

**Galley Boy**

**JAMES MUDGE**

**SS Opawa (Plymouth), Merchant Navy**

**Died 6 February 1942**

**Aged 19**

**Commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial, London**

**Panel 76**

The Mudges were an Exeter family who came to Buckland St Mary between the Wars. They lived at Furnham (now known as Southern Cross) on Castle Main, not far on from the Eagle Tavern. This was a smallholding at that time, and they milked a few cows. Richard Smith of Buckland, whose father was friendly with the Mudges, can remember helping his father hand milk the cows when Mr Mudge was ill. He milked a big white cow, very proud until she kicked him and the bucket right out of the cow shed! Leslie Mudge, James's father, was a land agent; his father in Exeter had been a builder, and his father before him a Bank Cashier, and his father a smith, all in Exeter, or the Exeter area, going back to at least the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

James was the oldest of three children; he was born on December 30 1921 in Heavitree, Exeter; his father at that time was an auctioneer. The other two children were Joyce and Thomas. Like James, Thomas too died young, in 1951, but of TB; he, and their mother Caroline, are buried in Buckland St Mary. Thomas, we're told, lived in a summer house in the garden for the sake of his TB. Eventually, after his wife's death, Leslie Mudge moved to Dorset to work as a land agent for the Yetminster estate; he died in 1969. All three children served in the War: Thomas was in the RNAS and Joyce a Leading Wren in the WRENS.

James is likely to have been called up by 1941 – remembering that he was only 18 in 1940. Why did he go into the Merchant Navy? Personal choice, or where he was assigned? It was a dangerous calling, at the mercy of German U-Boats, as became all too apparent.

Completed in April 1931, on 23 Jun 1931, the Opawa, on her maiden voyage from Liverpool to Auckland, took the British steam merchant City of Kimberley in tow near the Cook Islands, and arrived at Auckland on 2 July. On 6 Jul 1940, she was requisitioned by the Admiralty as troop transport but returned to the owner after serving four months as cargo transport. On 14 Jan 1941, the Opawa was damaged by near misses during an air raid on Avonmouth.

Opawa was fatally damaged on 6 February 1942 by a torpedo fired by German submarine at position 38° 21' N, 61° 13' W and sunk by gunfire.



*SS Opawa, Floating Dock, Wellington, New Zealand*

*According to Uboat.net:*

At 12.10 hours on 6 Feb, 1942, the unescorted Opawa (Master Wilfred George Evans) was hit amidships by one torpedo from U-106 about 400 miles north-northeast of Bermuda. The ship had been chased since 08.32 hours and stopped after the hit. The U-boat dived to get closer and observed the launching of four lifeboats. At 14.17 hours, U-106 surfaced and shelled the ship with 93 rounds until she sank at 14.59 hours. However, 54 crew members and two gunners were lost. The master and 14 crew members were picked up by the Dutch steam merchant Hercules and landed at New York.

*According to the Mercantile Marine website:*

Opawa 10,354 tons was commanded by Captain W.G. Evans. Opawa was sunk with a tragic loss of life, two engineers were killed in the explosion and three of her lifeboats carrying fifty-four crew members were lost without trace. She had loaded 4,000 tons of copper and 2,000 tons of sugar in Australia, sailed to New Zealand and loaded refrigerated cargo, lamb, butter and 1,533 bales of wool, sailing from Lyttleton via Panama Canal on 6 January 1942 for the UK proceeding independent. 6 February 400 miles north east of Bermuda and 430 miles from Halifax, she was torpedoed by a U-boat, there was a terrific explosion wrecking the engine room, the steering gear was jammed, the main engines and all auxiliary pumps electricians all power failed, causing complete blackout of lighting and wireless power; the ship broached to. The engineers on duty were killed instantly. The ship's company were mustered at boat stations and were cleared and lowered to abandon ship. Captain Evans then decided to reboard the ship to send a distress message and salvage some navigational instruments and gather some warm clothing as most were scantily clad, as they approached the ship the U-boat surfaced and started firing shells into her before she started to sink. Opawa was now well ablaze, the U-boat now moved off without contacting the boat crews. The ship turned slowly on her port side and sank quietly, bow first.

400 miles from land, cold, wet, with the rain coming down, they decided to shape course for Bermuda. The boats parted company due to the heavy seas and swell running. 8 February the boat was experiencing high seas and gale 8 force winds, the hand pump was kept going to clear the boat of

water as it was pooping and shipping water, it became impossible to heave to, all attempts failing, the sea and swell was running thirty feet high, the men complained of swollen feet and knees, and for six days were soaked through. The boat had plenty of food and water to last for twenty-five days.

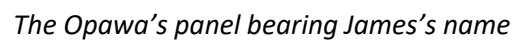
11 February 'We sighted a large ship but she did not see us. At seven o'clock that night another ship was sighted, flares were burned and she put about.' The fifteen survivors of Opawa were taken aboard the Dutch steamer Hercules and landed in New York on 13 February seven days after she was torpedoed. No trace of the other boats was ever found and it was concluded they had foundered in heavy weather, with the loss of fifty four officers and men, another tragic disaster for the company.

*[This information comes by kind permission of Brian Watson, owner of the Benjidog Ship Histories Website. A fuller version is available in James Mudge's folder.]*



James is commemorated on the Merchant Seamen's Memorial at Tower Hill in London, and on his brother Thomas's grave in Buckland St Mary churchyard: 'Lost at Sea Feb 1942 Aged 20'.

The reports of his death didn't appear in the papers until September 1942 – a long wait for his family from his death in February; in the list of other local Merchant seamen lost are 2 others from SS Opawa: William Redwood, Chief Officer, and John Workman, Third Electrician.





City or Borough of Edin  
Parish or Township of St. George

Enumeration Schedule.

PLACE	HOUSE	NAME	AGE	PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS	Where Born
106	1	Elizabeth	65	Widow	Edin
106	2	Mary Perkins	25	Servant	Edin
106	3	Thos. Bond	39	Myself	Edin
106	4	Mary Do	36	Widow	Edin
106	5	John Walker	19	Barmaid	Edin
106	6	Ann Taylor	44	Servant	Edin
106	7	Mary Bond	3	Widow	Edin
106	8	John Bond	46	Servant	Edin
106	9	John Walker	40	Servant	Edin
106	10	John Walker	32	Widow	Edin
106	11	John Walker	40	Widow	Edin
106	12	John Walker	36	Widow	Edin
106	13	John Walker	30	Widow	Edin
106	14	John Walker	40	Widow	Edin
106	15	John Walker	26	Servant	Edin
106	16	John Walker	46	Servant	Edin
106	17	John Walker	18	Widow	Edin
106	18	John Walker	25	Widow	Edin
106	19	John Walker	15	Servant	Edin
106	20	John Walker	25	Widow	Edin
106	21	John Walker	23	Widow	Edin
106	22	John Walker	16	Servant	Edin
106	23	John Walker	6	Widow	Edin
106	24	John Walker	41	Servant	Edin
106	25	John Walker	41	Servant	Edin
TOTAL in	25	10	4	13	13

PLACE	HOUSE	NAME	AGE	PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS	Where Born
106	1	Elizabeth	10	Widow	Edin
106	2	Mary Perkins	12	Servant	Edin
106	3	Thos. Bond	18	Myself	Edin
106	4	Mary Do	8	Widow	Edin
106	5	John Walker	3	Barmaid	Edin
106	6	Ann Taylor	45	Servant	Edin
106	7	Mary Bond	40	Widow	Edin
106	8	John Bond	15	Servant	Edin
106	9	John Walker	14	Servant	Edin
106	10	John Walker	14	Widow	Edin
106	11	John Walker	12	Widow	Edin
106	12	John Walker	9	Widow	Edin
106	13	John Walker	6	Widow	Edin
106	14	John Walker	3	Widow	Edin
106	15	John Walker	1	Widow	Edin
106	16	John Walker	15	Servant	Edin
106	17	John Walker	73	Widow	Edin
106	18	John Walker	60	Widow	Edin
106	19	John Walker	30	Servant	Edin
106	20	John Walker	14	Servant	Edin
106	21	John Walker	10	Widow	Edin
106	22	John Walker	20	Servant	Edin
106	23	John Walker	3	Widow	Edin
TOTAL in	25	10	13	13	13

DANIEL MUDGE 1841 CENSUS

City or Borough of Edin  
Parish or Township of St. George

Enumeration Schedule.

PLACE	HOUSE	NAME	AGE	PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS	Where Born
106	1	Elizabeth	14	Servant	Edin
106	2	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	3	Thos. Bond	44	Widow	Edin
106	4	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	5	Mary Do	44	Widow	Edin
106	6	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	7	Mary Do	44	Widow	Edin
106	8	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	9	Elizabeth Mudge	44	Widow	Edin
106	10	Charles Do	44	Widow	Edin
106	11	Mary Do	44	Widow	Edin
106	12	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	13	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	14	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	15	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	16	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	17	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	18	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	19	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	20	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	21	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	22	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	23	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	24	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
106	25	John Walker	44	Widow	Edin
TOTAL in	25	10	13	13	13

DANIEL MUDGE 1851 CENSUS

# 1881 Census - Great grandparents & grandfather Edward Mudge

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Civil Parish (or Township) of		City or Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Town or Village or Hamlet of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Registration District or District of	If (1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic
Sant Leonard		Exeter	Sant Leonard	Exeter		Exeter		Sant Leonard	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES No. of Inhabitants (Males & Females)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of Males Females	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	
33	Part 1 Place No 1		Ernest Baly	Son	unm	10	Dental Student	Devon Exeter	
			Maureen Baly	Daughter	unm	11	Scholar	Do Do	
			Helen Down	Serv	unm	20	General Serv Domestic	Do Barnstaple	
34	Do No 2	1	Daniel E Mudge	Head	mar	70	Wages Washer	Devon Woodbury	
			Sarah Do	Wife	mar	35		Do Tipton	
			Mathew Do	Son	unm	19		Do Exeter	
			Edmund Do	Son	unm	14	Scholar	Do Do	
			George Do	Son	unm	12	Scholar	Do Do	
			Arthur Do	Son	unm	3		Do Do	
			Malcolm Do	Son	unm	4m		Do Do	
35	Do No 3	1	Emily Haydon	Serv	unm	19	General Serv Domestic	Do Alington	
			John J Gillard	Head	mar	50	Retired Draper	Devon Chidlington	
			Annelle Do	Wife	mar	50		Devon Frome	
			Ellen B Do	Daughter	unm	22		Devon Plymouth	
			Gertrude Do	Daughter	unm	16	Scholar	Do Do	
			Reginald Do	Son	unm	10	Scholar	Do Do	
36	Do No 4	1	John Battisford	Serv	unm	77	General Serv Domestic	Do Heavitree	
			William Ryan Mills	Head	mar	64	Drumsticker	Devon North Tawton	
			Mary Ann Do	Wife	mar	71	Drumsticker	Devon Exeter	
			Emma Southland	Niece	unm	35		Devon Tipton	
			John Rickliff	Visitor	unm	70	Drumsticker	Devon Exeter	
37	Do No 5	1	Elizabeth Hawthorn	Head	W	67	Retired in House Wifery	Do Broadclyst	
38	Do No 6	1	William J Hoyle	Head	mar	50	Draper	Devon Exeter	
			Anna Do	Wife	mar	29		Do Do	
			Henry J Hoyle	Son	unm	9m		Do Do	
Total of Houses...		5	Total of Males and Females...			11	14		

NOTE.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Eng—Sheet D.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE						Reference—	COPYRIGHT PHOTOGRAPH - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, LONDON
1	2	3	4	5	6	Re 11 / 2152	



Administrative County Down

The undermentioned House is situate within the boundaries of the

Page 10

House No.	Occupation	Age	Sex	Relationship	Profession or Occupation	WEEKS WORK	Notes
70	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
71	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
72	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
73	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
74	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
75	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
76	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
77	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
78	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
79	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
80	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
81	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
82	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
83	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
84	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
85	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
86	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
87	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
88	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
89	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
90	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
91	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
92	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
93	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
94	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
95	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
96	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
97	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
98	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
99	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
100	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

1901 Census - Grandparents & father Leslie Mudge

NOTE - Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE REFERENCE: RG 13/2034 CROWN COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT PERMISSION

1901 CENSUS

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strictly only will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP TO HEAD OF FAMILY	AGE	SEX	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	BIRTHPLACE	NATIONALITY	INFLUENCE
Edward Mudge	Head	44	Male	Married	Builder & Carpenter	Down, Kent	English	
Anna Maria Mudge	Wife	44	Female	Married		Down, Kent	English	
Edward James Mudge	Son	15	Male	Single	School	Down, Kent	English	
Robert Mudge	Son	14	Male	Single		Down, Kent	English	
Robert Mudge	Son	12	Male	Single		Down, Kent	English	
Anna Mudge	Son	8	Male	Single		Down, Kent	English	
Arthur Mudge	Son	6	Male	Single		Down, Kent	English	
Thomas Mudge	Son	20	Male	Single	Farmer	Down, Kent	English	
Thomas Mudge	Son	15	Male	Single	Housemaid	Down, Kent	English	

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling)

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Edward Mudge

Print Address: Down, Kent

1911 CENSUS

## DETAILS OF THE OPAWA AND ITS LOSS

**Opawa** was completed in 1931 and was sunk in 1942 by a torpedo and gunfire from a German submarine in February in the North Atlantic. The survivors faced extreme hardship and all but fifteen of them perished - many in lifeboats that never made it to safety.

**Image 1: Opawa** - Location believed to be the floating dock in Wellington NZ with the floating crane Hikitea in the foreground; the date the photo was taken is not known. [[1](#)]



Registered owners, managers and operators	New Zealand Shipping Co Ltd
Builders	Stephen
Yard	Linthouse
Country	UK
Yard number	532
Registry	N/K



Official number	162907
Signal letters	N/K
Call sign	GJMC
Classification society	N/K
Gross tonnage	10,354
Net tonnage	6,235
Deadweight	N/K
Length	471 ft
Overall Length	N/K
Breadth	67.3 ft
Depth	36.8 ft
Draught	N/K
Engines	2-stroke cycle single acting 18 cylinder oil engine (2S.C.SA) with cylinder bore 26 3/4" and stroke 47 1/4".
Engine builders	A Stephen & Sons Ltd.
Works	Glasgow
Country	UK
Boilers	3 double boilers operating at 100 psi
Power	2,248 NHP
Propulsion	Twin screw
Speed	16 Knots
Cargo capacity	N/K
Crew	71 people were aboard when she was sunk.

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### Additional Construction Information

The Lloyds Register entry for **Opawa** for 1945 has the following additional information about her:

- 2 decks (steel) with a 3rd deck (steel) in forward holds

- Cruiser stern
- Duct keel forward of machinery space
- Tanks in way of tunnels
- Fitted with radio direction-finding and echo-sounding equipment

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## Career Highlights

Date	Event
20 January 1931	Launched
25 April 1931	Completed
6 February 1942	Sunk by submarine torpedo

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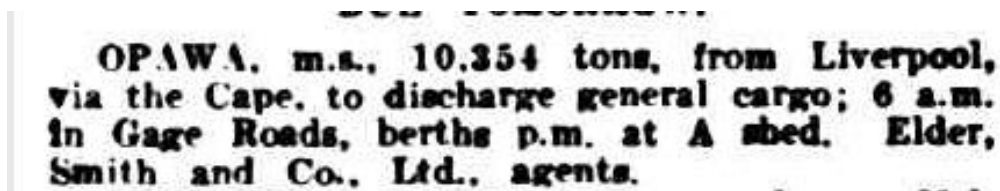
## Service Pre-WW2

I have been unable to find any specific information about the service history of **Opawa** before WW2 but Uboat.net - [External Ref. #3](#) - includes the following statement:

*On 23 Jun, 1931, the **Opawa**, on her maiden voyage from Liverpool to Auckland, took the British steam merchant **City of Kimberley** in tow which had lost her propeller near the Cook Islands and arrived at Auckland on 2 July.*

Presumably she was employed on services between the UK and Australia/New Zealand.

**Image 6** shows a newspaper cutting from 12 February 1936. [[5](#)]



OPAWA, m.s., 10,354 tons, from Liverpool,  
via the Cape, to discharge general cargo; 6 a.m.  
in Gage Roads, berths p.m. at A shed. Elder,  
Smith and Co., Ltd., agents.

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## Service in WW2

According to Uboat.net - [External Ref. #3](#):

*On 6 Jul, 1940, requisitioned by the Admiralty as troop transport but returned to the owner after serving four months as cargo transport. On 14 Jan, 1941, the **Opawa** was damaged by near misses during an air raid on Avonmouth.*

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## Convoys

Opawa took part in a number of convoys during the war years according to information shown in the table below which is provided courtesy of Convoyweb - See [Ext. Ref. #4](#).

Departure	Convoy	Arrival
Freetown, Dec 3, 1939	SL.11F (Freetown - Liverpool)	Liverpool, Dec 15, 1939
Liverpool, Feb 17, 1940	OB.93 (Liverpool - to OG 19F)	
	OG.19F (to AT SEA - Gibraltar)	Gibraltar, Feb 25, 1940
Methil, Jul 30, 1940	OA.192 (Methil - Dispersed)	
Liverpool, Feb 7, 1941	WS.6A (Clyde - Freetown)	Freetown, Mar 1, 1941
Freetown, Mar 8, 1941	WS.6 (Freetown - Capetown)	Capetown, Mar 22, 1941
Capetown, Mar 27, 1941	WS.6C (Capetown - Dispersal Off Aden)	
	Independent	Suez, Apr 20, 1941
Halifax, Aug 29, 1941	HX.147 (Halifax - Liverpool)	Liverpool, Sep 12, 1941
Belfast Lough, Sep 13, 1941	BB.75 (Belfast Lough - M Haven)	Avonmouth, Sep 16, 1941
Milford Haven, Oct 13, 1941	ON.26 (Liverpool - Dispersed)	

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## CHARLES GREEN'S ACCOUNT

The following is an extract from Charles Green, WW2 People's War –

*My name is Charles. I spent four years in the services in WW2, some of it in the Merchant Navy which I joined in 1939 at the outbreak of hostilities as a steward aged 18, on MV **Opawa** of the New Zealand Shipping Co. London.*

*We sailed the UK-New Zealand-Australia run, sailing initially under ballast from King George the 5th docks in London, to join a convoy of some forty plus other assorted merchant vessels under the protection of destroyers for a few days till we were clear of British waters, then we and a few other ships who had a slightly higher rate of knots than the older steam-ships, left the convoy to go it alone to our separate destinations.*

*The **Opawa** went out via Jamaica-Panama Canal to Sydney then on to Auckland and returning the other way via the Indian Ocean and Cape Town, docking back at Avonmouth, as London docks were then the attention of the Luftwaffe, the run took about three months. It wasn't long before Avonmouth was also attacked, which made things difficult for any ships' return home. For our defence from enemy bombers we had an historic anti-aircraft gun mounted right aft above the carpenters shop, a poor old thing but it did at least fire a few shots, even if in doing so, it almost dismantled the place, which wasn't built for aggressive usage. We the crew shared the gun-station and treated the whole affair when the alarm first sounded as a bit of a laugh, so chaotic were our attempts to get into action, but we soon got the hang of things.*

*There was at the time a real threat from magnetic mines the Germans had laid in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere, so we had a Degousing Gear (sic) fitted around the vessel to counter the mines' attraction to our steel hull, and this equipment came in for a real hammering from some of the very high seas in the Indian Ocean especially, bending the 12" H section steel arm which stuck out for'ard, like a stick of soft rock. Those were exciting days for a young chap who had never been to sea before, with enormously towering waves that swept over the whole vessel at times, and I spent hours of my off-duty time standing in the well-deck enjoying the thrill of watching the waves roar past me a few feet away and getting soaked.*

*Our cargo back to UK was New Zealand lamb, butter and the like, Grain from Australia, and bananas picked up from Jamaica, but my memory fails me as regards our cargo from Cape Town, maybe the Captain felt the wine was a good pick-me-up. We crew members certainly enjoyed our few days ashore there finding the bars, a great break to have plenty of beer and stretch our legs. It was here I believe that I first fell victim to the effects of too much Rum, and God how I suffered. The mere smell of rum for many years afterwards made my stomach pound and ache, though I seem to have recovered from that now thank the Lord!*

*I came ashore after two years on medical grounds, then after a few months ashore, joined the army in 1942. I had six months quick training then was part of the North Africa invasion by the 1st Army in November 1942.*

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**Opawa** was fatally damaged on 6 February 1942 by a torpedo fired by German submarine at position 38° 21' N, 61° 13' W and sunk by gunfire.

According to Uboat.net

*At 12.10 hours on 6 Feb, 1942, the unescorted **Opawa** (Master Wilfred George Evans) was hit amidships by one torpedo from **U-106** about 400 miles north-northeast of Bermuda. The ship had been chased since 08.32 hours and stopped after the hit. The U-boat dived to get closer and observed the launching of four lifeboats. At 14.17 hours, **U-106** surfaced and shelled the ship with 93 rounds until she sank at 14.59 hours. However, 54 crew members and two gunners were lost. The master and 14 crew members were picked up by the Dutch steam merchant **Hercules** and landed at New York.*

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***Opawa** 10,354 tons commanded by Captain W.G..Evans. **Opawa** was sunk with a tragic loss of life, two engineers were killed in the explosion and three of her lifeboats carrying fifty-four crew members were lost without trace. She had loaded 4,000 tons of copper and 2,000 tons of sugar in Australia, sailed to New Zealand and loaded refrigerated cargo, lamb ,butter also 1,533 bales of wool, sailing from Lyttleton via Panama Canal on 6 January 1942 for the UK proceeding independent. 6 February 400 miles north east of Bermuda and 430 miles from Halifax, she was torpedoed by a U-boat, there was a terrific explosion wrecking the engine room, the steering gear was jammed, the main engines and all auxiliary pumps electrics all power failed, causing complete blackout of lighting and wireless power the ship broached to. The engineers on duty were killed instantly. The ships company were mustered at boat stations and were cleared and lowered to abandon ship. Captain Evans then decided to reboard the ship to send a distress message and salvage some navigational instruments and gather some warm clothing as most were scantily clad, as they approached the ship the U-boat surfaced and started firing shells into her before she started to sink. **Opawa** was now well ablaze, the U-boat now moved off without contacting the boat crews. The ship turned slowly on her port side and sank quietly, bow first.*

*400 miles from land, cold, wet, and raining, they decided to shape course for Bermuda. The boats parted company due to the heavy seas and swell running. 8 February the boat was experiencing high seas and gale 8 force winds, the hand pump was kept going to clear the boat of water as it was pooping and shipping water, it became impossible to heave to, all attempts failing, the sea and swell was running thirty feet high, the men complained of swollen feet and knees, and for six days were soaked through. The boat had plenty of food and water to last for twenty-five days.*

*11 February 'We sighted a large ship but she did not see us. At seven o'clock that night another ship was sighted, flares were burned and she put about.' The fifteen survivors of **Opawa** were taken aboard the Dutch steamer **Hercules** and landed in New York on 13 February seven days after she was torpedoed. No trace of the other boats was ever found and it was concluded they had foundered in heavy weather, with the loss of fifty four officers and men another tragic disaster for the company.*

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## Peter Frank Luard's Account of the Loss of Opawa

The following moving account of the loss of **Opawa** is from the memoirs of survivor Peter Frank Luard and is reproduced with kind permission of his daughter Elizabeth Luard DeAmicis.

*On February 6, 1942 there were two loud explosions. The lights went out and the ship took an instant list. I grabbed my duffle coat and ran to my station on the bridge as Captain's messenger.*

*"Arrange for the boats to be swung out but don't abandon ship yet", the Chief Officer ordered.*

*"Go and see if Sparks has managed to get out an S.O.S." was the next order. I returned to the bridge to advise the Chief officer that Sparks was transmitting using emergency power.*

*Roll was taken and four members were missing and I was sent to search. We found two seamen stuck in the room when their door jammed. We broke the door down. The two engineers could not be found and had probably been instantly killed. The engine room was flooded.*

*"Abandon ship!"*

*Shortly the **Opawa** was on fire. It took forty shells to sink her.*

*Four boats were left on the lonely ocean four hundred miles from Bermuda and four hundred miles from the Nova Scotia shore of Canada.*

*In our boat were 15 men. Darkness fell. By February 7th the wind was blowing over 50 knots with violent rain squalls. Finally daylight came and we searched the horizon expecting to see the other boats but to our horror there was no sign of them. We were alone, adrift at sea. With care perhaps we could last 14 days so we set the rations accordingly. We set watch two hour on, two hours off.*

*We broached, almost capsized, became filled again and again with water. The next three days became somewhat vague in my mind. On the fifth day the steward complained of pains in his chest. The carefully guarded bottle of whiskey was rubbed in his chest. That night it began to get much colder. By morning it was below freezing. We must have just cleared the gulf stream. We estimated that we had sailed two hundred miles and had another two hundred to go to land. For the first time I wondered if we would make it.*

*At 0200 that afternoon the AB who was on forward lookout yelled that there was a ship on the horizon. We yelled, shouted waved but the ship disappeared below the horizon.*

*That evening I prayed and we all sang "For Those in Peril on The Sea." There was then a gentle breeze, a slight sea and a million stars above. I lay down with my blanket and fell*

*into a deep exhausted sleep. Suddenly, I was awake. "My God! A ship!". I grabbed the flares and pulled the cord. The ship turned to starboard away from us and disappeared into the darkness. Then suddenly she reappeared heading for us. The ship's crew lowered a scrambling net over the side and one by one with surprising difficulty we climbed up the net. The engineer prior to climbing up came aft and recovered the remains of his whiskey.*

*The **Hercules** - the rescuing vessel was an old 'goal poster' with a top speed of nine knots, flew the Dutch flag and was completely manned by wonderful Dutchmen. Ah - a comfortable bunk with sheets and glorious sleep. The **Hercules** had disregarded orders by stopping and allowing herself to be a sitting target.*

*On February 14, early morning, we sailed into New York harbor. It was snowing and visibility was down to a couple of miles. The skyscrapers of downtown Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty appeared vaguely through the snow. Immigration did not quite know what to do with us.*

Elizabeth provided the following additional information:

***Opawa** MV was a New Zealand Refrigerated Cargo Liner. On the 6th February 1942 under the command of Captain W G Evans she was torpedoed and shelled by German submarine U-106 when 400 miles NE of Bermuda on a voyage from Lyttelton to Halifax and the UK with a refrigerated and general cargo. Fifty six men were killed. My father was amongst the 15 survivors.*

*Peter Frank Luard passed peacefully in Nova Scotia on March 11, 2013. I don't know if he was the last survivor or not.*

*According to his records, on board the lifeboat were fifteen men: The Captain, Fourth Officer Bob Downey, himself, an apprentice Ian Davison, deck officers, the Chief Engineer, Chief wireless operator(Sparks), the Eighth Engineer, Chief Refrigerator Engineer, Chief Electrician, two able bodied seamen, one ordinary seaman, two engine room greasers and one steward. The Fourth Engineer should have been in the boat but had been killed in the explosion.*

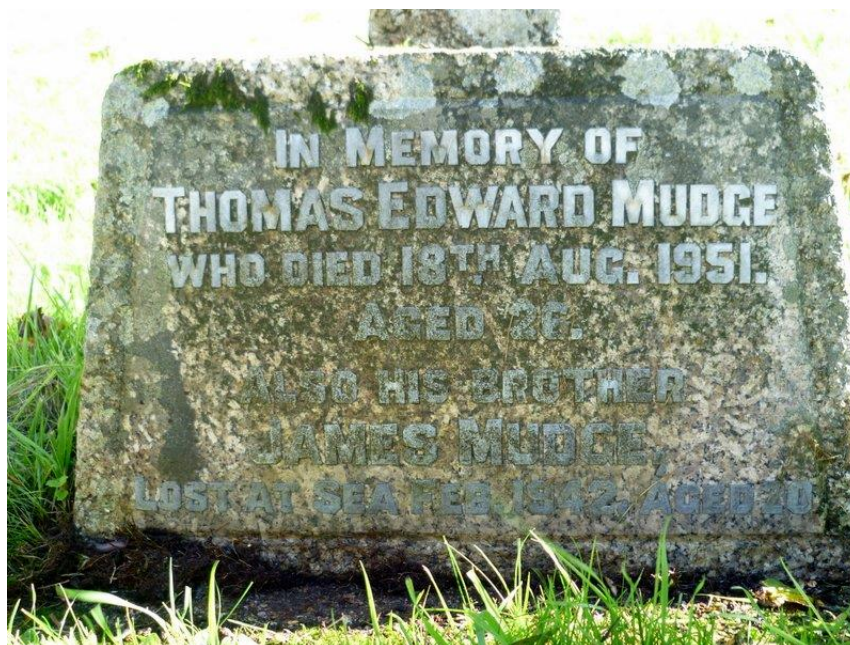
Peter Luard's memoirs were also referred to in an article in his local newspaper that is reproduced below. It gives additional information about discussions between the survivors as to which course to plot to reach safety.

## WEST M.N. CASUALTIES

The latest list issued by the Minister of War Transport of deaths of members of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets caused by enemy action on various dates includes the following:—James Mudge, galley boy, Buckland St. Mary, Chard, Somerset; William Redwood, chief officer 29, Cranleigh Gardens, Bridgwater.

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SOMERSET COUNTY HERALD SEPTEMBER 26 1942



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