

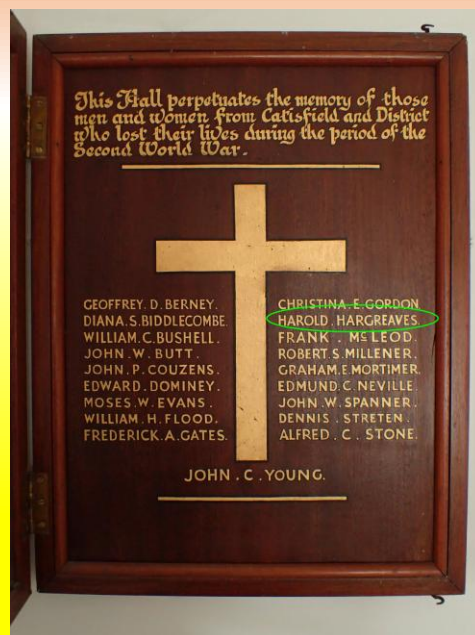
# Another (Amazing) Story

From the Plaque at the  
entrance to Catisfield  
Memorial Hall.

The Story of:  
Mr. Harold Hargreaves

From the researches of Doug Glading

Final2    Last update 14/10/2025



To DO:

Animate slides – transitions etc.    **Adjust all timings.....**

Revisit    simplify. Add to Notes

Operation Chariot

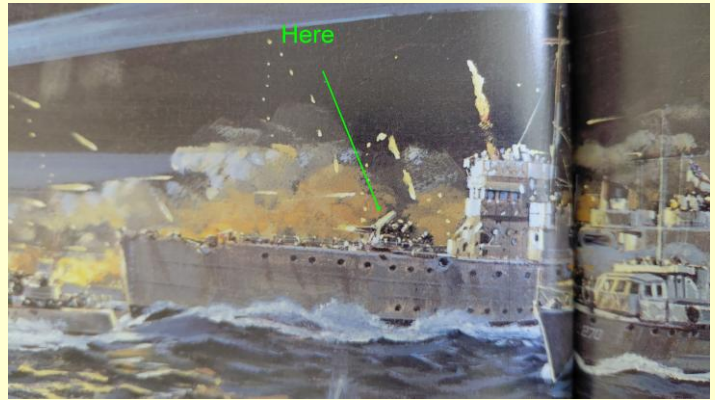
# The Daring Raid on St Nazaire

**One of the most dramatic attacks of WW2.**

**And at the very, very front.**

**From Catisfield.**

**Mr Harold Hargreaves, RN**



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You may have heard of 'Operation Chariot' – and forgotten the details.

Or it may be new to you.

## Operation Chariot

# The Night Raid

- Acting Gunner **Mr Harold Hargreaves** was the man firing the ship's (12-pounder) gun, with two loaders assisting.

- And he knew he was directly above hidden 4 tons of high-explosive.

- And that the (unpredictable) fuses were running.

- As the ship passed through the searchlights and many guns of the German defences.



Described as a “*Son et lumière from Hell*”

## Operation Chariot

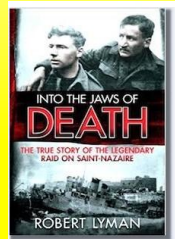
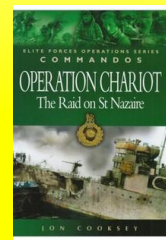
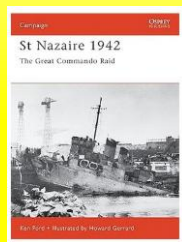
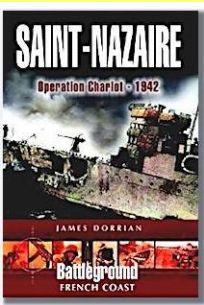
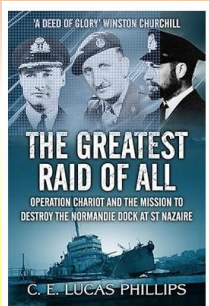
# Coverage

Many Books

Many Articles; Many Reports;

Films (fictionalised)

Documentaries (including a very good BBC one called *'The Greatest Raid of All'*)



4

I don't watch anything containing Jeremy Clarkson these day s- he's a real burke.

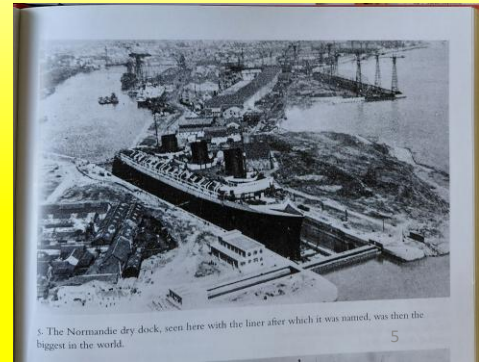
But he used to be a good journalist. Have managed to locate a location for the documentary he did (it's vanished from the BBC sites).

Very well done. No ego bits atall - just the story.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07Zd0Oy8JyQ>

## Operation Chariot

# The Reason for the Raid

- The huge German Battleship Tirpitz was lurking in a Norwegian Fjord.
- It would have been a major threat if it was allowed to move to the Western Atlantic.
- But it could only operate there if there were servicing capabilities
- And only St Nazaire had a dock big enough.... So had to be put out of operation



5. The Normandie dry dock, seen here with the liner after which it was named, was then the biggest in the world.

5

Picture shows the liner Normandie in the dry dock which was built for it.

## Operation Chariot

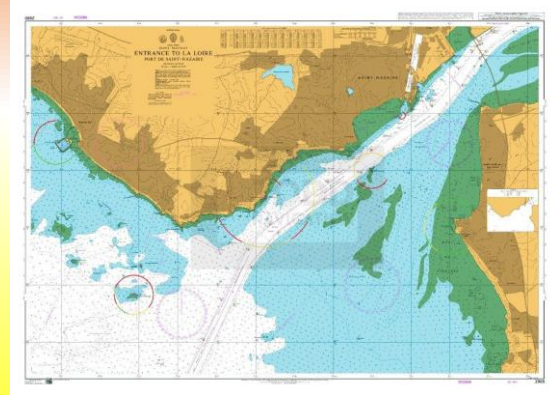
# St Nazaire

St Nazaire lies 6 miles up the shallow Loire Estuary.

With one dredged channel for shipping.

Protected by: Around large 28 guns, ranging from 75mm to 280mm, were positioned to defend the port against naval attacks.

Additionally, there were approximately 700 guns of various calibers, both fixed and mobile, including anti-aircraft guns, which could also be used against naval targets.



About 1,000 troops manned these defences, plus many more in and around the town.

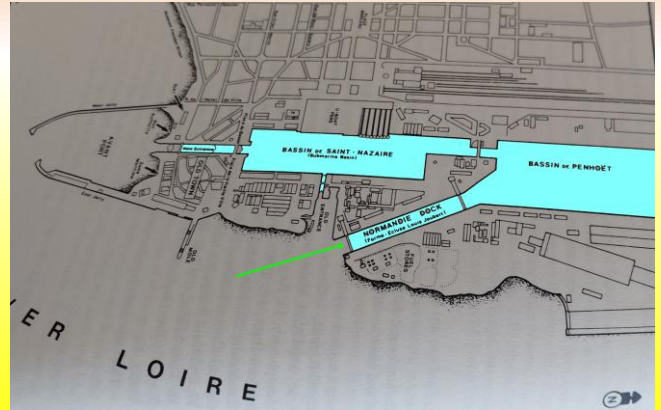
## Operation Chariot

# The Port

**The main target was the dry dock.** The docks included the dry-dock - 350 meters long by 50 meters wide and 16 m deep. With giant gates 9 m wide - too big for aircraft bombs.

There were three entrances to the inner docks.

Two could be attacked and the third could be hampered by attacking the gates and bridges there.



St Nazaire also housed Submarine Pens – also too substantial to bomb or attack.

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Use pointer

This was all before 'precision bombing' was introduced

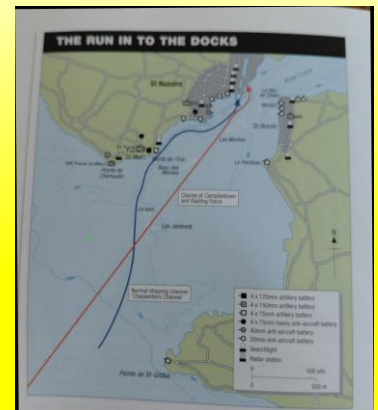


# The Plan

**Revised Plan:** One Destroyer to hit the gate (and land some commandos), rest of commandos to go in small fleet of Motor Launches.  
On a moonlit night. At high tide.

Ship to have 4 tons of high-explosive, very well concealed.

Fused by 2.5 hour pencil charges, and a backup fuse system



Lord Louis Mountbatten, chief of combined operations and responsible for raiding, approved the idea of launching a spectacular attack on the enemy's heavily-defended shore. Luckily the whole project caught the attention of Winston Churchill. Which helped it get through much scepticism.



# The Commandos

[illegible]

Priority group aboard the Destroyer, to attack the dry facilities such as pumps, winding gear etc.

Second on the Port flotilla of ML's, to destroy the 'Old Entrance' and swing bridge

Third on other flotilla, to attack the 'South Entrance' and to hold 'The Mole' for departure

## Just 2 hours ashore

Carefully planned about where each team would land and what each team would do.

## Operation Chariot

# The Preparation

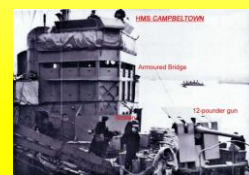
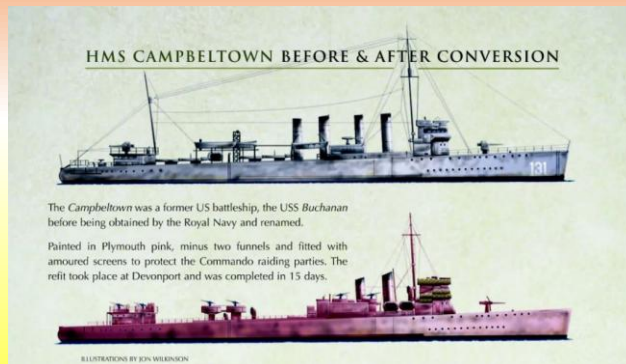
**Find** a (unwanted) Ship. The ex American 'Buchanan' became **HMS Campbeltown**.

**Convert it** – make it look like German 'Moewe' class, eg by removing 2 smokestacks.

Make as light as possible – eg remove main armaments and leave just **one 12-pounder gun**.

But add 2-foot high Quarter-inch armour plate vertically steel barrier on deck to protect commandos there. Who lay on their backs.

**Train commandos.** the King George the fifth dock at Southampton was built based on the St Nazaire one so the Commandos could study the gates and practice



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Shows how exposed Harold's gun was.

Aim was a draught of 11 feet.

You can see the vertical deck barriers. And the attempt to protect the bridge. The conversion was done very quickly – in 12 days.

## Operation Chariot

# The 'Small Boats'

The Operation had to use ML Motor Launches. These were the Fairmile type B of 112 feet long by 18 feet wide, 65 tons, and normally had a crew of 16 or so total. Cheap to built, with no armour.

They used high octane petrol and needed extra tanks, on the deck, for sufficient range to get there. *"Like riding astride a firework".*

Most of the motor launches would carry 15 commandos..

Four of the motor launches had two torpedo tubes each this included ML177



**MTB 74** had to be towed by Campbelltown as it was impossible to sail at the slower 15 knots speed of the task force MTP74 had special adaptation of torpedo tubes – they mounted far forward so could go over antitorpedo nets.



**MGB314** was used as the command centre, instead of Campbelltown, in case the ship grounded.



the motor launches (600 mile range – 900 mile return trip) had added fuel tanks on Deck with high octane fuel. The plan was that they would refill these tanks with seawater before the last stages - most did this.....

The launches were very prone to rolling - so the commandos (many had never been to sea) suffered badly from sea-sickness.

They were just constructed of wood - two layers of mahogany and one of calico in between. no armour at all to protect crew and commandos. Totally unsuited really.

One ML had been on loan to the Free French, so was flying the French flag.

## Operation Chariot

# The Approach



At 2 p.m. on the afternoon of March 26, the little armada set sail, pretending (for security) to be an anti-sub patrol. With full supplies for full mission, crew included cooks, stewards, even a NAAFI mart.

It comprised about 345 naval officers and ratings – 76 crewing the Cambeltown.

Only when en route were naval personnel told about mission – and those on Campbeltown learnt it was **'One Way'**. (Once this announced the troops apparently decided they might as well consume whatever food supplies they wanted....)

There were also medics, two French officers to liaise with locals, Intelligence (including a German civilian working for MI9!) and even two journalists.

*They crept over the shallows (Campbeltown grounding twice).*

*The **backup fuses** were set. The ship's concealed explosives were set to go off between 0500 and 0900 hours on the morning of March 28th*

12

On Campbeltown, there were about 78 commandos. About 50 travelled below decks, but about 30 went into the action lying on the deck, on their backs, so as to be ashore as quickly as possible.

*The force totalled 611, ominously replicating the 600 men who rode "Into the jaws of death, into the mouth of hell" in Tennyson's celebrated description of The Charge of the Light Brigade.*

## Operation Chariot

# The Entrance

The cloud cover went to 10/10, so the RAF bombers unable to bomb and distract defences

There were challenges from the defences, but the force responded with correct German codes

**01:27:** The German flags were then replaced with White Ensigns when the fleet was **still two miles** from its target.

The Germans responded with intense shelling and gun fire during the final 15 minutes of the run in, during which half the men aboard the MLs were either killed or wounded.

A survivor said "It was as if every gun in world was firing at us"



13

Last two miles indicated by ellipse

Of 6 launches attempting to come alongside the fortified Old Mole, only one succeeded in putting men ashore. At the second landing site in the Old Entrance, only two troop-carrying MLs managed to disembark their men.

Only at the dry dock was success achieved in full with *Campbeltown*, by dint of her steel hull and her officers' skill, landing her Commandos.

(NB some were already injured by then)

## Operation Chariot

# The Run In

Mr Hargreaves and his loaders started firing the 12-pounder at the searchlights and defences. *( As she is the most prominent ship, fully illuminated by powerful searchlights, HMS Campbeltown is repeatedly hit. The helmsman and his replacement are killed. )*

Walter Rainbird, a 19 year old cook, loaded the shells and an Officers' Steward loaded the cordite charge

At 500 yards out Mr Hargreaves team are told to go below.



HMS Campbeltown at St Nazaire, 27 March 1942: Wilkinson, Norman Mid 20th century © National Maritime Museum Collections

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The people manning the gun included Walter Rainbird, a 19 year old cook, who loaded the shells and an Officers Stewart who loaded the cordite charge .

We think the steward may have been **Petty Officer Steward Albert Edward LOVE**. He lived at North Boarhunt. He was killed in action.



## Operation Chariot

# The Operation

At 01:34 hours speeding up to 20kts, *Campbeltown* strikes the 'Normandie' dock caisson dead-centre, her velocity carrying her over and across its nine metre width - **exactly as planned**. But 4 minutes late!

The photos show the damage sustained during the approach – yet the explosives were not triggered.

Those commandos able to move, poured off, and set about sabotaging the dock pumps, gate winding gear etc.



This rather desolate Bundesarchiv image taken shortly before she exploded with heavy loss of life to German personnel on board and in the immediate dry dock area, shows the extreme precision with which Campbeltown was driven into the outer caisson of the 'Normandie' dock. With her bow astride the gate the way was clear for her commandos parties to scramble down the ladders shown on either side. The image also shows two men standing casually beside the 12 pounder gun-stand, just a handful of metres above the ship's undiscovered four-plus ton (total weight) demolition charge.....

**Mr Hargreaves set about his next task – setting the scuttling charges to flood the stern, so the ship could not be towed off.**

**He then helped the doctor with the wounded crew and commandos**

15

A number of commandos on the Campbeltown were killed or injured during the approach. As were some crew.

In the four minutes around the ramming by the Campbeltown eight of the launches were destroyed in the channel.

Most of the eight craft destroyed suffered greater than 80% fatalities.

So many of the secondary missions did not happen.

The main fusing of the hidden explosives were said to be 2.5-hour timers, triggered by a secret switch on the PO's wardroom. The wardroom was hit by a shell during the run-in – without triggering the bomb. You can see the shellhole below the gun.



Operation Chariot used unsuitable ships - wooden [Motor Launches](#) and an antiquated [ex-American World War One destroyer now in British Service](#) - with inadequate weapons, short of ammunition, denied effective gun or air support, and yet determined absolutely to sacrifice themselves to save their Merchant Navy comrades from destruction by *Tirpitz'* s massive guns.

## Operation Chariot

# The Exit

### Summary of Small Boats

**Sunk:** MTB314, ML298, ML447, ML 457, ML192, ML262, ML267, ML268, ML177,

**Scuttled:** after transferring to rescue ships :ML156\*, ML446\*, ML 270\*

**Captured:** ML306

**Returned:**

ML307 & 443 failed to land commandos.

ML341 engine trouble, returned.

ML160 rescued crew of ML447 and returned.

**MTB 74** deployed her torpedoes against the foundations of the 'old entrance' dock gate. They were delayed action and exploded ....  
. She carried 26 men on board, but stopped to pick up two more survivors, but was hit. Only 3 of the 34 aboard survived.

**The HQ Ship MGB 314** went to the stern of Cambeltown and took on about 30 wounded crew and commandos. It was heavily damaged off St Nazaire and was scuttled to prevent capture.

**ML177** also went to the stern. **Mr Hargreaves helped the ships doctor, Surgeon Lt W. James ("Jock") Winthrope RCNVR, to load about 30 more navy and commando personnel**

ML177 overloaded, so fired off its torpedoes to lessen weight, and set off at 20 knots down the estuary for the open sea.

However about 3 miles out ML177 engines were hit and she stopped, a searchlight got them, they had no steering and then they caught fire and sank. Two people are thought to have survived.

**There is no record of how Mr Hargreaves and the doctor died - whether it was from gunshot or the waters .**

## Operation Chariot

# The Results

Come the morning **Cambeltown** was firmly stuck on top of the dock gate. *(Some of the captured Brits were marched past it – without giving away that there was a huge explosive charge hidden in the destroyer's bow).*



**Just before noon** local time a party of around 40 German officers was being shown around the ship. And many sightseers were lining the dock.

**Then it blew** – the huge explosion killed or wounded an estimated 360 Germans and locals -- Bits of dead found 400 yds away on roof of the sub pens....

And the dock gate was blown in, putting the dock out of action for the rest of the war. And the winding gear and pumps had been destroyed by the commandos.

**So main objective attained.**

## Operation Chariot

# The Cost

Figures vary

As the main operation ended, about seventy commandos, more than half of them wounded, had to be left behind.

There were no launches to take them.

They were ordered to break up into small groups and try to make it to the Spanish border - **5 did.**

Of the 241 Commandos who took part, 59 were posted as killed or missing and 109 captured.

18

## Operation Chariot

# The Cost Summary

215 were captured; most of them wounded.

Only 228 of those on the raid made their way back to England.

85 Royal Navy personnel were killed or missing and a further 20+ captured.

The RAF lost 9

**Out of a total of 612 individuals involved (Navy and Army) on the sea operation 169 men died** - mainly in the burning waters of the estuary, **101** of them having no known grave.

19

Of the 611 who sailed into the Loire on March 28, 1942, 169 lost their lives and of those, 105 were members of The Royal Navy and 64 were ...

. Of the 625 personnel involved 169 were lost, mainly in the burning waters of the estuary, 101 of them having no known grave. Over 200 were made prisoners of war but 239 were able to return to England.

Of the 621 *men* who departed Falmouth on the afternoon of March 26, 1942 (264 Commandos and 357 sailors), some 382 became casualties, including

# Operation Chariot

Figures in reports do vary slightly

## The Cost Summary

	Took part	killed/MIA	Captured
Commandos	264	66	109
RN	357	105	104
Total	621	169	215
Returned	234		
RAF		9	

20

72% of the commandos were either killed, wounded or captured.

At least 11 of the on Campbeltown died.

At 02:30 the CO of the Naval force decided no option but to withdraw. 120 commandos found themselves stranded, half wounded..

101 of those who died have no known grave.

# Operation Chariot

Most of the dead are buried at Escoubiac



# Remembrance

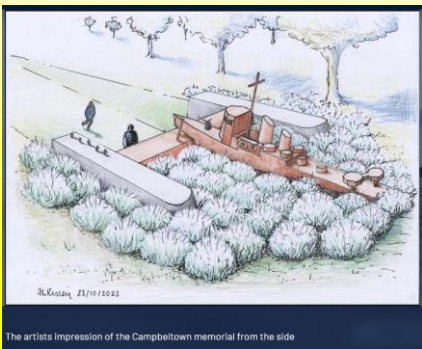


The only surviving part of the ship (at St Nazaire)



# 2027: A New Memorial

A new iconic and enduring memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire is under construction.



The formal dedication of the completed monument planned on the 85th anniversary of the raid in May 2027

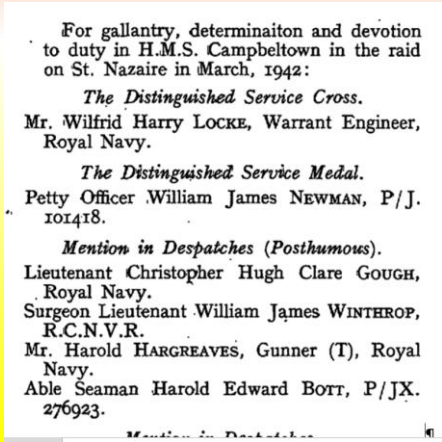


The sculpture is a steel replica of HMS Campbeltown riding high on the caisson gate will and includes 5 bronze commando figures, 180 mm tall to provide a sense of scale.

# Operation Chariot

# The Recognition

- 5 Victoria Crosses
  - 4 Distinguished Service Order;
  - 17 Distinguished Service Cross;
  - 11 Military Cross;
  - 4 Conspicuous Gallantry Medal;
  - 5 Distinguished Conduct Medal;
  - 24 Distinguished Service Medal and
  - 15 Military Medal.
- Another 51 men were mentioned in  
dispatches, 22 of them posthumously.



Also amongst those 'Mentioned in Despatches' was the NAAFI man James Bourne

140 decorations awarded

Operation Chariot

Who was Harold Hargreaves

Born Barnsley 5 may 1903. Son of a Master Brickmaker, so started life as one.

**Joined navy**, as boy, in **May 1919** (s/n J95238)

Became Regular as Ord Seaman 2 Mar 1921 for 12 years

Acting Leading Seaman 10 July 1932

Leading Seaman 10 Jul 33

Acting Petty Officer 11 Apl 35 ,

PO 22 Aug 36

CPO 7 Oct 40

**10 Oct 1941 T Acting Gunner (Warrant Officer, so became “Mr.”)**

Operation Chariot

Harold Hargreaves

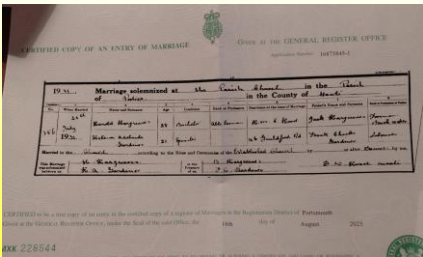
Served in various ships, including HMS Hood from 10 Mar 1931 to 31 Aug 33 (when it based Portsmouth)

Married Helena Adelaide Hargreaves  
( nee Gardiner) of Southsea.

Wedding was in Portsmouth July 1931

They lived at 37 Highlands Road, Catisfield (dates uncertain)

Helena remarried Oct 1946 to Edwin Hayes and died 1978 at 170 Highlands Rd



Operation Chariot

Harold Hargreaves

Harold's body was recovered and was buried at Le Clion-Sur-Mer Communal Cemetery.

(A different location to most of the Operation Chariot dead.)



Graves Registration Report Form.

COUNTRY: FRANCE  
COMMUNE: REPORT No.: SCHEDULE No.: 1  
PLACE OF BURIAL: LE CLION-SUR-MER COMM. CTRY. (Loire-Atlantique)  
Land belongs to:  
The following are buried here:—  
Signature: [Signature] Records Department Northern Region Date: 10 DEC 1959  
Certified complete and correct.

Grave	No. and Rank	Initials, Name & Honours	Unit	Date of Death	For works use
1	Gnr. (T)	H. HARGREAVES	Royal Navy H.M.S. "Cambeltown"	28.3.42.	C 4



**Thank You.**

**Please remember proudly  
these people from  
Catisfield who gave their  
Tomorrows.**

Any Comments, or if you can add new  
information, please contact

[history@catisfield.com](mailto:history@catisfield.com)

*Doug*



- Supply Assistant Geoffrey David Berney RNVR
- Wren Driver Diana Sydney Biddlecombe RN
- Commander William Charles Bushell DSC RN
- Flying Officer John Weldon Butt RAFVR
- Lieutenant John Philip Couzens, Royal Artillery
- Lance Bombardier Edward Lionel Dominey, Royal Artillery
- Warrant Mechanician Moses William Evans, RN.
- Leading Aircraftsman William Henry Flood. RAFVR
- WO Class I Frederick Augustus Gates RSM, Royal Artillery
- Christina Emsie Gordon
- Temp Acting Gunner (T) Mr Harold Hargreaves WO RN
- Lieutenant (E) Frank McLeod RN,
- Petty Officer Robert Savitri Millener, RN
- Lieutenant Edward Graham Mortimer RNVR
- Private Edmund Charles Neville, Infantry
- Able Seaman John Woodman Spanner, RN
- Mr Alfred Dennis Streten
- Captain Charles Edward Stone Royal Artillery
- Clement (John) Young Merchant Navy