

# Maritime Disasters of WWII

## 1939

### *ATHENIA (September 3, 1939)*

The *first civilian casualty of World War II*, the Cunard passenger liner **Athenia** of 13,581 tons, (chartered from the Anchor Donaldson Line) was sunk without warning west of Scotland by the German submarine **U-30** (Oblt. Fritz-Julius Lemp) on the opening day of the Second World War, the captain believing it to be an armed merchant cruiser. The ship was carrying evacuees from Liverpool to Canada. There were 1,103 passengers not including crewmembers. Survivors were rescued by the British destroyers **Electra**, **Escort** and **Fame** and the freighters **City of Flint** the yacht **Southern Cross** and the Norwegian tanker **Knute Nelson** which brought its survivors to Galway. In all, 118 passengers were drowned. Also on board were 316 Americans of whom 28 were lost. Oblt. Lemp was never court-martialled for this error but next day Hitler ordered that under no circumstances were attacks to be made on passenger ships. The **City of Flint** (4,963 tons) was later torpedoed (on January 25, 1943) with the loss of seven lives. On May 9, 1941, Oblt. Fritz Lemp and fifteen of his crew were lost when the U-boat he then commanded, the **U-110**, was captured. This was the most important prize of the war. She was carrying the much sought after *Enigma* machine which helped Britain to break the top secret German military codes.

### *HMS COURAGEOUS (September 17, 1939)*

The 22,500 ton light cruiser, later converted to an escort carrier, commanded by Capt. W.T. Makeig-Jones, and accompanied by **HMS Ark Royal** and **HMS Hermes**, was sunk by German submarine **U-29** (Kptlt. Otto Schuhart) while on anti-submarine duty 150 nautical miles west-south-west of Mizen Head, Ireland. A total of 576 men died in this tragedy, the first Royal Navy ship sunk in the war. Lost were 514 navy men, 26 Fleet Air Arm men and 36 RAF servicing crew. The carrier sank in about fifteen minutes after being hit by two torpedoes from a salvo of three fired from the U-boat. Captain Makeig-Jones stayed on the bridge and saluted the flag as the ship turned over and sank. All such patrols by aircraft carriers were stopped from then on. The entire crew of the **U-29** was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class, when the boat made it safely back to Wilhelmshaven, the first time this decoration was awarded to members of the U-boat service. The **U-29** survived the war and was scuttled on May 4, 1945.

### *HMS ROYAL OAK (October 14, 1939)*

*The first British capital ship to be lost in the war*, the 31,200 ton battleship was sunk at her moorings at the British Home Fleet Naval Base in Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, by the **U-47**, commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Gunther Prien. The **Royal Oak** went down with the loss of 833 men including 24 officers from her wartime crew of 1,234. Her commander, Rear Admiral H.F.C. Blagrove also died. At 1.16 am, three torpedoes were fired from the **U-47**, all three struck and within 15-minutes the battleship rolled over and sank. A total of 391 lives were saved from the stricken ship. Being anchored in the comparatively 'safe' waters of Scapa Flow, many doors, ventilators and hatches, were left open. If these had been closed at the time of the attack, the **Royal Oak** would have taken longer to sink, thus perhaps saving many more lives. The **U-47** made its way back to Germany and a hero's welcome for the crew. Gunther Prien and the **U-47** were lost while attacking convoy OB-293 on the night of March 7/8, 1941. The **Royal Oak** lies in 25 metres of water, 1000 metres from the shore. Every year, on the 14th of October, a White Ensign is

placed on the hull by Royal Navy divers. (A gift of 7,500 pounds sterling was given by the Maharaja of Gondal for the benefit of the dependants of those killed)

### A NEAR DISASTER *(October 30, 1939)*

The German submarine **U-56**, commanded by Lieutenant Wilhelm Zahn, found itself bang in the middle of a contingent of the British Home Fleet sailing just west of the Orkney Islands. Leading the contingent was the battleship **HMS Rodney** followed by the **HMS Nelson** and **HMS Hood** all surrounded by a protective screen of destroyers. Here was the **U-56**, sitting at periscope depth in an ideal firing position and straight ahead was the Flagship of the Fleet, **HMS Nelson**. Elated, Zahn fired three torpedoes at the target which was impossible to miss. Two of the torpedoes actually hit the Nelson but did not explode! The U-56 made a quick getaway. Had the torpedoes exploded, the V.I.P.s on board the **Nelson** would have been in great danger. They had gathered for a conference to determine what action had to be taken after the sinking of the **Royal Oak** at Scapa flow. The illustrious guests included the C-in-C Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Charles Forbes, the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Dudley Pound, and Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Winston Churchill! This heaven sent opportunity caused Admiral Karl Donetz, the German U-boat supremo, to write in his war diary "*Without doubt, the torpedo inspectors have fallen down on their job ... at least 30% of our torpedoes are duds!*" Gunther Prien, hero of Scapa Flow, remarked "*How the hell do they expect us to fight with dummy rifles*". Without doubt this was a great embarrassment to the German Navy - 31 U-boat attacks from favourable positions, 4 attacks on the Warspite, 12 attacks on various cruisers, 10 attacks on destroyers and 5 attacks on troop transports - without a single hit! All torpedoes failed to explode. How lucky we were!

### RAWALPINDI *(November 23, 1939)*

P&O liner on the London, Bombay and Far East routes. At the outbreak of World War II the ship was taken over and converted to an armed merchant cruiser. While on patrol between Iceland and the Faroes she was attacked by the German battle cruisers **Scharnhorst** and **Gneisenau**. Hopelessly outmatched she attempted to escape into a nearby fog bank. With her bridge and wireless-room destroyed and completely at the mercy of the enemy ships it was decided to abandon the vessel. The casualties on board the Rawalpindi amounted to 275 dead including her commander Captain Kennedy and 39 other officers. Twenty-two crewmembers were taken prisoner by the German warships. The blazing **Rawalpindi** drifted for three hours before sinking.

### ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE *(December 13-17, 1939)*

The German 16,200 ton battleship, was named after World War I hero Graf Maximilian von Spee (1861-1914). It was damaged during the Battle of the River Plate off the coast of Uruguay, in which the British cruisers **Exeter**, **Ajax** and the New Zealand manned light cruiser **Achilles** took part. The ship was forced to take refuge in the neutral port of Montevideo where she was granted only a temporary stay. During the battle, the first naval engagement in World War II, 72 British sailors were killed and 36 men killed from the Graf Spee. During her war cruise of 77 days, the **Graf Spee** had sunk nine merchant ships totalling 50,000 tons. The battleship was scuttled by her crew on the 17th, soon after she left port. The ship was blown up by her own torpedoes which were rigged to explode after her crew had been taken off. Rather than see the ship humiliated in defeat, Hitler had ordered her destruction. Her commander, Captain Hans Langsdorff, who never willingly gave the Nazi salute, committed suicide three days later. (*He is buried in the German Cemetery in Buenos Aires*) During her short career the Graf Spee had sunk nine ships totalling 50,089 tons. These were the steamships **Clement**, **Newton Beach**, **Ashlea**, **Huntsman**, **Trevanion**, **Africa Shell**, **Doric Star**, **Tairoa**, and **Streonshalh**.

# 1940

## SS DOMALA *(March 2, 1940)*

British India passenger liner of 8441 tons, launched in 1921. Bombed by the German Luftwaffe, badly damaged, set on fire and had to be beached off the Isle of Wight. *This was the first naval action in the English Channel in World War II.* (Some sources say that around 100 people were killed) Later, the ship was salvaged and rebuilt under her new name, **Empire Attendant**. It was while part of Convoy OS-33 that the ship was torpedoed in 1942 by the U-582 south of the Canary Islands. The ship's captain, forty-nine crewmembers and nine gunners were lost. In the U-Boat's log she is entered under her former name, '**Domala**'.

## RIO DE JANEIRO *(April 8, 1940)*

Built in 1914, the 5,261 ton German passenger liner was transporting troops and horses to the invasion of Norway. While off Lillesand in southern Norway, the ship was torpedoed by the Polish submarine **Orzel**, which had made a dramatic escape from the Estonian sea port town of Tallin, seventeen days after the war with Poland started. The first torpedo missed, the second scored a hit but failed to sink the Rio de Janeiro. With smoke pouring from the stricken liner, the order was given to "abandon ship". A third torpedo struck the ship amidships, breaking its back and sending it slowly to the bottom. About 150 men including 97 Luftwaffe Flak troops and 80 horses were drowned. There were 183 survivors. *This was one of the first actions by a Polish submarine in the Second World War.* Within 48 hours all the main ports of Norway were in German hands. In June of that year, the **Orzel**, commanded by Lt. Cdr. Grudzinski, fell victim to a mine in the Skagerrak and sank with its entire crew of 5 officers and 49 men.

For more on the history of the Orzel, go to <http://www.dutchsubmarines.com/>.

## BLÜCHER *(April 9, 1940)*

German heavy cruiser launched in 1937, sunk by shells and two torpedoes from the Oscarsborg Fortress at the entrance to Oslo harbour while participating in the invasion of Norway (Operation Weserübung) After receiving many hits from the 280-mm guns and two torpedoes from the Kaholmen Fortress at the other side of the Oslo Fjord, the **Blucher**, which was carrying 882 military staff, the 163rd Infantry Division, and a team of Gestapo agents whose mission was to occupy Oslo and arrest the King of Norway and members of his government, turned turtle and sank at 7.30am. (Ironically these guns were made by Krupps of Essen in 1892) A total of 125 sailors and 195 soldiers and civilians lost their lives but her Commander, Vice Admiral Oskar Kummetz, survived. (Some sources say around 600 went down with the ship) The ship's namesake in World War I was sunk by British heavy cruisers at the Battle of Dogger Bank on January 23, 1915. The death toll on that occasion was just over 900.

## HMS GLORIOUS *(June 8, 1940)*

Sister ship of the **Courageous**, sunk by the German warships **Scharnhorst** and **Gneisenau** while aiding in the evacuation of British troops from Narvik in Norway (Operation **Alphabet**). En route to Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, the **Glorious**, (22,200 tons) commanded by Captain D'Oyly-Hughes, encountered the German cruisers which scored direct hits on the carrier at a range of 20,000 yards putting her flight deck out of action. A total of 1,207 men, including 41 RAF ground personnel and 18 RAF and Fleet Air Arm pilots, died. There were 39 survivors rescued by the Norwegian ship '**Borgund**'. Two escort destroyers, the **Acasta** (Cdr. Glasford) and **Ardent** (Lt-Cdr. Barker) were also sunk during the attack. The **Acasta** had fired a torpedo at the **Scharnhorst** causing damage to her quarterdeck and killing 48 men and two German officers. The total death toll from the three British vessels

amounted to 1,519. There were only 63 survivors but 25 of these died from exposure before being picked up two and a half days later. (*Acasta* 164 and *Ardent* 152) Only 38 men survived the sinking of the three ships (only one survivor from the *Ardent*, Able Seaman Rodger Hooke and only one survivor from the *Acasta*, Leading Seaman Cyril 'Nick' Carter) The British Admiralty now accepts that it was the torpedo fired from the *Accasta* that finally sunk the *Scharnhorst* and that Leading Seaman Carter was the man who pulled the lever that sent the torpedo on its way. One hundred miles away was the cruiser *HMS Devonshire* which picked up the garbled SOS from the *Glorious* but dared not repeat it. At that moment she was on a secret mission, transporting King Håkon of Norway, the Crown Prince, 56 staff members and Government officials and the national gold reserves, from Tromsø to the safety of the British Isles, there to spend the next five years in exile. *The Glorious (22,200 tons) was the first aircraft carrier to be sunk by surface ships.* On June 8, Hurricanes of 46 Squadron RAF landed safely without arrester hooks on the ship, the first time this had been attempted on a carrier. Most experts had dismissed this as impossible. Tragically, only two of the Hurricane pilots survived the sinking of the *Glorious*.

(The two 15cm twin turrets from the *Gneisenau* are still active on a NATO coastal battery at Stevnsfort, south of Copenhagen in Denmark. The battery is now open to the public. A triple 280 mm turret from the scuttled *Gneisenau* is located at the entrance to Trondheimfjord. Named 'Batterie Orlandet' it was built by POWs and after the war it was taken over by the Norwegian Army. Shut down in 1974 it was then opened in the early 90s as a museum under the name 'Turret Caesar'.

## LANCASTRIA (June 17, 1940)



The Cunard/White Star passenger liner *Lancastria*.

The Cunard/White Star passenger liner *Lancastria*, the former *Tyrrhenia* (16,243 tons), is bombed and sunk off St. Nazaire, France. While lying at anchor in the Charpentier Roads on the estuary of the River Loire, five enemy planes dive bombed the ship which sank in twenty minutes taking the lives of around 2,000 troops and over 1,000 civilians. The *Lancastria* had been converted into a troopship and set sail from Liverpool on June 14th to assist in the evacuation of British troops and refugees from France (*Operation Aerial*) Her captain, Rudolf Sharpe, took on board as many troops and refugees as possible. She was about to sail to England after loading on board soldiers and RAF personnel from 73 and 98 Squadrons of the British Expeditionary Force, plus about a thousand of civilian refugees. One bomb exploded in the Number 2 hold where around 800 RAF personnel had been placed. About 1,400 tons of fuel oil spilled from the stricken vessel as the Dorniers dropped incendiaries in an attempt to set the oil on fire. The 2,477 survivors, including her captain, were picked up by *HMS Havelock* and other ships. The bomb which actually sank the *Lancastria* went straight down the funnel. The site of the sinking is now an official War

Grave protected by The Protection of Military Remains Act of 1986. *The loss of the Lancastria was the fourth largest maritime disaster of the war.* Captain Rudolf Sharpe later lost his life when the ship he commanded, the **Laconia**, was sunk. Under the Official Secrets Act, the report on the Lancastria cannot be published until the year 2040. If it is proved that Captain Sharpe ignored the Ministry of Defence instructions not to exceed the maximum loading capacity of 3000 persons, grounds for compensation claims could be enormous. (A remembrance service is held in June each year in the St Catharine Cree Church in Leadenhall Street, London)

During 'Operation Aerial' 28,145 British and 4,439 French, Polish and Canadian troops were evacuated from Brest. Among the French contingent were many German and Italian nationals, all members of the French Foreign Legion. At Lorient, the trawler **La Tenche**, was sunk with the loss of 218 lives. At Saint Nazaire, 57,235 troops and civilians were evacuated. From St. Malo, 21,475, from Cherbourg, 30,630 and from La Pallice, 2,303. Thousands of others were picked up from smaller ports, in total, 163,225 persons. *(During the Dunkirk evacuation, 'Operation Dynamo' 338,226 troops were saved)*

### **MV PAGANINI** *(June 28, 1940)*

The passenger Motor Vessel **Paganini**, built in 1928 (2427 tons) was in convoy bound for Durres (Albania) when at 11.00 hrs. a fire occurred in the engine room. A subsequent explosion caused the loss of the vessel in position 41°27'N 19°11'E. A total of 147 men were drowned.

### **ARANDORA STAR** *(July 2, 1940)*

One of four ships placed at the disposal of the War Office for the transportation of enemy aliens to Canada. The Arandora Star sailed from Liverpool, without escort, to St. John's, Newfoundland, carrying 473 German male civilians interned when war broke out in 1939, and 717 Italian male civilians interned after Mussolini declared war on June 10, 1940. The vessel carried a crew of 176 and a military guard of some 200 men. Also on board were some Italian internees from internment camps on the Isle of Man, many of whom were genuine refugees mistakenly selected for deportation. The 15,501 ton **Arandora Star** (Blue Star Line) was torpedoed and sunk by the German U-boat **U-47**, (Korvkpt. Günther Prien, 1908-1941) seventy five miles off Ireland, at 7.05am. A second explosion, apparently a boiler, broke the ship in two before she finally sank at 7.40am. At about 2.30pm, the Canadian destroyer, **HMCS St. Laurent**, found the lifeboats and started to take the survivors on board. They reached Greenock in Scotland on Wednesday, July 3, at 8.45am. where the sick and injured were taken to Mearnskirk Hospital in Newton Mearns by a fleet of ambulances. The 813 survivors were later put on another ship, the **Dunera**, and transported to Australia. A total of 743 persons lost their lives on the **Arandora Star**: 146 Germans, 453 Italians, and 144 crew and soldiers. (The **U-47** went missing on March 7, 1941) In Bardi, a village in northern Italy, a chapel has been built to commemorate the victims of the Arandora Star. This disaster changed British internment policy. From then on, all internees were interned in British camps only. *(On a remote cliff on the island of Colonsay a memorial was unveiled to commemorate all those who perished and in particular to a Giuseppe Delgrosso whose body was washed ashore near this spot. Near the memorial plaque is a cairn of stones. All visitors are requested to bring a stone and add it to the cairn so that it will continue to grow)*

### **BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI** *(July 19, 1940)*

A fast Italian light cruiser of 5,069 tons, launched in 1930, was said to be capable of 40 knots. She was completely taken by surprise in the misty light of dawn by the Australian cruiser **HMAS Sydney**

and four destroyers north-west of the island of Crete. Captain J. Collins of **HMAS Sydney** was concerned that they may be heavy 8-inch cruisers, but he decided to attack and opened fire first on the **Bartolomeo Colleoni's** sister ship, the **Giovanni Delle Bande Nere** at 20,000 yards. The Australian cruiser then fired salvoes at **Bartolomeo Colleoni** and the destroyers fired their torpedoes. Both the Italian ships made smoke turned away



believing that the destroyers were also cruisers. **HMAS Sydney** and the destroyers chased both Italian ships for about one hour with the **Sydney** concentrating her gunfire on the **Colleoni**. Hit repeatedly by shells, **Colleoni** soon became a blazing wreck and was "bow down" and had to be abandoned by her crew. The destroyers moved in for the final kill as the **Sydney** went after the **Giovanni Nere**. After the torpedoes struck, the cruiser capsized and sank six miles off of Cape Spada, taking 125 crewmembers to the depths. British destroyers rescued a total of 525 survivors from the sea including her commander, Captain Umberto Novaro, who unfortunately died two days later from his injuries and was buried in Alexandria. (He was posthumously awarded the Italian Golden Medal)

German propaganda broadcaster and ex-British patriot, **Lord Haw Haw (William Joyce)** gave the German account of the **Battle of Cape Spada**: "Two British heavy armed cruisers and a large force of destroyers attacked two Italian light cruisers off the coast of Crete and in the ensuing battle the two British cruisers were heavily damaged. Slight damage was inflicted on one of the Italian cruisers.

### **MEKNES** *(July 25, 1940)*

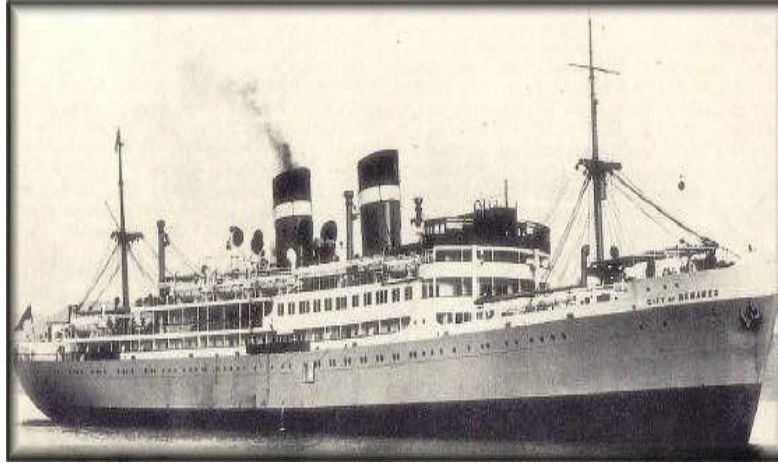
French passenger liner of 6,127 tons left Southampton carrying 1,277 French naval personnel who were being repatriated to France to continue the fight. At 10.30 pm the ship was hit by a torpedo from the German motor torpedo boat **S27** off the coast of Brittany. Some 383 Frenchmen were lost. *(Fifty-nine French ships, which had sought refuge in the harbours of Plymouth and Portsmouth were seized by the British Royal Navy on July 3, 1940)*

### **BRETAGNE** *(July 3, 1940)*

In one of the saddest episodes of the war, the French battleship **Bretagne** was sunk by British warships, which included the **Hood**, **Ark Royal** and **Valiant**. The refusal by Vichy France to hand over their battleships to Britain, rather than fall into the hands of the German Navy, resulted in the attack at the French naval bases at **Mers-el-Kabir**, and **Oran**, North Africa. Hit by 15-inch salvos from a range of 14,000 yards, the **Bretagne** exploded and capsized with the loss of 977 men. Many died clinging to the life-saving nets as the ship rolled over. Another ship, the **Provence**, (23,250 tons) was badly damaged and suffered the loss of 135 men. The battle-cruiser **Dunkerque** (26,500 tons) lost 210 men. The British attack on Mers-el-Kabir took the lives of 47 officers, 190 petty officers and 1,054 ratings, a total of 1,282 men. This action caused great bitterness in France, many French pilots volunteering to bomb Gibraltar, which they did on the night of 24/25 September, 1940, dropping 200 tons of bombs on the British fortress.

### **CITY OF BENARES** *(September 17, 1940)*

City Lines passenger liner of 11,000 tons (Captain Landles Nicoll) carrying some 400 passengers and 99 evacuee children on their way to a new life in Canada. Part of convoy OB-213, the ship was torpedoed by the **U-48** (Heinrich Bleichrodt) when 600 miles and five days out from Liverpool, its starting point. A total of 325 souls were drowned including seventy seven of the ninety children on board. Many survivors were picked up by the destroyer **HMS Hurricane**. This tragedy ended the British Government's Children's Overseas Resettlement Scheme in which 1,530 children were sent to Canada, 577 to Australia, 353 to South Africa, 202 to New Zealand and another 838 children sent to the United States by the American Committee in London. In August, 1940, the Dutch liner **Vollendam** was torpedoed and sunk off Ireland but the 321 children on board were all saved. (**HMS Hurricane** was later lost on December 24, 1943 to the **U-415**). The **U-48** survived the war and was scuttled on May 3, 1945.



City Of Benares.

### EMPRESS OF BRITAIN *(October 26, 1940)*

Built at Clydebank, Scotland, for the Canadian Pacific Line, the 42,348 ton passenger liner was requisitioned by the government after her 100th voyage in 1939 and began work as a troopship. On October 26 she was sailing northwest of Ireland when attacked by a Condor aircraft of the German Luftwaffe and set on fire by incendiary bombs. The abandon ship order was given and 598 persons were transferred to naval escort vessels. The Empress was then taken in tow by the Polish destroyer **Bursa** but two days later was torpedoed by the **U-32** (Hans Jenisch) and sunk. Although casualties were not heavy (49) it deserves a mention here as the largest civilian liner to be sunk in World War II. *(The U-32 was later sunk by the British destroyer HMS Harvester)*

### JERVIS BAY *(November 5, 1940)*

Originally built to carry emigrants to Australia, the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line 14,164 ton liner was taken over by the Admiralty in 1939 and converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser (MAC Ship) with a crew of 254 men. On the 5th of November the Jervis Bay was the sole escort for **convoy HX-84** from Halifax to Britain and consisting of 37 freighters. When the convoy was attacked by the German battleship **Admiral Scheer**, the **Jervis Bay** engaged the **Scheer** in a desperate attempt to enable the convoy to escape.

In a twenty two minute battle the **Bay's** commander, Captain Fogarty Fegan, and most of his officers were killed. In all, 187 officers and crew were lost when the blazing ship sank 755 nautical miles (1,398 kilometres) south-southwest of Reykjavic, Iceland. Fifty six survivors were rescued by the Swedish freighter **Stureholm** (Capt. Sven Olander) but three died before reaching the port of Halifax. Captain Fogarty Fegan was posthumously awarded the **Victoria Cross**. On December 11, 1940, the **Stureholm** was sunk with all hands by the **U-96**. The **Admiral Scheer** went on to sink six other ships in the convoy which took the lives of another 251 men. On April 9, 1945, she was bombed and sunk by the RAF while at her anchorage in Kiel.

### SS PATRIA *(November 25, 1940)*

In September, 1940, around 3,000 Jewish refugees from Vienna, Prague and Danzig were attempting to reach Palestine. In a convoy of four river steamers, they set sail down the Danube and reached the Romanian port of Tulcea where they transferred to three Greek cargo ships named **Atlantic**, **Pacific** and **Milos**. Conditions on board these three ships were horrendous, reminiscent of Japanese hell-ships later in the war. Eventually the ships reached Palestinian waters, but the British Colonial Office refused them permission to land. It was finally decided to

deport the refugees to the island of Mauritius where a special camp was to be built. The three ships were then brought into Haifa harbour where the liner *Patria* was berthed. The refugees were then embarked on the *Patria* and as the last passengers from the Atlantic were coming on board, a tremendous explosion ripped the liner apart. The death toll amounted to 267 refugees killed. The explosion was the work of the Jewish underground army, the *Haganah*, who had meant only to damage the ship to prevent it sailing but had miscalculated the amount of explosives needed to disable the ship.

### HMS FORFAR *(December 1, 1940)*

Auxiliary cruiser of 16,402 tons, formerly the liner *SS Montrose* which was requisitioned as an Armed Merchant Cruiser in 1939 and renamed *Forfar*. Commanded by Capt. N. Hardy, the *Forfar* was on her way to escort an incoming convoy when torpedoed 623 kilometres west-northwest of Galway, Eire, by Kretschmer's *U-99*. Badly damaged after four torpedo hits over a period of one hour, the *Forfar* finally sank at 4.50am the following day, taking the lives of 36 officers and 136 ratings. There were eighteen survivors. The previous month the *U-99* had sunk two other AMCs, the *Laurentic* and *Patroclus*. Lt. Cmdr. Otto Kretschmer, Germany's top U-boat ace with 44 ships to his credit, was captured after his *U-99* was sunk while attacking convoy HX-112 in March, 1941. He survived the war and attained the rank of admiral in Germany's post war Navy.

### SS CALABRIA *(December 8, 1940)*

Passenger ship (9,515 tons) of the British India S. N. Co. formerly an Italian ship captured by the British, was sunk by a torpedo from a German submarine while en route from Freetown to Glasgow. *Her entire crew of 130 men and 230 Indian passengers went down with the ship.*

## 1941

### SS OROPESA *(January 16, 1941)*

Passenger liner of 14,118 tons (Capt. H. Croft) built in 1920 at the Cammel Laird shipyard at Birkenhead for the Pacific Steam Navigation Company. In 1921 she was chartered to the Royal Mail for the Hamburg-Southampton-New York service. In 1931 she carried the Prince of Wales and Prince George to South America. In September, 1939, the ship was taken over and converted to a troopship and on January 16, 1941 while en route from Mombasa, East Africa, to the UK, was sunk by three torpedoes from the *U-96* (Kptlt. Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock) about 100 miles off County Donegal, Ireland. Of the 249 crew and passengers on board, 113 were killed. The same day, another U-boat, the *U-106*, sank the cargo-liner *Zealandic* (10,578 tons) of the Shaw Savill & Albion Co. All 73 crew and passengers were lost. The *U-96* was sunk by US bombers on March 30, 1945 at Wilhelmshaven. *The U-106 was sunk by depth-charges dropped from a Sunderland aircraft on August 2, 1943, there were 36 survivors but 22 of the crew were killed.*

### SS ALMEDA STAR *(January 17, 1941)*

The 14,935 ton Blue Star Line passenger liner (Captain H.C. Howard) was sunk by the *U-96* (Kptlt. Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock) while en route from Liverpool to the River Platte. The attack occurred about 250 miles west of the Island of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland. There were no survivors. A total of 166 crew and 194 passengers lost their lives. The *U-96* was later bombed and sunk by US aircraft at Wilhelmshaven.

### FIUME, POLA and ZARA *(March 28, 1941)*



Italian cruisers of the 1st Naval Division, each of 10,000 tons, together with two escorting destroyers, the **Alfieri** and **Carducci** were sunk at the Battle of Cape Matapan off the southern tip of Greece. In this night action the Italian ships were engaged by the British battleships, **HMS Warspite**, **Valiant** and **Barham**. Caught completely by surprise in searchlights from the destroyer **Greyhound**, the **Fiume** (13,260 tons) was hit by five 15-inch shells from **Warspite**, the **Zara** (13,580 tons) by a broadside of 15-inch shells from **Valiant** and **Barham**. The **Pola** (13,531 tons) crippled and on fire, lay dead on the water and after her crew were taken off she was sunk by torpedoes. The Italian force suffered a crushing defeat, 2,303 men from the five ships were killed. Thirteen officers and 147 ratings were picked up by the Italian hospital ship **Gradisca** sent in response to a radio message transmitted to the Italian Admiralty from the Royal Navy ships. Another 110 were rescued by Greek destroyers, and the rest, numbering around 700, were picked up by the British destroyers. *(During World War II, around 33,000 Italian sailors lost their lives)*

### SLAMAT *(April 27, 1941)*

The 11,636 ton Dutch passenger liner was taken over for service as a troop transport and while engaged in the evacuation of British and New Zealand troops from Crete, she was attacked for the second time by German aircraft of Luftwaffe JG-77 and sank with the loss of 193 men. Of the troops on board, around 700 were rescued by the destroyers **HMS Diamond** and **HMS Wryneck**, both of which were later bombed and sunk, drowning most of the survivors of the **Slamat**. *There was one officer, 41 seamen and 8 soldiers saved from this triple disaster, leaving a death toll of 843 men.*

For more, see <http://home.kabelfoon.nl/~popta/slamat/index.htm>.

### SS NERISSA *(April 30, 1941)*

Canadian 5,583 ton passenger vessel built in Scotland in 1926 for the Warren Line. Engaged on the New York-Bermuda run before the war, she was pressed into service as a troop carrier and was sunk during her 40th wartime crossing of the Atlantic by the U-552 (Erich Topp) while en route from Nova Scotia to Liverpool, England. Carrying 175 passengers, mostly Canadian Army personnel and a class of newly graduated RAF pilots, the **Nerissa**, under the command of Captain Gilbert Watson, sank in less than four minutes with the loss of 124 passengers and 83 crewmembers including Captain Watson who stood on the bow of his ship as it went down and yelling to his men in the water 'Good luck boys'. The 84 Survivors were picked up by the destroyer **HMS Veteran** and eventually landed at Londonderry in Northern Ireland 200 miles away. *(Erich Topp, who sank the American destroyer **Reuben James** on October 31, 1941, survived the war and died in Germany on December 26, 2005, at age 91)*



## The Canadian passenger ship SS Nerissa.

### PINGUIN *(May 8, 1941)*

German cruiser, commanded by Capt. Krüder, sunk in the Indian ocean by the British heavy cruiser **HMS Cornwall** near the Seychelles. The **Pinguin**, on a mission as a raider, had sunk or captured a total of 32 ships. Casualties on board the **Pinguin** were 3 officers and 341 crewmembers as well as around 200 prisoners. Twenty two prisoners and 60 crewmembers were rescued from the sea by the **Cornwall** (Capt. Manwaring)

### HMS GLOUCESTER *(May 22, 1941)*

British cruiser of the Mediterranean Fleet (Force C) sunk by bombs from German JU87s during **Operation Merkur**, the German airborne attack on the island of Crete. The crippled ship lay dead in the water, on fire and listing to port. The "Abandon Ship" order was given and she sank at 5.15pm. *The Gloucester's commander, Captain Rowley, 45 officers and 648 crewmembers were lost.*

### HMS FIJI *(May 22, 1941)*

British cruiser of 8,000 tons (Captain P. William- Powlett) sunk by bombs from German and Italian aircraft during the **Battle of Crete**. She sank forty nautical miles south-west of Crete near the island of Antikithera. In September, 1940, the Fiji was torpedoed off the Outer Hebrides, Scotland, while escorting troop transports heading for the port of Dakar (**Operation Menace**). After repairs which lasted almost six months, she returned to duties in the Mediterranean. The **Fiji** had survived about twenty bomb attacks during the four hour engagement off Crete but later another three direct hits proved fatal. Casualties were 17 officers and 224 ratings killed. A total of 523 survivors were picked up by the destroyers **Kingston** and **Kandahar** which had earlier rescued survivors from the sunk destroyer **Greyhound**. The **Fiji's** place was taken by the Australian cruiser **HMAS Australia**.

### CONTE ROSSO...OCEANIA *(May 24, 1941)*

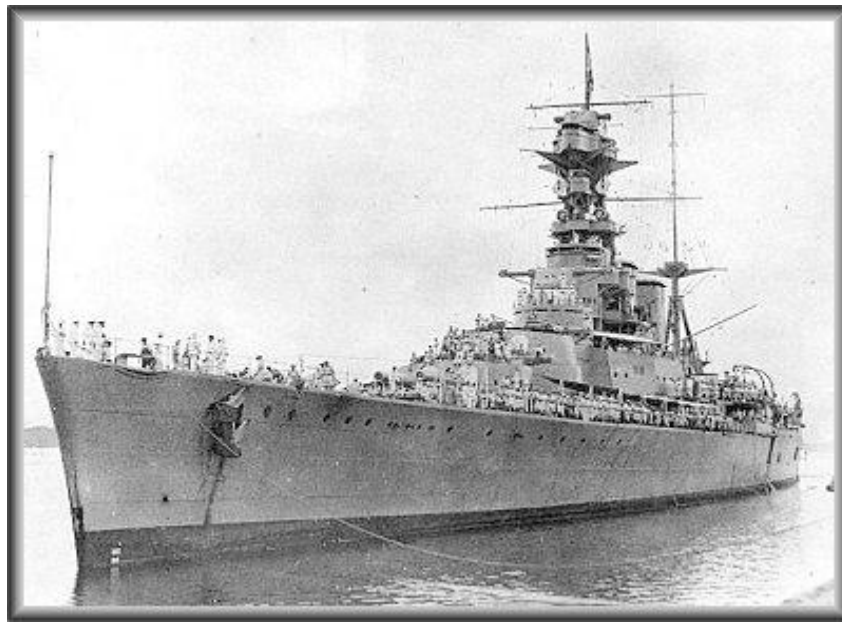
Italian passenger liner of 17,879 tons, built in 1921 and converted to a troopship in 1940, and now belonging to the Italian Merchant Marine, was sunk by the British submarine **HMS Upholder** (Lt-Cdr. Malcolm Wanklyn) about 80 miles off Tripoli, North Africa. The **Conte Rosso** was carrying 2,729 Italian troops on their way to Tripoli when attacked. A total of 1,209 lives were lost. Lt-Cdr. Wanklyn was awarded the Victoria Cross in recognition of this. Also sunk by the Upholder were the two 19,475 ton motor vessels **Neptunia** and **Oceania** part of a convoy bound for the Axis occupied part of Libya. On September 18, 1941 the Italian passenger liner **Neptunia**, taken over for service as a troop transport, was torpedoed fifty-eight miles from Tripoli. The same day, the Upholder sank her sister ship **Oceania**, also converted to a troop carrier. The death toll from both ships was 384 men, some 6,500 being rescued. On April 14, 1942, the **Upholder** and its entire crew were lost when depth-charged while on its 23rd patrol.

### HMS HOOD *(May 24, 1941)*

*Britain's largest battle cruiser*, (44,600 tons) commissioned in May, 1920, was sunk by the German battleship **Bismarck** commanded by Admiral Lütjens and captained by Captain Ernest Lindemann. In an early morning action in the Denmark Strait, between Iceland and Greenland, the **Bismarck**, accompanied by the cruiser **Prince Eugen** (Captain Helmuth Brinkmann), were en route from Bergen in Norway to the Atlantic when they intercepted the **Hood**, the **Prince of Wales** and six escorting destroyers. From 26,000 yards, the **Bismarck** opened fire and

at 16,500 yards scored a direct hit on the **Hood's** magazine causing the 112 tons of explosives to blow up. The battleship, commanded by Vice Admiral Sir Lancelot Holland, went down in about four minutes. Of a crew of 1,417 (94 officers and 1,323 ratings and Royal Marines) there were only three survivors, a death toll of 1,414. (Ted Briggs, one of the three survivors, died in October, 2008, aged 85) The mighty battleship had only fired its guns once in anger, at Mers El Kebir in 1940. The day the **Hood** sailed from Scapa Flow repairs were attempted on a defect in the magazines hydraulic system which failed to lift the cartridge into the loading position. In the heat of battle, could this defect have caused the cartridge and the whole magazine to explode? *Did the Hood in fact, self destruct?* For the **Bismarck** to score a direct hit on the magazine at this distance must be the luckiest shot of the war. The second question is why did the German battleships break off the engagement instead of pursuing and engaging the **Prince of Wales**?

For more, see the excellent **Battle Cruiser Hood** website at <http://www.H.M.S.hood.com/>.



Britain's largest battle cruiser of WWII, HMS Hood.

## BISMARCK *(May 27, 1941)*

*Hitler's greatest warship commissioned in August, 1940.* Fully loaded she weighed 52,600 tons. After her encounter with **HMS Hood** (20 years older than the Bismarck) she headed for St. Nazaire, the only port on the coast of France with a dry dock big enough to hold her. An order was given by Churchill to *"Get the Bismarck"*. The hunt for the battleship dominated the world's press, the chase lasting four days and covering 1,750 sea miles. Spotted by a Coastal Command Catalina flying boat, her position was reported to the Royal Navy ships. Finally, on May 27, the mighty battleship met her end after 277 days of war service. Severely damaged by salvos from the battleships **HMS King George V**, **HMS Rodney**, and by torpedoes from the cruiser **HMS Dorsetshire**, she was finally scuttled by her crew. Casualties amounted to 2,097 officers, men and cadets lost including Admiral Lutjens and Captain Lindemann. There were 115 survivors, picked up by the **Dorsetshire** and the destroyer **Maori**. In 1989, the wreck of the **Bismarck** was found. She lies intact and upright at 4,763 metres about 602 miles off the coast of Brittany.



Germany's greatest warship, the battleship Bismarck.

### SS ANSELM *(July 5, 1941)*

Built at Dumbarton in 1935 at a cost of 158,876 English Pounds, the Anselm (5,954 tons, Captain D. Elliot) was converted to a troop carrier in 1940. While transporting 98 crew and 1,210 troops, including 175 Royal Air Force personnel who were heading for the Gold Coast, now Ghana, from Gourock, Scotland, to Freetown, West Africa, (Convoy WS-9B) the ship was struck on the port side by a torpedo from the U-96 (Willenbrock). The ship sank in twenty-two minutes about 300 miles north of the Azores. In the panic and chaos which followed, a total of 254 men, including a large number of the RAF men, were lost. One of the escorts, [HMS Challenger](#), positioned herself alongside the sinking ship and managed to rescue 60 men.

### SS DONAU and SS BAHIA LAURA *(August 30, 1941)*

Two German transports of 2,931 tons and 8,561 tons respectively, and part of a troop carrying convoy, were sunk by torpedoes from a British submarine west of Seloen Island, Norway. Casualties from the two ships amounted to 468 dead. A total of 1,196 men were rescued.

### MV ANDREA GRITTI *(September 3, 1941)*

Italian vessel of 6,338 tons and part of a convoy heading from Naples to Tripoli was torpedoed by British torpedo-carrying aircraft about 25 miles from Capo Spartivento in position 37°33'N 19°26'E. The ship blew up and sank with the loss of 347 men.

### IIMARINEN *(September 13, 1941)*

Flagship of the Finnish Navy, the [Ilmarinen](#) (3,900 tons) along with her sister ship the [Vaninamoinen](#), were built as armoured cruisers/coastal defence vessels. Their main function was to act as movable gun batteries to support defence in areas where shore artillery was not available. For this reason their armament was to be as heavy as possible including 254/45mm guns firing a shell weighing 225 kgs. These two ships, while anchored at Turku, provided an effective AA barrage that saved the city during its sixty-one air attacks from Soviet aircraft. The [Ilmarinen](#) was sunk at 20.30hrs during the deception operation '[Nordwind](#)' after the ship struck two mines south of the Finnish island of Uto. *The Ilmarinen sank in seven minutes, sadly taking 271 Finnish sailors to their deaths. There were 132 survivors picked up by other ships.*

## ARMENIA *(November 7, 1941)*

Russian hospital ship sunk at 11.29am by German torpedo-carrying planes while evacuating wounded soldiers and sailors from the Crimean Peninsula. As well as the wounded servicemen from Sevastopol and Yalta, the ship also carried around 2,000 unregistered civilians and medical personnel. The Armenia was a two deck passenger/cargo vessel launched at Leningrad in November, 1928. After the torpedoes struck, the ship took only four minutes to sink to the bottom of the Black Sea at a depth of 472 meters. The Red Crosses painted on both sides were ignored by the pilots during the attack. *It is estimated that over 5,000 people died in the sinking. There were only eight survivors who were picked up by an escort vessel. (The latest Russian sources put the death toll at 7,000)*

## HMAS SYDNEY *(November 19, 1941)*

Commissioned at Portsmouth in 1935 under the name **HMS Phaeton**. Transferred to the Australian Navy under her new name **HMAS Sydney**. The cruiser of 7,000 tons, captained by Captain John Burnett, set sail from Fremantle in Western Australia on November 11 to act as escort for the troopship 'Zealandia' to Sunda Strait. Returning to Fremantle she became engaged in a fire fight off the coast of Western Australia with the German raider **Kormoran**. Disguised as a Dutch merchantman, and commanded by Theodor Detmers. The **Kormoran** was one of the ten armed merchantmen employed by the German Navy during the war. Badly damaged and on fire, the **Sydney** disappeared into the night, never to be seen again. All of her 42 officers and 603 men were lost in this, *Australia's worst World War II sea tragedy*. The **Kormoran** also sank with the loss of 85 men but 315 of her crew made it to the West Australian shore, many were rescued by the Australian hospital ship 'Centaur' to spend the rest of the war at the Dhurringile POW camp in Victoria. Controversy raged for decades as to whether there was a cover up by the Australian Government as to the circumstances of the ships disappearance. *Will the truth ever be known?* The only piece of wreckage found was a life-raft which can be seen in the Australian National War Memorial in Canberra.

*In a search lasting almost sixty-seven years the wreck of HMAS Sydney was finally found on March 16, 2008, by the search vessel 'Geosounder'. The wreck sits upright on the sea floor at 2,560 metres, nearly two and a half kilometres below the surface. Part of her bow is missing. Twenty-four hours earlier the wreck of the German raider 'Kormoran' was also found twelve and a half kilometres away. Around the wreck was a large field of debris that would suggest the ship had suffered a catastrophic explosion. It is known that the Kormoran carried 320 sea mines.*

(Theodor Detmers survived the war and died in Hamburg on November 4, 1976)

## HMS DUNEDIN *(November 24, 1941)*

British light cruiser of 4,850 tons commanded by Captain R. S. Lovat, was sunk by two torpedoes from the German submarine **U-124** (Kapt. Lt. Johann Mohr) in the South Atlantic, the ship sinking by the stern in seventeen minutes. The German radio announced that **HMS Dragon** had been sunk, mistaking the name. It was not until four officers and 63 ratings had been picked up from the Carley floats by the US merchant ship **Nishmaha** on the 27th that the British Admiralty announced the sinking of the **Dunedin**. The tragedy took the lives of 26 officers including the captain, and 392 ratings. The **U-124** was later sunk by depth charges from **HMS Stonecorp** and **HMS BlackSwan** on April 2, 1943, off Oporto, Portugal. *Her entire crew of 53 died.*

## HMS BARHAM *(November 25, 1941)*

The 31,100 ton British battleship, part of the British Mediterranean Fleet, blows up north of Sidi Barrani after being hit on the port side by three torpedoes from the German submarine **U-331** commanded by Kptlt. von Tiesenhausen. About four minutes after the torpedoes struck the Barham's 15-inch magazine exploded which completely disintegrated the battleship and sending up an enormous cloud of black smoke which covered her sinking. A total of



862 crewmen perished including her commander, Captain G. C. Cooke. There were 449 men rescued from the water by the destroyers [HMS Hotspur](#) and [HMAS Nizam](#). The [U-331](#) was later sunk on November 17, 1942, by torpedo-carrying Swordfish from the carrier [HMS Formidable](#). (32 men died, 15 were rescued). Kptlt. Hans-Diedrich Tiesenhausen was one of the rescued and survived the war. He died on August 17, 2000, in Vancouver, Canada, at the age of 85.

*It was during a spiritual séance in Portsmouth that the apparition of a dead sailor appeared and told the gathering, which including his mother, that his ship had been sunk. The ship in question was the [Barham](#). The gathering was presided over by Helen Duncan, a citizen of Edinburgh and one of Britain's most respected materialization mediums. The dead sailor's mother then contacted the War Office asking for details of the sinking and explaining how she came to hear of it. As ship sinkings during wartime was classified 'Secret' an investigation was launched and Helen Duncan, a mother of seven, was arrested and charged under the Witchcraft Act of 1735. After her release from prison she continued to bring comfort to grieving wartime families. In 1951, the Witchcraft Act was repealed and four years later Spiritualism was formally recognised as a religion. Helen Duncan died in 1956 at age 59 after many attempts to clear her name.*

### **JOSIF STALIN** (*December 3, 1941*)

Russian troopship of 7,500 tons, severely damaged after hitting four mines during the evacuation of Soviet troops from the Hangö garrison in the Gulf of Finland. It is not known the exact number of soldiers lost but it is believed that around 4,000 troops were on board at the time. Rescue ships picked up 1,800 men from the sea but left about 2,000 still clinging to the floating wreck. Another vessel with a similar name, [Josif Stalin](#), was sunk when crossing the Volga while evacuating civilians from the besieged city of Stalingrad. When midstream the ship was shelled by German guns and sank drowning over 1,000 people. A week before, a smaller steamer, the [Borodino](#), met a similar fate and several hundred wounded soldiers and civilians were lost.

### **USS OKLAHOMA and USS ARIZONA** (*December 7, 1941*)

US battleships sunk at Pearl Harbor during the sneak attack by Japanese naval planes. *This cowardly attack triggered the American involvement in World War II.* Death toll from both ships amounted to 1,592 men, 1177 from the 1,400 crew on board the [Arizona](#) and 415 from the [Oklahoma](#). Two other battleships, the [West Virginia](#) (429 dead) and the [Tennessee](#) were damaged and 196 Navy and 65 Army Air Force planes destroyed. All told, a total of 2,409 servicemen and 68 civilians were killed and 1,178 were wounded. Only 29 Japanese aircraft were shot down. That same afternoon the United States Chief of Naval Operations issued the following order *"Execute unrestricted air and submarine warfare against Japan"*. During the Pearl Harbor attack, fifteen navy men earned the nation's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Ten were awarded posthumously. ([Rear Admiral Izaak C. Kidd was killed when the Arizona blew up. He was the highest ranking US naval officer to lose his life during the war](#))

### **HMS REPULSE and HMS PRINCE OF WALES** (*December 10, 1941*)

British warships sunk by Japanese naval aircraft off Kuantan, Malaya. The ships were spotted by the Japanese submarine [I-58](#) just before dawn and attacked by a force of nine 'Betty' torpedo-carrying planes of the Japanese 22nd Naval Air Flotilla from the Japanese base at Saigon and led by Lieutenant Haruki Iki. The battleship [Prince of Wales](#) (36,727 tons) was hit by six torpedoes and sank at 1.23pm. The cruiser [Repulse](#) (26,500 tons) was hit by five torpedoes and sank at 12.33pm. The death toll from both ships was 840 men ([Repulse](#) 513, and the [Prince Of Wales](#), 327). A total of 2,081 lives were saved by the escorting destroyers [HMS Electra](#), [Vampire](#) and [Express](#) and taken back to Singapore. The day after the sinking, Lieutenant Iki flew over the grave site of the two ships and dropped a bouquet of flowers. The Far Eastern Fleet commander, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips went down with his ship. In this action, the Japanese lost only four planes. After this disaster, the dominant role of battleships in war

came under grave doubt. *The wrecks of the two ships were found in July, 2001, and buoys were attached to the propeller shafts with Royal Navy flags attached to the lines. The sites are now protected as a War Grave. The ship's bell from the Prince Of Wales was recovered in 2002 and is on display in the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool, England. The sinking of these two battleships gave the Japanese complete command of the sea and left the door to the 'impregnable fortress' of Singapore, wide open.*

### SEBASTIANO VENIER *(December 9, 1941)*

Italian motorship of 6,310 tons, built in Amsterdam in 1939 under the name **Jason**. Requisitioned by the Italian Navy and renamed **Sebastiano Venier**, the ship had left Benghazi harbour with around 2,000 British prisoners of war including black South African troops, New Zealanders and Australians, all captured by the Germans in North Africa. Five miles south of Navarino on the Greek Peloponnese, the ship was attacked by the British submarine **HMS Porpoise**. She was not flying a P.O.W. flag. Hit by a torpedo between the No.1 and No.2 hold on the starboard side, the force of the explosion hurled the heavy hatchway covers to mast height, the falling timbers killing dozens of men trying to escape from the hold. From the flooded No.1 hold only five men survived. Most of the panic stricken crew abandoned the ship taking all the lifeboats. The Italian hospital ship **Arno** appeared on the scene but ploughed its way through the men struggling in the water and kept on sailing, its priority being the rescue of the crew of a German ship sunk nearby. A total of 320 lives were lost among them 309 British P.O.W.s, including 45 New Zealanders. Eleven Italian soldiers also died. The ship did not sink but managed to reach the shore at Point Methoni near Pilos where it was beached. All prisoners who managed to reach the shore were confronted by hundreds of Italian occupation troops and were taken to a makeshift camp where during the next few months many died from frostbite and disease. In May, 1942, the prisoners were transferred to Campo 85 at Tukurano in Italy.

### ALBERTO DA BARBIANO and ALBERICO DI GIUSSANO *(December 13, 1941)*

Two Italian cruisers, both sunk by torpedoes fired from the British destroyers **Sikh, Maori, Legion** and the Dutch destroyer **Isaac Sweers**. The destroyers were proceeding from Gibraltar to Alexandria when they sighted the Italian cruisers. Around 900 men from the two cruisers were killed.

### HMS GALATEA *(December 15, 1941)*

British light cruiser (5,220 tons) of the Alexandria Fleet, 15th Cruiser Squadron, commissioned 1935 and sunk by three torpedoes from the **U-557** (Paulshen) off Alexandria, Egypt. The commander, Captain Sims, 22 officers and 447 ratings were lost when the **Galatea** sank. There were 144 survivors. The **U-557** was sunk next day west off the island of Crete after being rammed accidentally by the Italian torpedo boat **Orione**. All hands, 43 men, were killed.

### HMS NEPTUNE *(December 19, 1941)*

British light cruiser, commissioned February 23, 1934. The **Neptune** was part of the Malta-based **Force K** of Admiral Cunningham and was trying to intercept an Italian convoy heading for North Africa. The **Neptune** capsized and sank about twenty miles off Tripoli after sailing into a newly-laid Italian minefield and hitting four mines. A total of 765 officers and men went down with the ship, Two officers and 148 ratings were New Zealand naval personnel. The survivors of the **Neptune** were found on a raft four days later by two Italian torpedo boats. Of the sixteen men aboard only one was alive. Leading Seaman John Norman Walton was the only survivor. He became a prisoner of war in Italy and was released in 1943. One of the escort destroyers, **HMS Kandahar**, also sank after striking a mine in the same minefield. She sank with the loss of 73 of her crew. Eight officers and 166 ratings were rescued by **HMS Jaguar** which had sailed from Malta to search for survivors.

**CITTA' DI PALERMO** (*January 5, 1942*) Italian passenger ship (5,413 tons) built in 1930 and converted to an auxiliary cruiser, left Brindisi for Patras escorting the motor vessel Calino. On board the Palermo were around 600 Italian troops. At 08:00 hrs. when three miles north-west of Cape Dukato she was struck by two torpedoes launched from HMS Proteus. The Palermo took only six minutes to sink. There were a few survivors but almost all on board went down with the ship.

### **LAMORICIE** (*January 9, 1942*)

The French passenger ship Lamoricie was crossing the Mediterranean from Algiers to France when she sank near the Balearic Isles. While sailing to Marseille the weather deteriorated severely and the ship altered course to assist a freighter in distress the *SS Jumieges*. Unfortunately the latter foundered in heavy seas with all hands before the Lamoricie could be of assistance. The captain tried to take shelter behind the island of MENORCA but the ship could not cross the wind. Finally the boilers shut down, all power was lost as water began pouring in through the coal hatches and the ship started to list heavily and began to sink. (The ship had recently been converted from diesel oil to coal owing to wartime shortages) A total of 301 passengers and crew were lost. There were 93 survivors. One of those lost was Jerzy Rozycki, one of the three Polish cryptologists who worked on cracking the German Enigma code in 1932. Rozycki and his team had travelled from France to Algiers in late 1941 to work on the Enigma codes and was returning on the Lamoricie when disaster struck. Two other members of the code breaking team, Jan Gralinski and Piotr Smalenski also perished.

**LADY HAWKINS** (*January 19, 1942*) Passenger/cargo ship (7,988 tons) of the Canadian National Steamship Company, the Lady Hawkins was sunk by the U-66 (Korvkpt. Richard Zapp) midway between Cape Hatteras and Bermuda. The ship was carrying 212 passengers and 109 crew when hit by two torpedoes. About 162 passengers died as did 88 of the ships crew. The steamship Coamo rescued 71 persons from a lifeboat and brought them to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The liner Coamo was later torpedoed on December 9, 1942 and sank with the loss of 133 passengers and crew. The U-66 was sunk on May 6, 1944 by the destroyer escort USS Buckley. There were 36 survivors but 24 of the crew died.

### **SS STRUMA** (*February 24, 1942*)

The chartered Greek owned ship Struma sailed from Constansa under the command of a Bulgarian captain, G.T. Gorbatenkoin, and flying the Panamanian flag. There were 769 Romanian Jews on board, including 269 women and 105 children, many from the town of Barland, their hope was to reach Palestine. After three days at sea, the Struma anchored off the outer harbour at Istanbul, with engine trouble. Here she awaited British permission to proceed to Palestine, permission which the British refused (a mistake they were to regret) one reason given was *'It will encourage a flood of refugees'*. Turkey, for some unknown reason, likewise refused them to disembark although the local Jewish community, who were already running a camp for Displaced Persons, were quite willing to take the Struma's passengers and were in the meantime supplying them with food and water. One of the passengers, Medeea Marcovici, suffered an embolism and was transferred to the Jewish hospital in Istanbul. She was granted a visa for Palestine and died there in 1996.

After two months at Istanbul with engines that were damaged beyond repair, conditions on board became appalling, many of the passengers now suffering from dysentery and malnutrition. Eventually the Turkish police arrived to tow the Struma out into the Black Sea. The British had exerted strong pressure on Turkey to pursue this course. The enraged passengers fought then off but a second attempt, where force was used, succeeded and the Struma was towed out and cast adrift outside Turkish territorial waters. This inhuman decision by the Turkish and British governments was to destroy the special relationship between Britain and the Zionist Jews. On the water for 74 days since leaving Conatansa, the Struma, hopelessly overcrowded, and with no country willing to accept them, was suddenly torpedoed and sunk by the Russian submarine SHCH-213 commanded by Lt. Col. Isaev, just ten miles from Istanbul. All on board, a total of 769 persons, perished except one, nineteen year old Romanian Jew David Stoljar who today (1999) lives in Oregon, USA. The British High Commissioner in Palestine, Sir Harold MacMichael, stated: *"The fate of these people was tragic, but the fact remains that they were nationals of a country at war with Britain, proceeding direct from enemy territory. Palestine was under no obligations towards them"*.

## DE RUYTER *(February 27, 1942)*

Dutch light cruiser (7,548 tons) sunk during the seven hour Battle of the Java Sea. Flagship of the Allied Force Commander, Rear Admiral Karel Doorman RNN, the ship was hit by a torpedo from the Japanese heavy cruiser Haguro at 23.32pm and sank taking the lives of 366 men including Admiral Doorman. There were 70 survivors. Also sunk in this battle were the Dutch light cruiser Java (7,205 tons) and the destroyer Kortenaer 1,640 tons) The Java was struck by a torpedo from the Japanese heavy cruiser Nachi (14,980 tons, commanded by Rear Admiral Takagi) and sank in fifteen minutes taking 530 crewmembers to their deaths. There were 35 survivors. *This was the greatest loss of life on any Dutch warship.* The destroyer Kortenaer (Lt. Cmdr. Kroese) hit amidships at 17:13pm by a torpedo from the Haguro, broke in two and sank almost immediately, losing 59 men from her crew of 171. The destroyer HMS Encounter rescued 113 from the stricken vessel but one survivor died on board. During the battle, 152 torpedoes were fired from the Japanese warships, but only three found their targets. In this, the saddest of days for the Royal Netherlands Navy, a total of 955 brave men gave their lives. (The Battle of the Java Sea, *the greatest surface engagement since Jutland*, took the lives of 6,339 sailors from both sides and the loss of many Allied warships. Only four ships were sunk on the Japanese side)

## HMAS PERTH *(March 1, 1942)*

Australian cruiser of 6,830 tons launched in 1934 under the name HMS Amphion. Transferred to the Australian Navy in 1939 and renamed HMAS Perth. During the Battle of the Java Sea the Perth's commander, Captain Hector Waller, pulled his ship out of line when the heavy cruiser HMS Exeter was hit and placed it between the Japanese warships and the Exeter to save it from further damage (the Exeter later sank). The Perth, accompanied by the American cruiser Houston, was later sunk in the Sunda Strait half an hour after midnight about four miles from St. Nicholas Point in Java as the two ships attempted to escape southwards from the battle area and into the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately they ran straight into a Japanese invasion fleet of destroyers and troop transports in Banteng Bay and after a long running battle during which all ammunition was expended, both ships were sunk by torpedoes. On board the Perth were 45 officers, 631 ratings, 4 civilian canteen staff and six Royal Australian Air Force personnel, a total of 686 men. Casualties were 23 officers and 329 ratings killed. There were 334 survivors who were taken prisoners of war. Of these, around 106 died in captivity. Not one of the Perth's officers died while a prisoner of war, due no doubt to the privileges granted to men of officer rank. For this heroic act, Captain Waller never received the equivalent of the British VC as did the captain of the Houston. The Dutch government offered its highest award, the Militaire Willems-Orde posthumously to Captain Waller, but to its *everlasting shame, the Australian government turned it down.* In World War II, twelve Victoria Crosses were awarded to members of the Australian forces engaged in operations against Japan but not a single VC was awarded to the Royal Australian Navy.

## USS HOUSTON *(March 1, 1942)*

Sunk in the Sunda Strait by torpedoes from the same warships that sunk HMAS Perth The Houston went down just twenty minutes later about a mile from the Perth, taking 643 men to their deaths. The 368 survivors made their way to Bantam Bay on the western shores of Java, only to be captured by the Japanese who had already occupied the area some hours before. Of the survivors, seventy-seven died while in Japanese captivity. Both captains of the Perth and Houston went down with their ships. Captain Robert Rooks, the commander of the Houston, was awarded the *Congressional Medal of Honor*, posthumously. The Houston lies in approximately 107 feet of water just north of Panjang Island.

## GALILEA *(March 28, 1942)*

Italian liner of 8,040 tons, torpedoed and sunk by a British submarine near Antipaxo. The Galilea was carrying Italian troops from North Africa to Italy when attacked. The ship went down taking the lives of 768 troops and crewmembers to their deaths.

## HMS CORNWALL and HMS DORSETSHIRE *(April 5, 1942)*

HMS Cornwall, (Capt. Manwaring) the 10,000 ton, 8-inch gun British cruiser sunk off the coast of Ceylon by bombs from 53 Japanese planes from the carriers Akagi, Soryu and Hiryu. From the Cornwall 198 men were lost, the ship sinking in 22 minutes at 1.40pm. HMS Dorsetshire, (Capt. Agar) British cruiser sunk along with the Cornwall, lost 227 men, the ship taking at least nine direct hits and sinking in less than eight minutes. The cruiser Enterprise and two destroyers rescued 1,122 men from the water.

## HMS HERMES *(April 9, 1942)*

The 10,850 ton aircraft carrier (Capt. R. Onslow) was the first Royal Navy ship to be specially designed as such. This was the ninth ship to bear this name. The Hermes left the naval base of Trincomalee, Ceylon, escorted by the Australian destroyer Vampire, and while sailing south off Batticaloa on the east shore, the ships were attacked by carrier-borne aircraft from a Japanese force of three battleships and five carriers including the Akaga, Hiryu and Soryu, which had entered the Bay of Bengal a week before and were now attacking the naval base. Around seventy bombers were sent to dispatch the Hermes which sank within ten minutes, followed by the Vampire shortly after. Of the complement on the Hermes, nineteen officers and 283 ratings died. On the Vampire, nine men lost their lives. The hospital ship Vita rescued approximately 600 survivors from the two ships and took them to Colombo and later to Kandy for recuperation. The air attack on the base killed 85 civilians in addition to military losses. Thirty-six Japanese planes were shot down. The wreck of the Hermes was found sixty-three years later, in 2006, about five nautical miles from shore and fifty-seven meters down. Divers attached the White Ensign to the rusting hull. The wreck of the Vampire has never been found.

## RAMB IV *(May 10, 1942)*

Former Italian hospital ship captured by the British and now a Ministry of War transport, was carrying 360 staff and wounded patients when attacked by enemy aircraft while on its way to Alexandria from Tobruk. The ship had to be abandoned and later sunk by Royal Navy warships. During the attack, 155 wounded men were killed and ten of the crew lost their lives.

## BATTLE OF MIDWAY SINKINGS : SORYU, AKAGI, KAGA and HIRYU *(June 4-8, 1942)*

Japanese aircraft carriers sunk during the Battle of Midway. In this battle the enemy lost four aircraft carriers, all reduced to burning pyres within ten minutes by just 54 American pilots.

1. **The Soryu plunged to the ocean floor at 7.13 am taking her whole complement of 728 officers and ratings with her. A floating blazing wreck, the Soryu was sighted by the US submarine Nautilus which speeded her end by firing three torpedoes into the ship.**
2. **The Akagi, flagship of Admiral Nagumo, sank with the loss of 221 men after being scuttled and torpedoed by her own escort destroyers.**
3. **The blazing 30,000 ton Kaga sank with around 800 sailors and airmen after being torn apart by two great explosions.**
4. **The Hiryu, the fourth carrier to be sunk, was still afloat and burning at 9.00 am next day but was also sunk by torpedoes from her escort destroyers. A total of 416 men died on the Hiryu. Her captain, Tomeo Kaku, and her commander, Admiral Yamaguchi, lashed themselves to the bridge and went down with their ship after saying goodbye to the surviving crew.**



The United States lost 307 men in this battle. None of the opposing ships sighted each other; the entire, decisive battle was fought entirely by the carriers' planes. From the Japanese carriers, around 250 planes were lost. The aircraft included Vals, Kates, and Zeros. The American planes were from the carriers Enterprise, Yorktown and Hornet. The aircraft included the Dauntless, Devastator and Wildcat. In all, the Americans lost 72 planes. The Yorktown was the only casualty of the US Task Forces, three bombs from a Japanese dive bomber reduced the carrier to a derelict wreck and when two torpedoes hit the vessel causing a 26-degree list, the order to abandon ship was given. At 6 am on June 7, a Japanese submarine found her and performed the coup de grâce with two more torpedoes.

*The American victory at Midway gave Australians their first real feeling of security. Its takeover by Japan was no longer a real possibility. Australia's only defence against the Japanese at this time was its distance from Japan and the size of the country. Was Australia worth the enormous cost and effort needed to launch an invasion?.*

### MIKUMA (June 5, 1942)

During the Battle of Midway, Japanese Admiral Yamamoto was going to attempt not to make Midway a complete failure. He sent out an urgent message to send four of his smaller aircraft carriers down from the Aleutians and brought up a number of heavy cruisers to join his main fleet.

But the attempt at the taking of Midway was destined to failure. Yamamoto finally signalled his ships to withdraw. Two of the cruisers from the Midway force under the command of Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, the Mikuma and the Mogami, both of the Mogami class heavy cruisers, came under attack of the USS Tambor, a submarine of the US Strike Force. Both the Mikuma and the Mogami turned so as to avoid attack, but turned into each other. The Mogami, building up full power turned into the path of the Mikuma hitting her amidships. Both cruisers were badly damaged. Rear Admiral Spruances' dive bombers found the two cruisers early the following morning, their bombs adding greatly to the damage. The Mikuma finally sunk, Two of her survivors were picked up by the American submarine USS Trout. The crippled Mogami managed to get back the base at Truk where she was fitted out as an aircraft carrying cruiser, but the Mogami was finally sunk by US aircraft in the Philippines in October 1944.

### TRENTO (June 15, 1942)

Italian cruiser badly damaged by British torpedo-carrying aircraft south-west of Crete while attacking the Harpoon convoy en route to Malta. The Trento was taken in tow by its escorting destroyer but was then hit by two torpedoes from a British submarine and sinks. Of its complement of 1,151 men there were 602 survivors, a death toll of 549.

### MONTEVIDEO MARU (July 1, 1942)

Sunk by the American submarine USS Sturgeon (Lieutenant Commander Wright) about sixty-five miles west of Cape Bojidoru, Luzon, in the Philippines. She was heading for Japan from Rabaul, New Britain, carrying 1,035 Australian nationals including 845 army prisoners of war, the bulk of the 2/22 Battalion, Australian 8th Division (Lark Force). The 7,267 ton passenger ship had left Rabaul on the 22nd of June, unescorted and unmarked when at 0225 hrs on July 1st, was hit by two torpedoes from a four torpedo spread from the Sturgeon at a range of 4,000 yards. Developing a list to starboard, the ship sank stern first at 0240. Later reports indicated that 845 army personnel, 208 civilian P.O.W.s, including twenty missionaries, who had been living and working on New Britain when the Japanese came, 71 Japanese crew and 62 naval guards (a total of 1,186) made up the ships complement. Among the 208 civilian prisoners were the 36 crewmembers of the Swedish cargo ship Herstein which was bombed and set on fire while loading copra in Matupi Harbour. From the Allied contingent on board, there were no survivors. *Lives lost amounted to 1,053.*

A week later, on the 6th, the rest of Lark Force (168 men) and some civilian nurses, were herded on board the Naruto Maru and nine days later, dirty and half starved, arrived safely at Yokohama. All survived the war. After the war, Japanese sources state that seventeen Japanese crew and guards had survived the sinking of the Montevideo

Maru and reached the shores of Luzon Island. Their fate is uncertain, they have not been heard of since and it is presumed that they were attacked and killed by Philippine guerrillas.

### GLOUCESTER CASTLE *(July 15, 1942)*

Union Castle Line passenger ship of 7,999 tons and converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser, was attacked off the Ascension Islands, by German commerce raider Michel during a voyage from Birkenhead to Cape Town, South Africa. All her starboard side lifeboats were destroyed after which she sank about ten minutes later. Of her complement of 12 passengers (all women and children) and 142 crew, a total of 93 souls perished. Two lifeboats escaped the scene carrying 61 survivors but was later picked up by the Michel and transferred to her supply tanker, the Charlotte Schliemann, which transported them to Yokohama, Japan, where they were interned for the rest of the war. Two of the survivors died while in Japanese captivity.

### USS QUINCY, USS VINCENNES, USS ASTORIA *(August 9/10, 1942)*

Three US cruisers sunk during the one hour 1st Battle of Savo Island by a force of Japanese warships including five heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and one destroyer. The American warships were protecting and escorting US troop transports en route to Guadalcanal. Total losses from the three ships amounted to 1,077 men killed and 709 wounded. On the USS Astoria 216 men were killed. The Vincennes lost 332 men and 529 men were lost on the Quincy. Many of the blood and oil covered survivors, struggling in the water, fell victim to the sharks. Japanese casualties were only 58 killed and 70 wounded.

The catastrophe at Savo Island was a demoralizing defeat for the Allies and the worst defeat ever suffered by the United States Navy. During this one hour duel, the Australian cruiser HMAS Canberra (Captain Frank Getting) was also sunk with the loss of 85 lives. Many of Canberra's survivors were rescued by the American destroyers USS Patterson and the USS Blue which was herself sunk with all hands some weeks later on August 23. On hearing of the Canberra's sinking, Churchill requested that the British cruiser HMS Shropshire be sent to replace her. In 1943, the US launched a new cruiser and named her Canberra, the first time the US Navy had named a vessel after a foreign warship. Fifty years later, a deep sea diving team, led by Robert R. Ballard, and including one of the Canberra's survivors, Ordinary Seaman Albert Warne, placed a plaque on the battered but upright hull of the Canberra which read "*In Memory Of Our Fallen Comrades*". *USS Astoria, HMAS Canberra, USS Quincy, USS Vincennes.*

### HMS EAGLE *(August 11, 1942)*

British 22,600 ton aircraft carrier (Capt. L. Mackintosh) launched in 1918, sunk in the Mediterranean, 70 miles south of Cape Salinas, Majorca, by four torpedoes from the German U-73 (Kptlt. Helmut Rosenbaum) while escorting a convoy (Operation Pedestal) to the island of Malta. All four torpedoes hit the Eagle on her port side slewing the ship to starboard and shedding the parked Sea Hurricanes on her deck into the sea. Listing to port she turned slowly over and sank just over seven minutes later. Many of the survivors, bobbing in the sea by their hundreds were severely injured by concussion when the Eagle's boilers exploded. Of her crew of 1,087 a total of 160 perished, two officers and 158 ratings. The 927 survivors were picked up by the destroyers HMS Lookout and HMS Laforey and the tug Jaunty. The Eagle was the only aircraft carrier in Admiral Cunningham's Mediterranean Fleet and the only carrier with *two funnels*. *(On the 16th December 1942, the U-73 was sunk off Oran by the US destroyers Woolsey and Trippe, killing 16 of her crew. There were 34 survivors)*

### HMS MANCHESTER *(August 13, 1942)*

British light cruiser (9,400 tons) launched in April, 1937 and torpedoed four miles east of Kelibia, Tunisia, North Africa, by Italian torpedo boats, MAS-16 and MAS-22. The cruiser was engaged in escorting the great 'Pedestal' convoy to Malta at the time of the attack. Badly damaged, the ship had to be scuttled by her crew. A total of 150

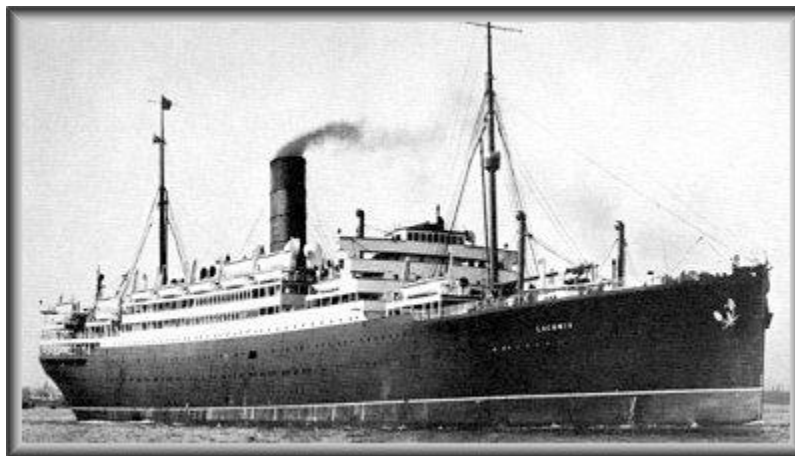
men lost their lives. Three officers and 375 ratings landed on the Tunisian coast and were interned by the Vichy French authorities.

### SS BAEPENDY (*August 15, 1942*)

Brazilian passenger and cargo ship (4,801 tons) now serving as a troop transport, sunk by the U-507 (Korvkpt. Harro Schacht) off the mouth of the Real River between Rio de Janeiro and Manaus. There were over 700 troops on board of which 270 died. Also sunk was the Annibal Benevolo, another Brazilian passenger ship, with a loss of 150 and the Araraquara with 131 passengers and crew lost, both sunk on the August 16, 1942. The U-507 was later sunk on January 13, 1943, by depth charges from a US Catalina flying boat in the South Atlantic. The entire crew of 54 perished. The sinking of these passenger ships *caused Brazil to declare war on Germany* on August 22nd.

### LACONIA (*September 12, 1942*)

British Cunard Line luxury liner (19,695 tons) converted to a transport ship, was torpedoed and sunk by the U-156, commanded by Kptlt. Werner Hartenstein. The ship was carrying over 1,800 Italian prisoners of war captured in North Africa and guarded by 160 Polish guards, former Russian prisoners of war. Also on board were 268 British military and civilian personnel including 80 women and children. About 500 POW's were killed instantly when the torpedoes hit the prison holds. Over 200 survivors were picked up by the U-156 helped by the U-506 and U-507 and then the U-boats in turn were attacked by an American four-engine Liberator of the USAF 343 Squadron from the US base on Ascension Island. Even though they displayed a large Red Cross flag, the plane dropped three depth charges. Altogether, including the crew, 2,732 persons were on board the Laconia when attacked. A total of 1,649 lives were lost including the captain, Rudolf Sharpe (ex-Lancastria). Vichy naval craft picked up 1,083 survivors. This incident caused the German Naval Authorities to issue the '*Laconia Order*' by which all *U-boat captains were forbidden to pick up survivors*. At the Nuremberg Trials, Grand Admiral Doenitz was accused of a war crime by signing the order, but was acquitted on that charge only to spend 11 years and 6 months in prison for other war crimes.



**The British Cunard Line luxury liner Laconia.**

Another account of the sinking can be seen at the [Laconia Incident website](#).

### USS WASP (*September 15, 1942*)

American aircraft carrier which as part of the British Mediterranean Fleet, assisted in escorting convoys to Malta. She was then transferred to Far Eastern waters where she took part in operations off Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. While south of the islands on September 15, she was attacked by a Japanese submarine which scored three

hits on the carrier. A heavy list to starboard developed after which she caught fire and sank. Most of her complement of around 2,000 were rescued but 193 of her crew were killed.

### **LISBON MARU** *(October 1, 1942)*

Japanese transport vessel of 7,053-tons, carrying 1,816 British and Canadian prisoners of war from the Shamshupo POW camp at Hong Kong to Japan, was torpedoed by the US submarine Grouper about six miles off Tung Tusham Island on the Chinese coast. The prisoners were contained in three holds which soon became foul with the stench of sweat, excreta and vomit. Many lost consciousness through thirst, lack of fresh air and extreme heat. Men were reduced to licking the condensation from the sides of the ships hull. A bucket of liquid was lowered by the guards and thirsty men rushed to grab it, only to find it was filled with urine. On top deck were some 778 Japanese military men on their way home to Japan. At 7 o'clock in the morning, the torpedo struck, severely damaging the ship but causing no casualties among the prisoners. Soon a Japanese ship, the freighter Toyukuni Maru came alongside and took on board all the Japanese soldiers but none of the Allied prisoners.

The Lisbon Maru was then taken in tow heading for Shanghai, but some hours later the ship, now low in the water, began to sink by the stern. Prisoners in Number 3 hold were unfortunately below the waterline and now beyond rescue. Some prisoners in the other two holds managed to break free but were shot down as they emerged. Another four Japanese ships appeared on the scene and some escaped prisoners, swimming in the water, managed to reach the dangling ropes and started to climb aboard only to be kicked back into the water when within a few inches from the deck. Eventually, most of the surviving prisoners were taken on board the four ships and taken to Shanghai where thirty-five sick and wounded were unloaded. A few however, managed to swim away from the Lisbon Maru and were rescued by Chinese fishermen and taken to a group of small islands near by (Sing Pan islands). At Shanghai, a roll call accounted for 970 men, a total of 846 had perished, 154 were from the Middlesex regiment. Of the 970 survivors, some 244 died during their first winter in the Japanese camps. The 'Lisbon Maru' was not marked in any way to indicate that she was carrying prisoners of war but as she was armed and carried Japanese troops the ship was a legitimate target. (Among the 1,780 graves in the Sai Wan Bay cemetery are the graves of those who lost their lives in this tragedy)

Toilets for POW's on these ships were primitive to say the least. They were hung like bird cages over the two sides of the ship. all swaying like swings in the wind. A prisoner hung on to the ropes and defecated directly into the ocean. Some, too weak to get out, had to wait for the next in line to help him out while he in turn helped the other in. In the wake of the ship two yellow coloured streaks could be seen trailing to the horizon, the result of droppings from dozens of these outboard 'benjos'. When the seas were rough, the prisoner got drenched but as toilet paper was unknown, what the hell, it was better than using your hands to clean yourself. But why bother, you may ask, back in the torrid holds of the ship you again sat in a few centimetres thick carpet of semifluid human waste, blood, urine and vomit, the stench of which must have been horrific. Caged animals could not have suffered worse.

### **HMS CURACOA** *(October 2, 1942)*

British light cruiser of 4,290 tons was engaged mainly in convoy escort duties during WWII. It was while escorting the Queen Mary that disaster struck. The Cunard White Star liner was carrying 15,000 American troops to England when the Curacoa's lookout reported what he thought was a submarine on the port bow. The Queen Mary turned sharply to starboard and the Curacoa, in pursuit of the suspected U-boat, crossed her bows with insufficient clearance causing the two ships to collide. Proceeding on a zigzag course at a speed of twenty eight and a half knots the Queen Mary knifed through the escort cruiser cutting her in two, the halves separated by about 100 yards. Fearful of U-boats in the area and aware of his responsibility to his passengers, the captain did not even slow the ship down until it entered the safer waters of the Firth of Clyde. The 'Queen' was badly damaged, her bow plates folded back at least forty feet into the ship. A total of 338 men aboard the Curacao died as a result of this tragedy (25 officers and 313 ratings) There were 26 survivors. The incident occurred some 20 miles off the coast of Donegal, Ireland.

## KOMET *(October 14, 1942)*

German commerce raider (3,287 tons) escorted by four Motor Torpedo Boats and some minesweepers was bound for the North Atlantic. The British Admiralty, knowing that an attempt was being made to send the Komet to sea, had stationed a strong force of craft in the English Channel to intercept her. In the short action which followed, the Komet was set on fire and shortly after, blew up, killing all 351 of her crew. Two of the torpedo boats and one minesweeper were also sunk.

## SS PALATIA *(October 21, 1942)*

Cargo/Passenger ship of 3,974 tons, former Russian 'Khasan' captured by the Germans at Tallin on June 22, 1941, and now part of the Hamburg-America Line, departed Kristiansand, Norway, on October 21, 1942, having arrived the day before from Stettin. On board were 999 Russian prisoners of war and 135 ships crew and guards, a total of 1,134 men. About an hour after sailing, the ship was attacked by a torpedo carrying plane from 489 Squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, based at Wick, Scotland, and piloted by Flying Officer Richardson. *The Palatia sank near the Sangnvaar Lighthouse, taking 954 prisoners, crewmen and guards to the bottom of the ocean. The wreck lies in over seventy meters of water and is now classified as a War Grave.*

## MV ABOSSO II *(October 29, 1942)*



**The Elder Dempster Lines passenger/cargo liner MV Aboosso II.**

Elder Dempster Lines passenger/cargo liner of 11,330 tons (Capt. R. W. Tate) while on its way from Cape Town to Liverpool, she was attacked and sunk by torpedoes from the U-575 (Kptlt. Gunther Heydemann) about 589 nautical miles (1,091 kilometres) north of Lagens Field, Azores Islands. Two torpedoes were fired at intervals of twenty minutes, the second sinking the Aboosso in about fifteen minutes. There were only 31 survivors including five Dutch members of the 33 Netherlands Royal Navy and one female passenger out of the ten women on board. Three of the four Royal Navy men on board survived. All survivors were in lifeboat No 5, the only lifeboat with survivors that didn't capsize. In all, a total of 168 crew and 193 passengers were lost (=361). Among the passengers were 44 newly trained pilots from the No 23 Service Flying Training School, X Flight, Advanced Training Squadron, at Heany, Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. Pilot Officer William B. Thomson of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, was the



only survivor from this pilot graduating course. Survivors were picked up from the freezing Atlantic 36 hours later when an Australian Navy Lieutenant on board the sloop, HMS Bideford, which was escorting a troop convoy proceeding to North Africa as part of Operation 'Torch', sighted their lifeboat. The sloop put them ashore at Gibraltar three days later.

Pilot officer Thomson was assigned to return to Britain onboard a Sunderland Flying Boat, one of two which were to take off in formation. On take off his plane developed engine trouble and take off was aborted and delayed for a few hours. The other Sunderland, which had a number of high ranking officers on board, plus five passengers, continued on to Britain only to crash in heavy fog upon arrival...all the five passengers were killed. Pilot Officer Thomson claimed that it was only fate or his lowly rank which kept him off the ill-fated flight. (*He died in 1993*) On the Alamein Memorial are inscribed the names of 19 RAF men lost on the Abooso. Others are commemorated on memorials in various countries including Singapore (21) and one name on the Australian War Memorial. (*The U-575 was sunk on March 13, 1944, with the loss of 18 crewmembers. There were 37 survivors*)

### **WARWICK CASTLE** (*November 14, 1942*)

Passenger liner of 20,107 tons owned by the Union Castle Line of London. With 428 persons on board, including 295 crewmembers and 133 servicemen, the liner was torpedoed by the U-413 at 8.44am. The ship sank in 85 minutes. The Warwick Castle was being used as a troopship and had just disembarked troops during the North Africa landings and was returning empty as part of Convoy MFK-IX when attacked. A total of 114 lives were lost. (60 crew and 54 service personnel). There were 314 survivors.

### **SS PRESIDENT DOUMER** (*October 30, 1942*)

Ex-French passenger liner, now a Ministry of War Transport of 11,898 tons (Bibby Line) serving as a troopship, sank with the loss of 260 lives near Madeira. She was part of a UK bound convoy when struck by a torpedo from the U-604 (Kptlt. Horst Höltring) about 151 nautical miles (280 kilometres) north of the Madeira Islands in position 35.08N, 16.44W. The U-604 was scuttled on August 11, 1943, in the South Atlantic with the loss of 14 of her crew.

### **SS MENDOZA** (*November 1, 1942*)

Ministry of War Transport liner of 8,234 tons (Captain B.T. Batho) sailing from Mombasa, East Africa, was sunk by the U-178 (Kpt. Zur See, Hans Ibekken) about 70 nautical miles (129 kilometres) east-northeast of its destination, Durban, South Africa. The Glasgow-registered Mendoza, an ex-Vichy French ship captured off Montevideo by a British armed merchant cruiser, and now sailing under the Blue Funnel flag, was carrying 153 crew and some 250 passengers when it blew up taking the lives of 28 of her crew and 122 service personnel. With her two propellers and rudder blown off, the ship settled by the stern. Ten lifeboats were launched, the survivors attempting to reach land when the American ship SS Alava arrived. While climbing the ladder, Captain Batho slipped and fell into the water, his body crushed between the ship and the lifeboat. The U-178 was scuttled on August 25, 1944 at Bordeaux, France.

### **CITY OF CAIRO** (*November 6, 1942*)

British passenger ship sunk by the U-68 (Kptlt. Karl-Friedrich Merten) 840 kilometres south of the British island of St. Helena. There were around 100 deaths among its 300 passengers and crew. Merten believed that the ship he had sunk was a 8,000 ton cargo boat. After the sinking, the U-boat commander helped rescue survivors still in the water and had them placed in the lifeboats. He then departed the scene with an apology for the sinking but not before he provided the survivors with precise details of how to reach St. Helena. However, one lifeboat drifted for fifty-one days before reaching the coast of Brazil. Only two of its original eighteen people on board, were still alive. Some years later the British survivors held a reunion in London and Merten was invited to attend having previously published his own account of the sinking. At the reunion, one of the survivors was heard to remark "We couldn't

have been sunk by a nicer man". Karl-Friedrich Merten died of cancer in May, 1993. (*For the full story and photo of the City of Cairo go to the SS CITY OF CAIRO website*)

### **HMS HECLA** (*November 11, 1942*)

Royal Navy depot ship of 10,850 tons, the fifth of seven ships to bear this name, was taking part in the Allied landings in North Africa, when it was torpedoed and sunk just after midnight by a German U-boat, the U-515. It sank west of the Straits of Gibraltar, 337 kilometres northwest of Rabat, French Morocco. A total of 279 men died and 568 survivors were rescued by the escort destroyers. HMS Venomous succeeded in rescuing more survivors from Hecla and landed them at Casablanca. Seven months earlier, on April 16, 1942, she was part of convoy WS-18 which ran into a minefield laid by the German Minelayer Doggerbank. Damaged and taken in tow by the light cruiser HMS Gambia, she was to spend the next eighteen weeks in Simonstown undergoing repairs. In this instance twenty-four of her crew were killed when she struck the mine amidships.



**The destroyer depot / tender ship, HMS Hecla.**

### **USS JUNEAU** (*November 13, 1942*)

American anti-aircraft light cruiser named after the capital city of Alaska. During the night actions of the naval *Battle of Guadalcanal* the Juneau, commissioned in February, 1942, was struck by a torpedo from the Japanese submarine I-26. The torpedo was meant for the American cruiser San Francisco but missed and hit the Juneau. Badly damaged, the ship tried to escape from the battle zone but was again hit by a second torpedo which apparently hit the powder magazine causing the ship to explode in a great ball of fire. This time the Juneau sank in less than thirty seconds taking the lives of her Captain and 687 crew members. There were about 115 survivors but only 10 were alive when help arrived eight days later. On board the Juneau were the five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, George, Francis, Joseph, Madison and Albert who had enlisted together on January 3, 1942 and insisted on serving on the same ship. Four of the brothers died in the explosion, the fifth, George, died from his wounds on a raft some days later. After this tragedy, President Roosevelt issued instructions that in future if any American family lost more than two sons, the remaining boys would be relieved from further combat duty and sent home. A new ship, The Sullivans, was named in their honour and christened by the boys' mother, Mrs. Alleta Sullivan, in April, 1943. It was the first US Navy ship with a plural name and went on to earn 9 battle stars while serving in the Pacific theatre. She was decommissioned in 1965 and is now moored at the pier side of the Naval and Servicemen's Park in Buffalo, New York.

## USS SAN FRANCISCO *(November 13, 1942)*

American heavy cruiser of 9,950 tons launched in 1933 and commissioned a year later. In 1942 she was part of the naval force covering the invasion of Guadalcanal. During the landings a Japanese torpedo bomber crashed on the aft superstructure of the ship killing fifteen men and wounding twenty-nine others. The San Francisco, flagship of Admiral Callaghan, was badly damaged during the *Battle of Cape Esperance* in which she received forty-five major hits from the Japanese battleship Hiei. On board the 'Frisco' 77 men had been killed including Admiral Callaghan (some reports say 115) and 105 men wounded. Limping back to Pearl Harbor before returning to the US for repairs, the San Francisco served out the rest of the war, earning seventeen battle stars.

## HIEI *(November 13, 1942)*

Japanese Kongo class battleship sunk by bombs and torpedo hits during the half hour naval *Battle of Guadalcanal* (off Savo Island) Damaged by shells from the USS San Francisco, her steering gear shattered, the Hiei was now careering all over the ocean. Her commander, Captain Nishida, then switched to manual steering and after nearly completing a 180 degree turn sailed the ship away from the battle area at reduced speed. Soon three B-17 bombers, from the American held Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and in company with six torpedo carrying planes from the USS Enterprise, attacked the Hiei. Listing to starboard and down by the stern, the order was given to abandon ship and the evacuation of nearly 1,300 of its crew began. The Hiei, was then scuttled by her crew and abandoned. Left alone in the gathering darkness it was never seen again. So were 188 men of her crew who went down with her to the bottom of Ironbottom Sound. *This was the first Japanese battleship sunk in WWII and the first warship sunk by the US Navy since 1898.*

## USS ATLANTA *(November 13, 1942)*

American light cruiser, (6,000 tons) sunk during the Guadalcanal Landings by a torpedo from the Japanese destroyer Akasuki and from shells from the battleship Hiei. The Atlanta ran into the line of fire from the USS San Francisco and received another nineteen 8 inch shells before the mistake was discovered. Fired at from both sides, the cruiser was soon ablaze throughout her whole length, her crumpled decks strewn with dead bodies including that of her commander, Admiral Scott. The commander of the San Francisco, Admiral Callaghan, was killed minutes later by a 14 inch shell from the Hiei. *Of the Atlanta's complement of 735, a total of 172 men were killed and 79 wounded.* The decision was taken to scuttle the ship by demolition charges and the Atlanta now lies at the bottom of Savo Sound.

## SS SCILLIN *(November 14, 1942)*

Italian cargo/passenger ship en route from Tripoli to Sicily with 814 Commonwealth prisoners-of-war on board, a naval gun crew and 30 Italian guards, was torpedoed by the British submarine HMS Sahib (Lt. John Bromage) 10 miles north of Cape Milazzo in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Sahib rescued 27 POW's from the water (26 British and one South African) plus the Scillin's captain and 45 Italian crew members. Only then, when the commander heard the survivors speaking English, did he realize that he had sunk a ship carrying British prisoners-of-war and some Italian soldiers and had drowned 783 men. At a subsequent inquiry into this 'friendly fire' tragedy, Lt. Bromage was cleared of any wrongdoing as the ship was unmarked and at the time he firmly believed that the ship was carrying Italian troops. The Ministry of Defence kept this incident a closely guarded secret for fifty-four years, telling relatives a pack of lies, maintaining that they had died while prisoners-of-war in Italian camps or simply 'lost at sea'. *It was not until 1996, after repeated requests for information from the families of the drowned men that the truth came out.* On the 24th of April, 1943, the Sahib was attacked by bombs from German Ju-88s and depth charges from the Italian corvette Gabbiano Badly damaged, the Sahib was later abandoned and scuttled.

## HMS AVENGER *(November 15, 1942)*

British escort carrier (13,785 tons) built in the United States as the passenger liner Rio Hudson. Transferred to the United Kingdom under Lend-Lease and later converted to an auxiliary aircraft carrier in March, 1942. While in

convoy from North Africa to the Clyde in Scotland, she was torpedoed by the German submarine U-155 just west of the Rock of Gibraltar (87 kilometres south of Faro, Portugal). The Avenger had been taking part in the North Africa landings before sailing for her home port on the Clyde, Scotland. At approximately 0307hrs the Avenger, part of Convoy MKF-1, was hit on the port side causing her bomb magazine to explode and blowing out the centre section of the ship. Enveloped in flames and black smoke, the Avenger sank in less than two minutes after the torpedo hit. Sixty seven officers, including her captain, Cdr. A. P. Colthurst, and 446 ratings went down with the ship, a total of 514 men. Twelve survivors were picked up by the escorting destroyer HMS Glaisdale. The U-155 (Korvkpt. Adolf Piening (1910-1984) survived the war and was scuttled during Operation Deadlight.

### **HMS ARETHUSA** *(November 18, 1942)*

British cruiser of 5,200 tons escorting convoy MW-13 to Malta (Operation Stonedged) When the convoy was about 450 miles from its departure point, Alexandria, it was attacked by a formation of torpedo-carrying enemy bombers. Avoiding all but one of the torpedoes the Arethusa, was hit causing immense damage to the ship and killing 156 men from its complement of around 500. The ship managed to limp back towards her home base under her own power but finally had to be towed the last 150 miles, stern first, by the destroyer HMS Petard, to be met by tugs on the approach to Alexandria. Safely in harbour, the bodies of those killed were transferred to the destroyer HMS Aldenham and transported three miles out to sea for burial.

### **SS TILAWA** *(November 23, 1942)*

The 10,006 ton British India SN Company passenger/cargo liner (Capt. F. Robertson) sunk by the Japanese submarine I-29 1,497 kilometres north-northeast of the Seychelles Islands while on her way from Bombay, India, to Mombassa and Durban, South Africa, with 6,472 tons of cargo. The explosion created great panic among the native passengers who rushed the lifeboats causing many deaths. Some time after the torpedo struck and whilst the ship was still afloat some crew and passengers attempted to reboard the vessel when the second torpedo hit. The ship carried 222 crewmen, four gunners and 732 passengers. Of the 958 people on board, 252 passengers and 28 crew were lost. The cruiser HMS Birmingham rescued 678 survivors and next day the P&O ship SS Carthage rescued four Indian seamen from the ocean.

### **SS NOVA SCOTIA** *(November 28, 1942)*

Passenger/cargo ship of 6,796 tons launched in 1926 for the Warren Line, requisitioned and converted to a troopship in 1941, was en route from Aden to Durban, South Africa, carrying 780 Italian POW's and 130 South African military troops acting as guards, plus a crew of 127. It was sunk in the southern Indian Ocean 244 kilometers northeast of Durban by the U-177 (Korvkpt. Robert Gysae). Casualties amounted to a staggering 863 lives lost. *The U-177 was sunk on February 6, 1944, by depth-charges from a US Liberator aircraft. Fifty of her crew died, there were 15 survivors.*

### **CERAMIC** *(December 6, 1942)*

White Star Line, later Shaw Savill, a liner of 18,481 Gross Tons. On November 23, she set sail as a troop transport from Liverpool to Australia. When 1,148 kilometres west-northwest of the Azores, the ship was torpedoed three times and sunk by U-boat U-515 (Oblt. Werner Henke). A total of 655 crewmen, troops and nurses lost their lives including 33 Australians. There was one survivor, Royal Engineer sapper, Eric Munday, who was taken on board the U-boat to spend the rest of the war in a German POW camp. The rest of the crew and passengers were left to perish in the stormy seas. Allied propaganda claimed that the Ceramic's survivors were machine-gunned in the water. This was a big lie. It was many months before the Admiralty found out what happened to the Ceramic as she sank before any distress signal could be sent out. It was a letter that Eric Munday was able to write from his POW camp Marlag-Milag-Nord, near Hamburg, that alerted the Admiralty to the circumstances surrounded the loss of the Ceramic. The U-515 was sunk on April 9, 1944 in mid Atlantic by aircraft from the escort carrier USS Guadalcanal and from depth charges from the escort destroyers USS Pope, Pillsbury, Chatelain and Flaherty. Sixteen of the crew were killed, there were 43 survivors taken prisoner. Fearing a war crimes trial, the captain, Werner Henke, committed

suicide while in US captivity in Camp Fort George G. Meade in Maryland. (Some reports say that he was shot while trying to escape)

### **SS BENALBANACH** *(January 7, 1943)*

The Ben Line 7,152-ton passenger/cargo ship launched in June, 1940 and sunk north-west of Algiers when the convoy she was part of was attacked by a single enemy aircraft. She was carrying 389 men of Motor Transport unit and a crew of 74 from the Clyde to Bona, North Africa. This was her second trip to the Allied landing area conveying troops and equipment. The Benalbanach was hit by two torpedoes launched from the aircraft. The ship caught fire, blew up and sank almost immediately taking the lives of 57 crewmembers and 353 service personnel. Her commander, Captain D. MacGregor, died in the water just as he was about to be rescued.

### **M.V. CITTA' DI GENOVA** *(January 21, 1943)*

Built in 1930 (5413 tons) the Italian motor vessel leaves Patras on the 20th bound for Bari with 200 Italian troops and 158 Greek war prisoners on board. On the 21st at 1315hrs, twenty five miles west of Saseno Island, she is hit by two torpedoes from a salvo of five fired from the British submarine, HMS Tigres. She sinks in a few minutes with the loss of 173 men.

### **SS HENRY R. MALLORY** *(February 7, 1943)*

Part of the 69 ship UK-bound North Atlantic convoy SC-118, the American ex-passenger liner Mallory, (6,063 tons) built in 1916, was attacked and sunk by a torpedoes from the German submarine U-402 (Forstner) part of a twenty U-boat pack. The Mallory was en route from New York to Reykjavik, Iceland, and had parted from the convoy just before the attack. Eleven ships in the convoy were later sunk. There were 494 passengers and crew on board the Mallory (Captain Horace Weaver) including 381 US troops, 34 armed guards, 2 civilians and a crew of 77 of which 39 members were lost. Also on board were 610 bags of mail. A total of 272 men perished. The 224 survivors were rescued four hours later by the US Coast Guard cutter U.S.C.G.C. Bibb, which picked up 205 men, three of whom died on board, and by the escort gunboat U.S.C.G.C. Ingham, which saved 25 men, two of whom died later. The U-402 was bombed and sunk with all hands in Mid Atlantic by aircraft from the carrier USS Card on October 13, 1943.

### **U.S.A.T. DORCHESTER** *(February 3, 1943)*

Ex-coastal luxury passenger ship of 5,649 tons converted to a troop carrier, sunk by torpedo from the U-223 (Kptlt. Karl-Jung Wächter). The Dorchester was bound for the American base at Nararssuck in Greenland from St. John's, Newfoundland, as part of Convoy SG-19. With 902 passengers and crew on board, the ship was attacked at 03.55hrs about 150 miles south of Cape Farewell. Of the passengers, most were US troops. In addition she carried 1,000 tons of cargo. Escort ships of the Greenland Patrol rescued 229 persons from the stricken vessel, 132 by the US Coast Guard cutter USCGC Escanaba, and another 97 rescued by a sister ship, the USCGC Comanche. In all, 672 souls were lost including 404 soldiers. Hundreds of dead bodies, kept afloat by their lifejackets, were picked up from the sea. Later, even the Escanaba fell victim to a German submarine, being torpedoed in the Belle Isle Straits with only two members of the crew surviving. On board the Dorchester were four Army chaplains of different denominations who helped distribute life jackets and help the injured. When the storage locker was empty they removed their own life jackets and handed them to the next man in line. As the ship went down, survivors in the water could see the four chaplains standing on the sloping deck, arms linked and praying while awaiting their fate. A special Medal for Heroism was authorized by Congress and along with the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross, were posthumously awarded to the four chaplains. The U-223 was sunk in the Mediterranean just north of Palermo, Sicily, on March 30, 1944, by depth from British destroyers. Twenty-three of her crew were killed but twenty-seven survived.



## CITY OF PRETORIA *(March 2, 1943)*

Ellerman Line passenger/cargo liner of 8,049 tons, New York to Liverpool, carrying a general cargo, was sunk by two torpedoes from the U-172 (Korvkpt. Carl Emmermann) and blew up immediately south-east of Cape Race. All on board, 145 persons, perished. The U-172 was sunk by depth-charges dropped from US aircraft on December 13, 1943. Thirteen crew were killed and 46 survived.

## EMPRESS OF CANADA *(March 14, 1943)*

Liner of the Canadian Pacific SS Company, 21,516 tons (Capt. George Goold), converted to a troop transport. Referred to as the 'Phantom' by the German U-boat captains because she had escaped U-boat detection for three and a half years. While sailing from Durban, South Africa, to the UK via Takoradi on the Gold Coast, West Africa, she was sunk just after midnight, off Sierra Leone, by the Italian submarine Leonardo Da Vinci whose commander gave Captain Goold half an hour to abandon ship after the first torpedo struck. On board were 1,346 persons including 499 Italian prisoners of war and Greek and Polish refugees. A total of 392 people died including around 90 women and 44 crewmembers. The survivors, who had to endure exposure and vicious shark attacks, were picked up by the destroyers Boreas, Petunia and Crocus and the Ellerman Line vessel Corinthian. One man who did not survive was the naval officer in charge of the Italian prisoners, who failed to pass on the order 'Abandon Ship' to the lower deck thus causing great loss of life among the prisoners. On hearing this, angry survivors grabbed the officer and threw him overboard to the sharks. No formal action was ever taken over this murder. Da Vinci was later sunk with all hands by the destroyers HMS Active and HMS Ness on 24th of May, 1943, near Cape Finisterre.

## HMS DASHER *(March 27, 1943)*



**The British aircraft carrier HMS Dasher.**

US-built merchant ship, the Rio de Janeiro, was later converted to an escort aircraft carrier in 1941 and loaned to the Royal Navy under the Lend-Lease Agreement. Renamed HMS Dasher (7,866 Tons) she saw service in the Mediterranean and on convoy duties to Murmansk. In 1943 she was being used as a Fleet Air Arm Training ship. It was in this capacity that the ship blew up in the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, between Ardrossan and the Isle of Arran, while heading for the port of Greenock. At about 4.45pm, on this hazy Saturday afternoon, while her Swordfish planes of No. 891 Squadron were practicing take offs and landings on her deck, one of her pilots misjudged a landing and crashed into a store of aviation fuel drums and explosives. The subsequent fire and violent explosion sent the Dasher to the bottom in less than five minutes, her bow rising almost vertical before plunging stern-first to the bottom. Oil from the sinking ship caught fire and spread over the water in which the survivors were swimming. A total of 358 officers and men drowned but 149 sailors survived and were picked up from the sea by dozens of small rescue vessels which sped out from Ardrossan to give what help they could. The Dasher lies upright in 170

metres (310 fathoms) of water, her flight deck some 30 metres above the seabed. As the 50th anniversary of her sinking approached, the Royal Naval Association undertook to erect a memorial at Ardrossan so that those that perished shall not be forgotten. (*On June 28, 2000, a Memorial Plaque was fixed to the flight deck of the Dasher the site of which is now a war grave*)

### **CITY OF GUILDFORD** (*March 27, 1943*)

Ellerman Lines passenger/cargo ship of 5,157 tons, en route from Alexandria to Tripoli, North Africa, carrying aviation spirit and munitions, was sunk by the U-593 (Kptlt. Gerd Kelbling, Knights Cross) near Derna. Sixty-eight of her crew, 11 gunners and 46 passengers were lost, a total of 125. There were 13 survivors. The U-593 was sunk on December 13, 1943 in the Mediterranean by depth-charges from USS Wain and HMS Calpe. All her crew survived.

### **MELBOURNE STAR** (*April 2, 1943*)

Blue Star liner (12,806 tons) Capt. J. B. Hall, sunk 600 miles south-east of Bermuda by the U-129. (Korkpt. Hans Ludwig Witt. Knights Cross). There were 113 passengers and crew lost, and only four survivors. The U-129 was scuttled on August 18, 1944 at Lorient, France.

### **SS FRANCESCO CRISPI** (*April 19, 1943*)

Italian passenger ship of 7,464 tons, built in 1926 and used by the Italian Army as a troop transport was torpedoed and sunk by HMS Saracen off Punta Nere in position 42°46'N 09°46'E. The Francesco Crispi was en route from Leghorn to Bastia in Corsica when attacked. She sank with the loss of around 800 men.

### **SIDI-BEL-ABBES** (*April 20, 1943*)

French steamship of 4,392 tons torpedoed and sunk by the U-565 near Oran about ten miles north of the Habibas Islands. On board were some 1,130 Senegalese troops being transported from Casablanca to Oran. A total of 611 lives were lost, 520 being rescued by British naval escorts.

### **SS ERINPURA** (*May 1, 1943*)

British India SN Company troop transport in convoy with 23 merchantmen and escorted by eleven destroyers, was bound for Malta. When some 30 miles north of Benghazi, the convoy was attacked by German bombers and torpedo carrying aircraft. On board the Erinpura (Capt. P. V. Cotter) were 1,025 troops. One large bomb exploded in the hold sinking the ship in a matter of minutes. A total of 664 lives were lost including forty-four crewmembers and three gunners.

### **A.H.S. CENTAUR** (*May 14, 1943*)

Former passenger/cargo vessel, the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur (3,222 tons) sunk after being set on fire by a torpedo from the Japanese submarine I-177 near Cape Moreton, 38km off the Queensland coast. The Centaur had left Sydney Harbour while brightly illuminated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Red crosses were painted on both sides of the hull and funnel and she flew the Red Cross flag. She was on her way to Port Moresby in New Guinea to pick up wounded from the battles of Buna and Gona, when the attack occurred at 0410hrs. The ship sank in about three minutes taking the lives of 268 people, including 18 doctors, 11 nurses, 193 other medical personnel of the 2/12th Field Ambulance and 45 members of her crew. There were 64 survivors from the 332 persons on board, picked up by the American destroyer USS Mugford. Of the twelve nursing sisters on board, only one survived. In 1990, the ship was declared a historic wreck. After the war, the captain of the I-177, Lt-Cdr Hajime Nakagawa, was arrested and tried as a war criminal. He spent four years in Sugamo prison for atrocities committed

in the Indian Ocean such as shooting survivors of torpedoed ships. *During the war 49 ships were sunk off the East Coast of Australia, a total of 1,287 lives were lost. The wreck of the Centaur was finally found on December 20, 2009, at a depth of 2059m.*

### **SS YOMA** *(June 17, 1943)*

Passenger/Cargo liner of 8,131 tons of the British and Burmese Steam Navigation Co., built 1928 in Scotland and now serving in the Mediterranean as an auxiliary transport. She was in convoy GTX-2 with the ships SS Amarapoor, Pegu, Kemmendine and Sagaing en route from Sfax to Alexandria when she was sunk at 7.33 am by two torpedoes from the U-81 near Derna. She was the only ship to be sunk during this convoy. On board were 1,793 troops of which 484 were lost. British Army men included 134 officers and 994 ratings. Free French Army men included 22 officers and 643 ratings. Capt. George Patterson and 32 crew members also perished. Survivors were picked up by escort ships including the Australian minesweepers HMAS Lismore and HMAS Gawler.

### **USS HELENA** *(July 6, 1943)*

American light cruiser of 13,327 tons, sunk at the Battle of Kula Gulf 10 miles north of Kolombangara in New Georgia. Hit by three torpedoes from Japanese warships, the Helena jack-knifed and sank with 186 of her crew of 888. The survivors were picked up by other US warships. About 400 of them later served on board the new USS Houston. The Helena was the last but one of the 10 American cruisers lost in WWII. The USS Helena was awarded 7 Battle Stars.

### **DUCHESS OF YORK** *(July 11, 1943)*

The twin funnelled 20,021 ton passenger liner/troopship owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway was in convoy with the liner SS California and the munitions ship SS Port Fairy en route to Freetown, Sierra Leone. About three hundred miles off Vigo in Spain the convoy was attacked by three FW-200 German bombers during the evening of the 11th. The two liners were hit amidships and set on fire. The three escort destroyers, HMS Douglas, HMS Moyola and the Canadian destroyer H.M.C.S. Iroquois proceeded to transfer passengers and crews. The Iroquois rescued 628 from the Duchess of York but sadly 89 men lost their lives. Soon after midnight on the 12th the blazing hulk of the two ships were then sunk by torpedoes from the convoy escorts. The SS Port Fairy was then escorted safely to Casablanca where all survivors were disembarked.

### **NISSHIN**

Japanese seaplane tender (11,317 tons) departed Kure escorted by two destroyers. On board were over six hundred troops and twenty-two tanks on their way to reinforce the garrison at Buin. Commanded by Rear Admiral Osugi Morikazu, the convoy was attacked by a US strike force as it sailed through the Bougainville Channel only two hours and twenty miles from its destination. Heavily bombed and strafed the ship was doomed and soon on fire from bow to stern. Heeling heavily to starboard, the ship plunged bow first under the waves. One of Japan's greatest sea disasters the sinking took the lives of around 1,080 lives including those from the two destroyers which were also bombed but not sunk. There were 178 survivors rescued by the same two destroyers that had earlier protected them.

### **R.N. ROMA** *(September 9, 1943)*

Italian battleship, flagship of Admiral Carlo Bertgamini, sunk in the Mediterranean (off the coast of Sardinia) by direct hits from two radio-guided 'Fritz-X' 320 kg bombs dropped from Dornier 217 K1s Luftwaffe planes from the Istres airstrip near Marseille. (A total of 1,386 such bombs were manufactured during the war. This radio-controlled bomb was the first really effective weapon against the battleship, other than the torpedo). The **Roma** capsized, broke in two and sank at 16.12hrs. The Italian surrender had just been signed and now their foe was their former ally, Germany. The Roma (41,650 tons) had set sail for Malta from her base at La Spezia with orders to join the British fleet. On seeing the planes approach, the gun-crews mistook them for British aircraft coming in to act as escorts and

held their fire. Admiral Bertgamini, 86 officers and 1,264 crewmen perished as the ship went down. The pitifully few survivors were picked up by two of the escort destroyers. In the Mediterranean theatre alone, a total of 28,937 Italian sailors lost their lives. (The wreck of the "Roma" is at 41 10N 8 18E). *During WWII, eight battleships were sunk by aircraft; these were the Roma, Prince of Wales, Repulse, Arizona, Oklahoma and the Japanese Hiei, Musushi, and Yamato.*

### M.V. DONIZETTI *(September 23, 1943)*

Italian passenger vessel of 2,428 tons and now under the German flag, arrives at Rodi Island to embark Italian troops who have to evacuate the island. Licensed to carry 700 passengers she now had on board 1,576 military men plus around 220 crew. On the 23rd she left Rodi bound for Piraeus under escort of the German frigate Taio. While south of the island she was attacked by the British destroyers HMS Fury and HMS Eclipse. Badly damaged by gunfire the Donizetti capsizes and sinks. *There were no survivors.*

### MICHEL *(October 17, 1943)*

German commerce raider of 4,740 tons, originally the Polish freighter 'Biolskoi' captured in Norway, was sunk by four torpedoes from the American submarine USS Tarpon (Cmdr. T. Wogan) about 60 miles off the Japanese island of Honshu as she approached Tokyo Bay. A tremendous explosion soon after the fourth torpedo struck, sank the vessel and she went down within thirteen minutes with the loss of 263 officers and crewmen including her commander, Captain Gumprich. Sadly, nineteen Norwegian seamen, prisoners on board the Michel, died in their 'cells'. There were 110 survivors who managed to reach shore. During her first cruise, commanded by Hellmuth von Ruckteschell, she sank 15 ships, (including the Gloucester Castle) a total of 99386 tons. On her second cruise, commanded by Captain Gunther Gumprich, she sank 3 ships, 27,632 tons. The Michel was the last of the ten armed merchant cruisers which the Germans employed during the war.

### SINFRA *(October 20, 1943)*

French ship of 4,470 tons, now in German hands, and serving as a troop transport and part of a German convoy, is attacked north of the island of Crete by Mitchell bombers of the U.S.A.A.F. and RAF Beaufighters. The Sinfra, with 2,664 prisoners of war on board, including 2,389 Italians, 71 Greek prisoners and 204 German troops, sinks. When Sinfra was torpedoed, the order went out from the ship "Send rescue vessels . . . rescue German troops first." One plane, a Dornier, of the 7th Luftwaffe Sea Rescue Squadron was shot down by the allied aircraft. By the end of the day, 566 survivors, including 163 Germans, had been saved leaving a death toll of 2,098. *This was the greatest loss of POW's in the Mediterranean during World War II.*

### HMS CHARYBDIS *(October 23, 1943)*

British Dido class Cruiser sunk 40 nautical miles northeast of Brittany, France, by two German- torpedo boats, the T-23 and T-27 of the 4th Torpedo Boat Flotilla commanded by Korvettenkapitan Franz Kohlauf. The Charybdis was part of Force 28 patrolling the Channel off the French coast (Operation Tunnel). Hit by two torpedoes on the port side, the cruiser was soon engulfed in flames and started sinking deeply by the stern. A total of 464 men lost their lives including her commander, Captain Voelcker. There were 107 survivors. One of her escort destroyers, HMS Limbourne, badly damaged, had to be scuttled. Forty of her 125 crew were lost. (A number of US soldiers were on board the Limbourne, all were lost; why the G.I.s were there has never been established) None of the bodies were ever recovered. Eighteen of the seamen, whose bodies were recovered from the sea after the sinking of the Charybdis, lie buried in the cemetery at St Peters Port on the island of Guernsey and many more at St. Brieuc in France. In 1992, the wreck of the Charybdis was found by a French team of explorers and in 2001 a British team surveyed the wreck. She lies on her port side, her back broken, at a depth of 83 metres. A year later they found the wreck of the Limbourne about five miles from the Charybdis, and positive identification was made by photographing the ships bell.

## SENDAI *(November 2, 1943)*

Imperial Japanese Navy cruiser of 7,100 tons commissioned on April 29, 1924 at the Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Yard in Nagasaki. Sunk at the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay off Torokina Point in the Solomons. Torpedoes and shells from US Rear Admiral Aaron Merrill's Task Force 39 set the cruiser on fire. At 0200 hrs the Sendai is abandoned and sinks at 0430 hrs with 184 of her crew. A total of 236 crewmen are rescued. The wreck lies at a depth of 440 metres about 55 kilometres north-east of Kota Bharu, Malaysia.

## USS LISCOME BAY *(November 24, 1943)*

American escort carrier sunk by torpedoes from the Japanese submarine I-175 (Lt. Cdr. Tadashi Tabata) 40 kilometres west-southwest of Butaritari Island, near Makin Atoll, Gilbert Islands. The carrier sank in 23 minutes after being hit. Her aircraft bombs, stowed in the hold, blew up in a terrific explosion taking the lives of 644 men and its Commander, Rear Admiral Henry A. Mullinix. The stern of the ship simply vanished, the explosion sending fragments of steel, human flesh and clothing so high in the air that they showered down on the USS New Mexico which was following almost a mile behind. Fifty-five officers and 217 men were rescued by the destroyer USS Hoel. The I-175 managed to escape in spite of the many depth charges being dropped. Black mess steward and ships boxing champion 'Dorie' Miller was among the dead. Miller won the Navy Cross at Pearl Harbor by moving his mortally wounded captain to a place of greater safety and then manning a 50 calibre machine gun on the deck of the USS West Virginia until his ammunition ran out. As Miller remarked later "I think I got one of those Jap planes". He had no formal training in weapons. On June 30, 1973, the destroyer USS Miller was named in his memory. Legislative efforts to upgrade his Navy Cross to the Medal of Honor have to date been unsuccessful.

## ROHNA *(November 26, 1943)*



**The British liner / troopship HMT Rohna.**

Seventeen year old British liner/troopship of 8,602 tons, carrying 2,193 passengers including 1,988 US troops, 7 Red Cross personnel and a crew of 198, sailed from Oran, Algeria, bound for Bombay, India, via the Suez Canal. She joined the convoy KMF 26 which consisted of 24 ships in six columns, four ships in each column and escorted by seven British destroyers. Between Algiers and Philloppville the convoy was attacked by around 30 Heinkel 177 bombers of 11/KG-40. The Rohna was hit by a HS 293 'glider bomb' (*the world's first guided missile*) The troopship, crewed by Indian seamen under British officers and captained by an Australian naval officer, was owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company. The ship sank in less than 30 minutes taking 1,015 US troops and 102 crew members to a watery death. This was the largest loss of American lives at sea during WWII. Between



10.30 PM and midnight, rescue ships, including the minesweeper SS Pioneer, the Red Cross ship Clan Campbell and the Rohna's sister ship HMT Rajula, reported "sailing through a sea of floating bodies". Just over 900 survivors were rescued. Eight of the Heinkel 177s were shot down during the attack. Survivors were landed at Phillopville and taken care of by a British army unit. For reasons of national security details of this tragedy were kept secret for many years.

For more on the Rohna survivors, see the *The Rohna Survivors Memorial Association's* website at <http://www.rohna.org/>. For the full story see Carlton Jackson's book 'Forgotten Tragedy'.

## SCHARNHORST *(December 26, 1943)*

The 32,700 ton German battleship, (Captain Fritz Julius Hintze) was attacked by the British battleship Duke of York and destroyers Savage and Saumarez while attempting to intercept an Allied convoy sailing to the port of Murmansk in Russia. Damaged by the 14-inch shells from the Duke of York and hit by torpedoes from the British and Norwegian destroyers, she was then attacked by the cruisers Jamaica, Belfast and Norfolk. After a battle lasting thirty-six minutes, the mighty ship rolled over and sank bows first at 7:45pm about 75 miles off the North Cape, the northernmost point in Europe. The 36 survivors of the 1,969 crew were picked up from the sea but 1,933 men had died. All of the Scharnhorst's 51 officers were lost including the Group Commander, Rear Admiral Erich Bey. Altogether a total of fifty-five torpedoes were fired at the Scharnhorst, but only 11 struck the ship. Losses from the British ships were eighteen killed and sixteen wounded. *The Battle of North Cape* was the last conflict between British and German capital ships in World War II. Thus ended effective efforts by Germany to block the Murmansk convoys. The wreck of the Scharnhorst was located by a Norwegian team in September, 2000. It lies, her hull upside down, in just under 1,000 feet of water.

# 1942

**CITTA' DI PALERMO** *(January 5, 1942)* Italian passenger ship (5,413 tons) built in 1930 and converted to an auxiliary cruiser, left Brindisi for Patras escorting the motor vessel **Calino**. On board the Palermo were around 600 Italian troops. At 08:00 hrs. when three miles north-west of Cape Dukato she was struck by two torpedoes launched from **HMS Proteus**. The Palermo took only six minutes to sink. There were a few survivors but almost all on board went down with the ship.

## LAMORICIE *(January 9, 1942)*

The French passenger ship **Lamoriecie** was crossing the Mediterranean from Algiers to France when she sank near the Balearic Isles. While sailing to Marseille the weather deteriorated severely and the ship altered course to assist a freighter in distress the *SS Jumieges*. Unfortunately the latter foundered in heavy seas with all hands before the Lamoricie could be of assistance. The captain tried to take shelter behind the island of MENORCA but the ship could not cross the wind. Finally the boilers shut down, all power was lost as water began pouring in through the coal hatches and the ship started to list heavily and began to sink. (The ship had recently been converted from diesel oil to coal owing to wartime shortages) A total of 301 passengers and crew were lost. There were 93 survivors. One of those lost was Jerzy Rozycki, one of the three Polish cryptologists who worked on cracking the German Enigma code in 1932. Rozycki and his team had travelled from France to Algiers in late 1941 to work on the Enigma codes and was returning on the **Lamoriecie** when disaster struck. Two other members of the code breaking team, Jan Gralinski and Piotr Smalenski also perished.

**LADY HAWKINS** *(January 19, 1942)* Passenger/cargo ship (7,988 tons) of the Canadian National Steamship Company, the **Lady Hawkins** was sunk by the U-66 (Korvkpt. Richard Zapp) midway between Cape Hatteras and Bermuda. The ship was carrying 212 passengers and 109 crew when hit by two torpedoes. About 162

passengers died as did 88 of the ships crew. The steamship **Coamo** rescued 71 persons from a lifeboat and brought them to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The liner Coamo was later torpedoed on December 9, 1942 and sank with the loss of 133 passengers and crew. The U-66 was sunk on May 6, 1944 by the destroyer escort USS Buckley. There were 36 survivors but 24 of the crew died.

### SS STRUMA *(February 24, 1942)*

The chartered Greek owned ship **Struma** sailed from Constansa under the command of a Bulgarian captain, G.T. Gorbatenkoin, and flying the Panamanian flag. There were 769 Romanian Jews on board, including 269 women and 105 children, many from the town of Barland, their hope was to reach Palestine. After three days at sea, the **Struma** anchored off the outer harbour at Istanbul, with engine trouble. Here she awaited British permission to proceed to Palestine, permission which the British refused (a mistake they were to regret) one reason given was *'It will encourage a flood of refugees'*. Turkey, for some unknown reason, likewise refused them to disembark although the local Jewish community, who were already running a camp for Displaced Persons, were quite willing to take the Struma's passengers and were in the meantime supplying them with food and water. One of the passengers, Medeea Marcovici, suffered an embolism and was transferred to the Jewish hospital in Istanbul. She was granted a visa for Palestine and died there in 1996.

After two months at Istanbul with engines that were damaged beyond repair, conditions on board became appalling, many of the passengers now suffering from dysentery and malnutrition. Eventually the Turkish police arrived to tow the Struma out into the Black Sea. The British had exerted strong pressure on Turkey to pursue this course. The enraged passengers fought then off but a second attempt, where force was used, succeeded and the Struma was towed out and cast adrift outside Turkish territorial waters. This inhuman decision by the Turkish and British governments was to destroy the special relationship between Britain and the Zionist Jews. On the water for 74 days since leaving Conatansa, the Struma, hopelessly overcrowded, and with no country willing to accept them, was suddenly torpedoed and sunk by the Russian submarine **SHCH-213** commanded by Lt. Col. Isaev, just ten miles from Istanbul. All on board, a total of 769 persons, perished except one, nineteen year old Romanian Jew David Stoljar who today (1999) lives in Oregon, USA. The British High Commissioner in Palestine, Sir Harold MacMichael, stated: *"The fate of these people was tragic, but the fact remains that they were nationals of a country at war with Britain, proceeding direct from enemy territory. Palestine was under no obligations towards them"*.

### DE RUYTER *(February 27, 1942)*

Dutch light cruiser (7,548 tons) sunk during the seven hour **Battle of the Java Sea**. Flagship of the Allied Force Commander, Rear Admiral Karel Doorman RNN, the ship was hit by a torpedo from the Japanese heavy cruiser **Haguro** at 23.32pm and sank taking the lives of 366 men including Admiral Doorman. There were 70 survivors. Also sunk in this battle were the Dutch light cruiser **Java** (7,205 tons) and the destroyer **Kortenaer** 1,640 tons) The Java was struck by a torpedo from the Japanese heavy cruiser **Nachi** (14,980 tons, commanded by Rear Admiral Takagi) and sank in fifteen minutes taking 530 crewmembers to their deaths. There were 35 survivors. *This was the greatest loss of life on any Dutch warship*. The destroyer Kortenaer (Lt. Cmdr. Kroese) hit amidships at 17:13pm by a torpedo from the Haguro, broke in two and sank almost immediately, losing 59 men from her crew of 171. The destroyer **HMS Encounter** rescued 113 from the stricken vessel but one survivor died on board. During the battle, 152 torpedoes were fired from the Japanese warships, but only three found their targets. In this, the saddest of days for the Royal Netherlands Navy, a total of 955 brave men gave their lives. (The Battle of the Java Sea, *the greatest surface engagement since Juland*, took the lives of 6,339 sailors from both sides and the loss of many Allied warships. Only four ships were sunk on the Japanese side)

### HMAS PERTH *(March 1, 1942)*

Australian cruiser of 6,830 tons launched in 1934 under the name **HMS Amphion**. Transferred to the Australian Navy in 1939 and renamed **HMAS Perth**. During the **Battle of the Java Sea** the Perth's commander, Captain

Hector Waller, pulled his ship out of line when the heavy cruiser **HMS Exeter** was hit and placed it between the Japanese warships and the Exeter to save it from further damage (the Exeter later sank). The Perth, accompanied by the American cruiser Houston, was later sunk in the Sunda Strait half an hour after midnight about four miles from St. Nicholas Point in Java as the two ships attempted to escape southwards from the battle area and into the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately they ran straight into a Japanese invasion fleet of destroyers and troop transports in Banteng Bay and after a long running battle during which all ammunition was expended, both ships were sunk by torpedoes. On board the Perth were 45 officers, 631 ratings, 4 civilian canteen staff and six Royal Australian Air Force personnel, a total of 686 men. Casualties were 23 officers and 329 ratings killed. There were 334 survivors who were taken prisoners of war. Of these, around 106 died in captivity. Not one of the Perth's officers died while a prisoner of war, due no doubt to the privileges granted to men of officer rank. For this heroic act, Captain Waller never received the equivalent of the British VC as did the captain of the Houston. The Dutch government offered its highest award, the **Militaire Willems-Orde** posthumously to Captain Waller, but to its *everlasting shame, the Australian government turned it down*. In World War II, twelve Victoria Crosses were awarded to members of the Australian forces engaged in operations against Japan but not a single VC was awarded to the Royal Australian Navy.

### USS HOUSTON *(March 1, 1942)*

Sunk in the Sunda Strait by torpedoes from the same warships that sunk **HMAS Perth** The **Houston** went down just twenty minutes later about a mile from the Perth, taking 643 men to their deaths. The 368 survivors made their way to Bantam Bay on the western shores of Java, only to be captured by the Japanese who had already occupied the area some hours before. Of the survivors, seventy-seven died while in Japanese captivity. Both captains of the Perth and Houston went down with their ships. Captain Robert Rooks, the commander of the Houston, was awarded the *Congressional Medal of Honor*, posthumously. The Houston lies in approximately 107 feet of water just north of Panjang Island.

### GALILEA *(March 28, 1942)*

Italian liner of 8,040 tons, torpedoed and sunk by a British submarine near Antipaxo. The **Galilea** was carrying Italian troops from North Africa to Italy when attacked. The ship went down taking the lives of 768 troops and crewmembers to their deaths.

### HMS CORNWALL and HMS DORSETSHIRE *(April 5, 1942)*

**HMS Cornwall**, (Capt. Manwaring) the 10,000 ton, 8-inch gun British cruiser sunk off the coast of Ceylon by bombs from 53 Japanese planes from the carriers **Akagi**, **Soryu** and **Hiryu**. From the Cornwall 198 men were lost, the ship sinking in 22 minutes at 1.40pm. **HMS Dorsetshire**, (Capt. Agar) British cruiser sunk along with the Cornwall, lost 227 men, the ship taking at least nine direct hits and sinking in less than eight minutes. The cruiser **Enterprise** and two destroyers rescued 1,122 men from the water.

### HMS HERMES *(April 9, 1942)*

The 10,850 ton aircraft carrier (Capt. R. Onslow) was the first Royal Navy ship to be specially designed as such. This was the ninth ship to bear this name. The **Hermes** left the naval base of Trincomalee, Ceylon, escorted by the Australian destroyer **Vampire**, and while sailing south off Batticaloa on the east shore, the ships were attacked by carrier-borne aircraft from a Japanese force of three battleships and five carriers including the Akaga, Hiryu and Soryu, which had entered the Bay of Bengal a week before and were now attacking the naval base. Around seventy bombers were sent to dispatch the Hermes which sank within ten minutes, followed by the Vampire shortly after. Of the complement on the Hermes, nineteen officers and 283 ratings died. On the Vampire, nine men lost their lives. The hospital ship **Vita** rescued approximately 600 survivors from the two ships and took them to Colombo and later

to Kandy for recuperation. The air attack on the base killed 85 civilians in addition to military losses. Thirty-six Japanese planes were shot down. The wreck of the Hermes was found sixty-three years later, in 2006, about five nautical miles from shore and fifty-seven meters down. Divers attached the White Ensign to the rusting hull. The wreck of the Vampire has never been found.

### **RAMB IV** *(May 10, 1942)*

Former Italian hospital ship captured by the British and now a Ministry of War transport, was carrying 360 staff and wounded patients when attacked by enemy aircraft while on its way to Alexandria from Tobruk. The ship had to be abandoned and later sunk by Royal Navy warships. During the attack, 155 wounded men were killed and ten of the crew lost their lives.

### **BATTLE OF MIDWAY SINKINGS : SORYU, AKAGI, KAGA and HIRYU** *(June 4-8, 1942)*

Japanese aircraft carriers sunk during the **Battle of Midway**. In this battle the enemy lost four aircraft carriers, all reduced to burning pyres within ten minutes by just 54 American pilots.

1. The **Soryu** plunged to the ocean floor at 7.13 am taking her whole complement of 728 officers and ratings with her. A floating blazing wreck, the Soryu was sighted by the US submarine **Nautilus** which speeded her end by firing three torpedoes into the ship.
2. The **Akagi**, flagship of Admiral Nagumo, sank with the loss of 221 men after being scuttled and torpedoed by her own escort destroyers.
3. The blazing 30,000 ton **Kaga** sank with around 800 sailors and airmen after being torn apart by two great explosions.
4. The **Hiryu**, the fourth carrier to be sunk, was still afloat and burning at 9.00 am next day but was also sunk by torpedoes from her escort destroyers. A total of 416 men died on the Hiryu. Her captain, Tomeo Kaku, and her commander, Admiral Yamaguchi, lashed themselves to the bridge and went down with their ship after saying goodbye to the surviving crew.

The United States lost 307 men in this battle. None of the opposing ships sighted each other; the entire, decisive battle was fought entirely by the carriers' planes. From the Japanese carriers, around 250 planes were lost. The aircraft included Vals, Kates, and Zeros. The American planes were from the carriers **Enterprise**, **Yorktown** and **Hornet**. The aircraft included the Dauntless, Devastator and Wildcat. In all, the Americans lost 72 planes. The Yorktown was the only casualty of the US Task Forces, three bombs from a Japanese dive bomber reduced the carrier to a derelict wreck and when two torpedoes hit the vessel causing a 26-degree list, the order to abandon ship was given. At 6 am on June 7, a Japanese submarine found her and performed the coup de grâce with two more torpedoes.

*The American victory at Midway gave Australians their first real feeling of security. Its takeover by Japan was no longer a real possibility. Australia's only defence against the Japanese at this time was its distance from Japan and the size of the country. Was Australia worth the enormous cost and effort needed to launch an invasion?.*

### **MIKUMA** *(June 5, 1942)*

During the **Battle of Midway**, Japanese Admiral Yamamoto was going to attempt not to make Midway a complete failure. He sent out an urgent message to send four of his smaller aircraft carriers down from the Aleutians and brought up a number of heavy cruisers to join his main fleet.

But the attempt at the taking of Midway was destined to failure. Yamamoto finally signalled his ships to withdraw. Two of the cruisers from the Midway force under the command of Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, the **Mikuma** and

the **Mogami**, both of the Mogami class heavy cruisers, came under attack of the **USS Tambor**, a submarine of the US Strike Force. Both the **Mikuma** and the Mogami turned so as to avoid attack, but turned into each other. The Mogami, building up full power turned into the path of the Mikuma hitting her amidships. Both cruisers were badly damaged. Rear Admiral Spruances' dive bombers found the two cruisers early the following morning, their bombs adding greatly to the damage. The Mikuma finally sunk, Two of her survivors were picked up by the American submarine **USS Trout**. The crippled Mogami managed to get back the base at Truk where she was fitted out as an aircraft carrying cruiser, but the Mogami was finally sunk by US aircraft in the Philippines in October 1944.

### TRENTO *(June 15, 1942)*

Italian cruiser badly damaged by British torpedo-carrying aircraft south-west of Crete while attacking the **Harpoon** convoy en route to Malta. The **Trento** was taken in tow by its escorting destroyer but was then hit by two torpedoes from a British submarine and sinks. Of its complement of 1,151 men there were 602 survivors, a death toll of 549.

### MONTEVIDEO MARU *(July 1, 1942)*

Sunk by the American submarine **USS Sturgeon** (Lieutenant Commander Wright) about sixty-five miles west of Cape Bojidoru, Luzon, in the Philippines. She was heading for Japan from Rabaul, New Britain, carrying 1,035 Australian nationals including 845 army prisoners of war, the bulk of the 2/22 Battalion, Australian 8th Division (**Lark Force**). The 7,267 ton passenger ship had left Rabaul on the 22nd of June, unescorted and unmarked when at 0225 hrs on July 1st, was hit by two torpedoes from a four torpedo spread from the **Sturgeon** at a range of 4,000 yards. Developing a list to starboard, the ship sank stern first at 0240. Later reports indicated that 845 army personnel, 208 civilian P.O.W.s, including twenty missionaries, who had been living and working on New Britain when the Japanese came, 71 Japanese crew and 62 naval guards (a total of 1,186) made up the ships complement. Among the 208 civilian prisoners were the 36 crewmembers of the Swedish cargo ship **Herstein** which was bombed and set on fire while loading copra in Matupi Harbour. From the Allied contingent on board, there were no survivors. *Lives lost amounted to 1,053.*

A week later, on the 6th, the rest of Lark Force (168 men) and some civilian nurses, were herded on board the **Naruto Maru** and nine days later, dirty and half starved, arrived safely at Yokohama. All survived the war. After the war, Japanese sources state that seventeen Japanese crew and guards had survived the sinking of the Montevideo Maru and reached the shores of Luzon Island. Their fate is uncertain, they have not been heard of since and it is presumed that they were attacked and killed by Philippine guerrillas.

### GLOUCESTER CASTLE *(July 15, 1942)*

Union Castle Line passenger ship of 7,999 tons and converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser, was attacked off the Ascension Islands, by German commerce raider **Michel** during a voyage from Birkenhead to Cape Town, South Africa. All her starboard side lifeboats were destroyed after which she sank about ten minutes later. Of her complement of 12 passengers (all women and children) and 142 crew, a total of 93 souls perished. Two lifeboats escaped the scene carrying 61 survivors but was later picked up by the Michel and transferred to her supply tanker, the **Charlotte Schliemann**, which transported them to Yokohama, Japan, where they were interned for the rest of the war. Two of the survivors died while in Japanese captivity.

### USS QUINCY, USS VINCENNES, USS ASTORIA *(August 9/10, 1942)*

Three US cruisers sunk during the one hour **1st Battle of Savo Island** by a force of Japanese warships including five heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and one destroyer. The American warships were protecting and escorting US troop transports en route to Guadalcanal. Total losses from the three ships amounted to 1,077 men killed and 709



wounded. On the [USS Astoria](#) 216 men were killed. The [Vincennes](#) lost 332 men and 529 men were lost on the [Quincy](#). Many of the blood and oil covered survivors, struggling in the water, fell victim to the sharks. Japanese casualties were only 58 killed and 70 wounded.

The catastrophe at Savo Island was a demoralizing defeat for the Allies and the worst defeat ever suffered by the United States Navy. During this one hour duel, the Australian cruiser [HMAS Canberra](#) (Captain Frank Getting) was also sunk with the loss of 85 lives. Many of Canberra's survivors were rescued by the American destroyers [USS Patterson](#) and the [USS Blue](#) which was herself sunk with all hands some weeks later on August 23. On hearing of the Canberra's sinking, Churchill requested that the British cruiser [HMS Shropshire](#) be sent to replace her. In 1943, the US launched a new cruiser and named her Canberra, the first time the US Navy had named a vessel after a foreign warship. Fifty years later, a deep sea diving team, led by Robert R. Ballard, and including one of the Canberra's survivors, Ordinary Seaman Albert Warne, placed a plaque on the battered but upright hull of the Canberra which read "*In Memory Of Our Fallen Comrades*". [USS Astoria](#), [HMAS Canberra](#), [USS Quincy](#), [USS Vincennes](#).

### [HMS EAGLE](#) *(August 11, 1942)*

British 22,600 ton aircraft carrier (Capt. L. Mackintosh) launched in 1918, sunk in the Mediterranean, 70 miles south of Cape Salinas, Majorca, by four torpedoes from the German [U-73](#) (Kptlt. Helmut Rosenbaum) while escorting a convoy ([Operation Pedestal](#)) to the island of Malta. All four torpedoes hit the [Eagle](#) on her port side slewing the ship to starboard and shedding the parked Sea Hurricanes on her deck into the sea. Listing to port she turned slowly over and sank just over seven minutes later. Many of the survivors, bobbing in the sea by their hundreds were severely injured by concussion when the Eagle's boilers exploded. Of her crew of 1,087 a total of 160 perished, two officers and 158 ratings. The 927 survivors were picked up by the destroyers [HMS Lookout](#) and [HMS Laforey](#) and the tug [Jaunty](#). The Eagle was the only aircraft carrier in Admiral Cunningham's Mediterranean Fleet and the only carrier with *two funnels*. *(On the 16th December 1942, the U-73 was sunk off Oran by the US destroyers Woolsey and Trippe, killing 16 of her crew. There were 34 survivors)*

### [HMS MANCHESTER](#) *(August 13, 1942)*

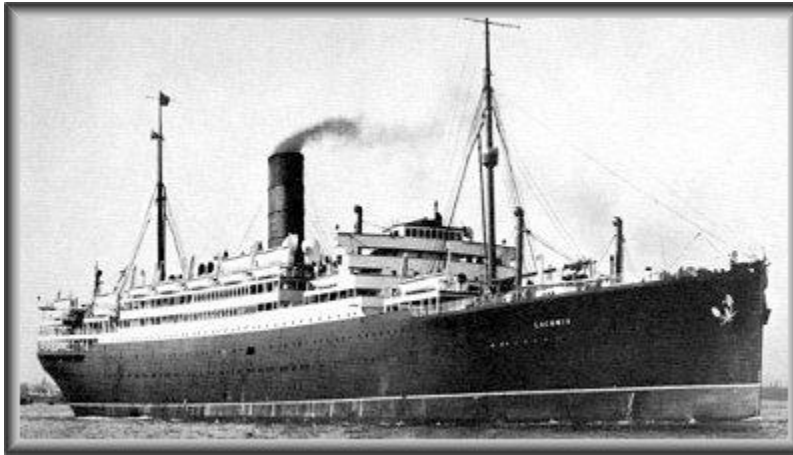
British light cruiser (9,400 tons) launched in April, 1937 and torpedoed four miles east of Kelibia, Tunisia, North Africa, by Italian torpedo boats, [MAS-16](#) and [MAS-22](#). The cruiser was engaged in escorting the great 'Pedestal' convoy to Malta at the time of the attack. Badly damaged, the ship had to be scuttled by her crew. A total of 150 men lost their lives. Three officers and 375 ratings landed on the Tunisian coast and were interned by the Vichy French authorities.

### [SS BAEPENDY](#) *(August 15, 1942)*

Brazilian passenger and cargo ship (4,801 tons) now serving as a troop transport, sunk by the [U-507](#) (Korvkpt. Harro Schacht) off the mouth of the Real River between Rio de Janeiro and Manaus. There were over 700 troops on board of which 270 died. Also sunk was the [Annibal Benevolo](#), another Brazilian passenger ship, with a loss of 150 and the [Araraquara](#) with 131 passengers and crew lost, both sunk on the August 16, 1942. The U-507 was later sunk on January 13, 1943, by depth charges from a US Catalina flying boat in the South Atlantic. The entire crew of 54 perished. The sinking of these passenger ships *caused Brazil to declare war on Germany* on August 22nd.

## LACONIA *(September 12, 1942)*

British Cunard Line luxury liner (19,695 tons) converted to a transport ship, was torpedoed and sunk by the **U-156**, commanded by Kptlt. Werner Hartenstein. The ship was carrying over 1,800 Italian prisoners of war captured in North Africa and guarded by 160 Polish guards, former Russian prisoners of war. Also on board were 268 British military and civilian personnel including 80 women and children. About 500 POW's were killed instantly when the torpedoes hit the prison holds. Over 200 survivors were picked up by the U-156 helped by the **U-506** and **U-507** and then the U-boats in turn were attacked by an American four-engine Liberator of the USAF 343 Squadron from the US base on Ascension Island. Even though they displayed a large Red Cross flag, the plane dropped three depth charges. Altogether, including the crew, 2,732 persons were on board the **Laconia** when attacked. A total of 1,649 lives were lost including the captain, Rudolf Sharpe (ex-**Lancastria**). Vichy naval craft picked up 1,083 survivors. This incident caused the German Naval Authorities to issue the '*Laconia Order*' by which all *U-boat captains were forbidden to pick up survivors*. At the Nuremberg Trials, Grand Admiral Doenitz was accused of a war crime by signing the order, but was acquitted on that charge only to spend 11 years and 6 months in prison for other war crimes.



The British Cunard Line luxury liner Laconia.

Another account of the sinking can be seen at the [Laconia Incident website](#).

## USS WASP *(September 15, 1942)*

American aircraft carrier which as part of the British Mediterranean Fleet, assisted in escorting convoys to Malta. She was then transferred to Far Eastern waters where she took part in operations off Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. While south of the islands on September 15, she was attacked by a Japanese submarine which scored three hits on the carrier. A heavy list to starboard developed after which she caught fire and sank. Most of her complement of around 2,000 were rescued but 193 of her crew were killed.

## LISBON MARU *(October 1, 1942)*

Japanese transport vessel of 7,053-tons, carrying 1,816 British and Canadian prisoners of war from the Shamshuipo POW camp at Hong Kong to Japan, was torpedoed by the US submarine **Grouper** about six miles off Tung Tusham Island on the Chinese coast. The prisoners were contained in three holds which soon became foul with the stench of sweat, excreta and vomit. Many lost consciousness through thirst, lack of fresh air and extreme heat. Men were reduced to licking the condensation from the sides of the ships hull. A bucket of liquid was lowered by the guards and thirsty men rushed to grab it, only to find it was filled with urine. On top deck were some 778 Japanese

military men on their way home to Japan. At 7 o'clock in the morning, the torpedo struck, severely damaging the ship but causing no casualties among the prisoners. Soon a Japanese ship, the freighter **Toyukuni Maru** came alongside and took on board all the Japanese soldiers but none of the Allied prisoners.

The **Lisbon Maru** was then taken in tow heading for Shanghai, but some hours later the ship, now low in the water, began to sink by the stern. Prisoners in Number 3 hold were unfortunately below the waterline and now beyond rescue. Some prisoners in the other two holds managed to break free but were shot down as they emerged. Another four Japanese ships appeared on the scene and some escaped prisoners, swimming in the water, managed to reach the dangling ropes and started to climb aboard only to be kicked back into the water when within a few inches from the deck. Eventually, most of the surviving prisoners were taken on board the four ships and taken to Shanghai where thirty-five sick and wounded were unloaded. A few however, managed to swim away from the Lisbon Maru and were rescued by Chinese fishermen and taken to a group of small islands near by (Sing Pan islands). At Shanghai, a roll call accounted for 970 men, a total of 846 had perished, 154 were from the Middlesex regiment. Of the 970 survivors, some 244 died during their first winter in the Japanese camps. The 'Lisbon Maru' was not marked in any way to indicate that she was carrying prisoners of war but as she was armed and carried Japanese troops the ship was a legitimate target. (Among the 1,780 graves in the Sai Wan Bay cemetery are the graves of those who lost their lives in this tragedy)

Toilets for POW's on these ships were primitive to say the least. They were hung like bird cages over the two sides of the ship. all swaying like swings in the wind. A prisoner hung on to the ropes and defecated directly into the ocean. Some, too weak to get out, had to wait for the next in line to help him out while he in turn helped the other in. In the wake of the ship two yellow coloured streaks could be seen trailing to the horizon, the result of droppings from dozens of these outboard 'benjos'. When the seas were rough, the prisoner got drenched but as toilet paper was unknown, what the hell, it was better than using your hands to clean yourself. But why bother, you may ask, back in the torrid holds of the ship you again sat in a few centimetres thick carpet of semifluid human waste, blood, urine and vomit, the stench of which must have been horrific. Caged animals could not have suffered worse.

### **HMS CURACOA** *(October 2, 1942)*

British light cruiser of 4,290 tons was engaged mainly in convoy escort duties during WWII. It was while escorting the **Queen Mary** that disaster struck. The Cunard White Star liner was carrying 15,000 American troops to England when the **Curacao's** lookout reported what he thought was a submarine on the port bow. The Queen Mary turned sharply to starboard and the Curacao, in pursuit of the suspected U-boat, crossed her bows with insufficient clearance causing the two ships to collide. Proceeding on a zigzag course at a speed of twenty eight and a half knots the Queen Mary knifed through the escort cruiser cutting her in two, the halves separated by about 100 yards. Fearful of U-boats in the area and aware of his responsibility to his passengers, the captain did not even slow the ship down until it entered the safer waters of the Firth of Clyde. The 'Queen' was badly damaged, her bow plates folded back at least forty feet into the ship. A total of 338 men aboard the Curacao died as a result of this tragedy (25 officers and 313 ratings) There were 26 survivors. The incident occurred some 20 miles off the coast of Donegal, Ireland.

### **KOMET** *(October 14, 1942)*

German commerce raider (3,287 tons) escorted by four Motor Torpedo Boats and some minesweepers was bound for the North Atlantic. The British Admiralty, knowing that an attempt was being made to send the **Komet** to sea, had stationed a strong force of craft in the English Channel to intercept her. In the short action which followed, the Komet was set on fire and shortly after, blew up, killing all 351 of her crew. Two of the torpedo boats and one minesweeper were also sunk.

## SS PALATIA *(October 21, 1942)*

Cargo/Passenger ship of 3,974 tons, former Russian 'Khasan' captured by the Germans at Tallin on June 22, 1941, and now part of the Hamburg-America Line, departed Kristiansand, Norway, on October 21, 1942, having arrived the day before from Stettin. On board were 999 Russian prisoners of war and 135 ships crew and guards, a total of 1,134 men. About an hour after sailing, the ship was attacked by a torpedo carrying plane from 489 Squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, based at Wick, Scotland, and piloted by Flying Officer Richardson. *The Palatia sank near the Sangnvaar Lighthouse, taking 954 prisoners, crewmen and guards to the bottom of the ocean. The wreck lies in over seventy meters of water and is now classified as a War Grave.*

## MV ABOSSO II *(October 29, 1942)*

Elder Dempster Lines passenger/cargo liner of 11,330 tons (Capt. R. W. Tate) while on its way from Cape Town to Liverpool, she was attacked and sunk by torpedoes from the **U-575** (Kptlt. Gunther Heydemann) about 589 nautical miles (1,091 kilometres) north of Lagens Field, Azores Islands. Two torpedoes were fired at intervals of twenty minutes, the second sinking the Abossa in about fifteen minutes. There were only 31 survivors including five Dutch members of the 33 Netherlands Royal Navy and one female passenger out of the ten women on board. Three of the four Royal Navy men on board survived. All survivors were in lifeboat No 5, the only lifeboat with survivors that didn't capsize. In all, a total of 168 crew and 193 passengers were lost (=361). Among the passengers were 44 newly trained pilots from the No 23 Service Flying Training School, X Flight, Advanced Training Squadron, at Heany, Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. Pilot Officer William B. Thomson of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, was the only survivor from this pilot graduating course. Survivors were picked up from the freezing Atlantic 36 hours later when an Australian Navy Lieutenant on board the sloop, **HMS Bideford**, which was escorting a troop convoy proceeding to North Africa as part of Operation 'Torch', sighted their lifeboat. The sloop put them ashore at Gibraltar three days later.



The Elder Dempster Lines passenger/cargo liner MV Abosso II.

Pilot officer Thomson was assigned to return to Britain onboard a Sunderland Flying Boat, one of two which were to take off in formation. On take off his plane developed engine trouble and take off was aborted and delayed for a few hours. The other Sunderland, which had a number of high ranking officers on board, plus five passengers, continued on to Britain only to crash in heavy fog upon arrival...all the five passengers were killed. Pilot Officer Thomson claimed that it was only fate or his lowly rank which kept him off the ill-fated flight. *(He died in 1993)* On the Alamein Memorial are inscribed the names of 19 RAF men lost on the Abooso. Others are commemorated on memorials in various countries including Singapore (21) and one name on the Australian War Memorial. *(The U-575 was sunk on March 13, 1944, with the loss of 18 crewmembers. There were 37 survivors)*

## WARWICK CASTLE *(November 14, 1942)*

Passenger liner of 20,107 tons owned by the Union Castle Line of London. With 428 persons on board, including 295 crewmembers and 133 servicemen, the liner was torpedoed by the U-413 at 8.44am. The ship sank in 85 minutes. The Warwick Castle was being used as a troopship and had just disembarked troops during the North Africa landings and was returning empty as part of Convoy MFK-IX when attacked. A total of 114 lives were lost. (60 crew and 54 service personnel). There were 314 survivors.

## SS PRESIDENT DOUMER *(October 30, 1942)*

Ex-French passenger liner, now a Ministry of War Transport of 11,898 tons (Bibby Line) serving as a troopship, sank with the loss of 260 lives near Madeira. She was part of a UK bound convoy when struck by a torpedo from the [U-604](#) (Kptlt. Horst Höltring) about 151 nautical miles (280 kilometres) north of the Madeira Islands in position 35.08N, 16.44W. The U-604 was scuttled on August 11, 1943, in the South Atlantic with the loss of 14 of her crew.

## SS MENDOZA *(November 1, 1942)*

Ministry of War Transport liner of 8,234 tons (Captain B.T. Batho) sailing from Mombasa, East Africa, was sunk by the [U-178](#) (Kpt. Zur See, Hans Ibekken) about 70 nautical miles (129 kilometres) east-northeast of its destination, Durban, South Africa. The Glasgow-registered [Mendoza](#), an ex-Vichy French ship captured off Montevideo by a British armed merchant cruiser, and now sailing under the Blue Funnel flag, was carrying 153 crew and some 250 passengers when it blew up taking the lives of 28 of her crew and 122 service personnel. With her two propellers and rudder blown off, the ship settled by the stern. Ten lifeboats were launched, the survivors attempting to reach land when the American ship [SS Alava](#) arrived. While climbing the ladder, Captain Batho slipped and fell into the water, his body crushed between the ship and the lifeboat. The U-178 was scuttled on August 25, 1944 at Bordeaux, France.

## CITY OF CAIRO *(November 6, 1942)*

British passenger ship sunk by the [U-68](#) (Kptlt. Karl-Friedrich Merten) 840 kilometres south of the British island of St. Helena. There were around 100 deaths among its 300 passengers and crew. Merten believed that the ship he had sunk was a 8,000 ton cargo boat. After the sinking, the U-boat commander helped rescue survivors still in the water and had them placed in the lifeboats. He then departed the scene with an apology for the sinking but not before he provided the survivors with precise details of how to reach St. Helena. However, one lifeboat drifted for fifty-one days before reaching the coast of Brazil. Only two of its original eighteen people on board, were still alive. Some years later the British survivors held a reunion in London and Merten was invited to attend having previously published his own account of the sinking. At the reunion, one of the survivors was heard to remark "[We couldn't have been sunk by a nicer man](#)". Karl-Friedrich Merten died of cancer in May, 1993. *(For the full story and photo of the City of Cairo go to the [SS CITY OF CAIRO website](#))*

## HMS HECLA *(November 11, 1942)*



Royal Navy depot ship of 10,850 tons, the fifth of seven ships to bear this name, was taking part in the Allied landings in North Africa, when it was torpedoed and sunk just after midnight by a German U-boat, the [U-515](#). It sank west of the Straits of Gibraltar, 337 kilometres northwest of Rabat, French Morocco. A total of 279 men died and 568 survivors were rescued by the escort destroyers. [HMS Venomous](#) succeeded in rescuing more survivors from Hecla and landed them at Casablanca. Seven months earlier, on April 16, 1942, she was part of convoy WS-18 which ran into a minefield laid by the German Minelayer [Doggerbank](#). Damaged and taken in tow by the light cruiser [HMS Gambia](#), she was to spend the next eighteen weeks in Simonstown undergoing repairs. In this instance twenty-four of her crew were killed when she struck the mine amidships.



The destroyer depot / tender ship, HMS Hecla.

### USS JUNEAU *(November 13, 1942)*

American anti-aircraft light cruiser named after the capital city of Alaska. During the night actions of the naval *Battle of Guadalcanal* the [Juneau](#), commissioned in February, 1942, was struck by a torpedo from the Japanese submarine [I-26](#). The torpedo was meant for the American cruiser [San Francisco](#) but missed and hit the Juneau. Badly damaged, the ship tried to escape from the battle zone but was again hit by a second torpedo which apparently hit the powder magazine causing the ship to explode in a great ball of fire. This time the Juneau sank in less than thirty seconds taking the lives of her Captain and 687 crew members. There were about 115 survivors but only 10 were alive when help arrived eight days later. On board the Juneau were the five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, George, Francis, Joseph, Madison and Albert who had enlisted together on January 3, 1942 and insisted on serving on the same ship. Four of the brothers died in the explosion, the fifth, George, died from his wounds on a raft some days later. After this tragedy, President Roosevelt issued instructions that in future if any American family lost more than two sons, the remaining boys would be relieved from further combat duty and sent home. A new ship, [The Sullivans](#), was named in their honour and christened by the boys' mother, Mrs. Alleta Sullivan, in April, 1943. It was the first US Navy ship with a plural name and went on to earn 9 battle stars while serving in the Pacific theatre. She was decommissioned in 1965 and is now moored at the pier side of the Naval and Servicemen's Park in Buffalo, New York.

### USS SAN FRANCISCO *(November 13, 1942)*

American heavy cruiser of 9,950 tons launched in 1933 and commissioned a year later. In 1942 she was part of the naval force covering the invasion of Guadalcanal. During the landings a Japanese torpedo bomber crashed on the aft superstructure of the ship killing fifteen men and wounding twenty-nine others. The [San Francisco](#), flagship of

Admiral Callaghan, was badly damaged during the *Battle of Cape Esperance* in which she received forty-five major hits from the Japanese battleship **Hiei**. On board the 'Frisco' 77 men had been killed including Admiral Callaghan (some reports say 115) and 105 men wounded. Limping back to Pearl Harbor before returning to the US for repairs, the **San Francisco** served out the rest of the war, earning seventeen battle stars.

### **HIEI** *(November 13, 1942)*

Japanese Kongo class battleship sunk by bombs and torpedo hits during the half hour naval *Battle of Guadalcanal* (off Savo Island) Damaged by shells from the **USS San Francisco**, her steering gear shattered, the **Hiei** was now careering all over the ocean. Her commander, Captain Nishida, then switched to manual steering and after nearly completing a 180 degree turn sailed the ship away from the battle area at reduced speed. Soon three B-17 bombers, from the American held Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and in company with six torpedo carrying planes from the **USS Enterprise**, attacked the **Hiei**. Listing to starboard and down by the stern, the order was given to abandon ship and the evacuation of nearly 1,300 of its crew began. The Hiei, was then scuttled by her crew and abandoned. Left alone in the gathering darkness it was never seen again. So were 188 men of her crew who went down with her to the bottom of Ironbottom Sound. *This was the first Japanese battleship sunk in WWII and the first warship sunk by the US Navy since 1898.*

### **USS ATLANTA** *(November 13, 1942)*

American light cruiser, (6,000 tons) sunk during the Guadalcanal Landings by a torpedo from the Japanese destroyer Akasuki and from shells from the battleship Hiei. The Atlanta ran into the line of fire from the USS San Francisco and received another nineteen 8 inch shells before the mistake was discovered. Fired at from both sides, the cruiser was soon ablaze throughout her whole length, her crumpled decks strewn with dead bodies including that of her commander, Admiral Scott. The commander of the San Francisco, Admiral Callaghan, was killed minutes later by a 14 inch shell from the Hiei. *Of the Atlanta's complement of 735, a total of 172 men were killed and 79 wounded.* The decision was taken to scuttle the ship by demolition charges and the Atlanta now lies at the bottom of Savo Sound.

### **SS SCILLIN** *(November 14, 1942)*

Italian cargo/passenger ship en route from Tripoli to Sicily with 814 Commonwealth prisoners-of-war on board, a naval gun crew and 30 Italian guards, was torpedoed by the British submarine **HMS Sahib** (Lt. John Bromage) 10 miles north of Cape Milazzo in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Sahib rescued 27 POW's from the water (26 British and one South African) plus the Scillin's captain and 45 Italian crew members. Only then, when the commander heard the survivors speaking English, did he realize that he had sunk a ship carrying British prisoners-of-war and some Italian soldiers and had drowned 783 men. At a subsequent inquiry into this 'friendly fire' tragedy, Lt. Bromage was cleared of any wrongdoing as the ship was unmarked and at the time he firmly believed that the ship was carrying Italian troops. The Ministry of Defence kept this incident a closely guarded secret for fifty-four years, telling relatives a pack of lies, maintaining that they had died while prisoners-of-war in Italian camps or simply 'lost at sea'. *It was not until 1996, after repeated requests for information from the families of the drowned men that the truth came out.* On the 24th of April, 1943, the Sahib was attacked by bombs from German Ju-88s and depth charges from the Italian corvette **Gabbiano** Badly damaged, the Sahib was later abandoned and scuttled.

### **HMS AVENGER** *(November 15, 1942)*

British escort carrier (13,785 tons) built in the United States as the passenger liner **Rio Hudson**. Transferred to the United Kingdom under Lend-Lease and later converted to an auxiliary aircraft carrier in March, 1942. While in convoy from North Africa to the Clyde in Scotland, she was torpedoed by the German submarine **U-155** just west of the Rock of Gibraltar (87 kilometres south of Faro, Portugal). The **Avenger** had been taking part in the North Africa landings before sailing for her home port on the Clyde, Scotland. At approximately 0307hrs the Avenger, part of Convoy MKF-1, was hit on the port side causing her bomb magazine to explode and blowing out the centre

section of the ship. Enveloped in flames and black smoke, the Avenger sank in less than two minutes after the torpedo hit. Sixty seven officers, including her captain, Cdr. A. P. Colthurst, and 446 ratings went down with the ship, a total of 514 men. Twelve survivors were picked up by the escorting destroyer [HMS Glaisdale](#). The U-155 (Korvkpt. Adolf Piening (1910-1984) survived the war and was scuttled during Operation Deadlight.

### **HMS ARETHUSA** *(November 18, 1942)*

British cruiser of 5,200 tons escorting convoy MW-13 to Malta ([Operation Stonedged](#)) When the convoy was about 450 miles from its departure point, Alexandria, it was attacked by a formation of torpedo-carrying enemy bombers. Avoiding all but one of the torpedoes the Arethusa, was hit causing immense damage to the ship and killing 156 men from its complement of around 500. The ship managed to limp back towards her home base under her own power but finally had to be towed the last 150 miles, stern first, by the destroyer [HMS Petard](#), to be met by tugs on the approach to Alexandria. Safely in harbour, the bodies of those killed were transferred to the destroyer [HMS Aldenham](#) and transported three miles out to sea for burial.

### **SS TILAWA** *(November 23, 1942)*

The 10,006 ton British India SN Company passenger/cargo liner (Capt. F. Robertson) sunk by the Japanese submarine [I-29](#) 1,497 kilometres north-northeast of the Seychelles Islands while on her way from Bombay, India, to Mombassa and Durban, South Africa, with 6,472 tons of cargo. The explosion created great panic among the native passengers who rushed the lifeboats causing many deaths. Some time after the torpedo struck and whilst the ship was still afloat some crew and passengers attempted to reboard the vessel when the second torpedo hit. The ship carried 222 crewmen, four gunners and 732 passengers. Of the 958 people on board, 252 passengers and 28 crew were lost. The cruiser [HMS Birmingham](#) rescued 678 survivors and next day the P&O ship [SS Carthage](#) rescued four Indian seamen from the ocean.

### **SS NOVA SCOTIA** *(November 28, 1942)*

Passenger/cargo ship of 6,796 tons launched in 1926 for the Warren Line, requisitioned and converted to a troopship in 1941, was en route from Aden to Durban, South Africa, carrying 780 Italian POW's and 130 South African military troops acting as guards, plus a crew of 127. It was sunk in the southern Indian Ocean 244 kilometers northeast of Durban by the [U-177](#) (Korvkpt. Robert Gysae). Casualties amounted to a staggering 863 lives lost. *The U-177 was sunk on February 6, 1944, by depth-charges from a US Liberator aircraft. Fifty of her crew died, there were 15 survivors.*

### **CERAMIC** *(December 6, 1942)*

White Star Line, later Shaw Savill, a liner of 18,481 Gross Tons. On November 23, she set sail as a troop transport from Liverpool to Australia. When 1,148 kilometres west-northwest of the Azores, the ship was torpedoed three times and sunk by U-boat [U-515](#) (Oblt. Werner Henke). A total of 655 crewmen, troops and nurses lost their lives including 33 Australians. There was one survivor, Royal Engineer sapper, Eric Munday, who was taken on board the U-boat to spend the rest of the war in a German POW camp. The rest of the crew and passengers were left to perish in the stormy seas. Allied propaganda claimed that the [Ceramic's](#) survivors were machine-gunned in the water. This was a big lie. It was many months before the Admiralty found out what happened to the Ceramic as she sank before any distress signal could be sent out. It was a letter that Eric Munday was able to write from his POW camp Marlag-Milag-Nord, near Hamburg, that alerted the Admiralty to the circumstances surrounded the loss of the Ceramic. The U-515 was sunk on April 9, 1944 in mid Atlantic by aircraft from the escort carrier [USS Guadalcanal](#) and from depth charges from the escort destroyers [USS Pope](#), [Pillsbury](#), [Chatelain](#) and [Flaherty](#). Sixteen of the crew were killed, there were 43 survivors taken prisoner. Fearing a war crimes trial, the

captain, Werner Henke, committed suicide while in US captivity in Camp Fort George G. Meade in Maryland. (Some reports say that he was shot while trying to escape)

# 1943

## SS BENALBANACH *(January 7, 1943)*

The Ben Line 7,152-ton passenger/cargo ship launched in June, 1940 and sunk north-west of Algiers when the convoy she was part of was attacked by a single enemy aircraft. She was carrying 389 men of Motor Transport unit and a crew of 74 from the Clyde to Bona, North Africa. This was her second trip to the Allied landing area conveying troops and equipment. The [Benalbanach](#) was hit by two torpedoes launched from the aircraft. The ship caught fire, blew up and sank almost immediately taking the lives of 57 crewmembers and 353 service personnel. Her commander, Captain D. MacGregor, died in the water just as he was about to be rescued.

## M.V. CITTA' DI GENOVA *(January 21, 1943)*

Built in 1930 (5413 tons) the Italian motor vessel leaves Patras on the 20th bound for Bari with 200 Italian troops and 158 Greek war prisoners on board. On the 21st at 1315hrs, twenty five miles west of Saseno Island, she is hit by two torpedoes from a salvo of five fired from the British submarine, [HMS Tigres](#). She sinks in a few minutes with the loss of 173 men.

## SS HENRY R. MALLORY *(February 7, 1943)*

Part of the 69 ship UK-bound North Atlantic convoy SC-118, the American ex-passenger liner [Mallory](#), (6,063 tons) built in 1916, was attacked and sunk by a torpedoes from the German submarine [U-402](#) (Forstner) part of a twenty U-boat pack. The Mallory was en route from New York to Reykjavik, Iceland, and had parted from the convoy just before the attack. Eleven ships in the convoy were later sunk. There were 494 passengers and crew on board the Mallory (Captain Horace Weaver) including 381 US troops, 34 armed guards, 2 civilians and a crew of 77 of which 39 members were lost. Also on board were 610 bags of mail. A total of 272 men perished. The 224 survivors were rescued four hours later by the US Coast Guard cutter [U.S.C.G.C. Bibb](#), which picked up 205 men, three of whom died on board, and by the escort gunboat [U.S.C.G.C. Ingham](#), which saved 25 men, two of whom died later. The U-402 was bombed and sunk with all hands in Mid Atlantic by aircraft from the carrier [USS Card](#) on October 13, 1943.

## U.S.A.T. DORCHESTER *(February 3, 1943)*

Ex-coastal luxury passenger ship of 5,649 tons converted to a troop carrier, sunk by torpedo from the [U-223](#) (Kptlt. Karl-Jung Wächter). The [Dorchester](#) was bound for the American base at Nararssuck in Greenland from St. John's, Newfoundland, as part of Convoy SG-19. With 902 passengers and crew on board, the ship was attacked at 03.55hrs about 150 miles south of Cape Farewell. Of the passengers, most were US troops. In addition she carried 1,000 tons of cargo. Escort ships of the Greenland Patrol rescued 229 persons from the stricken vessel, 132 by the US Coast Guard cutter [USCGC Escanaba](#), and another 97 rescued by a sister ship, the [USCGC Comanche](#). In all, 672 souls were lost including 404 soldiers. Hundreds of dead bodies, kept afloat by their lifejackets, were picked up from the sea. Later, even the [Escanaba](#) fell victim to a German submarine, being torpedoed in the Belle Isle Straits with only two members of the crew surviving. On board the [Dorchester](#) were four Army chaplains of different denominations who helped distribute life jackets and help the injured. When the storage locker was empty they removed their own life jackets and handed them to the next man in line. As the ship went down, survivors in the water could see the four chaplains standing on the sloping deck, arms linked and praying while awaiting their

fate. A special Medal for Heroism was authorized by Congress and along with the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross, were posthumously awarded to the four chaplains. The U-223 was sunk in the Mediterranean just north of Palermo, Sicily, on March 30, 1944, by depth from British destroyers. Twenty-three of her crew were killed but twenty-seven survived.

### **CITY OF PRETORIA** *(March 2, 1943)*

Ellerman Line passenger/cargo liner of 8,049 tons, New York to Liverpool, carrying a general cargo, was sunk by two torpedoes from the **U-172** (Korvkpt. Carl Emmermann) and blew up immediately south-east of Cape Race. All on board, 145 persons, perished. The U-172 was sunk by depth-charges dropped from US aircraft on December 13, 1943. Thirteen crew were killed and 46 survived.

### **EMPRESS OF CANADA** *(March 14, 1943)*

Liner of the Canadian Pacific SS Company, 21,516 tons (Capt. George Goold), converted to a troop transport. Referred to as the 'Phantom' by the German U-boat captains because she had escaped U-boat detection for three and a half years. While sailing from Durban, South Africa, to the UK via Takoradi on the Gold Coast, West Africa, she was sunk just after midnight, off Sierra Leone, by the Italian submarine **Leonardo Da Vinci** whose commander gave Captain Goold half an hour to abandon ship after the first torpedo struck. On board were 1,346 persons including 499 Italian prisoners of war and Greek and Polish refugees. A total of 392 people died including around 90 women and 44 crewmembers. The survivors, who had to endure exposure and vicious shark attacks, were picked up by the destroyers **Boreas**, **Petunia** and **Crocus** and the Ellerman Line vessel **Corinthian**. One man who did not survive was the naval officer in charge of the Italian prisoners, who failed to pass on the order 'Abandon Ship' to the lower deck thus causing great loss of life among the prisoners. On hearing this, angry survivors grabbed the officer and threw him overboard to the sharks. No formal action was ever taken over this murder. Da Vinci was later sunk with all hands by the destroyers HMS Active and HMS Ness on 24th of May, 1943, near Cape Finisterre.

### **HMS DASHER** *(March 27, 1943)*



**The British aircraft carrier HMS Dasher.**

US-built merchant ship, the **Rio de Janeiro**, was later converted to an escort aircraft carrier in 1941 and loaned to the Royal Navy under the Lend-Lease Agreement. Renamed **HMS Dasher** (7,866 Tons) she saw service in the Mediterranean and on convoy duties to Murmansk. In 1943 she was being used as a Fleet Air Arm Training ship. It was in this capacity that the ship blew up in the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, between Ardrossan and the Isle of Arran,



while heading for the port of Greenock. At about 4.45pm, on this hazy Saturday afternoon, while her Swordfish planes of No. 891 Squadron were practicing take offs and landings on her deck, one of her pilots misjudged a landing and crashed into a store of aviation fuel drums and explosives. The subsequent fire and violent explosion sent the Dasher to the bottom in less than five minutes, her bow rising almost vertical before plunging stern-first to the bottom. Oil from the sinking ship caught fire and spread over the water in which the survivors were swimming. A total of 358 officers and men drowned but 149 sailors survived and were picked up from the sea by dozens of small rescue vessels which sped out from Ardrossan to give what help they could. The Dasher lies upright in 170 metres (310 fathoms) of water, her flight deck some 30 metres above the seabed. As the 50th anniversary of her sinking approached, the Royal Naval Association undertook to erect a memorial at Ardrossan so that those that perished shall not be forgotten. *(On June 28, 2000, a Memorial Plaque was fixed to the flight deck of the Dasher the site of which is now a war grave)*

### **CITY OF GUILDFORD** *(March 27, 1943)*

Ellerman Lines passenger/cargo ship of 5,157 tons, en route from Alexandria to Tripoli, North Africa, carrying aviation spirit and munitions, was sunk by the **U-593** (Kptlt. Gerd Kelbling, Knights Cross) near Derna. Sixty-eight of her crew, 11 gunners and 46 passengers were lost, a total of 125. There were 13 survivors. The U-593 was sunk on December 13, 1943 in the Mediterranean by depth-charges from **USS Wain** and **HMS Calpe**. All her crew survived.

### **MELBOURNE STAR** *(April 2, 1943)*

Blue Star liner (12,806 tons) Capt. J. B. Hall, sunk 600 miles south-east of Bermuda by the **U-129**. (Korkpt. Hans Ludwig Witt. Knights Cross). There were 113 passengers and crew lost, and only four survivors. The U-129 was scuttled on August 18, 1944 at Lorient, France.

### **SS FRANCESCO CRISPI** *(April 19, 1943)*

Italian passenger ship of 7,464 tons, built in 1926 and used by the Italian Army as a troop transport was torpedoed and sunk by **HMS Saracen** off Punta Nere in position 42°46'N 09°46'E. The **Francesco Crispi** was en route from Leghorn to Bastia in Corsica when attacked. She sank with the loss of around 800 men.

### **SIDI-BEL-ABBES** *(April 20, 1943)*

French steamship of 4,392 tons torpedoed and sunk by the U-565 near Oran about ten miles north of the Habibas Islands. On board were some 1,130 Senegalese troops being transported from Casablanca to Oran. A total of 611 lives were lost, 520 being rescued by British naval escorts.

### **SS ERINPURA** *(May 1, 1943)*

British India SN Company troop transport in convoy with 23 merchantmen and escorted by eleven destroyers, was bound for Malta. When some 30 miles north of Benghazi, the convoy was attacked by German bombers and torpedo carrying aircraft. On board the **Erinpura** (Capt. P. V. Cotter) were 1,025 troops. One large bomb exploded in the hold sinking the ship in a matter of minutes. A total of 664 lives were lost including forty-four crewmembers and three gunners.

## A.H.S. CENTAUR *(May 14, 1943)*

Former passenger/cargo vessel, the Australian Hospital Ship **Centaur** (3,222 tons) sunk after being set on fire by a torpedo from the Japanese submarine **I-177** near Cape Moreton, 38km off the Queensland coast. The Centaur had left Sydney Harbour while brightly illuminated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Red crosses were painted on both sides of the hull and funnel and she flew the Red Cross flag. She was on her way to Port Moresby in New Guinea to pick up wounded from the battles of Buna and Gona, when the attack occurred at 0410hrs. The ship sank in about three minutes taking the lives of 268 people, including 18 doctors, 11 nurses, 193 other medical personnel of the 2/12th Field Ambulance and 45 members of her crew. There were 64 survivors from the 332 persons on board, picked up by the American destroyer **USS Mugford**. Of the twelve nursing sisters on board, only one survived. In 1990, the ship was declared a historic wreck. After the war, the captain of the I-177, Lt-Cdr Hajime Nakagawa, was arrested and tried as a war criminal. He spent four years in Sugamo prison for atrocities committed in the Indian Ocean such as shooting survivors of torpedoed ships. *During the war 49 ships were sunk off the East Coast of Australia, a total of 1,287 lives were lost. The wreck of the Centaur was finally found on December 20, 2009, at a depth of 2059m.*

## SS YOMA *(June 17, 1943)*

Passenger/Cargo liner of 8,131 tons of the British and Burmese Steam Navigation Co., built 1928 in Scotland and now serving in the Mediterranean as an auxiliary transport. She was in convoy GTX-2 with the ships **SS Amarapoor**, **Pegu**, **Kemmendine** and **Sagaing** en route from Sfax to Alexandria when she was sunk at 7.33 am by two torpedoes from the U-81 near Derna. She was the only ship to be sunk during this convoy. On board were 1,793 troops of which 484 were lost. British Army men included 134 officers and 994 ratings. Free French Army men included 22 officers and 643 ratings. Capt. George Patterson and 32 crew members also perished. Survivors were picked up by escort ships including the Australian minesweepers HMAS Lismore and HMAS Gawler.

## USS HELENA *(July 6, 1943)*

American light cruiser of 13,327 tons, sunk at the **Battle of Kula Gulf** 10 miles north of Kolombangara in New Georgia. Hit by three torpedoes from Japanese warships, the **Helena** jack-knifed and sank with 186 of her crew of 888. The survivors were picked up by other US warships. About 400 of them later served on board the new **USS Houston**. The Helena was the last but one of the 10 American cruisers lost in WWII. The **USS Helena** was awarded 7 Battle Stars.

## DUCHESS OF YORK *(July 11, 1943)*

The twin funnelled 20,021 ton passenger liner/troopship owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway was in convoy with the liner **SS California** and the munitions ship **SS Port Fairy** en route to Freetown, Sierra Leone. About three hundred miles off Vigo in Spain the convoy was attacked by three FW-200 German bombers during the evening of the 11th. The two liners were hit amidships and set on fire. The three escort destroyers, **HMS Douglas**, **HMS Moyola** and the Canadian destroyer **H.M.C.S. Iroquois** proceeded to transfer passengers and crews. The Iroquois rescued 628 from the **Duchess of York** but sadly 89 men lost their lives. Soon after midnight on the 12th the blazing hulk of the two ships were then sunk by torpedoes from the convoy escorts. The SS Port Fairy was then escorted safely to Casablanca where all survivors were disembarked.

## NISSHIN

Japanese seaplane tender (11,317 tons) departed Kure escorted by two destroyers. On board were over six hundred troops and twenty-two tanks on their way to reinforce the garrison at Buin. Commanded by Rear Admiral Osugi

Morikazu, the convoy was attacked by a US strike force as it sailed through the Bougainville Channel only two hours and twenty miles from its destination. Heavily bombed and strafed the ship was doomed and soon on fire from bow to stern. Heeling heavily to starboard, the ship plunged bow first under the waves. One of Japan's greatest sea disasters the sinking took the lives of around 1,080 lives including those from the two destroyers which were also bombed but not sunk. There were 178 survivors rescued by the same two destroyers that had earlier protected them.

### R.N. ROMA (*September 9, 1943*)

Italian battleship, flagship of Admiral Carlo Bertgamini, sunk in the Mediterranean (off the coast of Sardinia) by direct hits from two radio-guided 'Fritz-X' 320 kg bombs dropped from Dornier 217 K11s Luftwaffe planes from the Istres airstrip near Marseille. (A total of 1,386 such bombs were manufactured during the war. This radio-controlled bomb was the first really effective weapon against the battleship, other than the torpedo). The **Roma** capsized, broke in two and sank at 16.12hrs. The Italian surrender had just been signed and now their foe was their former ally, Germany. The Roma (41,650 tons) had set sail for Malta from her base at La Spezia with orders to join the British fleet. On seeing the planes approach, the gun-crews mistook them for British aircraft coming in to act as escorts and held their fire. Admiral Bertgamini, 86 officers and 1,264 crewmen perished as the ship went down. The pitifully few survivors were picked up by two of the escort destroyers. In the Mediterranean theatre alone, a total of 28,937 Italian sailors lost their lives. (The wreck of the "Roma" is at 41 10N 8 18E). *During WWII, eight battleships were sunk by aircraft; these were the Roma, Prince of Wales, Repulse, Arizona, Oklahoma and the Japanese Hiei, Musushi, and Yamato.*

### M.V. DONIZETTI (*September 23, 1943*)

Italian passenger vessel of 2,428 tons and now under the German flag, arrives at Rodi Island to embark Italian troops who have to evacuate the island. Licensed to carry 700 passengers she now had on board 1,576 military men plus around 220 crew. On the 23rd she left Rodi bound for Piraeus under escort of the German frigate **Taio**. While south of the island she was attacked by the British destroyers **HMS Fury** and **HMS Eclipse**. Badly damaged by gunfire the **Donizetti** capsizes and sinks. *There were no survivors.*

### MICHEL (*October 17, 1943*)

German commerce raider of 4,740 tons, originally the Polish freighter '*Biolskoi*' captured in Norway, was sunk by four torpedoes from the American submarine **USS Tarpon** (Cmdr. T. Wogan) about 60 miles off the Japanese island of Honshu as she approached Tokyo Bay. A tremendous explosion soon after the fourth torpedo struck, sank the vessel and she went down within thirteen minutes with the loss of 263 officers and crewmen including her commander, Captain Gumprich. Sadly, nineteen Norwegian seamen, prisoners on board the **Michel**, died in their 'cells'. There were 110 survivors who managed to reach shore. During her first cruise, commanded by Hellmuth von Ruckteschell, she sank 15 ships, (including the **Gloucester Castle**) a total of 99,386 tons. On her second cruise, commanded by Captain Gunther Gumprich, she sank 3 ships, 27,632 tons. The Michel was the last of the ten armed merchant cruisers which the Germans employed during the war.

### SINFRA (*October 20, 1943*)

French ship of 4,470 tons, now in German hands, and serving as a troop transport and part of a German convoy, is attacked north of the island of Crete by Mitchell bombers of the U.S.A.A.F. and RAF Beaufighters. The **Sinfra**, with 2,664 prisoners of war on board, including 2,389 Italians, 71 Greek prisoners and 204 German troops, sinks. When *Sinfra* was torpedoed, the order went out from the ship "Send rescue vessels . . . rescue German troops first." One plane, a Dornier, of the 7th Luftwaffe Sea Rescue Squadron was shot down by the allied aircraft. By the end of the day, 566 survivors, including 163 Germans, had been saved leaving a death toll of 2,098. *This was the greatest loss of POW's in the Mediterranean during World War II.*

## HMS CHARYBDIS *(October 23, 1943)*

British Dido class Cruiser sunk 40 nautical miles northeast of Brittany, France, by two German- torpedo boats, the **T-23** and **T-27** of the 4th Torpedo Boat Flotilla commanded by Korvettenkapitan Franz Kohlauf. The **Charybdis** was part of Force 28 patrolling the Channel off the French coast (Operation Tunnel). Hit by two torpedoes on the port side, the cruiser was soon engulfed in flames and started sinking deeply by the stern. A total of 464 men lost their lives including her commander, Captain Voelcker. There were 107 survivors. One of her escort destroyers, **HMS Limbourne**, badly damaged, had to be scuttled. Forty of her 125 crew were lost. (A number of US soldiers were on board the Limbourne, all were lost; why the G.I.s were there has never been established) None of the bodies were ever recovered. Eighteen of the seamen, whose bodies were recovered from the sea after the sinking of the Charybdis, lie buried in the cemetery at St Peters Port on the island of Guernsey and many more at St. Brieuc in France. In 1992, the wreck of the **Charybdis** was found by a French team of explorers and in 2001 a British team surveyed the wreck. She lies on her port side, her back broken, at a depth of 83 metres. A year later they found the wreck of the **Limbourne** about five miles from the Charybdis, and positive identification was made by photographing the ships bell.

## SENDAI *(November 2, 1943)*

Imperial Japanese Navy cruiser of 7,100 tons commissioned on April 29, 1924 at the Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Yard in Nagasaki. Sunk at the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay off Torokina Point in the Solomons. Torpedoes and shells from US Rear Admiral Aaron Merrill's Task Force 39 set the cruiser on fire. At 0200 hrs the Sendai is abandoned and sinks at 0430 hrs with 184 of her crew. A total of 236 crewmen are rescued. The wreck lies at a depth of 440 metres about 55 kilometres north-east of Kota Bharu, Malaysia.

## USS LISCOME BAY *(November 24, 1943)*

American escort carrier sunk by torpedoes from the Japanese submarine **I-175** (Lt. Cdr. Tadashi Tabata) 40 kilometres west-southwest of Butaritari Island, near Makin Atoll, Gilbert Islands. The carrier sank in 23 minutes after being hit. Her aircraft bombs, stowed in the hold, blew up in a terrific explosion taking the lives of 644 men and its Commander, Rear Admiral Henry A. Mullinix. The stern of the ship simply vanished, the explosion sending fragments of steel, human flesh and clothing so high in the air that they showered down on the **USS New Mexico** which was following almost a mile behind. Fifty-five officers and 217 men were rescued by the destroyer **USS Hoel**. The I-175 managed to escape in spite of the many depth charges being dropped. Black mess steward and ships boxing champion 'Dorie' Miller was among the dead. Miller won the Navy Cross at Pearl Harbor by moving his mortally wounded captain to a place of greater safety and then manning a 50 calibre machine gun on the deck of the **USS West Virginia** until his ammunition ran out. As Miller remarked later "**I think I got one of those Jap planes**". He had no formal training in weapons. On June 30, 1973, the destroyer **USS Miller** was named in his memory. Legislative efforts to upgrade his Navy Cross to the Medal of Honor have to date been unsuccessful.

## ROHNA *(November 26, 1943)*

Seventeen year old British liner/troopship of 8,602 tons, carrying 2,193 passengers including 1,988 US troops, 7 Red Cross personnel and a crew of 198, sailed from Oran, Algeria, bound for Bombay, India, via the Suez Canal. She joined the convoy KMF 26 which consisted of 24 ships in six columns, four ships in each column and escorted by seven British destroyers. Between Algiers and Philloppville the convoy was attacked by around 30 Heinkel 177 bombers of 11/KG-40. The **Rohna** was hit by a HS 293 'glider bomb' (*the world's first guided missile*) The troopship, crewed by Indian seamen under British officers and captained by an Australian naval officer, was owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company. The ship sank in less than 30 minutes taking 1,015 US troops and 102 crew members to a watery death. This was the largest loss of American lives at sea during WWII. Between 10.30 PM and midnight, rescue ships, including the minesweeper **SS Pioneer**, the Red Cross ship **Clan**

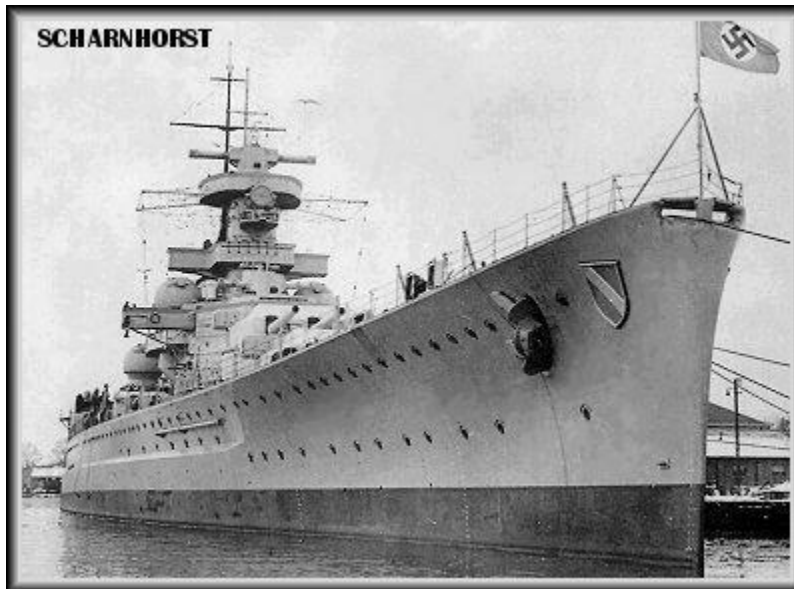
Campbell and the Rohna's sister ship **HMT Rajula**, reported "sailing through a sea of floating bodies". Just over 900 survivors were rescued. Eight of the Heinkel 177s were shot down during the attack. Survivors were landed at Phillopville and taken care of by a British army unit. For reasons of national security details of this tragedy were kept secret for many years.



The British liner / troopship HMT Rohna.

For more on the Rohna survivors, see the *The Rohna Survivors Memorial Association's* website at <http://www.rohna.org/>. For the full story see Carlton Jackson's book 'Forgotten Tragedy'.

## SCHARNHORST *(December 26, 1943)*



The German battleship Scharnhorst.



The 32,700 ton German battleship, (Captain Fritz Julius Hintze) was attacked by the British battleship [Duke of York](#) and destroyers [Savage](#) and [Saumarez](#) while attempting to intercept an Allied convoy sailing to the port of Murmansk in Russia. Damaged by the 14-inch shells from the [Duke of York](#) and hit by torpedoes from the British and Norwegian destroyers, she was then attacked by the cruisers [Jamaica](#), [Belfast](#) and [Norfolk](#). After a battle lasting thirty-six minutes, the mighty ship rolled over and sank bows first at 7:45pm about 75 miles off the North Cape, the northernmost point in Europe. The 36 survivors of the 1,969 crew were picked up from the sea but 1,933 men had died. All of the Scharnhorst's 51 officers were lost including the Group Commander, Rear Admiral Erich Bey. Altogether a total of fifty-five torpedoes were fired at the Scharnhorst, but only 11 struck the ship. Losses from the British ships were eighteen killed and sixteen wounded. *The Battle of North Cape* was the last conflict between British and German capital ships in World War II. Thus ended effective efforts by Germany to block the Murmansk convoys. The wreck of the Scharnhorst was located by a Norwegian team in September, 2000. It lies, her hull upside down, in just under 1,000 feet of water.

# 1944

## [SS PETRELLA](#) (*February 6, 1944*)

German troop transport sunk by torpedoes from the British submarine *HMS Sportsman* north of Souda Bay on the island of Crete. Of the 3,173 Italian prisoners of war on board a total of 2,670 lost their lives.

## [SS ORIA](#) (*February 12, 1944*)

Italian troopship taken over by the Germans in November, 1942, in Marseilles. Given a new name 'Norda IV' she departed Marseilles for Italy where she was given back her old name of ORIA. Still under German management the vessel departed Rhodes for Piraeus on February 11, 1944, with 4,200 Italian prisoners-of-war on board. They were guarded by over sixty German soldiers. Next day, February 12, the ship encountered a severe storm and while attempting to anchor near the island of Patroklos she stranded on the Gaidaroneos Reef and broke up. Only 49 prisoners, 6 soldiers and 5 crew including the captain, were rescued.

## [SS KHEDIVE ISMAIL](#) (*February 12, 1944*)

Egyptian transport of 7,513 tons requisitioned by the British for use as a troopship while docked at Bombay in 1940. Sister ship to the [Mohamed Ali el-Kebir](#), the vessel was carrying 1,511 returning service personnel including 178 ships crew, 996 officers and men of the 301st Field Regiment, East African Artillery, 271 Royal Navy personnel and a detachment of 19 British Wrens. Also on board were 53 nursing sisters with one matron and 9 WTS girls (Women's Transport Service, East Africa). While returning from Colombo, Ceylon, in [convoy KR-8](#), the ship was torpedoed in the Indian Ocean at 14.33 hours. It took only 1 minute 40 seconds for the ship to sink taking 1,297 of her passengers and crew with her. There were 214 survivors including only six female passengers from the vessel, a victim of the Japanese submarine [I-27](#) commanded by Lt-Cdr Fukumura. This was the greatest maritime tragedy involving female service personnel in British naval history. The I-27 was hiding under survivors and flotsam but priority lay in destroying the submarine rather than rescuing survivors and so a depth charge attack was made, unfortunately killing some of the survivors in the water. The I-27 was later blown apart by torpedoes fired from two of the escort destroyers, [HMS Petard](#) and [HMS Paladin](#).

## [HMS PENELOPE](#) (*February 18, 1944*)

British cruiser (Captain George D. Belben) launched in 1935 and sunk by a torpedo from the German submarine [U-410](#) (Oberleutnant Horst-Arno Fenski). The [Penelope](#) was returning from the Anzio beach-head to Naples when

she went down at 0718 hrs taking the lives of 417 members of her wartime complement of 623. The *U-410* was later destroyed on March 11, 1944, during a US bombing raid on the Vichy Naval Base at Toulon.



The British cruiser HMS Penelope.

### SS DEMPO *(March 17, 1944)*

Dutch passenger liner (16,979 tons) serviced the Holland-Java route with 634 passengers in four classes. Used as a troopship from 1941 but was sunk in the Mediterranean by the **U-371** (Lt-Cdr. Mehl) A total of 498 US troops on board, died. The **Dempo** was part of convoy **SNF.17**. The year before, on October 13, 1943, the U-371 sank the US destroyer, **USS Bristol**, off Algeria. On May 4, 1944, the U-371 was herself sunk in the Mediterranean north of Constantine by depth charges from 4 destroyers including the American destroyer **USS Pride** and the British destroyer **HMS Blankney**. Three of her crew were killed and 48 taken prisoner.

### YOSHIDA MARU *(April 26-May 6, 1944)*

A Japanese convoy (**Operation Take-Ichi**) transporting around 20,000 troops, en route from Shanghai to reinforce the Japanese garrison of Halmahera on the Vogelkop Peninsula, was attacked by the American submarine **USS Jack**. The **Yoshida Maru** was carrying an entire Japanese Army regiment of 3,000 men. There were no survivors when the ship sank off Manila Bay. On the 6th of May, the American submarine **USS Gurnard** spotted the convoy and attacked. Her torpedoes sank the transports **Tenshizan Maru** (6,886 tons) **Tajima Maru** (6,995 tons) and the **Aden Maru** (5,824 tons). *Nearly half of the troops that embarked at Shanghai were lost.*

### SHOKAKU *(June 19, 1944)*

Japanese aircraft carrier (25,675 tons) sunk about 140 miles north of the island of Yap, during the two day *Battle of the Philippine Sea*. A spread of six torpedoes were fired from the submarine **USS Cavalla** (Lt. Cmdr. Kossler) three of which struck the **Shokaku**. Badly damaged, the carrier ground to a halt. One torpedo had hit the forward aviation fuel tanks near the main hanger and planes which had just landed and were being refueled, exploded into flames. Ammunition and exploding bombs added to the conflagration as did burning fuel spewing from shattered fuel pipes. With her bows subsiding into the sea and fires now out of control, the captain gave orders to abandon ship. Within minutes, total catastrophe struck the vessel. Volatile gas fumes had accumulated throughout the vessel and when an aerial bomb exploded on the hanger deck, a series of terrific explosions simply blew the ship apart. The mighty carrier, now a blazing inferno, rolled over and slid beneath the waves taking 887 navy officers and men plus 376 men of Air Group 601, a total of 1,263 men in all, to the seabed. There were 570 survivors, including the carrier's commander, Captain Matsubara Hiroshi. *(The USS Cavalla is now on public display at Galveston, Texas)*

## TAIHO *(June 19, 1944)*

The largest and newest carrier in the Japanese fleet, sunk west of Guam during the *Battle of the Philippine Sea*. It took only one torpedo hit from the **USS Albacore** to sink the 29,300 ton vessel, the flagship of Vice Admiral Jisburo Ozawa. Two fuel tanks were ruptured and fumes from the liberated crude oil and aviation spirit spread throughout the vessel. The ship sunk after a catastrophic explosion caused by the accumulated fumes igniting near an electric generator on the hanger deck. Of her complement of 1,751 a total of 1,650 crewmen were lost. The USS Albacore (Lt. Cmdr. H. Rimmer) was lost during her 11th patrol off the coast of Japan, on November 7, 1944, after hitting a mine while submerging. *Her entire crew of 86 perished.*

## HIYO *(June 20, 1944)*

Japanese aircraft carrier also sunk during the *Battle of the Philippine Sea*. Hit by bombs and aerial torpedoes from Avenger aircraft from the carrier **USS Belleau Wood**, part of the US Task Force 38, she was set on fire after a tremendous blast from leaking aviation fuel. Dead in the water, the burning **Hiyo** then slipped stern first under the waves, taking the lives of 250 officers and men. The rest of her crew, about one thousand, survived to be rescued by Japanese destroyers. The Philippine Sea battle was a disaster for the Japanese naval air arm, only 35 out of Admiral Ozawa's 473 planes were left in a condition fit to fly. *Soon, the loss of the Marianas, Tinian, Saipan and the island of Guam forced the resignation of the Japanese prime minister, General Tojo.*

## TAMAHOKO MARU *(June 24, 1944)*

Part of a convoy sailing towards Japan with 772 Australian, British and American prisoners of war on board. With the lights of Japan in sight, one of the ships in the convoy, exploded after being torpedoed by the US submarine **USS Tang**. Nearby, the **Tamahoko Maru** was almost blown apart and water poured in through a gaping hole in her side. On top of the main hatch cover 80 men were sleeping. Not one of them survived. As the Tamahoko (6,780 tons) settled in the water, hundreds of prisoners jumped into the sea and soon a Japanese whale-chaser appeared and started picking up survivors. The final count was that 560 POWs had died. *Of the 267 Australians on board only 72 survived.* Fifteen US soldiers and sailors were killed as well as thirteen merchant seamen rescued from the sunk freighter **American Leader**. Next day, 212 survivors of the Tamahoko Maru were brought into the harbour at Nagasaki to spend the rest of the war in the POW camp, Fukuoka 13.

## TOYAMA MARU *(June 29, 1944)*

Japanese 7,089-ton troop transport torpedoed by the **USS Sturgeon**. The vessel was carrying over 6,000 men of the Japanese 44th Independent Mixed Brigade from Kyushu to Okinawa. As the torpedoes hit, thousands of drums of gasoline exploded turning the holds into a fiery hell. There were about 600 survivors, a death toll of around 5,400. The year before, on December 15, 1943, a total of 504 Canadian POWs from the Sham Shui Camp in Hong Kong were transported on the **Soung Cheong** to Japan via Takao, Formosa. At Takao, the prisoners were then embarked on the **Toyama Maru** and all were transported safely to Moji, Japan, on the 5/6th January, 1944. During the voyage, Rifleman Doucet of the Royal Rifles of Canada was beaten in a most brutal manner by the Japanese interpreter Nimori. Kicked in the stomach as he lay on the deck he never recovered from this attack and died in the Marumi POW camp a month later. Nimori was eventually tried by a British Military Court in Hong Kong and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment.

## TAIHEI MARU *(July 9, 1944)*

Troopship of the Imperial Japanese Army sunk off the Chishima Islands in the Kuril Islands chain, probably by an American submarine. The ship departed from the port of Otaru in Hokkaido with around 2,000 troops and crew on board. The troops included 182 Koreans who were conscripted into the Japanese army during the Pacific War.

Casualty toll on the **Taihei Maru** amounted to 956 deaths. *(A total of 708 Koreans died while fighting for Japan during WWII)*

### **TSUSHIMA MARU** *(August 24, 1944)*

Passenger/cargo ship of 6,754 tons, sunk by the US submarine **USS Bowfin** just north-west of the island of Akuseki. The **Tsushima**, unmarked and unlighted, was evacuating some 1,788 persons including children, school teachers and some parents, from Okinawa to the mainland of Japan prior to the American landings on the Ryukyu Islands. The attack on **Convoy Namo 103**, which included the Tsushima, was carried out at night between 10 and 11.30 pm. The ship sank in less than fifteen minutes and took the lives of 1,529 souls. Some survivors managed to cling to rafts for three days before being picked up. Of the 826 children on board, 741 drowned. *There were only 59 child survivors.*

### **SHINYO MARU** *(September 7, 1944)*

Japanese 2,634-ton transport carrying hundreds of American and Filipino prisoners of war captured at an airstrip near Lasang, were being transported from the island of Mindano to Manila when attacked by an American submarine, the **USS Paddle** commanded by Lt. Cdr. Byron Nowell. A torpedo hit the **Shinyo Maru** blowing her apart, the bow section sinking with hundreds of men trapped inside. But many survived the sinking, some making their way to Sindangan Bay in Mindano. There, they contacted Filipino guerrillas who radioed for help. The US submarine **USS Norwhal** was contacted, and being in the area of the sinking, proceeded at full speed to search for any survivors. As luck would have it, 81 persons were plucked from the water. A total of 667 American and Filipino POWs were killed in the explosion or drowned when the ship went down. Some were shot by the Japanese while attempting to swim to shore.

### **RAKUYO MARU and KACHIDOKI MARU** *(September 11\13, 1944)*

On September 4th, 2,218 Australian, British and American prisoners of war, who had survived the building of the Death Railway, were marched the three miles from the Valley Road camp in Singapore to the docks to board the two twenty-three year old passenger/cargo ships **Rakuyo Maru** (9,500 tons) and the **Kachidoki Maru** (10,500 tons). The Kachidoki Maru was the ex US ship **President Harrison** which had ran aground at Sha Wai Shan in China and was captured and salvaged by the Japanese. Both vessels were bound for Formosa. In the South China Sea, the twelve ship convoy, including three transports, two tankers and four escorting destroyers, was attacked by three American submarines, the **Growler**, **Sealion** and the **Pampanito**. The Rakuyo and Kachidoki were both sunk by torpedoes 300 miles west of Cape Bojeador, Luzon. *A total of 1,144 British, and Australian POWs lost their lives.* Among those lost were thirty-three men from **HMAS Perth**. All told there were 1,074 survivors, 141 were picked up by the three submarines. The **USS Queenfish** and **USS Barb** arrived later and in heavy seas rescued another thirty-two before heading for Saipan. The Japanese destroyers rescued 520 British prisoners from the Kachidoki (488 POWs and crew had died) and 277 British and Australians from the Rakuyo, to again become Prisoners of War.

### **JUNYO MARU** *(September 18, 1944)*

The 5,065 ton Japanese cargo ship Junyo Maru, built in Glasgow by the shipbuilders Robert Duncan Co., was en route from Batavia (Jakarta) in Java, to Padang in Sumatra, when hit by two torpedoes from the British Triton Class submarine **HMS Tradewind** (Lt. Cmdr. S. Maydon) which had departed its base in Trincomalee on September 8. On board the Junyo Maru were 1,377 Dutch, 64 British and Australian Prisoners of War and a few dozen American merchant seamen. Also on board were 4,200 Javanese slave labourers bound for work on the 220km long railway line being built between Pakan Baru and Muaro in Sumatra. Packed into the holds like sardines, it was 'standing room only' with very little chance of escape in an emergency. The Junyo Maru was by this time just a rust bucket.

*The death toll amounted to 5,620 dead, the world's greatest sea disaster up till that time.* A total of 723 survivors were rescued by Japanese ships, only to be employed on the building of the railway. Many did not survive the war. Of the 100 odd Dutch nationals who survived the sinking, ten died on the railway. As the ship was unmarked the submarine commander could not have known that the ship carried such a cargo.

However, a few of these sinkings were carried out in the full knowledge that the ships carried prisoners-of-war. The Japanese naval code had been broken and was being deciphered and read by the Allies. The codes reported the sailing times, destinations and cargo of all convoys so the Allies knew which convoys were carrying prisoners. But the submarine commanders were ordered to attack the convoys, not any specific vessel. There was no way of knowing which of the ships carried POWs.

### **HOFUKU MARU** *(September 21, 1944)*

Japanese transport carrying 1,289 prisoners-of-war en route from Singapore to Japan was attacked and sunk by US torpedo carrying bombers. Loaded with British and Dutch POWs, it stopped at Manila to unload the sick and dying. It sailed again in convoy and was attacked again in Subic Bay when only three days out. It took only a few minutes for the ship to go down drowning around 1,047 men who were trapped in the holds. Less than 250 survived.

### **URAL MARU** *(September 27, 1944)*

Japanese transport ship (6,374 tons) built in 1929, sunk by the American submarine **USS Flasher** 150 miles off Masinlik, Philippines. *About 2,000 of the 2,340 people on board were drowned.*

### **MUSASHI** *(October 23-26, 1944)*

The giant 64,200 ton Japanese battleship built at the Mitsubishi Shipyard in Nagasaki, was sunk during the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*, the greatest naval battle ever fought. The super battleship took 6 torpedo hits and 17 bomb hits during four attacks from the 259 planes of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet. The Musashi, her speed now down to six knots and her bows almost at sea level, then rolled over on her port side and sank taking 1,023 of her crew to their deaths. This was nearly half of her complement of 2,200 men. Her captain, Real Admiral Inoguichi Toshihira, went down with his ship. During the battle the Japanese Imperial Navy lost 34 ships, the US Navy lost six ships.



**The Japanese super battleship Musashi, leaving Brunei in 1944.**



## USS PRINCETON *(October 23-26, 1944)*

American carrier was one of the six US warships sunk in the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*, the largest naval engagement since Jutland. The other five ships were the **Gamber Bay** (119 men were killed) and the **USS St Lo**, both escort carriers, the destroyers **Hoel** (202 killed) and **Johnston** (187 killed) and destroyer escort **Samuel B. Roberts**. Casualties from the six ships were 898 killed and 913 wounded. The Princeton, hit by a bomb from a dive bomber, suffered 229 killed and 211 seriously injured when her magazine exploded. She had to be scuttled by the light cruisers **USS Irwin** and **USS Reno**. *The Gamber Bay was the only American carrier sunk by naval gunfire in World War II.*

## USS SAINT LO *(October 25, 1944)*

American aircraft carrier sunk in the *Battle off Samar* by a Japanese Zeke-52 kamikaze aircraft. The plane hit the **St Lo** at 10:53hrs. Shortly after, a massive explosion of her own magazines caused an enormous mushroom shaped cloud to rise above the doomed vessel. Another six or seven explosions occurred after her commander, Captain F. J. McKenna, gave the order to abandon ship. The St Lo disappeared beneath the sea at 11:25 hrs taking with her 126 members of her crew. Her escort destroyer, **USS Dennis**, rescued 434 survivors. *(During the Battle off Samar the US lost 5 ships and 23 aircraft. Casualties were 1,130 men killed and 913 wounded)*

## ARISAN MARU *(October 24, 1944)*

Japanese freighter of 6,886-tons bound for Japan (in convoy of 17 ships) from Manila Bay in the Philippines. In the holds were about 100 civilians and 1,782 American prisoners of war being transported as slave labourers to work in the mines and factories of Japan. Crowded so close together they could not lie down, the holds soon became a hell-hole as the temperature soared to over 100 degrees F. The lack of fresh air caused many to go mad as the holds became fouled by the stench of sweating bodies, urine and human excrement. As the ship sailed into a typhoon, the odour of vomit from the hundreds of sea sick prisoners added to the wretched conditions.

Four days out into the China Sea, in the Bashi Straits, at 1500 hrs on the 24th, a terrible jolt shook the ship from bow to stern as three torpedoes from the American submarine **USS Shark** (some sources say **USS Snook**....both these submarines failed to return from that patrol) split the ship in two. The two halves separated but remained afloat only to sink two hours later. Most of the Japanese crew and guards were the first to escape by the few available lifeboats. Those guards left behind were set upon by the enraged POWs and killed. Only seven men survived the sinking by clinging to wreckage. Two were picked up by the Japanese escort destroyer the other five were later rescued by a Chinese fishing boat and reached the Chinese coast. As the **Arisan Maru** was unmarked, the captain of the submarine had no way of knowing that the ship carried POWs.

Many other 'hell ships' sailed the pacific seas and were sunk during the last three years of the war but little is known about them. After the war investigators discovered that the Japanese had destroyed numerous records of these voyages. Between 1942 and 1945 it is recorded that 134 Japanese ships made 156 voyages carrying POWs. *The number of prisoners amounted to 126,064 of which 21,039 died.*

## FUSO *(October 24-25, 1944)*

Japanese battleship (39,154 tons) sunk during the *Battle of Surigao Strait*, Leyte, by a torpedo from the American destroyer **USS Melvin**. Badly damaged, she lost speed and fell out of formation only to blow up in a cataclysmic explosion half an hour later at 03.40hrs. **The Fuso** (Admiral Masami Ban) broke in two parts, the two sections remaining afloat and blazing furiously only a short distance from the northern tip of Kanihaan Island. The bow section was sunk by gunfire from the **USS Louisville** and the stern section sank half an hour later after having drifted with the current for some distance. Many survivors swimming in the sea refused to be rescued by the US

ships. The Japanese destroyer [Asagumo](#) may have, or may not have, rescued some of Fuso's survivors but she herself was torpedoed and sunk with all on board some four hours later. Those that survived the sinking of the Fuso and made it to shore, were butchered by Philippine natives out for revenge. The entire crew of the Fuso therefore died, the exact number is not known but estimates put her full complement at just over 1,400 men. *(The last Japanese battleship still afloat at war's end was the NAGATO. It was sunk off Bikini Atoll during one of the atomic bomb tests in 1946)*

## YAMASHIRO *(October 24-25, 1944)*

Flagship of Vice Admiral Nishimura Shoji and sister ship of the [Fuso](#), sunk during the *Battle of Surigao Strait*. As the formation entered the Strait, the ships were attacked by PT Boats and destroyers of the US Battle Force under the command of [Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf](#). One of her escorting destroyers, the [Yamagumo](#), hit by a torpedo, blew up and sank with all hands. The [Yamashiro](#), after being hit by four torpedoes, started to list and when the list reached 45 degrees the order to abandon ship was given. The order came too late, for after two minutes the ship abruptly capsized taking most of her 1,400 crew to the depths. There were only ten survivors who were rescued by the American destroyer [USS Claxton](#).

## ABUKUMA *(October 26, 1944)*

Japanese light cruiser of 5,570 tons commissioned in May, 1925 and sunk off Negros Island. Attacked by B-24 Liberators of the US 13th Air Force the cruiser takes a direct hit followed by two more direct hits which starts heavy fires and explodes four 'Long Lance' torpedoes in the torpedo room. The Abukuma sinks by the stern at 11.42 hrs with the loss of 250 of her crew. Her commander, Captain Hanada and 283 officers and men were rescued by the escorting destroyer Ushio.

## BREMERHAVEN *(October 31, 1944)*

German ex-refrigerated cargo ship, converted to a troop transport in 1942 and then to a hospital ship early in 1944, sailed from the Latvian port of Windau at 5:30pm on October 29th, bound for Gotenhaven in the Bay of Danzig. On board were 1,515 wounded soldiers (stretcher cases) 156 walking wounded, 680 refugees, 511 workers from [Organization Todt](#), 200 SS guards, 42 medical staff, 22 anti-aircraft gunners and 45 civilian crew, a total of 3,171 persons. At 9:30am on the 31st, the ship, commanded by Captain Grass, was attacked by five Russian planes when about 60 miles from its destination. Hit by one air-borne torpedo and two bombs, one of which exploded below deck setting the ship on fire. When the fire got out of control, the order to abandon ship was given. Luckily, the [Bremerhaven](#) (5355 Tons) stayed afloat long enough for rescue boats, including the tug-boat [Danzig](#), to approach and save 2,795 from the burning vessel. *Unfortunately, 410 souls were lost as the still-burning vessel rolled over and sank at 7:30 pm.*

## NACHI *(November 5, 1944)*

Japanese heavy cruiser of 13,380 tons (Captain Kanooka Enpei) In an attempt to escape American air raids on Manila harbour, the [Nachi](#) headed for the open sea but another strike from [Halsey's Task Force 38](#), caught the [Nachi](#) just off Corregidor. Immobilized with bomb hits and a torpedo strike in the starboard boiler room, the ship lay dead in the water only to be attacked again by another air strike, this time taking 5 torpedo hits. The [Nachi](#) simply blew apart and sank at 16:45hrs. A total of 807 of her crew died, plus 74 Fifth Fleet staff. There were 220 men who survived the blast. *(This is according to the official US Navy report)*

**The latest version of the sinking of the NACHI.** The cruiser was damaged in a collision with the Japanese cruiser [Mogami](#) and needed repairs in Japan. Before sailing she was loaded with 100 metric tons of looted gold bullion and towing a barge loaded with drums full of silver and gold coins, diamonds and gemstones. The [Nachi](#) sailed out into Manila Bay where she was deliberately torpedoed by a Japanese submarine lying in wait. All crew were machine-

gunned to death in the water, there were to be no witnesses. The looted gold was to be retrieved after the war. In 1975 the first attempt was made to find the wreck but ended in failure. Later that year, [President Ferdinand Marcos](#) of the Philippines financed an expedition to recover the treasure and according to numerous sources finally recovered the gold which in 1975 was worth six billion US dollars. Gold at that time was selling at \$65 an ounce. Other Marcus assets, deposited in Swiss banks, were frozen in 1998. Now (July 2003) these assets total 1.6 billion dollars. The Philippine Supreme Court has requested this money be returned to the Philippine Government. Swiss authorities have agreed to do this.

## USS MOUNT HOOD *(November 10, 1944)*

Named after the 11,239 foot high active volcano in the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. Commissioned on August 6, 1944, the converted merchant ship she set sail on the 21st of October bound for the Pacific Theatre via the Panama Canal. Fully loaded with 3,800 tons of ammunition and explosives, in its five holds the [Mount Hood](#) anchored at Seeadler Harbour on Manus Island, the largest American Naval Base west of Pearl Harbor. There, on the 10th of November, while the ship was dispersing ammunition to other vessels preparing for the invasion of the Philippines, the ship blew up at 08:55 hours in a terrible explosion sending up a smoke cloud 7,000 feet into the air. The largest part of the ship found after the explosion measured 16ft by 10ft. The ship's former position was shown by a trench on the harbour floor, 300 feet long, 50 feet wide and 35 feet deep. The Mount Hood and all its crew aboard at the time, simply disappeared. The tragedy took the lives of 295 men aboard the ship plus 49 men killed on other ships in the harbour, 371 men were injured. There were 18 survivors from the Mount Hood who were ashore when the ship blew up. Thus ended the ship's career, after only four months service. *Controversy still rages as to whether this accident was the result of careless handling of ammunition or a torpedo from a Japanese midget submarine.*

## TIRPITZ *(November 12, 1944)*

The 44,755 ton German battleship commissioned in 1941 (sister ship to the [Bismarck](#)) was named after the creator of the German High Seas Fleet, Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, and out of action for six months following an attack by Royal Navy midget submarines. Only once during the war did the [Tirpitz](#) fire its huge 15-inch guns and that was in the bombardment of Spitzbergen in September, 1943, which destroyed the Allied base there. On September 17, 1944, it was again attacked while holed up in Altenfjord in Norway. For this attack the Soviets co-operated by permitting the RAF to use their airfield at Yagodnik. Hit by one of the 13 Tallboy bombs dropped on the ship, the Tirpitz was damaged but not sunk. The battleship was then moved south to Tromsø and moored in Sorbotn off Hakoya Island. For the next attack on November 12th, the RAF dispatched 32 Lancaster bombers from Nos 9 and 617 Squadrons based at Lossiemouth, Scotland. Flying at 14,000 feet, they scored three direct hits with 12,000 pound Tallboy bombs tearing open her hull for a hundred feet. The Tirpitz turned completely over, her upperworks hitting the shallow bottom leaving her stuck there with only her red keel showing above the water. *Trapped inside were 971 crewmen who slowly died as the water rose inside. Only 76 men survived by making their way up to the bottom of the hull which was then cut open by rescue teams.*

The wreck was scrapped in situ after the war by a Norwegian salvage company. They presented the two RAF squadrons with an engine room bulkhead door salvaged from the ship. This steel door is now on show in the Bomber Command Museum as a memorial to the gallant crews of 9 and 617 Squadrons. *(The sinking of the Tirpitz was further proof that battleships had become obsolete).* (The first Tallboy bombs were dropped on a railway tunnel at Saumur, France, on June 9, 1944, by Lancasters of 617 Squadron. The tunnel was blocked for a considerable period preventing a German Panzer unit from reaching the battle area around Normandy)

## KONGO *(November 21, 1944)*

Built in Britain by Vickers & Son at Barrow. On October 25th, 1944, the 36,601 ton Japanese battleship [Kongo](#) was badly damaged by air attacks during the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*. A gash on her starboard side opened up fifteen oil tanks, the contents of which poured into the sea. The damage forced the Kongo to attempt a return voyage to Japan for repairs. While plowing through rough seas in the Formosa Strait she was attacked by the American submarine

**USS Sealion** (Captain Eli Reich). Two torpedoes hit the battleship causing a list of 20 degrees. Heading for the nearest port of Keelung on Formosa, some sixty-five nautical miles distant, the list increased to 45 degrees. It became obvious to the captain and crew that the Kongo was sinking and the order to abandon ship was given. When the list accelerated past 60 degrees, tragedy struck. Her forward 14-inch magazine exploded with horrifying results and the Kongo rolled over and slipped under the waves. Some 1,250 officers and men were lost. Her escorts, the destroyers **Hamakaze** and **Isokaze** rescued survivors. The Hamakaze picking up seven officers and 139 men, the Isokaze rescued six officers and 85 men, a total of 347 survivors. A third escort, the destroyer **Urakaze**, was also sunk by the Sealion taking all hands, 307 men, to their deaths.

### **KUMANO** (*November 25, 1944*)

Japanese heavy cruiser, a survivor of the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*. (in which Japan lost 26 ships, the US, 6 ships) The badly damaged vessel lost 56 officers and men killed and 99 wounded. The **Kumano** (Captain Hitomi Soichiro) managed to escape to Manila for repairs. On her next sortie she was hit by torpedoes from a US submarine but again made it home. Dubbed the 'ship with nine lives' her luck finally ran out on 25th November when, en route to Formosa, she was attacked by Avenger planes of Air Group 80 from the carrier **USS Ticonderoga**. Four direct hits by 500 lb bombs slowed the ship down but next came an attack with aerial torpedoes scoring 5 hits on the disabled ship. Listing at an angle of 45 degrees the order to abandon ship was given. The *Kumano* then turned turtle, her hull showing above the water. Survivors clinging to the hull and swimming in the water were subjected to strafing by the American planes. At 5:15pm she slid under the waves taking 440 men including her captain, out of a complement of 1,036, with her. In all, she had absorbed a total of eight torpedoes and six bombs before sinking.

### **M.S. RIGEL** (*November 27, 1944*)

Originally a Norwegian steamer owned by the 'Bergen Dampskipselskip' and captured at Oslo in 1940 during the German invasion of that country. Used as a troop transport under German naval control and part of southbound Convoy 410, she was carrying military equipment, 450 Wehrmacht troops, Russian POWs and ten Norwegians, eight of whom were prisoners, One a maritime pilot and one female passenger who worked on the ship. The Rigel (3,828 tons) was attacked north of Namos by 16 Fleet Air Arm planes from the British carrier **HMS Implacable**. Altogether she was carrying 2,838 persons including 2,248 Russian prisoners of war on their way to a POW camp in Germany. Hit by five bombs from the British planes, there was little time to launch the lifeboats before sinking. A total of 2,571 lives were lost. There were only 267 survivors. Of the ten Norwegians on board only one survived. *The pilots of the British planes had no way of knowing that the ship they sank carried their Russian allies.*

### **SHINANO** (*November 29, 1944*)

Named after the Shinano province of Japan, this 71,890 ton super battleship, now converted to *the world's largest aircraft carrier*, set sail on her maiden voyage on November 28, 1944, escorted by three destroyers. On her way to the safety of the Inland Sea to conduct her sea trials, she was spotted by the American submarine **USS Archerfish** commanded by Joseph F. Enright, USN. On board the **Shinano** were 2515 officers and men plus some 300 shipyard workers and 40 civilian employees. The Archerfish fired a volley of six torpedoes, four of which struck the carrier on the starboard side causing a torrent of sea water to flood in. Developing a list of over 20 degrees the mighty ship lay dead in the water. Her escort destroyers came alongside to take off the crew, shipyard workers and civilians, who had started to panic. Hundreds of others jumped into the sea, clinging to anything that would float. Too weak to haul themselves aboard the destroyers they fell back into the water and drowned. Her short life of 17 hours at sea ended at 10:55 hrs on the 29th November when the brand new carrier slid to the bottom 352 kilometers south of Nagoya, Japan, without having once fired her guns. From her complement of 2,515 a total of 1,435 souls perished. There were 1,080 survivors including 55 officers, 993 ratings and 32 civilians. Joseph F. Enright, commander of the Archerfish, was awarded the Navy Cross at Pearl Harbour in March, 1945. The commander of the **Shinano**, Captain Toshio Abe, went down with his ship. Archerfish ended her career in 1968 on the ocean floor off

San Diego when she was used as a target for a new type of torpedo fired by the [nuclear submarine USS Snook](#).

## ORYOKU MARU and BRAZIL MARU *(December, 1944)*

These two 7,000 ton Japanese passenger ships were being used to transport some 1,619 American Prisoners of War, mostly officers, to Japan. Marched through the streets of Manila from the Bilibid POW Camp to Pier 7 for boarding, the prisoners were crammed into the holds, standing room only. Also on board were around 700 civilians plus 100 crew and 30 Japanese guards. Already overloaded, the [Oryoku Maru](#) then took on about 1,000 Japanese seamen, survivors of ships sunk in Manila Harbour. She was spotted on her next day out at sea by US Navy planes from the carrier [USS Hornet](#) and attacked. The Oryoku Maru sailed into Subic Bay in the Philippines and ran aground to prevent her sinking. The attack continued over a period of two days in which 286 US soldiers were killed. The survivors, numbering 925, who were forced to swim ashore, were then transported by truck and train to San Fernando and thence to other ships, the [Enoura Maru](#) and [Brazil Maru](#). The Brazil Maru, which also carried a cargo of 12,000 bags of sugar, sailed for Japan on January 14, 1945. Conditions on board were indescribable, hundreds dying on the way from the cold, lack of air and water. On arrival at Moji in Japan two weeks later, only 475 were alive. Of these, 161 died within the first month ashore. Of the original 1,619 Americans on board the [Oryoku Maru](#), around 300 had died. *In a period of just over six weeks American submarines had killed over 4,000 Allied POWs.*

## ENOURA MARU

Following the bombing of the [Oryoku Maru](#), those prisoners who survived were then put on board the Enoura Maru. Previously used to transport horses, the holds were filthy with manure, yet into these holds were crammed some 1,040 men with little room to sit down. Some were so hungry that they picked out grain from the manure, grain that had dropped from the horses mouth during feeding. On New Years Eve the Enoura Maru reached Takao in Formosa. The crew then started to celebrate the New Year, leaving the POWs to fend for themselves for the next four days. During those four days thirty-four prisoners died. On the morning of January 9, aircraft from the [USS Hornet](#) carried out a bombing attack on the harbour. Little did the pilots know that the ship they were bombing carried their own countrymen. The bombs that struck the Enoura Maru killed 252 men and injured a similar number, many of whom later died from their injuries. No medical help was forthcoming from the Japanese crew, the prisoners left in the hold surrounded by hundreds of mutilated bodies. Two days later the bodies were removed and transported in cargo lighters to the outer spit of the harbour and buried in a mass grave. In the later part of 1946 the bodies were exhumed by an American Graves Recovery Team and re-interred in the National War Cemetery in Hawaii.

During the year (1944) about 53 of these hell-ships had sailed carrying a total of 47,057 prisoners to different destinations. The casualty rate was thirteen hell-ships sunk with 17,383 lives lost. That same year there were 674 deaths aboard these 'hell ships'. The deaths were not attributable to air or submarine attacks but to illness, suicide and murder (prisoner killing another prisoner) Crazy by thirst, prisoners would drink their own urine or slash their wrists for a mouthful of blood. Others would kill their companions and bite open an artery in the neck to get to the blood. Thirst would turn a man into a vampire. One prisoner who survived the war stated "Some prisoners fell into depravities of which I, for one, did not realize the human race was capable". In the latter part of 1944, murder became commonplace on ships carrying American soldiers. Back in 1942, murders were committed among British POWs on board the [Dainichi Maru](#). In 1944, there were no reports of homicide among British, Dutch or Australian prisoners. *Of all the nationalities that were transported on these hell-ships, all were subjected to the same inhumane conditions, yet, it seems that only Americans killed each other.*

Crowding and sanitary facilities were a serious problem on all troopships whether Allied, Axis or Japanese. The Japanese maintain that their own troops suffered the same conditions as Allied prisoners (without, of course, the deliberate starvation). Australian POWs were always amazed at the brutality of Japanese officers towards their own



men. Slapping, kicking and punching were commonplace, an everyday occurrence. Is it so surprising then that prisoners were treated so badly by the Japanese soldier?

### UNRYU *(December 19, 1944)*

The Imperial Japanese Navy aircraft carrier **Unryu** was sunk during her first war voyage at sea. Torpedoed by the **USS Redfish**, the *Unryu* had only been in commission for six months after the devastating losses at the *Battle of Midway*. The ship was loaded with a special cargo of thirty 'Ohka' rocket propulsion bombs before being sent on her way to confront the US invasion forces during the Luzon landings. The torpedo struck the *Unryu* at 16.35 hours on the starboard side setting off the deadly Ohka bombs and volatile cargo of aviation fuel stored in the lower deck hanger. A second torpedo struck at 16.50 hours, the detonation literally blowing the bow area apart. After the boiler rooms flooded, the ship listed to over 30 degrees and the order to abandon ship was given. Minutes later, with a 90 degree list, the carrier plunged headfirst to the bed of the East China Sea some 379 kilometers northwest of Naha, Okinawa. *Casualties were appalling: Captain Kaname Konishi and 1,238 officers and men, plus an unknown number of passengers, lost their lives. Only one officer and 146 men survived to be rescued by the escort destroyer Shigure.*

### LEOPOLDVILLE *(December 24, 1944)*

An 11,509 ton former Belgian luxury liner, now troopship, was carrying US soldiers across the English Channel to Cherbourg in France, a trip she had done twenty four times before. On this Christmas Eve the ship carried 2,235 men of the US 64th Infantry Regiment of the US 66th Infantry Division which had left New York on November 14th. The troops were to relieve the 94th Division already fighting the '*Battle of the Bulge*'. When the ship was 13.8 kilometres north-northeast of Cherbourg, a torpedo fired from the German U-boat the **U-486** (Oblt. Gerhard Meyer) hit the vessel amidships just below the waterline. The ship sank three hours later at 9.15pm . Official records put the number of men lost at 802. The 66th Infantry Division alone, lost 14 officers and 748 men, but the exact number is not known due to the hurried departure at 9am from Pier 38 at Southampton and the unorganized boarding procedures. As no life jackets were issued, and no call for assistance or distress signal sent from the ship, the men of the Leopoldville died in the freezing 48 degree waters of the English Channel.

Most of her crew, Africans from the Belgian Congo, took off in the lifeboats, deserting the troops on board. Her commander, Captain Limbor, was the only officer lost. Some 700 survivors were rescued by the escort destroyer **HMS Brilliant** (Captain Pringle) and transferred to the St. Nazaire/Lorient area but 493 bodies were never found, presumably going down with the ship. The wreck of the **Leopoldville** lies on her port side in 180 feet of water in a remarkable state of preservation, in an area now used for testing nuclear submarines. The Allied Governments covered up the story of the tragedy for over 50 years, relatives being told simply that their loved ones were 'Killed in Action'. In 1996, Britain de-classified the files relating to the disaster. A memorial to the Leopoldville can be seen at Sacrifice Field at Fort Benning in Georgia, dedicated on November 7, 1997. *The U-486 was sunk on April 12, 1945, northwest of Bergen, by a torpedo from the British submarine HMS Tapir. Her entire crew of 48 men, perished.*

## 1945

### USS TICONDEROGA *(January 21, 1945)*

American aircraft carrier of 27,000 tons, hit by a Japanese suicide plane while patrolling the waters off Formosa. Although the ship was not sunk it suffered casualties of 144 men killed and around 200 injured. *This tragedy was not revealed until six months after the event.*

## SS BERLIN *(January 29, 1945)*

The German passenger liner Berlin (15,286 tons) part of the 'Strength Through Joy' cruises, was later converted to a hospital ship and helped in the evacuation of refugees from the Hela Peninsula. Damaged after striking a mine off Swinemunde it was taken in tow for the port of Kiel but later that same day it hit another mine and this time the ship sank. No lives were lost. After the war ended, the Russians raised the vessel and after repairs it entered the Soviet navy under the name **Admiral Nachimov**. In May, 1957, it was delivered to Soviet state shipping line and placed into service in the Black Sea serving the Odessa-Batum route. On September 1, 1986, it was involved in a serious collision off Novorossiysk with the motor vessel **Pjotr Wassjew** after which it sank. Unfortunately on this occasion 398 lives were lost. Other German hospital ships sunk during the war were the **Birka**, sank after hitting a mine at Altafjord, Norway. Casualties were 115 killed. The **Posen** was bombed by Russian aircraft off Hella on April 11, 1945. Around 300 lives were lost.

## WILHELM GUSTLOFF *(January 30, 1945)*

**THE GREATEST SEA TRAGEDY OF ALL TIME.** The 25,484 ton German luxury cruise liner, launched in 1937, was built to carry 1,465 passengers and a crew of 400. The **Gustloff** and her sister ship **Robert Ley**, were the world's first purpose-built cruise ships. The ship, now converted to a 500 bed hospital ship, set sail from Gotenhafen (former Gdynia) in the Bay of Danzig en-route to the port of Stettin as part of the largest naval rescue operation in history (*Operation Hannibal*.) Overcrowded with 4,658 persons including 918 naval officers and men, 373 German Women Naval Auxiliaries, 162 wounded soldiers of whom 73 were stretcher cases, and 173 crew, all fleeing from the advancing Red Army, the ship plowed her way through the icy waters of the Baltic Sea. Just after 9pm the ship was hit by three torpedoes from the Russian submarine **S-13** (a German designed boat) commanded by Alexander Marinesko. The first torpedo hit the bow of the ship, the second, below the empty swimming pool on E-deck where the Women Auxiliaries were accommodated (most were killed) and the third hit amidships. Indescribable panic reigned as the ship listed and sank in about ninety minutes near the Danish island of Bornholm. Many families committed suicide rather than drown in the freezing waters. Rescue boats picked from the stormy minus 18 degree Celsius seas 964 survivors, many of whom were landed at Sassnitz on the island of Ruegen and taken on board the Danish hospital ship **Prince Olaf** which was anchored in the harbour. The exact number of drowned will never be known, as many more refugees were picked up from small boats as the Wilhelm Gustloff headed for the open sea and were never counted. Around 4,000 of those who died were children. (Latest research puts the number of people on board at 10,582) Many of the 964 persons rescued from the sea, died later, and it is likely *that well over 8,500 souls perished.*



## GENERAL VON STEUBEN *(February 10, 1945)*

A few days after the **Gustloff** had been sunk, the 14,600 ton liner **General von Steuben** of the Nord German Lloyd shipping line, set sail from Pillau in the bay of Danzig, her destination being Swinemunde. On board were 2,800 wounded soldiers, 320 nurses and 30 doctors as well as over 1,500 refugees and 165 crewmen. Just after midnight, torpedoes from Marinesko's **S-13** hit the Steuben. She sank in seven minutes, the wounded lying helpless, strapped to their stretchers. In those seven minutes some 3,608 persons died, around 659 being picked up by escorting ships. Sixty years later in May, 2004, the wreck of the Steuben was found lying on its side at a depth of 45 meters (150 feet) and scattered all around the wreck are human remains, skulls and bones. *Within ten days, Captain Alexander Marinesko had sunk two of Germany's largest liners and in the process had taken the lives of over 10,000 people. (Captain Marinesko died in October, 1963, from cancer and only in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev posthumously awarded Marinesko with the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union')*

## USS BISMARCK SEA (CVE-95) *(February 21, 1945)*

The 10,982 ton escort carrier was launched in 1944 under the name '**Alikula Bay**' and later renamed **Bismark Sea**. Joined the US 7th Fleet and saw action off Leyte and in the Lingayen Gulf landings. While taking part in the **Two Jima invasion**, the Bismark Sea (Captain J.L. Pratt) was attacked by three Japanese kamakazi planes from the island of Kyushu, Japan. One of the planes crashed onto her deck, the other two were shot down. An explosion in her ammunition store caused uncontrollable fires and in spite of all efforts of her crew to save the ship, the carrier sank ninety minutes later. *Of her complement of 860, a total of 318 men lost their lives.*

## USS FRANKLIN (CV-13) *(March 19, 1945)*

American aircraft carrier attacked by Japanese planes off Samar Island. Two direct hits by 550lb bombs caused fires and internal explosions but failed to sink the ship. A total of 725 men were killed and 265 injured. The **Franklin** had a crew of 3,450 officers and men. After the war, 393 bravery decorations were awarded to the crew, including one Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to naval chaplain Lt. Commander Joseph O'Callahan for heroism, the first naval chaplain to be so honoured. The Franklin (commanded by Captain Gehres) was the most severely damaged US ship to survive but managed to make her way back to Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands and finally to the US for repairs, a voyage of nearly 12,000 miles.

## AWA MARU *(April 1, 1945)*

Japanese passenger/cargo ship of 11,249 tons, (Captain Hamada Matsutaro) sunk while homeward bound after having delivered Red Cross relief supplies to American and Allied POWs in Japanese custody under an agreement between Japan and the US Government which guaranteed safe passage for such ships. The third ship to carry out this relief programme was the **Awa Maru** which picked up the Red Cross parcels from the stockpile at Nakhodka, one hundred miles south of Vladivostok. They had been transported there by five Soviet ships which had sailed from Portland, Oregon, in December, 1943, loaded with 2,500 tons of supplies. The Awa Maru was painted green with large white crosses on her sides and funnel, all illuminated by special spot lights. Loaded with 175 tons of Red Cross supplies, the Japanese also loaded crates of aircraft parts, munitions and other commodities desperately needed by Japanese troops in Southeast Asia.

This was in complete violation of the Relief for P.O.W. agreement. After unloading her cargo at various stops on her journey south, the Awa Maru was now in Singapore preparing for the journey home to Japan. Before leaving Singapore on March 28, she had on board over 2,000 Japanese officials, diplomats, technicians, war loot and civilians, all eager to escape the Allied bombs that were now falling on the city. The war loot consisted of forty metric tons of gold and 150,000 carats of diamonds, all worth over \$5 billion. Calling at Batavia (Jakarta) she took

on 2,500 tons of crude oil, hundreds of tons of oil drilling machinery, tin ingots, tungsten and rubber. Although the Americans knew what was going on they were reluctant to do anything about it in fear that the relief supplies would be stopped. Submarine commanders were ordered to *'let it go by safely'*. However, April 1st saw the US submarine **Queenfish**, Commander Charles E. Loughlin, on her fourth patrol, in the Taiwan Strait in an area near where the Awa Maru would have to pass through. At 11 pm, a pip appeared on the Queenfish's radar indicating a possible target at 17,000 yards. Loaded far beyond normal limits, and traveling low in the water, the ship presented a smaller than usual radar image not unlike that of a destroyer.

*What happened next proved to be the greatest submarine error of the Pacific war.* The **Queenfish** fired four torpedoes, all of which hit the target. As the submarine approached the oil covered spot where the target had sunk, the crew picked up one exhausted man from the water, a first class steward from the sunken ship, 46 year old Shimoda Kantaro, the only survivor of the Awa Maru. Drowned in this disaster were 2,003 persons including seventy-two Taiwanese civilians. On arrival back at base, Commander Loughlin was relieved of his command and faced court-martial the result of which cleared him of all charges of wrongdoing. *As the ship was sunk in Chinese territorial waters, Beijing carried out the salvage and recovered the looted treasure.*



The Japanese passenger/cargo ship Awa Maru with clearly visible white crosses on her sides.

## YAMATO *(April 7, 1945)*

Japan's 71,659 ton, 862 foot long super battleship **Yamato**, commissioned on 16th December, 1941, was the world's largest fighting ship afloat. She carried nine 18.1 inch guns which could hurl a shell a distance of 35 miles. As the Americans prepared to invade the island of Okinawa, the Yamato set sail from Tokuyama with the cruiser **Yahagi** and eight escort destroyers under the command of Vice-Admiral Ito Seiichi, on what was considered a suicide mission, to engage the American amphibious fleet as it approached the island. Sailing with nine escorts but without air cover, the Yamato was soon spotted by a US scout plane which radioed its position to the invasion fleet. Within hours the mighty battleship was attacked by an armada of 386 fighter planes and torpedo carrying bombers from the flight decks of the invasion fleet carriers. Hit by at least eight torpedoes and many bombs during the two-and-a-half hour battle, the Yamato developed a 120 degree list to port after one of her magazines exploded. Minutes later the great ship capsized and sank at 14:23 hrs off the coast of Kyushu, taking with her 2,498 members of her crew including Admiral Ito. Of her full complement of 2,767 men, there were only 269 survivors. The cruiser **Yahagi** was also sunk with the loss of 446 lives. Another 721 lives were lost from the sinking of five of her escort destroyers. Total casualties from the five ships were 3,665 dead. *The sinking of the Yamato was the largest single loss involving a warship in history. Just like the **Tirpitz**, the Yamato never had a chance to fire its big guns against enemy warships.*



The Japanese super battleship Yamato, running trials in 1941.

### SS GOYA *(April 16, 1945)*

A passenger/cargo ship (5,230 tons) built in Norway for the Hamburg America Line, it was taken over by the German Navy to help in the evacuations from the Hela Peninsula in the Bay of Danzig. It had taken on board the remnants of the 35th Tank Regiment and thousands of pleading refugees. When sixty miles off the port of Stolpe near Cape Rozewie, she was attacked by the Russian submarine **L-3** commanded by Captain Vladimir Konovalov. Two torpedoes were fired, hitting the **Goya** amidships. Immediately the ship broke in half and sank in about four minutes. Of the estimated 6,385 people on board, only 183 were rescued. For this episode, Konovalov was awarded the medal, '**Hero of the Soviet Union**'.

*In spite of the huge losses suffered during the evacuations (Operation 'Hannibal' and often referred to as Germany's Dunkirk) around two million people, including 700,000 soldiers, were saved, thus avoiding capture by the Red Army.*

### CAP ARCONA and THIELBECK *(May 3, 1945)*

Four days after Hitler's suicide the German pre-war luxury liner **Cap Arcona**, 27,561 tons, anchored in Lubeck Bay along with two other ships the **Thielbeck** and **Athen**, were bombed by RAF planes of 83 Group, 2nd Tactical Air Force. On board the three ships were around 7,000 prisoners from the Nazi concentration camps at **Neuengamme** near Hamburg and **Stutthof** near Danzig, half of whom were Russian and Polish POWs who were being evacuated ahead of the advancing British troops. Arriving at the port of Lubeck they were forced on board the 1,936 ton **Athen** to be ferried out to the **Cap Arcona** whose captain, Kapitän Heinrich Bertram, refused to let them on board protesting that his ship could only accommodate 700. Threatened with arrest and execution, he relented and watched as thousands of prisoners were herded into the holds of his ship. Guarding them were some 400 SS troops. (These ships were to be sailed out to sea and then scuttled, drowning all on board according to Himmler's order to all concentration camp commanders that '*surrender was unacceptable, that camps were to be immediately evacuated and no prisoner was to fall alive into the hands of the enemy*') When the **Athen** had finished its ferrying duties a group of prisoners were then transferred from the **Cap Arcona** (which was now seriously overcrowded) back to the **Athen** whose captain then ran his ship against the quay at Neustadt and hoisted a white flag, thus saving his 1,998 passengers.

A short distance away, the civilian liner **Deutschland** (21,046 tons) was anchored and about to be converted to a hospital ship. Firing their rockets, the Typhoons of 184 Squadron from Hustedt attacked first, hitting all three ships. The second attack was by 198 Squadron from Plantlünne led by Group Captain Johnny Baldwin. The third attack by 263 Squadron from Ahlhorn attacked the **Deutschland** as did the fourth attack by 197 Squadron, also from Ahlhorn. The **Deutschland**, burning furiously, keeled over and sank four hours later. Fortunately there were no prisoners on board and the crew had deserted the ship during the first attack. The 27,561 ton **Cap Arcona**, with nearly 4,500



prisoners trapped below and suffocating in the smoke and flames, turned over on her side and lay partly submerged and burning out. Some managed to break out and cling to the hull of the ship, others jumped into the freezing Baltic Sea. In all, 314 prisoners and 2 crewmembers were rescued. The **Thielbeck** (a 2,815 ton freighter) was left a smouldering wreck and sank forty-five minutes later. Of the Thielbeck's 2,800 prisoners, only around 50 were saved. Many survivors, trying to swim ashore, were mown down mercilessly in the water from machine guns of SS troops stationed on shore. They only rescued those in SS uniform, about 350 at the most. *Altogether, over 6,500 people died in this tragedy.*

The RAF pilots knew nothing about the prisoners on board and it was not until many years later, in fact 1975, that they learned that they had slaughtered their own allies! For weeks after the sinking, bodies of the victims were being washed ashore, to be collected and buried in a single mass grave at Neustadt, in Holstein. For nearly three decades, parts of skeletons were being washed ashore, the last find, by a twelve year old boy, was in 1971. The history of this tragedy is depicted in the '**Cap Arcona**' Museum in Neustadt, opened in 1990. Max Pauly, the ex-Commandant of Neuengamme Concentration Camp and SS doctor Alfred Trzebinski, were later tried and convicted of war crimes. *Both were hanged in Hamelin Goal.*



**The Burning Cap Arcona**

## HAGURO (May 15, 1945)

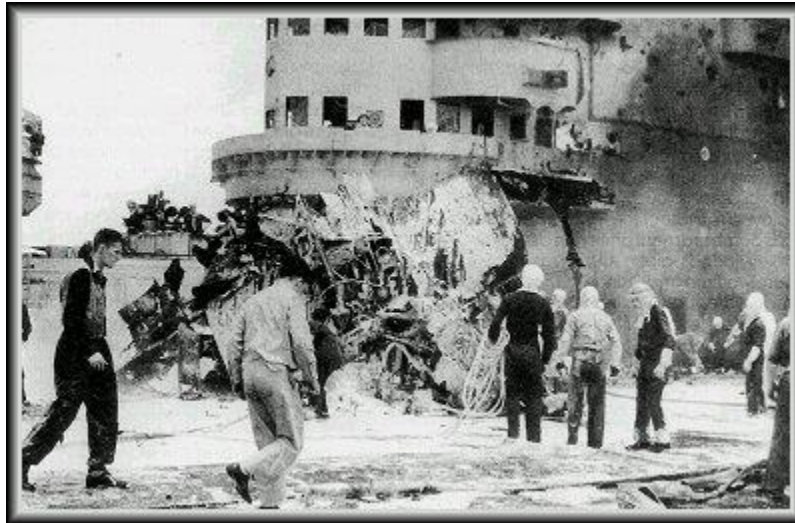
Japanese heavy cruiser of the 10th Area Fleet commanded by Captain Kazu Sugiura. Commissioned in April, 1929, the ship was a survivor of many battles including the Battles of the Java Sea, the Coral Sea and Midway. Attacked by five British destroyers the ship was hit and damaged by two torpedoes and sank after the third torpedo hit about 45 miles north-west of Penang. The exact number of casualties is not known but believed to be around 900. There were 320 survivors. This was the last surface naval battle of World War II.

## ASHIGARA (June 8, 1945)

The 13,380-ton Nachi class Japanese cruiser sunk by the British submarine **HMS Trenchant** commanded by 'Baldy' A. R. Hezlet. (It was estimated that around 1,200 Japanese troops were on board on their way from Batavia to reinforce the garrison at Singapore). At the last minute, the **Ashigara** had altered course and was hit by five torpedoes out of the eight fired by the Trenchant. In an effort to beach herself she headed towards Klipped Shoal near Sumatra but half an hour after being hit, the blazing Ashigara capsized and sank. A total of 853 survivors were rescued by the Japanese escort destroyer **Kamikaze**. Commander Hezlet was later awarded the DSO and the United States Legion of Merit.

## USS BUNKER HILL (CV-17) *(June 27, 1945)*

Aircraft carrier operating off the island of Okinawa, hit by a Japanese kamikaze suicide plane piloted by Kiyoshi Ogawa. The ship suffered the loss of 373 crewmen when the re-armed and re-fuelled planes on deck exploded and caught fire. The **Bunker Hill** did not sink but made it home to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for repairs. Air attacks by Japanese planes on American ships off Okinawa killed 2,658 men during ten kamikaze attacks in which eleven ships were sunk and 102 damaged. During the Pacific War, 288 United States Navy ships were hit by kamikazes, 34 were sunk. (**Kamikaze** units, was first formed in October 1944, as a Special Attack Force called '**Shimpu**' by Vice Admiral Takijiro Onishi and included 23 volunteer pilots) A second unit was formed soon afterwards under the name Kamikaze "Divine Wind" after a typhoon that destroyed a Mongol invasion fleet way back in 1281 AD. *In their suicide attempts, 1,465 kamikaze aircraft were destroyed killing 1,228 pilots.*



**Damage caused to a British aircraft carrier by a Japanese Kamikaze aircraft.**

The picture above shows the damage that was caused by a Japanese kamikaze aircraft after it had targeted and crashed on the deck of a British aircraft carrier. These Japanese 'death pilots' aimed at different points depending on the type of ship that they were going to attack. On an aircraft carrier they aimed for the central elevator, on larger ships such as battleships and heavy cruisers they aimed just below the bridge and anywhere between the center and the bridge of smaller ships and transports. Later British aircraft carriers generally suffered less damage than the American aircraft carriers because they had specially reinforced steel flight decks whereas a kamikaze could easily penetrate the wooden decks of the American carriers.

## USS INDIANAPOLIS (CA-35) *(July 30, 1945)*

Launched on the 30th of March, 1930, this 9,950 ton heavy cruiser served throughout the Pacific War until its final mission. **One of the wars most secret missions was the delivery of the uranium core to be used in the 'Little Boy' Hiroshima bomb.** After unloading the component to the B29 Bomb Squadron on the island of Tinian, the **Indianapolis** departed for Leyte to join up with the **USS Idaho** for gunnery practice before rejoining the rest of the US Fleet off Okinawa for the expected invasion of Japan. Halfway between Leyte and Guam, the cruiser was hit by torpedoes from the Japanese submarine **I-58** (Captain Hashimoto). The Indianapolis rolled over and sank bow first taking the lives of 883 US sailors. (Position 12 degrees-2 minutes north by 134 degrees-48 minutes east) There were 316 survivors from the 1,199 crew. Most of the men died in the water from exposure and shark attacks. Of the thirty nine Marines on board only nine survived. The survivors were rescued four days later by the US destroyers **Cecil Doyle**, **Talbot** and **Dufilho**. After hospital treatment on Guam the survivors were soon

on their way home on board the carrier **USS Hollandia** . The captain of the Indianapolis, Charles Butler McVay, was later court-martialed for failing to zig-zag in hostile waters. His sentence was remitted by the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, and he was restored to duty. He retired as a Rear Admiral in 1949 and in 1968, in Litchfield, Connecticut, he committed suicide by a pistol shot to the head. In July, 2001, Captain McVay was exonerated for the loss of his ship. *The Indianapolis was the last major warship sunk in WWII and America's greatest naval disaster at sea. How different would history have been if the cruiser was sunk on the outward journey taking the nuclear components to the bottom of the ocean?*

### **UKISHIMA MARU** *(August 24, 1945)*

In the Aomori Prefecture, in the far north of Japan, around 5,000 Korean slave labourers had spent the last few years of the war digging a major underground complex of tunnels and storage facilities. With the work completed and the end of the war just a few weeks away, the five thousand labourers including many Korean sex slaves, the so-called 'Comfort Women', were put aboard the Japanese warship **Ukishima Maru** with the promise that they were being returned to their homeland. The warship sailed south along the west coast until it reached the Maisaru Naval Base in Kyoto. There, the hatches to the holds were sealed down and the ship taken offshore and scuttled. Explosives were placed inside the hull, the resulting explosions sinking the ship within minutes. There were only some 80 survivors. Fifty-seven years later, in August 2001, fifteen of the survivors who were still alive, won a lawsuit for compensation against the Japanese government. *They were paid the paltry sum of \$30,000.*

### **OP TEN NOORT** *(August 30, 1945)*

A 6,076 ton Dutch passenger liner based in Java and on regular service between Surabaya and Singapore. Converted to a hospital ship for the Dutch Navy at the outbreak of the war. In harbour at Surabaya during the *Battle of the Java Sea*, she was dispatched to look for survivors but was intercepted by two Japanese destroyers and ordered to turn back to Bandjarmasin in Borneo where she was boarded and apprehended. Ordered to take on board 970 Allied prisoners-of-war, including around 800 survivors from the British cruiser **Exeter** sunk in the Java Sea battle, she sailed for Makassar and there, for the next eight months served as a hospital facility for the POW camps in the area. Later, June 5, 1942, she sailed for Yokohama under the Japanese flag and a new name '**Tenno Maru**' and extra funnel to hide the fact that she was a former Allied hospital ship. The remainder of the war she sailed between Singapore and Manila carrying looted gold and other treasures from the Japanese occupied countries. Just weeks before the war ended she arrived again in Yokohama loaded with 2,000 metric tons of gold but instead of off-loading her cargo she then sailed on to the Maisaru Naval Base where more gold and platinum bars, diamonds and other gems were put on board. (A metric ton of gold equals 26,400 ounces) Realizing the war was over it was decided to sink the ship and recover the treasure at a later date. Just days before the Japanese surrender the **Op ten Noort** was taken out into Maisaru Bay late at night by a group of high-ranking Japanese naval officers. The Japanese captain and twenty-four crewmen of the Op ten Noort were then shot dead to preserve the secret and the ship scuttled by placing explosive charges in the hull. *When the wreck was found in 1990 the Japanese valued the treasure at thirty billion US dollars (Three trillion Japanese yen)*

[Source: <http://members.iinet.net.au/~gduncan/maritime-1a.html> Oct 2011 ++]