

Norman Barton's story (as provided by his son Norman Barton)

France

Norman Barton was conscripted into the army in October 1939, aged 20. He was sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force in December 1939.

As the Germans advanced, they pushed the BEF back, prompting the evacuation of more than 338,000 Allied soldiers from the beaches and harbour of Dunkirk, in the north of France, between 26 May and 4 June 1940, codenamed 'Operation Dynamo'.

Unfortunately, he was, together with about 58,000 Allied soldiers cut off by the Germans south of Dunkirk and had to make for the evacuation ports in the northwest of France.

On reaching St. Nazaire, during codename 'Operation Aerial' Private Barton and fellow soldiers on the 17 June 1940, were told they would be boarding RMS Lancastria, moored in the bay. Fortunately, the lighter transporting them out to her was redirected to another evacuation ship because the RMS Lancastria was already drastically overloaded.

It was recorded that her prewar passenger capacity was 1,300 passengers. However, during the evacuation it was estimated that she had loaded well over 5,000 troops and civilians. RMS Lancastria was hit by three or possibly four bombs, whilst stationary as her captain would not set sail for England without an escort, rendering her an easy target. Several survivors reported that one of the bombs had gone down the ship's single funnel, sinking her in 20 minutes.

In the version my stepmother wrote down when Dad talked with her about his war experiences, he came back to Plymouth on HMS Battle. I can find no evidence of this, but 'HMS Battle' may well have been a class of destroyer.

Post France

On arrival in England, he was sent to Aylesbury and then to Aberfoyle in the Trossachs to train and to prepare for an expected invasion. He sailed from Liverpool on HMT Georgic, departing on 7 October 1940, calling at Freetown enroute, unfortunately, where they were not allowed to leave the ship. After navigating the 'Cape of Good Hope' their ship reached Cape town on the 28 October 1940, here they were allowed shore leave. His next stop was Mombasa, then Aden, reaching there on the 12th November 1940. They disembarked in Egypt on 22 November 1940. Greece. He was posted to Greece as part of the British Expeditionary Force arriving there in March 1941. I think he disembarked in Volos rather than Piraeus, port of Athens although I have no confirmation of this. He described being in transport near Larissa and how there was no air defence against the Luftwaffe.

Post Greece

Private Norman Barton died on 5 May 2009, aged 90.