

Cassim Mahomed Sema, 81, of Newcastle.

He also managed to track down Len Thomas, 76, a crew member of the rescue ship, HMS Birmingham.

Thomas provided Mahomed with pictures of the panic-stricken crew and passengers scrambling for the safety of the lifeboats.

Mahomed said his father, who passed away in 1983, was tormented with guilt over his brother Omar's death for more than 40 years.

"He lived with this sadness in his heart for the rest of his life. He had this personal guilt. My dad never spoke about the incident, although he was an excellent storyteller."

Haunted by his father's grim tale, Mahomed has written to both the Japanese and the English embassies, pleading for help in securing records of the ship's cargo and its passengers.

"What irks me still is why the Japanese sank a passenger ship. According to Thomas, the ship was carrying 60 tons of silver, and Moulana Se-

ma said he suspected it was carrying gold as well.

"It makes one wonder whether the Japs were after its valuable cargo. What is also sad is that neither the Japanese nor the English have acknowledged the disaster. If it was a passenger ship, why was it torpedoed?"

His voice thick with emotion, Mahomed described how his father spent two nights on a piece of timber which he found among the float-sam.

"My dad told us he was holding Omar in his hands when they fell into the sea. As they hit the water, my dad lost consciousness.

"He could not recollect what happened. All he can remember is coming up for air, but his brother was not there. His brother fell close to the ship and it was possible he could have been hit by the propeller. He could not remember what happened to his two brothers-in-law, Hassim and Mockaria."

Mahomed said his father was not a swim-

mer. "He held onto the piece of timber to stay afloat. He spent two nights on it and kept shouting out his brother's name.

"My father told us he had nothing to eat. He used to fill his mouth with water and spit it out. He used his handkerchief to wet his face and also to attract attention. My dad also spoke of how sharks attacked others who were in the water."

Mahomed said his father was returning from India after visiting family members, while his uncles had visited the sub-continent to get married.

"My uncle, Omar Mockaria, left my aunt, Hajira, who is now 81, and a six-month-old child when he returned to South Africa. My other uncle, Joosub Hassim, left my aunt, Zubeida, who is now 79.

"Both my aunts, who are South Africans, have to this day never visited our country. They are living in Gujarat, India."

Moulana Sema, a founder of the Darul

other loud bang and, within seconds, the Tilawa sank."

Sema said the sea had been very rough.

"We broke open a box we found on the lifeboat and discovered some round biscuits. We found water in an aluminium container."

"They were given tiny pieces of biscuit and were rationed by being allowed only small sips of water.

"I was vomiting all the time. I had no strength. I could not even lift the oars to steer the boat. Because I was so sick, I thought that I would never make it to shore alive.

"Now and again it rained. The sun also burnt us, adding to our troubles. I often felt the urge to urinate, but somehow I couldn't. We saw seagulls the following day, which raised our hopes that land was

near." "When we saw the HMS Birmingham after two days, we took someone's shirt and tied it to a stick and waved it, but they did not spot us. Fortunately, a helicopter despatched from an aircraft carrier later spotted us and we were picked up.

"I remember we boarded the Tilawa when the sun was rising and we were rescued when the sun was setting," said Sema.

Malim said he was 14 years old when he boarded the Tilawa.

"I was on my own and I was very excited. We jumped into the sea when the ship went down. We were later picked up by a ship. I can't recall how we were rescued," he said.

Chhita said they would have perished at sea if they had not been rescued by the HMS Bir-

mer, Praggi Desai, who was a member of Mahatma Gandhi's Indian National Congress Party when the disaster struck.

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