

remembrance ni

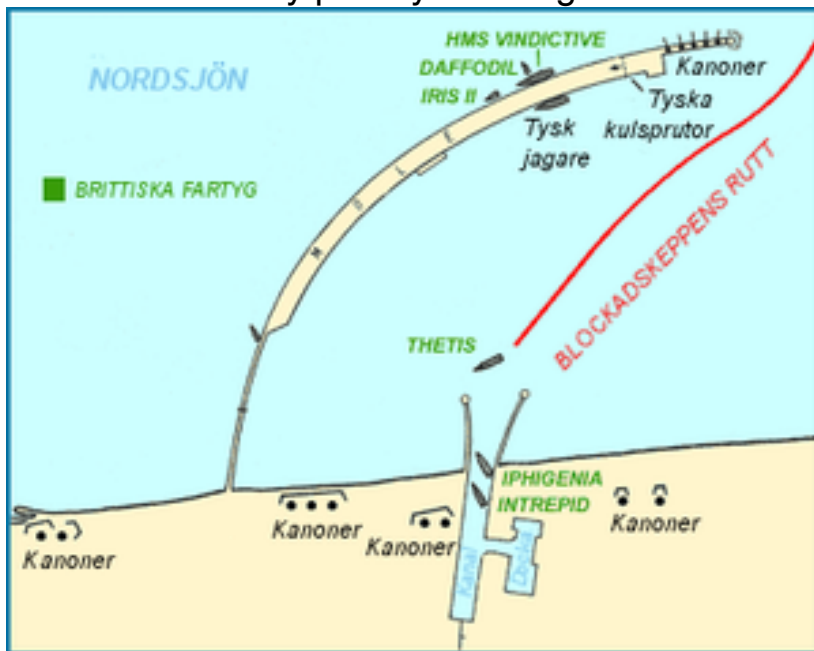


Iphigenia and Intrepid sunk in the canal at Zeebrugge

**Son of first Lord Mayor of Belfast
decorated for action in raid on
Zeebrugge**

Commander Oscar Henderson, the son of the first Lord Mayor of Belfast and the proprietor of the Belfast News Letter, was awarded a DSO for his action on the night of 22-23 April, 1918, when naval history was made with a raid on the Belgian port of Zeebrugge.

The raid on St George's Day was intended to neutralise this key port by blocking the mouth of



the Bruges canal in an attempt to prevent German submarines and torpedo boats from using it.

It was a fierce action. Of the 1700 British and Commonwealth men involved in the operation, 300 were wounded while more than 200 were killed.



**Painting by Charles John de Lacy depicting
raiding parties from HMS Vindictive
storming the mole**

**The Admiralty notice of the award on
23/07/1918, to the then Lieutenant Oscar
Henderson, RN (HMS Isis II), stated:**

“ When a shell carried away the bridge of his ship and caused a serious fire amongst the ammunition and bombs, he led a volunteer fire party with a hose on to the upper deck to quench the fire. Took over command of the ship after Cdr. Gibbs had been mortally wounded”. HMS Isis was a former Mersey ferry steamer which Henderson successfully brought back to Dover from Zeebrugge.

The first occasion for which his actions were recognised was during a landing at Gallipoli Peninsula on 25-26/04/1915. The citation stated - “Commended for service in action. Took part in the landing at Morto Bay, and with commendable initiative pushed on in support of the Marines, after he had assisted in the disembarkation.”

Henderson's service career was typical of the time. He served as a Midshipman 1909 - 11, before serving in the Mediterranean Fleet 1911 - 12, and the China Fleet 1912 - 14 during which he was present at the capture of Tsing Tao in 1914. He served in Gallipoli 1915 - 16 before joining the Grand Fleet in 1917, and the Portsmouth Escort Flotilla in 1918.



The crew of HMS 'Vindictive' celebrating the Zeebrugge Raid on 23 April 1918.

Oscar Henderson was educated at the Methodist College, Belfast 1900 - 03, Bradfield 1903 - 04, Osborn, and the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth 1904 - 09.

Oscar was the third child of Sir James Henderson (1848-1914), Oakley House, Windsor Pk., Belfast. Sir James was Belfast's first Lord Mayor. He is credited with the fine City Hall which stands in the centre of the City today. He took a Law degree at Trinity College Dublin. He was called to the Irish Bar in 1872 and he became

Editor of the Newry Telegraph in 1873, retaining that position until 1883. In 1884 he became Managing Proprietor of the Belfast News Letter and Belfast Weekly News which his family owned until 1991.

James Henderson was made Freeman of the City of Belfast in 1912 and he was knighted by The Lord Lieutenant at the Vice Regal Lodge, Phoenix Park, Dublin on 12/01/1899.

After his naval service Commander Henderson was appointed Comptroller and Private Secretary to the Duke of Abercorn, the first Governor of Northern Ireland. He was awarded a CVO and a CBE for his services.

Both his sons, William and Brum, were involved in the media. Captain William Henderson, OBE, DL, who served with the Irish Guards 1942 - 47, was chairman of the Belfast News Letter until it was sold in 1989. He also played an important part in securing the franchise for UTV in 1958. Brum was named after the architect, Sir Brumwell Thomas, who designed Belfast City Hall. Brum, a graduate of TCD and a journalist with the News Letter became General Manager, Managing Director and Chairman of UTV.

Fatality from N Ireland

Thomas Charles McSHANE, AB. SS4230, in HMS Vindictive, died at Zeebrugge. Age 24. He was born in Newry 13/03/1894. He served in HMS Antrim 05/10/1914 - 16/12/1917; Chatham Naval Base (HMS Pembroke) 16/12/1917 - 28/02/1918; HMS Vindictive from 23/04/1918. He was the only son of Hugh and Margaret McShane, River Rd., Lambeg, Lisburn, and a brother of Sophia Hamilton, Larkstone St., Belfast. (Family notice, Belfast Telegraph). He was interred at St James's Cemetery, Dover. ADM 188/1098/4230

The following from N Ireland served at Zeebrugge -

BELL, S

RMLI. Private. 17301. Plymouth Division. Enrolled 16/09/1914. In HMS New Zealand 27/05/1915 - 18/02/1918. Wounded Zeebrugge. Discharged 12/11/1919. Re-enlisted for hostilities 13/11/1919. Born Whiteabbey 01/09/1897. Son of Mrs A. Bell, Abbeyville Cottage, Whiteabbey. ADM 159/160/17301

GAMBLE, Thomas Henderson

RN. CERA. M3809. Enrolled 10/01/1912 for 12 years. War service in Tyne, Aquarius, Dolphin, Maidstone and Pembroke I. In 1917 was chief engineer in submarine E-31. Although he was not yet a member of her crew in 1916, the E-31 had the distinction of being the only submarine to have shot down a German Zeppelin. Thomas participated in the raid on the German submarine base at Zeebrugge (See note on Sub C3 in briefing below). Following the war, he served with the New Zealand Navy and on a variety of ships before retiring from the Navy in 1934 with the rank of CERA. Worked in Harland and Wolff possibly on the Titanic. Born 12/08/1888. Son of William Hilditch and Maggie Johnston, Straid, Ballyclare. In April 1915, Tom married Kathleen Dorothy Dyke. They had three children. Died 1977 at the home of his son, Alec, in Somerset, England. Ballynure - PCI RH and WM. ADM 188/1025/3809

GIBSON, R E

RN. Armourer. Northumberland St., Belfast

GOUDY, Thomas James

RMLI. 17191. Private. Plymouth Division. Enrolled Belfast 07/09/1914. Served in Orcanna,

Sutlej, Morea and Lion. Zeebrugge. Discharged 23/10/1919. Born Belfast 22/08/1895. Son of John Goudy, Finlay St., Ligoniel, Belfast. ADM 159/160/17191

HERRIOT, Thomas Hunter

RN. Flight Officer. Heligoland and Zeebrugge. Mercantile Marine Medal. Croix de Guerre (Belge). MBE. 1939-45: Squadron Leader, Pathfinder Force, RAF. Born 23/01/1894. Campbell College. Son of J. S. Herriot, Beaconsfield, Belmont Church Road, Belfast.

KERR, R

RMLI. Private. Wounded at Zeebrugge. Linview St., Belfast

KIRKPATRICK, Kenneth Clark

RN. Commander. DSC. Lieutenant 11/01/1909. Awarded DSC for his actions at Zeebrugge. DLL for Co. Down. High Sheriff of County Down 1948. Master of the East Down Foxhounds and the County Down Staghouads. Born 14/03/1896. Son of John J and Cecilia Kirkpatrick, KinCraig, Antrim Rd., Belfast. Church Hill, Newcastle. Carnmoney Parish Church RH

LYNCH, William

RMLI. Private. 18185. Plymouth Division.
Enlisted 10/06/1915. Served in Temeraire
26/09/1916 - 23/05/1919. Zeebrugge. Born
Carrickfergus 28/03/1896. Shore St., Belfast.
ADM 159/162/18185

McALISTER, J

RN. Stoker. Nile St., Belfast

McMASTER, T

RM. Armourer. Loughview Cottage, Whitewell,
Belfast

O'NEILL, Harry

RN. ERA. Omagh

STEWART, A

RMLI. Private. Wounded Zeebrugge. Canmore
St., Belfast

WHITE, Wilson Henry

RMLI. 16494. Plymouth Division. Enlisted
08/12/1913. War service in Tiger 03/10/1914 -
16/12/1917 and RM Brigade 01/01/1918 -
08/12/1919. Wounded Zeebrugge. Discharged.
Re-enlisted 09/09/1939. Ply.X3351. Died 1940.
Interred Woodbury, Exmouth, Devon. Born

Belfast 26/09/1895. Son of Sarah Ann White, Darwin St., Newtownards Rd., Belfast. Husband to Margaret White, Walton St., Belfast. ADM 159/159/16494

Briefing on the blocking raid on Zeebrugge port

The daring St George's Day raid in 1918 was staged when Allied fortunes were at their lowest ebb as the German Army drove the British and French Armies to the edge of breaking point.

Flanders-based U-boats proved a major thorn in the side of the Royal Navy and maritime traffic in the North Sea and Channel.

Led by the energetic commander of the Dover Patrol, Roger Keyes, a specialist force of blockships, gunboats, submarines and assault parties attempted to 'cork the bottle' by wrecking the mole at Zeebrugge harbour and scuttling the blockships in the narrow main channel.

Although the raid failed – the blockships did not stop U-boat traffic – and cost the attackers heavily (of the 1,700 sailors and Royal Marines

taking part, more than 580 were casualties, 227 of them killed for just 24 German casualties), it was hailed as a success thanks to a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign by the Admiralty and the award of eight VCs to participants.

The aim of the operation:

1. to block the Bruges ship-canal at its entrance into the harbour at Zeebrugge;
2. to block the entrance to Ostend harbour from the sea; and
3. to inflict as much damage as possible upon the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend.

The operation was intended to block the access of German shipping and submarines in and out of both ports. German submarines, torpedo boats and ships were based at the inland docks in Bruges and were using the Bruges shipping canal to access the English Channel via the two sea entrances at Zeebrugge and Ostend. Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, commander of the Dover Patrol, devised a plan to block the ports. The operation would take place with about 75 ships and over 1,700 men in a night-time operation. The state of the tide, calm weather,

favourable wind for the smoke screen and an absence of fog were crucial to the plan and its timing.

Diversionsary Operation on Zeebrugge Mole

The raid on Zeebrugge harbour began at one minute after midnight on 23 April with the diversionsary operation to land a force of Royal Marines at the mile-long Zeebrugge Mole. The men landing on the Mole formed a storming force and a demolition force to destroy the German gun batteries, seaplane station and defences on it. They were carried to the Mole by the old cruiser “Vindictive” and two Mersey River passenger ferries, the “Daffodil” and “Iris II”. The primary duty of the “Daffodil” was to push “Vindictive” up against the Mole, then pull alongside the Mole herself and her Marine force would disembark onto the Mole. The Acting Captain of the “Vindictive” was Commander Alfred Francis Blakeney Carpenter, RN.

As events unfolded the “Vindictive” was already under fire as she arrived and there were casualties to many of the leading Marines and commanders of this storming operation. The

smoke screen was less effective than planned because the wind changed direction half an hour before the arrival of "Vindictive" at the Mole. "Daffodil" had to continue pushing "Vindictive" against the Mole and her Marines had to disembark via the bow onto "Vindictive" and then onto the Mole. "Iris II" could not land her Marines directly onto the Mole either, and great bravery and casualties were suffered by the men trying to secure her to the Mole. She attempted to go alongside "Vindictive" instead but only a few men managed to get onto "Vindictive" before she was withdrawn. Many casualties were suffered by the crews manning the guns on "Vindictive".

Demolition of the Viaduct Bridge by Submarine C3

At 12.15 hrs the viaduct bridge connecting the Mole to the shore had been blown up by a daring submarine operation. HMS C3, commanded by Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford, RN, wedged itself between the iron pillars of the bridge, fuses were set, the crew were taken on board a launch and the submarine, packed with explosives, blew up taking most of the bridge with it. This was done to prevent German reinforcements coming onto the Mole to put a

stop to the British Marines carrying out the damage on the Mole.

The storming force and demolition force were on the Mole for about an hour, where casualties were suffered. By 01.15 hrs “Vindictive”, “Daffodil” and “Iris II” had collected the survivors and were clear of the Mole on their way back to Dover.

Sinking of three cruisers filled with concrete

The diversionary attack on the Mole was to distract the Germans' attention away from the main objective of the raid, this being to sink three old British ships filled with concrete to block the access to the ship-canal. These three ships were “Thetis”, “Intrepid” and “Iphigenia”. Between 12.15 and 12.45 hrs all three blocking ships were sunk. The “Intrepid” was sunk in the most successful place of the three in the ship-canal. The crews of the blocking ships and submarine C3 were rescued by motor launches.

The British deemed the operation a success, although the sunken ships did not create a 100%

block on the German access to the submarine pens.

Gallantry Awards

Eight officers and men were awarded the Victoria Cross:

- Commander (Acting Captain) Alfred Francis Blakeney Carpenter, RN
- Lieutenant Richard Douglas Sandford, RN
- Lieutenant Percy Thompson Dean, RNVR (Motor Launch 282)
- Captain Edward Bamford, DSO, RMLI
- Serjeant Norman Augustus Finch, RMA
- Able Seaman Albert Edward McKenzie
- Lieutenant-Commander George Nicholson Bradford, RN
- Lieutenant-Commander Arthur Leyland Harrison, RN

A large number of gallantry awards were made following the raid. Under the terms of clause 13 of the VC statutes, in cases where a body of men was deemed to have been so gallant, the best way to select VCs was by a ballot, enabling the men themselves to decide. Following on from a

ballot for the Royal Marine participants, a ballot was held for the Royal Navy participants.

These latter were the ships crews of Vindictive, Iris II, Daffodil, as well as the men of the Naval Storming Party. Captain Carpenter of the Vindictive, and AB McKenzie who belonged to B Company of the seaman storming party, were awarded the VC as a result of the ballot.

A full list is provided by the excellent website at naval-history.net.

Analysis

In 1931, the official historian, Sir [Henry Newbolt](#), wrote that before the raid, two submarines entered or left the Flanders bases each day and continued at that rate during the week after the raid.

The block ships were sunk in the wrong position and the canal was only obstructed for a few days. The Germans removed two piers in the western bank of the canal near the block ships and dredged a channel through the silt near their sterns.

At high tide, U-boats could move along the new channel past the block ships. The average



Channel obstructed after the raid; (Left to right) HMS *Intrepid*, HMS *Iphigenia* and HMS *Thetis*.

number of passages was maintained until June, when the rate fell to about one submarine per day, to an extent due to a bombardment of Zeebrugge on 9 June. After the damage was repaired, the rate of U-boat traffic did not return to the pre-raid level. Newbolt considered that the

reduced traffic was caused by the recall of some U-boats to Germany in June, after reports that operations in the Dover Straits had become too dangerous. The usual remedy of increased destroyer raids was not possible, because of the difficulty in using Zeebrugge as a harbour.

Newbolt wrote that the raid on Zeebrugge was part of an anti-submarine campaign which had lasted for five months, using patrols and minefields to close the straits and which continued despite the most destructive sortie achieved by the Germans during the war. The British anti-submarine measures inflicted a steady attrition on the Flanders U-boats and the attack on Zeebrugge came when the German blockade of Britain was supposed to have reduced drastically the resources and endurance of the British Empire. News of the raid was skilfully exploited to raise Allied morale and to foreshadow victory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Great War Web Site

Royal Navy and MOD press unit

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The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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