



## About Colonsay

### S.S. ARANDORA STAR - MILITARY GUARD CASUALTIES

#### **Military guard casualties**

It is quite difficult to ascertain exactly how many men formed the military guard on board the SS *Arandora Star* when she left Liverpool . A document which can be found in the National Archives from F.O.i/c Greenock, dated 4.7.40 and marked as 'SECRET', reports five Officers and 195 'other ranks' making a total of 200 men. The report goes on to mention that when the Canadian destroyer HMCS *St Laurent* arrived at Greenock, of the military guard, 163 men were landed making a total of 37 lost. These figures seem to have been used in a number of publications and web pages.

Reports written by members of the SS *Arandora Star* crew and the Captain of the HMCS *St Laurent*, which can also to be found in the National Archives however, give a slightly different set of figures.

1. Chief Engineer R. C. Connell, in his statement of 3rd July 1940, mentions 254 guard troops although states "This is a mere approximation."
2. Chief Officer F. B. Brown, in his statement of 3rd July 1940, also reports there were 254 guard troops of whom 163 were saved giving a total lost of 91 men.
3. Captain H. G. de Wolf of the HMCS *St Laurent* in his report of 8 th July 1940 provides the following figures for military guard landed at Greenock - 5 Officers and 157 men giving a total of 162 survivors.

On balance, it seems that the military guard comprised of 254 men, of whom 163 were saved and 91 lost, presumed drowned. This appears to be to be the most accurate information available from reports written at the time.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, have a list entitled **Arandora Star Casualties - Non Crew** which provides details of 30 men [Army] and 1 [Royal Marine] ie 31. Interestingly, all of these are commemorated either on the Memorial the Missing at Brookwood in Surrey or on the Dunkirk Memorial. This list does not include the names of any of those whose bodies were recovered and buried and whom research has shown were aboard the SS *Arandora Star* and died on 2 July 1940. When asked to explain, the CWGC replied that they only record the place and circumstances of death when known - their primary role is to record the place and details of burial and commemoration of each casualty. When this total of 31 lost with no known grave is added to the number of those identified and buried, a figure of over 90 is reached - considerably more than stated by some sources.

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The two lists reproduced here, containing names and details of 94 men [93 Army and 1 Royal Marine] have been compiled through a number of different sources and are believed to represent the best available record of those who lost their lives.

\This list identifies all members of the Military Guard who are known to have been lost.

In total, only 23 bodies were recovered, identified and buried in a marked grave. The majority (i.e. 17) can be found in small graveyards around the north-west coast of Ireland . In Scotland , four bodies were recovered and buried in graveyards on the islands of Colonsay and Islay as well as on the mainland at Ardnamurchan and as far north as the island of Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides . Finally, the bodies of two men were returned to their places their places of birth (i.e. Manchester and Brixham) to be buried in a family grave. The proportion of those lost whom it was possible to identify is relatively high [24%] and this was presumably due to the presence of uniforms, documents and identity tags found on the casualties.

This list gives the known place of Burial or Commemoration for those who were lost from the Military Guard.

This map shows the graveyards in which the recovered were laid to rest.

### Individual Casualties

Through the Colonsay website, relatives of a number of these men have been in contact and their stories including photographs will be presented at a later date. The casualty lists show that those who perished came from a number of different regiments and a variety of military backgrounds and experiences - this is the story of just two of these men.

#### Major C. A. Bethell

The Officer in charge of the Military Guard was Major C. A. Bethell who had been commissioned into the Royal Scots Fusiliers on August 15<sup>th</sup> , 1914. He served with his regiment in France however after being wounded twice he was medically downgraded and spent the rest of the war with the 1st Garrison Battalion of the Royal Scots Guards in India.

After the Armistice he seems to have recovered his health and was allowed to continue his career with the Army. In 1921 he was transferred to the Tank Corps in the rank of Captain and eventually retired in 1936, remaining in the Regular Army Reserve of Officers.

In 1939 he was recalled to active service at the age of 47 and having been granted the rank of Brevet Major, was placed in command of troops whose duties would be to escort internees to the new camps in Canada - when the Arandora Star left Liverpool on her final journey, many of the men under his command had recently returned from the beaches at Dunkirk.

Brevet Major C A Bethell was one of over 90 men of the military guard who lost their lives on 2 July 1940. His death was announced in '**The Times**' and in a later story it was disclosed that *'he gave his lifebelt to one of the internees as the ship was sinking, walked on to the bridge and went down with the liner alongside the Captain'* One of the survivors later said *'It was the finest thing I have ever seen.'* Unlike the ship's master, Captain Moulton and 3 of his officers, Brevet Major Bethell was not granted an award for bravery but he did receive the Atlantic Star.

#### Private Peter Clarke

Major Bethell was the oldest of the soldiers to die and the youngest was just 17 - **Private Peter Clarke** of the 4th Bn. Devonshire Regiment, originally from Kentisbeare in Devon.

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The finding of Peter's body was reported in a local newspaper, **The Donegal Democrat**, on Saturday August 24 under the headline - **MORE BODIES WASHED ASHORE**. *The body of a British Soldier with equipment, was washed ashore at Keadue Strand, Co. Donegal. His identification card bore the name of Private P.T. Clarke, No. 5619912, 4th Devonshire Regiment. The body was interred in the old graveyard at Cruit, Kincasslagh*

NB Further stories will be added to this section so if you would like to contribute, please get in contact through the Colonsay website.