

Monthly Showcase - April 2010

Artefacts relating to the Zeebrugge Raid of April 23rd 1918 at the Royal Marines Museum



April 23rd 2008 marks the 90th anniversary of the 'Zeebrugge Raid' of 1918, when Royal Marines of the specially formed 4th Battalion stormed the German defended Belgian harbour. Under the cover of smoke and darkness, their role was to neutralise the 4.1 and 3.5 inch guns on the 'mole' by landing from the converted cruiser HMS Vindictive and two requisitioned Mersey ferries, Iris & Daffodil. This was to divert attention from three block-ships that were sailed into the harbour and sunk at the mouth of the Bruges ship canal to obstruct its use by U-boats.

Amongst the items relating to the raid, shown here, is a damaged Lewis gun from the fore top of HMS Vindictive, which along with 2-pounder quick fire guns, were manned by the Royal Marine Artillery under the command of Lieutenant Charles Rigby RMA. During the run in to the target, the fore top guns engaged the German defences and the guns of a moored Torpedo boat destroyer before being hit by numerous shells that killed or wounded all the crews and put many of the weapons out of action. Although wounded, Sergeant Norman Finch RMA managed to get a 2-pounder back in action and kept up a continuous fire until further hits rendered the position untenable. For his action, Norman Finch was voted to receive the Victoria Cross by the survivors of the Battalion, under rule 13 of the warrant.

Sergeant Finch's VC is displayed in the Museum's Medal Room along with a VC awarded to Captain Edward Bamford for his gallantry at Zeebrugge. The Lewis gun and other artefacts illustrated here are also on display, and a booklet 'The Royal Marines & the Victoria Cross' is available from the Museum shop.