THE FALL AND EVACUATION OF SINGAPORE

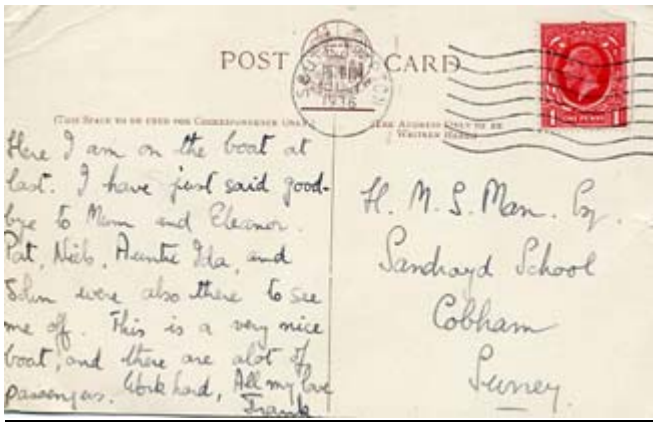
INTRODUCTION

This description of the fall and evacuation of Singapore in February 1942, followed by the journey from there to England via Australia, New Zealand, the Panama Canal and the US, was written by my father Frank Man (1914 – 1986), on his return to England some nine months after his escape.

My father left England for the Far East in the autumn of 1936 to take up a position at a mercantile house - Edward Boustead. He was originally posted to Singapore but in early 1939 was transferred to Tumpat in Kelantan on the Malay Peninsular, a place he described as 'awful'. He returned to Singapore a year later. He was always keen on the navy and would probably have chosen that as a career but his family placed a greater emphasis on succeeding at commerce and so when war came it was with some enthusiasm that he joined the navy.

This version of my father's escape was created for the internet in 2004 and will be revised and annotated in due course. At the end of the account is a letter from Frank Man's mother to her daughter Eleanor (Frank's sister) describing his arrival at home.

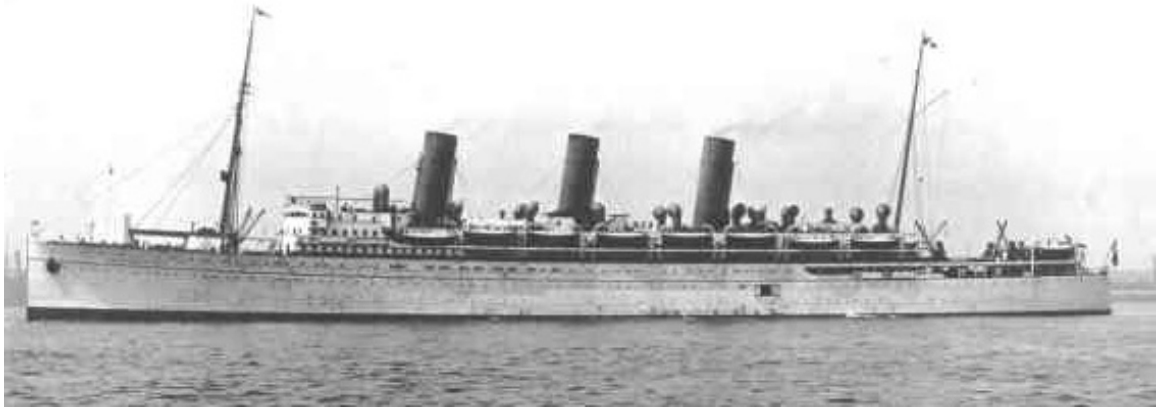
David Man, New York City, April 2004.



Postcard sent by Frank Man to his brother Henry on Frank's first trip to Singapore. The card is dated October 10 1936, some two years later Frank's future wife was to sail on the same ship from England to Singapore to visit her parents.

EVACUATION OF SINGAPORE

On February 4th whilst still in command of H.M.S. "Penghambat" I returned to Singapore from the Johore Straits Patrol where we had been patrolling for the past few days in between the two front lines. We were withdrawn owing to incessant machine gunning from the shore as well as from the air. From February 5th to February 9th we were moored alongside the wharf inside Telok Ayer Basin awaiting instructions. During this period there were continual air raids and dive-bombing attacks on the wharves as well as on the ships anchored in the Roads; luckily no one was hurt, nor was the ship damaged. We were sent out on various odd jobs within the harbour limits, such as



transporting women and children to evacuee ships and also taking out medical assistance to ships returning from patrol with casualties. We were also called out to pick up survivors from the "Empress of Asia" (above) when she was bombed and sunk near Sultan Shoal.

At 19.30 on February 9th we received instructions from Captain Meuloch, R.N. (X.D.O.) to pilot and escort a lighter and tug to Pulau Tekong in order to relieve the Garrison there who had been without food for several days. We were warned before leaving that once we had been spotted by the Japanese batteries on Pulo Ubin it would be useless to carry on. We proceeded in line ahead, "Penghambat" leading on the inside of No. 3 minefield (a tricky passage even by day). Lieutenant Milne, R.N.V.R. (1st Lieutenant "Penghambat") was put on board the tug in order to keep station on "Penghambat" and we proceeded at 3 knots, which was the tug's maximum speed with tow. We arrived at Angler Bank Buoy (which was still alight though dimmed) at 01.00 where I secured "Penghambat" and the tug proceeded alone to Tekong Pier where she slipped the lighter and returned at 04.25. The return journey was made in the swept channel outside the minefield, passing Peak Island at dawn. We tied up alongside the wharf at 07.00 February 10th. There were the usual air raids throughout the day and some street fighting during the evening.

At 13.00 on February 11th during a particularly heavy raid on the wharf, "Penghambat" received several large pieces of shrapnel through her side both above and below the waterline. As it was impossible to save the ship and as she was sinking rapidly

it was decided to abandon her, so we saved as much gear as possible, as well as all the personnel without any casualties. Later in the day verbal instructions were received from Commander Bailey, M.R.N.V.R. (Acting Captain A/V) to transfer to H.M.S. "Malacca". (a minesweeper)

We boarded H.M.S. "Malacca" at 16.00 on February 11th. I had previously given members of the Malay crew the choice of joining me in "Malacca" or of returning to their families ashore. Those with wives and children to look after decided to return to them and I gave each of them a signed certificate saying that they were returning to their families with my full permission and that they were not deserters. Those that did come with me are mentioned by name in the ship's log.

On the morning of February 12th Lieutenant Milne and I went ashore to assist in the evacuation of women and children and also to help land casualties from a patrol vessel which had been bombed coming up the western entrance. On February 13th the air raids become even more vicious although our A.A. Batteries were doing magnificent work. At about 15.00 the wharf at Telok Ayer was crowded with women and children who were waiting for transport to ships anchored in the roads[*sic*]; amongst these were a considerable number of hospital nurses. Behind them and within 20 yards of them was an A.A. Battery of 8 guns and it was at this precise moment that the Japanese decided to make a determined dive-bombing attack on the battery. Some of the bombs missed the target and fell amongst the women and children – there were a number of casualties. The A.A. battery was also put out of action except for one gun.

When darkness fell all the women and children had been embarked on various ships. By this time the Japanese guns were firing on the wharves, and shells were landing on the target at regular intervals. The whole water-front was ablaze and I counted 27 large fires, it seemed as if night had been turned into day. At 24.00 we received verbal instructions to proceed alongside the wharf and take on board as many soldiers as we possibly could. We managed to squeeze 60 on board in addition to the ship's company. During this embarkation, which lasted about an hour, shells were falling all round us by luckily we sustained no damage nor casualties although the ship berthed astern of us received a direct hit. We slipped at about 02.00 and proceeded out past Peak Island. Navigation was very difficult owing to the smoke from the fires, and the wrecks of various ships littered the harbour. We came through safely and set a south-westerly course to the Durian Straits. The latter had recently been mined by the Dutch and there was only a very narrow swept channel through it which was not lighted at night. On the way we were signaled by five different ships who asked us to guide them through the minefield, they all followed astern of us but we informed them that they were doing so at their own risk. We completed a successful passage through the minefield.

At dawn on Saturday February 14th we were well past the minefield and those ships that had been following us overtook and passed us, we being the slowest of all doing about 6 knots. We had received verbal instructions from Commander Alexander before leaving Singapore to hide out for the first day to evade Japanese aircraft and then carry on non-stop to Batavia. At about 07.00 we found a suitably small island near False

Durian Island where we anchored close inshore and did our best to camouflage the ship with camouflage netting which Lt. Milne had very cleverly collected from a burning godown on the wharf just before leaving. There was not quite sufficient to cover the whole ship, but we covered the seaward side and also painted out the white markings on the funnel. The ship's boat was lowered and the majority of the military personnel were put ashore. During the morning a careful A.A. watch was kept and there were continual alarms but most of the planes were flying very high. A total of 187 planes were sighted between 09.00 and 12.00, all enemy. Two other small craft were hiding out about 1 ½ miles away from us and they were identified as the launch "Fanling" and the tug "Elizabeth", both full of military personnel. At about 11.00 the tug "Yin Ping" accompanied by a S.H.B. Water Boat and a Eureka joined us. The "Yin Ping" signaled saying she had lost her anchor and cable and asked permission to make fast to our stern. Permission was reluctantly granted, and she made fast with a hawser about ½ cable astern. The Eureka made fast alongside "Yin Ping" and the Water Boat ("Daisy") anchored in close proximity. The proceedings then began to look like the final day of the Henley Regatta. Dispersal was the obvious solution to avoid being spotted hence our reluctance to allow "Yin Ping" to make fast to us, however, Captain Atkinson, R.N. was about "Yin Ping" so deference had to be made to a senior officer. Lieut. & Mrs. Wilkinson were also on board.

At approximately 13.00 a formation of 9 large enemy bombers appeared from the direction of Palembang flying lower than usual and heading straight for us. The alarm was sounded and guns manned. Unfortunately just prior to this the tide had changed and swung the ship round so that her uncamouflaged side was to seaward and facing the approaching bombers. With the hustle and bustle of securing the "Yin Ping" there had been no time in which to change over the netting. The bombers flew right over the top of us and for one moment it looked as if they had not spotted us, however to our dismay we saw them turning off their course and come back in a wide circle over the top of us again and losing height. It was obvious what was going to happen so everyone took cover and then the bombs dropped from a height of about 4000 feet. None of the bombs hit the ship, but none missed by more than 10 yards. The force of the combined explosions nearly capsized the ship and she was very nearly swamped by the cascade of water which

fell from the bomb splashes. Luckily there were no casualties, and this was due to the fact that the majority of the ship's company and soldiers were ashore. After the shock of the explosions had subsided a minor panic started amongst those remaining on board as the ship was listing heavily and she had been holed in several places near the waterline. It was useless to try and launch the boats owing to the angle at which the ship was listing so the order was finally given to abandon ship and try and reach the shore by swimming. Our departure was accelerated by the fact that the bombers were circling around for a second attack, several swimming records must have been broken. No further bombs were dropped although the enemy planes circled over the top of the ship for a second and a third time. After the planes had disappeared it was decided to return to the ship and discover whether any of the damage sustained was repairable. The ship's company returned in the one boat that had already been launched, and after inspection it was discovered that although she was leaking badly it might be possible for the bilge pumps to keep the leak under control long enough for us to reach the main land of Sumatra. After some difficulties the bilge pumps were got going and with the help of a bucket party the level of water remained more or less constant. The real danger of the leak was that if the water came up to the level of the storage batteries in the forward hold (which were used in the anti-magnetic mine sweep) chlorine gas would be formed which is very poisonous. The water level in the forward hold was 4 ft. about 6 inches below the storage batteries. It was then decide to weigh anchor and get under way as soon as possible, which we did. However, we had hardly started when the engine room reported that the main condenser pipe was broken as a result of the bombing and that it was impossible to continue. Lieut. Milne then performed a miracle of amateur engineering by repairing the pipe with the help of a piece of wood and an old shirt. We then proceeded on our way with the bilge pumps working and the bucket party being relieved every half hour. By this time the list was only slight.

During the bombing "Yin Ping" had slipped her hawser and proceeded to anchor between us and the shore which made us dubious of her signal saying she had lost both her anchor and cable. The Eureka and the Water Boat both ran themselves aground on the island, the former on some rocks. After the bombing "Yin Ping" towed the Water Boat off the mud, leaving the Eureka on the rocks as it was impossible to get her off. "Yin Ping" and the Water Boat followed on astern of us. For the rest of the day we proceeded along peacefully and were not molested in any way.

As it was now impossible for us to get through to Batavia and as the nearest Port[*sic*], Palembang, was already in the hands of the Japanese we decided to land on the coast of Sumatra and make our way somehow over to the other side and from there perhaps commandeer a Junk or other vessel and sail to Colombo. Although we did not know what was ahead of us we had to make plans of some sort. After a consultation we decided to enter the mouth of the Indragiri River which flows for some hundreds of miles into the interior of Sumatra and to arrive at the entrance to the river at dawn the following morning.

Soon after darkness had fallen we were signaled by two ships (that were afterwards identified as "Tenggaroh" and "Hung Sau") who told us that they were full of

survivors (men and women) from two other ships that had been bombed and sunk that morning. They asked us for a position which we gave and as they had a large number of wounded on board we advised them to try and make the Indragiri River with us the following morning, to which they agreed. We then carried on at slow speed. At approximately 22.30 a shout was heard in the darkness just off the starboard bow; the Aldis lamp was brought into action and picked out a figure sitting astride an Oropesa float. The ship was brought alongside and the figure was identified as signalman Findlay R.N.Z.V.R. a survivor of H.M.S. "Changteh". He stated that his ship had been bombed and sunk about 8 hours previously, that casualties were heavy and that he thought there were several more survivors floating nearby. We circled around for about an hour trying to find these survivors but without success, and we eventually gave up hope and carried on.

At dawn on February 15th we found ourselves at the mouth of the Kuala Lajau which is the southernmost arm of the Indragiri Delta. The entrance was very shallow and we had no charts to help us; however, thanks to Providence, we managed to find our way up to the mouth without mishap. Here also we found a small Examination Station with two Malays in charge. We anchored here and sent a boat ashore to try and contact someone to pilot us up the river. The Malays were extremely obliging and helpful and were not at all put out by the motley crowd who had disturbed their peaceful existence. They got hold of the local "Kapala" or head man for us who agreed to pilot us as far as Lapat which was a small village about 15 miles further up stream. From there up to Tembilahan, which was the largest village in the district, we were left to our own devices. We accomplished this journey safely and arrived there at 16.30. "Tenggaroh" and the "Hung Sau" had followed all this time and at Tembilahan they discharged all their wounded and we did the best we could to help them. Fortunately there was one R.A.M.C. Doctor in the party who was not wounded and he did a magnificent job with the very limited medical supplies at his disposal. He carried out twentyseven[*sic*] amputations within four hours by candle light and without the use of anaesthetic. His name was Lieut. Colonel Hurd-Wood, he had been in the Navy in the last war and commanded a Destroyer.

On arrival at Tembilahan we discharged all the Military personnel we had brought out of Singapore, and we were very glad to get rid of them as they were a responsibility as well as a millstone round our necks. In this village we also learnt of the fate of various other ships that had left Singapore with us; these included the "Thu Kwang", the "Kung Wo", "Changteh" and "Kuala" all of them had been bombed and sunk. We also understood that there was still a vast number of survivors from these ships who had not

been picked up but were still floating around in life boats or else stranded on small islands, amongst them some 200 women and children.

The following morning February 16th at 08.00 we started to embark as many wounded as we possibly could; we finally managed to squeeze in 17 seriously wounded stretcher cases and about 40 walking wounded. The majority of the latter should have been stretcher cases but there were not enough stretchers to go round. Amongst these were 5 nurses, 2 of whom were unwounded. One of these was Miss Howard ex Matron of Seremban Hospital who did magnificent work under very trying conditions. Medical supplies were more or less non-existent, fresh water was very scarce, and food consisted of bully beef and biscuits. By mid day we had got all the wounded on board so weighed anchor and carried on up stream with two young Malays as pilots. As we had wounded on board we painted large Red Crosses in all the most conspicuous places and dismounted all our guns; fortunately we never saw an enemy plane.

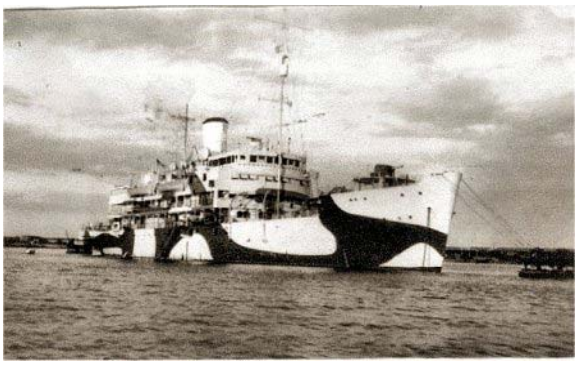
Our plan was to proceed up as far as a place called Rengat which was some 200 miles up stream and where we understood there was a small hospital as well as road and telephonic communication with the other side of Sumatra. It was impossible to accomplish the journey in one day so we spent the first night at a small village called Chenako, this consisted of one hut with a telephone to Rengat. We made use of the telephone telling the hospital at Rengat to prepare for the wounded. Up as far as Chenako the river was still fairly broad with flat paddi[*sic*] land on both banks. We proceeded very close to the banks, on some occasions we were so close it was possible to lean out from the upper deck and pick leaves off the trees in passing. We arrived at Chenako at 18.30 and anchored; considering the number of people on board, especially the seriously wounded, we had a very quiet night, there was not a human sound to disturb the silence of the night until dawn broke. The only thing that bothered us was the mosquitoes.

At 06.30 the following morning (February 17th) we weighed anchor and proceeded up stream. With all the extra people on board it meant so many more mouths to feed and with our very limited cooking arrangements and lack of choice in foods a word must be said about the fine effort put up by the Chinese boy Shi She Yek as well as Able-Seaman Barstow. They provided food regularly and efficiently for everyone on board and did so cheerfully. An aspect of our journey which might have become a serious problem had they not turned to it ably and willingly.

After leaving Chenako the river narrowed considerably and there were dense jungle on both sides. The current was very strong and our speed became slower and slower. At 14.30 we finally arrived at Rengat and went alongside the Pier. We were expected so arrangements had been made for disembarking the wounded, and accommodating them in the local hospital. One incident in this disembarkation is worth recounting. As in Tembilahan there was some difficulty in getting the stretchers off the ship and on to the jetty as most of the cases had to be handled very carefully. There was one man who had had his right forearm amputated as well as having several shrapnel wounds in his back, in fact he had been placed on the danger list. When his turn came to

be lifted out, much to every one's surprise, he stood up, walked to the side of the ship and started to climb on to the jetty. No one was more surprised than the doctors: however they soon had him back on his stretcher and safely into a lorrie. Having disposed of all the wounded we unloaded all our stores and all gear which was of any value to us, which included personal gear. The next problem was how to dispose of the ship, she had done her job and was of no further use to the war effort, but owing to her secret and valuable sweeping gear on board it was essential that she should not fall into the hands of the Japanese. We slept on board that night and following morning we sailed up a small creek and opened the sea-cocks. She sank very quickly as she was already half full of water.

In Rengat one of the Dutch officials was very kind to us and lent us his house where we had a bath, which we all needed very much. Later on in the day we managed to commandeer two lorries from a nearby Rubber Plantation and on these we packed all our gear and also ourselves. In these lorries we hope to cross Sumatra and reach the port of Padang where there was a chance we might find a ship to take us away. We also took with us 19 walking wounded, in fact all those that were fit to travel. We finally departed at 14.00 and spent the first night at a place called Telok, arriving there at 20.00. At Telok we were extremely well looked after, officers being accommodated in the Rest House and the ratings in a house close by. We slept in a bed for the first time for weeks.



The next morning (February 19th) we packed into our lorries and proceeded on the next stage of our journey. We left behind us in Telok the greater part of the walking wounded as they had found the journey too much for them. It was by no means easy going as the "road" was really not much better than a track through the jungle and very bumpy. The country became very mountainous and in parts most picturesque; we had to cross the high mountain range which runs down the centre of Sumatra. We had a young Malay driver who insisted on going as fast as he could the whole way. On several occasions he nearly gave us a heart attack by taking a hairpin bend on two wheels at 40 m.p.h. with a drop of a few thousand feet on one side – however he got us there in the end. Our next stop was Tawah Luentong where we arrived at 15.30 in the afternoon. This was a delightful place and boasted a railway station. We spent the night there and at 05.00 the following morning (February 20th) we took the train to Padang, where we arrived at 11.30. From here we marched to the local Club where we were provided with an excellent lunch and a glass of beer. A considerable number of evacuees from Singapore had already arrived in Padang, chiefly service personnel. That afternoon we marched down to the Harbour where H.M.S. "Danae" was waiting to take us off. It was a very pleasing sight and put a lot of heart into us especially when the Marine Band started to play popular melodies. About 600 passengers were taken on board and told to stake their claims on the deck and sleep where they could. The "Danae" slipped at about 18.00 and we proceeded on a westerly course, to avoid enemy aircraft. Our speed was 24 knots, zig-zagging continually. Our food consisted of

sandwiches and water with occasionally a cup of tea. At night we slept huddled on the decks to keep warm. We were still at sea the following day (February 21st) which was without incident, most of us were past caring what happened. At 15.00 the following afternoon (February 22nd) we arrived at the port of Tyilatjap in Java. The Military and R.A.F. personnel disembarked first and were taken to some camp inland. The Naval personnel, now amounting to about 200, were accommodated in H.M.S. "Kedah", which was lying alongside just ahead of "Danae" [below]

We remained in Tyilatjap for four days trying to find a ship to take us down to Australia. Amongst the naval party were several senior officers including Captain Bell, R.N. (late "Exeter" and "Graf Spee" action) who automatically took charge of us and organised our passage. We eventually found accommodation in a very ancient and small dutch[*sic*] coastal steamer called "Khoen Hoea". We had received permission from the Dutch Authorities to take her over which we did on the afternoon of February 26th. The regular ship's crew of Javanese immediately deserted on our arrival so all the business of working the ship, fuelling and victualling her had to be done by ourselves. We started that afternoon and by mid-day the following day we had a large stock of coal on board and tinned provisions sufficient to last us for several weeks if necessary. The only serious problem was fresh water, the ship's capacity was limited and with the extra number of people on board severe rationing was necessary; each man was allowed one pint per day for washing and drinking. Actually this turned out to be sufficient as we washed in sea water and kept the pint for drinking only. On the morning of February 27th we were joined on board by some Australian troops (44), deserters from the A.I.F. in Malaya, we had no alternative but to take them although it would have been a pleasure to have left them behind. They were arrested on their arrival in Australia.

We set sail in the "Khoen Hoea" at 17.00 on February 26th. Approximately 15 ships left at the same time, all of them proceeding independently and bound either for Australia or Colombo. There was no convoy of any kind, in fact no war ship of any description was seen. The ships that left with us were of all shapes and sizes, some large freighters amongst them and some of them carrying evacuees. On board the "Khoen Hoea" we also had 12 civilians from Singapore, including Mr. Rogers Chairman of the Singapore Harbour Board. They stood up to the hardships very well and played their part

in taking submarine watches. Another difficulty with which we had not reckoned was the question of charts. It was not until we were at sea that it was discovered that the ship possessed no charts of Australian waters. Luckily we found an old number of "The National Geographical Magazine" on board at the back of which was a meteorological map of the world; this we used as our chart to navigate us down to Freemantle. The ship's maximum speed was about 8 Knots but owing to rough weather which we experienced most of the way we were only able to average just over 5.

The first night out we experienced no excitement, and on the following morning we were passed by the majority of ships that had left shortly after us. On the night of February 28th at about 02.00 gun fire and search lights were heard and seen on the port beam. We could not identify them at first until we saw one of our merchant ships ablaze, when we realised that we had run into part of the Japanese Fleet. We turned away immediately but with our slow speed we were unable to get away from the scene of the action for some time. At one time one of the look-outs reported "torpedoes approaching" and we saw something which might have been a torpedo approaching us on the port beam. We all waited for the sound of the explosion but it never took place. There can only be two explanations for this and they are (1) it was not a torpedo (2) the torpedo passed underneath us. The second explanation is quite plausible in view of the fact that the ship was very small only drawing 8 feet and that owing to the rough weather she was bounding on top of the waves with most of the ship out of the water. It was confirmed that submarines were in the vicinity as shortly after this occurrence another merchantman was torpedoed and shelled by an enemy submarine. The whole action only lasted about an hour and a half and when dawn came there was not another ship in sight. The rest of our trip down to Freemantle was uneventful apart from the weather. After we had been out for three days the wind freshened considerably and the sea was rough, it blew half a gale most of the way down. After the fourth day part of the bridge collapsed owing to the continual buffeting and the heavy sand bags that had been put up there as protection. We decided to dispense with the sand bags after this and temporarily repaired the damage. We were anxious about our approach to Freemantle as we had no charts of the harbour nor did we know the positions of any of the minefields. Luckily about a day before we expected to sight land we met an American submarine, we spent an anxious half hour until the submarine was identified as American. She gave us our position and offered to show us the way into harbour; this offer was very gratefully accepted. At 06.00 on Monday March 9th we entered the harbour of Freemantle and we all breathed a sigh of relief when the anchor dropped and small ships came out to take us off.

F. O. S. MAN

AUGUST, 1942

P A R T II
RETURN TO ENGLAND

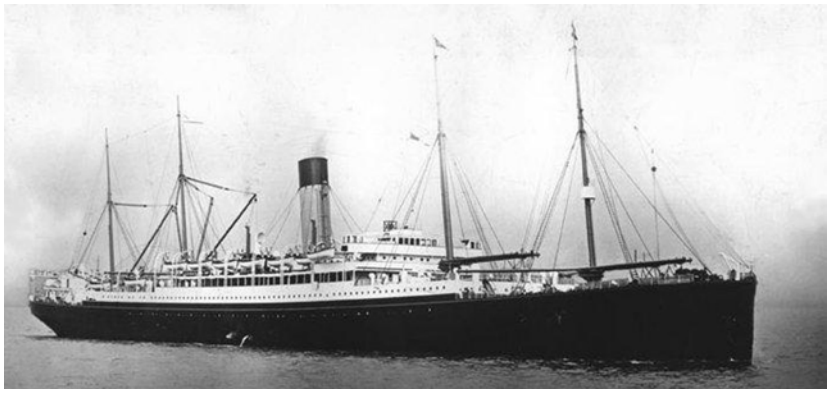
Part I of this record deals with my escape from Singapore on Feb. 14th 1942 and my eventual arrival in Australia on March 9th. Part II deals with the journey from Australia back to England which started on May 12th and ended on August 14th. The interval spent in Australia between March 9th and May 12th has not been recorded as it hardly warrants it, the time there was spent for the most part in buying clothes and generally recuperating. This interval was spent entirely in Melbourne where, apart from trying to start a new wardrobe with the meager pittance allowed me by the Navy, I tried hard to get transport back to England as soon as this was available. It was not an easy task to get the Naval authorities to take any quick action in the matter nor, to be fair to them, was it very easy for them. I should say at a guess that the number of Naval personnel who escaped from Malaya and Java and arrived in Australia amounted to roughly 100 officers and 800 ratings. All of them arrived in a more or less destitute condition and had to be cared for and eventually given a job; this naturally took time and the task of the Naval authorities was not lightened by the fact that all of them were clamouring to get back to England.

It was eventually decided by R.A.N.B. (Royal Australian Naval Board) after about a month of waiting, that all officers and men who had been in the tropics and away from England for a period longer than 3 years should be allowed to return there. The remainder were either shipped straight off to Colombo to carry on their Naval duties there or were incorporated in the Australian Navy. After this decision had been made and those concerned had been informed, the next step was to find accommodation and transport for them. The latter was by no means an easy matter as the question of shipping space was a serious one at that time. Although Australia was importing a vast amount of war material from the U.K. and the U.S.A. she was also exporting an equally large amount of food supplies, so, although there was a large "turnover" of shipping there was still the question of shipping space to be got over.

I had been in Malaya without a break since October 1936 and therefore qualified to return to England for which I was more than thankful. After a seemingly endless wait accommodation was eventually found aboard the S.S. "Ceramic"[1] due to sail from Sydney on May 16th for 10 officers and 150 ratings. I left Melbourne on the afternoon of May 12th 1942 in charge of a draft consisting of 8 officers and 37 ratings. It was an all night journey and the train stopped at very nearly every station, the result being that at every stop I had to clear the station bar and try and get all the draft on board again before the train re-started. This was a difficult and unenviable job, the more so as all the ratings were in exceedingly high spirits at the thought of going home and thus found plenty of excuse to imbibe freely. I eventually gave up the unequal struggle of looking after the draft at every station and resigned myself to the fact that I would very probably arrive at Sydney with only about half the number I had started out with. We arrived at Sydney at 10 a.m. the following morning and roll-call was taken on the platform, much to my surprise the draft now consisted of 39 ratings and 8 officers, so far from losing half the draft on the way as I feared I discovered I had gained two. I was past caring then and

sent the whole lot off to the barracks where they could settle the matter amongst themselves.

We had two nights in Sydney which gave us time to have a look at the town. There is a great rivalry between the two cities of Sydney and Melbourne, as an impartial observer I would say that Melbourne is by far the more pleasant of the two. Sydney's only claims to greatness are its harbour and bridge. The latter is without doubt a magnificent and imposing structure and the pride and joy of all Australians. I found it was not diplomatic to mention that it was built by an English firm. I think it is worth mentioning a small incident here which took place in Sydney and had its repercussions in Scotland nearly five months later. One evening I visited the Australia Hotel with a friend, Lieutenant W. B. Bevis, R.N.V.R., we were sitting in the lounge having a few drinks before dinner when an army officer came up to us and asked us whether we would like to join him in a drink. We were pleased to accept his hospitality and after several drinks he suggested that we should all three go out on a party that night and that he would provide the girls. This being our last night in Australia we readily agreed and the party took place and was a great success. The sequel to the party will be told in its chronological place towards the end of this account.



We embarked aboard the S.S. "Ceramic" (above) at midday the following day, Saturday May 16th. Our fellow travelers consisted of a Naval draft of 10 officers and 150 ratings also a draft of about 200 ranks of the R.A.A.F., all of us destined for England. There were no women on board. The "Ceramic" was a single-funnelled cabin-class ship of about 18,000 tons, twinscrew and capable of a maximum speed of about 14 knots. Her main drawback was that she was a coal-burner. She was built on the Clyde in 1912. Until the arrival of the "Queen Mary" at Sydney she had been the largest ship ever to visit Australian waters. She was the flag-ship of the Shaw-Savill and Albion Line. In September 1940 she was rammed by another vessel during a fog off the East coast of Australia, she sustained considerable damage but was repaired and had been doing excellent work ever since. The "Ceramic" eventually met her end under very tragic circumstances in November 1942. It was the trip after she had brought us safely back to England. She was on her way to Cape Town with a full passenger list consisting chiefly of women and children when during a heavy gale off the north-west coast of Africa she was torpedoed by a U-boat and sank within three minutes. There was only one survivor, a gunner in the Royal Artillery, who was picked up by the U-boat after having been in the

water for four hours. The official account says that over 500 persons lost their lives. It appears that owing to the heavy seas it was impossible to lower the lifeboats; she was also sailing independently and without escort. The news of this disaster was not released to the public until September 1943.

I shared a cabin on board with two other Naval officers – Lieutenant W. B. Bevis R.N.V.R., whom I have already mentioned, and Lieutenant (E) H. H. Holm R.N.R. It was Bevis who took me out of Singapore in his Minesweeper and we had been together every since that time. I knew him well in Malaya before the War as well as during it; he was married in Penang two days before the War with Japan broke out and had to be recalled from his honeymoon. He had only seen his wife twice since his marriage; fortunately she managed to leave before the collapse and get to Colombo from where she returned to England. He knew she had arrived home safely and therefore was keener than most of us to get home. In peace-time he worked with the Shell Company. Holm was picked up by us off the coast of Sumatra after his ship had been sunk, he was slightly wounded and had literally lost everything he possessed including his clothes. When we picked him up he had been in the water for nearly two days stark naked. He also was a married man and had two children, all his family were safe in England.

The Officer-in-Charge of the Naval Draft was Lieutenant Clarke R.N., he had had a shore job at the Naval Base in Singapore and had found his way down to Australia in much the same way as I had although some weeks before. The first Lieutenant of the Draft was Lieutenant Durrant, he had been in Australia for some six years and was returning home for the first time since. Lt. Pirie R.N.V.R. was a kind of secretary to Clarke, he was Anti-Submarine officer on board the destroyer H.M.S. "Jupiter" which was sunk during the battle of the Java Sea. He had had an uncanny experience during the loss of the Jupiter; the ship was torpedoed close in-shore off the north coast of Java and started to sink slowly, as the life-saving equipment was not sufficient for the whole crew to abandon the ship at once the captain ordered it to be done in relays. The shore was only some 2 miles away and although it was dark it was still possible to see the outline of the coast. Lieutenant Pirie was in the first load of survivors and after these had been landed the boats were rowed back to the destroyer to pick up the remainder; on arrival at this position no trace of the destroyer could be found nor were any further survivors seen or heard. What happened to those people left on board is still a mystery as even if the destroyer had sunk there should have been survivors floating in the water near-by[*sic*], and although the returning boats searched for some hours in the vicinity none were found. There was another amusing tale about the "Jupiter" which is less gruesome than the above. She was based on Batavia shortly before the collapse of Singapore and was sent out one day to investigate a submarine reported off Tanjong Marah[*sp?*] in Java; unfortunately there are two places of this name, one in Java and the other in Sumatra. The "Jupiter" proceeded to the Tanjong Merah[*sp?*] in Sumatra, which was incorrect, but surprisingly enough there <u>was</u>[*sic*] a Japanese submarine there and she sank it with depth charges. Lieutenant Pirie was awarded the D.S.C. for this action.

To return to the officers in the Draft. Surgeon-Lieutenant Seymour R.N.V.R. was the only doctor in the party, and he had plenty of work to do during the voyage. He was a

survivor from H.M.S. "Electra", another destroyer sunk during the Java Sea battle. Lieutenant Nixon R.N.R. escaped from Java in the "Angking" (a ship well known on the Singapore-Hong-kong[*sic*] run), she sailed from Tjilstjap in Java and was torpedoed and sunk about two days out. Lieutenant Nixon and two Malay sailors were the only survivors, they drifted on a raft for three days without food or water under the tropical sun until they were finally picked up and brought safely to Australia. Sub-Lieutenant Barnett-Smith had escaped from Singapore and also found his way down to Australia; I knew him in Malaya when he was Customs Officer in Trengganu one of the wildest of the Malay States. He had had some exciting experiences getting down to Singapore from Trengganu when the Japanese were threatening the town. The only communications Trengganu had with the outer world were by sea, there were no roads out. When the time came to leave Barnet-Smith plus four other European men and three European women had to make their way through the jungle for 120 miles before they were able to find civilized transport. Their exit apparently was so hurried that they had no time to make arrangements for their trek, the women were even wearing high-heeled shoes when they started. The Malays were magnificent to them and guided as well as protected them through the jungle. For food they had to rely on tropical fruits, and at night they lit a fire and slept around it whilst the Malays kept guard. Pay/Sub/Lt. Black R.N.V.R. had originally escaped from Hongkong and then again from Batavia; he was the only paymaster on board and we found him most useful to deal with problems of foreign-exchange and other monetary difficulties at the various ports we visited. S/Lt. Bigley R.N.V.R., like Barnet-Smith, had also been a Customs Officer in Malaya and had only joined the Navy ten days before the fall of Singapore; he escaped in the same way as I had.

The above were the other officers traveling in this draft. The draft was organised into three divisions and provision was made for amusing ourselves during the voyage; each officer had his special duties allotted to him and everything ran extremely smoothly in spite of being idle for three months.

We sailed from Sydney at half past one on the afternoon of Saturday May 16th. It was a glorious day and we stood on the foc'sle[*sic*] and watched the ship make her way down harbour and out through the Heads, it was a wonderful sight. The cabin I shared with Bevis and Holm was roomy and comfortable, there was also a private bathroom attached so we lived in comparative luxury. Apart from divisions and P.T. in the mornings we had all the day to ourselves and it was not easy to keep everyone amused although the Australian Comforts Fund had been extremely generous to us and supplied all manner of deck games including several medicine balls which were very popular. They had also supplied everybody with a small canvas bag containing warm clothing, razor blades, soap, and two handkerchiefs; in addition to this they provided each man with a sheepskin waistcoat which was a God-send to all of us during the cold weather.

Our destination was unknown to us and it was not until we had been two days out of Sydney that we were informed that our first port of call would be Lyttleton in the South Island of New Zealand. Early on the morning of Wednesday May 20th we sighted land. It was glorious weather and we could see the outline of the coast on both sides of

us quite plainly. We were passing through the straits that divide the North and South Islands of New Zealand, the scenery was very grand and quite different from anything I had seen in other parts of the world. Everything appeared to be on such a vast scale, towering cliffs and high mountains in the background impressed me most. We entered Lyttleton harbour early the following morning and we were secured alongside the wharf by about 10 o'clock. The entrance to the harbour is not unlike that of Sydney, narrow, and surrounded by high cliffs, it is only when one has approached within about a mile that one realizes that there is an entrance there at all.

We spent altogether ten days in Lyttleton which is part of Christchurch. They are about five miles apart and we lived ashore in Christchurch for the whole period. The new of our arrival had proceeded us so that arrangements had already been made to welcome us. The Secretary of the Navy League took us under his care and was extraordinarily kind to us all through our stay. Parties were arranged for us and we were entertained every day. As the "Ceramic" was coaling as well as loading 3000 tons of cold mutton it was thought advisable for all passengers to leave the ship and find accommodation ashore. On the morning of our arrival both drafts, Navy and R.A.A.F. were accordingly put into a train and taken out to the local race-course where we were to be accommodated in the Grand-Stand[*sic*]. It was not a long journey but it was sufficient to give us a good idea of the countryside; the country around Christchurch is extremely flat and is known as the Canterbury Plains, it is from these Plains that the famous New Zealand lambs come. Rising sharply from the Plains and about 40 miles distant is a very high range of mountains known locally as the "Alps". They are snow-covered for the majority of the year and in winter they provide excellent facilities for winter sports. The grand-stand at the race-course did not strike any of us as being a comfortable place to live as it meant sleeping on straw on the stone floor of the gentleman's cloakroom. We therefore decided to pay for our own lodgings and returned to Christchurch where we found very comfortable rooms in Warner's Hotel. Here we lived in luxury for ten days and were entertained like lords, the hospitality of the people of Christchurch was overwhelming; they did all they possibly could to make our stay enjoyable and they certainly succeeded. One of our number, Sub-Lieutenant Barnet-Smith even went so far as to get married although it meant leaving his wife behind, and I do not think they have met since.

Finally, on June 2nd our stay at Christchurch came to an end and we once more put to sea for the longest leg of our trip. We had enjoyed ourselves so much that many of us were sorely tempted to remain behind and join up with the Royal New Zealand Navy, but the call of home was too much for us and we continued on our way. We left Lyttleton at 9 a.m. and set our course almost due east across the South Pacific Ocean. Our destination was Panama and we estimated the journey would take us 28 days which meant we should arrive on June 28th, we actually arrived on June 23rd. For the first four days out we had good weather, but after that there followed ten days of gale with a strong wind and stern sea. It was difficult at times to remain in one's bunk and meals in the saloon were most difficult although amusing; it was almost impossible to keep any crockery on the table. The temperature dropped considerably and I was thankful for the warm clothing that had been given us in Australia. I quote the following passages out of

my diary which I kept throughout the trip and which illustrate very well this part of our journey.

> "In the lounge most of the furniture has slid to one side and there have been several amusing incidents of people careening across the floor seated helplessly in an armchair. Barnet-Smith also caused some amusement by being hurled from one side of the ship to the other holding a glass of beer in his hand and finally landing in the lap of an R.A.A.F. officer. The latter was slightly flattened but not a drop of beer was spilt." "I turned in last night wearing a [bal*alaya] helmet, sea boot stockings and two sweaters and only just managed to keep warm."

Gradually as the days passed by we journeyed into warmer latitudes until we were in the tropics once more; by June 18th most of us were sleeping on deck at night, it was far too warm down below with all the scuttles closed.

During the trip Bevis and I amused ourselves by taking Star sights and generally polishing up our navigation; this was a golden opportunity to do so. An entry in my diary shows our position at 17.30 on June 17th as roughly 16°S, 96°W. course N.19°E. speed 13.1 knots. In the evenings after dinner I used to play Bridge with Bevis, Black and Holm; I had never played before but became quite a fiend towards the end of the journey. During the day we played deck-games and read books, there was a very good library on board. As we neared the approaches to the Panama Canal we were once more entering the war zone and careful look-out had to be kept for submarines and aircraft especially as we were traveling unescorted. We intercepted several wireless messages from ships who had been torpedoed. On the morning of June 20th we sighted an aircraft but it was too far distant to be identified, we presumed it to be an American aircraft on patrol. On June 23rd at dawn we sighted land, the first for three weeks and at 9 o'clock in the morning we anchored at the entrance to the Panama Canal and picked up our pilot. We remained at anchor the whole of that day and night waiting for a clear passage through the canal, we were not granted any shore-leave which was unfortunate as the landscape looked interesting. At half past six the following morning we weighed anchor and started on our way through the canal. It was one of the most interesting experiences I have had and certainly from an engineering point of view the most impressive. We carried two pilots as well as a platoon of American soldiers who acted as sentries. The latter were there to see that absolutely nothing was thrown over the ship's side, not even an empty cigarette carton; I am not sure whether the reason for this was to prevent sabotage to the locks or to stop rubbish getting into the pipes that operate the rise and fall of water in these locks. The thing that impressed me most was the speed and efficiency with which this great ship was handled, especially the "mules" that actually pull the ship in and out of the locks; the drivers of these "mules" are supposed to be the highest paid officials in the Canal Zone, they certainly have a very responsible job. There are actually three sets of locks through which one has to pass, and they take up most the time of the passage. All groups of locks were heavily protected by barrage balloons and A.A. guns of all types. A very large part of the Panama Canal consists of a fresh-water lake which has been dredged to allow the largest vessels to pass through it. The passage through the Canal took us approximately eight hours and we were tied up alongside the coal wharf at Colon by five o'clock that afternoon.

The weather was now extremely hot, in fact very much hotter than anything I had experienced in Malaya or the East Indies. At times it was almost unbearable especially below decks, even at night time it was very seldom cool. The humidity appeared to be even greater than in Singapore. Colon itself is not a very imposing town, at least I can only judge from the little I saw of it; being a large coaling port it is not easy to keep clean and added to this are of course the old-fashioned ideas of sanitary arrangements still used by the local inhabitants. The latter were a very hybrid lot consisting chiefly of niggers and South American half-castes. I went ashore in the evening with Bevis and Holm, we had dinner at the American Club which seemed to be the only respectable place in town. We drank Pabst beer out of tins and plenty of it. I found it exceptionally good. We then went on a typical tourists' journey of the local night life, visiting about four different night clubs. There were none of them particularly attractive, and their standard of cabaret was definitely low. Most of the cabaret artists were American although the "taxi-girls" were South American. We returned on board at midnight to find the ship practically deserted, a few hours later people began to drift back in various states of intoxication. On the whole none of the draft misbehaved themselves although one member of the R.A.A.F. was stabbed slightly and spent the night in jail.

It was impossible to sleep on deck now owing to the ship coaling all night, and there was coal-dust everywhere.

The following morning I went ashore again to try and buy a few things but without very much success. There were no good shops and besides, owing to the rate of exchange ($2 to the £) I did not have very much money. I finally decided to postpone all purchases until we reached New York. I went to the American Club for lunch were I met a very charming American Naval Officer who was serving in a Sloop based on Colon. The U-Boat menace in the Caribbean Sea had just started then and things were looking very unpleasant for the Allies. Convoys had not yet been organised and shipping through the Canal from East to West had almost been brought to a stand-still. The U.S.A. having only recently entered the War, were in no way prepared to meet this menace; the only warships they had available were ancient sloops of the last war and hastily converted fishing boats, all these were working overtime patrolling the coast, and there were no other ships available to do convoy escort duties. I returned on board for tea and did not go ashore that night. In the early hours of the following morning there were the usual scenes of the drunks returning home. The ship was due to leave at 4 a.m. and orders had been issued for all passengers to be on board by 3.30 a.m.; at 3.?5 a.m. the gangway was removed and at 3.55 a.m., a lone reveler was seen walking unsteadily along the wharf towards the ship. He was an R.A.A.F. Sergeant. The problem that faced him now was how to get on board; fortunately for him one of the coal shutes into the bunkers was still in position so he took a running dive and disappeared down the shute. Although he was now on board the next problem was how to get him out of the bunkers; he could be heard singing lustily far down in the bowels of the ship, and seemed to be quite unperturbed. Finally, after some two hours shoveling by his friends he was extricated, looking very dirty, but still very happy.

The ship left the wharf and anchored in the harbour. It was slightly cooler out here and less dirty, but all the same it was still very hot. We remained anchored for seven days and were not allowed to leave the ship. It was a sore test for tempers but we came through it successfully. We weighed anchor at last at 12.20 a.m. on Friday July 3rd. We now had probably the most dangerous part of our journey in front of us. During our week of idling in Colon harbour various stories and rumours had reached us of the dangers that lurked in the seas ahead of us. We even had a practical demonstration of what might happen to us. There were numerous other merchant ships anchored in the harbour with us, all of us were waiting for the first convoy to be formed up before we sailed. One merchant skipper decided he could not wait any longer so, of his own accord and without orders he set sail and left us. We saw him go out, it was about 10 a.m., and at 3 p.m. he and his crew returned in the life-boats, their ship had been torpedoed only a few miles out. This experience certainly did not make us feel any more confident. There is an entry in my diary which illustrated very well our feelings at this period. "They say the passage takes four days – one day out and three days back!"

The convoy consisted of only nine ships and our escort consisted of what looked like three Sloops and two Motor boats. This was the first convoy to sail from Colon, and therefore it was not surprising that a large number of the ships found it difficult to keep their positions, some of the ships were extraordinarily bad at keeping their station. There were the usual rumours of submarines in the vicinity, but the convoy was not attacked nor, I believe, did we even sight a submarine. Our destination was unknown to us, the only thing we did know was that we were heading in a northerly direction. Before leaving Colon we had taken on board some more passengers, all of them Merchant Navy Officers survivors from ships torpedoed in the Pacific Ocean. They had some amusing stories to tell, but in spite of everything they were incredibly cheerful.

At four o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday July 7th we arrived at Quantanamo[*sic*] in Cuba. The port is situated in the south east corner of the island and has been lent to the U.S.A. as a Naval Base. It is a perfect harbour but as a town it did not look very impressive from what we were able to see of it from the ship. We remained anchored here for two days and amused ourselves by sailing life boats around the harbour, the wind was quite strong enough to handle them easily, they make a lot of leeway, and usually it meant having to row back to the ship. I wish we had had an opportunity of going ashore as the scenery looked most inviting and it would have been nice to have set foot on Cuba.

Early on the morning of Thursday July 9th we set sail again. This time the convoy consisted of six ships escorted by two sloops, the "Ceramic" carried the commodore being the largest ship. Our destination was Key West, the southernmost tip of Florida, which was a general meeting place for the north and southbound convoys. There was some slight excitement on the second day out when a Catalina flying boat reported the presence of two enemy submarines; our escort immediately made an attack and seemed to drop depth charges at random all around the convoy. No "kill" was made, and it seemed very doubtful whether there were any subs present.

At 10 a.m. on July 12th we anchored off Key West with about 30 other ships. Land was only just visible and as there seemed to be no protection of any sort we presumed the anchorage was surrounded by a minefield. At a quarter past six the following morning we weighed anchor and were part of the convoy of 30 ships, most of them tankers. The latter were fully laden and had sailed up from the South American oilfields, most of them were presumably on their way to Europe. The weather was very hot thanks to the following wind and it became hotter the further north we traveled. Our destination was Newport in Virginia, our reason for calling here was to take on more coal. It had now become a regular feature of the day for the convoy to be attacked by submarines although no ships were lost, we became quite used to the thud of depth charges exploding under water. We also had aerial cover now in the form of Blimps, excellent things for spotting U-Boats but can only be used outside the range of enemy fighters. We were continually passing southbound convoys, usually of about 30 or 40 ships most of them tankers, the average was about two per day; it made one realize the vast amount of shipping still at the disposal of the Allies. It was also surprising to notice that the majority of the escorting ships were flying the White Ensign, chiefly trawlers. On Friday July 17th at 5 o'clock we anchored at the entrance to Newport harbour. The following morning we went alongside the coal wharf, it was not an easy manoeuvre and took 2 1/3 hours to complete owing to wind and tide being against us. Coaling started immediately and the ship was soon covered in a fine layer of coal dust, it was most uncomfortable living on board, being both very hot and very dirty. We went ashore in the evening and had an excellent dinner in town. There did not appear to be very much offered in the way of entertainment, which surprised me in an American city, so we returned on board quite early. The way back to the Docks lay through the negro quarters, we took a tram and were the only white people on board, the remainder being niggers of varying hues. They are an amusing race and full of fun, and as far as I could see were contented with their lot. There was a notice in the tram to the effect that niggers were to give up their seats to white men should they be required. I thought this an unnecessary announcement but perhaps it is needed; it would be unheard of to put such a notice in a tram in Singapore, but perhaps this is no comparison.

It was not until the morning of July 20th that the ship finally finished coaling and we were able to move away from the coal wharf into the comparative coolness of the convoy anchorage. By this time most people were rather irritable and tempers had become frayed due entirely to the heat, dirt, and lack of entertainment ashore. Finally on the morning of July 22nd the convoy set sail, much to everybody's relief. It consisted of 16 merchant vessels and two escort vessels; being so close to land it was possible to have continuous air cover – Blimps and Lockheeds. As usual our destination was unknown; there were rumours of Halifax being the first stop with the hope that something might happen to make us go into New York. The following morning (July 23rd) we entered Delaware Bay, the water here is extremely shallow and we hit bottom several times. Being in convoy it was impossible to alter course into deeper water, although this would appear to have been the natural thing to do if the Commodore of the Convoy knew his job – which apparently he did not. Finally at 10.30 we grounded good and hard, and it was obvious that we would not be able to get off without assistance. One of the escort vessels, a British Trawler, attempted to tow us off but without result. Tugs were

wirelessed for from Philadelphia, the nearest port, and whilst we were waiting for these various other attempts were made to try and extricate ourselves. One of these consisted of mustering all hands on the foc'sle where they rushed madly from side to side while the engines went full astern. Even this valiant attempt to "roll" ourselves out of it failed. Eventually three tugs arrived, and with such heaving, bumping and scraping we were hauled off and proceeded on our way northwards escorted by the Trawler. It was obvious that the ship had done itself no good, and on occasions the bumps on the bottom were so marked that it felt as if the ship would break in half. She was too heavily loaded to go into dry dock, but an under-water inspection would have to be made as soon as possible.

Early on the morning of July 24th we arrived at New York and anchored between Staten Island and Governor's Island, a hot and misty morning. At 6 o'clock in the evening we weighed anchor and proceeded up stream into the harbour. This short trip up New York harbour in the twilight is the most beautiful trip I have ever done. The silhouette of the tall skyscrapers against the darkening sky with the lights being switched on one by one in most of the buildings was a sight never to be forgotten. The most appropriate adjective to describe this scene is "awe-inspiring", but the description of New York being rather like a wedding cake is also quite apt. We tied up at No. 52 pier at half past eight, no shore leave was granted. The following morning everyone was as keen as mustard to get ashore, but there were endless arrangements to be made over passes, money, and customs; these finally arrived at 1 p.m. so we were able to step ashore before the shops closed. Summer in New York is notorious for its overwhelming heat, and the City maintained its reputation on this occasion. The heat was overpowering and on top of that we had to wear our blue uniforms, not having anything else. Most of the discomfort was walking in the street as in the buildings it was far cooler, and most of them were air-conditioned.

I stepped ashore that afternoon with Bevis and Holm, our first object was shopping so we got on the first bus, paid a nickel – for which you can travel anywhere in New York – and proceeded up 8th Avenue to the shopping centre. The local people were always extremely kind and helpful to us, we obviously looked strangers and on top of that, very hot and sticky, when we told them we were English our stock went up 100% and their hospitality was almost embarrassing. I made a few purchases but had to spend a great deal of time watching Bevis and Holm buying "Undies" and "Scanties" for their respective wives, I think they did so more in the way of a peace offering than anything else. Having loaded ourselves with parcels we had to return to the ship to deposit them and then set off again to taste the night life of the City. Our first port of call was the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel which housed the White Ensign Club, this was probably the most palatial and ornate building I have every entered, but in spite of this we got very little out of them, and only two drinks. We then took a bus down 5th Avenue into the heart of the metropolis where we had some bear and club sandwiches at the Bar Parlour, most delicious. We then crossed the street and entered Radio City – the most palatial place of entertainment I have every been to. Here we saw a film called "Mrs. Miniver"- an excellent show, as well as this there was a stage show which consisted of first-class variety turns. Just before the showing of Mrs. Miniver a young lady who was seated next to me, and whom I had never seen before in my life, proceeded to have an epileptic fit

much to my embarrassment. She created such a commotion that all the lights were put on and some attendants came and carried her out. All eyes were turned on me and some of them looked most suspicious as if I had made a "pass" at her. The high light of the stage show was the dancing of the famous Rockettes, chorus girls about 50 of them who danced magnificently and with the most perfect precision. The Show ended soon after 10 p.m. and we then strolled down Broadway looking at the people and at the shops – an amazing experience. There was supposed to be a Black-out in force but there were lights everywhere – it made me realize how little the Americans really knew about war. We had been at a low-down dive, most amusing but rather unhealthy in several respects so we left hurriedly and went to Jack Dempsey's Bar. Here we had several more beers, our financial position not permitting us to have anything more expensive. After this we went to the Night Club called La Conga where we had more beer and sat and watched the dancing and the cabaret. The bands (two) were excellent, and it was an entertainment in itself watching the dancers. It would have taken a great deal of enticement to have persuaded me to perform on the dance floor. We left at 1.30 a.m. and wandered back to the ship. Here there was great activity and they were erecting numerous new gun emplacements, the din of riveters went on all night, but I had consumed a sufficient quantity of beer to sleep soundly. The following day was Sunday, and as conditions on board were rather uncomfortable I went ashore with Bill Bevis to do some sightseeing. We took a bus to the Empire State Building (reputed to be the tallest building in the world) and fortunately we found it open to the public. We took a lift up to the 80th floor, a journey completed in 40 seconds with one's stomach lagging some 10 seconds behind. From here we took another lift to the 102nd floor which was the top. From here we had a really magnificent view. We could see the Normandy lying on her side alongside her berth, with the Queen Mary on the opposite side. A strong wind was blowing which made the whole building sway slightly from side to side, a most uncomfortable feeling which was not helped by a hangover from the night before. To crown it all the Yankee Clipper (flying boat) arrived and proceeded to circle around us, this was too much for both of us, and we returned hurriedly covered in a cold sweat and looking very green. We had an excellent lunch at one of Child's Restaurants, memorable for some really delicious ice-cream. Afterwards we went along to the N.B.C. Building at the Rockefeller Centre – another vast skyscraper. Here we were conducted around the broadcasting studios where we actually saw a play being broadcast, it was most interesting to watch especially the sound effects department which had to produce amongst other things a shipwreck at sea and an aeroplane crashing. There are a total of 157 studios in this building, we did not visit them all; however, we did see a television programme being broadcast. We came out and had tea at an Automat, an incredible experience, you get everything from a slot machine. We then went to the Roxy Cinema, a most palatial building, about the same size as Buckingham Palace. Saw a bad film, but as usual an excellent floor show. Afterwards we had an excellent dinner of fried steak and more ice-cream. We turned in early, feeling very replete. The following day we were still alongside but had no money left, so had to remain on board. Fortunately at about noon we managed to wangle an advance, and I stepped ashore with Bevis and Holm to do some more shopping. We took a bus to 42nd Street which consists of shops interspersed with Cinemas. We made several purchases and were looking for somewhere to lunch when by accident I bumped into a fellow walking along the street. I apologized, and to

my amazement, found it was a great friend of mine from Bousteads, Singapore, by the name of Donald Kirk. It was an incredible coincidence especially as he happened to be on two days leave from Canada, and I had to choose that particular time, literally to bump into him. Our meeting was duly celebrated with a most excellent lunch. Unfortunately we had instructions to be back on board by 4 p.m. so we had to break up what looked like being a really first class party – just as well, perhaps. The ship eventually slipped at 9 p.m. and proceeded to anchor down stream. There were only two people missing from all the hundreds on board which was quite good considering the many and manifold temptations of New York; unfortunately they both belonged to my division, and I was saddled with the wearisome task of trying to trace them. They eventually re-joined the ship at Halifax, our next port of call.

We finally sailed from New York at 1200 on Tuesday July 28th. We were alone except for an escort of two destroyers which was very comforting. The weather became much colder as we went northwards and fog accompanied us nearly all the time. On the afternoon of July 30th, we berthed in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There is a considerable difference in the weather after the hot stickiness of New York. We now have mist and cold. As this is our last port of call before reaching England everybody was very keen to get ashore and make some final purchases. Shore leave was granted the following day, July 31st so I went ashore and made numerous purchases chiefly foodstuffs. I had to buy an extra kitbag to carry it all, and I was anxious to know whether I would be able to get it all past the English Customs, if and when we ever reached England. Halifax is not a beautiful city, but I was greatly impressed with the atmosphere of the place, there seemed to be an air of confidence and friendship amongst the inhabitants which was most heartening. Above all I was impressed by the outstanding beauty of the womenfolk, almost without exception they were all very charming. There is not very much entertainment ashore which is not helped by prohibition. The following afternoon Bill Bevis and I attended the official opening of the Navy League Centre which was a Recreation Ground for the Services. It started with a display by the three Services which included a magnificent show of drill and P.T. After that there were several track events helped by several world famous athletes including Charles Dodds, the holder of the World's 1500 metre record. The final entertainment was a baseball match in which Babe Ruth took part; it was an interesting performance more amusing than enlightening, the first ball game I had every seen.

At 1200 on Sunday August 2nd we slipped and put to sea on the last leg of our long voyage. The convoy formed up slowly at slow speed as a thick fog had settle down. There were 30 ships all told. By August 4th the fog had cleared and the weather was fine, the convoy was in good formation and most ships carried out a firing practice. Thick fog came down again the next day, visibility about ½ cable and no other ships could be seen, station was kept on fog buoys streamed astern by all ships. Two ships lost the convoy that afternoon to proceed to St. Johns, Newfoundland, and were torpedoed before they reached their destination, not very heartening news for the rest of us. The fog finally cleared on August 7th and apart from two bad stragglers they were in good position. Various practice manoeuvres were carried out and smoke screens were laid down all very efficiently. The coast of Ireland was finally sighted on the morning of Thursday, August

13th. At 2 p.m. on Friday, August 14th we berthed alongside at Liverpool and after a very quick dispersal we caught the London train, and I was home again once more at 12.30 that night.

Outside Buckingham Palace after receiving the DSC from left to right Eleanor (sister of F.O.S.M.) Right is F.O.S.M. and his mother Nora, it is not possible to identify the location or occasion. After his return FOSM was a squadron leader of a flotilla of mine laying ships in the Channel below).e

LETTER FROM NORA MAN TO HER DAUGHTER.

Deepdene
Epsom Road
Ewell
Surrey

17 August 1942

My Girlie

I must write and tell you some details about Franky and his arrival. I am in bed still 7.30 Mon[day] morning and this is my chance – Well I had given Henry a marvelous bath including hairwash and pedi mani cure. He was all ready to pop into bed but I fully dressed when at 11.00 O' clock the Tel. Went; he dashed down and finally understood that it was Franky so I dashed and he was at Waterloo St. It was wonderful to hear his voice and I told him the last train from Waterloo 11.47 and here Henry would fetch him at Epsom St[ation]. Wasn't it lucky there still was that last train down. He had arrived

Liverpool and got away about 2 O'clock. I told him they would most likely have to walk home and they did Henry went ½ hour earlier to try and persuade a taxi but nothing doing. They met and Franky was so amazed at the length etc! I sat in the drawing [room] for half an hour before he came and dashed to the door and had him in my arms and it was just too wonderful. In his uniform so nice looking a bit thin and warn but else his dear self and we were happy. We were alone too for ¼ hour when A. Ida came down in her dressing gown (they were in bed at 10.30) Frank went up, saw U. Chasso who got up. It was such a reunion. This was only a few minutes – then just Henry and I took him down for a little food one egg was all he wanted too excited though he had had nothing since 5 O'clock. Then bed at 1.30 try and sleep. Thank God for his return when one hears his story which comes out slowly more and more it is just a miracle. Sat[urday] morn[ing] getting straight a bit and he had breakfast[?] in bed at 11. O' clock and I sat by him. Else Reg[enednase]. came to lunch as arranged and I would not upset that, with her two boys but I took Franky to the "Spread Eagle" for a good lunch and went at 12.30 (lunch at 1) and we returned at 2.30 for coffee in the garden with Else and her boys had left for a cinema Rembrandt and were fabelhaft untergebracht with (John Kipling film) from 2 – 5.30 when they left with Else. Franky talked in the garden and later Tea when quiet and true when one sees the tale unfolded it is too awful in parts and too wonderful too and the escapes! Now more and more bits came out. Edward came Sat., 5 before Else left till Sun[day] eve. so he was lucky getting Frank in. He and Henry slept in your and Janet's bed. Frank and Ed. had 2 baths and I could on [?] my San San as of old! Sun. Frank came down at 10.30. _____, Edw[ard] was ordered to lunch only to A May and my boys tea – 7 0 clock[?] all on bicycles.

Weather fine again and she was blissful showing Franky Parklands in fine weather. He admired and admired but got no word in edgeways so need not talk. Here I rescue him from time to time for U. Chasso. But they are all so pleased and happy. Arthur likes Franky and F likes A very much! A's holiday on the Thames won't come off and he has not decided what to do and when. On Sat eve[ning] I rang up Ia [Dora?] and Morrice and Frank spoke to them and Janet was there and she and Frank talked for 36[?] ! so pleased! Andrew is home last week, thank God! Franky can make up plans as he goes to the Admiralty to hear about leave now he gets 14 days officially only which is ridiculous but we will see 6 years tropics must be considered Toots thinks him unchanged (its not much) not like Niels [and] Charlie she says). I am sending Frank along (with Henry) to Dr [Charlie] Lown today for the once over and later to Bash. Henry wired to his camp master and said brother home on short leave from S'pore etc. and that he was coming a week later. So when you come Friday as arranged and Henry leaves Monday I have my three children together for 2 days! Lots of snaps for Morgan to be taken. When Franky knows his leave and had his interview on Tues we still propose to go away even 2 or 3 days --- Mr. Freshwater will come Thursday also and we get along quite well and do less of course as when you are here. Weather seems to get better now. I hope so. We miss you of course and Morgan all the time. God bless. Have a good time and change if you write your train W'loo here arrival Henry will meet you. Tel. from Waterloo perhaps but give both trains Waterloo 1.0'clock ? [?]

A had your letter
Must get up 8.15

Just found yours downstairs

love and kisses to you and children and kind regards to all

Mum

I rang up my friends Molly A. etc. sent p.c.'s
No time to read this through.

SHED 1873. 7th September

LES F

LIEUT. F. MAN

D.S.C. FOR AN OLD CHELTONIAN

An Old Cheltonian has been awarded the D.S.C. "for bravery and undaunted devotion to duty in important and hazardous minelaying operations."

He is Lieut. Frank O. S. Man, R.N.V.R., the eldest son of Mrs. H. M. S. Man, of Epsom, and the late Mr. H. M. S. Man, who entered the College in January, 1928, and whose brother, Mr. C. G. Man, was also at Cheltenham College.

After leaving Cheltenham, Lieut. Man went to Oxford, and in 1937 he went out to Singapore in connection with his business. He joined the R.N.V.R., and as soon as war broke out he was called up.

He had an exciting time before the capture of Singapore by the Japanese, and only left the city the night the Japanese went in to occupy it.

The ship on which he was travelling was torpedoed, and it took him six months to get back to Britain by way of Java, Australia, and America.

Lieut. Man, who is 30 years of age, is unmarried.

THE LANDINGS IN NORMANDY

7th Sept. 1944 "Times"

NAVAL AWARDS

The King has given orders for the following appointments and approved the following rewards and awards:—

For gallantry, skill, determination, and undaunted devotion to duty during the initial landings of allied forces on the coast of Normandy:—

SECOND BAR TO D.S.O.—Cdr. [illegible] R.N. [illegible]

For gallant and distinguished services while operating with the Army during the successful landings in Normandy:—

[illegible]

For outstanding courage, skill, and devotion to duty in H.M. ships Tartar, Ashanti, Eskimo, Javelin, and H.M. Canadian ships Haida and Huron in action with German destroyers:—

[illegible]

For undaunted courage, skill, and devotion to duty in successful patrols in H.M. Submarine Tactician:—

[illegible]

For outstanding skill and determination in H.M. Ships Kilmarnock, Aubretia, and Blackfly in anti-U-boat operations:—

[illegible]

For bravery and undaunted devotion to duty in important and hazardous minelaying operations:—

BAR TO D.S.C.—[illegible] R.N.V.R.
D.S.C.—Lt. F. O. S. Man, R.N.V.R.
D.S.M.—[illegible]

For distinguished services in H.M.S. Prince Leopold in the successful landing operations in Sicily, the Messina Straits, Salerno, and Normandy:—

D.S.C.—Lt. H. A. [illegible], R.N.V.R.

For gallant and distinguished service while operating with the Army in Italy:—

M.C.—[illegible], R.M.

For skill and devotion to duty in H.M.S. Ashanti and the Polish submarine Piorun in a successful engagement with enemy minesweepers:—

D.S.M.—P.O. Tele. [illegible]

For undaunted courage, skill, and determination in the daring attack on the German battleship Tirpitz on April 3, 1944:—

D.S.M.—[illegible]

For distinguished services in the field while operating with the Army:—

M.M.—[illegible], R.M.

For gallant and distinguished services:—

D.S.M.—[illegible]

[1] **CERAMIC** was built in 1913 by Harland & Wolff at Belfast with a tonnage of 18495grt, a length of 655ft 1in, a beam of 69ft 5in and a service speed of 15.5 knots. Launched on 11th December 1912 she was equipped with 2 permanent guns which were installed under covers on the after deck. She was delivered on 5th July 1913 and on 11th was present at the Mersey Pageant when King George V opened the Gladstone Dock. Third in a line of ships she had some 600 guests on board and at night was lit by white stars along the hull. On 24th July she sailed on her maiden voyage from Liverpool to Australia on the Joint Service and was the largest ship on the Australian and New Zealand routes until 1923 when P&O's *Mooltan* joined their fleet. To this day she holds the record for the loftiest masts to go under Sydney Harbour bridge. She was also the largest ship on the Liverpool - Cape Town leg until Union-Castle's *Arundel Castle* entered service in 1921 and was designed to enter the old lock at Tilbury with a foot to spare. In August 1914, flying pennant A 40, she carried troops of the Australian Expeditionary Force to the United Kingdom. She was narrowly missed by a torpedo fired by an unidentified vessel in May 1916 when she was carrying 2500 troops in the Mediterranean. In May of the following year she began operating under the Liner Requisition Scheme carrying mainly refrigerated cargo. On 9th June 1917 she was missed by a torpedo in the English Channel and on 21st July 1917 was chased by a surfaced U-boat off the Canary Islands but managed to outrun it. She was returned to White Star in 1919 and was immediately refurbished before commencing her first post war sailing on 18th November 1920 from Liverpool to Sydney with a call at Glasgow. In 1930 she collided with P.S.N.C's *Laguna* in the Lower Thames. She was transferred to Shaw, Savill & Albion in 1934 when Cunard-White Star was formed and commenced her first sailing for that company on 25th August from Liverpool to Brisbane. In June 1936 she was modernised by Harland & Wolff at Govan when her tonnage was marginally increased to 18713grt, a verandah cafe added aft and the forward bridge deck glassed in. At the same time her crew accommodation was repositioned and improved. She returned to Shaw, Savill & Albion on 15th August 1936 and resumed service on 23rd August. In February 1940 she was requisitioned as a troopship and in December of that year she collided with Andrew Weir's *Testbank*. On 23rd November 1942 she sailed from Liverpool with 378 passengers and 278 crew and gunners. Around midnight on the 6th/7th December , enroute from Liverpool to South Africa and Australia she was torpedoed off the Azores by *U-155* with the loss of 655 lives. A Royal Engineer sapper was picked up by U-515 and subsequently interrogated and the loss of the *Ceramic* went unrecorded for several months until the survivor was able to write from the POW camp Marlag-Milag-Nord near Hamburg.