



remembrance ni



Five Belfast men lost escorting largest convoy to Murmansk on February 25, 1944

HMS Maharatta was an M-class destroyer which served during World War II. Begun as *Marksman*, she was damaged while under construction, and dismantled to be rebuilt on a new slipway. She was launched as *Mahratta* in

1942, completed in 1943, and quickly pressed into service. After a short but busy career in the North Atlantic and Arctic, largely guarding merchant convoys, she was torpedoed and sunk on 25 February 1944. Five men from Belfast were lost.

She was laid down on 21 January 1940 but the incomplete ship was blown off the slipway during an air raid in May 1941. *Marksman* was to have been the lead ship of the M-class destroyers, and the class was sometimes known as the *Marksman* class. Damage sustained by *Marksman* was so bad that she had to be dismantled and transferred to an alternative site. The new ship was laid down on 18 August 1941, but she was renamed *Mahratta* at her launch in July 1942, after the Maratha Empire of India, as a recognition of the financial support given by India to the war effort.

Mahratta was adopted by the people of Walsall, who held a “Warship Week” from 7–14 February 1942, aiming to raise £700,000 – the cost of a warship. She was completed on 8 April 1943 and entered service on that date. During trials in May 1943 HMS *Mahratta* escorted RMS Queen Mary part way across the Atlantic.

Duties

Operations: FJ, 2-6-1943. FH, 8-6-1943. Camera, 7-7-1943. SF, 30-7-1943. Governor, 26-7-1943. Lorry or Lozry, 26-8-1943.

Sailed with Convoys:

FR, 20-10-1943 - 28-10-1943.

RA-54A, 1-11-1943 - 14-11-1943.

JW-54A, 15-11-1943 - 24-11-1943.

RA-54B, 26-11-1943 - 9-12-1943.

JW-56B, 22-1-1944 - 1-2-1944.

RA-56, 3-2-1944 - 11-2-1944.

JW-57, 20-2-1944 - 28-2-1944.

She took part in six operations and escorted seven convoys. The operations included the relief of the garrison at Spitzbergen, Norway. Another was a speed run to Murmansk, Russia. In July 1943 she was part of an attempt to lure the Tirpitz out of her Norwegian base.

In September 1943, *Mahratta* was sent to the Mediterranean with HMS Matchless to escort HMS Valiant to Plymouth for repairs. *Matchless* broke down on the way back, and was taken in tow by *Mahratta*. The chain later broke, and after this *Mahratta* rescued some survivors from a Coastal Command Halifax aircraft that had been shot down by a German U-boat. They had spent eleven days in the water. *Mahratta* arrived in Plymouth on 11/10/1943 and later that month sailed north again to Scapa Flow and Seidisfjord to escort Convoy JW 54A as part of Operation *FR*.

Convoy JW - 57

Local escorts which sailed on the 22nd February, were the minesweepers HYDRA, LOYALTY, ORESTES and RATTLESNAKE, and the corvettes BURDOCK and DIANELLA. Close by the escorts from the 20th to the 28th

LOSS OF DESTROYER MAHRATTA

The Board of Admiralty regret to announce that the destroyer H.M.S. Mahratta (Lieut.-Commander E. A. F. Drought, D.S.C., R.N.) has been lost. The next-of-kin of casualties have been informed.

✱ Lieutenant-Commander Drought was awarded the D.S.C. in 1941 for distinguished services in effecting the withdrawal of troops from the beaches of Greece. He has been in command of the Quorn and the Mendip, and of the Mahratta since February, 1943. The Mahratta (formerly the Marksman) was one of the Laforey class and was built at Greenock.

February were the destroyers BEAGLE, BOADICEA, KEPPEL and WALKER, and the corvettes were BLUEBELL, CAMELLIA, LOTUS and RHODODENDRON.

On the 22nd February the Flag ship, cruiser BLACK PRINCE joined with the destroyers **MAHRATTA**, MATCHLESS, METEOR, MILNE, OBEDIENT, OFFA, ONSLAUGHT, ORIBI, SAVAGE, SERAPIS, SWIFT,

VERULAM and VIGILANT. All these ships stayed until the 28th February, except **MAHRATTA**, because on the 25th February she was struck by two T5 Gnat torpedoes fired by U-990, off the coast of Norway. She sank and only 16 of the 236 crew survived.

Also on the 22nd February the destroyers WANDERER and WATCHMAN, and frigates BYRON and STRULE, escorted the carrier CHASER to join the convoy, they stayed until the 26th February. Cruiser cover was provided by BERWICK and JAMAICA on the 26th and 27th February.

Although *Mahratta* was lost, the convoy was a success. It was the largest convoy ever sent to Russia. The convoy arrived at Kola Inlet on the 28th February.

A memorial to those who lost their lives on the Arctic Convoys was unveiled at Murmansk in 1991, on the 50th anniversary of the first Arctic Convoy.

See Roll of Honour - February 25

Roll of Honour - February 24

WW2

1941

+COCHRANE, Quentin Alexander

RNR. Sub-Lieutenant (E). HMS Manatee. Died 24/02/1941.

Age 45. Son of William and Elizabeth Cochrane; husband of Eileen Cochrane, Larne Harbour. Liverpool Naval Memorial.

Panel 2

+McCARTHY, John

RN. Able Seaman. C/SSX 23954. Date of Death: 24/02/1941. Age: 20. H.M.S. Dainty. Ship sunk by German bombers as it left Tobruk harbour. Loss of 33 lives. Son of Joseph and Agnes McCarthy, Lurgan. Chatham Naval Memorial, Panel 43

1942

+BOAL, William James

RNVR. FAA. Prob T/ Sub-Lieut (A). DCM. 755 Squadron based at HMS Kestrel, Worthy Down, Winchester. Died 24/02/1942. Age 47. Whilst serving as a pilot instructor there was a collision with another plane. Served in the ranks of 9th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in World War 1. DCM 01/01/1919, France. Son of Robert and Jane Boal. Husband to Margaret Boal, Tobermore. St Columba's Church of Ireland graveyard, Draperstown, Co. Londonderry.

+DALTON, Edward Charles

RNVR. FAA. 750 Squadron. Lieutenant (A). Died 24/02/1942. Age 39. HMS Goshawk. In WW1, aged 17 he joined the RFC. After the war he took up the cause of civil aviation being associated with Mr.E. Hillman during the early stages of Hillman Aviation. He was a member of several well known aero clubs in Ireland and England. Shortly after the outbreak of WW2, he was commissioned in the RNVR and at the time of his death was serving in 750 Squadron which was shore based in Trinidad at Piarco Savannah and part of No 1 Observers School. When returning from an exercise flying a Blackburn Shark, his aircraft collided with a Grumman Goose. Everyone aboard both aircraft was killed.

Son of Joseph and Mary Ann Dalton, husband to Helen Betty Dalton of Belfast. Port of Spain (St. James) Military Cemetery.

1945

+SCOTT, John Malseed

RNVR. Died 24/02/1945. Age 36. HMS Ellesmere - an armed escort which was torpedoed. Principal of Darkley school, Co. Armagh. One of his pupils, Patrick Knott, was lost in HMS Glorious 08/06/1940. Son of Joseph and Louisa Scott. Lowestoft Naval Memorial, Panel 16. Whitehead WM

Roll of Honour - February 25

WW1

1915

+KELLY, John Joseph

Irish Guards. 1st Bn. Private. 4876. Died 25/02/1915. Aged 26. Brother of James Kelly, of 67, St. Columb's Wells, Londonderry. Bethune Town Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France

WW2

1942

+GIRVAN, Thomas

Royal Artillery. Bombardier. 1486429. Died 25/02/1942. Aged 51. 315 Anti Aircraft Battery. Husband of Amelia

Girvan (Nee Patton) of Whitehouse. Greencastle (St Mary)
Roman Catholic Churchyard

1943

+BEATTIE, John Harwood

RN. Warrant Writer Officer. HMS Victory. Died 25/02/1943. Age 46. He had been home four weeks prior to his death and received the congratulations of friends on his recent promotion. He had 25 years' service. Served in HMS Birmingham, Fearless and Inconstant. In 1921 he was promoted Second Writer while serving in HMS Curacoa. He served as Captain's Writer in HMS Cornflower whilst on the China station from 1931 - 34. An enthusiastic cricketer he was a brother of Alfie Beattie a well known Waringstown cricketer and cousin of Ruric and Jack Harwood also members of the club. Husband to Evelyn May Beattie, Waringstown. Son of Samuel John and Elizabeth Beattie, Waringstown. Holy Trinity, Waringstown, C of I Churchyard. Belfast Weekly Telegraph 05/03/1943.

+MAGUIRE, Anthony

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 6th Bn. Fusilier. 6984981. Died 25/02/1943. Aged 22. Son of Patrick Joseph and Julia Jane Maguire, of Hollybrook, Co. Fermanagh. Medjez-el-Bab War Cemetery, Tunisia

+CROCKER, William Robert

Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. 1st Bn. Fusilier. 6976088. Died 25/02/1943. Aged 32. Son of Robert and Mary Anne Crocker, of Belfast, Northern Ireland; husband of Elizabeth Crocker. of Belfast. Medjez-el-Bab Memorial, Tunisia

1945

+CRAWFORD, Richard St. John Trevor

RAFVR. Flight Sergeant. 1073650. Died 22/05/1945. Aged 22. Son of Robert James Crawford and Ruth Dorothy Crawford of Belfast. Carnmoney Cemetery East

HMS MAHARRATA

+FULTON, David

RN. AB. D/JX148901. HMS Maharatta. Died 25/02/1944. Age 25. Son of Hugh and Mary Fulton, Belfast. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 86

+HICKS, George

RN. Leading Seaman. D/SSX 22741. Died 25/02/1944. Age 26. HMS Mahratta. Son of Robert and Evelyn Hicks, Belfast. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 85

+JONES, Samuel Edwin

RN. Seaman. D/JX 649439. Died 25/02/1944. Age 19. HMS Mahratta. Son of Samuel Edward and Rebecca Amelia Jones, Coutraí St., Belfast. (Belfast Weekly Telegraph 24/03/1944). Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 88

+KEAG, Samuel

RN. Officers' Steward. D/LX25821. Died 25/02/1944. Age 20. HMS Mahratta. Son of David and Annie Keag, Gaffikin St., Belfast. (Belfast Weekly Telegraph 24/03/1944). Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 91

+NEILLY, Albert

RN. Petty Officer Telegraphist. D/JX153420. Died 25/02/1944. Age 37. HMS Mahratta. Son of Joseph B. and Martha Neilly, Ogilvie St., Belfast. (Belfast Weekly Telegraph 24/03/1944). Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 88

1946

+BONNAR, William McKee

RAFVR. Squadron Leader. 108613. Died 25/02/1946. Aged 28. QUB, MB, BCh, BAO 1939, MD 1942. Son of Samuel and Elizabeth Ellen Bonnar, of Carnmoney. Kirkee War Cemetery, India. QUB RH

On this day - February 24

1940

Following General von Manstein's recommendation, the German invasion plans of Western Europe are revised to send armored forces through the "impassable" Ardennes Forest.

1941

The 2-engine Manchester bomber is used for the first time during an RAF raid against Brest.

Reconnaissance elements of the German 5th Light Division clash with British forces for the first time in Africa, at Nofilia near El Agheila.

US Navy survey ship Bear and motor ship North Star arrive in Antarctica to evacuate remaining US personnel from Byrd's 1939-40 expedition.

1942

Parliament begins a two day debate on the conduct of the war.

USS Enterprise attacks the Japanese garrison on Wake Island.

1944

Hitler speaks to a closed door meeting of Nazi Party leaders and activists at the Hofbrauhaus in Munich on the occasion of the anniversary of the proclamation of the Party Program in 1920. Hitler refuses Goebbels requests that the speech be broadcast and even prohibits any mention of it in the newspapers.

'Big Week' continues with a co-ordinated RAF and USAAF attacks on the Schweinfurt ball-bearing factory.

1945

A haggard and aged-looking Hitler addresses his Gauleiters and Reichsleiters for what proves to be the last time in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the Nazi Party program. Perhaps sensitive to the likelihood of public scepticism and derision, he refuses to allow the speech to be broadcast or even reported to the public at large.

A German counter attack wipes out the Russian Hron bridgehead over the Danube to the northwest of Budapest.

German U-boats sink 8 ships and 2 destroyers from a convoy bound for the Russian port of Murmansk.

U.S. Marines capture a second airfield on Iwo Jima.

Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Maher Pasha declares war on the Axis and is immediately assassinated in the parliament chamber.

On this day - February 25

1941

British Commando's land on the Italian held Island of Castelorizzo in the Dodecanese.

The British submarine, HMS Upholder, sinks the Italian Cruiser Armando Diaz to the southwest of Malta.

British Nigerian troops of the 11th African Division occupy Mogadishu, the capital of Italian Somaliland, having advanced up the coast.

The 12th African Division pushes up the river Juba in Italian Somaliland towards the Abyssinian border town of Dolo.

First delivery of Martin B-26 Marauder medium bombers to US Army Air Force.

1942

After the withdrawal of ABDA HQ from Java, Wavell himself now leaves for Australia.

The debate in the House of Commons comes to a close with many speakers being sharply critical of government policy, with the bombing of Germany being called in to question.

1943

The RAF begins a round the clock bombing campaign in Tunisia, with 2,000 raids in the next 48 hours.

First time US Eighth Air Force (based in England) and US Fifteenth Air Force (based in Italy) bomb the same target—Regensburg, Germany.

U-boats break off attack on Allied North Atlantic convoy ON-166; 15 of 49 ships have been lost since [February 21](#).

US reoccupies abandoned Kasserine Pass.

In New Zealand, Japanese POWs attempt escape; 48 POWs and one guard killed.

1944

Convoy JW-57 (43 ships and 19 escorts) sailing from Loch Ewe to the Kola Peninsula, is attacked on 25 February off Norway. One destroyer, HMS Mahratta, is sunk by U-990.

U.S. forces destroy 135 Japanese planes in Marianas and Guam.

1945

Turkey declares war against Germany.

400 RAF bombers carry out attacks against Dortmund and Rheine.

US Fifth Fleet carrier aircraft and B-29 bombers strike Tokyo in devastating raid.

[US M26 Pershing tanks](#) are first used in combat in Europe, by the US 3rd Armored Division near the Roer River.

Acknowledgments

CWGC

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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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