

Reginald Valentine WILLIAMS

Lieutenant, Gunnery Officer and Instructor, Malayan RNVR
CH 24540 Royal Marine

European Warder, Prisons Department, Straits Settlement - Singapore and Penang
Director, Bulu Telang and Tamaram Rubber Estates, Shanghai-Sumatra Rubber Estates Co.



SIGNATURE *R. V. Williams*

Lot

Details:

(Four): 1939-45 Star; Pacific Star; Defence Medal; 1939-45 War Medal; all unnamed as issued, in box of issue, complete with original wax paper envelopes and tissue, and original transmittal slip from Colonial Government of Singapore; along with two ribbon bars, the latter having devices indicating qualification for Burma Star (erroneously applied). Lot comes with a copious amount of documentation and research, detailing Williams' life, including his attempted escape from Singapore aboard the ill-fated HMS Siang Wo, subsequent capture and period as FEPOW.

Personal Details:

Date of Birth: 24 March 1906

Place of Birth: New Ferry, Wirral, Merseyside, Cheshire, England

Father: Thomas Williams (b. 1844, in Higher Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside, Cheshire)

Mother: Sarah Williams (nee: Evans; b. 1881, Harwarden, Cheshire)

Spouse: Elsie Corfield

Date of Marriage: 22 Dec 1927, Wirral, Cheshire

Date of Death: 22 January 1976

Place of Death: Perth, Western Australia



Sub Lieutenant R.V. Williams,
Malayan RNVR c.1941

Detailed Biography

Date	Event	Remarks
1906 Mar 26	<p>- Reginal Valentine WILLAMS born, New Ferry, Wirral, Merseyside, Cheshire, England.</p> <p>- Williams' father was 37 years his mother's senior; <u>siblings</u>: - Almon (step-brother) 1885; - Milfred Thomas (step-brother); 1887 - Minnie, (step-sister); 1889; - Sarah, (step-sister); 1891; - Ellen Amelia (sister) 1898; - Lucy Winifred (sister) 1903; - John (brother) 1908.</p>	<p>- son of Thomas Williams (b. 1844 in Higher Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside) and Sarah (b. 1881 in Chester). - father's occupation: carter.</p>
1904 May 9	<p>- Williams baptised at St Martin's Anglican Church in the Diocese of Chester.</p>	<p>- family's residence given as 4 Kempton Road, New Ferry, Wirral, Merseyside (Liverpool), Chester</p>
1911 Apr 2	<p>- Williams recorded in England Census as residing at 23 Georges Place, New Ferry, Cheshire.</p>	<p>- by this date, his father had died, and the bread-winner was his step-brother Almon, indicated as a "carter for contractor".</p>
1925 May 5	<p>- Williams enlisted in Royal Marines.</p>	
1927 Dec 22	<p>- Williams married Elsie Corfield (age 21) of 5 Alma Street, New Ferry; by civil ceremony in Wirral, Chester.</p>	<p>- father of bride indicated as Edwin Corfield, boiler fireman; - father of groom indicated as Almon (sic) Williams, general labourer of 23 Georges Place, New Ferry.</p>
1934 Apr 10	<p>- Williams discharged from Royal Marines, by purchase; - character rated as "Very Good".</p>	
1934 Apr 27	<p>- Straits Settlements Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (SSRNVR) established in Singapore;</p>	
1935 Jan 15	<p>- British Admiralty presented Singapore with HMS <i>Laburnum</i>, (Acacia class Fleet Sweeping Sloop), to serve as the SSRNVR's Headquarters and drill ship; - <i>Laburnum</i> was berthed at the Telok Ayer Basin; she was commissioned as the SSRNVR HQ on 18 Feb 1935; - she was scuttled in February 1942, prior to the fall of Singapore.</p>	
1935 and 1940	<p>- Williams indicated in Straits Settlement Directory as European Warder, Prisons Department (Singapore; then Johore)</p>	<p>- Changi Prison, Singapore; - Johore State Prison, Johore Bahru.</p>

1936	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Royal Navy (Malay Section) established. - the RN (Malay Section) had a strength of 400 men who received their training at HMS <i>Pelandok</i> from 1940-1942, the Royal Navy training establishment in Malaya; (note: this training centre was destroyed during a Japanese air raid). - recruitment was increased and in 1941 at the outbreak of the war in Asia, the Royal Navy (Malay Section) had a strength of 1450 men. - Under the command of first commanding officer, Commander Horace Vickers, the recruits were trained as telegraphists, seamen and visual signalmen before serving on board RN ships, (mostly merchantmen hastily converted and armed for combat); these ships were part of 80 warships the RN had for the defense of Malaya, with the battleship HMS Prince of Wales and battle cruiser HMS Repulse leading the fleet. 	
1937	- Changi Prison (built in 1936), formally opened in eastern Singapore Island.	
1937 Jan 12	- Williams reported at funeral of a European Warder from Changi Prison, Singapore.	
1938	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Penang Branch of SSRNVR established; - initially known as SSRNVR Penang, it was later designated as the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (MRNVR) and received HMS <i>Panji</i>, transferred from Singapore, for training purposes; - by 1940 the MRNVR acquired two additional patrol boats: HMS <i>Trang</i> and HMS <i>Jerong</i> and five minesweepers. 	
1938 July 29	- Williams sails for Singapore, from London, aboard P&O <i>Carthage</i> .	- passage paid for by Crown Agents.
1938 Aug 20	- Williams' only son, Michael Thomas Williams, born, Wirral, Cheshire, England.	- died 23 Nov 2007 in Northern Territory, Australia.
1938 Oct 7	- Williams' wife (Elsie), daughter (Ruth Beryl) and son (Michael Thomas) depart London for Singapore aboard P&O <i>Canton</i> .	- passages paid for by Crown Agents.
1939 Jan 29	- Williams' three year old daughter, Ruth Beryl, died, in Johore Bahru, as a result of a scalding water accident.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - see <i>Singapore Free Press</i>, 24 Jan 1939, p. 3; - Johore Bahru is immediately opposite the northern side of Singapore Island, the most southern tip of Malayan mainland.
1939 (post-Sept)	- SSRNVR increased the recruitment of mainly indigenous personnel, to beef up local defences.	
1940 Dec 16	- Williams mobilised as member of Straits Settlement RNVR.	- but in what capacity: seaman gunner; Midshipman; Sub-Lieutenant?
1941 Mar 16	- Williams commissioned as Sub Lieutenant, HMS <i>Pelandok</i> , Malayan RNVR	- see <i>Navy List</i> Oct 1941.
1941 Dec 8	- Japanese invaded Malaya and the Straits Settlements by landing on Kelantan.	
1941 Dec 16	- Penang fell to the Japanese.	
1941 Dec 16	- Williams promoted to Lieutenant, SSRNVR.	
1942 Jan 15	- Malacca fell to Japanese.	

1941/42	Williams' (second) daughter, Gwendoline B. Williams, born.	
1942 Jan 16	Williams' wife, (Elsie), son, (Michael), and Daughter, (Gwendoline) evacuated from Singapore, aboard S.S. <i>Aorangi</i> , for Sydney, NSW.	- they take-up residence, for the duration, with Mr and Mrs R.B. Dunlop, 35 East Esplanade, Manly, (Sydney), NSW.
	- the <i>Aorangi</i> sailed in company with the <i>Narkunda</i> with service personnel and evacuees; itinerary as follows: - <u>23 Jan</u> : Fremantle; - <u>29 Jan</u> : Adelaide; - <u>31 Jan</u> : Melbourne; - <u>3 Feb</u> : Sydney; (where the family disembarked).	
1942 Feb 12	- Williams evacuated from Singapore aboard HMS <i>Siang Wo</i> ;	
	- <i>Siang Wo</i> was a 2500 ton river boat built in 1926 for trade on the Yangtze River for the Indo China Steam Navigation Company; she was requisition as an Auxiliary Patrol Vessel by the Admiralty for the Malayan RNVR, in Singapore, in April 1941; - on 12 Feb 1942, HMS <i>Siang Wo</i> sailed from Singapore with 200 onboard: 8 naval officers; 81 sailors, (ie., the crew); plus, as passengers: 116 RN personnel; 3 Army personnel; 22 civilians.	
1942 Feb 13	- HMS <i>Siang Wo</i> successfully traversed the minefields off of Singapore, continuing south towards Java; - throughout the morning of 13 Feb, <i>Siang Wo</i> came under repeated bombings from Japanese aircraft, until, at c. 2:00PM, the ship was hit, knocking out her steering gear; afterwards the Captain (steering mechanically) chose to beach her near Muntok Lighthouse; - Williams wounded by shrapnel in the leg while in <i>Siang Wo</i> ; - passengers and crew of <i>Siang Wo</i> made there way into Muntok city, where the Dutch Resident (the only other European on the island) indicated he had been given orders to surrender the town and inhabitants to the Japanese; the Japanese arrived 18 hours later.	
1942 Feb 15	- Singapore fell to Japanese.	
1942 Feb 15 - 18	- Williams taken prisoner of war by Japanese at Bangka Island sometime during this period; - given POW number 1129.	- see POW Index Card and post-war POW Questionnaire; - the exact date of Williams formally becoming a POW varies across the records.
	- as the Japanese occupied Bangka Island, the interned Allied POWs in the cit of Muntok's cinema, hotel, soft drink factory, prison, and police barracks; - in his post-war POW questionnaire, Williams indicates he was interned at "Dutch Hotel", (which is probably not its formal name, but simply how he thought of it, in retrospect, in 1945).	
1942 Feb 16	- "Banka Island Massacre" occurred; Japanese soldiers machine gunned 22 Australian military nurses, whose ship was sunk while trying to escape from Singapore; there was one survivor.	
1942 Apr 20	- Williams moved to POW Camp in Palembang.	- see Williams' post-war POW Questionnaire.

	<p><u>From:</u> <i>East Indies Camp Archives</i> (http://www.indischekamparchieven.nl):</p> <p>The prisoners of war who were collected in Palembang in March 1942 were primarily British and Australian.... A number of buildings in Palembang were used to hold the prisoners of war, but in relative short order the Allied POWs were concentrated in two camps: the so-called Chinese school (or A-Camp) and the Mulo School (or secondary school, or B-Camp). Both school buildings were encircled by a fence and barbed wire. The prisoners were put to work in various locations, for example at the Talangbetoetoe airfield, in the harbour, and in the city constructing air-raid shelters.</p> <p>In March 1944, the prisoners of war from the Mulo School began work on a new replacement central camp on the eastern side of Palembang, at the beginning of the road to Soengeigeroeng.</p> <p>In June 1944, the Chinese School was cleared and the prisoners of war taken to the new Soengeigeroeng camp in the eastern part of Palembang.</p> <p>Commandant: Major Matsudera Guards: Japanese military personnel; Koreans Camp leaders: Lt.-Colonel Meyer; Wing Commander Modin</p>	
1942 Dec c.12	- Williams given POW postcard to send to wife.	- based upon the diary entry of a fellow Palembang POW.
1943 Dec 17	<p>- War Office held a press conference regarding "the present position" of Far East POWs; approximately 300,00 POWs and interned civilians held by the Japanese; "...in Sumatra, Malaya, Siam and Burma, so far, the Japanese have refused to let anyone know where the camps are... neither the ICRC nor the Protecting Power (Swiss government) know what is going on or where the prisoners are"; there has not been more than one communication per prisoner received by relatives; the route for mail (from POWs) is via Japan (where they are censored) and then via Russia. See: <i>The Times</i>, 18 Dec 1943, p. 6.</p>	
1944 Mar - Jun	<p>- between March and June 1944 the Chinese and Mulo School (see above) were cleared and the prisoners of war taken to the new Soengeigeroeng Camp in the eastern part of Palembang.</p>	
1944 May	<p>- In May 1944 a wave of dysentery spread through Soengei Geru Camp, killing many of the gravely under-nourished POWs; (the Camp Commander, Nakai, ignored pleas by a British naval surgeon to build isolation wards to help check the spread).</p> <p>- the prisoners particularly despised Ito, the ration sergeant, who stole the prisoners' Red Cross parcels and clothing to sell at brothels in Palembang. Ito frequently stated that the deaths of all the prisoners would mean that the camp guards could go home.</p> <p>- Prisoners were punished at Soengeigeroeng by being confined in a 6' by 4' (2m by 1.5m) barbed wire cage built on top of a red ant's nest; a Dutch soldier, who had suffered mental collapse, was confined without food and water in this cage until he perished.</p>	
1944 Aug 10	<p>- flying from their bases in India, B-29 Super-Fortress of 20th Bomber Commander (USAAC) bombed Pladjoe Refinery at Palembang, Sumatra.</p>	
1945 Jan 24	<p>- Royal Navy carrier-borne Avenger aircraft attack oil refinery at Palembang, Sumatra.</p>	
1945 Aug 15	<p>- Japanese Emperor announced Japan accepted Allies' terms of Japan's surrender, (ie., the Potsdam Declaration).</p>	

	<p><u>Aug 28</u>: Royal Navy sailed into Penang; accepted Japanese surrender;</p> <p><u>Sep 2</u>: Japanese government representatives signed the surrender document, aboard USS Missouri, in Tokyo Bay;</p> <p><u>Sep 4</u>: Royal Navy sailed into Singapore; accepted Japanese surrender;</p> <p><u>12 Sep</u>: in Singapore, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia Command, received formal surrender of Japanese forces in South East Asia; (a British Military Administration was formed to govern the liberated areas until March 1946).</p>	
1945 Aug 23	- RAAF drop first tranche of supplies into Palembang Camps.	
1945 Sep 11	- War Office, Admiralty, RAF announced that FEPOWs will be released from service as soon as they are fit, if they desire; this is not the situation with ex- POWs from other theatres, who are retained and serve on equal footing with others after release.	
1945 Sep 14	<p>- War Office press release on “Conditions in Far East Camps”: “Sumatra: Fifteen camps containing prisoners of war have been located in Sumatra. Of these, five contain POWs from the UK, of whom there are some 1800. Medical supplies, food, and clothing have been flown into all camps, and medical teams have reached some. The camps containing British POWs are located at: Medan; Rantauparapat, c. 150 miles south-east of Medan); Pakanbahru, (in central Sumatra) Palembang; and Lobo Linggam, c. 150 miles west of Palembang). See: <i>The Times</i>, 14 Sep 1945, p. 4.</p>	
1945 Sep 15	- the first former POWs from Palembang Camp are evacuated by air to Singapore. (Need to confirm this ???)	
1945 Sep 16	<p>- SEAC HQ completed operational planning for re-occupation of Sumatra; there were to be three centres of effort: Padang, Medan and Palembang;</p> <p>- <u>Padang</u> to be the priority (base for Japanese Army HQ), with a brigade scheduled to undertake “initial occupation” to arrive on 10 Oct 1945;</p> <p>- <u>Medan</u> to be re-occupied by another brigade on 6 November;</p> <p>- the timing of <u>Palembang</u>’s re-occupation was to “await detailed information regarding minesweeping requirements, the availability of aircraft from Burma, and the availability if necessary Army forces”; (the SEAC appreciate indicated the problem with Pedang’s re-occupation was that, unlike Pedang and Medan, which were on or near the coast, Pelambang was situated 60 miles inland).</p>	
1945 Oct 4	- 26 th Indian Division, (the formation entrusted with the re-occupation of Sumatra – about 15,000 men), set-off from Madras, in convoy for Padang.	
1945 Oct 13	- Williams is asked, by the POW RO, (Australia) to assist with the War Crimes Commission.	- this letter sent to his wife’s address in Manly (Sydney), NSW – presumably for his attention once he arrived home.
1945 Oct 25	- 1 st Burma Regiment arrived, by air, in Palembang.	
1945 Nov 2	- Williams “handed over to British Army”; perhaps a better translation would be: “released from the camp”.	- the date is certain, but the phrase “handed over to British Army” is a translation from the Japanese on the reverse of his POW index card.
1945 Nov	<p>- Williams repatriated to Manly, Sydney, Australia;</p> <p>- on release he collected £2160 in back pay and allowances;</p> <p>- lost 25% of body weigh (ie., 40 lbs) in captivity: weight dropped from 172 lbs to 132 lbs.</p>	<p>- address given as: 35 East Esplanade, Manly, Sydney, NSW;</p> <p>- this is the residence of Mrs R.B. Dunlop, the person with whom Williams’ wife, Elsie, moved in after her evacuation from Singapore.</p>

1945 Dec 17	- Williams wife , (Elsie), son, (Michael), and daughter (Gwendoline) arrived in Southampton, from Sydney, aboard the Union Castle Liner, <i>Stirling Castle</i> .	- residence in UK given as Colonial Office; place of future residence given as "other part of British Empire" (likely Singapore).
Late 1945/1946	- Williams returned to Malaya	- presumably re-claiming his pre-war position as a European Warder; (in the lot is a group photo of c.100 native and European warders, including Williams, notated: "Changi Staff, post-war".)
1946 Mar 30	- Williams (alone) departed Southampton, bound for Singapore, aboard the Nederland Liner <i>Oranje</i> .	<u>LAIUK</u> : 24 Oteley Avenue, Broomborough, Wirral, Merseyside, England; <u>Occupation</u> : Prison Officer.
1946 Apr 1	- Federated Malay States (FMS), Unfederated Malay States (UMS), Malacca, and Penang reformed into the Malayan Union; - Singapore annexes Labuan to become the separate Crown Colony of Singapore.	
1946 Jun 24	- war crimes trial of 24 officers and guards of Japanese POW camps in and-around Palembang Sumatra commences at Changai Prison, Singapore; - trials continue until 6 September 1946; - Williams most likely testified (original hand-written notes regarding several of the accused are with the lot).	
1946 Jul 29	- Williams' wife (Elsie; age 39), son (Michael; age 8), daughter (Gwendoline; age 5) departed Southampton for Singapore aboard N.V. Rotterdam Lloyd Liner <i>Sibajak</i> .	- <u>LAIUK</u> : 30 Wycliffe Street, Rock Ferry, Cheshire, England.
1947 Oct 6	- Williams correspondence with Volunteer Force Records Office gives his address as: Lt. R.V. Williams, MRNVR 46 Pearls Hill Terrace, Singapore	
1947 Oct 24	- Williams resigned from Malaya RNVR.	- see: Singapore Gazette, 25 April 1948, Notification No. 986; - address given as: C/O Commissioner of Prisons, Singapore.
1948 Jan 31	- the Malayan Union (est in 1946) re-formed as the Federation of Malaya; (the Malay States becoming British Protectorates, while Malacca and Penang remain Crown Colonies).	
1948 Jan 15	- Williams , with wife (Elsie) and daughter (Gwendoline) arrive in Fremantle, from Singapore, aboard S.S. Gorgon.	
1948 Apr 1	- Singapore government begins the issue of ribbons for war medals for qualifying recipients in the Singapore Volunteer Forces, Passive Defence Force, and Essential Services, (the latter 2 categories seemingly only qualifying for the Defence Medal); - 14,000 persons, in total, estimated to have qualified; - initial issue should have been completed by c. mid-June 1948; - see: <i>Singapore Free Press</i> , 5 May 1948, p. 5	

1948 May 20	- Commandant, Singapore Volunteer Corps, indicated that only 1010 claims for the 1939-45 Star and Pacific Star have been received; deadline for applications is 30 June 1948.	
1948 Oct 29	- Williams wife (Elsie) and daughter, (Gwendoline) book passage from Fremantle to Singapore – but cancel.	- refund of £35 issued; and additional £17 was paid for another ticket (to Sumatra to join husband?); - ticket was issued in Perth, W.A. on 22 Oct
1948 Nov	- Williams engaged as Assistant on the Tamaran Rubber Estate of the Shanghai-Sumatra Rubber Estates Company; “later, he became manager”.	- see letter of reference, 28 Dec 1955.
c.1950	- Williams engaged as Manager of the Boeloe (Bulu) Telang and Tamaram Rubber Estates of the Shanghai-Sumatra Rubber Estates Company.	
1951 Jan	- Singapore government commences the issuance of Campaign Stars, (1939-45; Pacific) and Defence Medal; and 1939-45 War Medal; - more than 20,000 recipients are forecasted; - see: <i>Straits Times</i> , 20 Dec 1950, p. 5.	
1951 Sep 8	<p>- Allied Powers conclude a Peace Treaty with Japan; - Article 16 of the Treaty states:</p> <p><i>As an expression of its desire to indemnify those members of the armed forces of the Allied Powers who suffered undue hardships while prisoners of war of Japan, Japan will transfer its assets and those of its nationals in countries which were neutral during the war, or which were at war with any of the Allied Powers, or, at its option, the equivalent of such assets, to the International Committee of the Red Cross which shall liquidate such assets and distribute the resultant fund ... for the benefit of former prisoners of war and their families on such basis as it may determine to be equitable.</i></p> <p>Accordingly, Japan paid £4,500,000 to the Red Cross. Article 16 has served as a bar against subsequent lawsuits filed by former Allied Prisoners of War against Japan. In 1998, a Tokyo court ruled against a suit brought by former Allied POW's, citing the San Francisco Treaty.</p>	
1952 Feb 27	- Williams reported as being sentenced to one year in prison for possession of arms and ammunition; - four hand grenades, a sten gun, a rifle and ammunition found in his house.	- described as Director of Bulu Telang Estate in Tandjung Pura District of Eastern Sumatra.
	- when Indonesia became independent, most arms licenses held by Europeans were withdrawn; protection of the planters became the duty of the army and the police; only in exceptional cases where planters given permission to keep arms they had under the Dutch regime; - in the previous 26 months (ie., since Indonesia became independent) c.100 European planters were killed by bandits.	
late-1952 / early-1953	- Williams departed Indonesia for Australia;	- settled, by Dec 1955 (latest) at: 172 Onslow Road, Shenton Park, Perth, Western Australia.

	<p>Letter of Reference from Shanghai-Sumatra Rubber Estates Company, (dated 28 Dec 1955) indicates: <i>... Mr Williams took over when the conditions in the country were critical and disrupted. We are glad to say that Mr Williams carried out his duties under very trying conditions with courage and resource...</i></p>	
1957 Mar 20	<p>- Williams advised by Colonial Office that, as a FEPOW, he is eligible to receive £28 from the liquidation of overseas Japanese assets, in accordance with Article 16 of the Peace Treaty.</p>	<p>- see: 8 Sep 1951, above; - £28 in 1957 equate to about £600 in 2011.</p>
1958 Feb 7	<p>- Williams and wife (Elsie) recorded in Electoral Roll for the Sub-Division of Subiaco, W.A.</p>	<p>- address: as in 1955 above; - occupation given: planter. - entry repeated in 1963 and 1968.</p>
	<p>- appears Williams eventually commenced working as a Storesman in the Repatriation General Hospital, (Hollywood), near his home in Perth; - this hospital was opened in 1941 by the Australian Government as No. 110 Military Hospital, (with 500 beds), to care for service men and women; in 1947 control of the hospital was passed to the Repatriation Commission to provide acute care for veterans and war widow/ers, and renamed the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH) Hollywood.</p>	
1976 Jan 22	<p>- Williams died, at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Shenton Park, Perth, Western Australia; - cause of death recorded as lung cancer and emphysema.</p>	<p>- obituaries offer sympathy to Gwen and Michael (surviving children?); - one from Stores Staff, Repatriation General Hospital, Hollywood, (Perth); to a "good friend and workmate"; death certificate indicates occupation as "storesman".</p>
1989 Aug 25	<p>- Williams' wife, Elsie, died, Braille Nursing Home, Victoria Park (perth), Western Australia.</p>	