

QUORNA – Kangaroo Island

The steel-hulled screw steamer *Quorna* (formerly *Warrener*) was built in 1912 by Fullerton & Co at Paisley, Scotland and registered in Port Adelaide by George Wills & Co. It measured 175.5 feet (53.5m) length, 24.0 feet (7.3m) breadth, 11.6 feet (3.5m) depth and was 606 gross tons.

The cargo vessel arrived in Port Adelaide in November 1912, and within 12 months was sold to the Adelaide Steamship Company, who renamed it *Quorna* and added accommodation space.

For more than 30 years the steamer carried passengers and cargo around the South Australian coast. It was a regular visitor to Spencer Gulf ports.

The *Quorna* was laid up in Port Adelaide in 1947. On 3 October 1950 the steamer was moved to the North Parade Wharf, where everything of value was removed, prior to the vessel being presented to the RAAF for bombing practice.



Quorna at Kingscote
Photo: *The Advertiser*

On 29 October 1950 the stripped hulk (with "Good-bye sweetheart" chalked on one side) left Port Adelaide under tow of the tug *Foremost*. The next morning it anchored 10 miles east of Cape Hart, Kangaroo Island - the target of "Operation Lame Duck", a highly organised RAAF training exercise involving 14 planes and forty-two 500 pound bombs, as well as rockets and machine gun ammunition. Three Lincoln bombers, each carrying 14 bombs, flew directly from Amberley in Queensland – a 9 hour non-stop return flight. Eight Mustangs and three Beaufighters, which were to follow the bombings with rockets and machine gun fire, arrived in South Australia (at Mallala) from New South Wales, the day before. It was anticipated that, with such a small target, any direct hits on the *Quorna* would call for extremely accurate bombing. In what was undoubtedly an anticlimax to the exercise, the steamer was hit on the bombers' second run and sank within six minutes – before the short-range planes had even left Mallala!

RAAF Gives Quick End To Quorna

Accurate bombing by Lincoln heavy bombers sank the old coastal steamer Quorna within a few minutes near Kangaroo Island yesterday morning.

The Quorna went to the bottom before Beaufighters and Mustangs based at Mallalla RAAF aerodromes could make their final runs. ...

The heavier planes took off at 3 a.m. from Amberley, Queensland ... They reached Adelaide just before 8 a.m. and headed for the target area where a RAAF Dakota with observers and pressmen was waiting.

Far below, the Quorna rode gentle swells, clearly visible as the three Lincolns began "dummy runs" above her position to gauge wind velocity. Because of cloud, they flew at 5,000 ft. instead of the planned 15,000 ft.

The first salvoes of four 500-lb bombs from each of the three heavy bombers missed the target, falling close enough astern to throw spray over the Quorna and rock her with their wash.

But with corrections to their bombsight from the initial bombing run, the crew of the first Lincoln made no mistake with its next salvo.

When the huge plumes of spray cleared, only the stern of the Quorna remained.

From the pole at her stern, the house flag of the Adelaide Steamship Co. still waved as the ship sank.

A Lincoln dived in a few minutes later to photograph the wreckage, but the Quorna slipped under, leaving hardly a ripple as she sank.

For pilots ... waiting their turn to "have a go" at the target, the sudden sinking was an anticlimax to days of preparation and careful briefing ...

With the sudden disappearance of the Quorna, the Beaufighters and Mustangs found no target for their rockets and bombs, and the Lincolns, ... jettisoned their remaining high explosives.

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