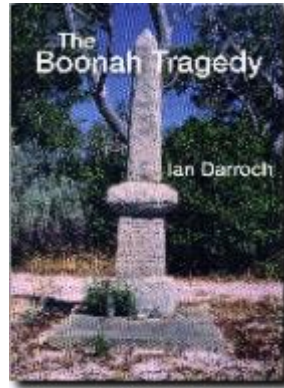


THE BOONAH TRAGEDY WWI



EAST ROCKINGHAM CEMETERY



MILITARY CEMETERY KARRAKATTA

A little known episode of World War One when the troopship "BOONAH" arrived back in Fremantle in 1918 bearing soldiers infected with the "Spanish Flu" (Pneumonic Influenza) then rampant in South Africa where the ship had docked. A number of the soldiers, quarantined at Woodman Point, and the nurses attending them, died. Sir Hal Colebatch, as State Minister for Health, features, prominently in the account.

The HMAS BOONAH, was carrying approximately 1000 soldiers and crew, and was the last troopship to carry diggers intended for the battlefields of the Western Front. After leaving Fremantle, it reached Durban in South Africa two days after the Armistice was signed, and it was here that the soldiers would have the disease passed on to them by way of local labour who were coal bunkering the ship before the vessel's return voyage to Fremantle. It has been called the BOONAH Tragedy, and after the crisis in Fremantle, it eventually sailed for the Eastern States, but prior to that, it became a major concern to all the authorities, including the WA government and the Public Health Department, mainly because of quarantine regulations caused by the 'Spanish Flu' pandemic, and they just couldn't cope with this health crisis and didn't have the facilities in WA to cater for such an emergency. To add to this, the contingent of WA soldiers onboard the BOONAH were virtually on the verge of revolting, because they were not allowed to disembark in their home port, because of the health crisis unfolding onboard the vessel.



At the quarantine station Woodman Point there was not enough food, accommodation or medical staff, and this facility was endeavouring to house 600 soldiers off the BOONAH, and in sheer desperation the authorities called for volunteers from a group of military nurses onboard the WYREEMA, another transport in Gage Roads, to help their colleagues. All the nurses onboard the WYREEMA volunteered to help, but the authorities selected only twenty. Of these volunteer nurses from the WYREEMA, four would eventually succumb to the 'Spanish Flu' and die.(3 military and 1 civilian nurse) and also 26 soldiers from the BOONAH.



HMAT WYREEMA



The F.H.T. launch "Reliance", used to bring the soldiers ashore at Woodman Point Quarantine Station



Harry Maxwell George 62495 - Died 14.12.1918



C.V Morrison 66845 J Haggerty 62626 W.M. Laffan 68689 H.S.Knott 3202



B.D. MeAdam 62476 J.L. Fuge 20126 J.K Williams 66548 J.Tutton 66538



M.J. Green 72748 A.H. Sayers 3215



Soldiers buried at Woodman Point and later interred to the Military Cemetery at Karrakatta in 1958.



N.A. Austin 3784 - J. Clatworthy 62782 - G.D. Moss 3781 - T. Corcoran 68777

C.W. Lancaster 68827 - T.S. Emerson 5775 - C.W. Torney 68874 -

A.G. Wilson 3221 - T.H. Hempzell 62818 - R.J. Adams 3410 - C.L. Dyer 62544

C.G.T. Nilsson 60736 - A. Vernon 65543 - G. Blair 74903 - H.H. Phillips 62591

After eight days in Fremantle, the BOONAH would break quarantine regulations, because of fresh cases of the flu being discovered each day on the ship, and sail for South Australia via Albany. On arrival in SA, more soldiers would be sent to the Torrens Island quarantine station.

The BOONAH would remain in Commonwealth hands until 1925, when she was sold back to a German steamship company. She underwent a number of name changes until the outbreak of the Second World War, and she was then taken over by the German Kriegsmarine.

In 1940 she was torpedoed and sunk by the British submarine H.M.S. NARWHAL off the coast of Norway, thus ending a chequered career which lasted 30 years.



Persons wishing to purchase a copy of the book *The Boonah Tragedy* by Ian Darroch can do so by contacting Ian on 9528 5899 or by e-mail: ianfaye@iprimus.com.au

Photography by *Earle Seubert*