

# Global Times: Descendant hails memorial fulfilling Xi's pledge to commemorate Chinese fishermen in Lisbon Maru rescue

**Beijing, China Aug 24, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com))** - Global Times: Descendant hails memorial fulfilling Xi's pledge to commemorate Chinese fishermen's heroism in Lisbon Maru rescue

The film *Dongji Rescue*, which tells the story of the long-overlooked bravery of Chinese fishermen who rescued 384 British prisoners of war (POWs) during WWII, was released on August 22 in the UK and Ireland, with wider European releases following from August 29.

The rescue it depicts is rooted in a specific wartime incident: in October 1942, the *Lisbon Maru* - a cargo vessel requisitioned by the Japanese army to transport over 1,800 British POWs from Hong Kong to Japan, was hit by the US army off the Dongji Islands archipelago in East China's Zhejiang province.

Dennis Morley was the last survivor of the *Lisbon Maru*. His greatest wish was to build a memorial honoring the brave Chinese fishermen who rescued him. He called them true heroes, saying he would not have survived without their courage.

In 2022, Denise Wynne, daughter of Morley, wrote a letter to Chinese President Xi Jinping, to express gratitude for the Chinese rescue efforts and her unwavering support for the enduring friendship between the people of the UK and China. She also suggested a memorial be built to allow people to pay tribute to the brave Chinese fishermen and the British soldiers who were entombed in the sea beneath.

Xi, in a reply letter, encouraged family members of the survivors to make efforts to further advance China-UK bilateral friendship. The Chinese president also informed Wynne that he had instructed relevant departments to look into her proposal to build a memorial in Zhoushan for the *Lisbon Maru* rescue.

Wynne said she was very honored to receive Xi's reply. "President Xi said he would look into it (the building of the memorial), and he has done that," she said in an interview with the CCTV News, expressing her gratitude to the Chinese leader.

On May 20, more than a dozen descendants of POWs from the *Lisbon Maru* shipwreck, gathered at the unveiling ceremony of a memorial being built for the Dongji fishermen in the Dongji Islands archipelago.

Standing before the memorial, Wynne gazed intently at its surface. "Establishing a memorial was a shared wish of my father and the other British POWs," she told reporters at the ceremony.

"Now, our descendants can come and see it, and they can remember the sacrifices of their ancestors and the bravery of the rescuers. Future generations can also take pride in this," Wynne said.

## Erecting a new memorial

Dongji Islands archipelago, this serene seaside, witnessed a violent baptism of blood and gunfire 83 years ago. In 1942, the armed Japanese cargo ship *Lisbon Maru* was mistaken by an American submarine for a warship and struck in the East China Sea near the Dongji Islands archipelago on October 2, due to the Japanese army's violation of the Geneva Conventions by failing to display POW transport markings.

As the ship sank, the Japanese forces opened fire on the drowning British POWs. In that desperate moment, some local fishermen from Dongji Islands archipelago bravely rowed their small boats into the chaos, risking their lives to rescue those in peril. Ultimately, a total of 384 of the POWs were saved, while 828 would forever rest beneath the waves.

"My dad always said that the Chinese fishermen were heroes. He was always very grateful to them," Wynne shared with the Global Times. "Without them, I wouldn't be here."

To honor the humanitarian spirit of the fishermen, and to commemorate the bond forged between the Chinese and British people amid the war, a specially dedicated memorial was recently erected in the Dongji Islands archipelago under the care and guidance of President Xi.

On the unveiling ceremony of the memorial, the day's overcast skies, with the salty sea breeze caressing the rocky shores, amid gentle sound of waves lapping against the coast belied a tumultuous history.

This chapter of history was not destined to be swallowed up by the waves; it was bound to be known and remembered by more and more people. In June 2024, the documentary *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* premiered in China; in March this year, it premiered in the UK; and in August, the film *Dongji Rescue* was officially released. The Lisbon Maru incident itself and the humanitarian rescue efforts of the Chinese fishermen are gradually emerging from the annals of dormant history into the active public consciousness, becoming a vibrant testament to the global fight against fascism, and a lasting symbol of friendship between the peoples of China and the UK.

On May 20, in the presence of descendants of the British POWs, descendants of the Dongji fishermen who participated in the rescue, and officials from both the Chinese and British governments, the Memorial for Dongji Fishermen's Rescue of British Prisoners of War was unveiled on the Qingbang Island. At the center of the memorial, a bilingual inscription reads, "Love knows no boundary; Friendship transcends time."

### **'Cherish this legacy'**

Standing before the memorial, tears welled up in Liang Yindi's eyes.

A descendant of the Dongji fishermen, Liang recalled that her four grandfathers had participated in the rescue. The vivid images from history began to surface in her mind, visions of events recounted by her elders since childhood.

On October 2, 1942, while the fishermen were working by the sea, they spotted thick smoke rising in the distance, accompanied by the intermittent crack of gunfire. They would later encounter the scene of a large sinking Japanese ship, with many Western faces struggling to stay above the water, all while nearby Japanese soldiers on small boats continued to open fire on the drowning men.

"Quick, save them!" the fishermen shouted, rushing to the sea in their boats. They dodged bullets while adeptly pulling the drowning British soldiers aboard.

This heroic rescue scene has been immortalized by the memorial made of admiralty brass. On the right side of the memorial, two powerful arms intertwine, evoking the image of fishermen pulling the soldiers from the water.

Chief designer of the memorial, Zhai Xiaoshi, who is also Dean of the Public Art Institute at China Academy of Art, shared an anecdote with the Global Times about the design process of the intertwined arms. "Initially, we designed it as a handshake, but during discussions with local experts and fishermen in Zhoushan, some with fishing experience told us that it would be difficult to pull someone from the water with just a handshake; only by grabbing the arms could we exert enough force," Zhai recalled. Thus, the design team revised the plan, changing clasped hands to intertwined arms.

The memorial features many other creative design elements, such as sloping rocks, rising waves, and splashes of water from gunfire. "These elements are meant to recreate the chaotic environment created by Japanese gunfire at sea, and to create an extreme image of life-and-death rescue." Zhai told the Global Times. "This turbulent and dangerous setting further highlights the courage of the Chinese fishermen who risked their lives to rescue the British POWs."

The rescue moment is not only captured in the memorial, but is also deeply etched in Liang's heart. At the time, her four grandfathers rowed two boats and rescued 26 British POWs in total.

This story is one that children from Dongji fishermen families, including Liang, have heard since childhood. The bravery and kindness of their ancestors have become ingrained in their DNA and serve as lifelong examples.

Liang, now a director at the Dongji History and Culture Museum, often shares the story of the Lisbon Maru incident with visitors from around the world. She said that as a descendant of the fishermen, she feels more gratitude than pride. "I want to cherish this legacy, and ensure that more people know the story of the Dongji fishermen," she told the Global Times.

### **'A bond transcends time and language'**

The smoke of war has long since dissipated, yet the friendship between the peoples of China and the UK endures.

On February 24, 2024, during the Lantern Festival, the Chinese Embassy in the UK hosted a reception in Gloucestershire, attended by approximately 200 descendants of both the rescued British POWs and the Dongji fishermen who saved them. Wu Buwei, a third-generation fisherman whose grandfather participated in the rescue, moved attendees by sharing a cherished photograph of his grandfather alongside three survivors. He called on both communities to safeguard this legacy of courage and compassion: "We are one family bound by the sea."

Later, in June 2024, 15 British descendants traveled to Dongji Islands. At the coordinates where the *Lisbon Maru* sank, they cast wreaths into the sea to honor their relatives. Emotional scenes unfolded as POW descendants and fishermen's families embraced, addressing each other as "brother and sister."

During their stays in Dongji Islands, descendants of the British POWs including Wynne visited the local history and culture museum, where they found comfort and gratitude in the exhibits commemorating the Lisbon Maru incident, said museum director Liang. "As a descendant of the Dongji fishermen, I shook hands and embraced them, feeling a profound bond that transcends time and language," she said.

Once a remote and little-known place, the Dongji Islands archipelago has gained recognition as a charming destination in recent years. An increasing number of global tourists are drawn to the archipelago's shores. While enjoying the beaches and waves, they may also wander through the museum and come across the memorial. They will learn that not far from the memorial, beneath the

waves lie the remains of 828 British POWs, along with the wreckage of the *Lisbon Maru*.

"The memorial is a snapshot of history," Zhai said. He said that he hopes more visitors to the Dongji Islands archipelago will come to understand the Lisbon Maru incident through the new memorial his team designed.

"The humanitarian spirit of the Chinese fishermen deserves to be celebrated, and this history is one that must always be remembered," he said.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202508/1341418.shtml>

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