

Brave Report



HMS Peterel

Castledawson seaman was in first ship to be sunk by Japanese

Bill Tipping, an Able Seaman from Castledawson, was aboard the first RN ship to be sunk by the Japanese in World War II. He was serving in HMS Peterel, a river

RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance

gunboat assigned to the China station. Peterel's mission on the Yangtse river was to protect British interests in the bund, an international settlement of European nations, which had long been established in Shanghai, China.

At the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 many ships and personnel from the Royal Navy's China Squadron were recalled to home waters, or sent to the Mediterranean. A number of river gunboats were considered of limited value and these were laid up locally. HMS Peterel, was retained in Shanghai to provide a token British military presence that it was hoped would dissuade the Japanese (who had already occupied most of the city) from moving against the International Settlement there. Her crew was reduced to 21 and 19 locally recruited Chinese. She was moored in the pool of Shanghai (off the French Concession). With her reduced complement, she was capable of steaming for only a limited period of time and her main armament had been disabled to lessen her value to the Japanese in the event of capture. Her captain, (62-year-old Temporary Lieutenant Stephen Polkinghorn RNR) was under orders to scuttle the vessel should the Japanese attack.

HMS Peterel was launched in 1927. Originally armed with 2x3" AA guns & 8xmachine guns, she was disarmed in January 1941. In December 1941, when the Japanese land forces entered Shanghai's International Settlement, there was a large build up of Japanese naval forces in the area. At around 4:20am local time on 08/12/1941 news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a few hours earlier, began filtering through to Shanghai. HMS Peterel was notified of the attack by Commander Kennedy from the



Bill Tipping

British Consulate and the ship was called to battle stations.

Japanese marines boarded the US Navy river gunboat, USS Wake. She surrendered without a shot being fired (the only US Navy ship to surrender during World War II). The Japanese later commissioned her into their navy, as the Tataru and subsequently gave her to its puppet reorganized National Government of China based in Nanjing.

[RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance](#)

Although Japan had not declared war on Great Britain, Japanese marines also boarded the *Peterel* to demand her surrender. Polkinghorn attempted to stall for time, in order for the demolition fuses to be lit and the code books to be passed down a special chute in order to be burned in the boiler room.

When his attempts failed, Polkinghorn told them to "Get off my bloody ship!" The Japanese disembarked and almost immediately the Japanese cruiser Izumo, an accompanying gunboat and Japanese shore batteries in the French Concession opened fire at almost point-blank range. Despite being outnumbered and hopelessly outgunned, the RN crew of HMS *Peterel* returned fire, using small arms and the deck-mounted Lewis machine guns, (the breechblocks from her 3-inch guns having been removed and taken to the RN dockyard in Hong Kong). The RN crew inflicted several casualties on the Japanese before *Peterel* capsized and drifted from its mooring under heavy fire. The Japanese machine gunned both the surviving Royal Navy and locally recruited Chinese crewmen in the water.

Of the British crew of 22, 18 were on board *Peterel* at the time of the attack. Six of them were killed by the Japanese; they have no known graves and it is unclear whether their bodies were recovered from the water. 12 Royal Navy crew survived, some sought refuge on a neutral Panamanian-registered merchant vessel, the SS *Marizion*. In violation of international law, the Japanese boarded the ship and took the survivors prisoner. The number of casualties suffered by the locally recruited non-combatant Chinese crew and the fate of any survivors at the hands of the Japanese is unknown,

(under a directive ratified on 05/08/1937 by Emperor Hirohito, the Japanese removed the constraints of international law on the treatment of Chinese prisoners by its military).



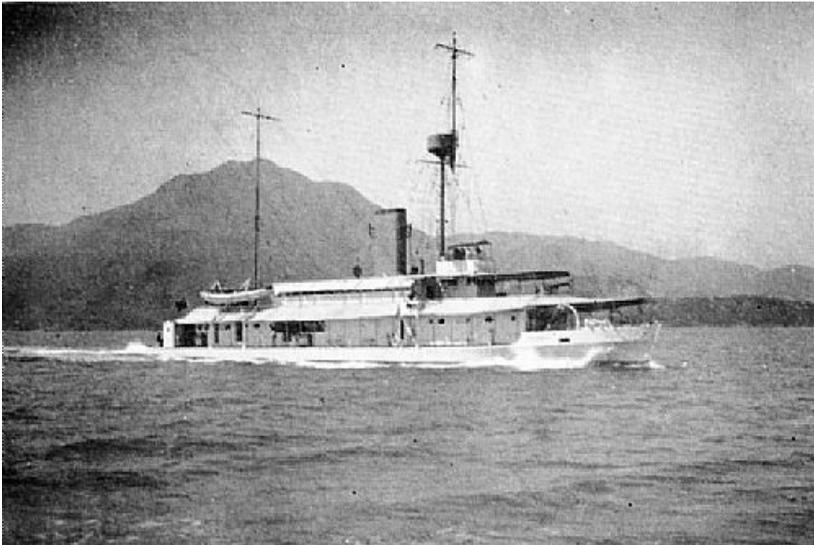
The Royal Navy survivors from HMS Peterel (including Polkinghorn), were moved amongst the Hongchow, Kiang Wang and Woosung internment camps in China. Ongoing supplies received from the British Residents Association (Shanghai) and the International Red Cross were critical to the survival of those interned. On 09/05/1945 the inmates at Kiang Wang were moved to camps in Japan itself.

Three of the crew of HMS Peterel were onshore during the Japanese attack; two were captured but the third (PO

[RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance](#)

Telegraphist James Cuming), remained at large in Shanghai for the duration of the war, working for a Sino-American spy ring. "The Lonely Battle", an account of Cuming's tale, was written by Desmond Wettern in 1960.

Polkinghorn survived his three years and nine months in captivity. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in Shanghai. The citation (published in The London Gazette on 23/10/1945), reads "For great courage, determination and tenacity in fighting his ship, HMS *Peterel*, when attacked by overwhelming Japanese forces at Shanghai on 8th December 1941".



For the year following the attack family believed that he had been killed

Bill Tipping had enlisted in 1937. After the attack on Peterel he became a prisoner of war. However his family

RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance

for the year following the attack believed that he had been killed. A memorial service was held in a church in his home town. Then the family received notification from the Red Cross that he was a prisoner. When Bill returned he was a shadow of his former self. He had suffered ill treatment and witnessed atrocities. Bill recalled how the POW's had to sleep with their heads towards the centre of their accommodation for fear of the Japanese bayoneting them during the night. His release came after the USA took the drastic step of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan - a sight which Bill witnessed, albeit from afar.

After ten months of his release Bill migrated to the USA and later settled in Brampton, near Toronto in Canada where his sister Betty resided. He later married. He died on Christmas Eve 1990 following a long battle against cancer. A special memorial service was organised by Canadian Legion 210.

In December 2013 HMS Daring (a Royal Navy Type 45 destroyer) visited Shanghai and its crew participated in a HMS Peterel Commemoration Service.

Witnessed Churchill and Roosevelt's historic meeting

Ordinary Seaman **Alan McIvor from Desertmartin** was one of the crew of HMS Prince of Wales when Churchill and Roosevelt met on the ship in August 1941. In Desertmartin Parish News of November 1997 an article

'The Story Behind the Hymn' featured Onward Christian Soldiers.

Mrs Joan Hill from Carrickfergus, later wrote to the magazine, "My brother Alan McIvor was one of the crew of HMS Prince of Wales and well remembers that day in August 1941. He was there on the quarter-deck, standing right beside Churchill and Roosevelt. On that day, he and the rest of the crew little knew what was in store for them a few months later and the hymn sheets they were singing from and worse, a large number of them themselves, would end up on the bottom of the South China Sea. On 10th December 1941 the Prince of Wales was torpedoed by the Japanese and sank a short time later with great loss of life."

Ashes scattered in the South China sea

Alan survived and kept faith with his shipmates who did not. In December 2006 he travelled to Liverpool to attend the yearly memorial service in the cathedral for those who went down with HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse. He also laid a wreath at the Belfast Cenotaph on the anniversary of the battle of the Somme in July 2006. The Royal Navy affords all the veterans of the sunken ships the honour of scattering their ashes over the site in the China Seas. On the 10th December 2007, the anniversary of the sinking of the ships, Alan's ashes were scattered there. Alan was named after an uncle who was lost in World War I. Born Desertmartin 14/06/1923. Died 29/07/2007. Desertmartin Parish Church

CASTLEDAWSON ROLL OF HONOUR - WORLD WAR I

CHAMBERLAIN, Henry Neville

RN. Lieutenant. Died 16/7/1918. Age 31. Serving on HMS Anchusa, a mine-sweeping vessel, which was torpedoed by a German submarine, U54, off the North Coast of Ireland. The majority of the eighty officers, men & boys were lost. HMS Anchusa was launched in 1917, an Anchusa Class Convoy Sloop, also known as a Fleet Sweeping Sloop, Flower Class. The Royal Navy Flower Class consisted of 39 vessels, deliberately built to designs which gave them the look of merchant ships, so that as well as mine-sweeping, they could serve as Q ships at need. HN Chamberlain lived in Carrickfergus before joining the Royal Navy. B Carrickfergus 1887. Son of the Rev George and D M Chamberlain of The Rectory. Brother of Rev AP Chamberlain, Rector of Castledawson. Brother in law of Rev CG Manning, CF, MC., later Archdeacon of Down. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 29. RBAI WM. Carrickfergus WM, Castledawson WM

DONNELLY, Joseph

RNAS. Armoured Car Division. Petty Officer. F/9833. HMS President II. Died 11/06/1916. Age 28. Accidentally drowned in Russia. Son of Thomas and Margaret Donnelly, Alexander Park Avenue, Belfast. Formerly from Castledawson. Buried Rostov [Bratski] Cemetery. Haidar Pasha Memorial, Turkey

CASTLEDAWSON WORLD WAR I - THEY SERVED

JOHNSTONE, William

RN. Stoker. Castledawson - PCI RH

RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance

CASTLEDAWSON - WORLD WAR II - THEY SERVED

CAMPBELL, Joseph

RN. Petty Officer. Curran Presbyterian Church RH

McIVOR, Alan

Ordinary Seaman. 29451. Survivor from HMS Prince of Wales.
Born Desertmartin 14/06/1923. Died 29/07/2007.

TIPPING, William Gamble

RN. AB. Enlisted 1937-38. In HMS Peterel when sunk
by Japanese. POW. Died Canada 1990. Son of David
Tipping, contractor, Castledawson,

Acknowledgments: Sam Hutton; Castledawson
RBL; Force Z Survivors; Mid-Ulster Mail; Wikipedia

HELP REQUESTED

Please send names of Ex RN/RM/WRNS who served in
either of the world wars. Details also appreciated.

CIRCULATION - Please share 'Brave Report' with your
former service colleagues - and we will post direct to
them if they simply send an e-mail to:
houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com, placing Brave Report
in the message bar, and give their name and former arm
of service, and if they are members of the RNA or RBL,
having knowledge of their branch would be appreciated.
There are specific areas where we need information
from!

RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance

PUBLICATION NOTES

Please note all the material in Brave Report is copyright.

Brave Report is collated and published by The Very Rev. Dr Houston McKelvey, OBE QVRM TD.

Dr McKelvey served as chaplain for 29 years with 102/105 (Ulster & Scottish) Regiment, Royal Artillery TA; for 20 years as Chaplain to the RBL - Northern Ireland Area, and for a period as chaplain to the Belfast Branch of the Burma Star Association. He was involved in the life of HMS Caroline and HMS Hibernia. He was appointed an Honorary Chaplain to the RNR. He is a Past President of QUB Combined Services Club.