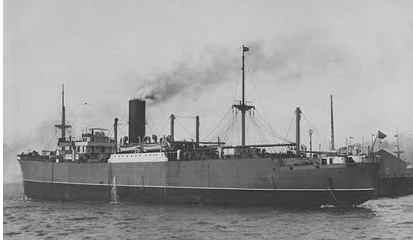


William Fenwick Rush

Born around 1913, he was the son of William James Rush (1873-1965) and Winifred Frances Stewart Maude (1878-1965).

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Relatives of a New Zealander killed when his ship was sunk by a Japanese submarine seventy years ago are being sought by Australian authorities after the discovery of a wreck off the New South Wales coast.

William Fenwick Rush was a Fourth Engineer Officer aboard the MC Limerick which was torpedoed near the town of Ballina on ANZAC Day in 1943.

The 30 year-old was one of the 72 crew members who abandoned the ship soon after it experienced engine problems, became separated from a convoy of five merchant vessels enroute from Brisbane to Sydney, and was sunk.

He drowned, along with Australian 3rd officer John Edgar Willmott, 26, and neither body was recovered.

Survivors were plucked from the sea by two minesweeper escorts.

But the Kiwi-owned vessel's exact location was unknown until late last year when fishermen discovered what they believed to be the wreck in 105 metres of water.

High tech ocean research equipment has since been used to create a 3D image of the find and the ship is now confirmed as being the long lost Limerick.

Representatives of the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage are keen to ensure the site is protected and want to make contact with family members of the two dead men.

But efforts to find any have so far been fruitless.

William Rush was born in Havelock in 1913 and had a sister named Sybil.

Their parents, William and Winifred, both died in 1965 and are buried at the Havelock North Cemetery.

Environment and heritage spokeswoman Susie Summers says Rush was not aboard the ship when it sank and there is no chance of finding remains.

But locating his family would bring closure.

"It would allow them to know that there is now an actual wreck site on the seafloor where future remembrance or commemoration services can be held," she says.

Ms Summers hopes relatives may also have photographs, diaries or letters describing Rush's time onboard the Limerick that would assist with further research into the ship and its demise.

She says there are no plans to place a plaque on the wreck though staff are liaising with recreational diving groups who have shown an interest in visiting Limerick and photographing its condition.

"The Heritage Branch proposes to undertake future more detailed side-scan sonar imaging of the wreck to provide greater detail of the structure, and possible remote operated vehicle filming," she says.

Relatives of William Rush should email Tim Smith, Deputy Director, Heritage Branch of the Office of Environment and Heritage at tim.smith@heritage.nsw.gov.au