



RMS Leinster Log

October 2017

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Welcome to the October 2017 bulletin which is being sent to those who have asked to be kept informed of plans to mark the centenary of the sinking of the *RMS Leinster* in October 1918.

National Maritime Museum, Dun Laoghaire



**RMS Leinster
in wartime
camouflage
An Post
1st day cover**

Open Day
 10th October 2017
**To Commemorate the Sinking of
 R. M. S. Leinster**
 Free Guided Tours, Numbers limited to
 40 per tour. First come first served.
 11.30 am and 2.30 pm
administration@mariner.ie www.mariner.ie
 01 2143964

National Maritime Museum, Dun Laoghaire - Open Day

On 10 October 2017, to mark the 99th anniversary of the sinking, the National Maritime Museum in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin will have an Open Day (i.e. free admission all day). Two group tours will be held, which will have a particular focus on the *RMS Leinster*. If you live nearby, why not take the opportunity to visit this excellent museum and hear some interesting stories from Ireland's maritime history. Tours will be at 11.30 and 14.30. There will be an Information Desk for people who may like to talk to us about their relatives on the *RMS Leinster* or plans for the Centenary next year.

Visit www.mariner.ie for the National Maritime Museum website.

RMS Leinster on Facebook

We will be using Facebook to make information about the *RMS Leinster* Centenary more available and our page will be launched within the next week. Thanks to Ronnie Roberts for his assistance.

Why wasn't the *RMS Leinster* escorted?

The short answer is that the Royal Navy did not have enough destroyers to provide continuous escorts for every merchant ship. Many destroyers were employed in guarding the Royal Navy fleet based at Scapa Flow in Scotland.

City of Dublin Steam Packet Company ships were given occasional escorts from the end of 1917. The *RMS Leinster* was attacked on 27 December 1917. Her Daily Journal for 28 December recorded a delay of 8 hours at Holyhead while awaiting Admiralty orders to sail. She finally sailed with a convoy escorted by two U.S. destroyers. Also on 28 December, on the trip from Kingstown (Now Dun Laoghaire), she was protected by American destroyer No. 48 (the *U.S.S. Parker*).

On 3 January 1918, a U.S. destroyer and a seaplane escorted the *RMS Leinster* from Holyhead. On the return journey from Kingstown "a destroyer" protected her. On 4 January, a U.S. destroyer accompanied her on the trip from Kingstown. On 6 January, she was escorted by "*Destroyer C.C.9*" on the voyage to Kingstown, and by U.S. destroyer *Wadsworth* from Kingstown the same day. On 7 January, the *Wadsworth* brought her from Holyhead. Several times in the Daily Journal in January 1918 Captain Birch recorded the comment "*No escort.*" This suggests that perhaps he had come to expect an escort as being the norm and the lack of an escort as being worthy of comment. But he must have soon realised that the provision of an escort was the exception rather than the rule and the comments stopped.

On 9 February, the *RMS Leinster* was escorted in both directions by U.S. destroyers 26 and 47 (*U.S.S. Patterson* and *U.S.S. Alwin*). On 10 and 11 February, the U.S. destroyer 36 escorted her from Kingstown to Holyhead. On 7 April she was accompanied by "*destroyers*" from Holyhead to Kingstown. On 22 April American destroyer 92 guarded the *RMS Leinster* from Holyhead to Kingstown. The only other times that destroyer escorts were provided were on 15 and 16 August. On the first date the ship was travelling from Holyhead and was escorted by the destroyers D-01 and D-77. On the second occasion, also while travelling from Holyhead, she was protected by destroyers 75 and 98.

December 1917 and January and February 1918 were the only times that the *Leinster's* Daily Journal recorded being escorted by U.S. destroyers.

In summary, there were not enough destroyers available to provide continuous escorts for individual merchant ships like the *RMS Leinster*. In the period 28 December 1917 to 10 October 1918, the ship was only given destroyer escort on 16 occasions.

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The *RMS Leinster* was also occasionally escorted by airships. Airships were cigar-shaped balloons filled with lighter than air gas. They used engines to manoeuvre through the air. The crew travelled in control cars hanging beneath the balloons. The earlier type of control cars were aeroplane fuselages. Cables running from the control cars were used to operate elevators and rudders in the tail of the balloons to steer the airships.

Airships were used for anti-submarine patrols. They were stationed at Pembroke and Anglesey in Wales and Luce Bay in Scotland. A number of sub-stations for the airships were set up in Ireland. These were used for mooring airships overnight before their return to base. The sub-stations were at Ballyliffin, County Donegal, Larne, County Antrim (both were sub-stations for Luce Bay in Scotland), Malahide Castle, County Dublin (sub-station for Anglesey) and Johnstown Castle, County Wexford (sub-station for Pembroke). A sub-station at Ballyquirke (also known as Killeagh), County Cork, was still under construction at the end of the war. It was to have been a sub-station of Pembroke.

The *RMS Leinster* received airship escort between May and August 1918. Her Daily Journal during this period often recorded airship protection for part of the journey. This usually happened on voyages from Kingstown, when the ship was met in the Irish Sea by an airship from Anglesey. On other occasions the Daily Journal noted that the ship had an airship escort, presumably for the entire journey. The *RMS Leinster* first had airship protection on 7 May 1918. She was accompanied on the voyage from Kingstown by SSZ51 and from Holyhead by SSZ 34 and 35. During the rest of the month she was escorted from Kingstown on 8 May (SSZ 51), 9 May (SSZ 50), 10 May (SSZ 51), 17 May (SSZ 34 and 35), 18 May (SSZ51), 19 May (SSZ 34), May 25 (SSZ 51) and May 27 (SSZ 50). She was escorted from Holyhead on 9 May (SSZ 50) and 29 May (SSZ 50). The *RMS Leinster* was taken out of service for overhaul following a voyage from Kingstown on 30 May. Two days later Ship's Captain William Birch was taken on a flight in an airship. Captain T.B. Williams mentions the event in his book *Airship Pilot* 28. "*Captain Birch and I had become friends as we were on and over the Irish Sea so often together. I took him for a flight in SSZ 35 on the 1st June, and he arranged with the Triplex Company, of which he was a shareholder, to send me some flying goggles which I still have.* (Williams's book was published in 1974) *When I was flying with the Italians later in the year I was sent an account of his death, which I found very distressing. He had been blown off the bridge of the Irish Mail Steamer by a German torpedo.*"

The *RMS Leinster* returned to duty on 29 June, when she made a night sailing, leaving Holyhead at 2.45 a.m. From 5.30 a.m., until her arrival at Kingstown, she was accompanied by SSZ 51. The following month she was escorted three times on the Kingstown to Holyhead voyage. On 4 July, 29 July and 30 July she was escorted by SSZ50. She was escorted by the same airship on the Holyhead to Kingstown trip on 29 July. August 1918 was the final month during which the *RMS Leinster* received airship protection. She was escorted on the Kingstown to Holyhead voyage on 3 August (SSZ 34), 13 August (SSZ 51) and 16 August (SSZ 33 and 35). Protection was provided on the trip from Holyhead on 3 August (SSZ 33), 9 August (SSZ 31), 15 August (SSZ 33 and 35).

The *RMS Leinster* was sunk almost two months after she last received airship escort. On the evening of 9 October 1918 an airship was damaged in the trees at Malahide Castle airship station, Co. Dublin. This fact has been cited in a number of articles about the *RMS Leinster* sinking. It has been suggested that, but for the damage to the airship, the ship would have been escorted the following day. No evidence has ever been produced to support this theory. Contrary evidence is suggested by the fact that the *RMS Leinster* hadn't been escorted by airship for almost two months prior to her sinking.

Update on plans for the centenary

Since the last bulletin, the National Maritime Museum has had discussions with a number of organisations and secured their agreement to participate in centenary commemorations. As plans are still at the development stage, we feel it best not to comment on these until a future bulletin.

A 4,000-word article on the *RMS Leinster* sinking and the forthcoming centenary has been sent to the journal of the Federation of Local History Societies of Ireland. The article lists the counties in Ireland from where passengers came. It also informs readers that on 10 October 2018, the Local History Society in Geneva, Florida will hold a commemorative service at the grave of a young U.S. sailor who was lost in the *RMS Leinster* sinking. The article expresses the hope that some Irish Local History Societies will hold similar commemorative services in their localities.

In the previous bulletin, we asked for the assistance of readers in promoting remembrance of those who were on the *RMS Leinster*. We will repeat this call in future editions of the *RMS Leinster Log*. We were delighted that two people, who speak German, volunteered to research German sites on the internet. We are very pleased to say that both researchers have turned up information on the German side of the story which will be of assistance during the centenary commemorations. We thank them both for the research they have carried out and their promise of further research.

Remembering all those who sailed on the final voyage of the *RMS Leinster*,

Brian, Philip and Will

The RMSLeinster.com Team