



remembrance ni

Service personnel and relatives killed during the Belfast Blitz which destroyed 55,000 homes



On the 15th April 1941, Belfast was hammered in one of the largest and most devastating aerial bombardments of World War II. Some 200 Luftwaffe bombers hurled their high incendiary bombs at targets around the city resulting in almost 1,000 people losing their lives and a further 1,500

being injured. This was the greatest loss of life in one night of any bombing raid on the United Kingdom during the war.

The anti-aircraft batteries did not fire upon the German bombers as they believed that the RAF would come to their assistance and they did not want to fire mistakenly on the RAF fighters. Sadly the RAF did not respond and the bombers dropped their payloads with impunity.

As the Antrim Road water works had been wrecked in the bombing there was little or no water pressure to fight the fires so the city burned virtually unchecked. Some 55,000 homes had been destroyed, over half the houses in the city, leaving over 100,000 people homeless. Two hospitals were damaged, eleven churches were destroyed and two schools rendered inoperable.

The Luftwaffe targeted Belfast because it was a manufacturing centre and crucial for the British war effort. Germany, therefore, saw Northern Ireland as a legitimate target and sought to stop the flow of materials into England.

The shipyards at Harland and Wolff employed 35,000 people and were the largest in the world. They built ships for the Royal Navy and some of the most renowned were the aircraft carriers HMS Formidable and Unicorn as well as the cruisers HMS Belfast and HMS Penelope. This shipyard as well as others in Belfast renovated and repaired over 3,000 ships for the Royal Navy as well as 500,000 tons of merchant ships; a formidable asset to the English war effort.

Not only did Belfast manufacture ships, but Short Brothers built aircraft; most notably the Sunderland Flying Boat and the Stirling long range bomber. Bofors anti-aircraft shells were produced in the hundreds of thousands by James

Mackie and Sons and Churchill tanks were built by Harland engineering Works. The Irish linen industry produced thousands of yards of high-quality aero-linen cloth that was used for covering airplane fuselages. Other smaller industrial enterprises produced gun parts, mountings, aircraft parts and all types of ordinance parts for shells and weapons.



Papers recovered after the war detailed the German's understanding of Belfast and they had intelligence that Belfast was protected by just seven anti-aircraft batteries; the most abysmal defences in all of Great Britain. The Germans identified the following areas as strategic targets, Harland and Wolff Ltd shipyard, the Short Bros. aircraft factory, the Belfast power station, the Rank & Co mill, and the Victoria Barracks.

On the night of April 7-8 1941, a small raid took place. It is thought that this raid was designed to test the Belfast defence set-up. As there was little in the way of defence, the major raid took place a little over a week later on April 15

with devastating effects on the city. The third Luftwaffe raid took place on the night of May 4-5, 1941 with 150 people killed but thousands of incendiary bombs were dropped. The last raid took place on the night of May 5-6, 1941.

The UK government faced considerable anger as there were only 200 public shelters. There were no searchlights as they had only just arrived for installation and there was no smokescreen ability and no barrage balloons. In short the city was woefully unprepared for such an attack. The neutral Irish, south of the border, responded immediately to calls for help from their Northern Irish neighbours. Firemen and tenders were sent to assist and whatever help could be given in this area was given to the people of Belfast.

Blitz impact on service community

The blitzes of Belfast impacted on the service community in different ways. Individual service men were killed. The families of those serving elsewhere obviously were in great danger. At least one serviceman's family was completely lost.

As the docks and shipbuilding facilities were targeted, naval fatalities were almost inevitable.

HMS Caroline

Two men attached to HMS Caroline were killed - they were **Able Seamen Frank Mundy Coombs** who died on 15/04/1941 and **Victor Frank Dolan** who died on 20/06/1941.

HMS La Malouine

Two crew members of HMS La Malouine a Flower Class corvette died on 05/05/1941. **Steward Stanley G. Ash** was

22 years old and the son of Florence Hatch from Trumpington, Cambridge. **Ordinary Seaman James Taylor** was 23 years old and the son of Edward and Annie Taylor from Bristols Hope, Newfoundland. He previously had been Mentioned in Despatches. These men were aboard HMS La Malouine on the night of the 4th / 5th May 1941 when the Luftwaffe bombed the city in what was known as "The Fire Raid". Both men died by a bomb which was a near miss but damaged the ship.

Warrant Officer First Class, **Regimental Sergeant Major, Henry Phillips** was serving with 6th Battalion Royal Ulster Rifles and died on 16th April 1941.

Lance Corporal Harry Norman Pickup was serving with the Pioneer Corps. He was 22 years old and the son of Henry and Janet Pickup from Pinner, Middlesex. He died on 5th May 1941.

Private Felix Marasi of the Pioneer Corps was the son of Felix and Margherita Marasi. He was Killed on 5th May 1941.

Marine Thomas Douglas Harvey was 52 years old and was based at the HMS Royal Arthur Shore Establishment. He died on the night of 8th / 9th May 1941. He was the son of Thomas and Ellen Harvey of Belfast.

Captain Ronald Victor Kingston was 28 years old and the son of Thomas and Lucy of Wandsworth, London. He was on the General List and was killed on the night of 15th / 16th April 1941. He was a Liveryman of the Vintners Company.

Newtownards Gunners

Two Gunners from Newtownards 175 Battery, 66 Light Anti Aircraft Regiment were killed in the raid of 05/05/1941. **John Brown and Harry Corry's** graves are in Newtownards Movilla Cemetery. Harry Corry's brother David also died on active service.

Gunner's five children and wife died

William Douglas was serving with the Royal Artillery on the night of 15th / 16th April 1941 when the Luftwaffe blitzed Belfast and his wife and children were killed.

The Douglas family lived at 8 Ballynure Street off the Oldpark Road in Belfast. The family had been staying at 4 Ballynure Street when it was bombed.

William's wife Emily was 29 years old. Son Samuel was 9 years old. Son William was 8 years old. Son James was 7 years old. Daughter Margaret was 5 years old. Daughter Sarah was 12 months old

The Clarke Family lived at 4 Ballynure Street and their fatalities were - Jeremiah (Husband) aged 49, Lavinia (Wife) aged 49, Robert aged 26, Jeremiah Gerald aged 17, William aged 15, John aged 13, Cecil aged 12, Desmond aged 10.

The Douglas Family headstone lists all five children however according to a book on Belfast City Cemetery, "Written in Stone" by Tom Hartley, there are only three of the children buried there with their mother, with no record of either Samuel or James. This would suggest that the remains of these two young children were never identified or located.

Caroline naval medic adrift whilst Belfast home is bombed

Matthew Dermot Edwards a Surgeon Lieutenant - Commander, RNVR, in HMS Caroline was mobilised September 1939 and appointed to RN Barracks, Deal. Early in 1940 he was appointed to HMS Mohawk, Tribal Class Destroyer, 4th Destroyer Flotilla and served in the Norwegian campaign. He subsequently served in the North Sea and when Mohawk evacuated the British Ambassador from The Hook of Holland to Tilbury. Moved to the Mediterranean as part of the 14th Destroyer Flotilla based at Alexandria, Mowhawk took part in action against the Italian Battle Fleet of Cape Spartivento. Went to Gallipoli to bring down Shell petrol barges from Rumania. Bombarded Bardia. Bombarded Vellona as a diversion during Fleet Air Arm Attack on Taranto. In April 1941 Mowhawk was based in Malta to intercept convoys supporting Rommel in North Africa. In an action in which 3 enemy destroyers and 4 or 5 transports were destroyed, Mohawk was sunk.

Matthew Edwards spent time on a raft before being rescued by HMS Nubian. The same night this occurred his house in Belfast was destroyed by enemy action in the blitz.

Taken back to Egypt in a Merchant Ship he then served in HMS Stag, the Shore Establishment in Ismalia until October, 1942. His subsequent service was with the Fleet Air Arm at Machrihanish until the end of 1943. Then in Formidable in dry dock in Belfast. In 1944 he was appointed to Fleet Air Arm in Ceylon and promoted Lieutenant-Commander. In 1945 he was appointed to RN Dockyard, Chatham, in Industrial Practice.

Belfast WRNS Officer commuted during the blitz

WRNS. Third Officer Nancy Rowson, nee Redmond, enlisted in August 1940. She served in HMS Titania, a submarine depot ship anchored in Belfast Harbour. Nancy lived at home and commuted four miles by car with a gas bag on the roof, even during the blitz. She and her family slept in a shelter in the garden over this period. She had completed officer training at RN College Greenwich. Her other wartime postings included cypher duties on Hoy, at Scapa Floe including Watch keeping hours, and cyphers for signals with Russian and Atlantic convoys. Posted early in 1945 to FAA station at Eglinton, she was present at the surrender of eight U - boats on 14/05/1945. She was demobbed in December 1945.

Aircraft carrier HMS Furious aided air defence of Belfast

The aircraft carrier HMS Furious was in Belfast during the blitzes of April 1941 and provided a significant amount of air defence. In the second blitz she was hit by a 250lb bomb that penetrated the flying deck in to the hangar decks below where the original armoured battle cruiser deck prevented further penetration. Fortunately during the refit no aircraft were aboard.

In Furious during the blitz was **Fleet Air Arm, Chief Petty Officer, Sydney Waller**. He transferred from RAF to FAA in 1939. Served in carriers HMS Furious and HMS Attacker 03/1940 - 10/1944. Served his first period in Arctic waters during Norwegian campaign in 1940. He served on Furious between March 1940 and October 1941. Furious was one of

the few fleet aircraft carriers at outbreak of war and the only one of those to survive the war. Originally laid down as a battle cruiser carrying the largest naval guns, 18 inch, of her day she was converted to an aircraft carrier in 1917.

Equipped with two squadrons of relatively obsolete Swordfish biplanes, during the campaign the squadrons suffered a fifty percent casualty rates and finished with virtually no serviceable aircraft. Furious escaped the campaign relatively unscathed. Her sister ship Glorious was sunk in circumstances shrouded in a secrecy that will not be lifted until the 100 year embargo placed is lifted in 2040. Only 39 of the over 1500 crew survived the sinking of the Glorious by the battle cruisers Gneisenau and Scharnhorst. Around 25% of Sydney's entry at Halton training for FAA were lost.

After his service he became a teacher and held posts in Castlewellan and Dunluce. He took up sailing in Mirror dinghies at first. In retirement he joined Cockle Island boat club as a member of 'the Wrinklies'. In that club he had an active social life and made many good friends. He gave up sailing in 2008 at the tender age of 87.

When he was aged 92 he received his Arctic Star awarded for service North of the Arctic Circle. Though born in Manchester, Sydney Waller lived in Northern Ireland for over 60 years. It is a place he visited frequently as a young child from the later 20s. His father, a joiner with the LMS Railway, was a keen sea angler and each summer used his railway holiday pass to take his family to Northern Ireland by the LMS steamer from Heysham and onwards to Portrush on the LMS NCC (Northern Counties Committee) Railway from

York Road. He was husband to Nora nee Gregg of Portrush whom he met in childhood and later married.

Belfast Blitz service fatalities

+ASH, Stanley G

RN. Steward. P/SR56933. Died 05/05/1941. Aged 22. HMS La Malouine. Son of Florence Hatch, of Trumpington, Cambridge. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+BROWN, Henry

RN. Stoker 1st Class. D/KX 117314. HMS Caroline. Died 16/04/1941, aged 54. Died during German Air Raid. Husband to Georgina Brown of Burke Street, Belfast. Belfast City Cemetery. Glenalina

+BROWN, John

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 1465501. Died 05/05/1941, German Air Raid on Belfast. Aged 28.175 Battery, 66 Light Anti Aircraft Regiment. Son of William and Ellen Brown (nee Cassidy) of Greenwell Street, Newtownards. Husband to Sarah (Sadie) Wallace of East Street, Newtownards. Newtownards Movilla Cemetery

+COOMBS, Frank Mundy

Royal Navy. Able Seaman. D/JX 171434. Died 15/04/1941. Aged 34. HMS Caroline. Son of Frank and Louisa Isabel Coombs, of Bath, Somerset. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+CORRY, Henry

Royal Artillery. Gunner. 1544177. Died 05/05/1941, German Air Raid on Belfast. Aged 42. 175 Battery, 66 Light Anti Aircraft Regiment. Son of David and Margaret Corry of Newtownards. Husband to Margaret M. Corry of Newtownards. His brother, David Corry, also died on Active Service. Newtownards Movilla Cemetery

+CORRY, Samuel

RN. AB. D/SSX 17718. HMS Quebec. Died on 16/04/1941. Aged 26. HMS Quebec. German Air Raid. Husband to Martha Corry of Belfast, who died in the same incident. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina Section

+DOLAN, Victor Frank Douglas

Royal Navy. Able Seaman. P/JX 142717. Died 20/06/1941. Aged 21. HMS Pegasus. Son of Mrs. I. Dolan, of Southsea, Hampshire. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+KINGSTON, Ronald Victor

General List. Captain. 115422. Died between 15/04/1941 and 16/04/1941. Aged 28. Son of Thomas Kingston and of Lucy Charlotte Kingston (nee Sprigge), of Wandsworth, London. Liveryman of the Vintners Company. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+MARASI, Felix

Pioneer Corps. Private. 13058655. Died 05/05/1941. Aged 25. Son of Felix and Margherita Marasi. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+PHILLIPS, Henry

Royal Ulster Rifles. 6th Bn. Warrant Officer Class I (R.S.M.).
7006718. Died 16/04/1941. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+PICKUP, Harry Norman

Pioneer Corps. Lance Corporal. 13058709. Died 05/05/1941.
Aged 22. Son of Henry S. Pickup and Janet S. Pickup, of
Pinner, Middlesex. Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina

+TAYLOR, James

Royal Navy. Ordinary Seaman. P/JX181288. MiD. Died
05/05/1941. Aged 23. HMS La Malouine. Son of Edward
and Annie Taylor, of Bristols Hope, Newfoundland. Belfast
City Cemetery, Glenalina.

remembrance ni

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

Copyright - all material in this **remembrance ni** publication is copyright, and must not be reproduced in print or electronically.

To receive a copy of **remembrance ni** or notice of new postings on web site please contact -
houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

Contact - Simply input Remembrance ni in the title bar and give your first and second names with e-mail address in body of text. There is also a contact facility on the web site. See Menu at <https://remembranceneni.org/>
