

# WWII Hell Ships



During World War II, 70,000 or more Allied prisoners of war and conscripted Asian laborers were moved in Japanese merchant ships across the vast expanse of the occupied East. These vessels were called ‘hell ships, and with good reason. POWs and slave laborers were crammed into stinking holds, filthy with coal dust, congealed sugar syrup and horse manure left over from previous voyages. Without water, or nearly so, sick, abused and neglected, they baked in unimaginable heat inside their steel prisons.

Many died. Some went mad. Others were murdered. Some of the cruelty they experienced was extraordinary even for prisoners of the Japanese. On one ship jammed with prisoners in blazing heat, the water lowered into the holds was far too little and, one POW remembered, foul and polluted, covered with a thick, greenish scum. Two more containers sent down from the deck contained only seawater and urine. You are bred like rats, the ship’s interpreter sneered, and you will die like rats.

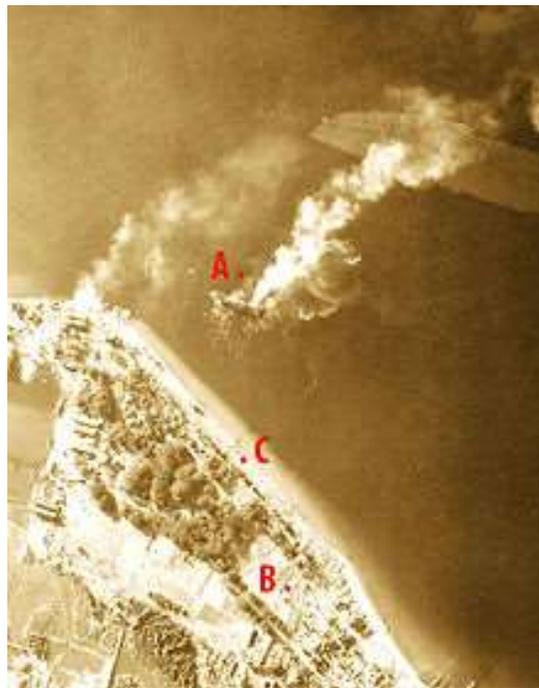
Something on the order of 62,000 prisoners were moved by 56 ships. As many as 22,000 perished from murder, starvation, sickness and neglect—or were killed unknowingly by their friends, since Japanese prison ships did not display the red cross required by the Geneva Convention when prisoners were being transported. That callous act made the jammed freighters targets for any Allied aircraft or submarine, and no pilot or sub skipper could know that his quarry carried men of his own or Allied nations.

Arisan Maru, for example, was torpedoed east of Hong Kong in October 1944 by an American submarine—either Snook or Shark (neither boat returned from that patrol). Of about 1,800 POWs on board Arisan Maru, only eight survived, five of whom, naked and emaciated, managed to find their way to freedom in China.



**Arisan Maru**

Oryoku Maru was bombed and sunk by American aircraft off the Philippines' Bataan Peninsula in mid-December 1944. On board were more than 1,600 American POWs, about 1,340 of whom lived through the ordeal.



**Oryoku burning after attack on 15 December 1944 about 11 AM. Photo by a Hellcat from USS Hornet shows POWs swimming in the water.**

Following the bombing of the Oryoku Maru, those POWs who survived were re-assembled at San Fernando La Union, PI and put aboard two more hellships to continue their journey to Japan. About 1,040 men were forced into one hold of the Enoura Maru, and the remaining 240 men went on the Brazil Maru. The Enoura Maru had previously been used to transport horses and the hold was filthy with manure. On its last trip the Brazil Maru had carried coal. Neither hold was cleaned out before the POWs were forced down into them. Some of the POWs were so hungry that they ate grain that had been dropped by the horses when they were feeding, and which was now mixed in with the manure.



**Enoura Maru & Brazil Maru**

The Enoura and Brazil Marus left the Philippines on December 27, 1944 and headed north to Japan via Takao ( Kaohsiung ), Formosa. All of the POWs on the Enoura Maru were crammed into the second hold aft of the bow. The POWs suffered terribly from hunger, thirst and the filth that pervaded the holds of the two hellships. Diseases broke out and many of the men were violently ill. On December 31 - New Year's Eve - they reached Takao. Once there the deprivation continued as the Japanese celebrated their New Year holiday for four days and left the POWs to fend for themselves during that time. The prisoners had little food or water from January 1 – 4, and thirty-four died on the Enoura Maru, and five died on the Brazil Maru.

By January 6, ten men had died on the *Brazil Maru* and then the remaining 230 were transferred across the harbor to the *Enoura Maru*. At this time some 240 POWs from the second hold on the *Enoura Maru* were moved up into the first hold to join the men from the *Brazil Maru* who had been put there. This made a total of about 470 men in the first hold.

At this same time, General MacArthur's invasion force was about to land in the Lingayen Gulf in the Northern Philippines, and Admiral Halsey was tasked with striking air bases and harbors primarily in southern Formosa and in Northern Luzon from which the Japanese could attack the Navy ships in the Lingayen Gulf during MacArthur's landings, which were to begin on January 9th, 1945. Thus, on the morning of January 9th, American aircraft – again from the *USS Hornet*, carried out an attack on shipping in Takao Harbor. Both ships were attacked again by U.S. planes. Enoura Maru went down, taking with her a large, undetermined number of prisoners. Following are excerpts of the attack and the aftermath are adapted from Duane Heisinger's book "Father Found" –

"Taking off from the carrier about 9:15 a.m., the Navy aircraft flew initially at 500 feet then, after rounding the southern tip of Formosa, climbed through scattered clouds, breaking into the clear at 6,500 feet. There were sufficient aircraft to check out the airfields in the area, as well as the Takao Port.

The weather was clear over the harbor - "The only spot along the coast so favored" were the words in the after-action report. The Hornet attack aircraft were carrying 250- and 500-pound bombs, while escorting fighters were equipped for strafing and rocket attacks. The aircraft arrived over Takao Port an hour before noon and began making "dives from east to west."

The harbor was crowded with an estimated 25 ships in the small inner harbor, with more in the outer harbor. "Some were moored in pairs, side by side, presenting unusually attractive targets. . . a bomber's dream." (The Enoura Maru was in one of these two-ship nests.) The aircraft pushed over at 7,500 feet, with their bomb release and pullout averaging 1,200 feet. "Four good hits were observed with others probable. Medium and small anti-aircraft fire was intense and accurate with two aircraft hit on pullout. Heavy anti-aircraft was moderate." Aerial photographs show bombs striking near the bows of the two-ship nest, which included the Enoura Maru. Over the next thirty minutes, two aircraft groups of five planes each continued the strikes. The first group got six hits and the latter, three, on ships within the harbor. Cmdr Robert E. Riera, the Air Group Eleven Commander, was the target co-ordinator of the effort from 11:00 to 11:30. His reports described the overall effort: "The most successful anti-shipping strike flown by this squadron to date." Little did he know that his successes were against ships that were only carrying his own countrymen!

During the raid the Enoura Maru took several hits – maybe as many as five, according to some of the surviving POWs. One of the bombs went right down into the forward hold, and according to survivor POW Ulanowicz - "252 were killed in the forward hold, about 40 in rear hold." Many more men were injured in other parts of the ship as well.

C/O Col. Beecher wrote in his postwar memoir: "The bomb that did all of the damage had apparently hit the ship just on the edge of the forward hold and what we had gotten [in the second hold] was the scattered fragments. The force of the explosion knocked heavy wooden hatch covers and steel beams loose and rained them down into the hold. Of the nearly 500 prisoners in the forward hold over 250 were killed outright and many others died later of their wounds. Our total casualties were approximately 270 killed and 250 wounded. . ."

Charles was in the first hold and narrowly escaped death and being crushed by the beams and planks by quickly getting himself and a couple of the men near him close to the bulkhead. This saved their lives as the beam missed hitting them by only about a foot.

In the second hold POW John Wright detailed the injuries: "There were broken arms, broken backs, broken legs, hemorrhages and decapitations. Many men were badly bruised and shocked. The steel beams and heavy wooden planks of the open hatch had been blown loose by exploding bombs and had fallen on the prisoners below. It looked like a lot of men had been crushed. . . The hatch covers did the heavy damage; the steel splinters and fragments did the rest."

Devastation was everywhere. Col. Beecher wrote: "Marine Gunner Ferrell, one of my battalion officers, was sitting - holding his head in his hands. One of his eyes had been blown out. One of the doctors bandaged Ferrell up and gave him a sedative which was the strongest thing he had. Ferrell had no treatment for that eye with the exception of occasionally washing it out. He sat for days suffering, tortured by the terrific pain."

All of this suffering was greatly aggravated by the lack of medical help from the Japanese over the immediate hours and the days that followed. The surviving military doctors, corpsmen and others within both holds did what they could to prolong life and assist those who were wounded, but it was largely a losing battle, especially for those men who had suffered serious wounds. The men were weak and fragile

before the bombing. They were much worse afterward with many just clinging to life. With no medical aid from the Japanese they were doomed to die.

Surviving POW Amoroso wrote: “The Japs provided no medical supplies for the care of the wounded, and just left us in that hold with those hundreds of mutilated bodies for two days.” Many of the injured died in the next few days.

Finally on January 12th they began to remove the dead from the ship. The stronger and mostly younger men were called upon to help remove the bodies. They placed the bodies - their comrades, friends of years, or days, or just hours before, into a rope cargo net lowered into the holds. Few were now recognizable even to close friends. The net then lifted these lifeless remains into cargo lighters brought alongside the damaged Enoura Maru, and over the next two days more than 300 POWs were buried on the outer spit of Kaohsiung Harbor in a mass grave.

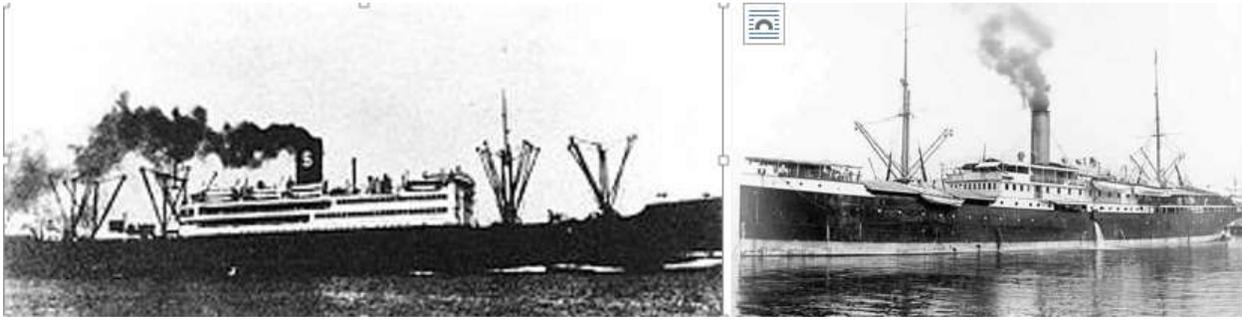
The surviving 890 POWs were then put aboard the Brazil Maru and taken on to Japan. By the time they reached Moji only 450 were alive, and within three months after arriving in Japan more than 100 more were dead. Of the more than 1,600 POWs who had started their journey to Japan on the Oryoku Maru a month earlier, only about 400 survived the war.

Fuku Maru was sunk by U.S. Navy aircraft in Subic Bay, in the Philippines, during September 1944, killing more than 1,200 British and Dutch prisoners. Sixty-three men survived, but for them there was more horror to come: They were transferred to the ill-fated Oryoku Maru.



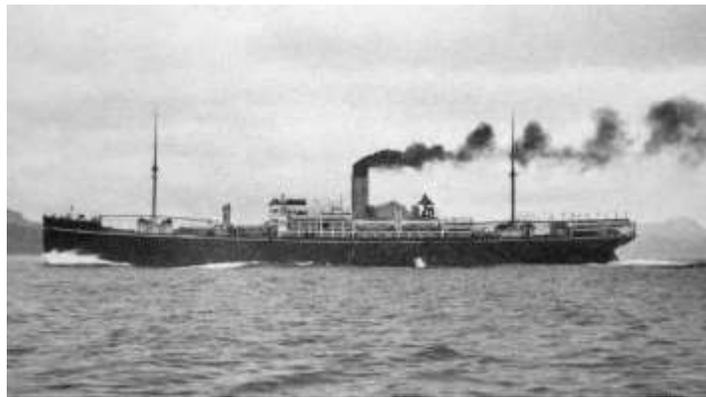
**Oryoku Maru**

Two more prison ships, known to history only as PS 3 and PS 4, were sunk by Allied forces, the first bombed in Manila Bay, the second torpedoed between Hong Kong and Formosa. Between them, some 2,700 prisoners were killed.



**Kachidoki Maru & Harukiku Maru**

Kachidoki Maru, torpedoed by USS Pampanito off Hainan Island, took about 400 British POWs to the bottom with her, and an unknown number more died when HMS Truculent sank Harukiku Maru in the Strait of Malacca.



**Rokyo Maru**

A total of 1,159 American and British prisoners perished when USS Sealion sent Rokyo Maru to the bottom near Hainan Island. On the 9th September 1944 FRUPAC, the US Fleet Radio Unit, Pacific, intercepted a Japanese message about a convoy en route to Japan. As a consequence a US submarine wolf pack, the USS Growler, USS Sealion and USS Pampanito were sent to lay an ambush. They rendezvoused together late on the 11th September and then, in the early hours of the 12th, began a joint attack when the Japanese ships crossed their path.

They were not to know that on board two of the Japanese transports in the convoy, the Rakuyo Maru and the Kachidoki Maru were 2,217 British and Australian Prisoners of War. They were being taken to Japan to be used as slave labour, most of them already having survived the horrors of the 'death railway' in Burma – Thailand. The majority of the 1317 men on the Rakuyo Maru were in the hold. A relatively fortunate few were being kept on deck – they had a grandstand view of events:

We were sleeping topside on the Rakuyo Maru. At about 2 o'clock in the morning a two-funneled destroyer was hit by a torpedo and blew up. [This was the attack made by the GROWLER.] There was a lot of gunfire and flares, and then everything was quiet. At about 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. a red flare went up on the

port side of a tanker right ahead of us. Then a torpedo struck and the tanker burst into flame, literally blew up, and threw flaming oil high in the air.

Then the ship on the port bow (presumably a transport) swerved in and almost collided. She looked disabled, for she just seemed to drift toward the burning tanker and caught fire aft. In a moment there was a puff of smoke around the bridge and she was in flames forward.

Then there was a thud forward on our ship followed by another thud aft, and the Rakuyo Maru began to settle in the water. The Japs took to the boats at once and about five minutes later we went into the water, too, and climbed aboard some rafts. The tanker was burning fiercely and we tried to keep away from fire on the water. A half-hour later the tanker sank.

The Rakuyo Maru took a list to starboard but looked as if she would remain afloat for a while. Some survivors started back, but before they could get to her she began to keel over and settle. So we changed our minds about getting provisions and water. She sank about 6 p.m.

Shortly afterwards a destroyer picked up Japs in long boats. We were held off with revolvers. Later another destroyer came up escorting passenger-freighters. They rescued the remaining Japs and all three ships steamed off. I believe they were loaded with raw rubber.

***This account originally appeared in Polaris , October 1985.***

Many men had survived the attack but the Japanese had made off with eleven out of the twelve life boats. There was a struggle to escape from the Rakuyo Maru and build rafts before she sank some 12 hours later. Another account comes from Australian Roydon Cornford :

The first torpedo hit us in the bow at No.1. hold. The explosion nearly washed us overboard. It flooded the hold containing the POW's causing panic because ten seconds after the first torpedo hit, the second torpedo hit the engine room causing the ship to list and sink ten feet, after which it just floated. I can remember the Japanese in the lifeboats on our ship singing out "torpedoes" before we got hit. I did not see them but some of the POW's said that they did.

How lucky we were, with a torpedo hitting both sides of the hold containing the POW's. By now we realized the ship was not about to sink immediately. The POWs in the hold calmed down and climbed the ladder to the deck in an orderly manner. The shock of the water washing us around the deck and water pouring into the hold is something hard to forget. The torpedoes killed a lot of the Japanese, mostly in the engine room and blew those on the gun turret overboard.

The Japanese on our ship had abandoned ship with no word to us. They had taken 11 lifeboats and 2 small punts. Some Japanese just jumped into the sea and any POW's trying to get into the lifeboats were kept back with guns and bayonets. I saw one Japanese boat drift into the flaming oil and you could hear the screams of men burning and drowning. Since there were lots of Japanese from other ships also in the water, approximately 15 POW's did manage to get into a lifeboat with about 20 Japanese.

Our ship had settled with a serious list to the port side, sitting about 10ft lower in the water. The POW's were tossing overboard 6ft by 6ft rafts, hatch covers and anything else that would float, with POW's jumping overboard to hang onto the rafts. In some cases the English POW's killed a few of their own men by tossing rafts onto men in the water. These rafts were not made for you to sit on, just to hang on to the ropes on the side of the raft. By now most of the POW's had left the ship so we left four men to guard the last raft that we had for seven of us while we found water. We all had a good drink, donned our life jackets, tossed our raft overboard and jumped into the sea.

The seven of us paddled and kicked the water to get away from the slowly sinking ship. We had only got about 100 yards away when a Japanese naval escort came back, flashing signal lights when it also got torpedoed and exploded. That torpedo exploding made us sick, causing us to lose all the water we had drunk.

It was now 4am and most of the rafts had drifted close together. A lot of the English POW's drifted into burning oil and a lot also died after being hit by rafts and hatch covers which were being thrown into the water. The English had been on the starboard side of the Rakuyo Maru. A few men had still not abandoned ship and they found a lifeboat that the Japanese could not launch but which they managed to launch. They also found one terrified Japanese Jig-a-Jig girl still on the ship whom they took with them. Once in the water they met up with a boatload of Japanese and handed the Jig-a-Jig girl over to them.

Now quite a few POW's swam and paddled back to the ship and climbed back on board. By daylight the ocean was heavily dotted with debris, POW's on rafts and lifeboats. There were also a lot of Japanese on rafts. By now we realised that the ship was doomed since it was slowly sinking into the water. However you could still see men walking around the decks. While all this was going on two Japanese naval ships appeared on the horizon and slowly nosed their way through the oil and floating debris.

Our spirits soared, after spending so long in the water, thinking rescue had arrived. The frigates picked up all the Japanese from the lifeboats then lowered a motorized lifeboat which moved among us picking up all of the Japanese and Koreans in the water. While this was going on an old Japanese transport ship also arrived but did not do any rescuing.

The lifeboats the Japanese left in the water were soon filled with POW's, 350 or so spread evenly between the 11 lifeboats. Luckily, I did not get in one. By now it was late on the first day with the two Japanese ships and the transport ship still close by when our ship suddenly went down nose first, tossing blocks of rubber high into the air and generating great spouts of water. Men who had remained on the ship went down with the sinking ship.

The two Japanese naval ships and the oil transport ship just sailed off and left us floating around in the water. It soon became dark so we tied two rafts together and pushed bamboo and bits of timber under them. Eighteen of us could sit on the rafts and the kapok life jackets took the rest of our weight.

During the first night the rafts drifted apart and our two rafts were 100 yards from the next raft. There were lots of rafts and men spread all around the ocean, with dead Japanese and POWs floating around in

life jackets. Any POW's who did not have life jackets took one off a dead Japanese. We spent the first night floating around listening to POW's calling out for friends.

Meanwhile the Japanese convoy continued and the USS Pampanito set off in pursuit. After dealing with a 'hot running torpedo' – a torpedo that began running inside the torpedo tube on the submarine – the USS Pampanito was in position to attack: 2240 Fired five torpedoes forward; three at large transport and two at large AK.... Swung hard right and at 2243 Fired four stern tubes; two at each of the two AK's in the farthest column. Saw 3 hits in large AP, two hits in large AK (Targets No. 1 and 2) and one hit in AK (farthest column) heard and timed hit in fourth AK (Leading ship in farthest column)....

In all, seven hits out of nine torpedoes. From the bridge we watched both the large AP and the large AK (one with two hits) sink within the next ten minutes, and saw the after deck house of the third ship, on which we saw one hit, go up into the air with the ship smoking heavily.

The fourth ship could not be observed... because of much smoke and haze in that direction. A short interval after the seven hits, the escorts started dropping depth charges at random, but for once we didn't mind.

Amongst these ships hit was the Kachidoki Maru with 900 British Prisoners of war on board. It appears that there were very few survivors, probably only men who happened to be on deck. They were taken on board the Kibitsu Maru, which was to successfully complete the journey to Japan.

It was only as the USS Pampanito returned along the route she had taken that three days later that she came across a number of men in the water clinging to rafts, most of them were covered in oil and very weak. With the sudden realization that they were too tall to be Japanese, the Pampanito launched a rescue operation and summoned the USS Sealion back to the area to help.

**Captain Summers, commander of the USS Pampanito account:**

All were exhausted, after four days on the raft and three years of imprisonment. Many had lashed themselves to their makeshift rafts, which were slick with grease. Some had nothing but life belts. All showed signs of pellagra, beri-beri, immersion, salt water sores, ringworm, and malaria. All were very thin and showed the results of undernourishment.

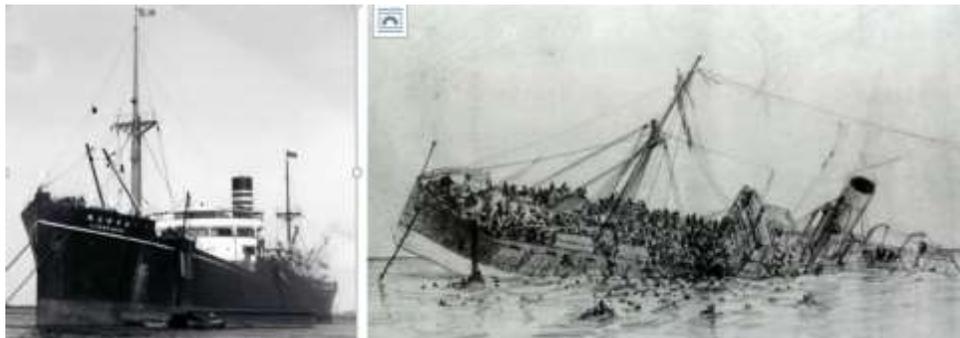
Some were in very bad shape, but with the excitement of rescue they came alongside with cheers for the Yanks and many a curse for the Japs. It was quite a struggle to keep them on the raft while we took them off one by one. They could not manage to secure a line to the raft, so we sent men over the side who did the job.

The survivors came tumbling aboard and then collapsed with strength almost gone. A pitiful sight none of us will ever forget. All hands turned to with a will and the men were cared for as rapidly as possible.



**Shiniyo Maru**

USS Paddlefish sank Shiniyo Maru off Mindanao in the SEP 44, killing nearly 700 more Americans. Prisoners trying to escape from the sinking Shiniyo Maru were shot by the Japanese guards as the Americans struggled from the holds or in the water.



Lisbon Maru, torpedoed by USS Grouper in October 1944, went down with another 846 POWs, the only bright memory being an unarmed rush by men of the Middlesex Regiment, who overran and killed several Japanese sentries assigned to keep the prisoners cooped up in the holds of the sinking ship.

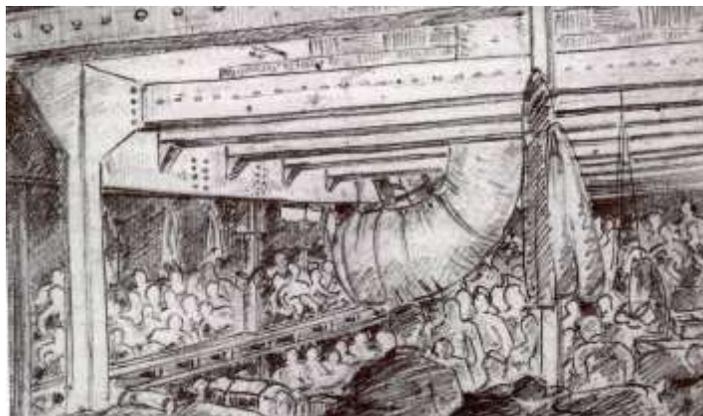


**Junyo Maru**

As tragic as the losses were on board Arisan Maru, Shiniyo Maru and the others, as ugly as Japanese indifference and cruelty were on those vessels, they were not the worst tragedy among the thousands of POW deaths from friendly fire. That distinction belongs to the sinking, in October 1944, of Junyo Maru.

Junyo Maru was an old three-island, single-stack merchantman, displacing about 5,000 tons and sailing under the orders of the Japanese government. She was reportedly built in Glasgow in 1913, although one prisoner on her last run later said that somebody had seen a plaque on board bearing the legend Liverpool, 1908. She had been owned by three British lines at various times, then passed through three Japanese owners. She had gone through five name changes. Her last—Junyo—means hawk in Japanese. Maru is simply the standard Japanese designation for merchant ship.

Junyo Maru was a little over 400 feet long, with a beam of 53 feet, and was accurately characterized by one prisoner as a rustbucket. On September 18, 1944, she was underway from Batavia (now Jakarta), Java, crammed with about 2,300 POWs—Dutch, British, Australians, Indonesians and a few Americans—and some 4,200 Javanese slave laborers, called romushas. She was bound for Padang, up the west coast of Sumatra. Her human cargo was to labor on the infamous Sumatran railway that was being built to transport coal from the west to the east coast of Sumatra, from where it would be shipped on to Singapore.



As was common on the hell ships, conditions on Junyo Maru were appalling. Between decks, the Japanese had inserted a layer of bamboo scaffolding to make extra decks, and the holds were crammed with bunks, three or four deep. Every level was jammed with prisoners, many of them sick, weak and emaciated. The bunks filled up quickly. Many men could only stand; the others sat with their legs pulled up or squatted in holds coated with a glutinous black substance, probably the melted remains of a cargo of sugar cane mixed with remnants of later loads of coal or iron ore. Both forward holds—numbers one and two—and the forward deck were crammed with the miserable romushas. Aft, holds three and four held the POWs.

There was not enough water, and there were no latrine facilities, save for a few boxes suspended outboard on the upper deck. Some prisoners were too weak even to reach these primitive privies, and human excrement accumulated in the holds and dripped down from the hatch covers. Some prisoners remained on the upper deck, exposed to wind and chilly rain at night and brutal tropical sun throughout the day; the rest baked in the iron ovens below. Men sat on cargo derricks and on the hatch covers, from which every other plank had been removed to admit a vestige of air. Before the ship ever sailed, the stench of human bodies

and human waste was overpowering. Many prisoners suffered from malaria or dysentery or both. Some died; others went mad. The sick and the weak sank further toward death. There was virtually no lifesaving gear on board. A lifeboat hung outboard on either side of the center island; some life rafts were piled on deck. That was all, and all that the prisoners could hope for. One account says the Japanese donned their own life vests as soon as the ship put to sea, but there were no vests for the prisoners.

Before Junyo Maru departed, one English prisoner made a desperate attempt to escape by diving overboard and swimming for shore. He was cut off by some of the Japanese crew in a small boat, beaten up, returned to the hell ship and locked up. If anybody else tried to escape, the prisoners were told, the penalty would be death.

Junyo Maru sailed from Batavia on September 16. Turning west through Sunda Strait, she passed the volcanic island of Krakatoa and set a course northwest, parallel to the western seaboard of Sumatra. On the 17th, she headed on toward the port of Padang, about halfway up the coast of that long island. On that night came a torrential rain, drenching the men on deck and streaming into the hold to mix with the sticky mess in which the prisoners already sat or squatted. The prisoners on deck, unprotected, shook with cold, but there was no shelter.

The ship steamed some 15 or 20 miles from the coast, escorted by two vessels that one prisoner described as a corvette and a gunboat, and for most of the day also covered by one or two aircraft. While the escorts sometimes circled the freighter, they spent most of the voyage trailing her, one on each beam. The escort commander may have been careless, lazy or both, or maybe he was convinced that this voyage was a milk run. If so, he would soon find out just how wrong he was.

Out in the blue water of the Indian Ocean a sleek steel shark waited, haunting the Japanese shipping lanes along the Sumatran coast. No escorts were going to get between her and her prey. She was the submarine Tradewind, a twin-screw Triton-class boat of the Royal Navy, commanded by Lt. Cmdr. S.L.C. Maydon. A new boat, commissioned just a year before at Chatham, England, Tradewind displaced over 1,300 tons. She could do more than 15 knots on the surface and almost 9 submerged. And she packed a real punch: She was armed with 11 21-inch torpedo tubes with 17 reloads, and boasted surface armament of a 4-inch gun, a 20mm Oerlikon AA cannon and three machine guns. Her range extended to 8,000 miles at 8 knots.



**HMS Tradewind P329**

Tradewind had left the port of Trincomalee, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), on September 8. By the 17th, she was cruising in her patrol area, though she was severely handicapped by the failure of both her radar and her high-power periscope. But her skipper was made of stern stuff, and he was determined to carry on with his patrol for another day.

He and Tradewind's 61-man crew quickly scored a couple of small successes against the Japanese. On the 13th, Tradewind surfaced to board a sampan in Sungei Pinang Bay, took off her five man and one monkey crew—the monkey had earned his keep throwing coconuts down from palm trees—and sank her. Then, three days later off Indrapura Point, Tradewind stopped and boarded Bintang Pasisir (Star of the Shore), a large sailing prau, sending her on her way when a quick search revealed she was loaded only with nutmegs and cinnamon bark. Only the ship's papers were taken.

An hour or so after leaving Bintang Pasisir behind, Tradewind's crew boarded still another prau, and found this one loaded with cement for the Japanese. Seven of the eight-man crew were sent ashore in a small boat—the eighth said he'd rather be a British prisoner—and the British boarding party primed the prau with two demolition charges. She blew up, as Commander Maydon's report said, with a most satisfactory scattering of Japanese cement. But now someone on the submarine took a close look at Bintang Pasisir's papers, which revealed she was also carrying cement, iron and barrels of nails, in addition to her innocent cargo of nuts and bark. Like the cement Tradewind had just satisfactorily scattered, that cargo was also bound for the Japanese at Benkulen, on the coast of southern Sumatra.

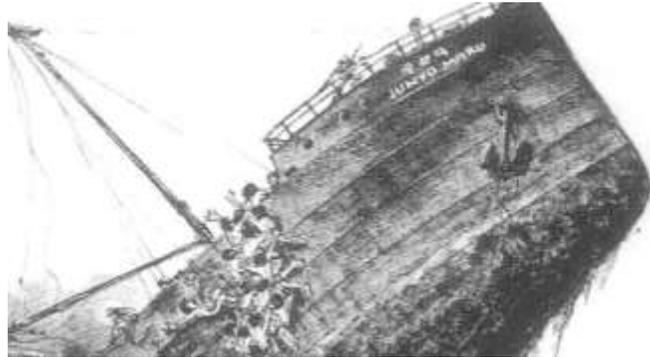
So Tradewind turned back to find the prau, which she did a couple of hours later. The vessel's crew was sent ashore, and Maydon ordered Bintang Pasisir set afire, then riddled her with rounds from the sub's Oerlikon. As the prau settled beneath the waves, Tradewind went on to look for bigger game.

Two days later, on the 18th, she found it. At about 3 p.m., the officer of the watch, reserve Sub-Lt. P.C. Daley, spotted a tiny plume of smoke through the secondary periscope, about 13,000 yards to the south. Maydon accordingly ordered full speed toward the target. Because, as Maydon's report stated, range taking and hence estimation of speed through a low-power periscope is very inaccurate over 4,000 yards, he had to close the range. As he did so, he found he was stalking an old fashioned merchantman, a 4,000- to 5,000-ton, three-island vessel with a single thin funnel and two masts. Maydon guessed she was about two-thirds fully loaded. At long range, without his high-power periscope, he could not guess what that load was.

Tradewind's skipper could see that the freighter had two escorts—one to her starboard, the other on her port quarter. They were identified in Tradewind's patrol report as motor launches—and his crew picked up their radar echoes. In spite of their presence, however, Maydon pressed his attack, guessing his target's speed at about 8 knots, estimated from the echoes of his asdic (sonar). His target was zig-zagging, but obligingly zig-zagged back to her original course. And so, a little before 4 p.m., Tradewind was in position at a right angle to the plodding merchant ship's course and about 1,800 yards away.

A few moments later, Tradewind fired four torpedoes at 15-second intervals, dived and turned away. About a minute and a half later, her crew heard an explosion, and 15 seconds later came a second blast. Junyo Maru's escorts put in a depth-charge attack, dropping three charges, but by then the submarine was

deep beneath the surface and moving away. A little over a quarter of an hour after the strike of the last torpedo, Tradewind's asdic picked up the crackling sounds of the target breaking up.



Because her main periscope was out of commission, Tradewind could not closely search for hostile aircraft or get a good look at the armament carried by the little escorts. Had Maydon been able to judge the strength of their armament, as he said in his report, it might have been profitable to have waited until they were well laden with survivors and then to have surfaced and gunned them. Under the circumstances this was not considered prudent. And so Maydon reloaded his tubes and wisely waited until just after 5 before he returned to periscope depth and risked a look through the secondary periscope. The sea was empty, except for the outline of one of the escorts about three miles away. The target was gone, and Tradewind turned away. As night fell, she surfaced, moving southeast through torrents of rain. Behind her in the darkness the sea was full of dying men.

Junyo Maru had indeed gone to the bottom, and gone quickly. One torpedo had smashed into her forward, a second aft, the first hurling a shower of debris into the air—metal, wood and human beings. The stricken freighter soon began to go down by the stern, her siren screaming. There was panic in the crowded holds.

The prisoners down below had only a single iron ladder by which to escape their steel trap, and the men struggled and fought to reach their only way out. Others climbed high enough to pull themselves up by the braces supporting the planks covering the hatch. Some men already on deck helped others out of the struggling mass in the hold. Up on deck the senior POW officer, an English captain named Upton, was giving orders to clear prisoners' dunnage away from the stacks of life rafts and get them over the side. Many of the captives pitched in to follow his directions. Meanwhile, the Japanese guards ran aimlessly back and forth—some jumping into the sea, still carrying their rifles.

The crew struggled to release the two lifeboats slung outboard toward the rear of the center island, and POWs began to throw into the sea not only life rafts, but pieces of timber and anything else that would float. More and more of them began to jump overboard as the dying freighter settled deeper by the stern. The men in the water could see the torpedo holes in her sides, gaping gashes some 20 feet across. As the gunboat circled the area dropping depth charges, the corvette began to pick up survivors. Some prisoners were saved, but most of those rescued were Japanese, each of whom waved a small Japanese flag, apparently part of their equipment.

The terrified romushas huddled together toward the bow. Only a few of them tried to save themselves by jumping overboard, and a few tried to climb the foremast to escape the rising water. By now the Japanese had gotten one lifeboat overboard, but it flooded quickly because of a hole in the side. When swimming prisoners tried to grasp the sides of the swamped boat, the Japanese in the boat beat them off with an ax.

As Junyo Maru settled deeper in the water, her bow rose more sharply into the air and the cluster of romushas began to slide toward the stern and the remorseless rising water. As the angle of her deck rose, men began to lose their grip and fall into the sea. And then the freighter slid quickly beneath the surface, her bow rising almost to the vertical, and she was gone, leaving the surface of the Indian Ocean littered with struggling men.

Night fell and the stars came out. Survivors clung to rafts and debris while their strength held out. All around them other men were dying in the night, crying for help in the darkness, but there was no help to come. One group pulled their most exhausted comrades onto their almost submerged raft, then swam away from other desperate cries in the night, fearful that their raft would not support another human being. Some swimmers finally gave up, letting themselves slip beneath the water. One man bit another prisoner in the neck and drank his blood. At daybreak, the Japanese corvette returned, and some of those still living were pulled from the water. The rest were gone.

Of the 1,700 or so Western POWs and about 500 Indonesian prisoners, some 1,500 died. Of the romushas, more than 4,300 of them, only a couple of hundred survived. As closely as it is possible to estimate, 4,320 men went down with Junyo Maru or died in the water later. And that does not count the survivors who were worked to death, murdered or died of disease in 120-degree heat during the construction of the Sumatran railway. Of 680 saved from the sea and sent to build the railroad, one survivor wrote, only 96 of the POWs survived; there were no survivors among the miserable romushas.

Tradewind and her captain survived the war. The submarine served until she was put into fleet reserve at Portsmouth in 1953. She was scrapped two years later. For a long time Maydon did not know about the cargo of the ship he had sunk off western Sumatra. It was not until many years after the sinking that he corresponded with a survivor, asking what the cargo of Junyo Maru had been. The submariners had always been afraid, he wrote, that we would scupper our own people. Only then did he learn, from the survivor, that his torpedoes had in fact killed thousands of his own, and Allied, troops. The effect of that knowledge on Maydon can only be imagined.

No blame attaches to Tradewind's skipper, a fighting sailor carrying out his orders, or to the other Western fighting men whose bombs and torpedoes took the lives of their own countrymen or allies. The real blame lies with the Japanese, not only for their callous and brutal treatment of prisoners and slave laborers but also because they neglected to display the red cross as a warning that the hell ships carried POWs. Displaying that respected talisman would have cost next to nothing. And it would have saved thousands of lives. Some things are hard to forgive.

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