



## Painting of *Oranje*

### (1<sup>st</sup> Netherlands Hospital Ship *Oranje*)

Sources include research by Miss Susan Oag and various websites



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

# Painting of *Oranje*

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This watercolour was presented to the United Service Club of Queensland in 1995 and currently hangs in the main staircase at Level 3. The painting, its subject (ie the ship), the person in whose memory it was donated, and the donor all have an interesting story.

The watercolour was previously owned by Colonel Archibald John Aspinall AAMC, who served on *Oranje* as Senior Medical Officer and OC Troops in 1941-1942, and presented in his memory and in his honour to the Club by his son.



The work is a 30 x 45 cm watercolour, by John Charles Allcot (1888 - 1973). The Australian Dictionary of Biography<sup>1</sup> says of him:

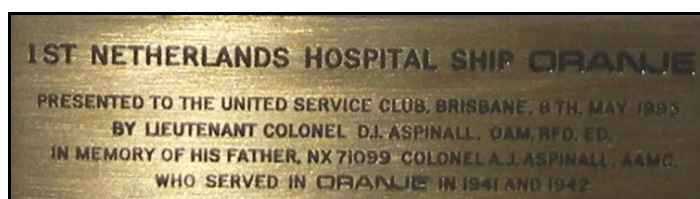
*Painting to tried and tested conventions, with impeccable attention to detail, Allcot used water-colour and gouache, and oils.*

*His work was prolific and romantic. At a time of great change in the shipping industry, he specialized in nostalgic views of sailing ships and steamers, and found an appreciative market of ship-owners, captains, crews and their families.*

*While best known for his ships, he continued to enjoy painting landscapes.*

*A fellow (1956) of the local Royal Art Society, Allcot was a member of the League of Ancient Mariners and of the Shiplovers' Society. He was elected an honorary life member (1962) of the Australasian Pioneers' Club and appointed OBE in 1970.*

In 1995, Lieutenant Colonel Douglass Ingham Aspinall OAM, RFD, ED (Retd)<sup>2</sup> presented the watercolour to the Club in memory of his late father, Colonel Archibald John Aspinall AAMC. (The watercolour had previously belonged to his father.)



<sup>1</sup> See: <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A130035b.htm>

<sup>2</sup> His post nominal changed in 1998 when he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO)

As part of a series of letters between the Club and Lieutenant Colonel Aspinall<sup>3</sup>, on 20 March 1995 he wrote:

*I would like the painting to be kept where it will be appreciated by service and ex-service people. I am therefore prepared to give it to the United Service Club where it can be displayed in perpetuity. I would ask that it not be sold and that, should the Club ever be wound-up, it to be passed to a similar organisation or returned to the family.*

*Although I am a Life Member of the Royal Automobile Club of Australia, which incorporates the Imperial Service Club, I do not consider it to be a Service Club in the old sense.*

*I am aware that all such clubs, including yours, now accept civilian members but I have always enjoyed the atmosphere and friendship of the United Service Club and would like the picture to remain there in memory of my father*

### **Colonel Archibald John Aspinall**

Colonel Archibald John Aspinall (1883 – 1945) served in the Australian Army Medical Corps during World War II, including 114th Australian General Hospital and in *Oranje* in 1941 and 1942.

The photograph below, taken in June 1942 at Wellington NZ shows Colonel Aspinall standing third from left (he was then a Lieutenant Colonel) .



*New Zealand Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Peter Fraser, talking with wounded New Zealand soldiers who were transported home from the Middle East on the hospital ship Oranje. Identified, left to right: (1) NX71099 Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Archibald John Aspinall, (2) Matron Sarah Anne Jewell, AANS (3) Prime Minister Fraser. Lt Col Aspinall died of illness on 5 December 1945. Matron Jewell was one of the 268 people who lost their lives when the hospital ship Centaur sunk after it was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off the Queensland coast on 14 May 1943.*

He died of illness in NSW on 5 December 1945 aged 62, and is buried at South Head General Cemetery Sydney (Sect I. Grave 217).

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence dated: 16 March 1995, 20 March 1995, 22 March 1995, 3 April 1995, 7 April 1995

## **The Donor: Lieutenant Colonel Douglass Ingham Aspinall AO, RFD, ED (Retd)**

Lieutenant Colonel Douglass Ingham Aspinall AO, RFD, ED (who donated the watercolour to the Club) was a former CO of 17 RNSWR and former regimental secretary of the Royal New South Wales Regiment and a Life Member of the Royal Automobile Club of Australia. He died suddenly at Yass, NSW, on 1 August 2012.



Doug joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Imperial Force (2<sup>nd</sup> AIF) in May 1945 and trained in Cowra, NSW, and Seymour, Victoria. The War was over by the time he completed his training so Doug volunteered to go to Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, a posting that ran from February 1946 until November 1947.

In 1949 he commenced Medicine at Sydney University, leaving after three years due, in his own words to “lack of application.” His attraction to the services however did not suffer the same fate and while at university he enlisted in the CMF in the Sydney University Regiment (SUR) and on December 8, 1950, was one of the first three SUR soldiers to be commissioned after World War II.

In 1952 he transferred to 17/18 Infantry Battalion (the North Shore Regiment) while working in his civil capacity for a medical supplies company in Sydney until 1956.

At the end of 1956 he was selected to become an Australian Military Observer with the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). In Doug’s words again “on the strength of the appointment, I married Mary Morgan”.

After his return from Kashmir in November 1960, Doug worked for Australian Paper Manufacturers until he took early retirement in 1979. Meanwhile he also continued his service in the Army Reserve visiting South Vietnam in 1968 where he was attached to 1 RAR.

He commanded 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal New South Wales Regiment (RNSWR) from 1968 to 1971, retiring as Lieutenant Colonel in 1976.

Doug also busied himself with other voluntary activities including acting as Regimental Secretary of the RNSWR from 1968 to 1996, and trustee and secretary of the RNSWR Trust until 2007.

In January 1980 Doug found himself with a new job Royal Agricultural Society of NSW, and a very short retirement. He remained with the RAS until 1989.

From 1980 to 1997 he served as secretary to the NSW Stud Merino Breeders’ Association and the Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders. In 1986 he became inaugural secretary and executive director of the newly-formed World Federation of Merino Breeders.

For his service to agriculture, the community and defence, Douglass was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) on Australia Day 1988 and was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) on Australia Day 1998.

He was predeceased by his wife who died in late 2003, and is survived by his son and daughter,

## The Ship: 1<sup>st</sup> Netherlands Hospital Ship *Oranje*



*The 'Oranje' off the Western Australian coast in 1941, shortly after the completion of its conversion as a hospital ship. The red crosses and green stripes on the white hull were meant to be a conspicuous reminder to enemy vessels of its non-combatant role.*

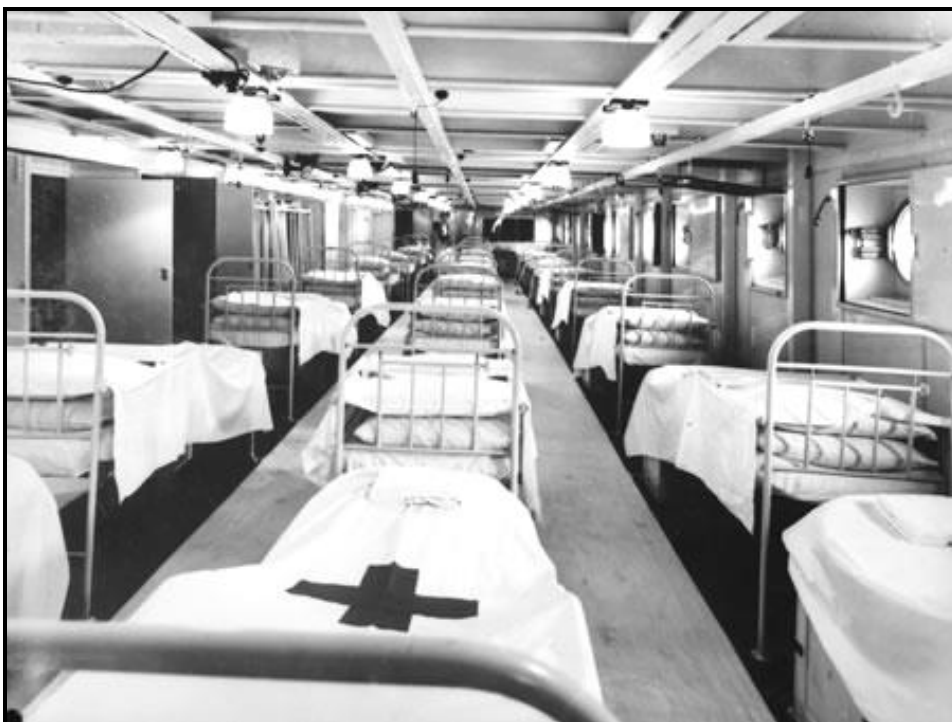
The *Oranje* has an unusual story in her own right:

- The modern 20,166-ton liner *Oranje* was completed in early 1939 for the Nederland Line, and began its maiden voyage to Batavia in September of the same year.
- The outbreak of war between the Netherlands and Nazi Germany found the *Oranje* at Surabaya, where it remained for over a year, owing to the uncertain world situation.
- In early 1941, the Dutch government-in-exile offered the ship to the Australian and New Zealand governments as a hospital ship, an offer that was quickly accepted.
- Initial conversion of the vessel for its new role took place at Batavia, and the work was completed at Sydney.
- Capable of 26 knots, *Oranje* was at the time the fastest hospital ship in the world and represented a valuable addition to the Allies' medical capability.
- Originally staffed and operated by a Dutch crew, with a small complement of New Zealand and Australian staff, it later carried a largely Australian, and eventually a largely New Zealand, medical staff.
- The *Oranje* completed 41 war voyages, covering over 382,000 nautical miles and carrying some 32,461 patients.
- It was subsequently used to repatriate many Dutch internees from the Netherland East Indies to the Netherlands.



*Left: Art Deco–style lapel badges were probably manufactured as souvenirs and intended for sale to the ‘Oranje’s’ passengers, but only one fare-paying voyage was made before the war intervened. Nick Hutteman collected this example during his wartime service aboard the hospital ship.*

*Right: As a unit of the Australian army, ‘Oranje’ received the title ‘1st Netherlands Military Hospital Ship AIF’, and its crew were issued with this distinguishing colour patch. The brown background was common to all medical units, while the orange flash was chosen in honour of the Netherlands’s national colour*



*One of the well-appointed patients’ wards aboard the ‘Oranje’  
In June 1941, the Netherlands government officially handed over to the Australian and New Zealand governments, the ocean liner ‘Oranje’, for the duration of the war. It was fully equipped as a hospital ship and shown here is the interior of one of the wards showing rows of neatly made beds.*