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Naval History



Arkeonews

WWII Hellship Hōfuku Maru, War Grave of More Than 1,000 POWs, Found off the Philippines



The Hōfuku Maru, sometimes written without the macron as Hofuku Maru, was one of the Japanese vessels later remembered by Allied prisoners as "hellships." These were cargo ships and passenger vessels used by Imperial Japan to move prisoners of war between camps, ports and forced labor sites across occupied Asia.

Conditions aboard the ships were brutal. Prisoners were often confined in dark, overcrowded holds with little food, water, air or sanitation. Disease, heat, thirst and exhaustion turned the voyages into ordeals even before the ships faced the dangers of war at sea.

Forgotten documents changed the search

The breakthrough came after years of archival work by the Hellships Memorial Foundation, founded by retired U.S. naval officer Randy Anderson and later joined by researchers Tim Beckensall and John Duresky.

The team located long-overlooked records in American and Japanese military archives. Those documents pointed to a sinking site more than 30 miles away from where the Hōfuku Maru had long been assumed to have gone down.

That shift changed everything. Instead of searching in the traditional area, researchers were able to build a new search zone from wartime convoy data, attack reports and Japanese source material.

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