

# WHY THE WAR ENDED

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11 August 1937: The famous American aviatrix Hilda Stammers disappears while attempting to fly over the Pacific Ocean after taking off from Patagonia in South America.

22 June 1922: A relatively unusual item in the daily report of the Mount Wilson Observatory states that a familiar planet has changed appearance when viewed through a telescope.

1 September 1939 to 12 January 1940: Germany demands Poland handover Danzig. Poland refuses. Germany invades Poland. France and Great Britain join the war in support of Poland. Apocalypse in Europe. Spreads to Asia. Japan annexes Formosa from China. An American naval expedition against Japanese airbase in the Pacific Ocean. Germany and Japan declare war on America.

12 February 1940: After only a few months of war across Europe and Asia, most cities destroyed, millions killed. Unexpected declaration of the end of war.

1 March 1941: Astounding news about Australia. Arrivals and departures of ships and planes banned by order of the new League of Nations. Surprise, curiosity and suspicion among people around the world.

15 January 1940: The first reception of a strange radio message by an Australian warship cruising near New Guinea. Captain grows curious. The attention of two British warships directed towards the area. Ignoring military orders, a British plane flies off in the search of the source of the message.

20 January 1940: A British plane hit by Japanese fire over Formosa. Injured pilot captured by Japanese.

22 January 1940: Secret radio exchanges between the heads of state of Japan, Germany and Italy.

28 January 1940: Voluntary proposal of armistice by Germany, Japan and Italy to Britain, France and America. Suspicion and scepticism from Britain, France and America. Proposal of an all nations meet in Shanghai at Japan's insistence.

20 March 1940: Expedition of international team of scientists to New Guinea.

18 December 1940: A League of Nations ban on the broadcast of new, sensational news from recently constructed observatory in Lhasa.

4 May 1941: Worldwide panic at the revelation of unimaginable epidemics across Australia, China and South America. United world prepares for new battle.

Most of the events alluded to here in brief with the dates jumbled up are known today. Yet, most people are aware of neither the deep relationship between these seemingly disparate events, nor of the enormity and unimaginable nature of the phenomenon that they point to. The whole affair is shrouded in horrific, unravelled mystery.

Under orders from the League of Nations, it was forbidden to reveal all the details of the matter. But realizing that the people of the world cannot be left in doubt, suspicion and the uncertainty of oncoming terror, the ban has now been lifted. A complete account of the greatest crisis in the history of the earth is provided here.

First, we must go back to 22 June 1922, on board a ship in the Pacific Ocean. An ordinary freight ship. Sailing from Selibis to Darwin.

Late at night. Mr Langdon, the aged second mate, is the only person on watch on the observation bridge. Not that there is anything to watch over. A cloudless star-filled sky, a motionless sea. But for the sound of the propeller screws, it is hard to tell the ship is moving.

Gazing into the darkness, Mr Langdon is probably thinking about his home in the valleys of Scotland. Retirement is approaching. He has spent his entire life at sea, without having attained the success he had hoped for. But he has no regrets. All he wants is to spend the rest of his life in peace in his own country. So what if he has not gained fame or power? Are these the only ingredients of happiness?

Perhaps destiny is smiling covertly at Mr Langdon's desires. No one

knows that even if he does not seek it, his name will be connected to the history of an epochal change on earth.

As Mr Langdon is trying to recall images of Scotland, his flight of fancy is suddenly interrupted. He stares at the sky in disbelief. In the course of the 30 years he has spent as a sailor, Mr Langdon has seen many remarkable sights on the high seas, but he has never been as astounded as he is tonight.

What is visible in the skies can be described as a meteor shower, but this description does not do justice to it. He has been fortunate enough to witness many such showers in the course of his duty during silent nights in the warm tropics. But the scene tonight cannot be compared to them.

He has never heard of so many meteors of such dimension and brightness falling to earth together. The most noticeable aspect is the perfect formation in which they journey downward. Someone seems to have arranged them with great skill, like fireworks, before ejecting them in the sky.

Although Mr Langdon does not get the chance to count them accurately, he estimates there must be 20 of them. Their radiance makes the darkened sky glow with a blinding light for a few moments. Not just that, he also thinks he hears a strange sound as the burning meteors plummet earthward. The darkness and silence of the night are restored soon afterwards. Later, Mr Langdon wonders whether he has been dreaming.

The very next day, he informs the captain of the ship, as well as several other shipmates, of the strange meteor shower. It is revealed that another of the sailors also saw the strange glow, though not the meteors themselves. The incident is mentioned in the log.

The incident is considered closed for the moment. Mr Langdon returns home and writes about the meteor shower for a minor newspaper. Not many people read it. Even fewer make an attempt to understand the mystery.

If it is not for the intrepid American aviatrix Hilda Stammers's attempt to fly over the Pacific Ocean 15 years later, on 11 August 1937, and if another two-and-a-half years later, a sailor on an Australian warship is not roused into action by a strange radio message received while sailing near New Guinea, it is doubtful whether humanity would have had the good fortune of solving this mystery in time.

Let us begin the second act of our story aboard the warship.

The flames of the world war are burning across the globe. Separated from its fleet, an Australian destroyer is trying to navigate a dangerous area under the cover of night to escape the Japanese navy. There is no respite for the operators in the radio room. The destroyer can only move forward by constantly exchanging coded messages with other ships. Danger lurks in every moment. One message not received, one instruction misread, and the vessel will either fall into enemy hands or be dashed on the rocks of New Guinea's treacherous coast.

As the messages pile up, an operator is startled by a new, very faint communication in his receiver. *Who could be sending an uncoded message in this time of war?*

He has no time to concentrate on this message. But his curiosity is growing. As soon as he has a few moments to spare, he tries to read the entire message. When he does, his confusion increases.

*Would anyone but a lunatic send such an eccentric message?*

'Go to the source of the River Sepik in New Guinea. Earth faces imminent disaster. There is no time – no time.'

What does this mean? And yet, the radio operator cannot be indifferent to it. He cannot help relaying it to his fellow operators, followed by the commander of the ship.

By this time they have sailed out of enemy waters into a relatively safe zone, secure after receiving assurances of support from two British warships nearby. The strange radio message becomes the subject of their attention now. The message is still being transmitted constantly, like a distant cry for help from a dying person.

The commander of the destroyer is not a man who is bound by routine. He has the imagination and the courage to go beyond established procedures.

On his orders, the attention of the two British warships nearby is drawn to the message. They are asked whether they can make sense of the communication.

The message has also been received by these two ships. It turns out they don't understand it either. One of the commanders has been on an expedition once within New Guinea – he says the source of River Sepik is still unknown to outsiders. No one from the civilized world has set foot there yet.

The message is about to be abandoned as the ravings of a lunatic. But destiny is not wholly unkind when it comes to the human race. British warships have a plane or two on board to look for submarines. After discussions about the message with Mr Benn, the pilot of one such plane, both he and the aircraft are found missing. No one knows when he has taken off in the darkness of the night, despite having no formal orders.

Flying off with a plane without orders is an act of gross indiscipline. Punishment is inevitable. But it seems unlikely that Mr Benn will return to face it.

Let us now follow Mr Benn's aircraft deep into an unknown, hilly region of New Guinea in search of the source of the Sepik.

It is nearly dawn. The wings of the aircraft are red from the rising sun. Below, the forest-covered hills of New Guinea are still dark. The first rays of the sun are yet to reach them. A faint thread can be seen amidst the darkness. The Sepik.

Gradually, the terrain becomes visible. The Sepik turns into a silver ribbon. Mr Benn flies at a lower altitude. Hé is now flying over an undiscovered part of New Guinea. Even if he cannot solve the mystery of the radio message here, his expedition will not be wasted. The descriptions that he can provide on his return is by no means worthless for exploration.

The plane drops even lower. The Sepik is becoming narrower, its source is not far away. Mr Benn flies over a range of low hills. The Sepik has cut a path through it.

Mr Benn reduces his altitude further. Tribal villages are visible now and then, houses resting on raised platforms. But this is strange! Are they not inhabited? Mr Benn knows the curiosity tribal people have for aircraft. But not a single human being can be seen.

It isn't natural for them not to emerge into the open at the sound of a plane flying overhead.

Mr Benn flies over several villages. All of them seem deserted.

The range of hills in the distance appear to hide the source of the Sepik. Mr Benn flies closer to the ground to observe the place closely.

How odd! A calamity seems to have struck not just the people but also the plants and trees in the area. They appear to be dead. He is also astonished to spot several perfectly circular lakes cut into the hillsides. Who has made these flawless structures in this land of tribal people?

The plane is skimming the treetops now. Mr Benn is about to pull back on his joystick to gain altitude when he notices something. The fuselage of a crashed plane. One wing points towards the sky.

A plane? Here?

Mr Benn now simply has to investigate. After circling the area twice, he lands in an open field. The first thing that catches his attention when he climbs out of the plane is an unfamiliar smell. Although far from being a stench, it is making him uncomfortable. Mr Benn looks around for a wild flower of the kind that gives off such a fragrance, but he cannot find any. Unable to locate the source of the scent hanging heavy in the air, Mr Benn proceeds towards the wreckage of the plane. A huge surprise is waiting for him.

When he is closer, Mr Benn can read the signs on the aircraft. He has no trouble realizing that it is American, and that the crash is not a recent.

Noticing a hut woven with branches and wild grass near the site of the wreckage, he is about to go up to it. He intends to ask its inhabitant about the plane. But he has to come to an abrupt halt, for a voice from the hut is saying to him in his own language, 'Stop! Stay right there!'

It is natural to be taken aback by such a development. Who could be speaking English in this remote land? Is the pilot of the plane still alive? But if that is the case, why ask someone from your own race to maintain a distance?

After a few moments of bewilderment, Mr Benn takes a step or two ahead. At once, a sharp order is heard from the hut: 'I'm warning you, don't move another step. It's dangerous.'

Stopping unwillingly, Mr Benn asks, 'What sort of danger?'

'You'll find out soon,' comes the answer.

'But who are you?' Mr Benn asks.

'You don't need to know.'

'Of course I do. I want to know whether you're the one who's been sending those strange radio messages,' Mr Benn asks hotly.

'So you're here in response to my messages. Thank you.'

'There's no need to thank me. Identify yourself.'

'It's no use. I'm beyond all that now.'

'What is this nonsense?' says Mr Benn and takes another step or two forward.

Now the order turns into a plea. 'No, don't come any closer. I'll tell you who I am. I'm Hilda Stammers.'

*Hilda Stammers!* Mr Benn stops in his tracks. *She's still alive!* It seems unbelievable. 'If you're Hilda Stammers,' he says excitedly, 'what objection can you have to showing yourself? Why, for that matter, did you send those strange radio messages?'

'I will tell you everything. It is to reveal everything that I have patiently remained alive.'

'But I want to see you first.' An adamant Mr Benn marches towards the hut.

'I beg of you, don't come any closer,' the plea is repeated in a wretched voice.

Now a bloodcurdling scream is heard.

It is Mr Benn who is screaming. He had not expected such a sight. It is beyond his imagination that the human body, god's creation, could become so gruesome. What he sees is not the beautiful Hilda Stammers but a nightmare. The figure in front of him is even more grotesque than the shapeless, hideous lump that one may get by inflating a human body like a balloon. Even the most obese humans retain some of their proportions, but this particular bloating seems the result of a dreadful disease of some kind. It creates an instant feeling of revulsion. Besides two eyes and the glimmer of a mouth in the middle of an enormous and ugly sphere, there is no resemblance with the human form.

Mr Benn rushes out of the hut. He now understands why Hilda Stammers refused to be seen, why she pleaded with him not to go any closer. Controlling himself with great effort, he says, 'I do not understand how this happened to you.'

A little later, a soft reply emerges. 'That's what I'll tell you. If I can do this service for the world before I die, I will have no regrets.'

To provide a detailed account of the valuable and extraordinary information that Mr Benn gathered from Hilda Stammers, we have to skip forward to the news of the British aircraft shot down by the Japanese over the island of Formosa on 20 January 1940. The pilot of this aircraft is none other than Mr Benn. He is on his way to Europe from New Guinea when this mishap occurs.

Here, too, destiny comes to the aid of mankind. Had Mr Benn died

when his plane crashed, it is doubtful whether humanity would have had the time to prepare for the ultimate test.

But Mr Benn, having bailed out with a parachute, is safe, although he has been taken prisoner by the Japanese.

There is no need for a comprehensive retelling of which Japanese officials Mr Benn is taken to, what he tells them, what evidence he provides for his claims, and how his statements filter upwards all the way to the top of the Japanese government. It is enough to know that it is on the basis of what an ordinary aviator reveals that the leaders of three nations voluntarily offer their opponents an armistice.

That the proposal was not in vain, that human beings have not taken leave of their senses despite being engaged in a brutal war, is proved by the first conference of the major world powers on 16 July 1940 in Shanghai. The conference is held in complete secrecy. Mr Benn is the only person besides heads of states and top scientists who is permitted to attend. It will turn out to be a crucial event in the history of the world. It is here that the League of Nations is reconstituted with several special powers. It is decided that a delegation of some of the finest scientists in the world will be sent to New Guinea to learn more about the incredible information conveyed by Mr Benn.

However, the League of Nations is unable to exercise its authority until the delegation of scientists returns from New Guinea. There is no dearth of people who are suspicious of the necessity and the purpose of reconstituting the organization. Marshal Renault, the well-known French general, has been opposed to the idea of the League of Nations from the outset. The longer it takes for the scientists to return from New Guinea, the more he incites his country against the existence of the League of Nations. He has no hesitation in attacking the League while attending a session on 23 July 1940.

As an agitated Renault is explaining to the gathering that it is futile to reconstitute a League of Nations, which has already failed once, that it is nothing but the conspiracy of a handful of power-hungry individuals, that they are demonstrating supreme obtuseness in giving credence to the absurd story of an insignificant and neurotic aviator like Mr Benn, an aged Japanese man with a mane of white hair is seen entering the assembly with slow footsteps.

Everyone present stirs at the entrance of this man. That is not surprising. For the aged man is none other than Dr Sanuchi, the leader of the team of scientists sent to New Guinea. His unexpected appearance, without being accompanied by anyone else, piques everyone's curiosity. But Marshal Renault shows no signs of relenting. Taunting the Japanese scientist, he says, 'Will Dr Sanuchi kindly elucidate on the mortal danger that earth faces which he learned of in New Guinea?'

The august Dr Sanuchi smiles. 'I hope to do that. But first, there is something else I must inform everyone of. The danger to our world comes not from New Guinea, but from a much more distant location.'

'More distant than New Guinea!' Renault says in a tone of surprise. 'And where might that be?'

Dr Sanuchi smiles again, but sadly this time. 'It is not from anywhere on earth, Marshal Renault – the threat to the world comes from Mars.'

'Are they going to attack us?'

'Not "are they", Marshal – they already have. Eight years ago.'

Now everyone is dismayed. What is Dr Sanuchi saying? Has he gone mad?

Gauging the reaction of the gathering, Dr Sanuchi says, 'Even though what I am saying is difficult to believe, it is absolutely true. We have arrived at this conclusion after detailed investigations and research in New Guinea, and after reconciling our findings with astronomers' records over the past 30 years. The Martians mounted an invasion of earth 18 years ago. The description from the Mount Wilson observatory of the meteor shower on 22 June 1922 and the account of the same phenomenon in a minor Scottish newspaper by Mr Langdon, the second mate of a freight ship, prove that the event took place.'

'But it appears to have been a rather friendly invasion,' says Marshal Renault mockingly. 'I see no signs of an army or of weapons.'

'Would you employ artillery to disinfect a patient's room from germs, Marshal Renault?' Dr Sanuchi asks with a smile.

'Why would I, when I have phenyl and chlorine?' Renault answers testily.

'That is the precise arrangement that the Martians made to disinfect earth, Marshal Renault. To them, we are nothing but germs on this planet. Instead of deploying arms, they have used a chemical which acts like poison on us. It is this poison that is about to destroy mankind.'

Now Dr Sanuchi explains the results of his team's investigations in detail. The burst of meteors that Mr Langdon observed 18 years ago were not meteors, they were projectiles fired towards earth by the unknown inhabitants of Mars. They exploded on landing in New Guinea. The circular lakes that Mr Benn observed were created by the impact of these projectiles. Dr Sanuchi and his team have discovered fragments from the metallic outer layer of the projectiles. The projectiles were filled with the seeds of a poisonous plant unknown on earth. These seeds were scattered on the soil, growing into vegetation over the years. They now cover most of New Guinea. The strange smell that Mr Benn got on landing on the island was from these plants. He did not spot them because they stick to the ground like moss. But he was told by Hilda Stammers that it is the smell of the poison that attacks human beings. The poison is inhaled and mixes with the blood, bloating and destroying the body and then the mind.

Hilda Stammers' plane crashed on this island. While trying to escape, she discovered the terrible plight of the local population who had been poisoned by the alien plant and learned the horrifying truth about them. Realizing the havoc that the poison could wreak on all living creatures, she applied her dwindling strength to repairing the radio on her plane in order to send out a warning message. She then tried desperately for many years to contact other humans with her ominous communiqué.

The people of the world have responded and tried to take precautions. But the poison has begun to spread already. The war between nations has been called off in the face of this impending doom, but this has not stopped the venom from infecting people elsewhere. From New Guinea, the plant has spread to Australia and from there to China and South America, bringing its poisonous effect with it. The League of Nations suppressed the news for a long time to prevent panic, but that is no longer possible. Australia, China and South America have become graveyards. The air there is so full of the poison from Mars that it cannot be breathed. Scientists are trying their best now to prevent the poison from spreading further. Although they have been partially successful, is there really anything to be optimistic about?

No one can doubt the intelligence and strategic superiority of those who can send poison to earth across space. It is unlikely that they will give up if thwarted this time. Human beings cannot even begin to imagine what form their next attack will take. All that they can do is to establish

observatories at different points on earth and train telescopes fearfully on Mars. There is no knowing how or when the enemy will attack. Mankind may become extinct when that happens.

The only source of satisfaction in the face of this global doom is that all differences of race and colour and gender seem to have been magically wiped out. The entire world is united today. Mankind has finally realized the foolishness of fighting amongst themselves.

## WERE IT NOT FOR

### ARJUN RAJENDRAN

Historians will forget the fishermen, their 5000 boats and black flags. The dimensions of the monument to the medieval warrior king is 210 meters tall and costs

enough to fund a decade of suicides for the state's indebted farmers – having battled pests all their lives, it's natural they should end theirs with pesticide.

A feat like David Copperfield's, who in 1983, vanished the Statue of Liberty to assert the importance of freedom, graces the inauguration.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister closes his eyes, rubs his temples, and the ginormous monument of the maharajah brandishing his sword, disappears like the values

of currency notes. Indian pilots, flying Sukhois above the Arabian sea, past the kingless horse – to reinforce the disappearance, touch spectators' raw nerves,

stir erasure into their blood. Any fisherman volunteering to cast his net only hauls in cow bones. The Hon'ble PM rubs his temples harder, and everyone is

in 1659, witnessing a grainy scene of a tiger-claw (تیر کل) plunging into Afzal Khan's chest. The PM opens his eyes. The maharajah is back on his steed, 420 meters tall.

The sea feels bountifully Hindu again. Gifts Bombay ducks and shrimps<sup>۵</sup> to the fishermen. A sword brandished at the sky, in case it starts raining Mughals.