



Nov. 4, 2024

SVC History Department will mark 80th anniversary of SS Léopoldville disaster with lecture and display

LATROBE, PA – On Christmas Eve 1944, the SS Léopoldville, ferrying reinforcements from the America 66th Infantry Division to the Battle of the Bulge, was torpedoed by a Nazi submarine and sank in the English Channel. Of the 2,000-plus soldiers aboard, 763 were killed, including 73 from Pennsylvania. The bodies of 493 victims were never recovered.

To mark the 80th anniversary of the SS Léopoldville tragedy, the History Department in the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Saint Vincent College has organized a memorial event at 7 p.m. Nov. 13 at the Verostko Center for the Arts in the Dale P. Latimer Library.

The event is sponsored by Saint Vincent College's Center for Northern Appalachian Studies. Carol M. Ross, an employee of the College, suggested the idea of a SS Léopoldville memorial to the History Department.

Ross' father, Ross H. Saunders, an Army lieutenant from Bovard, survived the attack on the SS Léopoldville. After he returned from serving in World War II, Saunders went to St. Bede Catholic Church in Bovard every Christmas Eve and lit a votive candle in memory of his lost comrades.

In 2011, Saunders was too ill to light his Christmas Eve candle. He passed away two days later. Saunders' family has continued to honor the memory of the men aboard the SS Léopoldville.

"I always felt Daddy was a hero," Ross said. "This started as my way for doing something as a special 100th birthday gift for him. It became something that I want to do because it's history, and I want to make sure that the history is passed on not just within our family. I definitely think my dad would be proud."

The event will feature a lecture by Nicholas DeWitt, a naval and maritime historian and registrar of Saint Vincent College.

"My plan is to tell the story of the Léopoldville sinking from the perspective of those who were there, with special focus on Lt. Saunders' story," DeWitt said. "We often talk about the combat experiences of the war, but we don't usually spend as much time discussing the lives lost on the way to war. This is one of many such stories, and it is a great way to give those who attend a window into that part of the larger history."

Dr. Emily Arledge, C'15, assistant professor of history, and Jonah Weaver, a sophomore from Danville who is majoring in public history, are spearheading the project. Weaver, a research

FOLLOW SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



@saintvincentcollege



@mysaintvincent

For Information:

Rob Biertempfel
Constituent Marketing Manager

Saint Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Road
Latrobe, PA 15650

Phone: 724-805-2739
rob.biertempfel@stvincent.edu | www.stvincent.edu



assistant under Arledge, has gathered items related to the SS Léopoldville and Saunders for an exhibit located on the top floor of the Latimer Library.

“We hope that this lecture and display will help revitalize the public history program at Saint Vincent College and allow the program to interact with the broader community,” Weaver said.

Arledge aims to use the SS Léopoldville event as a springboard for a broader regional archival initiative next spring.

“I always like to say that public history is community history,” Arledge said. “We’d like members of the Latrobe community to bring us their photos, fill out some forms and contribute to a historical database and preserve their family histories. There’s something special about being able to sort of touch history, so I’m really excited to see what’s going to happen.”

PHOTO: U.S. Army Lt. Ross Saunders

ATTACHMENT: SS Léopoldville memorial event flyer

FOLLOW SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



@saintvincentcollege



@mysaintvincent

For Information:

Rob Biertempfel
Constituent Marketing Manager

Saint Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Road
Latrobe, PA 15650

Phone: 724-805-2739

rob.biertempfel@stvincent.edu | www.stvincent.edu