

= SS Empire Endurance =

Empire Endurance was a 8 000 GRT cargo liner that was built in 1928 as Alster by Deschimag Werk Vulkan , Hamburg , Germany for the shipping company Norddeutscher Lloyd . In the years leading up to the Second World War Alster carried cargo and passengers between Germany and Australia . After the outbreak of war she was requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine for use as a supply ship .

Alster was captured off Norway on 10 April 1940 by the British destroyer HMS Icarus . Initially serving under the original name as a repair , supply and cargo ship in Norway , she was later passed to the Ministry of War Transport ( MoWT ) and renamed Empire Endurance . She served until 20 April 1941 when she was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U 73 south east of the islet of Rockall in the North Atlantic Ocean .

= = Description = =

The ship was a 8 000 GRT cargo liner . She was built in 1928 by Deschimag Werk Vulkan , Hamburg as Alster , with yard number 211 .

Alster was 509 feet ( 155 m ) long , with a beam of 63 feet ( 19 m ) . She had a depth of 30 feet ( 9 m ) . She was assessed at 8 000 GRT , 5 328 NRT , 12 000 DWT . She had four masts , a single funnel , a round stern and a slanted stem .

The ship was propelled by a 1 000 nhp triple expansion steam engine , which had cylinders of 31 1/4 inches ( 79 cm ) , 52 3/4 inches ( 134 cm ) and 86 5/6 inches ( 221 cm ) diameter by 57 1/2 inches ( 145 cm ) stroke . The engine was also made by the shipbuilder . A low pressure steam turbine drove the ship 's single screw propeller through double reduction gearing and a hydraulic coupling . She had a total of 6 500 indicated horsepower , which gave her a top speed of 14 knots ( 26 km / h ) .

= = History = =

Alster was launched on 5 January 1928 , and completed on 25 February 1928 . She was built for Norddeutscher Lloyd . The Code Letters QMHG were allocated and her port of registry was Bremen . She served on routes between Germany and Australia and East Asia . Lloyds Register entries show that she held a passenger certificate from 1934 - 40 . With the change in Code Letters in 1934 , Alster was allocated DOEO as her callsign . She had a crew of 69 and could initially take 14 passengers . In 1930 the passenger capacity was increased to 16 .

= = = Norwegian Campaign and capture = = =

On 18 March 1940 , Alster was requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine . She was used as a supply ship in Operation Weserübung - the German invasion of Norway , forming part of the invasion 's Ausfuhr Staffel , transporting heavy equipment . Alster departed Brunsbüttel at 02 : 00 on 3 April , destined for the North Norwegian port of Narvik . She was one of four supply ships sailing from the Schleswig - Holstein port in support of German forces landing at Narvik on 9 April , under cover of sailing to Murmansk in the Soviet Union . None of these ships made it to their destination . The lack of supplies and artillery would leave the German forces fighting at Narvik vulnerable . Upon reaching Norwegian waters , Alster and the tanker Kattegat , also bound for Narvik , was escorted by the Norwegian torpedo boat HNoMS Trygg as far as Kopervik , where they arrived on 5 April . At Kopervik the German plans suffered a delay because of a lack of pilots to guide the ship northwards , Alster continuing later that day , while Kattegat departed Kopervik only on 6 April . Many of the other supply ships sent out in advance of the invasion also suffered delays , putting the supply part of the invasion plans out of schedule . While at Kopervik , Alster and Kattegat were inspected by the torpedo boat HNoMS Stegg , the Norwegians finding nothing irregular . By 8 April , Alster had

reached Vestfjorden , where she was hailed by the Norwegian patrol boat HNoMS Syrian , which warned her of the British naval minefield laid in the area earlier that day . Alster steamed to Bodø , to await developments . Two days later , on 10 April , following the outbreak of war between Norway and Germany the previous day , Syrian was despatched to seize Alster off Bodø . When Syrian found Alster , the commander of the small Norwegian patrol boat chose not to board the German vessel as he suspected she was armed and possibly carrying troops . As Alster attempted to escape , Syrian sent out messages to the British warships in the area .

On 10 April , Alster was captured by the British destroyer HMS Icarus in Vestfjorden , north of Bodø . When intercepted the German crew made an unsuccessful attempt at scuttling the vessel , setting off one explosive charge . The light cruiser HMS Penelope had also been sent after Alster , but had run aground near Bodø and suffered serious damage . With the British capture of Alster , no more German supply ships were heading for Narvik and the forces there , leaving General Eduard Dietl 's troops with the supplies on board the tanker Jan Wellem and the large stockpiles of weapons , ammunition , uniforms and food captured at the Norwegian Army base Elvegårdsmoen . At the time of her capture , Alster was under the command of Kapitän Oskar Scharf , who had previously commanded the Blue Riband @-@ holding ocean liner Europa . Initially Alster was brought to the improvised British naval base at Skjelfjord in Lofoten . On arrival at Skjelfjord on 11 April , a prize crew from Penelope took over responsibility for the ship . At Skjelfjord , the captured German crew made an unsuccessful attempt at scuttling Alster by opening the ship 's sea valves . While at Skjelfjord Alster , being equipped with derricks , was used to help repair damaged Allied warships . One of the vessels on which emergency repairs were carried out from Alster , was the destroyer HMS Eskimo , which had lost her bow during the naval battles off Narvik . Alster was also used as an accommodation ship for the crews of the damaged vessels at Skjelfjord . On 24 April Alster departed Skjelfjord for the Northern Norwegian port of Tromsø , manned by a British prize crew . The eight German officers captured on Alster were transferred to the United Kingdom on the British destroyers HMS Cossack and HMS Punjabi . In all , 80 Germans were captured on board Alster , and all were eventually sent to the United Kingdom .

Her cargo of 88 lorries , anti @-@ aircraft guns , spare parts for aircraft , ammunition , communications equipment , coke and 400 ? 500 tons of hay , was unloaded in Tromsø on 27 April , as part of the Allied support of the Norwegian forces fighting the German invasion of their country . The cargo was put to use in the supply and defence of the Tromsø area , except for the hay , which was quarantined by the Norwegian authorities at Ringvassøy for fear of foot @-@ and @-@ mouth disease . The coke on board Alster had been placed by the Germans in a 6 ft ( 1 @.@ 83 m ) layer covering the deck . The supplies on Alster were transferred to the Norwegians by the Allied naval commander Lord Cork after the Norwegian authorities had made repeated request for weapons and other war matériel , and was intended to be a first effort before the arrival of larger quantities of arms and ammunition promised to the Norwegians . The lorries and weapons from Alster were received , assessed and distributed by Norwegian military personnel under the command of Major Karl Arnulf , who had arrived in Tromsø on 7 May 1940 , having made his way from German @-@ occupied South Norway . The communications equipment included both a mobile radio transmitter , which was used as a spare for Tromsø radio broadcasting station , as well as large quantities of field telephone equipment which was sent to the units of the Norwegian 6th Division on the Narvik front . The field equipment from Alster replaced the old and worn field telephone systems in use up to that point . Training on the German equipment was provided by Swedish volunteers . While docked in Tromsø in May 1940 , Alster had 70 captive Germans on board . At Tromsø , Alster was manned by Norwegian sailors , replacing the British prize crew .

On 16 May a request was made to the Admiralty for a call sign for Alster , the ship departing Tromsø the next day for Kirkenes in Finnmark , escorted by the anti @-@ submarine whaler HMS Ullswater . She was despatched to the northern port to retrieve a cargo of iron ore . Arriving on 19 May 1940 , Alster loaded some 10 @,@ 000 tons of iron ore over four days , sailing south to the port of Harstad on 22 May , still escorted by HMS Ullswater , as well as the Norwegian patrol boat HNoMS Nordhav II . On 23 May , the British submarine HMS Truant made an unsuccessful attack with two torpedoes on Alster off Havøya , despite efforts having been made to both keep the cargo

ship away from the submarine 's patrol area , and to warn Truant of the ship 's identity . The torpedoes missed , exploding when they hit land . Alster and HMS Ullswater arrived at Harstad on 26 May , with the escort vessel sailing northwards to Hammerfest with mail and provisions for the heavy cruiser HMS Devonshire . While Alster was at Harstad shipping in the town 's harbour was repeatedly subjected to attacks by Luftwaffe Heinkel He 111 bombers , the ships being defended by Gloster Gladiator fighters of the No. 263 Squadron RAF operating from Bardufoss Air Station and anti @-@ aircraft artillery . During one of the attacks on 26 May the ship 's Norwegian fireman was mortally wounded by bomb fragments , dying in Harstad Hospital later the same day .

On 27 May Alster sailed for the United Kingdom in a five @-@ ship convoy which included the crippled HMS Eskimo . In addition to her cargo of iron ore , the ship carried 209 British military personnel , 46 Norwegian military personnel and 72 German prisoners of war . She also transported the " B " gun turret from Eskimo , which had been removed from the destroyer during makeshift repairs . Alster arrived at Scapa Flow on 31 May , unloading her passengers there . Sailing on 3 June , in the company of the passenger steamer St. Magnus and escorted by the destroyers HMS Ashanti and HMS Bedouin , she arrived at Rosyth in Scotland on 4 June 1940 .

= = = As Empire Endurance = = =

Alster was passed to the MoWT and renamed Empire Endurance . The United Kingdom Official Number 164841 and Code Letters GMJJ were allocated . Her port of registry was Middlesbrough . She was placed under the management of the Booth Steamship Co Ltd . Empire Endurance was a member of Convoy FN 255 , which departed from Southend , Essex on 17 August and arrived at Methil , Fife two days later . She then joined Convoy OA 202 , which departed on 21 August and dispersed at sea on 25 August . Her destination was Montreal , Quebec , Canada , where she arrived on 3 September . Empire Endurance sailed on 12 September for Sydney , Cape Breton , Nova Scotia , arriving three days later . She then joined Convoy HX 74 , which departed from Halifax , Nova Scotia on 17 September and arrived at Liverpool , Lancashire , United Kingdom on 2 October . She was carrying general cargo stated to be bound for Newcastle @-@ upon @-@ Tyne , Northumberland . She left the convoy at the Clyde on 2 October .

Empire Endurance departed on 25 October to join Convoy OB 234 , which had departed from Liverpool the previous day and dispersed at sea on 30 October . Her destination was Montreal , where she arrived on 6 November . She departed on 18 November for the Clyde , arriving on 27 November . The ship was declared a prize of war on 10 December 1940 , valued at £ 144 @,@ 000 . She departed on 5 January 1941 to join Convoy OB 270 , which had departed from Liverpool that day and dispersed at sea on 8 January . She sailed to Saint John , New Brunswick , Canada , arriving on 17 January . Empire Endurance sailed on 3 February for Halifax , arriving two days later and departing on 9 February for the Clyde , where she arrived on 21 February .

Empire Endurance departed on 23 February for Swansea , Glamorgan , arriving on 1 March . She sailed on 9 March for Avonmouth , Somerset , arriving the next day . She departed on 29 March for Cardiff , Glamorgan , arriving the next day and sailing on 2 April for Newport , Monmouthshire , where she arrived later that day . She sailed on 13 April for Milford Haven , Pembrokeshire , where she arrived on 15 April .

On 19 April , Empire Endurance departed from Milford Haven , bound for Cape Town , South Africa and Alexandria , Egypt . She was manned by 90 crew and had five passengers on board . Amongst her cargo were the Fairmile B motor launches ML @-@ 1003 and ML @-@ 1037 . At 03 : 32 ( German time ) on 20 April , Empire Endurance was hit amidships by a torpedo fired by U @-@ 73 , under the command of Helmut Rosenbaum . At the time she was south west of Rockall at 53 ° 05 ' N 23 ° 14 ' W. A coup de grâce was fired at 03 : 57 which hit just under the bridge , breaking her in two . Empire Endurance sank with the loss of 65 crew and one passenger . Among the crew members lost was the captain , Fred J.S. Tucker of the Royal Naval Reserve . On 21 April , the Canadian Flower class corvette HMCS Trillium picked up twenty crew and four passengers at 52 ° 50 ' N 22 ° 50 ' W. They were landed at Greenock , Renfrewshire on 25 May . On 9 May , five crew were rescued by the British cargo liner Highland Brigade . They were landed at Liverpool . Those

lost on board Empire Endurance are commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial , London .