

COMMEMORATION: Service to mark 60th anniversary of destroyer being hit by German U-boat



HMS Cassandra above, was hit by a torpedo while escorting convoys in December 1944. Sixty two sailors died. A service to mark the 60th anniversary of the catastrophe is being held in Portsmouth Guildhall on Saturday 11th December 2004.

Ceremony for warship torpedoed on 'hell run'

Attache expects warm welcome

THE destroyer HMS Cassandra was shepherding vital convoys through frozen seas on the 'hell run' between Britain and Russia when her luck ran out.

A torpedo from a German U-boat tore off the bow of the Portsmouth-based warship as she escorted Convoy RA62 back to the UK.

Sixty-two sailors perished in the attack on December 11, 1944, and it was only the skill and courage of the survivors that saved the ship from a watery grave in the Arctic.

This weekend, to mark the 60th anniversary of the incident, some of them will rub shoulders with representatives of the Russian and German governments at a special service of reconciliation and remembrance in the city.

The Russian naval attache, Captain Andrey Vanchugov, and his German counterpart, Capt Peter Monte, are expected to attend the service at the Guildhall on Saturday.

Veterans of the HMS Cassandra were awarded

THE German naval attache in the UK is expecting a warm reception from Royal Navy veterans at this weekend's service in Portsmouth.

Capt Peter Monte said the horrors of the Second World War were 'a long time ago - both nations, Britain and

Germany, have to build on the co-operation and reconciliation of the post war era.'

Also attending the service will be a former First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Jock Slater, and Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Gerken - both of whom served in Cassandra in the 1960s.

£6,500 by the National Lottery to stage the event.

The names of the 62 dead are recorded on a plaque in the D-Day Museum at Southsea and a memorial service is held there each year.

But Joe Ince, the association's secretary, said the venue had been switched to the Guildhall because so many people wanted to attend.

Mr Ince said: 'We're providing the old boys with accommodation, travel and food.

'They had it so rough on the Arctic convoys. This is probably the last time they'll come en-masse.

'We felt we owed it to them to organise something special for the 60th anniversary.'

Cassandra, commanded by 24-year old Lieutenant Geordie

Leslie, was hit off northern Norway by a torpedo fired from the submarine U365.

The crew of the crippled destroyer managed to stem the flood of water and the ship was towed 200 miles back to the Kola Inlet in Russia, stern first, by the frigate HMS Bahamas.

The U-boat was sunk soon afterwards by a Swordfish torpedo bomber from the aircraft carrier HMS Campania. No allied merchantmen from RA62 were lost.

Russian labourers fitted a temporary bow to Cassandra and she returned to the UK in 1945 and was placed in reserve.

A modernised Cassandra was recommissioned in 1960 and served on until 1967.

CREW OF U-BOAT ARE ALSO HONOURED AT EVENT

IT WAS the first time Roderick and Jennifer Leslie had heard the true horrors their father and his crew battled through when HMS Cassandra was hit by a torpedo.

They got the chance to speak to survivors whose courageous efforts kept the ship afloat at a ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of the attack on the destroyer.

While their late father, Lieutenant Geordie Leslie who commanded the ship aged just 24 years old, told them about the attack, he never spoke about the real horrors of December 11, 1944.

The Portsmouth based warship was shepherding vital convoys through frozen seas on the 'hell run' between Britain and Russia when, off northern Norway, a torpedo from a German U-boat blew off the bow.

Sixty-two men died and it was only the skill and cour-



Roderick Leslie and his sister Jennifer Leslie at The Guildhall event for HMS Cassandra, right (046094 182)



AS WELL as remembering the British sailors who died, the ceremony was also a service of reconciliation honouring the crew of German submarine U365 which fired the torpedo.

The U-boat was sunk by a

Swordfish torpedo bomber from aircraft carrier HMS Campania just a few days after the attack. The ceremony was attended by the German naval attache Captain Peter Monte.

Veterans of the HMS

Cassandra Association were awarded £6,500 by the National Lottery to stage the 60th anniversary event. The names of the 62 who died in the 1944 catastrophe are on a plaque in the D-Day Museum at Southsea.

Can also be seen at: <http://www.axfordsabode.org.uk/cass-mat.htm>

age of the survivors that saved the ship from a watery grave in the Arctic Ocean.

Mr Leslie, 49, who had travelled from Bristol for the ceremony at Portsmouth Guildhall, said. 'It has been absolutely incredible talking to people who served with my father.

'We have found out things about my father that we never knew.

'He never talked about

what happened. He talked about the war but it would always be funny anecdotes.'

Ms Leslie, 44, added: It was only in the run up to the ceremony that we have really began to realise just how young my father was at the time

Seven survivors of the Cassandra catastrophe were able to attend the service on Saturday.

Cliff Wickstead, 79, from

Wombourne, Staffordshire, said: 'I remember being in my hammock and was fast asleep when all of a sudden I was woken up by a dull thud and then the whole ship seemed to shudder.

'We were ordered to go to the upper deck. There was no panic everyone just walked up.

John Barnard, 79, from Oxford, said: 'I was on lookout at the time of the attack and

I remember being knocked out. I was very lucky because just 24ft in front of me a whole part of the ship had just disappeared'

Former First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Jock Stater, who served on the modernised Cassandra in the 1960s, said. 'It was a stirring tale of great courage and seamanship in the finest tradition of the Royal Navy.'

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Survivors from HMS Cassandra on the Guildhall steps with Admiral Sir Jock Slater, centre, and ViceAdmiral, Sir Robert Gerken