

# ZHEJIANG DAILY

(Translated by Brian Finch MCIL)

## Looking for the “*Lisbon Maru*”

Reporters Zhang Pinfang, Wang Yimin, District Party Committee Reporting Group, Liu Chijian

On 2 October in Lianhua Island, Puta District, Zhoushan City, the sky was high, the clouds pale, there was a gentle sea breeze.

A plastic wreath of flaming red poppies was quietly placed amongst the crowd, accompanied by the sound of solemn music. Ninety local high school students and folk artists surrounded it, stood in silent tribute and paid their respects.

The wreath was specially flown in from the UK several days before, as a present<sup>1</sup> [sic] from Major Brian Finch, Chairman<sup>2</sup> [sic] of the Middlesex Regiment Association. In the UK, this type of wreath is used only in remembrance ceremonies for those killed in war.

And during World War II, the Middlesex Regiment was stationed in Hong Kong and took part with Chinese people in the anti-Fascist war of resistance against Japan.

On the same day, commemorations were also held in Hong Kong China and in London, England. It was an incident in the seas of Dongji, Zhoushan, on this day 70 years ago, which led to the “bridge” involving two nations and three regions in these remembrances.

That was the famous incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* during the Second World War. In the long span of history, 70 years is but the twinkling of an eye; but to the individual it has lifelong significance.

Recently we set out on the road of looking for the *Lisbon Maru*, recording the accounts of eyewitnesses at the time, and at the same time researching into the spritual wealth behind the incident.

### **Looking for One’s Roots: War Piles up an Exotic Atmosphere<sup>3</sup> (sic)**

“Most of the Englishmen saved were placed in the Island temple and in the fishermen’s homes” said Chen Yonghua. Life for the islanders on this small island, sealed at the time by the Japanese army, cut off from the outside, was very hard. It was under these conditions, faced with prisoners of war who

---

<sup>1</sup> The wreath was presented by the Lisbon Maru Association of Hong Kong (trans)

<sup>2</sup> I am not Chairman of the Middlex Regiment Association, just a member (trans)

<sup>3</sup> The precise meaning of this heading is not very clear (trans)

were barely dressed and extremely exhausted, that they took the dried fish products that they would be reluctant to give up in normal times and gave them to the prisoners of war to appease their hunger, and took out their personal clothes and gave them to the prisoners of war to keep warm.

“Many of the men were feverish, and gestured to indicate that they wanted to eat something sweet. So we put all our white sugar in the sweet potato soup” said Chen Yonghua. At the time, white sugar was wrapped in clothing and kept in the bottom of a chest; its value goes without saying.

In the early morning of 4 October 1942, just as the island fishermen were discussing how to send the British prisoners of war safely back to their country, five Japanese warships sailed from the direction of Shenjiamen and rapidly surrounded Qingbang and Miaozihu Islands.

So as not to get the good kind-hearted fishermen into trouble, the British officers and soldiers took the initiative to form up in ranks. At 2:00 pm that afternoon, 381 British officers and soldiers were escorted onto Japanese ships by Japanese soldiers. But the Japanese did not realise there were still three prisoners of war who had hidden from arrest; they were British Warrant Officer Fallace, British businessman Evans and British diplomat [sic] Johnstone<sup>4</sup>

Today, 83 year old veteran Liang Yijuan’s contribution to this affair cannot be left unrecognised. We found veteran Liang Yijuan. Recalling the past events, the old man’s face was full of pride. “At that time I was only 13 years old and too fond of playing. Once, I discovered that there was a small cave in Southfield Bay on the north side of Qingbang Island”, the old man said. He and two other partners took these three prisoners of war and hid them in the cave and finally succeeded in eluding the Japanese search.

Sea erosion had formed the cave naturally, and unexpectedly it had become the final “hero”. One morning at the beginning of autumn, we followed another old man who had witnessed this great rescue that year – 88 year old Lin Agen – into the cave. From the Qingbang Island residents’ assembly area, we walked for 20 minutes along the mountain path winding along the sea, and could see a rock, and straddling this rock was a place overgrown with weeds, and the cave was between the rock and the weeds.

The cave had a small entrance and a large interior; about two metres deep; after entering the cave it divided into two paths, left and right; left went straight out to sea, the right sloped upwards; the cave could hold thirty or forty people. Veteran Lin Agen said that at high tide the sea covered the entrance, but there was still plenty of room inside, but it absolutely could not be seen from outside. Up to now, many of the island residents had not found this cave and had never been there.

---

<sup>4</sup> Johnstone was a Warrant Officer with the Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (trans)

The three prisoners of war had lived in the cave for a full five days. On 9 October 1942 six Qingbang fishermen sailed their boats and through the night slipped through the blockade and took them to Xianshan fishing port in Ningbo. After a few days, local troops handed them over several times and sent the three men to Chongqing. Johnstone and the other prisoners stayed in Chongqing for a while, using their personal experiences to expose the Japanese atrocity on the radio station, triggering public opprobrium at home and abroad. Finally, they were sent back to the UK by the British Embassy in China.

### **Historical Great Rescue on the Dongji Sea**

In the Special Storage Office of the Zhejiang Archives, there is a set of historical documents, serial number L030-236, put together more than 60 years ago.

Opening the front cover of this dossier, a telex written entirely in English greets the eye. The letter was written on 12 April 1948 by the British Ambassador in China to the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main points were:

During World War II, a Japanese ship, the *Lisbon Maru* transported nearly 2,000 British prisoners of war from Hong Kong towards Japan. On 2 October 1942, whilst the ship was sailing in the seas off Zhoushan, it was attacked by torpedoes and sank. At the time, more than 200 British prisoners of war were saved from drowning by the courageous efforts of the fishermen of Qingbang Island, Zhoushan, to rescue them. Despite the fishermen's livelihoods being very poor, they did everything they could to provide those British prisoners of war with food, shelter and care, enabling them to survive.

Our search for eyewitnesses from 70 years ago began. We reached Qingbang Island, a small island worthy of its name<sup>5</sup>. Most of the buildings were built on the mountain side, some were made simply by piling up rocks. The people's lives were simple but they were kind: the men went out to sea fishing, the women sat around together making nets and processing sea products; the elderly gathered in small groups passing the time of day.

Amongst them, a white-haired old man wearing a deep blue T-shirt was the person the reporters had come to meet. 85 year-old Chen Yonghua took his boat out that year with his partner and rescued five British soldiers. Sitting beside the old man, listening to his account, our thoughts were taken back to 70 years ago.

"That day was unusually good weather for Dongji, the sea was calm and tranquil." Chen Yonghua, who was only 15 at the time, and several partners were working by the sea. "The sky was misty and bright; I heard a tremendous noise and in front of my eyes was a large ship I had never seen before giving off black smoke." Because this was wartime, Chen Yonghua

---

<sup>5</sup> Qingbang literally means "green creek" (trans)

did not taken any notice till the nex day. “I saw the rear of the ship clearly sinking, with the bow sticking up and finally becoming vertical and sinking into the sea, setting off a huge wave.” Chen Yonghua said that the place where the ship sank was about 10 kilometres to the north of Qingbang Island.

It was only many years later that Chen Yonghua knew that the ship was the *Lisbon Maru*, a Japanese cargo ship, 120 metres long, 18 metres wide, displacing 7,152 tons, which during World War II plied between China and Japan carrying prisoners of war.

The time returned again to Christmas night in 1941. Japanese troops had captured Hong Kong, and more than 10,000 Allied troops from Britain, Canada, Australia (sic)<sup>6</sup> and India had become prisoners of war. In Autumn 1942, the Japanese army sent prisoners of war in batches back to Japan for hard labour. On 25 September that year, the Japanese army drove 1,816 (sic)<sup>7</sup> mainly British prisoners of war onto the *Lisbon Maru*; they were all forcibly squeezed into small and narrow holds. The ship also carried 778 Japanese soldiers to guard the prisoners of war, and two days later they set sail.

On 1 October 1942, the *Lisbon Maru* reached Zhoushan waters. Because it did not indicate that it was a ship carrying prisoners of war, it was hit by torpedoes from the submarine *USS Grouper* of the 81st Squadron of the US Pacific Fleet.

“At first we were happy at the sinking of such a large ship, because a lot of cloth printed with fine and dense flowers would float off a large ship.” Chen Yonghua said he had never seen such beautiful cloth.

At first, many people started their boats to go and net some cloth. But following that, Chen Yonghua was startled. “Everywhere the sea was covered in fair-haired foreigners; near the sunken ship were two Japanese warships, with Japanese troops standing on them using machine guns and rifles firing at the people who had fallen in the water. It was hard for the fair-haired foreigners to climb onto the warships, as they were kicked off by the Japanese soldiers.”

Blue-eyed, fair-haired people had given Chen Yonghua’s ancestors distressing memories. “During the years of the Opium War, Zhoushan was invaded and occupied by the British for as long as five years”, Chen Yonghua said. “But we fisherman have always had a tradition: if we discover someone has fallen into the sea, we risk our lives to save them.” To his understanding, this is a spirit handed down by word of mouth for hundreds and thousands of years by Zhoushan people.

“Quick! Get in the boats!” Chen Yonghua and the other fishermen no longer looked for cloth, but one after another started to save people. That day, so

---

<sup>6</sup> No Australian units were stationed in Hong Kong in 1941 (trans)

<sup>7</sup> The number was actually 1,834 (trans)

long as there were fishermen with boats, they all went out to save people. Very quickly, fishermen from Miaozihu and other small islands nearby joined in the rescue. 198 fishermen took 48 boats out on 65 journeys and altogether saved 384 prisoners of war from the sea.

At the time, the fishing boats were small, and on each trip could only take around a dozen people; the fishermen had to risk their lives and paddle the boats, rescue a few, then turn round and rescue some more.... But there were still many prisoners of war who, because they had been floating for a long time, and their strength was exhausted, were unable to wait for the fishing boats to appear for the second time, and sank forever to the bottom of the sea. In the end, 843 (sic)<sup>8</sup> prisoners of war drowned in the sea.

### **Not Only for Commemoration**

Wang Yimin

In the minds of the people of Qingbang Island, veteran Chen Yonghua is the most authoritative eye witness at the time of the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*.

On 10 September, the reporter visited veteran Chen Yonghua on Qingbang Island. At midday, his daughter was in the house preparing a sumptuous feast for the old man's lunch.

After lunch, taking the opportunity of old man having left, Chen Yonghua's daughter told the reporter that it was very possible that this would be the last meal the old man would eat on Qingbang Island.

A dozen or more years ago, Chen Yonghua became ill. For the convenience of medical treatment, Chen Yonghua and his wife left Qingbang Island and moved to live on Zhoushan Island. However, every summer he spent some time in his daughter's house on Qingbang Island.

In May this year, the old man was diagnosed with cancer and it was at an advanced stage. The doctor quietly told his family that he could only last another two or three months. In his family's view it was already a miracle that the old man had lasted until now.

That day, the old man saw that the Zhoushan weather was gradually getting cold and had proposed moving back to his own home, and would make the move after lunch. During the feast, the old man said I won't come back this year, but I'll come again next summer. "Whenever you want to come, you just come" said his daughter.

---

<sup>8</sup> Actually 828 (trans)

Veteran Chen Yonghua had been fishing all his life; he had been out to sea countless times, yet every time he spoke about rescuing people 70 years ago, from his account it seemed as if it had happened yesterday.

With the passage of time, there are fewer and fewer people who witnessed this piece of history. As for us, nowadays, seeking the significance of the *Lisbon Maru* is not only to enable more people to listen carefully, understand, and come to know about this piece of history; it is even more to seek the background to the historical value and the national spirit.

The poppy wreath that was flown in from the UK is now quietly resting in the exhibition hall of the Zhejiang Ocean University for students to visit. But what else should we do for this unforgettable commemoration? Apart from anything else, we must not repeat this bitter history.

### **Handed Down: A New Oceanic Culture Bright Spot**



Years later, most of the fishermen who saved British prisoners of war at the time have successively passed away. No more than five of the fishermen who witnessed and took part in the rescue that year are still alive.

However, it is worth rejoicing that nowadays, if you come to Dongji, sit down and chat with the locals, everyone can tell a few tales about the *Lisbon Maru*.

“I know a little, because I was influenced by my father’s generation from a small age.” Liang Yijuan’s daughter Liang Yindi works for the Dongji Town Government. In recent years, she has maintained a close interest in the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*, but she has a concern: “When my father’s generation have gone, we shall have to rely on us passing on the stories of that time; but the next generation might wipe out the memories of this piece of history.”

On 4 April 2005, the Incident of the Sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* Historical Research Society was established in Dinghai District of Zhoushan City and Liang Yindi became a member of the Research Society. “The main task of the Research Society was on the one hand to continue to unearth, sort out, research and do textual research on historical facts and material on the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*, and carry forward the spirit of

humanity and internationalism shown by the Zhoushan fishermen who, heedless of their personal safety, risked their own lives to save British prisoners of war; and on the other hand, to draw up a research plan and an action plan so as to provide material for future literature and art.

On 18 August 2005, with the support of people from all walks of life in Zhoushan, British veteran soldier Charles Jordon, a survivor of the *Lisbon Maru* disaster who had been rescued by the fishermen of Dongji, Zhoushan, after a separation of more than half a century brought his wife and two other survivors' relatives from Britain to Dongji, Zhoushan, to look for the benefactors who had saved his life that year, and was warmly embraced by the heroes who were still alive, Chen Yonghua, Shen Agui and the rest of the seven elderly fishermen.

In September 2009, with the support of the Dongji Town Government, and the hard work of members of the Research Society, the *Lisbon Maru* Commemorative Museum was established and opened on Miaozihu Island, Dongji. Hu Mu, a member of the Puta District Political Consultative Committee in Zhoushan, proposed many times that a memorial should be built to commemorate this great historic event, thereby adding a material symbol at the same time as recalling the precious spirit.

“This incident of the sinking was a maritime disaster with a relatively large number of casualties globally and historically, and was a cultural legacy of World War II; it should be of interest to the international community” said Hu Mu.



18 August 2005. *Lisbon Maru* survivor Charles R Jordan aboard a boat on the way to Dongji, Zhoushan, tightly embracing elderly fishermen Guo Ade and Wang Baorong.  
Picture: Field of Vision Network

**Zhoushan Daily**  
Sunday 7 October 2012

**Memorial Ceremony held for the 70th Anniversary of the  
Sinking of the *Lisbon Maru***

Reporter: Wen Jun    Correspondent: Chen Wenwen

“Remember the souls of 800 British soldiers 70 years ago in World War II.” 2 October this year was the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*. An act of remembrance, organised jointly by the Municipal Social Science Federation and the Zhejiang Ocean University, was held on Lianhua Island, Puta District, on the 70th Anniversary of the *Lisbon Maru* disaster, to remember the souls of the allied soldiers at eternal rest in the waters of Zhoushan.

**Poppy Wreath Posted by World War II Officer (sic)**

On 2 October 1942, a Japanese military cargo vessel sailed from Hong Kong towards Japan; the ship was laden with goods and materials from the war of the invasion of China, and more than 1,800 British troops who had been captured by the Japanese whilst engaged in the defence of Hong Kong. Three nautical miles to the east of Qingbang Island, the cargo vessel was sunk by a submarine of the US Pacific Fleet.

From 9:00 am until dusk, Zhoushan fishermen rescued altogether 384 British prisoners of war. Some of the survivors were recaptured by the Japanese army, and following the sinking of the ship more than 800 are at eternal rest on the ice cold sea bed. “Poppies are international symbols displayed for the remembrance of deceased officers and soldiers.” One of the initiators of the commemoration, Zhoushan maritime navigation specialist Hu Mu, told reporters that the Lisbon Maru Association of Hong Kong and Brian Finch, Chairman (sic) of the Middlesex Regiment Association, had sent the highly symbolic poppy wreath by express delivery.

It was explained that the Middlesex Regiment of the British Army was a unit that fought in World War II; Mr Finch was an officer in this Regiment. The reporters saw at the ceremony that on the face of the poppy wreath was written in Chinese and English: “Lisbon Maru Association of Hong Kong, to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the *Lisbon Maru* disaster” and on the back was Major Finch’s name.

**Carry Forward the Promotion of Zhoushan’s Foreign Exchanges**

During the act of remembrance, the mourners first presented a poppy wreath and observed a three minute silence. After reading out the address clearly in both Chinese and English, the Zhejiang Ocean University students took the address, folded into a paper ship, a poppy wreath<sup>9</sup> and carnations, tied them

---

<sup>9</sup> This was a wreath handmade locally (trans)

together and put them in the Lotus Ocean<sup>10</sup>. “When reading the address there was a lump in my throat; a feeling I could not describe”. Zhejiang Ocean University student Wang Junwen said revealing the history was like seeing a picture of the allied troops struggling in the water whilst being shot at by Japanese machine guns. “Mourning them enables us to feel how precious is today’s peace and we wholeheartedly wish that our nation can be even stronger and more prosperous.” “The remembrance activities carry forward the magnanimous actions of the courageous Zhoushan people in rescuing people and promote Zhoushan’s foreign exchanges.” Retired cadre Mao Dezhuan said that after the new district of the Zhoushan archipelago was established, opening up to the outside world and overseas exchanges would definitely enter a new phase, and the *Lisbon Maru* Incident would become an important gateway.

### **The *Lisbon Maru* Incident is a Bright Spot in Oceanic Cultural**

“The Lisbon Maru Incident is a valuable historic cultural legacy given to Zhoushan by World War II.” Hu Mu said that when he was on an exchange with Professor Shi Ping from the Shanghai Maritime University, Professor Shi Ping had pointed out that the *Lisbon Maru* Incident reflected the contribution made by the people of Zhoushan to World War II, embodying the Zhoushan people’s simple kind-heartedness, and reflecting internationalism in Zhoushan’s oceanic culture; it should become a bright spot in Zhoushan’s oceanic culture.

One of the initiators of the act of remembrance, Puta District Oceanic Cultural Research Institute Deputy Secretary General Sun Hejun, said the sacrifice of 843 (sic) British soldiers in one incident in Zhoushan waters in the Pacific Campaign, was a major incident in the history of the whole of World War II. The bodies of 843 (sic) soldiers show up the tragedy of the Far East Campaign in World War II. “Thoroughly enquiring into and researching the internationalism distilled from the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* has an important practical significance in furthering the understanding of the oceanic civilisation contained in Zhoushan’s oceanic culture.”

---

<sup>10</sup> A local stretch of water so named because it is near Lotus Island (trans)

# Zhoushan Evening Paper

Sunday 7 October 2012

## Zhoushan, Hong Kong and Britain Hold Commemorations in Remembrance of the 70th Anniversary of the Sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*

### Paper Boat and Wreath Offered to World War II Soldiers at Eternal Rest on the Sea Bed



Remember the souls of 800 British soldiers  
70 years ago in World War II<sup>11</sup>

Reporter Wang Xiaodong

If there was a monument, two ships, still sailing. Daybreak is in front, justice can be seen. 800 British souls, reflect the words from my heart. Wreath, paper boat; waves all around.... Dinghaiyi Middle School student Sun Niannu, full of emotion, read clearly the address for the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*; the scene was solemn. Students from the Zhejiang Oceanic Institute folded the address into a paper ship, and put it, together with a wreath, into the Lotus Ocean, floating towards the British soldiers, victims of World War II, now at eternal rest on the Zhoushan sea bed.

On the morning of 2 October, the Municipal Social Science Federation, the Zhejiang Ocean University and scholars from the City<sup>12</sup> joined with local enthusiasts on Lianhua Island, Puta District, and held an act of remembrance on the 70th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*.

### We Will Remember Them

“70 long years, but the spirit of this kind of great love cannot fade with time....”

---

<sup>11</sup> This is the main message on the banner. The other writing is too small to read (trans)

<sup>12</sup> ie Zhoushan City (trans)

The famous Hong Kong historical researcher Mr Tony Banham wrote the memorial address for the act of remembrance; he passed it on to Zhoushan; in the address he said: “70 years have passed; there are very few survivors of the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* left; but we still remember them, as well as their comrades and their rescuers.”

On 2 October 1942, the Japanese cargo ship the *Lisbon Maru*, carrying goods and material from the war of invasion of China, and more than 1,800 British troops who had taken part in the defence of Hong Kong and been captured by the Japanese army, was sailing from Hong Kong to Japan and was sunk by a torpedo fired from a submarine of the US Pacific Fleet, three nautical miles to the east of Qingbang Island, Dongji. After the disaster, the people of Zhoushan courageously rescued 384 of the British prisoners of war who were in peril; some of the survivors were captured again by the Japanese, and following the sinking of the ship a further 820 British troops up to today have been at eternal rest on the ice cold sea bed in the waters of the Zhoushan archipelago.

### **Two Nations and Three Places Hold Acts of Remembrance**

Zhoushan City had held a relatively large scale act of remembrance in 2005. That year, 80 year-old Charles Jordan, who had been rescued by the Donji fishermen, made a special visit to Zhoushan with his wife to thank his rescuers. Two years ago Mr Jordan passed away, but on 2 October this year in the UK, the next generation of the British allied soldiers of the time, including Mr Jordan's family, held acts of remembrance of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*, to mourn their relatives at eternal rest on the Zhoushan sea bed, following the sinking 70 years ago. “These acts of remembrance held at the same time in two nations and three places to remember the British soldiers who were sacrificed 70 years ago in World War II at eternal rest on the sea bed, passes on the oceanic spirit through the blood line. Today we must show this kind of spirit even more” said Puta Political Consultative Committee Member Hu Mu, one of the initiators of the act of remembrance.

World War II Officer (sic), Englishman Major Brian Finch, on learning that Zhoushan was to hold an act of remembrance of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* made (sic) a special wreath of silk flowers and had it flown out to the *Lisbon Maru* Association of Hong Kong, and the wreath was sent by express post to Zhoushan.

### **Clear Virtue of Zhoushan People Helping Others**

Professor Shi Ping of Shanghai Maritime University wrote a letter specially for this act of remembrance, which said: The *Lisbon Maru* Incident was an incident in World War II, and this incident had significance for Zhoushan; its value reflects the contribution made by Zhoushan people to World War II, and this contribution embodies the Zhoushan people's spirit of simple, kind-hearted humanitarianism in healing the wounded and saving the dying. This spirit is precisely one clear aspect of the human nature in Zhoushan's oceanic culture,

namely the virtue of being good at helping others; and furthermore, this incident reflects Zhoushan people's spirit of willingness to help others; it illustrates an aspect of humanitarianism in Zhoushan's oceanic culture and should become a bright spot in Zhoushan's oceanic culture.

And Hu Mu said, if we could find the bones of the British soldiers from the incident of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*, that would be a world-shaking event, and Zhoushan would become a world hotspot.

**Memorial Ceremony for the *Lisbon Maru* 70th Anniversary 02/10/2012**



