

Birmingham Medal Society Meeting Thursday 3 May 2018

16 members present and 4 guests, (9 of whom sat down for meal before the meeting, 5 with drinks only, 1 staying overnight at the hotel).

The President opened the meeting, thanking all for attending and welcomed our four visitors: John Somner, Martin Keyes, Christopher Mellor-Hill and Brian Benbow.

Apologies being received from John Barker, Chris Burns, Chris Davies, Paul & Sue Handford, Martin Harrison, Roy Painter.

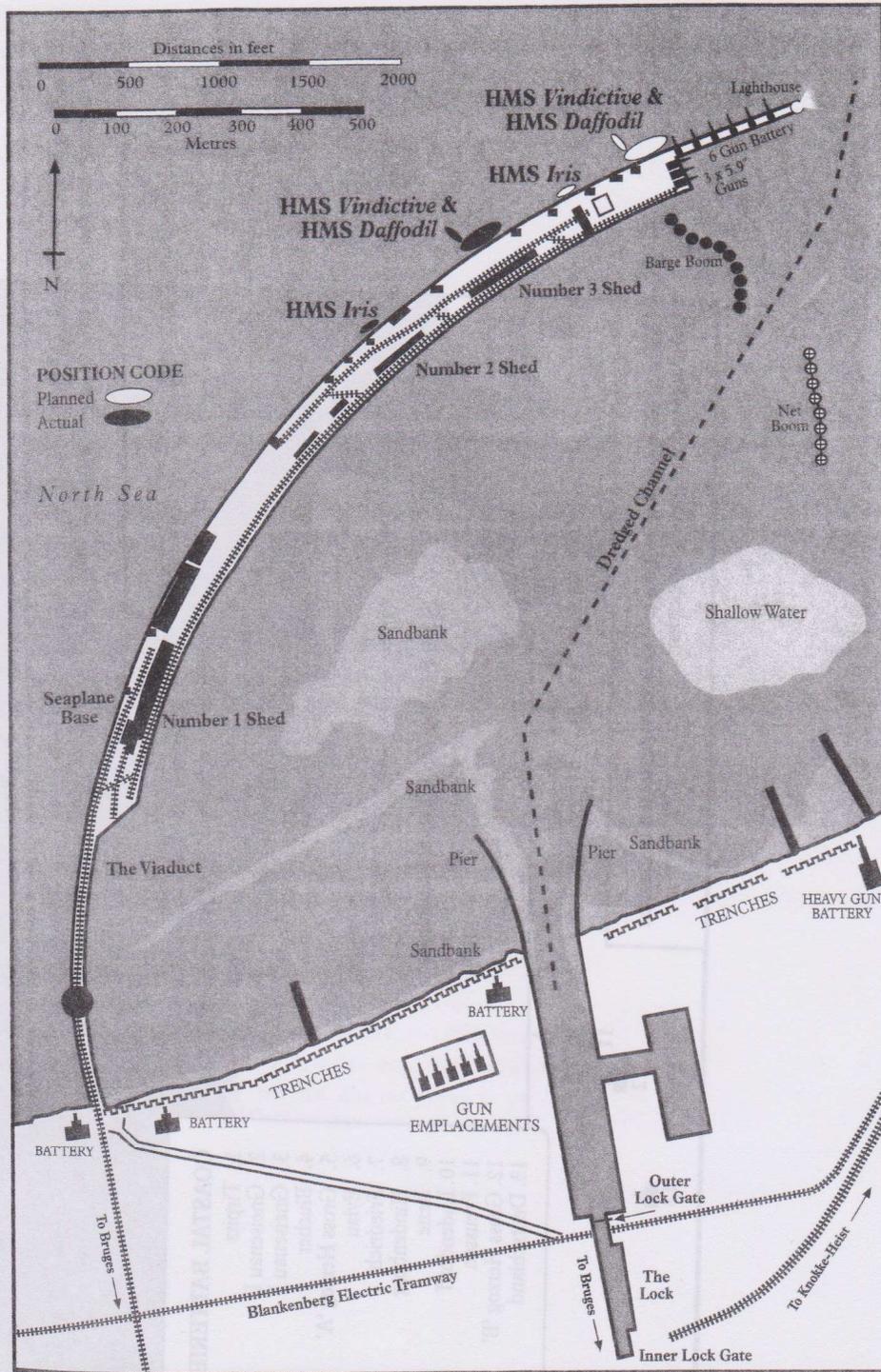
Committee Points – The Committee held a meeting on 3 May at 4pm to agree content of the 2018/19 programme based on the suggestion list compiled by members at the April meeting. Work had commenced to update the Library Booklist which would in due course be added to the BMS Web-site.

General Data Protection Regulations operative from 25 May 2018 – members were reminded to sign the letter sent out electronically on 28 April by Chris Davies, BMS Secretary. Those present including those not on email were asked to sign the form so the BMS could hold their contact details – forms for this purpose being available at the meeting. Hardly anybody has so far signed – we will follow this up at the June Meeting.

BMS Mini-Convention would be held at Knowle on Sunday 17 June 2018 – doors open at 10am – admission fee £15 per head to include buffet lunch. Philip Wilson circulated a proforma to ascertain likely take up in terms of attendance, members including their guests, exhibitors and short talk speakers. The feedback was most favourable and Philip will produce a booking form for distribution prior to the June monthly meeting. The Drummond Lecture would be held at the Mini-Convention there being a fall back speaker Mick Atkinson on 'Waterloo' in the event that Simon People is unable to give his lecture – 'The Last One Hundred Days.'

The President then invited Philip Wilson to give his talk on 'The St. George's Day Raids – Zeebrugge and Ostend April 1918.' All present being given a map of the Ports of Zeebrugge & Ostend 1918 as an aid memoire, for what turned out to be a most informative presentation with supporting images, some of which are appended to this short report.

The original raid had been scheduled for the 8/9th April 1918 but weather conditions were such that it was aborted, one vessel failed to return: the loss of Coastal Motor Boat No 33 remains very much a mystery for it was heavily damaged and ran aground east of Ostend. According to German sources it contained a naval chart of the "Ostend Roads" which in black ink was written 'Number 33 Boat Chart 9th April 1918' showing the direction of approach of block ships. Armed with this information the Germans correctly surmised that the next time the conditions would be right in terms of tides for a raid on Zeebrugge would be the night of 22/23 April 1918. My Lords in the Admiralty including Roger Keyes had no knowledge of the fate of CMB No.33 or that its charts and plans had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Accordingly on the afternoon of 22 April 1918 a fleet of 165 different British vessels concentrated near the Goodwin Sands and set off eastwards in three columns. Leading the centre column was *HMS Vindictive*, towing the tubby *Iris* and *Daffodil* (Mersey Ferryboats requisitioned). In her wake were the five block ships (3 for Zeebrugge and 2 for Ostend). At the head of the starboard column was *HMS Warwick* with Keyes preceded by 2 destroyers. The port column comprised destroyers, in between the columns were 2 dozen coastal motor launches and over sixty motor launches. Some of these small craft were to race into Zeebrugge and torpedo German Destroyers before they could out to sea. The attack on the Mole at Zeebrugge was intended to be a diversion whilst 3 block ships went through the harbour to the mouth of the Bruges Canal – the intention being to block the canal and prevent the German submarines from leaving their submarine pens. The viaduct on the Mole was to be blown up by the explosion of the British submarine C3 laden with 10,000 kilos of dynamite – see plan of Port of Zeebrugge. Royal Marines and Blue Jackets were to land on the Mole from *HMS Vindictive* and other vessels with orders to blow up warehouses and destroy gun emplacements – they incurred heavy casualties. For further details see list of recommended reading appended to this report.

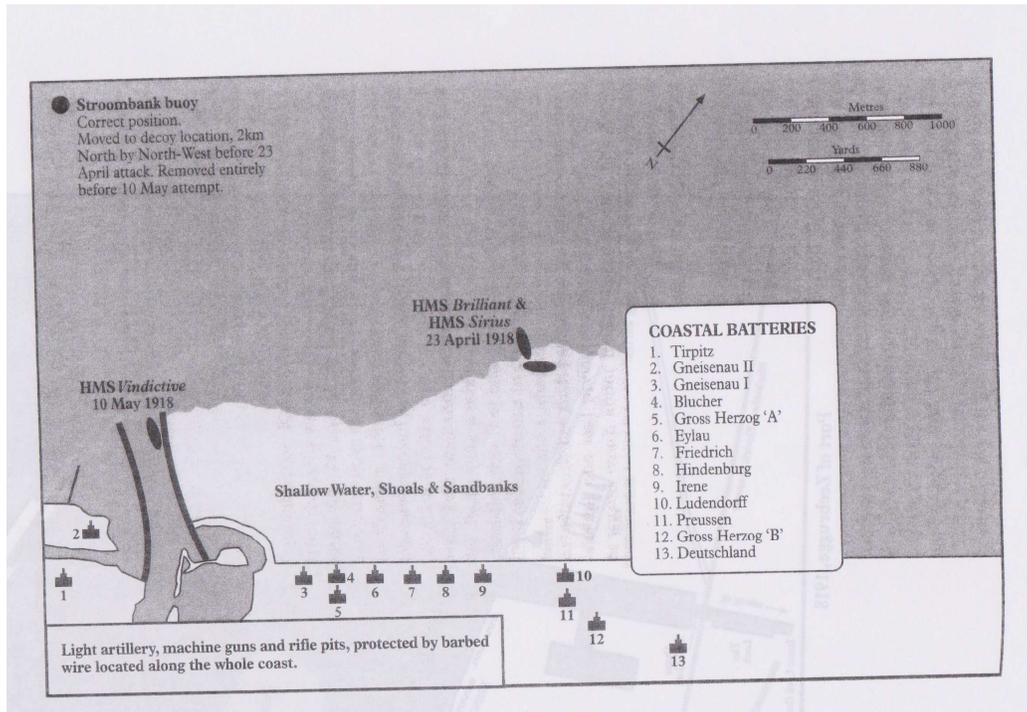


Port of Zeebrugge, 1918

Port of Zeebrugge

All went according to plan with elaborate smoke screens which veered away just as the *HMS Vindictive* ended up in the wrong position on the Mole with the result that the German guns on the end of Mole were not totally silenced. The raid lasted approximately an hour during which time many lives were lost and although the canal at Zeebrugge was blocked by 3 blockships it was still navigable by German submarines at high tide.

Having been forewarned 8/9th April the German had moved the Stroombank Buoy so that when the two blockships *HMS Brilliant* and *HMS Sirius* ended up being stranded on a sandbank some considerable distance away from Ostend. Consequently a second raid was planned for the night of the 10th May 1918 with *HMS Vindictive* as one of two blockships. Unfortunately the second block ship *HMS Saphoo* blew a boiler near Dunkirk and rather than abort the raid *Vindictive* went ahead as planned but failed to entirely block the channel at Ostend. See plan of Ostend Harbour.



Port of Ostend

Two Victoria Crosses were awarded to the 4th Battalion Royal Marines to be balloted for under the 9th Statute of the Order and they went to Bamford and Finch. A total of 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded for the raid on Zeebrugge on night of 23 April with a further 3 being awarded for the night of the 10 May at Ostend. Philip's talk included images of the 11 VC recipients and in some instance images of their actual medal groups which can be seen in amongst the Ashcroft Collection. One of our guests later showed a pair of medals to Gnr H.J.Somner Royal Marine Artillery who was severely wounded by shrapnel burst during the raid at Zeebrugge. Somner later participated in the VC Ballot for Zeebrugge.



Vindictive

One of our members with more than a passing interest in the Royal Air Force then produced a DSO and bar , BWM with MID and GSM: clasps Iraq and North West Persia – the VM was missing from the group. The DSO had been awarded to Wing Commander P.F.M. Fellowes, 61 Wing RAF who had cleared up after the Royal Navy by successfully bombing and destroying the lock gate at Zeebrugge.

The President then thanked Philip Wilson and those who had shown medals linked to the St George's Day Raid. There then followed a short break after which we returned to the 100th Anniversary of the Royal Air Force. A splendid duplicate group of WW2 medals containing a copy VC with full attribution was then displayed by one of our members, who outlined the circumstances under which Warrant Officer Norman Jackson was awarded the Victoria Cross for the night raid on Schweinfurt on 26 April 1944. The Lancaster was flying at 22,000 feet at 200 mph when it was attacked by Focke –Wulf 190 and a fire erupted on the upper surface of starboard wing, adjacent to the fuel tank. Jackson despite being wounded climbed on to the top of the fuselage and began to inch towards the blazing wing. Almost immediately his parachute opened the canopy and rigging spilled back into the cockpit. Jackson continued to crawl aft attached to his parachute with the intention of fighting the fire with a fire extinguisher. His was well deserved VC to learn more see 'For Valour - The Air VCs' by Chaz Bowyer.

Also shown was a miniature set of medals attributed to Wing Commander G.L. Cheshire VC, DSO and 2 bars DFC with supporting images of both Jackson and Cheshire following their VC investiture at Buckingham Palace. It being acknowledged that the nearest thing to owning a real VC is to acquire a real duplicate group or miniature group with provenance.

Also shown was a silver war badge number 3616 with a WW2 badge for Loyal Service Badge. Badge 3616 was awarded to 2/Lt T.S.L. Mann who had the misfortune to crash over Walsall on the 7 April 1917 there was other supporting research with it.

Time was running out and all present were informed that the next meeting would be the 7 June - 'My Favourite Research Project' which Ken Weston had kindly agreed to introduce.

Suggested Reading Material on St George's Day Raid

Zeebrugge Raid: 'Zeebrugge - Eleven VC's Before Breakfast' by Barrie PITT first published in 1958- reprinted 2003, ISBN 0 304 38340 5.

'The Zeebrugge and Ostend Raids 1918' by Deborah LAKE first published in 2002 reprinted 2015, ISBN 978 147383 796 6.

'Zeebrugge & Ostend Raids' by Stephen McGREA in the Battleground Series, first published in 2007, ISBN 9781 84415608 5.

Both raids are also well covered in 'The Naval Front' by Donald MAXWELL and Gordon S.MAXWELL first published in 1920 by A & C BLACK Ltd, London.

Philip Wilson, Vice President, Birmingham Medal Society

11 May 2018.