



remembrance ni

## Fleet Air Arm pilot from Fermanagh fought with RAF in Battle of Britain

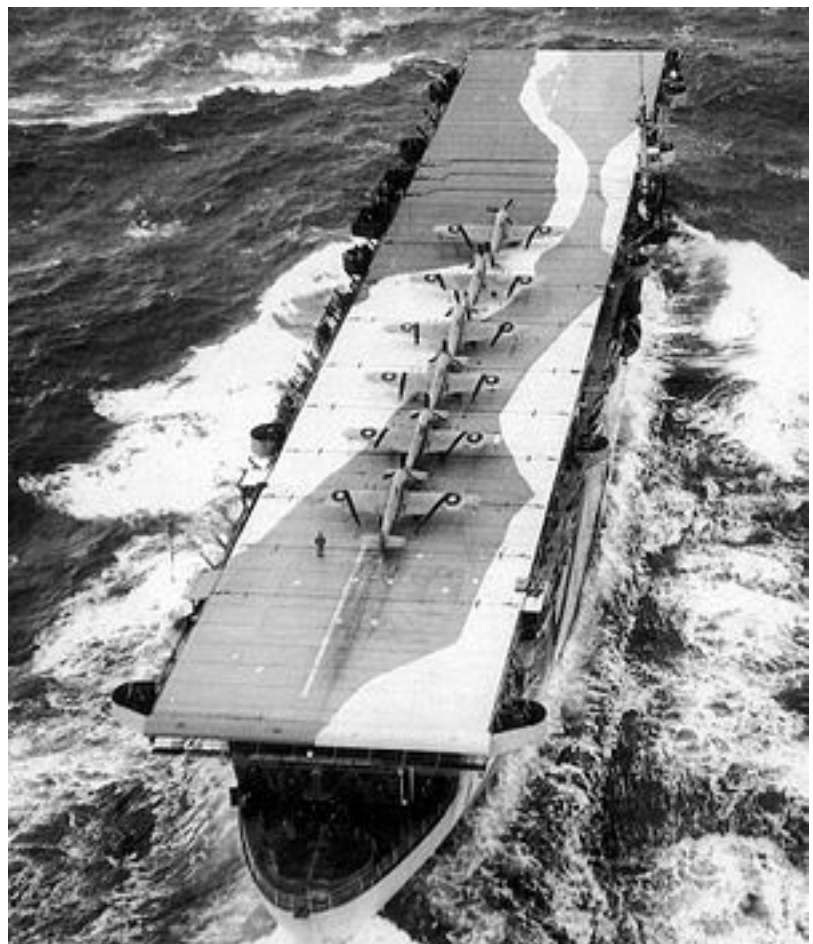
**Lieutenant Henry William Beggs** was one of over 500 personnel killed when a German U-Boat sank HMS Avenger to the north-

**HMS Avenger with Sea Hurricanes on deck**

west of Gibraltar in November 1942.

Lieutenant Beggs served in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy during World War Two. After flying in the Battle of Britain, he went on to join the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm.

Born on 6th September 1916, he was the son of John Allen Beggs, MRCVS, and Anne Louise (Nancy) Beggs (née





Allingham) of Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh. He was the husband of Patricia Rosemary Beggs of Chiswick, Middlesex.

He enlisted in the Royal Air Force on a short service commission in November 1936. As an Acting Pilot Officer, he completed training and joined RAF 115 Squadron on 4th September 1937. The Royal Air Force terminated his commission on 28th December 1937.

In May 1939, Beggs joined the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm. On 15th June 1940, he was attached to the Royal Air Force, converted to Hawker Hurricanes, and served in the Battle of Britain. On 1st July 1940, he joined RAF 151 Squadron from RAF Martlesham Heath, Suffolk.

Beggs downed a Messerschmitt ME109 of 4/JG 52 over Kent on 14th August 1940. The following day, he received injuries after a Messerschmitt ME109 shot down his Hawker Hurricane P3605 over Dover. After recovering from his injuries, he rejoined the Fleet Air Arm. In January 1942, he joined Naval Air Squadr on 883. He died on 15/11/1942 aged 25 years old.



The Royal Navy declared Henry William Beggs missing presumed killed after an attack on HMS Avenger (D-14). Commander AP Colhurst was captain of the Royal Navy vessel as it embarked on a return journey to the Clyde from North Africa.

On 15th November 1942, at 0414hrs, U-155, under the command of Adolf Cornelius Piening, fired 4 torpedos at

convoy MKF-1Y. The convoy was around 120 miles north-west of Gibraltar. HMS Avenger was one of 3 ships hit by the German submarine's torpedos. The Ettrick also sunk and a missile caused damage to USS Almaack (AK 27).

The torpedo that struck HMS Avenger detonated the ship's bomb load and blew up the entire centre section of the vessel. The Avenger sank in under 2 minutes. HNoMS Glaidsdale (L 44), captained by Lieutenant Commander T Horve), picked up 12 survivors. The remaining 514 personnel on board died as a result of the incident.

Henry William Beggs has no known grave. His name is on Bay 3, Panel 1 of the Fleet Air Arm Memorial, Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire. There is an H.Beggs named on Enniskillen WM.

## **HMS Avenger**

On 18 April 1942, *Avenger* started flight deck landing training with four Fairey Swordfish aircraft of 816 Naval Air Squadron, Fleet Air Arm. The exercise had to be curtailed when her engines broke down. Repaired by 30 April 1942, she joined the escort to convoy AT17 to cross the Atlantic to Britain. During the crossing the Swordfish of 816 Squadron provided anti-submarine patrols. On 4 May, two aircraft lost the convoy in heavy weather and requested a homing beacon from *Avenger*. She was unable to help, not having the correct equipment, and both aircraft and crews were reported missing. When *Avenger* arrived in Britain the Fleet Air Arm had a shortage of Martlet fighter aircraft, so a small number of RAF Hawker Hurricanes were converted into Sea Hurricanes. *Avenger* was chosen to test their deck landing

ability on escort carriers. The tests, flown by Eric "Winkle" Brown were successful, and the Sea Hurricane equipped 802 Naval Air Squadron and 882 Naval Air Squadron, with 12 aircraft assigned to *Avenger*. They were joined by three Fairey Swordfish and five crews from 825 Naval Air Squadron.

*Avenger* was a Class Escort Aircraft Carrier obtained under US/UK Lend Lease Agreement. The ship was under construction at Chester, Pennsylvania by Sun Shipbuilding as mercantile to be named *Rio Hudson*. She was laid down on 28/11/1939 and launched on 27/11/1940. After her requisition by the US Navy she was taken in hand by Bethlehem Steel Corporation, New York for conversion to suit use as an Auxiliary Aircraft Carrier.

Transfer to the Royal Navy was agreed on 31/07/1941 and the ship was identified as BAVG2. Build was completed on 01/03/1942 when she became the seventh RN ship to carry the name *Avenger*.

This name was first used in 1779 for a Sloop and lastly in 1915 by an Armed Merchant Cruiser sunk in 1917 by U69.

She was the second of the US built CVE to be transferred to the Royal Navy and like others in the first batch of US built Escort Carriers the ship had diesel propulsion machinery driving a single shaft. British radar was fitted after arrival in UK.

Whilst in service her propulsion machinery was unreliable.





## **North Antrim Marine five years a POW was RBL stalwart**

Bill Bamber was born in Coleraine on 12th July, 1922, son of William and Annie in Adams Place, which is opposite the Union St., Orange Hall. He attended Eden Elementary School and later worked for Boyds' Engineering, Bendooragh. Inspired by his father's account of the Royal Marines at Gallipoli, he enlisted and travelled to Deal.

Due to the onset of war in September 1939, training was condensed. Engagements at Boulogne and Calais followed. Taken prisoner on 26/04/1940, he was marched into Germany to Stalag VIII -B where the prisoners were made to work 12 hour days. He was liberated on 02/05/1945.

Bill and Elizabeth Anne McKinney were married 15/03/1947. In 1949 he volunteered for and completed the Commando course and was posted to Malaya with 3 Commando

Brigade. After tours in Malta and North Africa, he completed his service on 11/07/1953.

He then completed 31 years as a postman covering a daily route of 22 miles each day. He served in the RUSC and later joined UDR serving from 1972 - 79.

He was Chairman of Ballymoney Branch RBL 1972 - 79. His wife was awarded the Legion's Award Bar for outstanding service to the Women's Section. In 2004 a book titled, "My service life" written by Ronnie Gamble, was published. His funeral was from St. Patrick's Parish Church to Ballymoney Cemetery. - (Based on a report in Ballymoney Times, 19/07/2011).

## **Carrickfergus and Larne aircrew died together over Burma**

Sergeant Trevor Barkley Boyd - 1145139 - Royal Air Force Reserve, was born in Greenisland, Carrickfergus in 1922. He was killed in the air on a bombing run over Burma on 23rd/24th February 1944 aged 22.

Trevor was the son of Edgar and Margaret Jessie Boyd of Greenisland and like many others in Northern Ireland during the war enlisted with the Royal Airforce Reserve. He was assigned to a B-24 Liberator bombing crew as one of the 11 man crew. On the evening of 23rd February 1944 he and the B-24 crew of BZ951 were on a bombing mission en route to Sindi in Burma when the aircraft was lost in the sky due to an explosion. Records on the event are vague but it appears that the entire crew were lost and none of the men



## **Singapore Memorial, Malaya**

were ever recovered for burial. The entire crew including Trevor are remembered on the Singapore Memorial, Malaya on column 43 .The crew included another County Antrim man, flight Sergeant David Nelson from Larne.

## **The crew of BZ951**

**ALLITT**, Flight Lieutenant, ROBERT EDWARD, D F C, 40594. Royal Air Force. 23rd February 1944. Column 431.

**BEATEY**, Warrant Officer, THOMAS ATKINSON, 1104751. Royal Air Force. 23rd February 1944. Age 28. Son of



Thomas Beatey, and of Catherine Beatey, of Percy Main, Northumberland. Column 433.

**BOYD**, Sergeant, TREVOR BARKLEY, 1145139. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 23rd February 1944. Age 22. Son of A. Edgar and Margaret Jessie Boyd, of Greenisland, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. Column 435.

**FLETCHER**, Sergeant, WILLIAM KENNETH, 1601738. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 23rd February 1944. Column 436.

**FRASER**, Flight Lieutenant, FRANCIS JAMES, 66511. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 23rd February 1944. Age 25. Son of James and Janette Fraser, of Hove, Sussex. Column 431.

**HOUGHTON**, Flight Lieutenant, RAYMOND DOUGLAS, 109364. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 23rd February 1944. Column 431.

**NELSON**, Flight Sergeant, DAVID, 533351. Royal Air Force. 23rd February 1944. Age 26. Son of Hugh and Nancy Nelson, of Ballyhampton, Larne, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. Column 435.

**O'DONNELL**, Pilot Officer, ERNEST WILLIAM, J/86852. Royal Canadian Air Force. 23rd February 1944. Column 444.

**RICHARDSON**, Flight Sergeant, HERBERT ARTHUR, 517958. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 23rd February

1944. Age 29. Son of Herbert George and Selena Richardson, of Southsea, Hampshire. Column 435.

**MERRIMAN**, Flying Officer, SYDNEY, 1791. Royal Indian Air Force. 23rd February 1944. Age 21. Son of Ernest and Gladys Merriman, of Agra, India. Column 445.

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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](mailto:houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com)

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[houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com](mailto:houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com)

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