

Ships sunk on the east coast of Sri Lanka during the British era

Author – Jinali Ekanayake (jinaliekanayake88@gmail.com) Maritime Archaeology Officer, Maritime Archaeology Unit, Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka

Co-Authors – Indika U. Hevage (hewageindika@gmail.com), Rasika Muthucumarana (muthurasika@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The eastern coast of Sri Lanka is considered to be the coastal region from the Kokilai lagoon in the north to Panama in the south. The coastal region has been used for various activities with various marine relations since the BC period. The activities of the Portuguese, Dutch and English in this coastal region during the period of colonial rule were continued. This can be confirmed by reference to archaeological and literary sources.

Due to the uniqueness of Trincomalee natural harbor in the world, this area can be recognized as an area that has been controlled as a colony by various foreign nationalities since the past. This Paper outlines the information about the sunken ships in the naval activities of the British rule in the east coast region of Sri Lanka. There are many ships that sank due to natural disasters, industrial errors and human activities, and the most notable are the ships sunk due to attacks during the Second World War. The number of ships found in that area are about twenty-one. Of these, about eight of these ships sank during the Second World War.

In addition to discussing information about the ships SS Ava, HMS Diamode, SS British Sergeant, another unique quality of this research paper is the graveyard of the Pasikuda area, which has been introduced by Mr. Darshana Jayawardena, who is engaged in diving research in the sea Coast around Sri Lanka, in the book called Ghost of the Deep. Discussing the identification of the four sunken ships at the place called shipwrecks with the intervention of the Maritime Archeology Unit. Accordingly, it is hoped to identify the cultural heritage related to the water created by sunken ships in the eastern sea region, which is a special sea region, and to discuss related activities.

KeyWords: East Coast in Sri Lanka, Shipwrecks, Cultural Heritage, British Era

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Sea region of Sri Lanka can be identified as an area where archaeological factors representing all periods from the prehistoric era to the colonial period are found. The eastern sea region extends from Pulmude to Pothuvil, facing the Bay of Bengal and has a unique position in the Indian Saga. The current Trincomalee Port, which was known as Gokanna Port in the past, has attracted world attention historically and geographically, is also located in this area. This region is also home to many important cultural and religious places including Buddhist Hindu Muslim temples and churches, as well as forts like the historical Batticaloa Dutch Fort, Trincomalee Fort, etc. In addition to its natural beauty and cultural significance, the Eastern Coast has also played an important role in Sri Lanka's history. The region has been the site of many battles and conflicts throughout history, including during the colonial period when it was a strategic location for naval powers.

Sri Lanka became a colonial state of different countries at different times due to various reasons such as spreading religion and establishing colonies with the main purpose of trade. Sri Lanka became a British colony for the last time. When the British expanded their power in Sri Lanka, more attention was given to the eastern region.

For several reasons, the British chose the eastern part of Sri Lanka to expand their power. Sri Lanka's east coast is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, which made it an ideal location for the British to establish a naval base to control trade routes and protect their interests in the region.

In expanding its power through trade, the eastern region of Sri Lanka was rich in resources such as wood, spices and gems, thus the ability of the British to gain economic advantages in the region was a factor. The main exports of the East Coast during this period were coffee, tea, rubber and spices, which were grown on plantations located inland. These goods were transported by rail to the coast and then shipped to Britain and other parts of the British Empire. The British began large-scale fishing operations in the seas off the east coast, and exported dried fish and fish oil to markets in Europe and Asia. In addition to exports, the east coast of Sri Lanka functioned as an important center for the import of goods such as textiles, machinery and buildings.

Sri Lanka's east coast has a long history of trade with countries in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Another reason for the British to increase their wealth and establish themselves as a leading trading power was that the east coast was an easier way to access this trade network.

In addition to this matter, it was unique that the British were able to use the natural harbor of Trincomalee to expand their power in order to gain an advantage over their rivals and other colonial powers when establishing control over the east coast.

There are various reasons why ships usually sink on Coastal areas. As the most common reasons are, Hurricanes, big waves, weather changes are one of the reasons for being affected by natural disasters. Various accidents like collision with other vessels, collision with rocks or reefs, technical faults in vessels, mistakes made by sailors is another reason.

Naval battles that occur when naval powers compete for control of their regions are another reason. Deliberate sinking of vessels to create artificial reefs and disrupts enemy shipping lanes, to prevent surrender to enemies, as a decommissioning method, for various operations, etc. is also a reason. The same is true for the east coast of Sri Lanka as a whole.

The unique facts identified in the study about these ships were that the majority of the sunken ships were ships that were destroyed during naval battles during the Second World War. Also, upon further study, it was possible to identify that the ships were named by the shipping companies with abbreviations.

- SS - Steamship
- RMS - Royal Mail Ship
- HMS - Her Majestic Service

The identified ships were found in the areas of Trincomalee, Wakare, Pasikuda, Batticaloa, Kalmunai, Pothuvil in the East Coast region and such ships it was possible to discover that about twenty ships had sunk in those areas. Through this research paper, some unique ships will be discussed among the sunken ships during the British period.

SS *British Sergeant* Wreck

The SS *British Sergeant* was a British fuel tanker that was broken in two and sunk off the coast of Sri Lanka during World War II by a Japanese air attack. The accident happened on April 9, 1942. The attack killed 36 of the crew and another 65 were rescued by nearby ships. The middle part of the ship is divided into two parts: the front part which is laid upside down and the rear part which is tilted to the side and buried in the sea. It can be identified as the safe ship from sunken ships. Its width is 16 meters and the length of one part is 75 meters and the other part is 52.80 meters. (Exploration report 2012, 33) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Sergeant - 2023.04.03)

The wreckage of the SS *British Sergeant* was discovered in 2012 by a team of divers off the coast of Batticaloa in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. The wreck lies at a depth of 25 meters and is now a popular

dive site for experienced divers. The site is also considered an important historical artifact as a reminder of Sri Lanka's role in World War II and its long history of maritime trade.

SS Lady McCullum

This ship has been engaged in duties around the Sri Lankan sea limits since the year 1908. Information has been revealed that this ship was also involved in the rescue operations related to the sinking of the Sir John Jackson ship that sank in the Batticaloa area in 1908. (The Times of Ceylon 28, September 1908)) While sailing from Trincomalee to Kalkuda hit a reef and sank on January 01, 1926 CE. At that time it was working under the Ceylon Steamship Company. The parts are broken and scattered all over the place. But it is possible to identify the bow part and the stern part of the ship. The poplar and the poplar shaft are well preserved. Two boilers and three iron anchors can be seen, one anchor is located in the front part and the other two anchors are located in the center and rear parts of the ship. According to the information from a diver in the area of 13.10 meters length and width from the front section to today according to the remains of the remaining parts of the ship, according to the information from a diver, he sold some parts of Sri Lankan iron for money and one of them was called "Ally & Macleelan" and "CLA" or "CIA Company" was recorded. (Exploration report 2012, 32-33)

HMS Hollyhock

HMS *Hollyhock* was a Flower-class corvette of the British Royal Navy that sank off the coast of Sri Lanka. A vessel that saw great service in the British Royal Navy during World War II. The speed of this 940 ton ship is 16 nautical miles. Forty-nine people have lost their lives due to the attack on this ship. It is 60 meters long. At present, it is submerged at a depth of 42 meters in the sea limits of Kalmunai.

(Jayawardene 2016,175) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Hollyhock- 2023.04.03)

HMS Hermes

HMS *Hermes* was a British aircraft carrier that served in the Royal Navy during World War II. It was one of the first purpose-built aircraft carriers launched and the first to be sunk by enemy action. The 20 number of aircraft that could be carried on this enormous ship, which was 182.9 meters long .During the war, HMS *Hermes* served in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and Pacific theaters. It was involved in the Battle of Calabria and the Battle of Crete and provided air support during the Allied landings in North Africa and Italy.

Due to the threat of Japanese attack, the ship left for the Maldives but was hit by several bombs and torpedoes on April 9, 1942 and finally sank with 307 crew members on board.

Today, the wreck of HMS *Hermes* is considered a war grave and protected site under the Antiquities Ordinance of Sri Lanka. The wreck is located about 10 nautical miles off the coast of Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka at a depth of 53 meters and is a popular dive site for experienced divers. (Jayewardene 2016, 175) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Hermes_\(95\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Hermes_(95))) - 2023.04.01)

HMS Diomed

In the 1960s, Arthur C. Clarke and Mike Wilson's group, including diving activities, have taken underwater photographs near Pegeon Island in Trincomalee. During those activities, efforts were made to locate the alleged location of the HMS *Diomed*, but their efforts were unsuccessful. It is said that in the year 1795 AD, the English Navy came to Trincomalee port in Sri Lanka with three ships: HMS *Diomed*, Suffolk, Centurion, Heroine and received a positive response to the request to surrender to the Dutch governor who ruled Trincomalee. But it is said that during this journey, the ship unfortunately hit an unidentified ship and its crew threw cannons into the sea to save the ship.(Clerk & Wilson 1964, 200)

James Martin Hill House Company can be identified as the manufacturer of the HMS *Diomedé* ship among the things that were discovered in the search of information on the Internet. It has also been reported that this ship was involved in the capture of South Carolina in 1782 CE and the capture of the Indian Ocean in 1794 CE. About eighteen cannons were identified here by the Marine Archeology Unit during the research conducted in 2011 CE, and a large number of small-sized gun bullets, a large number of broken bottles, wood and metal parts were identified. According to the facts mentioned above, the ship that was found in the Uppuveli beach which was wrecked by the British on the second day of August 1795 CE can be called HMS Diomedé because no other wooden ship has been found in the eastern region of Trincomalee. It was possible to further confirm this based on the amount of artillery and the size of the cannons found. (Exploration Report 2012, 23-25)

Four sunken ships were found in a small area of about one square kilometer in the Pasikuda area. Due to this, identifying each ship separately has become a difficult task. Mr. Darshan Jayawardene, who has published a book called "Ghosts of the deep" related to drowning, has introduced this place as "the graveyard of ship wrecks" in his book. Three of the four ships were identified separately after comparing the data obtained during the discoveries and research carried out by the Maritime Archeology Unit. Accordingly, the new nomenclature could be given to the ship instead of the existing nomenclature. Through this research paper the facts related to those identified vessels are unique. (Jayawardene 2016, 198)

SS Gladys Moller

It has now been confirmed that the 'Pasikuda steamship 01' identified during research by the Galle Marine Archeology Unit is the SS *Gladys Mula Nauka*. The reason for this is that in the research activities of the Galle Maritime Archeology Unit, measurements have been taken that these ships are 125 meters long and 17 meters wide. It is closest to the SS *Gladys Moller*, which are 129.5 meters long and 15 meters wide. It can be said so because the remaining three ships lost at this point are less than 108 meters in length. Also taking into account the fact that the information found on the ship includes three steam-powered boilers with a single aft rod and an aft blade. This ship, located at a depth of about 8 meters, was used as a cargo ship during the British rule. (Jayawardene 2016 ; 198) (Exploration report 2012: 39-40)

SS Clan Lamont

After engaging in research through the information about the ship SS *Clan Lamont* that sank on May 3, 1891 mentioned in the book of Mr. Darshan Jayawardena, it was identified that this ship is the ship introduced by the Galle Sea Archeology Unit as steamship number two. The ship was measured to be 94 meters long and 11 meters wide. The length is similar to the length of the SS Clan Lamont and the facts found in the information found about the ship were also similar to this ship in having three boilers with a single stern and on the other side. The most important facts were that the ship known as Pasikuda steamer number two also had the double mast used for sails found on the SS Clan Lamont. This ship also sank at a maximum depth of eight meters. This ship is the most decayed of the sunken ships at this location. (Jayawardene 2016, 198)

SS Amarillys

This can be introduced as a ship found by chance. In the year 2014, while taking photographs of Pasikuda steamship number two, this ship was found and it was identified that this ship was operated by steam power and had three boilers. The maximum depth of the ship was about 11.5 meters. The information that it was not sunk in the Kalkuda area was found in a book written by the hand of a contemporary British officer in this country. "In February 1908, the Amarillys steamer of the Stagalin Company was

wrecked at Venludis Point near Calcutta," it says. Researching the information revealed that the ship was carrying coal from Calcutta to Bombay in India and was wrecked in the Kalkuda area.

Although the information about the ship was found in this way, it was quite a difficult task to identify these ships from the ships sunk at that place. After engaging in a comparative value with the information received, it was possible to identify what the ship was. The information received there is that the Anva ship is 106.68 meters long and 14.63 meters wide. During the records taken by the Galle Maritime Archeology Unit, a ship with a length of 108 m and a beam of 15 m was found and it was named Pasikuda steamer No. 03. It was confirmed that steamer number three was none other than the SS Amaryllis, as all three ships, which were difficult to confirm, were less than 100 meters in length, and had three boilers and a stern and a stern.(Exploration report 2014, 40-41) (gunawardane 2008, 48).

In addition to these vessels, there are many sunken ships of the British rule, now identified by various names such as SS *Ava*, SS *Sir Jhon Jackson*, Pasikuda Iron wreck 01, SS *Brenus*, Batticloa boiler wreck, Umari, Komari etc., which are now part of the historical story and have functioned as bio-systems and helped to create the beautiful diving site. Accordingly, we can recognize that because of these ships sunk during the British period, they give great value to the history of the region and have also helped to strengthen the economy of the region.

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