

Petty Officer HERBERT FRANCIS ERIC GYNGELL

D/J 113228, H.M.S. *Matabele*, Royal Navy

who died age 33 on 17 January 1942

Remembered with honour at the PLYMOUTH NAVAL MEMORIAL

Herbert Gyngell was born 6 December 1908, the son of the well-known Bert & Florence Gyngell of *Abbey Garage*, Church Street, and nephew of Fred. Gyngell of the *Central Garage*, at the Cross.¹ Husband of Esther Maud Gyngell.

He joined the navy as a boy-sailor in 1925 following Edgar Banfield to *HMS Impregnable* and *HMS Emperor of India*. In 1937, by the end of his 12 year engagement, he was an acting Petty Officer but he stayed on to become a **Petty Officer**. When war broke out he was serving on *HMS Curlew* until it was sunk in the Norwegian Campaign on 25 May 1940. He was rescued from the sea with a serious head wound and spent time in hospital at Narvik - amid the bombing - and then in Scotland. On 16 July 1941, he was sufficiently recovered to join *HMS Matabele*.²



CPO Gyngell



the "unofficial" medal, issued by the *Russian Convoy Association*



Wedding 1934

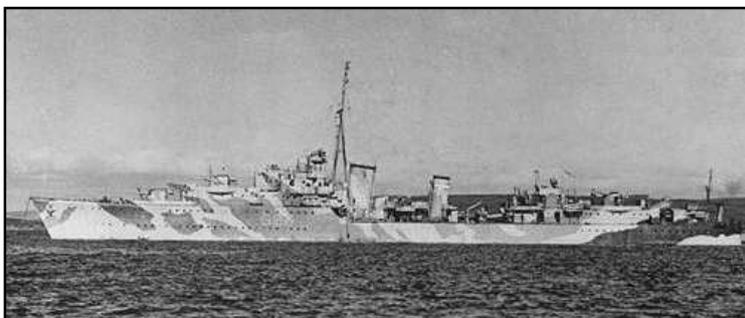


The Medal Received 2016

¹ In 2005, *Slatter's Bistro* and *One-Stop Retail Stores* respectively.

² We are indebted to tin daughter, Mrs. Valerie Ellis, and her daughter, Viv, for much of this information.

That was after the Nazi invasion of Russia on 22 June 1941 when *Matabele* was immediately assigned to Russian convoy duty. *Matabele* was a *Tribal Class* of Destroyer which had been commissioned from *Greenock* in 1939.



On 8 January 1942, *HMS Matabele* and *HMS Somali* were ordered to join the escort of the infamous convoy **PQ-8**. On 17 January, just off Kola Inlet, *HMS Matabele* (Cdr. A.C. Stanford, R.N., DSC) was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-454*³ and sank in two minutes. Even in that short

time, many had managed to abandon ship only to be frozen to death in the icy waters.

The incident has been recorded in a book by Ewart Brookes, the *Gates of Hell*⁴:

"It was sunk east of Bear Island. A rescue ship raced toward her and reached her in a few minutes. There were men in the water, their heads held above it by their lifebelts, men who stared back at their rescuers with unblinking, unseeing eyes; men who bobbed about in waves, in groups as if they were participating in some sort of grotesque square dance... But all of them were dead. Frozen in little more time than it takes to boil an egg. Two Matabele men alone survived."

Sadly, Herbert Gyngell was not one of them but we are able to feel how painfully our servicemen died. We should, therefore, be shocked - and collectively ashamed - that the British government has not recognised this sacrifice by the issuing of a Campaign Medal.⁵

³ *U454* was sunk at 1400 hrs. on 1 Aug, 1943 in the Bay of Biscay, by depth charges from an Australian Sunderland aircraft, leaving 32 dead and 14 survivors.

⁴ Arrow Books, p 27. Mrs. Ellis also recalls another relevant book, "*Last Call For HMS Edinburgh*".

⁵ Letter to the Echo, 28 May 2005 by Neville. Gyngell, a child of Herbert. He has also supplied this photograph of the "unofficial" medal, issued by the *Russian Convoy Association*. **Eventually, the official medal was sent to his children.**