

'SS Hong Tat'

- Captured in the Sunda Strait and taken to Muntok, Banka Island on 17.2.42

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The 'SS Hong Tat' (sometimes referred to as the 'Hong Tatt') was a modest sized coastal trader owned by Ho Hong SS Co. (1932) Ltd - sometimes referred to as the Ho Hong Shipping Co., of 65 Chulia Street, Singapore.

This small ship is first recorded in Singapore newspapers in 1926 and thereafter appeared regularly in shipping reports in daily newspapers as either berthed in Singapore Harbour or trading on routes between Sumatra and Singapore.

In 'A Doctor's War' (ADW) by Dr Rowley Richards, the vessel is described as a *"...small island cargo ship about 30 metres long...coal burning steamer with a bridge, a small cargo hold fore and aft and the decks covered by canvas awnings ..."*.

The 'SS Hong Tat' was the vessel used by a selected group of men from the 2/15th Field regiment, AIF and other AIF servicemen to escape Singapore a few days prior to the Surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942.

Singapore Under Siege;

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

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

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

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

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

The naval ships, apart from a couple of destroyers, which briefly escorted the bigger merchant ships like the 'SS Empire Star' and 'SS Gorgon' after leaving Singapore, included auxiliary (i.e. merchant ships which had been requisitioned) patrol ships, auxiliary minesweepers, flat bottomed ex-Yangste River gunboats and ex Yangste river passenger ships, RAF fast launches and even a large tug like the 'HMS Yin Ping'.

Of the 46 or so ships leaving in the last window of opportunity, as many had thought, only 6 would make it to safety at Batavia or Fremantle. The other 40 ships would be sunk, run aground, or captured at sea by the Japanese navy - most around Banka Island off the east coast of Sumatra - with many hundreds of their passengers and crew killed, or taken prisoner to face three and a half years of extremely harsh, malnourished and medically deprived treatment in Internment or POW camps in Sumatra and elsewhere. Many of these women, children and men would die during the remainder of the War in these cruel camps.

2/15th Field Regiment, AIF;

The bulk of the men on board the 'Hong Tat' when it left Singapore were from the 2/15 Field Regiment, AIF. In fact, Lt John Bull states in an Appendix to ADW that *"...Of the Australian POW in Palembang, many, both from the 2/15th Fd. Regt. and other units owed their escape from Singapore to the voyage of the 'Hong Tat'..."*.

The 2/15th Regiment had three Batteries, the 29th, the 30th and the 65th Field Batteries – these artillery batteries had been in action in Kluang, Muar and Gemas and all along the Malayan Peninsula during December 1941. Once the Japanese landed on Singapore Island itself on 8 February 1942 the 2/15th were in action once again providing artillery support near the Johore Strait and then at Bukit Panjang.

Departure of the 'Hong Tat';

It was against this apocalyptic background of bombing, shelling, burning buildings and hundreds of bodies lying in the streets - with increasingly closer machine and small arms gunfire - that the departure of the 'SS Hong Tat' from Singapore Harbour took place.

[Researcher Note: it is perhaps worth understanding at this point that, immediately upon the Surrender of the Japanese in 1945 there would be some significant controversy amongst surviving POWs in Singapore from the 2/15th concerning the departure of those of their comrades on the "Hong Tat". This appears to have unjustly arisen amongst 2/15th men left in Singapore who had become POWs and also those transported to the Burma Railway camps, and who no doubt had understandably stewed on the matter for three years, but sadly without the correct information on the departure of the 'Hong Tat'.]

As far as this researcher can ascertain, the truth of the matter is contained in the book 'ADW' by Rowley Richards, who had been medical doctor to the 2/15th, in a chapter titled "The Story of John Bull: An Important Tribute". To quote " ... *During the final days of the Malayan Campaign in February 1942 many of us maintained hope that, maybe, just maybe, there would be a rescue attempt, but this was nothing more than wishful thinking. A small group of us led by our 2 i/c John Workman, with the assistance of Ted Dahl, the 84 LAD engineer, and Stuart Ward, the adjutant – and with the blessing of our CO Lieutenant Colonel John Wright – made plans to prepare boats in the event of an evacuation Dunkirk-style, to enable the 2/15th to remain intact as a unit. On 12 February, orders were issued by one of the battery commanders to two of his battery officers to seek, obtain and prepare sufficient transport to provide for the whole regiment in the event of an organised evacuation. Two*

of the officers, Lieutenant John Bull and Lieutenant Roger Martin, along with some of their sergeants and other men, found two suitable small island cargo ships about 30 metres long...One of the boats, the 'Hong Tat' under the control of John Bull, was soon made ready, and with a little work the engines were made efficient and effective. The engines on the other ship, however, could not be repaired, and Roger Martin returned to Regimental Headquarters to obtain assistance from the engineers to repair his ship. During action, the last we heard was that John Bull and his troops on the 'Hong Tat' had been raked by machine gun fire while they were moored just off the end of the pier...".

On the same events, but in the words of Lt John Bull "... An escape plan was conceived by senior Royal Aust. Artillery officers led by Brigadier Callaghan to evacuate Artillery personnel from Singapore, through Sumatra to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The 2/15th C.O. ordered another officer and myself to commandeer two small ships as part of this plan, to load as many regimental personnel as possible from a designated point, and await further orders. The second ship was never procured, but I was successful with the 'Hong Tat'. Having embarked about 30 military personnel, the Japanese surrounded the shoreline and made further loadings impossible. They machine gunned the ship, and under my orders we steamed out of range and reported to the British Naval Officer in charge of embarkation at Keppel Harbour, who told me to pick up who we could, and get out of Singapore as fast as we could, as it was about to capitulate to the Japanese...".

*Returning to Richard Rowley's book we learn "... Following the machine gun fire, which killed one of our men [researcher note: this was **Sgt Brian Jack West**, NX 30409], Bull weighed anchor and pulled further out into Keppel Harbour. He then came back to the pier area and found a naval commander, the RN chief naval officer in charge of evacuation. By this time the chaotic evacuation of Singapore was well under way for civilians and certain selected military personnel. Bull was told that the Japanese were just around the corner and held most of the eastern area of the docks. The RN commander ordered him to take what men he could - in addition to his original group - and wished him the best of luck. John Bull, realising he would be unable to make further contact with the 2/15th, followed these orders. He and his party, now increased to 26 men, were headed for minefields when they were warned by a small naval patrol boat that they were in potential danger. The naval patrol issued Bull with a chart and guided him out of the harbour....".*

There are other explanations for the source of the machine gun fire which struck 'SS Hong Tat' and killed Sgt West - another 2/15th Officer told author and wartime historian Lynette Silver in more recent years that the British Army had been ordered to fire on any vessel trying to evacuate Singapore after noon on 13 February and it was in fact this Allied unit which turned its machine guns on the 'SS Hong Tat'. This is highly possible but another nonsensical decision by someone in the British command structure, given the fact that all vessels had been told to clear the Harbour from 11 February. This explanation does have more credence than the source of the machine gun fire being Japanese, because they were simply still too far away to have hit the ship with machine gun fire - even the heaviest MGs used by the Japanese had a range of about 4,000 metres but an effective range of only 800 metres.

Whatever the source Bull had just experienced one of his NCOs mortally wounded and the source of the bullets would have been relatively immaterial to his decision to move further out into the Harbour.

Passengers and Crew;

So, on board the 'Hong Tat' we appear to have around 30 men, although some references say more and in an interview with John Bull by 'The Gilgandra Weekly' of 27.9.11 it states that Bull evacuated with 60 men. There appears to have been no merchant naval officers or crew on board, so this number of 30 – 60 men includes those Army personnel such as Lt Bull in command and others steering the boat and maintaining the engines – almost all of whom appear to have come from the 2/15th and, it appears, the 2/19th Regt.

In addition, records do show that there was a civilian from Malaya, one Captain Horace Ronald Carey, 2nd Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (JM).

There is an impression amongst researchers that there were other Australian and British troops on board – quite whether they were from the original group in Singapore or picked up from other stricken vessels along the route is unclear.

One other reference – a monograph in the AWM being 'Into the Fire' by Hal Richardson who was on 'Hong Tat' (see below) makes mention of at one stage being alongside another vessel carrying British troops – what occurred if anything insofar as a transfer of any of these personnel is unclear.

Voyage of 'Hong Tat';

In the book 'The Story of Changi' by Captain David Nelson, SSVF, he records "... *Hong Tatt, captured at Muntok 17.2.42. passengers Army 20 AIF 33. Only casualty Sgt. West, AIF killed at embarkation. Ship at Naval Base 13.8.42...*".

Insofar as the departure date and time we have a record of the departure of 'Hong Tat' in the monograph by Hal Richardson 'Into the Fire' (ITF. P.74-75) wherein Corporal Seddon, Royal Marines (who later witnessed the aftermath of the 'Radji Beach' massacre on Banka Island on 16 February and became a POW on Banka Island)) was escaping on the tug 'HM Tug Yin Ping' and observed whilst that vessel was leaving Singapore that "*As Black Friday was turning into Saturday, February 14 ... Moving gingerly up the wreck strewn harbour 'Ying Ping' [sic] sighted a sister tug, 'HM Tug Trang', aground on a sandbank. Aboard was RN. Commander C.C. Alexander and it appeared 'Trang' would go no further, so the towed launch was used to transfer 70 British Army and RAF other ranks to 'Ying Ping'. The number was restricted because 'Ying Ping' was carrying coal on deck and space was limited. Behind 'Trang' another small ship, 'SS Hong Tat' was aground, listing to an alarming angle and the launch visited her, found Australian soldiers standing waist deep in sea trying to push her off the bank and, while 'Hong Tat' was willing to take some British on board, the launch declined and returned to 'Ying Ping'...*".

With no naval or apparent seamanship experience on board it was a huge task that John Bull and his soldiers had undertaken in their last-minute escape from Singapore in a bid for freedom. The nature

of their plan is alluded to in an interview with 'The Gilgandra Weekly' on published on 27.9.11, where he is reported as having had "...the aim of reaching the British controlled safe have of Christmas Island , the local man [John Bull] captained the small cargo ship laden with Australian soldiers through treacherous enemy territory, going as far south as the Sunda Strait between the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Java... we had to move by night time and in the day time, hide up in the Mangrove swamps. The idea was to go through the Straits and go to Christmas Island which was in British hands at the time. I was captain of the ship and I made the decision to go there. To our dismay, one morning we found that we were almost in the middle of the Japanese fleet. They sent over two officers and I surrendered to them along with the 60-odd men. They led us through the straits again to the island of Bangka, which was in the archipelago there. We stayed there for two or three weeks and you could not get away from it, it was surrounded by water. After a while they took us over to mainland Sumatra to a city called Palembang which was an oil city. There we stayed for three and a half years..."

Insofar as the voyage after leaving Singapore, Lt John Bull explained in Richard Rowley's book "...We successfully navigated a mine field from naval maps given to us by the Navy, and with a myriad of other craft, both large and small, sailed south for several days , surviving many aircraft bombing attacks. Running out of fuel and food, we fortuitously replenished both, and picked up many survivors from ships sunk by the bombings out of the water. We lay up by day in the mangroves that fringed the Sumatran coast and sailed by night to reach the Sunda Straits between Sumatra and Java, only to be apprehended by the Japanese Navy to whom we surrendered, and were sent under escort to Muntok on Banka Island, where we remained for a few weeks before being sent to Palembang..." (ADW).

Rowley amplifies on the capture "... A small Japanese naval frigate stopped Bull and he was ordered to follow the frigate to the tiny Banka Island (near Sumatra) ..." (ADW).

It appears there was no fight over the ship and the men on board - apart from the five ordered by the Japanese to crew the ship almost immediately back to Singapore - initially became POWs on at Muntok (Rowley says three months but it was almost certainly the three weeks experienced by most POWs at Muntok) before being moved to Palembang POW camps a couple of weeks later.

[Researcher Note: Some 25 vessels in the evacuation flotilla which left Singapore between 11 and 14 February 1942 were either sunk or captured in the waters around Banka Island or in the Banka Straits which separates the Island from Sumatra.]

Casualties;

The only casualty was Sgt Brian West of the 2/15th and this is explained in the Memorial To Missing Grave Cards held in the National Archives of Australia where it is recorded "... Wounded in stomach 13.2.42 by Jap machine gun and died at sea on 'SS Hong Tat' - witnesses Sgt J.H.C. Fitzhardinge (NX 68775) and Bdr. R.J. Middleton (NX 33070) ..."

This clearly occurred as the 'Hong Tat' came under fire before moving further out into the harbour at Singapore and must have influenced the decision by Lt Bull to obey the order by the Royal Navy officer in charge of evacuation at Singapore Harbour to board as many men as possible and leave immediately.

Prisoners of War;

The AIF later held in Palembang (many from Muntok) came primarily from the following Australian units – 2/15 Field Regt., 2/18 Btn., 2/19 Btn., 2/26 Btn and the 2/10 Field Ambulance – plus a couple of men from HQ and AASC.

The 'Hong Tat' was one of those small ships immediately sent back to Singapore from Banka island and moored at the Naval Base on the north side of the island – some of these ships were used either as POW camps or reintroduced by the Japanese – often with Allied sailors as crew – in trade or supply lines between Singapore and the Dutch East Indies.

In the UK Archives is a document listing many men who were "Missing" or "Dead" and amongst these is a paragraph "... *The following reached Banka Island from Singapore in S.S. "Hong Tatt" and left again as crew under Japanese, after being taken prisoner. The destination is thought to have been Singapore: -*

NX17649 S/SGT G.E. Spencer 2/15 Bn Regt AIF

NX 32484 BDR C.F. Erickson "

NX 26514 GNR J. S. Bedford "

NX 32775 BDR C.R. Murray "

NX 49117 PTE R S Sullivan 2/19 Bn AIF....."

- This explains where in particular the person by the name of "Charlie Ericsson" - praised by the 2/15th Regiment's Medical Officer, Rowley Richards, in his memoirs "A Doctor's War" – disappeared to after the ship reached Muntok whilst most of his comrades became POWs on Banka island for a few weeks before being moved to Palembang. Bdr Charles Francis Erikson had been the man who had managed to get the engines of the 'Hong tat' started in Singapore and kept them running all the way to the Sunda Strait where it was captured by the Japanese. The man referred to as 'Gnr. Bedford' was in fact Gnr. J.H.G. Woodford, 2/15th.

Post War;

Once again quoting Richard Rowley in 'ADW' "... *After the war was over, Bull went to the Palembang aerodrome and, with a few of his troops, took the surrender of the Japanese officers and 300 men and notified Mountbatten's headquarters in Singapore. Within hours, Lady Mountbatten had arrived to inspect the POWs. Bull and his party were then taken to Changi where they were ostracised by the officers and men of their own regiment who believed they had 'deserted'. Nobody asked them what had happened or why they had left before capitulation. Bull and his men were so bitterly disappointed they offered no information. Neither Bull or his sergeant nor some of the men who were with him have ever attended a regimental reunion. At no stage were John Bull and his original group of men deserters. They behaved with the highest standard of discipline, comradeship and integrity. Bull lost only three men of his group in three and a half years. This can only be explained by his resourcefulness and efficiency in maintaining morale and cohesion. Bull's sergeant was Jim*

Fitzhardinge and the engineer who repaired the engines, and subsequently drove them was Charlie Ericsson [sic: Charles Francis Erikson]. This tale is a sad commentary on a lack of communication and understanding; reference is made here to exonerate Bull and his men who were never deserters. They were in fact deserted by some of their officers and men ...". (ADW)

The exemplary conduct of Lt John Bull and the conduct of his men is also reflected positively in a post war report by Major W.A. Tebbutt, AIF, the senior Australian officer in Palembang POW camp who, in "Annexure 1 to Appendix A' of his report stated "... *Lieut. J. D. Bull, 2/15 Fd Regt – He was the only AIF officer apart from myself with the troops from 22nd July 1942 onwards. The consistently good morale and conduct were in no small degree due to his energy and example.... NX58775 L/Sgt J.H.C. Fitzhardinge and NX 53121 L/Sgt G. C. Halls - both these NCOs behaved well. Fitzhardinge particularly showed physical and mental stamina of a high order...*".

The ship clearly survived the War and by 1947 - referred initially to by the Ho Hong Shipping Co in their advertisements that year as the 'SS Empire Maymead (Hong Tat)' - was again being used on the route between Singapore and Djambi (up river in southern Sumatra) . The Ho Hong Shipping Co lost 10 of its similar coasters during the War. The 'Hong Tat' became a feature in the 'barter trade' between Malayan and Sumatran ports after the War and was also reported carrying relief supplies for the Chinese inhabitants of Paken Baroe during the post war independence fighting between the Indonesians and the Dutch. In 1948 there was a report that the ship was "...*allowed to leave the Republican port of Djambi [by the Dutch] with 250 tons of rubber...*"

It is continued to be reported as a merchant vessel out of Singapore in local newspapers until 1964.

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

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Thank you.

Michael Pether.

SOURCES:

- 'The Gilgandra Weekly' - article from 27.9.11.
- JM – Jonathan Moffatt researcher with Malayan Volunteer Group, United Kingdom, author and historian on the pre-War European population of Malaya and Singapore and the people

and events of the war against the Japanese. Jonathan's research databases on POWs in Palembang and European civilians prior to and during the war have been used in the compilation of this document.

- Singapore National Newspaper Archives – the online newspaper archives at the National Library of Singapore.
- United Kingdom Archives
- ADW a book – 'A Doctors War' by Richard Rowley.
- ITF a book – 'Into the Fire' by Hal Richardson, held at the Australian War Memorial Museum.

Passengers /Crew:

- 'BEDFORD' – required by Japanese to crew ship back to Singapore – he was in fact Gunner John Henry Gilbert WOODFORD, 2/15th (see WOODFORD).
- **BEVERLEY – Gnr Vivian Cecil Beverley**, NX29583, 2/15 Field Regt, AIF. Born 1910 and in 1936 there is a birth notice announcing his daughter Rose bay at Cronulla. Captured 17.2.42 he is mentioned in 'The Propellor' Hurstville, NSW in a list of soldiers from St. George /Cronulla as being a POW. His NOK was 'Beverly Challis'. Then on 17.9.45 he is listed amongst "Names of Liberated Men from Palembang". His service file at the NAA not been digitised. He appears to have died in 1974 and cremated at 'Crematorium Woronora' NSW.
- **BRIGGS – Gnr Eric William Briggs**, NX27604, 2/15 Field Regt, AIF. Born 5.10.08 in Brisbane he appears to have lived in Chippendale, Sydney. Enlisted at Paddington, NSW and captured 17.2.42. NOK shown as Florence Briggs. His NAA service file has not been digitised. Died 1969, Crematorium Rockwood, NSW.

- **BULL – Lt John Douglas Bull**, NX58482, 2/15 Field Regt, AIF, born 1916 in Drummoyne. Enlisted Paddington, NSW, captured 17 February 1942 and his NOK shown as Betty Bull. His affidavit on War Crimes is on file at AWM 54, (Barcode 478853), 101/4/24A and 1010/4/24B (barcode 1189901) - they are not digitised. John Bull was quite a remarkable young man of only 26 years when assigned to take his troops out of Singapore to restart elsewhere in the war. The son of a solicitor and born in Drummoyne he attended school in North Sydney and then decided to pursue a career on the land He graduated with a degree in agricultural science and then was employed in the Department of Agriculture as an agronomist for the district of Narrabri. It was these skills as with his command of his men which saved many of their lives during the extremely deprived and harsh POW years in Palembang – he taught his men that collecting a small amount of their rice ration and fermenting it boosted their Vitamin B1 levels and protected them against serious diseases such as beri beri. On his return with his troops to Singapore at the end of the war he and they were shocked to be considered deserters - despite him having acted under orders from both initially his own commanders and then a ranking naval officer. Understandably John Bull rejected any further contact with his Regiment. He returned to country NSW bought his own properties, with his wife, prospered on the land and raised his family.
- **CAREY - Horace Ronald Carey**, MA [Cantab] b.1903. Educated Ashford and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. To Malaya 1924 as Assistant Master FMS. Various appointments including Inspector of Schools NS. Principal, Malay College, Kuala Kangsar 1938-41 POW Palembang. Returned as Principal, Malay College 1946-1949 (JMM). He is listed without specifics in a database of Malayan Volunteers and in the Palembang POW camp register he is listed with the rank of a Captain, with FMSVF crossed out and A & SH inserted in the register, so appears to have been assigned to the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. He married Agneta Mary Featonby Saville (b.1910 and d. 2002 Durban, South Africa).
- **COLEMAN – Bdr. Frederick William Coleman**, NX 27307, 2/15 Field regt., AIF. Born 27.3.10 in Vacluse, NSW and appears to have lived in Vacluse, NSW. Divorced in 1932. Enlisted Paddington, NSW and captured 17 February 1942 with NOK shown as Henry Coleman. His NAA service file is not digitised.
- **COLLINS- Gnr William Alexander Collins**, NX30797, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 15.3.16 at Maclean, NSW and appears to have lived in Raffville, NSW. Enlisted Paddington, NSW and captured 17.2.42 with NOK shown as John Collins. His service file in the NAA is not digitised.
- **CROSS – Gnr John Clarence Cross**, NX 30582, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 7.10.19 in Taree, NSW and appears to have lived at Kunkletown, Taree, NSW. Enlisted Paddington, NSW and captured 17.2.42. His NOK shown as Eliza Cross. There are two photos of John Cross on file at the AWM

- **DALDRY – Gnr George Daldry**, VX18474, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 23.2.19 in Carlton, Vic he appears to have lived in Springvale, VIC. Enlisted at Caulfield, Vic, he was captured 17.2.42. His NOK shown as George Daldry. His service file at the NAA is not digitised.
- **DUNN – Gnr Stewart Munro Dunn**, QX 19635, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 29.3.09 in Roma, Qld. he appears to have lived in Townsville, Qld. The 'Townsville Daily Bulletin' of 9.9.41 recorded that Gunner Dunn married Miss Joan Johnson in September 1941 in Brisbane – which must have been just prior to embarkation for Malaya. He had enlisted Brisbane and was captured 17.2.42 - his NOK is shown as Joan Dunn. He died as a POW on 31.7.45 in Palembang, and his death notice in 'The Telegraph' Brisbane on 17.10.45 recorded *that* " ... *Mrs Joan E.G. Dunn, 133 Lytton Road, East Brisbane has been advised her husband has died The son of Mr & Mrs E. Dunn of Townsville....*". tragically the 'Townsville Daily Bulletin' also recorded a week earlier than the death notice – on 11.10.45 - that the military authorities had told Mrs Dunn that her husband was alive. The NAA file records his final grave being at 'Menteng People' cemetery, Jakarta.
- **ERIKSON – Bdr Charles 'Charlie' Francis Erickson**, NX 32482, 2/15 Field Regt. AIF. Born 29.10.01 at Concord, NSW and enlisted with 30 Bty, Concord. Was a key person in getting the ship 'Hong Tat' away from Singapore after he was able to start the engines and maintain them all the way to the Sunda Straits and then back under Japanese guard to Muntok. His record shows he was captured 17.2.42 but required by Japanese to crew ship back to Singapore from Muntok. 'The Age' Melbourne of 20.7.42 listed him amongst men posted as Missing. His NOK was Ethel Erickson. His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.
- **FINNERTY – Gnr Sylvester Herbert Finnerty**, NX 20532, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 29.5.04 at Tenterfield, NSW, the son of Patrick and Katherine Finnerty, and appears to have lived at Tenterfield. Enlisted at Paddington, NSW he was captured 17.2.42 and his NOK was shown as Kate Finnerty. His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.
- **FITZHARDINGE – Sgt James Henschman Clubbe Fitzhardinge**, NX 68775, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 13.10.18 at Randwick, NSW he was the son of Mr & Mrs Fitzhardinge of Bowral ('The Southern Mail' 17.9.4 when they received a letter from James from POW camp). Appears to have lived in Rosebay, NSW, lived in Bowral prior to the war and was an active golf player. Captured 17 February 1942 his NOK was shown as Roger Fitzhardinge. In 1969 he is referred to in newspapers as a former real estate agent of 'Jim Fitzhardinge Real Estate'. He died in 2011. His War Crimes Affidavits are on file in the NAA - AWM 54, 1010/4/52, Barcode 478882 and AWM SP 459/1, 573/1/248, Barcode 3151977.
- **GEORGE – Gnr John Andrew George**, NX 32517, 2/15 Field Regt. Born 4.12.19 at Concord, NSW and appears to have lived in Dubbo. Enlisted at Paddington, NSW and captured 17.2.42 his NOK is shown as Andrew George. His service file at the NAA has not been digitised.

- **HALLS – Sgt Brice Clement Halls**, NX 53123, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 6.9.06 in Grenfell, NSW appears to have lived in Grenfell, NSW, where he also enlisted and where he died in 1969. Captured 17 February 1942. His NOK was shown as Paul Halls. His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.
- **HARRIGAN- Bdr John Frederick Harrigan**, NX 30502, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 26.12.03 at Quirindi, NSW and appears to have lived in Gennedah (Gunnedah?). Enlisted at Paddington, NSW and captured 17 February 1942, his NOK was shown as Patricia Harrigan. He married Agnes Mary Potts. His War Crimes Affidavits are in AWM 54, 1010/4/66, Barcode 478903 and SP 459/1, 573/1/248 Barcode 3151977. He died in 1989.
- **KEDWARD – Gnr Leo Augustus Kedward**, NX 28640, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 16.6.15 the son of Augustus and Ethel Elana (Moxey) at Cessnock, NSW and appears to have lived at Bondi, Sydney, NSW. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW, and was captured 17.2.42, his NOK shown as Augustus Kedward. He married Norma Bertha Regan and had three sons. Leo died in 2007. His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.
- **MCANELLY – Gnr Daniel Vincent McAnelly (McANNELLY?)**, NX 28026, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 4.5.15 (1914?) one of eleven children of Bernard and Margaret McAnelly at 'Lola', Lismore, NSW. and appears to have lived at Collins Creek, Kyogle, NSW. Daniel stated he was a 'Banana Grower and Farmer' at the time of his enlistment on 15.5.40 at Lismore, NSW and stated his NOK as his mother Margaret at Collins Creek, Vis Kyogle. Captured 17.2.42. He died on 15.7.06 at the RSL Veterans Home, Caboolture, Qld..
- **MEURER – Gnr Henry Christian Meurer**, NX 2798, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF Born 1909 the son of Mr & Mrs F. Meurer, Neutral Bay and appears to have lived at Hendra, Brisbane. Captured 17.2.42. He married Dorothy May read of Wamberal ('SMH' 15.12.45) almost immediately on repatriation to Australia. He retired in 1960 as Cpl in RMC and died in 1998.
- **MIDDLETON – Bdr Robert John Middleton**, NX 33070, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 123.9.18 at Drummoyne, NSW. His NOK is shown as William Middleton but his service file at the NAA is not digitised. Robert died 2004.
- **MURRAY – Bdr. George Raymond Murray**, NX32775, 2/15th Btn., AIF was born on 17.2.14 at Kandos, NSW and at the time of his enlistment at Paddington, NSW was a 'Foreman, Fitter, Labourer'. Captured, his NOK was shown as Victor Murray (father), George was one of the 2/15th men who was required by the Japanese to crew the ship back to Singapore. Sadly, newspaper s of the wartime reveal that his brother in law came forward during that time to reveal that George's wife Madeline, who had married George just prior to embarkation in 1941, was already married to another servicemen.

- **NEILL – Gnr Aubrey Charles Neill**, NX 24931, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 26.11.09 at Colo, NSW. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW and was captured 17.2.42; his NOK was shown as Archibald Neill. Aubrey was in 'Japan Party 1942' from Palembang camp but died in Formosa on 5.10.43 – he is buried at Sai Wan Bay cemetery, Hong Kong. His service file at the NAA has not been digitised but there is also another file on him NAA A8231, Barcode 20946422..
- **POOL – Gnr Alfred Augustine Pool**, VX 56612, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 86.8.03 (or was it 1899 and a WW1 veteran??) at Bendigo , Vic Alfred Pool appears to have fooled the authorities in wartime and possibly enlisted when he was too young for the First World War and then enlisted again for the Second World War with a different birth date. In WW1 he enlisted in the Div. Signals Company stating he had been born in Bendigo on 6.8.1899 (age 18 years 2 months) and his NOK was his father Alfred Harris Pool then when he enlisted at Royal park, Vic for the Second World War he gave his DOB as 6.8.03 and his NOK as H. Pool. Captured 17.2.42. He appears to have lived in Melbourne and died in 1975. Neither of his World War service files in the NAA have been digitised.
- **RICHARDSON – Gnr Harold A. Richardson**, NX33812, 2/15 Field Regt.,AIF, born 1916 and appears to have lived in Strathfield, Sydney, NSW. Captured 17.2.42.
- **RUSSELL – Gnr John Alfred Russell**, NX69551, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 10.12.18 at St Peters, NSW. and appears to have lived in Arncliffe, Sydney, NSW. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW on 31.7.40 giving his occupation as "Motor Driver" and his marital status as 'Single'. His NOK was his mother Jane Russell, 30 Glen Road, Arncliffe. He was captured 17.2.42.
- **SMALL – Gnr Clarence Geoffrey Small**, NX 31966, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 4.6.17 at Muswellbrook, NSW and appears to have lived at Muswellbrook. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW giving his NOK as William Small. He was captured 17.2.42.
- **SMITH – Gnr William Jack Smith**, NX30538, 2/15 Field Regt., AIF. Born 20.2.17 at Condobolin, NSW and appears to have lived at Condobolin. He had a sister named Miss A Smith. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW giving his occupation as a Labourer, he was captured 17.2.42. After the war he was discharged to Denison Street, Condobolin. He later changed his name (1961) to Francis Ernest Smith at 10 Lawrence Street, Peakhurst, NSW and in 1989 was living at 4 Oxley Street, Condobolin.
- **SPENCER – S/Sgt (or L/Sgt) George Hunter Spencer**, NX17649, 2/15th Field Regt., AIF born 7.12.17 at Summer Hill, NSW. On enlistment he gave his occupation as 'Station hand' and his mother as NOK, Mrs Veda May Spencer, C/o Tattersalls Hotel, Glen Innes. Captured with the 'Hong Tat' he was required by the Japanese to crew ship back to Singapore. After the War he

was discharged to 11 Manning road, Double Bay. He died at Coorparoo, Qld in 2002.

- **SULLIVAN – Private Edward Shamus Sullivan**, NX 49117, 2/19th Btn., AIF born in London, England on 9.1.06 he enlisted in Paddington, NSW. His NOK was shown as Vera Sullivan. After capture he was required by Japanese to crew ship back to Singapore.
- **WELCH - Bdr. Ronald Welch**, NX30475, 2/15 Field Ambulance, AIF. Born 21.4.16 in Brisbane, enlisted in Paddington, NSW and married Amelia. Appears to have been from Gundagai. Although his service file at the NAA is not digitised, his War Crimes Affidavits are filed at the AWM 54, 1010/4/146, Barcode 479028 and SP 459/1, 573/1/248, Barcode 3151977.
- **WEST – “... Sgt Brian Jack West**, NX 30409, 2/15 Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, aged 24, born 17.2.17 at Orange, NSW, aged 24 years buried at sea on 14 .2 42. Father Mr William West, Canoolas [sic- this is Canobolas near Orange, NSW], via Orange NSW. Also commemorated on Kranji memorial Panel 15 Col 115...” (CWGC et al). As so often happened during the war heart breaking misinformation was passed to relatives about the fate of their sons – in 1943 (‘Leader’ Orange, 1.9.43) Mrs W.E. West of Canobolas was reportedly advised by another women that a radio message had been received form her other son - a POW in Japanese hands – that Brian was safe. The reality was that only casualty amongst this group during the evacuation was Sgt Brian West of the 2/15th and this is explained in the Memorial To Missing Grave Cards held in the National Archives of Australia where it is recorded “... Wounded in stomach 13.2.42 by Jap machine gun and died at sea on ‘SS Hong Tat’ - witnesses Sgt J.H.C. Fitzhardinge (NX 68775) and Bdr. R.J. Middleton (NX 33070) ...”.This clearly occurred as the ‘Hong Tat’ came under fire before moving further out into the harbour at Singapore and must have influenced the decision by Lt Bull to obey the order by the Royal Navy officer in charge of evacuation at Singapore Harbour to board as many men as possible and leave immediately.
- **WOODFORD – Gunner John Henry Gilbert Woodford**, NX 26514, 2/15th Regt, born 30.8.02 at Forest lodge, NSW. Married Effie Lucy Hume on 21.4.21 at Leichhardt and enlisted at Leichhardt on 1.6.40. He was a truck driver and mechanic according to his enlistment papers. He became a POW at Seletar (NOK Mrs E. Woodford, 47 Charlotte Street, Leichhardt) in Singapore after being required to crew one of the small vessels captured at Muntok – presumably the ‘Hong Tat’. He died in 1981 at Leichardt.

Probable Passengers:

Lt John Bull makes a reference in his small ‘appendix’ in the book ‘ADW’ to “...*Of the Australian POW in Palembang, many, both from the 2/15th Fd. Regt. and other units owed their escape from Singapore to the voyage of the ‘Hong Tat’...*”.

In his 2011 interview with "The Gilgandra Weekly" he also made reference to there having been 60 men on board the ship.

There is an impression amongst researchers that there were other Australian and British troops on board – quite whether they were from the original group in Singapore or picked up from other stricken vessels along the route is unclear.

So as to not lose track of probable passengers on the 'Hong Tat' the remaining Australian Army POWs in Palembang POW camp are now listed as probable passengers – if anyone can correct this list to remove any names because they reached Palembang or Muntok by means other than on the 'Hong Tat' the researcher of this document would be most appreciative;

- **ANDERSON** – *Gnr. Arthur Desmond Thorn Anderson, VX 42633, 4 Anti – tank Regt AIF. Born 15.3.19 at Footscray, Vic. Arthur enlisted at Caulfield, Vic and gave his occupation as 'Transport Driver & Mechanic' with his NOK as his mother Ruby May Anderson, 21A Kireep road, Balwyn. He became a POW in Palembang then sent in Japan Party 1942 and he died of Colitis and Malaria at 3rd Branch Camp, Taiwan/Formosa on 4.11.42. He is now buried at Sai Wan Bay cemetery, Hong Kong.*
- **ANTHONEY** – *Pte. Leslie (Ross??) Anthony, NX40399, 2/18 Btn, AIF. Born 13.12.19 at Walgett, NSW the son of John Parker Anthony and Rosetta Maud Walkden Anthony. He enlisted at Tamworth, NSW and gave his NOK as Rose Anthony. He died on 7.8.45 and buried Menteng Poeloe, Djakarta. His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.*
- **BATT** – *Pte Cedric William Batt, VX 26626, AASC, AIF. Born 1.3.10 at Ballarat, Vic. Cedric enlisted at Caulfield, Vic and gave his NOK as William Batt. He died on 23.8.44 and is buried in Menteng Poeloe, Jakarta. His service file at the NAA has not been digitised.*
- **BELL** – *Pte Lindsay Gordon Bell, NX7091, 2/19 Btn., AIF. Born on 27.8.19 at Manilla, NSW. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW and gave his occupation as "Farm & Station hand" and his NOK as his mother Isabella Bell, Wongo Creek, Manilla, NSW. He was discharged after the war to 56 Manilla Street, Manilla and was the husband of Sylvia. He died in 1999 in Manilla, NSW.*
- **BRAVO** – *Pte. Roy Albert Bravo, QX 13103, 2/26 Btn, AIF. Born 2.2.2 at Carlton, Vic. He enlisted in Mackay, Qld, giving his NOK as Leu Bravo. He married Mary Teresa Kippa – Rivy. In 1958 he was living in Petrie, Qld.*
- **CHISHOLM** – *Sgt Graham Chisholm, BEM, VX 51176, Signals 8 Div., AIF. Born 6.11.15 at Brisbane and enlisted at Royal Park, Vic. Giving his NOK as Ivie Chisholm. An article in the 'ABC Weekly' of 5.10.46 records how Graham Chisholm bravely recovered a radio from a*

wrecked Hurricane fighter plane whilst he was a POW in Palembang and then Flying Officer Huck' Finlay, RAAF used it to receive radio broadcasts in Palembang POW camp. Graham Chisholm's War Crimes Affidavit is filed in AWM 54, 1010/4/32, Barcode 478861. and died 2002.

- **CLARKE – Pte John William Clarke**, NX35993, 2/19 Btn, AIF. Born 1.9.10 at Ashlaby in England. On enlistment he gave his occupation as 'Milk vendor'. His wife was Mrs Lorna May Clarke, 164 Forsyth Street, Wagga and after the war his discharge address was 15 End Street, Deniliquin.
- **COX – Pte Aubrey James Cox**, NX 2704, 2/19 Btn, AIF. Born 1918 died 2002. The Palembang POW camp register gives his NOK as Mrs E. Mosley, Cascade via Dorrego, NSW. There is no service file held at the NAA, only a POW Trust Fund application.
- **GRIFFIN – Pte Thomas Grant Griffin**, NX 43116, 2/18 Btn., AIF. Born 29.12.19 at Cessnock. He married Daphne Iris Dunn in 1941 and in 1950 he married Betty Lydia Woods Griffin (she later became Conlon by surname). Thomas Griffin appears to have been a very sick man and numerous files are held in the NAA including Repatriation Medical case files, Repatriation Pension files for his widow and a POW War trust Fund Application. He died in 1963.
- **JONES – Pte. Victor Jones**, VX 31124, AASC, AIF. Born 2.9.09 at Ferny Creek, Vic. He enlisted at royal park, Vic when he gave the name of his NOK as Elizabeth Jones. His service file at the NAA has not been digitised and there is a War Crime affidavit file AWM 54, 1010/4/81, Barcode 478929.
- **MOYE – Corporal Victor George Moyer**, NX 52775, 2/20 Field Ambulance Born 29 July 1918 (29.7.20?) in Brisbane to George Raymond Duke Moyer and Nellie Winifred Reid., enlisted in Paddington, NSW and married Lorna Moyer (divorced 1946). His service file in the NAA has not been digitised.
- **PEARCE – Pte Francis George Pierce**, NX 32590, 2/10 Field Ambulance, AIF. Born 16.1.20 at Wentworth Falls, NSW. He enlisted at Katoomba, NSW on 20.7.40 when he gave his occupation as Labourer and his NOK as W.D. Pearce. Francis Pearce was married with a child when he enlisted. His service file shows that whilst in Army service he was constantly in trouble and being punished. He lived at Valley Road, Wentworth falls. According to the Ballarat POW memorial he was also known as 'Francis G. Harris'.
- **PIERCY – Pte. William Joseph Piercy**, NX48922, 2/19 Btn., AIF. Born 22.9.22 at Nowra, NSW. He enlisted at Paddington, NSW. His service file has not been digitised. He married in 1966

and was the husband of Katie and the father of James. He died in 1991 and is buried at Shoalhaven Memorial Gardens, Shoalhaven, NSW.

- **PILKINGTON – Sapper Thomas Stewart Pilkington**, NX1071, 2/12 Field Engineers., AIF. Born 15.7.14 at Gwahta, WA. He enlisted on 5.4.41 at Paddington, NSW and at that time his occupation was ‘Lorry Driver’ and he was married. Thomas Pilkington gave the address of his NOK as Irene Mary Pilkington, Moa Street, Balranald, NSW. His service file is characterised by discipline issues. He died 1965 or 1988 depending on different references.
- **SHEEHY – Pte Frederick James Sheehy**, QX 13548, 2/26 Btn., AIF Born 22.10.10 in Berkshire, England. He enlisted at Kelvin Grove, Qld and stated his NOK as Lily Sheehy. His service file at the NAA has not been digitised..
- **SMALL – Pte Mervyn Lindsay Small**, NX 47542, 2/30 Btn, AIF. Born 28.8.18 and enlisted in Casino, NSW on 24.6.40, giving his occupation as Labourer and with his NOK as his father Verdon Small, Casino and appears to have lived at 162 Lennox Street, Casino. His address on discharge was Rappville. He is shown on a piece of film held at the AWM, evacuating on a Dakota from POW camp in Sumatra (Accession #FO 7341).
- **TAYLOR – Pte Anthony Charles Taylor**, NX 28955, 2/18 Btn., AIF. Born 3.2.21 at Goodiwindi, Qld. He enlisted at Merrylands, NSW giving his occupation as Labourer, single, and his NOK as his father Richard Samuel Taylor, Cabramatta Road, Cabramatta. His address on discharge was Bowden Street, Cabramatta..
- **WHITE – Corporal Ronald James White**, NX52490, 2/19 Btn, AIF. Born 23.12.18 at Parramatta, NSW. On enlistment he stated his occupation as Motor Truck Driver and that he was single, with his NOK as Miss Ethel Wallett. His address on discharge was 21 Albert Street, Granville, NSW. On 21.8.42 ‘The Murrumbidgee Irrigator’ Leeton, NSW wrote about him having “...enlisted from Leeton in July 1940 and sailed for Malaya with the Riverina Regiment (was posted Missing). He was employed by Mr R. Monfries orchard...”.
- **YEATMAN – Lance Corporal Ernest Alfred Yeatman**, NX45391, 2/20 Btn., AIF. Born 20.5.13 at Cessnock, NSW. On enlistment he gave his occupation as a Master Baker and that he was single with his NOK as his father Archibald Yeatman, 34 Mayfield Street, Cessnock. Ernest contracted malaria whilst serving in Malaya in 1941 but survived the war and died on 6.10.84.

