

George North Watson M.B, M.R.C.P



Rank: - Major (acting Lt/Colonel)

Number: - 75408

Regiment: - Royal Army Medical Corps, Hospital Ship HMSS Newfoundland.

Died: - Died at sea 13/09/1943 Age: 33 years.

Cemetery: - Cassino Memorial, Italy, Panel 12.

George Noble was born in 1910 the son of Noble and Amy Watson (nee North, m. 1904, registered Dewsbury) of Commercial Street, Batley. Noble was a draper who had a business at 25, Commercial Street, Batley, where the family also lived. Noble had served in the South African and Great War. Both George and his

brother Captain John William Watson RASC joined the Territorials before war broke out.

George North attended Batley Grammar School and excelled at athletics. At the inter-school sports at Pudsey in 1928 he won five events out of six, the 100, 220, 440 yards races and the long and high jumps. While at Leeds Medical School he carried on his activities and played rugby.

George married Eliza Ann Farrington who lived at 10, Cresswell Lane, Heckmondwike in 1937. They moved to live at Easterley Crescent, Harehills, Leeds. George was a resident medical officer at St. James Hospital, Leeds. George enlisted before war broke out.

The HMSS Newfoundland was a large ship and was entirely painted in white except for large red crosses painted amidships and on the funnel. At night she sailed with all her lights on so that enemy submarines and aircraft would be able to tell that she was a non-combatant and therefore protected by the Geneva Convention.

In September 1943, the Allies invaded Italy and HMHS Newfoundland was assigned as a hospital ship to the 8th Army. The HMHS Newfoundland was one of 2 hospital ships that had been sent to Salerno Beaches on 12th September, where they were to deliver 103 American nurses. There were only 2 patients on board so it was quiet for all the nurses and doctors on board. That evening there was a party held in honour of the American Nursing Corps and after these two nurses showed some of the American Sisters around the operating theatre on board the Newfoundland. Although the Americans had not been on board for very long, they had made firm friends with the British nurses.

The Luftwaffe had already attacked the Newfoundland twice that day. The first occasion they were anchored with another hospital ship when they were dive-bombed. All the bombs missed although one landed between the 2 ships. A few hours after this incident they were dive bombed again. A third hospital ship had joined them and the bombs fell all around and amongst them. After this incident a decision was made to move further out to sea and anchor for the night. The 3 hospital ships were joined by a 4th and about 40 miles off the Salerno Beaches

they all anchored for the night. They were all lit up like Christmas Trees to highlight the fact that they were hospital ships.

Around about 5 o'clock in the morning of the 13th September, a single aircraft was heard and Captain Wilson, who was on the bridge heard a bomb falling. It was thought to be an aerial mine and it landed on HMHS Newfoundland on the boat deck behind the bridge. It caused a large amount of damage. The communications were lost and more importantly the fire fighting equipment was completely shattered. Fire immediately took hold.

The surviving British nurses and all the American sisters went straight to their stations in the smoke and flames and

waited to be told what to do. There was another explosion and it became clear that the oil tanks had also caught fire so the order was given to abandon ship.

The survivors took to the lifeboats. The 2nd Officer who had a broken leg, a broken arm and splinter wounds took command of a lifeboat full of nurses.

Meanwhile Captain Wilson and 17 volunteers stayed behind to fight the fire. They were soon assisted by USS Mayo who put a party on board and together they spent around 36 hours trying to put out the fires and search for survivors. They did not succeed and the ship was declared beyond all hope of recovery. Those on board were taken off and HMHS Newfoundland had to be sunk by USS Plunkett.

Of the 14 British staff nurses on board, 6 had been killed. All the medical officers too had been killed.

The reason or motive for the Luftwaffe had for attacking HMHS Newfoundland has never been known. One theory has been put forward that the American

FORMER B.G.S. ATHLETE REPORTED MISSING

Major George North Watson (33),



Major Watson.

R.A.M.C., an "old boy" of Batley Grammar school and son of Mr. Noble Watson, formerly a Batley draper and now of Easterly Crescent, Harehills, Leeds, has been reported missing.

Major Watson, whose wife lives in Sandringham Gardens, Moortown, Leeds, was resident medical officer at St. James' Hospital, Leeds, before the war. He did exceptionally well in athletics at Batley Grammar School and at the inter-school sports at Pudsey in 1928 won five events out of six, the 100, 220, and 440 yards races, and the long and high jumps. While at Leeds Medical School he carried on his athletic activities and played rugby.

Major Watson and his brother, Captain J. W. Watson, R.A.S.C., joined the Territorials before the war.

Mr. Noble Watson served in the South African War and in the last war,

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nurses were mistaken for troops because of their green uniforms and maybe the Luftwaffe believed that the hospital ship was being used as a troop ship.

His parents had left Batley to reside at Easterly Road, Harehills, Leeds.

George North is remembered with Honour at Batley Grammar School and Batley War Memorial. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star and the 1939-1945 War Medal.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group