

= HMS Grasshopper ( T85 ) =

HMS Grasshopper was a Dragonfly @-@ class river gunboat built for the Royal Navy in the late 1930s . After completion was sent to the China station where she was deployed on the Yangtse River to relieve the Insect @-@ class gunboat , HMS Gnat . She remained there until the declaration of war by the Empire of Japan in December 1941 . She was subsequently transferred to Singapore Naval Base and participated in the Malayan Campaign in early 1942 . Near the end of the Battle of Singapore , she evacuated the base on 11 February together with her sister ship HMS Dragonfly . Three days later she was attacked and sunk by Japanese aircraft off the island of Sebayar . Most of the ship 's survivors were later captured on Sumatra by Japanese troops .

= = Design and description = =

The design of the Dragonfly @-@ class ships was based on that of the earlier HMS Scorpion with that ship 's flagship accommodations replaced by a low @-@ angle director @-@ control tower . Grasshopper displaced 585 long tons ( 594 t ) at standard load and 685 long tons ( 696 t ) at deep load . The ship had an overall length of 196 feet 6 inches ( 59 @.@ 9 m ) , a beam of 33 feet ( 10 @.@ 1 m ) and a draught of 6 feet 3 inches ( 1 @.@ 9 m ) . She was powered by Parsons geared steam turbines , driving two shafts , which developed a total of 3 @,@ 800 shaft horsepower ( 2 @,@ 800 kW ) and gave a maximum speed of 17 knots ( 31 km / h ; 20 mph ) . Steam for the turbines was provided by two Admiralty 3 @-@ drum boilers . Grasshopper carried a maximum of 90 long tons ( 91 t ) of fuel oil .

The ship mounted two quick @-@ firing ( QF ) guns 4 @-@ inch Mk V guns in single mounts , one each fore and aft of the superstructure . These guns had a maximum elevation of + 30 degrees . She also carried a single QF 3 @.@ 7 @-@ inch howitzer . For anti @-@ aircraft defence , Grasshopper had eight single mounts for .303 @-@ inch ( 7 @.@ 7 mm ) anti @-@ aircraft machine guns . She had a crew of 74 officers and enlisted men .

= = Service = =

The ship was ordered on 9 August 1937 as one of the intended replacements for the existing river gunboats stationed on the Chinese rivers . Grasshopper was laid down on 29 December 1937 by John I. Thornycroft & Company at Woolston , Southampton , and launched on 19 January 1939 .

In April 1939 she sailed to the China Station under her own power and was expected to arrive on 24 May . Grasshopper was commissioned on 1 June 1939 in Hong Kong and completed on 13 June . She was deployed to the Yangtse River where she replaced the Insect @-@ class gunboat HMS Gnat later that month . Part of Gnat 's crew transferred to Grasshopper , including the ship 's mascot , a dog called Judy . Following Japan 's entry into the Second World War in December 1941 , she was transferred from China to Singapore . During January 1942 , Grasshopper supported retreating Allied troops during the Malayan Campaign . Starting on 27 January , Grasshopper and Dragonfly rescued almost 3 @,@ 000 soldiers from the British 53rd Infantry and 15th Indian Infantry Brigades from the swamps south of Batu Pahat after they had been cut off by the advancing Japanese forces .

After the Japanese captured the Malayan Peninsula , both ships moved to Singapore harbour . On 8 February , the Japanese launched an amphibious assault across the Strait of Johore and following heavy fighting , many ships began evacuating from the harbour . By 11 February Gnat and Grasshopper were the largest vessels left . The two ships left Singapore for Batavia at 21 : 00 on 13 February , having taken on other personnel to evacuate them . Amongst these was Commander Ian Forbes , formerly of the battleship Prince of Wales , which had been sunk by the Japanese just over two months earlier . By the following morning they could hear the attacks by Japanese aircraft on other vessels in the distance . As they were sailing south , they were attacked by Japanese bombers . During the initial pass , Grasshopper was hit by a single bomb . When the planes returned , Dragonfly was hit three times and sank quickly . Grasshopper was hit twice and was set

on fire . The order to abandon ship was given as the fire spread to compartments adjacent to an ammunition store .

The crew were ferried across to the nearby island of Sebayar by the ship 's boats while the Japanese aircraft strafed them , where they joined some survivors from the Dragonfly . However the ship did not sink initially and after the planes departed , several crewmen were sent back on board to scavenge supplies . Among the survivors were six captured Japanese airmen and two pregnant women who had their babies delivered by the ship 's coxswain . Both boys were named after him by their mothers . Whilst on board , Petty Officer George White found Judy , who would later find a source of fresh water for the crew on the island . On 19 February , the remaining crew managed to commandeer a Chinese tongkang and using that and the ship 's boat , they reached Singkep in the Dutch East Indies . After two days , the crew departed for Sumatra on a Chinese junk , leaving their injured in the care of the Dutch Empire . They eventually reached Sumatra and sailed through the Strait of Malacca and up the Indragiri River . The river narrowed too much for the junk to go any further , leaving the crew 200 miles ( 320 km ) from Padang . They trekked through the jungle but entered a Japanese @-@ held area and were captured 4 miles ( 6 @.@ 4 km ) outside their destination .

Two of the crew elected not to travel with the others to Sumatra . They were Petty Officer George White and Able Seaman " Tancy " Lee , who were joined by one of the evacuees from the Royal Naval Reserve and two British Army soldiers who were already on Singkep . To prevent trouble with the incoming Japanese forces , they were transferred to the smaller Selayar Island . They were subsequently offered a boat by the island 's administrator , and a map of the Indian ocean torn from a child 's atlas . They decided that they would aim to sail to Madras , India , as there were concerns that the Japanese were working their way through the islands . Their departure timetable was brought forward after the island was visited by a boat containing a Japanese officer and five soldiers . They were told by the Japanese to remain on the island and await collection . That evening they prepared the boat and put supplies on board . They departed on 11 April , only travelling by night until they were clear of the islands . During the day , they landed on nearby islands and hid . After four days , the engine broke and could not be turned off . As they travelled through the islands , they passed two Japanese transport ships and were buzzed by a Japanese bomber . Once out of sight of the islands , they navigated using the position of the stars during the night and the sun during the day . After seventeen days of travelling , they landed in India , a distance of 2 @,@ 680 miles ( 4 @,@ 310 km ) , only 23 miles ( 37 km ) away from their intended destination .