

Launch 'Elizabeth'

- Sunk by gunfire in the Banka Straits on 16 February 1942

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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 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 had 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.

Launch/'Tug' 'Elizabeth':

The small vessel 'Elizabeth' has been described by contemporary records as a 'Tug', and the report by Cmdr. Reid, RN, in Palembang POW camp describes it as a "... *small motor tug...*".

Whether it was originally based in Singapore or Penang is unknown.

In the early weeks of the Japanese invasion of northern Malaya, during December 1941/ January 1942, it was being used on the west coast of Malaya to evacuate retreating servicemen.

On 6-7 January 1942 HDML 1062 escorted the tug 'Elizabeth' from Port Swettenham to Malacca which had been evacuated and motored to Muar in company with two steam ships – one, the 'SS Kinto' was attacked and hit several times by Japanese aircraft and set on fire. HDML 1062 and 'Elizabeth' were machine gunned but did not suffer casualties. After reaching Muar and having a confrontation with the local District Commissioner who complained that the presence of the Motor Launch was provoking a Japanese attack, Lt. MacMillan of HDML 1062 appears to have ordered the District Commissioner to leave his ship at gunpoint and then motored off to the Singapore Naval Base in company with 'Elizabeth'.

As one of the 40 -50 vessels of all sizes and descriptions remaining in Singapore Harbour on 11 February 1942 'Elizabeth' was designated to take part in the final, desperate evacuation of key service personnel and civilians to safety in Batavia.

'Elizabeth' left Singapore Harbour on the night of 13 February and Lt Frank Man, 'HMS Malacca' recorded that early on the following morning of 14 February 1942 when the 'Malacca' was trying to camouflage and hide itself "... *at a small island near False Durian Island ...*" for the coming daylight hours (as ordered by Commander Alexander before they had left Singapore) he observed the tug 'Elizabeth' and the launch 'Fanling' "... *hiding out about one and a half miles away..*". False Durian Island (now known as Pulau Sanglang Besar or 'Sanglar-Besar Island') is some 60 km from Singapore and was a favourite first 'stopping / hiding' point for some of the evacuation ships during the week before the Surrender. The island is to the south west of Durian Island and on the other side of the main shipping channel south – it is in fact in a group of about seven small islands and from a satellite view appears a good hiding spot, but of course more from ships than bombers.

Insofar as the 'Elizabeth', Captain David Nelson in his book 'The Story of Changi' recorded "... *Left Singapore night 13/14.2.42. Sunk by gunfire Bangka Straits 16.2.42. Passengers: Royal Marines3, RAF. 6, Army 2, Survivors 2 only, including Stoker Farrow, POW, Palembang. Survivors from 'Fan Lin' report 'Elizabeth' just behind; saw her ordered alongside destroyer. 20 minutes later destroyer hauled off and sank her by gun-fire. Fate of crew unknown...*".

From the files in the UK National Archives we know something of the final days of this small vessel from several letters;

- Lt. Ian Forbes, RN, an officer on 'HMS Grasshopper' recorded in a letter to the Secretary of the Admiralty on 24.10.45 "... on the night of 13/14th February 1945 (sic 1942) I was hailed on the bridge of 'Grasshopper', as follows ... 'Grasshopper ahoy is Forbes on Board? I answered [then] 'Motor boat ELZABETH here, Captain Beckwith, First Lieutenant Kempson. We are going the same way, keep a lookout for us on the way down.' His craft, which I could discern by the light of the burning warehouses of Keppel harbour, was then hidden from view by a fall of shot from the Japanese Army, and I presume sailed for Batavia...".

So, we know that 'Elizabeth' left Singapore harbour on the night of 13th February 1942 probably some hours before the three ex Yangste River gunboats 'HMS Grasshopper', 'HMNS Dragonfly' and 'HMS Scorpion' themselves left at just after midnight that night.

Then from another archived document we learn more on the 'Elizabeth';

- Lt Richard Pool, RN, wrote on 26 October 1945 "...She left on 12th February 1942 [Researcher Note: this is a date error] with a crew of about fifteen or sixteen officers and ratings for Batavia. She was under command of Lieut Richard Beckwith, RN, and one other officer with him was Lieut Robin Kempson, RNVR. The ratings consisted of a number of ex 'Repulse' and 'P.O.W' ['HMS Prince of Wales']. Names I never knew but know that there were at least two E.R.A.'s from either one of the big ships... It seems to have been established quite conclusively that she was sunk in action with Japanese forces, somewhere near the Banka Straits...".

This confirms that Lt Richard Beckwith, RN, was in command and his First Officer was Lt Robin Kempson.

Stoker Frederick Farron, RN, a surviving crew member of 'Elizabeth' advised the War Office after the war that on the 14th February 'Elizabeth' picked up six RAF 'Other Ranks' from a raft after their (unknown) ship had sunk. Then the **key document, which is recorded just as Farron wrote it,**

- which is a letter written during October 1945 (in long hand) by Stoker F. Farron, (ex 'HMS Prince of Wales') one of the few survivors from 'Elizabeth', which is a first-hand account of the last minutes of this small vessel "...It was about 6.45am on the morning of 16th Feb 1942. Japanese destroyers intercepted and opened fire at us hitting us just above the water on the starboard side aft which put the engines out of action and we were stopped there so the destroyer came alongside, the captain of the destroyer ask for Lt Beckwith to go aboard destroyer but Lt Beckwith would not go without they took all of us on board so they told us to abandon the ship we did so leaving on board dead PO.G.1, Cpl Marines, 2 A.Bs. ,1 RAF man. It was about 7.15am when we got in the water , so what we had to do was tie lifebouys [sic] together and put the men who were wounded in them because the dinghy we had aboard had turned upside down, we where [sic] south of Banka Island in the middle of the straits all we could see was the big hills in Banka. Then it was when Lt Beckwith gave us order to split up into two parties. He imself [sic] took charge of one and Lt Kempson the other by this time we were in between the Elizabeth and the destroyers which had begun to open fire to sink the Elizabeth then when she sank, they never bothered us no more just steamed away..."

Another, this time typewritten and appearing to be a summary of the recollections of Stoker Farron, document in the same file in the UK National Archives is titled "Narrative By: No. D/KX 127093. Stoker F. Farron (ex 'Prince of Wales') and summarises the events as,

"... 0700-16.2.42. Sighted two enemy destroyers with convoy. Destroyer fired one round, a direct hit which killed about five on board. The destroyer came alongside ELIZABETH, and took off the Commanding Officer, then sent him back on board with orders to abandon ship. The dinghy was damaged and out of action. We all went overboard together in lifebelts. The destroyer opened fire on ELIZABETH and sank her in the Banka Strait..."

Who was on board the 'Elizabeth':

We are reliant on Stoker Farron and Lt Ian Forbes for the identities of those on board (see individual entries below for more detailed descriptions)

Ships Company as recorded by Farron,

- Lieut. BECKWITH, R.N. - Ex Second (G) Officer, 'PRINCE OF WALES'.
- Lieut Robin KEMPSON, RNVR
- Sub. Lieut. EVANS, RNVR, 'ex Laburnum' [Note: War office established it was not Sub Lt E.J. Evans, MRNVR – who died on the 'Giang Bee' - but this researcher thinks it may have possibly been Joseph Horace Evans of the Penang Ferry Service and this is under research at present]
- Chief E.R.A. HOLLYHEAD, ex 'REPULSE'.
- Two ERA's ex 'REPULSE'.
- Stoker from Sefton Park, Liverpool [probably Stoker Farron].
- Petty Officer, Gunner's Mate (believed to have been in Singapore before the War).
- D/JX Able Seaman (HO) E. Rendell, ex 'REPULSE'
- Seven other Ratings

Passengers,

- Royal Marines – one Corporal (ex 'REPULSE' and an Irishman) and 2 Marines, one of whom was ex 'REPULSE' and the other who was Marine WILLIAMS (ex 'PRINCE OF WALES').
- Army: 2 Officers – one a 2nd Lieut. [this was 2nd Lt Basil Drakeford, SSVF]
- RAF – 6 Other Ranks – rescued on 14th February 1942.

Casualties and Survivors:

So we know that 'Elizabeth' had a crew of 15 or 16 men and was carrying 11 passengers – this indicates that she was a small vessel of probably no more than 50 – 60 feet in length with little deck space, otherwise she may have had more passengers on board.

It is possible that some of the crew referred to were simple 'supernumerary' naval men.

When the first shells struck 'Elizabeth' at least five men were killed (analysis of total numbers mentioned suggests one or two other men as well);

- The Acting Petty Officer / Gunner's Mate
- Corporal McKillen of the Royal Marines

- 2 unidentified Able seamen
 - 1 RAF 'other ranks '
- leaving 22 men to enter the water – some of these men were wounded.

Stoker Farron leaves us with this description of the situation after the sinking;

Lt Beckwith gave the order for the survivors to split into two parties one under Beckwith and the other being "... Lt Kempson, Sub Lt Evans, Army Officer, 2 Marines Ex Prince of Wales, 2 A.B.s and myself... Lt Kempson who had no lifebelt on and had a broken arm was hanging on to a piece of wood to keep afloat, the last I seen of him was in the afternoon when he said he could see the land which he thought was Sumatra so he left us because he reckoned that he would make land by the time it got dark that night , with him went the Army officer and I never seen him again so the rest of us swam around just hoping for the best until I myself decided to try and make the land so I ask Sub Lt Evans could I go and he said yes, so I left the party and on I went but I did not reach land that night I seen J. destroyers on patrol around the isles which came very near me and put the searchlights on me but did not do no more about me. It was not until just before dark on 17th Feb 1942 that I got to a small Isle where I rested there for the night. Then the morning of 18th I swam across to a bigger Isle where I got some coconuts that had fallen from the trees then I slept in the was jungle for that night the next day I came across some natives who took me to their house and gave me something to eat and drink, put me in a small hut to sleep on 20th they took me to Lt Col. Long Army, Lt Stein, MRNVR, two Abs who were ex Prince of Wales & Ex Repulse, they told me that they had arranged to go across to Banka where there was some more English people, so 12 midnight the natives got about and took us across to Banka for the next day which was 21st Feb, we went to the town of Banakapanang [sic: Pangkalpinang] where we were taken to a Dutch Police Station where there was a Dutch man in charge of it and it was him who told us that the Japanese were in charge of the place and all he could do was to hand us over to the Japs but before he did so he sent us to hospital we I got my wounds treated and cleaned up and they all so gave us some food then they handed us over to the Japs who the next day they took us to Muntok where they had all the other prisoners ..." (letter from Stoker Frederick Farron, November 1945 held in the UK National Archives).

Analysing Stoker Farron's reports we learn that, of the **20 or so survivors**, two parties gathered in the sea after the Japanese destroyers left;

- The first under the command of the captain of the vessel, Lt Richard Chester Beckwith, comprised up to **twelve men**,
 - ERA Alfred Hollingshead
 - 2 unidentified ERAs
 - One Stoker
 - Two Able seamen
 - And probably the five remaining RAF other ranks
 - None of these **twelve** men were ever seen again.
- The second, under the command of Lt Eric John 'Robin' Kempson, RNVR, comprised **eight** men,

- The surviving Army Officer
 - ‘Sub Lt Evans’ – possibly Lt John Horace ‘Froggy’ Evans, MRNVR.
 - AB Rendell
 - An unidentified Able Seaman
 - Stoker Farron
 - Stanley William, Royal marines.
 - An unidentified Royal Marines
- of this group we know that Farron and Rendell reached Banka Island, but the other **six men** were never heard of again. *The unknown factor is whether Sub Lt Evans was in fact Lt. John Horace ‘Froggy’ Evan, MRNVR, s who is recorded as alive and well after the War – but is not recorded in Palembang POW camp which would have been his most likely place of imprisonment.*

The reliable report compiled by Cmdr. Reid, RN, and CO of POWS in Palembang POW camp noted “...2 survivors only...”.

It simply does not fit with the probability of survival evidenced with personnel – servicemen and civilian men, women and children – from the numerous other vessels that were sunk in the area during the same week that 18 – 20 men out of some 20 -22 men died in the sea without reaching either Banka Island or the Sumatran mainland.

The harsh fact is that there is a very high probability that if any of the missing eighteen men had reached the shores of Banka Island they would have probably been summarily executed by the Japanese troops who had landed on that island only a day or two before – these troops had been ordered to kill all survivors they found on the coast of Banka.

Many of the survivors were young, fit men like 18-year-old Royal Marine Stanley Williams, who had not sustained any injury – there should have been a good chance that they reached land either on Banka Island or the Sumatran mainland. There are no POW records for any of the servicemen on the launch as passengers – sadly it is likely that for some they will lie undiscovered either on the beaches or in the jungles of Banka Island with many other murdered servicemen and civilians evacuees from the many vessels from Singapore sunk around the Island or in the Banka Straits.

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Anyone who has corrections, amendments, clarifications or additional material on the events, the crew or passengers of ‘Elizabeth’ 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:

- UK National Archives

Reconstructed Crew and Passenger Lists:

Crew:

- **BECKWITH** – Lieut. Richard Chichester Beckwith, Royal Navy, died 16.2.42, ‘HMS Prince of Wales’, aged 28 years, son of Edward Hornby Beckwith and of Janet Beckwith (nee Chichester) of Instow, Devon; husband of Yvonne Rosemary Beckwith (nee Pridham) of Fleet, Hampshire is the official record (CWGC). Richard Beckwith was born on 4.8.1913 in Instow, Devon into a family of which his maternal grandfather had been Admiral of the Gibraltar Fleet and Baronet of Raleigh. He married Yvonne Pridham in June 1941 in Barnstaple, Devonshire (Terry Ohl www.wikitree.com). He also served earlier during the War on ‘HMS prince of Wales’ when the ‘HMS Hood’ was shelled and blew up - his brief interview of his observations that day is on www.hmshood.org.uk. Richard had been 2nd Gunnery Officer on the ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ (UK National Archives file) when it was sunk off the coast of Malaya in December 1941 and would then have been attached to shore base ‘HMS Sultan’ in Singapore before being assigned to command the ‘Elizabeth’ during the evacuation of Singapore. Survivor Stoker Farron records “...Lt Beckwith(Captain) ...” in his post war letter and then recounts “...that after the Japanese destroyers opened fire on ‘Elizabeth’ and hit the vessel just above the waterline the engines were out of action and “... the destroyer came alongside, the captain of destroyer ask for Lt Beckwith to go aboard destroyer but Lt Beckwith would not go without they took all of us aboard so they told us to abandon the ship...” This act of bravery would cost Richard Beckwith his life – although no doubt he would have become the subject of severe interrogation by the Japanese military for his knowledge of codes and Allied shipping if he had chosen to comply with the Japanese demand. Stoker Farron continues his letter that, after leaving five or six dead on board, the remaining crew and passengers jumped into the sea” ...south of Banka Island in the middle of the straits all we could see was the Big Hills in Banka. Then it was when Lt Beckwith gave us order to split up into two parties. He himself took charge of one and Lt Kempson the other, by this time we were between the ‘Elizabeth’ and the destroyers which had begun to open fire to sink the ‘Elizabeth’ then when she sank they never bothered us no more just steamed away. In Lt Beckwith’s party was the 3 E.R.A.’s, two of them wounded very bad, 1 Sto. Not wounded, 2 A.B.’s not wounded very bad, 1 Sto. Not wounded, 2 A.B.s not wounded and five RAF men quite alright....The last I seen of Lt Beckwith’s party was when they were making the way to

these two big hills we could see....I am afraid they must have died or been killed because while I was a prisoner I made enquiries about them through the other prisoners that had been sunk all over the Straits but they did not see anything of them...". The awful reality that has been revealed by research that, on the 16 February 1942 and the next few days, the Japanese troops on Banka Island had been ordered by their commanding officer on the island to execute any shipwrecked survivors captured landing on Banka island – the massacre of 21 Australian Army nurse, civilian women, civilian men, Army personnel and officers and crew from the 'SS Vyner Brooke' and the 'Pulo Soegi' was taking place on the west coast of Banka Island on the same morning as Lt Beckwith and his party would have been swimming towards that same coast.

- EVANS** – *"...Sub Lt Evans, MRNVR..."* clearly reported by Stoker Farron as last seen in the waters of the Banka Strait after the sinking. This was neither Sub-Lt Eric John Evans, MRNVR who lost his life on the 'Giang Bee' or Lt R.J. Evans, MRNVR who left Singapore on 6 February on 'HMAS Wollongong' and reached Batavia and finally Australia (letter dated 7.3.46 to War Office by Lieut R.J. Evans). Lt R.J. Evans in a letter to the War Office explaining that he was not the person on the 'Elizabeth' goes on to say *that "... the only other Officer of my name known to me in the MRNVR was a Lieutenant in command of 'HMS Jarak' a small minesweeper previously in service in Penang waters, and I last saw him on the morning of the 1st march 1942 when his ship was in the small Dry Dock at Tanjong Priok and Commander Fergusson then advised him to sail as soon as possible for Tjilichap, since when I have had no further news of him or his ship..."*. [Researcher Note: This letter is incorrect as the 'Jarak' was attacked by Japanese warships on 15 February, set on fire, abandoned, reboarded and cleared of any stores by its surviving crew, steered towards Singkep island and scuttled near that Island on 18 February]. The only known two other men with this surname in the 'MRNVR' were (according to a database of 'Volunteers') an *"... J.E.. Evans, Missing Believed Drowned..."* (which could be a confusion with Eric John Evans mentioned above) or **Lt John Horace 'Froggy' Evans**, Superintendent of Ferry Services, Penang Harbour Board. This officer in the MRNVR however survived whatever his experience was in the evacuation of Singapore and reappeared in Penang again in 1946 (Malaya Tribune 23.1.48) to resume his role in the Ferry Service. "Froggy" Evans again appears in papers (ST 22.6.50) as Lt Cdr J.H. Evans. MRNVR, Commanding Officer of the Penang branch of the MRNVR as it began its transformation into the Royal Malaya Navy. In 1951 he is recorded as 'Captain Evans' and retiring from the Penang Harbour Board to live in Singapore (Sunday Standard 25.2.51). A person with the same initials appears during the 1950s as in charge of the Commonwealth Shipping Service in Papua New Guinea and receiving the OBE during that decade as an Australian.
- FARRON** – **Stoker Frederick Farron**, D/KX 127093, Royal Navy. Ex 'HMS Prince of Wales'. Was born on 1.2.23 and enlisted in the Royal Navy on 10.3.41. From his letter written in November 1945 Stoker Farron tells us that after the order to abandon ship he jumped into the sea and Lt Beckwith gave the order for the survivors to split into two parties one under Beckwith and the other being *"... Lt Kempson, Sub.Lt Evans, Army Officer, 2 Marines Ex Prince of Wales, 2 A.B.s and myself... Lt Kempson who had no lifebelt on and had a broken arm was hanging on to a piece of wood to keep afloat, the last I seen of him was in the afternoon when he said he could see the land which he thought was Sumatra so he left us because he reckoned that he would make land by the time it got dark that night, with him*

went the Army officer and I never seen him again so the rest of us swam around just hoping for the best until I myself decided to try and make the land so I ask Sub Lt Evans could I go and he said yes, so I left the party and on I went but I did not reach land that night I seen J. destroyers on patrol around the isles which came very near me and put the searchlights on me but did not do no more about me. It was not until just before dark on 17th Feb 1942 that I got to a small Isle where I rested there for the night. Then the morning of 18th I swam across to a bigger Isle where I got some coconuts that had fallen from the trees then I slept in the was jungle for that night the next day I came across some natives who took me to their house and gave me something to eat and drink, put me in a small hut to sleep on 20th they took me to Lt Col. Long Army, Lt Stein, MRNVR, two Abs who were ex Prince of Wales & Ex Repulse, they told me that they had arranged to go across to Banka where there was some more English people, so 12 midnight the natives got about and took us across to Banka for the next day which was 21st Feb, we went to the town of Banakapanang [sic: Pangkalpinang] where we were taken to a Dutch Police Station where there was a Dutch man in charge of it and it was him who told us that the Japanese were in charge of the place and all he could do was to hand us over to the Japs but before he did so he sent us to hospital we I got my wounds treated and cleaned up and they all so gave us some food then they handed us over to the Japs who the next day they took us to Muntok where they had all the other prisoners ...” (letter from Stoker Frederick Farron, November 1945 held in the UK National Archives). From his ‘MI9 Liberation Questionnaire’ we learn that he was captured at Pangkalpinang on Banka Island’s north coast on 21.2.42 and held in Muntok POW camp during February/ March of 1942, when he was then transferred to a series of POW camps at Palembang. He listed his mother’s address in the Palembang camp records as ‘Mrs Farron, 68 Nuttall Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool. 7’. Another report summarising his recollections is held in the UK National Archives and states “ ... A.B. Rendell and I reached a small island near BANKA after being in the water for about two (2) day...” .[Researcher Note: there is a discrepancy here because he does not mention Rendell in his post war letter as accompanying him to land and also Rendell recorded a date of capture three days earlier that 21 February - this may be an oversight in the letter or Rendell may have considered himself a ‘captured’ once they reached Pangkalpinang].

- **‘HOLLYHEAD’/HOLLINGSHEAD** – ‘Chief ERA Hollyhead’ recorded by Stoker Farron. In fact, there is no one by that name listed in the CWGC website – it appears almost certainly to be **Engine Room Artificer 3rd Class Alfred Hollingshead**, D/MX 54968, Royal Navy who is listed as dying on 16.2.42 and his record shows ‘HMS Sultan’ (the Singapore shore base). No family are listed. He is also remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, panel 68, Col. 3(CWGC). On the ‘force z’ website Arthur Hollingshead is listed as having been a member of the crew of ‘HMS Repulse’. Survivor of the sinking, Stoker Farron, states in his post war letter that the ERAs on the ‘Elizabeth’ survived the shells hitting the vessel and they were part of the group of RAF men, and vessels crew led by Lt Beckwith towards the “... *big hills in Banka* ...” and last seen heading through the sea towards Banka Island. Whether the group ever succeeded in reaching the shores is unknown – it is reasonable to assume that one or more made it to Banka but there is no record of POWs linked to the vessel. There is a high probability that if they reached a beach on Banka Island on that day or any of the next few days, they would have been summarily executed in the same fashion as survivors of the ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ or the ‘SS Tandjong Pinang’.

- **KEMPSON** – Lieut. Robin Kempson is mentioned in letters and records on the ‘Elizabeth’ held in the UK National Archives. This is in fact **Lieut. Eric John Kempson, RNVR**, who is officially listed as dying on 16.2.42 and with the attachment ‘HMS Sultan’ (the naval shore base in Singapore where he would have been based after the sinking of ‘HMS Prince of Wales’). He is also remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial Panel 103, Col. 3. (CWGC). ‘The London Gazette’ has him as a temporary Sub Lt in 1940 but he clearly received promotion over the next 12 -18 months. One of only two known survivors of the sinking of the ‘Elizabeth’, Stoker Farron, wrote after the war that after the Japanese destroyers opened fire and shell hit the small vessel, bringing it to a halt, the crew were ordered to abandon ship before the Japanese opened fire again. In the water the Captain, Lt Beckwith gave the order for the survivors to split into two parties - one being led by Lt Kempson. This group comprised Robin Kempson, ‘Sub Lt Evans’ (this is a mystery because Evans of the MRNVR was killed on another ship evacuating Singapore), an Army Officer (a 2nd Lieut.), two Marines (ex ‘Prince of Wales’), two Able Seamen, and Stoker Farron. Farron then tells us “... Lt Kempson, who had no lifebelt on and had a broken arm was hanging on to a piece of wood to keep afloat [Researcher Note: ion 1.11.45 Farron said they were swimming from 0700 hrs on 16 Feb], the last I seen of him was in the afternoon when he said he could see the land which he thought was Sumatra so he left us [Farron later stated this was at 1600 hrs on 16 Feb] because he reckoned that he would make land by the time it got dark that night , with him went the Army officer[an unidentified 2nd Lieutenant] and I never seen him again so the rest of us swam around just hoping for the best until I myself decided to try and make the land so I ask Sub Lt Evans could I go and he said yes, so I left the party...” (letter from Stoker Frederick Farron, November 1945 held in the UK National Archives). Robin Kempson had been appointed a temporary Sub Lieutenant in 1940 and was the sibling of actress Rachel Redgrave and another brother (my heritage website). Also recorded as “... A Sub Lieutenant (Ginger -haired) RNVR., from ‘PRINCE OF WALES’ (was promoted to LIEUTENANT in SINGAPORE) believed to be -LIEUT. KEMPSON, RNVR...” (UK National Archives file). ‘Robin’ Kempson was remembered by his family in 1945 when the following was placed in ‘The Times’ newspaper “... ‘ON Active Service’, KEMPSON – On Feb.16 1942 at sea near Sumatra , Eric John (Robin) Kempson, Lieut., RNVR, formerly of ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ second son of Mr and Mrs Eric Kempson, Corner Cottage, Goldbanger, Essex aged25...”(www.churchside1.plus.com)[Goldbanger - now referred to as ‘Goldhanger’ – is a village and parish in the Maldon District, east of Chelmsford in England.]
- **RENDELL – Able Seaman (HO) E. Rendell**, D/JX204381, Royal Navy. Ex ‘HMS Repulse’, although he is said to have survived with Stoker Farron, Edwin Charles Rendell was (according to his MI9 questionnaire) captured on 18.2.42 which was three days earlier than Stoker Farron. Edwin Rendell was born in 1920 and died in 2006. He appears to have come from Tiverton, Devon because on the Palembang POW Camp records he gives the address of his mother as ‘Mrs J Rendell, 12 Bruin Road, Tiverton, Devon’.
- **UNIDENTIFIED ERA** - ex ‘Repulse’
- **UNIDENTIFIED ERAs** – identities unknown who died either swimming to shore in the Banka Straits or were killed after reaching land on Banka Island.

- **UNIDENTIFIED Lieutenant** – and unidentified Lt RNVR (ex P.O on ‘HMS Prince of Wales’)
- **UNIDENTIFIED NAVAL RATINGS** – four unidentified naval ratings, two of whom were left dead on the ‘Elizabeth’ when the survivors abandoned ship.
- **UNIDENTIFIED ‘ACTING PETTY OFFICER GUNNER’S MATE’** – left for dead on board the ‘Elizabeth’ when the survivors abandoned ship, “... *medium height, plump, dark, suntanned skin...*” (UK Archives file)
- **UNIDENTIFIED STOKER** – Farron believed “...*he came from Sefton Park, Liverpool and had arrived in Singapore in January 1942, ‘Elizabeth’ being his first ship...*” – this appears to have been one of the ERAs who survived the attack but became ‘Missing’ after swimming to land.

Passengers:

- **DRAKEFORD** – Basil Percy Drakeford, Manager, Bennie S. Cohen & Son [Malaya] Ltd, Kelly & Walsh Building, Raffles Place, Singapore. 2nd Lt SSVF & General List. Escaped Singapore on the tug *Elizabeth* – which was sunk Banka Strait “... *He swam ashore and found a Malay kampong where they fed him but persisted that he moved on They showed him a bit of a path which he followed until it came to thick jungle and then petered out , he could only return to the kampong. On his return the villagers were inclined to be hostile, and one of them brandished a shotgun at him. Fortunately, he spotted a lifeboat which they had salvaged and told them that if they would let him have it he would willingly leave the village, to which they agreed. The rudder was missing, as was the stern bench on which the coxswain usually sits, but the villagers helped Basil rig up a steering oar, and then gave him a kerosene tin of drinking water. They obviously were very scared of the Japanese finding him there, and it was that, no doubt, that prompted them to assist him on his way. He hoisted the sail and headed south through the Banka Strait...*” (Memoirs of Lt A.R. Mann, RNVR.). He later met up with two men from HMML 311 , AB Belmont and AB Dunn and they later were joined by Lt Mann, RNVR from ‘SS Vyner Brooke’ and Staff Sgt Knight RASC plus Stoker Way also of “SS Vyner Brooke.’ – finally making it to Java. However, Basil Drakeford had cut his legs in the jungle when he had joined a party of Dutch soldiers to check on Japanese movements from the boat they were travelling in the latter stage of the journey south and the cuts had turned septic. He was left behind in Batavia in hospital. He became a POW and died in captivity within three months on 28.5.42 [31] Batavia. (JMM and Mann memoirs). The official record is “... *2nd Lieutenant Basil Percy Drakeford, #22708, General List [probably Straits Settlement Volunteer Forces], died 28 May 1942 aged 31 years, buried in Jakarta War cemetery grave 4.E.11. The son of Edward Percy Goode and Edith Drakeford of Brondesbury Middlesex. His brother David Goode Drakeford also died on service...*” (CWGC).
- **MCKILLEN** – Corporal McKillen, Royal Marines, Ex ‘Repulse’ Plymouth Division. Stoker Farron “... *believed him to be on the after 5” guns of ‘Repulse’, around 5’9”, fair hair, 24 years old and had a chain around his neck and was an Irishman...*”. He was left dead on the ‘Elizabeth’

when the survivors abandoned ship. This was **Corporal Robert McKillen**, Royal Marines, PLY/X 1456 who died on 16.2.42 aged 23 years of age, son of John and Elizabeth McKillen, Glengormley, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. 'HMS Sultan'. Also remembered on the Plymouth Naval memorial Panel 74, Col.3 (CWGC). Robert McKillen had been on the 'HMS repulse' when it was sunk off the coast of Malaya in December 1941, then attached to Singapore shore base 'HMS Sultan' before being assigned to the tugboat / launch 'Elizabeth' for the evacuation

- **UNIDENTIFIED RAF. 'OTHER RANKS'** – six RAF other ranks picked up from the sea on 14 February 1942 after their ship sank. One of these men was left dead on the 'Elizabeth' when the survivors abandoned ship, so five RAF men abandoned 'Elizabeth' and entered the sea, apparently '...quite alright...' according to Stoker Farron. Given that it appears six RAF men died as a result of the sinking of the 'Elizabeth' it is relevant to include a list of RAF casualties from the UK Archives in which it is highly likely that these men are listed;

SS/330/141/268 Cao PW
2
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. Fort-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. F.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.)
930128 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.G., 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: F/O. B. GALLICK, 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).

- 1 - (Contd.)

SS/330/141/26860 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.C.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. TERNAN 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.
		"TAFY"	-do-	15.2.42.
	A.C.	DIMON 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. STIEFF 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.

- **UNIDENTIFIED ARMY OFFICER** – rank unknown.
- **UNIDENTIFIED ARMY OFFICER** – a 2nd Lieutenant
- **WILLIAMS** – Marine Williams, classified as ‘Missing’ after surviving the attack on ‘Elizabeth’. After abandoning ship, he was in Lt Kempson’s party (with Stoker Farron) but became ‘Missing’ with Sub Lt Evans after Stoker Farron left to swim to land by himself. The official



record is “... **Marine Stanley Williams**, PLY/X 100178, Royal Marines, ‘HMS Prince of Wales’, died 16 .2.42 aged 18 years, son of William Henry and Elizabeth Williams of Leasowe, Moreton, Cheshire. Also remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, panel 76, Col. 1...” (CWGC). He had joined the crew of ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ when it was first commissioned on 19 .1.41 (Stan Cookson) and was serving on the battleship it was sunk off the coast of Malaya in December 1941. Stanley was one of at least 15 children in the family of William and Elizabeth (Stanley was the only of their children to die during the Second World War) and they lived in Birkett Avenue , Leasowe, Liverpool at the time of Stanley’s enlistment (Stan Cookson) , but other references have also mentioned that they may also have lived in a docker’s cottage in Birkenhead, Liverpool – possibly in Tollemache Road. It was also rumoured that tragically, not long after learning of Stanley’s death his father William Henry Williams took his own life, however family friend Stan Cookson (who is also the owner of the photo at left of Stanley Williams) advises that the Williams family have ascertained that this was not the case .