

## H M S “TAKU”

During the Second World War, the Royal Navy lost two hundred and fifty-four major warships in addition to over a thousand minor vessels and auxiliaries due to enemy action and to counter these losses a huge shipbuilding programme was initiated. The enormous expense involved forced the Government to appeal to the British people to assist in meeting the bill and in 1941 weeks were set aside during which local communities were encouraged to save to adopt locally a warship.

The weeks were organised by the National War Savings Committee and there were over one thousand 'Warship Weeks' organised during the campaign, involving one thousand, two hundred and seventy-three local authority districts. The campaigns encouraged civilians to save their money in Government accounts, such as War Bonds, Savings Bonds, Defence Bonds and Savings Certificates. Each Council set its own target appropriate to the size and wealth of its population. A small village for example might be able to sponsor something small such as a motor launch whereas a large city could aspire to reach the two million pounds that was required to buy a major battleship. The national campaign raised £955,611,589 for the war effort and resulted in the adoption of eight battleships, four aircraft carriers, forty-nine cruisers, three hundred and one destroyers, twenty-five submarines, one hundred and sixty-four corvettes and frigates and two hundred and eighty-eight minesweepers.

Other national war campaigns were a 'Wings For Victory' Week to buy bomber planes, a 'Spitfire Week', a 'War Weapons Week' and a 'Tanks For Attack' Week. The purpose of all these campaigns was to finance the building of ships, tanks or aeroplanes that would then 'belong' to the particular locality where the funding to build it had come from.

Communities that successfully raised the money required to construct a ship were able to 'adopt' a warship, receiving a shield from the Admiralty in recognition and often, in return, presenting 'their ship' with a commemorative plaque of their own. In Spalding, the Urban District Council and the Rural District Council decided in October 1941 to hold a Warship Week in March 1942, and a target was set at £425,000 to adopt a submarine. For two relatively small local authorities and a population of under thirty-five thousand people this must have been hugely ambitious especially when many similar size councils went instead for the much cheaper 'buy a Spitfire' option at only £12,000.

'Warship Week' was set for the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1942 using the slogan "*MAKE THE WEEK A SUCCESS BY LENDING MORE AND SPENDING LESS*". Parades and exhibitions as well as fund raising events were held in Spalding and in all of the villages and at the end of the week, the total reached was £383,151, which averaged £10.18s.0d (£10.90) per head of population. To raise this considerable amount of money was a monumental task and to put it into perspective, at today's values this would be the equivalent of raising twelve million pounds in one week.

This effort was enough to fund the construction of a new submarine and because of this incredible achievement Spalding & District adopted H.M. Submarine 'Taku', a 'T' Class, Patrol Type Submarine. The 'Taku' was already in service and had been constructed by Cammell Laird of Birkenhead and had been launched on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1939 and completed on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1940 and had cost at that time around about £350,000. The Royal Navy's T class of submarines was designed in the 1930s and approved in 1936. The prototype was called 'Triton' and completed in December 1938 and in total fifty-three 'T' class submarines were built just before and during the war.

This is a bit obvious but all 'T' class submarines had a name that started with the letter T. 'TAKU' was a Chinese fort situated in Tientsin Province, a strongly fortified spot guarding the approach to Tientsin and Peking that had been captured by British and French fleets in 1860 and again by allied troops during the Boxer uprising of June 1900.

In June 1942, some of the crew visited Spalding and stayed with local families. Led by the Royal Marine Band they marched from the Grammar School to the Market Place and at a ceremony that followed Rear Admiral Buckley and Lt. P C A Day who was the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of H.M.S. 'TAKU' exchanged plaques with the Spalding Urban and District Councils. The submarine's Jolly Roger flew from the Corn Exchange, which is now the South Holland Centre. Dances and other entertainment were put on in Spalding and surrounding villages because, as the presentation took place during "Wings Week", many servicemen were in town for the party.

Seventeen of the fifty-three submarines were lost to enemy action but the 'Taku' was a very successful vessel that managed to see out the entire war. She sank 32,473 tonnes of enemy shipping plus an unconfirmed 10,000 tonne tanker and many small craft. Until the end of 1940, she spent time patrolling off the coast of Norway and in January 1941, she went on patrol in the Bay of Biscay. In February, she was damaged by heavy seas in the Atlantic on the way to Canada and had to be towed back to the Clyde for repairs but by April, she was in the Mediterranean sinking a number of merchant ships and auxiliary vessels. Returning to the Mediterranean in May 1942 she carried out twenty patrols, attacking and sinking enemy shipping and was part of 'Operation Vigorous', which was an attempt to re-supply Malta from Alexandria. On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1942 in the Doro Channel, she was attacked by patrol craft and was kept under water for thirty-six hours before successfully making an escape. This would have been an especially unpleasant experience for the crew who were forced to breathe stale rancid air for all of that period.

On 20<sup>th</sup> December, she successfully landed three Greek agents on a special mission and then went on to bombard Port Kurn hitting some small ships and warehouses. She arrived in Beirut on 1 January 1943 and then went on to Malta to join the 10<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla but developed engine defects so had to return to U.K. In June 1943, she returned to Southern Norway and the Skagerrak but on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1944, just before eight o'clock, she was rocked by an explosion, which put out all lights and sprang several leaks. She had run into a mine and had to abort her mission and return to harbour. She could never

return to full combat service because the explosion cracked the hull but she remained on active service until June 1945 and was sent to the breakers yard in 1946.

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Minutes of Meeting of Spalding & District Savings Committee held in Council Chamber, Spalding 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1941.

Chairman : Mr. J.F. Alexander

Present also: Messrs M.C. Cooper, E.H. G??????? J.R. Green, F.M. Munson, G.F. Hodgson, O.J. Stanton & Hon Sec.

Apologies were received from Miss Rowell and Mr R W Hastings

The Minutes were read and confirmed.

Arising out of the minutes it was resolved that a letter of thanks be sent to donors of advertising space.

The secretary reported the arrangements made for the Concert at the Odeon Cinema on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1941 and it was resolved that Pacey's or Norwood Hotel be approached to cater for supper for band.

Arrangements were made for stewards to be on duty at the Odeon Cinema to help staff and it was agreed to distribute ?????? to each village.

The scheme relating to Warship Week fixed for 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March was reported by the Chairman and it was resolved that the tender for the weekly savings should be £10,000.

After discussion it was resolved on the proposition of Coun. Munson, seconded by Mr O.J. Stanton that the Warship Week tender be for a submarine, the total cost being £425,000.