

Bulletin Board Bulletin Board Bulletin Board

WWII's worst maritime disaster lives on in silence

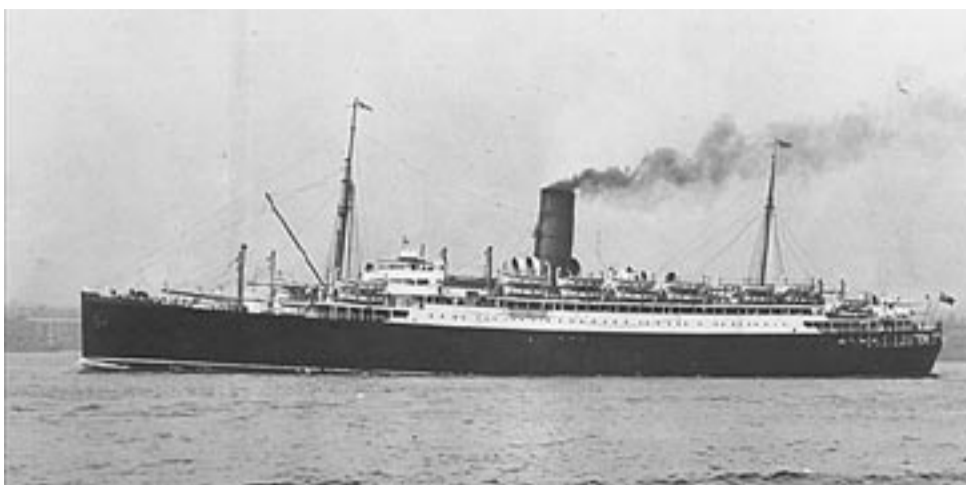
The Lancastria Association of Scotland is seeking help in tracing ex-servicemen and/or their families who were on board HMT *Lancastria* when she sank in St Nazaire, France, in World War II. Association membership secretary Linda Clark writes:

On June 17, 1940 at 3.48pm the requisitioned Cunard cruise liner *Lancastria* came under attack by enemy aircraft. She received three direct hits from a German Junkers 88 bomber and, within 20 minutes, the 16,243-ton liner sank, taking with her an estimated 4,000 victims.

The sinking is the worst single disaster in British maritime history and claimed more victims than the sinking of the *Titanic* and *Lusitania* combined. It is also the largest single loss of life for British forces in the whole of World War II.

It is a disaster that has remained largely forgotten and which, in part, has led to a silence that continues to this day — a silence the association aims to remedy.

The exact death toll may never be known and estimates range from as few as 2,500 to more than 6,000 lives lost. The *Lancastria's* acting Adjutant had desperately attempted to compile a list of those boarding from the small fleet of vessels ferrying men and refugees to the liner and initially put the figure at almost 9,000 embarked, a figure backed up by a number of survivors. That figure may be exaggerated and it is certainly disputed by the British



Lancastria, sailing from Liverpool, England.

Government. Recently, authors such as Brian Crabb have managed to pull together a full list of those known to have perished aboard *Lancastria* but there is evidence to suggest that many more individuals boarded her than official records indicate.

However, the scale of the disaster is only one part of the story and does not reveal the true extent of the horror that day. The events of that afternoon have become obscured, not least because they also coincided with another, "larger", news story, the formal announcement that France had capitulated to Hitler's Germany. Churchill, on hearing news of the *Lancastria* disaster, immediately placed a D-notice on it, preventing any knowledge of the sinking's reaching an already demoralised English population.

The association has helped many families find out what happened to their loved ones. Many received only a telegram in 1940 telling them their relative or spouse was "missing — presumed dead/drowned" and to this day they did not know where their bodies lay — most families presuming that they had never been recovered.

The association has managed on many occasions to provide information about the location of graves and the families have since made journeys to see the resting places of their relatives for the first time, 68 years after the disaster.

The association has an extensive library of information to help it trace the last movements of family members and many photos, maps and documents helping to locate the graves of those

servicemen whose bodies were in fact recovered.

On December 5, 2007, in the course of a parliamentary debate dedicated entirely to the *Lancastria*, the Scottish Government announced that it would commission a commemorative *Lancastria* medal. The first of these medals were presented to survivors, the families of survivors and the families of victims on June 12, 2008 by Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, in a moving ceremony at the Scottish Parliament. It was a truly wonderful occasion on which those who had been forgotten in the history books and were now in their late 80s and 90s finally received the recognition they so truly deserved.

The *Lancastria* was built in Scotland — in Clydebank, Glasgow at the Dalmuir shipyard of William Beardmore & Son in the early 1920s.

The association is at present fundraising to build a fitting memorial on the exact site where the drawing office and slipway once stood, now part of the gardens of the Golden Jubilee Hospital. If we manage to raise the funds in time we hope to unveil this memorial on June 17, 2010 — the 70th Anniversary of the sinking.

For more information or to join the Association access www.lancastria.org.uk or email Linda Clark at membership@lancastria.org.uk or write to **Linda Clark, Membership Secretary, 6 Sumburgh Street Glasgow G 33 3DB Scotland.**

Philippines calling

To read the current issue of the monthly newsletter of the Returned and Services League Angeles City Sub-Branch, Philippines, go to the web site: www.rslangelescity.com

To ensure receipt of our emails, please add secretary@rslangelescity.com to your address book.

Apprentices

60th anniversary reunion and Memorial dedication

Albury/Bandiana, October 24–26

www.austarmyapprentice.org

Contact: Frank Maloney (13thVM) 0418 728 181

Don't miss this one

AACC Memorial & Garfit-Mottram Dinner

Memorial Service 2 Oct 08 at Memorial Gardens, Gaza Ridge Barracks, Bandiana South Wodonga, followed by a BBQ. **Dress:** coat and tie (and female equivalent) with medals. Open to all ranks past and present. **Time:** 1830hrs. **Cost:** \$8.50

Garfit-Mottram Dinner 3 Oct 08 at Army Logistic Sergeants' Mess, South Bandiana Gaza Ridge Barracks. **Dress:** Summer Mess Kit (6B). Black tie or suit for retired AACC members (Sgt and above). **Times:** SNCOS/WO assemble 1830hrs & Officers assemble Army Logistic Officers' Mess at 1845hrs.

Cost: \$50

For nomination forms and RSVP by 15 September please contact Major Ruth Paul (02) 6055 4643 or ruth.paul@defence.gov.au

Call sign 42 — 2010 reunion plans

6RAR EAST TIMOR 2000 - Call sign 42 is attempting to conduct, on October 30, 2010, a 10th anniversary of the return from deployment in East Timor.

Expressions of interest are sought from members of the platoon so accommodation etc can be organised.

Contact: Col Bishop (0432 063 453) e-mail: A_227611@hotmail.com

Field Ambulance

Second Field Ambulance Past Members Association's reunion in Adelaide is on October 17–19.

Details from Phil 07 3869 0250; email dha09232@bigpond.net.au

RAAF photographers' reunion 2009

Plotters, photographer, interpreters and allied musterings
October 14 to October 21, 2009

at Caloundra, Sunshine Coast, Queensland
Low-key activities with a dinner on the Saturday

Come for as long as you are able and relive the memories.

For details
Contact photos@live.com.au

or photos
**165 Hotspur Crescent
Little Mountain
Queensland 4551**

Australian Rugby Choir — membership drive for would-be singers

Ex-service members who have attended plaque-dedication ceremonies arranged by the Australian War Memorial have commented on the musical support and the contribution of the music of the Australian Rugby Choir accompanied by the band of the Royal Military College.

These presentations require a considerable effort by the choir's administration in ensuring that enough choir members are at each performance and a

balanced voice output is available.

The ARC has more than 80 members and is recognised nationally as one of the finest in Australia. It has been invited on two occasions to perform at the Sydney Opera House. A large component of the choir has been invited recently to join a mass international choir performance at Carnegie Hall, New York, in September this year.

Unfortunately, an increasing number of the choir's more experienced mem-

bers, a number of whom have service backgrounds including in Korea, Vietnam and Malaya, are getting older.

The choir needs new members, particularly younger men, to enable it to continue to fulfil its commitments to the Australian War Memorial, the Bruce Stadium and other community activities.

There are no auditions and previous vocal experience is unnecessary. The only prerequisite is a desire to sing

with a group of other males of like mind.

Any ex-service members and others who are interested should contact the choir's ex-service liaison officer, John Prout: email jmprout@bigpond.net.au or phone (02) 6258 3151.

The choir rehearses weekly at the band room of the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Those interested will be welcomed by a choir member. There is no pressure to join.