

Ningbo Points to Lost WWII Tale

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Multifaceted Verification

Tianjin Maru Could Well Be Lisbon Maru

To further substantiate their connection, this valuable archival document was soon sent to Shi Fuming, head of the Party History Division at the Xiangshan County Party History Research Office.

Coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, Shi had been "immersed" in the Xiangshan County Archives for three to four months, almost every day from nine to five.

Shi offered his analysis based on in-depth research:

From the perspective of timing, when Su sent a telegram to Zhejiang Provincial Government on October 17, the rescued British POWs on Tianjin Maru had already been transferred to the Sixth Prefectural Administrative Office of Zhejiang Prov-

ince (hereinafter referred to as the "Sixth Prefectural Administrative Office"). By this calculation, the Tianjin Maru incident occurred at roughly the same time as that of the Lisbon Maru—both in early October.

From a geographical perspective, "According to other historical records, Tianjin Maru and Lisbon Maru encountered danger near Mount Putuo and Dongji Island respectively, which are both coincidentally within the eastern waters of the Zhoushan Archipelago, Zhejiang," Shi noted.

Both vessels were torpedoed by U.S. submarines, and subjected to machine gun fire after sinking by the Japanese forces.

As for key figures, "The telegram replied to Su in the Xiangshan County Archives notes 'three British prisoners (JOHSTONE) [Johnstone] of war,' " ex-

plained Shi, "The names of the three Britons on Tianjin Maru, as shown in related historical records, are identical to those of three British POWs aboard the Lisbon Maru."

In addition, the two ships transported roughly equivalent numbers of British POWs. The three rescued POWs estimated that the Tianjin Maru carried more than 2,000 people, while the statistics from postwar researchers indicate 1,816 POWs on the Lisbon Maru.

When it comes to the rescue effort, the British POWs in both cases were escorted by an official armed force—Dinghai County Militia Corps. "According to memoirs related to the Lisbon Maru, after the three POWs were rescued, they were escorted to Hulu Island, handed over to Wang Jineng of the fourth detachment

of guerrilla force, and then transferred to Mayor Su in Xiangshan County Government..." Shi noted.

"Wang Jineng was a subordinate of Zhu Tiejun, deputy commander of Dinghai County Militia Corps. The commander of that corps was Su Benshan," Shi added.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that "Tianjin Maru" was most likely the Lisbon Maru. Shi speculates that names were concealed in the telegram because the rescue of the British POWs had exposed the Japanese massacre of prisoners; explicitly mentioning the Lisbon Maru could have enabled the Japanese to trace the POWs' transfer route. He further notes that the Japanese had previously conducted a sweep of Dongji Island and massacred fishermen there, making secrecy essential to protect the rescuers.

Archival Value

A 1942 Document Filling a Gap in Historical Research

This telegram is included in the general archive entitled "The Atrocities Against Residents After the Landing of A U.S. Plane in Juexi" collected in Xiangshan County Archives. It was transferred to the archives by the Xiangshan Public Security Bureau in the early 1980s after Xiangshan was liberated on July 8, 1949 and taken over by the Xiangshan County People's Government.

Previously, the main source of the sinking of Lisbon Maru and life-risking rescue of British POWs by fishermen from Dongji Island relied mainly on the documentary records in 1948 and the recollections of individuals involved.

The release of this valuable telegram "fills the regrettable gap left by the absence of official documentary records from 1942—the year of the incident—and it holds considerable historical research value," said Yang Xuejuan, Director of Xiangshan County Archives.

In the telegram, the provincial authorities at that time commended Su and his subordinates for their bravery and the appropriate arrangements they made. This serves as powerful official evidence of the proactive efforts of the government, military and civilians of Xiangshan county to

assist Allied POWs in distress, which embody a great spirit of international humanitarianism—underscoring its historical and academic significance.

Moreover, the telegram offers a rare glimpse of how the three rescued British POWs were transferred from Xiangshan to Yunhe across Zhejiang province, China.

During a field visit to Guanshan Village in Xizhou Town, Xiangshan County, Shi Fuming learned that a local villager saw "three Americans" in the village escorted by a group of soldiers, when he was a primary school student; they made their way from the county government seat, via Qiaotou Temple, heading toward Shimenling.

Given the timeline, the "three Americans" were most likely the three British POWs rescued from the Lisbon Maru. Shimenling was a vital pass on the ancient route from Xiangshan to Ninghai.

Following Ningbo's fall, the Sixth Prefectural Administrative Office relocated near the Lianghuang Mountain in Ninghai, corroborating the telegram's reference to the transfer.

The yellowed telegram records not only the hidden story of a maritime disas-



A group photo of the three Britons and the Chinese rescue team.

ter but also a nation's steadfast commitment to justice and reverence for life amid the trials of war. More than a recovery of historical truth, it represents the inheritance of the spirit of peace. We remember history, as CGTN (China Global Television Network) cited, not to perpetuate hatred or seek revenge against a particular nation, but to draw lessons from

it—to recognize the value of peace and defend it with greater resolve.

Based on an article by Shi Chengcheng from Ningbo Evening News.

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