

53, Peverel St.
 Riccarton,
 Christchurch,
 N.Z.

4.3.62

Dear Mr. Skinner,

Your letter brought back many memories especially of H.M.S. Grasshopper & the island of ~~SANKEP~~ ^(?). Thank you very much for writing. With regard to your request re news of your friend Jack Mortlock, I'm afraid I cannot help you much myself. I have been wracking my brains during the past few days but can't remember anyone of that name.

I was a member of the ship's company of Grasshopper & can remember that we sailed from Singapore on the night of the 13.2.42 in company with H.M.S. Dragonfly (not Firefly). We embarked a few women & children & male civilians some Royal Mariner & Jap prisoners. The Dragonfly embarked a large number of troops & odds & sods. Japanese bombers attacked in strength the next day at about 11 a.m. scoring a direct hit on the Dragonfly in their second run. The Dragonfly went down in about 3 minutes with a heavy loss of life. Those who survived the sinking were badly worked over when the bombers attacked & machine gunned from the air. The Grasshopper was badly hit by bombs & set afire & finally beached on some island. My recollection of events from there is somewhat hazy as I was wounded in the action & was a stretcher case. My next recollection was being in a Dutch native hospital on the island of ~~SANKEP~~ with about 18 others including about 6 medical orderlies of various outfits.

We finally made tracks to ~~RANGET~~ in Sumatra in late March 1942 only to be captured 2 days later 23.3.42.

H.M.S. Scorpion did not sail from Singapore with us. Apparently she left a day or so before us & was sunk nearer to Singapore than we were. I have no information on any survivors from Scorpion.

To my knowledge no cables were sent en bloc from the ships. I may however be wrong on this point.

If Mortlock had got to Padang (Sumatra) as many of the survivors of ships sunk off the coast of Sumatra did, it is possible he may have gained a passage on the ill-fated "Rooseboom" the Dutch vessel which left Padang for India on the 26.2.42 & was sunk in the Indian Ocean. Walter Gibson was the only European survivor from that ship. He is at present living in U.K. He was also in the same camp at ~~MEDAN~~ with me. I cannot recall the name Mortlock in any of the camps, but the following people whom I knew well may be able to throw some light on the mystery. Dr. Pat Kirkwood formerly I.M.S. Jack Capper, Joe Harper, Indian Army medical orderlies. I don't know their addresses or even if they are still alive, but they survived the camps. Perhaps the F.E.P.O.W. club may trace them for you.

I shall certainly put an S.O.S. in our P.O.W. W.O.W. for you as one never knows something may turn up. Have you asked the Australian Ex-P.O.W. Assoc. for help in the matter? If not let me know & I'll see what I can do further. Will keep you posted on events.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) LAURIE HURNDALL.