

HMHS *Llandoverly Castle*, built in 1914 in Glasgow as RMS *Llandoverly Castle* for the Union Castle Line, was one of five Canadian hospital ships that served in the First World War. On a voyage from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Liverpool, England, the ship was torpedoed off southern Ireland on 27 June 1918. The sinking was the deadliest Canadian naval disaster of the war. Tragically, 234 doctors, nurses, members of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, soldiers and seamen died in the sinking and subsequent machine-gunning of lifeboats. Only 24 people, the occupants on a single life-raft, survived. The incident became infamous internationally as one of the war's worst atrocities. After the war, the case of *Llandoverly Castle* was one of six British cases presented at the [Leipzig trials](#). Under the command of Lt.-Col. Thomas Howard MacDonald of Nova Scotia, HMHS *Llandoverly Castle* was torpedoed and sunk by the German [submarine SM U-86](#) on 27 June 1918.^[3] Firing at a hospital ship was against international law and standing orders of the Imperial German Navy. The captain of *U-86*, [Helmut Brümmer-Patzig](#), sought to destroy the evidence of torpedoing the ship. When the crew took to the lifeboats, *U-86* surfaced, ran down all but one of the lifeboats and machine-gunned many of the survivors.

Only 24 people in one surviving lifeboat survived.

The Age (Melbourne) 3-7-1918

Act of Wanton Deliberation.

The Official Press Bureau has issued the following statement: — 'Germany's awful debt to the world continues to grow.

Another hospital ship has been torpedoed. This time it happened 120 miles from the nearest land. Her people were turned adrift in boats, to sink or swim, and, thought, as it happened, she was a Canadian hospital ship returning from Halifax with no wounded aboard, the tale of crime reveals wanton deliberation on the part of the submarine commander, almost suggesting that he hoped to find her full of injured, helpless men.

'The *Llandoverly Castle* was chartered by the.- Canadian Government to convey sick and wounded from England to Halifax. There were 80 members of the Army Medical Corps on board, including seven officers. The *Llandoverly Castle* was steaming at fourteen knots, showing the usual navigation and regulation' hospital ship lights. Under an overcast sky she was plainly visible. She was unmistakable for anything but what, she was a ship immune, by every law of war and peace, from attack or molestation.

No one on board saw - the wake of the torpedo. The first intimation of the presence of the submarine was a jar and the roar of the explosion from aft. Then the lights, went out, and afterwards, there was a dim light from an emergency dynamo. The ship foundered in the darkness. When the explosion occurred the engines were immediately rung to stop, and then to go full speed astern, but from the engine room there came no answer. The ship's rehearsed routine, however, held good, for with the Germans one must be prepared for every such emergency.

All on Board Leave the Ship.

Along the darkness of the decks the crew groped to the boat stations, and stood by for orders to leave. The captain mega phoned from the bridge to hold on till way was off the ship. The carpenter aft examined the damage. The Marconi operator in his cabin was vainly striving to transmit the ship's position, but the key did not gain response.. The spark had gone.

The carpenter reported that No. 4 hold aft had been blown in, and that the vessel could not remain afloat. The order was given to lower the boats on both sides and abandon the ship. The officer commanding the Canadian Army Medical Corps reported that all his people got away. This is important, inasmuch as only the captain's boat has been picked up. Save for any of the ship's company or engine room crew who were killed by the torpedo explosion, it is clear that everyone got away.

The captain went to his cabin, for an electric torch and returned to the deck. He found that the boat which had been held back for those who were the last to leave the ship had gone. The second officer lowered a lifeboat, and those who were still on board entered it by a lifeline, which consisted of a 2-inch rope, dangling alongside 60 feet of the ship's side. They pushed off and got clear just in time to avoid being sucked under as the *Llandoverly Castle*'s stern went down, leaving the long bows erect. One boiler seemed to blow up as the water reached it. The funnel leaned aside as she slowly listed to starboard, tore loose and fell away. Then, stern first, the liner slid under and disappeared. She sank in not more than ten minutes from the time of the explosion of the torpedo.

The Submarine Appears.

Huge quantities of wreckage were floating on the quiet sea, together with the rafts and gratings on which the hawsers had been coiled. Among them men were floundering and shouting. One man was walking about on a grating. The captain's boat picked up eleven men from the wreckage, and then proceeded towards a voice in the dark, calling for help from the water. They heard simultaneously two others calling from elsewhere. It was then that there appeared from the night, crawling through the floating debris, the long, black shape of the submarine: The conning tower opened, and figures were vaguely seen along the decks. The submarine officer hailed the boat, in English, to come alongside. The boat was pulling to pick up a drowning man, and the second officer shouted, 'We are picking up a man in the water. 'Come alongside repeated the brusque voice from the submarine. The boat held on its way, and forth with two revolver shots were fired at or over it. 'Come alongside, or I will shoot my big gun,' shouted the commander. The boat pulled to the submarine, and the captain, under orders, went aboard. The commander asked sharply, What ship I was that, it was, the hospital ship Llandoverly Castle, replied the captain.

The submarine commander did not appear surprised, but said, "But you were carrying eight American flying officers." We were not, replied the captain. We had seven Canadian medical officers on board and the ship was chartered by the Canadian Government to carry sick and wounded Canadians from England to Canada.

Replying to the commander's reiterated statement that 'You have been carrying American flyers,' the captain said, 'I have been running for six months to Canada with wounded, and I give my word of honour that I only carried patients, medical men, sisters, and the crew. The commander then demanded if any Canadian medical man was in the boat, and he ordered one of them on board the submarine.

Did Submarine' Fire at the Boats?

'The captain asked, 'Where are our other boats? The commander did not answer. He was watching the Canadian medical man, who was being roughly hauled on board, and thrust along the deck.

This was being done so violently, with the plain intention of injuring him, that the Canadian medical officer, Major Lyon, had a small bone of his foot broken. Another German officer in the conning tower motioned over his shoulder with his field glasses in a northerly direction. Major Lyon was interrogated, and, after protesting his character as a medical man, was ordered back to the boat. The captain also was allowed to go, and the boat pulled away. The submarine began, to circle round the wreckage, narrowly shaving the boat. She stopped it again, and took the second and fourth officers. They were questioned, this time the commander inventing a new excuse. He stated, There was a big explosion aft, and the vessel sank, therefore she must have been carrying munitions.'

'The second officer explained that what the Germans considered to be the explosion of the boiler was the falling of the funnel. They then were allowed to return to the boat. The submarine again circled the wreckage, and apparently stopped and began firing at an unseen target. She fired twelve shells. The unseen target may have been the other boats, which, if they be picked up, can furnish evidence on this point. The captain meanwhile, realising, the hopelessness of securing assistance from the north, as no wireless message had been sent out, decided to make for the Irish coast and send help to the others.

After sailing and pulling for 70 miles, the boat was picked up by the destroyer Lysander, which wirelessly for a search to be made for the other survivors. The destroyer took the occupants of the Captain's boat to Queenstown.'



H.M. Hospital Ship, Llandoverly Castle.

SURVIVORS OF THE H.M.H.S. LLANDOVERY CASTLE

*AS PUBLISHED BY THE 'LONDON TIMES' 1918

THE SURVIVING MERCHANT MARINES

1. R.A. Sylvester, Captain
2. L. Champman, 2nd Officer
3. D.C. Barton, 4th Officer
4. H.M. Evans, Purser
5. Albert Victor, Record, Lamp Trimmer
6. ____, Davis, Painter, Lamp Trimmer
7. Walter Scott, Able Seaman
8. ____, Hunt, Able Seaman
9. ____, Murphy, Able Seaman
10. ____, Schroeder, Able Seaman
11. ____, Goodridge, Able Seaman
12. ____, Ward, Able Seaman
13. ____, Tredgian, Fireman
14. ____, McVey, Fireman
15. ____, Mounsey, Trimer
16. ____, Hunter, Assistant Steward
17. ____, Abraham, Ward Steward

THE SURVIVING CANADIAN ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

1. T. Lyon, Major
2. A. Knight, Sergt.
3. S.A., Taylor, Orderly
4. G.R., Hickman, Orderly
5. W.R., Pilot, Orderly
6. F.W., Cooper, Orderly
7. Name Unknown—Ward Attendant

**In the research for survivors—the names of: Heather, Trimmer and Savage, Deck Steward have been found in one newspaper, but otherwise not confirmed as survivors.

The "Llandoverly Castle" Lifeboat Murders.



How the Huns Massacred nearly 200 of our British Seamen, Comrades, Red Cross Nurses, and Staff.

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A 1918 Canadian propaganda poster used the sinking of the Llandoverly Castle as a focal point for selling Victory Bonds



An Anti German cartoon by Louis Raemaekers