

COMPASSIONATE FOES

A story for Armistice Month by Stanley Evans

My mother's brother, Captain Donald Jackson, was killed in action during the Siege of Tobruk in 1941. A second brother, Frederick Jackson, was a merchant seaman aboard the RMS Rangitane when she was attacked by German raiders in 1940.

Rangitane carried 14,000 tons of cargo and 111 passengers when she left [Auckland harbour](#) Nov. 24, 1940, en route to [Britain](#) via the [Panama Canal](#). She was intercepted early on Nov. 27, 300 miles east of [New Zealand](#), by the German surface raiders *Komet* and *Orion* and their support ship *Kulmerland*.

Following standard [Admiralty](#) instructions Captain Upton ordered "QQQ" ('suspicious vessel') to be broadcast, which prompted signals jamming and shelling by the Germans. The interception had been made in the dark and the German ships were unsure of what they had found, believing that it was probably a cruiser-sized warship.

Once he knew that the distress signals had been received in New Zealand, Upton ordered the ship's surrender. The shelling had caused widespread fires and some casualties, and, with her steering damaged, the *Rangitane's* escape would be unlikely.

Sixteen people, eight passengers and eight crew, died as a result of the action, including those who died later of their injuries. The survivors, 296 passengers and crew, were taken across to the German ships by lifeboats or German boats and sent below.

German treatment of their prisoners was humane and as good as could be expected in the crowded conditions, and those who died were given proper funerals. The number of prisoners aboard the German ships caused concern to the German commanders and they decided to release most of them on the tiny island of [Emirau](#), off [New Guinea](#). The remainder, mostly of military age, were transported back to German-occupied [Bordeaux](#) and eventually to [prisoner-of-war](#) camps in Germany.

Frederick survived Emirau. Like many soldiers and sailors, Frederick never spoke about his wartime experiences.

After recovering from his experiences, Frederick resumed his seafaring career until he retired to Lowestoft, England, where he ended his days. If the German raiders' had abandoned the Rangitane's passengers and crew instead of taking them aboard their own ships, Frederick's story would have ended much differently.

Rangitane was one of the largest passenger liners to be sunk during [World War II](#).



British survivors on Emirau

Submitted by.

Stanley Evans' next book, *Cemetery Road*, will be published in 2016. He is the author of the award-winning *Silas Seaweed* books, and the *Sergeant Decker* books.