

## Maurice Avery Williams – (AHS Centaur)

### Summary of military service:

Q48389 (Militia) – QX40578 (AIF) Maurice Avery Williams  
Enlisted – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1941, age 41 years 5 month  
Occupation – Ambulance Bearer  
(20+ years' experience, Innisfail Q.A.T.B.)  
17.4.41, posted, 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, Brisbane  
1.8.41, posted, 1<sup>st</sup> Camp Hospital, Enoggera  
22.10.41, posted, NCMT School, Brisbane  
13.10.41, promoted Acting Corporal  
26.11.41, promoted Lance Sergeant  
29.7.42, posted 2<sup>nd</sup> Camp Hospital, Chermside  
13.8.42, reverted to Corporal  
19.9.42, Promoted Lance Sergeant  
(Employed as RAP Sergeant, 2<sup>nd</sup> Camp Hospital, Chermside)  
30.9.42, Army number change to QX40578 (upon enlistment into the AIF)  
19.3.43, posted 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Hospital Ship, Centaur  
27.3.43, reverted to Corporal (for posting to 3 AHS Centaur)  
14.5.43, missing Believed Drowned, result of Enemy Action  
17.8.43, now reported Drowned by Enemy Action



Photo of Maurice taken upon his enlistment into the AIF after being discharged from the Militia.



Photo of the Williams Family taken in Turner Street, Windsor in 1942.  
 L to R – ARTHUR Williams (son), Cpl MAURICE Williams, Mrs EDNA Williams (wife).

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

Funds may be Quickly, Safely and Economically Transferred by **MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM.**

Sch. C3873 7/1942

Office of Origin. No. of Words. Time of Lodgment.

**WARWICK** 48/1 *228* 10P

**TELEGRAM**

PERSONAL---MRS EDNA MAY WILLIAMS  
 TURNER STREET WINDSOR BRISBANE

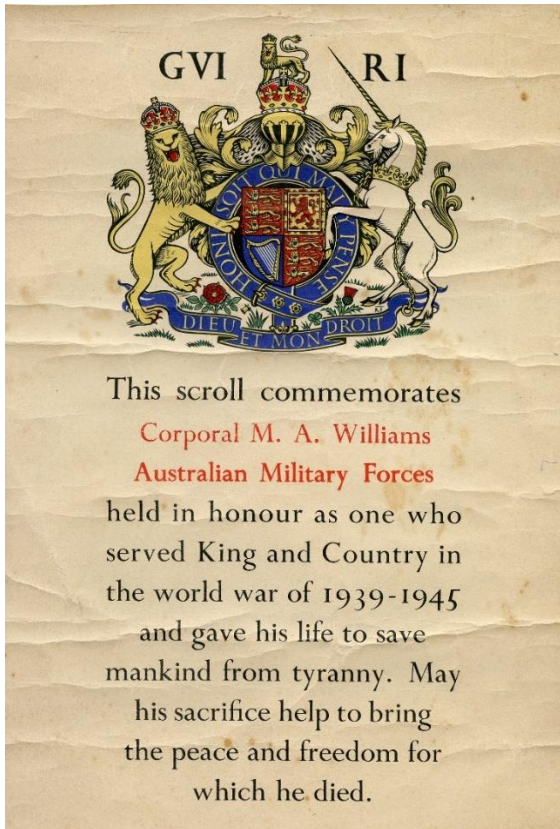
IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET THAT I HAVE TO INFORM YOU THAT QX40578  
 MAURICE AVERY WILLIAMS IS REPORTED MISSING BELIEVED DROWNED  
 AND DESIRE TO CONVEY TO YOU THE PROFOUND SYMPATHY OF THE  
 MINISTER FOR THE ARMY

MINISTER FOR THE ARMY

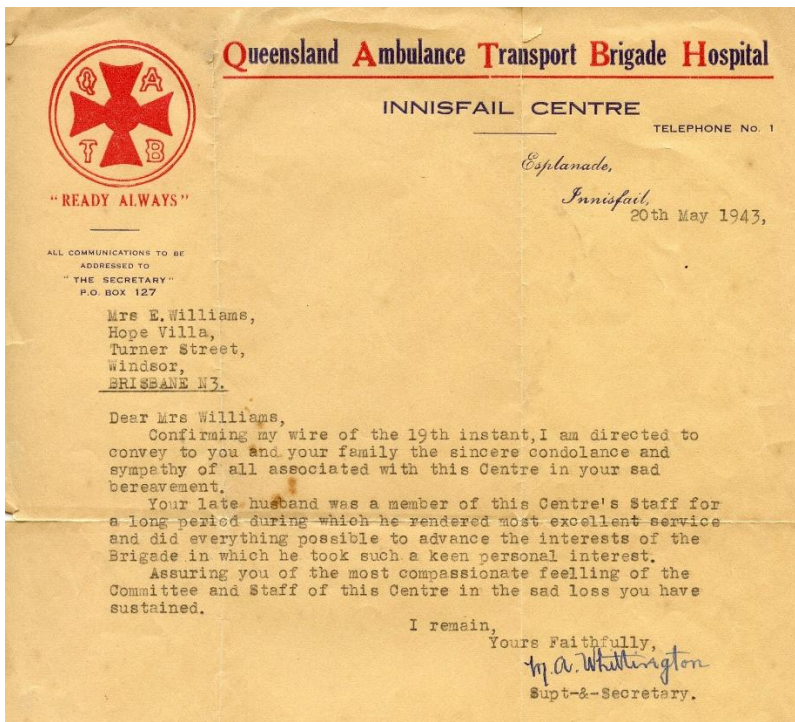
The date stamp indicates the date of reception and lodgment also, unless an earlier date is shown after the time of lodgment.

Office Date Stamp.  
 CHIEF TELEGRAPH OFFICE  
 17 MAY 43  
 BRISBANE

Telegram sent to Mrs Edna Williams on the 17 May 1943 informing her that Maurice is missing believed drowned. (Three days after the sinking of the AHS Centaur. Note: Telegram originates from Warwick, Queensland.)



Commemorative scroll issued to the family by King George VI honouring the Service of Cpl Maurice A Williams.



Letter of condolence and sympathy dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1943, from the Innisfail branch of the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade. Maurice had worked here for over 20 years prior to joining the Army.

QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE UNION OF EMPLOYEES

C/o Q.A.T.B., Ann Street  
BRISBANE

GENERAL SECRETARY:  
P. S. JONES, Esq.  
PHONE B4495

30th. June 1943.

To/  
Mrs. M.A. Williams.  
Hope Villa.  
Turner Street.  
Windsor.

Dear Mrs. Williams,

The Executive Committee and members of the abovementioned Union desire to convey to you their deepest sympathy in the sad and sudden loss of your dear husband.

We in the Service who knew your late husband so well feel that Fate has dealt you a very heavy blow indeed, but we are deeply proud of one of our members, who having answered the call to duty, paid the supreme sacrifice whilst engaged in the work that he loved so well.

Our hearts go out to you in this your hour of trial, and may we be permitted to express the hope that your future life may be brightened by the memory of one who so nobly played his part in this life.

If we can assist you in any way, please let us know, and we can assure you that we will spare no effort in an endeavour to meet your wishes.

Yours very sincerely,

  
Secretary.

Letter of condolence and offer of assistance dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943, from the Queensland Ambulance Union of Employees.



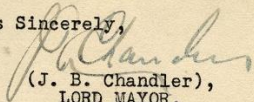
Town Hall,  
BRISBANE,  
9/8/43.

Dear Mrs. Williams,

On behalf of the Council and myself I extend deepest sympathy to you in the loss of your husband (Corporal Maurice A. Williams) whose death has now been officially notified to me.

Great as must be your sorrow, may I suggest that the thought that your husband nobly gave his life in the service of his country and the cause of freedom will prove of some consolation to you.

Yours Sincerely,

  
(J. B. Chandler),  
LORD MAYOR.

Mrs. E.M. Williams,  
Turner St.,  
WINDSOR.

Letter of sympathy from the Brisbane Lord Mayor dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1943.

T.G. 42A COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**URGENT TELEGRAM**

Funds may be Quickly, Safely and Economically Transferred by **MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM**

This Telegram has been received subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. The time received at this office is shown at the end of the message.

The date stamp indicates the date of reception and lodgment also, unless an earlier date is shown after the time of lodgment.

Office Date Stamp  
T  
C  
AUG 17 1943  
B

42/68141

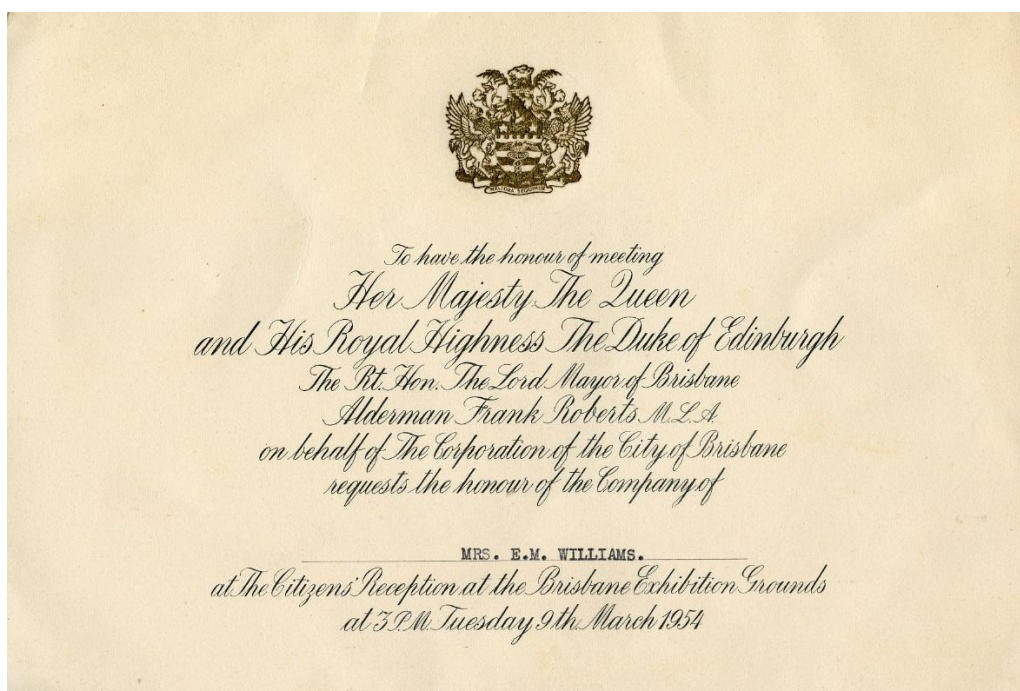
Office of Origin	No. of Words	Time of Lodgment
WARWICK	53/1 <sup>49</sup>	10 20a

PERSONAL MRS EDNA MAY WILLIAMS  
TURNER STREET  
WINDSOR

IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET THAT I HAVE TO INFORM YOU THAT QX40578 CORPORAL MAURICE AVERY WILLIAMS WAS DROWNED BY ENEMY ACTION ON FOURTEENTH MAY 1943 AND DESIRE TO CONVEY TO YOU THE PROFOUND SYMPATHY OF THE MINISTER FOR THE ARMY

MINISTER FOR THE ARMY

Second Telegram, dated 17 August 1943, sent to Mrs Edna Williams informing her that Maurice was 'Drowned by Enemy action.'



Invitation from the City of Brisbane for Edna to attend a Citizens Reception for Her Majesty the Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 1954. Anecdotally, Edna was one of the many people spoken to by The Queen at this reception.

## 2/3 Australian Hospital Ship (AHS 47) CENTAUR

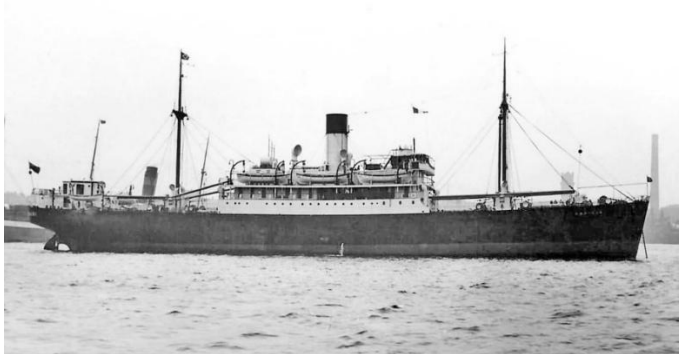
The CENTAUR was a passenger, livestock and cargo vessel built in 1924 for the Ocean Steamship Company's Blue Funnel Line. Named after the mythological Greek creature, she was specifically designed for the challenging conditions of Western Australian waters, including extensive mud flats and significant tidal variations

## **Initial Service 1924-1941**

Built by Scotts Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. in Greenock, CENTAUR began service on the Western Australia-Singapore route, carrying passengers, cargo, and livestock. She regularly called at ports including Surabaya, Semarang, Batavia, and Singapore. In December 1939, she underwent a minor refit in Hong Kong



Designed with a flat bottom, Centaur sat on the mud flats in those ports in Northwest, Western Australia where there are massive tidal variations.



## **Wartime Service (1941-1943)**

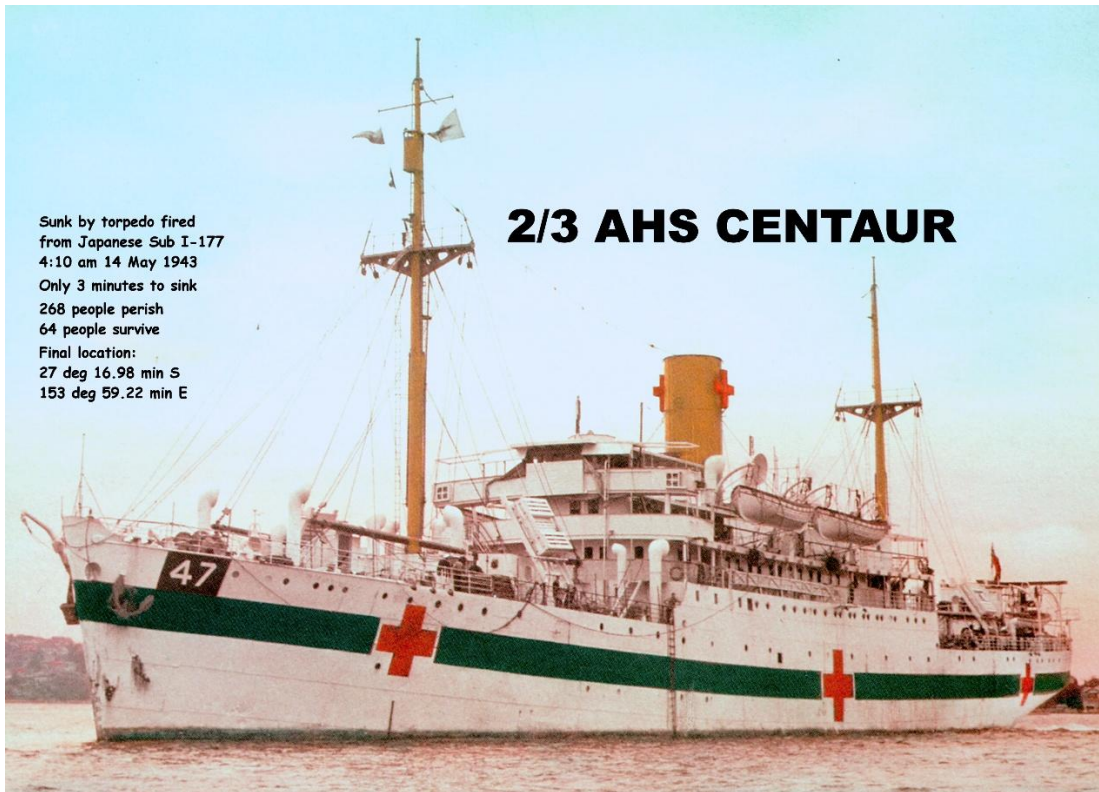
On November 26, 1941, CENTAUR participated in a significant rescue operation, saving 62 German survivors from the sunken cruiser KORMORAN. The captain carefully managed the rescue by taking lifeboats in tow and allowing nine wounded men aboard. Two of CENTAUR'S lifeboats were used when two German boats were swamped by heavy seas.

Following Japan's entry into World War II, CENTAUR'S route was restricted to Broome. She was later reassigned to Queensland, conducting runs along Australia's east coast and New Guinea carrying war materials.

## **Hospital Ship – Service and Loss**

In early 1943, CENTAUR was converted to a hospital ship (designated AHS 47) in Melbourne at an estimated cost of £20,000. Despite being clearly marked with white hull and prominent red crosses, she was attacked and sunk by Japanese submarine I-177 under

Commander Hajime Nakagawa on May 14, 1943. Of those aboard, 268 people were killed and 64 survived, enduring 36 hours in shark-infested waters before rescue.



Sunk by torpedo fired from Japanese Sub I-177  
4:10 am 14 May 1943  
Only 3 minutes to sink  
268 people perish  
64 people survive  
Final location:  
27 deg 16.98 min S  
153 deg 59.22 min E

## 2/3 AHS CENTAUR

AHS Centaur. Note: Each of the red crosses on the side of the ship and the funnel were illuminated by floodlights during the night.

# AHS CENTAUR

Artwork: Tony Bela

On May 14, 1943, Australian Hospital Ship Centaur was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. 268 women and men died.

**May 14, 0000:** Clear night. AHS Centaur, with 332 medical personnel, is 27 miles due east of Surfers Paradise.

**0100:** Brisbane-based Air Force radar operator discovers a blip on radar east of Moreton Island. Suspects submarine as signal vanishes quickly.

**0330:** Centaur is 23 miles due east of Point Lookout. Ship speed 11 knots.

**0345:** One bell rings, 15 minutes before change of watch.

**0400:** Dental technician Albert Taylor sees a school of porpoises swimming alongside the well-lit hospital ship. Sees a flash of white about 200 metres away from the porpoises heading toward the foredeck area.

**0410:** Torpedo fired from the Japanese I-177 Kaidai D7 type submarine strikes the ship on the port side. Warhead explodes. Blast penetrates main oil bunker.

**0413:** AHS Centaur sinks in three minutes with many of the passengers and crew asleep in their bunks.

**May 15, dawn:** 25 miles east of Moreton Island. One main group of 60 survivors, other smaller clusters and a couple of individuals balancing on rafts, a broken lifeboat, hatchboards and various spars.

**1340:** An Avro Anson of 71 Squadron discovers the survivors, 27 degrees 03 mins South 154 degrees 12 mins East.

**1400:** After 36 hours at sea, survivors are rescued. 268 people perish.

The torpedoing of the hospital ship Centaur was the highest loss of Australian lives on any Allied merchant ship sunk by the Japanese in the Pacific during World War II.

Source: Australian Hospital Ship Centaur, The Myth of Immunity by Christopher S. Milligan and John C.H. Foley

Graphic representation and timeline for the sinking of AHS Centaur

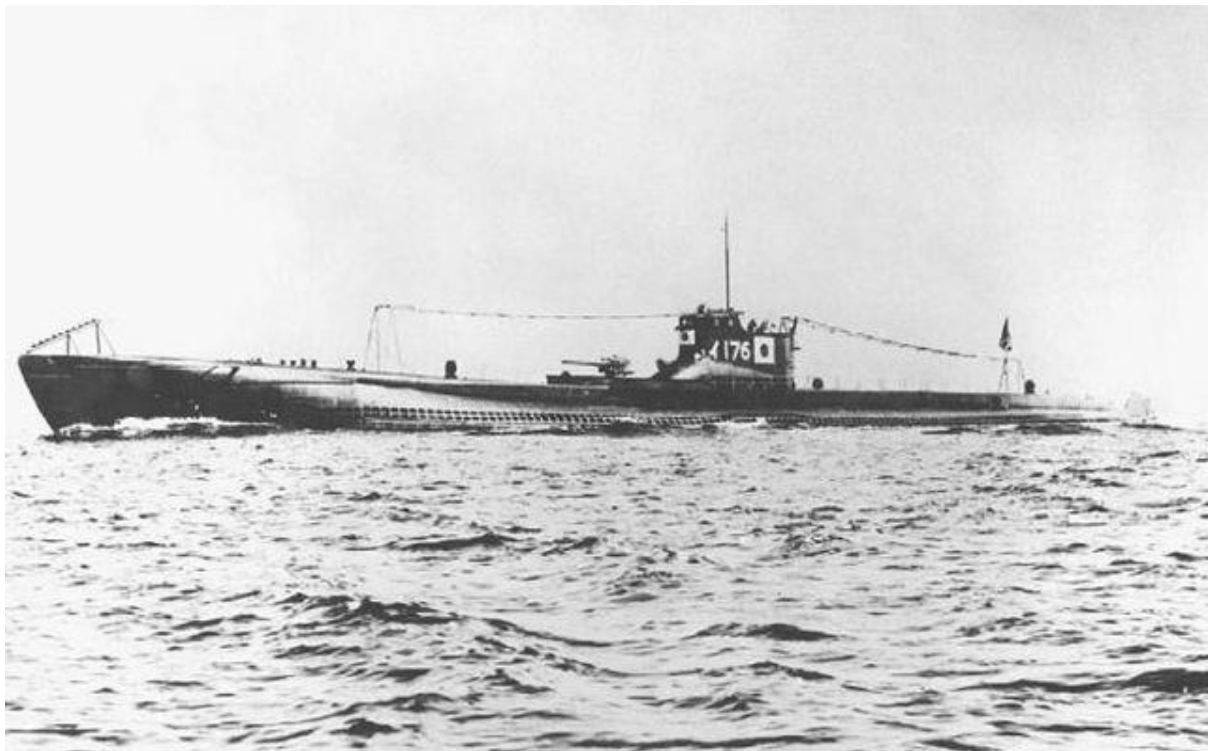




Photo of Imperial Japanese Navy I-176, a KD7 type *Kaidai*-class submarine which is a sister ship to the 1-177 mentioned above that is suspected to have sunk the AHS Centaur. (There are no photos of the 1-177 available.)



**ROLL OF HONOUR**




**MERCHANT NAVY**


Abbot, D.	Grainger, R.	Milligan, D.I.
Alexander, G.M.	Hall, H.R.	Morris, A.J.
Behan, T.	Hart, R.F.	Morris, T.V.
Bowden, J.O.	Hughes, T.S.	Murray, G.A.
Brandin, G.	Kaki, L.	Page, E.C.
Buck, J.C.	Laird, R.M.	Pearl, S.O.
Capper, J.	Lamble, H.E.	Pritchard, T.E.
Carey, G.E.J.	Le Blanc, J.	Ravner, A.
Clark, C.	Lee, M.J.	Siddons, F.
Cockerhill, D.	Lockhart, V.	Simpson, E.B.
Cuthill, W.D.	Long, G.E.	Spence, R.J.
Downie, W.R.	Longden, S.	Strack, S.L.
Fox, F.W.	Lyons, J.	Summers, E.J.
Gallagher, J.	MacLean, D.R.	Sykes, K.
Gannon, F.J.	McKinnon, W.J.	Warner, W.A.

**SHIPS MEDICAL STAFF**

Adams, M.L.	Jewell, S.A.	Moston, M.
Aitchison, G.F.	Johnson, A.E.	Ockwell, L.G.
Burrett, W.E.	Kerr, J.A.	O'Donnell, A.M.
Burroughs, S.P.	King, E.	O'Sullivan, J.C.
Clark, J.M.	Laverick, E.G.	Perry, N.E.
Clark, W.F.D.	Law, R.	Phillips, N.E.
Clegg, P.L.	LeBrun, C.R.	Rutherford, E.M.
Collins, L.F.	McFarlane, M.H.	Shaw, E.A.
Cooke, A.J.	McLean, N.	Smellie, M.A.
Cooley, G.G.	Manson, C.P.	Thomas, G.L.
Haultain, H.F.J.C.	Maynard, A.F.	Walker, W.
Hindmarsh, B.F.	Maynard, J.C.	Williams, L.L.
Holland, L.	Melbom, E.E.	<b>Williams, M.A.</b>
Howson, A.	Moore, D.W.	Wyllie, D.J.
Hutchison, R.R.	Moss, L.	



**ROLL OF HONOUR**



**2/12th FIELD AMBULANCE**

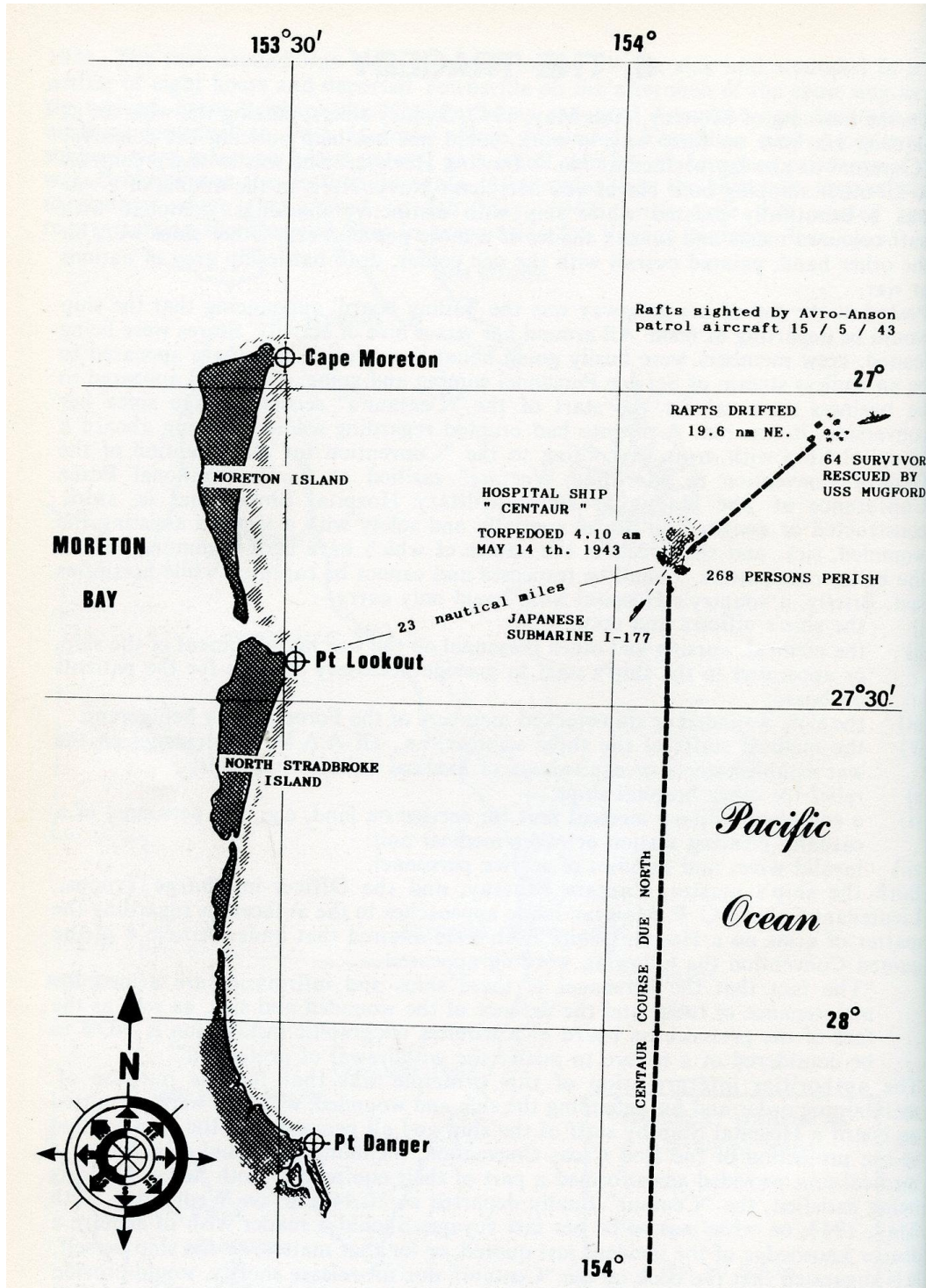
Anderson, F.W.C.	Fehrenbach, H.S.	Lowe, H.H.	Salmon, L.J.
Annis-Brown, J.	Findlay, R.W.	Lucas, J.	Sender, I.H.
Barlow, T.D.H.	Fishwick, C.E.	Lynagh, F.J.	Skaife, L.R.
Barnes, W.E.C.	Foley, S.D.	Lynne, C.E.	South, A.E.
Beckober, L.L.	Forrest, J.M.	Lyttleton, S.F.	Stanley, J.E.
Benton, K.E.	Friedrich, V.	McCaskie, T.E.	Stephens, H.B.
Black, W.C.	Garbutt, D.R.	McDougall, W.O.	Stevens, J.A.
Blackman, R.McG.	Garrit, W.D.	McGuire, H.J.	Stewart, J.
Bladen, H.A.	Geaghan, W.T.	McKay, C.S.	Stubbs, R.G.
Bourchier, K.P.	Goffett, C.A.	McSkimming, S.G.	Swan, L.R.
Bowen, D.L.	Gordon, C.T.	Marshall, J.B.	Swinburn, R.
Boyd, A.	Gore, W.H.	Miles, R.W.	Taggart, J.
Bracken, P.J.	Gunning, A.	Milley, T.H.	Taylor, J.
Bracken, J.W.	Haynes, K.R.	Miller, C.O.	Thelander, C.E.
Brewer, B.W.H.	Hayward, C.E.	Montgomery, C.G.	Thomas, J.V.
Brown, A.V.	Hembrow, J.H.	Moran, J.O'N.	Thompson, D.L.
Browne, J.McG.	Henderson, J.J.	Mort, R.F.	Thompson, H.W.
Bush, G.R.	Hewison, R.J.	Mycocck, F.J.	Thorpe, J.
Butt, W.J.	Hoare, J.W.	Newell, E.L.	Upton, G.H.
Carey, W.R.	Hodgkinson, N.A.	Oakley, H.V.	Vincent, E.C.M.
Chadwick, L.N.	Holloway, S.G.	O'Brien, M.J.	Walder, J.J.
Chapman, E.A.	Jackman, V.M.	O'Connor, R.	Walker, N.L.
Clark, L.S.	Johnston, R.C.	O'Neill, T.W.	Wattus, E.O.
Clark, N.S.	Johnston, S.R.	Overett, H.H.	West, W.C.
Claydon, J.A.	Jones, G.R.	Owens, E.L.V.	Westendorf, R.H.G.
Cripps, L.J.	Kemp, A.R.	Perrett, E.R.	Wheeler, N.E.W.
Cross, H.R.T.	Key, J.J.R.	Poway, A.R.	Williams, A.H.
Cummings, M.H.	Lambert, C.	Power, E.J.	Williams, D.K.
Denne, F.J.	Le Grand, P.M.P.	Reid, A.	Williams, E.F.
Doherty, J.P.	Leask, A.R.	Richardson, C.	Wilson, A.
Donohoe, H.M.	Leask, H.M.	Richardson, H.F.	Wood, A.
Duffield, C.C.	Leask, H.H.	Roberts, H.O.	Wood, L.S.
Fawcett, G.	Lee, T.A.	Robinson, C.M.S.	Woods, C.
	Lesnie, N.M.G.	Robinson, R.L.	Wright, G.
	Loader, J.J.J.		

**ATTACHED PERSONNEL FROM AASC**

Adams, A.T.	Etheridge, G.R.G.	Lawson, W.T.	Sheard, H.E.
Alexander, J.R.	Evans, J.K.	Lillas, R.L.	Shepherd, G.P.
Bayley, A.N.	Evans, W.A.	Long, A.	Simpson, E.J.
Bond, S.R.	Ferrow, J.W.	Lotze, E.L.	Sweeney, S.E.
Burns, W.R.	Fortier, A.D.	Lynneham, H.L.	Thomas, A.K.
Bush, G.F.	Fortier, F.L.	McGuire, C.P.	Trigg, B.S.
Cavanagh, R.C.	Fowler, C.A.	Mansfield, J.K.	Weshorp, S.B.
Colefax, B.D.	Galvin, S.G.	Murphy, G.G.	Wilson, G.A.T.
Coleman, W.J.	Hayward, T.H.	Pain, R.A.	Winder, G.A.
Collins, H.S.	Hogan, K.F.	Palmer, V.A.	Winterlood, A.A.
Corbett, K.N.			

## AHS Centaur – Discovery and Memorial

In 2010, following the discovery of HMAS SYDNEY, the wreck of CENTAUR was located by the SEAHORSE SPIRIT under David Mearns. She lies 2,059 metres (6,760 ft) below sea level in a steep-walled gully east of Moreton Island. A memorial plaque was placed on her foredeck during the final ROV dive on January 12, 2010. The site is now a protected war grave



Map showing the final resting place of AHS Centaur, now a protected war graves site.



Commemorative plaque placed on the foredeck of AHS Centaur by David Mearns search team January 2010.

### **AHS Centaur – At Sea Memorial Service and Wreath laying.**

On 24 September 2010, an official at-sea memorial service was held aboard *HMAS Manoora* directly above the wreck site of the *AHS Centaur*. Over 300 relatives of the fallen personnel gathered to honour the 268 victims of the World War II tragedy, laying floral wreaths and scattering the ashes of three survivors.

Prayers and readings were held before the official wreaths were cast into the Coral Sea. Survivor Martin Pash, then-87 years old, was the first to cast a wreath into the water in memory of those who lost their lives when the hospital ship was torpedoed in 1943.



Memorial service conducted aboard HMAS Manoora while located directly above the final resting place of AHS Centaur.



The ship's bell tolls as the names of the deceased are read out during the memorial service.



Arthur Williams, son of Maurice lays a wreath on the water above the AHS Centaur during the memorial service.