

## **Appendix 17: Personal experience of Miss Molly Watts-Carter (Singapore Civilian)**

Left Singapore Friday 13th of February, 1942 aboard the small coasting steamer "The Kuala" (800 tons). The party consisted of 300, mostly nurses from the General Hospital, remainder civilian women. Bombs fell close to the ship when it was leaving, killing several nurses and wounding many others. Managed to creep through the minefields under cover of darkness.

February 14th, 1942

Morning found us off Pon-Pon Islands, about 80 miles south of Singapore. Another ship of about 4xx tons accompanied us out, passengers mainly P. V. D. men. Both ships dropped anchor and were camouflaged. At mid-day a formation of nine Japanese bombers and another of eight flew over us. We all took cover in the hold of the ship. They had spotted us. Bombs were dropped scoring two direct hits forward, setting the ship on fire. Quite 60 women were killed by bomb splinters and glass, the rest of us jumped overboard and swam a short distance to shore. With a small group of seven men I was making a steep climb from the beach when the Japanese returned and tried to hit our sister ship. One bomb fell very close to us, killing all my companions and miraculously missing me. I was, however, numbed by the blast for about 15 minutes and could not move. We lived on the island for three days on rations rescued from the other ship before it sank. On taking account of our numbers we found that half of our boat's compliment had been killed by bombs while on board or in the water.

A Dutch launch passed close enough to see us, and signalled another small ship "The Tanjong Penang" to take off approximately 150 women and children. This ship arrived on the fourth evening. I was fortunate enough to become one of the number taken off. We had to leave a good 200 still on the island.

We steamed off through the night and next day without incident. However, the following night, the 18th, a searchlight was opened on us. We all took cover. I went to the opposite side of the ship from the light. Most of the nurses rushed to their cabins, one of which received the first shell, killing about twenty.

As a lifeboat was being lowered I managed to scramble into it, only to be thrown into the water a second later when another shell exploded near enough to shatter the lifeboat. The ship sank in five minutes. I soon found a small two-man raft, and later came across 10 other survivors with four small rafts. We tied the rafts together and hung on as best we could during the night. Next morning we decided to set course north west as we knew there were a number of small islands in that direction. We had a few paddles between us (the other survivors in the party consisted of five English women, one English man, three Malay boys and one Chinese girl). About midday rain fell and we were able to drink a little fresh water.

During the afternoon we sighted and hailed a submarine which ignored us and quickly submerged. During the night we kept our course roughly by the Southern Cross.

The next day a heavy thunderstorm provided us with more water for drinking. In the afternoon we were terrified to find ourselves in the middle of a minefield, so that night we changed course and

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hoped for the best. The following morning we found our little band very distressed. During the afternoon the Englishman and woman went mad and slipped off the raft and disappeared. Towards evening we sighted land, but we now only had our hands to propel us, as the paddles had been lost. I swam most of the time in an endeavour to steer. On the fourth day one of the half-crazed Malays seized the Chinese girl, strangled her and threw her into the sea. Another Malay disappeared, and an English nurse died from exposure and slipped off the raft. During the night I managed to catch a crab and shared it with the remainder of our party with some seaweed and baby jellyfish.

Next morning our party had dwindled to five, land was much nearer and we paddled almost to it. Then a cross-current caught us and swept us out to sea again. In the late afternoon another girl and myself unhooked our raft, and decided between us to try and push it to shore. Being a strong swimmer I soon had the raft moving again but my companion was too weak to assist. Only about 100 yards from the shore another strong current caught us and swept us out to sea again. so we clambered wearily onto the raft and ,exhausted, fell asleep. During the night I found myself in the sea, swimming aimlessly about, and when daylight came a Japanese cruiser appeared. I was sighted, a boat was lowered, they placed me on a stretcher and took me aboard. The Japanese treated me very well, and soon revived the flickering light in me with food and brandy.

The above was copied by Sgt. Crabb on 7.4.42 and forwarded to Changi P.O.W. Camp by prisoners returned from Palembang Island.