

# **CHORLEY & DISTRICT IN WORLD WAR TWO**



## **HMS 'URSULA': THE CHORLEY & DISTRICT SUBMARINE**

By Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

## THE STORY BEGINS - 'WARSHIP WEEK': 1942

'Warship Week' ran throughout Chorley and District from 31<sup>st</sup> January 1942 to 7<sup>th</sup> February 1942. It was launched by Admiral Sir Percy Noble K.C.B., C.V.O. and future Commander of 'Ursula', Lieutenant A. R. Hezlet, D.S.C. The campaign was originally planned to be launched by Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield, however he later became otherwise engaged.

During 'Warship Week' the target was an immense £175,000. This would be rewarded with the sponsorship of the pre-assigned, and already famous Submarine, HMS 'Ursula'. That figure would in truth only account for the hull of a new Submarine. However, a sum of £425,000 would cover the entire build of such a modern vessel.



Above: Advert for 'Warship Week'. (Chorley Guardian)



Considering the effort of, amongst other things, the 'Spitfire Fund' and 'War Weapons Week', the people astonishingly raised a commendable £387,354, over double the original objective. As a result the Borough adopted 'Ursula', who by 1942, had already made the newspaper headlines and had many exploits to its credit. This no doubt instilled a sense of pride in the people, that through their efforts they could take 'ownership' of this famous vessel.

DAILY MIRROR, Saturday, March 30, 1940.

# Daily Mirror

NO. 11,328 \* \* \* \* \* ONE PENNY  
Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

## URSULA SANK NAZI VESSEL



IT was officially disclosed in London yesterday that it was the British submarine Ursula, famous for her exploit in torpedoing a German cruiser at the mouth of the Elbe, which stopped and sank the Nazi merchant ship Hedderheim.

The Hedderheim, stopped by the Ursula eight miles east of the Skaw, was then flying the Estonian colours.

Thus the Ursula becomes the ace-submarine of the British Fleet and Commander G. C. Phillips one of the most daring submarine commanders of the war.

The Ursula, returning from patrol at the entrance to the Baltic, landed the first German prisoner to be captured by a British submarine during this war.

He was the chief engineer of the Hedderheim.

When that ship was trapped by the Ursula, Commander Phillips gave the crew fifteen minutes to get to safety.

The German sailor were later picked up by the British vessel.

Commander G. C. Phillips, of the Ursula.

Above: A national newspaper headline from 1940. (Crown Copyright)

## THE LAUNCH OF 'URSULA'

HMS 'Ursula' was one of the first three 'U' Class type Submarines. Having been ordered by the Admiralty in 1936, the Submarine was built by Vickers Armstrong Limited in Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria, at a cost of slightly over £200,000.

The single hull vessel was laid down on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1937 and was launched in the afternoon of Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1938. 'Ursula' was sent on her way down the slipway and into the Walney Channel, after the traditional christening with the bottle of champagne, by Mrs. Callander.



Above: A commemorative plaque marking the launch of 'Ursula'. (S.A. Clewlow)





Above: Mrs Callander launches 'Ursula'. (The Dock Museum, VPA 2562)



Above: 'Ursula' leaves the slipway and enters Walney Channel. The event was captured by numerous press representatives, official photographers and on newsreel. (RNSM, Gosport)



Above: VIP Invitation and ticket to the launch of 'Ursula' and also 'Triumph' and 'Unity'. (S.A. Clewlow)

Lt. Cdr. G.C. Phillips was officially given command of 'Ursula' from 8<sup>th</sup> November 1937. He found the vessel interesting to work with but had some criticism of the size and speed. Phillips was a quiet, slightly reserved man but who was well respected and came to know the workings of the 'U'-Class better than anyone else.

Upon leaving dock to begin acceptance trials, 'Ursula' was commissioned on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1938. 'Ursula' was one of just three 'Unity' Class Submarines built during a pre-war programme. The rest of that design was constructed during the war. There would be 49 vessels constructed during the war, of what became classified more simply as the 'U'-Class.

H.M.S. 'Ursula' Statistics (British 'U' Class)	
Pennant Number	59c (Feb 1938- Sept 1939) 59n (Sept 1939- 1940) N59 (1940- onwards) B4 / V4 (1944-1949)
Displacement	540 Tonnes surfaced 730 Tonnes submerged
Dimensions	Length: 191 ft 6 inch (x 16 ft x 12 ft 9 inch) (Extended to 197ft after the 1942 modification.) Beam: 16 ft Mean Draught: 12 ft 9 inch
Crew numbers	27: 4 Officers, 4 Petty Officers, 4 ERAs, and 15 others. In wartime- 31: 4 Officers, 5 Petty Officers, 4 ERAs, and 18 others.
Propulsion	2 x 615bhp Davey Paxman Diesel Engines (Surface) 2 x 825bhp Electric Motors Twin Screw (Submerged)
Fuel Capacity	38 tonnes of diesel
Range	4050 miles at 10 knots surfaced 23 miles at 8 knots submerged
Armament	6 x 21 inch Bow torpedo tubes, 2 external (non-reloadable) 10 Torpedoes carried 3x .303inch Machine guns 1 x 3 inch quick fire Mk 1 deck gun
Maximum speed	11.75 knots surfaced 10 knots submerged
Periscopes (Periscope running depth 27 ft)	Monocular "Attack" Periscope: 7in diameter. 1.5 x magnification  Bi-focal "Search" Periscope: 9in diameter



## 'URSULA' GOES TO WAR

At the outbreak of war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, HMS 'Ursula' was assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla which worked from the depot ship HMS 'Titania'. 'Ursula' was already on patrol having left Blyth on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1939.

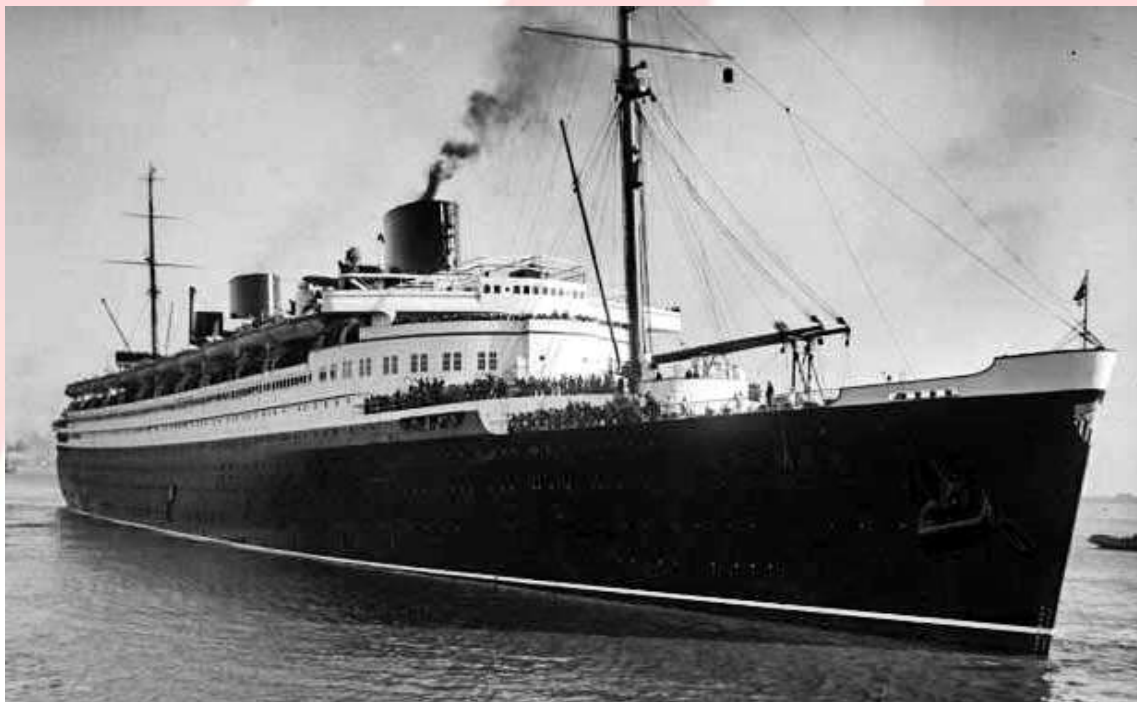
On 8<sup>th</sup> September 'Ursula' was ordered along with HMS 'Unity' to a designated area where an enemy escorted convoy had been reported. Under the command of Lieutenant Commander G.C. Phillips, HMS 'Ursula' was credited with the distinction of firing the very first British Submarine torpedoes of the Second World War. This occurred just before sunset on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1939, at 1923 hours. Four torpedoes were launched whilst surfaced, by Richard Pitman when ordered by Phillips, from approximately 750-1000 yards against the German Submarine 'U-35', approximately 23 miles off the Island of Schiermonnikoog, Netherlands. Under the command of Kapitan Leutnant Werner Lott, from warnings by the observant lookouts, who saw the tell tale splash and trail of the torpedoes, 'U-35' took evasive action, survived the attack and escaped. All torpedoes missed their target. The Captain of 'U-35' said that he then turned towards the Submarine and attempted to ram her at a speed of about 12 knots. The estimate he gave for the range of 'Ursula' was 547 yards.

After a brief pursuit, another torpedo was fired at 1933 hours but this one also missed. At 1950 hours however, it was in fact 'U-21' that reported being missed by a torpedo. So unknowingly, 'Ursula' could have scored two hits on U-Boats within days of the war starting. It was also later reported by 'U-21' that they had sighted 'Ursula' but were not in a position to instigate an attack.

When 'Ursula' was sailing on the surface charging batteries after its eventful day, an unknown trawler also attempted to ram the Submarine. Only by diving deep was 'Ursula' saved from an early accident.

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1939, 'Ursula' was in the vicinity of the pre-war German liner 'Bremen'. It was being stalked by Submarine HMS 'Salmon', commanded by Lt. Cdr. Bickford. (Ironically, he had travelled to America and back on 'Bremen', in 1933.) At around 1000 hours Bickford intercepted an Admiralty message to 'Ursula' that 'Bremen' was not a legitimate target and was to be allowed to continue on its way.





Above: A pre-war view of 'Bremen'. (Crown Copyright)

Upon rising back up to periscope depth, 'Ursula' was past the destroyers and well within a range of 1,200 yards of the Cruiser. At the given moment, Phillips ordered the launch of 6 torpedoes. At the time of firing the torpedoes, the 'Leipzig' so close that working sounds within the cruiser could be heard inside the Submarine. Following the explosion of the first torpedo strike at around 1131-1225 hours, these sounds ceased. The second strike, which in turn caused a second and third explosion, could be explained that it must have struck the ships magazine. 'Ursula' was so close that after the torpedoes had been fired, two of the ensuing explosions violently shook the Submarine causing many of the lightbulbs to shatter.

With the first strike having ended one series of noises, the second strike began a different series of hauntingly recognisable sounds. This was the noise of muffled explosions, groaning, twisting, and bending metal of the ships structure.

The German escort destroyer 'F.9' sailed into the path of the torpedoes heading for 'Leipzig'. It sank within three minutes and this would have accounted for the harrowing sounds heard onboard 'Ursula'. Two of the other R-Boat Destroyers were seen scouring the area in search of survivors. As for the cruiser 'Leipzig', no trace of it was seen again. At the time it was believed to have sunk. It had in fact been able to take evasive action after seeing the explosion on 'F.9'.

It was later established that during this action, 'Leipzig' (although it is believed that one torpedo did hit the stern) had managed to escape and that a second R-Boat escort vessel (although its identity is unknown) had also been sunk by the same salvo launched by 'Ursula'. Despite a protective cover of six escort vessels against the Cruiser, the attack was pressed home perfectly.

The service details of 'Ursula' up to December 1939, was reported in the 'Chorley Guardian' on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1941:

***"The skilful and successful attack of HMS 'Ursula' close to the entrance of one of the German Fleets main harbours, shows that the personnel of the British Submarines at the present time are worthy successors of the Officers and Men who so successfully penetrated enemy waters during the last war."***



Above: The Duke of Kent inspecting 'Ursula' crew, March 1940. (RNSM, Gosport)  
L-R: Lt Piper, PO Bravery, Stoker Johnston. Phillips is in the foreground on the right.





Above: Phillips (and his signature below) leaves 'Ursula'. (Crown Copyright)

G. C. Phillips



On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1940, at 2146 hours a ship was sighted, approximately eight miles off the Skaw, Denmark's northeast tip. 'Ursula' altered course to the east and gave chase. It was identified as the German merchant ship 'Heddernheim' (built in 1921 at 4947 tonnes and formerly named 'Fredericus Rex') and it was carrying 7000 tonnes of precious Swedish iron ore, from Narvik, Norway, bound for Germany. It had departed Haugesand on the 18<sup>th</sup>. At this stage of the war, in such shallow and treacherous waters, there was almost continuous enemy surveillance. This came both from the air and by high speed German patrol boats. 'Ursula' surfaced and closed in on the ship, ordering it to surrender.

Phillips instructed his Signaller to transmit the internationally recognised code 'K' - 'Stop Immediately'. Noticing that 'Heddernheim' had in fact sped up after the signal was sent, the order was emphasised with a shot over the bow from the deck gun. The Signaller then sent the message 'O.L.' - 'Heave Too or I will Open Fire'. 'Heddernheim', by then appreciating its dire situation, stopped engines and lowered a lifeboat which proceeded to sail across to the Submarine. The crew of the lifeboat were accepted aboard, where they were interrogated. They gave their nationality as Estonian, and as such they flew the flag of Estonia. However, they obviously failed to appreciate that the crew of 'Ursula' had seen 'Heddernheim of Bremen' written on the side of the ship.

In addition, Lt. Piper reported his thoughts to Commander Phillips. He had great knowledge of the Baltic merchant fleets from his time there in the Merchant Navy before the war. He explained that Estonia had no vessels of the size of 'Heddernheim'. Lt Piper could speak a little German and so spoke with the crew the best he could.

Eventually the crew returned to the 'Heddernheim' with the instruction to abandon ship within 15 minutes or be sunk. Despite the time limit placed on the order, the merchant crew set about the directive slowly. This nonchalance tried the patience of Commander Phillips. On his order a second warning shot was fired over the funnel of the 'Heddernheim'. This had the desired effect and succeeded in speeding up the evacuation. Commander Phillips made sure that all the crew had left the ship before sending it to the bottom of the sea with one precisely aimed torpedo.

Those who were given permission to climb the conning tower watched the 'Heddernheim' sink, stern first in 5 to 10 minutes at 2300 hours.

It is believed that 'Ursula' had sunk the 1<sup>st</sup> German manned, German Merchant vessel by British Submarine in the war; another noteworthy accolade.



Above: The crew of 'Ursula' under Captain Phillips. (Crown Copyright)  
Below: The crew of 'Ursula' under Captain Hezlet. (Crown Copyright)





## 'URSULA' IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Under the Captaincy of Lakin, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1942, 'Ursula' departed Lerwick to patrol the North Sea. At this time they were assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Submarine flotilla.

One of the first duties was to assist the escort of Convoy PQ-17 to Russia. PQ-17 was a convoy carrying supplies and war materials to Russia from Britain and the USA. The cargo was the largest and most valuable to be transported up to that date. It sailed from 27<sup>th</sup> June to July 1942 and was to gain the unfortunate distinction of suffering the heaviest loss of any of the 'PQ' (Russian bound) convoys of the war, with 25 from 36 of the Allied vessels being lost as a result of enemy action.

Later that year 'Ursula' was to be a part of the Anglo-American invasion of Vichy French North Africa- Operation 'Torch'. It was conceived with the aim of opening a second front so as to reduce the pressure faced by Soviet Forces on the Eastern Front and secondly to have a large force in opposition to enemy Mediterranean based forces.

A report of the Operation was made in the London Gazette, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1949:

***"The column (of 7 ships) for 'Z' Beach led by 'Jamaica' parted company at 1825, making for the eastern marking Submarine, HMS 'Ursula'... The Submarine's signal was sighted right ahead at 2100, and at 2205, Arzeu Island light and the glare over the town of Mostaganem were in sight.***

***By that time the wind was nil, the sea smooth, and even the stars obscured by cloud. Conditions were perfect. At 'Z' Beach the assault craft touched down undetected within a few minutes on either side of zero hour and the troops and beach parties proceeded on their several missions unopposed.***

***A company of U.S. Rangers... did not even get their feet wet."***

Once the crew were rested and stores had been replenished, 'Ursula' was almost ready for the next patrol. When the time came on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1942, the crew were joined by two Commandoes and their Folbot (folding canoe).



The Commandoes were Captain R. Livingstone and Sergeant 'Stan' Weatherall. The SBS (Special Boat Service) were on board to assist 'Ursula' in their specific mission which had been designated a "Nuisance Patrol", whereby they had almost free reign to attack anything of value.

At 2000 hours on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November, 'Ursula' surfaced and proceeded to sail close inshore to approximately just 150 yards off the beach near Oneglia, Cape Mele, Italy.

Captain Livingstone and Sgt. Weatherall, once fully prepared, climbed out of the Submarine and boarded their Folbot. They effected a landing at the coastal main road of the village and hid the canoe in a nearby garden. At this point they were delayed for half an hour. Although the consequences of being seen could have been serious, the cause was much more comical. They were hiding from a courting couple that were close by and stood against the nearby wall of the garden they were hiding in to enjoy each others company! At the railway tunnel there was a house on the edge of the track. Upon closer inspection Livingstone and Weatherall found that this was a Soldiers' Guardroom. The Soldiers inside could be heard talking and there were further Sentries posted at the mouth of the tunnel and up on the top. Having thought they had been detected, the two were forced to lie low for an hour.

During this time a notably long train passed by which would have caused maximum damage had the charges already been set. As it was there was nothing that could be done about it.

During the tense time in hiding, the two were lucky not to be spotted as a soldier came out onto the veranda and answered the call of nature, just over a yard away from the cover of the men.

Once the way was clear a series of Plastic High Explosive charges were prepared at specific locations. The charges were set on a pair of electric cable posts and along the outside bend of the line itself. A pressure switch was set under the lines to detonate the charges once a train passed over it.

At 2340 hours the lookouts on 'Ursula', who had been observing from afar, spotted the Folbot returning from the shore. Signals were exchanged to confirm friend and not foe and once cleared, the Folbot came too. Within minutes both Commandoes were back on the casing and the Folbot was pushed through the torpedo hatch into the fore ends and stowed. The hatch was shut and secured as soon as possible whilst throughout 'Ursula' was on the move sailing slowly out towards the open sea.

At about midnight, with those Lakin had permitted to be on the conning tower, a number of bright flashes were witnessed inland, followed by a loud bang and then a series of smaller explosions. Lights in the vicinity of the explosions went out indicating that the electricity cables had been destroyed and the operation had been a success.

Although at the time, damage to a train that was passing at the time, could not be confirmed, the line itself was known to be blocked for days after, causing major disruption. It was not known whether it was a passenger, freight or military train.

The rate of trains along the line in the immediate aftermath, was reduced from 40 a day to just 4.

In the early hours of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1942, the gun crew from 'Ursula' were again closed up for action. Their target this time was to shell shore targets near Oneglia at a range of about 1500 yards. There was a pier jutting out to the sea from the complex and 'Ursula' stopped some 150 yards from the end of the pier.

Lakin recalled with some humour that there were some cars in the vicinity and:

***"...they were unknowingly but obligingly lighting up the targets with their headlamps."***

The complex in question was an olive oil factory along with its storage tanks and processing buildings. Lakin had knowledge of the area and knew of the factory and its outer buildings. He had been in the area before the war as a Midshipman and amongst other things, he had been taken on an outing, to what was at the time, the largest olive oil producing factory in Italy.

The first shot hit an outpost at the end of the pier at approximately 0120 hours. The next target was the 250 foot tall, brick built chimney. The next ten rounds were fired at the oil tanks.

After about the thirteenth shell, a star shell burst above them, illuminating them in the sea. Enemy fire had already begun at about 0140 hours and the star shell and subsequent searchlights lit the sky at approx 0150 hours. Shells then began to fall around them from shore guns and eventually a searchlight was able to pin point them. Some shells then began to fall within 50 yards and closing. Lakin decided the time had come to withdraw.

Whilst shells continued to fall all around, 'Ursula' sailed out towards the open sea and to safety. Each time 'Ursula' attempted to dive it kept hitting the bottom in the very shallow waters. This happened up to six times before there was enough water to submerge. It is thought that the shore batteries, not expecting a bombardment from so close to shore, could not depress their guns low enough to target 'Ursula' and so they were able to leave the scene unscathed; though with 'Jimmy' Green feeling worst than most! The Italians optimistically claimed the next day to have sunk the attacking Submarine.

All in all it was viewed as a success; the factory received many hits, the chimney was destroyed, as was the outpost on the pier. In all it is thought that up to 25 shots hit targets. It is not known if any casualties were inflicted on the defending coastal forces.

Taken from the "Time" magazine interview with R.B. Lakin, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1944:

*"We went on to Maurizio about five miles away, where there was a large collection of olive-oil tanks. We went slowly into port, making no noise, with the gun manned, keeping a very good lookout in the darkness. I could see the Italians driving about in cars, and every now & then a chap would go by with his girl friend, smoking a cigarette. I could hear the dogs barking. It was all frightfully peaceful. I felt we were swine to interrupt it. The third shot carried away a privy on the end of the pier, containing, I think, the night watchman. We hit the target about 25 times. We kept it up about a quarter-hour before the sleepy Italians realized somebody was shooting at them. They didn't do very much except fire some star shells seven miles out to sea. As we slid out they got a light on us. A couple of shells fell close. Next day they claimed to have sunk us."*

It was to prove a busy day for the gun crew of 'Ursula' on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1942. A merchant vessel was sighted whilst at periscope depth at 1807 hours. It was later identified as being the 'Sainte Marguerite II'. Bearings and range were taken to determine its course and speed, with a view for a torpedo attack. However, the Lakin decided on a gun attack; maybe thinking that they already had their eye in! The gun crew closed up ready in the control room and ammunition was prepared. The Gunlayer Jim Appleton was given a sight of the target through the periscope and the course 'Ursula' would be on relative to the target, when they surfaced.



When under a 1000 yards from the ship, the Submarine put its hydroplanes hard to dive at the same time blowing the ballast tanks to surface. At a given time the hydroplanes were speedily set to surface. This was in such a way as to allow the element of surprise. When at a depth of 12 feet the gun crew were poised in the conning tower to reach the gun in quickest time. Within a minute of coming to the surface, the first shell was fired at 1830 hours, at an estimated range of 1000 yards. In no time at all at least five hits were made on the target. During this action, Sergeant Weatherall, with the Captains permission, helped out by joining the human chain handing shells up to the gun crew.

The first three shells struck the aft superstructure, starboard side of the hull amidships and into the poop deck. The Captain (who for identity purposes shall be referred to as 'Wagner') of the merchant ship, fully alert to the attack, ran to the starboard guard rail and desperately scoured hard out to sea to identify where the shelling had come from. Many of the crew by now had joined him on the deck looking for their assailant in the dark winter afternoon. The gun fired again and another shell exploded against the hull close to the waterline.

During this time the first mate Walter had fired a flare, their ES (Erkennungssignal), recognition signal, into the sky. They had been promised protection from Axis shipping and so, initially they thought they were receiving friendly fire by an Italian vessel.

Again in quick succession, two more shells from 'Ursula' struck the hull against the waterline but still they could see nothing; just the sound of the gun firing from the darkness.

Captain Wagner stepped back to the wheel house and called to "Stop engines and full astern". As 'Sainte Marguerite II' slowed down he ordered two crew men to lower a lifeboat and gave the order to abandon ship. He later reported that he and some crew had seen with horror a white arrow on the surface approach the ship with incredible speed, the tell tale trail of a torpedo. This had been launched from about 800 yards at about 1835 hours. They had held their breath but it passed safely underneath them. The ship had been sitting high in the water due to their fortunate lack of cargo. They now knew that they were up against a Submarine.

The crew continued to lower the lifeboats, now with more haste, boarded, and pulled away from the vessel. Only one lifeboat was operable, after the second, the forward life boat, had smashed on being lowered into the sea.

There had been no time since setting sail for the newly formed crew to practice lifeboat drill and the commands of the Mate went largely unheeded. Some of the men even chose to jump into the sea and then wait to be picked up by the lifeboat.

For some unexplained reason, Captain Wagner had refused all requests from the Wireless Operator to signal further distress calls.

Eventually, running on the surface with electric motors, 'Ursula' quietly nosed its way along starboard side to board the vessel. At this time, 'Jimmy' Green was now on the bridge as a lookout and to use the telegraphs if required. Sgt. Weatherall was also on the casing armed with his 'Tommy' gun. As 'Ursula' came too, 'Jimmy' Green was able to identify that it was registered in Marseille, therefore a French vessel. The name was 'SS Sainte Marguerite II' with Italian markings on the side and an Italian flag being flown.

Once 'Ursula' was secured alongside, at 1915 hours, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Hamilton, Captain Livingstone and other selected crew members went aboard to see what they could find. After 10 to 15 minutes some of the boarding party came up on deck wearing civilian clothing, carrying charts, books, papers, and a little bread (black or very dark brown in colour). There was even a small black and white mongrel dog in the arms of one of the crew.

There was nothing else to report about the patrol until 5<sup>th</sup> December 1942. Whilst sailing submerged, somewhere off the Balearic Islands, the Officer of the Watch saw a sailing vessel of some considerable size. The Captain was duly informed and when he peered through the periscope there was no sign of life on the upper deck which was suspicious, as was the course the vessel was steering. Lakin monitored this vessel for an hour or so, before the decision was made to surface to find out the identity, destination and cargo of the vessel. It was decided to fly a large Nazi flag, which had been recovered from the 'Sainte Marguerite II'. By waiting, until the light became poorer, between late afternoon and early evening and staying at a reasonable distance from the vessel when on the surface, it was hoped that they could fool the crew of the surface vessel into believing that 'Ursula' was in fact a German U-Boat. The boarding party selected by Lt. Hamilton consisted of himself to be its leader, Lt. Tweedie, RNVR (who spoke a number of foreign languages), Able Seaman 'Yorkie' Heseltine, and Telegraphist 'Jimmy' Green. 'Jimmy' Green had just come off the afternoon watch when Lt. Hamilton asked if he was free for special duty. He was, so was selected for the boarding party.

The boarding party dispensed with any uniform and any other items which may have portrayed their true identities.

***"I wore just a plain sailors navy blue jersey, dark sailors trousers, a non-descript pair of oil covered non-shiny boots and no hat. The others did likewise. Instructions were given that only the Navigator would speak when aboard the sailing vessel." J.F. Green.***

The gun crew was ordered to close up ready for action. The gun would be manned and trained on the target, but with no intention of firing except in an emergency. The Signalman had the swastika flag ready to mount aft of the bridge. The order was given to surface; at 12 feet the whistle blew which was the signal for the gun crew to open the hatch and man the gun. Next up, went Lakin and then the Navigator followed by the Signalman.

The swastika flag was mounted above the periscope standards. A Vickers machine gun was mounted on the port side of the bridge as a precaution. Verbal calls were made to the sailing vessel through a megaphone but no response came. It was said to be like the 'Marie Celeste', there was no response verbally or visually. There was no one on the upper deck, or in the bridge cabin. The Captain ordered the Signalman to fire a few rounds from the Vickers gun aiming high over their masts. Still no response came. One more burst of fire aimed much lower, brought bodies tumbling up from below deck to see what was going on. The Navigator shouted across to them in German, and then he changed to French.

When it became obvious that he was not being understood he tried with a few words in Spanish. This brought an immediate reply that they understood. The Navigator requested that they send a boat over to the Submarine to collect a boarding party, who would then inspect their papers and cargo. A boat was lowered and four Spaniards began pulling the boat towards 'Ursula'. In the meantime, the boarding party went down to the gun platform. When the Spanish boat came alongside, the boarding party jumped aboard. They were rowed back to the vessel, which by then lay about 600 yards away.

Eventually the boat reached the sailing vessel and the men prepared to board. This was a tricky operation because the swell at the time caused the sailing vessel to bounce up and down a considerable number of feet relative to those in the smaller boat.

The boarding party split up and 'Jimmy' Green kept with Lt. Hamilton. They went below deck to search for contraband in the cabins, lockers, and various nooks and crannies.



Lt. Tweedie and 'Yorkie' Heseltine conducted the same search but around another part of the vessel. It transpired that they were carrying no more than a cargo of salt. Lt. Tweedie and the vessels Captain exchanged pleasantries. A bottle of wine was given by the Captain for the 'U-Boat' Captain and instructions were given to take us back to the Submarine. 'Yorkie' sat right aft on the stern seat and 'Jimmy' was on the port side. The two Officers sat in front with their backs facing them. Ahead of the Officers were four crewmen facing them and getting the oars ready to row. As soon as indicated, the oars were used to push the boat away from the side of the cargo vessel. The crew members on the upper deck and the rowing crew men stood up smart, raised their right arms in the Nazi salute and called together "Heil Hitler!" 'Yorkie' and 'Jimmy' looked at each other, momentarily wondering what to do next. It was unexpected and quite a surprise. It was resolved when the two Officers stood up, sharply followed by 'Yorkie' and 'Jimmy', and simultaneously they responded with the call "Heil Hitler!"

***"We then sat down again trying to suppress a laugh, but we played the game as expected by good Germans." J.F. Green.***

Whilst all this was going on, 'Ursula' by this time had drifted away with the current and was only just visible in the poor light. The crew on 'Ursula' were not aware what had taken place at that point. After about twenty minutes the boarding party reach 'Ursula'. Once alongside the gun platform, one by one they climbed back aboard. The guns crew were still closed up, as were the bridge party and the swastika was still being flown.

Lakin indicated to the Spaniards that they could return and in turn the Navigator spoke, thanking them for the wine and their cooperation. With their oars they pushed themselves away from 'Ursula'. When only about 10 to 15 yards away, the Spaniards stopped rowing, stood to attention and again gave the Nazi salute and a call of "Heil Hitler!"

***"They all stood to attention, smartly raised their arms and in unison called out "Heil Hitler!" It was as if they had been trained to do it. Considering they could not see nor hear of the earlier salutes at the sailing vessel, it was marvellous to see." J.F. Green***

The next couple of days went by without incident until on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942, HMS 'Ursula' became the first Submarine to enter Algiers Harbour after the successful Allied Invasion.

Although the prisoners had gone, the men of 'Ursula' were still left with the small mongrel dog, Petain. They took to him very well and he received a lot of fuss. He was fed well and seemed at home. The men had found it amusing watching him trying to keep his footing when the Submarine rolled around in the choppy seas. Petain was **"scandalously petted and fussed over"** by the crew said Lakin. He had an intelligent face and was about the size of a Springer spaniel. When they returned to Algiers he departed with one of the crew who had left Submarines and joined combined operations. It is believed that Petain became a pet of the Commander of the Depot ship, 'Maidstone'.





Crew of the 'Ursula' in Algiers.



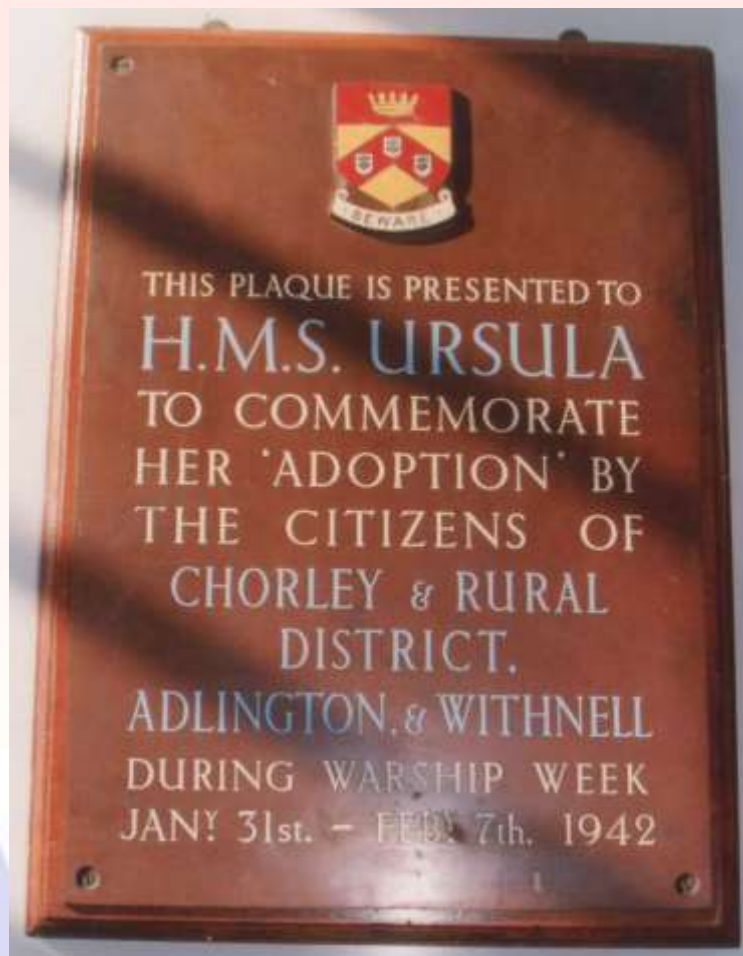


## THE CREW VISIT CHORLEY

The daring exploits throughout Winter 1942, the potentially fatal collision in December and the subsequent heroic return to base at the turn of 1943, prompted a very special invitation from Lancashire.

In October 1943, 11 of the crew from HMS 'Ursula', headed by Lt. Davies, were guests at Chorley and were welcomed by the Mayor, Alderman F. Brindle inside the Council Chamber of the Town Hall.

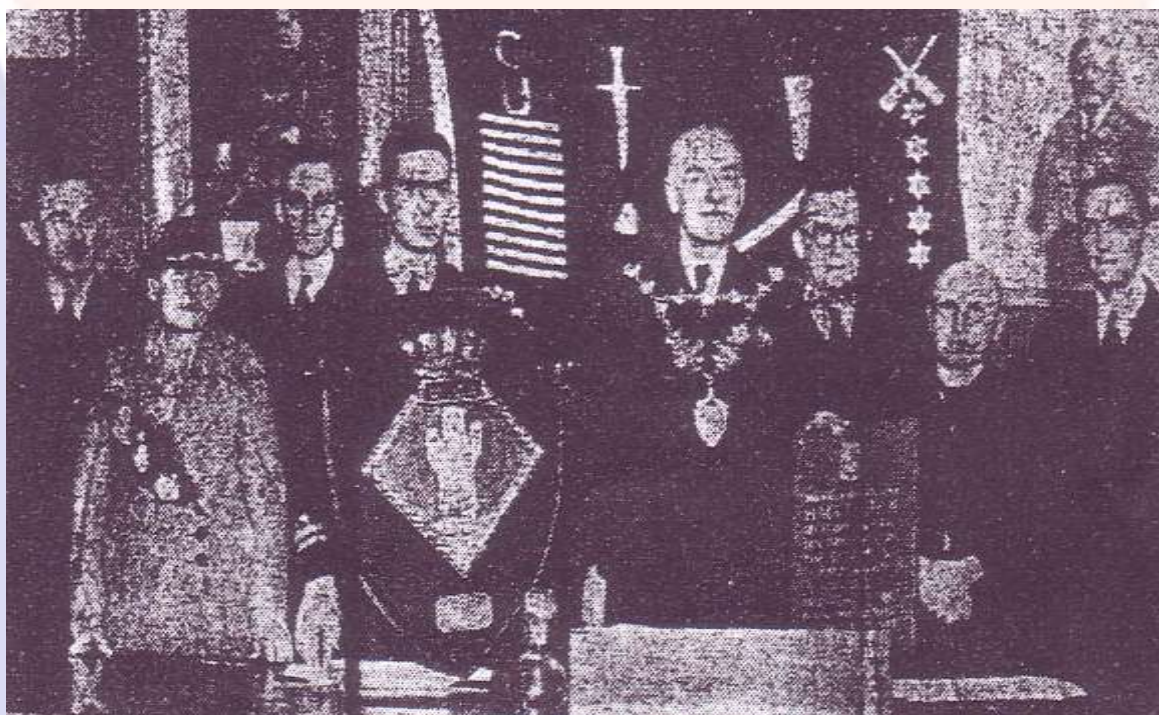
There the crew presented the people of Chorley and District with a plaque bearing the crest of HMS 'Ursula'- a gift from the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty. The Mayor in turn, presented Lt. Davies with a plaque bearing the crest of Chorley to commemorate the adoption of the Submarine by the people of the Borough. This was intended to be mounted within the Submarine as a sign of its adoption.



Above: The plaque intended for 'Ursula'; for some reason it remained in Chorley.  
(Mr S.A. Clewlow)



Above: The badge of HMS/m 'Ursula' presented to the Borough. (Mr S.A. Clewlow)



Above: Photo of the plaque exchange ceremony at Chorley Town Hall. (Lancashire Daily Post).



## 'URSULA' AND THE RUSSIAN NAVY

Towards the end of March 'Ursula' was recalled from its patrol. After a 36 hour stop at Lerwick, to pick up the mail, have baths, stretch legs and visit the local pubs, they made their way back to Dundee. There Davies and the crew were given a very specific brief. They were to meet, greet and train a Russian crew to operate 'Ursula'. It had been determined that the ageing 'Ursula' and other vessels of the British and American Navies were to be transferred into the Soviet Navy. The quantity of vessels being transferred to the Soviets and for operation in and around their waters, was not by any means enough to have any great bearing on the war. The transfer was more a political gesture that the nations of Britain, America and Russia were committed in the Allied cause. The cooperation between the Royal Navy and Soviet Navy would be known around the world and capitalised on with regards to its propaganda value.

In the morning on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1944, Kapitan 3. ranga J.K. Iosseliani, met the Commander of the Russian Northern Fleet, Admiral Arseny G. Golovko, the youngest of the Fleet Commanders. His orders were simple. He was to sail to England, take command of a British Submarine, sail it back to Russia and fight!



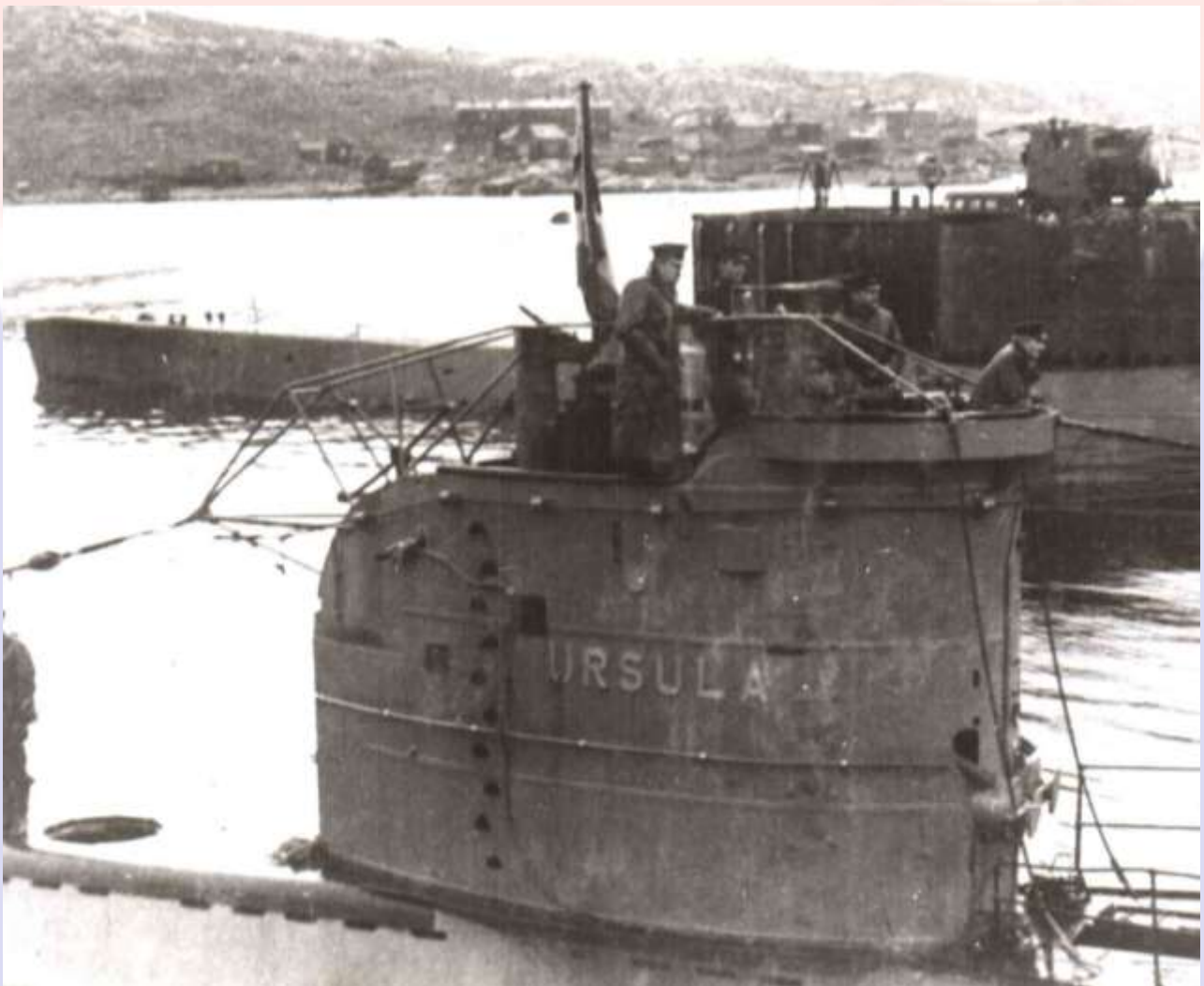
Above: 'Unbroken' and 'Unison' moored against 'Royal Sovereign'. (Mr A. Shenec)



The Royal Ensigns were smoothly lowered on the five vessels, under the sounds of British hymns. A minute silence was observed, before Soviet hymns were heard and the new Soviet ensigns were hoisted up. At the end of the ceremony the Royal Navy crews were removed by tugs.

'Ursula' would now be known in Naval circles, simply as 'B-4' (some sources refer to it as 'V-4' and others, depending upon the translation record it as 'B-4'). It has been noted, that later in the war, 'B-2' had its prefix painted in large letters on the conning tower. It is possible that likewise would have been done to 'Ursula', but obviously as 'B-4'.

It had earlier been approved that Lt. Davies's first child, could be christened on board 'Ursula'. It had been expected that the Russians would take command of the transferred vessels in August, so the christening was planned for Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1944. Sadly, the arrangements could not be completed before the White Ensign was hauled down and Davies's 'Ursula' became Iosseliani's 'B-4', and part of the Soviet Fleet.



Above: 'Ursula' arrives at Polyarny, 1944 (Mr A. Shenec)

It is believed that after the war, 'Ursula' was for a spell serving once more as a training vessel. Lt. Globa left command of 'Ursula' sometime in 1946. No further details of any description can be found thereafter. It seems that 'Ursula' in the post war years was surplus to requirement and in effect, moth balled until 1949.

As 'Ursula' had only ever been leased to the Soviet Navy, she was returned to Britain. On around 10<sup>th</sup> January 1949, Lt. J.C. Varley, DSC travelled to Russia to take command of 'Ursula'. It can be presumed that with the war over and the voyage not being an operational patrol, only a skeleton crew would have been required to bring 'Ursula' back home.

Lt. Varley was in command of 'Ursula' until 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1949. Varley recalled after the war that 'Ursula' really was not in very good condition. There are no further Commanders recorded for 'Ursula' so it can be presumed that once home and now in peace time, 'Ursula' no longer served a purpose.

The Soviet Navy struck 'Ursula' (as 'B-4') from their lists on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1949. Subsequently, once 'Ursula' was home and had been sold off for scrap to a Shipbreaker, it was also then omitted from the Royal Navy lists. After such an illustrious career it seems that the final purpose for 'Ursula' was as a floating exhibit. A statement was found on the internet indicating that in late 1949 or early 1950, 'Ursula' was docked near Minster, Isle of Sheppey. Apparently it was opened up for the public to board and have a look.

From the Isle of Sheppey, 'Ursula' either under tow or under the last of her own power, continued north along the east coast. As one of the last and longest surviving U-Class Submarines, it was signed off and scrapped in May 1950 by the ship breaking company Malcolm Brechin at Granton.

***"How would posterity and the youth of Britain remember my men who had died in such a desperate battle? Unless they were told the story, they would have nothing to remember."***

**Rear Admiral G.W.G. 'Shrimp' Simpson, CB, CBE.**

**Captain, 10<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla; Malta, 1941 - 43.**

## 'URSULA'



Above: The 'Ursula' Jolly Roger proudly displayed in the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, 2007. (Mr S.A. Clewlow)

The Jolly Roger from 'Ursula' consists of emblems symbolic of its actions and achievements. These include:

- 'C' struck through by a Bar = Cruiser sunk by torpedo.
- 'U' struck through by a Bar = U-Boat sunk.
- Red Bar = Warship sunk by torpedo.
- White Bar = Merchant vessel sunk by torpedo.
- Star = Ships sunk by surface gunfire.
- Chimney & 2 squares = Oil refinery destroyed by gunfire.
- Railway locomotives = Train destroyed by gunfire.
- Bridge = Bridge destroyed by gunfire.
- Dagger = Support of a Commando Raid.
- Flaming Torch = Participation in Operation 'Torch'.



The flag was flown only on certain occasions, from one of the periscopes; high above the after end and above the Periscope Standards, on a short flag pole. It would be flown for the day of returning from a successful patrol and also when the Submarine returned to its home port after a foreign posting. In addition to the Jolly Roger, the Submarine always flew the Royal Navy White Ensign.

Today the flag is held, and proudly displayed, amongst a collection of other flags and nautical artefacts in the Royal Navy Submarine Museum at Gosport. The Jolly Roger from HMS 'Ursula' was a feature of the Navy magazine "Navy News" in August 1997. It reported the presentation of the flag to the RNSM by former 'Ursula' CO Lt. Cdr. A-G. Davies, DSC, on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1997.



Above: The presentation of the Jolly Roger by Davies (left) to Cdr. J.J Tall, OBE. (RNSM, Gosport)

## URSULA HONOURS

During service with the Royal Navy HMS/m 'Ursula' received the battle honours:

**North Sea 1939, Norway 1940, Mediterranean 1941, Malta Convoys 1941, Arctic 1942, North Africa 1942-43.**



Above: A commemorative wooden board displaying the battle honours of 'Ursula'. It is not known who made it, when or why. Held in the RNSM, Gosport, 2007.



## 'URSULA' CREW HONOURS

As far as can be determined, there were 23 commendations for bravery and efficient service during the war, in recognition of service on 'Ursula'.

In addition some men were promoted or were increased in rank seniority.

Distinguished Service Order (2): G.C. Phillips (1940) and R.B. Lakin (1943)

Distinguished Service Cross (3): J.D. Greene and A.D. Piper (1940)  
and J.C.C. Hamilton (1943)

Distinguished Service Medal (10): C. Anderson, A.J. Bravery, E. Buckingham,  
W.J. Florence, A.J. Mallett, R. Pitman, N.  
Watson (1940) and F.E. Niblett,  
S.J. Clements, C.E. Allen (1943)

Mentioned in Despatches (8): D.E. Davies, M.C. Janvrin (1940) and  
G.E. Appleton, J. Clarke, J.H. Goldsbrough,  
V.J. Hutchins, A. Rhodes, J.R. Walford (1943)

In addition, all the men (and possibly the WRNS) that served on 'Ursula' would have been entitled to a variety of wartime campaign medals. Also for those who stayed in the Royal Navy after the war, their time onboard 'Ursula' would have contributed to their any award of the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.



Above: The medals of F.E. Niblett at the RNSM Museum, Gosport. (S.A. Clewlow)



## TELEGRAPHIST 'JIMMY' GREEN

John Frederick `Jimmy` Green, C/SSX.34113



At the age of 97, Jimmy is one of only two known surviving crew members from the Chorley & District Submarine HMS 'Ursula'. The other crew member is Commander Mike Hickie, DSC who now lives in Australia.

***"Stuart has put together a very comprehensive true life story featuring accurate data throughout, of the Submarine from its conception to its final fate.***

***Readers of this very true realistic story about 'Ursula' will be enthralled at the exploits, which included torpedo attacks, gunnery attacks, boarding parties, depth charging, special forces operations, and even impersonating a U-boat; serving in Home Waters, Norwegian, Mediterranean, Arctic and Baltic."***

'Jimmy' Green - January 2010.

Presented by Local Historian and Author  
Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

Some of my first public displays of local history and military artefacts was back in 1995 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day. Since then I have been researching and collecting information and artefacts of local importance and sharing it across our Borough, whether that is in schools, community centres, public events and temporary exhibitions, such as the popular Chorley Remembers exhibition at Astley Hall Coach House.

My work has been rewarded with Civic Society Awards, Parish Council Awards and even an invitation to the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. All that is extremely humbling but I like to see it as being a measure of just how interested and passionate we all are in our heritage.

A number of events and displays were planned to acknowledge the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day in 2020 but these were affected due to the Coronavirus issues. Hopefully this brief publication will help raise awareness of our local involvement during the war and go a small way towards acknowledging the anniversaries.

Feel free to contact me if you can add any information to anything mentioned or if you would like to ask any specific questions about the subject.

My local history books include:

The Bolton to Blackpool Dance Trains  
The Chorley & District Spitfire  
HMS 'Ursula' - The Chorley & District Submarine  
In Memoriam - Military Memorials and Graves (Borough of Chorley)  
Euxton CE Primary School- Golden Jubilee  
Euxton - Then & Now  
Euxton Remembers  
"Pals on Parade" (WW1 Brass music CD with Leyland Band)  
ROF Chorley: 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Please join, enjoy and share my Facebook groups:

Euxton Then & Now                      ROF Chorley (Buckshaw Village)  
Chorley & District in World War Two



saclewlow@yahoo.com    07866 925602    @StuartAClewlow