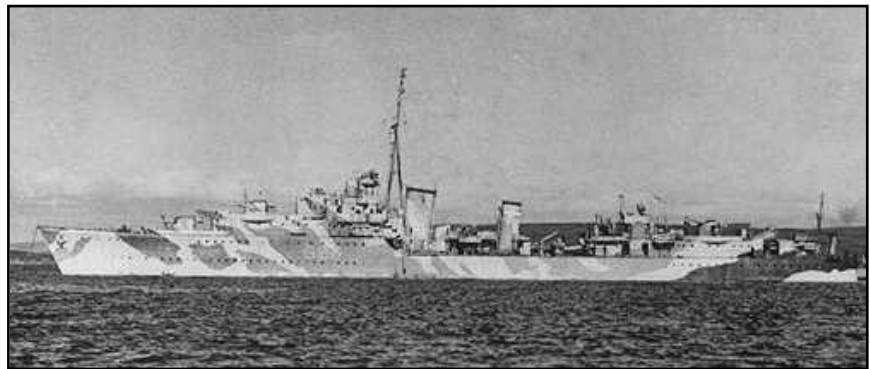


P.O. Herbert Francis Eric Gyngell, R.N. (Killed in Action, 17 January 1942)



**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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup>



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*<sup>3</sup> 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*<sup>4</sup>:

*"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.<sup>5</sup>

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



<sup>2</sup> We are indebted to **Mrs Valerie Ellis**, and her daughter, **Viv**, for much of this information.

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

<sup>4</sup> Arrow Books, p 27. Mrs. Ellis also recalls another relevant book, "*Last Call for HMS Edinburgh*".

<sup>5</sup> Letter to the Echo, 28 May 2005 by N.E. Gyngell, a child of Herbert. After a concerted campaign in 2012, his family received his posthumous medal in 2016.

## Eric Gyngell's Posthumous Medal:



	
<p><b>P.O. Gyngell's Medals, treasured by his family</b></p>	<p><b>The Valued Arctic Campaign Medal [2016]</b></p>

I revisited our book of 2005, "Never has so much been owed...." which featured the above obituary. When writing it I learned of the injustice meted out by the authorities to those who served, suffered and died on the Arctic Convoys.

The program out me, ***My Grandparents' War*** on **Channel 4**, which featured actress **Kristin Scott Thomas**. Her grandfather's baptism of fire was rescuing 300 sailors took part in the torpedoed on **HMS Courageous** just after the war broke out. He went on to rescue soldiers from Dunkirk after which he was despatched to the Arctic Convoys. The programme featured a very lucid 95 year old survivor who presented the actress with her grandfather's posthumous medal – 7 years late. The bureaucrats did not even find such a famous granddaughter. Having survived that ordeal, he took part in the D-Day landings. For him then his war was over.

The actress lost her father when she was aged only 6 – he followed his father into the Navy but died in an aircraft accident in 1966. She did have the consolation that her beloved grandfather lived to a good age – but, of course, talked little about his war.

Two photographs for which we did not have room in 2005:

	
<p><b>His marriage in 1934 to Miss Maud King</b></p>	<p><b>The hospital where he recovered, after the Norwegian Campaign</b></p>

Mr. and Mrs. King had twins **Neville and Valerie** [now Mrs Ellis] who were only toddlers, when he went to war. They were thrilled to receive his medals in 2016.

We can download the programme [and the others which have been excellent] and also these articles:

- <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/whitstable/news/brave-kent-veteran-brings-actress-to-tears-218064/>
- <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7768171/Dame-Kristin-Scott-Thomas-reveals-shock-learning-grandfather-saved-thousands-Dunkirk.html>