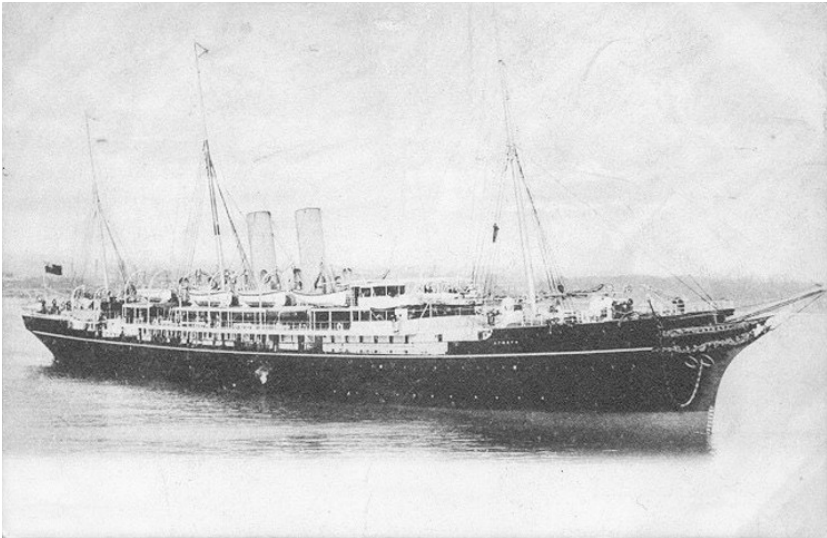


Brave Report



HMS Viknor formerly SS Atrato

They captured the major German spy and perished with him

In January 1915 the crew of the armed merchant cruiser HMS Viknor made a major contribution to the war by capturing the leading German spy-master after a search and chase operation. Unfortunately they and their captives were lost within hours, sunk in a storm or by a mine or a combination of both.

Northern Ireland - Service in the Royal Navy - In Remembrance

The ship's Commanding Officer, E O Ballantyne, had been informed by Lord Fisher that he was to search for and apprehend the SS Bergensfjord - a Norwegian owned and neutral ship. Information had been received from British intelligence sources that persons taken aboard the ship in New York under the guise of being neutral citizens were in fact German reservists.

This was quite a challenge to present to what in reality was a makeshift warship. Viknor was a civilian ship hastily prepared for war, and manned mainly by members of the Royal Naval Reserve, including twenty-five seamen of the Newfoundland Division of the RNR. In their search and apprehend action the ship's company proved that they were fit for role.

The Viknor which was only able to do seventeen knots had headed out to the North Sea as Admiral Jellicoe wanted it to strengthen the blockade of Germany by the northern patrol. On Friday 8th December the message was flashed to the fleet that SS Bergensfjord should be captured at all costs. British intelligence suspected, quite rightly, that German reservists had joined her in New York and were believed to be carrying fake passports provided by the German Embassy.

The Bergensfjord was deemed to be a prize capture and the merchant cruisers were ordered to intercept. Early on the misty morning of Monday 11th January the Viknor's 'man in the barrel' (crow's nest) sighted a ship to the north east of the Faroe Islands. Viknor altered course and hoisted a red flag 'stop engines' signal. Nothing happened. Viknor fired a rocket across the bows of the white vessel. A live shell was next. The Viknor's guns



The markers indicate locations of naval ships sunk off the north coast of Ireland. Viknor is the lowest to the LHS.

were trained. The rocket did the trick. Viknor beat to the windward side and lowered a boat with boarding party.

They found that the ship was the Bergenfjord and radioed fellow cruisers who converged at full speed at 0100 hours. The Norwegian captain tried to bluff it out answering the questions of the revolver carrying boarding party.

After a thorough search two stowaways and six German passengers were found. One of these passengers according to the ship's list was a Mexican named Rosato Spiro. He admitted after close examination to be Baron H A Wedell, a notorious arch-spy of the German secret service. Another passenger was listed as a Norwegian citizen, Dr Rasmus Bjornstad, who was also suspect.

Northern Ireland - Service in the Royal Navy - In Remembrance



Funeral with military honours of Commander Ernest Orfod Ballantyne in Dalkeith

They were removed to Viknor and a prize-crew was put aboard the Norwegian vessel which headed for Kirkwall.

Viknor radioed the good news and headed southwards towards Liverpool. There were celebrations aboard Viknor. The Commander-in-Chief sent a “well done” message.

The ship was low on coal and in need of repair. At 1600 hrs on 13/01/1915 she called up giving a position of 56 deg 18’N, 9 deg W, off Tory Island saying she was steering for the North Channel and home. That was the last that was ever heard from the Viknor. On the night of January 13, the ship disappeared off Tory Island. She

sank in heavy weather without any distress call. No one knows what happened. It was generally assumed she was sunk by a storm or by a mine in a field laid by the Germans, or by a combination of both.

The War Graves of Ballintoy and Rathlin Island

None of the 295 crew - 22 officers and 273 men mostly of the Royal Naval Reserve - were saved. The fact that some of the crew had time to put on lifebelts indicated that the ship took time to go down. Many of the bodies were washed ashore in the days afterwards and are buried in Ballintoy and Rathlin Island. Most of the crew have no



Unknown Sailors of HMS Viknor and HMS Raccoon. The plot is marked by a granite Celtic Cross erected by the people of Ballycastle. Bonamargy Friary Cemetery.



The graves of some of the men in HMS Viknor in St Thomas' Parish Churchyard, Rathlin Island

known grave.

HMS Viknor was an armed merchant cruiser of 10th Cruiser Squadron. She had been a ship of the Blue Star Line before being requisitioned and modified by the Royal Navy. Built by Robert Napier in 1888 as the Atrato for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and registered at 5,347 tons, she was 421 feet long with a 50 foot beam.

The Atrato could carry 279 passengers and was used for the routes between England and the West Indies. In 1912

she was renamed The Viking for her new owners, the Viking Cruising Co. With the outbreak of World War 1 most passenger liners were requisitioned by the Admiralty for war service and so was The Viking. In 1914 she was converted into an armed merchant cruiser and renamed HMS Viknor. The Viknor was assigned to the 10th cruiser squadron and was used to patrol the waters between Scotland and Iceland.

Twenty-five seamen who were lost were of the Newfoundland Division of the Royal Naval Reserve. 24 are commemorated on the Beaumont Hamel Memorial in France. One body was washed ashore and is buried in Colonsay.

Portglenone and Annalong

There were five from Northern Ireland lost on Viknor. Samuel Mooney Gourley, a RN Volunteer Reservist from Portglenone had been called up at the outbreak of war. The Ballymena Observer had previously reported his service with the Royal Naval Division in an ill-fated attempt to defend Antwerp. The report stated, "Samuel M Gourley, Portglenone, son of Mr. James Gourley, senior Postmaster in Portglenone, was with the Royal Naval Volunteers in the trenches at Antwerp. He returned to Portglenone on a few days furlough on Thursday October 15 and he left Ballymena on Sunday last to report himself at Dublin on Monday morning.

"Before going he received a presentation of a beautiful Bible from Miss Young, Portglenone House, and a presentation of cigarettes and money from several of his companions in Portglenone.

“The Naval Marine was one of a party of the defenders (of Antwerp) who, mud-stained, dirty and unshaven, returned to Dover from Ostend. Only a week previously he had left Dover and with his comrades embarked for a port unknown. They landed and were sent direct to the trenches where they were under fire at once.

“Several chaps around him were struck but he escaped. On the retreat he experienced many thrilling adventures. At one time they were almost led into the German lines but through the intervention of a Belgian officer they were put on the right track and the treacherous guide was shot. Most of them got back to England safely after about eight days but some strayed into Holland and were interned there and a few, alas, were left lifeless in the trenches.” ([See Brave Report Issue](#)).

Leading Seaman Hugh Pue from Annalong also died in HMS Viknor. Eighteen months later his brother James was lost in HMS Eden on 17/06/1916. They were the sons of Arthur and Elizabeth Pue, of Moneydorrhaghmore, Annalong, Kilkeel. Hugh was husband to Sarah Pue, Annalong.

In 2006 the survey ship Celtic Explorer located the wreck of HMS Viknor. It was later reported that the wreck is located on the outer edge of a minefield laid by SMS Berlin which lends some credibility to the theory that she could have hit a mine, but as yet there is still no definitive answer as to the cause of the loss. The first U-boat appeared in the Irish sea on 30th January, 1915 and there is no evidence of activity north-west of Ireland before that. Mine-laying by submarines, later in the war

accounted for the Laurentic and two ships off Rathlin Island, HMS Brisk and the Lugano.

Viknor was one of three Armed Merchant Cruisers of the 10th. Cruiser Squadron lost in January, February, and March of 1915.

SS Arabic III was an auxiliary cruiser in the German Navy. In October 1914 it laid a minefield between Northern Ireland and Scotland. HMS Audacious was sunk by a mine in the same area. About ten bodies of her crew were washed ashore or recovered. Those that were able to be identified (only 2 or 3) were brought back to their home towns or buried close to where they came ashore on Rathlin Island.

ROLL OF HONOUR - HMS VIKNOR

BLOCKLEY, John Alfred

RN. Petty Officer. 1st Cl. 132052. HMS Viknor. Died 13/01/1915. Aged 45 years. B Hinckley, Leicestershire 14/02/1870. Bangor Cemetery

GALBRAITH, Francis

RN. Boy 1st Class. J/28128. HMS Viknor. Died 13/01/1915. Aged: 17. Son of John and Martha Galbraith, Londonderry. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 8. Londonderry, The Diamond WM. Great James Street - PCI RH

GOURLEY, Samuel Mooney

RNVR. AB. Clyde 3/2177. HMS Viknor. Died 13/01/1915. Aged 21. Son of James Gourley, Portglenone. Portsmouth Naval Memorial

GREER, James A

RNR. Assistant Engineer. HMS Viknor. Died 13/01/1915.
Woodstock Rd., Belfast. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 10

PUE, Hugh

RN. Leading Seaman. 192413. HMS Viknor. Died 13/01/1915.
Age 34. Born Kilkeel. Son of Arthur and Elizabeth Pue, of
Moneydorrhagmore, Annalong, Kilkeel; husband to Sarah Pue,
Annalong. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 7

HMS VIKNOR WAR GRAVES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

GRIFFIN, J

RMLI. PO. 7084. Bonamargy Friary Cemetery, Ballycastle

HEWITT, ER

RN. First Class Boy. J/27300. Ballintoy Churchyard.

WALTON, JJ

RN. Petty Officer 2nd Class. 130152. Rathlin (St Thomas)
Church of Ireland Graveyard

Bonamargy Friary Cemetery, Ballycastle

Four Unknown Sailors HMS Viknor. The plot is marked by a
granite Celtic Cross erected by the people of Ballycastle.

Rathlin (St Thomas) Church of Ireland Graveyard

Nine Unknown Sailors HMS Viknor

ROLL OF HONOUR - WW1 BALLYCASTLE AND DISTRICT

BENNETT, Henry John

ERA. LS & GC Medal. HMS Amphion. Died 06/08/1914.
Aged 36 years. Born Belfast 11/07/1889. Culfeightrin, Torr
Head

CAMPBELL, Peter

RM. Private. CH/X2848. Died aged 24. Son of Daniel and Rose
Campbell, Ballycastle. Milford Haven Cemetery

COLLINS, Thomas

RN. Stoker 1st Cl. SS 113699. HMS Defence. Jutland. Died
31/5/1916. Age 22. Born Dublin 14/5/1893, Son of Michael and
Nancy Collins, Broughmore, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval
Memorial, Panel 15. Ballycastle WM

GAULT, J

RNR. Deckhand. DA20680. HMS Victory. Died of illness
01/07/1918. Ballintoy Parish RH. Lossiemouth Burial Ground.

GUBBEY, William Ernest Gubbey

RN. Ordinary Seaman. J19564. Died 26/11/1914. Aged 18.
Born 21/02/1896. Son of William Henry and Alice Maud
Eleanor Gubbey, Renny Rd., Fratton, Portsmouth - living at
Ballycastle at time of son's death. Gillingham (Woodlands)
Cemetery

HANLAN, David

Leading Seaman. 206086. SS Ravensworth. Collision at sea.
Died 15/09/1917. Age 36. Born Belfast. Son of David and Ellen
Hanlan; husband to Lillie Jane Hanlan, Cross St., Holyhead.
Ballantrae Parish Churchyard

JAMIESON, David

RN. Petty Officer. 192801. HMS Defence. Died 31/05/1916. Aged 36. Born Ballintoy 20/06/1880. Son of Alexander and Ellen Jamieson of Blackside, Ballintoy, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval Memorial, panel 11 Ballintoy Parish RH.

JARRETT, George James

Petty Officer. 222863. DSM & Bar. HMS Prize. Died 14/08/1917. Aged 31. Son of John and Annie Jarrett, Ballintoy. Born Ballintoy 1886. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 20. Ballycastle WM

JOHNSTON, Randal William McDonnell

RN. Midshipman. HMS Vanguard. Died 09/07/1917. Age 17. HMS Albion, August - September 1914. Bombardment of the entrance to Gallipoli, May 1915. Rough log books of above and obituaries from newspapers are in the Public Record Office NI. Born Ballintoy. Son of Brig. Gen. T. K. E. Johnston, CB of Glynn, and Margaret his wife. Chatham Naval Memorial. Glynn WM

KANE, Christopher

Able Seaman. 191225. HMS Princess Irene. Died 27/05/1915. Aged 34. Son of Patrick and Kate Kane. Born: St. James, Dublin 25/12/1880. Husband of Ethel Alice Kane, Garden Row, Cobridge, Hanley, Staffs. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 7. Ballycastle WM

McBRIDE, A

RN. Stoker. Culfeittrin Parish Church RH

McCRANK, James

Fireman. HMS Atlanta. Died 25/11/1914. Aged 28. Drowning accident in Glasgow Harbour. Son of James and Annie McCrank, Tervillin, Fair Head, Ballycastle. Ballycastle WM

McFARLAND, H

AB. Ballintoy Parish RH

McMULLAN, J

GNR. Ballintoy Parish RH

MITCHELL, Charles

Seaman. 3762B. HMS Newmarket. Died 17/07/1917. Age 36. Son of Charles and Mary Ann Mitchell, Ballintoy. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, panel 37. Ballintoy Parish Church RH

MITCHELL, J

AB. Ballintoy Parish RH

WW1**THEY SERVED****BYRNE, H E**

RNR. Sub. Lieutenant. "Lieut. H. E. Byrne was home on leave in Ballycastle. He was an engineer in the Royal Naval Reserve". Ramoan Parish Church RH

CASEMENT, John (Jack)

RN. Commander. DSO. MiD. In HMS Highflyer which did excellent work in sinking the Kaiser Wilhelm. His DSO was presented in June, 1919 for his part in this action. Submarine Research Station, Falmouth, Cornwall. Son of Roger Casement of Magherintemple, Ballycastle. He retired from the navy in 1922. CAI and Britannia Naval College. Deputy Lieutenant. B 19/03/1880. D 02/12/1944. Magherintemple, Ballycastle. Culfeitrin Parish Church RH.

COLLINS, John

Stoker. Brother of George and Thomas. George was killed in the last week of the war and Thomas who was serving on H.M.S. Defence was lost at the Battle of Jutland. They were nephews of John Brown of Broughmore. Ramoan Parish Church, Ballycastle

COYLES, John

RN. RNR. Stoker. John lived in North Street, Ballycastle, and left a wife and two young children to join the Royal Navy. He had previously worked as a fisherman. John was born on 30/1/1871 in Ballycastle and enlisted for a twelve year period on 7/11/1895. He was based at Devonport. John was five feet ten inches tall with auburn hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. When his twelve year period of service was up he joined the RNR on 8/11/1907. He was called up for further service when war broke out in August 1914 and served throughout the war. In April 1919 John's father, Archibald Coyles, died, but John was unable to get leave for the funeral as he was in mid voyage at the time. Archibald's grandson, Frank McLarty MM. only arrived on the day following the funeral. John was demobbed 2/10/1919.. Ramoan Parish Church, Ballycastle RH

GAGE, Alexander Hugh

RN. Chaplain 1900. Ordained 1899. Served on HMS Formidable 1901-04. Rtd 1916. Gage family of Rathlin. Ramoan Parish, Ballycastle RH

HENRY, John

RN. Ballycastle - PCI RH

HUMPHREY, John J

RNR Medical Service. Lieutenant. True Blue Masonic Lodge 89, Ballycastle. Ramoan Parish Church RH

HUMPHREYS, Thomas

RNTS. Chief Engineer. Ballycastle. Ramoan Parish Church RH

KERRIGAN, John

RN. AB. Stoker. J 20798. Born Magherindonnell, Ballycastle 20/04/1895. Joined RN 20/04/1913 and was based at Devonport. On joining he was five feet six inches tall, with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. His period of service was the usual twelve years. His record shows the usual rise through the ranks from Boy 2nd Class to 1st Class, Ordinary Seaman and finally AB. He was admitted to Haslar Royal Naval Hospital in August 1922 with an injury to his finger which proved serious enough to have him invalided from the Royal Navy a short time later. Ballycastle

LOCKETT, J

Stoker. Appears to have come to Ballycastle to live, probably with relatives.

McINTYRE, Joseph

RN Signaller. Gortconney, Ballycastle. Ballycastle Presbyterian Church WM. PCI RH

McKAY, Archibald

RNR. Gunner. Masonic Lodge 38, Ballintoy, Ballycastle

MILLAR, Charles Blois

RN. Captain. CB. Legion of Honeur, Croix d'Officer.

Commanded HMS Nottingham when it attacked and was sunk by a German submarine in the North Sea in August 1916.

Served as a naval cadet on HMS. Northumberland during the Egyptian war in 1882. Commanded HMS Pioneer on the Australian station between 1906-1908 and was appointed to the ill-fated Nottingham in July 1913. Captain Millar and all the officers were saved when Nottingham sank. Son of Sir Alexander Millar of Whitehall, Ballycastle. Ramoan Parish Church RH

MITCHELL, James

RNR. Ballintoy, Masonic Lodge 38. Ballycastle

MORRISON, Patrick

RN. Petty Officer. Patrick Morrison was home in Ballycastle on short leave in December 1914. He had been serving on HMS Theseus and when he returned from leave was to join AMC Ambrose. He had been shipwrecked on four different occasions, the last one being the wreck of HMS Drake off Rathlin Island on 17/10/1917. He was sent on leave following the sinking of Drake and survived the war. Patrick was born in Ballycastle on 22/05/1879. He was five feet six inches tall, with brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. Patrick joined the Royal Navy on 22/5/1895 and was described as a school boy. It was later discovered that he had joined without his mother's consent but was retained as her consent was considered not to be necessary. When his first twelve year period finished he was taken on for a second spell in May 1907 and served throughout the war. On 01/07/1919 he joined the new Coast Guard Force

WILSON, John - Signaller. Thought to have been a Ballymena man who had come to live in Ballycastle. Born 9/2/1896. Ramoan Parish Church, Ballycastle RH

ROLL OF HONOUR - WW1

CAIRNS, Archibald Joseph P

RNR. Seaman. P/X 18342A. HM Trawler Northern Rover. Died 05/11/1939. Age 25. Son of James and Elizabeth Cairns, Ballycastle. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 36

CAMPBELL, Peter

RM. Marine. CH/X2824. HMLCG(L)15. Died 25/04/1943. Age 24. Son of Daniel and Rose Campbell, Ballycastle. Milford Haven Cemetery.

DUFFIN, Patrick

RN. Petty Officer Stoker. D/KX 77364. Date of Death: 10/12/1941. Age 38. HMS Repulse. 436 men died during, or directly as a result of the sinking, following attacks by Japanese aircraft off Kuantan, Malaya. Part of Force Z. Son of Richard and Annie Duffin, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 51

GAGE, Arol Alexander Courtenay

RNVR. Lieutenant. HMS Bagshot. Died 21/12/1939. From Rathlin Island. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 33

McKESSICK, John Patrick

RN. Leading Supply Assistant. C/MX52826. Date of Death: 04/02/1940. Age: 23. H.M.S. Sphinx. Son of James and Matilda McKessick, Ballycastle. Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery

MOONEY, Daniel

RN. Boy 1st Class. D/JX 162737. Date of Death: 22/05/1941. Age:17. H.M.S. Gloucester. Son of Patrick and Sarah Mooney, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 49

PRICE, Vincent Cyril

RN. Signalman. P/JX 126917. Date of Death: 03/05/1940. Age: 29. H.M.S. Afridi. Son of Arthur Herbert Price and Annie Eliza Price; husband of Annie Jane Price, Ballinlea, Ballycastle. Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 40

WW1**THEY SERVED****McCULLAGH, James Desmond Reynolds**

RNVR. Midshipman 1937. 1939-46: Lt. b. 24th November, 1917. Son of J. A. McCullagh, Northern Bank House, Ballycastle. Campbell College

Acknowledgments: Des Blackadder, The Ballymena Observer, CWGC, Diamond Project, Presbyterian Church in Ireland Roll of Honour.