

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

QUORNA

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.

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 aircraft and forty two 500 pound bombs, as well as rockets and machine gun ammunition.



Quorna at Kingscote, c1947. Photo: *The Advertiser*

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!

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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 Mallala RAAF aerodrome could make their runs.

The Quorna was the target in "Operation Lame Duck" organised by the RAAF to give its aircrews and ground staffs practice in co-ordinated operations involving short-range striking forces and long-range heavy bombers.

The old coastal steamer was towed to an anchorage south of Kangaroo Island on Sunday by the tug Foremost, which stood by while the bombing runs were made.

The heavier planes took off at 1 a.m. from Amberley, Queensland, each carrying 14 500-lb. bombs. They reached Adelaide just before 3 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 salvos 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.

Plumes Of Spray

But with corrections to their bombsight from the initial bombing run, the crew of the first Lincoln made no mistake with its second 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 of the three Beaufighters and eight Mus-

For pilots of the three Beaufighters and eight Mustangs waiting their turn to "have a go" at the target, the sudden sinking was an anticlimax to days of preparation and careful briefing at Mallala to ensure that the airstrike would run smoothly as a co-ordinated operation.

In the briefing room at Mallala yesterday morning, all pilots of the Mustangs and Beaufighters were given last minute instructions on their role in the event of the Quorna defying the heavy bombing of the aircraft from Amberley.

Target Disappears

With the sudden disappearance of the Quorna, the Beaufighters and Mustangs found no target for their rockets and bombs, and the Lincolns, leaving for their non-stop return flight to Amberley, jettisoned their remaining high explosive bombs.

The officer-in-charge of the operation and Commanding Officer of No. 34 Squadron (Wg-Cmdr. I. L. Campbell) gave aircrews a special warning to avoid the tug Foremost and to adhere to a designated course as sidled protection to residents or holiday makers on Kangaroo Island, which was clearly visible from the target area.

Wg-Cmdr. Campbell flew in the observation Dakota throughout the operation, another observer being Wg-Cmdr. R. Burrage, Senior Air Staff Officer from the RAAF Southern Command.

The Advertiser, 31 October 1950