



About Colonsay

S.S. ARANDORA STAR - CREW NOTES

Merchant Navy Crew - July 1940

Like so many other aspects of this story, it has been difficult to find precise and accurate details concerning the ship's crew when she left Liverpool on 30 June 1940. Some of the official reports compiled after the sinking - such as those by chief officer Brown and chief engineer Connell - suggest that the ship had a crew of either 176 or 174 including its master, Captain Edgar Wallace Moulton. There is however, in these reports, an acknowledgement that these were estimates and not accurate figures. The figure of 174 seems to be the one most readily accepted and used in most publications and web pages.

In the National Archives, there are two sets of documents which give more information about the crew. The first lists details of engagement including name, age, rank, nationality, details of pay and release. This was completed in Liverpool on 29 June 1940, just one day before sailing. The second document, signed on the same day by each crew member, provides similar information as well as home address and next of kin. The two documents both give totals of 182 crew members, including the ship's master and his officers.

After the sinking, a report entitled 'Arandora Star Conditions on Board and the Disaster' was presented by Captain F. J. Robertson whose official duties were as Interpreter to the Italian Internees. In his final 'Comments and Suggestions' he states *'We were told by the ships officers that 80% of the crew had been signed on the morning we sailed'* It is therefore possible that some of the men who signed, did not report for duty hence the slight disparity in the figures.

The crew certainly contained a good mixture of youth and experience with about 50% in their teens or twenties and 30% over the age of 40. The youngest crew member aged just 15, was deck boy D. Arnold from Liverpool and the oldest, fireman C. Doherty who, aged 68 was also from Liverpool. Both men were amongst the survivors.

NB. Whilst the pages on this website are primarily concerned with remembering those of all nationalities who lost their lives on 2 July 1940, a full detailed crew list will be posted at a later date.

CASUALTIES

The most frequently quoted figure for crew casualties seems to be 55, however the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Roll of Honour contains details of 58 men - all Merchant Navy with the exception of fireman Walter Varley Standing of the Canadian Merchant Navy. A list of crew casualties from the National Archives also gives details of the same 58 individuals whose cause of death is recorded thus - *Enemy Action, supposed Drowned*.

The oldest of the casualties was 60 year old watchman William Moitie from Jersey and the youngest were three men aged just 18 - pantry boy Henry Davies from Liverpool, sailor Leonard King from Southampton and steward's boy J Firth from Birmingham . The tragedy brought particular grief to one Portsmouth family with the loss of 19 year old scullion Jack Halson and his older brother, 28 year old assistant baker William Halson

The names of 56 casualties lost at sea are recorded on the Tower Hill Memorial in London - 55 of them on panel 9 and 1 on panel 4. Walter Varley Standing's name is on panel 17 of the Halifax Memorial in Canada . The photograph of this panel has been kindly sent by Steve Douglas, co-ordinator of the Maple Leaf Legacy - A Project in Remembrance of Canada's War Dead.



The Halifax Memorial Panel 17

S.S. Arandora Star



Broadhembury village War Memorial

In small churchyards and graveyards around the west coast of Ireland and Scotland there are many headstones inscribed - A SAILOR OF THE 1939 - 1945 WAR, MERCHANT NAVY, KNOWN UNTO GOD - usually accompanied by a date when found. It is quite conceivable that a number these may be men of the SS *Arandora Star* but sadly we shall never know.

For their actions on that day, Captain Moulton as well as three of his officers - 1st officer Frederick Bertram Brown, 2nd officer Stanley Ranson and 4th officer Ralph Little were all awarded the **Lloyds Medal for Bravery at Sea** - of these men only 1st officer Brown survived.

The citation read 'having done all they could to save life and having no boat or raft to save themselves, they took to the water as the vessel sank'

Finally and somewhat ironically, the Merchant Navy casualties on that day included main greaser, Rocco Sinicola aged 23, son of Ferdinand and Maria Sinicola of Vauxhall London. How this young man, undoubtedly of Italian descent, must have felt when faced with the task of helping to transport many of his fellow countrymen to Canada, one can only speculate.