



TRANSPORT LOST

S.S. BALLARAT TORPEDOED

TROOPS AND CREW SAVED

***Southland* Story Recalled.**

On April 25, the second anniversary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli, the P. and O. branch liner *Ballarat*, which was acting as a transport for Australian troops, was torpedoed and sunk at the entrance to the English Channel. All the troops and all the members of the crew were saved.

The news of the sinking of the *Ballarat* was given in a cable message received yesterday by the Prime Minister from the High Commissioner.

The *Ballarat* had been engaged in transport work since about February, 1915, when she made her last voyage to Australia as a merchant vessel. With the other P. and O. branch liners using the Cape of Good Hope route, she was, before the war, largely used for the carriage of immigrants to Australia and in her time brought many thousands of them here. She had fine roomy decks and plenty of accommodation below, and this made her eminently fitted for the carriage of troops; she had a capacity of about 2,500 men.

The *Ballarat* is the second vessel to have been torpedoed with Australian troops on board - a remarkable fact, seeing that about a quarter of a million Australians have since the war began been carried overseas, and moved up and down the world, from Egypt to Gallipoli and back, to France and many other places.

The *Southland*

The first was the transport, *Southland*, which was torpedoed just off the island of Mudros on September 8, 1915.

The story of the *Southland* is remarkable for the coolness, presence of mind, and heroism displayed by the Australian soldiers on board, and no doubt when the details of the loss of the *Ballarat* comes to hand it will be found that the same qualities were shown there. The *Southland* was about 30 miles off the harbour of Mudros, when a submarine fired two torpedoes at her. One missed her, but the other found its mark. On board the *Southland* was a full complement of Australian troops. Her passengers included Brigadier General J. G. Legge who has just returned to Australia, and Brigadier-General Linton who was in command of the 6th Brigade. After the vessel had been struck, the soldiers singing "Australia Will be There," fell into line on deck as if on parade. General Legge set them a remarkable example of coolness. He found that there was something wrong with his spurs, and began very coolly and deliberately to adjust them, an operation which he carried out with much deliberation. The torpedoing caused a panic amongst the stokers, who feared that the ship was sinking. They refused to stay below, and volunteers to take their places were called for amongst the soldiers. There was a ready response and the amateur stokers kept the vessel going till she got into Mudros Harbour. A number of Australians were afterwards granted distinctions for their bravery on this occasion. The *Southland* was beached in Mudros Harbour and she remained a conspicuous object until Gallipoli was evacuated.

Most of those on board the *Southland* had left the vessel before she reached the harbour. She was less fortunate than the *Ballarat* in one respect for the attack was attended with the loss of several lives. One of those who died was Brigadier-General Linton, who was for some time in the water and died afterwards as a result of the immersion. An interesting incident that showed the ready resource of the Australian soldier occurred soon after the *Southland* was struck. She had some stable fittings on board, and a British Officer, struck by the idea that these would make good material for rafts went to hunt up the carpenter to have them pulled down. But an Australian, who

had the same idea, did not wait for the carpenter; he seized an axe and went to work. The materials were used for making rafts.

In the 18 months or more which have passed since the *Southland* was torpedoed one or two vessels which had been used to transport Australian troops have been lost for instance, the White Star liner *Afric*, but there were no troops on board at the time.

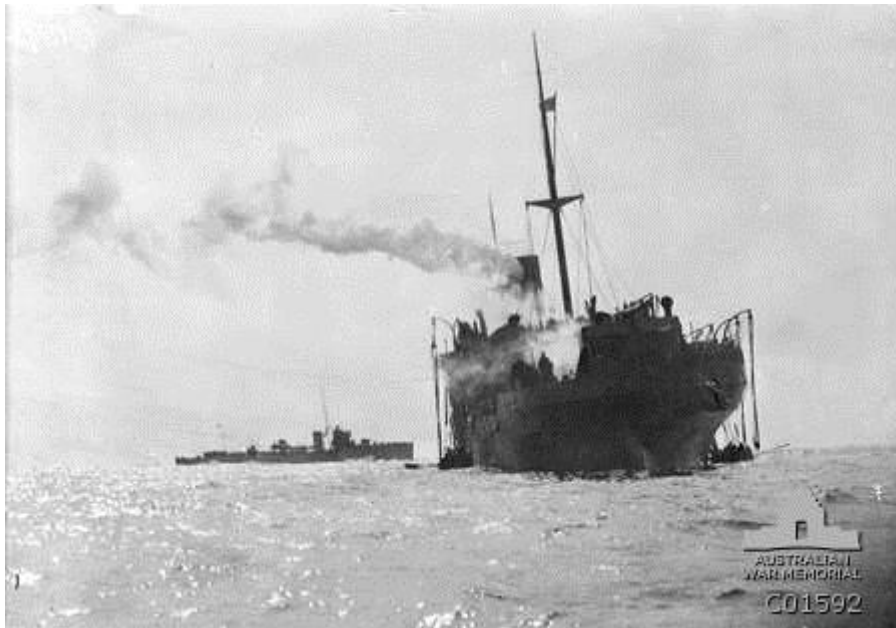
The Torpedoed Steamer.

With the exception of her sister ship the *Benalla*, built in 1913, the *Ballarat* was the latest of the P. and O. Company's branch line fleet. She was not six years old, having been launched at the end of 1911, and was built by Messrs Caird and Company, of Greenock. Her tonnage was 11,120 tons, and her dimensions as follow :- Length, 500ft, beam, 62ft, depth 41ft. She had twin screws giving a speed of 14½ knots, had three decks, and was equipped with refrigerating machinery. Her cargo capacity was very large, in addition to which she was a roomy and comfortable ship. As a troopship she could carry about 2,500 men.

Ballarat's Cargo

Like other vessels engaged in transport work, the *Ballarat* was also used to carry cargo from Australia to Europe. She was the first vessel to load fruit at Hobart (Tas) for England this season and when she left there she had on board 18,000 cases of Tasmanian apples, and a quantity of jam. Most of the fruit was insured for 13/ a case. The jam was for the Government, at whose risk it was carried.

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – Saturday 28 April, 1917)



The transport HMAT *Ballarat* after being torpedoed by a German submarine off the southern English coast. In the background a British destroyer is standing by to take the troops. (AWM Collection).