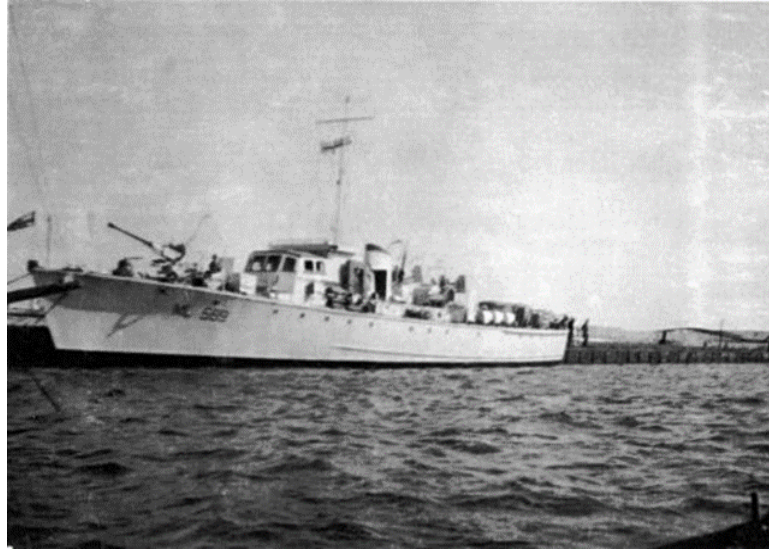


## ML311

### **Royal Navy Fairmile launch sunk in the Banka Strait on 15 February 1942**

[Version 2.3.0; April 2020]



A Fairmile 'B' Type of the same design as HMML 311

On the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1942 as the Japanese Army tightened its encirclement of the central area of the city of Singapore the Allied troops and civilians endured constant bombing and artillery shelling - the city was in flames; thousands of dead bodies littered the streets and much of the city lay in ruins. In the suburbs hand to hand fighting was taking place in last ditch attempts to stop the Japanese overrunning the city.

The governmental authorities had been very tardy and inefficient in the evacuation of civilians until only a few days before and chaotic scenes were taking place at the Singapore wharves as European and Eurasian men women and, plus a few well connected Chinese families scrambled onto any vessel departing that would take them.

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.

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

Amongst the vessels (Captains) were;

- The 'Pulo Soegi', a small coastal merchant vessel (Lt. Martin, RNZNVR)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 310 (Lt. Bull, RNZNVR)
- **Fairmile 'B' launch ML 311 (Lt. E.J.H. Christmas, RANVR)**
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 432 (Lt. H.L. Herd, RNZNVR)
- Fairmile 'B' launch ML 433(Lt. Cmdr. H. Campey, RANVR)

### Assembling the 1<sup>st</sup> Singapore ML Flotilla:

On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1942 – only a month before the evacuation of Singapore the draft of eight ('Colonial') officers and forty-four ratings, who had joined 'HMS Attack' in November 1941 in the UK for training, arrived in Singapore from England on the troopship 'Aorangi' to man the first four 'B' type ML.s (Fairmiles) of the Singapore Flotilla (Arkley).

In England, earlier, in October 1941 had occurred the first meeting between Lt Cmdr. Campey, RANVR, who was to be the new senior Officer of the Singapore ML Flotilla and some of his 'No.1s' or First Officers – Lt Bill Bourke, RNZNVR, Lt Ted Staples, RNZNVR, Lt 'Aussie' Henderson, RANVR, and Lt Bob Arkley, RNZNVR - at the 'Royal Hotel' near the naval base at Portland on the south coast of England. In November they boarded the 'Capetown Castle' at Liverpool and bound for South Africa, where they were joined by three other 'SOs' (Arkley description) – Ward, Christmas (Aust) and Herd (NZ).

On 23 December 1941 they all transferred to the 'Aorangi' in Durban where, on Xmas Eve, Lt Bob Arkley records in his diary *"... I have been appointed Lt. Cmdr. Campey's No.1, Bill Lt. Herd's, Ted Lt Christmas' and 'Aussie' Lt Ward's..."*.

Therefore, in overall charge of this contingent of officers who would form the 'newly manned' ML Flotilla in Singapore was the Senior Officer, Lt. Cmdr. H. Campey, RANVR.

*"...The convoy arrived at Singapore, then steamed into the harbour while enemy planes bombed the airport to the East. It was the first of many raids we were to be subjected to – described by one of the wits as 'being like home again'. As the 'Aorangi' berthed alongside an almost deserted wharf I sensed an atmosphere of fear...."* (Campey).

They reported to 'HMS Sultan' (the shore base of the Royal Navy in Singapore) on the other side of the island at the Naval Base, which had already shrunk in size from the original huge Far Eastern command base because the 'Far Eastern Naval Command' had already moved to Java to join the Dutch and American commands. The remaining establishment had been boosted by the small MRNVR of British residents and Malay citizens, Yangtse river Gunboats, Singapore Harbour Authority vessels and the first two MLs 310 and 311. Some survivors of the sunken 'HMS Prince of Wales' and 'HMS Repulse' had been temporarily added to 'HMS Sultan' – which Lt Cdr Campey comments *"... which was of doubtful benefit in some cases in whom the shock of defeat and regrouping caused demoralisation as I later found out ..."* (Campey).

MLs 310 and 311 were already in commission (albeit not well equipped). They were 'B' Type Fairmiles – round bilged 112 feet long, with a top speed of 20 -21 knots. Both vessels were manned

by a mixed crew of Malay ratings and RN ratings, with MRNVR officers in command. These were replaced by the officers and ratings from the new arrivals. MLs 432 and 433 had been launched and were awaiting completion at the Singapore Harbour Board over the next few weeks the completion of these two was held back because of “... *repeated daily bombings which caused the rapid dwindling of labour ...*” (Campey).

The officers were settled into the ‘Adelphi’ Hotel and the ML crews at the ‘Flying Angel’ hostel closer to the dockyard where the four MLs had been built and were berthed.

Then was delivered the news to the existing officers and ratings (mainly Malay ratings and Royal navy survivors of the ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ and ‘HMS Repulse’) on the Singapore MLs that arrangements were about to change “... *An RN lieutenant and a Lieut. Bull, RNZNVR, were in command [of the two MLs #310 and #311 already commissioned] and were not pleased when they had to remove themselves and the crews to be replaced by the newly arrived personnel under my command ...*” (Campey).

The arrivals soon found out that the four MLs had been built at the Singapore Dockyard to plans supplied by Admiralty - where the draftsman had made an error by shortening the length by two feet to 110 feet and the skilled local SHB manager had shrunk the plans proportionately to fit. This caused some stability problems later.

“... *ML311 was employed in clearing up small craft, evacuating islands off southern Malaya and Singapore, patrol work and investigation of enemy coastal movements ...*” (Campey).

“... *About the 5<sup>th</sup> February Lieut. Herd and S/Lieut. Bourke both RNZNVR settled their crew in ML432 to be ready for commissioning trials to take place on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1942 in a seaward area of the south western approach to Singapore harbour...*” (Campey). In fact, this turned into something a lot more and on that day ML432 and found herself in the position of rescuing some 330 survivors – on one voyage - from the bombed and burning ‘Empress of Asia’ which had been run aground at the approaches to Singapore harbour!

At this stage, 8<sup>th</sup> February – the day on which the Japanese Army landed at Kranji on Singapore Island - ML433 was still unfinished and laying alongside in the dockyard basin but it seems that it was rapidly, though incompletely, ‘finished’ with ‘three pounder’ mounted on the foredeck and a twin Lewis gun also positioned. On the 9<sup>th</sup> February both ML432 and ML433 were stocked by Sub Lts Bourke and Arkley from the main store depot at the Naval Base on the other side of the island and then “... *The next day 10<sup>th</sup> February both MLs 432, 433 went to a fuel storage island south of Singapore still manned by an official and a few helpers who quickly filled the main tanks and as many drums as could be stowed ...*” (Campey).

Lieut. Cmdr. Campey remarks in his memoirs “... *We were afloat at last and although officially not commissioned ML433 was ready to be used although the R/T sets of Hong Kong origin were of little use being ineffectively screened against electrical interference. They were impossible to use whilst the engines were running ...*”.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> February ML311 was anchored with the other MLs and “... *a miscellany of boats and craft ... gathered together in the middle harbour, a convenient point of departure close to the city ... and abreast of the ‘Laburnum’ jetty from where water supplies could be obtained. They lay there for*

*3 days and nights from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> February ...” (Campey).”* The vessels just had to sit out the regular bombing attacks that were being kept, initially, at a reasonable distance by AA gunners - until the last day.

### **Passengers and crew on ML311:**

In command of ML 311 was 33-year-old Lieutenant Ernest Joseph Huson Christmas, RANVR, a fair-haired man of small (five foot six inches) stature who hailed from Melbourne, Australia. A civilian he had joined up in Brisbane in September 1940 under the ‘Yachtsmen’s Scheme’.

He had been joined board his vessel on 13 February 1942 by Lt. Cmdr. V.C.F. Clark, RN, who Lt Cdr Campey (as Senior Officer of the ML Flotilla) *“... thought would be of help to her inexperienced CO ...”* (Campey). The First Officer was Lt. E. ‘Ted’ Staples, RNZNVR.

Cmdr. Reid, RN, in Palembang later compiled a schedule of sunk and captured vessels in which he recorded that on HMML 311 there were *“... 2 Officers and 13 men... RN 2 and Army 55...”* – making a total of 72 persons. Another source, a newspaper interview in March 1942 with HMML 311 crewmember AB Belmont, sated that there were *“... 60 Army personnel on board in addition to a crew of 14...”*.

A party of RAOC had boarded ML311 before it left Singapore (see also Campey report and story) and this is explained in the reports of LT Col Scott (RAOC) and Major Lyddon (Signals). Major Lyddon explained in his narrative *“... I embarked on HMML 311 with some fifty other army personnel, mainly RASC and RAOC ... some of the personnel on board were the following: Lt. Col. Scott, RAOC; Major Ortiger RAOC; Cpl. Land, Staff Sgt. Graham,; Pte. Kerr, Pte. Harris; Pte. Fletcher; Lc. Cpl Sandylands, Cpl. Mason; Ptes. Carr, Groonan, R. Simpson, and Stoker Kennedy. Of these I do not know which are safe but understand that L/Cpl Sandylands is a P. of W. in another camp in Palembang...”*.

IN addition, two senior officers, one from the RCOS and one from the 19<sup>th</sup> Hyderabad Regiment also boarded the vessel at a late hour to escape Singapore.

[Researcher Note: From information gathered the relatively small vessels leaving late on the evening of Friday 13 February (by then most of the remaining medium sized vessels which qualified for the description of a ‘ship’, those such as the HMS Giang Bee’, ‘SS Vyner Brooke’, and even the ‘last minute’ scramble of nurses , women and children onto the grossly overcrowded ‘SS Kuala’ had left ) comprised five ( including ML 1062) Fairmile launches, several small coastal vessels and were soon to be followed around midnight by the ‘Insect’ class Yangste River gunboats ‘HMS Dragonfly’, ‘HMS Grasshopper’ and ‘HMS Scorpion’.

As mentioned the Fairmile launches had been selected at very short notice to take many senior officers from all three services plus a large group of 100 – 120 skilled Ordnance from the RAOC to Java. The RAOC men were spread across the ‘Pulo Soegi’ and the Fairmile launches ML 433, ML432, ML311 and ML1062.

The Fairmiles travelled in pairs and crossed paths with other evacuation vessels as they adhered to orders and hid by islands during daylight hours – a strategy that would determine their fate because it was delaying their race to the Banka Strait, a location also chosen by a large and powerful IJN force of cruisers and high powered destroyers supporting the invasion fleet aimed at landing troops on southern Sumatra and Banka Island itself. ]

## Evacuation from Singapore:

To recap, the Captain of ML311 was Lt. E.J.H. Christmas, his First Lieutenant was Lt. E. Staples, RNZNVR, and a senior ranking officer, Lt. Cmdr. V.C.F. Clark, RN., had joined them at the last minute.



About noon on 13 February 1942, all the vessels gathered in Singapore Harbour received verbal orders “... to take on board as many evacuees as they could; most had done this already and the MLs were to lay alongside the jetty for the arrival of non-combatant personnel after 2000 hours, and all vessels were to make their way through Surien [ sic – Durian] and Banka Straits to Batavia, Java where further instructions would be given them ...” (Campey)..

**Lt. E. ‘Ted’ Staples, RNZNVR.**

Campey wrote in a personal memoir that “...I had estimated that the remainder of the MLs [ he is referring to 311,432 and 433 – since 310 had been selected to take RAMY, the air Vice-Marshal and their remaining staffs] could each carry 60 evacuees and crew together with the two or more forbidden guests they may have or had taken on board, although I had reason to believe there were more ...” (Campey).

HMML 311, with Lieut Cmdr. V.C.F. Clark, RN, aboard (with whom Campey had planned the voyage of the MLs to Java) would be accompanied by Lt. Cmdr. Campey on ML433 - which vessel had proven to have a compass that had developed a considerable error. The plan was to ‘lie up’ by day and sail at night.

Campey’s memoirs tell us that ML311 led compass faulty ML433 out of the harbour on Friday 13 February, during which passage Campey describes the scene as “... close to her stern light which rose, wavered, swung and fell like a hovering firefly against the darkness. Moving at ten knots it was not long before we overtook, then passed through the swarm of small auxiliaries as they appeared suddenly and uncomfortably close. Passing through the Durien Straits we left the main pilotage hazards behind, then altered course for the first lying up position in the large Amphitrite Bay [this was Amphitrite Bay – now named Teluk Kualacenaku. It is about 20 miles wide and currently described as “the coast ... being completely overgrown by trees, which are all of one kind ...”] cut in the Eastern shores of Sumatra. Dawn began to emerge as the MLs entered the depressingly flat seascape of the bay whose foreshores were hidden over the horizon. A small densely covered island knoll was selected, and we turned our bows into the steep vegetation covered banks to moor them to trees.... ML311 was lying down stream



*some fifty feet away. Each ML put a party of evacuee volunteers ashore to cut and collect vegetation with which they successfully camouflaged the MLs just in time to prevent two low flying Japanese planes' crews spotting us as they passed overhead across our islet mooring. The weather continued to be humid and hot and intolerably still, not a wisp of air moving until the cooler evening settled down whilst the MLs prepared to depart. ... We followed MI311 through the fading light as she moved out of the bay as darkness came down..." (Campey)*

[Researcher Note from Lt Cmdr. Campey's memoirs: ML433 at that point found its compass had begun to work accurately, so it proceeded independently but then developed an engine water pump problem and had to stop both engines whilst the flooding in the engine room was bailed out and one engine fixed. This took two or three hours and caused ML311 to turn back to search, unsuccessfully, for ML433 before resuming her course towards the Banka Strait. This was a fatal delay for ML311 which may have otherwise just made it through the Banka Strait successfully ahead of the arrival of the Japanese warship fleet.]

Another detailed account of the last voyage of ML311 is contained in an official 'Report of Proceedings' by the aforementioned Lieutenant Commander V.C.F. Clark, DSC and bar, RN, to the Captain Coastal Forces, East Indies written after Clark had been released from captivity as POW of the Japanese. It is dated "...9 September 1945, Singapore" and extracts of it are republished on pp.208-211 in the book "Singapore's Dunkirk' by Geoffrey Brooke.

To quote;

*"1. ...this report is forwarded by me, as Senior Naval Officer on board, in the absence of her Commanding Officer, Lieutenant E.J.H. Christmas, RANVR, whose subsequent fate is unknown.*

*2. I embarked on ML 311, 13 February 1942 as passenger.*

*3. Orders were later received from RAMY, through Commander Alexander, RN, to embark about fifty-five Army personnel after dark, then proceed to Batavia via the durian Straits...."*

[4 and 5 not shown here]

*6. At daylight (15<sup>th</sup>) we sighted what appeared to be a warship from two to three miles distant, almost dead ahead, in the swept channel, at a fine inclination, stern towards us and all appearances almost stopped. We maintained our course, being under the impression that this was probably a Dutch destroyer. When about a mile away the destroyer altered course to port and was immediately recognisable by its distinctive stem as a Japanese destroyer of a large type. At Lieutenant Christmas' request I took command of the ship, and increased to eighteen knots, maintaining my course, to close within effective firing range.*

*7. The enemy opened fire and, with the first salvo, scored two direct hits, one of which penetrated the forecastle deck, laying out the gun's crew, putting the gun out of action (not immediately realised) and killing the helmsman. Lieutenant Christmas took the wheel, I increased to full speed (about twenty knots) and made a four -point alteration of course to starboard to open 'A' arcs for the Lewis guns, now within extreme range. This brought me on a course roughly parallel and opposite to the enemy and closing the Sumatra shore which, in the almost certain event of being sunk, should enable the crew and troops to swim to the mainland. On my enquiring, after this alteration, why the three-pounder was not firing, I was informed that it was out of action. By constant zig-zagging further direct hits were avoided for a short time, during which the LGs continued to engage the enemy.*

*8. The enemy however, having circled round astern of me, was closing and soon shrapnel and direct hits began to take their toll both above and below decks. The petrol tanks were on fire, blazing amidships, and there was a fire on the messdecks. The engine room casing was blown up and two*

out of three ER personnel had been killed, whilst a third, a stoker, was wounded in the leg. The port engine was put out of action. The ER services as a whole, however, were maintained throughout the action. Finally, Lieutenant Christmas at the helm reported the steering broken down with the rudder jammed to starboard. We began circling at a range of 1000 yards. Further offensive or defensive action being impossible, all guns out of action and the ship ablaze amidships, I stopped engines and ordered 'abandon ship'.

9. Casualties were heavy. I estimate that barely twenty men, including wounded, took to the water. The Japanese destroyer lay off and, although the White Ensign remained flying, ceased fire but made no attempt to pick up survivors. I advised men to make for the mainland shore, but a number are believed to have made for the middle of the strait in the hope of being picked up. The action lasted about ten minutes. The captain of the 'Mata Hari' (Lieutenant Carson, T124), who witnessed the action, states that the Japanese ship fired fourteen six-gun salvos. There were four, possibly five, direct hits, and in addition to the damage from these, most regrettable carnage was caused on the closely stowed upper deck by bursts from several 'shorts'. The ship sank not long after being abandoned, burning furiously....

11. In accordance with KR & AI recommendation for award is attached herewith..."

The author continues that the recommendation, under 'King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions', was for the awarding of the DSM medal to Stoker P.H.H. Donne [sic – this was Stoker P.A. H. Dunne, RN]. Though wounded - the other Engine room ratings had been killed – he had kept the Engine Room in action to the last, despite being surrounded by blazing petrol tanks and the adjacent Lewis gun ammunition. At the order to abandon ship he assisted with the seriously wounded and was one of the last three to leave the ship.

**Another perspective of the last few hours of ML311 and many of the men on board is recounted in the book 'Spotlight on Singapore' by Denis Russell – Roberts (pp180-81) - from the view of the Captain and the passengers on board the recently captured evacuation ship 'SS Mata Hari' near Banka Island on 15 February 1942 as " ... Morning twilight revealed the Rising Sun at the gaff of a cruiser about a thousand yards away ..." and "... The Japanese cruiser steamed slowly round them with all guns trained. She completed a circle and was about to send a boat across when one of the British Fairmiles appeared on the scene, her White Ensign trailing out astern as she raced through the water. On came this speedy, one hundred and twenty-foot-long motor launch, 'H.M. Launch311', commanded by Lieut. Christmas of the Royal New Zealand Volunteer Reserve [ sic: he was with the Royal Australian Volunteer Naval Reserve]. Leaving Singapore on the night of 13<sup>th</sup> February with a crew of fifteen and fifty-seven service passengers aboard, she too, was bound for Batavia. The cruiser opened fire and two destroyers raced up to join the fray. Armed with only one three-pounder gun and three machine guns, 311 was magnificently handled. Twisting and turning like a hare to avoid the salvos as the cruiser fired broadside after broadside, she quickly closed the range to less than one thousand yards in order to bring her little gun into play. On 'Mata Hari' crowded decks Ruth [Russel-Roberts] felt an awed silence, as with bated breath she and the other passengers watched this heroic but hopeless action, so in keeping with the finest traditions of the service. Ruth stood ... too astonished to speak, yet silently praying that the gallant little vessel might escape and that the cruiser's shells should fall wide. But the end came with the twelfth broadside and 311 went down with her colours still flying. ...".** The delay caused by the diversion created by ML311 enabled the captain of the 'Mata Hari' to dispose of militarily valuable items like submarine detection equipment and the oscillator under the

ships bottom. The book closes on this incident with “... After sinking 311 the cruiser returned and sent her boat across...”.

Author Geoffrey Brooke also later wrote to Lt Commander Clark to ask him what happened subsequently, and he replied in amplification,

*“... After a salvo at approx. 400 yards from the Jap destroyer the ML (100ft Fairmile) of which I had on request taken command, was reduced to a shambles – fire in the fo’c’sle – fire in the engine room, gun knocked off its mounting, rudder jammed hard-astarboard and boat slowly turning in a circle and sinking. No further action was taken by japs. Upper deck, on which there were sixty key Army personnel, was a bloody shambles, deck and scuppers running with blood and a horrible gory sight. My left arm was broken at the wrist.*

### **Casualties:**

In an interview in 1985 (Oral Archives IWM) Victor Clark spoke more candidly on the attack, telling us that they had come across a modern destroyer which would have had a speed of 35 knots versus the 18 knots of ML311. Clark says he got together all the men on the ML with rifles and ordered “... everybody shoot at the bridge of the Japanese craft ...”, then put his vessel on a parallel but opposite course to the Japanese warship. He continues that at this point “... the young Australian Officer [Lt. Christmas] asked Clark to take the bridge whilst he went down to the wheel ...”. In this interview he then says that after the first round from the Japs he saw that the fo’c’sle gun was knocked off its mount; the young Lieutenant had been killed and that the rudder was jammed. The action had lasted nine minutes, the upper deck was “... a charnel house, it was ghastly, men with stomachs shot away and backbones showing ...”.

Clark then continued to Geoffrey Brooke – “... Those of us capable of doing so lashed helpless survivors hopefully to planks etc. and the unwounded (about a dozen soldiers including a Colonel and a young Petty Officer) told to swim toward the shore (mangrove). This party found an abandoned Dutch lifeboat and the young PO (trained by me at Shotley!) discovering mast, sails, compass, charts and provisions on board, took charge of the party (including the Colonel!) and sailed them for thirteen days and nights through the Banka Straits and down towards Batavia. Within a short distance of Batavia, they were caught by a junk full of Japs and became POWs. Rotten luck! ...”.

The identity of some of these men seems clear but there are some who have not been identified and one intriguing identity is that of the “... young Petty Officer...” mentioned by Clark – this Petty Officer in fact could only have been P.O. George Drew (see individual entries) who was the only P.O. on the ML – this means George Drew was one of the men shot by the Japanese from the junk. Or was Clark’s memory confused and he was meaning one of the Able Seamen?

Insofar as the location of the sinking – Cmdr. Reid, RN, wrote in his report in Palembang POW camp that the vessel sank “...south of Muntok 15’...” . This indicates that ML311 was sunk ‘15 minutes of Latitude’ in nautical navigational terms which equates to about 15 nautical miles south of Muntok – which is about five miles from the mouth of the Moesi (Musi) River.



Given that Lt. Cmdr. Clark does not say in his first report that he saw the death of Lt. Christmas - in fact he states that his "... *subsequent fate is unknown ...*", the researcher assumes that Lt Christmas was not killed on the ML311 and must have been one of the men who abandoned the ship and died later. In fact, in the British War Office files there is a notation, attributed to Leading Seaman Henry Swift, against the name of Lt Christmas, that "... *Lt. Christmas was badly wounded - seen diving overboard ...*" leaving us to assume that Ernest Christmas, in a badly wounded condition, lost his life in the waters of Banka Strait – or later.

The horrific situation of high explosive shells and heavy machine gun bullets (referred to by Clark as 'shorts') literally smashing the wooden hull, decks and superstructure of ML311 and at the same time the bodies of some fifty or more men on the decks and engine room, within the space of probably ten minutes, must have traumatised any survivors.

The reality is that five of the thirteen naval ratings on the ML311 and probably some forty to fifty ( of the 57 ) British Army personnel standing on the vessels deck lost their lives within minutes of the Japanese attack; with the probability that another five or six of the survivors - out of Lt Cdr Clark's description of "... *barely twenty men, including wounded, took to the water ...*" – were soon dying from their wounds, lack of fresh water or shark attacks in the Banka Strait after the sinking.

Major Lyddon gives in his narrative an indication of survivors at that stage when he tells us "... *There were about 30 in the water most of whom swam to the BANKA shore. Pte. Simpson and I made up a small raft. There was a strong current to the south and after swimming for about 10 hours we reached a fishing pagar 15 to 20 miles from where the ship was sunk. It was then about 1630 hrs, 15 February. During the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> February Lt. Commander Clark swam up to our Pagar from another further up the coast. He was wounded by shrapnel in the left forearm. At about 1200 hrs the three of us swam the 500 yards to the shore and then travelled about 6 to 7 hours through the mangrove swamps, arriving at dusk at a river SUNGEI POELURAN REDDING. We could see lights and after swimming to them found a fishing village where we were given food and a place to sleep. On 17<sup>th</sup> February Major Bird R/A aged 41 joined us. He was from HMML 433 and had left 3 or 4 others south of the kampong where we were staying...*".

Cmdr. Reid states that there were an estimated 14 survivors – Lyddon's report describes 8 of them..

This RAOC group definitely included one of the two parties, each of 20 men, from the RAOC who were detailed from the larger group of some 100 'ZAOW', RAOC men under the command of T/Major Marsh at Tanjong Pagar wharves on the evening of 13 February in Singapore by 'Naval officers' to join other vessels to escape – 60 men joined the 'Pulo Soegi' and some joined ML311 and it looks highly likely that the other 'party of 20 men' must have boarded Fairmile ML432.

### **Survivor stories:**

Lt. Commander Clark had found himself alone in the sea between Banka island and the Sumatran mainland. Holding onto an empty ammunition box with his 'broken arm' he then swam from about 0700 hrs until dusk that day until he was able to climb onto a fishing 'Pagar' on the coast of Sumatra. His story then becomes an arduous experience, collecting various other servicemen along the way,

on the coast of Sumatra and up a river before being betrayed by local people to the Japanese to become POWs – he was incarcerated in Palembang (see his personal entry below for the full story).

Apart from Lt 'Ted' Staples, RNZNVR, the only other crew member known to have survived and become a POW in Palembang is Leading Stoker Ashcroft but all that is known of his experiences is that he - along with Lt Cdr Campey , Sub Lt Arkley, Lt Col Bedford and an Aircraftsman Kirk were picked up over the next few days by a Japanese fishing boat that was being used to ferry Japanese stores and troops, they remained on those fishing vessels for a week before being taken to Palembang and POW camp.

In fact, all other surviving naval ratings on board (Swift, Dunne, Miles and Hill) are listed in War Office files as 'Java' POWs which indicates that these men had spent several weeks travelling by sea and were captured in Java. Indeed, Leading Seaman Henry Swift, RN, one of the crew, states in his MI9 'Liberation Questionnaire' that his date of capture at Bantam Bay on the north west tip of Java did not take place until 6 March 1942. This is a period of almost three weeks after the sinking of ML311.

The survivor story of AB 'Taffy' Belmont and AB 'Paddy' Dunn is one that has come to hand for the researcher more recently (April 2020) with the receipt of the memoirs of Lt A. R. Mann, RNVR who had survived the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' on the north west coast of Banka Island. From Mann's manuscript, and a newspaper interview in Australia during March 1942 with AB Belmont, we learn that after the shelling and sinking Belmont swam around in the sea until he reached a raft *"...with our Number One (the First Lieutenant) on it. Then we saw someone waving to us, went back and came across our captain, Able Seaman Miles, stoker Dunn who had been wounded and six Army personnel. The good swimmers decided to swim ashore [ probably to Banka Island since this where Lt Staples said he swam] which left nine of us to the raft. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft, and a soldier who was wounded in the spine, so there were two wounded, our captain and two soldiers with paddles and myself on the raft, and two soldiers hanging on behind. It was 7.10 a.m. when we got in the water and we struck out for the shore right away, but the tide kept pushing us out to sea. We saw some kampongs about eight to ten miles away, so we made for them, but the tide being so strong pushed us further down the straits.... eventually about 5.30 p.m. we got ashore in a mangrove swamp. In the box on our raft were two tins of corned beef and one of milk. We had a look around the swamp, but it was all mangroves, so we decided to wait until morning and explore. It was getting dark and we were all tired out and wanted to sleep. Our captain slept in the trees and the rest of us in the mud, with Able Seaman Miles on the raft. About 2.00 a.m. the tide came in, so we decided to make for the nearest Kampong. We shouted to our captain and told him we were going upstream, but he would not come as he said he was going to explore a nearby creek. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft and looked for the wounded soldier but found he was dead. We pushed upstream, seven of us wading up to our waists. The tide was coming in rather quickly. We must have gone about five miles when it got too deep for us to go any further. We were near a creek and it was nearly dawn, so we decided to split up. Three soldiers stayed with Able Seaman Miles and decided to go up the creek. I decided to swim among the trees and make my way upstream to the Kampong. Dunn and a soldier stayed behind resting in ta tree. I had been swimming and wading for about two hours when I sat on a tree for a rest. I heard someone calling out, I replied and along came Stoker Dunn. He and I kept going until we reached the Kampong., which took us the greatest part of the day. When we reached it we found that it had been deserted for a long time. We went to get some sleep but were awakened by two soldiers, one of whom had been with us in the morning. The other he had met in the swamp. We went back to sleep and awoke next morning about 6.00 a.m. The soldiers went inland but Dunn and I stayed. We tried waving to the Japanese destroyers and to boats, but they took no notice. We*

*stayed all that day and the following night. Next morning, we saw a small sailboat coming towards us. I decided to swim out to it. This I did and was picked up by Second Lieutenant Drakeford. We picked up Stoker Dunn and commenced to sail down the Sumatra coast until we reached a Kampong where people gave us food and water enough for three days. There we met Lieutenant Mann, RNVR, Stoker Way and Sergeant- Major Knight who joined us and together we kept sailing for 24 hours..."* This group eventually met up with local native policemen and Dutch soldiers and travelled to Java in a large prau. During this period, on 22 February, Lt Mann in his memoirs described Dunn's injuries *"... 'Paddy' Dunn's leg was in a ghastly condition with maggots in the wound and the leg swelling in a red angry mess. He was at time a bit lightheaded but complained very little. We heard more about the Lancashire Stocker's 'bluddy whitlch' than Paddy's leg. I find the 'whitlch' rather amusing now, but it was not so at the time, and if I ever felt like committing murder, I did many times in that boat..."*. They reached Batavia where Dunn was hospitalised for the wounds incurred in the attack on HMML 311 and consequently left behind to become a POW, whilst 'Taffy' Belmont made his way south to Tjilichap on the south coast of Java where he ( and Lt Mann, Stoker Way and Sergeant Major or Staff Sergeant Knight , RASC ) all boarded the KPM steamer 'General Vespucci' for Fremantle, Australia.

One significant piece of information in Lt Mann's account is that it reveals that the captain of HMML 311, Lt Christmas, did not die in the attack on the ship or in the sea afterwards on 15 February 1942 – as possibly inferred in various reports by Lt Cmdr. Clark, Leading Seaman Swift, and Lt Cmdr. Campey. With hindsight it is possible these men knew more that was written down but decided to spare the relatives of Ernest Christmas any undue pain or avoid any unproven slight against the name of Ernest Christmas. It would appear that Lt Christmas could have been wounded in the Japanese attack, was probably badly shell shocked , and had then lost his clothes from a shell blast or removed them in the sea - because the memoirs of Lt Mann record that he had been bluntly told by Belmont and Dunn in an account which is very consistent with the Australian newspaper article that the survivors had *"... spent the night in the swamp in trees. The wounded died during the night. In the morning the CO., who was stark naked, told them it was everyman for himself and then wandered into the jungle swamp. They did not see him again..."*. AB Belmont said , in what was probably a censored wartime newspaper article in March 1942, that the captain refused to join the other survivors of HMML 311 when they left the mangrove swamp and instead, for his own reasons, made his own separate way – no doubt eventually meeting his death in that swamp, or at the hands of Japanese soldiers if he managed to get further inland. The clear and tragic conclusion is that Lt Ernest Christmas died on or after 16 February 1942 – not on 15 February 1942 as official records show - probably in the seemingly endless mangrove swamps that stretch along the coast of Sumatra south of the Musi (Moesi) River.

As mentioned above, the only other surviving officer, Lt Ted Staples, RNZVR - the First Officer mentioned above by AB Belmont - later appeared in Java as a POW and appears to have been in one of the few recorded 'requisitioned' lifeboats that sailed to Java with survivors of Banka Strait sinkings. His MI9 questionnaire held in the New Zealand Archives in Wellington records that he was on ML311 when it sank on 15 February in the Banka Straits , that he was injured but then then swam to Banka Island, 'borrowed' a lifeboat and landed in Java on 10 March 1942. A telephone conversation with the son of Lt Ted Staples, RNZVR produced the information that the family, whilst knowing little of his wartime experiences, believed his story was told in the book 'Behind Bamboo' by Rohan Rivett.

The sailing voyage of the *"... lifeboat to Java ..."* mentioned by Lt Cmdr. V.C.F. Clark is another fascinating story of courage and despair. The only record of it appears to be in Chapter Seven of the

book 'Behind Bamboo' by Rohan D. Rivett who escaped from Singapore as a passenger on the 'SS Siang Wo', which ship was beached on Banka island on 15 February 1942 (the day that ML311 was sunk) only a few hundred yards from the Muntok wharf. Rohan Rivett and six companions then decided to try their luck and sail (or in fact row, as they did most of the way) along the coast of Sumatra to Java in a seventeen-foot boat.

On **6 March**, after several weeks of arduous travel, this motley crew of merchant navy officers and civilians from the 'SS Siang Wo' appear to almost certainly have come across six of the survivors from the ML311 (although in Chapter Seven the book never names the individual survivors or their vessel – which he calls an 'MTB'). Rivett describes the men he came across that morning as “... *These men were all in a bad way. They had had no food for four days, their feet were badly cut and swollen, and they were without boots or socks. We had managed to obtain some dried fish from the natives at the spit where the plane had crashed and now, as we set about cooking this for them we heard their story ... Two New Zealanders, an officer [which this researcher believes would have been Lt. Ted Staples, RNZNVR captured 9 March] and a rating [unknown] belonging to the crew of the MTB, were among our six. The others, a colonel of Engineers [who remains unidentified – but who was fluent in Chinese ], who was being sent to join Wavell's staff in Java, two survivors of the 'Repulse' [this does not appear to be the case for any of ML311's rating who had all been trained specifically for ML – but does not entirely eliminate the possibility that Stoker Dunne who was captured 8 March, or AB Miles were part of the group since Rivett may have made an error here], and a private soldier, were among the two hundred evacuees crowded onto the MTB...*”. Rivett then describes the specific circumstances of the sinking of the 'MTB' and the survivors finding “... *a lifeboat which had been washed ashore ...*” in such detail that, from this researcher's experience with evacuation stories, they could only be survivors from ML311.

Rivett's recount starts with 'fourteen' survivors assembling on Banka island, finding the lifeboat and then “... *until they reached the spit where they saw the wreck of a plane ...*”, took some instruments from the control panel of the plane and set off again; when “... *suddenly a junk bore down on them under full sail. When it was within fifty yards, they realized it was packed with Japanese.... they abandoned ship and started to swim for the shore with tommy-gun bullets kicking up water around their heads. All but two of them apparently reached the beach and succeeded in scattering into the jungle and mangrove swamp. The Japanese managed to capture two men who were wounded but finally abandoned their search for the others after darkness had fallen...*”.

[This indicates that the original 'fourteen' had become 'ten' after two died in the water and two were captured on land – and then as next explained another four were lost or captured in the swampy jungle. Note: A.B. Swift from ML311 records that his date of capture was 6 March.]

Rivett then explains that “... *Next morning our sextet met, as agreed, but could find no trace of their other companions. They then set off southwards ... for four days they had been trudging through swamps, often waist deep in mud, seldom making more than three or four miles a day. The treacherous mud had claimed their boots and shoes, hidden roots and sharp rocks had lacerated their feet and legs, and at times they had even been without water for over twenty-four hours. One man went down with a heavy attack of malaria...Years later, in a Siamese prison camp, one of them told me that he did not know what they would have done if we had not turned up at that moment, because they were at the end of their resources...*”.

The next day (it appears to be about the 6 or 7 March) Rivett and his companions set out in their boat again – now with thirteen men in the boat. In the early hours of the morning a day later “... *we found ourselves within a couple of miles of the Java Coast ...*” and were being quickly pulled southwards down the Sunda Straits (which separates Sumatra from Java) by the very strong sea currents. As dawn broke, and with all lying flat in the bottom of the boat - except two of the darkest

and most sunburnt on board who kept rowing Javanese style - they were swept literally through the fleet of the Japanese invasion force. They believed they were in the 'Merak region' or a little farther south and shortly ran their boat up a small creek where a number of Javanese were fishing. The locals initially were anxious that they keep going because they expected Japanese to arrive at any time, but this attitude soon changed to hostility and the group of survivors were eventually robbed, savagely beaten and trussed at knife point by the Javanese. It was Saturday 7 March. They were then forced marched for a day to be handed over to the Japanese the following day – either 8 or 9 March 1942. And so, began years as a POW.

The full story as recounted by Rohan Rivett in 'Behind Bamboo' is well worth reading.

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

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**Thank you.**



### Sources:

- CWGC – the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
- Book ‘Behind Bamboo’ by Rohan D. Rivett, published Angus & Robertson, London (first published 1946 then through until 1952) – pp. 56 – 68.
- Book ‘Singapore’s Dunkirk’ by Geoffrey Brooke, published by Leo Cooper (Octopus Publishing) 1989., pp 208 – 212.
- National Library of Singapore – online newspaper archives
- Report by Lt. Cmdr. H. Campey, RANVR – dated September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 and his personal memoirs written after his retirement.
- Report dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 1948 (unsigned but clearly by Lt Arkley) in the personal papers of Lt Bob Arkley, RNZNVR,) titled “Singapore M.L. Flotilla (‘B’ Type Fairmiles).”
- UK National Archives – file WO 361/316 ‘Malaya RAOC + REME’
- Website - [www.naval-history.net](http://www.naval-history.net) (for casualty list)
- Website – [www.navy-net.co.uk](http://www.navy-net.co.uk)

### Crew:

- **ASHCROFT – Leading Stoker Walter T. Ashcroft**, D/K 66889, Royal Navy, born 1906 and ex ‘HMS Repulse’, then ML311, captured 16 February 1942, Japan Party 1942 (Palembang POW list from JM and Force z website for ‘HMS Repulse’). For some unknown reason he is not listed in Lt Arkley’s list of Palembang POWs – he is however mentioned by Lt Campey (ML433) as being one of those picked up by a Japanese fishing boat being used to ferry Japanese stores and troops and after staying on that vessel for a week he was taken to Palembang POW camp on 24 February 1942 – which of course is a week later than the date on his Mi9 questionnaire (see ML433).
- **BELMONT – Able Seaman ‘Taffy’ Belmont**, Royal Navy, recorded by Lt A R Mann, RNVR in his memoirs as being a survivor of HMML 311 and in a lifeboat with AB Dunn, Lt Basil Drakeford, SSVF when Mann and two others joined up with them on their voyage south to Java (p.16 of Mann’s memoirs). Belmont was interviewed by Australian newspapers in March 1942 on his escape from Singapore on HMML 311, his arduous voyage and trek down the coast of Sumatra after the vessel was sunk and his eventual escape from Java to Fremantle (trove.au). **Able Seaman and P3 Gunner Fred ‘Bronco’ Belmont, DSSX 26846**, ‘HMS Prince of Wales’ and then HMML 311, spent some time in Australia after his escape. He returned to South Wales, married and had many children. He lived and worked as a miner in TONYPANDY in the Rhondda Valley. And died on 4 February 2006. He was noted on the ‘Force Z’ website as one of the crew of ‘HMS prince of Wales’ by his granddaughter Stephanie Belmont and Ray Evans.
- **CHRISTMAS – Lieutenant Ernest Joseph Huson Christmas**, RANVR. Born in Lenora, Western Australia, on 3.9.08 to parents Huson and Louisa Henrietta Charlotte Christmas, later of Kew, Melbourne, Victoria. A civilian he enlisted in September 1940 under the ‘Yachtsman Scheme’ in Australia where skilled yachtsmen had been selected to fill Sub. Lieutenant roles in the

RANVR. He was a small statured man with fair hair. He saw service for 18 months on 'HMAS Brisbane', 'Cerberus' and smaller vessels like ML311, on which he took command. The 9 September 1945 report by Lt Cdr Campey, RANVR, lists 'Cmdg. Off. Lt. Christmas, RANVR, believed killed'. In 1946 there appeared the following Probate Notice in "The Argus" newspaper (21.1.46) "... Ernest Joseph Huson Christmas formerly 60 Foley Street, Kew, Commercial traveller but late of the RANVR, Lieutenant deceased, after fourteen days Lilith Stahl Clarke of 60 Foley Street, Kew, married woman, the executrix of the deceased's will, dated 16 November 1940 will apply for Probate. Slater & Gordon, Solicitor...". The CWGC record states "...Lt Ernest Joseph Huson Christmas, #311, RANVR, died 15 February 1942 aged 33 years, HMML 311, son of Huson and Louisa Henrietta Charlotte Christmas of Kew, Victoria. Also remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial panel 77, Col. 1...". One significant piece of information in the memoirs of Mann, RNVR, ( who met up with Belmont and Dunn from the crew of HMML 311 on his escape south to Java by small boat) is that it reveals that the captain of HMML 311, Lt Christmas, did not die in the attack on the ship or in the sea afterwards on 15 February 1942 – as possibly inferred in various reports by Lt Cmdr. Clark, Leading Seaman Swift, and Lt Cmdr. Campey. With hindsight it is possible these men knew more that was written down but decided to spare the relatives of Ernest Christmas any undue pain or avoid any unproven slight against the name of Ernest Christmas. It would appear that Lt Christmas could have been wounded in the Japanese attack, was probably badly shell shocked , and had then lost his clothes from a shell blast or removed them in the sea - because the memoirs of Lt Mann record that he had been bluntly told by Belmont and Dunn in an account which is very consistent with the Australian newspaper article that the survivors had "... spent the night in the swamp in trees. The wounded died during the night. In the morning the CO., who was stark naked, told them it was everyman for himself and then wandered into the jungle swamp. They did not see him again...". AB Belmont said , in what was probably a censored wartime newspaper article in March 1942, that the captain refused to join the other survivors of HMML 311 when they left the mangrove swamp and instead, for his own reasons, made his own separate way – no doubt eventually meeting his death in that swamp, or at the hands of Japanese soldiers if he managed to get further inland. The clear and tragic conclusion is that Lt Ernest Christmas died on or after 16 February 1942 – not on 15 February 1942 as official records show - probably in the seemingly endless mangrove swamps that stretch along the coast of Sumatra south of the Musi (Moesi) River.

- **CLARK – Lieutenant Commander V. C. F. Clark**, Royal Navy, captured 28 March 1942 (Palembang POW lists from JM). He is also listed in the report by Lt. Cmdr. Campey, RANVR. As on the crew of ML311 'Lt – Cmdr. V.C.F. Clark, RN. POW'. Lieutenant Commander Victor Cecil Froggatt Clark, Royal Navy, (from a 1985 interview now held in the Oral Archives of the Imperial War Museum, London) was born in 1908 and had served on 'HMS Repulse' as a young Lt. Cmdr. (aged 33 years) in charge of one of the 15-inch gun turrets as 'Principal Control Officer' for 'A' turret on the fo'c'sle of the ship. He relates that when the 'Repulse' was firstly attacked by high altitude bombers the 15-inch guns were no use at all and that 'Ack Ack' gunnery was not very effective in those days. Bombing attacks were followed by torpedo bomber attacks and the captain of 'Repulse' was very skilful in avoiding torpedoes in the first attack. Then the torpedo bombers came from two directions at once and reality is that the ship can only avoid one torpedo at a time – four torpedoes hit 'Repulse' on the port side and the ship began to heel to port. He says that the 'Abandon Ship' order was given at a very late stage. Clark was on the bridge went over on its side – he went into the sea and was

sucked down twice close to a Carley raft. He was picked up by a destroyer within ten minutes. Back in Singapore he became an officer in charge of 'Kudat' with a Commando Unit (which included the famous officer Rose) raiding behind enemy lines in Malaya. He talks of being in Singapore until 13 February when orders were to go in a 72-foot (sic – it was 110 feet) gunboat commanded by a “... *young Australian Reserve Officer...*”. [This is an interesting observation since Ernest Christmas appears to have been only one year younger than Clark!] They were to take 60 key Army personnel to Java. It had “...*one little pop gun and twin Lewis guns ...*” and passengers were “... *key Ordinance people and Royal Engineers and technicians – mostly ratings ...*”. There was also one Colonel. A lot of those on board during the voyage were on the upper deck the whole time sleeping on the deck. He talks of the fact that the ship hid up under trees using camouflage material nets and such like; then that the signalman reported a ship in the morning dusk – not more than a mile away. Initially he thought the ship was Dutch but then to his horror he could see a ‘poached egg’ flying – it was a modern destroyer now only three quarters of a mile away. The destroyer could make 35 knots versus the top speed of 18 knots of ML311. He then told all the men with rifles to shoot at the bridge of the Japanese destroyer whilst they made an opposite but parallel course. At this point the “... *young Australian Officer ...*” asked Clark to take the bridge and he went down to take the wheel. After the first round from the Japs Clark saw that the fo’c’sle gun was knocked off its mounting; the young Lieutenant had been killed and the launches rudder was jammed. The action had lasted nine minutes, and the upper deck was a “... *charnel house, it was ghastly, men with stomachs shot away and backbones showing ...*”. Clark ordered the survivors - those in a swimmable condition – to swim to some mangrove swamps he could see in the distance and that the wounded should be left on a raft. A Dutchman later told him that the Banka Strait was one of the most shark infested waters in the world. Shrapnel had broken the Ulna of his left wrist, but he found a 3-foot-long ammunition box and started swimming in an easterly direction – he could see the top of a lighthouse in the direction he was swimming. He swam from 0700 to 1900 hours when he got to a fishing Pagar in shallow water and overnighted there. In the morning he started swimming again and found another Pagar with a British officer in it – they swam ashore to mangroves [ it appears to be the Sumatran mainland] and spent most of that day in the mangroves – with bare feet! Just before dusk they came to a river with a village but received a hostile reception from the natives who put them in an empty hut – there were some old canoes under the hut, so Clark and his companion took one and paddled upstream. They were then joined by two other Army officers (not from ML311) - he says there were two Majors and a Private (who Clark thought was in Ordinance). After about four days his arm had swollen badly and when this group came across a clearing with native huts the Private in the group found some yellow soap and brown sugar and some rice which he boiled to make a poultice (according to a recipe used by the grandmother of the Private!). Within 48 hours the poultice was “... sucking out the shrapnel ...”. [ Researcher Note: this Private was in fact Pte. Ralph Simpson, RAOC, a Yorkshireman who had not been on ML311 – he could have been on the ‘Pulo Soegi’ or another ML - and Clark did in fact contact Simpson after the war and go and see him.] Clark spent five weeks in the last hut eating rice and rubber nuts – one officer and the Private had left to go on during this time. After five weeks natives came and said “... *would you like us to take you to Palembang...*”, Clark and the other two were taken to a Japanese checkpoint and their POW experience began!

- **COLLINS – Ord. Tel. Dennis Collins**, Royal Navy [ Listed as a crew member of ML311 in the report by Lt. Cmdr. Campey – O/TEL Collins, P/JX 284325]. Also, there is the official record of Ordinary Telegraphist Dennis Collins, P/JX 248325, Royal Navy, died 15.2.42 aged 28 years in the

sinking of HMML 311. Son of Joseph Chappell Collins and Anne Elizabeth Collins of Halifax, Yorkshire. Also, on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial panel 67, Co.1. (CWGC).

- **DREW – Petty Officer George Frederick Drew**, C/JX 141584, Royal Navy died 15.2.42 aged 28 years in the sinking of HMML 311. Son of Mary Miriam Drew, of Walsall, Staffordshire. Also memorialised on the Chatham Naval memorial 51.3. (CWGC). A file in the UK Archives records **Acting Petty Officer George Drew** [ recorded as rank of P.O. Cox. and with the initial 'F' in Lt. Cdr Campey report so maybe he was known as 'Fred' or 'Frederick?'], C/JX 191584, Royal Navy (Chatham Division) having been 'Killed in Action' on ML311 on 15.2.42.
- **DUNN/DUNNE/DONNE – Stoker P.H.H. Donne**[sic], Royal Navy [ The report by Lt. Cdr Campey, RANVR, lists STO. DUNNE, P/KX32615 as a member of the crew of ML311 and then a 'POW']. From Dunn's MI9 Liberation Questionnaire we learn his wartime details as *"... **Sto. Percy Albert Holmes Dunn** [ it is almost indecipherable as to whether his name has a an 'E' at the end], then his Service Number as P/[indecipherable] 13261 [indecipherable], Ship, on HMML 311, Royal Navy. Born 19.11.21 and enlisted 26.5.41. home address 1 Beech Grove, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, England. Captured Java March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942. [Then it records that he was a POW at] – Hos. Bandong (March 6<sup>th</sup> to June 10<sup>th</sup>, Col. Maizie), Bandong POW C. (June to October, W/Comd. Nicholls), BOI. Glodok (October to Jan. G/Capn. Noble), Changi (Jan to March, Col. Holmes0, Thailand Hintok (March to Oct, Col. Humpreys), Changi (Oct to Finish, Col. Holmes) ..."* (MI9 on COFEPOW website). For his bravery during the sinking of the ML311 Stoker Dunne was awarded the Distinguished Service medal with the citation in the London Gazette, 19 February 1946 *"... For gallantry, although wounded, in keeping the engine room services of H.M.M.L. 311 in action after an attack by a Japanese destroyer on 15 February 1942 ..."*. The officer recommending him for an award was Lt Commander V.C.F. Clark, who had taken command of the vessel when the attack began. He stated *"... 11. In accordance with KR & AI recommendation for award is attached herewith..."*. The recommendation, under 'King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions', was for the awarding of the DSM medal to Stoker P.H.H. Donne [sic – this was Stoker P.A. H. Dunne, RN]. Though wounded - the other Engine room ratings had been killed – he had kept the Engine Room in action to the last, despite being surrounded by blazing petrol tanks and the adjacent Lewis gun ammunition. At the order to abandon ship he assisted with the seriously wounded and was one of the last three to leave the ship. The survivor story of AB 'Taffy' Belmont and AB 'Paddy' Dunn is one that has come to hand for the researcher more recently (April 2020) with the receipt of the memoirs of Lt A. R. Mann, RNVR who had survived the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' on the north west coast of Banka Island. From Mann's manuscript, and a newspaper interview in Australia during March 1942 with AB Belmont, we learn that after the shelling and sinking Belmont swam around in the sea until he reached a raft *"...with our Number One (the First Lieutenant) on it. Then we saw someone waving to us, went back and came across our captain, Able Seaman Miles, stoker Dunn who had been wounded and six Army personnel. The good swimmers decided to swim ashore [ probably to Banka Island since this where Lt Staples said he swam] which left nine of us to the raft. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft, and a soldier who was wounded in the spine, so there were two wounded, our captain and two soldiers with paddles and myself on the raft, and two soldiers hanging on behind. It was 7.10 a.m. when we got in the water and we struck out for the shore right away, but the tide kept pushing us out to sea. We saw some kampongs about eight to ten miles away, so we made for them, but the tide being so strong pushed us further down the straits.... eventually about 5.30 p.m. we got ashore in a mangrove swamp. In the box on our raft were two tins of corned beef and one of milk. We had a look around the swamp, but it was all mangroves, so we decided to wait until morning and explore. It was*

getting dark and we were all tired out and wanted to sleep. Our captain slept in the trees and the rest of us in the mud, with Able Seaman Miles on the raft. About 2.00 a.m. the tide came in, so we decided to make for the nearest Kampong. We shouted to our captain and told him we were going upstream, but he would not come as he said he was going to explore a nearby creek. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft and looked for the wounded soldier but found he was dead. We pushed upstream, seven of us wading up to our waists. The tide was coming in rather quickly. We must have gone about five miles when it got too deep for us to go any further. We were near a creek and it was nearly dawn, so we decided to split up. Three soldiers stayed with Able Seaman Miles and decided to go up the creek. I decided to swim among the trees and make my way upstream to the Kampong. Dunn and a soldier stayed behind resting in a tree. I had been swimming and wading for about two hours when I sat on a tree for a rest. I heard someone calling out, I replied and along came Stoker Dunn. He and I kept going until we reached the Kampong., which took us the greatest part of the day. When we reached it we found that it had been deserted for a long time. We went to get some sleep but were awakened by two soldiers, one of whom had been with us in the morning. The other he had met in the swamp. We went back to sleep and awoke next morning about 6.00 a.m. The soldiers went inland but Dunn and I stayed. We tried waving to the Japanese destroyers and to boats, but they took no notice. We stayed all that day and the following night. Next morning, we saw a small sailboat coming towards us. I decided to swim out to it. This I did and was picked up by Second Lieutenant Drakeford. We picked up Stoker Dunn and commenced to sail down the Sumatra coast until we reached a Kampong where people gave us food and water enough for three days. There we met Lieutenant Mann, RNVR, Stoker Way and Sergeant- Major Knight who joined us and together we kept sailing for 24 hours..." This group eventually met up with local native policemen and Dutch soldiers and travelled to Java in a large prau. During this period, on 22 February, Lt Mann in his memoirs described Dunn's injuries "... 'Paddy' Dunn's leg was in a ghastly condition with maggots in the wound and the leg swelling in a red angry mess. He was at time a bit lightheaded but complained very little. We heard more about the Lancashire Stocker's 'bluddy whitlch' than Paddy's leg. I find the 'whitlch' rather amusing now, but it was not so at the time, and if I ever felt like committing murder, I did many times in that boat..." They reached Batavia where Dunn was hospitalised for the wounds incurred in the attack on HMML 311 and consequently left behind to become a POW – it appears initially at Bandung.

- **HILL – Able Seaman Trevor Neville Hill, A/1887, RNZNVR.** Also recorded as A/B T. Hill RNZNVR in the 1945 report by Lt Cdr Campey, RANVR with the hand notation that he was a 'POW'. In a file in the UK Archives there is the record under 'Missing' of 'T. Hill, AB, RNZNVR'. In the newspaper 'Auckland Star' of 17 December 1943 there is the article 'After two years, Auckland Seaman safe, Prisoner of the Japanese' recording that "...Able Seaman Trevor Neville (Tim) Hill, RNZNVR, has been on the list of missing; now his parents, Mr and Mrs G. Neville Hill, 6 Kimberley road, Epsom, have received direct word from him that he is in good health though a prisoner of the Japanese in Moulmein, Burma. Printed on the card was 'I am with friends' and typewritten on the end of that was the name 'Sub- Lieutenant Staples'. Able Seaman Hill, who was a member of the crew of a patrol boat, was reported missing from a sea action in the java sea following the evacuation of Singapore. He was educated at Auckland Grammar School, where he had a distinguished sporting record. He was a member of the First XV., won the school steeplechase, and three weights in the school boxing championships, gaining the Watson Cup for the most scientific boxer in two successive years. He won the Auckland secondary Schools half mile and mile championships and was second in the New Zealand junior mile. He was also a keen yachtsman, a member of the C class yacht



*'Laloma'...*". Trevor Hill, born 1 September 1920, had enlisted on 2 March 1940 and after his initial training at the New Zealand naval base at Devonport, Auckland was selected to enter the navy and be sent to the UK for training. Tim went to 'HMS Victory' at Portsmouth for training and then to 'Alynbank' - a merchant ship converted into a floating anti-aircraft defence vessel. After eight months he was sent back to shore for further training and then to 'HMS St Christopher' for training in seamanship in small boats, handling and gunnery before boarding 'HMS Attack' where he would have joined up with many of the other ratings (and officers) destined for the contingent that would make up the Singapore ML Flotilla. Given his later POW placement in Java it is almost certain that Tim Hill was one of those men from ML311 who sailed the lifeboat from Sumatra to Java - and later to Burma. (source: National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy). Tim Hill was discharged on 14 January 1946.

- **KENNEDY** – *in the files of the UK Archives under the 'Missing' list for ML311 is the name 'Kennedy, Sto'. The name 'Stoker Kennedy' also appears in the narrative compiled by survivor Major Lyddon ( Royal Signals) when he lists the names of men he recalls being on board – whether Lyddon's record is the origin of the name for the UK archives 'Missing' list is unknown. This name does not appear in Lt Cdr Campey's lists of ML crews and it may be a confusion with the surname 'Kindred'? Further suggesting a misspelling is the fact that the CWGC has no 'Kennedy' dying in the region during February to June 1942.*
- **KINDRED – AB Henry John Kindred**, RNZNVR, W/3769 died 15 .2.42 aged 22 years. Son of Percy Thomas and Marian Violet (nee Barnham) Kindred of Torbay, Auckland (NZ Wargraves and CWGC. Note: CWGC does not mention he was on ML311). However, in the report by Lt Cdr. Campey, RANVR, he specifically lists Henry Kindred as a crew member of ML311 although states his fate as 'Unknown' and a file in the UK Archives records 'J. Kindred, AB, RNZNVR' as 'Missing Believed Killed or Drowned' aboard ML311. The Royal New Zealand Navy Museum records are "*... Kindred, Henry , Able Seaman, RNZN 3739, - Most likely killed on 15 February 1942 near Muntok, Banka island, Sumatra while serving on ML311 [ML310] when fleeing Singapore. Possibly died of disease when ashore with other survivors. Age 22 from Torbay, Auckland- declared dead & on memorial...*".
- **MARKLEW – Ordinary Seaman Arthur Marklew**, C/JX 246844, Royal Navy. Died 15.2.42 aged 19 years, in the sinking of HMML 311. Son of Arthur and Mary Marklew. He is also recorded as A/B Marklew in the report by Lt Cdr Campey, RANVR and in the UK Archives file of 'Missing' where he is shown as 'Marklew, AB [AA.3].
- **MILES – Able Seaman H. Miles**, Royal Navy [ recorded as a crew member by Lt. Cdr Campey in his report] and also shown in the file in the UK Archives as "*... H. Miles, AB, (QR3) 'Missing' - but with the further notation that " ... J.K. Reid, ERA., D/MX 73353, reports that H. Swift and H. Miles (thought to be the same as the ones referred to here) became POW. In Java, were in Tanjong Priok POW camp, Batavia, until July 1942, when they left in draft for Borneo...*". Able Seaman Miles experience after the sinking of HMML 311 was clarified with the receipt of the memoirs of Lt A. R. Mann, RNVR who had survived the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' on the north west coast of Banka Island. From Mann's manuscript, and a newspaper interview in Australia during March 1942 with AB Belmont, we learn that after the shelling and sinking Belmont swam around in the sea until he reached a raft "*...with our Number One (the First Lieutenant) on it. Then we saw someone waving to us, went back and came across our captain, Able Seaman Miles, stoker Dunn who had been wounded and six Army personnel. The good swimmers decided to swim ashore [ probably to Banka Island since this where Lt Staples said he swam] which left nine of us to the raft. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft, and a soldier who was wounded in the spine, so there were two wounded, our captain and two soldiers with paddles and myself on the raft, and two soldiers*

*hanging on behind. It was 7.10 a.m. when we got in the water and we struck out for the shore right away, but the tide kept pushing us out to sea. We saw some kampongs about eight to ten miles away, so we made for them, but the tide being so strong pushed us further down the straits.... eventually about 5.30 p.m. we got ashore in a mangrove swamp. In the box on our raft were two tins of corned beef and one of milk. We had a look around the swamp, but it was all mangroves, so we decided to wait until morning and explore. It was getting dark and we were all tired out and wanted to sleep. Our captain slept in the trees and the rest of us in the mud, with **Able Seaman Miles** on the raft. About 2.00 a.m. the tide came in, so we decided to make for the nearest Kampong. We shouted to our captain and told him we were going upstream, but he would not come as he said he was going to explore a nearby creek. We got Able Seaman Miles on the raft and looked for the wounded soldier but found he was dead. We pushed upstream, seven of us wading up to our waists. The tide was coming in rather quickly. We must have gone about five miles when it got too deep for us to go any further. We were near a creek and it was nearly dawn, so we decided to split up. Three soldiers stayed with Able Seaman Miles and decided to go up the creek...". How Able Seaman Miles reached Java to become a POW is unknown.*

- **PUDDY** – Listed in the UK Archives file as ‘PUDDY, S.D.’ and a crew member of ML311 with his fate shown variously as ‘Missing’ or as ‘Unknown’. It appears that this surname is some sort of error because no trace of this person can be found.
- **SHEEDY** – *the report by Lt. Cdr Campey, RANVR, records ‘STO.SHEEDY left in Singapore – sick’.*
- **STAPLES** – the report by Lt Cmdr. Campey, RANVR, lists ‘1<sup>st</sup> Lieut., S/Lt. Staples, RNZNVR, POW’ as a crew member of ML311. This is Tempy. Lt. Edward ‘Ted’ Lawrence Staples, RNZNVR. The MI9 Questionnaire ( in the New Zealand Archives in Wellington) completed by Ted Staples after the War records him as on HMML311, leaving Singapore on 12 February [sic] being sunk on 15 February in the Banka Straits , being injured, swimming to Banka Island , ‘borrowing ‘ a lifeboat and landing in Java on 10 March. A MI9 form in the UK Archives states that he was captured on 9 March 1942. This almost certainly confirms that Ted Staples was one of those described in ‘Behind Bamboo’ who, after the sinking, managed to find an abandoned Dutch lifeboat and over the next thirteen days and nights managed to sail the several hundred miles to Java – others were captured on 6 March 1942 at Bantam Bay on the North East tip of Java but Ted seems to have been captured a few days later (some officers have a capture date of late March 1942). There is a record (17.1.45, Hutt News, New Zealand) that his father Mr. A. J. Staples of 7 Harborview, Lower Hutt received a POW card from War Camp No.3, Thailand to say Ted was safe; in peacetime Lt Staples was apparently well known in Rugby Football circles in Lower Hutt, NZ., and had had been commissioned in the Royal Navy in 1940 before seeing service in the waters around Singapore. After the War, he was repatriated to the UK by RAPWI and on his return to New Zealand worked as Senior Technical Officer, Chemistry Section, Wallaceville Animal Testing Station, Upper Hutt, NZ. His gravestone in Waikanae cemetery, New Zealand shows his date of death as 4.11.2001 and that he was the husband of the late Edna Grace Handley Staples and the loved father of Ted and Lawrence Staples. A telephone conversation with Lawrence Staples and his wife Brenda (25.7.16) revealed that Ted never (understandably) talked much about his wartime experiences but kept in touch for decades with the POWs he had been close to in Burma. The family have drawn much of their knowledge of his escape from Singapore from the references to Ted ( he is unnamed in the book) in Rohan Rivett’s “Behind Bamboo” being the story of the survivors of the “SS. Siang Wo” which had been attacked and then run aground at Muntok . *The website naval-history.net and its Day by Day (14.2.42)*

*diary, incorrectly records Tempy. Lt. Edward 'Ted' Lawrence John Staples, RNZNVR, as having survived the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' with Captain Borton.*

- **START – Motor Mechanic Walter Leonard Start**, C/MX 77588, Royal Navy. Died on 15.2.42 aged 29 years in the sinking of the HMML311. Son of Walter and Ada Start; husband of Edith Ann Start of Walcot, Lincolnshire. (a village in north Lincolnshire). Also commemorated on the Chatham Naval memorial 63.2. (CWGC). A file in the UK Archives records 'Start, M/M' as 'Missing believed Killed or Drowned'. And he is listed by Lt Cdr Campey as on the crew of ML311.
- **SWIFT – Able Seaman/Leading Seaman (LR II) Henry John Swift**, D/JX????, Royal Navy, born 3.5.14 and enlisted in March 1930. Is listed as crew member of ML311 by Lt Cdr Campey, RANVR, and his MI9 questionnaire tells us that his home address was 8 Harcourt Road, South Shore, Blackpool, Lancashire, England and that he was on ML311 and captured on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1942 at Bantam Bay (now called Banten Bay) on the north west tip of Java on the Sunda Straits. This almost certainly confirms that Swift was one of those who, after the sinking, managed to find an abandoned Dutch lifeboat and sail the several hundred miles to Java. He lists his POW camps as firstly a "... Jap Coy Ship on 6.3.42 under Lt Cmdr. (N) 'Perth ...", which was followed on approx. 12 March by a move to 'Batam Cinema' and then Batam Jail on 22 March. In April 1942 he was moved to 'Bicycle camp' (Batavia) and then to the camp at Tanjong Priok [the port of Batavia] on 10 May 1942. His final move was on 27 November 1942 to 'UBE' Japan.
- **TOWNSEND** – *Under the listing of ML311 a file in the UK archives has "... Missing believed Wounded. Rating. Townsend, A.B. (3<sup>rd</sup> Class gunnery rating. A short rather tubby dark AB (ex P. of Wales) acting as officers steward in Wardroom was badly wounded on raft. Thought possible he would have died..." (UK Archives file). Lt Cdr Campey does not show this person on his list – it must be remembered that the list is from memory and consultation with other POWs – but he does show a naval rating for ML310 as "... Sto. Townend E.R., C/KX 127382 fate 'Unknown'...". This is confirmed by the CWGC with the record that s "Stoker 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Edwin Richard Townend, C/KX 127382 died 21.3.42 and buried in a collective Grave (presumably with other remains found of the ML310 crew and passengers?) Number 31. d. 1 -17 at Kranji War cemetery (CWGC). This person's name is, however, left on the list for ML311 because the file notation that he was seen on a raft (noting that ML310 was beached on an island) is quite explicit.*

#### **Passengers (incomplete list):**

- **CARR – Private Joseph Carr**, # 7638550, aged 30 years, '2 Army Ord. Workshop' [ sic the CWGC have misinterpreted the meaning of 'Z' Advanced Ordnance Workshop'], died between 15.2.42 and 16.2.42, son of Michael and Annie Carr of Bradford, Yorkshire. (CWGC). Joseph Carr is listed by Major Lyddon( Signals) in his narrative as being aboard and his death (when he was trapped below deck on ML311 when it sank on 15 February) was 'eye witnessed' by Sgt. R. Sandilands, RAOC and attested in a letter dated 24.11.45 "... Cpl. Mason, Ptes. E. Fletcher and J. Carr were below deck when Japanese cruiser started shelling, and there they remained

*until our M.L. sunk and they were drowned ...”* (WO 361/316). Sandilands reconfirms this fact, that Private Carr died by drowning on 15.2.42 at 6.00am as ML311 was sunk by a Japanese cruiser in Banka Strait, NEI., on a schedule form ‘Cas. (L) Interrogation Form No.1’ held in file WO361/316 in the UK National Archives.

- **FLETCHER**– Private Ernest Fletcher, # 7615822, RAOC, died between 14.2.42 and 15.2.42 aged 23 years, son of Frank and Ida E. Fletcher of Thorpe Hesley, Yorkshire (CWGC). He was listed by Major Lyddon (Signals) as being aboard HMML 311 and insofar as his date of death is more accurately – in the first case because the ML311 was not sunk until 15 .2.42 - his death (because he was trapped below the deck of ML311 when it sank) was ‘eye witnessed’ by Sgt. R. Sandilands, RAOC and attested in a letter dated 24.11.45 “... *Cpl. Mason, Ptes. E. Fletcher and J. Carr were below deck when Japanese cruiser started shelling, and there they remained until our M.L. sunk and they were drowned ...”* (WO 361/316). Sandilands reconfirms this fact, that Private Fletcher died by drowning on 15.2.42 at 6.00am as ML311 was sunk by a Japanese cruiser in Banka Strait, NEI., on a schedule form ‘Cas. (L) Interrogation Form No.1’ held in file WO361/316 in the UK National Archives.
- **GRAHAM – Staff Serjeant John William Graham, # 1982637, RAOC, died between 15.2.42 and 16.2.42, husband of Bertha Graham of Ardwick, Manchester (CWGC). He is listed by Major Lyddon (Signals) as being aboard HMML 311 and insofar as his date of we can say more accurately that his death was on 15 February 1942 ( when he drowned during the sinking of ML311 and could not swim) since it was ‘eye witnessed’ by Sgt. R. Sandilands, RAOC who wrote in a letter dated 24.11.45 “ ... *S/Sgt. Graham also went down with the ship as he was unable to swim, rafts and lifeboats being unobtainable ...”*(WO 361/316). Sandilands reconfirms this fact, that S/Sgt. Graham died by drowning on 15.2.42 at 6.00am as ML311 was sunk by a Japanese cruiser in Banka Strait, NEI., on a schedule form ‘Cas. (L) Interrogation Form No.1’ held in file WO361/316 in the UK National Archives.**
- **GREENAN/GROONAN – Lance Corporal Bernard Greenan, #7642209, ‘Z’ Advanced Ordnance Workshop, RAOC, aged 23 years died 13.2.42, son of Edward and Bridget Greenan of Broxburn, West Lothian, memorialised on Singapore Memorial, Col.108 (CWGC); more accurately Bernard died in the sinking of HMML 311 on 15.2.42, or thereafter in the sea or on Banka Island. Recorded by Major Lyddon as ‘Groonan’.**
- **HARRIS – Private Frederick Charles Harris, # 1579102, ‘Z’ Advanced Ordnance Workshop, RAOC, died 13.2.42 aged 22 years, son of John Felix and Lena Florence Harris of South Lambeth, London Also remembered on the Singapore Memorial, Col.109 (CWGC). More accurately John Harris died on 15.2.42 in the sinking of HMML 311 or thereafter in the sea of on the shores of Banka Island.**
- **HILL – Lt. Col. Herbert Lawrence Hill, Hyderabad captured 16 February 1942 (Palembang POW lists from JM). Lt. Col. Hill had been in command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 19<sup>th</sup> Hyderabad Regiment, 12<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade which, prior to the invasion, was headquartered at Port Dickson in Malaya. After the wounding of his superior officer he was placed in command of the regiment at the battle of Slim River. He survived the war and by 1957 is recorded as a Brigadier (Temp) and had been awarded the OBE. He authored unpublished papers held at the Nam ‘Life in Bombay’.**
- **KERR – Private John Harrison Alexander Kerr, #7613759, ‘Z’ Advanced Ordnance Workshop, RAOC died 13.2.42 aged 23 years, son of John and Margaret Kerr of Northumberland. Also remembered on the Singapore Memorial, Col. 109. More accurately John Kerr died on 15.2.42 in the sinking of HMML311 or thereafter in the sea or on the shores of Banka Island.**

- **LAND – Corporal Ernest Francis Land**, # 7608285, 'Z' Advanced Ordnance Workshop, RAOC, must have survived the sinking of HMML and become a POW – the records state 'OVS 9.10.42' - eventually being held in Labuan where he died on 17.5.45 aged 35 years – he was the son of Frederick and Harriet land and the husband of Phyllis A. land of Dagenham, Essex. He is buried in Labuan War Cemetery, grave K.D.8
- **LYDDON – Major Charles Home Lyddon**, RCOS [Royal Corps of Signals], Born 1905 and (a person with the same initials and name) died 1984 in Tasmania, Australia. Charles Lyddon was a career soldier with the first reference being 'The London Gazette' 30.1.25 stating "... *The undermentioned Gentlemen Cadets from the Royal Military College, to be 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1925: - Royal Corps of Signals, Charles Home Lyddon...*". The same source tells us that he was promoted to Lieutenant by 1930; by 1937 'The London Gazette' records (14.9.37) "... *the undermentioned Capt. To be Maj. 12<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1937, Lt. C.H Lyddon to be Capt. 15<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1937 with antedate for regtl. seniority only to 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb. 1937...*". In 1938 he was attached to the Dept. of the Director General of Munitions Production as a Staff Captain and finally, in 1943 (after his capture) 'The London Gazette' (12.19.43) recorded "... *Capt. C.H. Lyddon (32022) to be Maj. 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 1943, with an antedate for seniority only to 29<sup>th</sup> January 1942 ...*". Captured 26 March 1942 (Palembang POW lists from JM). Charles Lyddon survived the sinking of HMML 311 and found himself in the sea with Private Simpson, RAOC. To quote from Lyddon's later narrative "... *There were about 30 in the water most of whom swam to the BANKA shore. Pte. Simpson and I made up a small raft. There was a strong current to the south and after swimming for about 10 hours we reached a fishing pagar 15 to 20 miles from where the ship was sunk. It was then about 1630 hrs, 15 February. During the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> February Lt. Commander Clark swam up to our Pagar from another further up the coast. He was wounded by shrapnel in the left forearm. At about 1200 hrs the three of us swam the 500 yards to the shore and then travelled about 6 to 7 hours through the mangrove swamps, arriving at dusk at a river SUNGEI POELURAN REDDING. We could see lights and after swimming to them found a fishing village where we were given food and a place to sleep. On 17<sup>th</sup> February Major Bird R/A aged 41 joined us. He was from HMML 433 and had left 3 or 4 others south of the kampong where we were staying... Next day all four of us started to paddle up the river in two sampans. On 24<sup>th</sup> February pm we reached a boatbuilders hut about 35 miles upriver. As Simpson and myself were the only two who were fit it was decided that he and I should take the smaller of the two sampans and try to get assistance or make contact with friendly authorities. The journey up stream was more difficult than we had expected. At one stage we had to wait five days for a guide before we were able to reach Kampong REDDING on a road. Here we first got news that SUMATRA had fallen to the Japanese. At each village the Malays seemed anxious for us to move on, and when we reached SELAPN we were put on board a boat at night by the local head man and taken down the SUNGEILUMPUR to the coast at a point about 100 miles south of where we had originally landed. After spending some days in a deserted European house on a rubber plantation, a party of Malays appeared and promised to take us to a place where they said there would be another British officer. We went with them and they brought us upriver again, transferred us to a bus and on 24<sup>th</sup> March handed us over to the Japanese at BALEMBANG [sic]...*". In the book kept by Lt Bob Arkley on Palembang POWs (Arkley was camp Adjutant) it shows "... *Lyddon, C, Maj., RCOS. Mother, Mrs C. Forde, 16 Cosway Street, Marylebone, London. Also, that Charles Lyddon was in the 1st Draft 26.5.45...*".
- **MASON – Corporal Alfred Charles Mason**, #7595807, died 15.2.42 and 16.2.42 aged 29 years, RAOC. Son of Artur Ernest and Dorothy mason, husband of Edith mason of Hall Green, Birmingham (CWGC). Alfred Mason is listed by Major Lyddon( Signals) in his narrative as



being aboard and his death was actually 'eye witnessed' as being on 15 February 1942 (because Cpl. Mason was trapped below decks as the vessel was sunk) by Sgt. R. Sandilands, RAOC and attested in a letter from Sandilands dated 24.11.45 "... Cpl. Mason, Ptes. E. Fletcher and J. Carr were below deck when Japanese cruiser started shelling, and there they remained until our M.L. sunk and they were drowned ...". Sandilands also reconfirms this fact that Cpl Mason died by drowning on 15.2.42 at 6.00am as ML311 was sunk by a Japanese cruiser in Banka Strait, NEI on a schedule form 'Cas. (L) Interrogation Form No.1' held in file WO361/316 in the UK National Archives.

- **ORTIGER** – Major H. Ortiger, # 64808, ZAOW, RAOC "... died between 15.2.42 and 16.2.42, 'Z' Advanced Workshop, RAOC, son of Henry Peter Ortiger and Florence Ortiger of Farnborough, Hampshire..." (CWGC). The fifth child and third son of Henry Peter and Florence Mary Ortiger (née Harrison) was Henry Ortiger. He was born in Agra on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1909 and baptised ten days later and known as Henry to his family. To save confusion, his mother called his father Harry. Like his elder brothers Henry attended the elementary day Railway School at Aligarh before, at the age of 8 or 9, following them to St. George's College Mussoorie. But, being a few years younger than his brothers, Henry was, for a time, the only child at home, and he was apparently very lonely, especially when his father was posted to Azimganj in West Bengal and so his parents gave him a Persian cat for company. Having completed his secondary education Henry was another Ortiger to be enrolled in the Jamalpur Engineering College where he spent two years before, at the age of 22, and as Joseph had done, Henry, now an engineer, went to England for further training with Worthington and Simpson at Newark, on board the 'Orama', arriving at London on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1932. He gave as his destination address 12 Siward Street, Blomesbury, Kent. Now an engineer, Henry joined the army. According to the London Gazette he was promoted to the rank of probationary Lieutenant (OME [Ordnance Mechanic Engineer] 4<sup>th</sup> Class) with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), effective 1<sup>st</sup> April 1935. In May 1936, the RAOC Gazette, under "Moves of Officers" records that Henry was relocated from the Hilsea, Portsmouth to Catterick in North Yorkshire. At the RAOC Depot, Hilsea Barracks, recruits underwent basic training before proceeding to specialist trade training, and it is more than likely that while at Hilsea Barracks, Henry had been a Troop Commander, responsible for training recruits. While at Catterick Henry was confirmed in his rank of Lieutenant (and was now an OME 4<sup>th</sup> Class) effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1937. On 28<sup>th</sup> December of that year he was the best man at the wedding of Major Wilfrid Lord of Catterick and Miss Mabel Lamb. Having done his stint at Catterick, Henry was posted to the Far East. The RAOC Gazette of January 1938 states "*Lieut Ortiger is under orders and, by the time this appears in print, will be on his way to Singapore. We hope that his stay in the tropics will turn out to be enjoyable*". The May issue states, "*We welcome to Singapore ... Lieut Ortiger who goes to Changi...*". According to his aunt Edith Ortiger, Henry found the heat very tiresome. Having been brought up in India this would seem somewhat surprising, but of course the heat would have been of a different order than India. Situated so close to the equator, the high humidity of Singapore was what probably what made things so uncomfortable for him. Edith recounts that Henry used to say that when he was due to return to England, he would make sure that he would again feel cold by going via Switzerland. But, as we will see, he never made that journey. Notwithstanding the climate, Henry seems to have enjoyed playing hockey. An article in the Straits Times of 6<sup>th</sup> November 1938 reports on a match in which the Chinese team beat the 7<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battery (RA Changi) 3-0 in "*...a keen game of hockey. Definitely superior in stickwork and combining nicely, the Chinese were well worth the three goals...*".

While not specifically singled out for special mention, one of the RA team members was Ortiger. Five months later Lieutenant H Ortiger, RAOC, was one of the groomsmen at the wedding of a fellow officer, Captain Charles Harold McVittie to Miss Margaret Wark Divine, held on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1939 at St. Andrew's Cathedral. Henry, now with the post nominals AMI Mech E, was promoted to the rank of Captain on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1941, as announced in the London Gazette. (family record via Leonie Fretwell November 2018).<sup>iii</sup> His presence on the ML311 is recorded in the narrative by Major Lyddon (Signals) and his subsequent death after the sinking is confirmed in a letter dated 24.11.45 in file WO 361/316 "Malaya RAOC M380" held in the UK National Archives which states " ... On the 15/2/42 Major H. Ortiger myself and the other personnel mentioned [ he possibly refers to a schedule 'Cas (L) Interrogation form No.1" ] were on board ML311 when we were sunk by a Japanese cruiser whilst en route to Java. I myself was in the water for three days. About midday on the second day (16.2.42) a body lying face downwards Major Ortiger came floating past me and was definitely dead. I knew Major Ortiger very well, as I had worked for him in R.A.O.C. Catterick camp round about 1935 and again in Malaya & Singapore 1941-42. His height would be about 5ft. nine inches or ten, very fair, and of good build, would weigh about twelve and half stone. ( ) Sgt. R. Sandilands, # 7584291. Catterick camp, Yorks...". Sgt. R. Sandilands also confirms that he was an 'eyewitness' to the death by drowning of Major Ortiger in a schedule form 'Casualty (L) Interrogation Form No. 1' (also in file WO361/316) when ML311 was sunk by a Japanese cruiser at 6.00am on Sunday 15 February in Banka Strait, NEI.

- **SANDILANDS** – Sgt. Richard Sandilands, # 758429, ZAOW, att. 14 Section, RAOC (after the war his documents attesting the deaths of his comrades shows his unit as 'REME'), was listed by Major Lyddon (Signals) as 'L/Cpl Sandylands' and as being aboard HMML311 . He was captured at 'Pankilpinang' [ sic: Pankilpinang], Banka island on 27.2.42 and became a POW at Muntok and then Palembang where he was released on 25.9.45 (WO 361/316 'Cas. (L) Interrogation Form No. 1' signed by Sandilands and a letter on that file dated 24.11.45 attesting the death of Major Henry Ortiger). [Researcher Note: The fact that Sgt Sandilands was captured at Pankilpinang must have a story behind it – he was captured some 12 days after the sinking and on the eastern coast of Banka Island so must have either been walking across the island or around the coast during that time.] Richard Sandilands survived POW camps and the war and ( above) wrote to the War Office of the sinking after the war, but sadly died in 1948, whilst still in the Army, when he fell off a ladder and sustained a head injury ( Source: 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin James Massingham email 7.4.20 ).
- **SCOTT** – Lt Col Scott, RAOC – is recorded by Major Lyddon as being on board HMML 311.
- **SIMPSON** - Pte. Ralph B. Simpson, #7613873, 'Z' Advanced Ordnance Workshop, RAOC survived the sinking and found himself in the sea with Major Lyddon (Signals) To quote from Lyddon's later narrative "... There were about 30 in the water most of whom swam to the BANKA shore. Pte. Simpson and I made up a small raft. There was a strong current to the south and after swimming for about 10 hours we reached a fishing pagar 15 to 20 miles from where the ship was sunk. It was then about 1630 hrs, 15 February. During the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> February Lt. Commander Clark swam up to our Pagar from another further up the coast. He was wounded by shrapnel in the left forearm. At about 1200 hrs the three of us swam the 500 yards to the shore and then travelled about 6 to 7 hours through the mangrove swamps, arriving at dusk at a river SUNGEI POELURAN REDDING. We could see lights and after swimming to them found a fishing village where we were given food and a place to sleep. On 17<sup>th</sup> February Major Bird R/A aged 41 joined us. He was from HMML 433 and had left 3 or 4

*others south of the kampong where we were staying... Next day all four of us started to paddle up the river in two sampans. On 24<sup>th</sup> February pm we reached a boatbuilders hut about 35 miles upriver. As Simpson and myself were the only two who were fit it was decided that he and I should take the smaller of the two sampans and try to get assistance or make contact with friendly authorities. The journey up stream was more difficult than we had expected. At one stage we had to wait five days for a guide before we were able to reach Kampong REDDING on a road. Here we first got news that SUMATRA had fallen to the Japanese. At each village the Malays seemed anxious for us to move on, and when we reached SELAPN we were put on board a boat at night by the local head man and taken down the SUNGEILUMPUR to the coast at a point about 100 miles south of where we had originally landed. After spending some days in a deserted European house on a rubber plantation, a party of Malays appeared and promised to take us to a place where they said there would be another British officer. We went with them and they brought us upriver again, transferred us to a bus and on 24<sup>th</sup> March handed us over to the Japanese at BALEMBANG [sic]...” So Private Ralph Simpson became a POW in Palembang camp. His NOK listed in camp was his wife, Mrs R. Simpson, 53 Bromsgrove Road, Sheffield. In his MI9 Liberation questionnaire his address is given as 65 Wadbrough Road, Sheffield.11.*

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