



Woodford Remembers



Eric M Sanders

1 February 1919 – 17 June 1940

Family

Eric Mons Sanders was born on 1 February 1919 to Samuel and Edith Sanders nee Corbett. The couple had married on 27 February 1908 at St Mary's Church, Woodford. Samuel was ironstone miner, and Eric was the second of three boys born to the couple. He also had a younger sister – Brenda. They lived in Church Street near the church. He attended the village schools from February 1922 until April 1931 when he moved to Thrapston Secondary School to complete his education. In 1939 Eric still lived with his parents but at West View Woodford, just off the High Street. He was working as an ironstone labourer and his father was a general labourer.

Army Service

Eric Sanders was a trooper in the 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade, Royal Armoured Corps, Service number 7901263. This group were involved in the Dunkirk Evacuation in June 1940 and was part of the rearguard action who were to be evacuated from St Nazaire along with civilians, embassy staff and RAF ground personnel. This was known as Operation Aerial. The SS Lancastria was anchored in deep water and personnel were being ferried to the ship. The capacity of the ship was 1,300 with 375 crew. Estimates of numbers on board put numbers at anywhere between 4,000 and 9,000 personnel on board. Reports state that at 3.50pm a Junkers Ju-88 bombed the ship with three or four bombs hitting the ship and one bomb going down the funnel before exploding in the hold. The resulting explosions caused the ship to sink in in just 20 minutes. 2,477 personnel survived the incident, but Eric was not one of the survivors.

Churchill placed a "D" notice on the incident forbidding the reporting of the sinking and informing an already demoralised public. Churchill, in his memoirs said he had intended to release a few days later , but events in France "crowded upon us so black and quickly, I forgot" As a result the full details of that day will not now be released until 2040.

This remains the greatest loss of life in British Maritime History. The Captain of the Lancastria, Rudolph Sharp went on to command the SS Laconia, on which he lost his life in September 1942.

Burial / grave

No known grave.

Dependants

None.

Commemoration

Woodford Village Memorial

Woodford St Mary's Church Memorial

Dunkirk Memorial - Column 1

