



PRESS RELEASE: British Deputy High Commissioner offers Tilawa Wreath to memorialize 280 missing at sea

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MUMBAI, INDIA

On Wednesday November 23rd 2022, at the Grand Hotel Ballard Estate Mumbai India, the first ever commemoration was held for the S.S. Tilawa forgotten tragedy. The event was held on the 80th anniversary, the very day in which 280 people sadly perished due to 2 Japanese torpedo attacks by its I-29 submarine during the Second World War. 678 were rescued and brought back to Bombay on November 27th 1942.

The chief guest was British Deputy High Commissioner Mr. Alan Gemmell. An excerpt of his speech is as follows:

"It's my great honour to join you tonight, to mark the tragic loss of 280 lives 80 years ago. I thank Vice Admiral IC Rao and the Solanki family for the inspiring work they have done to bring this story back to present times and to keep it in our memories. We also remember the role of HMS Birmingham SS Carthage played in the recovery of 678 survivors. His Majesty's Government honours all those who lost their lives during the Second World War. It would be my great privilege and the privilege of the British deputy high commission in Mumbai if you would allow us to lay a wreath each year in our national service of remembrance for the victims of the Tilawa tragedy. In doing so you would allow us to recognize the critical role India and Indians played in the war effort. Including some 14 million people from your country who worked round the clock to provide critical supplies that were instrumental to the victory. Supplies that included 196 million tons of coal, 6 million tons of iron ore, 1.12 million tons of steel, turned into 25 million pairs of shoes, 37,000 silk parachutes, and 4 million cotton parachutes. A huge sacrifice from the people of India. The U.K. government fully supports your efforts to ensure that victims of this tragedy are not forgotten. From 2007 the Solanki family have been telling this story of this tragedy, to ensure those lost at sea are not forgotten."

In conclusion Mr. Gemmell read a poem written in November 1943, a year after the Tilawa tragedy, by Mr. Mervyn Maciel who was age 13 at the time. Tragically both of Marvyn's parents, and his 3 younger



siblings drowned. Mervyn is now 93 years old living in South London, U.K. His poem reads:

*"My mother was snatched at too early an age My father soon followed
that same old stage, And left us three brothers quite helpless, alone
To bear the yoke that they had borne. My mother's death took place at
home - Where all of us did weep and mourn But my father's was a death
at sea, It tore our hearts and orphaned three! My Dad with step-mum
and children three Was sailing to Africa full of glee; He smilingly
said, "I'll come back soon," But we knew not death would call so soon.
So sudden God's summons, so quick the deep sea Did swallow them all, O
Destiny, No time to say farewell, no time to say 'wait', Death's cold
gatekeeper had opened the gate! And now that he's gone, we can murmur
not But trust in God for that's our lot, And trusting in Him who
reigns on high We'll patiently wait till the end draws nigh. Then
Daddy and Mummy soon shall we meet When death has silenced our last
heart-beat, Together then we'll live forever and ever In He'ven so
beautiful, we shall part - no NEVER!"*

S.S. Tilawa was a passenger cargo liner built by the British India Steam Navigation company in 1924 named after a Burmese port, and used for about 18 years. Its last route was from Mumbai to South Africa via the Seychelles, Mombasa, and Maputo, ending in Durban. Passengers were mainly Indian nationals. On November 20th 1942 at 17:00, the ship left the Ballard Pier Mumbai. There were 222 crew members, 732 passengers, 4 gunners, 9 lifeboats, over 6,000 tons of cargo, including 60 tons of silver bullion.

On November 23rd, in the early hours of the morning, 930 miles northeast of the Seychelles, Tilawa was attacked by the Japanese Imperial Navy. The I-29 B-1 Submarine, twice torpedoed Tilawa. After the first torpedo attack, the first officer transmitted SOS messages to no avail. Within the short time of approximately one hour, a second torpedo was fired and sank the ship. For the next 2 days, all aboard still living would fight for their lives, attacked by barracuda, seeing their fellow passengers and loved ones drown to death. In 2017, the wreck site was visited by Argentum Exploration Ltd. who salvaged 2,362 silver bars, valued at \$50 million USD. The Republic of South Africa has engaged Argentum in an unprecedented maritime legal conflict, claiming state immunity over the bars.

More information on the S.S. Tilawa incident can be found on a website founded by Emile www.tilawal942.com. This website was created



for families connected to Tilawa to gain some closure, and meet fellow victims.

6 photographs attached.

Please visit www.tilawal1942.com for a comprehensive review on S.S. Tilawa. Any remaining survivors, descendants of victim's, or others with information are encouraged to share what they know and email info@tilawal1942.com

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