

Gnr. W.G.Rose – Royal Artillery

William George Rose was born in 1911, the son of Thomas and Lydia Rose of 24 Bailey Road, Westcott, and became a gardener for Sir George Touche at Broomfield Park. When Sir George died in 1935 he left William £50 in his will. In 1936 William married Florence Ann Johnson and they lived in Chapel Lane. The couple later moved to a tied cottage in Sandy Lane, Cheam when William obtained a post there as a gardener. William and Florence had two children: Norma Ann, born in Westcott in 1938, and Roderick, born in Alton, where William was serving, in late 1940.



William was called up in 1940 and joined the Maritime Royal Artillery which had been created when it was realised that merchant ships needed to be armed to protect them from attack from enemy surface ships and aircraft. William served in 7th/4th Maritime Regiment RA which, by late 1942, was one of six maritime regiments with 13,600 sea-going personnel who were all volunteers.

In June 1942 William was serving as a gunner on *SS Port Hunter*, 8,437 tons, a cargo ship owned by Port Line Ltd., which left Liverpool bound for New Zealand as part of convoy OS.33, carrying general cargo including ammunition and depth charges. By 11th July, the convoy of 41 ships was sailing south off the west coast of Africa. At 0900 hours that morning *Port Hunter* was ordered to leave the convoy to proceed independently to refuel at Durban en route to Auckland. The convoy had been shadowed by a pack of U-boats comprising U-582, U-116 and U-201. Shortly after leaving the convoy at 01.47 hours on 12th July, *Port Hunter* was torpedoed by U-582 commanded by Capt. Werner Schulte in a position approximately 370 miles west-south-west of Madeira. The torpedo struck the No.2 hatch port side causing the ammunition and depth charges to blow up. The ship listed to port and sank within two minutes leaving burning fuel oil and debris on the surface

Seventy-one crew members, all fifteen gunners and all of the five passengers, including two women, were lost. There were just three

survivors, all crew members who had been sleeping in deck cabins and were blown into the water; they were found clinging to debris when they were rescued early the next morning by HMS *Rother*.

William Rose is remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial which bears the names of 7,251 sailors of the First World War and 15,933 of the Second World War who have no known grave.

Five more ships in the Convoy were sunk by the U-boats over the next three days; the remaining 36 ships all reached their destinations. Three months later U-582 was patrolling south-west of Iceland when it was attacked and sunk by depth charges dropped from a US Catalina aircraft; there were no survivors. During the course of the war the Port Line lost 13 of its fleet of 28 ships as a result of enemy action; of these incidents the greatest loss of life resulted from sinking of the *Port Hunter*.