

Chatham Naval Memorial Extension



CWGC
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In 1946 it was decided that the existing naval memorials should be extended in order to commemorate the naval dead of the Second World War who had no grave but the sea. The architect of the Second World War extension at Chatham was Sir Edward Maufe, who also designed the naval extensions at Plymouth and Portsmouth, as well as the air forces memorial at Runnymede. The additional sculpture was designed by Charles Wheeler, William McMillan and Edmond Burton, and the Extension was unveiled on 15 October 1952 by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. The Extension records the names of over 10,000 men and women of the United Kingdom who died as a result of service in the Royal Navy during the Second World War.

The War at Sea, 1939 – 1945

When war broke out in 1939, Britain was a maritime superpower with a vast overseas empire to which it was connected by the largest merchant fleet and most powerful navy in the world. During the course of the conflict, the Royal Navy made a vital contribution to the British war effort by safeguarding the importation of food and war material and by transporting Allied troops to the fighting fronts in Europe, Africa and Asia. Hundreds of thousands of men and women joined the navy during the war, with manpower strength rising from just 129,000 in the 1930s to over 860,000 in 1945. They served in a wide variety of roles and vessels, from converted fishing trawlers to submarines and immense battleships and aircraft carriers.



IMM A 1357

Members of the Woman's Royal Naval Service (the Wrens), 21 of whom are commemorated on this memorial, served mostly in shore establishments and played a key role in organising and supporting the convoy systems that protected Allied shipping. In all, almost 60,000 naval personnel died as a result of their service between 1939 and 1945.

The Second World War saw no major fleet actions between the Royal Navy and the German Kriegsmarine but there were numerous encounters between British and German vessels, and between Commonwealth and Japanese ships in the Indian and

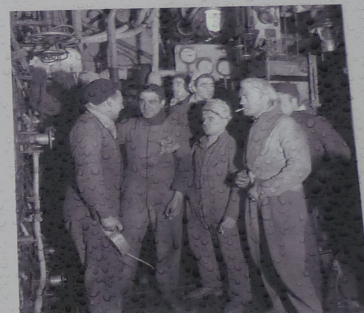
Pacific Oceans. During one such action, fought off the coast of Ceylon in April 1942, the Japanese sank two British cruisers, an aircraft carrier and several other warships.

Whether patrolling British coastal waters, attacking Axis submarines and shipping, taking part in seaborne invasions such as the Normandy landings, or escorting merchant vessels around the globe, men and women at sea lived with the constant threat of a torpedo strike. Over one quarter of those commemorated on the Second World War panels at Chatham lost their lives when their ships were attacked by U-boats. This includes eight Wrens who died when their transport ship was torpedoed en route to Gibraltar in August 1941, and another nine from the SS Khedive Ismail, sunk off the Maldives on 12 February 1944, on which more than 70 female personnel lost their lives.

The Battle of the Atlantic, a struggle to protect vital sea lanes between Britain and the US, lasted for the duration of the war. The fall of France in 1940 gave the German forces direct access to the Atlantic and U-boats wreaked havoc upon merchant and naval shipping until new technology, increased ship production and sophisticated signal intelligence turned the tide in the Allies' favour in 1943.

Among those commemorated here are naval personnel who were killed in accidents that occurred on or near the coasts of Britain and Ireland during the two world wars. The Second

World War panels at Chatham bear the names of most of the crew of HMS Curacao, which was struck by an ocean liner she was escorting off the coast of Co. Donegal in 1942, and 158 men who lost their lives when HMS Dasher exploded while moored in the Clyde in 1943.



IMM A 7253

Left: Supermarine Seafires on the deck of HMS Victorious with fellow aircraft carriers HMS Biter and HMS Avenger in the background, September 1942

Above: Stokers stand easy during boiler cleaning, HMS Curacao, January 1942

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The Commission is responsible for the commemoration of almost 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in 153 countries. For more information about the Commission, our work and how to search our records online visit www.cwgc.org. Enquiries are also welcome at our offices: **CWGC** Head Office Tel: +44 (0) 1628 507200 E-mail: casualty.enq@cwgc.org
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For more information about this location and some of those commemorated here, scan the QR code (right).

