

**C**AN a man die a living death, enter the realm of hell and live to talk about it? An Indian business man in Cape Town, Mr. Abdul Razak Halim, believes that he can. He says that he virtually lived in hell for three days—"the hell of the sea."

It was a experience that affected him for a long time, but now it can be told.

For Mr. Halim the doors of hell opened about 1 a.m. on November 23, 1942—during World War II—when a ship on which he and his brother were sailing to South Africa was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in the Indian Ocean. Then began three days of horror during which he drifted on the sea with a broken hip while fish nibbled viciously at his limbs. He could do nothing to chase them off.

Mr. Halim left South Africa as a youngster, in 1927, to study in India. "My brother, Gaffoor, joined me there later. After 15 years we decided to return to South Africa.

"We were so homesick that we were prepared to brave the danger of sailing during wartime, and left Bombay in the s.s. Tilawa on November 20. We thought we would not be attacked because we were on a passenger ship."

## Loud Explosion

But one o'clock on the morning of November 23, while he and his brother were lying on deck talking about his 21st birthday, which fell on that day, somebody shouted, "Submarine."

"Before we realised what was happening, a loud explosion filled the air with a frightening vibration. People were running around in a wild, frantic panic.

"Women and children were whimpering with fear. Before I could move, something heavy fell on me and pinned me to the deck of the ship. The impact broke

my hip. It was the most painful experience of my life.

"My brother tried desperately to free me and drag me to one of the lifeboats, but he couldn't. The ship was sinking fast so I told Gaffoor to leave me and save himself as it would be senseless for both of us to die.

"He was crying as he put on his lifebelt and said goodbye. I was lying there for ages when the darkness was suddenly lit up by a powerful light. It was the searchlight from the submarine. It had surfaced.

"The captain of the sub, using a megaphone, shouted that he was giving the passengers five minutes to take to the lifeboats.

## Second Torpedo

"I saw men, women and children jump overboard frantically. Some without lifebelts. Two minutes later another torpedo hit the ship, and the explosion threw me down the hold.

"My head was spinning wildly. When I felt the stern of the ship lift for the final plunge, I lost consciousness, resigned to death.

"The fierce sun bored into my eyes when I became conscious again. I was floating around on the open sea lying on a cabin door. How I came to be on this door I don't know. I couldn't think.

"Then sharp jabbing pains began to jerk through my body. I didn't know what was causing these pains, until nearly sunset, when I saw that fish were feeding on my limbs.

"I was too weak to do anything to stop them, and had to look on helplessly.

"Then a woman's screams for help rang out. I saw her to the right of me. She had a lifebelt on. I tried to paddle over to her, but was too weak, and she drifted out of sight.

"That first night on the ink-black sea I

kept thinking of death. But I told myself that if I could hold on and not give up hope, I was bound to drift to some island where I would be helped.

"Gradually weariness and pain forced me into a fitful doze. Somehow I managed to stay on the door.

"Early next morning I saw flying objects in the distance. I thought they must be birds, and that birds meant land. I felt that I would soon be safe.

"Then I felt hunger pains. It was terrible.

"But later, torn between nibbling fish, severe headaches which gave me black-outs, and the pain from my broken hip, I forgot my hunger and became interested only in getting to the spot where I had seen the birds. But I just couldn't get there.

"Later I found a biscuit tin, and the thought that I was at last to get something to eat bucked up my spirits. I struggled to force the tin open. It was empty.

"I began to panic. The birds which had given me so much hope, came closer and I received a shock. They were flying fish.

## Sharks Came Near

"I lost consciousness. When I came round there were sharks nearby.

"I don't know why, but they didn't attack me. Then that water-filled world I was in began to spin around crazily, and I again lost consciousness.

"I don't know how I stayed on the cabin door while I was unconscious, but every time I came to, I was in the same position as when I had blacked out.

"When night came the sharks were still near me. I feared I would never live through the night.

"That night, as I lay thinking, I thought I heard the drone of an aeroplane engine. I shouted and shouted until I was almost hoarse. I realised that it must be impossible for anyone to hear me.

"The sea was becoming rougher, so I

clung to the door madly for fear that I would be thrown off.

"I was convinced that I could not avoid becoming shark food that night, but I was too tired to worry about death any more, and dozed off.

"I woke up suddenly with a strange feeling that I was being watched. I could not see anything, except miles and miles of water. I was going mad because every few minutes I heard those droning sounds of an aeroplane, but saw nothing.

### Became Delirious

"My stomach was burning and my mouth was bitter and dry. Hunger, thirst, injury and the scorching sun had made me delirious and hysterical.

"I remember shouting at the sharks, 'Why don't you come and get me? Are you scared of me? Can't you see that I won't stop you?' Then I would fear that I was going mad, and say to myself: 'Don't give up. You are still okay. You managed it this far, you can still make it.'

"Later I had my doubts, and said: 'But how can you make it in this water? Nobody will find me. I will never be saved. Why didn't I drown on the first day? What is death? What is it? How will death come to me? Will I fall off my cabin door and drown, or will I just die on it without knowing?'

"Then suddenly I saw them. Aeroplanes. Not one, but many, and they were circling on one spot. Perhaps they had spotted other survivors from the Tilawa?

"Hope again became a part of me as I wondered."

While Halim was undergoing his ordeal, a British cruiser, the Birmingham, was searching for survivors of the Tilawa.

A former member of the Marines, Mr. W. P. Freeman, who is now a fireman in Cape Town, was on board the Birmingham at the time, and remembers vividly how Halim was rescued, half-dead. Halim accompanied me when I went to see Mr. Freeman, who did not recognise him. I



Most times that Mr. Abdul Razak Halim stands by the sea at Cape Town he recalls the three days he spent in a "hell of water" after a ship he was on was suddenly torpedoed and sunk by a submarine far from land.

PLEASE  
TURN  
OVER.

to keep out of their stomachs."

Turning to me, Mr. Freeman said: "As we drew nearer to him he tried to lift his hand and wave to us, but his hand fell back limply. The crew was so impressed that we cheered him wildly.

"The captain drew the ship alongside of the cabin door on which he was floating and we took him on board.

"You are a very lucky man," Mr. Freeman told Halim, and turning to me, he said: "I doubt whether he would have lasted another day. He was a terrible sight to see.



The British cruiser Birmingham picked up Mr. Halim when he had given up all hope of ever surviving.

We thought he would die before we could reach Bombay."

Halim smiled: "When I felt myself being lifted on board, I thought it was another nightmare. I didn't realise it was true.

"The first thing I asked for after they had taken me to the sick bay of the ship was a cigarette. They would not give me water, and fed me with soup.

"That is about all I remember of the trip back to reality.

"I was taken to hospital in Bombay. The doctors there decided to amputate my left leg, but I refused, and was told the leg would infect my whole body. I remained firm, and they discharged me.

"I went to another hospital, and there, too, I was told that if the leg was not amputated gangrene would set in. I again refused, and was discharged.

"Then I consulted an Indian Yoga (Aryurvedi) who manipulated my leg and did bone grafting. Within a few weeks my leg was healed and I could walk again, but with a heavy limp. My left leg had become shorter than my right."

Mr. Halim, a short, slight man, with sharp features, is unlikely ever to forget his days in the "watery hell," but he is not letting it affect his zest for life.

He is married and has a family. He is also a successful business man, with a happy capacity for enjoying himself in spite of the recollection of his days of horror, which comes cropping up again and again.