

Submission 185

Mr Ralph Peter Bull

INQUIRY 2011/020
SWB /2011/ 185

Berminham, Mary MS

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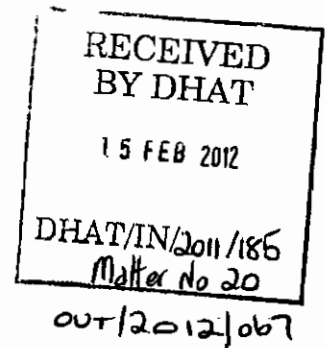
From: Ralph and Shirley Bull [ralphbull@bigpond.com]
Sent: Tuesday, 11 December 2012 11:34 AM
To: DHA Tribunal
Subject: HMAS YARRA 2

To Mary Berminham, Executive Officer.
As requested by you, I give my consent for my submissions re HMAS YARRA to be publicly available & I look forward to a successful outcome. Thank you for giving us the chance to maybe get some recognition for YARRA & her men. (My father was WO RALPH WILLIAM DONALD BULL - Gunnery Officer on YARRA.)

Ralph Peter Bull
2 Surrey Close
KANWAL 2259 NSW
PH.0243927002

To:
Defence Honours & Awards Appeals Tribunal.

From:
Ralph Peter Bull
2 Surrey Close
Kanwal, NSW. 2259
10th February, 2012.



Re:
Inquiry Into Unresolved Recognition For Past Acts Of Naval & Military Gallantry & Valour.

My submission is for HMAS YARRA II on which my Father W.O. Ralph William Donald Bull (Gunnery Officer) served & was killed in action in the Sunda Strait on 4th March 1942.

As my Father was killed four days before my 6th birthday, I don't have a great deal to recall, (my Mother never talked to me about what happened unfortunately) but I do have an original copy of Leading Seaman A.F. Parry's book "H.M.A.S. YARRA", "THE STORY OF A GALLANT SHIP". He served on YARRA for quite some time & only left her a fortnight before she was sunk. In the final chapter of the book (which I have copied for you) "SEVEN AGAINST ONE", pages 218 to 222 inclusive, he describes quite vividly what took place in YARRA's final battle with the Japanese ships. It was indeed very courageous of YARRA & her crew in what they tried to achieve.

To show you what Yarra & her crew achieved during her service for Australia, I have copied a portion of another chapter from the book, "BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THE JAPS", pages 210 - 217, telling the STORY of her ADVENTURE with the "EMPRESS OF ASIA". YARRA managed to take on board some 1334 soldiers from EMPRESS, their gear & equipment, & between them, the boats picked up about 400, saving some 1700. It must have been a very precarious situation for YARRA having all those people on board as she was only a very small ship. In all EMPRESS had on board 2500 troops & 500 odd crew, of which only 30 were lost. This is only a fraction of her great history. It is very worthwhile reading Parry's book.

It is now 70 years since YARRA's final battle & it is not before time that her crew had some recognition from our Government. Please do all that you can to make this right.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph P Bull".

Ralph P. Bull.
Phone no. 0243927002/0402069814.

P.S.

One thing I do recall is that the ship's cat jumped ship when YARRA was in port two weeks before. Did it have a premonition of what was in store for YARRA?

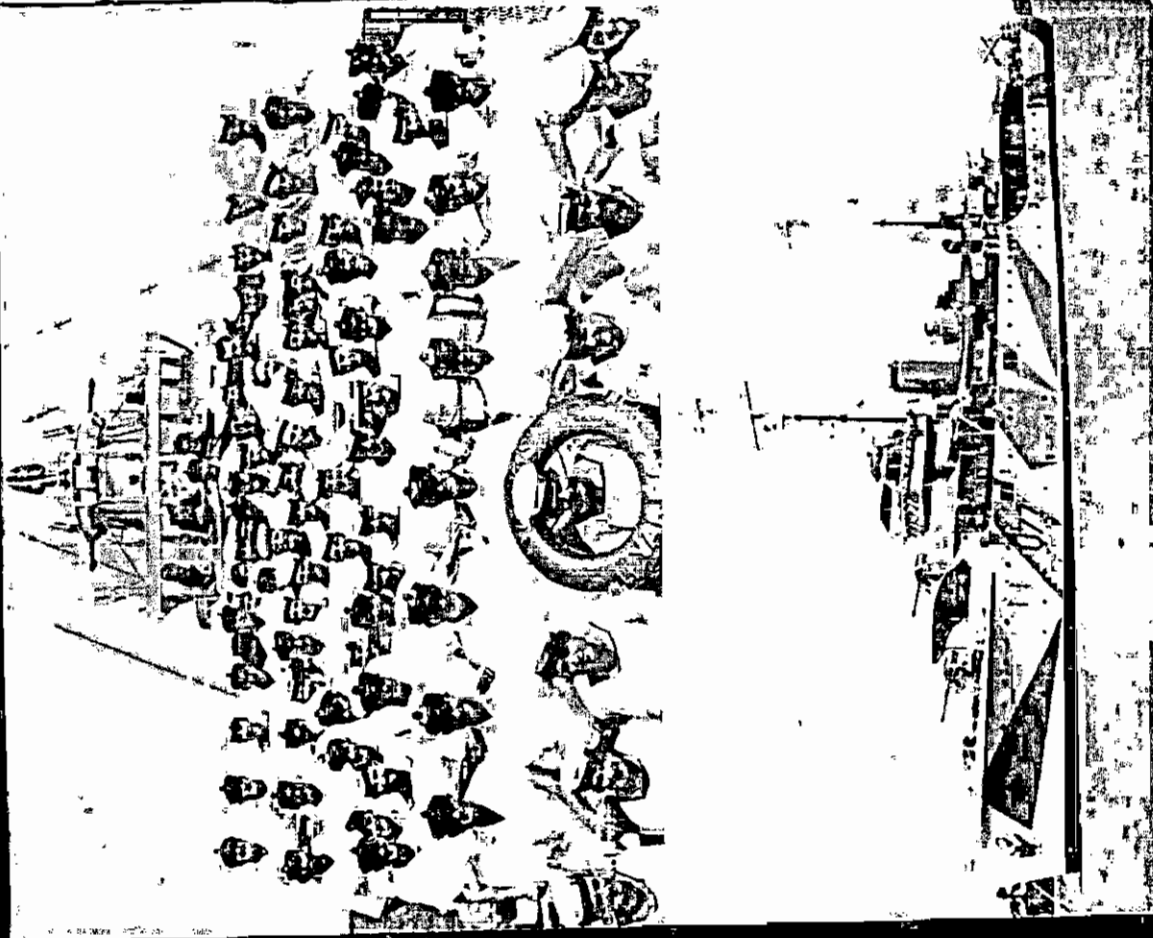
H.M.A.S. YARRA

THE STORY OF A GALLANT SHIP

By
A. F. PARRY
Leading-Seaman, H.M.A.S. Yarra

ANGUS AND ROBERTSON LTD
SYDNEY :: LONDON

1944



Above: CREW OF H.M.A.S. YARRA
Below: H.M.A.S. YARRA

FOREWORD

THIS is the story of an Australian ship which for two and a half years endured the dullness, the discomforts and sometimes the dangers, associated with war. From time to time she enjoyed those small pleasures which opportunity offered. In due course she achieved an honourable end. This will be the pride and comfort of those who mourn the men who together were a ship's company which may have added in some small degree to the prestige of this country.

W. H. HARRINGTON,
Captain, H.M.A.S. *Yarra*.

PREFACE

THE story of H.M.A.S. *Yarra* is little known to the general public. The purpose of this book is to tell it, and also to redeem a promise made to some of my shipmates. I served on this ship for some time in Australian waters and throughout her service overseas, leaving her only a fortnight before her last battle. The glory of that heroic fight has made the ship and her crew immortal in our naval history, and it is fitting that the full story should now be told.

H.M.A.S. *Yarra* was built in 1935 at the Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney, for the Royal Australian Navy, and she proved a valuable and adaptable ship. Before the outbreak of war she was employed mainly in training R.A.N. Reserve ratings off our coasts, where she showed her mettle in many storms. The war brought her more dangerous duties, such as mine-sweeping, anti-submarine patrol and convoying, to keep the seas clear for troops and supplies. Her first taste of active warfare was the pursuit of a ship believed to be the German raider *Von Scheer*, but the time for battle had not yet come.

How it came, and the trials and triumphs that followed, are told in these pages. Apart from details that have been censored, this is a complete record of the service of H.M.A.S. *Yarra* overseas.

A glossary will be found at the end of the book for the use of readers unfamiliar with naval terms.

A. F. PARRY,
Leading Scaman, H.M.A.S. *Yarra*.

SEVEN AGAINST ONE

219

were too far away to be discernible as either friend or foe. One can imagine with what anxiety the captain, Lieutenant-Commander Rankin, watched them. For his ship was the sole protector of the convoy, which consisted of the depot ship *Anking* (loaded with sailors, including wounded, who were survivors from other ships), a tanker laden with oil, and a small Malayan motor mine-sweeper.

At 6.30, while yet the *Yarra* kept watch upon her flock, distant flashes were seen from the ships, which were now approaching although their identity had not yet been established. For perhaps a few seconds these were taken to be signals . . . but, came the shriek of projectiles and, overhead, passed a salvo of 8-inch shells. The captain now knew them for what they were and immediately closed up action stations, at the same time putting the helm over and ringing down to the engine-room for black smoke and to the upper deck for smoke floats. Then, methodically laying a smoke-screen, he ordered his convoy to scatter behind its shelter. However, the enemy approached at a speed in excess of thirty knots, firing as they came, and the top speed of the convoy was little better than fourteen. *Yarra* herself, badly in need of complete refit after nineteen months of fighting against Italians, Iraqis, Iranians, Germans and now Japs, could do very little better.

The enemy was well out of range of the *Yarra's* guns and, knowing that the only possible chance of saving the convoy was to get to close quarters quickly, the better to stand some show of hampering the Japs, Lieutenant-Commander Rankin now put his helm over and charged straight for the enemy. His crew, to a man, were behind him and remained grimly on the job, intent only on trying to get a hit in on their big opponents. For the enemy force consisted of three 8-inch cruisers, and four destroyers. Against these the *Yarra* could muster three 4-inch guns which, while deadly accurate in the hands of her trained crews, were nevertheless wholly inadequate for the job they were called upon to perform.

As she went in towards the enemy, so gallantly, ninety

CHAPTER XIV

SEVEN AGAINST ONE

WHILE we were at sea we heard that Singapore had capitulated. Also that Palembang had fallen to paratroops after the Dutch had destroyed the mighty oil refinery there. So the Battle for Java was just commencing, and things looked very grim.

I subsequently heard from survivors of the good old ship that, when we left, she remained in Batavia a further four days doing a boiler clean.

On the way out through Sunda Strait she was bombed for eleven hours on end. To conserve ammunition (she had been unable to get any further supply) rifles were issued to the guns' crews with which to fight off the Japs, which they did successfully. But when it was over, stays were hanging Judas, and the aerial was down, half the flare was gone, boats damaged and the funnel holed badly. In the open sea she picked up a convoy and proceeded to Tjilatjap, but when just off that port received news that the Japs had occupied it ahead of them. *Yarra* then altered course towards the Australian coast.

All went well for a day or so. Although the strain was still there, due to the ever present possibility of enemy attack, it was comparatively quiet, and all hands were able to appreciate the blue waters, sunny tropic skies and, above all, the fact that the ship was at last heading towards home.

And then, when about 350 miles south of Java and almost in sight, so to speak, of the Australian coastline, came disaster.

It was during the morning watch, not long after dawn, that seven ships appeared over the edge of the horizon. They

shells passed over her, and her men prayed that *Yarra* might get to close quarters before she was stopped—as she surely must be. The sick bay was packed with Dutch naval officers and ratings who were being attended to by the doctor and his staff. Here the first hit was made. The Japs, having found the range, remained outside of *Yarra's* gun-fire and commenced to pound her to ruin.

The bridge and transmitting station were blown to pieces, killing every one there with the exception of Acting Leading Signalman Geoff. Bromilow, who was half-way up the bridge ladder and was blown down on to the deck below, wounded, but alive and barely conscious. Later, he was picked up by a scaman, who no doubt wished him to have a fighting chance, and thrown into the water where he was pulled to safety by one of the men on a raft.

All was now chaos—an 8-inch shell exploding in the engine-room had stopped the ship and she was helpless. Two of the three guns were out of action, and at least one crew lay dead around its gun, while the barrel of another was blown off short just forward of the breech.

The first lieutenant, Lieutenant-Commander Smith, walked round and told the men to stand by to abandon ship. Shortly after, the order was given, and men set to work launching Carley rafts, one-man rafts, spars and anything else that would float—the boats had all been ruined by the shells. After he gave the order to abandon ship, the captain went to his cabin to personally destroy important papers. He was not seen again.

And so, at a little after 7 a.m., the small handful of men who were left floated away from the ship's blackened and battle-scarred side. The action had lasted just half an hour. These men could hear gun-fire in the distance as the remaining ships were hunted down—the tanker blew up in flame and smoke, and the other two ships were dispatched as quickly. But the *Yarra* floated on, a tribute to Australian workman-ship, as, with decks awash, she refused to sink. And for some

little time there could be seen one man who would not leave his gun—leading Seaman Ronald Taylor (captain of gun), otherwise known as "Buck". He had said:

"This gun is still firing while I've got breath in my body." He had seen nine of his twelve men killed, but continued to lay and train and fight on until the end.

Once an enemy ship came up close to the survivors on the rafts and stopped; but, before it was plain why she had done so, her screws revolved and she passed on. After being shelled and bombed almost continuously for two and a half hours, two planes from the cruisers were sent up to dive-bomb the stricken *Yarra*. She sank shortly after nine o'clock—and the survivors found themselves alone upon the waters. They were thirty-four men all told, with food and water practically non-existent—a few sodden biscuits, and fresh water which allowed only a dessertspoonful daily for the wounded and a thimbleful for each of the others.

Through the twenty-four hours of each day they baked and blistered during daylight and shivered at night. They went through hell. Some ships were sighted but, after raising the hopes of the castaways, passed on unseeing.

In the evening of the sixth day, weak and exhausted, Stoker Petty Officer Brazier, Leading Cook Wagland, Geoffrey Bromilow (who, despite wounds in the leg and shoulder, was still holding out), Able-Seaman Orton, only survivor of No. 3 gun's crew, after being blown forty feet along the upper deck by the blast of the 8-inch shell responsible for the destruction of the gun, and the others—skeletons of their former selves—were sighted by a Dutch submarine. Willing hands from the rescuing ship pulled them aboard. Of the original thirty-four, thirteen were left—all that remained of a ship's company of 151 and others who had been aboard.

And so ends the saga of as gallant a ship as any, and of the heroes who manned her. It was her good fortune that, in nineteen months overseas, she was called upon to perform

many difficult and dangerous tasks, all of which were carried out with success and distinction to herself and to her country. Into that time also, she crammed more adventure than would ordinarily be spread over half a dozen ships. And of her and her men, it can be said, that when the time came to go, she and they went gloriously.

GLOSSARY

This glossary of abbreviations used by the author in his narrative has been prepared for the enlightenment of those unfamiliar with the language of the Royal Australian Navy:

- A.A.—Anti-aircraft.
- A.M.C.—Armed merchant cruiser.
- B.A.P.Co.—British-American Petroleum Co.
- Belum—Native dugout canoe.
- Black Prince—Term sometimes used by the *Yarra's* crew when referring (privately) to their captain.
- Blue—Trouble.
- Buzz—Rumour going about.
- Captain (D)—Captain in charge of a division of destroyers.
- Check receivers—Checking up of the communication system from transmitting stations to guns.
- Crusher—Regulating petty officer.
- D.A.—Direct action.
- E.R.A.—Engine-room artificers.
- E.R. Div.—Engine-room division.
- E.T.A.—Estimated time of arrival.
- Eurekas—Flat-bottomed motor patrol boats which carry machine guns.
- Gash—Spares not used ("Where are the gash annas [Indian currency] going to?")
- H.E.—High-explosive shell.
- Jimmy—First Lieutenant.
- Jonky—Master-at-arms.
- L.A.—Low-angle firing ("carried out a L.A. run").
- L.S.B.A.—Leading sick berth attendant.
- L.T.O.—Leading torpedoman.
- M.A.A.—Master-at-arms.
- Mac Wests—Life-saving jackets.
- Miscellaneous division—Division of cooks, stewards, and ratings other than seamen and stokers.
- M.M.—Multiple machine.

pointed out that he wanted them for the patient, the skipper said he would send it at once, and *Vampire* was able to let us have two dozen. The patient was doing well, and S.B.P.O. James and S.B.A. Meickle were proving good nurses. Of course, in a way, they claimed him as their patient in so much as they had assisted "Robbie" as far as possible during the big event.

As the correspondents were going over the side, the Aussie promised to send a story to his paper (which he subsequently did, covering nearly everything that happened on the trip, except his *mal de mer*); and the Yank said he was going to put his trip, and the ship, on the air one of the next three mornings, from Batavia through his U.S.A. station. Unfortunately no one remembered what it was.

The transfers completed, we took up position in the Singapore convoy; for here the convoy split up, five ships, including the *Devonshire*, *Felix Roussel* and *Empress of Asia*, proceeding west-nor-west, while the rest turned east-nor-east for Batavia. Three ships of our five were full of troops, a fourth carried much needed ammo, and the fifth, equipment. We had plenty of escort with them.

Everything remained quiet until we reached the end of Banka Strait. Then, as we were coming out into the South-West China Sea, came a raid by nine twin-engined Japanese bombers. On the first run, they came over fairly high, and A.A. fire did not stop them nor, as far as we could see, were any of them hit. They were concentrating on the last in the line, the biggest and slowest ship, the *Empress of Asia*. But their bombs (due no doubt to the A.A. bursts we sent up) missed her. They passed right over. When nearly out of sight, they swept round and came up into the same position as before; then in they came. This time, the concentration of A.A. was so good that the enemy planes couldn't take it and turned off, dropping their load into the sea a good mile away from any ship. We saw them no more.

Naturally, we were closed up all day at action stations, as we had been the day before and would be the coming day. Incidentally, our new captain, Lieutenant-Commander

BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THE JAPS 211

Rankin, was aboard, though, as we had not touched port, our old skipper was still with us.

No more was seen during the remainder of that day, except a single plane that was several times glimpsed away on the starboard beam, which lead *Danae* to signal:

"I think we are being shadowed."

During the night, *Exeter*, having led us nearly to Singapore where we were considered safe from surface attack, returned. *Java* left also. *Jupiter* and *Sutlej* went ahead with the needed ammo, and equipment ships to get them in by dawn, as they were faster than the others. Owing to the slowness of the *Empress*, who bore the signs of much sea-time, it became clear that we could not get her in by dawn, thus holding up the other two ships. Next morning was beautiful, with some fairly low cloud, and no bombers appeared as we ran up the Strait. All seemed peaceful except for a huge column of smoke on the starboard bow which we later learned was from the burning store-sheds of what had been the Naval Base.

When some twenty miles from harbour, the alarm bells rang. Flying very high in the direction of Singapore were twenty-seven high-level bombers; these flew on towards another objective and were not seen again. But below them were approximately twenty-seven more; and these, by breaking formation and scattering to the four winds in threes and fours and singles, made it very evident that they had reached their objective. All experienced a thrill as we realized that they were out to make good the words of the Tokyo spokesman of a day or two before, when he said:

"No more convoys will get into, or out of Singapore."

As luck would have it at this time, *Danae* had taken up position well astern, possibly as precaution against surprise attack by surface craft which may have been lurking amongst the islands. Thus, as the attack began, *Yarra* was actually the sole protection of the three ships, the smallest of which would be about 15,000 tons. Planes began to come in from all directions, in the best tradition of Nazi dive-

bombing. We did not waste any time opening up on the first one and, from then on, it was mostly local barrage, all guns firing independently as the targets approached from forward, aft and both beams.

It was quickly evident that the *Empress* was the target. Before long, so many planes were coming that, although *Yarra* fought with demoniac determination and fierceness, her guns alone were not enough; one plane managed to get a stick of four 60- or 70-pounders with incendiaries on to the target (as bad luck would have it they landed in the officers' lounge), and the *Empress* was afire. This ship was built in 1913, so the fire soon gained a firm hold on the old superstructure, burning fiercely despite all efforts to quench it.

Shore signal station, watching the fray through their large telescopes, told us after that *Yarra* was doing a great piece of work, presenting an inspiring sight as, almost hidden at times in smoke and flame, she "buzzed about like a bee in a bottle". They gave us credit for the safe arrival of the other two ships, the *Devonshire* being untouched, and the *Feliz* with six casualties aboard but no other damage. However, another Jap got through our protective fire, covered by his companions who were dividing their attack to apparently wipe us out of their way, and another stick hit the *Empress*, which, now that her superstructure had caught fire, was trailing a heavy plume of black smoke. From her, came the signal:

"Communicate me—I am disabled." And, as she sent it, she altered course to port, standing in to the shallower water.

Commander Harrington replied: "Am standing by," and altered course to follow her, while still our guns blazed furiously. In the distance, the other two ships were nearly into harbour and, astern, *Danae* was firing at a lone attacker.

From the bridge the order was passed for the "Jimmy," who left 3-gun and hurried up. The skipper told him to have the necessary wires and fenders flaked out ready, as he was going alongside, and to stand by to drop all boats and rafts. As I was not required on a gun, I hurried down

to the upper-deck and assisted in running out falls, until came the order: "Man the starboard lifeboat." So up I jumped into the stern sheets of the first whaler and Cook Hudson hopped in forward. In no time, we were turned out and lowered. Then, "out pins" and we slipped cleanly and were gliding past the ship's side till clear of her, when it was "out oars and row".

The *Empress* had by this time stopped and dropped both picks. Hundreds of swaddies (she had 2500 shock troops aboard) were in the water, some clinging to floats and rafts, most with cork life-belts on, and all steadily drifting away down the Strait. And so work began. At first, as we rowed from group to group, Doug and I did all the work, but, as the first of them recovered, they were only too willing to lend a hand. Before long the boat was full—so full indeed that I had to trim the dish, as water was lapping over the port gunwale. As a matter of fact, there were some fourteen soldiers and myself in the stern sheets, four to each of the five thwarts, two or three in between them, and another dozen with Doug up forward. In addition, we were towing a raft which held ten more. And so, with four swaddies on each oar, we slowly made our way toward a lighthouse with a jetty nearby.

For the first time, we had leisure to observe what was going on. *Yarra* was alongside the port quarter of the stricken ship, taking, over her bows, a stream of khaki clad figures which, as we watched, were rapidly spreading all along her upper deck. Two Jap planes came over us, but the ever-watchful *Yarra* let go a few rounds as warning, and then came a Hurricane and chased them away. They may only have been watching the rescuing operations; no machine-gunning of our boats took place; still, this could have been due to the *Yarra* or the Hurricane, neither of which took any chances in that direction.

Eventually, after much talking, and good work by a sergeant who set the example in fine style on the stroke oar, we got into the lighthouse and, slowly and carefully moving a few at a

time, got all out of the heavily laden boat on to the platform, and safety; the same with the raft. And then out again.

A strong private insisted on coming out to take an oar, and we were glad to have him. By now, numbers of small craft were on the scene, and *Yarra* was disappearing at a rate of knots, with her precious cargo, towards Singapore. This time we had only picked up the contents of a couple of rafts when we found there were no more to be seen, and so set course for the lighthouse again.

Eventually, the motor launch *Skipjack* took us in tow and proceeded to the *Wollongong* (Australian corvette) where we transferred our swaddies and, as it was all over, proceeded to the lighthouse where we were taken in tow by *Yarra's* motor boat, which already had one of the skiffs fast. Then we went to the *Bendigo* (another Australian corvette) for oil. Here we found the number two sea boat with Hopley, Pederson and Chief Writer Lennie Whear. We were able to get a drink of water and a much appreciated smoke—the first we had had since the excitement began. We took the sea boat in tow, too, and with all three boats and their crews astern, the motor boat started back. Then, sighting a Carley raft belonging to the ship, we stopped and took that on board as well. The other skiff had gone back on another vessel.

And so we made our weary, sunburnt, hungry way over the miles to harbour, reflecting that it was mighty hard luck to lose a ship when only a dozen or so miles out, but congratulating ourselves on the number saved and the fight we'd put up.

We entered the narrow harbour, passing the *Feliz* where the swaddies gave us a cheer—and there was *Yarra* ahead of us, looking good to our eyes. The whole ship's company including Archie, the "Black Prince" himself, with the new skipper were on the quarter-deck to welcome us back.

To sum up: the *Yarra* herself took off 1334 soldiers, their gear and equipment, and, between them, the boats picked up about 400, so that altogether the ship saved some 1700. And it was subsequently learned that, despite the bombing, of the

2500 troops on board and 500 odd crew, only thirty were lost and these by accident.

During the fight, we had had a very near miss by a diving plane from overhead; the stick whistled between the masts as we made a turn and fell to port—the incendiaries likewise. This plane machine-gunned the upper deck but, by a miracle, hit no one. One bullet buried itself in the compass platform a few feet from where the captain, the new skipper, some officers and ratings were standing.

A piece of flying metal, thrown up by one of the bullets when it hit a hatch, nailed McIlroy, the layer of 2-gun, in the back of the skull, just underneath his tin hat. It was cut out, and five stiches inserted, whereupon he was his cheerful, dry self again.

Johnston, on the .5 machine-gun, was hit in the back by a large piece of metal, similarly thrown up, which fortunately landed flat against him. He suddenly found himself lying on the upper deck, but did not remember falling off the .5 platform, a drop of about fifteen feet. He got out of it with bruises, and carried on.

Both forestays were shot away, and bullets were heard by the T.S. crew rattling off the outside of their station. The funnel was holed by some small pieces, and several bullet holes were distributed elsewhere along the upper deck without further damage.

Of the enemy planes, five were observed by us to crash. Subsequently the signal station ashore told us they had seen us shoot down ten. We fired in all, close on 400 rounds. Three-gun, with layer Rowley Oliver, trainer Kimmins, captain of gun George Lloyd, and officer of quarters Lieutenant-Commander Smith, R.A.N.R., scored a direct bull's eye on one of the enemy planes. The fuse of the shell in question, in common with all others fired, was estimated, and burst just underneath the bomb-rack of a diving plane, which disintegrated in mid-air.

All hands had plenty to talk about that evening at supper, which was a very light meal indeed. In the ship we no longer

had any green vegetables or fruit, canned or otherwise, and both meat and flour were rationed.

After supper, someone made the discovery that, in the three sheds along the wharf, were tons of canned foodstuffs. Not only was most of it consigned to Malaya (which was in Japanese hands) but, most important, the doors were not locked. So, despite their fatigue, raiding parties—a few at a time—sneaked off and came staggering back with cases of jam, fruit and cream, meat and vegetables. In a couple of hours every mess was well stocked and, sorting out the gear, stowed it away out of sight. In addition, there were cases of jelly, soups and sauces, so that next day we were able to have a first-class three-course meal. What a change! We found it was nearly all Australian stuff, too.

None of us had any compunction about taking these provisions. They were badly needed, and apparently Australia couldn't send us a supply ship. So we just supplied ourselves—and made a better job of it. Fighting on an empty stomach is no joke.

The previous time we were in Singapore one of our ratings had been placed in hospital ashore owing to acute appendicitis. So the Doc went off to see if he could bring him (Specs Mason) back with us again. But no trace of him could be found. Probably he had been sent to safety in a hospital ship, or other transport. We heard that a big Jap convoy was off Saigon, on its way down, and that the Japs were trying desperately to get a foothold on the island.

We went out to the *Empress* at dusk. She had burnt herself out but was still floating as the hull was quite O.K. Aft, and untouched by the flames, were two oerlikons. We badly needed those guns, and the skipper sent away a sea boat to find out if the hull was cool, but she was still nearly red hot and so we had to leave them. That night we took on about fifty or sixty ratings and a dozen or so officers and, with *Sutej* and *Danae*, started back for Batavia, conveying the *Félix Roussel* and a couple of others carrying refugees, women and children. On the way down, and north of Banka, we went to the assistance

BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THE JAPS 217

of another refugee ship reported to be on fire, but she was well under control and quite happy, so we rejoined the convoy. That day, and before we made the strait, we were attacked by a trio of Japs, but our Blenheim escort of three planes chased them off and shot one down—the Blenheims were manned by Australian airmen.

We left the others at Palembang, and proceeded in to pick up the *Vendetta* which had been towed thus far by the *Stronghold*. While there, we saw another twenty-seven Japs going over to bomb the Palembang drome. Taking *Vendetta* in tow, we reached Batavia without further incident.

We heard that the Japs made a landing one night, during darkness, on Singapore, but the Gordon Highlanders and Gurkhas went berserk and cleaned them up to the last man. The next night the enemy made four landings, and fierce fighting went on. What was left of the Singapore Naval Base was in enemy hands, but the large floating dock had been blown up before the enemy could reach it.

The Malayan campaign (now over) was an inglorious episode, despite the fact that soldiers and sailors fought so heroically to stave off defeat. Where were the planes, in numbers necessary to meet the enemy on even terms in the air? Where were the guns needed to blast the enemy off the earth and out of the sky? Where, in fact, was the ammunition and all the support that should have been ours but was not?

On Thursday 12 February 1942 I returned from the military dentist to be told I had a pierhead jump and ten minutes to pack my bag and hammock—for Australia. Half the fellows in the mess gave me a hand to pack and, just as a little reminder, slipped a tin of herrings in tomato sauce into one and a tin of salmon into the other.

I was very sorry to leave those fellows, with whom I'd shared so much and lived and fought with for so long. But Australia beckoned; they knew what that meant.

The draft home consisted of the former skipper, Commander Harrington, Chief Shipwright Flower, Able Seamen Avery, Phillips, Parry and Stokers Gater and O'Connor.