

80 YEARS ON

Remembering the crew and passengers
of the

SS Almeda Star

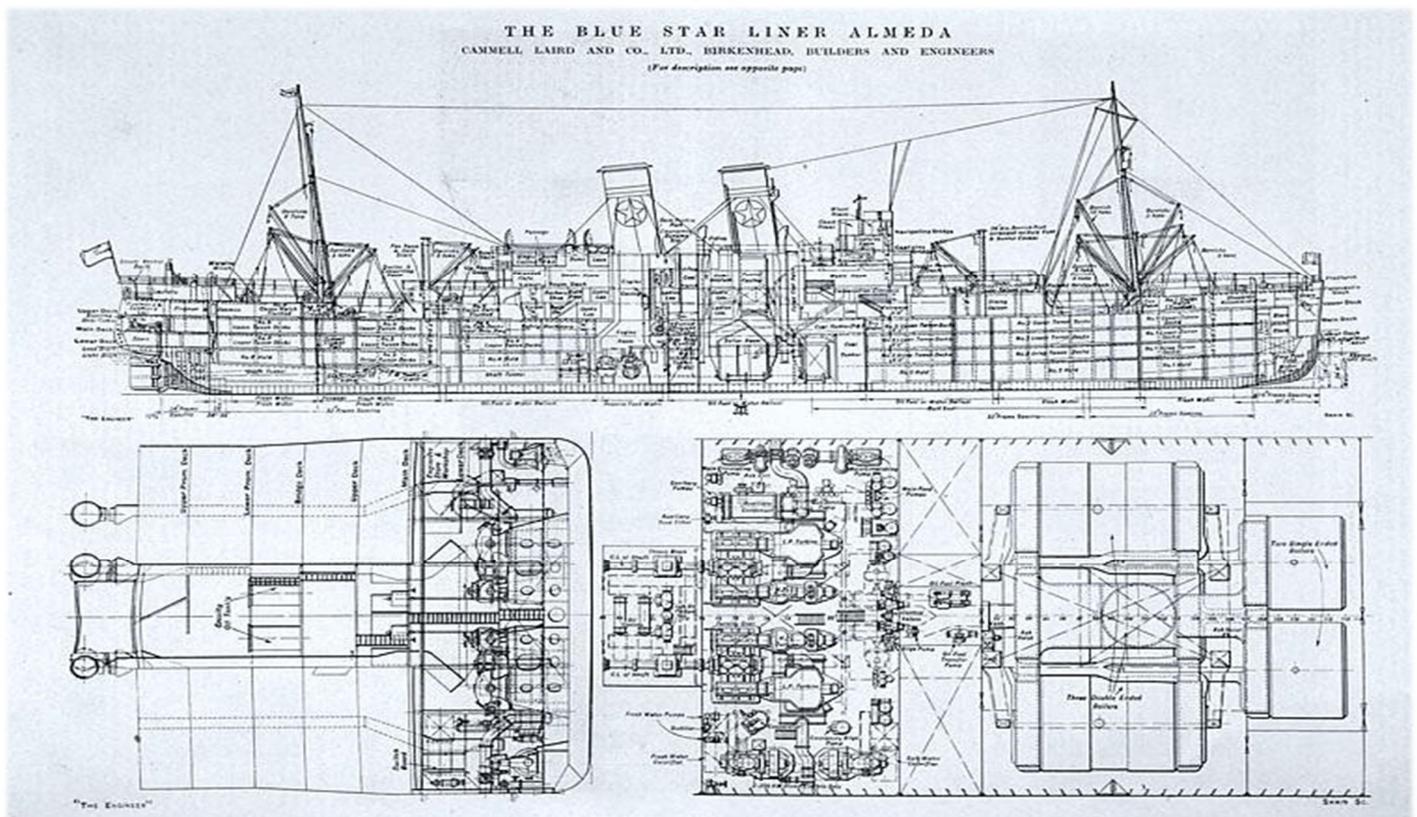


Sunk in the North Atlantic

Friday 17 January 1941



The SS Almeda Star, a 16-knot vessel of nearly 15,000 tons, was built in 1926 by Cammell Laird & Company Ltd and normally used for the luxury passenger and refrigerated cargo service between the United Kingdom and South America with calls at Boulogne, Madeira, Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo and Buenos Aires.



On 15 January 1941 she sailed unescorted from Liverpool commanded by Captain H G Howard, Commodore of the Blue Star Line, with a crew of 166 officers and men and 194 passengers bound for Trinidad.

At 0745 hours on 17 January 1941, German submarine U-96 fired one G7e torpedo at the SS Almeda Star, bringing her to a stop after a hit amidships. Minutes later she transmitted her one and only distress signal. As the ship failed to sink after being hit in the stern and amidships by two further torpedoes at 0805 and 0907 hours, the U-boat surfaced to shell the ship.

The German crew observed four lifeboats and still saw people on deck before opening fire from 0932 to 0948 hours, hitting with about 15 of 28 incendiary shells. Only small fires were started which soon went out so U-96's Commander, Kptlt. Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock, ordered yet another torpedo to be fired at 0955 hours.

This final torpedo hit the forepart of the SS Almeda Star and caused her to sink by the bow within three minutes in the rough seas. Her last known position was 58°16'N 13°40'W, which places her approximately 35 miles north of Rockall in the Atlantic Ocean.



Seven destroyers were ordered to search the area, but they found no survivors.

The master, 136 crew, 29 gunners and 194 passengers were lost.

Among the passengers were 21 officers and 121 ratings of the Fleet Air Arm who were transiting to HMS Goshawk, the Royal Naval Air Station at Piarco.

Seven other passengers were family members of the naval aircrew, the youngest being only one year old.

The average age of the Fleet Air Arm men who lost their lives that day was just 22 years and this tragic event remains the single highest number of deaths suffered in naval aviation history to date.

The Merchant Navy crew who died are remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial, London and the Fleet Air Arm personnel who perished are commemorated on the Lee-on-Solent Memorial, Hampshire.



Lieutenant (A)
Gordon Aylott
749 NAS

**Three of the Fleet Air Arm aircrew
who were killed on 17 January 1941**



Lieutenant (A)
Richard Wrightson
750 NAS

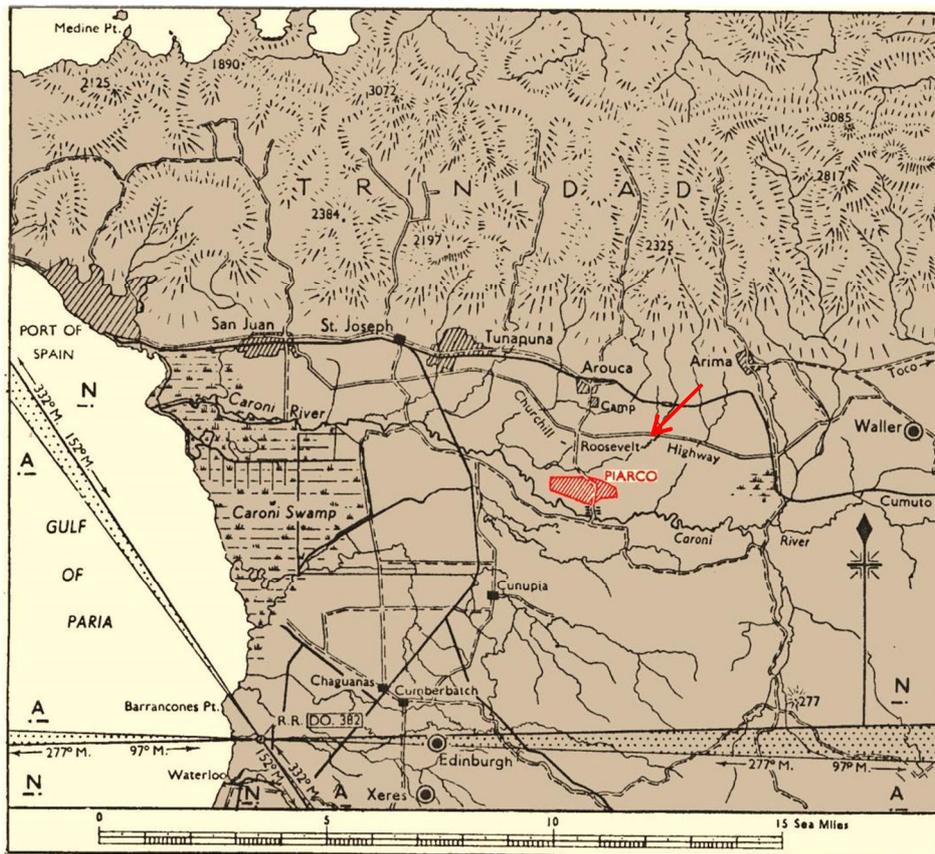


Lieutenant (A)
Gerald Alderson
750 NAS



Trinidad and Tobago played an important role in the Allied war effort during WWII. HMS Goshawk was commissioned on 6 November 1940. It was the second largest base at Piarco on the island of Trinidad and home to the Fleet Air Arm's Observer & Air Gunner School.

The station operated a combination of more than two hundred Royal Navy single and twin-engined aircraft, most which were operational British carrier aircraft. The Fleet Air Arm naval squadrons forming part of No.1 Observer School based at Piarco were 749, 750, 752, and 793 the Air Towed Target Unit. The planes were dual role and used to spot U-boats as part of their training missions.



Also located at Piarco was the Empire Air Training School, where locals and overseas young men were taught to fly for the Royal Air Force, and the Military Airlift Command. Alongside the two training establishments, the airlines KLM, Pan Am and British West Indies Airlines operated with occasional long-range Royal Air Force Training flights.

Even with its enormous traffic congestion, Piarco was also an overflow base for Waller Field, a United States air base located in north east of the island, as well as for aircraft transiting Trinidad for the South Atlantic route. There was also a reserve aircraft facility based at the airfield.