

St George's Day

ZEEBRUGGE RAID COMMEMORATION

Thursday 23rd April 2009

Reported by DENISE LEE

On Thursday 23rd April I was allowed time off from school to go to the services to be held that day. It was a sunny day and a large number of people had gathered in St. James' cemetery to commemorate the 91st anniversary of the Dover Patrol's raid on Zeebrugge. The service started at 11.20am and was led by the Reverend David Ridley of St. Mary's Church, Dover. After *The Bidding*, the *Last Post* was played, followed by *The Silence* (not a sound from the crowd) then the *Exhortation*. *Reveille* followed and the *Kohima Prayer* and the *Zeebrugge Citations* were read. The *Prayers for the Fallen* were followed by *The Lord's Prayer*, then *The Blessing*. Wreaths were laid on the memorial by the Town Mayor, representatives from Belgium, local dignitaries, members of the Armed Forces and ex-service organizations. The Chairman Derek Leach OBE laid the wreath for the Dover Society.

After the service two coaches took everyone back for the service at the old Town Hall.

At 12 noon The Right Worshipful the Town Mayor of Dover Councilor Diane G Smallwood sounded "eight bells" on the Zeebrugge bell. The service then followed the same format as at St. James' up to the Zeebrugge Citation and finished with the Blessing.

This was the first year that the flag flown from HMS *Vindictive* was shown during both services. The shrapnel holes could clearly be seen in it.



After the service everybody was invited into the council chamber for refreshments.

The Zeebrugge Raid

The fleet finally sailed on 22nd April, the eve of St George's Day, and from the destroyer *Warwick* Admiral Keyes made his famous "St George for England" signal. From the *Vindictive* came the reply "May we give the dragon's tail a damn good twist."

In just over an hour of fighting more than 160 men were killed and some 383 were wounded. Later another 28 died from their wounds, 16 were missing and 13 were taken prisoner.

After the Raid

The *Vindictive* arrived in Dover at 8 o'clock the following morning to great cheering from all the other ships in the harbour. The residents of Dover, including Admiral Keyes' wife, reported that during the raid they could hear the guns on the Belgian coast seventy-five miles away and that the sound had rattled their windows.

The Zeebrugge Bell

In the belfry high up in front of the Town Hall hangs the bronze Zeebrugge Bell. The Germans had stolen it from a Belgian church and hung it on the Zeebrugge Mole to give warnings of attacks. The bell was a gift of the King of the Belgians and is a memorial to the sacrifice of British Servicemen in the Raid on Zeebrugge on the 23rd April 1918.

The bell is struck eight times at noon every year on the anniversary.

The same year naval raids by volunteers were also carried out on the port of Ostend as well as on Zeebrugge. The main aim was to deny the Germans the effective use of these ports. These aims had only a limited amount of success, although the raids were a considerable achievement.

Awards for the raids on Ostend and Zeebrugge

Eleven Victoria Crosses (eight for Zeebrugge) and 679 other decorations were won for bravery. About 200 British Servicemen were killed and 400 wounded. A number of the dead have been buried in St. James' Cemetery, Dover.

