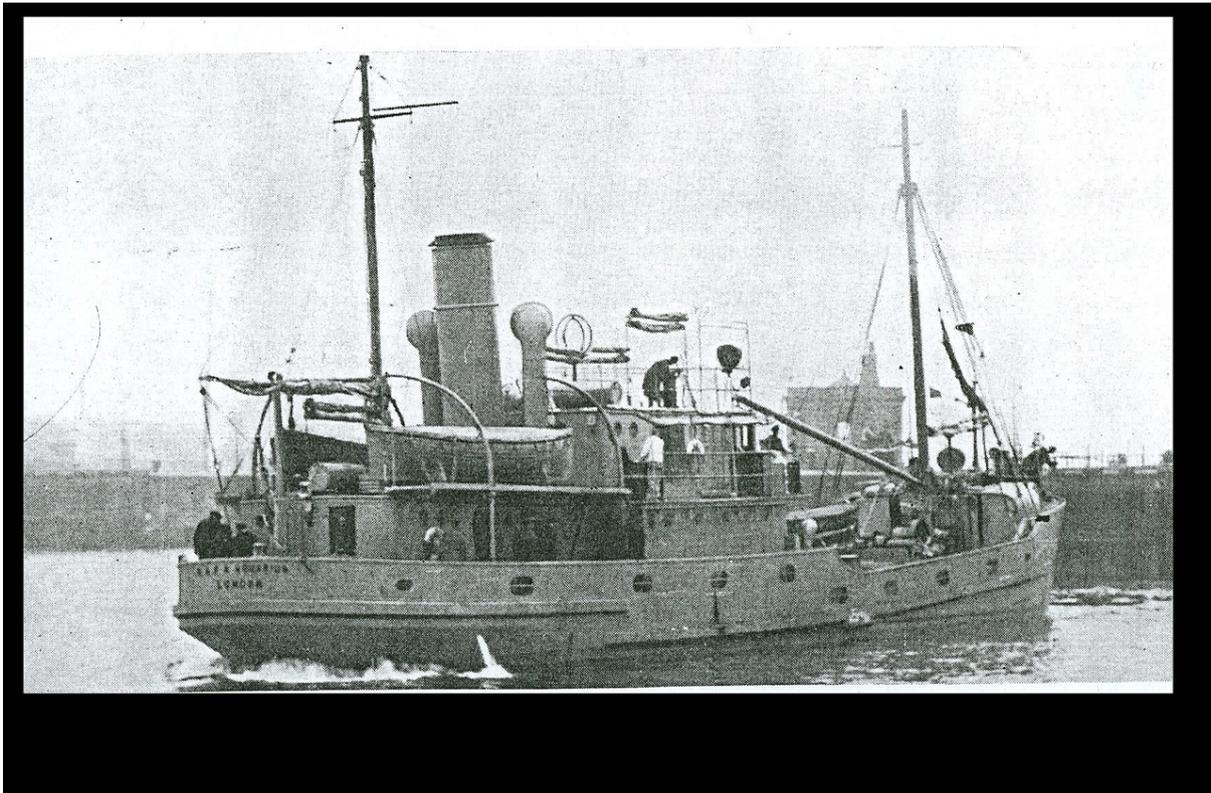
Contemporary newspapers ('Singapore Tribune' 15 April 1934) also announce the arrival of the vessel under the intriguing headline "The Air Ministry's New 'Mystery Vessel' For Singapore: Most Advanced Ship of its Kind" saying that "... Singapore is the destination of a small steel ship. The 'Aquarius', which has been built to the order of the Air Ministry at Northwich, Cheshire, in the inland ship-building yard of Messrs. Yarwood and Sons. The vessel has been something of a 'Mystery ship'... It will carry a crew of 32, including eight aircraft ratings and two aircraft wireless operators, and will have direction -finding equipment which can locate aircraft up to 200 miles distance. The shipyard staff say they do not know the purpose for which the ship is built... It is the first boat built at Northwich for the Ministry, and if nothing else gave it an air of mystery, the fact that Aircraftsman Shaw – better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia' - helped supervise her equipment, might have done it...".

This public statement was followed the next month by a letter from 'T.E. Lawrence' at Cloud hills, Moreton, Dorset and dated 24 May 1934 to his friend Clare Sydney Smith and includes the paragraph "... Our 'Aquarius' is proving herself almost a greyhound. Six weeks out, and almost at Singapore. You will laugh when you see the tiny ugly little thing – but her quality is excellent, and she will last for years and do all manner of work. If only she had been a few m.p.h. faster and a few feet longer and broader. It is the only instance I have seen of two quarts having been successfully inserted into a pint pot. Of course, with ships, you can arrange more top-hamper than with beer...".

Ten days later the 'Malaya Tribune' (2 June 1934) newspaper reported " 'Aquarius' Arrives at Singapore "and explained "... A small steel ship has arrived at Singapore. It is the 'Aquarius', the 'mystery' ship, which will be used for refuelling and stores duties with the Flying Boat Squadron No. 205 of the RAF. Colour was lent to the mystery by the presence of Aircraftsman T.E.W. Shaw, formerly world famous as 'Lawrence of Arabia' while the ship was under construction. Every morning he arrived at the shipyard bareheaded and wearing tweed jacket and flannel trousers, but none of the workers knew who he was. Shaw, who was for some time specialising on speed-boat work at the RAF base at Calshot, concentrated on certain technical details on board. With a length of 113 feet and a beam of 22 feet, the 'Aquarius' carries a crew of 32... she is equipped with a range finding apparatus which can locate aircraft as far away as 200 miles...".

For the next seven years up to the invasion of Malaya there were weekly newspaper reports that the 'Aquarius' was routinely moored at Keppel Docks in Singapore Harbour with a variety of other craft.

The story of the departure and sinking of the vessel has been rather confused by many sources since the war, primarily because there appears to have also been a much larger American passenger ship by the same name of 'Aquarius' also in Singapore harbour at the time of the evacuation. Details of this ship are sparse, but the larger American ship of 6094 tons was apparently built by G.M. Standifer Construction Corp., Vancouver for the US Shipping Board. It is recorded as leaving Singapore on the night of 11th/12th February 1942 in company with many other ships and is later that year recorded as forming part of 'Convoy ON 132 Heysham' on 18.9.42 and listed as "Aquarius 023 AMER 6, 09420 NYC". It survived the War and was sold to the USSR in 1945 being scrapped in 1960.



Where and when was the 'Aquarius' sunk?

We firstly rely on David Nelson's records to tell us that 'Aquarius' left Singapore on 10 February – it must have at that stage been moored in Singapore Harbour, because the Japanese had occupied the Naval base and Seletar airfield on the north eastern coast of Singapore island by that date.

It presumably had something like its normal complement of crew - which was apparently 32 men, but "Wikipedia" extends the number of people likely to have been on board with a claim that it was "... bombed and sunk 15 miles north west of Muntok with 32 crew and 60/70 passengers – and only 3 survivors ...". This claim on the number of passengers on board was sourced from the 'angelfire' website, but that website does not record the source of these numbers and has not responded to requests for clarification.

The location of the sinking appears to have been “...ten to fifteen miles from ...” what we know was an island which in 1942 was named, depending on the source, either Pulau Tjebia/ Pulau Tujuh/Pulau Tujoh/ or even Pulau Tojong depending which contemporary recorder was writing a report. Today this island shows as either Pulau Cebia or Pulau Khebia on Map Carta. It is situated amongst a group of islands just over 17 nautical miles (30 kms) north west of Banka Island off the east coast of Sumatra. This was the island on which the Royal Navy launch HMML 310 was beached and wrecked and which became the fateful last place of Rear Admiral Spooner and Air Vice Marshall Pulford who were on that vessel during the evacuation of Singapore.

Who was on board the ‘Aquarius’?

A list of officers and crew has not yet been located – yet there must be official records, possibly in RAF files (as opposed to Royal Navy files) in the UK Archives. The only naval personnel found to be recorded on board to date by the researcher were Lt. Clement F. Press of the Malayan RNVR (website naval-history.net) and Stoker Scammell, Royal Navy mentioned below.

From a report by a Lt Stoner who had been on the ill-fated HMML 310 and a Lt Bull, RNZNVR also from the same vessel, we know that the three survivors (the only survivors on record from the ‘Aquarius’) who reached Tjebia Island included an Australian civilian dockyard engineer named Dimmitt, a Royal Navy Stoker named Scammell and a Gordon Highlander named Docherty. This is repeated in the book “Course For Disaster” by Leo Cooper 1987 wherein he quotes HMML survivor Lt Richard Pool, RNZNVR.

In addition we know from the original 1946-47 records of the Colonial Office Record of Deaths in Singapore – compiled from many sources including the ‘Searcher Organisation Clearing House’, the Commander SEAC and even, in the case of Mr and Mrs Frank Sole, an eyewitness of their departure on ‘Aquarius’ - that a sizeable group of civilian men and three women - including male employees and at least two of their wives of the Standard-Vacuum Oil Company’s staff in Malaya and Singapore, plus men who were Naval Dockyard engineers (and possibly one of their wives) were on board when the vessel was sunk. It should be also kept in mind that John L Rush had become engaged to a Miss Cornelia Buckan/Buchan in late January 1942 and her fate is unknown.

Almost certainly there were servicemen on board as passengers; amongst these it seems most likely that there were RAF support personnel since this was a RAF vessel and the other civilian men on board clearly had a working connection with the Seletar base in support roles such as fuel storage engineering and fuel supply. The copies of pages from the UK Archives shown at the end of this document are included to prevent the loss of a potentially useful document giving the names of RAF men known to have died during the evacuation of Singapore. Amongst those listed one of the potentially most relevant is that of Pilot Officer G. Rutherford, Marine Craft Section, S.H.Q Seletar, RAF., who died at sea on 15.2.42.

So, the picture is that the complement of some 60 -70 passengers was comprised of employees of the naval dockyard in Singapore, employees of Standard – Vacuum Oil Company, and Gordon Highlanders – plus possibly other skilled men in engineering roles and servicemen , in particular those related to servicing the Flying Boats of 205 Squadron.

The most detailed information located to date on the fate of the 'Aquarius' is contained in 'Malayan Research Bureau' report No. 31 (page 425) being " Memorandum to Mr McArthur with the Compliments of Mr. E. L. Moser, General Manager, Standard Oil" (stamp dated '1942') wherein Moser states that he received the following information from one of his New Zealand Executives;

"We have been in contact with Lieut. H. J. Bull, RNVR., ... he has no personal knowledge of the sinking of the 'Aquarius' nor does he know anything about who were the passengers on that vessel. Lieutenant Bull relates how he took a party of evacuees in his motorboat from Singapore [Researcher Note: this was HMML 310]. Owing to enemy action he had to beach his boat on a small island north of Banka, and there they camped in a native village. After they had been on the island for a couple of days, two sailors limped into the camp and announced they were the only survivors of the 'Aquarius'. Their story was that the 'Aquarius' was bombed by the enemy, the first bomb landing on the bridge and killing the only three women passengers aboard as well as the deck officers. They said they had swum three miles to a reef, and there collected driftwood which they used to float themselves across to the island, taking a whole day on the journey. This would place the distance of the sinking of the 'Aquarius' as about ten to fifteen miles from the island. Later, one Dimmett, a civilian from Singapore, who hails from Perth, Western Australia and whose father is a Member of the Legislative Council, arrived at the Camp. He was also a survivor from the 'Aquarius', his story being that he had struggled on to another and smaller island, and there got a native canoe on which he paddled across to where Lieutenant Bull was. Lieutenant Bull and two of his crew set off in a native boat for help; he landed at a distant mainland and had flying – boats sent back to pick up his party. When the flying – boats arrived, they found the camp burnt to the ground, and Lieutenant Bull's motor ship burnt to the water's edge. There was no trace whatsoever of any of the party he had left there, and since then nothing has been heard of them. Lieutenant Bull wishes it to be understood that his information about the 'Aquarius' was obtained from the two sailors and, later, from Dimmett. He points out that no one can be sure that these three were the only survivors of the ship, and this appears a reasonable view because of the original statement of the two sailors that they were the only survivors, and then the later appearance of Mr Dimmett. ...".

Casualties;

Apart from those mentioned in the Colonial Office Record of Deaths (Singapore) and the consequent listings in the CWGC records, the only records known of survivors are of those three men who reached Pulau Tujuh/Pulau Tjebia and were found by the survivors of HMML 310 – however these three men died of illness on that island. The family of Aubyn Dimmitt believe that he might have died of a tropical illness and dehydration. They are today buried in a collective grave # 1.17.2 in Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore where they were reinterred after the War.

We must therefore assume that all others died in the bombing and sinking of the vessel some miles from this island.

One of the three survivors reaching Pulau Tjebia has also left us with the knowledge that the casualties included the three women on board – it has been possible to determine that this group who were "... on the bridge when the first bomb struck..." definitely comprised Mrs Jeannie Isabella Robertson and Mrs Alice Sole and then possibly either one or two of Mrs Kirkman, Mrs McAusland,

Mrs Marjorie Ross (and baby?) or even the fiancé of John L Rush, Miss Cornelia Buckan/Buchan. The researcher of this document has the view that in fact there might have been a couple more women on board than the "three" stated by the first two survivors reaching Tujuh/Tjebia island and which information is second or third hand.

It is also not unreasonable to consider the probability that one or more men from the 'Aquarius' reached Banka Island. These were generally fit men and the distances to Banka are not beyond the bounds of human survival at seas – particularly since it appears that sea currents run predominantly north to south along the west coast of Banka towards the Banka Straits. Sadly, there is a very high probability that anyone from the 'Aquarius' reaching Banka Island would have been summarily executed by Japanese troops on that island in the same manner as survivors of the 'SS Vyner Brooke.

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

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.

Sources:

- JMM – the "Malayans" database of author and researcher Jonathan Moffatt.
- CORD – Colonial Office Record of Deaths.

Reconstructed Crew and Passenger Lists:

Crew:

- **PRESS** – “...**Lt. Clement Frederick Press**, MRNVR., FMS Railways, died on ‘Aquarius’ off the island of Tjebia in the Netherlands East Indies...”. (CORD. ref. 24 on 10001/46). Also, there is the record that he was qualified as an AMIE, and was from Blackley, Manchester. Employed by the Transportation Dept. FMS Railways Kuala Lumpur. Lt MRNVR. Lost at sea 13.2.42 HMS Aquarius off Tjebia. Wife Morna lived post-war in Berkhamsted, Herts. (JMM). Other sources confirming this include naval-history.com and the Malayan Volunteer database compiled by the late John Brown. The website ‘findagrave’ tells us that his wife was Morna Rimington Press who died on 9.1.78 and was cremated at Chilterns Crematorium, Amersham, Chiltern District, Buckinghamshire.

- **Stoker 2nd Class Leonard Stanley Scammell**, D/KX 126814, Royal Navy who died on 31.3.42 aged 28 years ‘HMS Sultan’, son of Herbert and Sarah Ann Scammell of Bedminster, Bristol and husband of Edith M. Scammell of Bedminster (CWGC). We know however from the report by Lt Stonor of HMML 310 which had been beached at Tjebia Island that Stoker Scammell arrived on that island from the sinking of ‘Aquarius’, but subsequently died on the island. Edith Scammell was born Edith Davies on 18.1.14 and they married in Bristol in 1939 (www.scammellfamilyhistory.uk). Leonard Scammell is noted in a report by a Lt Stonor as being one of two survivors (the other was Docherty) who arrived on ‘Tjebia’ (Pulau Tujuh) after the sinking of the ‘Aquarius’ – the survivors of the beaching of HMML 310 were already on that island – Scammell died of illness on that island after a couple of weeks.

- **UNIDENTIFIED** – there must be another 28 or so unidentified Naval Officers and crew who perished in the sinking of the ‘Aquarius’.

Passengers:

There are estimated to have been some 60 -70 passengers crammed aboard the vessel – to date only 18 have been identified. The others will include naval dockyard personnel, possibly Royal Marines who had been guarding the naval dockyard, engineering specialists, Gordon Highlanders and almost certainly other servicemen such as RAF men from the Seletar base.

At least ten men from the Standard – Vacuum Oil Co., plus one wife (Mrs Sole) and the engineering staff of the Naval Dockyard were identified soon after the War by an organisation known as Searcher Organisation Clearing House in Singapore and formal records made by the Colonial Office in their Register of Deaths (CORD) in Singapore.

- **BARNE-** “... John M Barne, Standard – Vacuum Oil Co., died on the ‘Aquarius’ (CORD. Serial # 1100, ref. 32/10251/1/46). Also, the record that he was “... *John Michael Barne employed in Industrial Sales, Standard- Vacuum Oil Co, Eastern Smelting Building, Kuala Lumpur. Lost at sea 2/42 ...*” (JMM). His death is confirmed in CWGC records, John M Barne, civilian, died on ‘Aquarius’ 15.2.42 (CWGC). The earliest newspaper report is in the ‘Malaya Tribune’ of 1938 when J. M Barne arrived on the ‘Corfu’ from London. (MT, 11.4.38). then in 1940 he is advertised as an employee of Standard – Vacuum Oil Co who would be giving a presentation on “Bearings and their Lubrication” to the Dredging Association of Southern Malaya at the Masonic Hall, Venning Road, Kuala Lumpur on 26.10.40. (ST, 21.10.40). **John Michael Barne** was born on 3.5.12, the son of Michael and Gwendoline Marjorie Barne (nee Gray) and the brother of Ivo Miles Barne (b.1916) – several websites include him in a list of descendants of King James I and XI.
- **COLLINGS – Armun Collings**, who had been a RNVN Signalman in World War One, lived with his family in Dagenham, Essex during the early 1920s until they moved to Egypt where (according to his daughter Hetty) he ‘built a barrage’. The family moved on to Singapore in 1939, where Armun Collings was foreman of works for the Admiralty on huge storage tunnels being built at Kranji. During 1940 and 1941 both Hetty and then her mother Mary (who had trained at the Woolwich Arsenal during WW1) trained as cypher clerks with German raiders active and Japan threatening. Armun’s two sons also served, Cyril in the Royal Navy and Armun Jr (Bob’) as a merchant seaman and then a soldier. Hetty, a 16-year-old cipher clerk, evacuated on Orion 31.12.41 arriving Fremantle WA 6.1.42. The family did not know what had happened to their husband and father for many years until an Admiralty telegram in 1946 said it was believed he was killed on February 15 1942 when the “... Air Ministry Vessel Aquarius, on which he was being evacuated from Singapore, was sunk by enemy action...”. Hetty evacuated Singapore on the ‘Orion’ to Australia. (Glen Hielscher submission on loss of ‘HMAS Sydney’ to Commission of Enquiry and JMM).

- **DIMMITT – Aubyn W J Dimmitt** an Australian oil storage engineer died after reaching the Tujuh islands following the sinking of the 'Aquarius – he is recorded in a report by one Lt Stonor (WW2talk) where he is reported as one of three survivors of the Aquarius arriving on Tujuh/Tjebia island, where the survivors of the attack on HMML 310 and its subsequent beaching were stranded. It states “... a civilian dockyard employee named DIMMETT who was an Australian, he died on Tjebia...”. The earliest records in Australian newspapers (trove.au) show Aubyn Dimmitt graduating from the University of Western Australia in 1937 and being appointed an Assistant engineer with the Commonwealth Oil refineries; in 1938 he left Perth to take up a role in Adelaide and by 1939 he is in Nedlands ,WA., . He married Mavis Isobel/Isabel Smith around this time and soon left for Singapore with his new wife where he took up a position with Fogden & Brisbane, Engineers. In 1941 Mrs Dimmitt had been on holiday in Perth, WA. And returned to Singapore with her baby daughter ('The Daily News' Perth 28.1.41). That year Mr & Mrs A. Dimmitt arrived in Singapore on the 'centaur' (SFPMA 18.8.39). That same year Aubyn Dimmitt was reported acting as best man at the wedding of Herman Van Dyk at St Andrews Cathedral. The first record of his death is in 'The Western Australian' 25.10.45 when there appeared “... Mr. James Dimmitt, MLC has received advice that his son Aubyn who remained in Singapore at the request of the Admiralty to undertake demolition, died on an unnamed island on which he was shipwrecked with Rear Admiral Spooner and Air Vice Marshall Pulford, both of who also died there. Mr Dimmitt who was a Bachelor of Engineering of the W.A. University was for 31 [researcher; they probably meant 3] years employed by Fogden Brisbane & Co as a civil engineer in Singapore mainly in oil storage construction at the naval base. His wife and young daughter escaped from Singapore and are resident in Perth...” and “... DIMMITT – Died of illness (Malaya) Aubyn beloved son in law of Mr & Mrs W. Smith...”. In 1946 he was remembered at the University of Western Australia as one of the engineering students who had died in the war - specifically as “... a civilian attached to the Admiralty...”. Mrs Isabel/Isobel Dimmitt was born on 11.7.15 and died in 2009. Aubyn Dimmitt had attended Hale School at Wembley Downs, Perth , WA., and in April 2002 a plaque in his honour was placed in the 'Memorial Groves' at the School by his brother Richard Dimmitt (assisted by his sons Aubyn and Simon) which reads “... Aubyn attended Hale School between 1929 and 1932 and was a prefect in his final year. He then attended the University of Western Australia and graduated as an engineer at the end of 1938. Subsequently he was transferred to Singapore around 1940 and from there was seconded into the British admiralty. He was evacuated from Singapore in February 1942 but the ship in which he was sailing was sunk the next day. He managed to join other survivors but after swimming and canoeing from island to island he perished on an unknown island in the South China Sea. He was 28 years of age...”.
- **DOCHERTY – Private James Joseph Docherty**, #2885195, 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, who died on 1.3.42 aged 26 years and is buried in Collective Grave 31. D1-17 at Kranji War cemetery in Singapore (CWGC). Private Docherty is known to have been on the 'Aquarius' and on Tjebia Island from a report by Lt Stonor who was also on the Island after being aboard HMML 310.
- **FOX – Byron Fox**, died in the sinking of the 'Aquarius' (CORD, Serial # 1326, ref '5 on 10001/47). Also, that he was a civilian and he died 15.2.42 on 'Aquarius' (CWGC). The first record of Byron Fox is in the 'Malayan Tribune' (10.11.20) when he is described as an American citizen and by profession a surveyor, this was in a traffic violation report in Ipoh. In

1925 he was reported as moving from Yukon Gold Co. Malaya to Secretary and Treasurer of the Dutch Guiana Gold Co., New York (ST 24.2.45). In 1929 and 1931 he appears in Singapore papers and then by 1935 he is reported hosting a party (at which interestingly fellow 'Aquarius' passenger and victim Frank Sole attended) and said to have played the piano. During the 1930's Byron Fox became part of the 'social set' in Singapore. In 1936 he is recorded as going on leave to the USA via Hong Kong on the 'Rajputana' and the 'president Hoover' and in 1937 he returns and is advertising for a house he wants to rent as an employee of Standard – Vacuum Oil Cop. This employment was confirmed also that year in the 'Straits Times' (24.2.37)

- **KIRKMAN – Sam Mayes Kirkman**, died in sinking of 'Aquarius' (CORD Serial # 1281, ref. 56/1025/1/46). Also, civilian, died 15.2.42 on 'Aquarius' (CWGC). All that is known of Sam Kirkman is that he appears to have been married (possibly to Hazel Ann Roberts), had a son named Frank Lloyd Kirkman born on 1.2.20 in Canton, Ohio (who later became a Lt in the US Marine Corps and died in 2007 in Charleston, USA) and that in 1939 his tennis prowess in Singapore saw him recorded as the 1938 winner of the 'American Cup' tennis doubles competition.
- **MATTHEWS - Noel Walter Louis Matthews**, B.Sc. AMICE from Rickmansworth. Assistant Civil Engineer, HM Singapore Naval Base. Lost at sea 15.2.42[31] on SS *Aquarius*. (JMM). Noel Walter Louis Matthews also appears in the records of the University of London as BSc, AMICE, and Assistant Civil Engineer, Naval Dockyards. (Navy List August 1939).
- **MCCARTHY – John Joseph McCarthy**, 1st Class Engineer of Yardcraft, Singapore, died on 'Aquarius' (CORD. Serial # 1142. Ref. 10001/46) this is confirmed also with civilian, died on 'Aquarius' 15.2.42. (CWGC). The use of the term 'Yardcraft' indicates that John McCarthy was on the staff of the Naval dockyard in Singapore in a support position to the servicing of Admiralty requirements at the naval base. The term is used to describe both the staff in this section and the vessels they oversaw (e.g. in 1949 Singapore newspapers advertise the sale at H.M. Dockyard Singapore of a "...Yard Craft Ex L.C.T. (E) 384..."). The name 'J.J. McCarthy' is not unusual, but it may be a reference to this man in local newspapers where the 'Straits Times' included that name as arriving on the P & O steamer 'Mongolia' from London on 12.2.27. there is another reference to a 'J.J. McCarthy' in 1933 as the defendant and Principal of Anglo – Asiatic Steam Navigation Co., being sued in Shanghai for \$10,000 ('Malaya Tribune' 27.4.33).
- **McCAUSLAND - William A McCausland**, Standard-Vacuum Oil Co., died on the 'Aquarius'. (CORD. Serial # 1091. Ref. 40/10251/1/46.) Also, the record that he worked for Standard Oil Vacuum Company and was lost at sea on the *Aquarius* 15.2.42. Lived in Malacca, children Alison & Jimmy. (JMM) This death is confirmed in CWGC records. He was obviously married but it is not known what happened to his wife. In 1938 there is a reference to a McCausland playing rugby in Negri Sembilan – but it may not be him.

- **MITCHELL - Alexander Yuill Mitchell**, died on 'Aquarius' (CORD. Serial # 1277, ref. '8 on 10001/46'.) Also, the record that he was born in 1904 and was from Coatbridge [a small town in North Lanarkshire about 8 miles east of Glasgow] but moved to Bangkok in 1934. Engineer, Standard Vacuum Oil Company. Exempted from military service in SRA[V] 1941. Lost at sea 15.2.42 on RN Tug *Aquarius*. (JMM). This death is confirmed in CWGC records. Interestingly he is recorded on the Coatbridge (Garturk) Boy Scout Memorial as a WW2 victim – but local historians do not seem to know who he was. On his parent's gravestone in Stirlingshire he is recorded as "... son of James and Janet Mitchell (nee Yuill) presumed lost his life at the fall of Singapore, 15 February 1942, aged 37 years..." (Scottish War Graves Project). Alexander Yuill first appears in the 'Sunday Tribune' (30.10.38) as" ... *Lubricating Oil Assistant at Standard – Vacuum Oil Co has returned to Ipoh after spending a pleasant rest at the Cameron Highland Hotel...*". In 1939 he is reported as best man at the wedding of one Robert Crombie at the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore (ST. 27.12.39) and in 1941 he appears several times in local newspapers firstly as an engineer of the Standard-Vacuum Oil Co returning to Singapore by the 'President Monroe' after a holiday in the USA (ST, 13.6.41) ; then having his application for exemption from mobilisation refused - with permission to appeal(ST, 29.9.41) and finally having his exemption for mobilisation approved – he was a Volunteer gunner - as Operations Engineer at Standard – Vacuum Oil Co. (ST, 29.9.41).

- **PRESS – Lieutenant Clement Frederick Press**, MRNVR, died 13 February 1942 on 'Aquarius' Also remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, panel 97, col.3.(CWGC); Ancestry.com state he was born in 1902. The database of Malayan Volunteers by John Brown records him as Lt Clement Francis Press, MRNVR, died 13.2.42 on "Aquarius" and states that he was from Blackley, Manchester. He is first mentioned in the records of the Royal Astronomical Society, London on 11 April 1930 as proposed as a fellow of the Society with the address of 1919 Tufnell park Road, London, NW7. It is not known when he moved to Malaya but the 'Straits Times' of 19.2.39 records him as the Acting President of the Port Swettenham Recreation Club and then on 12.11.39 as a donor of five dollars to the Malaya Patriotic Fund in the Alor Gajah, Malacca area. The 'Straits Times' of 6.7.41 displays a large group photo of the junior officers of the FMS Railways, port Swettenham sitting next to a Miss Press. Also, Clement Frederick Press, AMIME from Blackley, Manchester. Transportation Dept. FMS Railways KL. Lt MRNVR Lost at sea 13.2.42 HMS *Aquarius* off Tjebia. (JMM).The final mention of Clement Press is in the 'Straits Times' of 14.10.47 where the Public trustee is advertising for claims on the estate of Clement Frederick Press who died on or about 13 February 1942.

- **ROBERTSON - James John Robertson**, died on 'Aquarius' (CORD. Serial # 1248. Ref. '8 on file of A.Y. Mitchell'.). Also, Standard Oil Vacuum Company. Lost at sea with wife Jeannie Isabelle 15.2.42 on the HM Tug *Aquarius*. (JMM). Also, James John Robertson, Civilian, United Kingdom died Sunday 15 February 1942 on the 'Aquarius' (CWGC). **It is unclear whether this man and the below named 'John Robertson' are in fact the same person** – the CWGC states that the Mrs Jeannie Isabell Robertson was the wife of **John Robertson**? But the issue is whether 'James John' and 'John' are the same person. The 'Malaya Tribune of 25.4.36 recorded "... Mr J.J. Robertson of the Standard – Vacuum Oil Co and Mrs Robertson arrived back from home leave on the 'Chitral'..."".

- **ROBERTSON – Mrs. Jeannie Isabella Robertson**, Civilian, United Kingdom, died Sunday 15 February 1942 on the ‘Aquarius’, wife of John Robertson (CWGC).

- **ROBERTSON - John Robertson**, Standard Oil Vacuum Company. Lost at sea with wife Jeannie Isabelle 15.2.42 on the HM Tug Aquarius. (JMM); the CWGC records John Robertson as dying on 15.2.42 on ‘Aquarius’; it is unclear however whether ‘John Robertson’ and the (above named) James John Robertson are in fact the same person? The ‘Malaya Tribune’ on 27.4.39 recorded “... *Mr John Robertson of the Standard -Vacuum Oil Co has been transferred from Singapore to Penang and left for Penang today accompanied by Mrs Robertson...*”.

- **ROSS - Thomas Marshall Lisle Ross**, Standard -Vacuum Oil Co., died on ‘Aquarius’ (CORD. Serial # 1164. Ref. Searcher Organisation Clearing House, 36/1025/1/46). Also, the record that he was born in 1906 at Muswell Hill. To Malaya 1929. Assistant, Standard Oil Vacuum Company, Chartered Bank Building, Penang then Singapore. Lost at sea 15.2.42[36] on HM Tug *Aquarius*. Wife Marjorie. (JMM). In 1939 there is a report that Mr & Mrs T.M.L. Ross would be arriving on the ‘Canton’ from Marseilles to Singapore. **Of significance to this overall story of the ‘Aquarius’ is the record in Singapore newspapers in January 1942 “... ROSS – at the General Hospital, Singapore, on Jan.5 1942 to Marjorie, wife of T.M.L. Ross a son...” (SFPMA. 6.1.42). This is very late for Mrs Ross and her baby of only a few weeks to be evacuated before the fall of Singapore and the researcher of this document would appreciate any assistance in resolving whether Mrs Ross and baby son evacuated safely from Singapore – or were they on the ‘Aquarius;’. There is no record of Mrs Ross arriving by ship in the UK in 1942 and she does not appear in any of the passenger lists for the sunken ‘SS Kuala’, SS Giang Bee’ or ‘SS Vyner Brooke’.**

- **RUSH - John L. Rush**, Standard Oil Vacuum Company. Lost at sea 15.2.42 on HM Tug *Aquarius*. (JMM) – this information is confirmed by the CWGC. John Rush who appears to have come from Cranford , New Jersey (see below) is mentioned quite a number of times in pre-War Singapore newspapers – firstly in 1938 as being in the cast for ‘Escape Me Never’ by the Singapore Repertory Players at the Victoria Theatre (SFPMA 31.10.38). Then in 1939 he is in many reports of playing golf - this occasion for the American Association versus the Japanese Golf Club at the Japanese course in Tanglin (ST. 20 5 39) and golf reports continue during 1939-40. He is also mentioned in 1939 in a court report wherein he was convicted for negligent driving in Singapore (ST. 20.5.39). **Finally, in a poignant and unresolved matter of whether he took this women along with him on the ‘Aquarius’ there is the announcement in January 1942 – just three weeks before boarding the ‘Aquarius’ that “ ... Mrs H.H. Buckan announces the engagement of her daughter Cornelia to Mr J. L. Rush of Cranford , New Jersey...” (ST. 19.1.42). Whether Cornelia Buckan (or is it Buchan??) may have evacuated at around that time – research has been unable to prove what happened.**

- **SOLE – Mrs. Alice Sole**, died on ‘Aquarius’ (CORD. Serial # 1239, ref. ‘Signed statement by eyewitness of her departure’, 11 on 10001/46). Civilian, United Kingdom, died Sunday, 15 February 1942, ‘Aquarius’ (CWGC). This is presumably Mrs Alice Alexandra Sole (nee

McGregor) - below. The 'Malaya Tribune' of 25 May 1935 ran a large article covering the wedding of Mrs Sole " ... *The Presbyterian Church was beautifully decorated with sprays of Honolulu creeper and white lilies for the wedding yesterday afternoon of Alice Alexandra, daughter of Dr G.C. McGregor and the late Mrs McGregor , and Mr Frank Stanley Sole of the Standard - Vacuum Oil Co., Singapore....*"

- **SOLE - Frank Stanley Sole** died on the 'Aquarius' (CORD. Serial # 1238. Ref. 'Signed statement by eyewitness of his departure. 11 on 10001/46). Also, another record that he was born in 1897 in Islington. To China 1920. In Singapore by early 1930s. Standard Oil Vacuum Company. Married Alice Alexandra McGregor 5.35 Singapore. Lost at sea on HM Tug *Aquarius* 15.2.42 .and wife Alice too (JMM). He is also listed as Frank Stanley Sole, Civilian, United Kingdom, died Sunday 15 February 1942 on the 'Aquarius' (CWGC). Finally, we know that Frank Sole was a member of Lodge Tullibardine in the East, No. 1118, S.C. Reg 30.5.27. Initiated 23.10.36. Oil Co Rep. In 1946 there was the following Notice in the 'Malaya Tribune' of 8.10.46 "... *Estate of FRANK STANLEY SOLE deceased. The abovenamed who before the War was Industrial sales Manager of Standard -Vacuum Oil Co. in Singapore, was lost at sea in 1942. Any person having information as to the contents or whereabouts of his will, which he made in Singapore before the War, is requested to communicate with Messrs. Allen & Gledhill as soon as possible ...*".
- **UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN** – the MRB report by Lieut Bull. RNZNVR, relays the information that there were only three women passengers aboard who all were killed by a bomb. These included the two women mentioned above – Mrs Alice Sole and Mrs Jeannie Isabella Robertson – and research has yet to confirm whether Mrs Marjorie Ross, Mrs McAusland or even the wife of Sam Kirkman was on board.
- **UNIDENTIFIED SERVICEMEN** – almost certainly there were servicemen on board as passengers and amongst these it seems most likely that there were RAF personnel since this was a RAF vessel and the other civilian men on board clearly had a working connection with the Seletar base in support roles such as fuel storage engineering and fuel supply. **The following copies of pages are included to not lose the link with names of RAF men known to have died during the evacuation of Singapore. Amongst those listed most relevant at first glance are Pilot Officer G. Rutherford, Marine Craft Section, S.H.Q Seletar, RAF., who died at sea on 15.2.42**

SS/330/141/268 Cas Pw

B (1)

ROYAL AIR FORCE.

KILLED IN ACTION: (Includes drowned in action, or drowned in consequence of ship sinking, or in consequence of having been ordered to abandon ship).

Officers: Wing-Commander R.A. CHIGNELL (Fighter Group) killed and buried at sea 14. 2. 42.
Pilot Officer M.F.W. PAUL (R.A.F.V.R.) buried at sea 16. 2. 42 -(Tarsus Est. Port Dickson Ansea R.S.)
Pilot Officer G. RUTHERFORD, buried at sea 15. 2. 42 (S.H.Q. Seletar - Marine Craft Section).
Pilot Officer TONGUE J. (R.A.F.V.R.) buried at sea 14. 2. 42 (A.H.Q. P.E.)

Other Ranks:
512515 L.A.C. CHECHETS (243 M.R.V.R.A.F.) 15.2.42.
Sergeant W. BULLOCK, buried at MUNTOK, 25 yards N.E. of N.E. corner of Cinema near the Pier, 16. 2. 42 (A.S. R.S.)
518522 Sergeant E. CHATT, buried at MUNTOK, 25 yards N.E. of N.E. corner of Cinema near the Pier, 16. 2. 42. (A.S. R.S.)
Sergeant McBRIDE (buried at sea 15.2.42)(SHQ Seletar).
1252182 Cpl. K. FAIRBRASS, R.A.F.V.R., buried PULO POMPOM (Rhie Groun) 18.2.42. (SHQ. Seletar)
921522 A.C.1 ELTON W.J., buried BANKA ISLAND, 17.2.42 (R.A.F.V.R.) (A.S.R.S.)
950128 A.C.2 MARCH A., buried at sea 16.2.42 - R.A.F.V.R. (A.S.R.S.)
L.A.C. FERRY M.C., R.A.F.V.R., Fighter Group,
A.C. 2 GRANT J., buried BANKA ISLAND 1. 3. 42, R.A.F.V.R., (A.S.R.S.)
L.A.C. TITLEY A. 15. 2. 42. (243 M.R.V. R.A.F.)
L.A.C. DOUSE D. 15. 2. 42. -do-

MISSING BELIEVED KILLED OR DROWNED(as above):

Officers: P/O. B. CALLICK, 36 Squadron.
W.O. Pilot GEO. PECK (36 Squadron Fighter Group).

Other Ranks:
CPL. EMERY, R.A.F.V.R., at sea 15. 2. 42.
L.A.C. WATKINSON, R.A.F.V.R., at sea 14. 2. 42.
A.C.1 WARDALE J.
1255228 A.C.1 BOWEN T.B. at sea 14.2.42 (R.A.F.V.R. S.H.Q. Seletar).
A.C.1 HILL, R.A.F.V.R., at sea 15. 2. 42(Fighter group).

SS/330/141/268 Cao Pw

B (2) 3

(contd.)

- 2 -

MISSING BELIEVED KILLED OR DROWNED(as above) (CONTD.)

Other Ranks: (CONTD.)

941184 A.C.1 MORRILL W.E. at sea 14.2.42 (R.A.F.V.R.
S.H.Q. Seletar).
1177613 A.G.1 DOLMAN J.H., R.A.F.V.R., at
sea 14.2.42 (S.H.Q. Seletar).
638121 A.C. (or L.A.C.) SWIFT, Banka Islands,
14.2.42 (S.H.Q. Kallang).

MISSING:

Officers: F/O. R.R. LAMB (100 Squadron) 9. 3. 42.
Pilot Officer STACEY (243 M.R.V. R.A.F.) -
15. 2. 42.

Other Ranks:

Sgt. MERCER J. (R.A.F.V.R.) BANKA ISLAND, 24.2.42
(62 Squadron).
Sgt. TEARNAN A.A. (R.A.F.V.R.) BANKA ISLAND, 24.2.42.,
(62 Squadron).
545204 Cpl. WILDMAN C. (Fighter Group) at sea
15.2.42. (Fighter Group).
Cpl. CHALMERS W. at sea 15.2.42 (S.H.Q. Seletar).
Cpl. TYRNELL C., R.A.F.V.R., at sea 15.2.42 -
(S.H.Q. Seletar).
632213 L.A.C. LAMONT D.C., at sea 15. 2. 42 -
(Fighter Group).
L.A.C. MILNE J., R.A.F.V.R., at sea 15.2.42(Fighter Gp).
L.A.C. UNDERWOOD, -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
L.A.C. DOUGLAS -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
L.A.C. McGRINDLE J. -do- " " 15.2.42 -
(S.H.Q. Kallang).
L.A.C. MALONE, R.A.F.V.R., " " 15.2.42 -
(S.H.Q. Kallang).
A.C.1 MIDDLETON, at sea 15.2.42 (S.H.Q. Tengah).
A.C.1 ROBINSON A., R.A.F.V.R., at sea 15.2.42(Fighter Gp).
A.C.1 BULLOCK R. -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C.1 LOOBY, -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C. ADAMS, -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C. WILLIAMS, -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C. WILSON R. -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C. SPRINGHALL -do- " " 15.2.42 " "
A.C. GEORGE, -do- " " 15.2.42 " "

- 2 -

(Contd.)

MISSING (CONTD.)Other Ranks:

569643	L.A.C.	DATSON, T.H.	(A.S.R.S.)	16.2.42.
...295	A.C.2	MOORE F.A.	-do-	16.2.42.
	CPL.	SPARKES	(243 M.R.V.R.A.F.)	15.2.42
	CPL.	HORTON	-do-	15.2.42
	L.A.C.	YARDLEY L.	-do-	15.2.42
	L.A.C.	HUGHES W.	-do-	15.2.42.
	L.A.C.	UNDERWOOD J.	-do-	15.2.42.
	L.A.C.	RICHARDS	-do-	15.2.42
	L.A.C.	VAUX "PADDY"	-do-	15.2.42.
	L.A.C.	DAVIES (OR DAVEY)	-do-	15.2.42.
	A.G.	DINON D.	-do-	15.2.42.
	A.C.	GUY	-do-	15.2.42.
	A.C.	LUCAS	-do-	15.2.42.

DIED OF WOUNDS:

Officers: Flight-Lieutenant R.W. ARMSTRONG, R.A.F.V.R.,
(Fighter Group) - Interred at MUNTOK
Cemetery, BANKA ISLAND, 11. 3. 42.

Other Ranks:

1000442 A.C.1 TATE G.M., R.A.F.V.R., (A.S.R.S.) -
Interred MUNTOK Cemetery, BANKA ISLAND, 18.3.42.
643047 Cpl. KELLY W., at CHARITAS HOSPITAL,
PALEMBANG on 17. 2. 42.

DIED:

Officers: P/O. PAUL STEVENS, R.A.F., died approx.
25. 4. 42. of exposure in open boat, approx.
500 miles S. of Java. Buried at sea. Age 21.

Other Ranks:

1250898 A.C.1 GARRARD N.F., R.A.F.V.R., (A.S.R.S.)
Died of Dysentery at CHARITAS HOSPITAL, PALEMBANG,
on 12. 4. 42.
941974 A.C.1 WILCOX S., died of Dysentery and
Malaria in CHARITAS HOSPITAL, PALEMBANG, on
17. 5. 42. Buried Grave No. E.34 in New
European Cemetery, Palembang,
926871 L.A.C. PEROWNE W.H., at CHARITAS HOSPITAL,
PALEMBANG, on 20. 8. 42. Grave No. E. 11/47 in
New European Cemetery, PALEMBANG.
CPL. STIFF L.G. (R.C.A.F.) died of exposure in
open boat approx. 25 miles S. of Sumatra, approx.
on 23. 6. 42. Buried at Sea - Age 21.
L.A.C. MARLOW K. R.A.F., died approx. 3.7.42 (as
result of exposure in open boat) at Blimbing
Lighthouse, S.W. Sumatra. Buried in Cemetery
about 1 mile from Lighthouse. Age. 24.