

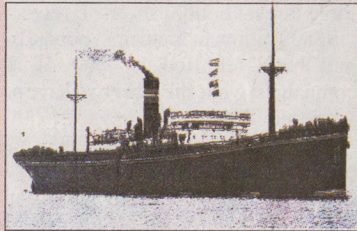
# Director documents heroic WWII rescue saga of the Lisbon Maru

**Una So**

A new documentary commissioned by Radio Television Hong Kong tells the tragic story of brave Chinese fishermen and British soldiers, captured in Hong Kong, who died on board the Japanese freighter Lisbon Maru during World War II.

The documentary begins with the divers' first contact with the vessel 26.6 meters beneath the ocean — 66 years after it was sunk.

Documentary director Alan Lau Kin-lun's interest was aroused when he heard about the plan by the Hong Kong Underwater Archeological As-



**Fishermen defied death to save British POWs from the ship.** LISBONMARU.COM

sociation to search for the freighter. On September 25, 1942, 1,816 British prisoners of war from the Sham Shui Po POW camp were herded on to the Lisbon Maru on their way to provide

free labor in mines, factories and dockyards in Japan.

There were also 780 Japanese soldiers on board.

A few days later, near Donji Island off Zhoushan, some 160 kilometers from Shanghai, American submarine USS Grouper spotted the Japanese vessel and torpedoed it.

While the Japanese troops were evacuated on to their destroyers, the British POWs were stranded in three locked holds below deck.

The prisoners in one hold managed to cut their way free and jumped into the sea. Within 26 hours, the doomed vessel sank.

More than 1,400 people perished; some were trapped in their pens, some drowned, while others were shot by Japanese soldiers on nearby destroyers.

International conventions on war forbid the use of POWs as laborers and the Japanese had probably hoped the incident would sink to the bottom of the sea. But the saga involved a dramatic rescue.

Chinese fishermen who witnessed the event set out to scavenge the vessel. They found groups of British soldiers struggling to swim ashore.

From morning till late night, the Chinese fishermen ferried 386 soldiers

on their three-man sampans. Their mission of mercy involved tremendous risk as it was carried out while hostile Japanese vessels patrolled the waters. The Japanese later recaptured all but three of the rescued Britons.

Lau was touched by the fishermen's selfless deed when much of China was under the threat of Japanese aggression.

"They saw people drowning and the fishermen were driven to save them," Lau said, enlarging on his interviews with remaining rescuers.

The documentary will be broadcast on Saturday at 7.30pm on TVB Jade. [una.so@singtaonewscorp.com](mailto:una.so@singtaonewscorp.com)