

# **Durrington**

## **Roll of Honour**



*Lest we Forget*

### **World War II**



**P/JX 157754 BOY 1ST CLASS**

**A. W. S. MILES**

**ROYAL NAVY**

**H.M.S. *ROYAL OAK***

**14TH OCTOBER, 1939**

## Alfred Walter Sydney MILES

Alfred Walter Sydney Miles' birth was registered in March quarter, 1923 in the district of Amesbury, Wiltshire. His mother's maiden name was listed as Way. Alfred W. Miles married Alice H. Way in 1919 at Salisbury Register Office. Their marriage was registered in the December quarter, 1919 in the district of Salisbury, Wiltshire.

Alfred Walter Sydney Miles enlisted with the Royal Navy. He was given the service number of P/JX 157754. Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class Alfred Walter Sydney Miles' records show that at the time of his death he was attached to H. M. S. *Royal Oak* of the Royal Navy.

Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class Alfred Walter Sydney Miles was killed by enemy action aboard *Royal Oak* on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1939, aged 17 years.

Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class Alfred Walter Sydney Miles is remembered on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Hampshire – Panel 34, Column 2 as he has no grave. His death is acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The CWGC lists Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class Alfred Walter Sydney Miles as the son of Alfred William Miles and Alice Hayter Miles, of Marlborough, Wiltshire.

A. W. S. Miles is remembered on the Durrington War Memorial, Wiltshire.



**Durrington War Memorial** (Photo courtesy of Ian King 2010)

## **Portsmouth Naval Memorial**

The Portsmouth Naval Memorial is situated on Southsea Common overlooking the promenade.

After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided.

An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The Portsmouth Naval Memorial was unveiled by the Duke of York (the future George VI) on 15 October 1924.

After the Second World War it was decided that the naval memorials should be extended to provide space for commemorating the naval dead without graves of that war, but since the three sites were dissimilar, a different architectural treatment was required for each. The architect for the Second World War extension at Portsmouth was Sir Edward Maufe (who also designed the Air Forces memorial at Runnymede) and the additional sculpture was by Charles Wheeler, William McMillan, and Esmond Burton. The Extension was unveiled by the Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother on 29 April 1953.

Portsmouth Naval Memorial commemorates around 10,000 sailors of the First World War and almost 15,000 of the Second World War.

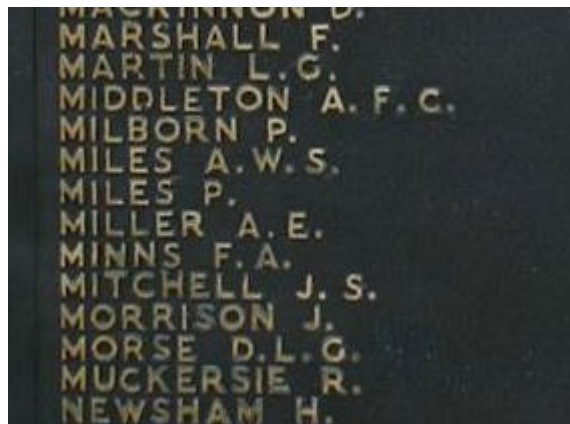
*(Information & Photo from CWGC)*

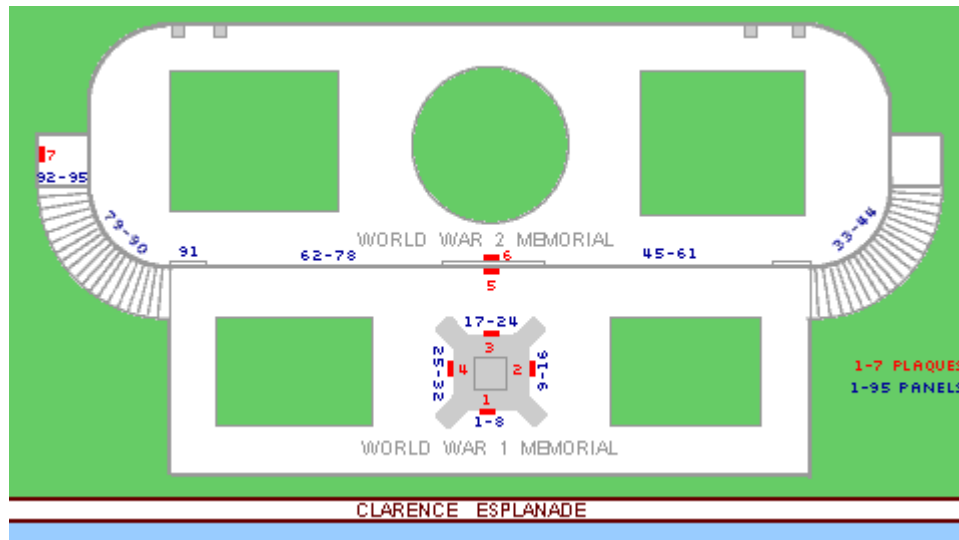


**Portsmouth Naval Memorial**



Panel 34 (Photos from Memorial & Monuments in [Portsmouth](#) – Tim Backhouse/Geoff Allen)





## HMS *Royal Oak*



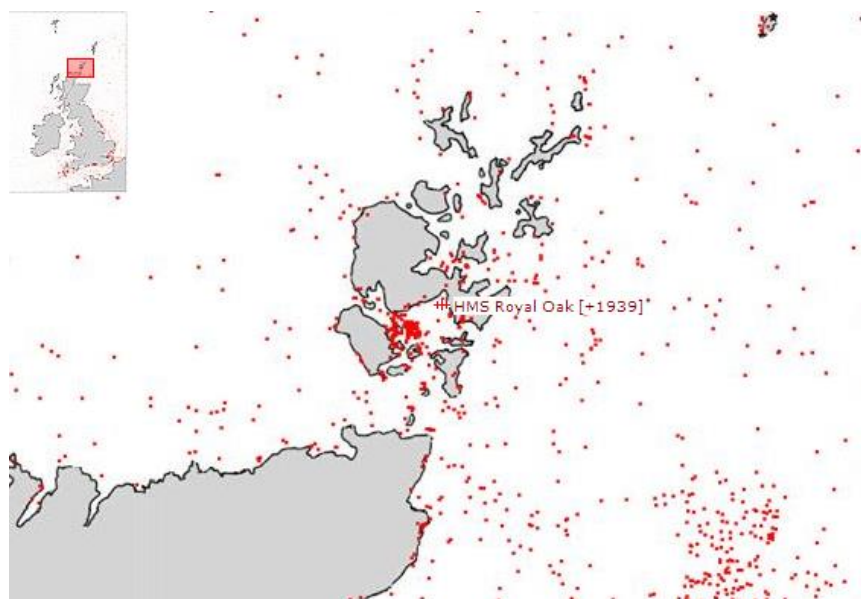
HMS *Royal Oak* was one of five *Revenge*-class battleships built for the Royal Navy during the First World War. Launched in 1914 and completed in 1916, *Royal Oak* first saw combat at the Battle of Jutland as part of the Grand Fleet. In peacetime, she served in the Atlantic, Home and Mediterranean fleets, more than once coming under accidental attack. The ship drew worldwide attention in 1928 when her senior officers were controversially court-martialled. Attempts to modernise *Royal Oak* throughout her 25-year career could not fix her fundamental lack of speed, and by the start of the Second World War, she was no longer suited to front-line duty.

On 14 October, 1939, *Royal Oak* was anchored at Scapa Flow in Orkney, Scotland, when she was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-47*. Of *Royal Oak*'s complement of 1,234 men and boys, 833 were killed that night or died later of their wounds. The loss of the old ship – the first of the five Royal Navy battleships and battlecruisers sunk in the Second World War – did little to affect the numerical superiority enjoyed by the British navy and its Allies, but the sinking had considerable effect on wartime morale. The raid made an immediate celebrity and war hero out of the U-boat commander, Günther Prien, who became the first German submarine officer to be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. Before the

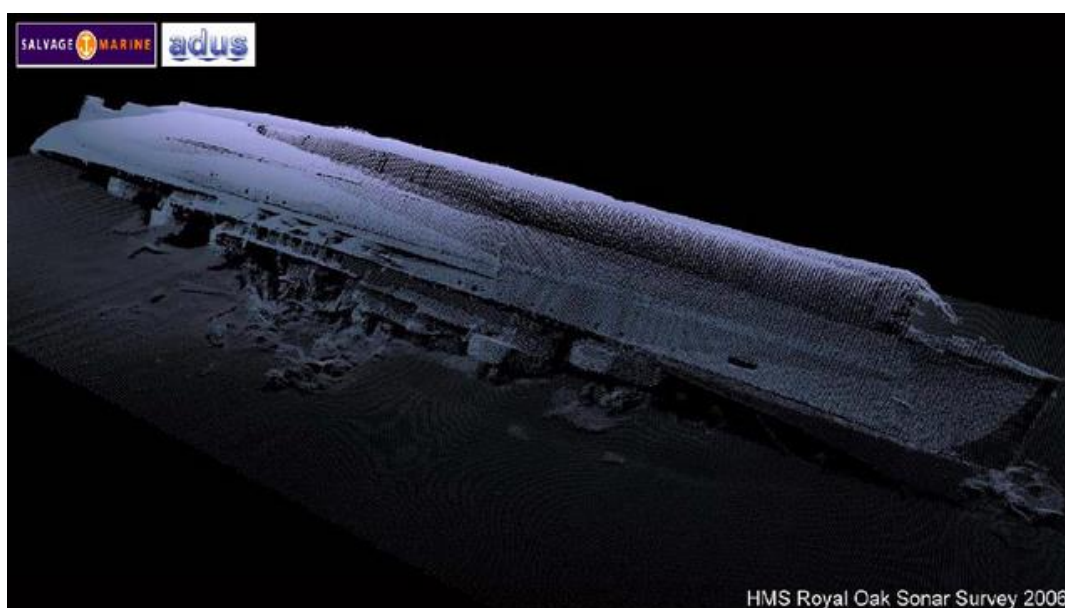
sinking of *Royal Oak*, the Royal Navy had considered the naval base at Scapa Flow impregnable to submarine attack, and *U-47*'s raid demonstrated that the German Navy was capable of bringing the war to British home waters. The shock resulted in rapid changes to dockland security and the construction of the Churchill Barriers around Scapa Flow.

The wreck of *Royal Oak*, a designated war grave, lies almost upside down in 100 feet (30 m) of water with her hull 16 feet (4.9 m) beneath the surface. In an annual ceremony to mark the loss of the ship, Royal Navy divers place a White Ensign underwater at her stern. Unauthorised divers are prohibited from approaching the wreck at any time under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

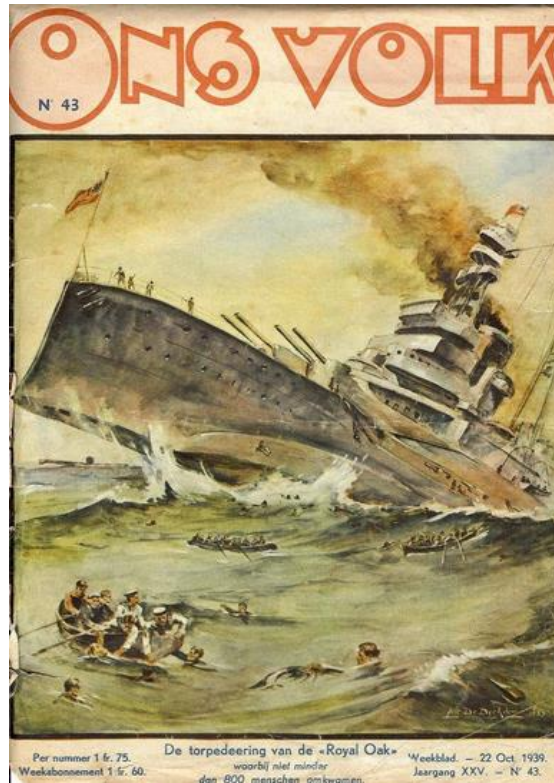
(Wikipedia)



Location of the wreck of *Royal Oak* (Photo from [wrecksite](#))



Sonar Image of *Royal Oak* from [2006](#)



The Royal Oak – headline news in the magazine “Ons Volk” 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1939

(Photo from Lettens Jen – [wrecksite](#))



The annual raising of the White Ensign [underwater](#)



Memorial in St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Scotland including the *Royal Oak's* Bell



## Newspaper Article

### **A sacrifice never forgotten: Battleship wreck torpedoed by German U-Boat during one of the blackest days of the Second World War is remembered in poignant mission ahead of Remembrance Day**

- HMS *Royal Oak* was fired three times by Germans in the early hours of October 14, 1939, in Orkney, Scotland
- 1,200 crew members were asleep below deck. Just 325 survived the attack, which sunk the ship in 13 minutes
- A team of Navy officers have recovered the original flag and replaced it to honour to memories of the sailors

Alone in the darkness, in icy waters on the sea bed, her rusting hulk symbolises the sacrifice so many made for freedom.

This is the ghostly image of HMS *Royal Oak*, torpedoed by a German U-Boat during one of the blackest days of the Second World War.

The magnificent battleship's guns lie twisted in the deep, her once-proud tower broken and buried by the sands of the last seven decades.

But today, after a poignant mission ahead of tomorrow's Remembrance Day commemorations, a white ensign was raised once again from the

Royal Navy divers carried a new standard 80ft below the surface of Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, where the warship sunk in 1939, and attached it to the upturned hull. It is an annual ritual performed to underline an eternal promise - that those who gave their lives would never be forgotten.



Six weeks into the war, 833 sailors were killed when the ship went down in minutes after being attacked at anchor. Most were killed by fire, many as they slept in their hammocks. Of those who escaped, few survived the freezing cold sea. More than 100 of the ship's 1,234 complement were 'boy sailors', the war's biggest loss of these brave teenage seamen, assigned to the British fleet before they became ordinary seamen at 18.

In a sombre ceremony, ten divers from the Royal Navy Northern Diving Group, based at Faslane, raised the flag in the eerie underwater silence before attaching it to an upper propshaft and saluting the memory of the fallen. Normally, the white ensign is flown at all times when Royal Navy ships are underway. Here, it could hardly flutter in the same way as the one on a nearby shore memorial does - but at least the current allowed it to stay unfurled with some dignity. This was still a war grave, after all, and hundreds of ordinary men and boys, who once served beneath this flag's wartime forebear, lay inside.

The ship's previous ensign was recovered and will be presented to the Royal Oak Association.

The haunting picture of HMS *Royal Oak* was created technologically 12 years ago by joining together a series of photographs and video clips, the only possible way to visualise the wreck through the murky waters as a single image.

Even on the clearest days, visibility is limited to around 50ft; on bad days, to virtually nothing. After the ensign was in place, the diving group's commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Richard Osbaldestin, paid tribute to the dead and their sacrifice.

'Diving on the *Royal Oak* is a timely reminder to the younger members of the team of the UK's maritime heritage and the great contribution the Royal Navy made,' he said. 'For many at the time, this tragedy symbolised the beginning of the war in the realisation that nowhere was safe - and the country was at war at home just as much as it was on the Continent.'

Having survived the First World War, she narrowly missed bombs thrown by Franco's pilot during the Spanish Civil War while conducting 'non intervention patrols' around the coast.

In 1937 she also starred in a melodramatic movie, *Our Fighting Navy*, as a South American rebel ship, *El Mirante*, commandeered by Robert Douglas.

Despite the relatively shallow water in which she sank, the majority of bodies could not be recovered from *Royal Oak*.

The wreck has been designated a war grave and all diving or other unauthorised forms of exploration are prohibited under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

The brass letters that formed *Royal Oak's* name were removed as a keepsake by a recreational diver in the 1970s. After being returned twenty years later, they were displayed in the Scapa Flow visitor centre in Lyness.

A memorial at St Magnus' Cathedral in nearby Kirkwall displays a plaque dedicated to those who lost their lives and a book of names. This list of names was not released by the Government until 40 years after the sinking. A page of the book is turned every week.

## **MIGHTY OAK: THE FIRST TRAGEDY**

'*The Mighty Oak*' as she was known, was a Revenge Class battleship built in Devonport and launched in 1914.

She first saw action at the Battle of Jutland. The 29,000 ton ship had a top speed of 20 knots and an impressive array of guns. But by the time World War II broke out she was deemed unsuitable for front-line action.

She was sunk while anchored at Scapa Flow, the wartime home of the fleet, on October 14, 1939. The war was just 41 days old.

A U-Boat captained by German naval ace Günther Prien sneaked through a blockade into the supposedly safe haven, and fired a series of torpedoes. Three scored direct hits and the ship took only around ten minutes to sink.

HMS *Royal Oak* was loaded with fuel and ammunition - so regular safety inspections of the wreck have to be carried out along the wreck's 620ft (189m) hull.

Twelve years ago, 97-year-old war widow Dorothy Golding was reunited with her late husband Arthur when her ashes were placed in a weighted casket in the ship on which he died.

*(Daily Mail - 9 November, 2013)*