

GHOST OF

OURANG MEDAN

FOR OVER EIGHT DECADES, STORIES CONCERNING THIS GHOST SHIP HAVE BEEN CIRCULATED AROUND THE WORLD. HOWEVER, DURING THAT TIME PERIOD NOT ONE FACTUAL DOCUMENT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED
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In recent years, numerous digital painting representations have been made of SS *Ourang Medan* including this one.

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This image has been circulated as being a photo of SS *Ourang Medan* but there is no factual proof that it is actually the ship.

How do stories regarding the oceans' "ghost ships" begin? And, for the majority of these floating mysteries, do the facts actually back up the numerous accounts on the oft-times strange legends surrounding such vessels? Let us examine one of these floating ghost ships.

Her name was SS *Ourang Medan*. The word "ourang" (sometimes spelled as "orang") has its roots in the Indonesian and Malay languages as a term standing for "man" or "person." On the island of Sumatra (fans of Sherlock Holmes will recall that the famed detective mentions to his chronicler Dr. Watson "it was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared"), the largest city is Medan so the name of our ghost ship roughly translates to "Man of Medan."

Our story begins around 1940 in a world just beginning to be torn apart by war. Accounts centering on SS *Ourang Medan* started appearing in newspapers and magazines but there are many problems with this story and they center on historical accuracy. Today, researchers are not even sure that the *Ourang Medan* actually existed. Details on the construction and operation of the vessel are vague at best while

searches over the decades for the ship's registration along with an accident report have proven to be spectacularly unavailable. So, is it time to tell the story for which the "world is not yet prepared"? We think so.

The saga of SS *Ourang Medan* begins during the tumultuous years of 1939/1940 — Germany had invaded Poland along with France and rolled over those nations with little problem. Hitler was now poised on the coast of the English Channel, looking across that short stretch of water at Great Britain.

The evacuation of Dunkirk had been completed and the Battle of Britain was about to begin while Germany made plans for the massive invasion of the British Isles. Into these world-changing events chugs our freighter — the SS *Ourang Medan*.

Exactly when or how it was first reported is a bit unclear after the passage of over eight decades but

our tale begins around the receipt of a frantic SOS message sent out from the area south of the Solomon Islands. The first message stated, "SOS from the steamship *Ourang Medan*. Beg ships with shortwave wireless get touch doctor. Urgent." Then, according to accounts of the time, there was a second message. It noted, "Probable second officer dead. Other members crew also killed. Disregard medical consultation. SOS urgent assistance warship."

After the second message had time to be digested, came a third but it was



Strait of Malacca displayed in red.