

THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING THE AFTERMATH OF THE BOMBING OF MV KOOLAMA IN FEBRUARY 1942 OFF THE KIMBERLEY COAST

On 2 October 1996, Bill Loane, author of *The Koolama Incident*, spoke to the Kimberley Society about his latest research. No summary of the talk is available but Rod Moran, the Books Editor at *The West Australian*, had earlier hailed the Japanese attack on the *Koolama*, which occurred on 20 February 1942, as one of WA's most intriguing wartime dramas. The story of the attack is contained in Bill's book, and his talk focussed on evidence that had recently come to light about a possible mutiny by the ship's officers after the attack. Was there, as Bill believes, an official cover-up during the war?

Postscript

Since the presentation of Bill's talk, there has been a lot of interest in this topic. The following book note, published in the Kimberley Society's *Boab Bulletin*, provides an update.

The Koolama Incident in the Timor Sea, 1942 by Bill Loane. Rosenberg Publishing, [Kenthurst, NSW], 2004. Soft cover, 215 pages, RRP \$29.95. A decade ago, Bill Loane published *The Koolama Incident* to reveal, for the first time, the events that surrounded the Japanese bombing of the *Koolama* off a remote part of the Kimberley coast. The book created such interest that he continued to collect information about those events. Some of that information went into a documentary titled "Malice or Mutiny: The Koolama Incident", which screened late last year on the George Negus show. Another one-hour film commissioned by the ABC at that time has yet to go to air. It will be well worth watching and, in the meantime, Rosenberg has launched Bill's revamped and partly rewritten book. The new edition is stylishly presented and includes rare 1942 photographs. Drawing on Bill's extensive research, it tells the story of the only ship bombed, and subsequently sunk, in Western Australian waters during World War II. It is a complex story and, in dealing with the conflict that complicated the escape of the 180 survivors, Bill takes great care to avoid discrediting any of those who participated in what, to some, appears to have been a mutiny. His weaving together of scraps from diaries, interviews and reports allows him to document events that, at the time of their occurrence, were shrouded in secrecy. The book is thus a welcome addition to both the military history and the social history of Australia's north. Copies are available in bookshops and, with the addition of \$5 for postage and packing, from the publisher at PO Box 6125, Dural Delivery Centre, NSW 2158.

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