



A research note on the history of ships, places, organisations and events associated with the
Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)

War and Marine casualties of the RFA

Thomas A Adams MBE

Content

1. Introduction

2. World War One casualties 1914-19

3. World War Two casualties 1939-45

4. Falklands casualties 1982

5. Marine casualties

Annex One: Additional World War Two casualties

1. Introduction

Shipping casualties generally fall into two categories – **War Risk** and **Marine Risk**. This Backgrounder covers the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service from its inception in 1905 and records the wrecks, losses and casualties as well as the category.

The cause for the casualty defines the military action or indeed marine action that contributed to or caused the loss, for example, torpedo attack, navigational. The cause can also include constructive total loss, capture or serious casualty.

A constructive total loss is defined as 'the loss of a ship by sinking or by being so seriously damaged that she is unfit for further service and is scrapped'.

A serious casualty is defined as a ship that as a result of being badly damaged by an action is put out of operational service for a considerable period requiring



major shipyard work or is hulked, eg, ABBEYDALE and BRAMBLELEAF.

This Note records some discrepancies between official records and the information recorded in **The Tower Hill Memorial Registers**, London, maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It is also important to note that Lascar seamen known to have been domiciled in India (and now Pakistan) are not named – they are commemorated on memorials at Bombay and Chittagong; Also Chinese seamen known to have been domiciled in Hong Kong or China are not named – they are commemorated when their names were added to the 1914–18 memorial at Hong Kong. RN, RNR, DEMS and Royal Maritime Artillery personnel lost when serving on merchant ships are – they are generally commemorated on appropriate Naval and Army memorials.

Discrepancies. Even today, war loss information in particular can highlight discrepancies. Examples are RFA INNISTRAHULL, and BIRCHLEAF an Admiralty owned tanker which at time of attack was not actually a Royal Fleet Auxiliary. As research continues this Note will be updated.

This list is arranged in alphabetical order.

2. World War One casualties 1914-1919

In alphabetical order.

RFA CREOSOL tanker
ON 139147 17 February 1918
War risk – constructive total loss when on passage Humber/Sunderland when torpedoed and sunk [54.52N 01.11.30W] by UC17. Two of her crew were lost. 16.4.2012 wreck designated under the POMRA1986, Order 2012.

RFA HUGHLI salvage vessel
ON 104821 26 April 1919
War risk – constructive total loss after striking a mine off Belgian Coast at Nieuport. 19 of her crew were lost.

RFA HUNGERFORD store ship
ON 136803 16 April 1918
War risk – constructive total loss
On passage Le Havre/New York when torpedoed by UC 75 [9 n.miles SSE of Owers Light Vessel]. Unclear how many of her crew were lost.

RFA INDUSTRY store carrier
ON 138989 18 October 1918
War risk – constructive total loss
Near Strangford Light Buoy and with escort of an armed trawler when torpedoed and sunk by UB 92. Crew – understood that 17 were lost.



INNISTRAHULL small motor water tanker
ON 133144 1916
War risk — constructive total loss
The position not recorded. Crew – no information recorded; although she is incorrectly listed in Lloyd's Register 1935.

RFA VITOL tanker
ON 140342 7 March 1918
War risk – constructive loss
when on passage Liverpool/Queenstown, Ireland when struck a mine [52.37N 5.04.07W] laid by U 110. Beached as total constructive loss. Four of her crew were lost. The value of cargo lost is given as £17,919 (at 1918 valuation).

3. World War Two casualties 1939-1945

In alphabetical order.

ABBEYDALE tanker
ON 165409 27.06.1943
War risk — serious casualty
In convoy XTG2 in Western Mediterranean [36.53N 01.55E] badly damaged when torpedoed by U 73. Crew – no casualties recorded [one later death recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial]



Enemy action damage to RFA ABBEYDALE, Algiers 1943
[TARBS collection]



ALDERSDALE tanker
ON 165572 05.07.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
Barents Sea [77.00N 22.00E approx]. Seriously damaged in air attack. Ship abandoned; 7.7.1942 wreck attacked by gunfire from U 457 and sunk at 75N 45E. Crew – no casualties reported 54 survivors rescued by HMS SALAMANDER.

BRAMBLELEAF (1) tanker
ON 140287 10.06.1942
War risk — serious casualty
In convoy AT49 Alexandria/Tobruk – Eastern Mediterranean [off Mersa Alun] when torpedoed by U 559. Ship towed to Alexandria where she was used as a fuel hulk. Crew – 2 officers and 5 ratings killed, 6 ratings injured.



Lost in the air attacks on Malta RFA BRAMBLELEAF, June 1942 [TARBS collection]
CAIRNDALE tanker
ON 167165 30.05.1941
War risk — constructive total loss
West of Gibraltar [35.19N 008.33E]. She was serving as the Force H attendant oiler when torpedoed by the Italian submarine GUGLIELMO MARCONI. Crew – 2 officers and 2 ratings killed and 4 ratings injured [three deaths recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial].

DARKDALE tanker
ON 165991 22.10.1941
War risk — constructive total loss
St Helena [15.54.58S 5.43.15W] when at circa 0015 when at anchor she was torpedoed by U 68. Crew – 11 officers including 2 radio officers plus 30 ratings including 3 DEMS killed [only thirtyseven deaths recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial].
Survivors were the Master, Chief Engineer and 7 ratings, all of whom were ashore.

DENBYDALE tanker
ON 168051 20.09.1941
War risk — serious casualty
At Gibraltar when Italian submarine SCIRE penetrated Bay of Gibraltar, launching three Siluro a Lenta Corsa (SLC) human torpedo/frogman teams. The tanker was severely damaged, partially sinking. She spent



remainder of her life as a fuelling and accommodation hulk at Gibraltar. Crew – no casualties reported.

DINSDALE tanker
ON 168276 31.05.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
South Atlantic [01.00S 030.15W] on passage
Trinidad/Port Elizabeth, with a cargo of aviation spirit,
when 120 miles SSW off St Paul's Rock she was
torpedoed at circa 0130Z by the Italian submarine
CAPPELLINI. The submarine reportedly used three
torpedoes. Ship was abandoned and her survivors were
landed in the UK. Crew – one officer and four ratings
lost, one officer injured out of the complement of 59
[four deaths recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial].

EBONOL tanker
ON 140439 19.12.1941
War risk — capture at Hong Kong
This tanker was scuttled to avoid capture. Salvaged by
the Japanese and renamed ENOSHIMA MARU. Recovered
at Batavia in 1945. Crew – four officers taken as PoWs;
chief engineer died in PoW camp 11.09.1942; 26 ratings
missing or PoWs.

FRANCOL tanker
ON 140441 04.03.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
near Tjilatjap – approximately 300 miles south of Java
[11.00S 109.00E] on passage Batavia/Fremantle when
sunk as a result of an air attack and by gunfire from a

Japanese naval surface squadron. Crew – 3 officers
missing, 4 taken as PoWs, 13 survivors [four deaths
recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial]
[Lloyd's Official Records list date as 03.03.1942, position
11.30S 109.3E, and two crew prisoners of war.
International Red Cross gave sinking date as
04.03.1942.]

GRAY RANGER tanker
ON 168210 22.09.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
Arctic waters south off Mayen Island [71.23N 11.03W]
She was working as the escort oiler with convoy QP14 en
route to Russia, when torpedoed and sunk at circa
0626A by U 435. Crew – three officers including radio
officer lost, three rating killed; one officer injured.
Master, Chief Engineer, 7 DEMS and 11 ratings picked up
and landed Scapa 27.09.42; 6 officers including Radio
Officer, 4 DEMS and 14 ratings picked up landed
Greenock 27.09.42; all other survivors landed during the
course of September.

MONTENOL tanker
ON 140408 21.05.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
In eastern Atlantic, 40 miles ESE off Santa Maria, Azores
[36.41N 22.45W] when on passage to the Far East via
the Cape in convoy OS28, she was torpedoed by U 159.
It was impractical to tow the damaged ship so she was
finally sunk by gunfire from HM Ships. Of the crew of 56
plus 3 DEMS ratings – two ratings killed and one died



later from his injuries [this ship is not recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial]. Her Lascar survivors repatriated to Bombay.



RFA MONTENOL [TARBS collection]

OLEANDER tanker
ON 146640 08.06.1940
War risk — constructive total loss
At Harstad Bay, Northern Norway. On 26 May 1940 this tanker was damaged by a near miss during an air attack. Vessel was beached and attempts made to salvage her cargo - 08.06.1940 vessel recorded as lost. Crew - 3 ratings injured.

OLIGARCH tanker
ON 142604 30.6/01.07.1943
War risk — serious casualty
In Eastern Mediterranean [32.57N 21.10E] in passage with convoy GTX3 when tanker was torpedoed and she proceeded to Tobruk. After minor repairs escorted to

Alexandria for use as a fuel hulk. No casualties recorded and her officers appointed to other RFAs, ratings repatriated to the UK.

OLNA tanker
ON 146149 18.04.1941
War risk — constructive total loss
Suda Bay, Crete - she was damaged and set on fire by aircraft. She was beached and badly burnt out. Fell into German hands on evacuation of Crete on 31.05.1941. At the end of the war she was found as a wreck at Scaramanga, fit only for scrap. Crew - Officers repatriated to UK and Chinese crew repatriated to Singapore. One rating injured, he died 04.06.1941 as a direct result of injuries received.

PLUMLEAF tanker
ON 140263 26.03.1942
War risk — constructive total loss
Parlatorio Wharf, Malta - this tanker was damaged during an air attack. Her aft end went aground, but she remained lying upright. 04.04.1942 she received further damaged during heavy air attacks by II German Air Corps and Italian formation. She sank to deck level in about 46ft of water and after refloating on 28.08.1947 she was towed to Catania for scrapping. No casualties reported.

RUTHENIA fuel hulk
ON 110650 16.02.1942



War risk — capture
Singapore – this fuel hulk was scuttled and later salvaged by the Japanese. She was renamed CHORAN MARU; recovered 1945. Crew – no casualties reported

RFA SLAVOL tanker
ON 142303 26 March 1942
War risk — constructive total loss
NE of Sollum [32N 25.57E] – she was on passage Alexandria/Tobruk with a cargo of fuel oil when torpedoed and sunk by U 205. 4 officers, one radio officer and 31 Lascar ratings lost. Five deaths recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial. Her 18 surviving Lascar ratings were repatriated to Bombay.

WAR DIWAN tanker
ON 143379 16.12.1944
War risk — constructive total loss
River Schelde estuary [between NF 15 buoy and NF 17 buoy] this tanker was mined when enroute to Antwerp; she broke in two and finally one half had to be sunk by gunfire. Survivors taken on HMS FRANKLIN and landed Ostend. They returned to Tilbury on 18.12.1944. [Wreck of the after part lies 51.25.31N 3.27.21E; forward part lies 51.25.45N 3.29.37E]

WAR MEHTAR tanker
ON 144350 19.11.1941
War risk — constructive total loss

Off Great Yarmouth, England [52.35.45N 2.9.30E] this tanker was on passage Grangemouth/Harwich with 7,000 tons of Admiralty fuel oil when torpedoed by Schnellboot S104 of the 2nd German E-boat flotilla. The crew of 45 were saved. 1 officer and 3 ratings injured. Unsuccessful attempts made to salvage this tanker.

WAR SEPOY tanker
ON 142773 19.07.1940
War risk — constructive total loss
Dover Harbour, England [51.06.42N 001.19.45E], she was damaged beyond repair during an air raid. 07.09.1940 sunk as a blockship in Western Entrance, Dover Harbour. Crew – 1 officer injured [one death [master] recorded on The Tower Hill Memorial].

WAR SIRDAR tanker
ON 144354 28.02.1942
Marine risk — constructive total loss/capture
Sunda Straits off NW Batavia, Java [12.39N 109.37E] 25.02.1942 direct hit during air raid – no casualties recorded. 27.02.1942 sailed in convoy Batavia to Tjilatjap. 28.02.1942 she grounded on a reef with and HM Ship standing by she was bombed and machine-gunned; ordered to abandon. 01.03.1942 all hands taken off by Dutch minesweeper; the Master to Australia on leave; officers repatriated to the UK in SS STRATH HALLION from Sydney. Ship salvaged by the Japanese, renamed KONAN MARU. 1943 renamed HONAN MARU; 23.03.1945 sunk by US submarine BLUEGILL.



4. Falklands casualties 1982

RFA SIR GALAHAD landing ship logistics
ON 309790 8 June 1942
War risk loss [Fitzroy Cove
Falkland Islands] five crew killed, 11 crew injured, 43
dead plus injured military passengers.
SIR GALAHAD was involved in Operation Corporate when
at 1315 she was bombed by Argentine aircraft, severe
fires and ship abandoned. 25.6.1982 was sunk as a war
grave, off the Falklands, at 52.12.39S 056.45.21W. Site
is designated as a Protected wreck under Protection of
Military Remains Act.

RFA SIR TRISTRAM landing ship logistics
ON 334639 8 June 1982
War risk loss [Fitzroy Cove
Falkland Islands], two crew killed, plus many dead and
injured military passengers. SIR TRISTRAM was involved
in Operation Corporate when at 1315 she was bombed
by Argentine aircraft, severe fires and ship temporarily
abandoned. She was brought back to the UK and rebuilt.

5. Marine casualties

In alphabetical order.

BIRCHOL tanker
ON 140325 29.11.1939
Marine risk — constructive total
loss
off Hebrides, Scotland [57.06N 007.13.45W]. Crew –
one rating injured.

BOARDALE tanker
ON 165489 30.04.1940
Marine risk — constructive total
loss
Aasan Fjord, off Narvik, Norway. Crew – no casualties
reported.

ENNERDALE (2) tanker
ON 305869 01.06.1970
Marine risk — constructive total
loss
230 degrees 1.25 miles off Mamelle Light, Seychelles)
[04.29.36S 55.31.32E]. This mobile reserve tanker was
outward bound from Port Victoria, struck a submerged
object – 230 degrees 1.25 miles off Mamelle Light,
Seychelles) [04.29.36S 55.31.32E] – later described as
an uncharted coral pinnacle. She was safely abandoned
with no casualties. Neither the vessel nor her cargo of
thousands of tons of fuel oil was salvaged. The loss



report indicated that Master and Navigator bore some responsibility. No casualties.

GREEN RANGER tanker
ON 168231 17.11.1962
Marine risk — constructive total loss — Mansley Cliff, Hartland Point, North Devon, England [50.58.42N 004.32.06W]. She was undertow by the tug CASWELL, on passage from Plymouth/Cardiff. During a force 10 NW gales the tow parted off Lundy Island and tanker was blow ashore. The wreck later broke in two. Crew – running crew taken off safely

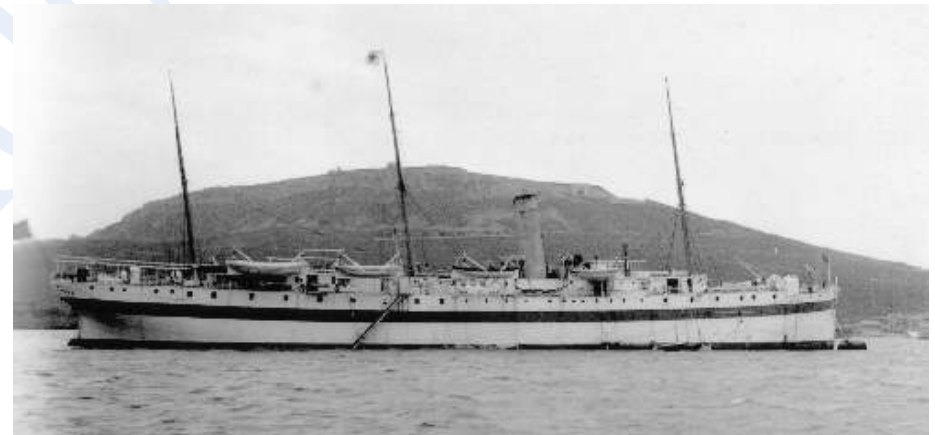


RFA GREEN RANGER grounded off Hartland Point [TARBS collection]

HEBE
ON 304252

stores freighter
30.11.1978
Marine risk (fire) — constructive total loss

Main Wharf Admiralty Dockyard, Gibraltar. At circa 2300 a fire broke out extensively damaging the accommodation and bridge. One rating died. In 1979 Statement of Defence stated vessel was declared a CTL and was up for disposal. Cost of loss estimated at £1,000,000. A crew member was later charged with arson and murder.



HM Hospital Ship (RFA) MAINE (1) [TARBS collection]

RFA MAINE (1)
ON 94303

hospital ship
17 June 1914
Marine risk – when on passage in fog when she grounded, owing to navigational error, [south coast of Isle of Mull, Firth of Lorne, west coast of



Scotland]. 20 June 1914 ship abandoned and there were no casualties reported. Admiralty salvage attempts abandoned, declared a total loss and on 06 July 1914 her hull was sold for scrap.

RFA THRUSH salvage vessel
ON na 11 April 1917
Marine loss – constructive total loss

On passage off Larne, County Antrim, Northern Ireland when she foundered in poor weather. Crew – eight lost, rest rescued by Breeches buoy.

Annex One: Additional World War Two casualties

In chronological order.

BERTA tanker 05.1940
Bombed in Dover Straits; one officer injured.

BROOMDALE tanker 16-18.05.1940
Bombed, 1 rating injured and transferred to HM Ship for medical treatment then to Hospital Ship ATLANTIS for passage to UK.

SCOTOL tanker 14.08.1940
Bombed at Portland; one officer injured.

DENBYDALE tanker 04-05.05.1941
Bombed at Liverpool; no injuries reported.

WAR PINDARI tanker 14.07.1941
Bombed at Skaalefjord off Solmunde; no injuries recorded.

MAINE (3) hospital ship 06.09.1941
Bombed at Alexandria; three ratings killed, one officer injured; 10 RFA and two RN ratings injured.

PETRELLA tanker 12.09.1941
Bombed in Mediterranean; chief engineer killed, one engineering rating injured.

PASS OF BALMAHA sunk by enemy action 17.10.1941
Two officers [ex RFA RELIANT and ex RFA SLAVOL] killed – had been transferred on CinCs instructions to complete complement. This ship was not serving as an RFA.

LADY HAWKINS sunk by enemy action 19.01.1942
One officer killed from RFA BISHOPDALE. This Ship was not serving as an RFA.



BISHOPDALE RFA tanker 04.08.1942
Struck a mine, no casualties, returned to port.

LACONIA torpedoed 12.09.1942
Chief Engineer from RFA MAINE killed; he was being repatriated to the UK. This ship was not serving as an RFA.

MENDOZA torpedoed 01.10.1942
24 ratings ex RFA GREEN RANGER, 29 ratings ex RFA EAGLESDALE and one officer from RFA ARNDALE being repatriated to UK; 9 ratings lost and 8 injured. This ship was not serving as an RFA.

ABASSO enemy action 30.10.1942
One rating ex RFA EASEDALE being repatriated to the UK was lost. This ship was not an RFA.

ENNERDALE RFA tanker /LSG 08.11.1942
Damaged by enemy action; no casualties

DEWDALE RFA oiler /LSG 20.11.1942
Bombed and damaged at Algiers; one rating injured.

EMPRESS OF CANADA torpedoed 12-14.03.1943
The former Captain of RFA ARNDALE being repatriated to the UK was lost. This ship was not serving as an RFA.

BELGOL RFA tanker 24.05.1943
Bombed; chief engineer injured, one rating and one gunner injured (burnt); letter of their Lordships appreciation of commendable services to the chief engineer.

DERWENTDALE RFA tanker /LSG 14.09.1943
Bombed in Mediterranean; engine room damaged, towed to Malta; one officer injured, three ratings injured

EAGLESDALE The Tower Hill War Memorial Registers record 8 dead on the ship RFA EAGLESDALE. The only ship recorded during World War Two to carry this name was the London registered RFA steam tanker. They were actually being repatriated to UK in the SS MENDOZA when this ship was lost on 1 October 1942.

ENNERDALE RFA tanker /LSG 13.07.1943
Air attack at Sicily, shell exploded on No 8 port wing tank lid; one officer killed.

WAR NIZAM RFA tanker 20.02.1944
Air raid near Southend-on-Sea; one seaman killed and one injured when returning from shore leave.

BROOMDALE RFA tanker 28.08.1944
Accidentally torpedoed by HMS SEVERN; holed in No 1 and No 2 port tanks; one Lascar rating injured.

BISHOPDALE RFA tanker 14.12.1944
San Pedro Bay, Layte Gulf, Philippines when dived bombed by Japanese aircraft that crashed into No 3 wing tank and exploded; she was just securing alongside to a US cruiser; two ratings lost, two ratings injured. One rating died on 16.12.1944 of the injuries sustained.



References

ADM267/129 (TNA, Kew)

Lloyd's Registers (various editions)

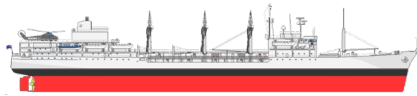
Historical RFA (<http://historicalrfa.org>)

The Navy List (HMSO, London) various editions



Navy News (Portsmouth) various editions

Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 – Designation of
Vessels and Controlled Sites Orders



This open source research note relates to the ships, organisations, equipments and events associated with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The analysis, opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in this are those of the compiler and do not necessarily represent the views of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary or any other organisation or enterprise. The author asserts ownership of this research note and asserts moral rights to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0. Appropriate acknowledgement must be made if extracts are reproduced or this research note is cited as a source of information.

© Copyright and Database right Thomas A Adams MBE 2018