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# From the Editor...

**W**ITH MANY elements of the war otherwise going very badly for Britain and her Empire during the early days of 1942, the favourable outcome of the commando raid on St Nazaire, and the successful ramming of HMS *Campbeltown* into the gates of the dry dock there, gave a considerable boost to morale at a low point of the war. Churchill, of course, had suffered the high point of America's entry into the war following the attack on Pearl Harbor and, almost immediately, the low point of the sinking of HMS *Repulse* and HMS *Prince of Wales* as well as the effective loss of the Empire through Japanese aggression in the Far East.

Given the success of Operation Chariot at St Nazaire, and against the background of all else that was then going on in the war, there is little wonder that the operation became known as 'The greatest raid of all.' It was certainly a most appropriate sobriquet. Not only that, but the raid also resulted in 89 decorations for gallantry, including five VCs awarded to Lt Cdr Beattie, Lt Col Newman and Cdr Ryder, with posthumous awards to Sergeant Durrant (featured in this issue) and Able Seaman Savage. Four DSOs were awarded to Major William Copland, Captain Donald Roy, Lt T Boyd and Lt T D L Platt. Other decorations awarded were four CGMs, five DCMs, 17 DSCs, 11 MCs, 24 DSMs and 15 MMs. Four men were awarded the Croix de Guerre by France and another 51 were Mentioned in Despatches.

Heroes all, we salute the 'Charioteers' and pay tribute, too, to the often overlooked air-element of this remarkable raid.



*Andy Saunders*  
Andy Saunders  
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The average sale for the period Jan-Dec 2015 was 10,843, print and digital copies monthly.



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See page 84  
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This month, a commemorative printed tissue paper handkerchief produced to commemorate the death of Lord Kitchener and the men on HMS Hampshire. Few of these delicate souvenirs survive.



## COVER STORY

Battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* downs a Japanese G4M as she sustains a fatal torpedo hit off Malaya on 10 December 1941. *Repulse* successfully dodged up to 19 torpedoes, and her AA suite accounted for two G4M bombers downed and 13 G3Ms/G4Ms damaged. However, her luck ran out, and a succession of rapid hits caused her to sink with the loss of 513 of her crew.

(ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW HAY)



# U-Boat Images Released By Historic England

Jack Casement took this picture of UB-106 on the rocks in Falmouth, Cornwall, in 1921.

## THE MEMORIAL TO SUBMARINERS

To coincide with the release of Casement's images, Historic England has announced that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will upgrade the National Submarine War Memorial to Grade II\* status. Located on the Thames embankment at Temple Pier in London, the memorial was original dedicated to the submarines and submariners of the First World War.

The sculpture by Frederick Hitch consists of a bronze relief panelling depicting four naval figures in the interior of a submarine contending against the inimical influences of the ocean, represented by figures attempting to trap it in a net. On the left is a plaque listing the submarines lost in 1914-1918 and on the right is a list of submarines lost from 1939 to 1945. To the left and right of the plaques are female figures representing Truth, and a blindfolded Justice. Under the centre panel is an oblong plaque showing a submarine cruising on the surface of the sea.

Ornamental border includes the badge of the Royal Navy, some dolphins and the prows of boats. The memorial was unveiled on 15 December 1922 in a ceremony attended by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair KCB.



A SERIES of unique photographs of wrecked First World War German U-boats on the Cornish coast have been released by Historic England.

The U-boats that feature in the images were amongst the many surrendered by Germany at the end of the First World War. By early 1919, several U-Boats in seagoing condition had already been delivered to the Royal Navy, the French Navy and the United States Navy for victory tours, examination and testing. Dozens of other U-boats, however, remained laid up in Harwich and other locations around the British coast, awaiting their fate (which usually involved being scrapped).

One batch of nine U-boats had been allocated to the Admiralty for explosive testing and gunnery practice. One of these vessels, UB-118, sank off South Devon while under tow from Harwich to Falmouth. The remainder of the batch reached their destination safely. Two boats, whose numbers are not known, were sunk as gunnery targets in Falmouth Bay soon after their arrival, while UB-86, UB-97, UB-106, UB-112, UB-128, and UC-92 were moored at Gyllyngvase in the shadow of Pendennis Castle.

The naval historian and author Nick Hall explained the fate of these U-boats: 'It was an exposed position and a severe winter storm broke their moorings and drove all six boats ashore - five on rocks

surrounding Pendennis Point and one on Gyllyngvase beach. These stranded U-boats attracted large numbers of tourists, who combed the beach for souvenirs or took boat trips to view the stranded vessels. Significant salvage attempts were not undertaken until the Second World War, but the remains of the U-boats today lie in shallow water and can be viewed by divers.'

The photographs, newly-acquired by Historic England, were taken in 1921 by Captain Jack Casement. Jack was a distant cousin of Roger Casement, the Irish-born civil servant who worked for the British Foreign Office as a diplomat, and later became a humanitarian activist, Irish nationalist, and poet. Captain Casement, who had been decorated for his wartime naval service, was working for the Submarine Research Centre in Falmouth at the time he took the pictures seen here.

Serena Kant of the Historic England listings service has been



researching the post-war fate of surrendered U-boats. Kant was contacted by Casement's family when she published an article in a conservation bulletin. It is his family that has donated the series of photographs to Historic England.

**ABOVE:** Captain Jack Casement RN. Jack photographed the wrecked submarines during what was probably one of his last official postings. He retired shortly after. (ALL IMAGES © HISTORIC ENGLAND/PATRICK CASEMENT)

**BELOW:** Naval visitors photographed by Casement on the listing UB-112. (© HISTORIC ENGLAND/PATRICK CASEMENT)



## COMPETITION WINNERS!

We are pleased to announce the fortunate winners of our recent competition to win copies of the superb 'Stations of Coastal Command - Then and Now' by David Smith and kindly donated by our friends at After the Battle

Publications. The lucky winners were as follows: Susan Pearmain of St Martin's, Isles of Scilly, Ian Hale of Abergavenny and Ian Collins of Haywards Heath. Meanwhile, the winners of our competition to win copies of the remarkable book by Mark Barnes, 'The Liberation of Europe', published by Casemate, were as

follows: Philip Davey of Reading, Mr R Woodham of Stepney Green, London, Mark Preston of Gravesend and Ian Collins of Haywards Heath who was fortunate enough to be a winner in both competitions! All our lucky prize winners have been notified and their prizes have now been sent out to them.

Congratulations to all our winners and commiserations to those who didn't win this time. Thank you for taking part.

**FOR A CHANCE TO WIN ONE OF FIVE AUTHOR-SIGNED COPIES OF PETER LUSH'S BOOK 'WINGED CHARIOT', BY GRUB STREET PUBLISHING, GO TO PAGE 84 IN THIS ISSUE.**



## Last Battle Of Britain Kiwi

THE LAST surviving New Zealander to have earned the Battle of Britain Clasp has died, aged 99, reports Geoff Simpson.

Bernard Walter Brown was born in Stratford, North Island, New Zealand, on 6 December 1917 and educated at the local technical high school. He went to work for the Post Office, but in February 1938 Bernie applied for a short service commission with the RAF. He was accepted and, later in the year sailed for England in the RMS *Rangitane* of the New Zealand Shipping Line, the ship later sunk by German surface raiders in November 1940.

Brown began his training at 5 E&RFTS, Hanworth, on 31 October 1938 and in January 1939 was posted to 5 FTS, Sealand. After completing his training, he went to No 1 School of Army Co-operation, Old Sarum, for a course on Lysanders, joining 613 City of Manchester Sqn at Odiham on 6 October 1939.

Initially, the squadron was supplied with Hawker Hectors for its Army Co-operation role, with Lysanders beginning to arrive and operational status achieved in the spring of 1940.

On the 26 May 1940 Plt Off Brown was flying one of six Hawker Hectors tasked to attack gun emplacements near Calais. According to *Men of the Battle of Britain* by Kenneth G Wynn: "En route, he test-fired his forward gun but the omission of a split pin caused the muzzle attachment to fly off, penetrate the fuselage and hole the main fuel tank. Brown jettisoned his two bombs and turned back, making a forced-landing on Herne Bay golf course."

Brown became one of the Army Co-operation pilots to volunteer for Fighter Command and arrived at 7 OTU, Hawarden, on 22 August 1940, converted to Spitfires and joined No 610 (County of Chester) Sqn at RAF

Acklington on 3 September when the squadron had just moved north from Biggin Hill. On the same day, he was promoted to Fg Off and on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month Brown went to Biggin Hill to join 72 Squadron.

His operational career with the squadron lasted three days. His Spitfire was shot down by a Me 109 over Gravesend and he baled-out, wounded, landing near Eastchurch. He was admitted to hospital and posted from the squadron to RAF Biggin Hill, as non-effective sick. Brown later instructed in Southern Rhodesia and returning to the UK in 1943 he joined Transport Command to become a ferry pilot. He transferred to the RNZAF and was released in 1945 as a Flight Lieutenant. He later became a First Officer on Dakotas with BOAC. Later moving to BEA, he retired in 1972 and returned to New Zealand.



**ABOVE:** Flt Lt Bernard Walter Brown, the last surviving New Zealander to fight in the Battle of Britain, has died aged 99.

**BELOW:** On 26 May 1940, Brown was sent off to dive-bomb Calais in an obsolete Hawker Hector.



**!** A successful operation to safely remove a Second World War bomb found in the River Thames has been conducted in London. The device had been found in an area of the river close to the Houses of Parliament, off Victoria Embankment, and Royal Navy and Metropolitan Police specialists were called out to safely dispose of the 75-year-old device after it was dredged up by workmen. Both Waterloo and Westminster bridges and Westminster and Embankment London Underground stations had to be closed for several hours while the operation was in progress. Despite the passage of so many years, devices like these continue to be found around Britain - most particularly during building and construction work.



A collection of First World War cartoons by one of Britain's most popular 20th century illustrators have been unearthed after 100 years. Joseph Morewood Staniforth has been credited with more than 1,300 newspaper cartoons during the Great War. Some of his most acclaimed work included a rousing call to arms following Lord Kitchener's plea for recruits, an illustration of Sir Winston Churchill dressed as a bargeman after the failed Dardanelles campaign and a depiction of Kaiser Wilhelm II as a beggar on the streets of Germany. Cardiff University's Professor Chris Williams has overseen a three-year project to digitise Staniforth's distinguished wartime cartoons. He said: "For me, Staniforth was one of the most popular cartoonists of all time, but his work has been under-appreciated."



# Former British Army Half-tracks Salvaged

IN 2016 the Dutch company restoration company, BAIV, discovered two International M5 Half-tracks, battle-weary survivors of the Second World War; the first in The Netherlands, the second in France, **reports Carry Harts**. BAIV opted to rescue both veteran vehicles and the company is currently restoring them so they can parade at the forthcoming Liberation of Europe commemorations, starting in Normandy with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in 2019.

Close examination and historical research proved that both vehicles operated with the British Army during the Second World War. After the war, one served for

many years in the French Army and in 1959 was bought by the famous Dutch surplus dealer, A.J. Barth (Blaaksedijk) from a British Army depot in Belgium. It was used by a Dutch farmer in the province of Friesland, for which it was fitted with a crane. He used the half-track as crane support vehicle for decades. The vehicle ended its active life next to a farm in Offingawier (also in Friesland). The new owner planned to restore the M5 himself, but before he could start work he passed away. The family decided to sell the vehicle and it eventually ended up with BAIV.

The second M5 was traced by the owners of BAIV in 2016 in La Sône in France, at the surplus yard of Monsieur Lascombes. Though almost completely hidden under a mass of weeds and undergrowth, the hull of the half-track proved to be sound and BAIV bought the vehicle and transported this unique Second World War survivor to Maarheeze in the Netherlands for a Class A restoration.

After the two vehicles were dismantled and their chassis' sandblasted, the restoration

of the vehicles began this year at BAIV's workshop in Maarheeze. One of the M5s has already been fitted with a fully-restored engine and was tested successfully. The upcoming year will see both vehicles fully restored, ready for their new crews to practice driving and maintaining the vehicles ahead of the 2019 commemorations.

For *Britain at War* readers who might be interested in investing in the restorations of either of these vehicles, BAIV offers potential new owners a unique opportunity to be part of the process. All clients of the Dutch company receive periodic updates on social media platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp. In this way, the new owners experience the restoration of their vehicle as if it were being completed in their own garage. When the vehicle is finally ready, and rolls out for the


IMAGE: A M5 stuck in thick mud.




ABOVE: The new engine fitted to one of the half-tracks.

BELOW: The long lost M5 found in La Sône, France.



 The diary of a First World War veteran has been published for the first time after remaining hidden away for more than five decades. When British war veteran Sergeant Horace Reginald Stanley passed away in 1971, his journal remained untouched for another 16 years until his daughter, Heather Brodie, and granddaughter Juliet Brodie decided that his harrowing accounts and stories, in addition to his remarkable photographs, should be made public. They hoped that this would allow people to gain a better understanding of the bitter and lengthy conflict. 'Grandad's War', by Juliet and Heather Brodie, is now available through Poppyland Publishing with more details available at [www.poppyland.co.uk](http://www.poppyland.co.uk).

 The MOD has launched an appeal to locate relatives of Dublin-born 25-year-old Fleet Air Arm Lieutenant Edmund Seymour Burke, who was killed along with his colleague when their Fairey Fulmar fighter aircraft crashed in the Barents Sea on 31 July 1941, whilst operating from the carrier HMS *Illustrious*. The two were seen getting into their dingy which washed ashore two days later. Both occupants were dead and they were buried as 'unknown' on the Rycachiy Peninsula, northern Russia. According to the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, little is known about Burke and they are anxious to obtain more information. Anyone who can help trace Lieutenant Burke's family is asked to contact the following email address: [DBS-JCCCommem4503@mod.uk](mailto:DBS-JCCCommem4503@mod.uk).



# The glorious days of Britain in WW2



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# Silvertown Explosion: Marked 100 Years On

## Forgotten Stories Published to Commemorate Event



THE FAMILIES of 73 people killed in the Silvertown Explosion have marked the centenary of London's biggest blast.

On 19 January 1917, about 50 tonnes of Trinitrotoluene (TNT) destined for the Western Front exploded at Brunner Mond, a converted munitions factory at the Royal Docks. The blast was heard 105 miles away, at Sandringham, Norfolk. The factory was purifying

TNT, and producing tonnes of the compound daily.

A series of commemorations took place to mark the disaster, and included the publication of forgotten stories from survivors, released by the Royal Docks Management Authority. In addition The Museum of London Docklands have announced they have digitised and released an album of 24 images taken by John H Avery, whose photographic services

were commissioned by the Port of London Authority to document the damage done to their property in order to claim compensation.

However, the primary focus of commemorations was on a memorial event, where families of the victims remembered those lost at the site, now part of the Royal Wharf development. Joining them were Sir Hugo Brunner, great-

grandson of the factory owner and initiator of the ceremony, the Mayor of Newham Sir Robin Wales, and historian Dr Malcolm Graham. Sir Robin spoke of the loss to the community living and working within a major industrial hub.

Damage at the epicentre would not be dissimilar to that seen along the Somme frontier. The plant was destroyed instantly, as were



IMAGE CREDIT: Museum of London / PLA Collection



nearby buildings and Silvertown Fire Station. Burning debris, including chunks of railway wagon and machinery, tonnes in weight, was strewn for miles, crushing homes and warehouses packed with combustibles and causing fires visible from Maidstone, Kent, 36 miles away.

One eyewitness stated: "Suddenly there was a deafening roar, a fountain of flaming debris was projected high into the air and this spread out like a fiery rose, dropping death and destruction over the whole district."

Sheila Simpson represented her grandmother's sister, Elizabeth Preston, who was killed at her home over the road from the factory. She left her house with her mother-in-law and two children. Sheila said: "I was amazed to find the house still standing but that was the reason why they had died - because they went out into the garden."

First responders and firefighters were among those caught in the disaster, as prior to the time of the explosion, 6.52pm, a fire had broken out and efforts to extinguish the blaze were underway. Former Woolwich policeman Alan Godfrey spoke of the heroism of local officers, in particular praising PC Edward Greenoff, stating

his sacrifice was 'incredible': "He was on duty outside the factory when the fire broke out. He remained at his post to warn others of the dangers as the explosion was imminent. He was struck on the head by a large missile and died in hospital a few days later."

Thankfully, the time of day meant the factory was largely unoccupied as were the upper floors of nearby homes, reducing casualties. Nevertheless,

damage was extensive, in nearby Greenwich, a gasometer was struck and 7,100,000cb ft of gas erupted in a fireball. The Port of London Authority estimated 17 acres of warehouses were destroyed while, eight miles distant, the windows of the Savoy Hotel on the Strand were smashed and a taxi was damaged in Pall Mall.

Around 70,000 homes in the area

were damaged, with 900 levelled, leaving thousands homeless. Close to 500 were injured. The cause of the blast was never established, though sabotage was ruled out. The effects of this, and other similar disasters, led to the War Office taking control of munitions production and storage and the legal

reclassification of TNT, typically an extremely stable compound, as an explosive under the 1875 Act.

The forgotten stories can be read at: <http://www.londonsroyaldocks.com/forgotten-stories/>



Britain at War thanks The Museum of London Docklands for their support with this article. The museum is located at West India Quay in east London. Opened in 2003, this grade one listed converted Georgian sugar warehouse specifically tells the story of the port, river and city - focusing on trade, migration and commerce in London. The museum is open daily 10am-6pm and is FREE to all, and you can explore the Museum of London Docklands with collections online - home to 90,000 objects with more being added. [www.museumoflondon.org.uk](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk).



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# Stolen Dambuster Logbook - Where Is It Now?

AT A hearing in Wood Green Crown Court during January, a military historian, who was well-known as a 617 Squadron historian and author, stole a Dambuster crew member's flying logbook from the war hero's widow and also stole irreplaceable artefacts from the National Archives as well as memorabilia from other 'Dambuster' squadron members' families. Alex Bateman, a former history teacher who worked at Harrow School, forged a Christmas card and faked a burglary in a bid to steal the invaluable logbook from 92-year-old Doris Fraser, the widow of the late Flight Sergeant John Fraser.

Valued at £10,000, the book has never been returned to the family after Bateman claimed Flt Sgt Fraser's logbook and two other members' logbooks, belonging to Kenneth Earnshaw and Gordon Yeo, were stolen from his home in a break-in just hours before the media revealed he was refusing to return her property in 2003. In 2003 it has emerged that he was handed a Police caution by Scotland Yard after it was discovered he had been stealing documents from the National Archives at Kew. For more than ten years, while purporting to be researching wartime air operations, he had been taking hundreds of items from The National Archives and selling them to buyers in the United States.



Some of these documents related to missions conducted by the elite Lancaster bomber unit, including papers relating to the 1943 dams raid. He also took treasured items from other members of the squadron which have also never been returned, it emerged in court. Bateman, of Harrow, persuaded Mrs Fraser to hand over the book in 1996 when he first began looking for research material. Her husband, Flt Sgt Fraser, was one of only two men to survive the crash of one of the Lancasters during Operation Chastise.

After the war, Mrs Fraser started a new life with her husband and children in Canada, but offered to help Bateman when she spotted a local newspaper appeal from him asking for information about the squadron. Mrs Fraser posted him the logbook in January 1996 and the pair maintained a good

relationship, regularly exchanging Christmas cards until early 2003, when Mrs Fraser's daughter, Shere Lowe, asked for the logbook to be returned. Instead of returning the logbook, Bateman sent a letter stapled to a piece of card, which read: "Dear Shere, here as promised is the log book of your father - I know you will find it of interest and it's a pleasure to return it to its rightful owner." He had also included a cassette tape about the Dambusters raid, but the logbook itself was missing and there was a slit in the bottom of the envelope. Bateman then claimed that the logbook had been found in a post office sorting room, but suggested he should hand it over in person when the family came to England in May 2003 for a Dambusters reunion "unless instructed otherwise". Finally, he faked a Christmas card claiming

she had said he could keep it. The case was initially dealt with as a civil matter, but in May 2015 the Met police began investigating the historian for theft.

Judge John Dodd told Bateman that he faces jail, and urged him to return the books: "He has done something dreadfully cruel, I think he has it in his power to tell the truth, and if he does choose to tell the truth and restore the original document that will help him enormously." Bateman, who was remanded in custody until 3 February when he was due to be sentenced, was told that he inevitably faced prison although sentencing was ultimately deferred until 10 February.

If any reader of Britain at War magazine has any information which might lead to the recovery of the stolen logbook, or has any clues as to its present whereabouts, they are asked to get in touch with us at [contact@britainatwar.com](mailto:contact@britainatwar.com) or call us on 01780 755131 or via PO Box 380, Hastings, East Sussex, TN39 9JA.

**IMAGE** Although not Fraser's crew, this is the crew of Lancaster AJ - T, photographed at around the time of the Dam's raid. Memorabilia associated either with the raid and its participants has become highly sought after and today commands extremely high prices.

## The Tiger Collection

**IMAGE:** As reported in our January edition, the Tank Museum at Bovington took delivery of a unique Tiger 'Elefant' from the United States in December. This, together with the museum's Tiger 131, will form the dual centrepieces of the new Tiger tank exhibition which will open there in April 2017. In next month's issue of Britain at War we will be paying special attention to the story of the mighty Tiger tank to coincide with the opening of the new exhibition. Pictured here is the impressive 'Elefant' in its current home prior to the exhibition being constructed around it. (PHOTO CREDIT: THE TANK MUSEUM)



A British tank used by the Canadian Army and the Home Guard for training and target practice has been found at Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking. The tank, a Cruiser Tank Mk V, A13 Mk III 'Covenanter', was one of a pair buried at the site, formerly a base for Allied troops. The tank equipped numerous British armoured divisions based in the British Isles, but never operated outside of the United Kingdom as problems with the types cooling system rendered it unfit for service overseas. Therefore, the Covenanter, of which 1,700 were built, was relegated to training purposes. This recently found example was buried five feet underground, and there are plans to fully recover the vehicle. The other lost tank was recovered on the Denbies Estate in 1983.



The French embassy in Ottawa has announced that it will indefinitely extend the deadline for Canadian veterans who fought to liberate in France during the Second World War to apply for their Légion d'Honneur award. The Légion d'Honneur is France's highest civil and military honour, and was being issued to qualifying applicants who applied before December 2013. High demand, more than 1,000 applications, led to the original deadline being extended to July 2015, and now, ad infinitum. The news came as 92-year-old Canadian Normandy veteran William Leland Berrow, of Coquitlam, received his medal for his service to France. Berrow served as a dispatch rider, and frequently scouted ahead of the logistics columns he escorted, searching for German patrols and deadly booby traps.





## HMS Vanguard Wreck Surveyed Ahead of Loss Centenary

THE WRECK of HMS *Vanguard* has been surveyed ahead of the centenary of her loss on 9 July 1917. The survey, which involved both photographic and 3D image scanning of the protected war grave, was announced last autumn and it was hoped the results would shed light on what caused the battleship to sink in one of the most tragic accidents in the history of the Royal Navy.

The eight-year-old vessel was a veteran of the Battle of Jutland, where she helped cripple the light cruiser SMS *Wiesbaden*, and when firing at German destroyers that evening became the last ship to fire her guns in the battle. She had also sallied with the Grand Fleet on 19 August 1916, to force back a raid on Sunderland.

On the day of her loss, none aboard the ship, who had that day drilled procedures for abandoning ship, detected anything amiss until the first explosion at 23:20. The subsequent disaster claimed all but two of the dreadnought's 845 crew when she exploded

at anchor. Among the dead was Captain Kyōsuke Eto, an observer from the Imperial Japanese Navy, which was allied with the Royal Navy.

The survey was completed by a team from SULA Diving, Seatronics and Teledyne Reson, working from the *MV Huskylan* and in conjunction with the University of the Highlands and Islands Archaeology Institute. The wreck lies some 110ft down and the vast debris field was also recorded.

Dive survey organiser Emily Turton stated: "The purpose of the survey is to tell the story of HMS *Vanguard* at 100 years underwater and to offer a sensitive contribution to the centenary commemoration in 2017."

The first findings support the conclusion *Vanguard* was lost after a huge internal explosion behind her bridge. Ms Turton commented: "Surprisingly, given the nature of her loss, both the bow and stern are intact despite large pieces of wreckage having

being thrown hundreds of metres away." This gives additional weight to witness statements, which described a large explosion occurring immediately behind the bridge, an indicator of a magazine explosion.

Though this turn of events had long been accepted the actual course of events resulting in the strongly-suspected catastrophic cordite explosion are still unknown. The inquiry into the loss examined witnesses from nearby ships, who sighted a white glare between the foremast and "A" turret, quickly followed by two large explosions. The court found that at one, maybe two, of *Vanguard's* magazines exploded. Additional supporting evidence came from debris, the explosion was so great that debris and remains showered nearby ships. One large steel plate, some six feet long, struck HMS *Bellerophon* and testing concluded the plate originated from an internal room to the centre of *Vanguard*.

Even with this intrinsic analysis,

the inquiry could not establish in certainty why the blast occurred. The inquiry heard it was possible some of the cordite charges on board were past their listed safe life, and that a spontaneous detonation may have occurred, but neither theory could be proved. The most probable conclusion was that the initial fire or explosion took place in a 4-in shell magazine, and spread to a main magazine.

This was the final conclusion of the board, which attributed the loss to a cordite explosion and surmised this might have occurred because watertight doors which should have been closed were left open, allowing heat from the ship's boilers to raise the temperature in a 4-in magazine and cause a fire.

However, for now at least, the cause of this disaster remains a mystery of Scapa Flow. The recoverable bodies were laid to rest at Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery, Hoy, where there is a memorial.

★ In 1936, two large stone guardian lions were donated to the Australian War Memorial by the Mayor of Ypres. The lions, carved from limestone, were given to the Australian government as a gesture of friendship and, during the war, had originally stood on plinths on either side of the Menin Gate through which many Australians marched to the battlefields between 1914 and 1918. In 2014 the Menin Gate lions were removed from display in preparation for their loan to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa and returned to the Memorial in 2015 but are now being returned to Ypres as display centre-pieces for the commemorative events in 2017 marking the centenary of the battle of Passchendaele.

i The largest known remnant of the tricolour flag hoisted over Jacob's Biscuit Factory during the 1916 Easter Rising was donated to Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, after 100 years in Jersey. The flag had been in the Channel Islands since 1916 where it had been sent by John Le Provost, a member of the Jersey Pals Battalion who fought in Dublin during the Rising. It was returned to Ireland by John Le Provost's great-grandson, David Blake, after he learned exactly what his family had been handed down. The Jacob's Tricolour was made up following the destruction of the GPO flag, which had either been shot or burned down after the GPO came under fire. It was fashioned by Thomas Meldon, George Ward and Derry Connell using bunting and nailed to a flagpole above the factory. The flag will be put on display in Glasnevin Museum from January 2017.



# Gibraltar, a Rock, a bastion, a fortress



**G**ibraltar is a British Overseas Territory that stands at the entrance of the Mediterranean guarding one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. Its key contribution to British and western defence interests during World War II and the ensuing Cold War era, has been well documented in history, while its modern day role as forward mounting base remains significant.

The Rock of Gibraltar has approximately 30 miles of natural caverns and man-made tunnels in its interior, dating back to The Great Siege of 1779-1783 when army artificers dug out tons of rock, to create a complex and efficient system of fortifications.

## The Great Siege Tunnels

The Great Siege Tunnels is an impressive network of military defences originally excavated from the Rock's Jurassic lime-stone interior, by British military artificers during The Great Siege of Gibraltar carried out by a combined Spanish-French military force (1779-1783). The intricate network of interlinked passages was dug out by precursors of the Royal Engineers, using only sledgehammers, crowbars and gunpowder. Cannon were placed in embrasures along the tunnel to provide a formidable military advantage to defend the north face from frontal attack. The names of Governor General Elliot and Sargent Major Ince will forever be linked to this engineering feat.

## WWII Tunnels

Further excavations inside the Rock were carried out by Royal Engineers in 1940 just after the outbreak of World War II, under orders from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who feared an imminent attack from Nazi Germany. The idea of a fortress inside a fortress was revived by Churchill who ordered the construction of a system of passages that turned the inside of the Rock into an impregnable bastion. With the passage of time, the tunnels have become a spectacular tourist attraction open to the public since 2005. The historical interest is considerable as not only Churchill, but other notable contemporary leaders such as 'Ike' Eisenhower and De Gaulle visited these fortifications. It is from this hidden location that Eisenhower would mastermind the North African landings.

## Northern Defences

The first two phases of the Northern Defences regeneration project have been completed. The Defences are an impressive network of military fortifications carved into the Rock by Royal Artificer Corps, in the late 18th century. The area has been transformed with many of its historical and heritage features restored revealing a thousand years of military history, ranging from medieval battlements to WWII installations which can now be safely explored. Guided tours of these Defences are now available.

## 100 Ton Gun

The 100 Ton Gun at Napier of Magdala Battery with an 18 inch calibre coastal defence cannon, is an emblematic tourist attraction located at Rosia Bay. There are only two surviving guns of this type in the world, the other can be found in Malta. Open to the public, it has recently undergone extensive refurbishment. The gun is not operational.

## City Under Siege Exhibition

The City Under Siege Exhibition gives visitors a taste of what life was like during the early years of the 18th century, shortly after Gibraltar was seized by an Anglo-Dutch fleet during the War of Spanish Succession. The exhibition includes the buildings constructed by the occupying force in Gibraltar, mainly the well preserved ammunition storage armouries at Willis's Magazine. Perhaps the most notable feature of the building are the graffiti and wall paintings dating back to 1726. According to historians, it is believed that soldiers on guard would pass the time drawing on the walls to keep awake, as sleeping while on duty was considered an offence punishable by summary execution in those days. There are two particularly outstanding paintings, one of a period galleon and another attributed to Sergeant Major Ince, the man behind The Great Siege Tunnels.

## For more information contact the Gibraltar Tourist Board

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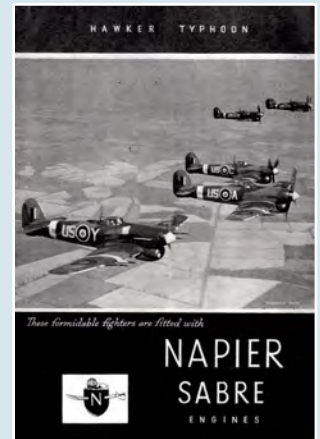


# Hawker Typhoon Preservation Group Acquire Napier Sabre Engine



**LEFT:** Women workers sort Napier Sabre parts for assembly at a shadow factory in north-west England during 1943. (1940 MEDIA LTD)

**BELOW:** A wartime trade advert for the Napier Sabre engine. (1940 MEDIA LTD)



THE HAWKER Typhoon Preservation Group have announced that a major milestone has been achieved in the restoration of Hawker Typhoon Ib, RB396, by working with Cranfield University to secure a Napier Sabre Ila engine, as Mark Khan reports. It will

be used as the power plant to enable the aircraft to take to the sky. The engine will be subject to a strict assessment and rebuild in line with Napier and RAF overhaul manuals at an approved restoration facility in the UK. Formerly a teaching aid belonging to Cranfield University,

the engine had been based in Derby until 1 January. Plans are being drawn up to transport the engine to Goodwood Airport where it will form the basis of a fundraising campaign.

The rarity of this type of engine means that securing this resource, after 10 years of research and discussions, is a huge boost to the project. Not only is it likely to be the only running Napier Sabre outside the US, but it also makes RB396 the only Typhoon outside of the RAF to have secured a suitable engine. Somewhere in the region of 4,500 Sabre engines were built.

The Napier Sabre is a horizontally opposed, 24 cylinder, sleeve-valve engine. Incredibly powerful, yet compact, it was the pinnacle of piston engine performance during WWII. In service the engines were rated to approximately 2,200hp

from 2,238 cubic inches (37 litres) powering the Typhoon to a maximum speed in level flight of over 400mph. The Sabre is synonymous with the Hawker Typhoon and the project trustees concluded that no other 'substitute' engine could be used for RB396. Many years of research, negotiation and all-available manpower has been utilised to reach this point, such is the significance of this example.

A Supporters' Club 'members only' unveiling of the engine is planned for mid February at the engine's new home. The event is fully booked, with spaces being allocated within a few hours of members being given advanced notice of the acquisition. After this event the team will be running regular sessions where it will be possible to view the engine. More information can be found on the project website: [www.hawkertyphoon.com](http://www.hawkertyphoon.com)

**IMAGE:** The Napier Sabre engine secured for the RB396 project.



**VC10 Open Day, Dunsfold Aerodrome, 11 March**  
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**Simon Weston CBE Lecture, The Tank Museum, 25 March**  
Falkland's War veteran Simon Weston CBE talks about his involvement in the conflict for the islands, and of how he overcame his injuries (sustained during the air attacks which gutted the RFA Sir Galahad at Bluff Cove) and adversity. Tickets start from £17, book online or call 01929 405096 (£2 fee for phone bookings)

**'Our Most Dear Enemies', RUSI Whitehall, 2 March**  
A free discussion, open to all, about Anglo-French relations since 1945. Join historians RT Howard and Professor Richard Viven as they discuss the highs and lows of the alliance, from Suez to Exocet, to Libya, between the UK and France. Register: <https://my.rusi.org/uk-french-relations-since-1945>

**Special Auction Services Militaria Auction, Newbury, 8 March**  
Highlights of items going under the hammer include a collection of 77 American Great War propaganda posters, sold as individual lots, with guide prices between £80 and £1200. The collection is expected to reach £25,000 in total. Contact: 01635 580595



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## Russian Carrier in Channel Transit

**IMAGE:** Type 23 Frigate, HMS St Albans, escorts the Russian guided-missile cruiser Petr Velikiy and the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov on 24 January 2017. During their transit of the Channel, HMS St Albans was joined by three RAF 29 Typhoons, leading to this dramatic image. (CROWN COPYRIGHT 2017)



## RAF Casualty Records: The MOD Wants You! Volunteers Sought for File Transfer to The National Archives



THE MINISTRY of Defence has told Britain at War it is seeking volunteers to assist them in their preparation of Second World War RAF Casualty Packs for transfer to The National Archives.

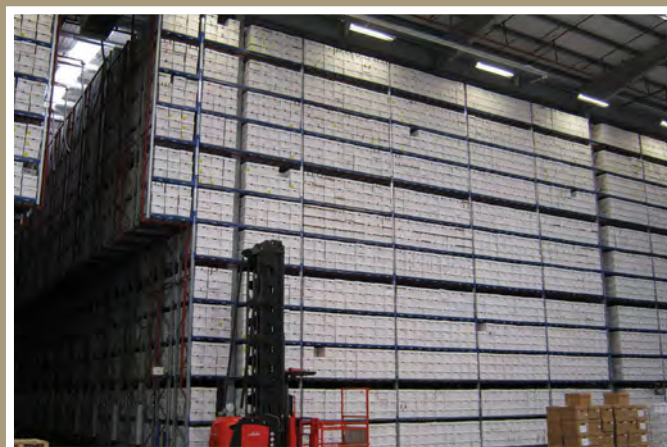
The packs, created between 1939 and 1945 following an incident or loss of aircraft or personnel, are a valuable resource to historians. The transfer commenced in 2013 but the number of packs involved (around

55,000), and the effort required to physically prepare them has limited the number actually transferred to The National Archives.

The MOD is therefore exploring the possibility of using volunteers and is seeking expressions of interest. Working at Portsmouth Naval Base, volunteers would prepare packs in accordance with TNA guidelines. There are no security clearance requirements and full training will be provided.

Volunteers would be expected to commit to a minimum of 4 hours per week in the period 0915-1645

Monday to Thursday for an initial period of at



least 3 months, the prospective start for volunteers is September 2017. The role would be most suited to dexterous individuals with an ability to perform repetitive tasks to produce high quality work in accordance with set guidelines, and who enjoy working within a team.

**ABOVE:** Some of the vast number of casualty packs waiting in storage

**LEFT:** A selection of the files to be prepared for preservation.

Expressions of interest should be sent by e-mail to DBSKI-RecordsPubEnqTeam@mod.uk including a contact e-mail address and telephone number, or in writing to: MOD Records Office, PP34 20 Store, Gloucester Road, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth, PO1 3NH.

**Applicants should be aware that the packs contain information (letters from next of kin, exhumation reports, photographs) that some people may find distressing.**

PLACES TO VISIT



### Thames Valley Branch

'Cheerful Sacrifice - The Battle of Arras 1917' a centenary talk by author Jon Nicholls starts at 20:00 on 30 March. Venue: Berkshire Sports & Social Club, Sonning Lane, Reading RG4 6ST. Contact: 01276 32097, sandhurst37@tiscali.co.uk



### Somerset Branch

German activities in France and Belgium and the Armenian genocide in Turkey are part of 'The Atrocities of the Great War' - a talk by Steve Kemp on 8 March at 19:45. Venue: The Village Hall, Fore St, Othry, Somerset TA7 0QQ. Contact: 01458 251095, mph40cdorm@sky.com



### London (East) Branch

Dr Emma Hanna will talk about 'Entertaining the troops at the Front' in WW1 on the 16 March at 19:45. Venue: Walthamstow Cricket, Tennis & Squash Club, 48a Greenway Avenue, London E17 3QN. Contact: 07956 541897, londoneastwfa@gmail.com



### Wiltshire Branch

The little-known 'Boer Rebellion, 1914-15' is the subject of James White's talk on 5 March at 14:00. Venue: The Dormers, Highworth, Wiltshire SN6 7PQ. Contact: 01367 253100, wfwiltshire@outlook.com





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# Victoria Cross Found In The Mud Of The River Thames



*The Victoria Cross recovered from the mud of the River Thames by Tobias Neto. (MUSEUM OF LONDON)*



A TOTAL of sixteen Victoria Crosses were awarded to men who fought in the Battle of Inkerman in 1854. Of this number, the whereabouts of fourteen are known with certainty, although one of the missing two has now been found writes Robert Mitchell.

Whilst falling outside the general remit of subject matter relating to the wars of Britain, her Empire and Commonwealth since 1914, this discovery is so unusual, and so tied into the theme of gallantry

central to the core content of the magazine, that its inclusion here is strongly felt to be warranted.

The Battle of Inkerman was one of the defining moments of the Crimean War. Fought on 5 November 1854, it was the third major engagement of the conflict between the allied armies, Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire, and the Russians and has been described as 'the soldiers' battle'. Of the fighting that day in November 1854, Sir John Fortescue,

the great historian of the British Army, once wrote: 'The moral ascendancy of the British was astonishing. They met every attack virtually with a counter-offensive, and hesitated not to encounter any numbers whether with bullet, bayonet or butt. There never was a fight in which small parties of scores, tens, or even individuals, showed greater audacity or achieved more surprising results. They never lost heart nor, by all accounts, cheerfulness. The enemy might be in front, flanks or rear, or all three points together: it mattered not. They flew at them quite undismayed and bored their way out ... Never have the fighting qualities of the British been seen to greater advantage than at Inkerman.'

In December 2015, Tobias Nehmy Neto, from Putney, South-West London, was metal-detecting along the banks of the River Thames (as a 'mudlark' he holds a permit to search the foreshore) when he made his remarkable discovery: 'I was detecting in my usual area ... when I came across what looked like a large brooch. Only when I got home did I realise I had a Victoria Cross on my hands when I read "For Valour" below the crown. Then I noticed the date on the reverse: November 5, 1854.' This VC was,

therefore, awarded for an action at the Battle of Inkerman; but who was it awarded to?

The two 'missing' Inkerman VCs were awarded to 22-year-old Pte John Byrne, of the 68<sup>th</sup> Foot, the Durham Light Infantry and Pte John McDermond, of the 47<sup>th</sup> Foot, who was also aged 22. During the fighting, Pte Byrne saw one of his wounded comrades, Anthony Harman, about to be taken by the Russians. Instead of saving his own skin, Byrne went in the opposite direction and despite heavy fire from the advancing enemy, reached Harman and helped him back to safety. Byrne saved his comrade's life in the most extraordinary circumstances and when the first nominations for the new award of the Victoria Cross were made, Byrne's name was on the list. John Byrne continued with his Army career, earning the DCM for actions against the Maoris in New Zealand and retired from the army in 1872 with the rank of Sgt. He found work as a labourer with the Ordnance Survey of Wales but got into an argument with a fellow worker, John Watts, who, Byrne claimed, had 'insulted the Victoria Cross'. Byrne shot Watts with a small revolver, hitting him in the shoulder. When Police went to arrest Byrne he put the revolver in



**TOP:** *The Grenadier Guards attacking the Sandbag Battery at the Battle of Inkerman, a painting by Orlando Norie. Three Guardsmen were awarded Victoria Crosses for their part in the fighting at the Sandbag Battery.* (COURTESY OF THE ANNE S.K. BROWN MILITARY COLLECTION, BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY)

**ABOVE:** *This painting by Edmund Morin provides a graphic impression of the nature of the hand-to-hand fighting at the Battle of Inkerman.* (ANNE S.K. BROWN MILITARY COLLECTION, BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY)





**MIDDLE LEFT:** Men of the 68<sup>th</sup> Regiment in winter dress. The 68<sup>th</sup> (Durham Light Infantry) was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of Cathcart's 4<sup>th</sup> Division. On the morning of the Battle of Inkerman, two companies of the 68<sup>th</sup> were returning from duty in the trenches in front of Sevastopol, being relieved by two other companies of the regiment, when the Russians attacked. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

**LEFT:** A group of men of the 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment, John McDermond's unit, in winter dress ready to go to take their turn in the trenches during the Crimean War, just as they would have appeared in November 1854. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

his mouth and pulled the trigger. He was 46 years-old.

Pte McDermond's VC was awarded for his part in the rescue of his CO, Lt Col O'Grady Haly who had led a charge against a Russian column. After cutting down three of the enemy, he was unhorsed: 'The Russians bayoneted me on the ground and disabled me ... a bayonet thrust grazing my left shin bone, left leg, and coming through the thick of the calf. Another small prod in my back and thigh. A probe in the ribs, and a thrust in my face which grazed my temple.' Coming to his aid, McDermond killed one of the Russians and then fought off the others as Haly was helped back by a Pte Kelly, also of the 47<sup>th</sup>, and an unknown bugler of the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment. As Kelly was killed later in the battle and the selfless young bugler of the 30<sup>th</sup> faded into the fog of Inkerman, only McDermond was decorated.

John McDermond served with the 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment for just under 16 years, seeing service in the Ionian Islands, Malta, Turkey, Gibraltar and Canada. He was invalided out of the Army in 1862, aged 33, after being injured on board ship while in transit to Canada. There was no sympathy or special treatment in the unforgiving world of the British Army at the time – even for its VC heroes. McDermond appears to have had a difficult life after leaving the Army and died six years later, according to some reports in the poorhouse, and is buried in an unmarked grave in Woodside Cemetery, Paisley.

The question of whether the VC located by Neto belonged to Byrne or McDermond remains unanswered. Whilst the date of the action is engraved on the reverse of each VC, the recipient's rank, name and regiment are

engraved on the reverse of the mounting bar, which is missing from the recovered medal. Mr Neto believes that the VC was Byrne's: 'According to our investigations, Sgt Byrne, originally from County Kilkenny, Ireland, moved to Newport, Wales, in 1879. At that time, he was involved in a fight allegedly related to the award of his VC and he shot his assailant in the shoulder.' Mr Neto then goes on to theorise: 'In a fit of regret and despair, Byrne fled to London, disposed of his medal in the River Thames, and subsequently returned to Newport. On the following day, Byrne was found dead in his house at Crown Street, Newport.'

John Grehan, author of the newly-published *The First VCs: The Stories Behind the First Victoria Crosses in the Crimean War and the Definition of Courage*, notes that whilst Mr. Neto believes that it was Byrne's troubled mind that

led to him losing or throwing away his VC, there is another factor that might indicate it belonged to John McDermond: 'Whilst McDermond received his VC for courage in saving the life of Lt Col Haly at Inkerman, Byrne was involved in two incidents during the war, both described in his VC citation in *The London Gazette* of 24 February 1857. It is possible the dates of both of Byrne's actions would have been engraved on the reverse of

the medal, as this happened in other cases such as Captain Sir William Peel with three dates on the reverse of his cross. That only 5 November 1854 is engraved on the recovered medal might indicate that this was, in fact, McDermond's VC.'

Unless the missing mounting bar is found, the provenance of the discovery will remain unresolved, as will the question of how it found its way into the River Thames.

*Men of the 68<sup>th</sup> in their red coats, as they would have fought at Inkerman.*  
(US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



*A view of part of Inkerman battlefield today – a picture taken looking west from the Saddle toward Careenage Ravine.* (COURTESY OF DAVID ROWLANDS; WWW.DAVIDROWLANDS.CO.UK)







**DECISIVE DEFEAT UNDER THE RISING SUN**  
Force Z: The Sinking Of Prince Of Wales And Repulse

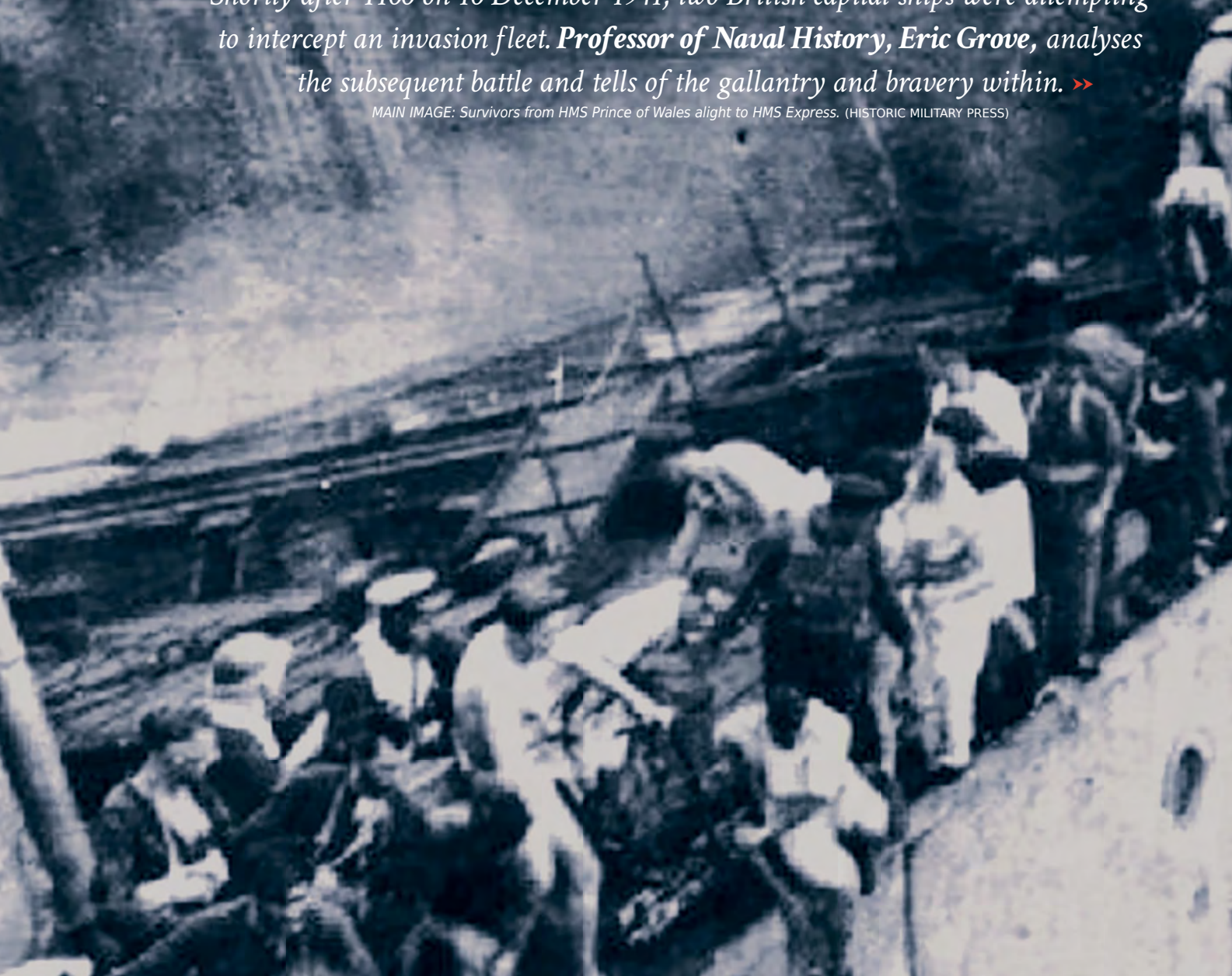


# DECISIVE DEFEAT

*Under The Rising Sun*

*Shortly after 1100 on 10 December 1941, two British capital ships were attempting to intercept an invasion fleet. **Professor of Naval History, Eric Grove**, analyses the subsequent battle and tells of the gallantry and bravery within. >>*

MAIN IMAGE: Survivors from HMS Prince of Wales alight to HMS Express. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)







AT







# DECISIVE DEFEAT UNDER THE RISING SUN

The Sinking Of Prince Of Wales And Repulse



**F**lying the flag of Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, was the new battleship *Prince of Wales*. Her first year had been eventful, she had accompanied HMS *Hood*, battling teething problems to score decisive hits on *Bismarck*. *Prince of Wales* had then taken Churchill across the ocean for his 'Atlantic Charter' meeting with Roosevelt, and then, in the Mediterranean, fought to protect a vital convoy to Malta. Back in Scapa Flow that October, *Prince of Wales* enjoyed barely a fortnight's rest before she was underway again – bound for the Far East.

To her starboard was the battlecruiser *Repulse*, a much older ship, commissioned in 1916. Since August *Repulse* had been with the new Eastern Fleet and had escorted a troop convoy from the Clyde for Suez, via the Cape. By November 27, she waited on her companion at Trincomalee, Ceylon. The two ships formed Force Z. In August, Churchill called for a 'deterrent squadron', formed from a small number of the best ships 'to show itself in the triangle Aden-Singapore-Simonstown'. The intention was to 'exert a paralysing effect upon Japanese Naval action.' The Naval Staff, which was developing its own ideas about a future Eastern Fleet – composed of seven older capital ships, demurred.

## ABOVE:

*HMS Prince of Wales* as new, before her battle with *Bismarck*, May 1941.

(HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS (HEREAFTER HMP))

## RIGHT:

*HMS Repulse* firing her 15in guns during manoeuvres off Portland. The ship astern is HMS *Renown*.

(HMP/US NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE CMD (HEREAFTER USNHH))

## BELOW:

Lt. Phillip Franklin, Cmdre. Arthur Palliser (3rd from left), and Adm. Charles Little, with multinational officers aboard USS *Augusta* in 1937. They discussed operations off China. Palliser would inadvertently play a vital role in the 1941 blunder off Malaya as R.Adm. (HMP)

In Downing Street on 20 October. Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord, and Tom Phillips, his deputy and C-in-C Eastern Fleet designate, gave in. Pound 'took note' of the Cabinet's willingness to accept risks in the Atlantic and agreed *Prince of Wales* should proceed to Cape Town in the hope the deployment might have the salutary effect on Japanese motives ministers wanted. A decision to move further east would be deferred. The Admiralty planned to send the carrier HMS *Indomitable* to join Force Z. However, the new ship had only been

commissioned on 10 October, and needed to work-up. Famously she went aground, but had not occurred she was not due to arrive in Ceylon until late December.

*Prince of Wales* departed Scapa on 24 October, boarding Vice Admiral Phillips the following day. Accompanied by the destroyers, *Express* and *Electra*, *Prince of Wales* arrived in South Africa on 16 November. However, instead of remaining there while further deployment was discussed, she was quickly ordered into the Indian Ocean, as 'it has been necessary for political reasons to announce the strengthening of our forces in the Eastern Area.' She arrived at Colombo on 28 November and was reinforced with two more destroyers, then rendezvoused with *Repulse*, arriving in Singapore on 2 December. Phillips was promoted full Admiral and confirmed C-in-C Eastern Fleet

With a desperate need to occupy the resource rich Dutch East Indies and other colonial holdings, the Japanese were not deterred. Their 22nd Air Flotilla set up at Saigon under Rear Admiral Matsunaga, his task to cover Japanese landings in Thailand and Northern Malaya. The 'Genzan' Wing of 36 Mitsubishi G3M2 ('Nell') twin-engine bombers







deployed there, the similar 'Mihoro' Wing settled in at Tu Duam, north of Saigon. A wing of 36 long-range Zero fighters was also deployed. With the Royal Navy's decision to support Singapore with Force Z, the Japanese deployed a further 27 Mitsubishi G4M1 'Betty' aircraft of the 'Kanoya' Wing, originally supposed to support operations in the Philippines.

### THE EVE OF WAR

The deployment was caught by the British, but they underestimated Japanese capabilities and presumed their primary tasking would be high-level bombing. Of greater concern, was a fresh minefield discovered on 6 December, blocking direct passage north from Singapore, between Tioman and the Anamba Islands. Phillips left on 4 December to visit Admiral Hart, Commander of the American Asiatic Fleet, in Manila, while *Repulse* departed for Darwin to reassure Australia of British dominance at sea. During the Manila discussions intelligence flooded in on a large convoy spotted south of Saigon, sailing on a westerly course.

These first sightings were vague, but denoted imminent escalation. *Repulse* was quickly recalled and Phillips flew back to Singapore. The Japanese began landings to capture Kota Bharu at 0045, 8 December local time, just before the Pearl Harbor attack (considering the International Date Line). At 0400 the same day Singapore was bombed.

### 'GO OUT AND FIGHT'

At 1230, after Phillips signalled London, he held a meeting on-board *Prince of Wales*. It was attended by his staff, the captains of his capital ships and of his destroyers - *Electra*, *Express*, *Tenedos* and *HMAS Vampire*.



Phillips planned to sail into the Gulf of Siam and attack Japanese shipping supporting the landings, such an operation as extremely hazardous, but potentially decisive. He concluded: 'We can stay in Singapore, we can sail away to the East Australia, or we can go out and fight. Gentlemen, we sail at five o'clock'.

Force Z duly sailed. At 2300 Phillips received a message from Rear Admiral Palliser, his Chief of Staff: 'fighter protection on Wednesday 10 will not, repeat not, be possible.' However, Phillips misunderstood this important, yet muddled, signal, he now thought any fighter cover was impossible, but this was not so, Palliser was referring to operations in the Gulf of Siam. An Australian squadron, 453 Sqn, of Brewster Buffalo at Sembawang airfield could cover Force Z.

Force Z sailed round the Anamba

islands, avoiding the minefield, and turned northwest. Low cloud, rain and mist made concealment good but by mid-afternoon, Japanese submarine I-65 sighted the force. The commander of the invasion force, Vice Admiral Ozawa, was surprised. Reconnaissance still put the British in Singapore. Nevertheless, he ordered his transports to cease unloading and pulled them back, and tasked available forces to search for the potent flotilla. His force consisted of five heavy cruisers, each with long-range 24-in torpedoes. The Japanese, despite not using surface radar, were masters of night actions, and *Prince of Wales* surface search radar was at that moment unserviceable. Therefore, Ozawa's cruisers remained undetected, only chance would allow the Japanese to engage, who can say what may have ensued had the ships crossed each other. >>

#### ABOVE:

Fire directors for *Prince of Wales'* anti-aircraft batteries during an exercise in home waters, October 1941. Sadly, their efforts would not save the ship. (BRITAIN AT WAR ARCHIVE)

#### BELOW:

A view of *HMS Repulse* taken during her 1923-24 World cruise with *HMS Hood*. Note the extensive side armour, added during her 1919-22 refit. (HMP/USNHHHC)







# DECISIVE DEFEAT UNDER THE RISING SUN

The Sinking Of Prince Of Wales And Repulse



by aircraft, surprise was lost and our target would be almost certain to be gone by the morning and the enemy fully prepared.'

## 'AS QUIET AS A WET SUNDAY AFTERNOON'

An urgent report came in from Palliser, a second landing was reported to be underway off Kuantan. At once, Phillips altered course. Even if he knew air cover was available, Phillips could not request it as to do so would further compromise his position, and Palliser did not pre-empt. Early on 10 December, the British warships slipped out of the night to disrupt the ongoing landing, but their spotter aircraft could find no trace of the enemy, only the activities of trawlers, some with barges in tow. The destroyer HMS *Express* was sent in for a closer look, but signalled it was 'as quiet as a wet Sunday afternoon'.

Meanwhile, Matsunaga had dispatched aircraft to find the British, followed by 26 'Nells' from Genzan Wing, 17 carrying torpedoes and the rest bombs. A further 27 'Betty's' from Kanoya Wing were scrambled, all with torpedoes, while 33 'Nells' from Mihoro Wing got airborne, eight with torpedoes and the rest bombs. Twenty-six aircraft carried a single 1,100lb



bomb, eight carried a pair of 550lb bombs; the recce aircraft each had two 110lb bombs. The torpedoes were 18in Type 91s, with 330lb warheads on the 'Nells', and 450lb warheads on the 'Betty's'.

The Japanese first spotted the lone HMS *Tenedos* at 1000 and she promptly came under attack by a squadron from Genzan Wing. Her skilful captain exploited the ship's agility and nimbleness and dodged the bombs from all nine aircraft. She reported the attack, but there was little that could be done.

## ALL HELL LET LOOSE

The two capital ships were spotted at 1015, 140 miles northwest of *Tenedos*.

## MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Phillips planned to attack at 0745. However, he required total surprise and his cover was already blown - three floatplanes launched by Ozawa's heavy cruisers, and the light cruiser *Kinu*, found and tracked Force Z. Running low on fuel, HMS *Tenedos* turned for home at 1820. Thirty minutes later, the force turned to 320 degrees and increased speed to 26 knots. As darkness set in, a flare was spotted five miles ahead. A reconnaissance flight had found what it thought were the British ships. However, it had mistaken them for Ozawa's cruisers. Matsunaga called off the strike, avoiding disaster. Neither party knew just how close the British ships were, moving silently through the darkness. Ozawa turned away to the northeast, to meet with Admiral Kindo, whose force was centred on a pair of Kongo-class battleships.

Knowing that knowledge of his presence would cause his prey to scatter, and the Japanese were actively looking for and shadowing him, Phillips opted to cancel the operation. He turned for Singapore, signalling: 'I have most regretfully cancelled the operation because, having been located

### ABOVE:

Initial high-level bombing on HMS *Prince of Wales* (top) and HMS *Repulse*. A short, plume of black smoke can be seen emanating from *Repulse*, which has just been hit on her port side. *Prince of Wales* can be seen taking evasive action. The white smoke shows that the ships were increasing speed. (HMP)

### RIGHT:

A Japanese G3M 'Nell' Medium bomber. (ALL IMAGES VIA PROFESSOR GROVE UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)

### RIGHT:

A squadron of the improved G4M 'Betty' medium bombers.





# DECISIVE DEFEAT UNDER THE RISING SUN

## The Sinking Of Prince Of Wales And Repulse



**LEFT MIDDLE:**  
HMS Prince of Wales leaves Singapore on her final mission.

**LEFT:**  
HMS Tenedos in 1921, the aging destroyer differed little in 1941. She came under attack from nine G3M bombers, but was not hit.



The first wave went in, with eight 'Nells' attacking *Repulse*. They scored a hit with a single 1,100lb bomb, but the damage was largely superficial. The hanger was hit, disabling the ship's spotter plane. Fire from *Repulse* hit five of the Nells, damaging two severely.

Nine more aircraft, all 'Nells', formed up on *Prince of Wales*' port side. Coming in at just over 100 feet and at 150 knots, they released their torpedoes. One exploded on contact with the water, but the rest ran true. On her bridge, *Prince of Wales*' officers were astounded. To them, a torpedo attack was not in the offing – after all, these were twin-engine medium bombers. The battleship responded with a powerful array of anti-aircraft weapons which included 16 5.25in dual-purpose guns; 32 2pdr 'Pom Poms'; 40mm Bofors guns manned by Royal Marines on the quarterdeck, and newly-installed 20mm cannon and Lewis guns. However, the fire was not as effective as expected – the Pom-Poms had difficulties with defective ammunition, perhaps caused by the hot conditions.

Force Z was alone. But this did not mean the attack was going to be easy.

One 'Nell' was hit after dropping its torpedo. The crew deliberately tried to crash into *Prince of Wales*' superstructure but slammed harmlessly into her starboard side. Two torpedoes headed for the ship, one hitting aft, under the stern by the port outer shaft. Thanks to skilful manoeuvring, this was the only torpedo to hit *Prince of Wales* during the first wave, but it was enough. Badly damaged, the port shaft was flailing and eventually broke, causing much internal damage. Water inundated vital machinery spaces, electrical generators were knocked out, disabling steering, pumps, communications, ventilation, lighting, the four aft 5.25in twin gun mountings and other defences.

A second torpedo would have hit further forward but seems to have exploded prematurely, possibly due to the shockwave of an explosion out from part of the ship weakened by German bombing as she was under construction. The ship took on 2,400 tonnes of water and listed 11.5 degrees to port. The commanding officer, Captain Leach, was only able to reduce this by one degree by counter-flooding. *Prince of Wales* was in very serious trouble.

### CONSUMMATE SHIP HANDLER

Captain Bill Tennant of *Repulse* had distinguished himself at Dunkirk. He was soon to confirm his reputation as a consummate ship handler. The attack on the battlecruiser was delayed by concern in the Genzan Wing the target ship might be one of their own Kongo. This allowed *Repulse* to begin evasive action. Two squadrons dropped 15 torpedoes from different distances and directions, then strafed *Repulse* with 20mm cannon and machine guns. Tennant skilfully avoided all 15 torpedoes. A set of bombers attacked, but Tennant was able to dodge these, ➤

**ABOVE:**  
HMS Repulse steams away from Singapore, beginning her final sortie.

**BELOW:**  
Taken from Japanese news reel, Japanese soldiers land in Malaya on 8-9 December 1941. A Japanese officer, (right) observes the progress. (HMP)







### RIGHT:

A Japanese painting by Nakamura Kanichi, depicting torpedo attacks on *Prince of Wales* (centre) and *Repulse*. (HMP/USNHHC)

### MIDDLE:

Adm Phillips (L) with R.Adm Palliser.

### BELOW:

During a brief but busy career *Prince of Wales* took Prime Minister Churchill to the Atlantic Charter Conference, Aug 1941. Here, Allied leaders gather on *Prince of Wales* off Newfoundland. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill are seated, behind them are Adm Ernest King, USN; Gen George C. Marshall, US Army; Gen Sir John Dill, British Army; Adm Harold Stark, USN; and Adm Sir Dudley Pound, RN. At far left is Harry Hopkins, talking with W. Averell Harriman. (HMP/USNCHC)



too. The splashes from the misses confused the torpedo bombers, who were convinced they scored several hits. However, such violent manoeuvres threw off the ship's gunners, and only four 'Nells' suffered damage from *Repulse*'s defences.

Tennant closed on *Prince of Wales*, and asked if the ship had raised the alarm. She had not. At 1158 Tennant sent the following in code: 'To Any British Man of War. Enemy Aircraft Bombing.' This took six minutes to decode and 15 more to reach the Operations Room. The 11 Buffalos of 453 Squadron had been on alert and were airborne in five minutes, but were an hour away. As help scrambled, Force Z spotted a large formation of aircraft to the east. These were 26 'Bettys' of Kanoya Wing. Seventeen approached



the stricken *Prince of Wales* on her starboard beam, but only six attacked. Three torpedoes hit, one at the bow, blowing right through it, another under 'B' turret and the third at the stern - compounding the damage there. This actually temporarily corrected the list, but *Prince of Wales* settled lower still in the water.

The rest of the wing attacked *Repulse*. Seventeen 'Bettys' flew in from her starboard side. Tennant moved to evade but then three 'Bettys' veered away from *Prince of Wales* and attacked *Repulse*'s port side. Tennant gritted his teeth and braced, he dodged the first, larger,



group of torpedoes, but in doing so took a hit amidships on the port side, on the anti-torpedo bulge. Nine more aircraft headed for *Repulse*, six attacked starboard and three port. As two overflowed the bows, *Repulse*'s hit them and they burst into flames and crashed. Their attack, however, was successful. All three torpedoes hit the port side; one close to the stern, jamming the steering. *Repulse* began to heel and Tennant ordered abandon ship. She capsized, her screws still turning, bow standing out of the water - just 11 minutes after the first torpedo hit. *Electra* and *Vampire* moved in to rescue survivors. Men from *Repulse* manned action stations on *Electra* to free crew up for rescue work.

### CRUSHING BLOWS

As *Repulse* sank, eight 'Nells' of Mihoro Wing attacked *Prince of Wales* at 9,000 feet. One 1100lb bomb penetrated to the cinema flat, where 250 wounded were being tended; casualties were heavy. However, the battleship's





### STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE:

**The Prince of Wales** and **Repulse** were the first capital ships to be sunk solely by aircraft while in open sea and offering defence. Both ships were fast compared to their US contemporaries caught at anchor. Additionally, **Prince of Wales** boasted modern anti-aircraft defences intended against contemporary aircraft, and equipped with the advanced High Angle Control System (though inoperable for periods during the attack). This serves to further question the effectiveness of capital ships in the vast Pacific, and although costly in terms of life lost, queries the impact (in terms of open ocean campaigning) of their loss. The raids, combined with Pearl Harbor, left the Allies with just four capital ships in theatre: the USN carriers, **Enterprise**, **Lexington**, and **Saratoga**, and the battleship, USS **Colorado**. The Allies were prompted to realise the potency of aircraft, and their carriers would be instrumental, even defensively - Genzan Wing attempted to replicate their feats when attacking USS **Lexington** on 20 February 1942, but lost 17 aircraft to air patrols.

However, the ships were important to the defence of Singapore and the core of British sea power in that theatre was wiped out, as had the not insignificant 'long-arm' of reinforcing strength for Fortress Singapore. Thus, the loss helped facilitate arguably the greatest British military disaster and the death knell of Empire. In February 1942 the multinational American-British-Dutch-Australian Command (ABDACOM) would be defeated and their commander, Dutch Admiral Karel Doorman, killed, at the Java Sea in one of the largest and costliest sea battles since Jutland. Together with the neutralisation of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese carved out their 'Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' with impunity.

5.25in gun mounts damaged five of her attackers. Other bombs missed, exploding on both sides of the ship.

Without prompt, HMS *Express*, tied up on the flagship's starboard side – a perilous place to be. *Prince of Wales* received her fatal torpedo hit 50 minutes before *Repulse* sank; she lasted another 50, Leach was confident the ship could reach Singapore, air cover, and safety. However, she began quickly to list further, and Leach reluctantly ordered abandon ship. *Express* stayed as long as she could but eventually the mooring cable snapped and she had to move away.

The evacuation was orderly, but Phillips opted to go down with his command, Leach stayed with him and was drowned also. *Prince of Wales* capsized with men still on her flat bottom plating, they went into the sea

as the stern sank and her holed bow rose. Out of 49 torpedoes dropped, the Japanese claimed eight hits, four on *Repulse* and four on *Prince of Wales*. The British downed three aircraft, with a fourth crashing on landing. Several were damaged. *Prince of Wales* sank at 1318, just before she did so the RAF finally appeared. As Flt Lt Tim Vigors, their leader, wrote: 'The view was fairly sickmaking, particularly as I realised the immensity of the disaster and knew it need never have occurred.'

With no Japanese fighter cover, the Buffalos could have dealt with shadowers and aggressors: 'even six Buffalos could have wrought merry hell with them and certainly prevented a lot of the torpedo strikes.' In the eerie calm, the sounds of attack could be heard in the distance, with the Buffalos protecting the destroyers,

Singapore was undefended and on the receiving end of another aerial barrage. Additionally, the fighters missed an opportunity to down a scouting aircraft, had they succeeded, the Japanese would not have known the extent of their success and would have been forced to act as if the ships not only survived, but were somewhat battle-ready. A second-wave was readied, and only called off on account ➤

**ABOVE:**  
HMS *Express*, the only ship of Force Z to survive the war.

**BELOW:**  
HMAS *Vampire*, she picked up 225 of the 2,081 British survivors.







# DECISIVE DEFEAT UNDER THE RISING SUN

## The Sinking Of Prince Of Wales And Repulse

### CHURCHILL REACTS:

After the battle, Sir Dudley Pound informed Churchill, below is the transcript of the call:

**Pound:** Prime Minister, I have to report to you that the Prince of Wales and the Repulse have both been sunk by the Japanese - we think by aircraft. Tom Phillips is drowned.

**Churchill:** Are you sure it's true?

**Pound:** There is no doubt at all.

-Churchill hangs up-

Churchill later wrote: 'In all the war, I never received a more direct shock... As I turned over and twisted in bed the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked.'

Churchill informed the Commons on 11 December and the Eastern Fleet would spend the remainder of the invasion withdrawing. No British capital ship would return until March 1942, with the deployment of Warspite and four Revenge-class ships. Each survived the Easter Sunday Raids, which Churchill thought the most dangerous moment of the war, but were returned to theatres where they were more useful.

*those hundreds of men clinging to bits of wreckage and swimming around in the filthy, oily water. Above all this, the threat of another bombing and machine-gun attack was imminent. Yet, as I flew round, every man waved and put his thumb up as I flew over him. After an hour, lack of petrol forced me to leave, but during that hour I had seen many men in dire danger waving, cheering and joking, as if they were holidaymakers at Brighton waving at low-flying aircraft. It shook me, for here was something above human nature. I take off my hat to them, for in them I saw the spirit which wins wars.'*



**TOP RIGHT:**  
Capt. Bill 'Dunkirk Joe' Tennant, as VAdm, May 1945.

**RIGHT:**  
Repulse survivors in the water as HMS Electra closes in for the rescue.

**BELOW:**  
Prince of Wales lists heavily as men scramble onto boats. (AWM)

of this scout's report - the Japanese narrowly avoided a disaster of their own.

Tim Vigors, leading the formation of Buffalo over the struggling men, reported:

*"I witnessed a show of the indomitable spirit for which the Royal Navy is so famous. I passed over thousands who had been through an ordeal, the greatness of which they alone can understand ... It was obvious that the three destroyers were going to take hours to pick up*

However, although it was no fault of 453 Sqn, it would seem more likely the survivors Vigors saw waving and cheering were, in fact, shaking their fists at the belated arrival of British fighters. Perhaps, they were simply gesticulating to be seen in the vain hope of discovery and rescue. An entry in 453 Squadron's war diary added:

"Both flights were ordered into the air - first flight [led by] Tim Vigors proceeded northwards past Mersing, and shortly afterwards came upon the scene of a major naval disaster. Large patches of oil covered the water and two large warships were observed to be sinking - other naval vessels were standing off picking up survivors. The flight patrolled the area in search of enemy aircraft but none were sighted, so returned to base. The other flight [led by] Van came along a bit later but they had no luck either. Discovered on landing that the two ships were the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*."

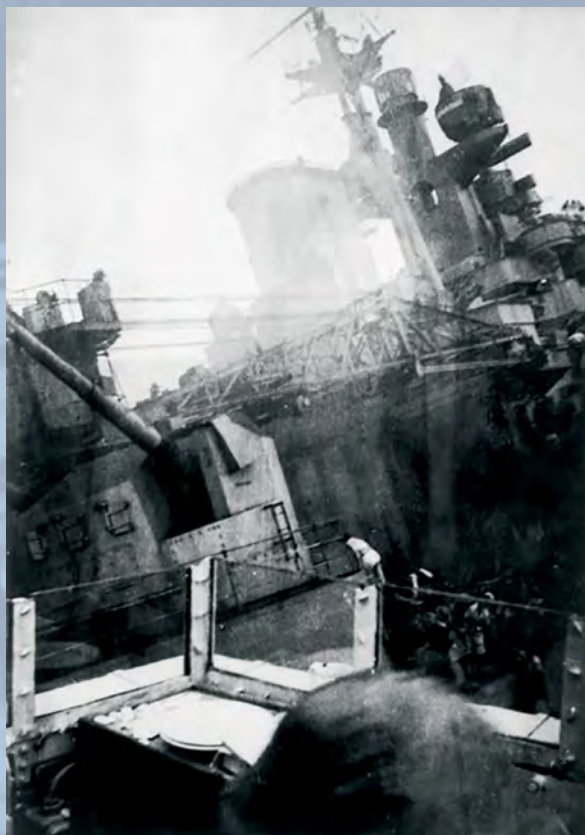
Had fighter cover had been provided, however, Matsunaga was likely to simply have deployed his Zeros. Equally, had Indomitable been present her Fulmars and Sea Hurricanes might have been hard-pressed, even with the support of the Buffalo. Nevertheless, the late call for fighters was the major error of the engagement and responsibility must

be placed at Phillips' door and perhaps at Palliser who might have shown greater initiative to provide cover as he signalled Force Z about Kuantan.

The three destroyers, largely unaffected, picked up 2,081 survivors, including heroic Captain Tennant who was rescued by HMAS *Vampire*. Casualties were heavy, but not as high as they had the potential to be. Still, 840 were lost, 513 from *Repulse* (40% of those aboard) and 327 from *Prince of Wales* (20%).

On the return to Singapore, *Express* passed HMS *Stronghold* and four American destroyers. *Express* signalled the action was over, but the ships proceeded to search for more survivors. Sadly, they found none. However, USS *Edsall*, came across one of the same trawlers encountered by Force Z. She boarded the vessel and found her occupied with Japanese crew and identified her as *Shofu Fu Maru*. Although more clandestine and smaller in scale than he anticipated, it seems Palliser's report can be vindicated.

On 11 December, a Japanese pilot, Lt Haruki Iki, flew to the site of battle and dropped two wreaths. The first honoured fellow members of his Kanoya Wing, but the second was for the British sailors whose bravery gained them the utmost admiration from all pilots in the squadron. ☉







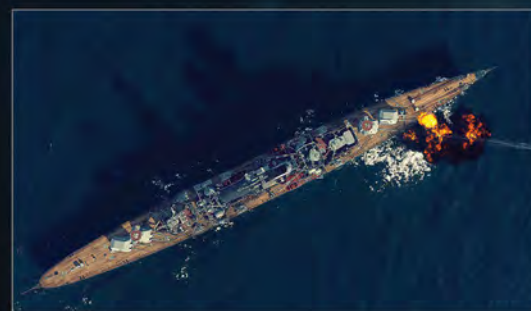
## Battle of the Denmark Strait Bismarck's Pyrrhic Victory

In the early morning of May 24, 1941, several giants rocked the Atlantic in the Battle of the Denmark Strait. Kriegsmarine battleship Bismarck and heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen clashed with the pride of the Royal Navy, battle cruiser Hood and the battleship Prince of Wales, who were all that stood in the way of operation Rheinübung. Vice Admiral Lancelot Ernest Holland, the commander of Hood, issued the attack order.

Just 15 minutes after the start of convergence—at 05:52—Hood unleashed a salvo from around 13 miles (24km) away. But in doing so, Hood could not escape covering fire from Bismarck. At 06:00, an explosion engulfed the artillery cellars in Hood's hold. All the while, Prince of Wales fired blindly—her management positions divided—and scored a hit. A great wound tore Bismarck open; British ships hounded her oil trail, following her as she attempted to escape her fate.

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# IMAGE OF WAR

## TOMMY BEATS THE HUN

The Somme, France, Autumn 1918

In this official photograph of the Second Battle of the Somme, British soldiers rest in what was once the old German frontline, recently captured. The battle was one of success during the 'Hundred Day's Offensive', which saw consecutive advance from 8 August 1918 until the Armistice. In good humour, they gather, many donning ponchos for protection against the wet, mud and cold, around a sign which reads 'Old Hun Line'. 'Hun', a British slang term for German, allegedly entered popular vocabulary after the Kaiser urged his armies to 'behave like Huns' to win the war.  
(NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)









## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Java Sea Salvage Controversial And Complex Issues

Dear Sir,  
I read with both interest and dismay the news item on the unauthorised recovery of material from the Dutch and UK naval vessels lost in the battle of the Java sea (*Ghost Ships: Seven Sunken Warships Vanish*, Britain at War January 2017).

Contrary to what is stated in the item the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001* has no application here, as it applies only to underwater cultural heritage that has been submerged, fully or partially, for at least 100 years. Moreover, the UK has not signed the Convention. The UK, along with most other western maritime states, asserts that the principle of 'sovereign immunity' confers immunity on sunken warships from salvage without authorisation but not all states agree, some applying

the principle only to functioning warships and not to the wrecks of warships. Certainly, the principle of sovereign immunity and warship wrecks cannot yet be said to have achieved the status of customary international law observed by most states.

The *London Salvage Convention 1989* prohibits the unauthorised salvage of state owned or operated vessels used for non-commercial purposes, e.g. a warship, but again not all states are party to the convention.

Additionally, Royal Navy wrecks can be designated under the *Protection of Military Remains Act 1986* but beyond UK territorial waters that act applies only to UK nationals, or to UK flagged vessels, and it cannot be applied in the territorial waters of other states. The UK also asserts that Crown Title (ownership) remains vested in such wrecks in perpetuity

and such unauthorised recovery amounts to theft of Crown property. Again, not all states acquiesce in this interpretation of international law. From the above, your readers will correctly deduce that the international legal regime surrounding wrecks of warships is very complex and far from being settled. What is certain is that the attitude and laws of the 'host' state (in this case Indonesia) are crucial to the successful protection of such wrecks and the excellent cooperation extended by Singapore and Malaysia in protecting the wrecks of HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* deserves further recognition than has previously been the case.

Finally, I note with grim irony the statement by the Dutch MOD that "... *The desecration of a war grave is a serious offence*".

The legal basis for this assertion is difficult to discern, given this

current state of international law.

Moreover, as Dr. Innes McCartney has shown in his excellent book '*Jutland 1916 The Archaeology of a Naval Battlefield*' and as Britain at War has recently highlighted, Royal Navy wrecks from Jutland have been systematically looted on an industrial scale. Attention has focused on the alleged activities of a Dutch salvage concern, but despite the provision of photographic evidence the Dutch authorities have been unable or unwilling, or both, to take any action. It does seem to me, currently, that Dutch moral outrage at such desecration only extends to their own fallen sailors and not to those of other nations. Perhaps a case of the biter now bitten?

By email.

**Michael V. Williams**

(Visiting Research Fellow, School of Law, Criminology and Government, Plymouth University)

**IMAGE:** Java under fire during the Battle of the Java Sea, possibly showing the torpedo hit to her aft, just 15 minutes before she sank after losing her stern.



The author of the Letter of the Month may select a book of their choice (maximum value £25) from the extensive range of titles available at [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)



## Paul Nash And The Windsor Messerschmitt

Dear Sir - I was fascinated in your two articles featuring the artist Paul Nash in your February 2017 issue. However, something struck me when I saw the images of Nash himself - particularly when I looked at the portrait photograph of the great man and then immediately recognised the photograph of

the Messerschmitt 109 downed in Windsor Park as being similar to some in my own collection.

I quickly realised that Nash himself was in one of the shots I have and which was taken by a news agency photographer at the scene. In fact, I had often wondered if Nash was there to witness the German aircraft being

hailed up by the RAF crane, as his famous painting so closely resembled the photograph of the actual event. Now I know the answer through having seen your photograph of the great artist. Clearly in view in the photo I have, leaning forward and peering into the Messerschmitt's gun bay, is Paul Nash - then working as an Air Ministry war artist and the only

civilian being allowed anywhere near the German fighter.

This is quite a well-known photograph from the Battle of Britain, and it is fascinating to discover that Paul Nash appears in it and that he later went away to famously paint the scene.

Yours sincerely  
**James Moneypenny**, Rye, East Sussex.



## Mis-Identification Of Paul Nash's Famous 'Hill 60' Painting

Dear Sir - Your news feature on the Paul Nash exhibition was an absolute delight to see but I'm afraid I must pull you up on a very significant error in your piece.

On page seven you reproduce an image which you caption as Nash's famous 'The Landscape - Hill 60' painting, but I'm sorry to say that it isn't. However, I am sending you a reproduction of the correct image in question, arguably one of the most famous pieces of art from the Western Front.

Thank you for an otherwise superb piece!

Yours sincerely,  
**Sarah Branston-Hall**, Lancaster. (By email)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Our apologies for this error. I'm afraid we were misled by a faulty caption in several reference sources we relied upon and must make it clear that our author of this piece was in no way at fault and had, in fact, supplied the correct image which was also correctly captioned.





## THE CROYDON RAID

A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined

# THE CROY

Illustration Piotr Forkasiewicz





# CROYDON RAID

The attack on Croydon aerodrome during August 1940 was a raid intended to hit RAF Kenley a few miles away, but its outcome saw the loss of many of the raiders including the attacking unit's commanding officer in an episode that has fascinated and puzzled researchers of the period as **Simon Parry** and **Mark Postlethwaite** explain. >>





# THE CROYDON RAID

A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined

## RIGHT:

Hauptmann Walter Rubensdörffer.

## MIDDLE RIGHT::

Obergefreiter Ludwig Kretzer.



**W**ith the Luftwaffe continuing its objective to cripple the RAF both in the air and on the ground, so attacks against RAF airfields continued and intensified from mid-August 1940 with targets like the airfields at Biggin Hill, Tangmere, Hawkinge and Kenley in RAF Fighter Command's vital 11 Group area all high priority on the German's target list. Croydon, which had been London's airport pre-war, was now an operational RAF fighter airfield and whilst its status might well have meant that it, too, was on the target list it is certainly a fact that an attack had neither been planned or intended for 15 August 1940. Indeed, it has often been suggested that Hitler had hoped to arrive here in triumph once victory over Britain had been secured and thus attacks

on the aerodrome were expressly forbidden. Whilst that may or may not have been the case, it is certainly a fact that Croydon fell within the Greater London area and, at this time, attacks against targets in the Capital were off-limits to the Luftwaffe. However, RAF Kenley – just off to the south – was a legitimate target and the Messerschmitt 110-equipped Erprobungsgruppe 210, a specialist low-level precision fighter bomber unit, were detailed the task of putting it out of action. The attack was the unit's deepest penetration raid to-date. But things did not go well.

## DEFENSIVE CIRCLES

Firstly, the Me 109 fighter escort from JG52 'lost' their charges on the way to the target, and as the raid approached from the east, directly into the evening sun, identification of the target in the haze was all-but impossible and when Croydon loomed ahead, so the attackers mistook this for their target. Although great damage was caused at Croydon, and up to 62 people were killed and 37 seriously injured, Eprg210 suffered very heavy losses from the 14 Me 110s and 8 Me 109s dispatched. However, Croydon airfield received warning an attack was imminent and the resident Hurricane-equipped 111 Sqn had been scrambled a few minutes before it was bombed at 19.05 hours. Yellow Section of the squadron met the Me 110s head-on

at the bottom of their dive, and, following the attack, defensive circles were formed by the Messerschmitts to the south of Croydon before the crews fled to the Channel – at least 15 minutes flying time away. Meanwhile, the fleeing attackers were intercepted by 32 Sqn (up from RAF Biggin Hill) near Redhill just a few minutes later. What ensued was a confused and confusing series of individual battles and pursuits across Surrey, Kent and Sussex – but it is the loss of the raid's leader, Hptm Walter Rubensdörffer, which is the focus of this examination. However, to better set the scene, the Operations Record Book of 111 Squadron lays out the bare detail of events that evening:

'At 19.00 hours aerodrome at Croydon base was attacked by ME Jaguar [sic.] dive bombers. Squadron nine Hurricanes S/Ldr Thompson, F/Lt Connors DFC, P/O Fisher A\*, P/O Hardman, P/O Walker, Sgts Dymond, Craig, Carnall, Wallace,

## BELOW:

Crowds gather outside Croydon aerodrome on the evening of 15 August 1940 to witness the spectacle of the aerodrome ablaze. Two young lads repair a bicycle tyre on the pavement, probably after picking up a puncture from the resulting debris.





## THE CROYDON RAID

### A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined



took off 18.50 hours on receipt of air raid warning. Enemy aircraft about 15 in number approached aerodrome from east and dived low towards hangars dropping a number of HE bombs in a stick and destroying part of the main buildings and some civilian aircraft factory hangars on the north side of the aerodrome. Fires started in the Canadian squadron armoury also in the main building block, and a quantity of ammunition was exploded by the fire, which was under control and out in 30 minutes. The hangars on the north side of the aerodrome burnt for a considerable time. 111 Squadron meanwhile formed line astern, attacked enemy formation chasing raiders on a south-westerly direction. 4 ME Jaguars were definitely destroyed by S/Ldr Thompson, Sgt Dymond, Sgt Craig and one between F/Lt Connors DFC and Sgt Wallace. Four more were

damaged, 2 by Sgt Dymond and 2 by Sgt Wallace and in addition one of the Me 109 escort fighters was probably destroyed by S/Ldr Thompson.'

*\*NB: Plt Off A G A Fisher had earlier that day been in action over Selsey, West Sussex, when he witnessed his brother, Fg Off B M Fisher, shot down and killed in horrific circumstances as his parachute failed. Shaken by this episode, and doubtless by the later raid on Croydon when the two brothers' Log Books and personal effects were also destroyed, Plt Off Fisher did not fly operationally again after the sortie at 19.00 hrs on 15 August 1940.*

#### WHO SHOT DOWN RUBENDÖRFFER?

The loss of Rubensdörffer, leader of Erprobungsgruppe 210, has fascinated researchers over the years. The first RAF pilot to be linked to the destruction of his Me 110 was

Sqn Ldr Thompson of 111 Sqn. Frank Mason, in his book *Battle over Britain* (1969), put forward this suggestion but without further explanation. Thompson made his attack over Croydon and reported as below;

#### "COMBAT REPORT:

*S/Ldr J M Thompson - Blue 1, B Flt, 111 Squadron*

*At 19.00 hours the squadron engaged Me Jaguars dive bombing base. I ordered my section into line astern and went into attack. I fired a 5 second burst at a Jaguar climbing vertically from astern and observed bits of cowlings, fuselage etc flying off in all directions. This was observed by P/O Walker No.2 of the section. This aircraft was probably destroyed, but I was forced to break away owing to my low speed. I was unable to climb up to the Jaguars again but observed a Hurricane below me chasing a 109 and a 109 chasing him. I engaged this 109 with a deflection attack from about 200 yards and observed my bullets bursting on his wings and fuselage. I broke off when I observed the black smoke and glycol pouring out of the enemy aircraft.*

*Jaguar confirmed ground observation."*

However, Thompson could not follow his prey, and as Rubensdörffer's Me 110 fell some 25 miles from Croydon it led to the claim being dismissed as Rubensdörffer's aircraft, although when a revised edition of *Battle over Britain* was published (1990) Mason added a footnote to support his assertion that Thompson was responsible for bringing Rubensdörffer down:

*"The author recalls being fortunate to examine wartime cine-gun combat films while in service in Fighter Command in the 1950s, among these was Thompson's film of 15<sup>th</sup> August showing his attack >>*

#### ABOVE LEFT:

*One of the raiders was brought down at Hawkhurst, Kent, and was later put on public display to raise money for the Spitfire Fund.*

#### ABOVE:

*Crowds flock to view the captured Croydon raider.*



#### LEFT:

*Ltn Horst Marx, 3/ErpGr210, poses in front of his Messerschmitt shortly before shot down and taken POW on the Croydon raid whilst trying to valiantly protect his CO.*



# THE CROYDON RAID

A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined

## RIGHT:

Sqn Ldr John Thompson, CO of 111 Sqn, pictured later in the war in a Spitfire and as a Wing Commander.

on a Bf 110 in which the enemy aircraft's code letters (S9+AB) were clearly visible on the starboard side of the fuselage. Such clarity of film was extremely rare, and was made possible by the fact that the enemy aircraft was flying south, and the evening sun was fairly low in the west as Thompson carried out a rear quarter attack down to close range on the starboard side with the sun behind him."

In 1983, however, Thompson himself gave an account of the action to the historian John Vasco:

"It was our third operational sortie that day, the first being over Eastchurch at dawn against perhaps 100, the second over Portsmouth and finally over Croydon. We were sent off to patrol about 10,000 feet over the western boundary of the airfield, a mistake in my opinion. We saw the bombers just after they had entered their dive just east of the airfield. We turned in immediately to engage. I chose the leader and caught him climbing vertically after his attack. I remember seeing my bullets striking his fuselage and wings, but could not stay to see what happened as I was being approached by a 109. I heard much later that the 110 at which I had fired eventually crashed and the pilot, the C O of the squadron, I believe, was taken prisoner. I avoided the 109 and got on his tail and chased him down the streets of Purley at low level, so low in fact that I could see my bullets striking the roofs of houses. I don't think I hit him,

## RIGHT:

The tangled wreckage of another of the Croydon raiders, this time near Horley, Surrey.



## RIGHT:

Marx's victor was Plt Off 'Polly' Flinders in a Hurricane of 32 Sqn.

he was too far away and going too fast and I couldn't catch him. We lost some airmen killed in a direct hit on one of the air-raid shelters, but lost no pilots. I see from my log book that we claimed 4 shot down and had a few damaged. The squadron mascot, a bull terrier called 'Gangster', lost a leg and we had to put him down."

## ROLLED OVER AND DIVED INTO GROUND

More recently, the most commonly accepted 'victor' in various published works is Plt Off Duckenfield of 501 Sqn, who claimed a 'Do 215' near Tunbridge Wells. Although Duckenfield is not mentioned in the squadron's records by name, there is reference to 'Blue 2' making such a claim and witnessed by a pilot 32 Sqn. No combat report for Duckenfield survives for this combat, but it is known that he did write it. However, although no primary source evidence in the form of a

combat report exists to support this, Ron Duckenfield wrote an account in 1979:

"On the day in question – 15 August – the squadron was operating from Gravesend. In the morning, we were sent up to intercept a raid of about 45 Do 215s, of which I claimed one damaged (over Detling). Then, about lunch-time, just after we had refuelled, there was a much larger raid. This second raid headed for Croydon and inflicted very severe damage, not only on the airfield, but also on the town itself. There were perhaps 100 Do 215 aircraft in the enemy formation, escorted by an equal number of Me 109s and Me 110s; about 200 in all. The 'Scramble' warning to 501 Squadron was given a little late, so it was not until the enemy had actually finished his attack on Croydon that we began to close. In the subsequent mêlée, the enemy formation having been broken by attacks from other RAF fighters, I suddenly found a Do 215 heading south in a long shallow dive towards the coast, which gave



## THE CROYDON RAID

### A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined

him such a turn of speed that it took some minutes before I could come near enough to him astern to open fire. I fired several bursts with no apparent effect (he was weaving pretty violently) but then, when we were both down to about 4,000 feet, I managed to hit him with the last of my ammunition. One engine caught fire and there must also have been a casualty in the cockpit, because the Do 215 rolled over and dived into the ground, somewhere just west of Tunbridge Wells. I had no time to check exactly where because I was already very



**LEFT:**  
Witness George Tuke re-visits the crash scene in the 1990s where he picked up debris from the crash still scattered across the meadow.

**LEFT:**  
Lt Koch's Scottie terrier, 'Grock', poses with a 250 kg bomb ahead of the Croydon raid. He was named after a popular German comedian of the 1930s.

**LEFT:**  
A close-up of the ErprGr 210 unit badge carried on the unit aircraft and seen here on Koch's Me.110; a map of Great Britain in a gunsight.

**BELOW:**  
Lt Karl-Heinz Koch got as far as Hooe, on the Sussex coast, after being hit on the way home from raiding Croydon. He was uninjured and taken POW although his crew man was badly wounded.

low on petrol."

Despite inaccuracies in timings, aircraft numbers and types, Duckenfield's account certainly provides some compelling – if not conclusive – 'evidence' that he may well have been at least partly responsible for Rubensdörffer's demise. However, it also seems clear that Sqn Ldr Thompson, or another of the Hurricane pilots, had damaged the Me 110 during the combat immediately after the bombing and that Rubensdörffer headed south to the Channel as best he could – especially given Mason's assertion relating to the

fuselage code letters S9 + AB being visible in Thompson's gun camera film and which were certainly the markings of Rubensdörffer's aircraft. Lt Horst Marx, flying an Me 109 of Erprobungsgruppe 210, stated that he had been in radio contact with his CO and that Rubensdörffer told Marx his radio operator was already dead and that he himself was wounded. Lt Marx then attempted to escort the Me 110, but was shot down by Plt Off 'Polly' Flinders of 32 Sqn moments before Rubensdörffer crashed. Whether the 'Do 215' that Plt Off Duckenfield reported was, in reality, Rubensdörffer's Me 110 remains a matter of both interpretation and speculation. However, about 10 minutes after the bombing of Croydon the burning Messerschmitt finally became uncontrollable and, too low to bale-out, Rubensdörffer and his crew man went down with their machine. >>





# THE CROYDON RAID

A Famous Battle Of Britain Attack Examined



**ABOVE:**  
Rubensdörffer with his Mercedes staff car, France, August 1940.

**TOP RIGHT:**  
A Messerschmitt 110 of ErprGr 210 lands back at its base. On 15 August.

**RIGHT:**  
Rubensdörffer and Kretzer were originally buried in this grave at Tunbridge Wells, but have since been exhumed and re-buried at Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.

## RUBENDORFFER'S FINAL MOMENTS

On the ground near Rotherfield, 16-year-old George Tuke had a grandstand view:

"This day saw me having an early luncheon with my parents followed by a bus ride to Tunbridge Wells and the then Ritz Cinema for a film show.

The road north of Mayfield passes an area called Trulls Hatch with a side road leading west to Rotherfield. At this point there is a lay-by with a fringe of trees along its length and a high brick wall behind. On my bus journey home in the early evening the bus conductor was leaning out from his rear platform keeping a wary lookout for air activity – the air raid sirens having already wailed their message sometime previously.

At Trulls Hatch we were met by the raised hand of a police officer or a warden directing the bus into the layby under the trees. Everyone was ordered off the bus to take cover. I myself walked across the road to a ditch near a field gate to await events.

Distant air activity and gunfire could be heard to the north. My attention was suddenly drawn to what can only be described as a ball of black smoke, flecked with puffs of red, coming at a very low height towards me. Obviously an aircraft in dire trouble, but British or German? As it rapidly approached, clearing Marks Cross College by inches, one could not ascertain that it really was an aircraft. Such was the intensity of smoke and flame that an awesome trail of what must have been literally molten metal dropped off and floated to the ground. In an instant, it dove into the ground followed a few seconds later by a pent-up explosion and towering pall of smoke and flame. As I jumped the gate and ran at breakneck speed to the impact point, explosions of fuel and ammunition rocked what, up to then, had been a quiet and peaceful summer evening. The crash had taken place within the confines of a pig farm. Wreckage was everywhere, pigs that had not been killed were scampering in blind panic, some terribly injured and burnt – squealing as only pigs can. The heat from the burning wreckage coupled with the stench of aviation fuel and oil, plus frying pigs, was nauseating to a marked degree.

I soon realised that the aircraft was an Me 110 which normally carried a crew of pilot and gunner. Amidst all of this were their now crumpled bodies. It became somewhat dangerous to linger as exploding ammunition was cracking off in all directions and I beat a hasty retreat. I was aware of course that other people were converging on the scene and some may have been there before me. Later, as I made my way back to the main road, someone catching me up passed the remark: 'All those bodies! I don't think he was aware that what he thought were numerous bodies, or parts thereof, were in fact pigs. By this time the roads were jammed with vehicles and sightseers. It took some time to clear my lungs and mouth of the stench that has been breathed in and which clung to my clothes.'

The unintended raid on Croydon had certainly caused significant damage, but the cost to the attackers had been considerable. ☉



## LUFTWAFFE CASUALTIES

**Stab EproGr 210 Me 110D Wn.3338 S9+AB**

Bletchinglye Farm, Catts Hill, Rotherfield, East Sussex. Ff: Hptm Walter Rubensdörffer (EKI, Ritterkreuz, Gruppenkommandeur) and Bf: Ogefr Ludwig Kretzer both killed.

**Stab EproGr 210 Me 110D Wn.3374 S9+BB**

Redhill Aerodrome, Surrey. Took off Calais-Marck Ff: Obltn Horst Fiedler - died 18th August. Bf: Uffz Johann Werner PoW.

**Stab EproGr 210 Me 110D Wn.3339 S9+CB**

School Farm, Hooe, Sussex. Took off from St. Omer, via Calais. Made a good landing. Ff: Ltn Karl-Heinz Koch and Bf: Uffz Rolf Kahl - wounded, both PoWs.

**Stab ErpoGr 210 Me 110**

Returned damaged. Ff: Lt Willi Benedens wounded, Bf: Uffz Mass safe.

**1/ErpoGr 210 Me 110C-6 S9+TH**

Broadbridge Farm, Smallfield, Horley, Sussex. Took off from Calais-Marck aerodrome and shot down while attacking Croydon aerodrome. Fitted with one large gun, a Rheinmetall MG 101 of 30 mm instead of two 20 mm cannons. Ff: Ltn Erich Beudel and Bf: Ogefr Otto Jordan both killed. Beudel and Jordan had swapped to this machine after their Me110 had been damaged during the attack on Martlesham Heath earlier in the day.

**1/ErpoGr 210 Me 110**

Returned damaged. Ff: Uffz Werner Neumann and Bf: Ogefr Karl Stoff both safe.

**2/ErpoGr 210 Me110D**

Ightham, Kent. Ff: Ltn Helmut Ortner PoW, Bf: Ogefr Bernhard Lohmann killed.

**2/ErpoGr 210 Me110D Wn.3341 S9+CK**

Hawkhurst, Kent. Made a forced landing.

Ff: Obltn Alfred Habisch and Bf: Uffz Ernst Elfner both PoW.

**3/ErpoGr 210 Me109E-4 Wn.1910 Yellow 3+**

Lightlands Farm, Frant, East Sussex. Took off from Calais-Marck aerodrome for escort duties. The pilot baled-out safely, save for a cut thumb, before the aircraft dove into an orchard. The pilot was arrested by two policemen at Mark Cross on their way to Hptm Rubensdörffer's crash. Ff: Ltn Horst Marx - PoW.

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## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid

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### ABOVE:

Heroic Charioteer: Sergeant Thomas Frank Durrant VC (1918-1942). A pre-war regular who had enlisted in the Royal Engineers in 1937, he served with No.2 Independent Company in Norway in 1940 and was among the earliest volunteer recruits to join the newly-formed No.1 Commando, becoming a sergeant in the demolition section.

### RIGHT:

Charge into St Nazaire: a contemporary impression of the naval element of Operation Chariot, with HMS Campbeltown on a collision course with the Normandie dock and motor launches.



# SUPERHUMAN

Hailed as the 'greatest raid of all', the combined naval and commando assault on the French port of St Nazaire 75 years ago was an epic of audacity culminating in a unique feat of arms.

**Steve Snelling** charts an extraordinary story



# OFFICE GRAM

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OFFICE STAMP



To \_\_\_\_\_ m



**T**he great Normandie dock was wreathed in flames and scorching heat from the acrid, smoke-shrouded inner port felt like an open furnace. To 19-year-old Ordinary Seaman Ralph Batteson, strapped inside a splinter-matted gun 'bandstand' perched on the stern of Motor Launch 306, it appeared they had entered "the mouth of hell" as he later wrote "Large field-pieces, anti-aircraft batteries and machine-guns poured fire on us from either flank, the deafening roar of the explosions threatening to burst our eardrums".

It was some time after 0130 on March 28, 1942 in the French Atlantic port of St Nazaire and Operation Chariot, the extraordinary attempt to destroy the world's largest dry dock in one of the most heavily defended harbours on the planet was in murderous full swing.

The destroyer HMS *Campbeltown*, her bows laden with explosive, had already rammed the massive outer caisson and begun disgorging its cargo of commandos bent on

further mayhem and myriad acts of destruction. And as a small fleet of motor launches made for their landing points amid a cauldron of shot and shell, the night sky was lit with what Batteson called "a fantastic Guy Fawkes' display". The air, he wrote, was "decorated by lines of tracer bullets" and criss-crossed with a deadly pattern of shells that "streamed overhead". From the sound of small arms fire it was clear that some of the commandos were ashore and battle joined. But ML 306's raiding party was not destined to be among them.

Her final run-in to the Old Mole was barred by a blazing motor launch that had come to rest alongside the jetty wall. "Flames blasted skywards," wrote Batteson, "and I heard the crackle of burning mahogany from her decks."

Backing off, ML 306 headed for another point along the jetty only to find itself in still greater peril. "To our horror," wrote Batteson, "a second motor launch appeared, drifting like a floating fireball on the far side..."

We were in danger of being trapped between two blazing wrecks." Worse still, the fuel tanks of one of the >>

# AN BRAVERY

Commando assault on the German-occupied port of St Nazaire 75  
unique honour made to a soldier engaged in a fight at sea.  
story of desperate defiance against the odds.



# SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid



**ABOVE:**  
Symbol of success: the iconic German image of HMS Campbeltown sunk at the stern and rammed hard against the caisson of the largest dry dock in the world at St Nazaire on the morning of March 28, 1942.

**RIGHT:**  
Operation Chariot target area: a post-raid aerial reconnaissance photo of the port area of St Nazaire released to the press on April 1, 1942. It shows the twin jetties of the Avant port and above them on the right, the Old Mole poking out into the Loire which was the intended landing point for ML 306. Above it, visible through puffs of cloud, is the entrance to the Normandie dock, minus the outer lock gate which had been destroyed by the detonation of 10,000lb of explosive hidden in the bows of the Campbeltown.

launches had exploded, turning the water round it into a flaming lake that was spreading ever nearer.

"The force of the heat on our faces and bodies was almost unbearable," remembered Batteson. As impossible as it was to reach the Mole, it was nearly as impossible to escape from it. Bathed in light from the fires either side of her, ML 306 was a target for machine-guns posted along the shore, but repeatedly hit though she was, she managed, by dint of skilful manoeuvring, to extricate herself and reach open water. To the disgruntlement of his commando passengers, the launch's skipper decided that withdrawal was the only option. With port and river still an inferno of fire, and bullets and shells splashing all around, ML 306 steered towards the sea, leaving Batteson with fleeting glimpses of commandos silhouetted against the burning dockyards. Even as they retreated, the young seaman heard, carrying across the water, "the shattering blasts of explosions" which he imagined to be "some of our intended targets... being destroyed". For the commandos, thwarted in their mission after weeks of training, the sounds of destruction merely added to their frustration.

With a trailing smoke screen covering them, they drew away little realising that their biggest test was yet to come and that for one of them a posthumous place in history awaited.

## 'FORMIDABLE'

The 14 soldiers assigned to Lieutenant Ian Henderson's ML 306 were part of a landing force of around 270 men who were variously tasked with assault, demolition and protection duties during an audacious raid deep

into enemy territory with potentially far-reaching strategic consequences.

What would be remembered as 'the greatest raid of all' was a desperate endeavour designed to deny the port of St Nazaire to the battleship *Tirpitz* in the hope of preventing

her employment in the Atlantic where it was feared she might add to the havoc already being wrought by Germany's U-boats. As well as putting the Normandie dry dock out of commission, it was hoped that the commandos, carried aboard *Campbeltown* and a dozen motor launches, would render temporarily useless a range of key port installations before re-embarking and returning home. The demolition parties, composed of men drawn variously from Nos 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 12 Commandos, were all given specific targets, with Lt Ronnie Swayne's nine-man team aboard ML 306 focused around the South Lock, or Southern Entrance. All being well, the party, divided into two four-strong sub-groups and covered by a five-man protection squad from 2 Commando under Lt Johnny Vanderwerwe, were to place explosive charges on the two lock gates and operating mechanism together with the swing bridge on the southern end of the New Entrance which were to be detonated simultaneously with other demolitions





## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

### Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid



in the same area. The sub-groups were commanded by two of the force's most dedicated and determined raiders: Lance Sgt Ernest 'Des' Chappell, a railway signalman conscripted into the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and Sgt Tom Durrant, a 23-year-old straight-talking pre-war Royal Engineer from Kent with a family score to settle. To Durrant, a veteran of the Independent Companies and an early recruit to 1 Commando, the raid represented a chance to make good a vow made a year earlier. Meeting up after a Buckingham Palace investiture where his brother Jack received a Military Medal for bravery during the sinking of the Cunard liner *Lancastria* in the Loire estuary in 1940, he promised "when we get back into St Nazaire we will knock seven bells out of them".

It was no idle boast. Of all the outstanding personalities among the Charioteers, Durrant, with his swarthy good looks and Errol Flynn moustache, struck his commander as a man of "formidable" character.

Swayne later wrote of him: "He was about five feet ten, well-built, strong [and] dark as a gypsy... He was the most loyal and efficient sergeant I encountered

during the war and, I was told, was accustomed to deal violently with anyone criticising his officers or men. When required to discuss plans he would do so more as an equal than a subordinate, but I cannot recall any occasion when he showed disrespect or questioned a decision of his own officers."

In short, Tom Durrant was not a man to mess with.



**ABOVE:**  
In relaxed mood: Tom Durrant taking a break during his commando training. (COURTESY DURRANT FAMILY).



**LEFT:**  
Survivor: Lance-Sergeant 'Des' Chappell was seriously wounded operating one of the Bren guns aboard ML 306. (VIA JAMES DORRIAN)

### 'TOUGH AND RESOLUTE'

Durrant and his fellow commandos were received aboard ML 306 at Falmouth on 15 March, fewer than three weeks after the raid was officially sanctioned by the Chiefs of Staff. One of eight Fairmile 'B'-type boats from the 28<sup>th</sup> ML Flotilla allocated to the naval force, re-styled the 10<sup>th</sup> Anti-Submarine Flotilla as part of the operation's cover plan, >>

**LEFT:**  
Eyewitness to valour: Sub-Lieutenant Philip Dark (1918-2008), second-in-command of ML 306. A pre-war art school student, he later became a world-renowned anthropologist and provided one of the two officer recommendations in support of Durrant's posthumous Victoria Cross.



## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

### Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid

#### RIGHT:

Survivor: Ordinary Seaman Ralph Batteson, seen here as a prisoner of war following the raid. As a 19-year-old in his first action he operated the launch's aft Oerlikon gun until it was put out of action during the fight with Jaguar.

#### FAR RIGHT:

Honourable foe: Kapitainleutnant Friedrich Paul, captain of the Jaguar, who repeatedly urged the launch to surrender but was forced to resort to his heavier armament.

the 112ft long, 85-ton launch had undergone a number of changes in readiness for her mission.

As well as the addition of two 500-gallon fuel tanks to extend her range, her 47mm Hotchkiss gun had been replaced by rapid-firing single-barrel 20mm Oerlikons, sited fore and aft, and a third officer, Sub-Lt Pat Landy, an Australian, had joined Lt Henderson and his number one, Sub-Lt Philip Dark, tasked with helping direct the guns and disembark the commandos.

But none of the changes could disguise the boat's fundamental unsuitability for close-quarter action. In common with all the other wooden launches of her class, ML 306, with her thin mahogany hull, was never intended for anything other than coastal support and anti-submarine duties. Her vulnerability was hardly helped by the presence of the new deck-board fuel tanks, but, with naval resources stretched to the limit, the Fairmiles were all that could be spared.

For their part, the crew appeared to draw strength from their new-found commando friends. "They were tough and resolute and showed lightning-swift reactions when required," recalled Batteson. "True, they were

dressed in a motley assortment of clothing that could hardly be called standard issue, but I knew they had been specially trained and selected for this mission, and were to be relied upon."

Further 'working up' continued until 25 March when the target was finally revealed. Before embarking, Tom Durrant found time to rush a letter off to his mother. "I can't tell you where I am," he wrote. "If anything happens you will be notified." Tucked in with it was £20 10 shillings. "I shan't be needing it where I am going," he added.

#### 'HELL BROKE LOOSE'

The outward journey was largely uneventful but even so there was a discernible change of mood.

"Everyone was unusually quiet and watchful, waiting for something to happen," thought Batteson. "Even the commandos were silent for once. In them, as in all of us, I could sense the tight, coil-sprung tension building up, awaiting a violent release." It would be a little while coming.



#### RIGHT:

Preparing for action: Tom Durrant, in the foreground, poses for an informal commando group picture during training (COURTESY, DURRANT FAMILY).



## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

### Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid

To Batteson, engaged in his first “genuine war situation”, there was a “strange, uncanny atmosphere” about the passage which made him feel as though he was “in a state of suspended animation, moving relentlessly forward into the unknown”. By half past midnight, the force had entered the Loire estuary, MGB 314 leading two columns of motor launches with *Campbeltown* sandwiched between them and a spare launch and MTB bringing up the rear.

ML 306 was next to last in the port column and, with just 11 sea miles to go to its landing point on the Old Mole, her second-in-command, Philip Dark, could clearly see anti-aircraft fire lighting up the night sky. What was an ineffectual diversion continued fitfully as the flotilla pressed on. Despite a number of sightings, the German gun batteries remained silent even after the force was brilliantly floodlit by searchlights at 0122. A signals ruse bought a further five precious minutes before the storm finally broke in a torrent of fire from both banks. Dark was almost mesmerised by the enemy tracer passing “above and around us”. He recalled the “strange fascination” of watching their flight as they “curved away overhead after their seeming rush straight at one”.

The only thing on Batteson’s mind was “the struggle to stay alive”. As “all hell broke loose” around him, he focused on following Pat Landy’s directions as he guided him onto a



#### LEFT:

*Chariot wreck: the smouldering remains of one of the vulnerable, wooden-hulled Fairmile launches captured by a German photographer on the morning after the raid. Burning boats like this one prevented ML 306 from reaching her landing point and put an end to all hopes of evacuating the commando raiding force.*

succession of searchlights. Hard as it was to hear amid the din, it was even more difficult to judge distances.

“Sometimes I used the flight of tracer shells to guide my own shots on target, and swept the Oerlikon up and down in the manner of a garden hose as I fired,” he wrote. “Unorthodox, perhaps, but it seemed to work.” What was not working, though, was the landing plan. As they closed the Old Mole the planners’ worst fears were realised in a ghastly parade of burning boats.

ML 306 passed one launch, stopped and ablaze, its crew leaping from her fo’c’stle into the oil-coated water.

Ignoring her skipper’s yells to go alongside, they forged on only to find two more boats on fire either side of the landing point. Unable to find a way through, Henderson searched

elsewhere but, with enemy fire intensifying, he was forced away.

“We circled around for quite a while,” wrote Dark, “firing at various targets and trying to get alongside but to no avail.” ML 306 was repeatedly hit. Shrapnel splintered the guard rails, wounding Dark in the right leg and Durrant, who sustained superficial “scratches”. More worryingly, the forward Oerlikon was put out of action by a jammed round.

“Reluctantly”, wrote Dark, Henderson decided he had no option but to withdraw.

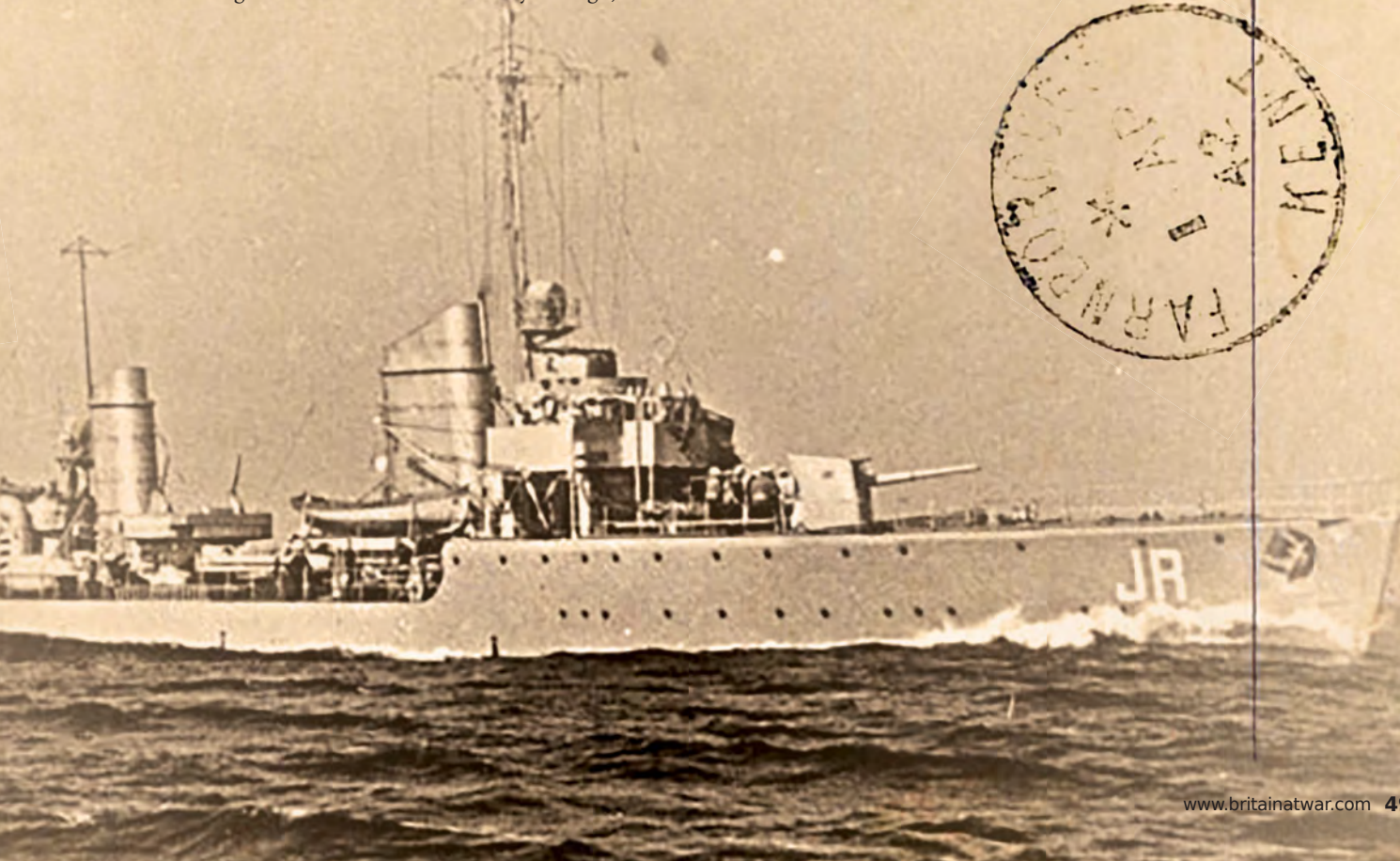
#### ‘CHEATED’

The commandos made little effort to hide their disappointment. As

‘Des’ Chappell put it, “we were bloody annoyed... We knew what we had to do and we wanted to >>

#### BELOW:

*German Goliath: the German torpedo-boat destroyer Jaguar, part of the 5th Torpedo Boat Flotilla. She was equipped with three 4.1-inch guns, three 20mm guns and two Hotchkiss guns. (VIA JAMES DORRIAN)*





# SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid



## ABOVE:

Fulfillment of a mission: the pall of smoke marks the funeral pyre of the Campbeltown after the explosion of its hidden ammonal charges around 1035 on March 28, 1942. The blast, which resulted in the deaths of more than 100 German 'sightseers', occurred as Philip Dark was being interrogated aboard the Jaguar, some 500 yds from the dock gates.

## RIGHT:

Bound for captivity: wounded survivors of ML 306 are ferried ashore by tender following the savage river battle.

Petty Officer Motor Mechanic Alex Bennett, had little idea what was happening, but nevertheless responded with cool efficiency to the skipper's instructions. Such was Henderson's skill that, aside from a drenching or two from a near miss, they managed to evade the enemy's fire during the run out of the river.

Dark, his leg stiffening, was sent below to rest as the commandos busied themselves on deck, cleaning their weapons, replenishing ammunition and changing magazines in anticipation of daylight air attacks to come. Around 0530, having cleared the batteries and reached the estuary, Swayne came up from the wardroom

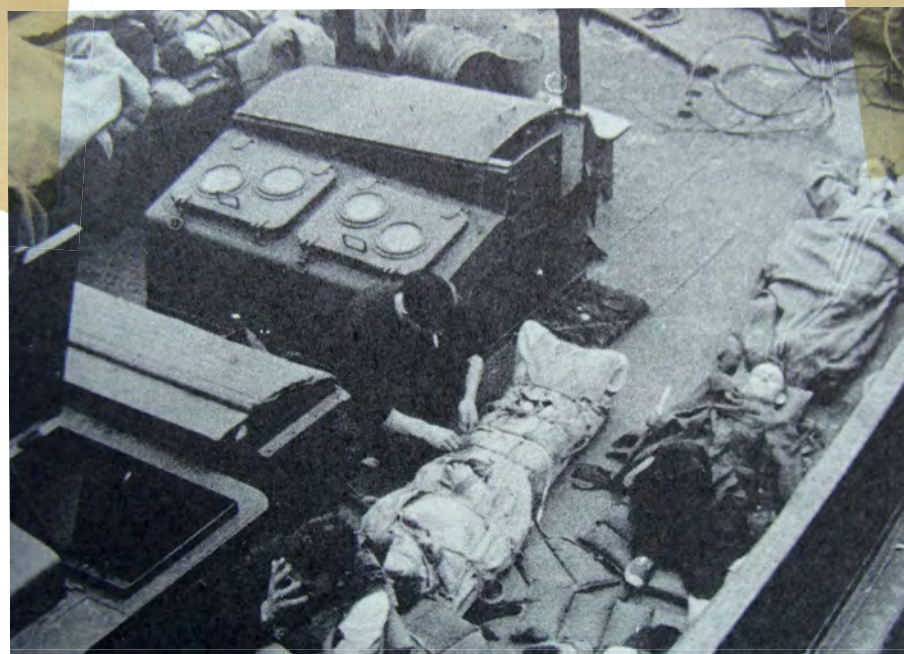
with sandwiches for the men on the bridge to find Henderson "puzzled" by some "white streaks in the water" that were just discernible through the morning mist. "My suggestion that they were caused by a large fish wasn't well received," he recalled, "so I went below again."

Dark was called back up to the bridge. He came quickly and quietly to discover the launch stopped and Henderson watching the progress of some vessels headed their way on a parallel course about 100 yards away. "The level of phosphorescence was abnormally high and their bow waves stood out," wrote Dark. He counted three ships and thought "they were

do it!" Swayne, however, was more equivocal. "The troops were half angry at not being able to land, and half glad to be on the way home," he later reported.

"Though relieved, they felt cheated of their part in the operation and some even suggested that it would be a good thing if we met some German ships. "With [just] wood to protect us and an armament of only one Oerlikon and a few Brens [together with the twin-Lewis gun] this was not a good idea, so we brewed some cocoa and made Bully beef sandwiches."

With the launch intermittently caught in the beams of searchlights and sporadically fired at, they drew away at a rate of 18 knots. Stoker E A Butcher, toiling down in the engine-room with



## RIGHT:

Before the blast: the scene aboard the Campbeltown on the morning after the raid as Germans, oblivious of the time-delayed explosives waiting to detonate beneath them, examine what they assumed was a failed attempt to break through the lock gates.





## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

### Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid



clearly not ours". Henderson hoped they might escape detection, but resolved to fight if necessary. As the ships drew closer, he addressed those commandos scattered about the deck, asking them if they were ready for action before adding "you might get it quicker than expected".

Meanwhile, Dark whispered down the fo'c'stle hatch: "Action stations, as quietly as you can!" Emerging onto the bridge, Swayne was handed some 'night glasses' through which he saw the silhouettes of five German destroyers. "These were my fishes and they looked very dangerous," he later wrote. "As the enemy ships overtook us we could hear the German voices shouting orders, and I remember that the Bully beef sandwich I was eating went quite dry in my mouth. There was a chance that they would miss us in the thick mist..." In fact, their fate had already been sealed.

An alert lookout having sighted the "shadow" of "a small boat", the 800-ton *Jaguar*, commanded by Kapitanleutnant Friedrich Paul, was ordered to "attack" while the other craft of the 5<sup>th</sup> Torpedo Boat Flotilla slowed "to assist... if necessary".

Swayne watched the change of course knowing full well what it meant. With crew and commandos poised, his eyes were fixed on the ship as it passed by on the launch's port beam. "As it drew level - 40 or 50 yards away - a searchlight was turned directly on us," he wrote. Moments later, gunfire signalled the start of an action of David and Goliath proportions.

#### 'BADLY HIT'

Accounts of the short and savage struggle that followed differ in detail, if not substance. According to Swayne, "the two ships opened fire

simultaneously", the opening shots from the launch, variously credited to Tom Durrant and Ralph Batteson, knocked out the searchlight and splattered Paul's bridge.

To the upward fire of the launch's sole functioning Oerlikon, its bridge-side twin Lewis-gun and an assortment of Bren and Tommy guns, *Jaguar* replied with its light armament, a hail of bullets and shells tearing through the wooden hull and exposed deck. The worst damage was amidships where commandos lying, unprotected, on the engine-room hatch were flailed by raking fire.

Among the men wounded was 'Des' Chappell, hit in the right thigh and left calf. The same burst sparked a small fire in part of the bridge which was quickly put out. During the furious exchange of fire, the aft Oerlikon was put out of action by a direct hit which killed Ordinary Seaman Tommy Garner, knocked Pat Landy unconscious and ripped off Ralph

Batteson's helmet together with a sliver of his right ear.

At that moment, the young seaman spotted Tom Durrant. "I could see he was badly hit, and bleeding from several wounds," wrote Batteson, "but he clasped a Bren gun and determinedly sprayed the destroyer with his bullets." The next instant, Able Seaman V Alder, manning the twin-Lewis, was hit and sank to the deck. "Durrant stumbled towards the weapon, shouting for more ammunition," wrote Batteson. "He laid down the Bren and, taking up position behind the twin Lewis gun, hammered a fresh stream of bullets into *Jaguar's* vitals." Taken aback by the effrontery and ferocity of the resistance, *Jaguar* replied with a new tack designed to settle the fight in one fell swoop. From the bridge of the launch, Dark watched as the vessel "circled up astern of us" before coming round and steering straight at them in a clear attempt to ram. She would >>

#### ABOVE:

German troops, watched from nearby defences, clamber about the carcass of HMS Cambeltown, busy analysing what they thought to be a failed attempt to destroy the lock gate. Within mere moments of this image being taken, their conclusions would dramatically need re-evaluating.



#### LEFT:

Captives courageous: survivors of ML 306 are escorted ashore on the morning of March 28. They include Ordinary Seaman Ralph Batteson and Lieutenant Ronnie Swayne, supporting a wounded comrade, Sub-Lieutenant Philip Dark, left with plaster to his nose, and, half-hidden by Swayne, Sub-Lieutenant Pat Landy.



## SUPERHERO Heroism At T

### RIGHT:

In German hands: a pensive Pat Landy on the dockside with Ronnie Swayne enjoy a smoke after their ordeal.

### RIGHT MIDDLE:

Barely alive: Lance-Sergeant 'Des' Chappell with fellow commando survivors (l to r), Private R Bishop, Corporal E Evans and Private W Eckmann.



have succeeded but for a desperate manoeuvre ordered by ML 306's skipper. Swayne later reported: "If Ian Henderson had not ordered full steam and hard to port we would have been cut in half. As it was, we received a glancing blow that would have turned over anything but an ML."

The impact was sufficiently violent to send men flying. Vanderwerwe, already wounded, was thrown over the side and never seen again. Three others were hauled back on deck after being pitched into the water, one of them minus several toes lost to the launch's propellers. Chappell was left "hanging over the gunwale" before someone dragged him aboard to continue firing. By then, the launch

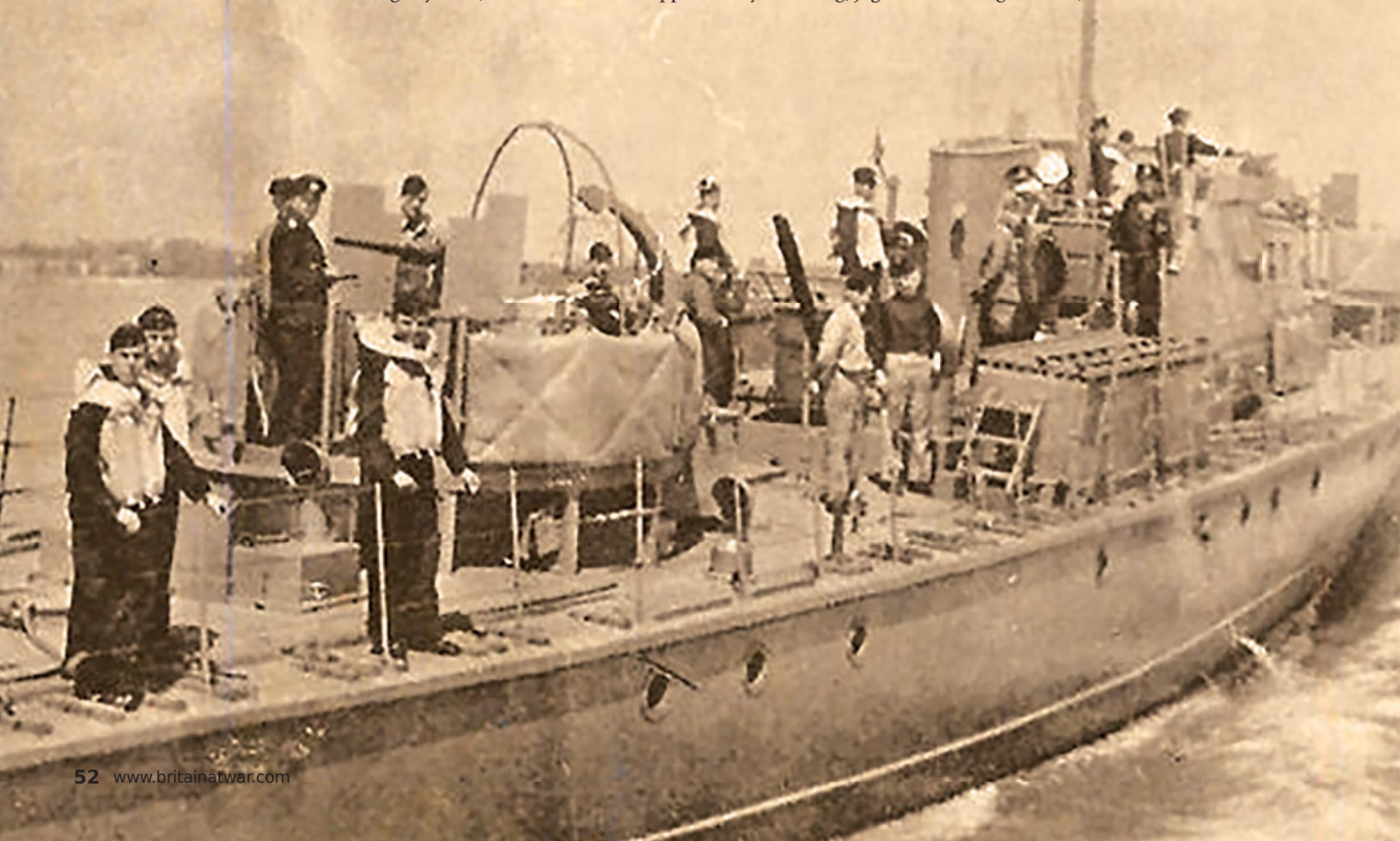
was a bullet-riddled shambles, its bloodied deck littered with dead and wounded, but still there was no thought of surrendering. "We were fighting for our lives," recalled Chappell.

Every burst of enemy fire continued to be answered, most notably and most heroically by the terrible and terrifying figure of Tom Durrant. Standing fully exposed at the twin-Lewis, his stomach ripped open by multiple wounds, he refused to give in, fighting on with every last ounce of fading strength and with nothing but raw courage to sustain him. The end, however, could not be long delayed. Having failed to sink her opponent by ramming, *Jaguar's*

captain turned to his heavier guns with yet more devastating results. One shell struck the wheelhouse, badly wounding the 21-year-old coxswain, Leading Seaman Walter Sargent, and PO Bennett was fatally wounded as he lifted the engine-room hatch to find out what was happening. It was time to call a halt to the slaughter. According to Swayne, the launch's skipper was in the process of "trying to haul down the ensign" when another shell slammed into the bridge. Sargent died instantly, Henderson fell mortally wounded, with one leg severed, and Dark was blasted

### BELOW:

Prize of war: a rare photograph of ML 306 restored and ready for action with a German crew following her engagement with the *Jaguar* at St Nazaire. (VIA JAMES DORRIAN)







unconscious into a corner. With that, said Chappell, the *Jaguar* circled and moved to within hailing distance. "A voice shouted out to us in English, 'Have you had enough?'" recalled Chappell. "We had, but we couldn't bring ourselves to admit it and so we just fired back and kept firing. At least that's what Tom Durrant did... Every time they spoke they were answered by a burst of fire. We thought it was the right thing to do."

As Swayne struggled in vain to release the launch's Carley float, *Jaguar* moved almost alongside and another call to surrender was met by another show of defiant obstinacy. As ever, it came from Durrant, an instinctive retort in the form of a hail of bullets that peppered the enemy bridge, narrowly missing *Jaguar's* astonished captain. It proved to be Tom Durrant's final act. Moving astern, *Jaguar* poured more fire onto the helpless launch. Amid the storm of shrapnel, Ordinary Seaman Arthur Shepherd was badly hit, with one leg shattered below the knee, Chappell was struck again, a fragment penetrating his steel helmet and skull, and so too was Durrant, who finally collapsed with wounds to his head, both arms and legs, as well as his chest and stomach. "By this time," wrote Swayne, "there was scarcely anyone moving on the ML, and the decks were covered with wounded. The fo'c'stle was full of smoke and steam... The destroyer stood off at long range and gave us some more bursts. "When it closed again I shouted that we would surrender. They were still suspicious and I had to give my honour that we wouldn't play any tricks." This time there was no resistance. "It was over,"

Dear Mrs Durrant,

You will wonder who this is writing to you but my husband Lieut R.O.C Swayne of No 1 Commandos captured after the St Nazaire Raid and now a prisoner of war. has written to me from Germany asking me to write to you. He tells me that your son Sgt Durrant lost his life I know a little of what you must be feeling as my husband was missing for two months and I was told also ~~by~~ by someone who also took part that was little hope his boat having blown up. I know also that there is nothing one can say which can really comfort you in fact the one thing that hurt me in my joy at hearing my husband was a prisoner was the thought of others who had not been so lucky. May I say however

that I think you have every right to feel great pride. My husband has always had a great regard for your son both as a man and soldier. he has often talked to me about him. In a letter from Germany dated April 1st which I received today he says that your son "behaved with a courage and tenacity that could not be equalled". He also says Sgt Durrant is very badly wounded but still cheerful. In a later but undated letter he asks me to write to you saying that your son has lost his life. I know how painful it will be <sup>for you</sup> to read this letter but you may like to hear these details and to know that your son was so brave will you please accept my Deepest Sympathy which I cannot even begin to express and that of my husband who asked me to write if there is in any way whatever in which I can help you please let me know.

Yours sincerely  
Charmian Swayne

wrote Ralph Batteson. "Thank God, it was over."

### 'SUPERHUMAN'

The action was, indeed, finished, but the suffering for the wounded would last a while longer. As well as the seven who were killed either

during or died shortly after the fight, many of the survivors among the 28 commandos and crew aboard ML 306 were wounded. Of these, the most seriously injured was Tom Durrant. According to Swayne, he had been wounded in more than a dozen places and his courageous spirit, even ➤

## SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

### Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid

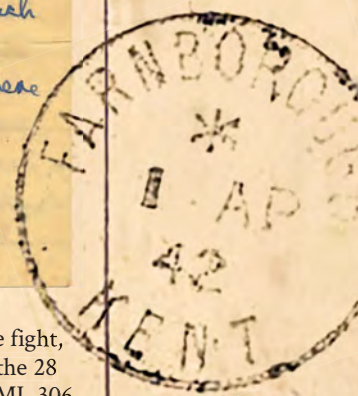
July 1<sup>st</sup> 1942

#### CENTER LEFT:

End of the mission: Philip Dark, Ronnie Swayne and Pat Landy in discussion while commandos and crew of ML 306 await developments on the dockside surrounded by German guards. Swayne was later awarded a Military Cross for his part in the action. The launch's skipper, Lieutenant Ian Henderson, and coxswain, Leading Seaman Walter Sargent were posthumously mentioned in despatches.

#### LEFT:

Tribute to valour: the first news of Tom Durrant's death and courageous action, contained in a letter sent to his family by Lieutenant Swayne's wife in July 1942. (COURTESY DURRANT FAMILY)





# SUPERHUMAN BRAVERY

Heroism At The St Nazaire Raid

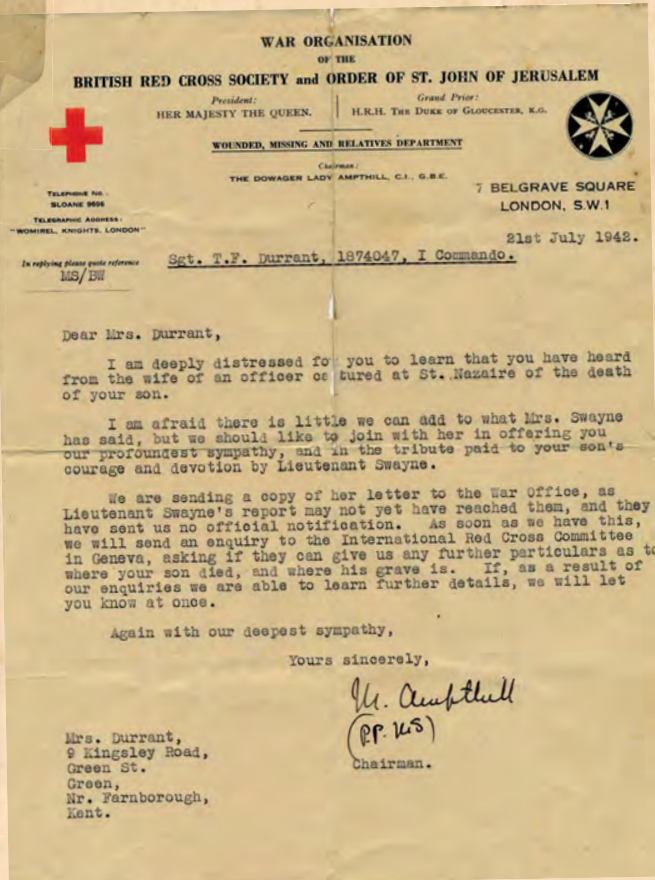
## RIGHT:

Sorrow and pride: Tom Durrant's mother displays the Victoria Cross she received following a Buckingham Palace investiture at the end of the war.



## MIDDLE RIGHT:

Grim tidings: a letter from the Red Cross which followed the news from Lieutenant Swayne's wife. (COURTESY DURRANT FAMILY)



after surrender, made an impression on friend and foe alike. Dark, a former medical student who took charge of the injured aboard Jaguar, later wrote: "Sgt Durrant was conscious but bespattered with shrapnel wounds. He suffered but bore up incredibly." The young commando was still alive

when brought ashore, but died shortly afterwards. The memory of his heroic fight, however, would endure.

Both Paul and his flotilla commander, Kapitain-zur-See Moritz Schmidt, made no secret of their admiration

for outstanding bravery displayed in a "hopeless position". A few days later a German officer visited the senior commando officer, Lt Colonel Charles Newman, in captivity and reported on the great courage shown by a sergeant aboard a motor boat "as you may wish to recommend him for a high award". The sergeant was, of course, Tom Durrant and his heroism had already been noted by his colleagues. According to Ronnie Swayne, in a letter written to his wife three days after the raid but not delivered until July, he had "behaved with a courage and tenacity that couldn't be equalled". His note was followed by a fuller report, compiled during his incarceration, and a recommendation, written shortly after his release in May 1945, which was fully endorsed by Philip Dark and supported by Charles Newman.

The result was unparalleled. On 19 June 1945, the London Gazette announced the posthumous award of a Victoria Cross to 1874047, Sergeant Thomas Frank Durrant, "for great gallantry, skill and devotion to duty". It was the first time in the medal's history that a soldier had been so honoured for an act of valour during a naval action. Among a flurry of congratulatory letters sent to his mother was one from Major General Robert Laycock, Chief of Combined Operations. In commending her son's "superhuman bravery", he concluded: "It is men like your boy who enabled this country to win the war against aggression." ◎



## RIGHT:

Last post: Tom Durrant's grave in Escoublac-La-Baule war cemetery.



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# GENERAL SIR RICHARD NUGENT O'CONNOR

## PART II: A PERSONAL D-DAY: FIT FOR DUTY?

Cunning and brilliant, the popular and proven O'Connor faced his greatest challenge not in the desert, but in Normandy - and in his own mind. In the second of this two-part feature, **John Ash** asks: Did incarceration affect the later commands of Britain's Desert Fox?



ABOVE: Sir Richard Nugent O'Connor, postwar.

**R**esponsible for arguably the first great British ground victory of the war, Lieutenant-General Sir Richard O'Connor forced massive Italian surrenders during Operation Compass, culminating at the Battle of Beda Fomm, ending 7 February 1941. From his letters: *"I have seldom seen such a scene of wreckage and confusion as existed on the main Benghazi Road... I think this may be termed a complete victory, as none of the enemy escaped."* Adding: *"The Italian [10<sup>th</sup>] Army had completely ceased to exist... The army was not only defeated, but liquidated, nothing remained to fall back on Tripoli."*

Yet, O'Connor refused to accept this stunning outcome as a total success - there was still work to do. Elements of 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars reached El Agheila and patrols moved 50 miles beyond the lines, meeting little opposition. He stood ready to press on to Sirte, even Tripoli.

O'Connor did not want to halt the pursuit, hoping to press his advantage. In later times, he spoke of his regret that he did not ignore orders: *"A brigade of the 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Division, lorryborne, with supplies of petrol, was drawn up on the Benghazi*

*and Sirte road, facing south, all ready to advance... I have never really forgiven myself for not using them."*

The halt order came from Churchill himself. A new front opened in Greece while O'Connor waged his war and Wavell, C-in-C Middle East, had to divert forces. The critical weakening of XIII Corps and lacklustre commitment to Greece, led to a stunning reversal in North Africa and costly failure in the Aegean.

### THE FOX LEAVES THE DEN

In March 1941, General Erwin Rommel arrived and O'Connor now faced an equally cunning and resourceful foe. The pair would no doubt have fought an interesting campaign; both had the potential to be every bit each other's nemesis.

Rommel's first attacks came on 31 March with the defeat of 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Division. O'Connor rushed to meet with Lieutenant-General Neame and Wavell as Rommel's initially limited action expanded and the situation deteriorated. The 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division withdrew, but 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured was, with its commander, Major-General Michael Gambier-Parry, captured. »



## GENERAL SIR RICHARD NUGENT O'CONNOR

**Nickname(s):** Dick (Informal)

**Born:** 21 August 1889

**Died:** 17 June 1981 (aged 91)

**Allegiance:** United Kingdom

**Service/branch:** British Army (1909-1948)

**Battles/wars:** First World War: Battle of the Piave River, Palestine, Second World War: Operation Compass, Operation Epsom, Operation Jupiter, Operation Goodwood, Operation Bluecoat, Operation Market Garden

**Awards:** Knight of the Order of the Thistle, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, Distinguished Service Order & Bar, Military Cross, Mentioned in Despatches (13 times), Legion of Honour, Croix de Guerre, Silver Medal of Military Valour.

**BELOW:** British Shermans and infantry wait ahead of Operation Goodwood. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS (HEREAFTER HMP))





## RIGHT:

O'Connor's senior officers; 2nd Army commander, Miles Dempsey, and 21st Army Group commander, Bernard Montgomery. (HMP)

**RIGHT:** Major-General Sir Richard O'Connor (centre, middle distance) and Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Neame VC (centre), with Major-General Gambier Parry (right) and Brigadier John Combe (left) following their capture. (HMP)

## BELOW:

Cromwell and Firefly tanks before Goodwood. Cromwell was low profile, fast, and well-protected, but although the OQF 75mm gun (a bored out 6Pdr firing American shells) had an excellent HE shell, it lacked a good AP round. The Firefly or the faster Challenger, was allocated to troops at a ratio of 1:3 to resolve this. (HMP)



In the retreat, XIII Corps headquarters was moved to Tmimi on 6 April and at 8pm O'Connor, Neame, and Combe left for the new HQ. A second car followed with Neame's staff, including Lord Ranfurly. The generals drove overnight, negotiating tracks and weaving through army traffic. They caught up with a slow moving line of vehicles and began overtaking, halting in the middle of the column as it rolled to a stop. Lord Ranfurly commented on the 'Cypriot' drivers (often hired by the army) shouting as they overtook. He strolled over to Neame when a German soldier interrupted. O'Connor and Combe woke and hid weapons on their person. No one expected German patrols so far east, and Brigadier John Harding (who assumed temporary command of the corps) left later yet arrived safely. Attempts were made to

exchange or buy O'Connor's freedom, however the Chiefs of Staff would not agree.

While a devastated O'Connor arrived in Italy, the question of whether he could have continued his advance raged. Wavell felt it was not feasible due to poor availability of support and serviceable vehicles, robbing any advance of haste. Harding suggested Italian strength 500 miles inside their own lines would prove superior.

However, Rommel recorded: "Graziani's army had virtually ceased to exist... No resistance worth of the name could be mounted..." Continuing: "Troops who on one day are flying in a wild panic to the rear, may, unless they are continually harried... very soon stand in battle again, freshly organised as fully effective fighting men." O'Connor's friend, Brigadier Barclay, suggested:

*"It has been said XIII Corps was not in a position to continue strenuous operations... It would have been difficult to find anyone in a responsible position serving with the Corps at the time who would have subscribed to this view." Adding: "Officers and men were 'itching' to go on and were all agreed... There may have been good reasons for abandoning the North African offensive... but the condition of units of the XIII Corps was not one".*

## ESCAPE

The generals were incarcerated in Campo 12 and were in good company. Major-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart VC joined them and the men committed to escape. Gambier-Parry was also present, and according to de Wiart was "a first class 'forger - which could no doubt earn him a steady income in the underworld".







**LEFT:**  
British Shermans, and a Sherman ARV (carrying two BSA motorbikes), all with wading gear, wait in their LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) ahead of their landing on Normandy's beaches. (HMP)

O'Connor secured support by having a letter smuggled into British channels. Fellow inmate, New Zealand Brigadier James Hargest, said of O'Connor: *"[He] never for one moment of his captivity gave up trying to escape... In his zeal he became completely one-track minded."*

O'Connor reflected how escaping kept him going. However his first attempt, to slip out over the wall, failed.

Then there was the tunnel, starting from the sealed chapel where work could proceed uninterrupted. The tunnel took months to complete but strengthened defences and good weather prevented immediate escape. It was not until 30 March 1943 that six officers scrambled out and vanished into the night. O'Connor and de Wiat covered 150 miles before their recapture.

On 7 September 1943 the prisoners were assembled and informed of Italy's surrender. General Chiappe took the men to Florence station, explained German troops were coming, and that the men were to move to Arezzo. Hidden around Arezzo, most of the British slipped away. O'Connor and Neame lodged in Segetheina, where Neame received a message coordinating a submarine pick-up for O'Connor, Neame and Air Marshal Owen Boyd. The officers made the rendezvous but the submarine failed to arrive. An Italian, Signore Arpesella, later bought them passage to British lines on a trawler. The most harm the men came to during their escape was O'Connor tripping at dinner with Generals Alexander and Eisenhower after crossing the lines.

## VIII CORPS

Home for Christmas Day, barely two weeks passed before O'Connor would find another command. However, his fitness for command was questioned, even though the Italians generally treated prisoners well. O'Connor rarely spoke of his time as prisoner, but despite immense mental toughness and that he became fitter - his physical prowess proven by the audacious winter escape, there seemed a lasting effect.

For O'Connor, the worst thing was that he was tested, proven, and undefeated in battle - yet still captured. He became subject to scandal, centred

on how a man of great reputation and ability was unable to reverse the situation faced by Neame. The collapse in the desert was a shock, and O'Connor was scapegoated. The success of Montgomery after successive leaders' 'failings' fuelled ill-founded criticisms of Britain's Desert Fox, even though 'Monty' never blamed him.

Historians argue this criticism often stemmed from professional jealousy or ignorance, but many leading figures recognised his achievements yet considered O'Connor ill-suited for command after such a lengthy capture. Still, other generals, ➤

**BELOW:**  
Major General George 'Pip' Roberts DSO, MC (right), commanding 11th Armoured Division, with Brigadier Roscoe Harvey DSO, of 29th Armoured Brigade talk in front of Roscoe's Sherman command tank (note extra aerial on the front hull for the additional No.19 wireless, but retained main armament), in a Normandy staging area, 15 August 1944. (HMP)

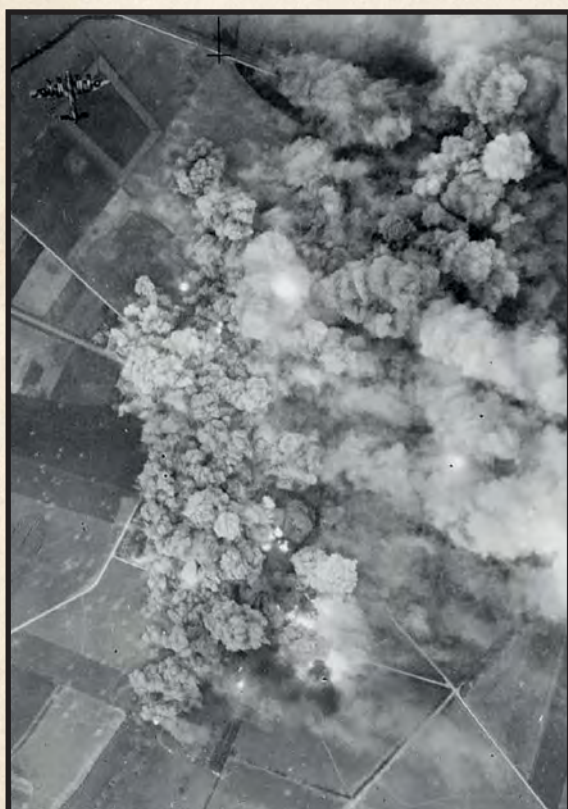






**ABOVE:**  
Cromwells and  
Achilles tank  
destroyers  
assemble for  
Goodwood.  
(BRITAIN AT WAR  
ARCHIVE)

**BELOW:**  
Bombs fall on  
Cagny.  
(BRITAIN AT WAR  
ARCHIVE)



including Wavell, fought furiously to protect his reputation and felt his escape restored his standing. Eisenhower, Churchill, and Alexander were impressed, and Montgomery suggested O'Connor lead 8<sup>th</sup> Army in Italy. Alanbrooke deferred his decision until he had met the escapee general, but shortly after O'Connor was given VIII Corps, part of Montgomery's 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group.

## MISSING OUT?

However, if O'Connor was not at fault for the collapse in North Africa, if he was fit to command, if his capture had little or no lasting effect, and if criticism against him was misplaced, why did he fail to shine?

In August 1944 O'Connor turned 55 – old for a corps commander, perhaps, but workable with his level of fitness. Yet, it is claimed O'Connor aged terribly in captivity, that capture was hard on his mental health. Despite confidence in him, some close to O'Connor noted some 'spark' was missing. However, O'Connor won the battle for his own mind, whatever effect there was appears to not have affected his generalship.

Therefore, the strategic situation was the most critical factor. O'Connor had many advantages; for one, he was trusted by Churchill. He also inherited a corps filled with rising stars. Among them stood 'Pip' Roberts, 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division's well-regarded commander, who at 37 was possibly the youngest Major-General in the army. The 11<sup>th</sup> itself was arguably the best British armoured division in Europe. Another standout officer could be found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Household Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Abel Smith, who generated remarkable successes in future operations. Other commanders, such as Miles Dempsey and Montgomery had been elevated to positions above O'Connor, but, knowing these men well, he worked with them effectively despite their

restrictive seniority and their tendency, rightly to wrongly, to smother bold operations with caution.

Some issues, however, could not be resolved by any corps commander. Although familiar with the intricacies of supply in the desert, North-West Europe presented its own challenges for O'Connor. Vulnerable supply ships sailing long distances were less an issue, but replaced by the lack of suitable ports. The great size of the desert facilitated independent operations which suited O'Connor well, a key element of his daring brilliance which translated poorly to Normandy's restrictive terrain. His units would not have physical space to manoeuvre. Normandy also required rigid cooperation between generals, more than O'Connor was used to. He was unlikely to get free reign. Weather played a role too, with heat replaced by rain, mud and dust.

The most damning effect of capture was how lengthy incarceration prevented O'Connor practicing years of development in tactics and strategy. He missed out on key experiences and had not witnessed the strategic situation unfold. A crisis in manpower gripped British and Canadian formations during Normandy which was not an issue during O'Connor's previous command. Plus, O'Connor had rarely fought Germans, had little experience of their tactics, and certainly had not faced a defensive, resource-starved, German Army relying increasingly on anti-tank guns and infantry.



## NORMANDY

On 12 June 1944 the first of VIII Corps landed in Normandy and O'Connor immediately planned for VIII Corps' first operations. The weather and the small beachhead made it difficult to spring VIII Corps, but with Operation Epsom, 26 June, into action they went.

The aim was to cross the Odon and Orne rivers and cut off Caen from the south, but their opposition was strong - a pair of SS Panzer divisions with a contingent of Tiger and Panther tanks. The more 'open' terrain outside of the Bocage was still restrictive and the network of fields, hedges, and woods perfectly suited the defender. Additionally, many VIII Corps units were unable to land due to the weather, at least one armoured division could not participate and O'Connor had to rely on two attached independent brigades, 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured and 31<sup>st</sup> Tank.

Although heavy artillery support was allocated, from the assets from three corps, strategic air support was rained off. Additionally, XXX Corps failed to achieve all their objectives in a preliminary operation, leaving VIII Corps exposed. The assault left O'Connor on a salient, vulnerable. However, as Montgomery wanted to focus German armour away from the Americans, such tempting target was perhaps promising. British



**LEFT:**  
Soldiers of 1<sup>st</sup>  
Welsh Guards  
pour fire into  
Cagny, 19 July.  
(BRITAIN AT WAR  
ARCHIVE)

troops made quick progress, but the Germans responded. The four mile gain concerned them. They rushed in armour, but were decisively repulsed.

After bitter fighting across tough terrain, the results were somewhat inconclusive. The British gained six miles, broke German defences and forced them to commit precious reserves, but the advance was contained and Caen not cut off, albeit

at the cost of 120 valuable German tanks. However, O'Connor endured the stiffest resistance yet offered by German forces and still gained. Such results in perhaps the hardest battle of O'Connor's career so far were impressive and morale was high. Montgomery was pleased, stating: "Your contribution to the general plan of battle has been immense", despite unbearably heavy losses. ➤

**BELOW:**  
British and  
Canadian tanks  
on the move  
during the  
breakout from  
Normandy.  
(CONSEIL  
RÉGIONAL  
DE BASSE-  
NORMANDIE/  
CANADIAN  
NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES)







**ABOVE:** Ram Kangaroo personnel carriers of 4th Armoured Brigade in Rethem, 16 April 1945. The Kangaroo was one suggestion made by O'Connor and others, such as the Canadian Guy Simmonds, to give infantry protected mobility when supporting armoured operations. They would not be used during Goodwood, but were a common feature of subsequent operations. (HIMP)

The 15th Scottish alone lost 300 killed, 1,640 wounded, 800 missing/captured – 25% of the division's casualties from Normandy to VE Day. Such losses were simply unsustainable.

By 12 July two subsequent operations, Windsor and Jupiter, met further success but again at cost. VIII Corps' 43rd Wessex Division had been mauled, but with the arrival of Lieutenant-General Neil Ritchies' XII Corps, VIII Corps could be rested. Respite would do them good, as O'Connor's greatest struggle was to come.

## GOODWOOD

Commander British 2nd Army, Miles Dempsey, was issued the following directive by Montgomery on 10 July: "Second Army will retain the ability to operate with a strong armoured force

east of the River Orne in the general area between Caen and Falaise. For this purpose a corps of three armoured divisions will be held in reserve, ready to be employed when ordered by me."

Three days later, O'Connor was handed the reins. VIII Corps had been given 7th Armoured Division and 8th AGRA (Army Group Royal Artillery, a counter to manpower shortages) but lost much of its infantry. By making VIII Corps armour-heavy, three armoured divisions and five independent brigades, the British united a core strength of armour under a single command. O'Connor, with more than 2,600 tanks, stood ready for the push.

Goodwood ranks among the more controversial operations of the period. Depending on differing interpretations of the intentions, the operation was a

failed breakout, or, a limited operation where breakout was a possibility which never occurred. The original plan was to breakout, but more restricted prior to its launch – yet none senior to Montgomery were informed. O'Connor, while other units battled to secure Caen, was to assault as far forward as Bourguebus Ridge and only reconnaissance units were to progress to Falaise, 15 miles south, in which they succeeded. A general advance would take place only if the situation allowed.

## OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

In planning Goodwood, O'Connor faced major problems. First, against his command style, he could not use surprise and led a frontal assault which, as a skilled flanker, he hated. Surprise was a key element in his operational art which was unachievable as German troops held the Colombelles Steelworks towers and watched the bridgehead. Although Allied intelligence expected heavy resistance, they were unaware the attack was anticipated, with 1st SS Panzer Corps and LXXXVI Corps prepared. Rings of bolstered defences, 10 miles deep, took advantage of the open ground from good cover. The area was also densely populated, and mutually supporting occupied villages (typically 1500m apart – perfect tank-hunting range) surrounded by hedges, and orchards proved every bit the fortress.

Secondly, the small size of the staging area created problems moving three armoured divisions into position. They had to cross a river, a canal, and a hastily deployed and unmapped British minefield before even beginning the attack. Dust kicked up by movement further betrayed them and despite the best efforts of engineer units, who could only work at night, the assault stymied and only a handful of lanes were cleared. The front allotted to VIII Corps was narrow, almost too small for a single brigade, preventing more than one division from forming up.

Finally, O'Connor realised the vital necessity for air support, as the narrow front and busy staging area meant his artillery had to be held back, unable to support him fully. The exceptionally heavy strategic bombardment was welcomed, but only had limited impact. As the ridge was outside the envelope of artillery, any failures of the strategic air would be magnified – 2,077 bombers were allocated and 83 (Tactical) Group RAF, flying air-



**RIGHT:** O'Connor, with Prime Minister Churchill, Montgomery, and other prominent officers, observe Allied aircraft overhead. (BRITAIN AT WAR ARCHIVE)





ground sorties, was also available. Eighth Air Force alone would drop 89,000 100lb and 20lb bombs on the ridge.

## PRESERVE THE INFANTRY

These immediate pressures were worsened by ongoing issues in manpower. The 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Infantry Division was to remain in reserve and with multiple simultaneous operations running, there was little infantry to assist O'Connor. 'Pip' Roberts, leading the advance, commented that with only the single infantry brigade in his division, he'd struggle to clear settlements. O'Connor sympathised, but did little but advise bypassing resistance. The 51<sup>st</sup>, just two miles away, had to remain in reserve.

O'Connor's inability to quickly take Cagny, because of a similar lack of infantry, would cost him 16 tanks and hold up the entire advance bar 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which passed unmolested. The village was held only by four 88mm AA guns and a small ad-hoc medley of men commanded by Hans Von Luck, until 4pm the first day.

O'Connor had called for the limited resources of infantry to be mobile and under armour, requesting, prior to Goodwood, modified self-propelled guns functioning as armoured transports – enough for two battalions. The move was blocked, but II Canadian Corps commander Guy Simonds debuted 'Kangaroo' armoured personnel carriers during August's Operation Totalize – undoubtedly inspired out of the shortcomings of Goodwood.

On launch day, 18 July, progress was swift. Two miles were quickly covered, with Germans dazed by heavy bombing. Tiger tanks, weighing around 60 tonnes, had been flipped as if they were coins, some defenders were driven insane. Men captured from 16<sup>th</sup> Luftwaffe Field division were so shaken they were unable to walk, and could not be interrogated for a day. There were suicides associated with the heavy bombardment. Half of 503<sup>rd</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion's vehicles were knocked out, and 200<sup>th</sup> Assault Gun Battalion, directly opposing the advance, was destroyed. For five miles, a scarred and cratered landmass was encountered during the armour's push through unharvested fields and villages (some, like Cagny, oddly untouched despite 650 tonnes ➤

**ABOVE:** Tiger Killer. The Firefly, excepting the M10 Achillies, was the only tank in numbers during the early stages of Normandy that was capable of defeating Tigers or Panthers at 1000 yards. However, such German vehicles, and extended ranges to fight them, were rare. (HMP)

**MIDDLE LEFT:** Prisoners taken during Goodwood, under guard. (BRITAIN AT WAR ARCHIVE)

**LEFT:** Fearsome, but not invincible. Tiger I was vulnerable to 17Pdr guns at long range, and the 6Pdr could also be effective, especially with new ammunition issued in March 1944. However, at 300 yards most tank guns could defeat Tiger's frontal armour, especially the 75mm M3 fitted to Shermans, and, to lesser extents, the QF 75mm fitted to the Cromwell. Here, men of the Durham Light Infantry, 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Division inspect a knocked-out Tiger during Operation 'Epsom', 28 June 1944. (HMP)







## ABOVE:

Tiger 313 of Schwere Panzer-Abteilung 503. Nearly 60 tonnes impressively but brutally flipped by bombing prior to Goodwood. Tiger 313's servability however, is in question, as earlier photos show 313 took a powerful, but non-penetrating, hit to the side, leaving a deep fist-sized dent.

## BELOW:

A Cromwell tank and Ram Kangaroo personnel carriers in Weseke, March 1945. (HMP)

of bombs). Resistance grew – but the fiercest lay beyond the bombed zone, as the guns on or behind the ridge were mostly intact.

## TWO BLOODY MILES

Seven miles from the start point and just two miles from their objective, 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division's 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade suffered as fire rained in from Bourguebus Ridge. Units reaching the foot of the rise required urgent support, yet, because of traffic congestion in rear areas, fire from bypassed villages, and the raised railway which cut the battlefield in half and dangerously exposed tanks crossing it, the advance units were forced to cling on with little assistance. Fortunately, the 29<sup>th</sup> were spared when 83 Group RAF's Typhoons halted a counterattack by a battalion of Panthers and 15 Tigers, elements of 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Corps led by Sepp Dietrich. Elements of 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured

(Desert Rats) were sent to the 29<sup>th</sup>, which had lost half its tanks, but 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade's progress was slow, and the glorious reputation of the long-weary Desert Rats, so proficient in Italy and North Africa, was threatened.

The attack on 18 July gained ground, but left VIII Corps exposed. Gains were consolidated over the next two days, with further attacks on both flanks launched. The Bourguebus was contested, with parts falling, before weather put a stop to proceedings. Breakout never occurred, but the size of the cramped bridgehead grew, German armour was worn down, and casualties amongst British infantry, actively being preserved, were light. Heavy tank losses, 36% of all British tanks in Normandy – 126 lost in 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade alone – were easily replaced or repaired. Not so easily replaced, were at least 110 German tanks, though Dietrich personally awarded every man in the tank workshop at Foret de Cinglais with an Iron Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class.

## WASTED OPPORTUNITY

By keeping the 51<sup>st</sup> back the entire operation, already hamstrung by varying factors, was put in jeopardy. As Pip Roberts suggested, German forces could not launch a counterattack so strong it would defeat three corps – one of which was armoured. Had they, a single division would not stop them. To O'Connor, the reserve hampered his operation. The decision was not his, but, well

aware of the issue, there was a case for reversal. O'Connor escaped the anger associated to Goodwood's 'failure' to breakout, but he knew what was needed for the operation to progress more smoothly yet did little to challenge it. Roberts subsequently noted there were 72 88mm guns, 12 heavier flak guns, 194 field guns, and 272 Nebelwerfers on or behind Bourguebus ridge. Critically, these were out of range of artillery and largely untouched. By having more infantry accompanying the advance, holdouts such as Cagny could have been swiftly dealt with, freeing up armour. Infantry could then escort the tanks uphill.

O'Connor worked on the next attack, Bluecoat, as the furore over Goodwood raged above him. Left unaware of the change in aims, Eisenhower, Arthur Harris and Arthur Tedder (who welcomed the fact O'Connor was commanding and expected another Compass), were furious at the absence of a breakout – and arguably only contributed their support expecting spectacular results. Dempsey and Montgomery were scolded, but spared dismissal.

## BLUECOAT

O'Connor worked quickly to disseminate the lessons, namely the need for cooperation between infantry and armour – critical, as the next operation, Bluecoat, would take the British into Bocage country. Infantry battalions were to work with armoured







## CHANGES

Montgomery ordered a general advance on 8 August, yet O'Connor was not going to be part of it. Perhaps allowing commanders operational freedom meant any failings were accentuated. Commander XXX Corps, General Bucknall, was soon replaced by Brian Horrocks and a number of O'Connor's best divisional commanders had been wounded or transferred into Horrocks's command. A further, personal blow for O'Connor, was that Brigadier Hargest, fellow Campo 12 escapee, was killed in Normandy.

With XXX Corps gaining on and surpassing VIII Corps, and the Americans moving as swiftly, O'Connor's command was reduced and he out of the pursuit. XXX Corps began the race to Brussels under the leadership of Brian Horrocks, another brilliant and charismatic desert general, fresh from convalescing. He reversed the fortunes of the corps, and was in a better position to advance eastwards. As a result, O'Connor, who had waged a tough and challenging campaign, was halted.

General Sir Richard O'Connor was once again prevented from pursuing a retreating enemy in a battle which he decisively forced. Nevertheless, it was his breakthrough, casting aside, once and for all, any effect captivity may have had on him. Whatever spark O'Connor lost, he found at Bluecoat. With room to act, O'Connor's style of command finally seeped through and began to fit the Normandy battle. He was perhaps not the best man for the job, but clearly, the inclusion of Britain's Desert Fox was beneficial to the pursuit of the campaign. ■

## LEFT:

Although this shows bombing to the Calais area, heavy bombers such as this Halifax were used by O'Connor and his seniors to prepare the way for British operations in Normandy. (BRITAIN AT WAR ARCHIVE)

regiments at a small unit level, with command shifting between the tanks and the infantry depending on circumstance. The tactic was described as "highly satisfactory" and remained in use until the end of the war. Strategic air support would again be vital, but this time a valuable second strike was allocated. The Americans had just launched their breakout, Cobra, which was successful in part because all but one German armoured division was watching the British sector. The lone Panzer Lehr division facing the Americans was bombed into submission.

VIII Corps reverted back to a balanced force and a five mile advance against Point 309 was O'Connor's objective, to be followed by exploitation if possible. Yet, there were still difficulties. Some of his units were miles away from the start point the day before launch, 30 July. His artillery, 8<sup>th</sup> AGRA, was 30 miles to the rear, 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured some 25 miles behind the lines, Guards Armoured, 45 miles. Additionally, the terrain was appalling. There was only one south-running road and only infantry and Churchill tanks could move effectively through the thick countryside. Nevertheless British troops advanced to within a mile of Point 309 and waited for the second strike. When complete, two Guards Armoured battalions, one carrying infantry on the tanks, rushed the hill. Mines were the main problem for 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured, stuck attacking down the road after their long night march, but they too met their objectives. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Household Cavalry discovered an

undefended bridge five miles past Point 309, at Souleuvre. This was captured by 29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade and the recce troops moved forward another seven miles.

Bluecoat turned into a bitter struggle, but is considered to be VIII Corp's best action – likely because O'Connor attacked with some surprise, he finally had some space to manoeuvre, and there was little reason for 'Monty' to be cautious at this stage and he could unleash his generals. So effective was O'Connor's advance, he inadvertently created a dangerous salient for VIII Corps as he outran XXX Corps, bogged down on the left flank. The Americans broke out, with Patton leading the way to the Seine, but O'Connor, moving as swift as he could to trap the Germans, was slowed by XXX Corps poor advance.



## BELOW:

British troops advance behind a Churchill Infantry Tank during Operation Bluecoat, where lessons regarding infantry mobility and infantry/armour cooperation were put into action. (THE TANK MUSEUM)



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## A black and white photograph of a man in a military uniform and beret, wearing glasses and a mustache, looking off to the side. He is positioned behind a large, heavy-duty mechanical device, possibly a tank's turret or a large gun, which features a prominent yellow star on its side. The background is a brick wall with a small window.

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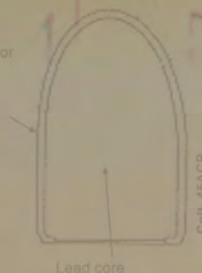
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Cupro-nickel or  
gilding metal  
jacket

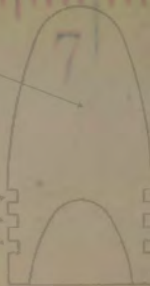


Colt .45ACP

Lead core

Cannelures

Solid lead



Webley .455 MkII

# Lawrence's

**MAIN IMAGE:**  
T.E Lawrence  
pictured in Arab  
dress.

**OVERLEAF:**  
A view of the  
bullet pictured  
showing the  
construction of  
the base of the  
bullet on display  
at the National  
Civil War Centre  
at Newark.

Three case studies related to conflict archaeology projects are examined by **Mark Khan** showing how interpretation of ammunition-related finds have been used to piece together stories of what took place where the finds were excavated. The results show the importance of understanding these objects and interpreting them accurately.

**B**attlefield and conflict related sites have recently seen a number of archaeological excavations revealing fascinating stories. Surprising as it may seem for events that have sometimes occurred within living memory, excavations at First and Second World War sites have uncovered a wealth of previously unknown detail. It is not unusual for official records of events, or first-hand accounts relating to often confused situations, to sometimes be incorrect or vague. Thus, archaeological work has huge value in understanding and interpreting places where conflict activity has taken place. Such work can also aid better understanding of those who fought at these places or were otherwise involved. Additionally, an important aspect of these projects is the role of commemoration of those who died, were wounded or who took part and it is not unusual to have relatives of those who were involved with the sites taking part in excavations.

As a new archaeological discipline, the archaeological community still

has much to learn about the subject, and understanding the context of conflict sites, and particularly military technology, often requires specialist knowledge. Those with military experience can play a vital part in interpreting and understanding the archaeology and whilst some projects are extremely good at engaging those with specialist knowledge, others are less so. Failure to correctly identify artefacts, or the legacy of military related activity, can lead to errors in interpretation and, in some cases, can be dangerous. By their very nature, battlefield and conflict sites pose a number of risks, including from unexploded ordnance, and failure to recognise or misidentify ordnance-related items could be fatal.

However, remnants of military ordnance can be extremely useful in interpreting a battlefield or conflict site. Opposing sides used particular types of ammunition which will frequently have only been used over specific time periods.

To allow munitions to be properly managed, they need to be recognisable and to facilitate this the materiel is often clearly marked. A brass >>



# Bullet

*"The bullet we found came from a Colt automatic pistol, the type of gun known to be carried by Lawrence, and almost certainly not used by any of the ambush's other participants."*





## LAWRENCE'S BULLET

### Making Facts Fit the Story?

Cupro-nickel or  
gilding metal  
jacket

Solid lead



cartridge case, for instance, may show what type it is, where it was made, who made it, and when. A forensic approach can thus be taken to analyse various types of fired ammunition. When a modern military rifle or pistol round is fired, two artefacts result; the fired cartridge case and the bullet. Both can be examined, and depending on condition may provide a mass of information if *correctly* interpreted. In this article we examine three case studies where ammunition finds have been used to shape interpretation of the story through the objects themselves.

### CASE STUDY ONE – LAWRENCE OF ARABIA'S BULLET

In March 2016, a team of archaeologists from the University of Bristol made a claim that they had found a bullet fired by T.E Lawrence during an action that took place at Hallat Ammar during the First World War. The claim was made via a university of Bristol press release issued on 31 March 2016.

The specific action referred to relates to the ambush of a train carried out by irregular Arab forces led by Lawrence. The attack on the Turkish train was immortalized in a scene in David Lean's Oscar-winning 1962 film 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Professor Nicholas Saunders of the University of Bristol, speaking of the find, claimed: *"The bullet we found came from a Colt automatic pistol, the type of gun known to be carried by Lawrence, and*

**ABOVE:**  
A group of  
Turkish officers  
of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Turkish  
Calvary Division  
pictured in  
Palestine in  
1917. The officer  
4<sup>th</sup> from the left  
can be seen  
wearing a large  
calibre revolver  
type holster.

**RIGHT:**  
The Hedjaz  
railway near  
Halat Ammar.



*almost certainly not used by any of the ambush's other participants."*

The claim was published and widely circulated in the media, but unfortunately without any detailed or supporting evidence being published. Requests for information relating to the research allowing the claim to be validated resulted in no detailed reply, only a reference to an internet link relating to the ownership of an M1911 pistol by Lawrence plus reference to a forthcoming book due to be published by Oxford University Press in 2017.

To prove a single bullet was fired by a specific gun by a specific individual at a given place and time is difficult. To do this, a detailed forensic analysis is required. The weight, dimensions and construction of the bullet as well the markings on the bullet made by the weapon's rifling (concentric grooves in



the barrel used to impart spin on the bullet to improve accuracy) correspond directly to the type of gun from which a bullet is fired. Each type of firearm has characteristics that can allow this matching to be made. In some cases, a fired bullet may be too badly distorted from impact and it can be difficult or impossible to provide a match. If sufficient evidence can be obtained, then a basis of probability can be ascertained but to make a substantiated claim both the fired bullet and original gun need to be available to match comparative markings on the original fired bullet and a comparator bullet fired from the same gun. Even if this were possible, and if a lengthy period of time had elapsed since the bullet was fired, physical changes to the gun barrel may have occurred to make this impossible. Without sufficient forensic evidence, any claim is simple

the media. From this image the actual construction of the bullet was unclear, but it appeared to be solid lead and showed the bullet in the context of a measuring scale. From information available in this image it seemed very unlikely to be a .45 ACP bullet; it was of the wrong construction, had incorrect dimensions and was the wrong shape. Despite requests, no further substantiating evidence was forthcoming.

### DID LAWRENCE OWN A COLT .45 PISTOL?

There has been much speculation in relation to this question. In certain circles, much has been made of Lawrence's choice of an M1911 pistol due to it being a 'new state-of-the-art American gun'. Whilst this fits the somewhat romantic picture of Lawrence, the reality is that the Colt M1911 was, by 1917,

**RIGHT:** The image shows a large calibre revolver round and an unfired .45 ACP round. Left is a .45 Smith and Wesson revolver round, showing the typical appearance of a large calibre revolver round. A .45 ACP round is pictured on the left. The .45 Smith and Wesson cartridge is also known as the .45 Schofield. The notorious American outlaw Jesse James owned a .45 Schofield. The cartridge in the picture is not believed to have belonged to Jesse.



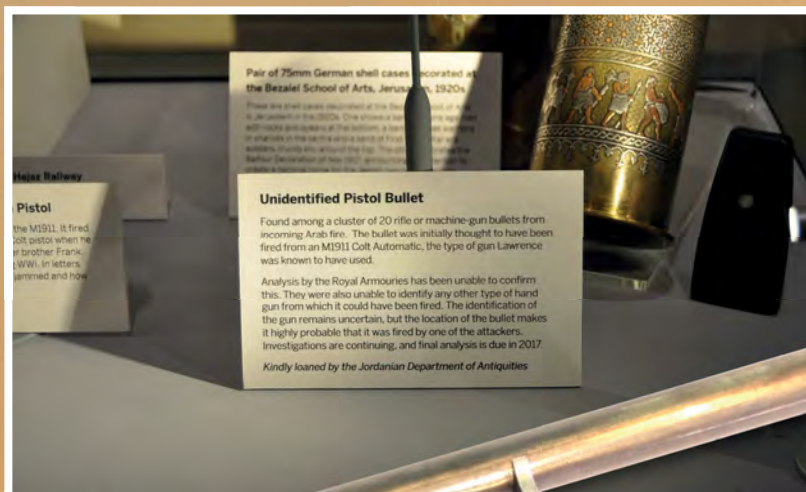
**RIGHT:** A close-up showing the different construction of the base of a typical large calibre revolver bullet (.45 Smith and Wesson) and a .45 ACP bullet. The similarity of the .45 Smith and Wesson bullet and the 'Lawrence' bullet can be clearly seen.

### DID LAWRENCE TAKE HIS COLT TO THE MIDDLE EAST?

Unfortunately, there is no evidence to substantiate this. A contradictory and confusing account by American journalist Lowell Thomas exists and links Lawrence to a Colt Revolver, but cannot be used as a credible reference. American author Leroy Thompson in his book - 'The Colt M1911 Pistol' claims (in cautious terms) 'In September 1914 Lawrence received two Colt 1911 pistols, reportedly a gift from Gertrude Bell. He was quite fond of the weapons and carried them throughout his service with the Arabs. Lawrence's brother Frank also carried a 1911 until he was killed in France during 1915'. On page 32 of his book he shows an image captioned 'T. E. Lawrence reloads what appears to be one of his two Colt 1911 pistols, gifts from the explorer Gertrude Bell.' The image is very poor and it is impossible to clearly see what Lawrence is holding. Additionally, some of the facts related in the text can be seen to be incorrect in relation to the detail of Lawrence's acquisition of the pistol. Importantly, one has to question also why he would choose to arm himself with a sidearm that used a different type of ammunition than would be readily available to him in theatre. The standard British sidearm was then the .455 revolver, firing completely different ammunition which would be provided by the British >>

**LEFT:** The unidentified bullet previously claimed as Lawrence's, on display in Newark.

**LEFT:** A large 11mm Gasser or Montenegrin type revolver. This type of revolver was in use by the Ottoman forces during the First World War.



one of many types of automatic pistol then in use. The design of the Colt itself dates back to a design patented by John Browning in 1897 and the M1911 is part of series of automatic pistols designed over the period 1897 – 1911. That Lawrence held the gun in high regard is clear, however, and in a letter to his American friend, Emily Rieder, in August 1914, he writes of how he regards the Colt 'as the best pistol'. He also writes asking for Emily Rieder to acquire one, not for himself, but for his brother Frank (a Second Lieutenant in the Gloucestershire Regiment) who was due to be sent to France. Being of a generous nature, Rieder actually sent two pistols allowing Lawrence to also own one.

conjecture. The Colt automatic pistol as claimed to have been used by Lawrence was a Colt M1911 model which fired a specific type of .45 ACP ammunition. The bullet in question is therefore claimed to be of this type but the only evidence produced was a single image. This was published in the university's press release, along with the story, and was widely covered in



## LAWRENCE'S BULLET

### Making Facts Fit the Story?



**ABOVE:**  
Jacketed .45 ACP  
bullets with a lead  
Webley .455 bullet  
for comparison.

**BELOW:**  
Lawrence stated  
that Austrian  
officers were on  
the train with one  
firing a pistol. They  
were instructors for  
artillery supplied to  
the Ottomans like  
this Skoda 24cm  
Mörser M98 in  
Ottoman service.

military logistic system - whereas .45 ACP ammunition would not. Thus, Lawrence would somehow have to obtain supplies himself. No comprehensive proof therefore exists to show that Lawrence chose to arm himself with this weapon during the attack on the train, or that he even had one in his possession in the Middle East.

### CAN THE BULLET HAVE BEEN FIRED BY LAWRENCE?

No forensic analysis is available in relation to the bullet which is

currently on display at the National Civil War Centre, Newark. The bullet forms part of the 'Shifting Sands' exhibition relating to Lawrence of Arabia and the Great Arab Revolt. As such, close inspection is now possible. The location of where the bullet was found is also important but only a vague reference exists in relation to this. From visual examination of the bullet, however, it is possible to determine that it cannot be a .45 ACP bullet. The construction in unjacketed solid lead, its length and the bullet form and shape are all incorrect. Additionally, there are no traces of



rifling to indicate it was fired by any particular gun. To have been fired by a Colt M1911 pistol, clear evidence of left hand twist rifling - 1 turn in 16", groove diameter .451"-.001" would be required. The caption associated with the bullet now states:

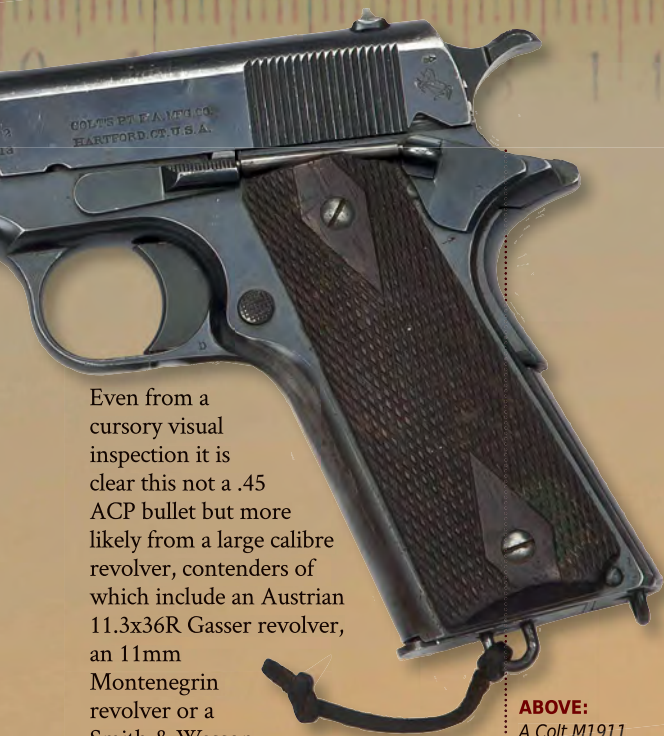
### UNIDENTIFIED PISTOL BULLET

*'Found among a cluster of 20 rifle or machine-gun bullets from incoming Arab fire. The bullet was initially thought to have been fired from an M1911 Colt Automatic, the type of gun Lawrence was known to have used. Analysis by the Royal Armouries has been unable to confirm this. They were also unable to identify any other type of handgun from which it could have been fired. The identification of the gun remains uncertain, but the location of the bullet makes it highly probable that it was fired by one of the attackers. Investigations are continuing, and final analysis is due in 2017.'*

From this, we can see that the original claim that the bullet came from a Colt automatic pistol of the type of gun alleged to have been carried by Lawrence has been changed.







Even from a cursory visual inspection it is clear this not a .45 ACP bullet but more likely from a large calibre revolver, contenders of which include an Austrian 11.3x36R Gasser revolver, an 11mm Montenegrin revolver or a Smith & Wesson .44 Russian Model revolver, all known to have been used by Ottoman forces and up to 5,000 .44 calibre Smith & Wesson Russian model revolvers were purchased by them. The Imperial War Museum in London has an example captured at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Gaza on 8 November 1917 by Lieutenant R.P. Sorge of 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers. An example of a large calibre 11mm Montenegrin revolver recovered from Gallipoli is also on display in the Kabatepe War Museum, Canakkale. Lawrence's own account of the action at Hallat Ammar clearly details the presence of Austrian officers on the train and one of them firing a pistol at Lawrence's bodyguard. The 11mm Gasser would no longer have been standard issue to Austrian officers in 1917, but its use cannot be discounted.

## CASE STUDY TWO

In June 2006 an identification claim relating to ammunition found during an archaeological project was also made and occurred as a result of work



**ABOVE:**  
A Colt M1911 pistol. This is an example of a private purchase pistol of the type owned by Lawrence and his brother Frank.

**TOP RIGHT:**  
Zeppelin L33 which crashed at New Hall Farm, Little Wigborough, Essex, in Sept 1916. The skeletal frame shows the construction of a Zeppelin offered little solid structure to catch a .303 bullet.

**RIGHT:**  
.303 Bren fired at Westleton Walks.

**RIGHT:**  
Italian weapons captured in North Africa, 171 Schwarzlose machine guns, which fired the 8mm Mannlicher, were captured along with 3,397,000 rounds of 8mm ammunition.

**LEFT:**  
A 'standard' .303 Ball bullet (L) and a .303 Tracer bullet (R). The tracer bullet matches the bullet found at the crash site of Zeppelin L48.

## LAWRENCE'S BULLET

Making Facts Fit the Story?



carried out at Theberton Hall Farm, Suffolk, near the site where Zeppelin L48 crashed on 17 June 1917. During this project, a fired .303 bullet was found and the excavation of L48 is detailed in a book authored by Neil Faulkner and Nadia Durrani: 'In Search of the Zeppelin War'. A claim is made in relation to this bullet, that: 'it is quite possible - quite possible - that

this is one of the rounds that brought down the airship'.







In the text describing the bullet a rather curious reference is made in relation to the bullet featuring 'hug marks' resulting because the bullet was 'was probably fired at height - the wind chill factor at extreme attitudes would have shrunk the barrel of the guns which in turn would have ➤➤







## MAP KEY

-  Shows the maximum range of a .303 bullet if fired from centre of circle fired from with Dunwich Training Area
-  Shows the maximum range of a .303 bullet if fired from centre of circle fired from with RAF Leiston Airfield
-  Boundary of Dunwich Training Area
-  Boundary of RAF Leiston Airfield
-  Approximate position of Zeppelin Crash
-  Path of a .303 round fired within Dunwich Training area or RAF Leiston, showing how these would easily be within range of the approximate location of the Zeppelin crash Site

hugged the bullets far tighter than at ground level'. When viewed close-up, these supposed altitude 'hug marks' are apparent on this bullet but are no more than normal rifling marks made on the bullet when it was fired and as it traveled up the barrel of the gun that fired it. The claim that 'wind chill' would have 'shrunk' the gun barrels has absolutely no historical or technical basis. Standard practice to keep guns operational during a flight was to fire occasional short bursts to prevent working parts becoming clogged. A test burst of three rounds was also fired before engaging to ensure gun functionality and to 'loosen up' the gun. These test bursts would also ensure the barrels

## RIGHT:

The excavation site at Perham Down, where many fascinating artefacts were discovered.





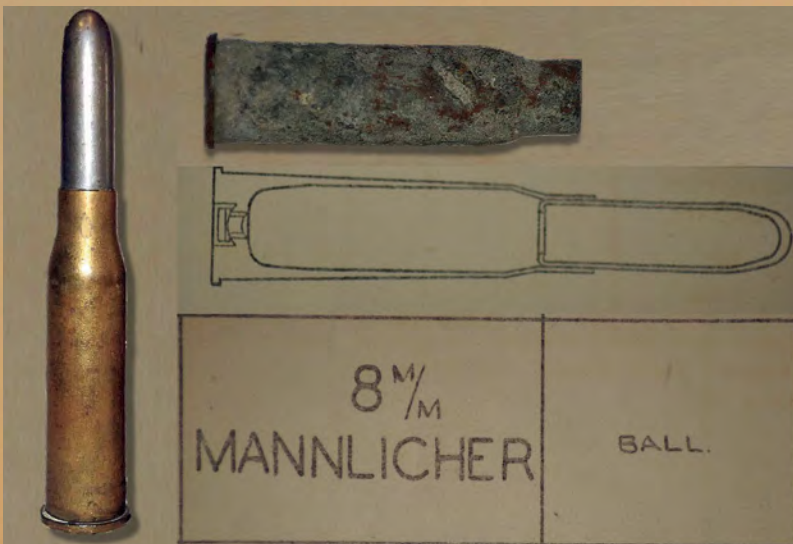


**ABOVE:**

*Another view of the extensive excavations at Perham Down.*

**LEFT:**

*The 8mm Mannlicher cartridge case that was recovered during the excavation at Perham Down, pictured with a comparative round and details from a British wartime manual detailing enemy ammunition.*



were 'warmed'. A further claim is made stating 'Its location, depth, and the marks make it likely that this is one of the bullets that brought down L.48'. But in relation to identifying the bullet, a fundamental error is made. It is described as 'standard rather than

specialized incendiary ammunition'. The dimensions are given as 37mm x 8mm and from the image available of the bullet in 'In Search of the Zeppelin War,' and the dimensions detailed, it can be ascertained that the bullet has been misidentified. It is not a 'standard'



**LEFT:**

*The 8mm Mannlicher cartridge discovered at the site.*

.303 Ball round (31.8mm in length) as claimed but a post First World War .303 tracer bullet which are 37mm in length and resemble exactly the form of the bullet found. This is further evidenced in the BBC Timewatch programme 'The First Blitz' where close-up images of the bullet are featured.

An important factor not included or referenced is in relation to the location of where the bullet was found and the close proximity of the excavation site to locations where major Second World War activity took place – notably the airfield at RAF Leiston (approx 1,500 yards distant) and the boundary of Dunwich Heath training area where major live fire training exercises took place during the Second World War. During one exercise alone in 1943 so much ammunition was used that men took bets on how many live rounds they could fire. These locations are within range of a .303-inch bullet (approximately 2,750 metres). Air conflict also took place during the Second World War above this location and spent bullets fired from aircraft could also have fallen on the site.

### CASE STUDY THREE

In July 2016 a two-week archaeological excavation took place near Perham Down, Wiltshire, to excavate sections of a large First World War Practice trench system known to have existed at the site but subsequently returned to agricultural use. By good fortune a contemporary map of the trench system existed, which when combined with geophysical survey allowed specific features of the system to be excavated although little was known about the system and how men trained in it. The aim was to discover more about the system and how it >>



## LAWRENCE'S BULLET

Making Facts Fit the Story?



### ABOVE:

An American Field Service (AFS) ambulance in North Africa. The AFS crews played a vital role but sometimes found themselves close to the fighting. In 1941 Alan Stuyvesant was taken prisoner in an AFS ambulance at Bir Hakiem.

### ABOVE RIGHT:

The headstamp marking details on the 8mm Mannlicher cartridge showing the date of manufacture. 'BPD' indicates the round was manufactured by Bombrini Parodi-Delfino in 1934.

### RIGHT:

Stuyvesant post war. As well as his war service, Alan was a keen sportsman, game hunter and dog breeder. He tragically died aged 48. (COURTESY OF THE BRITANNY FIELD TRIAL HALL OF FAME/ AMERICAN BRITANNY CLUB OF THE USA)



was used and the project was led by conflict archaeologist Richard Osgood and was carried out by participants taking part under the banner of Operational Nightingale (an initiative using archaeology to help wounded and injured service personnel recover) in conjunction with Breaking Ground Heritage (also an organisation using archaeology to help facilitate a recovery pathway for injured service personnel). Archaeology support was provided by Wessex Archaeology and this inclusive project notably incorporated subject matter expertise in the areas of unexploded ordnance, military history and military artefact recognition.

As excavation progressed, a number of spent or exploded ordnance artefacts were uncovered, and rather unexpectedly of Second World War vintage. The area was not believed to have been used for any activity in the

Second War that would account for these items, but with the assistance of local knowledge, it became apparent that the area had been used after the Second World War for destroying large quantities of unwanted munitions. At the end of the war, vast stocks of ammunition were surplus ammunition and had to be destroyed by blowing it up or dumping at sea and Perham Down was used for the destruction of ammunition by blowing it up with some First World War trenches providing convenient demolition pits. Interestingly, many of the items found were related to types of ammunition and weapons used by the Home Guard. Amongst them one in particular stood out. This was an Italian 8mm Mannlicher rifle cartridge

manufactured in 1934. How did this mysterious find end up in a field in Wiltshire?

On 14 May, 1940 The Secretary for War, Anthony Eden, issued an appeal for volunteers to defend against the threat of invasion and, around the country, thousands came forward to volunteer for the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), an organisation eventually becoming better known as the Home Guard. Losses of equipment caused by the British withdrawal from mainland Europe resulted in a chronic shortage of arms and equipment and to help defend against the expected





invasion supplies of a variety of arms and ammunition were generously donated by citizens of the United States. These supplies were routed via the American Committee for the Defense of British Homes and a counterpart organization (the Civilian Committee for the Defence of British Homes) set-up in Britain to organise distribution of these supplies to the Home Guard. One consignment for the 11<sup>th</sup> Wiltshire (Factory) Battalion in October 1941 lists entries relating to two 8mm Mannlicher rifles, each complete with 60 rounds of ammunition, and donated by Alan and Lewis R. Stuyvesant of Allamuchy, New Jersey. In reality, though, there are a number of explanations why this single round of ammunition came to be at Perham Down.

Another explanation could relate to the capture of a significant amount of this ammunition from the Italians in North Africa. The 8mm Mannlicher round was used in the Schwarzlose machine gun issued to Italian colonial troops and captured weapons were



**LEFT:**  
A third view of the excavation site where the 8mm cartridge, amongst other finds, was discovered.

brought back from North Africa to the UK for demonstrations. The find may thus be related to this. No direct connection can be made, of course, between this single round of 8mm ammunition and the Stuyvesant brothers, nor to the other potential link.

What is demonstrated here, though, is how facts can easily be constructed around a

story. What we can be certain about, however, is that without the correct level of knowledge or sufficient research it is possible to misidentify ammunition finds. Using facts to fit a story without substantiation can easily misrepresent history. ☹

**BELOW LEFT:**  
A Second World War Committee for the Defense of British Homes poster.

**BELOW:**  
A Second World War American Field Service recruitment poster. (US NATIONAL ARCHIVES)

# SEND A GUN TO DEFEND A BRITISH HOME

British civilians, faced with threat of invasion, desperately need arms for the defense of their homes.

THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE  
OF BRITISH HOMES

has organized to collect gifts of

PISTOLS—RIFLES—REVOLVERS  
SHOTGUNS—BINOCULARS

from American civilians who wish to answer the call and aid in defense of British homes.

These arms are being shipped, with the consent of the British Government, to  
CIVILIAN COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HOMES  
BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND

The members of which are Wickham Steed, Edward Hulton, and Lord Davies

## YOU CAN AID

by sending any arms or binoculars you can spare to

AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR  
DEFENSE OF BRITISH HOMES

C. Suydam Cutting, Chairman  
ROOM 100

10 WARREN STREET, NEW YORK. N. Y.

*American Rifleman*, November 1940







## WINGED CHARIOT

RAF Support for the St Nazaire Raid

**MAIN IMAGE:** The pilot of an ASR Lysander gets ready for the next 'op'. Lysanders of 277 Sqn operated in the east of the English Channel whilst 276 Sqn operated in the west. (1940 MEDIA)

# Winged *Chariot*

Vital in the execution of Operation Chariot, 'The greatest raid of all', was the involvement of the Royal Air Force, although their role has often been misunderstood, misinterpreted or underplayed. Now, on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the raid, **Peter Lush** sets out the detail of the RAF's important involvement. >>



AP  
Da  
N

# ROUTE

## WINGED CHARIOT RAF Support for the St Nazaire Raid



05° 47'W  
06° 07'W  
05° 47'W  
N 05° 00'W  
N 03° 18'W  
3'N 02° 50'W

St. EVAL  
FALMOUTH  
PREDANNACK

A  
B 2300hrs

BREIST

LORIENT

SAINT-NAZAIRE

2200 hrs Z  
2000 hrs E

La ROCHELLE

BORDEAUX





## WINGED CHARIOT

RAF Support for the St Nazaire Raid



**LEFT:**

Air Marshal  
Arthur Harris,  
AOC-in-C Bomber  
Command.

**RIGHT:**

Vertical of St  
Nazaire taken on  
25 March 1942.  
The five boats of  
the 5<sup>th</sup> Torpedo  
Flotilla (1) can  
be seen tied up  
alongside in the  
submarine basin.



**T**he only real criticism at the time (and ever since) has been of the RAF's so-called diversionary raid...". Thus wrote Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine in his foreword to the recently published 'Winged Chariot', a complete account of the RAF's support role during the raid on St Nazaire in March, 1942. On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the raid, that perception still prevails. Mention of the RAF at St Nazaire draws such comments as: "I didn't know they were there", or: "We fouled up there, didn't we?" With this latter comment coming from a serving RAF station commander, it is surely timely that the record should now be set straight.

**BELOW:**

Lockheed  
Hudsons of 233  
Squadron who  
flew searches  
from RAF St Eval,  
here seen over  
Northern Ireland  
while based  
at Aldergrove.  
(1940 MEDIA)

The diversionary raid was but a small part of the story and we shall see later how it unfurled. It was not, however, the only RAF contribution as it is also necessary to consider the input of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU). As well as the sweeping of the Bay of Biscay by aircraft of Coastal Command for two days before the action ashore, to help facilitate the safe passage of the Task Force, and for two days following the raid to search for and protect any survivors who might have escaped from the jaws of the Loire.

### ORDER NOT ISSUED TO BOMBER COMMAND

To put the RAF role in context, it is helpful to have a brief overview of the raid itself. The objective was to destroy the great Normandie Dock in St Nazaire to deny its use to the huge

German capital ships, for there was no other such facility available to them on the western seaboard of Europe. An old American destroyer, HMS *Campbeltown*, its bow packed with explosives, would ram the southern caisson of the dock while commandos swarmed ashore to destroy dock facilities. Accompanying *Campbeltown* would be a flotilla of small coastal craft, mainly Fairmile 'B' Motor Launches, also carrying commandos to carry out further demolitions. The Task Force would sail from Falmouth on a 34 hour, 400 mile passage to the target and those forces that survived the action and escaped from the river would meet with escorting Hunt Class destroyers at a prearranged rendezvous. During the approach of the force to the target, and while they were ashore, a phased diversionary bombing raid would be







**LEFT:**  
Bristol Blenheims  
Mk VI of 254  
Squadron  
who flew their  
searches from  
Predannack.

mounted to keep the defenders' eyes in the sky and the civilian population in their shelters.

Unfortunately, the RAF encountered its first difficulty when it was sidelined during the planning process. Although a Naval Force Commander (Commander Ryder RN) and an Army Force Commander (Lt Col Newman) were appointed, no such appointment was made for the RAF. However, an officer (Gp Capt A H Willetts) was appointed to liaise between the Chariot Committee and Bomber Command and although he carried out this function with zeal and efficiency he found himself caught between the conflicting requirements of the RAF's ongoing bomber offensive and the raid itself. He also found himself in the invidious position of having responsibility without power, a situation that nearly resulted in the diversionary raid not taking place at all but for his timely and perceptive intervention. Discovering in COHQ files a copy of the order 'Execute Chariot' his immediate enquiries found that it had not been issued to RAF Bomber Command and he was thus able to rescue the situation.

### PRICELESS INTELLIGENCE

The first contribution of the RAF had been as early as October 1941, during planning for an earlier raid on St Nazaire which was abandoned. From its own reconnaissance photographs the PRU had produced, through its model-making section at Medmenham, a superb and accurate model of the dockyard. This model was available to the planners of the March 1942 operation and proved a vital aid, not only in the planning process itself but

also in briefing both naval and army personnel. The PRU involvement would be continuous, both before the raid, when it provided constant updates to the priceless intelligence necessary for success, and after, when it brought back irrefutable evidence of the destruction of the Normandie Dock.

Aircraft were drawn from across the whole spectrum of RAF units; from Bomber Command came Whitleys and Wellingtons from 1 and 4 Groups based in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, while Coastal Command drew units from as far away as Reykjavik, although all their sorties were flown from St Eval and Predannack in Cornwall. Sunderlands operated from RAF Mount Batten, while Air Sea Rescue Lysanders flew from Harrowbeer and Warmwell. Fighter Command provided cover for both the Task Force and the Lysanders. The RAF was also unstinting in its provision of

personnel, for while the Navy fielded 355 personnel and the commandos 270, some 544 aircrew would fly in the various elements of RAF support. These included men from Australian, New Zealand and Polish squadrons.

Ryder and his little flotilla sailed from Falmouth early in the afternoon of 26 March. Before he left he had been advised that aircraft in the form of four Whitleys would commence a sweep of the Bay at 2100 hours that evening. Later a fifth Whitley would sweep closer to the coast down almost to the Spanish frontier. These five aircraft, drawn from 502 and 612 Squadrons flew their sorties from a datum line of 48°N in a south by south-east direction before returning to the datum line and back to their base at St. Eval. Little was seen except fishing boats, but this was an essential operation as the Atlantic coast of France was littered with U-boat bases at Lorient, Brest, St Nazaire, La Rochelle and Bordeaux. >>

**BELOW:**  
Short Sunderland  
Mk III, RB-Z,  
W4004. This  
aircraft patrolled  
the Bay of Biscay  
on 26 and 28  
March but not on  
27<sup>th</sup>.







## LEFT:

*Armstrong Whitworth Whitley, flown by 51, 58 and 77 Squadrons. (ED COATES COLLECTION)*

## RIGHT:

*Pilot Officer Douglas Murray Stein, killed in Whitley Z6964. (LANG FAMILY COLLECTION)*



From these bases, U-boats traversed the Bay of Biscay to reach hunting grounds in the North Atlantic and a chance encounter with the Task Force would have been catastrophic. The value of having a continuous aerial presence was that it was well known that U-boat commanders would not surface if there was the sound of an aircraft in the sky.

The following day, these five sorties were repeated but this time cover was augmented by four Sunderlands of 10 RAAF Squadron. These aircraft, with a crew of ten or more, were capable of longer sorties than the Whitleys and of attacking and sinking U-boats. However, none were encountered.

## MUCH ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE

At 0134 on Saturday 28 March *Campbeltown* impaled itself on the southern caisson of the Normandie Dock – a mere four minutes late, its safe passage across the bay having been aided by cover afforded by the RAF. This first phase of the RAF commitment had not, however, been without cost. Whitley WL-X of 612 Squadron had taken off from St Eval on 26<sup>th</sup> and had crashed on the Crozon peninsula, south of Brest, the following morning. In the misty condition a farmer had heard an aircraft circling,

followed by a crash. The aircraft caught fire and the captain, Fg Off Desmond Bow, and Plt Off Douglas Stein, together with the other four members of the crew, all perished.

Two hours earlier, the diversionary bombing raid had started with ten Whitleys of 4 Group attacking the dockyard (Phase I), soon to be the scene of the commando action. An hour later 25 Whitleys, also of 4 Group, took over and continued until 0120, ten minutes before H-hour when *Campbeltown* would strike (Phase II). At 0120, 25 Wellingtons from 1 Group commenced bombing an area of the dockyard away from the focus of the landings below (Phase III). This last phase was planned to continue until 0400 hours. It was this diversionary bombing raid that was the subject of much acrimonious debate during the planning process. It has already been stated that the seeds of difficulty were sown with the decision of the Chariot Committee of Combined Operations Headquarters not to appoint an Air Force Commander. The weakness of this situation now manifested itself as Bomber Command prevaricated over the provision of the necessary aircraft.

Two factors drove this discord. Firstly, the previous month Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris had been appointed AOC-in-C Bomber

Command and his priority was the bombing of Germany rather than small 'sideshows'. Secondly, there was a grave shortage of aircraft at that time, there being only 70 Whitleys in the Air Force and the original plan for Chariot support would have required deploying all of them.

## 'SOME DEVILRY AFOOT'

The first plan, drawn up by Director of Plans, Wg Cdr Elworthy, on 16 March was for 30, 60 and 10 aircraft respectively for the three phases. By the 18<sup>th</sup>, the plan had been seen by Air Vice-Marshal Saundby, SASO Bomber Command, who was adamant that such a heavy scale of attack was not necessary and suggested, with Harris's agreement, that twenty Whitleys dropping the occasional bomb would be quite sufficient. This off-hand proposal had been improved by 22<sup>nd</sup> to 30, 15 and 5.

Still not considered sufficient, Willetts persisted and by 24<sup>th</sup> had achieved a more realistic force of 30, 15 and 5. Even then, Lord Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations and chairman of the Chariot Committee, felt it necessary to approach ACM Harris personally and on 25<sup>th</sup> a final complement of 10, 25 and 25 was agreed. This was only the day before the Task Force sailed. In fairness to Bomber Command it will be seen that the 35 Whitleys that flew Phases I and II represented half the total then available to the RAF. They were precious, and would be needed for the bomber offensive over Germany. Hagglng for sufficient aircraft was not the only difficulty encountered by the RAF, however.

At that time of the war Churchill was anxious to avoid French civilian casualties and, with the accuracy of bomb aiming somewhat suspect, stringent conditions were imposed on the crews which rendered their task virtually impossible. The conditions were:-

- Not to fly below 6,000 feet
- Only to drop one bomb at a time
- Only to bomb if target visible
- Not to bomb the town



## LEFT:

*A Sunderland navigator plots a change of course at his spacious navigator's position.*





This virtual impossibility was rendered certain by the weather conditions prevailing over the target, with three layers of 10/10ths cloud between 2,000 and 12,000 feet. The crews were reduced to circling round and round without dropping their bombs. Such unusual activity gave rise to grave suspicions among the AA troops on the ground, causing their commander to give his opinion that 'there is some devilry afoot'. He went on to warn 'beware landings', a remark that has too often been taken to mean 'from the sea'. But now, fortune favoured the raiders.



**LEFT:**  
An air sea rescue  
Lysander is  
prepared for a  
sortie.  
(1940 MEDIA)



**LEFT:**  
Flying Officer  
William Desmond  
Stuart Bow,  
captain of  
Whitley Z6964.  
(LANG FAMILY  
COLLECTION)

## 'MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS'

A month to the day earlier, the British had carried out their first paratroop operation when raiding Bruneval to steal vital German radar equipment. Did this result in a briefing to German AA defences to watch for this new phenomenon of 'devils' from the sky? Post-war documents show that at no time was a raid on St Nazaire from the sea anticipated. Indeed, a flak regiment commander on the south bank of the Loire, reporting that a destroyer and sixteen small craft were coming up the river, was told: 'You are a flak officer. Keep your eyes on the sky and mind your own business.' The bombing raid had done its work, but more by good fortune than judgement. The Task Force was not finally engaged until six minutes from the target.

As with the sweep of the bay, so, too, the bombing operation was not to be without its losses. Four Whitley aircraft were lost on their way back to their bases, but mercifully with the loss of only one life. Three crashed in the Yorkshire Dales quite close to home

and in one, KN-G of 77 Squadron, Sergeant Douglas Colledge, the Observer, was killed. He is buried in the CWGC plot, St John the Baptist church, Leeming. The fourth, MH-S of 51 Squadron, damaged over the target, came down in the Channel 20 miles south of Lyme Regis. The crew got into their dinghy and were rescued after ten hours, having been located by Lysanders from Harrowbeer and Warmwell.

With the commando action now over, and some of the little ships making their tortured way out of the estuary, Coastal Command were briefed to mount searches from dawn on 28 March to find, protect and shepherd them home. Eight launches made it out to sea and of these one was captured in an action with German vessels (see pages 44-54) and three set off for home together, having been too early at the rendezvous. The other four successfully met the two escorting destroyers, soon to be joined by two more.

## FLEW INTO THE WRECKAGE

The retiring force, although on its correct heading, had drifted a little south of its planned route and this

made the task of the searching crews more difficult. Of the first sortie, flown from Predannack by five Beaufighters of 236 Sqn, only one, ND-Y flown by Sergeant Archie Taylor with Sergeant Hilary Parfitt as his observer, found the escaping launches. They arrived to find a Ju 88 threatening the flotilla and immediately engaged it, but so closely that after shooting it down they flew into the wreckage and were themselves lost. They were the only casualties of the search operation and were the last RAF losses.

Two more Beaufighters from 236 Sqn flew a second sortie and one, piloted by Sqn Ldr Pike, discovered the group of four destroyers and four launches. While circling above, he was joined by two Hudsons of 233 Sqn flying from St Eval and together these aircraft witnessed the burning and abandonment of the launches after their crews had been taken aboard two of the destroyers for fast passage to Plymouth.

The third search group comprised five Blenheims from 254 Sqn at Predannack and three Hudsons of 407 Sqn from St Eval. Like the first sorties, they searched too far north and none of them sighted the launches. On the way back to their base, however, >>

**BELOW:**  
A PRU Spitfire of  
the type which  
operated with  
B Flight, 1 PRU,  
from RAF St Eval  
and brought  
back valuable  
reconnaissance  
photographs of St  
Nazaire.  
(1940 MEDIA)







**RIGHT:**

*The pilot of  
Beaufighter ND –  
Y, Sergeant Archie  
William Taylor,  
RAAF.  
(MICHAEL  
DUNBAVAN)*




three of the Blenheims broke off to chase a Focke-Wulf which disappeared into clouds. Now out of position they made landfall over the Brest peninsula and aircraft QY-K was damaged and force-landed on the beach at Morgat, the crew being taken prisoner. They were to spend the rest of the war in captivity and endured the Long Marches west to eventual freedom in early 1945.

The fourth sortie was flown by Hudsons of 53 and 59 Sqns and these, too, were unsuccessful in locating the retiring force as the launches had by then been scuttled and the destroyers were on their way back to Plymouth and the medical attention many of the men needed so badly. They did, however, see the two destroyers due west of Ushant.

## A CONSIDERABLE CONTRIBUTION

There remained the search for the three launches that had set course for home after reaching the rendezvous early. No word having been heard from them, sweeps were mounted on 29 March. Whitleys from 502 and 612 Sqns flew from St Eval deep into the Western Approaches and Hudsons from 407 Sqn searched the area south of Ireland and west of Cornwall in case the launches had overshot Land's End, but, unbeknown to them all, the launches arrived safely at Falmouth at around noon that day.

The Royal Air Force contribution to the raid on St Nazaire had been considerable. They had provided the model on which the raid was planned and the participants briefed, together with constant intelligence from photo reconnaissance. They had flown 108 sorties totalling 675 flying hours, destroying one enemy aircraft and chasing off several others. At no time had damage been inflicted on the Task Force from the air. The RAF had aircraft in the air for all the hours of daylight and for one hour short of four-full days. Far from being a failure or a 'foul-up', the RAF had every reason to be proud of their contribution. 



**RIGHT:**

*A Beaufighter  
Mark 1C of 236  
Squadron. Based  
at RAF Wattisham,  
a detachment  
was flown to  
RAF Predannack  
to take part in  
the search for  
survivors.*

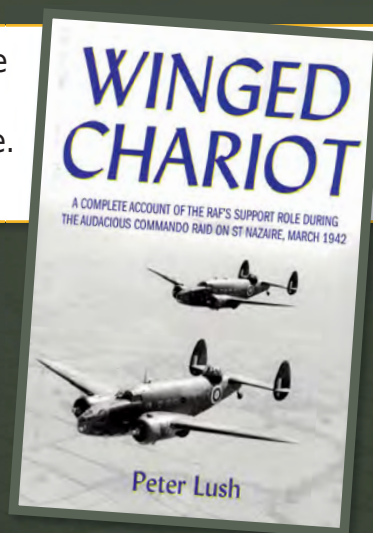
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2. Who was the leader of RAF Bomber Command at the time of the raid?
3. Which long range RAF flying boat was involved in supporting operations?
4. Name one of the airfields used by the RAF during the supporting air operations?



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# GREAT WAR GALLANTRY

## March 1917

Throughout the First World War, the many announcements of British and Commonwealth gallantry awards appeared in the various issues of *The London Gazette*. As part of our major monthly series covering the period of the Great War commemorations, we examine some of the actions involved and summarise all of the awards announced in March 1917.

### BELOW:

The first six recipients at the Hyde Park ceremony in June 1917. From left to right they are Major Henry Murray DSO and Bar, Lieutenant-Colonel James Forbes-Robertson (awarded the DSO and MC), Captain Ambrose Peck (DSO), Captain Edward Evans (DSO), Lieutenant-Colonel Agar Adamson (DSO), and Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Fewtrell (DSO). (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**T**HE AFTERNOON of 2 June 1917 saw one of the largest investiture ceremonies ever seen in Hyde Park in London. The first individual to be presented to the King was Major Henry Murray, Australian Imperial Force. In its biography of 'Mad Harry' Murray, the Australian War Memorial calls him 'the most highly decorated soldier in the Australian army; dashing, brave and handsome, Murray rose from the ranks to command a battalion'. The account goes on to state:

'He described his occupation as a "bushman" when he joined the 16th Battalion AIF in 1914, but Harry Murray was already a mature and independent leader of men ... It was soon evident that he was also a natural soldier. On Gallipoli he was promoted, awarded the Distinguished

Conduct Medal, then commissioned as an officer in the 13th Battalion. The following year, in France, Murray's reputation grew, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his work at Mouquet Farm. Later, in January 1917, near Gueudecourt, in a night attack at Stormy Trench, he won the Victoria Cross. There, in fierce fighting, he fought off enemy counter-attacks and led a "brilliant charge". At Bullecourt in April, leading his troops with the cry, "come on men, the 16th are getting hell", he got a second DSO.' These were the awards presented by the King at Hyde Park.

The announcement of Captain (as he was then) Murray's VC was published in *The London Gazette* on 10 March 1917. The citation provides the following information: 'For most conspicuous bravery when in command of the right flank company in attack. He led

his company to the assault with great skill and courage, and the position was quickly captured. Fighting of a very severe nature followed, and three heavy counter-attacks were beaten back, these successes being due to Captain Murray's wonderful work. Throughout the night his company suffered heavy casualties through concentrated enemy shell fire, and on one occasion gave ground for a short way. This gallant officer rallied his command and saved the situation by sheer valour. He made his presence felt throughout the line, encouraging his men, heading bombing parties, leading bayonet charges, and carrying wounded to places of safety. His magnificent example inspired his men throughout.'

'Murray was not a reckless hero, but rather a quiet and charismatic leader who believed in training and discipline and who possessed sound tactical skills,' continues the AWM biography. 'In







**ABOVE:** The first boat loads of men of 1st Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers landing at 'W' Beach on 25 April 1915.

# GALLANTRY AWARDS

GAZETTED IN MARCH 1917

Victoria Cross	6
Distinguished Service Order	68
Distinguished Service Cross	22
Military Cross	330
Distinguished Flying Cross*	-
Air Force Cross*	-
Distinguished Conduct Medal	141
Conspicuous Gallantry Medal	-
Distinguished Service Medal	50
Military Medal	1,053
Distinguished Flying Medal*	-
Air Force Medal*	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,670</b>

\* Indicates an award that has not yet been instituted. Mentions in Despatches are not included.



May 1918 he was promoted Lieutenant Colonel to command the 4th Machine Gun Battalion. Further honours came; he was awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* and appointed Companion in the Order of St. Michael and St. George. Charles Bean described him as "the most distinguished fighting officer of the AIF".

A total of six VCs were announced in March 1917 – three of which were for the same action, namely the landings on 'W' Beach, Gallipoli, on 25 April 1915.

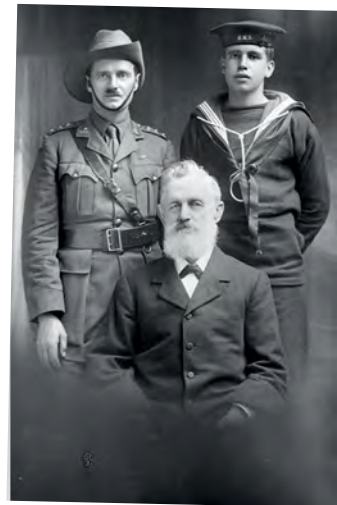
Approaching 'W' Beach, to the west of Cape Helles, that morning, in line abreast, were the thirty boats carrying the men of the 1st Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers. As they reached the shallow water, the picket boats that had towed them towards the shore cast off the ropes and the oars of the naval ratings bit into the smooth water to complete the last stretch to the beach. Where they were heading was, according to a staff officer with the 29th Division, 'a short stretch of sandy beach about 200 yards long and 10 yards wide, cliffs on each side, those on the left climbable, those on the right precipitous with a track accessible beneath them, The beach itself

was covered with wire down to the water's edge and beneath it. The exits to the beach were sandy undulations with a solitary tree and a hut, and two nullah [watercourse] beds leading up to a neck whence the ground dipped over to the main wooded Krithia valley. On the right the ground sloped up to Hill 138, where the Turks had a redoubt and much barbed wire was visible. There were Turkish trenches everywhere.'

A single company (12 Company) of the Ottoman 3/26 Regiment held the beach. At a range of 400 yards the Turkish heavy machine-guns opened fire on the

leading boats, though the enemy riflemen waited until the British were just forty yards from the shore. They could hardly miss.

'The timing of the ambush was perfect,' recalled one officer, Captain Richard Willis. 'We were completely exposed and helpless in our slow-moving boats, just target practice for the concealed Turks, and within a few minutes only half of >>



**MIDDLE LEFT:** Lancashire Fusiliers of the 125th Brigade bound for Cape Helles, Gallipoli, in May 1915. The soldiers have just disembarked aboard Trawler 318 from the transport SS Nile, from the deck of which this picture was taken. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

**LEFT:** The first soldier decorated during the investiture was Major Henry 'Mad Harry' Murray, seen here standing on the left. The visit to the UK for the ceremony enabled Murray to meet his uncle, Captain William Littler, and a cousin, Keith Adams, who was serving in the Royal Navy. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; P01465-003)



**LEFT:** A contemporary artist's depiction of the men of the 1st Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers landing on 'W' Beach on 25 April 1915. Note the presence of the barbed wire defences which caused the British troops such difficulties. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



# RUNNING TOTAL OF GALLANTRY AWARDS

AS OF THE END OF MARCH 1917

Victoria Cross	252
Distinguished Service Order	4,235
Distinguished Service Cross	413
Military Cross	11,243
Distinguished Flying Cross	-
Air Force Cross	-
Distinguished Conduct Medal	11,271
Conspicuous Gallantry Medal	54
Distinguished Service Medal	1,474
Military Medal	43,682
Distinguished Flying Medal	-
Air Force Medal	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,624</b>



the cliffs to the left which did not appear to be covered in wire. The cliffs would give some protection from the Turkish fire and at least give the men the chance to land and organise themselves.

Standing up in their boat the two officers waved and pointed and managed to direct some of the boats to the beach at the foot of the cliff. The Fusiliers landed and with a small band of men, Frankland began to climb the cliff. Scrambling ahead of his men, Frankland shot three Turks and gained the crest. The rest of the men soon joined him. A bid was then made to take Hill 138 but once again heavy wire-entanglements prevented this. Franklin then tried to move across to 'V' Beach but was again held up by Turkish wire and the brave officer was shot dead as he tried to disentangle himself. Nevertheless, the Lancashires had gained a toehold on the Gallipoli Peninsula and 'W' Beach had been secured.

In his first despatch, the British Commander in Chief of the expedition, General Sir Ian Hamilton, wrote: 'So strong, in fact, were the defences of "W" Beach that the Turks may well have considered them impregnable, and it is my firm conviction that no finer feat of arms has ever been achieved by the British soldier – or any other soldier – than the storming of these beaches from open boats on the morning of 25 April.'

The Lancashire Fusiliers had started the day with twenty-seven officers and 1,002 other ranks. Twenty-four hours later, a head count revealed just

sixteen officers and 304 men. The incredible effort shown by the men of the Lancashire Fusiliers resulted in the award of an astonishing six Victoria Crosses for actions that lasted little more than an hour – the famous 'Six VCs Before Breakfast'. Three of the six were announced in March 1917 – these being the awards to Captain (Temporary Major) Cuthbert Bromley, Sergeant Frank Edward Stubbs and Corporal John Grimshaw. All three men have the same citation:

'On the 25th April, 1915, headquarters and three companies of the 1st Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, in effecting a landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula to the West of Cape Helles, were met by very deadly fire from hidden machine guns, which caused a great number of casualties. The survivors, however, rushed up to and cut the wire entanglements, notwithstanding the terrific fire from the enemy, and after overcoming supreme difficulties, the cliffs were gained and the position maintained. Amongst the many very gallant officers and men engaged in this most hazardous undertaking, Captain Bromley, Serjeant Stubbs, and Corporal Grimshaw have been selected by their comrades as having performed the most signal acts of bravery and devotion to duty.'

So moved was General Hamilton at the events on this small strip of the Gallipoli Peninsula, that he later ordered that 'W' Beach be renamed 'Lancashire Landing'. It is still known by that name today. ☺

## TOP:

Lancashire Landing, or 'W' Beach, as it appears today in a view looking east along its length in the direction of Cape Helles. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

## RIGHT:

The Memorial Stone to Major Cuthbert Bromley VC, which is located by the main War Memorial in Seaford town centre, East Sussex. Cuthbert was born to his parents, John and Marie Louisa in Hammersmith, London before the family moved to live in Seaford. One of four brothers, Cuthbert had originally intended to enter either the medical profession or the civil service upon the completion of his schooling. However, he eventually settled on the Army and received a commission in the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1898. This memorial stone was unveiled by Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, Peter Field, on 16 August 2015. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



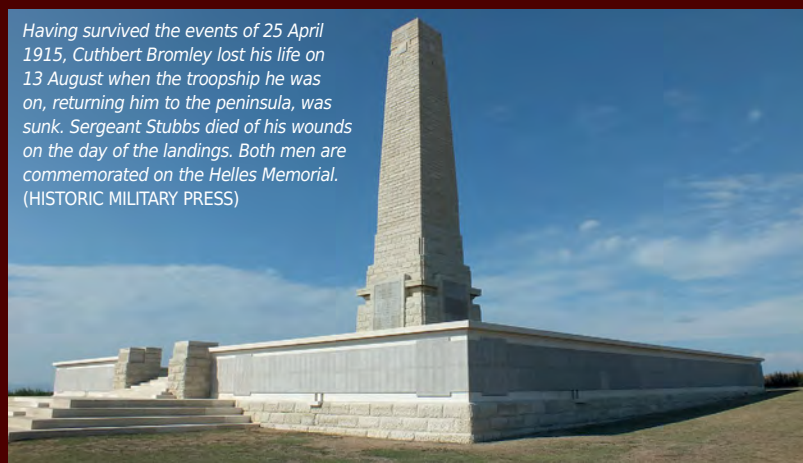
the thirty men in my boat were left alive.'

There was no respite for those who reached the beach. Another of the Lancashire Fusiliers, Captain Harold Clayton, subsequently wrote: 'There was tremendously strong barbed wire where my boat was landed. Men were being hit in the boats and as they splashed ashore. I got up to my waist in water, tripped over a rock and went under, got up and made for the shore and lay down by the barbed wire. There was a man there before me shouting for wire-cutters. I got mine out, but could not make the slightest impression.

'The front of the wire by now was a thick mass of men, the majority of whom never moved again. The noise was ghastly and the sights horrible. I eventually crawled through the wire with great difficulty.' Clayton was killed a few weeks later.

Witnessing the slaughter of the first troops on the beaches ahead of them, Brigadier Steuart Hare and his Brigade Major, Captain Frankland, saw that there was a very short stretch of beach under

Having survived the events of 25 April 1915, Cuthbert Bromley lost his life on 13 August when the troopship he was on, returning him to the peninsula, was sunk. Sergeant Stubbs died of his wounds on the day of the landings. Both men are commemorated on the Helles Memorial. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)







LORD ASHCROFT'S  
"HERO OF  
THE MONTH"

# Commander Loftus William Jones

VC

## LEADERSHIP

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS  
INITIATIVE • SACRIFICE  
SKILL • ENDURANCE

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Commander Loftus William Jones' award is part of the collection, and Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of leadership:

"Charismatic, strong, inspirational, the natural leader not only takes command, but also infuses all those around them with confidence and hope. They exude calm and resolve. They are a tower of strength."



**TOP RIGHT:**  
*HMS Shark, the 4th Flotilla leader, pictured underway. The 950-ton destroyer was capable of a top speed of about thirty knots and boasted three 4-inch guns, a quick-firing 2-pounder gun and four 21-inch torpedo tubes in pairs. (ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF STEVE SNELLING UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)*

**W**ILLIAM LOFTUS JONES was born in Southsea, Hampshire, on 13 November 1879 into a family with a strong naval tradition. He was the second son of Admiral Loftus Jones and his wife Gertrude (née Gray). With his father being such a senior Royal Navy officer, it was not surprising that "Willie", as he was affectionately known in his family, followed him into the senior service.



**RIGHT:**  
*Commander Loftus William Jones, VC. "Willie" Jones, as he was known in his family, was the last of four men to be awarded the Victoria Cross for their actions in the Battle of Jutland.*

After being educated at Eastman's Royal Naval Academy in Fareham, Hampshire, he rose quickly through the officer ranks and, at just 23, was in command of his own ship, the destroyer *HMS Sparrowhawk* in 1903. After further appointments, he was elevated to Commander in June 1914.

Following the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Jones initially commanded the destroyer *Linnet*, which, along with three other destroyers, sank the German minelayer *Königin Luise* as early as 5 August 1914 in the first British action of the war. From 9 October 1914, Jones commanded *HMS Shark*, a destroyer that, late in December 1914, clashed with the German High Seas Fleet, aggressively pursuing and helping to see off the superior force.

At 14.00 hours on 31 May 1916, *HMS Shark*, captained by Jones, was providing protection from enemy submarines, along with three other destroyers and two light cruisers, for the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron as it headed south in the North Sea in advance of the British battle fleet. No enemy ships were known to be in the vicinity and the ninety-one-strong complement of officers and men on *HMS Shark* were as relaxed as they

could be two years into the First World War. Little did they know it, but the Battle of Jutland was about to begin.

At 14.20 hours, messages were received that an enemy force was at sea and the ships' companies were soon ordered to "action stations" as they proceeded, at full speed, to intercept the enemy. At 17.40 hours, German destroyers and light cruisers appeared out of the haze. When ten German destroyers launched a torpedo attack on the Third Battle-Cruiser Squadron, four British destroyers, including *HMS Shark*, broke up the offensive.

Soon after the four destroyers had returned to join their two light cruisers, three German battlecruisers appeared and started firing on the six British ships. Under a heavy fire, *Shark* was hit and a shell fragment destroyed her bridge helm.

The enemy, whose bombardment was murderous, was using shrapnel, some of which struck Commander Jones in the thigh and face, leaving him to stem the flow of blood with his hands. Meanwhile, the coxswain was hit a second time and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The enemy closed in on *Shark*, its after gun was put out of action almost immediately, and its crew killed or

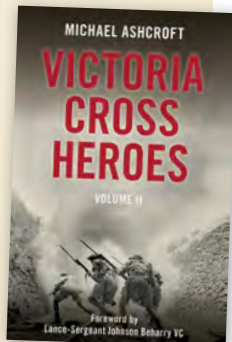


### VICTORIA CROSS HEROES II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was published in November. For more information, please visit: [www.victoriacrossheroes2.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes2.com)

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: [www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes). For details about his VC collection, visit: [www.lordashcroftmedals.com](http://www.lordashcroftmedals.com)

For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: [www.lordashcroft.com](http://www.lordashcroft.com). Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



#### TOP RIGHT:

Another view of HMS Shark. She was launched at Swan, Hunter's Wallsend Yard on 30 July 1912, joining the 4th Flotilla on her completion.

#### RIGHT:

A contemporary wartime illustration depicting HMS Shark's final moments.



#### FAR RIGHT:

Commander Loftus Jones' body, kept afloat by a cork lifebelt, was washed ashore on the small Swedish island of Fiskebackskil where he was buried with full military honours on 24 June 1916. After the war his widow, Margaret, and daughter, Linnette, who was named after her father's first wartime command, HMS Linnet, visited the grave and memorial erected in his honour.

#### BOTTOM:

Commander Jones' grave was later moved and is now situated in a Commonwealth War Graves plot in Kviberg Cemetery near Gothenburg. Most of the burials there are naval casualties from the Battle of Jutland whose bodies were recovered in Sweden. (COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION)

wounded, while the forward gun had already been blown away. The situation was worsening by the minute as dead and dying crew lay everywhere. Unsurprisingly, the one surgeon on board was overwhelmed by his task.

By now, the enemy was at close range and preparing for the "kill". Commander Jones ordered the collision mats be placed over the shot holes as desperate attempts were made to keep the ship afloat. When the crew of the last gun – amidships – was reduced to two men, Shark's bloodied captain stood beside it, calling the range. As one of the two men fell, weakened by the loss of blood, the captain took his place.

Then, moments later, Commander Jones was struck by a shell which blew

off his right leg above the knee. As his men tied an improvised tourniquet – made from pieces of rope and wood – on his leg, Jones continued to direct the firing.

The bows of HMS Shark were soon disappearing below the waves and other parts were awash with water as two German destroyers closed in to only a few hundred feet in order to finish off the stricken ship. "Save yourselves, was Commander Jones's final orders to his men.

Some twenty survivors clambered on to two rafts and pieces of wreckage as two more torpedoes hit Shark, blasting the dead and wounded into the water. Her stern rose up and she sank. Commander Jones, who had been placed on one of the rafts and propped in a sitting position, smiled and said: "It's no good, lads. Minutes later his head fell forward as he gave his final breath. He was aged 36 when he died.

Some of those who had made it on to the rafts also died from their injuries, or fell into the water and either drowned or succumbed to the cold. Shortly after midnight, however, a flare fired from the other raft was spotted and six survivors from the ship's company were eventually rescued by a Danish steamer, the SS Vidar.

Shortly after his death, Commander Jones' body was washed ashore off the coast of Sweden still in the life-belt that he had donned after being forced to leave his ship. On 24 June 1916 he was buried in Fiskebäckskil Churchyard, Vastra, Götaland.

Margaret Jones, Commander Jones's widow and mother of their daughter Linnette, made extensive enquiries into how her husband had perished and, partly as a result of her investigation, Jones's posthumous VC was announced on 6 March 1917. The six survivors from the ship were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. Mrs Jones received her husband's VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 31 March 1917. Three years later, Mrs Jones, accompanied by Linnette, visited her husband's grave in Sweden.

I purchased Commander Jones's VC and service medals in 2012 in a private sale, along with a number of personal effects. Perhaps the greatest compliment to his courage came from Admiral Beatty, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, during the war and later the first Earl Beatty. He said: "No finer act had been produced in the annals of Her Majesty's Navy. Ⓢ





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# IMAGE OF WAR

## IF WAR SHOULD COME RAF Tengah, Singapore, 1963

Although Bomber Command retired Canberra in September 1961, the type still formed the vanguard of the RAF's nuclear force in Cyprus, Germany, and Singapore where they were tasked with the low-level deployment of nuclear weapons should the Cold War escalate into conflict. However, the B.15 (upgraded B.6s for the Far East) was more than a carrier for Britain's 'Red Beard' nuclear bomb. B.15s incorporated upgraded avionics, three cameras, and underwing mounts for up to 1,000lb of additional munitions, resulting in a highly versatile multi-role aircraft. The type served in Singapore until 1970 and the last RAF Canberras to operate as bombers, using American-made Mk 7 or B43 nuclear bombs, were the B(1)6s, B(1)8s and B.16s of RAF Germany retired in 1972.

(COURTESY OF JEFF THOMAS)





# FIRST WORLD WAR DIARY

**MARCH 1917: A large German withdrawal devastates swathes of French land, and the British achieve a major objective in taking Baghdad, however, focus is squarely on the cities of Washington and Petrograd, as political turmoil sets the scene for two major nations to drastically alter the war.**

## WAR AT SEA:

**1 March:** The British hospital ship HMHS *Glenart Castle* is damaged by a mine in the English Channel. In the same month, HMHS *Asturias* is sunk by UC-66 (20 March) with 43 lost and HMHS *Gloucester Castle* is torpedoed by UB-32 (31 March) with three killed, but the ship survives.

**17 March:** Eight German destroyers leave Zeebrugge in two groups and enter the English Channel. One group is tasked with attacking shipping, and torpedoed the *Acasta*-class destroyer HMS *Paragon* off Goodwin Sands. HMS *Llewellyn* is also torpedoed, but survives. The second group shells Ramsgate and Broadstairs.

## HOME FRONT:

**17 March:** Zeppelin L-39 unsuccessfully raids Kent. Blown away by strong winds and blighted by engine problems, L-39 is destroyed over Compiègne by French anti-aircraft guns.

## UNITED STATES:

**4 March:** Senators Frank Norris, Robert La Follette, and others filibuster a motion to put the United States on a footing of armed neutrality. The bill previously had been passed 403 to 13 by the House of Representatives.

**5 March:** President Wilson is inaugurated for his second term. In his speech, he announces that American involvement in the world, and therefore war, is almost inevitable.

**9 March:** President Wilson gives the order to arm merchant ships without Congressional approval.

**20 March:** Former President, Theodore Roosevelt, calls for war with Germany, while Wilson's cabinet agrees unanimously to call a special session of Congress on 2 April, to discuss a declaration of war.

## WAR AT SEA

**17 March:** American newspapers report that three US-flagged vessels, the *City of Memphis*, *Illinois*, and *Vigilancia*, have been sunk by U-boats.

## WESTERN FRONT:

**16 March:** German troops begin their withdrawal from the Somme to the Hindenburg Line, a 90 mile network of tunnels, trenches and other defences 8,000 yards deep. The vast fortification was built in five months, mostly by POWs. As German troops retreat, they scorch the earth behind them and relocate civilians.

## WAR AT SEA

**19 March:** The French semi-dreadnought battleship *Danton* is torpedoed by U-64 off Sardinia. The sinking kills 296.

## MIDDLE EAST:

**26 March:** British Lt. Gen Sir Charles Dobell is tasked with capturing Gaza, and succeeds in taking Wadi Ghazze, a major water source southeast of the city. A force of mounted units led by General Philip Chetwode spearheads the attack on the city. Supported by two infantry divisions, they battle harsh terrain and push into Gaza, which should have fallen, but a communications blunder allowed the garrison to be reinforced.





# MARCH 1917 WORLD MAP

## WAR AT SEA

**16 March:** The last German attempt to push a surface raider out of the North Sea fails when the *Leopard* (ex.*Yarrowdale*), captured by SMS *Möwe* and converted into an auxiliary cruiser, is caught by HMS *Achilles* and HMS *Dundee* midway between Scotland and Norway. All 319 crew perish. *Leopard*'s still-at-sea captor, *Möwe*, slips through the blockade toward Germany the same day.

## EASTERN FRONT:

**10 March:** Demonstrations in Petrograd grow, and 200,000 striking workers control much of the city. Tsar Nicholas II orders the garrison to quell the unrest with force. Two days later, a battalion from a garrison regiment mutinies and joins the demonstrators. Amongst the anarchy, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies is formed. At the same time and in the same venue, the Tauride Palace, the discontinued Duma (assembly) elects a temporary committee, in defiance of the Tsar, to restore order.

**14 March:** The Petrograd Soviet issues 'Order Number 1', removing the authority of officers. This secures the allegiance of the garrison by scrapping military discipline, replacing it with elected committees tasked with resolving grievances. In return, soldiers are expected to only obey orders from the provisional government which do not conflict with the orders of the Soviet. The next day, the entire 170,000 strong Petrograd garrison, of which some 12,000 were fully trained, joins the demonstrators, as do fresh troops sent by the Tsar. Although few soldiers participate in rioting, they overthrow their officers and no longer hold back protesters.

**16 March:** Tsar Nicholas II abdicates, he also abdicates on behalf of his son, Alexei. The nominated successor is his brother, Grand Duke Michael. However, the Grand Duke declines, ending over 300 years of the Romanov Dynasty. On the same day, the Russian Baltic Fleet begins a mutiny.

**20 March:** The former Tsar and his family are placed under house arrest, the original intention of the provisional government is to allow the Romanovs to leave for Britain.

## MESOPOTAMIA:

**2 March:** Russian forces launch an offensive from the Caucasus aimed at Baghdad, through Kermanshah. They meet success, but are ultimately halted by bad weather.

**5 March:** General Maude continues his advance on Baghdad. Unbalanced by the threat from Russia, Kahlil Pasha has only 10,000 soldiers to defend Baghdad, but must also defend the west bank of the Tigris and the railway link to Samarra. Near Zor, a British cavalry brigade skirmishes with an Ottoman force and the following day, extensive Turkish positions at Ctesiphon, are found abandoned.

**9 March:** Maude crosses the Diyala River, defeating Turkish counterattacks. However, a flanking move on Baghdad advances into a line of defences running from Tel Aswad to Qarara and is halted. A day later Turkish troops retreat to a new line running from Lake Aqarquf to the Tigris. A sandstorm slows the British advance and disrupts communications.

**11 March:** In an end to 300 years of Ottoman rule, Baghdad falls to General Maude. His troops advance through the city and seize Kadhimain, to the north, and Kashirin. Over the following week, the British attack the Turkish rear-guard and capture Khan al Mashahidah railway station, sweep west and capture Nukhta, and take Buhriz and Ba'qubah to the northeast.

## MESOPOTAMIA:

**23 March:** The British run into heavy resistance at Shahraban, 1,200 are killed or wounded.

**29 March:** Mirages and intense heat hampers Maude's advance on a concentration of 5,000 Ottoman troops defending a canal near Sindiya. The British fail to flank the Turks, and suffer heavy casualties in a frontal assault. The Turks then withdraw to Shatt al Adhaim. At Shahraban, the British meet their objectives in the face of heavy resistance, and push across the Diyala River.

## MIDDLE EAST:

**26 March:** T.E. Lawrence leads an attack on Aba el Na'am railway and captures 30 Ottoman soldiers. Two days later, he attacks at Mudahrij.



## "NO CURRENTS TO TROUBLE HIM"

The Gallipoli Current At Anzac Cove A Myth

# "No Currents T

The story of the landings at Gallipoli having been executed at the wrong century, but now John Howell looks at the background and sets out what

**MAIN IMAGE:** Soldiers of the Australian 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade row to the beaches of Anzac Cove, whilst empty boats return to the destroyers. 25 April 1915. (ALL IMAGES VIA HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**OVERLEAF:** Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton GCB, GCMG, DSO, TD. His wounds from the First Boer War left his left hand almost useless and his left leg was shorter than the right as a result of a serious injury suffered in a fall. Hamilton was twice recommended for the VC, but was first considered too young, and then too senior.

**F**or a century now, Australians and New Zealanders have had to accept that a mysterious current swept the Anzac landing force more than a mile north of their landing place at Gaba Tepe. Every utterance on the topic has perpetuated the story that they struggled ashore at a spot where the terrain was hopeless. This bad start at the wrong place meant that courage and persistence would never be enough for them to achieve their task. In fact, the author contends that the landing was where it was intended and General Sir Ian Hamilton had nominated the section of coast that was to be Z Beach, but it was left up to Major-General Bridges and Anzac Command aboard the SS *Minnewaska* to finalise their own details.

Intelligence gathering in the weeks just before the landing was continuous, and provided daily information that clearly showed the

easy terrain around Gaba Tepe to be well defended. Attentive army officers were aboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth* (1913) on April 14 when it cruised down the Peninsula past what had been designated as Z Beach. Charles Bean wrote in his diary that one of the observers was Colonel MacLagan (actually Colonel Ewen Sinclair-MacLagan) who was to lead the 3rd Australian Brigade ashore on 25 April 25, and Sinclair-MacLagan, looked at the defences of Gaba Tepe and said:

"If that place is strongly held with guns it will be almost impregnable for my fellows."

### A SLAUGHTER OF MEN

In the days before and after the cruise of HMS *Queen* (1902). Charles Samson and his RNAS fliers had taken observers, including Major Charles Villiers-Stuart, on reconnaissance flights over Z Beach and around Gaba Tepe. They saw that Sinclair-MacLagan's fears were realistic; artillery behind Gaba Tepe would have been deadly for those coming

ashore, and a barrage of shrapnel would have meant a slaughter of men approaching the beach in open boats.

The sum of all the intelligence information was processed, leading to a decision clearly spelt out in Major-General Bridges' Operation order No. 1 of April 18. This order is in the Australian War Memorial archives today, overlooked or filed in obscurity for years. The written order notes in the first lines of Point 1: "Information of the disposition of Turkish forces in the Gallipoli Peninsula is being issued separately to brigade commanders."

This was because information was still coming in daily, especially from the photographs and notes of the RNAS fliers. Maps were improving, and Point 1 of the Order finishes with:

"The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps will land north of Kaba Tepe – the landing will probably be opposed."

Point 2, meanwhile, adds more definition to the location of the landing:



# o Trouble Him"

place after being swept along by a strong current has endured for a he considers to be the myth of the 'Gallipoli Current' at Anzac Cove.

"The Division will land between Kaba Tepe and Fisherman's Hut. Its first objective will be the occupation of the ridge extending from Sq 212(i) to point 971 in Sq 238(m)."

So, the choice of landing site is clearly stated in the order. Ari Burnu and Anzac Cove are almost midway between Gaba Tepe and Fisherman's Hut, and this is where the Anzacs went. They were never to land at Gaba Tepe and charge across the relatively flat terrain to capture Maidos (now Eceabat). They were to land where they finally landed, and undertake the difficult task of capturing the high ground, the real key to taking and holding the Peninsula.

Colonel Henry MacLaurin commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade in the 25 April landing, but was killed by a Turkish sniper two days later. Part of the map he carried ashore is illustrated, and is now in the Australian War Memorial. The ridge that was the prime objective – running from Map Reference

212(i) to 238(m) - is the high ground starting near Gaba Tepe and includes Lone Pine, The Nek, and Chunuk Bair. Anzac Cove and North Beach are just to the right of squares 223 (k) and (p). Why then, have we all been swept along by a non-existent coastal current for 100 years? Who made this into fact?

## MYSTERY CURRENT

On 7 May, a fortnight after the landings, the Anzac Command produced a 'Report on the Operation of the First Australian Division.' The second page stating:

"The position at which the landing was effected lies in Square 224 (g) and (l), and was about 13/4 miles north of the intended landing place."

The first half of this is true, but the second half contradicts Operation Order No.1. Was the Z Beach landing already seen as a possible failure? Was this 7 May report already setting the tone for ongoing justification of the very limited progress of the Anzac landing? Map reference 224 (g) >>





## "NO CURRENTS TO TROUBLE HIM"

The Gallipoli Current At Anzac Cove A Myth



### ABOVE:

**Top:** Now ashore, soldiers of 1<sup>st</sup> Bat, AIF rest. The battalion landed during the second and third waves, and fought until the evacuation in Dec. 1915.

**Bottom:** Anzacs construct dugouts on the beach at Anzac Cove.

### CENTRE:

11<sup>th</sup> Bat. AIF and 1<sup>st</sup> Field Coy, Australian Engineers, wait on the forecastle of HMS London off Lemnos.

### BELOW:

Boats carrying troops to Anzac Cove. General Bridges can be seen in the foreground.

and (I) is precisely what we now call Anzac Cove, but 13/4 miles to the south is Gaba Tepe, which those aboard *Queen Elizabeth* had already decided was a deadly place to land as they sailed by on 14 April. The negativity certainly continues with the next lines:

"While in the tows, and during landing, the troops were under machine gun fire and musketry fire and enfilade shrapnel fire from KABA TEPE. An accurate statement of the losses incurred during disembarkation cannot be obtained; it is feared that there were many casualties."

So, the landing in accordance with the orders was now apparently unintended, and it seems the peninsula scuttlebutt was justifying the 'error' by talking of a current. The talk even made its way to the top man, but cannot be attributed to

him. General Sir Ian Hamilton has been blamed for many things, but not the mystery current. He wrote of the Anzac's planning in his 'Gallipoli Diary' of 1920:

"Birdwood, on the other hand, is of one mind with me and is going to get his first boat-loads ashore before it is light enough to aim. He has no currents to trouble him, it is true, but he is not landing on any surveyed beach and the opposition he will meet is even more unknown than in the case of Helles and Sedd-el-Bahr."

The underlining of his phrase about the current is the author's, but the remark is followed by precluding a landing at Gaba Tepe: "he is not landing on any surveyed beach..."

### A DEATH BLOW

Hamilton told us some more of what he knew and thought six years later.

In 1926 a book by T. J. Pemberton entitled 'Gallipoli Today' came out. It was about the Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries of Gallipoli, the introduction written by Sir Ian Hamilton. It would seem that 90 years ago the mythical current was paradoxically a fortunate thing, even though it took the Anzacs to the wrong place. In his introduction, Hamilton wrote that:

"Mr. Pemberton follows the generally accepted view that it was a lucky chance and a fortunate current which landed the Anzacs a mile further to the north than had been intended by my plan."

Hamilton revealed that he was not a believer in the supposed current, and conceded only that:

"I have several times admitted the plausibility of the arguments which lie at the back of this opinion. No doubt





## "NO CURRENTS TO TROUBLE HIM" The Gallipoli Current At Anzac Cove A Myth



exists in my mind that the official history will give it [the current story] a death blow."

The first volume of the Australian Official War History was 'The Story of Anzac', written by Charles Bean and published in 1921, five years before Hamilton's comments in 'Gallipoli Today' and many years before the British Official War History that Hamilton was expecting would end tales of a mysterious current. Bean makes no mention of any current in the Official War History, but explains that in the dark, the southern-most boats found themselves further south than most of the other boats and so the officer in charge: "swung his steam-boat to the left." Bean seems unsure why they did this, or why other boats followed suit. He wrote:

"The naval men appeared to see far better in the dark than did the troops,

for, as the land grew closer, one after another picked up this movement, swung several yards northward, and then straightened again."

An Australian soldier Private Keith Wadsworth was in one of those small boats and confirmed all this in his diary. As soon as the silhouette of the shore was clear to the Navy helmsmen, they deliberately headed to Anzac Cove and North Beach:

"...as we came closer to the cliffs we all swung around to the left of where we had been heading for and went along the shore for some distance."

### WRITTEN DOWN AS TRUTH

The British equivalent of Bean's war history was 'Military Operations, Gallipoli', compiled by C.F. Aspinall-Oglander published in 1929. In a long paragraph, he explains that a

Lt. Waterlow mistook Ari Burnu for Gaba Tepe and turned his string of boats further north to North Beach. A Commander Dix realised this, and crossed under the stern of Waterlow's boats to land at Anzac Cove, all others following:

"...steadied on a roughly parallel course, and all twelve tows made for the shore at a point approximately one mile to the north of the intended place."

Aspinall-Oglander says that they got to this point by mischance and, in this context, Bridges' clear orders of 18 April are disregarded. The mystery current was then inserted and written down as truth. Eye-witness accounts like Wadsworth's were ignored, as Aspinall-Oglander continued:

"In the black-darkness it was so difficult for the tows to see each other that they insensibly >>

#### ABOVE:

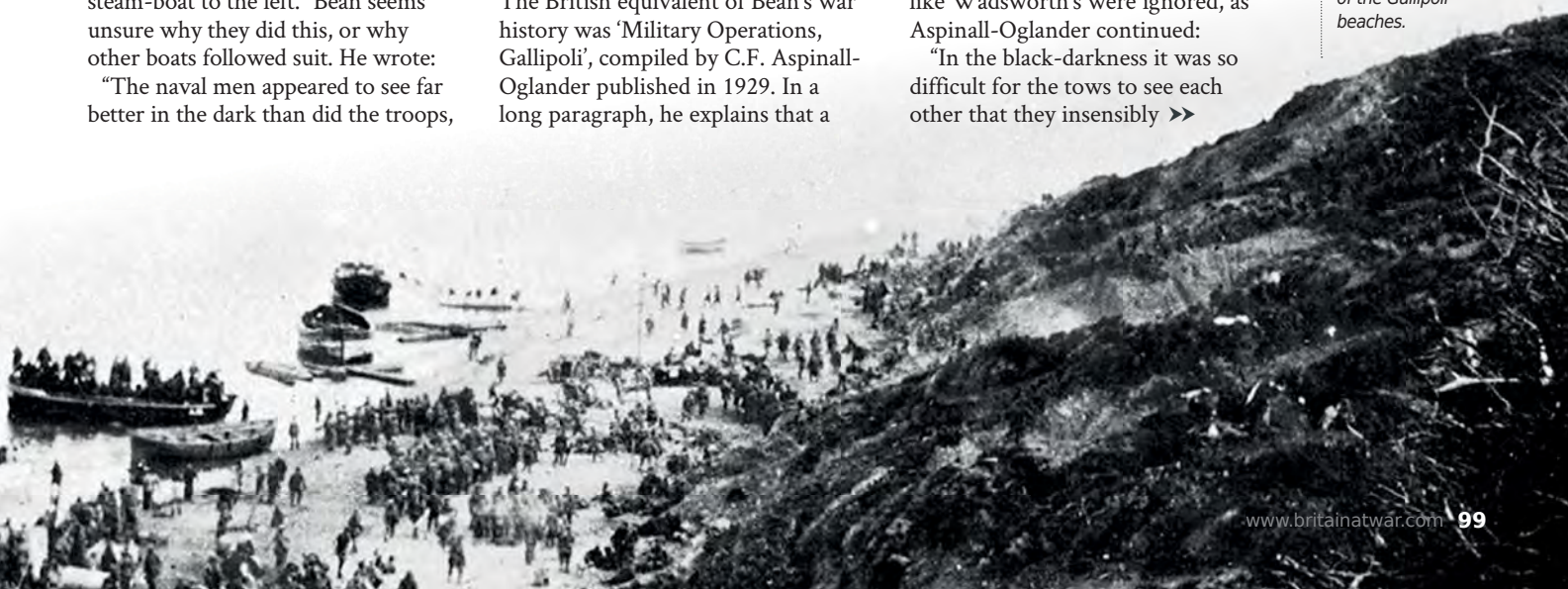
**Top L:** The landings, well underway.

**Top R:** Men from 1st Brigade and 7th Bat, 2nd Brigade in a captured trench at Lone Pine, 6 Aug. 1915.

**Above:** Supplies piled up at Anzac Cove, May 1915. Following the landing the beach became the main hub for Anzac troops.

#### BELOW:

The landings underway on one of the Gallipoli beaches.





## "NO CURRENTS TO TROUBLE HIM"

The Gallipoli Current At Anzac Cove A Myth



**TOP:**  
Reconstructed  
trenches at Chunuk  
Bair.

**ABOVE:**  
Looking up from  
the beach north  
of Anzac Cove,  
the location where  
the so-called  
'Fisherman's  
Hut' stood. Here,  
roughly 140 men  
from 7<sup>th</sup> Bat. AIF,  
landed on 25 April  
1915, to be shot  
to pieces by Turks  
occupying this  
knoll. This stretch  
of shoreline marked  
the northernmost  
landings that day.  
(HISTORIC MILITARY  
PRESS)

**RIGHT:**  
The stone marker  
overlooking Anzac  
Cove today.

bunched together ... and there now occurred one of those mischances, the fear of which had inclined the navy to favour a daylight landing. The northerly current that sets along the Gallipoli coast was stronger than the sailors had realised; the tows were imperceptibly carried a full mile north of the selected landing place."

The 'official' British version was completely the opposite of what Ian Hamilton was expecting it to say! He knew that there was no current, and had been relying on Aspinall-Oglander's history to end such talk.

### SWIM AGAINST THE POWERFUL TIDE

The frontispiece of the Official History notes it is: Based on official documents by direction of the Historical Section Committee of Imperial Defence. This was final and official, and it was controversial after this date to dispute what was

now recorded fact. It would have surprised Sir Ian Hamilton, and it contradicted Charles Bean and lowly private Keith Wadsworth – who, after all, was the only one of them actually there on that fateful Sunday morning!

So how did Charles Bean react to this new and powerful British account, so different to his own official Australian version? When his book 'Gallipoli Mission' was published in 1948 he obviously (and maybe reluctantly) found he could no longer swim against this powerful tide and wrote a new and different version of the landing, revealing:

"I had gradually realised that, although there was much confusion in the landing and the fight that followed – indeed, owing to the boats being carried by current in the dark to a wrong and terribly rugged landing place, the covering force was shuffled like a pack of cards."

Charles Bean's original version written for the Australian official history had been carefully written from his own reports and many interviews with those who were there at dawn on 25 April, but after two decades of repeated stories of the northerly current he now felt he had little choice but accept it as fact. Repetition of the myth had made it into fact. It is noteworthy that T. E. Lawrence seemed to recall amazing detail of his many desert exploits, and his 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' has descriptions that go to the very sound and feel of the ground under his feet. He was once queried about an unlikely personal anecdote by one of his many biographers. His telling reply was: "History is not made up of truth".

That it has taken a century to query the myth of the current at Anzac Cove is perhaps a perfect example of this. ☺





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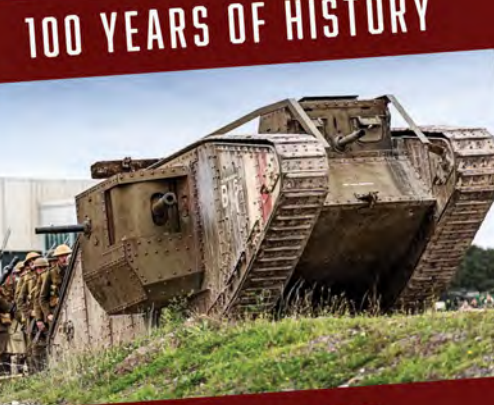
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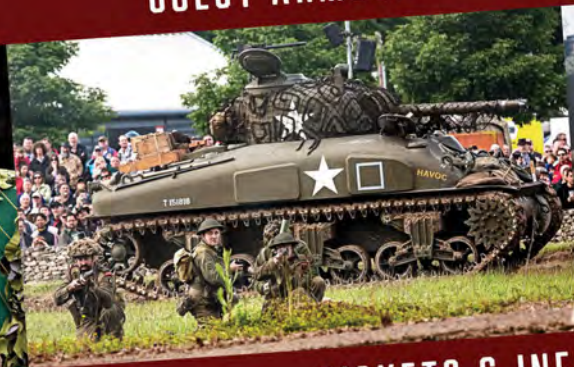
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THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

# "Battle of Britain"

A Harry Saltzman Production

STARRING IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

Harry Andrews Michael Caine Trevor Howard Curt Jurgens Ian McKellen  
Nigel Patrick Christopher Plummer Michael Redgrave Ralph Richardson  
Susannah York PRODUCED BY Harry Saltzman AND S. Benjamin Fisz SCREENPLAY BY

DIRECTED BY Guy Hamilton

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE



## ODEON · BOLTON

## COMMUNITY SUNDAY







**CLOCKWISE:**  
The iconic British Quad poster is the one we all remember.

Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding visited the set at Duxford on 26 May 1969. In this official still he is seen chatting to Susannah York and surrounded by his pilots including Douglas Bader, Bob Stanford-Tuck, Al Deere and Johnny Kent. Inset is the film stamp on the rear of the image.

This Buchon fighter currently operated by ARCo at Duxford, G-AWHK/C.4K-102, has been painstakingly liveried in its former film guise as 'Yellow 10'. Here being taxied out by John Romain on 24 August 2010.

Post the launch of the film Spitfire Colour Slides Ltd released a series of copy 35mm colour slides taken by film still photographers. Totalling 86 slides they are of exceptional quality.

The starring 'Me109' fighters, in actuality Spanish Buchons, one aircraft's Merlin engine is clearly visible.

## *In the first of a new regular series looking at military-related collectables, Peter Arnold examines the popular field of collecting material associated with the epic 1969 film 'Battle of Britain'.*

Fifty years ago the first rumblings of a film about the Battle of Britain started to surface in the aviation enthusiast community and by the end of 1967, after an on-off period of financial backing, aircraft earmarked for the film accumulated at RAF Henlow, the engineering base for the film. Then, through the very wet spring and summer of 1968, the aircraft, principally static and taxiing Spitfires, departed for Duxford, the major base for filming. Clearly, these aircraft became a magnet for photographers – both official and otherwise. Many images tended to be on colour slides and there wasn't too much one could do with a slide in 1968 short of projecting it. Who would have thought that, years later, technology, the Cibachrome process, home scanning, image manipulation and printing could produce such great images from a 1960s slide?

So, photographic images from the film are great collectables and, arguably, one of the main focuses for collectors today. They break down in to several groups. First, there were official black and white stills taken by the company professionals and issued to the press. Some of the air to air shots are particularly desirable to aviation enthusiasts, but collectors should beware of copies and strive for examples with the official stamp on the rear and a stuck-on caption. Also in this group are on-set images, some with visiting personalities, fighter pilot advisors from the RAF and the Luftwaffe and individual images of the stars. The latter are possibly of more interest to general 'movie buff' collectors. For the writer, the most desirable are images taken by enthusiasts over the fence at remote locations - or by those with official business on set and with a private camera. Certainly, eBay is the easiest place to monitor prices of Battle of Britain film image material, but prices are unpredictable. Nine original slides of modest quality bought last year were poorly captioned and sold for less than a 'fiver'. Within weeks, the same

images saw two people bid a single slide of a Spitfire up to £80 plus - and it was only a shot of one of the glass fibre replicas!

Aside from Disney, there was relatively little 'Movie Merchandising' in the early 1960's compared to today, but in conjunction with massive pre-release publicity in the UK, United Artists Corporation Ltd issued an 'Exhibitors Campaign Book'. This was basically a catalogue of merchandising material available to Cinema management to promote the film directly but also to illustrate the scale of various joint venture promotions advertising the film giving details of 'in house' marketing material, prices and the source from where it could be ordered. The contents of this document are beyond the scope of this article, but tripping selectively through the goods on offer we have: eighteen stills available at sizes ranging from 10 x8 to 80 x40, from 1/9d through to £4-15-0 each, eight portraits of Susannah York in WAAF uniform (the idea being to invite local newspaper readers to place them to encourage enlistment to the WRAF) and at 14/- per set. The subject matter was a little dull, notwithstanding Susannah York's charms, and certainly included none of the famous 'stockings and suspenders' shots. Along with twenty different formats of high quality card-printed 'Battle of Britain' adverts, ranging in price from 11/- to 46/-, the final page listed and illustrated five variations of the of now classic film poster and included the eight set 'lobby cards' in colour.

To promote the film, details of various joint ventures were included in the Campaign Book, among them an exhibition at Selfridges, a Wells drink promotion "The Bottle of Britain", eight dedicated Pan books in their 'Battle of Britain' series, two dedicated Dinky toys of a Spitfire and a Stuka in film livery, a photographic album to take colour postcards of the film in conjunction with J. Arthur Dixon, children's books and jig-saw puzzles in conjunction with >>

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BPC Publishing, Frog Model kits, the original soundtrack of the film from United Artists Records and colour poster prints by Plaistow Press Ltd along with A & B C chewing gum cards for children to collect. All of these are very collectable today. Additionally, and although rarely seen, the film company promoted the film during production by issuing numbered Press Release Briefings. The full set of seven are hard to find, but they are out there if the collector looks hard enough.

In 1969, Weidenfeld and Nicolson published the book 'The Battle of Britain - The Making of the Film' written by Leonard Mosely. Hardback, it was £2.50 at the time but a paperback was also produced shortly after. The hardback had a notoriously delicate dust cover, and prime examples were fetching toward £100 fifteen years ago, but this high price seems to have subsequently subsided. It is a 'must read', and currently on eBay one can see good copies of the paperback at 'buy it now' prices ranging between £2.81 and an astonishing £134.32! The late Robert Rudhall, formally Assistant Editor at Key Publishing's Flypast Magazine, wrote a pair of complimentary books on the film in 2000/1. Both are excellent and a priority for the serious collector, but they are getting hard to find and very expensive. Subsequently, a paperback version of Robert Rudhall's first book was issued by Victory Books. Although of lesser quality, it still commands a very high price on Amazon - presumably because of its rarity.

Moving up the scale, we come to the competitive general 'movie buff' territory - posters, lobby cards, front of house material etc. Here, condition is paramount; pin holes, minor tears, creases, and whether folded or rolled all influence the price, but be prepared to pay £300 to £400 for a reasonable example of the standard 'British Quad Crown', sized 30 x 40. Apart from all the sizes available for the UK, this was repeated for a host of other countries where the film was screened and with different languages and artistic graphics. The writer bought an example from France without paying too much attention to the language in the advert, but noted it had a rather a hefty delivery charge. It turned out to be a multi-section bill-board example that could have papered his study ceiling and still have some sheets to spare!

**BELOW:** Dinky produced a pair of models of the Spitfire and Stuka dedicated to the film. Expect to pay in the region £100-150 for a good 'non play' example in a clean original box with all the instructions and the codes decals still to be affixed.

Artefacts connected to the premieres are especially sought after. The film was premiered at the Dominion Theatre, Tottenham Court Road, London, on 15 September 1969 whilst simultaneous premieres were held in 11 other UK cities. Each had its own high quality dedicated programme and ticketing. Invitations with tickets come up for sale on occasion, those with famous names commanding a premium. There was also a Royal Gala Performance on 20 October 1969 in the Presence of Her Majesty the Queen. Digging deep, the author purchased a signed programme which had autographs on the cover. One needs to be cautious about autographs as there is a whole industry faking them. One of the signatures was actor Robert Shaw, and another that took some deciphering before finally being revealed as Mary Ure, Shaw's spouse, giving credibility. The star signature just spelled 'Dowding' in a very shaky script. At the German Premiere in Cologne on 17 September 1969, VIP's were presented with a metal embossed commemoration plaque in a fine case. When one of the production principals' house was cleared following his death the author managed to acquire one but

obtained a further example in July 2011, on eBay, for a bargain 40 Euros.

Dedicated collectors are always on the lookout for memorabilia from the filming and set. Here, the sky is literally the limit ranging from simple paperwork right up to one of the fighters used in the film. Again, the author has an autographed item obtained via Britain at War's Editor; a framed letter head from the film company, Spitfire Productions Ltd, inscribed with the famous actor's most famous line: "We either stand down or blow up" (Michael Caine).

A substantial number of full-size replica aircraft from the film survive, mostly with museum collections. Of the 30 or so flying ex Spanish Air Force '109s' used in the film, one example in the UK, operated by ARCo at Duxford, is painted precisely in its former film livery. In 2014, all eight Buchons belonging to one of the film's pilot's, 'Connie' Edwards, were sold to the Swiss company Boschung Global having sat in Edwards' Texas ranch, untouched, for 45 years. So, for potential collectors, the current price range is from a £2 key fob on eBay to a £2m fighter. Choose wisely and they will be a good investments. ☺





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## Luftwaffe Eagles Over Ireland

Justin Horgan and Paddy Cummins

Publisher: Horgan Press

[www.horganpress.com](http://www.horganpress.com)

ISBN: 978-0-9955530-0-2

Hardback: 384 pages

RRP: £35.00 (not including postage and packing)

**WHEN A book which is so clearly a labour of love like this one arrives on the editorial desk it is always cause to take more than a second look. In this instance, and with the general subject matter close to the reviewer's heart, it didn't need any prompting to quickly get stuck into devouring its truly fascinating content.**

To many, the title might at first seem somewhat 'niche' but the reality is that this is an important and untold part of the story of Luftwaffe air actions against the British Isles – albeit that the aircraft covered in this absolutely superb volume are those which came down in the neutral Irish Republic, Eire. Because of the geographical location, these German

losses have largely been ignored in the context of air actions against Britain between 1940 and 1945. However, they are very much part of this story and all credit must go to Justin Horgan and Paddy Cummins for recording all of these losses in such meticulous detail. It is certainly a most valuable piece of research and is a must for those with an interest in Luftwaffe air operations in North-West Europe.

Drawing on official reports, eye witness accounts and the testimony of many Luftwaffe aircrew who survived coming down in the Irish Republic this is not only a highly-detailed record but it is well-written, nicely produced and contains a wealth of unique photographs and other images all printed on quality paper in this large-format book. The only complaint, however, is the lack of an index although this does not detract greatly from the book and the chronological coverage makes it easy to follow and to find individual cases with ease. With the story of each loss carefully told, the authors leave literally no stone unturned in their quest to tease out the very last bit of detail including mini biographies of the German fliers involved. Additionally, the fatalities are also

covered in detail with photographs and information secured from families and next-of-kin in Germany and elsewhere. Also covered is the story of internment in Eire and the official government position on these unintended arrivals in the country. Tragedy, and not a little humour, is all covered in this myriad of stories and the reader will find photographs of the downed and wrecked aircraft, the personnel, the camps, war graves, the crash scenes today, paperwork and documents relating to the German fliers and images of surviving artefacts from the multitude of German aircraft covered – a number of these being the impressive Fw 200 Condor aircraft several of which crashed through various causes such as navigational error or mechanical problems whilst engaged on long-range flights during the Battle of the Atlantic.



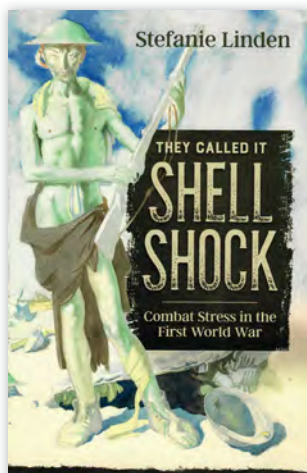
This really is a fascinating book and the reviewer cannot sing its praises highly enough. Not only that, but such an impressive book at £35.00 plus P&P represents exceptional value for the money. It is available from the publisher, direct.

**REVIEWED BY ANDY SAUNDERS**

Illustrations ✓ References/Notes ✗  
Appendices ✓ Index ✗







## They Called It Shell Shock

Combat Stress in the First World War  
Stefanie Linden

THERE ARE elements of the First World War that remain very firmly in the national consciousness in terms of what represented that conflict; trenches, mud, mass slaughter, gas and shell shock. To an extent, in the overall context of that war, the first four elements may well have sometimes been overplayed or misrepresented – horrific though they all were. Shell shock, however, was something entirely new in warfare conducted on an industrial scale. Although much talked about, then and since, it is a wartime feature that has often been neglected in written histories.

With her background in psychiatry and the history of medicine, the author provides an intriguing and yet harrowing insight into the incapacitation of soldiers on an epidemic scale and presents a fascinating case that the experience of shell shock patients in that war has shaped and laid the foundation for the understanding of modern post-traumatic stress disorders, including combat stress. This is a must-read for those wishing to understand this terrible Great War phenomenon.

Publisher: **Helion & Company Ltd**  
[www.helion.co.uk](http://www.helion.co.uk)  
ISBN: 978-1-91109-635-1  
Hardback: 271 pages  
RRP: £25.00

## Military Pistols

Handguns of the Two World Wars

Gordon Bruce

THIS BOOK in Crowood's Europa Militaria series provides a handy reference of the history and characteristics of all the major self-loading pistols that were adopted by the military forces of the nations involved in the two world wars. In total, it presents a total of nineteen pistols, and the firms who made them, along with a technical appraisal of each weapon.

With a colour photo and cutaway of each gun and its breech operation, this is a most useful and very handy easy-reference book for the enthusiast, researcher and historian. Additionally, the ammunition used by each weapon is detailed by the author, Gordon Bruce, who is an acknowledged expert in his field. This is certainly a nice little publication and will complement and enhance any library collection on the weaponry of war. As a guide to every significant pistol in use by the combatants in both world wars, this is a book which does exactly what it says on the cover. Recommended.

Publisher: **The Crowood Press**  
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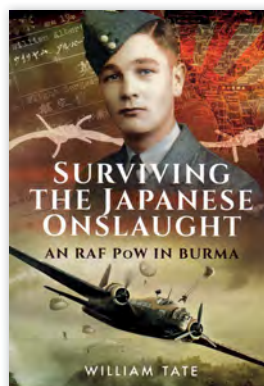


## Surviving The Japanese Onslaught

An RAF POW in Burma

William Tate

TOLD THROUGH his son, this is one of those harrowing yet compelling titles of survival against the odds and captivity and brutalisation at the hands of his Japanese captors. Bailing out of his stricken Wellington over Burma, and after initial attempts at escape and evasion, RAF Warrant Officer William Tate, was captured by Japanese forces and, almost immediately, was subjected to violent treatment and suffered terrible conditions including being shut into a small bamboo cage in the relentless sun. Beaten, but not broken, William Tate ultimately endured over two years of captivity – a captivity which, typically, included harsh treatment, dreadful living conditions, lack of proper food, slave labour and disease, with malaria, dysentery and beriberi all taking their toll. Watching the death of one of his fellow crew-members through the latter disease, and having to further endure what he called 'the unforgivable indignity and insults shown towards our dead servicemen' would have surely broken lesser men. Shining through this visceral tale is an unmistakably indomitable human spirit and bitter determination.



In terms of any account of a Prisoner of War unfortunate enough to have been captured by the Japanese, this is certainly a compelling and absorbing read.

Publisher: **Pen & Sword**  
[www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)  
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## Another Bloody Chapter In An Endless Civil War

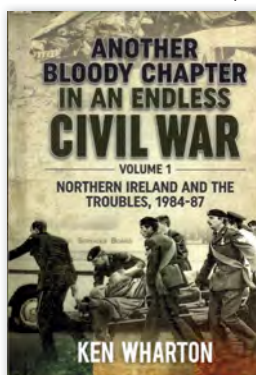
Vol 1 : Northern Ireland and the Troubles, 1984-87

Ken Wharton

HELION ARE to be congratulated for tackling yet another difficult and controversial subject involving Britain's recent (and to an extent, current) military history; the troubles in Northern Ireland.

It has always seemed to the reviewer that 'troubles' is a singularly anodyne word to describe the awfulness and the brutality of what has occurred in the province in recent years, but Ken Wharton provides us with a fascinating insight into the terrible events which took place there is just four short years of a bloody civil war. Certainly, his account is anything but anodyne.

Drawing on a myriad of sources, Wharton pieces together every single terrorist event (mostly perpetrated by the Provisional IRA) across those years. What results is a chilling litany of terror; murder, intimidation, extortion, threats, beatings and torture. However, this is written primarily from a 'loyalist' perspective and, one day, it will certainly be interesting to perhaps sit down and read of these events from a Republican



viewpoint – however uncomfortable and unpalatable that might be. This book, though, pulls no punches and it also examines what the author calls 'the negative interference of the United States'. Wharton, however, is balanced in his condemnation of terrorists on both sides, including the UFF, UVF and RHC etc. and their ruthless, cold-blooded and calculating killers 'who never gave an ounce of mercy or pity and yet demanded it from the security forces.'

Some will certainly find this a difficult read, enlightening though it is.

Publisher: **Helion & Company Ltd**  
[www.helion.co.uk](http://www.helion.co.uk)  
ISBN: 978-1-91109-627-6  
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RRP: £25.00



## Southwark In The Blitz

Neil Bright

AT THE end of the Second World War a large number of towns and districts across Britain published accounts of their part in the war; the bombings, the casualties, their heroes and their rolls of honour. Written in the immediacy of conflict, and drawing upon locally available facts and statistics, these can often be a valuable aid to the research of wartime events in specific areas. Across recent years, however, local history authors have often sought to plug gaps in that written record and Neil Bright does an admirable in his telling of Southwark's wartime history in the Blitz.

With some of the Luftwaffe's primary targets either within or very close to the borough, the bombing taking a terrible toll on Southwark's population and infrastructure. Indeed, by the end of the Blitz in May 1941 the borough had seen an astonishing 2,000 of its residents killed.

This book is a very useful addition to our sum of knowledge about the London Blitz and is highly commended to those with an interest in studying the subject or wishing to learn more of Southwark's local and social history.

Publisher: **Amberley Publishing**  
[www.amberley-books.com](http://www.amberley-books.com)  
ISBN: 978-1-4456-5615-1  
Softback: 128 pages  
RRP: £12.99



## A Spitfire Girl

Mary Ellis with Melody Foreman

Publisher: **Frontline Books**  
[www.frontline-books.com](http://www.frontline-books.com)  
 ISBN: 978-1-47389-536-2  
 Harback: 224 pages  
 RRP: £25.00

**THE STORY** of the Air Transport Auxiliary, especially the role of women pilots who served in that organisation, is one that is given relatively scant attention in the printed word. However, this truly wonderful book at least helps to redress the balance.

Mary Ellis, a redoubtable veteran who marked her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday even as this review was being written, tells her story through conversations with Melody Foreman who has skilfully woven what must have been a long series of meandering conversations, over endless pots of tea, at Mary's Isle of Wight home. In fact, as one gets drawn into reading this book, it is almost as if the reader is just listening to Mary recounting her many tales as the intrepid young aviatrix she once was. In fact, the style of an autobiography is dramatically altered from the usual convention of an author merely writing structured chapters about their life to a series of thoughts, reminiscences and ideas – darting from one to the next with a delightful matter-of-fact and chatty style. Again, I go back to that notion of Mary recounting these tales to the reader over cups of tea! Certainly, Melody has had to skilfully weave Mary's many tales together in a logical series of chapters which chart her remarkable flying life. And it is also the case that the



reader is inexorably drawn to the conclusion, by the last page, that they have indeed been having that conversation over tea with Mary.

Mary served from 1941 and, during her time, she flew 76 different types of aircraft – and no less than 400 different individual Spitfires. The types flown by Mary ranged from Tiger Moths, high performance fighters and four-engine bombers through, ultimately, to the Gloster Meteor, becoming the first woman to fly the type. In total, she flew over 1,100 hours with the ATA and visited no less than 210 airfields. The reviewer's favourite tale, however, is of Mary's arrival at an RAF airfield in a Vickers Wellington. Taxying in, Mary jumped out of the aircraft to be greeted by an astonished ground staff. 'Where is the pilot?' they demanded. 'I am the pilot' replied Mary. In disbelief, the groundcrew searched the Wellington for the real pilot they felt sure must be hiding away somewhere.

This is a lovely book, and such a refreshing change to be able to read such 'ripping yarns' about a young girl pilot instead of the usual archetypal swashbuckling and testosterone-fuelled fighter boy. It is highly recommended.

**REVIEWED BY ANDY SAUNDERS**



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A HISTORY OF CONFLICT  
**BRITAIN AT WAR**  
 MAGAZINE

**APRIL 2017 ISSUE**  
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## BLOODY APRIL 1917

After more than eighteen months of stalemate on the Western Front the allies were about to launch another offensive, this time on the Arras front and with full air support from the Royal Flying Corps. What followed was an air offensive fiercely countered by the German air force, including its potent new Albatros DIII, and saw a near massacre of allied fighters and the worst month for flying casualties the war had yet seen, as **Peter Hart** explains.

## TIGER!

To coincide with The Tank Museum's incredible new exhibition, 'The Tiger Collection', we take a look at legendary Tiger 'ace' Michael Wittman and the controversial and hotly debated



story of his demise in Normandy in August 1944 and examine how his tank came to be knocked-out. Additionally, we focus on the story of the Tank Museum's own 'Tiger 131', how it came to be captured and its story since falling under new ownership.

## THE LIMITS OF COURAGE

In a short naval career of 'meteor-like brilliancy', New Zealander William Sanders fought a series of Q-Ship duels with German U-boats which included one of the most celebrated close-quarter sea battles of the First World War. His actions earned him the Victoria Cross, Distinguished Service Order and promotion all within the space of seven months, but, as **Steve Snelling** reveals, by the time he embarked on his final war cruise in the summer of 1917 the strain was beginning to tell.







Phil Jarman looks at her contributions to recording the Second World War through her work.

03

# WARTIME HEROES AND VILLAINS



**B**efore the outbreak of the Second World War Dame Laura Knight was a popular and highly successful artist, widely known for her stunning portraiture as well as her reportage style to record scenes and, occasionally, controversial subject matter and her contribution to the art world was rewarded in 1936, when she became the first woman elected to the Royal Academy since its foundation in 1768. As such a renowned artist, Knight who worked in oils, watercolour and also adopted analogue print technologies throughout her early career, was fully

prepared to be employed as an official war artist from 1939.

Under the direction of Sir Kenneth Clark, the War Artists' Advisory Committee commissioned Knight in a variety of roles from the outbreak of the war. As a woman who had enjoyed decades of artistic autonomy, her role as a war artist was not without its challenges. Throughout her career she had faced strong opposition and opinions in a truly male dominated world, where women artists were limited in scope of subject matter and opportunities to exhibit at prestigious events.



Married to fellow artist Harold Knight in 1903, Laura frequently used the expertise and opportunities provided by her husband as a way of exploring new ideas and directions.

Becoming central figures in the Newlyn artists' colony based in Cornwall from 1907, the Knights employed models to pose in situations previously not seen in collections.

Initially, Laura Knight recorded beach scenes of children playing, devising a fairly impressionist style that was received well at the Royal Academy where a painting simply titled 'The Beach' was exhibited in 1909. After this initial success, She began painting women in situ in the Cornish landscape, and developed a more realistic style, later to become her trademark.

Knight who in her early years was not permitted to paint from life, but like fellow women art students had to record the human form by studying plaster casts or copying the work of male exponents, created a controversial composition. In 1913, She included a self-portrait of herself as the artist creating a painting of her close friend Ella Naper by using mirrors in a painting titled 'Self Portrait with Nude,' thereby challenging the archaic attitudes of the male dominated art establishment. At the time, the Royal Academy refused to exhibit the painting and some critics suggested the artwork was vulgar and not fit for display. After Knight's death in 1977, this painting





was purchased and exhibited by the National Gallery and is now regarded by the art world as possibly one of her finest works.

Between the World Wars, Knight's artistic directions absorbed the subject of ballet and the circus, but unlike her contemporaries her drawings and paintings recorded the performers offstage and in unguarded more contemplative moments. Continually breaking new ground, Knight painted women performers informally in dressing rooms and off-stage, and her reputation as an eminent artist flourished. Whilst travelling with her husband in 1926, Knight created a portrait of Pearl Johnson, an active campaigner against racial segregation in the United States. Knight observed and recorded the racial tension within the maternity wards of a Baltimore hospital. The issues addressed through her portrait again brought more controversy to the artist. As many British artists during the 1930s moved towards abstract and modernist directions, Knight continued to paint in the traditional realistic tradition, nowhere was this style more evident than in her work created as a war artist from 1939 to 1946.

During this time, she produced 17 finished paintings and numerous preparatory sketches and trials. Some works were intended for reproduction as posters, others recording for exhibition purposes those people who had demonstrated exceptional courage in the face of the enemy. >>



**ABOVE LEFT:**  
One of the largest paintings commissioned by the WAAC, Dame Laura Knight's renowned portrait of munitions worker, Ruby Loftus.

**ABOVE:**  
Knight's striking rendition of the post-war Nuremberg War Trials in 1946 showing clearly those on trial against a landscape of devastation in the background.

**LEFT:**  
Women of courage, the wonderful expressions of two wartime heroes, Corporal Elspeth Henderson and Sergeant Helen Turner, both recipients of the Military Medal.

**OVERLEAF:**  
A team of women from the Balloon Command hoist a barrage balloon over war-torn Coventry.



## ART OF WAR

### Wartime Heroes and Villains

#### RIGHT:

*Tense moments prior to take off, preparations and instrument checking by the crew of a Short Stirling based at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk.*

The subjects of one of Knight's first wartime commissions were the two WAAFs, Corporal Elspeth Henderson and Sergeant Helen Turner, who were awarded the Military Medal for Bravery after they stayed at their posts despite their building receiving a direct hit from a bomb during a raid on RAF Biggin Hill. Showing the work of the women in uniform on the home front, Knight captured WAAFs engaged in preparing balloon defences over Britain's industrial heartlands. One painting produced in 1941 showed the repair of a partly inflated barrage balloon in Birmingham, the second depicted a team hoisting a balloon over Coventry. These paintings engaged the public and were used to promote the recruitment of women into the vital Balloon Command. Both incorporate elements of sharp observation, detail and accuracy. The subjects depicted suggest both heroism and the glamour of women in action.

One of Knight's most famous paintings, 'Ruby Loftus screwing a breech-ring', which showed the skill of Ruby and her fellow munitions workers who were employed to provide vital weapons for the fighting forces. Using her renowned observation skills, Knight captured the factory worker poised and actively working the lathe as if she were a performer in a ballet production. Later in the war, Knight spent several months studying aircrew preparing for raids over occupied Europe. Observing the



personnel at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, the painting called simply 'Take Off' was completed in 1943. Showing some of the crew of a Short Stirling carefully checking instruments prior to taking off and joining the bomber stream heading for a raid. Unfortunately, the navigator pictured in the final painting was killed in action. Following this news, Knight arranged for a photograph of the painting to

be despatched to the family of the airman.

After hostilities had concluded, and almost at the age of 70, she asked if she could record the war trials in Nuremburg in 1946. For her contributions to the recording of the work of combatants and workers during the conflict, her request was approved and she was given this commission. The final outcome of her depiction of those war criminals who had survived to stand trial departed from the familiar realistic style she employed during the war years. Knight wanted to show the horror of the consequences of the work of those in the dock, and although clearly depicting Goering, Hess and Speer in the foreground she set the courtroom scene against a backdrop of desolation and destruction, created in a more impressionist style. At the time of the painting's completion, the outcome didn't receive glowing accolades from the commissioners and critics. However, seven decades on, this image is now recognised as one of the most powerful depictions of war in the history of art.

As a young artist brought up in the East Midlands, and once excluded from life classes due to her gender, Dame Laura Knight could not have envisaged the impact her work would have on the male dominated hierarchy in the art world and her contributions to equality within her chosen profession. ☉

#### BELOW:

*Dame Laura Knight talking to and observing workers in an aircraft factory during the war.*





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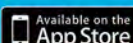
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# COMMEMORATIVE PAPER HANDKERCHIEF

NO.32



**In the sixteenth century handkerchiefs were not only expensive gifts, but a status symbol. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, advances in both the method of manufacture and materials used had ensured that handkerchiefs were available to all.**

Almost anyone could afford a pocket 'hanky', and by the outbreak

of war in 1914 they ranged from materials such as fine silk to cotton handkerchiefs for the working class, the latter costing a penny apiece. They were even being sold to commemorate notable events, such as coronations or jubilees, or as souvenirs of places of interest.

This practice continued throughout the First World War, though rationing and a shortage of materials led to an increasing use of tissue or crêpe paper, both of which were often extremely thin. The example seen here was printed to commemorate the death of 'Lord Kitchener, his staff, and men' in 1916.

In May that year it was arranged that Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener and Lloyd George (the then munitions minister) - the two

**ABOVE:** A portrait of Field Marshal Lord Kitchener. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

**RIGHT:** The commemorative paper handkerchief produced to mark the sinking of HMS Hampshire and the death of Lord Kitchener. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

**BELOW:** One of the last photographs ever taken of Lord Kitchener. At 12.55 hours on 5 June 1916, whilst at Scapa Flow, he boarded the battleship HMS Iron Duke, from the destroyer HMS Oak, before proceeding to HMS Hampshire. Here, on Iron Duke, Kitchener is bade farewell by Admiral Jellicoe - with whom he is seen shaking hands. Jellicoe is facing the camera in the very centre of the picture; to his left is Kitchener, on his right Mr. J.H. O'Beirne of the Diplomatic Service. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

key figures in Britain's war effort - would travel to Russia to maintain relationships with this important, if faltering, ally. At the last moment, Lloyd George decided that he could not afford to leave his new ministry for such a long period, leaving Kitchener to travel alone.

On 5 June, Kitchener arrived at Scapa Flow aboard the destroyer HMS Oak. There he transferred to the cruiser HMS Hampshire for the intended voyage around the north cape of Norway to the Russian port of Archangel. At 16.45 hours that day, Hampshire slipped its mooring and sailed from Scapa Flow. An hour later, the cruiser was joined by her escort, the destroyers *Unity* and *Victor*, with revised instructions to take the westerly passage round the Orkneys rather than the more direct eastern route. The ships steamed out into the open sea and into a strong north-easterly gale.

Soon the destroyers were having trouble keeping up with the much more powerful cruiser, and so HMS Hampshire ploughed on alone. Then, at 19.30 hours, disaster struck when Hampshire hit a mine off Marwick Head.

A massive explosion ripped the ship apart and in just fifteen minutes Hampshire went down. There were just twelve survivors from the 655 men on board. Of Kitchener there was no sign - not even a body.

When the news of Kitchener's death hit the newsstands, the entire country was stunned. One of the Kitchener's Army volunteers, who was interviewed by the Sunday Times in 1988 at the age of 101, still recalled exactly where he was when the news broke: 'I was in Chattenden Barracks in Kent as a Drill Sergeant. When we told the troops about Kitchener's death, they said: "Oh my God! What's going to happen to us now Kitchener's gone?"'

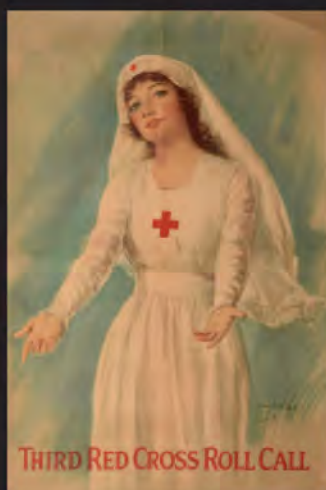






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