

*From a UK Daily Telegraph series entitled 'Britain at War' comes this very interesting story that led me onto a search for more details, of which I now have enough to write a full sized book but for the sake of you my reader I have kept it down to a longish article.*

### **Britain at War: Lessons on wartime Britain**

I left England in 1940 at the age of 3 together with my older sister aged 11 on the Duchess of Bedford en route via New York to be with my grand parents in Vancouver Canada.

The grand parents' home was actually in Japan and they had come over to collect us to go back to Japan where it was thought we would be safer than remaining in the UK.

Fortunately we did not make that last leg of our journey owing to illness and remained in Canada until 1944. When both grand parents died it was considered, for various reasons, important that my sister and I were returned urgently to the UK.

It being wartime still, it presented a problem as there was no transport across the Atlantic available to civilians. By the end of 1943 there were a number of refugee children living in the United States of Canada who were desperate to be returned home and this information came to the attention of my father, a serving officer in the Royal Navy.

At that time the Royal navy was busy ferrying Lend-lease pocket aircraft carriers built in the USA across the Atlantic to Britain.

In early 1944 The Royal navy was due to take collection of another aircraft carrier named HMS Ruler and a Captain Curry was to sail her from New York to Liverpool acting as escort to a convoy of British Merchant shipping bringing vital food and supplies to the UK.

Captain Curry knew my father and told him he had agreed with the various authorities that he could bring back about 40 children with minders if they could be ready to sail from New York on a certain date. So we were rushed over from Vancouver and joined HMS Ruler for our journey home. We endured the usual horrendous North Atlantic winter storms – Aircraft carriers can certainly toss about in rough seas and several minders ended up with broken limbs or were prostrate with sea sickness.

We also experienced at least one U-boat attack on the convoy.

Captain Curry was determined that we children should be entertained as well as told what the war was all about and what the conditions would be like with bombing and food rationing etc when we got home.

So we had games to learn how to identify ships and aircraft etc, and lessons about life in wartime Britain. This must have been beneficial for the children who were mostly in their teens.

Because he knew our father, Capt Curry was anxious that both my sister and I should understand the role of the Royal Navy and so, on a clear morning after a U-Boat raid on the convoy, my sister and I were taken up to the Bridge. For the first time we could look out and see the convoy of merchant ships we were escorting.

Several Merchant ships had been attacked and were pointed out to us; black smoke rising from them. Capt. Curry explained that some vessels astern of us were damaged in the attack and were losing speed and might not be able to keep up with the rest of the convoy.

He was concerned because they would be vulnerable to further attack but the convoy had to maintain its current speed and the Royal Navy had to stay with the main convoy.

His admiration and concern for those stricken merchant seamen so impressed itself on my young 7 year old mind that I can to this day still see those ships slowly falling behind.

I felt such a sadness even though I did not yet really understand but I have never forgotten that moment standing on the Bridge and I have never ceased to be grateful for that opportunity to witness the extreme courage of our wonderful wartime merchant seamen.

Of course for me the next unforgettable moment was the arrival in Liverpool and being met by two people my sister assured me were my mother and father. Getting used to wartime Britain, and re-establishing family ties was difficult and the long term effects of such wartime family separations is, of course, another story.

Miss Bronwen Renwick, Maidenhead

*A beautiful little story that to me says such a lot about the things she hasn't written about –the trauma of a 3 year being separated from parents & home for years then having to learn to love two total strangers-the mind boggles. "Aircraft carriers certainly toss about in rough seas" an under statement if ever there was, they were famous for it I believe, the hulls having been built as cargo ships then a flight deck built on top made them very tender.*

*The wartime evacuation of children from UK to Canada and the USA ended in tragedy when ships carrying them were torpedoed and sunk, I suppose it was just normal bureaucracy, some committee saying "" that's a good idea, lets ship them out to America" knowing nothing about the war at sea.*

From here I went looking for photos and histories of the ships the writer mentions

## The Duchess of Bedford a CPR Liner

A very fortunate ship that had a long and illustrious career, she lived through bombing, shelling, U-boats, bounced off an iceberg and still sailed serenely on doing her job.

Name changes and numerous facelifts came and went but she sailed on unperturbed, the big jets took over the transatlantic passenger trade sending her on her last voyage to the breakers in December 1960.

Built on the River Clyde at John Brown's famous shipyard she was launched in January 1928.

Looking on the Internet for details of her history I was amazed how much is written about her in Wikipedia and many other websites, my favorite amongst all these is <http://www.duchessofbedford.com/>

A fascinating website written by the son of a Fireman who served on her from 1941 to 1946.

The front page has the line "my fathers brother was in the Royal navy and there was friendly rivalry between them, the brother would proudly say "I'm in the Navy" to which the father would retort "I went to sea"

A favorite-but very true - merchant navy saying.

The 'Duchess' sailed on her maiden voyage to St. Johns and the St Laurence river ports of Quebec and Montreal on the first of June 1928, just 6 months to fit out after her launch, the shipyard was really humming in those days.

No who's going to 'twang the string' strikes that ruined Cammel Lairds in the 60s.

From Wikipedia:-

The Duchess of Bedford was one of the several "sturdy Canadian Pacific liners which were known as "Drunken Duchesses" for their lively performance in heavy seas." She was built as a sister ship to SS Duchess of York, SS Duchess of Richmond and SS Duchess of Atholl.

Among the Duchess' better-known passengers in 1931 was Montagu Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, who was en route from Canada to England when he received word the United Kingdom had permanently abandoned the gold standard

The writer Elspeth Huxley worked on her biography of Lord Delamere while crossing the Atlantic in 1933.

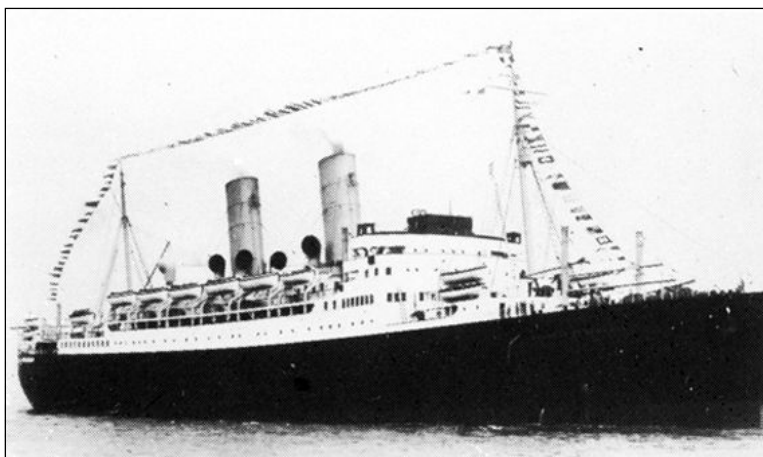
*(So now you know)*

The four ships maintained regular weekly sailings to those Canadian ports from Liverpool's famous Pier head, (which wasn't a pier at all but a long floating wharf running parallel to the river bank (it always puzzled me so I hope it puzzles you) and some times alternate sailings from Greenock.

In May 1933 came garbled radio reports from other ships or ship that she had sunk after hitting an iceberg, it wasn't until the next day that the duchess herself sent a message to say that all's well. What caused this alarm I haven't been able to discover.

Yet just a few weeks later she did collide with an iceberg when steaming in thick fog in the Belle Isle Straits but escaped with no serious damage and carried on with the voyage.

On my trips through that area in times of fog and ice I recall peering over the bow for growlers and sniffing the air for icebergs, it must have been a nightmare of a passage in 1933 with no radar or without the regular radio reports from the coast guard on the positions of icebergs. I remember that when in fog for days the bridge used to fix their position by the reported positions of icebergs aground on the Grand Banks.



Dressed overall the Duchess of Bedford leaving Liverpool on her maiden voyage June 1928

### World War 2 Service

The 'Duchess of Bedford' had an enviable record for WW2 merchant ships for as a troopship she carried almost 200.000 service men and women, sailed some 400.000 miles and not one of them suffered any serious injury despite the Duchess earning the name of being the most bombed ship!

She was bombed on numerous occasions even back in her home port she near missed by a stick of bombs anchored in the Mersey during the Liverpool Blitz

On being taken up as a troopship at the start of the war her first voyage as a trooper was to take civil and military officials to Bombay. What 'officials' means I do not know but that is what it says in Wikipedia. Convoy BM 11 sailed from Bombay on the 19/01/42 and arrived Singapore 29/01/42- other ships in the convoy were 'Empire Star', 'Empress of Japan', Wakefield (USA), West point (USA) they carried to an unknown fate - 5 light AA batteries, 1 light tank squadron, 1 Railway company(? Ed) and the 18th division (less 53 brigade) some 17000 troops plus stores & equipment.

The 'Duchess' sailed from Singapore on the 30.01.42 with 1,221 refugees for Batavia, Colombo, Cape Town and Liverpool. Arriving in Liverpool 19.03.42. The Wakefield and Westpoint also sailed that day making a total of 4000 evacuees from the besieged city.

The 'Duchess' was attacked after leaving by aircraft, but again only received slight damage and didn't suffer any casualties. Her good luck carried her safely through three invasions - Operation Torch landing American troops in North Africa-the invasion of Sicily she landed the American marines at Salerno where she was again attacked and near missed by aircraft and was credited with shooting down a torpedo bomber. Next she was landing troops at the famous Anzio beach head.



**The 'Duchess' in wartime drab loading American troops somewhere?**

In 1945 she was used to ferry Soviet POWs on two voyages from the UK to Odessa, one reference I found said that in 1944 the Bedford left Liverpool with more than 3000 Russian ex-prisoners of war, bound for Basra, from where the ex-prisoners would have been taken by train to Russia.

I found references of her sister ship the Duchess of Richmond and other UK liners on this run also.

I did find details of her carrying American POWs from Odessa to Malta & Italy so she obviously was in Odessa. American, British & Canadian POW's from camps in Poland that the Russians overran were railed to Odessa where they were put on ships back to allied bases.

Trying to find the details I wanted I came upon websites detailing the most horrific stories.

The Yalta conferences between Stalin, Roosevelt & Churchill discussed at length the repatriation of POWs.

Very very briefly what I gathered in half an hour. (it would take years to read it all)

America (Roosevelt) at first said they would only repatriate those Soviet POWs who were born in Russia (not the countries the Soviets had overrun) and only those who wanted to go back to Russia.

Many many thousands of Russians, Poles and men from the other East European countries that Russia later swallowed up and had been forced into the German army and towards the end of the war had surrendered en-masse to the western allies as fast as they could.

Stalin countered by saying (something like) if you don't send them all back we won't send back any of your POWs. America apparently wanted to hang on to their argument and call the Russian's bluff but Britain persuaded them to accept the Russian line.

As a result some many thousands of Soviet POWs held in Britain were repatriated to Russia against their wishes, reports from the ships involved that I have read so far tell of some of the POWs jumping overboard rather than be shipped back to Russia.

From the little I have read it seems that most if not all of those who landed back in Russia were slaughtered on Stalin's orders soon after they left the ships.

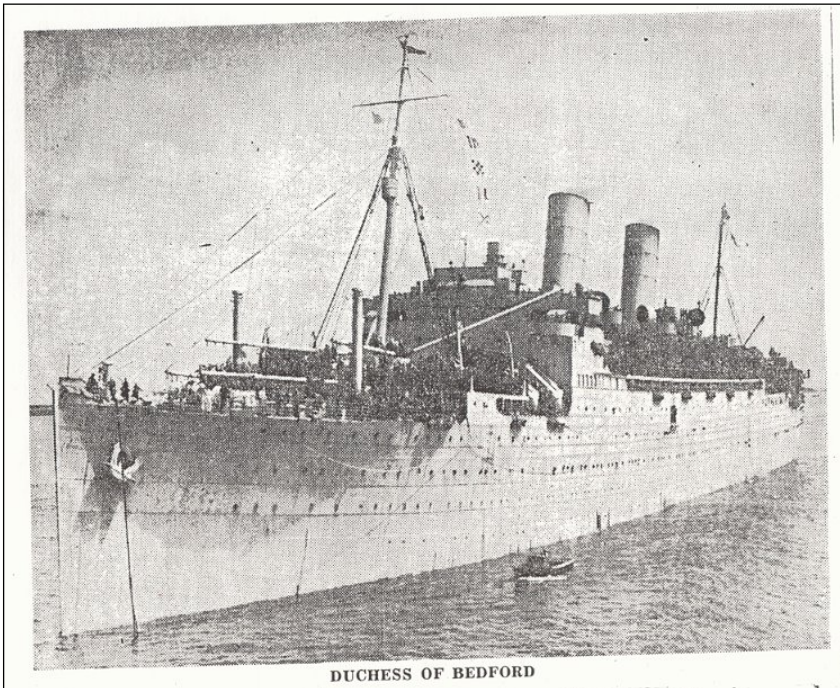
*It's too big a subject to handle here and I don't think I want to.*

### **Back to the Duchess of Bedford.**

It was 1947 before she was released from Troopship duties which apart from the Russian & American POWs had included shipping Canadian POWs back home followed by Canadian troops going home, the survivors of the many thousands she and her sister ships had brought over from Canada in the early war years.

Back at John Brown's on the Clyde she was refitted with all the new mod cons for a north Atlantic Liner, as well as getting a refit and her funnels changed she also got a name change, at first it was going to be the 'Empress of India' but by the time the refit was finished India had gone independent so she became the 'Empress of France', her only sister ship to survive the war the 'Duchess of Richmond became the 'Empress of Canada' together they went back to doing the work they were built for-carrying paying passengers across

the Atlantic which they did exceedingly well until the big Boeing 707 jets stole all their customers.



Going by the massive crowd onboard this faint photo has to be when she had a full load of troops onboard.

December 1960 the 'Empress of France' leaves Liverpool on her final voyage—to the breakers yard in Newport South Wales (The same yard that scrapped the Vindi) The 32-year old Empress of France was bought in 1960, by the British Iron & Steel Corporation, for scrap.

Two famous things from the ship were saved from the scrap yard. The Empress Bar was dismantled and taken to Glamorgan where it was incorporated in the Barry Hotel in Barry as the Empress Room.

In 1961 the ship's bell was presented to Colonel John Wallis, at the Canadian Army Headquarters, Ottawa.



### Mysterious happenings aboard the Duchess

The 'Duchess' left behind her two intriguing mysteries-the first one is - Did she or did she not sink a U-boat, several accounts say that the Captain reported the sinking of a U-Boat with Gunfire from the ships ancient 6 inch on the stern and the Oerlikon AA guns. The Duchess left Liverpool on the 7th of August and 2 days later in heavy weather a U-Boat was seen close astern, the ship opened fire scoring hits on the sub that was seen to sink stern first.

The master Captain Busk-Wood was awarded an OBE.

The mystery is that no one can find which submarine they sank or attacked, the excellent and authoritative website on U-Boats [www.uboat.net](http://www.uboat.net) has no mention of any such submarine, in fact it doesn't list any U-boat being near it on that date and no subs are unaccounted for at that time.

There is online an interesting archive from 2005 when many people were debating this.

As well as being no reference to this submarine one of the correspondents in the online debate said the London gazette had no record of an OBE being awarded to captain Busk-Wood.

Another correspondent countered this by saying it may not have been published to protect him from German retribution if he was later captured by them, as happened to a WW1 captain of the Railway ferry 'Brussels' who rammed and sunk a U-boat off Zeebrugge, on a later voyage he was captured when the 'Brussels' was sunk, he was tried by the German's as a war criminal and executed.

The second mystery is about who and how launched a lifeboat whilst the ship was steaming at full speed one night in the Red Sea without apparently anyone seeing them.



On the foredeck she carried 2 lifeboats each side one mounted over the other, the top one was swung out when at sea, now the picture it they are in the Red sea heading for Suez it's red hot down below possibly hundreds sleeping on deck and when dawn comes the bridge notices that one of the boats is missing. Two days later the missing lifeboat was towed into Suez by another ship, the galley gossip was that some soldiers had gone missing but nothing official was ever said apparently.

On the internet there is plenty to read about the ship herself and the people who sailed on her as passengers, POW's, Refugees and of course the crew.

I have come across many fascinating websites that people whose parents lived or died in those traumatic years it is really worth having a look.

I started this section about the 'Duchess' with a story from a lady who was an evacuee from England to Canada aboard in 1940 –the next pages that end it are a story from another lady who was an evacuee from Singapore on the Duchess and it is altogether 'another' story.

## Evacuation from Singapore on the Duchess of Bedford

Veronica Vaughan, now Roscow tells what happened to her and how her baby was born on board.

I am Veronica Roscow and my second husband is Geoffrey. My first husband was Ernest Vaughan, a Sergeant in RASC Supplies in the regular British Army. He was stationed at GHQ, Fort Canning, Singapore. There we had Married Quarters and we had one daughter, Morven.

In the early morning of the 8th December 1941, we were asleep in our bedroom and daughter Morven and the Amah were in the smaller room, when there was a loud whistling noise, followed by a crunch and then a loud bang. We both woke with a start. I asked what it was and was told we were being bombed by the Japanese. It was the day after Pearl Harbour.

It must have been about a week later that we heard on the news of the sinking of 'HMS Prince of Wales' and 'HMS Repulse'. We were absolutely horrified! They were supposed to be there to protect us. It was at this point I think that we had our doubts as to the outcome, knowing now that our large guns were pointing out to sea while the enemy had landed on north Malaya.

The bombing of Singapore went on and as the nearest bomb that fell was on the school at the bottom of our hill just below our house, we moved our beds downstairs as there was more protection. We continued our daily lives, still being bombed and with food getting less every day. There was one blessing - the NAAFI had plenty of baby milk powder.

Christmas came and went. I think we had a tin of Wall's sausages for dinner that day. We were still being bombed and our very few fighter planes were useless against the bombers of the Japanese. So the New Year, 1942, came with the Japanese getting nearer from upcountry in Malaya. Things were getting from bad to worse. On one day my husband was driving two officers in Johore when snipers wounded one of the officers, so they returned at once to HQ. On another day the camouflage at Nee Soon Barracks was being sorted, when bombers arrived and the gun-emplacement and the soldiers there, were no more! There are many more tales to tell, but I will let it rest here.

I haven't mentioned that I was heavily pregnant at that time and the baby was due at the end of February. We all managed well enough but the food situation was really bad and if our Amah hadn't known someone to sell us some eggs and if we had not had our home-grown tomatoes, we'd have starved.

At midnight on 29th January, there was a banging on our front door. A Corporal was there to tell us that Morven and I were to be ready, with two suitcases packed, as we were leaving Singapore by ship at 12 noon the next day. Our husbands would be able to see us onto the ship but would have to leave when ordered. After a very sad farewell, that was the last that I saw of my husband.

When we had been allocated our bunks in the corridor on promenade deck, we had a meal and tried to sleep. We heard the engines working and later learned that we had moved from the docks, to shelter from bombs among the many islands around. It must have been that night that we had our first death on board. The Purser it seems had a heart attack, due to the responsibility of having 1000 women and children on the ship. On the voyage home there were more deaths, all buried at sea.

The next morning we went back to Singapore harbour to pick up more women and children. I believe it was nearly 1000. We were on the Troopship 'SS Duchess of Bedford'. On the 31st January we set sail with heavy hearts, for England.

Waking up next morning, I was surprised to find I was showing signs of imminent childbirth! This was only 1st February and the baby was not due until the 28th. Nevertheless, after breakfast, a very kind lady looked after Morven while I went in search of the ship's hospital.

When I found it, there were panic stations "You can't be due" but, after posting a notice on deck 'Is there a midwife aboard?' a Mrs Auten, who was the Matron of Singapore General Hospital, volunteered and so began my labour, while the ship was being attacked by Japanese bombers and was hit several times.

## Evacuation from Singapore on the Duchess of Bedford page 2

My girl was delivered at around 10pm and, after a couple of stitches and looking a bit more respectable, in came Captain Busk-Wood, insisting on a name or names for entry into the ship's log, but I had no name in mind. We'd chosen one for a boy but not a girl.

Then Mrs Auten said she would be pleased to have the baby named for her. To my great relief she said that her name was Diana (Well, it could have been anything!).

The Captain then asked if the name of the ship could be added. So she became, Diana Bedford Vaughan and was so recorded in the ship's log.

The next morning the hospital was crowded with sailors wishing the baby well and crossing her palm for good luck, as she was the first birth on their ship. I stayed in the hospital for 10 days as there was a problem with my blood, but that was soon sorted. It was very fortunate that I was able to breastfeed Diana, so she thrived, gaining weight nicely. Because of her birth, I and the two girls were given a small cabin for ourselves! It was such a blessing.

We sailed on to Batavia, where we stayed a week for repairs after the bombings. We then set sail for Colombo. As we were entering harbour, 'HMS Exeter' was leaving. We passed very close broadside to her and bandied words with her crew across the water and they shouted how lucky we were to be going home.

About two days later it was announced on the tannoy, that Exeter had been sunk with all hands lost. You could have heard a pin drop, such was the shock and sadness on our ship that day.

We stayed at Colombo for ten days and had to board the liner 'Empress of Australia' for one day so that our ship could be fumigated.

Onions stored in the hold had rotted and the smell was disgusting I must say now that the people of Colombo were extremely kind and sympathetic to us and looked after our babies in their crèche while we did some shopping, which I may say was essential by that time until the ship's shop obtained goods from Durban, our next port of call. Mrs Marie Reading and I became very good friends. She helped me such a lot with my children and I can't thank her enough, especially on our train journey to London - but that is another story.

The people at Durban were not so friendly towards us on the ship, perhaps they were more pro-German!

Nevertheless the ship stayed in port for 14 days to stock up with provisions.

We sailed for Cape Town, our next stop of fourteen days, where they were so kind. They gave my two girls some winter clothing and also a Moses basket, which was so very useful to carry Diana in.

We were also advised to send home food parcels, which I did, and they did arrive at my in-laws' house two months later. At this time I must point out that I never saw any racial discrimination at all. I saw all races and colours in the shops. What happened later I have no idea.

When we were about to leave Cape Town, Dame Marie, an opera singer, sang us off with 'Wish me Luck' and 'Tomorrow is a Lovely Day'. As soon as she had finished, the claxon sounded a warning for a boat drill!

Because I had the two small babies I had sussed out where the life jackets were stored on deck. I collected three and went to my lifeboat station and, as I was the first person there, the officer in charge patted my back, while some others caused chaos on the stairs and arrived late at the station and were soundly told off.

After that we sailed along the west coast of Africa to Freetown. We did not go into port but a tanker came out to collect the water we were carrying for the town.

We set sail again soon after and, to outwit the German submarines and warships, the ship zig-zagged over the Atlantic and, according to rumour, to America and then to Newfoundland. Across the Atlantic, heading for Scotland, we sailed among the islands for some hours.

We reckoned it was to fool the German submarines. When all was clear, that evening we sailed down the west coast where we had two air-raid warnings but the all-clear sounded soon after.

### Evacuation from Singapore on the Duchess of Bedford page 3

The next morning, 5th April 1942, Good Friday, we landed at Liverpool.

After we disembarked we were ushered into a large shed, where all our luggage was strewn and we had to go searching for our cases. There was no help forthcoming until a photographer turned up and wanted to know where was the first baby born on board the ship. Before I could bat an eyelid, some huge woman grabbed Diana and posed with her. I hope she enjoyed her picture in the Picture Post! I asked if I could have my baby back and later, when Mrs Reading and I had found and collected our cases and I managed to buy some milk for Morven, we caught the train for London.

The journey took seven hours and was horrendous! Feeding baby in a carriage full of service men is another story and perhaps best forgotten. I had been told by Ernie that there was no station at Hackbridge and we had to go on to Sutton, only to find he was wrong. This we could have done without! Anyway, we got to Hackbridge station and the porter knew where the Vaughans lived and kindly took us there.

Can you imagine how surprised Mum Vaughan was, seeing us on the doorstep as there was no way we could have let them know we were arriving, as it was Easter and all the shops were closed. They made us very welcome and were pleased we were safe. Next morning, Grandad took Mrs Reading to her mother-in-law's in Surrey. We stayed in touch for many years, so if you are out there somewhere Marie, please get in touch via [WWW.COFEPOW](http://WWW.COFEPOW).

The girls and I lived with the Vaughans until my sister and I started up home together, hoping that our men would return but, after working on the infamous Burma Railway, they were on board a ship taking them to work in Japan, when it was sunk by the Americans!! Sad but true.

My brother, who was an army officer but not in the same POW camp, survived his incarceration and came home.

When Morven was 11 and Diana 10 years old, I married again and have been for 55 years.

Diana (now Lawlor) is a member of COFEPOW.

<http://www.cofepow.org.uk/index.html> children & families of the far east prisoners of war.

Eds note the above site is big and interesting, stories of people and all the ships involved, including the Japanese ships that took those who didn't get away to Japan. What these people went through!

### Ships that sailed from Singapore after the 'Duchess'

I can't list all of them as there were ships of quite a few nationalities and lots of local coasters.

**Empress of Japan** - left 31.01.42 with 1,221 evacuees as causeway being blown. Batavia, then England via South Africa. She arrived Liverpool 19.3.42, some passengers having disembarked in Cape Town.

NB Empress of Japan changed her name to Empress of Scotland en voyage.

**SS Norah Moller** (4433 tons?) Shelled and set on fire 57 passengers, some women and children. Passengers rescued by HMAS Hobart and HMS Tenedos, the latter rescuing 28 wounded of which 6 did not survive. Possibly reached TP 04.02.42 [MP]

**Silver Gull** - left with 166 women and children, broke down on Rhio.

**Towed from Rhio by Capt Bill Renolds in his converted Japanese fishing boat Kohfuku Maru, later Suey Sui Fah (later the 'Krait' now in Sydney Harbour) [GB]**

Estimated 166 - 216 women and children, mainly families of Dutch Indonesian garrison soldiers at Rhio.

**SS City of Canterbury** - left Singapore 06.02.42 - Women and children, RAF personnel 453 squadron.

**SS Plancius** 840 mainly women and children evacuees from ships

HMS Monarch (?Dominion Monarch) - left Singapore 08.02.42 for New Zealand

**Silver Larch** - left Singapore 10.02.42. Reached Java.

**SS Ipoh (Straits Shipping Co)** - left 10.02.42 Reached TP 14.02.42 -200 women and children, many the wives of Malaya Survey Dept 300 RAF personnel [MH]

**SS Deucalion** - arrived Singapore 10.2.42. Impossible to dock so embarked many men, women and children from small boats drifting and being strafed by machine guns. Arrived TP, took on board approximately 480 personnel of RAF, RNZAF and RAAF together with many British civilians including women and children who had previously escaped from Singapore. Left TP 22.2.42 arrived Fremantle 2.3.42

**Agan (244 tons)** - left Singapore 11.02.42. Either reached Palembang or was sunk and survivors picked up by the Tengorah [MP] 150 civilians including women and children

### List of ships to escape Singapore

**Kulit** - left Singapore 12/02/42 with a number of civilians- assumed lost or captured Sumatra 02/03/42 (Ships/SE Asia on COFEPOW website).

**Giang Bee (Chiang Bee)** (1200 tons) Chinese owned coaster. Left Singapore 13.2.42. MP says 11.02.42 Sunk by Japanese. Very few survivors. 200 - 300 old men, women and children. 200 - 240 killed in lifeboats or drowned. Ernest and Violet Kenneison and granddaughter Betty (Edith). Ernest killed. Violet and Betty interned Palembang. Irene Kenney, confidential secretary to R H Scott, Director of Far Eastern Bureau. Mrs Ismail and Molly [W&S]

**Ping Wo - pre-war Yangtze steamer**, 200' long, 6' draft. Left Singapore 11.02.42. Arrived Fremantle 04.03.42 **Towed destroyer Vendetta to Fremantle**. 200 civilian passengers [MP]

**SS Jalavihar/Jalibahar** (5330 tons) - left 11.02.42. Heavily bombed in Durian Straits but reached TP then Ceylon

**SS Jalakrishna** - left 11.02.42 at 1700 hours. Possibly cleared harbour on 12.02.42 in convoy with De-lamore, Empire Star, Jalibahar & Li Sang. Damaged by bombs in Sunda Straits but reached Tanjong Priok, then Colombo. [MP]

**Scout** - left 10.02.42 Naval personnel and Megan Spooner, wife of Read Admiral Spooner [MH]

**Edang** - left 11.02.42 with 11 other vessels in slower part of convoy heading for TP.

**Li Sang** sailed c 1730 on 11.02.42, might have cleared harbour on 12.02.42 [MP]

**SS Jalratna** (3942 tons) Sailed night of 11.02.42. Reached Tjilitjap, which left on 19.02.42 [MP]

**Gorgon (3533 tons)( Blue Funnel Line) - left 10.02.42 With Empire Star** formed advance guard of mass evacuation. In same convoy as Durban, Kedah, Stronghold. Gwendolyn Mary Oak-Rind nee Grafton [JM] Mrs K Stapledon [IWM 85/31/1]

**Empire Star & Yoma**. [MP] Survived Japanese dive bombing attack. Reached Tanjong Priok, then Fremantle. 358 - 380 passengers- see Empire Star below

**Kedah** - small coastal ship Straits Shipping Co. left ?13.02.42. Survived repeated bombing and shelling thanks to Captain Sinclair and eventually arrived Batavia. **Survived war to lead RN fleet back into Singapore Harbour September 1945 [GB]** Possibly 750 men, women and children including Mrs Muriel Reilly, Governor's cipher clerk. [MH]

**SS Hong Kheng** (6167 tons) sailed night of 11.02.42

**Empire Star** - left 12.02.42 with Gorgon under escort. Survived severe attack, reached Batavia then reached Fremantle 23.2.42 Alison Nelson TWA at Naval Base, mother of Mason Nelson [MVG 4] Gwendolyn Mary Oak-Rind nee Grafton [JM] 2,154 military, naval and RAF personnel and large contingent of Australian, British and Indian military nurses [MS] and [JK] MP says 2000 RAF ground crew and service families.

**HMS Scott Harley** sailed daybreak 12.02.42, arrived TP. For full story see Cofepow website. Most European passengers shipped from TP 21.02.42 to Bombay on Plancius. Some went on to Australia on the Johan de Witt. [MP] lists 170 women and 30 men, including Michael Ashe Roland Bradell Miss Linda Brash

Mrs Annie L Clark (wife of Norman Clark, engineer at Govt Rice Mills)

Mrs Elliott/Mrs Sharpe-Elliott (canteen worker MAS, husband engineer at Naval Base)

Mrs W F Joyce Fitzpatrick (husband with Singapore Cold Storage)

Eliza Martin/Mrs Eric Martin

Mrs Enid Miller

Mr & Mrs Percy

Nessie Rhodes/Mrs 'Dusty' Rhodes of KL

Winifred Sinclair

Dr J W Scarff, his wife, daughters Elizabeth and Jopin and 2 boys

Joan Winchester/Mrs V A Winshester (wife of a vet and whose brother in law was a doctor)

A Russian mother and daughter (latter had a hairdresser salon at Raffles Hotel)

A Secretary to the Governor of Singapore: described as about 35 and 16 stone.

A Naval Policeman

Possibly a Mr Potts, Melvin Thompson, Mrs Duke and Mrs Ray ('of the Municipality) and one child

## List of ships to escape Singapore

**Koh Fuka Maru** - ex-Japanese fishing vessel owned by Australian Bill Reynold. Sailed Telok Ayer 12/02/42 with about 50 women and children. After rescuing many more eventually reached Madras. **Re-named 'Krait'**. After more adventures now moored in Sydney Harbour.

**SS Redan** (531 tons) - Thai Navigation Co. Sunk in Berhala Strait.

89 passengers including 6 women and 3 children. Captain Rasmusson's account says 62 lives lost in attack by 2 Japanese destroyers including "two young ladies, said to be from Messrs Mansfield Co's Singapore Office . . . while typing out the passengers' list in the Chief Engineers Cabin" .About 30 people including 4 women and 2 children got away by boat and were captured by the Japanese.

**Sing Wo (2500 tons) - Yangtze River Boat.** Left 12.02.42. Bombed and ran aground at Muntok where passengers imprisoned. 230 passengers including Rohan Rivet, author of 'Behind Bamboo.'

**Fanling - Motor launch.** Left 13.02.42. Sunk in Bangka Straits 47 passengers, 4 survivors

**HMS Chang Teh (or Tay)** - left 13.02.42. Sunk in Durian Strait.

**SS Kuala** - left 13.02.42 at about the same time as Mata Hari and Vyner Brooke. Bomb damaged while waiting to leave Singapore, 2 killed and buried at sea, many casualties. Sunk by bombing while at anchor off Pompong island. 14.02.42. Many searing survivor stories 500/600 people on board including most of Public Works Department, RAF Radio Location Unit with gear, various troops and women and children of many nationalities, large group of nurses and 5, IWM-S says 7 women doctors, ordered to leave.

Please see separate entry on this website 'SS Kuala - Researched Passenger List' for Michael Pether's almost complete list of 'Kuala' passengers, which he has prepared as a memorial to them.

**Tandjong Pinang**, sometimes called Tanjong Pinang

.Please see separate entry on this website, 'SS Tanjong Pinang - Researched Passenger List' for Michael Pether's almost complete list of passengers, which he has prepared as a memorial to them.

**Ying Ping** left 13.02.42 [RE]

**SS Sing Kheng Seng** Straits Shipping Co. **45 crew from the Empress of Asia** and unknown others [MP]

**Mata Hari** - left 12.02.42 [GB] 13.02.42 [MP] Captured by Japanese in Banka Straits and passengers taken to Muntok for internment 300 passengers+ 120 more including Mrs Russell-Roberts, died in internment Mrs Jennings died in internment large group of nurses including Nurse Phyllis Briggs, living in UK , Christine Briggs, Mamie Colley, Margaret Dryburgh [W&S]

**Vyner Brooke** - left 12.02.42. Built to take 12 passengers, left with 250, Dive bombed and sunk. Many Australian nurses on board.[W&S] Mrs Mary Brown (wife of EA Brown, choirmaster St Andrews) and daughter Shelagh (married Arthur Lea 1946). Their experience of wreck and internment contributed to **TV series 'Tenko' and film 'Paradise Road'**. [MVG 5]

Beth Cuthbertson [GB]

Matron Drummond [GB]

Sister Ennis [GB]

Sister Iola Harper [GB]

Mavis Hannah

Sister Betty Jeffrey

Matron Paschke [GB] (drowned)

Elizabeth Simmons [W&S]

Sister Jessie Simons [GB]

Mrs Brown and Shelagh [GB]

Dorothy MacCleod [GB]

Nora Chambers with sister Ena Murray and sick husband John

Maudie James [W&S]

Olga Neubrunner, heavily pregnant but miscarried baby on the pier at Muntok [W&S]

Mrs Parfait [GB]

Olga Springer [GB]

Mischa Warman 4 year old White Russian from Shanghai. Parents killed. [W&S]

Group of survivors on Muntok discovered by Jap patrol 16.02.42, men bayoneted, women marched into the sea and shot. One survivor, Vivian Bullwinkle. [MS, JK, MP]

## Last page of ships to escape Singapore 1942

**Hong Kwang** - left 13.02.42. Abandoned Java 09.03.42 [MP]

**Name Unknown small coaster** left 13.02.42 12 men and a woman named Mary Jenkins. [MP]

**Rantau** (Straits Steamship Co) (75 tons)

**Relau** (75 tons) Palm oil tanker of Straits Shipping Co. Captured by Japanese-66 passengers survivors en route including 13 from Scorpion [MP]

**with Rantau and Relau** were **Chiang Tay, Tien Kwang, Kwang Wu, Mata Hari, Hung Jao** (Yangtze customs boat) and Fairmile, fast naval patrol launch **W Spooner and Pulford**.

**Huang Jao** - former Yangtze River customs boat, picked up Giang Bee survivors and single survivor of Giang Tay. Subject of war crimes tribunal, sunk by gunfire, women and children on board.

**Kwang Wu** - left 13.02.42. Sunk off Pompong island.

**Blumut** - Small craft of Johore Marine Dept. 29 passengers. [MP] Captured by Japanese off Banka

**HMS Grasshopper** - left 13.02.42 with Kuala but ordered back to take more passengers. Left 12.30 14.02.42. Bombed w Fairmile and Dragonfly. Ran ashore on Sempang island, women and wounded taken ashore but no water so taken to Sungei Buaya island, heroic work by nursing sister H V Fisher and naval ratings. Two babies delivered on Posik Island, mothers' names not known. [GB] Grasshopper blew up.

On board Grasshopper Mr & Mrs Lampen-Smith (NZers) whose son had left on Charon arrived Padang too late to evacuate. Interned Bankinang with Brenda Macduff, Br nurse.

**HMSs Barlane, Barrier, Barricade and Fastnet** were boom defence vessels built in Bristol in 1937, specifically for Singapore harbour defences. under Commander G L Baily [RM]

**Evacuated by flying boat Ceres G-AETX 4/1/42**

Elizabeth Alexander with Billy 5, Mary 3 and Bernice 4 months [MH]

Robert Arbuthnott with mother and brother [MVG &MH]

**USN President Polk** on her maiden voyage Bombay to USA under Captain Dutton and Commander Jeffs took the following to the US [DP] Carol Purdie with Robin 2 and Diana 3 weeks. Muriel Collings and daughter Ann. A little boy called Larry. A bell boy called Tom.

*Poignant stuff isn't it 'A Bell Boy called Tom' says it all. Every one tried their best for their fellows. I particularly noted that Veronica Vaughan through all the travails of escaping Singapore and the long journey back to Blighty only complained of one thing –  
The journey from Liverpool to London on the train!  
The women caught up in all this were really very brave and so matter of fact in the wonderful the way they carried on with life the best they could.*



*Thank you if you stayed with me all the way through this story that is truly a remarkable monument to merchant ships of all nationalities, they just got on with it and did the job.*

*Interesting to to learn about the 'Krait's' role in the escape from Singapore*

*TH*

*The story of escaping from Singapore and the list of ships came from the website*

*[ttp://www.cofepow.org.uk/](http://www.cofepow.org.uk/)*

*Which is a UK based charity—They also have a section of the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire*

*The photo right is also from the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas it is of the start of the Merchant Navy Memorial 2500 oak tres to represent the ships sunk in WW2*

*Go there if you can its worth it.*

## H. M. S. RULER

*This "Woolworths" escort carrier in sharp contrast to that of the Duchess of Bedford had a very short, very busy life with never a dull moment.*

RULER Class Escort Aircraft Carrier obtained under US/UK Lend/Lease Agreement. A mercantile under construction by Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation at Seattle and requisitioned by the U S Navy for completion as an auxiliary aircraft carrier (CVE) to be named USS ST. JOSEPH. She was laid down on 25th March 1943 and launched on 21st August that year. Build was completed by Willamette Iron and Steel at Portland on 20th December 1943 and she was transferred to the Royal Navy as HMS RULER. This ship was fitted with US Navy radar outfits during build and the first RN ship to carry this name.

Date 21 January 1945



Bow view of HMS RULER docked with her flight deck packed with snow-covered Grumman Hellcat fighters

Commissioned: 22 December 1943

Decommissioned: 29 January 1946

Struck: 20 March 1946

Fate: Scrapped 1946

General characteristics

Class and type: Bogue class escort carrier

Displacement: 15,390 tons

Length: 492 feet Beam: 108 feet 6 inches

Draught: 26 feet

Propulsion: Steam turbines, 1 shaft, Speed:

18 knots (33 km/h)

Complement: 646 officers and men

Armament: 2 × 5 in (127 mm) guns

8 x twin 40 mm Bofors

35 x single 20 mm Oerlikon

Aircraft carried: 30

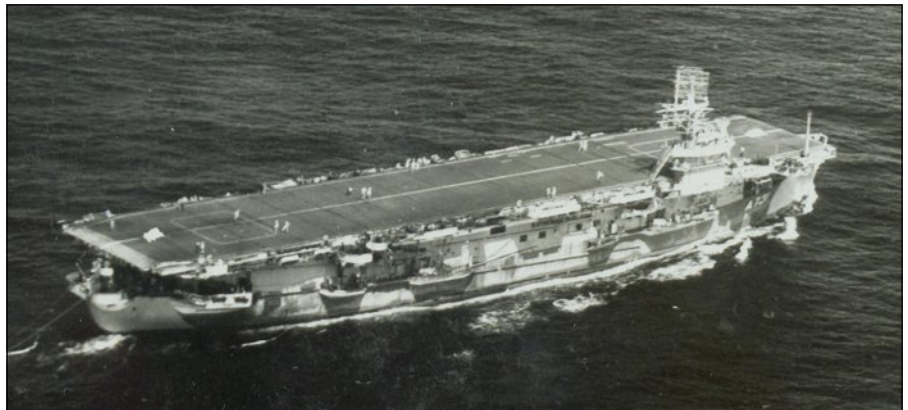
Following her maiden voyage when she carried the children mentioned in the story she continued escorting Atlantic convoys and carrying more children. In early 1945 she was transferred to the British Pacific Fleet and sailed for Sydney. Under control of the American admirals she joined the fleet in campaign against the Japanese and supported the attack on Okinawa.

August 1945 saw her off the Japanese coast covering replenishing the BPF.

This schedule shows her last days on operations.

August 6th Deployed with HMS ARBITER and HMS CHASER during replenishment of the ships of the BPF off Japan.

(Note : Screen was provided by HMS NORMAN, HMS NIZAM, HMS PHEASANT, HMS CRANE, HM Frigate BARLE, HM Australian Minesweepers BALLARAT and BURNIE.)



13th Deployed off Japan during last replenishment of BPF ships during attacks on the Japanese mainland screened by HMS PHEASANT, HMS CRANE, HM Frigates FINDHORN, USK BARLE, HM Australian Minesweepers BALLARAT, BURNIE, GERALDTON and IPSWICH.

On completion withdrew from operational area and took passage to Manus.

(Note : British Pacific Fleet ships, except for token force was **withdrawn from the Joint US/RN operations against targets on Japanese mainland because of a lack of fuel from British sources**)

15th Aug. Reverted to RN control and nominated for transport of allied prisoners of war and nationals interned after December 1941.

Passage to Japan to collect passengers. 31st Arrived in Tokyo Bay  
September 2nd Present during formal surrender of Japanese  
13th Sailed from Tokyo Bay to Manila with 445 passengers.

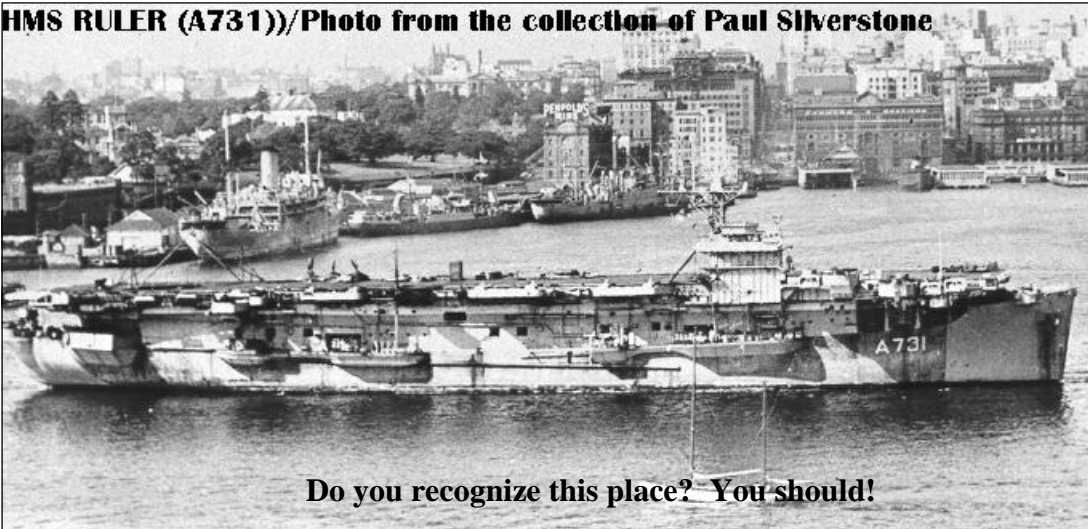
## Post War Notes

HMS RULER continued deployment for transport of RAPWI and support Royal Navy ships and shore bases in the Far East until 22nd October 1945 when she returned to UK to Pay-off.. The ship arrived in the Clyde on 3rd December 1945 and commenced de-storing with removal of British equipment. On 4th January 1946 the ship sailed fro Southampton took passage to Norfolk a few days later. She was Paid-off returned to US Navy custody on 28th January 1946 and formally returned to US Navy the next day. Later that year she was sold for demolition by a US ship breaker.



Left -Grumman 'Hellcat fighters flying over HMS Ruler

**HMS RULER (A731)/Photo from the collection of Paul Silverstone**



**Do you recognize this place? You should!**



The 445 POWs she ferried from Tokyo to Manila included civilian internees –so once again HMS Ruler brought children home.

The photo here shows some of them with toys made for them by the ships crew

A poem for the children on 'Ruler'  
written by L.S.A. Nicoll

Come children dear, lash up and stow  
Your tiny sleepy heads!  
Here comes the bogey R.P.O.  
To pull you from your beds.

Is Jo-Jo on the big see-saw?  
But where are John and Sally?  
Margaret's on her prancing horse  
With David - in the galley.

It's 'rise and shine', the morning's fine  
My little Eddie Wee  
Come Valerie and Jacqueline  
Let's see the sparkling sea.

Amah's in the forward heads  
Washing out your clothes  
And Dad is in the Radar Mess  
- snoring through his nose.

It's morning on the 'Ruler' kids  
We're such a happy band  
With Santa Clause upon the bridge  
And bound for fairy-land.