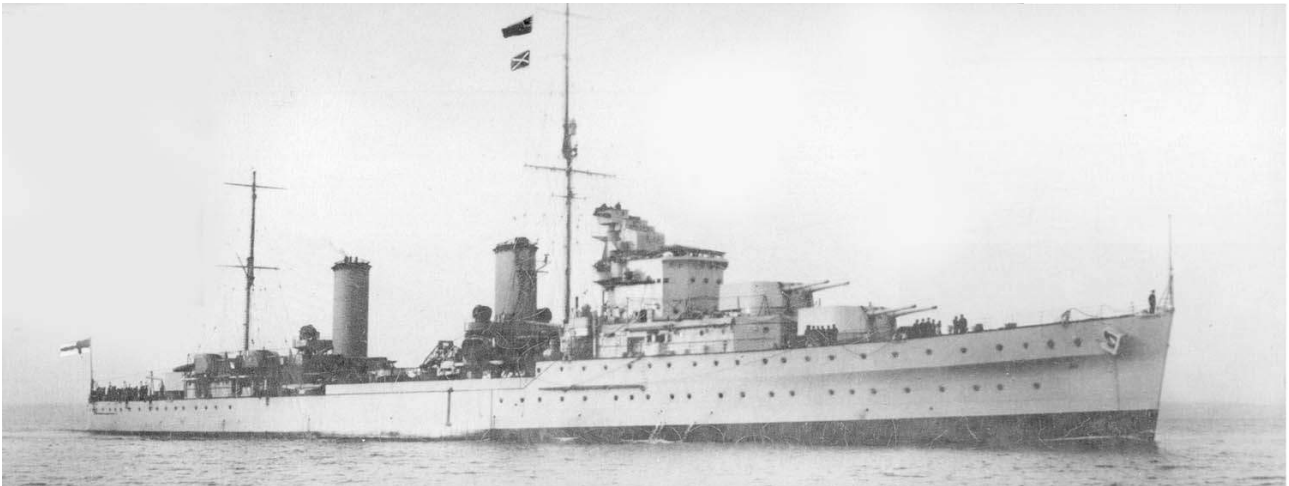




## remembrance ni



### **HMS Galatea - ship with superb war record sank in three minutes**

**HMS Galatea was sunk north west of Alexandria on 14/12/1941 by the German submarine U-557. 469 men including at least 12 from Northern Ireland, were killed. Captain Sim died with 21 of his officers and 447 ratings. About 100 survivors were picked up by the destroyers Griffin and Hotspur.**

Galatea saw much war service as she had taken part in the Norwegian campaign and the evacuation of the British army from France in May/June 1940; she also took part in rounding up the Bismark.

In the middle of September 1941, Galatea was sent with HMS Naiad to reinforce HMS Coventry and others in the Red Sea. On the night of 20/21/10/1941, along with Ajax and Hobart, she bombarded an enemy battery east of Tobruk. On 21st November, she left Alexandria with the Mediterranean Battle Fleet for Operation Landmark which was support for the Libya offensive.

On 6/12/1941 she left Alexandria again, with HMAS Hobart and others to join the commissioned supply ship Breconshire and escort her to Alexandria. On the night of 14/12/1941 Galatea was attacked by German dive bombers; the attacks persisted for about seven hours. Just before midnight, when north west of Alexandria, Galatea became a target for U-557 which hit her with two torpedoes in quick succession. The cruiser turned over and sank in three minutes, this is reported variously as being at 31deg 12 min (or 17min) N, 29deg 15min E.

## **Galatea's war service record**

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Galatea was serving with the Mediterranean Fleet, where she remained until March 1940. She returned to the UK and joined the 2nd Cruiser Squadron of the Home Fleet at Scapa Flow on 04/03/1940. From 21/03/1940 to 23/03/1940 she took part with the Squadron and eight destroyers of the Home Fleet in a sweep - called Operation DU - into the Skagerrak. In April she took part in Norwegian operations and although bombed, was not damaged.

On 10/05/1940, with HMS Arethusa, she arrived at Ymuiden, Holland, to escort three merchant ships which

were to carry gold bullion from there, to Southend, England. They left on 11th May.

On 26th May she bombarded positions at Calais and formed part of the covering force for Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk.

Towards the end of June HMS Galatea brought home the British Ambassador to France and the Ministers for Canada and South Africa from Bordeaux, arriving at Plymouth on 24th June.

During July and August she was based on the River Humber and early in September she sailed for Sheerness. On 7th September bombs fell close during an air raid, and on the 9th September a mine exploded close under the starboard bow, near the Tongue Buoy. She was out of action for four months. including a refit at Chatham, Kent.

On 20th January 1941, after the repairs and refit, HMS Galatea arrived at Scapa Flow and on 26th sailed with HMS Nelson, and a number of other ships to carry out a sweep for the German warships Scharnhorst and Gneisnau which were assumed to have passed through the Great Belt on 23rd. She returned to Scapa on 30th January in company with HMS Arethusa. On 8th February she sailed again, with HMS Aurora and others to search for an enemy warship which had been sighted by HMS Ramillies, returning on 13th.

On 23rd March, and again on 5th April Galatea left Scapa Flow with HMS Aurora to cover minelaying operations off Iceland and the Faroe Islands, and on 13th April, she left again with Arethusa for Seydisfjord for a reconnaissance of the Icelandic harbours. On 19th both cruisers sailed for a

patrol between the Faeroes and Iceland after a report that the German battleship Bismarck was at sea. She continued patrolling this area until the middle of May.

On 22nd May 1941 she left Scapa Flow with HMS King George the Fifth (KGV) and others to watch for Bismarck and Prinz Eugen which were reported to have left Bergen, Norway, and she continued with operations until Bismarck was sunk on 27th May, when she arrived at Reykjavik with HMS Prince of Wales. On 29th June she left the Clyde as part of the escort for convoy WS9B en route to join the Mediterranean Fleet via the Cape of Good Hope. She arrived at Alexandria in mid-August and joined the 15th Cruiser Squadron.

## **Operation Treacle off Tobruk**

At the end of the month she took part in Operation Treacle, which was the relief of the 18th Australian Infantry Brigade at Tobruk by the Polish Brigade, after which she returned to Alexandria covering HMS Phoebe which had been hit by an aircraft launched torpedo off Bardia.

In the middle of September, Galatea was sent with HMS Naiad to reinforce HMS Coventry and others in the Red Sea. On the night of 20/21st October 1941, along with Ajax and Hobart, she bombarded an enemy battery east of Tobruk.

On 21st November, she left Alexandria with the Mediterranean Battle Fleet for Operation Landmark which was support for the Libya offensive. On 6th December she left Alexandria again, with HMAS Hobart and others to join the commissioned supply ship Breconshire and escort her to Alexandria."

All this activity was eventually to come to an end on 14th December 1941.

## **The fate of U-557**

Interestingly the story does not end there. U-557 headed back the same day for the base of the 23rd flotilla on the Greek island of Salamis.

At 1800 hrs. on the 16<sup>th</sup> she radioed her base to say she was 18 hours from port. At around the same time the Italian torpedo boat Orione left the Cretan port of Suda. At 2144 hrs. the Italian commander spotted the U-Boat and, having had no notification of friendly craft in the area, mistook her for British and made the decision to ram her. The U-557 sank with all hands. Unwittingly the sinking of the Galatea had been avenged by the U-557's ally.

## **An eyewitness account of the sinking of Galatea**

The following is an eyewitness account of the sinking of H.M. cruiser Galatea by Larry Allen, Associated .Press. war correspondent, who was on board. It reveals that the captain, some 300 of the crew and Mr. A. M. Anderson, another war correspondent, are feared to have lost their lives.

Alexandria, Saturday, – H.M. light cruiser Galatea, struck by three torpedoes fired by an Axis submarine, flopped over like a stabbed turtle and went down within three minutes off Egypt. The torpedoes, launched at close range in pitch darkness on Dec. 15, clanged in lightning succession aft,

amidships, forward and port-side, and ripped into the cruiser's interior with loud blasts and spurting flame.

I was on board the cruiser and clung to the starboard rail of the quarterdeck until flung into the sea as the warship heeled over. I battled through thick oily scum for 45 minutes before being rescued.

It was at midnight, after having beaten off dive-bombing attacks for more than seven hours while patrolling with a squadron of cruisers and destroyers off Cyrenaica that Galatea's loudspeaker ordered gunners to stand-by. A young Marine roused me from sleep in the captain's cabin. I ran to the commander's cabin and informed Reuter's correspondent Mr. Alexander Massy Anderson. Adjusting lifebelts, we raced towards the bridge.

### **“TORPEDOES CHASED US”**

We had hardly started to run when the first torpedo clanged into the ship with a burst of flame, rocking the cruiser.

Torpedoes seemed to chase us along the deck. A second projectile crashed through amidships. A third struck forward just under a six-inch gun turret. The cruiser listed quickly, and the whole ship shuddered.

I knew it was too late to reach the bridge, so dashed behind a six-inch gun turret forward over the starboard side quarterdeck as the entire ship dipped deeply into the sea on the port side. I caught hold of the starboard deck rail as the cruiser rapidly turned on her port side, unscrewed the nozzle of the lifebelt hung around my neck, and blew into it with all the breath I could summon.

The cruiser flopped completely over to port, sending me sliding down into the sea. Hundreds of officers and ratings poured into the water. I heard Anderson at the rails shout something to a ship's officer. I never saw him again.

Knowing I could not swim, and fearful lest the old lifebelt I retrieved after the bombing of H.M.S. Illustrious on Jan. 10th would collapse, my body slipped deep under the water with scores of others as the cruiser, with a tremendous suction, disappeared in a huge lake of oil.

## **HUNDREDS IN SEA**

I feared, too, that the torpedoes' fire might have reached Galatea's magazine, and that the explosion would blow us all to bits, but there was only a muffled blast as she took the death plunge.

I felt I must have swallowed gallons of oily scum and water before I bobbed to the surface and tried to float, holding my lifebelt high close to my chest. Around me there were hundreds of bobbing heads. I tried to battle my way as far as I could from where the cruiser sank. Several sailors had succeeded in getting off a small motorboat. I attempted to propel myself toward it but went under again, coming up with lungs feeling as if they would burst. I gasped a cry for help.

A sailor helped me clamber aboard the boat, but a score of others had the same idea. Her rear section rapidly filled with water and was pushed down by the weight of a dozen more bodies. I struggled forward to the starboard side. Several sailors followed me. The boat dipped and suddenly turned over.



Again I went under, then, groping blindly, grasped the wheel of a motor launch and pulled myself into the front cockpit. Then the launch sank. A lone sailor and myself hung on the tip-most point of the bow until she slipped beneath the waves.

## **CRIES IN THE DARK**

Desperately I tried and succeeded in getting hold of a small floating spar. I tucked it under my left arm and joined scores of others in cries for help in the pitch darkness, hoping to attract the attention of the destroyers. But no one had a torch.

At that moment I saw a huge black silhouette of a destroyer about 75 yards ahead. "Help, I am drowning", I heard a sailor in the water near me cry.

"Keep going," I gasped. "Look, there's a destroyer ahead."

That seemed to give him a new burst of energy. He swam towards it. I tried hard, but could not get an inch closer. A big wave swamped me again with a mouthful of oil. Then, almost miraculously, there was a wave from behind that carried me almost directly under the propeller of the destroyer Griffin.

I shouted for help until I felt all the glands of my throat burn. Suddenly a long oily rope was flung over the destroyer's side. I grasped it, but there was no strength left in my hands.

"Hang on", a ship's officer shouted. "We will pull you up."

"I can't," I answered as the rope slipped through my fingers.



## SAVED BY SAILOR

At that moment a life raft drifted against the destroyer's side. I repeatedly banged my head against the warship until I cried out time and again, "Stop it, you are killing me."

Sailors boarded the raft and clambered up safely. Several unknowingly stepped on my head, pushing me down again into the water.

Then a young British sailor aboard the raft saved my life. He passed a heavy rope under my armpits, tied it around my neck, and flung the end to the quarterdeck of the destroyer. Three others slowly pulled me out of the oily mass and flopped me aboard like a wet fish.

They cut off all my clothes and carried me to the mess deck below where there were nearly 100 other survivors. I felt a sharp sting in my left arm as the ship's doctor gave me an injection and for the next ten hours lay on a mass of greasy rags, too weak to get on my feet.

During that 10 hours the destroyers and cruisers furiously searched a wide area of the Mediterranean trying to find and destroy the submarine which torpedoed Galatea. In addition to nearly 100 survivors rescued by Griffin, another destroyer, Hotspur, picked up about 75.

Galatea's normal complement is 580. Her commander, Captain E.W.B. Sim, R.N., is among the missing. Anderson, Reuter's war correspondent, is also missing. He was one of the most widely known newspaper men in the Middle East and particularly noted for his bravery and devotion to duty in face of enemy attacks. He always stayed on the bridge to see action. Anderson and myself were the only two

correspondents to see the biggest mass dive-bombing attack on H.M.S. Illustrious on Jan 10th last year.

This dispatch was written from the bed of my hotel, where I shall probably remain several days. – A.P.

## Galatea data

Galatea was a cruiser of the "Arethusa" class, built and engined by Scotts of Greenock and authorised in the 1932 naval building programme. She was laid down on 2nd June 1933, launched on 9th August 1934 and completed on 14th August 1935. Her armament consisted of six 6" and four 4" guns and she carried two triple revolving 21" torpedo tubes. Of 5,220 tons standard displacement, her overall dimensions were length 506 feet, breadth 51 feet and draught 15.75 feet. She had turbines which gave a designed hp of 64,000 to equal 32.5 knots, although a mean speed of 33.1 knots was achieved on her acceptance trials.

## HMS GALATEA ROLL OF HONOUR

### **ALEXANDER, Abraham Neill**

RN. Stoker 1st Class. D/SKX 33. HMS Galatea. Died 15/12/1941. Age 20. Son of Joseph Alexander and Jane Elizabeth Alexander, **Belfast**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 52

### **BOYD, Hugh Rock**

RN. Able Seaman. D/JX 162143. HMS Galatea. Died 15/12/1941. Age 19. Son of Hugh Rock Boyd and Florence

Kathleen Boyd, **Randalstown**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 50

**CLOUGHER, Richard George**

RN. Petty Officer. D/JX 138937. HMS Galatea. Died 15/12/1941. Age 24. Son of Henry Clougher, and of Lilian May Clougher, Woodview, Co. **Armagh**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 45

**DENNISON, Samuel**

RN. Leading Seaman. D/JX 151069. Date of Death: 15/12/1941. Age: 25. H.M.S. Galatea. Son of William Benjamin and Mary Dennison, of Belfast; husband of Margaret Dennison, **Belfast**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 45

**FISHER, Robert**

RN. AB. D/JX 150152. Died 15/12/1941. Age 21. HMS Galatea. Son of Robert and Sarah Fisher, **Scarva**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 96

**HUGHEY, James**

RN. Ordinary Seaman. D/JX 162742. Date of Death: 15/12/1941. Age: 21. HMS Galatea. Son of John and Catherine Hughey, **Strabane**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 49

**JACKSON, James**

RN. Stoker 1st Class. D/KX 93097. Date of Death: 15/12/1941. Age: 25. HMS Galatea. His brother William was killed in action in HMS Dorsetshire. B Longshot, **Ballyclare**.

Son of Peter and Eliza A. Jackson, Ballyclare. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 53

**MATCHETT, Vivian 'Twinem'**

RN. Able Seaman. D/JX 184764. Date of Death: 15/12/1941. Age: 20. H.M.S. Galatea. Son of Frances Ernest and Mary Elizabeth Matchett, of **Hillsborough**. He was one of 12 siblings, and was interested in pigeon racing. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 47

**McHERRIE, John**

RN. Stoker 1st Class. D/SKX 38. Date of Death: 15/12/1941. Age: 21. H.M.S. Galatea. Adopted son of Margaret Harris, **Banbridge**. Seapatrik Parish WM. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 53

**McLAUGHLIN, Thomas**

A.B. D/JX 144906. HMS Galatea. Died 15/12/1941. Age 20 years. Mediterranean. Son of Barney and Ruth McLaughlin of **Limavady**. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 47

**MOORE, Hamilton Johnston Leader**

RM. Private. PLY/X 3263. HMS Galatea. Died 15/12/1941. **Belfast**.

**STINSON, Frederick Albert**

RN. Leading signalman. D/JX 153410. Died 15/12/1941. Age 20. HMS Galatea. Son of Samuel Robert and Daisy Kathleen Stinson, Clonavon Place North, **Ballymena**. Plymouth Naval Memorial. Panel 50. Ballymena WM

# remembrance ni

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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 [houstonmckelvey@mac.com](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

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